



MARIÁS

ISSUE #1

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PAGSULAT SA MGA BULAKLAK
WHEN WRITING ON FLOWERS

WHAT IS MARIAS AT SAMPAGUITAS?

The title of the magazine is in the Philippine language, Tagalog. When translated, 'maria' refers to the christened name for a Filipina, a Filipinx womxn and 'sampaguita' is the national flower of the Philippines.

We sought writing to match our slogan, 'pagsulat sa mga bulaklak', which means, 'when writing on flowers.'

Flowers are gentle and fragile, yet convey certain emotions and messages, depending on its species. We want coded words, cries for attention. We want the soft and untouched, the broken and crumbling; we want voices to share their pain, so we may heal together. We want tender love stories and wrenching heartbreak; we want to be moved to tears.

The collected works in this issue are works we believe fit our message.

Maraming salamat sa inyong suporta! Ingat!

OUR TEAM

MASTHEAD

Morgan Russell

Morgan Russell (she/her) is the Creative Writing Editor for Marías at Sampaguitas. When she's not waxing lyrical about the importance of storytelling, she writes poetry that can be found in Rabid Oak, Empty House Press, Apricity Press, The Rush, and mutiny! She is on twitter @conniptionns.

Nazlı Karabiyikoğlu

Nazlı Karabiyikoğlu is the Interview Editor for Marías at Sampaguitas. She is an author from Turkey, enthusiastic traveler, Feminist activist, and Mother of four cats and countless animals all over the world. Full-time resident in Georgia, escaped from the oppression in Turkey. Has 5 published books in Turkish. For further information: www.nazlikarabiyikoglu.com.

Hailey Marie Saga

Hailey Marie Saga is a Filipina filmmaker and photographer from Orange County, CA with aspirations to become a family lawyer. She currently is a senior at the Orange County School of the Arts in Santa Ana and studies film and television. Even though most of her weekends are filled with photography and filming, she spends her free time looking up Philippine news, playing The Sims 4, and writing unpublished Disney's Phineas and Ferb fan fiction. Her Instagrams are @hxilcy and @wonderinkprod.

Kathy Mak

Kathy Mak is the Poetry Editor for Marías at Sampaguitas. She is an emerging writer based in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her poetry and creative nonfiction have appeared/are forthcoming in The /t&nz/Review, Marías at Sampaguitas, and Kissing Dynamite. She writes to reflect on her experiences, and to explore the unbounded. She was previously a reader for Marías at Sampaguitas.

Keana Águila Labra

Keana Águila Labra (she/her) is an INFJ, bisexual Virgo who resides in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is the Editor-in-Chief of Marías at Sampaguitas.

MASTHEAD (CONT.)

Katie Hizon

In addition to being a creative writing student, Kate Hizon enjoys conveying stories through graphic design. Her free time is spent learning about the brain, winning family mahjong night, and over-organizing her music playlists. She can be contacted at eggcheeked@gmail.com.

Evelyn Yeh

Evelyn Yeh is a freelance graphic designer and visual artist who works with artists in electronic music communities. Their graphic design work can be viewed at evelynyeh.com and their visual art can be found on Instagram [@glassevisual](https://www.instagram.com/glassevisual).

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS

Christine Fojas

Christine Fojas is a Filipino-Canadian hailing from Las Piñas City and currently living in Metro Vancouver. She has a BA in Comparative Literature from University of the Philippines and works as a library technician at Douglas College. A list of her publications can be found at her [website](#). She is also on Twitter as [@chrisfojas](#).

April Frances Federico

April Frances Federico is an up-and-coming poet, journalist, activist, and visual artist. She has a specific ardor for women's rights and Title IX issues. She is a huge literature nerd studying Creative Writing with minors in Arts Management and Visual Arts at Roger Williams University. She is also the voice behind The April Diaries and her work has been published in Rose Quartz, Ayaskala, honey & lime lit, Kissing Dynamite, Satin Soulbits, and HEAL(er) Mag.

Emily Deibler

Emily Deibler is a native of North Georgia. She is a published poet and author. Her short story "Deer in December" was published in TL;DR Press' Halloween 2018 Horror collection, NOPE. She has also published her poems "Turkey Hunting," "Patty," "Samantha," and "Daughters of the Sun." Her debut novel, Dove Keeper, came out in October 2018. She can be found on Twitter at [@emilydeibler](#).

Gervanna Stephens

Gervanna Stephens is a Jamaican poet and proud Slytherin with congenital amputation living in Canada. She is Assistant Editor with The/t&nz/Review, hates public speaking, has two sisters who are better writers than her & thinks unicorns laugh when we say they aren't real. Recent or forthcoming work can be found in Moonchild Magazine, Ghost City Press, Montreal Writes and Yes Poetry.

Janelle Salanga

Janelle Salanga is a self-professed Gryffindor & a current sophomore at the University of California, Davis. She is majoring in science & technology studies while minoring in political science and communication. When she's not coding or binge-watching Michael Schur shows, she writes for UC Davis Magazine as an editorial intern and is currently directing a vignette for Pilipinx Cultural Night. Her work has been published in The Margins, Occulum, and The Brown Orient, among other places. She tweets [@janelle_cpp](#).

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS (CONT.)

Juliette Sebock

Juliette Sebock is a Best of the Net-nominated poet and writer and the author of *Mistakes Were Made*, *Micro*, *How My Cat Saved My Life and Other Poems*, *Three Words*, and *Boleyn*, with work forthcoming or appearing in a wide variety of publications. She is the founding editor of *Nightingale & Sparrow*, runs a lifestyle blog, *For the Sake of Good Taste*, and is a regular contributor with *Marías* at *Sampaguitas*, *Royal Rose*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, and *The Poetry Question*. When she isn't writing (and sometimes when she is), she can be found with a cup of coffee and her cat, Fitz. Juliette can be reached on her website, juliettesebock.com, or across social media @juliettesebock.

Nashira

Nashira is an Afro-Pinay/ Polynesian artist & activist from Cebu. She spends her free time making zines, collages, and infographics that explore the issues that plague her communities; from mental illness, to climate change in the Pacific. She believes in creating change in the form of art, one poem & poster at a time. On [Instagram](#) & [Twitter](#) as @nashira.

Shreyaa Tandel

Shreyaa Tandel is a self established poet or you can say amateur poet from India. Her poems "Inadvertently Alive", "Virgin" and "Blackhole" have been published in the blue pages lit and vamp cat magazine respectively. When she isn't writing or is glued in front of a computer/cell phone screen, she spends time singing north indian classical music and reading the bhagwad gita and pretending very hard to be happy, even though she isn't. Her email is shreyaatandel1526@gmail.com.

Tiny Tanaka

Tiny Tanaka is a poetry and prose writer, recovering addict, Hafu-sprinkled with Korean heritage, lesbian, who happens to have borderline personality disorder. They fight for intersectional feminism, LGBT+ rights, and to end the stigma of mental illnesses.

Venus Davis

Venus Davis is a 20-year-old nonbinary writer from Cleveland, Ohio. They are currently a poetry reader for *Random Sample Review* and a social media content creator for *Ayaskala*. Venus is also working on writing a poetry chapbook inspired by astrology. Follow their twitter for more memes, rants, and the occasional poem: @venusbeanus.

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS (CONT.)

Grace Beilstein

Grace Beilstein is a sophomore at The Kinkaid School in Houston, Texas. She writes flash fiction, poetry, and prose. She is one of three main editors of her school's award-winning literary magazine "Falcon Wings."

Aspen Duscha

Aspen Duscha is a coffee-loving poet who in addition to gathering books loves to gather words and discover the world around them.

Paul Robert Mullen

Paul Robert Mullen is a poet, musician and sociable loner from Liverpool, U.K. He has three published poetry collections: *curse this blue raincoat* (2017), *testimony* (2018), and *35* (2018). He has been widely published in magazine, journals and anthologies worldwide. Paul also enjoys paperbacks with broken spines, and all things minimalist.

Hannah Schoettmer

Hannah Schoettmer is a senior at Interlochen Arts Academy. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of [Butcher Papers](#), a youth-focused literary magazine. She also serves as an Executive Editor with *Ayaskala* and is a regular contributor at *Marias at Sampaguitas*. She has been recognized by TeenInk, Write the World, the Scholastic Art and Writing awards, and the Live Poets Society of New Jersey, among others. Her creative work has appeared or is forthcoming in *24hr Neon Mag*, *Royal Rose*, *Crepe and Penn*, *Wide Eyes Publishing's salt + vinegar*, and elsewhere.

Lynne Schmidt

Lynne Schmidt (she/her) is a mental health professional in Maine. Her unpublished memoir, *The Right to Live: A Memoir of Abortion* has received Maine Nonfiction Award and was a 2018 PNWA finalist, while her poetry has received the Editor's Choice Award for her poem, *Baxter*, from *Frost Meadow Review*, and her chapbook, *Dead Dog Poems*, was honorable mention from *Pub House Books*. Her work has appeared in *Soft Cartel*, *RESIST/RECLAIM*, *Royal Rose*, *Maine Dog Magazine*, *Alyss Literary*, *Her Kind Vida*, and others. When given the choice, Lynne prefers the company of her three dogs and one cat to humans. Twitter: [@LynneSchmidt](#). [@Abortion.Chat](#). Facebook: Lynn(e) Schmidt.

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS (CONT.)

Priya Verma

Priya Verma is from India, currently pursuing her bachelor degree in literature. She loves trying up new things, whether it be art or some random trek. She is always up for a conversation about Game of Thrones over some perry perry cottage cheese fries! She is also a regular contributor for Teen Belle Magazine.

Vanessa Maki

Vanessa Maki is a queer writer, artist & blk feminist whose work has appeared or will appear in various places. She has self-published a handful of chapbooks & currently has two forthcoming in 2020: *sweet like limes* (Bone & Ink Press) & *the chosen one* (Animal Heart Press).

Marina Manoukian

Marina Manoukian is an armenian reader and writer. based in berlin, she is currently a contributor for [pussy magic](#), you can also find her writing at [full stop review](#) and [cultura colectiva +](#). find more of poetry, prose, and collage at [marinamanoukian.com](#) // @crimeiscommon (ig/twitter)

Nazli Yildirm

Born in Ankara, Turkey, Nazli Yildirm is published by various magazines in Turkey. Besides poetry, she is a photographer and she likes composing stories with her camera. She established a photo zine called HAYRET herself. She is a proud feminist, activist and member of LGBT+ community in Turkey. She wants to reflect her experience on Turkish LGBT+ apart from current the oppression in Turkey. Going after making otherized people feel belonging through her poems and photographs, she is on the prowl of showing the power of restorative and constructive things. She will continue revealing the invisible pieces of existing and transformation thanks to those images.

READERS

Ada Pelonia

Ada Pelonia is the Head Reader for Mariás at Sampaguitas. She is a writer from the Philippines, and she enjoys writing poetry and fiction. Her work has appeared in Porridge Magazine, 101 Words, Germ Magazine, and elsewhere. Some of her works can be seen at adapelonia.weebly.com or on Twitter [@_adawrites](https://twitter.com/_adawrites).

Nisarga Sinha

Nisarga Sinha is a 19 years old amateur Indian poet. Her poems have appeared in Mariás at Sampaguitas, Teen Belle Magazine, Headcanon Magazine, Crêpe & Penn. She's pursuing Major in English Literature. She writes because thoughts can be suffocating and little things intrigue her. When she's not writing, she's reading fanfictions or pretending to sleep when she clearly can't. You can find her on twitter and instagram as [@nisarga_sinha](https://twitter.com/nisarga_sinha).

Anushka Bidani

Anushka Bidani is an 18 year old poet & essayist from India. She adores the rain, blue skies, open mic events, the human anatomy, & art in all its distinct magnificent shapes. She's the Founder, Editor-in-Chief & Creative Director at Headcanon Magazine, & serves as a general reader for Three Crows Magazine. Currently, she writes monthly articles for Teen Belle Magazine on young women's menstrual, sexual, and reproductive health. Her work has appeared / is forthcoming in Royal Rose Magazine, Esthesia Magazine, & Nightingale & Sparrow; among others. She's an art student at Ashoka University. She writes at <https://anushkavidanix.wordpress.com>. You can contact her at bidanianushka@gmail.com.

Srishti Uppal

Srishti Uppal is an eighteen-year-old poet and essayist from New Delhi, India. She is Editor-in-Chief of Teen Belle Magazine, and blog correspondent for The Brown Orient Literary Journal. Her work may be found in The Mystic Blue Review and Paper Trains Literary Journal. She is a mental health advocate for Fortis Healthcare. You can read her work [here](#).

READERS (CONT.)

C. Cimmone

C. Cimmone is a reader for Marias at Sampaguitas. She also serves as Editor-at-Large of Trampset and a contributor for Arouse. Her narrative prose has been published in a menagerie of literary journals. Her chapbook, *When I Was Alive*, is available on Amazon. When Cimmone grows up, she wants to be a reclusive writer who only ventures out on Thursday nights to stand-up comedy in the city. She is alive and well on Twitter [@diefunnier](#).

Prithiva Sharma

Prithiva Sharma is a twenty year old student from India (going on 21 now!). Her hobbies are - procrastinating, whining about how she is not ready for adulthood, and yelling at people who think 'moderate' is a political leaning. She lives on Tumblr, and has argued with more than one person on how fanfiction is a legitimate literary genre (she reads everything, but fanfictions resonate with her). She writes to exorcize herself, and to help someone, anyone, possibly even one person in the whole realm to reach their catharsis. You can find her work on Instagram [@prithiwaah](#), her love for Chris Evans on Twitter [@prithiwaah](#), and everything fandom on Tumblr [@givemeanythingnow](#). Whatever you do, don't Google her.

Lynne Cattafi

Lynne Cattafi is a Poetry Reader for Marias at Sampaguitas. She teaches English at a private school in New Jersey. When she's not teaching her students to love writing poetry and reading books, she enjoys drinking coffee, building Lego cities from scratch with her children, walking her beagle, and reading historical fiction and mysteries. Her poetry has appeared in *Elephants Never*, Marias at Sampaguitas, *The Wellington Street Review*, and *Vita Brevis*. She can be found on Twitter [@lynnecatt](#).

Rosie Carter

Rosie Carter is a photographer, illustrator, and writer based in Boston, Massachusetts. Her work has previously been published in *Nightingale and Sparrow*, the *Journal of the Core Curriculum* at Boston University, and Marias at Sampaguitas. She enjoys philosophy and is avid about all things cat-related. You can find her reading and relaxing with her two cats, Butterscotch and Orzo.

READERS (CONT.)

Asela Lee Kemper

Asela Lee Kemper is a writer, in-the-learning-process songwriter, and poetry reader at *Marías at Sampaguitas*. She holds a BFA in Creative Writing with a minor in Emerging Media & Digital Arts from Southern Oregon University. Her work has previously published in *SOU Student Press' Main Squeeze* and *Essential Oil*, *Flawless Mag: The Border Issue*, *Silk Club QUIET! Vol. 2*, *Reclamation Magazine*, and *No Tender Fences* the anthology. While she enjoys listening to K-Pop and looking up new puns, Asela describes herself as an Asian American writer who screams internally 24/7. She currently lives in Southern Oregon with her family. You can find Asela on Twitter @AselaLeeK, Instagram @thesakuraink, and Facebook.

Persephone Kirkland Delatte

Persephone Kirkland Delatte (they/them) is the aesthetic coordinator for *Periwinkle Literary Magazine* and a grad student. They are a writer and an illustrator, and they also make jewelry, embroider, and speak Italian. They are currently working on a debut YA sci-fi / fantasy series, and their poetry has been published by *F(r)iction* and *The Mark Literary Review*.

Jacqueline Thrower

Jacqueline Thrower is a writer based in Southern California. She is a recent graduate from California State University, San Marcos, earning a Bachelor's degree in Literature and Writing. Her writing is often inspired by the several places she's traveled to and she's mainly fascinated by the multifaceted voices of individuals she comes across. Thrower is currently a reader for *Marías at Sampaguitas* and can be found on Twitter @jgthrower and Instagram @t.queline_

SOCIAL MEDIA TEAM

Kelly Ritter

Kelly Ritter is a reader, writer, & crafter currently living life in Muncie, Indiana. She recently graduated from Ball State University with a Bachelor of Arts in English & a minor in Creative Writing. She is one of the social media editors at Brave Voices Magazine. When she's not reading or tweeting, she's outside practicing yoga or cuddling her kitties. She is the Head Social Media Editor for Mariás at Sampaguitas.

Dana Praise Guerrero

Dana Praise Guerrero is a 18 year old Filipina, born and raised in Quezon City, Philippines. She is currently taking BA in Multimedia Studies from the University of the Philippines Open University. At present, she works primarily under the Department of Publications and Communication for Project Katipunan at The Initiative PH (TIPH), a youth-run organization that "coordinates relief efforts and sustainable programs for various local communities." Took a short stint as part of the creatives team for Women Techmakers Manila 2019. Have a glimpse of her design life at <https://sites.google.com/up.edu.ph/danapraiseguerrero>. Chat with her @danapraise (ig/tw) and @danapraiseg (fb) for multimedia-related, volunteer and internship experiences in the future!

Nidhi Suryavanshi

Nidhi Suryavanshi is a published writer, poet and journalist.

Rosie Carter

Rosie Carter is a photographer, illustrator, and writer based in Boston, Massachusetts. Her work has previously been published in Nightingale and Sparrow, the Journal of the Core Curriculum at Boston University, and Mariás at Sampaguitas. She enjoys philosophy and is avid about all things cat-related. You can find her reading and relaxing with her two cats, Butterscotch and Orzo.

LETTER FROM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Marias at Sampaguitas in an online literary magazine that aims to elevate and highlight the creative voices of marginalized individuals, people of color, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, non-binary identifying folx, and everyone in between. It was created with the intent to be a safe space.

I was inspired by the emergence of other online lit mags, such as *Rose Royal Magazine* and *Nightingale & Sparrow*. I wanted to house the work of those who would otherwise not know where their work would be accepted.

Representation is power, and we want to showcase the power in these writers' voices.

Even though the magazine's title and slogan are in Tagalog, we wanted to make it clear that we accept submissions from everyone from all backgrounds. We aim to be a feminist, inclusive publication.

After the receipt of all our submissions, I'm still astounded at the traction we've received in such a short amount of time.

I hope this inaugural issue is a reflection of our mission statement and inspires you to create not only for your community, but for yourself.

I want to continue to read work from writers who have never submitted and from those who are familiar with the adrenaline of acceptance and the bittersweet taste of rejection. I want to hear from you!

This issue could not have been done alone, so I want to give special thanks to the following: Nashira Rose, Anushka Bidani, Imani Campbell, Ada Pelonia, Dana Guerrero, Kelly Ritter, Juliette Sebock, Day Sibley, Morgan Russell, Kathy Mak, Hailey Saga, Nazlı Karabiyiçoğlu, Christine Fojas, Elfy Arrizon, Srithi Uppal, Kailah Figueroa, Kate Hizon, and Evelyn Yeh. Each one of you has offered me advice, consolation, kindness, and ultimately, your friendship, for which I'm eternally grateful.

To those who have work in this issue, thank you for giving us a chance and thank you for allowing us the honor of giving your writing a home.

And, thank you, Reader, for taking the time to read their honesty, bravery, and love.

Mahal na mahal kita!

Sincerely,
Keana M. Águila Labra-Asunción
Editor-in-Chief

Special thanks: lahat ng gagawin ko ay para sa nanay at lola ko. Gihigugma ko ikaw.

