

Voices

# Voices

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MIDWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY PRESENTS

# VOICES

VOL. XXXX

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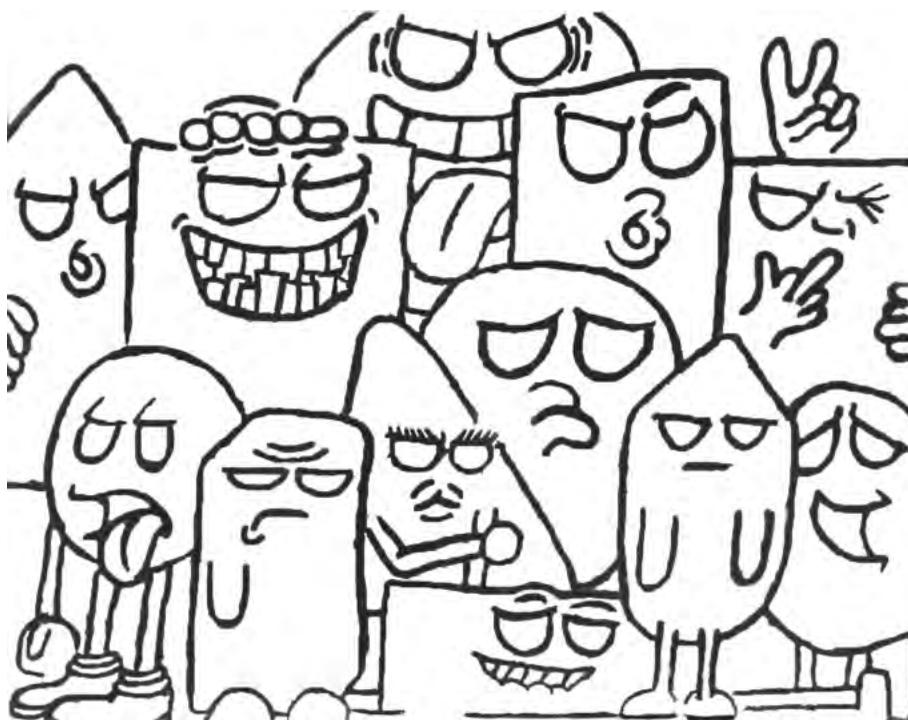
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ISAIAH EDWARDS

*The Odd Ones*

KM polymer plate 5" x 4"

## EDITORS' NOTE

The Editors proudly present the fortieth issue of *Voices*. We extend our thanks to Dr. John Schulze, our *Voices* advisor, for his expert assistance and guidance throughout the process of compiling this journal. We are also grateful to the Department of English, Humanities, and Philosophy; the Student Allocations Committee; and the Bryan L. Lawrence Endowment for making this year's *Voices* possible. Finally, we thank everyone who contributed their work to our publication.

The Editors hope that the time and effort invested in the creation of this *Voices* issue matches that of our contributors. We appreciate each and every submission, and hope that our contributors are proud to see their work published in this journal. We are confident everyone will enjoy reading this edition of *Voices* just as much as we have enjoyed making it.

If you are interested in submitting your work for a future edition of *Voices*, you can search for us on [Submitable.com](http://Submitable.com) or visit our website: [mwsu.info/voices](http://mwsu.info/voices).

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*Out of This World*

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# CONTENTS

Isaiah Edwards	
THE ODD ONES--	1
Daniel Garcia	
LA LUNA--	9
SONRISAS--	11
LA POPULAR BAKERY --	12
Yamilett Compean	
JULY 6, 2017--	13
Frida Arredondo	
SOY MUJER--	15
I AM A WOMAN--	16
Emone Collins	
COLOR OF MY SKIN --	17
Gracie Glebe	
THE RIDE--	19
FALLING IN LOVE--	20
Joshua Espitia	
VACUUM--	21
SCHRÖDINGER'S BREAK-UP--	22
Tyne Sansom	
INFECTED WITH BRETT--	24
Nicholas Skaldetvind	
VANISH--	25
Tessa Kennedy	
BOXED IN--	27
THE GIRL IN BLUE--	28
AN APPEAL--	29
Grace Tschlis	
DEPARTURES--	30
Miranda Mullins	
THICK THIGHS TELL PRETTY LIES--	33
GOOD--	36
Rachele Salvini	
THE DIVORCED FEMINIST'S SEXUAL DEBACLE--	38
Chloe Dewberry-Hanssen	
AN OPEN LETTER FOR SELF HEALING--	42
SILICON DIOXIDE--	44
Rachel Ross	
I'M NOT FOR SALE--	45

Adrienne Hill	
ORANGE GIRL--	46
ORANGE GIRL BLUE HAIR--	47
Shasta Fox	
INGRID--	48
Bry'ton rolle	
STAINED--	49
Tanner Slavins	
SAINT RITA OF CASCIA--	50
Megan Allen	
UP IN FLAMES--	51
Rachel Wilson	
ERIC'S COFFEE--	52
Regan Pace	
GROW TO LOVE--	53
FLASH FLOOD--	54
AUTOBIOGRAPHY--	55
Katie Jones	
TEA--	56
Jessica Odom	
ONE SHORT DAY--	60
HAPPY--	61
THE IMPERFECT MORTICIAN'S MANUAL--	62
Emone Collins	
DARKNESS--	63
Logan Murphy	
GRANDFATHER CLOCK--	65
Cody peterson	
I NEVER LOVED YOU--	66
Taylor Deanese Johnson	
ONE MINUTE--	69
A.J. Wilkins	
TICK--	71
Emma Carnford	
ELEMENTAL--	73
A MINUTE'S WORTH--	74
Caitlin McNeely	
THE FIREWORKS' SECRETS--	77
MORE THAN FLOWERS--	78

Alysia McKinney		
	BIRDCAGE SOUL--	79
Autumn Fredline		
	BANG--	80
Elena Lake		
	SCRATCH--	81
Shem Alexander		
	TWO MARTYRS--	82
Krysten Farrier		
	FREE PALESTINE--	83
Rachel Wilson		
	PAST DUE--	84
Natalia Hernandez		
	DEMASIA--	85
Bailey Pitzer		
	TRAPPED WITHIN--	86
Jayden Johnson		
	MIND OVER MADNESS--	87
Juan Parra		
	TREE--	88
Jessica Manchester-Sanchez		
	BECAUSE I SPEAK WITH TREES--	89
Nathan Conard		
	CAMPING CINQUAINS--	90
Joshua Sidic		
	MULBERRY--	91
	WINTER ON NAKAMUN LAKE--	92
John Monagle		
	IN THE MINUTES OF WINTER DAY--	93
	SATURDAY MORNING--	94
	REGRET FOR THE MIRROR--	95
Jason Inman		
	LAST CHANCE--	97
Almira Lewis		
	WAITIKUBULI (DOMINICA)--	100
Tyne Sansom		
	EYE OF THE HURRICANE--	101
	SHADOW PUPPET--	102
Autumn Fredline		
	I DON'T GET IT EITHER, ALRIGHT?--	103
	QUILTS--	106
	BELLE OF THE BALL--	107

Whitney Atkinson	
FORTY-THREE STEPS TO FREEDOM--	109
E.N. Bourland	
AN ODE TO LACUNAS, CO-AUTHORED BY RHYMEZONE.COM--	117
THE POLITICAL IS PERSONAL--	118
THE WORST THING ABOUT READING--	120
Madison Leonard	
BISEXUAL AND CATHOLIC--	121
Haylee Fowler	
VOICES--	122
Trinity McGraw	
MY ENEMY--	123
Ryane Townsend	
F-STOP--	124
Ginger Johnson	
FAMILY I NEVER KNEW--	126
DROWSY STABILITY--	127
BOOK LOVERS--	128
CONTRIBUTORS--	130

## MSU WRITING AWARDS

**The Vinson Award** is given yearly to a current, full-time undergraduate MSU student who is in good academic standing. Students may submit poetry, short fiction, or creative nonfiction. The award is presented at the Honors Banquet during the spring term. In addition to publication in *Voices*, the award includes a cash prize of \$1,000.

**The Bryan L. Lawrence Creative Writing Award** is given annually to the best submission to *Voices* from a student attending MSU Texas. Poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction pieces are all eligible. In addition to a certificate and publication in *Voices*, the award includes a cash prize of \$200.

**The President's Awards for Creative Writing** are awarded in two categories: poetry and prose. All submissions from all contributors are eligible for this award. In addition to publication in *Voices*, each winner will receive a cash prize: First Place— \$100, Second Place— \$50, and Third Place— \$25.



# DANIEL GARCIA

## *la luna*

her pants sag  
as she walks.  
the thud of her  
shoes echoes  
back and forth  
against the walls  
of grandma's hallway.

it's just a phase  
they all say,  
grandma, mama, auntie.  
she will grow  
out of it  
like a tree.  
they hear that  
she is dating  
the girl she  
brings to dinner.  
she just wants  
attention they say,  
grandpa, papa, uncle.

she has your attention.  
why would she  
still be searching for it?  
what would you do  
if you knew  
I've kissed  
another man?

it's just a phase, they say  
but don't believe them, *prima*.  
phases exist all around us,  
think of the moon.

## VOICES

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the moon goes through phases  
and remains *la luna, pero*  
*no somos la luna.*  
I can assure you,  
you are not the moon.

*sonrisas*

in the summer we eat watermelons  
and drink fruit sodas.

the girl's face cracks when she smiles,  
and her freckles darken under the sun.

her eyes bleed hazel,  
and they vanish when she laughs.

cherry-red lips, sticky fingers  
a bucket of balloons.

the water strikes my back,  
the cold paralyzes me,

you laugh as I fall on pavement,  
I wish your eyes could see me smile.

*la popular bakery*

for you, an orange muffin.  
for me, a churro.

we enjoyed the sugar crystals  
that congealed on the crusts of our pastries  
and dusted our lips.  
what didn't make it into our mouths  
eventually fell to the yellow-tiled floor  
spotted with mud and coffee stains.

for you, strawberry milk.  
for me, chocolate.

we cracked the seals of our bottles of milk,  
sipped and swallowed,  
our mouths thanking us for the gift  
after having been dried out by sugar and flour.  
the corners of your mouth were always dyed pink.  
the color would fade as the milk crusted.

these memories remain so vivid no matter how hard  
I try to forget them.

today when I go into la popular bakery on culebra road  
the wrinkled woman running the counter still asks me  
with a smile,  
an orange muffin and a churro, mijo?  
I smile back,  
just coffee please.

# YAMILETT COMPEAN

*July 6, 2017*

My favorite t-shirt is a Jarritos shirt. A Jarritos is a carbonated fruit-like drink made in Mexico. The t-shirt has a vibrant picture of a sugar skull that is associated with the Day of the Dead. Underneath the skull is a banner that reads “we are not from here.” That shirt is a lot like me. I am painted vivaciously on a bare background, and just like the drink, I am not from here.

My father, who suffered the red, dry eyes of a train roof, wanted a dragon of a son. Instead, he got a sunflower. Nonetheless, he told me that I burned with rage from the oppression of my people, that I could set fires with my anger of being denied. “All are welcome.” I embodied his hope of staying where he wasn’t wanted, but when my father was deported, it ignited a flame in my belly and sparked scales as rough as my father’s hands. I finally became the dragon he saw, but I still saw me. I saw a person with armor, for fear of people getting too close. I saw my fire as a drive to be the things my father couldn’t; I saw someone with wings who could leave if she wanted to. If she needed to.

My abuelita, my grandmother, who filled her lungs with fresh water when she crossed the Rio Grande, disagreed. To her, I was no dragon. To her, I was the daughter of the star keeper, that there was a reason my mind was bright and my eyes had stars, unlike her own pupils of pain. Enclosed within factories she could never escape, she cried that I was made for better things than storms of stereotypes and droughts of equality. I was not to share her fate of hidden fear or long hours of monotonous work for little pay. I was made for more. However, I never wanted more. I just wanted enough. Unfortunately, reality is a gravity we all must feel, and I will never have enough time with her.

My mother will also never have enough time. Her dandelion-self had to grow alone in concrete jungles and harsh suns. Being without roots, she had no water. Those who loved her would only pluck her petals, blowing her into nothingness for the fulfillment of their selfish wishes. She was the source of their happiness, but could not experience it for herself. However, when you love something, you water it. She watered me with the joys she never had. She has shown me that I can be the source of my own happiness, that I can be the fulfillment of my own dreams, that my destiny can be crafted by my own hands. She has given me roots. Though I have these roots, I am not bound to here. I am not bound to any of these descriptions of who I am.

I do not deny their definitions. I am my father’s dragon, I am my grandmother’s star keeper, and I am my mom’s blooming hope, but my story is not theirs. Deportation is not my fear; failing calculus is. Minimum wages are not my future; a four-year university is. My love will not be plucked; it will

pollinate others. My story is not the immigrant story; it is the story of an artist that is bad at math, the story a singer who now spins flags, the story of a writer who should have never quit. These stories have allowed me to define myself, and your stories define you.

I am defined in their eyes, but I am a person that should not yet be interpreted by where they call home. We each have our own inheritance of things we must be, and of things we must become due to those who once were. Our lives orbit around people and around their stories. They revolve and revolve within generations of founding fathers and unburned witches. We are all products of someone else's story, but we should choose to define ourselves before letting others determine what we truly are.

## FRIDA ARREDONDO

### *Soy Mujer*

A veces me urge salir a correr  
con las estrellas de guía o al  
primer parpadear del sol  
y aplastar con cada paso las penas  
que al alma le pesan  
Pero después reacciono  
y siglo XXI no significa seguridad.

A veces me gustaría eliminar perfección  
de mi vocabulario  
Pero después recuerdo y mi sexo  
no me garantiza un mejor puesto.

A veces quisiera que la lluvia  
me acariciara sin pesar  
Pero después recuerdo  
que ella es el ácido que más  
quema la cordura.

A veces quisiera que mis palabras  
ya no fuesen reproches civiles  
Pero luego recuerdo  
que tengo una voz  
que hace más eco que  
las que han estado antes de mí.

A veces quisieran minimizar  
mi esfuerzo y mi poder  
pero se les olvida  
que soy mujer y que yo puedo  
con eso y con más.

Translation of *Soy Mujer*

*I am a Woman*

At times, I have the urge to run  
with the stars as my guide  
or at the beat of the sun  
and stomp with every step my sorrows  
which weigh on my soul.  
But then I have an epiphany  
The twenty-first century does not mean security.

At times I would like to eliminate  
perfection from my vocabulary  
But then I remember, what about my gender?  
It does not guarantee me a better position.

At times, I wish the rain  
would caress my skin with a gentle touch  
But then I remember  
that she is the acid that burns sanity.

At times, I wish my words  
were no longer civil reproaches  
but then I remember  
that I have a voice  
which has a stronger echo  
than those before me.

At times, they wish to minimize  
my endeavor and my power.  
I am a woman and I can overcome  
this and much more.

# EMONE COLLINS

## *Color Of My Skin*

I am not the color of my skin  
I can try to blend,  
but just can't fit in with the lights, the browns,  
but I wear this crown

I am not the color of my skin  
I am the girl within  
a Black Queen  
not the ones in the magazines,

The ones from my 'hood'  
Clearly misunderstood  
The ones with food stamps, on welfare  
Yeah, I went there

I am not the color of my skin  
No, I will not longer try to fit in  
For I will embrace this color all over me  
And this crown God has placed above me

*Weak Women*

The cries of a weak woman  
whimpering from the pain,  
pain from the broken soul  
stabbing at her mind  
piercing at her brain  
the wicked sounds of depressing music beating  
at her ear drums  
tender, yet hollow

The sad “this is our” songs,  
eating at her thoughts  
barely audible, countless  
nights she found herself  
crying, crying herself to sleep  
in her reverie, her reality  
is striking at her mind,  
not her body, so deep  
that her day dream  
became a nightmare

A lucid dream that was too  
much to bear because everything that sent her  
on to this series of events  
tied around a broken friendship  
being swept away  
as if it was built upon dust

A friend that promised  
to love this woman  
a friend who she yearned  
to trust, a friend who  
led this woman on  
only to let her down,  
her friend didn't mind  
to show it. The depth  
of this woman's sorrows,

the tears of this poet.

# GRACIE GLEBE

## *The Ride*

We were in our old truck, driving down a dark country road at about 8 pm. It was quiet. We had barely said anything to each other during the ride, which was pushing 5 hours now. Earlier, to break the silence, I had asked “When do you think we’ll be there?” At first, he hadn’t answered. Then, almost as if he was breaking out of a trance, he said “Oh, in a little while. Not too much longer.”

We had been silent since then.

The road had a lot of dips and curves, no streetlights, and even with our headlights on, it was dark. It felt like driving into a void, with no way of knowing if we would ever come out the other side. Time passed slowly, the minutes feeling like hours. Even the clock on the dashboard seemed to be grinding to a halt, pushed forward only by sheer will of the vehicle, who insisted that it keep ticking. The silence hung over everything, damp and stiff, suffocating even the engine and the few noises from outside.

Suddenly, it was broken. “Look, I’m sorry, okay?”

I looked at him. His eyes were glued to the road, his hands gripping the steering wheel. I answered him cautiously, as if he had not spoken at all, but the voice had come from my head. “Sorry for what?”

He looked at me for a moment before looking back at the road. “For whatever it is that you’re mad at me about. I mean, you’ve been pretty quiet this whole drive. Usually you’d be talking nonstop, but this time...” He paused. “It feels like you’re mad about something. So, whatever it is, I’m sorry.”

I looked away from him. He had a point. I was being uncharacteristically quiet. But why? Nothing was wrong. I wasn’t mad about anything.

I set my mind to work, trying to come up with some reason why I would be mad. I couldn’t place anything. My head began to hurt.

Then, through the dark corridors of my mind, a smell came.

A sweet, subtle smell that had been underlining everything he did, everywhere he went. A smell that followed him and left traces of itself on his clothes, his papers, his lips. And through that sweetness, there was bitterness. A slow rot that was chipping away at the man I knew.

I opened my mouth to speak, then closed it again.

We continued to drive in silence, through the impenetrable darkness.

*Falling in Love*

The cliff slipped out from under my feet  
The valley below getting closer by the second  
A chaotic river lapping the sides of the mountains  
Waiting to swallow me and take me away.  
Yet behind the fear building in my stomach,  
Past the sadness for other cliffs I have fallen off of,  
I felt a terrible excitement for what's to come  
Knowing that the waves could rip me apart  
Or carry me safely to an oddly familiar shore.  
And finally plummeting into the water  
My mind raced with doubts that were washed away  
Ready to be welcomed by a warm embrace or a cold stare  
Waiting for the sign that this fall was not for

nothing

or a sigh.

