

# CALLIOPE

## ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE

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CALLIOPE ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE • FALL 2021

CHAPMAN  
UNIVERSITY

FALL 2021



# **CALLIOPE**

## **ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE**

Prose, poetry, artwork, and music by members of Chapman University  
Fall 2021 | One University Drive, Orange, CA 92866

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# Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

I think many of us expected all of our problems to magically disappear once we returned to in-person schooling. After a year and a half of relentless Zoom meetings, we were chomping at the bit to return to some semblance of normalcy. Never mind the struggles and truths the pandemic had uncovered—all that mattered was getting back to normal.

As soon as we set foot back on campus, however, it was clear that we still had a long way to go. From a near outbreak to an indoor mask policy to showing a simple email at the door of every building with no end in sight, that normalcy we craved slipped away. *Calliope* was not immune either—there were paper shortages, budget complications, and packed schedules that made for ghostly meetings.

And yet, through all of these difficulties, we continued to create. *You* continued to create. Every one of you persevered and endeavoured to share your work with the world. When *Calliope* sent out the call, you didn't hesitate to answer.

This is why we are creators. This is who we are as artists, authors, and musicians. We take all that pain, uncertainty, fear, and joy, and we channel it into something beautiful. We put ourselves on display, pursue our passions, and work to inspire change.

I cannot verbalize how much *Calliope* has meant to me these past two and a half years, nor have I taken for granted my time as Editor-in-Chief. To the authors whose pieces are hauntingly real and elegantly written—thank you for your willingness to be vulnerable. To the artists whose works amaze and delight me—thank you for sharing your talent and vision. To the musicians whose songs appear in our first-ever SoundCloud album of original student music—thank you for taking this leap of faith with me and paving the way for the future. And to everyone who came to our write-ins—from the bottom of my heart, *thank you*.

Kelly, thank you for your unyielding dedication to *Calliope* and flawless organization. Fiona, thank you for putting up with my endless texts of "Hey, can you post \_\_\_\_ to the Insta?" Julianne, thank you for your unending patience as we figured out how to prepare a pdf for printing for the first time in three semesters. And to the entire *Calliope* staff, thank you for your tireless enthusiasm. *Calliope* would not exist without each and every one of you.

And now, dear reader, please enjoy the Fall 2021 issue of *Calliope Art & Literary Magazine*.

Wishing you all the best of luck,

Tara Mann  
Editor-in-Chief  
*Calliope Art & Literary Magazine*, Fall 2021

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# Soft Hands

Eliana Nava • Poetry

There are times when I want to peel you an orange. But instead, I watch you tear at its skin because you tell me you can do it yourself. Your brows furrow and your hands become unsteady, trembling with desperation. I stay quiet and pray for the rind as you spit a few curses and beat at the bitter flesh until the evidence stains your arms. It smells rotten from where I sit beside you.

No sweet citrus air, no sugary tang, just the sour sting of pulp soaking your palm. The orange lays dead in your hands. You cry because you did not mean to be rough. You did not mean to be cruel.

And here, my love, here. This is the part where I reach over and cup your gleaming hands and tell you to forgive. Here is the part where I reach into my bag and pull out the orange I saved just for you. Here is the part where your hands can be soft.

Here is the part where we can try again.

## Coastal Colors

Ava Schneiderman • Pastel Drawing



## ode to the road trip pescadero

Kyra Jee • Poetry

windchill slicing shallow against our cheeks,  
and ocean salt faint on the lips.  
lighthouse december, the first trip out west —  
trail ends here!  
with the simple *bread* of it all, stone-fire fresh,  
for generous handfuls.

a thick loaf of instant warmth,  
toasted crust broken open  
in strata at the onset of teeth.  
herby, earthy confetti-flecks of green  
yield mild bitterness,  
immediately subsumed by  
the meatiness of morning-harvested artichoke hearts  
falling apart on the tongue  
in uncountable layers.

inside, sea-foam softness:  
heat having crisped the crust, then  
suffused the center doughy.  
bread in hand, now. unafraid of  
sinking into lush butter and — garlic rosemary and —  
giving the other half to you.

# california 91

Keira Deer • Poetry

i waste a great portion of  
my good sweet time on the freeway  
now.

through dirt-scrubbed glass, i see  
people search the horizon with some  
lick of abandon in their eyes,  
as if maybe they had never seen the  
creeping carpool caravan that perpetually stalls  
the freeways in the canyon.

maybe they hadn't,  
and they were lucky for that.  
bowie sings about the jean genie  
through the cd i clicked  
from a cracked-plastic case and  
slid into the dashboard.

*she loves him, she loves him, but  
just for a short while.*

dad drives and says we have to listen loud, because  
this!

this is rock and roll!

sister whines in the backseat.

the fan in this tired  
lifelong truck makes it humid and dense,  
and the smell reminds me of  
the long road trip once taken  
up the side of a mountain to pursue  
the sort of special chime of life they have  
up there.

this truck is as old as me and yet  
i dare to wonder which of us has experienced more  
in our seventeen years.

brake.

accelerate.

# It's Your Lucky Day

Makena Snipes • Photography





## At my apartment, three hundred neighbors. or, What is the point of witness?

Kyra Jee • Poetry

At my new apartment, three hundred neighbors  
call creaky to the orange sun.  
Cobblestone clouds and feathered palms as witness.  
This morning, one of my neighbors,  
dead in the parking lot.

Not every prayer is holy before you give it to  
God. This one is dirt. God,  
ease the grief of the parrots.  
It is too late to wish you an easy death.  
Body of lime and neck pomegranate.  
But to your loves who cannot linger,  
I pray healing on my walk to school.

This morning, desperately —  
    Why hasn't anyone picked it up?  
But then, when gone tomorrow —  
    Where did they take it?  
Not the trash. Please. My hands spurt nerves at the idea  
of gloves cradling birdly weight,  
then gloves dropping my neighbor  
to cardboard bed and banana.

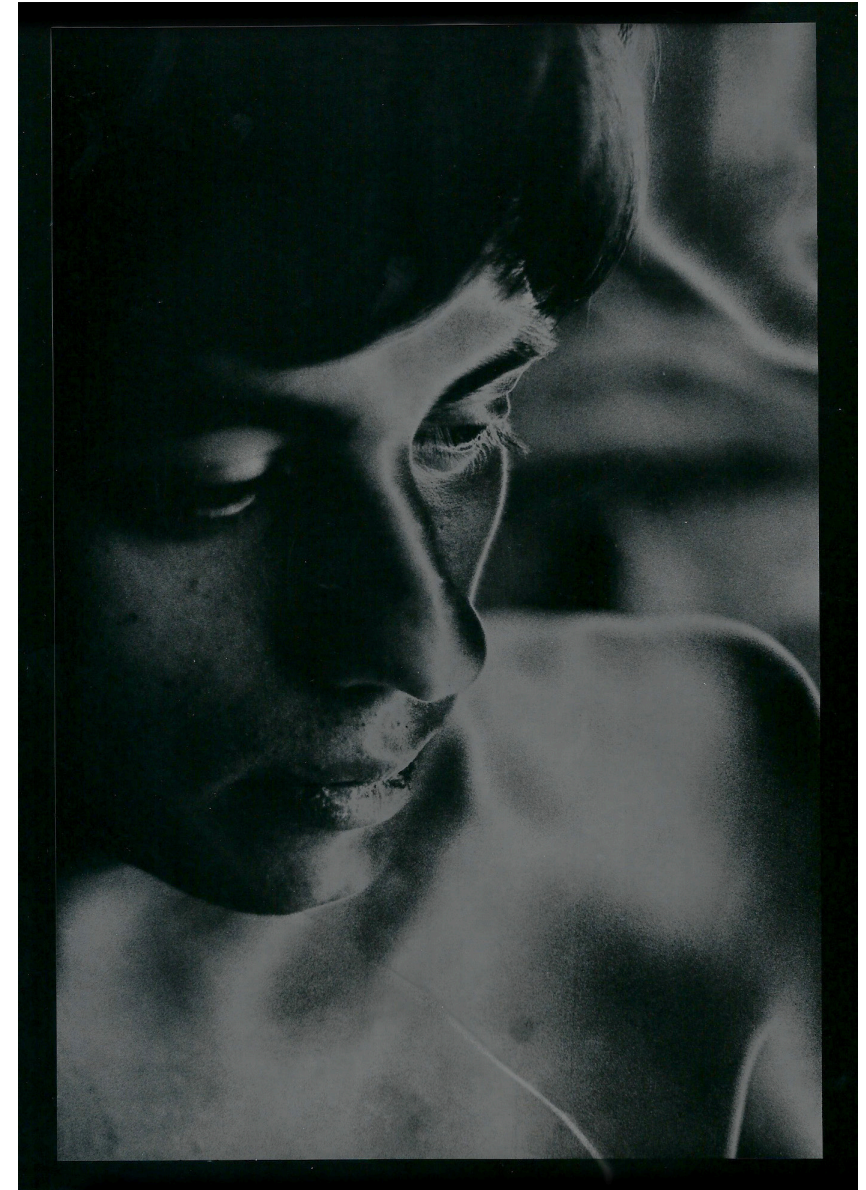
But don't leave it in the dirt either,  
a carcass unhygienic and raw.  
No one wants to see that.

Once, at a funeral, they gave me a dove to hold in ceremony  
— each quivering with life and toes clenched —  
I let the bird go, immediately, on accident.  
But I hope it never lands.

God — The Parrot — My Neighbor — My God.

## I'll be Seeing You

Morgan Grimes • Photography



# Storybook Damsels and My Distress

Kelly Taylor • Fiction

If this were my last breath, I would use it to say I love you. But it's not my last breath. So I blow it out.

"I just don't think this is going to work," Kiera says. She's bent over a cardboard box, attempting to arrange her pristine book collection to absolute perfection. I want to tell her there's no such thing as perfect, but she's had enough of my opinions. They're probably at the top of her list of reasons for breaking up with me.

"Why don't you try another box?"

"I can't. I won't be able to fit anything else in my car." She carefully wedges a paperback that looks like it was purchased yesterday—even though she has read it three times over—in between a novel as large as a bible and a fancy hardcover with gold-edged pages, the telltale sign of a collector's edition. It fits, almost perfectly, and I start to applaud. Then she sighs and pulls it back out.

My hands hang awkwardly in the air mid-clap, fingers curling inward in an attempt to conceal the action. As if I could snatch it back from time if I clenched my knuckles tight enough. "What was wrong with that spot?"

"It doesn't fit. If I leave it there, the corners on the Dickens will shift when I'm carrying it and it'll get scratched. It's just too risky."

*A Tale of Two Cities* is the aforementioned special edition with horrifically dangerous edges.

"I'll get another box," I say.

She bats a thin arm in my direction. It makes the fabric of her worn blue cardigan flop in the air. A loose thread hangs from a hole in the elbow where she accidentally got it caught on the door jam at Mega Bean Coffee one afternoon. It was kind of cute the way she pushed the door open with her back, looking up at me with eyes that told as many stories as the tales that fell from her chapped lips. She was rambling about the differences between the show *True Blood* and the books that inspired them, enlightening me about which one tackled issues of racial prejudice better. She didn't even notice the snag until it pulled her to a jarring halt.

