

# KALOPSISIA

POETRY | PROSE | VISUAL ART



ISSUE II | SEPTEMBER 2020

# Masthead:

Editor in Chief:

Katie Li

## Executive Editors:

Peter Donley

Kaia Gelatt

Pernille Petersen

Gabriela Pletosu

Madison Smith

Naomi Voeller

Jenny Zhan

## Social Media:

Madelyn Deutsch

Ashleigh LA Salle

Rhys Pearce

## Past Editors:

Lillian Han

Eleanor Lynch

## Staff Artists:

Elwing Gao

Luana Góes

Annabelle Tjio

## Poetry and Prose Editors:

Rachel Bernstein

Katie Chen

Clara Dusing

Morgan Flodman

Mai Ly Hagan

Gouriraj Kapur

Josie Lee-Donaldson

Adya Mohapatra

Emily Ng

Rhys Pearce

Caroline Redman

Trini Rogando

Karina Samuel

Timi Sanni

Trisha Santanam

Annabelle Tjio

Cindy Tran

Sunny Vuong

# Table of Contents:

## Poetry:

After the Afro	1
cradle of stars	7
a rhapsody of light	7
color	9
summertime orange juice	9
i sense that the sunflowers have died	10
life from death	11
no one likes bruised mangoes	12
Curses and Gratitude	14
Do You Have a Plan?	15
If We Weren't in Cleveland	15
effeuiller la rose	18
ELEGY (ii.)	19
ELEGY (iii.)	19
Gravity	20
Plant Nanny	24
The Law of Conservation in Four Acts	26
everyone loves a fighter	28
Family in Three Parts	31
There are Four	33
Femininity	35
Kit Kat	36
love story	37
upon entering foreign city limits	39
Raised by gulls	40
mccli	41
Canary in a Coal Mine	45
Sweet Nothing	46
No Hymns for Hyper Realities	48
Sumatra, 1945	49
dear diary	52
the candy in the back of my mouth	53
Michelangelo Child	54
Icarus, My Love	55
the world remains cold	56
lost incantation	57

my anxiety compels me to write a hymn for myself or perhaps it's a prayer in verse	58
Mindscape	59
euneirophrenia	60
$ax^2+bx+c$	61
pretty things skinny things	68

## Prose:

Ariana Grande v. Mozart	4
Chariotless God	6
Falling Forward	29
Maybe (Not)	42
The Color of Lightning	51
The Old Green House on the Mountaintop	62
Your Commentary, by the Mirrors	66

## Visual Art:

Becoming a Victor	3
color study pt.1	8
Familiar Faces-Redux	13
Fragmented Maze	17
Unnamed Love	17
Seconds	23
Waorani	27
Soul Studies	34
aurI	38
citadel	38
formations (green)	38
blue rust	38
New Hobbies	44
Open for Social Distance	44
Compound 1	47
Compound 2	47
Rainy Day Saudade	47
Melting Pot	50
dream	65
Discontinued	69



2320// *We (Gen. 8)*

I love the curving roads of the superway.  
every second I'm looking over the horizon  
something new is revealed, like little actors sliding into the spotlight with a cheeky grin  
As if to say "Hey! Look at me man, ain't I something?"  
only for their boys to jump onstage, one after another,  
a never-ending encore.

I'm getting tired of the pavement shaking the stage  
So I switch it up

And lift off

Towards the warm, white ember glow of the moon

I'm shrouded in darkness, but I don't need the light no more.

My janky 2308 Hovermaxx model doesn't get around like a newer car,  
as its radio warbles out its muffled words

just loud enough for me and all my friends to shout along

as my ride glides

taking me through the air

in one clean,

crisp,

cut.

I can't help but smile into the biting air of twilight

I'm too fast for my problems to keep up.

So when I'm pulled over by an officer for going about 100 miles over the speed limit

my ancestors can smile knowing

I just now thought about the fact that

We actually had to worry about this type of thing.

**About the Author** Quan Harris-Holley is an African-American high-school Junior from Charlotte, North Carolina. In his free time, he plays soccer and reads.



## Sulola Imran Abiola

### About the Artist

Sulola Imran Abiola is a native of Oyo state, Nigeria, a poet & a photographer, a public servant, a lover of arts, and an optimist who tries to break through in every life-sniffing situation. He was born and bred in the bustling city of Lagos state. He writes across all themes. His work is forthcoming in The Quills, Writenowlit and several other magazines. He writes from the state of Osun. He tweets via @official\_sulola



# Ariana Grande v. Mozart

By: Avalon Lee

The plaintiff, Ariana Grande, is seeking an injunction to prevent Mozart from claiming that he is a better musician than Ms. Grande. Judge, after all the evidence has been presented, we are certain you will find that Mozart's claims are false, and therefore should be enjoined from any such speech in the future.

## Ariana Grande:

Let's get this out of the way: The music itself is superficial. A basic requirement. A true musician is the whole package. Mozart has his rags-to-rags sob story and that *Amadeus* film; I have my latex rabbit ears and god-is-a-woman creed. A true musician stands on a pedestal of gimmicks, so I won't waste your time by comparing our music.

Anyways. Let's talk about ponytails, the one gimmick Mozart and I share; the single factor that determines who is the better musician.

My ponytail is iconic, more so than Mozart's, so clearly I'm the alpha musician. My ponytail has sparked revolutions. Entire websites and Pinterest boards are dedicated to speculating the source of my Japanese synthetic fiber extensions. YouTube gurus attempt to recreate the classic look with dollar store dupes. Ask anyone who has the better ponytail and they'll say me. Mozart's ponytail was a sign of the times. My ponytail fundamentally *changed* the times.

## Mozart:

I fully acknowledge that my ponytail as a sign of the times. Sure, I could have splurged on heat-resistant extensions to enhance my status as an era-defining prodigy. Rather, I chose to relate to the common man, those untouched by musical talent. Judge, do we measure success based on how far one rises above the others, or by how he humbles himself among we the people?

Furthermore, we have proof that Ms. Grande's ponytail puts the owner in "constant pain" onstage. See Exhibit A, a closeup of Ms. Grande's head at the Billboard Music Awards. The heft of the Velcro clips peels her scalp off her skull. Use the magnifying glass to examine her hairline, the microscopic scabs. By siding with Ariana Grande's ponytail, Judge, you fully endorse that masochism and beauty are in symbiosis. Welcome to the twenty-first century, where we crucify those who parrot "beauty is pain." Certainly, any ponytail is a better ponytail than Ariana Grande's.

## Ariana Grande:

Exactly, welcome to the twenty-first century. I'll remind the Judge that the question's in present tense, and presently, Mozart has been dead for more than two-hundred years. His keratin has rotted in a grave with only the company of Austrian earthworms. In other words, the composer's ponytail has decomposed. It's in no state to even be the runner-up ponytail.

Anyway, the question's in present tense, which totally cancels Mozart's claim as alpha musician. Once again, Mozart, present tense.

## Mozart:

Dear girl, it matters not that I am dearly departed. Music immortalizes its mother. Musicians breathe life into a composer's lungs, schooled in the art of resurrecting the dead. Each score is a spellbook of necromancy. Find black magic at your local concert hall; hear my Tuesday thoughts in the contour of soundwaves.

Even centuries later, people clamor for more, and not because I am on the front cover of *Vogue*. Audiences applaud the music of the living to cater to sensitive feelings, or to trend with the trends. Audiences applaud the music of the dead because their hearts demand it.

My sonatas and requiems have withstood the test of time. Compared to that, your musical legacy is embryonic; thus I deserve bragging rights as the alpha musician.

Ariana Grande:

Thank you, next. I'll say it one last time, music has nothing to do with musicianship. It's a basic requirement—

Mozart:

Tell the religious "God is our refuge" and see how they react. In my day, it was sacrilege in an unbeliever's mouth, but angel speak from a choir. Music transcends. If you honestly believe it's only a minimal requirement, *lech mich im arsch*, angel.

Ariana Grande:

Don't call me angel, you patronizing stump. Besides, God is a woman.

Mozart:

Heretic! God is the head of the household, a male. God is our refuge. Judge, see how pedestrians kneel for sidewalk copper.

Ariana Grande:

Again, we're in the twenty-first century. In the name of political correctness, God is a woman.

Judge:

Silence! All this talk of God nauseates me.

In my younger years, I had the pleasure of pampering God's greater-than-thou air. He constantly referred to Himself as everything from a pebble to a chicken to solid food, specifically. It's pointless to argue. As He is so fond of saying, "I am who I am."

I have reached a decision in the case of Grande versus Mozart. The injunction is granted, but not on Grande's behalf.

Because of your holy talk and gross faith, I grant myself a restraining order against you both. You are hereby banished from everything under my domain, from the firepits to the flogging post to morning icebreaker sessions. Mozart, leave. For your lack of natural wings, you'll have to take the staircase to your right. Ariana Grande, one day you'll realize the light is coming. Run towards it. Out of my sight, irksome imps.

Case dismissed.

And so, Mozart cranes his neck up towards the serpentine staircase, his tendons already aching. But every tread would be worth it, especially after those hellish two-hundred plus years. He'd heard fables of heaven's harps and choirs. The music! None of that here. The devil's taste in music is a looped track of the cries of the damned.

"Remember our deal," Ariana Grande breathes as she passes by. Her synthetic fiber extensions swish against his shoulder.

Ah, yes. He'd promised her exclusive pop-ified arias every Saturday for eternity in return for a small favor: Help him push Satan to His breaking point so that He would banish them to heaven. Already melodies perfect for her four-octave range fermented in his head. His fingers itched for a fountain pen and notebook, anxious to scrawl a tangible record so it wouldn't knot with the dozens of other threads he'd dreamt up during morning icebreakers, those godawful, tortuous sessions.

But first, the staircase.

**About the Author** Avalon Felice Lee is an Asian-American sophomore in California. She has been writing prose since the age of eleven. When not writing, she's probably practicing cello, assaulting the ears of nearby victims.



# Chariotless God

\* Note: Italicized phrases are quotes from *The Iliad*

By: Melissa Mulvihill

With such a name as Ares, I expect him to be more than the keeper of an orange apron and stale cigar smoke but when he speaks, I know this is folly. *Do not sit beside me and whine, you double-faced liar.*

I'm used to disappointment though. And audiences. He has two guard dogs. Or vultures. When I make eye contact, the skinny one looks down, engaging in ridiculous busyness. The bald one carries, holstered on his hip, the symbol of danger ready at his disposal. His gun is the summary of him.

Orange Apron is mired in a state of suspended anticipation in which things for him are started and yet nothing ever begins. He's experiencing the wanting of something without knowing what it could possibly be. He is bored and he cannot take himself in hand. Instead he prowls, looking for a brawl. *To me you are the most hateful of all gods who hold Olympus.*

At first, I am disoriented, experiencing the unloveliness of this man's permanent scars. Blood rushes up my neck and into my cheeks. I am reduced to lowest terms by him. Defined and then restricted. I don't even exist in the whole universe. He is the kind of subtraction that turns me deadish. I'm temporarily held captive by the notion that I don't talk back to men with gray hair.

"Well. Well. Well. Whose little girl are you?"

Orange Apron has had eight decades, at least, to commit to fathoming his inadequacies and warning others of them in good time, with apology and charm. Yet persists here, jonesing for battle, a known quantity behind a retail counter, with the inability to harness the world without destroying it. *Forever quarreling is dear to your heart, wars and battles.*

"You wanna build somethin'? Take somethin' apart? Or keep somethin' from fallin' apart? Which is it? I sell it all here."

He leans over the wide counter all of his weight on his hands, his jaw juttied out arrogantly. The stench of his stale smoke fills my nostrils. *But were you born of some other god and proved so ruinous.*

"I can help you with it all, Doll."

Those things of which I can perceive the beginnings and the ends are not me. I am not the audible world. Nor am I the silence. I am not rooted in utterances or elapsed instants. I am not anyone's.

"Well? Little girl, what can I do for you?" *Long since you would have been dropped beneath the gods of the bright sky.*

"I came here to have ten keys made. But there's absolutely nothing you could ever do for me. You gods, you continue to disappoint."

"Wut?"

"Nothing."

Tragic gods always under interpret. I'm certain there's a dog at home he's made mean. Chariotless god.

## About the Author

Melissa writes about finding things in places she thought were empty. Her poems and essays can be found at Prometheus Dreaming, The Feminine Collective, The Write Launch, and Impsired. She's a frequent contributor at The Blue Nib Literary Magazine and she has multiple poems anthologized at The Poet's Have Digest. Her poem, Your Phone Call, was selected for publication in The Blue Nib 2017 Anthology. She graduated from Kenyon College with a B.A. in psychology and from John Carroll University with an M.A. in counseling.