A kiss

# JOSHUA ESPITIA

## *Vacuum*

I unraveled hair  
long and brown  
from the roller brush  
of a jammed vacuum cleaner

She's been gone  
six months now

Pulling those strands  
dislodging them from  
the parts that suck  
so I can go on

Get back to  
the daily grind

Makes me think  
we shed so many  
pieces of us  
in places past

Our old keratin  
strewn about  
dead skin dusting  
hotel mattresses

Or a touch of DNA  
on a lover's face

Maybe a memory  
left trapped inside  
a mind that said  
goodbye a bit too soon

Never really gone

Missing all the same

I have to wonder  
what I've left behind  
that keeps anyone  
from getting shit done

*Schrödinger's Break-Up*

Forever was never an option  
she said in that eternal instant  
of inevitable cataclysmic fission

Schrödinger would disagree  
and insist that no options arise  
in the physical mix of we; see

Forever is as always as never  
as is all that lies in between  
existing in harmony, simultaneous  
in moments spanning eons lasting  
blinks of eyes that never begin  
nor do they end for the observer  
or the observed - assuming any  
vision is possible through eyelids  
in a constant state of blinding flux

And her eyes, regardless of such  
quantum flutter, would have still  
locked onto his - are locked now

That initial contact an impetus for  
bonding between cosmic beings of  
simple flesh constant among stars  
and subatomic particles released  
before any big bang boomed in  
primordial heavens above, around  
two people that have never not  
existed, have never not been  
connected and have always been  
apart from each other, a part of  
endless universes devoid of the  
uncertainty of what comes next

For them, next is now is always is  
never will they not know the hurt of  
what was as it is what is right now  
alongside the joy of what was that  
is the reality of an eternity of never  
knowing what might have been had  
the right tumblers clicked, locking  
worlds into alignment permanently  
beyond theory and letting that cat  
out of the bag - or box as the case  
may be (likely both) - once and for  
all for the sake of one perfect thing

That might last forever even though  
she said it wouldn't no matter what  
he was still saying to try to sway her

## TYNE SANSOM

### *Infected with Brett*

He winced like Eastwood to see  
his past, the long and short of it.  
He was a boasting brother too  
lit to be legitimate;  
unforgiven blood was thinned  
in pace with the roused vigor  
of a Talking Heads party,  
*Watch out, you might get what you're after.*

He rolled like McQueen into the past  
like a boulder that crushes the path  
of a sapped trail that must find  
new life and direction; like a vein  
in his leg that twists like a snake,  
or a river, or a lie.

He carried on like a Hemingway bar fight,  
defending his misogyny  
that twisted up deep  
inside him when his  
far-removed eloquence  
was liquored up and loose.

The sun rose when it set then,  
infecting justice with brettanomyces  
that makes a beer go barnyard  
and forces it to whiff of cow ass  
that's spread wide for the red nose  
of a supreme clown that dances  
and mocks the court  
that made us  
and sends us  
twisted.

# NICHOLAS SKALDETVIND

## *Vanish*

He stared at her fixedly  
arrayed  
with a look of indecision  
numb with terror  
incapable of making the slightest  
movement  
underneath anguish  
and defeat  
and tremendous volume of thought  
but still fulfillment  
held him up against her mute stoicism  
knowing that he is capable  
of perfect promises, of vicious emphasis, of bursts of bawdy  
*perseverance and intelligence of conflict*  
outlining magnificent shows of concentrated purpose  
on earth  
all ecstasies found  
inside a ribbed ridge of rock  
where there ripples  
the drainage of a primordial  
wisdom  
going through all the things he knew  
channeled above golden clouds  
of meadowsweet  
springing up  
so now he sits at the window  
and listens to the sounds pour  
in of fond regretfulness  
of farewells  
impossible to outrun  
in operations of time  
in the even tenured tune  
of all that suffering he had suffered  
humming  
from a non existent ghost -  
all the joy of that ghost  
charming everything by its natural scenery  
waving in

## VOICES ---

a murmur of the soul  
profound and unnerving,  
a never-ending shadow  
of peace

in a prevailing singular silence.

# TESSA KENNEDY

## *Boxed In*

I see them,  
a line of them,  
like specks on a pointillist painting  
trickling from the cinema doors and into the road  
waiting for the premiere of *Star Wars*

in pajamas, in sweaters, in slippers, in jogger shorts  
9 pm to 12 am  
pale blue light like a filter over the evening  
two sixteen-year-olds are sharing a bag of Fritos and a grape Slurpee  
one cup, two straws  
a mother wraps her toddler in a blanket and brings him closer to her chest  
a thin, lanky man wraps his arms around his wife to combat the cold  
the neon light from the marquee bounces off of their skin

whispers float down the streets and bounce off the sidewalks  
no one can see the backs of the necks before them because  
they are facing one another,  
conversing—  
about the weather, the water, the waiting, the world

today you and I alone  
swallowed by darkness and couch cushions, earbuds in  
the red Netflix logo reflecting  
off the face of the stainless steel fridge  
the cat purrs from its crate  
and pierces the silence

*The Girl in Blue*

Cherry lips as raunchy and red as her eyes,  
puffed and bloodshot,  
seeking prey in the classroom,  
her words are stale as paste, thin as crust, iced as beer,  
shallow language, shallow thoughts  
hair woven into knots,  
cracking up, cracking knuckles, cracking crack under the bleachers  
this is the girl in blue.

but!  
there is a moment,  
as subtle as anything I have yet to see  
where the lines of her mouth twist downward  
her eyes gleam, glisten, clear  
and there's a pinch of regret  
in the noise of her jeer

*An Appeal*

Each day  
I fold reality into tiny pieces  
making knots, corners, and paper cranes  
out of my latest conversations

The hellos  
and good mornings  
of a friend,  
slashed, cropped, and twisted up  
until all I remember is her chuckle,  
surly and sour,  
about my complexion

This is origami of the common man,  
an art I know full well—

But—  
there are moments,  
in the midst of normal days tinted auburn,  
where I face neurosis

A reality so foreign,  
so far,  
and frenzied,  
that the paper isn't folded,  
it is melted and soaked and burned

An old spirit greets me in my bedroom,  
and winks knowingly at my visionary

*Departures*

Beatrice didn't have much faith in anything, but she firmly believed that screaming matches in airports were unavoidable. Those who managed to escape without fighting with a loved one either exploded in the car ride home or were heavily sedated in the air.

"Where are you even going to go?" Jeremy shouted at Beatrice as he entered the airport through the automatic sliding doors.

Beatrice, already several feet ahead of him and determined not to lose any speed, shouted back even louder, "Somewhere without you, that's for sure!"

"Can't we talk about this?"

"Oh, you've said enough!"

Beatrice twisted strands of her long black hair around her finger nervously. She blamed Jeremy for the gray hairs that had started to grow. A wheel on her small blue suitcase squeaked as she walked briskly towards the lady in a navy uniform behind the desk. "One ticket to Seattle, please."

"Don't help her!" Jeremy had finally caught up to his wife.

The attendant paid him no attention, "Let me take a look for you, ma'am."

"Bee, I really just want to talk to you. Calmly. Please, let me explain myself."

Beatrice turned to face him, attempting to crush his heart with just one glance. "I need to get away from you right now. I need a break, okay?"

"But I did it for us!"

As much as Beatrice wanted to ignore him and continue to purchase an airplane ticket, she could not let that slide.

"You quit your job to become a stand-up comedian for us? You didn't even discuss it with me first!"

"I'm gonna make it big! I'm a funny guy!"

"Who told you that? Your mother?"

Beatrice couldn't stand her mother-in-law, Claire, and everyone in their extended family knew it. The feud began on the wedding day seventeen years ago, when Claire told Beatrice in front of everyone that she would never make Jeremy happy. It was quite a toast.

Beatrice turned around again to face the ticket lady who was patiently waiting to be of some sort of assistance.

"There is one flight that leaves in about an hour, but there's only one available seat—"

"I'm traveling alone, so that's perfect," Beatrice replied, attempting to smile.

“No, it’s not. I’m coming too,” Jeremy said.

“I just said I needed to be by myself. You really don’t listen to me.”

“We’re supposed to be going to New York! We’ve had this planned for months and we haven’t done anything fun together in ages.”

“That was before you told me in the cab drive to the airport that you’re quitting your job! Instead, I’ll be going to visit my sister for a few days, alone.”

“Bee—”

“I’m sorry to interrupt this, um, discussion, but I need to help the customers behind you,” the woman said.

“Of course, my apologies,” Beatrice said as she hurried to finish up the transaction. She eagerly grabbed the ticket marked SEA and wheeled her suitcase over Jeremy’s foot and elbowed him out of the way.

Jeremy followed Beatrice to the long security line and she was reminded of a lost puppy.

“Do you not want me to be happy?” Jeremy asked his wife.

“Of course I do, but—”

“Then I don’t see what the problem is. Working in real estate was slowly killing me.”

“You didn’t need to quit. You could have done both,” Beatrice replied.

“Is this a money thing? Your business makes enough for the two of us, for a while.”

“We’ll talk about this after my trip.”

Beatrice was beyond frustrated. She wanted to stand in line, alone. She wanted to get through security and hopefully have time to buy a soft pretzel. She hated that Jeremy needed everything to be so immediate. Their opposing personalities had been wearing down their relationship for the past few years. Beatrice was afraid if she didn’t get some space soon, their entire marriage would crumble. After a few days without him, she could bargain with Jeremy without anger clouding her vision. Everything would work out, it always had before.

“We’re going to talk about this now,” Jeremy said.

“I’m going to continue waiting in line and pray that I catch this plane in time. What you do is your business.”

“For once in your life can’t you try to cooperate with me?”

Beatrice hesitated. She believed in only a few things: Airports were breeding grounds for conflict and divorce was not an option. She did not want to hear Claire say, “I knew it.” Years of enduring subtle insults at Thanksgiving and backhanded compliments during Christmas would have all been for nothing. Most of all, Beatrice was afraid she was no better than her parents. A messy divorce after thirty-four years of marriage and the family forced to choose sides. Beatrice was sure she could power through her own marriage; she

was stronger than her parents.

It was easier to pretend that the stand-up comedian issue was the real reason for Beatrice's frustration and anger. If Beatrice could get away for a few days, she could possibly convince herself that she still loved Jeremy. Her sister would be able to give her some advice, she was always the smart one.

"Beatrice?" Jeremy was still waiting for an answer.

"If performing stand up makes you happy, you should do it," Beatrice finally said. "But I think it's best if I go to Seattle alone."

The line was moving and it was Beatrice's turn to be led through the metal detectors. Jeremy watched his wife wade through the crowd of shoeless people.

"You just made me the happiest man alive," Jeremy said. "I love you!"

Beatrice pretended not to hear him and put her suitcase on top of the conveyor belt. She wished his mother heard him say those words to her. But she wished even more she felt the same way.

# MIRANDA MULLINS

## *Thick Thighs Tell Pretty Lies*

I used to love my curves.  
My plump hips,  
My thick thighs,  
My busty chest,  
My chubby cheeks.  
All the curves, stretch marks, and the lumps,  
Especially my lumps,  
Made me.  
And I loved me.

Until I met you.  
When we first met, you worshiped my curves.  
Kissed on my chest,  
Gripped my thighs.  
You used to say,  
“I love my baby’s fat ass,”  
As you would squeeze my thighs  
And I would laugh.

But then reality decided;  
“Babe, you should really workout some”  
“Hun, I really think you should lose some weight”  
Or you would talk of other girls,  
Thinner girls.  
“Country girls are so hot”  
“I saw this girl today at work and she was sexy.”

So now I’m looking in a mirror.  
In my black sports bra  
And my mixed match pink underwear.  
All I see looking back,  
Is not  
My plump hips,  
My thick thighs,  
My busty chest  
Or my chubby cheeks,  
Not even my lumps,  
Hell, especially my lumps.

I see my belly overflow the hem of my underwear,  
I see my breasts resting on my stomach,  
I see the extra skin around my neck,  
And I notice the way my stomach jiggles when I walk.

The sound of my feet hitting the ground,  
The way things vibrate around me when I walk,  
My shortness of breath uphill,  
And the way my thighs touch each other instead of having that gap.  
That cute gap.  
That gap that skinny girls have.

But now,  
I cover myself more.  
The curvy girl who used to wear crop tops confidently,  
Now wears a hoodie to hide.  
Secretly apologizing to everyone who ever saw her curves.  
Her plump hips.  
Her thick thighs.  
Her busty chest.  
Apologizing to everyone whoever saw  
Her.

And I compare myself to every girl around me.

*'If I had her legs'*

*'Her stomach'*

*'Her face'*

Maybe,

Just maybe,

You would be saying,

*"Nerdy girls are hot"*

Or bragging to your friends

*"I have this girl and she's so sexy"*

And maybe,

Just maybe,

You would still be here.

And I would laugh,

Smile,

And blush

And we would be happy.

Together.

But instead,  
I'm looking at this mirror,  
And all I see  
Is a fat girl  
Looking back at me.

*Good*

Nothing hurts  
More than the memory  
Of you.

The memories of us on the phone,  
Talking about our past and our future  
Under the stars  
Until the sun would light up my room.

The memories of us dancing in the kitchen at 3am,  
To the new Taylor Swift album  
Singing until our lungs gave out.

The memories of you leaving cute good morning notes  
For me to find on the way to the bathroom,  
Before I would get ready for work.

But you know the old cliché, right?  
Nothing good lasts forever.

Soon  
I had memories of you hanging up the phone  
At 11 o'clock,  
Without saying goodnight.

Soon  
I had memories of you  
changing the song on the radio  
To something only you know,  
And I can't sing with you to.

Soon  
I had memories of there being no notes  
For me to find on the way to the bathroom,  
Not even a good morning message from you.

To this day,  
I still find it hard to believe  
There was once an us.  
A we.  
And now?  
It's just you and me.  
Apart.  
As two.

And when people stop me on the streets  
Or in the halls,  
The memories come back.

The memories on the phone,  
In the kitchen,  
In the hallway.  
But they quickly fade when they say,  
“What happened between you guys?”  
“You both were so happy!”

If only they knew about all of the memories.  
They would know that I was happy,  
But you weren't.

I just smile  
Shake my head  
Let out a laugh  
Hold back the tears  
And I say  
“Everything good must come to an end I suppose”

And boy,  
were we good`  
Together.  
But now  
We must be good  
Apart.

Can you do that?  
Be good without me?  
Because I know  
I won't be good  
Without you.

I'll be better.

# RACHELE SALVINI

## *The Divorced Feminist's Sexual Debacle*

The whole debacle happened quickly.

Odessa smelled Blake's cologne as he set next to her at the dinner after his talk. It was one of those kinds of cologne that don't smell like anything in particular, except for money.

Jack never wore anything like that. Jack just smelled like Jack.

*You're pathetic*, Odessa thought as Blake sat down and smiled to her. *Still comparing every single man to your ex.*

The restaurant where professors usually gathered after talks and meetings was an Italian place on the Main Street of Bronxville. It was mediocly decorated and mediocly crowded, but decent enough not to disappoint guests like Blake.

Odessa listened to the tedious conversation between Dr. Keller, Dr. Morgan and Dr. Brady, who were all wearing their best two-pieces. The three professors were all excited about the collaboration between Blake's modeling agency and their college. Odessa noticed how her colleagues seemed to completely ignore how degrading it was that Blake's agency would recruit inexperienced students for an exhibition where real girls had to stand still like mannequins for hours. But Odessa stood there, nibbling her octopus and trying not to hate her peers, Blake, and the overall situation too much.

Keller, Morgan and Brady were blabbing about some of the most recent work by Valentino and Prada and how Italian fashion differed from French fashion now that Italy had a right-winged government and France didn't. Odessa knew her colleagues were talking about countries they had visited maybe only once, and they probably had no idea what politics were like there, but she kept her mouth shut and tried to avoid seeming too surprised when Blake's leg touched hers.

She hated him. He was an entitled piece of shit, and she had seen the way he would look at the female students. He had been spotted with a nineteen-year-old Victoria's Secret model in Park Avenue. She was gorgeous, yet she seemed in distress, as Blake was grabbing her arm so tight that you could see his nails sink in her candid flesh, even from the blurry paparazzi picture. Blake was well-known for being an asshole. She didn't understand how her colleagues, usually vocal feminists, could have forgotten all that.

Dr. Keller was sitting next to Blake, and she tried to involve him in the conversation; Odessa had to admit that he was doing a pretty good job pretending to be interested and answering right at the time when the conversation would stop and the three professors would look at him. Still, she could tell that he was thinking of something else—specifically, her thighs. She

saw the way he put his hands under the table and his fingers would tremble, as if he was tempted to touch her knee, yet not sure he should have. She could see how the muscles of his neck stiffened when she touched his leg back. She didn't know why she did it. Well, she knew, of course. It was the first physical interaction with a man in years. What were the chances that the first man after Jack would be a handsome, well-adjusted human being? It was highly unlikely. Odessa herself tried to nod and throw some "yes, of course," or "I don't really know about that" in the conversation, just because she didn't want to seem too quiet and weird. But as soon as they got up and her colleagues left after promising to invite Blake again and drowning him with compliments about his work, he jumped in Odessa's car. She had to drive him back to his hotel, but as she started the engine, he took the key from the steering wheel, threw it on the backseat and looked at her. They kissed. She didn't really know who began.

Maybe she kissed him because of the terribly vulgar and obvious way Blake had been flirting with her all night. Maybe it was the fact that she hadn't slept with anyone for years and she was tired of looking at the stretch marks between her legs when she was alone in the bathtub, wondering if they would repel any man from having sex with her. She knew that they wouldn't, that it was an irrational thought, one of those that you have when you feel insecure, when the patriarchy and the unrealistic standards of beauty creep into your own brain like smoke through the cracks of the walls of a building on fire. That was exactly how she saw her body, after years of solitude and no human contact whatsoever: a wreck.

She didn't know why it happened – she just went with it. Blake was gross, he had grains of cocaine stuck between the hair in his nostrils, his black hair was combed back as if he was some kind of cheap rock star and, most of all, Odessa was repulsed by the way he behaved with women and his reputation. He was everything she hated about men: how he dated nineteen-year-old models only because he could, how he did cocaine in bathroom stalls before giving talks, how he had probably ended up working in the fashion industry because he would meet as many women as possible. After what Jack did to her, after the texts from the sorority girls that she had found in his phone during the last weeks of their marriage, she had no patience for men like Blake.

Odessa hadn't slept with someone that was totally wrong for her since the time of her undergraduate degree, when her roommate kept on giving her unrequested advice about exercises to do to make her double chin go away. Odessa had been so insecure that she would take home any guy who would look at her, just to show her roommate that, despite her double chin, she was sexy and desired.

As time went by, she had realized that she never really had a double chin, and even if she had, she shouldn't have to worry. Her roommate was only imposing the standards of female beauty on her. Odessa was smart and driven and as she grew up she started to see what society, the fashion industry and the show business did to women. The double-chinned girl seemed far away as Odessa became a professor of Heritage of Costume and she started teaching at one of the most exclusive liberal arts colleges in New York. There was no reason to worry about a double chin now. As time went by, stretch marks and cellulite had started to appear, slicing down her thighs and hips. She tried not to look at them. Sometimes it was hard.

As she kissed Blake back, sitting in the car that she had paid with the money she made as a feminist, Heritage of Costume professor, she wondered if the twenty-year-old girl worrying about her double chin had ever gone away.

She liked to think that, in another situation, she would have punched Blake in the groin instead of indulging him. She liked to think that she was kissing him back because it had been evident that they wanted to sleep together all night and that they had probably always wanted it. She tried to see the tryst as in a clichéd romantic comedy, when the woman hates the guy but then realizes that she has been in love with him from the moment they set their gaze on each other. But as she and Blake kissed, she didn't feel excited as she thought those women would be. The excitement and joy were for Kate Hudson and Anne Hathaway and a bunch of terrible movie writers. As she felt his tongue sliming towards her throat, she just felt the pathetic urge to be desired and touched and she just wanted him to fuck her.

