

# KALOPSISIA

POETRY | PROSE | VISUAL ART



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# Masthead

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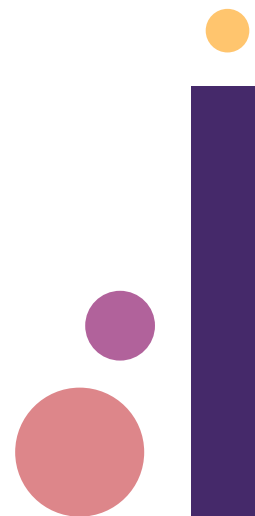
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# 3:10 a.m.

By: Isabelle Li

the highway is sea-tinged tonight,  
blue hour traffic stagnant.  
the liquor breath on golden gate bridge  
whispers bromides to lemon lamplight:

the driver side smoker wasn't / another burnt-out mollusk / switching station to wave murmurs / missing the next exit home / & the headless pedestrian wasn't heart-filled / brain-emptiness / wanderlust surfing an underlying pass / & the air wasn't pregnant with solitary brine / hung dry like ships in fisherman's wharf / & it did not just rain / & i do not break things before i touch them / & i am capable of love / & craving warmth / & carmine comforts / & i did not break a man's heart / before a boy's / & paint my nails blue / crude & bright / but the sewage drain is thirstier than ever / & the sky does what i cannot / the sidewalk siphons pluvial rings / like whitecap swells around my feet / the empyrean kisses concrete earth / in extended plays & exhaust hymns / every hum is an elegy to something / further & further off human shore.

## About the Author:

Isabelle Li is a student from Northern California. Her work has been recognized by Creative Communications and the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She has an appreciation for the (un)ordinary: antiques, chapbooks, daydreams, two-week-old cookies, and complaining about sleep deprivation. Catch her on a good week, and she'll even bake you a new batch!



Elwing Gao  
"98 Sun-flares Through a Looking Glass"  
Photographic typology



# birthday poem (not a poem)

By: Aria Hadley

yesterday I slept after I counted my white socks in rotation, and yesterday I slept but not before making a mental note to iron my school blouse. yesterday was a rainy july morning and there is no gap between the yesterday where I lost and the yesterday where I resorted to remembering. today the hour is empty, my hands are full and I'm here drunk on an absence I can't pinpoint.

three weeks before my eighteenth I was sixteen but memory still reels over the roses I received at fifteen. sometimes I'm a poet because I love the memory more than the person. but I don't have to swear to know: I loved who I was in the presence of people who loved me back. we were birthday wishes too young, too tender, too daring. we were stars trapped in between branches. I don't have a birthday wish: I have a dream holier than any prayer and in the empty air of time, the emptiness permits me to miss what could fill it.

(the thing is, we could have ran towards the center of any road and met god.)

then, then I beg. I begged for my walls back because I need the white empty slates, and in this room it's only sweltering hot for half the year. I don't know how to love but I know how to make a memorial, I know how to write a thought and tack it on the plywood walls. I know how to keep my lifelines close to me—I know where to look to remind myself to breathe. my dreams are etched on the slanted ceilings with firelights to guide me to slumber. going on eighteen, I do nothing but chase an absence like all the years before. where are the unkempt notes hanging where they should be? where are the ink smudges to remind myself that I am an artist, that I am capable of loving? I'd beg for the bugs back, the humid nightmare-showers if it meant my familiar demise.

so yes, I'm carving every prayer I find, I turn apathy into art. I want my walls back. if I ask you to tell me all the things you've wanted to say to me (or all the things i want you to say to me)—would silence be the only thing that spills from your mouth? so no, I don't have a birthday wish because if I jump into the depths of my longing there would be nothing left to curate. because I've thrown every lost gesture into ink as if my poems offer absolution to her full-bodied nothingness. here, every word, tacked on a wall that maps so much of who I am not.

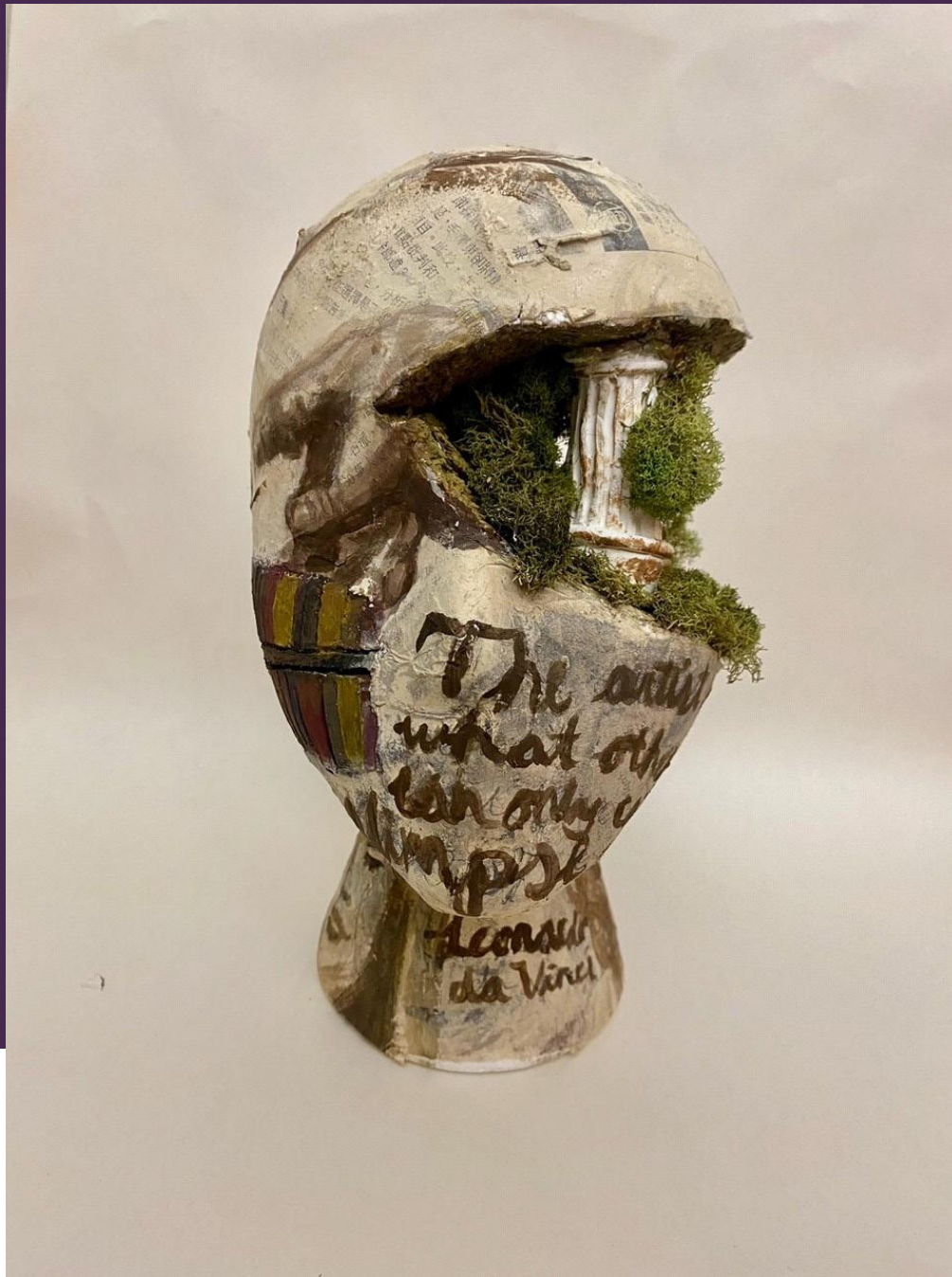
now, now at seventeen yesterday mouths her regrets and suddenly I want to vandalize every sonnet I have ever written. I want to text her that I miss her voice but not her and I want to tell her I hate her then correct myself that no, I don't hate you, I just hate how you made me feel. hours later after the first text the next would read, *i'm sorry, i was drunk* and it means: *i've had half a bottle of soju and you know that feeling you get when everything is heartbreakingly clear? that hyperawareness, that sort of sobriety? that's the feeling i carried when I was with you and that kept me sane, but see, I didn't want to be sane and god damn it, tell me my writing haunts you and I hate you but here's my poetry anyways and I loved the monotony of trying to matter to you, in whatever sense, whatever the hell that means and*

