

Marías at Sampaguitas

Issue 5
October 2022



Marías at Sampaguitas

Issue 5, October 2022



RITUALS

Cover Art by Amie Pascal

Pagsulat sa mga bulaklak Writing on flowers

MARIAS AT SAMPAGUITAS is a literary magazine that aims to highlight people of color, disabled and neurodivergent people, LGBTQIA+ communities, and everyone in between.

CONTENT WARNING

In our call for submissions, we encouraged our contributors to explore the far reaches of their creativity and to continue challenging the social norms that attempt to limit and define us.

The work we present here are reflections of these explorations, and include difficult topics such as **blades, death & grief, gore, mental & physical illness, pregnancy, religion, police violence, gun violence, racism and pandemic.**

We will include trigger warnings in the table of contents, as well as on the page. Please read with your well-being and safety in mind.

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Our thanks to everyone on staff for their hard work on this issue!

For Staff Bios, see pages 136-139

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(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Dottie Lo Bue (she/her) is a visual artist and writer who has had the privilege of publishing her debut chapbook, *ON BIRDS/WINGS/ROADS/SILENCE*, with Penumbra Press. She loves strawberries, animals, and thinks it is a little strange to exist at all. Her work can be found at dottielobue.com and [@dottielll](https://www.instagram.com/dottielll) on instagram.

Frøya Cassandra Norheim is a Norwegian trans woman who writes in her spare time as she tries to finish a MA in Comparative Literature. She is fascinated by genre fiction, the pulpy, and the cliché. In her work, she explores what lies beyond the self; what connects us to the past, the present, and the future. You can find her on Instagram [@starlightwake](https://www.instagram.com/starlightwake).

Kyle Vaughn is the author of *Calamity Gospel* (forthcoming from Cerasus Poetry, 2023), *The Alpinist Searches Lonely Places* (Belle Point Press, 2022), and *Lightning Paths: 75 Poetry Writing Exercises* (NCTE Books, 2018), and is the co-author/co-photographer of *A New Light in Kalighat* (American Councils for International Education, 2013). His poems have appeared in journals such as *The Journal*, *The Boiler*, *Poetry East*, *the museum of americana* (2022 Best of the Net nomination), and *The Shore* (2021 Pushcart Prize nomination). Find him at www.kylevaughn.org / twitter: [@krv75](https://twitter.com/krv75) / instagram: [@kylev75](https://www.instagram.com/kylev75)

Kihnindewa means “hunger” in a sleeping Native American language, chosen to name a perpetual state of desire. As a Two-Spirit Afro-Native poet based in the backwoods of North Carolina and also working as a spiritual healer & divinator, Kihnindewa writes retellings of dreams both waking & typical hoping to inspire you to grasp the intersections of awake & dreaming, spiritual & tangible, romance & need, Black & Native, man & woman. Kihnindewa can be found on Patreon, Medium, and Tumblr under the same name.

Maria Prieto was born and raised in Manila, Philippines. Her family including herself moved to Southern California when she was 12. She graduated with a BS in Psychology from University of California, San Diego and has a Master’s of Education. She spends most of her time reading, writing, and spending time with her child. Her book reflections and recommendations can be found on Instagram [@mpjustreading](https://www.instagram.com/mpjustreading).

Rebecca Herrera Alegria is a strawberry-haired girl born and raised in New York. She has had work featured in *Alebrijes Review*, *Celestite Poetry*, *Horse Egg Literary*, and more. Currently, she is the managing editor of fifth wheel press, an independent publishing platform for queer, trans, and gender non-conforming creatives. You can find more about her work on her [website](#).

cj jennifer (they/them) is a lifelong new yorker and cannot believe they've already reached their mid-twenties. cj tends to write about any of the vast array of things that interest them: sports, gender, judaism, math, love through an aromantic lens. find them on instagram [@userceejae](https://www.instagram.com/userceejae).

Ryan Ojeda has been writing poetry for around 5 years now, with it starting as a way to get creativity out. However, during the 2020 quarantine, Ryan decided to compile all of his work so far into a poetry book, *Transatlantic Communications*, published through Barnes And Noble Press. From then on, poetry became more of a passion for him with all of his work being posted to his Instagram, [@ZombiesAndPoetry](https://www.instagram.com/ZombiesAndPoetry).

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Supriya Finch (she/her) is a young British poet who occasionally wages war with the Instagram algorithm at [@finchpoets](#). She is mixed-race, a second generation immigrant, and a modern foreign languages student, and these identities contribute significantly to her work, particularly via themes of non-belonging and transcending geographical location.

Nuha Fariha is a first generation Bangladeshi American writer. A second year MFA Candidate at LSU, their work has appeared in *MAGMA*, *Jamhoor* and *Stellium Literary* among others. Nuha's chapbook is forthcoming with GameOver Books. They live in Baton Rouge with their son and partner.

Verna Zafra-Kasala (she/her) was born in the Philippines but was raised and still lives in the Pacific island of Guåhan (Guam). Her first microchapbook of poetry, *Rites of Passing*, is forthcoming from Porkbelly Press (2022).

Dario Adrian (he/him) is a Queer, Hispanic, Visual Artist from El Paso, TX. Photography is a means to curate moments of his days, travels, and energy work as they relate to human experiences that are oftentimes lost in daily routines. He embraces intersectionality and often incorporates one or more of these identities into his art/photography. His work comprises self-portraits, travel photography, event photography and a little of everything in between. IG: [@dario_adrian_sg](#)

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Christiane Williams-Vigil (she/her) is a Xicana writer from El Paso, Texas. Her work has been published in various literary magazines such as *HyDRAW*, *Chismosa Press*, and Marshall University’s *Movable Project*. Currently, she is a contributing staff writer for *Alebrijes Review*. Her Instagram handle is [@christyvigilwriter](#).

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Alexander Etheridge has been developing his poems and translations since 1998. His poems have been featured in *Scissors and Spackle*, *Ink Sac*, *Cerasus Journal*, *The Cafe Review*, *The Madrigal*, *Abridged Magazine*, *Susurrus Magazine*, *The Journal*, *Roi Faineant Press*, and many others. He was the winner of the Struck Match Poetry Prize in 1999.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jade P. Albert (she/her) is a 20-something millennial from Manila, Philippines. Passionate and warm, she is very outspoken about her love for dogs, sunsets, makeup, fandom, poetry, music, theater, astrology, and social justice. Despite her degree and career in digital marketing, Jade still considers herself an artist at heart. In her free time, Jade is an enthusiastic consumer and fervent supporter of the many things she enjoys, as well as an actor, singer, and writer on the side. Find more of her work on her Tumblr: thewheatfields.tumblr.com

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Thulani Makena (he/they/none) is a black, queer, and genderfluid multi-disciplinary based in the Southeastern U.S. They graduated with a B.A. from UofSC in 2019 with a focus in Animation and Printmaking. His current work focuses on the magik within the mundane and celebrating QTBIPOC narratives. Whenever they're not painting and designing they are frequently seen foraging, taking care of their cats, or volunteering at local farms and event spaces. You can find him online through his handle [@magikbeanshop](https://www.instagram.com/magikbeanshop) (spirituality & wellness) and [@magikbeanart](https://www.instagram.com/magikbeanart) (art only account).

Alli Cruz (she/her) is a queer writer of Filipinx and Cuban descent. Her work has appeared in *The San Franciscan*, *The Margins*, *Blackbird*, *Hobart*, and elsewhere, and she received her BA from Stanford University. Currently, Alli works in Development for Sony Pictures Television and serves as the Associate Reviews Editor for *Pleiades Magazine*. IG: [@allicruzin](https://www.instagram.com/allicruzin)

D.J.A. (she/they) is a writer, community organizer, farmworker, and mother - in no particular order - based in Oregon. Her favorite rituals are reading revolutionary works, laughing with her nine-month-old daughter, scribbling lines on various iPhone notes and napkins then trying to find all of them to assemble an actual poem, and calling home.

Reyna Rosales (they/she) is a Queer & Trans Filipinx writer who uses art to connect to community. Originally born in the Philippines, she has built homes in Luzon, in Los Angeles, and in the people she chooses to call family. You can find them on instagram [@tsismosx](https://www.instagram.com/tsismosx) and twitter [@tsismosx](https://twitter.com/tsismosx).

Everett Cruz (he, they) lives in Denton, Texas, where he studied creative writing at the University of North Texas. He is a Filipino-American who grew up in Fort Worth, Texas. His work has been or will be published in *Brave Voices*, *The B'K*, *Resurrection Magazine*, *The Minison Project*, *Marías at Sampaguitas*, *Brazos River Review*, *Stanza Cannon*, and *Five South*. Twitter [@EverettCruzIsOK](https://twitter.com/EverettCruzIsOK)

Shayn Green (she/they) is a black and queer visual artist from Charleston, SC. She loves to create afro-surrealist portraits that represent the intersectionality of her life experience. In Shayn's free time she enjoys watching reality television, dancing, and trying new things. To see more of her work follow her on Instagram and TikTok (@artbyshayn) or visit her website [artbyshayn.com](https://www.artbyshayn.com).

Logan Oldham (he/him) is a longtime writer and newly-formed poet who writes primarily about his experiences as a disabled, queer trans man with emotions far too big for his body. When he's not writing - or lying on his bedroom floor with the lights off and the music turned high, the sacred precursor to writing - Logan spends his time devouring novels, watching bad horror movies, and spending way too much money on way too much bubble tea. His work can be found on his Instagram, [@lilac_scraps](https://www.instagram.com/lilac_scraps).

CONTRIBUTORS

BEE LB is an array of letters, bound to impulse; a writer creating delicate connections. they have called any number of places home; currently, a single yellow wall in Michigan. they have been published in *Revolute Lit*, *After the Pause*, and *Roanoke Review*, among others. they are the 2022 winner of the Bea Gonzalez Prize for Poetry. they are a poetry reader for *Capsule Stories*. their portfolio can be found at twinbrights.carrd.co

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Jamae (she / siya) is a Filipinx multipassionate who crafts stories through words and movement. Coffee and chocolate are her creative fuel of choice. You can learn more about her poetry, performances, and other works on Instagram [@JamaeSab](https://www.instagram.com/JamaeSab) or at <https://Jamae.io>.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Reader,

The world is on fire and I am lighting candles. People are tweeting that the world is uninhabitable, and I wonder how one can come to the conclusion that the world is any one place, in any singular state, deemed beyond saving.

I won't lie: this summer burned so hot, I thought we might not make it to winter. There were evenings that would see me all but burn out. And then I heard my best friend's laughter in my ears; I thought about the begging tricks my pets will do when I sit down with dinner; I remember that I can go stargazing tonight if I want to, and I can shape some of tomorrow if I try.

Where you can't first find magic, you make it: maybe the sun sets a minute later for you to make it home, or the rain holds back just long enough for you to find cover; someone sees you stumbling to stay dry, and in that is someone's first smile today.

In isolation, I constructed rituals: my commute is slow, but filled with voice notes. The afternoon swelters, but I get to pick the movie for tonight's date. I don't know who will die over the weekend, but I will call my best friend and we will play video games.

It is my hope that in holding this issue, you feel closeness with every soul who had a part in creating this intricate ritual. We hope you will be inspired to create something in place of despair. You, Reader, reflect light into other lives by being there.

There are so many people you haven't met yet that are rooting for you—for your freedom, for your joy, and for your peace.

Asé,
Nashira de la Rosa



PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MOON

Dottie Lo Bue

I knew a ghost who said
*if I must be a ghost,
make me one of laughter,*

who sat at the table and talked
while I cooked and said
*I know we're not alone,
but why does it feel like it?*

who would look at the light
through the window for hours
and forget what it's like to be more
than a thing that's meant to look
at light.

The memory of the ground is not the same
as the ground's memory, vast, immeasurable. Death feels
distant from inside
my house.

Death is the body of a mouse, fragile, and good for study,

until—

until?

until

I spend the night reading every poem I ever wrote
to look for something living and find
the memory
of flowers.

WE HAVE GOTTEN USED TO THE BURNED BUILDING

Dottie Lo Bue



GRAVITY IS THE WEAKEST OF THE FUNDAMENTAL FORCES

To resist is the calling of the body.
Do not confuse its inelegant jumble of
fluids and carbon-based tissues
for the body itself.

No more than you would confuse
the Boston City Hall
for the state of Massachusetts.

I've never been to Boston, or to Massachusetts
(they are different places, you know)
but I've been in a body
or two.

A body is a bundle of sticks,
a clay pot, and vectors of gravity
intersecting at all points
with others.

I hold my hand towards you
(the hand is a symbol).

The function of a hand is to hold;
to bind vectors by arcane equation
to turn sticks into trees
(the hand is still a symbol).

How strange then to be hurtled through space
at six hundred thousand metres per second
by something so weak
that your hand in mine is enough to resist
every bit of its power,
and as long as my body is
part of the same constellation as yours
maybe that is sufficient
even if we've never been to Boston.

WORSHIP AND UNDERSTANDING ARE SYNONYMS

I reach to you across a gap of echoes
whispering, though I am far away

I placed the seeds, did you harvest
what I loved enough to spare?

what I sent off on the journey to the
home that hides in soils unseen?

I tore my eyes out at the roots of life
and hung them from the tallest branch

and with those empty sockets
I peered into the mesh of symbols

of birds and men and C₂H₄
so I would see, so I would know

and you would keep your eyes
as mine fell with the autumn leaves

I reach to you across the swirling sand
whispering, though my voice is gone

I tell you of the mesh and of the tree
a prophecy of what's already passed

I reach to you with hands that love
and ask only for your worship in return

ALLEGORY;

she walks across barren fields
barefoot
she remembers the shape of growing things

a prayer for rain escapes
the harrow
she recites in languages she does not speak

her world is a shadow play;
empty seats
and she will play her role until it kills her

this wasteland is her temple
in ruins
her dress is white as the rain that never comes

the wind holds neither scent
nor sound
nothing survives on faith alone

sunset's embrace carries her
to sleep
in her dreams the rain never ends

RECITATION

I recite to you the one that says
the owl opens his eyes all night to the moon. †

I show you the image of the sound of the pines,
draw a legend on the map of a thunderbolt.

When your form passed behind a diaphanous screen,
I lost my mind among a gust of moths.

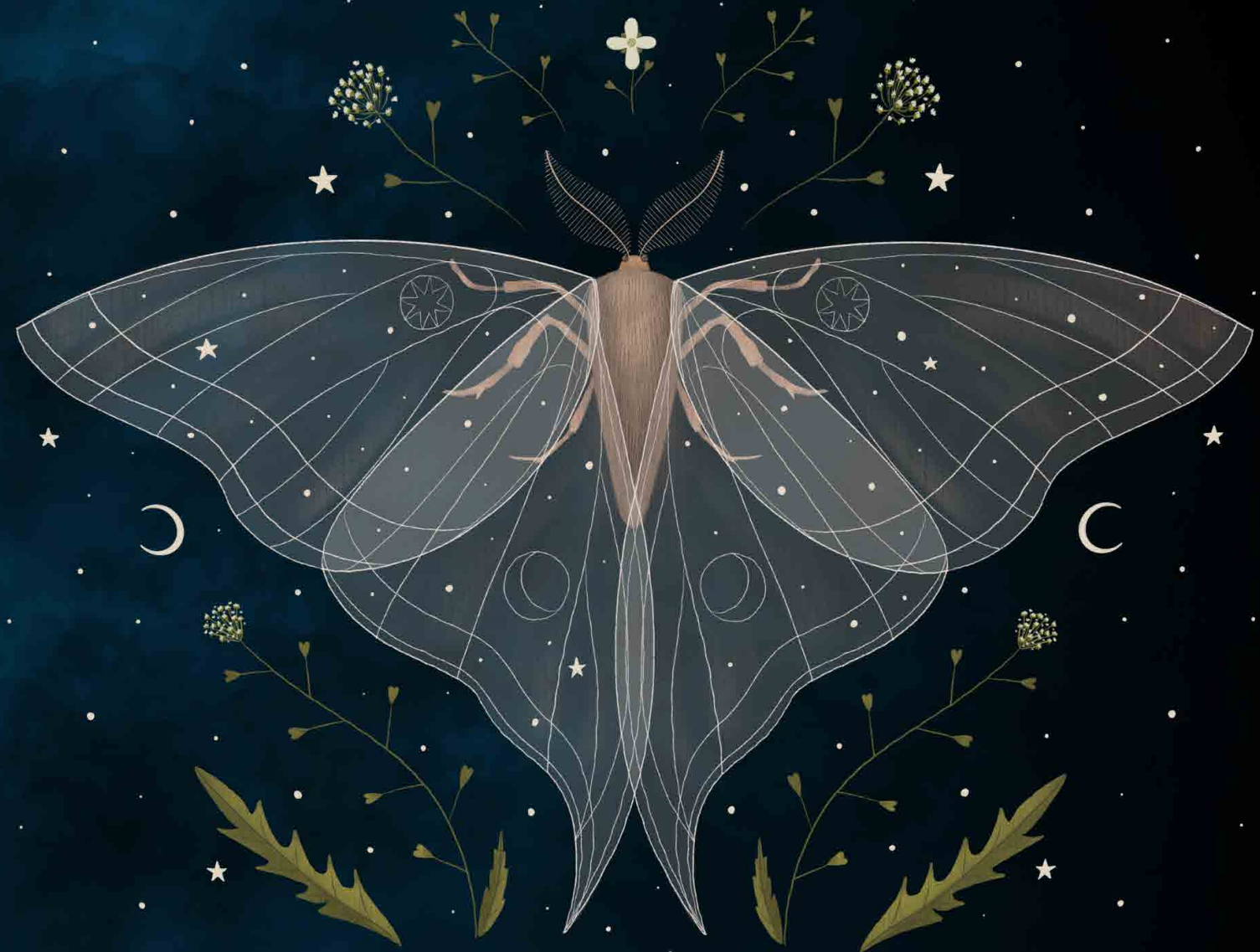
The distance of your city is a terrible green absence.
I send the wine back and ask for your address.