# cradle of stars

By: Tho Nguyen

we slept under a cradle of stars,  
moonlight eyes and silken hair and  
not a care in the world

a quiet repose from our clockwork lives,  
stillness baring her guttural heartbeat, thumping  
underneath a shirt of grass  
the yearning croaks of grasshoppers and  
smells of calm.

we wanted to believe we were lost, shipwrecked  
finally separated from the normal we had longed to cast away  
always reaching, always climbing the endless ladder  
listlessly watching  
hectic days give way to hollow nights,  
as blurry eyes search through clouded windows  
searching for all that slipped past our fingers

but the earth has always been,  
will always be  
a primordial mother waiting for the prodigal son to return,  
riches to rags  
folded in her embrace, under a blanket of wildflowers and  
a cradle of stars.

he breathes in crumpled silk, dreading the moment it will slip out his washed-out lungs. he wanted to hold onto this remnant of beauty, this remnant of hope. but as with everything, it too left him. the legends whisper of the time when light slipped past our fingers, evading the grasp of eagerly cupped hands. for who knows what happens when the lantern flickers out? an eclipse baptizes the earth, and we are bathed in inky darkness. and so, he hides his face under a veil of ashy smoke and joins the procession of those who lost light. wandering among the trail of the forgotten. trapped between two worlds; forever cursed to be servants at the master's table. but sometimes, fragments of hope will swirl in his ear, and his fingers will coax rhapsodic melodies and burnt-honey harmonies from ebony and ivory. waves of sound collide with the force of a thousand supernovas, and you can hear their echoes like floating specters. surpassing limits he never knew existed. and it shines, luminous even under his shuttered eyelids. beautiful, glorious light, soaking the tips of calloused fingers and pencil-lead hair. and for a fleeting moment, he is reborn again.

# a rhapsody of light

By: Tho Nguyen

**About the Author** Tho Nguyen is an incoming 10th-grader at Amador Valley High School. She loves poetry, calligraphy, and music. In her spare time, she enjoys curling up with a hot cup of tea and a book.



color study, pt. 1  
Acrylic and oil  
18 x 24 in



Zhan

**About the Artist**

Zhan is a student who enjoys reading and listening to music in her free time. Too much of her time is spent watching kdramas and cdramas and envying her cat's life. She will occasionally pick up a paintbrush or her camera.



# color

By: Simran Pandey

my parents did not paint  
me with turmeric and fennel  
or scent me with saffron and ajwain  
or play 70s music from the motherland,  
    humming along and imprinting the  
    lyrics into my brain;  
nor did they feed me coconut water straight  
from the trees in india  
    or even give me the elixir that was a  
    mix of ajwain and coconut milk  
    to cure my stomach aches;  
no, they did not sew me blankets from  
the finest gossamers of love or  
    clothe me in the soft silk sarees  
    that i wore every diwali—  
no, my parents did not infuse me  
with the flavors of my culture and my language  
just so  
    you  
    could try to wash it all away

# summertime orange juice

By: Simran Pandey

citrus trees blooming by the bucolic beach house  
the sun baking us lightly until we are golden brown

an orange falls on the beach chair nearby  
lydia, the maid, picks it up and grabs a knife out of her pocket  
    oh, to have a knife in your pocket instead of  
    in your heart

she almost juices the orange but i grab the halves  
her cheeks blush, no, slowly go ablaze with embarrassment  
as she backs away

i squeeze the orange onto my hand, letting it  
sting against my cuts and wounds, blistering my fingers as the heat  
    blisters me

juice never tasted sweeter

# i sense that the sunflowers have died

By: Simran Pandey

i remember that day in that brisk meadow:  
you walked to me, guitar slung across your shoulders,  
your eyes twinkling as the wind played with your hair—  
you sat down under the shade of the woodland trees that  
we first met under

if i squeeze my eyes tight enough, i can see the moment i saw  
something held by your hands, your  
demure smile quivering before you handed me the  
basket of sunflowers as i sat between  
the peonies and violets that had colored my world thus far

if i cover my ears, i can hear your words  
easing through your rosy lips; your story  
about seeing sunflowers near your house  
and immediately plucking them out and biking over  
to our spot; “a beauty for a beauty” you said

if i pinch my nose, i can almost smell  
the efflorescence of the sunflowers, your  
sweet cologne merging with the cold  
air that surrounded us in our own  
warm home, the hearth of our blooming love

if i bite my tongue hard enough, i can taste  
the bittersweet yet opulent flavor of that moment,  
the serendipity of it all, the dulcet tone of your  
voice as you whispered secrets to me;  
we were almost perfect

if i numb my hands, i can practically feel  
the gift of our love, my fingers  
brushing over the ethereal petals of the  
sunflowers, my mind pretending it was your hair;  
i thought our love would be sempiternal

if i can do all of this, do you think that:  
if i stop my heart from beating,  
i will be able to feel our evanescent love?

# life from death

By: Simran Pandey

i was biking along the dark, sullen  
roads, cobwebs adorning the dead  
peach trees when

i saw you running alongside me,  
and something, something about those  
hazel eyes, those curls resting gently atop your  
face made me stop in my tracks as

i got off the bike and left it there,  
fallen and forgotten; you led me to inside  
the woods, to a tree that looked so  
existing that it didn't fit in between these  
dead, broken weeds and bushes

you pulled me aside, literally  
pulled  
me  
to the edge of the tree and sat me  
down while

you told me the story of how this  
forest, or what was left of it, was once a  
cemetery

you told me that people are buried  
beneath the leaves i am sitting on, dreams  
dead with them

i looked back at you and saw that

you were laying on the ground, ear pressed  
against the bare, dirty ground, closing your eyes,  
humming quietly

your hands began to move rhythmically  
against the ground: up and down, down and up;  
the pulsatile movements were to some beat, i could tell

i asked you what you were doing

you simply smiled at me and said:

*living*



# no one likes bruised mangos

By: Simran Pandey

“always squeeze the mango to see if it’s ripe”  
my parents whispered to me in the indian  
grocery store, tamarind lining the shelves,  
turmeric coloring the air, coconut water down  
my throat, hot chai steaming in styrofoam cups

“always tap the watermelon to see how hollow it is”  
the lady behind me at the farmers market told me as she  
picked a watermelon off the stand and slapped it so  
hard my heart jostled; she clucked her tongue and  
repeated her trusted process, finally taking one home

“smell the cantaloupe to see if it’s good enough”  
the man at the counter advised me; his  
nametag torn a little around the edges so that  
i couldn’t read his name, his smile so  
sweet it had to be fake

“don’t buy the brown bananas”  
the article said to pick the nice,  
green ones instead - the brown ones:  
they are too mushy, too sweet,  
too fragile; always falling apart

i always pick the bruised fruit. the  
rotten fruit, the ones that don’t pass the tests,  
the survivors who escape conformity, the abominations,  
the only fruits with personality because:  
if i don’t pick them, will anyone else dare to?

## About the Author

Simran Pandey is a rising sophomore at Amador Valley High School in California. As an emerging writer, she devotes her free time to writing poetry and prose. She has been recognized by her town’s literary magazine and hopes to learn more about the literary world. Simran enjoys playing the tuba and learning about law, as well.

# DARKRECONSTRUCTION



“Familiar Faces - Redux”  
Acrylic on canvas;  
digitally manipulated  
35 in x 25 in

## About the Artist

DARKRECONSTRUCTION is a nonbinary queer painter from Queens, NY, working in an abstract expressionist style. They create abstract paintings focused on natural textures and soothing colors. More of their work can be found on their website, [darkreconstructionart.com](http://darkreconstructionart.com) and on [instagram.com/darkreconstruction](https://www.instagram.com/darkreconstruction).

# Curses and Gratitude

By: Taylor Bland

You have let...

The rifts of money steal your joy

So have you let the idea of flaccid penis,  
New roundness in the belly,  
A sudden but inconsequential loss of balance,  
Stillness (yet shifting),  
The temperature,  
Solutions (and lack thereof),  
Honesty (and its unwitting hurt),  
Pimp you

You have let an alternate universe spin you  
off of a real one  
And 'false positives' riddle you 'sick and tired't'

You vacillate between curses and gratitude  
And take up residence in fictional poles when  
there is common ground a bit more habitable

You let time pass but won't let things  
be

The array of personal experience  
Has summed into...  
'Triggers' and 'toxicity' termed,  
Anger and Sadness (in limited speech)  
When you have let  
Shame  
Desolation  
And your gripes with duplicity

Cook you into a muddled crest  
That still contains so much of a  
Life-giving magic...

It's your reach for the softened silver 'edges'  
And,  
Your bond with life's fitful courses of  
guarantee  
Which,  
Ms. Morrison would say is  
Your Happiness—  
'When your anticipation meets  
certainty'

They ask if you have been deceived by the current  
state of things  
As if your range of emotions lend a  
Red flag to joy

I've not been deceived.

I've just found myself frozen at the sharp peaks of  
success  
While tumbling down from what felt like  
A height I deserved to withstand

I've not been deceived.

Perhaps,  
Disenchanted.

## About the Author

Taylor Bland was born and raised in Metro Detroit, Michigan, as the eldest of 5 kids. After college, Taylor moved to Washington, DC where she obtained her Master's in Education from Johns Hopkins University to teach full-time in DC schools. While teaching, Taylor developed a passion for creating safe spaces for her black and brown students, as she learned first hand the inequities of being a black student, herself. For therapy and for fun, Taylor began writing short stories and poems at the age of 7 years old. As she ventured through young adulthood, Taylor began using her writing as a means to understand, accept, and even love her life choices and experiences and how they connect her to the ever-growing network of women she calls her family, her friends, and her beloved ancestors. More importantly, Taylor writes as a means of resistance — she writes 'to fill the broken cup that always appears to be both pouring while it is leaking.'

# Do You Have a Plan?

By: Julieanne Larick

Do you have a plan?  
I know you've been  
silent  
in a white plastic cell for seven days,  
but can you tell us what you'll do?  
Yes, we understand your life is  
ours to mold and  
the girl that's been here a month  
just puked up breakfast on her socks  
and no, we don't care about  
the drugged-up rambling that sent you here  
in an ambulance  
talking to the EMT who told you  
about how he learned  
Spanish last year in college,  
he made you feel okay;  
this was the first time you haven't  
felt like a shredded poem  
bleeding words to death.

Can you tell us what your plan is?  
After the lady with a face of oil  
that dripped onto an open  
pad of parchment  
drop by drop  
told you to shut up and take your pill,  
and to play with the other kids like  
you weren't fifteen and  
writing letters to your boyfriend that  
the kids grabbed and read aloud;  
cathartic and loving, sorrowful words  
devouring your flesh and  
exposing your screaming  
red veins  
in the process.

What's your plan?  
No, you can't go outside  
after you leave the cell,  
lest you climb a tree and  
the branch breaks,  
they would blame us.  
When your 11-year-old roommate  
kept your eyes burning open all night  
fearful she would wrap her hands  
around your neck and squeeze  
and like you weren't staring into the blank  
static white noise of a room hours for a day.  
Yes, you can hold your own mouth  
open by the teeth,  
we don't care if they rip out in the process,  
and let us know all your secrets and  
let go all your dignity because yes,  
we know what's best for you  
and didn't you buy those pills months ago?  
So how would you know  
what your plan is?

## About the Author

Julieanne Larick is a Midwestern Best of the Net-nominated poet. She studies English and Environmental Science at The College of Wooster. Julieanne reads prose for GASHER Journal. She has poems published in perhappened mag, Blue Marble Review, NECTAR Poetry, and others. Her portfolio is <http://www.julielarickwriting.com> and her Twitter is @crookyshanks.

# If We Weren't in Cleveland

By: Julieanne Larick

The open window gapes  
letting in little white petals to my room,  
tan pigeons hopping,  
apartment leaking in rosy air,  
but I miss you more.

The golf course is right outside my window and  
I can hear people talking from all the way up here.  
Part of me wants to be them.  
Part of me wants to be a bowing oak,  
rustling green leaves in the wind  
and balding sticks in the winter,  
but only if you were the sturdy bark,  
or the pollen-caked wind,  
or a even blinding cloud that floated miles above,  
swimming through the earth,  
drifting past my peak if only once.

Sometimes after I shower,  
I open a window  
and stick my nose against the screen,  
pretending the washes of air are water  
and that I do not live in Cleveland,  
but rather a misty eerie forest in Norway,  
or a twist of ocean spray in Greece.  
Somewhere where golf courses don't exist,  
only us in the heart of a sunbeam  
lazing in its shore and hearing its mellow breath.

So when I open the window to see a vacant garden  
sitting idly above the grass plains  
from my castle in the sky,  
May thundering itself to Cleveland,  
I feel a twinge of blue  
knowing you aren't here.

# Rutika Deshpande

## About the Artist

Rutika is an artist who currently lives and works in Ahmedabad. Her passion lies in the crossroads between written and visual art; she enjoys playing with the expression of verses and amalgamating poems into visuals. Rutika sees painting as an infinity in which she can blend and diffuse meaning to compose thoughtful interpretations.

"Unnamed Love"  
Acrylic and playing cards on canvas  
16 in x 8 in



Fragmented Maze  
Watercolor on playing cards  
30 in x 40 in



# effeuiller la rose

By: Emily Chang

rose petals strewn across the mountain trail  
a lovelorn path, damp and trampled  
cries burst from my lips, my fingertips scatter  
ragged amidst the mud and stones  
my ruby robes torn into wispy husks  
lifeless in the gloom of a lonely mountain

i'll give you my trust to break  
from hands outstretched, my rose to take  
rip off my petals one by one  
until i'm a bare stem and stamen, leaving  
your fingertips tinged with my pollen, my scent  
dripping off from the summer rain  
as you brush away the lingering red  
clinging tearfully to your hands

scatter me along the stream  
into the mud and stones of the winding path you take  
away from what we shared and planned  
the moments fade as you descend

and for a while after we part  
after my thorns failed to prick your hands  
my petals remain for passersby to wonder about  
wilted travesties of my love  
fragmented into dependency  
trodden in the trail, victim of my uncertainty  
after sunset the darkness consumes  
and my petals decay, never to bloom

## About the Author

Emily is a rising high school senior from Bellevue, Washington. She enjoys writing poetry and short fiction, particularly writing that explores the darker complexities of new technology or romantic tropes. Her short stories have received statewide recognition in the Future Problem Solving Scenario Writing competition, and in 2020 her work was nominated for FPS judging at the international level. Emily's poetry won an Honorable Mention from Write the World's Poetry and Spoken Word Competition in 2020. Emily also runs for her school's cross-country and track team, dabbling in sports journalism as editor-in-chief of Seattle Empowering Athletes. She loves exploring vegan recipes and hiking in the beautiful Pacific Northwest.



