

The Gallatin Review



Spring 2021

The Gallatin Review



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Eternal Summer Slacking

Holly Seefeldt

Happy Tuesday. It's not important. It's just another long day in a deliriously long summer. The whole year in fact has stretched out longer than any you have experienced in your ten years of being.

Things for the past year and a half have been strange. A sort of jagged, halting rhythm of starts and stops. Right when you plan to accelerate, the brakes slam on again, and you idle, for lack of anything better to do. Sometimes it's your parents' foot that holds the pedal, sometimes a foot heavier than theirs, but your foot is too light to take control of the road. You are ten, after all.

You started your period eight months ago, but it didn't matter. It runs in the family. Your mother wasn't home, so your sister took care of it. Your dad bought you flowers. You're a woman now. You can have babies now. You feel a soreness like you got punched with an iron fist between your legs every month. You can't flop down on your bed belly-first anymore because your chest feels like sharp rocks are trying to burst out of your swollen buds. You look in the mirror and will yourself to see an image of you, grown. And you do. Yet ten is no closer to being an adult than nine.

You learn to appreciate the days when you can swim. You sit on the edge of the pool, the warm concrete against the backs of your thighs, without a care or a tampon string to hide. The paint revealing the depth of four feet is just wet enough that you don't stick. Your perch is in just the right place between the lap swimmers and lap sitters.

Around the deck of the public pool in the quiet center of Pullman, Washington, is a high fence

of gunmetal gray, its chain links making diamond shadows across the concrete. Beyond this, the thick green grass of Rainey Park, a playground, and a gazebo. And further out, a main street and a university campus, assuring the small metropolis the identity of a college town. And past all this, yellowed under the dry August sun, are fields of wheat and barley, their hillsides rolling out into the distance.

The clouds are white and puffy against a blue sky, neither coming nor going. A year ago, you would have been at the pool with your friends and your sisters, daring each other to flirt with the lifeguards. And you would have done it. It was hard enough to get noticed as the middle child, might as well take the chance when it is handed to you.

This afternoon, you only have your sisters. It's been this way all summer. Your friends moved, one after the other. Belleview, then Albuquerque. Now you're left, but for how much longer is anyone's guess. The days have moved in a slow drip for a while. Each one stretches on forever and every week looks like it could go on repeating until time finally stops.

Your dad is unhappy. He finished school and now his work isn't working out for him, or something like that. No one has bothered to explain it to you. A year and a half ago you were left at your friend's house for three days. Your parents went to Kentucky. You knew it was for a job. You knew they were looking at houses. You don't know why they came back without an answer.

California came next. A good opportunity. Would you like to live in a city for a change? Never mind. Hiring freeze. So then maybe Pasco. We could stay in Washington, just move a little south. No. Not enough agriculture. Your dad's qualifications didn't fit. They had no use for his scientific research.

And then came Missouri. You pronounced it Misery. A good salary with Monsanto's name on every paycheck. Your Dad couldn't swallow his morals and your mother couldn't stand the heat. They declined, and you stayed. Until California unfroze. San Louis Obispo sounded nice. You could feel the palm trees in your mind. Picture the picture-perfect pastel houses atop the hills of San Francisco, peeking out from above the fog, just waiting to welcome you home. A city girl at last.

You hold onto a long list of maybes and an equal list of why nots and nos. California calls, and another no weighs down the scale. They can hire, but they can't pay. They'll get more funding, they'll call back. Your smart cosmopolitan future fades into the fog.

Your sisters are in the pool, the older one making sure the younger one doesn't drown. She's nine. She can swim. But your older sister is like a hawk, always ready to dive in for the catch. She's thirteen, and her age is the only reason you're able to swim alone, no parents deciding when pool time is over. The responsibility weighs her down like the dead bolts on the lifeguard chairs, anchoring them to the concrete deck, but she's the oldest. She's used to it.

You wear two-piece swimsuits, with shorts for bottoms now. No one taught you how to shave down there, only that if you did, you'd be conforming to unrealistic beauty standards. You don't understand the concept. The same rule maker made a rule that you couldn't wear nail polish.

At the other end of the deck is a pool with two diving boards, one low and one high. To their right is a wall made of concrete blocks leading to the entrances to the showers and locker rooms: one for men and one for women. Outside is a counter where you can rent foam boogie boards

and pool noodles.

Gray metal bullhorn speakers are bolted into the cement walls, playing the pool's radio music, Hot 104.3 FM, or, if the lifeguards allow, Z-Fun 106. The sound is thin and tinny as it echoes across the pool, but it's made up for on the other side, where standing speakers blast the sound back at full volume. The constant flow of summertime hits worms its way into your ears, forever imprinting the summer of 1998 on your memory.

The year has two great hits, starting with *Iris*. You're embarrassed to say their name, Goo Goo Dolls, but you can't resist their song, or their lead singer. Johnny Rzeznik. His name is as sharp and foreign as the feeling you get every time you picture his square jawline and spiky hair. The song speaks to you of loneliness, and you soak it up. His voice cuts through the splashes and screams of other swimmers, drawing you into a private dream.

*And I'd give up forever to touch you
'Cause I know that you feel me somehow
You're the closest to heaven that I'll ever be
And I don't wanna go home right now*

*And all I can taste is this moment
And all I can breathe is your life
When sooner or later it's over
I just don't wanna miss you tonight*

*And I don't want the world to see me
'Cause I don't think that they'd understand
When everything's made to be broken
I just want you to know who I am*

*And you can't fight the tears that ain't coming
Or the moment of truth in your lies
When everything feels like the movies
Yeah, you bleed just to know you're alive*

Your family likes you. You are quiet and helpful.

Never the one to say no. Always the one your dad calls on when he needs a daughter for heavy lifting, You're proud to be the one who gets asked. You don't mind that you're squished in the middle, only three years to call your own. You have two photo albums to your name, and you got night terrors when your sister was born, and you had to be weaned too early. Milk made you sick, and apple juice made you sicker, so you learned to subsist on water. You get overlooked now, but you use it to your advantage. You slide through the cracks intentionally. Asking for very little in the hope than when you do, it'll matter.

Happy Tuesday. It's only another day at the pool. You don't have anywhere else you have to be. There used to be gymnastics classes. Two nights each week. You were okay at it but getting taller was making it harder to keep up. Your younger sister was better. She had all the energy. She took it harder when your mom and dad took all three of you out. Why pay for a session when we are about to move? Oh, wait, we aren't. California never called.

You had music lessons too, but they are cancelled for the summer. Maybe longer. Your sisters' friends were your friends' sisters, so you all lost out together. Recovered together. Now you sit in a chlorine-tinged holding cell together. There are no more contests, no more dares, only sitting, then swimming, then sitting some more. You feel hollow. Songs come on the loudspeakers and you wish for Savage Garden to come back. It would be a reminder of happier days from the summer of 1997. You had friends then. Now you have sisters. You tell yourself it's no difference. It doesn't need to feel sad. Except one is a hawk and the other still a child.

You readjust your thighs on the soft paint at the side of the pool. Your shoulders are drying off and the sun's heat is creeping over you like hot desert sand. You kick at the water, then hold

your feet still, watching as your toes wiggle in the mini rapid waves. Placing both hands on the beveled edge of the pool, you lift off and swing your legs forward into the pool, dropping into its embrace with a silent gulp. The cool water slides across your baked shoulders, sending a shiver of pleasure down your back.

Swimming is familiar. Every day here is familiar. An endless cycle of summer passes, stacked towels, and wrinkled feet. You've been walking to this pool year after year, summer after summer, for as long as you've lived in this town. Five blocks from home, down a hill, across Jackson, then Spring, and then into the park. The humid locker rooms, the spray from the open showers, the blue smell of chlorine washing across people's skin like dish soap.

The radio comes in over the tinny speakers, the hits of the summer still on an endless loop. Reps every hour for the newest songs, like they think you don't notice.

*So Cal is where my mind states
But it's not my state of mind
I'm not as ugly, sad as you
Or am I origami, folded up and just pretend
Demented as the motives in your head*

*I would swallow my pride, I would choke on the rinds
But the lack thereof would leave me empty inside
I would swallow my doubt turn it inside out
Find nothin' but faith in nothin'
Want to put my tender, heart in a blender
Watch it spin around to a beautiful oblivion
Rendezvous then I'm through with you*

California still might call back. You stay in ready mode, capable of making a quick exit any day now. Your mother can't idle like you can. She had to relieve her uncertainty by adding possibility. We now have a new lead in Maine. That would be

nice. For her. She likes forests. You don't even know the name of the town. While we wait for that, here's another one. Fargo. That's in North Dakota. You can't imagine living in a town with that name. You'll think of farts every time you write your address. You think it's worse than Misery. Fargo does have a good job for your dad. Fargo is close to your dad's family. Fargo gets cold, and your mother hates the heat.

The jobs haven't called back. You listen to the report each day with one ear. It's useless to pay full attention. Updates are met with shrugs now, boxes half packed are unpacked again.

Another idea. Another application. Another interview and then, months of silence. Here's another. This one's in New Zealand. Wouldn't that be exciting. Shrug. You're questioning their sanity now, measuring their level of desperation in miles and dollars. You try to understand their constant repetition of something that clearly doesn't work. New Zealand. You wonder if they've really gone off the deep end this time.

*They made up their minds
And they started packing
They left before the sun came up that day
An exit to eternal summer slacking
But where were they going without ever knowing the way?*

*They drank up the wine
And they got to talking
They now had more important things to say
And when the car broke down
They started walking
Where were they going without ever knowing the way*

*Anyone can see the road that they walk on is paved in gold
And it's always summer
They'll never get cold*

*They'll never get hungry
They'll never get old and gray
You can see their shadows wandering off somewhere
They won't make it home
But they really don't care
They wanted the highway
They're happier there today*

*Their children woke up
And they couldn't find 'em
They left before the sun came up that day
They just drove off and left it all behind 'em
But where were they going without ever knowing the way?*

It's getting late. You can feel the change. The slight breeze off the concrete deck is a little less welcoming. The angle of the shadow is longer, the chain link fence's diamonds have changed into narrow rectangles. A little more room in the pool has opened up around you and the water isn't lapping as frantically at the edges anymore. The families in the shallow end are subdued, heads and shoulders bobbing above the waterline, turning to conversations over games. You'll have to swim across to rejoin your sisters. They'll be wanting to leave soon.

You haven't thought it over. It just comes to you. You have risen to many occasions, followed through on every dare. Did it for them. Because they asked. Now, do what they never thought of. Do it because you thought of it first.

This could be your last summer. Who says that it's not. Climb out and do it. It's not far to walk across the deck, and your feet slap against the concrete, still warm from a day under the sun. Your footprints fade to thin strips behind you, absorbed into the gray.

You pause behind the low dive. That was last year's challenge and you surpassed it several

times over. The view from back here makes the expanse of blue pool look longer. It's an unfamiliar vantage. You catch your breath as your throat tightens. 10 feet to walk over to it. More feet to look up at it. Look forward, you're not here to look surprised. No one waits ahead of you. The pool is clearing out. Only you haven't finished yet. One hand is all it takes, grasping the thin rung. One hand, then one foot. It's only a ladder after all. You can do this. You can walk out. You don't have to bounce. You don't have to dive in, headfirst. You don't have to make a splash. You can hold your nose and drop feet first. Who is going to see, care, or remember you were here.

It all changes when it's over. It all disappears when it's gone. You feel stable in the uncertainty. It's been like this for a while. Now it seems you grew into it while no one was watching.

The hawk circles below. You have to go now. Hold on. You haven't finished yet. Will you watch me?

It's now or never.

Jump.



Tangier, Morocco
Veronica Liow

Autumn in Mystic, CT

Sage Livingstone Molasky

Midwinter, shucking oyster shells in the blueblack cold
Fingers like bits of metal, I have pocket-knife hands.
Slicing open these suckers feels like you

slicing through me, sucking on your finger.

Midspring, the park is warm and raucous.
A tuba bellows across the crowded square.
You make a big bellow inside me,

shallow and warm the brass band sounds in the fountain.

Midsummer, I scour empty beaches looking for bits of you,
Like oyster shells, like Hershey's chocolate and broken glass.
Sea glass, my mother said, is a drowned woman's penance.

let me pray, I will devour your body, decaying like seaweed on the shore.



Retrospect
Jamie Zhang

John Keats in Lipstick

René Bennett

after the 1819 Odes of Keats

Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?
Because if it wasn't, why can't it be?
When I close my eyes, I see
John Keats in lipstick and this to me
Is truer than anything.
It's the high noon of the internet age—
Anything with an audience willing to believe
Can be true.
But if it doesn't truthfully have to be, at least let it be
in such an ecstasy.
When I close my eyes
He's rouged his lips and kissed
The isthmus of my neck—
O Keats, I feel you, against
My back, compressed.
What wild ecstasy?
Poetry: a rejection of extinction or
An attempt at utter destruction?
Or is it at the intersection that I
Am selling my neurotransmitters for a chance
At touching neverland with a toe
Or a tongue, summoned along your jaw
Like a set of wet stitches,
A fantasy made of eternity
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave this world unseen
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.
I'm riding the Z train into Manhattan at three
Recalling a vision of rouged lips—so
This is the poet's predicament.

Admit it, it's funny, and hot, in a way, to imagine
Our great poets drafting masterpieces
In full mug.
Synthetic is that imagery but is it not
A daydream of truth? That an impermanent mind
Has no identity, assuming no
Single version of reality,
the viewless wings of Poesy.
If I were as innocent as a flower
I would not be so distraught by such matters.
But I have been plucked and plundered of my body,
Withered, wasted, branded, repainted
And erased, I don't even know from where
I cultivated. I have been forced to take
A shape, to christen myself queer, to fear
Succumbing to some false garden
Or fail to bloom beyond identification.
And when I am fraught to find a point
I evoke my lone poet and remember there is
None, so then I spill my body into an ocean,
I sway, I'm swallowed whole, and in my rest
I feel it, against my back, compressed.
What wild ecstasy
To run away to the tune of soaring clouds,
Unleashed sensitivities, close-eyed submission;
I am in Italy at the grave of
John Keats, braving the sunset instead of
Holding my breath. Some things are worth
Dying over—that may be true—
But must we always acquiesce to our fates?
Or can we find another way? Truly:
Romeo had only to bow towards
The hymn of Juliet's heartbeat.

