

**THE  
GALLATIN  
REVIEW**



# COLOPHON

## The Gallatin Review Vol.37

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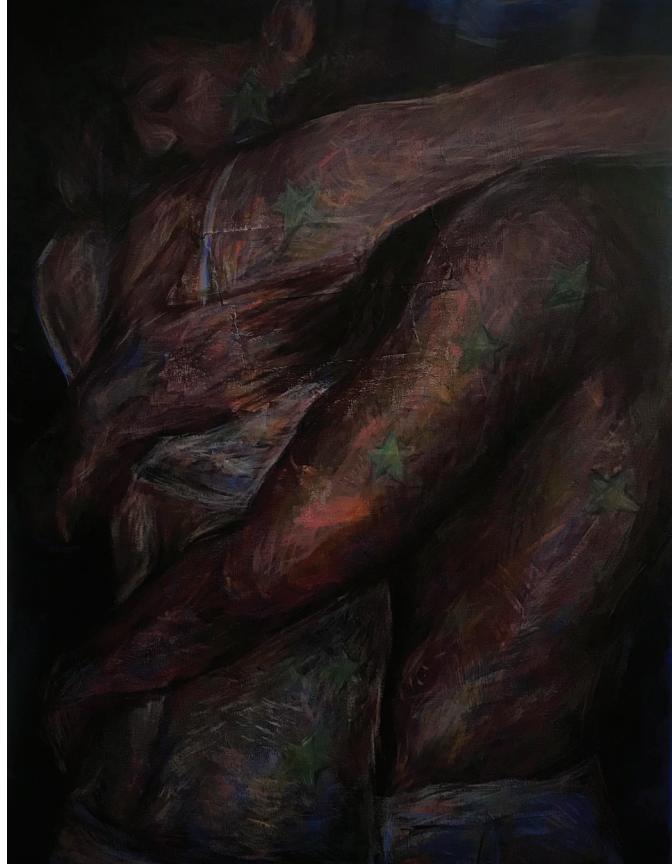
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(Starry) Embrace —Charlie Besso

## HEART /마음 •

—Iko Agada

There was an old lady who swallowed a fly. I don't know why she swallowed a fly. She swallowed a spider to eat the fly.

—

Esther chewed on the inside of her cheek. She sat in the reception room of Gibbons & Hamilton, LLP waiting for the receptionist to call her for an interview. Newlywed and blissfully aware of the mundane reality that stretched before her, she was trying her best to pass through the door to her American dream. Knock on wood. Hollow. If she dared to open the door by herself, she would find a wall. But Esther tries her best to not be curious.

Fuck.

She gripped her purse straps in her lap. Ashy knuckles. And in this moment, she thinks of her mother calming her down for a shot at the doctor's office. The same anticipation of pain, pain that everyone tells you will make you feel better.

“Let's play a game.” The receptionist looked up. Now she was different, a little older, white.

“Okay, mommy.” Tears and *kata* dripping out her nose. Wet on the back of her hand. “Okay.”

Her mother's hand swallowed her own.

heart •

mucus •

1

“I want you to look around the room and find something whose name begins with the letter A.”

Esther nodded. “Now count the letters in its name. Multiply that by two and divide that by four. What answer did you get?”

Down the alphabet they went. They got to D and then, the door opened.

- “Esther Akata?” No, 안.

“Esther 안?”

She stood up and smoothed the wrinkle in her skirt with her hand. A book about defense lawyers.

Seven. A lucky number.

It was clear that she got the job by the end of the interview. It was the way everyone was smiling. The firmness in the handshake of the recruiter was assured and warm.

On the drive home she stopped at the African supermarket. Saraga International Grocery smelled like home. The outdoors, the potopoto pooling in pothole puddles in the streets, a far place she had not seen in years. A clerk pushed around a dirty mop, streaking water in the meat aisle. A goat thigh hung above his head. She remembered when the store opened, and everything was shiny and clean. Now, because of the high demand, and the lack of staff and resources, it was falling apart.

She sucked on her teeth. Read her list.

- Tomatoes
- Garri
- Palm oil
- Plantains
- Ground peanuts
- 배

It was short. She needed to go home and cook. Tonight was her turn. Joseph was waiting for her, and she wanted to see his face in person when she told him she got the job. His smile.

She pushed her cart to the front unevenly and set her produce on the belt. *Beep. Beep.*

*Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.* Twelve seventy-five. Cash. Everything fit into her reusable shopping bag.

“Come again soon.”

She hadn’t been home in years.

—

In the car, while she was thinking about her wedding, Esther had a revelation.

White dress, white lace, white veil, white teeth.

She hadn’t gotten her period this month and she was onetwothreefourfivesixseveneightnineten days late.

That wasn’t too bad. It isn’t anything to worry about and yet, her eyes find a sign.

Electronics. 5.5.

If her mother had been in the car, she would be looking out the window, head shaking, braids whipping in the wind, forcing Esther to keep her eyes on the road lest she be blinded by her mother’s disappointment.

All she had ever wanted was a grandchild.

Esther began to cry. At first, pathetically and then at the traffic sign (red), recklessly. She left herself and screamed all the way home.

She was laughing. She was crying. She was dying.

It was too much at once and as she pulled into the driveway, all she wanted to do was take off her shoes at the door and fall into her husband’s arms.

She walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell. A moment. Why did she ring the bell? She walked over to the garage and entered the code and rushed under the door as quickly as she could. Outside it was twilight, and she watched as the garage door closed on the intermittent high keening of the whining crickets.

One time, she had written a letter to a stranger hoping to get one back in the future reciprocating her love and desire for happiness. She had sent it far away knowing she would

• “An,” Esther’s Korean surname

• cassava flakes, a popular West African food made from cassava tubers

• watery mud

• Korean pear

never see it again. Her handwriting hadn't been very good. She was still waiting for a reply.

The shoes came off. And Joseph, on his way to bring in the trash bin, was there to catch her.

—

She was surprised when her gynecologist gave her the news.

“Are you fucking with me right now?” she asked Michelle, her friend of twelve years. Her friend only grinned back at her, enjoying her reaction to the joyous news. Esther began to cry, softly at first and then with great heaving sobs. These days everything was setting her off. The weather, the sound of her boss' voice, her ghost of a mother that followed her around. Maybe this was why. She needed to have an explanation for who she was. Her body had been in tune long before she had and the relief she felt was crashing over her in waves. Her inadequacy lifted off her shoulders, she gripped Michelle's hands and smiled through her tears.

“Come back in a week, we'll do an ultrasound and make sure everything is okay.”

On her way out she embraced her friend one last time.

“Wait till I tell Joseph.” It was a hug that lasted for eternity, all of Esther's goodwill poured from her heart and out past her skin and into her friend.

“Thank you.”

“Drive safe. I'll see you next week.”

In her car, Esther leaned against the steering wheel and took deep breaths. She felt them rush down past her lungs, settle in her stomach, twist and stretch before her diaphragm contracted and they whooshed out. Esther remembered her mother telling her about how she had been pregnant and hadn't known for months because she kept getting her period. What a treacherous existence, at any moment the chord that tethered her to the

simplest of actualities could have been ripped away. In a heartbeat gone, dissolved into a mass of tissue and clots. Of course, it only mattered now that she existed and could think about it. How dark. Her existence only mattered because she existed.

She pulled the car out of the parking space and headed home.

—

Joseph was waiting for his wife to come home from her appointment. His phone rang. His sister. He got up from the couch, walked past the dining table set with dinner and grabbed a beer from the fridge.

“오빠, 잘 지냈 어?”

“응, 너도 잘 지냈 어?”

“어, 다음 주에, 엄마 생일파티 있으니까 오빠한테 전화하기 했 어. 에스더 어니 어때?”

It's a standard conversation. They decided to meet tomorrow at a café they both liked to plan their mother's birthday party. “내일 마나.” He stared at the water droplets condensing on the side of his beer can. He went to the sink, filled a cup with water, and watered the kitchen plants: the large pothos, Esther's aloe vera, the small avocado tree they had grown together from a single seed. Everything ages. His mother was almost a year older, and for a minute, he remembered what it was like when time moved slowly, but now he realizes that during that time, he had been moving fast. Barely taking in anything, hyper-fixating on the strangest things . . . Childhood. He sat down at the table with the covered food and waited for his wife to come back.

The sound of the door in the garage woke him up from his dream, and Esther's heels met the ground frantically, unevenly. What did he dream about? He doesn't remember. And there she was. He could see all her top row teeth and there were tears in her eyes. She was on him laughing, her hands holding his face, kissing

“Brother, how have you been?”

“Yes, I have been well. How are you?”

“I called because next week is Mom's birthday party. How is Esther?”

“We'll meet you tomorrow.”

his eyes, nose, mouth. The mixture of her salty tears with her laughter tasted sweet in his mouth.

Sometimes, time still moves in slow motion, and you can see the once imperceptible yearning of the plants as they move towards the sun in their own time. You breathe in and know that the moment you are in will last forever and ever.

They were going to have a baby.

—

Now, Esther is eight years old, and while her parents plan to move to America and dream of opportunities and myths, she dreams of hell.

When Jesus comes, it's *harmattan*, and the blunt winds have chapped her lips raw, and her knuckles are white. She is asking her mother for some Vaseline. It's surprising how fast the earth is split in two, and the oceans surge, and the devil, released onto the earth, roars with power.

God sounds like God, and he counts the righteous by hand as dead bodies are pulled from the earth, worms writhing in the underbellies until the moment of transfiguration. She has never seen anything quite so grotesque. She shivers and feels wet shame between her legs. The beauty of the divine leaves the faces of God's sheep glowing, and she waits patiently with her family for their turn to be called.

First, God calls her mother, and the warmth in his voice is evident and pure.

Then, God calls her father, and her brother, and her sister, and her other brother, and her aunt.

She is left standing, soaked, sucking on her thumb in her front yard. Her younger brother looks at her. Even her other brother with his obstinate disobedience and mean-spirited pranks looks down at her, and she wonders, why do people go to heaven?

Tears threaten to spill. What had she done

wrong? She thinks about everything that has ever happened in her life. Every sin she has ever committed.

Sometimes, you don't have to do anything wrong to be found guilty.

And she begins to cry slow, heavy, hot tears that warm her cheeks and distort her vision. She falls to her knees.

All around her, the life she once knew falls apart, and she kneels alone in the ruins of her understanding. Her family looks down on her from the sky, grieving, at first, then suddenly, at peace. Even the angels pity her for a moment.

It takes them a second, a day, a hundred years to leave, and when they do, the devil comes to reap his soul. She joins the millions of forgotten parents, children, uncles, and aunts in a march that never ends, for a cause she does not comprehend.

The wars and fires rage on, and over and over she dies to herself and confesses her sins. The things she sees as she walks the breadth of the earth, she will not forget them for a thousand years.

—

Every night for the past six months, Esther went to work, came home, and lay down beside Joseph. Then at twelve she woke up, got into her car, and drove to the nearest park almost an hour away. There she hunted animals, fed on their flesh, ate their hearts, and inhaled their souls.

This was quite literally her American nightmare.

Maybe it was the sound of her jaw unhinging that made everything real to her. This is happening right now, her body was telling her. The pit in her stomach felt deep and dark and her saliva dripped, hissing as it dropped onto the earth. The deer in front of her was frozen. A deep ancient fear that locked and held the neurons, nerves, and muscles in

place. She stalked over, the soil beneath her feet was cold. This was happening.

Yes. Deer. Two.

It was the twisting of the limbs and the hissing of the flesh, the hard grinding of the bones that filled her. The blood coated her face: warm and deep. Nutritious.

When she got to the heart, she took her time, fingering each artery, licking the blood from her fingers. The deer gazed up at her, its eyes only white. She petted its head. It trembled softly in the cold night air, a soft gurgling in its throat. She took the large heart in her hand and pulled.

This was life, this held all the complexities of the universe, and now she held it in her palm.