## ELEGY (ii.)

By: Ari Lohr

in an instant  
the blood runs

and the eyes shut  
and the lungs shriek for air.

you ask how i'm feeling,  
and i respond

*whatever the opposite of weightless is.*  
and what a sick and sadistic

symphony silence performs.  
how strange a song

held breaths compose.  
of course

you reject the music and instead  
insist on an orchestra of heartbeats and pressed lips

and i make no sound  
except the frantic arrangement of tremors and gasps

like the percussion of  
skyline and sea

and you glide your fingers along my thigh  
and i wonder

if this is how it feels  
to will away gravity. again

you ask how i'm feeling,  
and i croak out an ensemble of worship

two octaves above my natural voice.  
what a brief and beautiful rhythm lust is —

to chant crescendos of tension  
and drown in the downbeat.

i tell you i fear the ocean;  
you say you're a strong swimmer.

we kiss,  
and for six seconds

i believe it.

## ELEGY (iii.)

By: Ari Lohr

the man  
swallows the bullet and speaks

and from his tongue  
spews an opera of hail and wind.

it's 3 pm and i'm  
flying over the atlantic,

and i realize i'm closer  
to touching the sun

than i'll ever be. from above  
the water looks

less like an ocean and more  
like the fragile waltz of

windows and light. of course  
i say waltz when really

i mean weapon. i say light  
when really i mean time.

because that window —  
if opened —

would kill everyone on this plane  
in seconds.

what a bitter and cruel irony it is  
to see straight through

your own death with each  
inner glance you take.

still  
what alluring magic it is to fly;

the seconds before the smoke  
makes your nose into an hourglass

of gunshots and rain  
and your eyes flood

like the ocean reloads  
into barrels of salt,

sweat, and sea.  
what a stunning,

brutal beauty that is.

# Gravity

By: Ari Lohr

## TRIGGER WARNING: SUICIDE/SELF-HARM

*at a maximum height of 746 feet, the Golden Gate Bridge is the most popular suicide destination in the world. accounting for gravity, it took six seconds to reach the water from the place you jumped.*

6.

& with a warm kiss,  
you're gone. six months  
after you left  
to study physics,

i sift for clues  
in research articles  
published long before  
your death.

5.

as if endlessly grasping  
for god's arm, it  
is impossible for two  
atoms to touch.

sharing the same charge,  
electrons on the outside  
of atoms repel each  
other. technically speaking,

the closest one gets  
to touching something  
is hovering just  
above it.

4.

i could write  
a metaphor for water,  
compare the ocean  
to god –

say  
in the seconds  
before impact, you found  
yourself in its image,

your arm  
outstretched  
& shivering in the  
kinetic midnight air.

to do so, however,  
would imply  
that you actually  
touched it.

3.

the night you jumped,  
it was cold enough  
for the sea  
to almost

freeze. there,  
the current slows with  
each moment, as if  
each molecule

were an interlude  
in your own death.  
as your palms hover  
just above

the water, i imagine  
them, still warm,  
cradling a birthday candle  
between your lips.

then,  
a soft breeze.  
your breath melting  
in the air forever.

2.

of course,  
time is never  
really frozen. only,  
the larger an object grows,

the longer each second lasts.  
in this space,  
i have time to ask you why.  
i have time to find your mother.

i have time to write this poem. and  
another. and another.  
what comes from smoke  
is more smoke.

what comes from heat is more heat.  
in six seconds,  
i have spent years  
waiting for your return.

1.

despite centuries of research,  
physicists are woefully unable  
to explain gravity.  
although undocumented,

it's believed that gravity  
has an equal and opposite force  
somewhere in the universe.  
in this way,

we are never truly apart.  
somewhere, a place exists  
where the air

does not heat

& the sea does  
not thaw &  
you are still  
there

as you were once,  
wings endlessly spread.  
truthfully, Luka,  
my pen

is the only force  
keeping gravity from  
killing you  
a second time.

i don't fight  
for extra seconds;  
i just write the clock  
differently. each day,

i close my eyes &  
count down  
until, again,  
you are right here.

sometimes,  
i swear  
if i reached out at night  
i could graze your arm,

wet with longing, as if  
each finger  
were a passing wave  
on your skin. but just

as i remember  
atoms can't touch,  
my hand slips  
& again

there is nothing  
but moist air and darkness.  
even though  
i am always disappointed,

i still hope  
the ink dries  
before tomorrow,  
or at least –

0.



**"Seconds"**  
Watercolor  
By: Elwing Gao

# Plant Nanny

By: Ari Lohr

## TRIGGER WARNING: SUICIDE/SELF-HARM

i have this app called Plant Nanny –

basically, you have a virtual plant in your phone.  
every time you drink a glass of water,

you tell your phone,  
and your little plant is watered too.

you can either water it,  
let it grow,

foster it,  
or you can watch it wilt.

of course, being a responsible,  
competent college student, i

let it die within the first week.  
i have learned a lot from this plant app –

like, when you see a virtual plant  
die in front of you,

it *does not* motivate you to drink more  
water, but it *does* motivate you

to feel really fucking guilty about yourself.

i have this thing called my mind –

basically, you have this analog brain in your head.  
every time you do something healthy,

your brain senses it,  
and your mind lights up too.

you can either water it,  
let it grow,

foster it,  
or you can watch it die.

of course, being a responsible,  
competent college student,

i have long felt  
depression's parched, calloused grip

around my throat.  
dehydrated hands

and desert lips.

i have learned a lot from my diagnosis –

like, when you see your own body  
evaporate in front of you

it does not motivate you to drink more

water, but it does motivate you  
to feel really fucking guilty about yourself.

you see, mental health is like a garden.  
you can either water it,

let it grow,  
foster it,

or you can neglect it,  
watch it wilt,

watch it wither.

sometimes,

it's the small things –  
pruning the split ends

from my hair  
like dead branches.

avoiding the shower  
for a week, then,

running my fingers  
dry along my scalp,

dandruff drifting  
in the air

like a swarm of dandelion  
seeds in the sizzling summer breeze.

my brother  
telling me

*to just go outside,*  
*that if only*

*you had a little more sunlight*  
*or just drank some more water*

*you would be fine.*

sometimes,

i wonder if i should  
just die. like,

i only thought about this plant  
once i saw it had already wilted.

why is watering myself  
the hardest thing i've ever done?

like,



again, i'm lying awake  
at night – rose-petal ribs  
and poison-ivy palms –  
petrified of my own  
drought.  
but isn't it funny  
how the moon  
always turns a firefly  
into a phoenix? like,  
my own mind  
is an invasive species  
i can't fight off.  
what is this pain

if not perennial?  
every year  
on my birthday,  
i awake to a new  
red-ring scar engraved  
on my tree-trunk limbs.

i've spent years  
dealing with self harm –  
wet wrists  
and dry tongue.

sometimes,  
i saturate my skin  
and germinate  
my guts,  
my spine  
a nursery of dread.

if i could mutate my mouth,  
i would.  
if i could fertilize my fear,  
i would.  
if i could drink fucking water  
without exhausting myself,

i would. you see,  
self-care is like a garden –  
you can either water it,  
let it grow,  
foster it,  
or  
you can neglect it,  
watch it wilt,

watch it bleed,

sometimes,  
i cut myself open  
and rip out each vein  
like a weed.

i am always thirsty,  
but i am too busy  
baptizing my bones in blood  
to get a glass of water.  
i can't keep a  
virtual plant alive  
– not even  
the fucking cactus –  
because i  
am too crazy  
to remember  
that if i don't drink water,  
it will die before i do.

when my brother asks  
if i am feeling any better  
after his advice,  
i tell him that,  
truthfully,  
every night i imagine myself –  
somewhere –  
beneath six feet of dirt.

# The Law of Conservation in Four Acts

By: Ari Lohr

and from whom does God commission light? beneath the sultry embrace of my mother's fists, the buck's torso shutters but it remains stagnant. its carcass trails the muted glow of her fingertips, and i wonder under which breath the beast first fathomed its own passing. i ask, and she clutches its horns and her hands tremble and her mouth quivers, and she whispers of the silent, restless elegy of heat escaping the corpse. truly, i doubt the burden algor bears on a beast.

\*\*\*\*

before dinner, my father methodically strips the meat from the buck's skin. mother finds comfort in this form of deliberate. the calculated shedding of being to bread // the systematic exchange of warm // to frigid // to sweltering beneath the brisk heat of the grill. the flame's anxious tremble. the kindling forged from mortis. the outburst of the brazen body and its divine and magic hands. i call it playing God; mother calls it survival.

\*\*\*\*

that night, i read that up to thirty stars explode in a given second somewhere in the universe, releasing enough energy to light the galaxy for weeks. i ponder what strange sort of magic it takes to devour a supernova, and after research, learn that a star's life ends when it consumes the entirety of its fuel and is no longer capable of burning. crushed by the calloused grip of sulfur and iron, the star becomes so dense it collapses beneath the weight of its own gravity.

\*\*\*\*

the day you died, 2,592,000 stars exploded somewhere in the universe. i ask God which one he used your body for. i ask God how it feels to be kinetic. he says nothing, but glows.

## About the Author

Ari Lohr is a wannabe-astronaut-turned-poet attending university in Boston, MA. He is a Brave New Voices semifinalist, and has performed at various local and regional slams such as Slamlandia, Portland Poetry Slam, Verselandia, and more. Ari's poetry focuses on the gravity between mental health, LGBTQ advocacy, grief, love, and a variety of other themes. He has been published in a variety of magazines including the Bitter Fruit Review and the Big Windows Review, and is set to appear in various publications including the Incandescent Review later in 2020. Ari can be found on Instagram as @i.o.jupiter.



“waorani”

Luana Góes

Acrylic and paper collage on A4 paper

8.25 x 11.75 in

# everyone loves a fighter

By: Sunny Vuong

i am all bloody knuckles and rusty-stained teeth and splinted, jagged edges  
so in hindsight, and i've always spit my excuses back at you like the molten iron that pools in my  
mouth, you should have known much, much better

you know: you used to say you were a lover, not a fighter, and you said it through a smile, your  
teeth flashing with how clean they were, and i was smitten with them then, so i believed you  
you're such a liar, such a silver-tongued devil,  
and the worse part is that i knew it, i saw through you  
but you licked my wounds until they were nothing but bruises, so who was i to speak up?

all is fair in love and war, but dear Lord, who ever said they were mutually exclusive?  
venus and mars are in an affair, and no one bothers to recognize it but me  
not even all the cloth bandages in the world could patch us up  
but i told you, i did! i said i put up a good fight; it's not my fault you said you could take me

i was a wild one, weaned on the slide of asphalt scraping the skin of my cheek  
i grew up with my fists raised and a stone-cold cradle of concrete  
and you saw me, heart held behind a million daggers and a million more bruises  
and you decided you wanted me, swore you could handle it, and oh, baby, were you punching  
well above your weight class

it wasn't just me beating the life out of us, no  
this was a team fight, dear, don't you think it was a solo match  
i am scarred, and my teeth will never not be bared, but it is by no fault of mine that you thought  
we could have a love that didn't end up knocking out by the first round

i can handle the broken bones (but i must applaud you for healing equally as well)  
but i should have been strong enough to kill us sooner  
everyone saw it coming, and everyone knew how i was, and everyone warned the two of us,  
but as it so turns out—everyone loves a fighter, too

## About the Author

Sunny Vuong is a second generation Asian teenager whose poems have been published in the 2020 River of Words Anthology and online literary journals such as Cathartic Literary Magazine and Bitter Fruit Review. Sunny believes that her writing is an extension of herself, and that by getting her name out in the literary world, she can finally speak out about the issues important to her through her writing.

# Falling Forward

By: Yash Seyebagheri

Your new community has less than 200 people, one main drag and a litany of dirt roads. From the top of the main hill on the edge of town, you can see everything, cabins and trailers peeking in and out of pines. Long storefronts to the south and east, reminiscent of old mercantiles, but full of gift shops, a coffee shop, a supermarket. An iron bridge rises over the river, an elegant labyrinth of steel. Vast, verdant hills loom.

Sometimes you stand on this main hill. Try to lean out. You inevitably pull back; you've fallen many times. You've felt the world taking. Your father has taken smiles and ease — The world has levied bills. Rejected your stories and job applications.

But this is your community, a fact that rises to you looking from the hill. You could drive down the roads, like locals in their Chevys, relishing the whirl of the road. Take to the river, hunt in the still of winter and challenge the elements. But you are still an observer after six months, a man whose life is blank now.

This move is the byproduct of choice, the culmination of savings, jobs. It is the culmination of things your father didn't want, something you locked away with tight tenderness.