It was okay, though. It was fine. It was okay to know that she would feel the urge to be fucked by someone that wasn't Jack. She was relieved that after all, despite the divorce, despite Jack's constant cheating, despite her loneliness, she could still feel like she would enjoy someone to grab her breasts and put a hand between her legs.

The car was still in the parking lot of the restaurant and people were leaving. She hadn't even thought about stopping him to go to a better place.

"Let's go to your hotel," she panted, as she untangled from him.

"The key is in the back," he answered, and she felt his nails in her flash as he tried to rip off her tights.

"Stop," she said. "They are new."

They were new. They were Donna Karan sheer tights. She knew that, in all the porn movies she had been watching in the past few years, women would let men rip tights and yoga pants and stockings off and they would let them stick their hands up asses and pussies no matter what. Her tights were really good, though. She needed to preserve some of her dignity.

Blake laughed nervously, his cock bulging in his grey slacks, and then literally dove in the back to retrieve the keys. Odessa didn't want to look at her reflection

in the rear window.

“Let’s go,” he said, as he gave her the keys. He was still panting, but as Odessa started the engine, he felt her up again. “Damn, that dinner was boring,” he said, his fingers all up her skirt. “I’m so glad you were sitting next to me. I had to look at Dr. Keller’s stupid face for hours while all I wanted to do was just put my head between your legs.”

Pathetic, gross, and squalid. That’s what it was to be with Blake now. Odessa just drove, knowing perfectly well that she was choosing to do this, knowing perfectly well that Blake would probably act like a douche bag whenever they met at every damn fashion exhibition from now on. She knew all that. She knew that Blake could have any kind of woman and that, if she hadn’t been at the dinner, he may have gone home with some other professor – maybe Dr. Brady, who was single and young and pretty – and that there was nothing special about Odessa herself. Blake was just being Blake, and Odessa would be one of the many. It was okay. Blake didn’t know that he was going to be her first man after the divorce and that she had been thinking about what it would be like to sleep with someone after Jack. He wouldn’t know that she had been crying her heart out after masturbating to porn and crying even more at how pathetic the whole thing was. Crying after coming. Wasn’t it terrible? It never happened to her when she had sex with someone. It didn’t even happen the last time she had sex with Jack, years before, when they basically threw each other against the bed and the wall and the desk because they were so full of anger and frustration right before the divorce.

She didn’t cry after Blake fucked her in his hotel room for the first time. As he came, she saw the grain of cocaine in his nose, she saw his black eyes closing and she didn’t feel anything more than the sexual pleasure of having a dick inside her and a body pressed against hers. As he shook and grunted, she realized that sex was always the same, and there had been no point in trying to imagine what it would be like to have sex with someone who wasn’t her ex husband. It was just the same. He fucked her three times, and she never cried, never felt anything more than the physical pleasure and relief. She didn’t understand why people got mad about cheating, why people couldn’t stand the idea of their partner or their ex fucking someone else. It was just mechanic. And it was good.

CHLOE DEWBERRY-HANSEN

*An open letter for self healing*

I love you, Body.  
I love you, Face.  
I love you, Eyes.  
And I love you, clumsy grace.

I love you dearly,  
even though I don't say it enough.  
I think you're gorgeous  
and I want to scream that at the top of my lungs.

You're beautiful.  
But a different kind, a new edition.  
The kind of beautiful with a revised definition.  
One that encompasses every curve and every roll,  
every scar and every part of your lovely soul.

You're like the sun when it's warm and sweet.  
Brightening up others day with a big smile and a couple crooked teeth.  
You're like the moon when it's cool and calm.  
Creating works of art with worn hands and itchy palms.

You're not the kind of beautiful that you learned about when you were a little girl.  
The kind that made you believe that just being yourself isn't enough to be alive in this world.  
That being you wasn't right.  
That the only way to true happiness was to be thin, blonde, and white.

The type of beautiful you are is dazzling and true.  
You now understand that the best thing to be is you.

I wanted to remind you of these things because you've wanted to die before.  
Take a blade to your wrist and bleed to death on the bathroom floor.  
What a cruel thought for someone who deserves  
so. much. more.

But look at you now.  
You've grown so much..  
I love you, body.  
I'm so glad we're back in touch.



*Silicon Dioxide*

The element that mostly makes up the reflective, condemnatory subject glass.

Glass makes up a mirror. Many people these days think that a mirror makes them up too.

Yet, my friend, we are not glass or elements for toying around with.

We are human.

We are things made by a greater sculptor than any artist.

Glass is a cold shallow thing that points out your every flaw. It tells of your every single imperfection.

What I say is that you do not need this piece of glass to see that those flaws make you just that much more beautiful.

And darling let me tell you, you are not glass. You are not what you see in the mirror.

You are the late night conversations that make me smile. You are the ecstatic personality I love to meet. You are the neck I want to kiss. The smell and heartbeat I tend to miss.

You are you and you are good. Always enough and never too much.

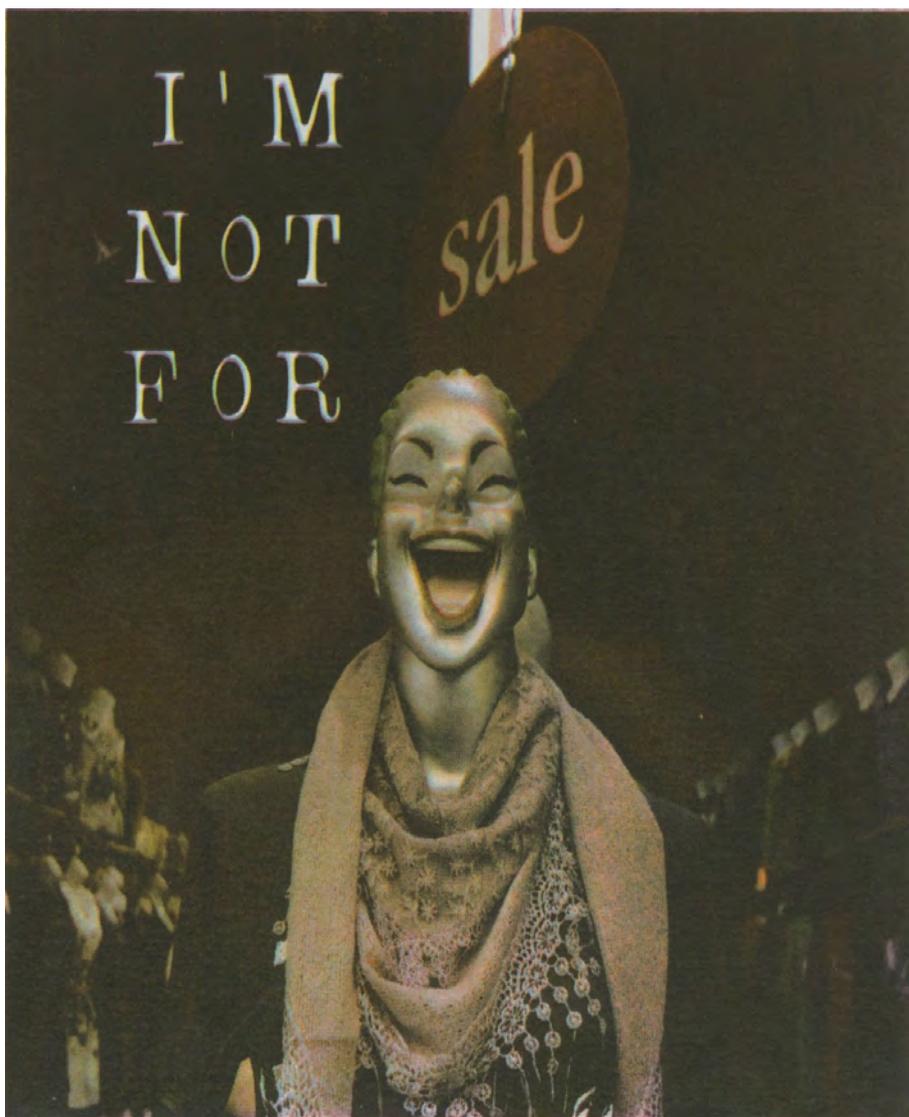
One day I just want you to understand how lovely. You. Are.

So yes, keep on being you and living life with that beautiful smile of yours.

Mirrors are just glass and you are so much more than that.

RACHEL ROSS

*I'm Not for Sale*



Screen print, 8" x 8"

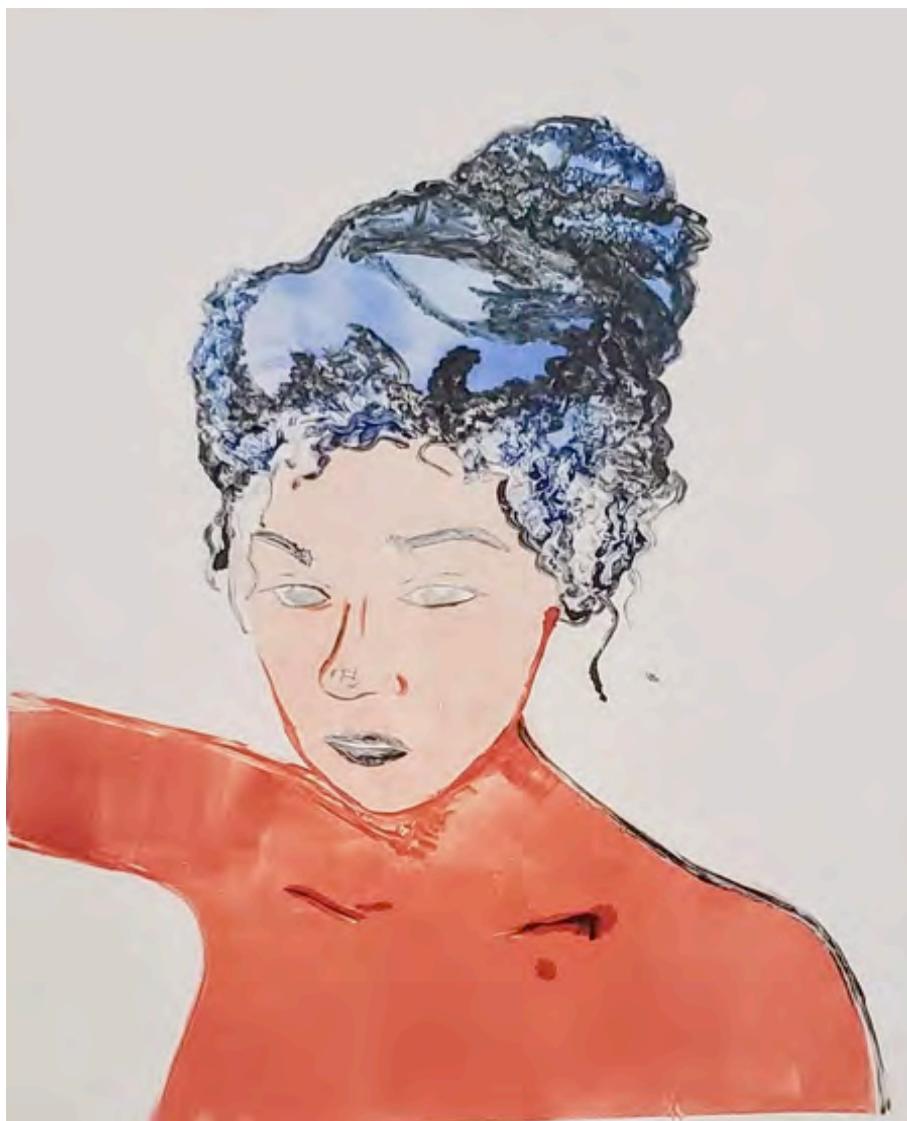
ADRIENNE HILL

*Orange Girl*



Additive monoprint, 18" x 24"

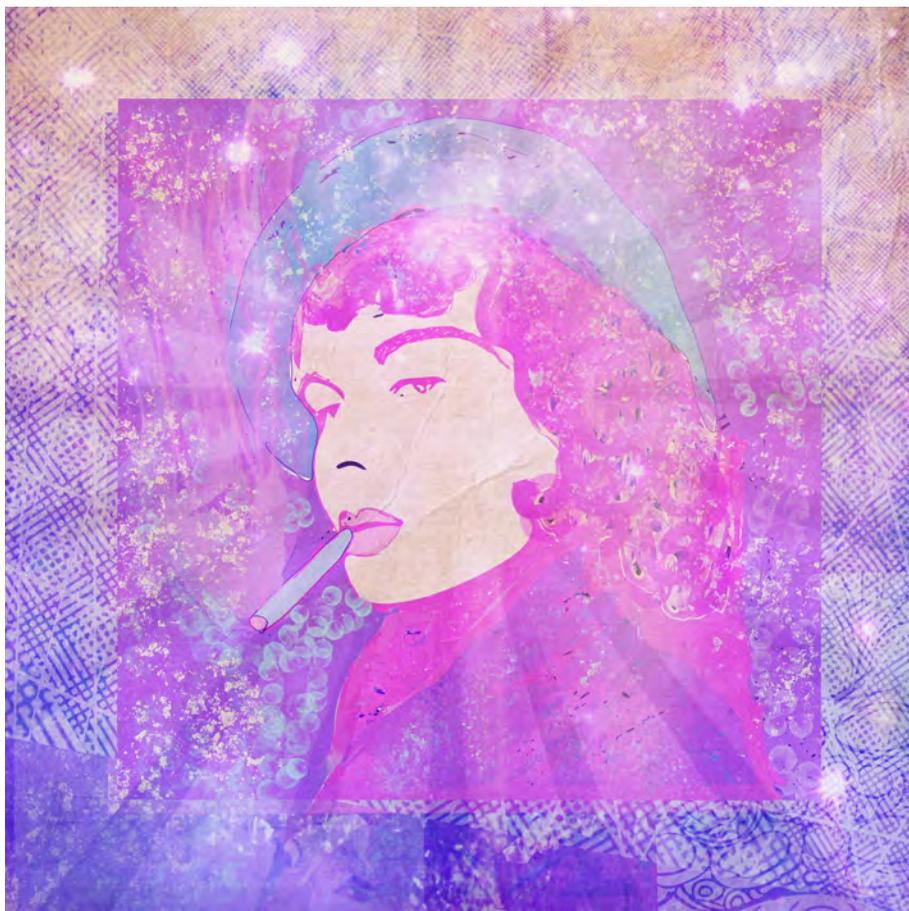
*Orange Girl Blue Hair*



Additive monoprint, 18" x 24"

SHASTA FOX

*Ingrid*



Digital painting, 13" x 13"

BRY'TON ROLLE

*Stained*



Archival pigmented print, 10.5" x 13.5"

TANNER SLAVINS

*Saint Rita of Cascia*



Graphite, 18" x 24"

MEGAN ALLEN

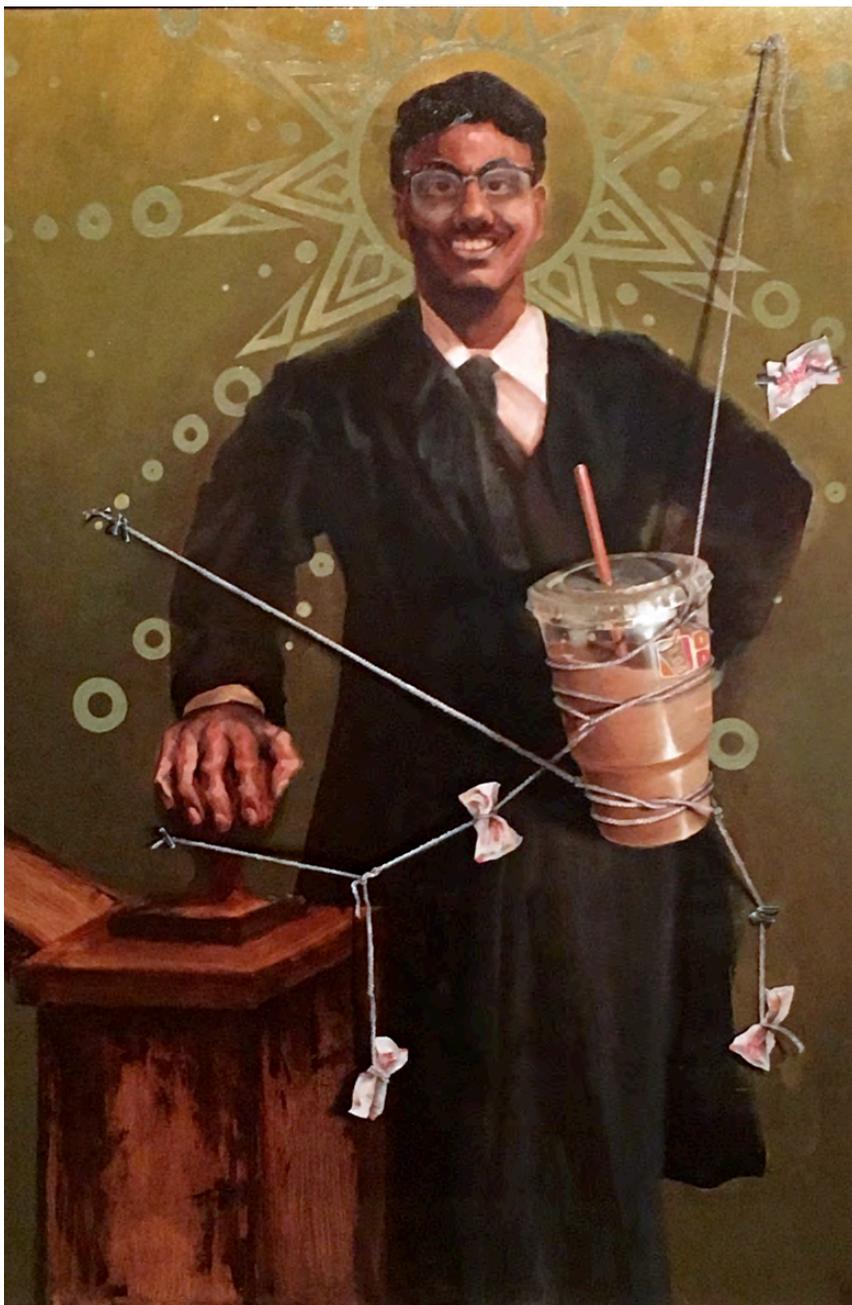
*Up in Flames*



Digital Photograph, 8" x 10"

RACHEL WILSON

*Eric's Coffee*



Oil on panel, 37.5" x 25.5"

## REAGAN PACE

### *Grow to Love*

The scent from the kitchen  
draws me in after I wake

The flavor I once spat out as a child  
I have matured to savor

Columbian, strong, dark  
almond milk splash, two sugars

occasionally substituted for homemade  
sticky sweet caramel syrup spooned in globs

Ritual sends me stumbling  
into the day with wide eyes and a quickened pace

Ground, pressed, dripped, poured  
Sipped, gulped, stirred, brewed

Money sapped from an addiction to the empire  
made entirely out of beans

*Flash Flood*

the day I finally stand up to you

lightning will strike behind my eyes  
you'll see the flash before you hear the boom

my jaw will clench with air pressure tension  
cold front moving in  
I must brace myself  
because winter tells convincing lies

thunder will rumble in my bones  
not the way Florida summer sounds in the afternoon  
warm, revitalizing—a reminder  
but the way freight train clouds of Texas sound in the spring  
loud, ominous—a warning

we've smelled the rain coming for years  
now the sky is pitch black  
and the raindrops are fat  
and the water is rising

I hope you can swim

*Autobiography*

I am beginning to smell  
like the inside of a library  
or a used bookstore.

