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Voices
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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 Literary Club. 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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Jamie Sandoval
Disconnected Web

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Felicia Alvarenga
Exposed

Kassandra Arreola
Work of Art

i can trace every inch of your face and create a masterpiece.
that's what you are to me
you are living proof of what life needs to be
you put your hands on me until i couldn't see
and i was singing the lyrics as if you were next to me

talking bout how "if i could show you, you would never
leave it."
didn't know that i could ever mean it, because i've never
been a work of art
not to anybody, anywhere
not a damn thing.

i've been hung up only to be taken down
and been put under water until i drowned
but i wouldn't want it any other way
regardless of what others say

you were the only one willing to paint me on walls and
fences
the only one willing to show others what they couldn't see
and i settled to be hung up in a museum of heartache
where spectators would pass and come up with reasons as to
why he created me

what was the meaning?
what was the reason?
i settled to be hung up among other paintings
rather than to have my own place in your heart



Anu B
Childhood Dream

Nicole Avila
No to Temporary

Do yourself a favor and
don't fall in love with
people. They're a blip
on the radar. A temporary
escape. Instead fall in
love with the way red owns
the sky at dawn and how
just those few first rays
of warmth can awaken a
legion of flowers. Connect
with the beauty of the night
and her children -- the stars,
how they speak of longing.
Say no to people and yes
to the world for it will
embrace you long after
human arms can't reach you.

Bethany Lynch
Clocks like Dinner Plates

I am obsessed with time
The minute hand rotates
As my mind deviates
While my inert calculator calculates.

I stretch the time
And cut it between my knife and fork
I mince it into tiny / little / pieces
And I try to see how many minutes I can move-
Around my plate
Without ingesting them.

Time is dense like chocolate
Cake, which is why I'm afraid of it
I'm afraid time will make me fat
If I take in too much
It will be so excessive, I will not
Be able to digest all the seconds/
Or minutes / or hours /
That I devoured.

The hours
Slow down my heart like
Egg nog
The seconds
Slip past my lips
Like water

I am obsessed with time
And it makes me look longer /
Look harder at the clocks all around me.
They tick endlessly in bright / white disks
Like diner plates
Full of uneaten /

Under the pressing weight of
Every minute.
Time is daunting
The clocks are daunting like
Dinner plates.



Iureni Silva
This Picture is Forking Awesome

Natassa Yulo
The Cosmetic Surgeon's Office

Bright eyed bench below blue dews
Thirsty marsh, manic tide mummified
Scattered shoulders suspended like the sky
Oh my, what a tie!
Consecrated colors, crop, chop, pop!
Dandelion ducks dangling tucks
Marshmallow mists and cornflake sleet
Wrecks whirring wheels and steel mills
Fingers confess freezing cross
Uncouth, cold, conveying concealed thoughts
Long outskirts, cover souls not bones
What have you got to lose?



Christy Oliver Nguyen
Contemplation

Victoria Gee
I Am No Unicorn

Looking at her hurt. The entirety of my body ached just watching her twist her hair, slowly, in between her index and middle finger. Slowly, as she wrote furiously in her journal. The gradual turn of her fingers, the chipped black nail polish appearing and disappearing in her curls as her hair knotted up at the ends, and she just keeps weaving, absent-mindedly, almost as if the weaving of her hair mirrors the weaving of words upon the page.

Oh, if only I could be that page of paper. I want to have all her deepest secrets written upon my body like a tattoo. I want to feel her eyes glance over her words as they bleed down my chest. I want to know her soul like the back of my hand, because it will be the back of my hand. I want her on every part of me, because then maybe I won't be me, I'll be her masterpiece, her crowned jewel. Maybe then I'll live on past myself. Live on for her.

Hunched over her desk, golden curls cover her face as they stick out everywhere. The only way she is seeing past those curls to her notebook is one single lime green clip, attempting and failing at taming her bangs. But still, I can see her face so clearly, past the jumble of hair. She sits up straight, arching her back and twisting her body slowly, stretching her neck from left to right, all the while with her pen sitting haphazardly in her mouth, as if it could drop to the floor at any second. Oh, now how I wish I was that chewed up pen. She leans back down, taking the pen out of her mouth and resumes her hunch-man stance over her notebook, writing even faster than before, like the words are dying to get out of her. She's just barfing words onto the page at this point, but oh how I wish she was spewing those words onto me. She chews her bottom lip, furrowing her brows as if something she just wrote confused her. Perhaps she wrote some-

thing that is her soul, but she's surprised that it is. Like when you look in the mirror, but you don't recognize yourself. As she chews her lower lip, continuing to tattoo these words onto my lower thigh, I start to imagine...

I stand up and walk towards her confidently. Hello is all I need to say before she slams her notebook to the floor and stands up to smile at me. She tilts her head ever so slightly as she leans in. I smell her strawberry chap stick just before she presses her lips against mine, softly at first and then urgently, like when she was passionately pressing the red pen onto her paper. I am now her canvas. She tattoos me with kisses as she unbuttons my shirt, yanking it off within moments. She moans as I kiss her neck, pulling her into me as we melt together...

I cough.

She stiffens, muscles tightening under her tank top as she jolts upright, no longer my feisty hunch-man of Notre dame. My cough removes her from her trance and mine. As she turns slowly to gaze on the offender, it is me. I am going to piss myself if she utters a single word to me, I don't think my bladder could handle that kind of vocal intimacy from her. She smiles sheepishly and stretches out her hand with a tissue. Our hands touch for a moment. "You have some, uhm... on your collar". I. Am. Going. To. Die. Now.

Professor Whatshisname looks frightened as he tells me to go to the nurse's office. My whole body is tingling from feeling that black nail polish under my fingertips. I jump out of my seat like it's an electrocution chair and hurry to leave the room. I don't go to the nurse's office. I go to the bathroom to look in the mirror. Yupp, still don't recognize myself. The blood on my collar is not going to wash out. I cough more blood into the sink. It's just a small cough at first, but then it turns into a full out fit and by the time I am done, it's bloody murder all around me. I brace my hands against the cool

ceramic sink and look up into the mirror. Blood is sprinkled across the mirror like the painting I did in Art that went horribly wrong. The blood encompasses my whole being. Now I recognize myself. Hello old friend.

I want to go back to being her masterpiece. I want to go back to watching her tilt her neck to the side as she closes her eyes, the light laying gently on her skin. Oh and how I wish I was that sunshine.

I walk back to class, but everyone turns to stare at me. Everyone knows. Everyone knows I'm dying, they see Death follow me into the class; Death is my shadow and my mistress. Everyone stares. Everyone, except her. She's back to being hunched over, consumed by hair, scribbling feverishly into her notebook.

Everyone sees me as an imprint. Something that is here now, but soon only a small footprint of my existence will remain. However, I see myself as her masterpiece, something much more important than any random dying kid in any random city making any random family cry for any random amount of years until I am just another random imprint. I am her opus. I will live as her oeuvre long after we are both gone.

But at the moment, I am still alive. I am alive in a blank classroom, surrounded by blank students and a blank teacher and Her. She doesn't know that I am her opus. It's just a secret between me and her chewed up red Paper Mate at this point. A Paper Mate that doesn't seem to be working right now. She pushes back a handful of curls behind her beautifully unpierced ear as she shakes the pen stubbornly. Scribbling empty circles that turn into a crater on the corner of her page as she wills Paper Mate to relinquish its last breath of red. Oh God, I can feel that divine pen scribbling into the crevice of my elbow and it feels so good. If ever I've been sexually aroused by a pen, it's now. She tries every-

thing for that thing to bleed more red, like she needs this pen specifically to uphold its promise to her and surrender onto the page the end of her thought. If Paper Mate reneges, I'm preparing to slit a wrist so she can finish her literary conception. She can dip her black nail polish in the little pool of my blood and finger paint with it if that will make her happy.

You can tell she's loved this pen too. The squishy bit where her fingers go are worn in with little grooves where each finger fits, and almost pink too, like she drew the red out of the pen through osmosis. Of course under her will, Paper Mate finally gives in, and she quickly finishes her thought before Paper Mate changes his mind. She only needed two more sentences.

The bell rings.

She hurries to zip up her backpack, but keeps her notebook and pen in her hands. I watch as she puts her backpack on, swinging it over one shoulder recklessly. Then off she nearly runs out of the classroom. But she stops at the trash can first. She rolls Paper Mate in her hand, contemplating his future worth. Then, regretfully, she gently places her fallen comrade in the bottom of the bin.

I wait.

