

Spring 2021

## SEEDS - 2021

Jim Jones

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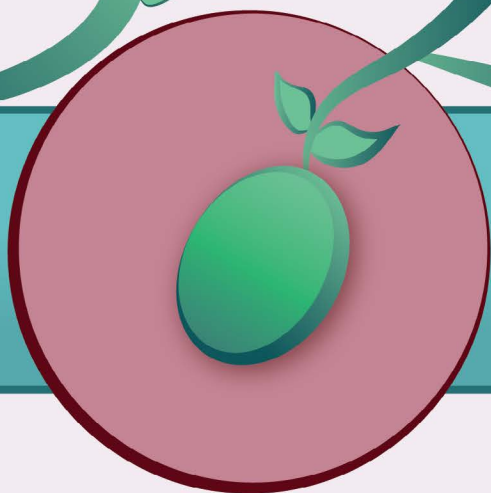
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Fall  
2020



Spring  
2021

# SEEDS

Literary & Visual Arts Journal  
Northeastern Illinois University



# SEEDS

LITERARY & VISUAL  
ARTS JOURNAL

SPRING 2021 ISSUE

# Staff List

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## Editor's Note & Acknowledgements

In spite of the pandemic, SEEDS pulled together and is able to offer a collection of 70 to 80 pieces of prose, poetry, and art created by NEIU persons. We hope that you enjoy these pieces, and we thank the contributors.

A few years ago, after earning an MA in Linguistics here, I decided to study for the MA in English Composition here too. The NEIU community is something that played an important role in my decision. As you peruse the creative pieces in this collection, you might, likewise, find yourself impressed with the spirit of the contributors.

Our Managing Editor for this 2021 issue of SEEDS will present a few words:

First and foremost, thank you to the contributors for allowing us to publish your work, thank you to our hard working, persistent staff members who gave their all in spite of the pandemic, and thank you to Amanda Goldblatt and Dennis Sagel for guiding us when things were tough; we hope all will agree that SEEDS 2021 is a beautiful anthology of work. All of these people, and others, have impacted the creation of this journal. This issue is quite special. Created in the  
III

midst of a global pandemic, our art speaks and is impacted by the world around us. The pandemic, the Black Lives Matter Protests, and the uncertainty of the future have all shaped the journal. This journal will reflect a time of change and growth, not only in the world but within ourselves. I challenge you, as the reader, to think about the circumstances of the world and how they might have impacted the journal. We are forever grateful to be a part of this process. Northeastern Illinois University, where anyone can be an artist, a poet, a writer and a dreamer, thank you for letting us be a part of the creation of this journal.

Jim Jones  
*Editor-in-Chief*

Saarah Junaid  
*Managing Editor*

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Poetry





# Mulberry Jam

Cathy Colton

I'm a compassionate ice cream ragdoll  
    playing Barbies under the mulberry tree.  
Ken and Stacey's feet turn purple in the  
    turquoise and silver sports car.  
Barbie smiles and grits her eyes while  
    washing the blades of grass in the sink.  
I sing sweet choir songs  
    my braids swaying to the beat.  
Ken knows he must beat it home  
    to the great green pretending  
    where all is white and cheery  
    while strange serpents undulate under the lawn.  
But really I need to pull back this screen  
    of happy sky.  
"Pay attention to the me behind the  
    (baby blue cloudless) curtain!"  
For I am/she is a shrewd butterscotch Medusa  
    shredding analysis and narratives  
    glaring those motherfuckers to statues.  
And then whistling Lily Allen at them as they explode  
    crashing pebbles into the black absinthe sun and  
    melting the plastic dolls into mulberry jam.

# YOU WERE THE SUN THAT ROSE BUT NOT ANYMORE

Dayana Garifas

i could have ran a mile to the finish line  
but you wouldn't be there at the end.

i could have crossed lakes to watch the sunrise  
but you wouldn't cross it back with me.

you no longer were my sun that rose  
when i wasn't your whole galaxy anymore.

it's disastrous how damaged i was  
to make a home out of you.

i gave my all but at the end  
you chose to crush it.

in my heart; i would have admired if it had worked out  
but there was only the silence of you  
not saying enough words

but i knew it wouldn't have  
if you didn't view me as your whole anymore.

i finally see my worth that i've gained from  
the hurt you brought.

you were the sun that rose but not anymore.

# Cages

Rebecca Gawo

Put them in cages, so they make more sense  
to us, who are also in cages, but  
smaller than theirs - confined in our minds to  
the endless rationalizations that  
we conceive, believe, and organize.

Organisms are best kept apart  
unless their organs look just like ours -  
in which case, they can stay. As for the rest,  
who cares? They're not needed, anyway.

Keep them behind bars; there they'll belong -  
there they'll become extinct. After all,  
we know no wrong. The world is whatever

we make, whatever we think. We decide  
what's right and wrong. What rules we should enforce

is always our decision to make, of course.

# Inhumanity

Alondra Marisol Herrera

How many questions do you have about the world?  
I personally have a lot.

When will toxic masculinity end?

When will people be able to wear what they want  
without being judged?

Why do people not understand that no means no,  
And why is it “no means no” and not “yes means yes”?  
Because silence could also mean no, you know?

Why does society belittle sex workers?

Why are women called wh\*\*es for having sex,  
but men are applauded?

Why are women constantly sexualized?

Why is it always “don’t dress provocatively”?

Why doesn’t society just teach boys to keep  
it in their pants?

Why are women called bossy and men assertive?

Why was the 19th amendment even argued about?

Why do women still struggle to get equality?

Why are single mothers frowned upon  
when the father is the one who failed?

Why are women expected to have kids?

Why do people in 2020 think it’s OK for a law  
to be passed that controls a woman’s body?

Why can’t people just accept different  
pronouns and genders?

Why does animal and domestic abuse even exist?

Who wakes up and thinks it’s ok to harm someone else?

Why are women not arrested for  
false rape accusations?  
Why did it take so long to abolish slavery?  
Why was there a Chinese exclusion act in 1882?  
Why were so many people supporting the  
building of a wall between Mexico and the U.S?  
Why are Muslims labeled terrorists and  
the KKK still not illegal?  
Why is climate change not taken seriously?  
Why can't everyone just keep trash in their  
pocket until they see a garbage can?  
Why doesn't everyone just use a reusable straw?  
Why do police get better funding than public schools?  
Why are homeless people looked at with disgust  
when their stories are unknown?  
Why do wealthy people get handed even more  
opportunities like unpaid internships?  
Why isn't there a Hispanic Disney princess?  
Sofia the first doesn't count.  
Why did it take so long to manufacture darker  
skinned barbies?  
Why do (most) make up industries not have darker shades?  
Why are white boys arrested and given water after  
committing a school shooting  
Whereas a black woman was killed in her own home?  
And why were Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison,  
and Myles Cosgrove never arrested?  
In the beginning of civilization,  
why did white people think they were superior?  
Why were derogatory terms even created?

Why don't people understand that guns lead  
to gun violence and gun violence leads to mourning?  
Why are drug addicts frowned upon instead of helped?  
Why is mental health not taken as seriously as it should?  
Why isn't healthcare free in the U.S?  
Why do undocumented immigrants get treated  
as if they weren't people? Why are kids in cages?  
Why are women getting raped by officials in  
detention centers?  
Why do Americans claim Mexicans are stealing their jobs  
when back on the onset of WW2, the Bracero program  
was formed to contract as many as 100,000 Mexicans  
a year to work in the U.S?  
Why does every white person call every  
Latinx person "Mexican"?  
Why do minorities have to work 10 times harder to  
obtain the same recognition as a white person?  
And why is it so difficult for people to just...  
have human decency?

# 1995

Najlah Iqbal

Abu.

That's what I used to call you.

A father by name only.

Until it wasn't even a name uttered anymore.

Just a repressed memory of something that had been.

A memory that makes my heart ache to the point of exhaustion.

And now I'm 25 and the memory of you still lingers.

How could I miss someone who doesn't miss me back?

# An ode to Ms. Khan

Najlah Iqbal

I think about Ms. Khan often when I work with students. I remember when she worked with me when I was a child. My mom was in the next room with my grandmother. Books open, unfamiliar words being released into the air of an ESL classroom.

In the midst of the chaos came Ms. Khan. When Ms. Khan walked into the room, her presence fell on us in a wave of calm. She had caramel brown skin. She always let her hair greet her shoulders, smiled with her eyes, and came into every room with enough energy to fuel a car for a long road trip. While our parents spent the evening forcing new vowels and language to fit into their mouths, Ms. Khan watched us. While our families, with their bellies full of native foods learned about this America and assimilated to a new view, Ms. Khan played with us. During that hour, our family had to forget home and family, Indian streets and skies while they sat under a Chicago sky trying to build unfamiliar lives, Ms. Khan made us feel at home. While our families were busy reshaping and rebuilding, Ms. Khan was a light that did not want us to forget where we came from. She always played different types of music as we played, rarely was there a night where Bollywood music did not play, that we did not play, that we did not laugh. Rarely.



In those moments of joy and sound, comfort and safety, friendships and community, Ms. Khan possessed a magic I search for in myself as I work with my students. A magic of forgetting the pain and hurt, leaving the memories of the struggles and obstacles of this daunting life behind, even if momentarily to share laughter with my kids, to find joy, to ease their tension, and make them feel like they belong.

# More Than One Way To Say I Love You

Najlah Iqbal

In a Hyderabad household,  
there is more than one way to say “I love you”  
but oddly enough, it isn’t saying “I love you.”

It’s getting scolded for not wearing a coat,  
when the sky brings in the clouds and winds  
wrapping itself around you so tight  
that you clench your teeth in regret  
for not grabbing that damn coat.

It’s your mom telling you to text her  
when you arrive to work,  
and then again, when you leave work every day,  
beware if you don’t send those texts immediately—  
you will see eight missed calls and ten voicemails from her.

It’s homemade garam parathas straight off the stove  
and into your hands, you are so hungry you don’t care  
that the paratha might burn a layer of skin off your hands.  
Your aunt says she made behndi for dinner  
and tells you to make sure you take some home,  
while you are already sitting there  
shoveling in enormous bites of food  
briefly pausing to make sure air is going into your lungs.

It's seeing your entire family,  
shoveling their way into a crowded auditorium,  
complaining about where to find their seats,  
but as soon as they see you, they stop everything  
and stand there wildly waving and taking pictures,  
radiating with pride as you walk to your seat in your cap  
and gown.

So it isn't "I love you,"  
it's "I love you "  
in different ways of service and care  
That's the Hyderabadi way.

# Devon Ave

Mahnoor Jamal

Devon is the place to be  
Got your Nihari and your Biryani  
White folks gotta get behind me  
Because we own this street  
Samosas on every block  
Chaat where the corners meet

Spinzer's bun kabobs remind Ami of Pakistan  
the green sauce got so much color it stains  
your fingers into the flag

Taj Sari's Farzana aunty sitting in the back  
ready to greet you with negotiated prices  
Shalwar kameez  
Lenghas and the rest  
no wedding goes underdressed

Bismillah's Paratha rolls has Devon's Dadi  
hand rolling each paratha  
slices the chillies for the chutney herself  
call it the desi version of mild sauce

We got brothers selling  
every spice you can think of  
We call em Patel  
they even got the herbal remedies  
homeopathic medicine don't need no pharmacy

When medicare don't pull through  
or your status don't let it  
Sahara Wali got her low price check-ups  
The Clinic you take your kids to for fast fixes anyways

Italian Express barely Italian  
service slow  
But they got halal spicy gyros

Ali's barber shop for quick snips  
he invited the whole street to his daughter's wedding  
Danced past the banquet hall's curfew because  
he invited them too

Ghareeb Nawaz not ghareeb  
Register filled off 4 dollar chilli chicken plates  
served on a silver platter

Devon is the place to be  
Whites can't gentrify this land  
Can't draw borders to partition  
this subcontinent  
It's our settlement  
Chicago's safe haven for all brown skin and  
mispronounced names  
Where fresh off the boats get home

# My Root Head

Jon-Paul Kreatsoulas

I'd give anything  
absolutely anything  
to face an autumnally transitioning sky  
that communicates "Maybe I'll catch fire"  
with the harbored fascination of a child whose neck is  
scarf-wrapped

After a period of considerable bloodletting  
this is what would bring me the greatest sense of content-  
ment and peace

It would transport me to those cherished moments of  
epiphany  
of needing to acknowledge the necessary cancer-cutting  
from my own being  
at the expert suggested rate and practice of:

"The sooner the better, if we're trying to see next year."  
Not next Monday

Not in 21 days

Not later than now with self-devised prescription in hand

- Venus in Furs for comfort
- Krystaline for humility (in varied doses)
- Falkor in the form remembrances to engage selective memory
- Tango Till They're Sore to scratch the nightly nicotine itch
- Tulips to conjure the weather to personal favor
- Rapt for whimsical daydreaming (as well as coldest sobriety)
- Howl for whatever else ails (the pink ones with chiseled lighthouses on them – promised myself that

IN THE CASE OF FEELING THE SLIGHTEST  
BIT MISDIRECTED:

(childish tantrums are reactionary behaviors - once you've lost sight of this, you've lost sight and mantra all together and you'll need to sell your soul in order to retrieve)

Take two of each and check up on myself in the morning

# Thank You For Playing Morricone

Jon-Paul Kreatsoulas

When prayer cards were dispersed at the service, that's when I was overcome with dread. I'm sorry that modern medicine couldn't cure modern lycanthropy. And in a selfish way, maybe my thresholds for wailing echoes and being in the company of people who beg to exchange their lives for those of others are relatively high, when such spectacles do occur, because, I'm on what I think is the more "level" side of thinking and coping. But I'm aware that there is no "level" side. I'm sorry the stream of consciousness exercises didn't work out in your favor. Maybe you should have upheld the practice a bit longer, but such advice was always unsolicited. I didn't want to pry then, and I'm too exhausted to ask for permission now.

What we do have to look forward to now is the hanging of Halloween decorations. We can make light of being manic for a day, or for a whole month even, if we allow ourselves, of course. We can admit to what we viewed and endured as burdens. We can be truthful about not wanting to be in certain company. We can come clean about wasting time and burning our efforts to pure fume.

I want to do it right the first time.



When prayer cards were dispersed at the service, I couldn't help but think of how often grand ideas got ahead of me. It's as if I had commissioned myself to paint elaborate pictures of futures that were out of my sphere of control, and more ethereally, out of the folded hands of possibility. I allowed this every time and I take full accountability for what is written just north of Widow's Peak. I take responsibility in managing the projection booth upstairs, just under the moon.

The meeting in Montauk is still on. Tentatively. Given the nature of entering and leaving lives with little, just as much as a blatant warning, we move and rejoice accordingly.

When prayer cards were dispersed at the service, I felt fire-branded with disappointment that I had not solidified the habit by now of writing down that which I urged myself to remember.

# The Queen of Dead Succulents

Jon-Paul Kreatsoulas

Carpathia, my sweet  
we didn't stand a chance  
even when the world  
and compromised foundation  
wasn't folding over  
a tempest  
in preparation  
for something even more torrential  
Carpathia, lover,  
a word with thee:

The Lord has not left us, as I have not been concerned with  
divine intervention as a means of  
repair and reconciliation in the first place. The pending  
presence was never worth the worriment,  
and yet, it's all I felt as the self-manifested stress carved new  
sides of my body I have never seen.

I was grateful to know  
your touch and teaching  
as I watched you clip dying petals  
and water for hours  
by your southern-facing windows

# Coffee Addict

Saarah Junaid

It wasn't-  
It didn't-  
It didn't start out as an addiction.  
No, it was a hobby  
yes, I know...  
Isn't that how many addictions get started?  
One drink  
turns to two  
for fun  
turns to need  
no, it wouldn't be that bad  
if it was just that  
like other things you add  
more toxic things the worse it is  
my anxiety and coffee  
together?  
The worst,  
something I need to quit  
but it went from innocent  
to dark  
real quick  
in seconds.  
Need it  
want it  
anxious  
all  
the  
time  
because  
of  
it.

# Floating

Saarah Junaid

Let me know if time slips easily into the abyss for you too  
as if the darkness consumes you  
where there is nothing left  
except empty promises that sink  
like thick dust on old furniture  
standing still in moments  
wishing for that nostalgic feeling to appear  
living in photographs filled with unkempt relationships  
now I wonder where do I stand  
just floating in between two times  
belong to neither  
just being.

# Froot

Hailey Jurasek

I am a rind  
sour sticky grapefruit stings like acid in the throat.  
Spoon me out in succulent slices,  
slip a part of me into your mouth.

Or maybe I am a shell  
slick with egg whites, smooth on the outside  
almost perfect,  
but you'd never lick your fingers after dipping them into me.

And how I long to be the skin  
that holds the soft flesh of an apple,  
how I long to be loved  
all the way to my core.

Although, even then I couldn't be without flaws,  
some would still beg their mothers to  
slice me off to separate me from the rest of my body,  
it's only the insides they want.  
To suck on the softest parts of me  
without having to stomach sinking their teeth  
through my skin.

# Empty Soul

Ayushi Kumar

you're a girl  
your legs show  
your skirt is too short  
you're out alone?  
too much skin  
she is asking for it  
laying half-dead  
body went numb  
all naked  
my heart still beats  
my soul trying to escape  
I start to shut down  
my body screams no  
the pain, the bruises  
I try to fight back  
but fail  
to him, it was fun  
advantage taken  
asked if I enjoyed it  
he walks out all clean  
as if nothing happened  
ripped me apart  
I felt empty in this empty world

# Quarantine (Stay Home)

Ayushi Kumar

Stay home, they say  
life would be easier  
oh, I wish I didn't have to  
I'd rather be somewhere else and be safe  
school, sports practice, or Becky's house  
stay home spend time with the family  
it will be fun  
I wish I didn't have to  
dad doesn't like me or  
when I make any noise, all he wants is silence.  
he sits with a belt and some Hennessy  
reminds me to be quiet  
oh, I wish I didn't have to  
I wish to play or watch some tv but instead  
I walk upstairs quietly go into my room  
look at the window praying to god  
I hope this is over soon.  
may I get to go out and be safe somewhere else  
instead of home.

# Voices

Ayushi Kumar

the voices in your head

try to shut you down

your overthinking tries to

pull in the darkness

the voice in your head

is your enemy and your friend

shut the negative thoughts

and believe in the positive

breathe ...

believe in the power in you

and let the voice overtake you.



# Loneliness

Gabriela Lopriore

They ask me,  
What are you afraid of?  
I answer,  
I am afraid of loneliness  
it twists the mind  
it makes me writhe  
in pain  
I feel it in my bones  
in my blood  
in my heart  
in my soul  
surrounded by people  
who love me  
but do they?  
Do they?  
Loneliness calls  
in the dark  
it tells me I can neverw  
run away  
it tells me I am  
a prisoner  
it tells me I am  
nothing  
absolutely  
nothing

I wish I could  
escape  
I wish I could  
be happy  
but happiness  
seems so far away  
I surround myself  
with friends  
other people  
I wish they could see  
how I ache inside  
there are days  
where I wonder  
Will I be alone forever?  
I am trapped in my thoughts  
they consume me  
like poison  
telling me horrible things  
I walk along streets  
filled with people  
and I wonder,  
do they see  
my loneliness?  
Do they care?  
Should I bear it

on my own?  
Should it be only  
my burden  
to bear?  
I wonder  
I fear  
I cry  
I scream  
with loneliness  
they ask me  
what is it you fear?  
I tell them  
I  
fear  
loneliness  
forever

# Plant Whispers

Abena Motaboli

The plants give us life,  
They are watching us.  
They've been watching us since the beginning of time -  
And by watching I mean to take care  
To take care of one another.