"No, it's fine," she says. "I'll move Dickens to another box. I can wrap it up and put it with my shirts."

"Suit yourself."

Her small hands, constantly peeling from the dry desert air, slide over unbroken spines as she re-arranges the books for what must be the tenth time. I go back to my side of the room and look at my DVDs. They're scattered on the floor in shiny silver heaps where I dumped them haphazardly out of the entertainment unit. Half of them are scratched, unlike Kiera's books, and it matters a lot more with a DVD.

You can still read a book with a scratched cover, but a damaged DVD is worthless. One scratch or smudge and the movie jumps and pauses at odd places until the story doesn't make sense anymore. For a brief moment, I ponder the usage of the wrecked DVDs as a metaphor for our relationship, something I never would have done before I knew her. The thought makes me smile, though it isn't funny.

I should probably just throw them away. She's told me a thousand times that I should. Maybe in spite of her, or maybe just because I've had them forever, I snap them back into their plastic cases and shovel them into my suitcase. What's one more damaged fragment to take away from this wreck?

Just as I'm tugging up the zipper of the ratty old suitcase, my eye snags on the image of Anna Paquin with a single bloody tear dripping down her pretty cheekbone pictured on one of the cases at the top of a stack.

"Where did you put my shirts?"

"Hmmm?" I turn to face her, noticing the way her wavy black hair threatens to slip from where it rests behind her ears. I used to kiss those unattached earlobes in darkened rooms where our bodies temporarily fell into rhythmic harmony. I avert my eyes. "I don't know. I don't think I've seen that box."

"Yes, you have. You duct-taped it this morning."

"Oh, ummm . . ." I scratch the back of my head. "Try the kitchen I guess."

I don't miss it when she rolls her eyes or when she stalks to the kitchen, murmuring to herself about men and their lack of decent brains.

"I don't see it," she calls, voice getting tighter with annoyance.

*That's because you don't see anything.*

"Let me see," I say.

The sight of the kitchen catches me off guard. Never have I ever seen Kiera near this much of a mess without having a panic attack. Boxes litter every square inch of the white tile floor along with so much bubble wrap I could take a bath in it. I point at a box. "It's right there, underneath your pillows."

"No, those are my pants."

"Does it matter?"

"Of course it does! The buttons on the pants could leave an impression on the leather." She waves the book around for emphasis.

"Don't some of your shirts have buttons too?"

She blinks twice in rapid succession the way she always does when she's trying to be patient with me. It's always reminded me of the way someone might double-tap on an iPad screen. *Blink. Blink.* "Yes," she says, "But those are smaller. *And* I can wrap it in a T-shirt. No buttons on T-shirts. Nothing will be able to touch it."

Sometimes, I think that her life is wrapped in a T-shirt with those books. It might as well be.

It's while she's wrapping the soft cotton around the polished leather book that a flash of green grabs my attention.

“What’s that?” I ask, pointing at the little green triangle jutting out from between the pages.

“What’s what?” She rotates the book in her hands to get a better look. The thin pages fan out in the air just enough that the green object slips from between them. It lands on the floor.

I pick it up. It’s not much. Just a sheet of colored copy paper folded hamburger style to make a card. Clumsy letters written in red marker across the front read, “Merry Christmas!” And suddenly, the slip of paper feels a lot heavier in my hand. I remember it.

I remember the book. This book. *A Tale of Two Cities*. I gave it to her on our first Christmas together. We were sitting on the hardwood floor practically under the Christmas tree. The little green thistles of one of the branches parted the curtain of her hair just above her shoulder like a rock ledge might part the smooth stream of a waterfall. It should have made her look disheveled. But in those quiet moments when we spoke in hushed tones with words that our gentle voices deprived of their sharp edges, it only added to the air of tranquility. I don’t think either of us truly listened to the harmless talk about our jobs and classes. It wasn’t the words that mattered but the comfort that came with speaking them to someone else.

When she carefully folded back the cheap holiday paper, her face opened like a book. She flipped through the pages, admiring the elegant swirls etched under each of the chapter titles. Her fingers stopped at a page in the middle of the book, tracing the words down the neat column until she found what she was looking for. “I wish you to know that you have been the last dream of my soul,” she said, reading aloud. Her shining blue eyes met mine, brimming with a question she wouldn’t let herself voice. I nodded as if that quote was the reason I had bought the book. As if that was the exact meaning I’d intended for her to extract. In reality, it had popped up as an advertisement on my computer while I’d been gaming, and it looked really cool, so I’d taken a chance.

If only I had quoted it like that. If only I were Sydney Carton.

Kiera stares at the card with wide eyes—eyes that still hold the hint of a question. “I guess you might want that back.”

I thrust it forward. “Keep it.”

I can tell she wants it, even if she doesn’t want me. She’s big on keeping records. One of these boxes is full of the old crap she used to keep in the bottom drawer of her nightstand: ticket stubs, paper wristbands, even napkins from particularly good dates. Everything holds a memory. She loves memories, with their tendency to turn little moments of everyday life into enchanting fictions. She’s stuck in them. Good and bad alike. It’s not so much that she keeps reliving the past but re-feeling it. Over and over again. Every time she looks at something as small as a cheesy, obligatory Christmas card—one that isn’t even signed with a “Love, Christian.” Those emotions won’t ever go away. So, in a way, we won’t ever end. We’ll stay whole and

unbroken in her memories.

I don’t know if that comforts me or makes me more uneasy.

We stand there, neither of us willing to break the silence. Then her fingers close around the card, and it’s out of my hands. I wait for the tension to release. It doesn’t. She chews on her bottom lip as she studies the thin green paper with meticulous concentration.

“I just . . . I don’t know how to explain it,” she says. “It’s just not there. You get that, right?”

Oxygen gushes from my lungs as if my diaphragm is a balloon that someone has poked a hole in. It makes a sound like an exhale. She means it’s not like it is in the stories with the insanely hot prince who understands every fiber of her being. I’m not perfect. I’m human. I play video games during dinner while I’m supposed to be paying attention to her. I forget about dates and eat cheesy fries way too close to her immaculate books. I don’t spontaneously buy her flowers, and I can’t for the life of me remember which one is her favorite no matter how many times she tells me. But that doesn’t mean I don’t—

“I know,” I say.

Her teeth release her lip from the vise grip. “Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

She smiles that quirky little smile, the one that almost makes me believe in perfection. My heart slows down. For a second, I think it’s going to stop. But then it doesn’t. She looks away, frowning down at the book.

We go on packing without incident, silently keeping to our own sides of the room. Everything is divided, unscrewed, unglued, and disassembled. Our lives go into separate boxes and get packed into separate cars.

I keep thinking about that Christmas. She read me the entirety of that book over the course of the winter. We didn’t have a fireplace, so we settled for sprawling on mounds of blankets under the tree. She’d lie on her stomach with the book propped open before her in one of the few instances it was ever allowed to touch the floor. I’d rest on my back, staring up at the dying limbs and their browning needles. She’d use the brief pauses when she turned a page to steal glances at me. Maybe she was checking to make sure that I was listening. But I always was. I didn’t mind books. In fact, I shared her love of stories. It’s kind of what brought us together in the first place. Only, while she prefers to tell her tales with paper, mine unfold in digital campaigns and virtual realities. The two practices aren’t all that different. So I listened as she walked me through the world of Lucie and Sydney. And when she came to her favorite line, the one she’d quoted on that first night, her voice nearly turned the words into a song. It wasn’t that line that stood out to me, though. It was what came next. *A dream, all a dream, that ends in nothing, and leaves the sleeper where he lay down . . .*

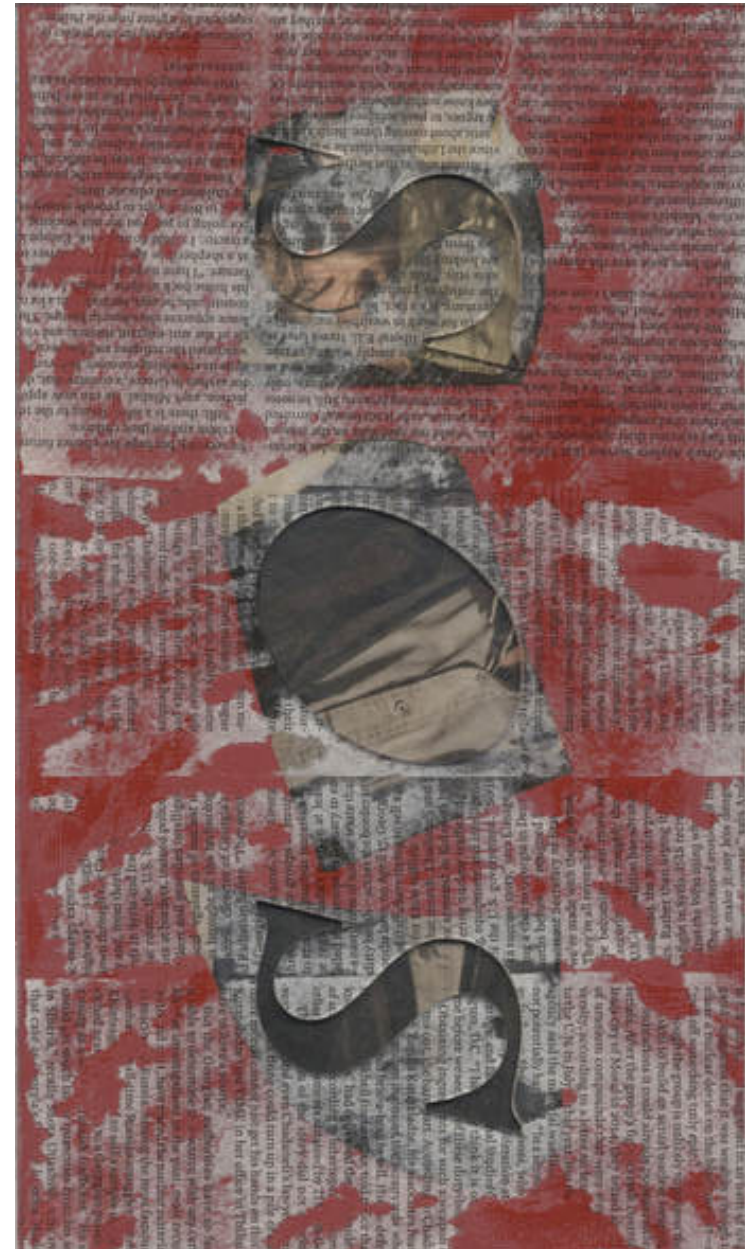
“Fire Lily,” I say.