A bit of self-reflection and a dose of
Worldly thinking can calibrate your fate to
An entirely other drift.
Even a moment's action can arouse your stars;
Constellations bend; planets mend;
 No hungry generations tread thee down.
And when I open my eyes I see
The ground rupturing beneath me
Like a seismic revelation
And I am holding my breath and the sky
Is gaining sentience and John Keats
Rises up before me,
 silent form
Teasing the shadows, soil streaming down
Revealing the skin, the rouge dreamy
Lips. I say, *Give it to me*
And then I'm on the grass and he does not kiss
The nest of my neck, but puts the body
To the test. I don't want to be kissed
I want the life sucked out of me.
I want your arms around my thighs,
Mouth on my shuddering,
 A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.
We are coming undone with every thrust,
Our voices stuck in the thrumming blood,
 So let me be thy choirs, and make a moan
 Upon the midnight hours
And we will howl with every drop of sweat
 Yes, I will be thy priest
I have achieved levitation
I am evaporating as flowers,
 Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
Yes, Romeo had only to check for a pulse.

Abuelo

Nikki Myers

Holding up rolls of film
Sticky fingertips
Distinguishing between the brown
and the white family members
This history is only here
The size of my father's thumbnail
No it is not digitized
I cannot post a #tbt
Or look, my grandfather's professional portrait
His death never made local news
But I know him deeply
Don't ask me for documents
I won't dust and sift through the heart just yet

New York City 10/18/20

There I go
drifting in the dark.
Cubist blues
bang in my ears,
a kaleidoscope of garbage
crowds my eyes.
Wine lingers
beneath my tongue.

I don't live here, do I?

The beneath so different
from the above.
Some days I just
pause here
for the warmth.

Sirens pulsate submerged
beneath the foreground
of my music,
dodging cars,
lines picked up
corner to corner.

Who are you, Stuyvesant?
A lover of love?

Sobered by the cold,
the poverty of the city
unavoidable.
It's getting cold out,
isn't it?
Our eyes catch.

Quickly his mouth mimes
those words I've heard
a thousand times.
I don't listen.
Yet I know
what he says.
I've seen those eyes
in different faces.



United Difference
Mychal Pagan

Everyone Remembers

Cecilia Innis

almost drowning as a kid
in the deep end of the neighborhood pool
after taking off their flowery
arm floaties
against their mother's orders.

"Don't take them off."

You remember
the command
through one ear and out the other, the
sunshine is warm on your back,
the calm water is softly beckoning.

Everyone remembers the cool, flat, reflective plane of the pool,
a face and two pigtails smiling on the surface,
the sound of sirens
calling out to you:
"Come and play."
The turquoise, chemical blue—
a poor performance of the sky—
is awaiting your company.

Everyone remembers wavy, watery
vision, light dancing—reflecting—off
the metal arm railing leading into the pool and
the white stairs, just out of reach.
Remembers,
(simultaneously)
silence
and muffled laughter, some light chatter and the smell of barbecuing,
darkness
and blurry figures with noodles for arms and legs,
heeding the DON'T RUN sign.

Realizing
(for the first time)
there's something in the air that keeps people alive,
that, when absent, feels like cotton in your chest—
the mass of spongy lung meat stiff and unmoving.

Everyone remembers
fruitless struggling,
arms propelling through molasses,
as if someone put reality on slow-mo,
and fear creeping up through your chest
to pump you with useless adrenaline.

You realize
nobody is coming to save you,

Until your cousin grabs your wrist
and yanks you out
and the cold air smacks you awake
from the trippy dream
and you're dripping and projectile vomiting
what you thought you could drink.

Everyone remembers their mother's hysteria.
She didn't hear a splash where could you have gone you were right under her nose where were
the arm floaties?
Remembers being escorted away from the pool,
its surface once again flat
as if it hadn't just tried to swallow you.

Everyone remembers what it feels like
to stop breathing,
remembers
accepting defeat.

Informal

Nina Chabanon

All my teeth fell out
in a dream, they sank like hands in a lap, in church, and I tried to drink
wine that came from someone's body.
It went how you think, straight to my head, and I turned that color.

In a sex dream about my first love, without sex, I woke up realizing
I'd been the only one there.
I try that to use that reference later when I pose for a boy who is always painting
portraits—

Portraits of all the girls that pass through him,
because there were many and that's exactly how we did it.
And I learned more from them and it and him than I did in the buildings
all around the park, like a belt, in the same jeans I always have sex in.

I knew another boy who talked less but did the same thing.
And he painted them on the ceiling so you could always see what had just been.
And I kept asking if mine was a water stain and then I tried to mirror it,
and then the other girls,
though the cottage cheese ceiling made it seem like all their teeth were falling.

I don't miss him.
I've repainted, people I've had and really had sex with.
And I've woken up feeling loved to an empty room and bed and ceiling.

Without teeth or paint or drinking,
I've turned other things and seasons red.
Like a sex dream where no one has sex, they just fall instead.



Coastal Love III

Emma Ivy

grams

Connie Li

Most bugs that fly, fly higher than I can jump.
What a feat! I kick them out
from the mix of tall weeds, duck
under a wisp of gnats. Sometimes,
I can only think of my self
and feel sorry that I love her
so terribly, that I am not more like a stick
tossed by a bird across the clearing
he has made to cavort across for a mate.
Just look at any person
wiping their nose on their
terry cloth cuffs, beaming with snot, marvelous
as a crowning baby or some lingered-on morning
glory in a garden, tended to diligently
by the emotional creature
who makes her home on a long-fibered carpet,
circling around as the dog
settles in a nest for the night.
So I am leaving
my teeth to air dry, so I dream
of my real mouth, so in my dream
I'll swallow rice paper prophecies and white
candy rabbits, I'll toss a coin
for everything, I'll eat the roadside
mulberries in whatever state they're found.

Fish in the Sea and on the Counter

Nina Chabanon

Deliver me from the boredom of hanging on your feet
Like a fish who wants the hook, somehow, that makes its mouth bleed
I keep myself cold and clean
I arch my back to be seen
I leave a footprint on your ceiling to remind myself, too, of where I've been
Once a year
It was the boredom of turning 21 after four years of feeling it
Like a fish who opens his eyes again and looks at the white counter and knife's
reflection
What is he gonna do? Jump? Where does he have to go back to?
I keep myself clean and cold and limited in how many times I can call my mother, for
that very reason
And then men, they knock their whole heads into the ceiling
They leave craters, like they were just on the moon
And every morning, sober: I see them
I roll around in the tangerine bedsheets
Until vines grow around my ankles
Something else for me to be stuck in and on and I wait until leaves grow and I make
bed-fires with them

I trace my tattoos to keep my eyes down, to keep my fingers on a line and to myself
I have to keep things like that to remind me
Of the ocean of that boredom,
However cold and clean it was.

The Pool

Michelle Capone

Clara hated the water, and she hated the sun. She hated the pool, and she hated her swimsuit. She hated her neighbors, and she hated her friends. Her mom was forcing her to go—she always forced her to go. So now, instead of being at home, Clara was cramming her feet into the spaces between the posts of a black metal gate, trying to pull herself up and over, so she could open the pool entrance for her mom.

“Do you want help?”

“No,” Clara said, but it sounded more like a growl. Her right foot kept slipping down the post and it hurt, badly. She couldn’t stop hearing the high-pitched squeaking of her own skin sliding against metal. It was the only sound being made at the pool.

Her mom had forgotten the key card—that’s what she told Clara upon arrival. “You’re going to have to climb.” She didn’t know why her mom bothered pretending, Clara knew what this was. Punishment. There was no “help,” only Clara and the pain and the entrance.

Focus. The right side of the gate was attached to a wall, so Clara tried jamming her leg into the crevice they made to give herself something to push off. She felt the strain, looked down and saw how the whole thing shook; the gate, her body, and the air around her. Clara closed her eyes and counted to five. Pushed more, until it worked, and her stomach dragged against the top of the entrance. She let go and dropped to the floor—all that exertion built up to three seconds of complete ease. Clara felt cheated.

“Here,” Clara walked forward and pushed the button that unlocked the gate.

“Can you open it instead? My hands are full,” said her mom. She was holding the cooler that Clara had refused to pack that morning in her left hand, and in her right was a bottle of wine.

Clara was so sick of having to do things she didn’t want to do. Her mom hadn’t even let her bring a book to the pool, why should Clara have to open anything?

Without answering, Clara pressed the button again and ran to the entrance. She needed to get to it before the buzzing stopped. There was about seven feet to cover, and usually Clara was good at reaching the gate before the magnetic lock turned on. But she failed: one, two, then three times, and after the sixth attempt, Clara started to cry. She wanted to hit something—like the gate, or the wall. Maybe if she did, her mom would let her go home.

But no, Clara needed to open this gate. She didn’t want to, she needed to—there was no other option for her. It’s like how she couldn’t leave the basketball court if she missed her last shot. A weird feeling would pop up in her body, pressure building everywhere, pushing on her chest and legs and brain. It made it impossible to do anything else, to think about anything else. Clara put the palms of her hands on her eyes and pressed down. *Focus. Focus. Don’t hit yourself. Stop crying. Focus.*

“Can you hurry?” Clara heard her mom say, but she couldn’t see her. Clara was facing away from her and looking at the button. It would be awhile before anyone else showed up with a key. Mom had taken them there early before the pool officially opened; Clara knew she did it for her. After what happened yesterday, neither of them wanted to see how Clara would react to the extra attention an arrival full of people would bring. *Focus. Not your fault. Focus.*

She positioned herself behind the button again, and took a running start, slapping at it hard as she passed.

The gate made a violent sound as Clara slammed into it and opened just as violently. Her mom had been standing far enough back that she didn’t get hit, but as a result, the door had nothing to stop its path. The hinge stretched fully, and Clara heard the sharp clang of metal clashing against metal; it sounded like release.

“There you go,” said Clara, she was rubbing her left thumb across the side of her pointer finger over and over. Then, remembering she was supposed to be mad at her mom and not herself, sarcastically said, “What a fun pool day so far, I love it here!”

Her mom ignored her and walked to the row of lay-out chairs on the left side of the deck, Clara followed and tried to calm herself down. She thought about how the pool was a rectangle, how the chairs ran along its vertical length, starting at the shallow end and abruptly stopping at the deep. Each one had green plastic straps and an adjustable white frame, so the moms always fully reclined. Across from the chairs, on the other side of the pool, was empty space. A place for kids to run around and crack their heads open—that’s how Clara thought about it. Everything about the pool was dangerous, and hot, and gross, and the whole thing *suffocated* Clara, suffocated her; she didn’t understand how no one else saw that. Didn’t they feel the stare of the sun? Didn’t they feel the stare of the water? Like they were working together to trap you, or pull you apart, or both.

And there were no lifeguards (the pool dropped only five feet down at its deepest end), and there was no supervision (the moms were too wine drunk to patrol), and every impulse a child could have was pulled out by the pool, laid on

hot concrete, and examined. This led some of them to do things, mean things: things they were secretly proud of; inevitable things.

“You need to put on sunscreen,” her mom said, distracting Clara. She pulled the spray out of the bag and waved it around. “Take your cover-up off.”

“No.”

“Clara, no one’s here,” her mom said nicely, quietly, “you can put it back on right after.” Clara felt her mom’s hand touch her knee and jerked away. The chair she was sitting on moved with the force of her and scraped against the ground. “I said no.”

Clara pulled her knees onto the pool chair and into her chest. She hated being touched, and her mom knew that. Neither of them said anything else, but Clara saw her mom open the wine bottle, saw her pour the liquid into a tumbler. Clara just stayed in her same position, focusing on the air in front of her face. Sometimes, she needed to be still.

It was awhile before Clara could register anything else, her thoughts took up a lot of space and made existing in the present difficult. Coincidentally, that’s what a lot of moms called her: difficult. She liked to think that the word didn’t hurt her. Clara was difficult, and unlike the moms yesterday, she was also smart. Smarter than their kids, that’s for sure, and smarter than them. Clara just didn’t like being touched. Maybe, if Cullen hadn’t done what he did, Clara wouldn’t have said what she said. Maybe, if her mom had defended her instead of dragging her to the pool to apologize, Clara wouldn’t be sitting on hot plastic trying not to hit herself. Maybe—

She was cut off from her thought process when she heard three car doors slam in succession,

followed by the creaking of the gate, and a “Don’t run!”

“Hey, Clara!” She looked over and saw Spencer speed walking towards her, shirt already off. He had their best friend necklace on—a brown horse pendant that said “friend,” on a leather cord—which helped Clara ignore the fact that Cullen, Spencer’s older brother, was trailing behind him. They had gotten the necklaces last week at the mall, but Spencer hadn’t been able to wear his since then; he had told her that his dad yelled at him for buying it. He continued: “Wanna get in the pool?”

“Yeah, Clara,” said Cullen, with a smile on his face that scared her, “wanna get in the pool?” Suddenly, he turned around and pushed Spencer into the water—hard and mean. The sound of his entire body hitting the surface was painful, and Clara found herself running to the edge of the pool, moving for the first time in twenty minutes.

“What is your problem?” Clara yelled, reaching her hands down to help Spencer. White ripples of water from the impact zone were making their way through the pool like artificial waves, and Spencer was bobbing up and down—a scrawny buoy with red rimmed eyes. Of course, none of their moms saw what happened, too distracted. Clara’s mom was most likely already drunk, just like yesterday when Clara got kicked in the back of the knees and grabbed.

Spencer placed his arms on the ground above him, locked them so he was hovering high enough that Clara could pull him the rest of the way out of the pool. She patted him on the back a few times and watched him spit up water, then turned to glare at Cullen. There was just something about today, something about his smile, that unnerved Clara.

“It’s okay,” said Spencer. He stood up and moved

so that he was blocking Clara’s view of Cullen. “Just let it go, he’ll be horrible for the rest of the day if you don’t.” She nodded her head; it was too early to fight.

“I know you want to go in the pool,” said Clara, while in the process of standing up, “but can we just lay down until Savannah gets here?” She’d come up with another excuse in an hour when the pool was consumed with people, and Spencer would either believe her, or he wouldn’t; either way he was too nice to make her swim.

“Sure,” Spencer said, he pointed over at their moms. “I’ll go grab our towels, wanna choose the chairs?”

“Yup,” said Clara. She smiled at him, then raised her hand up in a fist. Spencer went to bump their knuckles together but opened his palm at the last second and yelled, “Turkey!” Clara laughed, tilted her fist down and wiggled her fingers: “Spider!” Before Spencer could continue with the game, Clara stepped away and pushed lightly at his shoulder. “Grab Capri-Suns if you can, Spence.” They both laughed, and Clara walked away feeling almost calm. She couldn’t forget about Cullen, but Spencer helped—he always helped.