She touched her bare swollen belly and felt the wind slice into her skin. In the soft night light, the sticky heart gleamed, and she stared at it for a moment.

Transfixed.

The baby kicked, and she unhinged her jaw, her rows of teeth poised like knives in the night, and swallowed the heart whole. You could see it in her throat as it made its way down her esophagus; her body accommodated it, stretching. Brown skin pulled taut, tension, and then it was gone.

Does this night ever end?

If she had any say in the way the world worked, it never would have started. In the middle of the hunt, a braid had escaped from her bun and now lay stuck in the blood on her cheek. She felt stretched in the best way. Naked, quivering with adrenaline.

Monday. Work tomorrow.

She woke up beside Joseph. Her belly fit into the curve of his back and her knees fit right into the crook of his knees. The smell of pear from his shampoo hung in the air and she shook her face in his hair. This was hers.

Once she left the bed that smelled like them, the real world stretched boundlessly before her. Everything the light touches. He breathed, sighed in his sleep.

Joseph was dreaming about the future. He saw his beautiful wife and his beautiful child in their beautiful house and smiled softly. Pressure on the back of his hair, warmth at the small of his back. How God did wonders, bringing souls together on the earth for a short while. He turned and faced Esther. She kissed beneath his jaw. He felt her smile against the vein in his neck.

“We have to get ready for work.”

“Weaf2gitredi4wuk,” she mimed at him. She sucked on her teeth. MchtsheW. Stupid man. Her stupid man.

She sat up, her feet hung over the side of the bed, and smiled at his laughter. Maybe she could convince him to join her in the shower.

—

One night, months ago, she searched on her phone:

“How to Get Blood Stains Out of Your Clothes”

Things you’ll need:

1. Hydrogen peroxide
2. Water

Steps:

1. Grab your bottle of hydrogen peroxide and apply a small amount directly to the stain.
2. Wait several moments, the stain should disappear!
3. After the stain is removed, rinse the area with cold water to remove any leftover peroxide.
4. Throw your article of clothing in the wash.
5. All done! 😊

How She Got the Stains Out of her Clothes:

Don’t get caught. Don’t get caught. Think of your husband. What will he say? You’re covered in blood. What the fuck is wrong with you?

Her thoughts ran in all directions, bouncing off each other violently. She knew that whatever this was, it was wrong. She collapsed to the floor of her garage, exhausted yet sated.

A deep breath. Fuck. She searched in the dark, and spotted a box of fertilizer, the yellow box almost glowing in the dark.

Miracle Gro. Five.

Her breathing slowed. She stood up. She rubbed her belly and knew in her soul that she had months left of whatever this was.

She turned the light on in the kitchen and sank to the ground, her head in her knees. She couldn't stop to slow her thoughts down and think about the cold night air and the white of the deer's eyes. She picked herself up from the ground and began to hum. She couldn't think of any songs, and what she ended up humming was a broken melody that decayed in the air behind her as she moved to the bathroom to wash her hands.

Esther looked at herself in the mirror above the sink. She stared deep into her own eyes and into her soul, and the woman in the mirror did the same, and the woman in that mirror did the same. All of them, herself into infinity, looked at what they were becoming.

What else could they do, but survive?

She took off her clothes and put them in the wash. She pushed the buttons and worked the settings. Detergent. Fabric softener. Bleach.

Everything was in slow motion. She began to cry as she walked through her house naked.

At 2:00 a.m., she stepped into the shower. A moment later, she folded herself into sleep.

At 3:30 a.m., she leaped out of bed in a panic, and glanced at Joseph, who had slept through the most momentous night of his life. She wanted to keep it that way. He deserved peace. He could never know what she was becoming. She put on her slippers, went to the laundry room and got out the neon green

rubber gloves reserved for cleaning. She grabbed a rag and a spray bottle of bleach and spend the rest of the morning wiping all the surfaces she had touched until not a drop of blood remained. Even then, she kept cleaning. She was bent over on the floor when she felt the timid, gentle warmth of the rising sun on her neck, she was bent over on the kitchen floor desperately scrubbing. It was then she decided she could not wash out the stains on her soul, thoroughly traumatized and extremely exhausted she walked into her bedroom, climbed into her bed, and fell asleep.

Joseph called off work for her. When he kissed her cheek, he wondered vaguely at the faint smell of bleach. Had she been cleaning? He was curious, but thought twice about prying.

—

Joseph makes them breakfast. He meticulously fries the eggs, and gently places the bread in the toaster, and sets out the ketchup, the table mats, hot sauce, and pepper.

“Help me check on the bacon, it is in the oven.”

On the side of his cheek, *mwhaa*. She pulls out the pieces of bacon and places them on a plate.

He watches her eat.

“뭐? 뭐?”

“아침이 어때?” He asked.

“어, 나 너무 좋아해.”

He doesn't say anything else, but his eyes dance with light. The sounds of breakfast take over, and for now, in their cramped little kitchen, on their little piece of the American dream, on God's beautiful earth, it is just Esther, Joseph, and their plants. Something more, nothing less.

—

Ah, three. Trinity. The perfect number.

“What? What?”  
“How is breakfast?”  
“I really like it.”

# THIS UNIVERSE IS SO SMALL

—Lillian Lippold

She barely knows me when, nine stories up, she dangles her feet out of my window. Is it bad city etiquette to spy on other people's visible apartments? She says that she is afraid to look into shadowy windows because she knows that those are the ones with people who are looking back. She falls in love with busy sills, she says, and the people who set up their computer so that they are looking straight out at her. She drags the chair from my dining room so that she can show me what she means, and the wood scratches my floor.

She eats some shrimp dumplings, and she tells me that she can feel her upset stomach blowing up her fingers. She makes me hold her left hand flat on my palm as she squeezes her eyes shut and breathes in gasps for an hour. Below her second knuckles, her flesh is pink and puffy. She does not move her hand or open her eyes but reaches for a full glass of water with her other hand, like a blind woman scrambling for drink. She takes small sips and does not apologize when it is over.

They say that when a witch is married, it rains during the sunshine. Still, every time it pours, I imagine her vowing to me over and over, our hands wet with spring shower.

“I will, I will, I will,” she says. “I will, I will, I will.”

# ALONE...

—Michael Kelly

vague, gray vapory moisture  
enveloped in a  
tired tight colorless world  
of sharp stretched glass  
amidst creeping eerie  
silent shadows  
soft . . . cutting . . .  
painful, wheezing—  
whimper of helpless want—  
for a breath—  
to stave off death  
hoping  
praying  
for one final touch  
of a loved one's hand

Dedicated to all the lives lost in the pandemic, especially to those souls who were denied the comfort of a loved one nearby.



Mom, Submerged I —Zoe Schweiger

# UNCOMMONS (OR A SPHERE-SEALED MIRROR)

—Ben Hefter

all i've had today are fake foods  
frosted flakes and soylent  
sold shrink wrapped together  
like a city-slick M-R-E  
which reminds me,  
i did send a salami to your boy in the army  
who'd been "SEEKING ENRICHMENT DURING DEPLOYMENT"  
but all I got back was a lousy bag of bullets  
and a diorama burn pit  
no help to someone so skirting unemployment

the water from my faucet tasted sickly sweet  
so i put in a maintenance complaint  
purging terms like mutagenic and teratogenic from my mind  
and hankering for challah I made my way over to the kosher grocer  
i crossed the street and passed two tall tots  
and the stop clock lingered at eleven for two seconds

i secured my sweetbread and went to sit where a bench had been  
and stuffed the toe of the thing in my mouth  
but a small tickle to my tonsils caused a cough  
and i spat out a receipt reading fourteen ninety-two  
still at a gappy's questing glance i resigned into a smile  
I was glad I hadn't bought the lentils

there are rules and there are no rules, there is no game, i "have no name"  
i will spend my adolescence wanting for wisdom  
wanting to be the sage, never seeking sages to study  
i pass a stranger with my exact posture  
my hands in their pockets  
and i'm reminded of my stuytown apartment  
and banging ringing through the floor and ceiling  
and the sweetness of the water  
and the smell of mold

Love seeketh not itself to please,  
Nor for itself hath any care,  
But for another gives its ease  
And builds a heaven in hell's despair.

—William Blake

How I cherish and treasure the priceless gift you have given this sinner all his life, every second of every day your love has been there, God-like, unconditional . . . sustaining me through my own personal hell, slowly, gently, softly healing a son's soul which felt it deserved eternal damnation.

Shamed, lost, and broken—adrift in a raging sea of despair—it was your love God threw me as a lifeline, setting me safely ashore amidst your tender mercies. Your understanding and forgiveness knew no end, your loving compassion restored the flame of hope that had long been extinguished by the rivers of tears shed in my dark, lonely sorrow. When valued loved ones stepped away, turned their backs, you stepped forward, drawing me unabashedly into your arms of love, holding me closer than I had ever felt before, calming and quieting my quivering heart.

Slowly the years went by, worlds apart yet bound strongly by the suffering and loss we were both going through. We only saw each other a few times a year across a cold, blackhard table, our every minute together monitored, but still you came despite financial hardships, bad weather, and long miles.

My love for you continued to grow but I was filled with a conviction that it seemed so small compared to the size of your love for me. I prayed for God to reveal more of my wonderful mother to me through His eyes,

with His heart, and He granted me my deepest desire. He let me appreciate just how small a portion I would ever witness of your total devotedness, the late nights on your knees in tearful prayers for me, the uncountable times I broke your heart inadvertently or, sadly, at times intentionally . . . yet never did you count it against me. Like Jesus gladly accepted the cup of suffering as He trod the Via Dolorosa being spit on, cursed and laughed at, struck by the very souls He loved enough to die for. God showed me how heavy with heartbreak your love has often been as you, too, would walk amidst those you loved so dearly in spite of how we treated you at times. We can't stop you from loving us as hard as some of us have tried.

So now, after thirty-six years, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for the quiet, humble, Godly example of love you showed this wayward son when I was blessed to finally be with you on our first family reunion trailer visit in 2000. That gift of love was the most beautiful, heavenly moment of my life. As the last bags of groceries were put down, I spontaneously turned right into your embrace and wept in your healing arms. After fifteen years, after all that pain, to be held by you, surely as tenderly and lovingly as the day you bore me into this world.

We all have known many kinds of love, but to finally see and fully understand the love of a mother for her child—it was, is,

and always will be the greatest love of all.  
I'm happy and full of joy that I can still cry in  
remembrance of that moment. I was as blessed  
as any child has ever been on that day when  
you told me you forgave me for anything and  
everything the second you first held me to your  
breast. I thank God I have finally truly seen you  
as my mother and as my best friend.

If I were hanged on the highest hill . . .  
I know whose love would follow me still . . . Mother o' mine!  
If I were drowned in the deepest sea . . .  
I know whose tears would come down to me . . . Mother o' mine!  
If I were damned of body and soul  
I know whose prayers would make me whole,  
Mother o' mine, O mother o' mine!

—Rudyard Kipling





cycles —Pilar Cerón

dad smokes outside West Ridge cafe  
 friday nights at ten  
 after coffee, two creams no sugar  
 shelf burritos and twizzler sticks  
 gone hard and cold at our corner table

the sun sets chalk-eyed  
 and only the river's letting loose her hair,  
 the strong curl of a night storm.  
 it's quiet and

i'm thinking about giving Colorado a go  
 turning seventeen away from home

lake swimming and being drowned  
 in house party noise until four a.m.,  
 smoke sticking to the air like dad's  
     long pale breath trailing outside  
     he kicks snow against a tire rim

in the mountains i'd drive a truck up lost gulch, losing  
 service to call home, tell dad to get out more  
 maybe tell him i'm also lonely in passenger seats but Aurora

& Runaway shake the car stereo and it's like we're best friends  
 young and maybe even something  
 to each other when she whispers *but i kept running*  
*for a soft place to fall*

the Chautauqua tree hues  
 lush me in green like  
 his rusted coffee mug maybe  
 suburbia would remind me of his  
 thrift store belt buckle  
     cold silver in Alaskan wind

people say i'm lost dreaming but when i'm gone  
 you—  
 dad & silent winter town—i'll wonder  
     were you losing when i took off running  
     for everything you couldn't see?

it's hazy in the dark maybe  
 because i'm crying under my overhead lights or  
 the fog is thicker some nights and right now

i'm not sure mother nature has any daughters so i'll always  
 tell you how the sky looks, it's  
 a mirror of our first songs written under the moon, purple and  
 warm speckled smolder

i'm just seeing now  
 why you named me a star and i'll be  
 home soon to tell it all to you.