Once, you shared constraint with your father, still in your twenties. You lived on the edge of your hometown, a mid-sized city. You were next to a soccer field where people wandered around daily, as if thinking they could go somewhere better. You called it the suckerfield. He laid on the couch and insisted you do his homework for nutrition management and anger management classes. He called you too artistic, told you to give up writing, the words predictable, but striking with precision.

Now, he fulminates from a distant city, words playing in your mind.

*"Why do you not think about your life? See the end at the beginning. What will you accomplish in the middle of nowhere?"*

*"You're too emotional. Life is a jungle."*

*"You always run away from challenges. I'm telling you these things because I'm your father. I love you. Others claim they love you, but they don't."*

You try to lose these words in the vastness of the valley. Start walking, albeit with awkward gait. Morning and evening. You traverse curving roads. Absorb the twang of neighborly good mornings and drifting welcomes. They are voices without calculation and menace, replete with gruff tenderness. They ask where you've come from; you only mention coming for a change of scene, to ruminate.

You savor low, easy nods, the sound of The Eagles and Fleetwood Mac and other 70s groups floating from homes. Here people fix roofs and porches; work in woodshops. There's something sublime in stained T-shirts.

How content people seem, taking things apart. Song lyrics blend, an odd mélange of possibility and darkness. *Don't stop thinking about tomorrow in the Hotel California*. You relish the smell of Marlboros and oil, the Chevys and Dodges that sputter dependable assurance. And yes, the occasional Subaru that purr smoothness.

Your father doused himself in Polo cologne, wore Khakis and striped navy-blue shirts. He drove a used Mercedes, something that connoted a man still on top of the world and not a retired soil scientist.

You organize your little cabin. Arrange your Yates and Nabokov on the shelves, blast your own brand of music; Tchaikovsky at first. But Tchaikovsky's superseded by the Eagles. A safe choice. On top of all this, you buy flowerpots. Festoon them with lilacs, something that conveys tenderness. Belonging. You even try to throw a barbeque but burn the burgers. You love the scent of charcoal on a summer night. Smoke rising from backyards. The laughter of mysterious families, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers who wear smiles, untrammled by so much. Perhaps happy families are all alike, as Tolstoy said. You envy it.

The walks are stepped up to three times a day, down your road and then all the way to the little lodge up the hill. There's a release not being home. Up trails and paths you stride. People praise the constant walking. Your gait. Weight you've shed. Move forward, they laugh jovially.

Your father would tell you to walk faster, pick up the pace. He used to take you to walk at the suckerfield, called you weak, told you to push yourself. *I want you to be healthy. I do this because I love you.*

You start walking at your own brisk gait, your own awkward gait all too clear. But now you shake your butt, swing your arms, give your motions some artistic meaning.

Looking over precipices, over pines and curvaceous hillsides, even into ponds bathed in rippled moonlight, you can't move backwards. You know the impact of falls. Even now, sometimes you forget you're here. Brace for another fatherly lecture. *Get a girlfriend, use people. You're too honest.*

So you lean out a little on that hill overlooking the town. A little more. Sure, the possibility of precipice taunts, but you cannot help but laugh.

You lean out into dirt and towards rustic storefronts stained with sunlight. The long main drag fresh with tar and newly painted blackness. The pink and purple real estate office. But there's no need to think of the immediate consequences, the bruised leg, the subsequent limp.

You'd rather fall forward and feel the sharp edges of something else. A good sharpness, something that will harden. Strengthen. You want to laugh and dance, not knowing. Maybe imagine, forget, or even tell stories. You don't know what's next, speaking those words over and over, a smile growing.

## About the Author

Yash Seyedbagheri is a graduate of Colorado State University's MFA program in fiction. His story, "Soon," was nominated for a Pushcart. Yash has also had work nominated for The Best Small Fictions and Best of The Net. Yash's stories and poems are forthcoming or have been published in Write City Magazine, WestWard Quarterly, Café Lit, and Ariel Chart, among others.



# Family in Three Parts

By: Rachel Bernstein

i.  
I like to think the motto for the family goes something like:  
“out of ashes emerges an angel  
(watch out for paraphrasing and notion)”

The World is balanced  
carefully  
by a team of three.  
They’re everywhere and nowhere  
as the rest of us  
cringe and wonder  
if this is the time The World crumbles.

(Not to suggest that the team is bad.)  
(Because they’re not.)  
(It’s just. . .  
it seems that world has come so close to falling so many  
times.)

And, you can tell that the weight is there  
When The World they balanced grew heavier and heavier  
with poking and prodding  
and demands and needs and wants and the rest of us cried  
for ourselves and for the team of three.

Because after a while, the ashes fell.  
And there were two angels.  
One was we  
And one was The World.

ii.  
the motto for the team of five made possible by the team of  
three,  
goes something like: “I love you because you make me crazy.  
(watch out for intelligence and smiles and teasing).”

The team of five is  
gasoline and a match  
wonder and magic  
the sort of love that feels like kryptonite and an overflowing  
heart

Two is a boy that can move mountains with his mind,  
who wants to be on a ship in the saltwater sea  
And has the sort of manners that would make a southern  
gentleman jealous

Three is a girl that sees the world like a soup that she has to taste every bit of,  
And has the sort of heart that expands so much  
that I fear her chest will break.

Four is a girl that has a passion that is the envy of an issue-oriented politician  
who loves so deep that it can sometimes cut her deeper.  
The charisma and sarcasm of a comedian, the song voice that one longs to hear.

Five is one that has the laugh that makes others giggle along with her,  
she cares for animals like they're her lifeblood  
And has an enviable sort of confidence.

I'm number one,  
Number one as in firstborn.  
The one that writes and writes and writes and reads and struggles and lives  
And loves the team of five so much that my eyes water

The team of five.  
Wide smiles, cozy hugs, jokes, laughs.  
All marked with love by pink lipstick and tickled on the nose  
By cashmere.  
"I love you because you make me crazy.  
(watch out for intelligence and smiles and teasing)."

iii.  
There are times that I wish I were somewhere else.  
I would be lying if I said something to the contrary  
To wanting to be somewhere  
Where the sun isn't so hot  
and the sidewalks are laden with cobblestones.

But then I'll be somewhere hot with my team of three  
And team of five.  
The boy who moves mountains with his mind and the girl with  
The abundance of passion and opinions  
will be arguing  
Over something that seems trivial to others  
And the team of three will chime in with differing opinions.

*Really? You believe that?*  
*Of course, I do*  
*Who do you think I am?*  
And everyone else will be laughing or staring  
with agape mouths.  
and I want to cry.  
Because I have never known a love so deep.  
So much so that my chest contorts and squeezes  
and feels warm.

Like the way that I felt  
when I was in a bay filled with jellyfish  
and my arms getting burned  
and I felt no fear.  
none at all.

I was there struggling and living  
as everyone splashed the other  
as the sun set and the water was turning purple and light blue  
and feeling grateful and at peace  
and marked with pink lipstick and cashmere  
with a heart lodged deep in my throat  
and beauty and love pouring out of my ears and mouth.  
as the semblance of The World was on the entire team of five's  
shoulders.

## There are Four

By: Rachel Bernstein

i. Danielle is an autumn morning.  
Her skin is caramel, and her eyes are green like a granny smith apple.  
Tired eyes when she has to wake up and the sky has not.  
The sun's rays as long as her legs.  
And a folk song not nearly as good as her voice.  
On an April night in two-thousand and sixteen,  
I called her an opera.  
I have never said anything quite as true.

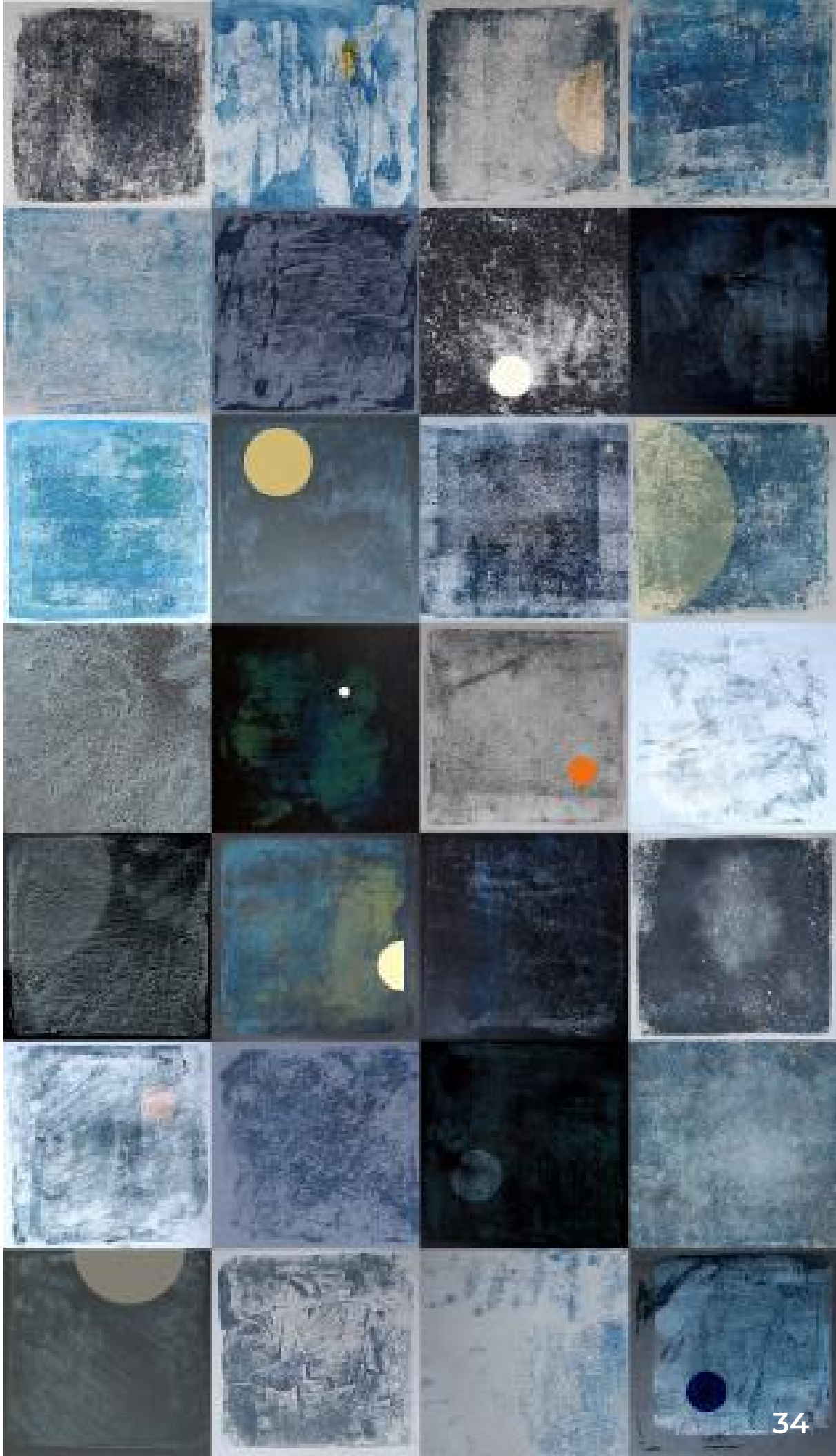
ii. My mom is a summer afternoon.  
her personality as warm as the sand on the beach.  
She is coffee on an early morning and has the smile of a camp counselor  
and an easy afternoon that says: "let's order in"  
On a July birthday night,  
I told her I was thankful for her.  
I have never said anything quite as true.

iii. Nan was winter night in the city.  
Her cheeks were chilled with blush not winter's bite  
She was hot chocolate and a cozy holiday song.  
There was a red lipstick rebelliousness to her  
that still adored Shakespeare.  
She had all the eagerness of a kitten in its first snowfall.  
On a November morning,  
I told her I was glad I was her "light".  
I have never said anything quite as true.

iv. I am a spring morning.  
A nervous energy.  
That tries to be chilled with blush, as warm as sand,  
one that prays for my skin to be caramel and eyes as green as apples.  
I hope to be coffee on a summer morning and to have the comfort of a  
holiday song,  
I want legs as long as the rays of the sun.  
On an April night, a birthday in July, and a November morning. . .  
I have never said anything quite as true.

### About the Author


Bernstein is a junior at the University of Southern California whose work has been featured in DASH and has won national and regional awards from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She's probably watching television.



**“Soul Studies”**  
Elwing Gao  
52.5 x 30 in  
block printing ink,  
photoshop

# Femininity

By: Makenzie Beckstead



Foggy mountains.  
rivers rush in the silvery night.  
Eyes close then open.  
i feel  
soil beneath my feet.  
Marveling at the stars,  
there's a shiver in my spine  
It whispers "you're alive."  
Never mind that i slept  
for several years.  
now,  
I'm awake.  
Nymphs lead me  
deeper into the forest,  
In pursuit of moonlight:  
The food which feeds  
my soul,  
Yet never poisons  
my heart.

## About the Author

Makenzie Beckstead is a college sophomore studying English Education at Utah Valley University. She serves as a reader for Wintermute Lit and dabbles in espionage (but shhh, don't tell anyone). Her work has appeared in potted purple. Find her on Twitter at @kenz\_beckstead.

