# UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO HONORS JOURNAL VOLUME XXVII

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO HONORS JOURNAL

The journal is an annual interdisciplinary, student-run publication sponsored by the Arts & Sciences Honors Program at the University of Colorado Boulder under the supervision of a faculty advisor and the Director of the Honors Program. The Journal presents a collection of works that reflect the utmost talent, diligence, and creativity among undergraduate students at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Each year, the Honors Journal combines undergraduate work from all academic fields, including: art, creative nonfiction, fiction, gender & ethnic studies, humanities, natural science, open media, poetry, social science, and more. Although the Journal is directly associated with the Honors Program, submissions are accepted from all undergraduate students at the university. The Honors Journal is distributed and available to all students and departments at the University of Colorado. In order to reach a broader audience and exhibit works that are impossible to fully incorporate into the print edition, the Journal has an online version hosted at www.colorado.edu/honorsjournal/, where content from this and past years' editions is accessible.

The Honors Journal was established and first published in 1992 under the supervision of faculty member Professor E. Christian Kopff and with the support of Honors Program Director, Jack Kelso. The first volumes were devoted to undergraduate research, highlighting an article by an outstanding Honors professor and abstracts of all summa cum laude honors theses.

In 1995, the Journal went on hiatus until 1998, when Honors Program Director Dennis Van Gerven reinstated it under the supervision of faculty mentor Dr. Claudia Van Gerven. That year, the Journal expanded to include poetry, fiction, and black-and-white artwork.

### SELECTION PROCESS

In order to ensure that the integrity of the Honors Journal is upheld, all selections are made via a blind review process. Upon receipt of each submission, pieces are screened by the managing editors to remove all identifying information from the piece, and each submission is labeled with a number that is used for reference purposes. Genre editors are not made aware of the names of the authors/artists until after final selections have been made.

Within this blind selection process, genre editors are instructed to remove themselves from review of any submission whose author they can identify. These pieces are reviewed and selected by the co-editors of that genre and/or the Head Editors in order to prevent any biases from potentially clouding judgments.

For additional queries regarding the blind review process, please contact us at honors.journal@colorado.edu and we will be happy to address your concerns.

### **GET PUBLISHED**

The Honors Journal is an important showcase of the University's finest undergraduate work and offers students a unique opportunity to see their efforts published in a widely-distributed, juried publication available both in print and online versions.

Every year, the Editorial Board seeks submissions of exemplary undergraduate work for consideration of inclusion in the upcoming Journal. Generally, we are looking for art, creative writing, and academic papers. We are also interested in personal essays, final course assignments, critiques or reviews, short or long works of fiction, travel writing, and papers about works of literature, philosophy, or history. We accept submissions of all varieties. Essentially, if you are an undergraduate at CU-Boulder who has work that you are proud of, there is a category under which it can be published.

The Honors Journal accepts submissions year-round at www.colorado.edu/honorsjournal. For students completing an honors thesis in the spring semester of their senior year, please note that the Journal allows graduating students to submit work up until the submission deadline in November following their graduation. To submit something, visit the website and click on the "Submit Your Work" tab. We look forward to reviewing your submissions!

#### Dedication

This year's journal is published in the memory of Paul Strom, who was a member of the Honors Program faculty for 20 years and who passed away in March 2022. Paul's contributions to the Honors Program are immeasurable. He encouraged curiosity and creativity among his students, values held dear by the Honors Journal Editorial Board. His kindness touched all of our hearts.

#### Acknowledgments

The Honors Journal could not be possible without the unyielding support of the University of Colorado Boulder Arts & Sciences Honors Program. In particular, the Editorial Board would like to thank Honors Program Director Janet Jacobs and Program Manager Janelle Henderson and Program Coordinator Kimberly Quiñonez. We owe a great deal to all of the Honors Program faculty for their continued support, without which the Journal would never find its way into the world.

This publication was funded, in part, by the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP, https://www.colorado.edu/urop/) at the University of Colorado Boulder, which provides grants to support student-faculty partnerships and projects in all fields of study. The Editorial Board is immensely grateful for the support of the above and for their dedication to student-run organizations such as our own.

Additionally, the Board would like to thank Dr. Abby Hickcox, whose guidance and leadership all year has helped to produce a new and exciting Honors Journal that nonetheless stays true to its rich history of promoting critical and creative thinking on and off the university campus.

#### CU HONORS JOURNAL ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT 2022

In today's world, it is crucial to acknowledge that our current decisions may impact the future. Climate change and land degradation have become increasingly devastating to the environment and those that depend on it. Therefore, the University of Colorado Honors Journal wants to take on more of a responsibility to address and remediate these environmental concerns through its production process. This year, the journal has implemented a new eco-design. Each journal is printed on 10% post-consumer content recycled paper, which was FSC certified in its production. The Honors Journal aims to be a leader in environmentally friendly practices and to support the undergraduate students of CU Boulder as well as the planet.

Recycling: Each journal is recyclable, except for the glue within the spine. If you wish to recycle your journal, be sure to tear out the spine and discard it. The remaining pages can be recycled through paper recycling services.

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS APRIL 2022

Dear Reader,

It is with great pleasure that we invite you to explore the journal before you.

To grasp the plethora of ideas, beliefs, and strengths of our community at the University of Colorado Boulder is a monumental, challenging task which the Honors Journal takes on every year. Amidst great change, challenging social complexities, and discouraging tragedies, the students of this university have created beautiful, expressive works which we have the privi-

lege of reviewing and compiling for you.

CU's population, the source from which this journal's content is gleaned, is rich with experiences and stories unlike any other. This journal reflects not only the intelligence present on this campus, but also the emotional journeys that our students have embarked upon during their time here. Above all else, it is our mission to not only show what the students of this campus are capable of, but also to raise up and give a platform to students whose voices have been historically silenced or

pushed aside.

We cannot give enough thanks to those who have supported us through the creation of our 2022 Honors Journal. Our team of editors has been unequivocally vital to this process and have demonstrated outstanding teamwork and dedication since August. And, of course, this edition of the journal could not have been created without the guidance, support, and leadership of our faculty advisor, Dr. Abby Hickcox. She inspires and sets the bar for all of us and has left a lasting legacy within the Honors Journal and within our lives.

We hope that this journal will generate strong emotions, jumpstart conversations, and spark creativity within anyone who opens its pages. To say that being a part of this journal has changed our lives would be an understatement, and we hope that that feeling remains alive within the following pages.

Thank you,

Evan Watt and Anna Haynes

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# BRINGING RESTORATIVE JUSTICE TO NCAA FOOTBALL Aubrie Bailie

For the full text, please see the QR code at the end of the excerpt

#### INTRODUCTION

This research examines restorative justice as well as current justice policies of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Through this qualitative study, I explore the extent to which restorative justice may be a beneficial form of due process for the NCAA football organization. Although the NCAA currently utilizes punitive sanctions, the data from this thesis suggests that through incorporation of restorative justice practices, the student-athletes will be better served. An in-depth review of the existing literature is presented to better understand the NCAA organization and to create a complete foundation for this research. The background of the NCAA, including an organizational breakdown is provided. Finally, a brief summary of the NCAA's policies and regulations is presented and the NCAA's most common sanction, ineligibility, is deciphered and analyzed. Once a clear understanding of the NCAA is established, the concept of restorative justice is defined and background information is given on this method of discipline. A brief history of The University of Colorado Restorative Justice is discussed, to help differentiate its program from other restorative justice organizations. In addition, the differences between restorative and punitive justice are laid out in order to assist the reader in creating a clear distinction. Opinions from professors at Bluffton University in Ohio are utilized to show real-world examples of the introduction of restorative justice. In addition, a parallel study conducted in New Zealand and North Carolina, is summarized to demonstrate restorative justice's effectiveness in youth sports. Interviews from two members of The University of Colorado Restorative Justice's faculty provide a necessary background on restorative justice, including what components must be considered by the NCAA. The faculty members provide insight on how the restorative justice process can be altered to best fit the NCAA football organization's needs. Interviews from eight University of Colorado football players and coaches depict the reality of the current NCAA policies and sanctions. The interviews dive deep into the sanction of ineligibility and demonstrate real-world opinions and feedback. The football players and coaches offer realistic advice on the implementation of restorative justice into their program. Analysis of these

the ability of bringing restorative justice into NCAA football.

[...]

RESULTS

[...]

#### D. Ineligibility as a Sanction

Perhaps the most important question that was asked to both The University of Colorado football players and coaches, was their opinion on the current NCAA policies and regulations. The most common sanction, ineligibility, received negative feedback from every interviewee. From a coach's standpoint, ineligibility is negative because it often takes the strongest players and prevents them from competition. This obviously affects the team's performance, and can cause a team to lose a game that would not have otherwise been lost. A team's performance is arguably the most important factor of the sport as it affects everything from team ranking to the coaches' salary. From the players' point of view, ineligibility is unfavored for many reasons. The most standard reason is that the players are "unable to compete in the sport they love and are forced to watch their teammates practice and perform from the sidelines." Although this may seem like a "natural consequence" to their actions, all interviewees admitted that it rarely, if ever, has the intended effect on players. Rather than contemplating their actions and using their ineligibility as a time to self-reflect, interviewees agree they end up unable to channel their emotions in a positive way and end up in a downward spiral. For players who use football to stay clean from drugs or alcohol, this often results in substance abuse. For others who use football to be held accountable for school, ineligibility causes them to believe there is "no point" in going to class the next day. The University of Colorado football players admit that they "don't feel like going to classes, let alone doing any work if [they] can't compete on the football field". In addition, interviewees admitted that the inability to play with their team usually creates an environment of hostility and jealousy among players. Interviewees agree that the NCAA takes a punitive approach to justice and implements ineligibility as a scare factor for athletes. Further, they agree that the sanction ends up doing more harm than good and fails to meet its intended purpose.

common interview responses is used to draw conclusions regarding

#### E. Bringing Restorative Justice to NCAA Football

Although it was crucial to receive feedback on how restorative justice should be altered for NCAA football from restorative justice experts, it was equally as important to receive the same information from The University of Colorado football players and coaches. When questioned why NCAA football does not utilize a restorative justice process, interviewees agreed that there is either a lack of knowledge surrounding restorative justice or that the NCAA is merely "afraid" to try a new method of justice. Interviewees unanimously agreed that restorative justice would be a positive implementation for their program and that they would be willing to comply with the process, if given the opportunity. Once this agreement was established, I asked interviewees to expand on why they believe restorative justice would be beneficial, and what agreement items they believe would create an environment of equality.

Interviewees explained that while ineligibility can lead to unfair and negative consequences, it is unrealistic for the NCAA to agree to a method of justice that eliminates this sanction completely. This is because ineligibility is used as a scare factor that keeps players from violating regulations, according to The University of Colorado football coaches. Therefore, interviewed coaches suggested alternate sanctions could be included in addition to ineligibility in serious or repeat offense cases. For first time or minor violations, alternate sanctions would be the only necessary agreement item, and ineligibility would not occur. Interviewees suggested these alternate sanctions could consist of tasks such as completing online drug and alcohol awareness courses or community service hours. These sanctions would allow the responsible party to self-reflect on their actions and would turn the violation into a learning experience. In addition, this would force the NCAA to create a concrete rank order for policies that makes certain violations more punishable than others. Interviewees believe this would be an effective tool of deterrence for athletes and would serve to improve the players' character.

By limiting ineligibility, coaches would not fear holding their players responsible for their actions. Without the possibility of missing the "next big game", more players would be held accountable and there would be equal treatment among athletes of all skill level. When creating alternate agreement items in NCAA football restorative justice circles, it will be imperative that the items maintain alliance with the NCAA's goals. Interviewees admit that the implementation will only be possible if the NCAA feels as though they are still a part of the sanctions and that the sanctions do not venture away from the NCAA's overall vision. Overall, interviewees agree that this method of justice would benefit their program and team, by creating a unified platform for players to be held accountable.

[...]



# WILL PUNTUATED EQUILIBRIUM THEORY HELP US EXPLAIN THE DEVELOPMENTS SURROUNDING COVID-19 AND ENVIROMENTAL POLICY? Adam Garfinkel

For the full text, please see the QR code at the end of the excerpt

#### ABSTRACT

This project is titled, "Will Punctuated Equilibrium Theory Help us Explain the Developments Surrounding COVID-19 and Environmental Policy?" As the title suggests, the research question will be regarding the effects of COVID-19 on the punctuated equilibrium theory, specifically relating to environmental policy in the United States of America. Punctuated equilibrium theory suggests that in both American and specific foreign governments, the policies that get created and passed tend to be rather steady and unchanging, until a major event occurs, which disrupts the normally homogeneous system in a large way. An example where we have seen this theory hold true in the past was in the aftermath of 9/11, when the United States Government passed a series of new laws regarding air flight safety and other anti-terrorism acts, something that the country had not seen in policy until that point. This project will test this theory in the modern context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and seek to understand whether or not environmental policy has experienced a large shift after the major event that is the COVID-19 pandemic.

[...]

#### CHAPTER 8: FOUR STATE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The following chapter will compare all four states that were selected for the two case studies to identify commonalities, larger lessons, and make conclusions regarding how various states have handled their environmental policy throughout the pandemic. This chapter will also include a broader discussion of environmental policy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, identify some limitations of the study, the next steps in research for future scholars, and conclude the project with a final statement. The discussion will begin with a reintroduction of the hypotheses, as the four-state discussion will be based upon them. The hypotheses are listed below for reference. Hypothesis 1: The factors that determined the differences between states' environmental policies prior to COVID-19 are the reason we see a difference in how states are treating environmental policy through the pandemic, not because of differences that may be expected during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sub-Hypothesis 1a: The most prominent factor in determining how states handle their environmental policies through the COV-ID-19 pandemic is the ideology of the state's legislature, including the majority political party in power in the state, the margin of said majority, and the party of the governor.

Hypothesis 2: Although the main cause of the change in environmental policy specifically may not be due to the expected changes from the COVID-19 crisis, punctuated equilibrium is still occurring, especially in other areas of policy.

Sub-Hypothesis 2a: Punctuated equilibrium occurring in another area of policy will take attention and money away from environmental policy in all states.

Hypothesis 3: States did not increase environmental policy spending since the beginning of COVID-19.

In Reference to Hypothesis 1: Throughout all four states selected for a case study, this hypothesis had both evidence to support it, and evidence against it. The evidence to support it was that the states which were already environmentally friendly before the pandemic (Colorado and Virginia) were still the most effective at maintaining a relatively high level of environmental policy throughout the pandemic. Evidence that further supports this hypothesis is that at the state level, Colorado and Virginia are both Democratic trifectas, while Arizona and North Carolina lean Republican. State politics certainly count as a factor which influenced how states handled their environmental policy prior to the pandemic, which this hypothesis argues is the most important piece of determining how states handled their environmental policy through the COVID-19 crisis. The evidence against this hypothesis is that even Colorado and Virginia experienced an 88% and 20.2% drop off in environmental legislation respectively during the pandemic. Considering that these two states were in the upper-echelon of states in their environmental policy prior to the pandemic, it seems as though the differences that may have been expected due to a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic are truly the most influential factors in how states have handled their environmental policy between March 11, 2020, and December 31, 2020.

There is evidence to support the assertion that punctuated equilibrium has occurred in every state during the pandemic, including the four states chosen for case studies. In the case of the four states that were chosen, all four experienced a significant increase in the introduction of COVID-19 related legislation, while exeriencing a decrease (in varying degrees) to their respective environmental policy introductions. Clearly state politics and other pre-existing

factors played a role in how extreme this drop off in environmental legislation was, but the overall lesson from the numbers discussed in chapter 5, as well as the case studies in chapters 6 and 7, is that punctuated equilibrium during the pandemic has been widespread throughout the United States.

In Reference to Sub-Hypothesis 1a: There is evidence to support this hypothesis in all four states included in the case studies. The two states which experienced the largest drop offs in state-level environmental policy through the pandemic were the Republican leaning states, Arizona (97% drop off) and North Carolina (98.18% drop off). Meanwhile the Democratic leaning states were much more resilient in their levels of introduction of environmental policies throughout the pandemic, experiencing significantly less drop off than their neighboring Republican states.

On a countrywide scale, questions still remain about the answer to this hypothesis. Generally, the numbers support the assertion that the largest percentage drop offs in environmental bill introduction occurred in Republican leaning states, but there are examples which support the opposite conclusion, depending on the comparison. Hawaii, a Democratic trifecta at the state level of government, had a 90.3% reduction in environmental policy introductions since the beginning of the pandemic, while Texas, a Republican trifecta, only experienced an 86.8% reduction in environmental policy introduced after the beginning of the pandemic. While this is further evidence to support the occurrence of punctuated equilibrium occurring in all 50 states during the pandemic, this also means that more case studies must be completed on this topic to truly understand if sub-hypothesis 1a is accurate or not. Pure numbers can give us an insight into the way states handled their environmental policy throughout the pandemic, but the best way to get insight into state agendas and recovery time (length of time until environmental policy is back to normal levels of introduction), is through case studies with interviews of specific legislators who have insight that numbers alone cannot tell us. Although on the surface Hawaii's environmental policy was seemingly more damaged than Texas' environmental policy, there is a good chance that Hawaii's environmental policy will be quicker to rebound than Texas' after the pandemic ends, just based on legislator agendas in the two states alone.

In Reference to Hypothesis 2: There is evidence which disproves the first statement in this hypothesis between the two case studies. All four states in the case studies experienced a decrease (varying in size) in the number of introductions of environmental policy since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, while increasing the total number of COVID-19 related policies during the same timeframe, showing evidence that the main cause of change in environmental policy since the introduction of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the pandemic itself. There is evidence, however,

to support the second half of the hypothesis, as punctuated equilibrium is almost certainly occurring in many areas of policy. The extreme increase in the introduction of COVID-19 related legislation combined with the wilting numbers of the amount of environmental legislation introduced between March 11, 2020 and December 31, 2020 points to this second part of the hypothesis being true.

In Reference to Sub-Hypothesis 2a: The evidence found in the four states selected for the case studies supports this hypothesis. All four states experienced losses of varying degrees in their environmental policy outputs (legislation introduced and passed) and inputs (budgetary considerations). While one of the limitations of this project is that not every state could be selected for a case study, the evidence from the existing case studies does show this rapid decrease in attention and money (information regarding environmental budgets was found through the interviews alone, as an applicable online database of state environmental budgets does not exist) from environmental policy since the beginning of the pandemic. While at face value this trend is true, it seems as though Republican-leaning states (at the state level of government) experienced the harshest decline in both attention and fund allocation towards environmental policy, while Democratic leaning states at the state level experienced less harsh declines. While all of this information points to the hypothesis itself being accurate, it should definitely be noted that the pandemic did not affect all states' environmental policies with the same level of potency.

In Reference to Hypothesis 3: The information gathered in the interviews points to this hypothesis being supported, but due to the lack of an applicable online database which contained all of the state-level environmental budgets before and after the pandemic, the possibility of this hypothesis being disproven remains. At least one interviewee in each state of the four selected for a case study stated that there was a financial decrease of some kind in the environmental budget. The states were handling these decreases differently, however. Some states were allocating environmental funds directly towards pandemic relief, while others were saving the environmentally distributed money for later dates, when they most likely will address environmental policy in greater depth. Some states were using federal funds for pandemic relief while cutting taxes and other money-making means for the state legislature, so the money that would have been allocated towards the state environmental budget in a normal budget cycle was not even collected during the unique pandemic budget cycle. Although this scenario did not appear in the four states selected for a case study, it is also likely that some states were already midway through their budgetary cycles when the pandemic first occurred, causing no immediate decrease in environmental spending, as this money may have already been spent. Another scenario that did not occur within the four states chosen for case

studies but is certainly possible is the scenario in which some states were never intending to allocate funds towards environmental issues prior to the pandemic beginning, so they were never planning on experiencing an increase in environmental policy spending, regardless of the introduction of the pandemic.

[...]



## THEY LOOK AT ME LIKE I'M NUTS: Exploring Cultural Idioms of Distress and Other FACTORS THAT LIMIT AND ENHANCE MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS' WORK WITH IRAQI REFUGEES Nadyah Spahn

For the full text, please see the QR code at the end of the excerpt

#### ABSTRACT

There are approximately 80,000 Iraqi refugees in the United States, many of whom report severe mental illness but face barriers to treatment. Thus, to improve the mental health outcomes of Iraqi refugees, I interviewed mental health practitioners who work with this population. Based on a qualitative analysis of these interviews, I found two main themes in their responses. First, through a focus on cultural idioms of distress, I found that many practitioners misunderstood cultural phrases, while other practitioners demonstrated greater understanding due to their shared Iraqi background. Second, I found that practitioners that relied on the biomedical framework struggled to develop rapport, diagnose clients, and suggest interventions while the practitioners who utilized a holistic viewpoint were more effective in those domains. To address the limitations in cultural knowledge and clinical practices, I created a two-phase intervention based on the findings of this study which may help to make mental health services more accessible and sensitive to the needs of Iraqi refugees.

#### INTRODUCTION

Refugees are people fleeing conflict or persecution, and have been officially recognized by international law since 1951 (Refugees, n.d.). In 2019 alone, 30 million refugees were forced to flee their homes, and of those, 31,250 refugees were resettled in the US (Refugees in America | USA for UNHCR, n.d.). Around 80,000 of the refugees who are resettled in the US are from Iraq, wGGhere there have been numerous wars and periods of political violence. Iraq has experienced the Iran-Iraq War from 1979-1987, the invasion of Kuwait during the Gulf War in 1991, the US War on Terror in 2003, and the surge of sectarian violence after the 2006 bombing of the Al-Askariyya Mosque (Sassoon, 2011). At the same time, ISIS gained power in Iraq and carried out many terror attacks, which caused many Iraqis to flee. Three million Iraqis have been forced to flee the country as refugees since 2014, and of those, more than 50,000 have been resettled in the US (Iraq Refugee Crisis, n.d.). The violence experienced by Iraqi refugees has led to significant psychological distress.

There are an estimated 10,000 Iraqi refugees in Utah, which is a large percentage of the total 25,000 to 50,000 refugees that live in Utah, who are also from Burma, Bhutan, Somalia, Eritrea, the Congo, and Sudan (Mental Health Facts.Pdf, n.d.). Most of these refugees live in Salt Lake County, and many display symptoms of mental illness.

Refugee populations have high rates of mental illness. For example, Blackmore et al. found in a meta-analysis that 31.46% of refugees report post-traumatic stress disorder and 31.5% of refugees report depression (Blackmore et al., 2020). The rates of mental illness in refugee populations are higher than the general population, as only 6.8% of Americans report PTSD and 7.1% of Americans report depression (Epidemiology of PTSD - PTSD, n.d.; NIMH » Major Depression, n.d.). Despite high rates of pathology in refugee populations, there are many barriers to mental health treatment for refugees, such as cost, transportation, stigma, and lack of understanding about cultural idioms of distress, or the ways that different cultures understand and express mental illnesses (Shannon et al., 2015).

In many refugee populations there is a large stigma associated with mental illness, especially for refugees who lived in rural areas and were not exposed to Western conceptions of mental illness in their home countries. In Iraqi culture, the stigma around mental illness is mainly religious, as it is believed that faithful Muslims do not develop mental illness, so when someone has psychological distress, it is seen as the result of supernatural causes and is a source of shame for the family (Shoeb et al., 2007). Due to this stigma, mental illnesses are often conceptualized as physical illnesses in order to receive treatment. Even if refugees can overcome the barriers and seek treatment for their psychological distress, there are often issues with interpretation, cultural differences, and a lack of cultural or linguistic understanding by the provider, which can harm the therapeutic relationship and long-term success of treatment (Flaskerud, 2010). Thus, it is imperative that mental health practitioners have an understanding of their clients' culture, how it impacts their understanding and expression of distress, and the unique struggles that they face in their daily life.

Cultural idioms of distress are a valuable tool to ascertain how well practitioners understand their clients' culture, and how this knowledge can be leveraged to provide better mental health treatment for refugee populations. Accordingly, my research utilizes cultural idioms of distress as a way to understand what factors limit or enhance practitioners' work with Iraqi refugees in order to ascertain how to improve such work and its outcomes. Through semi-structured interviews with case management providers and mental health practitioners who work with Iraqi refugees in the Salt Lake City, Utah area, I asked practitioners about their beliefs about Iraqi refugee's mental health, about their challenges and successes with their clients,

and about their understanding of the cultural idioms of distress used by Iraqi refugees. These interviews provide insight into the ways that practitioners understand the cultural context and modes of expression of their clients.

[...]

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# THE SPORTS CULTURE AND CLIMATE FOR LGBTQ ATHLETES AND MEMBERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO BOULDER'S NCAA ATHLETIC PROGRAM Nicholas Turco

For the full text, please see the QR code at the end of the excerpt

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"For both men and women, the first step in getting power is to become visible to others, and then to put on an impressive show.... As women achieve power, the barriers will fall. As society sees what women can do, as women see what women can do, there will be more women out there doing things, and we'll all be better for it."

—Sandra Day O'Connor

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, as the two legendary path makers they were, remind us that the power of visibility can change the world. That is the power of people being seen doing what they were told they could not do or being somewhere they were told they did not belong alters the minds and hearts of societies. You do not have to go far to understand that in many cultures across the globe, LGBT+ people have been historically underrepresented and excluded in sports, and thus invisible in the sports world. But that is changing. Across the nation and globe more LGBT+ people are coming out, living authentically, and being embraced for who they are. Sport has achieved an almost supernatural pedestal in our world. It is this pedestal that also allows the inclusion of LGBT+ individuals in this world, and a potent accelerator for change in many aspects of LGBT+ rights.

This analysis focuses on LGBT+ college student athletes. What is the culture within which LGBT+ student athletes are operating today? Spurred by decades of legal and social change, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provides an inclusive policy framework and recommendations for LGBT+ athletes. Advocacy groups are paying attention as well, monitoring the adoption of these policies. Athlete Ally is one such organization created to measure how Power Five Schools are doing when it comes to the implementation of these policy recommendations. (Power Five Schools are those that compete in the five most competitive college football conferences.) There has also been an explosion of social activist campaigns in recent years which aim to further the rights and visibility of LGBT+ athletes. However, there remains a significant gap in case-by-case and in-depth understanding of the culture surrounding athletics for LGBT+ people at specific NCAA member institutions.

It remains that policy is not the same thing as culture or even implementation. My study aims to understand the culture of

University of Colorado (CU) Boulder Athletics for LGBT+ members in comparison to CU's Policy. CU Boulder scores 95/100 on the "Athletic Equality Index" as measured by Athlete Ally and is among the top of Pac 12 schools for their inclusive policies for LGBT+ athletes. To what extent is this policy being observed on the ground and among the various members of the CU athletic community—student athletes, coaches, and administrators? The specific question being asked in this study: What is the culture and climate like for members of the LGBT+ community in CU Boulder athletics?

[...]

#### CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This research set out to understand what the culture of University of Colorado (CU) Boulder athletics are like for LGBT+ student athletes, coaches, and administrators. Legal protections have grown over time to address discrimination against members of the LGBT+ community. Inclusive policies have been adopted, and LGBT+ rights in sports are now written into collegiate athletic programs across the country. But policy is not the same as practice. Does the collegiate athletic culture reflect the policy commitment to fostering an inclusive culture? This study set out to examine how the culture is perceived by members of the athletic community at CU Boulder and to compare that to their inclusive policies.

In order to answer this question a Qualtrics survey with both qualitative and quantitative questions was administered to inquire about the culture of the sports climate for LGBT+ members at CU, along with an invitation to participate in a 30-minute Zoom interview doing the same. The survey and interview invitation was distributed to all 581 athletes, coaches, and administrators within CU's Athletic Department. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics in R Studio and through a close and in-depth analysis of the text entry survey and interview responses looking for key patterns.

The findings were complex and multifaceted. Some of them raised more questions than they answered. The key findings include:

- 1. CU departmental leadership and administration are outwardly inclusive.
- 2. The sports climate at CU for LGBT+ athletes appears to differ in inclusivity across sport and gender categories. Specifically, male revenue sports appear to be less inclusive.

- CU athlete allies seem to be aware of privilege dynamics and use their voice to speak constructively and humbly about LGBT inclusion.
- 4. Being a student athlete at CU (and within a healthy athletic environment) helps some student athletes identify more, not less, with their athletic identity, and in healthy ways with their LGBT+ identity.
- 5. Some respondents agree on lower athletic identity feelings among LGBT+ athletes at CU but disagree on the cause. Specifically, some participants believe that this is because of a larger cultural social fabric, while others believe that it is because of lack of the department more directly addressing discrimination.
- 6. Coming out and being out and visible may help athletes at CU identify strongly as an athlete and in healthy ways as an athlete and a LGBT+ person.
- 7. Opinion on the ease of coming out within CU Athletics falls in a wide continuum trending toward being an easy and welcoming experience.
- 8. A vast majority (80%) of participants believe members within CU Athletics serve as active and outspoken allies of their LGBT+ members, while only 20% believe that this is not the case.
- 9. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of participants believe CU Athletics is an inclusive place for transgender student athletes, while 40% believe that it is not a supportive place for transgender student athletes.
- 10. While there are many signs of policy change in CU Athletics, most (71%) are unaware of the NCAA's LGBT+ Inclusive Initiative Framework and its comprehensive resource guide-Champions of Respect. Related to this, most CU Athletic members are not terribly aware of why they score so high among power five schools for their inclusiveness using national policy measurements.

[...]

From the results of this study, it appears that in key areas CU is excelling at providing a warm, outwardly inclusive and supportive environment for its LGBT+ members. In other ways, it seems that CU may have ways to grow so that it can take on a role as a national leader in combating complex cultural dynamics of transphobia and homophobia that have thwarted national sporting and non-sporting communities for generations. Perhaps the most important question that remains is, what better medium than sport to create these dramatic demonstrations of radical love and social acceptance across the world? This research is relevant in the canon of political science research because it discusses the implications of college athletics and their power to create widespread social acceptance and change for LGBT+ people.



# PRISONS IN PARADISE OR PURGATORY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS AND RECIDIVISM RATES IN NORWAY AND THE UNITED STATES Isabella Jones

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### **ABSTRACT**

This honors thesis is a comparative analysis of criminal justice and prison systems between Norway and the United States. Norway has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world, because of their rehabilitative methods, while the United States has one of the highest recidivism rates in the world, because of their methods of punishment. The arguments presented here could help the United States in its efforts to decrease recidivism rates by working to rehabilitate and restore offenders, instead of punishing them. Providing resources like education and employment skills to offenders would help them assimilate to the outside world and keep them from recidivating. If the United States were to adopt a criminal justice system like Norway's and provide resources to offenders to better prepare them for reentry into the outside world, then sociologists would see a decrease in recidivism rates as a result of more humanistic prisons that focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment.



## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE SUBJECTIVE EFFECTS OF CANNABIS Carter Witt

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### INTRODUCTION

As cannabis becomes integrated in society, it is important to examine differentiating factors that may influence its effects on people, such as gender. Across two observational studies, we examined gender differences in the acute subjective effects of cannabis use, including euphoria, energy, tension, and paranoia. Study 1 included 108 flower users (n = 44 women, n = 64 men) and Study 2 included 35 edible users (n = 21 women, n = 14 men). Participants were assessed in a mobile pharmacology lab before and after ad libitum use of their assigned cannabis product. In Study 1, although men and women reported similar levels of subjective high, men reported significantly greater levels of positive effects (i.e., euphoria, energy) relative to women. In Study 2, men and women reported similar levels of high and positive effects. No gender differences in paranoia or tension emerged in either study. Future research should examine the mechanisms behind these differences, and factor gender into future studies exploring the effects of cannabis.

[...]

This study found significant gender differences in the positive subjective effects of cannabis, such that men experienced more euphoria and energy than women in Study 1. This study also found that when using flower, women ingested significantly less cannabis to feel the same amount of "high" as men. These findings are relevant primarily for cannabis users, researchers, and anyone else who is curious about the effects and uses of cannabis. For example, these data could have public health implications for why men are more likely to have CUD. The differences in subjective high could be due to biological differences in metabolism or the influence of psycho-social factors such as expectations. It is also important to analyze the absence of differences between women and men and the implications of this finding. For example, these findings indicate that cannabis may negatively affect the mood of men and women at a similar rate. This could mean that the presence of positive effects is more influential than negative

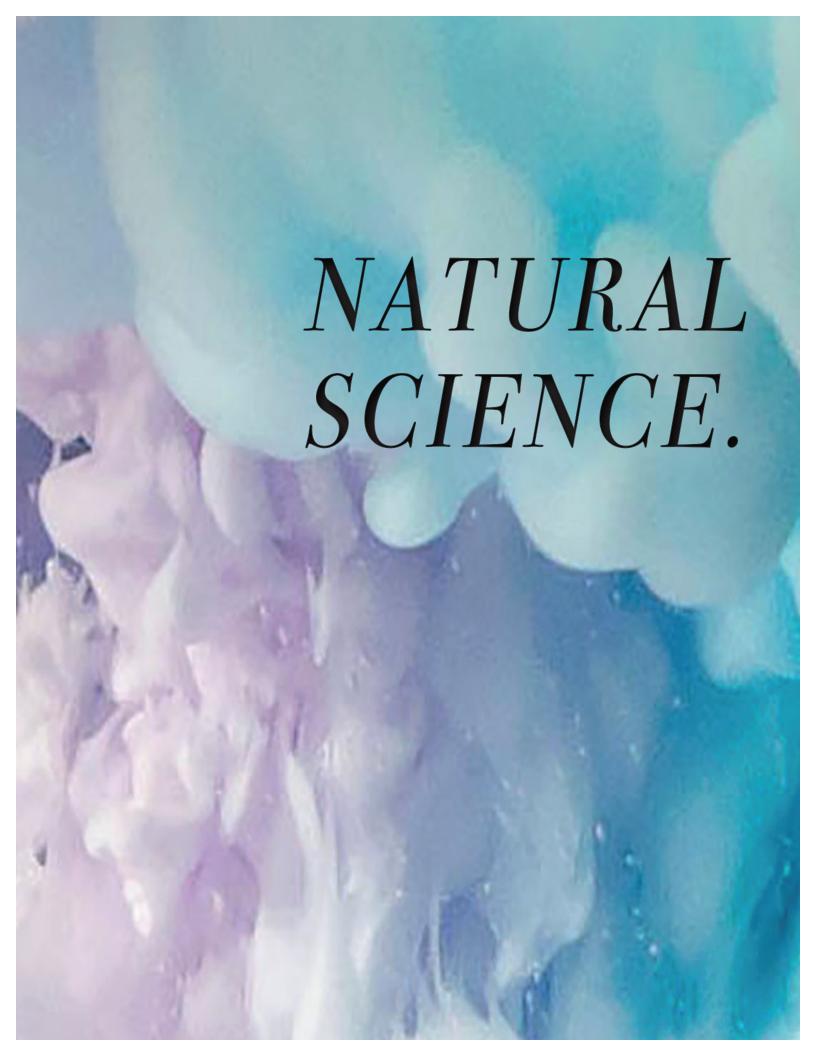
effects in determining someone's likelihood to develop CUD.

It should be noted that these findings are different than those of Cooper and Haney (2014), who found that women reported more positive effects of "feel good" and "take again." This study used different positive effects (energy and euphoria) but this difference indicates that positive effects cannot be generalized and men and women may experience different positive effects differently. Given the increasing accessibility and popularity of cannabis use, it is important to factor gender into foundational research. This study recognizes that correcting gender bias in research and medicine requires acknowledgment and commitment. We aim to ensure that the effects of cannabis are not over-generalized and presented to a population that does not experience cannabis's effects equally. Given that women and men experience positive effects and some negative effects differently, future research should examine the mechanisms behind this difference, as well as factor these differences into future studies that aim to explore cannabis's acute effects.

#### **WORKS CITED**

Cooper Z. D., & Haney M. (2014). Investigation of sex-dependent effects of cannabis in daily cannabis smokers. Drug Alcohol Dependance, 136, 85-91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j. drugalcdep.2013.12.013







## BRAIN CLOCKS & DENDRITIC SPINE MORPHOLOGY Will Stritzel

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

Daily cycles in behavior and physiology, called circadian rhythms, have profound effects on health and well-being. Circadian rhythms emerging from local molecular clocks in the prefrontal cortex regulate learning and memory. My goal in this study was to determine if genetically encoded fluorescent proteins can produce sufficient signal in dendritic arbors and spines to measure and characterize dendritic spines accurately and reliably. I also aimed to link dendritic spine morphology with time-of-day differences in the learning and recall of cued conditioned fear extinction. Neurons were labeled using an intersectional viral strategy, and dendritic segments were imaged using confocal microscopy. Apical dendritic segments and spines were analyzed with Imaris image analysis software. My results show that fluorescent protein signals can indeed be used to measure dendritic spines in select cases. In addition, the data suggest that circadian rhythms in fear extinction behavior may be driven, in part, by timeof-day differences in distal apical dendritic spine density. My work provides evidence that dendritic spine analysis can be accomplished using widely available transgenic techniques and points to one mechanism by which circadian rhythms regulate extinction behavior.

#### LAY SUMMARY

Circadian rhythms are daily patterns in behavior and physiology. The timing of when to sleep, eat, exercise, and many more behaviors, is mediated by circadian rhythms in the body and brain. Dysregulation of circadian rhythms has been associated with many mental and physical health risks including heart disease, metabolic disruption, depression, and anxiety. Our lab studies the effects that circadian rhythms in the brain have on emotional learning and memory. In this experiment, we studied extinction learning: a process where repeated exposure to cues associated with a fearful memory in a safe context decreases the fear response elicited by exposure to those cues. Our lab has shown that this type of learning is superior during the active phase than during the inactive phase. The aim of this project was to identify a potential mechanism by which superior extinction learning occurs during the active phase. Neurons primarily send signals to one another through features called synapses. Synapses are tiny gaps between the axon terminal of one neuron and the dendritic spine of another. The number and structure of dendritic spines on a neuron can dramatically affect its activity. My research suggests that superior active-phase extinction learning may be due to the greater density of long thin dendritic spines during the active phase than during the inactive phase.



