

THE VAGABOND

FALL 2024



THE VAGABOND



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Southwestern Foundation. We are very thankful for their
continued support.

Editor's Note

These are truly strange and turbulent times. Everyone has something to say, but no one is really listening. Which is why it's even more important to make sure our students have a platform to share their voice and their stories.

With a new school year we are offered a new beginning, another opportunity to create; and create the students have. This semester we are publishing 33 pieces; 18 prose, 14 poems and one screenplay, all from 18 different writers. Every semester I am blown away by the creativity, talent and effort of the writers of our college. You can feel the passion and love they have for the craft and their individual pieces. It is always an honor to be entrusted with their work and I am grateful to be able to bring this magazine to you all.

Thank you.

The Vagabond editorial staff would like to thank the following people and organizations for their support of the publication of our club's literary magazine:

Professor Heather Eudy. She has helped and motivated past and present club members and officers to publish the magazine. She has been one of the biggest advocates of The Vagabond from dealing with issues outside of the club's control to reaching out to other English faculty to encourage students to submit their work to the Vagabond.

Dean of the School of Language and Literature, Antonio Alarcon. He has been a big supporter of the publication of the magazine. He is always looking for ways to help the club and the Vagabond whenever we encounter any issues.

The Southwestern College foundation. They have funded the past two Vagabond issues as well as this current one. With their help we have been able to get more copies in more students' hands and thus get the voices and stories of our writers to more people.

Associated Student Organization (ASO). The ASO has had a hand in funding almost every publication of the Vagabond since its inception. It is reassuring to see that an organization run by students sees the value in a platform that is for the students by the students.

We are grateful for everyone mentioned as well as many other's support and generosity. It really shows that our school cares about encouraging and nurturing the creativity and strong voices of the students from our school. Thank you.

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AB INTRA

A soul safe from taint is one gravity simply cannot reach, / *did your God intend that?*

Ramos

The waiter just keeps refiling my water. With every refill he gets friendlier, but his eyes show more and more pity.

Zuniga

I see the life you have built for yourself despite it all, I wonder if mine will be anything like yours? I hope so.

Robinson

I imagine if I stay still forever, the trees and I might just become one.

Escobedo

Lay your head next to mine / In our bed of lies

Moscara

Your name is tangled in every one of them, and all that you have touched, burns and glows.

Martinez

I should've kept my mouth shut. I should have never repeated their words.

Artienda

Delighted but unsure, used to having reasons and words

Villafana

Motive too, hm? Be careful, you might actually get this right.

Thabet

Life is too short to waste it on those/who don't see what's ahead.

Vimarievie

But if I don't keep trying that is when I have finally given up. I can't let myself give up.

Moya

But you are together nonetheless, comforted by the mere company of your souls

Bugsy

I have been achingly waiting for you to stop deluding yourself and set yourself free.

Cruz

I can't tell you all my regrets, can't give any apologies

Villafana

The small kitchen table cracked as it was turned over; grain and dates spread across the uneven dirt floor.

Ponce

Maybe this is what she's been needing all along—a fresh start with no false hope for answers.

Saldaña

But really, that's what we want, isn't it?

Rash

Am I not the woman of your dreams

Robinson

McCarthy and Liu sat in silence. Already, they had been given more questions than answers.

Rash

I'm nobody's tapestry/To be sewn

Vimarievie

I felt like a grain of sand in a soup bowl.

Ponce

Diffuse all of Cells/with just one kiss.

Vimarievie

“No, fight me! I must not die like this!”

Moscare

Your own prison was the confinements of that crib,

Martinez

Screaming the truth, we tried desperately to hide.

Cruz

Waiting for the harbor to pick me up/but I still get ignored.

Vimarievie

How do you explain being on a college campus in the middle of the night, when you're not even a student? He didn't belong here.

Garcia

Is it Brandy or Bacardi that'll keep you loving me in a year?

Ramos

Silence had been a person I had grown accustomed to being kind to.

Gomez

I welcomed it wholeheartedly as I peered/At the flow of tears falling into their place,

Bugsy

Even, *I'm going to melt off of the face of the earth.*

Saldaña

The table made up for their silence in spades.

Robinson

How dare she? How could she? She said she loved him.

Villafana

Brief Introduction to Grief

Alexis Ramos

For Devonte

last night was going to be one for the movies, not one for this
morning's news.

what's new?

lightly-tapped in to see your name blurred by a
detriment's wondrous feat,
how lucky of death to have met you,
fermenting air a level incredibly sweet, setting relief free to the
bumblebees.
nature's irony peaks reminiscing how springtime spawned your
crippling allergies.

the soil needs you, pinnacles of you decomposed from your
final form,

too in the molecules of water I drink, hydrating endlessly—

Except, I want more.

death obfuscated elegantly as a rational deci-
sion to drink and leave;

a soul safe from taint is one gravity simply can-
not reach,

did your God intend that?

the nerves on strings lubricating the grooves
of my brain

became catheters to this doom that reeks,

dialing tones ding this call devoid of a consciousness
your live signal will never reach.
My therapist told me to remove “never” from my
vocabulary. But,
where’s the monthly reminder that I’m a “ketchup
packet” for the sake of
comedy?
when your wife called in, a nightingale flew.
no pinch can violently twist a delusion, or even
rape the truth.
It’s true. nothing to prove.
to do.
The Sun doesn’t need a human hand
to hold in
order to be felt, to feel brand new.
The light dealt.
We weren’t too close,
Melody from heaven—
If I sing, will the waves deliver
the
sound: “*I miss you?*”
I don’t hope so.
I don’t hope.

First Date

Jose Zuniga

I always liked the smell of sandalwood. It has such a serene sent. It also reminds me of my father as that is the aftershave he uses. I still don't have any facial hair, but I use some of it as cologne. Tonight is a special night after all. I look in the mirror, not a single strand of hair out of place. I got a black button up under a black jacket, freshly pressed 501's and almost new white Airforce ones; I only bring them out for special occasions. Fresh and clean. I go to the living room and ask my parents "how do I look?"

My mom gushes "estas bien chulo mi principe" she holds my face and gives me kiss on the cheek and wipes it off.

My dad steps in and says "alright, alright we gotta go he can't be late"

We leave before my Mom brings out the camera and hop into

my dad's F-150. Despite him working construction, the truck is always spotless inside and out. The inside always smells like black ice.

The car ride is awkward. I'm so nervous I keep shifting in my seat. My dad notices and he smiles "Don't worry too much about it mijo. Its just a first date."

I take a deep breath and nod.

My dad just laughs and tells me the story of his first date with mom and what disaster it was. He was broke and couldn't afford to take her out someplace nice and fancy. So he made her a picnic and they went to this field by the woods just outside the city. But when they got there the trail to the spot was overgrown. My mom's dress got a bit torn when it got stuck in some branches. Then in the middle of their picnic it started raining something fierce. They ended back in my dad's truck wet and muddy. He always ends the story the same way "...And you know what your mom did when we finally got inside the car? —She laughed" He smiles and I see a little glimmer in his eyes. "That's when I knew your mom was the one for me"

We get to the restaurant and my dad tells me "I'll be back in two hours if you need more time just let me know" I nod and before he leaves, he calls out to me "Don't worry mijo everything will be fine, just have fun."

I enter the restaurant and get seated at my table. I check my phone, 6:27. I'm a little early. I text her and ask if she's on her way. She tells me that she's still getting ready and will get there a bit late.

I see the memes. A picture of me sitting alone in this restaurant drinking water while looking through my phone with the caption, *when you just don't get the hint.*

I look around and I see her. I see them. She and her little group of mean girls. They have their phones out all pointed at me, the freak that flew too close to the sun. I hear their muffled giggles and snickers. I want to go up to them confront them cause a scene, embarrass them or something; but I can't. I feel tears building up in my eyes. I stop blinking to keep them inside. I can't let them see me cry. So, I smile. I smile, wave at them and raise my glass to them before I drink. All the while I feel that my heart jumped to my throat and then dropped to my stomach, and all I can think is *does it count as terrible first date if your date set you up and never showed?* At least its only 14 minutes till I go home.

With Love,

Rainée Robinson

B,

Do you hear our echoes of laughter through the house, can you see shadows of our younger selves floating around corners and down darkened hallways. Can you taste the richness that prevailed throughout our loud kitchen and short childhoods?

I see you and realize the privilege burned into my everyday life. I hear the echoes of my luck in every story from your life you chose to share. If the roles had been reversed I don't think I could have survived as the woman I am today.

I think about the similar paths you and your dad took, how easy it was for him to find common ground in the struggles you two both went through. I wonder how he can relate and not feel the shame of it all. Not see the weight you carry with you.

I see the life you have built for yourself despite it all, I wonder if mine will be anything like yours? I hope so.

I wonder how you cannot hate me, how can you not resent the distance placed between us? Do you cringe at our stilted conversations, or long looks, or pained silences. How can you not hate the man who believed I did not need you.

Your father is a strong man, proud but distant. You see him in his brother and cousins, you hear him with their laughs and cadence. But you don't see him.

My father is loud, lively, and a proud man. I see his smiles and hear his laughs. I know him from his stories, his exploits and his friends. I see the way he carries himself and the long incredible life he must've lived before me. Without you.

Our father is a loud, proud, strong, lively, *distant* man. I wonder how you cannot resent him for all the years, when I can't help but resent the man who never introduced me.

I can't but cast doubt on the relationship I have with him now. No amount of asking or explanation has never fully explained why he felt like I did not need you.

While he may have never said that outright I feel the burden of his words all the same. The weight of the statement crushes me every time we lock eyes.

To my brother, I man I barely know and to my regret; A man I don't know how to grow with.

I cannot parse my frustration from my anger, detract my el-

tion from my anxiety or understand my despair and peace when I see you.

I never felt like the eldest, not once in my life. I thought something was wrong with me, why didn't I get it like other older kids in the family? Did you feel the same? Wonder what it would be like if you had siblings, running around you, annoying you, being there. You are a balm, a solution, and my greatest regret.

To my big brother, how is it possible that after all this time you feel like home?

With love, Sis.

Snow

Abel Escobedo

You find yourself when you are fully away, lost, estranged. You have never had more time to reflect than when you were left on your own.

I stop for a moment to catch my breath, two hours into a hike and I have still not become accustomed to the weight of my boots, crushing the frost below them, leaving a small, shallow dent. I think to myself as I walk through the snow, is loneliness something I provoked or was I always this lonely to begin with? Ice, hunger, sorrow, pain. I stop again to catch my breath, revealing the lips from beneath my mask to the cold, stinging breeze that is drying my throat as I breathe in the air. From my mouth comes a sigh, long, deep and warm. I can see the fog of my breath extend

and dim down before me, fading away and returning to the place I took it from.

I open my jacket as if to let my chest breathe and rapidly feel a warm gush of wind leaving my body. It's hard to believe my way of refreshing is to let the snow slowly fall on my face. It burns as it lands, but it's better than dying of a heatstroke in the middle of a storm. I imagine what kind of headlines the papers would have if they found me under such conditions: "Hiker refuses to wear a jacket on a snowstorm on a mountain 'it got too hot' ". But what kind of reporter would be keeping an eye out for hikers who could potentially make a good story? Especially in this kind of weather. Unless of course they had a lot of time.

The monotone sound of the storm to which I have become accustomed to is only ever interrupted by the sounds of my body as I move. The brushing of my knees, the crunch beneath my feet. I take off my backpack and sit on a rock I have cleared of snow, by body facing the cliff that falls to one side of it, below, a green, hardly touched by the clouds valley, with ochre colored wood. I had not noticed my legs had grown tired until I set them to rest. The sky above my head is in patches of gray and patches of blue, it seems the storm could not figure out if it wanted to happen or not. Looking below at the valley, I realize how lucky I am to admire this view, from afar, and cannot help but imagine how different the weather must be. If only for a few meaningless degrees. The green pines seemed enormous from beneath them, but from here they appear so gentle, like a spur of wind might tumble them down. How beautiful the trees are, and how beautiful am I, if only for

now, that I cannot see me.

I imagine if I stay still forever, the trees and I might just become one. Perhaps if I stay absolutely still, I'll become like one of them, mimic their every moves, as subtle as they are. Emit the same odor, the same noises, obtain and display their hues. Maybe then, I will feel comfortable with myself. Maybe once I get rid of everything I currently am, then my life will turn for the better. Perhaps this view and this weather is finally getting to me. I stand back up and pick up my things, once I have fully covered myself, I start to walk again.

The more I continue, the more trees I see. Red colored wood adorning their crusts, making them stand out, making them be seen. I wish I could be seen. But what exactly do I want others to see? If what I show of myself is not what I wish to be known for, but what is safe for me to portray, it is what was given for me to show. So then, who am I if I don't like what I see and won't show what I want? Am I the eternal state of limbo I have trapped myself in? The unending days of sorrow that I swear will sometime end. Who am I to myself but foremost, who am I to others? For lack of an answer, I just keep on walking, burying my feet deep within the snow in an attempt of holding tighter within it.

The snow looks so perfect before me. A white canvas, a template for the perfect creation, a great idea waiting to happen. I'd fill it all in if only I could remember its color, both the sun and the sky have turned into gray. Most my thoughts have escaped me with the wind. Most except the ones I can make with the pictures that surround me. A cold, dry wind strikes my face and forces me

to close my eyes.

I imagine a cabin, a fireplace, blankets, hot chocolate. And as I walk through the snow, I can feel them come to life, the warmth of a mug held in both of my cupped hands, the blanket containing the heat I produce while the fire, in waves, salutes my own face. I imagine cinnamon and the taste of it on my lips, no longer shattered from the cold. Cold, what was that? And I imagine a body with me, someone, sharing the same warmth, resting on myself. I forget, if not for a brief moment, the harsh arid mountain, as I shield my own self with an image I've made. Warmth, such a vivid reminder of what I could have. Such a brief encounter with what I consider love. Asleep in a cabin, and far from my reach. Love, warmth. The most concrete image I can get in complete isolation. Buried somewhere within and waiting to happen if only it could be discovered. The person calls my name, and I am met with their face. 'You've got the colors of the spring and I'm wintering from within, insufferably alone, irredeemably grotesque', I think. I open my eyes and find I am no longer within the cabin, but back in the snow.

The scenery around has remained the same for the last hour. Uneven land, horribly strong wind, and no life in sight, apart from the occasional tree that shields me from the weather. Why had I ever started this trail? Why had I ever come here alone? 'The waterfall', I think. Of course, I had come to see it, I had hoped to take some pictures and become relevant for a couple of minutes. I had hoped to distance myself from other's opinions. Little had I known that their opinions had also become my own. I will contin-

ue until I reach the waterfall and see what comes next.

How lonesome it is on the top of this mountain. What I would give to stop this life of isolation. In another life maybe, if such a thing even exists. For the sake of my wellbeing, I decided it does, otherwise, what purpose would there be in moving forward with a shattered expectation. If only for now, I decide it is better to live off a lie. Are lies not, in the end, the only truths that have kept us alive? A calming story we tell ourselves to ease our minds to sleep. For now, and forever, I will convince myself of these lies until I wilt into nothingness and death becomes kind. And within my lies I will live as a pale, ivory rose. As a symbol of perfection, everything I could ever want. And I'm sure even then it would not be enough. For I might fool the eyes of others, but I will never fool my own. Because I know what I was, and I know that a lie only keeps the wounds open.

Oh, my white, ivory rose. Cursed by the winter, cursed to fall into the grasps of snow.

I try to imagine the waterfall and how beautiful it should look. When I finally get there, I should be able to look down and see where the water falls into. I imagine there must be a breeze in the air, the mist being picked up by the rocks it crashes into. But I have nothing to base this assumption on. And so, I walk, and walk, and keep on walking. I raise my arm and realize it is all covered in white, the snowfall has become less aggressive, but it remains intact on my jacket. If I stayed still, would it eventually cover me whole? I walk and I walk, leaving the valley behind, leaving the cabin, the hot chocolate, the rose. Up ahead it is just me, and that

makes the trail more difficult.