# Kit Kat

By: Morgan Flodman

I thought I had outgrown trick-or-treating,  
but a childish longing stirred my stomach  
when, on the microwave, a small Kit Kat  
caught my eye—it's needless to say chocolate  
is a luxury most girls would never  
reminisce while tearing it open,  
yet I think it's incredible how this  
fun-sized candy appeared as grand as a  
time machine hurtling into long ago.

I remember when I'd cling to your shirt  
like a baby koala and we'd watch  
our nighttime cartoons—you'd pull out something  
from your stash: a red-wrapped delight, a  
cerise tint just above your fingernails,  
perhaps the same color as the bathrobe  
you'd don the next morning. You'd break off a  
piece for yourself and hand the other smooth,  
delectable fraction to yours truly.

I'd beg for another—though playfully  
reluctant, you were always generous.  
I often wonder if you wanted me  
to take that Kit Kat as your memory  
or rather to preserve your sweetness—of  
course, coincidences drop in before us,  
but a mother's comfort seems to dwell in  
the greatest and the least of things. I just  
thank you for this liking to Kit Kats, Mom.

## About the Author

Morgan Flodman is a young writer from the small town of Cherry Valley, MA. Her work has been recognized by Appelley Publishing, the International Torrance Legacy Creativity Awards, and the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. Another piece of her poetry has been published in the 2020 edition of *The Apprentice Writer*. When she's not overanalyzing her drafts, Morgan enjoys reading, editing for three literary magazines, blasting her playlist, exploring the neighborhood, and spending time with her loved ones. To keep up with her literary endeavors, feel free to follow her Instagram account (@morganflodmanwrites).



# love story

By: Jessica Kim

when poetry met prose, she expected him  
to cradle her quietly among his sentences,  
to fill in her gaps with a mosaic of musty  
love songs & leftover lullabies. but prose  
wanted perfection: to frame every letter  
into paper thrones & imprison every flaw  
in honey-coated coffins. poetry had too  
many fault lines in the atria of her jumbled  
heart, her quiet prayers beating in rhythm  
to her muffled footsteps. follow the ticking  
of winged clocks, the slight cranny left  
between a period & the next capital letter.  
a beginning after the end. why does prose  
still go on. it's autumn & they stand before  
a trail of withered leaves. prose wanted to  
go straight forward, poetry wanted a break.  
so they parted ways into separate worlds,  
discontinuous.

## About the Author

Jessica Kim is a young poet based in California. Her works have been recognized by the National Poetry Quarterly and Pulitzer Center, and can be found in Eunoia Review, Clover & White, Minute Mag, Perhappened, and many more. She loves all things historical and sour.



# Paul Dakota

## About the Artist

Paul Dakota has been taking photographs for 3 years now. He employs various treatments on raw images including PhotoShop. His subject matter is wide-ranging, but somehow the work usually ends up referencing humanity's relationship with the earth. The good and the bad aspects. As a species how we perceive the planet and its resources.

- 1: aural composite digital photography 40 x 28 in
- 2: citadel composite digital photography 40 x 28 in
- 3: formations (green) composite digital photography 40 x 28 in
- 4: blue rust composite digital photography 40 x 28 in



1



2



3



4



# upon entering foreign city limits

By: Anne Gvozdjak

rearview mirror:

flashing taillights glinting across gullies, agape  
to swallow the mid-downpour wetness of black concrete  
and salted tears dripping between fists, clenched  
on the shuddering, beaten steering wheel. skeleton body rattling  
from behind the rumbling engine as it learns the hungry city heartbeat,  
spitting dream after dream through exhaust pipes  
and open windows, chasing down every last drop  
of the distant midnight wilderness.

## About the Author

Anne Gvozdjak is a rising high school senior who lives in Seattle, Washington. Besides writing poetry and making slow progress on her novel, she loves math, music, biology, and hand lettering.

# Raised by gulls

By: Liz Chadwick Pywell

Their cries drown out the baby, pull me  
to the window where birds are dropping,  
crashing into glass with sick thumps  
of flesh and beak and claw,  
black eyes twisting furiously before they die.

They pile one atop the other,  
grotesquely indiscriminate  
in their arrangement of bloodied wings,  
and I stare, my glassy eyes met by theirs,  
outstaring me forever.

When the pact is over and the last stragglers,  
finally sensible of the suicidal chaos,  
turn and flee, I open the door,  
shovel gulls like snow or shit,  
watch downy plumes dance like ashes.

Legend says they raised him,  
my saintly son, found a doe to suckle  
him, built him a feather bed. Cenydd,  
godly, twisted child of mine,  
knows that life was built by me.

## About the Author

Liz Chadwick Pywell is a lesbian poet based in York, North Yorkshire. She is particularly interested in listening to the voices of women who have been ignored or drowned out in history, literature and mythology.

# mccli

By: MP Armstrong

i.  
i used to keep time with numbers. not the ones on the clock,  
but numbers of my own invention. hours constructed from  
bloody pillows and painkiller dreams; days counted—one, two,  
three—until each emerged solidified from the cloying cloud  
of cleaner-smell, dizzyingly sweet like rotted peaches dripping  
through the cracks between ceiling tiles. i have started keeping time  
like that again, inventing the methodical progression since the clock  
slipped past me. i build sleep by stacking nightmare upon nightmare,  
swallow until my stomach settles, force clots to form in the haze.  
i feel ghosts prick at the crook of my arm. i feel ghosts well in my eyes'  
corners. and the ghosts leak, tick-tocking, into the wrinkles of my brain.

xiii.  
i turned sixteen crying yellow dye in a doctor's chair, surrounded  
by shriveled-victory presents: a body functioning on will and morphine  
instead of organs and oxygen, a cocktail of life and illness,  
misery preserved by the lab coats that decided i am worth saving.  
i turned sixteen choking on promises of *never again*, kept them tucked  
in the back of my throat until my twentieth year forced them up and out.  
*never again* splattered on my bedsheets, tinged with reddish rage  
and staining the blankets with fear. *never again* shattered against the wall,  
in shards sharp as the knowledge that i am again shackled to the chair,  
with the sleeves of lab coats peeking just around the corner.

xvii.  
i left the hospital with the spokes of my wheelchair caught on  
strained threads yanked from the starched white seams. but eventually  
each one snapped. the confinement, the killer, the sickness stopped holding  
onto me. the days emerged—april ninth, april tenth, april, may, and june,  
the suddenly-shallower lungs only an unpleasant reminder on the steps  
of the occasional staircase. i don't think i will be that lucky this time,  
to only have occasional reminders when i pass, like the places where  
rows of arena seats turned into rows of beds. i feel this one ingraining  
itself into my veins: a quicker heartbeat, a tenser throat, and a reminder.  
you have been here before; you have survived; and you are not immune.

## About the Author

MP Armstrong is a disabled queer writer from Ohio, studying English and history at Kent State University. Their work appears or is forthcoming in Perhappened, Prismatic Magazine, and Hominum Journal, among others, and their debut chapbook, *who lives like this for such a cheap price?*, is forthcoming this winter from Flower Press. Find them online @mpawrites and at mpawrites.wixsite.com/website

# Maybe (Not)

By: Katie Rebhan; Originally published by Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine

Maybe she would be busy in the back of the shop, organizing the mugs that Brentwood's Coffee offered to frequent customers. One after the other, carefully stacking them in their designated spots. The bell on the door would chime suddenly, and she would startle, almost dropping the coffee mug and turning quickly to see who it was. She wouldn't observe anything too specific about the man; perhaps a glimpse of green eyes or the small imperfections in his sweater. He would order something with too much sugar to still qualify as coffee, paying with three singles (keep the change). While he waited for her to prepare his not-even-really-coffee, he would stand off to the side of the counter, eyes buried in his phone. She would of course speculate about what he was reading. Her first guess would be news, but then she would realize that he wasn't the type and instead would definitely be reading some sports article (but she would have been wrong again: he was hurriedly texting his brother about the cutest girl working in an old coffee shop on Sharpe Lane). Upon completing his oh-my-god-a-milkshake-is-less-sweet-than-this, she would call out his name, horribly mispronouncing it, although they were both too polite to acknowledge it. As she passed him the coffee cup (be careful, it's hot), he would press a folded piece of paper into her hand (don't read it until I'm out the door). She would follow his instructions, watching him walk slowly out the door, and then she would hurriedly unwrap the paper, her eyes flicking over the scrawled "call me, coffee shop girl" and the number underneath.

Maybe she would be standing on the corner of Alden Wood and Sharpe, absorbed in a book. It would be something classic, but not too abstract or lofty—maybe *Frankenstein*. It would be the best part of the book, the climax, that moment when you just can't put a book down. She would be trying to finish it before work, her eyes darting across the typeset lines. The pages would be weather-beaten; raindrops from last night's five minute storm, red wine from her "table for one" night at the steakhouse, bright orange stains from cheese puffs eaten at one in the morning when sleep had eluded her yet again. She would turn the page, holding the words in her mind, a split second of wondering what would happen next, how the sentence would end. She wouldn't notice the man rushing to get to work, blabbering on his phone to Don about how the company would be ruined if Don did that, no Don, I swear I can't trust you with any—, and then he would crash right into her. *Frankenstein* would soar through the air in a perfect arc and land in a heap of garbage, adding the smell of a days-old banana peel to the pages. The man would grab the book, brush it off on his Burberry coat (it's not too expensive, it's Chicago, I'm sure to get tons of use out of it), and hand it to the stunned woman. In five seconds, he would find the tiny details where love is born (a speck of brown in her otherwise blue eyes, the slight dimple in her left cheek, a small chip on her front tooth). In five and a half seconds, she would notice things about him that even he hadn't (an eyelash hanging off his eyelid, the patch of unshaven scruff on his cheek, the sharpness of his teeth). "That's my favorite book," he would say, and the corners of her mouth would lift into a smile. "Maybe we could talk about it sometime," she would reply. "I know a good coffee shop down the street."

Maybe she would be jogging through the train station, glancing frantically at the large station clock above. Her train would leave at 7:07, but she couldn't be that late, could she? She would pass a news stand (if anyone still reads newspapers, you can get the Chicago Tribune right here), a bakery that smelled like warm muffins and smoke (Ryan, I know it's only your second day, but you can't burn the scones every time), and a shoe shine (man, where have these loafers been, they're covered in dirt). And then she would see it: a digital clock, red numbers blinking 7:05. She could still make it if she ran, so she would hurtle around a corner, absorbing admonishment (watch where you're going, Miss!) and curses (slow your roll, bitch). Finally she would reach the train, only slightly out of breath (thanks high school track team). She would be at the end of the line of people, so she would sit right next to the door (every time it opened, she knew a blast of cold air would hit her squarely in the back), but at least it was a seat. She would just be reaching into her bag for her book (*Frankenstein* was just so good) when she would spot a man running for his life toward the train. The tired voice of the train lady would sound over the speakers, warning passengers to stay clear of the closing doors. The man was close, close enough that he might make it (maybe not), so she would get up from her seat and hold the door open. The man, catching her act of kindness, would put on a burst of speed, and as the train began to pull away, she would extend her hand and he would grab it, rough against smooth, impossibly enormous against impossibly tiny, a million memories shared through the briefest of touch. He would stand next to her for the rest of the journey, talking to her all the way to the station on the corner of Alden Wood and Sharpe, a few blocks away from a little coffee shop called Brentwood.

But maybe she would run a little slower through the station. She wouldn't get a seat, wouldn't see a man hurtling to catch his train, and she would ride alone while he waited for the 7:22. He would be late, and Don was going to mess something up if he didn't hurry, so instead of taking his usual route to work through the corner of Alden Wood and Sharpe, he would take side streets, which were devoid of young women reading *Frankenstein*. And because he had missed his train, because he hadn't walked through Sharpe Lane, he wouldn't stop in the old coffee shop with the cute girl behind the counter. But maybe she would. And he would. (And they will.)

## About the Author

Katie Rebhan is 17 years old and from McLean, Virginia. Writing is her favorite pastime, as she believes it is a way for her to share her ideas and passions with others. In particular, she enjoys writing short stories, essays, and plays, some of which have won writing contests. In addition to writing, Katie plays volleyball and golf and serves as a referee for her county volleyball league. She is also an editor of her school's yearbook and newspaper, and in her free time, she loves to read and bake.



