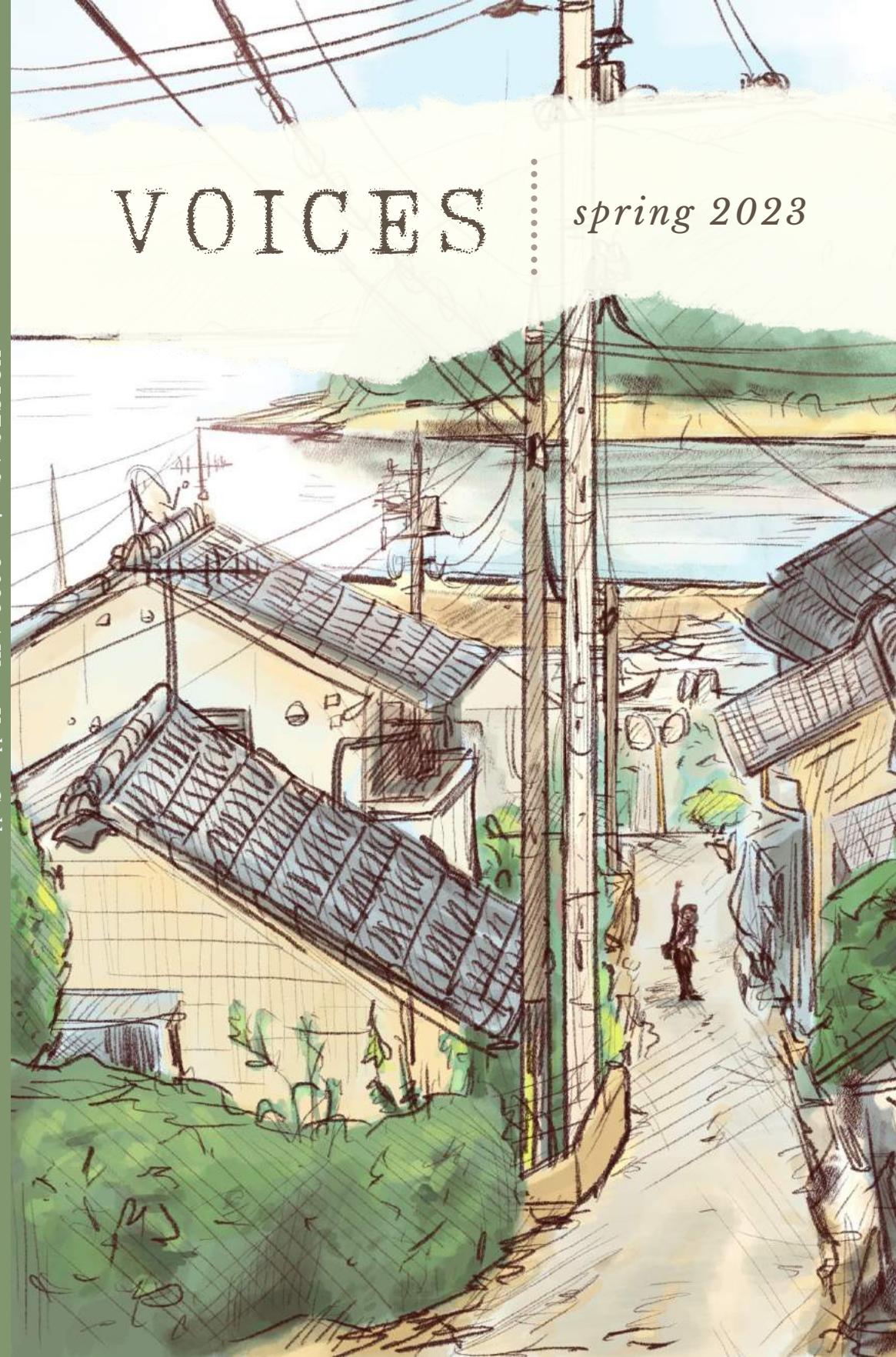


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VOICES

spring 2023

VOICES / Spring 2023 / West Valley College



Voices is a literary and arts magazine that showcases the diverse voices of West Valley College. It is published once every spring, and is produced by the members of the *Voices* staff and English 80 & 81. Current students, alumni, faculty, and staff of West Valley College are invited to submit their works of original fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and art for publication.

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For more information, visit us at:
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On the Cover: *Greetings from Onomichi*, Abigail DeSa



VOICES STAFF

Frida Cervantes
Mei Corricello
Harbinger De Golier
Hani Schumaker Jo
Nick Langley
Rahul Nagendra
Nicole Nijmeh
Sebastian Olivry
Emily Pacini-Carlin
Kelly Quick
Aysel Sherwani
Charity Spicer
Evan Summers
Anay Reyes-Torres

FACULTY ADVISOR

Nils Michals

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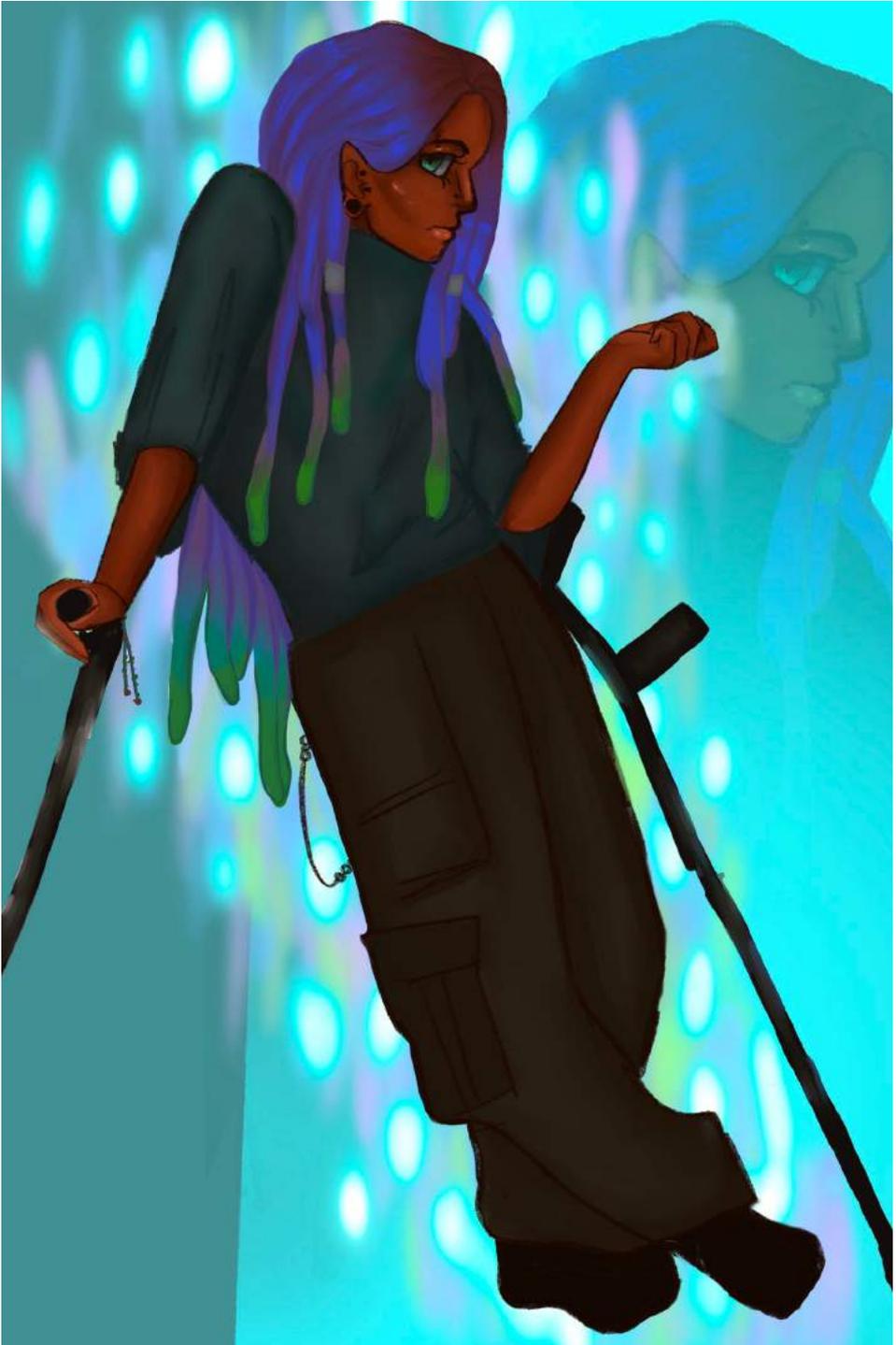
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Hannah Chang



UNTITLED

Luca McPeak

THE DUALITY OF MAN?

August Agnelli

I do not feel at home in my body, so I think I might be a man.
Recently my gender has been somewhat of a mystery,
But sometimes I am okay with who I am.

Some days I would rather go without showering than
have to look down at myself in disappointment because of what I
can not be.

I do not feel at home in my body, so I think I might be a man.

Yet occasionally I dare to glance into the mirror, enjoy what lies
there, and

I think: Maybe I AM happy with what I see.

So at least sometimes I am okay with who I am...

I hate when people call me a woman and when people call me
“miss,” or “ma’am”

So I do what I can: I change my name to August, let loved ones
know my pronouns are they/he.

I do not feel at home in my body, so I think I might be a man.

Except for most days, when I feel like neither. Days when I scan
My body critically, but feel nothing but neutral toward what I see.
I guess sometimes I am okay with who I am?

I can call myself genderfluid, nonbinary, trans masc. I can
Call myself queer, which might be the best label. The two sides of
me do not agree.

I do not feel at home in my body, so I think I might be man
But there are days where I am okay with who I am.

HOW TO PARENT

Esther Zhang

Pro parenting tip 1: Give your kid the respect that you want them to give you.

On a Monday afternoon when you are swamped with work-at-home emails and piles of undone laundry, your four-year-old will run into your room. Observe the snot on their nose and the red rimming their eyes. Listen carefully to the bubbling, blubbering cry about their dried-up favorite blue marker. No – not the blue marker they use to color the skies. No – not the blue marker with glitters. It’s the thin one with Superman on the wrapper. Don’t you remember? Yes, you say gently, and lift your child up on your knees. Offer them a pat on the back and lean in to offer your words of comfort: “Such a first world problem.”

Pro parenting tip 2: Delight in moments of connection to your child.

When Christmas season comes around again, find a spare moment between buying gifts for your in-laws and making cards

for your child's school teacher. Take your child out on a snowy day so you can make beautiful memories together. Start the day with some hot chocolate. It makes your kid so excited that he burns his tongue and spills the bag of marshmallows. He asks you: Why do hot things hurt? Vaguely explain tissue damage while forcing him into a warm sweater and coat. By the time you get outside, the inch of overnight snow has become mushy at the edge. Why does snow melt, he asks you? Say something about evaporation. Then where does snow come from, he asks next. Why is it white? Why is it brown? Why doesn't it snow in the summer? Why is snow so cold? Keep a smile on your face, muster up all your patience, and offer him your most valid answer: "It's magic."

