

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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Gwyndolyn Szoboszlay

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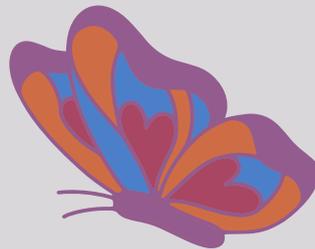
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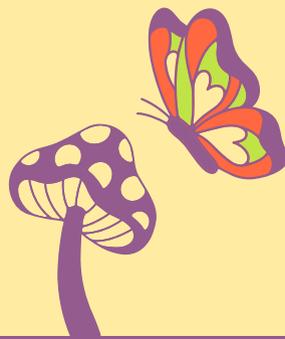
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# VOICES

2024  
is  
Psychedelic





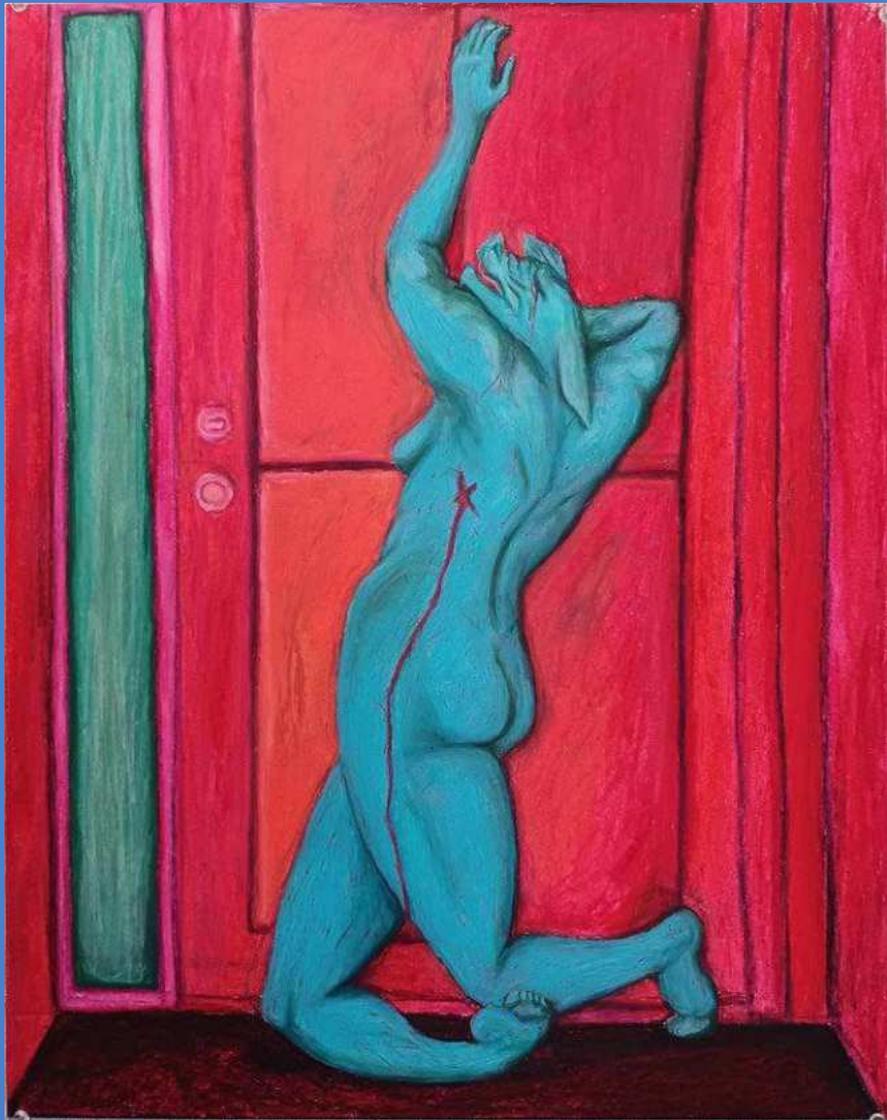
**Antsy**  
Angelina Smith



**Formal  
Abstraction**  
Liya Wu



**Foreshortened  
Red Rose**  
Liya Wu



**The Sacrifices of  
Transformation**  
Madelyn Abetecola

# White Picket Void

Damian Ellis

The shrill pitch of an alarm fills the room. Tilting my head to find the irradiated green segmented display of a cheap alarm clock. 7:30am flashes on and off as I slam my hand into the clock. I sit up in the darkness, waiting for my eyes to adjust, I'm startled by a figure standing in the corner. I quickly rub my eyes, and as they adjust to the darkness I see that it was just my coat and hat resting on my hangar. "Just my mind playing tricks in the dark." Pulling my legs out from under the blanket over the side of the bed, streams of light trickle in from beyond the curtain. After light footsteps toward the window, and with a firm grasp, I pull back the curtain to reveal a bright sunny day. Another day in paradise.

Walking out of the shower, hair glossy and wet, I'm met with the smell of breakfast. Strutting down the stairs I take a big whiff. As the smell of coffee and bacon fill my nostrils, the sound of children's laughter echoes through the house. The young brother and sister at play are running through the house. Walking into the kitchen a slender figure stands in front of the stove. Brown hair, clean and straight. Skin as smooth and white as snow. It never ceases to amaze me that she looks as good as those girls in the magazines, if not better. I hold my perfect wife from behind to greet her for the morning. She turns her head towards mine "Good morning afwksosdj." The jumbled mess of sound catches me by surprise. "Excuse me?" I pull my head back in confusion. "I said good morning Paul. Don't tell me your hearing is already going?" "I must not be fully awake." What did I hear? Is my hearing really going, It would be a bit strange for a 29 year old man of perfect health to already be losing his hearing. I look out the window, a young teenage boy is taking out the trash, and as he turns he notices my gaze. He begins to wave good morning, but as I begin to wave back the shine from the trash can lid blinds me for a brief moment.

At that moment I can't shake the feeling I saw that young boy resemble the figure I saw this morning. "Oh my, look at the time, at this rate you're going to be late for work." After fixing my tie, and a kiss on the cheek, I make my way to the door. Oh, and on your way home, could you pick up some ajsuehdhdj?" "What was that?" "Milk, we're out of milk. Honey, are you feeling alright? Maybe you should see the doctor." "No, I'm fine. Must not have had enough coffee." We both share a hearty laugh, but I can't shake this uneasy feeling. As I walk down the hallway I make sure to check a family photo hanging on the wall. My wife, our two children, and myself, the perfect family. In the top right corner of the frame there is a green flashing light. I breathe a deep sigh, All should be fine. I begin walking towards the car. "Howdy ho neighbor!" The kind elderly man waves to me as he walks to pick up the daily paper. What a peaceful life. I don't have to worry about the dregs of city life, the towering skyscrapers, the neon lights, the cramped spaces, the underworld criminals threatening to ruin my day. The paper boy on his trusty bicycle tosses me today's issue. "What's my perfect world looking like today?" Unfurling the paper I glance at today's headline. "Local business man, a respected pillar of the community, has just declared bankruptcy." Quite a tragedy. "Did you read the news?" The old man cries as he flags me down, paper in hand. "Ya, you hate to see a local business closing its doors." "It is truly a cryin' shame. Say can we count on seeing ya at tonight's poker game?" "Oh...sorry I don't think I can make it tonight, I need to pick up milk from the store, and once I'm home I'll need to spend time with the wife." "Ahh...getting stuck to the ol 'ball and chain, well if you find yourself sneaking out feel free to stop by." The old man and I share a small chuckle, but as I try to focus on his face it begins to lose any defining characteristics, and begins to blend. "You should run along now, wouldn't want to keep the ol 'boss man waiting." The man proclaims as the tone slowly drains from each

word, and just like that in the blink of an eye I find myself at the checkout line at the grocery store.

The hustle and bustle of a busy store fills my ears, I find myself face to face against a bright eyed young woman. The bright peppy smile begins to soothe myself. "How are you doing today sir?" She asks as she begins packing the bag. "I've been better." Even with the help of the cashier in front of me I can't help but still feel lost, where did the time go? "Well sir your total comes to 150,000,000 credits." The entire market falls silent, I swear I can hear a pin drop. "I'm sorry, how much?" "I said your total comes out to 35 dollars and 42 cents sir." "Oh...right, my apologies." I hand her 40 dollars. "Keep the change." My eyes glance over to a newspaper stand, the same issue I saw this morning. I pick up the paper, wanting to know more about this local business man. I unfurl the paper again to read the head line, "Local coward, too consumed by his fantasies, hides from the world. Wait, that's not what I read this morning, who are they talking about. As I glance down the page the words begin to fade and blur. In a fit of anger and confusion I rip up the paper and cast it away. I look around, I'm alone, everyone seems to have vanished into thin air. The silence is deafening until from the back of the store I hear what sounds like tin cans tumbling from a shelf onto the floor. My feet began carrying me as fast as they could, out of the building and over to my car. I slam myself into the seat of my car. "I can't go back." Panic begins to set in. As I turn the key to the ignition I try to calm myself down. "I saw a green light, I should still have time left, I don't have to go back, I won't go back!" I turn the key in time with every exacerbated breath I take, but to no avail the car refuses to start. The world around me becomes gray and cold. I hold my hands in my face, and then I hear a knock at my window. I turn hoping for an ounce of something good to happen, but I'm met with a figure.

The tall slender figure, in a dark coat. His outfit is devoid of any color aside from the streaks of white that adorn his tie. He wore black gloves so tight you could see bones protruding from his hands, and held a black featureless cane in his left. I swear he has a face, but it was so indistinct, and blended with every face I had seen throughout my entire life I struggled to convince myself he has one. "Time is up, Mr. Gordon." The loud chimes of a grandfather clock fill my ears. I feel the ringing pounding against the very fiber of my being. I instinctively cover my ears, but to no avail. Closing my eyes and gritting my teeth in pain, I rush out of the car to find myself back at home.

As I rush into the house I cry out for my children, for my wife, but in my attempts to do so I struggle to remember their names, or if they even had any. Rushing through the empty abandoned home panic continues to rush over me. "No I can't go back, there is no place for me in that world. I refuse to live in that swine ridden colony. No how could this happen, I swear I had plenty of money left, how could I be out? How Long Have I been in here?" I continue searching. "Please just let this be a prank. Ya that has to be it right? just a practical joke to scare me." I try to find the photo, it's just an empty plaque, but the light is flashing a bright red. I tap the plaque to bring up a screen. After a brief logo, I am greeted by a menu. I navigate towards account information. I can't believe what I see.

Name: Paul Gordon

Last Login: 25/1/3042

Current Session: 370 Days

Account Balance: -150,000,00 Cr

"This can't be. How have I been here for over a Year. No this has to be a mistake. I'll just log out, talk to a representative and get this all sorted out. I will not be reduced to the state of those pathetic debt shackled husks, just waiting for the carrion to get them." I command the system to log me out. Immediately the house turns to a white void. "Any minute now I will wake up, climb out of my pod, and get this whole mess sorted." Seconds pass, and yet I feel no sense of waking up. The seconds begin to feel like minutes, which begin to feel like hours, which begin to feel like no time at all. I try to scream for someone to hear me, but as I open my mouth no sound escapes my lips.

Panic reaches maximum, but my thoughts begin to slow. My panic turns to dread, as I begin to lose feeling in my legs. My dread grows into full fear, as the empty void continues to travel up my body. "Please, I'm too young to lose it all." My fear sets in as I begin to feel sadness, and soon I feel nothing at all.

Console Log: Date 1/2/3043; Data expunged; Vacancy Noted.



**Self Portrait**  
Grace Koepfer



Healing is allowing myself to do the things you never let me;  
To feel my emotions,  
To be a fully realized person,  
To make up my own damn mind,  
To be myself.

Healing is allowing myself to feel.  
To not deny the things that make me human,  
But embrace them.  
I waste so much time denying fears,  
That I- no  
We buried deep;  
In my flesh,  
Then my bones,  
Until it was all I could feel  
For days on end  
Impossible to pretend.  
That and rage;  
Passed the point of anger.  
And pain;  
Manifesting in my body,  
From mental to physical,  
Morphing into something real.