*I wished to return the passive aggressiveness you threw my way, I still wish to hear every senseless thing you say and I'm sorry my wanting to be loved came across as loving you though really, none of this was an accident. none of my lost hours for her were incidental, and really, I'm not sorry but I wish she was—I'll wake up sun-kissed and yearning and maybe she won't believe me but the walls will.*

**About the Author:**

Aria Hadley is a humanities student, calligraphy enthusiast, and poet. They can be seen spacing out while thinking about clouds and listening to movie soundtracks. She has also been published in *Flare Journal*.

Heidi Hu  
"Renaissance"  
9.5 x 6.5 x 5.5 in.  
Mixed Media



*Renaissance* was inspired by the cultural outburst that occurred during the Renaissance period in European history. Art, music, literature, science, and other fields all saw major breakthroughs and advancements during the Renaissance, and it was a time of pursuing knowledge in all fields. In the piece, I included quotes and sketches from Leonardo da Vinci, arguably one of the most famous and possibly also most influential people of the Renaissance. I admire and respect the work that was done during the Renaissance, and this piece was my interpretation of the period.



# crossword poem

By: Sanya Tinaikar

my dad says crosswords take you away from the world like an escapist living in a makeshift bus on an ill-fated adventure, so he solves one every Sunday with a cup of coffee in hand and a pencil to his temple leafing through his lexicon, and I like crosswords as much as the next person traveling through city traffic junctions amid tangled interactions I really do, where control is promised and illusions are impermeable and if you tap someone on the shoulder you'll find them trapped in an abstract matrix of letters, linguistics, & ampersands, I read once that it takes a cruciverbalist up to six hours to make the modern grid, so I wonder if they get trapped in totalitarian one-dimensional squares, as mundane as it is marvelous, the next time I whip my pen out to ascribe arbitrary letters to boxes, see my name flanked by geometrics.

## About the Author:

Sanya Tinaikar is a 16-year-old writer and student from Pennsylvania. Her work has been recognized by *The New York Times*, *Scholastic Art and Writing Awards*, and *The WEIGHT Journal*, among others. She additionally serves as the Editor-in-Chief for her school's newspaper, *The Summit*. She is honored to have her work featured in *Kalopsia*. Find her @sanyatinaikar on Twitter or curating Spotify playlists.

Addison Moss  
"One Month Supply"  
Photography



**Artist's Statement:**

*One Month Supply* is a photograph I took of my "dead" pointe shoes. This collection represents what I regularly exhaust in a few weeks as a ballerina. From afar, pointe shoes are romanticized, even fetishized, but up close, their reality is far more tactile, even brutal. Here one gets a glimpse of the sewing required (often with dental floss since thread isn't strong enough,) the nail extraction to "break" the shoes, the sweat/dirt/blood that the craft requires. Indeed, the shiny pink satin takes on a different sensibility, still wonderful but more complex.

# 6:37 a.m.

By: Eleanor Lardner

When you wake up and there are little birds chirping outside the window on the dead branches of the old cherry tree that you fell out of when you were seven. And maybe the little birds aren't that little, but before you've put on your glasses and opened the shades, that's how you picture them.

Somedays, the feeling is gone by breakfast. Eating a waffle, the syrup pools on your glass plate, and you watch it, disgust coloring your face because your fingers feel sticky even with your plate inches away.

Somedays, the feeling stays, hanging around like an old friend who you haven't seen in years. Even when you've finished leftover spaghetti and meatballs for breakfast. They're cold because the microwave broke last year and you just keep forgetting to fix it.

(The spaghetti is clumped, chilled, on your fork, and an image tickles the back of your mind: a ball of yarn, pierced by a knitting needle. Laughter bubbles up in your throat, spilling out onto the air of the dark kitchen. Glancing at the microwave clock, (reflex- an old habit) (you remember), your eyes find the chipped blue and white clock, a porcelain gift from your parents' wedding. 6:37 a.m., it reads, and you laugh again at the absurdity of it all. Here you are, sitting in a kitchen with the lights off, rain splattering over the crooked panes of glass. Here you sit, eating a yarn-ball of spaghetti at 6:37 in the morning. shivering. wrapping your arms around your chest. A smile spreads across your face. The kitchen smells like mint, rain clouds, and bubbling laughter, and you are alone in all the best ways possible).

## About the Author:

Eleanor Lardner is a junior at the Ethel Walker School in Connecticut. She recently spent a semester traveling across the Western US, learning about indigenous land rights, BLM lands, bison revival projects, and the US-Mexico border. She writes both poetry and prose, and can often be found snuggling with her dog, making pie, rock climbing, and going on adventures.





Felicity Liu  
"Roe's Woes"  
18 x 24 in.  
Acrylic and newspaper on canvas

# You are more than a dream some god somewhere dreamt up

By: Jason Li

is what I tell myself over & over  
until the phonemes themselves become prayer            manifestation  
an offering to an annihilator            standing on the mountaintop  
I pray until my mouth runs dry            my teeth dull  
after cutting into the overcooked night  
for far too long. That's when god wakes  
& I come to an end  
          another brainwave rendered meaning  
-less by a rising sun & an iPhone alarm

Recently I've come to realize that I've  
          been oversharing my business to the people in my life.  
The act is pathological. Because if  
          you don't know where I am or what I am doing every second of my day  
how do I prove to myself that I am still real? You know  
          a narrative is only as strong as the god who crafts it.  
Like a dream. Like the truth. Truth is,  
          it is gum in my mouth, mutable religion, false leviathan, but it is not my fault—

I am only trying to survive.

Survival. Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying & Love What Remains. What remains  
is the space between god's forefinger & wrist            a liminal distance  
          I've traversed so many times over            & in this space is  
New York City            Manhattan on an empty stomach  
when skyscraper lights & alien spaceships appear one & the same.  
Early morning so early            it might as well be the dead of night  
          Silence so absolute  
          you can hide a corpse in it            or your former  
Reflected in the East River, a stream of headlights beams toward Queens,  
a school of electric humpback whales making its way home  
          Here I am            composed of mud & wet clay  
          a body amorphous

& here is where I found you once. Teetering, balancing on the edge of something undefined.  
Transient. You were freezing, it was winter, & breath coated each attempt you made at  
salvation. Exposed kneecaps developing early signs of frostbite while kissing concrete. The  
rapture was the next day but you hadn't yet been cured of your acrophobia. So you sang to  
god & I loved you for it. & when I lost you in the wander streets of the city I looked for you, I  
waited, I wanted to see you. You see, for the longest time I wanted to believe you. When I held  
you we shivered in tandem even with the radiator seizing in the corner. You see, I didn't want  
to let you go. I wanted to shrink you down until no trace of the god in you had ever existed,



will ever exist. Like a neutron star collapsing upon itself into a behemoth.