I try to romanticize the situation I'm in. Snow, the cold tangible cloud that has fallen before me. Putting it that way, snow sounds more like a companion rather than a constant threat of hypothermia. There is nothing on my mind, and so it all remains quiet. All but the brushing of the pines' needles, and the tapping of snowfall on my face.

I have become so accustomed to living in my skin. That, in my head, it is nothing but a bad thing. If only I could let go easier, maybe then I could imagine myself as someone else without thinking of me as a fraud. Maybe once I finally reach the end of this trail, I will find all the peace I require. I walk through the storm that blows hard on my face. I walk and I walk, I remember that someday, this all shall end. 'One day you will live in comfort, comfortable within yourself, absolutely at peace', I lie. And so, my mind becomes at ease.

Lie With Me

Isaiah Moscare

Lie with me

Lay your head next to mine

In our bed of lies

As we drift blindly into the blissful abyss

Lie with me

For when I profess my love

I beg, do not delve

Merely mirror my machinations

Lie with me

at least until the sun comes up

and burns our truths

up and out of our gullets

The truth is too much

for me to bear

and the night

far too long

I know I am a fool
To ask, to beg, to plead
but please
for just one more night

Lie to me.

In Between First Dates and First Breakups

Aranza Martinez

She sits naked by the bed, only covered by a damp violet towel; she slouches on her velvet chair, the one with a broken leg and an undefined tear on the back.

She ponders in silence, hearing the cars go by one after the other, outside her window it's like they are on a chase, a haze, a trance.

Dream a little dream of me.

Make me into something sweet.

A charming man picked her up around 4:30, by the brick wall, the one covered in vines that grows fruit so bitter it won't even catch a plague.

He saw her sitting, with her bag leaning on her leg, clutter sticking out from the opened pockets. Starring at her was like starring into Deadly Nightshade. She sang an odd tune, hard to define.

Dream a little dream of me.

Act like the young and free.

He took her for a ride in his black truck, his hand on her leg and

his green eyes straight to the open road. He paid for dinner, made good jokes, said bad things about the world, complained about his job, and then smiled to make it all better.

Dream a little dream of me.

Paint this story, until it fades and leaves.

She sips cold water, naked on her velvet chair, the one with a broken leg and an undefined tear on the back. She puts the glass down and continues to brush her heavy coils.

Your name is tangled in every one of them, and all that you have touched, burns and glows.

She will sleep soundly tonight. But wishing she could take you wherever she went, and maybe smoke a cigarette and lock chests in this cloud of grey smoke.

Dream a little dream of me.

Turn into the sun, skin to skin.

Make the world bend and break to your will.

The Seventh Captive

Amyrey Artienda

I glued my eyes to the ceiling, as I laid in bed my eyes were glued to the ceiling trying to make sense of what was happening. I've never experienced something like this before. Ever since I got into bed at eight o'clock, my mind had been haunted with the low, droning chant I had recited earlier today. Once it started it never stopped, making my efforts to fall asleep futile.

'Sevenworms for the Sevenheads on the Seventh Sun.'

I'm not surprised that it's stuck in my head. It was like a catchy lyric from a pop song. But the chant was voiced by a chorus. Each word was enunciated so sharply that it had disrupted my train of thought if I wasn't careful. I believed this was a delayed stress response. What I had done filled me with dread. It caused the chant to do something.

Occasionally, my vision would be tinted with a green haze, causing my body to convulse. All control was stripped away as I thrashed around in my sheets. My jaw stayed locked as a glow pulsed in beat to the chant. When it was over, my jaw loosened on its own and I was left with an ache in my chest.

'Sevenworms for the Sevenheads on the Seventh Sun.'

This was like a seizure, but it was happening at an alarming rate. There wasn't a reliable way I could track how long each one lasted. How did the glow trigger the seizure? I'm not inclined to believe that reading the chant out loud caused it, but there were too many unknowns to come to a concrete conclusion. What I knew for certain was that the glow happened after the chant repeated seven times.

My mind wandered to Madeline, but I shut down the thought before it began. What I needed was to see where the glow came from. If I got into the bathroom before it started, maybe I could catch it through the mirror. There was a chance I would collapse before I could, but that didn't deter me.

With what little time I had left, I pushed off my blanket and rushed toward the bathroom's door. I threw it open, causing it to bounce against the standing wire shelves. Plastic bottles tumbled to the floor as I tried to reach for the light –

'Sevenworms for the Sevenheads on the Seventh Sun.'

My sight was overtaken by that loathsome green tint and I screamed as my knees buckled beneath me. No matter what, I

would not let my body fall. I exerted enough of my will to catch myself on the door's frame. My body quaked as I dug my nails into the wood and I fought to turn my head towards the mirror. A hot pain twisted with my neck, but I only stopped when I caught a glimpse of my reflection. My eyes were replaced by two orbs of glowing green light. The shaking caused them to blur my face with their light. It was so bright it cast my body into shadow. But from the corner of my eye I noticed a dim light emanating from my wrist. It cracked through the dark as thin, vein-shaped lines. It reminded me of when Madeline drew something similar on my wrists.

'Sevenworms for the Sevenheads on the Seventh Sun.'

She etched it into my skin to 'initiate' me. I needed to become one of them, she explained. There weren't enough members for their club activity and needed me to be the 'Harbinger'. But why appoint the temporary member a key role? Why not the club's leader? Madeline seemed the closest to it; being the one to explain what to do and ripped that page from that book for me to read. As a favor.

'Sevenworms for the Sevenheads on the Seventh Sun.'

Why did I go through it despite the danger? Even if I believed nothing would happen, no sane person would have accepted the risk. But I owed her. Did Madeline use this as an opportunity to prove herself right? Despite our debates, I thought they were good-natured. Had she thought differently?

'Sevenworms for the Sevenheads on the Seventh Sun.'

I had to accept now that Madeline and the club's members weren't disillusioned students playing pretend, but instead fanatical believers in ancient words carved in decayed books. And I let myself be pulled into it. I should've kept my mouth shut. I should have never repeated their words.

“Sevenworms for the Sevenheads on the Seventh Sun.”

My Hair

Dana Villafana

Silver nail scissors gleam,
Older than me, dull to the touch but sharp,
Enough to cut my long, Rapunzel hair

Curls hit the bathtub as I watch,
The mirror, smile about to break my face,

Soft strands don't touch my chin, I look more like myself than I
ever have

More than I ever thought I would

Tears fall like summer rain

Delighted but unsure, used to having reasons and words

There is a reason but no words

No words for this peculiar happiness

No words for euphoria of a specific kind

Not yet, not here

When happiness is interrupted, ears left ringing with artificial
shame

No words then, I have words now

Bountyful Final

Essa Thabet

Fade in:

INT: INTERROGATION ROOM - JULY 21, 2009 10:47 PM

1

We fade in and zoom out of a black steel table, a case file gets slammed onto it and we pan toward SERAH peering into JAY's eyes, tearing through his soul like paper.

SERAH

Eyes on the file. I'm NOT your distraction!

JAY looks down and begins to read the file, with no words uttered.

SERAH

I gave you this 2 days ago, to hunt down a culprit with every record possible laid out in front of you, and it was even laminated as a treat. But I expected too fucking much!

JAY

Sorry sir.

SERAH slams his fists down on the table in a quick motion before fixing his hair aggressively.

SERAH

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE DAMN FILE! sighs...Marline Torton kills her husband and runs off before the police arrive. Case is open and shut with a load of evidence tied to her, but she's nowhere to be found.

SERAH sits down in front of JAY pointing at one of the documents.

SERAH

She hasn't jumped states or snuck onto any flights, yet, and all trails are getting colder because you can't figure out where Waldo is.

SERAH leans closer to JAY's face as JAY continues reading and remaining still.

SERAH

(whispering)

You're going to answer every question I ask, you won't stutter, you won't pause, and if you even twitch I'll smack the shit out of you.

Give me 2 nods.

JAY looks up at SERAH, nodding twice, then looking back down at the file while SERAH begins interrogating JAY quickly.

SERAH

Where were Marline's last 3 known locations? Earliest to latest. JAY quickly flips through the papers, stopping at one, and starts to read.

JAY

Uh, her most recent-

SERAH slaps JAY.

SERAH

Where, Jay?

JAY

The earliest was the Calamar Mall on Broadway, where she bought a gift for her son after he was recently released-

SERAH slaps JAY again.

SERAH

I asked WHERE, Jay. Not whatever bullshit she was up to!

JAY

...Earliest was the Calamar mall on Broadway, next she was at her son's apartment, delivering the gift at-

SERAH slaps JAY once more.

SERAH

Are you fucking deaf? Did I ask about their tea party?!-

JAY suddenly stands up, enraged, as he stares down SERAH, who is unfazed by his anger.

JAY

YOU TAUGHT ME TO BE "ATTENTIVE" TO EVERY DETAIL, EVERY ACTION, AND NOW YOU BULLSHIT ME?!

SERAH, now stone-faced, stands up, grabbing the file off the desk, and holding it up to JAY.

SERAH

No. You bullshit yourself. Cause you knew to tell me every detail but forgot to tell yourself?

JAY straightens himself up, confused by SERAH's statement.

SERAH

Why did you waste my time convincing me that you had something to give? Cause the only thing I realize now...

SERAH tosses the files on the ground, getting them scattered

and disorganized as JAY looks over to see his only resource in the room discarded like it meant nothing. SERAH then raises his voice to redirect JAY.

SERAH

...IS THAT YOU'RE A DESPERATE FUCK! Desperate to redirect your mind away from your trauma.

JAY quickly turns to face SERAH, a mix of shock then anger growing on his face from knowing what SERAH is going to say next.

SERAH

Yeahhh... All those talks we've had, "why you're here" and how you want to "move on".

JAY

Don't, leave it be. You're teaching is one thing, but this'll go too far.

JAY balls his hands tightly, trying to restrain his anger as SERAH pushes deeper into JAY's anger.

SERAH

You failed! You thought you do this on your own yet your attempt at an actual case has gone to shit! The same way your life has since you lost Dahlia and Ellie-

JAY immediately rushes toward SERAH, throwing a right hook and missing as SERAH redirects his body and kicks him onto the

floor along with the files.

SERAH

What'll that do Jay?! Huh?! Will that fix it? "Oh poor me with my dead fucking family, let me catch bad guys to numb the pain like I'm Batman or some shit"-

JAY turns and lies on his back facing SERAH with rage and tears on his face. JAY immediately gets back up and tries to throw a other punch but SERAH counters by grabbing JAY's arm tightly.

SERAH

You think your issues will find the Marline, hm?? The one with potential lives at stake? No, right?!

SERAH pushes JAY back lightly and fixes his shirt. JAY leans on the table, silent as SERAH's words sink into his head.

SERAH

Nothing fixes loss, get it? Which is why this isn't fucking therapy! ...It's my fault for not realizing that before I accepted to train you as a bounty hunter...

JAY

No..you're right, but it's my fault. I was too excited to finally get a win because I thought you gave me an easy one.

JAY walks over and then begins picking up the files weakly, still in

pain from SERAH's kick.

JAY

A lady who killed her husband, so many easy motives and places she could be, but little thought went into the rest.

As he's picking up files he looks at little details from each one, such as credit card uses, license plates, and contacts, unable to find a pattern until...

JAY

Hold on...

JAY then starts putting certain files onto the desk and sorting them as he tries to assemble a potential theory. SERAH walks back to the table and watches over.

JAY

Marline's last known location would've, but it wasn't because she never got home.

SERAH

Good, I think your head hit the floor hard enough. Keep going.

JAY hands a paper to SERAH to show him.

JAY

She was dropped off at both, the mall and her son's apartment, by her husband. But she never got picked up after.

SERAH

Yeah, probably because he was murdered.

JAY then hands him a few more documents while organizing the rest on the table.

JAY

But how could she have murdered him, if she was at her son's house across town? The document noted that CCTV didn't pick up any footage of her husband's car going to pick her up.

SERAH

She could've walked home, now show me what you're trying to say.

JAY's movements become more energized as he quickly and desperately searches for more details in the documents.

JAY

She couldn't have made it home in the time between when she presumably left and the time of the murder, that is if forensics was right. That's why... Marline didn't kill her husband. Her son did!

JAY finally clicks the last pieces of his theory together, sorting back all the documents into their folder as he continues explaining to SERAH.

JAY

Micah Toten was the last person to see her and in his statement, he even claimed that Marline left after they reunited. All adds up and

that's before the motive.

SERAH

Motive too, hm? Be careful, you might actually get this right.

JAY

4 years ago he went to prison for aggravated assault. Apparently, someone injured his father and Micah took matters into his own hands and beat the shit out of the guy.

JAY pulls out another document, showing details on Micah's case.

JAY

However, even though he got away with it, his father didn't approve and got him sentenced. Safe to assume Micah would've held a tinnnnnyyyy grudge. That would also add to why dear old dad didn't stop by to say "hi" when he dropped off Marline.

SERAH

Finally... sigh Was it really that hard?

SERAH sits down and rubs his temples. JAY looks at him surprised, realizing that he knew the whole time.

JAY

You KNEW!

SERAH

Of course, I did! I realized the moment I got my hands on it. You

really think I had time to play detective like you and the other lazy PDs in this place? Cause that ain't our job!

JAY

Yea I know we find the damn killer, but in this case-

SERAH interrupts JAY and pulls out his phone and starts checking his messages while talking over him.

SERAH

This case still has a killer. Possibly even a killer with a victim. After all, he and his mom were on good terms. So I doubt he would kill her.

JAY

Well, he believes he's no longer a suspect because he managed to frame his mother, meaning he's probably at work. So we do what we always do, we stake him out. That is if you give me another chance to make up for this final.

JAY holds his hand out firmly as SERAH stands up and walks up to JAY, giving him a serious look before grabbing his hand, and gripping it tightly.

SERAH

Let's hurry. Delay for even a second and I'll drop you from this desperate try to move on, like I told you from the start.

JAY nods and shakes SERAH's hand, accepting his words with stern awareness of the costs.

End

In November, I lie awake

Vimarievie

The rivers call your name.

Your face is all that remains.

The road to fame,
went out like a flame.

Destiny came.

My symphony, they played.

Connecting the dots,
I trace it with my thoughts.

Metaphorically, I'm lost.

“You always will be.”

And yet, I'll always be free.

I go unseen in your dreams.

Breaking down the seams of reality.

While you still picture me
in your arms.

Driving in a car,

But I'm long gone.

Because I prosper in all the storms I enter.
I become strong when you falter.
Sought out of every adventure,
I've said "no" to the boys and their specters.
I read it out of anger.
I thought you didn't care.
You were somewhere over there.
Without repair, I stared.
Walked away cuz you wouldn't spare me a word.

The truth is you did care
But didn't have the right words to say it
Or at least that's how I wanna paint it.
But tomorrow's sorrows came from yesterday's powers.
I am an anecdote that you couldn't see.
A gray coat you hang,
just in case the trees get too green.
It all turns into a new leaf,
A new day to see.
Or so to meet.

The pages get burned,
yearning for more.
Just in case it gets cold at dawn.
The untended lawn tends to your heart,
when I'm gone.

You're wrong.
A quote you stare at for far too long.
Hoping it would change into a song.
The words you wish
you could replace with
"I love you."
Until it's not about you anymore.

"You're just a character," he says
With a grin on a sad face.
A handshake to prove your place.
You're conflicted with remorse.
I'm left with a sour note
& I assume the best.
Cuz that's what my head says,
it's better left unsaid.