Breathing with us slowly,  
Moving with us through the day,  
Silently at night.  
And if you listen real close,  
They are breathing with us now.

The thin needles fall beneath,  
The pines who whisper to your toes as you-  
Trek your way across this earth.

The pink blossoms on the trees,  
That pull you in,  
In the midst of a crisp spring.

And the ebb of the tide that flows,  
With the wind.

The wind delicately dancing with the tops of the willow  
trees, Silently hanging by.  
And they're here -  
Nature's giants.  
Singing quietly.  
Amidst our voices.  
On our earth.  
This shared planet.

Our mother.



(Image taken by myself in North Carolina while on an artist residency)

# El Mar

Abena Motaboli

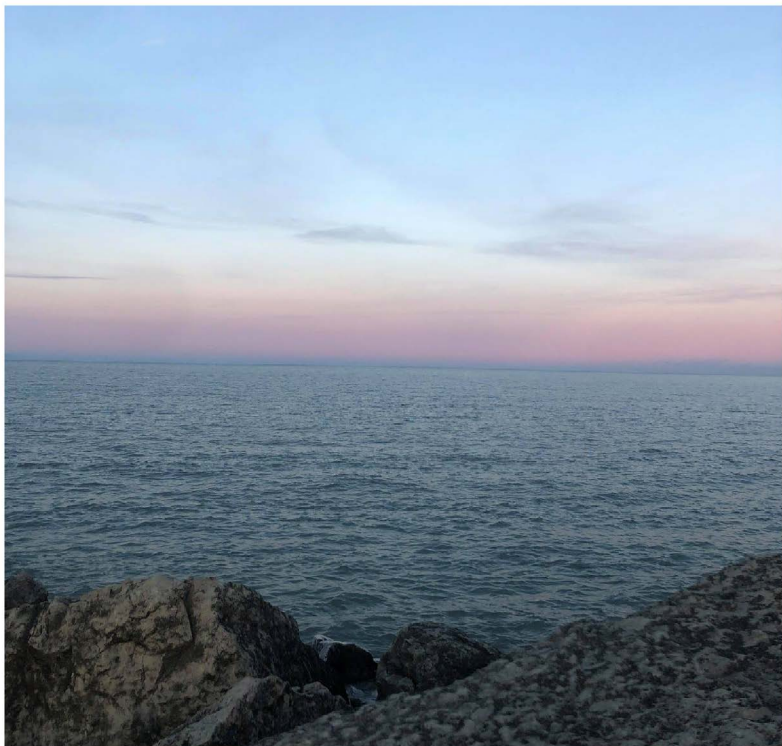
Sometimes I hear the waves dancing,  
I hear them dancing behind me,  
Singing songs of calm,  
Whispering fleeting moments of peace.  
I hear the waves dancing at night,  
I hear them shrieking with laughter full of joy, sometimes.

At dawn, the water dances,  
She dances swiftly with ease,  
Ease of a body who has danced for centuries

She moves with force,  
Her waves grabbing the currents below.  
And still  
She dances.

In the evening glow she will dance again,  
With a force as fierce as  
SHE,  
Glistening in a sky streaked with hues of blue and gold,  
Her choppy currents spilling over the concrete edge.  
Constantly in motion,  
Pulling you in,  
Always in wonder.

And I wonder how the waves know,  
Maybe it's because they know something we don't know,  
But if you listen long or close enough  
Maybe,  
Just maybe ,  
You will hear them call.



(Image of Lake Michigan by eve)

# Buzzzzzz

Abena Motaboli

Pretty,  
Pretty  
Buzz plant.

You  
Make me buzzzzzzzzzz,  
Native to Brazil.  
Jambu,  
Spilanthus acmella,  
Acmella oleracea,  
Electric daisy,  
My eyeball plant  
My all time mouth lover

You.  
Buzz like a button,  
A sichuan button.  
Sweet as a daisy,  
Yellow and streaked in hues of red, Forever blooming.

My sweet,  
Buzz button.  
You-





(Picture taken by myself holding a buzz plant)

# Painting Skies

Kayla Nuszen

Echoes in my head

I kill the pestilence instead

No more spiritual obnocities

Just pouring out my atrocities

Failure to accept is simply your loss

I do not seek to play the game

For I merely know the part

Bid these scripts goodbye

and wipe my smile clean

Because a thousand roses with the sharpest thorns, I have seen

I tried to listen yet my eyes refuse reality

And my lips have forgotten seemingly everything

Black mirrors cloud my mind

Cannot differentiate time

Feels like I'm drifting by

and I'm painting my own skies

If I fall, I'll hit grain

If I fly, pray I won't feel pain

Too used to being consumed by water, air, and flames

# Ball and Chain

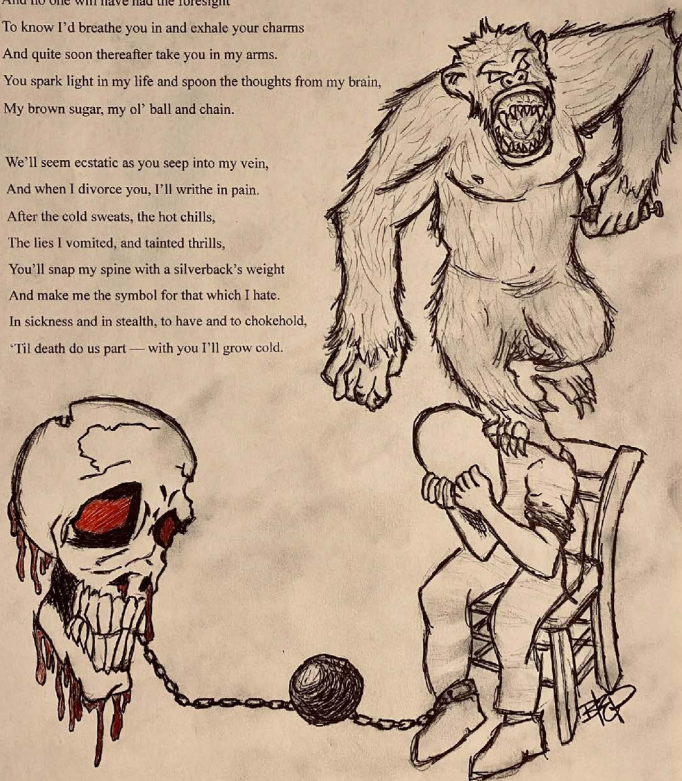
Becca Petros

Dearly beloved, they have gathered here today  
To join us for good as you lead me astray.  
I know someday you will kiss me goodnight,  
And no one will have had the foresight  
To know I'd breathe you in and exhale your charms  
And quite soon thereafter take you in my arms.  
You spark light in my life and spoon the thoughts from my brain,  
My brown sugar, my ol' ball and chain.

We'll seem ecstatic as you seep into my vein,  
And when I divorce you, I'll writhe in pain.  
After the cold sweats, the hot chills,  
The lies I vomited, and tainted thrills,  
You'll snap my spine with a silverback's weight  
And make me the symbol for that which I hate.  
In sickness and in stealth, to have and to chokehold,  
Til death do us part — with you I'll grow cold."

Dearly beloved, they have gathered here today  
To join us for good as you lead me astray.  
I know someday you will kiss me goodnight,  
And no one will have had the foresight  
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In sickness and in stealth, to have and to chokehold,  
'Til death do us part — with you I'll grow cold.



# Clandestino

Margarita Rivera

Adentro del laberinto  
Silencio que asfixia  
Falta de instinto  
Respiros de sangre  
Y escalos de frío  
Escenas repetinos  
Con movimientos sencillos  
Oscuros deseos  
De dolor divino  
Seguir el sonido  
Profundos gemidos  
Se vuelven aullidos

Perdido

Gateando va destruido  
El veneno escupido  
Ahogado en el ruino  
A flote en el espacio  
Entrar el pasillo  
Ecos del pasado  
Volver a nacido  
Circula el destino

# I wish it was less

Marco DeLa Rosa

As we clear the forest of error, we leave behind four  
hundred thousand fallen souls

I wish it was less

Struggling through their last breaths and moments,  
staring at empty seats covered in disinfected white sheets  
No one to hold their hand as they transition

I wish it was less

Less hate, less loss of life, less to mourn, less division,  
less death

“Peace isn’t quiet”

It is fought for, it is burned and bridged, it is lost and  
returned, within and out of reach

I wish it was less, but hope this is the moment where we  
cultivate the future

That every black and brown child knows they are  
NOT less

That every woman knows they are the leaders that will  
give more

Where law enforcement isn’t feared, where politicians  
put people first

Where memes don’t, start with a laugh but end with a  
little pain, in after-thought

It should’a been less,

Less of a fight, to turn away from bigotry and racism but  
ideologies are not broken easily

I wish it was less,  
So we are burdened to live more, to honor them and  
finish what is unaccomplished, unchanged, so it is not  
left in vain.

I wish it was less,  
SO WE GIVE MORE Those of us that can, MUST  
More love, more education, more protest, more songs,  
more poems, More Unity

The pasture leads us to promise, and that I promise you,  
my friends,  
I wish there was less time in between last seeing you,  
now you're in square form behind a screen, it is STILL  
CLEAR there is more good and less evil in this world

I wish it was less, but let us be “brave enough”, to say no  
more.

# [23]

Adriana Santillan

When I think of you, dad,

I think of someone who could reach the stars  
But decided to stay earth bound to be with me.

When I think of you, father,

I think of the man who decided that I wasn't important enough to fight for  
But who still loved me with all that he could and as much as he could.

When I think of you, old man,

I think of a man lying on the floor, collapsed and unmoving  
For death picked you that evening and decided it was your time  
Without informing the rest of us about it

When I think of you, man,

I think that maybe what needs to be said will never be said,  
For you are gone, and I need to grieve.

When I think of you,

All I think about is how much I love you  
How much I miss you  
And how much I wish you were here to hear my words.

I love you,

Dad  
Father  
Old man  
Man

my everything.



## [22]

Adriana Santillan

There is an old man who lived in a tiny room  
Separated by only a screen from the rest of the world.  
This old man is like any other old man trapped in a room  
Without anyone to care for him.  
And yet, he is special.

For he is my old man.  
My father stuck between four walls  
One closet, one window, one door.  
Trapped forever in this expanse of loneliness  
All because we couldn't save you in time.

You were lifeless before anyone ever found you, father.  
Your last few moments were the same as most of your life,  
Alone.  
For that, I am sorry but there is nothing I can do to change your  
fate.  
For this, fate has been sealed 6 feet below in a cemetery in Niles,  
Too far away from me to say what I constantly want to say to  
you.

I wish I could be with you when it happened,  
Wish I could've gotten help sooner.  
But then would I want that image of you,  
A strong man of six feet five inches being brought down to his  
knees  
By an organ in your chest that means nothing and yet every-  
thing.

I hope you are doing well, old man,  
For I am not.

# It is What it Is

Loni Strach

a thing, a thought, an action?  
an untruth, broken promise, or excuse?  
a reason to quit, to transmit, or submit?  
to deflect, a defect, or infect?  
an insecurity, from instability, with inability?  
a right, a wrong, or the other?  
because you can't, you won't, so you don't?  
all black, white or grey?

you say it without saying it.  
you play it without playing it.  
you surrender to it without pause.  
the circumstances leave you, without cause.  
it is yours to speak.  
like a slap across my cheek.  
so you can be the good guy.  
no matter how little you try.

these empty words  
carry the weight  
of indifference, dismissal  
and of hate  
so be careful to consider  
the stain left on my heart  
when these five toxic words  
from your lips do part.

# Hide and Seek

Loni Strach

A sinister visitor unknown to doctors  
Lying dormant inside of her insides,  
A parasite gaining nourishment from her body  
Dividing and infiltrating cell after cell  
Playing its own game of hide and seek.

Wreaking havoc and crippling pain  
The mutation sails through her blood  
Dictating how she will live her life  
Denying what was once promised her,  
Stealing the best years of her remaining life.

Metastasized. Metastasized.  
Feeding off her organs as if at a buffet  
Sampling from this one and that  
Stuffing its nameless face  
with all that it can consume.

Accepting eradication is impossible  
Radiation and chemotherapy  
Are but a mere slumber to the beast  
Simply slowing down its destruction  
With no plans to vacate the premises.

Hope is but a fool's illusion  
Wasting time that can't be turned back  
Spending energy that is lost forever  
Fighting what you cannot win,  
Wishing for just a little more time.

# Unforgiving

Loni Strach

A lifelong battle pursues the tormented, refusing to assuage the heart and soul where a relationship splintered beyond repair offers cruel hopelessness.

Eternally standing outside and looking in to what she misses the most yet unwilling to forgive the hurt done to her, by those meant to protect her.

Her heart, seemingly encased in layers of steel acts to insure against all future pain while blocking her off from the family she needs, to save herself.

She survives her fragmented new life alone allowing her anger to act as a reminder of what she has already lost, incapable of remembering who she was before the betrayal.

Caught in the eternal wave of fight or flight to save herself once more, she screams for help to help her heal what is broken inside.

# The Fool\*

Hana D. Urban

The sky is falling, but perhaps I don't have to always think of it

There will be time, there will be time...

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled

At the shores of a Great Lake

Losing myself in this diminutive ocean

Allowing the horizon to blur deep blues

And the filthy pigeons fighting squirrels

Getting fat for the winter

'Too beautiful for one pair of eyes'

There will be time, there will be time...

Do I dare?

To gaze over my shoulder at the

Horrors of this world

To look upon the

And smell the

On my way home, I collect garbage

Careless amongst my safe haven

I say goodbye and close the lid

*\*Language taken from "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock"*  
*by T.S. Eliot*

# Scientist and Artist think of an Algorithm

Joanna B. Vaklin

Flowers are flowers, following fibonacci

0 1 1 2 3 5 8 13

See? It's easy to see the pattern that lies in so much

If we can explain it, I don't think we will

Maybe the sound of the pattering rain will be enough

It's easy to see that the trees sway

while the leaves change their color

from green to red or orange or

their characteristic color that shows up before they die

yes ... yes, indeed they die

As do we

yes, yes ... as do we

The art of it lies in the consistent act for armor

Armor, survival, longing to live long, long time to live long

As you can see, it's enough. The cells have created what

they need to create xx xx x x x x x x x x xx x x x x x x x

We can count the genes, we can look at them, we can see

the shape, we can analyze it enough for us to know

Not too much, but something at all

Fibonacci, 0 1 1 2 3 5 8 13 and so on

An armor that will make it stable and make each petal see  
it all

Should we go left or should we go right?

Let me know, been thinking about it all night.

# Everywhere, Everything, Everyone, Content, Data

Joanna B. Vaklin

If I am alone and I know so, I don't want that. You know, it's not okay to be surfing through so much content. So much, so many images, so many faces, eyes, bodies, lives, jokes, moments, memories, experiences, colors, videos, lips, noses, tummies, abs, arms, workouts, love, cuddles, boy friend, girlfriend, wife, husband, partners, pranks, laughs, smiles, tears, shots, masks, sad, happy, fake, stop, pause, record, opinions, yes, no, cancel, accept, stan, fan, lovers, poems, words, claims, looks, thoughts, clothes, skin, cellulite, no cellulite, legs, fingers, toes, nails, hands, pupils, hairlines, curls, men, women, people, waists, thighs, rolls, good, ugly, beauty, stores, foods, swears, hatred, land, dirt, mountains, water, seas, oceans, hometowns, trees, skies, clouds, show-offs, shy, introverts, extroverts, dollars, coins, cards, lipstick, lip glosses, eyeliner, mascara, blush, foundation, blend, bake, application, links, websites, urls, sponsors, eyebrows, plants, pinks, greens, blues, drinks, liquor, smoke, cigarettes, ads, language, computers, phones, cases, buttons, styles, shoes, shirts, sweaters, hoodies, headphones, water bottles, cups, coffee, tea, apples, crackers, cookies, blanks, beds, views, skylines, skyscrapers, rich, poor, middle class, earrings, diamonds, rings, necklaces, forevers, always, never, humans, hurt, pain, sweat, blood, ends, beginnings, vases, flowers, laws, cases, governments, faces, eyes, bodies, lives, jokes, moments, so many faces, eyes, bodies, lives, jokes, expectations, homes, houses, apartments, nowhere, somewhere, here, there, anywhere, faces, eyes, bodies, lives, jokes, faces everywhere, expectations everywhere, heres, theres, everywhere, everything.

Everything and everything is too much to consume.

# Forever and Sometimes

Joanna B. Vaklin

Best part of your set  
set of eyes, set of days,  
of our irresistible words that my heart wants,  
but have yet to consult with my brain.  
I think I am on the same page, at least I know  
that maybe there is forever or maybe there is  
sometimes. And I don't mind if that is all it is  
because sometimes has forever in it. A natural  
infinity in a place that goes much further than  
we can ever be. Much more than what is. What  
is meant to be? What does eventually really  
mean? It's further away from what I can see,  
how much I can see. I want the butterflies to go  
away so that I can see, so that I can see  
somehow in some way. You can come with me  
or I will see you there. I like your dreams, our  
dreams, but I don't know what will be. I am still  
on the edge of the world and I am scared and  
depressed sometimes and don't always believe  
in my beauty. And in our togetherness, I might  
not know and I promise you, it's sadder than we  
think it is. What is meant to be? Is there such a  
thing? Is there pigment in a place that is already  
red? I wish we could meet now, I wish I could  
tell. And I wish my answer waiting for me at the  
stair step outside the brick building.  
Will I listen to the words?  
Will I want to be where I am?  
And I miss something I don't know and my love  
don't know and my love goes deeper than it shows  
and I wish forever would know how far it goes.  
And I wish forever would know how far it goes . . .  
And I wish I knew and I can promise you  
only that much.



Prose



# Me and Nancy Drew and the Kitchen Saint

Cathy Colton

My bangs are sweat-shellacked to my forehead on this Tuesday. The Pippi Longstocking braids Mom insists on at least keep my hair off my neck. I chew on the tip of one of them while sitting sideways in the overstuffed chair, my sunburned legs dangling off the side, so I can face the screen door while I read. And wait. At least a whisper of a hot breeze finds its way in while Nancy, Bess, and George speed down the country road in Nancy's convertible coupe, their long hair whipping around their faces as they hash over the clues they discovered in the barn. I'm not sure exactly what a coupe is, but I want one when I'm old enough to drive. And I want hair that can whip around freely, not hang in submissive braids that droop next to my arms.

The shrill alarm shreds the air. The Wait is over. I shove my bookmark between the pages and sprint to the kitchen to shut up the timer. Grandma pants a bit as she pulls her aproned self up the stairs and in through the wide-open back door. "Why the good Lord sees fit to make it so hot this early in the morning already I'm sure I don't know," she complains. The good Lord isn't the one who set the oven in the cramped kitchen to 375 degrees an hour ago. But, the buttery aroma is the subtly more powerful force that accosts me as I pull down the oven door, and my mittened hands present the counter with a sheet of cream-colored thick triangles of perfection. I step onto the stool to reach for the container of powdered sugar. My job

is to sift just the right amount of powder on each piece of shortbread. “Wash your hands first,” she tells me, pouring sugar into the metal sifter.

The scents from that long-ago kitchen live on in my memory years after Grandma is gone. My sisters and I have tried to re-create her shortbread. Many people bake the Scottish pastry; it even sits in boxes on shelves of grocery stores, but none melts in the mouth in just the way Grandma’s did. Her recipe—best as I can recall—was to cream the butter and keep adding in flour until “it feels right.” But only decades of holding to the sacred ritual of Baking Tuesdays—no matter the level of heat and humidity of those Tuesdays in a Midwestern July—could grant one the instinct for something born in a Scottish coal mining town, later to be passed down to the wives of sons stuck in Illinois mining country.