Pro parenting tip 3: Spend quality time with your child when they need attention and love.

On another Monday afternoon, your kid waves his fifth drawing in your face. Look up from your spreadsheet of taxes and bills due that month. I drew a Tyrannosaurus Rex, he explains excitedly. Do you see his fifty rows of teeth? He is attacking the woolly mammoth here which is powerful because it has long tusks but the T-rex has fire coming out of its mouth! Smile and say that it looks very grand. When he asks you which dinosaur he should draw next, you take out a piece of paper from the printer and fold it into an airplane instead. Take this, you say while turning on the ceiling fan, and see how far you can throw it. It will grant you eight precious minutes of freedom.

Pro parenting tip 4: Be a role model of diligence and responsibility.

Get another kid and start juggling two school schedules, basketball games, swimming practice, and of course, birthday parties. Spend half of each day in your car, careening from one end of town to the other. Learn to curse at other drivers during traffic hour, step

on the gas before every yellow light, and ignore the growing pile of snack wrappers in the back seat. Always keep a car seat strapped in so you can bring the other kid along. When picking up one kid, never get out of your seat. Find a shady spot, relax, and speak to the kid who's in the car that day: "Go get your brother."

Pro parenting tip 5: Help your children develop good habits from an early age.

Watch fondly as your kids start playing together. They do everything together now: fight, scream, whine, shoot nerf guns at each other, ask you for a peanut butter snack, never put toys back where they belong, and cause a general ruckus. One kid reports that the other one is bullying him. The other kid reports that the first was annoying him. Lecture, scold, and comfort. Then lose it. Yell at both of them both to go and clean up their damned messy rooms. You will be rewarded with several hours of quiet. Cleaning is such a dreaded fate that they will meekly leave you undisturbed for the rest of the day.

Pro parenting tip 6: Realize that despite everyday frustrations and annoyances, you will miss the old days. Your children will grow up faster than you can imagine.

Notice when the kids start becoming quiet on their own. Rants about Superman and dinosaurs and classmates fade into silence. Favorite jackets rapidly become too small, and although you can get a surprising amount of work done during the day now, it's not as satisfying as you imagined. On one afternoon, step back and realize that you don't even know where your kids are in the house. Unplug the internet. Watch them show up one by one, like magic. Gather them all together for a phoneless family dinner. Ask them about their day, watch their smiles, and grasp onto these moments that make you think: I like being a parent.



JUST LIVIN' WITH IT
Emily Pacini-Carlin



ARMENIAN TREE
Lauren Wolf

RUBY

Anonymous

Ruby left her broken down Pontiac in the parking lot of her daddy's work. Ruby came alive and she started walking like a Kerouac character.

/

Ruby doesn't worship God at any church but she says his name when I'm loving her. Ruby has a ruby red heart that's beating in her chest I felt when I was close to her.

/

Ruby's 'cross town and she's probably cryin' about those things I didn't have to say. Her lipstick's on the cigarette that's in my ashtray; I look at it and wish that she had stayed.

/

Ruby's 'cross town and lord I'm cryin' about those things she never said. She told me that she'd love me 'til the day I died; either that was a lie or I am dead.

EVERYTHING'S EXHAUSTING

Dylan Dann

One thing I absolutely hate about depression is how exhausting everything is.

It's so exhausting to get out of bed and brush your teeth.

It's so exhausting to take a shower.

It's so exhausting to eat a proper meal.

It's exhausting to clean

It's exhausting to respond back to a friend

It's exhausting to do work

Exhausting to have a passion you had die

Exhausting to look for another one

Exhausting to find joy in anything you do

exhausting to think about the future exhausting to reminiscence

abto the past exhasuting to tihink exhtsuaing to b bedrun

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.....

.....

But the most exhausting part of all? Pretending everything's fine
the whole time.



SUNSET SHERBERT

Brandi Robertson



LILIES AND LIFE

Deepthy Prasanth

BOY

Lucien Maurer

Boy died three days ago and Miriam is still inconsolable. I'm not so much. I don't know why. I didn't love him like she did, I guess. I loved Miriam for her passion; she burns and she weeps and she loves, all fire, all heart. But it's been three days, and that's too long to sit still without matches to burn. I traded a peel of skin to a girl from the docks for a candle, but that was last night. My sky is red with promise as the last of the flame dwindles. We have to go.

"I'm going to drive," I tell her.

She lies on the truckbed empty-eyed, staring up at whatever it is she sees. Her hands trace the absence of stars. "Don't move, Prim," she says. "I can't move. We don't even know where his body is. It makes me sick."

I'd ask her if she wants to join him, just to wake her up. I know she does, so I don't ask. "We've got to go."

"I can't."

I'm the stoic one. It's up to me. "OK. Just stay back there." I slide into the driver's seat. The ignition snarls and the car starts. Miriam cries out. "I know," I say, even though she can't hear me. Old wheels start trundling along these uneven dirt roads. Our lights flick on, not bright enough to see anything by, but a comforting reminder that we're here and we're better off than most: we're not in the mines or the docks, consumed by mist, coming back a little different with every emergence. Candle Girl had one eye hazy-gray already. She couldn't have been more than sixteen.

I drag on the brakes when a sudden weight shifts in the back. Miriam's getting up. She never touches the ground; she opens the door and slides into the passenger seat, jumping from the bed to the tire. I don't question her, and she doesn't offer an answer. Instead, I drive. She looks out the window.

I don't know what she's seeing. I hope it's beautiful. From the way her eyes dull, I don't think it is.

The hills are twenty miles off, rising like embers in reverse, burning at their edges and black at their base: an inseparable, holoblastic mass, threatening to grow into an embryo. The Skull watches us move forward with two white stars in place of its eyes. I'm doing badly. I usually can't see it. "Mir," I say.

"What," she rasps.

"Do you see it?"

"I always see it," she says, and curls up into herself further. "It's the only bright thing."

It makes sense. I hate to think of her, abandoned to thunderstorm dark. "Just don't look," I tell her, and turn my eyes to the road again, sepia in the dwindling light. Now that we're moving again it's not so bad; I look up and see pink streaked with gurgling crimson, like an expanse of raw flesh.

The iron streetlights twist up like daggers from the road. The grass is black. It's sunset, I think. The truck could go forever if I let it— what fails me is myself. Now that Boy is gone, Miriam and I fit comfortably in the cab, no third body pressing into the space between us. There's no voice to intrude on our sacred silence. There's no laughter, either. Well— there will be, again, one day, I hope. Healing is inevitable while you still live.

“Mir,” I say, again.

She doesn't turn to look at me.

“Miriam.”

She doesn't answer. I give up on her for now. I have to keep going.

I think it's nighttime. The only tell is that the Skull's strange eyes burn brighter. Twice I've caught her staring directly at it; I had to blindfold her, to keep her safe. It's so easy to get sucked into the raw horror of watching it breathe, its scoured-bone jaw opening and closing again like a suffocating fish. Before I knew the Skull, I didn't think that bone could move like that. My wrists on the wheel are starting to fail, crying sharp pain up my arm whenever I twist slightly wrong, and soon I know I'll have to break.

We don't have enough light to stop. Miriam will have to take the wheel. That's how we did it to begin with: Boy drove one day, Miriam the next, and then me. Three drivers for easier shifts. It'll be harder now that he's gone. I've seen even bigger groups, too—once, we passed a bus full of people. Imagine having to drive only once every couple of weeks. The only constraint is space. Our little truck manages with two or even three, but four—when we tried four—had proved too much, and it had stuttered out on the road. The mists almost caught us that day. I still remember the feeling of the Skull's eye, boiling the left hemisphere of my brain.

I think that's what gave me the idea, actually. Funny I didn't realize until just now. Miriam's hands twitch. She reaches up to her blindfold and pulls it off. “Let me drive,” she says.

I don't protest. The switch is so rehearsed that we need no more than five long seconds to complete it. My legs brush her legs,

across; her legs brush mine, under; I feel the miraculous warmth of her body through to my stomach. "Thank you," I tell her, feeling almost abashed. Miriam always made a lover of me, just as Boy made a wife of her. We had thought it would be easy.

The truck runs smoothly with her instruction. It's always liked her. She hums to herself, and for a sweet moment like a held note, everything is as it should be.

We reach the foothills and stop the truck on an unspoken consensus. Below us, a lake of mist spreads out, greying our skin where it curls around us. Miriam looks at me and says, "I know something."

The Skull watches us both. It smiles.

"What is it?"

She blinks. "I don't know that." Turning to the Skull, she continues, "I think— when I look in his eyes— I think I know something. And it is awful, Prim. It's just awful."

"I would never let anything hurt you," I say.

She smiles at me for the first time since Boy died. "I know that for certain," she replies. "But something makes me fear you— in the moments I look in his eyes. They're like stars," she adds dreamily, "like the sun made tiny..."

She cannot look away from it. Neither can I, when I turn to see what she sees. I'm fine— why do I still see it?

My hands feel wet and warm. I take her hand and hope nothing rubs off on her. "Let's go for a swim," I say.

I cannot blindfold her forever. This, like the fire I set to him, is the only way to keep her, made therefore inevitable. "Come on, Mir," I tell her. I gather her to my chest and step backward.

The mist is so soft. I wade into it with her, keeping her gaze on mine. She is weeping. I hope it doesn't hurt her; it doesn't hurt me.

Up to our chests, and she says, "I miss him."

Up to our necks, and I say, "I'm sorry." Pathetic consolation. Are these the last words I want to speak to her, my Miriam? I let them hang and keep submerging.