There is nothing I can do, of course. & already I have begun the Sisyphean task of rebuilding.

#### **About the Author:**

Jason Li (he/him) is from Macomb, Michigan. Based in New York City, he received his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in chemical engineering from the University of Pennsylvania.

Yolanda Zhang  
"Lift 3"  
Photography

Yolanda Zhang  
"Lift 1"  
Photography



**Artist's Statement:**

I've always been trying to explore the connection between humans and nature through photography. This series of photographs aims at capturing the sky, this ordinary element, from an unexpected perspective. In order to do that, I've combined several pictures, using photoshop, to show the audience how limitless the sky could be.



Yolanda Zhang  
"Lift 2"  
Photography

Yolanda Zhang  
"Lift 4"  
Photography

# The Woman Who Mailed Socks to a Curling Skip

By: Leanne Shirliffe

His ankles looked cold, she said, so she sent him crew-length socks, colorful like a spring basket from the five-and-dime. I imagine her, a retired curler from a long-gone rink, decades later watching the Brier under an afghan crocheted in lilacs and saucy blues, never warm enough, made colder by bare ankles in the hack.

Before being sawed in two, transported by a flat-bed truck, and rebuilt in a busy town, the rink's coordinates were prairie perfect: across the tracks from the once-there grain elevator, bordered by hockey ice and a skate shack resurrected from a Winnipeg street car.

She had laced up first on the farm's pond, played hockey with the boys. In spring, when the snow on the quarter melted into a lake then froze solid on a blue-cold night, she'd carry her skates to the north corner, swap boots for blades, unbutton her coat and hold the sides wide to let the wind sail her away.

Her ankles were warm. She was never more alive.

# The Old Elm in the Park

By: Leanne Shirliffe

Below the sprawling branches of a long-standing elm they sit,  
oblivious to the crunch of feet on autumn's offerings.

Her hands are sticky with the aftermath of vanilla bean  
ice cream that melted faster than her hunger.

Side by side they reach upwards, a seated ballet of hands  
and wishes. "I got one!" she squeals. Dirty palms showcase

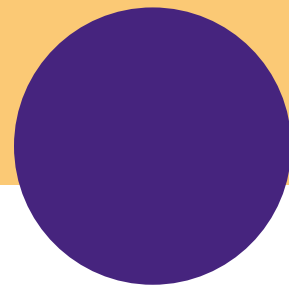
a yellow leaf rescued from grass-matted masses. She leans  
into him—her hair half fallen from a once-perfect ponytail—

and he wonders why he never sat side by side with  
his own daughter, this girl's mother, why it took

only two hours of catching leaves to realize that it's not  
that youth is wasted on the young, but that children

are wasted on their parents, parents like him  
who grip what was once alive until it crumbles,

who forget that holding each other gently  
is the shared work of being human.



## About the Author:

Leanne Shirliffe grew up on a grain farm in rural Manitoba and now lives in Calgary, Alberta. She is working on a poetry collection at the intersection of farming, feminism, and family. Her latest poems appear in *Stanchion*, *VoidSpace*, and *One Art*.





Elwing Gao  
"Ink Bottles"  
8.5 x 11 in.  
Colored pencil on cardstock



# Angels From Young

By: Sandra Lin

Children are works of art, you know,  
built up from an idea & a passionate, heated grapple in the  
bedroom at three a.m. in the dead of the night, then a cell, then two, then four.  
You were once a child too, you know. You were once a cherub,  
banished from the manmade heaven of your mother's womb.

Born in water. From water. As water.  
Your liquid scalp, soft, putty, bending to fit the shape of the birth canal.  
Now, here is the secret no one chooses to acknowledge: children are made  
of water & thoughts.  
& that there's a child in every one of us, no matter  
how much the grown ones try to fake it. (They want  
to be hugged & praised & coddled too.)

You, my dear, were born to be corrupted. That's the thing  
they tried to hide from us all. See, celestial beings were sent to  
become guardians of this mortal hell, but they all failed & turned wicked,  
so eyes turned to call on you.

Like all the others, you cast yourself into the nest of a womb.  
Like all the others, you grew & kicked & forgot your  
mission the moment you fed yourself too much amniotic fluid  
& washed the divinity from your soul.  
Like all the others, you fell happily  
into a trap you knew was a trap before it was too late  
& you can't remember a thing to regret.

Because you already became one of the sinners you were sent to  
curb when you made your ephemeral mother  
vomit, & her stomach & breasts hurt & hurt & hurt.

You were made of water, lovely, malleable water. Holy, almost,  
until the venom of mundane society seeped into your  
veins & cracked the halo, broken & dimmed.

This was where your story truly began: a wail of hunger, your human  
mother begging for you to stop crying, face thin & hollowed.  
& after a while, she became deaf, feeding you here & there, a few  
mouthfuls of soured milk bordering on hot, but she could  
somehow still hear the doorbell ring.

Years passed & you were five. You were in  
kindergarten, a pair of searching eyes that knew

how to skim faces & pick out the irate ones & all the ways to please them.  
You donned jeans like all the other kids. & here's  
what you didn't know: mother gave them to you not because they  
looked nice, but because they covered the bleeding welts on your legs.

Build me a city, your teacher said, so you did,  
& your classmates called you a brown-noser, a teacher's pet.  
The dyed building blocks rolling between your hands  
like clay, the edges seeming to smooth & flatten if you  
did it fast enough. Here. Have a city. It's seven  
stacks of two cubes with a hat on top.

This was what it meant to be seven, the age where  
you've done every one of the seven sins over and over, like a tape on  
replay. Too prideful to cry when scolded harshly in public.  
Too lazy to do the two-paged assignment after cleaning the whole  
house alone. Too wolfish when you gulped down free  
samples at the store, too covetous when you touched the toys  
mother will never get.

(& lust, the child hiding behind them all when you  
waited for your mother to compliment the gold star you got. It  
never came & you kept waiting, waiting, waiting...)

Funny how the word "sinner" is made of six letters  
& missing just one to be the lucky number seven, a space  
reserved for you, only you. Your bed has been made in that wooden  
box with the characters S-I-N-N-E-R since the moment of your birth,  
& you can't outrun that. So you laid down, an exemplar  
to all; this is what a sinner looks like.

The number seven, you figured, is  
(not) pretty lucky after all.

In high school, you relearned the same things you've learned  
before. H<sub>2</sub>O. Biology & chemistry. Water molecules. Dihydrogen monoxide.  
How water fills the container that holds it. How  
water spreads thinner than A4 paper on flat porcelain plates when unrestrained.  
How water in small streams & wide rivers devours land.  
How water in salted oceans conquers the earth & dictates the skies.

Your mother began getting onto you about your submissive nature.  
Why all the other kids can laugh together & drink the scotch they stole  
from their parents' cabinets. Why you, iron-boned & thick-fleshed,  
swallowed razor blades with your wrists & remained mute, dead-tongued &  
closed-mouthed.