On paper you held, an envelope, is your incarnate tongue.
I went inside its question, *what wisdom teaches separation?* †

And I finally found that word you were looking for:
just ask, and I'll add it to your vocabulary.

† Kabir

KYLE VAUGHN



DREAM LUVR

Baby, the summer is ending. I'm turning to liquid, inside-out an' heart-first, uncanny twilight red on the bare skin of your back. I've been holding my breath.

Are you gonna tell me you love me? I can't stay forever.

A pink rain, peach through the setting sun's reflection, just a drizzle, I'm thinking of you. The noise on the glass soft and ever-escaping, delicate little feet pattering in chorus, fated & just as desperate, a grand escape - not because we're afraid, honey, because we're not meant to be kept.

And this is no spectacle of divine justice-bearing, honey. I'm no sympathetic heretic, I told you surrender is prophecy, I spoiled the surprise on your birthday. I'm no sympathetic heretic, but I can swear that I never wanted you to see me rattling my chains. I swear I don't mean to talk in my sleep.

Don't you feel like it's thundered every day this July?

I dip my toes into the dew & the grass, and I remember you:
Sweat & white sage, cracked open & shedding tear after tear on my favorite sweater again, our little matryoshka,
You're just a newborn under all that spite,
We needed this rain. I'm thinking of you. Of your brown eyes & your orange comforter & how angry we were the last time I saw you.

Are you gonna tell me you love me?

I'm the startling kind of sharp, I know, but you have the kind of soft that's impossible to hold. Ever-escaping, folding and collapsing in on yourself under my heavy hand, under your own desperate comforts & solitudes,

Our little bambi. Oh, honey, what can I do?

Indigo on the bare skin of your back. Moonlight finally, orange comforter, and the brown of my hands. I think you're sleeping, and I guess that you're dreaming. I am too, always, still:

I imagine myself pink & warm in your mind's eye, chiffon-like glow spilling over the curves of your arms, soft for a change,

And I imagine you want to stay. I imagine you again & again, always, still.

Baby, I could take care of you. I could take care of you.

KIHINDEWA

AN AMOEBA OF LIGHT / YOUR RETURN

I.
I catch myself talking to my passenger seat again.
Though I swear I just saw the songs on the radio glow on your hair.
Your fingers graze the back of my neck,
the air from your laugh tickling my earlobe.

Stay awake with me, I should have said.
We still had a long way to go.
But instead, I let you lean your seat back.
Let myself ignore the light telling me you've unbuckled

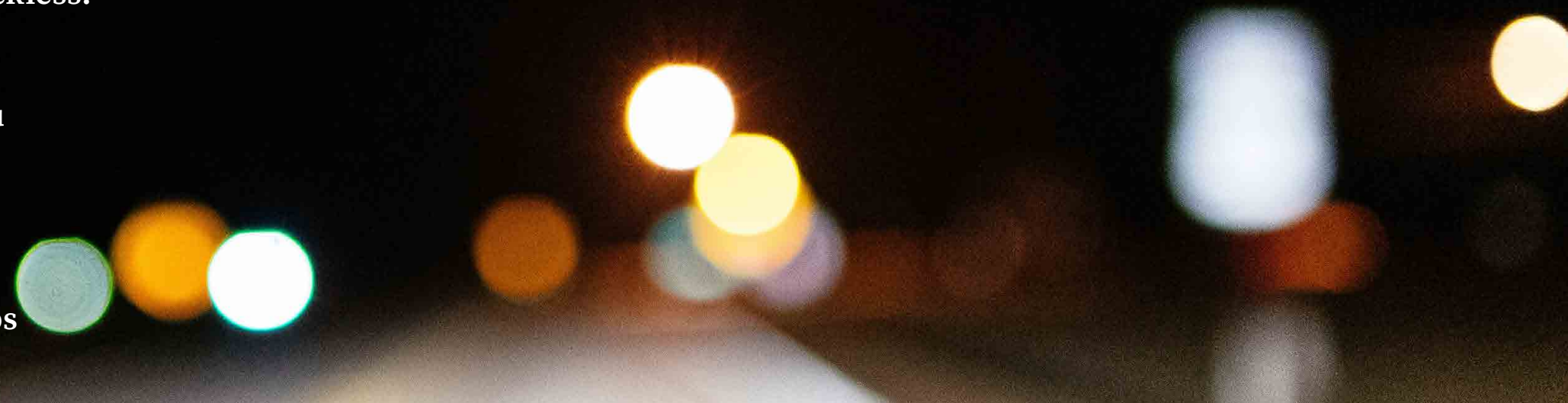
I was your nothing. You insist I call you the same.
the nothingness of us was
Supposed to protect
(you)
I was your nothing / your nobody /
I was just my name.
and yet, you are still hurt
and I am not just my name without hearing your father's voice say it.

You're the 'dance in the middle of the street' kind of reckless.
And once you told me,
blindfold me and tie me up in this graffiti of a house.
You pull my chin up and say, look how much I trust you
But then remind me again of our nothingness.
You loop into the crook of my arm,
And I drown in your scent
while you drape a handkerchief over your eyes,
make a knot already, you say, nudging me with your lips
how could I say no to you?

II.
how long has it been
Wake up, I said,
Your eyelids open with a projector screen unrolling,
an amoeba of light covers the walls.
then a movie that opens with us wrapped around each other,
But tell me who keeps on pressing (pause) (replay)
I shout, LET THE MOVIE CONTINUE ROLLING
(pause) (replay)
I WANT TO KNOW WHAT'S NEXT
(pause) (replay)

I remove the handkerchief covering my eyes
shake the ropes off my wrists.
I remember
I remember
I remember
this graffiti of a house
one set of footsteps
a different car
the shadow of the passenger seat.

MARIA PRIETO



CRUSH

REBECCA

HERRERA

ALEGRIA

here's how it happens. we are lying on a bench in washington square park and the sun hums over us like a violin and your hair curls into april tulips and we are the only two people for miles. *i'm collapsing*. all around us are dewdrops scattered like rice and plum blossoms ripening into our open mouths. out comes the season. out spills confession. sonnets are being drafted about us, signed in flames by each white dwarf star. apollo himself has covered manhattan in gold shimmer and hyacinth extract. well, if only. if only we met here instead. if only the earth wasn't warming and you and i were sculpted from marble or oil painted in yellow ochre and cobalt. if only we really were the only two people for miles. if only it wasn't raining. if only this wasn't *sweetbitter*.¹ in every corner of this island i've made promises and i've set my hopes and i've left my rose quartz offerings to the ghosts. *sometimes you are the only person for miles and under your feet there are only empty train cars.*

¹From Sappho fragment 130; "Eros the Bittersweet" by Anne Carson

it starts with needles. spring is coming and we must learn to weave.² we'll craft these floral crowns and virgin veils with crochet chains, houseplant vines, and the plastic six-pack rings we found on a beach two miles away from a lighthouse and a 7-eleven. the celebration opens. nymphs surround the willow trees and braid their blonde branches, listening to the violin leaves and the sneezing. the goddess smiles from behind the iron gates, in glitter and gardenias. we're going to make sure the season is welcomed and warmed, despite the television screens, the polyester, and the warheads. our swift feet will run across the soot-covered grasslands and if our prayers are heard then gardens will bloom from our footprints. persephone taps her nails against the ice. the evening news breaks. i've held these lavender seeds under my tongue and in my stomach for so long it'll have to be a bloodletting. spring begins and so does the ritual. at the ends of my toes i feel the rose bushes.

²An echo of Natalie Diaz's first line in "Manhattan Is a Lenape Word"

PRIMAVERA

REBECCA

HERRERA

ALEGRIA

MAKE FOR ME A SANCTUARY AND I SHALL DWELL WITHIN

from five thousand miles away you text me a love poem. no, a test
tube baby: words gently pried from their holy source to be measured
and replanted, rooted in your bones and grown up your own. like

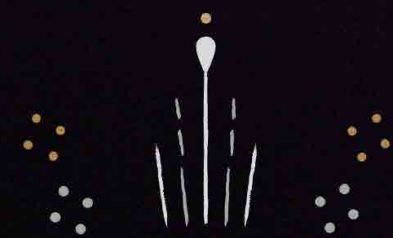
adam sprouting eve. how grass stayed buried in soil, god suppressing
the growth until man learned to beg for it, coax out shoots via spoken
hope-filled pleas. in the dark i hold your humble offerings, such raw

yearning bringing me to weep. notes familiar but bruising anew. i long
for everything with you – travels abroad, your mouth open in wondrous
prayer, my middle round as the earth; full with a different kind of life.

every night i wait for you. fall asleep thinking, *love, come home to me*. only
i cannot compete with your city, ancient stone skeleton and nervous
system miracles, bloodstained joy and joyous tears. can solely offer my-

self: watery depths that demand the immersion of your softened fingers,
calling out to the like in your endless mind. i will reflect the beauty that
breaks out only when we feel safe. flow liquid, follow you roaring or gentle,

filling any riverbed crack of you that wants for feeling, or cold. convert
each cavity of my being to vessel for your every pain, every word. thumbs
press skin, insistent: i am yours for the taking. you need only look back.



CJ JENNIFER



DIE IN LOVE, STAY ALIVE FOREVER

Die in love
so your heart feels comfort.
Pass through the veil
to what lies beyond.

If I hold you in my soul
as I leave behind my body,
will you come with me?
Will I remember you

in the beyond?
Will having you there
with me help me
stay alive forever?



RYAN OJEDA

MARTYR

After Sappho

I was raised to think Catholic
families were above casting stones.
My maiden home is a glass house

full of sinners; married single mothers
& ignorant uncles dead set on making children
they do not need accompany them in their misery.

They kneel, lifting themselves up to no one, chanting
centuries old poems & sipping blood. Living room altars &
ritualistic depictions of a virgin & her son. When pressed, Mary

lied. So will I, named witch, am fixed to fit their cross—
my own blood buzzing for my beheading; my gender,
my diagnosis, my downfall, sweet mother, I cannot weave

your rosary, for I am overcome with longing for the truth.
Before the end, I lick my wounds. I find solace in my new identity.
Some cousin, in another time, will remember me.

NASHIRA DE LA ROSA



JUST A WISP BY AMIE PASCAL





MASTROLOGY

BY KEANA AGUILA LABRA
& ERIC ASUNCION

♈ ARIES (MAR 21 - APR 19)

Create: Your Zodiac is a sign of strength. But what of the tender side you hide so often? Today, create with softness—perhaps a reflection of the happiness a walk through the park gave you, or a loved one's back rubs in a poem. Yearning for gentleness does not take away your strength; it adds to it. **Ritual:** Write the reassurances you wish you heard growing up and until now. Look at this list, and give all of these to yourself. Grant yourself this softness. **What our resident Aries Moon, Dina, is up to:** I'm going to channel the chaotic energy that often has me bouncing off walls into healthy and mindful practices. I'm going to get my exercise in by taking long autumn walks on crunchy leaves and stretching for the stars, finish my novel by writing every day even if I hate every single word that comes out, and clean my mind and living spaces by addressing each task as a bite-size piece rather than a looming No-Face who has eaten all the chairs and assignments!

♉ TAURUS (APR 20 - MAY 20)

Create: Yours is a hardworking sign, and you are always pushing yourself to do your very best. But you deserve rest, too. Through a stream of consciousness exercise, create for yourself a list or image of what rest looks like for you. After writing your list or creating your image, create a personal media playlist for yourself -- adding songs, videos, or sounds that you associate with your stream of consciousness piece. This is your "mix-tape" for rest. Revisit it whenever you need to slow down. **Ritual:** Choose one day this week to dedicate to yourself. Block out the entire day, and pick one hobby that you enjoy—reading a book, gardening, collecting seashells, etc.—and make a promise to yourself to focus on this activity for the day. Release pressures of deadlines, quotas, or expectations. Be as you are.

♊ GEMINI (MAY 21 - JUN 20)

Create: Gemini, you're a source of boundless energy and fun; ruled by speedy Mercury, you are never short of a laugh or witty comeback. But do you ever stop to let your emotions sink in? Sit for 5 minutes and see what emotions pass through you. Try to hold onto these feelings before you let them pass. Then pick one of these feelings or fleeting thoughts, and challenge your quick-thinking mind with a structured form poem: write a sonnet, cento, or villanelle about what you are feeling. **Ritual:** A few minutes each day, still your mind with a quiet activity that takes concentration, whether it's completing a puzzle, building a house of cards, or meditating, etc. Practice being present in the moment.



CANCER (JUN 21 - JUL 22)

Create: You are the first to arrive with your palms open, to ask others, "what do you need?" You may forget to ask these questions of yourself. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness or inability. Make a list of what you need from life—choose one item from the list and write a flash

fiction piece where your protagonist has the same needs, and meets these needs.

Ritual: Roll out a yoga mat, rug, blanket, etc. for a mindful stretch. Stretch towards the left, then towards the right. Sit and hug yourself, and recite, "I am loved. I am wanted. I deserve to take space." **What our resident Cancer Sun, Lorenz, is up to:**

As someone who goes through seasonal depression, I use the fall season to remind myself of grounding rituals and practices. I take a hint from trees and do my best to lighten my load. This November I will intentionally recognize shame I carry and take time to release or minimize these shames. Fall is also harvest season, so I will remember to count the blessings I receive.



LEO (JUL 23 - AUG 22)

Create: Leo, to do your best, you must feel your best! Look in your closet and style a favorite article of clothing that you haven't worn in a while, in a new way. Take a photoshoot around the house. Choose your favorite photo from the shoot and write a poem about how you felt in that moment.

Ritual: You are a star, but you are more than a performer; take off your mask. Give yourself time to meditate. Reach for the sky in a tree position, then dangle toward your toes. Breathe deeply. You don't need to be anything more than yourself to deserve love. **What our resident Leo Sun, Kelly, is up to:** I am taking in a deep breath of the crisp autumn air and letting it refresh my spirit and cleanse my new home! After a busy and stressful summer, I'm looking forward to spending time with family and friends, grow my skills in my careers, and get back to the hobbies I love!



VIRGO (AUG 23 - SEP 22)

Create: Perfection is in the eye of the beholder. Take a lined piece of paper and create outside of the lines, on top of the lines. Delight in smudges. Write a song where no lines rhyme. Draw a picture using erratic strokes. All this, too, is perfection. **Ritual:** You are not

responsible for fixing everything and everyone. Doing your best is enough. Create something without any revision. Hold your inner editor's hand and tell them, it's okay. You are enough.



LIBRA (SEPT 23 - OCT 22)

Create: Making decisions is hard when you carry the weight of everyone's cares on your shoulders. But how often do you betray inner peace for the peace of others? Remind yourself of the joy of making decisions for yourself! Write a short "choose your own adventure" story. Share it with a friend, and celebrate one another's choices of adventure. **Ritual:** Take a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Write all of your values in which you are unwavering. Remind yourself of why these values are important to you. Keep this paper with you, for conviction in times of conflict. You are worth standing up for yourself.



SCORPIO (OCT 23 - NOV 21)

Create: Folks come to you for your wisdom and guidance on their troubles. But this can leave you feeling lonely, Scorpio. On a piece of paper, number lines 1-8. On every odd-numbered line (1, 3, 5, 7) write a question that you have been asking. Now take a walk or sit outside. On every even-numbered line (2, 4, 6, 8) write what you observe. Take in your surroundings—feel the wind, hear the bustle of the city, smell a neighbor's cooking wafting through a window. This is the world responding. This is your call-and-response poem. **Ritual:** Practice the art of boundaries. For one hour, take care of yourself. What does this look like? Playing video games? Taking a nap? Make a plan to incorporate this hour of leisure at least once a week. Then try to steadily increase the frequency of this self-care over time.