**"New Hobbies"**  
Annabelle Tjio  
digital photography



**"Open for Social Distance"**  
Annabelle Tjio  
digital photography

# Canary in a Coal Mine

By: Elizabeth Shvarts

Canary in a coal mine  
never learned to speak  
never learned to fly  
they used her candle to warm their calloused hands  
Covered in scars and smoke and soot  
before she learned the difference between  
A hearth and hellfire

Canary in a coal mine knew she was porcelain  
A storefront display never meant to

Fracture  
fragile  
forced into a gilded cage  
But little did she know  
"handle with care" was a punchline not a promise

Canary in a coal mine  
Is  
Crystalline commodity  
Taxidermy tucked under plexiglass  
Away from dirt-caked fingernails  
Poised to pry her wings apart

Canary in a coal mine  
Is just another news story an  
age-old metaphor;  
  
I was 12 years old when I read about Brock Turner  
How rape was met with a light rap on the knuckles:  
"Six Months for 'Twenty minutes of Action'"  
Because his hands were of ivory towers of chlorine ablution absolves  
soot-stained sin  
But like the rest restless to reap  
the rewards of tearing down a temple they had no permission to enter, leaving me wondering  
whether my wings would too, be clipped

Whether my treble voice would be sore from screaming like I was a

Canary in a coal mine  
No longer sings full-throated golden noted arias  
Instead  
She learns to croak a battle cry  
Learns to fly away  
Close enough to taste the moonlight sky six feet above

Canary in a coal mine  
learns to dream of  
Dust and ashes  
Ashes and dust,  
Becomes a phoenix rising

Canary in a coal mine  
learns to be infinity



# Sweet Nothing

By: Elizabeth Shvarts

I remember  
Handshakes sealed with spittle  
Our simple ritual sacrosanct  
Who knew show and tee

We found solace in  
Stories of cardboard knights and dragons and princesses who we knew didn't need saving  
but we played along anyway  
Our happy endings  
Dangled  
On the precipice of pinky promises

I remember the locomotion  
Of five-year old limbs swaying to playground hymns  
Before our sweet dance gave way to stasis  
Before dandelion wreaths turned into white puffs of

Smoke  
And mirrors  
But I still remember how you  
You  
Pricked the spindle  
And let  
venom  
overflow in

Your  
*Our* veins  
Braided like the Rainbow Loom bracelets we never got around to finishing  
Tight as my breath when your fingers grazed mine  
Intertwined  
In a fairytale

This time  
The pumpkin rots before the clock strikes twelve and cardboard knights  
Grow weary wielding plastic swords  
This haze of faith and trust and pixie dust was set to dissipate the second our eyes  
My eyes opened

So I'll renounce my dandelion crown, I'll crawl back to the  
Seashores and pray for waves to wipe the slate  
Swallow each syllable as I bleach the taste of strawberry-cinnamon chapstick  
from my tongue

Teach me how to forget  
Forget pinky promises  
Forget fairytales

But I remember loving you  
Once upon a dream

## About the Author

Elizabeth Shvarts is a writer who hails from New York City. She has performed at the Apollo as part of Climate Speaks, a youth arts program about the climate crisis. Her work has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and published in the Incandescent Review. Additionally, Elizabeth is an avid entrepreneur and she co-founded the nonprofit Bridge to Literacy last year to spread literacy to children in underserved communities around the world. In her spare time, she can be found reading, biking, and baking vegan recipes.



2



3

1: Rainy Day Saudade,  
9 x 12 in,  
watercolor

2: Compound 1,  
photography

3: Compound 2,  
photography

# Elwing Gao



# No Hymns for Hyper Realities

By: Olivia Farrar

Seconds are fragments of shrapnel that compose the bullet of the hour

The hour of loafers hypnotized into jumping from  
gas pedal to brake,

Stark, yellow spray paint lines on freeway cement  
remind you of the dried up ravines that bordered your old church,

Orange flags marking the location of pipelines, so weightless in the wind,  
why can't they be wildflowers that barely sway?

Approaching the city center,  
minutes become more methodical—

With your drumming fingernails on the wheel,  
Congestion in the city center calling for sudden stops and gut-wrenching go's,

Shift stick into park,  
The aching ankle hits the pavement, car door shut.

You ascend in an elevator, transferring from one seat  
to the next,  
life to afterlife—

Intersections filled with traffic  
become incoming emails.

Blaring horns  
become coughing coworkers.

Paycheck dissolved into petroleum,  
Dollars shoved into machines dispensing diesel.

At least somewhere in this  
repetitive,  
time-consuming,  
abysmal expanse,  
you could briefly recall flower petals

that grew outside of the office's periphery.

## About the Author

Olivia Farrar (sometimes endearingly referred to as Liv), is a sophomore student at the University of Denver who is currently working towards her English degree with a designation in Creative Writing. She is an award-winning poet and has been published in Foothills Magazine, Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine, Unpublished, and Crossed Paths. The main motifs that circulate throughout her prose and poetry are that of the spiritual, the unspoken, and the unknown. When she's not writing or reading, she's enjoying the beauty of the mountains through her love of hiking, fishing, and camping.

# Sumatra, 1945

By: Nathaniel Voll      *for G. Pauline Kok-Schurgers*

When you were young and  
still trafficking memories  
that follow dream-logic  
(nightmarish indeed),  
you'd squint through the blinds,  
and you'd watch as the foreigners  
trample on history,  
too loyal to see.

And as you recount with your books  
and your flashbacks,  
I wish I could save you  
like you have saved me.  
So hide in Sumatra,  
and do what you're told, or they'll  
scatter you, Oma,  
out over the sea.

Now look beyond Holland,  
past boys draped in violence,  
throw out the binoculars.  
Blinding? Don't see.  
You're overused, beautiful,  
grasping at minor chords.  
You're an antenna  
too focused to see.

For as the sun shatters bright,  
gay and traumatic,  
off aeroplanes painted red  
straight over me,  
I'll think of you, old-soul,  
as energy plummets.  
I'll speechlessly listen,  
unsquintingly see.

Now sign the book, Oma,  
and put aside difference.  
Set fire to the trauma and  
break me in three.  
Save one for yourself,  
and give two to the memories.  
As for the rest?  
It belongs to the sea.

For I am a friend who has broken his promises.  
I am a man who has sinned upon thee.  
And I am a child who cannot understand  
the subtleties nestled in your tragedy.

## About the Author

Nathaniel Voll is a poet, playwright and actor based in Ontario, Canada. He is a graduate of the University of Toronto and Sheridan College's Theatre and Drama Studies program. Nathaniel currently works as a public servant and arts educator, with a focus on community development and restorative justice. When he's not writing, you might find Nathaniel shooting hoops, biking, or fighting off imaginary foes with his 8-year-old son. For more from Nathaniel, visit [nathanielvoll.weebly.com](http://nathanielvoll.weebly.com).





"Melting Pot"  
Acrylic  
5 x 6 in  
Annabelle Tjio

# The Color of Lightning

By: Blythe Wong

Rapid fire lectures chastised Sapph through the bathroom door, her mother's tears of betrayal giving way to anger. As the rawness in her throat crept up again, Sapph swallowed hard and locked the door, her blue-stained fingers shaking as she did so, leaving streaks of lightning on its knob.

The bathroom light ate up Sapph's complexion, flattening her features, painting her sallow. She typically would have frowned at this sight and dabbed rouge onto her milky cheeks, but she merely continued to paste the electric blue dye onto her hair. She did so numbly, fingers scrambling against her scalp, rarely stopping to smooth out tangles or check that each strand was coated evenly. Only when she scraped the bottom of the container did she pause, taking the first real look at herself.

There was a miserable thing in the mirror, her hair hanging limply off her head, matted and slick with dye, ears stained lightning blue.

Despite this, Sapph saw her complexion brighten, and she smiled weakly. As she rinsed off in the shower, the water muffled her mother's fury over Christmas dinner.

Sapph's dress shimmered under the Christmas lights as she staggered up from her seat at the dinner table, swaying precariously on her heels as she beamed at her family. With an air of bravado, she raised her butter knife and struck it against the empty champagne flute, giggling at the chime it produced.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have a juicy declaration for you gossip aficionados," Sapph slurred. "After years of your fun 'guess-the-dyke' game, I'm here to share a little secret!" Pausing for dramatic effect, Sapph gave her best wink and whispered conspiratorially, "I'm gay! The black sheep once again. Surprised?" Chuckling, she stumbled back to her seat, falling back into it as her legs gave way.

The air was thick, oppressive even, as a strained silence filled the room. Sapph watched her uncles bristle, their glares sharp and cold like the darts they shot before dinner. Meanwhile, her aunts brimmed with anticipation, their whispers begging to be passed around the table.

Sapph's mother felt a chill run down her spine and prayed desperately that nobody would question her.

"Lyra, is this true?" Her sister frowned, unable to remain silent any longer.

Keeping her head down, Lyra spoke, hoping her voice sounded steady. "No... it isn't. She's intoxicated. I wouldn't raise... my daughter isn't that kind of person."

Sapph, despite her stupor, understood the implications of her words, and stifled a sob.

Lyra wanted to stop, but her family leaned closer, wanting more. Cursing Sapph for the cold turn of events, her voice hardened. "She's not gay. She's never had piercings, tattoos, or even dyed hair. She's just being childish."

The mirror was now slick with steam from her shower as Sapph leaned forward, lining her eyes lightning blue to match her new hair. With a final flourish of eyeliner, she strode proudly out of the bathroom, beaming.

"Sappho Callas! Your behavior was unacceptable. Do you know how ashamed I was?" Her mother stood in the dim hallway, her red-rimmed eyes stern. "Wait—what did you do to your poor hair?"

Taking a deep breath, Sapph stepped past her and swung the front door wide open. With one foot already out of the house, she turned to face her mother, her hair incandescent with the color of lightning.

"Nothing much, Ma. Just making sure the world knows who I really am."

# dear diary

By: Blythe Wong

dear diary, i think i fell in love today  
she sang Sinatra, velvety like melted chocolate,  
her eyes gleaming in some special way  
and though i knew what trouble this was to bring  
blood boomed in my ears and  
all i wanted was to watch her sing  
she swayed on stage, flushed with bliss  
and all i could think was  
didn't Sappho say her skin sparked like this?

dear diary, i told her today  
with mercury pulsing through my veins and  
the metronome in my chest at vivace  
there i stood, singing her praise  
like an evangelist at church, but  
with chocolates and a fifty dollar bouquet  
her chilling glare was the last of her i saw  
i wasn't to be trusted, she said  
leaving me ashamed, and completely rubbed raw.

dear diary, i was blackmailed today  
he told me he would out me  
and i felt a stutter in my airway  
how cruel one must be, how grotesquely flawed  
he gripped my skin by the corners and  
crushed my carefully curated facade  
i willed the crack of a palm and an imperfect scream  
his cheek throbbed scarlet red  
in my eccentric daydream.

dear diary, i finally came out today  
and my momma, she told me  
i couldn't possibly be gay  
she said i was just in it to fit in  
she knew my friends,  
with their dyed hair, their punk rock sin  
and i just wanted that "rainbow privilege"  
because colleges crave diversity and  
queer employees boost the company image.

dear diary, i think i'll be okay  
momma hasn't come around but  
i took pops to pride today  
although the flags were twenty a piece  
and momma would surely be disappointed  
he knew their true value and bought one for me  
as we walked home, taking the scenic track  
i squeezed his hand tight  
for my flag waved proudly from the opening in his backpack.



# the candy in the back of my mouth

By: Blythe Wong

1.  
summertime sweetness under the fireworks  
far away, they were blooming dreams and  
the thunder of my heart  
like shooting stars dipped in morning dew and rainbows  
and your kisses, they were like  
fizzy lemon drops in my mouth.
2.  
it's four o' clock in the morning but  
the dark circles under my eyes  
they ache for you  
when i wake up, the taste of sweet citrus  
on my tongue and the rawness of my lips are  
happily reminiscent of childlike wonder.
3.  
i look up when i'm under you and  
your ceiling reeks of confusion and doubt  
but my world begins to spin again with the  
raised corners of your mouth, the squint of your eyes  
the candy in my mouth turns sweet and  
i know it's because of you.
4.  
on my neck are blue and purple blossoms  
i find it funny how broken capillaries are now  
symbols of ownership, but i think i like it  
yet with the scrape of your teeth  
my soul feels stolen and your lemon drops grow flat—  
i tie my hair up regardless.
5.  
backed into a corner: adulation turns to avarice, malignant like a tumor  
your candy throbs against the roof of my mouth and  
i want to spit it out but you—  
you've grown tired and i have not, so i continue  
my teeth ache and the moon laughs and  
the asphalt pushes up against my soles.
6.  
bruised cherries and raspberry slush stain my underwear,  
this time not as a monthly annoyance but rather  
a safe haven, for your disgust is my escape—  
i no longer need to part my legs  
the pain ceases, but i'm dismissed often now  
your lemon drops become unforgivably acidic.
7.  
it has grown hollow, the candy in my mouth  
i try to speak: one scrape of my teeth and it shatters, leaving nothing  
but a souring, saccharine aftertaste and  
an impression that i did something wrong  
for my lips are still chapped and sticky and  
despite myself, i'm *aching*—  
aching for the candy in the back of my mouth.

# Michelangelo Child

By: Blythe Wong

## TRIGGER WARNING: SUICIDE/SELF-HARM

Tell me, lonely child  
Why do you hide your zebra-striped arms  
The raw pink flesh on your wrists  
Why cover your pain with layers of cloth and concealer  
Are you afraid of letting them know how deeply you feel?

Tell me, lonely child  
Why does the pocket knife in your pencil case feel like home  
When you are so sickened by the lines it carves  
You did this to yourself, you should be proud  
How can you look at your creations and weep?

Tell me, lonely child  
Why do you lock the door before making art  
Aren't you proud of the way you carve your pathetic self  
Into a marvelous sculpture of blood and bones  
Did Michelangelo shun and ridicule his masterpieces too?

Tell me, lonely child  
Why continue to create if you are so ashamed  
Have you become so infatuated with your art that  
Putting your knife away is like losing an appendage  
Are the patterns on your skin the equivalent of crack cocaine?