& you didn't know what to say. After all, you were made of  
water: dirty, dirty water on the side of the road that everyone steps in.

After all, you were a child & children are made of water & so were you. See, this is why you're the way you are. Water takes the shape of the container that holds it, just like how you grew to fit the role given to you & the environment around you.

Like your mother, you don't know how to unspill spilled milk & the puddle keeps running in the wrong direction. Like those who sent you, you make the wrong choices over & over & they tell you that this is life: a series of wrong decisions you spend your years trying to correct.

Okay, well, here's the thing:  
it takes a lot to get a river that had always flowed south to start flowing north. It takes a lot for those shoved in hell to claw up to heaven. It takes a lot for a child wearing socks to climb back up the slide.

The good news? Nothing is impossible.  
Water is hard to trap with a pair of hands & it can erode mountains and remake shorelines. Keep making waves, my dear. Perhaps one day you'll find yourself among the gods again.

## rusted sunflower teeth

By: Sandra Lin

(This is a reverse poem. Each stanza can be read from the bottom up, left to right.)

### **i. rusted apples**

i'll raise light to the moon  
with wax rolling off my fingertips; drink fire from my palms &  
breathe. the meat of skinned apples rust gold in the air  
by the window; remember me as someone who fights to  
swallow back letters, read magic, & write dragons. forget the girl sitting  
with tongues writhing in pockets yet still  
takes to remaining silent, but i will never be cold as long as you're warm  
under this sky. the boy on the bus never  
stops hurling slurs at rusted apples & golden mangoes  
until they wither. i'll never see when the world  
will be consumed by the dark—before the time when only stars are left glinting  
between the clouds, show me warmth before the sun

## ii. sunflower burns

a passion fruit with the seeds scooped out, empty.  
i boil it into honeyed tea, the steaming liquid dark like  
irises. it takes only ten seconds for the sun to burn sunflowers &  
still; petals crumble to the ground as if begging for mercy from blue  
skies. & yet, the fire does not stay  
away. the streets are littered with knife wounds, flesh spilling red petals to the  
concrete. it stretches miles  
from this place, those glassy slender eyes sunken into bruised  
yellow bodies. tell me how i can take you  
through this fire when those ringing guns are still firing into  
butter skin that can never make it  
in this night—the jaundiced moon is muted with words. pearled. wrapped with  
stars that keep the sky glittering & full

## iii. teeth marks

the frost of the frozen pear black in my hands, cold:  
the smile of the girl who drags the corners of her eyes white, like  
crescent nail beds. my teeth, rooted, bleeding between  
my gums. remove these ugly words pinned by  
lashing tongues, the force formidable. it rattles my  
teeth; these moon curls settling on leering face, gutting  
daffodils between birds, the soft pink tissues on the insides of my cheeks swelling with  
blood. a cream pillar in the sky, you are. still-standing, a bundle of  
practiced firmness against the world, face tired, etched with  
the careful hands of liberosis:  
a victim of lies. the skin of the black pear is pierced beneath  
teeth that never stop biting ice as if it is  
something soft between canines, my skin melting, the breath at my pulse hot

# Impotence

By: Sandra Lin

I.  
Winter nights in Brooklyn turned bedroom floors to blazes of ice,  
melting against the warm arches of my bare feet.  
Mama hissed at me to wear slippers when I turned off the lights;  
we couldn't afford to turn on the heater  
and she didn't want to feel my cold feet under the same covers.  
There were three of us but the small room was hollow and incomplete.  
Moonlight laying thick as frost upon my sister's cheek, mama pulled us close,  
saying, *Think how cold it is tonight and daddy still has to work far away.*

*You must behave and do well in school, it's the only way out.*

And mama, I swore I would, laying awake in our single thin-walled room, wearing thin, cold skin, holding a slow, burning heart.

II.

The pencil, filed blunt on the table and the tear-stained papers, burnt and ripped from angry marks made by my mama who said my dullness was enough to make her vomit blood.

The couple next door was fighting again, the woman walking out to make lunch with purplish bruises, and we avoided looking at each other.

Mama smacked a burst of stars into my eyes, hollering for me to pay attention because this was why I was dumb and a waste of her money. How does a daughter tell her angry mother that the teacher only ate chips and drank soda in the supplemental class she and daddy worked their bodies to bone and sinew to pay for?

I am sorry I was not brilliant like my younger sister, sorry I was not the sparrow-winged future everyone lusted for.

III.

My sister and I, two peonies in a garden of white roses and my silent tongue, ballooning to fill my whole mouth. New city, new people, how do I escape this alienating land? Eyes are watching and mouths talk and I'm still choking on this swollen, numb tongue.

My path is narrow and school is still the only way out.

Daddy, with the stench of sweat soaked into wounded skin from hot Floridian summers trapped in the kitchen and mama, her small figure hunched with skeletal hands.

I am almost scared of snapping her spine if I hold her too tight.

Don't work too hard, I want to say. But the notion seems silly when we're all breaking ourselves to the point of becoming dust, with bodies falling apart at the seams and tempest minds that should've drowned out our buoyant wills.

IV.

There's something electric about unfounded assumptions, striking tenderly against my spine like the head of a match.

My eyes, locked behind thickening glass, and the screen, the only bright thing I see. It's a taste of sugar sweetening my whole mouth to see the numbers on my report card rise like helium balloons and my own aspirations rocket with them.

The numbers I bring back, mama says, are like shining leaves of gold pressed against their worn faces. Teachers still only grade assignments instead of teaching and my brain is still rock-hard, unable to be soaked like sponge, and the knowledge must be carved into my head with chisel and hammer, patience and might, and it's often fleeting after the carving is done.

My under-eyes are dark, and people still think I'm smart.

V.

No one has ever told me I'd want to please strangers too.