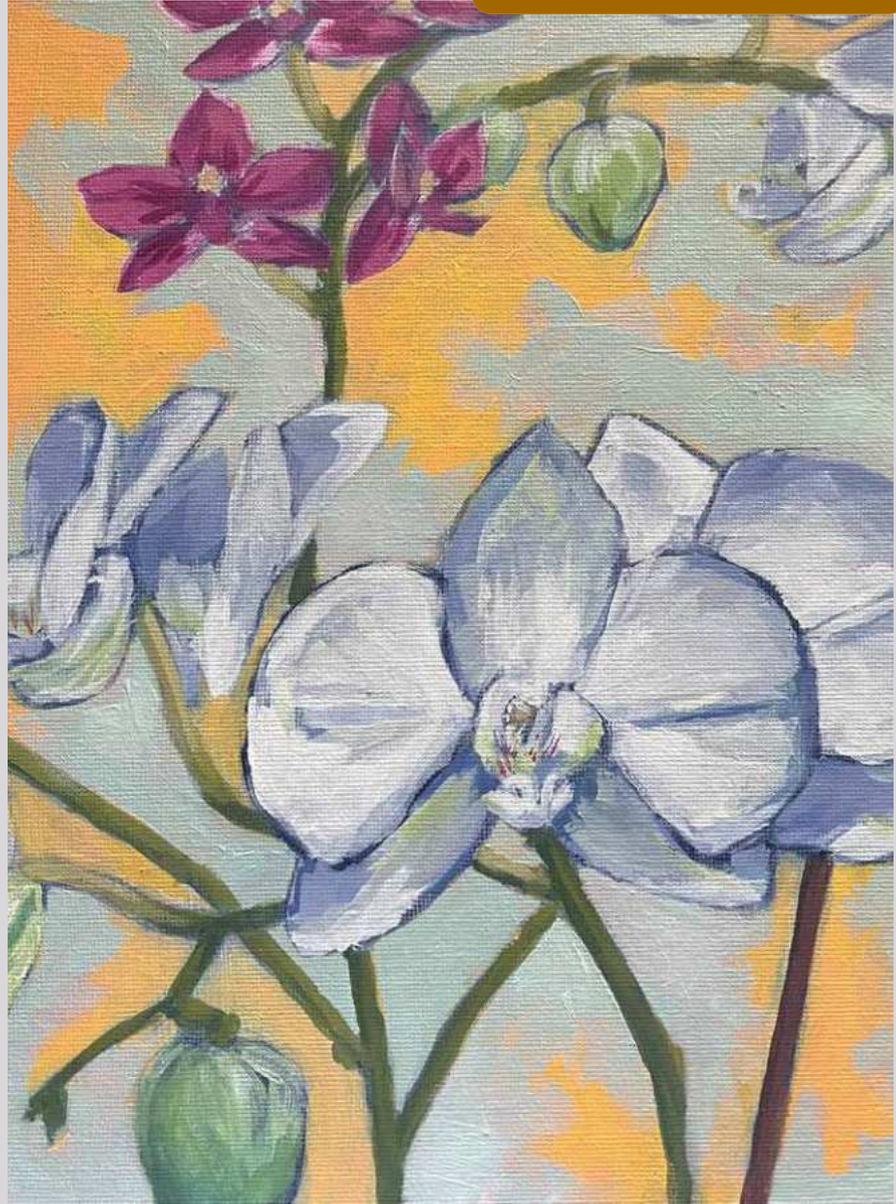
I learned to ignore my pain;  
Ignore my body's messages,  
To turn grimaces into smiles,  
To never complain.  
To hold such a little regard for my own body.  
That I become an afterthought.  
To tune myself out,  
So when doctors ask questions  
I guess.  
I'm so at of tune with myself  
And my grip is slipping on my health,  
I can't take it.

Healing is acknowledging my pain

And soothing it.  
To do what's good with my for my body,  
Without fear or shame  
To recognize how feeling  
And use my cane.  
That doesn't make me weak  
By choosing to use it, I choose myself  
And that makes me strong.

Healing is choosing myself.

**Orchids**  
Amani Jordan



# Peonies in Pink

Andreas Kalemis



# I Always Thought Rain Looked like Tears

Abdul Abuzaina

Rain begins to fall. The gray clouds they descend from, fill the sky. Morning is still trapped in the night. The drops of moisture land against a glass window. Landing flat, one after the other. Drops combine and run down the smooth surface like a streak of a shooting star. The alarm clock on the nightstand reads 6:22 am. The little dots in the middle blink with every second that passes. Blink. Blink. Blink. Blink. Where does rain come from? Ms. Norlander's third grade science class said that during the day, when the sun heats up the water on land, it transforms into water vapor. The gas then rises to the sky above where it begins to form into a cloud containing droplets of water. When the droplets get heavy enough, they start to fall right back to the surface. I always thought rain looked like tears. Ms. Norlander would say that rain was her favorite weather and that even though it made most people sad, it always made her happy because it always made her look forward to when the sun comes out and a rainbow stretches across the open sky.

But what if the rain lasts forever?

What if the sky never stops crying?

What if the sun disappears, never re-emerging again?

—

7:52 am. Dressed in a black hoodie and blue striped pajamas, Carson comes down the stairs to find his father, Emmet, in the kitchen.

"Mornin' son. How'd you sleep?"

"Alright." He replies faintly under his breath.

"I made some pancakes and there's also some whipped cream and orange juice in the fridge," says Emmet, trying to sound enticing but subtle in getting his son to eat.

"I'm just gonna have cereal." He reaches to the cabinet for a bowl.

"Alright. You heading out to class? I can give you a ride."

"No, that's alright. I'll head there later."

"Ok. Well, um, maybe I can bring some Thai for dinner tonight?"— as he wraps up the plate of freshly made pancakes and tosses them in the fridge— "actually I'm going over to Spence's house for dinner." Emmet shuts the fridge door. "Ah, ok well, that's good, you should have a home cooked meal. Spencer's mom makes a mean casserole." He comes around to the counter and rests his arms on the marble top, speaking in a low voice, he says: "Listen, I know things are... hard right now" —trying to choose his words carefully— "But things are going to be ok."

"Have you been to see your mom yet?"

Carson stops pouring the milk on his frosted flakes. He shakes his head no.

"Car, it's been a month, how about we go see her together?"

"Yeah, maybe." Carson grabs a spoon from a drawer and heads back upstairs with his bowl of cereal.

Emmett stands up straight and raises his voice to reach the stairwell, a slight desperation in his voice, "Well, how about this weekend?"

—

10:55 am "Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed! — tear up the planks! — here, here! — it is the beating of his hideous heart!" reads Professor Greene holding up the pages of the Tell Tale Heart while leaning casually against his desk.

"What do you think the narrator hears in the end here?" — he purses his lips together and squints his eyes slightly in an analytical expression— "does he actually hear the dead mans beating heart?" — he takes a momentary pause— "Or has he simply gone mad?"

The English 1A professor takes off his glasses and turns his head to the bored freshmen in his class and then to the clock. And seeing that the end of his period has arrived, makes his way behind his desk. "I look

forward to reading your analysis on the narrator. Please drop off your papers on my desk on your way out and enjoy your weekend!"

Carson grabs his bag and heads for the door. "Carson!" calls professor Greene, "May I have a word?"

"I noticed you didn't leave a paper on my desk as you were heading out."

"Yeah, I'm sorry professor, I haven't gotten to it yet."

The Professor nods his head, a raised lower lip. "And the last paper on the Robert Frost poem?"

Carson remains expressionless, looking past the professor.

"Well maybe you should work on reading them first," he says with a lowered head and raised eyebrows.

"Poetry isn't really my thing," clicking the edge of his lip.

"Carson, these papers are a big portion of your grade. It's important that you turn them in," he says in a warm tone.

"I know, I'm sorry. I will."

With an exhale, Professor Greene places his glasses back on "Well, just get them to me next week and we'll call it even, alright?"

"I'll get on that," he replies, dryly.

—

Noon. In-N-Out burger wrappers and empty take out bags with nothing but used napkins and empty fry trays in them, rest by Spence's feet. The gray clouds cover the sky but luckily it's not raining and the concrete is dry enough to skate on.

"What did Professor Greene talk to you about today?"

"Just my missing papers."

"Dude, you still haven't turned those in yet? We worked on them together."

"I know but I never finished mine."

"Why didn't you ask me to help you?"

"It's fine."

"You know I would've helped you."

"I know." Carson stands up and picks up his skateboard that he was sitting on with a flick of his ankle. He dashes through the skatepark. Spencer follows suit, riding over hills, ollieing, doing 50-50 backslides, and kickflips. Except Carson isn't landing as many tricks as he usually does. Sweaty and out of breath, Carson takes off his shirt in an attempt to keep his temperature down. He hates it when his clothes start feeling wet and his skin feels sticky. He attempts a frontside 180 and lands on his back. His frustration building up. He tries again, and catches himself with trailing steps. His arches begin to ache. He tries again, and he falls to the ground, slamming his wrists against the hard concrete. A drop of sweat falls to the floor making a small splash. Instantaneously, Carson gets up, grabs his board and slams it against the rail. The metal ringing out with each thunderous clap. The wood of the board, chipping. Finally, Carson throws the board down, jumps in the air- mustering all the momentum he can into a single stomp- and lands with both feet in the middle of the board, splitting it into two. Spencer sees this from across the park and rides out to his friend. "You good?" Carson grabs his shirt and lunges it on his shoulder, walking off, "I'm done skating."

—

1:11 pm Carson turns the shower knob off and steps out of the shower. He wipes the foggy mirror with his hand and stares at himself for a second. He couldn't remember the last time he looked in the mirror. He turns the door handle and walks to his room. He remembers to grab cotton swabs to clean his ears, recalling that there must be some in his parents bathroom. He slides open the third drawer on the bottom and grabs two swabs, one for each ear. He notices something behind the box. He opens the drawer farther outward, revealing a pink glass bottle. He

stares at it for a moment and picks it up slowly. Bringing it to his nose, he takes off the cap. It's his mother's perfume. It smells just like her. His body stiffens, remaining still. A moment later, he places the cap back on, returns the perfume to the drawer, and heads to his room to get dressed. He enters his room and closes the door behind him. He tosses the used earwabs in the bin by the nightstand and sits on his bed, with his towel still around his waist. He closes his eyes and starts massaging his neck, sore from not sleeping well last night. He stops, opens his eyes and brings his arm to his side. He stares outside the window at the clouds. "It's going to rain again" he thinks to himself. He bites his lip. He looks at his phone beside him. He picks up his flip phone and dials a number. He has the number saved but he types it out anyway. Button by button, slowly. After he's finished, he stares at the screen. "Dial."

The phone rings. He places it up to his ear. Ring. Ring. Ring. Ring. His body runs hollow and a pressure builds up behind his eyes. A mellow voice answers: "Hello, this is Kat. I'm sorry I missed your call, I most likely misplaced my phone and am now searching for it. Feel free to leave me a message and I'll get back to you as soon as I find it!"

"Hey mom. It's nice to hear your voice. I'm sorry I haven't come around much. I was actually thinking of coming to see you today. Maybe I'll bring those donuts that you love so much?" He lets out a light choked laugh.

"You know the ones from Stan's with the jelly fillings." He takes a pause.

"I miss you, mom. I'm sorry I haven't said that before. I know I should call more and I didn't and I'm sorry. But I wanted you to know that—the pressure behind his eye getting heavier—I love you." He closes his flip phone and changes back into his pajamas. Outside, rain begins to fall.

—

4:45 pm The phone rings. Hello? Car, dinners in an hour, my mom says that you better be here. I'll be there. Good... wait, why do you sound like

you're in bed. Because I am. Dude, it's like 5. You're not sick are you? Not physically at least. Well you better not bail cuz mom actually gets sad when you don't show up. I'll be there, I promise I just gotta do something first. Alright see you in a bit. Bye.

—

5 pm "two jelly filled donuts please"

"you got it, chief. Anything else?"

"No, that's it, thanks."

"Hey, be careful out there, the rains stopped for a while but those clouds mean a big storm is coming"

"I'll keep that in mind. Thanks again."

—

5:15 pm Carson is standing on the grass with a bag of jelly donuts in his hand. He looks up at the sky and it already looks like it's nighttime. He reaches into the bag and takes out a jelly donut and places the bag on the floor in front of him. "You were never the type of person that cared about having dessert before dinner anyway." In front of him are the words carved in stone:

Katherine Franklin Hoffman

1965-2004

"Beloved mother, wife, daughter. Forever cherished"

He runs his finger through the etching of the word "mother" and tears run down his face. The storm has started and it might be a while before the sun comes out again.