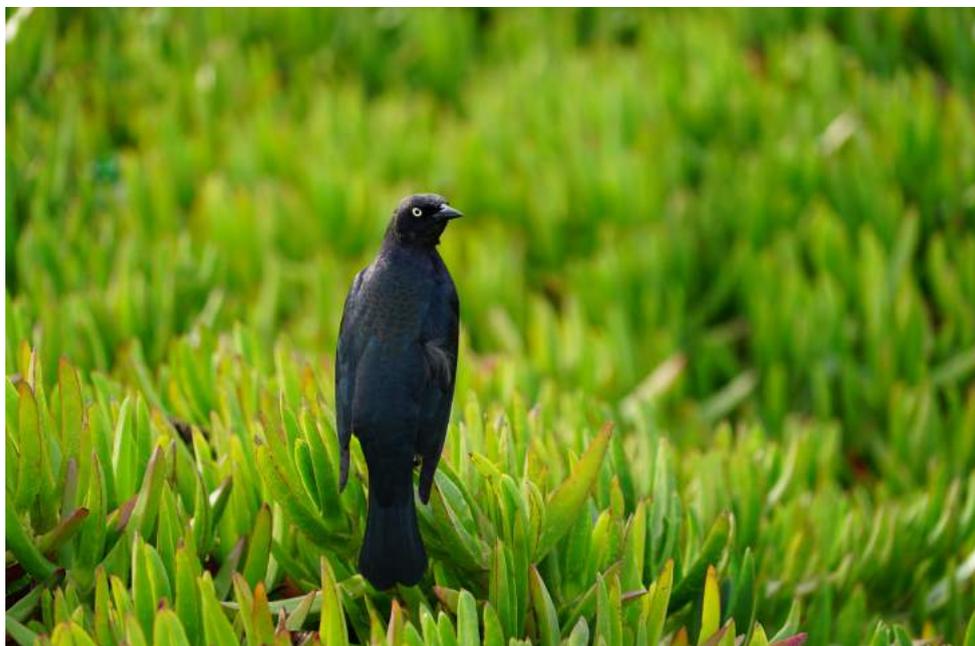
Up to our eyes. Hers are a wavering darkness. The truck's spotlight vision stays steady on the abandoned road.

The mist consumes us. It's like standing in a cloud with your eyes open. Underneath the ghostly waters, it's only me and her, alone together, our hands clasped; and for the first time since I set out on the long drive, I think I might be happy.



GREETINGS FROM ONOMICHI

Abigail DeSa



BREWER'S BLACKBIRD

Zoey Vadnais



ALL MY RELATIONS

Aresena Equihua

DOWNTOWN

Harbinger De Golier

There is nowhere so isolating
As the center of a crowd.
Faces glancing past,
Become faceless.
Neon signs flash “Open!”
While people within those fish tank walls
Are focused only within.
When it starts to rain,
Faces bleed off the street.
Bat-winged umbrellas open
Over the few brave enough to stay.
Lights from car and window ripple
On the oil-slick asphalt,
And turn night into a nebula.

LETTING GO

Saba Hakimzadeh-Abianeh

Softly drifting into the sacred
present. Feeling the day slow
down to its seconds.

A dry tree in the distance
falls from the intense heat.

Splintering sounds of cracking, the earth
quivers with the tree's landing.

Soft night breeze in the summer
raises your hairs, and crickets chirp their
symphonies, creating a harmony with the beetles.

BY THE SKIN OF OUR FEET

Yasmeen Farid

The boy has not seen more than fourteen turns around the sun—he has worked since he was old enough to go to work without his father. He is from a village far from mine, but our stories are much the same. He sends money home to his mother and sisters and keeps very little for himself. His name is Ashish—a beautiful name. The Ma'am calls him “Charles,” and he must come when he is called. We are to speak only in English to the children—Ma'am does not want her little angels' tongues tainted black with our “savage tongue.” Ashish does most of the talking, as his English has progressed faster than my own. Sometimes, when it is just the children and I, and I am certain that no one except Ashish can hear, I sing them songs in *our* language—they are much prettier than the same clunky song Ma'am sings to her children when she comes in to say goodnight. Our songs lilt and twist in the air like our dancers, skirts flaring out and jewelry tinkling in bright, shining colors. The children love them, but know not to ask for them until Ma'am is gone from the room. Ashish likes them, too—he says I could be “famous” for my singing, and asks for songs his mother used to sing to him as a child. It is strange to think of him as no longer a child when he is so like a small boy, a younger brother—but a child would live with his mother, and Ashish cannot. We take the children for strolls in the garden—Ma'am requests we take them every day, but only ever comes part way through the garden with us, and never offers to push the pram. She claims heat fatigue and retires to the shade. She does not seem to realize how much her children wish for her to stay, though they cling to her skirts, and run into mine when she brushes them away without a backwards glance. The plants in the garden are similar to those in my village, my home—but cut back, into an “orderly fashion,” as Ma'am calls it. The garden is also as

big as my entire village, big enough for as many as fifteen families to live together on the land. The property.

They bring other plants, too—ones that do not belong here, which die in the soil that does not suit them, or poisons it, or grow so well that they choke out everything else around them. I have seen animals die from tasting these foreign plants. The children love the garden—they laugh and play and pick flowers for Ma'am—sometimes for me, and for Ashish, but are clever enough to press them into my skirts and into his kurta so that Ma'am cannot see. They run in their little leather boots—though it would be better for them to run with no shoes at all, so that they can develop the tough skin to protect their soft soles that Asish and I have. We walk with no shoes at all, which Ma'am does not approve of—but she never offers us shoes, and we cannot afford them with what is left of our wages, so we wash our feet dutifully in the basin by the door before entering the house and do not say a word about the way Ma'am's shoes hurt her feet and how she cannot walk even in grass without them—painful both ways.

Her children grin up at us with their big blue eyes set into their round pink faces; and it is hard not to smile back. It is hard not to care for them, to even love them a little—but as I remind Ashish, we cannot. For as sweet as those big blue eyes of sky may look up at us now, they will, in time, turn to the hard chips of glass and ice which Ma'am has in her slim porcelain face, and the skin of our hearts must be as tough as that on our feet if we wish to avoid being cut by them.



LAST YEARS OF ADOLESCENCE

Amani Jordan

FŪRIN (風鈴)

Abigail DeSa

With summer,
comes a breeze.
Bringing about
winds chime.

Glittering in the sky,
dangling from its thread,
the chime shimmers
as nature's breath blows.

In this sight so beautiful,
comes a sound so clear.

In sets of three,
the bells whisper
Ting. Ting, Ting.
Serenading all
below its gaze.

The birds chirp to the tune.
The children laugh along.
The cicadas harmonize.
The symphony.
The song.

With summer,
comes wind chimes.
With wind chimes,
comes peace.



I'M STILL HOLDING FOR THE LAUGH

Hani Schumaker Jo

THE RAIN GLOWS BLUE

Stacy Phan

The rain glows blue outside my window,
But the room stays dark like the feather of a crow.
I can feel her heart flutter under my hand;
I can see a faint outline as she disbands
her hair.
As it falls and flows down her shoulders
Like the water in the gutters,
I feel her breath on my neck... It makes me shudder.
Like the shutters, moving with the wind, left
out in the open,
I stay warm with the hands that I'm holding.
As I pull and push and ebb and flow
Like the rain, glowing, outside my window.

SHE SAID

Antonella Doblanovic

She taught me how to eat an apple
No waste
Just seeds and a stem
Within one, there lie all that was needed to make another
We sat at lake's shore
Waters edge continuously joking it was gonna get us
You have to eat the core as you go
She said
Don't leave it for the end
Was I in over my head?
Did she take my freedom?
Or did I give it up?
Why did I give it up so easily?
Holding my phone
one minute till the hour
Zero minutes
No call
We promised
Like pulling the aglet on a shoelace I came undone
Melting
Collecting
in a pool on the floor
Found out later that she forgot
I lay like an orangesicle in mid July while she forgot
Like the san Francisco bay
Fog gathered
I cant stop touching you
She said
Entranced by glitter drippin from her mouth
Im not a fan of PDA
She said

Introducing me to a friend
her hand like a bar of soap she touched me
I thought you said...
She taught me
that people are full of contradictions
not to give up my own rules for someone else's
to join together is not to lose yourself
to create a union is not to become unanimous
to intertwine is not to blend where you can no longer find your
edges and her beginnings
we made the best vegan chocolate cake
I still make it
Aunt Wendy's recipe
the smell from the kitchen silently calling, pulling me
Nostrils enlarge
my nose tips me forward
legs start working then running to avoid falling
don't eat it
she said
it has to cool
mother and child
my eyes wide, mouth open, face bordering the pan
I am the same person who reveled over the cake as I still do today
But I know a few more things
the scene looks different
I share the cake with new people
They say "mmmh" with closed eyes
Cacao colored joy on their tongues
Where did you get the recipe?
A friend
I say
A soft smile pushes up my cheeks
Nostalgia colored by lose ends flashes in my mind and body
She taught me how to kiss
I think ive been having romantic feelings for you

Her head in my lap
The words held with hesitation and apprehension
I swallowed
I repeated adding “too”
This new mutual truth permeated our still bodies
like walking after sitting for a long time
How to act now?
I had never been here before
I had a beer at the party that night
The pulled up edges of my smile to the bottle crafted two rivers
down the sides of my chin
Verbal contracts
I held onto everything I could
Any promise to keep afloat in these icy waters
I laugh now at another seamless foreshadowing job by life
Listening to Emotional motion sickness
Our first bonded moment
I should’ve known
I love that song
She said

LOCKDOWN LIGHT

Jenn Castro

You're on campus?

Yup.

Jesus. You ok?

The milk pitcher is empty.

Gather like cornered match sticks

In a curtained room,

They instruct their teacher to

Stack desks

against

the door.

Still there?

Yup. I'm fine.

I can't believe I'm reading this.

I don't even know what to say.

I'm just going to keep praying.

The curtain has no wind.

“The brain's safety feature to protect you. An appropriate response. Keep breathing. Stay connected to those around you.”

In the garden today I'm wondering why I spend so much time there.

My foot's falling asleep.

You on the floor?
I confess I do not know how to lock down.

Yes, and the soothing I receive from pulling weeds
The smells of the dirt and the leaves and the compost.

It helped.
I talked to the teacher.
Then another student rightly told us
not
to
talk.

No one is talking?
Nope, complete silence.

Let me know if you
need anything

Ok

Omg. I love you. Be safe.

She's hiding
Crouched
Under the desk.

I don't believe anything will happen.
but I am sitting on cold carpet
in a dark locked classroom
where the teacher drew the shades
and, advised by the 23 year olds,
piled desks in front of the door.

An oak tree swishes its leaves over a sunny park bench.

It's their normal. I was reading about a bunch of students who've been through multiple shootings.

Multiple shootings.

How can it be that schools are the unsafe place?

Damn.

I'm so sorry.

I'm hungry and I have to pee.

So someone brought a replica of a rifle to campus.

We are post game.

Removing our baseball caps
Running our hands through our hair
Turning our caps
to face backwards
Screaming "Hey," all the way
Across the parking lot
Wrapping our bodies around each other's bodies
While screeching.
Swaying. Slouching.
Chewing our gum.
Watching our phones.

A fake rifle.

Need me to do anything?

No, just vote.

Any more news?