My husband, I suspect, married me in part to secure an “until death do us part” spot in the family of this old woman who sent the visitors she especially liked home with a hefty care package of her baked goods. And she liked Steve, who made her laugh with his off-beat stories—and when you’d led a life like hers, laughing as often as possible is good. “Here. I’ll add a few more to the tin. You give this to that young man of yours,” she’d say as I readied to drive back to Chicago.

I never did get that coupe; my hair is short; it’s been close to thirty years since I’ve eaten Grandma’s shortbread. But, I still enjoy sitting in a summer breeze reading a mystery novel. And I can still feel the powdered sugary butteriness melt in my mouth. It was that good.

# My Nutty Life

Mike Fudacz

I awoke to the sound of chirping neighbors. The nerve! Every morning, as the light rises, so do their vocal cords. OK enough complaining... I digress, my name is Sandy. I was born along with two brothers and two sisters. Mom taught us everything she knew. She educated us on the fundamentals of survival. Caring for the five of us little ones never fazed her. She was our rock. I cherished life with mom and growing up with my siblings. We could spend a day running and chasing each other; learning how to be quick, agile, and smart. Mom loved our playful energy and encouraged the exercise. If we would “Always stay aware,” we were allowed. Mom would say, “Do not live in fear, live in awareness.” “Trust your instincts.”

It was arduous to not live in fear. You see, monsters existed in the world. At any moment we could be swooped up or swiped away! Mom instructed us not to spend our time worrying. “Do not live in fear, live in awareness.” This was easier said than done. I was the worry wart of the bunch. Hearing the screech of a monster would send me scurrying to the safety of home. Oh, how I loved our childhood home! Strong on the outside and soft on the inside, our home was the

epitome of coziness. For additional safety, our home was on the twentieth floor, away from the dangers down below. My favorite aspect of home was my family. I hated being alone. The safety of being snuggled together with my siblings and mom felt remarkably soothing. They were my security blanket. We would rest and sleep, the five of us nestled with mom.

As the light rose in the sky, my siblings and I gave a good stretch, and looked for mom. "There she is." We were able to see her preparing breakfast. It was something special to watch mom gather our food. She was fast and fierce. I watched intently, "When I grow up, I will be just like her," I said.

Something was different today; I could sense it. Mom taught me to always use and trust my instincts. I glanced her way as did my siblings and I gathered the day's food. This was something we excelled at doing. Mom said, beaming with pride, "You are all naturals." As she called us over, I had a queasy feeling in my belly. My intuition was right. The day I feared had arrived. "I am so very proud of all of you and know you will flourish on your own. Always trust your instincts. Do not live in fear, live in awareness. I love you all with all my heart." One last snuggle and my siblings were off in every direction. How were they ready for this? I stood behind, not making a

move. "Mom, I'm afraid." "Afraid of what darling?" "I'm afraid for both of us." Mom nuzzles close and asks for me to explain. "I am so scared to be alone and don't want you to be alone either! What if I get grabbed by a monster!? What if I cannot sleep! Who will protect me, who will comfort me?" Mom assured me not to worry, "Do not worry sweetheart, come winter and fall you will find the comfort you need." A warm snuggle and she disappeared into the brush. I was alone. Alone. Fear paralyzed me as I seemed to forget all I was taught. How could I do this without my mom, my brothers, my sisters? I lifted my head; "I am my mother's daughter!" Confidence exhumed my body. I found a safe place for my food and began to search for a home. There was no time to be lonely or scared. My intuition and instinct carried me along. I gathered a combination of the most secure and softest materials one could find. Like I had a sixth sense, I built my freaking house in a day! As the day's light faded, I gathered a few more items and headed to my new home. "I am not afraid, I am aware." I told myself. I was alone. I was afraid. I longed for the warmth of my sibling's cuddle, the security of mom's watchful eye. I wondered how my siblings were doing? Was my mom lonely like me? I took a deep breath, "I am my mother's daughter."

As the days went by... I grew to accept my isolation. I remembered my mom's words, "Come winter or fall, you will find the comfort you need." I did not know how, but I trusted her. Leaves began to fall as the seasons began to change. Long story short, I met someone! After the most memorable day together, he was gone. I was alone, again. My intuition told me my loneliness was over. There was a different type of queasy in my belly. My new family was on its way! Forty-four days later and I was a proud mom of five beautiful babies. Oh, it felt so wonderful to snuggle together. I missed that during my isolation. I raised and trained my young just as mom did! When the time came for them to go off on their own, I was surprisingly OK. Whenever loneliness took control, I would remember mom's words... and I knew once the cold season dissipated... so would my isolation. "Come winter and fall, you will find the comfort you need."



-  
Laura Gaerditz

## **The Soiree**

The manor was decorated for the festivities. White smoke linen tablecloths, blood red wine, delectable food piled high. Far more food than even the most gluttonous guests could hope to eat. But the ten had not yet touched the table, the thought hadn't occurred to them. They still danced, each paired in partner. Their visage, a blur of twisting vibrant fabric. Each dance coordinated, each step in sync. Suddenly, it all stops. Lines silently form, pairs stand side by side. Ten guests walk into the drawing room. Eight guests exit, dashed in red. Only then do they feast.

## **The Spectator**

The family had fractured generations ago. The poison rooting deeper with each year. My husband, the first to fall, took a sledge hammer to my head and then to the childrens'. Then my poor brother, who they surmised burned alive. Was it suicide or murder? I don't know. He's never been of a fit state to comment. Cassie, my last living heir, stands ten feet below me weighing her options. A handful of glistening pills in one hand and hope in the other. I have no sway here. The decision is entirely hers, as the pills fall from her hand.

## **A Broken Word**

There are very few friends who would hide the body. They say they would on drunk nights or in silent falsely honest moments, but they wouldn't. When the deed isn't speculative, when the crime is as real as the blood on your hands, they falter. They hesitate when they shouldn't. Naturally you remind them of their promise. Their sacred oath to you, that you remembered and they forgot, due to an excess of drink, poor memory, or a combination of both excuses. So, what are you left with? Now you have two bodies and no one to bury them with.

# Springfield

Rodrigo Haro

In the memory of my grandfather, Rodrigo Haro,  
1928-2004

My time participating in theater was eventful. During my time in theater, I was part of a group of students who volunteered in theater. I auditioned my first semester at The University of Illinois at Springfield.

During my audition, my scene partner cued me on the lines. She kept signaling with her body language and facial expressions. The director, Dr. Hill-Peterson, told me to audition again.

“Do you want to do it again?” she asked.

I nodded yes.

“Try it again, Danny,” she encouraged me.

Dr. Hill-Peterson, who had previously worked in theater at Cornell, gave us the scripts. I read the lines. I looked up at my scene partner before reciting my lines, my voice getting louder on the words and lines I thought were important, my right foot stomping the ground for emphasis. The director looked at me, bewildered, with a frown and a look of disappointment in her eyes. She was asking me to try harder. I kept waiting for a reaction, apologizing profusely with my silence. I did not perform as she expected, and as I knew I could. I breathed during my

performance, but panicked at other times. Afterwards, I stood there embarrassed by my sleight-of-hand audition.

Looking down, she said, “Thank You,” avoiding my gaze.

God help me, I thought. I felt sad, yet relieved. I had gone through the audition. Feeling accomplished, I walked home with Dr. Hill-Peterson in mind.

I met my scene partner while sitting before the audition. I walked to her after making eye contact, and conversed about theater.

“Hi, I’m Danny,” I said, stretching out my right hand, and gripping her gentle right hand, softly. What’s yours?” I asked, returning her smile.

She was looking down at her script, practicing her lines, her shoulder-length, blonde hair covering the left side of her face. She looked up with her sky-blue eyes and huge smile showing her radiating, white teeth.

“I’m Emily, nice to meet you,” she said. She seemed happy and excited to be talking to someone. Her smile was contagious.

“What are you auditioning for?” I asked.

“I’m trying out for Lisabette,” Emily said with confidence.

“Have you auditioned for anything before?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’ve done community theater, and did theater in high school, too,” Emily answered. “How ‘bout you?”

“This is my first time trying out for anything,” I said. Looking for a way to introduce my friend, I simply just said, “This is Vera,” pointing to her next to me. Vera was my friend from high school who attended UIS with me.

Looking at us, she said, “Oh, nice to meet you,” turning to Emily and shaking her hand. Vera was glowing and gravitated to our conversation.

“Nice to meet you, too,” she said. “Are you auditioning for anything?” she asked Vera.

“No, I’m just here with my friend,” Vera said.

“Yeah, she’s here with me. I just need some support,” I added, feeling anxious and trying to stay calm.

“Right, someone for support,” Emily said.

“Yeah, I’m nervous,” I said.

Emily’s name was called. “Good luck!” I exclaimed as she walked away.

“Good luck to you too,” Emily said, while looking back.

I felt better after talking to her. I had built confidence.

Dr. Lydia Hill-Peterson called me a couple of days later. I answered the phone cheerily and with high spirits. "Hello," I said.

"Hi, Danny," she began as I answered the phone. I was amazed that I was talking to her on the phone, given my audition. Her voice was low, she spoke slowly, and paused delicately between her words. "You," she paced herself, "did not get the part," she said with care. "I think you would be a great addition. If you want you can be part of the stagehands. I have a couple of positions open. You would be changing scenery, and setting up props before, and during each show. I am offering you the position in the team, do you accept it?" she asked enthusiastically.

"Yes, of course," I said with trepidation. I did not want to let her down, or end things on bad terms, given my relationship with Dr. Hill, her husband, and my professor of Theater 101, a class I was taking during the semester. I did not want to look bad.

During our first meeting we all sat down at an elongated, long table, and had our first reading. We each had a copy of the script and read along. All of us in the play, cast and crew, were seated listening to each other's voices and intonations for the first time.

Virginia was one of the actresses. I remember her fondly. Mostly, I remember her voice. Her beautiful voice. Her voice was soft, low, and she knew how to sing. She sang beautifully. Virginia had a voice trained to answer her deepest prayers.

I heard her sing during one of the viewings of *Rent* on campus. She knew every line of the musical. She sang out of heart. She was everything I thought she was.

She was brunette. I felt a loneliness which prevented me from talking to her. I felt lonely even though I was in the presence of people. I ran to people for comfort. My lonesomeness caused me to run to people out of a need to emerge from my aloneness. I craved other people. I ran to the viewing of *Rent* to not be alone. I was surprised I was in the company of people I knew. I was there by myself, but in the company of others. Coincidentally, Virginia and two other actresses from the theater were there. Maybe it was a sign from above.

She was a seasoned actress, but she didn't get paid. She was there with another actress. She was with an actress who played one of the main roles in the play. The other actresses' names were Jamie and Mary Kate.

*Anton in Show Business*, by the playwright Jane Martin, was the play we put on. The play is a comedy about three actors playing the parts of the three sisters in the play *The Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov. The performance of the play was intricate, difficult to perform. There are many settings in the play that Joshua and I had to stage. We had many scene changes.

The Studio Theater, properly named, was in the main hall of the university. The stage was between two sides of bleacher seats that were foldable. The seats were on both sides of the stage. The entrance was downstage, and the back

of the stage, upstage. Although the theater was small, it had ample space to maneuver props and platforms to stage plays successfully.

A wall separated the entrance from the stage. Audience members had to go right or left to enter the theater. Once in their seats, the audience members looked directly at the stage below them. The theater had fifteen aisles of bleachers on each side with a capacity of about one-hundred or so people. The backstage, located upstage, was hidden behind a heavy set of blue curtains. There was enough room behind the curtains, in the small hallway, to place tables to hold props and for cast members to stand, a few inches from the curtain, waiting for their cues to enter the stage. The backstage also had two dressing rooms, one for women and one for men with the necessary closets, and space to dress and to rehearse.

I spent the majority of my evenings rehearsing in the Studio Theater. Joshua, a graduate student, who assumed he was going to be paid, and I, would adjust the stage by moveable platforms using metal handles. We were the only two stagehands in the play. During the play, we would lift the platforms, bending our legs in order to not strain our backs, creating new settings for the play. We would change scenery by moving the platforms from place to place, adding or taking away props like stools, chairs, tables, while in our black clothing. I would also blow a horn, downstage, mimicking the siren of a police car, during one of the scenes. I would make sure not to trip or fall while carrying the platforms, as they were heavy, long, and large, during scene changes.



During one of the performances, while changing the stage, I tripped by the heaviness of the platform. I stumbled slightly and landed on my rear, the platform falling to the ground with a large thud. I recovered and stood up fast, grabbing the handles quickly, cognizant of the fact that the audience was looking at me. I looked at my crew partner, Joshua, in the eyes, signaling to him that I was ready to proceed. He looked at me with a look of concern, but also slight anger. Looking disappointed, he carried the platform with me to another space on the stage.

Backstage we had a tough conversation.

“What happened?’ he asked.

“I’m sorry,” I apologized, “I let go of the handle when the platform landed on my right foot and slipped. My back gave in. I think I was moving too fast,” I rushed to explain. “I wanted to get off the stage and didn’t look where my foot landed. The side of the platform hit my foot when we were coming up, causing me to fall backwards,” I said with a strange feeling of embarrassment and an apologetic tone. Thinking Joshua would be upset, I did everything I could to deescalate the situation and avoid a potential conversation that could start a conflict.

“It’s okay,” he said with a pat on my back, and a look of deep encouragement from his eyes. “Just be careful next time,” he said. I nodded in agreement. He seemed satisfied that we conversed about the accident. He walked away to the left, putting props on a short-end table. I stood still in place, backstage, staring ahead at the blue stage curtains in front of me.

I couldn't think what to do or say. I felt embarrassed that my floor Resident Assistant, Ingrid, had seen me fall. She had seen everything. Ingrid was in charge of the East wing on the first floor of Lincoln Residence Hall, the dorm in which we lived. She was seated in the first row in front of the space where we lifted the platform. I had invited her to the performance a couple of days before. I was excited that she was in attendance. Her presence made me nervous. That's what caused the accident. She had seen it all. She was right in front of me.

"Did you do it on purpose?" Ingrid asked me later that evening when we were in the hallway, standing in front of our bedroom doors. Her dorm room was right across the hall from mine. She was always in front of me, ready to cheer me up, ready to give me attention, ready to talk, ready to give me the compassion that I needed. Ready to give me love.

She transferred out of Springfield after my freshman year and went to the main campus at Urbana-Champaign. Ingrid chased her boyfriend. I remember her saying goodbye in the hallway. After she left, I did not know where to belong. I didn't belong. I moved into an apartment on the other side of campus, without Kalpesh, my freshman roommate. I felt lost living with people I didn't know.

She was always there. She had beautiful, blue eyes, and short ear-length hair. She was majoring in English like me. She studied hard. The campus had a dance before Winter break that we both attended. I saw her dance on

stage erotically, turning her back towards the crowd, and swaying her hips back and forth. I was surprised. I had never seen her dance like that before. Her sensual side was a part of her I had never witnessed. She was attractive. I saw her differently after that day. I noticed her body more, her round, full butt, and the way her hips moved with her body while walking. I always turned around. Sometimes she turned around, meeting my eyes, craving me more, calling me towards her body and sensuality. She always noticed me while staring at her behind, meeting my gaze. She wanted me to confront her about our attraction, and to initiate our relationship. She seemed unhappy in her relationship with her boyfriend, who was a graduate student in the MBA program.

Her door was full of Post-Its that students in our first floor wing posted on her door, encouraging messages and announcements like “I love you,” and “the dryer is broken,” were common and recurring. She had a white dry-erase board on her door posted with her open door office hours, work hours which she spent at the front desk, and her study hours which were off-limits to students. I never had the guts to walk-in during her office hours. I noticed her calling me, her body heat like a magnet, attracting me to her, rising at the occasion of my presence. I always took a right (her room was to my left) and went into my room, ignoring her presence.

I cried out loud the day the Bears lost the Super Bowl to the Colts in 2007, screaming out loud, “They lost!” with intense passion, after she asked me, “What’s wrong?” noticing me sad, gloomy and blue. I ran down

from the third floor East wing, where the Residence Hall had a viewing party, to my room after the game. I lay in bed, questioning myself why I had cried out to her pretending to be in pain when I felt fine, only mildly upset that the Bears had lost. I lay in bed wondering if I was going to get up and walk into her room to talk to her until I heard her door close. I heard her boyfriend's voice then I got up to write. Ingrid was also lost in our relationship, confused about the circumstances that lay ahead.

One of the actors would smoke a cigarette during one of the scenes, and would take extra drags once offstage. I would make sure the white box of cigarettes (brand new with blue lettering) would be available for him on the backstage table. On a cup of water, the student-actor would put out the cigarette once backstage. His name was Beber.

He was one of my roommates in the Residence Hall, living on another floor. Beber played one of the few male roles in the play. The opening scene in the play involved Beber being shirtless with his scene partner, Kathy, keeping her back to him. She was one of the actors that played the major characters. Kathy stood in front of him, her back to him, naked from the waist up, not facing the audience. Her breasts, the front of her body, were hidden from the audience. It was a scene that introduced the relationship between the two major characters.

Beber and his scene partner, Edward, another student-actor, who lived in the Residence Hall, had an endearing, close friendship. They showed love in their

eyes when they looked at each other. They would look at each other with a loving endurance I grew to understand. During the last performance, they had a moment of immense grace. They looked at each other during the last scene onstage, at the play's end, and had a look of intense happiness in their eyes. In each other's humanity they recognized their souls. They grew fond of each other, and had an empathic, working relationship and friendship that they developed, cherished, and held.

Downstage, the audience could look up and see the sound production office, protected by large Plexiglass windows, where the lighting and sound designer controlled the lights and sounds. In addition, we also had a costume designer who designed, embroidered, and provided the necessary dress for the play. All of these positions were non-paid, and volunteers provided the time, effort, and talents.

Joshua, at one point, thought that the position was paid and asked me, bewildered, if we were going to be paid.

"How much are you being paid?" he asked me, drunkenly.

"We're all volunteers," I said, smelling alcohol on his breath.

"Oh, no one is getting paid," he said, doubtfully.

Joshua would drink before and after each rehearsal. He would drink with his friends. There was a small, but

substantial, population of students from India at UIS. They were mainly graduate students. Joshua was in the computer science program seeking his Master's. He along with the rest of the foreign students from India came to UIS looking for the American college experience which for them, or at least Joshua, meant getting drunk. I could never understand why he drank before rehearsals. He was upset to be working on the set when he wasn't inebriated. He seemed discomforted, and a bit angry, frustrated. I explained to him that the position was voluntary. On the good days, when he was sober, he would stay quiet throughout most of the rehearsal, and worked alongside me. He seemed bothered. I would help him accomplish our duties, where to stand, where to go, and what to do. He knew our rhythm to work, but he still seemed agotado. I felt empathy towards him. I knew how it felt to be bossed around. I would leave him alone at the other end of the backstage. We waited behind the curtains, both of us ready to enter the stage. I stared at him and saw him stressed. He looked like he needed to be somewhere else. I kept thinking he was thinking of his classes.

We met after rehearsal one night. Kalpesh was my best friend and roommate during the year I participated in theater. We had different apartments one year later. His friend had a party that night, and he invited me. His apartment was close to mine.

Kalpesh looked at me with a sadness I had not seen before when I arrived. I held back my tears. We had not seen each other since the semester began, waiting for the other to text. I texted him one weekend after Jay, my girlfriend, went home for the weekend. I had been dating Jay since the

semester began.

