

VOLUME 40

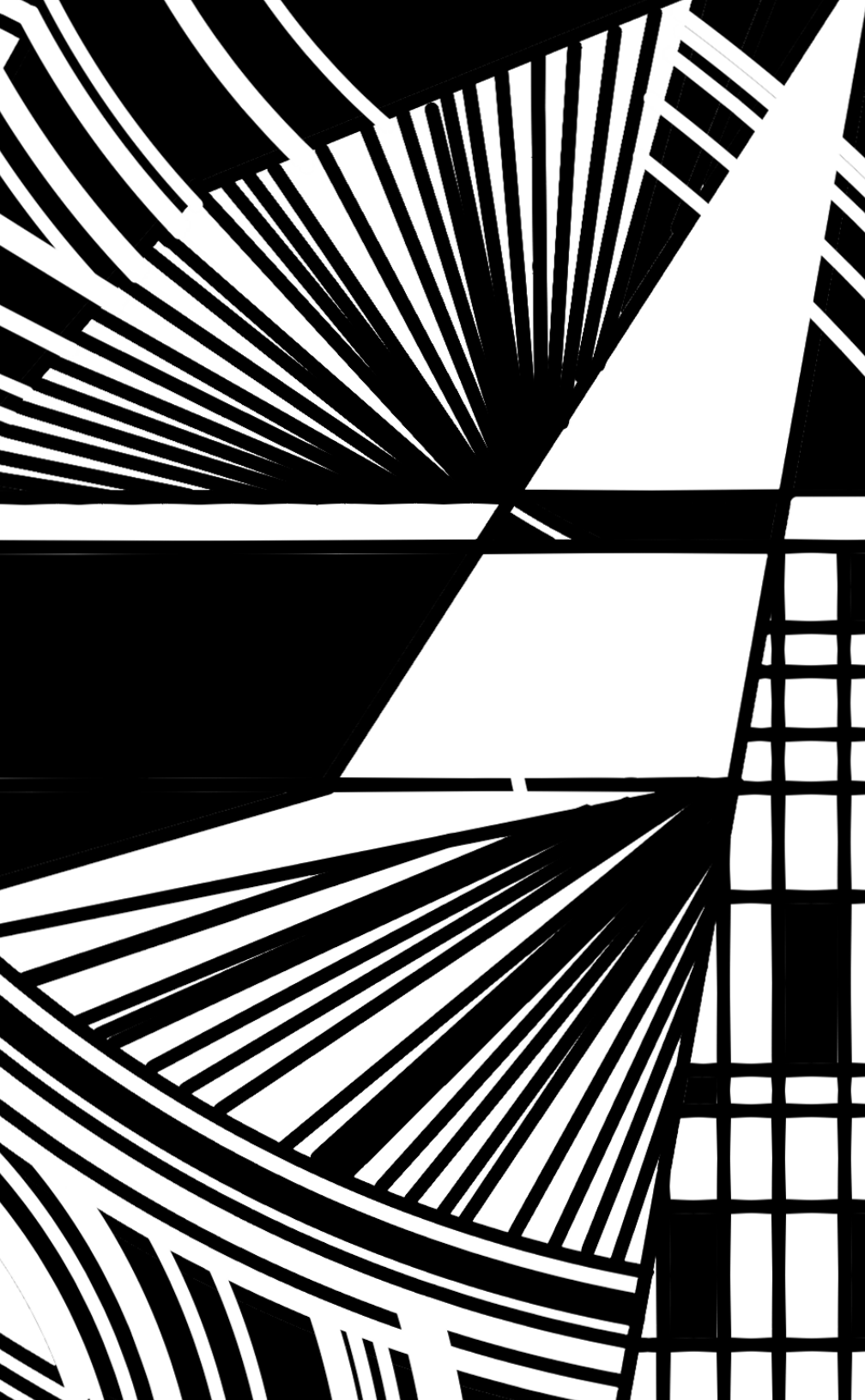
THE CAULDRON

KALAMAZOO COLLEGE

THE CAULDRON

2019
2020





Staff

FACULTY ADVISOR

Oliver Baez Bendorf

CO-EDITORS

Phạm Thu Uyên

Guilliana Jew

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Mireli Hernandez

POETRY CHAIR

Paige Chung

FICTION CHAIR

Mireli Hernandez

NON-FICTION CHAIR

Nehe-Miah Scarborough

ART CHAIR

Elioenai Quinones

Committee Members

POETRY

Karina Pantoja

Emiliana Renuart

Joseph Ney-Jun

Yung Seo Lee

Francesco Giuseppe-Soto

Addisyn House

FICTION

Hannah Rainaldi

Shannon Carley

Emma Fergusson

NON-FICTION

Karina Pantoja

Talea Fournier

Liana Dunietz

ART

Mattie Del Toro

Angela Pastor

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank:

Our Faculty Advisor, Oliver Baez Bendorf for his guidance through curation.

Bruce Mills for his continual support and belief in the magazine.

Aaron Coleman for the dedication in his role as Divine Crow Judge.

Brian Dietz and Jon Collier for their mentorship throughout our induction as a student organization.

The Office of College Marketing and Communication for design of the magazine, and their never ending support for this organization year after year.

This year's staff for their presence and perspectives.

About the Cover: Elioenai Quinones

I wanted to create fragmented images of paths. What really stood out to me in my meeting with the editors was the word navigating through the material that was presented, so I wanted to work with landscape.

COVER ART

Untitled by *Elioenai Quiñones*

11. A Third Eye *Mansi Dahal* **Vibbert Award Winner**
12. Bugs for her *Maci Bennett*
13. Only as Good, Only as Strong *Emma Fergusson*
15. It's Not As Bad As It Seems *Karla Navarro*
16. Dinner Preparations *Danny A. Galindo*
19. Hijo's Sorrow *Francesco Giusseppe-Soto* **Divine Crow Winner**
20. A Love Supreme, Pt 1 - Acknowledgement *Ashley Ver Beek*
21. Things I wanted to tell you while you were unavailable *Maci Bennett*
22. On the Wayward Path Home *Coronado*
23. The Good Deed *Emma Fergusson*
26. Hoops *Vivian Enriquez* **Divine Crow Winner**
27. Gaagiizom *Sophia Hill*
29. 0 *Karla Navarro*
30. At the Well *Audrey Honing*
31. i tried to get high off lilacs the other day *Karina Pantoja*
32. better than my father, mama said *Aarzo Qureshi*
35. lion on a scratchboard *Vikram Surendran*
36. theater of disappearance *Addisyn House*
37. cold reflections *Coronado*
38. five heads reaching skywards *Audrey Honing*
39. i look at my instagram profile and think what if *Francesco Giusseppe-Soto*
41. Don't be like this *Isabella Yeffeth*
42. i remember *Morgan Acord*
43. a prayer for *Ynika Yuag*
45. Cheetah *Madeline Earl*
46. David and the town *Savannah Dobreff*
50. Mi madre *Vivian Enriquez*
51. Coke *Asante Soloman*
55. (un)documented *Karina Pantoja* **Divine Crow Winner**
57. Old Money *Madeline Earl*
58. have you tried meditating? *S. Whitfield*
59. an answer for my sisters *Ynika Yuag*
60. Fold *Rebecca Chan*
64. When i was *Aarzo Qureshi*
66. Chan, Cynthia *Rebecca Chan*
68. thousand/separate/sentences *Mansi Dahal*
69. On Icarus regarding theorems *Sophia Hill*
70. Greyscale Galaxies of Granite *Cecilia Barkume*
72. Unsettled *Ashley Ver Beek*

Divine Crow Awards

The Divine Crow Awards are given each year to three exceptional pieces in *The Cauldron*. A writer from the extended Kalamazoo community judges the pieces blindly.

This year's judge is Aaron Coleman, a Kalamazoo College alum. He is the author of *Threat Come Close* (Four Way Books, 2018) - winner of the Great Lakes Colleges Association's New Writers Award - and *St. Trigger* (Button, 2016) - winner of the Button Chapbook Prize. Coleman is currently a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature and Translation Studies at Washington University in St. Louis.

The recipients of this year's Divine Crow Awards are "Hijo's Sorrow" by Francesco Giuseppe-Soto, "Hoops" by Vivian Enriquez, and " (Un) documented" by Karina Pantoja.



Stephanie Vibbert Award

The Stephanie Vibbert Award is given to one work which exemplifies the intersection between creative writing and community engagement. This award honors Stephanie Vibbert, a senior English & psychology double major who died in a car accident returning from a peace march in Washington D.C. in 2003. Stephanie's life was passionately devoted to both creativity and to community service. This award was created to encourage Kalamazoo College writers to use their creativity to reflect upon and explore issues of poverty, human rights, sexual orientation, race, class, gender, and cultural diversity.

The recipient of this year's Stephanie Vibbert Award is "A Third Eye" by Mansi Dahal.



Editor's Note

UYÊN

I am thinking about the work we do, why we do it. As editors, we have had the power to read stories that were shared by our community at Kalamazoo College, and decide the stories we want to hold on to. This is the work. Thinking of Chimamanda Adichie, I am reminded that I have lived through so much violence of the single story(ies). Thinking of Leslie Silko, I remind myself that as long as I remember the stories, I would be okay. Thinking of Dr. Reid Gómez, I remember that as much as we have to bow to the established power, we're also the future of power. This, is the why.

Now, you, the reader. What would be the work you do, and the why?

GUILIANA

The process of curation for The Cauldron this year has been frustrating, overwhelming and healing all at once. Being a student led group, we have a lot of expectations placed on us, everything from the subject material to the cover to the process of curation is underneath a lens for people to see. Last spring, in one of our earliest conversations, Uyên and I discussed what changes we wanted to see in regards to the magazine. The biggest change we wanted to implement was to make the magazine more accessible, from our transparency as an organization to our outreach through art and writing events. Our biggest struggle was with securing funding, and it made us think about the future of the magazine. Often, we worked with the idea that this was going to be the last year of the Cauldron.