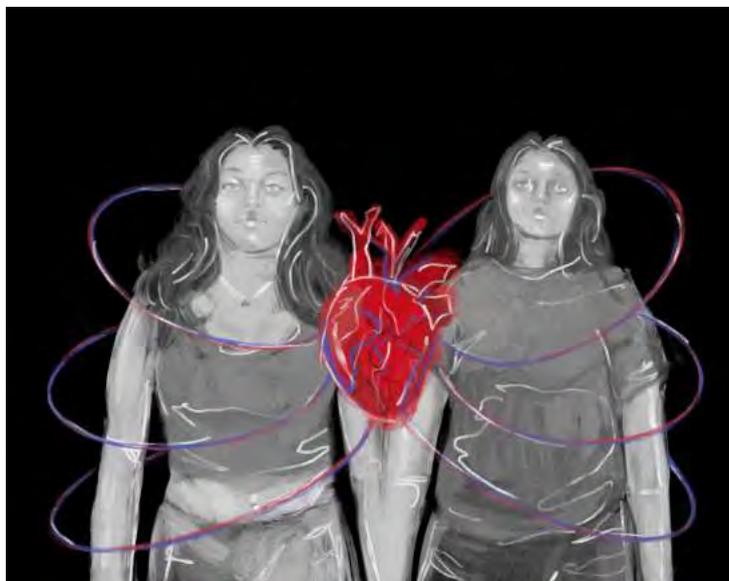
EL SEIS DE ENERO DE 2021

Jason Challas



THE RESTING MAN

Evan Summers



FRIDA E FRIEDA
Frida Cervantes



HUNTOKAR
Emily Clarke

BEFARMAEED / WELCOME

Saba Hakimzadeh-Abianeh

The dancing dawn wind caresses green grass
growing on Karkas Mountain. She dances
past a herd of sheep and their shepherd
leading them to greener pastures, fresher waters.
Nomad of the Natanz Valley, the shepherd
moves methodically, a jackal stalking.
He whistles an old ballad to the dancing dawn wind.

A red village lies on the skirt of Karkas Mountain.
Cloaked, hidden, protected.
Abyaneh, Viunah, Miyuna, Oyaneh..
Dawn wind gently dances through the streets of Abyaneh.
She dances with the dawn's call to prayer projecting
from the village speakers. She passes by the village baker
preparing his large stone oven. Comforting aromas
of fresh bread spreading through the village.

The dawn wind dances by a group of Abyunaki women
dressed in their traditional garments. Pink and red flowers
on their scarves, framing their faces. They sit together
on the front steps of their houses, soaking the heat of
the morning sun. They speak in ancient tones.

Dawn wind dances past the women, their shops, and houses.
She passes their orchards and dances with their apricot,
apple, and walnut trees. They sway and move their branches
to the dawn wind. They feel her dance past them
and through the southern mountains.

CARNIVAL

Cici Carey

Lights, bright and colorful flash around me. Laughter, children and adults alike joking, playing, running about as they point at all of the wonderful and exciting things around them. Sugar, the sweet smell of treats that wrap around me from all of the food stalls lining the path around us. My brother's hand, callused and rough against my soft palm as he guides me toward the ferris wheel. The metal circle that reaches toward the sky as it spins round and round. As we walk I look around, squeezing his hand tightly. There are so many people, everyone seems so carefree, maybe I can be carefree too. My brother pulls me closer, leading closer to the ferris wheel.

“Come on, Uncle promised he’d save us a spot as long as we were quick.” he wiped powdered sugar from his face, what was left of the funnel cake we had shared. I could still taste the vanilla ice cream he had given to me. I look up again, and see a little girl clutching a small stuffed rabbit in her hand as she sits next to an adult on the ferris wheel. She makes the rabbit dance along the bars as she giggles. My brother stops walking then. I look up to see what is wrong, but something else catches my eye. Smoke. Black dark smoke curls up from a nearby tent, the scent burning my nose as the wind knocks it into my face. Screaming, parents and children alike are shouting in a panic, but why? It is just a small fire, nothing to worry about. I look around again and start to notice there is paint on the floor, spread across the grass at odd angles. Maybe one of the canvas artists had taken off without closing the lid, spilling the paint as they went. As I try to find the painter, the crowds become thicker and my brother and I are jostled around but he holds my hand firm, keeping me close. People are shouting to run, save yourself, but I don’t understand, why is everyone running from one little fire.

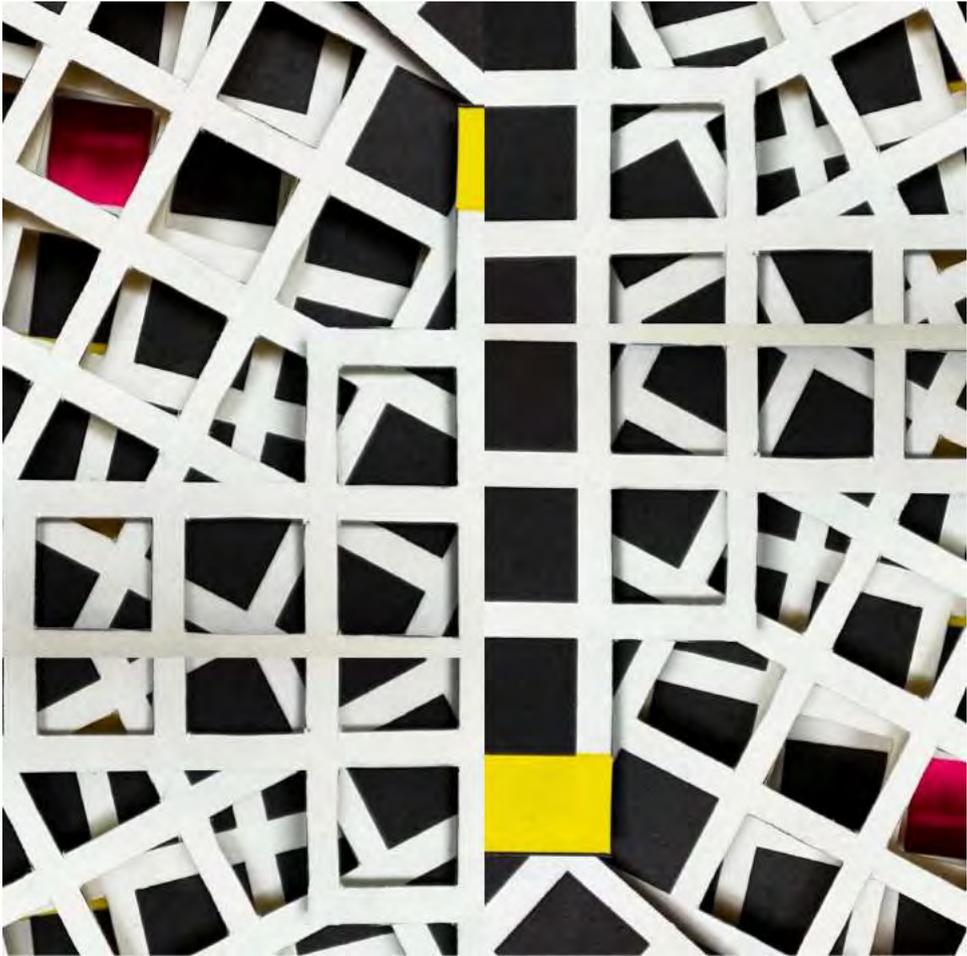
“Come on!” he shouts over the noise. “We need to go!” But I can’t go. I wanted to ask the little girl about her rabbit. I wanted to ride the ferris wheel and find our uncle. He’ll be worried if we leave without him. “We have to go!” He repeated but still I didn’t move. Over the shouts I could hear a loud banging now. Like when I used to hit the pots and pans together in the kitchen when my brother and I had our little marching band. I look up, following the noise, seeing the ferris wheel spinning. The lights are moving faster now, and they seem to be coming closer. I watch in awe as the wheel seems to roll right toward us, the crowd suddenly dodging out of the way of the metal hamster ball. My brother shouts something but I don’t hear what he says, I’m too focused on the lights, and the girl with the rabbit as she rolls toward me. I notice she’s covered in paint too, but now she looks kinda funny and I can’t figure out why. But she’s there holding the rabbit out to me as the wheel gets closer and closer. I reach for it as my brother shouts again.

Then it stops. All of it is gone. The lights, the colors, the smells and sounds. I can still feel my brother though. He is no longer holding my hand, he is hugging me, like he is trying to protect me from something. What could he possibly be protecting me from? I wonder what that girl’s name was, she seemed so nice. Maybe I’ll find her another time and ask her for her name. I don’t know how long I sat in nothingness, but it felt like a long time. Just sitting and thinking, and wondering and waiting. Then, the nothingness was gone too, and I was looking up at the blue sky. Huh, I must have fallen asleep at some point. I sit up, looking around, and realize I am still at the carnival. But the lights are gone, and the smells, and the laughter and screaming. The ferris wheel is no longer there, but the little girl’s rabbit is in my hands. It’s soft, and warm, like it had been well loved by her. I will have to take care of it now. I turn around and around until I notice there are people walking through the grounds.

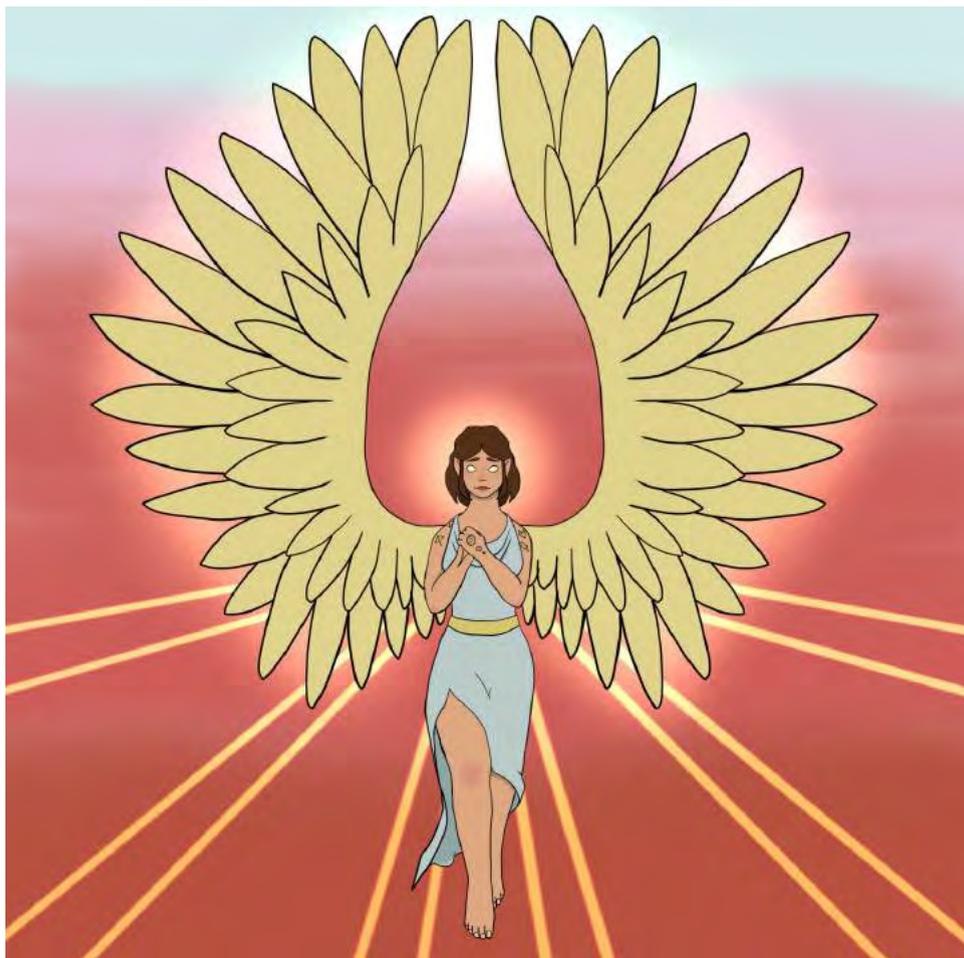
People who are wearing uniforms, carrying bags and tables on wheels. People with flashlights who seem to be looking for something, and people wearing suits with masks. There are people on the ground too, sleeping, all spread out in different angles. I didn't know you could sleep in so many ways. I walk over to one of the men with the tables and tap him on the arm. He doesn't look at me.