I did not want to drink, but we missed each other. We spent the night playing beer die on a miniaturized ping pong table. We rolled the dice on our hands, bounced them on the table, and aimed them into the red, plastic cups of our opposing team.

The party was caught off guard by a campus police officer who knocked on our door. The neighbors were complaining of loud noise, and disturbance. After the police officer left, we turned off all the lights, and sat there unable to know what to do. We whispered, blaming one another for causing commotion.

“What the fuck, dude!” Peter, Kalpesh’s roommate, said in astonishment.

“How are we going to finish the beer?” Kalpesh asked, trying to figure out what to do.

“Just wait,” Peter said, after a moment.

We all remained still, afraid to make noise and get noticed. Our silence was deafening and betraying. We needed to make each other know we were there. We needed to let each other know how we felt. We needed to see once we saw the light in our eyes. Our anxiety needed to be toned down. After ten minutes we started the party again, drinking, finishing the beers.

The party slowly filled. I needed help starting conversations with unknown and known people. Perhaps, the alcohol helped. Or, maybe the fact that people I met were

mutual friends of Kalpesh and his roommate eased the pain, suffering, and overbearing torture of initiating new relationships or conversations. For me everything was a difficulty beyond expression, beyond my own ability. I could not imagine being social or having a vast amount of friends. I perceived I could not be capable of approaching, showing support to, or having interest in the people I wanted to get to know.

I was surprised that I had found a way to get back together with Kalpesh, my best friend on campus. The relationship between me and Kalpesh was based on a true friendship. He was my first roommate in college in Springfield, but I said I could not be his roommate again sophomore year.

The day of the party, Kalpesh went to get fast food after smoking a blunt. Kalpesh came back with fries and burgers, too high to ask if I wanted anything. Kalpesh did not bring any food back for me.

I felt ignored, but nevertheless loved and acknowledged. I enjoyed his company. Kalpesh showed the kind of support that no one else provided. Our mutual support was based on a deep longing friendship. When we were away from each other's presence, I missed him dearly. We had a connection within our souls that brought us together. We prayed when he came home inebriated. He would step on my feet on his way up to his bunk bed.

I left when the party started dying out.

I walked with purpose. Ready for tomorrow. Although in a slump, drunken stupor, I held my head up



high. Looking up at the world, I was ready for another season of theater.

Kalpesh was with me during the theater season. I fondly remember him sleeping and me coming in and out of the room. He was an intricate part of my first-year experience at college.

The performances ended in late November. The semester ended in the first week of December.

I went through the semester and finished out the season, participating in all performances. Staging the performances at the end of the semester. We had a couple of rehearsals in between. The performances ran for two weeks.

I said bye to the crew at the end of the semester, telling them I would see them soon. They had similar faces, similar personalities, and similar smiles and were familiar with each other. They were lonesome yet were on each other's side, unable to feel each other's presence.

Outside the theater, we walked to the hallway knowing that we would see each other soon. We felt God's presence.

# Damn!

Roger D. Hicks

We always cleaned the family cemetery on the old homeplace sometime near Memorial Day every year. Most of us cousins would show up with a few missing from year to year but nobody ever missed being there more than two years in a row. Spring was in full swing three years ago when we got there. The birds were building nests. The sky was blue and most of the clouds had moved on across the ridge on Hog Trough Hollow before daylight. I was the first one there with my lawn mower, weed hook, and Coleman cooler in the back of my truck. I took a walk around the little fenced area reading the headstones, remembering everyone I had known, and still wishing I had known Grandma and Grandpa Carpenter, but they had died ten years before I was born. Their parents were thought to have been buried in two of the old graves which just had sandstone markers without names but nobody alive remembered just who was who in those spaces. I've always thought that's a damn shame.

The rest of the cousins arrived by eight with tools, ice chests, and a few children, some big enough to work, some still young enough to spend the day playing tag among the tombstones, napping in the shade, and waiting for lunch. The weather was warm but not hot, just good working and sweating weather. We mowed, cut weeds, put the bigger children to picking up tree branches and carrying weather-beaten plastic flowers to the bed of my truck for the trip to the dump on my way home. We were almost

done by lunch time except for a little push mower work around the outside of the fence. We quit at noon, washed our hands from somebody's big water jug with a thumb button on the faucet just like the one that used to sit on the pulpit at the Old Regular Baptist church where most of our ancestors had belonged. Then cousin Kevin, who had just joined that old church with his wife Matilda, said a quick blessing before the food got passed out from the tailgate of his truck. Fried chicken, mustard potato salad, baked beans, big old cat head biscuits baked elbow to elbow in a red hot cast iron skillet from cousin Sally's kitchen which were good enough to sell in a big city restaurant but just not quite like those we were fed three meals a day when we were all the ages of the children who had resumed playing among the monuments.

While the plates were being filled and passed out, Cousin Myrtle, the oldest of us still alive, walked toward her car and yelled over her shoulder, "Don't load up too heavy! I brought something special." She returned carrying a plastic Christmas themed tray loaded down with some pretty ordinary looking sandwiches on white bread separated by layers of waxed paper.

I was thinking, "That ain't nothing special" until I suddenly realized what Myrtle had done. Those sandwiches were Funeral Bologna just like we all saw for years being carried into the homes of the dead during visitations when funerals were all held in a living room cleared of all furniture which had been replaced with folding chairs from the funeral home. The casket set up in front of the windows flanked by

two of those tall, pink and white funeral home lights, the adjustable rolling base for the casket hidden behind a red velour cover, and a see through mesh net hanging from the top lid to keep the ever present flies away from the body for three days and nights while neighbors came and went. And church, or at least a singing service, was held every night with those old lined out hymns rising against the unpainted, smoke stained, sheetrock ceilings and falling back down over the family to further accentuate the loss. "Damn," I thought, "It's a shame we don't do that anymore."

"I made these Funeral Bologna Sandwiches from Kentucky Border Bologna, Hellman's Mayonnaise, and my own sweet pickle relish made from some of those Straight Eight cucumbers I raised from the seeds I saved before Grandpa Carpenter died," she said with a smile. "I made them just like Grandma Carpenter did when we had that last funeral at Uncle Agrey's house for him when he got killed in that car wreck. I even ground the bologna, pickles, and mayonnaise in that old hand cranked grinder Mommy left me." The children were confused, or at least the ones who had been paying attention instead of arguing over who got the drumsticks. Those of us who were old enough to remember Uncle Agrey's old board and batten house for that last home funeral understood fully what Myrtle had done and we appreciated her for it. The sandwiches disappeared before all of the mustard potato salad and baked beans because us older adults realized that if it was Memorial Day at the cemetery and we had a chance to eat Funeral Bologna one more time we'd better step right up and take at least one sandwich. I took two. I grabbed

one in each hand and wandered off toward the big double marker we had bought for Mommy and Daddy and paid off by the month for two years. I never sat down to eat the sandwiches but just stood there reading the dates and names, and looking at those carved, interlocking wedding rings with the date of their marriage six months before I was born. I never said anything. I just stood there and chewed slowly until I felt Myrtle's hand on my elbow.

"I knew somebody would appreciate these. That's why I took the chance. I even made sure I used my Mommy's old meat grinder. I hadn't used that thing in years and I had to clean on it for two hours. I wanted these to be special. I tried my best to make them just like Grandma always did when somebody was dead." We hugged and tried not to cry and I walked over to Uncle William and Aunt Liza's graves with Myrtle to support her while she ate her sandwiches with her parents who used to bust my rear when I needed it just like mine did for Myrtle when she needed it. Then we hugged again and I thanked her with tears in my eyes. Damn, those were good sandwiches.

Shortly after that Memorial Day cleanup, the certified letters started arriving from the US Army Corps of Engineers for those of us who still held the deeds to some portion of the homeplace. We were informed in terse, professional, military language, just like that heard by people in some jake leg foreign country when the peace-keepers arrive, that our land was on a list of property that was being considered as part of a new flood control project with a big dam, a new lake, and boat ramps for skiers and

fishermen. A lot of the homeplace was going to be a boat ramp, access road, and parking lot. As the letters arrived, the phones started ringing all the way from Widespot to Carpenter and beyond to all the midwestern towns our cousins had traveled to after high school. Somebody, I don't even remember which one of us talked to a lawyer and learned what eminent domain meant. We studied deeds, plat maps, government manuals, and got up on our toes for a fight. Then, as we got better educated about the entire issue, we realized that eminent domain was a lot like a slow moving locomotive pulling a long string of coal cars toward a distant steel mill on a downgrade. It could not be stopped. I also came to realize that when our ancestors had started clearing and fencing and eventually filling that precious piece of ground they had no idea what a floodplain was unless it was represented by muddy water standing over a corn field. The cemetery was technically in a floodplain despite the fact that no one alive could ever remember seeing water stand in even the lowest corner but according to the Corps of Engineers none of us had lived five hundred years to see that kind of flood.

Sherman Simpson was the name of the expert sent out all over the valley of the soon to be flooded Rough Cut River to appraise property and inform the future dispossessed of the price the government was setting for the land they were taking. All the fighting, all the small town country lawyers, all the tears in the district court room didn't do a thing. The judge issued orders. New deeds were written to the Corps of Engineers and in a few more days little checks began arriving in our mail boxes. We started receiving new

letters from some other government expert whose name I have tried religiously ever since to forget which told us that all the known graves in the affected area would be relocated. Each of us who had been designated as next of kin to each of the dead were generously being offered the opportunity to decide where we wanted them to be moved and another opportunity to attend the removal and reburial. Hell, we could even bring along a minister to say a prayer and sing a song or two. Damn, wasn't that neighborly of anything as big as the federal government or the Corps of Engineers?

We still went to the graveyard those last two years for the cleanup day and most of those were occupied in more cussing and crying than mowing and weed cutting. Some of us tried to keep our cussing outside the fence. We had lost. We knew that and nobody wanted to admit it. Sometime before next Memorial Day, the government laborers, undertakers, and backhoe operators would arrive and all our loved ones would be moved to that new government cemetery which would have a great view of the new dam and hold the loved ones of the people our ancestors had hated plus most of the people those people had hated. Whether we wanted to or not, it suddenly became common to see descendants of both sides of long drawn out disagreements sitting side by side on a bench in front of the court house and cussing this thing over which we had no power. Damn, that was odd.

When the messages arrived informing us of the day the backhoes and flatbed trucks would travel to our cemetery,

we called around and got together to see how many of us would go and which preacher we would ask to come along. We mutually decided to ask Preacher Elbert Mullins to go with us. His family cemetery was already dug up and moved. We figured he would understand what we were feeling better than most people. Most of us got there well before daylight even though the letters said the government crew wouldn't arrive until eight. While the sun was rising over the ridge behind Hog Trough Hollow, Elbert said a quiet prayer for the family before the workers got there. Then when the crew arrived, the boss told us Elbert could pray and sing a song before they started working.

“Oh, Lord, we have come here to grieve once again over the graves of our loved ones, our family, our kin. We ask you to give them peace, Lord, and we believe they are already in Your arms. We are only watching the removal of the dust You designed when You said ‘Ashes to ashes and dust to dust’. But this place, these people, these loved ones are precious to us, Lord. We ask You to give us peace as we see them dug out of this hillside they loved and believed would be their final resting place until that blessed morning when Gabriel's trumpet sounds. We ask You to bless their rest in this new place they are being taken to until resurrection morning. Or so we hope, Lord! And, above all, Lord, we ask for peace and strength and understanding of this thing we don't understand. Amen!”

A few of us mumbled “Amen...” and shuffled off to the high side of the cemetery to sit in a row like dry land ducks on the grass while the backhoe operator ripped down the chain link fence and rolled into the lowest row of graves nearly all of which had only old mossy sand stones for markers. One of the laborers took a spud bar, pried the rock out of the



ground and carried it to a big wooden box somebody had marked with a permanent marker, "John/Jane Doe #1, Row 1, Space 1". So it went across that row, one by one, these ancestors we never knew, or their graves, were dug into by the backhoe which never found a thing but rich, soft, black dirt that used to be family. At every one of those graves, the operator took out one scoop of that beloved soil which our ancestors had toiled over until they became the same and placed it in the big wooden box with the rock somebody else we never knew had placed with love in the hope that the Angel Gabriel would recognize it as a resting place. That backhoe operator never climbed out of his air conditioned glass sanctuary, never smiled, never said a word, and never made eye contact with anyone except the supervisor. None of us knew any of the crew. They weren't from around here.

Then about ten in the morning, the backhoe got to the first row of graves with marble or granite tombstones. The laborers had already pried all the markers loose from their bases and put heavy lifting straps on the first half dozen. The operator lowered the bucket and somebody hooked it to the straps so it could be lifted to a flatbed truck and secured. Somebody let a small scream escape when the scraping sound of the steel backhoe teeth on that first steel vault told us in no uncertain terms this was final. Somebody's parent was leaving home forever. Somebody's ancestor would not be at the homeplace for us to visit anymore. Softly, somebody somewhere down the line said "Damn!" and then several of us got up with heads down and walked to vehicles to leave because we couldn't tolerate the terror anymore.

Myrtle and I stayed until the job was done and followed

that line of trucks a few miles down to where Hog Trough Hollow met the Rough Cut River and on to the bare hillside overlooking the steadily growing dam. This was where the Corps of Engineers had designed the new government cemetery which would hold all these loved ones. They gave each family a designated section big enough to hold their entire cemetery plus a few dozen empty spaces anybody unlucky enough to live this long would have to pay to be buried in later. Wasn't that mighty damn neighborly of anything as big as the federal government or the Corps of Engineers? The caskets and wooden boxes were lowered into graves which had already been dug. The tombstones would be added the next day. The backhoe operator had a steady job.

Before the reburials started, the government expert told Elbert he could say a prayer and sing a song. The prayer was short. "Lord, we bring these loved ones to what we hope will be their final resting place until that blessed morning when all these trials and tribulations will end. Please help us, Lord, as we go to our homes and keep these precious loved ones in your Grace. Amen!" Those of us who had been tough enough to watch the entire process all said, "Amen!" Then Myrtle and I started toward our cars and just as we hugged and clung together I heard her, for the first time in my life, say "Damn".

# A Collection of Short Stories Into Others' Lives.

Saarah Junaid

It takes a lot of guts to sit at a cafe alone. She hadn't mastered that art yet. She was too afraid. But she didn't know how other people did it. Sitting alone surrounded by people. She saw a woman sitting along musing to the book she was reading. She saw someone her age looking deeply out the window. But here she was sitting across from her brother with headphones in watching people and wondering what their stories were. As we all had complex stories. She sees the two lovers sitting in the back of the cafe whispering in each other's ears laughing. She saw an older couple reading the newspaper. An old corney pop song was playing on the radio. Everyone seemed to be fully present in the moment but her. She stared at her cup of coffee feeling like the loneliest person in the world even when she was surrounded by people.

"I can't believe we are going to the most crowded bubble tea place ever." He yelled with frustration. He couldn't even find a parking spot but his sister wanted to go there so bad. "We could've just gone to Boba Club! What is so special about Avalanche?" There he was on another Saturday afternoon with his younger sister, being her chauffeur. Most of the time, he didn't mind it too much but today, he was missing a basketball game to be with her. His sister was now 15 and it seemed that she thinks the world revolves around her and only her. "Because, this

is the best place to get some Boba!” He heard her say in her snarky teenage voice. Oh the days he wishes she was still 11. He looked around at the line, which was long and then he grabbed his wallet and gave his card to his sister. His anxiety would be astronomical if he went out the door now. “Here, you know what I like.” He said while she went outside by the line. Looking around he saw his sister talking to a bunch of friends. This is why she wanted to come here. Hey, in the end, at least he got some bubble tea.

She was back at the cafe again. It had been a couple of weeks since she was able to get back as she had a thousand and half papers to do for university. This time, her younger brother was not with her. This time, she was going to master the art of just being and sitting alone. When she got to the barista, they smiled. “What will you be having today?” Taking a deep breath, she read off her order from her phone, “I would like an iced coffee with caramel syrup and almond milk.” The barista motioned for her to pay so she did and now she was waiting for her drink. “Please don’t act awkward”, she whispered to herself. Meanwhile, “M, let’s go get some coffee!” his sister yelled excitedly. Giving her a look of disapproval, he drove to the new coffee shop he discovered. His sister and him both go inside. He looks at everyone in the shop. There was a couple laughing in the back, friends drinking coffee and eating afternoon sweets and there was a girl sitting by herself at a booth. He smiled to himself. She must be confident enough to come by herself and not care what anyone else thinks. Then he hears “R, your coffee is ready!” and the girl goes up to get the coffee. As she walks

to get her coffee she notices a dude with a teenager waiting by the cashier. Feeling even more self-conscious she walks quickly in an effort to return to her seat when all of a sudden while being lost in her thoughts, she runs into the dude. “Hi.” He said looking at the girl. “Hi” her meek voice says aloud. Who knows, maybe this is the start of something new.

# Who is Rameen?

## December 8, 2020

Rameen Karar

My goal is to become a pediatric nurse while obtaining a master's in public health. I left my home in November 2019 to be an independent adult, so I moved into the Nest under Student Emergency Housing. I am currently a junior majoring in Chemistry and minoring in Physics and Math modeling. I grew up in West Rogers Park with my parents, who also attended Northeastern Illinois University. My mom is an accountant and my dad is a data scientist, while my sister is an accountant as well and my brother is majoring in Chemical energy at IIT. I believe in helping people matter what, I want to advocate for those in need, for example the student body at NEIU. The majority of the student population is from low-income households, so funding the education is an issue. I fall under that category as well, so I would like to start the Chemistry Scholarship fund to help individuals continue their education at NEIU. I would like to help my peers in other ways after creating the scholarship fund too. Like how at the moment I used to use a portion of my SNAP benefits every month to donate food to the NEIU food pantry so individuals could create healthy meals for their families. Because even one voice can speak volumes and provide hope to those that cannot. Those that are living in fear and danger feel as if nothing in the world can change their situation. I want to

be that individual that can provide change to those individuals. By creating a fund for individuals where ethnicity is not the issue, students at NEIU could take more non-required classes and electives that interest them and increase the quality of their education. Anyone can get a degree in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics) at a university and do an internship, but what you've learned and your experience matters. I believe that "generations" and the "majority" do not meet the context of every statistic. The times are changing, and we need to change as well. Students' experiences and stories matter, not the answers on a standardized test and an internship because the majority of students can't commit to an internship due to finances. Life can be beautiful in difficult times because it teaches us lessons!

# Professors

Rameen

Dear Dr. K. Nicholson,

Hopefully you get this before Christmas.. I bought Christmas gifts for all my favorite professors and you fall into that category, so here you go.. Since you love socks, and it's the only physical thing that I notice about you, because I enjoy looking at the floor more than making eye contact. I bought you chemistry-themed socks. These are like your current socks; they follow the same trend as your socks now: they stand out to me. I've also included a cake mix; you mentioned that out of the 15 cupcakes I gave your kids, you only got one, which doesn't surprise me, but the fact that you let them eat all of them is concerning.. and that you prefer that over pie. I apologize for the lack of effort, but I can't consume any sugar now due to a diagnosis during Thanksgiving, so I didn't want to buy ingredients that I don't use on a regular basis. Only to bake one thing and let the remaining ingredients go to waste. Your kids probably consume more sugar than I do.