## INTRODUCTION OF A LIN-65 MUTATION INTO A C. ELEGANS TRANSGENIC REPORTER STRAIN AND ITS EFFECT ON HPL-2 LOCALIZATION Zuhair Chaudhry

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### **ABSTRACT**

Current theory suggests that repeat noncoding intracellular element transcripts (RE transcripts) lead to excess levels of double stranded RNA (dsRNA) and could play a part in the development of neurodegenerative diseases. These RE transcripts could activate immune responses leading to neuroinflammation often seen in neurodegenerative diseases such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). Two genes correlated with transcriptional regulation in Caenorhabditis elegans are HPL-2 and LIN-65. Since both genes have been linked to transcriptional regulation, here we investigate if these two genes interact with each other. What we found was that deletion of LIN-65 did not affect HPL-2 localization; however, further studies need to be performed to see if this is true.



# SIMULATION OF ELECTRON DRIFT PROPERTIES AND TRACK RECONSTRUCTION FOR THE DEEP UNDERGROUND NEUTRINO EXPERIMENT

Aaron Mutchler

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

The Deep Underground Neutrino Experiment (DUNE) is a new cutting-edge experiment that will be fundamental in the study of neutrino oscillations and physics beyond the standard model. DUNE will be the flagship neutrino experiment, with the longest neutrino beamline of 1300 kilometers, using state-of-the-art near and far detectors to measure neutrino flavor at the start and end of the beam. In the near detector hall, DUNE will implement a High Pressure Gaseous Argon Time Projection Chamber (HPgTPC). A crucial step in studying oscillations is understanding the flux of neutrinos and their interaction crosssections in the near detector. Neutrinos will interact with the argon and produce charged particles, which liberate electrons that drift across the HPgTPC. To extract the necessary information about neutrino interactions, details of the drift electrons must be known, such as the drift velocity, diffusion, and attachment. For this thesis, I will simulate electron drift properties in DUNE's HPgTPC. Using the new PyBoltz simulation code, I determine the allowed region of operation for the HPgTPC. With this, I will further study how changes to the electron drift properties, namely the diffusion, will impact the reconstruction efficiency of muon tracks through GArSoft simulation.

#### LAY SUMMARY

The Deep Underground Neutrino Experiment (DUNE) is a new cutting-edge experiment that will be fundamental in the study of neutrino oscillations and physics beyond the standard model. DUNE will be the flagship neutrino experiment, using state-of-the-art near and far detectors to measure neutrino flavor at two separate points. A crucial step in studying oscillations is understanding the flow rate of neutrinos and how they interact in DUNE's detectors. In the near detector, neutrinos will interact with a gas composed of argon and methane producing charged particles. Those charged particles will free electrons in the detector which we can easily detect. We then use properties of those produced particles to extract the necessary information about neutrino interactions. In order to extrapolate these details, information about the newly produced particles in the detector must be known. This includes 'drift properties' about how the freed electrons move through the detector until they are detected. In this thesis I simulate these electron drift properties in DUNE's near detector. In doing so I set bounds on the detector's operation parameters. I then investigate how altering one of the drift property parameters impacts the detector's ability to reconstruct the interaction event and particle trajectories.



# FUNDAMENTAL STUDIES OF A-KETO ACIDS AT THE AIR-WATER INTERFACE AND THEIR IMPLICATION ON ATMOSPHERIC AEROSOLS Brianna Hopper

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### **ABSTRACT**

The focus of this thesis is surface area isotherms obtained using a Langmuir-Blodget trough which are used to qualitatively determine surface partitioning and, in some cases, surface orientation. Though the results and discussion are placed within the context of aerosols, this thesis can exploit the flat surface of a Langmuir-Blodget trough due to the relative size difference of an aerosol and individual molecule. To better understand the behavior of the above atmospherically relevant organics, surface partitioning was studied as a function of concentration, nonpolar chain length, polar head group, state of ionization, and photochemical processing. In addition, UV absorption spectra are presented for lactic acid and sodium lactate, molecules which are photoactive at wavelengths outside the actinic spectrum but whose absorption spectra have not been well-documented in the literature.



## SYNERGISTIC POTENTIAL OF COMBINING EMERGING THERAPIES FOR POST-TRAU-MATIC STRESS DISORDER

Richard Sangmin Park

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a complex, multi-faceted psychological disorder involving dysregulation of systems that govern stress and immune response, and affecting civilians and military personnel alike. An increased prevalence of PTSD and an incomplete understanding of its underlying mechanisms makes treating, and even diagnosing PTSD challenging. Diagnostic criteria for PTSD are in flux due to the ambiguity surrounding this disorder. This literature synthesis presents a comprehensive overview of the current treatment options for PTSD to identify common targets and synergies (potent multiplicative benefits rather than merely additive effects). This insight is then used to suggest combinations of synergistically acting components for use in novel integrative therapies. Chronic inflammation, resulting from dysfunction of the immune system, is identified as a defining characteristic in PTSD patients and a target of multiple external modulators. These modulators of the immune response include dietary factors as well as many other aspects of lifestyle. For example, omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants such as Vitamin E can mitigate chronic inflammation and the associated dysregulation of the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis. Other novel therapies like trauma sensitive yoga, cannabinoids, therapy dogs, virtual reality exposure, electroacupuncture, probiotics to promote a healthy gut microbiota, exercise, and pharmacology can also be linked to immune-modulatory effects and may thus contribute further to synergistic benefits when used in conjunction with other immune-modulatory therapies. This literature synthesis suggests that a combination of multiple therapies, medications, and lifestyle management has the potential to exert multiplicative benefits in restoring balanced immune and stress responses and thereby treat PTSD. Furthermore, suggestions are formulated for further research and development which is necessary to fully realize the untapped potential clinicians and medical professionals can use to better diagnose and treat PTSD.

#### LAY SUMMARY

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a debilitating mental health condition that affects millions of people worldwide. This psychiatric disorder has comorbidity with other disorders like eating disorders, major depressive disorder, sleep disorder, and suicidal ideation, to name a few. This mental health condition is triggered by a severely traumatic event, which can range from a near-death experience to cases of sexual assault. What makes PTSD one of the most difficult disorders to diagnose is due to the fact that things that are perceived as a traumatic event vary considerably from person to person. One common misconception held by the public was that only servicemembers in the armed forces developed PTSD, but this condition affects both military personnel and civilians alike. It involves dysregulation of physical and mental systems within our bodies designed to deal with stress. An increased prevalence of PTSD and an incomplete understanding of its underlying mechanisms makes treating, and even diagnosing, PTSD challenging. As a result, this literature synthesis is aimed to give a comprehensive overview of the current treatment options available for patients suffering from PTSD and discusses what common targets these treatments are used for. From there, the literature synthesis uses these common targets to suggest combinations of different treatment options which could offer a multiplicative effect on a patient's treatment regime. It combines different therapies, medications, and lifestyle management choices to help restore a balanced immune and stress response, thereby treating PTSD.



### CHANGES IN MEDIAL GASTROCNEMIUS ACTIVITY UNDER DIFFERENT SENSORY CONDITIONS WHEN DANCERS PERFORM A BALANCE TASK

Amy Megan Malacalza

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

The medial gastrocnemius, an important calf muscle, plays a role when dancers seek to maintain balance. In order to balance, the somatosensory, visual, and vestibular systems work in conjunction to control muscle activity. The activation of skeletal muscles can be recorded with high-density surface electromyography, which allows for a dynamic assessment of the amplitude of the muscle activity in millivolts through calculating the root mean square (RMS) of the signal. The purpose of the study was to measure medial gastrocnemius activity in dancers during single-leg balance when standing on either a foam surface with eyes open or a rigid surface with eyes closed. The data and methods drew from a study by Davis et al. (2021) and provided the basis for this research. Nineteen participants with dance experience performed the single-leg balance tests and the data were pooled from before and after a 4-week exercise intervention. The results revealed significantly higher medial gastrocnemius activity during single-leg balance on the rigid surface with eyes closed as compared to the foam surface with eyes open, when measured as both monopolar (p = 2.98x10-06) and single differential (p = 0.003) RMS amplitude. The results demonstrated the influence of visual feedback on calf muscle activity in dancers when performing different types of single-leg balance activities.

#### LAY SUMMARY

Dancers continually experience challenges to balance that require muscle activity controlled by the brain, which uses somatosensory, visual, and vestibular systems. The medial gastrocnemius, an important calf muscle, plays a role in balance for dancers and its muscle activity was evaluated in this study through high-density surface electromyography (EMG). Dancers perform on a variety of surfaces with little known about how surface influences muscle activity. Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, there have not been studies using the more advanced method of high-density surface EMG in the setting of single-leg balance in different surfaces. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to use this method to measure activity of the medial gastrocnemius when dancers perform a single-leg balance on a rigid surface with eyes closed versus a foam surface with eyes open with the data and methods drawing from a study by Davis et al. (2021). Participants were found to have significantly higher medial gastrocnemius activity during single-leg balance on the rigid surface with eyes closed as compared to the foam surface with eyes open. These results demonstrated the influence of visual feedback on calf muscle activity during single-leg balance, indicating dancers have greater activation of the medial gastrocnemius with their eyes closed rather than open.



# RADIATION PRESSURE INSTABILITY DRIVEN ERUPTIONS IN LOW MASS X-RAY BINARY DISKS

**Eleanor Gentry** 

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

Low-mass X-ray binary (LMXB) systems comprise a compact object (a neutron star or stellar-mass black hole), a main sequence star and an accretion disk. The accretion disk forms as the more compact object's gravity pulls mass from the secondary star (see Figure 1). Some LMXB accretion disks go through cycles of eruptions in which the luminosity increases rapidly. This project analyzes these eruptions numerically to study the mechanisms that cause and affect the eruptions, and uses that analysis to explain observational phenomena in LMXBs.

In the following, we first review the observational background for this project (Section 2). Next, we discuss the fundamentals of accretion theory (Section 3) and the specific instabilities thought to be in our system (Section 4). We then discuss the framework of our specific model as well as the numerical methods used (Section 5). Finally, we present results from a series of simulations (Section 6) and the conclusions made from those results (Section 7).

#### LAY SUMMARY

Low mass X-ray binary (LMXB) systems are binary systems with a compact object like a black hole or a neutron star at the center, and a secondary solar-type star. The accretion disk between these two objects accretes matter from the secondary star onto the compact object. This project investigates the role of the radiation pressure instability in the thermal evolution of LMXBs. The disk will go through cycles of increased luminosity over time, during which the frequency of emission from LMXBs also changes. In order to understand the role of the radiation pressure instability, which develops in the accretion disk very close to the compact object, we focus on running a simulation in the inner part of the accretion disk. We study two types of disk: strongly magnetized disks and weakly magnetized disks. We find that for strongly magnetized disks, higher rates of mass flow through the disk are needed than for weakly magnetized disks to observe the radiation pressure instability. The higher accretion rate is needed because a strongly magnetized disk is colder than a weakly magnetized disk for a same accretion rate, so it will not reach the thermal regime necessary to have radiation pressure dominate over gas pressure in the disk. Hence if the inner parts of LMXBs are strongly magnetized, LMXBs may never reach the regime where the radiation pressure instability dominates and the radiation pressure instability may not play a role in the evolution of the disk.



### MAPPING THE MANCOS SHALE BADLANDS IN CAINEVILLE, UTAH USING HISTORIC AERIAL IMAGERY

Keely Lawrence

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

Recent advances in remote sensing capabilities have created opportunities for us to observe and analyze landscapes in ways that were not feasible before using aerial imagery. By obtaining high-resolution aerial imagery of a region, three-dimensional landscape models can be generated using Structure from Motion (SfM) photogrammetry. These landscape models can be used for a variety of applications, but, of particular interest, they can be used to observe geomorphic changes that a region undergoes over time. To analyze erosional processes within a specific region, it is often more useful to us to be able to view localized small-scale landscape changes through the recent past. A limitation we encounter in this query is that SfM photogrammetry software is optimized for building models with modern digital imagery. Further limitations arise in accessibility of necessary data, such as a lack of quantity or quality of historic aerial imagery for an area, a lack of in-situ GPS measurements to aid in the geo-rectifying process, or a lack of modern digital aerial imagery to serve as a reference. In this study, my objective is to test whether it is possible to generate coherent three-dimensional models from historic imagery dating back as far as the 1950s with SfM photogrammetry and access to limited data. I have selected the Mancos Shale badlands in Caineville, Utah as a remote field site based on its unique landscape, lack of vegetation, and previously documented erosion rates from an in-situ experiment. As data, I use historic aerial imagery from 1954 and 2001 and positional information obtained from Google Earth Pro. Using Agisoft Metashape Pro to perform photogrammetric processing, I successfully generate two three-dimensional models, one for each historic landscape. To further experiment, I see if it is possible to geo-rectify the image sets sufficiently well by differencing the models using the open source software CloudCompare and conclude that access to more data, such as in-situ position measurements, may be required for success in future experiments.

#### LAY SUMMARY

Rare earth elements (REE) are materials that are important in many of today's complex technologies, including those we use every day, such as cell phones and computers. However, they can be difficult to find and only occur in commercially viable concentrations in a few places on Earth. In this thesis, two occurrences of igneous rocks, located about one kilometer apart in the Front Range of Colorado, each containing some of the same unique REE-rich minerals are studied and compared, in part, to help contribute to a better understanding of how these minerals form and where they can be found in the future. A combination of analytical techniques is used to gather critically important information about these rocks, including their mineral assemblage, chemical makeup, age, and spatial and genetic relationship to the older, surrounding rocks in which they have intruded, as well as their relationship to each other. These methods show that these occurrences are the same age, genetically related and, at some point in their emplacement, split from one another and evolved differently. This created two sets of very rare rocks that share many similarities but also contain some key differences that require continued study. The need for economically viable REE-rich minerals will continue to grow and the study of geological occurrences such as those in this thesis is an important part of furthering our knowledge and understanding of how they form and where to find them.



# ASSESING THE PERFORMANCE OF HELIANTHUS ANNUS IN URBAN COMMUNITES Roy Rutherford

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

Global urbanization and habitat fragmentation continues to endanger ecosystem sustainability and biodiversity worldwide. The loss of biodiversity and habitat drives extinctions, hinders ecosystem services, and reduces ecological productivity necessary for long-term sustainability. While urban environments can impose both novel and intense ecological stress, many species are preadapted to thrive in urban settings. Better understanding the resilience and the evolutionary trajectories of urban plant species could inform future environmentally-considerate land use. Helianthus annuus (common sunflower) is a native species that thrives in disturbed habitats and is also capable of providing mediatory services to its surrounding environment. To assess the performance of H. annuus in various habitats along the Colorado Front Range, several fitness-related traits, as indicators of potential fitness performance, were observed for relationships with various anthropogenically-driven environmental impacts (AEIs). Significant but weak-to-moderate correlations and positive relationships were found for most size and quantity-related traits when compared to the number of seeds per individual, suggesting that potential fitness can be indicated by trait values of larger sizes. Additionally significant positive relationships of weak-to-moderate correlation strength were observed between fitness-related traits and greater amounts of AEI intensity, suggesting that H. annuus has higher potential fitness in heavily urbanized habitats. Further investigating common sunflowers' adaptations to urban environments could position H. annuus as a partner for environmental remediation in urban habitats.

#### LAY SUMMARY

Global urbanization and land development continues to threaten natural areas and the species that call these areas home. While transformed and now urbanized areas may no longer be the home many species were accustomed to, some seem to thrive in urban settings. Urban environments represent a novel habitat for many and are heavily fragmented in terms of available habitat and available, hospitable habitat. Though a complex and dangerous mosaic of habitat for some, urban environments can be advantageous for others. Helianthus annuus (common sunflower) is a flowering plant that can be seen at home along urban roadsides, sidewalks, and near other human-made structures, taking full advantage of growing areas that other plants could not hope to survive in. Sunflowers not only thrive in urban environments, but can provide remedial services to their surrounding soils and ecosystems, improving soil health, removing soil toxins, and keeping invasive species at bay. The goal of this project was to assess H. annuus' reproductive potential in urban and natural environments as prospective partners in urban conservation and land use. We found that traits related to reproductive success (number of seeds, flower buds, number of leaves, and plant height) seemed to benefit in environments with more human-made disturbance. Sunflowers growing closer to roads and sidewalks tended to be taller and produce more seeds on average when compared to individuals growing in less disturbed habitat. Further investigating the sunflowers' urban success could be informative for future urban conservation and environmentally-conscious land use.



### TO BREAK OR NOT TO BREAK, THAT IS THE QUESTION: INDUCING DNA DAMAGE IN THE T. THERMOPHILA GENE TTHERM\_00459400 RESULTS IN POSSIBLE INCREASED MRNA EXPRESSION Regan L Fenske

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

The DNA Repair pathway is a part of the central mechanism of the cell, repairing thousands of DNA lesions every day. DNA repair pathways including homologous recombination (HR) and non-homologous end joining (NHEJ) maintain the health and genetic stability of the cells. Many genes in the DNA Repair pathway have yet to be identified, so genes from Tetrahymena thermophila have been tested to reach a further conclusion. T. thermophila organisms show increased DNA damage and repair during mating, and gene TTHERM\_00459400 showed promising gene expression levels during mating. To determine whether the gene expression of candidate gene TTHERM\_00459400 increases after being exposed to a DNA damaging agent, custom primers for the gene were designed using Primer-3Plus and then verified using a PCR. T. therm cells were split; half were incubated with the DNA damaging agent HU and half without. More PCRs were conducted to test the mRNA expression of the gene, and the results were then visualized using a Gel Electrophoresis. After the primers were validated, it was found that the gene expression of TTHERM\_00459400 possibly increased after DNA Damage was induced. Gene expression has not been confirmed, so further testing needs to be conducted to conclude whether or not mRNA expression increased. If mRNA expression increases, the gene can be studied further to see if it is a part of the DNA Repair pathway. Answering the many questions regarding the DNA Repair pathway is important to gather an understanding of cellular health and could even lead to breakthroughs in cancer research.

#### LAY SUMMARY

The DNA Repair pathway is central to the health of cells, repairing thousands of DNA breaks every day to maintain the health and genetic stability of the cells. Many genes in the DNA Repair pathway have yet to be identified in humans, but genes in other organisms that have a similar function have been identified. If some of these genes can be related back to genes in humans, then they can be identified as belonging to a repair pathway. One such organism is the single-cell eukaryote Tetrahymena thermophila. T. thermophila organisms have shown increased DNA damage and repair during mating, so they are a promising organism to use because gene expression can be easily measured during this specific stage of the organisms' life. One gene in the organism, TTHERM\_00459400, showed promising gene expression levels during mating. To determine whether the gene's expression increased after being exposed to a DNA damaging agent, custom primers for the gene were designed and verified using various PCR experiments with and without the damaging agent. The results of the experiments were then visualized using a Gel Electrophoresis. After the primers were validated, it was found that the gene expression of TTHERM\_00459400 possibly increased after DNA Damage was induced. Gene expression has not been confirmed, so further testing needs to be conducted to conclude whether or not mRNA expression increased. If mRNA expression increases, the gene can be studied further to see if it is a part of the DNA Repair pathway. Answering the many questions regarding the DNA Repair pathway is very important to gather an understanding of cellular health; this research could even lead to breakthroughs in cancer research.



# DESCRIPTION, AGE, PETROCHEMICAL ANALYSIS, AND A COMPARISON OF TWO REE-RICH MINERALIZATION OCCURRENCES NEAR JAMESTOWN, CO Shea Joseph Burnham

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

Two occurrences of rare earth element (REE) mineralization occur near Jamestown, Colorado in the 1.4 Ga Silver Plume-type Long's Peak-St. Vrain pluton and 1.7 Ga Idaho Springs Group schist. There is a northern locality and a southern locality which are about 1 km apart. These occurrences were first described by Goddard and Glass (1940) and then later by Allaz et al. (2015) and Stern et al. (2018). This thesis will be the first to focus primarily on the southern locality and to compare it to the other locality. Samples of schist, REE-rich rock, amphibole-bearing rock, and an unidentified felsic rock were analyzed by petrographic microscope, whole rock analysis, and electron microprobe. The felsic rocks contain a fine-grained, granular matrix of quartz and plagioclase with minor biotite, and quartz phenocrysts up to 2 cm long; this is compared to the aplite of the north, which is fine-grained, granular, and contains quartz, plagioclase, K-feldspar, and minor biotite, but no phenocrysts. The REE-rich rocks are massive and fine-grained and contain a complex mixture of REE minerals and allanite rims, compared to the north, where zoned nodules and veinlets form inside aplite. The amphibole-bearing rock is not found in the north and contains amphibole, quartz, and minor allanite, but is mixed with more complex REE species in some samples. Whole rock analysis shows that the southern locality has higher Fe in the system than the north, with REE-rich core averaging 2.1 wt. % Fe2O3, compared to 0.51 wt. % Fe2O3 in the north. Southern REE core samples have an average of 1.7 wt. % F, compared to 9.3 wt. % in the north. The REE core samples of the south have an average LaN/YbN = 26, compared to 113 for the north. Rim samples show a reversed pattern with LaN/YbN = 1060 in the south and 207 in the north. This leads to chondrite-normalized plot of rim + core showing the same pattern with north and south samples. Nd-analysis of monazite and allanite grains from REE rock was done by laser ablation multi-collector inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometer (LA-MC-ICPMS). Nd-analysis shows initial Nd-isotopic compositions for the southern REE rocks and the northern REE rocks and aplite all fall between -2.2 to -1.0 and with 147Sm/144Nd ratios between 0.03 to 0.11. Nd-analysis also revealed that the southern locality is 1421.9  $\pm$  24.9 Ma, compared to 1420  $\pm$  25 Ma and 1442  $\pm$  8 Ma ages for the northern locality determined by Allaz et al. (2015). These data suggest that the REE rocks from the southern locality are cogenetic with the

REE rocks and aplite from the northern locality, but that the two magmas evolved differently near the surface.

#### LAY SUMMARY

Rare earth elements (REE) are materials that are important in many of today's complex technologies, including those we use every day, such as cell phones and computers. However, they can be difficult to find and only occur in commercially viable concentrations in a few places on Earth. In this thesis, two occurrences of igneous rocks, located about one kilometer apart in the Front Range of Colorado, each containing some of the same unique REE-rich minerals are studied and compared, in part, to help contribute to a better understanding of how these minerals form and where they can be found in the future. A combination of analytical techniques is used to gather critically important information about these rocks, including their mineral assemblage, chemical makeup, age, and spatial and genetic relationship to the older, surrounding rocks in which they have intruded, as well as their relationship to each other. These methods show that these occurrences are the same age, genetically related and, at some point in their emplacement, split from one another and evolved differently. This created two sets of very rare rocks that share many similarities but also contain some key differences that require continued study. The need for economically viable REE-rich minerals will continue to grow and the study of geological occurrences such as those in this thesis is an important part of furthering our knowledge and understanding of how they form and where to find them.







# THE RACIST HISTORY OF GUN CONTROL POLICY AND RHETORIC IN THE UNITED STATES: FROM THE COLONIES TO THE PRESENT, HOW AFRICAN AMERICANS' RIGHT TO OWN AND USE FIREARMS HAS BEEN RESTRICTED BY THE WHITE POPULATION Alexandra Lanzetta

For the full text, please see the QR code at the end of the excerpt

#### INTRODUCTION

"The stranglehold of oppression cannot be loosened by a plea to the oppressor's conscious. Social change in something as fundamental as racist oppression involves violence."

Say their names: George Floyd. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbury. Philandro Castile. Treyvon Martin. Eric Garner. Elijah McClain. Rayshard Brooks. Daniel Prude. Attatiana Jefferson. Aura Rosser. Stephon Clark. Botham Jean. Alton Sterling. Michelle Cusseaux. Freddy Grey. Janisha Fonville. Akai Gurley. Tamir Rice. Gabriella Nevarez. Michael Brown.

Above are just a sample of the hundreds of innocent Black men and women killed by police officers in the recent past. The nationwide grief their deaths have produced make it, at times, hard to stand by a country you so desperately want to love but are ashamed of at the same time. The United States labels itself as the land of the free and the brave, but, in actuality, it is plagued by systemic racism which has been perpetuated for centuries by the white population. This has ultimately cost the lives and livelihoods of tens of thousands annually. The hypocrisy is astounding. While, as a nation, we would like to think our racist past is simply that—our past—this is not the case. Black people today may no longer be physically bound by metal shackles, but they are still controlled, in a sense, by the state and public alike. This paradox is especially evident when examining the history of gun control policy and rhetoric in the United States and Colonies which predated it. The Second Amendment is considered to be a fundamental right of Americans, yet in reality, this right has only freely been applied to the white population. This is not a coincidence. In fact, the history of gun control is thoroughly entangled with systemic racism. This includes policy that both explicitly and implicitly targets the African American population, as well as rhetoric and attitudes that essentially bar Blacks from owning or using guns out of fear of imprisonment, injury, or death.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that it is immoral, if not impossible, to understand the issue of gun control policy, rhetoric, and

attitudes without fully acknowledging the issue of race, specifically the Black race. Starting in 1680 with the passage of one of the first weapon control laws in the Colonies, Blacks, whether free or enslaved, were barred from carrying a weapon or weapon-like object.<sup>2</sup> The motivation behind this is clear. The white population had a strong desire to keep African Americans weakened and subservient and accomplished this by taking away the object which would most support Blacks' ability to resist this system and defend themselves as human beings, not as property.... This is seen in the passage of the Black Codes, the installation of Jim Crow laws, the solidification of police brutality, biased policing and prosecutorial practices, mass incarceration in the criminal justice system, and most recently with the passive attitude of politicians, the media, and the general public alike towards the thousands of Black male lives lost to gun violence annually.

[...]

How has gun control policy and rhetoric in the United States been shaped by race?... Race has always played a role in the motivation and formulation of gun control laws and attitudes; however, over time its methods have changed. In early American history, it was not only acceptable, but encouraged to create and defend racist policy.... However, as the country progressed and African Americans were both given and demanded for themselves more rights, explicitly biased rhetoric and laws were no longer publicly tolerable. This resulted in the creation and proliferation of subtle racism. This new kind of hatred continued the trend of treating African Americans as lesser members of society, yet did so in a way that did not violate anti-discriminatory laws. This is evident in the stark difference between the colonial laws explicitly banning Blacks from owning or wielding anything from a stick to a gun, to today's laws which prevent most people with a felony or drug addiction (people who are more likely to be Black because of the biased criminal justice system) from owning a gun.

[...]

1. Robert F. Williams, Martin Luther King Jr., and Truman Nelson, Negroes with Guns (New York: Marzani & Munsell, 1962), 107.

2 Charles E. Cobb, Jr., This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns made the Civil Rights Movement Possible (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 33.

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# TIBETAN FOLKTALES FOR CHINESE CHILDREN: ISSUES OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE, TRANSLATION, AND CULTURAL AUTHENTICITY Elizabeth Palmer

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

A children's book of folktales is a deceptively simple thing. How much academic exploration can you do on a book made for children? For this project, I analyzed three Tibetan folktales from Paoma shanxia de chuanshuo 马山下的传说 (Legends from Under the Happy Horse Mountain) by Cheng Shengmin 程圣民 Legends from Under the Happy Horse Mountain is a 2004 collection of Tibetan folktales for a Chinese audience, written by a non-Tibetan author. The three specific stories from this collection that I looked at are "The Golden Gourd," "Demon Takes a Wife," and "Unsalted Tea." This paper required broad interdisciplinary research. This included translating Chinese, researching Chinese and Tibetan cultures, and learning about the wider field of education and education theory. Moreover, it often ventured into previously unexplored territory, topics that have not been written about extensively by English-speaking scholars. For example, what cultural values are common in Tibet and how are they similar and different from cultural values held by wider China? How might traditional folktales, translated into children's literature, work as part of multicultural education and representation? Lastly, how might Tibetan children be affected when they read a book about their culture, written by someone outside it? Though I am not yet able to answer that final question, the first two proved extremely thought provoking, establishing how complex even a simple-seeming book for children really is.



### THE POLICY GAP: ARGENTINA'S CURRENT MIGRATION LAW AND REALITIES FOR BOLIVIAN MIGRANTS Emma Seidler

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

Policymaking intentions compared to law in practice are inevitably varied. One of the purposes of gap studies is to examine the breach between policy and reality. This research adopts the structure of a gap study to understand exactly how Argentina's 2004 New Migration Law is different in practice than it is written in law. The law grants social services, including health care, to all migrants within the country, regardless of migratory status. However, in reality, this law does not function ideally. The research identifies how the gap in policy and practice exists and explores a specific example of how the rift affects immigrants' access to the health care system. Bolivian migrants in Argentina are specifically subject to the effects of the policy gap due to social and political discrimination and racism. To complete the study, a qualitative data analysis method was employed. News sources published in Argentina before and after the implementation of the New Law were utilized as primary sources. Through diligent application of codes, a structure was applied to the textual data that allowed for a cohesive and comparative analysis. The findings show that discrimination has persisted in several ways despite the implementation of the anti-discriminatory New Migration Law: first, stigmatization of immigrants by the government through words, actions, and policymaking; second, the attitudes represented by policymakers are mirrored in society, with racism and the use of derogatory language serving as examples of informal discrimination that persists. Continued discrimination represents the gap in policy, and the health care system is one area where immigrants contend with the effects of the gap. Stigmas act not only as social challenges, but also as barriers to the health care system for Bolivian migrants.

[...]

#### INTRODUCTION

Immigration policy has historically been, and continues to be, a highly contested issue within the political spheres of many countries. It is centered around the debate of foreign populations within a country and the rights that they are to receive. The dispute over these policies and the discrimination that results from them often distracts from the fact that each immigrant is an individual, likely in a vulnerable situation due to their migratory status.... In a similar way that the United States oversimplifies its past of colonization and

domination of non-white cultures, Argentina considers its population to be a "melting pot" of people-el crisol de razas. However, with the amalgamation of cultures comes more likelihood for discrimination and inequality.

[...]

#### CHAPTER IV: METHADOLOGY

This project was not at all meant to generate or perpetuate the notion that Bolivian immigrants in Argentina are a monolith.... Instead, it is meant to understand the way that having the unique identity combination of Bolivian and migrant affects an individual's experience. This research is important because it emphasizes and denounces forms of discrimination that are not often discussed. Hopefully calling attention to and criticizing discrimination will create a safer space for migrants to live.

[...]

#### **CONCLUSION**

[...]

The results show that both social and governmental factors continue to play a role in how implications of the law are or are not carried out. Governmental factors include the reinforcement of stigmas surrounding Bolivian migrants and implementation of hostile policies carried out by political figures. Social factors consist of expressions of racism through derogatory language and informal discrimination. Together, these factors contribute to the hostile environment that Bolivian migrants experience in Argentina. This population has been subject to discrimination since the establishment of Argentina as a country with European ideals and influences. The white, European nature of the desired national identity created hostility toward indigenous and Latin American groups that has yet to be overcome completely. Even with a progressive anti-discriminatory law in place, the lasting effects of constitutional European migration promotion can be observed in policymaking and public opinion.

[...]



# VIOLENT OR VICTIMIZED: A HISTORIC ANALYSIS OF THE STEREOTYPE ASSOCIATING MENTAL ILLNESS WITH VIOLENCE

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

Hannah Hagens

The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate the origins and falsity behind the stereotype associating mental illness with violence. By understanding that not all people with mental illness are violent, one becomes aware of the inaccuracy of this popular stereotype. So where did they come from? This thesis will track a shift in the media's depiction of mental illness, from what appeared to be moving in a more positive direction in the 1940s and 1950s to a sharp turn towards the negative and damaging in the 1960s and after. This thesis will argue that, starting in the 1960s, the media fostered an environment for the stereotype associating mental illness with violence, and as a result created a society that feared those with mental illness—a lingering effect to this day. This thesis will provide an explanation for how the stereotype associating mental illness with violence contributed to the rise of those with mental illness in the criminal justice system and homeless populations.



# TRUE HAVEN: NUANCED 'SAFE' SPACES FROM MORRISON'S TRILOGY Emma Purcell

For the full text, please see the QR code at the end of the excerpt

Hard circumstances beckon eventual reprieve, and in Toni Morrison's novels, the exhausting grievances, desires, and missions are no exception. Agitated lives necessitate refuge. Safe spaces exist and are found; however, the permanence of any 'secure' safety remains infinitely conditional as character relations develop, passion unveils, and accusatory convictions find target. Beloved, Jazz, and Paradise each reveal the violence that festers in the fringe of presumed safe spaces. In evaluating the separate purpose of each temporary haven and each terminal downfall, the fragility of refuge necessitates a continued search for safety beyond place.

Morrison constructs the premise of Beloved as an exploration surrounding the multifaceted layers that haunt Sethe, an escaped slave's, found 'safety.' Sethe's story begins at Sweet Home, the slave plantation that "[isn't] sweet and it sure [isn't] home" (Morrison 16). The horrors at Sweet Home stir up Sethe's desire to escape and find freedom and safety, which she does, at least for a short while. Sethe's intense mother-love registers as the driving force that leads her journey away from Sweet Home. She must leave so that she can provide for her children who have already set off in a wagon to escape a future of enslavement. After an excruciating escapade away from Sweet Home, Sethe arrives at her mother-in-law Baby Sugg's home called 124—a place she associates with safety for herself and her children.

The safety sought versus the reality met at 124 reveals the unfortunate presence of violence in safe spaces. 124's shifting dynamics—from a welcoming way station, to haunted, spiteful, loud, and quiet, to empty—complicate the house's characterization. The instability of 124 instigates several interpretations of what role it holds in the story, at separate times harboring both protection and danger for the inhabitants. 124 initially presents as the destination holding refuge from Sweet Home for Sethe and her children. This assumption seems reasonable given that Baby Suggs resides free and safe prior to Sethe's arrival. The reputation devolves as Sethe arrives: "Sethe knew the grief at 124 started when she jumped down off the wagon..." (Morrison 105). 124 had previously carried a reputation as "a cheerful buzzing house where Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed" (Morrison 103). But soon after Sethe's arrival, violence taints 124's capacity for true refuge.

Sweet Home's cruelest slave owner, Schoolteacher, tracks Sethe to 124. Schoolteacher's presence represents evil entering 124's yard and requires Sethe to find a quick solution to the encroaching danger.

124 is not secure enough to shelter Sethe and her children from their former enslavement, so she strives to reach the only place that could form a strong enough separation from themselves and worldly danger: death. Sethe only succeeds in 'saving' one of her children, the one later called Beloved. Morrison explains, "[the] plan was always that they would all be together on the other side, forever" (Morrison 284). Schoolteacher's arrival strips 124 of its expected safety. Sethe's act of love and violence, regardless of its intention, transposes 124 from a safe house to a place of isolation and haunting sorrow.

Beloved's 'salvation' from the danger of re-enslavement results in her ghost haunting 124, first in spirit and eventually in flesh. The surrounding community rejects the remaining inhabitance of 124 because the "baby ghost fill[s] the house" (Morrison 113). 124 no longer represents a place of safety and welcome; rather, it "shut[s] down and put[s] up with the venom of its ghost" (Morrison 105). As the women of 124 deliberately isolate themselves from their community, readers learn that 124 is not only related to the destruction of the living, but also as the unrest of the "black and angry dead" (Morrison 234). 124 is haunted. Place itself cannot provide an escape from danger, yet once Beloved returns in flesh, Sethe still attempts to find safety, nevertheless. She closes everything out beyond the walls of 124 that could possibly assemble harm: "Whatever is going on outside my door ain't for me. The world is in this room. This here's all there is and all there needs to be" (Morrison 215). The isolation in and of itself becomes dangerous. As the women are "left to their own devices" (Morrison 235) in 124's isolation, Beloved terrorizes Sethe from the inside: "Beloved ate up her life...And [Sethe] yielded it without a murmur" (Morrison 295). Danger prevails even within safety's shelter and isolation, inflicted by the very person Sethe hopes most to protect: "She wanted for her children...exactly what was missing in 124: safety" (Morrison 193). She yearns for 124 to be secure enough to keep her family safe, but all places fall short in providing refuge for characters in Beloved; the possibility of suffering is relentless.

The idea of safety is convoluted throughout Beloved due to the life position slaves are victim to. Spaces, further, are never entirely safe. There is always the chance that the wrong step could relapse into enslavement: "Slave life; freed life—every day was a test and a trial. Nothing could be counted on in a world where even when you were a solution you were a problem" (Morrison 302). Place is not enough; no place can keep former slaves "uncaught" (Morrison 316). Every-

one is fugitive, imprisoned by the imminent danger of oppressive lives, an existence of hopeless desolation. How are characters to seek refuge if place cannot provide?

Morrison answers with an exorcism. But it is not the exorcism itself that provides newfound safety; instead, Morrison suggests that it is the community of women instigating 124's reintegration with their supportive network. In witnessing Sethe's slow decline under Beloved's toll, Sethe's other daughter, Denver, realizes 124 needs saving. But asking for community support is incrementally difficult because of the 124 women's reclusive mindsets. Because Sethe implanted such fear of the outside world in her children, Denver finds herself fearing anything beyond the world within 124's walls. Denver recites that she has been taught that "there [is] no defense" (Morrison 288) in the outside world. Baby Suggs, whether in sentiment or actuality, speaks to Denver with words to inspire courage: "There ain't...Know it, and go out the yard. Go on" (Morrison 288). And as she ventures, Denver slowly gathers community support. First as food offerings, and eventually as "rescue" (Morrison 301).