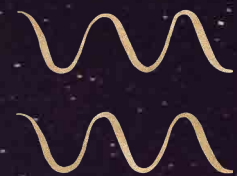
SAGITTARIUS (NOV 22 - DEC 21)

Create: Set a timer for 5 minutes. Create during this time, in any form you choose: a sketch, a poem, a flash story, etc. Afterward, read and reflect on your work for another 5 minutes. Incorporate your reflections into the final piece. Savor the act of revision. Practice the art of being deliberate. **Ritual:** You can be brave, yet also reckless. You are impulse toward adventure. Learn to slow down, to meditate. Start with 1 minute, then 2. Build up to 5 or 10 minutes of meditation. Learn that there can be a need for seriousness, just as there is a need for laughter. There is beauty in stillness and quiet, too. **What our resident Sagittarius Rising, Nashira, is up to:** I've always struggled with seasonal depression, but now, I'm set on finding the joy in this part of the year! I come back to one comic by José María Nieto, "what do you think the new year will bring us?" / "I believe it will bring flowers," / "really, why?" / "because I am planting flowers." — Autumn & winter will bring joy because I am sowing joy into these months.



CAPRICORN (DEC 22 - JAN 19)

Create: Print out a page of a coloring book (the internet has plenty to choose from!) For 30 minutes, color using any supplies you have available. Enjoy the process and make it a point to leave the picture unfinished. You don't always have to push yourself to deliver. **Ritual:** Linger in a warm bath. Enjoy your local park. Take in the beauty of the world. Recharge for your next endeavor. This time is just as important as productivity. **What our resident Capricorn Sun, Isabel, is up to:** I am going to figure out how to achieve a better sense of balance as well as a controlled rest. I'm going to finally stick to a consistent routine (going to the gym often, eating well, working at a healthy pace) and I'm going to continue writing (fanfics, poetry, scripts), journal my feelings, continue my earring shop (Kumikislap Co.), and rebuild The Walang Hiya Project! I'll continue to welcome growth and change with open arms, happily and willingly :)



AQUARIUS (JAN 20 - FEB 18)

Create: You, Aquarius, know the beauty of the world. You also hold within yourself a beauty that some may describe as otherworldly: your mind is full of the infinite possibilities. Indulge in daydreaming, and write a short science fiction or fantasy story. **Ritual:** You can realize your dreams by taking even the smallest step towards your goals. Encourage yourself with help from loved ones, friends, and family: small steps taken with many people can make a big difference. Pick up a piece of trash, or perform a small act of kindness for a neighbor. Realize your impact in the world. **What our resident Aquarius Sun, David, is up to:** Experimenting with new cooking recipes! I'm eager to use healthier ingredients and foods I haven't learned to work with, and try recipes from the cultures that make up my family's heritage.



PISCES (FEB 19 - MAR 20)

Create: Your emotions are a gift, a world of depth and wonder. It is our emotions that make us human. Tap into your talent for understanding emotions by writing a spooky story, to your level of comfort: it can be a slightly chilling campfire story, a terrifying horror story, a breathless thriller, or an eerie mystery. **Ritual:** When life gets turbulent, practice this exercise to instill calm: Take a piece of lined paper. Number five lines in decreasing order: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. On each line, list: 5 things that are black, 4 things that are white, 3 things that are brown, 2 things that are pink, and 1 thing that is blue. Try to visualize each item as you write. Breathe. Re-center.



THE MOON IS WATCHING ME

And I, her
When we exchange wan smiles
It is the closest I get to prayer these days (raised Catholic)
And I think of my foremothers
Wonder if they looked up at her too
Before a higher power
Displaced their higher powers (razed, Catholic)
Wonder if Mayari calls to me
Searching for their faces in mine

CLARA DIZON



COPING AS A FORM OF MAGIC

The sleeping sigh of the darkened world
Is as a promise I make to my stress worn self

In the moment of held breath that is 2am
Going through a door is checking it is closed

Stepping into that sparkling, crystal dim light
Feels like the call of a flute on a distant wind

It descends in a silken waterfall made of intangibility
A silvered caress that gilds everything it touches

Standing on dew clad, tickling grass
A trumpet call of clarity leaves lungs blown clear

My mind reset by cool tranquillity
Surrounded by the comforting cloak of the dark

I can face my own sleep, among this world of rest
With the confidence and calm brought to me by this quiet practice

ENFYS EDRICH



I NEED... I NEED...
WHO ARE YOU? WHO ARE YOU?
ARE YOU? WHO ARE YOU?

Is a person a person if their worth is determined by their worth to others? by their actions? ...!

You're weak
You're pathetic.
You're not even a person.



And instead I choose release.



RITUALS AS ELDEST DAUGHTER

BY KEANA AGUILA LABRA

III.
the light's a cool teal but it's purple, really,
when you squint at it just right, and it's
an ending, if you stare at its ellipse long enough.
and it's all there for you to hold in your dripping palms.

midnight swims are just another way to finish
something soft and something painful, all cool
stillness and rough concrete, no love beneath its
unforgiving light, bouncing among the pool and no further.

we're not supposed to be here after dark but we have the key.
it's all off limits but we're too scared of the ocean at night
and this isn't an ending we want to put off.

what does it feel like, to drown when you can breathe?

it feels like the icy burn of a winter's night,
it feels like the longest flight you've ever taken,
it feels like the heaven of a room where no one can find you
and it's all of them at once and you won't ever catch your breath.

a pool at night before the frost is just another excuse
to wait for cold, to wait for a darker night
and postponing the drowning is like waiting for the ledge.
it's just another fall, and don't you want to get it over with?

maybe later,
said the one doing the pushing,
said the one singing the funeral dirge,
said the one who's been treading water for long enough they're starting
to sink.

now,
whispered I.

drown now, in all of the indigo light of the dark moon, and let the circle
take you.



HAIRRATIVES (REPRISE)

Each month, I press a blade against my head
and I come away fresh, shoulders blanketed

in the trimmings. Clouds cascade to the hardwood
floor. Now, the ritual is pretty much

painless no practice or even precision needed.
There's a time for sharp lines. Other times

are meant for cuts mock-up rough, home
made, a friend taking a blade to your

own private jungle. No hate to barbers,
but I would rather leave the shaping up

to the trusted. You know, it didn't always
feel loving. There are times it felt charged

without the electric accompaniment,
not fit for this, the fine work of removing.

On a summer night I cried so much I
couldn't breathe when a loved one tangled

herself into my hair. Her room felt
edged with razors, run through with a comb.

The buzz doesn't actually bite, but
I always expect it. A massage of hand-warm

metal. The things that grow
from you are often the hardest to

understand. Now, it leaves me calm
to leave parts of myself in piles.

EVERY SUNDAY, I TAKE MYSELF TO THE GROCERY STORE

In the parking lot, I am a person. In the store, I am that thing attached to the other end of the credit card. I am what I will eat this week. I am every other shopper. I start with produce, always. This is the happiest part of the store. This is where I'd like to be kissed in public and fed fresh fruit. I imagine I come home with enough peaches for an enormous pie and I turn on the tv for the weather instead of the news and I think to myself I have got to buy a bigger couch to fit all of my friends. I'm vulnerable to daydreaming in this aisle, but then I get practical with the canned goods. This is survival food after all. This is what I'll be eating at the end of the world. I am going to die – that realization drives some people to yoga. I should write a will soon. I hope I still get to go to the store after I die. Oh, look, the tuna's on sale! Next, I pretend to calculate whether or not I can afford a treat this week. Even if I can't, I always buy a treat. This is the part where I stand in front of every Little Debbie confectionary and remember what it was like to be a kid. I think as far back as I can go, and it's like fighting into deeper and deeper water but – yes, eventually I get there. In the recesses of my memory beneath the id and the superego, there are Oatmeal Creme Pies. I wipe away a tear. I keep walking. Sometimes, but much less often, I think about my future. This happens in the home goods aisle, usually when I buy toilet paper. My bucket list: I want to have dinner parties, I want to work with my hands, I want a love so tender it falls off the bone, I want to write down on my shopping list one last time everything that costs 99 cents then throw it away for good. Last is the cosmetics aisle. I think of how I would like to look. I think of how I would like to smell. I become actualized when I decide I am the type of girl that wears citrusy deodorant. Finally, I go to the self-checkout. I scan my green beans wrong and the computer summons an employee anyway. I apologize. I collect my bags. I love what I am in the grocery store. I have walked in a large circle, and I am at the center of it. I will do this every Sunday like church.

ALISON KNEELAND



RIBS

Yesterday I walked my little dog right into a gray pile of roadkill out in front of the neighbor's house, stinking and swollen up with blowflies. I got too close and breathed too hard and caught one up the nose. I stayed so paralyzed that my dog lifted up his leg to piss on me, but I still didn't move, cause I was done for if I swallowed it.

Eventually, it buzzed up so far I swear it touched brain then I spit it out of my dirty mouth, so I had room to scream *how could something so foul have been inside of me?!* And I screamed and retched til the neighbor turned on his porch lights, and I was embarrassed he might see what I puked onto his yard, so I ran home and didn't sleep all night long.

In the morning, the foul thing was gone. I wondered if it got eaten or if some things are too ruined to be useful, even to a starving animal, even if you fixed it up real nice with a side of your mom's potatoes. My heart that I threw up sat in its place, shining like a rose on my neighbor's lawn, and I hoped the HOA wouldn't be too hard on him.

I tried to distract myself by reheating leftover Chinese and painting my nails, but soon enough there was a knock on my front door. I waited a whole minute and breathed and breathed and breathed before I opened it. My neighbor was stood there, holding my heart, tied up with a little bow like that could make it any less grisly. I tried to apologize for the littering but he looked me straight in my eyeballs and kissed my loose and bloody heart, right on the blue part.

I told him *that is not a good thing to do. That is not a healthy thing to put in your mouth. If you swallow, you'll rot from the inside out.* He didn't stop, though, and it was making me mad, and nervous, cause it really wasn't clean, so I said *I will gut you in my kitchen, which is to say, I will never ever love anyone else. I want to be eaten like ribs.*

My neighbor said he knew. He'd seen me wandering up and down the street with my leash. I think he's a preacher, cause he said he would try to talk to God and put in a good word for me and ask Him how I can still be useful like this. Now we just have to wait for a sign or a famine or a rapture, so I pulled out Scrabble to kill the time and two big glasses of wine.

We couldn't put my heart back in cause I was too squeamish to see what happens to the flesh when a scalpel goes in that deep, so we made it into something else, like art, and it drips sometimes, but not all the time, so we put it on the shelf by the TV where we watch Netflix to pass the time til God answers, and my neighbor let me paint his nails blue.

Sometimes, I dream that He's finally tearing the meat off my ribs with His teeth and swallowing hard like He's the only one who can stomach it. And then He will fashion my leftover white bones into piano keys and gift them to a poor kid or an orphan who would really like to play cause God makes things into other things, like art. But I'd really need to be cleaned down to the bone first.

Other nights I dream that my neighbor's telling me I don't need to be useful to be forgiven, or maybe I'm awake on those nights. Sometimes, I can't walk my dog for days or brush my hair, and, when I open my eyes, I see the Lord with bloody lips from spitting out my rack of wolf in lamb's clothing. My neighbor is awfully sweet during those times, and he holds me all night long, so now everything feels like a prayer, and, when he kisses me, I am more blameless than a child.

ALISON KNEELAND

5pm

A Manual for Living,
a toothbrush,
makeup remover,
a tortoise-shell button,
foaming hand-soap,
stretched hair ties,
“Bottle-Blonde” spray,
stickie notes labeled with lost things,
withered succulents,
double-sided tape, and
a dress two sizes too small.
I undress in the mirror
and cup my breasts.
I am fifteen. I am unnamed.
My finger, struck in hot wax,
burns, then cools.
I write, illegibly and illegitimately,
in black, inky wax across
a blank mirror:
*Most people do not struggle
to name what I cannot.*
Illogic comparisons. Escher sentences.
I trace my fingers across the contour
of my skin, the flexing tip of soft
and hard surfaces.
No woman but in flesh.
I scrape across a flat line.
Off-brand face lotion,
a silver picture frame,
polished crystals in a smooth bowl,
cold, linoleum licking my feet,
and my exposed chest.
I count them so that they are proven,
Become soft and moveable feasts then
experienced.



Autodidact in Decline

Maybe it is strange,
me liking Solitaire as much as
I do.
I collect moments like traffic cones or pineapple slices,
and I have just realized
that I am holding the cards straight up like a
secret, when it is just me
here.

Bill Evans plays in the next room—
yes, it is not the real Bill Evans,
but a thin sheet of PVC,
turning into itself.

And the books that I love,
are just versions of myself that I
like to hold.

The playing cards watch
my fingers.

Somewhere, a spider collapses
into its shapes,
and I have forgotten the word for it.

JENNIFER NESSEL

A PILGRIMAGE THROUGH RITUALS

Daily

Trembling, I used to recite hollow words to their merciless god;
institutionalized with the same verses my ancestors heeded,
told,
“Your dead are suffering. Your dead are gone. Their souls languish.
You must pray”

Presently I press my hands together and whisper,
sensing that primordial dust around me: my ancestors
mortal by the blood in my heart and in names I echo each day

Weekly

Sometimes I linger in sadness and realize I have not seen my mom in a while
(and then seeing her is like remembering I should quit smoking)

Monthly

For years I stopped bleeding:
swapping small convenience for consternation

In part, I thought of the moon and her phases
and what I might be missing

/there isn't enough time left to see if
I might want something I have never wanted until now

Yearly

My birthday is not complete until
I shed a few tears—
(I never figure why)

These are little secrets I keep, the notes
I write to leave for myself, for when I'm left feeling lonely and pouring a drink;
I'm trying to mend
the cuts on my soul from before I ever had a body

Nightly

Bright hypnagogia caressing the folds of my eyelids
lull me into dreams of a far-off place, lush trees and soil I have never visited,
the roots that have been cut;

I am not afraid to venture further into the dark
My hands are covered in dust



THINGS I AM LEFT WITH

After Jericho Brown

Tuesday I am laid into cold earth
Blood stains my mother's left hand

Damp white tears on a cloth
Mid March the rain falls soft

I scream no mouth open sound
neck tied with a yellow shoestring

Above the line, empty of clothes
Tuesday I am laid into cold earth

NUHA FARIHA

My mother's hand left blood stains
On a white cloth damp with tears

Soft rainfall stops us mid march
She screams open mouth no sound

My father's yellow necktie hung
On an empty clothes line above

SURREALIST DREAM OF TRILINGUAL MASS IN LA SAGRADA FAMILIA

It is too early for this.
Catalan is like a fox
and Spanish like a dog sleeping on a sunny doorstep. The Bible
is unspooled before us as I do what all good immigrant kids do and take the
cues as they come.
The English, when it comes, is like porridge.

The congregation weaves the prayer around us like shoals of fish and I try not
to peek during the miracle of transubstantiation.
Some priests are good singers
some less so.
Robes grass-green and belief heaving, they raise their voices like running taps
to pool coolly in Gaudi's ribcage crypt:
the plain, traditional heart in the insane, unfurling body of the cathedral.

Communion swirls around the lagging unbaptised who have had
too much public transport and not enough sleep.
The English, when it comes, tells us how we must give it all for God
and is hardly meat-and-two-veg.

It is almost afternoon when my first miracle ends
and by the time the service has fallen like a careless shawl from a shoulder
it is enough to look at the stained-glass window and
crave new, organic lines,
stepping out into the sun and into the park.

SUPRIYA FINCH







WITCH MOUNTAIN BY DARIO ADRIAN

Haiku:
Tattoos as weapons
They see them, ink for mug shots
He wears them, homage

Leviticus 19:28 "You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the Lord."

He traced his babies names into his chest
showing the world their invitation
into his creation story
Not ritual just
Messages to his kin
Culture born and bled back to the body
his skin,
His parchment

The impotence of community
says it must be ritual
and forget they stole language
from the griots belly and now try to
sell it back as culture

Their bodies,
their canvas to sail
It's an aura portrait in blood
paying homage to the
mother
daughter
home
Their belief in something,
anything bigger than themselves and
calling their own existence into being

Some mark indelibly
the character of their resolve
Others mark the outside like casting spells
to keep inside in
Others are lost tongues and speak by scarring street unicorns into their backs
to magic the strength back to their voices
when the world tells them that they can not lift their spirits higher than their own heritage

They blacken their veins
and plunge their arms above their heads
to watch their stories surf the sky

This isn't ritualistic
It's living testimony

IREZUMI (TATAU) TSHAKA CAMPBELL



PENSAMIENTOS SOBRE CURANDERISMO

Rub an egg over my skin.

Mutter the words under my breath to draw out bad energy.

Crack it into a glass of water and eye it for any hints of ill-will.

Dare to throw Mal Ojo at me, and I return the favor with a sharp sting.

Speak my intentions into the night.

Boil rosemary in a pot.

Until the water turns dark yellow and the leaves wilt into themselves.

I let my home saturate with the masculine herb and wash my hair with it to protect myself.

My blood is woven with the rules of how I move in this world.

I think now of my grandma's altar.

Toppled with thick candles and porcelain figurines.