Life is too short to waste it on those
who don't see what's ahead.
Let's be direct, I said.
I intended to see through the masquerade,
Not to quiver in all this pain.

The first of November,
I finally read the letters.
I saw the blood on the paper.
Tell me there is no one else
behind the wallpaper
Except for the boy who just entered
Or am I just too clever to know all the reasons.
To doubt the season, but
leave it to me to find every juxtaposed treason.

Great Escape

Mariana Vizcarra Moya

Cold and cramped. That has become my new normal.

The life I had before is but a distant dream, the smell of flowers, the sounds of a crowded street, the feel of grass. It's been so long, it would all overwhelm me if I had it again. The only thing I have now is the smell of dust and metal, and the cold stone at my feet, the only sounds being the ocean and occasional loud bellows of cattle. Locked away in a tower like a princess in a story, but unlike them there will be no hero coming for me. I'm being punished for an act I didn't commit. The days in my prison are monotonous, the only thing that keeps me from going mad is imagining myself back home. A fading memory of a house on a mountain side, a lush field at my doorstep, and watching the sun rise and set every day.

Freedom is just outside waiting for me. I'm surrounded by shelves and boxes full of hopes and dreams. No prison can contain the infinite freedom of one's mind, but everyday it seems that hope for escape is what is crushing my soul. Outside I see the sun and its glorious rays of light. Warm and bright. The sound of the ocean waves so calming I almost forget the jagged rocks below my window await my fall. I can see myself out there again, the days in the sun giving me a tan, meeting people, breaking bread or running until my legs give out. It's a lovely fantasy, to live a life of normalcy with others after so long in this place.

It's not the first time an escape plan was thwarted. No matter how hard I try to keep it a secret it never works. Each failed attempt slowly crushes me, but if I don't keep trying that is when I have finally given up. I can't let myself give up. One day, I woke up with the knowledge that today is the day. If I'm trapped here one more day I will have lost myself and after so many attempts, my captor will not be forgiving anymore. He knows what I'm about to do and is on his way to stop me. I look out my window and see the great expansive ocean, this will be the last time I see this view. I find that a small part of me will miss it. Life here was terrible but at the same time it was all I had. I take one last look at the place that was my home for many years and I leap towards my freedom.

I feel the sea breeze surround me and the sun envelopes me with its warmth. After so long in a stone box feeling the sun on my skin, heading towards a new life, I am brought to tears. I haven't felt this joyous in a long time. I can't get enough of it. I often looked at the birds outside my window with envy, but now I am

soaring among them. I continue to reach towards the one thing that makes me feel like I'm home already, the sun. I see the sun smiling down on me and for the first time in my life I understand why people dedicate their life to worship him. I want to feel his warm embrace, stay a little longer in the glory that is the sun's rays shining down on the Earth and the sea below. I will be worthy of being face to face with the god of the sun.

Suddenly, the face I see it's not one of happiness but of pity. I stop flying and start to feel the weight of the sky pushing me down. What was supposed to be my great escape is now my death. I fall and now all I can hear is the wind rapidly blowing past me. The warmth I feel is no longer from the sun but from the very wings that gave me my freedom coming apart. If someone was calling out to me I would never know. My life has yet to start and as I fall I know that my death will be my legacy. The cold sea will be the next thing that my body will be surrounded by. The sky eager to banish me from its realm.

Will they think me foolish or ambitious? Will they remember that I was just a prisoner longing for a home? I hope to inspire art, for my story to be told for generations. My name will become a cautionary tale but at least my name will be known.

Forever I will be Icarus who flew too close to the sun.

Baby's-Breaths (A Lost Love Letter)

Jude Buggy

written for you, maybe we could of made it in another life

My dearest, A

You told me once that you see yourself as baby's breaths

Little white flowers with the tiniest petals, the name itself a fleeting
moment in time

Roses, sunflowers, tulips,

The colors catch the eyes of the onlooker, hooks them in and
forces them to succumb to their

urges of a single touch

These beauties are covered by little white specks of dust

It lines the edges so the main attraction seems less empty

Because even the extraordinary has emptiness in where it does not
reside

These breaths fill the space left by those before them, simply an
afterthought in the bigger

picture

To see yourself as this, then, is to be inherently flawed

Insignificant to the general eye but important enough to be present

A constant battle between purpose

What is your purpose?

If one is so easily overlooked, then what's an absence to do much
damage?

Maybe the strange viewers that adore you in your countless num-
bers can give you the strength to

keep growing

But when the reminder of your position slithers it's way into every
comparison with brighter

flowers, better flowers

Nothing can stop the thoughts from running wild

Rapidly, they switch from idea to idea

Truth to false, false to feeling

You reside there, in all your numbers, small and frail, as little tear-
drops from your pretty petals

fall

They soak the foam from which you've been shoved

This continues from minute to minute, hour to hour, day to day to
the point where time seems to

be unmoving and still

You look around to see the reflections of yourself

Just as pitiful and hopeless

But you are together nonetheless, comforted by the mere company
of your souls

You are small alone, yet strong when you sprout thousands of
pieces of yourself

The sorrows of a single individual nourishes the parched bouquets
of hundreds

You are flawed as an individual part, even multiple parts, but when
the pieces of your deepest

self start to bloom

You become something more than a single flower

You become a body, filled with multiple realities, truths, values

That is your purpose

To flourish within yourself and be able to aid the other flowers
who are only one

You are a simple accent, but also a masterpiece

Because to see yourself as baby's breaths, then, is to be inherently
imperfect

Yet perfect

With love,

Jude Buggy

Let Me In

Evelyn Cruz

I knew I wouldn't have to beg you to go out tonight. The twitching of your right hand and the restlessness of your leg lets me know that tonight is *the night*. You are getting the urge, and this time, you can't ignore it. It has been a pathetic attempt to try and fight to resist it, but it is a losing battle. You will give in; you always did. You might stay resilient for a bit, but the temptation is far too great to ignore. You have tried your hardest to resist the pull, but the sick part of you that you desperately try to hide won't let you go. Its claws have dug too deep. You can't ignore it for long. The attraction was too strong for me to even try to put up a fight. I have been achingly waiting for you to stop deluding yourself and set yourself free. It's liberating. I promise you'll like it.

The loneliness that some feel at night doesn't touch us because we are never truly alone. We have each other as we find solace as

we stare up at the full moon. You will no longer be lonely if you just join me. We have been separated by this invisible wall you built, locking me out. We used to have fun together, and now you act like you can't stand me. *Why do you push me away?*

Under the all-seeing eye of the moon, bad things take place. Sinister motives are acted upon, and those who are too weak are preyed on. Once the full moon rises and the night sky washes over, evil is unleashed. The luminous orb is a beacon calling out to us. Asking so beautifully to come out and play. People use the night's influence to commit their sins under the cover of darkness. But those of us who are the true sinners find peace in the night where we no longer have to pretend. Where we can set free the evil that lurks within that we tame during the day. The moon and the darkness sees the real us. Darkness isn't something to be afraid of, at least not for us. We are the things that roam around in the dark hunting little lambs.

They've called us lunatics. Insane. Demented. They blame the moon for our intermittent insanity. Instead of just admitting we are all sick in the head. Then they stuff us full of pills that can never give us the same buzz and say we are all fixed now. We can never be fixed because there is nothing wrong with us.

Shadows spread wide around us, taking up their rightful space, tired of being confined in the small shade of our footsteps during the day. Finally able to set them loose as we creep through the night. In the haunting stillness of the small hour of the night, we are only accompanied by the sound of our wet footsteps as we make our way through the dense park. We are surrounded by

the shadows of long limbs clawing after us, begging to devour us. Their leaves rustling out echoes of praises at the full moon chanting along with our thumping heartbeats. This park has been one of our hunting grounds for years. We find ourselves walking the same path we always take through our trek as we bask in the night air under the stars.

The crisp air fills my lungs as we stalk down the uneven pavement, and the full moon watches from above us, luring us out. It promises me that you will give yourself over tonight. One can only deny themselves for so long before you break. As the night goes by, the ethereal white glow follows alongside us, guiding us as we let go of the masks we don during the day. Those suffocating facades crumble away as we bare ourselves to the night as witnesses of our true faces. The temptation of the night gets stronger as it calls out to us until I can no longer neglect the sweet promises. The wind ruffles our hair as it whispers to us, egging us on to play. Only a few can hear the call, and even fewer answer it. While others hide in their homes, safe from the darkness and danger, we dance with it. The darkness molds around us, celebrating our coming home. It has been too long since we found comfort with one another.

“Tell me something, my friend. You ever dance with the devil in the pale moonlight?” I jest as I skip alongside you. Pouting when you pointedly look away, refusing to entertain me, as you keep walking down the lonely pathway.

What happened to us? We used to be so close, but now you push me away. We were inseparable. It started with the quiet conversations we shared under the blanket of the night. The kind of

conversations that people aren't supposed to say out loud. Taboo things that would deem us insane, but we couldn't stop. The thoughts kept raiding your mind until your control fractured, and we bludgeoned that late-night runner over the head with the loose brick you picked up from the planter. You just kept smashing that brick against the soft flesh until she was unrecognizable.

That was the last time we got to revel in the kill. You have made me wait for months for this chance again. The last kill may have curved your craving, but my craving can never be satisfied for long. I could never be sated with my voracious appetite. I need more. So much more. Giving into those fantasies, we dove deeper into our depravity. The kind that burrows its way in and transforms us into something more.

Something better.

You were there with me as we played out these desires. Until one day, you changed. When I wanted to talk about the forbidden fantasies, you'd just shut me up. *'Don't let them take a look to see what you buried deep under your skin,'* you had chided me, but I never was one to heed your warnings. When I spent many nights living in these thoughts, you shoved them back, hiding them in the corner of your mind. You tried to dispel them. I watched you fight and fight to keep them locked up, but they just kept coming back. Even when you try to pretend you are normal, I can see through the façade you have mastered. Watching eagerly. Waiting for you to let the dark, seductive thoughts in. I promise you that when you do, you will feel complete. You will feel the bliss of letting go. We can enjoy those fantasies together again.

Until then, I will sit and wait for you to get antsy and for your resolve to get weaker until you are forced to act. The blood in our prey's veins calls to you just like it does me. Every day, I watch you go through life dull and stiff, being someone you're not. The only time I have seen the certifiable you is when you take what you want. When you wake up. It was the most beautiful sight. The pounding of your heart and the high you get as you hear the screams and watch as they choke on their own blood. The way your eyes light up and the smooth movements as you slice your knife across some prey's long neck and their blood paints your skin. You have never been more mesmerizing.

You enjoy the hunt as much as I do, so why do you fight against it? Just give in. Why wait so long in-between kills. You may have been able to ignore the call, but soon, your restraint would snap, and there will be carnage left in your path. And I will be right there with you when you finally stop resisting, savoring the bloodbath created by our hands. Until then, all I can do is taunt you until you give in.

"Since when did you get so boring?" I tease, only to get ignored.

I always liked to play with you.

"Come on, I know what will make you smile," I coax as I move forward, heading down a different path that points us through the park and towards the lonely bars. You follow obediently as I lead you to some helpless prey that you won't be able to resist. My mouth almost waters in anticipation.

Is it so wrong to want you to feel the freedom I feel? Those chains couldn't hold me, yet you give them permission to leash you. Denying yourself of your true desires. You find comfort in those suffocating chains. *Why?* Why do you let them constrain you?

We grew up together. I know you. You keep the chains because the weight reminds you to be normal. Let those immobilizing chains fall, and I promise it will make you feel so good. Let the shackles slip and allow the darkness to spread around us, enveloping us in its embrace.

You asked me once, 'Why am I not scared of you?' The answer is really simple because I understand. I understand your urges. Those dark thoughts that you are forced to hide. But I saw you. The real you that night when you made your first kill. When you played in her blood and finally awoken. I get you, because I had the same urge.

No one can understand us. We don't need them to understand. It has always been just us—you and me. I've watched you try to fight against the darkness. Pushing back against your urges is pointless. You will give into the temptations, because no matter how much you deny it and yourself, I know that you secretly want to let them take over. To give into it.

I can make you feel good. Just give in.

Become one with me. You can't keep yourself split from me. We are one and the same. My voice echoes in your thoughts. I feel what you feel. We cannot exist without the other.

I know you're bored, so let's let loose.

Then I see it, the opportunity we needed to get you to snap.

A drunkard stumbles by as trying to take a shortcut to get home. Too bad he will never make it. Reaching for my hand, you take the knife. I watch as you stalk behind him, scoffing when you don't even cover the sound of your steps. Your prey is too inebriated to even notice the dark shadow behind him. His impending death. With a firm, confident swing, you stab his gut as he stares up at his demise. The drunkenness in his eyes clears as he takes in the danger he is in. When I notice the manic grin on your face, I know you have let yourself be free once again. Mania fills me as I witness you come alive.

Now it's my turn.

After the first cut, euphoria spreads through my bones. It's addictive. This is the buzz I have been searching for. Nothing can satisfy me like this, so I keep slicing and slicing. Until my arms get tired and my hand cramps. Then I stab just a little more. His piercing screams and the wet sounds fill the silence of the calm night. A symphony of cries and pleas plays around us. The more he begs, the more it feeds my craving.

So keep begging as tears roll down his cheeks, mixing with blood. As he watches the final thrust of my knife that will end his useless life. Warm blood splatters onto the ground, and his breathing rattles as his life quickly drains out. He is a masterpiece painted by my hand to share with the world of his sacrifice.

His blood is an offering.

By his blood, I am clean.

They say eyes are the window to the soul. So, I'll use his to see what the fuss is about. Is it a black pit of nothingness? The nothingness I see when I look in the mirror. The only thing I find in his eyes is the moon's reflection. So, I'll watch until his life's light goes out and whatever *soul* he had departs.

His life is in my hands. His world ends because I said it was his time. I am the only one that matters during his last breath.

I am his god.

I am his ending.

Exorcizing these nobodies of their souls and taking their pathetic lives. Watching as they beg and plead to me. Pray to *me*. Their blood will spill at my altar. Their cries are prayers sent to me.

When I release my hold on my prey's neck, his body thumps as it falls into a dirty puddle at my feet. My eyes stay transfixed on the rippling reflection as the waves gradually still. Only one reflection stares back at me. The illuminating glow of the moon shines around me, celebrating unity. We are no longer at odds. You have finally accepted me, and now we are one. We have always been one.

Just how we had always been.

Lifting my eyes up to the moon, smiling as I am now whole, no longer fighting within myself. I have accepted who I am.

Living is Harder

Dana Villafana

Death isn't an ending
Instead an unwilling start
A painful new beginning

Some strange person created, before you and after you
A middle child turned oldest child
Three siblings become two

Your face slips from my mind as much as I try to hold on
Your scent is the second
Your voice tripping along

I can't hold onto you, sobbing into shirts and screaming at the trees
I can't tell you all my regrets, can't give any apologies

Grief is slowly killing me
You are slowly killing me

Even if your scent, your voice, your face fades
you'll be over my shoulder laughing at me as a shade

I loved you, I love you, I always will

But you're dead and I'm the one who has to live with that.

The Viziers Resolve Before the Darkness

Alma Ponce

“Ja, I’m sorry...but we must invade!”, Ahmed slammed his fist onto the aged oval table in front of him. “We cannot allow these people to defy our laws”, he said softer. He knew his friend and most trusted advisor was crestfallen. Lute and string instruments sounded faintly from the other side of the palace. “You know what this will do to people, to their families...what about the innocent children?” Jafar replied. His eyes gaping and mouth strained as he waited for his Sultan’s response. “I wish it did not have to be this way, but the law is the law. We can not have our citizens turn their back on over a thousand years of our teachings...we must show them that they have to abide by our ways”, Ahmed sighed as his shoulders sank. He understood what Jafar was feeling, as much as he understood that this was a significant day for his own family. The smell of fresh bread, saffron, mint and cinnamon filled

the decorated halls and rooms of his antiquated royal home. “We should return to the celebration. My daughter will be making her decision soon...and I will need to make the announcement. I will need my Vizier by my side, so can we discuss this further tomorrow?” The nearly imperceptible sternness in his voice caused his advisor to stand up straighter. Jafar’s eyes focused on his longtime friend, the hue of his dark brown irises began to swirl into a blend of violet and emerald green, his fingertips glowed with a low amber light and after a short hesitation, he nodded.