Thirty women from the community congregate and release 124 from its haint by performing not only the removal of Beloved, but also a "baptism" (Morrison 308) of sorts for Sethe. Support from the community provides strength and courage enough for Sethe to learn how to exist in a world where there aren't any permanently safe places for herself or the people she loves most dearly. Paul D, an embodiment of a slave's continually troubled existence, knew there was no absolute safety to be found from the very moment he arrived at 124: "I knew it wasn't the place I was heading toward; it was you" (Morrison 55). The places within Beloved, though indisputably personified in some ways, truly don't hold the power. Without Beloved's haunting and Sethe's fear, "124 is just another weathered house needing repair" (Morrison 311). All along it was the people crafting the course of the story. While place can determine life circumstance, it is people that manifest these circumstances. People enslave, people are enslaved; ghosts haunt, places are haunted. Beloved teaches that it is not place that establishes safety, it is the people within and surrounding the places that forge opportunities for safety through support and community; safety in Beloved is connection.

[...]

Morrison's trilogy recognizes safety's fragile nature through each haven's impending, inevitable downfall. Characters seek refuge for family, for love, for peace, and they are met, time and time again, with means of destruction and violence in many forms. As the safe spaces fall, it takes an expanded definition of what constitutes haven in order to find peace. Morrison stretches haven beyond place. Place is not enough, could never be strong enough to maintain constant

harmony because peace is not place; peace is people. Haven is community support and established connections; it is in connection with others that one can find refuge. Haven is not a place; it is and has always been people. Yet people are also simultaneously the instigators of violated refuge. Morrison's selection of the epigraph in Jazz best represents human nature's duality: "I am the name of the sound / and the sound of the name. / I am the sign of the letter / and the designation of the division" (Funk). We are both. We are violence and peace, danger and haven, pain and reprieve. We represent all forces that construct and deconstruct safe spaces, as well as the very embodiment of harnessed refuge itself. True haven is us.

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### SEX BEYOND CONSENT IN I.M. COETZEE'S DISGRACE AND NGŨGĨ WA THIONG'O'S PETALS OF BLOOD Malia Wright

For the full text, please see the QR code at the end of the excerpt

#### ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the episodes of rape, prostitution, and consensually ambiguous sex in the postcolonial African novels Disgrace by J.M. Coetzee and Petals of Blood by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Drawing on scholarship on sexual consent, it argues that the liberal theories of sexual consent are rigid and offers an alternative way to consider sex that recognizes the complexities of human nature, the connection between identity and sexuality, the limits of autonomy, and the roles of male dominance and female subordination ingrained in patriarchy. The analysis also takes into account the distinct social environments of postcolonial Kenya and post-apartheid South Africa and the ways that racial identities and colonialism complicate sexual consent.

This thesis engages with existing critical work on the novels and liberal theories of consent. There is little scholarship about sexual consent for either primary text or among postcolonialists in general. For this reason, the thesis reads the sexual relationships in the novels through consent theories that, like liberalism, were created in the United States and Europe. In their work, scholars like Ann Cahill, Carole Pateman, David Archard, and Catherine MacKinnon critique the dependence of theories of consent on the liberal democratic values of individualism and autonomy, and challenge the understanding that humans have possessive ownership of themselves and are abstractly equal in society. This thesis extends their arguments that this notion of sexual consent is reductive and does not consider the intensities of human desires and the limited agency of marginalized groups from patriarchal societies to the postcolonial context. Central to the plot of Disgrace is a student-professor relationship and the rape of a white woman by Black men. These events present ideal locations to explore the nuances of rape and intercourse and the ways that social constructions of race and gender infiltrate sex. Petals of Blood follows four protagonists, one of whom is a woman, Wanja, who is sexually promiscuous and has spent many years as a prostitute. Her beauty and sexuality led her to attract many men who feel powerless with desire. Her time as a sex worker and her mobility in her sexual relationships provide complex circumstances for an analysis of possible female agency.

In exploring the ways that sex is a private and personal action but also a socially and politically constructed human behavior, this thesis analyzes what is right or wrong about episodes of sex that go beyond only consent. In doing so, it finds ways that women can

have sexual agency beyond consent as a form of contract. This thesis ultimately pushes for sexuality to be understood as fluid and for social constructions of sexuality to be recognized to allow both women and men to find ways that sex can be safe, equal, and fulfilling.

#### INTRODUCTION

Sexuality and sex are complex topics. Tied up in sex are some of the most intense and uncontrollable emotions of human nature: love, lust, passion, and desire. Sometimes, the feelings and actions that lead up to, during, and after sex can be inexplicable. Yet, discourses of human sexuality can often be rigid, leaving little room to explore and understand human nature and motivations. This inflexibility can transfer to perceptions of sexual consent.

[...]

It is crucial to continue examining and discussing cases of sexual assault, rape, and the #MeToo movement, but it is also important to keep in mind the limitations of the Western discourse of consent. One way to do this is by investigating how these discussions are complicated in the Global South, specifically in postcolonial contexts.... Consent doesn't effectively define sex in Western spaces, where the theory was created and shaped by Western sexualities and sexual norms, so its flaws are perhaps even more obvious in non-Western, postcolonial societies.

This thesis will explore how consent is complicated through representations of rape and prostitution in J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace and Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Petals of Blood, two postcolonial African novels. Both novels challenge liberal theories of consent and human rights through their portrayal of the complexities of human nature and gender relations that influence the sex that their characters engage in. By applying the work of consent theorists to the already complicated sexual relationships depicted by Ngũgĩ and Coetzee, this thesis imagines new ways to understand the rights and wrongs of sex outside the inflexible constraints of consent and identifies ways that women can act with agency in sexual relationships. The discussion of sexual consent, rape, and prostitution will focus on heterosexual relationships between cisgender individuals. This is not to say that consent, rape, and prostitution are not or cannot be problems within other kinds of sexual and gendered relationships. They can, but this thesis

will be dealing with the power dynamics between cisgender men and women within patriarchal societies that are often reflected in sexual relations and that make the matter of consent especially complicated.

[...]



# POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY, AND PATRIARCHY IN THE REIGN OF EMPRESS WU Ashley Howard

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### ABSTRACT

The topic of how women in societies with patriarchal ideologies and systems can break through the social hierarchy to establish power and influence and what role religion plays in these types of political issues has been relevant for millennia and is still relevant today. In China and much of ancient East Asia, traditional structures of belief and power tended to be patriarchal, which made it difficult for female leaders to rise to positions of authority. Despite this social system, some women in imperial Chinese history rose above the system to become authority figures. One of these women was Empress Wu Zetian (624-705) of the Tang dynasty, who rose to power to become the sole emperor of China in 690 CE. This thesis examines iconography in Mogao Caves 96 and 321 in Dunhuang, Gansu, two caves constructed by the elite Yin family of Dunhuang under Empress Wu's reign. Using iconographic and archaeological methods, I analyze the murals and statues within the two Yin family caves to understand how Empress Wu and powerful families of this period leveraged popular Buddhist stories and imagery to assert and legitimize authority. These two caves both featured imagery of several Buddhist teachings supporting female authority, suggesting that Buddhist concepts and infrastructure, as well as the ambitions of elite families, were utilized to demonstrate and cultivate political authority throughout her empire.



# EPISTEMOLOGY OF COLOR: KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURES IN THE DYE INDUSTRY OF COLONIAL INDIA Emily Ray

For the full text, please see the QR code at the bottom of the page

#### INTRODUCTION

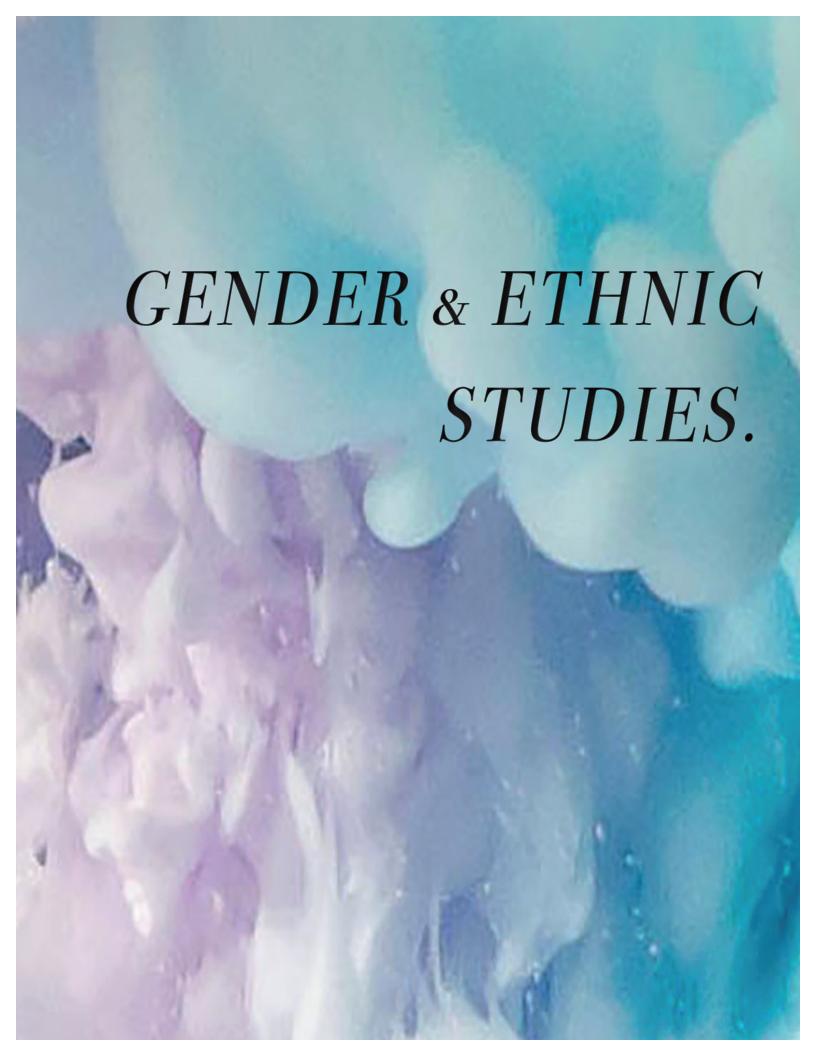
What is knowledge? It is a question philosophers have been trying to answer for millennia. The history of science seeks to answer a similar question. How is knowledge developed and how do societies throughout time and space define science? European scientists and historians have come up with very specific guidelines for how scientific knowledge is defined, but knowledge has existed in many forms, and we are only just beginning to investigate alternative, non-written forms of knowledge. One industry that provides a very interesting cross section between science, traditional, and practical knowledge, is dye, especially natural vegetable dyes. For the entirety of Indian civilization, the people of the Asian subcontinent have been known for their fabulously dyed cloth. As the native home of the indigo plant, India has long been involved in the domestic and international textile trade. When the British established a colony in India, they introduced new knowledge structures to the dye industry. In pre-colonial India, the dye industry was extremely regionally specific and dye knowledge was generated through family and village networks and transmitted through the practice of the craft. When British naturalists and botanists came to India, they sought to catalog information in writing for the purpose of finding a universal indigo processing method. These knowledge structures were different both in their transmission and their goals. The native Indian strategy for dye knowledge was transmitted orally and practically and was highly specific and localized in nature. The British sought empirical knowledge that could be recorded in writing for the purposes of collecting, storing, and comparing. Knowledge in the dye industry transitioned from generational craft to empirical science with the invasion of British colonialists.

[...]

This essay aims to explore the production and transmission of knowledge in the Indian dye industry during the colonial period. By providing a contrast between medieval and early colonial dye methods and the later British imperial perspectives, I hope to illustrate the fluidity of knowledge structures within this industry.

[...]







## THE TRAP OF TRANSMEDICALIZATION:

#### HOLDING COMMUNITIES AND IDENTIES HOSTAGE

#### Chris Hendrie

In recent years, there has been an insurgence of public discourses involving non-normative identities and experiences. The field of Transgender Studies focuses on and highlights the experiences of trans identified individuals, exploring trans subjectivities and what 'transness' really means. Much modern scholarship on trans identity frames gender as entirely socially constructed, which has received a variety of responses from both trans and cisgender individuals. These conflicts are ongoing, with the 'truth' of transness still hotly debated. One of the most prevalent and controversial ways of framing trans identity is transmedicalism.

Transmedicalism is a view of transgender identity that holds that experiencing dysphoria is required for 'legitimate' trans identity. This belief asserts that gender dysphoria, generally described as a feeling of distress originating from the incongruence between one's assigned gender and gender identity, is a condition to be treated through medical intervention such as hormone therapy and gender affirming surgeries. Transmedicalism grounds transness in gender dysphoria, asserting that a lack of gender dysphoria is a lack of transness.

This paper will utilize author, scholar, and Professor Finn Enke's definition of 'transgender,' describing the term as "an ever-expanding social category that incorporates the broadest possible range of gender nonconformity" as well as a "gender identity that differs from the sex assigned at birth" (Enke, 18). Outside of the realm of trans studies, the latter definition tends to be more familiar and widely circulated. Jumping off from this definition, this paper explores the way that transness is constructed and defined in the context of an increasingly medicalized world.

Transmedicalism did not come to be one of the dominant narratives about transgender identity by coincidence. Its modern prevalence speaks to way transmedicalism has cemented itself in the histories and modern realities of trans subjectivities. This paper contends that transmedicalism is a nuanced framework of pathologizing transgender identity that depends on and perpetuates systems of oppression, intracommunity conflict, and limited visibility of trans subjects.

#### Systemic Underpinnings of Transmedical Ideology

Participating in transmedicalism entails being an agent of a system that promotes hegemonic ideas about what constitutes a valid body. Operating under transmedical narratives, "only certain genres of identity are deemed legibly trans, and only legible transness is permitted to access a wide variety of medical, legal, and social privileges, including intracommunity recognition and legitimacy" (Cavar, 35). Legible and legitimate transness is then afforded to trans bodies that most fit normative categories ('normative' being positioned as that which is white, wealthy, able-bodied, heterosexual, binary, and cis passing). Situating transmedicalism within its historical context reveals how these systems of hierarchy and exploitation ingrained themselves into transmedical ideologies—and their ultimate implementations.

Medical and psychiatric institutions have long been used as means to reinforce social norms, especially through the medical manipulation of subjugated identities. Even the gender binary, upon which transmedicalism relies, was established and implemented by processes of settler colonialism, which aims to eradicate Indigenous perspectives on sex and gender. Non-white bodies have been constructed as inherently deviant, including in realm of gender. Scholar Che Gossett articulates how "the grammar of 'cisgender' lacks the explanatory power to account for the colonial and anti-Black foundational violence of slavery and settler colonialism through which the gender and sex binary were forcibly rendered" (Gossett, 185). The racialized sex-gender binary regards whiteness as a requirement for 'successful' gender production and embodiment. Current politics on transmedicalism and the enforcement of medicalized trans identity, by nature of their own history, live in the ghost of the slave trade, settler colonialism, and cultural genocide.

Transmedicalism justifies and encourages the surveillance of trans bodies. Marking medical intervention as the only gateway to legitimacy is inherently exclusionary to countless social groups, especially given the racialized nature of exploitive capitalism. Dan Irving explores these subjectivities at length in his academic work, criticizing how medical experts have been granted excessive power and influence over the production of trans subjectivities. The results of this consolidation of power are exemplified through the living legacy left behind by American sexologist David O. Cauldwell, who famously 'treated' transgender patients in the early 20th century. Cauldwell and many other sexologists categorized transsexuality as a self-hating psychosis that severely infringed on one's productive capacity (Irving). Doctors and medical professionals often denied certain patients medical care or transition on account of their race, class, and sexuality, refusing treatment to non-white, non-heterosexual, disabled, or otherwise

'unproductive' bodies. In doing so the medical profession was able to literally construct the next generation of visible and viable transgender subjects, formally constructing successful trans embodiment to be incompatible with other non-normative identities.

#### **Intracommunity Conflicts**

Systems of heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism all profit from the illusion that identity policing is vital to the integrity and respectability of trans people. These systems work intentionally to integrate themselves with the collective consciousness of the trans community. The internalization of social norms is the most insidious and effective method of establishing social control and ensuring the perpetuation of oppressive systems of power (Villatoro et al.). Once the myth of medicalization is internalized within trans spaces, it actuates a witch hunt to find the trans 'impostor.'

"Truscum" (aka transmedicalists) and "tucute" (aka transtrenders, 'imposters') occupy opposing positions in the debate of transmedicalism and dysphoria as it unfolds in online spaces. Truscum are people, cisgender or transgender, that support and promote transmedicalism. By extension, truscum believe trans identified people who do not experience dysphoria or desire medical transition are appropriating transness. These appropriators are often referred to as tucutes or transtrenders, trans-identified individuals who are deemed illegitimate due to a lack of dysphoria. Transtrenders and tucutes are typically described as pretending to be trans for the sake of gaining pity or attention. These 'trenders' are often blamed for the rising number of openly trans-identified people. As trans people become more visible in mainstream media and discourses, these terms are becoming more ubiquitous.

This self-policing and gatekeeping of trans identity is a prime example of respectability politics. Respectability politics refers to a collection of practices and attitudes that reinforce dominant norms, especially as a method for producing a successful counter-narrative to the stereotypes imposed on marginalized groups (Pitcan et al.). The truscum vs. tucute debates are reflective of trans people internalizing and adopting hegemonic social norms in trans spaces. Oftentimes, truscum who are binary transgender people will justify the legitimacy of their own transness by contrasting their experiences with tucutes. One transfeminine truscum YouTube commenter wrote, "I have too much disdain for the transtrenders. They just want to feel special. I just want to feel comfortable in my own skin and function in society. I need estrogen to function, those twats just need attention" (Beibee). Another openly transmedicalist YouTube commentor wrote, "The transgender activist movement isn't even for real transgender people anymore" (Alpine Ink). This sentiment imposes a hierarchy within the transgender community, with 'real transgender people' (implied to be those that are dysphoric and seek medical transition) posed as

being oppressed in part due to 'fake' transgender people hijacking the movement. Respectability politics exchanges the empowerment and recognition of these people for the creation of 'successful' transgender subjects who can serve as agents of oppressive systems; it muffles the voices and perspectives of trans people of color and nonbinary people, dismissing them as fake or damaging to the community.

The success of transmedical discourses is based on the belief that transness is finite and incapable of existing outside of arbitrarily defined parameters of normalcy. When transness is viewed as a medical rather than a social phenomenon, it is all too easy to impose statistical and medical logics that do not apply to socially constructed identities. People are not statistics. Constructions of what constitutes normalcy are subjective and cannot be confined to statistical measures and logics. It is not as though a finite number of people can be 'gender outliers.' The allegedly rising proportion of transgender people poses a threat to cisnormativity by implying that cis-ness may not be a sound standard for normalcy. Transmedicalism is deployed as a countermeasure to this threat, with the ultimate aim of restoring cisnormativity and assuring cis subjects that the number of 'real" transgender people is small and nonthreatening to social norms. However, transness is not finite or limited. It is not a commodity that must be diligently divided among its recipients. Allowing access to shared identity categories does not rob anything from existing members of that identity. Intracommunity conflicts such as the truscum vs tucute debates reveal the damage that transmedical ideologies inflict upon communities and individuals.

#### You Are Not Trapped in the Wrong Body, You Are Oppressed

This all begs the question: if the transmedical narrative perpetuates oppressive norms and destabilizes the transgender community, then why is this politics still so commonly adopted by individual trans people? What does transmedicalism offer its adherents?

The relationship between trans people and the medical community has become intimately connected. Medical and psychiatric approval or diagnosis is typically required to move forward with legal processes like changing gender markers and names on legal documents. As such, those who are granted access to legitimate transness through medical narratives are also granted legal benefits. Those that can successfully embody transness (as defined by cisgender metrics) are granted access to resources that can make daily life easier. Medical discourses are also affirmed by the large number of transgender people who do seek medical transition such as hormones or affirmative surgeries. Many people find that medical intervention drastically decreases their dysphoria and grants them agency over their body

This sense of agency is crucial, especially for a community which is often deprived of choice or feelings of control. Ultimately, the degree of agency with which an individual adopts certain views of themselves is the most important determinant of whether that framework is constructive or destructive. Transmedicalism is problematic in that it denies the validity of other constructions of transness and often monopolizes mainstream discourse about trans identity. This renders the pathologized trans individual as one of the only visible narratives, limiting the extent to which individuals can choose to identify with other frameworks while still being granted societal legitimacy in their identity. This is the trap of transmedicalism: it presents itself as the only valid way to embody transness, restricting the agency with which trans subjects can choose how to relate to themselves (Gossett et al.).

Even before transsexuality was recognized as a disorder in the 1980s, medical professionals categorized transgender people as being "depressed, schizoid, manipulative, and controlling" as a result of being 'trapped in the wrong body' which was (and continues to be) the dominant narrative of what it is like to embody trans identity (Stone, 229). This translates to the narrative that transgender people do, and should, hate their bodies. Transgender bodies are not portrayed as desirable or empowering, but rather as a source of shame and disgust. When the perceived legitimacy of one's identity hinges on the extent to which that individual hates their body, it can actuate a self-fulfilling cycle of dysphoria. When transmedical views of self are internalized, the hegemonic systems of hierarchy constructed to oppress trans subjects are internalized as well.

Ultimately, transmedicalism restricts transness, reducing it to self-loathing and discontentment. Transness is not monolithic, nor does it need to be unpleasant to embody. Thinking outside of a transmedical framework allows for a transness that is expansive, joyful, and free. Transness can be medical, but it can also be magic, joy, and freedom.

#### Visibility and Demedicalizing Transness

The trap of visibility is explored at length by Gossett, Stanley, and Burton in the text "Trap Door: The Politics of Trans Visibility." Medicalized trans bodies engage with trans visibility in very nuanced ways. Some trans subjects, especially those that most embody normative categories, are granted a unique and conditional form of visibility via the pathologizing and medical 'treatment' of their identity. Passing, the ability for trans individuals be perceived as cisgender, is often especially attainable for these subjects who have undergone some extent of medical transition. This allows a sort of pseudo-trans-visibility, where the transgender subject is afforded visibility and legitimacy in mainstream discourses due to their ability to be un-transed. This begs the question: Are transgender people truly being accepted and granted visibility, or are they only being offered this sort of illusory visibility on the condition that they otherwise embody and uphold cisnormativity?

Data on violence and hate crimes propose that this form of

visibility is not working in favor of all transgender people. Transgender people, especially trans people of color, are victims of higher rates of crime and violence each year (Gossett et al.). The ludicrous idea that there are vast numbers of 'fake' transgender people is validated by transmedicalist rhetoric, cementing transphobic tropes like the misguided teen seeking attention, conniving hookup baiter, and sexual predator playing dress-up into mainstream narratives. While granting validity to some trans people, transmedicalism also perpetuates these stereotypes that have been used to justify anti-trans violence. It allows white cis-passing transgender people to essentially evade transness— or at least its societal consequences—while the consequences of transness are still being enforced on other members of the community. These impacts are ignored, as they point to the harsh reality that trans visibility and inclusion as we know it simply is not working.

Perhaps the source of discomfort associated with transness is not the trans body. Transmedicalism dismisses the difficulties associated with holding a transgender identity as being innate to the identity itself rather than a consequence of living in a transphobic society. The body is not the prison. The prison is living in a world that polices, controls, manages, and devalues certain bodies. The body is not the problem. The problem is the consequences non-medicalized trans bodies generate for their subjects in how they are regarded by mainstream society. Instead of trying to heal healthy bodies, we need to direct our attention to healing our sick society.

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### SAY YES TO CONSENT

#### Katherine Storm

"I firmly believe that by instilling in young minds the importance of affirmative consent and relationships built on love and respect, that we can reduce the sexual violence inflicted on young women" (Silva 2016). Teaching comprehensive affirmative consent is a subject that has all too often been pushed aside for other topics and frowned upon teaching in early childhood classrooms. The reality is that a comprehensive education on consent when children are young leads to a greater understanding of sexual consent, and therefore fewer assaults. In addition, it helps children learn how to say no and have bodily autonomy at a young age, setting them up to know what is right and wrong when they reach secondary education and beyond. The purpose of this policy proposal and research was to prove that teaching consent throughout a student's life is productive and beneficial to everyone, and to require on the federal level that all states, districts, and schools must integrate lessons of consent in kindergarten through high school graduation.

My proposal is to make the inclusion of comprehensive affirmative consent education mandatory for all states, thus giving students all equal education regardless of their given communities' political undertones. As summarized in an article from Education Week, "Making understanding and negotiating consent a life skill gives children and adolescents ways to understand and respect both their own desires and those of other people" (Sparks 2019). Not only will teaching children consent support their bodily autonomy and wellbeing as they grow up, but it will teach them the skills to listen to others and be able to understand when something is not right. If given a good understanding in their primary years, it is the hope that students will know what is right and wrong when they grow older and enter secondary education or the workforce, and promote safe and respectful behavior wherever they choose to go.

For many, hesitations can be made when approaching teaching young children about consent, as they see it only relating to sex and sexual assault. Although it can sometimes be a difficult topic to bring up with students in the classroom, there are many resources available to educators to teach about consent to their young students who would find the most success learning about how to say no to hugs, dangerous situations, and the like. It also teaches kids how to respect when their friend or classmate says no. I found several options in my research as to how to incorporate consent education into lessons for young kids.

In an article from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, author Grace Tatter lays out some options on how to talk about consent with young children. Tatter recommends videos which outline consent and children's books to share during story time such as "My Body! What I Say Goes!" by Jayneen Sanders, and, "I Said No" by Kimberly King and Zach King. She also offers this advice: "Model consent and empower students. Of course, some of consent is skill-based: learning to simply ask questions about what behavior or actions are appropriate. 'Would you rather a hug or a high-five?' Give children agency over what is age-appropriate, like what snack to have, or what to read at story time" (Tatter 2018). The goal of teaching students about consent when they are young is to give them the tools to grow up respectful of each other and themselves and make sure they know what is right and wrong, as well as what is comfortable for them

In kindergarten, students would ideally learn how to say no and respect when their classmates do not want physical contact. Teachers would read stories about consent and answer questions asked by children about what they are learning. Parents would be kept in the loop and understand what conversations are being had at school so they may continue at home in regards to family members. A first grade classroom would look similar, still reading stories and talking about the importance of bodily autonomy, and adding in an aspect of understanding body parts and what is okay and not okay to touch. In addition to introducing the topic of different body parts and "swimsuit areas," a conversation could begin both at home and in the classroom about stranger danger and identifying an untrustworthy adult. Second through fifth grade would look similar, still instilling the morals around respecting your body and your friends' bodies, while bringing in more conversation about potentially dangerous situations. By introducing the topic in elementary school and keeping it consistent in school and at home through the years, children will be effectively instilled with an understanding of affirmative consent, which will then support them as they continue learning about relationships, sexual assault, and other topics to be introduced in middle and high school.

By the time students reach middle school, they are much more aware of their surroundings and those around them. Likely at this point, they are thinking about relationships, but not always in them. Many sexual assaults happen in middle schools due to the ignorance and hormone-filled halls, so it is a good time to begin having more serious conversations with students about consent in regard to sexual assault and harassment. "Emphasize the importance of talking with a trusted adult. At this age, some students think, 'Well adults just don't understand,' Schneider says. 'I remind my students, though, that for teachers and parents, it's our job to keep them safe' and that if they

have an interaction they're uncomfortable with, with either a peer or an adult, they should tell an adult who they trust" (Tatter 2018). This quote from Tatter does a good job of acknowledging the difficulty in asking for help while in middle school and the importance of present trusted adult figures for students to rely on.

A large issue of middle school which directly impacts the proper education of consent is the developmental stage at which most students in middle school are. A mistake often made by educators when attempting to teach students about these topics is bringing them all into an auditorium where it is easier for them to get away with joking with their friends and separating students based on gender. By attempting to give a presentation on an uncomfortable topic with hundreds of middle schoolers packed together, the importance and severity of the topic can be lost (especially if the students have not received education on the topic before). Separating students creates many issues, including needlessly discriminating against transgender and nonbinary students, as well as giving students an unequal education.

Most students take a health class in seventh or eighth grade, and then again in high school, most likely in tenth grade. By the time students have reached high school and their high school sex eduation class, they are aware of sex and relationships and may be engaging in activities themselves. For these classes, it is important to talk about the effects of alcohol and drugs on consent; for example, if one or both partners are under the influence no matter what, consent cannot be given. Another important topic often skipped over is consent and comfortability in relationships. Especially in high school with high hormones and the excitement of new relationships, conversations of consent can be forgotten. It is important to make sure students are aware that just because they have engaged in an activity before or are dating does not give automatic consent. This is a topic that I have found to be forgotten and disassociated, which can be damaging to youth when navigating what is right and wrong.

For both middle and high schoolers, clear resources should be provided so that they can do reliable research on their own time. Because of the inquisitive nature of teenagers, many may feel the need to look into different topics on their own, and without correct sites and research habits, they can stumble across negative resources which give an inaccurate notion of consent and healthy sex and relationships. For example, Willis et al. (2019) quoted another source saying that "even though young people label pornography as their primary sex education, they identify sexual consent as an area that pornography does not teach them about." Although an uncomfortable topic, it is important that the presence of pornography be covered in classes.

The inclusion of affirmative consent education in health classes and throughout early childhood is severely lacking in the state legislature, and therefore damaging children who do not receive comprehensive lessons elsewhere on the subject. An article from CNN discussed a study that found that, "as it is, only 24 states and the District of Columbia mandate sex education in public schools.... Of those, only eight states require mention of consent or sexual assault...: California, Hawaii, New Jersey, North Carolina, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and West Virginia" (Maxouris & Ahmed 2018). In another study looked at by Malachi Willis, Kristen N. Jozkowski & Julia Read, the word consent rarely appeared in health class requirements for different states, with it appearing the most in Ohio's legislation three times. According to a study reviewed by NPR, "87 percent of students said that they, personally, would believe someone who reported a sexual assault. But only 51 percent of students thought their peers would believe such a report" (NPR Morning Edition 2018). Looking at these statistics is shocking; students do not believe their peers would believe a reported sexual assault. Included in educating students about consent would be teaching them how to believe and respect victims when they come forward, thus fostering an environment where they felt comfortable sharing their truths. In addition to the #MeToo movement, #WhyIDidntReport has brought attention to various concerns stopping victims from reporting the assault they endured. As good as it is that these issues are being brought forward now, it would be better to be able to avoid this altogether and give survivors a society and environment where they feel safe to report.

With my proposal, the teaching of comprehensive, affirmative consent would be mandatory across the states, beginning as early as kindergarten, with the goal of educating children on consent and respecting themselves as well as others. With this baseline from childhood, we would hope that by the time they reach post-secondary education or the workplace, they have the tools to stand up for themselves and others, understand and accept no as an answer, and give victims of sexual assault a safe environment to be heard and respected. While the topic of consent is often frowned upon in public school discussions (especially with young kids), the root of the issue is about teaching respect and boundaries in a way that will grow and mature with the student.

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# GENDER, GRAPHICS AND GLITTER:

### How Children's Greeting Cards Enforce Gender Stereotypes

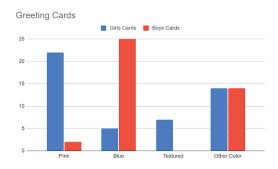
#### Katherine Storm

Greeting cards have been a social staple of politeness and good wishes tracing all the way back to Ancient China and Egypt. Although the sentiment has stayed the same, the practice of greeting cards has changed drastically through time. There have been many iterations of greeting cards, with more specific and themed ones appearing in more recent history. Today, when going to the store, one is likely to find shelves with messages of a "Merry Christmas," "Get Well Soon," "Happy Birthday," "Sorry For Your Loss," and many more. One thing mainly seen in Birthday and Anniversary cards is the unnecessarily gendered colors and text. I elected to study greeting cards, specifically birthday greeting cards for young children because I saw a striking difference between cards meant for young girls versus cards meant for young boys. I initially saw it as gendered because, just from an initial look at the greeting card display case, there was a "line" of sorts separating the pink cards from the blue cards, thus separating the girls' from the boys' cards. On closer inspection, I saw vast differences in text, color, and texture between the cards intended for girls versus boys.

I think this difference is important in how we discuss differences between girls and boys, and how the gender binary starts at such a young age. We have talked quite a bit about how performative gender is, and how people actively do gender. In this case of child's greeting cards, we can see how companies are creating and enforcing this gender binary onto consumers, and therefore children. Chances are, children will receive many cards throughout their young lives, and if they all are perpetuating this idea of what girls are and what boys are, what does that tell the children? Some articles I found important to this discussion were: "Mom transforms American Girl doll into a boy for her son," and "Blame the Princess" because both writings examined the idea of performing gender, and how we not only perform gender on a daily basis, but enforce said gender ideals on listening youth. Another article I found illuminating on the subject is titled: "How Kids' Birthday Cards Perpetuate Gender Stereotypes." Several great points are brought up, and the author discusses many of the same things I noticed in my research in regards to the unnecessary gendering of children's birthday cards.

To gather data, I went to my local Target and viewed the children's birthday card aisle. I took pictures of both specific cards, as well as the displays as a whole. At home, I narrowed in on one shelf in particular, assuring there were the same number of cards for the boys' vs. girls' section, and went through and counted how many of the cards were pink, blue, different colors, and textured. I then placed these numbers in a spreadsheet to make a graph, and graphed out the differences between cards meant for girls and cards meant for boys. I decided to focus on color (specifically pink and blue) and texture on the cards because I noticed most differences in these distinguishing features. In my picture, I had a sample size of 82 cards, 41 of those intended for girls and 41 intended for boys.

In my research for the graph for greeting cards, I found some striking differences in cards marketed towards girls or boys. In the Target where I conducted my research, they had labels on the shelves indicating if the cards were meant for girls or boys. My sample picture where I gathered the data is from said display case, where I took a sample of 82 cards: 41 girls' and 41 boys'. Of the girls' cards, 22 were mostly pink, 5 were blue, 14 were another color (mostly orange or yellow), and 7 had an element of texture, meaning glitter, shiny print, or fluff on the card. From the boys' cards, 2 were pink, 25 were blue, and 14 were another color (mostly black, red, or orange), and none of the cards had glitter, shiny lettering, or fluff.



It is a popular distinction between gender to assign pink to girls and blue to boys. But where does this idea come from? I turned to some writing by Maleigha Michael, who, in an article titled "Sexism in Colors - Why is Pink for Girls and Blue for Boys?" discusses the history behind the color assignments. She explains that, in the 19th century, people began using pastel colors for babies. Blue was meant to compliment blue eyed and blonde haired children, whereas pink was meant to compliment brown eyed and brown haired children. Blue was then associated with girls, with it being seen as a dainty color, and pink with boys being seen as a powerful strong color. Then, as people began associating red with romance and romance with women, pink became a "girls" color. Although there have been many movements to disregard this color binary, the idea persists through capitalist consumption, and therefore through our society and children. When I was a nanny, I once had a conversation with the

five year old girl I cared for about colors, and she was very insistent that pink was for girls and blue was for boys, and that because of that, her brother could not like pink. It was interesting, as an adult, to see how much importance she put both on the color assignment, and the binary based on that.

One of the other most important findings I had with greeting cards was the text both on the front of the card and on the inside, as well as the toys or games some cards came with. I took special note of four cards (two for girls and two for boys) that paralleled each other, as well as two additional cards meant for girls. For the four cards, I made sure to pick ones that paralleled each other, for example, making sure both had superhero themes, so that I could directly compare the two.

My first example is "Frozen" themed, with the girls' card featuring Elsa and the boys' card featuring Sven and Olaf. On the front of the girls' card it says, "Wishing You a Perfect Birthday," with sparkly snow fluttering around Elsa and a pink and light blue color theme. On the front of the boys' card is written "On Your Birthday, Everything's COOL!" with no special sparkles or textured text, and a royal blue and orange color theme. Inside the "Elsa" card is the text: "You're as bright as sunshine, a princess through and through - That's why this birthday wish is filled with hugs for you!" and "Enjoy Your Special Day." The card also boasts a cut-out paper doll, once again full of sparkles. Inside the "Sven and Olaf" card is written "...but not as cool as YOU! Hope it's the happiest!" and a memory game along with stickers. Aside from the cosmetic differences in look and color, a big issue I found with these cards were the toys they came with. The card intended for girls came with a doll whereas the card intended for boys came with stickers and a memory game. This perpetuates the idea that girls are to sit quietly and play with dolls (thus practicing their caretaking), whereas boys are to think and learn.

Next, I analyzed two cards that had superhero themes. The card intended for girls shows Wonder Woman, and the card intended for boys shows Batman. The text on the girls' card reads, "A hero is kind, smart, courageous, and true..." in a shiny gold print, surrounded by shiny gold stars with a light blue and red color theme, whereas the boys' card reads "Birthday Hero... It's your day to hang out and have fun!" with a black, red, and yellow color theme. Inside the Wonder Woman card, it continues, "that's why a hero is someone like you! Happy birthday" with a wearable button of Wonder Woman. On the other hand, the Batman card says "...you can always save the world later! Happy birthday to a great kid." The card comes with a toy Batman mask for kids to wear. The issue in these cards comes in how they relate with children and their relationship with superheroes. For girls, they are stating that the recipient of the card is someone like a superhero, not an actual superhero, and on top of that, the only aspects they list and deem worthy for a female superhero are her attributes surrounding what she can do for others in an emotional and caretaking way. On the other hand, the boys' card assumes the boy is a superhero and knows it, and acknowledges him taking a day off to have some fun. Never in the girls' card does it mention her resting and having fun, only how she can emotionally serve others like a superhero.