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EMILY DEIBLER

A native of North Georgia, Emily is a published poet and author. Her short story “Deer in December” was published in TL;DR Press’ Halloween 2018 Horror collection, NOPE. She has also published her poems “Turkey Hunting,” “Patty,” “Samantha,” and “Daughters of the Sun.” Her debut novel, *Dove Keeper*, came out in October 2018. She can be found on Twitter at [@emilydeibler](https://twitter.com/emilydeibler).

The Witch's Daughter

by Emily Deibler

The stories speak of gnarled cypresses, branches like a dark god's crown. Spanish moss, the bangs of the swamp, hanging like shrouds. The croaking of crows and unknown beasts, devil-haired. Eyes, red (*like the smooth skin of winterberries*) in the dark, swelling on the swamp bank like baubled effigies. What they don't speak about are these:

How Darlin's mother crafted the girl eyes she'd been born without. Picked her off the churning bank when she'd been left there for the gators as a baby. (*a wail by the growing ripples, blood for the hungry water*)

How her mother gives the women from town stories, love tips, healing potions—how she taught Darlin to know plants by smell and touch. Pungent, fetid, brittle, home. Years of tracing fingers over jars of dried milkweed, cattail, rosemary tucked in the pie rack like rounded teeth. Her gator, Scamp, who likes warming his belly on the hearthstones.

(just an ol' swamp cat)

The air drips with the shedding of stars and gods' eyes. The Witch, Gator Queen, Woman-King, the Devil's Bride, the Horror of the Deep and Dark Southern Woods—her mama.

Mother, pulling Darlin to her as the hearth burns and Scamp deeply snores by the door. The little shanty with the groaning roof reeks of meadowsweet, lavender, wet. On Darlin's tongue is milkweed, tasting faintly of vanilla and butterfly mouths. Mother, whose shoulder becomes a home (*warm, firm, eternal*), hums a lost song from the Okefenokee island she came from—the one where the Daughters of the Sun, immortal, dance and laugh—voices thick with salt apples and whiskey—under the horned moon.

There in Mother's arms Darlin feels and hears the thunderous heartbeat of the swamp, the bellows and purrs of courting gators, the orchestra of frogs and fireflies.

Daddy Issues

by Emily Deibler

Daddy issues are always
an issue put on the girl, the plump
pomegranate snaked
down,
seeds
falling
like
bloody
teeth.

*Oh, she has
daddy issues.
Her dad didn't
hug her enough.
Snickering.*

Sylvia Plath is known
for *daddy, daddy*, bees, eating
men, petals, fish bones,
Smoke. *Daddy. If only her daddy
hugged her more.*

It's as if a dead flower
is to blame for its death,

not the hands who neglected
the watering can
and the earth.
The wilting is our
sin, the glove
to wear, our black
shoes.

A breath is blamed
when a hand has
stopped it.
Daddy, daddy, purple-black
glances when I dared to breathe
or *achoo*, who chased me
through the kitchen to hit me,
my first memory.

That's a flaw of mine,
For being affected, for being
blue, not a flaw of his, on
his knuckles, red.

Victims

by Emily Deibler

We have been born on cradles
of thorns; our skins are twilight with
cracked stars, pink cheeks growing purple.
By the time we are ten, we count our scars
and decide whether we want to be buried
or cremated once we cross the wrong men.
We learn how best to apply foundation to hide
the newest bruises, keeping our photo albums from
perusing eyes. Bodies are temples, moldy and
haunted, and some ghosts can't be exorcised.

Our funerals are tattooed on our joints. Segments,
fractures. We are hushed worms drowning on the split
sidewalk, tasting rain, salt, tears—crushed, squirming,
hearing *Why didn't you stay in the dirt?*

Sick Girl

by Emily Deibler

Just when you think healing your mind makes you better, you write
with an ice pack on both wrists—you, forever broken.

Disorder implies things were once in order, but now
there's nothing you can properly maneuver. (*broken*)

You've been doing good, better. The Prozac stays in the bathroom
drawer, mostly. You're proud, queer, funny, clever, broken.

Green-and-yellow pills barely outpace the letters stamped on your creaky spine:
IBS-EDS-GAD-GERD-PTSD, “gimp”, “cripple”, “moth-head”, “brain-feathers”, “broken.”

People like you now, you, not your glass-fantasy-world shadow self, foaming, fuming
behind the lipstick like the Dead Sea in a bottle, all salt—*surrender, waver, cower, broken.*

Knees, back, neck, arms, wrists. (*pain*) And yet still you write, dream,
keep those Sunday afternoon plans. You, slanted, never broken.

Holly

by Emily Deibler

Her bonnet and knitted scarf were as scarlet
and harsh as the blood of her fallen enemies
when she served in 'Nam. At her desk, she
twittered and fawned over a drawing book
she found at the used bookstore when
she wasn't busy penning erotic poetry
or weeping over a man's dead father
in a Bloody Sunday film. The boys in class
would ask how she got so handy
with a needle, and she replied
with a white smile that, oh, well,
she was good with sharp things.

Corpsewood

(Based on the Corpsewood Manor Murders)

by Emily Deibler

Still but new in their glorious
decay, the green moss and orange
fungus quicken by the black, oaken
deadfall; within the rounded,
ruined brick walls & hanging
gunsmoke, you can taste the wet,
leaf-long sigh of the professor
leaving his treasured golden harp,
kneeling by his discarded altar
stone, and cradling his lover's
ashes to his naked collarbone.



KIMBERLY TE

A Cambodian American video producer and filmmaker raised in Northern Virginia and currently based in NYC. Instagram: @Kooliokookie & Twitter: @Kooliokookie

Rose Colored Mirror

by Kimberly Te

I realized that I saw myself more like the way he saw me.
The way that my imperfections didn't exist.
How the things I hated about myself
Were beautiful
How the parts of me I never noticed
Were perfect
He would whisper my dreams into my ears in the night

Until the moonlight faded
How do I wash words like that away
Without feeling imperfect all over again.
I loved that carved image more than me.
But it was never real.
It was all just words from the part of his mind
That loved me the least.

GERVANNA STEPHENS

Gervanna Stephens is a Jamaican poet and proud Slytherin with congenital amputation living in Canada. She is Assistant Editor with *The /t&sz/ Review*, hates public speaking, has two sisters who are better writers than her & thinks unicorns laugh when we say they aren't real. Recent or forthcoming work can be found in *Moonchild Magazine*, *Ghost City Press*, *Montreal Writes* and *Yes Poetry*.

A grove of spirits

by Gervanna Stephens

If belief kills and cures
then this spirit yearning in my bones must be a begotten
nightmare,
swiftly palms yield upright
surrender is clouded judgment and sinewy hearts
spirit rattling and awakening and calling to the oak
spirit deepening and feeling and powerful
solemnity peers after light
to answer a calling
spirit vibrating
knows this body is empyrean
flooded enchantments
wistfully pliant in its need
if belief kills and cures
shall I but empty this breath?

Breathy motifs

by Gervanna Stephens

in and out
in and out
in and out
solid chest, quaking mouth

in/out
in/out
in/out
there is nothing loud about needing to breathe
muscle memory or impulse
again and again and again

in
out
in
out
in
out
there is a reaping stinging in this chest
spinning whirlpools and weeping relief
in and in and in and out
there is nothing silent about needing to live.

Dear Young Black Person

by Gervanna Stephens

sometimes existing and surviving are the best we can do.

don't judge it. don't push it.

one day you will come into your melanin,

like how the voice of a boy cracks at puberty.

you will embrace yourself,

like the glowing of a mother pregnant and full.

you are not lazy.

you are not unloved.

you are still your best self

even if your skin matches the night

and its shades of grey.

you are more than a penny for your thoughts

and standup comedy.

you are the skies expanse:

wide and tinted and beautiful.

GC COHEN

gc cohen currently lives in Massachusetts and dreams of homesteading with her wife and son. her work has been published in *The White Squirrel*, *Sidelines*, and *War, Literature, and the Arts*. her debut poetry collection, *family matters*, will be published in January 2019.

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bygccohen.tumblr.com

untitled
by gc cohen

if at any point
they EVER
put hands on you

get yourself the hell
out and away

and do not look back

- *it will never be worth it*

the ones
that laugh the most
are the ones
that usually
need the most love

check in
on them

there will be many times
you will wonder
what the hell
you saw in them

we all sometimes
accidentally look up
and stare into the sun
for a moment too long

if they belittle you
they are the ones
with confidence issues

when you left
you gave me
the gift

of finally
understanding
what it meant
to stand up
for myself

RUTH ANNE GARCIA

Ruth Anne Garcia is an Author, Poet, and mother living in New Mexico. Her writing stems from her desire to tell a good story and take her audience through a journey of adventure, excitement, and growth. Coming September, she will be releasing a poetry collection that takes you through her journey living with Crohn's Disease. From Diagnosis to Recovery and beyond, you'll learn about her struggle, fight, and how she's used it to fuel her art and raise her children. You can reach out to Ruth Anne in the contact section with any questions or just to chat and get to know her. Or you can follow her on Twitter @weirdwordist or follow her website <https://ruthannegarciabooks.wordpress.com/> where she keeps up to date on her projects and communicates with fellow writers.

Broken Glass

by Ruth Anne Garcia

Broken glass, drifting in the air, spilling all over the tile flooring. Swept up and discarded in a bin, never to be saved, put back together.

No matter the significance, size, beauty. Glass is powerful and cuts like a knife.

Vision of a beautiful mosaic painting, the glass shows a side of beauty, grace, and intrigue. In a single moment, an object thrown, glass breaks.

The once beautiful image, is now nothing. Disappeared, no longer thriving. Gluing glass back together is pointless. Too many pieces to puzzle together.

No one has the time to put it together, to figure it out. Instead sweeping it up and discarding it, becomes easy.

The discarded glass no longer holds the beauty that it held, and the image is not fixed. It is replaced and not re-created.

Glass is simple, graceful, and full of promise. Bend it, shape it, give it room to grow.

If you smother it, or break it, the illusion is gone forever.

Drowning

by Ruth Anne Garcia

Drowning, sinking, disappearing. The quiet becomes more desirable, and the sound too loud.

Heading in the right direction, or wrong depending on the point of view. Red, white and black are the

colors emitted from the air.

Time stands still, then spins forward, never constant. The day's blend together and are less clear. Vision blurs and images start to muffle, no clarity.

Day is done, but goal is set. Good times could come, if the mind was open to it.

The mind wants openness but remains closed. Tendency to move forward is far and in between.

The future is not mapped out and is unset.

Slipping Under

by Ruth Anne Garcia

Who is this person that is masked by this shell that covers her? The shell is broken and bruised, tough and impenetrable.

Underneath is a resemblance of the person she once was. Each time a tiny sliver of light shows through, the pain and fear engulf her and she's shielded under in the abyss.

Fighting to break through, but having no strength and no hope. Banging, knocks and attempts to break her out fails, she clings onto her legs pinned to her chest and hides in fear.

Fear of being hurt by another person, fear of letting someone in. All she's known is the flooded abyss of her life, and no matter who tries to wash it away, it remains.

Eyes shielded and body bent she continues to hide in the corner of her mind, unable to allow change. Staying in this position is a known, if she stays like this she can survive, even for a short time.

If she drops her hands and raises her head, there could be consequences. She could get hurt yet again, she could be pushed into the abyss further and further.

The darkness could spread and she could be left with nothing, so the attempts to break her out are useless. They are useless but she clings to them.

The thought of being pulled out and lifted up from the darkness and into light, is a strange comfort. A comfort that is unattainable, yet desirable.

For now, she hides and she listens. For now, she stays and she clings to the tiny sliver of light that cracks through once and awhile. For now, she waits and she tries not to be swallowed whole.

NASHIRA

Nashira is an Afro-Pinay/Polynesian artist & activist from Cebu. She uses art as a weapon to champion for the rise & recognition of women of color. On Tumblr as @nashira and Instagram & Twitter as @nashxra.

Nonbinary lesbian

by Nashira

my body is not a question mark, but
if it was, I would be the only one
who could benefit from the answer.

I am not a confession, waiting to be heard, I promise
there is nothing that needs to be pressed out of me.

my name is my name is not an apology & should I ever pause,
the world will not stop turning because I was not born to convince
others of my being. life is better lived than spent wondering if I am *enough*
in the eyes of other people. I am sure

as a seed into a tree, swaying but standing tall I am growing
in the right direction.

Mother's Tongue


by Nashira

my tongue is dipped, not dull;
quivering, but strong enough
to take anyone on. it is not “weak”
in any language. I am not “weak”
in any language. these dialects are gifts
from my grandmothers: my tongue
can be a shield and it can be a blade / I only wait
for the right time to strike

first-wave women of color

by Nashira

not everything that leaves my grandmother's lips is golden, so we fight / sometimes / lovingly: she is a feminist in every sense but the term. we start, stirred by something in the news and she says "abortion is murder" to the tune of an adopted doctrine / I argue, reading articles until she comes clean / she beats around the bush her pastor planted until we stumble unto "my body is my own" in her own terms. I live to pick it out of her. to hear the dissent & radical sentiments she's carried over the century / I wonder how many battles you've fought under your breath. you are a soldier with hardly any protection & every discourse I push into your direction fascinates me. our grandmothers are doctorates without degrees—leaders & luminaries well before "feminism" found its way into our dialects; colored women are living shards of history.



**EMILY
NICOLE
CRAIG**

Emily Nicole Craig graduated from the University of North Alabama on December 15, 2018 with a BS in English, Professional Writing and a Photography Minor. A week prior to her graduation, she self-published a poetry and photography book, which one can view on her website: <http://www.emilycraigwriter.com/>. Her Social Media Handles are Facebook - Emily Nicole Craig, Instagram - emnicolecraig & Twitter @emilycraig44.

Battle Ground Problems

by Emily Nicole Craig

My heart can withstand a war -
a war inside itself.
beating its core...
til the skin turns black and blue
from the intense pressure -
pressure beating against...
my ribcage with every punch.
busting every vein
with extreme vengeance...
killing the host -
from the inside out.
wrecking every living organ -
to take the heart out.
My heart can withstand a war –
but a war on itself...
can turn deadly in seconds.
an outcome unknown -
to the soul that lies within.

A Gentle Reminder

by Emily Nicole Craig

Life is beautifully messy -
the ins and outs
all meshing together
creating something amazing.
In the middle of the chaos
you stand by side me,
holding my hand
gently rubbing your thumb
over mine.
Reminding me...
that I am still me –
and everything is okay.

TUCKER LIEBERMAN

Tucker Lieberman's photographs have recently appeared in *Barren*, *Royal Rose*, and *Paper Trains*; his art in *Burning House*; his poems in *Déraciné*, *Neologism*, and *Defenestration*; and his fiction in Owl Canyon's *No Bars and a Dead Battery* (2018) and Elly Blue's *The Great Trans-Universal Bike Ride* (forthcoming, 2021). You can hear him on Episode 26 of the "Stories We Tell Our Robots" podcast. He lives in Bogotá, Colombia. www.tuckerlieberman.com. Twitter: @tuckerlieberman.



Thistle in Vermont
by Tucker Lieberman



Koi Pond in Vancouver

by Tucker Lieberman



Silver Decorations

by Tucker Lieberman



Half-burned Rainbow Candle

by Tucker Lieberman



Cactus in Mexico

by Tucker Lieberman



**BARBARA
JANE
REYES**

Barbara Jane Reyes, adjunct professor in Philippine Studies at University of San Francisco, author of *Invocation to Daughters* (City Lights Publishers, 2017), and four previous collections of poetry, including *Poeta en San Francisco* (Tinfish Press, 2005) and *Diwata* (BOA Editions, Ltd., 2010). *Letters to a Young Brown Girl* is forthcoming from BOA Editions, Ltd., in 2020.

Excerpt from *Brown Girl Beginning* by Barbara Jane Reyes

Dalaga

The breaking begins before you have words for it. Before skinning your knees on sidewalks riding two-wheelers, before coloring books and peachy flesh Crayolas, before Hello Kitty and Disney princesses, before applying your mom’s Avon lipstick behind the locked bathroom door, before unearthing you dad’s *Playboy* magazines at the back of his closet, before your Barbie dolls’ first girl on girl action. They are already breaking you. When your “uncles” kiss you too close to your lips, and inhale you. It doesn’t matter how boozy and pomaded, how tobacco stained or how much gold they’re flashing, how much unbuttoned chest hair, aftershave, and body funk. You must allow them to handle you fast at the waist, be a big girl squirming on their laps and bulging crotches. You are to sit still, and smile. When they marvel at how you have grown, *dalaga na*, you learn you are to say, *salamat po*.

Bleed

This is how it began: When I was seven, I never knew that ladies’ hands could hold hammers and hurt. When I was eight, they told me to stay in the shade. They told me no man would ever want a dark Igorot girl, so dirty. When I was nine, I learned I should smile at all the men who told me I was pretty. When I was ten, I learned to flip my hair, to roll up my skirt at the waist. When I was eleven, they told me my legs were fat, my knees so black. When I was twelve, they said (in front of company), *hija*, you should be bleeding *na*.

Tomboy

When I was twelve, I wanted sharp pressed suits — David Bowie, “Modern Love.” I wanted those cheekbones. I wanted to play electric guitar, slung low between my legs, pointing to heaven and wailing. I wanted a motorcycle jacket, and rockabilly hair. I wanted dragon ink to ribbon my arms — Japanese, whiskered, breathing fire. I wanted cowboy boots and a big-ass black stetson. On Saturday mornings, my dad would call from under his Mustang, ‘64-½, with Alabama plates. I’d wear his old shirts. I’d hand him each greasy tool, one by one. He’d nod, “that’s my boy.”

Becoming

When I was thirteen, they let me dance with boys, five, six years older than me. When I was fourteen, they told me I gained weight. They told me my hips were wide. When I was fifteen, they told me I should be a wife by the time I turn 21. When I was sixteen, they told me to study hard and go to college. They told me to stay away from boys. They told me to let the men drive. They told me to wait. When I was seventeen, they told me I must give my parents grandkids. When I raised my eyebrows at them, they told me to do as they say. They told me a lady does not talk back. They told me a lady always obeys.

Run

One day, a group of boys said they'd rape you. Just drag you behind the bushes, and rape you. Just like that. Because you did not smile at them. Because you did not say thank you. The threat was so artless, and this is when you knew it was idle, dumb boys puffing out their chests because there was nothing else to do that day. Who knows what they were waiting for you to do. When you told them that they could go fuck their mothers (among other things), you could see the fraying, those thinning tethers to manhood, that thing that tells a young man to weep is weakness. Some tears fell. They weren't yours. Nobody touched you that day, not a hand on your motorcycle leather, your fishnet thighs, your shaved skull. Your eyeliner never smeared or ran. You never ran. And even today, you tell this story, only in second person.

Brown Girl Breaking

by Barbara Jane Reyes

Tradition

Remember when they said, until a boy is born to a couple, they must not stop bearing children. It is tradition. They meant you were surplus. Remember when they said to your face, no brothers, such a shame. It's too bad you weren't born a boy. You must then know useful things. Clear the table. Do the dishes. Sweep the floors. Babysit. Cook the rice (measure the water up to the first knuckle; don't you know that already). It's too bad you are not pretty; you will never marry a doctor, they said. You will never have mestizo children, they said. Ay, babae, they said. Ay, sayang, they said.

María Clara

Remember when they said, why can't you be more María Clara, more true, Filipina. More model of modesty, more model of grace, they said. A fresh rose, opening. A dewdropped angel. More child. More los ojos sonriense. More chrysallis. More waiting for permission, they said. Why can't you be more blushing, more tremulous. Más tierno el amor. Why can't you be more weepy, faint, contoured, dimpled. More soft spun silk. Why can't you be more gazing, solitary, deferent, they said. More brokenhearted. More dulce es la muerte. Motherless, warded, shredded, and wet. 'Susmarya, they said. Why can't you be more like that, they said.