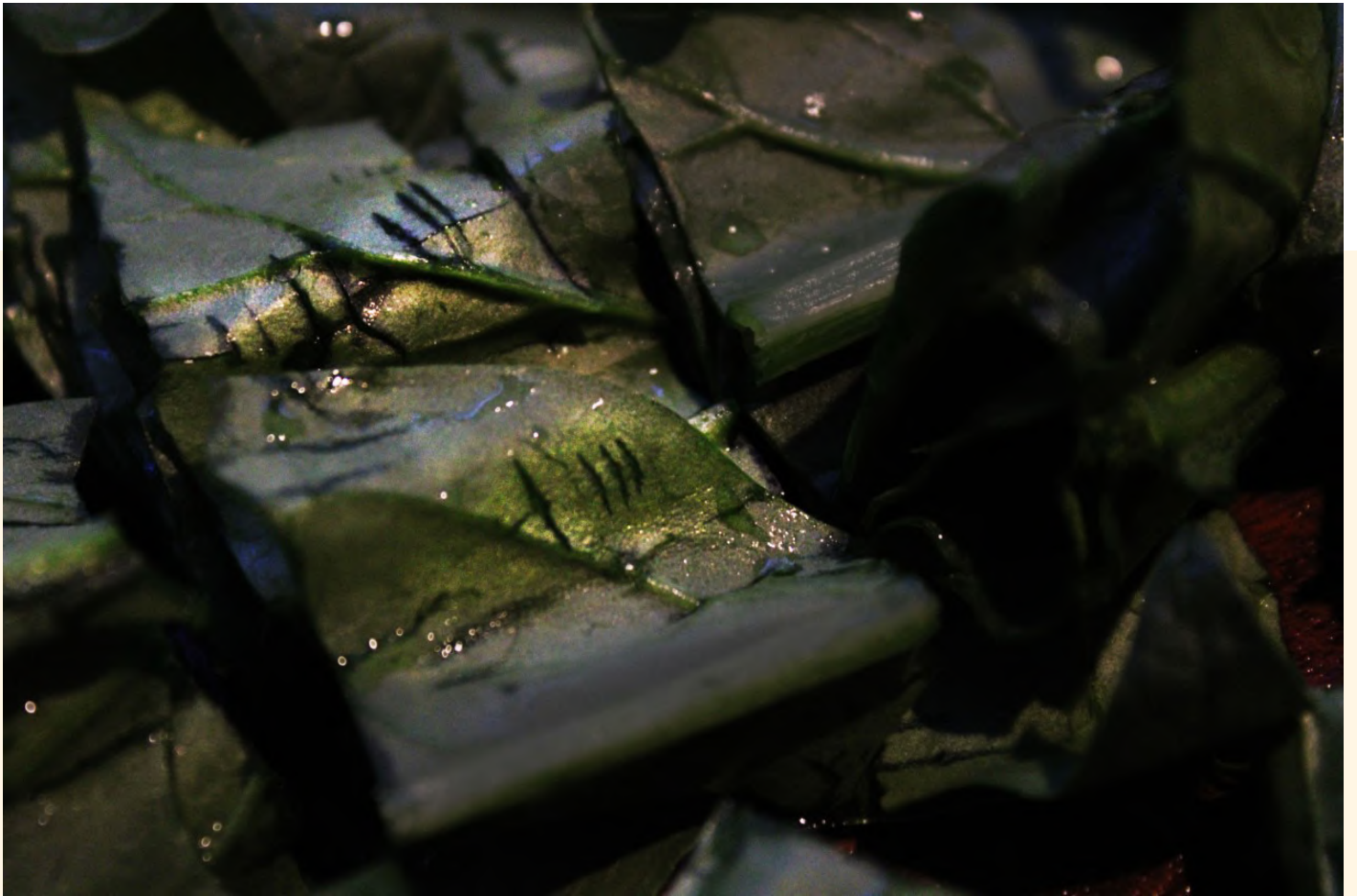
Intelligence is a fake badge I wear with my glasses



and the color of my skin. Mama and daddy have become slaves to work, and sometimes, they feel like pillars standing at the edges of the blank sky: distant and cold. My heart lingers in the bedroom with cold floors, the whispering voices in school halls becoming spurs in my flank; I want to become that sparrow-winged future, but I don't have anything other than wanted numbers on a sheet of paper and writings with thousands of featherless words that are hot as baked stones. I am trying not to get burned by the heat of ambition and get out alive, sparrow-winged and haloed with leaves of gold.

### **About the Author:**

Sandra Lin (林诺晨) is a Chinese American born in Manhattan, New York who currently goes to Bell High School in Florida. She has won the *Polyphony Lit* Fall Contest 2021 and founded a creative writing club and online literary magazine at school with her twin sister. Sandra is currently working on a novel that is LGBTQ and Asian-themed. Other than her passion for writing/reading, she is interested in pursuing a career in the medical field. In her free time, Sandra enjoys generating more WIPs than she can finish, watching C-dramas and shows, and panicking about the future. She can be reached on Instagram and Wattpad @sandranuochen.



Fiona Jin  
"incisions"  
Photography

# Dear God

By: Rhyme Zhou

Dear God,

Last night I woke suddenly, startled awake by some small sound. I lay there, half asleep and frightened, thinking that perhaps it had been nothing at all, but a tiny crackling noise said otherwise. It was something else that made me pause—a human sound, a quick intake of breath. My doctors said I was stuck in Maladaptive Daydreaming again. It was another word for delusion—I was sick. But why, in the silences and muffled wind sounds, could I imagine each gesture that I knew was taking place?

It was difficult to admit that you are sick. Instead of stressing over the eerie gaze and micro-aggression around me, I found myself trapped in a loop of self-reflection, incessantly thinking of what I had done wrong. Perhaps it was because I was too harsh on my academics in junior year. Perhaps it was because I read too many intense thrillers about obsession in quarantine even though everyone said not to. Perhaps it was because I lied to my grandparents that I would spend time with them in summer but I had no intention to do so. God, my mother insisted on taking me to see a Chinese herbalist doctor next week. I never quite believed in traditional Chinese medicine because of its obscurity. Remembering the names of *Eucommia ulmoides* Oliver, *Ginkgo biloba* L, and *Saigae Tataricae* Cornu Powder in my medicine already made me nauseous.

My dear God, I do not want to sound like an ungrateful child.

But here's the thing: late at night, I would take a shower, lie in bed, open FaceTime, scroll down, and spend minutes staring. I would rub the first name repeatedly with my thumb, picturing how my mom's phone rings, lights up with my name, and brings her car to a sudden stop. She genuinely cared about me; I knew that. I wanted to make her proud; she knew that. Sadly, I still had not finessed in what to share and how to share after 17 years—I would silently turn off the phone, trying to find some excuses for my reticence.

Silence made me anxious. Only freshness of the outside could dissolve the chaos of the world within my head—it blended with the drops left on the leaves on rainy days, paces of running footsteps, shapes of rising smoke, and the swirling afternoon laundry. I could be so passionate about the most mundane things, but I also wanted to be heard. I wanted to pick up every detail of those frightening perceptions at night, to decode them, and to express myself again. I wanted to express my tenderness towards my mother, my creativity, and the silence that made us two parallel lines—all of us scabbled to intercept but were only left with the same old fatigue.

I am working on it, starting from all the unanswered messages and calls in my inbox. Like how gravity pulls all things in the universe to their unique trajectories, I am refusing to make my mental health struggles be what I think about all day long. Even when the ship of my mind starts sinking again, I will hold onto the rails and feel a hand in the deep water. I will

adjust my breathing, float up, and stretch out my body without rushing. I will, God, quietly observe this new world, uncertain but tranquil. I will kick my feet and accelerate the speed of ascent. At one point, my head will emerge above the water. I am in control of my mind. There will be no crackling noises.

My voice will then loom up with waves surging beyond shipwreck, throating its way through vignettes of time: road trips with mom, running errands with grandma, letting my imagination fly in ink...



### **About the Author:**

Rhyme Zhou is an incoming college freshman majoring in Computer Science. She's originally from Hangzhou, China. She's a junior editor at *Polyphony Lit* and an executive editor at *Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine*. When she isn't writing or editing prose pieces, Rhyme is out coaching badminton, revisiting Gabriel Iglesias' iconic jokes, or working on her new coding projects!