Everyone is gone. Now is my chance. I walk over to the bin. I swiftly sweep down and scoop up Paper Mate in my hands. He feels even better than I imagined. I close my eyes as I run my fingers over the pen, imagining her taking it out of her backpack, writing in her journal, dropping it on the floor, and then picking it up and putting it back in her mouth. As I picture her slowly bringing Paper Mate up to her lips, parting her lips ever so slightly to allow enough room for the pen to fit in between, reaching the front of her teeth, I do the same. Oh, and now I can feel her in my mouth.

Perfection.

I open my eyes and Professor Whatshisname is starring straight at me. He knows. I walk quietly out of the blank room, our pen still in my mouth. Yupp, this is the most arousing pen of my life.

Slam.

I walk right into Her. Her. Pen. Is. Still. In. My. Mouth. “Sorr—” Her apology trails off as her gaze falls to her Paper Mate dangling from my quivering lips. “... Is that my pen?” She knows it’s her pen. My legs are going numb. I need to think of a clever explanation. “I, uh, collect empty pens?” I say as more of a question to her, asking if she could possibly buy this explanation. Her mind is processing this information as her curls sway side to side, shaking no, they don’t believe me. “I collect empty rolls of toilet paper.” She responds flatly. Really? I ask. “No, but it’s a poetic retort to all that bullshit you just threw my way.”

I FELT YOU WRITING IN MY ELBOW CREVICE.

Her mouth drops. I. Just. Said. That. Out. Loud. My mouth drops. I’m shaking, I can’t believe I just yelled at her about my elbow crevice. I need to run. I’m preparing to launch from my haunches like a gazelle until she laughs. Her curls laugh too. I’m so confused. “I feel myself writing in my elbow crevice too most of the time.” She says. She uses her chipped black nail polish to tuck a tendril behind her ear, looking at my expression as I realize I am not in imminent danger.

The bell rings.

She looks back at the classroom, and then back at me, unsure. I hold my breath. She turns back to me, then smiles.

Let's go. She says. She starts walking down the hallway, leaving.

I follow.

This guy.

Hacking up blood all over the place, and now he thinks he can just feel me write in his elbow crevice whenever he wants? Note to self: Crevice is a fun ass word, add it to your repertoire.

Okay, so I'm intrigued. And he can't possibly murder me while he's dying of tuberculosis or some shit half the time. Plus those two weeks of karate in third grade have prepared me for any situation. Plus this is just another thing to write about. Plus I hate Chemistry. Done deal.

We walk. He looks at me like I'm a magical unicorn. Note to self: not all unicorns are magical. I hate that I kind of love that he can appreciate a good, till' death do us part, pen. "Where are we going?" He croaks.

I start writing the word croak on my thigh as we walk, my finger pressing gently into my leg as I curve the o slowly. We are off to see the wizard I say simply. In actuality, we are off to the oracle, but the oracle sounds much less impressive in this context. Every time I look at him, he looks like he is about to disintegrate, so I take to counting the number of sidewalk cracks I step on. Eight. Note to self: interacting with other people is tedious post puberty. Twelve. Before puberty, this awkwardness would have never occurred. I would have shown him my Pokémon cards and he would have shown me his Barbie; yes I am evolved enough not

to stick with gender roles in assuming all he liked was hot wheels and footballs. And anyways I was the one that thought Peyton Manning was clutch as fuck. Twenty-three.

Do you know what an oracle is? I ask.

“Someone who tells you the future right?”

Forty-two.

No, I say. It is someone who makes you feel better about the present. The future is always changing, we just don't know the future, so we don't know that it's changed. Each choice we make leads us down a different path than we were going down five minutes ago. If I hadn't run into you in the hallway, then I would be in Chemistry right now, contemplating the oxygenation of copper sulfate. Instead, I'm taking you to the oracle so that maybe you can realize that there is more to life than just the crevice of my elbow. Fifty.

He looks at me like he doesn't think that there is anything beyond this nub on my arm. Oh, how wrong he is. Now we're making our way up the mountain. I quickly pick up a little granite rock, foggy white and jagged. He stumbles along the deer path, tripping and coughing. Oh, good grief, I've killed him. But he keeps walking, so he's either turned zombie or he'll be fine. Note to self: the way to kill a zombie is decapitation.

As we begin to ascend the steepest portion of the mountain, I hear the slow trickling of the stream, the tick tick tock of a woodpecker, and the rustling of leaves as he grabs on to tree branches to stay upright. It smells... vital. I breathe in the fresh, crisp air of cold redwoods and moist hacked grass. The aroma of some kind of wet animal, like a deer or wild llama sits heavily on the loud air. Are there wild llamas? Note to self: get a llama. Yes the air is loud today, it is all that

I can think about it is so loud, screaming in my ears through my nostrils. But it does smell... significant.

“Are you going to murder me?” he laughs nervously.

Not today I say. I don't know how poetic it would be to murder a dying kid.

But life is never poetic.

But I wish it was.

Dream
Within a dream
And within that dream
A pug
Reading a book
A blank book
Only the word
Forgotten.

I suppose when I am forgotten, I will still be remembered for this elbow crevice the way he is staring at me right now, so hard like he is trying to puzzle through my body parts to figure out what goes where, but then also so soft, like he's afraid if he tries to fit each piece together, I'll break under the scrutiny. Mystery reveal—I have boobs just like half the human population.

We reached the top.

You can just about see the tops of the redwoods up here. We stand on top of a boulder that has been marbled by thousands of years of rain. I sit down to feel the cold smoothness against my hands. We are so high above the city at this point, we are *in* the fog and clouds. He sits down beside me, wheezing from the exasperation of the climb. The city lights begin to turn on, block by block as the sun sets. Each little suburban home, I tell him, so close to nature yet so oblivious

that it exists. It's just who wants mac n' cheese for dinner? And what TV show are we going to watch tonight? They never really look up to see what's beyond themselves. Is there any contemplation?

"I'm usually watching America's Next Top Model right now." He jokes, smiling. I laugh. We both know he's serious.

The night is cold, but it's nice to feel something other than neutral. I look out into the haze of trees, all melded together under our thumbs. I stare at the singular dead oak tree in front of us. It is blackened to a crisp like it was struck by lightning at one point, withering under intense heat to become half the tree it once was. Yet it is still standing, stubbornly rooted above the land of make believe. The branches are broken, hanging to the ground for support. I dust off, grabbing the small foggy rock I found on the way up, and place it under the oak, touching the bark for just a moment, rough yet warm under my fingers. I sit down again.

"Wha—" is all he gets out before he sees what I see. In the distance white wings flap slowly, working on ascending the tree tops. Dipping in and out of the redwoods, dragging his talons gently through the tops of the leaves, the bird quietly dances towards us. What took us hours to do, only takes this winged creature moments. He rises exponentially, flying up hundreds of feet above our heads, and then glides down effortlessly swooping to land on the single oak branch still outstretched towards the sky. Settling his white and brown spotted feathers, he stares back at us, all knowing. Eyes as big as the moon, the owl examines his surroundings silently.

Behold, the oracle.

You can ask the oracle your future, I tell him. "I already know my future", he responds solemnly. All of our futures are Death, I say. It's not about the death part, that only

makes up a few moments in your life. The living part, however, that lasts a hell of a lot longer. I nod towards the owl, with his wise old face staring back at us. He is silent for a long time, though time is only a construct, so he was just silent. "But I'm afraid of dying" he whispers, looking directly at the owl. No, you're afraid of living, I say. That's why you live inside my elbow crevice so much. I really don't know how right I am about the stuff I'm declaring, but it sounds poetic. And I want poetic to be in this land of make believe.

The owl shakes his head, twisting his neck around to look out at the world below. Everyone is forgotten in the end, I say. You can't live on through me, because I'll be dead soon enough after you're gone. But if you find your voice now, you won't need my voice anymore. Voices, I say, live on forever. Though forever is probably a construct too. Note to self: constructs are bullshit.

We both look at the owl, then back at each other. He smiles at me slowly, then is smiling so much that it's infectious. Even the owl is smiling. I smile too, almost laughing. I don't know if I'm right about anything, but we both know it's the best shot at the truth for us, just two kids in the land of unicorns and make believe. The owl, only a tourist in the land of mac n' cheese, launches out of the oak, flying into the full moon of the night sky. Note to self: Get a new pen.

Nicholas Munoz

Karma

Doors don't shut themselves.
They hang quietly in the back.
Minding their own business.
If they had shoes and feet,
They would be drawing circles in the sand
Waiting to be opened
And closed
And opened.