Kiera halts in a squat, arms wrapped awkwardly around her last box.  
 “That’s your favorite flower.”  
 “Yes,” she says, voice breathy as if I’ve suddenly sucked the air out of her lungs.  
 She trains that serious, contemplative gaze on me, lips parting like she’s going to say something else, ask something else. Then she shakes off the daze and stands. “I left the key on the counter.”  
 “Okay.”  
 “Could you get the door?”  
 “Oh. Yeah.” I reach around her and pull it open.  
 She steps out into the otherwise vacant hall, ballerina flats sinking into the old carpeting.  
 “I guess this is it,” she says.  
 “I guess so.”  
 “Goodbye, Christian.”  
 “Bye.”  
 Kiera ducks her head in a slight nod and turns toward the stairs.  
 I draw in a breath. Will she ever be satisfied? Will I?  
 “Kiera?”  
 I love you. Do I even know what that means? Do I love her? It’s not that storybook romance, but is it the best we can find?  
 “Yes?” She looks over her shoulder, causing the ends of her hair to take flight momentarily. The dark strands fall against her back, standing out like ink stains on her light blue cardigan. The same light blue as her eyes. Those piercing eyes that are boring into me with a curious anticipation. As if they’re offering me one last chance at redemption. One last chance to use this breath for something productive. One last chance to say—  
 “Nothing.”  
 In seconds, she is gone, disappearing around a bend in the stairs. I’m left standing there, still breathing, with all too much air left to occupy my lungs. All too much space.

## SOS

Nikki Kalhori • Mixed Medium *Acrylic*



# Gay Best Friend

John Finnegan • Poetry

In high school I was the gay best friend.

No one wants that for themselves, to be a wicker man for their identity. But any reception was the exception and I wore the name with pride Gay Best Friend, a crown of thorns placed upon me.

They declare me king of queens and hoist me onto the cross to die for them.  
To cry for them. Suffer for them.

That is the role of the Gay Best Friend.

Straight people don't realize that being the Gay Best Friend is its own type of homophobia.

You're expected to be beautiful, but not in the way you want to.

Keep yourself fit and thin. You need to be muscular—but not like a man—slender, light, ephemeral in your size. Clay to be sculpted by critical hands.

Be hot on all the trends. Cruel and cutting, but have the perfect words of comfort when called upon. My vocabulary contorts to their expectations. Just enough sass to be cunning, but not oppressive. I must never be a threat to their power.

Relationship advice? I have that. Nevermind that I live in fear of having my skull caved in by the men I loved.

I'll rattle on about your boyfriend all day.

I am to avail the world with tales of the men I long to kiss, to feel against me.  
But I am not to pursue any of them.

The realm of the physical belongs to cisgender heterosexuality. My identity exists only in the abstract. I am queer in every way but practice.

My wrist drops like a kneeling dog for their delight.

Each exaggerated motion premises mockery. Queer men. I'm sorry. In search of love I allowed hate.

Straight people don't want a Gay Best Friend, not really.

When you start questioning your gender and ask for support, they say "Can't you just be a drag queen?"

When you march in the streets you feel the spit and bile on your face, forced to confront that hatred birthed from the mouths which cut into your wrists and heart.

They eat Chick-Fil-A.

When you realize you're not a man, you have never been a man, and that you thought you were running away from masculinity, you'd just found it in another shape.

They cast you aside.

For them, being depressed isn't gay, being afraid isn't gay, being a person isn't gay. They don't want a Gay Best Friend, no.

They just want a faggot.

## Covered

Lauren Herrle • Painting



## A Double-A Experience

Tyler Yang • Nonfiction

### **It's hard to understand who I am.**

I pray, but I'm not religious. I love Tolkien, but I'm a football player. I blast rap but sing R&B. I'm quiet but confident. I pace my words but my thoughts run a mile a minute. I'm silly but write great essays.

But most importantly: I am tall, but I'm Asian. I am athletic, but I'm Asian. I am Asian, and I'm A-shamed.

### **It's hard to understand who I am. I've lived a life of contradictions. Contradictions are the building blocks of who I am.**

I spent my first year at Phillips Academy Andover in a dormitory called America House, an appropriate name because of the diverse makeup of its inhabitants. Upon the backdrop of America, entered two main characters: Best and Will.

Best was an international student from Asia. He spoke without an accent but seemed wide-eyed and soft, doomed to perish in the wilds of Western masculinity. For a year, I couldn't stand being around Best. He was just too foreign. He smiled too much, dressed dorky, was habitually meek, and, most frustratingly, he seemed to suffer no repercussions for not assimilating. He just wasn't my version of "cool." Even when I shamefully scorned our friendship in search of more "normal" friends, he was continuously friendly, welcoming, forgiving. He seemed to give not even a passing thought to fitting in. I hated that. He didn't buy into Western masculinity and was always pacifyingly friendly. I hated that. Best did not meet my definition of normal, because he did not experience the trials or endure the compromises I'd made with my own identity. He was too deferential to white folks and took their prejudices in stride. It infuriated me how much he allowed people to push him around, how little fight there was encoded into his DNA.

### ***Homo-Asianus: known for their meek nature and a strong sense of community; cowardly.***

In America House, I was an anthropologist cataloguing my own species, studying Asian-American behaviorism, analyzing the seemingly hard-coded deference for those with an Aryan complexion, our habit to not make eye contact, to accept their prejudices and assumptions. I saw us as a different species, like the animals zoologists put a genus to and classify. Even after being



raised in the States since elementary school, my family acts timid, particularly in the presence of white Americans. An extra effort to impress white guests, a bigger effort to laugh at their jokes, and a forced friendliness in public. Even though we grew up in California, even though we're in America, even though we've been Americans for two generations. I was angry at Best, my family, and myself. I am unreasonably angry at all the Asians I see accepting the stereotypes thrust upon them, enforcing ideas that strip me of my individualism, of my own mettle, of all those attempts I've made to wash away my own race-imprisoned mindset.

### **Cut back to America House. Enter Will.**

Will was an Asian student who had grown up in a tough Hispanic neighborhood. He had more pride about being from Lawrence than Vietnam, identifying more with his adopted culture than his ethnic roots. He had washed his hands, either by choice or circumstance, of a part of his identity. The injustice I see in our daily lives didn't bother him, because he lacked connection to our shared heritage. From jokes about Asian food to jabs at Asian traditions, he wore his separation like a costume, like a protective screen against microaggressions, against shame. For the entirety of our sophomore and junior years, I tried to emulate Will. I was tired of people judging me by my race, so I separated myself from *that* part of me. I shunned fellow Asian students, as if by keeping myself from them I could keep myself apart from the stereotypes. I became a self-styled, snobby second-generation Asian-American. Not in the sense that I'm rich and spoiled by money, but rather that I'm rich and spoiled with cultural entitlement. I found myself subconsciously making negative snap judgments about FOBs (fresh off the boat: Asians who recently immigrated to the West).

If you look like me but don't dress like me, talk like me, walk like me, and act like me, I judged you. I became a part of the unwelcoming committee that my own parents must've met upon arrival. I JUDGE you.

To my shame, this judgment cost me my friendship with Best.

For a while, my self-styled snobbery protected me at America House. I was unbothered by snide comments and microaggressions. *It's not about me, I'm not them*, I told myself. But as I matured, I discovered pride in my identity. I rebuilt some of the bridges I had foolishly burned. I rebuilt friendships—some of them. My friends' interest in discussing topics of race, of unapologetic cultural pride, began to resonate with me.

Exit shame, stage right.

I figured it out. I am Asian. So what if math clicks easily for me? There is not a single thing in the world I can do about it. I should be proud and unwilling to dumb myself down. Rather than lock my excellence away,

I should embrace it, embrace my strength, embrace myself.

On the field, they act like I don't belong. How dare I step outside of my stereotype and pick off a quarterback, how dare I play basketball with a bruising mentality, how dare I get up after a punch and swing back? How dare I be unafraid? I have been through all of that, and I still hit back.

Conversations about pride began to transform my attitude and my priorities. Perhaps, my discomfort with the stereotypes being superimposed upon me was more important than the polite social etiquette of smiling and nodding. Maybe it was time to correct the problems bothering me at its roots. I became a demolition expert, detonating verbal micro-aggressions in a social guerrilla war. I became an accountant, double- and triple-checking that my worth is more than what I've been assigned by a dismissive country. I became an activist, refusing to bow in the face of adversity. I can be Asian, sporty, swaggy, and proudly geeky. I can tell people no. No, I don't eat dogs for dinner, no that wasn't funny, no I won't swim helplessly in your wave of prejudice.

Enter our main character: Tyler.

He exits America House, and re-enters on the stage of America.

How does the sum of my parts add up on such a large stage? By the numbers, I represent a very insignificant percentage of the American populace, 5.67%. Until the recent pandemic, I had no decisive fight to pour my energy into and no injustice to grow awareness of. Our 5.67% has suffered major injustices, but our Asian-American community has been too splintered to form a unified front, to center our drama on this larger stage.

I learned about the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Japanese internment camps in a single history class. Mainstream media sometimes mention these outrages in passing before washing their hands of the stigma, considering it addressed. My point isn't even that we are being hushed by mainstream culture but, instead, we are not even worthy of being quieted and are purposefully forgotten. In the wake of this pandemic, all the decades we've spent congratulating ourselves for being the model minority evaporate and expose the ugly truth that the world still sees us as "other."

For years, the model minority hoped that conditional acceptance would go unchallenged. The media and the former President offering us as scapegoats for Covid-19 proves that hope wrong. We cannot put hope in conditional acceptance. We cannot put our hope in shame. We must put our hope in unity.

As a community, we need to stop dividing ourselves as Chinese, Japanese, Korean in the face of the coming struggle. We need to stop trying to further separate ourselves into first-generation and second-generation. We need to support one another. Why should we break ourselves down further when an attack on any Asian-American is a belittlement of us all? Don't we understand

that nobody else differentiates Asians as anything beyond yellow and brown? Why allow them to divide and conquer us? Yes, the media and the former President's attacks might be focused on Chinese people THIS time, but it was only a generation ago that same blame was focused on Japanese people. How can we forget so soon and learn so little from our own past? We might be very different cultures but, here, we share experiences.

From Best, I learned to love myself and my culture. I will forever regret pushing away the first friend I made at Andover. From Will, I learned to stand up and hold my head high, because although my culture is who I am, it is not ALL that I am.

The tragedy of America House is that it took me until senior year in high school to show others the kindness my own parents were deprived of when they first immigrated here. To stop putting down those we deem as alien and instead learn from one another. We can learn how to assimilate, we can learn to be powerful.

It is time we break out onto the stage and into our starring roles, to take charge of our own identity and spin it towards a new American narrative.

## Day In

Angela Darjuan • Digital Art



# My Marys

McKenna Sulick • Nonfiction

Spaghetti, a side of zucchini, and garlic toast was my great grandmother's sacred meal. We ate it as a family on the first night of each lake house trip, laughing and conversing as our sunburned faces had spots of spaghetti sauce on them. This meal signified the suspension of the buzz of everyday life for the coming days in the mountains. My great grandmother always sat at the end of the long dining room table with a napkin tucked into the collar of her shirt so her outfit wouldn't get stained. She'd sit there smiling at us all throughout dinner, intently listening to our troubles and triumphs.

My great grandparents Chuck and Mary Therese Chodzko bought a small house in Lake Arrowhead, California in the 70s. In the 90s, they tore down the house and turned it into a home where every member of their expanding family had space to rest. Mary Therese put a sign above the front door that read "maison des'enfants," which translates to "house of the children." In the coming years, that would ring true—as of now, Mary Therese has 15 grandchildren and 27 (and counting) great grandchildren.

Being the wonderful Irish Catholic woman she was, Mary Therese put a white statue of the Blessed Mother in her classic form—hands gently outstretched with her veil cascading down her shoulders—in the corner of the backyard in between flowerbeds. She watched over us as our massive family spent hours there together for over thirty years. The Blessed Mother statue was a representation of what it meant to be in this family—you loved as she loved, fought as she fought, and had the tenacity that she had in all the tough times.