Mom, Submerged —Zoe Schweiger

We would walk home, up from the valley, and just as we turned the corner, a darkness would infuse Mom's face when she saw our overgrown grass. She would look at the neighbor's lawn cut short—a line drawn between our two properties visible only if you were looking for it, but she always was. She would wait until a big game was happening, until the whole town was down at the baseball fields or everyone was in their houses watching Bonanza and she would do it herself. People forget, but it was rare in those days for a woman to mow her own lawn. Rare for a woman to own a lawn. She had bought it after selling Grandpa's land and saving some of her salary as a nurse. My mother wasn't ashamed of owning, but she was ashamed of long grass, and I think of Dad having left us. I wanted to mow it for her. I offered when I turned twelve, but those were the days when fathers said, "My daughter will never mow a lawn." Grandpa was dead and a dad seemed to never have existed so she would do it herself until my brother was old enough to do it for her.

It was silly for her to care so much because we never played on the lawn anyway. My brother Max and I blew past the yard and made a beeline for the old graveyard or the spring or the creek. The graveyard was on a ridge halfway up one of the peaks. In 1964, we spent the early weeks of summer at the graveyard. Every fifty years or so a big rainstorm shifted all the tombstones. We tiptoed around, not knowing where bodies might lie beneath us. No one was buried there anymore. It was a place for the pioneers that had come to the

mountains first. "The real McCoy's," Grandpa called them. After he died, Mom started saying that and all the other things that Grandpa used to say that didn't really make sense to me, but I got what he meant.

We grew sick of the graveyard a few weeks after school let out. It stopped being creepy and started being boring, just a bunch of confused tombstones, nothing moving. The creek was the next logical choice, alive and rushing.

We didn't tell Mom when we started going to the creek. She would have thought we were too small. She said the water would sneak up on you and grab you by the ankles to take you away to the sea, but I was starting to lose my faith in her. Slow and rambling, moseying around rocks and damming up twigs, it didn't feel like that type of water to take you away, but Mom said there was something called a "flash flood." She said that if it was raining high in the mountains, further away than we could see, it could sweep down in a wall of water. I told her that if that happened it wouldn't matter if we were in the water or on the bank; she said to stop being smart. I made Max swear he wouldn't tell her and we went anyway.

The best part of the creek was a ravine, with a rope to swing on and grass to lie in. The sun set over a ridge, just in time for us to get home before dark. After sprinting up the trail, the water made of snowmelt was like waking from a long nap.

The first day Penny came with us was sometime in the heat of summer. I wasn't

sure when her family had moved in—it just seemed like she appeared one day. They were new to the mountains, and Mom had to show them how to bear-proof their trash cans and deer-proof their garden. There was no point in fighting off raccoons, mom said. “My Grandpa used to shoot them,” I whispered to Penny.

The first time we took her to the creek, the boys did tricks off the rope to impress her, but she looked at them like they were dirt and hooked her arm around mine, her skin soft and warm like a winter fire. She didn’t even dip a toe in the water; she had called it a “hick” thing to do. I didn’t know what a hick was, so I didn’t know she was making fun of us. I should have guessed from the way she wrinkled her nose and tipped up her chin.

One day at the end of June she must have changed her mind because she finally got in the water. It was a hot day, maybe the hottest that summer saw. We were standing at the base of the trail in the quiet morning sun when Bobby Jones told us he had found a dead deer to poke. He wanted Penny to go to the bloated corpse with him and the rest of the boys.

“Gross,” Penny said and then stuck out her tongue. “Crissy, Max, and me are going to the creek.” I stared at her, mesmerized at the sound of my name on her lips. She looked back at me. “Right?” I nodded in agreement. With that, she started up the trail as Max and I followed. For the better part of the hike I watched her long curly hair bouncing ahead of me. It was ruby red and pulled tight into little rings twisted by god himself.

We raced up the trail until sweat glistened on Penny’s face and Max panted like a dog. At the creek, we flopped into the tall grass next to the water. Tall enough to graze Penny’s shoulders, it was perfect for hiding from the sun. We ate our peanut butter sandwiches in silence, still huffing. Her shoulders had freckles, so many you didn’t know where freckles stopped and skin began. When she

looked away I liked to locate the little spots of pale, pinpricks in the shroud of night.

She never put her hair up in a ponytail even when we ran. That day it swayed like wheat in the wind. She didn’t notice the grass touching her shoulder; she was distracted, watching my brother down at the water.

“Are you going to go in?” The sun was on her face and in her eyes.

“Yeah, but we have to wait. Mom says you should wait thirty minutes so you don’t get a cramp.”

“But I want to go now. Right now.” She stood before I knew what was happening.

“Okay, let’s go. But not too deep.” I stood to meet her, the sandwich heavy in my stomach.

“No, we have to go deep. I want to go off the rope and you have to go first so you can stop me if I start floating away.” Her eyes were wider than I thought eyes could be and looking right at me.

I climbed the few boulders to the notch in the big cottonwood where the rope waited. Max looked up at me. He had been collecting flat stones to skip. He didn’t like jumping but he liked to watch me. Penny stared too, curious but uninspired. I wished I could do a flip or a big cannonball like the older boys but I was scrawny at best, skeletal at worst, and not stupid enough to try. I placed the knot of the rope between my legs, sat, and stepped off the rock.

It is short, so short, that space between flying and falling. But that was my favorite part, a place in time when you didn’t have to be anything. There were no rules on the rope, except to let go at the right time. Then the water was all around me, and I wanted time to wait so I could just be water, but I knew Penny was watching.

She was a year older than me, almost fourteen. Her breasts were more developed than mine, which was all that mattered at that

age. Mine were small. Billy Hanson had called them mosquito bites. Penny's were small too, I guess, but they were real breasts. She placed the rope between them and for a second before she dropped I swear she was scared. But as she flew and fell she whooped in a way I never had. She popped out of the water like a cork, her white dress plastered to her skin. Her smile covered her whole face. I felt there was a type of happiness I had never known.

"This water is fucking freezing!" she bellowed, so loud it echoed off the canyon walls. Max gasped. I looked at both of them and a laugh escaped my mouth so long and true that it rippled with the water. Both her and Max were surprised by it and were pulled into laughing alongside me. Little flecks of water were on her nose and eyelashes, and a small flutter danced in my belly like a trapped hummingbird. I held her hand as we found our footing on the mossy stones.

We lay in the grass to wait for our clothes to dry. Penny had an arm behind her head, exposing her armpit and the little bit of skin near her breast.

"Does your mom always make you take him with you?"

I moved a rock out from under my back. "No, not all the time."

"That's lame. I'm glad I don't have a brother."

"Yeah, pretty lame."

"He likes you though. As far as brothers go, he seems cool."

"Yeah. When Dad left, Mom started working a lot so I had to make dinner and do laundry and sorta become his mom." A cloud shifted and the sun struck my eyes.

"Wow, that's crazy. You, a mom." Her voice floated away in the wind.

She sat up, the grass she had been lying on was flat against the ground. Her dress was still transparent from water. I could see her bra strap. It was a real one, not the trainer ones

Mom bought me.

"Crissy!" Max waved a rock in the air.

"Good job, Max."

He was knee-deep in the stream.

"Do you want to go further up?" Penny tilted her head to where the water disappeared around a bend.

"Mom said I should watch him."

"He'll be fine, we always just sit here, let's go see what's up there." Her dress was less see-through in front, but her hair swirled around her face.

"Only for a few minutes. We need to get home before dark."

We stood up. Penny brushed the dirt off her dress. I didn't own anything white, Mom said white things got dirty and unless I was going to scrub it out, she wasn't going to waste her money.

"Max, we're just going to go up here a ways."

"Okay." The stones in his hand looked like perfect skipping stones. I thought of inspecting them but Penny's white dress was moving upstream.

The rocks were bigger here, harder to balance on. You had to hop between them like you were crossing the stream. Max was closer to shore now. We passed around some trees and lost sight of him.

"It's nice here," Penny said with a lilt.

"Yeah."

The trees up there were aspens, not pines. When the wind blew they made the light flicker, and a noise that was like warm water washed over our faces. I was suddenly aware of every part of myself and every part of her. We each stood on rocks above the water. The light spots between her freckles were brighter in the sun.

"So, are you gonna kiss me?" She looked straight at me, waiting for my answer to her question.

"Here?" I asked in return.

“Yeah.”

I tried to exhale, but something was stuck, and I almost felt like crying but nodded anyway, “Yes.”

“How?” Her eyes were a deep hazel, mud and moss together.

“How?”

“Yeah, how are you going to kiss me?”

“On the lips?” I could hear my heart in my ears and my chest and could feel the corners of my mouth.

“No, I mean *how*?” Her eyes were wanting, testing something in me.

“Like grown-ups do?”

Her eyebrows arched in surprise. “Like with mouth open and tongue and stuff?”

“Yeah. Like that.”

With that, I moved forward. I stumbled towards her, over the last few rocks between us, a current tying us together. But I didn’t make it all the way. I think she knew I wouldn’t. I was close enough to smell her starched white dress when I fell.

In less than a gulp of air, the rocks leapt up to meet me. A pain cracked through my face as my jaw slammed tight with something caught in between. I wasn’t sure what had happened until I felt the hole in my lip with the tip of my tongue and heard my brother scream and saw the blood on Penny’s dress.

My mouth was copper and a slickness spread down my chin and to the center of my chest. Max’s little hands held either side of my face. He had evidently been peeking at us through the trees. His rocks were on the ground, and he had my blood on him. I looked back at my feet, confused at their betrayal. A violent green moss I hadn’t noticed covered the curve of the stones.

“Let’s go home.”

The words came out in a rushed garble. I snatched Max’s hands from my face, somehow my shoes found purchase on each stone. I didn’t realize I was crying or that Penny wasn’t

with us until we were halfway down the mountain and the sun was setting. Flashes of her face came back to me, fear and maybe a shock of disgust that I saw across my vision late into the night.

When Mom came home from work she stitched up my lip. I had washed our clothes by then so she couldn’t smell the creek water or see the mud from where I had fallen. Max was asleep on the rug in front of the crackling TV. Mom made me soup and kissed my forehead when I winced with the first spoonful.

“It will heal, Sweetpea. All things do.”

I guess she meant it because she stopped talking about Grandpa as much even though she still used his words. By the end of the summer she seemed to get sick of strategizing the mowing of the lawn and did it whenever she damn well pleased. She would go out in the mid-day sunshine and wave at people as they walked by. Maybe I should have learned more from that because I never talked to Penny again.

Max and I went to a new stream, one with smaller rocks. But sometimes when we searched for skipping-stones I would look at the grass and think of red on a white dress.

Here at the base of your knee  
the world is towering with room  
for many shadows.

## HERE AT THE BASE OF YOUR KNEE

—Annie Burky

The floor gives enough  
to allow me security,  
but not enough to make me wonder for our  
home.

Our home—  
the people we were and are under  
the hazy yellow light  
of long afternoons with my mother.  
Yellow and smoother with a heat  
that grows until the only escape  
is my drooping head on your knee.

But I wake and you are old and I am  
somehow still young  
and you feel a curse of what comes next—  
A tower above me.

I must stand and leave you on the floor and  
dream more.

A tower above me and you feel  
a curse of what comes next.  
Somehow still young, but I wake  
and you are old and I am.