So, who are we doing this for? For the people who need to share their stories. For the readers who diligently pick up new copies of the Cauldron every year. For ourselves, as the editors. We recognize our positionality as queer people of color navigating this space and our obligations in letting people's voices come through. We've spent many nights cramped in Uyên's living room laughing, crying, talking and planning for this magazine. We are proud of the work we have done with the organization as a whole, and we hope it has shown.

A Third Eye

Mansi Dahal

Red. Black. And Gold. A third eye. And a circular nose ring. The long slender strokes of black I drew for *kajal* is sharp. You would feel the cut if you stared at it for too long. The eyebrows are poignant. The center of attention. Just how I want them to be. And the eyes? They are not symmetrical. This gives me another reason to like the nose. I don't have to draw two noses and worry about their symmetry. But eyes are still my favorite. You don't have control over certain things, do you? I have not drawn concrete lines around her face. Just the patches of gold mixed with red forming an oval structure around the white blank spaces. I don't think I can ever look like *Kumari*. But I still think I am a goddess, in my own way. In a way every woman is. The red is evenly spread around the lips and forehead, around the third eye. I have the tendency to save red for special occasions. The flag of Nepal is red. Nepali's bravery is red. *Dashain's tika* is red. The brides in Nepal wear red. Their desire is red. Their rage is red. Their destruction is red. Their creation is red. I created this painting in my first year of college. I had the audacity to paint *Kumari* in this tiny canvas with the free paints they gave me. And hang it in my room. And expect not to miss home. Funny how I carried it from dorms to apartments to houses. In my fourth year of college, it still hangs against my blank grey wall. And I still expect it will help me not miss home. Sometimes when I look at this canvas it reminds me of the first postcard I ever sent. It was of *Kumari*. I left it in a wooden bed frame in a post office in Nepal with two big stamps on it. That's where they asked me to leave it. I was worried if it would even be received. Luckily it was. I wonder what it feels like to get *Kumari's* face in a picture and not a canvas. If her *kajal* is still sharp enough? Are the eyes symmetrical now? If the painted third eye looks weird with the other real ones? I don't think he remembers the postcard now. But I do.

bugs for her

Maci Bennett

it isn't healthy, things she's been doing
lately; the mixed-metaphors and walking
in circles in grocery stores—she's done
this all before, years ago, weaving a careful web,
a comforting safety net to catch
her grief, a slippery thing, but she's alone,
the only spider that hasn't buried itself under
scorching beds of dry sand, desert feelings
tried holding her but she evades capture
lapsing eyes and hollow cries and
all the fireflies glow for her at night
committing suicide in windshields
and porch lights, I—
 never asked her if she was alright

it isn't healthy, I know, but her heart
lately, hasn't been beating right
squirming behind the glass case
like a worm freshly pinned through the middle
put it on display while its life fades
our love, she claims, is the drowned
body of a dragonfly caught in a pool filter
spinning, spinning, spinning among dead flies,
a travesty to see perished such a beauty
and the stinkbugs, she says, are pilgrimaging
to purge their souls of sins
but the holy city's closed its gates
so none of the pilgrims will be saved
they wander and wonder, weak and weeping
to be let in, to be let in... I
 never asked her if she was okay

it isn't healthy, these fantasies
lately; caterpillars become butterflies
and butterflies become starlight
to live in Mason jars like memories,
hole-punched lids so they can breathe
like the night we strolled in the park
it was pitch-dark, a dream, a joy
 to rest her head on my shoulder and later,

to find her asleep between my arms,
body melted and malleable from such love-making, she
only had peaceful dreams; now, she
cries in her sleep no matter how I intertwine our
limbs, a configuration of trauma and pain these
days I don't ask why she's breaking
 afraid to know if maybe I'm the reason

Only as Good, Only as Strong (Excerpt)

Emma Fergusson

He didn't move, couldn't bring himself to lift one foot—so solid and stubborn, turned to stone—and couldn't remember how to—couldn't remember what it was like to learn to walk, couldn't recall the basic mechanics of the movement, had never needed to. He watched the doorway. He could only see the cupboards and part of the counter beneath the corner of the window. As he stood there, the light itself grew brighter and warmer; it seemed to pour out from the kitchen like smoke billowing in from a campfire. It got in his eyes, irritated them—the way looking straight into the sun burns the eyes deep and white—overwhelmed him, because no one could look straight into the sun—could behold the magnificence that streamed endlessly from its burning core—a beauty too celestial, too heavenly for those who tread on the earth. He rubbed his face with the palms of his hands—expected to find the golden soot clinging to his skin. And then, just then, she tumbled into view.

At first, he couldn't see her; the window lit her from behind, her features dissolved into sunlight, and the tangled mass of hair blurred around her head in a magnificent ring. Though he couldn't see her face, he knew her instantly and where she'd come from. He became aware of his own heartbeat—aware in a way he'd never known before, aware in a way that made him too aware of being alive but also too aware of that distinct possibility of death: so close and yet impossible to comprehend so long as that rhythm continued to thump away, continued to beat at the walls of his chest, continued to alert him painfully, repeatedly, to the seeming perpetuality of his own existence.

She seemed to be floating. Floating, floating, upward, toward him—and then she tumbled. He couldn't reach her in time. There was a terrible splash and the water tickled his ankles and he couldn't move. Instead, the world moved. Instead, he was somewhere else. He was giving Josie a bath, washing her arms and her face and the spaces between her toes. She was splashing in the tub. She was putting up a fight. But she was smiling too. And giggling. And it was lovely to hear that cadence again—the one by the boy-prodigy composer in the tiny powdered wig. So lovely. He tipped a half-filled cup of warm bath water over her in one thick, solid stream. She tilted her head back and gurgled at it. She thrashed around and swatted at his arm. She knocked the cup out of his hand. It plopped in the tub. She screamed with laughter. He shook his head and went to grab it—the sleeves of his button-down rolled up to his elbows but already soaking at the cuffs—and she splashed at him. She laughed. He made an angry face. She flopped down into the tub. He grabbed her by the ankles and tickled the soles of her feet. How lovely. He'd forgotten.

He opened his eyes—hadn't realized they'd been closed—and the light had gone. The room was grey. Perhaps a cloud had moved across the sun. The house felt cold. It looked cold. It sounded cold. He heard that dull plunk in the kitchen—the dull plunk of the water from the leaky faucet in the sink of the kitchen. It was not a musical sound, just a sound—a sound as any other sound. His heart felt very still.

She'd gone. And she hadn't left a trace of sunshine behind.



It's Not As Bad As It Seems

Karla Navarro



Dinner Preparations

Danny A. Galindo

The clock in the far corner of the room runs fast, and ticks louder than its tocks, but it reads 6:23, so it's approximately 6:13, meaning? Meaning he has still... still 47 minutes, roughly, before his mother comes for dinner. A dinner he hadn't planned for. One he only now is returning for, with his arms full of groceries, key jammed into the side door. A dinner he doesn't want to make, but he's still rushing inside to drop everything clumsily onto the countertop, and trip over untied shoelaces of scuffed boots that haven't seen the light of day for several weeks now. He rolls up his sleeves-

"No," His inner voice stops him, panicked and quiet, hissing in the back of his skull. He remembers the dull ache under his sleeves and shakes like a perturbed cat caught off guard, moving to gather his groceries and begin cooking. He goes for the knives, old friends with their familiar glint and weight in his hand, and again blinks himself out of his stupor as he goes to wash them and then the fruit and veggies for the salad. He won't eat it, but his mother surely will.

He goes to chop, quickly, and once again his mind trails off. The ticking of the clock matches the pace of his chopping, almost growing louder, almost growing closer. He thinks he feels his arms growing slick and warm and-

He jolts when he hears a timer go off. He checks his phone as it shrilly chirps and screeches some annoying default tune at him, buzzing from his pocket. He puts down the knife next to the full salad bowl, fingers intact, and turns off the timer for the rice cooker that he'd set on his phone. When did he even put that rice in? He forgot. He would buy a real, good quality one, but he doesn't have the funds. Or that he necessarily wants to use any of the funds he does have. It'll all just go to waste, he worries about that daily, but... Anyways, he has sushi to roll. In his periphery the clock reads 6:50, his head double, triple checks as he paranoidly checks corners and shadows as the sun sets. (It's really 6:40, once you consider the way it runs away with time, stealing precious seconds and-).

The stick of saran wrap against his fingers, the callused tips tugging at the edges as he presses down, wraps it in a towel, like sheets over a corpse- He rolls the rolls, rolls the rolls, rolls the rolls in the old (but clean) towel, the *fwap* of the finished roll coming back out sharp against the silence of the kitchen. He should turn on some music.

With the sushi rolled, veggie and fish nigiri, some maki with shrimp and crab and whatnot, the usual that he knows he likes and hopes his mother won't gag over (that's why he got the salmon, he hopes she'll eat it all so leftovers don't go to waste, it's not like he'll be around to finish it for her, or that he even wants to, she's such a judgmental, controlling, manipulative, bitch-)

The doorbell goes off and he nearly drops the plates he was setting out, stubbing his toe and biting his tongue to keep from cursing loudly. He's alone, it shouldn't matter how loud he curses, but he feels like he's being listened in on. Unsure if whether it's his mother from her commute over being aware of his delinquency, or some deeper recesses of his mind and the shadows creeping in—

Blowing out the air slowly in his frustration, he flexes his hands and feet and cracks his neck, going to the door and opening it up for his mother.