Sampaguita

Remember when they said, hija, why can't you be more sampaguita, model of fidelity, model of devotion. More white, more aromatic. More starry-eyed. More versatile. Opened at dusk. May you be farmed, collected, propagated by gentle cutting. May you be susceptible to attack. May dirty hands string you together. May coins exchange hands in the speeding streets for you. Why can't you be more self-sacrificing. More promise making, sumpa kita. You may be small. You may not be showy. If we may use you in all the ways we wish, then you will be more lovely to us.

White

Ay, Dios mío, your nose is so flat, your little chinky eyes, your hair like a bruja. Others would bleach and operate to get rid of what you got. Others would die. You're so awkward and bony. Your children will look like little monkeys. You're so dark, you look dirty. Just being dark, no one will want you. You're so ugly. Ay, salamat sa Dios, prize the God-given aquiline nose, the wonder-filled luminous eyes, the soft, baby brown hair. Others would bleach and operate to get what you got. Others would die. You're so tall and slender. You will have such angelic children. Eternally white, you are confident. Just being white, you win. You're so delicious.

Sour

Remember when they said, you need a man to complete you, to fill you, yes, to fill you till you can no longer be filled. To give you sons. To give you worth. To make you cry. To trophy

you. To show you what's good. If you are alone, people will suspect. They will ask each other why you have been overlooked, sour milk left on the shelf to spoil. They will voice their own theories, why no man wants you. Try not to be so difficult. You need a man to make decisions for you — what to eat, how much. What you must and must not wear (in what size, *siyempre*). When you may speak, what you may say. Whom you must forgive. For whom you must bend. When you must absorb all the blows. When you must absorb all the blame.

Lady

A lady does not open her own doors. A lady does not leave the home without first asking permission. She does not voice her opinions or contradict. She does not frown, smirk, or slouch. A lady does not quarrel in public, place her needs before others, or perspire. She does not monopolize the conversation. She does not invite, initiate, or compete. A lady does not remove her shoes in public. She does not use her hands. She does not laugh, shout, or scratch. She does not swear or smoke. She does not belch, fart, piss, or shit. She does not coordinate her own movement. A lady does not mind. A lady does not eat. A lady does not matter.

Bend

Remember when they said, you must never slouch, ladies. You must always bend. When a bamboo reaches its highest peak, it bends back down to the soil. Elegant, effortless. Bend. Slender, there, at the waist, *cambré*. To bend is an art. *Allongé*, let wind, let waves pass through the vertebrae, and sway. Bend at the nape with grace. No matter the strain or weight, accept that you must allay. And the body will be a haven they claim. The bamboo bends. It does not break. To break is common. A lady is not common. You must always save face. You must not let them see you break.

Break

When they tell you, you belong by his side. You are his lady. What will happen when you ask for space. What will happen when you try to leave. He will come after you. Yes, he will come. You will be returned to him. You will always be returned to him. Or you will burn. You will always be his lady. You belong to him, *belonging*. Please do not argue, please do not overreact. There is nothing you can say. You will be OK, if you keep your head down. If you do not ask. If you do not speak. You must stay. You must. Smile. You must smile that lovely, lipsticked smile.

Remember to arm yourself. Remember to make a break.

And by any means necessary, remember to not look back.

EILEEN TABIOS

Eileen R. Tabios has released over 50 collections of poetry, fiction, essays, and experimental biographies from publishers in nine countries and cyberspace. Her award-winning body of work includes invention of the hay(na)ku poetic form as well as a first poetry book, *Beyond Life Sentences* which received the Philippines' National Book Award for Poetry. Translated into nine languages, she also has edited or conceptualized 15 anthologies of poetry, fiction and essays. Her writing and editing works have received recognition through awards, grants and residencies. More information is available at <http://eileenrtabios.com>.

Aesthetics in the Dictator's Aftermath

by Eileen Tabios

I.

Once upon a time, I thought *Poetry is a fairy tale*. From that delusion, I came to stand in front of a building. Inside, a stranger waited for me. What I mostly knew about him is that he was as curious as I am.

I raised my finger to push at the dirty-white button by his apartment number: 3J. Before my flesh touched the button's chill, I heard faint music. I turned my face towards the sound and saw children playing at a park across the street. They gleefully chased each other in circles while a nanny's nearby boombox sent forth innocent tunes fitting for innocent creatures.

But is anyone really innocent? I thought as I returned my attention to the grey building.

II.

Once upon a time, a young poet and an experienced artist looked at each other across an abyss.

The abyss, too, can be a page. The empty page longs perpetually for its lover: the writer who would, upon it, write.

A young poet wanted to learn. The experienced artist began with no preconceptions, just curiosity. In the beginning, curiosity sufficed.

Curiosity is a form of desire.

III.

Once upon a time, I willingly went into a stranger's arms. Such testifies to the reach of a dictator's cruel reign—how a dictatorship can continue long past its demise through the tight clench of *Aftermath*.

Human history reveals patterns. Unfortunately, one repetition is this tragedy: the fall of a tyrant does not guarantee the rise of a better society.

When I stood in front of the stranger's building, the sunlight that had begun that day felt like a dream. It was sunny, then suddenly it was not. Years later I understand the phenomena to be a metaphor: one must be in darkness to redefine light.

No new world is possible without a new vocabulary.

But, years later, I understand that those who want to create a new world never arrive in that world. A new world is not for staying in but holds borders one must always expand. It's exhausting. Yet that exhaustion is the least of its tolls.

IV.

Once upon a time, I looked at my reflection on the steel plate of an intercom to a building I was visiting for the first time. My hair was fluttering in the slight breeze. Once, a lock stumbled over my right eye, blocking its view. Within that instant, my left eye grasped something I did not discern with both eyes: an eyelash dangling from another lash, a gust away from falling. When a narrowed focus reveals a previously-unknown fragility, one's nature is revealed by whether one aborts vision or not.

I did not close my eyes. I brushed aside errant hair for both eyes to watch as the lash lost its grip and began to fall.

As well, I watched myself watching the sunder, the flailing, the fall.

V.

Once upon a time, I left the dimness of a subway system to break out into daylight. In the five-block walk required to reach the building for an appointment with a stranger, the sunlight evaporated. By the time I was standing in front of an intercom panel, searching for the apartment number "3J," it might as well have been a wintry day in London.

Once, he took me to London. But we traveled on separate planes so that, he explained, we both could more fully relish the *anticipation* of our "London adventure."

Through him, I learned to anticipate tears.

VI.

Once upon a time, I heard the intercom buzzing that signaled the unlatching of the front door into a grey building. Inside, a stranger waited for me. I pushed open the door and walked into a hallway awash in light. I moved forward: I walked through light.

I had been so focused on the stranger I would have chosen the metaphor of walking through a dim tunnel where he waited as the light of destination. Instead, I seemingly walked through light and to reach him was to reach the onset of darkness.

Darkness. And what a contrast he was against the suns inhabiting his paintings. There is so much light in his paintings. Large paintings. To stand in front of one could be to stand on a sun-drenched white granite balcony overlooking the sapphire Aegean Sea. A few days after our first meeting, I confessed this previously-private metaphor. The next night, we were sipping d'Yquem in Rhodes. The following morning, we would wake to my metaphor-turned-reality.

So quickly did the Grecian sun turn hot, turn blinding-bright. He gave me Greece—an experience whose pull lingers after decades, past even the changing of centuries. It lingers so that, once, I even lived with huge dogs named Achilles, Athena, Ajax...

He gave me a multi-storied, complex mythology to play with. By the time I matured under his tutelage, I had acquired the skills to create a new mythology—a tale that began with him as Adam, the first human in Christian belief. And I? To his ecstasy, I brought him down.

VII.

Once upon a time, I opened the door into a grey building where a stranger waited for me. He later shared that as he'd looked at his bathroom mirror that morning, he asked his reflection whether my visit was a good idea. The problem, he said with a laugh, is that he never turned away from anything that made him uncertain.

“Occupational hazard,” he explained.

His paintings are dense abstractions, often vivid with color except when they aren't. Much of their surfaces are covered by white, grays and pale blues. But the paintings pulsate despite the cool palette of the surfaces that covered layers of more vivid colors. The hidden colors seemingly struggle to break through the surface to contaminate its cool tones that presume control is possible. My favorite paintings actually display slight cracks through which can be discerned colors so intense they seem radioactive.

Occupational hazard—it seems he always must leave himself to the possibility of being overcome by elements not under his control. But his goal, nonetheless, is to retain control.

Control, until that, too, became predictable. I met him as he began looking for a different art practice, which is to say, a different way of life.

He didn't know that day as I stood in front of his building what my role in his search would become, or if I had any role. He was just doing his job, he said.

He said, “I was open ...”

VIII.

“Once upon a time, I approached a building in a neighborhood I had never before visited.”

I look at that sentence and realize much of my focus has been on the “building” when, perhaps, it also should be on “neighborhood.” For, does not neighborhood denote context and environment? How can anybody understand anything in a vacuum?

We tried to be—to engage with each other—in a vacuum, though we euphemized the goal as creating a new world. I recognize the silliness now. Vacuums don’t exist except as the dirt-inhaling machines. But its interior is not the suspension we once thought was possible. Somebody is manipulating the machine.

Someone is pushing at the “On” button. Someone is pushing at the “Off.”

The notion of being carried away by, say, passion is an attempt to avoid responsibility for lust.

Once upon a time, I approached a building in which a stranger waited for me. It was an appointment dictated by art, curiosity, and many other euphemisms for lust Like, revolution.

JULIETTE VAN DER MOLEN

Juliette van der Molen is an expat writer and poet currently living in the United Kingdom. She is an intersectional feminist and member of the LGBTQIA community. She is the poetry editor for Mookychick Magazine and a seasoned spoken word performer. Her books include: *Death Library: The Exquisite Corpse Collection* and *Mother, May I?*. Her work has also appeared in *Burning House Press*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, *Collective Unrest* and several other publications. Her next book, *Anatomy of A Dress*, will publish in December 2019 through *The Hedgehog Poetry Press*. You can connect with her through her website www.JulietteWrites.com and on Twitter via [@j_vandermolen](https://twitter.com/j_vandermolen).

Shrink Me

by Juliette van der Molen

shrink me
small
until
i cannot see
the clouds.
until
the leaves
become skyscrapers
and the daffodil
street lights
bow over me
to shine a
filtered,
safer sun.

Wilderness Rose

by Juliette van der Molen

If I were a rose, I wouldn't wish to
be a two step marching Austin. Growing
in a hot house heave, under watchful eyes,
plucking hands— thumbs pricked quick by prison thorns.

I'd take my name in a three step waltz, dance to
the twisted base of Champion Trees. Flee
from constant chatter— drinking deep through
lacy leaves and verdant, wizened fingers.

A bud loosed from frightened fist, unfurled free—
secret bloom of crushed wonder— above slick
moss carpets of forest floor. Tucked tight in
mother's soil palms, like a whispered prayer.

One imperfect petal, blown asunder,
cradled in the soft rushing shush as I
walk away and the water falls to fade—
ink from the pages of my memory.

Beautiful Things

by Juliette van der Molen

It was supposed
to grow straight
up from the
root. Pushed
through dirt and
broke free into
air. Climbing
up high
in the sky,
she said. No
doubt about that.
Until it didn't,
and one curve—
a shuffled element
sent one branch
to spiral, then
the next,
over it—
for companionship.
While the others
reached high,
just grew and grew
until the crippled
bark was forgotten,
knotted low.
Except—
this is the
part i see above me,
my back to the roots
as it curls—
entwined, and
i think—
so many beautiful
things get left
behind.

Pocketed

by Juliette van der Molen

i wish i could
be in your pocket—
small.
a smooth pebble—
tumbled,
from a river bank
or
a petal pressed—
fragrant,
against
your heartbeat
or
a pocket watch—
gears clicked,
soft
against you,
or
a ghost glow—
moonlight
settled
snug,
a tiny stillness
in the deep
of your pocket.



RIA VALDEZ

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Our Brew

by Ria Valdez

Caffeine and alcohol could either start a relationship, or end it. For J and I, it was both.

There were three things I remembered the night J became my fake girlfriend in the middle of our coffee session: I was kidding when I asked her; her favorite coffee at that time became mine too; and the gap between her teeth peeked out from her mouth when she said yes. We weren't close friends even though we were in the same *barkada*. Our only bond was through coffee sessions because both our roommates hated coffee. That night, the coffee she bought for us to share had tasted sweet like the sugar syrup of *leche flan*. I wasn't a fan of sweets but I liked the coffee. Of all things I could remember that night, there was one thing I had forgotten: both of us were Catholics.

J's number one trademark, and my favorite feature of her was the gap between her two front teeth. I originally called her "Gap," but our friends thought "Gaffy" was cuter and so the name stuck. She didn't seem to mind and even embraced the nickname. When we would walk around downtown, people mistook us for twins. Our classmates said soulmates looked alike. I wasn't sure if we were soulmates though. I believed fate wasn't present in our pseudo-relationship. J and I did everything to look convincing as a couple when we were fake girlfriends on that day.

We established silly rules: we should hold hands in the corridors and in class; we should share a chocolate drink in a tetra pack; and we should pay for each other's meals. J never had a romantic relationship before, which was probably why she let me decide mostly on those rules. The one rule she really wanted us to follow was to call each other cheesy couple names. We both hated being called "babe," but we did so to make us look convincing.

When I asked J to be my fake girlfriend, she was thinking of another girl—the girl who didn't love her back. I, on the other hand, thought about the girl who turned me down because she told me she was straight. But I didn't even ask that girl to be my girlfriend. I had just told her I liked her. I guessed J and I had our own heartbreaks before we had each other.

Our "relationship" never made it to lunch because I had a high fever, caused by a side effect of my antibiotic. My father fetched me in our boarding house before we went home. J and I then promised to each other never to be in a fake relationship again.

"We're not meant to be," she laughed when she and my friends visited me at home. "It's a sign."

But in that one day where J was my fake girlfriend, coffee had tasted extra sweet as if it had honey in it. J had made me coffee that morning as part of the rules we made. It was the 3-in-1 sachet of Nescafe that was "Now creamier!"—the same coffee we drank the night before. The taste of that coffee in the morning never left my mouth the whole day—even when I was being taken to the doctor.

When I went back to school after I got sick, I immediately asked J to have lunch with me at Jollibee. This was where we became real girlfriends. But I wasn't sure if she was serious or not. Perhaps there was a part of me that wanted to think she wanted this as much as I really did. On our first coffee session as an official couple, we didn't know how to act around each other. I felt like we were still two friends trying to convince others that they were lovers.

Having a girlfriend did not feel weird at all. It wasn't like when I had a boyfriend. Boys demanded

a lot. They had always nagged me to let them carry my shoulder bag because they wanted to be gentlemen. They would even get mad if I opened a door for them. I hated their pride of not making me do things because it had to be them. When J became my girlfriend, we didn't have a sense of that pride and dominance. We both carried our own bags.

J was drunk the first time she told me she loved me. I had fetched her in UPub, a bar in Mintal, because she wasn't texting me anymore and I got worried. Red Horse tasted sweeter and I believed that was the first time beer didn't taste like rust to me. We had shared a beer before I went home ahead to do something for the student council. J was usually silent. She wore earphones all the time, shutting the world out and keeping the music in. But she talked a lot on our way home.

I held her by the shoulders to maneuver her up the spiral staircase of our boarding house. The staircase was narrow and I had to stand behind her. She stopped to look at me. I couldn't see her eyes clearly because it was almost midnight and our landlady had turned off the lights in the living room. I thought she was going to barf because she leaned forward enough to for the scent of Red Horse to invade my nostrils.

"Ka-sweet mo uy. Maka-in love," she slurred.

She didn't really say she loved me, but I believed she did. I watched her crash into my bed and spread my blanket over her body, tucking it under chin and under her feet. She lay down spread-eagled on my bed, leaving a space for me that was fit for a doll. I had to squeeze myself into that space just to lie beside her. I felt my body shrink and fold as if it were for origami: arms and legs, like edges of the paper being folded to meet at the center. I didn't complain that time. I didn't mind being creased then smoothed out. I was in love.

The first time J kissed me was the morning after she had a talk with the girl who didn't love her back.

"She asked me if I still loved her, but I told her not anymore. And it was true, there was none anymore," J said while wiping my tears.

I never expected I would cry at the idea of letting J go for someone she really liked. I was still crying when J pressed her lips on mine. I stopped crying and kissed back. I could taste a tinge of alcohol on her lips—she had been drunk the night before. Whenever I smelled beer in her breath, it reminded me of the comfort of this moment. It also reminded me she was near. I had kissed a girl when I was six years old but that was a different story. My kiss with J this time was my first kiss with a girl who really mattered to me. I thought J and I would find the kiss awkward because we were both raised in a Catholic-oriented family that considered homosexuality as a sin. But our kiss felt natural: her bottom lip parted my lips and she let it stay here, as if she was trying to keep it warm between my lips. I felt her smile in the kiss and I smiled back.

I always imagined a lesbian relationship to be platonic. And lesbian sex was only a creation of pornography. As if she read my mind, she pecked my lips again. It felt like a reassurance that she didn't feel guilty as well. I no longer prayed like I did when I was still in a Catholic school. But I believed in a loving God who loved us all equally. It wasn't the same God my parents raised me to believe in. But since I lost that kind of prayer in my life, I had embraced what would truly make me happy. And that was loving girls.

We loved coffee so much that we went to coffee shops often to spend all-nighters there. We crammed a lot. We wrote essays and poems together. Sometimes we held hands under the table and used just one hand to type on our laptops. Whenever we had frappes, I would always stir the whipped cream into the coffee. She always complained about that, saying that they were called "sprinkles" for a

reason. But I told her that whipped cream and coffee were meant to be one. Not mixing the whipped cream meant there was a sweet layer before the actual coffee. ““You wouldn’t taste the coffee because the cream is in the way. You would only taste the sweet part,” I had argued. But she continued to tease me how weird it was.

One time when we were on our way back to Mintal, she leaned her head on my shoulder until she eventually dozed off. While we waited for the jeep to be filled with passengers from Bankerohan, I whispered I love her. I felt her cheek twitch but she pretended not to hear. I believed she was smiling even though she didn’t say she loved me back.

When we drank liquor or beer, we drank it with friends. We sat beside each other in the table and held hands. We gladly kissed for them when they teased us. Our friends didn’t want to have juice as a chaser because it caused hangovers. I also found juice too sweet and I puked more than usual when I drank it with brandy. We still went with juice because I told them J wanted to. When J and I went home together drunk, we crashed into bed together. These were the nights when the bed would fit both of us. Our bodies laced like our hands.

On mornings we exchanged breaths of beer between kisses, and woke up with headaches as if we shared one head. We were both wrapped in each other’s arms and held each other close, afraid that one would fall off the bed. On mornings like these, the hint of beer in her breath made my mouth feel warm. I wanted to make J drunk all the time to have moments like these. She never told me she loved me when she was sober.

Our daily coffee consumption became two mugs a night. We bought 3-in-1 Nescafe sachets with different flavors every week because we had already found the coffee with free sprinkles expensive. The new instant coffee we bought was cheaper and easier to prepare. Instead of long talks over coffee, we had shorter talks in bed. When we first made love, it was in the dark. It didn’t feel weird touching someone with the same body parts as mine. Those were the parts J and I had touched the way a breeze would graze over blades of grass—both careful and teasing. When our kisses became urgent, our hands became clumsy. My hands and hers fumbled around each other’s body, trying to touch anything that felt like skin. I had been intimate with boys before but it wasn’t as sensual as this because the boys I had been intimate with knew what parts of me they wanted to touch. J and I didn’t even feel guilty that we were Catholics. Feeling the warmth of her body close to mine made me forget what I was raised to believe in.