Is my drooping head on your knee that grows  
until the only escape—  
yellow and smoother  
with the heat  
of long afternoons with my mother.  
The hazy yellow light,  
the people we were and are,  
under our home.

But not enough to make me  
wonder for our home, to allow me security.  
The floor gives enough.

For many  
shadows, the world is towering  
here at the base of your knee.

# HOW TO MAKE SAKE

—Annie Burky

## How to Make Sake the Traditional Way

- Step 01: Polish Rice
- Step 02: Wash and Soak Rice
- Step 03: Steam Rice
- Step 04: Make Koji Rice
- Step 05: Make Shubo
- Step 06: Fermentation
- Step 07: Press Fermented Rice
- Step 08: Remove sediment
- Step 09: Filter alcohol further
- Step 10: Heat Sake
- Step 11: Store and wait for shipment

## How to Make Sake at Home in 5 Easy Steps

### Step 1: Preparing your Sake Rice

Fish are in the same sea but swallow  
one another whole. Maybe a school of fish or a harem of heron  
is a better metaphor. Like rice grains scrubbed into oblivion  
and hollered into compliance until their matter descends into  
a fermentation pulverization and it comes out sweet  
and new. Some call that poison.  
Same for grapes and grape wine. Same oblivion.

### Step 2: Moto

But if the vine breaks  
or the patty floods with grime and gook, if a few grapes  
survive, a mangle of grains are picked, is that generation a victory?

### Step 3: Miromi mash

Your life is not your own. My body flops frail  
and aching in the changing weather. Who have I failed? Am I  
the sad grape the line accounts for? The lame pigeon  
the others scoff at but leave some crumbs for. A clacking  
jaw inept for the place with patties flood.

### Step 4: Yodan

A boy who died at war is only a boy and the war, communal  
suicide. A forest mowed down,  
A library meeting a match,  
A line about to drown. Who really cares? Who gives a shit if one boy stumbles?  
At the worst, he is a single grain of rice so ripe and pregnant with the sun's  
burn and the earth's hollow that I am plucked  
and smashed and brought to my knees  
to make a juice so sweet with my brethren that the town sees god.

### Step 5: Secondary, Clarifying, Maturing



Urban Anthropomorphisms —Natalia Palacino

# W,O,R,M,H,O,L,E,S

—Anika Kaplan

T

Tapping keys random word generator edit  
sense into twigs and dirty laundry worm  
through other side of message pour

A

A pile of dirt on chosen meaning trace back  
the trail office of imposition open from  
noon to seven on weekdays hot singles

N

Near you missed connections searching for  
girl on F train with scraped knees

G

Gave you bandaids hearing not exactly  
listening arms reach from knowing  
swinging back and forth flatness puts on  
makeup and

L

Looks a lot like presence or presents  
senseless like pirates crawling on hands  
and knees hope in stealing back the

E

Ear wigs and house centipedes foraging homes  
at the bottom of your screen

# EPISODE OF THE MADELEINE

—Madi Torem

God was just twenty-three years old when he swung down from the Christmas tree lighting at the Rockefeller Center and joined the crowd as they stood in awe  
Even younger when he graduated from Emory University with a degree in marketing  
He took classes with patriots and survivors who clung to the utterances of professors  
As they talked of Rousseau and Proust and  
God remembered living in the author's head as he strung together the longest novel of all.

Episode of the Madeleine:

There are fifteen paintings on my walls.

Fifteen.

Each one a decaying piece of canvas that swears itself a relic.

I wake up blind because of the blocked window that only serves to amplify the tone-deaf saxophonist who studies above.

I wake up and cannot see the nude body of a woman I do not know.

Or the shamefully gaunt face I hid behind my hung clothing.

Or the still life of a younger me that smiles with all of her teeth.

Her name is still mine even when I cannot see her in the morning.

I turn on my fluorescents and stare in the mirror.

My cheeks have curved inward since I left my parents' house.

My ribs protrude higher than they did before.

My head produces frizzy ringlets that stick out from my leftover bun and I squint at them while I stretch my tattooed arms above my head.

Side to side I move them.

My spine is like tiny sickles chopping away at my back and they cut deeper as I reach to my toes.

Behind my knees feels torn and

in and out I breathe.

My collared shirt pokes out from underneath my sweatshirt on my way to work.  
My grandma gave me this shirt.  
Now she is dead and I wear her shirt on the MTA to Brooklyn to clean dirty bottles for minimum wage.  
The old woman on the car a few feet over is coughing so I look down at my hands and wonder when I will give up my bad habits  
like biting my nails and not washing my sheets and misappropriating dad's money.  
And beating my nose into my skull.

I meditate while scrubbing flavored oil from canisters.  
My hands will be dry after this.  
I'm paid in cash and I like it that way.  
I buy a tea latte with it on the way home knowing it will keep me up past bedtime.  
Sometimes it is fun to inflict harm.  
I sit down on a bench in the park and call my mom.  
I take my first sip in between quips about royal gossip.  
The cinnamon spreads warmth on my tongue seemingly up into my brain.  
It burns, but all I can feel is the elegance of the tearoom at the Drake Hotel.

I am eleven years old in my basketball shorts.  
We are two pigeons amongst the swans in their white gloves and petticoats.  
I munch on scones and clotted cream.  
The harpist ends her set before we leave  
stuffed with cucumber and cream cheese.  
I have cinnamon tea and I drown it with cream and sugar cubes that I  
pop in my mouth when mom isn't looking.  
And I stare up at the mirror-paned ceiling and squint so as to see my frizzy ringlets falling out of my ponytail and I feel completely out of place.  
And I smile with all of my teeth.



I See You —Trish Sachdev



Brain Couture —Trish Sachdev

## SONNET FOR MEDUSA

—Madi Torem

Maybe Medusa misgives messages  
Mistaking menagerie for a meal  
Myopic milieu offers menaces  
Marvels of mamba mane moored to mobile

Maligned by a matriarch of meddle  
Maiden's magnetism meant malison  
Mingling the mortal monster with mettle  
Maneuvering machines Manichaen

Maddened moans of the formerly mused  
Misery meant to manifest murmur  
Model mythicizing of the misused  
Metamorphizing men that married murder

Perseus presents pater pervasive  
Preludes punctuate the pants persuasive

# UNDER A BIG TREE

—Eva Bruckner

My legs are covered in that thin film of dirt, left over from lying in the grass,  
And from staring at the parts of the trees that vanish when the air becomes callous, no longer sweet  
and wet fire.

A fly with navel orange eyes looks up at me from my prickled dirt legs and rubs the air with its own  
segmented legs, making fire out of fire with nothing to burn but daylight.

It's dusk, or the time right before dusk when everything is gold and blurry.

My skin is a teacup with condensation around its rim, it's the color of the sun when it looks at its  
own reflection, blinding and boundless.

There's a give to the bench, a deep but formidable sink where we sit.

It's holding the weight of a smile, one that plunges so deeply in between two points, a parabola that  
sounds like summer.

I look at the sky: it's turning over, but still there.

There are these loaded clouds whose seams might burst at any moment, cool juice raining down on  
a park full of people who forgot their umbrellas.

Every cloud has been colored in by an optimist; thick lines of silver-gold highlight the dark buckets  
that promise to dump and then disappear.

I sit in the smile some more, I think about how okay it would be if it poured.  
How I'd sit in the grin, even deeper now from the weight of rain, how everything would smell like  
grass clippings and trash, a whiff of which I won't ever turn down.  
A squirrel looks up from its nut, the one it's been gnawing at while a pigeon watched, jealous, its  
orange eyes huge, a reflection of an offering that's been claimed.  
It's smelling the rain, or maybe the perfume of the white-haired woman who tosses it food and  
kicks at the pigeon to keep its distance.  
The woman's walker is wet with sweat, slippery and precarious life support.  
It's the color of the rim around the clouds, a sliver that means "give me your hand."  
The way rain draws you close, huddled under an umbrella or an awning or scaffolding with  
strangers, soaked and waiting for the air to be still.

And inside, where rain pelts the window, quieter now through double panes and wet in a way we  
can't feel.

Streaks on glass that invite you outside and advise you stay in.

A gust of wind that knocks us onto a bed, wet hair like a dog's and dry clothes we've just slipped  
into.

A fan that chills a lukewarm liquid that cannot be differentiated between sweat and rain and maybe  
they're the same thing anyway: precipitation from the world inside me or just from the  
world.

Outside, the bench breaks, overcome by a giddy smile that dipped so deep in the middle it  
snapped.

A welcome destruction.



# THE SUMMER REMAINS

—Sammy Tavassoli

The summer remains,  
Pieces of falling foliage  
Shine brightly in the sun  
I wonder if they, like our love,  
Will soon lose their color.

The autumn leaves  
Arrive flushing red  
But they too wither away  
Broken by newer winds  
Love is the same.

In this daze, I can hear  
The passing autumn showers  
The chirping crickets  
I wait, the wind blows,  
But I cannot hear you.

The moon descends  
Atop the Miya River  
A lonely instrument's strings  
Gently sound and echo  
Against the surrounding pines.

# ZUIHITSU

—Cameron Saltsman

A man sits next to me  
on a park bench.  
I cannot tell if  
he's talking to  
himself  
or talking to  
someone on the phone.  
*Twenty-two years old*  
*and she's dying.*  
He smells of whiskey.  
*Go into the heart . . .*  
*and the heart blows.*  
An ant crawls into  
a cigarette and  
doesn't crawl back  
out.

I woke in the night and you had your arm  
raised high in the air, mid-sleep. In the  
morning, I couldn't tell if it was you who was  
dreaming, or me.

Hazel jumps  
on a trampoline listing  
the names of her future  
daughters telling us  
how she won't need a  
husband or wife—the  
doctors will put the  
babies right inside her.  
After she's popped out four, she'll  
open a frozen yogurt shop and all  
of her daughters  
will help with the scooping.

*Everyone in the garden, and*  
I can't stop thinking of  
*Georges Seurat.*

I dreamt we were living together. We had this  
dark and tiny room and I was so happy. We  
bought a Russian Wolfhound and delighted in  
its beauty. We were filled with so much joy  
that we forgot to feed the dog for many days. It  
lay there, dying, as we laughed and embraced.

A man waters  
plants in a  
public garden.  
He lifts the hose from  
under the feet of two  
women  
trying to explain things to each other.  
The man turns on the  
hose and aims it at a  
cluster  
of white hydrangeas.  
The spigot is strong  
and petals bend under its force.  
I lose sight of  
the man as he  
wanders off  
behind a  
rosebush.

*These things that you*  
*paint . . . they're uh . . .*  
*all around us, and you,*  
*uh, you really see them.*  
*Sometimes I'm*  
*not seeing these*  
*things . . .*  
*they're hiding in plain*  
*sight, but now . . . I'm*  
*seeing them.*

All I remember from that summer is your  
truck and that little iPod we played music off  
of. Besides that, you are just a gesture, and  
indistinguishable.