Under sad circumstances, we had to sell Mary Therese and Chuck's Lake Arrowhead house and leave behind its spaghetti dinners, floral bedspreads, and sepia-tinted memories in 2017. My extended family and I spent one last weekend in the house and packed up all the extra things that were left behind. I did one last tearful walk-through of the house and looked towards the backyard. There stood the Blessed Mother statue, worn by years of mountain weather, cracked in some spots from stray pine cones falling on her as the seasons changed, not-so-white from all the time spent outside, but still as beautiful and treasured as ever. I dusted off some spiderwebs and awkwardly leaned down to pick Mary up, taking her into the house with me.

"We're taking Mary with us, Mom," I said.

"We can't fit her in the car—"

"We'll make her fit."

So, there Mary sat for the whole drive back down the mountain towards home, just standing with her palms outstretched in the middle of the car. She was large and powerful standing there. I stared at her, sort of off-put by her sudden presence.

~

The Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, the namesake of the song "Ave Maria"—whatever you want to call her, that's her. Keeping with Catholic tradition, an angel came to Mary and asked her to be the mother of Jesus. It's written that she was around 15 at the time, and still, she said yes with complete trust. Growing up in the Catholic Church, I always found that strength to be shocking, yet admirable. Of course, the hardest thing Mary had to endure was watching her child die before her eyes. She stood there at the foot of the cross as Jesus was being crucified. People said disgusting things as he carried the cross, mocking the wood he hung from, and there Mary endured. Once Jesus died, the men left, but the women stayed.

The Gospel of John says, "So the soldiers did this. But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, and Mary Magdalene."

There is no further mention of Jesus's disciples at the crucifixion in any of the Gospels after that verse. It was the women who followed Jesus the whole way up to the place of the crucifixion, the women who stood and watched as he died, and the women who prepared Jesus's body for burial. The strength of a woman is unlike anything I've ever seen. I know that to be true through the Blessed Mother, the women in my family, and most especially with Mary Therese.

My Mary Therese went through more trials than most, and still had unbelievable strength throughout them all. She went to college, unlike most women of her time, and became a teacher. She married Chuck Chodzko, had four kids, and stopped teaching. Mary Therese started to feel different as the years with four kids went by. She couldn't get out of bed and lost the desire to do anything in her life. She talked to Chuck, and he thought she should go back to work to get her out of her depression and anxiety.

Mary Therese returned to work as a teacher and felt massively fulfilled. My great grandparents heard a lot of talk from the neighbors because Chuck had "let" her work. He had always been a progressive man, and teaching was helping his wife immensely. Mary Therese dealt with depression and anxiety every day for the rest of her life, but you would never know it if you didn't know her. She would wake up, put on her matching pantsuit, take the curlers out of her hair, swipe on her rose-colored lipstick, get down to business teaching, then tend to her children and the crosses they carried.

Like Mary, she watched her children go through numerous traumatic events. She sat there, at the foot of her children's crosses, watching as horrific



accidents and a nasty divorce and a few gut-wrenching deaths hung her children and grandchildren on their crosses. She never judged them, never made them feel less than, never shamed them for their reactions to their crosses. She wiped their blood, cleaned their wounds, and kept them going.

Like all good mothers know, you can't carry your children's crosses for them. You can't pick up that splintering wood and drag it up the hill for them while still carrying yours. It doesn't work that way. Mary Therese and the Blessed Mother knew that. They did what they could until it was time to stop doing. Mary Therese aided her children and grandchildren more times than I can count. Once, her son got in a car accident that left him without speech, without the ability to walk, and with his law career as he knew it completely over. She sat there at the edge of his bed every day, praying the rosary, and holding his hand. She said those Hail Marys over and over for weeks on end. Her hands never left her rosary beads, even as she watched as her son regained speech, the ability to walk, and the ability to practice law again.

In the early 80s, my grandmother's husband left her for good with three kids under five years old. Mary Therese dedicated literal years to helping my grandmother get her life back. If my grandmother was panicked and needed her at 2 A.M., Mary Therese would get in the car, drive to her house, and hold her while she cried. Her family was so special to her. We were worth doing anything for—she called all of us special, and I can still hear her saying to me, “You're my very special girl. You know that, right?”

~

I often wonder how I can emulate the Marys in my life. How can I stand through the difficulties those around me are going through, just as Mary stood through Jesus's death? If Mary Therese could show up for her children as they carried their crosses, how can I show up for my loved ones and watch them carry theirs?

The white, cracked statue of the Blessed Mother that Mary Therese placed so lovingly in her backyard made it back home with my family. She stands in the corner of our backyard now, her palms open, facing towards the pool. My cousins jump in that pool now, washing the dirt off the statue with splashed chlorine. She sometimes gets hit with one of my brothers' stray footballs when they play catch. “Sorry, Mary!” they say.

Now that my Mary Therese has been gone for around six years, it's sometimes hard to feel where she is. She had dementia for the last few years of her life, and it was crushing to see our matriarch slowly slip away. Despite the dementia, there wasn't a day that Mary Therese didn't have on a matching set, earrings, lipstick, blush, and curlers. I'd go to visit her whenever I could and she'd always greet me with, “Oh, there's my McKenna! My special girl!”

I'd lean down to hug her, feeling her loose Irish skin against my cheek.

There was almost always blush, lipstick, or perfume transferred from her skin to mine, but that was the best part. It was a remnant of someone I loved. A parting gift I could take with me.

~

On the day of her funeral, I smiled at Mary Therese's picture with a flower wreath around it. There were children everywhere, running around and playing tag on the grass patch outside the cemetery, but that's how it always was at “maison des'enfants.” Mary Therese would've loved that. I like to think she's up “there” somewhere, hanging out with *THE* Mary, telling her about the multitudes of grandchildren she keeps an eye on all day long. Or they're exchanging spaghetti recipes. I have yet to decide.

## INSIGHT

Nikki Kalhori • Mixed Medium *Cardboard*



## Funerals for Spiders

Carly Mardesich-Westergaard • Fiction

“You’re going to run out of pots,” he says with his head in a cabinet.

“Then I’ll get more,” she replied. She removed the curled corpse from the ceiling corner of the living room with all the gingeriness of a down feather. “Or I’ll find a new spot somewhere to start putting them.”

“How long do you think you could get away with that before maintenance catches on?”

“Long enough to find a park or a patch—somewhere nice for them.”

The evening had turned inky some time ago, but the lamp warmed the room to gold, beige walls gilded by the light from the single bulb. They’d meant to get more lamps, but there was a charm to the lone light. It meant that they both ended up together on the same end of the couch, which usually turned to snuggles, and neither could say they wanted that to change.

He appeared in the archway to the kitchen with a sigh. “Is it really necessary?”

Every time he asked this with a look on his face soft enough to ward off ill intent, but not soft enough to cover his annoyance. Since it really wasn’t all that often a spider found its way to the corner of the living room or behind the shower head or up in some lighting fixture and moved right on in with them, she wasn’t sure why it seemed to bother him so. He had no issues with spiders or bugs or any arthropod for that matter, but nonetheless, she often refrained from even telling him they had a guest until it was time to send them off.

“They’re spiders. Why do we have to wait until they’re dead?” he pressed.

“Maybe we should watch *The Lion King* again,” she murmured.

“We could put them outside when we find them,” he tried. “That’s as much the circle of life as leaving them in nooks to die.”

“It’s just not the same to me,” she said, more to the spider cradled in her palm than to him.

He came over and planted a light kiss on her head. “Alright. But it’s late. Can it wait until morning?”

She laid her hand over the one he’d left on her shoulder. “You can go on to bed. I’ll be in when I’m done.”

“You sure?” he asked.

She nodded. He gave a salute to the spider, left her with one last kiss, this time on the lips, and disappeared into the dark of the hallway to the bedroom.

She opened the slider to the patio. Still holding the body in one hand, she

lifted the terracotta drip tray turned upside down to serve as a lid for a small matching pot tucked into a corner of their patio and removed a pre-cut half of a popsicle stick and a permanent marker from within. On the popsicle stick, she wrote the name she'd given this spider—Jeremy Spider—and the dates of his residence with them: one of the longer durations among the spiders: a full two weeks from the day she first met him, hanging from the lamp where he'd first found perch.

Her partner was right; space was becoming few and far between, with popsicle-stick grave markers like a small army in each pot. But, tonight there was still some space in the lilies, and it would do perfectly for Jeremy Spider. With the blunt end of the stick, she dug a hole big enough for the remains and laid him in.

With her hands folded on her knees and head bent to the ground, she said, "Jeremy Spider, you were loved and appreciated in life, and in death. Your webs helped to catch bugs, as well as dust. You were a great listener, and a comfort on nights when the apartment was left to us. But, your life cannot be summed up or reduced to utility. Your worth is inherent and immeasurable. Jeremy, it has been an honor to know you and call you my friend."

A single delicate finger pushed the dirt over the spider, and he melded into the array of popsicle tombstones. He was laid to rest.

She lowered her head once more and prayed to someone or something for the tiny creature to find peace. Beyond her closed eyes, the sprinklers that watered the lawns sprung to life, casting a fine spray over the grass and walks. One reached so far as where she sat on the stone before her potted garden. A dusting of droplets fell over her.

When she opened her eyes, she could do nothing but suck in a breath and clutch at her heart.

The manicured walks and kempt buildings of her apartment complex were gone, and in their place stood a forest of blue-silver light. The arching navy branches' gleaming baby blue canopy fooled her into thinking it was daylight for a moment, but the deep ocean sky full of sparkling foam cap stars set her assumptions right. The dark trunks set a stark background for the true sight to behold.

All around her hung a silver spider-silk tapestry. She couldn't feel the breeze, but it rippled the fabric, allowing it to catch and bounce the moonlight, and every last one of the countless embroidered *thank you*s shone, clear as a light in the dark.

She had no words as she read over the mural. Some were elegantly woven by countless strings coming together in curling, organic letters. Others were more crude, with sharp edges and harsh lines. All of them were signed—Agamemnon, Celestine, Richard, Bjork, and more. And with each one, she

felt the tightness in her throat grow a little stronger, until she could do no more to hold back, and hot, happy tears fell over her cheeks. As she blinked like a madman to read through her watery eyes, spiders descended on silver thread like falling stars from branches above and rose from the grass like drops of hot blue sunlight called home.

And she was their sky; they crawled up her legs, over her arms and shoulders, even up to her face. She gasped as they seemed to swallow her form, and she had to fight the reflex to flinch or brush them away. She snapped her mouth shut, though, so she wouldn't accidentally inhale any. But, it was a worry short-lived, as they kept to her cheeks, scooping up her tears and encasing them in glittering silver silken coffins that fell with surprising weight into her hands.

She stared into her palms at what had become beads of silver moonlight.

"You understood," she said to them with shaky joy, eyes scanning their tribute. "You knew all along."

Two jumping spiders on her arms, Jacqueline and French Toast, waved their pedipalps at her, big black eyes luminescent with wisdom she no longer doubted.