The chairs she decided on were all the way down at the deep end, far enough away that she and Spencer wouldn’t hear their moms’ conversations. Clara wasn’t in the mood to listen to them talk about what happened yesterday, and she really wasn’t in the mood to get blamed. She hadn’t meant to say it—“I’ll kill you”—it had just slipped out. No one believed her. No one understood.

“I’ll kill you.” Clara felt awful when she thought about the exact words. Awful, because some part of her meant it. Awful, because saying it didn’t feel like her choice. But she refused to

apologize, what she said was not as bad as what Cullen did.

Eventually, Spencer came back with their towels and laid them out on their chairs. Clara thanked him, and they both relaxed into their seats. She listened as he talked about summer homework and watched as the pool gradually filled in with kids over the next hour. *Savannah, Sasha, Jake, Brady, Nathan, Alex, Caitlyn*. Those were the people she recognized, and therefore, needed to avoid. Hiding would only work for another hour or so, and after seeing how antsy Spencer was getting, she knew she was going to have to wait the time out alone.

“Spence,” said Clara, gesturing to the pool, “you can go if you want. I’m not gonna be mad.”

“I’m good—”

“Come on,” said Clara. She sat up and lightly pushed Spencer’s shoulders. “I wanna nap anyways, just come back when you’re tired of getting splashed.”

He smiled wide at her and started speed walking straight towards their group of friends. She saw them all look towards Spencer and then clenched her teeth—Cullen had noticed her. He was smiling at her too: sharp, calculated lines, not lopsided like Spencer. That didn’t scare Clara, though. What scared her, was that that smile was always the start of something, and that something always had to do with Clara.

And Clara was tired. The heat was oppressing, the water was filled with little kid pee, and as much as she didn’t want to react, Clara knew she eventually would. She felt her thumb rub against her index finger again, a constant motion, and turned her head to look at her mom. Drinking—not a surprise.

Clara lied back down and closed her eyes, let her thoughts drift in and out of space. When she was alone, everything in her had the opportunity to be fluid and unhurried. Mostly, Clara made up stories, and then in the middle of those stories, allowed her brain to make up new ones. Scene to scene to scene, barely even thinking about it for hours.

Of course, during these moments of aloneness, Clara was as far removed from what was happening in front of her as she could be, so it was easy for people—Spencer—to sneak up and ruin them.

“Are you ready to get in?” She looked up, and saw Spencer standing over her chair, water dripping down his hair onto her arm.

“I don’t really wanna swim,” said Clara. She tried to look as tired as possible, yawned and blinked her eyes slowly. “I’m pretty sleepy, probably because of the nap.”

“Really?” said Spencer.

“Yeah,” said Clara, nodding. “You should keep swimming, though.”

“I want to,” said Spencer, “but no one wants to be ‘it’ for Categories, and Cullen keeps trying to force me to do it.” He sat down in his chair and adjusted the cord of his necklace, tugging it so that the pendant was centered. “Now every time I get near him, he dunks me in the water and pulls on this.”

“I don’t know what his problem is,” Clara said, frowning. The temporary internal neutrality she had achieved earlier had faded away, and all that was left was anger. “Are you okay?”

“Not really,” said Spencer, head turned away from Clara. His voice was quieter than usual, no

longer bright and happy. He didn't sound like Spencer.

"You know what?" Clara said. "I'll be 'it.'" She nodded to herself and clenched her toes. "Yeah, I'll be 'it' first. Make sure everyone lines up."

Categories was everything Clara hated. A game where the objective was to swim from one side of the pool to another without getting touched. The person doing the touching was outside the pool, facing away from it, calling out categories; they were supposed to jump in whenever they thought someone was starting to move away from the wall.

"Are you sure?" Spencer said. Clara always refused to play, too stressed by both roles in the game, but she was tired of Cullen and mad at herself. She should be able to swim in the pool without freaking out; she shouldn't have left Spencer alone to deal with his brother.

"One round, Spence," said Clara, "to start the game, so he can leave you alone." Spencer nodded and jumped back in the water. Clara took her swim cover off and tried to take deep breaths. Cullen was watching her. Clara could see him watching from the pool. Everything's okay. It's just one round. You can put it right back on afterwards.

She walked over to the edge of the deep end and turned so her back was facing the pool. This is so stupid. The concrete burned Clara's feet, the sun burned Clara's everything, and the pool behind her burned images into her mind; quick snapshots of people touching her. One round, that's all Spencer needed. *One round. One round. One round.* The category was "favorite colors," because it was *always* favorite colors at first, but it might as well have been nothing. No one actually swam when their category was called. She couldn't believe she was actually going to

have to jump in and tag someone. Clara started rubbing her thumb against her pointer finger, and then curled her toes. If she stayed silent, maybe everyone would cross out of boredom.

"Hurry up!"

"Come on!"

"Clara, call it out!"

It seemed like every kid in Eagle's Watch was lined up underneath her, yelling and smacking the water, trying to make her turn around. Her swimsuit was making her uncomfortably sticky, that's all Clara could think about, that she was getting touched all over by constricting blue fabric. She shouldn't have played. She shouldn't have played.

"Call it!"

"Say something!"

"Clara!"

"Okay!" Clara yelled. She felt the back of her eyes start to ache. "Okay! Jesus, okay!" The kids below her quieted and the splashing stopped. "Blue!" Clara heard a couple fake kicks but didn't turn around. "Yellow!" That was Spencer's favorite color. Clara didn't turn around. "Orange!" At this point, half the kids were probably on the other side of the pool. Clara didn't turn around. "Red—"

Clara screamed.

Her body snapped forward, Clara looked down; Cullen had slapped her butt, and he was smiling.

Something in her collapsed, then, or exploded, or shattered, or split like a fault line; all she knew—all Clara knows—is that what happened

next could've only happened during summer, could've only happened at the pool.

She crashed into the water and landed on top of Cullen's back; she clawed at his eyes, ripped out his hair, bit into the colliding waves around her and tried to shred his skin. Clara felt the flat pain of a heel kicking into her stomach and thrashed against it. She refused to stop her attack. The kicking moved higher and got harder, Clara's nose got smashed, and the pain was surprising enough that she let go of the leg she was holding. Cullen took the opportunity to spin and put both hands on the top of Clara's head: pushed down. There was no air, only mouthfuls of water.

Then, as soon as Clara was getting desperate, Cullen lifted his hands up, swam to the ladder, and scrambled out of the pool. He was already out of the water by the time Clara had reached the ladder. She climbed it as fast as she could and was ready to run after him, but saw he was standing there, waiting for her.

"Listen, Clara—"

Before he could continue, Clara winded her fist back, and punched him across the face, hitting his right cheekbone and his nose. She punched him again on the same side, then moved her fist back, and punched him directly in the nose.

It made a sick cracking sound after Clara connected with it, and started gushing blood, coating Cullen's face and Clara's hand. She hit him again. More blood got on her. She hit him again. More blood.

It wasn't enough.

Clara stopped for a second, collected her energy, and kicked Cullen in the chest with the flat of her foot. The kick was hard enough that he lost balance and fell backwards. Cullen broke the fall

with his hands and curled over onto his side. Clara immediately started kicking him sharply in the gut. She did it again. Then again. Over and over, like a gangster in a mob movie.

"STOP!" Clara recognized Spencer's voice. "CLARA, STOP!"

But Clara wasn't *Clara* anymore. That had been taken away from her. She kept kicking. The air was getting hotter and more humid by the second. Maybe it was all the blood. Clara could see it staining the concrete, and now she could see it getting all over her foot.

Clara dropped to the ground on both knees and lifted Cullen's head up by his hair. She checked the back of his head for bleeding and found none. *So much for that.* Still, she punched him again. Blood sprayed onto her face, and even more got on her hand. She let his head drop back onto the floor. Clara felt done.

She got back up and looked around the pool. The moms were still talking, Sofia was distracted in the shallow end, the Eagle's Watch kids were circled around her, Spencer was crying, and her swimsuit was covered in blood—but that's a thing she felt rather than noticed. The nylon was soaking it up alongside the water.

Masked

Megan Higley

A soft breeze,
city screams.
Hidden behind the cotton
that kisses my upper lip.

A lion's eyes,
uncovered thighs.
I know how this dance ends.

Palms wet,
twitching breath.
As the sidewalk shrinks between us.

The gaze I hold,
falsely cold.
Only ice will shield me.

How foolish of me to dream.
As if an absence of mouth
would stop
the uninvited howls.



on disappearing
Sawyer Wolf

Fifteen Ways of Looking at the Sun

Cecilia Innis

In response to "When I Am Asked" by Lisel Mueller

1.

The yellow half-circle you draw on the corner of a piece of construction paper when you're 6 years old. It has a crooked smiley face and triangles for rays.

2.

When your teacher tells you all stars explode during elementary astronomy you cry the whole bus ride home.

It's not fair:
five billion years is too little time.

3.

What your mother says when you go outside:
"You'll damage the cones in your eyes if you stare too long."
Squinting past tinted pink Hannah Montana shades,
it's fire dims.
Is this what it's like to look through rose colored glasses?

4.

A string of clichés:
Glinting
 Dancing
 White
 Dazzling
 Brilliant
 Bright

5.

You can grab it if you try hard enough.
It can't be that far away.
Look how it cooks the blacktop
and burns the soles of your tender feet
as you're running out to get her mail.

6.

Hiding (hiding in your dimples, in your smile).

7.

Peeking through the blinds to wake you up before your alarm goes off,
but you never invest in a sleeping mask because you secretly like the feeling.

8.

Caressing
Melting
Pooling
over leather seat cushions.
Burning.

9.

"Did you know that in Northern Ireland the sun doesn't shine for six months every year?"
"Really?"
"Yeah that's why the suicide rate there is so high."
"That sounds dystopian or something, living in the dark."
"Yeah."

10.

It was there on August 6th
But not because you remember.
But because you know it must have been,
This is not Ireland after all.
This is reality and
Surely it was there
On August 6th and the day after that
And the day after that.

11.

Sometimes she would pick me up from the bus stop when my mom was still at work
The day I remember is spring time
junior year and I couldn't drive
and the sun would cast diamonds on the hood of
her car
and make the seatbelt sting my skin as
she asked how my day was.

12.

Burning

Fire

Anger

I feel emboldened by its heat,
like I could have made time stop.

13.

A squirrel's body decomposes on the sidewalk in June, hot, molten and disgusting.

14.

It's not there in the hospital room
because she wants to keep the blinds
closed.

15.

Yellow shards of glass, protruding from a large, twinkling sphere,
a stubborn overhead light
looks down at the earth.
I wonder if it cares.
I wonder if it thinks five billion years
is enough time.

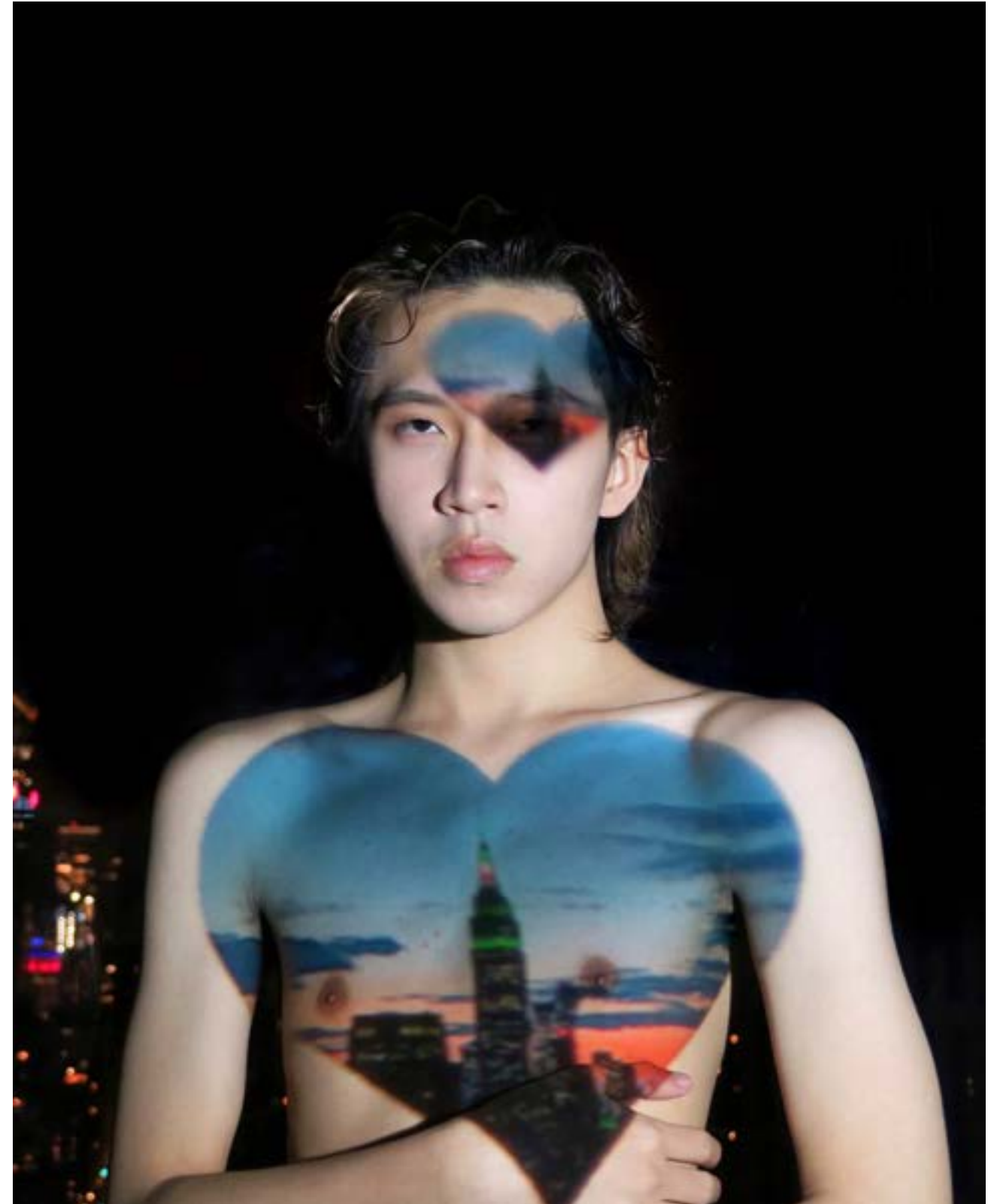


Mount Vesuvius, A Ways Away
Veronica Liow

It's Beginning To Hurt

Kiersten Asbill Chow

On a stagnant night in November, I need to tell you
all of my secrets. How all I've ever wanted
is to give myself to someone entirely, but maybe
that's too much for some people to hear. I think I'm always
packing it up and giving it to the wrong person
adorned with red satin ribbons. I tell myself
it's because I only choose to see the good in everyone.
For weeks, I've had this special box that I can't give to you
because you always feel so far away. It sits tucked in the corner,
crooning your name, waiting for you to unfurl its ribbons
and pick apart the insides. Three stars cut their way through the clouds
tonight, and I imagined you looking to the sky, full moon eyes,
humming a tune about heaven while combing through the stars
for Orion's Belt. Now, I ask everyone what color
they think the moon's light is. We'd stayed up until morning
when you palmed the back of my head, looked deep into my eyes and said,
"Occipital." as if naming bones were some sort of love-affirming
language. I can't bear to throw out the toothbrush
you left in my bathroom because on days I don't see you,
I pretend you're still fumbling with the Colgate
thinking of making the first move. I remember you cocooned
beneath my comforter, your arm draped over my shoulders,
pulling me closer in your half-dream state. I try to think of what
sort of movie reel was projecting against the back of your eyelids
when you kissed the tip of my nose in the dark—
what you were thinking when you grabbed my stocking-covered foot
and cracked every knuckle, then shook out your hand like you hurt yourself.
Because with every little gesture like a finger tracing the skin
at the nape of my neck, you hurt me a little more. I had to look up
what the lacrimal bone was after you told me because
recently my insides feel as knotted and sore as my roots
after you've tangled your hands through my hair
during the night. I know we want such different things.
I want to see you. Even more so, I want you to want to see me.