Fiona Jin  
"shatter & bloom"  
Photography



# An American Arrives in Olongapo City

By: Leanne Talavera

*Here's today. Jump. I promise it's not  
a lifeboat. Here's a man  
whose arms are wide enough to gather  
your leaving.*

*- Ocean Vuong*

You kiss a Filipina the way you plot a minefield. Here's where you hold them, where their fathers know not to. Today they'll want flowers, tomorrow a plane ticket. Jump! She'll soon warn you. She'll step off the rooftop. *I need you to promise, never to leave me.* But you'll say it's not her. It's who you left behind. That it's not who she is or what she does or what order she does both. A little bit, you'll acknowledge. But you're no lifeboat. Here. Here's some money, you'll say. Yes, for the *thing*. Or for yourself. To find a man? On the next boat, perhaps? Whose fingers will touch you in all the numb places. Arms guiding you across the contours of his skin. Are you ready? Is it tight enough? Wide enough? Long enough to be enough? To appease? To console? So history won't repeat itself. Won't gather like the Hershey packets you hold captive in your second drawer. Sorry, you'll say. You're leaving

## About the Author:

Leanne Talavera is a graduate in Literary Studies and History from New York University Abu Dhabi. A Filipina who has spent most of her life so far living abroad—growing up in Papua New Guinea and studying in the UAE—her works center significantly around themes of identity, home, and belonging.



Catherine McCarthy  
"Stitching a Self"  
6 x 6 in.  
Embroidery

How unexpected and beautiful diseased cells looked. A kaleidoscope of green and red and blue beads. How they swam and changed shape. Nerine stared into her microscope, searched for anomalies. Even after four years of working in a lab, it still amazed her, how disease could appear so magnificent magnified. She leaned back, glanced at the clock. Coffee time. Professor Geddes, but-call-me-Clare, would be here with a box of Danish pastries, urging her to go outside. To breathe in the fresh air. Nerine would smile, tell her to stop being so motherly. She knew it was part of Clare's looking out for her. Keeping her well.

She recognised the signs. A heaviness in her limbs, a tight band across her head. She craved outdoors. To be amongst the trees, the plants. The Japanese revered the ritual of Shinrin Yoku or forest bathing. Nerine pictured herself curling up on a carpet of pine needles, blinking up at patches of light between the branches. She stepped out into the courtyard. Moved through the plants, touched the leaves. Breathed in the scent of wood and of overripe fruit.

"Good to see you taking my advice for once. Cinnamon swirl?" Clare held out the box.

Nerine shook her head, took an apple out of her satchel. "Eliminating sugar from my diet." Clare shrugged, licked her fingers. "But it's Friday, cake day."

Nerine laughed. It had been Dale's idea to look at her diet, telling her food played a big part in how you felt.

"You don't believe this is real, do you? You think I am making this up?" "Look, Ner, I was just suggesting."

"Well don't."

"I don't know what to say to you anymore."

She bit her lip, stared at him, looked away. He picked up his car keys, told her he was going a drive, not to wait up.

She lay on the settee, wrapped in a duvet. Sleep, just a snooze. It had started with a gastric virus. Nerine had vomited at her father's sixtieth birthday during the photos. She had crawled into bed upstairs, heard the party from below. Three weeks later she was falling asleep on the bus to work, taking naps in the lab, her arms and legs dead-weights. A fizziness in her elbows, her joints. A saltiness on her tongue. Unable to lift her head off the pillow.

Nerine took a battery of medical examinations, including the Lucozade diabetes test, where she had to drink gallons of the sticky, sugary drink, have blood drawn from her at regular intervals. She had no prominent veins and the nurse injected into her foot. They tested for all the serious ones. Cancer, liver disease, her white blood count. All the ones she studied on a daily basis down the lens. All ruled out.

"There is one possibility." The doctor had peered over his glasses at her. "It's a bit of a controversial one."

Dale had laughed that night. "Trust you to be controversial, Ner." Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. CFS. It sounded like some budget airline.

"What does that mean?" Dale had asked her.

"My cells are unable to fulfill cellular energy demands. In the eighties it was called yup-py flu. It wasn't believed."

"I see."

She wanted to carry a large placard, shout through a megaphone, to declare my cells are bugged. Nerine had withdrawn into herself. She had bought a self-help book where it stated that she would be too tired to socialize, to function on any normal level, that she would have to pace herself, work out her energy levels. Nerine imagined an energy pack strapped to her back where she would watch the red needle bob up and down. She would choose between a walk or cleaning the bath: weeding the path or taking a bus into town. It reminded her of sums at school. Borrow one, pay back two. She moaned to Dale, said it was Karma, that she was being punished for all the late nights. Always expecting her body to be able to bounce back. No matter what. She missed jumping out of bed, dancing to Mr. Brightside by the Killers. She missed taking a train into London and trailing round the Tate. She missed impromptu parties and late-night drinking sessions at her local.

Nerine was signed off work. Clare sent her a peace lily and a pile of feel-good films. She told her to take her time. To rest. What choice did she have? She didn't want to lay down on the settee after chopping carrots for a salad or scrubbing the bath. Measuring out her joules for the day.

Clare had suggested part-time, to readjust. To come back little by little. Baby steps.

Nerine had frowned. "I'm not sure. I'm a bit flaky."

"Good. I like flaky. All scientists are flaky."

She and Dale argued. She quizzed him about where he was going, who he was chatting to, what he was saying behind her back. Telling everyone she lay on the settee all day. How she had no energy for anything.

"It's you I love. Not what you can do."

She told him to pack his things. That she needed time on her own. "We'll give it a month. Let's chat in a month."

Clare patted the bench. "Come sit with me. It's tonight, isn't it?"

Nerine sank down beside her. Some days were better than others. Today was one of her brain-fog-days. "Yeah. I'm going to finish with him. What use am I? I can only work a few hours a week. I can't make any plans. I'm not sure if I can have children. I think they would kill me."

"I hear what you're saying."

"Oh don't, you sound like my counselor with all the right-on-jargon."

"Shall I tell you what I think? Be Honest?"

"Yep."

"I think you are so caught up in all that you can't do, that you need to look at what you can do now. See yourself as a new version of you. That you are lucky you can tune into your body. You decide how to be."

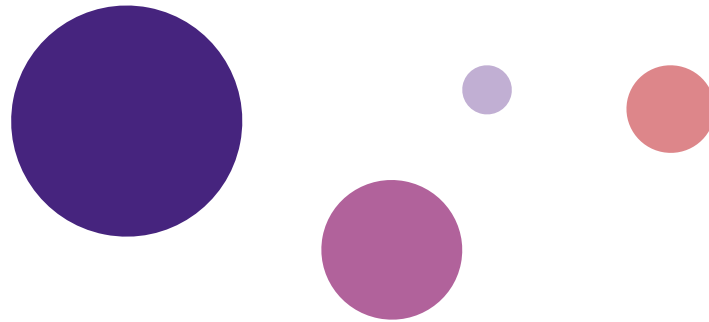
"You don't get what it's like. How draining it is."

"No, you're right Nerine. I don't get what it's like. All I see is a girl in her early thirties who could lose out on so much. Maybe you need to change your goalposts. Have a different outlook."

Nerine stared at her. "I'm cutting out sugar."

"Good, that's a start. Try to shift things with your thinking. See what you do have. Without being all preachy." Clare stood up. "I'm here if you need me. Take the afternoon off, do kind things for you. Meet Dale."

Nerine took a piece of A3 paper and wrote down “this version of me.” She chewed the pen lid and began to scribble.



### **About the Author:**

Mairi Sutherland lives in the Highlands, Scotland. She is a creative writing tutor who gets a buzz from encouraging writers. She has been writing for many years and has had short stories published before. Her latest “in the blink of an eye” features in *Northwords Now*, Summer 2022. Mairi won the Glasgow Women’s Library Bold Types Competition in 2017 with her short story “Botticelli Beauty.” This is her first American foray and she is thrilled to be included in *Kalopsia*. Her novel, “the things we don’t,” seeks a home.