When he opens the door, she greets him and hugs him too tight, strangling, breaking bones, killing-

"Hey mom. Come on in. I just finished with the food. Did you hear if dad was going to make it or not?" He extracts from her jaws of life and closes the door behind her, static and fuzz closing in as his mother begins to speak and he just thinks to the bathroom and the mirror cabinet and the tub and the balcony and-

"Yeah, mom. I missed you too. I'm doing fine. Let's eat, I'm starving."

hijos sorrow

Francesco Giuseppe-Soto

at six years old
i was hungry
so i peeled an orange

i used the knife madre always used
when she chopped the carrots
she put in our caldo
except i cut
the bottom of my palm
and i peeled my cascara
all the way back
until there was holy flesh

this right hand is no longer soft

and i cried for a mother's sleep
until there was a bowl of caldo
in front of me

at nine years old i don't know how to deal with pain

i devoured the bowl to the last drop of broth
and i kept devouring
until my breasts were big
enough for concern
and my stomach
was a matter of size
and only size

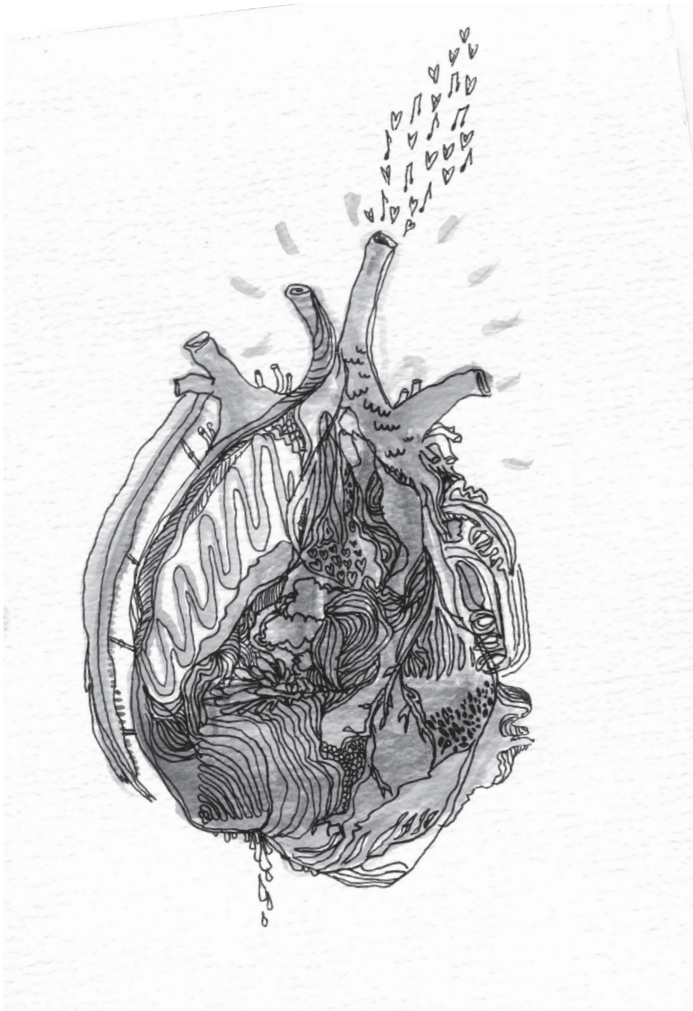
the night me and my body said enough
i let out a hollow cry
it sounded like asking for help
it looked like pinched stomach rolls
on a kitchen countertop
the light of skin with enlarged pores
my stomach the tender meat
to be chopped
into small thinly sliced pedazos

when i picked up madre's knife i was
no longer hijo i became
bloody
something like carrots
bloody meat

*this is not skin this is
never skin these breasts are
weighty this stomach longs freedom*

A Love Supreme, Pt.1 – Acknowledgement

Ashley Ver Beek



Things I wanted to tell you while you were unavailable

Maci Bennett

Centuries ago, a witch-hunter tossed women out of windows, and if they flew, they were guilty. “There were also outright quacks who claimed medical competence they did not have” (Richard Keickhefer 63). Enzymes get lonely too. I can’t be your reason. You can’t be my answer. Any woman can fly if you throw her hard enough. “This is beautiful” (a boy from my creative non class, referring to my piece during workshop—it was a success). Trust can feel uncomfortable. But good things can feel uncomfortable too. I love *you*. My grandmother’s roommate passed away on Monday. My mother found me morbid when I said, “Good. She wanted to die for so long.” Imagine menstrual blood for aphrodisiacs. I’m learning; I can’t control your drinking. I can only control myself. “If an even number result, the patient will not escape” (89). The body provides friends for even the loneliest of enzymes. I *love* you.

On the Wayward Path Home

Coronado

Home is aroma's lingering longing
Home's liquid luck, like laughing
 Home bites at depression's leftovers
Home, so desperately clinging on a full moon's mausoleum
 Home never knew a graveyard would grow from their tears
 Home, as if time drank from it's nectar
Home, as if death never knew of it's desires for an end
 Home, si mama voy a regresar
 Home, lies in the fly's eye.
 Home picks prickly pears on time's mouth
 Home feels flowers flow from fragrant memories
Home never tells me it needs... me
 Home says to make a group chat called globalization, wait, nvm it got hacked.
 Home is a fucking car horn that does not stop ringing
Home said their zip code told it "go fuck yourself"
 Home does not understand how numbers were tattooed on it's soul
 Home had a soul?
 Home says "Aniin"
 Home lives entangled, like a visceral laugh
Home,
rest now,
you are on my back,
waiting,
when a Full Moon
stays,
in our dreams.

The Good Deed (Excerpt)

Emma Fergusson

"Are you cold, Mary? You've got your winter jacket on, don't you? You've still got your jacket on. Been wearing it for months and you're still cold, aren't you?"

Mary tilted her head up, her face all wet and her hair stuck in clumps to her forehead. She nodded at Sasha with a sniffle. She wiped her nose again, and Sasha turned her gaze toward the street—toward the cars dashing by. Mary picked herself up, leaning forward on the pavement and heaving her body to a standing position.

"Atta girl," said Sasha. Danielle watched her too.

Mary looked toward her backpack, hanging helplessly from the thorny bush by its straps.

"Maybe you oughta give me your jacket. So it doesn't get caught in the branches." Sasha's face was straight. "Come on."

Mary looked to Danielle, searching for something like validation for her distress. Maybe for help. Danielle looked away.

"Gimme—" Sasha snatched at the arm of Mary's coat and she jerked back, avoiding contact. "You can trust me, Mary. Don't you know you can trust me?"

Mary's face was hot and wet already, but soon she had hotter, stinging tears staining across her cheeks. Sasha grabbed at her again. This time Mary shrieked, but her vision was too clogged to judge Sasha's movements. She leapt and grabbed onto the sleeve of the coat and began to shake Mary's arm out of it.

"Ow!" Her arm was twisted and tugged and finally bent backwards as Sasha removed the garment against her will.

Sasha wrestled the jacket off her and tore it out of Mary's grasp with a snap. Danielle jumped and clapped her hands over her face. Sasha held the coat out by the sleeve and Mary watched it dangle as the damp air snaked its way around her. She shivered in the t-shirt of her P.E. uniform. It was blue and red with a bobcat for school pride.

Sasha had a wide, white grin on her face. She let the red coat swing back and forth, back and forth. A minivan buzzed by and the coat swung toward it, as if under the influence of magnetic attraction. The wind began to pick up, and as Mary held her arms close to her bony chest, Sasha allowed the coat to ripple like a flag toward the street. The wind pulled her bangs out of her face and suddenly her eyes were visible, though guarded by the wide lenses of her purple frames. They were tiny and black and reminded her of the shiny eyeballs, like ball bearings, swiveling around in the skulls of the rats she had researched in science class. Some rats—mostly the wild ones—hunt and eat small mice for survival. Mary planned to write a whole paragraph surrounding this fact.

The Good Deed (Excerpt) *continued*

Emma Fergusson

"Would you cut it out?" cried Danielle. Her face was pale, and she didn't seem to mean what she'd said.

"What," said Sasha, "you think I'm gonna drop it or something?"

Mary's teeth chattered and she dropped to the ground to wrap her body around itself.

"Goodness! Doesn't anyone have a sense of humor anymore? A bunch of babies—"

Just then, an old red truck clattered past. It had a tall antenna with a purple smiley face topper on the end. The coat was caught up in the pull of the truck and slipped just slightly out of Sasha's grip. She snatched it out of the air before it had the chance to escape.

"See!" she yelled. The traffic was roaring, and Mary covered her ears. The world would be muffled from then on.

"Stop it, just—" but Danielle's voice was swallowed up.

Sasha swiveled to face her. "You have something to say to me? Think I'll drop it?"

Danielle shook her head no.

"Do you want it?" She held the coat out to Danielle. It was limp—like the skin of some poor, exhausted animal.

She shook her head again.

"I'll drop it if I want to drop it." She turned back to Mary. "Get up or I'll drop it! This time I'll really drop it!"

But Mary wasn't there. She couldn't hear. She was somewhere else—perhaps in the thorn bush with the used tissues. She rocked back and forth, back and forth on the pavement.

"Don't believe me, do you?"

This time, Danielle yelled. She bellowed. "We believe you, Sasha! Just quit it!"

Mary looked up. Her eyes were silent.

Sasha smirked at her and, in one swift, fluid motion, flung the red jacket into the street. Mary watched it soar and plummet. It dropped so suddenly, like a great bird shot down mid-flight, and spread its sleeves like wings. The driver of a white vehicle—beat up beyond recognition of make or model—who was startled by the child-shaped flare suddenly sent soaring across his windshield, tore the car out of its path and veered off into the next lane, where he smashed into the side of the car passing there. Sasha screamed and covered her mouth. The next car plowed into the back

of the white one as the coat laid itself to rest on the hood of the second vehicle. Smoke exploded from the hood of the first car and billowed out, dark and grey, straight upward, and vanished into the sky. Mary watched the flicker of blue and red, blue and red, high above where the smoke swirled and disappeared, but could not hear sirens or the screech of tires all around. She did not hear Sasha's scream or Danielle's stunned calls for help. She heard only the tittering of the little birds, high above, bouncing from branch to branch.