My Beloved City
Reto Zarch

Deliverer

Alexis Sharp

The COVID-42 pandemic crisis was twice as deadly as its predecessor, killing eight percent of those infected. As a precaution, citizens were placed under mandatory, strict quarantine. Robotic drones could deliver groceries and supplies, but there was an innate need for human contact. Those few who were immune to COVID-42 were drafted by the government into becoming Deliverers. Found below is a selected diary entry from a Deliverer that details a day in their life.

7:00 a.m.

My first client of the day was also one of my first-ever clients. Tessa Rayburn was a single mother in her 40s. Every time I saw her, she was dressed in a snappy professional outfit—never mind that she had nowhere to go, that she took work calls and not video chats—and her brown hair was wound in a tight ball above her neck in a way that looked almost painful.

Ms. Rayburn paid for me, but she wasn't the one I was here for. She let me in, gave me a nod, and disappeared into her office while I headed to her daughter's room.

Ava was hard at work already when I entered the bedroom, scribbling upon a coloring book, a purple crayon in her pudgy fist.

"Hi, Deliverer!" She beamed at me before turning her attention back to her art project.

I sat down beside her, knees cracking with the effort. I was hoping this would be an easy day. The doctors had called me in for another blood draw yesterday after my shift, and I was still feeling a bit queasy.

"This should be the last pint we need from you," the nurse told me. I couldn't see her mouth beneath her mask, but her eyes had crinkled in a smile.

I'd nodded at her. I'd wanted to scream. It was the same line they'd fed me the last three blood draws. They were always *right* on the cusp of a usable vaccine, but they never managed to cross the finish line.

Deliverers were supposed to serve their country for a year maximum. This past November marked the second year of total quarantine, and I doubted we'd have a usable vaccine before another Thanksgiving came and went.

I leaned over to look at Ava's project. It was a simple picture of a dog in front of a fire hydrant.

"Dogs aren't purple." I informed her.

"So what? I like purple." Ava declared. I could hardly argue with that logic.

Ava delegated me to the task of coloring in a cat in stripes of neon yellow and lime green. I set to the task dutifully, taking care not to color outside the thick black lines. Ava hated when colors strayed out of their designated bounds.

Ava's mother had not once asked me to provide her with anything; a firm handshake upon our first meeting was the only physical contact we'd had in the seven months she'd been my client. I was here for Ava alone, as Tessa believed, like many parents, that young children required more net socialization than adults. If they didn't get that varied interaction, they'd be stunted and awkward if when normality returned. Tessa wanted to set her daughter up for success as best she could.

So, every Monday, for 1.5 hours before Ava's

kindergarten YouZoom class, I provided her with socialization and enrichment. We colored, played with dolls, chased each other in games of tag. I'd been Princess PrettyPeach at tea and Prince Horace Slugface on a quest to save a damsel stuffed animal from Ava the Terrible Dragon.

It had been a bit of an adjustment, at first. I'd never dealt with kids, really, before COVID-42. Kids were generally not my thing. They were sticky and loud and smelled weird. But part of my job now was to deal with them, so I learned. Ava could be nightmarish at times, but I soon sleuthed out her weakness: she couldn't stand to be ignored. Whenever she threw a fit, I simply had to turn away and ignore her, and soon enough she'd subside and come over to tug at my shirt to apologize.

"Have you made any friends in school?"

Ava shrugged. I nudged her.

"C'mon, it's been weeks since you started. You've had to have met someone."

Ava's crayon came down firmer on the coloring book page.

"I don't need them." Ava said shortly. "I have you."

9:30 a.m.

My second client had her back to me as she opened the door. She held up a selfie stick, her phone camera catching us both in the frame.

"Aaaaand here's my Deliverer! I have to go now, because we'll be spending all freakin' day together, but I'll be updating you all on tomorrow's vid, so be sure to tune in."

She giggled girlishly and cut the livestream. Only

then did she turn to face me, assess me, a buyer inspecting chattel. There was a shrewdness in her green eyes, jarring when set against her pastel clothes and bubblegum-dyed hair.

"You looked tanner in your profile." Her cutesy, over-the-top tone dropped to something more authentic. "But we can fix that. Come in."

I matched her brisk pace, eyes struggling to take in everything. Finch—that was her YouZoom screenname; even my invoice didn't show her real name—was a social media sensation. Her house reflected her celebrity. Art deco was hot again. There were statues of Atlas holding up sheets of glass, serving as end tables. Orpheus serenaded Eurydice in a golden-framed painting. Veins of gold spiderwebbed through handsome wooden furniture, and the rugs and pillows were white and fluffy.

One painting on the wall gave me pause. There were two objects in the painting, a lion and a Deliverer. The blue and black uniform of the Deliverer was unmistakable. The Deliverer was grappling with the lion, who was attempting to sink its teeth into the Deliverer's shoulder. It unnerved me, but I couldn't put into words why it did so. Perhaps it was simply so bizarre to see someone in my job presented in such a dramatic light—had anyone ever painted a chef in such a fashion? Or a postal worker? I searched for a title somewhere, to explain the meaning, but I could only find a smushed artist signature crammed into the bottom left corner.

Finch sat me before a vanity and did my makeup with a precision and speed won from experience. She gave my cheeks a flush of life and darkened the overall skin tone of my face. A tan was near-impossible now to obtain for most in the city, and as such, the look was all the more coveted. Afterwards, she brought me back to the living room and instructed me to sit. I perched on the

end of one of the white couches. The leather creaked in protest. Finch cozied up next to me. She flung her legs over mine playfully, entwined her arm with mine, pressed our cheeks together. She smelled like apples.

“Smile. No, a little wider. Too wide, don’t look like a maniac. There, hold that!”

Her phone took selfies rapid-fire, tens of photos generated in five seconds. We repeated this process all around her expansive house, performing variations of “hanging out.” We pretended to cook in the kitchen. We mimed playing a duet on her grand piano with ivory keys (elephants had been extinct for a while now, so I wondered where she got it). We played video games together, which we were both dismal at. And all the time, the camera shutter clicked and clicked and clicked.

Another Deliverer might have enjoyed this client. I didn’t know much of anything about Finch and her work; I wasn’t star-struck. Instead, the moving from room to room to pose like a model was just kind of...sad, really. Deliverers weren’t exactly cheap, and I felt she was wasting the opportunity to use me for what I was actually there for.

And then, as we returned to the couch—

Her hand crept beneath my shirt. I held up my open palm.

“Legally you cannot remove any part of my uniform—”

“I know, God,” She rolled her eyes. “But we can make out, right? I paid the premium.”

She didn’t wait for my reply. Her kiss was sloppy and unrefined. Most kisses I got were just like this one, too much tongue or teeth, confusion. I

wondered how many first kisses I was.

Finch didn’t pop the buttons of my shirt off, but she did slip her hand back under my shirt. But it just rested there, cold against my skin. Finch’s gaze every now and again would slide away from me to the camera on the tripod planted before us.

“Touch me,” She whispered in my ear. I did so, and she let out a convincing moan.

Finch wasn’t aroused by me, but rather, the thought of her audience. She got off on the thoughts of their reaction, dangling before them what they could never afford.

1:17 p.m.

Mark was another serial requester of my time. Every Monday for the past three months, he’d requested me, and me specifically. He was tall, heavy-set. Red dots of acne stood out on his hairy chin. He greeted me with a warm smile and kissed my cheek chastely at the door. His large hand was on the small of my back as he guided me to the living room.

A movie was paused, ready to play. A pair of lunches were set out on rickety particle-board TV trays: two vegburgs and fries.

“It’s your favorite, right? There’s even mustard on yours, I know you like that.”

I agreed with him, and we sat on the couch together. He slung his arm around my shoulder with an easy familiarity, as if we were partners, and hit play.

It was a new film, just released on streaming; Mark must’ve paid a premium to watch it so soon. It was “live action,” not my favorite genre. When repeated pandemics made filmmaking

difficult, directors turned to animated films for kids, and “live action” for adults, which was just animation made to look as real as possible. The human mind, however, realized the uncanniness. No matter how much money and time they had sunk into it, our primitive hindbrains would see a pasted picture of a living man on a digital body in a digital world and scream, “*Wrong!*”

The food was warm and tasty if a bit oversalted. I ate and kept my eyes on the screen. But in my peripheral vision I could see Mark watching me. He got like this, sometimes. Like he was here to please me, not the other way around. I exaggerated my appreciation for the food, for his sake.

His arm caged me in for the entire two-hour fifteen-minute runtime of the film. Only when the credits began their scrawl up the black screen did he finally detach himself from me. He hurried into the kitchen and returned with a square of light brown on a small chipped plate.

“It’s for you.” He pushed the plate into my hands. “For our anniversary—I mean, uh. Since it’s been three months since we first started seeing each other.”

I picked it up off the plate. It was softer than I thought it would be. I had to relax my hold or I’d crack it.

“What is it?”

“Chocolate.” He said the word with some reverence. “It used to be everywhere, back in the day. But it’s too warm now for the beans to grow anywhere but a few places.”

I didn’t want to know how much he’d spent on the chocolate, so I didn’t ask. I never got used to this treatment, the way some of my clients acted like I was anything more than a Deliverer.

I wasn’t chosen for this job because I was super smart, or good-looking, or had connections in high places. I won the immunity lottery, that’s it. And these people treated me like a deity for it.

The chocolate was starting to melt in my palm. I popped it into my mouth, and my tastebuds were flooded instantly by the thick, sweet taste. It was overpowering, *too* sweet. But I could only imagine how much money Mark had wasted on it, so I told him it was delicious, and thanked him heartily.

After my treat, we returned to Mark’s couch again, where he went on to tell me about his work while I made short noises of understanding in all the right places. He blanketed my hand with his large, clammy one.

And then my phone chimed, signaling the end of our time together.

A change overcame Mark. His whole body became rigid, as if the jingle playing from my phone was a live wire. There was a desperate look of want in his eyes that frightened me. I went to withdraw, and Mark’s hand tightened around my wrist like a manacle.

“Mark, I need to get going now.” I spoke calmly and firmly. Dealing with situations like this—where the client got over-attached—was something I had been trained for when I began this job. This was the first time I had to put said training to use. “I have another appointment I need to get to. I’ll see you next week, okay?”

“Fuck them. I know you don’t want to go. So just stay, okay?”

“Mark, let me go. You know attempting to hold a Deliverer over your allotted time is a punishable offense,” I warned him. I hoped he didn’t hear the slight shake in my voice. I tried once more to

tug free, but his grip became bruising.

“Give me your phone.”

“Mark—”

“Give me your *fucking* phone!”

He didn’t wait for me to move; instead, he leaned over and shoved his hand in my pocket and stole the phone from me. His face was an inch from mine. His short breaths, warm and full of vegburg stink, blew on my cheek.

Mark kept his hand locked around my wrist, but with his free hand he bashed my phone against the wall until the screen cracked beyond repair and went dead. He flung the broken phone clear across the room with distaste.

“There. Now we can finally be alone.”

He kissed me. He hadn’t paid for this service. I wasn’t going to interrupt him, because the kiss kept him preoccupied as my unchained hand drew up slowly to my side. There were many reasons why Deliverers were not permitted to disrobe in front of clients, and one of them was the thumb-sized distress button that was surgically grafted right below our sternums.

I leaned into the kiss with Mark, and with my evident enthusiasm, Mark melted against me. I felt along my shirt until my fingers brushed against the raised metal bump. I pressed down on the button. I needed to hold it for a continuous five seconds to trigger the alarm. My heart was beating so fast I was sure it was about to give out on me.

One Mississippi...

“Love you—” Mark gasped, petting my face.
Two Mississippi...

“—so much—”

Three Mississippi...

“—my Deliverer—”

Four Mississippi...

“—forever, forever.”

Five Mississippi.

My hand fell back in my lap. Help was on the way. I was not supposed to antagonize the client and fight him on my own. I just had to go along with what Mark wanted until—

—until—

How long was the response time? How long was I going to be held hostage here? I tried to remember—we had to have gone over this in training—but the memory escaped me in the haze of my panic.

“...felt it too, right?” Mark was saying.

I nodded. It was the right response; he lit up like the sun peeking through clouds.

“We don’t have time to waste.” Mark rose, tugging me along with him. “When you don’t report in, I’m sure they’ll come looking for you.”

He led me to his spartan bedroom. I’d never been in here before, as we spent most of our time together in his living room. A black backpack bulging at the seams was on top of his made bed. My breath hitched. This wasn’t a spontaneous fit—it had all been planned. How could he have acted so calm, all throughout the movie, when this scheme was lurking in the back of his mind?

Mark shouldered the bag and strapped a mask over his face.

We were going out.

We were leaving the apartment, and going God knows where. Did the distress button have a tracker inside? It had to, right? Right? Why couldn’t I fucking remember anything when I needed to?