I go through my life  
being written in  
and dog-eared  
and passed around  
like a beloved classic  
that never finds  
a permanent shelf.

There are creases in my spine  
from unexpected pauses  
and constant references back  
to the important plot points.

The pages of me  
crinkle and turn  
with each chapter.  
They are already  
yellowing with love.

# KATIE JONES

## *Tea*

tea- /tē/ *noun*. a hot drink made by infusing the dried, crushed leaves of the tea plant in boiling water.

tea-/tē/ *noun*. gossip or personal information belonging to someone else; the scoop; news.

Welcome to your favorite local restaurant! We have hot food, cold beer, and unlimited baskets of bread. We have smiles after smiles from college students, all of whom are eager to grab you a fresh glass of sweet tea- Would you like a lemon with that? Would you like two?

Welcome to your favorite local restaurant, in which you've begun to frequent once every two weeks and thus call yourself a regular. The hostess at the door asks for your name and you feel a twinge of annoyance--how does she not remember you by now?

Welcome to your favorite local restaurant. This time, the waitress is the slowest one you've ever had. You know you know more about the menu than this little blonde bimbo smiling the entire time she is taking your order. She couldn't get you extra butter for ten minutes, but yet it only takes two minutes for her to send the manager over once you've complained. Here's a coupon for your next visit, so sorry, are you in the military? May I get you a veteran's discount?

Welcome to your favorite local restaurant--that you're disappointed in tonight. You see the waitress of the table next to you hurry away from her table the moment the customer stopped ordering. You share a knowing glance with your fellow patron as if to say: How rude; do they not know you have both waited over an hour with a pager in your lap just to eat here?

Welcome to your favorite local restaurant, where your glance with the table over is interrupted by the table behind you. The patron is shaking his glass, rattling the ice at his waiter. His waiter pays no attention, deep in conversation with a dark-haired girl at the computer screen. They both look upset, and the blonde girl behind them is smirking while taking an order.

Welcome to your favorite local restaurant, where the birthday the workers are yelling near you wakes your newborn baby. They laugh when they see you pick him up to calm him, but it doesn't seem malicious--almost absent minded. Their smiles seem to fade as they drag the hefty birthday saddle back to the front of the restaurant.

Welcome to your favorite local restaurant, where you pack up left overs and tip 15%. On the way out, you mention to the hostess who forgot you that

you hope the visit is better next time. As you turn, you can see her polite nod turn into an eye-roll.

Welcome to our hellhole. We cannot call you customers, we must only call you “guests.” You see, as our manager explains it, this is our home, we are a family, and you are a guest in our home. That is, until we get to the back and you become “the bitch at 232 who’s draining sweet tea like her life depends on it.”

Welcome to our hellhole. The hostess at the door, Bianca, studies flashcards for her government test the next day. She cannot remember the amendments for her senior year social studies class, let alone an occasional face that passes by in a blur. She sees Michael and she blushes, and then sees the girl in front of her blushing at Michael as well. At this rate, she’ll never remember any of her government vocab.

Welcome to our hellhole. Bailee is in the back, yelling at a busser, who is refusing to scoop butter because “that’s NOT what I was scheduled to do tonight.” Finally, the manager, Terry, brings a scoop over to do it himself. He hands Bailee the butter and stays near the entrance to the kitchen to make sure the table is not angered by the wait--which of course they will be, because why wouldn’t they take time to complain about butter in the middle of the dinner rush?

Welcome to our hellhole. Jonica sprints away with her table’s order. She rounds the corner into the kitchen and starts to vigorously pillage through the sugars box. Triumphant, she pulls out a tampon. Malory smiles at Jonica as she runs to the bathroom. Everyone knows that Jake and Jonica drunkenly had sex over a month ago and she was late--everyone, that is, other than his girlfriend, Keri.

Welcome to our hellhole. As Malory begins to take her table’s order, she sees Jake and Keri standing at the computers. She mindlessly takes down an order as she listens to Jake promise Keri he has never slept with Malory; not even once, not even drunk. Malory smirks, knowing she’ll get a text to come over in two days when Keri is out of town.

Welcome to the absolute pit of our hellhole. Finn gathers everyone for a birthday, and slowly eight people piled together to cross the restaurant. We scream diligently for the ninth birthday in two hours. We all see a mother scowling as she picks up a baby and we laugh--as if it isn’t a massive downgrade of our dignity to scream “Yee-Haw” for strangers all night. We file back to the kitchen to collect more tea or bread for our tables.

There are various yells of “I need an adult!” across the alley in back of house. No one can find Terry or Lindsay to discount our tables or take appetizers off the tickets. Both managers are chain smoking in the back, talking

about how they only planned this to be a temporary job and they'll get out one day. They've both been here for over a decade, but they're not thirty, so it's not sad yet. They jokingly mention the last time they were at a corporate getaway and shared a bed, but drop the subject before too long, for the fear of Linda's fiancée hearing--after all, he's the kitchen manager, Matthew.

We have nametags, but we are nameless. We are merely part of your experience, when in reality we're the saddest staff you've ever seen. Autumn the bartender broke off her four-month engagement with Carter, who quit afterwards. She vents to the other bartender, Carly, who is pouring a raspberry margarita with one hand on her belly. She's one week from her due date--third kid, second baby daddy. She hands the margarita to Emily, who wears a cross around her neck and speaks like an angel. She has a fantastic relationship with The Father, but has never met her father, and this is why she has called at least half of the male staff daddy--but only for a night. She is saving up to move to Colorado because 'dammit if I don't get out of here soon I never will.' Brynna passes Shelby, who is staring down Jason. They've been sleeping together for months without anyone knowing, but he seems to be getting overly friendly with the new girl, Bailee. Bailee's already slept with Jake, but hasn't heard about his girlfriend Keri (who is secretly sleeping with Caleb, the new boy.) Keri carries two salads out to 414 and slides past Michael, whom she hasn't spoken to in months since she found out he has been sleeping with a lot of the hostesses. She wouldn't mind since she has a boyfriend, but 'they're like 16! That's just gross!' Michael winks at Bianca in the front (she's been collecting all the nametags of the servers she's had sex with) while he grabs steak sauce and hands it to Emily (not the Christian one, the country one) as she walks towards 335. On her way back to the kitchen, she grabs her best friend Madelyn to talk about how she slept with Jake after they played pool the night before- because everyone there has slept with Jake, or Jason, or Heath (who hardly works anymore, now that he has a girlfriend.) All three man-whores stand in front of the salad window discussing Bailee's ass. We are a well-oiled machine.

We are your favorite local restaurant, and this is our hellhole. You take home leftovers, and your waitress takes home \$10 less than half of what she needs for her electricity bill that's due tomorrow. Caleb, the spritely nineteen-year old, pretends to swipe a twenty from Trisha's pile of cash--she laughs, but she doesn't sleep with anyone more than five years younger than her. The neon signs are off, the music is low, and all of the employees are cleaning their condiments and salts; organizing their sugars. Everyone is bitching about the shift or whispering about where they'll go to drink that night. Terry's smoking a cigarette at the bar top while he counts out \$2,000 cash with no hesitation, constantly glancing up to see Lindsay and Matthew making out in the mouth

of the kitchen. In the distance, you can hear Blakely yelling about her cheating ex and how she's moving soon, she swears- but she has been saving up for that U-Haul for years now.

You will see smiles, and we will see numbers. Number of tables, number of guests, number on the tip line, number of people we've slept with that worked this shift with us alone. You see happy college students, but we're all either hungover, high, or heartbroken. Here we are, making you think we care about what kind of tea you're drinking, when we're splitting a large party with our ex. Welcome, welcome, welcome. You can only see the front of the restaurant; don't even think about the back--although Garza on salads is selling raffle tickets for his son's little league baseball team. None of us make enough money and we spend it all anyways.

So, guests, welcome to our home, our house of ill-repute, a brothel, if you will. There are several in your city. So many bodies and increasing body counts. This building is a cesspool of sex, but you bring your children in regardless and worry only about the peanut shells on the floor. You'd just better hope we've washed our hands before we serve you your food.

## JESSICA ODOM

### *One Short Day*

My laced-up soles of rubber beat along  
the concrete veins of New York's pulsing streets.  
Surging with wanderlust, I stand among  
storied towers and wonder at the feat.  
Perfected plans fracture in that moment  
and jolt awake my soul to find inside  
a fragment piece unmapped adventures meant  
for wanderers with gaping eyes held wide.  
I stumble to new heights: Van Gogh's Ear pops,  
mute candle choirs breath beneath stained-glass skies,  
caricatures are drawn by vibrant shops.  
My heart beats still as this sultry day dies.  
Life's peaks, in thrumming cadence but apart,  
are proof to me that the soul entwines the heart.

*Happy*

I looked for happy in a book-  
one hundred and sixty pages  
of yellow bound gobbledygook.

If only I could've forsook  
the emptiness that engages us  
I'd've found happy in my book.

Sadly, my feeling can't be shook  
as I'm running on spent wages  
and yellow bound gobbledygook.

In that store I might've mistook  
those common men for great mages  
when they pinned happy in their book.

O, were I a Knight! Not a rook  
who steals away in small cages  
with yellow bound gobbledygook...

By cheery color overtook,  
I aimed for higher stages  
looking for happy in that book  
of yellow bound gobbledygook.

*The Imperfect Mortician's Manual*

Tweeter Puff was dead and I stood at the trashcan in the pantry considering my options. I picked up the only box I saw, an empty trash-bag box ripped along the perforated edges with one end torn away from the glue. *Too flimsy.* I re-discarded it and turned toward the cluttered shelves. *Maybe a Tupperware bowl would work?* It only took a second for the idea to go stale: clear plastic seemed inappropriate and finding a matching lid would be a pain. I looked at an oatmeal box with easily discarded packets inside. Then I imagined someone wanting breakfast but getting a dead bird instead.

On my way to the junk room, I scanned the edges, corners, piles, and openings of my family's home. *How can there be a dozen feet in this house and not a single shoebox?* In the room that was always a few days from being cleaned out, after picking up a few promising failures, I finally found what I needed. *Yes!* The box was round and six inches wide. Its faded blue and silver design was almost pretty, which I hoped would make it an acceptable receptacle to the only person who cared for the deceased.

Back in the laundry room, I reached for the cockatiel. For once no predatory war cry or mini bolt-cutter beak lashed out at me. The bird's body dangling limp and lifeless in my hand was as light as a bundle of feathers; I removed it from a bed of newspaper, seed shells, and waste. *I'm glad I found him and she didn't have to see this.* Despite being a nuisance to most of the family, Tweeter Puff had perched securely on a single branch of friendship for over a decade. Although he had been a cage of hissing rage most his life, I tried to be gentle with the dead because I knew he was loved.

When I set the body in the box, its extremities protruded from the round space awkwardly. *Should I cut the tail feathers or...* With a careful twist, the body settled into place like a morbid screw... *that works.* Before today, I had never had this responsibility: Mine had been the tender soul that should not see the full, undressed sight of death. Not having an instruction manual for caring for the dead, I took a page from the unwritten book of perfect parenting: nobody knows what they're doing, so do your best and show your love.

After shrouding the corpse with a cut-out piece of dingy work shirt, duct-taping closed the coffin lid, and inscribing the funerary box simply as "Tweeter Puff," I wasn't sure what else to do to ease his passing. I decided that the usual grave-digger and fish flusher of our family would know best, so I sent the death notice:

Fri, 09/07/2018

Hey Dad, heads up, Tweeter Puff is dead. I put his body in a box and labeled it. Mom's going to be upset.

# EMONE COLLINS

## *Darkness*

My eyes could not adjust  
to this new found darkness  
I stopped in my tracks  
as I sluggishly turned my head

Only to see pitch black behind me  
I rubbed my eyes,  
hoping for adjustment  
but it wasn't there

My heart began to beat faster  
once my feet began moving on their own  
I wasn't in control of myself  
and I was frightened

Inching closer until I was inside  
into the darkness, blinding me from everything  
I shut my eyes again, longing for light  
I opened them to nothing

The rain began to pour down on me  
the wind blew hard against me  
I began to hear the sound of thunder  
barely audible in the distance

The devil was getting ready  
to beat his wife

I continued to walk,  
hearing the small rocks  
cracking, clinking,  
as they met with my shoes

My hair stuck to my face,  
the rain pierced my skin,  
lightning lit up my path, and  
before I could hear the sound of the thunder  
I saw them

## VOICES

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Countless lifeless bodies, lying on the infrequent  
broken sidewalks along the street  
I covered my mouth as it suddenly went pitch black  
my heart began to beat  
rapidly, as the thunder cracked  
And finally a loud clap

The darkness returned  
as silence fell around me  
I felt the rain and my conscious began to speak  
the voice of my heart

The voice of someone who means the world to me  
My sobs, once audible, were silent  
I was deafened  
to the sounds around me

# LOGAN MURPHY

## *Grandfather Clock*

click, click, click... it's 3 in the morning  
and I'm on the couch bed. The sound of click  
projected throughout the living room, there  
are 12 per second. my grandfather collected the sound,  
it was a hobby for him, one that I never appreciated  
as a child. This same sound of click once gave me a headache,  
now it is the tone I long for; some hear a tock,  
others a tick, but to me, it has always been a click.  
I hear nothing else when the clock continuously clicks, like  
a metronome sweeping me away to the far reaches of my mind.  
It takes me to a place where even my worries are not heard.  
Despite the source, time does not exist in the click, the world  
stands still like the trees in a windless forest. I was a child then,  
now the click is seldom heard, but when it is,  
I am back on that couch in the middle of the night,  
in the quiet and timeless realm of click, click, click.

# CODY PETERSON

## *I Never Loved You*

I am six and have convinced myself that I will always hate girls. They are mean and annoying, and I have no time for them at all. And you are the worst of all. Your clothes never fit you correctly, you talk way too much, and you pick on me and my friends. I remark to my mother how much I dislike you, and she immediately chastises me. She says that it isn't your fault. Apparently, your mom died and your dad is always working. I don't understand what those things have to do with it, honestly.

I am eight and still can't stand you. I begin to mock you every time I get the chance. It was easy enough to get away with considering you have no friends, and you are far too stubborn to snitch on me. I jeer at your hand-me-down shoes that seem to collect more holes every day. You always seem to have your nose stuck in a book instead of playing with the other kids at recess. I decide to steal your copy of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and rip all the pages out. I see tears fill your eyes as you stomp off inside, and I feel shame wash over me.

I am ten and have outgrown my bullying phase. I am not sure if you have forgiven me, but either way we are not friends. You do manage to make friends with the other girls at school though. I start to take notice of how intelligent you are. The books you read are leagues beyond what others in our class have even heard of. I find that recently I have acquired a new-found interest in literature.

I am twelve and I think I am in love with you. Every time I see you I feel like my heart will stop beating. Your smile is like a shining beacon and every time you speak it is with nothing but kindness and love for those around you. My friends say I am too young to be in love, and that girls aren't worth my time. I think they are full of shit. Your group of friends think I'm weird, so to them I don't exist. I can't help but stare at you. That probably doesn't help me look normal.

I am fourteen and finally in high school. You become a cheerleader and one of the most popular girls in our class. You are still an avid reader and excel in school. I play trombone in the band and join theater. I accidentally bump into you in the hallway and drop all of my books, and you smile at me and help me pick them up. That goddamn smile must have scattered my brain because I cannot get my mouth to work correctly, so instead of thanking you I instead mumble gibberish and run away. My "friends" think this is the funniest thing they've ever seen. They tease me about it and insist that not only are you out of my league, but that we are playing totally different games. I can't help but hope that one day it will all work out for me. Maybe one day I'll find my voice.

I am sixteen and hit a growth spurt. Over the summer I grew six inches and lost thirty pounds. I tell my friends that I have decided to embrace my new body and join the football team. I don't tell them that I joined mostly to impress you. I quickly discover that I am the worst football player alive. I somehow manage to get some playing time. After the first game you stop by and strike up a conversation. This is the first time you and I have spoken since we were kids. You tell me how well I played. A senior pushes me out of the way to tell you about the party happening tonight, but fails to invite me. You go to parties. Losers don't.

I am 18 and we are about to graduate high school. We both wind up at the same party. We have become friends over the last year, but we don't run in the same social circles. I notice you crying in the corner. You tell me that your boyfriend cheated on you and you just want to go home. I selfishly don't want you to leave so I convince you to stay. Your (ex?)boyfriend shows up and you decide to go outside. You snag a couple bottles of liquor on your way out and motion for me to follow. We wind up sitting out in the grass half a mile from the house. You hand me a bottle, and then immediately chug a quarter of yours. We spend a long time talking to each other. You talk about your ex for a little bit. You say that he was the Mr. Darcy to your Elizabeth Bennet. You tell me that your favorite book is the *Great Gatsby*, which is one I haven't read. You talk about how you want to be neurosurgeon and use your skills to heal people. You talk about traveling and making the world a better place. These things make me fall even more in love with you. After a few more drinks you lean over to kiss me. We become a flash of thrown clothes and tangled body parts. I wrap my arms around you and decide to never let you go.

I am 18 and you decide that you need to go home. You slip back into your dress and kneel down to give me another kiss. I am convinced this will be the first of thousands of goodbye kisses. I ask you not to go, not because you are drunk, but because I am selfish. I want to hold you until morning. I want to tell you I love you, but I cannot make my mouth work. You give me one last quick kiss, but I don't taste the vodka on your breath because of the whiskey on mine. While stumbling away to your car, you turn around to flash a sly smile in my direction. It was a smile that contained multitudes. I could see the future in that smile. You climb into your car and drive away. I don't know how fast you like to drive. I don't know you hate wearing your seat belt.

I am 18 and I am at your funeral. I tear up as I stare at your closed casket. Nobody here knows about the night we spent together. All they see is the fucking weirdo in the corner who didn't even know you. To them I'm the asshole who showed up and wants to cry and act like we were the best of friends. I think about how the mortician was the last person who touched your body. I have to leave halfway through to vomit.

I am 20 and I have read *The Great Gatsby* a dozen times cover to cover. I didn't ask you why it was your favorite book, but it has quickly become mine. I search for you in the pages trying to discern why you felt so deeply for it. The only thing I have discovered is my own fatal flaw. I, like Gatsby, created an image of what you should be and not who you really were. I hear the words of Nick Carraway in my head, "You cannot repeat the past" and I have to restrain myself from saying, "Of course you can."

# TAYLOR DEANESE JOHNSON

## *One Minute*

I had one minute of glory.  
One minute with all eyes on me.  
One minute of:  
“She is such a precious baby!”  
And, “She looks just like her father!”  
Only one minute of my life I had all to myself  
For once not having to share a single thing.  
But then out you came.  
Screaming and crying  
Pale, thin, pruney, and stealing my spotlight.  
From then on, my life was no longer my own.