"Hello?" I ask, but he doesn't seem to hear me. None of the people walking around seem to see me. Or maybe they're too busy to talk to me. So I turn again, looking about for anyone to talk to. And that's when I see them. My brother is standing by one of the broken stalls, a purple balloon in his hand. He smiles wide at me and waves me over.

"Come on ladybug! We're gonna be late if you don't hurry up!" I giggle and run to him, and notice others too. Many of the people who had been sleeping on the ground are all standing by the stalls, waiting and smiling. We can let these boring men and women clean up then. Once it's nightfall we can come back to play. I tackle my brother in a hug and he ties the balloon around my wrist. When I pull back he brushes my hair out of my face, and takes my hand. Those rough callouses brushing my palm once more as we follow the crowd into one of the tents. There are boxes and crates stacked on the inside, but I do not get the chance to look inside, instead we keep going. We walk to the other side of the tent, past all of the clothes and props and prizes, pushing through the red and white striped flaps. On the other side the carnival greets us once more, but this time it's even better. More children are running around or flying through the air. Stuffed bears walk around with cotton candy and lollipops. And our uncle is still waiting in line by the ferris wheel. We run to him then, and I get to him first, hugging him tightly. I know now, that I don't ever want to leave this carnival, not for as long as I live.



PAPER JAM
Dana Yee



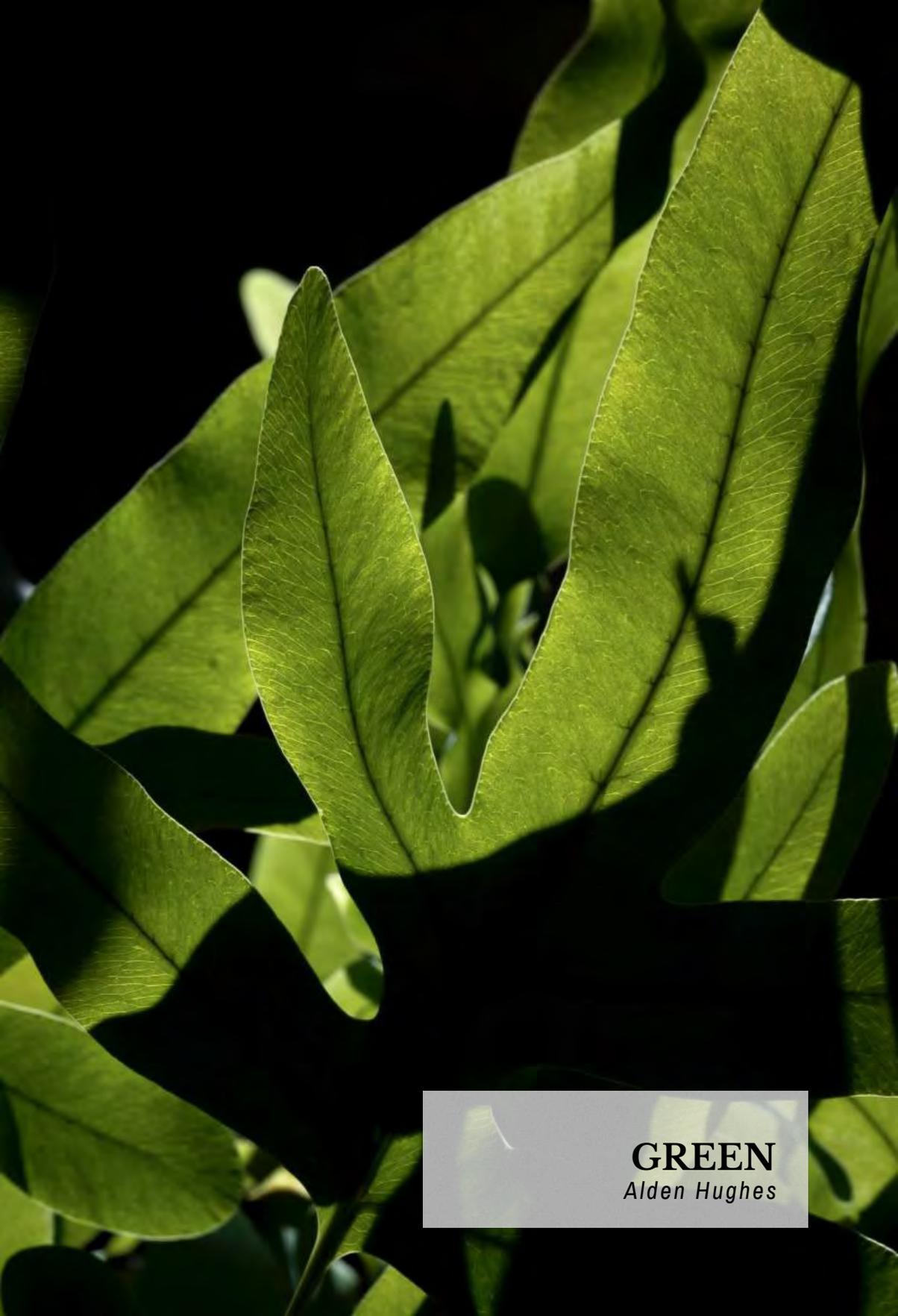
ONE TAKES THE BLAME

Harbinger De Golier



ALIVE AND DEAD

Charity Spicer



GREEN

Alden Hughes

SUFFOCATION

Nicole Nijmeh

Do I lose my value when I've been tainted—
When you spend your time praising the “tainted” online
If I feel beautiful in my small top—
Do you lose a grasp over me?

Is it wrong to want to feel confident?
Or am I supposed to be kept confined.
I am beat down and blamed—
But with your actions, should you not feel the same?

I now must choose the uncomfortable to be free.
I have to be hurt so I can see.
Even after the scars you left—
I still want to wish you the best.

I cannot live within the walls you created.
I am suffocating,
I cannot breathe,
I am conflicted.

If I stay I hurt,
If I leave I hurt.
What do you choose when you will choke either way?
The air I want to breathe is so far away.



THE MORRÍGAN

Kelly Quick

HAVE YOU HEARD?

Esther Zhang

Based loosely on the 1880s Rock Springs Riot.

“Hey, have you heard?”

The two men were starting the trek from No. 3 Mine to Chinatown, a pathway lined by dust and dry shrubs and the setting Wyoming sun. The speaker was Leo Sun Tsung, one of the older Chinese coal miners in the Rock Springs area.

“Heard what?” Asked his companion, a newcomer called Yii Sen Yen.

“Earlier today, the railroad workers had another Chinese man do the mountainside drilling. This huge rock was blocking the railroad path, and someone had to literally hang on the side of the mountain and drill at the rock so they could blast it all away. Boom! Bang! Can you imagine? Hanging so many meters above the—”

“Was he alright?”

“Huh? Oh—nothing more than the usual scratches.”

See Yen nodded and kept silent, irritated somehow by his friend’s wild gestures and excited voice. His story had been yet another example of this work’s gritty danger. See Yen had been prepared to face all sorts of hardships when he came to earn money in America, but he had not expected to feel so lonely. The lively villages and lush landscape of China hung too closely in his memories. The very idea of dying somewhere in this godforsaken place...it was not right.

“But do you know who I heard it from?” Sun Tsung continued, his enthusiasm undamped.

“Who?”

“The white men! I passed by them at lunchtime, and I understood some of what they said. They are so jealous, honestly. While they want higher pay and better working conditions, we Chinese are here doing the most crazy things.”

See Yen frowned, imagining the white workers in his mind. He had seen one or two in China, but here—all gathered together—it was disconcerting. He kept staring at them when he had time: some with leathery, sun-tanned skin, others with pale, red-flushed skin. Some with sky-blue pupils, others with dark hooded eyes. Foreign, alien bodies, and a rough language. In the eyes of the Chinese they hated, they were strangers from another world.

“To be honest,” Sun Tsung was saying, “They are the reason you can work here.”

“What do you mean?”

“Right before you came, some white miners went on strike for higher pay. But we Chinese kept working. Why should we care? We just want some money to bring home, right? Then guess what happened.”

“What?” See Yen asked, a bit reluctantly.

“The railroad company fired them! And they hired a bunch of Chinese workers instead, like you. Boy, those guys were mad.”

Sun Tsung chuckled, but See Yen felt a cold hand of fear around his heart. The angry eyes of those miners—was it because of this? His arrival? His job? See Yen was relieved when Chinatown loomed into view, and he shook the worrisome thoughts away. This was the life he chose. Regardless of their hostility, he was going to hold onto his place here.

...

In the waking hours of the morning, Chinatown reminded Hung Qwan Chuen of her childhood village. Among all the crooked wooden houses and handbuilt shacks, families were emerging. Laughter between two neighbors, someone’s chicken squawking in the yard, boys chasing one another in the dust, and newly washed clothes hanging gaily in the air. Qwan Chuen was hanging her own husband’s shirt when he emerged in the street. Leo Sun Tsung.

“Laopo!” He called, “My dear wife. Have you heard about all the news?”

“What is it now?”

“Well, I just heard it from Old Huang when buying noodles. Yesterday afternoon, there was a fight at No. 6 Mine. So awful. Two Chinese men were severely hurt.”

His eyes glowed with excitement. Qwan Chuen sighed, taking the noodles from Chinatown's resident gossip-lover: her husband.

"What happened?" She asked, "Who were fighting?"

"Several white miners and those Chinese men. Apparently, the white miners marched in all angry and said that the Chinese didn't have any right to work there. It's an old mantra, but those Chinese were tired of ignoring them. So a scuffle broke out. I heard that there was lots of blood and fierce fighting on both sides."