But they were not the kinds of birds who preyed on fish or mice or even rats. They were not the kinds of birds who dropped down and plucked small dogs from the earth. They were only the kinds of birds who gazed in amusement at the scene below, who called to each other across great distances, across telephone lines and gas station rooves and crashed cars, with nothing more than chatter between them, expertly stripping bark from tree branches and collecting strings and long blades of grass and pieces of plastic wrappers to fold into their nests. Spring had finally arrived.

Hoops inspired by Clint Smith's *Drone* Vivian Enriquez

these hoops are heavy/these hoops are heavy with stories/they have been taken away by teachers who thought they were inappropriate/these hoops are gold/they shine in all forms of lighting/they capture all the reflections of people--men--reflections of men who harass/those who ogle at this body/who assault in the streets/these hoops are strong/they have fallen off because of viscous make out sessions/graceful grinding on the dance floor/these hoops are cheap/cherished and protected when I couldn't afford another pair/these hoops are agile/they glide through the wind/tilt when the bus stops abruptly/sway as I shake my head no/these hoops have seen it all/the glare from a cop/the boots of ICE/the stares from whites/these hoops are heavy/these hoops are nice/these hoops are mine.

Gaagiizom Sophia Hill

After Grandpa Jim heard about the stitches,
I received a package by mail—a carved feather
sanded smooth, with no hint of a splinter and
just big enough to hold in my palm.

In those days, piles of wood shavings
slept at the foot of his chair; I loved
watching them grow with each turn of his wrist,
as little by little the block in his hand

fell away to reveal what was left. I wished
each time for the end result to be some new
toy to cherish and play with, but each time
I received a story about the Bear, the Turtle,

whatever animal he had carved, before
watching him gently place the work
on the top shelf, out of reach, with the others.
“I can teach you, my child, but you must be patient.”

He handled the whittling knife with
unparalleled skill, could precisely preach
the purpose of each x-acto blade for
shape, size, sharpness, saying always

start small, but I was
ambitious



0

Karla Navarro



At the Well

Audrey Honig

I can't stop writing love poems
for the girls in the bible.
Is that a sign of something wrong with me
or something wrong with the girls,

or the ghosts who dismembered the girl
in Gibeah? This morning, I pretend
I'm leaning on a well in Jerusalem,
well before Jerusalem was how it is today.

And at that well,
I whisper with Devorah.
She's a bitch so I like her,
but she's not the girl I write love poems for.

She tells me the judgements she's made
under oak trees, but only for the sake
of something interesting to say.
I will forget these secrets.

I write a poem for the girl in Gibeah:
I know her well. I give the poem
a pretty title because she didn't get a name
like I did. Now I tie a red, satin bow

around the parchment
which is really just paper. "Her body
knows how to search out kings:
and the ghosts can't tell elbow from rib." – I write.

i tried to get high off lilacs the other day

Karina Pantoja

because the peonies made my tongue swell up and
the hydrangeas made me forget my own name.

so i decided to try the lilacs because that's the color i painted
my room with my sister when i was seven and she was nine.

i thought the color would wrap around my insides
and make me feel like home.

instead my organs felt heavy -- my lungs weighed down
with dirt. i coughed up the stems and tied them into a crown --

put it on my head and tried to feel royal. it worked until a crow
swooped down and snatched it off. its claw snagged my temple,

blood dribbled down; collected in my cupped hands until i prayed
it into wine. drank it down smooth. stained my teeth red.

i tried to walk home but couldn't remember the way,
so i pulled out my hair and let the wind take it,

hoping one day a piece of me would know
the touch of my mother again.

“better than my father” mama said

Aarzoo Qureshi

he treats you good
better than mine
my mother says

a special,
reserved
sort of hatred in her eyes

eyes i do not have

her husband,
my grandfather

yes,
my father treats me good
when i cry
find
when i cant talk
cant scream
cant talk about
cant find the words

when i
the
cant
the
hurt
and
the
pain
mama

yes mama
he treats me good

yes, he treats me good
twisting what few words i have

shoving them down my throat
like fingers

wriggling and thick and hairy
down down
my throat so i can't
 fight

with all my words
thoughts

and i am left numb

yes mama
he treats me good

better than yours

who killed your young self
in quick,
merciful slaughter

you, lamb-like
swan-like
he killed you quick

while mine
does not kill

just cuts

cuts

cuts

hacks me I am silenced with a booming voice
hurts me with thick
 hands at my throat
and leaves to bleed

me, bear-like
beast-like
it's a slow pain mama

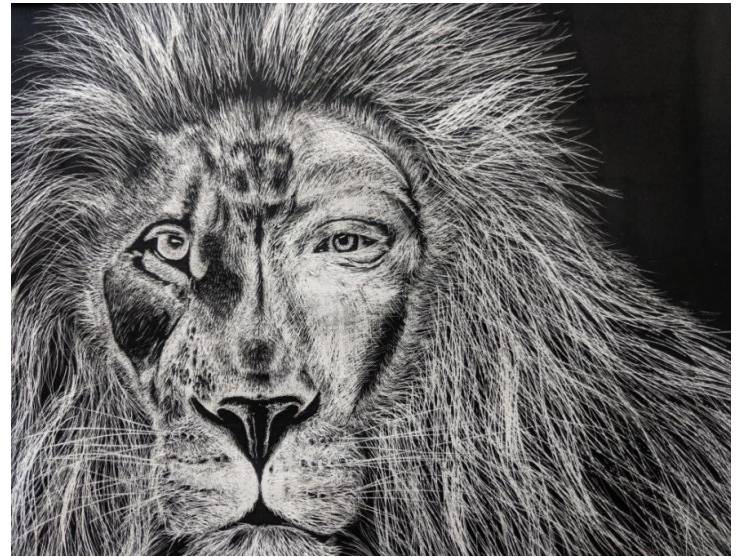
but sure

my father is
kinder, better indeed mama



Lion on scratchboard

Vikram Surendran



theatre of Disappearance

Addissyn House

what is beautiful?
robotic arms reaching towards brambles?
negative ten degree industrial refrigerators?
the quiet, all consuming nature of technology?

you cannot run.

skeletons die the way they are born: in milky smooth gel
and crustaceans are preserved with marble cake,
avoiding the meat cabinet.

beauty has swallowed us whole.

Cold Reflections

Coronado

I slipped on Ice again, fuck this snow, desperation is one step away from self-sacrifice. I checked myself in the mirror, anxious, that I dropped my dignity during the fall. I was relieved that the ice didn't break, and would have ruined another late night hookup. I even brought wine this time to make myself look good. Only my mom's god knows why... It didn't break in the fall.

I was walking on thin ice toward another grindr hookup. Somehow I never broke it cause my desperation made me a meticulous fool. I got up to his house still looking at myself in the mirror. I guess I just settle for the white guys who don't call me papi, look at myself in my pocket mirror right before a hookup, and I give it to him so he can look at himself. I wonder what he sees... maybe white jesus? He was laughing when he was looking at himself in the mirror. I don't know whether he is laughing at himself or was happy that he could share his white savior dick. I never know, it always surprises me the reactions I see from people. I mean it's my mirror, but I can never see what they see. Someone cried one time, because it cracked at the sight of themselves. They kept looking through the cracks of their own ego. They couldn't see themselves, even through my mirror.

The house broke into pieces after I left the front porch. I remember now what happened to the wine while I was walking back home. I was looking at myself in my pocket mirror for awhile, drinking it after I slipped on the Ice. I was happy for a moment looking at myself, admiring my reflection for once. My mom always prayed that I would love myself. My desperation made me self-sacrificial fool, I am sorry, ama. I know this isn't the type of altar you built in my heart, I am working on it. Oh yea, the white guy called me saying "I am sorry that I called you papi, I really enjoyed looking at myself through your mirror though, hit me up whenever you want!" I left my mirror in the place where I can see my mom's god. I walked away while the ice behind me broke into pieces. The ice I walked on now was just a little bit thicker for me to move forward.

Five Heads, Reaching Skywards

Audrey Honig

I'm eight and no good at being eight--
as one of the girls who cries too easily.

I build a crooked tower of plastic things I find, like the robins
at the window, who stack one new nest every spring onto a pile.

They teeter on the edge of the old nests and I worry.
Soon five pink heads reach skywards, gasping.

I bet I could balance this old tower on my shoulders forever...

I'm twenty and no good at being twenty—
still one of the girls who cries too easily.

These days, I often find myself praying
but I can't remember all the words.

I babble along with the early morning beaks: "Hallelujah."

i look at my instagram profile and think what if

Francesco Giuseppe-Soto

in ten years i'll feel important
enough to place a bed sheet
under my name call myself
writer or like *pet*
maybe something quirky because
i can finally be taken seriously
as a writer if not a son of someone
i remember only in Ramon Ayala songs
i'll have antique sapphire tethered to the last letter
of my name crinkled in attention
i can learn to love and not fear
my profile picture will plaster
my pinto skin in ivory worth tapping
except in this business there is no ASAP
Rocky holding bras because that's dehumanizing
only pics of Mitski because she's indie rock so
it helps my tunnel image in looking pretty and pinto
calls it

self growth

calls it

fostering whiteness that's appealing

calls it

the Mexican Chicken Noodle Soup for the Soul

trust me i know there's no money
in this my mom never fails
to remind me that lawyers are the soggy
breadwinners in this fantasy are mierda
because *i've never felt this alive!*
if my flesh could recite a sonnet it would
be Rossetti à la mode
but *no brown boys get to escape the barrio*

so

i keep wondering what i must say goodbye to
if i want to be a pet
my first job turns dust
my brother still never born
friends that say the n-word because they grew up
en el barrio, their hood of choice
are still in the valley in my medulla

i look at my instagram profile and think what if *continued*

Francesco Giuseppe-Soto

i'll strive to wash out the brown and become white
rice was always my favorite side, not quinoa
no carti no sade no benito no

do you know where do we go from here?

i'll ask the white suited man when i get abandoned
on the elevator or the figment he won't recognize
i used to have natural curls
hazelnut mocha peonies
tussled on temples
i swore it was natural
i had black now blonde faded frost

will he know that i wanted to look pretty?

in the future i'll say *fuck*
filters because i'll have the liberty
privilege of being
pompous pretentious patronizing
but for now i'll keep this image
of playboi
of my buchanan's
of my reckless browns
ode to the reckless browns!