Together —Vivian Xing

# AMPHITHEATER

—Ben Hefter

there's this old decaying amphitheater  
in the woods behind my old high school  
whose rebounding rhymes prompt  
several successive scenes and generative  
questions  
1: can rumor compare? can the unpacked past?  
2: has your mind remained at peace?  
might I find it scattered on the backing of your  
seat?  
3: isn't freedom such a treat?  
smothered by your others  
feet stuck  
feet sunk deep in concrete  
c-cop car on the hill there near the church  
c-cop inside is ageless and undying  
patches over gashes and holes in his starched  
shirt  
eyes locked on the sidewalk  
he never blinks  
he's guarding precious property he  
thinks he  
thinks he  
thinks he's  
never caught his caper  
only a couple kids  
abusing the church roof to smoke and drink  
saying  
we'll make it out somehow  
we'll drill the possibilities  
will ourselves to flee / run into the trees  
backlit by his headlights  
seeking something to protect  
we'll find a secret solace in the meadows of  
neglect  
we'll take a break from our suburban semi city  
scape  
we'll go where there is air  
we'll circulate it  
church side there's a dirt channel  
a ditch piled with waste  
white keys for a far doorway, locked  
shuttered in haste  
keeping bible studies classes  
keeping custom middle names  
and the faces of all those fit to blame  
for your unnerving temper  
a clever ruse  
fit enough to fashion a m-m-muse

for this latest dish I pull two carrots from  
death's rodentous jaws  
sufficiently infused with carrot adrenochrome  
as to make them bright and brimming with  
greater depth of flavor  
from my sleeves I summon the rotted remnants  
of my ancestral roots,  
a useful tuber otherwise known as "potato"  
and on the recipe's recommendation apply a  
retinol salve to the skin  
and sunscreen to soften sun damage  
and on cue through the window  
a blue cuckoo springs singing  
a car alarm's chorus  
news from Kenosha  
charged with private paranoia  
as if to say the pump out back  
with water sickly sweet  
will be dry within the week  
and to fill the bathtub with city stock tap  
full of crab larvae and trilobites and quartz silt  
lending a hint of umami  
manna from heaven  
taking in my hands an ancient engorged  
crustacean  
I gesture at the point  
of a knife affixed to the wall with blue tape  
those eye stalks of his so photosensitive  
understand, viewers, that he registers the glint  
of sunlight catching on cold metal  
beams—beads—bean brain  
tensing till he tires,  
relaxing into resignation  
having shed so much skin so many times  
leaving so much of himself behind, for  
progress' sake,  
getting so big and bitter  
getting potted and plated  
the meat before me is bland and tasteless  
it served him well  
myself much worse  
weldon.  
dessert is on its way  
no labor of mine  
just a few cattails from the estuary outside  
dusted with cocoa powder  
from the kosher grocer  
my apron ringing my feet  
sloughed off like loose skin



III of VI from 5 9 2020 series, 2020 —Eljjah Chavez





Projecting —Natalie Sophia Osmond

It was a nearly necessary extraction; it was tousled and overgrown to a point I had not reached in a long time. They said it had to be long in order for the wax to grip the hair and remove it completely from the root. And for beginners, like myself, we could wait two weeks if we shave often. But I couldn't forgo it. I wondered if it was too short or too long and if María would gently tell me or just snip some off begrudgingly before starting. I chose María on the app, admittedly, because she had the name of a friend from high school that I would walk home with after gym class. If she's anything like María, I thought, she'll be talkative and borderline salacious, saying, "It's no big deal. Everyone should do it. God knows it would be easier for both parties." Imagining the contrary, some lady silently and clinically pulling hair from my down there, almost made me retreat back to my freshman year dorm.

The leaves were just beginning to return to their sepia-toned splendor, accompanied by the brisk winds of change, when I decided to wax the hide for the first time. And not just my arms or legs or really any other part of my body (I have never met a pore in my body that didn't have a hair follicle). I reasoned that I hadn't come to a conclusion about my pubic hair, the way I have with other parts of my body with hair. It was more or less the same process I imposed upon myself and unbeknownst to me then, I will perpetually be in the middle of it.

I was considered a fairly lucky child, lily-white skin, according to my parents a chance

- to *mejorar la raza* in the distant future if I decide to bear my own children. Yet, I was pestered

with an abundance of dark hair ranging from soft down to bristly thick strands. Venerated for the hair on my head and my eyebrows but inundated with advice about what to do with the rest of it.

"You have really nice eyebrows, don't mess them up with overplucking!" my dentist dawdled with the dental drill during a routine visit. My wide-open mouth struggled to let out an intelligible "thank you" sound.

"¡No dejes que te toquen el cabello, te están echando el mal de ojo!"

My mother, privy to superstition, was my very first confidante in hair-oriented advice, going as far as to not let relatives, much less strangers, touch my hair. I thought her to be the ultimate authority on the matter because she has what I call "dolphin skin"—slippery, rubbery, and virtually hairless. She tells me to push my hair out of my face, slick all the baby hairs back to discourage any more growth on my forehead or anywhere else on my face (sometimes I catch her doing it to herself too). She adoringly says that I have the sideburns of Vicente Fernández, a renowned regional Mexican singer. She belts his rancheras regularly:

*Estos celos me hacen daño, me enloqueceeen*

*Jamás aprenderé a vivir sin tii*

*Lo peor es que muy tarde comprendí, sí sí*

*Contigo tenía todo y lo perdí*

*Contigo tenía todo y lo perdíii,*

We both deepen our voices and elongate the last word of each line.

Sometimes I join.

At the age of five, I began to ask my mom why I am like this. My dad, a tawny complexion

• Better the race

Don't let them touch your hair, they're giving you the evil eye! •

This jealousy hurts me, it drives me crazy; I will never learn to live without you; The worst part is that I understood it too late, yes yes; With you, I had everything, and I lost it (x2) •

with straight, faintly lustrous hair, has little body hair like her, I reasoned. She'd say, like

- clockwork, that her sisters are more *peluda*, that her fraternal twin Carmen has more hair than I, a way to placate me. It's natural, she said.

I wondered if it was so, as she glided the men's razor over my jaw. I was in the first grade or maybe second. Sat on the toilet lid while she stood, in this colorless bathroom made for one, her sopping wet ringlets tinged my cheeks with droplets. Her evening cream, a decadent baby powder scent, enveloped us as she adopted a surgeon's concentration, though not their precision.

I felt her fingers, thick and warm from decades of arduous labor, hold my chin, tilting my head to the left to haphazardly run the razor up one of my sideburns sans any shaving cream or gel.

- “¡Demasiado pelo!” she murmured more to herself, running the razor under water.
- “¿Pues quien me lo dio?”  
“Un día todos estos pelos se te van a caer. Verás. Eso es lo que me paso a mi,” she banged the razor on the peach-colored sink a few times to release the hairs lodged between the blades.

For a moment, I imagined my mother, small and demure, with woolly arms one moment and the next, the hair leaped out of her and onto the floor.

I believed that one day it would fall away, sloughing like a cocoon to reveal me. Like this hair had an expiration date, when really it would become a quotidian detail, its nuisance an ebb and flow. When I saw myself in the mirror once she finished, I saw that my face was illuminated, its rounded cherubness emphasized. There was a newfound bluntness to my eyebrows like Lichtenstein's crying comic girl. I hoped my crush wouldn't notice.

- “Mira te vas mas limpia, mas blanquita. Más como una niña normal.” I heard the smile in my

mother's voice, the latter phrase a reference to a Spanish sitcom coincidentally called *La Familia Peluche*, the plushy family, which we would say to each other all the time.

Her teasing was innocent and I tried to think of what she would say if she knew I stood outside of a European Wax Center to expose myself to some stranger named María. I nervously sipped a steaming Brazilian arabica coffee.

I fix my gaze on the smiling woman in a pool in the advertisement outside, expecting her to tell me it won't be so bad. Her tight-lipped smile, the bright yellow pool donut, and her impeccably hairless, tan skin with beads of water almost taunt me. I force myself past passive-aggressive Brenda (the name I give her after getting so acquainted) and go inside. I see a woman lolling on the chaise longue and donning dark shades, her conversation overlapping with that of the pair of young receptionists.

“I told him we should do Cancún and we can paraglide and go to this music festival,” the receptionist closer to me gestures wildly. Her petite figure shakes with excitement as her blonde ringlets bounce.

“Cancún is so fun! I went there on my honeymoon but this year we're planning on going to Greece,” the taller one nods excitedly before she notices me and begins to busy herself with her computer.

I speak low and gradually become louder now that I have their attention. “Hi, I have an appointment with María at 10:45 this morning.”

“Allison? Yes, I see you here in the system,” she grins, emerald eyes flickering from the computer to me. “I'll just take down your information and form of payment. María will call for you shortly afterwards.”

As she inputs my information, I zero in

• Hairy

• Well who gave it to me?

One day all of these hairs will fall out. You'll see.

• That's what happened to me.

• Look, you look much cleaner, whiter.  
• More like a normal girl.

on her delicately manicured fingers pressing down on the keyboard keys. I think of my own, each finger with a light tuft of hair below the knuckle. My gaze reflexively travels up her arms as her hand tucks a dark strand behind her ear. Tanned and slender and *hairless*. Not a pore in sight. I can always tell when someone shaves their arms, because even when the hair is removed there is something akin to a man's five-o'clock shadow, but the receptionist didn't have that.

My arm hair grows quite long. So long that my family jokes that we could braid it, so long that it almost looks like a sleeve of tattoo designs in the way that the hair curves, encasing my arms.

"Why do you have so much arm hair?" boys and girls alike would ask me.

"You have more than I do!"

"Can you at least trim it?"

No, I couldn't. I removed the hair a few times during my adolescence; one time I recall my crush at the time noticing and accusingly saying that it "was not real" because it would grow back. I made myself not remove it for years almost like a social experiment or my testament to not giving into vanity (there was a time that I used long sleeves in the summer). And I applied this practice to other parts of my body, but to a lesser extent, in the name of early-adolescent feminism. When that didn't work, I would counter, "Why don't you have more hair?"

What I wanted to ask was: Was I considered less pretty? Less feminine? Would boys like girls with hairy arms? Invariably, the answers to these questions were yes and no. Each boy I liked and that has liked me back has said to me that they like my arms. At some point, it became a benchmark of just how much they liked me or evidence that they wanted to pull a fast one on me, that they

would resort to such an absurd compliment. They thought that this was profound in some way, thinking that maybe I loved my hairy arms and I needed them to like them too. When my partner told me he liked them I laughed and saw his eyes widen quizzically. I immediately told him my history with the compliment.

"But I really do," his bushy eyebrows lowered and his entire countenance softened the way it always does. And I folded.

When it came to my legs, I could feel the relief and surprise of guys I liked when I wore skirts because my legs are not like my arms. They were hairless temporarily as I bestowed upon myself the mission of shaving every square inch of my legs. The first time I did I was eleven, and I gave myself a nasty wound, five inches in length. My older sister had to come into the bathroom to play nurse and press wads of toilet paper to the open gash as I cleaned out the strips of skin caught in the razor. I winced once the flesh gave away from the blades, remembering the searing pain as I sliced the outermost layer of skin. The gash kept oozing blood and to remedy this, we used an entire toilet paper roll to bandage it like a mummy. Months later and even a year later, I would feel the scar pulsate with my juvenile desire to be seen as womanly.

"Allison?" A stout woman with coppery skin and a warm smile calls out to me, saying my name the way my mother does. "Are you ready for wax?"

A switch goes off in my head, "*Si ya estoy lista.*" I was essentially taking inventory of my seemingly never-ending experiences with hair removal and was about to go on to the repertoire of hair removal products (depilatory creams, razors, epilators, and now, wax).

Her minor apprehension dissolves and her lips curl into a wide smile, "*Entra, entra mija. Ponte*

Yes, I'm ready •

*cómoda y puede quitarse su falda.”*

The room looks like that of a doctor’s office, but if the office had an interior designer who loved the color scarlet, drank metropolitans, and loved minimalism. I shrug off my coat and leave on my long sleeves, underwear, and socks. Even then I feel a cold draft flash my legs with goosebumps as I lie down on what seems to be an examination table with cushions. She pulls on some white latex gloves and orders me to pull down my underwear. I let it hang on my ankles, I think for my own comfort, before I toe it off in the pile of clothes pooled on the floor.

• “Eres solo una niña, una jovencita,” she says almost wistfully, glancing at my nakedness. I laugh apprehensively as I try to prepare myself.

• “Tienes que poner las piernas así, como las alas de una mariposa.”

She adjusts my legs, letting my knees jut out of my sides and the soles of my feet touch. She shows me the wax, a purple iridescent liquid, and tells me that this is designed to not cause much pain. Before she starts she douses the area with a transparent gel, tells me that it is to cleanse the skin and prep it for a less painful process. Using what I would call a popsicle stick, she stirs the hot wax a little ways from me. I fold my hands together, lying in wait like a surgery patient, waiting to be pierced and prodded.