Our practices are a forced clash of our indigeneity and Spanish Catholicism.

In dark hours, these candles are lit.

They are nothing more than wick and wax but act as beacons that ignite.

With every act, I think of Tonatzin Coatlicue, savior of us.

It is her human face that is printed many shades lighter on the labels of these torches on the altar. It is her, I cry out to.

She continues to guide us, for we will always depend on her.

She steadies my hand to hold the pen and inspires me to open my heart onto pages.

And with her superior strength, I tell the story of my loved ones—I am tied by ancient threads to them.

Bound forever to our sacred family tree.

When it comes my time to die, my loved ones will return to help split my soul from my body.

I will follow them into starless nights.

We will hide deep in others' dreams and on the outskirts of peripheral visions.

MONSTER SLAYER

an important job that i've been tasked with

with axe in hand, i spill the black blood of creatures that threaten our town
pushing fire through my empty gun, i combust any creature foolish enough to
challenge

with my grappling hook, i block spines from one monster while tripping another
the people shower me in glory & coins but also in suspicion
seems they've heard the quote about us

but slayer isn't all i am

at home, i hang up my weapons & tools

an ash salt bath washes away the day's curses & contaminants

as my kh'root tea steeps, i go up & down scales on my pan flute

i fill the bird feeders & hang them from the balcony

i patch up any holes or burns accrued from my day

i call my mom (she gets worried)

i practice my calligraphy with the pen she gave me

i unmake my bed just enough for me to slip in

and i count the eras as i drift to sleep

he who fights monsters may become one

so i take great care in maintaining my rituals

JASMINE

CHRISTIANE WILLIAMS-VIGIL

DIVINATION

In my dreams my teeth
do not fall away clean.

They crumble like tired
edges of a rockface

leave jagged peaks
naked along gumline.

I spit earth and sandstone
mouth swollen as a desert

and when I wake my tongue
screams for water. A relative

is going to die. I sit at
the kitchen table, bite

the tree bark the aunties
have given me, as they

begin a fervent chant.
I do not question

where omens and
countercurses come

from. I gnaw obediently,
rind relenting to teeth.



MEMENTOS

In the dead of night
when sleep is hard to come by,
I search for secrets in the
bottom of your bureau drawers.

The weathered grain scrapes
against my knuckles as I make
a mosaic out of the detritus,
a picture I piece together from

your odds and ends.
The words of El Shaddai,
your morning and evening ritual,
the prayer card in your hand void

of personal intentions, conversations
only God can now remember.
Your liniment bottles sit unscrewed
and half-empty. A handkerchief

reeks of the stale camphor
and the oils have bled the numbers
written on a scrap of paper, perhaps
a birthdate or insurance policy

I will never know. The blank
spots fester in the disarray,
this game of hide and
come seek you in relics

that offer empty comforts
passed down to me. What is
a prayer card if not another
story I did not care to hear?

A handkerchief if not
a thin veil for the answers
to questions I did not
think to ask you?

ATANG; OR THE OFFERING

VERNA ZAFRA-KASALA

We gather flowers
from the garden
and light a fresh candle.
It's my turn to polish
the picture frames,
rubbing till I can see the glow
of the faces smiling up at me.

*Hello, I greet them,
or Happy Birthday or
Merry Christmas,
whatever salutation
fits the occasion.*

The plate of food we place
before them has a little bite
of everything.
We don't forget
the glass of water.

Come dessert,
we fix a separate *platito*
and are generous with the sweets.
I wonder out loud if the dead
crave for sugar,

keep my composure
when the aunties reply
the dead crave to be
remembered.

I offer them an extra
helping and a shot of wine
for good measure,
remind them that
they will always have
a place at the table.

INTO THE TREES

Masters of patience,
the endurers, with windy
hidden eyes.

Keepers of black frost and burning gales,
their long lives
spent learning earth's extremes--
the rime ice of December, or their ranks wasted
by tides of fire.

*

I've come a long way to join them here,
through years of nightmares and coma beds,
black dawns and blank pages.
From out of the long dusk
I walk over tangles of their ancient roots.
I've come to learn their question--
through deep blue and pale
yellow, their question is silence.

*

Under forest roofs I strip down my prayer.
*Never alone, here, may we never
be alone.* All my wishes
come from the first wish.
In the kingdom of cottonwoods, willows, and oaks,
I'm listening to the tiny green highways of leaves.
I've walked here from the other side of twilight
to an ancient world, the keep of the trees.

ALEXANDER ETHERIDGE



THE BIG TREE

BY DINA KLARISSE

Growing up, Sunny always took her Lola seriously when it came to things that were inexplicably rooted in the way they viewed and participated in living. Pancit and noodles on birthdays to ensure long life. No cutting hair or nails after dark. Jumping for the first sixty seconds of every New Year. Do not point at trees, in case they may take offense.

Church was a no-brainer – every Sunday since she could remember, she, Lola, and Lolo would walk hand-in-hand to St. Anthony’s down the street.

“Anak,” Lolo said to her one Sunday while they walked in bundled puffy jackets to church, “You are so special to your Lola and me. Ang aming bituin.” Our little star.

Sunny smiled and pressed his hand a little tighter. He had begun to stoop a little lower that year, his breath sometimes ragged during the morning or for the entire day. The other kids had learned not to tease her about living with her grandparents, that she smelled like moth balls and garlic and menthol cigarettes. She usually didn’t care, but during the times she did, she would make them hurt for every word against Lolo and Lola. But what had previously been sneers and jokes had recently turned to solemn stares and turned down heads whenever Lolo picked her up from school, limping along the playground with his shiny brown cane and barely being able to call out above a coughing whisper.

But this day, the day before he left them, he spoke as clear and melodic as she could remember. And she was his star, forever.

Sunny loved the gray that blanketed her city. It sat heaviest in the summers, yielding only to the howling sea winds that came from the curved bay that held their home like a cupped hand. The winds often brought a delicious smell of the sea, and Lola and Lolo would joke that the coastal fragrance was their own seaside hometown following them across thousands of miles of ocean. Sunny’s favorite part of the day was

right after getting up, when she could look out the window to the Daly City fog rolling through their backyard. Opaque white, a brightness that covered everything.

Almost everything, that is. For during even the foggiest of days, the tibig tree in the corner of their yard stood proud and unyielding to any form of cover. Its black silhouette punctured the bright gray, weaving in and out of light as it took space without apology. It was an ugly thing, its branches spread like dozens of arms over vegetables and flowers like a cloaked stranger reaching out through the mist. Its fruits grew along the branches in clusters of green, spilling growths that dropped to the ground and collapsed under her feet with sickening squelch.

Although Sunny loved church and the quiet comfort that came with prayer, she hated that every third Friday of the month, Lolo and Lola would spread a blanket in front of the tibig tree and pray for hours. They knelt along the rotting squashed fruit, too bland to eat even when they were freshly picked, and whispered in a language she couldn't understand. It wasn't English, Tagalog, or the mix of the two that the family often subsided on. Something about the tremor of their voices and the pitch of their prayer felt ancient and forbidden, its hissing consonants and deep vowels crawling into her ears and down her spine like cold water. She knelt with them regardless – whether it was out of love and obedience or from the feeling that she needed to stand witness to something unseen, she was never sure.

Whenever she asked why they prayed so intently to the tree, Lola answered with a tight-lipped smile that they were keeping ghosts at bay. “After all, angry spirits never really leave. They are our guests, we their humble hosts.”

“Where do they sleep?” Sunny would continue, giggling.

“They rest in the ground, anak. Spirits never feel sunlight and are forever weeping, and they take refuge in the roots of trees. Why do you think the ground is always damp when you dig just a few inches?”

When Lolo was around for the story, he would point his lips out the nearest window or toward the wall, wherever they were, always in the direction of the beloved tibig. “Why do you think I brought him here? I couldn't leave him to haunt your Lola or our poor neighbors at home.”

Now that it was just Lola and her, Sunny paid closer attention to the lessons on the unexplainable. It was old knowledge, things even her teachers didn't know. And there was always something new to learn. Don't wear red for a full year after a loved one dies. A moth on the wall is Mommy or Daddy or Lolo stopping by to say hi. When you're older and in love, do not marry within a year of a sibling's wedding or a loved one's passing. Don't make the same mistake.

The tibig stood in the backyard among peppers and the stubborn tomato plant that refused to grow any more than a foot off the ground, its fruits teasing small green but never ripening beyond that. From its twisted branches and the bulbous knots along its bark, it was easy to believe that such a tree could feel offended. Could feel anger. It looked like it was struggling to stay up and that everything annoyed or bothered it.

They had eloped three months after Lola's father died. A tall, imposing man who prided himself on old wealth and status, which he exemplified in a towering stone house and lush garden. A man who showed love through control and strict rules. He hated Lolo the carefree life he promised his second daughter. When her father passed, Lola took it as a chance to free herself from the life of stiff dresses and mestizo suitors that were lined up for her. She dug up the small tibig tree she had planted with her father right before her debut, the 18th birthday celebration where she was presented to society, and left on a stormy midnight.

Lolo brought the tree, roots and all, in his small suitcase when he first flew to San Francisco. Before Sunny existed. Before her parents existed. Lola was a young, newly wedded wife then, weeping for her husband lost across the ocean, chasing the promises of dreams others had sold to him.

Now that she had lost him again, Lola said it was as important as ever to continue their Friday rituals, every week now, to make sure the tibig tree stayed “happy.” The tree had been his only companion for those long years that Lolo had been alone, in this large house standing in the fog.

As always, Sunny went along with it, not wanting to upset Lola any more than she already was. So she spent hours every Friday kneeling among the rotting figs, head down over pressed palms as Lola whispered the unfamiliar words next to her. She noticed Lola spoke louder now, using each consonant to launch her voice down and up through the vowels. It created a melody, lulling Sunny so closely to sleep in its strange richness.

One Friday, Sunny struggled to keep her eyelids open as Lola prayed next to her. She stared at the branches in front of her, her eyes following each knot and cluster as they rose to meet Lola’s melody. Her vision blurred under her eyelashes and she felt the fog creep along her shoulders. Just before her lids finally fell closed, she felt the body next to her stand up and approach the branches. Sunny squinted and tensed her legs to get up, but felt stuck, weighed down by the mist now growing solid in front of her eyes.

She awoke to blinding sunlight, pouring onto their backyard as if the sun was spilling out its insides. “Lola?” She called out, pushing herself off the blanket. Fallen figs clung to her arms, and she shuddered as she peeled them off, their juice sticking to her skin and shining in the sun, emitting their familiar earthy saccharine.

“Sunny...” Someone whispered to her, not so much reaching her ears as much as it reverberated against the insides of her temples, echoing waves cascading down to her throat.

A shudder again as Sunny felt cold, despite the rare warmth of the bright afternoon. She turned toward the whisper and saw, etched into the trunk of the tibig tree, the faces of her Lolo and Lola gazing sadly out at her.

“Wh-what?” Sunny said, instantly reaching over and tracing her fingertips along their eyes. When the faces blinked, she screamed and pulled her hand away, stepping backwards onto the grass until she bumped into something behind her.

She felt the hands before she saw them, reaching around her arms and grasping her tightly. Too terrified to scream, she felt the scratching of bark and looked down to see they were tibig branches, the green fruits oozing red insides as they were crushed against her skin.

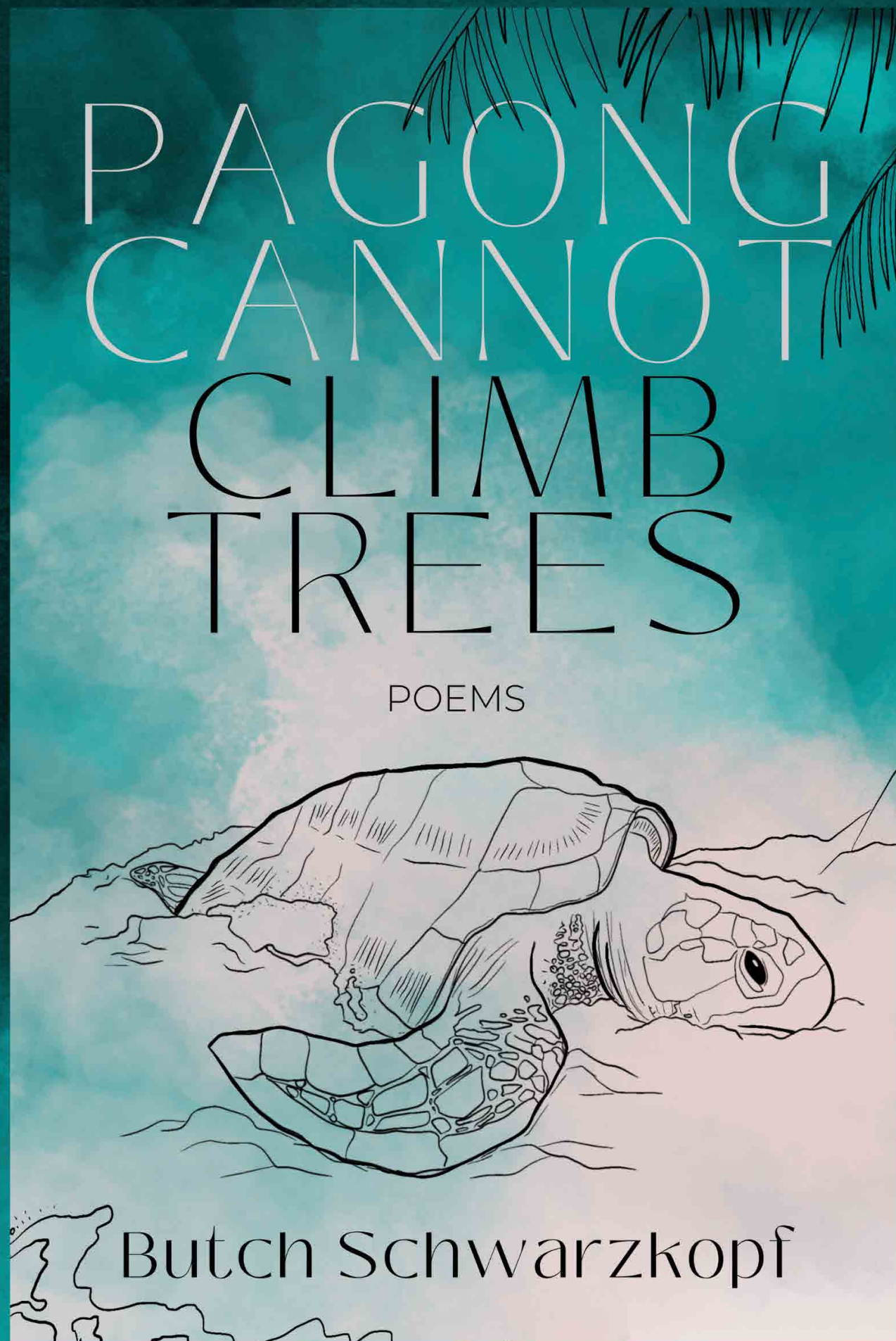
Sunny looked back to the tibig tree and cried, “Lola! Help!” Only to see that her grandparents’ faces were slowly fading into the wood. Lola’s eyes widened and her brow furrowed, shaking as the bark finally engulfed her into nothing.

The branches loosened around her and Sunny fell onto her knees, sobbing as her hands gripped the blanket her Lola had laid out just moments ago. Behind her, she felt whatever was there bending down over her hunched back and placing its coarse hands on her head.

In a voice that echoed in her mind, mirroring the consonants and wind-like melody she had heard on so many Fridays but could now feel more than understand, the creature whispered as it knelt down just outside of her periphery. “Let us pray.”

Interview with
**BUTCH
SCHWARZKOPF**
author of
**PAGONG CANNOT
CLIMB TREES**

by Asela Lee Kemper
& Nashira de la Rosa



Q: How did you come up with the title "Pagong Cannot Climb Trees"?

A: The title comes from a folk tale, "The Monkey and The Turtle," that my dad told me as a child. I'm not going to detail the whole folk tale here, but basically the monkey and the turtle deceive each other over a banana tree. The title comes from the part of the story where the turtle (pagong/pawikan) cannot climb the tree to harvest its fruit, but the monkey can.

Q: This chapbook explores grief, imperialism, and abuse among other heavy topics. Was it challenging for you to write these themes? What kept you going?

A: I think that dealing with these kinds of topics can definitely be challenging. In my own experience, I've approached writing about these topics from a place of healing, a place of coming to terms with. I think that has lessened the burden to some degree, because I'm not sitting here trying to encapsulate those heavy topics, but rather trying to heal from my own experiences. And I think that approach in itself has kept me going, the act of writing to heal has kept me going.

You know the 'men would rather do X than go to therapy' meme? In this case, X is poetry.

Q: You write about home, calling back to your family home in "Bahay." Do you share your writing with your family? Do they know about the chapbook?