Don't Be Like This

Isabella Yeffeth

It's your wedding day. Don't be like this. You're supposed to be happy. You *know* you're supposed to be happy, and you guess that you are. It just came as a shock, that's all. You spent your whole engagement assuming that this would end before it actually began. You spent all of your engagement assuming until she said "I do." Then it hit you.

You're married.

How do you feel? How does she feel? You look your wife in her eyes and she mirrors your expression. You assume she mirrors your expression, because Rose kinda looks how you feel right now. A little shocked. A little confused. Like she'd been betrayed by her own tongue with those two simple binding words. It kinda stung. Did she really not love you to that extent?

Did she really love Erin that much?

If you're being honest, you kind of feel like a villain. Like the jailer of a princess who's being kept away from her true love. You know why you feel this way. You see it in Rose's eyes when she looks away. She knows you know. Does she know? It seems so obvious to you, but maybe they think they're being subtle.

Erin is not being very subtle right now.

She looks kinda gone. Like she's watching a sad movie the rest of us can't see. Why did Rose even invite her? She must've known how much it hurts to watch the woman you love get married. She looks so much like a tragic heroine, at the lowest point in her narrative before she gathers her strength to defeat the villain and win the princess. The feeling of regret swells in you before you can stop it. The room is filled with impenetrable silence that fills your ears and brain with cotton. You want to say that you're not a bad guy; you're not the villain, not really. It's not your fault that your wife doesn't love you. Maybe it's society's fault, for forcing this role onto Rose so much that she has no choice but to follow through, resenting you for it. Maybe it's your families' fault, for pushing two kids with no concept of love or commitment together with off handed comments like "what a cute couple they'll make" and "they get along so well it must be love". Maybe it's her fault, for not saying no when you asked for her hand. Maybe it's Erin's fault, for falling in love with the same woman you did.

Maybe it's your fault, although you can't picture that quite so clearly.

When you first put the pieces together, you considered stepping down. Telling Rose that she should follow her heart, wherever it may take her. You pictured your whole speech every day at work, and every night you kissed her when she welcomed you home. Every day your heart swelled with love and you just couldn't bring yourself to break your own heart. Does that make you selfish? It's just human. You're only human. How could you be expected to make such a big sacrifice? You love your wife. You want to support her. You want her to find love.

Can't it be with you?

"You may now kiss the bride."

I Remember

Morgan Acord

“Don’t hit Elvis”

Connotations and appropriation

Narrow minds idolizing Bush the same way I was expected to worship Christ in white-washed
in the shade Southern Accent walls.

Or Mega-Churches where a man who looked like a text-book Spainard smiled at my mother’s
funeral.

Scooter to ankle blows.

Juice boxes slickening my tongue while the air-conditioning chilled my wet body.

Her rules,

Written in Down River Royalty script,

Picking up the former early 2000’s perfect life,

Throwing it to the curb,

Like a promising-at-the-time purgatory.

My home,

crayon smeared and remaining shouts from birthday parties,

Football games,

Hallmark Christmas evenings laying out spoiled milk and dry carrots,

In the morning knowing it was Daddy who took a bite,

But still joyful snuggled between Mama’s breasts,

drifting along like a beer can off the side of a highway I still find comforting.

Doorslams and pleas for me to be nice.

Will the moss, ivy, and cobble-stone roads in fairytale books that were never there, ever comfort
me again?

a prayer for

Ynika Yuag

god maybe I stopped loving you a while ago but
his sudden missingness cracked me open and
I found lost pieces that I had not touched in years including you.
maybe I have nowhere else to go
because for so long I prayed for peace but it has only led me here.

and when I offer people the sharp parts of myself that I no longer want,
I am told my sadness is just as sacred as my joy.
so maybe I should start praying for the ugly.

god give me the unimaginable, gut-punching days
where the weight of guilt is all 140 pounds of myself and the bed
give me the nights where I think of everything I should have told him
and the forgiving sunrises that follow

give me the days where I have no choice but to hold my own hand.

god I hope the heartbreak is not all behind me.
I hope I am still deserving of the kind of love that makes me feel like the
world is ending when it’s gone
I hope for the privilege of grief.



Cheetah
Madeline Earl



David and the Town

Savannah Dobreff

Bubblegum

The carnival would always come to town the last two weeks of October and vanish the week before Thanksgiving. David, to this day, isn't sure it was real, but he also hasn't given it enough thought to Google. What he does recall of it was two grown men, two forms he's labeled as "dad" and "uncle," spinning the teacup in a blur. The world became a blur of light and color, phosphorescent and psychedelic; a painting that shifted and breathed as the world bent with the dizziness of his mind. A figure like his sister blinked into the painting, across from him and not as enthused to be in a world without steadiness. A sigh from a mouth full of gum.

Jane Doe

His grandma has a pet deer. A doe wandered in her open back door when she was bringing groceries in; and with no herd in sight, she took the little one in. She got a collar, a large bowl of water that his grandma exchanges twice a day, the entirety of the garden and the grass in the backyard, and painted nails from David and his sister. She could sleep on a mattress Grandma left in the living room if she wiped her feet on the mat first, if not she was on the other mattress in the shed outback.

Crushed

David was on the set for yet another episode when, at the age of six, he developed his first crush that he knew to be a crush. An actress in her early 30s was guest starring on the third episode of the show and, unlike most of the adults up to that point, she wanted to talk to him. She liked hearing about his day and school and his stories and his grandma's garden. They would laugh at each other's jokes and she would tell him the simpler parts of her day. His stomach soared and his cheeks burned whenever he saw her. Her bits in the episode were filmed and she made sure to give him a real goodbye, taking the warm wings with her and leaving him crushed.

Marbled

On New Years Eve, every year without fail, the Polomas bake the largest cakes imaginable. Though there is no need for them to craft such marvelous creations, since they own the only bakery in town, they live for the smiles they receive. What started off as trying to bake something the size and height of a dining room table transformed into cakes the size of trucks, semis, houses, townhall. In order to avoid waste, the entire town gathered to eat and laugh and take more than enough cake to fill their freezers for months to come. The cake was baked in parts, parts that suited the needs of different people, because the cake was for everyone. David always got chocolate with cherries.

BLC

Everyone loves to swim in the southern half of the lake, dubbed GLL. The

GLL is crystal clear, you can see the bottom, the fish, the plants. It's always a comfortable temperature and even the most tepid of swimmers jump right in. But the northern part, BLL, is avoided by everyone in the town. It's just as clear, just as calm and an equally as perfect temperature; but no fish swim there and no plants grow there. Anyone who has accidentally swam beyond the mythical L line has talked about feeling immediate dread, deeply drained, as if they couldn't be happy ever again. They swim back as fast as possible, almost panicked, almost like they're being chased. Above BLL is a cliff, dubbed BLC. The people that come to town and ignore the many warnings, both verbal and physical, about the northern half of the lake and its cliff are always found on the banks of the northern shore. They're resting like they laid down on their backs to sleep, but no footprints lead to or come from them. Their bodies are always blue, like they drowned; always still damp, like they are freshly out of the water; always the same perfect temperature as the water.

David remembers getting a call, hearing *I'm at BLC*, and pedaling hard down the winding roads, his reflection flitting in puddles from spring storms. He remembers jumping off with his hands still on the handlebars and letting the bike drop at the edge of the grass slope to the lakeshore. Remembers skidding down the hill, on the cusp of tumbling, toward the damp form with raven hair.

70s Ink

Grandma was sad when she couldn't find Jane one morning. The doe had never left the yard before and, when two days passed, Grandma accepted that she was probably never coming back. So David took his grandmother to a tattoo parlor, where she got her first tattoo: a tiny doe on her wrist. Later that same night, Jane returned just as Grandma was getting ready for bed. She sniffed the old woman's wrist before curling up on her mattress to sleep.

Pass Time

There's not much to do in town when you're under the age of sixteen. The abandoned three story house was originally the hub of the town's street artists, the inside a completely different world that the outside hid perfectly. Soon a community of young people brought game systems and crafts and poems and snacks, and the home became their world. David's grandmother had donated twenty tubs of cheese puffs and David was one of the graduates of the house that dropped off old clothes every other year to those without. The police know about the house and how it's a haven of non-illegal fun for dozens of kids, which is why they let the kids stay; and the town council knows about the house, which is why all the utilities were double checked and work perfectly. But the kids know the town knows about the house but don't say anything, and they're content with that.

David and the Town *continued*

Savannah Dobreff

Pick

The bean fields west of town were witness to many-a-hand holding couples. David's first time there was with his own person of interest. They plucked reds, garbanzos, kidneys, and pintos; hands slowly moving closer in the dirt and leaves until they walked with muddy fingers intertwined through the rows. David slung their bag of beans over one shoulder and bumped the other playfully into the raven-haired man who was barely shorter than him. The man looked down with red cheeks, telling David to keep his bumps to himself.