When she started to be passionate about soccer, J drank buckets of beer with her teammates almost every night after their practice. She brought me along one night and I didn’t want to admit I wasn’t enjoying their company. It reminded me of how my grandparents had gone to Butuan City just to support my cousin in his basketball game while they had only stayed for ten minutes in my debate tournament because I wasn’t winning like him. That was the reason I hated sports and J knew that. She eventually noticed how silent I was or how I went to other tables often, and finally stopped inviting me. But on nights she came home early, she smelled of sweat and grass. She didn’t want me to hug her because she felt stinky. I told her I didn’t mind. I gave her massages when she said her body ached.

We had our first anniversary on July. We went to Eden Nature Park, a resort that closely resembled the coldness of Baguio. This vacation was my gift to her so I paid for the room with the extra money in my bank account. The room we could only afford was part of a duplex building. There were seven rooms in our wing, each room separated with green bamboos painted on concrete walls. There were two separate beds. We used one for our bags and the other one for the two of us. J had bought red

wine and we drank it with cheap potato chips. Wine was probably the most expensive bottle of alcohol we had drunk together and we bought it for today's celebration. I always thought it tasted sweet like grapes but it tasted bitter like beer. It also made J's head feel heavy. We laughed, kissed, and held each other for a while before she said she was sleepy. She had just arrived from GenSan that day to celebrate our anniversary. While she slept the whole night, I thought about our plan to gaze at Davao City's lights competing against the stars in the sky. I had wanted to share those lights with her. I watched *Awkward*, an American TV series, on the bed where our things were until I felt sleepy. I carefully lay beside J on the other bed and wedged myself between her and the wall, feeling myself being folded forcefully. I fixed my eyes on J's sleeping face to distract myself from the coldness of the wall seeping through my skin.

When we were on our way back to Davao, I accompanied her to Mintal before I went home to Ma-a. My wallet got stolen on the jeepney ride home because I had slept the whole time. I was thankful it only had twenty pesos left as I had spent most of my money on the Eden trip. When I told J about it, she told me she would give me a new wallet for my birthday—the night I got so drunk because she didn't celebrate it with me. The new wallet she gave me was blue just like the one I had lost, but had a smaller slit than usual wallets so I had to fold my bills in half just so she could see me use her gift.

After our anniversary, we decided to become roommates for the next school year. We tried to mix our own coffee with black coffee in small sachets, creamer, and sugar. I liked mine with more cream and hers with more sugar. I didn't know we liked different brews of coffee all this time. We loved being roommates and going home to each other after tiring student council meetings and soccer practices as much as we loved waking up to the snores of each other. But then I started to notice that she went home late almost every night.

"*Shat kayo mamaya?*" I had asked her one time even though I knew she was going to drink with her friends again.

"Yes, *treat ni coach*" she replied while she stuffed her soccer jersey in her bag.

"Will you take long?"

"The usual."

"Wake me up when you're home. I miss our cuddles."

She smiled and nodded before she left. She didn't wake me up when she went home that night. She was too drunk. I got mad the morning after but then she said, "Try to understand *gud*, Ri. I don't get to spend time with my teammates that much." I guess I was the only one who felt that we didn't spend time with each other.

Our room felt empty without her. It reminded me of the times I would stay alone in my room because I felt isolated from my relatives. Ever since my relatives found out I was a lesbian, I could feel tension every time we had a family gathering. I felt I wasn't safe anywhere even among people I care for. And that I was looking for a certain presence to be as somewhat refuge. I missed seeing J writing in her journal on her side of the study table, where she had arranged her books by width and had placed a little glass jar of coins for her fare and cigarettes. Before she would leave our room, she would always fix our bed, making sure our sheets looked

smooth as a newly waxed floor. Sometimes I was afraid to lie down because I wanted the sheets left that way.

J usually came home drunk or tired around nine or ten in the evening. Without a word to me, she would crash on the bed and crease the sheets. I mentally laughed at myself for trying to keep things as they were.

On nights where I felt the room was empty, I spent time in the visitor's area outside our room. R was always there because her roommate was always away too. Emptiness brought us together. R always drank tea that had a citrus scent. She offered it to me once and I began to drink it every night. The tea felt soothing in my throat, almost like inhaling again after holding my breath for a long time. She was my classmate in some subjects but when we talked over tea, it felt like we knew each other for a long time. "I can't believe we never talked before. And now I'm graduating," she had said one night. I felt sad R would be leaving soon because I had feelings for her—the kind where I wanted to know more about her every day. But I was in a relationship with J and R had a boyfriend. R and I just remained friends.

I decided to spend a lot of time with my friends, usually over beer, so that I wouldn't feel J's absence. Drinking with my friends now felt like drinking beer for the first time. Beer tasted like rust at first but I craved for it when it began to taste like apple juice. Whenever I went home, she was usually asleep. There came one night when J told me she missed me. I didn't want her to think that I felt it too because I wanted her to think our relationship still worked. I sometimes thought that our relationship was still the joke we had once shared to convince people that we were a couple.

We had almost broken up two times: one was when her friends were uncomfortable with J and I's relationship. They didn't like how we held hands and kissed so we had to hide our displays of affection. I wondered if they thought all lesbian couples were gross. The other time was when I was so drunk and mad at J for some reason I have already forgotten that I cursed "*Tang ina niya naman eh!*" She had understood it as me cursing her mother. I hated how fast she could utter the words "break-up" as if it was a protocol for our fights. Hearing her say "break-up" was like having my ear drums shattered and my rib cage crushed. The first time she had said it, when we both found out that her friends were uncomfortable with us, I knelt at the foot of her bed and begged for her not to break up with me.

"How could you miss me? We're roommates!" I said with a stiff laugh. She said nothing and I was afraid she would break up with me again when all I wanted to do was stay. It was a protocol. "*Pero masarap magising na katabi ka,*" I said. "At least we could still wake up to each other." We tried to make things work. We even had a "*balik-alindog*" program for our relationship where we would only spend time with each other. But we were so used to spending time apart, we forgot how to act around each other again. Trying to make things work felt like we were working against fate. Maybe lesbian relationships were like that.

J and I rarely drank together now. If we would, we only shared a couple of shots of rum before she would leave for another bar in Mintal. I told my friends we could have water as a chaser now. J and I were stuck to this routine for what I felt was a long time. She had started to drink with my friends without me and I didn't miss holding her hand while I drank with my

friends. We drank in different bars in Mintal. Even though Mintal was a small place and I had memorized almost all the streets in it, I never saw her. The distance between bars were just a couple meters away but the distance between J and me felt really far, farther than our weekends spent apart whenever she went home to GenSan.

On my birthday that year, we drank in different tables. She drank with her teammates, like she always did, while I drank two tables away with my friends. I was so mad at her for not spending time with me that I bad-mouthed one of her teammates out of my drunkenness. And she was so mad at me, I forgot I was hurt. That night was like the others where I had to fold myself to fit in the space left beside her—a space fit for a doll. I felt my body resist as if it were cardboard. I wasn't made for origami anymore. That wasn't even the first night where I had screamed for her not to touch me out of drunkenness and how I meant every word. I never wanted her to find out that I did.

We never admitted it back then that we didn't want to go home to each other anymore. At least I did. No matter how close we held each other, her warmth didn't feel familiar anymore. We never admitted we had a new routine: we would crash into bed, both of us drunk; a stuffed bear I gave her would come between us while we slept; and different liquors in our breaths with hers also smelling of smoke. The room we shared had turned into merely a place for sleeping because we wanted to be anywhere else but here. I hated the temporaries that had now come from sharing one bed.

We wanted our coffee black to stay awake. It was bitter like chewing *calamansi* seeds but we drank it anyway, although not together anymore. J was still busy with her soccer varsity and I still talked to our fellow boarder, R, while I waited for her. R kept me more awake than coffee. J and I fought a lot about time for each other until I found myself not looking for her anymore. I didn't know when I started to get excited with the texts of R than with J's. Although R and I decided to remain as friends for the sake of our lovers, I had to admit I liked how she found excuses to talk to me.

After a class production, J and I had dinner with our friends in UPub. The free iced tea in every meal was the only thing we shared. It tasted sour. We didn't even sit beside each other that night. When J left our table to be with her teammates, our friends immediately asked what was wrong with us. I replied that we were just tired. "We're okay. Tired, but okay." I went home ahead of J without asking her who would accompany her home.

I was with R that night—the night before J and I broke up. I had wished J would sleep somewhere else because I wanted to stay with R. But her teammates brought her home around midnight and I helped her into bed when all I wanted to do is to let her sleep and lie down beside R. I only found out the next morning that J had read the poem I had written for R, the one I had submitted for, and would be published in, an anthology by lesbian writers. That was the reason she was drunk last night. Before she even said she wanted to break-up, I knew we were over. She didn't have a hangover that morning.

"Why didn't you tell me?" she asked.

"Nothing happened," I said remembering how much I wished I had stayed with R.

"Don't put poems on your desktop where I could read them."

J talked rather calmly before she cursed "*Putang ina*" and started crying as if her tears choked her. I held her and when she didn't pull away, I cried as well, finally admitting that we couldn't fix things anymore. "I will miss looking and thinking how you are the most beautiful creature I have seen," J said in between sobs. We cried harder.

"*So ano na?* What do we do?" I asked, hoping there was still a chance we wouldn't break-up. This was the first lesbian relationship for the both of us. Maybe I held on to the idea that relationships like ours would last. I honestly thought it was society that would drive us apart. But it was us. We were no different from any other relationship.

We remained roommates even if we had broken up. It was hard not to kiss her good night and to cuddle while we slept. It was hard to get over familiarity. One time she tried caressing my body until she eventually reached my crotch where I stopped her hand. "This wouldn't change anything," I said quite sadly. I knew where it would lead up to and though there was a part of us that wanted to do it, nothing could change our decision to break-up. I told her I knew she wasn't in love with me. And I wasn't in love with her anymore.

She was sober when she said she was leaving me. And I let her leave. I even told her it was okay. I wanted to offer her another bottle to make her drunk. But no amount of caffeine or alcohol could save our relationship now.

Before she went home to GenSan for the Christmas break, I accompanied her to the bus terminal. I watched her take a seat by the window. We would be miles apart again, but it won't feel different. She had always felt distant even while we lay side by side on the bed. Her bus was leaving and the thought of it was comforting. As it turned to vanish in the corner, I decided to walk to the jeepney stop. I stood there waiting for a ride home.

The Body in Shadows

by Ria Valdez

I.

When my lover undressed me for the first time, I told her to turn the lights off. I was a senior in college and she, a freshman. Everything about her screamed youth, from her giddy fingers to her curious eyes. When she asked me what was wrong, I wanted to say that my body had always been touched in the dark. But instead, I crossed my arms and leaned forward, almost into a fetal position. She wrapped her arms around me and whispered “I want to see you.” At that moment, and for a long time when we were dating, I believed her.

I met Iska in college. She was the representative, or the iska, of her degree program for UP Mindanao’s Isko and Iska pageant. This pageant is celebrated during the annual Freshmen Night where the whole UP Mindanao community gathers to watch the different courses doll-up their representatives. The year Iska had graced the stage, my org-mates and I sold pastil, a little rice meal wrapped in a banana leaf, to generate funds for our org. I was among those sweaty and irritated members of the audience whose eyes were on her as if they had expected her to return their stares. For me, she shone brighter than the spotlight itself with her porcelain-like skin and radiant smile. We have been dating for more than a year now and I still feel like she had never left that stage.

I felt like lived in a different world from her. She was a numerical person and believed that A happen because of B. Being a struggling writer, I found comfort in metaphors. While she had a lean figure and could pull off a denim shorts paired with a plaid top outfit, I have never felt confident about the body I hid behind a cartoon shirt and khaki pants. I was always on the borderline between being fat or skinny. The truth was, I never felt that I owned my body. I felt like I lost it a long time ago like loose change in pants pockets.

II.

My first boyfriend liked putting his hands in his pockets whenever he saw me. I thought it was a gesture of shyness, as what I’ve read in girl magazines I bought for guilty pleasure. But he just wanted his hands to be always warm. I met him when I was in second year high school. He was smaller than most boys in high school and his face had that permanent look of curiosity. He was a child in my eyes. His skin was white like powdered milk and his eyes were the color of caramel. The next thing we knew, we were exchanging numbers because my best friend wanted us to get together. She said we would make a cute couple because we were both small for our age.

He was my first male kiss. He told me to close my eyes, as if it were a surprise, before he leaned in and planted his lips on mine. I didn’t even remember how his lips felt like. Before him, the only person who had kissed me was a girl from kindergarten. I could still remember how soft her lips were. Like marshmallows. Kissing boys felt rough—like kissing sandpaper. I felt like I had to kiss back because Miggy had pressed his lips so hard on mine that I had to

kiss back to get him off my face. There wasn't any warmth between our lips, only friction. My lips weren't wounded but it felt like they were.

There was one time when Miggy and I were left alone in my house. I was excited to share my favorite film with him but he asked me to take my shirt off instead. When I refused, he held my wrists so hard, his knuckles turned white. I took my shirt off out of fear. Miggy was the first person to see me naked. He even took a video of that moment even after he promised he wouldn't. I had found that out from a common friend.

I hated him for asking me one time if it was okay to take a video of us naked. I said no because this was supposed to be an intimate moment. Miggy had a little tantrum about filming us naked. He said it wasn't about the intimate moment but watching that moment again and again, whenever and wherever. Was my body like loose change that he'd fumble for inside his pocket when he was asked of it? I could imagine that video being passed around like fare among the passengers in a jeep towards the driver. I felt I was being held by different hands. So I stood my ground and told him my decision was final.

When Miggy took his clothes off, all I thought was how I wanted to be familiar with a boy touching me to forget the girl who kissed me in the cubicle she dragged me into. It was like I had left some part of my body for her. I even wanted to tell Miggy how much I had thought of her while he touched me like a child trying to figure out how his new toy worked.

I didn't want him to take my virginity so he did whatever else he wanted. Part of me still believed in the Catholic concept of remaining a virgin before marriage. I made him keep his head between my legs. We were just using each other: he needed pleasure from me while I needed him to distract myself from thinking of girls.

After he slobbered all over my body, he got tired and eventually slept. When he was sleeping, I saw a little glint just below the TV that was more than a meter away from the bed. It was a camera. He had hidden it so that I wouldn't notice he was taping me. I never forgot that blinking red glint of the camera. The red light blinked like a cursor on the screen, waiting for the next word I that will come out from me. I just stared at it for the whole time, knowing that blinking lights would now leave me speechless.

I hated my body. Most of it was coated with his saliva, some with his cum. I felt grossed out by how filthy I was. I hated how he would see it whenever he wanted to, and so would his friends. I could just imagine my body being judged and being compared to god knows what. But what I hated most was how he continued to do what I told him not to. I wondered what I had looked like on the video. Did they mistake my closed eyes for pleasure and not fear?

But I didn't delete the video. I thought of how tight his grip on my wrists were. I didn't even want to confront Miggy about it. Even though I was afraid he might harm me, I knew I could crush his pride easily by saying he never gave me pleasure. Still, I believed Miggy and I could work out. I felt it was better for me to stick with him than explain to others what he had done. I couldn't help but think what others would think— how my body was used in this way and that. If I had another lover, would that person still look at my body not as a barren land with garbage dumped on it?

III.

I had always told Iska that I liked the way she thinks. I envied her logic because I was too emotional. That was one of my weaknesses in my undergraduate program where we had to find insight from the demons of our past to piece ourselves together. She studied Economics and she treated my creativity as supply and my writing deadlines as demand. I wished it was that easy to explain what I feel in two lines in a graph. She was my Other—the one who fills my lack. Because of that, I had grown dependent of her.

For my birthday she gave me a lamp she made herself. It was a cylindrical bamboo lamp, with glass marbles on it, that was suspended on a bamboo frame. The lamp was almost half a meter tall.

“I made it with wood glue and twine. My *papa* helped me with the light bulb,” she had said. At that time, all I could do was hug her because I couldn’t even muster a word that made sense. “Now it will never be too dark anymore,” she continued. I turned it on and the light was a warm yellow like an afternoon sun. It didn’t flicker and I was glad.

That night, we held each other close under the sheets with the light of the lamp casting our shadows on the wall. I held her hand and watched the shadow of our entwined hands look like a single fist. *My Other*, I thought. She leaned in for a kiss and murmured “Don’t mind the shadows.” We kept that lamp on every night but I still look at the shadows Iska and I made.

Talks under the light of the bamboo lamp became my favorite part of the day. We would talk about anything from politics to our favorite fried chicken in Mintal. There was one night when we talked about our own sexuality and when we knew we were queer. She told me about her past lover while I told her I was six years old when a girl taught me to kiss with her tongue. After saying that I began to cry. I remembered how that girl dragged me to the toilets during recess without a word and made me join her in a cubicle. The next thing I remember was how she was pushing her tongue inside my mouth and telling me to take my skirt off.

Iska suddenly slapped my arm. “*Bakit hindi ka nagsumbong?* You should’ve told your mother!” I stifled my sobs and watched the shadows on the wall grow larger. Iska didn’t seem to mind me looking at the wall so she continued “You always have a choice, Ri.” Choice felt like a needle stowed in a dark attic for me to find. And I’ll only know I found it when I hurt myself. The light of the lamp seemed to flicker and it reminded me of the red glint of the camera Miggy used years ago. I shuddered at the thought of Miggy towering over me, his hands grasping my wrists like he’d fall off a cliff if he didn’t. I decided not to think about what Iska said. But her words remain like lingering shadows on walls.

IV.

The next time I saw Miggy was six years after he took that video, years after blinking light had not been the same. I was waiting for a jeep to Mintal I Roxas, near ADDU. Iska and I would meet for dinner so I brought her favorite slice of chocolate cake. Suddenly, a heavy hand rested on my shoulders and its weight felt familiar. The hairs at the back of my neck stood up.

It was him. He didn't say anything, we just looked at each other as we were searching for something in each other's eyes. The he raised his hand in a hello gesture before he walked away. I was shaking so hard after he left that the cellophane containing the cake slice rustled. It had been so long yet his touch reminded me of blinking red lights and knuckles turning white. Since he had seen my body, I showered every night, no matter how cold it was, because I felt filthy. Then after showering, I would rub the towel furiously to dry myself, making my skin so dry, it cracked like a rice field in drought. Then I would curl into a ball before I sleep, letting this body be engulfed by the shadows made by my bamboo lamp. Sometimes, I would wake up in the middle of the night, crying because I pitied myself.

V.

I trusted Iska with my body the moment I agreed to turn the lights on. I figured if she was my Other, she would fill the emptiness I feel with my body. She kissed me slowly, her lips taking the time to travel on my neck down, then back to my lips again. I felt like I was exploring my own body with her. I felt her kiss different parts of me that I didn't know could be kissed: my left eyelid, the crook of my elbow, the birthmark behind my knees, and the space between my ankle and my heel. I felt her breath on every kiss she gave me. It was as if she was breathing life on me, like my body had been dead for a long time and she was trying to resurrect it with her breath. It felt like my skin was producing new skin, shedding the old ones that Miggy had slobbered on and that girl from kindergarten had pinned against the cubicle wall. For a moment, I felt like I owned my body again.

There was a night when we had a talk under the light of the bamboo lamp once again. I thanked Iska for making me love my body and that I had a hard time doing so because I was an abuse victim. The word "victim" felt heavy on my tongue as if my tongue turned to cement.