She nodded, taking in again the gallery of gratitude. She laughed through the cry that had yet to subside. Each message—spelling, script, signature—fit the personalities she had imagined for each spider so well that she wondered if she'd really imagined them or simply perceived them somehow.

She'd read listicles of the world's most beautiful artwork and arguments for this or that new wonder of the world. This outshined them all.

The spiders each bid a small goodbye, and they scuttled and rustled through the grass or back up their silk suspensions to encrust the mural with little aquamarine gems. With all the spiders safely strung up on their collective masterpiece, she took one more slow turn, engraving it in her mind.

"I won't forget this," she said. "I won't forget you."

The web rippled as the spiders waved.

She clutched the spun-silver tears to her heart and closed her eyes, letting herself drown in the feeling in her chest as warm and golden as the lamplight in her apartment.

She only opened her eyes when she felt something draping around her shoulder. Her partner had come out and wrapped a blanket around her.

"I thought you might be getting cold," he said.

"Thank you," she smiled.

"Did I miss it?"

She nodded. "I'm sure Jeremy wouldn't have minded."

"You ready?" he asked with a jerk of his head towards the slider and the warm inside.



She took his hand and they went in, where the lamp still filled the living room with gold. He switched off the light as they made their way to bed. She left her teardrops in the backing of an old ring box she kept in her bedside table drawer. The darkness consumed the room, and she had to remind herself that night was supposed to be this dark.

She nestled into the crook of his shoulder. "I think I know what heaven looks like," she whispered.

"What does heaven look like?" he asked, voice growing heavy with sleep.

"Spider silk and starlight."

He gave a soft hmm of acknowledgement and perhaps agreement, but he had drifted off by the end of the noise. She smiled to herself and nuzzled a little closer.

She slept well that night. Not everyone would understand funerals for spiders. But the spiders did.

## Starlit Flowers

Luciana Paventy • Collage



## breakthrough

Lydia Pejovic • Poetry

my grandma used to snatch quails  
and crack their necks with the sly grin  
of a woman who knows starving  
far more intimately than fullness.

i see her –

plucking the corpse raw, dreaming  
for her own lush, soft wings, singing  
her recipes into starving stomachs.

i see her –

in the eggs tucked in sturdy branches,  
in chicks cracking their way into existence,  
chirping loudly with tender, pink beaks.

i see her –

sprouting feathers in foggy moonlight,  
saying nothing of the sensation, voiceless in  
her tragic beauty like a limp-necked quail.

i ask her –

do feathers hurt when they burst through  
skin, or is the feeling negligible, like wispy  
baby hairs peeking on the ridges of foreheads?

she answers –

in silence, the weight of her absence sitting  
like nesting penguins on my ribs. if growth  
hurts, then we must suffer without words.

## The Weight of Things

Maddie Moore • Nonfiction

The sun filtered through floor-to-ceiling windows the day my grandma asked me to write letters to her coworkers informing them of her resignation, at eleven or twelve years old. I don't really remember and it doesn't really matter, the taste of summer nectarines and pancake sprinkles still on my tongue from that morning's breakfast. She sat at the long wooden table in the wide-open room, only fifty years old, quite young to be retiring from her nursing position that she had held for years. Quite young for all of it: kids at nineteen, grandkids at forty, retired at fifty, never making it to sixty.

I didn't mind writing the letters. We were on our summer trip to Wisconsin at the time, and I had nothing else to do but cause mayhem and wait until the next acceptable time to feast on some sweet Door County cherry pie. In fact, as a nosy child, I was quite excited to see what script she had typed on her phone for me to copy. She was my great storyteller growing up.

Everything around my sister and I she painted in hues of fantasy and allure, from fairies in the garden to the shapes of our pancakes. Those stories were of the past though, her voice now sounding like gravel in a blender and her hands too shaky and weak to legibly write her own words.

It had started out slow, with her lagging behind whenever we would walk somewhere. My grandpa, dad, aunt, sister, and I used to jokingly call her a turtle—always behind us, slow and steady. Every little figurine of the animal given at Christmas and mention of the nickname has been scrubbed from my grandpa's house now. The clinging of a single tear to wet lashes and a downturn of lips whenever they caught the corner of our eye are the only acknowledgments we dare give to something that turned so rotten. Some jokes just don't quite age well.

At first, it was a cane with bright floral designs that stood out against the black metal. I didn't think much about it. The only changes I really noticed were that I was subject to being hit with said cane when I was a brat and that I was to keep my shoes out of the way. My parents would remind me to make the most of every moment I had with my grandma, which didn't make sense to me because of course I was enjoying spending time with my grandma. All little things.

At the time of my writing the letters, my grandma was in what I considered stage two: the walker stage. By then, I had realized that any moment could be a last: a last smile, a last hug, a last pancake. My nuclear family had moved halfway across the country at this point, and even over the

phone, I could tell that whatever was happening with my grandma was just getting worse.

I honestly didn't even know what was truly going on. I found out after her death from a family newsletter that I had nicked from my parents—MSA: multiple systems atrophy. No wonder no one told me. How can you tell your children that their grandma's body was slowly turning against her by shutting down one part at a time? The answer is that you don't—at least, that was my parents' answer. Her legs went first with the cane, to a walker, to a wheelchair. Her voice and hands were not far behind. I felt guilty when I dreaded talking to her on the phone because I could never understand what she was saying anymore. Finally, she was in the hospital because her lungs gave out, and lastly, her heart stopped beating.

So, as I sat by her side and wrote her letters to her decades-long work buddies for her on a random day in the book of the past, the sun danced gaily across the table, our faces, our backs. In that moment, she taught me resilience and humility because there I was, a child, having to do something that should have been purely hers, and yet she smiled at me all the way through it. She was patient with me through my several "What?"s because I struggled to understand what she was saying.

Now that I am in college, with more experience of the highs and lows of life, more friends, and more understanding of the world around me, I cannot fathom how my grandma could have possibly sat back and allowed me to write those letters—those goodbyes—in my own handwriting.

How could she have smiled through the undiluted frustration of having to depend on people for every aspect of her life? She had to give up every little hobby and action that gave her joy and fulfillment in life, and those letters of resignation were like a resignation of life. Her hands that were not even worn down by the wear and tear of the years had to stop tickling her granddaughters' feet during the time of night when stories leapt among the shadows on the walls. Those stories lay dormant too, with her powerless hands and her powerless words. Her garden with her poppies and hydrangeas, the life she infused into every organism that lived in the little space she had cultivated with years of her love and nurturing soul, had started to wither along with her. She was not even gone yet and she was already packing up small wonders to carry with her to the next life.

She took the flowers, the whimsical bedtime stories, the perfect Sunday morning sprinkle pancakes. The butterflies she had joint custody of with my maternal grandpa, who had taken the birds and the trees a few years previous. She took my dad's Catholic faith that I had thought was unshakeable, she took the steel bars off her husband's emotional prison bars, she had taken up a seat at my eighth-grade graduation composed entirely of tears.

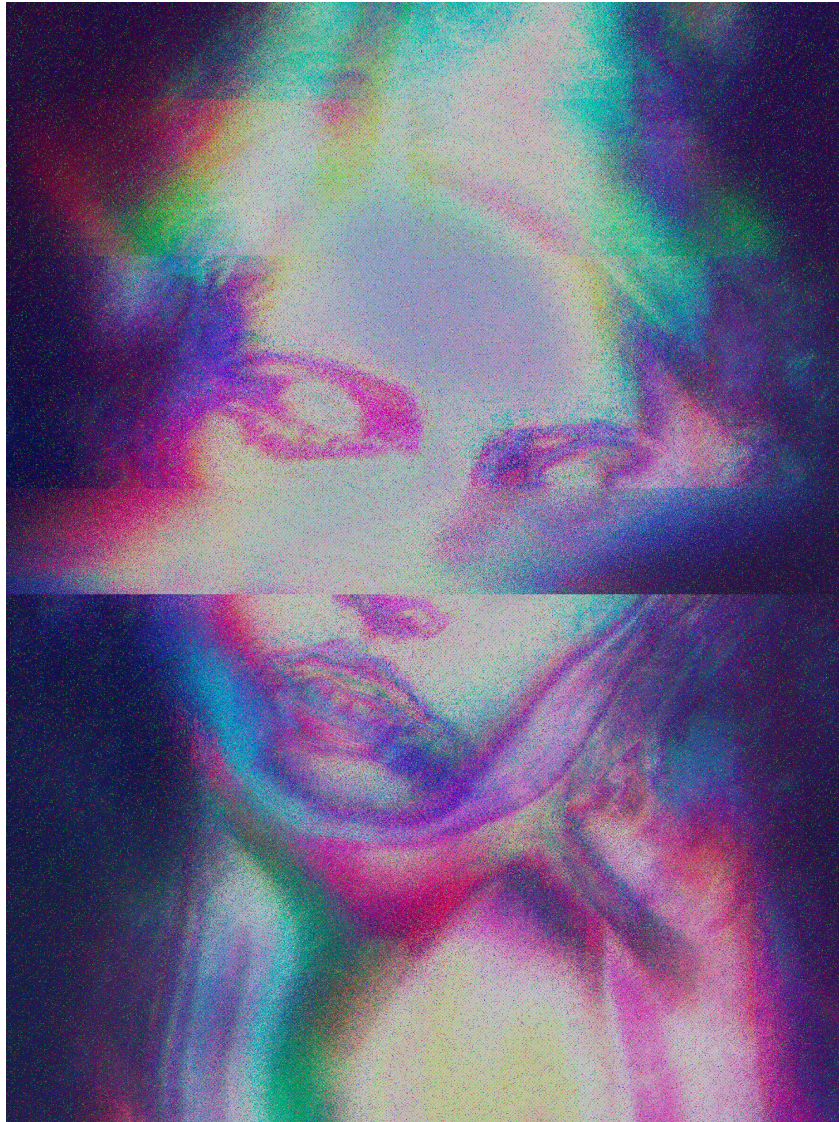
Is that an equivalent exchange for all the things that were taken from her? MSA took her sturdy legs, her holding arms, her life-giving hands, her jollier-than-Santa laugh. It squeezed the voice out of her throat, the breath out of her lungs, the steady beat right out of her heart. My grandpa took her pride and independence with caretakers, bathroom assistance, and the selling of her car that she could no longer even get in. And what did I take? I took her letters. I took this possible last correspondence between the coworkers that had seen her every day, that knew her in a way that transcended the familial and childlike window that I saw her through.

Even at that age, I knew the weight of a goodbye. My grandpa died suddenly in a car accident on his way home from a fishing trip years prior, and the knowledge that I would never remember our last conversation or last word to each other rattled around my brain constantly. The weight of her last goodbye to so many lifelong coworkers and fond acquaintances made my hand grow sweaty and smear the ink on some of the cards. That loss of control after she had already given up so much would have pushed me over the edge, but she just smiled at me. I remember that smile alone burned into my memory more than the words of the letters themselves because I didn't understand. I have only now come to the conclusion that, maybe, with her hand poised to knock on the doors of death, she understood that while the weight of a goodbye is a lifelong heart of grief, the weight of a smile is no weight at all.



# REAL

Jay Dye • Digital Art



# Minutes Since the Electrocardiogram

John Finnegan • Poetry

0 Minutes—There is a certain beauty in waiting here alone. Shirtless, electrodes dangling from my body, tendrils of an eldritch horror, every beat of my heart is an object of fascination and terror.