He had been acting out the scene while he talked, and now he paused to take a sip of the noodles.

"Does it not frighten you, though?" She asked. "It could have happened in your Mine No. 3. What if it was you who was hurt?"

"I wouldn't have been so stupid," Sun Tsung said, "But I wish it happened at our mine. We all need some excitement in our lives."

Qwan Chuen shook her head, putting their packed lunches into boxes. One for her husband, one for his nephew at No. 1 Mine, and one for her father lying sick in the house next door. If the fight had happened any closer to their area, she would have nagged him more about their safety. But she could tell her words were already taking effect. In Sun Tsung's usually carefree face, there was a glimmer of concern.

...

Leo Lung Hong walked out of the mine with a body of soot and fatigue. They had been making new tunnels today, and it was hard, risky work. Now, finally, he had an entire evening to spend as he wished. Thinking about the mahjong game had promised his friends, Lung Hong started hurriedly toward Chinatown.

“Nephew!” Someone called from across the road, “Lung Hong! Where are you going? Did you not hear about it? Have you not heard the news?”

“What?” Lung Hong asked, impatiently. His uncle was here again with some new rumors to spread. “I need to get—”

“No, no. This is important. You must have heard it. Did you really not?”

“What?” Lung Hong demanded. The older man was taking a moment to gasp for breath.

“The gunshots at No. 3 Mine! It happened just as I was heading home. They appeared out of nowhere, all those white men with their guns, hatchets, and clubs. We did not even know what was happening, and—BOOM!—a real gun shot!”

“What?” Lung Hong said, studying his uncle’s face.

“Yes, yes. It was such a shock. You know the herb store owner’s son? BAM! I saw him fall down and get shot with my own eyes. So many men were scared out of their wits, but I ran out immediately. I already told Qwan Chuen to flee. The other white miners are all heading to Chinatown!”

Lung Hong leaned closer, looking into his uncle’s face. He was telling a story, like usual, but there was a depth of fear not usually there.

“Uncle,” he said, voice low. “Did you tell everyone to run? Isn’t Hsu Ah Cheong—your wife’s father—at home? Did you—”

Sun Tsung went frozen, his face paling.

“You didn’t?” Lung Hong asked, “Then—”

“Hurry and go inform the other miners here. We must flee. Those miners are not just paying us a visit; I can feel it. My wife went to tell the women, and I promised to get everyone else. Oh—go, go! I must hurry back!”

Lung Hong watched the man sprint, with an element of surprise mixed with his terror. He had never before seen his uncle so serious.

...

By the time Sun Tsung arrived, the white miners were swarming away from the collapsing Chinatown, their job there done. The Chinese people were still racing and running out of the town, like mice and vermin chased out of their secret dwelling places. Some of them carried sacks of food and provision, while others merely fled with their lives. Spurred by some desperate urge, Sun Tsung raised his voice as he ran toward Chinatown.

“Have you heard?” He yelled above the chaos. “The attackers are going on to the next town in the east! Go, go to the mountains. Tell all your family. Follow the railroad! Wait in safe and hidden places!”

He repeated the call, his familiar voice traveling from ear to ear. Then he entered the flaming Chinatown. The debris of fallen and burning buildings lay all around him, the air thick with the smell of smoking wood, broken bodies, and fear.

The remains of mangled Chinese people lay strewn from place to place. He spread the escape instructions to any living being still there, as he headed for his home.

He froze when he reached the street, unwilling to recognize it. Their houses were nothing more than long slabs of wood and dust now, lying in the fire's ashes.

"Father-in-law!" He called, searching around. "Where are you? Have you not heard? The white miners are—"

He saw a familiar shawl, pinned by a window frame on the ground. He lifted the wood slowly, reluctantly. There lay the remains of Hsu Ah Cheong: half of his torso, a squashed face, and broken, scorched legs. After a long period of immobility, Sun Tsung knelt and touched the face tenderly. For the first time in his life, his voice failed him.

"Father," he whispered, words cracking. "Have you heard?"

...

To the end of his life, Leo Sun Tsung would repeat his line to anyone willing to listen.

"Have you heard?"

To friends, daughter, neighbor, strangers...

"Have you heard?"

But it is different now. Now, he no longer relishes the storytelling, the drama, or even the excitement. His laugh and glee is gone. After helping many of the people escape successfully and find refuge in a railroad car, he adopted a heavier and more responsible manner when talking to his fellow Chinese. People began to listen and pay attention to his words.

Even now, people pause to hear the story that they haven't heard...his story.



STRUNG GOLD

Abigail DeSa

HER BODY IS NOT HER OWN

Melanie Ho

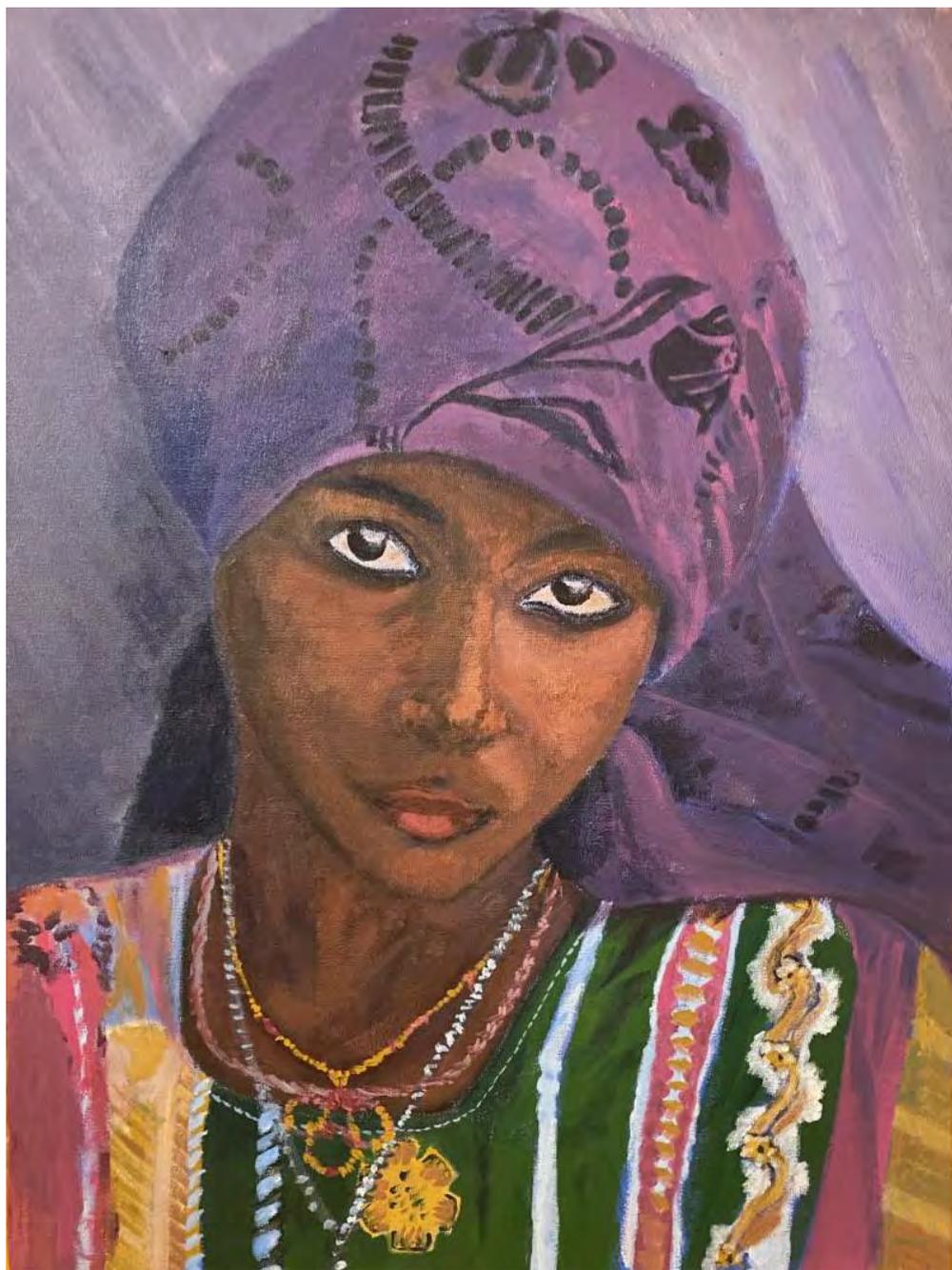
Instead, it is an object
Exploited and abused,
Always being used
To fulfill sexual desires
Of men

Her body is not her own.
But instead, an item
Picked apart and
Ripped to shreds
By people and their false
Expectation of Beauty.

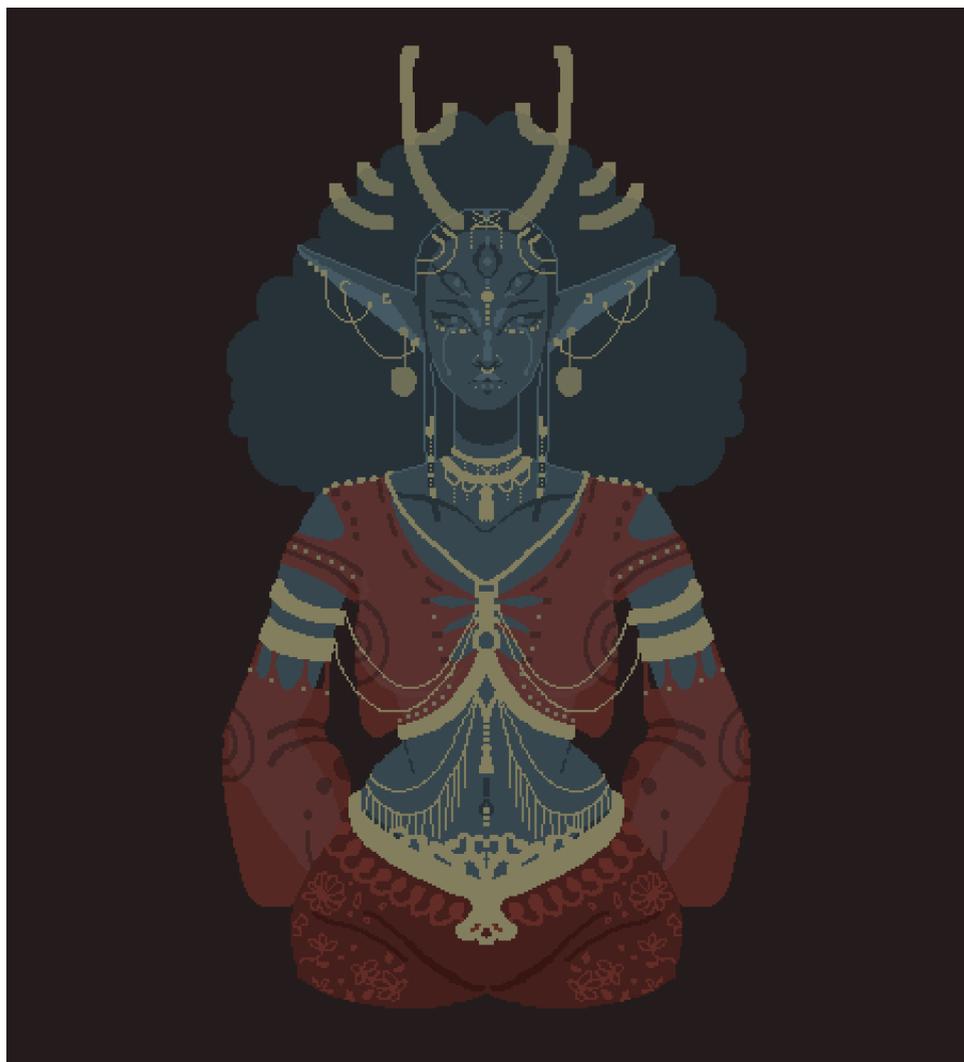
Her body is not her own,
Rather it is subject
Discussed in law making,
Where the government
Keep taking away the right
Of choice and control.