Looking back on it now, I didn't realize that what Miggy and that girl from kindergarten did to me was abuse until I wrote about it. A teacher I had in college defined abuse. As I recalled, abuse is a situation where one feels uncomfortable. Abuse also entails a struggle where one person wants something from the other who doesn't want to give in. Both of them abused me. And as much as I hated to admit it, I realized I was a victim. I didn't like to be called that since it sounds heavy and I was afraid of what other people would say about me knowing that I had gone through this. As if the very word had its own gravitational pull on people, making them drawn to the person labelled as such. I didn't need pity but clarity. I had carried this fear of dominance with me since then.

Iska flinched at the word "victim" the same way I used to shiver at it. "*Bakit ka kasi pumayag?* This wouldn't have happened if you refused." Her words rang like church bells in my ears while my mouth became a cathedral where my "Why's" remained as

unsung psalms.

“May choice ka talaga i-defend ang sarili mo,” she grunted. Her reply was a responsorial psalm when I talked about my abuse. Sometimes I didn’t believe her nods while I talked. I doubted she even listened. If my Other, the one who fills my lack, wouldn’t listen to me, who else will? Being a victim meant being put in a spotlight in a pageant for the rest of my life. I felt that I wasn’t safe because being placed there meant being seen but not being heard.

VI.

Since then, when Iska turned off the lights in my room and turned on the lamp, I would see her shadow grow. She hovered over me and there was a part of me that felt cemented to my bed. She filled my lack, she made me feel I had a new body. All this time I treated her as a light but I never realized she was making shadows of my past linger. And I treated those shadows as ghosts who haunt me and tell me I have done something wrong. I have done myself wrong. Iska made me feel that way and I guess that was what being a victim entailed to be.

Iska and I dated for almost two years before we broke up because I was busy with work and she was still in school. I’ve been single ever since. It was hard to find a lover who would not separate me from the shadows of my past. Until now, I still sleep to the light of that bamboo lamp even if I was alone with my shadows. I would watch the bamboo lamp before I sleep, feel the warmth of its light like the afternoon sun that was meant to set, and hope that the shadows of my past will too. But for now, my body is in shadows. I have yet to find my light.

Bike ride, 8:18pm

by Ria Valdez

I had sneaked away again. The moon leading me
to where roads sprouted as I pedaled

away. Each road, another question of why I was moving
forward. Should I have known better? Should my eyes

not lock with yours while you watched me teach
in class? You had taken down notes,

brushed your hair from your face when it hid
from my gaze, revealing a gold pin

on your collar. Your school's logo. A name plate
on your chest: *pre-service teacher*.

That night, you frowned when I told you it was raining
when I had ridden a bike. My hair plastered

on my face clumsily. My drenched gray jacket dark
like pavement. It was the first time we saw each other

without our uniforms. Our blouses, both bulletproof vests
for each other. *Don't shoot. Don't touch. Don't call me*

by anything other than "Ma'am." But we were stubborn,
you and I. We called each other *love*.

In the faculty room, I had always wondered how your hand
felt like whenever it was close to mine. A week after

we had called each other love, you told me
you didn't let anyone touch your hand.

And now here we were in a greasy fast food chain,
a paper cup of coffee between us

before you reached out your hand for me to hold.
Your hands were soft like rain drops

gently pattering my skin. We struggled to call each other
by our names the whole night. Before you left,

I kissed your cheek. You said I broke two rules of yours
that night: no one holds your hand and no one

kisses your cheek. I thought of how we would wear
our uniforms tomorrow, along with a smile

only the two of us would share. Love,
we've always been good at breaking rules.

The First Trip

by Ria Valdez

Unpacking was the worst part.
After I returned home alone, I let my travel bag
lay bare on my bed—a treasure chest
with a mouth that refused to close,
as if frozen in mid-sentence,
because of a broken zipper.
From the bag I retrieved

a pack of Salonpas, with two packs missing.
I had used them for my back which hurt
from sleeping by the wall, spine
against cement, cold latching on to bone
like water seeping into pavement. I slept
that way since she took up all the space
in the bed. She was tired and the night,
with its cold murmurs, told us to lay down.
We never got to see the city at night.

A brochure from the resort we stayed in, the words
“Eden Nature Park”, half-creased. The picture
of the Bird Sanctuary had scratches
from our untrimmed nails.
We followed every cemented path that led
to other paths guarded by railings
as if they were afraid to be lost within themselves.
We were poor with directions too.
What remained in my bag was an empty purse,

navy blue cloth like a city at dusk,
a canvas turned murky brown over the years. Her first gift
when she became my girlfriend a year ago.
What's left in the purse was a receipt. The cost
of our cottage, the buffet breakfast, the bird sanctuary
we never found, the view we never shared together,
and all the things we spent our money on.
All the things we tried our best to keep.

Why I Write

by Ria Valdez

Poetry
had not been kind to anyone.
All the lovers who became poems
remained as poems.
And it scared me how
you were turning
into one. Yet
here you were yearning
to be spoiled by metaphors.
You speak
in line breaks. Your lips,
I compared to the fluttering
of butterflies. I knew
and I admit that your presence
was more tangible on paper
than beside me. You thought
I never wrote about you
so you told me about a guy
who you imagined having children with.
I'm just imagining, it isn't real.
You also told me I never gave you anything
real. And you were right
because all I had were metaphors
that would never be used to describe us
anymore. And now this poem
that isn't about you
ends.

KARLA NEMANIC

Karla Renée Nemanic is a queer Latina whose passion is amplifying marginalized voices in literature. She is the poetry editor at Aristeia Anthology and a regular contributor at Rose Quartz Magazine. Her work has previously appeared in The Fem. When she's not writing poetry or reading, she's baking chocolate chip cookies and cuddling her black cat, P. B. Shelley.

Alma Cuerpo Masa

by Karla Nemanic

My mother says a soul
Can find its way into a body
At any given time
It can entrench itself in your masa
Like my mother's hands
Palming a fat white egg
Cracking it open
With a thwack
Against the round lip
Of a shallow bowl
And the metal rings out
Clattering
Against the stone
Of the countertop
The wet plop
Of the yolk pooling
Before it leaves
The dough only slightly more yellow
When the dough rises
In the oven
My grandfather's soul rises
In my blood
At five-ten
I am me
But at five-twenty
She says I have formed a wan crust
By six o'clock
The loaf is resting
Golden
On the cutting board
And the house is full
Of my scent

To say *I love you*:

Love is a wisp of copper hair tucked behind a pierced ear,
Love is laying together in a twin-sized bed, tracing lines onto warm hands
And the purplish lips that brush a stain onto my cheek.

It is a wisp of copper hair tucked behind a pierced ear
That doesn't hear me,
And purplish lips that brush a stain onto my cheek and
That tickle my arm when it is cold and

That don't hear me
When I whisper *I love you* into your hair
That tickles my arm when it is cold
As you lie in my arms with enough weight to make me numb

And I whisper *I love you* into your hair
And you croak *I love you* back
As you lie in my arms with enough weight to make me numb
And I press the bleeding heart of my lips to your crinkled forehead

And you croak *I love you*.
It is my cold fingers lingering on one shoulder
As I press the bleeding heart of my lips to your crinkled forehead
And the numbing grip of a pink, manicured hand on mine.

It is my cold fingers lingering on one shoulder
While they cover you with my leather jacket,
And the numbing grip of a pink, manicured hand on mine
As you say *I love you*

While I cover you with my leather jacket
And sharp shivers run through me
As you say *I love you*
And I tug on your hand

And sharp shivers run through me
When my back presses against your warm stomach
And I tug on your hand,
Which is draped on the dip of my waist.

When my back presses against your warm stomach,
Love is laying together in a twin-sized bed, tracing lines onto a warm hand
Which is draped on the dip of my waist
To say *I love you*.

Paresthesia
by Karla Nemanic

Aubade

by Karla Nemanic

I long for gauzy custard Morning to lift me
From my polyester bed into the warm cloud
Above the sky and blue nitrogen,
But that layer of the atmosphere
Is at least ten feet above my head. I jump
From underneath the duvet with a colorful print
The same as a drying field.
Flowers are molding in the streaked vase.
I smell lavender. Inhale, sweetly, exhale,
A gag on the patio. The Sun's long long
Arms wrap around my skin ten times, and I
Picture myself the next night, dripping in shivering
Dark dark Dark, already longing
For the rays to lift me
Into drippy, custard morning.

TINY TANAKA

Tiny Tanaka is a poetry and prose writer, recovering addict, Hafu-sprinkled with Korean heritage, lesbian, who happens to have borderline personality disorder. They fight for intersectional feminism, LGBT+ rights, and to end the stigma of mental illnesses. They may be found on their IG: [tinytanaka.poetry](https://www.instagram.com/tinytanaka.poetry).

Mercilessness

by Tiny Tanaka

She looked at him with no mercy as he whimpered and silently prayed for a quick death. Anything would be better than to have an unforgivingly slow death. She grinned wickedly baring her sharpened, pointed teeth. He would die by her webbed claws. The air was still with killing intent, an eerie presence around every corner of his prison. He killed her sister. He had taken one of her sisters and displayed her as if she was a living prize. A spectacle, a sightly creature from the deepest depths of the ocean surrounding their his tiny island. When he was done with his entertainment of her being he wasted no time executing her and displaying her body for his land creatures. Yes, this man deserved nothing but agony that would slowly eat away at his spirit. Crushed, pained, cursed for all eternity. She was hungry for his blood.

“Now, now,” a gentle chide broke through the fog of his cell. “We mustn't degrade ourselves to him kind.”

Barely held back anger flooded the siren's voice, “yes, my queen.” Her biting attitude was not unnoticed by her ruler.

“It is not blood we seek. The torture of his own soul shall be payment enough,” there was a light playfulness in her royal decree. The queen let slip a hint of mirth in her tone.

A siren's cry almost rang out, but was barely held back by a bite of the tongue and swallowing of pride. What could be more torturous than a death by her hand? “What is it you wish to do, my queen?”

“Use your song to entrance his being to be filled with gut wrenching guilt for all his sins to all of the women he played with.” There was a finality in her command that left no room for question. Her orders were law.

“Shall we return him to the land of the walking after? Will he seek the justice we wish upon him?” The brave young siren let a question slip from her tongue. Who was she to question her majesty?

The royal siren didn't pause to ponder the thought. She had foreseen this inquiry to her choice. "His guilt shall drive him to his kind's leader and leave him begging for the most acceptable punishment. He shall confess all of his crimes against those who had trusted him, betrayed by his wickedness, and fallen mercilessly to his favorite form of tortures. He shall spend his days repenting for the creator's forgiveness in the afterlife. He will no longer know sunlight or kindness."

Her subject did not question this decision. She truly wanted more, to see his pain with her own eyes. The siren in her called for bloodshed and misery, him wishing and begging for an end to her madness. This will suffice, she inwardly agreed.

The queen broke the tense silence, "he shall torture himself to his deathbed. He will no longer hurt a woman. This vile being will begin to understand the pain he brought our sisters, our land sisters, and our mothers of decades ago. This will be a start of a revolution, my dear." She nodded at her decision of his sentence. If the queen were to begin an end to the violence of her creatures, she must be willing to accept the bile that filled her throat at her inner self's thirst for the devil's blood.

The young siren received a nod to set forth the punishment of this man before them. She weaved an intricate web of silvery notes and keys, telling him that he must seek outward justice for the women he had beaten and abused. She threaded the command of her queen in her melody- he would not beg for mercy but he shall confess his sins for his world to know. She pushed forth the notion that he would never remember what had occurred in this place and instead claim that his conscious led him to his demise.

There was no forgiving what this man had done to her sisters of a different lifetime. She cackled after she guided his boat back to shore. This man shall meet his fate in three days time. Her mirror would allow her to watch him accept and push for an ultimate sentence for his crimes. Yes, this was the start of a revolution. For her sister's fall from bloodshed. For his people's guilt and inner shame.

The queen grinned wildly at his appointed sentence. Humans were much more torturous than her siren sisters.

Protect Me by Tiny Tanaka

she fought fiercely
for every cause she held dear
she threw her body into action
into the war
into the battle of her mind scape

she fought like she had nothing to lose
she fought like every battle would be her last

she's careless
some would say
she acts like there's nothing left of her life
others murmured
she fights like she's going to die for her cause
others assumed

to her friends
to her family
to those who looked up to her for guidance
and to those who kept space for her in their hearts
I'm sorry for your loss

80 MPH by Tiny Tanaka

and love will find you
even in the darkest of places
because sometimes
you weren't expecting a little love tap
or a honking bulldozer
going 80 miles per hour
but it'll find you all the same

so take my advice
don't run
let it hit you and pay you
with its assurance and support
and pray that you can find it in your heart
to accept the broken pieces and parts

take this new spark of yours
and love it fiercely
with all the firey passion you can
so when the flame
is nothing but a candle's flicker
you'll remember
that you aren't wandering any longer

you're staring at the head of the bull
and loving it with all your heart

Bitter Sweet Love

by Tiny Tanaka

I can't bring myself to write about love too often
perhaps I don't feel the immense sensation
that envelopes people like you
or perhaps that's the borderline personality disorder talking
where the feeling of unexplainable anger
and feeling of eternal abandonment
close around my chest
and squeeze until it bursts
in the form of salty drops
on my cheeks and in my hair

I feel so much for my one and only
but why is it that I can't bring myself to write about the love
that lingers in the darkness
and the love
that sings throughout my very being

perhaps I can't express those words
as clearly as my downward spirals

yes
that's what I'll tell myself for years past
and years to come
I'll be alright
I'll repeat those words
until it becomes natural on my tongue
and not so bitter
in between the gaps in my teeth
I'll be okay eventually
won't I?

Don't Remember Me

by Tiny Tanaka

They say that it takes seven years
for all the cells in your body
to replace themselves
it takes seven years
to rid my body
of every place you touched

every scar
that embedded itself
within my flesh
that was caused by your doing
has yet to all subside

the skin may be new
the cells may be new
but the wounds are aching and old

I'm tired of hiding
and tired of fear
overcoming my senses

I'm tired of being hyperaware
of the smell and feel
of tiger balm

I'm tired of waking up
at the sound of cars
screaming on the roads

I'm tired of my birthday
coming and going
and me dreading the day it comes

I'm tired of all the regret
that I brought upon myself
for not telling

I'm tired of telling myself
that it wasn't what it was
because maybe
I didn't say no loud enough
I said it too few times
I didn't fight back
my tears that shed covered my voice
that I didn't break up with you after
that I didn't understand
what was happening
or that I understood and liked it

I'm tired of making excuses for you
but as the days go by
I know you don't remember it

and sometimes
to this very fucking day
I relive it in nightmares

Journeys

by Tiny Tanaka

I didn't travel this far
for you to only accept that I was on a journey
searching for my soul

no

I was here to love you

until you knew that you were worth the wait

Wandering Wondering

by Tiny Tanaka

Do you think he misses me?

I wonder as I wander underneath the stormy skies

the sea knows that I am lost
in the hurricane that held my soul captive
that agreed to only release it when I gave up the right
to notice others staring at us

us not being together
us not calling out to each other in the darkness
where only we know if the storm will kill us in the end

if it were anyone else
I'd want a happy ending for them

but for us
did we deserve it?

God Gave Me You

by Tiny Tanaka

I get shivers down my spine seeing you look at me that way.
it was a constant thrill
being by your side
on nights like these where there were no fears or doubts
that the world around us would pull us apart
don't tell me something can go wrong

don't tell me that the whispers around us are getting to you
that your daddy doesn't like girls like me
around their good Christian daughters
that your momma prays the gay in me can go away
that the gay won't get to you too
as if it were a disease
something that you can catch
like the cold or flu

I can see the way your eyes dim
as you look out the the galaxy above us
when I brush your hair back behind your ear

do you think the stars would accept me as one of their own?
you say
one night where the clouds couldn't cover our hopes

I think only the devil would turn your brightness away.
you're too good for me
too good for this hicktown in the middle of nowhere.
too good to be caught up in hateful rumors
but I keep that last part to myself
I don't want the goddess before me
to know I hear the rumors
that haunt every corner of our village

you're always too kind.
I'm glad I can always see passed your masked mirror

the one that reflects everything done and given to you.
I'm glad you can see the me I want to shine
that can and will shine
once I get out of here and move to the city

what did I ever do to deserve you?
it's an honest question
god would've never given me something I couldn't handle
would never give me anything I don't want or need

but as you sit here before me
eyes up at the midnight sky I understand
that you don't belong in this cruel world that you were given
that you don't deserve the cards dealt to you

and so when you left us for heaven
because chemo only can work so hard
because your body can only push too far
I knew you were happy
I knew that our creator would protect you
and give you the life you deserve
the next time around

I love you.
but you made me promise
that I wouldn't be lost without you
that I wouldn't sacrifice my future
to join you where you can watch over me
so I'll sit here
just a while longer
and rebel
so I can get lost in the stars
and their infinite galaxies
and get lost
in the thought
that I'll meet you again



**ERICK
FERNANDEZ**

Erick Fernandez was a business major at City University of New York.

Mixtape for Janice

by Erick Fernandez

Two spirals of tape filled with lyrics of yesterday As they spin, sing a melody of love and heartbreak Track one Heartbreak Track two Metanoia, pause and move on Track three Good times, and tear stained eyes

Side B Roads that intertwine between past and futures Spinning and spinning The play button clicks And the present becomes the past.

WANDA DEGLANE

Wanda Deglane is a queer capricorn from Arizona. She is the daughter of Peruvian immigrants and attends Arizona State University. Her poetry has been published or forthcoming from *Rust + Moth*, *Glass Poetry*, *L'Ephemere Review*, and *Former Cactus*, among other lovely places. Wanda is the author of *Rainlily* (2018), *Lady Saturn* (Rhythm & Bones, 2019), *Venus in Bloom* (Porkbelly Press, 2019), and *Bittersweet* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press, 2019).
twitter: @wandalizabeth.

The Girl With No Name by Wanda Deglane

He says, *She climbed on and rode me but I don't remember
an invitation coming out of my mouth. I don't remember much.*

He says, *I was 16 and my clothes were off before I could think, and she was so rough
and everything hurt, and I could plainly see the pain still bursting like firecrackers.*

He chokes out, *I was crying so hard and I wasn't even hard and
I kept crying for her to stop but she wouldn't stop she wouldn't stop*

His face crumples, he tries so hard not to cry he stops breathing.
I don't know how old she was. I don't even know her real name.

He says, *Boys aren't supposed to cry. Boys aren't supposed to hurt.
Boys are supposed to want it no matter how much it shatters you.*

And it shattered him, ten times over. And I held him close to my chest
and cursed the girl with no name until he fell into fitful, haunted dreams.

And when the sun bloomed, he did too. The pain subsided, and he locked away
his tears, his memories, until the next time they come to visit like hollow, wilted ghosts.

Poem for winter

by Wanda Deglane

once, in the dead of winter, a dog pushes
my brother into the pool. I am six and I
watch him flounder and sink until my
mother runs screaming to drag him out.
once, in the dead of winter, I teach myself
to do a scratch spin on a small, muddy
patch of ice in the middle of downtown
phoenix. there are dozens of people around
me, shrieking and stumbling and gathering
fake snow in red hands. i spin so fast, the city
goes quiet for one sliver-sized second. i spin
so fast, the world flickers and shuts off.
once, I wake up to this state's shivering,
the heat sunk back to hell with its tail tucked
between its legs. my phone tells me it's
barely 60 degrees, but my fingers and toes
wail louder and wither like old grapes, like
anniversary flowers. I want winter to feel
more like a hallmark movie, like frosted
windows and unattended fires and my house
asphyxiating in snow. I want hot chocolate
pouring sweet and scalding down my
desert-parched throat. I want to rub these
tender tongue-burns against the roof of my
mouth for days. once, in the dead of winter,
I wrap my body in christmas lights and sit
in a dark room to get into the holiday spirit,
until each color sears itself into my brain, until
red and green smoke wanders out of my ears.
I blink at the lights and they blink back at me
to the tune of a death march.