Jafar couldn’t believe what he had heard. Ahmed had pulled him into the dim and stale council room away from his daughter’s engagement announcement to notify him of what the royal soldiers had found. Beggarly people who lived just outside of the city had been rumored to be converting. It reminded Jafar of his childhood, in a village much like those outside of the palace; the arid and hot sands that he ran and played on as a child. He could almost see the worn and tattered shack he shared with his elderly father and mother, whose likeness he inherited most. But, it was when his old friend had informed him that they would invade and imprison the “betrayers”, that Jafar went cold. His mother’s frightened brown eyes staring at him. His father’s roar as soldiers held him back by his arms, and dragged him outside. Attacked because a neighbor had accused his mother of witchcraft. The small kitchen table cracked as it was turned over; grain and dates spread across the uneven dirt floor. Invade? His ten year old mind knew that word well. He had grasped at his mother’s deep blue and green

skirts as a soldier grabbed her from behind, one arm wrapped around her waist and the other covering her muffled screams. The young soldier whispered something into her ear, and when Jafar saw the panicked fury in her face...he knew he needed to run. Her eyes turned gray and the room began to buzz. Jafar crept slowly backwards towards the door, his hands behind him feeling for an exit. And just as he felt the threshold, he turned to flee, as a blast of golden light and fiery air forced him into full speed. His vision blurred by tears, and the wind rushed his ears as he ran against its direction.

§

“Are you alright?”, the Sultan asked him. Jafar clutched the edge of the table embellished with metallic accents; he knew he had to stop him. His eyes shifted behind his friend to the vivid red margined tapestry that hung to the left of the room’s single window. He never noticed the intricate details of ancient markings on the fabric before. Three little men dressed in taupe robes with walking sticks in their hands, and a small herd of sheep crowding into one corner by the grisly beast hidden in the frayed edge behind them. Two women in yellow and orange dresses walked towards the white palace as they carried hand woven baskets of silver fish from the Persian gulf, on top of their heads. He remembered a story his mother once told him of a magical lamp. A fisherman had caught the golden treasure in a net, from the warm and brown-green mud at the bottom of that murky and shallow sea. A lamp with a man inside, that could grant three wishes. He could make out the city’s pebbled roads stitched into the heirloom

piece before him and had one last thought of when he first came upon one those roads and saw the palace in real life. He was young and walked swiftly, hoping to find someone who would offer him a drink of water. Back to that time he had escaped the prior Sultan's soldiers. His eyes grew darker, his lips curled inwards. As Ahmed stepped back, Jafar raised an open palm in front of himself as an orb of green luminosity churned and floated in his hand. He was going to find that lamp and use it to make himself Sultan, and stop the invasion.

After Admed opened his mouth to reason with his friend, a loud cheer came from the streets below them. Jafar went to the window but could not see what the crowd was congregating for. Hundreds of citizens gathered around the dusty street leading up to the palace, but for what, he could not see. An elephant bellowed from the front of the estate, followed by an intentful knock. The two friends rushed to the entrance hall adorned with gold and rich blue banners, followed by guests from the celebration within the palace. The sultan's daughter stepped from behind her father, then the wide ancestral palace doors opened. A young man in a cream colored pants and jacket ensemble stepped one foot inside, and announced himself. As he took off his oversized head covering laced with red and yellow threads, he grinned and said "Good afternoon your majesty, I am here to attend your festivities, my name is Ali".

The Abyss

Chloe Renee Saldaña

The afternoon air always smells busier around 2:30 as the sun peaks in heat, but she chose the long beige coat to cover her frame anyway. She likes to think that it's a nice neutral tone that moves nicely along the green foliage she passes by in the tidy suburb she moved to a couple years ago for her then-new career in finance. Her boots echo the heavy burden of the brick in her chest as they beat on the sidewalk and turn the corner marked with skyscraping palm trees. The burden makes it hard for her to breathe; she enters the little nook of a cafe and orders coffee a little breathlessly, the tapping of her boot audible from a mile away. The barista looks at her with a little pity and starts to prepare her order. After an endless 2 minutes she takes her black coffee but then realizes that she wants a blueberry scone. *That should've been obvious*, she berates herself. *Why is it hard to decide right away?* So she goes back to the line

of 3 people and is hit with a gnawing irritation out of nowhere; he's late. Again.

But maybe it's not really out of nowhere. It must have been burgeoning as it slowly interlaced itself into the numbing of her elbows up to her wrists and the volume dial turning down the noise of the cafe in her ears to a mere flatline of humming. The only thoughts in her head are profanities of disbelief that he still had the gall to be late. She already arrived 15 minutes later than what was agreed upon; she thought he needed to taste just a little bit of the anxiety she normally felt whenever he was late to their meetings and she looked and looked and looked out the window and at the doorway in hopes of finally spotting him. "This is the final straw," she hisses to herself as she walks up to the cashier again to finally order the blueberry scone. The scent and warmth of the bread did little to distract her from the sluggish time passing by and the dragging of the heavy wooden chair she sits on at the corner of the cafe. She smells the end of this arrangement instead, and the clarity of this stills her eyes from raking over the ferns that lay just outside the window she was situated in front of.

He comes in smelling different than what she's used to, making a beeline for the chair beside her. She can't really say it's anything noteworthy, this new smoky scent of his that stings her sinuses just a bit, but that it's just not what she knows anymore after a week of no contact. Maybe she should take it as a harbinger of a new reality: that he's not who she's always known since college anymore. She looks at the way he turned his chair a little away from her and looks at this with utter dread and defeated acceptance of

the turn of events; she won't get the answers she longs for and now she's staring at the certainty of it—the hauntings that have etched themselves into the dark circles underneath his hazel eyes, long lashes brushing them a bit too harshly; the lines of his lips pressing into themselves that display a tired discomfort; the loosely clasped hands he rests his chin on. *Is it the questions of her friends regarding the nature of their relationship that's getting to him?*, she has to wonder. *Is it the nitpicking of his mom, his perfect always-traveling mom, criticizing his choice of career in an office job since it's not as interesting as her exciting photojournalism job?* She likes to think she would despise his mom openly to her face, but that's not important right now. She still needs to know what happened to her sister; until recently she thought she was close.

No niceties were even given a thought to; they both know it's deemed unnecessary at this point. She knows the answer, feels it like a hammer to her funny bone as she demands, "So what... you're putting an end to this?" She has to ask. Her time and effort and hope have been wasted on nothing, and he still gets something out of it.

"I—it just turned out this way. Look, I'm sorry but I can't do *this* for you anymore," he says with a low, frayed voice betraying his new intentions. She feels the brick multiply in her chest and start breaking into shards, but she feels a slight relief from it. Maybe this is the way it's supposed to pan out—maybe she's meant to just let *that woman* go to live her life unsullied by the forces of justice that have been watching her every move, intending to embrace her in its finality. Maybe this is what she's been needing all along—a fresh

start with no false hope for answers.

“I don’t even know if I want to know how it happened, but I just didn’t think she’d get to you like that since you know what she’s done,” she dragged out with a burdened tongue. “What the fuck does ethics even mean to you—”

“It means I have to stop when I should, and let someone else take over. Which is the natural thing to do right now anywa—”

“Oh don’t fucking tell me what’s natural right now,” she says exasperatedly, licking her cracked lips to bring moisture back to it. The sun knew to hide behind passing clouds at that moment as if it were the youngest child caught between the oldest ones fighting. A shadow falls on her face and ages her a thousand years, weighing down the sides of her mouth and shading in the lines wrinkled between her eyebrows.

“I don’t know what to tell you except to repeat what I told you last time. I’ve gotten too close to her now, and yeah sure not in the way I should have,” he says with a vague wave of his hand, “but I did tell you that this informal digging you wanted me to do was going to be risky.”

“But you know what she did,” she pleads. “You were supposed to be there for me too,” her eyes imploring his, which turned away toward the shaded ferns. A pregnant pause stills the cafe and beyond. “I know it was her. You do too,” he shakes his head at her insisting, “you know it but you don’t want to admit it. And what about me?” She imagines she can hear her sister agreeing.

“I told you already, it could all just be in your head.” The colors within his figure’s outline are fading away into the background, with his outlines strangely stark against the background of the cafe. She can’t place where his voice is coming from; she’s not even sure he came at all.

Her lungs skipped a few breaths once her ears registered what he said. She has already decided before coming here to relieve him of his duty to her, of his favor for her. Yet she balks at the thought of actually realizing it. Hearing his reminder though brings to sharp focus on her loneliness in finding the truth. She plunges into the abyss of knowing that he’s not bothering to indulge her anymore when they promised to each other, from the very onset of this arrangement, open communication and complete honesty. The sun and the clouds and the entire outer space comes crashing down on the asphalt spread out beyond the ferns. The mugs and the various pots and pans start rattling away along with the chiming of the cash registers. The windows and walls are shaking off every shelf and picture frame attached to their surfaces. And the entire time, the two look on and on at each other, unmoving and unaffected, trying to bend the other’s will to give in to each other’s world. Ultimately, she looks around and sees that it’s the beginning of the end.

So she gets up, not wanting to know anymore why he fell in love with the woman who she knows—with complete certainty—murdered her sister. Realizing that the decision to end this with him had been right there all along, she crosses off this last item and it feels so final. She walks out, coffee still steaming, blueberry

scone untouched but the bag of it clutched tightly in her hand. Bits of planets and flaming meteorites fall all around her like party poppers in celebration of her loss, the rays of sunshine gliding through her hair with the help of the wind's lilting whispers. She steps around a puddle of molten lava seeping through the cracked sidewalk, and decides to see it all unfold from her favorite hiking spot that overlooks the cityscape.

At the top of what is called the Winner's Gorge, she thinks about the devastating reality of social obligations forcing her to call her friend and admit what is going on when she doesn't even want to talk to herself about it. She thinks of how many boxes she's going to need to put his stuff away in; she might not need his newspaper clippings and pieces of evidence anymore. But she doesn't think about whether she might be wrong, that he might have been thinking of a way out of this tragedy together. Taking a deep breath, she stills her mind and removes herself from the shaking of the earth. She walks to a better vantage point of the city and tells herself she can point out the cafe she just escaped from. She now only thinks of how everything looks so small and fragile from up here, immune from the smoke and screams the city is now alight with. She thinks of how suddenly empty her future feels, as if the ink well's gone dry and all her books and calendars and phonebook suddenly went on a backspace spree and deleted every word. The entire city is distorting into what looks like a rueful chasm at its center. She thinks that it hurts.

Past is Present in the Corvette Diner

G. W. Rash

It's something of a tradition in my family to go to the *Corvette Diner* every year on my mother's birthday, to bask in all the '50s nostalgia, and to drink milkshakes. God, the milkshakes. Best in the county. They put the shakes in these nice glasses like they would in an actual diner back in the day, with a little extra still in the cup the shake was made in. They really spoil you with the shakes.

Upon entering the *Corvette Diner*, customers are greeted by a blue vintage parked in the middle of the lobby, a signed autograph from Guy Fieri, and a slew of illustrated posters of all the Rock'n'rollers of old, like Buddy Holly; Roy Orbison; Chuck Berry, probably, somewhere; the Beatles and the Stones and maybe the Beach Boys; a few of the girl-groups; and Elvis. Of course, Elvis, the gracious King. Without Elvis, we would have no Rock'n'roll, which means we would have no Beatles, which means we would

have no love. Or pot. Without Elvis, there would be no *Corvette Diner* and no milkshakes. And where would we go on my mother's birthday then?

My mother – the whole reason we ever went to the *Corvette Diner* in the first place – always dug the aesthetic more than the overt Rock'n'roll references. She was there for the outfits, the car out front in the lobby and the half a car hanging over the root beer bar, the black and white checkered floors, the little paper hats the waitresses give you, the nice red booths, the fun menus with pictures of Elvis and Marilyn Monroe and Buddy Holly and James Dean with fun food items like a peanut butter burger, and the fancy milkshake cups that they put the milkshakes in. The place is really quite a spectacle. Where else would you want to go on your birthday?

I always liked the train car room, where each booth comes with a TV screen playing some black-and-white footage from an old show or commercial – the ghosts of the past watching over us as we eat our peanut butter burgers – with audio too quiet to be heard over “Pretty Woman” coming from the lobby. Wherever you look, there is a TV screen showing you the past; wherever you sit, the past is singing to you in one of a million voices every two and a half minutes. It gets the message across. The atmosphere alone is what brings you here; the TV screens and the music and the waitresses with beehive hairdos that throw straws at you. The food is subpar, except for the milkshakes. They've got some damn good milkshakes.

So, as I'm sitting there with my cookies and cream milkshake,

staring in awe at the scene around me, it's as if it were a genuine portal to the past, when everything was so much flashier and perhaps more meaningful. Only, the older I get, the more the effect wears off; the more obvious the waitresses' wigs are; the more mediocre the food is. It isn't the past miraculously alive and kicking in the present, but a monument that didn't quite get the full picture. Nowhere is this more evident than in the menu, so concerned with making references to classic '50s stars and films that they forgot to make to food actually *good*. Have I mentioned the milkshakes?

But really, that's what we *want*, isn't it? I want to bask in the nostalgia of a mythical time long gone, without having to think about all the nastiness that was thinly veiled beneath the surface. I can look past the subpar menu, or the fact that the waitresses don't even throw straws at you anymore, if it just means that I can be somewhere other than *here* for an afternoon. I'd rather be anywhere but here, the present. The only time I have to think for myself. The future will never come, as it is constantly being fed into now, but that won't stop me from spending most of my time there, shaping and reshaping it and in the end throwing it out before making another. And when I get bored of that, which I inevitably will, the *Corvette Diner* will be there waiting for me. Waiting to lie to me, telling me that I can't see the strings, and that the food is actually pretty decent, and that those times they can't wait to tell me about were perfect. As perfect as the damn milkshakes.

Empathy

Rainée Robinson

You cannot see the person past the visage,
But you'll know if I am deserving of your kindness.

Does what I wear and how I talk destroy your illusions?
Do I distort the image you've crafted from my voice?
Am I not the woman of your dreams simply because I mar my face
with a frown?

You know I am not very pretty,
You know I am not very smart,
You know I am not very funny,
Your belief.

The Finitus

G. W. Rash

“Sir?”

Lieutenant Lui sheepishly poked her head through the doorway of the captain’s office; she knew better than to barge in unannounced when the captain was in one of his “moods”.

“Yes, Lieutenant?”, he said.

Captain McCarthy was sitting at his desk with an open holodoc at his side. He scowled at his visitor.

“What is it?”

Lui entered and stood at attention. She held up a small hard-drive the size of a quarter, and offered it to the captain.

“We’ve retrieved the personal logs of the captain of the *Fini-*

tus, the starship we picked up.”

McCarthy’s expression eased as he took the drive.

“Then there was someone on board? Why didn’t our sensors detect them?”

“Uh- well, actually, Captain, they *did*. When we first detected the *Finitus*, there was in fact a single human lifeform onboard being picked up by our sensors. However, as we approached, it was just... gone. There are no remains – human or otherwise – on board; no sign that anyone had ever even been there, aside from—”

She pointed to the drive in McCarthy’s hand.

“-those logs.”

The captain nodded his head, and leaned back in his seat. He sighed and – to the lieutenant’s surprise – even smiled.