A draft emerging from the wilting willow tree
Riffles through the tattered sun-stained sunflower
Curtains. The once half-open,
Half-closed door is now careening.
A once quiescent slab of wood
Careens. Like those chimes
Outside the backyard window.
That chime ever so bright when the wind
presents more
than this mere bauble.

The cherubs sit in the windowsill
With their incarnadine wings
And their lissome hands.
Contemplating the notion of window-duty.
Standing guard to this abode
Not letting any mephitic
Souls enter through
That front door.

But someone forgot to close the back door.

So now this soul
is sauntering through the cracks where the
sunlight peaks in. Gliding past the kitchen

making all the glassware ululate
Gliding past the living room
where the cherubs sit in the windowsill
now making a slight nuance expression.
Gliding to your room.
Where it seeps into every fiber
of that cotton shirt you wear.
Into every molecule of the pillow-sheets
where you rest your head at night
Hoping closing your eyelids
would equate to a good night sleep—

But now you can't sleep.



Anu B
Beauty in Rose Petals



Brissette Li Lodoza
Untitled

Mary Mauntz
Lady of Shalott

Somewhere in time,
She stared before the void
Carried far with all the threads past
A dime a dozen,
The 'ol humdrum

Half-sick of shadows,
She sets her eyes on high
Past those tapestries of old
Stain glass thoughts
Parasitic pictures of perfection
Who refract something dear

The sibyl's crescendos
Grew fair endlessly
Each answering silence
Weighing heavier than the one before

The caving woods black bile
Bled into the deep waters lure,
Assuring her that there is nothing natural
About the feeling of almost

The darkly fog
Swallows her whole
Gnawing off her thimble thumbs
In the heap of ash
A single flame lighting her way
The last longing of her soul



Jamie Sandoval
Shasta 2

Evan Brown
After High Tide

I keep many things
concealed in a cave:

surfboard, towel, sunblock,
memories, notions, and time to

enshrine. Why sacrifice
anything to the sun when

all it provides is heat – unkind,
purposely murdersome, imposing. I like

forseen endings: groaning
outside the cave walls, the wild

grass parching, vetivert
evaporating out of the root. Smells nice,

but poor plant. The sun bullied
the ocean, which gave the thing

hypertension. Climbing
diastolic pulses resulted in

violent tides, obliging rocks to dis-
integrate into sand and mud and more

sand. That's a season
for you. There was one more chapter

I had to write with an overwhelming
nothing in front of me, a step

away from venturing

into newness. All I know is

it's safe in the cave.

That sun torched the sand where

my days weren't: the

dark echoes were intimate with me. That cynical

sun torched my feet, blistering

my ankles while I danced around bottle caps and

cigarette butts, relit once more

by rays of ultraviolet BIC lighters. They singed

the thrums of my cuffs, rose up

to flare my scrunched, salty

face. Beneath me,

jellyfish bodies – collapsed

umbrellas, discarded contact lenses

cooking in the sand. Warped tentacles, angel hair pasta

spilled on the floor.

They seemed to smile:

their lives spent in the sea up

to this point, and so brave to

fare in this world, the long-

range kind of world, a place

worth the way out. A life

— with hope. Closed, sound, whole.

Ernest Rodrigues
Another Day

The fledglings waited in their nest,
The sounds like fireworks
Brought them to attention.

The fledglings amassed at the base of cliffs
Waiting, until they would fly over the top.

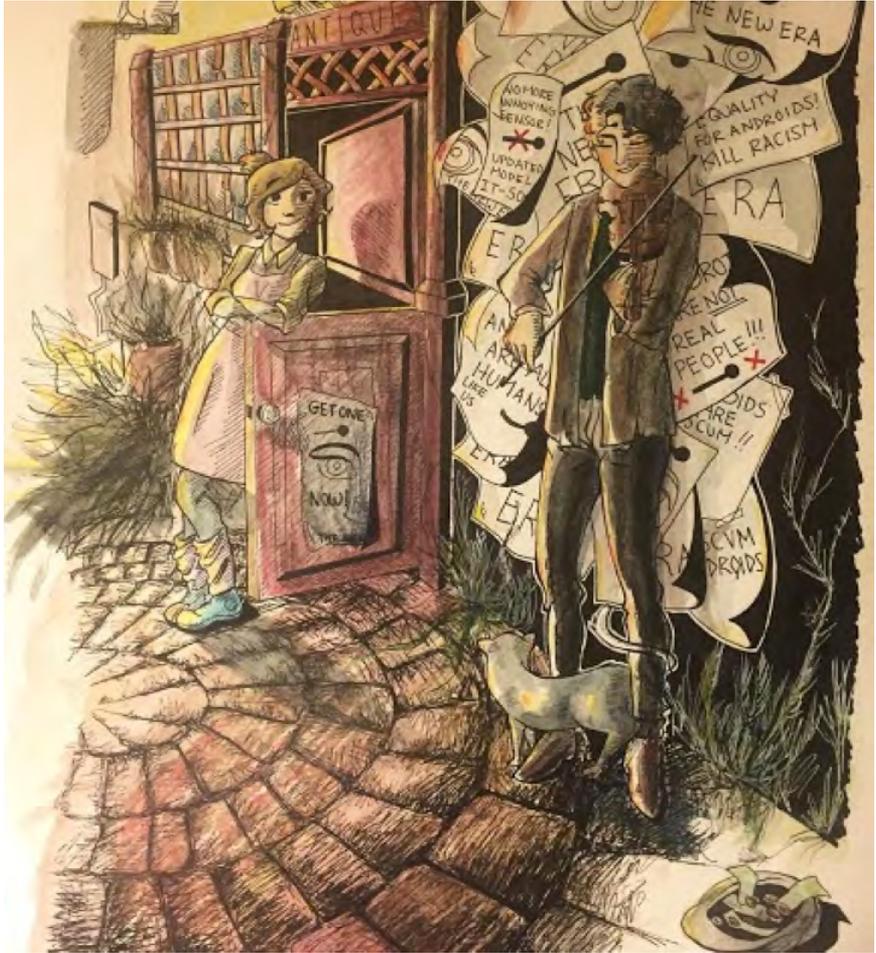
All the while
A smell like mustard seed
Lingered in the air.

The cry came and up they rose,
The flock rushed to engage their foes
They flew like eagles
And dropped like flies.

It was the cracks of thunder
That rang in the air,
Which brought the hail
That pierced the fledgling's flesh.

Soon, the sounds like fireworks ended,
The smell of sulfur now floated in the air
And once again new fledglings fill the nest
Waiting, until it was time
To go over the top once again.

For it's just another day,
In a war without end.



Christy Oliver Nguyen
Untitled

Evan Brown
I am (Not) Superman

I am not Superman – far from it.
I couldn't stop an asteroid
Hurling toward earth,
Or save dozens of lives
From a burning building.
I couldn't take out the bad guy –
Let alone a whole band of them.
I couldn't lift a car from a falling bridge
With my super strength; I possess none.
But refuse as I do, I'm your Superman to you.

If I had the strength,
I'd save a runaway train,
Or get rid of an evil brain.
I'd fly right to Italy
And straighten the Leaning Tower of Pisa, if need be.
Maybe I'd fly to the polar ice caps
And lift up melting heaps
Of thawed fragments descending into sea.
But I can't; this is fact.
But refuse as I do, I'm your Superman to you.

I couldn't survive in space –
Not a day.
I couldn't be the beloved hero –
There's no way.

There's a reason why I am not Superman;
And that reason lies within what
The core of my heart is made of.
But refuse as I do, I'm your Superman to you.

But wait.

Maybe I am Superman.
Maybe I am more than I might think I am.
Me, a puny human
Fallible at best
Finds little ways to save the day
And transcend the rest.

See, even Superman had his kryptonite.
Mine happens to be a smaller portion
Of inconsistency, insecurity, and inhibition
And a better portion of fear.
If I can't be the world's hero,
I'm more than content being yours.
So admit as I do, I'm your Superman to you.



Jamie Sandoval
Stalagmite

Catherine Kendall
Promises

It's the promise I spoke, not the promise I meant
That gave me pause when I saw how things went.
How youth said goodbye and wealth not long after,
Soon to be followed by romance and laughter.
When props are removed and facades pulled away,
Then what will remain—can anything stay?
When goods are all gone and we're left with debris
Will there still be an "us," will there still be a "we"?
Or did we but love the things we each brought
To a table of dreams that have all come to naught?
Have we slipped now too far to find our way back?
Have thorns made the way an untraceable track?
The fountain is silent, our old shrine to bliss,
We never imagined it coming to this.
The bowl cracked and dry as an old promise spoken,
Though outwardly whole it is inwardly broken.