Her body is not her own,
Neither is her mind or her soul
Because she is simply:
An object,
An item,
A subject,
Dominated under a society
Of male authority

Her body is something that is owned,
But not by her.



UNTITLED
Ashini Fernando



MOTHER OF ALL THINGS

Drew Cobene

PROUD I AM

Keyli Perez

Soy de Comonfort, Guanajuato

El lugar de las momias

My mother's house rested next to el cementerio

la calle era la 20 De Noviembre

a very sad life, she had

Motherless she became at age 8

alone most of her childhood

5 brothers 6 sisters without parents

The youngest of 11, often abused by her siblings

Poverty meant that 4th grade was the most education she would receive

Only 15 years old

A child, having a child

One child, became 5 children

el 24 de enero, del 2004

I was born

a decision to move to America was made

a better life was possible

No money for a bus ticket meant she had to walk

Trek the desert

The bell rings, you go home

The bell rings, I go to work

Your childhood is full of fun

My childhood is full of work

They come to eat,

I hide in the back because I came to clean

My nights are full of dirty dishes

Your nights are full of dreams

After work, I go to work

The shadow in the dark is me

My midnights are full of picking through your recycle
Wake up and repeat the cycle
I was ashamed
I hope you don't see me digging through your trash
I hope you don't see me a homeless girl
My mother's proudest moment was when she had her children
with her
14 years in America
a small garage is now my home
I don't know what privacy is
I don't know how it feels to have my own bed,
Let alone, my own room
A cruel father
Love is what I wanted
abusive is what he gave me
memories of my father beating my mother will live with me
forever
My dreams repeat my childhood
He was arrested but his other family bailed him out
never around, he was
knew him, I never did
having his blood, I hate
Drinking was more important then his family
I would automatically start packing my things
Drinking meant our van was our home for the night
Fear ran through my mind
Once he left, I was sad
no father who loved me
the dream of the perfect family, in a house faded
Soy tu padre, tu madre, y tu amiga
Numbers control my life
Social security numbers
Without these numbers, we are nothing
A flower bloomed and helped me emotionally
Mi tia flor, showered me with love

people give me advice
they say they see something in me
Study, work hard they tell me
But they have no idea how hard I work
Mexicans
Para que vean que se si pude
Pero no puedo leer bien, no puedo escribir bien,
que estudiante seria yo?
Healthy and proud
Social media videos of my father haunt me
Walking down the aisle with another family
Reminds me of the things he never did with us
my dream to dance with him at my quince,
Will always be a dream, bottled up, and forgotten
a very strong woman, she is
Forever my role model, she will be
And I know that some people might not have a father or mother
but i'm proud to have a mother in my life
Maybe my father wasn't there but,
now I know that I don't need him
I know who I am
a refugee
a refugee, who escaped a life of poverty
Surprise those who said I could not make it
Surprise those who said I will be another statistic
Mexican, I am
Keyli Gabriela Perez-Ortega, I am
Proud, I am



FLOWER SKULL

Evan Summers

A LONELY TOMB

Emily Clarke

“God I’m tired...”

Tousled salt and pepper hair speckled with sand draped across a young woman’s disheveled face. Ayla had been roaming the desert for what felt like ages, hoping that she might find any trace of life amongst the blistering arid climate. Three days ago she began her journey, and three days ago she never thought she would have wished to return. Despite her misgivings, here she stood, starving, fatigued, dehydrated, and aimless. Her village had warned her of how dangerous it was to do much of anything in her condition, let alone set foot into the harsh climate she now found herself in.

“There’s nothing out there for you!”

“You’ll die of heatstroke or dehydration if your disease doesn’t get you first!”

“There’s nothing you can do... please, just rest peacefully instead of torturing yourself any further.”

“Well...” Ayla thought aloud, “At least I’ll die with some hope for myself rather than sitting around and going quietly.” She covered her mouth as a hacking cough tore its way through her body, “Ooh, blood... That’s new.”

Part of her just wanted to lie down in the sand and let any scavenging creatures claim her soul for the dead, but she wasn’t about to waste all the time she spent out here. It had to mean something.

“Alright, enough moping. Time to keep moving, and... huh?”

Ayla’s monologue was cut off by a refreshing drop of rain. There was hardly a wisp of a cloud in the sky, and yet along came another drop, then another, then another. Five became fifty, fifty became hundreds, then thousands. In an instant, Ayla found herself in a torrential downpour of rain in the middle of the desert of all places.

“Sure, okay. I’d say I’m going insane, but my soaked everything says otherwise.”

The violent storm grew ever stronger, washing away what little foundation the sandy ground had for itself. Ayla’s position shifted as she tried to maintain her balance on the suspended ground.

“Cool, guess I’ll add being buried alive to the list of things threatening my life.” She stated sarcastically. As the ground eroded away, so too did the hill of sand in front of Ayla. And as the land washed away, it revealed a piece of a stone structure buried beneath the earth.

“Well that definitely doesn’t belong there.” She started toward the foreign object with as much haste as the forces of nature would allow. The wind howled and sent the bullet-like rain to shoot down at even higher velocities, threatening to shatter the base of the world, all while bringing more of the structure to the surface. Wave after wave of water dumped out of the sky to finally display the true nature of the rocky building Ayla had struggled towards, the top of a stone spire peeking out of the sand. A small window invited her to seek shelter, and she hastily accepted. Ayla’s slender form was just barely able to squeeze through the opening, greeted by a torch-lit spiral staircase leading down into whatever the rest of this structure was.

She sat for a moment on the dank steps to catch her breath and collect herself. Each cold intake of air threatened to send her into another raucous coughing fit, yet she stilled herself. She found the strength to say in between her shaky breaths, “Jeez, I don’t know who in their right mind would make a random building in the middle of nowhere, but I’ll have to thank them if I meet them.” After a short while she found the strength to stand and began her descent down the seemingly endless staircase, simultaneously curious and uneasy.

Dingy cobwebs and dust bunnies glint in the torchlight as she presses on, further into the abyss. At the end, a ragged wooden door. Ayla’s calloused hand shakes as she hesitates toward the handle, her mind races. What if there’s more danger on the other side? I’m not sure I have much left in me to handle it. But she touches the doorknob despite her worries, “Nothing ventured nothing gained.” And she yanks the door open with a loud creak, revealing a lengthy hallway lined with paintings. “This isn’t just a tower is it?” She wondered.

The corridor was lit by torches as the spire was, though only on one side, stopping just before another small decrepit door on the right. Ayla slowly started toward it, small feet conjuring rickety squeaks as the floorboards protested under her frail weight. She presses on down the cavernous hallway and pushes through the door, entering a once grand library. What once was a wondrous room filled with multitudes of dictations and literature, now reduced to a mess of rotting books, broken shelves, and depressing atmosphere. A large window across the room called Ayla's attention, displaying a mound of sand being eroded away by the deadly storm outside. "Thank god I'm in here..." Another disastrous wave of water whisks away a chunk of sand.

A single torch suddenly illuminates a small nook, outfitted with an old chair, a rickety end table, and a single solitary hardcover book. "How did that torch...?" Ayla was drawn toward the scene, intrigued by its bizarre nature. She sees the title of the novel, *The Lonely Path*, and flips through the pages, "Wait... I know this story." Her mind is taken back to when she was a girl, her mother reciting a fable to her. A tale of how a young man left his city in search of a better life, making one for himself alone. "I guess whoever owned this place had a favorite childhood book if this is one of the only legible things in this room." She speculated. "But anyway, seriously, what made that torch-" Her spoken thoughts interrupted as light went out and the far wall came down, rain gushing through and tearing apart the room. Shit!! Panic coursed through Ayla's being as she dropped the book and sprinted to the exit. The aged wooden door burst open to let her through, and promptly slammed behind her, securing her safety from the elements once again.

An exasperated Ayla coughed out, "What the hell is going on...?"

The lighting returned as torches began to illuminate the hallway she wound up in, leaving just enough light for Ayla to notice a series of paintings along the wall. A progressively aging man across all of them, with his fluffy auburn head of hair turning gray, his soft round face changing to be more rugged and gaunt, his cheerful demeanor becoming increasingly somber. Each painting had a small plaque underneath it. “2/24/1X53, 4/30/1X53, and all the way until 7/31/1X53... these portraits... not much time passed between them. How could someone change so much in such a small amount of time, unless...” She trailed off. The man’s progression felt eerily similar to- *Don’t think about it too hard, just keep moving.* Ayla started down the hallway in silence.

She came across another door, this one leading to a sizeable bedroom, met again with the familiarity of a single torchlight illuminating a book on the nightstand beside the ruined bed. Rather than a hardcover work of fiction, this journal was much more personal.

...

1/14/1X53

Finally! My journey finally begins. After wanting to leave this place for so long it feels so surreal that I’m actually getting out of here... This town is nice enough, but now that my family is gone, I feel it would be a nice change of pace to start somewhere new for myself.

1/31/1X53

After ages of traveling I’ve finally found a great spot to build a home for myself, and there’s even a village further from here that I could gain supplies from. I definitely don’t want to commune with anyone there, I work better alone, but sometimes a little business transaction is necessary for progress.

2/20/1X53

My home is complete! Some may say it's a little grandiose, but it definitely suits my style. I may have gained a few gray hairs from my toil, but as they say, "nothing ventured nothing gained."

4/27/1X53

Everything is different now... I may not have wanted to avoid unnecessary contact with the village folk, but they didn't deserve this. It's all gone, buried under sand, doomed to be forgotten, as am I. This sandstorm is far too dangerous to venture in, so I am left to the same fate as that down, buried and forgotten...