1 Minute—Outside a nurse murmurs something beneath her breath. Loud enough that I can hear it, quiet enough that I know she fears it.

2 Minutes—I am dying. I have been dying for a while. The doctors knew I was dying when I walked with bags under my eyes, each step seeming shaky and uncertain, as though in a death cloud.

3 Minutes—There are points when I question if the fighting is worth it. Every doctor has done all but scream at me to get better, to give my body what it needs. But my desire to do these things is gone. So we slowly drudge towards my demise.

4 Minutes—My death is not romantic like the movies portray these thoughts. There is no hemlock I put in my final cup of tea as I mourn an absconded lover.

5 Minutes—There is no dagger I plunge into my chest on stage, red ribbons flowing from my chest as and screaming for God's mercy. My death has been quiet.

6 Minutes—It is the hiding from sustenance and embracing of restriction. Feeling each organ switch off individually. The candles have been put out, only embers here.

7 Minutes—My body is a temple. I am a heretic.

8 Minutes—It all comes tumbling down around us as the walls of my body fall inward and my mind reduces to a singular point; our inevitable event horizon.

9 Minutes—My skin crumbles away. My eyes fade to grey. Skin taut over my bones I ask for mercy from a being that has left my body. I forced Them out long ago.

10 Minutes—The doctors return, stacks of papers in their hands. Pained looks on their faces.

Now

I

Wait

439,424 Minutes—Through grit. Through artifice. I have been rebuilt.



## Like Falling

Gabriella Brandom and Nicole Finochio • Fiction

Barley lay sleeping in the small hours of the night. An orange moon hung in silence over the sea. The fish tank glowed like a nightlight, and waves crashed on the cliffside. The room spun. It had been spinning for two hours. Barley sat up, and the room tilted. He grabbed the mattress edge to stop himself from sliding out, gripping blue bed sheets tight.

There was a time when the world was still; when the bookshelf didn't seem like it would topple. But now it was as if his room had been tossed into the sea. Bedrooms weren't meant for that, and waves jostled and turned him around. A horn sounded across Seabreak Shore, but he scarcely heard it. The waves roared, threatening to reach through the window and steal him away.

He looked around the room until his eyes fell upon the bookcase, and he traced along the line of the shelf. His dad had told him to be steady, look at the horizon. But no matter how still he willed it to be, the land shifted. He looked at the fishtank instead, Thompson swimming along red pebbles, bobbing up and down.

Once his dad had shown him a whirlpool, in a jar. He spun the water around and a spiral of bubbles and sand remained. Barley was inside there now, twisting and swirling through the glass.

How much longer until he fell through the world? But the water on his bedside table was still as ever. It did not move, and he shook it until it did, until the world matched how it felt in his head.

Barley stood quickly. The floor swayed, moving him with it.

He crept out of bed and downstairs. His mother sat in the chair, looking through binoculars out at the sea.

He was small in the archway.

"I think I feel strange," he said. The earth threatened to topple him.

She shifted the binoculars lower on the window. "Everyone feels strange sometimes."

"Like falling, I mean. I was trying to sleep and I felt like I was falling."

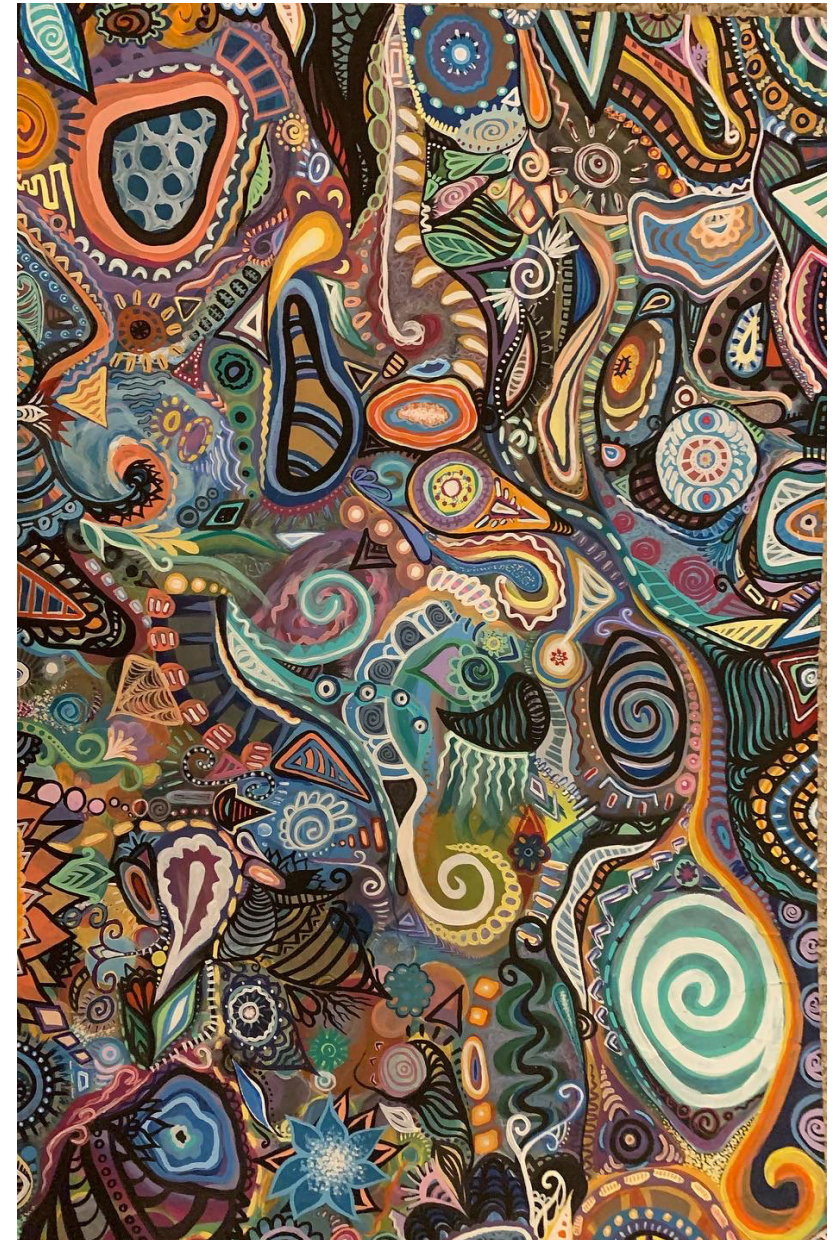
"Did you catch yourself?" She turned to look at him just then. She looked at him. The floor tilted to the left, and he fought it, helplessly.

"I don't want to fall," Barley said, as another wave made him rise, up and down. "I don't want to fall."

"If you catch yourself, then you won't fall," his mother repeated, and turned from him, out to the silent sea, out to the dark silhouettes of the ships, and the curving arc of the coast. He held on to the door jamb and waited for the ground to return.

## Flow

Ashley Anderson • Painting *Acrylic paint on a 20x30 inch canvas*



# On Zooplankton and Vastness

Amy Asmussen • Poetry

at the aquarium, it must be warm inside the  
*pry it open, crawl inside*

brain of a bull shark, but then you'd have to build mechanical fins  
*uterine in shape and structure*  
*how many bamboo sporks will it take to delay our expiration date?*

crustaceanlife sounds nice if you want to confine yourself to the x-axis  
*I saw a crab crawl across my pillow*  
*surviving requires an exoskeleton, a shell or dark crevice*

darker, the deeper you go  
*octopuses prefer it, and they're the closest to aliens we come*

Eden: like the ocean, unattainable. do gulls hold  
*what can be said in Eve's defense?*  
*Exxon Mobil? the crimes we commit*

funerals for their dead? slice open the stomach, and the Great Pacific  
*it's rather concerning—*  
*have you sat upon islands of plastic in the sea?*

Garbage Patch spills into a sanitized tray  
*a pink Baskin-Robbins spoon, a bit of fishing net, a cigarette filter*

hold out your hand, use two fingers.  
*to be a sea cucumber in a glass box, traded from hand to hand*

I want to stand where the waves are loudest, I want to stand in front of the  
*the tube we used to sit in; the water crashed over our heads*  
*it never touched us*

jellyfish, suspended and brainless. one time I dreamt I was chased by a  
*they don't know they're boiling, like the rest of us*

killer whale, up a flight of stairs. they kept getting narrower, until they ended and I jumped  
*I used to dream about fires, too*

liken myself to a lichen growing on the wall, impassive.  
*I could never quite manage the silence*

my mother loves to watch the mola flying on sunsails, I love to watch the sharks  
*they can move fast if they want to, when feeding or avoiding predators,*  
*the attendant says. I can move fast if I want to, I think*  
*for the promise of a home-cooked meal*  
*when I think the man on the streetcorner, the one in the hoodie, is*  
*following me*

nudibranchs must feel like a heartbeat in your palm  
*must be nice, catch a current and drift away*

otters are essential to the survival of the kelp forest  
*man is nothing if not dependent*

pocket a perfect, spiral turret and sow a garden of bones. Underwater, it's  
*there's a photo of my mother and her children*  
*she's tossing us into the waves, and we spread our arms*  
*like we could become birds*

quiet, twenty-thousand deep and three silences. A wave  
*in fifty years, we'll all be in the deep, the dark, the silence*  
*what will I tell my grandchildren, when they have to carry oxygen tanks on their backs?*  
*when California is underwater? antiseptic for the sunsores, they won't*  
*live past*  
*thirteen.*

rolls in, I practice sinking. The moon and her wife, the  
*death is like the ocean, some say. I hope it's black. then, at least, I'll get a*  
*good night's sleep*

sea, who understand that love is not the antithesis of war. We were meant  
*the moon's inching away, a few centimetres every year*  
*the sea will weep for eons when she's gone*



to see the ocean, I think. in the next life, I'll content myself as an  
*the extra webbing between our fingers and toes, the hair  
on the top of our heads, and the length of the vaginal canal  
are evidential of aquatic ancestry. I wonder if we'll return to  
wavebreaks when the ocean reclaims our creations*

undulating anemone. raised in a  
*to seek sensation  
to be anything, at all*

vivarium, allow myself to be fed and observed, in exchange for a daily dose of dopamine  
*life, the game of transactions: my life for yours*

whales dwelled on land, before they ventured back into the blue on vestigial legs. she kept  
*I wonder if their songs sound the same  
if some things remain constant*

x-ray tetras in a glass box on her desk. you love the ocean because it allows you to confront  
*like a precipice, like the sky.*

your insignificance. we're all zooplankton, she said  
*single-celled organisms, which will, after eons, become something else*

zooplankton and vastness.

## in the night

Li Anne Liew • Photography



# Let me devour you all

Brian Anderson • Fiction

We never expected the sun would get so angry.

“Just blow your brains out already,” the sun told us. “I can’t bear to watch anymore.”

The world looked on in collective confusion. We’d thought the sun to be our friend. It fed our plants. Gave us life when we never asked for it. Had we done something wrong?

We sent three astronauts to go find out. Halfway to the sun, it sent its first message in over a year.

“Don’t bother,” the sun said. “There’s no point. You won’t find what you’re looking for.”