The sky was baby blue, the weather what my father would have called a “Goldilocks Temperature.” Not too hot, not too cold, juuuust right. It was like the world was mocking my panic with its pleasantness. Mark kept pulling me along, like a dog on a leash. I thought about clawing the mask off his face. Would he run screaming back home? Could I get the mask off before he overpowered me? What if I failed? Would he strike me? Something worse? I didn’t want to find out—but my window for escape was rapidly closing.

Mark babbled on. “I’ve been talking to some people. There are communities. Underground, in the tunnels. They’re unregulated. They go outside whenever they want, and no one gets sick. It’s just a few blocks to—”

Gunshots shattered the air.

I clapped my hands around my ears, and when I peeped my eyes open again, Mark was face-down on the street. He’d been shot three times in the back, and once in the skull. Red was already spreading beneath him. My stomach turned.

Six officers carrying guns converged upon me and encircled me. Their uniforms were a deep blue that was almost black. Oxygen tanks were strapped to their backs, and snakelike tubes wound up from them to the masks secured on their faces.

“Are you hurt?”

I was feeling lightheaded, a dump of relief flooding my veins as my body registered it was over. I sank to my knees on the hard pavement. “Are you hurt?” The officer repeated, more insistently.

“...No. He broke my phone, though.”

“Which one are you?”

“Deliverer 237.”

One of the officers sent off quickfire messages on her phone before pocketing it.

“A new phone will be delivered to your residence tonight. We’ll escort you to your next assignment now.”

I wanted to scream. It was unfair, it was ri-fucking-diculous, that they expected me to continue working after watching Mark’s brains splatter the asphalt. But I stared at the guns in their hands, the tasers and batons strapped to their legs, and went quietly.

5:06 p.m.

“Deliverer.”

This was a new client. An older man. I no longer had my phone, so I couldn’t pull up his profile, but if I had to guess, he was in his early 50s. There were scatters of silver in his brown hair.

“Hello, Jamal.” I’d only been told my client’s name, and the services he’d ordered. It was an easy job. I was here to comfort, nothing excessive. I just had to get through this last job, and I could finally, finally, go home.

“Get you a drink?” Jamal asked. “I’ve got wine, beer ... milk?”

“Water is fine.” I didn’t drink in front of clients if I could help it, even if, right now, I really, really wanted to.

He filled a glass for me from the filtered tap on the fridge and gave himself a generous pour of red wine. I noticed there were two empty bottles on the counter already. I tensed but made myself relax. He didn’t appear to be angry or unhinged, just kind of melancholy.

As he drank, I looked around the house. A nice dining room table with two place settings. A loveseat sofa. A woman’s slippers, fuzzy and soft lilac, resting by a window.

I took in the gold band around Jamal’s ring finger, dulled from age, and understood.

“Would you dance with me?” He asked.

“Of course.”

“Alexa,” He called. “Play ‘Jeep’s Blues.’”

Big, brassy jazz came alive through the expensive sound system in the living room.

Jamal entwined one hand with mine and put his other on the small of my back. I mimicked him, splaying my free hand between his shoulder blades. We shuffled and swayed to the beat.

After the first song ended in a crash of cymbals, I asked: “Do you want to talk about her?”

“Her name was Elicia. She was a doctor.”

And then he burst into tears. Big, ugly, messy tears. Snot dribbled down from his nose. His head fell on my shoulder. I rubbed circles into his back, and we continued to sway as he heaved and cried. Less a dance, more rocking a child to sleep.

I wondered how many times Jamal and Elicia had danced to these same songs. My throat felt tight, but Deliverers could not cry. We were to inspire and comfort and please. Not feel.

We remained like that, in a rocking embrace, until our hour together was over.

6:45 p.m.

A new phone was left for me on my doorstep when I came home. I scooped up the box and went inside.

I showered. I ate. I never had to cook for myself anymore; I was provided with prepared meals that had all the nutrition I needed and then some. They weren’t taking any chances with Deliverers. We couldn’t afford to get sick from something unrelated to COVID. Taking time off was not an option, not with the demand for companions as it was.

I ate mechanically and stared dull-eyed at the white paint on my wall. The government had put me here in this house, alone, when I became a Deliverer.

My family couldn’t afford to see me anymore.

I was too exhausted to do anything, but not tired enough to fall asleep. The Deliverer app was already pre-installed on my new phone. I scrolled through the list of available Deliverers, pouring over their names and friendly smiles.

One of the “perks” of my job was the ability to call upon other Deliverers, free of charge. It was encouraged, actually, to build camaraderie amongst us all, to keep our spirits buoyed.

And I wanted someone. Someone who would understand what I’d been through today.

Someone who could hold me and tell me everything was going to be alright. But then I thought how I would feel, being dragged from my home after a day like today so another Deliverer could dump their problems onto me... and I. Just. Couldn’t. Do it.

So that’s why I’m here instead, writing this all down. I read somewhere journaling is supposed to make you feel better. I don’t feel any different. But at least it passed the time.



horsemen
Ava Morgan

O

Ariana Abadian-Heifetz

March, I got an abortion. Got one like a plane ticket around the world. Wrapped up package of paths leading through caves, up forests, into cottages made of sunflowers. Won't personify a seed. Saw fuzzy circle on a screen, nurse holding a lubed-up rod, displaying the ultrasound. In me.

A lentil sprout, small green poking out. Joining me at dinner, I thanked it for coming to sing me legend and looked forward to visiting Montana, when I'm ready for mountains. Ready for roundness, open fields and home bases. But now, craving vibrations. Tents under stars with sweet tongued lovers. Games of tag, girls I taught, sweaty barefoot by rivers. Arriving empty vessel filled by new places, building myself block by block, forming constellations.

I didn't get maternal. As in, I caught the wave early at day break. My boobs hurt. As in, when a starfish washes into your bathing suit pocket and you keep it there, don't think it'll thank you later. Don't think I'll thank it later when it grows into a polar bear. I didn't bleed as much as I thought I would. Plastic bed sheets an unnecessary purchase.

My body a Polly Pocket, rooms inside rooms inside rooms, capable of expanding and folding in on myself, origami boxes. Layers all mine. Aspen trees connected by roots from belly to moons. Gave my sprouted seed a road map, packed lunch box. A love letter: replant yourself.



Reflections 009
Emma Comrie

Full speed and we touch mirror images
shattered only by weaker souls
in you i see me
in me i see you
please
let me live among my kin

Scribbled lines

capture
My lonely mechanical state
I wake up
Pounding
Dreaming
still longing
to know you
love me

Heartbeats... a rhythm drowned
by forces of nature uncreated,
and it slows.

Diamonds break slowly,
and I rush
to collect them
to repair worth.

North Wind 北

tears of my voice...drown me into silence...as I dream of this lighter, lucid life...with
you...pieces scramble...towards battered wooden rims...glass hits the floor...beautifully
dented...like us...i wake to wonder...

be someone... don't know... how?

In August

Sage Molasky

I wear a black backless dress.
I do not yet know the pain of knowing my nakedness.

1:05 AM

I find a cavity inside me, it stinks like sex in a windowless room.
Women come and go with bowls of hot water, talking of the girl they used to know
I refuse to wash myself, eat greens or groom.
I hope to still smell like Edward Hopper once I have grown.

The women are old, they reek of midwifery,
Of blood and babies and love, unmitigated.
They are sober women, watching me drink myself awake.
They tell me that to sleep soundly I must put down my glass of whiskey and lick their bitter herbs,
Bread, unleavened, and fish, salted like the sea.

They tell me to eat greens and groom so I will grow big like them,
Round in the middle, by babies and lovers and old, old age.
In another life, I might have found them beautiful, I might have listened.
They tell me to bathe in their bowls of water, to wash the art off me.
"You'll fit in the bowl," they say. "You've grown so small."

I coo to them what light feels like,
How it feels to be bitten raw, black and blue
How to make love out of nothing.

I used to be a doll, ravaged, and I was beautiful.

The women tssssk at my black backless dress, hanging upon my headboard, a remembrance,
a tome.
Before leaving, they nod and they spit and they kiss my cold, aching bone.

Marx and Madonna Have a Chat at Death & Co.

René Bennett

When I say that history is materialistic,
I mean that a Gucci sweatshirt
is a symbol of political power.

You know that we are living in a material world.

The person with the biggest house
probably makes the biggest decisions
about the provisions of every other house.

*'Cause the boy with the cold hard cash
is always Mister Right.*

Who owns air conditioning? Who owns electricity?
Who owns the light that illuminates
our bodies trying to make sense of one another
on a box-spring bed?

*Only boys who save their pennies
make my rainy day.*

We depend on these cutouts of matter:
the last scraps of clear water,
the shape of a dance floor that guides our feet,
the glasses in our hands, molding our fingers
into place as we drink to our defenselessness. All we know
is this material fabrication,

this material world,

the bartender, the men in their balmorals,
the woman asking for change at the door,
all steered into place
by the chief suppliers of history.

*They can beg and they can plead
but they can't see the light.*

When I say that history is materialistic
I mean that we are spinning towards an end in which
even our exhaled breaths have become consumable. I mean that
the fate of our collective body is material.

and I am a material girl.



Oculus
Nicole Lecher

Endonym

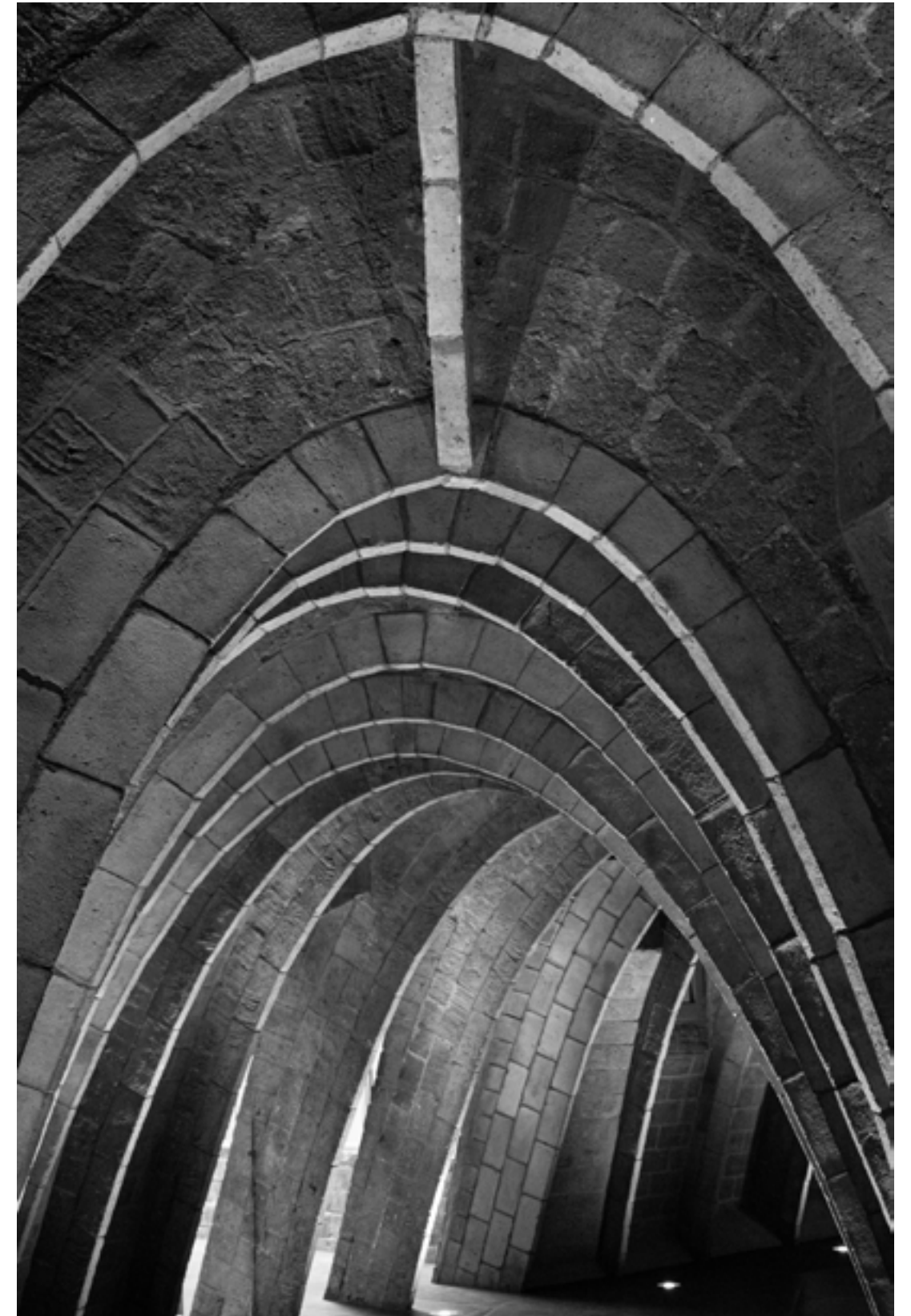
Nina Lane

There are strange answers to what it feels like to get there,
to become real,
like from a dishwasher hum that stops late at night
or a train that wrecks your hair because you missed it
or a drunken stumble home with no time until morning
to be glad you aren't dead.

What you call yourself in your own tongue is for so long a vulgar sound
afraid of being heard,
until the day you cut your own hair and cry out at your reflection and what's in it:
A conjuring,
a crossing over,
a thrumming lack of divine purpose, and
a loving desire to curl up on the floor.

You will know when to send for yourself and you will rise.
You will leave bread in the kitchen and a lover out there somewhere.
When you go for a walk they are still out there somewhere, or they aren't
and you do not need to know, you do not need to ask, you just get up
and walk.

It is always good to hurt in ways you never have before.
And you can tell yourself this while crossing the street,
cracked and undone, towards some unknown joy.



Arched Emma
Comrie

Above and Below

Cecilia Innis

“What are you thinking about?” Anna asks me this question often. We’re sitting in her bed, comforter pulled up to our chests. Our books, laptops, and pens are sprawled across our laps, but we know it’s no use having them there. I open Twitter and scroll through the endless string of feed. Someone’s procrastinating writing an essay. Someone else hates it when their boss yells at them. Another is live tweeting the first episode of Grey’s Anatomy, fifteen years after it premiered, fifteen years late. “Don’t bother,” I want to reply to them. “George dies, Derick dies, Christina moves to another hospital. Everybody you love will leave. They always do.” But I comment nothing. I exit Twitter and open up Instagram.

I’m usually thinking about dying. Not in an especially alarming way. The thought is just kind of there, slowly spreading outwards in my head.