• “Sabes, mi esposo es bien codo pero para estos waxes eso si no le importa si cuesta mucho,” she rolls her eyes and lightly chuckles. “Me imagino que es tu primera vez.”

I nod and she finally brings the wax-covered popsicle stick to me, smearing the area where my thigh meets my groin with the thick warm liquid. She lets it harden momentarily and moves to the opposite side and does the same. Her petite hand blurs, in a flash she holds the surrounding area taut and promptly

rips the strip away. I suck in my breath and withdraw, there is a momentary sting. She cups the crevice, immediately alleviating the pain. She asks if it hurts and I shake my head no. She repeats the same actions all around, peppering a monologue about her life in between rips and winces.

• “Mi hijo esta estudiando para ser dentista y siempre saca buenas calificaciones,” María and I fall into our roles imperceptibly. She feels familiar until she advises to not wear tight clothes and to not engage in the *cuchiplancheo* for at least twenty-

• four hours in order to not irritate my skin.

• “Ves que no dolió tanto. Usted fue muy fuerte y mira le quedo bien bonito,” she preens once she finishes and she sends me off my merry way with a wink.

At my dorm bathroom, I pull up my skirt in front of the long mirror of the bathroom, slightly lowering my underwear. It is puffy and flushed red. It makes me feel not quite like a girl, nor a woman. Yet I wasn’t the meek, quietly mutinous girl I know—I find myself in the midst of the amalgamation, finally feeling my age and naiveté. I almost like it.

On Thursday, I spend time with my partner in the city. The night before I shaved my legs with eyebrow razors the color of an orange creamsicle, nicking myself here and there and undoubtedly missing a few spots.

We are sitting on the train, heading to Central Park. My legs are crossed and my arms are splayed on his shoulders and his chest. He moves his fingers between the concave of the back of my bent knee, brushing upwards and downwards languorously, before running them down the length of my leg.

He croons, “I like your legs.”

• You’re just a girl, a young lady.

• You need to put your legs like this, in the form of the wings of a butterfly.

• Y’know my husband is quite the cheapskate, but for these waxes he doesn’t mind the cost.

• I imagine it’s your first time

• My son is studying to become a dentist and he always gets good grades.

• Sex

• That wasn’t so painful, you were very strong. And it came out great!



Harley —Charlie Besso



Fueled —Charlie Besso

# THE MOURNING SON

—Monserrate Delgado

I did not ask you to bring me here; to this palace of perdition  
That was your choice  
How dare you leave me and ignore the endless rain trailing your shadow  
There is so much I wanted to say, so much I needed to feel  
You infuriate me  
But somehow, I am still the mourning son  
I would often fall asleep listening to your lullabies and awaken to your warm embrace  
But grew to seek refuge within  
My only friend: the coldness which numbs the pain you created  
There is so much I wanted to say, so much I needed to feel  
You robbed me  
But somehow, I am still the mourning son  
Silly me, for longing to rest peacefully beside you again:  
As though in death you could provide  
That which was denied to me in life  
For once, I would like to rise not tormented by your absence  
Because somehow, I still love you  
Forever mourning  
Your son

# HUNGRY

—Livia Blum

little girl opens dead  
oyster and finds lost  
Ocean hiding, little shrimp  
and echo lullabies and  
forests and slow. it stays  
on her hands like pen  
stains a new creature  
under her nose, a tide  
rising, a salt something  
she dreams whale  
dreams, wails for water,  
is so thirsty. she drinks  
and her mouth prays  
the water clean again.  
her soul is quiver  
in the back of her head  
it is night and then day falling  
the sun stumbles  
over too much air and  
still the oysters are  
dying and the water is  
hungry is trying to escape  
the dawn and she drinks  
the sea through her baby teeth  
and it is not enough  
but the blue spreads under  
her fingernails and up  
her eyes and she is  
something else she is  
a thousand lost years  
she is deep and dead and  
eyes open eyes and  
rising with the sea



On Coral Bleaching —Charlie Besso

# INSIDES

—Cameron Saltsman

Sometimes the ivy on brick buildings sways like  
underwater kelp forests and the sun tickles my back and  
I think that maybe I am not placeless. I am not empty or  
emptying.

Door slams. Bells. Sink running. Another door.  
It's my parents' anniversary and they fought over lamb chops.  
Today I thought I could just give up and get married.

Pink tufts of flower heads. A girl scratching her knee.  
I kept thinking of you whenever someone passed my window.  
I kept thinking of 14th Street and the ear infirmary and

the Crocodile Lounge and the screams we'd hear at night.  
I want to scream into the ocean like a child. I want to pick apart  
lobsters and lick the green gooey stomach bits. I want to tear  
into

everything's insides. Black socks. Sunlight. You ask me  
how to die well and I ask for you to shrink me down and  
pocket me before wading through kelp forests warm and  
dead and white.



Glacier —Charlie Besso





# PARADERO

—Lau Guzman

Of the many untranslatable phrases of my life, “*paradero*” is among the least translatable. It’s Spanish for “the place where one stops,” but it is so much more. *Paraderos* are about respite and journey: a bus stop, a rest stop, a gas station, the whereabouts of something, a place on the side of the road where someone has set up a pot and a tent and some plastic tables.

I was at one such *paradero* somewhere in the Cauca Valley in October of 2017. It was late afternoon and the sky was cloudy. The mist from the Andes had not yet descended over the mountains. I found myself in the company of two bus drivers who attacked their *sancocho* noisily, fishing the chicken out of the soup to suck the marrow out of the bones.

The *paradero* was about the tenth hour of a thirty-hour bus trip I had undertaken with thirty-seven of my American friends who had all joined the same yearlong backpacking trip. We had spent the last month living and working as volunteers at Ciudad Refugio, a shelter for homeless people in the heart of Medellín.

I eyed the *sancocho* in front of me. “The Last Supper,” I thought. It did have something final about it, the taste of homegoing, warm broth, chicken on the bone, potatoes, cilantro, onion, yucca, corn. We were on our way to Quito to volunteer as needed with different organizations. Maybe they had *sancocho* in Ecuador, but I was certain that Colombia’s was better.

Behind me, my American friends sat on the bus. They had declined to join us at the *paradero*. Instead, they ate peanut butter and

jelly sandwiches. I knew I had one waiting for me when I rejoined them. My friend Bella Sorrentino had used some of her precious peanut butter to make me a sandwich. I didn’t even know where she had gotten it. I wasn’t aware of any Colombian grocery store that sold the awful stuff. And yet, I didn’t have the heart to refuse her generosity. I’d have to sneak the sandwich to one of the boys on the trip.

My friends on the bus didn’t know where we were. I didn’t see the point of telling them. The Cauca Valley was the kind of place where Colombians went missing and *gringos* were worth a sizeable ransom. They wouldn’t get it even if I did. To them, civil wars were things that happened in the nineteenth century and were written about in textbooks.

I had grown up in Bogotá in the 2000s. I was raised on stories of kidnappings and ransoms, rescues and returns. I knew that civil war was real. It was in the faces of the mothers of the dead and the missing, the bodies shown on the news, the dogs that smelled our car before we went into malls.

Back at the table, the bus drivers gawked at me as I scooped up a spoonful of rice to accompany my *sancocho*. They probably thought I was too young to be in charge of the group. They weren’t wrong. Deb Jones, the trip leader, didn’t speak Spanish very well. A few days before we traveled, she had thrust a phone number into my hands and told me who to call and what to tell them. I complied and didn’t register that I had booked us a bus through the Cauca Valley until afterwards. By then, the deposit had been paid and we were traveling through the Valley of the Shadow of Death—or

its Colombian cousin, anyway.

That morning, the bus arrived at the hostel where we were staying in Medellín. I greeted the drivers and loaded my friends onto the bus. Once we were all on, I told them that we would be okay to leave. They said they could only leave once the *encargada* arrived. I nodded and went to my seat to wait. A minute later, I realized that I was the *encargada*. I blushed when I explained my mistake to the drivers. They were gracious about it and we promptly left Medellín to follow the rolling spine of my continent southward.

*Encargada*, another untranslatable. It means “female person in charge.” But to me, it meant something like “the female person who is to blame in case these dumb *gringos* get themselves kidnapped or killed.”

Nevertheless, *encargada* I was. The virtue of growing up in a country and speaking the language gave me the right to exercise authority over the group, even if I was severely underqualified. The drivers explained that the next part of the trip was going to be the trickiest.

“You, me, and him, are team,” the older bus driver told me very seriously as he gestured at the three Colombians sitting around a plastic table in a *paradero*. “We have to work together to make sure everything goes well.”

He told me the sun would set soon, making the road even more dangerous. We would have to have a police escort until we arrived at the border with Ecuador. I nodded and said I understood, asking a few questions about how the bus company had arranged for the escort.

I finished my *sancocho* and thanked the drivers for my meal. Turned out, free food is a perk for the *encargada*. Food for the stomach to ease the soul. I got back on the bus and sat near the front.

“Everything okay?” Deb asked.

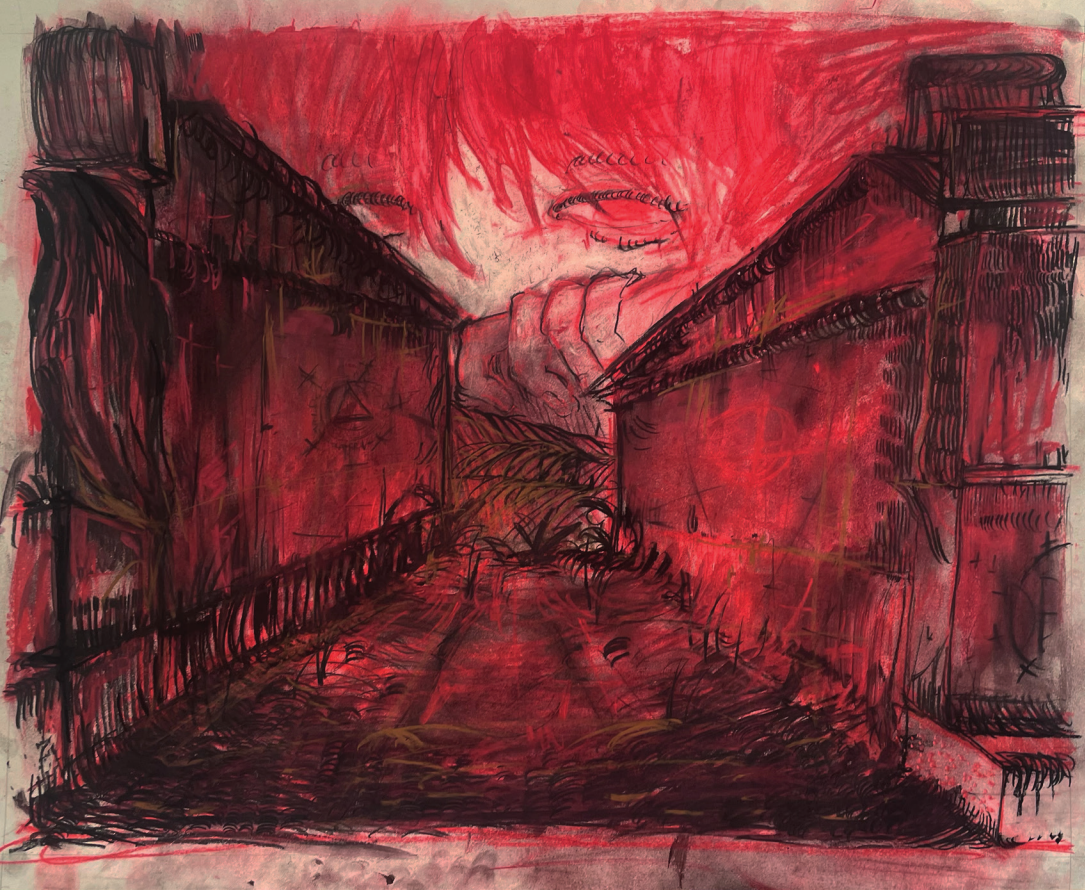
“Yeah,” I lied. “I’m going to miss

Colombian soup,” I quipped.