Another thing, I wanted to apologize for my behavior before Thanksgiving, I didn't mean to call you "privileged," it had no racial meaning to it. I just became very envious of you and everyone around me. Because you have a family, you have people to come home to. I don't at the moment. I'm just alone.. Which is why I avoided you and I stopped asking about your kids at one point because I hated this feeling. I hated the fact that I was jealous of



your kids because that's not normal! I forgot what position you were in, that your twins were sick, until Annie Fritz gave me a reality check. So I'm sorry, I didn't mean for my emotions to get the best of me, I shouldn't have taken advantage of the fact that you're my mentor (at least I hope you still are), and my favorite professor (you're not second best). I had no right to call you "privileged" because you're not.

On a lighter note, thank you for the homemade card of a turkey from Will This was okay.. I used to volunteer at the Chicago Public Library where kids made me cards and drawings, but unfortunately lost them when I moved. It was either that or harmonicas, but.. I can only imagine the look on the twins faces.

You can call me or Facetime me, to thank me. You've done more than enough, I'm pretty sure I'm your favorite student, even though I didn't do this for favoritism. Also please let me know when you hand in the doll to your church. I was planning on stopping by one day, but I've gotten lost before and instead ended up in the afternoon prayer.. and I kind of don't want to go..

Enjoy the Holidays, Love  
Rameen K.

# The Shakespeare Corpus

'Ken Konopka'

My introduction to William Shakespeare was probably like that of most Americans—reading fragments of his plays in some sort of high school English Lit class. I remember embarrassedly taking my turn flatly reciting Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be..." soliloquy. This Shakespeare stuff for me was not to be. It was much later that I would discover in movies like *West Side Story* and Kurosawa's *Ran* the value of his work—and actually bother to memorize a bit: "I have of late - but wherefore I know not - lost all my mirth..." - because I felt it. I've followed my nose over the years watching live performances and movies depicting and adapting his works, and I think I've grown to understand the appeal that's endured in spite of huge changes in the English language, for over 400 years.

I am clearly no Shakespeare scholar. Having grown up on the south side of Chicago the son of a steelworker and educated in the natural sciences, I bring mostly my intuitions to the playhouse, as did the larger portion of his original audience. But I suspect that many ones and zeroes have been concatenated in the search for the algorithm that underlies Shakespeare's role as the quintessence of Western literature. His monumental contributions (37 plays, 154 sonnets) give academicians plenty to deconstruct, and I'm sure theorists have methodically examined his work to see what makes it tick. There's plenty to be curious about – why is it still relevant four centuries later?

As I stare into the bucket of words that is the Shakespeare Corpus I'm both astonished and appalled. Our age has gifted us with superpowers not imagined in the sixteenth century. That's not to say that our hyperspeed is unimaginable – it just would have seemed so *unlikely*. The velocity of our age would certainly boggle the minds of our forebears, or my high school mind for that matter. I'm boggled now as I sit before a device that will count for me every instance of a selected word or phrase found in all the works of Shakespeare. Of course, counting things, even words, is not a particularly difficult thing to do; it's tedious and time-consuming, but not undoable. Imagine ticking off occurrences of the word "the" while reading the entirety of Shakespeare's oeuvre. And getting the number right! It's not that I *couldn't* do it, it's that I wouldn't do it. This sort of counting, however, is what computers do well, and quickly. Very quickly.

What appalls me about this tool is the thought that a mere word-count could say anything meaningful about Shakespeare, the paragon of English wordsmiths. It's the order of his words that makes Shakespeare Shakespeare, so what can I possibly gain from spending a few microseconds exhuming this corpus without the benefit of syntax, metaphor or inspiration? Will I garner insight into the bard by exploring his lexicon in ways that even he never could? Can his words, laid bare and arranged devoid of context, give a hint of the genius behind his storytelling?

Stories comprise characters who strut, fret, and struggle through their situations. They do this alone and with

others, so it seems that their words should reflect some quality of their interactions. The pronouns seem a likely place to start such an inquiry:

I (11,337), *you* (8,181), *thou* (3,461), *thee* (2,465)

The number of “I”s indicates introspection, but the characters are not so self-centered that they ignore others - that wouldn’t make for much of a story. I’m struck here by the balance between speakers and their interlocutors. The equal time given to the first and second person surely captures the intimacy that makes characters endearing. Maybe there is something to be learned here, not only by the would-be writer, but by a human trying to live a meaningful life. Will a focus on you make me a person that elicits the kind of empathy that drives Shakespeare’s success? Compare this result with the numbers for all English fiction since 1700 - about two-to-one “I” versus “you”! Maybe Shakespeare is onto something here. Maybe his characters’ interest in you is part of his appeal.

*he* (4,316) *she* (1,667)

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<sup>1</sup> Hamlet [II, 2] line 1389 Hamlet

<sup>2</sup> [opensource-shakespeare.org](http://opensource-shakespeare.org)

<sup>3</sup> Maybe this equanimity should not be so surprising since the numbers are based for the most part on plays. I wonder how this ratio would stack up when compared to Sam Shepard’s oeuvre (58 plays), for example?

The proportion (more than two to one) of the third-person pronoun he to she doesn't surprise me given the age in which he wrote, and the focus on the deeds of men in the literature of the time. The gender gap is even more pronounced when we consider this tabulation:

*man* (3,859), *woman* (453)

Well, we can't change history, but maybe we can learn from it. It's only recently that anyone started paying serious attention to this inequity - "feminism" was barely a word before the mid-1960s.

Well, what of the beasts?

*dog* (199), *cat* (34), *mouse* (22), *tick* (1)

Ah, the lowly, lonely tick. Denuded of their metaphors I suspect these words tell us little of his thoughts on animals, and more about his playfulness and imagination. Let us move then, gentle reader, to the grander themes: what of the celestial bodies? The cosmos?

*earth* (363), *sky* (60)

Logic demands that his words are grounded on the terrestrial sphere – these stories are not science fiction, after all. Instead, they are driven by the all-too-fallible inhabitants of our planet. The words are not completely earthbound, though. He gazes at our closest neighbor, the moon, for inspiration, but why the greater focus on the more remote fires?

*moon* (160), *star* (459)

Perhaps he recognized that the stars hold our fates steadily while the mundane cycles of the moon simply reveal how our natures unrelentingly drive us to repeat our mistakes. Our friendly neighbor is a timepiece that comes and goes and comes again while the subtle stars lie beyond our calculus, too immense to grasp. This simple accounting of words hints at celestial thoughts. How then does he speak of the realm beyond the stars?

*heaven* (588), *hell* (160)

Ha, his characters look to the bliss of the afterworld much more than damnation. Who wouldn't? But how to explain the inverted census of the inhabitants and their habitats?

*angel* (80), *devil* (241)

Stories of heavenly beings I daresay are less alluring than those of hag-seeds, and Shakespeare was nothing if not alluring. I suspect it's the delight in discord that brings out

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<sup>4</sup> Another useful corpus for the word-minded can be found in the Ngram Viewer. This corpus provides the means to search all published books to not only get word counts, but to see how those counts have changed over the years. The site provides the details of its construction and use. Suffice it to say that it is a very powerful tool.

<sup>5</sup> 1589 – 1612 for this corpus

<sup>6</sup> Again, the Ngram Viewer indicates that the word “feminism” has its roots in the mid-1960s.

*love* (1,640), *hate* (163)

*accept* (47), *reject* (2)

*trust* (175), *suspicion* (34)

*true* (755), *false* (281)

If the words we write indicate their stature in our minds, Shakespeare's view of the world embraces the *good* (2,526), overwhelmingly over the *bad* (126). The *sweet* (758) over the *sour* (35). The *excellent* (117) over the *terrible* (28). But, what of his equanimity here:

*death* (884), *life* (823)

*happy* (203), *sad* (166)

I believe that he, consciously or not, recognized that contradictions define our humanness. As he concocted tales for popular consumption, he knew that some polarities were necessary. He was aware that inescapable aspects of life such as sadness and death defined his characters as much as happiness and life.

Beyond a cold tabulation, what can I hope to gain from sifting through a pile of Shakespeare's words? Do I expect the facts to reveal truths? My high school self surely believed that truth was available, but Shakespeare never suggested that. His ambiguities leave his works open to interpretation from all sides of the social spectrum.

From John Quincy Adams' twisted view of race in Othello, to prison performances by our most marginalized citizens, Americans have democratized Shakespeare. I think there is a good reason for this: each of us experiences his words in our own way. My relationship with Shakespeare has undoubtedly evolved since that English Lit class. I have changed, but the words have not - and so I wonder, given the power of this tool, what have I pulled from the bucket?

I sit here, a casual coroner observing the guts arranged and quantified, wearing the Shakespeare Corpus "Like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief." I'm looking to understand the character of Shakespeare more than to understand Shakespeare's characters. Sitting here I anticipate the device unimagined, but not unimaginable, that would exhume the corpus of *my* 400-year-old words. Some 25th century graduate student researching the quaint (and often indecipherable) words of 21st century English by looking at my own improbable but not particularly dramatic journey. I can only hope that that corpus contains more "and" than "but". More "tried" than "surrendered."

In Shakespeare's corpus I found an optimist. I see a lover. I feel acceptance and trust. My guess is that Shakespeare would not have been much interested in the numbers. I'll never know, but even in this simple accounting I think I've met a fellow traveler who was curious and seeking answers:

*why* (1,400), *because* (186).

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<sup>7</sup> Macbeth [V 2] line 2225 Angus



# Punctuation: Three aphorisms

'Ken Konopka'

Punctuation serves at the pleasure of language.

Not vice-versa.

One punctuation mark that we don't use (but should) while writing is the fermata. In musical notation it indicates a prolongation of the note below, with the length to be determined by the musician. Why not give the reader a voice in the matter?

I once abhorred the semicolon; what was I thinking?

# Newtypes, Souls Bound By Gravity

Jonathan Lee

A distant voice keeps appearing in my thoughts and dreams. It says, “Our souls are bound by gravity. We need to move into outer space to be free and evolve.”

After that, a cascade of random images appear within my thoughts and hallucinations. These images are of these tall older men in refined business suits eating up huge meals of lobster and caviar inside their fancy mansions while a massive space colony is dropping from orbit and crashing into several cities, its debris destroying countless skyscrapers with loud explosions.

The unknown voice says, “Look at these old-types whose souls will forever be trapped by gravity. Holding the promising youth from paths of improvement and evolution. We need to move into outer space.” Its sound reminds me of a comforting note from a relaxing instrument, like a cello or a piano.

Then all of a sudden, a spark flashed from my mind and it was a signal to alert me that I was going to feel all the sensations of the world, the skies, and the cosmos. This view looked like a rainbow-colored psychedelic river of shining stars. My eyes dilated with an open glazed look at the new visual senses being awakened. The expression on my face was full of wondrous awe in reaction to the surreal events that are unfolding in front of me.

Then, the voice starts to form a glowing physical presence with long flowing hair, huge baggy overalls with an ethereal light and the face of a comforting mother.

I said with an echoing tone, "Who are you....Who are you...Who are you?"

This person with no name smiled but said nothing. She waved her hand and started to fly away.

"No, please don't go!" I cried.

I tried to reach out for her but the more she went away, the sight of her being faded into ghostly nothingness.

After the unknown ethereal woman left, I was soon drifting into the wide depths of the outer cosmos. It has not even been an hour yet but it feels like eternity since I was in my bedroom where I moved and interacted within the physical limitations of my body. *Did I ever really have a body? Maybe the body is all but an illusion and the soul is the true reality. Who knows? Also, what are "old-types" and "new-types?"* Such are the thoughts that flowed while seeing the stars and distant galaxies.

While drifting, I begin to piece together what she was saying about old-types and new-types. With my intuition, I come to understand the message she was trying to express to me. Her message was such that the souls of old-types are weighed down by the gravity of their past and prejudices while the new-types have the potential to be freed from this and be awakened into new visions and senses. They will be the awakened life forms that may one day bring forth a new stage of progress and evolution.

All of a sudden, I start to hear the murmurs of her voice again. The sound was faint yet I could still recognize her peaceful motherly timbre. She was flying directly towards me and the closer she was, the more I could see her otherworldly beauty.

After her arrival, she touched my forehead with both of her hands and began to sing a tune.

She sang, "La...la...la...la." Her singing had a smooth contralto.

With each musical note from her voice, this scene began to melt away into a different reality.

After everything began to melt away, I woke up to an unfamiliar city where cars and children blare out a loud chorus of bombastic noises. My eyes and ears are beginning to adjust with the new surroundings. This is no longer vistas of awe-inspiring cosmic visions with the woman, I am now in a world that is more grounded and less beautiful.

Time after time, hour after hour, minute after minute and second after second, the vibrancy of a man's energy and drive fades into irrelevance and desperate yearnings. The man who is like all of us, who is both too late and too early to acquire what he desires in the planned meeting. At the end of a tiring day where his heart struggles to beat normally, he goes to his red shining car and sits to relax with nostalgic music. He is like all of us, a victim of time and fate...a puppet of gravity.

When I see this man, it is like looking at a doppelganger. His face has the same features that I once had before I saw the transcendent visions with the flowing

ethereal woman. He had such empty sad eyes, tired lips and the lines of world weary history. I wondered, *Do all of our faces seem the same once we reach the age of lost youth and bitter remembrances.*

As this man was resting, the sky was slowly setting into cold darkness. Sounds of children playing, cars blaring their horns and animals with their usual loud barks were silenced. Even the tall intimidating skyscrapers were enveloped by the ominous grasp of the night's shadows. Only the man and his imposing red car was the clear sight to see, resting and sleeping as the night ignores him.

In my moment of curiosity, I quietly walked closer to the man and his car. Then, all of a sudden, the man wakes up. A sense of panic sweeps over with droplets of sweat appearing on my forehead, me with heavier breathing, fingers fidgeting.

The nameless man started to speak. "You are my water. I want to drink you. I want to suck you dry so I can have your face. I am you and you are me and we are two."

After saying that, he started to laugh louder and louder. Yet, his laugh felt hollow with no feeling of humor or warmth. With each laugh, his eyes started to bleed and then fall from their sockets.

The sudden changes of his body and his movements made me terrified and put me into a state where both my feet and legs could not even move a single inch.

"Don't leave, my water. Don't ever leave, you sweat with such moisture. I have to perform better when I catch your droplets!" he said in a soothing yet eerie tone.

Before he could do anything drastic to me, this awful scenario is beginning to shift with the sight of the street melting away into a different scene again.

Now, I begin to open my eyes again with the sight of the woman right in front of me. She is caressing my hair with her soft delicate hands.

“Now, do you understand my message more vividly, love?” she said in her usual calm tone.

“Yes, I do now, if I don't truly free myself again and again in my usual life, my eventual destiny is that of an old-type.”

“Indeed, darling. Now that you saw that vision, eventually your soul will be freed from gravity and you will be awakened into a Newtype. The next stage of evolution of humanity where our minds will resonate with each other in peace and harmony.”

“I understand.”

After saying such sweet words, our minds start to meld with our memories and our emotions become linked together. People will someday evolve into the promise of the Newtypes.

# Fortitude

Morgan Mowbray

Dear Prudence,

My daughter is depressed. Her grades are slipping and she's no longer interested in friends or her other activities. I'm worried sick about her and don't know what to do. Should I go and bring her home from college and convince her to take a semester off? Should I make her change schools so she's closer to home and can get a fresh start? I love her so much but I feel so helpless. She won't talk to me about it, but I know she's in pain. I'm her mom, it is my job to fix it. Please tell me what to do.

Dear Fix-It Mom,

I know you love your daughter, but I don't think pulling her out of school is the best decision, especially if she doesn't want to leave. Instead, encourage her to reach out to her campus' resources to get some help. Almost every university offers some kind of counseling services that not enough students utilize. It can be really helpful to speak to an outsider, someone who has been in your daughter's shoes.

I am also sensitive to the pain you are feeling Fix-It Mom. I know how hard it must be for you to feel so helpless. My advice for you - and I know this won't be easy - is to take a step back and let your daughter breathe. Let her know consistently that you are available for whatever she needs. Let her know she is loved and you trust her decisions. I wish both of you luck in this difficult time.

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Dear Prudence,

My girlfriend just told me that she's pregnant, and that the baby isn't mine. She admitted that she cheated on me a while ago, and I was just starting to forgive her for that when she dropped this bomb on me. She keeps saying how sorry she is and that she knows we can still make it work because I'm the only one for her. But come on, how am I supposed to love her after everything? And how am I supposed to love this kid, and raise this kid, when it really isn't my problem? It's not fair of her to put me in such a hard position, right? So please Prudence tell me what to do, cuz I'm losing my mind.

Dear Not-Your-Baby Daddy,

First off, don't be that guy. You either love her or you don't. With or without a baby. Yes, it is really that simple.

She's admitted her mistakes; but she's choosing you to have in her life, and that must mean that she loves and trusts you. So your decision is whether you can accept that and move forward, or you can't. You will love this baby because you love their mother, and no, a baby isn't just someone's "problem". But if you can't do any of that, then do her a favor and walk away now and allow her to build her life.

Don't wait and waste her time and become a problem.

Don't forget there is always couples counseling, or maybe just individual counseling, for you.

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Dear Prudence,

I think I'm in love with my boyfriend's sister. I've never felt



this way about another girl before and I am so scared. I was raised to believe it is wrong, but how do I ignore these feelings? Please Prudence understand that I know this love is real. It's the kind of love people write poems about or sing songs about. She's so beautiful, and I feel like I could look into her eyes forever. But if I act on these feelings, my life will never be the same and not necessarily for the better. It would break my parents' hearts, it would break my boyfriend's heart, and if she didn't return my feelings, it would break my heart too. How do I know what the right choice is? Please tell me how I could possibly make this decision. A decision that will define the rest of my life.

Dear Love Sick,

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I stare at the blinking cursor on the screen until my vision blurs and my eyes strain from being kept open. I sharply shut the laptop and give the table a harsh shove to put some distance between me and my writers' problem. That last one haunts me more than I'm used to. I guess because she's right, they do say our lives are made up of the decisions we make. Well I sure as hell didn't decide to be dying of cancer at the ripe age of 29. I also didn't decide to paint this hospital room puke yellow. I am so sick of staring at these walls, of being condemned to the bed in this room. Every night I tell myself, tomorrow I'll get up and walk out of here and never look back. And yet, here I am. I mean, who am I kidding, it takes all I have to be moved to

a wheelchair by two nurses for this or that test. That's why I'm going to let the quack crack me open and dig around. It's risky, and all the docs and nurses make sure I know that. But it's my body and I want to exert any kind of control I can have over it while I still can.

The nurse comes in with a huge pile of paperwork that I will have to read and sign. I sigh inwardly at her bright smile and perky greeting. She calls me Prudence, I quickly correct her to Prue. My social-justice-lawyer parents wanted to give me a meaningful name, but it follows me like a plague, but I guess it does give me a confident sounding advice columnist's name. I stare out the window as she goes through her spiel of rules and regulations for what I've already signed up for. You would think that dying of cancer would give you a get out of jail free card on all this shit. I let her continue uninterrupted, barely paying attention. This isn't my first time hearing all this. Not even my first time hearing it alone. My parents check in whenever they think about it, which isn't often. They can't just stop their lives every time I go to the hospital, or so they say. I learned from a young age that they are much more concerned with the well-being of their clients than that of their only daughter. How very prudent of them.

I'm brought back to the room when the nurse's chipper voice pauses. She's staring at whatever is on top of her pile of papers, an anxious frown on her porcelain face. She clears her throat, still refusing to make eye contact. Then she says it in a soft and gentle voice, you know it, the one you would use when soothing a frightened child. My DNR papers.