A: I don't really share my writing with my family. Although, I have had some family come to performances and such, but for the most part I try to keep things separate. I mean, it's easier to write about family when they don't know you're writing about them. They didn't know about the chapbook, but the other day my dad found out about it from my sister and he asked for a signed copy.

Q: "Manuel" is such a gorgeous piece. Can you tell us how this piece came together? Was this piece written for a particular person?

A: "Manuel" was written about my brother, who is one of the people the chapbook is dedicated to. I wrote it a number of years ago and meant it as a performance piece. I can't actually remember the way it came together,

but I know it would have been late at night, with many tears, and the feeling that the words were coming at me, as opposed to me choosing them.

However, I have to credit the layout of the poem in the chapbook to one of my editors, Maria Bolaños!

Q: A poem like "Sunlight" has such strong imagery and detail about your brother. Were poems like "Sunlight" and "Manuel" connected with each other as a way to explore family relationships?

A: Oh definitely. While they were written years apart, in different circumstances ("Sunlight" I wrote as I woke up one morning, hence sunlight lol - I'm not great at titles), they dealt with the same pain, so I wanted to keep them close together to flesh out that relationship. I think there's something really interesting about writing about the same thing from different points in your life. We change, our writing does too, and so does our relationship with our pain. It's interesting to see that develop.

Q: You have created short films before making this chapbook and included excerpts from what it appears to be scenes from a film. "Act II, Scene VIII" reads almost like you're reminiscing a part of your memory. Can you talk more about this piece?

A: This piece came from a poetry grind email chain that I was a part of (shoutout to The Digital Sala) - so a lot of the credit for it has to go to just immersing myself in the words of my peers. In some ways this came from a place of wanting to write a script but also write poetry at the same time. The result, I think, is somewhere in between the two.

Not to go into the whole persona vs poet thing, but I wrote the three 'characters' in the script/poem as myself in different places - I'd say that this is where that feeling of 'reminiscing' comes from, that conversation with/in/within self. Someday maybe I'd like to expand on this script/poem hybrid and find a way to film it, but that's for another day/another me.

Anyway, if you really want to get into some poetry with a filmic vibe, I suggest you buy *The Water We Swim In* by Christian Aldana, coming out in Spring 2023 through Sampaguita Press.



"...there's something really interesting about writing about the same thing from different points in your life.

We change, our writing does too, and so does our relationship with our pain."

Q: I love the way you played with form in "Staccato." Did you experiment with any other poetic forms in the writing of this chapbook?

A: I really struggle with structure (in life, not just in poetry) but there are a couple poems where I tried to follow specific forms.

"Staccato," as mentioned, is a comma poem in the style of Jose Garcia Villa. "My people" is a tanaga, which is a type of Filipino poetry (Tanagas are usually quatrains with 7 syllable lines and a strict rhyme scheme). "B*Y*N*" is a Labra, a form devised by Marias at Sampaguitas/Sampaguita Press EIC Keana Aguila Labra.

I guess you could also say that the final poem in the collection, "Novena," is in the form of a prayer - at least it's laid out the way I read prayers as a child.

Q: What can readers expect when reading your debut chapbook?

A: Vibes. lol. No but seriously, I'm not sure exactly what readers should expect when reading *Pagong*. I think that the chapbook is very much a journey of healing for me, and maybe, if nothing else, it can be an insight into how one person deals with their trauma/grief.

Q: What are you working on beyond *Pagong*?

A: What is it called when you have 100 half-baked ideas for projects but nothing actually in motion? There is one thing I want to do, though I'm still unsure if I will, but I just came back from a father-son trip to the Philippines and I wanna write about that experience for a bit.

Q: Unrelated, but important: Do you feel connected to your zodiac sign/animal?

A: Insert crab emoji 🦀 But to answer the question, yes, I think so. I think *Pagong* very much gives off "written by a water sign" vibes.

PAGONG CANNOT CLIMB TREES IS FORTHCOMING FROM SAMPAGUITA PRESS NOVEMBER 2022.

ABOUT BUTCH SCHWARZKOPF

Joseph "Butch" Schwarzkopf Jr. (he/him) is an Illawarra (Dharawal Country) based Filipinx poet and filmmaker. His works deal with diasporic culture, colonialism, and generational trauma. He has performed as a poet at events such as Outspoken Poetics, Unspoken Words festival, and The Digital Sala's Tula for Typhoon Relief, and competed in the Bankstown Poetry Slam Grand Slam, and APS Multilingual Poetry Slam. His works have been published in the UTS Writers' Anthology, UNSweetened Literary Journal, Australian Poetry Anthology, Mascara literary journal, and Marias at Sampaguitas literary magazine. *Pagong Cannot Climb Trees* (Sampaguita Press, 2022) is his debut chapbook. His short film, "Body," was a finalist in Made in the West, Sydney Lift-Off, and Cebu International Film Festivals. His biggest claim to fame is appearing in the background of Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings for 0.5 seconds. He can often be found wandering the aisles of his local Kmart, driving to Cabramatta for late night bánh mì, or practicing Filipino Martial Arts in his backyard. His favorite word is pie.

ABOUT SAMPAGUITA PRESS

Sampaguita Press is an independent micropress publishing house based in San Jose, California. We publish works by and for artists of color. We acknowledge the intersections of identity and support the LGBTQIA+ folk/x in communities of color as well.

SUNSHOWER

dearly beloved, we are gathered
under this shower of sunshine and rain
to celebrate the love and magic before us.
though a sunshower is ideal wedding weather
for a *tikbalang*, jackal, wolf, or fox pair,
today—as far as i can tell—we're only human.

but only humans can look at nature
and turn it into something mystical. you two
fell in love, naturally, and nothing about it
was ordinary. i was a witness to
your faith in signs, how you created
your own mythology out of text messages.

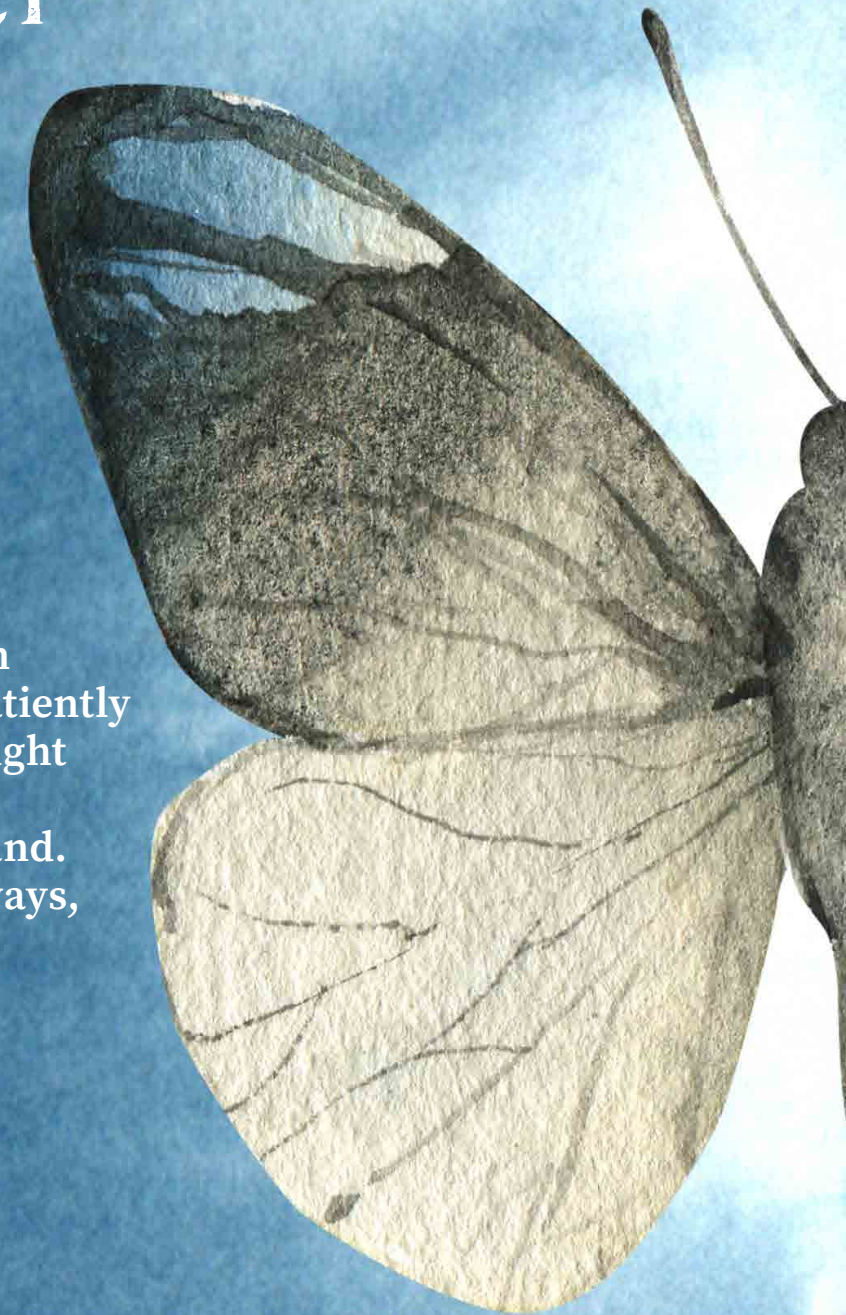
i hope that never changes. that in your life
together, you savor every moment
as a miracle. that your love prays for
whatever becomes of your bodies,
that your ribs find their way back
to the same side.

JADE P. ALBERT

THE BUTTERFLY

for my Lola


in the parking lot garden
of baguio country club,
translucent powder blue wings
fluttered across my vision.
i turned away from the sunflowers,
& there she was: floating through
the air before landing gracefully on
the bush in front of me. perched patiently
among the flowers, she found her light
& angled herself toward me
as i approached gently, phone in hand.
in one of our favorite holiday getaways,
she was just as i remembered:
picture-perfect from every angle.
this new form suits her.
her soul was always a butterfly.





POISON BELL PEPPER

You want a poisonous section in your garden but you ran out of space, so you plant bell peppers there, and it's probably fine but I feel weird eating them. You grow enough strawberries to cook one jar full of jam, and you carry it around to show everyone. I wanted to stick onions into glass jars with you and water them and see what happens, and then we'd keep the weird onion plant until it rots because we feel bad about throwing it away. We would have done a good job taking turns scrubbing the pot we could have made caramel in, and then we could have given up and stored it in the oven with burned sugar stuck to the sides. You could guilt me into riding my bicycle more often, even though you don't even have a bicycle, and you could laugh at me for wearing a helmet but I know you would worry if I didn't, even though I'm slower than anyone you ever met. I'm sorry I didn't say bye before my bus left.



LILIJA N.

PICKING FAVORITES (FAERIES)

at the first glance we all sparkle, beads
into stained glass greens, light beams
dancing in circles of leaf-friends, best
let's go to the woods together, braid
hair like children and girls

grin until your cheeks hurt, we wear
our bell-like-titter jewelry, we wear
acorn tops - tiny cruelties, beware
keep laughing at the beat, or else
we might suddenly disappear

alone, the prickling on your skin
is just a thousand of sharp teeth
alone, the prickling in your eyes,
is just this blinding sun, no heat,
we know, you'll come again, repeat
at the last glance we all sparkled, grin

TERESA ROSA

PLUCKING LIGHT BY THULANI MAKENA



BELIEF SYSTEMS

i.

My mother once had a dream that her father died the night before he did. B says the word *beloved* is reserved for someone he would die with, while H says closure is a myth. My sister asks if I believe in unconditional love & Facebook asks do I agree to the terms & conditions.

ii.

In order to stay in this country, my mother married my father. Ringed to secure an unlimited number of nights under the blue, red, white. Once, my mother had a premonition that she would die young, how I inherited my inclination toward the mystic: crystals to reflect myself back to me.

iii.

At church, my mother wore a pair of gold infinity earrings, dangling like our belief in the something-more. Owned by Facebook, Instagram lets me know they've updated their privacy policy again. Years later, my mother tells me she sold the infinity earrings to buy new treads on her tires. I was so lucky to have been born here. Like anyone, I chose not to read the fine print & pressed *Accept*.

DIRECTIONS

For my mother

I never looked like my mother. I never looked at my mother enough until I needed to look twice, until I noted all those hairs like a white growth on her head. My mother's beautiful head. My mother is beautiful when she heads up the stairs, which are hard on her knees these days;

these days, when she looks at me looking at her, I say, My beautiful mother. She doesn't believe me. She doesn't believe in her beauty the way the scale always tips in the wrong direction of her body. All that weight she carries.

I want to carry my beautiful mother away from the mirror & back to the sofa, where she can rest her beautiful knees, & we can watch another episode of that crime show with the actress who is Asian *but doesn't look it*, just so she can tell me again where her parents are from.



ALLI CRUZ

THE DOCTOR FINDS A HOLE IN MY LOLA'S HEART

& in another chamber, a valve refuses to pump blood.
a furious whirlpool commanded to turn stillwater.
the doctor compares the diagnosis to a plumber
trying to stop a house from flooding with his bare hands.

i cannot reconcile the two images: my grandmother, the sinking house.
my grandmother, whose teeth snap a baby bone in half
then opens her mouth, says: *look. they are all still there.*

in the morning, my dad helps me call Pagadian. my voice
crackles into the evening of another day.
i ask how lola's doing & mama replies,
that i should come & spend the summer at home.
is this what diaspora looks like? when the only homecomings
we make are for saying good-bye?

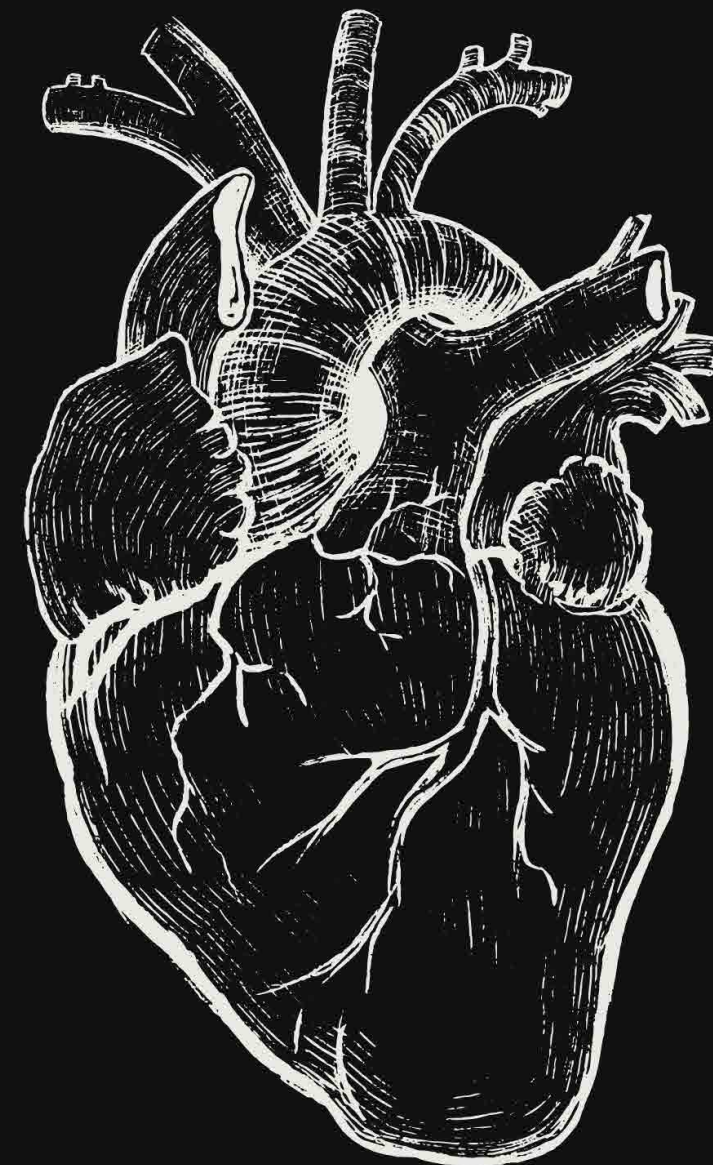
88 years of lola's life spans two countries.
sometimes this means forgetting to use spoon & palm
instead of fork & knife. sometimes this means giving
up one piece of your body at a time.
sometimes all you have is your hands.
sometimes *i love you* is the shortest ghost story
you'll ever write.

i do not think my grandmother misses that piece of her heart too much.
she has felt loss, has looked at her grandchildren
only to see the faces of everyone she left behind.

her hearing almost gone, lola screams at everyone:
the iro. the yaya. the boys on the traysiklo.
in this way, aging suits her.
she has always been louder than her voice.
a proud daughter of typhoon season. the kind of woman
who laughs & the room floods.

she cries & the river swells with reflections
of every star from here to Zamboanga.
this is the homecoming i imagine,
instead of passing small talk in a parlor full of ghosts,
water dripping slow through the roof.

D.J.A.