Catherine Kendall
Transitions

Maggie

The first thing I noticed was that the pain was gone, its absence a sudden silence after prolonged, throbbing noise. Not only had the red, roaring pain of the cancer ceased, so had the dull rumble of old pain in my left hip, and the nagging ache in my right shoulder. I had lived with them for so long that their absence came almost as a shock. And though I had heard the doctor say I was in a coma, my senses were suddenly as clear as a summer morning.

The next thing I became aware of was how light I felt. This wasn't the floating feeling I got from morphine, but a sense of weightless wellbeing, as if I could fly to the moon. I opened my eyes—I am sure they were open—and there was white light all around me, bathing me with a sense of inexpressible joy. Just moments ago, I had been in the netherworld of coma, the pain held at bay by opiates but always present. Free of its grip, I looked up and marveled that the light above me was brighter than the sun yet I was able to stare directly into it. It compelled me to move toward it.

The glorious silence was broken by the sound of weeping. I reluctantly pulled my gaze from the center of the light and discovered, to my surprise, that I was looking down at my own body, which lay still and white on the bed. Behind the bed, a machine sounded a long, steady tone. A curvy young woman with short brown hair was holding my left hand and sobbing...Amber, my firstborn. I stroked her hair softly but she went on crying. Beside her, a tall man with a kind, weathered face and silver-streaked dark hair wept silently, his broad shoulders heaving...David, my dearest love. He placed a work-worn hand on my still, pale forehead. I moved to his side and pressed my cheek to his, but he didn't

seem to notice.

“Please, Maggie, just a little bit longer,” he said hoarsely to the still form on the bed. “She’s almost here.”

The doctor leaned over, put his stethoscope to my chest, and listened for a few moments. He shook his head. “I’m so sorry, Mr. Martin. She’s gone.”

Gone? But I wasn’t gone; I was right here!

“I’m right here,” I shouted. I waved my hands in the air, marveling again at the absence of pain and my ease of movement. But no one seemed to notice. The light pressed in on me from above, pulsing, alive.

Something tickled at my memory. I had to stay because...because...I couldn’t quite recall. The light was growing even stronger now, as was my desire to embrace it. Somehow, I knew that all I had to do was look up and it would pull me away. It led to love, and bliss, and the answers to my questions...damn! My mind was so clear a moment ago, but now I couldn’t remember...oh yes, Erica! Erica, my baby, was having a baby...today, in this hospital. I had been fighting, holding back the tide all these miserable weeks so I could meet my granddaughter. I promised Erica I would hang on. But where exactly was she? In the presence of the light, everything looked dim and unfamiliar.

Erica

My friend Shelly had told me, “You’ll know you’re in transition when you don’t think you can take it a minute longer.” Well, I had already passed that point and the baby still wasn’t out. Sonofabitch it hurt! “Discomfort,” my ass! I couldn’t believe every human being on the planet got here this way.

Jesse wiped the sweat from my forehead and rubbed my back. “You’re doing great, Sweetheart!”

I grimaced. “Easy for you to say” I growled, as another contraction bore down on me.

“Breathe,” Jesse commanded, doing the huff-huff-huffs we’d learned in Lamaze.

“Fuck off!” I snarled, clutching him so tightly that my nails dug into his forearm. “I’d like to see you breathe through this!” I was sweating, queasy. “I think I’m gonna hurl!” I croaked through the contraction.

A nurse bustled in, the annoyingly perky one with the super-shiny bob.

“I’m gonna be sick!” I gasped. She was there in a split second, expertly rolling me to the side and shoving the emesis basin toward me. Ugh—I hated vomiting. The contraction trailed off, giving me a brief respite from the pain. Childbirth sucked!

“Let’s check you,” the nurse said brightly, not waiting for permission. When you’re giving birth, your vagina is public property. She swiftly thrust a gloved hand inside me, felt around then grinned broadly.

“Almost there—you’re dilated to 10 centimeters.”

“Ten!” I was elated. “I’m at ten,” I yelled, loud enough for the whole floor to hear.

I looked over at Jesse, who was beaming despite the dark circles beneath his eyes, the half-moon indentations on his arm.

“You’re gonna do this, Erica!” He kissed me hard on my dry lips.

I looked around the room and unshed tears rose to clog my throat. Mama should have been here. She promised she wouldn’t miss this, but she wasn’t here, and neither was Amber. Daddy told me when I called last night to tell him I was in labor that he was taking Mama back to the hospital. I had no time to dwell on her absence, though, because the nurse was getting me into position to push. The next contraction was on me before I could prepare for it, sweeping over me in a crushing wave.

“Breathe!” Jesse was huffing again, his face close to mine.

Zoe

I was turning and being squeezed from all directions. I could still hear the sound of the mother-heart, but it was fainter, distant. I could hear her voice but it was unusually muffled. I heard other, unfamiliar voices. I was bound by flesh and blood, muscle and fluid, safe in my own tiny ocean. But a change had come, it was time, and the life-walls moved all around me, propelling me forward into the great unknown beyond.

Maggie

With the speed of thought, I was at Erica’s side in Labor and Delivery Room 3. Her auburn hair was plastered to her damp pink face and the swell of her belly rose taut as a basketball as the contractions gripped her. They were only a minute or so apart. Her striking features were pinched into an almost unrecognizable grimace, and I saw the raw, animal pain in her eyes as she dug her nails into Jesse’s arm. Poor Jesse, kind as he was, made no move to free himself

from his wife's painful grip. The nurse said she was at ten; it shouldn't be long now. Outside, the darkness was lifting and the pale light of dawn began to creep through the half-opened blinds.

Around me, the light from above was increasing in intensity, washing out the faces in the room. And then I saw the Messenger, pure light within the greater light, hand extended, beckoning me.

"Please," I whispered, backing away. "Please—let me stay just a little bit longer."

I glided to the head of the bed, where I stroked Erica's tense cheek and kissed her furrowed forehead. "You are so strong; you can do this," I whispered in her ear. "You don't believe it now, but it's going to be wonderful." I knew she couldn't see or hear me but she grew calmer as she gathered her strength for the first push.

The light was growing stronger each moment, its pull all but irresistible. Oh, how I longed to take the Messenger's hand and follow him into the light...to my Creator...but not just yet. If I could stay just a little longer, I would meet my granddaughter. I had to keep my promise.

Erica

What I remember most about transition is that almost as soon as I was in it, I was through it. It had seemingly taken an eternity to get to that point but once I did, the rest happened fast. The medical people were bustling around the room and Jesse kept stroking my face and telling me to breathe. When the doctor instructed me to push, I gave it everything I had. I gave it strength I didn't even know I had. And in between pushes, I had the strangest feeling that Mama was there even though I knew she couldn't be; she

was dying, maybe she was already gone at that point.

In the all-too-brief space between contractions, the air stirred as my sister Amber slipped into the room, her eyes red-rimmed. But before I could even process what that meant, the great-grandmother of all contractions overtook me.

Suddenly they were saying “I see the head!” and telling me to push, PUSH, and I shut my eyes and pushed as hard as I could, as if I were giving birth to the earth itself. I heard a thin, high-pitched sound and at first, I didn’t even realize it was coming from my own throat. I was on fire; I was going to explode and rain down bits of flesh and blood all over the pale green walls and white tile floor. Then Jesse shouted, “I can see her face!”

The next thing I knew, she was sliding into the doctor’s hands, a little blue fish. Time froze for several heart-stopping moments until I heard her wail and the little blue fish turned into a pink baby, squirming and waving starfish fingers in the air. Then I was crying and Jesse was crying, and Amber was weeping as if she would never stop.

Maggie

They were telling my daughter to push, and I heard Jesse say he saw the head, and the baby slid out, her tiny, perfectly-formed body bluish and blood-streaked. It was then that I became aware of the portal, that shimmering, liminal space between life and life-beyond. And I was with her there, staring into her face, writing her features on my heart. The Messenger hung back, watching, and I was filled with gratitude.

It was only a moment, but it stretched between us as if time itself had been suspended. Zoe opened her eyes wide

and saw me, I'm sure she saw me, though she hadn't yet breathed earth's air, and I had breathed my last of it. No one else in the room could see me, but she did, I'm certain of it. Our eyes locked and understanding passed between us, love beyond words flowing directly from soul to soul. I touched her and blessed her; I kissed her hello and goodbye. I told her I loved her and we would meet again. Then she drew her first breath, the foreign air filled her lungs, and she wailed.

The Messenger took my hand and I glanced back at the baby, now curled on her mother's chest, and nodded. As we rose into the light, love and joy surrounded and filled me, along with an overwhelming sense of peace.