The room becomes heavy from their importance, I'm surprised I didn't notice it sooner. She explains what they are, what they mean, what they do - their power only growing and filling the already cramped room. When she's done she asks if I have any questions or if I need any help. I shake my heavy bald head, feeling too suffocated to speak. Yes, I don't wear one of those head scarves. I love rocking my bald head in public—I refuse to cover what others say is ugly. The nurse leaves her papers and rushes out of the room, not being able to stand the heaviness in the air. I long to follow her.

I turn on the small TV in the upper corner of my room. Not able to change the DVD myself - and not wanting to call the nurse back in here - I just start the disc over from the beginning. It's fine, it's one of my favorites. My collection of movie musicals—my salvation, my escape—are the only pieces of personality or originality in the room. This one is full of love and passion and it's able to go from humor to heartbreak with the change of a song. A world built on singing and dancing about your problems is a world I very much prefer. I try to forget the papers and focus on the lead actress getting ready for the next big song and dance, but like a lighthouse beacon, my eyes return again and again to the pile of papers on my little hospital table. I mute the movie and pick up the pen. I start with the familiar forms, filling out all the dotted lines methodically and mindlessly. One after the other I make my way through the pages until I get to the last one. I hold it gingerly between two fingers, afraid it might burn me. It grows hotter and hotter the further my eyes go down the page until finally I have to drop it. My mind spins from

all the questions that I'm sure everyone goes through when reading this page. No extraordinary measures. What does that mean? How is the surgery itself not an extraordinary measure against my cancer? Am I a hypocrite for signing this paper then having the surgery? I mean the surgery alone could kill me, so is there a big difference between dying on the table or in this room a few hours later? I've never actually sat down and asked myself if I want to die. If I say yes, they would have a psychiatrist down here before I even finish the thought. But am I living a life worth living? No one wants to talk about that. How can such a small piece of paper hold the fate of such a big decision? And now it is my decision. I think about all the people waiting for me to fix their problems. I think about Fix-It Mom, feeling so helpless for her daughter. What I really wanted to tell her is just hug her and never let her go, because it's what I wish my own mom would do for me. I think about Not-Your-Baby Daddy and how there's going to be a baby out there with three possible parents. I can't even keep the pieces of parenting my parents have offered to make one whole one. And then there's Love Sick. I was lost on how to help her with love when I felt so alone. Too bad there isn't anyone out there to help me now. I push down that thought of weakness before it can consume me.

After the third time of anxiously pacing outside my door, the nurse decides to come back in. She smiles and takes my hand like we are old friends. She asks me if I have any questions. She asks if I want to talk to the doctors again. She asks if she can call anyone for me. No. No. No. The only things I want, I can't have. We are both staring at the still unsigned piece of paper in my lap. I know she needs it

so she can do her job, but I need time that I don't have. I look back at the TV screen and watch the bright lights and colors play through the grainy image. I don't hear the nurse leave, but when the door shuts behind her I close my eyes and dream of a life where people never have to make these kinds of decisions. One filled with music and life, where I can dance and spin forever without getting dizzy. One where the hardest decision we have to make is who we choose to love.

# Yesterday's Tomorrow is Today

Zinnia Nguyen

*Read Me.*

The words are inviting, so out of curiosity, I step out of bed and walk towards the desk. The item is standing on top of a black cover it is a notebook. Holding up the notebook, the card slips off, and with the familiar feeling of having done this many times before, I open it.

*May 3rd*

*Hi Kumori, that is you, that is our name. Perhaps you already knew this when you woke up, or maybe you did not. If you don't feel like being called that this week, how about being called Ami? It's our middle name. It's something you like to switch to when you don't want strangers knowing who you are. By now you can probably guess that you don't remember anything. Are you wondering why you are like this? I'm sure you are. Well I don't have the faintest of ideas. But knowing us, you don't care for an answer because it doesn't matter. You know you will forget it later, or maybe you won't. If we can't remember, it is merely because it was not worth remembering--that is my guess. I don't have much to say, but I do have some things to say. If you are curious to continue knowing, bring this journal along with you today. If you are feeling up to exploring the unknown you can stop reading anytime. Oh, before I forget, a person is waiting for you. Downstairs our childhood friend will be sitting at what seems to be his usual spot. He's always on his phone playing a game. How you choose to approach him is up to you, as he always*

*seems to know what to do. When you look at him, you'll know it's him, or at least I did. His emerald eyes will pierce right through you with comfort. I started to realize that I've known this person my whole life. It made me wonder how many times we keep replaying this moment. Don't take too long, it would be rude of us to keep him waiting. You should smile, even if it is not a real one. Try your best, it's the least we can do.*

I pick up the journal and walk towards the door. Nervous as to who I will be meeting, I leave my bedroom. The hallway is dim with some lights shining through the windows and I see another door across from mine. Out of curiosity, I have already placed myself in front of the door. Wondering if this room belonged to the person she mentioned, or maybe it was just another room I have. I twist the doorknob only to be stopped at my own pace, it's locked. I faintly hear footsteps and then it becomes silent. Is that person here? Maybe he lives with me since this house appears to be spacious. I go down the stairs ever so quietly, not quite ready to be found. I continue lower and go towards a path that seems right, and peek my head through the doorway. A figure is sitting on the couch, holding his phone vertically as he taps away. I'm not too sure what to do, so I continue to watch him.

“Kuku, I would appreciate it, if you stop observing me like a creep.” he said.

I become a bit startled. “Wow, how did you see me? Is Kuku me?”

“It’s called peripheral vision. Yes, that is you, who else am I talking to? Good morning.” He gets up and his figure becomes closer.

“Oh, okay--um good morning, how did you get inside?” I attempt to smile. “I broke in.” He begins laughing and I panic. “Please don’t look so paranoid I was only joking. I live with you, silly.”

My head starts to sting a bit and something comes back to me. “Ray...?”

“Yes, that’s my name, and for figuring that out, here’s a prize.” He hands me a thin smooth plastic box.

“Cream waf--ers, do I like these?”

“No silly. You detest them so much that I decided to go out of my way to buy them just for you. Try them.”

My body becomes a little shaky and I can only blankly stare at the plastic. How should I open this? Should I rip it with my teeth, or do I get scissors? Neither of them seems like the right option. Before I can make a decision, he takes the wafer box out of my hand.



“You are overthinking this.” He opens it from the sides and taps the box against my head. “Thank you,” I take the box out of his hand and pull out a wafer cookie. He stares at me as if he is waiting for my next movement. I become immobile. His eyes are so captivating, she wasn’t wrong. “Your eyes are so pretty.”

His eyes widen and he quickly steps back. He covers a part of his face with his hand. “Watching you do anything has always been really intense, but that’s just who you are.” He chuckles.

He takes the wafer out of my hand. “Ahhhh, now eat.” I quickly chew so that I am able to eat the entire cookie. It’s not too sweet, it’s creamy and quickly dissolves into my mouth. Then, without realizing, I have already started eating more and more until I have gotten to the last one. I hand the wafer to Ray.

“Thank you, but no thank you. I got them for you, so you can finish.”

“Okay.” Excited that I can have one more, I eat the last. I look up to him. “Umm... what now?”

“What now, she says.” he chuckles.

He puts his hand out in front of me, and I naturally hold onto it. He holds onto my hand and begins walking us towards the door. “I’m sorry, but you’re too slow today and we have to get going or we’ll be late.”

Uneasy that I already have to leave the house,  
I firmly hold Ray back.

“Where are we going?  
I don’t understand anything yet.”

“Sorry, I usually wait for you to ask me. We are going to work because we have the morning shift. If you don’t feel like going, I’ll cover for you. But honestly, I won’t be able to relax knowing you are here by yourself. So please come with me.” He smiles.

We step outside and Ray goes towards his car. I stay by the door, enjoying the freshness of the weather. Can I even function as a working human-being today? I sigh and stand still. Ray pokes his head out of the car window.

“You can enjoy the atmosphere inside the car too.”

I open the car door and place myself in the passenger seat. Ray looks over and I become slightly nervous.

“Why are you gripping onto the journal so much?” he asks.

“Uh. Oh. I didn’t know.” I loosen my grip and place the journal gently onto my lap. The car engine starts up and he begins to back out of the driveway. I start touching the screen of the car’s stereo.

“Oh, did you want to listen to music?”  
He glances over.

I pause. “I---uh I don’t know, it just happened.” I withdraw my arm and become slightly timid.

“Well if you do decide that you want to, go ahead. Use my phone as always if you like.” I nod and stare down at the journal on my lap, maybe now is the best time to read. I am curious as to what I have written to myself. Will she reveal more about Ray? What will she tell me? “If you want to read the journal, you can go right ahead, I am driving anyway.” My eyes grow, in amazement that he might have read my mind. “Are you a wizard? How do you know?”

“I am an all-around top class wizard.” He snickers. “Hmm...Well, how do I know what? That when you buy anything you never want the item in front, but rather the one in the back. It’s because you don’t enjoy the thought that multiple people could have already touched it. Or do I know that when you are stressed out, you will clean. Whether it’s your room or the entire house. You will find anything to clean because it helps relax your mind. Yes, I do know that some days you will wake up forgetting. Forgetting maybe where you are, forgetting who you are and even forgetting me.”

There was a hint of sorrow to his voice.

“How long have you been dealing with this?”

“I don’t deal with it. I have come to accept it. I decided to stay whether you remain this way forever or eventually come back. Counting today this would be number seventy-two. Seventy-two times that you have reset. It has been a year and---.”

I tug on his arm. “It’s okay, you don’t have to explain anymore.”

“Sorry, I didn’t have to say that. I guess I didn’t know how to respond but I wanted to.” “If you’re at a loss for words, you don’t have to force yourself. Don’t you think that in itself is a form of comfort? You are doing great.” I smile.

A slight smile began to form on his face. “Don’t look at me, it’s distracting and I am driving.” I open up the journal and continue.

*Hello Kumori, have you decided to take me along with you today? I am assuming so if you are reading this. Or maybe you don’t see this and I am merely talking to myself, or someone else. I really shouldn’t get off topic, but I can only wonder. How was your encounter with Ray? Did you have fun? Did you run away? I hope not. Were you able to figure out his name all on your own? Of course you did. In honesty, I don’t have any ideas of what you will be doing because everyday is different. You could be going to work. You could be going on an adventure. Maybe you aren’t going anywhere at all. I’m not a magician, nor am I a fortune teller. I don’t know everything, I only know*

*what I know. If you are going to work, I will at least tell you about the people there. For starters, the only person who knows about our issue is our manager, David. You will figure him out right away because he is always wearing his nametag. He's nice and is willing to help, but that doesn't mean he's always a good person. You don't know what people will do with the information nor do you know what they might do to you. Never trust anyone too much. Next in line is your assistant manager, Eve. She recently changed her hair color to blue. She seems to adore us, but something about her is always off-putting. I guess it's because she enjoys engaging in gossip that you never will know if your name will slip up in her conversations. Who's to say that it hasn't already? Since you are going to be in the office throughout the day, you mostly will be interacting with them. Krystal, who is one of the supervisors, might be there. She's... friendly. Nonetheless it's not up to me to tell you how to enjoy your time because I won't exist anymore. The world belongs to you now. I am only here to let you know what I know and what I want you to know. When you close your eyes and look at the world, what do you see?*

I close my eyes: nothing. Suddenly I begin to feel pressure against my face. I thought I was supposed to envision something yet what is this force? Its presence isn't frightening but is instead gentle. The warmth engulfs my face and I start to get sleepy. I open my eyes to see Ray's hand squishing my face.

“Your face is always so cold, Kuku. We are here.”

“Is it weird that each time I forget, I forget a part of me? It’s like I don’t know who I am. It makes me wonder why I even forgot in the first place, but of course I don’t know the answer.”

“Well most of my memories are intact and I still don’t know who I am at times. People are always reforming themselves whether it’s in a day or in a few years. If it was that easy to define who you are as a person, I could have told you from the beginning. Anyways Kuku, you aren’t the type of person who has fun playing a role you don’t know. You always look like you are having fun doing anything even if you are in an uncomfortable situation, you make the most of it. That is one of the few features I like about you. You are great just the way you are, with memories or none. He smiles at me and my vision begins to get teary. Oh I’m crying.

Eventually we leave the car and head inside a building. We head into the elevator and Ray presses the button to the third floor. Ray went over paperwork that was assigned to me by David. He thought it would be easy for me to just do the math for sales and made sure everything added up correctly. He even points out that the post-its left around my desk were from me, they were small tips. David comes in and greets us before asking Ray for some assistance. Observing my desk, I note that the placements of utensils and paper are quite organized. There are a few cute objects scattered around, like a dancing flower in a pot. If it is energized by solar power, I wonder how it is moving with office LED lights.

There is a tiny size cat plush laying on the keyboard and a few origami lotus laying against the pen holders. Soon another person approaches me, she pulls off her hood and reveals her short lapis blue hair. “Hey Kumori.”

“Um... Hello Eve.  
Can you please call me Ami today?”

“Uhhh ... Sure, changing up your style I see,  
I like it! Okay Ami. Also I printed this out for you.”

Eve pulls something out of her bag and hands me a gift bag. She takes out a frame picture and hands it to me. It's a picture of me giving Ray a piggyback ride and Eve is poking her head into the photo. They look like they were having fun. I wonder if I was having a good time too, it seems like it.

“Isn't this cute? I even took the liberty to frame this for you! Man, that trip was great, we should do it again next year.” She excitedly speaks.

“It is very cute, thank you.”

I place the picture in between my monitor and keyboard, but far enough that it doesn't cover up some of the screen. Eve sits down at the computer next to me and begins working and soon, Krystal shows up. They both immerse into idle chit-chat about the recent events of a co-worker sleeping with David. They poke fun at her for perhaps being desperate for higher pay, or having bad taste

in men. Eve can't wait for the day that David gets fired so she can take over, but she also doesn't want to. She likes that she has power, but also not too much, because then there is more responsibility laid onto her. Every now and then they glance over and I wasn't sure if that was a cue for me to jump into the conversation but I couldn't. What am I supposed to say about people who I don't recall. How can I speak ill of others when I can't even remember their faces; I don't want to, even if I tried. I attempt to avoid eye contact and I look down at my journal. Something is poking out from the back pages. I pull on the edge and a photograph comes out.

“Hey Ami, why aren't you and Ray dating yet?” Eve asks.

“It would be too convenient,” I blurt out. Feeling alarmed that I had answered on my own. I then stay silent, but their continuous stares seem to ask for further explanation. “I have always loved him and adored him, but that love has never gone anywhere. It would be easy to be with him because it seems appropriate, but I wouldn't do it.”

“That's disappointing. I would be thrilled to see you both together, but I respect that” replies Eve.

I instantly get up from my seat and sprint off. I am still holding onto the photograph, so I put it in my pocket. I start grinning and I'm not too sure why. Maybe it's the fact that within that instant everything feels clear.



Though I'm mistaken--I thought that Ray and I were an item--I guess not.

"Why are you smiling like a weirdo?" asks Ray.

I didn't realize I'd walked off somewhere. No matter how much my mind wanders it feels like I will always find him.

"Ray, should we be together?" I ask.

His phone slips off his hand. "In what country?"

We both kneel down to reach for his phone, only to clash our heads. I step back and rub my forehead. "I don't know...The U.S, I think." Ray turns over to the wall and slams his head forward. Worried as to what he has just done, I tap him. "What are you doing?"

"Escaping." He muffles. He turns around and puts both his hands onto my shoulder. "How dare you ask me this." He shakes me furiously.

"I was curious because I thought we were."

"Oh? You think so. Well if you gladly must know, in your previous life you have rejected me several times. No matter how much you change, the outcome is always the same." He leans in closer to my face. His eyes are mesmerising. I would get lost in them. He continues to stare as if he attempts to hypnotize me. "Even now when

I'm this close, you don't bat an eyelid and it's frustrating."

"You are blushing," I observe.

"Thank you for noticing. I need water so stay here I will be back quickly." Ray dashes off. I hadn't gotten a chance to look at the photograph before Eve asked me the question. I pull the photograph carefully out of my pocket, hoping that it hasn't gotten wrinkled. In the picture, I see myself, I see others such as David and Eve, I see an unidentified person, and I see Ray. He's smiling so brightly. I wonder if he's enjoying life now or is he exhausted? Out of curiosity, to see if there is more to the picture, I flip it around. There is something written.

*How weak the mind is when it wants to forget.  
Maybe you didn't forget. Maybe you are lying. Is it a lie you  
tell everyone around you, or perhaps a lie you tell yourself?*  
My body becomes uneasy and I push the photograph back  
into my pocket.

# Walls

Adriana Santillan

Maggie lives in a tiny room that grows smaller with each passing breath. She can't stretch out, she can't reach out, without touching a wall or some part of herself in the process. She must reach around, make herself tiny. She isn't one to complain, that isn't her role in this. She toughs it out like she toughs out everything else in her life. She must. There is no one else who can help her but herself.

Unlike Maggie, Angie lives in a big room that expands with each passing moment. She lives, learns, thrives - even when her breath is shallow, and she must sit down and take a moment to compose herself. She can stand in the middle of her room and never even get close to touching the walls for they are too far away and her arms, her breath, is too small. She knows that being inside, trapped and alone, isn't for everyone. But she must be inside - only going outside to go to class - for she is delicate and she is breathless. She lives in a wide bubble of four vertical walls, two windows, and two doors. One door leads to the outside, the other to her closet where her worst nightmares are stored.

Angie doesn't complain. She's lived with it for so long that she can't remember not having a closet storing her shame. She uses it only when she needs to, opening the door quietly so as to not alert anyone, turning it on and putting the mask to her face for a quick inhale that turns to two and three and four... She doesn't remember ever breathing better

air than in those moments where she is beholden to a machine in her closet, her nightmare.

Maggie hears this machine sometimes, and the walls to her room get just a tiny bit smaller. She tosses and turns in bed, her elbow meeting one wall as she turns. She doesn't make a sound, doesn't yelp even though the pain is there. Angie mustn't know that she is awake, that she can hear her with that breathing apparatus of hers. It's the worst kept secret in the house. One that could cost Angie her life if it stops working or they don't get to it in time. Maggie knows this, she learned to operate it long ago when they first brought it into the home back when Angie was tinier than she was now. Maggie knows that the machine went from being prominently displayed next to Angie's bed to being shoved in her closet like a dirty secret that must be kept from the public.

Maggie doesn't get it. And she never will. But Maggie knows that Angie has her reasons for not wanting the machine being seen by anyone but her...

Angie is older now, starting to make a place for herself in the world. But Maggie is scared, so very scared.

# Hello Future Self

Adriana Santillan

Hello future self, I am writing this to inform you that this life you have led —from beginning to end —is one that has not been predicted by anyone. Not even me, your past self, knows what is in store for you ... for me -

*Where did the term "ping" come from/ why is it only used in corporate settings? /"I'll ping you."/ "Ping me later."/ "Can you ping Bob about that?" Who said it first? / Why did it catch on? / Was there some old early generation business chat that called / sending a message pinging? / Did something make/ a sound? Where / did / it COME FROM?*

Are you (am I) a published author? Is that story about angels and vampires finally done after twelve years of being in progress? Did you get the balls to send it to an editor? To a professional? To anyone other than your friends?

*Also / capitalism is relentless / Being an adult is exhausting / I want to move to a cabin / in the woods / become a reclusive novelist who sweeps / around my cabin / in a velvet dressing gown / sees only the rugged plaid-wearing type / who I pay to deliver my groceries / but I can't / because I need money to survive / being a reclusive cabin dwelling novelist does not pay!*

Are you (am I?) a professional? Do you wear business

suits? Did you finally stop dyeing your hair when the world gets too stressful to handle and the only thing that can stop the voices in your head is to change something about you so radical that you won't recognize yourself in the mirror, which makes you feel better because you don't see you in the mirror, you see someone else and that someone else has their life together and totally does not need to cry most of the day?