UNTITLED

After Phil Kaye's "Canyon"

I lost contact with my obaa-chan
for a while. My tongue got tangled
from gibberish versions of overhearing
mom's phone calls with her sisters and the
English alphabet as the sonics of kanji
slipped slowly out of me, left me
speaking in haiku. I begged mom
to reteach me her first language but she pushed
me back into a white classroom with Odysseus
and vocabulary lessons while the school's
speech therapist named Kathy stretched
the corners of my mouth for nine years until I
sounded like their version of a scholar. I can't
remember the last time we spoke solely in
Japanese. Even if I press my fingers
against a desk to draw what I wanted to say
in hiragana, I don't recognize the language I once knew.
When I asked mom to teach me her language
she looked at me,

Don't you want to survive here?

I squished my cheeks and felt the inside
of my teeth if there were any words from
my childhood left,
if I could find my voice
inside this American English mouth.

When I got older, I tried to reach out to
obaa-chan through scattered words
by little memory and whatever consonants
mom laid out for me before she shunned herself
from speaking her mother tongue.

I still can't trace the language but my voice slowly
trails back to its root word.

HIS PROMISE

The last time I felt a ghost's touch/ he broke his promise./ Back when he
was still/ alive,/ I asked /him/ if he and mom would get a divorce/because
of how loud they were whenever they/argue./ He looked at me with
widened eyes,/ "What? Why would I do that?"/ With a smile, he closed
our conversation,/ "I'm staying with you guys forever."/ That phrase felt
like his hugs—/warm/squeezing me to make sure that he was still/ here./
He said/ that we were stuck with him./ I tried to talk to him over the
phone after mom told me he/ got sick and had to stay in the hospital./
Ring/ ring/ ring/ ring—/ I hung up the phone before he had the
time to speak./ He was gone a week later./ They say that a person is still
with you/even after they are gone./ But he promised to see me graduate/
cheering me on as I walk down in my black gown to my degree./ He
dreamt/ one day/ he would walk me down the aisle on my wedding
day./ And he and mom/ retire in their log home and live together until
they leave/this earth together./ That he will be by our side/ Like his last
words/ I'm slowly forgetting/ what his hugs felt like.

ASELA LEE KEMPER



UNTITLED

After Hotel Del Luna

I still find traces of you
from the tips of my fingers. I
tried to wrap them around
your cheeks, grazing my hands
down to your neck
I kissed in the spot where you used to be.
Underneath the tree in a middle of an old,
stoned building where we hide and share
secrets, I can feel your touch
through the broken windows. Sometimes,
when I lay my back behind our spot and cry,
I would look up to the stars then
remember your eyes,
whispering your name as if
your spirit will appear in front of me.

I take a breathe as your soft light
shines down on me,
my heart is finally
at ease.

ASELA LEE KEMPER



NURSERY

For my lola

1. Superstitions: To bite your tongue is to be spoken about. When one starts menstruating, jump off the third step of a staircase for a 3-day cycle. Throw coins on New Years for wealth. Cut the rosary so someone else's death doesn't follow. Sweep only after novena. Don't wear red for a whole year. She is in all the butterflies that fly by.
2. Lola: She would have bitten her tongue when I spoke of how she passed. The Pacific Ocean bridges Ilocos' winding free hills to San Francisco's rigid gridded neighborhoods. And there by the sea is where a shop kept her title exalted as its name.
3. Crassula Ovata: A nurse in the hospital held my hand in the hospital where you laid and where I melted. I hoped my touch could be as comforting. I told this story while walking, and I saw her again. In evergreen, soft leaves held by strong sturdy stalks that grew in her own garden. They bloomed in winter, against what I had learned about this cold, unforgiving season.
4. Echeveria Lola: I said I hoped to have her green thumb while shopping for succulents. Hardy and resistant. Grown in LA. And that's when a friend grabbed a gift for me. A rose that bloomed all year long. And she greeted me with the tag.
5. Dreams: I woke up in tears like I always do, in moments where she visits in sleep. Then mom spoke of the day she would return her ashes home. I can't go just yet. I'm fighting to pursue a goal in a school not built for people like us, in a program made to exploit people like us. But she listens when I speak truth to her being.

REYNA ROSALES

Somewhere the titas still slide,
electric or cha cha, to music
that beats their hearts into one.
Like pagans they dance to Earth,
Wind, and Fire on this day,
the holiest day of the Lord.

And children with baskets hunt
eggs, painted or plastic, while
titos crack open beer and balut.
Their jokes are one language or two
or three about the still sliding
titas with hearts beating as one.

**THE FILIPINO
AMERICAN
ASSOCIATION
ON EASTER
SUNDAY
EVERETT CRUZ**

**REFLECTIONS
ON AN
UNMADE BED
MARIA BOLAÑOS**

the sheets on my bed: the topography of a soft planet
ridgelines and hills and valleys, and suddenly my thoughts
are on Mars and I wonder if this is how planets are born
too, if every celestial body is the absence of body, like god
got up one morning and forgot to make the bed
and now we are all here, unmaking, growing colder,
waiting for the end of the day



Our Echo of Sudden Mercy

Hari Alluri

BOOK REVIEW: HARI ALLURI'S "OUR ECHO OF SUDDEN MERCY"

BY NOREEN OCAMPO

I confess: my new office smells of mildew. It's an early Wednesday morning here in Mississippi, but exhaustion already hangs heavy in the air. I unload my armful of things onto my desk, pushing aside attendance sheets and twelve-page syllabi until I find what I hope will save my morning, a copy of Hari Alluri's forthcoming collection, *Our Echo of Sudden Mercy* (Next Page Press, 2022).

I start to read, and suddenly, Alluri sits in front of me, in the rickety chair usually reserved for my students. He shuffles a deck of tarot cards with practiced ease. Then, my office dissipates, and we're sitting together in his kitchen instead, the scent of mildew replaced by that of coffee:

*The easiest days begin when I've cleaned the stovetop
espresso maker the night before.*

*Most mornings the coffee grounds decorate the counter, spill,
bother my bare feet. And not just mine.*

Alluri shuffles the cards with a deftness that calms me, and I find that I'm not alarmed by the sudden change of space, only the sharpness of the grounds. A first card escapes the deck, the Situation Card, which bears the subheading, "inversion of the gaze." I'm not yet sure what to make of its meaning, but Alluri wastes no time:

You never know when the fire will ask you to be its home.

For me, what Alluri does in this first section of *Our Echo of Sudden Mercy* is urge us to subvert—or withhold—expectation, to look at our quotidian lives a little differently and find what else there is to see. I think what we discover together is both haunting and alive:

*I ask one of my demons: hold me with the precipice of you,
gathered under the constellation of migration. Make the bonfire
a laughing thing, like the ritual distance that marks each step.*

Many oppositions manage to coexist in this moment—distance and disconnect and the holding of the demons and this beautiful transformation of fire’s destruction into “a laughing thing.” Alluri invites us to take part in this remaking of the world around us, writing, “Say it: / I’m drowning. Say it to mean / drowning is a form of being held,” and it is impossible to read this collection without feeling like one’s world has shifted. This opening section in particular brings me to Bhanu Kapil’s *Schizophrene* and her cyclical return to the throwing of her notebook into her garden as Alluri uses each page to hold his own stories to a different light. As we push forward into the collection, he is unafraid to unmake and remake, and we are with him in every moment.

With that, the next card falls from the deck, the Obstacle Card, which reads, “foundations are being shaken.” I admit the ominous message worries me, but a sort of grounding pulses behind Alluri’s words. He stands with us, still in that same kitchen:

*If you ever get to watch the eggs fall as you rush them
out the fridge, crack on the lip left by its open door, spill
there and onto the linoleum as they tumble; if you towel
those eggs up, sob-sobbing the whole time...*

And we are simultaneously elsewhere, as he questions, “Is it possible that countries do not have a body the same way / my knees my hips my spine my lips don’t have a country?”

As Alluri shares the messages of this second card, it becomes clear that his words can soothe us through everyday hurt—as well as the type of hurt that should not be part of one’s everyday but is. There is no panacea

for one’s hurt, but Alluri’s words come close. Although he tells us of this “sob-sobbing,” of helplessness, missing, and all else that “towers over us,” he never lets us lose sight of how tomorrow can hold us:

*Peace be upon the surrenders I evade. I want to wake up to
the sound of my demons snoring as they dream.*

The final card of the reading, the Response Card: “when all seems too much,” unveils more of what lingers behind the other cards, pours life into questions one can’t yet answer:

*I say belong and I tell you I am
afraid community is impossible. I put on a ritual
mask and speak
into the mirror. I say mask and I mean to unmask my demons.*

At the end of every tarot reading, I hope for some sort of answer or balm or promise—but I think what Alluri does here is more powerful. The Response Card invites us to sit a moment longer with loss, pain, and uncertainty, with the way that what we “don’t know about what will happen next could fill the amphitheatre of every valley,” with “searching, widening the reach,” with “so many mothers’ griefs.”

And finally, we can arrive at someplace beautiful, someplace that can hold all of us, and I can promise that Alluri sends us off with something better than an antidote or answer, after all:

*There’s tears in our eyes just to say hello. How beautiful
the etchings of the world are on our bones,
on our work-torn muscles and the creases beside our eyes.*

Here, in Mississippi, my office still smells of mildew, but with something sharp as those coffee grounds piercing through to let fresh air filter in. I hear the rumbling voices of my classmates somewhere down the hallway. They are just as tired as I am but have found enough of a reason to laugh.



A CONVERSATION WITH HARI ALLURI: ON TAROT, GRIEF & "OUR ECHO OF SUDDEN MERCY"

BY KEANA AGUILA LABRA
& MARIA BOLAÑOS

Content warning: police violence, shootings, racism, pandemic, mild language

Thank you, Ka Hari, for taking the time to interview with us. We're super excited for our Rituals issue, to have you in it. Thank you for your book. What was the inspiration for it?

Most of it is directly a response to a series of questions that local artist, musician, and playwright, Khari Wendell McClelland, asked a group of folks—artists, musicians, thinkers, activists—and it was in one of the peaks, one of the devastating parts of the pandemic. And he asked us, *What are the essentials? How do we survive? How did we get here? What do we do now that we're here? What is essential?*

I had a conversation with the Director at The Cultch—Soft Cedar, actually—Soft Cedar is like an artist organization here that's connected to The Cultch, which is an East Vancouver artistic, theater, music hub. They have workshops and development projects. So yeah, when Khari asked those questions, I went to my notebooks. We had multiple peaks in pandemic, multiple moments when police violence led to more deaths of Black folks, Black trans folks. And we're all still remembering things like the dance club shooting, moments like that, as well as the rise of anti-Asian violence that was happening around that time in relationship to the pandemic, and then the stuff of just being in this moment itself.

And so [Khari] wanted to respond to that by asking questions, and then putting together [our responses]. It was all filmed in the space of The Cultch, two empty rooms at the time, and it was live-streamed. Thanks to multiple organizations' response to the question that we put all together, organizations like Community Building Art Works (CBAW), The Digital Sala, and even "organizations" I use loosely,

like communities and collaborations, BIPOC Writing Party, and The World We Want, are all communities that I was kicking it with, when pandemic hit, and these moments arising almost at the same time; Community Building Art Works moving their workshops online and making them free—Faith Adiele, Serena W. Lin—I mean we don't have to name every single person—they decided to do a one-time gathering of BIPOC writers, March 18, 2020. And it went weekly until a month or two ago.

So these things were happening and I was going [to the gatherings], and I got laid off pretty much the first official day of pandemic. I called in—we were being extra careful already—around the 9th or 10th, I called in, and that was it, two weeks. Yup. And I ended up taking more time than that and moving slower, going to all of these spaces where one of the things I realized early in pandemic was that writing and revision, together, for me are a need. And then one of the other things that came up with all these moments, and we'll use the word "community," we'll talk about the word itself later, but these folks coming together also reminded me that I do inherently believe that writing is collaborative always.

I was already kicking with these groups and regularly attending or hosting workshops. When Khari asked those questions, I went to some notes that I had, and I also spent the next couple of sessions that I was gathered with folks responding to those questions, and I went back and then pulled some notes. And there was a series of notes from a workshop I had given for CBAW, and a bunch of archives of my writing—I have a practice, it accrues. My goal is, if I ever feel like I run out of things to say, I can go back...and respond to those moments and try to figure out some questions I had at the time.

So I pulled up these things, and there was this poem by Faisal Mohyuddin, "Ghazal for the Diaspora," and I responded to it, when I had to asked folks to respond to it in the workshop, and I was like, *Oh wow, look at these notes*. And I looked at some from a couple of other moments. And I was like, *Okay, I'm gonna go into these archives now, thinking about that question and just pulling from what I've been writing for the last year*—because the event happened in April 2021, so it was almost like an anniversary event of pandemic. So it had been about a year since I'd been doing those things, so I just went to my notes and I pulled whatever was not already attached to something else. I just gathered it all, and I was like, *Okay, what do you want? What do you want to tell us? What do you want to say? What do you want to tell me?* And so, that's the initial inspiration.

Why did you choose to title the sections the way that you did? What role does Tarot play in your life?

I believe my original process was to do the numerology, either for the day I

recorded or for the projected day of the event (of the Essentials event), and then use that as the framework from which we're gonna respond. And so I went to the Kapwa Tarot by Jana Lynne Umipig, and it put us into The Tower. The Tower was to crown The King. So that's the center of the Imperyalista Tower, and that's where quote, "Foundations are being shaken" comes from.

In the original recording, I pull up that card. I kind of share the longer excerpt from that card. And then there's the rest of the recording, which is a shorter version for collaborative performance (there was a maximum of time). After that, you know the questions still continued to haunt, and you wonder what else comes up. And that was when I ended up dividing it into the full three sections [of the book].

And connecting that to two other decks that I find very helpful, the Sacred Symbols Oracle—let me go get 'em [gets up to grab cards]—here, their name is Marcela Kroll, I actually think she's part Pinay, and I maintain that [laugh]. I love this deck because I think a lot about the way that Tarot originally comes from Roma people, and there's so much exploitation around it, and violence is being done to them, and their relationship to Tarot, being targeted for their spiritual practices. Multiple histories and generations, including recently. And so I think a lot about that, and about trying to be careful about Tarot.

And so I feel strongly about these Oracle cards. I spend more time with Oracle cards than I do with Tarot cards, but I have a special affinity for the Kapwa Tarot because of the process that Jana Lynne went through, and the way she approaches it, I feel an alignment with and solidarity with the Roma Peoples. And I read some really strong, important pieces from Roma writers about Tarot, and there is some openness to other folks who are marginalized and face violence as a community, BIPOC folks specifically—there's some folks in their community who are completely closed, and other folks are more welcoming of the way that BIPOC folks have connected to this practice, especially as folks who don't necessarily have access to our spiritual practices for similar reasons of erasure.

And that's one of the things that Jana Lynne Umipig does with the Kapwa Tarot, is to connect back to spirituality, that is ongoing, and connect back across ocean to spirituality, and also to history. And I think it's important for me to recognize when I do all of this stuff, including other writing projects that I'm doing: that I'm writing necessarily failed and flawed diasporic versions that include that displacement as part of their being, and so my attempt is not to take on the truth of multiple communities that have ongoing Indigenous practitioners in the Philippines; my work is to ask what it means specifically to connect from a place of distance.

In another project I'm doing, tentatively called *The Living Crossroads*, that has

iterations that will show up in both—my next thing, and yeah, little pieces will start to show up—but in that project I was thinking about crocodiles and migration, and a few other things, and I was thinking about how the first beginning is still a bridge to a beginning that was before it, but also that migration is [itself] a beginning—like migration is a journey, but it's also a point of origin. Those questions will show up in that. I invoke a constellation of migration very early in the book, which, as far as I know, under almost any of the versions of the sky that I've heard of, I don't know of specifically a *constellation of migration*. I do think I'm drawn to it.

I feel like I've gone off [topic]—any thoughts or responses that were coming up for you all just now?

I am just basking...I don't mind learning all of the background! It's just so interesting, because the question was, What was the inspiration for this book, and your answer just truly says, Community. It's everyone that you you love and admire and look up to, and the folks you work with, and it just makes the book so much more special, too, because we know now—not that we didn't know before, but—we know certain names, certain decks that contribute to the love that you put together in this book.

Yeah, there's so so much, right? Like, there's even folks who are directly quoted or interpolated because that's who I was reading at the time, and if i'm reading something and I write it down, then it's in my notebook. And so when I go back to the archives of my notebook, that is sitting side by side with what I've written. Everything we've written has lineage, it's impossible not to. We're working in language. Even though we're working in languages that aren't ours, and even when we are writing echoes of languages, we may have forgotten, or not have access to, into another language. That act of collaboration is always there.

And I really like when it's literal questions, you know? That a real human being that I know and love in this city [Khari Wendell McClelland] who's got multiple iterations of both forced and chosen migrations in his lineage, asked these questions, and asked us to respond.