You made a linchpin of your humanity your fight against time

The thought is always some variation of

"Anyone can die at any time."

It's mostly a pointless, theoretical anxiety

That manifests in not much more than dozens of daily winces

But you struggle in one way; Press 9 To Save This Message

You can do it with anyone (and anyone can die)

Old friends, cousins you met once, bosses

Anyone you might miss, even just a shred

Anyone who has ever tried to call you at the wrong time

There would be so many, a hoard of possible memories

Thousand of them, that is

If it wasn't for your fallibility

Every thirty days you need to save it again

To prevent it dropping down a digital grate

But you don't

You meant to, and you do sometimes

But finals and family and

mental instability and dollar above minimum wage work

Means most anything can slip away

You've been thinking about meaning to make a note

to look into how to save them

onto a USB hard drive or the cloud or something

Thought about transcribing every syllable

But it would be surrender to give up the cadence and minutia of speech

That's part of the qualia that you would lose if they lost their breath

If - no, when someone dies you think you will

Learn

But as it is you're just too busy

Pressing 9, 9, 9, 9, 9

9 is

Your linchpin to humanity, or your fight against it?

# Elevators

Danny Anaya de Leon

Still,

The silence becomes my enemy.

Memories,

Flashbacks to the places I'll never be able to erase.

Never,

Leave my mind as I try to regain what your name meant to me.

Leave,

As I try to live.

No,

Good memories come to mind. Only films of terror.

Matter,

They say you do.

How Much I,

Try to remember the greenlight dying in the hurricane.

Try,

And try to forget the mistakes and choices I'll have to carry in my veins  
burned ashes.

To Forget,

Is to live a lie when said you "live in peace with it".

The Pain.

Will always be permanent, even in the history book you wrote about me  
in your mind.

Elevators taking journeys,

Elevators taking destinations,

Elevators, the last place I'll hold a memory of.

Elevators holding the last journey,

Elevator number 5 taking its last destination,

And in 12 seconds I'll take my last breath.

# The Summit of Joy

William Gauvin





**Twin Treasures**  
William Gauvin



*\*Trigger warning: physical and emotional abuse*

“GO! OUT! NOW! LEAVE!”

New Jersey. Newark. 1990. A shrill voice screeched out into a small neighborhood, not long before the sun began to set. The voice came from an Indian woman aggressively shoving and pushing her teenage daughter out of their small house and onto their front lawn.

“Maan! No! Please, I will fix this! I’ll get it taken care of!”

The daughter pleaded as she laid on the ground, defeated and visibly battered with tears in her eyes.

“There is NO fixing this! You are a randee! A veshya! A homoseksual! And I will not have this! IN MY HOUSE!”

The mother shrieked as she suddenly lunged a teapot at her daughters head. She missed, by only a couple inches. The hollow shattering of ceramic rung in the daughters ears even after the initial impact. She then looked up to her bedroom window to see her father carelessly throwing all of her clothes and belongings from the second floor of their house.

“Paapa! Stop! Stop it now!”

The girl cried as she ran to grab her things, avoiding the projectiles that rained down on her.

“Out! Out of our house!”

He demanded before dropping an old and very large suitcase down as well. This almost hit her too, but she narrowly dodged it just in time.

“You’re insane! You can’t just kick me out! Not like this!”

The daughter argued as she gathered her things off of the ground.

“We can! We will! We have!”

The mother shouted. At this moment, another teen girl just slightly down and across the road from them came out to throw away some garbage.

She was Romani, with dark skin and noticeably thin, black hair. She looked to the domestic scene and the screaming mother in shock.



You disgust me! You make me sick to my stomach! Mark my words, Sarala! I will not have a daadee as a betee! Your children will be lucky if they don't end up like you to make you a daadee!"

Her words were like hot stones against her daughters ears, searing and hard. The mother returned inside and slammed the front door shut behind her. More shouting and smashing of ceramic and china could be heard from within the house. Breathing shakily, the girl Sarala began packing herself up while sitting on the grass. She angrily threw her now dirty clothes and whatever items that weren't broken into the suitcase. The girl who witnessed all of this then came running across the street and onto the lawn.

"Sarala! What the hell happened?!"

"Go away! I don't need you here too!"

She snapped as she zipped up the suitcase. The girl kneeled besides her.

"Tell me what happened! I won't leave until you tell me!"

"Your boyfriend did this to me, Meera! It's all your guys's fault!"

"What? What are you saying?"

"I'm saying I'm pregnant!"

"You- What?!"

"I'm pregnant! I just got kicked out cause my parents found out about what we did that got me pregnant!"

She reiterated while crying. Her friend, Meera, frowned and reached to wipe her tears away. Sarala pushed her hands off of her.

"Don't bother! Unless you've gotta bus ticket for me, just go!"

"Bus ticket? You can't just leave town!"

"I can and I will! What else would you have me do?!"

"Come stay with me and my family! We'll house and feed you, give you everything you need!"



"When your house is in earshot of my parents? Absolutely not! That's hardly any better than just staying with them!"

Sarala then stood up with her suitcase and began marching off down the sidewalk. Meera stumbled for a moment before going after her.

"Sarala! Sarala, wait!"

She continued on as if not hearing Meera at all. Frustrated and scared, Meera ran back to her house.

Sarala walked, and walked, and walked, until eventually, her feet just couldn't take it anymore. She found a random store front in the city and sat by the door of it, hugging her knees while watching people and cars pass her underneath the night sky for what felt like hours. Slowly but surely, everything began hitting her; she no longer had a home. She no longer had a family. She was all by herself. She was homeless. Pregnant. Alone. And only fifteen years old.

"Sarala?"

A gentle voice asked. She jumped and turned her head up to see Meera standing with a large, paper grocery bag and tear stains on her cheeks.

"How did you find me?"

"I looked everywhere for you, I-I told my family-"

"I'm not staying with your family! I already told you!"

"I know! I know, just...they wanna give you some things,"

Meera meekly said as she handed Sarala the bag. Inside were some spare clothes and jackets, shoes, socks, underwear, and a bulky looking envelope. She picked up the envelope and looked at it front and back.

"What's this?"

"Money."

"Meera, no-"



"Meera yes! I won't force you to stay with us, but I'll shove that envelope up your ass if it'll make you keep it!"

Sarala couldn't help but give a small chuckle at this.

"I don't know which of us is more stubborn."

"It's definitely you. You're stubborn as a mule,"

Meera sighed as she sat besides her.

"Clearly not as stubborn as my parents."

"...Are you okay?"

"Don't give me that, I'm fine."

"I'll give you what I want! Are you okay?"

"I'm fine! I'm fine. I'm going to be fine. I was just figuring out my game plan when you walked over to bug me,"

Sarala bit back. Meera's lip began quivering.

"Please...just take my help! Let me help you!"

"I don't need your help! I've got this!"

"...Why do you insist on doing everything alone?"

"...I don't know. But this...I've gotta to do on my own, I've just got to."

Meera sighed shakily and wiped her eyes.

"I'll miss you."

"...I know. Me too."

They then went into hug one another. Sarala only used one arm, whereas Meera squeezed her in a tight embrace using both arms. After a couple moments, she pulled away to kiss Sarala lovingly. Reluctantly, she kissed back. A few more moments passed, and they pulled away.

"...I'm gonna miss your lips,"

She said while holding Meera's hand.

"Sarala...don't do this by yourself!...we can work things out together, somehow, I swear it!"



“No...I’ve made up my mind,”

She solemnly shook her head. Meera frowned and squeezed her hand.

“...will I see you again?”

“...I’m sure you will. It’s a small world, isn’t it?”

She said with a tiny smile, hoping to make Meera smile. It didn’t work.

“...Goodbye.”

They shared one last, tender kiss, before Meera stood up and began walking away. She walked slowly, hands folded in front of her as tears streamed down her face. Sarala watched her leave. Though she stood firm in her decision to be alone, she still got the biting feeling she was making a mistake. Letting out a long sigh, she looked to the envelope again and opened it up. The money inside was well used, and there was lots of it. She looked up to the store she sat in front of, seeing it was a convenience store. Standing up, she walked inside with her suitcase and began looking around. All she paid for was a simple hot dog, but concealed in her suitcase was a bottle of beer she swiped from the cooler. Sarala made it out of the store with no trouble and went into an alleyway to eat her hot dog. Once finished, she crumpled up the wrapper and stuffed it into the suitcase, before pulling out the cold beer. Having used her teeth to pop the cap off, she stared at her reflection in the condensation covered brown glass. She imagined guzzling the whole thing down in one go. Just like that, there’d be no more baby, leaving her with significantly less problems to deal with. Nervously, she brought the neck of the bottle up to her lips. She tilted her head back. Just barely, she could taste the beer edging on her tongue. As close as she was, she just couldn’t do it. Her head reflexively lurched forward, and she spit the taste of beer out onto the pavement.

“Argh!”



In an exclamation of fury, she threw the bottle against the brick wall in front of her, watching it splatter and fizz everywhere. On top of everything else, she now realized she was stuck. She had no idea where or how to get an abortion, and she didn't have the heart to end things herself. Panting, Sarala looked down and gripped her stomach.

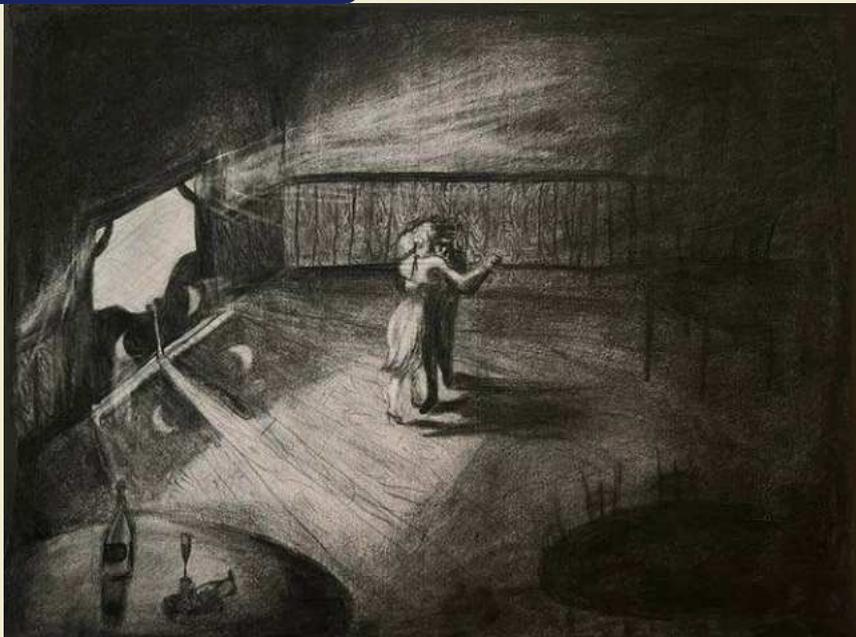
"Dammit...dammit, dammit, dammit! You stupid baby...I am gonna love you...! I don't care how bratty or spoiled or awful or rotten you come out! I am gonna love you!"