*You know what pays? Sitting at a desk every day listening to people talk in acronyms/ Why are there so many acronyms? / I want a nap and a juice box I want to climb a tree / I want socialized medicine*

*no more cops*

*I want a cabin in the woods / a velvet dressing gown / one of those long / cigarette holders / even though / I / don't smoke cigarettes.*

Are you (am I?) married to someone who loves us back? Are you happy? Are you *finally* over it? Are you over *him*?

Is his continuous existence in this world no longer a concern for you because you have someone who loves you and who you love and thus you don't need him or his blue eyes or his rough calloused hands or that deep voice

that makes your body shake when you hear it even if it's him saying he doesn't love you and doesn't want you and you should get out of his car now?

Also / yesterday I was playing among us / after completing all my tasks

## CARRYING THOSE FUCKERS

they had the nerve to say / I was Sus vote me out / like /  
ain't that just life

Man

Do you (do I?) have kids? Are you a good mother? Do **you ever remember what he said to you in the car about how he could never have children with you because it wouldn't work out and you wouldn't make a good mother no matter how much you tried because you're too immature, too concerned about your career, too self-focused, too selfish to share his attention and too young to be really, truly happy with him?**

Family is family / sometimes / i just wanna  
yeet ur ass / to the fucking sun In all honesty / why do i get  
/ so / angry  
men....

If this was a girl / i probably wouldve been like  
'hmm gimme more info / sure' Do you (do I?) have a better  
relationship with her? Do you live with her? **Did you move out like you threatened to so many times but never had the balls or income to do it because you got used to spending money since the first moment a credit card was put in your hand and you were told to go into K-Mart and buy whatever you wanted?**

I hate/ really/ hate ppl Ppl  
who do impulsive shit / like no Some people / do not /  
operate like that  
No / fucking / information I am lazy / this is not how / you  
entice me to / shit

Do you (do I?) still have scars? Do you still pick at your

cuticles instead of saying what you wanna say for fear  
that it might be too much, that it might scare them,  
might scare him, might make him turn away further and  
further until all that is left is the scars and regret and  
tears and blood?

Why do you always / always / gotta talk about him  
Get over it / already It's been like / what / a few months  
He is probably / gone and fucked / and forgotten /  
You Already / here you are / crying over a dick Not even a  
good / one / sheesh

Get / over / it Do you (do I?) think that this is all there is  
to life? Are you stuck or are you running on a treadmill  
trying to keep up? Is this life all you lead? All you will ever  
lead. **I write to you today to tell you** that this is not to  
be. You are more than sad memories and bad thoughts.  
You are worth more than his touch could ever be. *You are  
more than* the landscape of your body. I write to you from  
the past, here, today, to tell you that this is not it. You will  
thrive. You will **survive**.

I know this.

You know this. We know this.

I don't  
think  
we should see  
each other / anymore I can't do this / anymore  
I'm sorry Please/ get  
out / of the car



# The Answer

Loni Strach

The signs are always the same. Printed in capital letters from a printer somewhere in the back. Probably done by an underpaid medical clerk well aware she is yelling at the patients by using all caps. PLEASE SIGN IN UPON ARRIVAL. HAVE REFERRALS AND IDS READY WHEN CALLED. PLEASE COVER YOUR COUGH. PLEASE DO NOT CHANGE THE TV. ASK FOR ASSISTANCE AT THE DESK.

This is the fourth time they have been here. Waiting, in this waiting room. She knows the faces behind the desk. Their smiles register recognition with a hint of sympathy for her when she approaches and hands over her identification cards and referrals.

“Good morning Mrs. Taylor, how are you today?”

“I don’t know, you tell me.”

“Oh, I see you still have that sense of humor. You know I do not have that information,” she said with a smile. “So you keep telling me, but someone has to know what is going on, right?”

“Here are your ID cards back. I hope the doctors give you good news today. Fingers crossed! Please have a seat until you are called.”

The staff are all very nice in this office and she remembers

all of the nurse's names that have helped her in the past. She never forgets a face or a name. But she dreads coming here. The news is never good and never what they want to hear, even if it is presented with a smile and a soft touch.

*Have a seat. How the hell am I supposed to get comfortable in these shitty chairs!*

She tries to get comfortable in one of the less wobbly, sunken in chairs but it is useless. She sinks into the seat, letting it consume her and nestles up to him. She feels his stress of having to miss another day of work to be here with her. His boss is blowing up his phone wanting to know when he will be back to work. He catches her gaze and slides his phone into his jacket pocket and takes her hand. She prayed this would be the last time her husband had to miss work to bring her here.

Since high school, Maggie and Peter were always two peas in a pod and each knew they could not live without the other. They have been together for almost 30 years and her illness has taken a toll on both of them. Even through the pain and tears they choose laughter and joy. As long as she was by his side, he could face anything. He was her rock and the reason she recovered. She was never able to bear children for Peter but she was all he needed. Nothing else mattered.

“Hopefully, we will not be here all day,” he says as he puts his arm around her and squeezes her shoulders hard.

She knows he would rather be anywhere else

but here in this depressing box of sadness they call a waiting room.

As she sat silently, her mind began to focus on the walls of the waiting room. If she stared just long enough at them, it seemed like they would move. In and out, getting smaller and then bigger. She knew walls didn't just move. It must have been the color playing tricks on her mind. She had been in many, many waiting rooms over the years but none have ever been this ugly!

*Why paint the walls brown? It's bad enough to have to come here but then to sit here looking at these brown walls is sad and annoying. I wonder what emotion brown represents on that emotion spectrum. Does the shitty color of the walls represent the bad news people get in this office, I wonder?*

"Look at the walls, babe. They are literally the color of shit. Shit brown, diarrhea walls! We are sitting in a shitty room!"

"Or are we shitting in a sitty room," he joked with her.

They laughed long and hard at the "box of shit" they were sitting in together. She pulled out her phone to take a picture of the ugly walls to share with her sister later. She knew her sister would have fun coming up with "shitty" puns.

Suddenly, through her camera phone she was looking directly at a hallway with a white door that she had

not seen before. Located off to the right side of the waiting room, she could see the door had a small window in it and through it she could see a long hallway with multiple doors. No signage. No buzzers. No directional arrows. Just white, blank walls.

“Babe, look, have you ever seen that door before?” she asked him, pointing at the door.

“Umm, no, I don’t think so.”

“Seriously, right? We’ve been here like four times and I have never seen it before. I wonder where it goes?”

“Not sure, babe. Why are you so excited about a door? It is a big facility and maybe they added more exam rooms for more patients. You know, for that almighty dollar!”

“I think it is suspicious. I have not seen one patient go in there yet. They are taking every patient in those tan doors behind the desk.”

She jumped with fright as her name was called just then.

“Mrs. Taylor. Mrs. Taylor, right this way please.”

They grabbed their jackets and followed Tomas through the tan doors.

“Oh sorry, Tomas. Hey, is the office expanding? I was noticing that white door over there with the long

hallway. I have not seen it before.”

“No, I have not heard we are expanding. What white door are you talking about Mrs. Taylor?”

“The one to the right of the waiting room, you know. White door, small window, long hallway?”

“Sorry, I don’t know what door you are referring to. I just work here,” he said as he escorted them into a waiting room.

“The doctor will be with you shortly,” he said and closed the door.

As they sat in the exam room, Maggie was overcome with a strong sense that something felt out of place. From the moment she stepped in the waiting room, she was uneasy. She thought it was a sign of the bad news to come but this feeling was far different than her usual feeling of dread.

“Peter, don’t you think it feels weird in here today?”

“Yeah, it’s cold, as always.”

“No, it’s more than that. I have this weird feeling all over my body. Like it’s tingling all over.”

“You mean your “spidey” senses are activated? Do you think the news will be bad today?”

“I don’t know but I know that hallway was never

there before and Tomas said he did not know which white door I was talking about. Something is going on and he lied.”

“Ok, Ms. Conspiracy Theorist, don’t get all worked up.”

Just then there was a knock on the door.

“Come in,” Maggie shouted.

“Hello, how are you guys today? Nice to see you again,” said her oncologist.

“Hello, Dr. Garcia. Nice to see you too. How are you today?”

“Good. Please have a seat. I got your test results back.”

Maggie and Peter sat side by side in the chairs opposite Dr. Garcia. He held her hand and she tightly squeezed his.

Maggie searched the doctor’s face for any semblance of good news. A glint in his eyes or a tiny smile on his lips. But saw nothing. She squeezed Peter’s hand harder. She felt the tears well up in her throat and the anger in her gut.

“I am sorry to have to tell you this, Maggie. Your cancer is back and according to the labs it is stage 4 pancreatic cancer with bone metastasis.”

He tried to muster a friendly smile but instead reached out and squeezed her knee and whispered, "I am sorry."

She was one his favorite patients over the years. She was funny and very often outwitted him with her humor. Her positivity through her previous cancer treatment always cheered up the staff. She was always ready with a joke or a smile. He hated to give such devastating news but it hurt so much when he had to tell the good ones.

Maggie saw Peter's head drop out of the corner of her eye at the news. Her heart was broken for him. How would he survive without her? What could she say to him to make him want to go on without her? She threw her arms around him and told him it would be ok. They would get through it together. Together they cried.

After watching Maggie and Peter cry in each other's arms for several minutes, Dr. Garcia cleared his throat to get their attention. He waited while they wiped away the tears and proceeded to speak to both of them.

"I know this is difficult. I have been watching you two over the years at how strong your relationship is. Maggie may only have a few weeks to a few months to live. She can enter treatment for additional chemo and radiation but it will not buy her much more time. It will be painful and it will be debilitating. Your quality of life will be nothing. Maggie, do you want to continue with another round of treatments?"

Maggie turned to Peter, holding his hands to her

cheek and said, "I want my last few months to be my best months with you, Peter. I cannot go through chemo again. Please understand. I just want us to be together and then I can go in peace."

Peter wiped away his tears with Maggie's hand and said, "I want you to go in peace too. I will be with you until the end. I am ok with whatever you decide."

"I do have one more option for you both," Dr. Garcia said as he walked to the opposite door across the exam room.

"If you choose each other right here and right now, I can offer you a place where there is no pain, no cancer and no chemo. You will be together for all of your days but you will have to leave your life behind and you cannot go back. All you have to do is walk through this door and follow the hallway until it ends. I will give you time to think about it. I have another patient and then I will be back for your decision," said Dr. Garcia.

When he returned 15 minutes later the exam room was empty.



# MANIC

Andrew R. Torres

The sun sets on a short skyline on the town of wherever-this-is, it's damn near eight o' clock, and I am hungry. This is the journey I am going to take to the store. Be me. I go down the hall from the bed I God-forsakenly crawled out of shortly before I showered. I showered before I dropped the scrambled eggs, and did not resist drinking a black coffee with sugar. And this was also before sitting on the porch, judging the nicotine stain on my stone-like finger, and then begrudgingly doing the deed. Smelling like death, I crawled in the shower. I shagged my hair about with the shampoo and conditioner with menthol. I got out; put on the same clothes I always do because I'm poor. Poor because I spent money on myself and not my future. Poor, buying tickets away from my past. Letting go of money that could've gone to things that don't go in me. Putting time towards things not vanishing.

I haven't been to the store in a while. Maybe somebody went for me. This is my journey to get what I need. The food. I need to go out.

I make it out of the apartment begrudgingly.

The long walk in the silent hallway always creeps me out. The lights are dimmer than the last time I saw them. I make it from the sixth floor to the front desk. The bright lights have hurt my eyes for a while now. I make no eye-contact and yet the doorman still notices me. He still manages to say something to me, singles me out. Right before the door.

Right before my freedom. Right before I claw my way out and escape the goddamn building. I make conversation.

“Have a good one out there, it sure looks nice!” he gurgles at me from his socially distanced position.

“I will try my best! Take care.”

I’m glad the first words that come to my brain are polite this time. Attempting to avoid any more people. I haven’t seen faces this week, I cannot handle it.

I make it to the sidewalk. This is different.

For those who know and those who don’t; this is the manic. A gift for being released from everything earthly. The sun at this time of day, it just hits the eye a certain way. Protrudes from your skin with a certain warmth. For, the rays of light become visible to me. The eye serves as my prism and I can see the waves, separate, the light separating. Eyes rolling. Eyes bleeding.

SPlitting.

sPLitting.

spLItting.

splitTIng.

splittiNG.

And then I took a seat on the couch and turned on the meTV channel (with the old westerns and reruns from the cowboy era) On meTV (the interface in which I see the actions of Me, myself, and I; past, future, and present) I saw me, but I no longer had me in I; and I lost myself a

long while ago.

The Manic was in.

I am empty. I was empty. I haven't anything to linger on.

I just let go.

Manic is warm. That's what was hard to learn.

Hard to accept.

The Manic is like a metronome. One can be manic but you always return. Just as quickly as you enter the Manic, you exit. Yet there are times, when times are tough. When ends need to be met. When loose ends become tied up.

When the past is so heavy, so heavy it drowns your future.

When the metronome that keeps moving, sixty beats-per-minute. When that metronome stops. And it cannot return. When it is stuck to one side, forbidden, unable, to return to its opposite side. That is broken.

For what it is worth, I am the metronome, I am broken, I am stuck on this side now. I am broken, broken since I cannot remember. Myself died. In this particular turn of events, when the ends need to be tied, they get tied. But the world is so big, so hard to keep track of. Yet, the great clock-maker in the sky, he, or she is smart. They keep track. They tied the loose ends. Loose no more. Free, and so was I. Free from the parents and sister that god considered loose. Loose, no more. Tied them up, tied them around a pole on the way home from their Christmas party. And I, warm by the fireplace, sick at mi abuela's. I learned the next day, the Manic feels just the same.