Tell me, lonely child  
Why do you balk at sharing your art  
You know it is the only way out  
Are you afraid that they'll take your work away?  
You can let the scars linger as long as they like, you know

Let me tell you this, brave child  
Your magna opera are beautiful  
But keep creating your sculptures and soon  
You'll be nothing more than a shrunken bag of skin and veins  
Sucked dry by artistic mania and tissues wet with blood

It's time to give up your blade, brave child  
There's more to life than "pretty" pink lines  
Unlock your door and roll up your sleeves  
There will be someone waiting to kiss your wounds

And it'll get better from there, I promise.

– From one Michelangelo to another

# Icarus, My Love

By: Blythe Wong

Icarus, my love  
Your wings may be ghastly skeletons of  
candle wax and odd feathers  
seared black by the unforgiving sun,  
Nevertheless, I will remember when  
majestic feathery beasts sprouted forth from  
your back, brilliant white and thrumming with faith.  
They call you arrogant, but I call it hopeful bravery

That is something I can only wish to have.

Icarus, my love  
Could you spare me your cocktails of hubris and vainglory,  
or perhaps a hefty slice of your ego for dinner?  
I am starved and would like to survive today.

My love,  
One day I will become proud like you  
and I shall build my own waxy wings,  
Soaring high to meet that brilliant, blazing star  
melting myself to the bone, victorious  
then falling like a blue flamed comet,  
My scorched, searing dreams trailing behind me

As I enter the atmosphere, the world shall tremble.

Icarus, my love  
When I pierce the heartless, bitter sea  
swallowed by the relentless tide,  
I will burn through the waters until I find you—  
—you, buried deep in the ocean floor, engulfed in silt and  
fine stardust, your pride reduced to a smouldering ember.  
Then I too, will fade out beside you,  
the last remnants of our bravery and pride  
evanescent to ocean ash.

Icarus, my love  
When we scatter to the ends of the Earth  
carried by capering currents and  
the salt-laden winds atop the sea  
When you forget me in the  
Howl of the Tide and Luna's pull,  
Remember  
the way the sky roared when we flew,  
the way the universe shattered around us.

We may have fallen, my love, but we fall triumphant.

And then, goodbye  
Icarus, my love  
as unrelenting as I.

# the world remains cold

By: Blythe Wong

night falls—

—the stars refuse to descend,  
so i do instead.  
one too many frigid, hazy grey nights and  
i am left adrift, craving warmth the way  
an infant craves his mother's embrace,  
the way i crave her silken voice purring my name.

you, strength, sit atop my table  
calling to me from that amber gilded tarot deck.  
sunlight kisses your freckles and beckons to me:  
enraptured instantly, my discordant tears subside.  
your rays, like molten gold, intertwine with my eyelashes  
your soft milky hands cup my wet cheeks—

—but the world remains cold.

i carry you in my pocket, running my thumb across  
the battered top of your card as  
warm spring zephyrs dance about my fingertips.  
you smile at me when you catch me looking: your lips are  
cherry red, the color of an eccentric daydream  
i envelope myself in that beautiful carmine—

—still, the world remains cold.

we play often, sometimes as children, other times as lovers  
you braid wildflowers into my hair and  
whisper poetry beside my ear, gentle lavender stanzas  
the color of hydrangeas left out in the rain.  
yet love smothers under inequality, and hand in hand we suffer  
for you are strong and i am not—

—and so the world remains cold.

you stare out at me, cerulean eyes inquisitive  
unable to understand the coldness that persists.  
i have received fizzy kisses that taste of champagne and  
dozed in strength's dewy meadows, secure in your arms  
you have played your fiddle, making tunes like melodious honey  
but i have failed you and  
you, *strength*, have failed *me*—

—for the world remains cold.

## About the Author

Blythe is a senior studying at Hong Kong International School. Through creative writing, especially poetry, she likes to share important events and reflect on emotions. Most of her pieces explore sexuality and self-growth, so her writing is highly personal. Although she has only recently begun to share her poems with others, Blythe hopes that they can form a connection with her pieces and find solace in them. Some of her other pieces have also been recognized by the *Scholastic Art and Writing Awards* and the *Bitter Fruit Review*, so readers can check those out too if they're interested.

# lost incantation

By: Laura Owens

my dear,  
what am I?  
a cold  
brambled work of art  
and what are these?  
ancient runes  
or  
*biro marks*  
you called them,  
gracing ashen skin  
atop a withered heart

these sunken grooves  
bloodied tattoos  
open wounds for you  
to dig your grubby nails  
into a little harder  
your six-foot grave  
a little deeper  
go on  
*I dare you*

open wide  
lashed curtains  
to years of shrouded fears  
etched upon those  
dusty panes  
that flash  
like a VHS on fast  
forward  
how delusional!  
but what a feast  
for my own  
tear-stained glass

oh tempest  
borne of thorns  
and salted rain!  
a true work of  
heart— come on  
you can't deny  
how beautiful the sky  
looks when she's  
angry

I bet you're wishing  
the storm had two eyes  
because then there'd be room  
for the both of us

but alas

my offering  
to her  
a sacrifice  
no more as  
your body climbs  
long flailing limbs  
and ample shrieks sublime  
my parting gift  
to you—  
your shrinking form—  
a knowing wink  
I bid you  
take good care of it  
for once,  
my dear

## About the Author

Laura Owens is a 3D animator and aspiring poet currently residing in Oxfordshire, UK. Her words have appeared/are forthcoming in online and print publications including Thorn Lit, Eye Flash Poetry, Dreams Walking, Ayaskala, Q/A Poetry, perhappened, and Detritus. Say hi on Twitter/Instagram @laurabethowens

# my anxiety compels me to write a hymn for myself or perhaps it's a prayer in verses

By: Praise Osawaru

**TRIGGER WARNING: SUICIDE/SELF-HARM**

my anxiety hangs around my neck like my native bead [Ivie]  
or perhaps it is the rosary.  
when i step out under the morning star,  
my shadow scowls at me,  
so i retire & clip myself to an unlit corner.  
except on Sundays when i go for the sermon.  
the pastor breathes into my ears:  
O, have faith & be steadfast. there's light up ahead.  
but how do i tell him i've seen a stream flow  
from my wrists, yet i'm petrified of swimming.

i sit in my room & compose a hymn for myself  
or perhaps it is a prayer in verses.  
it goes like this:  
oh, seeping fear, depart from me.  
oh, enticing silence, let me be.  
oh, undying insomnia, release me.  
i recite the words over & over again  
until it becomes a garment i muffle my body in,  
but i still do not find quietude in myself.  
it's been six days since i last departed for the chapel  
i ponder what the pastor will hum into my head tomorrow, if i go.



# Mindscape

By: Praise Osawaru

My mind hosts swirling imageries that speak,  
& shadows that assume the role of paintings.  
Some nights, I see my hands locked with faces  
my flickering lens is yet to capture with its click,  
still, my mind sculptures a masterwork with an unrestrained muse.  
Like a poem not forced to rhyme, allowed to take its path,  
roses bloom unfetteredly amidst a landscape birthed  
within the canvaslike walls of my mind.  
It's crazy how I seek solace in the embrace of tethered,  
but untouched souls that instill calmness,  
when every day, thunder claps like the sound  
of hundred waves crashing down on the shore.

## About the Author

Praise Osawaru is a writer and (performance) poet of Bini descent. He's a Best of the Net nominee with works appearing/forthcoming in *Blue Marble Review*, *FERAL*, *Ghost Heart Lit*, *Glass Poetry*, *Kalahari Review*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, *Serotonin*, *Sub-Saharan Magazine*, and elsewhere. He was longlisted for Babishai 2020 Haiku Award and shortlisted for the Nigerian Students Poetry Prize 2020. An undergrad at the University of Benin, Nigeria, he's a Virgo who loves the strange and speculative. You can find him on Instagram/Twitter: @wordsmithpraise.

# euneirophrenia

By: Allison Zhuang

here's to the youth i could only have in dreams: suspended in the temperate nowhere between blindness and longing, laced boots splashing chlorine from the glassy puddles underfoot, the breathless air lulled in a wisteria haze, nested in rust-red ribs, let us wet the concrete with dying footprints, bleeding honey, flaunting silly truths and precious dares; let us

breathe

each other in and drape laughter over yearning; welcome the green grass stains climbing over our knees; wash our voices over each other's, 5 existences intertwined; (we don't worship the gods because we are them) us, pooled in dew beneath watchful golden streetlights; what could've been, swaying in the shadows.

the orchestra of copper sequoia surrounds our very own twilit galaxy. us, young enough to hunger; us, old enough to hurt. together in a ring, together in our years, let us pledge our bodies to temporal ruin,

carve open our souls to sip upon milky emergence, swim with our silent, submerged dreams and hold our friends always this close;

whispers the cobwebbed after-hours fountain:

*you will, you will, you will*

# $ax^2+bx+c$

By: Allison Zhuang

i can't see the bottom of this black pond.  
two koi circle; your wrongs sink and my remembrances float.  
who is this? it's not you on this trembling glass.  
to recall is to miss.  
red-blossoming swimmers must have been lost  
in communication because there are too many unknowns.  
i'm sketching the parabola of you  
but in this murky pond, there are only two  
fish—as many fragments of truth i needed minus one.

$$f(x) = ax^2+bx+c$$

three variables for a, b, and c, three  
points to articulate a parabola's spine,  
raising its sunlit arms to face the sky or  
hunched, bleeding out on cracked earth.  
just one koi too few.  
my graphing notebook tells me: insufficient information; infinite solutions; the answer  
could be anything (there is none).  
the water swallows the crumpled parabola into its void.

so i'll bunch up my paper resolve and fold it into flowers to drop at your door.  
slinking away, i'll scour the bottom of this cold pond for redemption and you.

## About the Author

Allison Zhuang is a poet from Palo Alto, California. A current gap student and an alumna of the 2019 Kenyon Review Young Writers Summer Program, her work aims to explore the self and express the inexpressible. When in the throes of writer's block, she can be found punning, singing, collecting manatee plushies, or exploring Northern California's beautiful coasts.

# The Old Green House on the Mountaintop

By: Laura Ogden

You slam the boot door of your black Bentley Continental and crunch across the gravel in your glossy Derbys, awkwardly carrying the large “FOR SALE” sign under your arm. Gusty winds are blowing the salty ocean breeze up the mountain from the sea, making you shiver, so you hug the sign more tightly to your body, using it to shield yourself from the winds. You set up the sign beside the driveway, and then stand back to admire your handiwork. You like the vision of your name and face up there on the yellow sign, alongside the company’s locally famous slogan – “*Your Dream Home Awaits!*”. You haven’t even stepped inside this particular property before, but you’re confident that your slick salesmanship skills will have the place sold within the fortnight.

You march up the driveway to the front door of the ugly old shack – *no*, your inner realtor interjects, “*antique cottage*” – and pause briefly to find the perfect words to title the property listing. While you pause to think, you hear the wind moaning, insects buzzing loudly, and the relentless trickling of a stream nearby. “*Listen to the soothing sounds of nature from your own personal treehouse,*” you think, making a mental note for the description. As you unlock the door and step over the threshold, the hardwood floors creaking beneath your feet, you hear a faint *cuckoo! cuckoo!* coming from the living room. Absentmindedly, you hang your gold jacket up on a hook overhanging a door to your left. You turn and stroll into the living room, peering around with all the keen interest of an obvious tourist. You don’t hear the door creaking open, nor the hook dragging the coat inside the other room, nor the door closing again.

The living room bears all the signs of abandonment; but, with the well-trained eyes a realtor, you see all the signs of potential. Tree roots and branches have grown into the room through the windows and fireplace, but they can be cut back. There are cracks in the walls, roofs, and floors, through which trail networks of ants treading their well-worn paths; but these can be plastered over, plugged up. Ramshackle furniture is strewn across the room, overturned and decaying, but easy enough to dispose of. Carpeting the floor are layers of leaves trampled flat by years of fauna footsteps, but a quick sweep shows that the floorboards are salvageable. A mosquito buzzes around your face, looking for a place to land. When it settles on your sleeve, you quickly smack it and flick its gunky carcass off into the air. “*Abundance of flora and fauna from your front door*”, you mentally note. Your eyes are drawn to the mantelpiece over the fireplace, where you see the aged cuckoo clock that had chimed at your entering. You’re surprised it still works, considering the state of the rest of the furniture in the room. As if aware of your approach, the clock springs to life; a small, brightly-painted, yellow bird bursts out of the small door and chimes – *cuckoo, cuckoo!* – before springing back inside its hiding place. The minute hand twitches into place to mark a new hour. Looking at your watch, you notice that the clock’s time is wrong, so you reach out and gently push the hands into the correct place. The bird bursts forth again – *cuckoo, cuckoo!* – and then retreats behind the door. Broken, obviously, but charming nonetheless. Oddly comforted by the quaint little clock, you begin to whistle to yourself. You turn cheerily towards the kitchen, and in your distraction, trip over a jutting root that you could have sworn was not there a minute ago. You mutter a few choice expletives to yourself while inspecting your ankle for damage; you don’t hear the quiet chuckling.