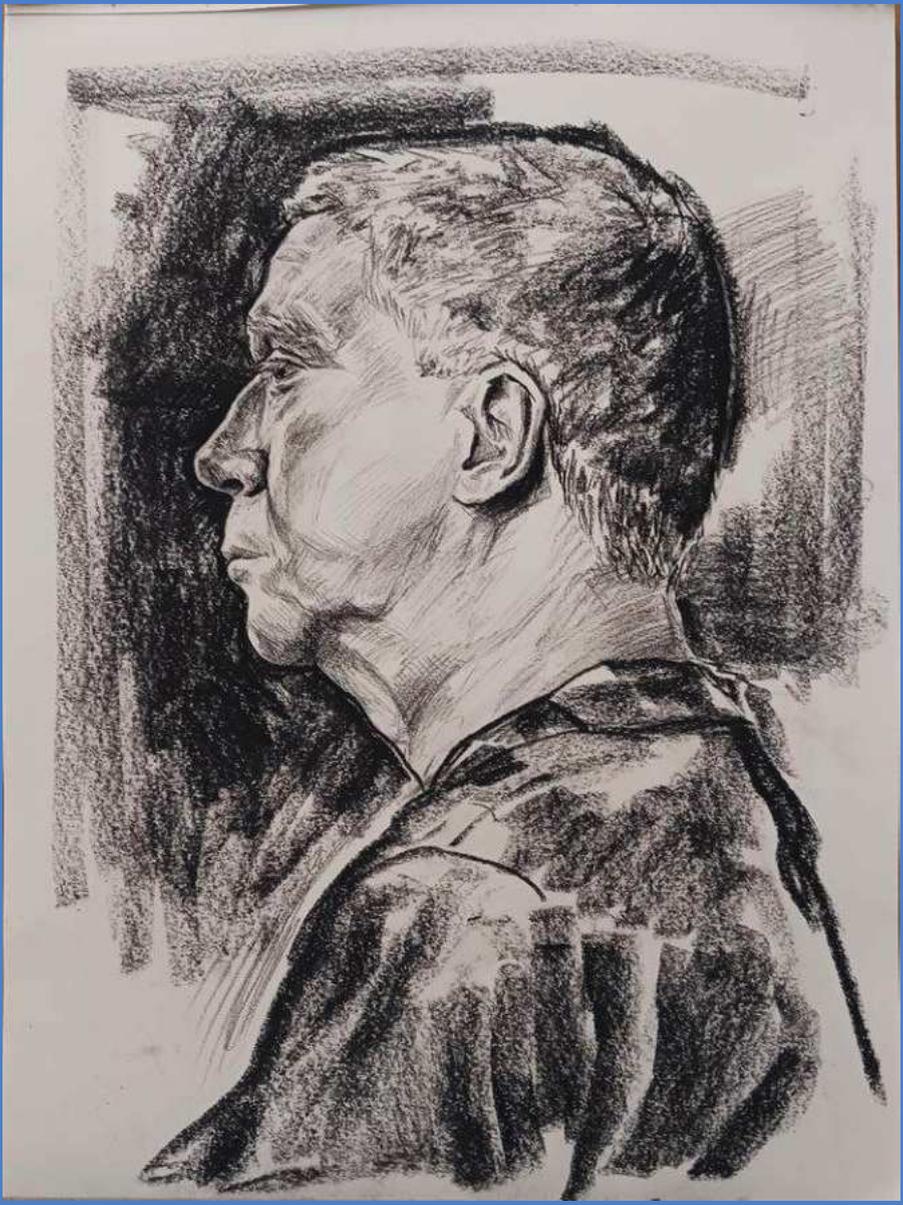
Her pledge echoed in the alleyway. She began crying again as she fell to her knees, wrapping her arms around herself.

"...I'm gonna love you every bit as much as my parents hate me."

## **Takes One To Know One**

Megan Jones





**Wayne 2**  
Angelina Smith

IT IS TIME

GOODBYE  
my  
FRIEND



YOU WERE  
SO BEAUTIFUL

WELL, STILL ARE



JUST LIKE ME...

MAY WE BOTH FIND PEACE

**A Moment of  
Reflection**  
Ruby Petty



**Untitled 5**  
Charity Spicer



Untitled 5  
Adela Maroon

# Triple Karat

Justin Nguyen



# When Notes Became Words

Amber Holloway

I remember the days

When I worried my hands

Would become permanently ink-stained

Multicolored blemishes

Made throughout the day

with Thoughts shared

and completed works

Lines written then Smeared

Like boxes stamped and tucked away

Only for works to now be rendered online

Completed through impermanent means

Leaving no lasting Marks

Empty spots

where the Ink

Once stained my hands

**My Dearest  
Friend**  
Marielle Liberkowski



all the love  
poured into you  
dwindled to a handful ashes  
someday i'll find a way  
to turn them to clay  
and mold you back to life  
the stars in your sweet eyes  
found their way back up to the sky

i felt in you  
the intensity of faith  
transferred from god  
i was written unto you  
as you were me

i search for you in all things  
through the windows of strangers  
and under rocks  
i only find your absence  
no more footprints to discover

it will always be a hot october night  
on my knees with copper on my tongue  
the seasons change unrecognizably  
i will always be here  
sweat and sweetness filling my nostrils

and i find myself  
trying to answer the same questions  
saturated soggy unreadable  
from the heat  
unrendered words dragging themselves  
along the page  
everything i make remains unfinished

# The Seafarer (or a Rubber Duck)

Amber Holloway

I sat upon the ship that night  
With my brethren all in tow  
When a wave—too large—  
tossed us back to our familiar home  
The water cool and welcoming  
though surprisingly deep  
Has it really been so long  
since we last set off to sea?

When we first set sail  
And turned our backs to the land  
We relied on the map makers  
once steady hand  
But now what use are his papers  
When it's adventure that we seek  
The plan all tossed asunder  
And left to our ways  
We start to plot our own chart  
going about our days

The crew all thrown to chaos  
But, I am still at peace  
For I have not been taken  
But decided to take my leave

# Untitled 6

Charity Spicer



## And So They Danced

Nineteenth

In between the moment that the branch broke off the old oak tree and the

moment that it hit the pregnant vixen, they danced. One taller than the other so as to distinguish who was who but never did one lead for four steps. Under their feet did the forest grass grow and gray, did the brush burn and bloom, did the fungus flourish and fester. These two beings who loved all they touched and all that ever were and were to be. Only in these moments could they dance and love each other as they had untold ages ago. But they each knew that this moment would end like all the rest but so too did they know that they would be able to meet again in the future and feel the others love yet again. And so they danced. Here was the only time that they could, here was the only time that Life and Death could hug and hold their counterpart. For no matter how long they slowed time, they could only slow it. Eventually the bough crushed the expecting mother's skull, a swift death was the only gift Death could give her for the moment she gave them. Eventually the kits in her womb would crawl their way out into the forest to look for a mother that would not be there for them. There Life gave the six of them a blessing to safeguard and harbor them against the rest of the creatures in the forest. And still the two danced. These rare and frequent moments where both life and death happen within an instant of the other. The six will grow into amazing foxes evading the hunters and eating their fill of the poachers' meals. However Life and Death did not care for the future; in this moment they only cared for the dance. And so they danced. Wielding primal powers the two weaved a new story for this small patch of land. They danced to the music of the world that any can hear so long as they immerse themselves deep enough to forget who they were, are, and will be. And so they danced. The music is enchanting but for these two the moment was ending.

The dance can never be eternal and so they broke off to dance again, be it due to a mothers death in childbirth or because a forest burnt down allowing for the seed pods to open. Regardless, the dance ended and the two lovers had to wait for another moment where they could dance.



**Shark Diving**  
Tyler Sawhead

## Grace

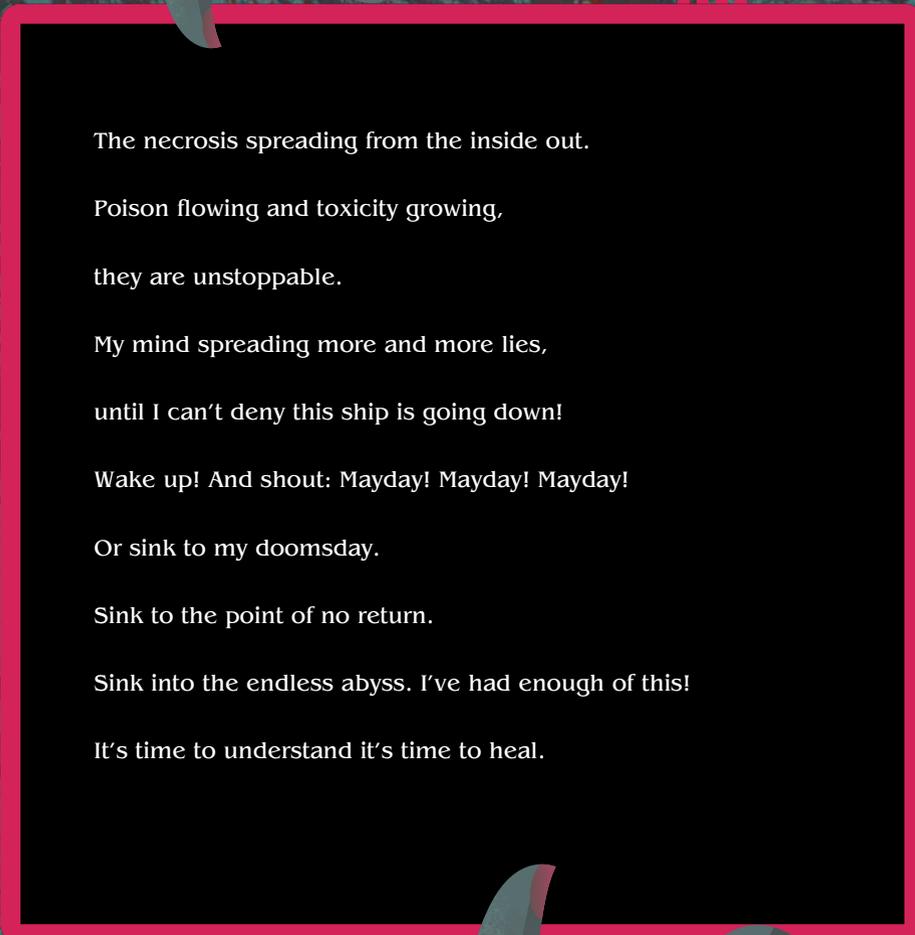
Dylan Dann

Despite how things ended though, I wouldn't change a thing about it.  
And if I could go back in time,  
I would do it all over again, except with a little more grace.

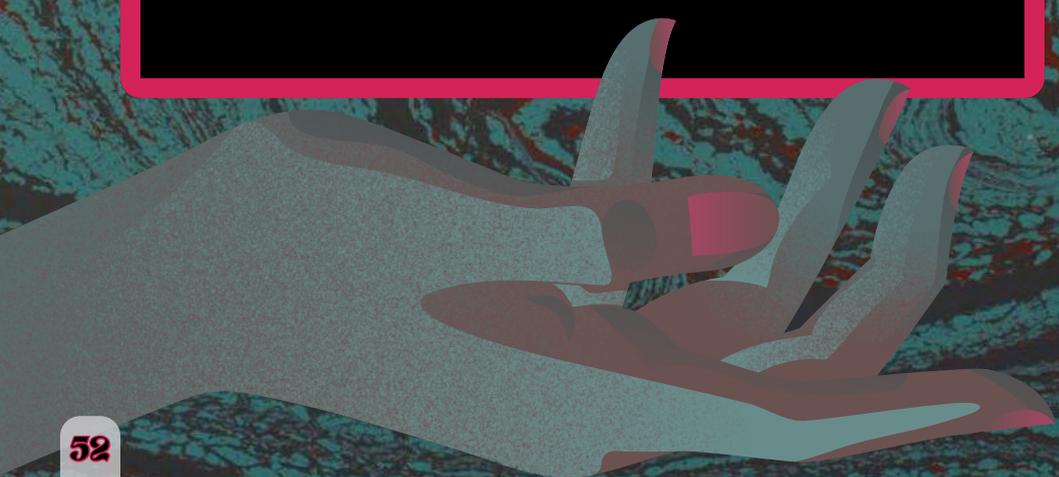
## Cups

Evan Summers





The necrosis spreading from the inside out.  
Poison flowing and toxicity growing,  
they are unstoppable.  
My mind spreading more and more lies,  
until I can't deny this ship is going down!  
Wake up! And shout: Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!  
Or sink to my doomsday.  
Sink to the point of no return.  
Sink into the endless abyss. I've had enough of this!  
It's time to understand it's time to heal.





You are not a monster or a beast your are not something to fear.

You have been hurt you are pain.

Now we walk this journey of understanding,  
You and me hand in hand.

This journey is one that will never end it will last our lifetime.

This road will have twists and turns, hills and mountains,

The road will be at times washed out or gravelly and hard to find,

It will be through light and darkness

Nevertheless this journey of understanding and healing will  
withstand.



## Nothing's New

Danny Anaya de Leon

Everyone's growing up,  
Everyone's living their lives,  
Everyone's finding their people,  
I'm stuck wondering when will that ever be me?

The more questions I ask the more confused I am left to endlessly wonder.  
Every decision I make just leaves me with more questions of who I will become.  
Every time I put myself out there, I'm placed even farther back.  
And every time I live in the light the smallest memory of the past places a thunderstorm in my mind.