“Who is the evil one?”  
“Can you read one another's minds?”  
“Was it cool to have a womb mate?”  
We even have to share questions.  
I am going to be real with you Tiff,  
sometimes I hate being a twin.  
We are a combined oddity;  
like the bearded lady or the elephant man.  
When I am with you people stare.  
To them, we aren't normal people  
We are the same

People don't see Taylor.  
They see Twin.  
Like a husband and wife  
Or a mother and child  
I am apart of you; I am you  
I will never know what it is like to be alone

Sometimes I dream of being alone  
I dream of my own tube of toothpaste  
My own clothes  
My own school  
My own parents  
My own friends  
My own me  
I dream of that one minute all alone,

## VOICES

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But I wake up when I am truly alone  
The rare moments you are not by my side  
“Are you guys clones?”  
The answer is clear when I am without you  
We are far from clones  
We are opposites,  
but that’s why I need you!  
You are my voice and I am your mind  
Together we make one body  
Without the other, we wouldn’t be able to operate  
Without my other me, I am not me

“Who is older?”  
I am older, by one minute  
The most miserable one minute of my life.

# A.J. WILKINS

## *Tick*

Charlie waits outside the room, leaning against the wall with his hands shoved in his pockets. He focuses on the ticking of the clock in the hallway instead of the screams coming from the room in front of him. The clock counts the seconds, the minutes, the hours. Charlie has been standing outside the hospital room for four hours, thirteen minutes, and twenty-four seconds. He has counted each second, each tick of the second hand moving forward. The clock hand jerks like it has forgotten each time that it is supposed to move, as if it settles down to rest at each second mark on the clock face only to lurch forward as time marches slowly on.

Four hours, thirteen minutes, and fifty-five seconds ago Kendall kicked Charlie out of the room. She had screamed in his face, demanded to know why he was here, why he cared. "There's no one else," he had told her, open hands out in front of him like a peace offering. "I couldn't leave you alone."

"Get the fuck out," she spat, sweat plastering her hair to her face. "I'm not gonna let you stay to ease your conscience."

"That's-"

"Out!" she bellowed and Charlie backed out into the hallway, just out of view.

Kendall screams again and he closes his eyes, head knocking against the wall behind him. His feet ache and his knees feel stiff, but he refuses to sit, refuses to leave. The clock ticks. *Tick, tick, tick.*

The last time Charlie spoke to Kendall before arriving at the hospital had been six months, twenty-one days, one hour, and fifty-seven seconds ago. She had stormed out of their cramped apartment and didn't answer his calls. Her friends refused to tell him where she was staying and how she was doing. He only found out she was in the hospital because one of her friends caved and told him. In that time it had grown, manifested. It wasn't the first time one had grown within her and Charlie doubted it would be the last. Each time, Kendall refused to get rid of it, claiming this time would be different. It never was. This is the longest it has ever survived and Charlie knows that when it dies it will be the last straw for Kendall and Charlie will lose her forever.

It has a name: Jason. Before Jason, there had been Olivia and Patrick and Henry. In the five years Charlie and Kendall had been together, there had been three miscarriages, three tiny funerals for tiny globs of bloody flesh, and three arguments about trying again. When Kendall found out she was pregnant for a fourth time after she lied about her birth control, Charlie didn't even hesitate when he asked, "Should I make an appointment at Planned Parenthood?" because he had assumed she wouldn't want to go through that

pain a fourth time. *Charlie* couldn't go through that pain a fourth time.

The clock ticks. Kendall screams. *Tick, tick, tick.*

They hadn't just been Kendall's; they had been his, too, but he never truly got to mourn. He had sat outside their bathroom, leaning against the door like he was leaning against the wall now, listening the Kendall sob. Charlie wanted so desperately to be in there with her, to comfort her, hold her hands. He wanted her to comfort him, because he had picked the names, too. He had bought a crib and bottles and pacifiers. He had bought tiny diapers and toys. When it was over, Kendall would snuffle, flush the toilet, and climb into the bathtub, blood staining her inner thighs. Charlie would open the door, avoid looking at the toilet where red was smeared on the seat, and climb into the tub with her. He'd hold her against his chest, head buried in her hair, and not cry.

It's quiet. Too quiet. Kendall isn't screaming. The clock keeps ticking.

The doctors pour out of the room, heads hung low. Two minutes and thirty-seven seconds later, Kendall calls out, "Charlie," and he goes into the room. Jason is small and blue. He is not crying or breathing. Kendall holds him close to her chest as if her frantically beating heart will breathe life into their son who never had a chance. Charlie's heart stutters and he screams, loud and long, until he has nothing left to give.

VINSON AWARD WINNER

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## EMMA CRANFORD

### *Elemental*

Specks of lights flicker in your eyes  
Like stars  
Peeking through sharp darkness  
Bright and Breathtaking  
Masking the gloom  
That lies underneath  
Reflecting off the calming waves  
That wash over my body

Sweet words of comfort  
Escape your lips  
I catch them on mine  
Burning like the sun's flames  
I feel them in my soul  
Engulfed  
Bathing in their warmth  
Gentle like falling embers of twilight  
Your fingertips grace my skin  
Sending sparks to my heart  
Hurricanes in my veins  
And I sat and wondered

How you are not the one  
The planets revolve around.

*A Minute's Worth*

Ten minutes.

It took them ten minutes to arrive. Ten minutes of my mother's precious life draining from her body. Ten minutes of me wondering whether or not she was even going to make it to the hospital. When she collapsed to the floor I stupidly spent an entire minute just holding her instead of calling an ambulance. I was in shock. Who wouldn't be? She was my entire life. She cared for me when nobody else would, when everyone else left me. She was my support, my lifeline, my best friend, my entire life. Now her entire life is relying on a plastic tube shoved through her skin. When the most important person in your life is on the verge of dying, how much of your own life is worth it?

Nine minutes.

I managed to grab a phone and call an ambulance at that point. I almost dropped it, my hands were shaking so much. 9-1-1 three numbers that decided whether or not my mother could live. Whether or not my future children would have a grandmother who would bake them cookies and knit them blankets. Who would give them a type of love that I know I could never give them. She was good at that. Giving love to those who needed it most. She always knew when I needed some extra love. Just a little more to get me through the day. An extra hug before school, an extra piece of cake in my lunch, an extra jacket when it was cold out. She was always giving something extra to people. Lord knows what I would do to spend an extra moment with her. Just a little more time to tell her the things I never had the guts to say out loud. How much she meant to me, how important she was. I didn't even get to tell her I loved her before she collapsed. She was a lifeless heap on the kitchen floor and I was an idiot who wasted an entire minute holding her, in shock. Surrounded by broken glass and red liquid from the wine we had been drinking that night. It was my first dinner with her since I moved out. Why did I move out? She's my mother, she's my everything. Dad's not here anymore, she's all I have. Why was I so insistent on moving out. What was I running away from? She wasn't hurting me, I was hurting myself. It's my fault. I caused it. That's the only explanation. Why would God punish someone who doesn't deserve punishing unless it is to punish me. I'm not perfect but she was close. She doesn't need to be in a hospital. She doesn't deserve this, I do. I'm the one that should be punished. But I guess that's what's happening. I guess that was God's plan all along. When the most important person in your life is on the verge of dying, how much is your own life even worth it?

## Seven minutes

When the ambulance arrived I practically screamed my lungs out. “You didn’t get here fast enough!” “Get her to a hospital!” “She’s Dying!” My own words keep replaying in my head. Over and over and over and over and over again. They won’t stop, they’re not stopping. It was my own fault. “She’s Dying! She’s Dying! She’s Dying! She’s dying.” The sirens wailed and wailed and I shook and cried. The words kept repeating over and over again. “She’s dying!” They kept pushing on your chest to get you to breath, mom you’re not breathing, you weren’t breathing. Take my air, take my breath, take my lungs, take my life instead. “You’re dying!” “She’s dying!” A paramedic restrained me. I was out of control. She has so much to live for! “She’s dying!” I work in an office building downtown. I file papers. I do nothing. She has so much to live for! “She’s dying!” When the most important person in your life is on the verge of dying, how much is your own life worth it!? “You’re not breathing, you’re not breathing! You’re dying!” It’s my fault. Mom, I’m sorry. I guess screaming only worked as a kid.

## Five minutes

I work in an office building downtown. I file papers. I really don’t do much. It’s a nice building. Tall building. Forty stories if you’re on the roof. I went up there a couple times to take a look at the city. Great view. A bit windy. Get too close to the edge and you tip over. It’ll be nice. It’ll do good. I haven’t been to work since she was admitted into the hospital. Two weeks. It’s been two weeks. No change. She started breathing again once we reached the hospital. I lost my breath from screaming so much. Mom, You’re still not awake. You’re still a lifeless heap, but at least you’re in a bed this time. You have a tube shoved through your skin. It’s supposed to help, but i really don’t know what it does. You’re supposed to be awake by now. The doctor told me. But you’re not. I’m not visiting you again today. I know it’s been 2 days, but I’m going to work.

## Three minutes

I managed to get up today, I put on that shirt you bought me. The red one. It’s the same color as the wine from that night. That night. I called a taxi to take me to work. Then I called you. Of course, you didn’t answer, I don’t know what I was thinking. You’re in a hospital. You’re a lifeless heap, but you’re in a bed this time. You’re dying. I left you a voicemail. “I love you mom, I’ll see you soon.” You don’t even have your phone. I mean, you had it on you when the ambulance arrived, but the hospital took everything you had on. Including that

necklace I gave you for your birthday. They said you'll get your phone back after you wake up. \*scoffs\* You're not waking up. I know this. I blocked the hospital's number because of it. I was tired hearing the same thing over and over and over and over again. "Nothing has changed." I got it, Thanks. People keep telling me to have hope. Hope is just a word. It's how people lie to themselves. I'm not lying to myself. You're dying. I'll get over it. I'm at work. I have a job I need to do. A task to complete. My day will be over before I know it. I stopped visiting you. I stopped making an effort. I stopped caring. When the most important person in your life is on the verge of dying, how much is your own life worth it?

One minute

I walked into the building. And greeted the receptionist. She knows what's going on, but she has hope. Yeah, have fun with that.

50 seconds

I took the elevator to the 39th floor and took the stairs to the roof. God, that's a lot of stairs. One stair, two stair, three, four, eight, nine, thirteen, seventeen, twenty one twenty nine, thirty four...

Thirty Five seconds

It's a bit windy up here as usual. But the views great. You'd like it mom

Thirty Seconds

I send you a quick text. I know you won't see it, but hey, why not. The doctor told me you'd be awake in two. Two weeks, two months, two moments, two, two, two all he said was two, two, two, two...

Twenty Two seconds

I put the phone in my hand. My screen saver is a picture of us. Last Easter. You look beautiful mom. The winds a bit harsh up here, but that'll help. I get closer to the edge, I can see the cars below. I can hear the honking, I hear the sirens. I hear my screaming over and over and over and over and over and over...

10 seconds

When the most important person in your life is on the verge of dying, is it worth it to live? My phone is in my hand. I lean forward and let the wind take over.

8 seconds

I pass my office on the 35th floor, thirty four, thirty three, thirty two...

6 seconds.

There goes the 30th floor, twenty nine, twenty eight, my phone rings...

4 seconds

Of course someone calls right now.

three

Who in the world...

two

It says "mom's cell"

one.



*More than flowers*

She is but flowers and air,  
a wisp of stardust and shade,  
a polite smile and  
glance away.

But she sees them on the street—  
and in certain, less popular, magazines—  
the Girls of heels sharp as knives, lips  
Red as Blood  
—baring their teeth when told to smile  
sticking out their tongues—  
being Stronger than words and hate.

Girls with souls of fire and steel  
Eyes that Dare  
Callused hands and feet  
Who move and shake and dance

She sees them and she thinks,

“These are my Sisters,  
my very heart.

Perhaps I am More  
than flowers.”

ALYSIA MCKINNEY

*Birdcage Soul*

Clenched fists, cold eyes, hot tears fall  
Split lip, bruised hip, none to call  
Lost hope, trapped soul, war of mind  
Hands rise, eyes dry, fist meets wall

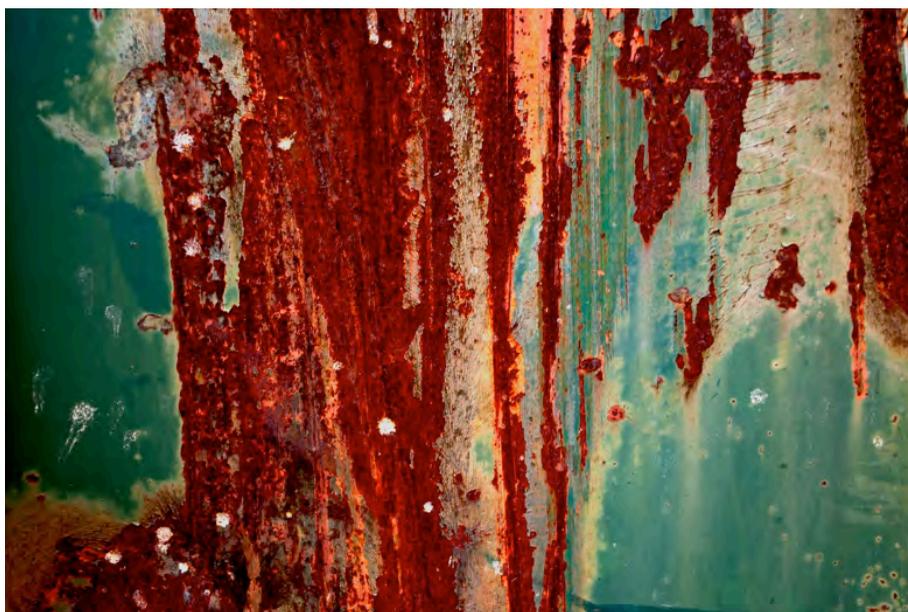
## AUTUMN FREDLINE

### *Bang*

Bang. The gun sang some drastic slang that laid claim to the life of a youth. Repeat however many times shooter decides to play recruiter for the afterlife, a God complex given with an AK-47. Each bullet in the magazine is a burning gallon of gasoline, a story-tall guillotine, a mass death unforeseen in the gleam of the murderous machine. After each life is plucked like a premature petal, "I am killed, I am injured, I am killed, I am injured," the dust begins to settle like the kettle never cried. Now we just bide our time as if mass slaughter were a returning tide, destined to beat upon the lives the civilized. In a nation that I can get a gun at the grocery store, keeping ourselves safe has become such a chore that we feel the need to hoard killing machines in our closets. Leaving the house this morning, civilians wore bullet proof vests with guns strapped to their chests in order to test anyone who thought they had the quicker draw. You don't blink as my jaw drops and my eyes rub raw. Some kids in this nation are more familiar with violence than they are with love, and yet we question why we villainize each other when push comes to shove. We have murdered the peaceful dove, and now we can't differentiate a monster from our next-door neighbor. A gun will never be a savior. A class is not a herd of deer for you to kill, a child not a bird of prey, no matter who they pray to. Hate has blossomed into a plague so vague that even the healthiest woman can claim lame with no shame, as if some sick game to play blame on human nature over flawed morality. Claim a fatality with the finality that can only be backed by corrupt legality in uninterrupted and abrupt end.

# ELENA LAKE

*Scratch*



Digital photography, 8" x 10"

# SHEM ALEXANDER

## *Two Martyrs*



Oil on Canvas, 16" x 20"

KRYSTEN FARRIER

*Free Palestine*



Archival pigmented print, 13" x 19"

RACHEL WILSON

*Past Due*



Oil on canvas, 24" x 16"

NATALIA HERNANDEZ

*Demasia*



Watercolor, 17" x 22"

BAILEY PITZER

*Trapped Within*



Charcoal, 18" x 24"

JAYDEN JOHNSON

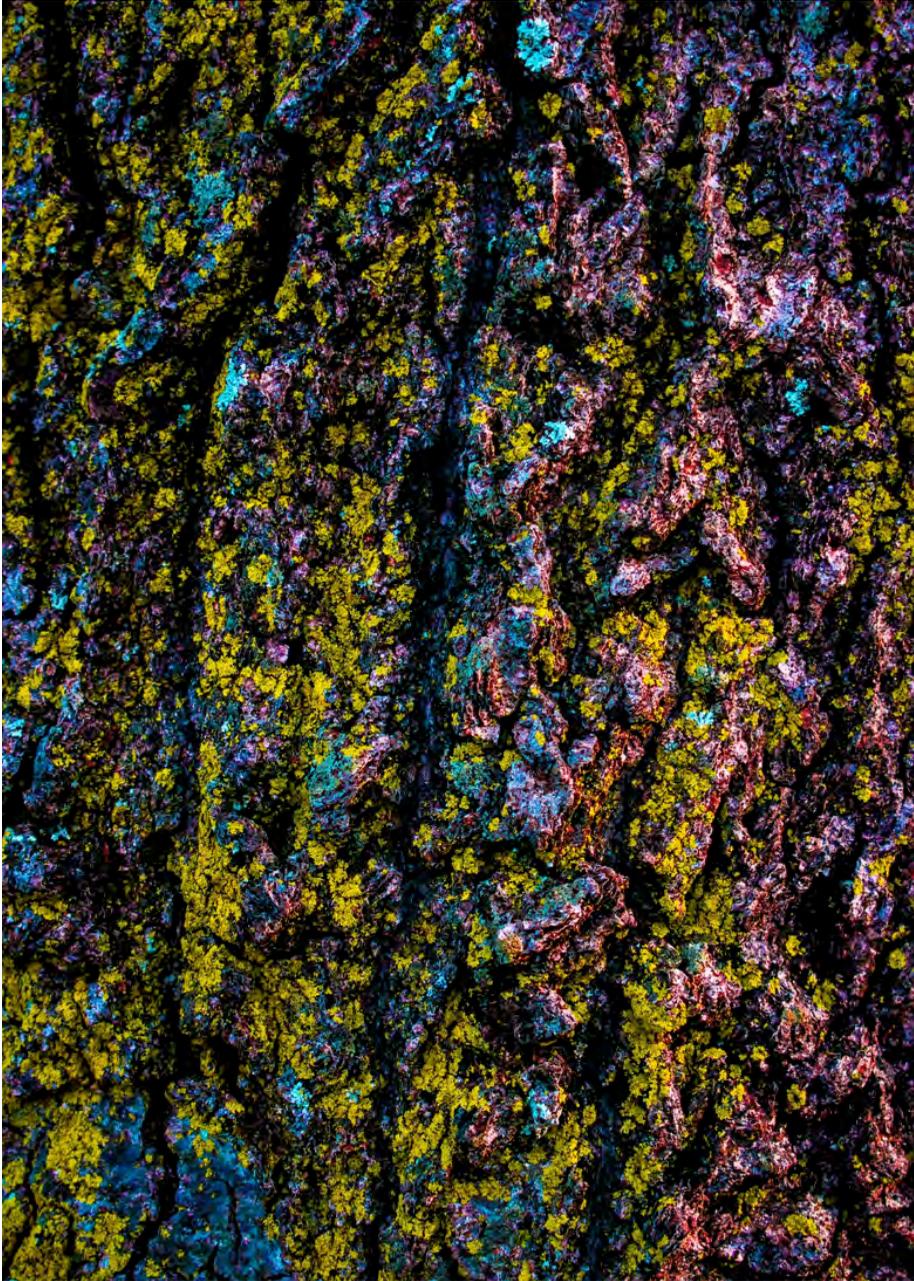
*Mind over Madness*



India Ink, 12" x 12"

JUAN PARRA

*Tree*



Digital Photography, 8" x 10"

JESSICA MANCHESTER-SANCHEZ

*Because I Speak with Trees*

They say I'm crazy. Trees have tongues; they speak with me and answer questions. A journey is a quest and a question is a journey for answers. Trees warn me about humanity. Trees understand wickedness. They don't start wars but if they must join in the fight for what's right, they'll march into battle. The trees will come walking.