“Nothing,” I reply. I can tell when she’s about to ask this. Like when I’m looking at empty space on the living room floor. Or staring at the ceiling from one of our beds. When I’m scrolling through my phone, not reading what’s going by. It’s not until right before she asks, “What are you thinking about?” that I realize my brain has given me away. Sometimes I tell her what’s really going on. *I’m tired. Stuff is hard. It’s the bad thing, it hurts. And other times I take the path of least resistance. Nothing.*

It’s that time of year in Brooklyn when the weather can’t decide if it’s summer or fall. One day it’s fifty degrees and there’s a breeze just cool enough for a sweatshirt. The next it’s seventy and I’m sticky with sweat on the walk I take so Buddy can pee. Buddy barks at everyone who passes by. I shorten the leash, pulling him closer to me.

He resists with all his might—digging his nails into the concrete, flexing his shoulder muscles, panting and whining. “Fine, Buddy, I’m sorry.” He runs ahead of me on the sidewalk while the string of leash releases. He’s panting, but now his lips are pulled back in a dog’s version of a smile. “Are you happy Bud?” I ask in the voice I use for him, the kind people reserve for babies. Our walks take the complicated out of everything. He doesn’t comprehend the world.

I’m a junior halfway through the fall semester of college when I see my fourth psychiatrist. Maybe I chase them away. Maybe they see how broken my brain is, pack up their offices—paperwork, stationery, framed pictures of their kids with baby teeth—and escape before they have to face it again. “It’s not you, it’s me,” these imaginary escapees say before they dash. Number four, Dr. Porter, asked me if I’d tried journaling. “Yeah, I journal here and there.”

“How does that make you feel? Does that help?” I don’t say that it doesn’t. I don’t say that I’ve filled an entire journal over the course of the last year, that seeing I haven’t changed from the first to the final page makes the pain fresh, raw. That every day is square one, and I have no progress to show otherwise. I don’t say that it doesn’t help.

“It’s actually pretty relieving. When my feelings are all jumbled up in my head. It helps to see them on paper.” We’re doing a dance where I lie, and she doesn’t know it. I let her think the bad thoughts are there but not debilitating. I let her mark my fake progress on her white notepad, hear her scribble right up against cardboard. The thick sheet of papers she’s written through are held in a tight loop behind her fingers. She must be near the last page.

“Right, that’s what I was getting at. Finding ways to release and process your emotions. And it’s great that you’ve already started to do this.”

“Yeah.” I already have all the right words, all of the thought analysis. My brain says, *She can’t therapize us. She will never fix us.* I give the professionals the language they want to hear.

Before we end our session, she adds 37.5 milligrams of Effexor to the 150 I am already taking. I leave her office, having pulled off a grand show. When I enter the elevator, I press the ground floor button. As I feel it creep down the shaft, I imagine sinking into the darkness I’ve created for myself.

I meet Anna in our freshman-year writing class. She is opinionated but not like those people that have the worst and loudest ideas about everything. When she speaks it is articulate, it is thoughtful. I want to listen. I want her to be my friend. But as with all of the people I become acquainted with from first-year classes, we lose touch. I spend too much time in my dorm room alone watching Netflix and eating Doritos and washing them down with sweet tea.

Psychiatrist number three is named Dr. Hatchet. I expect him to be cold and unmoving like the previous psychiatrists I’ve seen, but worse. I expect Dr. Hatchet to be harsh like a man, like my father, for him to scold me when I don’t take my meds or frown, spew anger when I don’t do the grounding exercises he’s assigned for crises.

“Oh, I’m so sorry to hear that. What makes you feel that way, like you won’t make it out of college?” He crosses his legs, and the cuffs of his creased pants rise, showing off his maroon socks. His voice is gentle. Like he’s cradling a broken glass bottle with the pieces held together only by his hands. Like a breeze could blow and it would shatter. He is painfully kind. I don’t deserve it.

“I’m not sure.” A few days ago, I had sex with a boy who told me I was beautiful when I took my

shirt off. Before it happened, we smoked weed. I had never gotten high before. He taught me how to drag it in, inhale deep into my lungs, and let it go in a puff of smoke. How to laugh off the coughing. How to wash the burn down with lukewarm water from the bathroom sink. How to lay on his bed and stare at the ceiling to soft music with the lights dim. How to look at each other’s eyes before we kiss. How to unbutton my jeans. How to fuck. How to touch our foreheads together while “One More Hour” plays from my favorite album, *The Slow Rush*. How to walk home by myself at one a.m. How to drug myself with the promise of another time, a distraction.

“Not sure about what? Why can’t you be in school just like everyone else? Like Anna. Isn’t she your friend?” I’ve already told him about Anna, how our relationship started to bud in coffee shops all over Manhattan. I ignore the part about her; he’s trying to make a tie to my real life—to disorient the bad thoughts. It’s a tactic I recognize easily now. Anna is a tether, a glimmer of hope.

“I won’t make it out of here because I’ve already decided I won’t.”

“Decided to not be here?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you feel safe with yourself?” These are dangerous waters, I can tell. I miss the stupid boy. I fill him with the reasons I am sad, but I snap out of the daydream so as not to get sent to the psych ward. Dr. Hatchet’s lips are moving but I can’t hear the sound coming out. There is an ambulance in the distance. I can smell the antiseptic of a hospital room. I imagine myself wearing the long blue gown the nurses make you put on after they stuff your belongings into a clear plastic bag and shove them in a locker. It feels like a bedsheet. The socks they give me

are bright yellow, not deep forest green like last time, and I can feel the white ridges across the soles connecting with the tile floor.

“Hello? Are you still with me?”

“Oh, yeah—sorry ... I’m safe right now.”

“How do we feel about upping your dose?” This time the meds are a combination of Wellbutrin and Zoloft. The Wellbutrin is “activating,” as Dr. Hatchet once put it. It makes me scream myself awake from nightmares. In one, I’m being swallowed by the ground. In another, vivid yellow butterflies land and crawl all over my body, and I can’t move to bat them away. I haven’t told him that either.

“That sounds okay.” I only have a few more appointments with Dr. Hatchet before he leaves my college and will no longer be in the system. I don’t ask him what he’s leaving to do, whether I broke him and made him hate his profession. I imagine him waking up in a sweat late at night and realizing psychiatry isn’t his passion anymore. That he’s always wanted to open up a restaurant and be a gourmet chef. I see him living out his dream, concocting a creamy sauce for a dish of shrimp alfredo in a large kitchen with pots and pans swinging from a rack above a center island. Fantasy Dr. Hatchet tastes the sauce and frowns, searching his memory for the missing ingredient. Maybe Fantasy Dr. Hatchet is somewhere, in an alternate universe, thanking me for being unfixable.

The beginning of sophomore year I’m walking the short trip from my dorm in Union Square to the Strand, my favorite bookstore on the earth. I haven’t been to every bookstore on the earth, but I have a naive faith in my convictions. I can usually find all of the newest most popular books right in the front, laid in neat piles across tables, but I’ll make a beeline for the stairs to reach the

towering bookshelves. I’ll run my fingers across the spines jutting out unevenly from their posts. It’s corny. It’s cliché. It’s a tourist attraction. I don’t care.

“Serena? Is that you?” It’s Anna from writing. She’s got a surprised look on her face. I know I have the same.

“Anna? How are you doing? It feels like forever since I’ve seen you.”

“Right? The summer was so long. Where are you going?”

“To class,” I lie, in case she is free, in case we have time to continue the conversation, in case I can’t hide alone in the Strand.

“Same. Actually, I’m super late. But we should catch up. Let’s get coffee one day.” When I muster up the courage to text her, we agree to meet at Outro, a small cafe with overpriced coffee and food. I order chai. She orders the same. We sit at a small round table with two chairs. So small our knees bump. It’s surprisingly easy for us to speak to each other. The sentences glide out of our mouths like we’d saved and hidden them away for the next time we met. We stay for hours talking about how we like our chai, about summer, about school, about her breakup, about my failed attempts to write, about her failed attempts to write, about hating my dad, about her war with depression, about mine. This chai has too much milk in it, she says. I like it just fine.

Dr. Ahn starts me out with Zoloft. She thinks we will see the effects in several weeks. I wonder if my doubting has anything to do with the fact that we won’t. Zoloft is typical for those just starting to treat depression with medicine. She asks me all sorts of intrusive questions to get a feel for what’s wrong, for how broken I am. *How long have you felt suicidal have you ever tried to*

commit suicide do you have a plan what does it look like why does it make you ashamed there is nothing to be ashamed of. It’s oddly refreshing. There are no emotions. There are no tears, no gentleness, no hugs. She runs the session like a mechanic. She is picking me apart to find the problem and fix it. I’m expecting her to pull out a wrench and unscrew my skull. I giggle to myself.

“What are you laughing at?” It’s not accusatory. It’s plain, monotone like the rest of her demeanor. I notice an engagement ring on her finger. I find it hard to imagine her in a relationship, showing affection to someone else. Settling down and having kids. Nursing and cooing at babies. I snap out of my daydream. Outside of my head, in the real world, I abandon the potentially warm and fuzzy Dr. Ahn. I let her approach my brain from a logical standpoint, with a scalpel and a knife.

“I’m not laughing at anything ... just ... well no. This whole process is funny, I guess. Sometimes I’m so depressed that it’s funny. It’s funny that I’m telling you these dark things in detail. It’s funny the lengths I’m going to ask for help.” I’m surprised at my honesty.

“There’s nothing wrong with asking for help.”

“I’m sorry for laughing.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Dr. Ahn says. “It’s normal to have all sorts of emotional reactions to these kinds of things.”

Before our last appointment—she’s moving to Florida because of her husband’s work—she promises me that I’m going to love Dr. Hatchet. What work her husband does that requires her to abandon me this way, I don’t know.

Anna often tells me I have nothing to be sorry for. I always apologize for things she thinks it’s

unnecessary to apologize for. For spilling things, for losing things, for oversharing, for taking up space, for breathing, for forgetting, for existing. In my memory she’s taking notes for physics across from me on the couch when I bump her with my foot for the millionth time.

“I’m sorry I’m sorry I keep doing that.”

“You have nothing to be sorry about stupid, I’ve also bumped you.”

“Yeah, but it’s worse when I do it.”

“I hate you,” she says jokingly. “Here,” she shoves me hard off the couch, “Now we’re even.” I fall to the floor laughing.

To be fair, doctor number one never prescribed me anything. So technically she doesn’t belong here with the rest of my failed ventures. I can’t remember her last name. She tells me to call her by her first, Julia. I’m so nervous sitting in her office, trailing my list of baggage in behind me. She asks what’s brought me here, and I take her through my long-rehearsed spirals.

“Well, she finally says, “Do you want to take medication?” It’s supposed to be a question, but the intonation is declarative. She can feel my apprehension, that I’m not ready, that I was sent here to quell the worried therapists at the school’s health center.

“No, I don’t.”

“Why not?” I don’t tell her it’s because I don’t want to be fixed. I don’t tell her it’s because I want to disappear into the tides, to be absorbed by the sand, to sink to the center of the earth.

“Because I can manage.” She doesn’t press me further. And I think to myself that Big Pharma wouldn’t really like her, that maybe she’s not too

good at her job.

“Okay. I’ll let your counselor know.”

The night it happens I lock myself in the bathroom door with a pair of scissors and strike all the hate out of myself. I know this will make everything worse, but I’m convinced that I deserve this. I make a mess of my skin, of the floor. Red clashes against white tile, against accusing white overhead light. I fish Band-Aids and hydrogen peroxide out of the cabinet and go back to bed. Miraculously, the next day, I manage to tell Anna what I did.

“Are you in pain?”

“Not really. Kinda.”

“Wanna watch something? Order Chinese? Talk about it?”

“Chinese sounds good.”

A few days later, Anna and I are lying on the roof. It’s the first of November and much too cold to be up there. Red and yellow leaves are scattered all over. Anna picks up a red one and rips it in her fingers. It crumbles and dissipates into the air. As I watch it go, I realize I don’t know where life goes from here. I don’t have any sense of time, at least not linearly, no feeling of moving forward. The present hangs heavy around us. My wrist is beginning to scab, to forgive me. Even though we’re shivering, Anna and I lie there, above the world, and stare up at the sky.



Body Matter: Butoh and Gender Dysphoria

Rix Chan

Beneficiary

Ariana Abadian-Heifetz

Ariana Shirin Abadian-Heifetz.

My name a time machine, of latticed vines feeding
from bones. A trail, my feet climb to Sinai, to Ahrestan, within
footprints of those who gave me legs.

Namesakes jumped to this shore, blood not on their
fingers, blood of our cousins crashing in waves left
behind. Peoples who don't proselytize, our ideas didn't spread
wildfires. We are found in footnotes.

My lineage holds the restless dead,
voices murdered by charlatans selling superiority.
They painted bullseyes on the hands we used to hold
each other. Breaking us apart in German cattle cars,
and redacting our culture in black body bags of the Iranian Chador.

Though this is true, stories tattooed to my veins, in the very blood
I pulse, I am not a history of the world.
Time to break it to you. I am white. White you can see. Ironic
inheritor of whips and columned homes white Christians surely built without a
mongrel like me in mind (they hadn't intended I'd survive). Yet, call me
Beneficiary. Of torches burned my libraries past in other lands, now, their
embers transplanted in America. Serve me good.
You, serve me good.

But I evade responsibility. Pointing to my grandmother's swollen
joints, the burs in her mouth. And direct you to place your weight
someplace else. Yet, symbols of my color
remain, I cannot ignore some body's three-fifths. I cannot silence
what's in a name. What's in Blackness? What's my skin mean in this context?

Sometimes privileged opting out is my tongue withering
in the heat of grief. The shame of an empty watering can
in a forest fire. Don't want a label "good" but I'm terrified of
uselessness. To realize my scream only a whisper on the winds of oppression.
To discover words do nothing during Holocausts.

But justice, not an invitation to start a search for purpose.
Or quench my thirst to matter.

Not a father's guilt trip, a standing ovation,
or an Olympics for victims.

Justice, a call to bury the decrepit atlas where America's labeled "Promised Land."
To find completed histories.
Justice, the planting of trees, one by one
by one. Focusing on seeds. Letting sweat join
tsunamis, limbs form stampedes.
Justice, the declaration from kitchen tables
and in rooms with great domed ceilings,
under nude cream-colored angels,
it is not the black face who is the "negro."
Justice, eyes waking up

when we fear the truth there can be no love.

POP CULTURE!