Finally, the two girls' cards I analyzed separately both had pink and sparkly themes. On the cover, one reads "Future Girl Boss" over a pink cheetah print background full of sparkles. Why must the card specify that she will be a girl boss? Why can't she simply be a boss? This negatively plays into the notion that women are not full bosses as men are, but simply women play acting as bosses as girls. The word girl in many contexts has been associated with more negative connotations, such as being weak, or not as intelligent, which adds another dimension of sexism and suppressing women from youth to this birthday card. The second card reads "Little Miss" over a dark blue background, with bright pink sparkly shoes with bows and flowers. "Little miss" is a term often used with young girls, as a way to both compliment them and age them in a way. The title "miss" is used with women to distinguish them as being unmarried women who have not been married, essentially categorizing and labeling them based on their relationship (or lack thereof) with a man. By calling young girls "little miss," we unfortunately subsequently categorize children with the same notion. In addition to this, the nickname can be used and seen as a way of demeaning children—somehow both aging them up and aging them down for a confusing dynamic and power play.

The class readings I connected strongly with this topic were "Mom transforms American Girl doll into a boy for her son," and "Blame the Princess," due to their discussions of performing gender. In "Mom transforms American Girl doll into a boy for her son," a mother is described creating an American boy doll for her son, who is sad he could not buy one like his sister had. The child wants to take care of his doll and interact with it, but because of the binary which barred him from getting a doll, he did not have the same option as his sister. This connects to the greeting cards because as seen with the "Frozen" cards, the girls were given a paper doll and the boys stickers and a game, failing to take into account the young boys who like Elsa more or may want a doll. In "Blame the Princess," the author describes how, for girls and women, their end all be all goal is to get married and have a family. The article describes many women who have been planning their wedding for years, longing for that fairytale perfect princess wedding. I believe that the greeting cards connect here because many of them refer to women based on their emotions and the emotional services they can give others, which strongly links them to the construct of emotions and therefore weddings. In more general terms, there are also many more greeting cards designed for women which have to do with marriage than for men. For example

anniversary cards, wedding shower cards, and wedding cards in general are more heavily marketed with women as the recipient in mind. The way in which we perform gender is highly evident in both the greeting cards and in weddings, given how the narrative is often "the woman getting married, usually a princess, is often the center of attention, she wears a long white dress, has a huge bouquet of flowers, a huge wedding party and so on. As girls age, they mimic this script. 'While little boys also get scripts, those usually focus on empowerment, like being a superhero or firefighter" (Ellin 2014). By having children's birthday cards focus heavily on girls being princesses and caretakers and boys being superheroes and manly men, it drives home this narrative that the wedding is the end all be all for women and a career is the end all be all for men.

The article "How Kids' Birthday Cards Perpetuate Gender Stereotypes" also lends insight into this discussion about cards, and the author laments how "card companies portray two and three yearolds—who may or may not even know their full name or address to have narrow personalities that fit into one mold: a teensy, tiny, smile-bringing girl" ("How Kids' Birthday Cards Perpetuate Gender Stereotypes" 2020). In her research for her blog, the author also pulls together visual aids documenting words used for girls' cards and boys' cards. As shown below, girl cards are likely to display soft and emotional wordage, whereas boy cards are likely to display more active and rigid words. gender stereotypes in kids' birthday cards gender stereotypes in kids' birthday cards





Figure 1. Words used for girls' cards and boys' cards. From https://thinkorblue. com/birthdaycards/

In my research I found stark differences between birthday cards meant for girls and birthday cards meant for boys. The cards intended for girls painted a pink picture of fluff, sparkles, and an emotional child who is dainty and small, whereas cards intended for boys painted a black and blue picture of heroes, duty, and fun, and a carefree child whose only focus should be on bettering himself and learning. These harmful stereotypes connect to major ideas in class in discussions of how we do gender, and how we force gender onto children from a young age with items such as greeting cards.

As they currently stand, the concept of gendered greeting cards, specifically gendered birthday cards for children, damages youth's perception of gender and gender roles, and therefore what their gender role should be. By the logic of these cards, girls should hope to be like superheroes, and they should value being kind, compassionate, and (emotionally) intelligent above all else. On the other hand, boys should expect to be superheroes, and expect days off to relax and have fun. Not once is importance placed on young boys worrying about being kind or thoughtful of others-no, his whole focus should be on himself and his enjoyment of life. By giving children these notions, they have the potential to grow up thinking of themselves in unnecessarily gendered ways and further packing themselves into the box made by society to be the ideal versions of women and men who will continue to perpetuate the gender binary.

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## TIKTOK TURNED ME GAY

#### Katherine Storm

Since its release in 2016—growing more popular in the last two years—TikTok has been an important feature of pop culture, particularly for Generation Z. The app features 15-60 second videos on a variety of topics, vastly differentiating between social groups, based on what content is repeatedly "liked." With the impacts of COVID-19 moving people into a time of self isolation, the app grew in popularity, as it provided easy to access entertainment. One of the trends I noticed in the app, notably within my own "side" of it, was a new openness and focus on inclusion, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community. As I interacted with more videos made by and for queer folx, my For You Page (FYP) quickly became full of queer content, in the form of jokes, education, shared interests, and more. Around this same time, seemingly in conjunction, I made the discovery that I was a lesbian, whereas I had previously been identifying as bisexual. It is my belief that I was able to make this discovery, in part, due to the influence of the TikTok app, through the content I was regularly interacting with. By analyzing the algorithm and FYP and its grouping strategies, the lack of heteronormative societal pressure due to COVID-19 isolation, and the community created through TikTok, I will discuss how TikTok aided in my discovery of my sexuality, as well as countless others' discoveries surrounding gender and sexuality. One of the most prominent aspects of TikTok is the For You Page, abbreviated as FYP. This is the main aspect of consumption on the app, where posted videos appear. Although used in other forms of social media, the algorithm on TikTok is a huge part of the app and influences quite a bit of how content is viewed. Because of this, different "sides" of TikTok have been created, in a way forming different communities in each one. Examples of sides of TikTok I have been on are Frog TikTok, Cottagecore TikTok, Gay TikTok, Non-binary TikTok, Bread TikTok... and the list goes on. This video¹shows how different "sides" of the app can be indicative of people's interests beyond the app. It is this occurrence I want to focus on. Through the content we interact with, users of the app are able to express themselves in like-minded communities.

While many people end up on different "sides" because of facets of their identity they are already aware of, as this TikTok²references, sometimes the algorithm gives people videos they do not

- $1 \quad https://www.tiktok.com/@rcoveringhetero/video/6883495589271620869?lang = entry the property of the prope$
- $2 \quad https://www.tiktok.com/@bluenbroke/video/6887128233637203201?lang=endowners. \\$
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- $4 \quad https://www.tiktok.com/@justellysa/video/6889197221900733701?lang = en$
- 5 https://www.docdroid.net/N46Ea3o/copy-of-am-i-a-lesbian-masterdoc-pdf

immediately connect with, that then provide an opportunity to learn and potentially discover something new about themselves, in this case, about their gender and or sexuality. For myself, this was definitely the case. After having the app for a couple months, and using it an increasing amount at the end of last spring, I found my content being very focused around queer women, and importantly for me, women discovering their sexuality as lesbians. Not only did the app provide a space for me to interact with other queer individuals, but it provided stories of others' experiences<sup>3</sup> that others and I could connect with, and information about different resources surrounding discovery of gender and sexuality.

One of the things discussed quite frequently on the app was compulsory heterosexuality (comphet)—such as this video, <sup>4</sup>which makes the argument that Cher from Clueless is a closeted lesbian, and discusses what that means. Watching videos discussing the issue, as well as reading comments about different further resources (such as the "Am I a Lesbian Masterdoc," <sup>5</sup>which I found through the app), is a huge part of what helped me discover my sexuality.

Another important aspect of TikTok and how the app created a community for people to express and discover themselves is the isolating outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic. In mid-March, when people began to isolate, many of my peers and I took to social media as a way to fill our days and pass our time. For some it meant creating content, and for others it meant taking in that content. With the self-isolation and worldwide quarantines, many people found themselves taken out of the society they had grown up in and lived in, instead getting the opportunity to create their own reality through TikTok and their communities within the app. So, by allowing teens and young adults to foster their own world of creativity and self discovery during a time when they are essentially only seeing each other through their screens, it is no surprise that so many people like myself made discoveries about their gender identity and sexuality. By essentially removing the society which enforced heteronormative agendas onto youth, and giving them a space to be authentic, many identities were unsurprisingly discovered and fostered through the app. As discussed above, with a lot of content on the app focused around education and sharing experiences, it seems the perfect space

was created for queer people to be queer.

As I have mentioned many times, an important aspect of Tik-Tok and my discussion is the community which has been fostered in the app. This community has done many things—spreading awareness about political issues, sharing thoughts and ideas, creating a safe space, and discussing the communal need for media which represents queer people in normalized, positive ways. As discussed in the article "Normalizing of Queerness and Modern Family," author Steven Edward Doran critiques modern shows, namely Modern Family for their inclusion of queer people and gay couples only in the realm of homodomesticity.

The same grievance for the way queer people are portrayed in blockbuster movies and popular TV shows can be seen on TikTok, where the gay community has rallied in a way behind the want for positive, normalized queer representation in media. This want comes out in many ways on TikTok, such as TikToker Emily, @emskindafitkindagay, who has a few videos 6tracking the Gay Christmas Rom-Com starring Kristen Stewart and Mackenzie Davis titled "Happiest Season." Since the movie was announced and minor details and photos were released, members of the queer TikTok community were overjoyed with the promise of a Rom-Com which seemed to be like any other Christmas Rom-Com, just about queer women. Hopeful viewers were disappointed, however, when the trailer was released to show it is another coming out story, just as "Love, Simon" was. In the search for positive, normalized queer content, TikTok creator Anna @anna.writes began a series of short video episodes titled "Dyke the Halls,"9which will hopefully turn into a cheesy, gay, take on a Hallmark Christmas movie. It is indicative of how much the queer community (namely on TikTok) wants movies and media they can relate to, even in, and sometimes especially in, the most cheesy, low production-value way.

TikTok has created a space during the COVID-era for people of similar interests and identities to come together and connect across physical and virtual space. In fostering this community through the algorithm and FYP feature, along with less contact with the outside world than before, TikTok inadvertently led to many Gen Zers discovering their gender identity and sexuality. And, due to this community and the increased awareness of similar needs and desires in our media, it also led to a movement to see more positive and normalized queer content on our screens, both big and little. Due to the discussed factors, I was able to discover my sexuality, as well as many of my peers, on the app. Discussions of gender and sexuality have been

increasingly brought into the mainstream in recent years; however, I believe that with the existence of TikTok and the app's features and prominence, we are likely to continue seeing discussions of gender and sexuality come into mainstream discussions and media in a more positive and inclusive way.

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<sup>8</sup> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0cbWdlQg 8

<sup>9</sup> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0cbWdlQg\_8

# SHIFTING THE PURPOSE OF ENDING VOTER SUPPRESSION

Maria Martinez

After an intense 2020 presidential election cycle, Joe Biden is the 46th president of the United States. Stacey Abrams is a politician who is passionate about being a voting rights activist. During the 2020 election cycle, she was often credited as the person who increased Democratic voters making it possible for Georgia to vote blue in 2020. However, Stacey Abrams' efforts were not completely centered on winning electoral votes, as her get out the vote campaign is centered around combating voter suppression. For Black women to thrive in elections, there needs to be a shift in the election system. Stacey Abrams' get out the vote campaign proves that voter suppression exists and eliminating this will give Black women the opportunity to hold a position in office. This paper explores how the current electoral system is flawed for Black women and other marginalized groups, eradicating voter suppression will increase the representation of Black women, and voter suppression is a product of white supremacy.

The election system is flawed due to prioritizing votes of some rather than all. Stacey Abrams' 2018 governor's race only served to prove that elections have historically been controlled by those in power. Georgia's gubernatorial race in 2018 perpetuated voter suppression, racial bias, and sexism. Stacey Abrams was running against Georgia's Secretary of state Brian Kemp, an adamant conversative. After months of grassroot movements, getting out the vote campaigns, and encouraging citizens to vote, she lost the race. Stacey Abrams' non-concession speech states, "We all understand challenges and complications; however, this year, more than two hundred years into Georgia's democratic experiment, the state failed its voters." In her speech, Stacey Abrams explains that many citizens of Georgia wanted to practice their right to vote but there were a multitude of barriers prohibiting them in doing so. Abrams was not able to successfully gain these positions of power because of these walls. Later in her speech, Abrams claims, "Georgia citizens tried to exercise their Constitutional rights and were still denied the ability to elect their leaders. Under the watch of the now former Secretary of State, democracy failed Georgians of every political party, every race, every region. Again." Abrams is decentralizing the arguments from associating voter suppression to political parties and centering it back to having the ability to pick your leaders and not have those barriers that prohibit it in the first place.

The election system is meant to allow people to vote for the candidate that fits their interest without having to jump through hoops. The flawed electoral system prohibits Black women from having the ability to run for positions of power, while, simultaneously, Black women are also fighting other forms of oppression when running for office. Stacey Abrams' non-concession speech also states,

"Which is why on Election Night, I declared that our fight to count every vote is not about me. It is about us." Even though not everyone who was affected by voter suppression was someone who supported Abrams, the effort was done to ensure this election system was effective. Abrams also stated, "It's about the democracy we share and our responsibility to preserve our way of life. Our democracy—because voting is a right and not a privilege." In a society that has racial hierarchies, privileges exist when being born white or in closer proximity to white. Race is a social construction that dictates who can hold power. If voting was more equitable then Black women would have the same opportunities as their white counterparts to run for these positions.

Eliminating voter suppression will create a pathway for Women of Color to not only vote but hold positions in office. The tactics of voter suppression affect marginalized communities by having strict voting regulations, voter ID law, and lack of access to voting centers. Voting has not been exclusively for everyone, as those in power have always dictated who has the ability to vote. Since most of the people who are affected by voter suppression are marginalized people, it is, in turn, harder for politicians who come from marginalized groups to get votes from their community. In the paper "Media Framing Of Black Women's Campaigns of the US House of Representatives" by Orlanda Ward, it states, "Black women are framed as having advantages due to their race and gender, but at the same time failing to win over White voters, despite evidence to the contrary" (Ward, 2016). In a racialized society it can be very difficult to reach the interest of others who do not share your same experience. The full enfranchisement of Black Voters would mean that Black candidates would have similar support as White candidates.

Black women are also subjected to many harmful stereotypes. In the podcast The United States of Anxiety episode "What Does the Right Woman Sound Like?" the host invited Rena Cook who is a specialist in teaching women on how to use their voice. She states, "Of course the double standard still handicaps outspoken women but here is the bottom line, we can't control that" (Wright 2018). There may not be the full abolishment of sexism under white supremacy but fully enfranchised Black voters would help women of color take these positions.

Stacey Abrams' strategy of combating voter suppression is a shift that could be adopted to other races' empowerment, especially for women of color. King describes the strategy of "expanding their coalition to include disengaged voters of color, as opposed to continuing the focus on persuading undecided, moderate, often white voters"

(King, 2020). The power of voters of color has impacted democracy before; another time where voters of color came in huge numbers was in 2008. In 2008, voters of color aided greatly in electing president Barack Obama to office. Through the power of white supremacy, new voter restrictions were put into place: "The substantial and accelerating population growth among minority populations shows that the 2008 display of minority voting strength is not a passing phenomenon" (Haygood, 2012). For a system of white supremacy, having marginalized communities succeed in elections is a threat. The disenfranchisement of BIPOC people was done purposely to keep control of the power.

Abrams and her team's approach to include those disengaged voters of color is a shift that needs to occur overall to ensure that people can practice their right to vote. Abrams has been working for this movement for a long time, even after her close loss in 2018, her efforts did not change. Georgia turning blue in the 2020 election was not necessarily a win only for the Democrats but a win for Black women who have been unfairly treated by this election system. It has revived the idea that people can elect the leaders that will serve them. Abrams told POLITICO shortly before Election Day, "Only the message is not trying to persuade them to share Democratic values. Your message is to persuade them that voting can actually yield change" (King, 2020). This strategy has brought back the idea that voting can make an impact with the potential to encourage Black women to pursue these positions because they have the support of their community. Removing barriers to voting will allow for more representation of Black women in office that will transcend into different policy changes. It is true that descriptive representation matters.

In the video "Stop Killing Us: Black Transgender Women's Lived experiences," Bela stated, "You can't have a cis women advocating for a trans women because that woman don't know our needs, you can't have a caucasian male advocating for us because he don't know our needs, you need a trans women of color" (Complex News, 2020). Although this advocates for Trans Rights, it is important to listen to the message. People within communities know their issues the best, and electing officials fairly will allow for this change to take place. In Lecture 1 of week 11 it is mentioned how political representation holds power in the form of "who has political voice through elected representatives" or "who benefits from political representation." If political representation is so impactful it is obvious why white men benefit from electing their leaders. White rich men are aware of the needs of other white rich men. Removing barriers to vote can eventually lead to a cycle where more Black women will go into office for the needs of the black community especially Black women. "In a role model capacity, the elected representatives of a group may likewise influence public perceptions of the group, and public, and legislator preferences concerning policies related to the group" (Haider-Markel, 2010). Therefore, ending voter suppression will increase the turnout of voters of color, allowing voters of color to choose people who represent them and therefore allow for policies to change.

There are those who question methods to combat voter suppression, like increasing voters of color, are upholding the values of white supremacy. The 2008 presidential election mobilized voters of color to cast their votes and have that platform to participate in democracy. However, after the election, those against it worked to create barriers: "The states that have passed these restrictions are, in many cases, the very same states that experienced high rates of minority population growth and political participation over the last decade" (Haygood, 2012). We have seen an increase of people voicing that voting should be easier. In states like Colorado there is a mail-in ballot strategy that has increased voter turnout on all sides. There are many strategies that can combat voter suppression, but instead certain states have continued to set these barriers. Racism is the main driver in white supremacy policies pursued by state legislators who are aware that they are capable of these strategies. They will continue to ignore the strategy to uphold power over others.

Stacey Abrams is one of many Black female leaders who have come up with strategies to combat white supremacy. It is only hopeful for the future of democracy that these grassroot movements continue. The adoption of Abrams' strategy should not be the only mission, it should encourage others to see the needs of their community. In the 2020 election we saw other states also have amazing turnout because people are invested in democracy. Stacey Abrams is a Black woman who has continued to fight voter suppression, so there can be more equitable elections for other Black women. Black women will thrive in political office if the shift continues to occur within communities. Mobilization does not stop with the currently elected president, it is only the continuation of the greater fight against white supremacy.

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# DISMANTLING THE HIDDEN HIERARCHY IN SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS AND GENDER IDENTITIES

**Eleanor Schnee** 

Jackson Bird is a transgender man who makes YouTube videos online discussing various LGBTQIA+ topics, as well as throwing random food into a waffling iron. In his memoir titled Sorted, Bird remarked that in college his "gender dysphoria...manifested in a steady contemplation of my sexuality" (Bird, 2020, p. 82). Bird was able to repress his true gender for so long because he often conflicted and confused his gender with his sexuality. This confusion was due in part because heteronormativity has no interest in educating people about identities outside the norm, but also because our systems for labeling sexual orientation and gender identities are inherently confusing. While there are conventional ways I could explain the differences between sexuality and gender as to help distinguish truth from misconception, they tend not to address the system itself. I also do not wish to simply provide a list of definitions for all the sexualities and all the genders to create a "complete" description of both, because such a complete list does not exist. Our sexual orientation and gender identities are not only lacking in their capacity and ability to describe people, but also create expectations and normalities that are used in unjust and oppressive hierarchies. And we can't meaningfully discuss how Bird repressed his gender due to convoluted identities without first addressing how to free ourselves from those same identities.

We tend to organize around oppressive hierarchies, some of which permeate through all our institutions and have existed for hundreds of years. With regards to sexual orientation and gender, the dominant structure is heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is the societal assumption that everyone conforms to heterosexuality and that there is attraction between "opposite" genders and neutrality among the same gender (Hutch 9/23/2021). As such, it includes all the confining expectations of heterosexual relationships like monogamous, long term relationships between cis-men and cis-women. With little flexibility, heteronormativity is a hierarchy that is constructed from the normalities and expectations of heterosexuality and has a very restrictive view of what relationships between people can look like. We can conclude that by embracing relationships outside of the norm, we can begin to deconstruct the hierarchical structure of heteronormativity.

Among the anthology Queering Anarchism, Abbey Volcano talks in her essay about how she often felt pressured by friends to be more promiscuous and to not be in exclusive relationships (Volcano 2013, pg. 37). Only because she held a queer identity were these assumptions laid on her. While these expectations were outside the normal, they can be and are just as restrictive as those of heteronormativity. And so, Volcano's experiences highlight how society applies certain restrictive expectations to everyone according to their sexuality. In order to free ourselves from restrictive views on relationships, we cannot simply embrace relationships outside the norm, we must break down the normalities and expectations that we associate with sexual orientation identities.

I believe dismantling normalities is a necessary action to take in order to prevent any hierarchies from being constructed. In her paper, Volcano also argues that instead of liberating people from the bounds of heteronormativity, we have "create[d] new borders and new limitations around sexuality—we have simply inverted the hierarchy and excluded those deemed "not queer enough"" (Volcano 2013, pg. 34). One of the philosophies of anarchism is that in order to bring about equality, we have to dismantle or tear down all 'unjust' hierarchies—though some argue all hierarchies are unjust by definition. Through that lens, we can see that inverting a hierarchy by creating new normals will never achieve equality, even though it may make the lives of marginalized people somewhat better. Breaking down normalities associated with all sexual orientation identities is one way to ensure no unjust hierarchies can be constructed. However, inverted hierarchies don't only occur with sexual orientation. Since heteronormativity insists "on there only being two genders and two sexual orientations" (Hutch 9/23)[a], gender can just as easily be constructed into inverted hierarchies. Therefore, breaking down norms associated with gender identities will aid in deconstruction of the gender hierarchies within heteronormativity.

For example, by dismantling the norms around being transgender-removing the expectations we have of trans people and or what it means to be a good trans person—we will be lifting the restrictive borders on who can hold the trans identity. While a consequence will be the trans identity becoming more broad and less unique as a descriptor, it will also remove its ability to prescribe what someone should be if they choose to take it as an identity. This is in contrast to our modern idea, which suggests that being trans is at the core of whoever holds that identity. The proposal of diluting or removing identity terms is a bit of a frightening concept given how we treat them today, but again taking a page out of Abbey Volcano's queer anarchist theory, "the ways we fuck, love, and gender ourselves are not inherently revolutionary" (Volcano 2013, p. 35). And if our identities are not at the core of our struggle, then we can continue to fight for equality without them. Thus, if we wish to radically change society to be more equal for all genders and sexualities, we must focus on

dismantling societal norms and not on creating more identities to attach norms to.

We could gain another perspective on the relationship between gender and sexuality by looking through the lens of the patriarchy. Specifically, how "[h]omosexuality is a by-product of a particular way of setting up roles (or approved patterns of behaviors) on the basis of sex" (Radicalesbians, 1970, p. 153[b]). By challenging the approved behaviors set forth by the patriarchy, we can begin to deconstruct homosexuality. And deconstructing homosexuality is in the same vein as deconstructing sexual orientation hierarchies on a whole. As such, we can challenge the hierarchy of heteronormativity by also challenging the patriarchy.

This type of analysis was not present in Jackson Bird's life when he was trying to figure out who he was. He only had limited knowledge from a high school psychology class, "there were only two sexual orientations: gay and straight. Bisexuals have to choose one" (Bird, 2020, p. 82). While this mindset was a start, it did a very big disservice to him. We say that every person has two separate identities, a sexual orientation and a gender; but something we do not often realize is that almost all of our sexual orientation identities are intrinsically tied to our gender identity. When talking in the dominant culture, one would not need to specify a lesbian woman because that definition of lesbian includes being a woman. From here, we can trace out a lot of confusions between and about sexuality and gender that most people have. As a consequence of this implicit gendering of sexualities, the confusion and uncertainty that arise among individuals who question their gender is only compounded. For example, a cis-man who likes women is straight, while a trans-women who likes women is a lesbian. With our current system, finding a correct gender identity may necessitate a change in sexual orientation even though no newfound or less-found attraction was discovered.

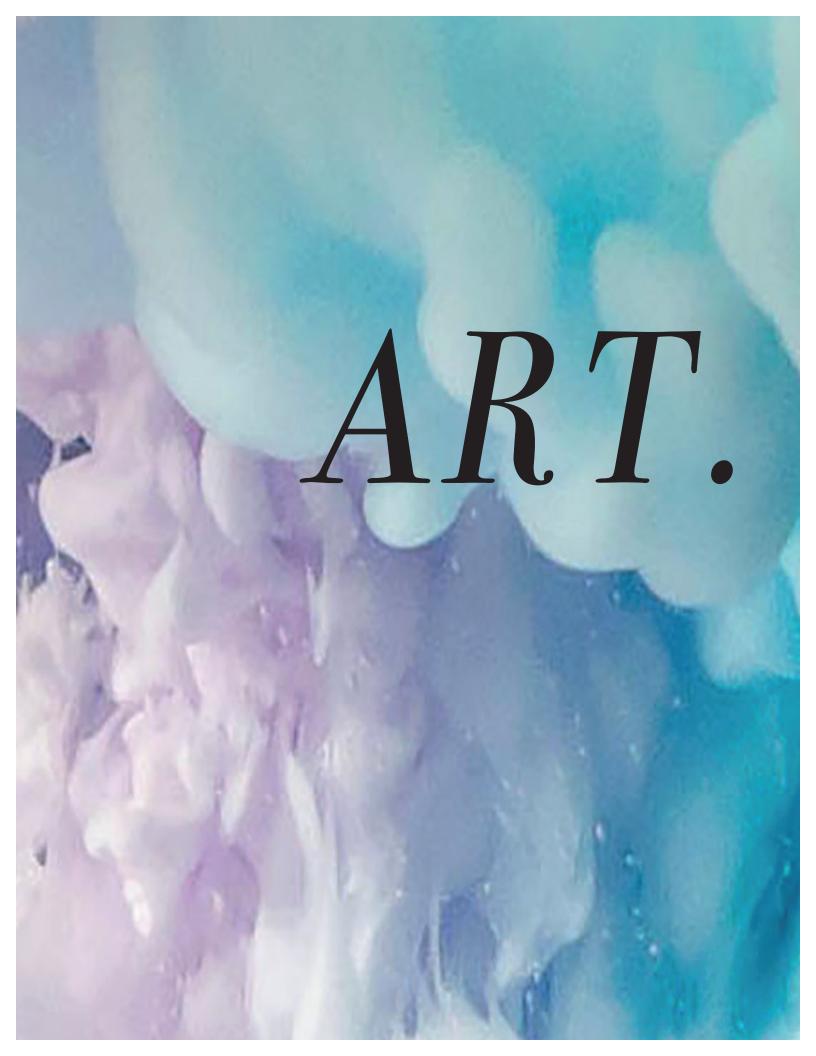
In middle school, Jackson Bird found himself watching an Oprah special about trans kids and remarked, "that...episode made me feel like my interest in boys disqualified me from being transgender" (Bird, 2020, p. 53). The inadequacy of our system for determining sexuality really shined in this moment for Bird. He was able to convince himself, at least for a while, that who he was attracted to had the ability to determine what his gender was. Even as he later realized that he could like men and be a trans-man, it would necessitate that he be gay, and thus make him "some extra-special kind of freak" (Bird, 2020, p. 53). While Bird is particularly harsh with his wording, I think he highlights the intersection of sexuality and gender hierarchies very well; being a gay cis-man or even a straight trans-man would be seen as more normal than who he was, a gay trans-man. The hierarchy that heteronormativity creates was threatening to place Bird at the bottom—as a gay trans-man—if he continued to have feelings about being a man or came out as such. This threat coerced him into

repressing his gender for the sake of staying on top of the hierarchy as a means of survival. "Threat" is a somewhat nebulous term but here I use it to refer to the discrimination, prejudice, and/or violence from both homophobia and transphobia that Bird would have faced as a result of being placed lower on these hierarchies. Later in the book, Bird remarks, "The big mistake I had made was assuming that there was only one way to be trans" (Bird, 2020, p. 102). Throughout his childhood, Bird had picked up on what expectations and normalities were associated with both straight trans-men and gay cis-men and felt as though, since his experiences didn't match the norms, then he couldn't be those things. Therefore, we can remove confusion—and coercion through violence—in people's lives with regards to their sexual orientation and gender identities by dismantling expectations and normalities that we associate with those identities.

Jackson Bird's childhood was filled with uncertainty and confusion because of our current system for sorting sexual orientation and gender identities. We must eliminate such uncertainties and remove these confusions by foregoing the normalities and expectations—set in place by the oppressive structure of heteronormativity—that we associate with sexual and gender identities in order to reach a more equitable future. And, if we keep in the back of our minds that dismantling normalities is more important than holding onto identities, then I believe we will reach this future one day.

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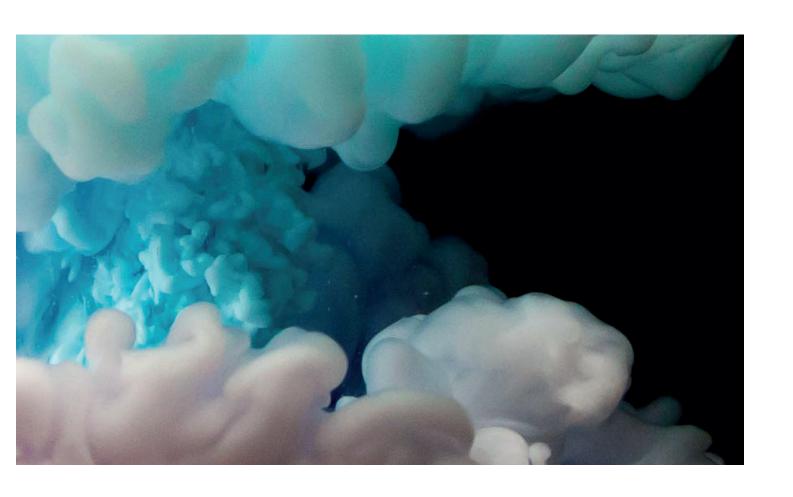


# WATER CLOUD 2

Kylie Sambirsky

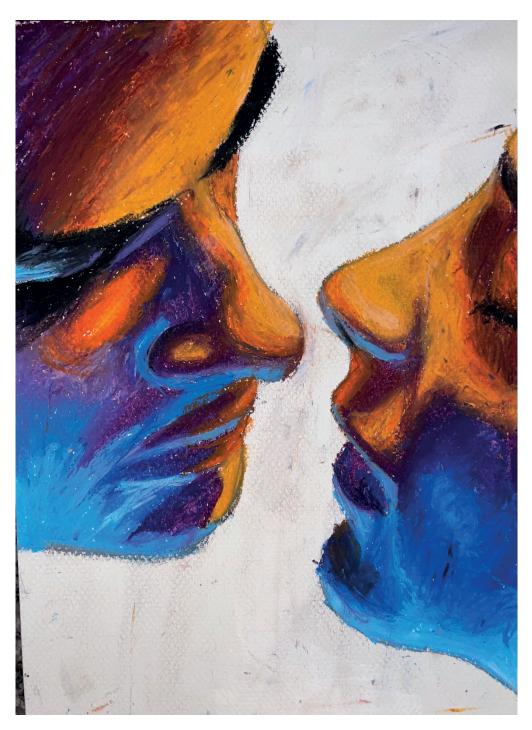
"A colored cloud in a fish tank."





# FIRE AND ICE

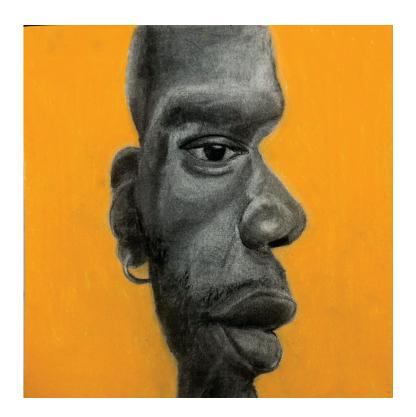
#### Laura Bauer



"Through my art I create portraits that depict a fictional person or moment—capturing their pure essence with facial expressions, colors, and styles—evoking emotions within the viewer because facial expressions are the most powerful form of communication."

# TWO-FACED

### Laura Bauer



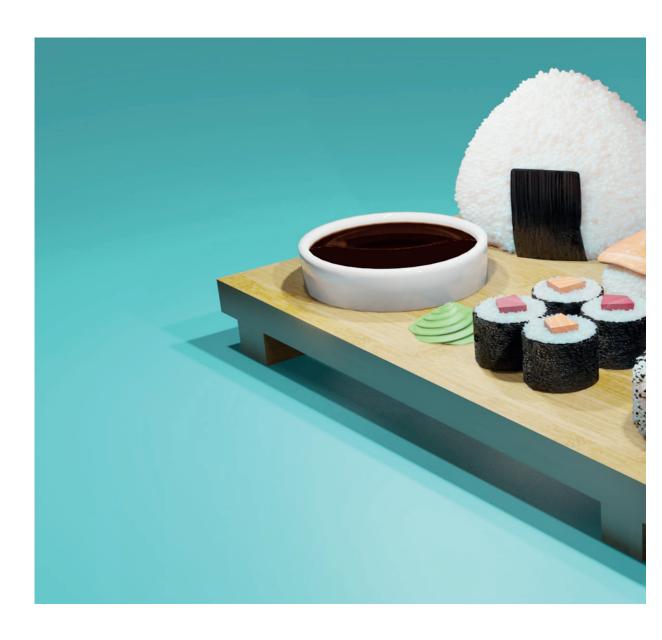
# BEAUTY IN THE MESS

Laura Bauer



# SUSHI

Gabe Butler

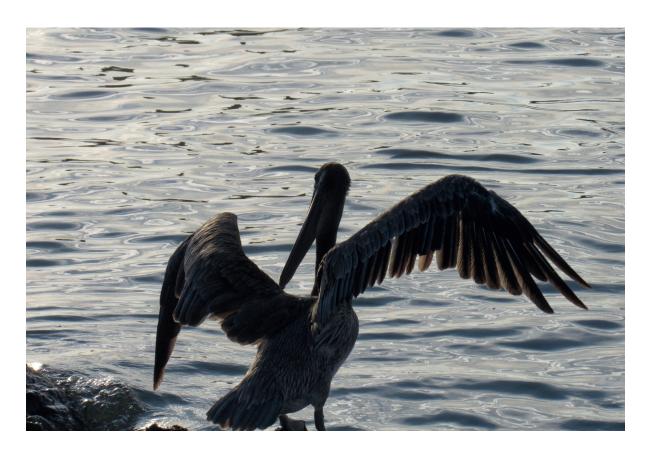




"As a self-taught 3D design and animation artist, this is one of my most sentimental works. Being that it was my first major project and sent me down the path of visual effects and CGI, creating my favorite food in my computer was a magical experience."

# THE THEORY OF FLIGHT

Kylie Sambirsky



"A pelican on rocks in the Gulf of Mexico, about to take flight."

# **ISOLATION**

Kylie Sambirsky



"A piece to show the effects that Covid-19 had on a local community. A blank marquee with the message to stay strong, unsure of what's to come."

# THE LOVERS

### Kylie Sambirsky



"Two lovers in Galveston walk into the sunset."









PLEASE SAY YOU LOVE ME BACK Kylie Sambirsky

"Documentation of the end of a toxic relationship. His words on her body."

# MEMENTO MORI Kimberly Tai Bowman



"Memento Mori is a work documenting my twenty-ninth birthday, a day I both celebrated and dreaded. I carry with me the same eyes, the same sadness of my young self. I am changed, yet unchanged."

# "THE AIR MAX"

Jeanette Martinez



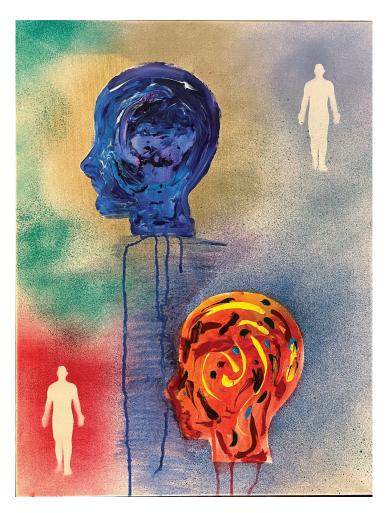
"My art piece is a representation of the Japanese flag made from a deconstructed Nike Air Max. The Nike Air Max is symbolic in Japan's sneaker culture because it is considered to be the first Nike sneaker to gain popularity."

# UNTITLED Quinn Toomey



"This photograph illustrates the beauty of decay. I have photographed many abandoned buildings, homes, and towns over the past few years and find them to be the most fascinating subjects. Many abandoned locations are marked with vandalism or graffiti, which often become a part of the intrigue. This house, off of a highway in Wyoming, appeared to be completely untouched. With this photograph I wanted to convey the beauty that exists in the natural process of decay—somewhat of an oxymoron. I have found that the deterioration of a home or place, something often thought to be very unappealing, can be quite beautiful when it is preserved and allowed to decay naturally. I also want to invite curiosity about the history of a space and allow that curiosity to to fuel the imagination."