Everyone's clock is ticking,  
Mine just seemed to run out of time.  
Everyone's moving in fast motion,  
While I'm stuck in time.  
With no Father Time to ask for help.  
With no one but my memories to hold on to.

It's been 2 years, almost 3 years and I'm still 17 at 20.  
I don't grow and become wiser, only retake the mistakes I can't learn from.  
I move on from the trauma but it'll never want to move on from me.

No new loved ones.  
No new wisdom.  
No new styles.  
No new stories.  
No new favorite memories.  
Only the worst of me.

So if you ever think you missed your chance at being friends with the old me,

I guess you still have a chance to meet him.

Nothing's older than time.

Nothing's more wasted than the last few years.

Nothing's sadder than the one I spent wondering what the rest of it will look like.

Nothing's new.

## An Old Movie Sky

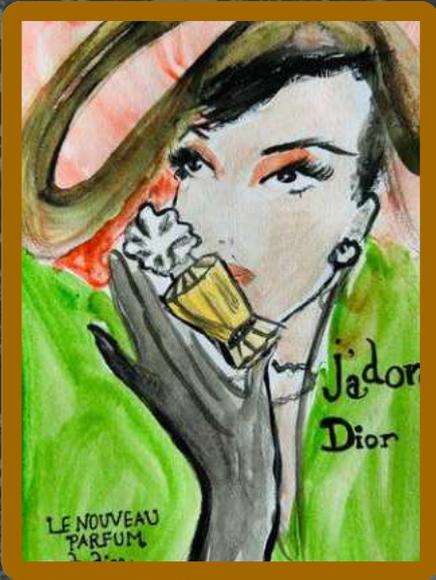
Danny Anaya de Leon



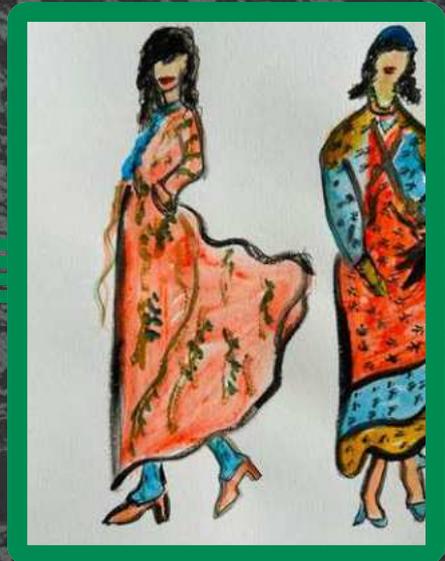


**Time Heals All Wounds**  
Ruby Petty

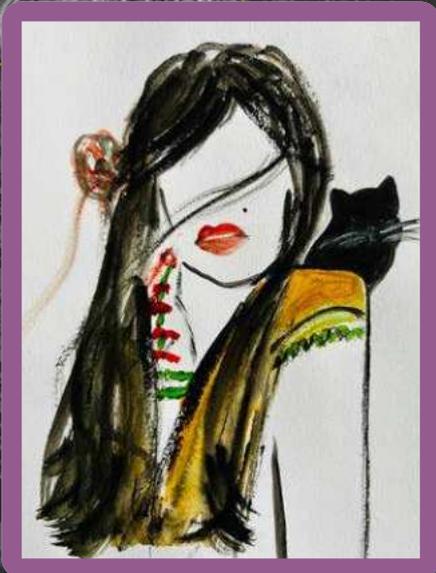




**Untitled 8**  
Anu B



**Untitled 9**  
Anu B



**Untitled 7**  
Anu B



**THE FOOL**

**The Repent of  
the Fool**  
Ruby Petty

# A Hunger of Beeches and Wolves

Gwyndolyn Szoboszlaj



Mist. Lonesome and bitter. The peculiar tides spiraled through the reddened pines. Whistling a keening tune as it followed the babbling brook and jackdaw's cry. I breathed in deeply, feeling it bite against my lungs and rustle my hair. I didn't really need to breathe anymore. It had been years since it actually did anything . . . but something in the act of pretending it would, pretending I could, helped steady my nerves.

I sat on a mossy outcropping of cobblestone and rotten wood. The carcass of a chapel that had once overlooked the woodland vale, back in those days before the rails and fog. Where rows of granite names sprawled on either side, now cracked by wildflowers and rain. Forgotten epitaphs, *not unlike me*, I supposed; As I fiddled with the thumb sized bottle tied round my nape. As often on such nights, I lay under the pale moon, away from the noise and folk of the town. The gentle silence my only company as I sat. Watching. Watching the mist of early morning spread through the valley and over the rail line, as an engine whistled like a loon in the distance. And waiting. Waiting for dawn to come, and for *her* to return.

The coyotes called over the ridge, and a moment later replied a low wail. A familiar lilting tune. Too musical for a beast. Too guttural for a melody. My neck pricked as the howling neared. Snapping branches and crashing ferns, followed by low and panting rasps. My nose twitched as I caught a faint scent. A taste of sweet iron, fur, and . . . *rosemary?*

I was nearly knocked over, as her chest crashed into me with all the grace of a freight train. "*Guess who.*" Long arms, blistering warm against my skin, wrapped around my bare shoulders. Painful for only a moment, my flesh ate at her warmth. Like a leech to her olive skin. Without looking, I could smell the smile on her lips, red and sweet.

My still heart fluttered, and my stomach growled.

*My tastes really have grown strange, haven't they?* I mused for a moment, as I looked up into a pair of eyes. Green and sharp. Like a yearning wolf. Hungry. And only half fed.

"But who else," I crooned, as my hands cupped Roe's freckled cheeks. Round and wide, they were cut only by her wolfish grin. "My dearest Rosemary. Catch any rabbits?" My back turned to the pale lavender haze, as it crept over the eastern hills.

"Fuck," She growled as I felt her clawed hands at my back and cotton skirt. "Martyrs' damned summer." Her claws snagged the faded fabric, yet no blood was drawn. As with a lurch of my atrophied stomach, I was hoisted upwards. I won't deny it. I blushed. Blushed like the blubbering teen I hadn't been for decades.

Or well, I guess, would always be.

"Roe!" Her intensity, in the moment, caused a giggle to escape my lips. "You don't have to carry me. I am fully capable of running on my own." I held tightly to her chest, apprehensive of my own touch. Roe crashed between the ferns, as small critters scattered underfoot. She leapt over fallen logs and twisting roots, loose clothes fluttering, as she cut a path through the fog. Towards a rising sound.

"Faster this way," I lurched forward and her grip tightened. "Plus you'd just sink." Over the grassy ledge ran a current of dark water. Bottomless in the pale. Corbhon Creek, a cute name for such a river. Her eddies bit at the clay and rocky bank. Inviting in the coming heat, she was a siren of gnashing teeth.

"There's a bridge a mi—" I yelped as frigid water splashed against my skin. Roe seemed unbothered by the thrashing meltwater, *if anything* she seemed damn near exhilarated. Half swimming, her feet clawed against the cragged stones. Her ruddy fur and tunic sodden as

she shielded me from the cresting sun. While my heels only skimmed the dark surface, the water seemed determined to pull me down, grasping at my hem. Leaving my muscles clenched and grip unsteady as the fabric clung to my skin.

Trudging onto the far bank, Roe's soft chest began to tense. "Your face!" She made an odd barking sound, low and rapid, as she placed me below a shady oak. "You looked so damn scared!"

"Don't laugh like that!"

"Agnes," She shook her fur, neck and shoulders twisting, as her face became more . . . human. "It's not like you can drown." Dark hazel eyes, sharp teeth, and a main of auburn hair. Completing the transformation with a coat of dull blue and a pair of luggage cases she had stashed under a rosemary bush.

"I also can't swim." I hissed, struggling to keep my creeping smile hidden. "But more importantly . . . you smell . . ."

Pain. Squirming heat. It crept through my veins and twisted up my throat. Black and lightless, my pupils dilated. Roe stepped back. Until a barrier, thin and golden, separated us. She looked at home under the morning sun. Hair like fire, and eyes like a deep forest.

*I don't.* My lips peeled back.

My arm flashed with pain. I shrieked as my fingers sputtered and smoked; driftwood skin cracked and peeled like aging parchment. My hand clasped around metallic bones and blackened flesh, oozing. Roe's face seemed tinged with concern, as she entered the hardening shade. Her eyes followed mine to the station's old bell tower peeking over the dappled woods. A train whistled near.

"Hungry?"

"Always." I half heartedly laughed, as my stomach, once more, growled.



**Oranges**  
Andreas Kalemis

**Sea of Sand**  
William Gauvin



## The Weight of Another

Leticia Garcia

I find myself alone  
As I so often do  
Haunted by thoughts and past  
memories  
They scream for attention  
Never yielding  
Living in semi-color  
Like a sore thumb  
In my mind.

They belong to someone else  
And yet I carry them  
As if I had birthed them  
As if I had breathed the very life  
That keeps them alive  
So willingly ready to haunt my mind  
Who had I mistaken them for?

Fields scattered across my  
consciousness  
Within them I search for days at a time  
And yet the answer remains a mystery  
And my thoughts breed  
In honorary misery.



They belong to someone else  
And I am here  
Hollowed and swollen  
Amongst the tears I have drowned in  
Time and time again.



**God's Latest  
Prophet**  
Riley Ramsey



is possibly the kindest person on Earth  
and cries when plants get stepped on  
and tells everyone about radical kindness  
and will never be believed

She is 12, and brash, and has never prayed  
and makes too much eye contact, and her favorite place  
in the whole world  
is 7/11

She sneaks out to walk in anesthetized suburbs  
She sees angels in the pupils of Ring doorbells  
hears cherub harmonize in the tangle of overhead lines  
smells apocalypse on the smoke from burnt casseroles left on porches  
and celestial ether in the wet cement

She is too kind against a world like this  
One of the two is doomed, but

Do Not Be Afraid.

Interventions are never easy; especially the divine kind

When asked her parents say  
they aren't worried

"it's just a phase."

# Roses in Pink, Yellow, or White

Amber Holloway

Like the roses that sit on the table  
Finally in a glass

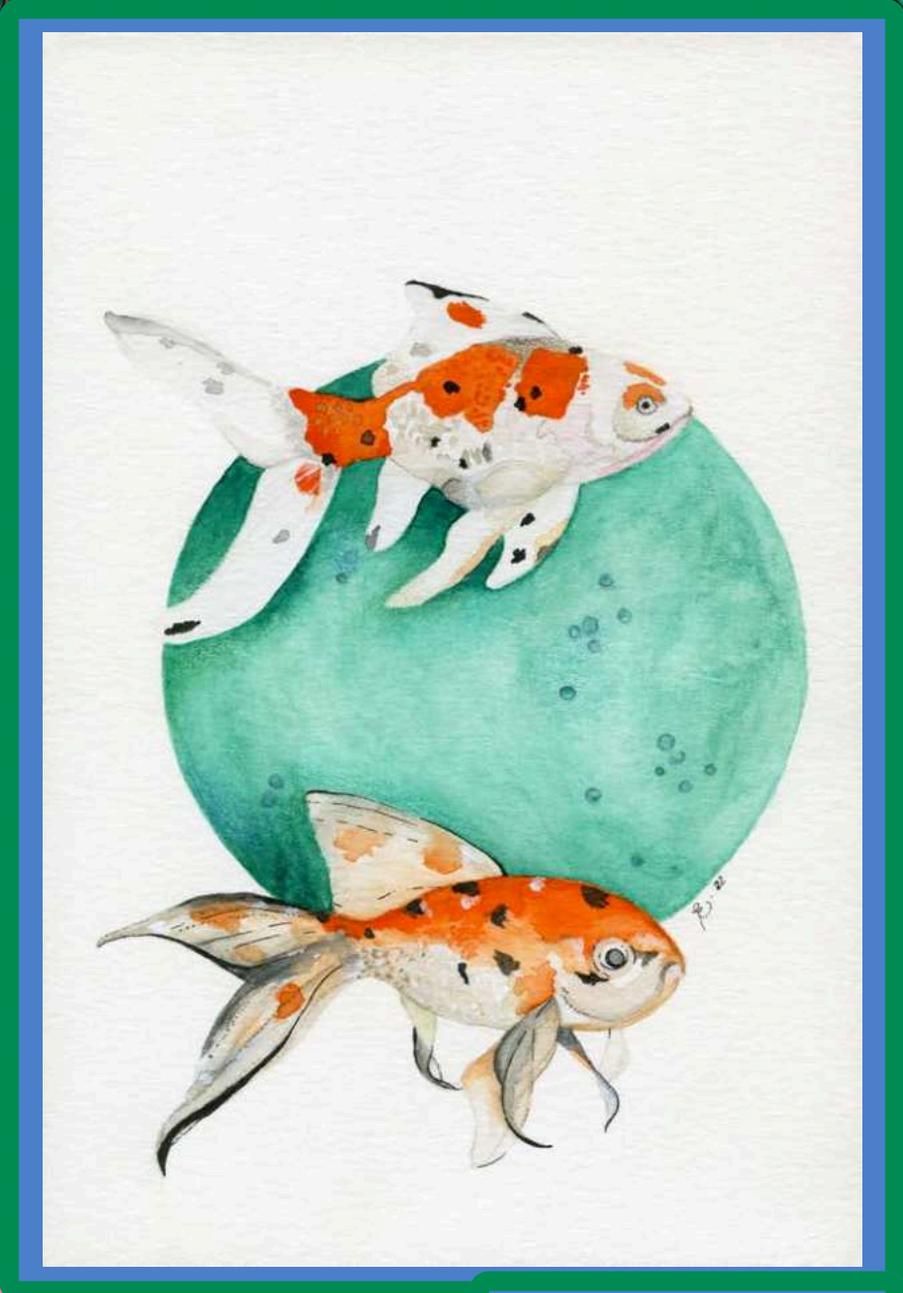
After laying in their bouquet  
Their leaves and petals worn  
Slowly gaining their energy back