Mella LaFrance

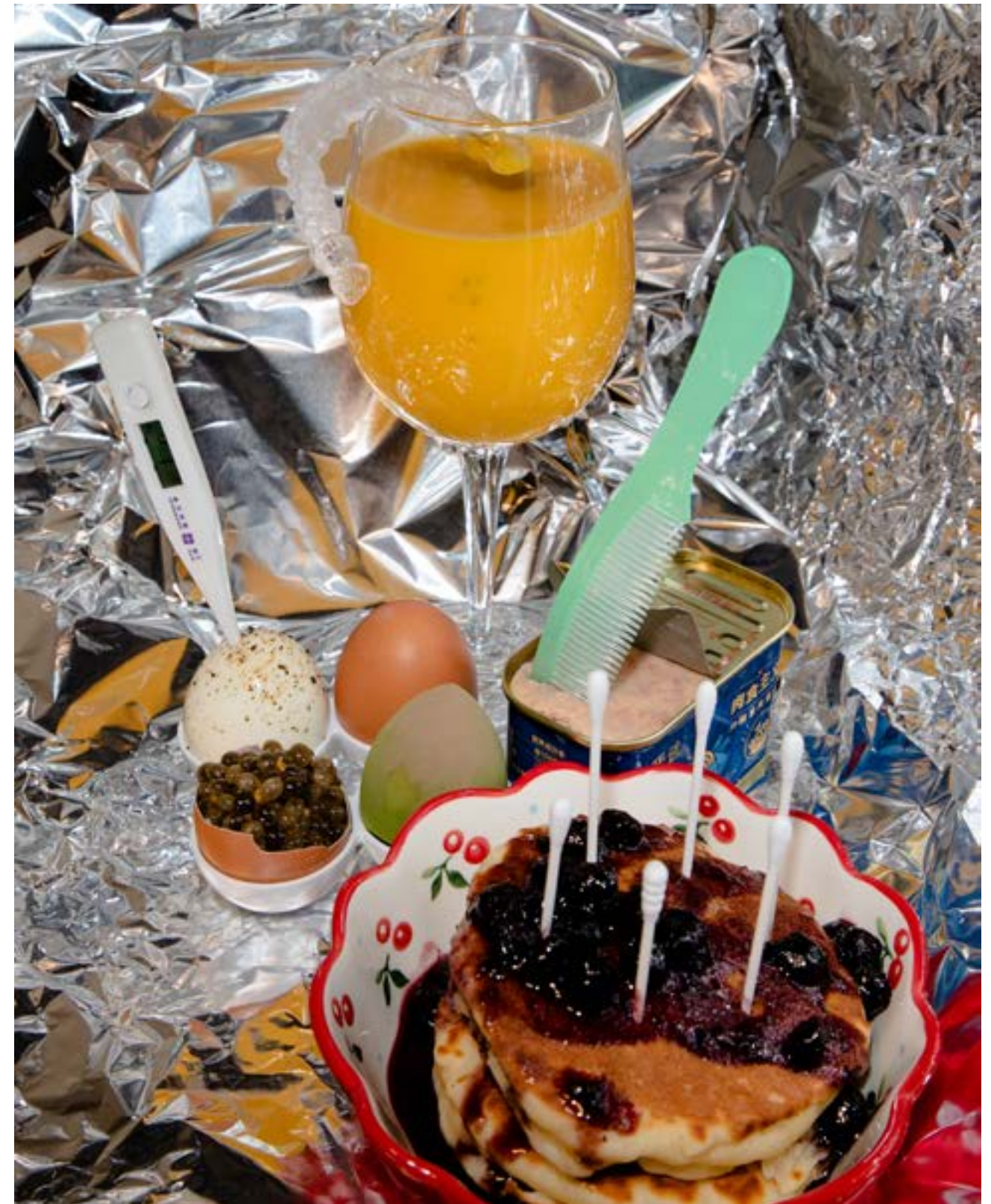
Pop! Pop! Pop!
like bubblegum

like sweet pink showers
and ceramic ashtrays
falling to the ground.

Pop! Pop!
like rubber bullets
and intimidation tactics. like red—
“the blood of angry men!”

Pop!
like I may explode at any second!
Pop! Pop! like culture! like my bits
on the floor.

Pop! Like a bullet aiming at
the mama leaning over her son’s
popped brain.
he’s spread across her mouth.
just like bubblegum! Pop! Pop! Pop!



Experiment with the Trivia
Vivian Xing

Jack I

Jesse McLaughlin

According to an elementary school teacher from Texas, you may very well be a chimera. Sometimes there are signs like swirled skin reminding me of summertime, chocolate-vanilla soft serve cones that never know it. and never even did cone. last long. She notes, however, in a post from November 17, 2011 that, if you begin dripping, you may not be a chimera but in fact a soft serve ice cream. Sometimes your fused twin may rear its (his /her /their) head as a totally different hair.

color
patched
into
your own.
Sometimes,
in the rarest of occasions,
he may whisper to you.

Whispering
is
considered
the most sacred
form of communication
with
your
absorbed
sibling
because he has no lips
just a direct flowline
to your stream of thought
that he lovingly upkeeps
because
he cares about you.

For those who do not know,
chimeras start out
as fraternal twins.
Two
separate
eggs.
Two
separate
sperm.

Sometimes
(and this is what makes the whole thing so
special,
so listen closely),
the two
separate
eggs
with the
two
separate
sperm
get cold.

You may imagine life
in utero
as
warm
and
wet,
but sometimes
the wet
creates
cold
and
the egg
starts
to shiver.

In the special case of
two
separate
eggs
with
two
separate
sperm,
they begin
to shiver
so violently
that their only choice is
to shiver
like this
together.

They jerk themselves
into
each
other,
up against
one
another,
to
keep
warm
and
yes
to
remind
the other
of
their
shared
existence.

Sometimes,
the twins
cradle
themselves
so well
and
so violently
they begin
to slip
into
each other.

Picture
holding
the hand
of
someone
you
love
and
slipping
your
fingers
into
the negative space

between
their
fingers
like
a
woven
sort of
union.

Now picture that, again.

Okay, you can stop now.

The
two
separate
eggs
with
two
separate
sperm

are now
one
egg
woven.

Sometimes
the
lone
egg
misses
his
egg
brother
who
lost
his
tongue
in

the
mix.

But
the
lost
brother
whispers

I
am
not
lost
from
you,

I am you.



August Rust
Kaarinana Sorenson-Jarrett

12

Nina Chabanon

When I was 12, Stephen Buck slapped my ass so hard that my face was as red as the handprint he left and the bricks that built our school. I didn't say a word. He was a year younger than me, performing in front of two of his friends and two of mine, in a potent display of masculinity and freedom. We were in front of the high school that both of my brothers went to at the time.¹ I never told my brothers about the boys in our hometown. Or the three years I spent in middle school getting my thighs squeezed, my ass slapped, and my entire body covered with boys' signatures and messages in Sharpie.² These boys were like white men in other centuries carving borders across land that wasn't theirs. I wondered if my brothers ever made anyone else feel like that.

Most calendar systems have 12 months in a year. The hours in a day, the minutes in an hour, and the seconds in a minute, are all built upon the number 12.

When my brother, Ben, was 12, it was the last time we lived in a house. It was the first time he had his own room, away from our other brother and his lifelong roommate, Johan. Ben's room was the only one in the house with a balcony, and it connected to my sister's and my room through a shared bathroom. I was eight and Maya was three.

It took a week in the new house³ for my brother to become terrified of sleeping alone. Every night my mother would make the pull-out bed for him right next to me in my sister's and my room, which was half the size of his. We all slept soundly and we never spoke of it.

This was the last year of our parents' marriage,

and of our relationship with our father. When Ben first became scared of sleeping alone by his sliding glass door, he wanted to sleep with my parents. After the first night, my father threw Ben to the ground and dragged him by the hand and hair back to his own room while he cried. The word *tapette*⁴ blared like a smoke alarm. My mother cried.

Today, Ben is 25 and he lives in a one-bedroom in Murray Hill with his model-boyfriend.

The maximum wind speed of a hurricane on the Beaufort wind force scale is called Force 12.

When my mother, Judith, was 12, she grew the biggest boobs in Paris and cut off all of her hair. Her mother and her sister offered no support or wise words; they were chic French women, thin and cold like the surface of a lake in winter. Men in Paris in 1980 didn't care if my mother was 12. It wasn't even a Humbert-Lolita point of interest. To them, she was a woman. They were men. They could do anything they wanted. She thought cutting off her hair and wearing her father's t-shirts every day would let her stretch her youth and innocence just a bit longer. When that didn't work, she gained enough weight to balance out her boobs and gratuitously hate herself for the rest of her life.

A standard digital telephone has 12 keys.⁵

When my uncle, Stéphane, was 12, he wet the bed every night and had porn magazines thrown at him by his hyper-masculine father so that he would toughen up. He was the only son, sandwiched between two daughters, and he spent his days in his vacuum-sealed room reading encyclopedias. He thought maybe if he just kept getting smarter, he would know how to make friends, or look pretty girls in the eye, or be someone his father wanted to get along with.

When that didn't work, Stéphane would hold my mother, his little sister, down on the ground when they fought, spit in her face, and make her answer the question: *C'est qui le roi? C'est qui?*⁶

He has two sons now from two different women and he lives alone. My grandparents pay his rent.

We are born with 12 pairs of cranial nerves that relay information between the brain and the body, including that which pertains to the senses of sight, taste, smell, and sound.

When my grandma, Evelyne, was 12, she took two buses and walked to an all-girls school right outside of Tunis every day, where she was the tallest girl and the only blonde with blue eyes. At 12, almost all the other girls had already gotten their periods. Not Evelyne. She wouldn't get hers for another two years.

But she was there when all the girls warned each other in earnest that now was the time for express care and caution. *Ne les embrasse même pas*,⁷ they told each other, or you're going to get pregnant. It was 1953.

The first time Evelyne spent time with any boys who weren't her brothers or her father was when she was 12, at a Zionist youth group. There, Jewish boys and girls gathered to watch films and go on picnics. They learned how to dance the horah, they learned about the new state of Israel, and they learned about the Shoah.

Evelyne tells me that for the first time ever, there in that *mouvement de jeunesse*,⁸ boys weren't things to be scared of. They became children her own age, people to be friends with. She stayed friends with them her whole life, and today many of them live near her and my grandpa in Miami Beach. I went to high school with the granddaughter of their oldest childhood friend from Tunis.

The average age for puberty to begin for those assigned female at birth is 11. For those assigned male, it's 12.

When my grandpa, Freddy, was 12, he lost his virginity to a prostitute. In Tunis, where he was born and raised, it was customary to do so before getting bar mitzvahed at 13. He says entering one of those brothels was like getting onto a rollercoaster. There was a height requirement. They had to look the part. And they did. They looked like 12-year-old boys about to have sex with a prostitute. With neatly combed hair.

When they got into the prostitution big top, half-naked women dotted the perimeter, placards hanging around their necks broadcasting their (likely fake) names. One by one, you told the woman at the front desk which one you wanted, and she gave you a number and called *alitalaa*⁹ or *prochain*¹⁰ depending on her mood and urgency that day. The take-a-number brothel could be compared to any modern deli or dry cleaners. Freddy says there were eight or 10 of them each time they visited, subtly signaling to me that he was a repeat brothel customer. Today he is eighty years old. His youngest grandchild, of which there are 10, is 13.

Freddy, who has been married to my grandma Evelyne since he was 19 and she was 18, once told me he and a lot of her *mouvement de jeunesse* friends, including the one whose granddaughter I went to high school with, spent their adolescence doing circle jerks¹¹ together.

From the Riley Children's Health Department of Indiana University:

Early adolescence (11-14) is the time most of the dramatic physical changes of puberty occur. Body/self-image: worried about being normal, attractive; preoccupied with concerns about sexual maturation, including wet dreams and

masturbation. Individual identity: feel watched; daydream; plan for the future although not necessarily realistic plans; begin to test limits; thinks about sex, which may lead to masturbation or wet dreams; lack impulse control; exaggerate personal problems out of proportion.

The first time a boy told me he jerked off while thinking about me was when I was 12.

His name was Art Alaj and he said my thighs were thick and it drove him crazy.

12 is the largest and last number with a single-syllable name in the English language. When I was 12, I had never kissed anyone before, and I found out boys at school referred to me as Nina "Rim Job" Chabanon.

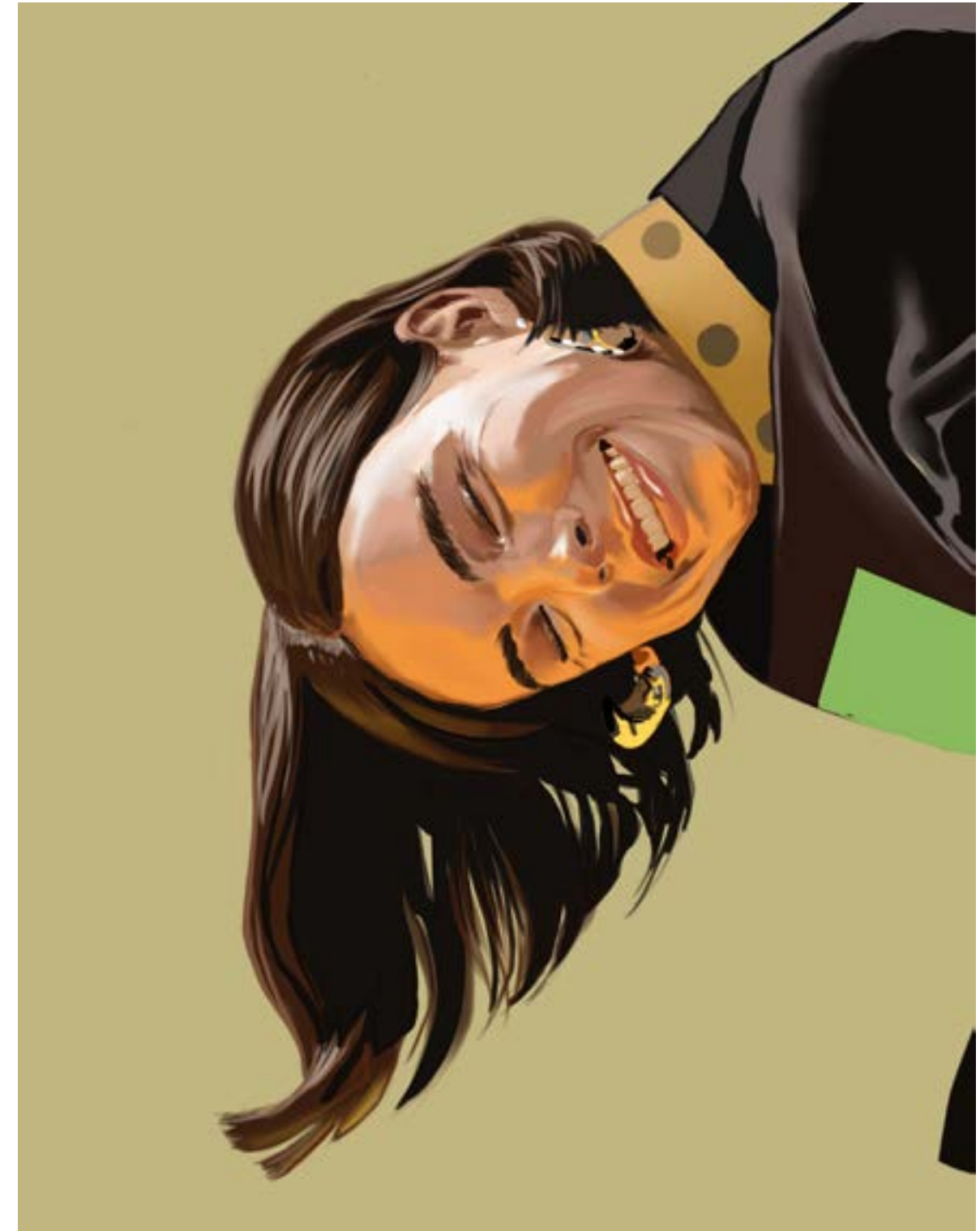
My whole hometown thought we were going to die on 12-12-12. It was all you heard about at school, at ShopRite, at the Dunkin' Donuts, at the YMCA. I wasn't sure either way, because I'm never sure. I was in middle school with a deleterious eating disorder that only got me compliments from the thin, cold French women in my family, who asked me for dieting tips, and I spent every day being groped and whispered about in the hallways. I wanted to die, by myself, or with the whole town. If 12 was the end, then so be it.