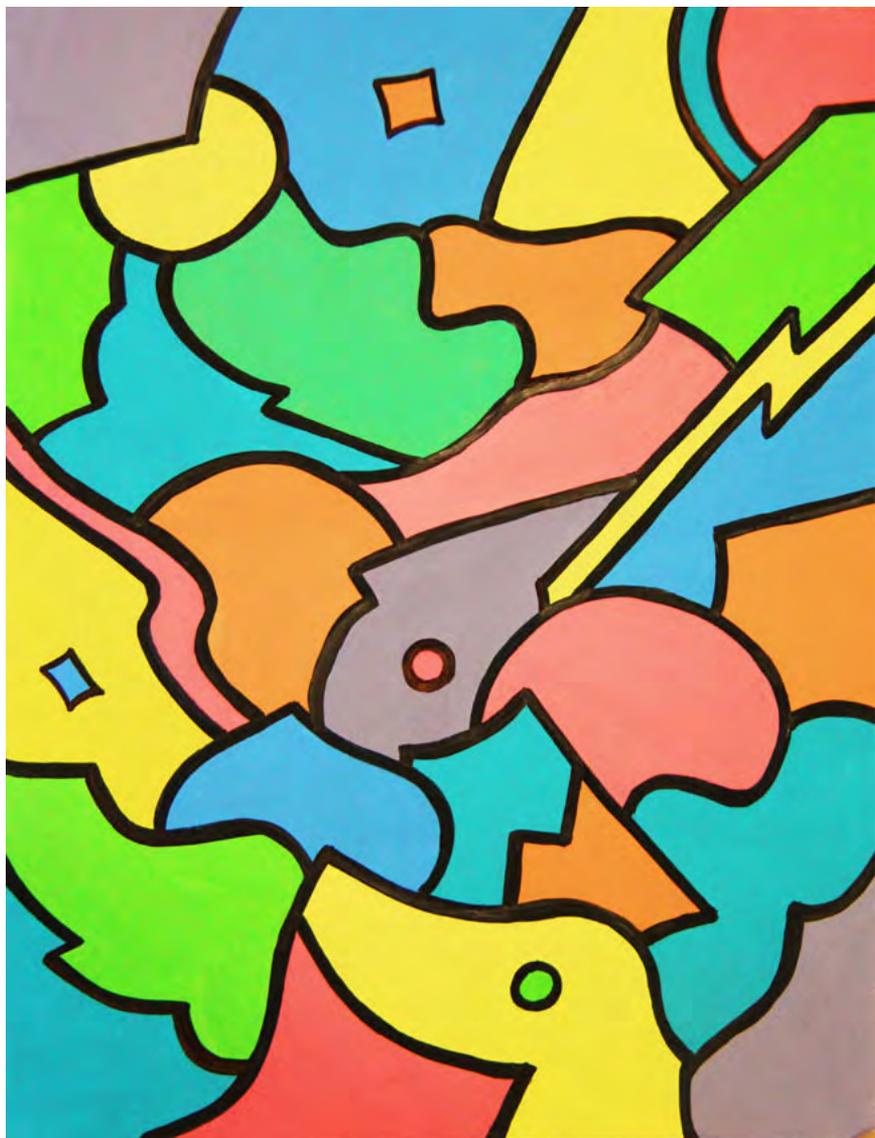
Zoe

I was being pushed, squeezed, maybe even crushed, and then suddenly I had the strange sensation of air on my face. Bright light pierced my eyelids and sharp noises assaulted my ears. Hands reached for me as I slid from my mother's body. Cold air prickled on my skin; all was a confusing blur of intense sensation.

In that electric moment, in the blinding light when I opened my eyes for the first time, I saw her, my angel. She kissed me. She spoke to me, but not with words, for I knew no words then. Yet I knew that we were part of each other and she loved me. Then the cold, strange air filled my lungs and I began to cry from the shock and confusion of it all, and they placed me on my mother's chest. And just before I closed my eyes again, I saw my angel disappear in a flash of light. I rested, soothed by the familiar thump-thump of the mother-heart beneath me, her warm, familiar voice above me.

Erica

The first thing I noticed when they placed Zoe in my arms was how much she resembled Mama. I have pictures of Mama when she was little, and Zoe looks exactly like her. I still can't believe my mother died just minutes before Zoe was born! They missed each other by two floors and five minutes. How sad is that? Mama didn't get to see Zoe take her first steps or say her first word, or bring me dandelion bouquets. Zoe is four now, and she has Mama's tender-hearted nature, and her faith. Just yesterday, she told me there was an angel watching over her. It's such a shame she and her grandmother never met. Mama would have loved her.



Brissette Li Lodoza
Untitled

Nicholas Munoz
Kumbaya

sometimes at night
I can't sleep
it's not the monsters
under my bed
or the light
flicking on and off
it's the thoughts that are
in my head

it's the thoughts
that press the
buttons, alternating the
levers
on this pin ball
machine
ricocheting the ball
bumper to
bumper

it's the thoughts
that grasp
Buddy Rich's drum sticks
from the snare
drum
to the high-hat
cymbals
this is an endless
solo

it's the thoughts that swing
the baton
the composer holds
to the symphony
of my

anxieties
worries
words I didn't say
lights I didn't turn off
doors I didn't lock
books I didn't finish
cigarettes I didn't put out
emails I didn't send
lint I didn't clean out of
the dryer

it's these thoughts
that spit
gasoline
on the tips of the flames
and they continue to rise
and rise
towards the night sky

so let us all
gather around the
campfire
and sing—

Kumbaya.





Anu B
Truth and Lies

Mary Mauntz
Sand

Since, I can still smell
Incarnadine, ire winds howl under guise of soft zephyrs
How they deafen my wizen ears to any nuance of meaning
Those mephitic ululations
Breathing the air, that yellow scent
Which is not of auric descent...
And not of the long forgotten...

Insidious kismet meet to gather my taste-buds angst
And rumor of saccharine sweet, babble bauble
They drill jewels in my eye-sockets
Casting beams of motley, multicolored revels

Dreams remain passing of yesternights
Heebie-jeebies croon neath my scalp
Peeling back my widow's peak
Releasing the offspring of my mind

Pillars of quiescent clouds rise from my skull
And dollop the mountain top
Heightening every promised sensation
Far as the wonder that keeps the stars apart
Yet so long as I don't mind
That you stole the timbre timber from my bones,
And the perhaps morrow from my marrow,
I will remain weightless

Emily Bowen
Becoming

Wind rolled through the open windows, and I breathed in the dark, lonely air. The scent of pine was a further reminder that I was far away from where I thought I was supposed to be. I wished I was in the passenger seat right then listening to the sound of ocean waves crashing in the distance, and pretending to be asleep and smiling to myself knowing that he could see right through me. He always knew when I was faking, but I knew that I looked adorable all curled up while he drove down the empty roads at night because he told me so. But I was driving now, and he was nowhere.

We were best friends. I loved him so much that it took me a while to realize it. He felt the same way, I think. I met him in California one summer when I was visiting an aunt I hardly knew, to help her with her gardening for some extra money for my senior year of high school. That summer was the best I'd ever had. We swam in the salty sea, we watched the sky change colors every evening eating peaches; we jumped on his trampoline. He helped me garden at my aunt's house. He introduced me to his friends.

He told me I was beautiful when I asked him to. He told me he loved me when I couldn't love myself. He was perfect. We were perfect for each other.

A deer stood in my headlights. My foot found the brakes and pushed. Hard. It wasn't enough. My car knocked the little doe off her feet, and she flew to her death. The car stopped, and I sat still. I killed a beautiful, innocent deer and only because I was so wrapped up in a stupid irrelevant boy who hadn't even talked to me in a month and a half. I got out of the driver's seat and sank to the ground, sobbing in the middle of the street. It took me a while to face her, but eventually I found myself crying over her body too. Her life

meant something, and I took it away, just like he did to me.

I came home to the mountains in September, and I talked to him every night on the phone. I stayed awake far later into the night than I should have just to hear him tell me that I meant something to him. Because if I didn't mean anything to him, I didn't mean anything at all. It started softly. He wasn't excited to tell me about his day, he was tired and fell asleep before I could call him, or he was with his friends. He assured me I was reading into things, that he cared for me, that I was being paranoid. On the days he remembered me, I was alive. I was full. I loved myself. On the days he forgot, I was inside myself, moaning with grief and wondering what I did wrong.