To once again become their  
Beautiful bloom

Though some petals were lost  
In their travels  
Others browned and wilted

That does not  
Damage their overall complexion  
Or the flower's glorious hue





**Two Fishes**  
Ellen Lopes



# Who Am I?

Leaney Nunes

Some days I am unsure  
If individuality  
Even exists.

I do not feel as if  
This mind is my own  
But rather,

A compilation  
Of all the minds before me  
And the minds before those minds  
And the minds that I surround myself with  
And the minds that I coexist  
with.

I wonder what traits  
Are mine to claim  
And which ones  
Belong to others.

So how am I supposed to feel  
As if  
I am  
My own  
entity

If I am merely a collection  
Of a billion different pieces  
Of a billion different people  
Of a billion different stars



# Nightlight

Mahima Seshan

Glow-in-the-dark stars  
never seemed so far  
away from where we are,  
hope trapped in a jar.

Like fireflies blinking  
from the bedroom ceiling,  
flashing, flickering,  
made of contained lightning.

Pasted up with glue  
like a trail along the roof.  
We venture into darkness blue—  
is it bright here too?

There's no glow alive but for  
one lonely moon awake.  
The only light to find  
is the light that we create.



## Life Packs a Punch

Andreas Kalemis

## My Heart

Anonymous

Able to be seen,  
Unable to be felt

Not severely harmed,  
Not fully healed

Just scarred;

The thought that I'll never be hurt by anyone as much as you  
protects it from any more pain

The thought that I'll never love anyone as much as you  
guards it from any more attachment

I feel so free, yet at the same time, so trapped

I'm afraid I'll forget about you if I leave you behind

At the same time, it's hard to keep carrying this weight with me

I don't know, but in the meantime, I'll still sit here with you, until I find a  
way out;

# Shelter From the Storm

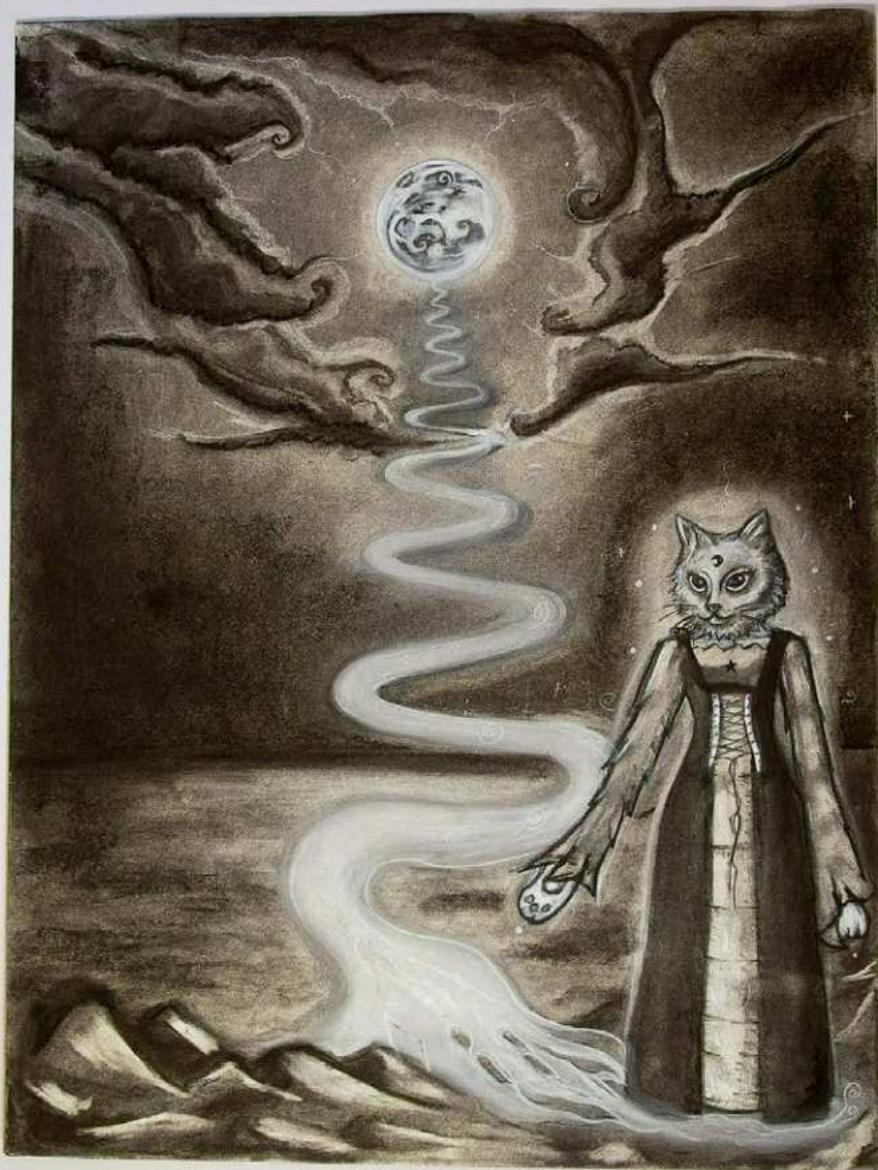
Megan Jones



# Little Man

William Gauvin





**An Invitation**  
Lív Catalano

# Winter in Uncanny Valley

Michael de Guzman

I found my old wallet today,  
and with it a picture of you.  
It's a small polaroid style photo;  
you stare into my eyes and grin  
and for a brief instant, it burns  
to hear your name in my head again,  
to hear your voice saying mine  
but

is this really what you looked like?  
Who took this picture?  
Was it me?  
When did it snow in California?

I strike a match to try and melt it,  
but there's barely a spark,  
so I strike another  
and another  
until I realize there aren't any match heads.

So as I rub my frostbitten hands together,  
it's back to staring into your eyes, then  
at your hair, then  
at the mole on your left cheek,  
hoping to feel something, anything,  
but all I feel is cold.

**Blue Jay**  
Ellen Lopes



## Glass & Steel

Gwyndolyn Szoboszlay

Pale yellow, the fluorescent bulbs

hum, illuminating the tram. A cloud scattered Tuesday afternoon, too early to clock off work and too late for lunch, leaving many of the vinyl seats empty. An older woman sits at the far side, a young man corralls his children, and a slouching teen nods along to their headphones. Glistening towers of glass, blue and gold, gleam as the train speeds past. An endless horizon of art and progress piercing the sky. The city of Muse. A splendor cut short as the train enters the tunnel. A day, like any other, in a sprawling metropolis of glass.

A window explodes. Someone screams.

A gray figure flies across the car like a rag doll. Bench warps and vinyl splits, as she slumps. Struggling to breathe as black blood trickles down her temple and mask. The occupants scatter, her cold eyes catching a smartphone flash, before they too flee. She sputters in relief.

Her comm flickers. "Pidge, do you copy," Diaphragm straining, gray bruises pool under her blood and paint splattered jacket. "Do you have the data packet?" A thousand thoughts swim through her head: blood tests, finals, her cats, the stars, last night, and infuriatingly, Sol. *Why did they have to be on the security detail? Fuck.*

As heists go, it wasn't great.

Luna's respirator unclasps. Her voice, no longer filtered, as she gasps. "Max . . ." Red blood dries below her eyes, as the dark gash on her forehead knits. Contrast to the titanium stars piercing her ears.

"Shit. Pi— Luna" The tone of her mentor shifts. "Don't. Stop. Breathing. It'll mend. I'll meet you at the drop point." Maxine's teeth grind as the comms cut. The train pivots upwards, as a quiet alarm begins to wail. Luna hulls herself onto the seat. "The drive . . . it's in my pocket." *I should've just stayed at the party.* She ties back her dusk colored hair, and her breathing eases.

*Flash.* Daylight

The train rises above the flashing screens of downtown. An unflattering grayscale of two supervillains, Pidge and Angler, faceless and gaunt; alongside some advertisement bearing an obnoxiously posed superhero, *Cricket*. She looks past, over the skyline, lingering on the overgrown edge.

*Clang.* Her head snaps up. *They're here.* Luna snaps on her mask, with a click, and smiles.

A flash of shimmering cloth. Deep tawny skin and bleached braids. A face, even half hidden by a visor, infuriatingly handsome, and pretty—though she knows they flinch at the latter. *"Murder?"* Sol growls, as the masked hero punctures the aluminum ceiling, magnetic charge keening through the train. *"Can't run this time. Pidge."* Luna's reflection ripples. *Here we go again.*

*"Reckless as ever,"* She chuckles in a synthesized voice. *"Lucky Cricket."* Luna enters a defensive stance which Sol meets in kind.

Cricket strikes first.

Sol's leg swings at Luna's side. Her forearm blocks. A low kick sweeps their leg. A bolt slashes her thigh. Warm blood seeps the fabric. Luna's hand plunges her reflection. Another shard lodges into her shoulder with a sickening squelch. As her fingers grasp a handle, and pull.

Flashes of fire. Carbon fiber bullets streak towards Sol, as they bound across the train. *"Reckless?"* Sol pushes off the door, twisting back. *"I'm not the one firing a gun."* The train groans. Bullets pierce their side, staining their silver and marigold uniform black. Sol spins off course, as Luna stows the empty pistol, and strikes. Fist on jaw on fist. Splitting knuckles and mingling blood. Nanites burn under her skin, as her chest and temple roars. *Reckless. Clever, De—*

Sol's knee connects with her groin. She goes pale.

*FUCK. Asshole! Definitely. A. Fucking. Asshole.* She almost doubles over. Sol freezes, eyebrows raised. Raising her head, she spots a building thirty meters out.

"Cheap shot." Luna groans, teetering backwards. "Sol." Mouth opening as they reach for her. Through the glass door, and through her reflection, she falls.

"Pidge!"

\* \* \*

She holds her breath, as countless effervescent polygons fall past. As though tumbling through the rivers of Old Terra, the bitter cold presses on her skin. Screaming, that her very matter, is unwelcome in the silence. With a twist she is pushed out of the unwater, and into the light. Luna slips over the edge. In reflex her hand clings to the window pane. Like a startled lizard, frozen in place, as the wind rustles her dark hair. Left arm dangling and vision swimming. She glances away from the bustling market. Crowds unaware of the criminal hanging ten stories up. Meandering through fragrant stalls and shops, enthralled. Creeping the ledge. She crouches behind an aircon, as a camera drone passes. *Move faster.* Staring at the half remodeled building ahead, she steps back. *Deep breath.* Winter air bites her lungs as she sprints, and jumps. Gray doves scatter. She clatters against the scaffolding. Shoulder and thigh screaming, and arm still half limp, as she crawls into the room. Her ear twitches.