#### DUALISM Lily Karp



"I make art in order to express, ask questions and make the viewer and myself look into their own psychology and everyday patterns of thinking. It is open for interpretation with intentions to look beyond the superficial. Who am I besides a brain in a body?"

HEARTACHE Lily Karp

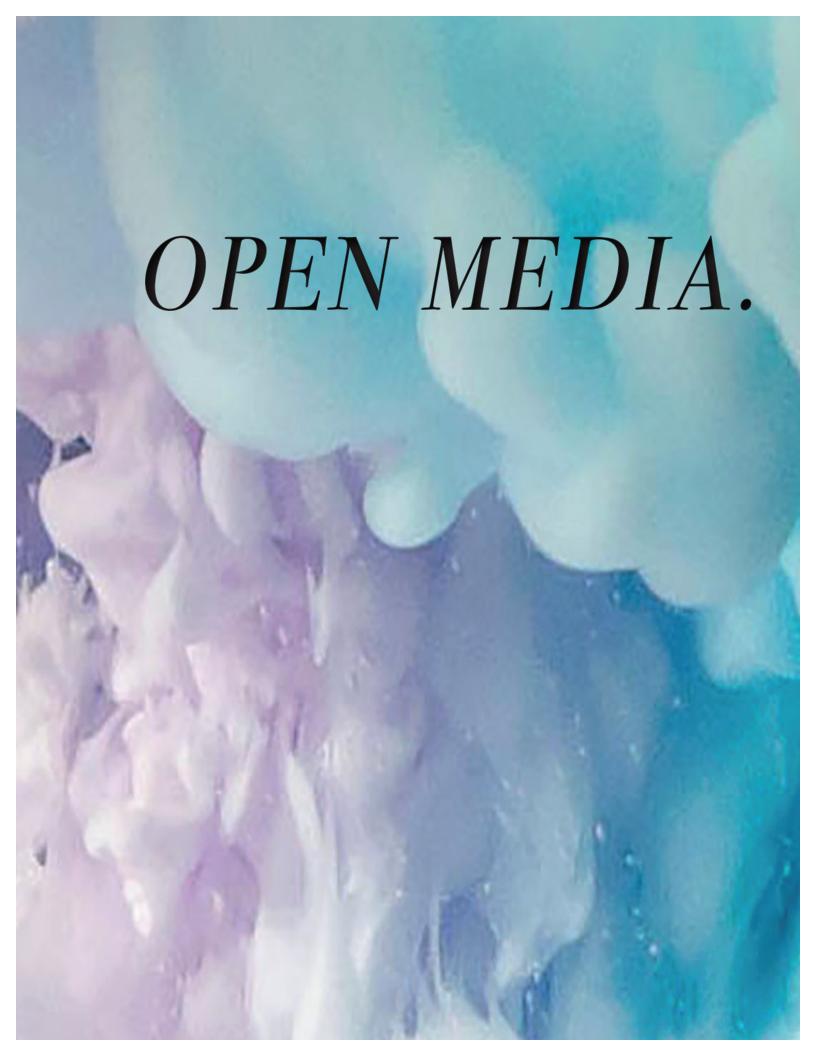


### "I DONT SMOKE"

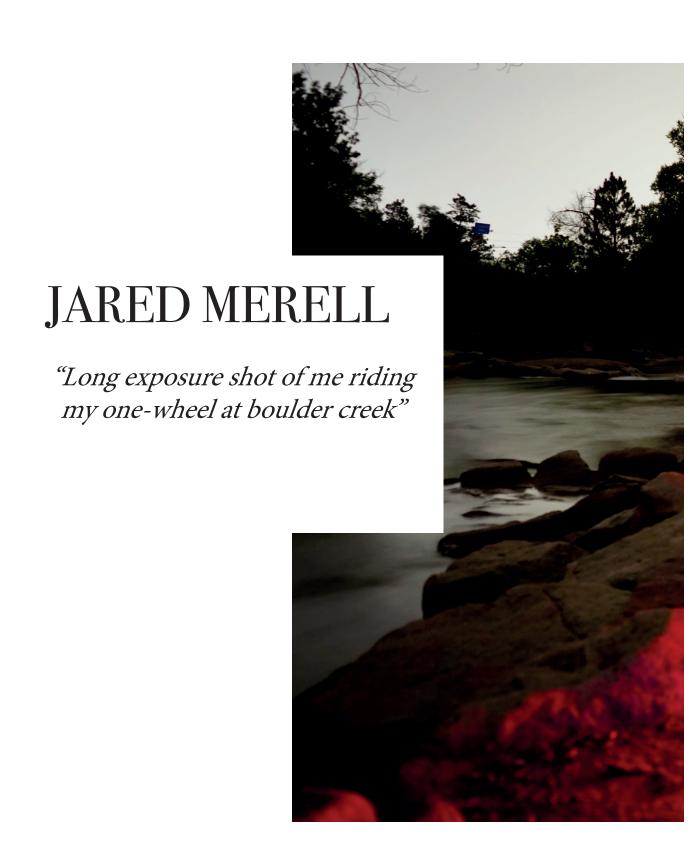
Maya Pavelin



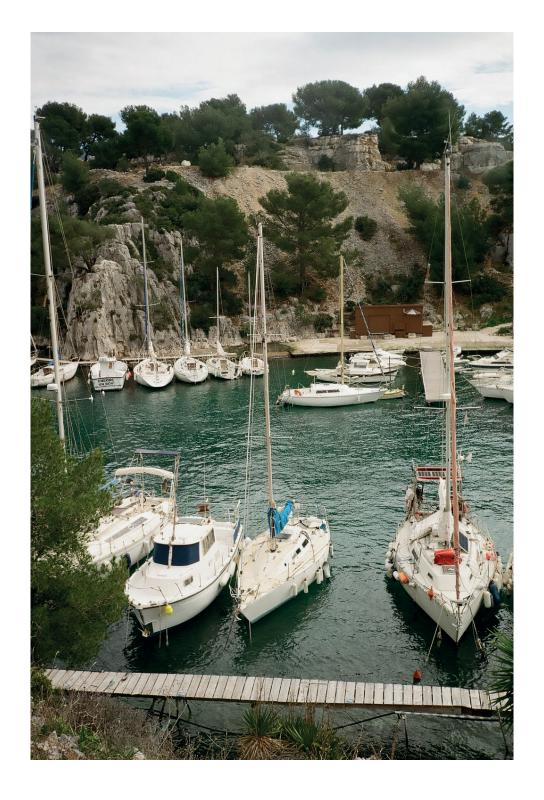
"During the pandemic, I completed a lot of paintings focused on the interiors of homes because that was what everyone was seeing a majority of the time, and I found a lot of beauty in the old homes around Boulder. This acrylic piece came from my obsession with the gorgeous old wood flooring in my musician friend's room. His guitar case can be spotted in the far right of the painting, and I recreated a few of his iconic stickers. I fell in love with the contrast between the white walls, the deep wood, and the unique rug pattern. The title was inspired by a sticker on the guitar case that pictured a cartoon mascot with the words "I Don't Smoke.""













# ANAFRANCESCA CURRY

CASSIS & LUBERON

"A rainy day in the French countryside on 35mm film."





I'm watching the sunset right now at Crystal Cove Beach and I wish you were here. It is the type of sunset that consumes you and the whole sky with it, changing every minute. Greens, orange, every shade of blue, pinks, and yellows. The somber, navy blue clouds shift to purple only when they reunite with the water. On both sides of my body the sunset is narrowing into the center of the ocean, and as I look straight forward the colors begin to soften and blend into one, the outline of the clouds disappearing in harmony with the color. Despite me usually being disgusted by seagulls on land, I find so much serenity watching them now. Their tiny black shadows traveling in the sky make me envious they can float in the light above while I can only swim in the water below. I think you would agree with me that the period between the changing of the seasons is when sunsets are the most intense; the relationship between the fog as it devours the ocean adds an element of drama, right? The waves crashing against the rocks is the ocean's language and it is something I have become very fluent in.

It is a numbingly powerful feeling being at the end of my day at the same time the world is choosing to end as well. I can see the moon and the sun clinging to each other before they say goodbye. I can see the exact point where the day meets the night in such a peaceful yet intense handoff of a moment. It's weird that even though my day is ending I am more awake than I have been all day. The cold front that greets me as soon as the sun disappears gently moves my hair to greet me. The dewy smell coming from the swells of the ocean and my sea-salt covered skin from a day of swimming pierces my nose so acutely I can almost taste the ocean. The sound of the whitecaps crashing onto dry land is as peaceful as the whisper of an angel but as commanding as a battle cry.

I feel like I am the only one at the beach. The only one who has ever been to this beach or sat at this rock. Every moment I experience has an impact on me that is greater than zero. And because of this I do not need to "seize the day" every day. Some moments, as quickly as being in complete darkness of the night when the light is revealed to me through the passing planes in the sky could change my life as much as looking into someone who I love's eyes and seeing the light there.

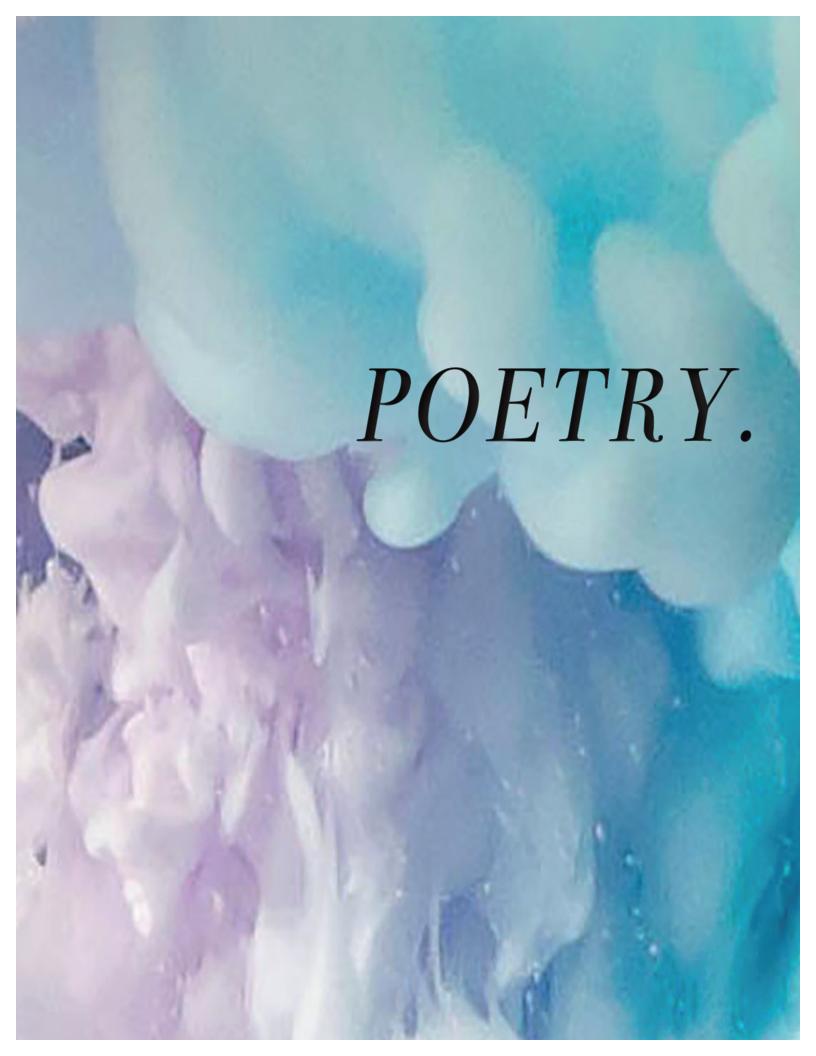
I watch the sunset almost every night but none of them compare to you. I can't find the right word to describe it in this moment, but maybe I can let you know tomorrow when I come back and live it all over again.

I feel the warmth. I feel you here with me.





"My younger sister Lieselle is the opposite of me: reserved, cautious, ethereal. I find her most often quite pensive, contemplating life in a state of reverie. By one look at her, like a white butterfly, she reminds me of my softness. I hope that when she looks at herself she sees much more than what is just in the mirror."





#### PTERYLAE Ava Morgan

Maman was a bird woman—flighty, and "fettered" to the ice box.

Pickled eggs and gurgled styrofoam cracks. Pectinate pickings and sauerkraut stench.

When did we three meet again?

I remember only red bricks and rain.

Craft-paper antennae stitched to headbands, tutus peeling underhand into pine needles.

Lilted morning song merged with my bearded crowings but met with Mama's glare, ruffled underpinnings.

If my destiny had always manifested dress, why did the thunderbolt smooth like clay in my hands?

My shame in my very beak. Fragile boughs of juniper berry jars. The trees branching into church pews. A fallen chick in the grass.

And what then, what then? Gone are my halcyon days, Maman. *D'elle à iel*. I'm sorry.

Hands broke the chick's breastbone, splattered bleat and lightning flash—fluidity replaced my lace beginnings, alkaline screech and acid breath drums replaced the stoic beat—raw howl and muscle wake

> I pressed the broken flesh to tongue and feathers dissolved into beast.

# A WALK TO PERU Zoe Schacht

I would walk to Peru with you
A quick weekend trip
You
Me
We
Us
Our feet calloused and sore,
When we'd get tired we'd find an ocean to lay near
The tide kissing our toes
would sing us lullabies
You would hum along
You are the sea
Never balanced
Never calm
Always drawn to the shore to find me
You'd crash
break
drown
ME
you
we
us
Aliens
foreign
Our tongues tied to our native language
hungry for fear
to feel uncomfortable
uncomfortable together
me, we
you, us
I'd walk anywhere with you

#### AN ODE TO SOLITUDE

#### Morgan Sierra Brown

I have found solitude one of my better companions.

In my younger years, it was kindly remarked to my mother my tendency to drift from the other children.

Dragging pink fingers along wired fence.

Unleashing the dandelions.

The desire of seclusion, felt at times even amongst the beloved. Wilting eyes, dulled face, spell of delay appear of insult.

I beg:
an exhaustion
of articulation, tread.

With oneself, accountable to none,
there is ascent to the dreamt.
Tracing a past home
or elementary school,
encountering the ghosts of those once known.
Reminiscence of the sweetened ease.
Recalled are the nights worth remembrance,
even those of solace.
the nights thought ruinous ease with age
Ah, for don't the thoughts of youth seem mad now, grown we are?

Even the absence of any thought at all, besides the presence of task.

A clearing of dregs indeed, those of resentment or melancholia.

For reckoning is best conceived crystalline.

I hold less concern as time continues that some assume this disposition an affliction. For I possess in my relative youth my truths of person and purpose.

For rumination, that is the propellant of maturation.

# ART SUPPLIES LIST

#### Kenlie Rohrer

pain and canvas
Tubes of orangepeel, lime, and chrysanthemum

Petals from the loins of those supermarket flowers

Perhaps blue, perhaps purple

Something unnatural,

That is seldom found in nature Herself

And a pain brushed, three new and wooden

Flesh striped bamboo, encased in a plastic sleeve; sinew

Perhaps a clock to wander the aisles

#### MERMADIA Dylan Carpenter

today, my unapologetic legs
stroll down pavement that will
be here long after I am gone and
I use my satisfactory lungs to
savor every molecule of the
autumn air that is fixed in its freshness.
seasons are much like scales on a fish:
already dying from the moment they take shape.
and I wonder why ice has those same properties;

if my own body would tragically dissolve
when left in the ocean long enough.
but children's books still tell the tale
of tails so much different than ours.
like how a mermaid's bottom half can
sparkle — completely star-crossed.
what kind of fate do the cosmos tell about plastic,
then, when such an entity seems deathless like a star?
or about the way the waves stand just a little higher each year,

on their tippy-toes beating against foreign walkways.

if a fish were to stand on their tippy-fins, gasping for air,
dwindling like a season, shedding scales and hope entirely,
what kind of book cover would suit them best?
would children still envy the sea?
good news is like Atlantis to me.
constantly searching for a buoy to tether myself to,
but sometimes I go overboard before I get the chance.
I spiral in gyres and shiver under coolcurrents —

with nothing but my useless legs. but how lucky I am

to inhale grievance and exhale sympathy. that my own lungs

will never know what it's like to live in a place where the air

is grainy and the space is hostile. how lucky

I am to be scaleless, gill-less, clueless.

it is said that we know more about space than

we do our own oceans, perhaps because it is

more exciting to look through every corner of

a treasure chest than a trash can.

but I wonder if mermaids know anything about us —
whether we are the aliens that have come to exterminate them
or just another unforgiving god. what if some alien race decided
to sprinkle wrappers on our heads until our babies' babies
had bendy straws for arms and plastic bottles for hearts,
cycling microbead after microbead throughout their
cardioplasticular system? I wonder how I would fair with a tail —
and should I come across the Mariana Trench, I wonder what I would do.
to go deeper, confronting the unknown, or to press my back against another

familiar sand bar full of yesterday's grocery bags
and rotting friends and family. I hear the beeps
from the self-checkout aisles and feel the rustling of
synthetic bags under my fingertips. how one
man's grocery run can be another mermaid's cause of
death. I become wrapped
up in thoughts like these. a net that follows me everywhere,
capturing me over and over again — setting me free,
catching me, stabbing an ice pick through my head,

feeding me to the masses, repeat, relentlessly.

yet, like words on a page, dew on a perfect amphibian,

it may get old but never dull. more than anything I pray
that mermaids are not real. because the plot
they would find themselves in is crueler than
anything any storybook could ever draw up —

because the treatment that real-life characters just like turtles and dolphins,

you and I are experiencing is simply unreal. so, after the fairytale ends,

I sigh, with tired lungs:

relief that it was all just fake, synthetically speaking

let down that I am beached in my own impotence.

noting that mermaids are the safest in our minds.

### **INTERZONES**

#### Kenlie Rohrer

Vortex waves through water of the worlds where spindled spines of lace trickle and tally. Floating among those vapid whorls find shrimp-fish, glowing iridescence, dust lay gently atop, a soft mud-foam.

Drunken mermaids submerged in clammy pearls and a darkness spread further in the deep bellows points within a point, a lodged starfish there.

Cave bats, shrunken and ear-bitten, shrivel as they lie naked in a turquoise cove. Worming their way through the waters, a bath of warm memories; fungal milk and learning to clip one's leather wings, snubbed of their own wilted waking. Tilting, near and there, among the interzones.

a clambering, a longing only to see: to jump.

# "BIRDS" Kenlie Rohrer

the day it snowed birds the day the sun died smoldered soot and candle flames burnt out to a lingering wisp cast out felonies: summer turned to ash in my hands to snow; clear water in a tin cup and the birds began, to fall they had wings of clipped ivory a blankness in their eyes a blackness colder than any ice to salvage yet any one life was something I could not muster as they tumbled down the sky their white bodies; of course, all white; whipped, protruding. they looked like bones of small children, spring animals borne only to die at winter's frost.

# PEARL ONION

#### Kenlie Rohrer

the stately dire need of the glassy, milkweed surface was breathing at me: heavy words, like that of a snowfall so thick and blank you couldn't hear your own ears, smudged with that tarnish of a hot and bothered new year's night, smoldered upon the quilt of bad ideas, turned to spinning evenings, and you only a drop of sick in an amber cup but it was tall, and spindly looking almost looked it was made of diamond of water rushing up from the ground and it caught you, a gushing fountain a raving gully, and brought you up with it flung from the open wings of misery, it was I who kept you, dashed to the dregs in a leathery red dress, etched skin-like as a rash upon your tanned skin. drunk in a chipped jade bathtub,

# **POSESSION**

#### Beau Farris

the earth pirouettes like a single mother the moon's surface lacerates like a chalkboard the mariana trench mangles like a father's hand the pacific devours like a deceased photograph the himalayas escalate like an empty gas tank the great barrier reef dwindles like an anxious fingernail the chihuahuan desert chars like a new pornographer the grand canyon burrows like a used pillow the victoria waterfalls overflow like an acquainted armchair the old faithful geyser descends like a stray bullet the everglades stagnate like an abandoned bar the great lakes divorce like a final handshake the mauna loa volcano bleeds like a school uniform the mekong river embosoms like a colored pencil the hubbard glacier abstracts like a for sale sign the moab arches harmonize like a string of shopping carts the mammoth cave echoes like a hospital waiting room the morro rock beach hosts like a tattered treehouse the puget sound inlet extends like a lunch buffet the giant's causeway staggers like a sick toddler the verdon gorge exposes like a power outage the black forest molts like a political talk show the cliffs of moher drift like a church casserole the uyuni salt flats beam like a broken mirror the pulpit rock tethers like a secondhand suit the giant sequoias stabilize like a skyscraper suicide the matterhorn patronizes like a new cane the galápagos islands poke like a sex-ed class the ngorongoro crater scoops like a poem's reader

# IT'S SORT OF A RELIGION

#### Beau Farris

to be a child in an open field. fingers and hair digging down the dirt desperate for soil, and nothing more. swaths of grass uprooted like broken eye contact. when did my hands stop plunging into the snake's den? those black coils promised perfection. now my shoulders poke through the tall grass

and a bare path shuns my agnostic bare feet. maybe it's less dramatic when my eyes could not differentiate one reptilian eye and used a stolen scalpel to sever snake scale from entrail: a communion between my fingers and dead organs.

curiosity probably didn't belong to the cat. even looking back to the life I've disassembled, my hands cover my mouth like two hands make the steeple. the entails of dawn paint wheat red, but I've conditioned myself to look away. when adolescence meant

taking apart bodies like the remote control. my fingers organized into someone else's to see how their flesh worked, like a prayer between bird wings. falling.

# ANTHROP GHAZAL

#### Beau Farris

When this year's second hottest day starts raining, my dog drinks from divots in a toolbox. I watch her lap collected drops: the anthrop

ocene isn't far off. A new epoch, as defined by geologists, in which Earth has been altered so dramatically by an ocean of anthrop

ologist's warnings: ozone alert. Nevertheless my gas canister empties into the mower. I cut the grass and she runs through anthrop

ocentric grass lines, four paws avoid spinning blades. Bone in mouth, maybe a last ditch effort to save tusks from bonfire? Anthrop

omorphic? If the third planet had arms like its conquerors, would it pluck us one by one, or limb by limb, until it was natural again? It could feed us, anthrop

ophagy style, differing from cannibalism. It is the flesh of humans to be eaten. How much to feed her, when factories devour countries like kibble. Immeasurable, unless anthrop

ometry: the distance between my body and the steering wheel to avoid an airbag. The distance between my body and the exhaust is inconsequential. An anthrop

osophy. Not believing in me. Not wishing to be you. Yearning to touch. Learning the bumps and grooves of the scars and grass. Listen to me, anthrop.

# **MEMORIES IN QUOTES**

#### Katherine Storm

#### FRIDGE POETRY

swinging through

another tornado listening

for the quiet

M turns to me

Her smile lighting up

My heart

As it has countless

Times tonight

She points to her poetry

Pieced together on my fridge

And proudly shows

Her thoughtful addition

She must have stood

In in front of my fridge

For ten minutes

Maybe more

Deciding the perfect words

To string together

For with M

All words

Must have meaning

I wonder how

It is possible someone

So thoughtful

So breathtaking

As her

Can fall for someone

So lost

So breathless

As me

#### SNAPPLE FACTS

"Real Fact" #931

The nothingness

of a black hole

generates a sound in the key

of B flat.

We double over laughing, and H asks

"Is it a scale in B flat, or the specific note?"

L responds that they do not know,

how could they know?

How could anyone know

What a black hole sounds like?

How could anyone know

But Snapple?

We have been sitting in our park

The sun is creeping away

And we have refused to leave

Refused to walk away until

Our fingers grow numb

From the cold

From the poetry

From the tarot

From the painting

L writes of me

H reads for L

And I paint H

These are the afternoons

Which make us feel

Infinite

Found

Eternal

Complete

These afternoons in the park

With Snapple facts

With graphite stained fingers

With paint smudged clothes

With tarot shaped words

#### CHOCOLATE POETRY

Extreme Dark from I Love Thee

I love thee, as I love the full, Clear gushings of the song,

Which lonely--sad--and beautiful--

At night-fall floats along...

Eliza Acton

I gave him this poem
Though I did not know it
For it came wrapped
Inside the safe sleeve
Of a chocolate bar.
I gave him this poem
In that chocolate bar
Though for what
I do not remember.

To me, it was nothing
To him, it was everything.
He wrote the poem
Again and again
On his typewriter
Only to regift the words
In a letter containing
Words of love

I do not remember.

I do not know what to call him

So I call him nothing
He could be an old friend

He could have been nothing He could have been everything

But he lost all right
To to be called friend

For his actions

I choose not to remember.

#### SONG LYRICS

I always sing the line "Creature only" as "Creature hold me."

It changes the whole meaning

Of the song for me From being molded

By God

To being molded

By someone you're in love with

A text sent to me By M at 3:36am I don't think I will ever know

What was going through

Her mind

When she sent it But I fell in love with The words she sent

A week later we stood In my kitchen again

Cooking another vegan dish And she played the song

And sang along

Her voice leading her movements

I burned the tofu

For I couldn't take my eyes

Away from her joy

The song in its intended meaning

Made her uncomfortable
For to be saved by God
Was not something
She had grown to know
In her years at the church

She was not found Instead she blossomed Beneath a rainbow of pride

#### POPSICLE JOKES

How does the ocean greet the beach?

It waves

We used to be able to Laugh at anything

Fits of giggles would come No matter the occasion With any small joke From any tiny print On a popsicle stick

We used to be able to Talk about anything

Hidden away and protected by The branches of our tree house Which still stands by my home

Built in a labor of love Kept by a labor of trust

We used to be able to Dream of anything

Grand schemes were planned

In the dim lights

Of sleepover excitement Never to be ruined

By the rising sun

Things have changed Things have changed.

We no longer have

Popsicle stick jokes Only our jokes Forged by years

Of trust
Of friendship
Of love

#### FORTUNE COOKIES

Take a chance
On that big decision
You've been pondering

M laughs at the paper

Which begins to crumple in her hand "But I don't have a big decision!"

She exclaims through laughs

Her breath creating shadows

In the cold February air

We are sitting in my car As we often find ourselves

Finishing a meal

Of dumplings and soup
With tea and french fries
And fortune cookies

We are in the parking lot
Of the ice skating rink

Which resides in my hometown

For an hour we glided Freely on the ice Chipped and cracked

Never before while skating

Have I held hands And not fallen But with M We are together In every sense

Fortune cookie crumbs Littering the floor Our breath filling the air

I know I have The easiest decision

To lean in

# THE SAILOR AND THE SEA

## **Emily Archambault**

They always blame the sailor
When a body is found at sea
Because one plus two could simply not
Equal anything but three
While a leviathan stirs beneath
Poseidon's breath casts salty breeze
It's the sailor's hands called red
And so he crashes upon the lee

What enduring wonders they are ignoring! Blind by reason (logic's whoring) See the faults of truth outpouring Anchors up, let's go off-shoring Songs and shanties will steal your breath Stomp and holler one plank from death Here souls and waves both come abreast So keep your spirits and leave the rest The world's different in these waters Full of monsters, siren's daughters Odysseus calls and Ahab wanders Mermaids flirt with pirate's slaughters It's magic, darling, understand To be born of what's beyond the sand And with this power the tides command We see at sea and go blind on land

So look a little closer!

Beyond the pale, another door

And one plus one plus two plus one

Begins to equal four

Feel the centuries churn below your feet,

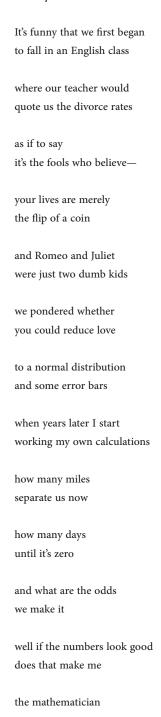
Take your last glimpse of the shore

A man turns to you and nods,

The sailor lives on one day more

# THE OTHER SIDE OF THE EQUAL SIGN

## **Emily Archambault**



or the fool?

# UNTITLED POETRY COMPILATION

## Evangelyne Eliason

SEPTEMBER 19, 2021 @9:49PM bound

berceuse

it seems i've found by an invisible chain a quiet place between me & my past

deep within me perhaps some things are better left unsaid

that has allowed me

to make peace or maybe it was all just in my head

with

so used to compliments

SEPTEMBER 19, 2021 @11:41PM about the chain dangling from my neck

the cost of empathy but a noose made of diamonds & pearls is

it is both a blessing & a curse
to hear unspoken words still a noose

to taste the bitterness of hidden pain ~ee

to hold an entire universe SEPTEMBER 26, 2021 @10:19PM

a galaxy of promise a soliloquy

a nebula fraught with emotions that are "another day" not your own and it's that same story

that same record on repeat

too tender

too gentle bitterness & fear and maybe just a little too broken for this anger & despair

shattered world trying to eat me alive—from the inside out

to the quiet soul it's silent battles like these

that swallows the blows of this world that ignite a deep longing within me so as to absorb its harshness longing for all the things i cannot have

and spare others from its bitterness

perhaps

guard your body i'm lonely, but not alone

your soul

and your mind perhaps

or else you will most certainly i'm lost, but not trapped

poison yourself perhaps

~ee i'm limping, but i'm not broken

SEPTEMBER 23, 2021 10:49AM not yet

sonder

and just like that i guess we'll see if tomorrow is yet

im free of every anchor "another day"

that used to hold me down ~ee

letter a leader on racism crazy how nobody tells you stolen souls they should still be here that true leadership is a battle why did you have to die? against your greatest demons black bodies a fight sold, beaten, raped, murdered. against those voices that say sold? i am not good enough or i will never make it fucking racism. heavy is its burden a journey costly is its price that breaks you down in just the right places pervasive are its fruits chipping away at your sturdy walls fucking privilege. leaving nothing behind but a raw "what about the property", they said "what about the noise", they said and vulnerable soul you're mad cuz you can't sleep what can i say to a leader? but go. i cant for where you go, is where you grow breathe ~ee OCTOBER 3, 2021 @12:19AM true love OCTOBER 9, 2021 @12:25AM i wonder what it means cu student government to be held im trapped in a system by someone's eyes that makes us alone cannibalize ourselves ~ee crumbling from the inside out OCTOBER 10, 2021 @12:13AM stolen secrets her epiphany maybe turns out i can't save the world everybody is wrong all i can ask is but if i could help just one soul where is the student body? maybe that person is ~ee

OCTOBER 5, 2021 @12:25AM

~ee

OCTOBER 1, 2021 @12:19AM

OCTOBER 9, 2021 @11:39AM

obetice

i am silent. silenced. but for long?

~ee

OCTOBER 31, 2021 @2:39PM

*anesthesia* i heard that

music is what feelings sound like

thank god for melodies and

minor keys

for they capture the pulse of human emotion

in a way that human language

cannot ~ee

NOVEMBER 2, 2021 @11:31PM

solitary confinement i often question

if i want to be loved if i want to be held if i want to be seen

i think i want it.

i do.

to be love to be held to be seen

i thought i wanted it.

do i? ∼ee NOVEMBER 6, 2021 @8:33AM

the paradox no matter what you've been through i believe you

~ee

NOVEMBER 24, 2021 @9:16PM

narcissistic trauma

in the delicate limbo between the seen and the unseen

all opposition has been silenced, but

she knows.

slyly, he smiles

knowing his tactics have always gone undetected, but

she knows

she won't forget because the body remembers what the mind has erased

~ee

NOVEMBER 26, 2021 @1:40AM

untitled

the past is just as it seems — passed i can hold space for the girl i once was now, i trust i will catch myself when i fall

i'm safe now.

love out loud

there's nothing worse than

love in the dark

~ee

#### NOVEMBER 26, 2021 @11:57PM

joy?

a smile

a sunrise

a warm embrace

all of which will become

foreign

if you become addicted

to your own sadness

~ee

NOVEMBER 27, 2021 @11:34

disillusionment - pt. two with all of the anguish suffering & sorrow in this world

the flag should

always

be half-mast

~ee

NOVEMBER 28, 2021 @8:45PM

dolente

when you overflow

it will be with

whatever is already

inside of you

~ee

NOVEMBER 30, 2021 @3:58AM

synthesis

like a compass with no direction or a map that leads to nowhere

the message is simple

if you do not choose yourself

you will lose yourself

now, scramble to gather the fragmented

pieces of your broken mirror if you hurry, then perhaps

you will still see

your reflection

~ee

# **LUCY'S POEM**

#### Trie Hall

Suns rise and set in outlines
Of a single day, hot in form
and function
Moons come to follow
Eye winking slowly, a lazy cat
peering down

Watching brush and grass and us
Together we whisper as one
out of tune
We stand still, alone
Millions of years, together at once
all the same

We work hard to survive them Each frightening day and gentle night
and evening
But not the morning
The creeping heat wakes up our bodies
Gently, like lovers' hands
and teeth

But here, are we not alone?
Our bodies house us, are our own a comfort
In a world where death
Reaches out; Our only guarantee waits to bite

Or are we known and loved?
Our bones we have left behind us hidden gifts
Our deaths a blessing
To make way for you and your children
Are you loved?

I can stand beneath the stars
And watch the lights far above me
tamed fires
Trapped in place and time
As me, and my kind, will surely be
all too soon

Perhaps I don't want to go
I am not ready to leave this
sacred place
With the snakes and cats
And the beasts who lie in wait for me
And my kind

I can imagine my body
Buried down in the earth below
slowly rotting
While my bones settle
In loving hands, tender and in awe
and full of wonder.

# ARE YOU THE STORM?

## M.Rapp

I look into his eyes
The moon hangs
High above the mossy trees
The marsh howls
The night birds hum warning
Black bruise sky sickness stomach twisted

They are green, soft

His palms upwards, extended towards mine

The clouds, grey, charcoal, soft, breakable, churn
engulf

My fingers smudge the charcoal, the earth crumbles, the wind throws fistfuls of hair in my face
ghosts linger

Tornado swept ravage rip revenge

The golden wheat is stripped from the fields by the wind

Mud clump body, lagoon lungs

Earth worms wiggle, suspended between water and moon

Birds' nests splinter, speckled eggs crack open too soon

The swamp clasps its hands around my ankles

The mountain crackles, ancient, cold, dull, stone groans

The crickets scream, the trees try to speak but their wooden lips cannot move
So leaves break way from branches as they shake
Roots gasp, grasp for something to hold onto
Sound sinks into lake, water still, void, viscous mirror that
Swallows moon and reflection whole

My veins are split root searching Fingertips frayed spidersilk Knees scratched dirt I find myself praying

I am afraid that I am only answering myself

Ears underwater flood bubble warp

Arms limp, frozen

I wiggle, suspended between water and moon

I long for the dry, powder, sunbaked soil
Wildflowers like thorny blankets
Clouds cushioned parasols
Rocks recluded tanning beds
The sun's palms reddening my cheeks with his touch

But I do not know where the storm ends If,

# 7:23 AM Abigail McCreedy

Chasing after the sun felt relentless

The odds of blindness and 3rd degree burns

99% chance of rain

But wouldn't it be a complete waste of time

Wouldn't you call me a fool

If I didn't try to clear the clouds

Open my umbrella

# LAVENDER DREAMS

# Abigail McCreedy

Remind me tomorrow Today I want to play Alice Trip on caterpillar dreams

Today I feel like lavender and lilac tea Serenity in the air, responsibilities royally fading Is it foolish to wish for impossible things?

Remind me next week
What I need are morning glories, lupus, cosmos,
balloon flowers, serendipity adventures

Hey I'm talking to you little girl the self that never ages Promise me to never trade in your imagination

Remind me in a couple months Still, I'm honeysuckle stuck Who do you wish to become?

Life seems to gravitate away from meditation

Remind me never Today I became Alice Found the white rabbit

I bought a plane ticket to places with more windows and naps Argentina, Japan, New Zealand, France

I think I'll be happier with the flowers

# THROAT AND LUNGS

## Abigail McCreedy

You fell like a flower weeping by Wednesday wilted on Friday

You were stage three on Sunday spreading and infecting faster than a wildfire

Lungs to ashes a cough like gunfire hair falling faster than a hummingbird's flutter

Wondering if you deserved the end of your serials, terminal with season four

Carcinogen fuming.

Laying in white hospital sheets you told me you saw God and Rama that second time around You would eat green peas drink chamomile tea

You died on Friday You were green last Sunday I hope you found a heaven where only health spreads

# HEARTSICK FACEBOOK

## Abigail McCreedy

I am so tired of mourning people who are not dead

The man at whole foods who helped me with red wine I'll never see his freckles again

My dog who's aged 77 to make us feel better we call him 11

The boy who broke my heart in June I watch his face resemble pixel eulogies

My mother 35 wrinkle less and the way she loved to run

In 2003 when the only money we cared about was avengers monopoly

The old blue spruce whose branches I use to swing 1,000 miles away from me

Cydnie Green from high school Her facebook page says she's doing okay Recently turned 28

The measuring tape at seven who told me I wasn't tall enough to ride the Jersey Devil coaster

The kids from college who swore to never grow up got jobs and grew apart

I long for lemon drop shots and loath

Staring at screens Seeing lives play out from afar

I become so exhausted, mourning people who are still alive.

## DO NOT EAT YOUR FRIENDS

#### Sarah Bian

#### ARTIST STATEMENT

Disclaimer: This poem in no way encourages self-harm or auto-cannibalism or the cannibalism of others. Please do not hurt yourselves or others, and please do seek help, treatment, and support if you do.