Delicately Misshapen

by Wanda Deglane

my body is ruined city / is a dump truck lit on fire
and swerving wildly / the odd shape my skin makes / like
it forgot halfway through just what it wanted to be / flat,
misshapen ass / and breasts like baby yellow jacket stings /
not twins but distant cousins that avoid each other's
uncomfortable gaze / I am watching lithe girls move
delicate as if floating / like clouds catching rain in the silk
of their hair / I hate every one of my movements I watch
closely in the mirror / awkward, hesitant, stumbling / sky
taking bites out of my body with each step / I dress not like
a girl flowering with life / but as if I'm already adorning
this body in its body bag / every eye must be following me /
must be thinking / *look at that dumpy, drooping, disfigured girl /*
look at that body, lopsided and bloated and too immense to avoid / I am
sucking in my breath so hard / my ribs threaten to bend in half /
I am pinching off the pale, flabby flesh covering my belly / that
turns bright red and then purple but never quite melts away /
I am feeding my organs more loathing than sustenance / how
they beg beneath my fingertips / while I weep at the way I only
grow larger and more lumpy / one day I will eat this body like a
bland, too-chewy hors d'oeuvre / gnaw away at the fat growing
uncertain in every wrong spot / I give rough hands secure places
to hold onto / I am making myself something worth looking at /
something beautiful to the touch.

mind / mouth
by Wanda Deglane

everybody loves the smart girl / paper-sharp tongue / and thick librarian glasses / the boys you love leave their homework for your doing / you tell yourself *just this once* / as you rush through math problems and essay questions / misinterpret their rushed o's for tiny hearts / carelessness for a little appreciation / everybody loves the smart girl / but not when she keeps her mind to herself / and her mouth always running / you learn to coat your pointed edges in sugar / play sweet and velvet-soft and dumb / break your glasses in two and stick contact lenses in your eyes / play coy / touch boy arms and toss your hair / you tell yourself *this is fun* / somehow convince yourself your dainty new image / doesn't rely completely on their flitting attention / first you roll your tongue in honey / then in submissiveness / then you cut it straight out / fold yourself in half and then in half once again / over and over until you take up no room / you strangle the smart girl in her own melancholy / leave this makeshift, photocopied paper doll in her place.

JULIETTE SEBOCK

Juliette Sebock is a Best of the Net-nominated poet and writer and the author of *Mistakes Were Made*, *Micro*, *How My Cat Saved My Life and Other Poems*, *Three Words*, and *Boleyn*, with work forthcoming or appearing in a wide variety of publications. She is the founding editor of Nightingale & Sparrow, runs a lifestyle blog, *For the Sake of Good Taste*, and is a regular contributor with Marías at Sampaguitas, Royal Rose, Memoir Mixtapes, and The Poetry Question. When she isn't writing (and sometimes when she is), she can be found with a cup of coffee and her cat, Fitz. Juliette can be reached on her website, juliettesebock.com, or across social media @juliettesebock.

Engulfed

by Juliette Sebock

You managed to pick the only one I liked less than myself
in that moment. But I tried, again,
for you
because you taught me too well to breathe in nothing but you,
forget I'd ever had plans outside of you, you, you
nothing but you.

Somebody sent her a warning,
carrier pigeon in the dead of night,
but she stayed in the dance, fluttering in the sparks
of your torchlight.

I still blame her, but I can't blame her
when I know that I'd do--did--the same,
confronted by flames at midnight.

Atonement

by Juliette Sebock

Shame.
Church bells ring,
signalling another day
where they all know what I've done.

Shame.
Amethyst scars like a scarlet A
mark where I've been, who was here,
what I let him do, what I've done.

Shame.
Purgatory's a push towards penance,
circling around through eternity
but never forgiven for what I've done.

Pastels and Neons

by Juliette Sebock

Carrots among flowers
(the fronds are close enough),
coffee beans in pinks and greens.
Quick sips between snippets
of vague conversation
leave you breathless,
sneak peek at what's to come.

Upgrade at nighttime,
but switching roles
(carrots to barley
and coffee to tea).
Empty bottles on the bar
a preview prior to a feature film.

Dreamsong

A song for Mercurio

by Juliette Sebock

Do the stars seem extra bright tonight
Or is it just because you're on my mind?
We've got to be crazy,
'Cause this ain't right.
So here's to you and I--
Leaving the world behind.

Recording the Stars

by Juliette Sebock

I don't remember what I made
waltzing through the kitchen,
blowing out my ear drums at the grocery
with the same song on repeat.

Fractures of records from my favourite bands,
wash it down with a shot of regret,
a bottle of realisation
next to the whiskey you left
halfway to Narnia.

I lie back again and
that guitar is still all I can stomach
as I stare at the smile scratched
into the ceiling of my subconscious.

And here I thought I'd never know
what it felt like to be this version of me,
playing that moment on repeat.

LANNIE STABILE

Lannie Stabile (she/her), a queer Detroiter, often says while some write like a turtleneck sweater, she writes like a Hawaiian shirt. A finalist for the 2019/2020 Glass Chapbook Series and semifinalist for the Button Poetry 2018 Chapbook Contest, Lannie's first published collection, "Little Masticated Darlings," is now out with Wild Pressed Books. Individual works are published/forthcoming in Entropy, Pidgeonholes, Glass Poetry, Okay Donkey, and more. Lannie currently holds the position of Managing Editor at Barren Magazine and is a member of the MMPR Collective. She is a Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize nominee.

Kyss Mig

Inspired by the Swedish film Kyss Mig

by Lannie Stabile

She leans in amid a background of deer
We, the bevy, are petrified
like Christmas decorations,
heavy and twinkling with anticipation

Doe by doe, a slow-motion charm
echoes this moment of ticking frenzy

Cell by cell, space between us shrivels
our gamy voyeurs dim and retire

The dusk wraps its wooded arms around us
My pulse melts under her tongue,
her breath waves through my teeth
As we fold soundlessly into each other's night

One Word Whisper

by Lannie Stabile

I am a dry, curling leaf:
part sun, part rust
Stuttering on sidewalks
Vibrant to passersby,
dying since I broke

I am also black mud:
heavy with emptiness
Still a bit frozen within
Sucking at clunky boots,
begging for the next steps

See how I can weigh both
nothing
& everything?
How I can trudge through barren
years, but crumble at a whisper?

Anthophilous

by Lannie Stabile

If I could copy your body,

I'd put the spares in concentric circles.
In the middle, perfect pairs of thighs,
gathering like dense, secreting stems.
Abundant svelte arms and slender

fingers

heartily blossoming toward a torrid

star.

Nothing less than a goddess bouquet,
I'd shove my nose deep in its center,
inhaling the perfume and grandiose.
I'd touch its golden pollen to my

tongue,

tasting wildflowers and natural danger,
a combination worthy of endless eons.

When I deemed the arrangement

flawless,

I'd place the ladies in an ornate vase,
taking care to display their finest

features.

And once I spritzed my prize with

love,

I'd present this impeccable posy to

you.



KATHY MAK

Kathy Mak is an emerging writer based in Vancouver, British Columbia. She has completed an online creative writing course called Lit Mag Love taught by Rachel Thompson, and an online fiction course with the University of Iowa. Her poetry has appeared in The /t&szl/ Review.

Living Up by Kathy Mak

I wonder what people think of me when they see me.

An Asian girl with short black hair, thick framed glasses, bulky clothing, loaded with a twenty-pound backpack. Check. Check. Check. By the look of her slanty eyes, she's Korean. No, wait. Look at her nose – a flattened squash, maybe Japanese...

I fit the criteria of an Asian nerd and I know it. Teacher's pet. Try hard. Geek. And so on. I once had a classmate ask me if I studied 24/7. Her mouth was open in shock, wide eyed, when she learned that I listened to music on YouTube in the evenings. After class, she asked me if I was an ESL student. My face might have reacted in some way, that propelled her to quickly say: because I've never seen you around school before.

On the same day, I learned what FOB meant when I was walking home with a friend. We were passing by an outdoor basketball court where a few boys in sweats were shooting baskets.

"See those guys? They're FOBs."

"FOBs?"

"Fresh off the boat. People from overseas China. Though it should be FOP now. Fresh off the plane." She laughed at her own joke.

I wanted to ask her if she thought I was a FOB. But I didn't, because I was afraid the answer would be yes.

Here in the twenty first century, we are making progress. We do not segregate between races. We do not allow discrimination nor prejudice. We promote diversity and inclusion. This is what the government says, what business corporations say, what society says. It. Is. All. Lies.

Because in reality, we are humans. Where there are humans, there is racism, prejudice, discrimination against everyone and anyone. But some races suffer more than others.

I had a White prof for a Kinesiology course. He was from England. He made playful jokes during lectures, which made a lot of people find him easy to talk to. One day after class, I stayed behind to ask a question. A White student was talking to the prof, so I stood behind the student. The prof started walking around the room closing the sliding doors, preparing to leave. So I followed in suite. He saw me waiting, and I'm ninety-nine-point nine percent sure he did. But he turned his back on me and answered a question from another guy that just came up to him from the other side. And he was White.

Because I am yellow, I am invisible. I am not seen, much less heard. I regret that I didn't stand up for myself, for brushing it off like it was nothing.

"Do you need paper? If you don't have paper, I'll give you paper."

I'm at the front of the line, showing my math teacher my homework for completion marks. I tell him my work is on the front side of the page only – the flip side is scrap paper from last year's math class.

“What's last year's, is last years. This year, we use new paper.”

I muster a polite-forced smile. I wasn't going to give up saving trees.

“Are you from China?” he asks.

I wonder how high up eyebrow raises can go on a person's forehead. I wonder why he asked a question that wasn't even related to the current matter on hand. Priceless disbelief was written all over his face when I answered no, that I was born in Canada.

Over the past few years, the flow of immigrants from China has increased. Friction, like dark energy between races is invisible, but present. Black Friday discount signs are lettered with Chinese characters, Oxford has the phrase 加油, “add oil” added to its dictionary, and according to Rocket Languages, Mandarin Chinese is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world.

Conclusion: China is becoming more and more prominent.

And yet, yellow = Chinese = poor = good at math = likes to eat rice = pees on the streets = spit and phlegm = underhand

I resent being judged as an overseas Chinese because of what it represents.

Appearance is what we feed on. Slim bodies, thick muscles. White skin. Dark skin. Beautiful. Ugly. Accomplished. Dropout. Wealthy. Poor. Every detail we think we know about this person is from what we assumed, judged, picked off from what we S E E.

This process: judging, is effortless. Natural. It requires no creative brain juices to be pumped. Yet it hurts the person being judged.

Fact: we are both the bully and the victim.

I am a CBC. No, not the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. I am a Canadian born Chinese. Some of my friends are CBC. Yet we no longer talk to each other because they think I am a FOB. CBCs don't want to associate with FOBs because it will degrade them. It hurts their pride, it hurts their being, to be associated with an underhand. They don't want to learn about their culture, their mother tongue, their heritage. Cantonese, Mandarin, or their native dialect becomes a broken language when forced out of their mouths. It becomes a baggage they don't want to face.

In my university, I volunteer in a conversation partner program as an English as an Additional Language (EAL) peer educator. I meet with international students once per week to converse with them in English, to exchange cultural perspectives, to let them feel comfortable speaking English. On one of my training sessions, my supervisor shows us a message that an international student wrote in response to the question “why do you want to join this program?”

Hello, This is my first year in Vancouver and also Canada, I feel very bad when I discuss with my classmates in the class due to my boring English, sometimes I have a lot of good ideas but I cannot speak them out. And I also face some kinds of social problem, nobody want to make friend with bad English. So, I really wanna practice my English as soon as possible, it's so important to my study, living, or working in the future. Please help me ;-)

It seems as though English = legitimacy. It seems as though being able to speak fluent English enhances social status, economic status, personal status, etc. It signifies success, superiority, belonging. It indicates you are a true Canadian. When I first read this response, I gleaned the fact that the student wanted to assimilate themselves to fit into a Canadian English-speaking society, because only in that way, they feel they can *belong*.

I begin to understand that initially *I* thought the same way. If I changed my appearance, clothes, strip away my culture, my language, people wouldn't categorize me as an overseas Chinese. I would look like I belong even more. I would be able to make more friends, be more successful, be loved more. I would be a "true Canadian". But by doing so, I would be assimilating bits and pieces of myself, that are a part of who I am, *willingly*.

Looking into the mirror, I don't need to wonder what people think of me. I see what they see. I know what they think of me. But I only care about what I see in me.

YVONNE REYES

Yvonne Alysha Marie Reyes was born, raised, and still living at Tacloban City. Her birthday is on January 2. She recently graduated BA Political Science at Leyte Normal University. She is currently a first year law student at Leyte Colleges. She is an advocate of environmental preservation/protection. She was part of our university theater ensemble (but was short lived). She loves the outdoors, ice cream even on rainy days, and music. She is introverted but also outgoing.

Untitled

by Yvonne Reyes

#1

For years I have given more than I receive. And I pay no attention to it.
For I love because it feels good.
But to be loved back, how overwhelming.
Maybe because I never knew how overwhelming the kind of love I give.

#2

The thing is, I'd do anything for you darling. No conditions.
I'd do anything to see you happy because it makes me happy.
But oh the irony that what makes you happy is also hurting me.
Ironic indeed.

#3

I fell in love with someone who go through the same misery as I do.

#4

We both share something different yet similar.
Both tragedies made into a work of art. Chaotic but beautiful.
We get along so well yet we love to hate each other.
Oh god, we do hate each other.
We were both f*cked up. We both need help.
And it wasn't love.
It wasn't a love story.
We could never agree to that, like most of the things we couldn't agree with.
We were holding on to each other's dear life only because we want to survive
from the madness going on inside our heads.



RACHEL STEWART

Rachel Cathleen Stewart holds a B.A. in English: Creative Writing from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. Her poems have appeared in *Gingerbread House Literary Magazine*, *Soft Cartel*, *Spill Yr Guts*, *TigerShark*, *Sequoia Review*, *Mannequin Envy*, *Poems Niedergasse*, *Unlikely Stories*, and *Slow Trains Literary Journal*. Her non-fiction prose has appeared in *XOJane*.

i. Childhood - Natchez Bungalow by Rachel Stewart

Forever frugal, my granny would bake banana nut bread
But leave out the bananas and the nuts
A would-be spice cake served at the once-a-year silver-plattered dinner
And snacks a plenty for us children

Everyone got their gifts in reused boxes,
The name tags actually holiday cards from the years past,
Her cursive loose and looping
Like the way she'd overline her lips in fuschia tones
Equality was always the theme - the same odd socks or too-small sweaters
Because we'd grown through the year
or she bought the wrong size
since that's all the clearance rack gods bequeathed her with

And still, we were delighted by it all
The silver tinsel still hanging on by a plastic thread
Bing Crosby spinning on the turntable
In the morning, we'd wake to toys under the tiny tree
And buddle up in warm coats to stand at the end of the sidewalk,
A sharp point cut on a sloping hill, for the local neighborhood parade
Santa waving from a red corvette like he was Elvis instead of a saint
Peppermints and strawberry candies littered at our feet
We picked them up like they were jewels
Safely ensconced in a Winn-Dixie grocery bag

ii. Adulthood - Christmas Music on the Radio

by Rachel Stewart

December already has her hooks in me
even though she's 30 days into the future
I drive home in the dim gray light to a home
where all the drawers and closets have come undone

I eat a slice of rye bread slathered with butter and honey
the deep tang offsetting the fatty sweetness

All my angles are softer now
my sharp edges hidden by age and weight
the wrinkles that never seem to show
and the greys that are slowing growing in

Give me full moons and drams of whiskey
not dirty dishes and jury summons
Give me kisses and whispers against my neck
not turning away a divided bed and life with the family
we can't create, along with the one we can't keep happy

Take your trees and twinkling lights
your sales and postcard invites
let me live in this space on my own for a bit
the wall will hit
it always does
an invisible crash against the immovable force of time
memory
and everything that's lost in between

KRISTIN GARTH

Kristin Garth is a Pushcart & Best of the Net nominated sonnet stalker. Her poetry has stalked magazines like Glass, Yes, Five:2: One, Anti-Heroine Chic, Former Cactus, Occulum, Luna Luna, & many more. She has three other chapbooks Pink Plastic House and Good Girl Games (Maverick Duck Press), Pensacola Girls (Bone & Ink Press, Sept 2018). She has another forthcoming, Puritan U (Rhythm & Bones Lit March 2019). Her full length, Candy Cigarette, is forthcoming April 2019 (The Hedgehog Poetry Press). Follow her on Twitter: (@lolaandjolie), and her website (kristingarth.com).

American Fire Doll

by Kristin Garth

Midnight door creaks means hide your head. Shut eyes.
Hold breath. Feign sleep. Play dead. Some nights, he peeks;
pulls covers to your knees. Tonight's surprise —
blue eyes he leaves, smoke, butterscotch scent, treat

he keeps inside his pick-up truck. "Fire doll" —
he shakes you, lifts her up in your twill sheets,
buttercup, singed nightgown, wool blanket shawl,
his bedtime story two girls recall, speech

about this one, who's real as you, pulled from
tall blaze, small rescue. "She's lost her home;
she'll spend the night." Another unwelcome
silhouette backlit, firefly nightlight comes

this strange little flame to sleep beside you, stokes
blue iris flickers. Your lungs fill with smoke.

**GUSTAVO
BARAHONA-
LÓPEZ**

Gustavo Barahona-López is a poet from the San Francisco Bay Area. In his writing, Barahona-López draws from his experience growing up in a Mexican immigrant household. His work can be found or is forthcoming in Rattle's Poets Respond, PALABRITAS, Cutthroat, Puerto del Sol and Unlost Journal. When Barahona-López is not in the classroom you can find him re-discovering the world with his son. His twitter handle is @TruthSinVerdad.

Alternative Fact #2737

by Gustavo Barahona-López

She says the niños were not put in cages
The cages are the barrios
and pueblos they came from.
We give them food and place to sleep.

Spring

by Gustavo Barahona-López

Daylight spreads
racing along the arc of the Earth
like Hermes delivering news of joy,
like curved lightning refusing to strike.

The heavens are in bloom.

There is no need to save daylight,
the sun hands it out in droves.
Leaves and skin soak the rays gleefully.
Pupils contract and adjust and reveal
a colorful world full of new shades.

The earth warms and incubates.

We, the living, grow,
in awe and wonder.
We embrace daylight like a nurturing blanket
that shields from the cold.

Looking

by Gustavo Barahona-López

for you
in the shadows
of the world
including my own

you are
the elusive
whisper that
once
found
engulfs
me a spinning
haze of brightness
opaque truth
do not let go
until I scribble
my soul
on canvas

come to me
grant
me the moment
of clarity
your embrace

My Debt

by Gustavo Barahona-López

I owe poems
I owe a poem to starless LA nights
To dead cockroaches on un-swept streets
To drunken fools on Monday nights

I owe poems to my family
I owe my mother a poem about sacrifice
My sister one of dedication
My grandmother one of memory

I owe humanity poems
I owe a poem about prejudice
About working together for everyone's benefit
About our eventual extinction

I owe myself poems
I owe myself a poem of struggle
Of effort turning into skill
Of my meaning of life

I owe my love an infinite number of poems
I owe her 30 poems about the petals of blue roses
I owe her 1,000 poems describing her brilliance
I owe her 4,000,000 poems recounting the divine experience of her touch

I declare poetic bankruptcy

The hopes of an Aztec oracle when she learns of the conquistadors

by Gustavo Barahona-López

May their weapons proclaim mutiny
and dive into the sea.