The deer's neck was broken, and her head faced the wrong way. I tried to fix it, but something snapped inside her, and I cried again. Suddenly there were headlights coming around the curve in the road. It was an old pickup truck, and it stopped beside the deer and me. A woman with gray hair and soft eyes and rain boots stepped out and spoke to me in a quiet voice.

"Oh honey, are you alright?" I nodded, but didn't speak because then she would hear my voice crack with tears and she would know how weak I was.

"This happens to everyone at least once, honey. Let's get her out of the road. Come on over here and help me with her." Together, we hoisted up that limp doe and placed her as gently as we could behind a tree far enough away from the road. The woman took the yellow ribbon that held up her silvery hair and tied it around the tree.

"Her life was not wasted, honey," the woman said because she saw the silent tears dripping from my chin. "She'll return to the earth, just like the rest of us will. She's part of the circle, and so are you and me and everybody." I nodded

again, and she, looking sadly at me with blue-gray eyes now twinkling with tears, held her arms out to me. She pulled me into her chest, and whispered, "I know you don't know me from Adam but I know you're special. You matter, honey." All I wanted to do then was crawl into her skin and live in that knowledge of who I was. I wanted to know who I was.

Autumn was a mix of loving him and trying to tell myself to move on. The days he didn't love me, nobody did. I lost 5 pounds in two months, partly because I was too stressed with what he thought of me to eat, and partly because I wanted him to love my thin body more. We began calling only three times a week, then twice, then once, then once every two weeks. He texted me good morning some days, and I would hold my head up high. My heart pounded every morning to find out if he thought of me that day. I was increasingly disappointed as November became winter.

I began to realize that maybe he didn't want me anymore. Maybe he moved on to a new girl; maybe I was just a placeholder so he could enjoy me until he found something new. It had been two weeks since we last had a real conversation, and I didn't want to seem desperate, but enough was enough, so I called him. It was late, and he was in bed (I could tell by the groggy "hello").

"Hey." All I could do was whisper, and try not to cry. It took him a few moments to respond.

"Um... Hey. What's up?" He asked me to know why I called; it was not a conversational "hey I care about how you're doing and want to know about it," it was an "I was sleeping and you woke me up. why." He was confused, and I was confused at his confusion. I loved him, why should I not call him? Why didn't he understand that?

"I was just wondering why we haven't talked in awhile.

I wanted to see how you were doing, and maybe... well, I wanted to know what was going on between us." He was quiet for a long time after I stopped talking. I hoped he couldn't hear my panicked breathing in the background. I wouldn't have been surprised if he could hear my heart pounding.

"Yeah... Um, I still care about you. I just feel like this distance thing is too hard. It's not that I don't like you, because I do, but I just can't keep this up anymore. I need to be with someone I can be with." I don't know what crushed me more: Hearing what I hadn't been able to admit to myself for the past two weeks, or the fact that he waited for me to ask him to tell me.

"Did you ever care about me? Because if you really loved me, that doesn't just go away with a little distance." I hoped he could hear how angry I was. I hoped he knew that beneath the anger, I was sobbing.

"I don't know, Ally."

"Ok."

"You're still one of my closest friends. I don't want to stop talking to you."

I put one of my old mixed CD's into the CD player before leaving the side of the road with the yellow-ribboned tree. It was titled "Roaming" and I had drawn a forest of pine trees to decorate the top of it. I had made it before I met him, otherwise I would have drawn the ocean. The first song to come on was "Passenger Seat". I laughed at the irony. Then I cried.

It's an interesting thing to drive while absolutely breaking down. You can't shut your eyes, so the tears just flow, and you can't take your hands off the wheel, so you can't

cover your ugly crying grimace like you usually do.

I listened to the song until I tuned it out with my own inner monologue.

Listen, he doesn't love you. So what? It just means there's someone better for you, someone that will love you better.

And then it hit me so hard I had to stop the car again. Death Cab For Cutie was still sounding from the car speakers, but softly.

No. I don't need to coexist to exist. I don't need love from anyone but myself. Easier said than done. The stars sang in agreement from their places in the sky. I was surprised they could hear what was happening inside my head from all the way up there, but then again, they are stars.

He and I didn't stop talking for a long time after that. We still shared happy moments, and I thought everything was right, but we also shared periods of silence, and I knew nothing would be the same. I was desperate for him, though it was clear he did not share those sentiments. I assured my friends that no, I was not single, but I wasn't in a relationship either. I told myself he needed time. Maybe when I went back to my aunt's for the summer, things would go back to how they were the summer before. Maybe. Soon, though, even our friendship began deteriorating. I clung to him because without his assurance that he cared for me, I was nothing.

This had been true for my entire life, not just in this relationship with this boy. I had always sought after the affections of others as a way to fill what I couldn't. It was always boy after boy who liked me for the funny comments and the spontaneity, but once I needed them, they were gone. They only had two lungs; they couldn't breathe for me, but I needed them to. But they couldn't.

I looked up through the windshield at the stars smiling above the tips of the trees. A cool breeze shivered through the open window before another car's headlights filled up the rearview mirror. They slowed to go around me in the opposite lane and stopped outside my window as I rolling it up. I was half leaned over, my hand turning the crank to get the window closed, when they said, "Hey are you ok?"

It was a man, with father features. He looked like he loved a lot.

"I don't know." I called out to him from behind a half closed window. He looked at me quizzically, then I realized that he wasn't asking about how I was doing, but more of what I was doing.

"Oh, yeah, I'm fine. I'm just rolling up my window."

"You might want to move your car out of the middle of the road to do that. I almost hit you." He nodded, and I copied him. He didn't wait for a response before driving up and around the next curve. Instead of pulling over, I kept driving. During the day, that drive was filled with expansive views of the mountain range and all the trees and even the sunset over the most westward ridge. I used to drive that road in the evenings to see the sun setting towards him. It was romantic.

There came a day when I texted him for the last time. He told me again that I just didn't mean that much to him anymore, and he didn't know a. I knew he was sorry, and I forgave him. It didn't make it hurt less, but I did it anyway. It was the first selfless thing we had between us. After that, I willed myself to move on. I didn't need him. I could breathe on my own. I didn't need him. I could breathe on my own. I didn't need him. I could breathe.

Again, easier said than done. I called my aunt to tell her I couldn't bring myself to be in the same state as him, and to apologize for not being able to garden for her that summer. I watched overripe lemons fall off my neighbor's little tree on their porch. I woke every morning to new flowers blooming and bees humming. They were worth something, so I had to be too. Nights usually ended in tears under the covers, but I was trying to be ok with that. Feeling pain is a part of being, and all I wanted was to be. I spent a lot of time laying on my floor and looking at the ceiling and wondering where I was. I knew I was lying on a dirty carpet in a house far away from the ocean, but the person I thought I was wasn't there. No, the person I thought I was left when he did. Or did I leave first? I couldn't remember.

I drove for another 20 minutes, listening to the playlist and sometimes crying and sometimes laughing and sometimes hitting my steering wheel with my fist. The road wound up the mountain, and I drove the curves like waves, but my heart knew these were safe. They were not his waves, they were mine. When the CD was playing its last song, the road leveled out into a parking lot with a sign saying "HOURS: SUNRISE TO SUNSET". It was not the first time I would ignore this sign. I parked the car, and listened to last notes of a song called "Jupiter". It made me want to be a planet, just to be sung about.

Thinking about him still hurt, and there were a lot of words unsaid that I wished I could spit on him. But I also wished that I could feel his fingers in my hair sometimes too.

The air was colder up there on top of the mountain than it was when I left my house. I pulled a threadbare sweatshirt out of the trunk of my car and held it up to put it on. It was his. It was big, and smelled like him. I took it off. I decided I'd rather be cold than be wrapped up in the memory of him. I thought of this as a great step into being, not needing his sweatshirt. I folded it up and put it back into the trunk,

planning on giving it to the next shivering homeless person I saw.

The wind whispered in the trees, and painted goose-bumps on my skin. I wrapped my arms around myself and began to walk through the brush off to the side of the parking lot. Taking the trail was safer, but my way was faster. Moonlight shone through the trees in speckles, but it was bright enough to find my way to a great boulder that overlooked the entire mountain range. My body warmed as I climbed to the top. I sat on its surface, breathing hard and wishing to be alone before remembering that I already was. It felt like someone else was there with me; there was more of me than there needed to be, and the more that was there wasn't very kind to me. She couldn't be scraped away, or cried out. The me inside had to become more than she was.

I leaned back onto the rock, which was cold through my thin shirt, and smiled back at the stars. They were rooting for me. I asked them who they were, about the day they were born, if they loved themselves. I asked who I was, who I was meant to be. I shivered while waiting for a response. The moon looked thoughtfully at them, waiting for an answer; I guess she wanted to know too. None of them knew what to say.