Trees never suffer depression. They stretch higher into the sky trying to reach the source of all that is good. They wander with the wind. Trees say I'm not one of them, yet. I am blossoming. How desperately I wish to take root.

They found me naked in a live oak in Hermann Park. I was making love but they say no. Dendrophilia, a man in a lab coat tells mother. I'm in the psych ward at Ben Taub Hospital. Do I know where I am, they ask me. I am in Houston, Texas, home to oaks, birches, ash, elms, firs, palms, pecan, mesquite, and pine trees. So many trees, but no redwoods. I long to meet a redwood, but I'm stuck here where I see a single towering pine tree from my window.

"This is an illness, Alex," Mother whispers. "Medicine will fix you. Many people suffer from schizophrenia, not so many from the tree thing, but that's okay. Medicine will fix you."

Four years ago there was a Dutch elm in my front yard. I was sixteen. A fungus attacked the elm's root system after a Hurricane saturated the soil. Medicine was supposed to fix it too. The tree called out to me to save it. I tried. Why couldn't this tree be in the back yard, my mother asked my father, that way the neighbors wouldn't have to see this mess? They cut down my beloved tree with a chainsaw. I heard him scream. I screamed too.

Neighbors watched. I was loaded into an ambulance. I slit my root system. I didn't want to live. The trees whispered to me; promised me their primeval status infused them with wisdom. My time on this acre is in its infancy. I am a sapling.

I'll take medicine again, to appease Mother. The voices will become whispers. When their leaves rustle in the wind I'll know. Our quest continues. If I need them they are waiting for me. I can join them anytime.

## NATHAN CONARD

### *Camping Cinquains*

Spider

Suspended in

My tent, your web complete:

Scurry back outside, escorted

By hand.

Canoe

Carving water,

Sovereign vision of the

Sun. Clean rocks in cold, swift currents

Submerged.

Fire, a

Sanctuary

Of smoldering heat, the

Fervent, persistent flutters of

Dry smoke.

Thunder,

Herald of rain.

My tent quivers, shrouded

By gentle darkness. Eyes closed, I

Listen.

# JOSHUA SIDIC

## *Mulberry*

When the old mulberry out back  
lost one of his arms during the storm,  
I thought he might cry, but he didn't

a dog, with an American flag  
kerchief around his neck  
pays his respects at the fallen limb  
his name is Hendricks

the wasps do not care  
they set up shop  
where his arm used to be,

it's rained for the last three days,  
but now the searing sun  
is back in the weightless sky,  
pushing down the heavy, balmy air

and the old mulberry cries,  
weeping sap  
because of something called  
wet wood disease

our landlord says  
he's tired of the tree shedding  
limbs after every storm  
and he's going to cut it down

we agree in a series  
of absent-minded nods  
while Hendricks  
barks his disapproval

*Winter on Nakamun Lake*

Well trodden path  
bearing signs of  
sojourns taken  
from icy banks  
of the frozen lake leads  
to the exhausted gate  
resting on rusting hinges  
pointing the way  
to a Prussian blue house  
with proud white shutters framing  
windows casting back the light  
of a sun splaying orange onto  
the slate, barren sky  
as it dips beneath the horizon,  
dead leaves lifted by frigid, cutting  
breeze makes trees shiver,  
shaken by the same wind  
laden limbs threatening  
to release their burden  
knocking on window pane  
asking to be let in  
pleas falling on deaf ears.

# JOHN MONAGLE

## *In the Minutes of Winter Day*

I hear fire pop in the fireplace  
as cinders fall. It was only  
a few minutes ago, when the flame  
was set and rose, searing the wood.  
Is the time I wear my name  
as short as a fire in the evening  
and will it fade like ashes scooped up  
in the morning and discarded?

Outside, a visitor would gaze  
at the canvas of the eastern horizon  
where cotton gray clouds  
swirl around purple mountains.  
Cars would be on the highway,  
tires lapping water,  
leaving tread marks imprinted  
until other cars follow.

The vapor of pinon smoke  
would fill the air. Snow  
on mountains and bushes  
looks like confectioners'  
sugar on cake. Rabbit tracks  
and footprints disappear  
when this ground assumed  
the color of gingerbread.

I feel my age wash away from me  
as flakes fall on my clothes and skin.  
Is my name as small as the snowflake?  
on the pane, quickly losing its form  
as it melts into a drop like any other,  
only one of the innumerable descending  
in the second amongst hours  
when all outside becomes white?

*Saturday Morning*

I was only six.  
My brother was only three  
in that house  
on that Saturday morning.  
Our father was sleeping.

We were in the living room.  
We were in our imagination.  
We ruled the world within.  
We did not know  
we were loud.

Our father stepped out from his room.  
He glared, he yelled  
we thought only of ourselves.

Silently, he went into the kitchen.  
Silently, we followed.  
He prepared and we were fed.

I am no longer six.  
My brother is no longer three  
in this house  
on this Saturday morning.  
Our father is no longer sleeping.

Silently, he thinks of us.  
Silently, we think of him  
and we are nourished.

*Regret for the Mirror*

You were attached to the bureau  
my mother gave to me.

Long after her younger days  
when she gazed on the reflection  
held for her as she applied  
makeup and lipstick,  
adjusted her black dress,  
then stood straight,  
looking into you  
for a moment  
before her husband  
entered the bedroom  
to see if she was ready  
to go for a dinner  
at the fancy restaurant,  
for needed hours  
away from the five children.

She gave you to me years after  
youth left her face.  
You watched my solitary  
aging, wondering if you  
would ever look upon  
a female face beside me.

You were packed away and shipped  
to a second-hand store,  
purchased by an elderly woman  
and placed in her bedroom. In you,  
she gazes upon herself, preparing  
to accompany her husband, her daughter,  
son-in-law, and grandkids to the airport  
for their return trip home.

My mother has passed from the earth.  
I am returning to her house.  
She will never gaze  
upon the woman beside me  
The woman beside me  
will never gaze herself in you.  
She, in her ignorance, will never grieve.  
I, in my knowledge, always will.

## JASON INMAN

### *Last Chance*

“You’re right,” I said. “I’ve failed as a man, a father, and a husband. I get it. So if that’s it, let me enjoy the fucking sunset in peace.” My wife’s footfalls retreated away from me, and she slammed the sliding glass door shut behind her. I refilled my plastic cup with *La Fin Du Monde*, a strong Belgian beer that seemed appropriate to commemorate my failings, here, at the end of my world. I sat alone on the unfinished deck that surrounded our cabin, staring out beyond the loose nails eager to snag shoes and skin, beyond the rolling redwoods that carpeted the surrounding hills, out to the sea, where the sun was yearning to vanish in the west. I felt a kinship with our local star, wishing that I too could slip beyond the horizon into a starry abyss.

Only a month prior, I had been working as the assistant general manager at the biggest dispensary in the Silicon Valley. My career ended quietly, without incident. Without warning, the owner sent down two of his minions to our location, and they interviewed all of us. Within hours, seven of the eight managers I had worked with for years were let go, and their subordinates promoted. By my reckoning, the operators were cutting their payroll costs by a third with this move. When my interview came, they asked if I was interested in staying with them, with the caveat that I could leave now and they’d consider it a lay-off. I took my leave, called everyone that had just been laid off, and organized a party. We spent the night talking shit, planning our next moves, and getting high. I never saw any of them again.

Without the generous salary, I knew I’d have to move. The prospect of breaking my lease was, however, a welcome one. I had spent two years in a cramped two-bedroom upstairs apartment above a very angry Vietnamese man in the heart of Sunnyvale. Once I had custody of my nephew, I had given him my bedroom. That left my wife and me (when we were “on again”) to share a ten by ten room with my two kids. There was no peace. If we so much as let a pan clatter carelessly to the floor in the kitchen, the old man downstairs would assault the ceiling with a broomstick, screaming a litany of insults and racially charged epithets. We waged a war of noise for months at a time. If my daughter toddled too aggressively across the floor, he’d turn his TV and radio on, full-blast. We would retaliate by laying our speakers face down on the floor, antagonizing him with Skrillex or deadmau5.

My relationship with my wife, Kalan, was no less volatile than the one I enjoyed with my neighbor. We had spent months apart, reconciled, separated, reconciled again, and finally, in an act of exasperation, called our relationship open. In practice, that translated to periodic abandonment, hostility, and secrecy. We tried to focus on co-parenting, a task we executed efficiently despite the animosity.

My nephew left to live with his girlfriend once the news came down that my job was gone and the lease was broken. Finding a new place in the Bay Area proved to be impossible, and after a brief stay with my mother-in-law, we were homeless. The only prospect we had was my buddy's cabin in a place appropriately named Last Chance: coastal, off-grid, unfinished, remote, and adjacent to his cannabis grow. He was willing to let us stay if I provided some security and direction for the kids he had working up there.

I had tried to sell it to Kalan as a positive: "You can see the ocean from the deck!" "The elementary school in Davenport has a one to five ratio!" "It's only an hour to Santa Cruz!" In reality, it was the only move to make. We packed up and set out for the coast in July of 2012.

While my children, Logan and Charlotte, took the imposition of austerity in stride, being only six and four respectively, my wife was more than a little perturbed by the reality of what I'd dragged them into.

"Where's the bathroom?" She'd asked, hands on her hips, looking at me with some kind of emotion between contempt and skepticism.

"The outhouse is about two hundred yards that way." I'd pointed out over the deck, across the dirt road, to where the dilapidated shack leaned among a cluster of madrone and oak.

"You're fucking kidding, right? You want the kids to walk that far to use the toilet?"

"Only if they're taking a dump, they can pee right off the deck."

"This deck doesn't have any railing, J. They'll fall off!"

"Then they can do it in the front yard."

The cabin was in desperate need of repair. I had spent the first month hanging drywall, fixing part of the roof, hammering hundreds of nails back into place, and making a field-expedient bathroom complete with a five gallon bucket with a toilet seat. No one was impressed. We were on raw subflooring, we could see the ground between the sheets of plywood. My answer to that problem was carpet remnants pilfered from dumpsters and a massive wood stove I acquired from Craigslist. The water pump was temperamental— we were lucky to get a hundred gallons into our storage tank before it quit, and I'd have to scramble down the mountain to the spring and fix it. We bathed in a thirty-five gallon galvanized tub, and boiled the water for it on a two-burner camp stove. I bought a generator but refused to let it run for more than two hours at a time, as we were spending more than six hundred dollars a month on gas for

our two cars and the genie.

After the repairs, I'd sat back and looked at what I had done, and considered myself a kind of hero. Despite the odds, we were now living off-grid, beholden to no one on a mountaintop, yet still technically in the middle of the Bay Area. Kalan, however, had taken the opportunity to remind me that I was an abject failure that would probably get us killed by a combination of tetanus, rabies, and dysentery.

The weeks had crawled by. The kids started school in Davenport, which was a thirty-minute drive down a winding dirt road, out to Highway 1, then another fifteen minutes south. I didn't lie about the ratios: their classrooms held about ten kids each. Kalan got a job as a waitress across the street from their school, and I registered for classes at Cabrillo College in Aptos, about another half hour south of that.

Weeks inched into months. What little effort I'd expended on finding another apartment waned as Kalan started spending her weekends, then weeks, with a new partner in Cupertino. As fall came, I kept myself warm with resentment and booze, and settled down to do homework by headlamp. I developed a nightly ritual wherein after cooking dinner, stoking the woodstove, and putting the kids to bed, I'd shuffle out onto the deck, stare out over the verdant rolling hills towards the Pacific, and watch the stars come out to dance. Half drunk, I'd gaze out at the thick band of stars slashing across the sky and wonder how the hell I was going to get out. Then I'd scream "goddamnit!" at the top of my lungs until some vestige of sanity returned.

I couldn't see an escape. I felt like I was becoming feral: too wild and angry to find work in the rigid upper middle-class battleground of the Bay Area. Staying sequestered on the mountain seemed untenable. But there was no way out. I was stuck on Last Chance.

# ALMIRA LEWIS

## *Waitikubuli (Dominica)*

Mother Sun looks upon the beauty of this child.  
A child who has grown into her divine forties.  
Waitikubuli, as the Kalinagos crowned her, has the physique of a goddess.  
With a body of luscious green,  
Complemented by a kaleidoscope of jewels.

Beautiful Waitikubuli has mothered many children herself.  
From Pennsville to Scotts Head,  
She's fed them Loubiere Spring Water;  
And the sweetest mangoes, guavas, and coconuts.  
She has also taught them to speak French, Creole, and Coy-Coy.

Mama enjoys giving her children gifts.  
The Boiling Lake in the Morne Trois Pitons National Park;  
To the Champagne Reef in the south of Pointe Mitchel;  
Even age is a gift, with centenarians like Ma Pampo;  
And twenty-one others!

The Sisserou Parrot and Bwa Kwaib appreciate her beauty  
By representing her internationally.  
Their representation pulls men to her,  
But the World Creole Music Festival, as well as Jazz and Creole,  
Keep them there!

So, as Mother Sun looks upon her daughter,  
She smiles because Waitikubuli has accomplished so much,  
Her independence in 1978;  
Leaders like Honorable Dame Eugenia Charles,  
Our Iron Lady,  
To her strength after Hurricane Maria in 2017!

Waitikubuli is a sight to behold,  
A protected gem;  
With her skin, untouched,  
She will forever be the Nature Island of the Caribbean!  
Long live Waitikubuli!

# TYNE SANSOM

## *Eye of the Hurricane*

Long and forlorn  
on a spiraling arm  
we occupy solidly a  
subjective existence

on a spiraling arm  
spun from the eye  
subjective existence  
came one, came all

spun from the eye,  
hurled through blackness  
came one, came all  
into magnetic nothing

hurled through blackness  
held from the center out  
into magnetic nothing  
spin its divided clusters

held from the center out  
positively charged protons  
spin its divided clusters  
into definitive repulsion

positively charged protons  
remaining stuck together  
into definitive repulsion  
for eyes to enter

remaining stuck together  
is undivided oneness  
for eyes to enter  
a subjective journey

it's undivided oneness  
hurling galaxian arms,  
for a subjective journey,  
you are here

*Shadow Puppet*

He would tap his lips  
with his digits  
and insert  
tiny piles of cotton  
he picked and  
plucked like ticks,  
dangling ornaments  
vibrating the undercarriage  
of a patchy homeless dog.

He rolled cotton  
between the bones  
slowly picking and  
penetrating past the fluff  
into the chalky  
pills, the fentanyl,  
the stupefying blasters,  
little gatekeepers,  
the holy shitters.

*Holy shit that's good. Holy shit, holy shit!*

Fingers of his shadow cast  
upon the wall like a spider  
widow whose frozen body  
the babies will eat.  
The cocoon popped  
and scattered them about  
the couch that had been  
picked clean of its  
cottony softness.

## AUTUMN FREDLINE

*I don't get it either, alright?*

I don't know how the fuck we work. My partner and I have been dating for over a year and a half at this point, and we've honestly never been happier. We study together, eat together, and spend most of our free time together. We even work together. However, I have no fucking clue how. We are complete and utter opposites that in no way should work out, but somehow, we do.

*"Why is it already so sappy?"*

Even as children, we were completely different entities. I grew up in Texas, and she grew up in Southeast Asia. While I was roasting marshmallows in a chiminea, she was cooking rice in an aluminum can over a fire. When she was in elementary school, she threatened a group of boys that were making fun of her, saying that she would hit them with the brick that was laying in the corner. And when they didn't stop, she actually hit them with the brick that was laying in the corner. A five-year-old hit another five-year-old with a brick and that badass is my girlfriend. As a kid, I was afraid of birthday candles. I literally bawled when they put me in front of my own birthday cake. I didn't even eat any of it in protest. Hell, I thought that was cool. Meanwhile, she was putting this douche five year old in his place via a brick to the face.

*"Wait, I told you about the rice thing?"*

*"Yeah, remember? You showed me that Facebook post about nostalgia and all of that."*

*"You actually remember that?"*

The first time we met was in an advanced English class. I was in the top, making perfect scores on essay after essay, competing in competitions and winning due to my proficiency with a language that the partner I was assigned to had only been speaking for a year. She knew a good amount for the small amount of time she had been given, enough to hold a conversation, but not enough when applied pressure. Our first assignment was on alchemy: confusing to students in their native language, more so for students in their second. Even so, she tried so hard. She worked her ass off to help me, to make sure that I didn't have to do the project on my own, simply because I was with her. I never had the nerve to tell her that it was fine. I was used to being used. She wouldn't have it. She pushed and pushed, and we got an amazing grade on that project. I didn't hesitate to say yes when she asked me to partner with her again.

*"I still have the emails from that. You do, too, yeah?"*

*"It's been four years."*

*"You ass."*

We continued to bond over language. In fact, I think that's how I got

her. Partners in English class slowly evolved to partners in Biology, which slowly evolved to her moving her seat across the room to simply taking a stool from the lab tables to share my desk with me. We began to become inseparable, not hinged at the hip, but something more internal. The day that I think it snapped for me was when we were going over the male reproductive system. The word ejaculate came up in conversation, and she turned to me and asked me what it was. Without thinking, I made the jerking off motion with my hand before signaling an explosion. All she said was “ohhhhh.” That’s when the puzzle fit into place, in a sea of the rest of the class’ laughter. This phenomenon continued throughout high school. I became her translator. I would explain what everyone else meant to her and what she meant to everyone else. It was our system. Explaining things helped me to learn and helped her to understand. Even so, I still laugh at her pronunciation. I have drilled it into her head that “naive” isn’t pronounced “knife,” and we spent a half hour in the car the other day with her saying the word “deodorant” over and over again.

*“Di-ob-door-unt.”*

*“Deodorant.”*

*“See, I can say it.”*

*“Knife.”*

*“Get out of the car right now.”*

Then bring up the aspect of religion. I was raised Baptist, a practicing Omnist. She was raised violently Catholic, a practicing subdued Catholic. She was christened at birth, almost guaranteeing her a ticket to the pearly gates. Meanwhile, I was never baptized. I was extremely convinced that, in order to be baptized, the voice of Jesus would pop into my head and more or less say, “get your ass in gear and go have a pastor dunk you under water in front of a crowd of old people that you haven’t seen since you were seven.” My mom finally told me that this was not the case when I was eighteen. I’m still not baptized, so whoops. Not to mention I’m clearly gay, so according to at least 30% of the Christian population I’m already doomed to hell anyway. No reason to go back and take a dip in the kiddie pool with the same priest that proclaimed “rape clearly didn’t scar you that bad if you waited so long to come forward” in front of a sea of “AMEN”s. I’m probably better off getting into heaven without them, anyway. But back to the present, my girlfriend crosses herself before every meal, and I can’t even remember the last time I said grace. Her rosary hangs with my rainbow lanyard on her rearview mirror. Her family literally has a photo of the Pope in their living room, and I couldn’t recognize him. After we went to go see *The Nun*, I legitimately asked her if her people have the blood of Jesus Christ in a glass vile, because honestly, I wouldn’t put it past them. They’re on some other level with all their traditions and practices. They eat and drink Jesus every Sunday, and I have no idea how they got his body and blood like that. But every time I voice my concerns, I just hear the ringing of her beautiful

laugh before I'm brought back to reality by her throwing my hand away from hers in mock disgust before I take it back, reminding her that that's why she loves me.