Feet thud behind. Crashing down the hall, she vaults over the sill, and phases through. Sharp eyes glittering as she looks over the rail. The amber sun sinking over the emerald skyline, as the neon veins of the outer city come alive. Landing on a root-cracked dome, as it blinks at the Milky Way.

*Shatter.*

"One. How do you know my name?," A voice calls from behind, a half tone softer than expected. "And two. *Who are you?*"

\* \* \*

Darting allies. Metal and skin gleaming in the sodden dark. Thorns claw as raindrops fall, biting at scaring seams. *Keep. Running.* She slides, rebounding off a wall, and swings onto the fire escape. The latter rattles as Sol flings upwards. Shouts and clattering follow the pair as they pass, casting their bruised expressions in flickering glow.

She grabs a knife.

"Sol, we dont all get to be fucking heros." The nanites sear her skin.

"Sometimes people die. And it's either people you care about, or people you don't." Hauling onto the roof, the events of the morning claw at her. Prying with tearing skin and arteries of red. The guard's eyes, wide and frantic, as he clutched his tattered throat.

The blade in her hand, a chunk of lead. *Breathe.*

"Who are you to decide!"

"I don't know," Pidge's mask finally cracks, as she tosses it to the side.

"Sol . . . and I'm just done." Luna can see the bewilderment in their eyes as their visor unclasps. Everything settles into place. For a minute, the only sound is pattering rain and rustling leaves.

"Give me the drive," Sol whispers. "I won't tell anyone, just go." They gesture to the winding streets, left dilapidated since Old Terra's fall. Cluttered apartments and sinking factories reclaimed by the neon lights and grasping vines. Home.

"No." Her fingers tighten. Lavender nails tip in black as they score her palm.

"Luna," Honest and warm. Sol. They make her think of summertime, sweet and bitter against her own sour taste. "I'm—" Luna's lips press against Sol's. Strawberry chapstick and coppery tang. Fingers wrapping

around silver braids and sun kissed skin. Burning where they meet. For a moment they aren't nemeses. They're just Luna and Sol. At a college party. Peach sundress and zodiac charms. Yellow jacket and patchwork jeans. Stargazing. Talking about pets, and space myths, and winter break plans. Simple and wonderful and—

*Only a memory.*

*Thud.*

"Too earnest for your own good," Luna mumbles, as the knife's butt strikes Sol's temple. ". . . And a little dense." She lays them below an awning, hands shaking. She drapes her jacket over their shoulders, and stands up with an aching groan, as an alert pings on her comm.

[EYE 18:00] - ANGLER (MAX)

She faces the collapsed observatory, dim light against moss covered steel. Watching a distant yellow star through the shifting gray. From her puddle bound reflection, Luna draws a thin rectangle. The data drive. *All this . . . And I still don't know what's on this thing.*

"Filk my life." She sighs, as she steps into the rain.



## Something to be Said

Riley Ramsey

There's something to be said about how grief scabs over  
The Ugliness contained, clotted  
The Infection deferred  
But the wholeness is not yet guaranteed  
You have to wait to see if it heals raised or pitted  
Once it's healed, I can think of you without falling to my knees sobbing  
I don't like what that means for you  
There's something to be said about how grief heals  
One day I looked and the scab wasn't there anymore  
And it felt like a betrayal  
Because the skin says that I never loved you enough  
Or in the right way  
Or for long enough  
And everyone said, for the longest time, that I wasn't even really grieving  
you  
And it felt true when I didn't of you for a year between anniversaries  
When I did, it felt like all that sorrow caught up, with interest  
But I was growing, and I think you shaped some of the folds in my brain  
I might have been too young to love  
Too young to understand until it was too late  
But I was just the right age to be loved and  
You did.  
You loved me like a beating heart  
You did so much for me  
And I couldn't do anything for you  
And I'm still here and you aren't  
And that Injustice will be in every poem I ever write.

# Through the Stargazer's Mind

Pearl Soni

When I look at the stars  
I realize but only one thing  
How minute I am  
But yet I tend to make my worries bigger than the universe  
The stars bring me peace and assurance  
Because I know that like me hundreds are worrying  
But compared to the stars we are nothing  
We are all but a little particle of dust  
And our problems might just be extended to us  
Then why worry I think in the moment  
But I often forget when the stars are out of sight  
No problem is big enough that it can't be conquered  
But we get too scared  
We make it a monster  
And this monster invades our brain  
If only our minuteness was understood by everyone  
Maybe the world would be a better place  
Maybe people would not worry as much  
And would be able to live as such  
But people think too much  
And that's the problem with this bunch  
Look outside in the night sky  
Maybe you'll realize and let out a cry  
Because after the end of it all  
Nothing is going to matter at all.





# Apoplexy

Jack Schumaker Jo

in the subtle sunlight of halfdawn,  
i sat in the empty waiting hall,  
a vulnerable paranoid lawn  
on which the noisebirds call.

finally, i was met with calm.  
with familiar stimuli in range,  
riddles paced through fawn.  
and the time passed strange.

knots on twine amalgamated  
into one continuous line.  
ticked, voided, and abated.  
shaped to a delirious tine.

still here in this plastic manger,  
a ferryman came to my side  
to warn me of the danger  
of riding the Styxian tides.

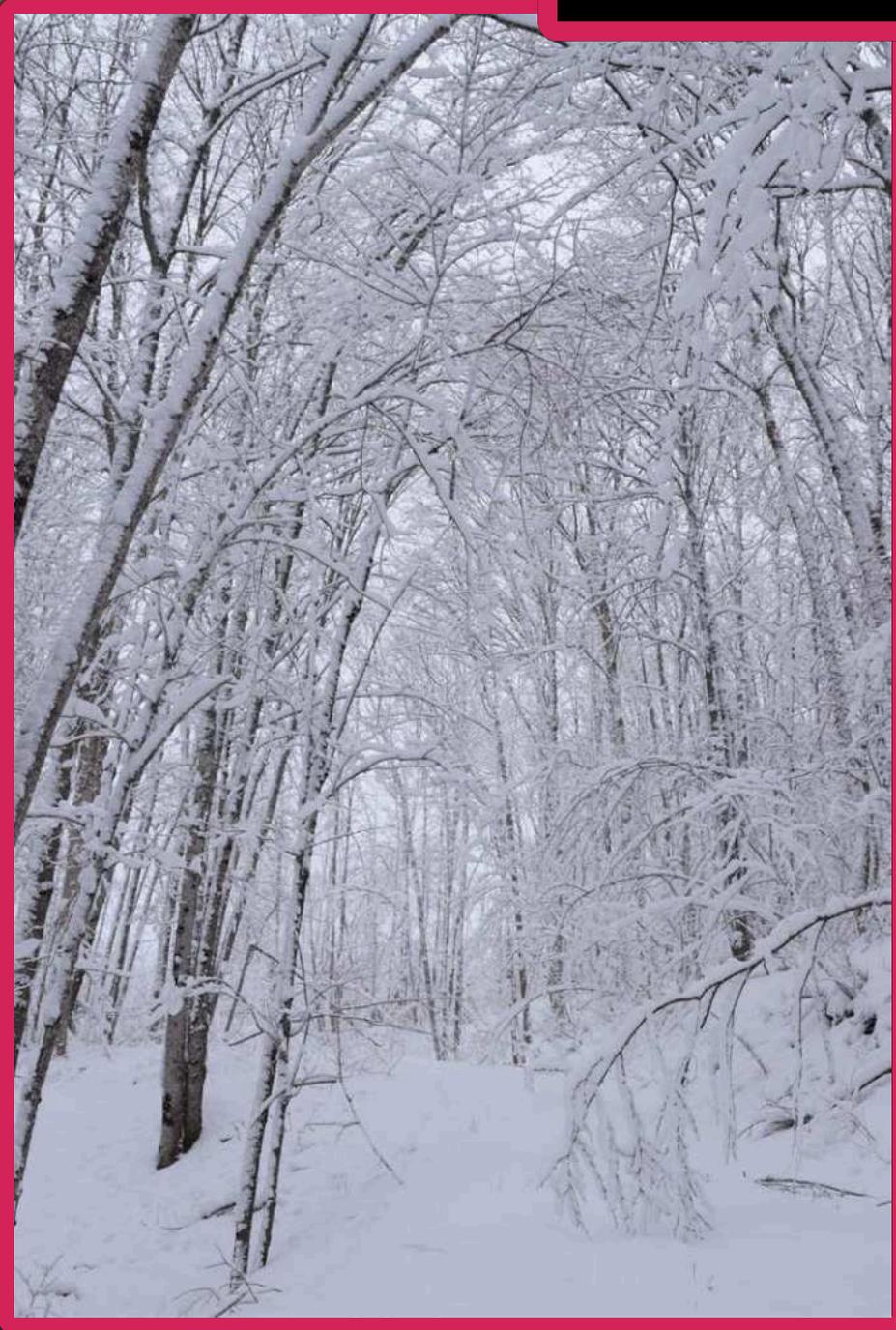
it was a foregone conclusion.  
i came here to be fixed, after all.  
now piloted to that oft-fêted room,  
they tried to keep me enthralled.

bulletsteel machines illuminate the room.  
I was the fish beneath the heavy sun,  
skin baking in oil and salt, barely awake.  
o, new instruction for me to run.

mask applied, counting down  
in a pale blue plastic gown.  
in a fit of finality,  
the world ran thin.



**The Hidden Path**  
William Gauvin



Hunger,  
I have felt her long.  
Fanged adder and leeches,  
fearing dawn.

She beckons me with blood and bile,  
to belove, to burn,  
and to defile.

I dare not sleep, I dare not wake.  
As the mask of me,  
tears and breaks.

## Vampirism

Gwynndolyn Szoboszlay

Hunger,  
all that is left.  
An epitaph for—  
my final breath.

I close my lips as she draws near.  
For if I smile,  
would she disappear?

Obol eyes, trace bare neck.  
Yet I back away—  
as my gut turns a wreck.

Hunger,  
buried six feet deep.  
A crooked heart—  
no longer beats.

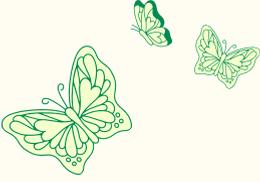
But for her.

It might.

Bleed.



**Untitled #2**  
Christine Josey



The memories of winter escape soundlessly  
As Spring approaches  
Lessening the stormy weather  
With less and less get together

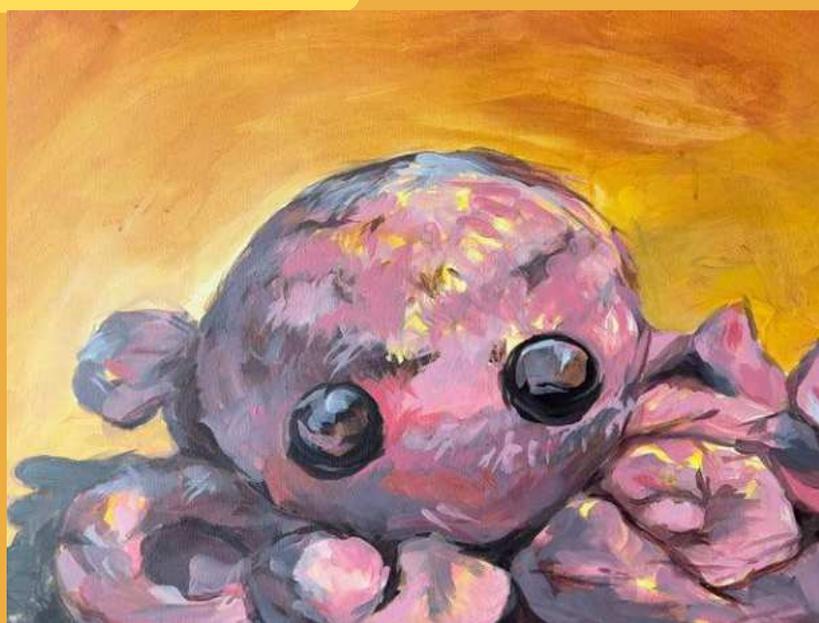
Planning for a summer vacation...  
Cabo or is it gambling in Vegas?  
Now packing your favorite swimsuits  
And Holiday photos to share.  
Although most wouldn't care