Crows

The yearly crow migration was upon the town: phone lines, rooftops, car roofs, fire escapes, light posts, awnings, backpacks, fire hydrants. The town is dusted in a snow of black feathers and feces for a week and a half, covering the week of the migration and the half a week of vacuuming every square inch. The birds don't swarm people with food or the crumbs they leave behind. No snapping or cawing at passersby. They simply sit and rest, plucking loose feathers that glide on the breeze. Kids collect the feathers to masquerade as crows, to see if they would notice another in their ranks. Mothers roll their eyes but then sneak a few to stick into their felt hats. The scary part is when they leave and arrive; blocking out the sun and sky with their numbers and the whirlwind of wings that shakes the town and has shattered a few windows on occasion, though that is covered by insurance in full.

David sees the man, then a boy, for the first time during the moments of the arrival. He looks at the short dark hair and at the broad shoulders tucked into a zip-up hoodie, but he sees the deep bark eyes that reflect light better than the snow. The wind wisps the litter from the edges of the road, tossing it here and there while the sound of the flock rolls through their chests. Everyone knows to cover their ears. The world is swallowed and left without the sense of sight; and, like a yawning breath, it returns. A crow is perched atop the man-boy's head, its head cocked sideways at David. The man-boy chuckles awkwardly, glancing up tentatively at the bird. It caws once at David before taking off, in a surge of warm wings, for another perch. David walks up to the man-boy with his hand already extended.

Dirty Knees

David's sister drunkenly kicked him in the shin as she passed. He limps after her, swearing just as hard because he doesn't understand why she's kicking him for this, again. She's storming out the backdoor of Grandma's with a half-empty forty, mimicking him in a mocking voice. She swigs, picks up a stick to swing into tree trunks and smacks the ripe tomatoes into paste. She asks why he doesn't care like she does, why he gets to have an infinite future and she doesn't. Tomato paste splatters her face and forty as

she downs three more gulps. She liquifies the next with a hard downward slam. He asks what she means, snatching the branch and throwing it out of her reach. She goes for another drink instead. David swipes the bottle, tilting its contents into his body. She asks why he still doesn't care that their parents are dead, why she has to carry all the grief alone. He shakes his head at her and she wipes her tomato hands on the knees of her jeans. An embrace with her head tucked into his neck; he doesn't always say how he feels. But she knows David hates tomatoes.

Bricks and Bones may Break what's Sewn

The man was sad in a way David understood. He'd be swallowed by bouts of hollowness that would make it difficult to leave his home. David's sister would also slip into darkness from time to time; he himself would too, though he won't say this away from his pillow. The man had only recently begun to walk again after the car accident that had almost cost him his legs, and David was loving, as he always was. The man decided to walk along the brick road that wound through town towards the GLL/BLL, gently so as not to jostle his rods too much. He saw a small girl skip to the Bee Tree with a piece of bread in hand. She said please and thank you when the bees slathered it in honey. He remembered loving their honey in his yogurt as a kid, though lactose was not as kind to him now. After a half a mile, he felt sharp pains in his legs, hunching his back and sharply sucking in air. A pair of women notice and help him to a nearby bench. He insists he's fine and calls David. The women leave as David takes his place next to the man on the bench, questions on his tongue. The man presses his palms to his eyes, his breathing uneven and ragged. He tells David he is sorry that he is not the same man. He apologizes for many things he should not and for the pain he has caused, and so David places a kiss on his temple, uttering back *but you can never hurt me*.

BLL

David remembers skidding through the sand, it cutting into his bare shins, to his bones, as his hand flies to the neck of the man. The stillness of the water, the silence of the sky; pressing into his throat, coaxing its air free. The man's eyes snap open, the warmth of summer trees look to him with a wet sadness David wants to hold in his chest. David stares at him in complete disbelief and the man responds that he's simply been sweating on the sand and could not bring himself to swim. Drops pepper David's shorts before he yanks the man up against his body. The man whispers his apology to David's neck, whispers that he will get help. David thanks him, his eyes glazing over as he looks out at the water. His fingers claw deeply into the man's shirt and refuse to let go.

Mi Madre
Vivian Enriquez

YO MOMMA so loud you'll miss the trumpets from heaven if she speaks
YO MOMMA so pretty she stops the metro bus by batting her eyelashes
YO MOMMA so enchanting all the leaves on trees shut up just for a second as she walks
YO MOMMA so caring she cut up fruit, delivered it to you, and made sure to skip the jicama
YO MOMMA so tough she wins staring contests against spiders and all their eyes
YO MOMMA so smart she scammed the SCAM LIKELY and evangelized the caller
YO MOMMA so complex she will dance the cumbia but not listen to it
YO MOMMA so talented she made a DVD player work without all the cords attached
YO MOMMA so strong she be driving eighteen wheelers across the USA
YO MOMMA so multifaceted she knows people from all types of crowds in LA
YO MOMMA so honest she tells you when you don't look right
YO MOMMA so hurt she lets her own traumas manifest into yours and suppresses both
YO MOMMA so traumatized that you hold her fears to your chest for her when she's not there
YO MOMMA so humble she thinks you are doing better and bigger things

But yo mamma doesn't know, you could never compete will all the things she's overcome to get you here.

Coke
Asante Solomon

Time was passing by pretty slow until this man walked in. The man has a square head and these deep brown eyes that were almost black. He is wearing a suit that did not make noise as he was walking. I noticed that because all the men that came in here with suits made noise with their movements, so his suit must have been expensive. He was holding these bouquets of yellow flowers and seemed to be waiting on someone because he constantly glanced at his watch. The man stood out at a cheap place like *Daisy's*.

Patty came up to the table he was at and took his order. He's giving Patty a smile that doesn't sit right with me. No one in their right mind would smile like that if they were nice. The only people who smile like him are the ones pretending to be. It wasn't the way he turned his lip upwards and showed his unnaturally white teeth. It was the oozing confidence, the glint of predatory in his eyes, and the way he shook Patty's hand. He grabbed her hand and put his other hand on top of her already grabbed one, and gave a firm but gentle shake. A sign of dominance. It was the day that I knew that I would see this guy more often than not.

Patty left to retrieve his order and I had gone back to studying him. Now, I'm a simple person. I usually mind the business of folks I don't know, but this guy just sparked my curiosity like a moth to a flame. Patty came back with his order and left as soon as he assured her he wouldn't need anything else. Even what he ordered is peculiar, a salad and water, who eats healthy at a bar? To be honest, I didn't even know *Daisy's* had salad on the menu. He ate his food in a way that showed he didn't come to a place like this often, but he was confident enough to be here.

...
It was late at night and *Daisy Dukes* is closing up, but the mysterious guy is still waiting in his same spot. My Ma's shift was over, she worked overtime today, and I knew that I had better start getting up to head towards her because she would definitely be tired. I was walking up to the front of the place to find my mom when the guy suddenly said, "Hey kid." I looked in his direction with raised eyebrows. He pointed at me and said, "Yeah, you, come here." His voice is a guttural deep that didn't match his face. I walked over to him. Talking to strangers was not how I was raised. In fact, I was raised the complete opposite, but instincts told me not to indict that I fear him in any way. Where is my mom?

My mom was a spirited woman whose skin was the color of dark chocolate, and her hair as untamed as a lion. Her favorite color of lipstick to wear was pink because she said it matched the color of my daddy. I've never met my dad, but people say that when he met mama he'd instantly fell in love with her. If you ask me, that love must've been for only a few weeks before he realized he didn't want it. I've never seen my father and if I walked by him in the street I wouldn't even know.

I make it to the man and he smiles at me.

"Who let you into this establishment kid?"

"My mama works here she decided to bring me with her to work today. Mr. Smith allows me to stay here as long as I don't cause trouble." I wonder why this man cares so much. Oftentimes, the people who come here don't raise eyebrows to a kid at a bar because they're more worried about getting their next drinks.

"Hm," He looks to the ceiling like he is thinking about something, "want some cash?" He pulls out a twenty-dollar bill from his pocket.

"What in heaven's name do you think you're doing?" I know that voice anywhere; my mom. If it's one thing you need to know about Leona, she does not take kindly to strangers, especially around her kid. She came up to us and looked down at the money in the man's hand. "He doesn't need any money. Who do you think you are Patrick?" How did my mom know this man's name? I've never seen him around the house before.

He puts his hand in the air, "Relax Leona, I was just trying to give the kid some change in his pockets. I know how hard it is for you and no man should walk around broke." At that moment, I can honestly say this was the first time I'd actually seen my momma turn red in the face.

"A thirteen year old boy should because they wouldn't be able to handle it."

The man gets up, walks close to my Ma and puts his hands around her waist. "You got to have some faith in him. You'd be surprised how responsible he could be." He whispers something in her ear and she seems to soften.

"Yeah, I guess you're right. He is getting older, but next time don't give him so much money Patrick." The man smiles and kisses her cheek. He hands me the money. I take it and crinkle it with my fists, but they don't notice. I don't appreciate this random man being so comfortable with my mom. Why isn't she pushing him away?

"Leona! Leona!" Patty rushed out from the back towards my mom. She was breathing hard and running impressively fast because Patty was not the type to exercise if she could help it. She got to my ma and put her hand out as a signal to 'wait one moment' as she attempted to catch her breath. After a few minutes she calmed down and said "The cook is threatening to quit again."

Ma rolled her eyes and sighed, "I'm coming." My ma looked at me, "Darius, I brought you to my job today to meet Patrick." She grabs his hand and intertwines it with hers, "We've been dating for a while, so I thought that it was about time he got to meet my you. Why don't the two of y'all sit down and get to know each other more while I handle this?" She asks, but

her eyes told me I didn't have a choice. She gave Patrick a quick peck on the lips and left to go handle business. I sat down at the nearest table and Patrick took a seat opposite towards me.

Patty smiled at me sympathetically, "I'm sorry Darius, I know you're ready to go home bud. Just be patient. Matter of fact, I know what will help the time go by! I'll be right back." With that, she had excitedly left to bring back who knows what. Soon, Patty came back with a fancy looking bottle named "Coca Cola". I knew that it was soda, but I've never had it before. I thanked her and she left to go help my mom with the cook.