Dried blood stains the bottom of the page.

7/31/1X53

I admit it, I miss my home. I never thought I would, but when faced with oblivion I suppose it becomes difficult to ignore. Grief drove me to isolation, and though it felt like the right thing to do for my mental state, it is ever clear that I should have spent my time wiser. Connections are what really matter in life, having others to rely on and being there for them in return. But as I cough, and bleed, and anguish, I am truly alone...

...

Ayla closed the journal and placed it gingerly on the bedside table, an incredulous look on her face. "No, no this can't be right... His story wasn't so tragic, he was supposed to be happy." She was distraught, to say the least. "*The Lonely Path* had seemed so hopeful despite its name, showing that anyone could build a life of their own, anyone could achieve what they wanted, and the man had for a time. But..." She trailed off. What was once a beloved childhood story had turned into a fanciful lie. The torchlight whisked itself away, and the door opened once more, leading Ayla down into the depths of this tomb, one last time.

The bottom-most section of this manor, a basement with an intricate tile floor, and a rusting light fixture hanging above a dusty lacquered oak wood casket. Ayla's mind was still, coping with what she had stumbled upon. All she wanted to do was find another city, someone who might be able to help her, but instead she was presented with a coffin and nowhere left to go. The cool damp air of the basement sank into her bones, and rested particularly on her left shoulder.

"So... now you know the true ending to the story."

Ayla jumped away and turned to find herself facing a somber apparition, the man she had been reading about since her childhood. "You're..."

"Alphard Denzel, the man doomed to solitude as a result of his own grief... What is your name?"

A Ghost. I really must be losing it. Ayla shook the thought away, "I'm Ayla."

"Well it is wonderful to meet you Ayla." Alphard replied, "It has been quite some time since I've met anyone. Even while I was still alive I never quite made any connection with anyone."

"So I've heard... I've known most of your story since I was a girl, but now after reading your journal... I'm so sorry for what happened to you."

"Oh succumbing to an unknown disease wasn't so bad." The specter joked.

"Heh, I would know," Ayla related, "But I'm referring to what really got you. Being trapped alone in your own home to pass on, it's so tragic..."

“Yes, well... as time has gone on I have come to terms with my end. Though it is true, what truly keeps me tethered to this plane feels like some lingering hope to truly know someone.” Alphard reflected, “In any case, what brings you here to my home young Ayla.”

She responded pensively, “...The same things that sealed your own fate.” Both of them were now especially aware of the howling winds and pounding rain outside.

This statement struck the ghost, he took note of her far off look, her graying hair, it nearly drove him to tears. “Oh my dear girl... I understand completely. And I am so, so sorry.” He mourned the loss of a girl on her deathbed, a girl he hardly knew, but understood her like no other. “Out of all the places you could have ended up, I am glad to have been the one to meet you, Ayla.”

Ayla could hear the rain pour outside, erupting to its peak, unsure of what was to come. Despite it all, the storm, her sickness, her growing weariness, she found solace in knowing someone could relate to her own journey. She replied, “As am I, Alphard” and she was finally content for the first time in so many years.



GIGANTOR
Kristie Maupin



VILLAGE LIFE
Yasmeen Farid



DANCING IN THE RAIN

Anu B

TO THOSE WE'VE LOST

Nineteenth

We think of you still

In the small moments where your absence is felt the most

In the big moments where your being there would have made them all the more grand

You whom we have lost

You who are still here but so far away to be in a different galaxy

You who have been left in our past so far behind that all we have are frayed memories and half remembered smiles

You who have changed so much that who you were will never be who you are

You who are lost in themselves

You who we have lost to the soil and grass

You who we have lost to their endless march

You who have not so much been lost but stolen

Stolen by the thief of all

You who we have lost to time

We still know where to find you

To us

We who are not lost to each other

Celebrate

Celebrate those who were lost

Celebrate with truth

Don't conceal who they were

In doing so you will keep more of them

Celebrate those are here

Celebrate when you lose someone

Be it to a different school, a different continent, or to a world we
know nothing about

So remember

Those we have lost are never gone

They are with us everyday

BENEATH

Jake Szabo

dust and sand,
between my toes, ancient
naked cities clinging
to my feet beneath some overpass.

looking down, vertigo
like Anubis laid waste to it
with endless inferno
so it's become a mirage.

did Aztecs walk this way?
like our trains
to store their cache
on now cobblestone roads.

does some agency
some office
keep these canals well
to last another assault.

along the coast
where cruise ships float in the sky
my eyes are far off with Apollo.
yearning for some familiar biome.

where ancient cobblestone becomes
dust beneath the overpass.

ONEROI

Gwyn Szoboszlay

Neon shades danced atop puddles and half-rusted pipes, as the constant hum of machinery reverberated from far below the concrete. Oil-tinged water, opalescent as it splattered underfoot; pink, cyan, and yellow blurring streaks in the pale. Andromeda's lungs burned as the endless cityscape blurred past her; the distant lights and screens flickering as the thralling crowds meandered below. Cold droplets fell upon her skin, coating everything in a pervasive and damp shimmer. Weaving between pipes and rails wrought of paint-chipped iron, she lept over a large grated vent, billowing buzzing vapors of sickly green. Although her chest screamed and clamored for air, for oxygen, she closed her eyelids and held her breath as tight as a piston's seal.

For a moment her fae skin stung, not quite burning, not quite painless. And then it was over. Opening her eyes as she landed, a gasping breath of the clea— not immediately toxic air, filled her lungs. Her sneakers skid half a foot as she landed upon her wheeled heels. Nearer, she half-rolled to the edge of the roof as she clambered over a bent panel of siding, her pale hands stung as the jagged iron dug into her skin. Still, she pressed on. Frustration on her cheeks and neck, ebbing the same unnatural pink as the city's haze. Her faerish avatar flickered as the pain seared across her nerves like live wires, the neon luminescence of her augmented eyes wrestling with the pale blue of her own banality. Through the oneiric wavering she anchored herself, breathing in the flow of Cyber as it solidified in her presence; the blue still flickering, reflecting, in the tarnished locket that ever swayed from her neck.

A gale of rare wind whistled through the packed alleys as she looked down from the skyscraper and upon the sprawling forest of glass, concrete, and alloyed steel below. Cyber, a maze that wavered in its own harsh glow and rainy gloom. A reflection of something half-remembered, half-dreamed, warped and unyielding. The stars above seemed all the brighter and bolder here, a crystalline memory plucked and polished from a thousand minds. A cloud-speckled blanket over the concrete spires and their blinking eyes, bathing Andromeda's bulbous alien-like eyes in effervescent shades. Distantly, she could even make out her own namesake, her chosen name, pulsing brightly with its many worlds; Lightyears, and a layer, away. Far beyond the woes of the dreaming and the waking. Creeping towards the rooftop's edge, careful not to slip once more, her locks of pale gold wavered in the nocturnal breeze. It all seemed... so... uncanny. And with a single breath, she jumped.

Falling.....

Falling...

Falling...

There is no feeling quite like falling. The weightlessness. The wind. The waiting... the waiting... the waiting for the lurch of lucidity or the crunch of finality. The true and rare sureness as one plummets downward under the accelerating pull of gravity. Quicker and quicker the distant ground came, the streets of meandering dreamers now not so far. Figures of gleaming augments, ragged cloth, and retro styles were unaware of the comet of a girl crashing down from above. Andromeda's pale fingers reached past her fluttering filaments of starlight hair, towards the dimming sky, as hazy reflections glimpsed and died in the passing panes of glass. The air grew ever acrid, tangible, and almost real, as she plunged through the layers of putrid smog.

Striking with a static current, her nerves lit with the bubblegum hue of Cyber's screens, her oneiric light. Wreathed in electrostatic filaments, her hand and feet slammed against the steel drain pipe running down the building's side. The pulling force spiraled forth from her limbs in invisible rings. The tube strained and whined alongside her shoulder as her weight pulled against the binding bolts. As she slowed to a stop, Andromeda could make out her own reflection peering back from beyond the glass, prismatic and rippling in the everpresent twilight. Neon pink, static grey, glittering lilac, and corporeal blue overlaid and overlapped. Echos of her Oneroi nature splintered as her free hand began to tear apart the veil.

Muted blue, her eyes peered between messy locks of brown hair as the autumn wind wailed. Mists rolled between the rows of stone slabs, inscribed with names worn away by tempests and

time, as she crept through the garden of eternal rest. There among the scarlet leaves and gnarled roots of the willow, lay still and breathless, a maiden with hair of fire, Piper.

The glass splintered as she felt the layers unravel between her fingers. The lurch came deep from within her firing synapses as she felt the waking, as the veil of Cyber, futures remembered and futures dreamed, split apart. Fractals spread across the surface shining the blue of her true irises, five great cracks spread and crossed as she pressed her hand firmly against the dark glass. As she looked into her shimmering reflections, hewn from starlight, she began to unravel. Repeating what she had been taught by another Oneroi some months ago, she shifted her center from Cyber to the waking, setting her anchor to the pulling force of reality, to her Polaris, her north star. Her love. And through the broken star, the looking glass, she fell.

As she crashed through the veil, Andromeda's prismatic slivers of form and ego collapsed, and the aspects aligned. Grey, pink, and purple overlaid, as her irises solidified clear and keen, blue, the color of the early morning sky. The fractals mended as the luminescence faded to seems along the cracked window behind her, giving way to the darkness of the lonely city street. A translucent hand gripped Andromeda's wrist as she fell forward.

"You're so lucky," The ghostly woman exasperatedly sighed, her red ponytail fluttering upwards like a winding trail of ruddy smoke.

"Lucky I'm not dead yet?" She asked as she swayed, at least thirty feet above the cragged asphalt of the desolate parking lot grounds. "Who needs luck when I have you?" Andromeda smiled up at Piper, ignoring her ashen and blooded complexion. Her echoing visage flickered, almost glitching, with the pale oneiric mire of the Otherside.

“Lucky I love you,” She chuckled as she slowly drifted towards the ground, setting first her girlfriend and then herself upon the solid surface. “And don't joke about dying— can't recommend it.”

Warm color flushed Piper's freckled cheeks as her milky eyes flooded verdant green. The dark blood soaking her denim jacket dried and faded to metallic dust as she fully corporatized. Piper's cold hand grew warm, fingers laced tightly in Andromeda's. Alive.

“If I do,” She smiled as Piper brushed stray mousy strands from her face. “You'll just have to come and get me.”

“In your dreams.” She quipped, half chuckling, as they drew nearer to one another. Piper's hand cupped Andromeda's rosy cheek, as she gazed down into her dower-colored eyes, almost glittering under the distant skies above.

“Can do,” Andromeda whispered as their lips met. The world, dreaming and waking, melted away... as all that was, was them.