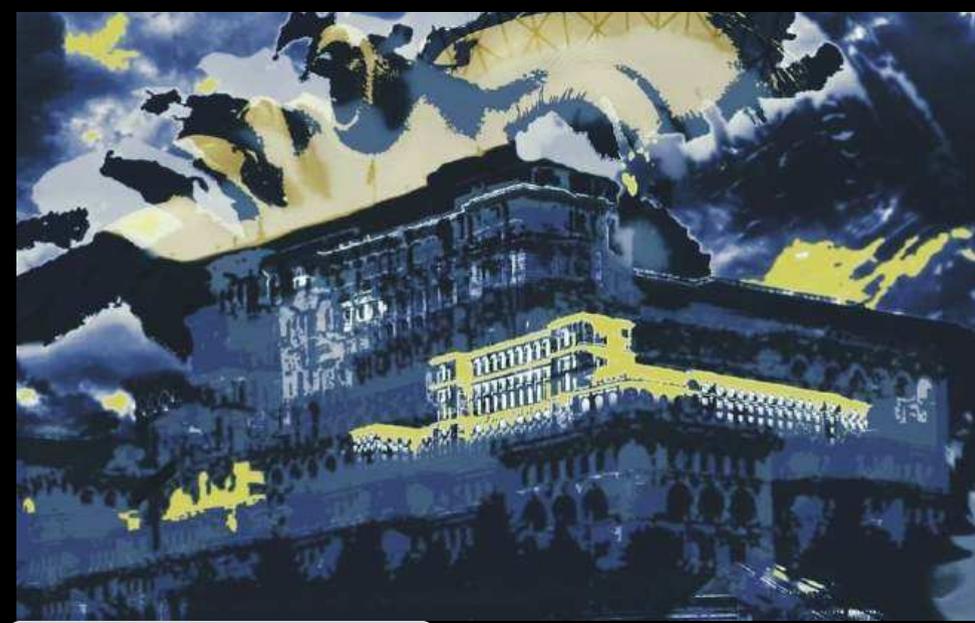
It is the shopping that everyone wants to do.  
And the fine eateries too.



**Pink Crocheted  
Octopus**  
Rani Schumaker Jo

**Moody Frank**  
Ruby Petty





## Untitled 3

Adela Maroon

## Denial

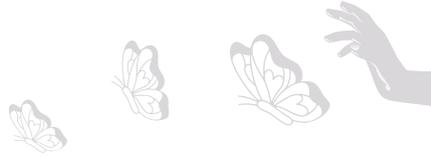
Leticia Garcia

You do not speak the truth  
Crack of a shell, to the root  
What compels you to do  
What you do?  
You create a story  
From the first to last page  
Surrounding this false truth  
To uphold your own view  
How lonely it must be  
To think of the lies you bleed  
And live within them  
As if they ever truly set you free.



# My Body is a House

Laurelle Kelly



My body is a house;  
Made of smooth oak that sways in the wind,  
Always a little unsteady,  
But strong where it counts.  
Planted in earthquake country;  
My state got fault lines like stretch marks,  
We both learn to hold when shaken  
Even with cracks in the foundation.  
My body is warm;  
Clinging to any sort of heat,  
Always ready to give that back,  
Cozy and sweet,  
Hoping that you'll stick around.  
My body is worn;  
Worry peels the wallpaper,  
Tears drip from the ceiling,  
Holes in the walls  
From when my anger was mismanaged  
And I'm learning that it's ok to be damaged.  
That I can be broken and beautiful all at once,  
Although actions cannot be undone  
They can be healed from.  
That I can patch the holes in the drywall,  
That I can ask for help when things decline  
And one day, I'll say I'm fine and mean it.

**statues**  
Marielle Liberkowski

this stone is so soft  
my palm breaks upon it  
spilling creamy rivers  
onto thirsty pores  
dilated pupils leaking  
into the blanks of their eyes

the warmth of a body  
eats its way into my icy veins  
fleshy fingers shoved down my throat  
i vomit peaches and cream  
convoluted colors seize in my brain  
bones untangling  
resin-coated bruises  
seared off my ribcage

i am surviving on the  
kindness of those  
who don't understand

wood splinters underneath  
the weight of my tears  
and i fall into a lilac dream

my existence lives between  
the folds of this reality  
my shadow casts in triplets  
i am only this skeleton;  
glitched and pixelated and scattered  
a parasitic seed  
shriveling under this heat  
chattering teeth  
whisper of warm nights

i hope they all know  
the texture of your heart  
the shape of your voice  
and the significance  
of your sunlight

i am alone here  
with those voices  
yellowed roots twining about  
in this reflection  
of your ecosystem  
loved and just as quickly  
unloved, undone  
decisions made in reverse,  
pressing rewind  
a mouth vacuuming words up  
reading my bible  
backwards and upside down

your creation  
made from shards of  
petrified glass and dust  
watches the fire that formed its body  
sputter out its limbs  
dissolving each hair,  
spitting it back onto  
the scorched fields  
outside these purple clouds

you don't need dust  
in your blood  
it was a mistake  
a vile mistake  
that grew too old  
and too still  
and too desperate  
for your touch



# Tintypes

Gwyndolyn Szoboszlay

Engraved on a thin tin plate, a moderately odd name. Ostensibly, an orphan's name. Cassandra G. Ward.

With a click of copper clasps, the suitcase sprung open. Pale hands shoved into place half-folded cotton shirts, alongside a dull moth bitten frock. A creased piece of paper, worn from countless foldings, softly crinkled between their fingers. Stamped. A with a poppy's mark.

The letter was shoved below a thin stack of papers and tinctures. The case closed.

A porcelain leg, much like a mechanical doll, clinked against the scuffed hardwood. Mustard yellow corduroy spun dust into curious spirals as they threw on their coat. Golden strands bound and bowed in cherry ribbon, as pyrite apertures flickered in the bleary glass.

Waxing light ebbed through thin curtains; Flickering glimpses of crowded roofs and peach-glint frost. Coming to the sill, they could almost taste a tinge of sweetness, among the ashen plumes and engine wail.

Knock.

Down the spiral stairs. Down to a dark green door. The handle pewter, the key in pocket. The suitcase at their side.

*Knock knock.*

The hinges creaked as the breeze stumbled in.

A red vest. Crisp at the edges.

A warm laugh.

Dawn.



**Untitled 2**  
Anu B

# The Park

Anonymous

My fondest memory of her was when she took me to the park. We were the only ones here. Green grass, a warm breeze, and everything so at peace.

I don't remember much, but I do remember her telling me how she would scream at the top of the hill whenever she was stressed. I remember me telling her all my biggest secrets, which no one else knows about. I also remember us laughing a lot while we played games on my phone. I'll never forget just how much joy we had being with each other that day.

For the first time, I finally felt a sense of calmness; everything was gonna be alright in the end. For a brief moment, I could stop worrying, and enjoy what's in front of me for once. It's still the best day of my life. I used to think about how I'd give anything to go back to that memory. Sometimes, I still do.

I used to go back here all the time, trying to constantly re-live that same moment. Eventually, I learned that although that day could only ever be lived once, the feeling is something I can look forward to experiencing again, someday.

Hopefully, that's soon. But it's no rush; at least this memory will keep me company in the meantime.

# Zircon the Cleric

Matthew Lucas



## An Interview With Andy Kinson

Andy Kinson is a professor of anthropology here at West Valley. The Voices Team wanted to hear his thoughts on art as a faculty member and as an archaeologist.

Q:

In recognizing art's importance in installing creativity, what would you consider is the value of art in our modern society? Is there a future for art or art history when our society is focused on creating and consumption?

Andy:

As an anthropologist, I see the value of art as a vehicle for cultural and personal expression. Art of all mediums allows the creator to express deeply held perspectives and ideas in ways that can be both aesthetically appealing and universal. It can also allow for the creation and transmission of ideas that otherwise might be difficult, dangerous or impossible to express within the specific social structure of the culture. If you will, I see art as an "alternate" language that can communicate identity, history, and values. Based on that, I absolutely believe there is a future for art. These kinds of deep-seated practices are very difficult to commodify or have "created" by external agents. We ourselves need to create because it is an inherent part of our humanity, and art gives many of us the means to fulfill this need.

Q:

Have you had the opportunity to check out Kathy Aoki's Koons Ruins exhibit in the art building? How do you feel about the message communicated in Aoki's exhibit?

**Andy:**

Yes, I have seen the Koons Ruins exhibit and have also seen several of Aoki's other installations. Again, as an anthropologist (specifically an archaeologist), I love Aoki's presentation of the fictitious Koons Ruins. The installation made me think of the way in which we create value in our society and also how we think about the past. It brought to mind some of the debates I've had in my archaeology classroom regarding the messages that we receive from the past and how at times people want to modify or erase those messages to meet their own ends. I'm not a big fan of removing monuments or erasing parts of the past that we find offensive or problematic. Not only do I worry about how that erasure does not actually force us to confront that past and interrogate it and learn from it, but it also presumes the "correctness" of the contemporary perspective. In Aoki's work, she manages to create a fictional narrative in which the work of Jeff Koons (which, by the way, I myself find puerile, ridiculous and exploitative) is systematically destroyed by a fictional art collector as an attempt to "Save the Public Eye". In taking this approach, Aoki herself does not erase or destroy Koons work. Instead she manages to challenge the viewer to contemplate that act and ask pointed and critical questions: Why would someone want to destroy this artist's work? What are the aspects of this artist's work that are being critiqued and deconstructed? How do we determine the value and meaning of art, and who ultimately gets to decide? The reason I love the installation so

much is that it manages to create a dialogue and debate, rather than simply usurping the responsibility for “editing” our past/contemporary realities.

**Q:**

When you look at the history of art, it seems like something of a conversation, with people adding and responding to existing works throughout history— how do you feel that you are contributing to this conversation?

**Andy:**

Absolutely. Art is a conversation, both between the past and the present as well as between the present and the future. I show my students many examples of how ancient artwork and architecture is reflected in modern art and architecture and the ways in which acts as a symbolic means for societies to reflect or create values and identity. We also look at examples of modifications or destruction of ancient artwork as forms of colonialism, imperialism and cultural erasure. As a form of non-written communication, artwork can speak across time and space and give us a window into the psychology of other people. However, we always need to remember that we also are always viewing and experiencing art through our own contemporary lens. Hence, any interpretation of art ultimately tells us more about the viewer than the artist themselves. I focus on this idea in my archaeology class because the vast majority of our understanding of the past is based on modern interpretation of the

material culture left behind by our predecessors. So when we engage in our analysis of the past we always need to carry with us the awareness of the lens through which we are viewing the data. At the end of the day, we end up viewing art with an active reaction rather than a passive reception. Our interpretations are a conversation with that past, an attempt to put ourselves in the place of the ancient artist, an exercise in humanity and empathy.

# Everything I Love is Behind Me

Nineteenth

Everything I love I is behind me  
All the art I adore I've had stitched on to my back with inks and needle  
The painful process was rewarding in its own way as each time the needle  
pierced flesh I knew that one more dot was added to the canvas I would  
carry with me for the rest of my life  
I had names and flowers  
Birds and trees  
Worms and butterflies  
All in a harmony behind me that I would never see  
A landscape of picturesque peace despite the life I find I've lived  
In my pack I carried all the possessions that reminded me of those who I  
love and who loved me  
Keepsakes of adventures with those who I've had to leave behind  
Behind me on the life I forged and behind me in time  
I did not matter to me that some of them now only thought fondly of that  
past version of me that no longer exists  
I loved that man too for I was him and I will never stop loving who I was  
But I no longer am the one they loved as time will change us all but they  
will always be someone I love  
I put that which I love behind me not to score that deep feeling but because  
with them behind me I know that I can face all that will come  
I put that which I love with all my heart behind me as a sign of love  
For between that which I love and that which wishes to harm those I love  
must then get through me  
I knew I could face the future struggles and battles as if I felt everything I  
love would be behind me  
I knew a day would come where I would need to make sure that all I loved  
was behind me so that all that I loved would be able to know how much I  
cared

So to you the one I love the most  
Know that I don't do this out of hate  
I don't do this out of rage  
I don't do this out of disappointment  
But I need you to get behind me and never look back  
I need you to know that I love you



**The Lake and the  
Unexpected Beauty**  
Danny Anaya de Leon