After Patty left, Patrick decided that it was time to speak to me. "You know I care about your mother very much right? I would never hurt her on purpose." He leans back on the chair and clasps his hands together. "I know this might be a lot for you right now and you're probably puzzled." He laughs. "I don't blame you because I would be confused too." I snort, confused is an understatement.

Apparently, Patrick didn't take my snorting response well and started speaking to me more sternly. "Rather you like it or not, I am going to marry your mother and move in. You guys need a man in the house anyway." He just keeps talking and I tune him out. Guys like Patrick think they're always right and everyone else is wrong, so it's better to let him continue to think I'm listening then talk back to him. I take a sip of soda, it's a little strong, but it's still delicious. I continue to drink it, and as I'm finishing up I decided to take a long swing of it when I hear-

"...and you better start calling me Dad." Dad? This random guy that I just met decides that I have to call him dad. Can you blame me for what I did? The fact that he had the audacity to say what he just said to me shocked me to the core. Nevertheless, he didn't even wait until I finished swallowing my coke before shattering my world. I spit up my drink as a knee-jerk reaction because I wasn't prepared for the boldness Patrick had. I had just met the guy and he was already giving me reasons to not like him. Not only was he a guy that my mom told me she is dating, he was also someone who has clearly lost his damn mind.

Before Patrick could react, I got up and ran. Patrick is not my daddy, but I know that is not going to stop him from giving me a beating like he is. I ran out of *Daisy Dukes* and into the cold dark night. The chill surprises me for a moment, but I collect myself quickly and make a sharp right. I hear the pounding of feet in the back and that motivates me to run harder.

(un)documented

Karina Patoja

one: a rosary within the base of the stomach
never blessed

two: a cowboy hat crushed
under stiff legs

three: a map of the united states
resting between breasts

four: a condom, ripped and wet,
stuck to bruised thighs

five: pesos rolling down the throat
singing to base of spine

six: american dollar bills shredded
around a young boy's body

seven: cigarette butts resting under a man's tongue
ashes found home in between bottom teeth

eight: corn husks cut from palms
frijole juice spilling from veins

nine: an american flag pin pierced in the ear
dry blood stained patriotic

ten: a love letter nestled in a child's sternum
signed *un beso*



Old Money
Madeline Earl



Have you tried meditating?

S. Whitfield

Someone else is living
under the dining room table, winding knots
around my sternum.

Her whispers, remind and caress
failures from under my fingernails
dig into my palms, or else murmur
doubts stacked neatly between
sparse confidence along my spine
coaxing them to crumble; I cannot stand
when there is nothing to hold the weight
of so much dread folding the joints down.

It takes an inordinate amount of weed
to get her tired enough to quiet when she
finds photocopied memories tucked under floorboards,
worn out and chicken- scratched over from the last
time we reviewed what went wrong: the high
is red rimmed and attempted patience-
trickled honey self-care bullshit
our throat closing around an *om*
though lavender sparkles chakras
to oblivion. Face masks from smashed banana and shattered
crystals harden into screwed on smiles
and only broken mirrors decode the grimace.
Bath bombs fizz to clean like maybe she's
an infection but hydrogen peroxide kills the good
bacteria, too; I don't think I can survive another purging.
I might soak until bathwater peace
bleeds through and drips across floorboards,
the dining room table is already water spotted and stained.
Cleansing in chamomile
leaves us sticky and allergic to change
while sweet basil puffs, aiding in sleep,
dull our racing heart from thunderous
eyes of the storm to vibrations
humming our nerves past classic anxiety
into the life I am living.
We are learning
to *b r e a t h e* through it.

an answer for my sisters

Ynika Yuag

you are both growing faster than i planned and
i am trying my best to carry you both as well as
the weight of all your questions. maybe i do not have all the answers but i
can offer you one.

in the years you have yet to see, when you feel drenched in heaviness
and hopelessness, you will ask yourselves and others what the "point"
is, perhaps through desperate tears. and maybe you will not ask me, but
because i have survived thus far the years of distance between the crowns
of your heads and mine, still here is my answer:

the point is that sometimes you get to hold babies and giggle at their
unbelievably small feet, often wearing small socks. you will wonder how it
is possible that socks can be that tiny. you will find it comical that babies
are just humans but much smaller.

other people will not find these observations as amusing as you will find
them, but you will laugh anyway.

and while you are laughing at the smallness of babies, you will forget
momentarily the heaviness around you. the world is so unkind but
somehow tiny humans still exist in all their fragility and laughter still
erupts out of them uncontrollably. you will witness how their joy suddenly
sparks the humanness of everyone else in the room. and maybe you will
still feel heavy and hopeless,

but you will laugh too.

this is the point.

Fold

Rebecca Chan

I'm twenty years old, and I've been trying to fold paper cranes since the fourth grade. I'm not deficient in origami, paper-manipulating skills: I can construct a cootie catcher in forty seconds even, my paper airplanes can hit anyone on the back of the head from across the room, and my paper snowflakes are the annual envy of my Christmas craft party. But for some reason, I have never mastered the elegant art of folding a paper crane. Every time I try, I can't finish. I either tear the wings or ruin the tail or lose myself in the instructions, following the wrong shapes or creases or angles.

In the fourth grade, I had a friend named Charlotte: the paper crane master. She folded at least three of them every day, with no great intent, simply busying her hands with a sticky note to relieve the tedium of arithmetic. I tried to copy her, many times, but every time I couldn't keep up, the sticky note adhesive hampering my stride or my trembling hands unable to bow the head into place. It always embarrassed me, as I had a crush on her, and my failed attempts probably made me look like a big idiot.

Since then, I've returned to the paper crane, maybe a couple times a year, to see whether my dexterity has sufficiently improved. Every attempt ends in disappointment, a bitter defeat, until a few months later, I forget the poignancy of failing a simple task, buy some more square paper, and try again.

I've been on winter break, home from school for ten days now, and the inherent restlessness of time unoccupied has crept through my mind to my heart to my hands. The last time I was home was for summer vacation, and I filled my hours with Violet. We were dating then, having met in Advanced Trigonometry. She's from the other side of Wisconsin, closer to Milwaukee, and I wasn't able to see her over break. But we talked every day, staying up late to text each other or Facetiming over dinner. Though the break felt like forever, time trudging as waterfowl along a marsh, I was never bored, never plagued by untapped energy, because every effort went to her: sending her a good morning text, asking her about her job at the roller rink, attempting to fold a paper crane for her.

I pace through my room, alone, accompanied only by the din of my sister's pinging videogames and mother's raucous vacuuming. I check my phone again, no new texts or messages or notifications. I don't know why I still, after two months of separation, expect something from Violet. It doesn't make sense, I know, but I always anticipate a new something from her, a something that never arrives.

I close my door to soften the rough ambiance of familial clatter, then I sit at my desk. Before me is a mirror, and taped the corner is a square picture of Violet. I smile at my reflection, seeing my lips curl and slight tension settle in my cheeks. I drop the forced grin.

My reflection stares back at me. As does Violet's picture. She watches me with gleaming eyes, streaks of gold and azure and jade spiraling among their hazel. Her cheeks a modest pink, she beams at me. Her tattered overalls and messy flannel are part of her charm. In her hands, she cradles a baby chick, a blob of yellow fluff with two orange legs and a beak. Violet always told me that when I visited her farm, she'd acquaint me with her chickens and ducks.

I've still never held a bird. I imagine it's deceiving: rough, pointed feet hidden beneath downy feathers. Over the course of our relationship, though, I became increasingly interested in all sorts of fowl. I even took a Biology course on bird anatomy. Bird bones are hollow. That's how they can fly. What would we be like if our bones were hollow, too?

My fingertips brush the photograph. I cannot bear to take it down. From the cupboard beside my desk, I extract a piece of origami paper and a book from my childhood—1,001 Folds for 100 Origami Projects—resigning to my adamant, stubborn nature.

I open to a section with much wear—its three full-colored pages heavily traversed and reread—and start at the beginning, simply, and work slowly, confirming each fold before creasing, confirming each crease before folding again. Triangles multiply into more triangles then merge into diamonds, an elaborate fractal structure building upon itself, each step in the process a display of geometric grandeur. At the second-to-last step, I fold the head and tail into position and freeze. I don't know which side is the head and which is the tail. I flip the intricate paper structure in my hands over and over. Lost. Again.

"It is no matter," a quiet voice sounds from somewhere in my room, not loud or clear enough for me to track it.

"Abby, what are you doing in here? Aren't you playing Minecraft or whatever?"

"No," the voice sounds again, "not her. I rest in your hands."

I cup the incomplete origami in both palms and bring it toward my face, squinting and surveying the folds for some mysterious form. Nothing unusual. I stand, origami still in hand, and leave my room, ducking down the hallway to peer down the stairs. Sure enough, Abby's situated two feet from the TV, enamored with square adventurers and monsters. My mother's vacuum starts again, and I retreat back to my room.

"You do not believe me?" the voice says as I sit.

"What's happening? Who are you? Where are you?"

"Your twin palms," the voice replies. The incomplete paper crane lies still in my hands.

"Who are you?" Baffled, I check each corner of the mirror, searching for a looming figure, an unfamiliar presence creeping behind the curtains

or under the sheets. Nothing. “Are you the paper crane?”

“I cannot fathom who I am, Creator.” The paper crane hops in my palms, moving closer my chest. “I rely on the faith that you can tell me.”

I turn the paper over in my hands a few times, rereading the book’s instructions. Then, as swiftly as a flock of birds springing away from a tree, I realize that my questions—what is head, what is tail; what is front, what is back—are nonsense. They resolve themselves. In the process of folding, the creature is symmetric. The tail may as well be the head; the front is no different than the back.

“You have discovered the truth. For what do you wait?”