May the sea open up
and crash upon them as they
see their destination.

May the gods use conquistador sails
as targets for lightning bolts.

May their Spanish blood become
the gold they seek.

May their souls corrode and crumble like
aged adobe.

May they never take to the sea again.

JOSH DALE

Josh Dale was born in Philadelphia but now lives in the close suburbs. He loves his Siamese cat, among being a freelance editor, bicyclist, and an MA candidate at Saint Joseph's University. He's the founder and editor-in-chief of Thirty West Publishing House where he folds pages and pokes fingers with every book. His latest chapbook, *Juncture End* (Really Serious Lit, 2019), may have disappeared by the time you read this. More can be found at his site, joshdale.co

What Comes Next* ***For Grandad Richard***

by Josh Dale

the war is over
and the good guys came home
to spread uniforms among
the acres of fertile
plush they called a home

Levittown being Patient X
in this charade of progress
rows and rows split
by asphalt and sod
you'd think this is how a prison is made

then the architects came without
a warrant but did it anyway
refacing decades-old facades
and bombed-out steel mills
change with the times
slinging architectural jargon
up with the cranes
appeasing those mounds we call
land developers

sorry grandad your life was full of mirth
and I was a bad grandson
but that one fishing trip was enough
and I remember the hook in my shirt
time to time and laugh
thinking how blue the sky was
and the water it reflected

hope you like what you see
cause I see them change every week
I hold the prototypes in rolls
and how often do I want them
piled into a teepee and lit up

Talking Plants

by Josh Dale

The plant hanging in neighbor's window
tells me everything
I need to know about life
and things that wilt in the frost
oh I imagine humans wouldn't
be capable of coldbloodedness
for the risk is too great
the stakes too high
the ability to love
and to grow by sun and sin
and the smog cloud
will come for us all
in due time so keep
your family and friends by the
fire and burn one appendage
at a time so you'll
appreciate the life given
and miss the flash entirely

A deluge

by Josh Dale

Someone in a Qatar Airlines just took off
on their best life
while you're staring at life in the rear view
awaiting a ticket
rain trickling down the window
as you speed enough to graze
the tail
it's hard to be Washington
when no one threw you in the water
deeper than two feet
quelling the 5-alarm fire
smoldering within us
and that's the irony of it all
as you raise the chalice to lips
life and wonder
time waits for no one
and the rain still falls
as loud as it wants to
even if you refuse to
Listen

The boy sleeps

by Josh Dale

The boy sleeps with his head
cradled in the nook
of a plane window
colliding angelic mountains

A plain that is crossed
trodden iced feet
he is no Apollo that
could catch up.

Replenished cycle
of air to lung
as he sleeps sound
turbulent woes dispersed

Too far above for Satan to grab
the boy doesn't clench
the boy doesn't squirm
the boy doesn't speak

as if this was his calling
his one and only reprieve
His shout towards God
to let go of himself

streams of air
like grains through his fingers
and lands the pin
onto the heart

KELSEY KREMPASKY

Kelsey Krempasky is a Canadian poet currently attending the University of Manitoba. Her poetry has been published in The Manitoban, The Rising Phoenix Review, Royal Rose Mag and Venus Mag. When she isn't writing, she is probably singing Fall Out Boy with her dog. You can find her on twitter and Instagram @kelseyb21.

Summer, 2009

by Kelsey Krempasky

that summer tastes like too many shots of
fireball whiskey and lipsmackers vanilla

swirl chapstick. we hold hands as she takes
me across the crowded living room

and doesn't let go as she molds her own
body against a boy who smells of

weed and insecurity. the next week she
overdoses on sleeping pills and i don't

ask why she did it. i don't tell her that
i've never felt more alive than when

i'm with her. i am a marionette that
summer- wrists tied with strings

and she clings onto them, puppets
me around until i don't know where

my own skin begins. until there is no
limb she hasn't manipulated. 'here.

make me dance. i will do it even
after you cut me loose.'



ADA PELONIA

Ada Pelonia is taking up Bachelor of Arts in Journalism at University of Santo Tomas. Her works have appeared in various magazines, both online and print, such as Capsule Stories, Pulp Poets Press, Germ Magazine, blink-ink, and elsewhere. When she's not writing, she enjoys wandering around museums and binge-watching anything within the spectrum of speculative fiction.

intoxication
by Ada Pelonia

maybe it was the drink
that confused every working
cell in my brain. maybe it
played with my nerves and
the neurotransmitters have
flailed on certain places
they shouldn't be. or maybe
there was some unnamed
being toying with me when
by the time her image entered
my brain there was that static
tremble that roared in my heart,
making it beat her name the way
i know it shouldn't.

her voice,
the way it sounds like whispers
that i've kept on hiding behind the
soft ushers of flowers dancing
behind my ears.

her hands,
that i could have easily held had i
kept my distance at arm's length.
but i couldn't. i never did. because
i knew well that even by her smile
i could be easily drawn to tell her
how long i've felt this tremble. the
beats it creates when she's near.

but the drink
played me when by the time
i knew that no medication could
ever sober me up, i spoke, whispered
her name, and told the words i've been
longing to tell. i could swear i saw the words
billow in the air like bubbles drifting.
but when it popped, not only those words
left but so did she.

COURTNEY LEBLANC

Courtney LeBlanc is the author of *Beautiful & Full of Monsters* (forthcoming from Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), chapbooks *All in the Family* (Bottlecap Press) and *The Violence Within* (Flutter Press), and a Pushcart Prize nominee. She has her MBA from University of Baltimore and her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She loves nail polish, wine, and tattoos. Read her publications on her blog: www.wordperv.com. Follow her on twitter: [@wordperv](https://twitter.com/wordperv), and IG: [@wordperv79](https://www.instagram.com/wordperv79).

PLUMS

~after William Carlos Williams

by Courtney LeBlanc

While flying across the country I dreamt the man sitting next to me had a round body but a small, shrunken head, like that of a turtle. When the flight attendant came by she began hand-feeding him deep purple plums, his mouth opening wide to eat them whole. I woke startled when the beverage cart rumbled by and glanced at the man to my right. Normal head. I shook the dream from my thoughts, wondered its meaning before remembering the plums at home in the icebox, the ones I'd forgotten to take as my mid-flight snack.



AUDREY BOWERS

Audrey Bowers is a senior creative writing major at Ball State. When they aren't writing poetry, you can find them editing Brave Voices Magazine, a literary magazine they founded in 2018.

treading water

by Audrey Bowers

living with mental illness
feels like rowing a paddle boat
into the eye of of a hurricane

my stomach tosses & turns
like the ocean waves
its saltwater invades my lungs

i'm kicking & screaming
no one can see or hear me
i'm on my own i guess

the storm passes
and the shore is near, but
i still feel like i'm dying
& i wonder when i'll feel alive again

explaining my queerness to my mother

by Audrey Bowers

it's been two years
since i've told her
& she still doesn't
seem to understand

she calls my identity
a lifestyle &
acts as if being gay
is something i chose

she says she doesn't care
if i'm gay, straight, or bi
as if being gay
is something to apologize for

she acts as if being gay
is a sickness, something like the common cold,
claims she knows when it all started, believes
it will be cured if she prays hard enough

this is what i want to tell her:
i'm sorry
i'm sorry that i can't fix myself when
i was never actually broken in the first place

i'm ready to believe in better days

by Audrey Bowers

where living won't feel like a chore
& my brain won't trick me
into thinking that i'm a burden
on a constant basis

the radio will play my favorite song
the sky will be radiant
instead of overcast
& i won't be so stuck
in my head all the time

i'll see at least a dozen
golden retrievers
my gas tank will be full
& there will be nothing but
green lights ahead of me

my mom will tell me
how proud she is of me
& i'll believe her
i'll look in the mirror, say i love you
& know i'm being honest for once



KILEY LEE

Kiley Lee first encountered poetry while wading through her mother's library as a child. This experience began in her a life-long love of language that has pushed her to quietly hone her craft. She recently relocated back to Almost Heaven, West Virginia. Her cat approves this poem. You can read more from Kiley in Ghost City Review, Anti-Heroic Chic, or on Instagram: @kileylee.writing. Follow her on Twitter: @KBogart10.

The Next State Over

by Kiley Lee

How many times have I been here -
aching for the beginning of before?
Hot hands submerged
plucking glass pieces

How can capability strangle lifting
forks to centers unguarded?
Soft and stabbing
I should be grateful
I should be grateful

Walking planks tuck me into
scratchy coughs
and wrap me in
a fire crackling

Half the floor is gone
The sink is chained to
the only window with a view
so I can see the sun dip below
my composure

The Sweet Singer

by Kiley Lee

O, David, give me your heart
Cut your hem of cloth
and break my leavened body
before the earth
Tempt me into transformation

Am I not the one you sing to?
I've heard your longing
Selah

I'll write your verses in the night
if you come for me with your
miracles of wine and wonder

Can you see me from your window?
Do I remind you of God?

Save me from wicked hands
chained in gold and jewels
Hide me in your kingdom
Forever

ROU REAGANS

Rou Reagans is a young Filipina-Australian poet taking up Human Resource Management in the Philippines. She writes in between lectures and daydreaming about getting her hair dyed blue. When not writing you can find her reading fiction novels. You can also find her on Instagram @roureagans and Twitter @rouwrites.

For a better future

by Rou Reagans

crimson tides wash the
once white satin barong
turning the innocent youth
into stains of a forgotten dream
with eyes flooded by memories
of what could've been

and at every gunpoint held
a fallacy is woven into
the very fabrics of the society
making us believe in
the backstreet accidents and
planted indications,
weeds of the those who
deem themselves significant
whilst we lay here
in the graveyard we call
our homeland
still waiting for a better promise.

MARISA SILVA- DUNBAR

Marisa Silva-Dunbar is a Pushcart nominated poet. Her work has been featured in: Royal Rose Magazine, Pussy Magic, Bone & Ink, Amaryllis, Midnight-Lane Boutique, and Constellate Literary Journal. She graduated from the University of East Anglia with her MA in poetry. Marisa is the founder and EIC of Neon Mariposa Magazine. She has work forthcoming in Honey & Lime, The Charles River Journal, Dark Marrow, and Apathy Press. You can follow her on Twitter@thesweetmaris.

Spill

for #becky

by Marisa Silva-Dunbar

You try to divvy up yourself so you seem like an enigma asking to be solved—you unravel so easily. I am a haruspex; let me read your entrails.

Here is a place for your brain: quote and praise the philosophers in meme form so you and your public can easily digest them. List your grades for praise—set up debates to engage in. See, you're smart too—let people grasp the depth of your knowledge and heart. Lament those you've lost; denounce capitalism and classism—learn not to be an ableist bitch, like your inferiors.

Create a vision board for the life you want: eyeliner you'll never figure out how to apply; a fantasy closet built from boots, beanies, bones & black—wedding dreams, and glitter dresses, show you can be girly too. ;) Construct a collection of words so reality never reflects on you; believe you are the prize that got away instead of the wannabe Sin City girl they didn't see a future with.

Your most prized place: a gallery of improvised pouts. Contort your face so that when someone says you're *beautiful* they add "*doesn't even look like you.*" Try to set thirst traps; admonish men for not wanting you even after teasing them in your polyester tank-top. Tell them they're trash you can't help but gobble up like a greedy little roach. Oversing your *soul* out for the world when you can't sleep—flood our feeds with your need for validation—convince us you are vision in PINK!

I'll be honest, I feed off your desperation; a constant reminder of what I don't want to be.

In the 8th Circle, Bolgia Two

by Marisa Silva-Dunbar

I.

You have been here so long,
you think you are a demoness
calling herself “girl.” You have swallowed,
and leisurely bathed in so much of your own
miasmatic (you say it’s *orgasmic*) excrement,
that you hand it out like hostess gifts,
or party favors to those you think want it.

Eventually, you will drown and be buried—
even if you imagine hell as a glittery casino,
or a pulsing arcade where you wheedle
and serve prosaic (you say *super cravable*)
meals to important beasts. They pretend to be your
friends while you fill their plates up with flattery—
they love that you are a constant reminder
they have more status in the Inferno than you.

II.

There is always someone wanting to save you
from perdition. They want to teach you the awareness
you lack, clean you up so you can fool those you come
in contact with—*see, you don’t need to be covered in shit,
you can find your “authentic” self under all the layers.*
They see an empty human soul and want to fill her up
with projections and predictions of girls they loved before.

They like to think they are enlightened enough to guide
you through ascension, but they pity you too much,
and even they don’t know how to fly—haven’t been high
enough to reach the outskirts of limbo.

They will abandon you too, leave to be your own nightmare—
a feast for the Queen of Heaven and Hell.

JANELLE MARIE SALANGA

Janelle Salanga is a self-professed Gryffindor and an ardent advocate of used bookstores. A current sophomore at the University of California, Davis, she plans to major in computer science while minoring in Asian American studies. When she's not cwoding or binge-watching Michael Schur shows, she writes for UC Davis Magazine as an editorial intern and is currently directing a vignette for Pilipinx Cultural Night. Her work has been published in The Margins, Occulum, and The Brown Orient, among other places. You can find her (re)tweeting assorted oddities [@janelle_cpp](https://twitter.com/janelle_cpp).

Something just like this

by Janelle Marie Salanga

I caress the wedding dress, running my eyes over it with pride. The tailors Father hired outdid themselves – the fabric, as cool as the metal of my sword, glides over my skin like air. Iridescent, it glimmers faintly in the sunlight.

In two days, I wear it.

In two days, I take the throne from Father. Our words fly as fast as our swords, because I inherited his quick temper, not just his propensity for quick sword-work. Despite our similarly stubborn personalities, which lead to far too many verbal sparring matches to count, he’s taught me the fundamentals of being a royal, and the weight of the responsibility.

As a woman, I need to be able to hold my own as a lady, as a ruler, and as a warrior, and for the past sixteen years, my entire life has felt like a thread held just so. Father is vocal about his worry, but sometimes I catch him glancing at me when he thinks I’m not paying attention, a surety in his eyes that calms me if the thread threatens to snap. I think back to those moments now.

Despite my impending wedding, the rest of the housestaff – and Father – have granted me an unusual amount of privacy. I’ve felt freer than ever, but I’m aching for some company, some adventure.

I pull back the thick velvet curtains hanging over my window and swing my legs over the edge of the balcony, careful to clutch tightly onto the wall while I’m moving. I close my eyes and move my legs back and forth, enjoying the slight breeze that ruffles my hair, and sit there until –

“Wouldn’t it be unfortunate if you fell?”

“Fell for you?” I recognize the voice before I turn. I hope she hears the eyeroll in my voice, and when I turn around, I know she has – there’s laughter in her eyes that betrays the firm set of her mouth. “Already done, m’lady.” I bow exaggeratedly, taking her extended hand and jumping into a standing position, then pause.

“Aren’t you not supposed to be here? You know in our kingdom, the bride isn’t supposed to see the groom –”

“Ah, but there’s your mistake. I’m not a groom.”

Lea winks at me, and my heart lurches all over again. My hand tingles where her hand meets mine.

“So what’s your news?”

She twirls me around wordlessly, again and again until we’re dizzy with exhilaration and laughter is bursting from our mouths. Still, this can’t go on much longer; rock isn’t as soundproof as it appears, and though my corner of the castle is normally quite loud, I know the volume could raise suspicions. I lean the other way and stop the momentum, raising my eyebrows so she knows I’m serious. I let the laughter leak out of my mouth.

“Leanne.”

“I didn’t find it,” she says. Though her voice is sad, it carries clearly and doesn’t falter. My stomach drops. “We journeyed for the past week. No mirror.”

I know what disappointment feels like, and this isn’t it. I narrow my eyes and scrutinize Lea’s face.

“You’re sure.”

It’s not a question as much as it is a plea. I need to know that this is the right decision for my kingdom and for me, especially as a woman: going behind Father’s back and marrying a woman— testing my peoples’ trust right as they become fully mine isn’t what one would call a strategic move.

This mirror is legendary. There are whispers about it, stories that boil down to this: Hidden past miles and miles of thick, unfriendly greenery and forest, nestled in the heart of a lake supposedly so clear you can see straight to the bottom, is a mirror that shows you who you aren’t.

It would answer my question. It would show me married if this wasn’t right.

But maybe it doesn’t exist. Lea doesn’t seem like she’s lying. Twelve years of knowing my best friend, my confidante, and she doesn’t have any of the tells: her nostrils aren’t flaring, her hands aren’t hidden, and most importantly, her eyes are clear. I exhale through my mouth and slump to the ground.

“Are you okay?” She puts a cool hand on my shoulder.

“I need some time to think.”

She slips out of my room as quietly as she came. Beside me, the wedding dress sits, sparkling.

-

When I leave Rella, my stomach feels like the choppy waves I’d ridden to reach the middle of the lake. I remember how loudly my heart was pounding, the volume

so deafening it drowned out every nerve of mine screaming for me to turn back – I imagined myself capsizing, covered in kelp, prey for the merwomen that admittedly, would have beautiful faces I could admire for the millisecond before the water absorbed me.

Right when I saw their faces contort, the waves calmed, and they dipped back underwater. The lake gave way to an islet half the size of Rella's room, and sitting innocuously in the middle was a slab of glass, unpolished and jagged around the edges.

I scanned the area, looking for something cleaner – this looked like a fragment of my sister's dresser mirror unceremoniously chopped off. Everything around me was barren, so I picked it up.

Instead of my soaked, bedraggled face, completely with a head of unkempt hair, I saw my hand clutching Rella's. Us walking down the aisle, us draped in ceremonial wear. Us kissing in front of a crowd, in front of a priest, in front of her father, in front of our kingdom.

But you have never wanted to rule a kingdom, my head whispered. You have only ever wanted to love her.

With a shaking arm, I threw the mirror into the lake and watched as the frothing waves claimed it as their own. For a moment, I thought I saw the surface calm and sparkle.

CHARITA GIL

Charita Gil edits web articles during the day and writes fiction (and sometimes poetry) at night—if she’s not just being an introvert and watching historical and Korean TV series. She is a journalism graduate from the Samar island in the Philippines, and she loves languages, bread, music, books, dogs, and cats. She is a serious French and Spanish bathroom singer, thanks to the influence of her idols, Céline Dion and Thalía. Her work of varying genres has appeared in *101 Words*, *The /t&szl/ Review*, *ARTPOST* magazine, *The Brown Orient*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, and *Exoplanet Magazine*. Visit her at her website: charitagil.com. You can also find her on Facebook (Charita Gil), Instagram (charitagil), and Twitter (@Charita_Gil).

Foolish Girl

by Charita Gil

A young sunflower
waiting for the sun...in vain
—a fool in the rain.

LAKE VARGAS

Lake Vargas primarily writes poetry and creative non-fiction. Her work has been published by *Empty Mirror*, *The Cerurove*, and *Homology Lit*, among others. She tweets at [@lakewrites](https://twitter.com/lakewrites). More of her work can be found on her Tumblr, [@stonemattress](https://www.tumblr.com/stonemattress).

Today Tomorrow Next Week

by Lake Vargas

After the first time I saw you
I came home to a mouse,
a thick gray line on the trap.

I didn't cry. Instead, I crept
into the shower and closed
my eyes, thinking of the syrup

in yours. Each drop parachuted
down on me as I thought maybe
I shouldn't see you anymore;

there are buildings collapsing
in bellows of crashing plaster,
rivers driving their knifed bodies

through canyons, and oceans
enfolding everything at the end.
The mouse chirped to nothing.

Then, the neighbors who share
a wall with me pressed the 6
button on their blender. I bit

my lips down on my smile,
wondering if you would touch
me but knowing we have time.