I felt bad for lying about the danger that I had put us in. We should have flown. I should have realized earlier that the road from Medellín to Quito goes through the Cauca Valley. I should have told Deb and not booked the bus. I had failed to understand, and unlike my American friends, I had no excuse. I decided I’d have to explain later if anything bad did happen to us. *Please, God, don’t ever make me explain*, I prayed.

As we traveled, the clouds parted and the sun set in a glorious blaze over the Andes. Bella and I watched a Nicholas Sparks film. Around me, my friends slept. Even Bella dozed off eventually. I stayed wide awake.

I don’t think any of them noticed that we were following the flashing blue-red lights of a white police Toyota SUV.



...and they will hold you like a child IV —Dante Lee

## THERE IS NOTHING I WON'T DO

—Michelle Capone

On Old Glenview road, past the Presbyterian church and the rust-red barn, past the field with the cows and the field with the Halloween pumpkins, past the disordered houses which are brick and wood and melancholic and which are overgrown with prickly green shrubs and which are constantly smelling of water-logged books and which were imposing, but are not anymore, and which are half-invisible, half-solid, half-important, there is a girl walking and bleeding, bleeding and walking, gliding like a box-cutter through soundless air.

A hand deep in a pocket touches what it means to touch; a switched-off handle stays cold despite used fingers. Mary thinks about her goal, situated so carefully on the narrow road of her mind and the wide road of her neighborhood, and she smiles, further cracking her lip. Wet blood, all taste, cover teeth that she is still losing. How many have fallen out? Mary wiggles her tongue and counts the holes, then does a little jump. Three. Three teeth. Three teeth all in different parts of her mouth. She continues moving, still poking her tongue there and there and there. There and there and

there. *Here is the inside of me. Here are fleshy, puffy gums underneath my very fragile teeth.*

Mary had not considered, before this walk on this road, that there were parts of herself she did not know existed, parts of herself she had never felt. Now, she is feeling them. Now, she is rubbing her thumb against the side of tough leather. Now, she is thinking about today.

Now, she is speeding up, recklessly moving her feet, kicking loose pebbles on pavement, pretending they are herself. She is hearing these pebbles, which in her mind are her teeth, and they are pittering on the ground, a weak, awful sound—the glass jars in Mary’s kitchen make this noise, too. Stomp, rattle, stomp, rattle.

Soon after the teeth numbering, the sun starts lowering, and the wind comes. The space in front of Mary, which was previously empty except for her peripheral view of sidewalks and grass, is now orange with cracked leaves, darkening gradually. Mary continues forward, still far from a destination. It will happen inside his home or outside his door; she doesn’t mind much either way.

Mary hates the leaves, though. They brush against her invasively, not meant to crumble against little girl skin, raw from autumn cold. *A nice jacket would fix this, Mary thinks, one that swooshes while I move.* Right now, her arms are naked and red and tucked close to the sides of her body, and they are seeking warmth, slippery warmth, warmth that will belong to Mary’s hands once she passes the bend in the road and the fields that precede it. She jumps hard on the collection of leaves in her way, very satisfied at the thought.

Except for those leaves, there is no sound. The trees are bare, and the wind rushes through them as if they are nothing. Not even a whistle, which Mary can admire. She will be like that today: quick and efficient and unrelenting.

A pothole catches Mary’s attention. She steps inside of it, and as she does, raises her left hand to her mouth, opens wide, and now,

more blood. Knuckles scrub the palate above her tongue. *There and there and there. There and there and there.* It hurts this time; the pain is pulsing, rooted deep in the soft parts of her jaw. Mary removes her fingers and stares hard at their new sticky color, wipes them on stiff jeans. *Bodies have so much blood, she thinks, leaving the hole. It just comes and comes.*

She doesn’t have to wonder much about the blood in her own body, Mary knows it very well. Almost every day, she knows it intimately. Her blood collects in her mouth, and it collects under her skin, and it collects in the pit of her stomach, and, on linoleum kitchen floor, it collects as pools, right in front of her eyes. Even if she doesn’t feel blood, Mary tastes it constantly, a phantom sting. There is nothing like that taste, over and over again, in her own mouth.

Another smile: the wind has carried a smell, old and damp, into Mary’s path. Wood. Water sucking wood, from trees ahead of her, that indicates nearness to the bend. Again, her pace quickens. She skips and skips, flexing her fingers around the stolen object in her pocket. There is nothing she won’t do—that is something Mary is sure of. Some people really deserve it. Some people, like her dad, other people are better without.

The bend begins. Mary steps on a yellow line in the middle of the road and holds both arms out; she is balancing on a beam, tipping left and right, spinning as she follows the curve, completely unworried about cars. Most people have come back from work, and those who haven’t can’t stop her. Noise drifts when the street is this empty—she’ll hear what’s coming from a mile away, and Mary doesn’t need a mile. Already, she is anticipating the sound the corn stalks will make when she walks through them. They are coming soon, piled thick in rows.

A black bird caws. Another flaps its wings. Mary, with arms still raised, pushes her thumb

against a small, metal button. She sees the blade release, and thinks, *I'm so happy. I'm so happy with this.*

Her entire body feels complete, so Mary twirls around and around, watching how quickly the knife moves, watching how quickly she can blur the world into motion; how easy it is to focus on herself when she has a knife in hand, a knife that she will name, eventually, because she has heard that, sometimes, people do that. She wonders if her dad has already named the knife and decides it does not matter, because it is her little girl knife now. It is her knife. Mary's knife. Tiny, shiny Mary, because the waning light from the sun is glinting against its blade, reflecting the threat it is cutting. *Tiny shiny.*

She stops when she feels like stopping, pockets the knife, and keeps walking forwards. There is the corn field, yellow brown, with tall, rustling husks that hide a small house Mary knows exists past the field. Her mom has driven her by it before, dark sunglasses on, a hand pointed out the window: *You see that? It's your father's workshop.* Mary remembers watching her fingers shake on the steering wheel from the back seat, remembers her own fingers shaking, and how she crossed them tight in her lap to stop—the knife is in her hand again. The air has gotten colder and sharper and now there is the field, with bending corn, because the wind is so powerful, and Mary knows it'll be time soon, so she holds the knife tighter, and she smiles *so so so* wide, the smile she knows her mom loves.

Shoes sink into dirt in front of the stalks, and Mary tries comparing herself to their height. She leans forward slowly, rolls her feet so that she's on her tippy toes, and reaches up—an attempt to rip an ear off—but Mary's too small. Which is fine, she thinks, because it's much more fun to push through things than it is to hurt them. Tiny Shiny drops back in her pocket, ready, but still. Mary's left arm glides

through the first row of the field, and her body glides within its motion, bringing with it a sweeping right. The stalks part like water, and Mary is deep inside an ocean of corn—husks and silk and green covering her view of the sky.

There is rhythm and overwhelming sound; there is the smell of dry dirt and the crisp snapping of her own feet; *there and there and there*, is the ache of her mouth; *there and there and there*, is the blood inside of it; *there and there and there*, is the blood on her jeans, on her fingers, on her face. What Mary knows is this: she is not the one who stomps. She is not the one who breaks cabinets. She is the one who is shoved into counters face first, the little girl who knows what it is like to feel granite penetrate a nose and watch as teeth fall onto a floor, the little girl who has heard her own self bounce all over, who has never been a stranger to the constant, open vulnerability of a body.

It's like there is TV static in her brain, now. That is the noise of the field, TV static and sniffing nostrils. Mary considers how she must look, *crazy*, and finds she doesn't mind much. She swims through the last bit of stalk and sees her dad's house. A wood workshop. A lonely, small wood workshop that he runs to every morning after his episodes.

Mary moves faster, reaches a path lined with rocks, perfect in their placement, walks up a handmade porch, stained brown, and before she knocks, flips out her knife, puts it behind her back.

He answers the door wearing a red, puffy vest—which complicates things, a little, for Mary. Originally, she was going to gut her dad the moment the door opened. Before he could say a word, Mary was going to take Tiny Shiny and stab him right in the stomach, an overhead swing. But seeing him now, his size, and his thick clothing, brings Mary back to her goal. Any movement she makes will only injure him, and that is not what Mary is here to do.

"Well," says her dad, the slightest

Southern drawl, “are you going to say something, or just stand there looking stupid?” He stomps the toe of his boot on the hardwood behind him, and Mary doesn’t flinch. Her knife remains steady as she waits for him to bend down, to unzip his jacket, to close his eyes and yawn, to do anything that gives her the chance she needs.

But her dad does nothing—he just stares, and after a moment, starts closing the door.

“Can’t I come in?” Mary says quickly, moving her left hand to keep it from shutting.

“Hell no,” her dad says, “I’m working on stuff, and you look filthy.” He gestures to Mary’s face and jeans with his unoccupied hand, unbothered by the fact that he was the cause of the filth. There’s nothing quick to his movements, every inch of him is deliberate and mean. Mary wishes he was already dead, that she had already killed him. She thinks: *It’s my turn. It’s my turn.*

“Well,” says Mary, “I still want to come in.” She shifts her head to look inside the house, stops once her dad turns his chest to block her eyeline.

“Well, I’m still not going to let you.”

Her dad slams the door hard, and Mary just barely removes her hand in time to keep it from getting caught and smashed.

“Then I need a ride home,” yells Mary, squeaky-voiced, pounding flat-palmed on wood. *Thud, thud, thud*, and the pain reverberates *there and there and there*, in the parts of herself that he has tried to ruin, *there and there and there*, in the flesh of her mouth.

No response, so Mary pounds harder, and when that doesn’t work, she starts kicking. Tiny Shiny is still behind her back, razor sharp and big as ever, and Mary realizes that it doesn’t matter if she wants to kill her dad, because the bastard won’t even look at her long enough to let her try.

“I’m your daughter!” Mary screams, pounding and kicking, kicking and pounding.

“I am your daughter!”

“You’re not getting a ride from me, sweetheart,” her dad responds back suddenly, twice as loud despite the separating wall, “so get to fucking walking!”

Mary gives the door one last kick and looks to her right. She switches Tiny Shiny over to her left hand, brings down the blade, and pockets it. She grins, thinks about how she will act like the wind, steps off her dad’s porch, bends down, and grabs a medium-sized rock from the collection in front of the stairs. *My hand is like a mouth*, Mary thinks, feeling the rock’s weight. Then, she winds up and throws it into a window.

Glass shatters immediately, but Mary keeps throwing. Her dad is screaming and screaming and it doesn’t matter, because he is screaming and opening the door, screaming and running towards Mary, screaming and grabbing her by the collar, screaming and dragging her inside.

As he drags her, Mary’s knees scrub the ground and hit every foot of the steps. She falls hard on them when her dad finally pitches her to the floor, a sharp welcomed pain. If he crouches down to hit her, the whole thing will be easier.

“You bitch,” he yells, slamming the door again. “You god damn bitch!”

The picture in the entrance hall rattles and falls, more glass breaks, and Mary, with a hand in a pocket, crawls towards the middle of the room, away from the wall of knives and tools next to the door. Like Tiny Shiny, her dad’s workshop is built to cut wood, and Mary’s not going to let herself die because of it.

Opposite her position, she spots a transparent door leading to the backyard, so she forces herself upright and does her best to run, knowing her dad will eventually follow.

But he is still screaming. He is raging against the walls, distracted, even though Mary caused the mess, because he secretly loves to be angry, because there is no part of her dad

that doesn't relish in his own ability to create violence, and Mary, who needs him to die, will take advantage of this indulgence. She hears him again, "Crazy bitch, stupid cunt," and runs faster.