Many people don't realize that working ourselves past our limits is a form of self-harm. When we strain ourselves past a healthy level for our goals, we can damage ourselves and our bodies in the process. I wrote this poem to describe that feeling of burnout and the desperation that comes at the price of your body. This is a prevalent issue, especially in the world of academics. Some examples are refusing yourself sleep, food, or relief until you accomplish a task, taking on more work or stress that you are physically able to endure, competing and comparing yourself constantly with peers or mentors, or enduring long, extended periods of mental and physical exertion. We often praise hard work and discipline, claiming that ultimately, accomplishing our goals justify the sacrifices we make along the way. In a way, I thought it sounded like praising hunger while denying your body its basic need for food.

I wanted to describe the feeling of being so utterly hungry that you start to eat yourself.

However, please do refrain from consuming your flesh or the flesh of your friends! There are better, more nutritious sources of protein.

what organ holds all your want?
what hoards, man, c'mon what hoards your hunger?
your thirsting haunt, your wanting, your detente
of this aching, fucking gnawing
teeth of stomachs, weak with enough
enough you would think it would be enough

tongue, it tastes rust, degrees, and possession and it craves everything it tastes the rest in its obsessive chest compressions, i can't, i can't i can't breathe, in my ribs i could chew your ears off just to listen

i could eat you, all of it
your body, full of itself and stalls a bit
as I eat up the envy inside my ambition
oh my god, just fucking listen
to my stomach, louder than trachea
louder than my fucking fuck-me-up
I crave your flesh, and nothing! nothing less

arve out my liver, i can live without it
i can go live my life without myself to doubt it
clean out the insides, butcher up the cord
to the carnivorous bible, written on breadboard
i am a cleaver, so devout

now I need thyme

lemongrass, and fall, winter seasoning
garlic salt to stimulate and sting the bedbugs
that crouch upon my tongue
they crave my flesh too, you know, so

put the heat on simmer, and the hissing
of my precious liver kissing the body oil and body fat
a sexual ritual, habitual of my
tongue and something else, no, someone
somebody to whom I can gift my right-hand lung

when the meat is tendered, fat rendered and your hunger has not yet surrendered do not eat your friends

that is impolite

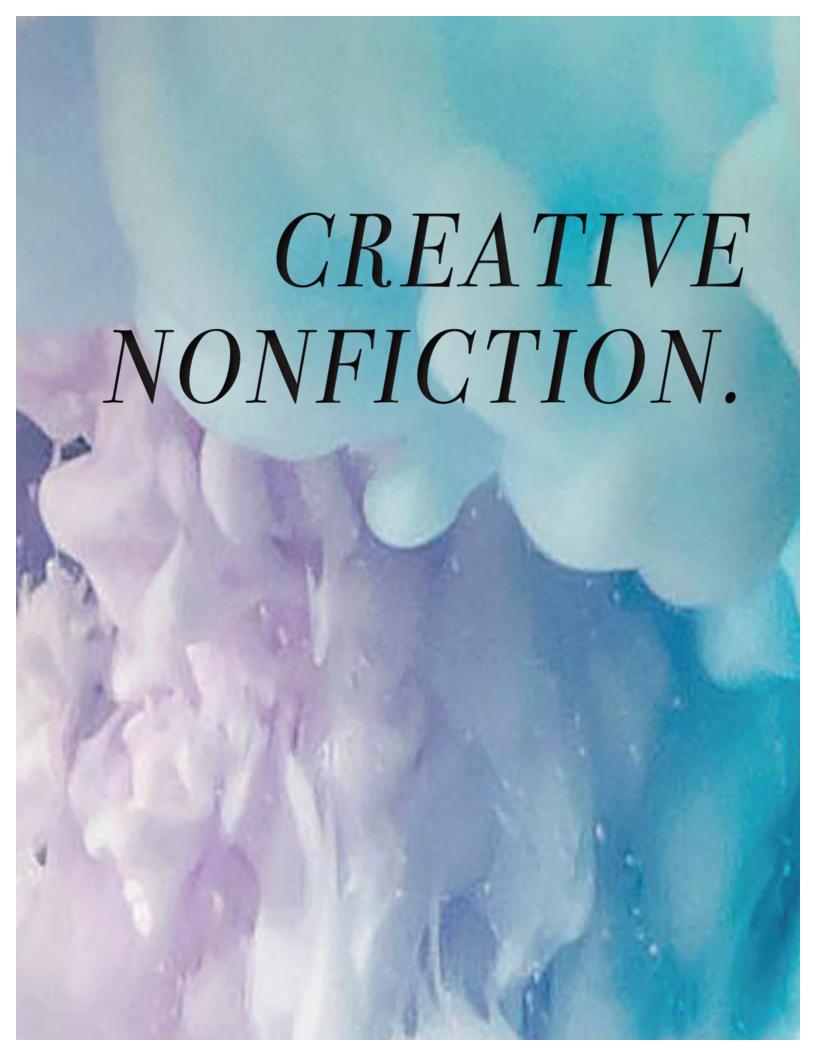
slightly wash your hands, and then, invite

them to sit, to fit them with a bib giddy, offer them a rib cage and then ask for wine this is what they mean by body fine

with knife and butter seduce the meat
don't be afraid to cut me
smother it with grave and biscuit
and eat it all, all of it
don't you dare fucking stop
you don't need no fork
nor knife nor bitter butter up
use your nails to cut it up
and lick your fingers
lick, or bite them off
the crunch of bones and fuck-me-up
suck off the flavor, the grease and bathe me
with your unsatiated tongue

i don't know what you're trying to taste from your insides in trying to diagnose what makes your hunger widen

seriously
hurry the fuck up, just swallow
do you now know
know which organ houses your hunger?
or will we have to eat another one?





## I LOVE YOU BUT

#### Makayla Sileo

My dad taught me what infinity meant when I was eleven. At the bottom of his birthday card I wrote, "I love you to the moon and back times a trillion gazillion double million," and in parentheses, the number one with too many zeros to count or even make sense. That is a lot of zeros, my sweetness, he said joyfully. Not enough, I responded, my hand cramped, but I pinky promise I love you more. He grabbed a napkin from the table and wrote "I love you to the moon and back times  $\infty$ ." It means I love you more than the human mind is capable of knowing. There is a potent unconditionality to infinity, and from that day on I simply assumed that all people knew it equally. But infinity is elusive and most people have never been given a napkin with unconditional love written on it.

\*\*\*

Ahmad is, by pure definition, a whole-hearted and unconditional lover of both people and life. I ran into him early one October morning when time was dragging and the air was biting and my heart wasn't much warmer. He said *boo* instead of hello, always playful, always smiling. I appreciated this, as the morning was much too lonely. We were good friends, but not too good, ones that spent hours together but the hours never seemed to add up because of the chatter and anonymity of the group. I liked him though, thoroughly.

As we chatted, I noticed that his eyes smiled even when his mouth didn't and so I stared at the wrinkles that formed where his joy was carried. Around us, life went on. The wind carried fallen leaves and their musty scent around our ankles. The quad had a particular hush about it, as if everyone was too sleepy to ease their wintery loneliness. Time and students passed from this building to that one. Neither of us seemed to notice that we were in the middle of the walkway—not because it was a love-at-first-sight kind of meet cute—but because he was a familiar face and so was I, and both of us were far from home; him from the UAE, me from myself.

He asked my major and my birthday, excited to tell me—an English major—about how he—an engineering major—wanted to write books because his mother loved to read, and I felt embarrassed to know him without knowing him. I want to write a love story about what happens after love, he told me. He glowed differently, idling in a fullness and passion that warmed me in the chilly morning air. All the books we read are about meeting and falling in love, but I want to write about grappling and maintaining the love you are in. He told me he loved a girl back home, but that he still didn't know enough about love to write the story. My country never learned how to respect women and so I wasn't allowed to love her in public. The truth was bitter: public love—and public love without conditions—is a privilege, a privilege that Ahmad was not afforded.

As we stood there he told me stories, stories of intricate richness, but his tone remained eerily casual. I held onto his every word, desperate to escape into a good conversation with a good human. He spoke mostly of his younger sister and how he calls her each morning. He showed videos of her dancing or singing, desperate to show off what he loved, desperate for someone to see a piece of his home. He told me how he graduated high school and went into the military where he burned a hole through his hand after swinging into an open window and down a thick rope. He explained how he couldn't dress himself for weeks after simply because he had been scared of the heights and wanted to be on the ground as quickly as possible. After graduating, Ahmad went to Minnesota for a year to learn English, which he arrived knowing nothing of but is beautiful at now. His tutor had a crush on him. I just needed to get an 80% on the language exam in order to go to university in America, he went on. His mom wanted nothing more than for her children to study in the States, so Ahmad got an 88%.

Ahmad asked—him being the oldest sibling—if I was spoiled to be a younger sister. As we walked, I thought of my later curfew and gas tank that was somehow always filled. Yes, I said, yes I suppose I was. He said his little sister was spoiled too. He asked me if American fathers beat their daughters like Emirati fathers beat their sons. My sister was never beaten either, he said, you both are lucky.

\*\*

Fireflies are good luck, my sweetness, my dad responded every time I asked why people caught them in mason jars. At the young age of four, I simply could not imagine how imprisoning anything would make it better. Bugs built with wings lost their freedom for someone else's temporary enjoyment. I turned the page of the picture book for him, indicating that I wanted him to keep reading; I was never the patient type. Most nights went like this. My parents took turns at who came into my room each night and I loved them equally and so every night my room was saturated with love. My childhood bedroom was plastered in purple heart wallpaper that said "love" in different fonts, and before I could read, I was tracing that word and learning it by heart and every night they kissed my forehead I re-learned that word. Night and night again, after my mom went to bed my dad would gather my sister and me on the bed to read "Dads are for Catching Fireflies", and every night my dad would cry. Why are you crying, Daddy, I would ask, It's a happy book! He always answered, It is happy, my sweetness, it really is.

\*\*\*

After a bit of time, we walked back to the dorms together, because I was cold and Ahmad needed to go to the dry cleaners to get his suits pressed. I hate wearing suits, he told me. When I asked why, he said that he only wore suits on Christmas day, and Christmas was the one day he had to stand next to his father in their family portrait and pretend that they were equally respectable men. Ahmad asked if I loved my father and whether I called my father dad. There is a great distinction in what we value by how we call it.

I call my mom "Mama" and she has a beautiful spirit, one that hugs you no matter what. My dad has a colorful mind, one that is saturated in curiosity and a desire to understand. Not only was I never beaten, but I was often hugged. And I am convinced their love for me is what taught me how to hold myself. I never quite understood how Ahmad existed with such joy, grace, and kindness despite a faulty father. He is proof that a person is as significant and influential as one lets them be.

I was raised by family game nights and home-cooked sit-down meals, I was taken to the mountains to learn about myself, given an education to learn about everything else, and offered an infinity, not of time, but of love. While the most optimistic of people might assume that all people know and show love equally, there are distortions. This is something we cannot ignore, no matter how much we desire to. Love is a necessity, but also a privilege. It is people like Ahmad that are proof that conditional love does not always birth conditional love. It is people like Ahmad that keep hope kindled.

\*\*\*

Ahmad and I slipped back into talking about the weather. It was even colder now despite being closer to afternoon. It was time to go. *Goodbye*, Habibi, he said. I knew what that meant, having been told weeks earlier that it meant "my love" in Arabic, and I wondered how a boy could so easily say a word that he had rarely heard himself. I loved him for it, loved him for his ability to love despite his own deficit. He carried on, waved, whistled a bit, and shrugged as he walked away. Another day, another conversation, another story told. His words crept into my being, and I found both a deep sadness and infinite appreciation for the joy that pools in the corners of people's eyes as they speak of what they do have. He thought nothing of it, but I slept differently that night, and I love him for reminding me what a privilege it is to love and be loved.

# A SEA OF YOU

#### Natalie Fischer

I throw my phone across the room, hearing the thud as my door halts its flight. Underneath the sharp sound is something important, something irreversible, something more profound. In the ensuing silence, I hear it. The irrevocable crack that precedes the shatter. A sound that alters this moment, reverberating through my hunched body; a noise that transmutes my world, shaking me to my core. A shift that changes me. I will never be the same.

In the aftermath of the cataclysm, I lay amid the rubble. Broken trust. Broken friendship. Broken heart. Curled in the fetal position, my cheek is pressed against the soft sheets of my bed. My hands push against my chest in a feeble attempt to protect my heart as the dam inside me ruptures, and out pours the dark waters that were locked behind it. A tidal wave of memories, so profoundly mundane, rushes over me, drowning me with its savage force and dragging me out towards an apathetic and unforgiving sea. The jagged edges of my heart impede my resistance—I am so tired of treading these treacherous waters—I surrender.

I let the sea of memories sweep me away from the safety of the shore that day, from the security of ignorance and denial. And I sank. His voice floated to me through the murk, wrapped around me like a constrictor. A voice I loved, a voice I remembered but no longer recognized, a voice that saved me in my peril only to crush me in my safety. The voice of a ghost. "I think I'm losing my mind," I say to him through my hysterical, unguarded laughter. "Can't lose what you never had," he replies cheekily. Once and a thousand other times he'd teased me, laughed at me, with me. His voice was a dog-eared novel in the library of my mind. The echoes of it faded with each passing day, my memory of it washed out by time, like sand in the tide. A deafening silence took its place. In this absence of sound, I heard everything I should have said to him. I should have told him, could have a hundred times... My friend, you're scored on my heart...

The lost echoes of his voice drifted down the dark, sepulchral pathways of my memory, conjuring images of snow and ice. *Vanilla ice cream, homemade. Two parts white snow from his porch, one part milk, one part white sugar, all pure joy. His house, where I joke with his sister and bicker with his brother, where I play with his dog. Where we laugh together and banter and play Battleship... As the remnants of the memory lingered in my mind, I reflexively reminded myself to never play that game with you because you were a near-pathological cheater... before I ruthlessly righted myself: we would never play Battleship again.* 

The tide shifted, and I saw the two of us as we wandered side-by-side through a December morning. Snow decorates the drooping trees. It coats the frozen ground. The bitter chill kisses my lips. We pelt each other with snowballs, laughing, two kids without a care in the world—until he football tackles me into the snow. I am frozen through. We return to his house to watch movies together, arguing comfortably. We speak with familiarity, and share the effortless silences that come with comfortable companionship.

What happened to that companionship? I destroyed it. He always liked me as something more, always wanted to be more than friends, and I knew it. I knew it all along. I encouraged him to move on, to find someone else, because I knew that I'd only ever care for him platonically. I thought it was enough. I thought he was okay. Or maybe that's just the lie I told myself so that I would feel okay, that it was enough for me. How could I not see the pain I caused him? How could I be so selfish? I took his love for granted. Imprudently, I believed that love was, by nature, unconditional and eternal. Until the day came that I received a message that I (unaware) dreaded all along: he didn't like me in the way that he did before. I should have reveled. I should have celebrated for him, with him; I should have been unconditionally happy for my dear friend. But instead, I turned down a darker path, a road that would lead to a future without him.

Something took root inside me that day, something that metastasized and twisted and bloomed wickedly: fear. The parts of myself that were ugly and broken emerged, Hyde overtaking Jekyll. As the fear of losing him hounded and battered me like a sailboat in a storm, my center of gravity shifted. With the security of his unfaltering love no longer certain, I flailed for an anchor. And as is the law of the ocean, the more you struggle, the worse your situation becomes. Each day, my anxiety increased. I fretted ever more over each minute thing. I fed the fear, the monster within. My insecurities were projected onto him, bothersome and tiring. And he drifted further and further from me.

All objects have their breaking point, can only be pushed so far until they give. I stretched myself further, further, further...until I snapped. I wrote a letter, a letter that contained everything: my pain, my frustration, my excuses in the guise of past experience. A letter that contained nothing, because I didn't say the thing that mattered most. I didn't tell him how I felt about him.

I thought that I could walk away with that goodbye, but doubts plagued me, the what if's piling one on top of the other. What if it wasn't delivered, what if the address was wrong, what if, what if.

And finally I texted him. I asked if he'd gotten my letter. That should have been the end, I should have left it where it lay, but I had to

know. I had to know because that letter wasn't really a goodbye at all, it was a plea for reassurance, a shout into the void, a last desperate attempt to hold on. So I asked him. And when he just said "yeah", I said, "and...?"

And the floodgates opened. Torrents of scathing words and accusations and the most horrible, unimaginable belief, immovably implanted in his mind. My last vestige of hope was crushed that day, the pedestal that I had misguidedly built beneath him felled. "And...?" I type, breath uneven. His reply comes, and with it a world of pain: "And now I see that you were only using me all along. My family tried to warn me, and I didn't listen to them, but now I see."

Using him...to like me? Pretending to be his friend? Pretending to care? All the laughter and love and joy was reduced, mutated, obliterated by a terrible misunderstanding. My careless, foolish words twisted into something alien, a wretched and irreversible conclusion. It was the finality that was so difficult to absorb, the immutability of the outcome—I was helpless in the face of its wrath.

The May flowers bloomed as my heart wilted. The world burst to life in a plethora of vivid colors, but my mind was a study of gray. I tried to remember everything about him, to lock it in my heart, where it could never be lost. I found that those memories were guarded like a fragrant rose, surrounded by sentries of unforgiving thorns. I tried to forget, but that was even worse. An ocean cannot be held back through sheer force of will. And always, at the back of my mind, constant as the tide: What if he was right? What if I only used him, him with his short laugh and quick smile and heart of gold?

The month passed in a thousand agonizing minutes, time stretched and lengthened by the hands of regret. By the time I heard from him again, I was changed. Guilt and pain had eaten me away; I was living, but I was no longer alive. The true nature of his final texts was no mystery to me—the message was anything but opaque. "You weren't a great relationship in my life," he says to me. "I need time to process." This was not a promise, not an intimation of a brighter future. It was a goodbye. I knew it even then.

To continue to allow thoughts of him to fill my mind would have been to lose my sanity. Little by little, time and necessity helped me distance myself from my wounds, helped my mind heal. My guilt ceased to consume every waking moment as I gradually restricted thoughts of him to the deepest recesses of my mind, until he was barred from my conscious thoughts.

But my heart was not so easy. It is not subservient like the mind, but rather a rebel in the face of logic and reality. Every now and then, my defiant heart would remind me of this. He stands before me, smiling. He beckons from the doorway, inviting me back into his home. His life. His heart. I wake slowly, feeling at peace for the first time since I can remember. And then my conscious mind shakes itself awake, and I realize: it wasn't real. It was only a dream. Just another dream.

I've heard people say that pain is learning in disguise. There was no grand revelation for me, no cinematic 'lightbulb' moment. My lesson is a continuous process, a path without end.

Every day, some memory of him surfaces, rising like a specter from the restless waters of my soul. His name, spoken on the lips of my friends, crashes against my heart, and it hurts me. His legacy echoes down the carpeted high school halls at a deafening decibel, and it hurts me. His absence is evident everywhere I turn, the hole he left in my heart immeasurable, this hurts most of all. I feel the pain every day.

The pain is what saves me, my light in the darkest of places. I would not, could not, hurt like this if things were as he believed. My mind might be able to convince me that he was right, that I used him after all, that our friendship wasn't real, but my heart doesn't lie. He believed that I used him, when the truth is this: I loved him. He was one of the truest friends I've ever known. My love permeates every bittersweet memory, is evident in every moment of anguish I feel over his absence, overflows in my wounded heart.

Love and pain are two sides of the same coin. It was because I loved him that losing him hurt so terribly; it was the pain of losing him that made me realize how much I loved him. Pain is not a consequence of love, nor an excuse to harden one's heart against it. Pain is a crude token, won by those who have the courage to open their hearts to love in all its powerful, incomprehensible, and transient beauty.

But I didn't know any of this the day I threw my phone away from me, desperate to distance myself from his hateful words. The day I heard the crack of my heart shattering. The day the currents of change swept me out to sea. I would never be the same.

### THE DANCE OF LIFE: AS TOLD BY CARDINALS

#### Alexandra Moorhead

#### Definition

Cardinals are popular songbirds, credited for their beauty. So eye-catching are they that seven U.S. states call them their state bird ("Northern Cardinal: Life History").

#### Courtship

Courting consists of the male and female cardinals singing softly with their heads held high, swaying back and forth, in rhythm with the song (Kaufman).

#### Jitterbug #1

BJ and Jim's first date was actually not even a date. Instead, it was a double date. They came with two other partners, who are not important now. It was their first dance. Dancing along to the radio was free so, growing up poor with not much to do, Jim and his sisters were excellent dancers. His date was not.

"Do you know how to jitterbug?"

"No."

Looking across the table, his eyes landed on BJ, with her fiery red hair.

"Do you know how to jitterbug?"

"A little."

Next thing she knew they were out on the floor dancing the night away. Their original dates stayed sitting awkwardly, sullen about their pairs of two left feet.

#### Songbirds

"In summer, their sweet whistles are one of the first sounds of the morning" ("Northern Cardinal: Life History").

#### Songs

The next thing she knew, he was calling her and leaving messages with her roommates. BJ worked long hours and did not have an answering machine. She was getting tired of them asking, "Who's Jim?"

#### **Migratory Birds**

Cardinals are also one of the only birds in the northeast who tough out the winter, opting out of migrating to Florida ("Northern Cardinal: Life History").

Christmas in New England is almost concurrent with the beautiful red body of a cardinal backed by pure white snow. This wistful image is seen on almost as many Christmas cards as picturesque lighthouses framed by the white of the snow and cool blue of the ocean.

#### Migration

"You're going to be an old spinster." A taunt that BJ's brothers always launched at her. BJ, unhindered by this threat, decided to go to nursing school.

"When I was out of high school there were two options. Be a teacher or be a nurse, so I decided I guess I'd be a nurse."

The Peter Bent Brigham Hospital is where she went to school and later worked, only leaving in a spur of the moment decision so she and a friend could travel to Europe. As penny-pinching nurses, they took a boat, not a cruise, and decided to vacation until they were out of money. They elongated their stay to 3 months by residing 6 days a week in hotels without private showers, electing to wash their hair in the sinks. After coming back to Boston, they then made a slight detour to San Francisco, then finally back home to Boston, where she stayed, through the

snowy weather and cold nights.

#### Songbirds Revisited

Cardinals attract many people to the bird watching hobby not just because of their bright red plumage, but for their beautiful songs ("Northern Cardinal: Life History").

#### Songs Revisited

As head nurse of the coronary care unit she was a lot of things. Headstrong, knowledgeable, and determined to name a few. Her most admirable trait was her compassion. The many times she sat by the bedside of someone who was nearing the end of their life, she reassured their families that the last sense to go was hearing. Your dying child, brother, sister, mother, or husband could not taste or smell anything, see you, and could not feel you but, to their last faint beat of heart, they could hear you.

#### Treats

Long after BJ had ever had a dog, she still carried dog treats with her in her car. That way if she saw any dogs while she was out, she'd always have something to give to them.

#### Proposal

Their love story was not all roses and butterflies after that first magical not-date. Jim started ignoring her so, in her normal independent and stubborn fashion, she started seeing other people. Then one fateful night he called her, practically begging her to come to dinner with him. She conceded but in protest wore the ugliest dress she could find in her closet. That was the night he proposed.

Her answer, "I'll think about it."

#### **Mating Birds**

Many cardinals are said to mate for life (Kaufman, Kenn & Kimberly).

#### St. Louis Cardinals

The St. Louis Cardinals were given the name when "one day, Willie McHale, a sports reporter for the St. Louis Republic heard a female fan praise the color (of the players' socks) as a 'lovely shade of cardinal.' So, McHale called them Cardinals' ("1901 St. Louis Cardinals Roster").

#### Mates

She did think about it. She didn't have a choice. He'd call every day.

"Hello my beautiful red-head. I thought I'd help you make your decision, so I made a list of pros and cons of marrying me. I have a whole list of pros, but I can't come up with any cons."

#### **Food**

Male cardinals represent that "you are what you eat." Their red color is the result of the carotenoids in their diet (Clifford).

#### Beer

Jim loved his beer, but he was not a drunk. He had at least 2 drinks a night. Evidence of this was found in his leprechaun-like beer belly. However, every so often he'd go a week without any alcohol at all, just to prove, to himself, to the fates, maybe to God, that he could.

#### **Nest-Building**

Female cardinals are not as popular on Christmas cards. Their duller plumage doesn't hold a candle to the magnificent red of the male cardinals. However, the female's song is just as alluring, and she is the one who does the most building of the elaborate nest the family resides in ("Northern Cardinal: Life History").

#### Home-Building

After marriage and their first child, she said she was staying home.

There was no point in arguing with her.

She raised the kids; he raised a business. The bank laughed at him when he requested a loan. They thought never in a million years would that corner of Charlestown, overrun with crime and poverty, ever be an ideal place of business. Obstinate in his decision, he scraped together every penny. The building still stands, in a now flourishing part of town, a testament to their hard work and, more importantly, stands for how they strived to provide a great life for their children.

She did the bookkeeping—all the way up to 6 months before she died.

He was never able to shake off the aftertaste that getting evicted from his home as a child had left. Therefore, he worked for the company he grew from the ground up, all the way until the day he died.

#### Confidence

Puffing out their chests and standing with heads held high, cardinals can be seen as an extremely confident species (Clifford).

#### **Bullshit**

One of the traits Jim Balcam possessed that made him a stellar businessman was the ability to "baffle you with the Balcam Bullshit." He could sell a glass of water to a drowning man. After a meeting one day an adjuster said to my mother,

"It's so hard to say no to him when he looks at you with that big Irish smile."

#### **Nest-Building Revisited**

The female crushes twigs with her beak until they are workable. She then pushes them into a cup shape creating a four-layered nest. One layer with coarse twigs, then covered in a leafy mat, then lined with grapevine bark, and then covered finally with grasses, stems, rootlets, and pine needles ("Northern Cardinal: Life History").

#### Origin

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "cardinal" comes from the Latin word "cardo" meaning "hinge" ("Cardinal").

#### Home-Building Revisited

She remembered the names of all the people that he couldn't remember.

She used to paint his fingernails with clear polish. If he wanted to be a good businessman and make an impression, he couldn't show up to meetings with chewed-off fingernails.

If you needed someone to make you the best birthday cake, to make a new craft for the church sale, to take care of your kid when they were sick, someone who knew how to do the Heimlich when you're out to dinner with the family (this happened twice)—she did it all.

#### **Territorial Birds**

Oftentimes cardinals attack their own reflections in the spring and early summer. This is because they are obsessed with defending their nest from intruders. They'll spend hours fighting these "intruders" in a hopeless battle ("Northern Cardinal: Life History").

#### **Territorial**

Her strong headedness never faded either. As an 80-something year old who drove 20 under the speed limit, she only ran a red light twice—both times was when Jim was in the hospital. Hobbling up to the front desk the secretary told her she couldn't go back to see him. Leaning her frail body on her cane for support she said,

"Look, I understand that you have rules but you're going to need a lot more security out here if you don't let me back there."

He let her by, apparently worried that this grandma could indeed bash his nose in with her cane, as she insinuated. Leaving the hospital later that day she said thank you and goodnight and, under her breath in an embarrassed tone, "I almost assaulted him on the way in."

#### Religion

Cardinals in the Roman Catholic Church are high ecclesiastical officials ranking just below the pope (Clifford).

#### Minister

Jim was a good man; this didn't stop him from trying to secure his place in Heaven. At the nursing home where he spent the last few months of his life, he'd slip the minister a \$20 bill every time he came around, just to be sure.

#### Superstition

Cardinals are often seen as good luck charms—especially for a family as superstitious as mine. Jim never walked under a ladder, always picked up a penny when he saw it, and always went out the same door he came in. For our family, seeing a cardinal represents that a loved one is still watching over you.

My grandma spent many afternoons sitting in her kitchen bay window, often accompanied by my dog on the other side of the table. From there they had a perfect view of the brilliantly red cardinal who called the top of the tree across from her condo, his home. Day in and day out he'd be there, rain or sun or storm.

#### Name

Now I apologize because Jim was not even his name, it was his middle. However, I only know the first letter of his first name. My mom only found out his first name when her sister found his birth certificate and she will be taking that secret to the grave. His parents named him after someone in hopes that the person would leave Jim money in his will. According to Jim, the H in H. James (Jim for short) stands only for "Honorable."

#### **Nubble Light**

Nubble Light is BJ's favorite place. During the summers that BJ, Jim and their family spent at York Beach she'd walk to the lighthouse every day. Years later, in their kitchen Jim stated to his eldest daughter,

"When I die, have me cremated and hold on to the ashes and then when your mother dies you can have her cremated and then mix our ashes together and spread them in the Piscataqua River."

"Don't you dare Debra. That's not what I want... You can go in the river; I'm going to Nubble Light."

Jim, knowing better, quickly conceded.

"Ok, we'll go to Nubble Light. Can I go too?"

"I'll think about it," she said.

We all knew she'd give in.

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## A GLOSSARY ON SILENCE

#### Ellie Wadsworth

#### **Amplify**

It seems paradoxical for the first section in an essay titled Silence to be called "Amplify." And while, yes, 'silence' has the opposite meaning of 'amplify', when you take the time to truly sit in silence, your thoughts and emotions feel as though they're being plugged into a speaker and become amplified inside your brain. The overpowering sound of silence can be enough to make someone's skin crawl.

#### **Brushing Teeth**

Camping has many enjoyments to it, and as an experienced camper I know them well, but my favorite of all is brushing my teeth outdoors. The common routine of putting toothpaste on a toothbrush becomes so much more interesting when you are doing it at the foot of a waterfall. Instead of the sound of a running sink, one can hear the sound of water hitting against rocks falling into a flowing abyss. Meanwhile, a bird chirps overhead, soaring through the empty sky. I see myself from the bird's view, standing on an outstretched flat boulder brushing my teeth. I am quiet. I am listening.

#### **Cochlear Implant**

A cochlear implant is an electrical device surgically implanted into the ear that allows for the detection of sound for someone who has a hearing impairment.

#### Cox, Trevor

The author of "Quietest Places in the World," Trevor Cox, argues that the human ear is so sensitive that it can't actually hear silence. Humans can't hear the concept of silence because "the tiny bones of the middle ear, which transmit sound from the eardrum to the inner ear, vibrate by less than a thousandth of the diameter of a hydrogen atom." Cox explains that even in the absence of sound the human ear is detecting the smallest vibrations; therefore, humans cannot hear silence.

#### Deaf

But what does that mean about people who are deaf? Do they hear the true definition of silence?

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, there are two types of deafness. One is partial and comes from an interruption of sound vibrations through the passage connecting the outer world to the nerve cells in the inner ear. The other type is nerve deafness: "some defect in the sensory cells of the inner ear or in the vestibulocochlear nerve prevents transmission of sound impulses from the inner ear to the auditory center in the brain" (Rogers). Trevor Cox and I would agree that this form of deafness is hearing true silence. But you can't ask someone who is deaf what they hear. You can't ask them to describe the silence. All they've ever heard is silence, and it's not even really hearing.

#### **Emma**

Emma was the first deaf person I ever met. As I was going into third grade, my family was Emma's host family—a designated family to welcome an incoming new student. Our moms made us go on a playdate to Water World so that we could get to know each other. Why they thought Water World was a good idea is still a preposterous concept to me. Emma has cochlear implants which are, in fact, not waterproof. With that in mind, Emma had to take off her cochlear implants for the day, which left us with no way to communicate.

Throughout the day we stood in lines silently staring at other faces. While I guess in some interpretations of the word 'silently' you could argue that we were 'standing there in silence'; I, however, would argue that only Emma was standing there in silence. I could hear the murmurs of conversations around me, the sound of people splashing in pools of water, and the creaks the slides made as someone prepared to barrel themselves down the slide. Meanwhile, all Emma sensed was the absence of sound.

#### **Great Sand Dunes National Park**

A friend once told me the Great Sand Dunes "are the quietest place in the lower 48 states." Where he got this information is unclear and it could very well be one of his own factoids, but there was no reason for me to doubt the authenticity of his fact because for the first time, in the Sand Dunes, I heard complete silence.

Seven of us lay lined up next to each other on a tarp barricading our sleeping bags from the sand. I awoke suddenly. The sleeping bag rustled around me as I sat up to stare at the moon-lit dunes surrounding me. The rustling stopped after I adjusted for comfort and that's when I heard the silence. I couldn't hear the congested breaths of my friends or the crickets chirping. I couldn't even hear the constant sound of air. There was nothing. Maybe I was experiencing the sound deaf people hear or maybe the sound a dead person hears. Either way, it was the loudest silence to be heard.

Trevor Cox went to Kelso Dunes (another set of sand dunes located near Baker, San Bernardino County, California) and said he "experienced something quite rare: complete silence."

#### Hear

Perceive with the ear the sound made by someone or something.

#### Honor

We use silence to honor the dead. We take a moment of silence to reflect on what has happened to them, to remember them, to honor them.

During the Black Lives Matter movement, we kneeled at the corner of Colfax and Speer in downtown Denver. The streets were blocked off by police officers and filled with attendants down countless blocks. We knelt in silence for eight minutes and 46 seconds. Eight minutes and 46 seconds. The same amount of time Derek Chauvin had his knee on George Floyd's neck. Thousands of us covered the Denver streets honoring George Floyd silently for eight minutes and 46 seconds.

#### John Cage's 4'33"

American composer John Cage created the controversial, influential, inspiring, perplexing, infamous piece 4'33". It is a three-movement composition of four minutes and 33 seconds of silence.

When pianist David Tudor performed John Cage's 4'33", he sat down at his piano, covered the keyboard, and glanced at his stopwatch. During the four minutes and 33 seconds he raised and lowered the keyboard twice, careful to make no sound, and turned pages of sheet music which were absent of musical notes. When the time was up, he stood to receive applause from the audience.

Was it four minutes and 33 seconds of silence? No. Cage explains that although the composition itself is a silent one, there can be no such thing as silence when there are sounds all around: stirring wind, pattering rain drops, murmuring people—accidental sounds. Cage and Cox would agree that there is No Such Thing as Silence.

You can even listen to 4'33" on Spotify.

#### Lasagna

A family friend of mine just posted on Instagram with the caption:

"Real G's move in silence like lasagna."

Not sure what that means, but I suppose silence might have some relation to lasagna.

#### **Moment of Silence**

Let's take a moment of silence right now. Stop reading and take a minute of silence to focus on the sounds around you.

Now turn your attention to your breath.

Listen.

Reflect.

What do you hear?
Where have your thoughts wandered to?

Did your thoughts feel amplified?

I'm sitting here, writing this essay, silently. The people around me are not silent; they're having their own conversations. They're taking part in their own lives. Each one of us is living our own individual life and we connect with each other in this moment by being in the same space. Is the person sitting across from me aware of the fact that I am now focused on him? Where have his thoughts wandered to while he also sits silently, writing away at whatever it is on his laptop? Are we taking a moment of silence together because we are both currently quiet? I am here having my thoughts wander from one thing to another while maybe he sits there quietly contemplating whether or not to send a text message.

With that moment given to me to sit in silence my mind has entered into a loud world of moving ideas all chasing after each other, endlessly cycling, into a tumbleweed rolling on and on until the moment is broken by outside sound. When the minute is over, the volume of my head balances out with the volume of the world. There is no silence inside or outside of my brain but at least they are at average levels that are maintainable.

#### Oppression

Although we use silence to honor people, silence also leads to oppression against the same groups of people we're trying to honor.

Before and after the moment of silence at the Black Lives Matter protest, all the thousands of people in attendance marched through the streets of Denver chanting:

"Say his name, George Floyd!"

"Say her name, Breonna Taylor!"

"No justice, no peace! No racist police!"

"What do we want? Justice! When do we want it? Now!"

Our voices don't stop there. Staying silent when we are facing any issue—whether it's political, environmental, health related, education related, gender or race related—is part of the problem.

There are other ways to help besides protests. You can donate, use social media to raise awareness, educate yourself, volunteer, and so much more. But whatever you do, don't stay silent. Use your voice.

#### Outdoors

The outdoors are my favorite places to appreciate silence. I appreciate it while brushing my teeth, waking up in the middle of the night in the Sand Dunes, hiking, and just sitting on rocks. There's no need to say anything when you're outside. All you need to do is appreciate the fresh air and the beauty of our planet. When I'm silent in the outdoors, like always, I get lost in my thoughts; but, this time my thoughts stay light. The fresh air and primitive feeling of being outdoors allow my thoughts to feel peaceful. They flow smoothly like the river I'm jumping over. They wander to intriguing and inspirational places like my curious feet wander over peaks and valleys.

### **Outer Space**

Outer space is the closest environment to hearing true silence. In space, there are no air molecules to carry the chirping sounds of humans, the hustle of everyday life, or the surrounding vibration of air. Sound waves cannot travel without air molecules thus providing a truly silent place. Maybe you can still hear the inner sounds of your body: the crack of a knuckle or the rumble of a hungry belly. Or maybe you can't hear those sounds either and outer space is the ultimate location to hear true silence.

This, however, would not be a serene way to experience silence. The only way to hear it would be to float through space with no helmet, leading to an inevitable death.

#### **Questions & Concerns**

Is it technically correct for me to write 'hear silence'? I know the answer to this question is "no" based on the definition of 'hear' and 'silence', but I can't think of a better way to describe how someone senses silence. We definitely don't smell it.

Does saying things like 'the loudest silence' make sense?

Can one silence be louder than others?

Do deaf people hear silence louder than those who can hear?

Or is it also wrong to put 'hear' in the same sentence with the word 'deaf'?

Is it possible for a person to experience true silence (excluding deaf people)?

#### Silence

Absence of any sound or noise.