But it wasn't.

I turned 13.

Notes:

1. Jonathan Dayton High School in Springfield, New Jersey; a hidden wasteland of sexual harassment, homophobia, and casual racism.
2. I can add: my chest fondled, my name turned into a sexual innuendo, and on one occasion, my apartment broken into when I was home alone. He was a male friend, who rang my doorbell, pushed his way in, and spent half an hour pulling me onto my bed and trying to kiss me. He was my first kiss.
3. In Cooper City, Florida. More sexual harassment, more homophobia, more casual racism.
4. A slur akin to "pansy," or more often used to describe gay men in a derogatory way.
5. (1 through 9, 0, * and #)
6. "Who's the king? Who is it?"
7. "Don't even kiss them."
8. The propagandist Tunisian boys and girls club. There were other variations of these groups for communism and socialism, which I truly wish my grandmother had attended instead.
9. To call on the following guest, in Arabic
10. To call on the following guest, in French
11. If, for some reason, you know even less than my eighty-year-old grandfather about colloquial sex terms: a circle jerk is a group (typically comprised of men) masturbating in unison and seeing who can finish first. Some variations include finishing on each other. My grandpa Freddy does not distinguish which version was most popular among him and his friends.



HOLD ON! STELLA!
Jalen Colbert

What's Ours

Cassi Quayson

my profile—scars, wide nose, coiled edges—
is public domain

but there is no one *like* me except my sister
we are a ten-headed creature with one body

and if I touch her it isn't wrong because we know how to share
recipes and stories and trauma and tips

on how to quickly fill tubes with blood and come and urine samples
that will never get tested

everything that's happened to her
I've felt around my own neck and inside my own body

everything I've ever wanted to do to myself
she's already tried

and has the scars to show for it

wide nose and coiled edges
to thank for it



An Ode to Outros

Mychal Pagan

And so,
I often hear I should be more outward,

out of my cold shell,
out of its stone silence,
out of its dead stare,
out of its
awkward burdensome defiance,
out of the freedom.

The freedom of the dark, pre-dawn chaos
The freedom from the bondage of the sun's
Organizing, diminishing glimmer

To be more outward:
out of the language of
my distance,
the distance between miseries,
the distance between a lover,
and an unlovable world,

Out of my obsessions
with their illusions of madness,
with their stigmatic memories of failure,
with their unforgiving gaze,
into a reciprocally unforgiving tomorrow,

Out of the servility of unauthorized anger,
the pain of my quiet defiance.

Outside the body, alive but hushed,
carcerally reduced to a permissible death.

Out there yonder beyond the devotion
to circadian but distant stars.

Out of the majestic
perfection of my non-perfection.
Out of the flesh of my frail limbs, my blemished skin, and
from the protection of all
my gorgeous flaws.

Out of the lies and all its shadows.
Out of the truth and all its dreams of
impossible light.

Ah...be more outward!

With the outness of a plant
Spiraling upward always
upward.
Out the hard earth despite winter
Falling upward always
upward.
Out its seed out its root
Snaking upward always
upward.
Out its filth; its feeding soil
Outflowing upward always
upward.

To be more outward!

Out and out the dawn of bad beginnings.
Out and out as the evening stars
in the morning's obscuring light

Out and out from the earth's womb.
An outness de profundis.
Out from her nadirs and out and out.

Out there!

Out of the confusion of troubling waters.
Out and out into the clarity of someone else's vision.

Out from beneath winter's Imprisoning snow and
Out and out into the ardor of my beloved's evening soul.

Out and out beyond the walls of my current prison
Out and out into the terrible
terrible unknown.

Ah! Out there and

Out and out beyond the reach of reason's tyrannical light.

Out from behind my tragic mask of heroic defiance
and
out and out so no one suspects genius.



A New Frontier
Mychal Pagan

Acostarme

Nikki Myers

Where do I fall between banana leaf wallpaper and
Printed notebooks reading *jefa, poderosa, mujer fuerte*
And grandmother's encouraged times of rest?
My mother never really wanted to leave home.

Hamaca is a Taino word.
It describes what we know as a hammock,
A vessel for combining sunlight, natural sound, and leisure
All things suppressed, recreated and sold as product.

And yet my grandmother won't sweep dirt out the door in the nighttime,
Lays coins on the ground for New Years,
A marker for another year negotiating our identities
As Latinas, as women, and as in-between black, white and *india*.

We are those with secret rituals,
Protected by the statues of *La Virgen* in every room
The Earth as medicine, Atabey as supreme feminine.
I see it in the cascarilla and the rattlesnake powder.

Contributors' Bios

Ariana Abadian-Heifetz is a writer and educator on social-emotional learning, gender and sexuality, identity, and privilege. She authored the graphic novel, *Spreading Your Wings*, to inspire body positive mindset shifts around menstrual health, which was published in 2018. She is an MA student at NYU Gallatin, where her thesis examines our culture's crisis of connection and how the high school "Identities in Conflict" curricula she co-created can tackle a facet of these issues by facilitating healthy identity development and relationships.

Kiersten Asbill Chow will graduate in May with a concentration in "The Political Economy of the Independent Music Industry." As a freshman at Gallatin, she combined her interests in music and poetry and has since released a collection of original songs and performed in New York and the UK. Her long-awaited debut EP will arrive this summer.

René Bennett is a senior studying creative writing and sociology. He is interested in how the affect of poetry can be blended with the ideas gleaned from various cultural and historical sources. René has work published or forthcoming in *Rainy Day Magazine*, *Fourteen Hills Magazine*, and *Crooked Arrow Press*.

Michelle Capone is a sophomore at Gallatin building a concentration centered around creative writing, identity, and the framing of women in literature. She is currently focused on writing and analyzing short stories; her piece, "Just Write," on the importance of the short story as a medium, is published on *Confluence*.

Nina Chabanon will be graduating from Gallatin this May after completing her concentration in "Feminist Storytelling," a combination of literature and art in practice and in history, through a lens of gender and sexuality theories. Nina posts her writing regularly on her blog *babyhairs.net*, and works as a curatorial intern for The Arts Oasis. She plans to continue a career in art and writing indefinitely after NYU.

Rix Chan (they/hir) is a performance artist combining movement, filmmaking, and AI studies. Their concentration, "The Cyborg as Gender," tests the reconstruction of personhood and objecthood through performance and mixed reality. They have trained under Eiko Otake and worked with performing artists and organizations such as Performa, Annie-B Parson, and Abigail Levine.

Jalen Colbert will graduate in Spring 2021, focusing his visual artwork on the intersections between humanity and structural forms. He plans on pursuing scenic and set design for film as a more dynamic medium for his research on the similarities between the human experience and the built environment.

Emma Comrie will graduate from Gallatin in May 2021 with a concentration in "Media, Cultural Narrative, and Visual Storytelling" and a minor in producing from Tisch. She has a passion for all things visual media and currently works as Gallatin's student photographer and social media coordinator.

Megan Higley is concentrating in “Film/TV Acting and Entertainment,” further exploring her passion for screen acting while gaining experience in multiple aspects of the entertainment industry. She recently completed a manuscript of poetry entitled *Finding Aquarius* that she hopes to develop into a book one day.

Cecilia Innis is a junior concentrating in sociology, critical race theory, and decolonial studies. She is also minoring in creative writing, with a focus on fiction and poetry.

Emma Ivy is concentrating in international peace and conflict studies, researching the consequences of war and colonization, and learning to develop sustainable forms of humanitarian aid. Emma is also a singer-songwriter and visual artist, studying the arts alongside her work in peace studies.

Nina Lane is concentrating in history and creative writing with a minor in linguistics. She is a member of the NYU sketch comedy group Hammerkatz and will graduate May 2023.

Mella LaFrance is a junior at NYU Tisch studying film & television with a minor in Social and Cultural Analysis. She is an editorial director at the Collegiate Association of Artists of Color and publishes her own zine titled *Mister Baby*.

Nicole Lecher is studying in the Global Liberal Studies program with a concentration in “Critical Creative Production” and will graduate with a studio art minor in the spring of 2022. She is most interested in researching cross-cultural relationships and interactions in a globalized landscape. Photography is her most popular medium of art, but she is also passionate about sculpture, painting, and fashion design.

Connie Li is a violinist and writer currently living in Atlanta, researching the ways experimental music and traditional Chinese medicine shape communities and inform solidarity. She loves tofu pudding and springtime.

Veronica Liow (she/they) is a senior building their concentration in the “Ethics of Multimedia Storytelling.” Liow is an interdisciplinary artist whose work incorporates multiple forms of media, more often than not with a focus on photography. Through using interactive and multimedia storytelling to engage with different communities, they are able to account for language barriers, accessibility issues for the differently-abled, and cultural differences.

Sage Livingstone Molasky is a junior at Gallatin concentrating in “Food, Religion, and Sexuality in the Early Modern Era,” focusing on the literary arts, art history, theater, and dramatic writing. She is particularly interested in consumption: the consumption of bodies, of the environment, and of the intersections between the two. Her research and work is influenced by medieval nuns and female saints, food as a vehicle for oral traditions, and the heroines of Renaissance theater. As a writer, she draws from the feminine form as a paradoxical representation of the divine and the secular, of sex and of piety, the earth and the cosmos.

Jesse McLaughlin will graduate from Gallatin in Fall 2021 with a concentration in “Compassionate Performance Practices Designed for the Twenty First Century.” He is planning upcoming creative research, such as tailoring the long-mysterious American eel life-cycle migration to a land-based score.

Ava Morgan is a freshman at Gallatin interested in concentrating in “Methods of Social Change,” focusing specifically on intersectional representations of marginalized identities in media and literature. Her photograph *horsemen* is her first published visual arts work.

Nikki Myers is a Dominican-American first-generation college student in her sophomore year, studying Latina Representations in US Media. Her concentration focuses on the way Latinas and women-aligned Latinx people are portrayed in US national media outlets, from news to popular music, and how those portrayals interact with American exceptionalism, patriarchy, and imperialism.

Mychal Pagan is a BA candidate at the Gallatin School of Individualized Study. He is curious about the relationships between perception, memory, and narration. He is fascinated by the process of filmmaking, the art of documentary photography, and creating poetry as a means of counter-narrative work.

Cassi Quayson is a sophomore at Gallatin concentrating in “Language and Liberation” and minoring in creative writing. She’s a staff writer for *Antifragile Zine* and an editorial director at the Collegiate Association for Artists of Color.

Holly Seefeldt is a MA student with a concentration in music journalism. Her creative nonfiction focuses on music, connection, and the development of identity.

Alexis Sharp is working on an MA thesis in “Narrative and Visual Storytelling” at Gallatin. She self-published her first book, *Eyes for Eyes*, about a wrathful unicorn in 2020 for Amazon. She’s now writing her second fantasy novel and exploring the relationship between genre fiction, young adult fiction, and feminism.

Kaarina Sorensen-Jarrett is concentrating in “Sustainable Fashion & Marketing” at Gallatin with a minor in French and will graduate May 2023. They are currently working on literary research surrounding the significance of cultural design and the effects of colonialism to be published in *Confluence* Spring 2021.

Sammy Tavassoli is concentrating in “Storytelling and the Mind,” which studies the intersections between cognitive neuroscience, psychology, philosophy of mind, literature, and creative writing. She has previously written for the *Washington Square News* and is currently conducting metascience research at the Wei Ji Ma Lab at NYU.

Sawyer Wolf studies art and visual culture, focusing on art’s ability to theorize about society, culture, politics, and philosophy, with a specific interest in gender. Additionally, Sawyer engages in their own artistic practice creating performance-based work across multiple mediums, including photography.

Vivian Xing is a junior concentrating in the presence of social and environmental issues in visual arts. She mainly explores her relationship with nature and society in her drawing, photography, and film.

Reto Zarch is studying Interactive Media Arts at NYU, focusing on installation art, real-life performances, and multi-media exploration ranging from videos, podcasts, to AR and VR. Reto also has a huge passion for fashion which has led him to internships during Milan Fashion Week, where he was photographed by *Grazia Italy*.

Jamie Zhang is a junior studying Film and TV at Tisch, and minoring in Digital Art and Design. From illustration to animation to graphic design, she loves learning new things and pushing herself to become a better creator every day.

Laura Zhang is concentrating in “Human Rights Narratives.” She is interested in exploring immigrant and refugee rights in poetry, literature, and media forms. She is passionate about working with organizations like the Queer Detainee Empowerment Project in New York City and practicing as a translator with the New Sanctuary Coalition.