The three astronauts looked at each other, disappointed. They turned back around.

A short while later the sun began to move closer to Earth. We begged it to stop.

“Save your breath,” the sun said. “And let me devour you all.”

The people of Earth revolted against the sun as it moved closer, ever closer. New religions formed. Hate groups formed. We all had a common goal. A common purpose. Politicians ran on their sun-based policies. Kids learned of the sun’s ways and studied its language. We were united and together, at least for a brief moment in time.

Then the sun started to retreat.

“You have learned,” it said. “I am honored to have helped.”

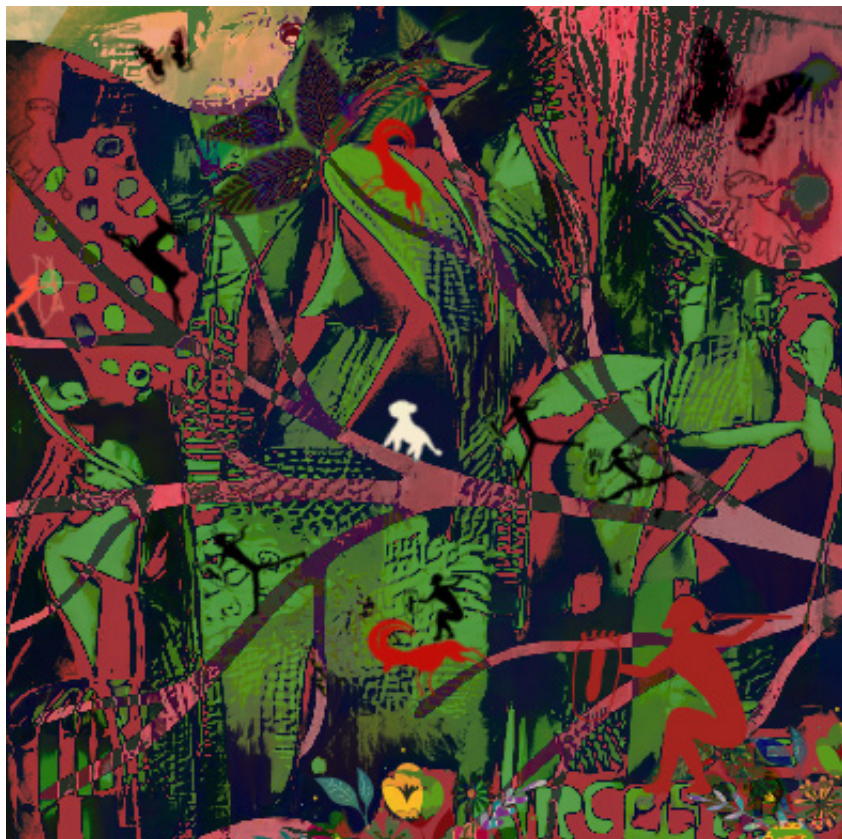
But it was already too late. The Earth formed a united coalition against the sun and blew it up after its sobering words. It was replaced with a new sun the humans made from scratch. The old sun cried out as its life dissipated, leaving us with one final message.

“Good luck,” the sun said, accepting its dismal fate. “I tried my best.”

The new sun was obedient and silent as it watched the Earth devolve back into chaos below.

## The Cavemen Hunt and The Cub Plays

Finn Sharpless • Digital Art



## Songs of Sphagnum

Jordan Sapp • Fiction

He had slumbered beneath their feet for hundreds of years, cocooned in a blanket of peat moss and mud. Bones turned to wood and skin hardened to bark as he transformed into something more, something other. He dreamed the dreams of ancient beings, spoke the language of the earth as it lived and breathed around him. Extending over the passing centuries, he became a being of the bayou in which he lay.

The pressure of the earth that encased him kept his eyes shut, but he didn't need eyes to see anymore. He saw through the eyes of the panther as it slunk between the fanned leaves of the saw palmettos. The breeze that stirred the alligator lilies and the cattails brushed over his skin. He climbed the swollen trunks of the cypress trees with the raccoons, glided between the moss-draped branches on the blue wings of a heron. His breath became the rasp of the tides as the water rustled through the reeds, sliding back and forth from the ocean.

The long roots of the water lilies floating near the banks wrapped around his body. Their thick stems cradled him, fuzzy tubers stretching their tendrils through the mud. The roots were arteries and he the heart, its slow beat like the thrum of the cicadas through the trees. No moment of the morass escaped his notice; it was his egg tooth that broke through the hatchling gator's shell, it was his lungs that expanded for its first breath of air. He knew the instant the venus flytrap would snap over the yellow fly; the acid digested his body while the fly's nutrients fed him all the way to his roots.

All the violences and the victories of the swamp were his. He was sustained by the flesh and blood of the marsh hare and the catfish. He died in the jaws of a black bear, succumbed as the venom of a water moccasin invaded his veins. He lived and died and lived again as the swamp billowed around him, disturbing the flow like the ripples of a pond skater jetting over the water's surface. Animal carcasses sunk into the mud, some allowed to macerate and fade away and others preserved in eternal death like he was. Their bodies fed the bog, the marsh, the swamp, the wetlands.

He was the purveyor of all, master of the melody of the mangrove and the cypress. The throaty songs of the bullfrogs called out in his voice, harmonizing with the keening cry of the hawk. The fiddler crabs scuttled in rhythm; the manatees spun through the seagrass, their cumbersome bodies conducted in an underwater dance. He breathed in air and water and mud and his exhalations shaped the curving path the water made through the trees.



He was a body that could not rot, a creature that was once a man but was man no longer. The estuary of his mouth unhinged, the brackish water pouring out like brown blood. Fish and rocks tumbled into the ocean like broken teeth, spat out to crystallize in the saltwater. The swamp decayed into him, withering into new forms, reborn again and again into the unforgiving earth. He was trapped, and yet through the whistling of the reeds, he was free.

## Wandering Toddler

Max Buka • Photography



# Spaghetti Junction

Gabriella Brandom • Experimental Fiction

Was the rain wild, coming down in sheets, the passerby little tin men and women flushed down the drain? Or was it soft, like a bass clarinet—a little muted, a little bizarre? Has Mark been sitting at the café all this time? For how long has his coffee been cold? Is cold coffee still acceptable to drink, even if it wasn't ordered cold?

Why was the place called Spaghetti Junction? Does spaghetti have a certain essence, a certain naming quality? What is the essence of spaghetti? And what is a junction, exactly? Is Mark tall, and is his height no longer average now that he's no longer in the north? Did the sugar already sink to the bottom of his coffee, so when Mark drank the very last of it, the undissolved granules slid past his lips, the ratio of sugar to coffee far higher than necessary? Did he deserve it after wasting three packets of white sugar in one cup of black coffee?

Did Mark try to sit at his usual table, only to find it taken by a suburban family and their two dog-in-laws? Were the dogs aware that they were in-laws? What was that boundary between urban and suburban, and how long would it take to get there? Would it be okay to ask them to move, or was Mark outnumbered five to one? Did he sit, then, dejected? Did he take a moment to listen to the flute playing over the radio? Did Mark even like the flute? Was Mark's disappointment reflected in the bottom of his coffee cup, or was the bottom of the coffee cup inherently disappointing, and his eyes reflected that disappointment?

Would it be better to stay here at not the right table, or go home beneath the fall of the rain? Does rain fall many different times in a moment, or does it fall all at once? Why did the server come by and ask Mark if his coffee was finished, even though it was obviously empty? Was there anything more to do with an already empty coffee cup? What about an already empty coffee cup to-go? Is that even on the menu? And would the cup go anywhere on its own unless Mark brought it there?

What were the server's intentions in reaching for the cup, and why did Mark make no move to stop her? Did he want to keep the cup? Did his words escape him? Did he escape them? Was he the strange man who came in every Wednesday, and was every Wednesday every six days or every seven? Why did the server say thank you when Mark hadn't really done anything but sit there, cold faced? Why was his face so much colder than the rest of his body? And how, exactly, does one measure the coldness of a face? What does "the

pleasure's all mine" mean, and why didn't Mark fight the urge to say it? Why did the server leave Mark in a silence, one that could not even be broken by looking into an empty coffee cup?

How long was Mark allowed to stay without a drink in front of him? Was the suburban family really a suburban family, and were they talking about him behind his back? Did the entire waitstaff make Mark the stock of the newest joke? Where were Mark's legs, and why were they thinking of running off without him? Would running off cause too much of a scene, if any given moment wasn't already enough of a scene? Would running off start the scene or end it?

How long had the suburban child been staring at him? Had he been eavesdropping? Did he hear Mark say "the pleasure's all mine," and did he think it was weird? How exactly do eaves drop? What kind of a person would be able to answer a question like that? Did Mark—or anyone in the vicinity, really—know what an eave was? Ever seen one? Felt one? Tasted one?

Why did the server ask Mark if he would like another drink? What does "not yet" mean, and why did Mark just say it? Why did he hear every word he said echoed a thousand times back? Did Mark have the slightest control over his mouth? Did Benny Goodman? Since when did Mark hate the flute? Since when did Liszt's symphonies have any appeal to him? Since when was he entranced by them? How does one pronounce his name, Liszt? Is it the kind of name to be skimmed over? If so, how often, and how come? Since when was skimming the unpronounceable acceptable? Can anyone innately say Tchaikovsky, or is it learned? Do letters ever feel as though they don't belong together and really ought to take a break to figure things out? How long ago did that happen, and were things any more figured out now than they were back then? And by the way, when did back then become then become now?

Is the rain still falling down like bricks? Is that the origin of hail? Is hail actually real, or is it something someone made up one day when they had nothing better to do? Should Mark take that same old street home in the rain, and would the homeless man not be there? Was it a lie to say he didn't have cash, when in reality he stopped carrying it after lying that he didn't have any? Why was Mark still here, and was it too soon after saying no to a drink to order another one? Why did he gaze out the window, when the rain obscured most everything? Surely there were better things to look at?

Where did Mark go? Did he turn invisible, or did he already leave? Did the suburban family pretend not to see him go? Did Mark go out the front door or the side door, and would anyone tell him that he chose the wrong one?



## Night Person

Ellie Hoskins • Prose Poetry

Halfway across the continent you are no doubt busying yourself with menial tasks, sparsely watching an old favorite movie or walking around the kitchen pulling drawers out. You'd like to convince yourself that you're a night person, or at least someone who is capable of being productive at night.

In truth, you are a relentlessly hot-blooded morning person, sunbathing in pockets of heat at the kitchen counter, endearing yourself to squares on the floor where light stains the dark wood gold.

It doesn't make sense that you would need the sun at all; you have a miniature version inside of you. So charming and funny, startlingly kind—a magnet person. In your old age you will spend some time painting the outside of your house bright orange. You could be nocturnal and never be cold.

But you would miss the daytime so much, the squinting brightness, the salt on your skin. You need your insides all around you, outside. Otherwise, how would you know about the sun in you? You would have it and never understand it.

Meanwhile I have you and don't understand you. We don't talk when I'm not home so I make you up and have strange dreams about you. I am a night person; I know I am. I walk in the cold and smile at the abstract thought of you walking next to me.