Outside now, Mary sprints to the oak tree ahead of her, collides with the ladder built into its side. Climbs. Each rung is un-sanded, and Mary feels its splinters enter into the webbing between her fingers, into the underneaths of her nails, into the smoothness of her red palms, but she keeps pushing upwards. There is a half-built treehouse above Mary, she could see it from inside, and all she needs is to get to the top. This isn't hurt, Mary thinks, *this isn't half of what I can take.*

"Mary!" The backdoor swings open. Mary hears it crash.

Her dad runs out, and Mary climbs faster, heaving herself onto the lonely piece of wood resting level on branches. She breathes deeply, blinks, readies herself. And as her dad steps his first foot onto the tree's third rung, Mary takes out Tiny Shiny, screams like she's never screamed before in her life, and jumps.

A mess of limbs—gangly knees and elbows—hits her dad in the face. They both fall to the ground, Mary on top, breathing heavy, but ready. She flips out the blade and just goes.

Tiny Shiny enters her dad's neck like it is nothing. And again. And again, like it is nothing, and again, like it is nothing, because it is. And there is so much blood spraying from him. Blood coating Mary's hands and cheeks. Her dad flails his arms, knocks Mary off his body, but she knows he won't be able to move for much longer, and Mary hopes he is in pain.

Then, instead of dragging his body away from her, her dad takes his last bits of strength to claw his way through grass towards Mary. But she is ready. And when he gets close, Mary just stabs him again. This time in his shoulder. She pulls out Tiny Shiny, pushes herself to stand, and then, because she can, Mary kicks

him right in the nose.

She sees, for once, her dad's blood, she smells, for once, her dad's blood, and for once, his blood is the one that covers her fingers, and it is warm like she thought—the only warm thing in the backyard. Next is his stomach.

*My hand with the knife is like a mouth, Mary thinks. A mouth. A mouth, mouth, mouth, missing zero teeth. A sharp mouth, with piranha jaws, that bites very cleanly. A mouth that does not have to chew much. Chomp chomp. In and out. A quick, never full, mouth.*

And she stabs him again, and she is able to smell blood. And she stabs him again, and remembers her mom, who she could not think of much today, because it was too painful. And she stabs him again, and relives that walk down the road, down the bend, through the field. And she stabs him again, and the blood is just coating her, and she is happy because he deserves it. And she stabs him again, and wishes she was strong enough to kick out his teeth, to make her dad feel one little bit of what she has felt her entire life.

And then she hears nothing, because her dad is not moaning or breathing. Mary relaxes onto the backs of her thighs. She looks at her little girl hands that are more mangled than she's ever seen them, and she looks at Tiny Shiny, the knife she stole from her dad's collection at home, and she isn't sure whether she wants to cry or wipe blood into her hair, so she moves towards the ladder and climbs again.

Lying on the flat of the treehouse, Mary wonders why her dad ever built it. She keeps her eyes on the sky, which is dark now, and knows that there is no part of herself that she doesn't know, swirls her tongue inside her mouth there and there and there, *there and there and there.*

He really has an unfortunate face,  
a sort of lumpy squish-shaped nose,  
and charred-tomato skin,  
melting off his bones.  
His bloated hands rub slow circles on the window pane.

Yet his eyes are clear and sharp,  
tracing my tired movements as I  
pretend not to notice. There's a depraved  
thrill in being watched, I think, a wanton  
delight in being wanted, that  
I have sorely missed.  
Lightheaded, I arrange myself  
carefully upon my king-sized bed  
(far too large for a single, lonely woman),  
backside facing the window,  
stained t-shirt draped in an ever-so-dangerous way.  
Us repugnant fools,  
we must find solace in each other.  
His deviant eyes burn as they  
crawl up and down my wise body,  
undressing me rather unkindly,  
until the only barrier between him and me is the dirty window.  
I miss being touched.

My love is all but pressed against the glass,  
staring, unabashedly hungry.

It's a clumsy affair,  
I delicately enter his window-washing chair  
which tips violently with every movement.  
There's a certain thrill in being watched, I think,  
and the city watches.  
As my bare legs settle upon his,  
the chair pitches backward and I,  
untethered by safety equipment,  
am flung into the open air.



# CONTRIBUTORS

**Allison Argueta Claros** •  
is a Salvadoran-American student in her third year at Gallatin, studying migration and transnationalism through policy and writing, with an anticipated minor in creative writing. She is especially interested in how narratives shape policy outcomes (and vice versa) in oral history, creative nonfiction, and the liminal legality experienced by immigrants. She is a staff writer for “Under the Arch” at *Washington Square News*.

**Anika Kaplan** •  
is a third-year student at Gallatin concentrating on Experimental Writing and Reading, with a background in visual arts. Her practice is rooted in weaving together different forms of language and non-language with an emphasis on theories of entanglement.

**Annie Burky** •  
will be graduating with her MA from Gallatin in Spring 2022 with a focus in prose, poetry, and journalism. Annie’s work has been published in *Ms. Mayhem*, *Honeysuckle*, the *Queens Daily Eagle*, and Gallatin’s *Confluence*. She is currently editing her first short story collection and developing a podcast series

**Ben Hefter** •  
is a current senior and aspiring senior citizen. His concentration explores the dynamic between common (and commonly violent) political narratives and the counter-normalization of said violence through various forms of literature. He and his girlfriend have two cats.

**Cameron Saltsman** •  
will graduate in May 2023 with a concentration in Poetry and Visual Art at Gallatin. Her art has been shown at the Gallatin Arts Festival.

**Charlie Besso** •  
has always been fascinated by how people treat beauty as though it is a source of credibility. As an artist, Charlie strives to re-interpret beauty and to use it as a tool to bring attention to things that matter (topics that might be deemed “ugly”).

**Dante Lee,** •  
a Film and TV junior, explores hope through horror and fear. He combines the dread and anxiety created from negative emotions and experiences with a sense of optimism. Currently he is co-writing a comic about New Jersey emos and getting his cat to stop stepping in paint.

**Elijah Angelo Chavez** •  
is an interdisciplinary, multimedia artist studying studio art and public policy at New York University. He works in mediums from painting, drawing, and printmaking to sculpture, installation, and photography in order to understand and express the connection between sexuality, culture, and socioeconomics.

**Eva Bruckner** •  
is a junior at Gallatin building a concentration in Writing about Life and Lives. Eva loves to write and make art about the world they observe around them, including a series of drawings which was shared in last year’s Gallatin Arts Festival.

**Iko Agada** •  
will graduate from Gallatin in May 2022 with a concentration in Bodies of Work, an exploration of literature, creative writing, and Black studies. Her work at Gallatin has been an exploration of how writing by Black authors creates a space of radical imagination and healing.

**Lau Guzmán** •  
combines her interests in literature, media, and politics through her concentration in Political Fictions. Her writing has appeared in *NYU Local*, *Washington Square News*, *Embodied*, and Gallatin’s *Confluence*. As a 2021 Global Fellow in Urban Practice, she worked with arts nonprofit Loisaida, Inc. and the Urban Democracy Lab to create a bilingual zine.

**Laura Zhang** •  
(she/her) is a junior at Gallatin concentrating in Human Rights: Legal and Social Empowerment with a minor in creative writing. She started writing poetry at NYU and is excited to continue finding joy in reading and writing.

**Lillian G Lippold** •  
is a queer interdisciplinary artist from SoCal & MN, concentrating at Gallatin in Fragmentary Poetics, Trans Performance, and Theoretical Studies of Death and Contact. Their work can be found in *Sterling Clack Clack*, *Bryant Literary Review*, *Santa Ana River Review*, and *oddball mag*. Additional writing and such is located at [lillianlippold.com](http://lillianlippold.com).

**Livia Blum** •  
(she/her) is a junior at Gallatin with a concentration in Storytelling as Resistance and a minor in creative writing. She is especially interested in the role of writing, theater, and film in social and environmental justice movements. Her work has been published in *Interim Poetics*, *Hanging Loose Press*, *The Nervous Breakdown*, and the *New York Times Metropolitan Diary*.

**Madi Torem** •  
will be graduating from Gallatin in May 2022 with a concentration in How to Create a Realistic Character, incorporating writing, acting, and psychology. Her future is looking like writing new songs/poems/plays/terrible tweets and taking on whatever jobs that will help her sustain this.

- Michael Patrick Thomas Kelly**  
 maintains a healthy diet of anything that deeply touches his heart, mind, and spirit—credits NPR as his greatest teacher during his thirty-seven years in prison—has never been online, used a cell phone, or had a salad. “The soul would have no rainbow had the eyes no tears.”
- Michelle Capone**  
 is currently focusing her studies on female characters and their relationships with other women in literature, as well as on creative writing. She has published pieces in *Confluence* and the *Gallatin Review*, and is currently, and constantly, working on other short stories.
- Monserate Delgado**  
 is an NYU student who is currently pursuing an Associate of Arts degree in liberal studies. As a poet and creative writer he focuses on the depth of the human psyche and the sentiment a piece is intended to evoke.
- Natalia Palacino Camargo**  
 (b. 2001) is a Colombian artist and curator born in Bogotá, D.C. She is currently a third-year student at New York University and is pursuing a double degree in studio art with a concentration in graphic design and digital art, video, painting, and textile art, and a degree in philosophy. Her intersectional art practice aims to make art with a purpose and create social impact. Natalia is very passionate about advocacy in gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and bettering and working with her Latinx community.
- Natalie Osmond**  
 (she/her) is a junior at Steinhardt majoring in studio art. Her art is a personal visual translation of her exploration of her identity and, more specifically, her womanhood through photography. Most of her work explores the male gaze, body autonomy, sexuality, relationships, and growing up.
- Pilar Cerón**  
 is a junior at Gallatin studying art, theater, fashion, and media with a focus on highlighting marginalized voices and stories. She is also pursuing a minor in Chinese language. She’s a first-generation college student and an NYU Martin Luther King Jr. Scholar. She loves good food and good music.
- Sammy Tavassoli**  
 is a senior concentrating in *The Mind and Its Stories*, which focuses on the intersection of neuroscience, psychology, and storytelling across written mediums. She enjoys writing her own stories in her free time and is currently conducting cognitive neuroscience research on the relationship between perceptual experiences and the forming of mental narratives.
- Sheridan Smith**  
 is a freelance photographer specializing in documentary photography and portraiture. She is a student at Gallatin, and works as a staff photographer for *Washington Square News*. Her academic focus is concerned with the preservation of truth and representation in visual storytelling through the interplay between documentation and creativity.
- Trish Sachdev’s**  
 concentration, Creative Communication for People and the Planet, was initially sparked by her long-lasting love for people connecting and for photography. For this reason, her passion for picture-taking continues to be pulled by portraits; it provides her and her model(s) with a safe and controlled space to challenge our creativity within the collaborative process. They develop a vision together, Trish adopts the techniques required to achieve their concept, and her model leans into an expression of themselves. A combination of this, alongside special attention paid to bold composition and careful color palettes, are what allows for her Funky Fish portraits to stand out. You can find more of her creative work on instagram @funkyfishcam.
- Vivian Xing**  
 is a senior concentrating on *The Role of Image in Individual and Social Reality*. The mediums of her work include drawing, Chinese painting, photography, and videography. Usually starting from the inquiry of her relationship with nature and society, Xing aims to invite her audience to reflect upon their shared experiences, emotions, and memories as a collective.
- XY Zhou**  
 is an artist at Gallatin with a concentration in *Translations Between Art, Philosophy, and Law* with a particular interest in classical Chinese art. They conduct research on the paradoxical relationship between aesthetics and ethics, and work in a variety of mediums including (but not limited to) poetry, essay, painting, sculpture, and ceramics.
- Zoe Schweiger**  
 is an undergraduate student studying fine arts with an emphasis on environmentalism. From Miami, she is drawn to archive her present moment while imagining the future of her home before the devastating floods that will ensue without structural change. She uses collage, video, and painting to depict her home, loved ones, and environment in relation to the imminent danger of rising water.