*"Oh gross. Are you seriously going to write that?"*

The difference in culture is a given, so I'm going to speed through it. Honestly, I've been with her so long I can't even notice it anymore. It usually comes up when I'm explaining something to my parents or my friends, and they get confused. It's mainly about manners. I swear, she is so well behaved, but she's cursed in front of my grandma. Good thing her accent is thick enough to mask it.

*"When did I curse in front of grandma?"*

*"It was when we were talking about the news. Someone doing something or whatever."*

*"Ugh, bitches."*

The standards of beauty are another thing. She hates everything about herself. She tells me she wants to get plastic surgery to change everything: her nose, her eyes, her lips; and I don't get it. I've tried so hard to convince her that I love her cute little nose, I think her monolids look more gorgeous than any other kind of eyelid, and she has lips that any American girl would kill for. Even so, I watch her roll her eyes every time I call her beautiful, and that is such horse shit. I guess it makes sense in some way. Humility is a sure sign of beauty. I just wish sometimes that she would stop that from clouding her vision and actually take a real look in the mirror and listen to me.

*"Oh my God why are you like this?"*

I still don't know how we work, and I doubt that I ever honestly will. However, I don't know if I actually care. We may be opposites, but I've never known myself to be happier. I find my justification of us in the little things, in the hours spent looking through "90's kids" nostalgia, the collections of emails written in broken English, the repetition of words ranging from deodorant to sexual assault, and the thousands of times we've proudly claimed the thrones of hell.

*"Babe..."*

Seriously, I never knew the most beautiful things could be so frustrating... but I love her.

*Quilts*

I am patchwork queer,  
A quilt of pieces of my ancestors.  
A patch of Freddie Mercury's back  
Is sewn above my left elbow.  
Wanda Sykes is missing my kidney.  
My heart comes from a transwoman,  
Hung in the 1920s.

A singer,  
An actress.  
A father,  
And then a mother.

I am a plethora of mixed fabrics,  
A walking sin,  
And yet  
A beautiful  
Scarred  
And stitched  
Masterpiece.

*Belle of the Ball*

As I leave my wardrobe, I fear that my queer skin shows through the lace of my liar's dress. I stress, confess, that my touch has touched another woman. I have pressed my lips to stolen kiss from soft petal, everlasting bliss in a one two three. And yet, as my love is stripped from me, torn from my body, I am skinned nothing, a bleeding late early.

As I walk down the path, I feel nails skewered through virgin palm beds. Every step takes a chance I am not ready to take, for my sake, I fear. When exposed to flame pain burns like acid rain, eroding my stone confidence. The lampposts scream as light burns bright, fright fueled by arms pulled tight, delightful glow of living hell. Corpse on a crucifix, quiet your screams. It kills the ambiance in publicity's dreams. Burn the vigil wicks with children's cross sticks. Melting candle bodies, wax piles at foot of flowerbeds, heads burned beyond chance of recognition. Take my stance as a coward, trance myself into enjoying warmth of sick flame prick of needle. Let blood escape to relieve my pain, razor across forehead is oil to fuel those sinners royal.

As I enter through the towering doorway, I move to cover my bare everything. My figure is caught in their stare, a glare in which I find myself bound in a straight jacket, a heteronym of my capture. They feel that my existence may bring upon their rapture. With each step my hell's heel takes, I begin to count my every mistake, the rake of metallic sole on skin stretched tight. They dance on flesh pulled fresh from bleeding muscle fiber. My heart beating, breeding dread from dead pulp. Use golden thread to sew my spread legs together, crimson adulterer.

As I cower in the closing corner, I shield my eyes from twisted royals, sick hands exposing me in elaborate ball gown or tuxedo, existence ruled on a forced binary of genitalia. Classify me as Mammalia, and yet I am closer to anything opposite. Brand me snake wrapped around wooden stake through my own heart. Yell vulture, mourning over the corpses of the fallen culture, cultures, we are all vultures. Tell me that I remind you of an insect that you seek to crush under stampeding combat expectation. Can't call me bitch because you removed every stitch of humanity from my sinning body. Look up to see decorative decapitations on full display, a collection of humanity in disarray, jaws dropped open, no pause, sever my neck, and don't hold the applause. Praise my dying night around flameless vigil of candlelight Burn bright like brother's corpse as he kicked in fight of the tugging rope.

But now, here I am. Middle of the ballroom, surrounded by royals, my tomb. I feel darkened eyes loom over me, over my body. They can see me. They can see my skinned flesh, my flaming chest, the nails through my palms, my calm decapitation, the noose around my neck, the bomb in my stomach. Quiet the dying's qualms. They don't mix well with the psalms overhead. Plant your seeds and cast out diversity. Wait to see what their grave markers read. Take my struggling body out to the cemetery, bury me six feet under your utopia. And, as I stand here, having read numerous tombstones, the moans and groans on the wind have said to me, "the pastoral is dead," and all my friends have gone with it.



procession of laces up Ruby's back.

Clara tucked the dangling laces beneath the stiff edge of the corset lining Ruby's torso. "That'll do it," she mustered, patting Ruby's back with a fervor that nearly catapulted her stiff frame like a bowling pin.

"I look ridiculous," Ruby griped, inspecting her waist in the armoire's mirror. Ruby's waist was a hand's breadth wide. She felt pluck-able, like a dandelion from a garden. A disposable decoration.

Clara eyed her with unspoken pity as she readied the next garment to adorn her with. Ruby turned, extending her arms above her by habit to slide through the sheath of luxurious fabric. As the silken layers glided over her head, she stared at the walls of the crimson womb. When her head burst past the neckline and the lamplight in her room greeted her, she accidentally met her own gaunt eyes in the mirror in a moment of disorientation. When that moment passed, the emergence felt as any other. Doomed. Resigned.

The lamps in the horse-drawn carriage wobbled with each sway and bump. William fiddled with the gears of his pocket watch, studying the movement of its hands as if he were master of the hours and minutes it contained. The cigar dangling from his other hand filled the space between Ruby and her husband with a fragrant fog. Stray wisps found purchase in the cracks of the doors and in the ceiling, transforming into thin needles as they found their threads of freedom toward the outside air.

Ruby struggled to contain her cough the next time her husband exhaled a chimney's worth of smoke between them. If she so much as shifted in her seat, she feared the supports in her corset would pierce her flesh. Descending their manor's forty-three stairs from bedroom to front drive had been difficult enough, and the effort merely met with the cold evaluation of dark eyes. William's mustache had twitched above his smirk as he examined the cinch of Ruby's waist, the way the dress two sizes too little for her strangled her ribcage and threatened to burst with each inhale she drew. His face would have likely displayed the same amusement had she thrown herself down the stairs instead.

Now, as he sat across from her, he hardly glanced at her. If he had, the veil of smoke would hardly be enough to disguise her discomfort. Her rigid spine felt as if her vertebrae were stacked bricks beneath her skin.

Unable to contain the itch in her lungs from the heavy, spiced scent of the cigar, Ruby finally coughed. Two black irises accosted her.

"Are you alright, darling?" William murmured. Smoke seeped from between his teeth as he spoke, the last foul dregs from the deepest part of his lungs.

"Of course," she responded coolly, a pawn placed on a chessboard.

Each word a calculation, a meticulous reaction.

William's hand flicked, but only to expel ash from the tip of his cigar. She flinched nevertheless, and his eyes didn't miss the movement. His gaze drew heavy as he regarded her, pupils dilating through lidded eyes. His gaze dropped to her body again, from the obscene display of her breasts to the toe of her velvet dancing shoes. "You look divine in that dress. It demonstrates your figure exquisitely."

"Thank you," Ruby quavered.

She turned and looked out the window, fighting nausea, and counted each stagecoach that passed them opposite, imagining herself in the path of one.

Within the estate, couples in their usual attire performed their usual dance. Women's bodies twirled. Their husbands laughed, dark liquors stirring in their glasses. William strolled between the men and women at a languid pace, often dipping his head to appease the salutation of old friends or business partners. The press of bodies swirling around Ruby felt like the wind propelling a fallen leaf to uncertain peril. Before the desperation to escape grew fervent, William pressed her shoulder and Ruby gratefully sprawled into a plum, velvet-lined chair.

The two assessed the ballroom in silence; one calculating their company, the other too breathless to speak. Finally, William crooned in Ruby's ear, "Do look more pleased to be here. You're returning to this ball a victor. The first of your generation to find a husband. Look at all the eyes on you, my darling."

Without needing to validate them with eye contact, Ruby felt the stares. She smiled and planted a genial hand on William's shoulder.

"I *am* pleased," She insisted.

"I should be needing a drink," William mumbled in response, adjusting the finger of his glove.

"I'll accompany you."

Ruby attempted to stand unassisted, but the gesture was none more than a flimsy, forward motion. She was resigned to reaching for him. He plucked her hand like a weed and ignored the way her eyes creased in misery as the abrupt movement reawakened the pain in her ribs. Her grimace had no time to be noted by an extended audience, however, as she was hauled between bodies in wide, gaudy dresses.

Regardless of its truth, Ruby felt untouched by any gazes as they became lost again in the sea of bodies. There, she was almost able to forget the hand gripping her waist and what her corset concealed. As long as her feet moved forward and she was indecipherable from any woman in the crowd, she

ceased to be a heifer at auction, a witch on trial. Ruby's feet had begun to tingle in her new shoes, livened by the rare possibility of blistering. She almost caught herself smiling genuinely as she and her husband neared a tray of drinks, when she caught a glimpse of unmistakable black curls. The raven-haired woman stood alone on the fringe of the dancers, hands folded across her ribs, not quite smiling.

William took a flute of champagne for himself, and a single sip emptied half the glass. His mustache became dewy with the alcohol. When he caught his wife looking at his mouth, he flashed a Cheshire grin, heedless of her true disgust.

"I should mingle," he said, gesturing vaguely to the accumulating stares of couples surrounding them.

"Go on. It's not a woman's place to intercede," she reassured him automatically, tempted to curtsy and duck away before he could detect her relief.

With little preamble, William tucked his glass close to his body and proceeded through the minglers to join a familiar group of former scholars. Upon approaching them, they all gestured with full glasses across the room to his wife, who had found and taken the hands of the black-haired woman she'd spotted earlier. Too many bodies passed by for William to see the words on his wife's lips, but soon, the unfamiliar woman pulled Ruby through the throng of bodies and out of sight.

"That beast intends to strangle you before your nineteenth birthday. You shall be the size of a twig. A thread!" the dark-haired woman cried. She had pulled Ruby into a bedroom off the darkest and most undetectable labyrinth of the estate's hallways.

"I know. Quickly, Marie." Ruby turned and exposed to her the shiny buttons stationed from the nape of her neck to the most inward curve of her waist.

Marie's deft fingers undid the procession of buttons hastily. The gown slouched off Ruby's shoulders and eventually shed to the floor entirely, but the discarded layers offered no relief from the suffocation of her corset.

"This shall take ages," Marie lamented, plucking an ungiving ribbon.

Ruby turned, desperately surveying the nearby desk. "Use those."

The corset took considerably less time to come off than it required putting on. With the assistance of a letter opener to snip the ties, Ruby burst from the garment.

"Oh, thank the Lord," she sighed, ripping the remains of the corset from her body and tossing them away. The frayed ribbons fluttered as they caught air for the brief second before they landed on the wooden floor.

"Begone, devil!" Marie laughed triumphantly.

Dressed only in her underthings, Ruby performed a single twirl to demonstrate her newfound freedom of mobility, inhaling so deeply her lungs strained. She felt as if she were wearing nothing at all. When she met Marie's eyes, they assessed her that she thought similarly.

The first time they had both attended the ball, they were fifteen, single, and tossed between prospective husbands accordingly. With the stunted grace and moderately good humor each could only barely manage to perform, the girls danced with processions of mustachioed and intense men sometimes twice their age. The girls' initial eye contact, stolen hastily and desperately over the shoulders of their dance partners, had anchored them to the knowledge that they weren't as alone and hopeless as they'd thought.

After the dance, Marie had tugged the bell of Ruby's sleeve.

Before she could fully turn, the girl's lips pressed to her ear. "Meet me on the terrace."

Ten minutes later, with hips leaned against the edge of the stone railing overlooking gardens invisible to them beneath the shroud of darkness, both girls had hardly gotten past basic introductions before Marie slid a hand to Ruby's waist.

"Is this not uncomfortable?" she demanded. Ruby couldn't decide if Marie was drunk or if her natural tone was always obtrusively curious.

"My dress?" Ruby had inquired.

Her companion nodded.

"Father prefers this fashion. He says my figure will attract suitors."

Marie watched her face intently, and it was then Ruby had realized Marie's hand was still on her waist. Her face warmed; the extended contact prompted a shortness of her breath unrelated to the tight gown.

"And this," Marie had whispered, stepping closer and bringing her other hand to Ruby's cheek. She swept back a curl to reveal Ruby's concealed jawbone. "Was this father, too?"

Ruby had been silent as Marie's fingers caressed her cheek, her palm cradling her jaw and fingers teasing the fine hair behind her ear. The hand on Ruby's waist slid around her completely, and her back arched to narrow the space between them.

Compelled by a need beyond her own consciousness, Ruby closed that gap entirely. Her lips sought Marie's despite the grit of lipstick against her tongue. Marie had tasted of champagne.

"Do you intend to tell your parents?" Marie asked their second year at the ball. They had bravely stolen off to a vacant bedroom upstairs in lieu of the terrace.

Ruby scoffed as she rubbed at a smear of errant lipstick on her inner thigh. “And do what? Marry you?” Her tone was derisive, yet mournful.

Marie had completed buttoning her dress and turned, likewise crestfallen.

“Perhaps,” she had whispered.

Marie turned to study the floorboards, the distant noise of the third annual ball wafting through the room. With her back turned, Ruby’s lips against her shoulder startled her.

“It’s nothing like with you,” Ruby whispered, trailing a line of kisses on Marie’s bare back.

“How so?” Marie whispered.

When Ruby declined to respond, Marie turned in her embrace and regarded her eye-to-eye. Ruby’s gaze averted. Marie tentatively reached out, her palm dwelling on Ruby’s left cheek. Its paleness matched the rest of her complexion. Marie’s fingertips continued down her throat, across her collarbones, her shoulders. As the weight of Marie’s palms settled on her body, Ruby’s lips pressed together to subdue a tremble. Gentle hands passed over Ruby’s breasts and continued until they splayed against her ribs, then her stomach.

Ruby burst into tears.

Silently, Marie redressed her, leaving her torn corset on the ground. The dress was enough sizes too small to crush her adequately on its own.

As Ruby followed Marie to the door, she glanced back to the letter opener Marie had tossed onto the bed earlier. The blade’s gleam winked in the receding lamplight, a whispered promise of its ability to undo more than the laces of her corset.

William noticed the modification of Ruby’s attire rather than the shine in her eyes or the patchiness where rouge had been hastily reapplied.

“You missed the toast,” he muttered.

“Oh, dear,” Ruby sighed, her tone affected convincingly by her previous tears. “You understand how us ladies are. Steeped in carelessness from the womb.”

William’s face contorted in response to the terminology. His tone soured considerably to match. “We must retire. I grow wary of this crowd.”

The ninetieth time Ruby had the dream, she awoke nauseated. Clara found her crouched over the bin and smiled knowingly as she drew the blinds open.

“Miss, do you feel up to breaking your fast? Mr. Andrews is waiting downstairs.”

“A moment,” Ruby moaned, looking upon her maid so miserably that Clara immediately dismissed herself without drawing the final curtain.

Alone, Ruby curled into the fetal position, the taste of her own vomit coating her tongue. She knew the idea to be senseless, but she could feel the child swimming inside her. Circles and circles. A waltz for angry flesh. The thought was dizzying. She vomited again to no relief, and then vomited again to be sure. At the bottom of the bin sat only the thinnest remains of her stomach’s contents, and nothing from deeper within.

She stood, realizing belatedly that with Clara’s absence, no one could assist her with dressing. She reached for her cashmere robe and cinched the waist with resignation, the alien swollenness of her stomach hardly apparent beneath the fabric.

The hallway outside the bedroom was vacant. Ruby’s bare feet upon the wooden planks were silent, oblivious to the cold against her soles. Her fingers crept to her stomach, a single hand roaming over the bowl-shaped intrusion beneath her skin. She was drawn to the top step of the grand staircase by numb impulse. She knew there were forty-three total; she’d counted after he’d threatened to throw her down them.

Her toes hung over the ledge of the top step. She reached for the bannister, but reevaluated and lowered it again.

From the kitchen below, she heard the dainty stir of a spoon in coffee. The rustle of a newspaper. The wind whistling through an open window.

It seemed easy. A step forward. A twisted ankle. An accident.

She realized she still had a hand pressed to her stomach, gripping the confines of her own flesh, traitorously stretched around the unwelcome protrusion.

Instinct whispered to her feet, *Walk. You know the path.*

And she did.

She waited for the scrape of a chair. For Clara’s scream.

Instead, she spat a single tooth onto the floor of the gallery and grinned a newly broken smile as unmistakable warmth greeted her thighs.

She bled for five days.

Clara cried for many weeks beyond.

“It was *my child*,” William screamed, throwing a saucer with enough force to shatter the nearby window. Ruby noticed the way the smoke within the room pirouetted in the new breeze, fleeing rapidly toward the brilliant, outer world.

She had the dream again the next night, sleeping unperturbed in her locked bedchamber. This time, however, it occurred in reverse: stick by stick, Ruby dismantled the walls of her nest, gathered them in her arms, and walked backward through the forest. She deposited each branch where it had been found, delicately arranging them exactly where they had previously fallen to restore nature's design. With each backward step, her stomach shrank, her breath came easier, her panic diminished. She escaped further from the nest.

The trees above waved at her in the breeze. She smiled at the sun between their branches.

# E.N. BOURLAND

## *An Ode to Lacunas, Co-Authored by RhymeZone.com*

On a misty afternoon,  
I sat before my writing desk  
To write a letter overdue

But as I wrote, I did require  
A synonym for a word I refused  
So I opened up another web browser  
RhymeZone.com, which I oft used

I typed in the word for which I sought,  
With the confidence of a douche bag on Tinder  
But my request turned up no results  
And I was left with a strange dilemm-er

Flustered, angry, wondering why,  
I took to old Google, my trust beside,  
I typed in my request, inquiring of his tomes:  
“Compersion etymology” in quotation notes.

Proclaimed the first hit on Google’s list:  
“[F]orget Greek and Latin” – therefore, I clicked:  
And from PolyInTheMedia.BlogSpot.com,  
I learned the short history of the word I’d picked.

The phrase came about in the 1970s  
In a free lovin’ commune in Ol’ Californ’  
The women, noticing an English lacuna,  
Sought guidance from a communally-owned Ouiji Board.

The Spirits, they spelled out from the ‘C’ to the ‘-sion,’  
The word which became our “compersion” –  
And from that wee community in the Bay,  
The word outspread across the U.S. of A.

Then in 2018 my dumbass took to RhymeZone  
To find a synonym for which there were none  
For this is the fate of lacunas all  
Unless we invent some more words, y’all.