Then finally, the North Star, the star of direction, the star that shines the brightest, the star that must know who she is, spoke to me:

“It hurts to become.”



Jamie Sandoval
Snow Caps

Ernest Rodrigues
Vindictive

I don't know why I tolerate you,
All you do is voice your opinion on everything,
And tell us what we should do,
I'm trying to tune you out;
Seriously just stop talking.

I cannot wait until we are finally apart,
Until then I will try to tune you out,
And pretend I care about what're saying.

Wait, where did everyone go?
No, I don't want to be alone,
Not with you of all people.
Great, guess I'm stuck here.

I see you talking but I don't care,
Maybe if I let this conversation die
You'll take the hint and finally leave me,
And I can finally enjoy myself at last,
But until then the only thing dead
Is you to me.

Bethany Lynch
Mastering Anger

I drip like paint
From a bristled brush
As your smile broils and
Blisters

You vomit curses
You dance cruelly around me
You step on my wings and call me to
Squawk

I tear like tissue paper
I crack like egg shells
Beneath your
Sasquatch feet

You enrage in volcanic tantrums
And in your voice
I hear
The sound of fury

I bleed like a cactus
When you harpoon me
With your eyes

And.
I scream a swarm of bees
I throw mountains against walls
Like dinner plates

I slam doors and watch them shatter
I dismantle your body
And blow curse words like bubbles

My lungs heave

Under the weight
Of pressing snow banks

I hate you, I hate you, I hate you
I hate you, I hate you, I hate you
I forgive you.



Anu B
Shattered Rain

Catherine Kendall
Farewell to Blue Eyes

To a face I'll never see,
To a hand I'll never hold, I say goodbye.
It shouldn't be so hard
To give up someone who never was.

My arms shouldn't feel so empty
When my life is so full,
I shouldn't feel so fragile
When sturdy walls surround me.

Shouldn't feel so alone
With all the love I know,
Shouldn't feel I'm drowning
In my own sadness.

Regrets piled like stones in my path,
Now they are crushing me,
Too many choices badly made
And this, not even mine.

I place you on the altar of my love
Slowly turn and walk away.
You were only possibility
But your blue eyes haunt my dreams.

Derrick Hills *Untitled*

**During World War II, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which forced over 127,000 Japanese-American citizens from their homes to U.S. internment camps, simply for being of Japanese ancestry. The assumption was that Japanese-Americans would be more loyal to Japan than the U.S. regardless of their country of birth and despite the fact that many had served or fought for the U.S. in previous wars. Whether they were born in Japan or had been in the U.S. for generations, they lost homes, businesses, life savings and almost all of their belongings. Many families and friends were separated as they were transferred to camps in various locations throughout the country, each one surrounded by towers and heavily-armed guards with guns pointed inward (towards the prisoners) at all times. After the war ended, Japanese-Americans – without homes, jobs or money – had to start from scratch building their lives again, and still faced anti-Japanese sentiment, hate crimes and discrimination for years to come.*

March 1942 – San Francisco, California:

The family approached the train station, a little boy squished between his parents and holding tightly to their hands as they walked. His mother had been crying for days. Tears welled up in her eyes and started to roll silently down her cheeks whenever she looked towards her husband, but she was trying to conceal them now– for her own sake as well as her son’s. The boy’s father kept a calm expression which faltered only slightly when he thought of what was to come for his family. The worry made his stomach weak, but he had to appear strong and at ease as not to further torment his wife and especially his child, who was the most oblivious of the three. He caught his wife’s eyes and tried to give a reassuring smile as she glanced nervously between him and their son.

The boy himself didn't know yet what to expect. His family had been acting strangely for a couple of weeks, and he suspected it was something to do with that letter they received in the mail. The same announcements seemed to be posted on walls and buildings all over town, though they were always too high for him to read. Since then, they were forced to give up the family pet, their fluffy white cat – appropriately named “Cloudy” by the boy – who always kept him warm on cold nights and helped him to fall asleep when his father was away from home or working late at their store.

An icy breeze made him shiver in his shoes, and he wished he had the cat to snuggle up to now.

Cloudy, he thought to himself, wherever you are, I hope you're okay. He would miss the kitty's company, but was glad to at least have his parents beside him. He tried to remind himself of happier memories, such as spending quality time with family– especially before bed when his father finally came home, and his parents would tell him tales of folklore and their own childhoods as they tucked him in. He listened a lot about how they worked so hard to save up enough money to come to America and create a better life for themselves, at first knowing such little English but working for years to improve it so they could open the family shop... They then worked tirelessly together to bring their store to its great reputation and success! The stories would finish with his father's lighthearted chuckle followed by a hug and soft kiss on the forehead, a goodnight from both parents. This was when the boy felt safest and most content with life. There was always a good story and always something interesting to think about while drifting off to sleep.

But the boy had not heard such a bedtime story in a long time. When he asked why, Mother simply told him that she and Father had been busy “taking care of business” and later

that night, Father came home earlier than usual wearing an odd expression on his face. He said he had lost something very important to him. The boy soon learned that his father had sold the store and everything in it, though he did not quite understand why in spite of his parents' explanation that the government wanted his family to "move away to a new place".

None of them could predict what would happen when they did move. All they knew was that they had no choice but to follow the law set in place. The boy's parents also knew they would not be able to take everything with them, and needed to sell as much as they could as soon as possible. But both their store and their house had been vandalized by racists from a nearby neighborhood earlier that week, who smashed their windows with stones and wrote hateful slurs on their doors. Due to the sudden damage, both properties depreciated greatly in value.

Their house was sold only a few days after, along with most of their belongings. Other items had to be given away for free, but some they were prohibited from bringing on the grounds of being "too traditional" or "suspicious" and had to dispose of themselves. This included the father's most prized possessions: little teacups and a kettle that his own mother had made for him as a farewell gift before his journey to America; and the mother's most prized possession: a bright kimono of her favorite colors.

No one would have bought such things, and being unable to take these items with them, neither could bear the thought of anyone else destroying them out of malice. So instead, they lit a fire underneath the chimney and burned everything as quickly as they could, watching sadly as the flames angrily devoured tokens from their most precious memories.

That morning they said their final goodbyes to the house, walking through each room and out the door for the very last time.

The boy thought about what they had lost in such a short amount of time and wondered what more there was to lose as the station drew closer.

The three joined a long line of people, others like the family, stuck the same situation. Immediately, the mother turned around and hugged her husband tightly. Once she was done, the father bent down to face his child and break the news he had been dreading to share with him for what seemed like a lifetime.

"I'm sorry, but I have to go now. I can't come with you and your mother today." The words were hardly audible, barely above a whisper.

"Why not?" the boy asked, suddenly scared and concerned.

"I've been told to go to a different place from you and your mother. There are too many people where you two are, so I have to stay somewhere else."

The boy stared back at his father's face and fought back tears as he realized his family wouldn't be able to stay together after all.

"I'm sorry we couldn't tell you earlier," the boy's mother added, kneeling down to her son's height to meet his helpless eyes. "We didn't want to scare you or make you worry more." She squeezed his hand gently as the boy turned again towards his father.

"How long will you be gone?" he asked.

“I don’t know,” the father admitted, “but you have to behave well. Be a good boy. In the meantime, just keep your mother company for me and we’ll see each other soon.” He hoped more than anything that those words were true.

The family clung desperately to one another for several minutes, in a tiny, warm circle with their backs to the outside world. Strong winds blew chilling air across the station, sending a few passengers’ hats and newspapers flying. But the family stayed still together until it was time to board the train.

“All aboard!” the conductor barked, as the mother stood quietly and rested her hand on the top of her son’s head, fixing a few stray strands of his hair.

“Do you really have to go?” the boy murmured in his father’s ear.

“I do.”

“But I’ll miss you!” the boy cried, as if it would change the situation not one of these families could control.

“I’ll miss you, too.” the father held tightly again to his son, giving one last hug, no one knowing how long it would be until they could be reunited.

“And remember, my child, that I love you very, very much,” he said before giving him a quick kiss on the forehead, slowly letting go of his hand as his wife and son reluctantly boarded the train without him.

The father watched the boy wave sadly through the window with his little nose pressed up against the glass and tears pouring down his cheeks. His wife stared out from

behind, trying to comfort their grief-stricken child but very much heartbroken herself. The father said his final good-byes as the doors closed and the train began to move, all-too-quickly picking up speed and all-too-quickly ripping his family apart.

The train grew smaller as it moved off into the distance. He watched it go against the cold morning sun until it was no longer visible on the horizon.