2019

by Lake Vargas

My kiss skids off your lips.
You have this habit of always
enfolding me, rocking me back
and forth, your fists dormant
on my back but still clutching
the cloth. I've never stepped

into waters like these, but now
I'm knee-high, letting the liquid
laminar me. Narcissus tilts
towards his reflection but you
are nothing like me and I am
nothing like you which means

something good. In the rain
Chrissy Teigen's sequin gown
is glinting. I don't have cable
but your fingers are soft pelts
of hail on my arm. I change
the channel from a family
passing casseroles around
to another watching television.



**LISA LERMA
WEBER**

Lisa Lerma Weber has been published in *Awkward Mermaid*, *Barren Press*, *Bone & Ink Press*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, *Mojave Heart Review*, *Royal Rose*, and others. Follow her on Twitter @LisaLermaWeber.

Esperanza

by Lisa Lerma Weber

Her name was *Esperanza*—

Hope

But did she have any?

Loving a faithless man full of fury and alcohol.

A man who would give her children but take her life.

Her name meant Hope

but she did have a prayer?

Did she cry out, "*Dios Mío, ¿por qué me has abandonado?*"

as she lay dying at the hands of her husband.

Or had she lost her faith in anything

the first time he hit her?

Her name was *Esperanza*—

Hope

But could she see *la luz*

as the darkness swallowed her,

as she was sacrificed to the gods

of anger and betrayal and machismo.

Her name meant Hope

and though she may have lost herself,

she lives on in the strength of her *nietas*,

and they carry her name on their defiant tongues.

Esperanza, no te dejaremos morir.

E.J. PEREZ

E.J. Perez is like her work; a work-in-progress. Mostly, she is learning to be exposed; it is difficult to pour out her thoughts into the relentless world of criticism. Her inspiration and stories come from her infancy and her mother's upbringing. Now and again, current events will fester long enough to be incorporated into one of her works. Every word is chosen with the intent to remain truthful to her craft and to herself.

Untitled 1
by E.J. Perez

Companion needs solitude
To embrace
To resolve
To fear

Solitary tendencies only grow
Do not seek
Do not join
Do not speak
The mind whirls in thought
To create
To imagine
To be

Escaping solitude impossible
In the mind
In the heart
Invisible

Girl Algorithm
by E.J. Perez

A knob turns, it coils, retracts and contracts, and it is the obstacle between my life and the one I am told I am to have. Numbers are the path for me; numbers dictate the exactitude of my success and failure. Everything in my life is timed, organized, and scheduled. The powder blue walls laugh at me because they are only a façade in comparison to the sky. My life at sixteen has consisted of countless math sessions, Algebra this, Calculus that, they say I am gifted. Last time I checked, gifts are pleasant, award instant gratification, and the work is conducted by the giver not the gifted. As I recall that statement, the image of my mother flashes by; the gift of a few words brought me the best day of my life. The day words became my best friend, my refuge, my life.

Nightingale Series #1

by E.J. Perez

A log onto my back,
A slap to the face,
Why is that baby crying again?
A punch rushes through the sheets.

Six-year old fantasies
Is all I have for me,
Reality is too bleak
And it is difficult to understand
How I came to be?

My mother answers all too quick,
Your existence is a byproduct
You see, all I wanted
Was your father at peace.

A pseudo mother I am of three
Soon there after, another three
We will lose one, the lucky one
Can't reproach, without them
I would not be me.

Clock

by E.J. Perez

A surge of color and mystic air
Like a pop of smoke enter the brain
Tick, tock, tick, tock, thump?
The bulb turns on and lights the way
Idea one, idea two, three and four

Sense and sensibility cannot help you
To wonder and create I will draw you near
Madder than mad we are all here
Chasing rabbits until the bright heart appears

One way out it is definitely clear
Why would you want to? please do not fear
Let your mind free to fly and cheer

We haven't much time
What will you do before you disappear?

The choice is yours, mine was to warn all who hear

ADAEZE I.

Adaeze I. is a 20 year old Nigerian-American QWOC from Florida who currently attends university studying psychology. Besides poetry, she enjoys reading, tea, stormy weather, and catching up on shows like Black Lightning and Doctor Who. You can usually find her in the farthest corner of her favorite local bookstore. To see more of her work, follow her on instagram at: [not.a.daisy](#).

fruition

by Adaeze I.

In another time we rest underneath
 hidden orange trees, our fingers sticky from
 peeling back the sweet ripened fruit,
 and I'll wonder to myself how to
 unfold these crumpled paper butterflies
 that have settled inside of me
 in order to tell you how much
 your laughter stings my heart—
 how your smooth healing smile
 devours the mask I wear,
 until I am left exposed and open
 beneath the clear sky,
 the delirious rhythm of my heartbeat
 confirming a long awaited beginning
 in me.

In this moment I am a
 fresh forest / thick with spring,
 breathing back soft memories
 as I cradle bloomed roses,
 my fingernails caked with dirt
 from unearthing the frigid soil,
 peeling back to find her and I alone,
 alongside one another—
 with time non-existent as a
 longing desire haunts over us,
 perfuming the air
 [our warm universe]
 with a chance to melt wildly into
 one another, until violets flare
 in our chests.

childhood folklore

by Adaeze I.

we had our rituals each summer:
 hands sticky with neon color syrup
 running down our fingers from
 melted popsicles, our mouths loose with
 rowdy laughter as we ran with burnt feet
 down an unforgivable asphalt road and

i remember how we let our fears
 wash away down the gutter /
 mixing with torn candy wrappers
 and front lawn debris as
 summer storms raged around us —
 the sun straining against the grieving clouds
 and our excitement as we felt
 the sky crack open / its thunderous voice
 a reassurance of its power

we should have known better than
 to wish for bliss amongst chaos

SHREYAA TANDEL

Shreyaa Tandel is a self-established poet, or you can say amateur poet, from india. Her poems "Inadvertently Alive", "Virgin" and "Blackhole" have been published in the blue pages lit, and vamp cat magazine respectively. When she isn't writing or is glued in front of a computer/cell phone screen, she spends time singing north Indian classical music and reading the Bhagwad Gita and pretending very hard to be happy, even though she isn't. You can reach her at shreyaatandel1526@gmail.com

eye

by Shreyaa Tandel

thou was sleep; and i was the eye who longed for thy.

as i see

the trees still, move by the faster grey browns blur..

as i see crowds pausing and

and singing a clamor of an opera as i see one of me on me

with wretch with rage

with an emptiness, i see.

as i see the skies white and bright

as the sun took the throne

and with the years of moments, o so many, passing by; it melting into the pink and

violet skies crowned the moon

i saw all of it as the day passed

bringing the the night long awaited as i could close me and cherish

thy

but then i see you run away from me,

untie it all and leave in a mirage i never thought of and i marry my old friend, that
are tears

who come and see me as i wrinkle and close myself in your musing

and then they spread kissing my cheeks and spreading in the night beneath
me.

Another scream

by Shreyaa Tandel

Another day

Another place

People being appalled,

Disgusted, and helpless

People being sickening

Monstrous and inhumane.

Victimizing the innocent, the faultless

A young man going to work, a child departing from school

A milkman on the way, and a recluse with his cigar

The eyes under the dark veils withered

And turned violet,

Crying for help,

Shattered, fatally bare, bawling

& helpless; every minute.

wind

by Shreyaa Tandel

And one day, the winds
Of siesta hours came from the south east
It was a cool breeze, when maria was lost in the tune
Of a foreign song on her, beloved gramophone
Which stopped as the wind wanted to have a talk,
It was tempted to sing a song to her she recalled,
She recalled it being in a hurry as it had to headaway
To skies not known

It sang a nostalgic clamor, a song of the heart
A song of kisses for nothing
A song like poetry, a song like no other; she said
It went like “what is even life, if it is bereft you?
The flowers bloom and the heart wilts
The heart ashes, when the cotton water from above tilts;
There’s a void now, that you have left
The void where I gave your place to three thing that I have
Pain, tears, and tuneless sound of the rusty guitar
I hope you pardon me for that

I remember how you looked at me, the little strawberry mark
That I had on my chin which you adored,
Now that thy is wordless
I shall revere thy, and persuade the little idiot
Which is my heart about your being, about your well being
From the way I breathe”
It sang the things she scribbled in the last page
Of her math book, when she was 15 summers old
And how greenness and love parted
A strange wind it was she said, in the end

Let it be

by Shreyaa Tandel

let the tresses be untied
Let them rest over your face,
Making a crescent moon
Just let them be, just leave them

Let the sun rest on your palm,
Making the night for the red moon,
Which bleeds to adorn your palm; and feet
Making it fragrant, let it be..

Let the curtains remain closed for a longer while today,
Let the night of rest, the day full of siesta hours be
Let your resplendent face rest on my chest,
While I sing you with my eyes
Just let everything rest, just let everything be.

Night

by Shreyaa Tandel

The night is passing by
And the wait elongates
Sleepless; yet the night flies
The promises tall made, easily slipped off the head
The candle refuses to douse
As the eye is opened wide
As the night passes by..

The eve of rift, unfortunate is upon
As the body hovers and beckons thy in cry
The eyes remain unquenched
And the night just passes by; like it holds a dusk
And endless dusk

Snow White & The seven dwarves

by Shreyaa Tandel

The mirror mirror on the wall,
Of many blue blooded winters and of the wretched fall,
Was spelled by a priest, to lie
For the evil god mother to be satisfied, to be fed
she beckoned her step daughter often, this time
with a poisoned fruit. She sent her to her void
where she resided in the cottage where her recluse self lived;
she met the famous seven dwarves there
one was called despondent, one awaited death
another one was called agony, and the other one called pain
the one who always accompanied her in the cottage was called cries
her favorite one was siesta, and one who looked her from afar was happy
she embraced them all, as they entered within her
and left to an unknown smoky juncture, with paths not known, and bereft any prince.

Nafeesa

by Shreyaa Tandel

I lied around in the summer spring once,
Roofless, in the backyard.
And she, with her anklet conversing the air
And humming a folklore and a tint of zeal
Came to me, sat besides me and pushed my uneven long hair back
Arranged my silver earrings; came to me, and dragged me outside
When I was in the company of the blue wide, and solitude
We sat together sharing good laughs; and held a moment of love
As we caressed each other's faces, slowly, with eyes closed.
We saw a bit more into each other, through the soul's aperture
And love's eye; near the riverine of tears
Somewhere away we went, in our own stratosphere.

Foreigner

by Shreyaa Tandel

The typical smell of bleach
And of the clothes washed and pressed,
Greeted a passerby, who left with the sense of
Familiarity.

A cup of sugary double creamed tea
Got closer to him and starred,
Directly in his eye,
as he blew it's fragrant steam hot.

He once sighed in the same room, he remembers,
In the days of summer.

Now his tired, pale yellow and red eyes
Carelessly looked around, felt like it was ages
He looked around and the dusty fan, was still performing
His routine old clamored song.

He dipped in wistfulness, the popular word nostalgia they say;
In his dining room.

He cried a tear or two, as he embraced an age old hearty glee
Locking the doors of his void.



**MARLENA
DOMINIQUE
CHILES**

Reigning from the suburban town of Fairfield, California, Marlena Dominique Chiles can be found binge watching the latest anime series or the Office. At the age of 24, Marlena is already a loving mother of one cat, with a serious addiction to sushi.

Reality and the Heart

by Marlena Dominique Chiles

I am not so simple.

My heart does not jump in your arms when it sees that you care.

Nor does it desperately need another to use as armor to prevent it from dwindling.

Your eyes digging through mine, pleading for acceptance.

I break eye contact.

Healing Process

by Marlena Dominique Chiles

Day by day

Step by step

I find myself astray.

I'm slowly picking myself up

Doing my best to fix the corrupt

Pieces of me fallen apart from the pressure.

Slowly, I'm bringing myself back together

Over time I've had to tether every fallen bit of

Myself back together.

I feel almost whole.

Time and effort are what heals the soul.

Ripping At the Seams

by Marlena Dominique Chiles

Oh, the ripping at my sides
I should probably hurry and decide
How exactly I'm going to deal with this.

It didn't become clear until I was older, that she
Too was ripping at her seams.
This world is so vulgar, the voices never stop
With their screams.

I've never been one to sew
I look away and hope that they rip slow
Never too fast, but simply in a calm flow.

The ripping never stops tearing the seams, my sanity
Never will touch sanctity.

The voices sometimes get too loud
I don't know the number, but it sure is a crowd.
The longer they speak, the faster they wrap me in the shroud.

Sometimes I accidentally look down
And notice myself coming unbound.
I then begin to panic
At the sight of my insides spilling out.

I seem to have forgotten how much time
Has passed by since this crime has been
committed.

One voice speaks out asking when will
Someone fix me?
Who will sew me back together and get rid of
This debris?

Another screams out furiously rejecting that
Anyone will.
Everyone I've depended on to do so, only
Stayed for the thrill,
Then abandoned me as soon as I revealed how I
Too, was coming unbound.

Before long another voice speaks up saying that
To depend on another
Is to set my seams up for a violent ripping.

My mother never taught me well on how the world works.
She only taught me how it should work, and
That I should expect no less.



**ANTHONY
AW**

Anthony AW (he/they) is an LA-based writer. Their work has been or will be published in Boston Accent Lit, Drunk Monkeys, Mojave He[art] Review, Rogue Agent & Yes Poetry. His micro-chapbook *Pantoum'd!* is published by Ghost City Press for their 2019 Summer Series. You can find Anthony online @an__o__.

entrapment spell

by Anthony AW

Where lies love/ Dove

sta amore / Here lies

— “28” by Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Some feeling

May I

of stuff

contain you

didn't say

much. May

I contain

you? My,(love)

May I

say this

contain you?

in verse:

I wish

a wish:

contain(s) verse,

your lips,))

your curvature

doesn't serve((to

this form

a square

(that)we shared

(in)one night

mattress bed

was (lov(e)ingly) clichéd.

getting ready
by Anthony AW

i undulate like
butterfly roach. i

find the cornered
belt-loop. i dress

in overgrown plaid
by soft lampshade.

there's zinc'n some
cupboard. tea kettle

bubbling. plastic push
pin sphinx holds.

half-off dread

by Anthony AW

The sun will rise
& bed sheets cover

neglected polluted minds, overcast'd
hearts. An endless tambourine

ringing the plague of
middle age. The pack

rats passerby. My blood's
stupefied; deadweight. I've drove

smoked weed. I've swerved
sunset, hitting no one.

I ask where's the
point in being perfect

when dust collects? As
gravity sets? I walk

to happier hours. Damn
weak drinks, I remember

ordering the house wine
& wanting to gossip.

MAVIS TIAN

Mavis is a Chinese-Australian poet who has a great love for history, and a caring streak that her mother maintains runs too deep. She has previously been published in works such as the Hermes Magazine, ARNA, and Honi Soit. Her poetry has recently won first prize in 17-21 category of Youth in Motion's Art & Writing Competition 2018. She has self-published her first book of poetry and is hard at work on the second volume. You can find this book and her poetry on her website: yimasecriture.com. Her social media handles are: GoodReads: https://www.goodreads.com/author/16485694.Mavis_Tian and Instagram: @adventures_of_evelin.

shallows

by Mavis Tian

Atlas, falling
blazing ice hurtling
last voices of
long dead stars
pierce loamy riverbanks
earth crumbling
in the wake
of bloodied crushed
scapula, duty
levigating away

Poseidon, falling
deep boom swallowed
shoals scatter
made mortal by
lungs contracting
in an everlasting scream
airless; deluged
thick like oil
casting wide
like a net, voice tangled
cut aorta-deep

burn[ed] out

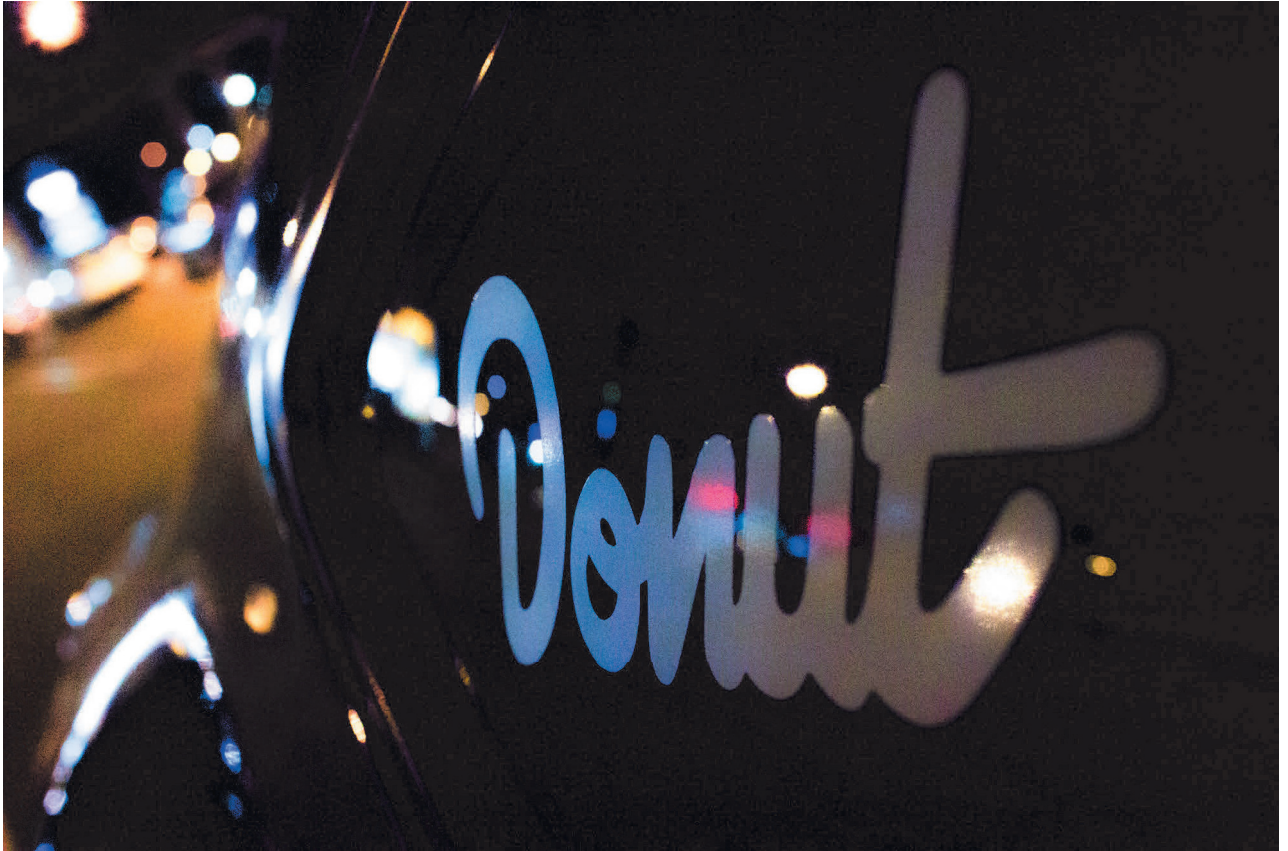
by Mavis Tian

do you know
what it's like
growing up
with the black dog
who pads alongside
you. content to watch
who knocks you
over, buries you
in suffocating love,
cold nose sniffing?
never knowing whether
dawn will ever
crest again, warm as
its pelt, solid fur
replacing desperate
need for physical
contact when hugs
fan anxious terror.
hungering to replace
the displacement of
being an anomaly
- dead person smiling.



**BELANA
MARIE
LABRA**

Belana Marie Labra is a student at the University of San Diego. She plans to major in Marketing with a minor in Computer Science. Her hobbies include photography, digital arts, and traditional arts. She also enjoys playing video games such as League of Legends and listening to music while she draws.



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