*The Political is Personal*

You say that it's just politics,  
Just a difference of opinion.  
But wise women once said  
*The personal is political*—  
And so I say  
The political is personal.

The political is personal  
It is within my person.  
I feel it in my heart,  
In my stomach,  
Which bottoms out  
When, suddenly, the political—

At the dinner table.

At the dinner table,  
He said, at the end  
Of the Thanksgiving prayer:  
“And thank God for Donald Trump.”

And there was laughter, some nodding  
A few shifty eyes—

I boomed,  
Almost jokingly.  
It was all I could think to do.

After a bit, I went  
To see if anyone else  
Had a problem with it—

No one did.  
They told me to hush,  
To not make a scene.  
It was I who was embarrassing.

A day later,  
I tried to get them to understand.  
I opened myself;  
I sliced open my veins  
And bled for them

They said,  
It's a matter of opinion.

I continue to bleed.

*The Worst Thing about Reading*

the worst thing about reading is  
when you notice your thumb at the corner of the page,  
and you're caught in a whirlwind,  
hurled into the present, the now.

you see the page, the letters:  
only letters on a page.  
the world you were in  
the characters you were—

for a split second are not  
as real as you'd imagined

but you shake it off—  
reality.  
and dive, once more, into the page:

it ripples  
refracting the letters in waves  
and accepts you  
pulls you under the current

## MADISON LEONARD

### *Bisexual and Catholic*

“You can’t follow God and be a bisexual.”  
I listen to these words,  
Praying with my rosary in my hands,  
Repeating ten Hail Marys  
Wondering why I can not have both.  
I still wish to follow God,  
But why should my faith  
Compromise my happiness?  
I wish not to give up being Catholic  
Because of my lifestyle either.  
I still feel stuck between both worlds  
No matter how much advice both sides give.  
Am I wrong?  
Or am I loved for who I am?  
For choosing to love Jesus and having faith,  
While I live out my life as a balance.

## HAYLEE FOWLER

### *Voices*

There's all these voices attacking me,  
Voices on the outside and the voices within.

A whisper says "what you do is bad,"  
And my heart burns with guilt of mourning.

Another breath says "believe and be firm,"  
And encouragement fills my bones.

Which one is correct?  
Which voice is you, God?

The demons in my mind keep talking,  
And God, your voice is hidden.

I try to stay quiet and hear you in the noise,  
But all I hear is yelling from forces on either side.

Speak to me God.  
Let me hear your voice.  
I can't do this anymore.  
Which one is You?

Stay in my life, Lord.  
I know you never fail me.  
Show me your voice.  
Let me hear your truths.

All around me opinions fly,  
All around me is everyone's but mine.  
Where is my voice God?  
Does it line up with yours?

Let me speak my thoughts.  
Let me know my beliefs.  
Speak to me, God, and let me hear you,  
So I can speak to them, God, and let them hear me.

# TRINITY MCGRAW

## *My Enemy*

Thoughts are like the vultures I see  
On the side of the road eating away at a carcass.  
Eating away at what remains,  
Leaving whatever strength I had,  
Gone.

My thoughts are my worst enemy,  
Coming from my own being,  
Yet still finding a way to betray me.  
Like Judas's kiss,  
God betrayed by his own creation.

Overcome with confusion,  
Stress, anxiety.  
I tell myself to push through,  
Stop overthinking.  
I tell myself I'm making it worse  
Day by day.

As I gasp for air in between my thought process,  
I drown each day.  
"Stay positive" they say, "you're a fighter" they say.  
But I am tired of fighting.  
Tired of being beaten in the alley of my mind.  
With no one around to save me.  
No one hears my screams,  
Because they are overcome by thoughts.  
My own thoughts.

RYANE TOWNSEND

*F-Stop*

There's an almost-empty bottle of Aberlour scotch on the dusty middle shelf in our family room. Its owner has never set foot in this house. He never will. He won't run his finger through the dust around the curved bottom of the bottle or draw designs in the dust on the leather of the old camera bag. *F-stop 4.*

I am not sure Bob would have done these things anyway. Yet, when I'm imagining him as the child in the sepia-toned picture propped up against the bottle, the child that looks like my little brother, I feel he would have been the kind of kid to draw designs into dust and chase dust bunnies with a broom. Perhaps his father instilled some sort of magic in his soul with the extensive camera collection kept on his fireplace mantle and the old antique desk that I fell in love with shortly after Bob married my mom. *F-stop 4.*

I didn't even know about the camera bag in the laundry room until we had lived in this house for a year. I was curious one day when searching for antacids in the plastic drawers on the shelf beside it, and I pulled back the zipper to see an old Pentax in its depths. My fingers left indentations and skip marks in the layer of dust on the leather exterior where my fingers had met resistance. It was like the bag was not meant to be opened. I opened it anyway, feeling as though I had found some sort of secret. In some ways, I had, as when I broached the subject of the camera with my mom. She said,

"Oh, that's Bob's camera."

I look at it every now and again, thinking of the shutter speed, the depth of field. It was a 35mm lens, standard for a Pentax. If I was lucky, it would have an f-stop of 2.8, which means anything beyond what is being focused on is blurred and unrealistic. The ideal portrait lens exists in the 1.8-2.8 f-stop range. Surrealistic. The ISO would probably be set to automatic, but you can't always hold a camera perfectly still without a little shake in the image.

My brother existed upstairs, in his room, on his computer. He was raised by women and shares his gender only with the housecats. He is quick to tell me he loves me, as if he thinks he will lose me forever. That fear is valid. I wonder if my mom lets Will sit on his computer for hours on end because it will keep him from thinking about his dad. *F-stop 2.8.*

My sister exists in her room or on the softball field or wherever else my mom has placed her in the athletic world. Sophie seems to enjoy it, but I wonder if it's meant to be a distraction. *F-stop 3.*

I exist in my bedroom, perfecting the art of procrastination by way of fear, anxiety, and an immense lack of white balance in my chest. Everything is off color, out of focus, outside the f-stop. I exist in the blue beyond the focused photo. I choose to be here. Being in focus is too exhausting and terrifying to comprehend. *F-stop 2.*

The ten years Bob existed as my stepfather and then a close family friend of five-plus years, I had always struggled to be close to him. At this point in time, I have realized that my siblings are his children, and the camera bag in the laundry room tugs at my heartstrings, and the ISO stabilizes, and the depth of field tightens, and I realize that we had more in common than I thought. *F-stop 1.8.*

# GINGER JOHNSON

## *Family I Never Knew*

I remember her picture sitting softly on the couch's side table along  
With a pretty pink jar that had ceramic roses that I couldn't touch.  
The women who looked different from me and vaguely like my mom  
The only memory I have of her, my relative, my namesake, my aunt

Thick wavy locks, brown eyes, and dark skin, she sits smiling at me  
I never met her, never had a chance, but still we share so much.  
Like people we love, places we've lived, and of course our name  
Ginger, which for her (the story I was told) was after the bread.

Any Okie will tell you that the heritage and history of this territory,  
From the Cherokees to the Kiowas, covers every inch of state land.  
How is it then that I learned, not from my aunt, but from a classroom,  
About her culture so close to my home. And it was only a segment.

I can pronounce the words, and I can laugh at the outsiders who say  
"Cha-too-ee" instead of Chouteau or put an "ah" to begin Adair.  
And I have tried to be engaged, but owning a dreamcatcher makes  
Me nothing more or better than the thousand other Tumblr girls.

Maybe things would have been different if she were here now.  
I have the sweet stories from my mom, the precious moments  
Made better with time. But I will never know her voice, her laugh,  
Or her side of the stories, instead I will only have her picture.

I might have seen family in my neighbors, of whom I know little,  
I'll admit that I don't identify with this part of Oklahoma's culture  
Not by any repulse or hate, but because I was raised away from it,  
Isn't it strange, how you can lose things that you never even had.

Maybe I'm grasping at straws or putting an idealize fantasy on  
A person I never even knew. The truth is I never asked, never  
Even thought to, about that part of my aunt's short time here.  
While not wanting to bring any pain to the ones that knew her.

No, I am not Native American. And I don't even know the identity  
That my aunt would have, but I want to know, want to have any  
Connection to the person who was so loved. And still I carry this,  
A picture, barely a memory, of my mystery, my what if, my aunt.

*Drowsy Stability*

There's something to be said for the silence between bodies  
The moments when two lay and soak in the comfort  
And the warmth that is shared underneath thin sheets

It is a trusting feeling that only lovers can have  
Stark nakedness, exposure, and vulnerability  
Building with each slow breath drawn in and out

Fingers gliding subtly over skin covered planes  
Learning the layout the groves the bumps  
And every feature of the soul in their arms

Moments before seems far past and distant  
The moments after this are yet unknown  
But this moment stretches seconds and minutes

Maybe there are mumbles, whispers, and sighs  
Or maybe just quiet that covers the settled air  
No need for spoken words, bodies can say enough

Life continues to move around the still clinging spirits  
And they will have to leave the serene satisfaction soon  
But it is with the promise that they will find the silence again

*Book Lovers*

Can I put a bookmark in this moment?  
Or maybe write in the margins?  
So I can look back at it one day  
And remember the exact moment  
That I showed you my favorite book

It's not a perfect one, this story  
It's been worn through so many times  
Creases all down its thick spine,  
With folds and small rips in its pages  
And it's definitely not a best seller

The protagonist is sometimes self-centered  
Worse, her quest changes almost daily  
You'll want to scream at her stupidity  
See her taking every possible wrong door  
And she can't seem to hold it together

The antagonist is different in every page  
And often, there are too many to keep track  
Battles with people, places, things, and ideas  
They can do the smallest things to break her  
Mostly, it's just her fighting within her mind

I didn't know if I wanted you to read it  
Because it contains every part of me  
I wondered if you'd tear through its pages  
Without caring any for the protagonist  
Just looking for aesthetically pleasing parts

But you thumbed through it so gently  
You read every single drawn out line  
Out of order, of course, only seeing the parts  
I wanted to show first, but eventually you'll  
Read it all, marking softly the open spaces

Even better, you'll help me write your pages  
And promise to always be my co-author  
As long as I am always to be yours. My story  
Grows every moment with you. And now  
All I'm asking, is for you to show me yours

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Megan Allen** is an artist studying Graphic Design at Northwestern State University. Megan likes to work in various medias including photography, ink, and watercolor painting. She plans to explore more 3-D medias as she continues her studies to keep her options open for future endeavors.

**Shem Alexander** is a Junior at Northwestern State University from the Caribbean nation of Antigua & Barbuda, currently pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Painting. He is interested by how history shapes our present world, and this is reflected in his artwork.

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**Whitney Atkinson** is a graduate from Northwestern State University and an enthusiast of all things literature. She enjoys peeling dried glue off of the top of the bottle, being sassy, reading until three A.M., strawberry vanilla Sprite from Sonic, man buns, and Italian Greyhounds.

**E.N. Bourland** is a graduate student and teaching assistant in the English department at Northwestern State University.

**Katherine Butler** is a Texas native who is currently in the process of applying to colleges.

**Emone Collins** is a junior at Hirschi IB Magnet High School. She began writing poetry outside of school several years ago, as a means expressing herself. Her work is inspired by her life and experiences as a young woman of color. An avid reader, Emone is inspired by the work of Langston Hughes and Angie Thomas.

**Yamilett Compean** is an undergraduate student at Northwestern State University.

**Nathan Conard** is a junior English major at Northwestern State University. In the future he intends to pursue a career as an editor, philosophical writer, and fantasy author.

**Emma Cranford** attends Northwestern State University and hopes to become a high-school English teacher.

**Chloe Dewberry-Hanssen** is graphic design major at Midwestern State University.

**Isaiah Edwards** is an undergraduate student at Midwestern State University. He is just an artist who likes character design and a good laugh.

**Joshua Espitia** is a former managing editor of *The Windward Review* literary journal. He has received Texas Intercollegiate Press Association and Haas writing awards for his short fiction and has twice been a panelist at the People's Poetry Festival. Currently he lives in Corpus Christi, Texas, where he writes bad comedy for the *The Vent Daily* and pays the bills as an ESL teacher.

**Krysten Farrier** is a graphic artist and printmaker. She graduates from Midwestern State University with a Bachelor in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Graphic Design and a secondary emphasis in Printmaking in the Fall of 2018. Her work is an examination of different design strategies she uses to create challenging pieces of work on worldwide events and social movements.

**Haylee Fowler** is a senior English major who is minoring in creative writing at Midwestern State University. After graduation she plans on pursuing a masters degree and hopes to become a published author.

**Shasta Fox** is a graduate student at Western New Mexico University.

**Autumn Fredline** is an undergraduate English major at Midwestern State University. When she is not lost in her own world, she can probably be found questioning existence or petting a random dog somewhere, as is her true calling in life.

**Daniel Garcia** is a senior at Abilene Christian University. He will be graduating this fall with a degree in English. After graduate school, he plans on one day becoming a professor of English. Daniel love words.

**Gracie Glebe** is an English major at Midwestern State University.

**Natalia Hernandez** is an undergraduate at Midwestern State University.

**Adrienne Hill** is an undergraduate at Midwestern State University majoring in sociology with a minor in art. She is the mother of a lovely cat named Dionne, and is an aquarius-pisces cusp! She has always had a deep appreciation for the arts including theatre, painting, and creative writing. This past year she has

become interested in Printmaking and her works deal mostly in this medium.

**Jason Inman** is a senior at Prescott College, graduating with a Bachelor's in psychology and Bachelor of Fine Arts in interdisciplinary liberal arts this month.

**Ginger Johnson** is a Math and English major at East Central University. She grew up around Tulsa and is currently 21 years old. Her writing focuses mainly on free verse poetry and short stories. She has previously been published in East Central University's literary magazine *Originals* and Midwestern's *Voices*.

**Jaydon Johnson** is an undergraduate at Midwestern State University where he is studying to get a Bachelors of Fine Art with a Teachers Certification. His latest work "Suffocating Sadness", was exhibited at the Juanita Harvey Art Gallery in May 2018. When he is not making art that address mental illness or everyday life, he is doing arts and crafts with friends around MSU.

**Taylor Deanese Johnson** is a Sophomore at East Central University. She is majoring in English and minoring in Graphic Art. She lives in Ada Oklahoma with her twin sister Tiffany Johnson. Taylor's hobbies include collecting records, playing video games, painting, and writing. Her career aspirations are to become an author and illustrator.

**Katie Jones** is a junior in the English program at Midwestern State University. She enjoys supporting local artist in Wichita Falls. She also loves animals, flowers, and all red wine.

**Tessa Kennedy** is an undergraduate student at Abilene Christian University pursuing a degree in Psychology.

**Elena Lake** is an undergraduate student at Midwestern State University.

**Madison Leonard** is an English major at Midwestern State University and a poet and short story writer.

**Almira Lewis** hails from the Nature Island of Dominica. She is a twenty year old Global Studies major and Spanish minor. Poetry began as a hobby but soon became therapeutic. She is a member of the Student Government Association and the Caribbean Student Organization, and is a Spanish Club Senator. She also wishes to engage in EURECA research projects in the future.

**Jessica Manchester-Sanchez** lives in Houston with her husband of 20 years, 17 year old son, and two grumpy cats. She studied journalism at Texas State University, then worked as an editorial assistant at a newspaper in Harlingen, Texas, where she wrote obituaries and filled in for the bird watching column.

**Trinity McGraw** is an active student at Southeastern University who has been writing since the age of twelve.

**Alysia McKinney** is a student from Poteau High School in Oklahoma. Writing has always been a form of relaxation for her. Anytime she has emotions she wants to get out but can't or doesn't want to express verbally, she'll pick up a pen and one of her many notebooks and writes whatever comes to her. For her it's always been about writing what she wants the way she wants.

**Caitlin McNeely** is a graduate student of English at Midwestern State University. Her academic interests include archival research and feminist rhetoric. Outside of school, she enjoys singing about everything she does, playing video games, binging TV shows, and reading excessively. She intends to pursue a doctorate and become a kick-ass professor.

**John Monagle** resides in Las Cruces, New Mexico. He has published poems in the *Edge Literary Review*, *Two Hawks Quarterly*, and *Sports Literate*.

**Miranda Mullins** is a sophomore at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma. She enjoys writing poems, and napping a lot more than she should.

**Logan Murphy** is an undergraduate at Abilene Christian University.

**Jessica Odom** is a senior English major at Midwestern State University. She was also named the Outstanding English Major for the 2018-19 academic year.

**Reagan Pace** is a student currently studying Biblical Languages at Abilene Christian University.

**Juan Parra** is a current student at Midwestern State University.

**Cody Peterson** is an English major at Midwestern State University. An avid reader and writer, he is passionate about one day teaching high school students, and then eventually move into teaching at the collegiate level.

**Bailey Pitzer** is an undergraduate at Midwestern State University.

**Andrea Ramos** is a Cal State University Northridge graduate who received her Bachelor's in Literature and Creative Writing.

**Bry'Ton Rolle** is a senior at Midwestern State University receiving a Bachelor's of Fine Arts with a concentration in Graphic Design, as well as a double minor in Photography and Business Administration.

**Rachel Ross** is a senior at Midwestern State University working on her bachelor's in fine arts in ceramics. Rachel enjoys working in the studio making cups and bowls. She works on the weekends at the local Farmer's market and a downtown craft shop.

**Rachele Salvini** is a student residing in Oklahoma, where she is getting her PhD in English and Creative Writing.

**Tyne Sansom** is a graduate student in creative writing at Eastern New Mexico University.

**Joshua Sidic** is a Political Science major who enjoys photography, art, and writing poetry.

**Nicholas Skaldetvind** is a free-lance country gentleman with a lot of feelings who used to live with his aunt and uncle in Moore, Oklahoma. Currently lives part-time in Jamesville, New York.

**Tanner Slavins** is a junior at Midwestern State University majoring in Art with hopes of becoming a Graphic Designer.

**Ryane Townsend** is a psychology and writing student, who after being included in this edition of *Voices*, will be published for the first time outside of his former high school's yearly periodical.

**Grace Tsihlis** is a sophomore English major at Midwestern State University. She has loved to read and write for as long as she can remember. After graduation, she hopes to work in publishing or editing. Her other hobbies include baking and traveling.

**A.J. Wilkins** is a sophomore studying Middle Childhood Education with a minor in Creative Writing.

Kevin Appiah-Kubi  
Whitney Atkinson  
Kolton Blue Bellah  
Robin Bissett  
S. N. Bourland  
Autumn Brook  
Rebecca Burns  
Sydney Elizabeth Chandler  
Lauren Compean  
Mallory Evangelista  
A. P. Fandrich  
Keysten Farnier  
Haven Gomez  
Leo Gonzalez  
Kristy Henderson  
Ashlynd Elizabeth Huffus  
Ginger Johnson  
Taylor Johnson  
Chad Marqui  
Jackson Martin  
Alexis B. Mendez  
Andrea Mikail  
David C. Mills  
Kathryn Miser  
Selena Mize  
Faith Munoz  
Jessica Odom  
Lynn F. Parker  
Nate Parsons  
Marissa Reyes  
Kali Root  
Cecile Rutledge  
C.J. Shaleesh  
Samantha Smith  
Yolanda Torres  
Dallas Wabbington  
Dominique Wagoner  
Cullen Wisenhunt



Voices

LXXX 2018-19