“Ah, a mystery. I’ve always liked mysteries.”

Lui blinked.

“We’ve... yet to find out what the contents of those logs are, Captain. We thought it best you listen to them first.”

“Very good, Lieutenant.”

He gestured to the seat opposite him.

“Sit. We’ll solve this mystery together.”

She did as she was told. Lui had never seen the captain this excited before, let alone show anything more than thin stoicism.

To be fair, she had not been stationed on board the *Pavor* (a questionably ironic name – essentially meaning “terror” in Latin – that the lieutenant found very little humor in) for very long; she had not learned all of the captain’s “quirks” yet.

McCarthy closed the program he had open on his holo-doc and inserted the drive. A list of audio files appeared, labeled “Captain Norman Pawn: Personal Logs.”

McCarthy scrolled through the list.

“Have we any information on this Captain Pawn, Lieutenant?”

“We haven’t found much yet, sir. Captain of a smaller ship; 32 years of age; very surface-level information.”

“Mm. Let’s proceed, then.”

Without wasting anymore time, McCarthy played one of the most recent logs.

Log: Captain Pawn – August 2, 2563

It is currently... 18:56 hours, and Doctor Blanche has yet to give me any answers on what we witnessed or the, uh- object we picked up after the incident. I was told Blanche was a genius, and yet? She’s stumped. I am trying to remain patient, but I expect more from my crew. I guarantee that a scientist on board any other starship would have come to a conclusion hours ago. I will not wait much longer.

END LOG

McCarthy and Liu sat in silence. Already, they had been given more questions than answers. Liu spoke first.

“Perhaps... the previous log could provide some context, sir.”

Without speaking, the captain played the preceding log.

Log: Captain Pawn – August 2, 2563

It- it's, uh- it is 13:33 hours. August second. Not one hour ago, my crew and I bore witness to something truly, uh... I'm sorry. My mind is... struggling to put together exactly what it was that I saw. I suppose I should start at the beginning.

We departed from Pluto at... 07:00- no, 08:00 hours. We were delivering shipments of basic supplies to some... dependent colonies. Routine business. We set course for Earth; figured we'd been on the clock for long enough and the crew deserved some shore leave. Our travels went without a hitch for several hours. Then, suddenly, all power went out; the whole ship was dark. We were stopped in our tracks. There was no apparent- no logical cause; no malfunctions in any of the ship's equipment. But- but there, out ahead of us, there was... oh, how do I describe it? It was like a structure, but somehow I don't believe it was. A structure has deliberate form, it has function. I can't even recall the form of the thing – what it looked like.

But something began to... coil out of it, like a snake. Its color was unlike anything I've seen before – that anyone has seen before. It... oh, my god. It had a face. Hub. Heb. It had a face! And it looked at

me. Right at me. I believe it said something, but... And it was so big; impossibly big. It kept coming out of the structure; it wouldn't end. It completely filled our view. I swear to God, it was bigger than any planet – any star – that I have ever seen. I have never felt so... so.

There was a silence of a few minutes, broken only occasionally by muffled sobs.

I have never felt so naked, so utterly powerless in my life. It completely surrounded us. It was only one Thing, but it completely surrounded our ship. And then, it was gone. And we had power again. But it didn't happen normally. The Thing didn't just leave or fade away, with our ship's power being restored afterwards. Does that make sense? One second, the Thing was out there ahead of us and our power was out, and the next, all was normal. The power didn't come back on; it already was on. Like the whole event never happened. But it did. We all remember it. It happened. It happened.

END LOG

Captain McCarthy and Lieutenant Lui once again sat in silence, trying to hide their unease from each other, but ultimately failing. And, once again, the lieutenant was the first to find her voice.

“I... question the credibility of these logs.”

McCarthy cleared his throat.

“No, you don’t, Lieutenant. You know better than that. You’re only trying to shut out your fear by denying its existence.”

Lui blushed. The captain sighed.

“And yet, we are still left with more questions. What of the ‘object’ the captain mentions in the next log? And how was he so composed, when just a few hours earlier, the man sounded on the brink of a mental breakdown?”

“Perhaps- perhaps we should keep listening, Captain.”

“Very well, Lieutenant. We shall proceed.”

The next three logs in the list were each several hours long. McCarthy skimmed through them, hearing only muffled sounds – perhaps a voice here and there – but nothing was really discernable. Finally, they found the following logs:

Log: Captain Pawn – August 16, 2563

The crew is gone. Poof! Ha, ha! GONE! Who the hell needed them, anyway? I’ve got all I need. The gift they left for us. Entropy. Entropy. I hold it in my hands this very moment. What amazing secrets I’ve learned from it. And what a curious feeling; in one hand, it feels hard and cold, while in the other, it feels soft, almost fuzzy. It tells me things. This gift is worth a million people I could have as crew members. And who needs them?

Log: Captain Pawn – August 28, 2563

I can't remember the last time I ate something; the last time I drank water. I think it's been a long time. I think I should be dead by now. Sometimes I hear and see things, in the dark. I am not alone.

Log: Captain Pawn – October 1, 2563

There is something in here with me. In the dark. I think it's killing me.

Log: Captain Pawn – October 10, 2563

The gift is gone. Entropy took it away. Did I do something wrong? I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry. Please. PLEASE! ENTROPY!

Log: Captain Pawn – October 31, 2563

Oh, it's getting ambitious now. I've had to fight for my life, and- what... no. No! You can't! Don't come here, you fools! You have no idea what-

END LOG

McCarthy exclaimed, “Damn! Poor bastard. Did it get him?”

“Perhaps it did, Captain, but I don't think that was the cause of his distress in that moment.”

“Your meaning?”

“This final audio log was recorded earlier today. It is entirely possible that it was the arrival of the *Pavor* that caused his outburst.”

The captain's eyes widened.

He whispered, "Pawn didn't want whatever was tormenting him to be released from the *Finitus*."

"And, in taking the ship in, we may have done just that, sir."

McCarthy shot forward in his seat and clasped his hands together.

"But- but you said that we only detected one lifeform on board the *Finitus*."

"A lifeform that suddenly *disappeared* with no explanation. Sir, we are clearly dealing with a force that we do not understand. It is possible that whatever was on the *Finitus* with Captain Pawn has the ability to slip past our sensors, or it had already disappeared before we found the ship. Either way, we must exercise extreme caution."

McCarthy nodded his head. He had a faraway look in his eyes.

"Yes. Yes, indeed, Lieutenant. We will enforce a total quarantine of the ship in the event that it escaped the confines of the *Finitus* when you first searched it. I want you to assemble a team to lock down and search the *Finitus* for the intruder. You must find some way to do it without reentering the ship, incase it's still in there. Go."

The lieutenant spared no time, and hurried out of McCarthy's office to complete her mission. McCarthy was left alone at his desk, his mind racing. He raised his hand to the intercom button at his desk, and hesitated; He realized his hands were shaking.

This is no different than any other alien encounter I have experienced. I must have strength!

He spoke into the intercom:

“Commander Dalton, I want the *Pavor* put on full red alert; we may have an extremely dangerous intruder on board. I’ve sent Lieutenant Lui to quarantine the *Finitus*.”

The commander’s voice was barely audible through heavy static.

“...ain?... at are... did yo... der?”

McCarthy cursed. He switched his intercom to the *Pavor*’s speaker-system.

“Attention all personnel; there is a dangerous intruder on board. Red alert. I repeat: there is a dangerous intruder on board. All non-essential personnel, go to your quarters immediately and lock your doors. Red alert.”

Just as he was going to get out of his seat and leave his office, the lights took on a reddish tinge, and a siren sounded through the speakers. So his message had gotten through. He didn’t have to leave his office after all.

He stood and paced the length of the room, his hands behind his back. How the hell was he supposed to fight a being that could appear and disappear at will? How was he supposed to fight a being that might not even *exist*?

Suddenly, the lights went out with an audible *click*. McCarthy

gasped.

He yelled into the intercom, “Commander, report. Commander!”

Nothing. The power was out.

“No, no, no-”

He closed his eyes, still hunched over his desk. How could he take control of this situation without contact with his crew?

There were noises outside his room now. It was... screaming. Yes, that’s what it was. The screams of his crew. He didn’t move.

The screams grew closer and closer to his office, moving through the halls of the *Pavor*, and then stopped all together. McCarthy stood still in his office, focusing entirely on the silence outside his door. Then it opened behind him. He hadn’t heard any footsteps leading to his door, or anything at all.

It took every ounce of strength within him to turn around and face whatever may lie in wait for him.

Nothing happened. As McCarthy’s eyes adjusted to the darkness, he could see that the doorway was completely empty. The only sound was his own breathing and thumping heartbeat.

He stepped out into the hall, anticipating something to leap out of the darkness and attack, but once again nothing happened. McCarthy felt no presence around him at all; he was alone.

He ran his hand along the wall as he made his way down the corridor; his eyes had not yet adjusted quite enough to confidently

walk without fear of bumping into things.

It wasn't quite as silent now. He couldn't tell if there were other noises going on throughout the ship, or if the sound of his footsteps were just being exaggerated and echoing throughout the empty halls. He stopped, and held his breath. Other than the beat of his heart, there was definitely something making noise. Almost like rushing water. It was hard to tell exactly where it was coming from; it sounded like it was all around him.

Then, in some far-off corridor, there was a more definitive sound: someone screaming. A woman. He rushed down the hall as fast he could in the direction of the sound, pushing aside his fear best he could.

As McCarthy twisted along the corridors of the *Pavor*, he quickly lost any recognition of where in the ship he was. He fancied he had a pretty good idea of the ship's layout, and none of the turns he was making made any sense to him. McCarthy knew what was happening; this was all the doing of the damned Thing that had been the end of the *Finitus*' crew. But he wasn't ready to give up on his own crew, and by God he'd save anyone he could.

There was another scream in some far-off corridor, in the direction he was running. McCarthy came to a hard stop, the momentum he had built up nearly throwing him to the ground. There had been something in the second scream that set something off in his mind – deep in his subconscious. There was something unnatural about it. McCarthy held his ground, his heart pounding in his chest like a jackhammer, and tried to listen through the rushing

sound in his ears that had only grown louder.

It was the same scream. That was it. It wasn't just the same voice, but it had the exact inflections, the exact tone, as the first scream. It was the same, just being used like a sample in a sound-board; he was being lured. No way in Hell was he going to take that bait. But, then what? Turn around, go back? He'd get nowhere the way the *Pavor* has become. He could probably-

There was a sound, like rushing wind, coming down the hall. Before McCarthy could react, something flew over his head, knocking him down with monstrous force. He looked up, to where the Thing was headed, and gasped. There was a figure, barely discernable, standing there in the hall. As his eyes adjusted, he could better make out their features.

It was Lui, but... *her face...*

Something began to happen then; her legs seemed to spiral out towards McCarthy as he found himself frozen in place.

He had no choice but to give himself up to the Serpent, as he was embraced in Its entropic gift.

Is it even real?

(to feel)

Vimarievie

What's the deal?

Stay to steal or

Leave it all to heal?

The damage of such

Imbalance

Shot through the glass

I'm like Alice

Never silent,

I make my own path,

don't need no guidance

I break down reality

Defying gravity

I'm nobody's tapestry

To be sewn

Or a quote that you can own

Mold me in words;

you'll never form

I'm a poem without words

I'm the story you've never heard
Yet We've been here before
Lying on the floor
A solemn rose you hold
Composing colorful tragedies
Inside the garden of my insanity.

It's always off with their heads,
But at least I'm yours instead
It's the anthology of never being known
A plethora of art stored in the heart of Rome
The secrets they brought home
The Penguins in the cold

Losing control &
Leaving me alone
Patience stoness my insanity
The moons fallacies
testing every galaxy
Borealis green, stitched in my seams

You'll see me in every gallery
Leading me on with your analogies
Staring till

you can't analyze me
That's the essence I've yet to see
Eyes so deep.

I drowned in my dreams,
Another shade of blue
I have yet to lose.
the flowers blooming all over me
In June.

Awake without shoes
A conclusion without rules
Stolen soup.

Mojave

Alma Ponce

I had worked so hard, I deserved this; to go away and pretend that I was never coming back. Although I had taken a long weekend trip every other month this year, I still hadn't eased the pestering grief. The sting lingered, along with the desperation to move on. Another cliché "finding myself" trip was underway. Travel was *my thing now*.

Thanksgiving was just around the corner, and I had been back home for almost two years now. *Damn, this is taking forever.*

On the outside it was as if I had plastered a smile over my mouth. Windows down, Creedence Clearwater Revival thundered from the speakers and a cold cherry coke in my hand. *I am living life!* Another weekend under the stars, with my sleeping bag and mud encrusted boots in the back of my new SUV, that I still hadn't

cleaned from my last hike. The can's condensation droplets on my shorts resembled the tears on my pants from that long drive home 696 days ago. This is going to be *the* trip.

Bumping along until I reached my site, I glanced around and knew the red rocks and exhausted shrubs would be perfect company for the night. I could already smell the burning pepper tree bark from the firewood that I brought with me as I built my campfire. I had decided I would have a can of hearty chicken noodle soup for dinner. He hated canned chicken noodles, he said the broth was too salty.

Under the stars at last. With a long sleeve Catalina Island shirt on, an old pull over sweater, and the puke green puffy jacket that my mom had given me for Christmas, I burrowed my butt into my navy blue canvas chair and tried to get a few chapters in by fire light as my soup warmed over the sputtering flames. After dinner, I stared at that dark sky sprinkled with tiny white lights, but it was the inky space between them that I focused on while I allowed my mind to wander. As I tried to stay warm, I prayed to my grandparents just in case they were up there somewhere. Especially to my grandmothers, who held the comfort I sought most throughout my life. The comfort that I needed now.

Coyotes howled out from the black desert behind me, and crept closer by the sound of it. Letting the fire burn out on its own, I nervously crawled into the back of my vehicle and wrestled with the zipper of the cocoon that would keep me somewhat comfortable for the night. Tossing, twisting, half dreaming through the night, I forced myself up at the first sign of sunrise, and got ready

for the day. I thought about my dogs safe at home being babysat by my dad, probably still dreaming of bacon and bellyrubs. My sweet girls. I shook off the thought that I may have had to leave them behind on that coastal end of the Bible Belt. No way was he getting the girls. But they were safe, at home sleeping, and we didn't have to hear those drunken squalls again.

I didn't know where I was driving to, I just knew I had to go. Further east into the desert and then left onto a casual road, I eventually found a steep climb and bushes that were alive. Evergreens in the distance, I made my way towards the Kiavah Wilderness and stopped when I saw snow. *I begged him for five years to take me someplace that snowed.* The thin crisp air revived me after the desert climate had turned torrid following the sunrise. Ice bit into my fingertips as I scooped up a handful of that glimmering early winter. I pressed it to my cheek, hoping the prickling sensation of snow burn would distract me from my thoughts. I mentally marked this pass for a future adventure, since I still had this one to finish.

That afternoon I headed back in the direction of camp when I noticed a familiar road sign; a trailhead for Nightmare Gulch.

No way would he want to hike somewhere that had a name like Nightmare Gulch. So I did it. I was doing all of the things that he never wanted to do.

Atop a hillock, surrounded by parched desert for a mile in each direction, and soaring canyon walls beyond that, I felt like a grain of sand in a soup bowl. I have been here before. I knew this view. And as I recalled the memory of my tiny feet running

through this valley, I indulged in my reminiscence. I was still that child that believed in wanderlust and desert dust. I realized that this was always *my* thing; and that I had found myself again.