With greater mindfulness of your surroundings, especially tree roots, you weave through the overturned furniture, sticks, dirt, leaves, and other natural debris – “*an idyllic paradise*,” you tell yourself – to inspect the rest of the house. The place seems much bigger from the inside; the further in you walk, the more doors you notice, and hallways leading off impossibly into more rooms, and a staircase that seems to go downwards, into the mountain itself. You consider going back outside to get some perspective, but curiosity bids you further inside. The wind howls more loudly, making the walls creak and groan. You whistle more loudly to yourself in response. When what remains of the kitchen hits your eyes, you stop whistling, and sigh, knowing you have your salesmanship work cut out for you – the sink is completely clogged with muddy water, spilling over onto the linoleum. A fat frog is balancing on a plate, half-submerged in the makeshift sink-pond; it croaks as you enter and leaps out the window above the sink, splashing more water onto the floor. You groan at the state of the oven, which has become a sort of nest for a family of possums, who hiss as you approach. Grimacing, you bend down – your knees aren’t what they used to be – and try to pry open a cupboard. While you tug at the unmoving handle, a white spider descends on glistening string from a web in the eaves overhead, silent as it turns eight eyes to face you. You manage to pull the door free and fall backwards into the puddled water in the process. A bat flies out unexpectedly, flapping frantically, trying to escape the sudden excess of light. A deep rumbling emanates from another room, like snoring, and you instinctually feel alarmed, somehow, as if you are trespassing; yet you know the house is empty, has been abandoned by the owners for years. You feel a tingling on the back of your neck that is unrelated to the cool breeze, and decide you’ve seen enough of the house for one day. You know nobody is nearby, and that the house is empty, but you’re starting to feel unnerved by the isolation and all the encroaching nature. It’s just the wind whistling and moaning, and the creaking and groaning of the forest outside, you reassure yourself, trying to massage the goosebumps out of your arms as you get to your feet. The creaking sounds makes you think of senior citizens struggling from their beds, getting to their feet as fast as nature will allow. The thought triggers you into doing a few calf stretches.

You take a step towards the dining area, and as the sole of your left shoe descends you hear a shrill squeak; looking down, you see the tail of some small animal scurrying off into the shadows. At the same time, you hear the cuckoo clock from the living room burst open again, with a shrill *cuckoo! cuckoo! cuckoo!* You ignore it at first, but the clock doesn’t stop this time; you peer back into the living room and see the bird shooting in and out of the clock with an increasingly haphazard passion, as though the clock is trying to jettison the bird, or the bird is trying to escape the clock. Yet the bird and the clock are manufactured as one and the same, chiming and tweeting in unison, irretrievably entwined, unable to stop. You pick up the clock and look for the batteries, but there are none. As the cuckoo clock grows steadily more fervent in its acknowledgement of time, you hear, again, a deep rumbling snore, louder this time, and the stirrings of ancient limbs from deep sleep. Startled, you drop the fragile clock onto the floor, where it smashes. The bird, vulnerable in mid-*cuckoo*, snaps apart from the clock, and its chiming falters into nothingness.

You try to cross the hardwood floors more quickly now, dodging roots that seem to be appearing wherever you try to plant your feet, to find the exit and leave before you lose your nerve entirely. You leap over a tree root that is grabbing at the air around your feet, sidestep a glistening spiderweb, and skid on some soaked floorboards; the water spilled in the kitchen is rising quickly from seemingly nowhere, now sloshing around your ankles. In the entryway, you see that your jacket is missing, and the coat hook gone. Dark rainclouds have collected overhead, drowning the entrance in overcast darkness. You stop to pull out your pocket notebook one last time to jot down the perfect title, which has come to you at last – “*secluded fixer-upper*” – and quickly use the wall as a vertical desk to lean on. The wind quickens as you make contact with the wall, and the house audibly protests this time; the walls sway and creak, and all the doors slam shut.

You jump and exit quickly through the front door, not bothering to lock it. A strong gust of wind blows it shut behind you, almost clipping you on the way out. While scurrying back to your Bentley, you hear the wind howl more loudly and the house groaning and moaning, disgorging you like the first bite of some unpleasant new food. You stumble into the car and lock the doors. You pause for a moment, staring back at the house against the backdrop of the swaying forest, and behind it, the panoramic views of the city below – and a final winning description comes to you. “*Breathtaking, striking views.*” As you pause to write it down, impressed by your own instinct for copywriting, a branch creaks ominously overhead. You adjust your tie in the rear-view mirror and turn on the ignition, feeling quite optimistic about the place. Sure, it has its quirks, but you’ve seen worse. If all else fails, the new owners could just knock the place down and start again, you think. People will pay anything for a view of the city, even if it’s out here in the middle of nowhere. You roll out of the driveway just as a heavy falling branch narrowly misses you; it lands with a sickening crunch in the exact spot you had been parked just a second ago. But you’ve cranked the stereo and are turning onto the road, whistling along to the song on the radio.

### About the Author

Laura Ogden was recently part of the international anthology *Poetry in the Time of Coronavirus* (2020) and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Juste Milieu*, *The Tundish Review*, *Femagogy Zine*, and *Soul Talk Mag*. She studies English Literature and posts about books on Instagram @drawingliterature.



“dream” Luana Góes 9 x 9 in ballpoint pen and collage on paper



# Your Commentary, by the Mirrors

By: Karina Samuel

## 1. Piano

You used to play Einaudi's *Nuvole Bianche* on the piano like grandpa taught you before he disappeared from within these brick walls. I watched you struggle, pensive, wishing the notes vibrated against the darkened, browned strings. Your right hand *sang*, and your left hand *crooned* in the same way his hands did when he played it. But now, every time your fingers even hover over the cold, ivory keys, the world is a dark, frosty winter. The roof caved in on you, and I felt it too. At least, I perceived it, from looking at the back of you. My gold frame was withering away with your familiar touch.

**Do you remember a time before the scant remnants of your worth were not measured by the quantity of time you felt compelled to stare at me? I would find it hard to believe if you did.**

## 2. Brother

You used to share a room with your *delicate* twin brother before he was whisked off to boarding school for being *different, special*. You both would screech the theme songs of children's shows, a whimsical abyss of sameness never challenged by monotony. I would watch you two perched in front of the slightly cracked, sweating windows, furiously staring at the white cars that drove by, in the sweltering Florida summer. You didn't look at me as much as I looked at you, back then. Maybe it is because I am forced to meet everyone's gaze, no matter the time of day. My eyes are always open, glassy and nondescript. Imagine that, a quiet observer. You don't know him.

**Do you remember the times that you would sit in the back of dad's flaming red pick-up truck, listening, absorbing, breathing in the rhythmic jazz? I do, even though I couldn't hear it. I was a cracked rear-view where objects are closer than they appear. You were an innocent twelve.**

**Just a note: I see you crying, sometimes. Your face turns puffy and it's on fire and your medication rubs off on your clothes. It's red and blue and all the colors in between. When you look at me, it makes you cry more. When your eyes aren't brown they are red. That's not normal, is it?**

## 3. Ballet

You used to take ballet with the *fragile* boy next door. He was fragile because your mom used to say that ballet wasn't for boys, that boys don't wear pink, that boys were trouble until you turned ripe, mature. The ballet studio was my family: squared with me, and me only. He was fragile, but still your partner for the *Giselle*. With your *pas de deux*, the earth shattered, but I stayed intact, of course. My brothers and I, watching you.

You would still look at me, but you never met my gaze in that room. You would stare at your feet, your thighs, your hips, and then at the other sickly girls, to compare. Your eyes were desert wanderers, vagabonds in the clutter that was your life. *Vagabond*. Oh, that 20th-century classic, A minor. Too bad I don't have ears to listen to pianos. I can only *see* the fleeting emotion of the pianist.

**Do you remember your first dimly-lit piano lesson? The room was dark and warm and yellow because Mrs. D. had outdated light fixtures. She looked like an overgrown vineyard waiting for winter to rip her apart. From where I watched, the only times she ever smiled was when you waltzed in with a check between your fingers, or when your mother forced you to give her gifts. Gift cards, usually, because nothing could match the gift of music she already owned. Otherwise, she wore a grimace that was two-parts tragedy and one part disdain from being forgotten. You didn't forget her, though. I still see you clutching that glossy Polaroid photograph you took when you were fourteen and she was six times that. When she died, you knew the winter came.**

#### 4. Skin

You've examined yourself in me on innumerable occasions. However, me and my brothers know full well your skin is your vulnerability. I saw your blue box flooded, overflowing with the creams and gels and lotions of the ocean, and I see you clutch each of one them between your bony fingers hoping they will magically heal your scars. You don't like to look at me during the process, because you notice your imperfections: your red and brown marks, your cysts, your unplucked brows. I see you getting upset, and I understand. Sometimes I want to tell you that nothing matters more than your inside, that I couldn't care less if you looked perfect or not. But who am I to talk? You only ever see my outside: the sparkling, flashy glass. Also, I don't know what you *people* deem perfect. All I know is that I give you your perfect reflection.

**Ah! Reflection, from Mulan. You used to play that on the piano, your escape. I don't think you remember how it goes anymore.**

**I hope you realize I am just aluminum metal. Just like all the other mirrors. And I also hope you realize that you and everyone else are all humans. I've made a few observations of your type.**

- 1. You all talk way too much.**
- 2. You all care way too much about the way you look.**
- 3. You are fake.**

#### 5. Scale (*not major, minor, harmonic, although I wish I was talking about those*)

You never used to stand on top of this *thing*, until now. I'm not entirely sure what it does, just that it makes you scowl and whine and glance sideways at me again. I see meaningless numbers that change by small margins each day. You see your entire valuation.

#### More observations:

**1. The scale is usually hovering at around 110 when you stand on it. Now, I'm not a nutritionist, but from what I've watched, most people that stand on it manifest higher numbers by a significant margin. They don't get upset.**

**You do.**

**2. The number decreases= :)**

**3. The number increases= :(**

**4. There are weight loss pills on your black countertop. Where did you even get those?**

#### 6. That *Night*

**Your skin is flushed and swollen and your eyes are rolling back in their sockets. You are half ghost, half flame, which leaves no more room for *alive*.**

**What on Earth are you doing? The white pills are in your left hand, shaking like you're having an earthquake from the inside, bubbles erupting from your volcanic mouth.**

**Oh, and the worst part? *I have no idea what to do.***

**A tall man that I've never seen before scoops you up and throws you on a blanketed stretcher. You leave.**

#### 7. Me

I never got to say goodbye.

Some final observations:

**1. I'm not usually this cynical, but the world is a terrible place.**

**Sometimes.**

**2. I remember EVERYTHING.**

**3. Everyone misses you. Or at least, they look like they do.**

**4. You were really, really good at the piano.**

**5. Gosh, you are were beautiful.**

*Goodbye.*

*-Your Mirrors*

### About the Author

Karina Samuel is a student at North Broward Preparatory School in Coconut Creek, Florida. Her work is heavily inspired by her extensive musical background in theoretical piano and violin.

# pretty things skinny things

By: Jaiden Thompson

friend melted lipstick into holy water; she asked me to insert the needle  
in her and when i poured it into a vase instead like sticky pink wine i said  
pretty thing pretty thing please stop being their thing; we toasted;

two years later she's a skinny thing skinny thing; no bones;  
only bright marrow; that's all she digests nowadays you see;  
*gotta be a pretty thing pretty thing; she's a sickly parrot;*

she tells me i'm a pretty thing pretty thing; that's not true  
but i say skinny thing skinny thing let me birth you bones  
though you've never been an eve i will be your adam;

and i peel back flesh; slice my plumpest rib so softly;  
i tell her skinny thing skinny thing feel no shame;  
this is no rebirth but your body will be anew;

for a skinny thing skinny thing she was rather ample;  
i soar through her body looking for a lovely nest;  
skinny thing skinny thing i'll make you whole again;

but she is still a skinny thing skinny thing with new bone;  
and when her family smells my collagen they thrashed her;  
hard; oh god that hurt; they break my rib like her;

oh but now i'm a pretty thing pretty thing! glorious!  
skinny things are pretty things! thus i am such a  
prettythingprettythingprettythingprettything thing

## About the Author

Jaiden is a young writer from Washington state, looking for their soul through writing verse and prose on occasion. As a raging member of the LGBT community, their poems more than often venture into queer themes and concepts. Other motifs within their writing include religion/mythology, racism, and the struggles of adolescence. Occasionally, they post some of their writing on their instagram (@a\_poets\_entrails).



"Discontinued"  
5 x 6 in  
Acrylic  
Annabelle Tjio

# Kalopsia Literary Journal

## About the Issue:

Layout and Design by  
**Peter Donley**

Cover Art:  
"Paddle"  
**Elwing Gao**  
8 x 12 in  
watercolor

## Staff Artist Biographies:

### **Elwing Gao:**

Elwing Gao is a 17-year-old artist from the Silicon Valley Bay Area. Her favorite medium is watercolor, which she is desperately trying (and failing) to stay away from at the moment in order to develop her own flexibility. In her free time, she likes to go outside, press flowers, and play guitar. You can find more of her art @waves.and.washes on Instagram.

### **Luana Góes:**

Luana Góes is an artist and designer from north Brazil. Her work often uses more than one medium in one piece, from acrylics to watercolors and collages. The art she produces is very influenced by her culture and community, various topics like mental health and movements like impressionism. You can find her on Instagram at @luana.g.m.

### **Annabelle Tjio:**

Based in Washington, Annabelle Tjio is a high school senior and Running start student. From graphite pencils, charcoals, and various paints to digital photography, she enjoys experimenting with multiple art mediums. Her art has been twice displayed at the Florida Bar Association and has since then, taken several art classes to develop her skills. When she isn't taking pictures, she's usually playing frisbee or perfecting her chocolate strawberry dipping form.