Heidi Hu  
"Not From Here"  
16 x 20 in.  
Acrylic on gessoed  
canvas

**Artist's Statement:**

*Not From Here* was inspired by the feeling of being someplace foreign and the feeling of being out of place. The feeling that you don't belong. You are somewhere you have never been before. You don't recognize anything, and you're uncomfortable, despite how many polite smiles and nods of the head people give you on the street. You feel that you are starting to blend in more and more. Maybe you can fit in after all, just like everyone else here. But a sense of uneasiness and unfamiliarity with every turn of the corner paired with the constant weight of many sets of eyes on you at all times is a constant reminder that you are not from here, every step of the way.

# Fifteen & falling snow

By: Fiona Jin

outside, does your breath  
turn to mist? swirling, shivering,  
evaporating. gone.

i'm still five five but sometimes  
i *feel* it—another layer of childhood  
falling, fluidly like the

swears down your mouth. they crystallize,  
frozen in time—hanging  
between your perfunctory, my

outrage? naive horror? uneasy  
acceptance?

i'm not that tall but everything seems  
smaller now. outside, hands clench  
from the cold.

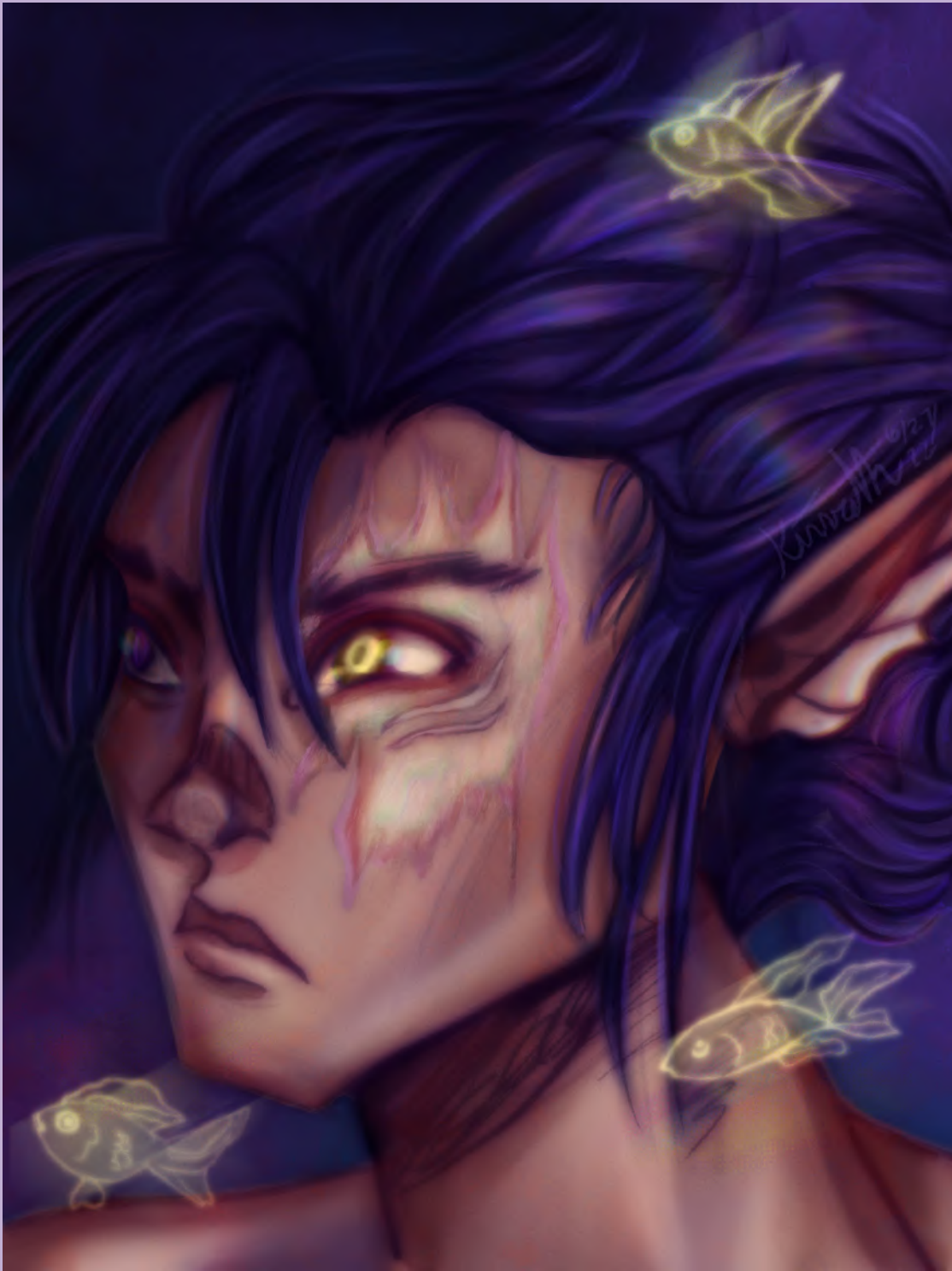
we shift and melt like the snow dancing now—  
delicate powder to brilliant ice, to  
crumbling slush and finally

to *water*, free-flowing  
at last.

## About the Author:

Fiona Jin is a writer and artist based in the Chicago Metropolitan Area. Her work is in or forthcoming at the *Interlochen Review*, *the Aurora Journal*, amongst others, and has received recognition from the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers. She seeks out a sky less so on fire.





Kinnereth Din  
"Abyss"  
Digital

# The Elephants Only I Can See

By: Melissa Mulvihill

\*First featured in *TMP Magazine* and *Full House Literary*

I pay attention to the darkness in my breathing by focusing on the elephants only I can see.

When I say “pay,” I mean full cash payment up front, like the time my husband just wanted to cut up an avocado for lunch, and instead drilled a serrated knife into the base of his index finger. He left his payment on the kitchen floor and the countertop. He even sacrificed some nerves.

When I say “attention,” I mean the scrape of the catheter that was threaded up my groin on a mission to burn misbehaving cardiac cells, the tone of my unsedated voice ricocheting around the electrophysiology lab, bouncing off the computer screens, *it burns*. What I really meant was *you’re burning me*, so, when I say “attention,” you know, I mean, the wave of fentanyl that came way too late.

When I say “darkness,” I mean the ledge outside of Ansel’s Cave, where at night I hear packs of coyotes dispatching their prey by ripping into it on the Sharon conglomerate. Their echoing howls run slick, right down through the rocks, right down through the mossy pebbles, right down to the roots of the ginormous tree that everyone just knew was going to fall, that everyone felt could not withstand one more Lake Erie blow. *That thing’s gonna have to come down, everyone said, or it’ll be in the way of everything when it falls*. They said *falls* but I know they meant *fails*. That’s what everyone means when they talk about things in imminent danger of falling.

When I say “breathing,” I mean the release of desperate puffs of regret, in that tone of voice someone uses when they’re about to break me apart and they know it, but they do it anyway. I mean the mocking scream of adrenaline oozing towards my extremities digging deep into my limbic system, prying me out of the bed, begging me to *do something, fight or flee, but don’t just lie there and sweat and gasp*.