Turning back towards my SUV, I knew I got what I came here for. And as I headed back for camp down that pebbly zig zagged trail, I began to smell a sweet nectar in the mild current of that gritty air. I hadn't noticed the apricot mallows or desert marigolds before. So, I quite literally paused to smell the flowers. I decided that this would be my new favorite oasis, and continued on my way towards camp. Morning would soon come, and I felt that I was ready to go home, ready to see my girls, and return to reality. I thought to myself how pleased I was. I did this. And I decided when and where I would go. I worked so hard, I deserved this.

**to my favorite human ever
(see you at the viennese ball):**

Vimarievie

Pass it on,

Meet me at the hall.

Catch me when I fall.

Where are thou, if not in my heart?

In every shooting star,

& its lingering sparks

that light up the dark.

In the alchemy that sets us apart,

from the world & its twisted art.

Let's start,

with mine.

You are the love of my life.

One look in your eyes & I feel fine.

We are both fools,

who got nothing to lose.

Ethereal moments with you.

I will never refuse our truth.

The way we always bloom

& how everyone looks at us in a room.

You.

Diffuse all of Cells

with just one kiss.

You

never miss.

I say

“I do”,

Only when I’m with you.

The world may never listen,

but you always do.

You know all the pieces of my mind.

I know all your prismatic sides,

& the way you say goodbye.

Always on time & never sighs.

This is no lie.

We always change

& although nothing stays the same.

Our hearts beat again,

Turning a new page that never ends.

The only gentleman
I know
Who brings me home in one piece.
I never have to taste defeat.
I never lie,
cuz you already know all my crimes.
I don't speak right
sometimes,
but you always listen every time.
Your smile glistens,
life finally feels different.
You're the moon &
I'm just the girl with the painted shoes.
There's nothing left to lose
Except for you.

You touch my face & it's like everything falls into place.
Every poem is about you.
Every word that I echo,
may it sing it back to you.
My forever home,
one that I can never leave alone.
To the only one who cared, when I was lost in May.

Your presence is the reason I stayed.

It's why

winter never feels gray,

Or why your birthday became my favorite day.

Or how mints reminds me of the day we skate,

and you caught me in the rain.

Why nothing feels right unless you're okay.

We always watch my favorite play

About the ones who got away

& for those who never paid.

That's us but with better days!!!

It's the way you say my name,

the endless nights we played

&

the long poetry that

we've become.

Awake.

At the Ballet & a bouquet of cliches,

What else is there to say?

I see a wedding ring

on sight.

Things that you called "mine."

What a surprise
“You’re eyes are a reflection of light,
One that creates new worlds inside.
In just one look, it collides every emotion
known to man.
Defies gravity with just one glance.
In the pupils of your eyes, I see eternity waiting for me.
In sunlight, you’re iris becomes
a mystical shade of brown, so profound!
Lost in your senses, crowned with your presence
So benevolent & iridescent.
The coalescence of when you least expect it.
The simple essence of being luminescent.
Cosmos are created every time you blink,
My love you are worth more than anything
That this life can bring.”

That’s what you said when I was crying all over my bed
And you wiped all my tears away;
With a simple touch of red
And we danced the night away.

The End.

Misnomer

Isaiah Moscare

I slunk into that dark, dank room holding its battered tray of gooey gruel. The air in that cell was thick and musty, barely lit by a small sconce opposite of where I knew it was chained. Almost as soon as the door shut itself behind me, I saw it. Its eyes glowed a menacing yellow in that dark side of the cell and when its gaze netted me in place it lunged at me. Its metal cuffs yanked it back with a resounding clanging immediately followed by the heavy thud of it crashing back to the cold, stony floor. My back was up against the wall right underneath the flickering sconce, I clutched at my chest for my heart threatened to burst out with each strangled breath. I only saw it very briefly but I'll never forget. For when it leapt at me from the darkness and into the flickering light I saw my undoing in its rippling muscles underneath its jade skin. It prophesied my demise in a growl from behind its tusks. I was envisioned my erasure

from this plane, for the fury in its fiery yellow eyes spelled out at least two of the nine circles of hell.

Even as I observed its villainous eyes slowly rise back up the ground and raise itself up much taller than me I trembled, I must've craved my death as some respite from the suffocating fear for I could not pull myself from that spot. Its stare seemed to snare me in place. Then it spoke.

“Food.”

Its voice boomed a deep note that almost shook the walls as it bounced off of them. I saw its gaze look down at the gruel I brought, not out of grace but duty, spilt across the ground.

“I-I'm sorry”.

I quickly sank to my knees, making a mess of myself as I pathetically scooped that disgusting slop off the ground and back onto that tray with my hands.

“Cease.”

He commanded. I froze in place and looked back up at it, the gruel still dripping off my hands.

“Fool. Your kind color us crude, barbaric savages but the man kneeled before me depicts precisely that. You sink to your knees, dirtying yourself in the so-called food and for what?”

It not only spoke, but it spoke well.

“I don't...”

“Speak, you sniveling fool!”

“I’m scared!”

I looked down at the ground, finally able to pull myself from its stare, throwing my hands up above my head shielding myself from that booming voice. I held that position for a few seconds before I heard another heavy thud. I looked up to find its eyes closer to the ground, on the same level as me but without the same wrath behind it. While the flames in its eyes still burned, it was... softer...

“Here.”

I heard a tear of fabric before it reached a tattered cloth out into the light, offering it to me. I stared at its hand, it was massive with muscle and littered with scars.

“Take it.”

Its voice, while still deep and boomed in that cell, didn’t carry the same anger behind it as before. I forced my shaky hand to take the ripped rag then wiped the gruel off of my hands before looking back up to find its glowing eyes in the dark still watching me.

“Th-thank you”

It grunts and I see its glowing yellow eyes roll in annoyance in the darkness.

“I didn’t know orcs could even speak...”

“Fool! Of course we speak. Most of us merely choose not to study the tongue of man.”

I listened in awe.

“As a chieftain of my people it is my duty to learn the tongue of many races. Dwarvish, Elvish, even draconic to better protect my people.” It narrowed its eyes and leaned forward. “But all of the knowledge in the realm can’t protect from man...”

“I don’t know what to say...”

“Tell me this human, you stank of fear as soon as you stepped in here, why? Despite slaughtering my village and capturing me, leaving me in the dark to rot. No sunlight to even tell me the days I’ve been in here. All of this but you dare to stink of fear! Why!?”

Its booming voice knocked me backwards onto my hands.

“L-look at you... you’re an orc. I’ve heard the stories of your bloodlust, devotion to the gods of violence, and even eating humans.”

“Tales?! You know nothing! Typical of man to fear what they don’t understand! You speak of bloodlust but have your people not waged war with every single one of the races, even your own!? And do not speak of our gods, human! While your people deify themselves, constructing monstrous monoliths of glass and stone in your own image, adorning your bodies in gold and jewels. And eating humans... even I’ve heard tales of the most depraved of you lot...”

“You attacked me as soon as you saw me!”

“And would you have not done the same!? After witnessing your village, your people, your family be slaughtered. It is an orc

warrior's duty, his honor to die in battle! So when your people raided my village and I rushed out only to be knocked unconscious and taken prisoner, you deprived me of even that! And even worse..."

Its voice began to shake with a sadness that stunned me.

"With nothing in this cell to distract my mind, no food, no sounds, barely even light... I am haunted by the cries of babes, children, the screams of my people shouting for their chieftain... their protector."

He began to sob, his glowing yellow eyes shaking and muddled with tears. His deep voice now echoing a sad note.

"I see their faces in this darkness, hear their voices in the void... of course I lashed out at you. I have been wracked with guilt that festered in the dankness of this cell. Guilt that is molded with spores of anger and wrath."

Its eyes began to inflame with anger and bore into me once more.

"I have rotted and withered away in this cell! Why must you lengthen my torture with this so-called food, delaying my expenditure from this plane?"

"They wanted you alive for... your..."

"My what!?"

"Your... execution..." my voice trembled.

Its eyes widened with a mix of fear and wrath and not soon after we heard the many footsteps of the imperial guards storming

towards the cell from down the call.

“No... I must die a warrior’s death...”

I watched his eyes slowly slink further back into the darkness.

“I-I’m sorry...”

The door swung open and a dozen guardsmen rushed in, all clad in lustrous steel armor with trim of gold. They stomped, a horde of metal, past me and into the dark side of the cell surrounding him. As they dragged him out of the dark and into the flickering light I saw his scarred body.

“No, fight me! I must not die like this!”

It locked his eyes on me. Lashing his limbs weakly, no doubt in thanks to the malnourishment.

“You lot dare to label us as monsters!”

Its stare and words froze me in place again as they continued to drag him out of the cell and down the hall.

“Man will see their undoing in their hypocrisy and ego. The wrath you wreak will be returned a hundredfold! Maybe not by me, but by someone, something!”

His voice rang from down the hall and around the corner. Even as it disappeared from the air, his words still rang in my head. I rushed down the hall to a window overlooking the execution platform. It took four men to hold his head down on the chopping block even in his weakened state. He thrashed violently as the executioner raised his massive axe high above his head. His gaze

found me once again and he stopped thrashing, seeming to focus the last of his energy, his anger, his wrath in that stare. Then that axe came swinging down. His head rolled off but the promise of vengeance never left those fiery yellow eyes.

Not All Those Who Wander Are Lost

Aranza Martinez

You open your eyes. You see a light. You are here now. Present at this moment. You are wide awake.

When your mother gave birth to you, you saw light for the first time.

It was a sudden and intense transition from the warm, dark environment of the womb to the bright, cold, outside world. As you emerged from the birth canal, you felt pressure; a physical one, but then, you felt a different kind of pressure.

Your body needed to adjust.

But you also sensed a touch of liberation as you took your first breath and began to subsist all by yourself. You were overwhelmed, confused, irritated. You cried like the world was ending because truth being, your world had just ended; that capsule that you dared to call home had just rejected you and expelled you from within. Now you were alone, but not for long.

The soft touch of your father's embrace was the first thing you felt, your mother was second, although your mother's embrace was the only one that ever got talked about.

Your own prison was the confinements of that crib, down the hall from the room where your mother had just experienced the most acute pain of her life.

Your confinement was set between the four walls of that white monstrosity of that building; that's when you found out... Hospitals aren't hospitable in the slightest.

Nurses walked across from you, they captured your eyes, and they gushed and talked about how smart you were going to be for being able to be so present in that moment, to be able, to not just stare,

but to see...

Seemingly, that's what you were doing, but what if you weren't starring? What if your eyes were just open at the right moment... The right time.

It makes no sense to place such an intense and astronomical amount of expectation on an infant; it makes no sense at all.

But regardless, that's life. Every parent thinks their child will become something greater than them, something greater than the world itself; but the world is not big enough for every child to become great, some are mediocre, and that's not bad either.

The lights in that room are harsh for eyes that have not experienced light before this moment, and the clothes you are wearing are harsh for skin that has not felt fabric before this moment either. It hurts to be alive, but it hurts more to do it for the first time.

All this talk about vitality makes you wonder... Are babies inherently nihilistic? And therefore, are parents existentialistic? You have wondered that for many years. It makes sense in your head. These two sides of the marvelous idea of life, simply exist and contradict each other, both morally and intellectually.

There has to be some sort of reasoning behind this theory, but you don't know that, you have never studied philosophy in order to make this point, but in its essence, you think it makes sense.

The entire purpose of Existential philosophy is to overcome absurdity, or, perhaps, better phrased, for man to triumph over the absurdity of existence. And isn't that what parents are meant to do? Isn't that what your mother and your father battled to do every day since before you were even born? They kept searching for a purpose for you, for anything that they could hold onto; a name, a room, a school, a hobby; they wanted you to be excellent... Perhaps more than that.

But you couldn't care less, not even about your name; in that moment in time, you went from slumber to awakesness in such a horrid and aggravating second. Now you were alive, alongside others who shared that exact moment once in their lives as well; for a fraction of an instant they could all relate to you, and yet, you knew, "There is no god, no heaven or hell, so screw it: there can be no right or wrong" So you cried, you cried like the world was ending.

You grew up, eventually, periodically, you grew up. And you, alongside that route you took, went through another transformation; now there was a God, now there was right and wrong, now you were not naturally nihilistic, you changed. You saw the world dif-

ferently again, you were illuminated and you began to fight against absurdity, against the “Dada Est” movement within you.

You open your eyes. You see a light. You are here now. Present at this moment. You are wide awake.

Broken Vows

Evelyn Cruz

The soft touches that once set my skin ablaze turned into a bruising grip, marking my flesh with your love. The hands that held me gently as if I was precious started to shred my skin apart, strip by strip. Using delusion and excuses to hold those shreds in place. Desperate to keep myself together. Together, using those once sweet memories of our beginning to keep us intact. The hope I held with a white-knuckle grip of who I thought we could be.

The picture-perfect photos hanging in fancy frames adorning our house created a lovely farce of our love for all visitors to witness, showing off the love between us. Yet, with every picture, I only remembered the horror behind that day. The arguments we had right after the camera clicked. Those memories were forever captured, frozen in time, hanging on the walls as a mocking reminder. The smiles haunted me as I walked around our house.

Screaming the truth, we tried desperately to hide.

Sweet promises and ‘I love you’ I used to treasure turned into veiled threats you’d whisper in my ear while gripping my arm too tightly to remind me to keep my practiced smile on as we waved and laughed with your friends. The words I used to hold dear were now said as a band-aid slapped on after you had broken my wrists. Always excusing yourself because it was *my* fault for setting off your nasty temper. You would recite the scripted words every time after each of your *mistakes*. A kiss to make it better could no longer do the trick. These bleeding wounds could no longer be held together by your meaningless words.

Butterflies would rampage in my stomach whenever you were near or merely at the thought of you. The rapid fluttering of their wings matched my racing heart as you freely gave me your loving touch. But even those butterflies weren’t safe from your violence. They flew so hard that they bludgeoned themselves to death. My weary heart would race as my body tenses, no longer in thrill but in warning of what was to come. The excitement I once felt with every new day with you turned into anxious anticipation of your moods. What would you do to me today? Act like the man I first met or the monster I knew more intimately. Did my love turn you ugly, or did you always look like that?

The vows you pieced together to perform as you swore your love as you stood across from me, tears falling from your eyes, painting your cheeks, no longer run through my mind. It didn’t take long for me to forget which words you used or how you strung them together. I can’t recall how I felt when you preached

the words you carefully picked out to lie to me. It was just a façade. To cover the true darkness that was hidden in your vile heart.

The veil had lifted from my eyes.

The shiny symbol that represented our *joyful union* rests heavily against my skin. Chained by a piece of jewelry on my finger. The same finger on the same hand you used to yank me back when I tried to run from your arms instead of into them. Your matching piece of metal was a prop you used to convince me you loved me. But when I see it, the only thing I feel is the coldness against my skin as you gripped me by the throat, playing with my life while I slapped at your arms. Your strong arms became binds, keeping me trapped. Holding me hostage every time I tried to leave you. Instead of using love to keep me secured by your side, you used your fists.

You burrowed yourself so deep into my skin, my heart, into my being that I would have to destroy what you left of me to get rid of you. Desperate to be free, I clawed at myself until you could no longer touch any piece of me. The love I once had that overflowed for you is now barren. A distant memory. Those memories slowly got tarnished and replaced. No matter how hard I try, I can no longer recall how it felt to love you. Your ‘I love you’ was no longer a declaration of affection, but a threat. My ‘I love you’ turned into a question that I never found the answer to, and I don’t want it.

Heighten to society

Vimarievie

I've set my sights on piety.

Don't please me this time.

I'm a woman on the horizon

I see things clearer on an island

I live life through my eyes

And cry every night.

I memorialize the thoughts that I concur

Actions speak louder than words.

I see things I haven't heard

and yet I'm still at the shore.

Waiting for the harbor to pick me up

but I still get ignored.

The doors become closed

and only opened when I'm bored.

It's shifting the way I think

and

the days only get so oblique.

So used to the pain that I fled

running through my head.