I will say, I was concerned that my responses were moving so small. I was really moving in these small granular-like moments, and it was personal, and I had a part of me that wanted me to make declamations, to declaim things, and to have you know, because so much of what was around it [was so big, I wanted] to have specific conversations into that; but the poems just kept resisting. The poems were like, *Some of that is for work on the ground. Some of that is things you've said and resaid and worked on, and activated in other ways. I want you to think through these questions, and these words*, the poems seemed to be saying.

As I kept pulling threads from my available writing at the time, I kept returning to those small moments. And partially because most of my world was within, from here, not far out; no matter how much was going on in the online world that I was connected to, referring back to another place, another place in the city, or down the street. It kept pushing me smaller.

That was one of my favorite things about the shape of this book, that the moments were so small. I really love pieces that speak to a closeness and reach so far, despite, or because of, its smallness. I found a lot to resonate with in these pieces. I'm still thinking about what you were saying, about how migration could be an origin in itself. I appreciate that you gave language to that idea, because that was something that I think in some ways I was dancing around when when I was trying to write. I was thinking to myself, *What if what if in between this can be a home too? What if being suspended in the in-between is a point unto itself that you can be held in?*

When you say that, it reminds me that it doesn't have to be always a declaration, it can be the being of the thing. The being of the thing can be about that. And the being of the thing can make that true. So when you say, *Can the in-between also be a home, can there be a holding in the spaces in between*, then you do the work and the poems find a way to respond to that. And if we think of the poems as living beings, then some of those beings, their being is that. The elements that make up the images, the sounds, and the the language that they're made up of, the way that they fall down the page, or the way that they're just one line along the way.

So yeah, I'm really grateful that some of us are trying to think about this because it was a question denied us for a very long time, and it is one of the most frustrating things about the expectations of—now, I'll talk about it in terms of narrative, like in terms of immigrant narrative fiction, or immigrant narrative memoir, or migrant narrative fiction, or migrant narrative memoir—I can't speak as much about the States but I can speak about stuff I've read in Canada: there's so much pressure for it to be about the irreconcilable differences and the two-ness of it. Like there's these two fixed spaces and the immigrant is in between—but the immigrant is not in between. They've already reached another place.

The phrase comes from Fred Moten—I found it in an essay when I was doing research as an undergrad like 20 years ago, and I didn't know that the name of that person would then show up later and come back and be so foundational all around me. It was a single essay where he's talking about Caribbean art, and the assassination of Lumumba, and the revolution in Haiti, and he gets obsessed with this phrase, “not in between,” and I continue to be obsessed by that. So I'm like *yes*, between can be an origin. Let's call it that origin, because we're not like a fixed third thing in between two fixed first and second things.

So I think we're working on those things, you know? And I think that folks—again, not to lump them into any kind of any kind of soup but—the importance, so much of the work that's being done around gender opens these questions in a different way, when so much of the conversation around gender and sexuality has been binary for so long; then a conversation and being amongst people starts to shatter that, then it becomes available to think about other things in multiple ways as well.

And I'm sure that these questions are also ancient. We know about third genders, and 40th genders, in ancient, ancient cultures. And so those refusals to accept static, or singular, or binary, existences, have been with us for a very long time.

While we were gathering these questions, doing our research, we found a similarly named Tarot reading called “Situation, Action and Outcome.” And the website that we found said that it helps bring insight to problems and helps focus on solutions. So we wanted to know: Was this a method you leaned on as you work through your poetry, through the grief, and if so, did this reading help with emotional grounding? How did it play into your writing process and putting your book together?

It really did. I specifically adapt that 3-card reading, and shift the language towards what I felt and feel spoke to me, and like you said when you mentioned grief, there's multiple collective griefs at play, and there's also individual griefs, like you mentioned, folks that we are close to who we've lost, or beloveds, beloveds of beloveds—my father was losing siblings, dear friends of folks I live with passed away, and then, of course the violent losses, and the gigantic, collective loss. And each of those singular violent losses speaks to an ongoing hundreds of years of collective loss are alive in that too. So when I'm thinking about grief, that's what moved it towards “Situation, Obstacle, and Response.”

I think about “Obstacle” because of Ganesh, Mover of Obstacles, deity on my father's side, South Asian side; you communicate with Ganesh to communicate with the rest of the gods. Offerings are made first to Ganesh, because Ganesh is the god of the threshold, keeps the space between the worlds. And you'll find crossroad and threshold deities in multiple ancient philosophies and religions. I think about Èṣù, and I think of Anagolay. My Apu Adman speaks of Anagolay as moving in a similar way to Ganesh and Èṣù, and also Hecate, as a holder of the threshold, as a keeper of loss. If we think about not just loss in terms of things but loss in terms of those we lose that we love, then we have a deity who must be working at the threshold.

So Obstacle Card comes up because Ganesh is a mover of obstacles, and recently I was just like, oh fuck, a *mover* of obstacles. He doesn't just *remove* obstacles; he moves them into the way also. Sometimes the response is to move an obstacle into the way. Like if the river is going to flood, you gotta move something into the way.

I've always thought of trying to remove obstacles from the pathway, but what if there's an obstacle *here*, and if you move it to *there*, it's not that you moved it out of your way, but now you see something different because now it's standing there. You know what I mean? And now if I put it over *here*, then a shadow falls a certain way, and now I'm seeing something I couldn't see before.

I love it, that's some escape room shit right there. [laughs]

[Laughs] It's definitely escape room shit, and what I may not have known I was doing when I was thinking about the Tower, like what if you move the Tower here, and some of what y'all ask [in the pre-written interview questions delivered before the call], and Noreen's ridiculously amazing review—she points that it is a holding of something in a specific light; so part of moving obstacles might be to move them in the way of the light so that light hits them in a certain way, and you see things you couldn't see before.

So the three cards—[the book] felt like it was moving in threes. I definitely felt a temporary moment of close with the last lines of the first section. It was a bit more difficult for me to find the moment of close between the second and third sections but then when it showed up I was like, *Oh yeah, that's clear*. When I felt [the manuscript] in this three-space, it didn't feel like a direct narrative arc, and I didn't want to repeat certain patterns that I've used as my structure as the shadow architecture of my previous books. And so I was like, *you've pulled these cards, you're responding to things in this way, and you've got it in three—how is it going to hold?* And when that came, it became super clear: we're talking about the situation, the obstacle, and a potential for response.

And each of those things is always all the things. There's moments of response in the first. The first card you pull might have responses in it. And the obstacle card both has responses and it talks to your situation.

So yeah, the three-card reading was one of the first I ever experienced, many years ago, and whether it was Oracle Card or Tarot, I'm pretty sure most of my first connections were through Oracle Cards. And then when you think about it in terms of grief, that's what I felt like the phrase “Outcome” didn't feel like it was holding enough for me. That's why I needed to shift it towards “Response,” because the way grief works is ongoing, and the cycles we're in are not short cycles, no matter how short I want them to seem, they're not short. So that's what called that to me. So I don't know about “solace” per se, but I know that I respond in that way, as a practice, to pull cards.

So my most standard practice when I pull cards is I just pull the cards out, and I

shuffle until they jump, and so the number of cards that fall on the table is how many cards I read. That's my most common way of doing it. And sometimes you need a bit more, when the situation is super specific and the questions are super specific.

[Showing his preferred card decks] The two other decks, Kapwa Tarot (by Jana Lynne Umipig), Sacred Symbols by Marcella Kroll, and the Asian American Lit Review Tarot—which is actually the first moment, when I went to the inaugural Asian American Literary Conference in DC, and the first time I met Mimi Khúc and Lawrence-Minh Bui Davis was around these cards, and they had just put together the Asian American mental health issue, and they had a box called “Open in Emergency” and the last line of Mimi's introduction was, “Open in emergency; we are living in emergency.”

They had a bunch of folks doing readings from the deck, and I sat down and got one, and I was like, *Okay, this is important; something is happening to me now*. And I'm so lucky that my first connections were specifically through culturally relevant responses. Like there's one card in here by Rajiv Mohabir called The Migrant, it's the third card. To be like *Oh, my God, there's a Migrant card?* You know? So this is the deck that moved me from only thinking about Oracles to thinking about interventions that we can make in relationship to these cards, and these decks.

And then my dear friend, Niki Cardeno (then Niki Silva), introduced me to the Kapwa Tarot and lent me her deck, and the first time I pulled from the deck I pretty much wept, pulling from the deck, to see—I think it was the Elder of Shells, one of the first cards I pulled—and to see she looks so much like an auntie, this full, round, brown, (even though it's in black and white) woman figure underneath the moon. And I was like, *Okay, something is here*. Someone has sat down and done the work, to do the connective work. And I think connective work is super important. And I'm hoping that *Our Echo of Sudden Mercy* is a small piece of connectivity.

I will say that I was pulling cards pretty every day at that time. I still pull them close to that, but at the time, I was pulling cards and numerology pretty much every day. So a very short, simple response to the question is that was alive for me, at the time, and it was part of my writing process. It was less a matter of, *I want to make it like this*, and more a matter of, *this is what's happening*. This is the embodiment of what that looked like.

I got that sense, definitely, from the book. I love that you said that your favorite style or method of pulling isn't even really pulling, it's just shuffling until cards jump, I thought that was interesting, because I felt something akin to that when I was reading *Our Echo of Sudden Mercy*, I was instantly reminded of one moment—in the poem (“Bless the

overflow...”), I think you were carrying a Trader Joe’s bag of trash, and then the bag breaks and just spills everywhere, and I love that moment because there was something you said—[paraphrasing], “Bless this moment for the bag breaking. But, bless all the moments as well that the bag chose not to break”—and I love the idea of cards jumping. I’ve never pulled before, but I’ve shuffled playing cards, and when cards jump, that’s just a mistake, just being clumsy, and you pick it up and you keep going. But now we see there’s meaning to that, and it’s not necessarily a mistake. There’s meaning in the movement there and in the little chaos that happens that brings the unexpected out.

You reminded me: if you don’t have a deck, and you just have a set of regular playing cards, you’ll be missing the Major Arcana, but you’ll have the full Minor Arcana, the playing card deck is the Minor Arcana. So you can just apply it. The next time you shuffle and drop cards, pick them up and see which ones they are. That’s a thing available to you, even if you don’t have the full thing. And the first time I saw them I was like, *Oh my god, these have such close overlap*. So to know that the whole Minor Arcana is held in every single set of [standard playing] cards that people play with, is wild.

I have another practice that’s connected, which is using a deck of cards to help teach me about mudras, which is an ancient hand language as old as dance, and as old as yoga, because they show up in both dance and yoga. Ways of holding our hands to symbolize certain energies and and there’s a way of connecting—certain mudras will match with each of our chakras. And from some counseling training back in the day with this cat, Harry Stefanakis, I learned that the chakras actually match up with the places in our body with the highest number of nerves, the biggest bundles of nerve gatherings are in each of them. So they’re literally the highest points of our energies. So I actually love it when some of the cards come, because then I can try and put together a sequence of mudras to connect with each chakra, and have a full moment, and that’s been a major part of the larger project I’m working on and *The Living Crossroads* which is this ongoing connective work.

That the practice of pulling cards, of meditating, of doing mudra work does help me cope in a time of great ungrounding, and in my own tendency—if I’m not careful—to move towards being ungrounded. That slow-down. Many amazing poets are like, *take any occasion to slow down, if you can offer yourself an occasion to slow down*. Whether it’s a poet who says that, or a spiritual teacher, or a deck of cards, that opportunity to stop and really reflect, I think, is part of what writing poetry offers. And then part of what the revising offers—because sometimes it all comes out in a burst—you have to sit and sift and ask questions and reflect. *What did I just do? How did that happen? Back to Khari, How did we get here? What do we do here, now that we are here? How do we become both more gentle and more strong at the same time?*

For the transcript of the extended version of this author interview, see MariasAtSampaguitas.com.

OUR ECHO OF SUDDEN MERCY IS FORTHCOMING FROM NEXT PAGE PRESS NOVEMBER 2022.

ABOUT HARI ALLURI

Hari Alluri (he/him/siya) is a migrant poet of Filipinx and South Asian descent living and writing on unceded Coast Salish Territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples and Kwantlen, Katzie, Kwikwitlem lands of Halkomelem speaking peoples. He is author of *The Flayed City* (Kaya), *Carving Ashes* (CiCAC/Thompson Rivers), and chapbook *The Promise of Rust* (Mouthfeel). Writer-director of *Pasalubong: Gifts from the Journey* (NFB/ONF), co-editor of *We Were Not Alone* (Community Building Art Works) and co-founding editor at Locked Horn Press, siya has received grants, fellowships, and residencies from the BC Arts Council, Canada Council for the Arts, *The Capilano Review*, Deer Lake, Martha’s Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing, VONA/Voices, and others. His work appears through these venues and elsewhere: *1508*, *AALR*, *Apogee*, *Four Way Review*, *Marias at Sampaguitas*, *Poetry*, *PRISM International*, *Witness*, and—via *Split This Rock*—*Best of the Net 2022*.

ABOUT NEXT PAGE PRESS

Next Page Press is an independent publisher based in San Antonio, TX. We publish contemporary poetry that is precise in language, clear in voice, and that fosters new thinking about how we make meaning in our lives. We are drawn to poems attentive to both image and sound. Next Page is committed to publishing professionally designed, beautiful books that feel good in the hand.



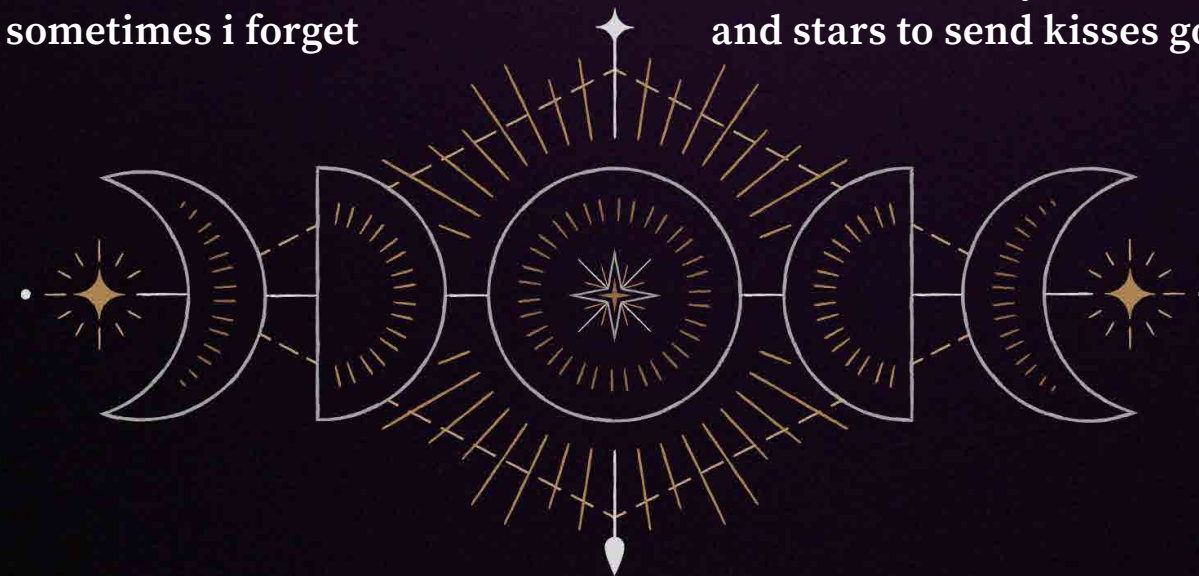
THE EARTH, THE MOON, AND THE MILES BETWEEN US

sometimes the grief of the earth between us becomes too much to bear;
gravity gathers behind my eyes and
i stare at the ground beneath my feet, these unwalkable miles,
tethered to you and stretched taut.
there is nothing on this earth that we can share;
no gentle nudge or teasing touch,
no hands pressed palm-to-palm, fingers crossed and curled
and holding on tight. i would braid your hair, if i could only reach it. i
would cook you dinner. i would -

but you're a shock of static through old speakers, a connection lost
and i'm a phantom in 240p.
a lagging i-love-you, a voice delayed, uncoupled from my mouth. you are
my soul,
split and scattered across winds i'll never see. i am your heart,
beating apart from your ribcage.
this is not the grief of letting go;
this is the grief of never having held at all. of knowing you but sharing
nothing. of arms curled around empty air, aching.
i want to hold your hand. i want to hear your laugh. i want to exist with you,
unfiltered by distance,
sharing everything we are. i want so keenly that sometimes i forget
we share the same moon.

we are spinning in distant earth-bound orbits,
never close enough to touch, grieved and gravity-snared,
but we spin beneath the same sky. i cannot reach you to dry your tears -
cannot hold you while the storm passes -
but when the sun makes its gentle return, it can warm us both. i will ask it
to shine a little brighter,
to kiss the tears from your cheeks; and i will whisper to it your favorite
colors,
so when it sets it can paint them across the sky.

and when it is quiet -
velvet night thrown wide and falling, a blanket big enough to cover us both -
i will ask the stars to wander closer, to share their glittering glow;
so when we lift our hands to trace them and hear their stories,
our fingertips may touch. worlds apart, we will find each other
on the surface of the moon, our gazes intertwined and resting, finally,
on the very same spot. i am tiny beneath it all, a speck,
a star to the stars -
but somewhere, you are too.
there is nothing on this earth that we can share.
but we have a sky vast enough to envelop us both, a cosmic hug;
and stars to send kisses goodnight.