When I say “focus,” I mean that day I was walking up Pioneer Bridle Trail and I saw an old woman on the trail with her blind dog and she said to her dog, *don’t call me an old woman*. As I passed by, she said to her dog, *I can walk to the moon and back because I still have great legs*. I nodded, while she hunkered over him, gazing in his eyes, leading him by his heart, in looping circles all around the trail.

When I say “elephants,” I mean that through my grayish astigmatism, through my old farsightedness, through the back glow of the villages of Burton and Middlefield to the northeast, our trees break in such interesting ways, looking like a failed sympathetic nervous system or elephants. That matriarch right there, stands guard over me, her vast back flank leading the way, the rest of her herd following along behind her, around the perimeter of the distant easement.

When I say, “only,” I mean that the matriarch will pin all of my poachers, with the precision

thrust for grievances past.

When I say “see,” I mean the resentment in my heart, where I shove blood artlessly between grief and tornados, like the one that uprooted the biggest, strongest tree in our woods, when it was just minding its own damn business.



### **About the Author:**

Melissa Mulvihill writes about the sharp edges of relationships with herself and with other people while living with several rare and difficult to treat syndromes. In 2021 she had essays published with *Pangyrus Literary Magazine*, *Tangled Locks Journal*, *Anti-Heroic Chic Magazine*, *HerStry*, and *Months to Years*. She graduated with a BA in psychology from Kenyon College and with an MA in counseling from John Carroll University. She is retired from homeschooling and from counseling, and lives and writes in northeast Ohio where she and her husband live.





Fiona Jin  
"stars & stripes"  
Photography

# nightlife

By: Tho Nguyen

glass-sharded city turns lawless at night:  
even if you don't want it to. neon dreamscapes  
lantern-hue bodies caught in rush hour  
settles on your tongue, displacing  
you pause. there is a man  
into concrete. [at the heart of the city  
and crescendo of car horns. the only law  
exchange.] next to him is a busker,  
of night sky. you are all just strangers  
with the busker and, for a moment, you believe  
you can leave everything up to chance.  
with the ground and flower forgiveness  
between pauses and chainsmoke cigarettes  
following the lights on the water's surface  
only to throw them under your feet.  
as you bathe under fluorescence

unguarded hour where everything comes alive  
drown the senses with their gaze,  
forget to look back. the grimy taste of asphalt  
the secrets staled there like a second skin.  
holding purple hyacinths like a lifeline, fists balled  
a lover surrenders his own to the vegas strip malls  
that runs like blood on these streets: equivalent  
saxophone wailing away the blues with a song  
trying to find something that lasts. your shoulders brush  
in the butterfly effect. but this time, you are certain  
this time, you don't wait to see the man tie his heartbeat  
with his tears. you don't wait to see the busker find his rhythm  
as a tribute to the stars. you leave them only to lose yourself,  
picking up the fragments of a past life  
a crescent moon your only witness  
and wipe yourself clean.

## About the Author:

Tho Nguyen is a junior based in the Bay Area. She enjoys sunset bicycle rides, jazz and citypop playlists, and spontaneous room decorating. Currently, she is binge-reading Richard Siken and Ocean Vuong, and she hopes you're having a wonderful day!



Kinnereth Din  
"Pansy Pixie"  
Digital

# About the Artists:

## Heidi Hu:

Heidi Hu is a 14-year-old artist from East Brunswick, NJ. Since her childhood, she has been passionate about art and has not stopped making art since. Heidi creates art as a way to de-stress and take a step back from reality. She uses art as an outlet for her ideas and emotions that she feels cannot be conveyed otherwise. It is a way to record her thoughts and memories, undiluted. Heidi's other interests include ice skating, reading, and fashion, and she loves designing clothes as well. Heidi has been published in *Celebrating Art* and received high merit multiple times, and she has also received regional Scholastic Gold and Silver Keys. She hopes others can enjoy her art as much as she has enjoyed creating it.

**Pieces:** "Not From Here" (34) and "Renaissance" (8)

## Fiona Jin:

Fiona Jin is a writer and artist based in the Chicago Metropolitan Area. Her work is in or forthcoming at the *Interlochen Review*, *the Aurora Journal*, amongst others, and has received recognition from the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers. She seeks out a sky less so on fire.

**Pieces:** "incisions" (25), "stars & stripes" (39), and "shatter & bloom" (28)

## Catherine McCarthy:

Catherine McCarthy is a writer and artist attending high school in Connecticut. Her work stems from feelings and experiences of the day to day. When not creating, she enjoys immersing herself in nature—or a book.

**Piece:** "Stitching a Self" (30)

## Addison Moss:

Addison Molly Moss is a sophomore at Stanford Online High School. She chose SOHS because she's an aspiring professional ballerina, currently dancing at the conservatory Colburn Academy in downtown Los Angeles (six days a week, 9am-4pm) but beginning the Pre-Professional division at Miami City Ballet in the Fall. Sometimes it feels quite overwhelming to be a full time student and full time dancer, but she's so grateful to be able to do both school and ballet at such wonderful places. She loves to draw, paint, and write in addition to ballet and is so excited to share her work.

**Piece:** "One Month Supply" (10)

## Yolanda Zhang:

Yolanda Zhang is an 18-year-old high school junior at Miss Hall's School, Pittsfield, MA. She is originally from Beijing, China. She's passionate about photography, writing, and music and wants to major in philosophy and psychology in the future.

**Pieces:** Lift (15)



# About the Issue:

## Art Director:

Peter Donley is a high school senior from suburban Seattle. He first joined Kalopsia as an executive editor in June of 2020, and has been working as the layout designer ever since. He will be attending Johns Hopkins University to study Mechanical Engineering in the fall. Due to his busy schedule, this is his last regular issue as art director, though he hopes to continue to assist in the layout and design of future issues in a less formal capacity. He has enjoyed his time at Kalopsia immensely, and looks forward to continue to collaborate with the entire staff moving forward. You can find him on Instagram @p.\_eter

## Staff Artists:

### Kinnereth Din:

Kinnereth S. Din is an eighteen-year-old artist and illustrator from North Texas, who loves thunderstorms, fuzzy socks, and lazy mornings. She has received a handful of local art awards and been featured in the Dallas Museum of Art's 2021 Teen Renaissance Exhibition. Her art was also selected for inclusion in Celebrating Art's National Summer Anthology 2020. While she hasn't settled on a favorite medium yet, most of her pieces seek to explore the poignant and beautiful. When she isn't scribbling in her sketchbook, you can usually find her daydreaming with a cup of tea in hand. Find more of her work, and follow her creative endeavors @artofkinn on Instagram.

### Elwing Gao:

Elwing is an 19-year-old artist from the San Francisco Bay Area, currently studying in New York. She works mostly in 2D mixed media, and often explores themes of nostalgia, memory, mental health and the documentation of time in her pieces. You can find more of her work and follow her current art studies @waves.and.washes on Instagram.

### Felicity Liu:

Felicity Liu is a high school junior from the Bay Area with a passion for creating. Her work appears in *TeenInk*, *Inscape Magazine*, and *Crystal Visions*, and has been recognized by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and the Celebrating Art Competition.



**Layout and Design by  
Peter Donley**

**Cover Art:  
"Midsummer Massacre"  
Elwing Gao  
8.5 x 11 in.  
Colored pencil on  
cardstock**