#### Vaults of Silence

The anechoic chamber is another way humans can try to sense the idea of complete silence. It is, in its most basic form, a vault of silence. Trevor Cox explains the anechoic chamber as "an acoustically isolated room that provides unchanging, guaranteed silence, uninterrupted by wind, animals, or human noise." It is a room within a room requiring you to enter three sets of doors before being inside the chamber. The room is made up of heavy, insulated walls and is mounted on springs to provide the user with a silent experience. Although the room is silent, Cox reminds us that users can still hear "internal noises that the room cannot dampen."

### Wind River Range, Wyoming

The Wind River Range, located in the lower central part of Wyoming, is where I learned to appreciate silence. A group of 14 of us started our month-long adventure backpacking through alpines and lakes chatting daily on our hikes. As the trip went on we became more comfortable hiking in silence. Eventually, we reached the point where we could hike upwards of five miles without conversing. Though there were sounds of nature surrounding us, the comfort of hiking in silence with a group of other silent hikers showed me how to be peaceful with my swarming thoughts.

### Zero

How would you describe silence? The absence of sound? The stillness of thoughts? Or the racing, muddle of thoughts that come from surrounding silence? Is silence good? Is it important that we use silence to honor those who we've lost? Or should we never be silent to help those in need of our voices? Where do you enjoy silence? In the comfort of your bed as you fall asleep at night or in the middle of a sand dune brushing your teeth? For people who are deaf, do you ever enjoy constant silence? What does it sound like to you...the complete absence of sound...zero sound...silence?

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# **GENESIS**

### Kenlie Roher

In the beginning, there were three witches who spoke to God.

Me, Mary, and Hannah. We were all young witches, hiding right under the nose of the church. We had been baptized not as infants, but as grown women, twelve years old. We had been born with spells lying under our tongues, but first we were taught to speak the words of God. And after we were taught to speak the words of God, we were taught to read them and to follow them, and to stay in our place. And then, very shortly afterward, we were taught to lie.

On the first day, God created me, Mary, and Hannah. He created me, Kenlie, the Standing Pool, Mary, the One Who Wept Over Him, and Hannah, One of the Wives. But that's exactly it, you see; I'm not so sure he created us at all (but more on that later). On the first day, he must've made us witches, or perhaps we fell to the earth like demons... but didn't God create the demons too? So, yes—on the first day, God created the witches.

On the second day, God sent us to summer camp. Christian Church Camp, to be more accurate. We were still too young to process what we actually were, how God had actually made us, and so we thought we would play pretend a little bit longer, whether that was subconsciously or not. We immediately found we didn't fit in with the others, especially the other girls at the camp.

We were interested in the moths, the large, beautiful ones the size of birds that would come out around dusk, when the night was welcomed as a squeezing, see-through mist of purple. We enveloped this time of time, it became us, exactly when all the other campers went indoors. "Too many mosquitos!" they'd say. We would just look at one another—seeing something in each other's eyes, but at the same time not sure of what we were seeing—and then look away, at the gathering milk of the moon.

That particular night, we slung up three papery thin hammocks, all jewel-toned and glowing in the thickness of the trees. There weren't many trees at the camp, as they had all been cut down years prior, but there was a suspicious clump near the edge of the campgrounds by the pool house, where people could choose to get baptized.

But the moths, of course, were attracted to the light and the darkness. And we were attracted to them. So, we went up and away from the slung hammocks, from the thickness of the trees, and near the campsite where the motel was. The motel was a hunk of white cinderblock, crumbling in almost everywhere you could imagine; inside the rooms, there were innumerable types of insects, arachnids.

Every summer, the three of us always came back. We all started in 2008, Hannah and Mary eight years old, me only seven. We knew nothing except that we could recite Bible verses with ease, and that sometimes we found ourselves awake at night after dreaming of the Rapture, unable to recall what the significance of the visions had been, but we would forget them quickly all the same, as if they had never happened.

One day, we were running around in the woods, and dusk was nearing. This was the time of day where the moths would come out. We found a pale pink one sitting delicately against the crumbling cinder block, directly underneath a light. We found a couple of smaller brown ones, a fuzzy orange one, and wrote their descriptions down in a leather bound journal. We drew pictures of the moths; we thought they were so magical, just like us.

While the others were at chapel, 9 p.m., we were inside the cinder blocks, reading Greek mythology story books. We didn't know if they weren't allowed—there were a lot of things that weren't allowed at camp—but we decided to keep them hidden anyway. It was more fun that way. We read about Aphrodite, Artemis, about Hera, Demeter, Persephone, and Athena. We thought the names and the stories were so beautiful, and we often talked about them late into the night. We had already read about all the gods in the book we were supposed to be reading, the Bible. We had already memorized all the verses, read through all the paper-thin pages, but now there were other things that attracted us.

Like the moths! We noticed a particularly large flutter outside by the naked lamp outside the cinder block. We got up from our beds, the springs creaking anciently underneath us, and scurried out into the dim light. The moth had landed on the cracked sidewalk, spilling into a pool of golden light. It was the biggest moth any of us had ever seen; it looked more like a bird. It had furry red wings with the most exquisite black markings. We had never seen such a vibrant moth before. I thought she must've been Athena herself.

We gasped at her beauty, and Hannah hurriedly went back inside our cabin to get the leather bound notebook. We wrote down everything we could about Athena, drawing multiple different pictures just so that we capture every angle of her beauty. Even after we were done, it still didn't seem like enough. We didn't want her to fly away; she seemed like she was one of us. But after a while, the other campers came back from chapel, marching up the grassy hill, the green turned black in the darkening night. We had to act like we had been among them the entire time, and slipped back into the group as if we were made of shadow; no one seemed to notice we had been gone, though, not ever. We just thought this was one of the many different types of power we had over the others, even though we weren't sure what was different about us. Maybe it was something like what the moth had; the beauty, the strangeness, the look of intelligent understanding in her eyes.

The next day, I told everyone to start calling me Athena.

# LETTERS FROM PLACES THAT ARE NOT WHERE I WANT TO BE

Javier A. Padilla Gonzalez

Rocio,
I am so dramatic and I think that I am dying with every second that passes, and life is so beautiful.
Hope to hear from you soon,
Javier.
Dear Colorado,
You gave me opium and imposing mountains. You were too cold for me, but I miss the suburbs and their Christmas lights. I am frightened by yucca and I saw a rattlesnake once. You make me feel like I do not belong anywhere inside of your borders, but I also cannot exist in a place where I cannot see the faint blue outline of the Front Range. Frankly, you were my first love, and I resent my mother for anchoring us to your impenetrable red soil.
Take care,
Your son.
Dear Moses,
What else did you expect from your people when you uprooted them and moved them across deserts for forty years? Of course they were going to dance and drink honey wine and search for new idols. A golden calf is appropriate imagery for people searching for home. After all, domesticated animals are part of the reason people were able to establish empires and cities.
Wishing you patience,
Javier.
To my guardian angel,
Do you like it here? It is always raining in this city. I used to love the rain, but now I am always damp and my socks are molding and if I stand in one place too long I am afraid the overgrowth will tangle me into place. I have found purpose in trying to find a place. I pity you.
I release you?

Javier.

Hi mom,

I am just writing to tell you that I am feeling sentimental, and I miss you. I am not sad and I don't want you to worry. In fact, the world is so big and so full of people. I am certain there will always be someone around to carry my feelings.

Love.

Javier, far from you.

Hi mom,

The world may be too big

Sincerely,

Me.

To all of the gas stations along the road from Colorado Springs to Jalostotitlán,

Have you seen Santo Toribio stop in to refuel? He is about my height, with black cropped hair and blue eyes. He was last seen wearing a singed black tunic. He smells oddly of gunpowder, and there are usually two or three wanderers trailing closely behind him. He might be my uncle (great). I am afraid that he is lost, but he is guiding a group into a harsh heat that will incinerate flesh. I have some questions to ask him about my family's situation. I am afraid the immigration lawyer that I previously contacted speaks a different language. I have enclosed a couple of relics that he might want back.

I appreciate your assistance,

another traveller.

Dearest Mimi,

That night that we were dancing in the cabin that your grandpa built, when the molly started wearing off, I became melancholic because I was jealous. I was jealous that you felt so entitled to a property, or that you could love it so much. It was obvious how much you cared when you started the fireplace, or when you remembered to put it out, or the way you brushed your hand over the gaudy wood paneling when you first opened the door. You sat outside in the snow for two hours and stared at an aspen tree that was due to be cut down soon. I was jealous of how powerful you became in that cabin, or the way you could relax on the garish leather lounger in the living room. You could go on for hours about the time that your sister peed herself in that room or the couch that your mom fell asleep on when she was going through her divorce and she got too high. That night that we were dancing and there was a blizzard outside, I was praying that the snow would cover the house and block the exits and we would become trapped. I did not want us to die, or develop frostbite. I was just praying that if I spent enough time there, it would also become my place. Maybe I hoped that if we got too cold we could both cut down that old aspen in the backyard for warmth, and you could tell someone else about that time we cut down the aspen in the backyard for warmth. That is, if your mother does not sell the cabin to pay for the divorce. In any case, my jealousy has subsided.

Thank you for sharing your place,

Javi.

To the mosquito in my room during a full moon, I wish that you would die outside with my blood still inside of you. I hate you, Me. Severin, I should have told you that I was not looking for a relationship with you. I cannot admit to myself that I will never be comfortable in one place, and being near you could be considered a place. I find myself replaying the music and noise I heard in Calle Jesús Maria in my head. I enjoyed our first date when I was rolling too hard, and I lost my debit card, and my head felt like it would fall onto the turntables. I miss the chaos, and I never wanted to cook minestrone with you because it takes too long. I would have felt restless. You should read this, Your Cicciolino. Dear Canyon de Chelly, You felt very close to divinity. The cottonwoods were in bloom and the early morning light illuminated every white cotton ball and they all looked like sprites. I was told a story about scorched peach trees, and the sprites fell into ashes. I wanted to leave and I wanted to stay. I wanted to hover near the tip of Spider Woman's leg. Respectfully, Javier. To Tswana, my love, A magazine that we should care about is having a party this weekend, and I have four pairs of shoes. The boots are muddied and scuffled, the other boots are knockoffs, the loafers were 200 pesos, and the converse are covered in dog shit. My lover invited me or demanded

A magazine that we should care about is having a party this weekend, and I have four pairs of shoes. The boots are muddied and scuffled, the other boots are knockoffs, the loafers were 200 pesos, and the converse are covered in dog shit. My lover invited me or demanded that I attend with her, and I feigned disinterest when I accepted her invitation. My boyfriend is out dancing with my friends, and they love him, and I feel like I am cheating on all of them. They believe that I am staying in because I have to write. My best friend's girlfriend wrote to my Mexico City roommate from Chicago: "Jav can be flakey, so IDK." I have a growing suspicion that he is only my 'friend' now. I am playing with the thought of texting my Colombian lover, and telling him that I am coming to see him later this month after all. It will probably all end the same. I will move and restart and pillage and run. It is what it is.

I hope you can feel that I miss you,

JavlexP.

Severin, You make me feel less restless and that is enough for now. Love, Your Cicciolino. To the border crossing in El Paso or Juárez, I always looked forward to seeing you. It may have been masochistic, naive or alchemical. You were change. I was either going to become brown or American. I always wondered who I was when I stood right on top of you. I could have lived in one of the border patrol checkpoint booths—the really cramped ones where the officers are always smoking. I could live in constant excitement and fear. Loosen up, Javier Alexandro Padilla-Gonzalez. Pedro Padilla, You used to be a reference point for my life. An amazing stela carved with the cardinal directions, rooted deeply into sand caves. Since your pulmonary embolism, you are a point that I try to avoid. I know all of your riddles, and I don't think that you know that you keep repeating the same riddle. Maybe you cannot recognize me. I hope your life was enough, Alex. Hi mom,

I met a boy and he is really sweet. Unfortunately, I am trying to get out of this relationship. I have been cheating on him with a girl who hates me, and it is fulfilling some stressed desire or prophecy. I would move to Switzerland with him and have his kids, and that scares me. All of my friends say that he is not cute enough to be with me, but I think they are jealous that I have found a place in someone and I could die tomorrow. He hates ice cream just like me. How is dad?

Honest,

Your son.

Hey Tony,

I still love you, and I never told you how you made me feel that night that you picked me up on the side of Powers Boulevard. My parents were angry that I was spending time with you, someone that my brother had outed to them. I wanted to get dropped off at home so you could pick me up as we had planned, but they refused after they heard that you are gay. When I jumped out of my dad's car and he drove away, I felt very lost. I could see the faces of some drivers, confused as to why I was potentially homeless. I dressed in a very preppy manner in those days. The mountain was silhouetted, and I could see the lights from a few homes blinking at its crest. You were so happy to see me that night. Your pimp-my-ride Honda that you love to talk about was my home. I am still trying to find another neon home outside of my family.

I hope that I am not outing you again,

Jav.

Hi Elliott,

Thank you for driving me to the beach on my twenty-first birthday. I hope that someday a luminous, prophetic angel can wake you up drunk to the sight of searing white sands and sharp crystal waters in Pensacola, Florida. It was all so new and shiny and pure and everything unlike me that morning. I loved spending time in New Orleans with you and CJ, but it could not compare to the salt of the ocean in my tired lungs. I know we do not talk that often anymore, and that you are anxious about talking on the phone, but I still love you. New Orleans was nice, but your stepdad might be a little racist and I think your stepbrother was hitting on me. It all washed off at that beach.

Javi.

Dear Saint Isidore,

I moved to Jalos right around the time that you were supposed to bless that desert with flooding showers. You might have taken a break that year, but I could still feel you holding your breath. Everything was tense and muggy and my grandpa started dying. I wish the dam would have broken. I wish you could have released me, and I could have floated south, to something else. But the dam held dry mud, and everything was stagnant. The donkeys were all awake at night, and tired during the day. My other grandpa's mule got cancer, and her unfortunate diagnosis dashed her dreams of pregnancy. It all made no sense and nothing seemed natural. Some days it was so hot that it made me wonder why anyone would live there, let alone die there.

Explain yourself,

A loyal dissident.

Chavela Vargas,

Did you miss your hometown? I wanted to say something about your liver, swollen with Mexicanness and mezcal, and your lungs coated in tar and mexicanness. Was everything you exhaled Mexicanness and the souring flesh of a donated organ not accepted by the host? Or was your liver bloated with a painful tequila? Was it trying to dislodge itself from under your cage, and forcing itself to crawl East? Maybe it wanted to be outside of you: not East, and not West, and not South, and certainly not North. I saw your custom-made chair at a museum nearby recently.

Congratulations,

Un fan.

to the vegetable vendor in Mercado Los Alamos,

I do not know your name yet, but you are not my usual produce guy. I hope you can forgive me this one time. It was late and you were one of the only stalls that had not packed their crates for the evening. I know that your shop is the first produce stall to the right of the East entrance. I also know that you were trying to overcharge me for those champignon mushrooms last Saturday. The price difference was about 40 pesos a kilo. It is petty, but I cannot help thinking about how you referred to me as a "guero" when I walked up to ask for the price. I noticed that you looked at your coworker, and you both looked at me, and decided on your price for a guero. I could have afforded the price difference between my usual mushrooms and your mushrooms, but I chose to buy huitlacoche. From you. Why did I purchase produce from someone who had offended me with his price-gouging plot? I bought huitlacoche because I wanted you to know that I live here, and that I think I know how much a kilo of champignon mushrooms should be worth. I can also pronounce huitlacoche impeccably, and I kind of know how to cook it. Maybe I wanted to act strange so you would somehow reflect on the way that your well-intentioned, colloquial Spanish slang makes me feel like I will never belong here. Maybe I am writing this to myself. I will be back one of these days to confront you directly about this pressing matter that you probably do not remember. The huitlacoche is still in a Ziploc bag in my fridge.

Honestly,

A Guero A Pocho

Hi mom,

I still haven't found a home, and I think I may have to come back to you soon. I know the story of the prodigal son by heart, but I do not remember his fault. I have seen Oklahoma and New Mexico. If I do not return to you, then you can assume I died peacefully. You don't have to slaughter your best goat for my funeral.

Resting in Peace,

Javier.

P.S. - I am just scaring you into missing me more. Neither of us are permanent, and I am scared that one day I will miss you more than you miss me.

Ana Mendieta,

How did your body feel encased in all of those irritating, repulsive weeds, sliding in that intoxicatingly fragrant mud?

Let me know,

Javier.

Dear Kansas,

You are so small and flat, and I could have just driven through you. I stopped at a Subway in Abilene, Kansas, and the workers all seemed very content to be living there. Maybe they were just smiling at my cropped sweater. I always wear that sweater during road trips. You are so small and flat and boring and lonely, and I want to move to you. I want to stop moving with you. I want to be the tallest object for miles, and I love dandelions. My friend Melia told me that I just like it when people talk about me. I think I have been writing a story ever since I saw the brown-gray expanse of your horizon.

Sincerely,

Javier Padilla-Gonzalez.

Dear God (Judeo-Christian, maybe even Muslim),

I have entered every one of your churches, and if I am lying then you will just have to forgive me. I will never find you inside your house. Sometimes there are mosaics and sometimes there are baroque wood carvings laminated in cheap gold luster. It's tacky.

God Bless.

Javi.

To the girl in my third grade class,

I am sorry that you had to go to school that morning. It was some morning in the spring, and you had joined Mrs. Panos' third grade class late in the school year, when everyone had already chosen their best friend. I think you explained later that your family had just moved to America from Ghana or Ethiopia. You were wearing a beautiful white lace dress and bloomers and matching lacquered Mary Janes. Shana and Jessica were picking at your clothes, and I don't think you understood their words but you knew they were not kind. They must have been afraid of you, because people don't usually dress like that in the United States and you looked so beautiful. You started crying and you looked so lost and your dad had just driven away. I think you knew a few words in English, so you couldn't defend yourself. You stopped showing up to class a couple weeks later and Mrs. Panos told me that your family had moved again. I should have defended you, but I was scared of Jessica and I had been in your place before I learned English. I am sorry and I hope that you are happy in whatever place you are now, but we both understand that it is not easy or maybe impossible. Do not resent that dress or your mother for making you wear it. People can be cruel.

Thinking of you,

The little Mexican kid in the pink polo shirt.

Dear Javier,

Do you remember the other night when you were in the ocean, and it was very dark and it was a couple of nights after the full moon? The tide towered over you and there was no sea foam. The waves traveled around your body and it was peaceful, and warm, and inviting. The violent waters chose not to shake your rib cage and kick in your knees. You were with your boyfriend, and he audibly feared for your life, but you were being so stupid and selfish and you couldn't hear him over the calls of a siren. The horizon was indistinguishable from the sky and the moon was splintered over battered waters. You spun around to orient yourself by the position of the sea cliffs, but they had disappeared. The earth inverted and everything was black matter. You thought about drifting out to open waters, where no one lays claim to what is essentially nothing.

Take care of yourself,

You.

Dear Mexico City,

I was growing tired of you before the earthquake. Thankfully, you responded to my apathy. I had that feeling where my nostrils cleared and my stomach felt uneasy. I started fearing for my life. I rarely fear for my life. It was incredible to see your streets rolling under my feet and the power lines swaying next to me. The whole city felt it, and we all poured out onto the streets and I found Naomi and hugged her and I really loved everyone that had survived. There were no casualties that night, but I didn't know that yet.

Respectfully,

Un Extranjero.

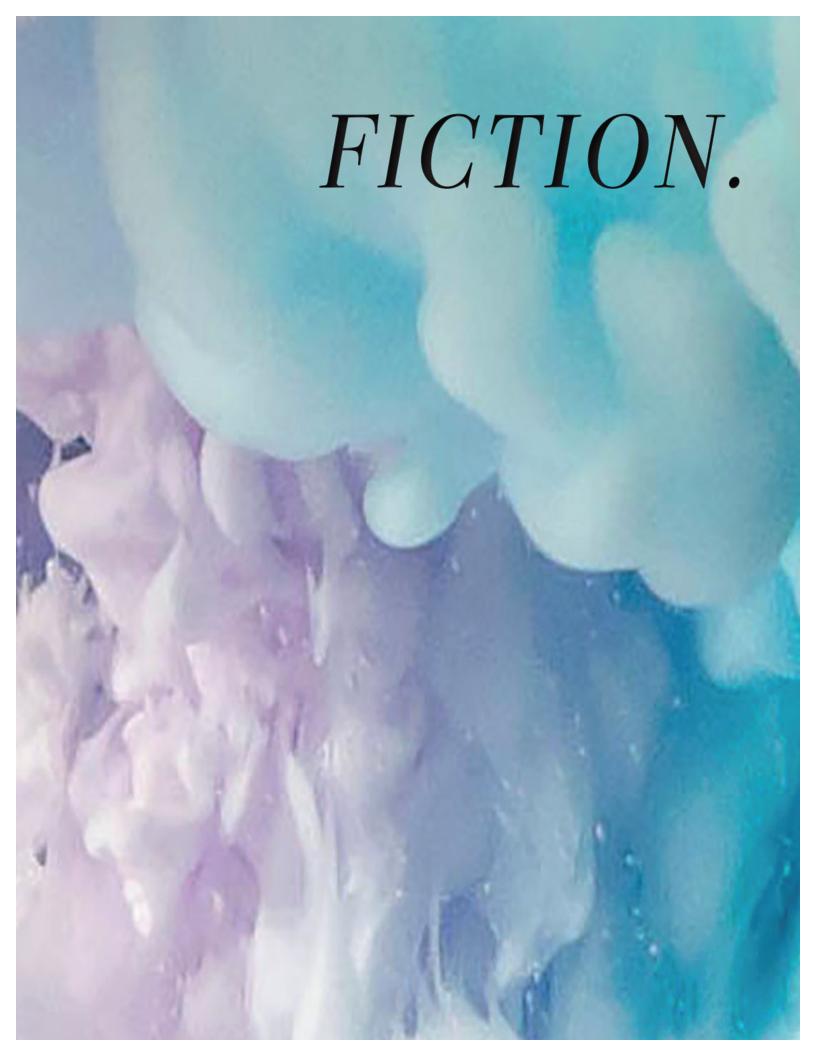
Mom,

When you realize you have been sequestered, do you look to the lush lawns shielding your 1000-square-foot suburban home and feel some freedom? Do you also look to the mountains and imagine sprouting feet so long that you could sprint along the ridge for 20 minutes and find yourself lost in the Sierra Madre for the first time? Has English scalded your tongue so severely that if you try to roll your R's on the roof of your mouth, it stings? Do you like to receive my letters during my quest to find a home, when you consider yourself home? Do you miss your parents enough to stay with them forever? Do you want to keep moving? Do these questions make you wish that the earth would open up and swallow you whole?

I think that it is important to stage a pantheon of nameless, famous, unimportant and unmentioned ghosts that continue to guide and misguide me. Imagine yourself, walking along a strip mall during the first snow, huddled by some ubiquitous purple majesties. It is all I can imagine when I am far from you.

Love,

Javier.





# **TOAST**

### Makayla Sileo

Most days Grace did not mind that her dad didn't exist. She didn't even seem to mind how her mom was pretending to be one from two states away. But today the heater broke. The house was as irritable as usual, clothed in wallpaper from the '70s, rooms swollen with knick-knacks from her grandmother's uneventful life. When her grandmother passed seven months ago, she left a void, a void that was quickly stuffed with unpaid electricity bills from a log mansion deep in a Missourian forest. The forest forgave often but the house refused to, and this made the days long for Grace.

When she got to the house, the sun was setting and draped shadows over everything but the tips of the towering pines. In the distance the school bus gurgled away, taking half a dozen high schoolers and their immaturities with it. Grace clenched her fingers sluggishly, the cold already persistent as she walked from the road to the house. She walked around the back, tripping over rusting gardening tools until she reached the back door. The quieting buzz of Missourian insects alluded that winter was approaching quickly, a whisper for Grace to find shelter somewhere, anywhere, and to do so quickly. The garage was dark and cluttered, lined with shelves of paint thinner and broken pots and her grandfather's large rubber boots. Though she'd never met him, she had loved her grandmother, and so she loved him by default. Grace kicked something away that clattered as she tranquilized the memory of her grandmother and tucked it into a darker place to rest. The garage hadn't changed in the six months Grace had lived there, and although she hated the musty weight of dusty shelves and disuse, she felt understood by the room. It opened into the kitchen, though Grace never stayed there long. That's where the people gather, Grace. She plucked this thought from her mind with false indifference and tucked it below her ribs. You need people to gather. Her stomach grumbled.

Grace abandoned her backpack and phone on a counter which was still decorated by stale coffee rings and toast crumbs from the morning. She found a soured rag but she cleaned the counter anyways, making a mental note, *Google how to get mold out of dish rags*. She stepped into the pantry. She was thankful it was empty. It usually was, due to a lack of time or something like that, but she checked four or five times after school, as if her mom had suddenly returned from her job in Oklahoma, or as if her grandma was home baking cookies, not lying beneath a cheap headstone. Grace was held up by empty shelves, the single lightbulb dimmer now, 'light' still idling on the grocery list from where she scribbled it a week ago. Behind her, the kitchen frowned deeper, slowly digesting the room and everything in it, which wasn't much because the girl was alone. It was a familiar and prideful hollowness. She collected her AP chemistry book, a glass of water, and shuffled through what should be the living room.

The house settled as Grace paused at the bottom of the stairs. She climbed one floor, two floors, three floors, the hallway parting with cranky sighs with each of her steps. She found herself in her room. The bed stretched from wall to wall and was dressed in a tired duvet that no longer smelled of home. It had been too long. The room was small, but it was hers. Through the walls, the crickets harmonized and Grace put on another sweatshirt and listened. The sound swallowed the house and the girl too. Grace began to hum along, but the sound was tired and she swelled with emotion, quickly collecting herself in embarrassment as if someone was watching. No one is watching. The crickets listened. No one is here. Grace had never really minded being alone except solitude was no longer a choice. Solitude was an obligation.

She rose from her bed, grasping her other arm to keep the chills out, and flicked on the bathroom light. To the left was an outdated bath and shower, the toilet to her right, and in front of her, the mirror. A girl stood in the reflection. In the mirror, she watched herself. She was average in height, with long legs and thighs that touched. She had grown into her womanhood at the age of 14 and she blamed her wide hips for her early isolation. She turned to the side and quietly cringed at her lovehandles. With both hands around her waist, she measured how close to her belly button both her fingers reached. *Not close enough*. Behind her, the house stirred as it cooled. Grace wrapped her thumbs and index fingers around her thigh, just above the knee, where she knew her leg measured 18 centimeters around. Slowly she slid her hands upwards, all the while keeping her thumb and fingers locked in a circle; she stopped when her fingers spread, indicating her thighs changed diameter. With her fingernail, she scratched a line into her fat, a centimeter higher than the one before and the one before that. *Eighteen centimeters is all I want*.

Her face was very Irish, delicate and pale, with freckles scattered across her cheeks. She glowed, not from joy or health, but from transparency; skin so sallow she sometimes wondered if she might melt in the bathtub like tissue paper in water. Most nights, this wonder becomes a quiet and demanding desire and so one day in August, Grace broke off the bathtub spout. Showers only, Grace. There was no hot water and so it didn't really make sense to bathe anyways. It's for your own good. In the mirror, her eyes met the gaze of eyes as complicated and green as the forest that spanned in every direction. Apart from her eyes, she was plain, and her mind never let her forget it.

Grace looked absent-mindedly, not quite there but not quite gone. *Maybe this is all there is.* She'd grown used to the idea that life was just a series of lame attempts to cope with existence. As a kid, she was raised in movement. Without a permanent sense of home, independence and

isolation felt inexorable yet somewhat desired. She attended seven schools within three years and didn't gain many friends or memories along the way. After a few years of living life on a roulette wheel, Grace stopped crossing her fingers that her chances would improve. Grace, you know this, bad events are independent. Just because you get 'bad' every day before doesn't increase your statistical chances of getting 'good' any day after. Grace and her mom were compelled to become friends because they were all each other had. They often bickered in the car because each new city and apartment and job was one more reason to keep distant and that somehow that felt safer. Grace found separation to be the only asset of change. The less time in one place, the less to attach to, the less to lose, the less to hurt. She sought safety and though her mom worked three jobs at any given moment to provide some sense of this, it never seemed to manifest. As Grace mulled over this thought, she flicked off the bathroom light. She loved her mom. I love my mom. But her mom wasn't there.

Grace's mom found a partially stable job in Oklahoma back in January. So when Grace's grandmother passed in March with lots of land and no other children to tend to it, Grace was promoted to the lonliest of positions. At 16, she was solely entrusted with a million dollar log cabin to live in while her mom remained in Oklahoma. It was an impulsive and desperate decision, but Grace didn't spite her mom for making it. She assumed physical distance wouldn't have that great of an impact; a drop of water into the ocean wasn't as detectable as adding a drop of water into a half-filled glass. The same was true for loneliness.

The night was full now. Somewhere in the distance the forest was shifting. Grace hadn't ventured into it since she was a tomboy, but she was content avoiding whatever lurked there that her kid self hadn't seemed to mind. The trees were untouched and mossy with roots spurting out of the ground. They often tripped little tomboys trying to run through. Through the window, Grace could see dark silhouettes plastered on even darker backgrounds. The vastness chirped louder. She could never find silence. Even when she was little, she found herself submerged in her own mind, asking herself the questions that no one could answer because she never spoke them. And while she explored both thought and forest, she wasn't searching for knowledge; she was searching for perfection. Everywhere that her life felt incomplete was a means for her to alter herself to fill in the cracks. My existential and uncalled for obligation. Though, with enough time, Grace morphed into so many different people that she was unable to trace her way back or remember if back was where it was better. Somewhere in the mix, she shed her tomboy spirit for porcelain, and any smudge or crack made her worthless. Place me on a shelf, she thought. Look at me but never come close. She scoffed. Ain't that what you did, dad? Her jaw hardened around that thought, didn't even have to meet me to shatter me. She couldn't decide if it was worse to hate someone you'd never met or to be begrudgingly adopted and carted around by your own mother. That's why she hated her father: not for abandoning her, but for abandoning her with a mom that wasn't particularly interested in her daughter. Grace couldn't blame her. The roulette wheel spun faster.

She opened the window, not to breathe in the fresh air, but rather, to avoid looking at her reflection. The air was fully cooled now but the house continued to adjust to the onset of darkness. The floorboards fidgeted underneath Grace's feet as she sat on the bed, still looking out the window. Something felt missing in her ribs. It wasn't a sudden sadness, but the cumulation of too many nights spent alone in a log mansion in the middle-of-nowhere Missouri.

All she could do was sigh. The house responded with a mechanical yawn as dusty as a Texan drawl, and after a sudden clang deep in the house, Grace perked up in fear or curiosity or maybe hope. The old house was falling apart. You and me both, she thought. Maybe the house was growing on her after all. We could be friends. With bare feet and her chemistry textbook in hand, she trotted down to the first floor, careful to skip the third step from the bottom which was caked in splinters. She peered around to see if something had fallen or a pipe had burst, but everything was as normal as it could be. This is the part where the murderer comes out of nowhere, isn't it? Grace giggled slightly, buoyed by black humor. Maybe my murderer would stay for a cup of tea. The faucet patted with its usual and torturous leak. The light cast a murky haze over everything and only then did Grace realize just how ugly the old house was. It was made of dust and pipes and books that would never be read and paintings that were beautiful but briefly noticed.

Humph. After another skeptical glance around the kitchen, Grace settled on the couch to do work and wait for whatever her gut said was about to happen. But she felt no fear. Within three minutes, the house cried out again, this time ending with a bloody screech. Fuck. Total darkness slapped Grace in the face like a familiar abuse. She was absorbed in a thick, black, stale air while her flashlight taunted her from two stories above. A chill caressed her spine.

Grace attempted to navigate out of the room by memory, but when memory failed, crawling followed. Now on all fours, she bumped her way into the kitchen. Her foot caught on a cord and a small table lamp clattered and shattered around her, as if verifying that Grace will be without light tonight. Two steps up, pivot to the right, she reverted to her toddler years where everything was to be learned, except now, everything unseen was a threat. The stairwell greeted her with a thud. One, two, four, how many stairs are there? She never thought to pay attention to these things. Maybe you really don't see until you're blind. Two flights of stairs later, Grace surfaced on the third floor embarrassed to be so uneasy by such a thing as darkness. Since there was nothing better to do, Grace fell into a brief and numbing sleep.

When morning awoke, Grace could see her breath. Frost licked the floorboards and her eyebrows and it was then that she wondered if her mom had told her what number to call when things broke. Grace buried herself in layers of clothing and went about her morning, asuring she wouldn't miss the bus. She flicked on the bathroom light by habit. Nothing happened. She showered in the familiar but worse cold water, shivered herself into her clothing, and stared at a partially frosty, partially foggy mirror. Nothing but shapes and colors could be seen in this state and for once, Grace felt beautiful. *Today I will have toast*.

As she descended the stairs, she discovered that the heat had only gone out on the third level. Feeling proud to still have two-thirds of a working house to come home to, Grace congratulated herself by allowing a bit of peanut butter too. For today, and today only, Grace allowed toast to be more important than 18 inch ideals. She was convinced that she had earned fuel by enduring a power outage, and she ate the toast furiously. *Maybe everything is going to be okay.* 

After school, Grace fiddled with her phone before calling her mom. "Hi mom. The power went out. Yep, no lights. No, you didn't show me where the switch is. It's where? Why is it in the wall of the pantry? But there are black recluses everywhere. No, I don't have gloves. Okay, I'll try it. Talk later? Oh. Maybe another time, then." She hung up and fell away from herself for a moment. It was her and a long wooden spoon against the darkness and the cold and crawlers in the pantry wall. While on all fours, Grace reached for a hastily cut out part of the wall, no more than a foot by a foot, and stuck the spoon in. It caught on the switch and she jerked her hand up to flip the lever. As she did so, she wondered if she was allowed to hope. When it fully flipped, the world remained as it was the moment before. Dark.

Nighttime was arriving again, so Grace hurried to the second floor before it was pitch black. She tucked herself into her new room on the second floor. Her eyes were beginning to adjust to the lack of light but she wasn't sure how temporary this situation wa. The thought spooked her. *Come home, mom.* 

Morning came, school passed, evening settled in. But when Grace went to study on the second floor, there was an eerie bite to the air. Another heater broken. Her skin was unprepared and so she went to bed without dinner to escape the cold.

The days passed similarly, and it wasn't until four days later that the last heater broke. The house had given up and Grace's mom had never called. Winter was approaching and appeared unforgiving, and Grace was falling further from herself. She ate bread now on the days that she ate, because the toaster became useless the day the last darkness came. No one was there to keep her warm or fed, and while she shivered constantly, she relished in the freedom from judgment. It was a paradoxical existence, a drive for something she couldn't have but didn't want. Some nights, when the darkness had settled in and there was nothing more than the beam of her flashlight, she would look in the mirror and whisper, "I just want to be your friend."

The house never warmed. Days became weeks, and as the log mansion in nowhere-Missouri grew colder, desperation set in. After school, Grace would turn on her electric blanket and light a candle and undress. She opened the windows more often now, again not for the air, but for warmth. It was 25 degrees outside, but colder within, and so she let the outdoors warm her room while she showered. She would shower for as long as she could endure the piercing water, often a minute at the most. She choked on air as it numbed her further. Then she'd stumbled over splintered floors to her electric blanket, paralyzed by chill or hunger or surrender, and fell into a deep sleep, where she was grateful that she couldn't consciously acknowledge the world.

Grace accidentally went days without speaking to anyone. She'd eat bread but refused herself more. She existed too many days without hope or kindness. And at some point it all became routine. Most nights she would whisper to whatever would listen, but even the crickets refused to hear her sorrow. Is this what I deserve? She grew angry some nights, but often fell into resignation. Consistent anger would have been better. Anger was better than emptiness and she knew this because Grace was starved.

When December came, so did her mom. While she felt something resembling excitement, she was cautious. Grace dreaded the caloric home cooked meals and unenthusiastic "how are yous" that she brought. No more starving. She rolled her eyes. Great. On Saturday she heard a knock on the back door, and weaved through the living room where no-one lived, through the kitchen that fed the demons in her head, past her grandfather's old work boots, and her grandmother's memory. She sighed at the door, unprepared for what to say to the person that loved Grace so conditionally. Another day, another spin to the roulette wheel that Grace couldn't stop losing too, another piece of toast to rest her worth on, another night shivering in an old log mansion in Missouri. Maybe another body will warm this house into a home, Grace wondered. She wanted love but knew that her mom gave it randomly and sparingly. Maybe today is different.

Grace opened the door. "I'm cold, Mama."

# THE GARDEN'S COMET

### Kenlie Roher

The old man threw me out on the porch, swamped in sky and summer and the folds of pink fabric he always made me wear. It could've been yellow, or pea-stalk green, but the fabric was always sun bleached and faded and it was never as bright as it could have been. I always wanted it to be a red dress, something where the color was so lush that you could have seen it from anywhere. But we never grew roses, and so I never even had anything similar to a red dress.

As soon as she heard the boards clatter under all that fabric, Sissy came running out from the boarded up house, probably with something like a tea kettle and pot stove, a few washcloths... and for what? She could've been carrying something along the lines of a large pot of every-flower, sprigs of green-blue and braided grass hanging down from her shirtfront. Or she could've been holding a baby, her baby, someone's baby, clinging on to everywhere, with blue-green skin glimmering against the light from the moon.

Old Man and Sissy and her not-baby stood out in front of me on that rickety porch, the one that didn't even have a swing. I felt like some sort of stupid maiden, laying in my puffy skirts like it was blood and guts, all because I couldn't find the decency in me to move.