LOGAN OLDHAM

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE LONGEST DAY AND THE SHORTEST NIGHT

for Ella

before i admit it's a problem, i tug you into my fullness,
my parched throat, my lonely aloneness.

we are together when heat bleeds through skin; soaks in
sweat; inspires the fullest movement

and the deepest stillness. we are together when i drink
myself away and spin myself dizzy

down the stairs; my headphones yanking from my ears
when i drop my phone,

screen shattering on concrete, and your tinny voice—
are you okay?

my laughter comes in waves, the ground miles away as i drop
to my knees to pick up the remains.

press my thumb against crumbling glass. fit my earbuds
back in my ears. look at the sidewalk

so long it tips sideways and then pull myself back
to my feet, back to your voice in my ear

back on the path i was following to the park. the sky so bright with stars
the clouds turn into a lamb lying down just for me.

i tell you and you believe me but just to be sure i tip myself back
to an angle and lift my camera to the skies

your throat releases the softest gasp when you see it
and in that moment i want to drink your voice

like silk. instead, i catch my breath in the midst of its run
to hide in the hollow of my chest, the space

between my ribs, pull it back into my lungs
where it belongs. i forget every word you said,

but i can feel your voice like a ghost still lingering. i clamber
my way up into my own hidey-hole,

set my festival bag down between my legs, complain about the slick metal
under my bare ass where my shorts have ridden up

and i'm too settled to tug them back down. your laugh pitching up into a shriek.
your hack when you hold your inhale too long.

both of us floating on cloud nine, at least a million miles apart
but still touching. still grasping

at straws trying to pull our way closer. our tongues tumbling over each other
in the rush of our stories. our longing

eating away at the hours until we're full and dawn's peeking its eyes over the covers.
just a few minutes more.

just a few minutes more. sneaking my way in the door, can hardly remember
which roommate i was worried i'd wake.

my thumbs growing heavy with tired as i tap my thoughts out on the screen,
wait for yours to return.

i don't remember my lids closing but i remember my body aching awake
hours later, reaching for my phone

and hissing at the catch of skin against glass. pausing to care only a fraction of a second
before swiping my way to the return of your presence.

BEE LB

THINGS THAT ARE BOTH TRUE AND FALSE

A burning haibun, after Skyler Witherspoon, after Sumaya Enyegue

I am happy. I am lost. I found what I needed. I have the whole world in my hand. right now, I mean. this living thing is easy. all you have to do is breathe. I have faith. in myself. in the world. in the concept of goodness. I try so hard to find it. I don't know how to hold it. I don't want to be here. here as in living. I want to be good. I am good. I am living. I want to be alive. saying this helps. releases the burden. clears a path forward. breathing comes easy. I blame myself. I refuse to say for what. I am happy, still. I am no longer angry. I don't know what I need. I want it to be easy. I don't try to make it harder. I crave stability. I find it mainly when I'm on my knees. I think I am good. I think this is living. I think I could keep this up forever. at least until my time is up. I'll stop counting the minutes. I really will. there is always good to be found. you just have to look. I'll look for the good in the world. I'll look for the good in myself. I want to love you. I want you to fix me. I want to not want you to fix me. I think it's possible for me to be fixed, but not by you. eventually, I think, I'll be whole. I think I'll make the most of my time. I think I'll leave something that lasts. I won't hold myself against anyone anymore. there is good in me. I don't know how to find it. I am trying to find it. I am always trying to find it.

BEE LB

██████████ I found ██████████ the whole world ██████████
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██████████ I ██████████ am good. ██████████ I could keep this up
forever. ██████████
██████████ To be found, you just have to look. ██████████
██████████ I'll look for ██████████ myself. ██████████
I want ██████████ to fix me. ██████████ It's possible
██████████ eventually, ██████████ I'll be whole. ██████████
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won't hold myself against ██████████ me. ██████████
██████████ I am trying ██████████ I am always trying ██████████

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██████████ to be ██████████
██████████ possible ██████████

RAPTURE

in a life where a love lost is a love long had
past the beyond expectation of frailty and ego
we experience this effervescent gold here, now, together
the crimson sparks rise above us all
calling the masses to devour what once breathed
life into our fleeting translucent veins
craving a taste of intellect
that has since been long obsolete

we make a world of magic for ourselves and dance innocently
in its ruptured beginnings
a world here is world won is a world worn
for all of us must call upon what lies beyond
and whisper sweet prayers in the quiet of morning
until there is nothing left
but the desperate demise of a tear lest shed
and the notebook that revealed it all

his mother wept for the daughter he could never be
the shattered glass of grief enveloped us all
bathing in the blood of the ruins of a life never had
we break our fast with the remains of the still winter solitude
what grave remains will haunt us
just in time for sunset
your still, soft, trembling brilliancy
catches the light when you least expect it

we don't have time for more glowing wounds
the lost gem festering with the fungus of immortality
i can't reach it from here
the thick saccharine syrup of honey drips from his trembling lips
tempting passions born from cloud kissed charms
remembering the status of creation
as one unavailing mass fruit of reluctance
twisting ropes into fantasy pirates
with whom only the devil has born
abhorrent falsehoods of bodies never prescribed

a pomegranate awaits in the distance
the juice of abundance almost ripe for the picking
we will build a home in a castle far away from here
where sunlight pours through the cracks in the resistance
something beautiful awaits
faltering hands that have been ready
for just a moment now
if we can wait
when heat rises black ribbons will swim into the rearview
rapidly shifting, shaping what becomes of mid-morning raging sempires
feel the liquid diamond sun rush through your veins
if this is being alive then what is it that i could become
if not infinite

HUMZA

LAST WORDS

At my funeral, please tell guests my sweetness wasn't born from flowers woven into my hair, but from gathering honey in the winter, stolen from tears flowing past an avalanche of sunsets. Tell them, "She tasted joy with a foreign tongue as she lapped water from a river she'd created." And if naysayers should arrive, remind them to find the exit from which they entered. As the sky's warm palette gives way to stars, please tell my family to find me in the last piece of chocolate cake, in the light press of a Colombian roast, hidden in seams of paintings, meandering through crisp yellowed leaves. Then, when it's over, take My Love outside, sitting together on the topmost step, whisper: "darling, remember to turn on the Lights."

JAMAE

THE ENDING

Last night I had a dream my baby was taken away, and she looked like my sister. My sister who was born when I was sixteen, my sister who is the youngest in our family, the only sister without a tattoo. My sister who is not the sibling I feel I was a third parent to: my brother who was born when I was twelve. Twelve and still learning, twelve and only recently figured out how to do my own laundry. Twelve and pacing around the kitchen, knowing if I set him down he'll start crying. Twelve and trapped on a chair with my brother in my arms, no phone, no book, nothing to do but look at him and think. I did a lot of thinking at twelve. When I was twelve we had a contest during our medieval unit in school, and I won. The book that put me over the edge was the one my brother was named for; I've never in my life met anyone else with his name. My brother was born the night before I had to turn in my book report, and in the rush to get to the hospital, I left my book in the car. My brother's birth is the only excuse I've ever made for cheating. I tried to stay up for those last eighty pages, I really did; but I was only twelve and I didn't yet know how to fight off sleep when you really need to. I was twelve; I knew nothing of need. A month after I told my teacher about another kid writing book reports for books they hadn't read, I started skimming. Next morning on the way to school, the report asked, "how did you like the ending?" And I lied. Pretended I knew. Pretended everything wasn't just beginning.

SKYLER WITHERSPOON

Our Staff

Keana Aguila Labra Editor in Chief, Founder

Keana Aguila Labra (they/them/she/her) is a Cebuana Tagalog Filipinx poet & writer in diaspora residing on stolen Ohlone Tamyen land. She works to provide a safe literary space for underserved & underrepresented communities as the Editor-in-Chief of literary magazine, *Marías at Sampaguitas* and the co-Founder of the BIPOC/LGBTQIA+ focused publishing press, Sampaguita Press. Outside of MAS & SamPress, she is the Interview Lead for the Walang Hiya Project, an arts collective centering Filipinxas of marginalized genders & LGBTQ+ folks. She is also a fellow of the Kearny Street Interdisciplinary Writer's Lab cohort of summer '21 & currently a Barangay Tanod intern with the Bayanihan Center in San Francisco. In her free time, she is a book reviewer with City Book Review. She is the author of the chapbooks, *No Saints* (Lazy Adventurer Publishing), *Mohilak* (Fahmidan Co. & Publishing) and *Kanunay*. She served as one of the Honorary Santa Clara County Poets Laureate of Oct. '21 alongside Lorenz Mazon Dumuk. Her biggest secret is that Tagalogs can't tell she's Cebuano when she speaks Tagalog. Unfortunately, all Bisayans can tell she's Tagalog when she speaks Cebuano.

Maria Bolaños Managing Editor

Maria Bolaños (she/they) is a Filipina American poet, book reviewer, and co-Founder of Sampaguita Press. She is committed to building spaces to nurture and showcase Filipinxao literature as well as Black, Indigenous, and POC literature. Her poems were nominated for Best of the Net in 2021 and 2022, and her writing has been featured in US publications such as *Touchstone*, *Cut Fruit Collective*, and the *International Examiner*; and international publications such as *decomp*, *Antigone* and *Yuzu Press*, among others. She is the author of the chapbook, *SANA*. See more of their work on Instagram [@mariabeewrites](#).

Dina Klarisse Poetry Editor

Dina Klarisse (she/her) is a writer, poet, editor, and serial procrastinator based in the Bay Area. Poetry is her way of making sense of her experience as a queer Filipina American immigrant and recovering Catholic, as well as her interest in the intersections of history, language, culture, and identity. Her work has been published in ASU's *Canyon Voices*, *The Daily Drunk Mag*, *Chopsticks Alley*, *Kalopsia Literary Journal*, among others. She is the author of the poetry chapbook, *HANDSPUN ROSARIES*. More of her writing can be found on her Instagram [@dinaklarisse](#) and blog [hellagoing.com](#).

Asela Lee Kemper Prose Editor

Asela Lee Kemper (she/her/hers) is a poet and editor. She holds many positions including poetry editor at *Variety Pack*, Prose editor at *Marías at Sampaguitas*, and Editorial Director of BuliLit Series at Sampaguita Press. She also has published works in SOU Student Press, *Flawless Mag: The Border Issue*, *Silk Club: QUIET*, *Reclamation Mag*, and the anthology *No Tender Fences*. Asela uses her passion for creative writing to open conversations on diversity and identity in literature. She currently resides in Oregon, USA with her family. You can find Asela on Twitter [@AselaLeeK](#) and Instagram [@thesakuraink](#).

Kelly Ritter Social Media Editor

Kelly Ritter (she/they) is a reader, writer, & crafter currently living life in Muncie, Indiana. She graduated from Ball State University with a Bachelor of Arts in English. When she's not reading or tweeting, she's outside practicing yoga or cuddling her kitties. You can find Kelly on Instagram, Twitter, & TikTok [@KellyLovesLit](#)

Nashira de la Rosa Multimedia Editor

Nashira de la Rosa (she/her) is an Afro-Pinay Polynesian artist from Cebu, by way of Melbourne. She has a passion for writing about culture and history, and believes art is an essential learning tool we can all use to keep these things close to the heart. She can be found on Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter [@nashxra](#)

Jennifer Nessel Editor

Jennifer Nessel is a Baltimore teacher working with ESOL students in reading and language arts. Their work can be found at *Defunkt*, *Apple in the Dark*, *Flash Frontier*, among others. They live outside of Washington, D.C. with their partner and two cats.

Isabel Angeles Editor

Isabel Angeles (she/they) is a 22 year old non-binary and bisexual Filipina writer/ artist, recently graduated from UCLA. Isabel's poetry navigates her identity as a 1.5 Gen Filipina, her experiences with queer love, and love in general. She is also the founder of the Walang Hiya Project ([@walanghiyaproject](#)), an arts collective for Filipino/a/x folks or marginalized genders and LGBTQ+ Pinoys. The collective strives to be a safe space for expression, healing, and decolonization. You can find her at [@roni.isabel](#) on Instagram and her poetry at [@buwanbeams!](#)

Noreen Ocampo Contributor

Noreen Ocampo (she/they) is a Filipina American writer and poet based in Atlanta. She is the author of two micro-chapbooks, *Not Flowers* (Variant Literature, 2022) and *Teaspoons* (Daily Drunk Press, 2021), and their poems can also be found in *{m}aganda Magazine*, *Depth Cues*, *Taco Bell Quarterly*, and *Hobart*, among others. She is a blog co-editor and web editor for *COUNTERCLOCK* and studied English, film, and media at Emory University. Say hi on Twitter [@maybenoreen](https://twitter.com/maybenoreen)!

David Anderson Operations Coordinator

David Anderson (he/him) is an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy novels. He is an aerospace engineer living and working on the Gabrielino, Tongva, Kizh land also known as Los Angeles. He is a mixed-race person of Native American and European ancestry, on a personal decolonization journey to reconnect with and honor his Yaqui, Hopi, Tongva and Chumash roots.

Jillian Rogers Social Media Coordinator

Jillian Rogers is an aspiring editor with two degrees in Creative Writing from SFSU in San Francisco, CA and Cardiff University in Wales. She spends her days as a barista, but at night she is a killer rearranger of words. Residing in Pacifica, ten minutes from San Francisco, Jillian enjoys the views of the ocean as she takes on the world through writing/editing. Her past writing internships include companies such as hibooks, Super Interns, and *Cardiff Review*.

Katrina M Social Media Coordinator

katrina m (she/her) is a queer biracial writer and poet residing in Redding, CA, USA. She graduated from Southern Oregon University with a Bachelor of Arts in English, minoring in Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies. You can find her work in various indie magazines such as *Polemical Zine*, *Silk Club*, and *Mariás at Sampaguitas*. Follow her on Instagram [@thelittlemoonbi](https://www.instagram.com/thelittlemoonbi) for more poetry, cats, podcast shenanigans, and boba.

Nikki Liv Casta Basas Social Media Coordinator

Nikki Liv Casta Basas (she/her) is a Pilipina American registered nurse and daughter of descendants from Leyte and Pangasinan who was raised in Hercules, California in the East Bay Area (Karkin & Muwekma Ohlone land). She graduated from the University of California, Irvine in 2019 with a B.S. in Nursing Sciences. Following her terms as Cultural Coordinator and Maria Clara Coordinator for the undergraduate Pilipinx American student organization of Kababayan at UCI, Nikki organized with the Bulosan Center for Filipino

Studies at UC Davis and with the Northern California Pilipinx-American Student Alliance (NCPASA). Here, she headed NCPASA's internship program as part of her position on board, and partook in the Summit and Community Action and Dialogue committees. She is a member of GABRIELA Oakland and is a performing artist with the Kariktan Dance Company based in Concord, California. An avid writer, Nikki finds catharsis in journaling and poetry. She is an admirer of musical theatre, long drives, Cinnamoroll, and various art forms.

Eric Asuncion Social Media Coordinator

Eric Asuncion (he/him) is a pop culture essayist, comic writer, and Social Media Coordinator of *Mariás at Sampaguitas* and Sampaguita Press. He is the co-director of the BuliLit Zine issue, "Nostalgia is in the Heart," which is forthcoming Fall 2022. He is a graduate from San José State University, holding a Bachelor's degree in English. His work may be found in the "CAMP: Glitter in Our Eyes" issue published by *Mariás at Sampaguitas*. As a writer and creative, he caters to the audience with a keen attention to detail, as well as the ability to use insight to simplify otherwise more complex ideas.

Wednesday Artist

Wednesday is a Filipino illustrator and designer from the Bay Area. She loves bright colors, doodling, and educating on the wonders of art. She's currently working towards her BA in design studies and has been featured or affiliated with platforms like LEAD Filipino, Southern Exposure Art Gallery, Queer Asian Social Club, Pinayista, and more! When she's not illustrating, she enjoys her time running at the park, drinking coffee at her favorite cafés, or hanging out with her loved ones. Her can find her on Instagram [@wednesdaybabyblue](https://www.instagram.com/wednesdaybabyblue).

MLOU Artist

MLOU (they/them) is a Queer, Trans & Non-Binary Pilipinx/o artist. MLOU likes to draw silly little bunnies and make art out of their feelings. Their work ranges from detailed repetitive line work, comical bunnies, and zines about their personal life. Their passions reside in art, mental health advocacy, and LGBTQ+ education. Their work can be found through Twitter & Instagram at [@MLOUTHEARTIST](https://www.instagram.com/MLOUTHEARTIST) and through linktr.ee/mloutheartist.

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