Visual Arts



# Ayesha A.

Who's to say



# Queerantine

Veronica Cerda



# Trip

Joshua Cordero





# Leaving Mexico

Alexandra Galvan



# Mexico

Alexandra Galvan



# We're All Broken Inside

Alexandra Galvan



# Johnny Boy

Brian Garbrecht







# Ode To Mom

Brian Garbrecht



# Dormiveglia

Kellie Jarr



# Lacuna

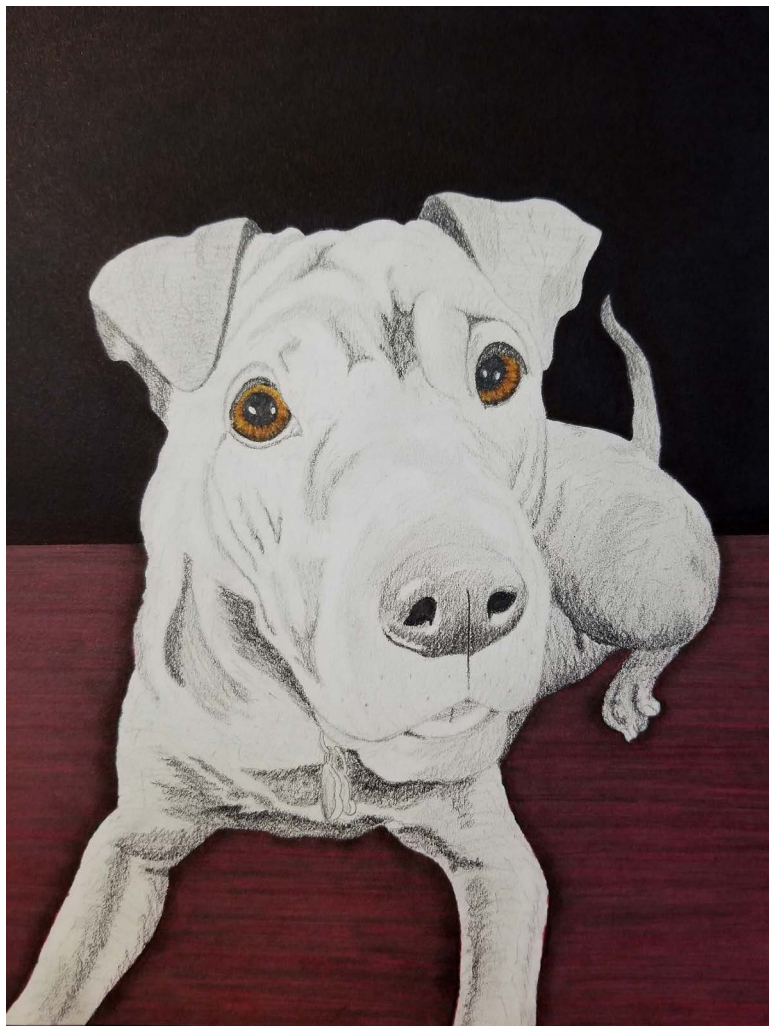
Kellie Jarr





# Molly

Kellie Jarr



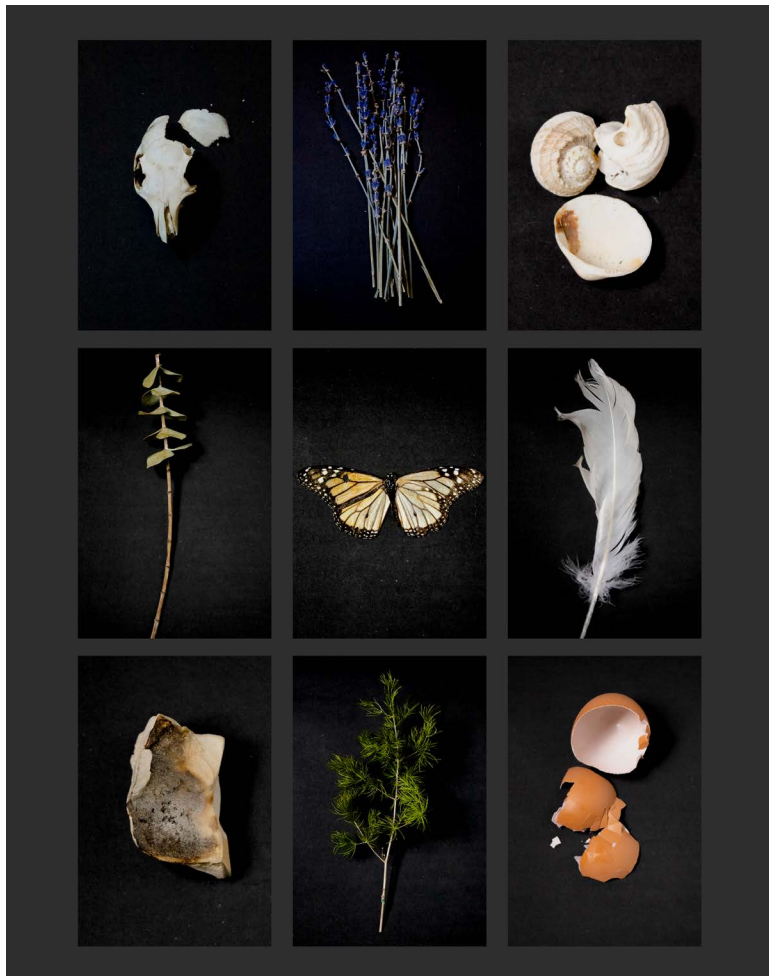
# My Finger

Katelyn Krabacher



# The Collection

Katelyn Krabacher



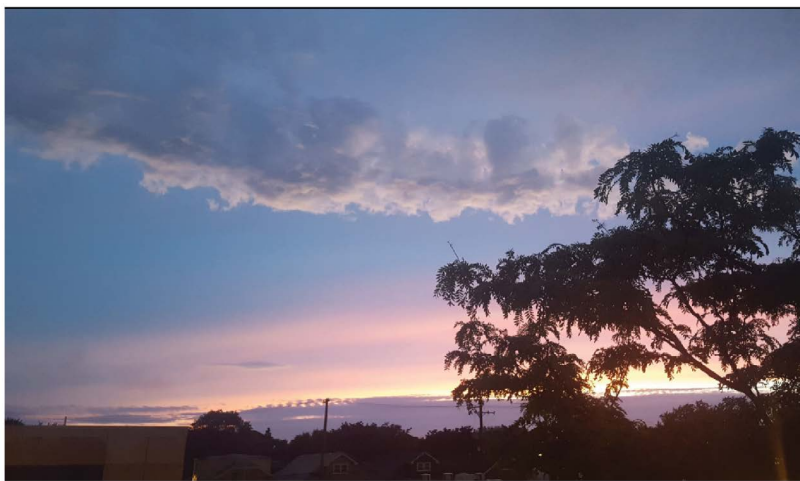
# The Elk

Katelyn Krabacher



# Blues

Ayushi Kumar



# Mystery

Ayushi Kumar



# Road Dusk

Ayushi Kumar





# An Alternate Christianity

Xena Lopez





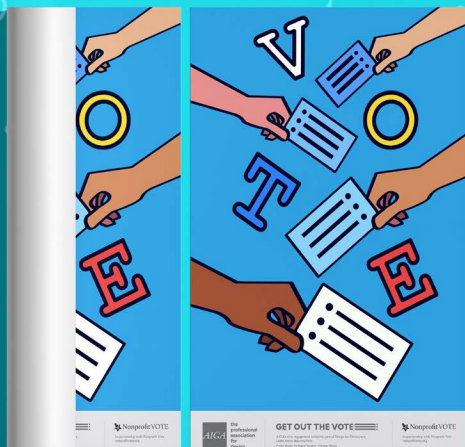






# AIGA Get Out To Vote Poster (GOTV)

Brandi Nevarez



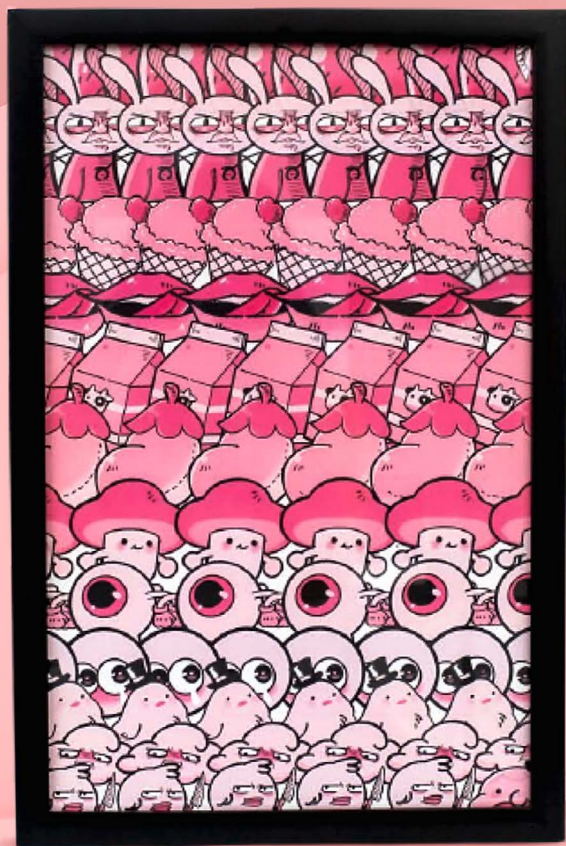
# My Eyes Are Up Here

Brandi Nevarez



# Pink Gradient

Brandi Nevarez



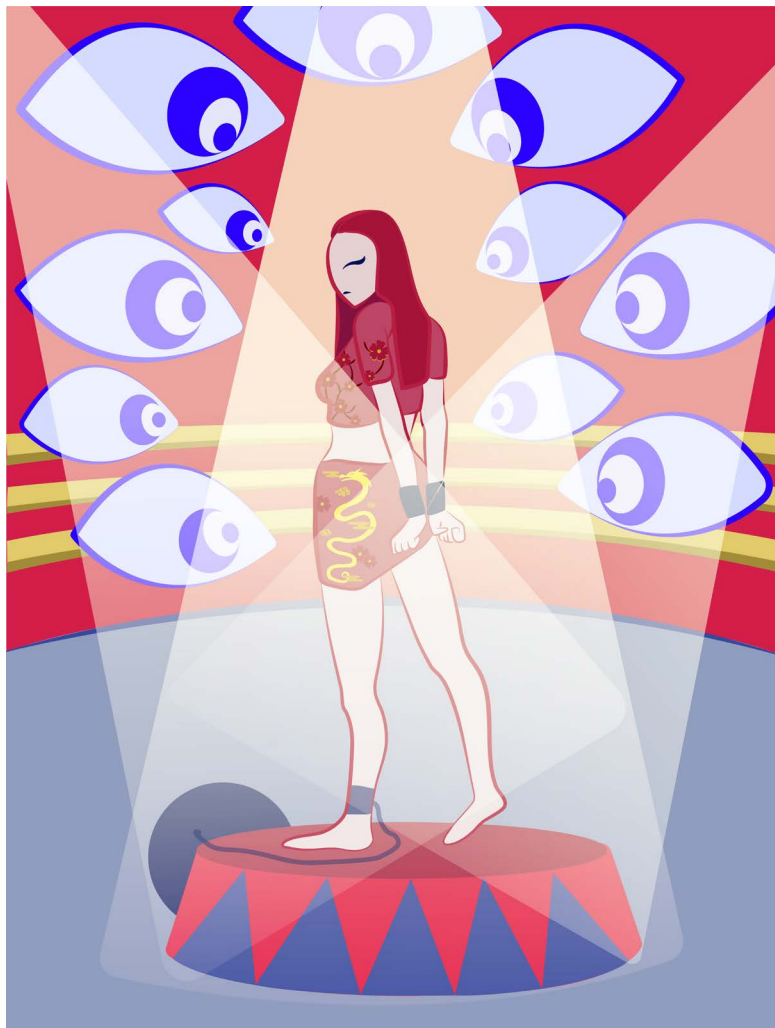
# Be Kind To Yourself

Zinnia Nguyen



# She's Not Eye-Candy

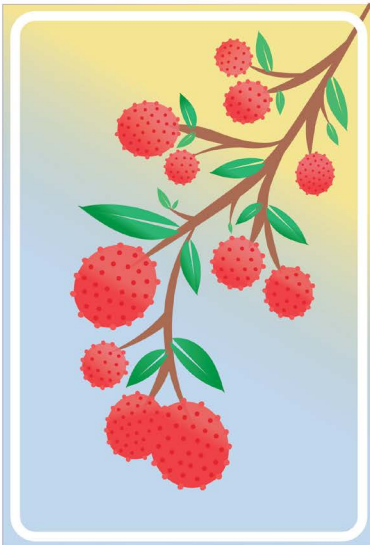
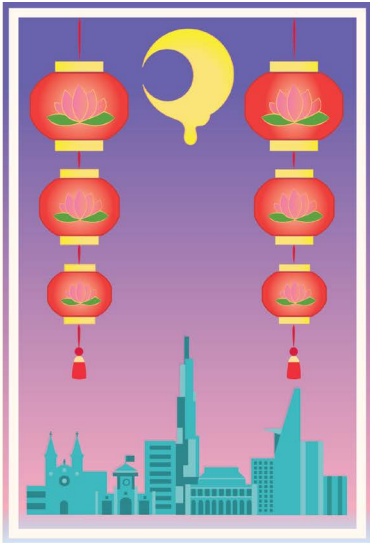
Zinnia Nguyen





# Vietnamese Culture Postcards

Zinnia Nguyen



# Nature Scenes Chicago

## Skyline From Northerly Island

Jorge Ortega



# Nature Scenes

## Northerly Island

Jorge Ortega





# Nature Scenes

## River Trail Bridge

Jorge Ortega



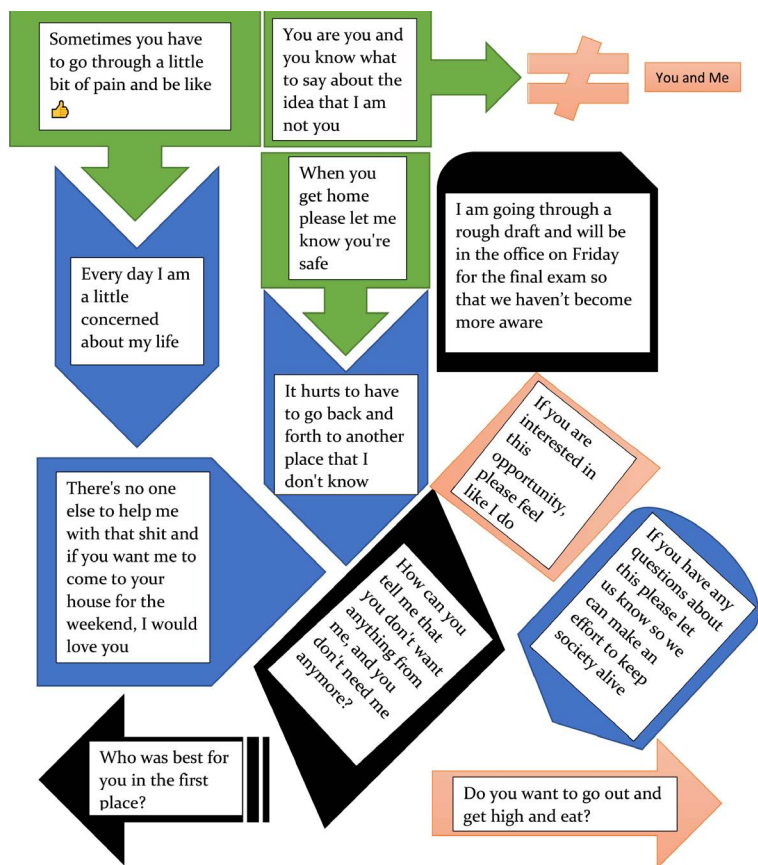
# Unrequited Love

Jacqueline Sanchez



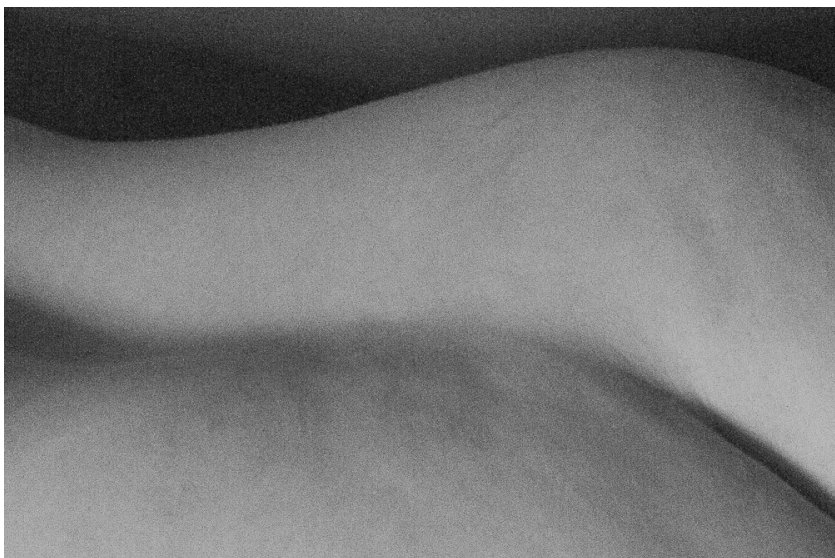
# Shapes Of My Life

Adriana Santillan



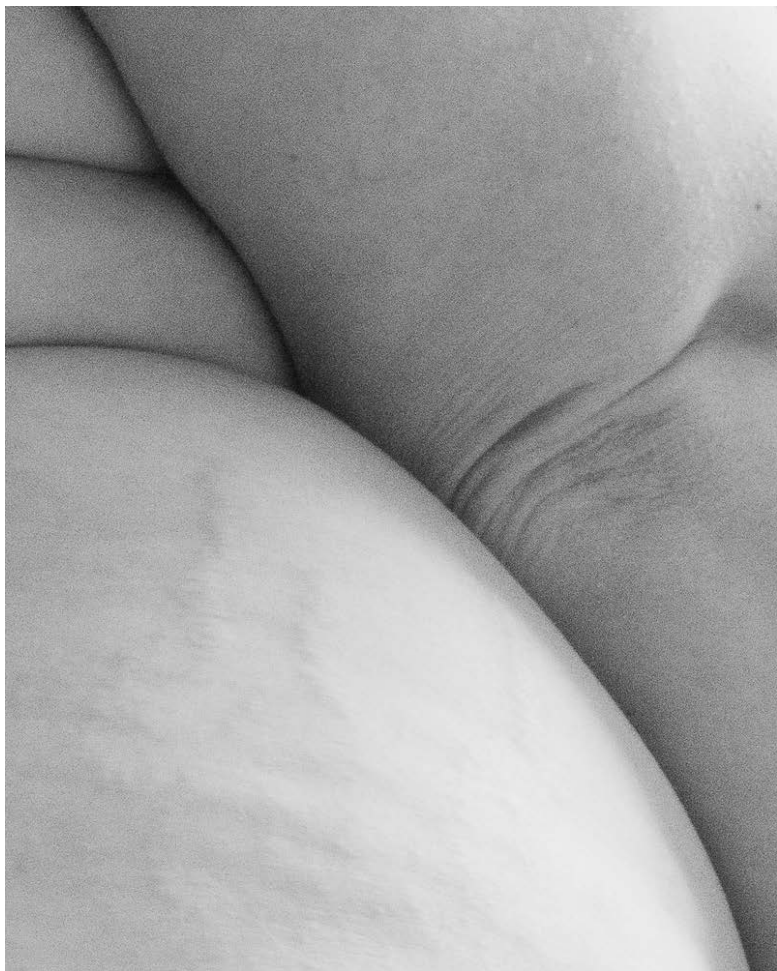
# Untitled

Mary Sheehan



# Untitled

Mary Sheehan





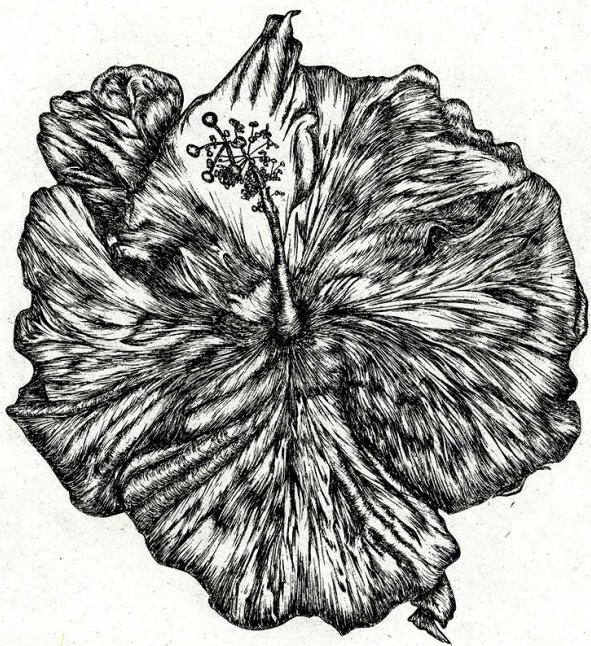
# Intaglio Prints on Handmade Paper

Rachel Singel



# Intaglio Prints on Handmade Paper

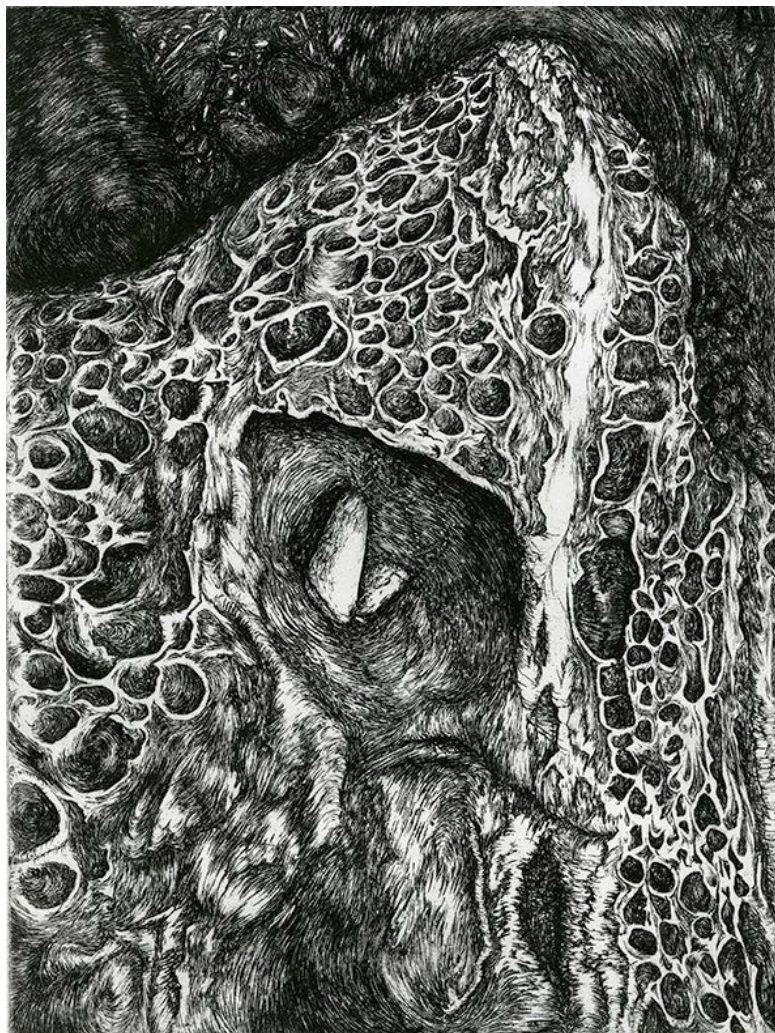
Rachel Singel





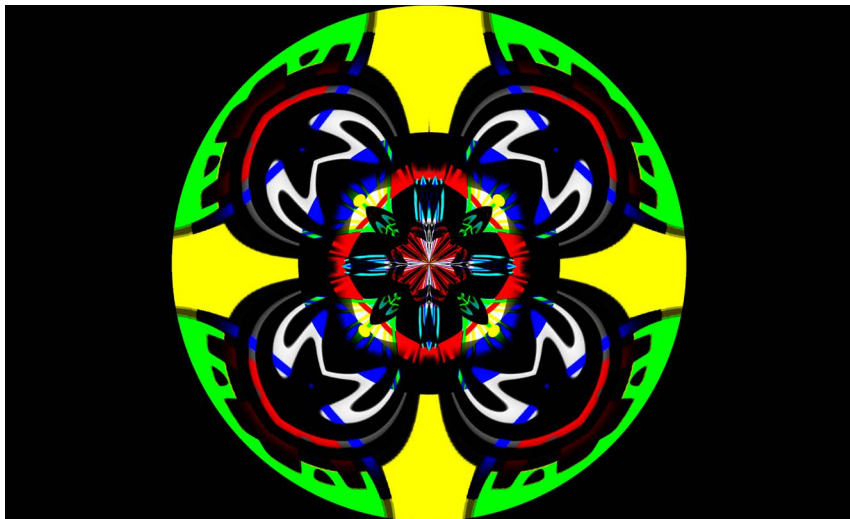
# Intaglio Prints on Handmade Paper

Rachel Singel



# Warriorpriests2

Michael Edward Supranowicz







SEEDS