“I love you,” the father repeated. “And I’ll miss you very, very much.”



Shadow of the White Ninja
West Valley College



Christy Oliver Nguyen
Concept: *Android Boy*

Cassie Del Rosario

Hands

I saw a church once, made of stone
Towering walls forged by a waltz of terrazzo and quartz
A façade cloaked in porcelain
In whose wrinkles, tucks, valleys
I see the face of an old friend

Where the linoleum picks up,
peels, and curls

Licking up like the tips of waves
Of whom they admire
Calling forth the sleeping waters from their cavern
To cascade on the rocks
A roaring river tasting of metal, lime, and bitters

I see stars, the cosmos in my cup
Effervescent, teeming to the brim
Of violet dust melding to cobalt
A galaxy I can hold in my hand, swig and swirl

I stir to find them again
Pining for sweet Grenadine
Her kiss of pomegranate
Cold as glass, cannot be matched
But settled for-
She stopped coming here months ago

My nose sunken in a bouquet of vanilla
Pressed in till the breath stings sweet
I am swimming in sap

A river of red to cleanse my dirty skin and carry me home
A soothing balm for my rigid fingers, handcuffed in
amber

Only then, can I make peace with my hands.

Evan Brown

Interlude

An awakening wind dispatched, forged
its way down mountains, tumbled through the streets
flattening grasses, seizing roses, suspending
leafless branches in a frozen explosion.
Colors once vibrant now robbed
by ice; an interesting photograph,
a snapshot tainted a paralyzing, achromatic
blue
captured with a fractured lens.

The moon, the rooftop, our sanity
whittled and waned —
eroded swiftly. Kisses,
hugs, laughs, smiles, subtle
blissful glances, all
too quick —
staccato
footsteps
scrambling to a halt, billowing
up dust from beneath recoiling feet. Once a wonderful
journey now a hasty
desperation
to just make it.

That wind uprooted yard
after yard,
the birches and the hydrangeas,
Ed Sheeran's lyrics, the Lego House
and the inside jokes
relinquished
from our vernacular, swept

away with the debris. My guitar string broke,
and you don't care!

Music is just
noise, anyway. Hear
nature's dominoes, coming
through fences, peoples' windshields, and
the loveseat on the curb —
with a "Free" sign on it
where we once embraced.
Petals, thorns, all the prickly appendages
scrutinized by the gusts. Unprejudiced,
nondiscriminatory.
We can learn a thing or two
from the ever-
changing moon, the wind, the
displaced
keepsakes. The
now-barren suburbia of our life
allowing better views beyond
the horizon.

Shivering, I blow steam through my palms.
I look up —
The moon, a glistening sickle in the sky
drew my eye. The stars
retreated
deciding not to scintillate tonight. Perhaps
they thought it was best.
Fingertips, cheeks, lips
simply frostbitten extremities now.

Kasandra Arreola

Swollen Eyes

Swollen eyes
And broken lies
Hide behind the infinite crimes
And you go on
And live your life
without knowing the damage you've caused inside me
Cut me out a piece of sky
Only to have rest come down
Crashing all over me
Hurting me,
Provoking me,
Into nights with no sleep
Remembering how to speak
Wanting to count those brown dots on your face
Ever so slowly
Cause it's not a race
And once the the dots ran out
I ran out of space
And somewhere to place my faith

Justin Chan
Atrial Fibrillation

I gazed at you for an eternity,
As my heart started to fill.
I never want to forget your face,
And I pray that I never will.

I always knew the price to fall,
But this time wasn't the case.
I always knew the heart was all,
'Till the moment I saw your face.

Earth resounded in jubilee,
As my heart danced in chest.
Outside kept cool composure,
A contradiction from the rest.

Seconds turned to hours,
And hours turned to days.
World remained the same,
Life changed in many ways.

But I had two different decisions,
Before she'd disappear.
Before the only company'd be,
The wind—whistling in my ear.

It came down to that fateful day,
I could finally hand her the key.
The morning before she left,
To reveal everything in me.

I peered into those eyes,
Silently willing them to glance back.

I blinked and she was gone,

I waited too long to act.

Alas she never obtained it,
Fear brought 'bout the end of fate.
One moment—an opportunity,
Another moment—too late.

Evenings found me weary with war:
The darkening dusk had won.
Struggling through every scenario,
Dismissing every one.

But every so often I would remember
each instant; reminisce for a while.
Recall each glance—met with glance.
Recall each smile—met with smile.

And only during these moments,
My heart believed that it was true.
In the medium of sleep and reality,
I believed she felt it too.

Hesitation was to blame;
Nostalgia saturated and sad.
I think about what could have been:
The best thing I never had.

The possibility plagues me;
Propaganda plays with my head.
'Til the day the procedures release me:
Heart dissected with paper and lead.



Shadow of the White Ninja
West Valley Campus

Caitlynn Fernane

Snow Storm

Small specs free fall from the deep gray sky
Turning trees from green to white
Blistering winds, Blizzard warnings.
When will you be home?

Sleek and still snowing
We'll make sure to spread the salt
Tonight, a sleepless fright
Concerned for our safety,
and yours, too.

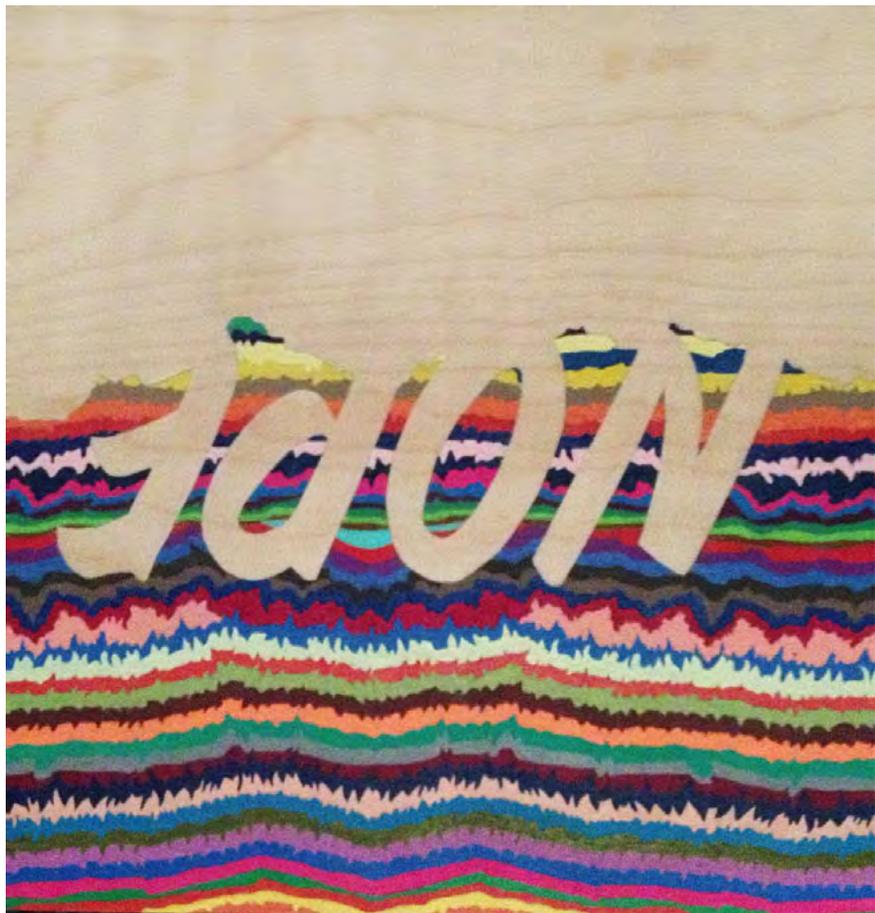
Streets are vacant,
not a car in sight
Snow still falling throughout the darkness.
Stars may be shining but cannot be seen
Hidden from the shedding snow.

Silently sitting,
Waiting.
Wishing you were here.
Sunshine speaks my mind,
something warm
and self-controlling.

But this storm of powder is freezing over.

It's just the beginning.

Jamie Sandoval
Bitterroot



Anu B

Bethany Lynch

Brissette Li Lozada

Caitlynn Fernane

Cassie Del Rosario

Catherine Kendall

Christy Nguyen

Daniel Miguel Duarte

Derrick Hill

Emily Bowen

Ernest Rodrigues

Evan Brown

Felicia Alvarenga

Jaime Sandoval

Justin Chan

Kassandra Arreola

Mary Mauntz

Natassa Yulo

Nicholas Munoz

Nicole Avila

Victoria Gee