Delicately, I pinch two corners and bring them both up. I now hold a ‘W’ with a wing on either side. I begin to bend one peak then stop, afraid of ruining the structure by placing the head on the wrong side, though I know the distinction between head and tail is nonexistent, a device of my own imagination.

More resonant than before, the voice declares “Fear not what I am, for I am what you shall. But in all, I am symmetric, a reflection of self onto self, hope onto love.”

The crane in my hands wobbles then rattles, lacerating my palms with a few small paper cuts. One peak of the ‘W’ twists and contorts, an erratic snake, until it bows, forming a head, and the whole creature steadies into stillness.

“Now that I am complete, can you prescribe to me what I am?”

I scan the book, searching for prophetic answers among technical language. “I don’t, I, uh, you’re a crane. You’re a paper crane. That I have somehow, after eleven years, managed to finally construct.” The crane rocks in my hand, tilting its head and stretching its wings. “But I didn’t wholly make you. I’m not capable of that. You made yourself. I only helped.”

“I would not be without you. I am a sculpture of your mind.”

“No.” I shift in my seat then run a finger along the crane’s wings. “It’s not me. It’s the book! The repetition! The habit! The years of trying and trying and maybe finally getting something right.”

The crane’s wings flutter. It raises its head then bows it again.

“Am I right?”

“I’m not in charge of you.” I check the mirror again, anticipating a giggling Abby in the corner, Violet offering a glance of reassurance, Charlotte smirking with a crane atop her head. Nobody. Only the photo. “You are what you choose to reflect.”

“I am what you choose to put upon me.”

With wings flapping in perfect synchronicity, the paper crane lifts itself from my hands, and glides through the window and into the flurrying winter snow. I follow, standing at the window, until it is lost in the evening dusk. I mouth a silent farewell.

My knees bend, and surge of ambition rushes from my chest to my shoulders. My arms undulate as a bird’s wings. I imagine my bones are hollow. I imagine flying wherever I choose. I imagine disappearing into a blustering winter vortex.

I reach a hand outside. The wind whips against my knuckles as snow melts into a puddle upon my palm. I flip my hand. The water cascades down, new snow powdering the other side. I extend both hands outside, farther into the frigid air, and begin miming the folds of a paper crane, following the patterns brandished in my memory. I reach the second-to-last step and freeze. I cannot remember order, method, symmetry, triangles, relation, identity, flight.

I retract both my hands, bringing them to my mouth, warming them with hot breath. I sit at my desk and rock back and forth. Violet looks on from above.

I fold, removing her picture from the mirror. My reflection watches me, unobscured, unblinking, weary. I ball up the photograph and hurl it out the window. My reflection and I both raise our palms in solemn repentance. Our hands are empty, still without a paper crane to hold.

When I was-

Aarzo Qureshi

16

my cala got married to a man
from where we came from
with green eyes, a holy color
made putrid by him

but his shy words were enough
enough for him to enter our house,
eat our food without shame,
stare at me with those empty eyes,
and marry my unsmiling, weeping aunt

i was downstairs for all of it
and told myself that this was fine
this was the way things go
but I still felt the weight of that man's eyes
on everything

but after he left
my cala pregnant
alone
sad
and broken
with that goddamn, fucking green card

i admitted the lies i told myself
just like my cala

confessing to god
the sins
women were taught
are our own

18

my grandmother
weak from dialysis
stroked my hair
with hands so gentle
i still weep remembering them

and she told me
take care of yourself
everyone loves you

so its a testament
-to my family
-to our culture,
-to god
-to myself

that i forgot everything she said

20

lose weight, fingers digging in back
why'd you move so far away
fix your hair, mocking eyes
wear this
borrow this, too tight clothes
pray
talk, a beck and call like a dog
why are you going into english
you know english, standing in the doorway
stop that
eat, expectant hands holding me

stay
everyone's here,
stay with us stay
stay

don't go upstairs
don't leave us

Chan, Cynthia

Rebecca Chan

...Your most recent letter having further reference to the immigrant visa cases of your children, Jackson, Cynthia and Dorothy has been received... In an effort to be of further assistance, I am once again contacting the Office of Refugees and Migration Affairs of the Department of State requesting their continued consideration of the cases of Jackson, Cynthia, and Dorothy...

—John F. Kennedy
March 14, 1958

Two mugs of hot water punctuate
fractured English as my grandmother

unwraps a Ghirardelli chocolate
square. Small, knobbed hands wield

a plastic knife, whittling the square
into two, then four. My grandmother

places three portions onto a napkin,
sliding them to me, before nibbling

her one piece to nothing. She
wipes her fingers. “What time it is?”

“Just past eight, Grandma Chan.” She yawns,
her breath musky, sweet, and stale.

She takes the wrapper from the table,
my brown-smeared napkin, too,

shuffles into quaint silk slippers,
and sifts through a shelf of sheet music.

“Broadway,” she decides, “Better than
the new music, no melody.” Handing

the Lutheran hymnal to me, she places
yellowed white pages on the stand above

her Nord keyboard. She presses a button,
and the keys flash red before

her rose-gold smile matching mine.
Brown, faded hands pluck “Oh

What a Beautiful Morning,” evoking
a countryside they’ve never seen.

“Sing along.” I sight-read
Rogers and Hammerstein:

“The breeze is so busy it don’t miss a tree,
an’ a ol’ weepin’ willer is laughin’ at me.”

...I am most happy to note that your daughters were issued visas by the consular authorities on August 26, 1958...

...I would like to take this opportunity to extend to you my very best wishes for a most joyous reunion with Cynthia and Dorothy upon their arrival in the United States...

Assuring you of my continued interest and willingness to be of all possible service, I remain...

—John F. Kennedy
September 3, 1958

thousand / separate / sentences

Mansi Dahal

she talks about her childhood while cooking fish / the onion is being perfectly caramelized /
so that i can day dream about its smell later / she tells me in *shillong* they make a paste
of *jeera* and *dalle khursani* / in a silauto and add in the fish curry / she never taught me
how to make fish curry / or momos / how do i know how to make momos then? / how do i know
how to make momos *aama*? / how do i know how to make momos when i came to study abroad?
/ how am i nepali if i don't know how to make momos when i came to study abroad? / other times
when i want her to talk about her childhood / she does not /so i make the most of it when she
slips these bits and pieces casually / words cannot do much justice
when your home is made of sign language / i start singing *lata mangeskar* in the kitchen/
washing the rice in the sink / she continues unconsciously / she does not sing
during family gatherings or karaoke sessions / so i have to do this trick/
nor does she talk about the faded photographs in her old albums / yellow sleeves rolled up /
luscious curls / killer smile / drenched in the salty sea / somewhere in india / her love dripping
for the ocean / it's been years since she has lost herself in oceans like that / she got married to
nepal / nepal is a landlocked country / the third fact i have read/heard the most in my life /
following mt everest/ buddha belong to nepal / today/ those facts don't deserve to be written in
separate sentences/ today /*aama* deserves to be written in thousand / separate / sentences

aama

aama

aama

aama

On Icarus Regarding Theorems

Sophia Hill

If

X= candle wax//a malleable//a sheen
that clings to the skin//a scent that clings
to the ceiling

Y= a match//a scratch// a shivering spark//
that nips your fingers if you are careless

Z= down// as in a young bird//a forgotten thing
repurposed//a second chance fate

then

$Z(X+Y) = \infty$ where (∞) signifies

a numberless godhood
a mind, (a mind), a mind
that need not calculate margin of error:
a god does not fumble
over unproven postulates and unfinished blueprints, gods
go straight to the cliff's edge and leap, catch drafts,
feathers whispering,
and soar//

Only a fool leashes infinity
imagines invisible ceilings in turquoise expanses
accepts a ball and chain mortality
when the solution lies
just a few feet higher//

My chest is pounding out the countdown to heaven
flying down my arms, up my neck,
behind my eyes, and I recognize
now, I can be the god
of the drawing board, if only I reach an inch
higher//

no one told me my math wouldn't add up
I had counted and recounted my variables, I thought
I swore to them all that this theorem would last, but
wind rushes past
uncalculated

greyscale galaxies of granite

Cecilia Barkume

i press my five fingertips against the shower glass, tighter. the showerhead is so caked with rust that it drops small orange and brown specks onto my body among the scalding water. i drag my fingertips across the glass, moving in spurts as i overpower the condensation. my finger is a paintbrush with five tips, it paints transparency and cleanliness as i move through the condensation. the space left behind by my fingers leaves drips forming out of nothing, gathering as much power as they can before continuing their voyage toward the porcelain goal.

“F”

i lift my paintbrush from the completed letter. droplets appear and extend the letter downward. my forehead becomes damp from sweat and airborne water. memories of previous attempts come flooding back. i shut my eyes for a few seconds and jerk them open. next one.

“E”

i start to shake. my paintbrush has five tips, but i’m determined to only use one. i’m seasick, the sound of droplets from the crusted showerhead makes me imagine what melting must feel like. i notice my blood-red skin, swelled from the burnt water. it doesn’t hurt.

“E”

my shaking turns to quaking. i look to the greyscale galaxies enclosing me for guidance. they ignore me. my paintbrush is stripped to nothing but bone. i try to catch my breath, but it alludes my grasp. the letters are fading. i’ve stopped before. i’ll be in the same place again. i place my paintbrush on the glass canvas.

“L”

the cacophony of bone rubbing against the glass churns my stomach. as i write the final letter, my body stops and takes a minute to transcribe my own message. i avert my gaze to the dripping ceiling. a liquid stalactite detaches itself, plummets and bursts on my forehead. the icy tip of the stalactite and the fiery stab of the hard water from the showerhead send me to the ground and out comes the kind of sound i act like i can’t produce.

my brushless five-tipped paintbrush contorts into a fist and crashes against the foggy glass. shards land in the toilet and i feel a little better. tears rush from me on their voyage toward the porcelain goal.



Un-Settled
Ashley Ver Beek