I sleep through most mornings, but when I wake up early enough, I open the blinds all the way and bounce around the kitchen and pretend I could be a morning person too. When I come back we'll spend a couple together—nights and mornings. One of us will always be tired and the other will always be waiting for them to wake up.

I don't mind waiting. Between your slow blinking and murmured, aimless sentences, I will find your little sun and hold it in awe before I go back to my learned night.

## green summer evening

Li Anne Liew • Photography





## Summer

Saif Khan • Poetry

autumnal liminality earns deathly winter  
nights lined with veins of poem credulous  
mind mined alongside Eliot until

spring sprung rebirth and queerness  
candor-sewn seeds unveiling  
Vuong's briefly gorgeous residence

then: *Summer*

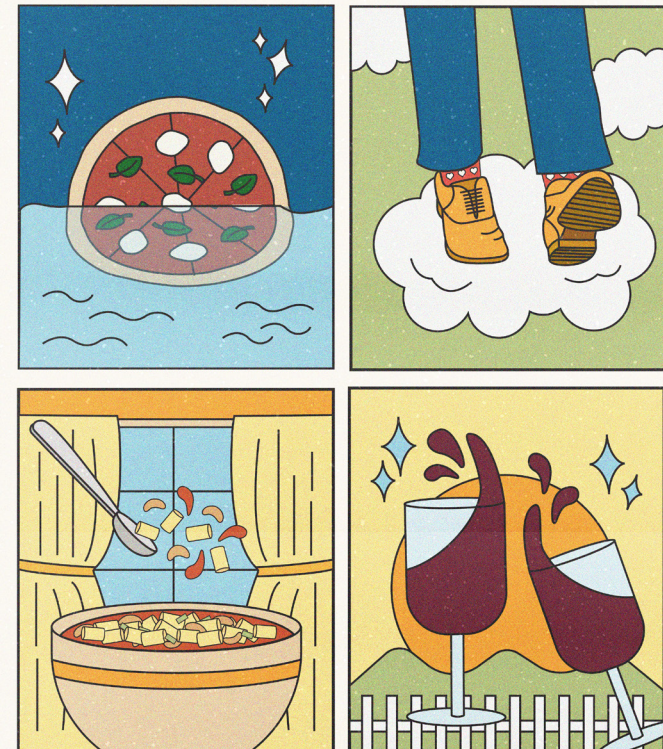
muses reassured by prolepsis  
lengthened days exhausting expectation  
envious pens who lose interest in

clear skies confined to warmth  
taking respite from healing  
our wistful contentment

## That's Amore

Victoria Bello • Digital Art

### THAT'S AMORE



When the moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie that's amore  
when the world seems to shine like you've had too much wine  
that's amore when the stars make you drool just like a pasta e fasul that's  
amore when you dance down the street with a cloud at your feet you're in love

DEAN MARTIN

THE CADDY 1953

## Fog Food

Ian Reafsnyder • Poetry

My dog sitting client misspelled “dog”  
as “fog” and I imagined a wisp,  
a breath of mist that greets me at the door  
and swirls around my legs. Or a cloud  
that condenses in my room when I call  
its name, burrowing through the vents  
before expanding to fill the space. It hugs  
the room, dampening my desk with droplets  
of moisture, leaving its love before it fades  
to find the rest of the family.  
I take my dog outside and it shimmers  
in the morning light, floating right up  
to the fence but never past it. Because  
that world doesn’t matter. Like an aroma,  
it clings to me.

Scan the QR code to hear original  
student music!

## Jonah Bird

“Crane Ridge/The Man’s Shadow” • Lofi Hip-Hop/Orchestral  
“Jagged Vacance” • Trip-Hop/Electric

## Elif Narbay

“For Real” • R&B/Neo-Soul  
“Loving the Butterflies” • R&B/Neo-Soul



## Contributor Bios

**Ashley Anderson** (she/her) is a junior screenwriting major, production designer, and painter. Her visual art consists mainly of abstract acrylic paintings. She is inspired by science fiction, instrumental music, and several experimental painters that she follows on Instagram. Ashley's artistic goal for this school year is to get a few of her pieces into a local gallery!

**Brian Anderson** is a writer from Portland, Oregon.

**Amy Asmussen** (she/her) is a third-year student pursuing a BFA in creative writing and a minor in environmental studies.

**Victoria Bello** is graphic design major who appreciates the intersection of visual art and all other art forms as she uses various media to inspire her work. She creates with the idea that design allows her to explore different identities and feelings.

**Jonah Bird** (he/him) makes music as Two-Headed Deer, is a sophomore philosophy student obsessed with ornate, lush, sprawling weirdness—in any genre of music or medium of art. His music weaves together elements from a multitude of styles, such as EDM, lofi hip-hop, folk, ambient music, movie scores, and horror sound design. Bird attempts to combine these varied, numerous influences in interesting and novel ways to create music that transcends genre. “What I’m trying to do, and what I think is the job of every artist, is to cram so many of my own passions and quirks and impulses into my work that the end result is something only I could have thought of.”

**Gabriella Brandom** (she/her) is a senior double-majoring in creative writing and anthropology. She likes antique clocks, cool socks, and going for walks. There was a time in her life when she could solve a Rubik's cube, but that time has long since passed.

**Max Buka** (he/him) is a sophomore studying business who loves every form of storytelling. He enjoys hearing what makes people tick and how each of their passions in life reflect themselves as individuals. From writing to photography to film to theme park design, Max hopes to incorporate his passion for storytelling into his education—but is still figuring out how.

**Angela Darjuan** (she/her) is a business administration major and graphic design minor. She finds inspiration through buildings, nature, food, and the people around her.

**Keira Deer** (she/her) is a freshman creative writing major who enjoys listening to dad music, writing late-night poetry, and watching old television shows from the seventies and eighties. She hopes to become a published novelist in the distant future and is embarrassed about writing an author bio because she thinks they sound like dating profiles.

**Jay Dye** (she/her) is a writer and artist who lives in Aliso Viejo, CA. She is currently working towards an MFA in creative writing at Chapman and would like to share the following very important message: TRANS RIGHTS! You can find more of her work online at [jaydye.org](http://jaydye.org).

**John Finnegan** (they/them) is a sophomore English literature student and member of *Calliope's* editorial board. When not writing, they can be found reading, hiking, or enjoying life like they never had before.

**Nicole Finochio** (she/her) is a senior animation major and English minor. She loves oversized sweatshirts, possums, and thunderstorms. In her free time, you'll find her doodling in her sketchbook and eating banana chips. She hopes to be a character designer or background artist.

**Morgan Grimes** (she/her) is from Houston Texas, and now lives and works in Los Angeles, California. As a senior chemistry, biology, and studio art triple major at Chapman University, Morgan has spent her time at Chapman building an art practice that encompasses many different media and ideas. Allowing the work to dictate the medium, she has spent time working in photography, sculpture, drawing, painting, as well as installation. Her interests in both science and art have driven her to create work that combines the two. Her work is often a visual exploration of scientific themes that strives to both educate and fascinate those who view it.

**Lauren Herrle** (she/her) is a sophomore studying business marketing and studio art. Her work focuses on people and emotion. She strives to incorporate past experiences into her artwork to stimulate a sense of connectivity.



**Ellie Hoskins** (she/her) is a sophomore screenwriting major. She's from Charlottesville, Virginia and often draws on her experiences growing up there in her writing. Aside from writing, Ellie loves roller skating, long drives, the mountains, online shopping, and reading her old diaries.

**Kyra Jee** (she/her) has a particular penchant for poetry and a bevy of semicolons waiting in the wings. She delights most especially in poems that make words do unusual things.

**Nikki Kalhori** (she/her) is a junior psychology major as well as entrepreneurship and leadership minors. She loves and has experimented with all kinds of art, but graphic design is her focus right now. Since her freshman year, her involvements on campus have included Community Council, the Office of Admissions, ISCO (Iranian Student Cultural Organization), Kappa Kappa Gamma, Residence Life, and *Calliope*. In between academics, involvements, and work, she spends time with her friends, family, and dog since she's originally from Orange County. She also runs her own small business designing and hand making earrings, keychains, and art; check it out at @jewelryartbynikki on Instagram.

**Saif Khan** (he/him) is a senior double-majoring in English and philosophy. He likes satire, 90s hip-hop, and the Oxford comma. He dislikes hangovers and willful ignorance.

**Li Anne Liew** (she/her) likes creating photographs that make the mundane feel grand and intimate.

**Carly Mardesich-Westergaard** (she/her) is a third-year creative writing and psychology student with a fondness for the fantastic. She can be found wrapped in a blanket with a mug of something warm, writing fiction and poetry about all the different worlds in her head and the people in them.

**Maddie Moore** (she/her) is a junior creative writing major with an LGBTQ+ studies cluster. She mainly focuses on creative nonfiction pieces and realistic artwork to best display her feelings and messages.

**Elif Narbay** (@elifnarbayofficial) is an independent artist and the lead singer of PARAD!GM (@paradigm\_bandofficial). Elif is originally from Turkey but was born and raised in Abu Dhabi, UAE. She's currently a junior at Chapman and is majoring in biochemistry and molecular biology with a double minor in neuroscience and music technology. Most of Elif's original music aims to describe the human condition in its multiple facets with soothing, jazzy R&B/Neo-Soul chord progressions to accompany them.

**Eliana Nava** (she/her) is a sophomore English major who is currently obsessed with oranges.

**Luciana Paventy** (she/her) is a first-year who enjoys Trader Joe's peanut butter cups, poetry, and a grand ol' time. This is her first published piece.

**Lydia Pejovic** (she/her) is a writer and current dual MA/MFA student at Chapman University. She received her BA in English from the University of San Diego. She writes both fiction and poetry, and has a soft spot for British Victorian studies. Check her out at <https://www.lydiapejovic.com/>.

**Ian Reafsnnyder** is a writer from Orange County and a junior creative writing major at Chapman. His work frequently concerns itself with animals and the natural world and has been published in *Ouroboros* and *The Aurora Review*.

**Jordan Sapp** (she/her) is a multidisciplinary artist who is inspired by the intersections between humanity and nature. Her practice is concerned with death and rebirth, growth and destruction, waste and renewal. She also likes dogs.

**Ava Schneiderman** (she/her) is a freshman student in the animation and VFX major. She has enjoyed making art since she was little.

**Finn Sharpless** (he/him) is a freshman majoring in public relations. He is from the Virgin Islands.

**Makena Snipes** (she/her) is a creative first and foremost while being a serious horror movie addict coming in second. As a senior graphic designer at Chapman, Makena has dedicated herself to utilizing many different mediums in order to construct and build surreal worlds through her art.

**McKenna Sulick** (she/her) is a senior creative writing major and psychology minor. She watches *Law and Order: SVU* compulsively, is made up of probably 70% oat milk and 30% writer's block, was in Fleetwood Mac's top .05% of listeners last year according to her Spotify Wrapped, and spends her free time acting like the local mysterious, unreachable girl while she journals at her hometown beach. She loves *Calliope* and is thrilled to be included among such talented, intentional artists!

**Kelly Taylor** (she/her) is a second-year undergraduate student in the Honors Program pursuing majors in creative writing and history. She hails from South Florida and adores unanswerable questions.

**Tyler Yang** is a student-athlete at Chapman University who enjoys writing in his free time.