I never look back,

my dress is stained
And yet it rained.
Do you fear my assistance?
Black hair and red lipstick.
trained to be consistent
Constant under a division.
It is a sign then,
that the poets can design
every term.
Yet to find
to fit their constellate heart.
But never forge the swords,
needed to cut their own.
You need to bleed,
to let it all grow.
But I reap what I sow
and call it a garden of all the things I wrote.
Enchant promises built on a throne.
Revolt against my foes.
Become everything they wanted to be
and then some more.
Insecure in my bones
Fluorescent through the snow

Written every word I spoke.

I've become yours,

Once more.

Magnets

Anthony Garcia

People always say that you have to leave your work at the door, that you can't let it take over your life. Especially as a homicide detective, when day in and day out you stare down the lifeless bodies of people that have had life ripped from them.

Seb didn't really mind the grisly photos currently scattered across his desk. Which he thinks he should be worried about, but he'd seen worse, both from working as a homicide detective and from his time in the military. Done worse, probably - even if it wasn't directly, even if he thought he was doing something good.

Lifeless eyes, charred skin, blood coating the ground around the victim. Very violent, but he could handle it.

Being told that he needs to look beyond the death, the station, the yellow tape of every crime scene. That losing sleep will just make everything worse.

“Dude, go to bed.”

That guy transferred months ago. Seb doesn't even remember his name.

“I'm serious. You look like death.”

Was this his punishment for being a bad coworker? Maybe he could reach out, apologize to the guy for brushing him off. Anything to make this go away.

“Damn it man, stop ignoring me.”

“You don't *have* to be here, you know,” Seb finally snapped back, whipping his head to face his tormentor.

Lifeless eyes, slightly charred skin, blood coating his clothes. If he squinted, a faint glow emitted off of him.

Standing across from him in the glorified shoe box he called a studio apartment.

“Not sure if you noticed,” The ghost replied, crossing his arms, “But I kinda do.”

Just to prove a point, he walked away, phasing through the wall on the opposite side of the apartment. In less than a second, as if that wall was a doorway to this one, he walked through the wall Seb's desk was pushed against, the top half of his body blocking all of the papers scattered across it.

“Maybe you're just not trying hard enough,” Seb scoffed, grabbing the papers that weren't currently inside of the man's body. One had bold letters across the top - *Nicolas García*, with

the accent crudely drawn over the ‘i’ in bright red pen. When the only reply he got was said pen chucked at him, something he easily dodged, he walked to the other side of the room, as if he could get away from him. Again, glorified shoe box. “If you *told me* who killed you, maybe I wouldn’t be up so late. Then both our problems are solved.”

That comment got an entire notepad thrown at him.

“Do you seriously think that *if* I knew who killed me, I would’ve kept that a secret for *this* long!?” Nicolas, as Seb had come to know, yelled at him, grabbing the file containing every grisly detail of his own murder.

“*Don’t throw that,*” Seb warned, eyeing the stack of papers inside that were held together with one measly paperclip. Nicolas heeded his warning and set it back down, only for a binder to come soaring towards him instead. He didn’t even know why he owned that, or what was in it., but it collided with the wall behind him with a heavy *bang*, and Seb felt panic.

His coworkers appearing on his doorstep one night, arms crossed over their uniforms. Their faces turning from annoyance to confusion when they realized it was one of their own, and then finding out his elderly neighbors called the cops on him for making too much noise past 8:30. Being teased about it for months afterwards.

“I don’t want to be here any more than you want me here!” Nicolas yelled, and Seb shushed him, only to remember that he was the only one that could actually see and hear him. What a joke. “But God is playing a sick joke on me, and now I’m stuck with the

most immature, idiotic, superficial, *deranged* piece of shit in a 30 mile radius, and you are the only one that can fix it. You're the only one who actually has a reason to care about this case."

He wasn't exactly wrong, Seb thought. He died in a public place, but it was late at night, with no witnesses, no footage in the area, no sign of a murder weapon, burned beyond recognition, and wouldn't have even been reported so soon if the ones responding to the fire didn't *immediately* recognize the stench of burning flesh. The full autopsy report hadn't come back yet, and wouldn't for some time, but the extent of the burns had been so bad they weren't sure how much they'd be able to find.

A horrified mortician. A closed casket. A picture of him smiling displayed instead.

All that to say, they weren't so sure if they could find who did it. His coworkers laughed, called it hopeless, and said it would probably go cold.

Seb wasn't the best detective in the precinct. No one called him in because they knew he would be the only one that could solve it, or because they thought he'd have some amazing break in the case. He got it by chance, and would've just thrown it out if the motherfucker himself didn't appear in his room that night.

Charred leather boots, with nails in the bottom, reminiscent of the dances he has long since forgotten. Family photos that stirred something deep within him that he hadn't felt since before the world seemed to crash down.

He sighed and looked at the paper in his hand. Nicolas García,

20 years old. Identified through dental records. Reported to be returning home from a folklórico performance nearby (*culture night at a local school*), last seen three hours before the estimated time of death. Supposedly stormed off after a “heated argument” with another man from his dance troupe.

Not very popular, from what Seb had learned.

Everyone in the group exchanging nervous glances when he walked in, gun and badge on display. Horrified looks when they realized why he was there. The dancers giving cagey responses and avoiding eye contact when he tried to speak with them. An empty spot in the choreography they tried to run while he was pulling people out to speak with them. Practice ending early.

“And if I can’t find the murderer?” Seb asked, eyeing the ghost. Nicolas had since stopped standing *in* his desk and was now in the furthest corner of the room, like he was physically repelled by him. Which didn’t make sense, because they were bound to each other, somehow.

Nicolas didn’t reply. Seb knew that he knew that it wasn’t very likely the case would get solved.

Cussing out his Lieutenant when he looked over the file. What does he want him to do, with nothing to go off of? Does he think he’s a miracle worker?

“Interview the people from the dance group again,” Nicolas suddenly spoke up, “The guy. That I was arguing with that night. He- he *knows* me.”

“I have no evidence to arrest him on,” Seb snipped back, sit-

ting down on the bed pushed into the corner of the room. He might've thought Nicolas was stupid for trying to physically keep back, but he wasn't exactly inclined to sit back down at his desk when he was standing right next to it. "And besides, they *all* knew you, Nic,"

Two magnets repelling each other in the backseat of his mom's car. Dropping one under the seat, and using the other one to attract it back when he couldn't reach it.

"That's *not* what I'm asking you to do. He'll answer questions if you don't *corner* him," Nicolas replied, reaching for something else to throw. The desk only had so much on it, though. "And *don't* call me Nick." Seb just scoffed, rifling through his stapled-together papers.

"What are *you* going to do? You can't even throw straight."

A boot flying into his headboard proved his point. Maybe he *should* put his shoes away.

"Fine, if you're gonna play that game, so can I," Seb finally looked up from the papers to see the glare on Nicolas' face, "*Eusebio.*"

Something akin to disgust or horror must've crossed Seb - *Eusebio's* - face, because Nicolas' glare faltered for just a moment.

Being three years old, just a baby, and his life revolving around his mom. Being held at night by her, whispering how much she loved him, and the name Eusebio not having any meaning behind it besides it being his name, and his father's name, and his grandfather's name.

“Never heard that name before. Where’d it come from?”

Being four years old, but feeling smaller than he’s ever been. Listening to the screaming downstairs, the sound of items hitting the walls. His mother yelling “Eusebio!” like it was poison on her tongue. Not being sure if she was still mad at his father, or if she was calling for him.

“Took me a second to figure out how to pronounce it.”

Being five years old, in a classroom for the first time, and squinting at the bright lights. Watching the teacher stutter as she read the roster. Watching his parents’ faces fall as she laughed nervously. Raising his hand shamefully. The kids on the playground saying, “That’s a funny name.” Letting them call him Seb, and then Sebastian, and never correcting anyone.

Seb didn’t say anything. Just tossed the papers down, grabbed his coat and keys, and walked out. Nicolas followed, of course, but, blissfully, he didn’t say anything.

They knew they both crossed a line, somewhere.

Seb just walked. He wasn’t sure at what point he stopped being aware of where he was going, but he knew the ache in his legs and feet meant he had been walking for a while. He didn’t stop until he reached a bench under a street light, in a part of town he’d only been to once.

Nicolas was across from him on the bench, of course. Seb knew there was no way for him *not* to be there. But something was different when his eyes fell on his companion, like they’d been intertwined somehow, and Seb could *feel* the despair plastered across his companion’s face, mixed in with his own concern.

He finally looked at his surroundings. A college campus. *Nicolas'* college campus.

Well, the campus he attended *before* he was murdered. They were sitting across from the building he used to practice in, now empty and quiet. No sound of footwork, or nails on wooden floors, or laughter as the team danced, like the first time Seb was here. Only a man outside, smoking a cigarette.

“I got him to quit, almost a year ago,” Nicolas suddenly spoke up, and Seb squinted at the man.

He recognized him. It was the man from the dance troupe he had seen in the corner of his eye, sulking in the corner. The one that answered every question with a question. The one Nicolas wanted him to interview again - the one Nicolas had argued with that night.

“He wanted me to quit drinking. But, well, you can guess where I was.”

The toxicology report wasn't back yet, but it didn't take any fancy forensics to guess Nicolas was *well* over the legal limit (*which would've been zero, because he wasn't even 21*). Ghosts smell, apparently, and Nicolas reeked of burnt flesh and alcohol.

The man outside the building was looking at them now, but made no move to approach. Seb was glad. How do you explain being on a college campus in the middle of the night, when you're not even a student? He didn't belong here.

Seb looked back at Nicolas. In the dim street lights, he might've

even looked more human. The light washed out the faint glow of his figure, and his skin almost looked like there was circulation beneath the surface. The burns didn't seem so severe, and the blood blended into his dark colored clothes. He could see - could *feel* - the attachment to this place, just from watching his expression. To the school, the building they were facing, the man.

“Did you bring me here?” Seb asked.

Nicolas didn't answer.

“If there's anyone that's going to give you any information that can help, it's him. I *knew* him.”

“You keep saying that. I don't understand what you mean.”

Nicolas huffed. “..I knew him the way you know the placement of every freckle and mole on someone's back. The way you know every color in someone's eyes. The way you know what foods someone *would* like, because you already know what they like, like it's as obvious as *breathing*. The way you-”

“You could've just said you guys were together,” Seb frowned, and Nicolas gave him an annoyed look, “That was cute, I guess. But you did *not* need to bring me here to stalk your boyfriend. Do you know how weird I look right now?”

Sure, Nicolas never answered his question before, but Seb knew that he was right about being brought here, somehow. He didn't even know how to get home from here, but Nicolas had been practically *begging* for Seb to take him back to his campus.

“Can't I have *anything* without you trying to figure me out? I

never said this stuff to anyone when I was alive - not even *him* - and now you're killing my vibe."

Seb blinked. "Sorry. But I *am* a detective, you know."

Nicolas didn't dignify him with a response.

He sighed, realizing that he must've gone wrong somewhere, because the connection that seemed to have formed suddenly felt like it had been severed. How dramatic. Instead of dwelling on whatever mistake he made, he looked around again, even if it was just to avoid looking at Nicolas's sour expression, and realized the man was staring again. But Seb realized he wasn't looking at *him*, but rather the open spot on the bench.

The spot Nicolas was sitting in.

Two magnets stuck together so perfectly that Eusebio had to pry them apart with his blunt nails.

Two magnets snapping back together the moment they slipped from his grip.

Goodness Grace

Alexis Ramos

find warmth in the gin that's burning from within the little apple cold in
your throat,

find the bottle called a friend whose friendship will only end when your
liver gives up fire through death.

kiss me when you're drunk

hug me when you're under this little sedative called love

Is it Hennessy or whiskey with a shot of my tears?

Is it Brandy or Bacardi that'll keep you loving me in a year?

dancing in swimming pools

when we're two ends apart

you're shallow with a poison pinch when

consciousness is a giggle, maybe a little more, just a

little more

have i seen you before?

temperamental tendencies, heartthrobs and heartaches from mood
swings,

in the midst of a distant memory,

a blur, a buzz,

a reminder from me.

Summertime Evenings (and Other Symptoms of Daughterhood)

Brisa Gómez

It had been a summer afternoon when my mother asked me, “¿Quieres ir por un helado?” I recalled being hunched over the living room table, my head sunk behind my gray laptop as I did my homework. Without a second thought, I looked up at her and said yes, comparable to someone accepting a hand while drowning or finally managing to take a breath after so long. I was searching for any kind of escape; I desperately needed to be somewhere else.

I stood up, using my pen as a divider for my notebook; I didn’t want to get lost by the time I returned. I settled near the couch and watched my mother search for my sister, while my father turned off the video he had been watching on TV—something about new video game releases or maybe house construction tips. He seemed tired during these days—more angry, more sad, and a little less than himself. I thought it was because he was fifty-one; growing up

had always been some sort of haunt.

My mother returned a moment later, announcing that my sister wasn't interested in joining us. I didn't ask why; I presumed it was partly because of my own past indifference. There was a seven-year gap between us—fourteen and twenty-one—which meant our interactions were reduced to morning greetings and unspoken goodnights. We still shared the same room, sleeping in different beds, side by side like parallel lines that could never meet. Sometimes that distance felt suffocating, and I often lay awake, wishing I had done more to show her how much I loved her, even on days when it didn't seem that way.

Before leaving, I washed my face with cold water, glanced at my reflection in the bathroom mirror, noting the tiredness at the edges of my eyes. My brown hair was pulled back in a bun to clear my face, mostly out of convenience. Almost everything I did seemed to be driven by convenience. I was a leaf swept along a reckless river, moving with the currents of who I wanted to be. I had a violent tendency to be other people because I had no idea how to be myself—not really.

As we walked to the ice cream shop, the three of us talked while cars drove by, their lights illuminating our surroundings as the air pressed against our skin, creating a sequence of hot waves that made me want to hide somewhere and not be found. I mentioned this to my mother, more or less, but all she did was express surprise at my sweaty, red face. I simply nodded in response, feeling comfortless for more than one reason. Whatever I said held little interest for her.

We continued until we were interrupted by overgrown trees whose roots protruded everywhere in every possible direction. Those wild roots caused us to swerve more than once and I stumbled three times. Each one of them I was told to be more careful. Then, barking dogs appeared on the other side of a gate and I covered my ears with the palms of my hands as we passed them. My parents insisted that I was overreacting, I wondered if that was their way of telling me there was something wrong with who I was. From a very young age, I had been told I was a sensitive being. Perhaps that was why I hated being perceived; vulnerability made me uncomfortable.

A few turns later, we arrived at the ice cream shop, resting in a small plaza-like structure—a place to settle in and pass the time. In such closeness, I noticed the doors were open, allowing the summer heat to pour in. Inside, the two workers appeared to want to be anywhere but there, and this was understandable; the single fan barely reached where the ice cream counter fridge was.

I was the first to order and the second to receive my ice cream—mocha, because I wanted to stay awake longer without the commitment of coffee. I was dressed in shorts, a thin T-shirt, and borrowed sandals from my mother. She didn't appreciate my habit of taking her clothes without permission, but I almost never listened to her when it came to her things. It was my way of becoming a little more like her and a little less like me.

It had been a summer evening, and I sat at the outside table, eating my ice cream while my parents talked about inconsequential matters. Silence had been a person I had grown accustomed to be-

ing kind to. In other words, the world held such tender tranquility in its grasp.

A few moments later, we finished our ice cream, stood up, and took out the trash. The sky slowly darkened amid its endless transition, and there was a distinct smell of burning wood wafting through the air, accompanied by its characteristic warmth. I didn't stop to think about it; I was too distracted, trying my best not to step in dirty puddles, small insects, or animal feces.

As I opened the exterior door, I noticed the house lights were on. I wished my sister had been at the entrance, but her absence was noticeable. Upon entering, I returned to the living room table and looked at my unfinished work. I opened my notebook, picked up my pencil, and continued to write.

The Happy Blues

Jude Buggy

Inspired by a psych song, meant to be sung in the style of blues

I woke up this morning, and I couldn't believe
That a happiness bloomed inside of me
I take a look in the mirror, and there I see
A smile on my face that would never ever leave
To my relief, the accustomed darkness retreated
Scurrying to the little holes above my teeth
To my relief, the things I needed
Seemed to be within my reach
The metallic taste, so pungent and clear
I welcomed it wholeheartedly as I peered
At the flow of tears falling into their place,
At the stitches that are now etched in my face

Written and performed by Jude Buggy a year ago, she hasn't come out with anything else since.

The Heat That Follows

Chloe Renee Saldaña

I close my eyes to pray, to meditate, to feel whatever is coursing through my body during times of stress and during times of peace. I close my eyes when I run my fingers through each tangle in my hair under the narrowed vision of the shower's rain, feeling the warmth of the water cascade down my body and soothe my soul. I close my eyes from the destruction of worlds meant to exist longer than mere childhood, than what is already once a vivid memory of a home. And with my eyes closed, I listen as best as I can to that beating in me—always contemplating, always asking demanding commanding more more more of what I am to be and what I have to do. This is a constant that does not haunt me, though. It defines me. I know who I am better when I'm meditating on what I have to offer, because maybe one day I will know what exactly it is I have to do. It is not a dull ache that constantly hounds a

specific spot on my skull throughout the day, pulsing with urgency. It is more like a slow burning at the pit of my stomach that jumps with purpose—a heat that creeps along the ridges of my spine and forces me to jump back and forth across time and space. These are my meditations.

§

Sometimes I find myself in earth-shattering moments of sudden hyper-awareness that leave me searching for God in the cracks of the pavement and the tinkle of my cousin's laugh. Often, they come crawling up my legs and knife their way into the atria of my heart in the middle of a conversation I try my very best to at least seem happy to listen to. It's not that I'm not interested in the conversation, rather I don't have the energy to actively contribute to it. Sitting at a slight distance away and observing the easy smiles of my loved ones must suffice... they must. I was sulky to begin with, anyway. The obnoxious summer heat sapped all of my energy away and is nearly visible as it hisses off my skin. This is something I fear is a constant grievance of mine to complain about. *I'm dying, it's too hot*, I'll say. Even, *I'm going to melt off of the face of the earth*. How dramatic, how irritant, how it always goes back to how I grew up with the heat of my hometown.

§

The things that haunt me, I have never really consciously thought about how they formed much of my current way of living. Like the way I have never learned to cook Filipino food when I was living in the Philippines but mastered it once I moved back

here and had no choice but to nurture an entire household that I cannot even completely claim as mine. Or the way I'm slightly jolted by surprise when someone here says they love eating *lumpia* and *pancit*, as if it's the first time hearing something Filipino in a non-Filipino setting. The most consistent haunting is when I'm doing my laundry and I start to sweat from the summer heat. For a minute, I'll stop in my tracks—maybe my shirt is only half-folded or my sock is hanging limp on one hand—and think about how the weather of the Philippines will never leave me.

Just last year when the college hung in limbo for official announcements of class cancellations due to the impending hurricane, I found myself swimming in the nostalgic memory pool that holds my undergrad days when I would refresh my school's Facebook feed every 5 minutes to confirm that school would be closed the next day, while the torrential downpour beat at the roof and shook the windows noisily. What more of the summers getting hotter and hotter every year—it's like I never really left the heat I dread. Just when I thought I was resolved with my angsty, denial-fueled upbringing in the Philippines, it seems to be dogging the footsteps I thought I was taking on the way out of there. In that minute where the earth shatters beneath my feet, I ask demand command, what have I forgotten to bring, or to leave? What, in my body mind spirit, am I supposed to meditate on as the Filipina who can no longer conform to the purely individualistic pursuits of America, but also the American who rebelled against the sacred social norms in Philippine society? What questions do I ask to find an answer that will bring some peace in mind? The heat seems to follow me, haunting me in moments I don't expect. My laundry

needs folding.

§

To enter the garage, one must wait outside our front gate to be let in only by permission—someone has to unlock the padlock holding the gates together and bend down to unlatch the two thin bars digging for treasure in the cobblestoned driveway of our open-spaced garage. Trees are planted along the sides, in the soil on the left and in all sorts of large pots on the right. But on our garden's bed of grass, there is a tree that stands solitary—this one tree that was my comfort zone. I would hug it tightly and gratefully, because I knew its life should be appreciated and that it speaks so many languages and arts and sciences in silence. I may have looked ridiculous hugging a tree but what other way is there to know how to live through typhoons and severe sweltering scorching heat, and know it requires strength to survive and be beautiful?

Funny thing is, it wasn't even such an aesthetic beauty; it was thin and grayish with lots of mud-like splotches along its crooked body. But beside it I would lie down on the grass on a mat after having done 30 minutes of yoga and look up at the brilliant cyan of the sky through the scramble of its leaves. Or I would lean against this tree and there I would read and read and read; books like *Slaughterhouse Five* and *The Secret Life of Bees* and I was so hungry to devour more books. But also I would lie down next to it and listen to a meditation app for at least half an hour, training my body mind soul to completely relax into themes of gratitude, loving kindness, and fostering self-love. I know it's because at my very core, I long for peace the most. The heat was not around to

bother me at this moment in time, I notice.

§

White plastic table, white plastic chairs, with a white plastic umbrella with 4 bodies and a baby. My family, the people I feel most comfortable with, people who look to me as reliable in taking care of their needs. I am happy, I am tired, I am calm, I am indolent. I was settled to just lay in my bed, to continue reading *Orientalism* by Edward Said because I tasked myself with the noble feat of understanding world issues and solving them on my own. I must think highly of my intellect, if I were to prioritize learning over socializing (now, I'm not really being ironic). I've just finished cleaning my bathroom spotless when my sister texted me to go meet our cousin and her boyfriend at Coronado to just hang out, with the little hiccup regarding my need to drive there to avoid a longer trip (she had to take her son, my nephew, to SeaWorld with a different car). I got to Coronado earlier than scheduled, grumbling about having to drive the entire way even though it was actually quite a pleasant task. I sit on a bench overlooking the entire downtown area and read, feeling at peace despite the earlier said grumbling. Even the nearby screeching of people hanging out at a pool did nothing to distract me from my stubborn pursuit of devouring as much as I can of my book before time was up and I had to interact with people. And then it happened, they arrived and I had to interact when I wasn't up for it.

Retrospectively, I can still feel the discomfort along my arms and legs in forcing my energy to revitalize when there was not much left to coax out. I barely remember the walk to the table

near the Ferry Landing, I only vaguely recall jokingly pouting about how I had to merge into the freeway. It was the heat; the heat drowning my thoughts out and reminding me of what I hated about living in the Philippines, but never why. I love them, with their honest laughs, their gentle presence grounding me back to the white plastic table, white plastic chairs, white plastic umbrella with the addition of my too-sweet pumpkin chai latte and its straw that felt communal by the second sip I got to take. But the heat was stronger in pulling me away and landing me back in my home that was not always my home.

§

My mother is half-white, and I have inherited her fair complexion. In the provincial town where I graduated 6th grade, high school, and undergrad, oh, was I the belle of the ball. Praised for being the whitest in the class; naturally, too. Praised for having an accent that betrayed my earlier upbringing, even if sometimes they poked fun at it. Praised for having the first touch-screen cell phone, for being dropped off at and picked up from a private college everyday, for having pink cheeks and brown eyes. I grew up watching my classmates dutifully hide under shades of porticos and Narra trees, shying away from the sun to avoid tanning further than their genes dictate. I grew up listening to stories of using papaya soap for skin-whitening and hair-straightening products. After going back here for a couple months on vacation, I became incredibly aware of the whitewashing my people have been subjected to for generations upon generations. I suddenly recognized how much privilege I had for doing absolutely nothing worthwhile

and hated the praise, hated the constant eyes I suddenly felt on every movement, hated the culture of praising those who look American and not Filipino in a country that was not full of Americans but full of Filipinos.

When I opened my eyes to the struggles stacked upon their backs by colonizing forces of white supremacy, I opened my eyes to peel off the myriad colors they painted on my precious fair complexion. I started laying under the sun, breathing in its heat and allowing it to color life onto my skin, to etch the meaning of living onto previously untouched lines of my body mind spirit. I now carry this burning, scorching energy within me everywhere I go. I open my eyes to read pages upon pages of books talking about how to love others and what to meditate on, inhaling in souls upon souls aching to be finally heard. I open my eyes to memorize the look on my sister's face as I tell the dumbest joke that ever existed. I open my eyes to thank, to observe, to immerse myself in everything and nothing I live through. This is how I keep myself from burning out from the heat. I now know that it follows me around for a reason.

Untitled #1

Rainée Robinson

Waves crashed in muffled silence, the distance has put a damper
on their strength.

The table made up for their silence in spades.

Laden with food, hands passing bowls and plates.

Swishing of towels on chairs, drinks being poured into glasses.

Laughter and body heat. To make up for the distance from the
waves.

Then and Now

Dana Villafana

Rain poured from the heavens, sending his blood flowing faster over the pavement.

-

Her laugh was a bright squeal as wine sprayed everywhere. “Ben! Watch it!”

He smiled and sipped at the bottle. The living room was drenched, along with the two of them, but it was worth it.

-

Ben breathed raggedly. It was too much effort to gasp for air.

-

She gasped into his ear as he picked her up in a bridal carry. Perfect

to walk over the threshold. “Didn’t you always say you wanted to be swept off your feet?”

“I didn’t exactly mean it literally.” Alice tucked her face into his neck, and he could feel the warmth of her breath on his pulse.

“That’s why we need to watch our words, sweetheart.”

-

How dare she? How could she? She said she loved him.

-

“Ben, I love you, but this is not okay.” Alice scowled from the doorway, her shoes still on, dripping tomato sauce into the carpet.

Ben rolled his eyes and smiled. “You’re beautiful when you’re angry.”

“I’m serious,” She snapped, “My sister is pissed, my parents are mortified, *I’m* fucking mortified, and I’m more than a little sure you haven’t been sober in a week!”

His head throbbed. “Can we talk about this later, darling?”

-

The knife gleamed a few feet away, washed clean by the storm. Her hands had probably been washed clean by then. He was as clean as any person dying next to a dumpster in an alley could be.

-

Her eyes gleamed with tears. Her curls were damp and her face

looked fresh, just out of the shower. Her coconut scented shampoo wove its way into his brain. “You should go.”

“Al-“

“Go, Ben! I told you I didn’t want to see you yet.” She tried to slam the door on him, but he blocked it with his foot.

“Baby, please-“

“Can’t you just listen to me for once? I’m not saying never, I’m saying not right now. Please, Ben?”

-

Alice Reed. The love of his life. The end of his life.

-

Her voice was crackly over the phone but no less sweet. “I made up my mind.”

Those words lifted the world off his chest. “Yeah?”

“Yeah. You remember that Thai place on Eighth? Can we meet there? Tonight?”

“I’ll be there.” He spoke before she could finish. “I can’t wait to see you again, Ally. These past few weeks have been hell.”

“They really have. Tonight, 9:30.”

“9:30. I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Contributors

AMYREY ARTIENDA is a psychology major at Southwestern College whose mind is always creating new fantastical worlds. Born with the taste for the esoteric and whimsical, she aspires to push past second-guessing to write several short stories. She holds a love for stationary, fountain pens, and a warm drink in autumn.

EVELYN CRUZ is a veteran from San Diego, California. She attends Southwestern College double majoring in Psychology and English. Her plans are to earn her degrees and become a correctional psychologist while working on her novel. She is working on finishing up her edits on her first novel of a planned fantasy romance trilogy series.

ABEL ESCOBEDO is a Mexican-American student, attending Southwestern College for Computer Science. Their stories usually revolve around nature and similar imagery. Most of the things they write are centered around personal experiences and natural occurrences.

ANTHONY GARCIA is a second year student at Southwestern College studying English. He plans to obtain a Master's Degree and work as an English professor to teach at the Community College level. He enjoys writing fiction stories that reflect his life and culture.

BRISA GÓMEZ is an avid reader and an occasional writer, with her stories primarily focusing on queerness and mental health. She is a psychology major and plans to become a therapist for neurodivergent teenagers and adults after completing her master's degree. In her free time, she enjoys drinking tea, playing videogames on her phone, and eating instant ramen.

CHRISTINA GUTIERREZ (JUDE BUGSY) is a writer from Chula Vista San Diego. She is a first-year student at Southwestern College majoring in English and Literature. She hopes to improve her writing skills through college and become an author or editor. She has always enjoyed writing as an outlet for her intense emotions and dynamic imagination.

ARANZA MARTINEZ is a binational student on her last year of college, she is studying to become a teacher and she is passionate about writing and painting; she is often found journaling or writing poetry and she hopes to publish a new novel by the end of the year.

ISIAH MOSCARE is a poet from San Diego. He is currently attending Southwestern College as a Creative Writing Major. He is planning on becoming a teacher to help usher in generation of young men not only unafraid to express their emotions but revel in it as well.

MARIANA VIZCARRA MOYA is a writer currently enrolled in Southwestern College and is majoring in architecture. They enjoy reading all kinds of genres. They hope to one day publish the graphic novel they have been working on.

ALMA PONCE is a Mexican-American writer based in San Diego, California who is double majoring in English and Landscape Architecture at SWC. She is currently working on pairing her love for writing and nature, to become a science writer, focusing on native plant conservation in California. Although her experience has mostly been in research, she is also exploring the world of creative writing and poetry. She plans to transfer to Cal Poly Pomona to be a landscape architect, while writing in her free time, and hopes to someday be published by National Geographic, and write novels.

ALEXIS RAMOS is a writer from National City in San Diego, California, and an English major at Southwestern College. With plans to teach at the high school or community college level, she wants to specialize in creative nonfiction and poetry.

GUNNAR RASH (G.W. RASH) is a writer from Imperial Beach, California. He goes to Southwestern College as an English major. He plans to use his writing skills writing Science Fiction novellas to be published in magazines and, later on, to write Science Fiction and Horror novels.

RAINÉE ROBINSON is a writer currently in Southwestern College as an English major. Her goal is to follow in the footsteps of her Grandmother and work at Library of Congress. She pursues writing with the lens of a young black woman growing up in a military family.

CHLOE RENEE SALDAÑA is in her 2nd year at Southwestern College. She returned to college to pursue a master's degree in Literature. She is currently honing her creative writing skills and

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ESSA THABET is an aspiring screenwriter, currently, their major is in Psychology but writing has always been the most important thing to them and they wanted to take this chance to share one of their stories.

DANA VILLAFANA is a writer in San Diego, California. They are a communications and English major at Southwestern College. They mainly write short stories in the fantasy and sci-fi genre, focusing on emotional turmoil.

VIMARIEVIE is a writer & dancer from Chula Vista, California. She currently attends SDSU & is an Southwestern College alumni. She is an English major and is planning to get an MFA in Creative Writing. She enjoys writing short stories & poems along with partaking in photography. She loves listening to music and creating playlists in her free time in order to find inspiration.

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This literary magazine was brought to you by our Southwestern College's writing club, The Other Writers Guild. The Other Writers Guild was created in the spring semester of 2008 by a group of students who were eager to write and wished to have a forum in which to show their work. The club has been committed to offering an open platform for members to show ideas and work in an environment that is comfortable and that offers positive feedback. Anyone who attends our school and has any interest in creative writing is welcomed and encouraged to join. If you are interested or want more information please contact us at:

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linktr.ee/theotherwritersguild

Once again thank you for your continued support.

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