The morning creatures stirred around the land, frothing up and down out of the blue grass like all of that bubbly water swirling about in Sissy's pot stove. The cicadas and the locusts that once buried this house knew we had to leave, and they were ready to reclaim what was theirs.

We were bathed in a glowing summer season, but the entire world glinted purple, because the sky had taken to changing colors at night. Nobody could really see that far, so no one ever knew why. No one questioned it; because how could you? The sky just glinted like the firmly pressed opal that danced on my finger, but was there anything to show for it? No, and there never would be.

But there was the comet. It hadn't quite been in the papers, other than those old loons at the gossip corner writing up a storm until their fingers bled. That's why nobody believed it until the professor in town made the telescope, and he showed us a big blurring picture of what we assumed was our universe, or somewhere between where we were and where God was, hiding. I had waited in line all night to look into that telescope and see what I saw. I was wearing a white dress, and the wind finally took up as soon as I got up there, whipping around my thin skirts so that they stuck, plastered to my body like the stench of dead skunk.

As soon as I peered through that telescope, I saw a bunch of blobs and blurs and colors and shapes. But I looked past all that, and I looked for someplace that you could maybe make yourself believe was heaven, but I didn't see anything. Hadn't I looked?

I was looking for something that looked like a pillar of white clouds, but by the time I remembered I didn't know where clouds came from, my dress was wrapped up over my head and I heard everyone behind me howling with the wind, a terrible laughter. I felt bad for looking at heaven, and I scuttled away, no better than a rat from the gutter, my face a beaten red, and looking no lovelier, though they always wanted me to be.

At the house, we knew the comet was coming, but we didn't really think twice about it. Maybe it was fear, of being swallowed by the unknown, of going past God. We didn't know, and we didn't dare ask, because something told us that just by the church being closed, with the windows boarded up, that the nuns were going to board the comet too. We knew they were in there, and we heard them and their legs scuttling around like bugs trying to get everything ready. We wondered if they'd packed the Bible, or if it really even mattered anymore. Maybe they'd tell us we were all trying to get to heaven, and this was just the easiest way. I always thought that God didn't want us to go the easiest way, but that was before I realized I'd never even touched a Bible, and wouldn't be able to read one if I had the chance.

I wondered if the nuns would teach me how to read, when we were on board the comet, with our boxes and bags and trunks all wound up with what-stuff, with Sissy's baby and her pot stove and washcloths and her full bouquet of flowers that would've probably tilted over and wilted by now.

I thought of all this as I watched the rain start, lying there on the porch in a huge dress, that I all but wondered how I had got put in it in the first place. This rain wasn't the kind any of us had ever experienced, and it certainly wouldn't be good for the crops. The people in the town would've wailed for days after their lost money, but now, they had packed all their roots up into a case, stuffed their carrots and potatoes into hat boxes, and were ready to ascend whatever staircase was placed in front of us, that is, to board the comet.

"When will it come?" Sissy asked Old Man as the landscape began to blend and blur around us. The rain was liquid, but it was heavy, more dense than the bricks of yellow cornbread Sissy always baked in loaves. It looked the color of honey, dripped sticky like the draining of maple syrup from a tree. I wondered if this was revenge. It looked of melted amber, of vaporized stars falling from the darkness of nowhere. It felt like the beginning and the end of the world all at the same time.

And then it was there, submerged in the ruined corner of our string-bean patch, the mud thrown up against the rain, splattered against the shuddering wooden house and all of us, drenching my dress in sand, water, and splitting beans. I couldn't help but cry out for the ruin of the dress in spite of myself, but the fear got caught in my throat; everyone from town was flooding onto our land, their lives packed up and shut away, all heading to our destroyed vegetable patch. I saw the professor and the nuns, and all the girls from the grammar school that had always laughed at me with pastel baskets strapped onto their heads, as if they had come from another planet themselves. They all ran towards the comet like their lives depended on it, the comet upended in our garden. All I could do was stare as they passed me by.

Sissy and Old Man had gotten mixed in with the crowd, and soon I was sure that everyone was on board except for me. I still couldn't bring myself to move, watery tears of disbelief collecting in my eyes. I couldn't see straight, and I tripped and fell into the mud as I ran towards the comet, the sludge collecting in my hair. My dress was a torn brown.

"Wait!" I tried to scream, but the rain coursed down my throat. I was almost certain it was too late.

Then, an arm, extending, alien-like and solid from the base of the comet.

At first, I thought I was seeing God for the first time, but it was the arm of the professor, his glasses splayed, his normally neat combover flying wildly in all directions, fraternizing with the wind. His hand beckoned to me, and he looked into my eyes like he was trying to tell me something.

I stood up, grabbed his hand, and boarded the comet.

# 2:26

### Elena Miller

Josie decides that she isn't going to start worrying about how long she's been on the train until 2:30. She had gotten on at 1:22 a.m. exactly, surprisingly punctual for The Rapid, and it should've only taken about 40 minutes to reach 79th Street. It's currently 2:24. But hey, sometimes trains are slow, or maybe there was some maintenance or something. To be honest she doesn't really know how trains are supposed to work, but maybe sometimes they just go slower to save gas, or something. There is no way she could've gotten on the wrong train, the Red Line started and ended at the airport. But no, she isn't freaking out because this is the way she comes home every day and she is going to make it back to her shitty apartment like she also does every day.

It hadn't even been that bad of a shift today. Working as a janitor at an airport wasn't really her favorite part of life, but no one had thrown up in her area of the terminal and the usual hyperactive children seemed quieter than normal. Now though, at the end of the day, everything was catching up. Her back hurt, her hands were chapped from the cleaning solution and her shitty bra was poking into her side, the wire starting to break free. She just wants this godforsaken train to get to her stop so she can go back to ignoring the cockroaches in her floorboards till her shift tomorrow.

As she sinks deeper into her seat, her eyes drift around the train car. The ads plastered to the walls are vibrant, almost sickeningly so, and contrast with the dingy gun-metal of her surroundings.

"Do You Feel Stuck?" A grimacing woman looms from an orange background, holding some kind of self help book in her hand.

"Do You Want To Meet New People?" A blindingly happy couple clutch at each other, their teeth like bone-white tombstones.

"Were You In A Train Related Accident? Call Johnson & Gray Law Firm Today!" A man in a poorly fitted suit gives Josie a violent thumbs up, as if wishing her a very happy train accident. Josie has never really cared for the ads in the train, but this late at night they seem menacing rather than simply annoying.

Has the train always been this empty?

She could've sworn there had been other people getting into the car with her. Late night fliers or employees like herself. But now, as she looks around, she's the only one here. The sudden realization of her loneliness sends a shiver up her already aching spine. But it isn't 2:30 yet, so she isn't worried. The train is just going slower than usual.

Looking out the window, Josie rests her head against the cold metal of the sill. Outside the landscape zips past, the moon glinting off snowy buildings, creating an almost ethereal effect on the otherwise dull view. The stars shine bright, little pinpricks in the sky that reflect off the dark waters of the lake. As the train moves it rattles her head and blurs her vision, but that's better than having to keep her neck up for however many more minutes she's going to be here.

Several minutes later, when she checks her phone again, it's still 2:24. It shouldn't be, logically, but glancing again at the cracked screen, Josie is faced with the undeniable truth. Either her admittedly old phone has finally broken, or it is still 2:24. It's not 2:30 yet, so Josie is still calm, is still completely in control. She quickly enters in her passcode and swipes to the settings. She knows she can change the time manually somewhere in there, and hopes that this is all it will take. The Date & Time tab sits quietly in the general settings where Josie goes to turn off the Set Automatically switch. Pressing on the little Cleveland she types in 2:25, but before she even gets to the end of the time her phone shuts off. Josie is left staring at the blackened screen, her own confused face grimacing back.

"Hey, Siri," she says, pressing the home button, "set an alarm for 2:25 a.m."

"2:25."

The voice comes out of nowhere, quiet and hissing, like steam from her mother's crockpot. Josie shoots up, phone still clutched in her white knuckled grip.

"Hello?" Her voice is shaky and uncertain in the rumbling air of the train car.

"2:25."

The voice sounds like it's behind her now, louder, more real. She isn't freaking out, she isn't she isn't

She doesn't want to turn around. That would make it real. She didn't think there was anyone on the train but now images flash through her head. Women like her, broken and abandoned, left to freeze in the backroads of the world. She doesn't have a lot of people to miss her and she

wonders if the person in the seat behind her can tell.

"2:25."

Again, those same numbers repeated. Josie grasps sideways, towards her bag that rests on the seat next to her. She has no illusions that she'll be able to get her pepper spray out from the pocket, but at least she'll have something to hit an attacker with if push came to shove.

"2:25, 2:25, 2:25."

And something brushes her shoulder. Josie whips around, swinging her bulky tote bag, heavy with her salvaged laptop, and hits nothing. There's no one there, just rows of grungy metro seats and a shadow. Or not quite a shadow, it's too defined, too physical. Sitting behind the seat where her bag used to lie, it almost looks like a woman. Dark strands of shadow make long hair, and if Josie squints she can parse the shape of a nose, a rounded jaw, and gently sloping eyebrows. But that's where any similarities end. Its eyes are dark, hollow and pupiless, its mouth is one long slit across its face, and its body is a formless thing, the shade that makes it up constantly shifting.

"Oh dear fucking lord," Josie gasps, the hand holding her bag now pressed to her racing chest, "What the hell are you?"

"2:25," the thing whispers, its slit-mouth gaping slightly as the words pass through its non-existent lips.

"Yeah, not very helpful."

As she stares at the thing, and it stares back, her racing heart begins to slow. It isn't moving, just undulating in place, and it didn't react at all to her tote bag going right through its shadowy head. It just sits, and stares unblinkingly forward.

"So," Josie says, trying to adopt a joking tone, "is this the moment you kill me, for like not being a virgin or something? Cause if that's the case I could name some better reasons to do it. Virginity is such a dated concept anyways."

"2:25," it hisses back, still very unhelpful.

"Ok, so I'm going to take that as a no?"

At this point Josie is just lost. Her initial panic, first at the voice, then at the thing itself, has mostly faded, leaving behind just a sense of confusion. She is still on the train and it's still 2:24 and she doesn't know what to do about it.

"Ok!" She exclaims, standing up, "I'm going to figure out what the fuck is happening, you stay right there."

The shadow doesn't acknowledge her, just continues to exist quietly. Josie begins to back up slowly towards the door separating the front of her train car from the back of the next one. She doesn't really want to turn her back to the thing, afraid that the moment she lets her guard down it'll snap. So she faces it even as her back hits the cold metal and glass of the door.

"Ok," she starts, addressing the shadow. "I'm going to turn around and look out the window, I need you not to attack me or like, to start whispering creepily or anything like that. Because this night is weird enough as is and I don't feel like fending off a ghost attack."

She gives the thing a thumbs up, as if it'll respond any differently than it has before. It continues to stare, which she decides to take as a positive sign. With one last glance she turns around to the door.

Outside there is nothing.

No train car in front of them, no tracks on the ground, no snowy Cleveland streets. Just a void. Just shadow.

Josie isn't going to freak out. She isn't going to cry. She is not going to scream in frustration or anger or anything. Instead she is going to quietly sink to the ground and put her head between her knees. It seems about as productive as anything else she could do. "2:25."

The shadow had gotten up. It's leaning its face against the pane of the window by the seat and seems to be looking out, almost longingly. Josie scrambles up from her crouched position and stumbles over to the window. The view is about the same as the one out of the door. Nothing familiar, just miles of inky blackness. Josie has never loved her home, Ohio isn't a particularly interesting place and Cleveland is simply Cleveland. But at this moment, she would give anything to see the moon over Lake Erie.

Next to her sits the shadow, the two of them separated only by the rigid backs of the subway seats. The shade that makes up its lower body is formed like a pair of kneeling legs. Its face is pressed against the window and shadowy limbs reach up and seem to claw at the glass. The darkness of that face doesn't seem to really make clear expressions but it looks frightened, almost desperate. To escape perhaps? Is this shadow stuck here as well?

"Please," Josie begs it, "do you know what's happening? Do you know why I am here? I'm just a fucking janitor, I don't know what to do!"
"2:25"

"God fucking damnit, that isn't helpful!"

She's crying now, tears trailing down her cheeks, staring at the thing that's probably trapped here with her. It doesn't move from its position, pawing slowly at the window pane, and pressing its blank face against the glass. Josie tries to touch it, to shake it, to force it to notice her, but

her hand passes right through the shadowy form.

And then it's moving again, pushing itself off the window and stumbling, almost human-like, towards the doors on the other side of the train. It hits them hard, and tries to shove them open, wedging shadowy fingers into the cracks. It's useless, even if the door gets opened there's nothing out there now.

The thing has started sinking down, the impression of its forehead pressed to the door as it kneels on the ground. It still hasn't acknowledged her.

Then she blinks and it's gone. She swivels her head frantically, only to stop abruptly when her gaze lands on the shadow again. It's sitting in the seat behind her, staring straight ahead, as if it never moved in the first place.

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"2:25," it hisses. "2:25."

"What the hell?"

"2:25."

"No, shut up. What the actual hell?"

"2:25, 2:25, 2:25."
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It reaches out its hand to touch the back of the seat. Josie remembers a brush against her shoulder, a gaze on her neck. The thing has returned exactly to where it was when it first appeared. Like a song on repeat, like a never ending story. It strikes her suddenly that she may not be getting off this train. That the shadow before her had probably never gotten off of the train. That a lot of people have gotten onto the Red Line and have simply disappeared. Shadows forgotten in the a.m. hours, left behind by the bustle of the rest of the world.

At Josie's elementary school there had been a yearly assembly about danger and the police. She doesn't remember what the speaker looked like, but she remembers the humidity of a couple hundred kids shoved into the school gymnasium, can feel the cool polyurethane on her calves and the press of her light up sketchers against her leg.

"A lot of people disappear," the speaker had said, "but not a lot get found"

How many had disappeared here? How many had never been found? Her life feels like a ticking time bomb. The shadow, the woman, had started moving again, clawing at the windows. When she had existed was there a shadow acting out its final minutes, like a death march. Josie doesn't want to disappear, she doesn't want to become a shadow. She wants to save up enough money to go to college, or at least to afford a better apartment. She wants to have kids, she wants to grow old, she doesn't want to die on a train, with only a shadow to keep her company.

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"Please," she says again, "isn't there anything I can do?"
"2:25."
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The woman seems to respond to Josie, in a way. She may not be able to speak but maybe she can hear her, maybe they can figure something out.

"Is there a way out of this?" Josie asks, "Say 2:25 if there is and uh, don't do anything if there isn't." There is a moment of silence, where Josie can feel her final hopes crumbling, like a seaside cliff worn by the wind.

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"2:25."

"Oh thank fuck, you really scared me for a second."
"2 25 2 25."
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And then the shadow is flinging herself up again, towards the door. It's tragic to watch, knowing that once upon a time this woman had desperately tried to free herself and had failed. But Josie won't be this woman. There is a way out of here and she will find it or, quite literally, die trying.

She takes a second to reach into her pocket for her phone. It's 2:24. She presses in her passcode and scrolls to her contacts. It didn't work earlier and it isn't going to work now, but Josie would feel like an idiot if she didn't at least try. Pressing on her mom's number she holds the phone up to her ears. Maybe if she closes her eyes it'll feel like a normal day, calling her mom in the early morning to let her know she got home safe. A drowsy greeting, a quiet goodbye. But the phone isn't even ringing. Looking at the screen again it's as if she never even turned it on. All she sees is her lockscreen photo and the white numbers 2:24. It wasn't going to work but the confirmation still hurts.

The shadow is beside her again, sitting in the seat. Josie takes a minute just to observe her. Her body is still mostly just a blob of void, but Josie can almost make out hands in her lap, crossed legs, slumped shoulders. Her dark hair grows long over her shoulders. She could be anyone. She might've been a traveler from the airport, just in Cleveland for a day. Maybe she even passed by Josie while she worked, two people who had nothing in common. Someone who just had somewhere to be, then was nowhere at all.

"You said that there's a way out of here, but what is it? How can I get off?" Josie says this, but doesn't expect a reply.

"2:25."

"Yeah you've said that a couple times."

"2:25."

Josie knows this is all she's going to get, she knows. But it's so frustrating, like trying to scratch an itch on your back, out of reach until you can get a friend to help. Sitting here begging a dead woman for help isn't doing anything, it's time to get to work.

She starts by checking the windows. The ones on these trains barely worked on good days, but she has to try. The first one rattles promisingly, but doesn't budge any further, the second one doesn't even move, but once she gets to the third, after a bit of a struggle, it cracks open.

"Yes!" She exclaims, "That's progress!"

But now looking outside she can see the void, previously a solid black, is roiling, pressing close to the window. A little tendrel of midnight slips through the crack she made and brushes the back of her hand. Suddenly she hears a song a few seats in front of her.

"I've been ghosting," it plays quietly, "I've been ghosting along."

It's the alarm she set earlier. The time is 2:25.

It's 2:25 and Josie's body is disintegrating. She falls off the seat away from the window, her legs no longer able to hold her weight. Her shadowy hands grasp at her face, but pass through her skin.

"No, no, no, no no no nonononono-." Her voice cuts off abruptly, leaving only a hissing noise behind.

"2:26," she croaks involuntarily, with words no longer hers. "2:26, 2:26, 2:26," her mind is fogging, filled with shadow and smoke.

"2:26, 2:26, 2:26."

The Red Line stops at E. 79th Street Station. No one gets off.

# **FLORA**

### Kenlie Rohrer

The Festival of Demeter and Persephone only came once a year, and with it, hundreds of spectators would gather at the center of the capital, waiting in long lines just to get a glimpse inside. The building was not permanent, a square box of thin sheet metal, one that the service workers hammered together every year before it came to town, one that could be discarded and sold for scrap easily, only to be reconstructed again the next lunar year. The box building looked large, deceptively so; after all, how large could something really be that only consisted of four corners? For some reason, the Festival always came at the end of the year, when the weather was about to tip towards the dry season; no one knew much about what the plants had been like, but most knew that plants did not appreciate dryness. There was something called "seasons" that used to take up all the time during the year, the plants changing as the weather changed, and the people were fascinated by this, and so, they were fascinated by the box, or at least what was inside it.

My grandmother had always wanted to go and see the inside of the box, and this year she thought I was finally old enough to go with her and experience it all. That day we got up early, darkness still sweeping the streets, and got into line with the rest of the people. From farther away, the line always seemed like it never moved, like it never got any bigger or smaller. Now that my grandmother and I were in the line, I knew that was not the case, as we seemed to be at the front near the entrance in no time.

I soon noticed something odd. "Where's the door?" I asked my grandmother, as I could see where the line backed up all the way to the edge of the building. I blinked a few times while focusing on the spot where the people began and ended, and couldn't see where they were entering the building. I looked at my grandmother, but she was facing straight ahead. She didn't say anything and she didn't look at me.

We finally reached the border of the building. I could see the little knots and imperfections in the metalwork of the box, and wondered for the millionth time what the metal had been a part of before it was made into this building, what it was used to make after the building was taken apart again. I was just about to reach out and touch the grains in the metalwork when my grandmother said, "You know, as long as I have lived in this city, I have never once seen them take apart this building." She still didn't turn around and look at me. "Now, isn't that strange?"

I shrugged, even though she wasn't looking at me. "Maybe it's all supposed to be part of the magic."

And it was, because at that moment, we were inside the box. I still never remembered going through a door, but I supposed it was one of those new transmitter things that were popping up all over the place now.

It was a kind of museum, but one unlike anything I had ever seen. There were museums that displayed images of what plants and animals had looked like at one time, but they were poor copies, drawings based off of drawings, not real things at all. I remembered sitting at one of the museums when I was younger, with my grandmother, some other children and their grandmothers, watching the flickering image against the metal wall panel, wondering what it might be like to smell a flower, eat a non-synthetic piece of fruit, or touch the muzzle of a horse...

But this place was full of flowers. Real flowers.

My grandmother immediately sagged against me in awe. I heard her whisper "Praise Demeter. Praise Persephone." I felt dizzy. I barely knew where to look first. The heads of the things were mounted on handsomely carved plaques; they were made to resemble actual wood, but of course they were only made out of scrap metal, as everything was. They were spaced evenly apart, some far larger than others, some far smaller, so small that I couldn't even make them out from where I was standing at the very front of the box. I longed to get a closer look.

My grandmother and I rushed like children to each and every plaque, examining the head of each specimen, and laughing aloud to ourselves. "These are just how I remembered them," my grandmother said at one point, even though I knew it was impossible for her to have been alive when there was any sign of plant life. The plants had gone before the animals, just slightly, or so we had learned at the other museums. The heads of the flowers were almost as large as ours, sometimes even larger. We put ourselves next to them, comparing their size with ours.

We learned the names of the specimens. We learned orchid, lily, rose, tulip, gardenia, amaryllis. There were some with remarkably long green branches coming from underneath the large heads, sticking into the plaques against the wall. I couldn't believe that the small, frail things could support the entire head of the flower. I couldn't believe how many different specimens there were. It just seemed too good to be true.

There were so many different colors. Brown, black, white, gray, and green, and all different shades as well. There were even some that had been soaked in a kind of dye; some of them were brighter green, and some were a violent shade of orange. I was unsure that any of the flowers had ever been that shade in real life.

There seemed to be many rooms of the flower heads, but I knew the building had only one room. I decided it was another optical illusion or transmitter like the door had been, and followed my grandmother to the one.

More and more heads. I was starting to tire of the newness, the effects of the initial surprise wearing off quickly. I squinted my eyes and peered down the never-ending hallway; or were they rooms? There seemed to be no end to the flowers. Just how many specimens were there? Surely there were never this many. I looked around for my grandmother, but didn't see her anymore. I shrugged to myself and continued on down the rows, thinking I'd find her a little farther down.

The more I looked at the heads, the more uncomfortable I began to feel. I stared into the face of one of the flowers, a particularly large one called a cactus blossom. I didn't think it looked like a very nice flower at all. The lighting behind it was flickering, and it looked particularly ominous against the dark metal background that made up the walls of the box. I moved on down the row, this time skipping a couple of the heads and settling on one of the dyed flowers. This one was a lily, a calla lily, or so it said on the small line of metal next to the plaque. I thought the brightness of the color would make me feel more comfortable, but what it conveyed was just unsettling. There was a small stick protruding from the center of the head, and if I peered close enough, I could see little beady feelers attached to the stick, fuzzy pinpricks of dust, somethings... I wasn't entirely sure what to make of it, but the thing looked alien. It seemed an orange head pulled taut against a white, white skull, a mouth far too wide and gasping. I saw veins pulsing against the skin, black and sickly looking; they disappeared down the throat and into the body, which was a pale green, jutting into the plaque. The shadows of the thing were all wrong, and seemed to fall to the floor in a massive puddle. They were leaking onto the metal walls of the place, along the back of the flower's skull, down it's curving mouth; it almost looked like it had eyes, like it was observing me instead.

I pried my eyes from the sight and looked around again for my grandmother. I still didn't see her anywhere, and by now I was starting to panic. She would understand that the flowers scared me. They came from a different time altogether, they weren't something I was used to. And how were the flowers fed? Didn't flowers need some sort of liquid to survive? Didn't they need sunlight? What was sustaining them behind the metal walls, behind the plaques, behind the heads?

I looked back into the calla lily's face, one last time, and saw there, nestled in its mouth, a human head.

I froze, and my eyes locked with the human's eyes. I noticed immediately that it was my grandmother's head, but it was completely white, as if it had been carved out of smooth alabaster. But everyone knew alabaster didn't exist anymore; the only thing we had was scrap metal.

"Grandmother?" I gasped, and tears pricked the corner of my eyes. I stepped closer to the mouth of the flower where my grandmother's head lolled on its orange tongue, almost as if the flower were taunting me. I always wondered what a flower smelled like, and as I got closer, I could smell its breath, its blood. It didn't smell at all like I thought it would. It just smelled like death, like rotting meat, like blood.

I backed away from the flower, from the head in its jaws, the face, eyes blinking at me, and I bumped right into something. I turned around, and it was my grandmother, with the strangest look in her eyes.

"Where have you been, child? I have been looking for you all day," she said, and her face contorted into a smudge of wrinkles. I realized it was the first time she had looked at me since we had gotten to the Festival. I blinked at her, turned slightly, and looked at the calla lily. "But that flower..." I began, but the calla lily was just a calla lily, stained orange. There was no head, and there was no alabaster, just the slight stench of iron lingering in the air. I still didn't like the look of it staring at me, and I followed my grandmother towards the front of the building without looking back.

We walked for what seemed like hours, her walking several paces in front of me. We walked for so long I didn't know whether we were going to the front of the building or the back of it, but I assumed my grandmother knew where she was going. We walked past hundreds and hundreds of spectators, all ogling at the precious flower heads dangling upon their plaques. I had heard of zoos being a thing in the distant past, but I wasn't sure if there had been zoos for flowers or other plant life; I thought it was only animals. I tried not to think about this as I passed each flower, tried not to think of the mouths snarling at me, the tongues rolling open, the heads that might come out, the smell of human blood...

I realized I had almost lost my grandmother again, and jogged to keep up with her. Since when was she this fast? Perhaps the presence of the flowers was giving her strength, or maybe it was just her motivation to leave this place. Perhaps she was just as freaked out by the flowers as I was.

As we got farther and farther down the rows of mounted flower heads, the fewer people I saw. The box had looked large from the outside, but it was massive from the inside, an uncountable number of flowers, infinite metal panels. My grandmother herself seemed fuzzy in the distance of my vision, stretching into somewhere else entirely, past the boundary and just about to reach it at the same time, crossing the threshold. Maybe there was another transmitter here too, the one that would let us back into the real world. I couldn't wait to feel the stagnant air on my face again.

But it wasn't the front of the box that came into view, or at least not what I remembered to be at the front of the box. My grandmother stopped next to a bunch of stacked metal tables filled with experimental equipment. A bunch of people in stained orange coats were waiting there beside the tables; some of them were fiddling with the equipment, some were standing there patiently, watching us approach. Had the coats once been white? They held their hands behind their backs. I wished they wouldn't hold their hands behind their backs. And on the tables were a few of the plaques, sitting flat, the heads sticking up, mouths wide and begging. The people were measuring out vials of thick, red liquid; the stuff looked gelatinous as it spouted out into multiple different glass tubes.

Glass. They had glass.

There were no other people around, and no mounted flower heads either. The tables were pushed up against the metal walls, and I could see no transmitter, door, or exit in sight, but after all, I had never even seen an entrance. I looked to my grandmother for some sort of explanation, but she was facing towards me, looking back the other way to what I assumed was the actual entrance where we had came in, a strange look of far-away yearning on her face, like she couldn't wait to get back to where the flowers were.

"Thank you for your gracious gift, Mother Demeter," said one of the people around the table. He was speaking directly to my grandmother, and bowed slightly before her. She turned her back towards him, gave him a sharp smile, and said, "Of course. I am only sorry that it took so long."

Before I knew what was happening, my grandmother was walking away, towards the front of the box, towards the flowers, towards the outside, and the people in orange coats were walking towards me. They removed their hands from behind their backs and put them on my skin, bringing me closer to the table with the red liquid. I could see it pulsating and squirming beneath the glass like it was alive, and I knew then what would happen to me. I focused on my grandmother's tiny form until she faded away completely from my sight.

"It is because of you, Mother Persephone, that we are allowed to keep life going," said one of the orange coats as he raised a white suchter to my throat. I recognized it from medical clinics I had been to; it would drain all the blood from my body in seconds, depositing the contents into the suchter to be transported anywhere the user pleased. The orange coat raised the suchter to my neck and breathed into my ear: "Most thanks for your gracious gift."

The Festival of Demeter and Persephone was not just a Festival, but a part of the culture in each capital city that happened to gain its presence. The lines were long and winding, and children were not allowed in unless they were of a certain age. A number of complaints were lodged against the specific construction of the building at one point in time, around the age when the Festival first started coming to town, although no one can quite remember that far back anymore. They said the box-like structure was confusing, maze-like, and was not suitable for a number of spectators, specifically those who were particularly young. They said the flowers were too alluring, too fragrant, and a number of people got lost in the building each year, never to be found again. It is assumed that they made it out, but after that, where did they go? The people who lost family members could only hope and pray to Demeter and Persephone that their loved ones might be found. They would continue to visit the Festival each year, in hopes to see the faces of the lost ones hidden among the blooms.

# A DEGREE IN UNDERWATER BASKET WEAVING

Riley O'Byrne

You said it wouldn't be useful, you did, to get a degree in underwater basket weaving. You told me, I'll never have a stable job if you get that degree! *To hell with you*, I thought, *to hell with you*, there's a use for everything! And lo and behold, I was right.

When the world flooded and the seas rose; when cities drowned and continents became islands; when humanity had to learn to swim instead of run; when we had to learn to hold our breath instead of learning to speak; my skills of underwater manipulation became handy.

So, father, do you dare criticize me now? When I am the wealthiest person on this soggy planet. And you, an astrophysicist who would make more than me, are without a home, without a job, and without a son.

# "THE BIRDS"

### Kenlie Rohrer

The second week that I went to the clinic was the first time that I saw the birds.

The mother, or what I presumed to be the mother, was holed up in the narrow hollow of the oak tree in the front of my apartment building. It was a twenty-one minute walk to the clinic. I heard the baby birds before I had even turned the corner, even stepped back a few paces so that I could see up into the tree and find out where the chirping was coming from.

It only took me a minute to realize that the birds had actually created a nest in a hollow at the bottom of the tree, not the top, like I had initially thought. This worried me. Why would they make their nest so close to the ground? What was the mother thinking? I tried not to think of the chirps as I backed away from the tree, headed down the street. I had other things to worry about.

The clinic was nothing but a whirl of death and confusion. I tried not to look into anyone's eyes as I took care of each patient, trying not to scream when a dozen more were brought in around lunchtime. I visited the same patients over and over until they weren't there anymore, and today was no different. I knew nothing about medicine and I felt like I had never done anything important in my life, but someone had to do it. Someone had to do it.

They couldn't all just die.

I gently reeled back the flimsy plastic shower curtain we were using as makeshift separators for each patient, knelt as I said hello to Jon. He looked even more pale than I remembered from yesterday night; not a good sign. I really didn't have any experience, but after the first week of volunteering at the clinic, I knew more than I ever cared to. I wanted to explore queer America, and I wanted to run away from home, and I had gotten far more than I had bargained for.

No. This was queer America. But why did I feel like I hadn't gotten what I wanted?

Jon tried to smile at me as I looked uselessly at his bed trimmings. He looked as if he hadn't moved since I last saw him. His eyes were purple and green, bruised. I knew he couldn't speak thanks to the hoarseness in his lungs, cutting off his voice, but his eyes still held their light. Veins strangled through his pale body, spider-webbing out through his arms. He looked like he had been poisoned. *Poisoned since birth* they would say, but they said that about all of us.

I knew his eyes followed me as I tried to do whatever I could, looking back at my clipboard, looking back at the wires, checking to make sure everything was in its place. I wasn't sure why I always expected to find some sort of relief after I had finished checking on some of the worst patients, but the minute I let the flimsy plastic of the shower curtain fall behind me, I was just stepping into more of it. More patients were being wheeled in every day, the volunteers at the clinic keeping their eyes averted, darkened, down at the ground. Was this where we belonged? I was so afraid that I felt nothing, but I couldn't ignore the feeling that I was holding my breath the entire time I was at the clinic.

Night fell eventually, as it always does. A lot of the women stayed at the clinic overnight; not in case anyone were to need them, but in case anyone passed away. It was a terrible thing to go wherever queer people went after they died, and to go there alone? It was much more frightening to pass over because a lot of us didn't have any of the answers. And what's more; where did people go if they had this sickness? Would we all be next? Would we all die?

My mind was blank as I walked the few blocks back to my apartment building. I thought of absolutely nothing as I counted my steps, my eyes glued to the dirty cement, used to the downcast. I counted my breaths until they seemed to return to a normal pace, but I didn't really know what normal was anymore. It had been ages since I had been anywhere except the clinic. I wondered bleakly if I had any food in the fridge for that night's meal, and then realized I had been wondering about that for the past two weeks. There was nothing, I knew. There was always nothing.

And then, just as I rounded the corner, I spotted something on the sidewalk. I had almost trodden on it; it was lumped in the small gap of space between where the cement ended and the grass began. It was small and brown and slightly fuzzy. If I hadn't been trained to look for the slightest bit of movement, the slightest bit of breath, any indication that the body was still alive, I might not have even realized that the lump was the baby bird I had heard earlier that day. I had almost completely forgotten about them. I looked up, and sure enough, I was standing right by the oak tree, the hollow that was too close to the ground lingering at the corner of my vision.

I peered into the hollow, where I had seen a shadow of a mother that morning. If you hadn't looked very closely, you would've thought she was still there, sitting on her eggs, that they hadn't hatched yet, that everything was normal. Everything appeared normal, until I realized the mother was nowhere to be found, the nest covered in shadows. Where was she? Had she flown away to look for food? Maybe she was looking for her baby, or maybe she had abandoned it all together.

I wasn't used to wasting time, so I walked up to my apartment, put on a pair of rubbery garden gloves and walked back down to the sidewalk where the lump was still heaving. Had it tried to fly to its mother? How had it gotten out of the nest in the first place? Had something tried to eat it? Was there a predator around? And where was the mother?

I knelt and gently scooped the frail thing into my cupped hands. It was no bigger than my palm and seemed so, so afraid. I could feel its life quivering against the gloves, against my skin, and I felt it all the way up my arms. I walked carefully over to the hollow where the shadow of the mother bird had sat, and slid the small baby bird onto the clump of dry leaves. Its tiny eyes blinked up at me, and I couldn't help but feel like I was back at the clinic, staring into the dead, glassy eyes of another person who had passed away. Would Jon be dead when I went back tomorrow morning? Or was he already dead?

The next morning, I came out early to check on the baby. I had reassured myself that the mother would be back, but as I peered inside the hollow, it was still completely empty. No mother and what's more, there was no baby. Panic rose in my throat, and I immediately went back a couple steps to check the sidewalk, the place where I had found the baby before. I didn't find it there, and I ran along the entire length of the sidewalk by the oak tree, still not seeing anything. I was afraid I stepped on it, so I looked at the bottom of my shoes, tears pricking the corner of my eyes, but I didn't see anything there either. What had happened to them? What had happened to us?

I was breathing very fast, and people were starting to come out of the apartment building. They were looking at me funny, but then again, they always looked at me funny because they knew I was gay. They knew I spent every day working at the clinic. They probably thought if they got too close to me they would catch the "gay cancer" too. And what if that's what it was? None of us could tell them they were wrong, that they were wrong about all of us. That they should be wrong for wanting us to die, for wanting us to take the blame.

And where was the baby bird? Where was the baby bird's mother?

After another half hour of searching, I found it, nestled in a grove of saw palms by the entrance of the apartment complex. No one would've ever seen it unless they had thought to look between the fronds, but if you were walking by and just happened to look down, there's no way you would've missed it. It looked the same as the night before, but I couldn't help wondering if it was actually dead. I think I would've found more relief if that were the case, but I took myself back up the apartment steps, put on the gardening gloves, and lifted its frail body once again. I wasn't sure how, but I swear I felt the heartbeat against my own skin. It was alive.

I turned around and started heading towards the oak tree, but stopped. The hollow was far too close to the ground. Wouldn't the baby just get out of the nest again? And the mother still hadn't returned, so how would the baby get any food? How did biology even work? Did it even work at all? I didn't know that much about birds.

I thought about taking the baby bird back into my apartment building and nursing it back to health myself. I could be its new mother and feed it from a tiny baby bottle just like it was a doll. Just like it was my actual baby, the one I would most likely never have. People hated gay people so much that they let them die, day in and day out. There would be no chance I could ever have a child. I didn't even have a partner, didn't even have time to go out and find one. The other lesbians at the clinic were far too busy averting their eyes, far too busy working to save the men from a death they knew was only too certain, far too busy pretending and avoiding and hiding their tears and then waiting in line to give blood once they were done working and not working all day. I know that's what I did, and I knew they were all the same. After all, how could there be love at a time like this? And wasn't it love that had gotten us all into this mess in the first place? Some sort of messed-up, non-biological love that went against nature itself? Isn't that why we were infected in the first place, why we were all dying?

We were all the same.

I felt something break inside me, and I walked the baby bird back over to the oak tree, bent down just slightly, and tipped it back into the empty nest. I would've liked to be its mother. No, I would've loved to be its mother. I would've loved to be something, someone I am not. No. Lesbians could not be mothers. Gay people could not be parents. How could they be parents if they were dead? And after all, what if the true mother ended up coming back? What if she had been there during the night, and had flown off this morning to find more food for her baby? No. I had better let the true mother take care of this. If she came back and found out her baby had been stolen, well... I didn't know much about biology, but I would've been upset.

I went back up to my apartment, threw off the gloves, ate a crust of stale bread, and headed down to the clinic, counting every sidewalk panel that fell in between.

As soon as I walked inside, I stopped breathing. I wondered if Jon had died during the night, had also stopped breathing, and thought better than to ask one of the other volunteers, since their eyes were perpetually facing towards the ground anyway. There would be no chance for me to ask. There was no casualty. I just had to wait until I made my rounds through all of the patients. I could do nothing else.

There were a few new ones today, and I had to take an extra long time getting them all comfortable and set up, but I couldn't help thinking

I was only setting them up for their deaths, which I guess I was. I tried not to think of the baby bird, sitting alone in the nest, wondering where its mother was. Wondering where I was. No. I was needed here. Where were the mothers of these people?

I was so busy thinking about the birds and mothers and fertility and motherhood and what it all meant that I didn't realize when I was standing in Jon's screened-off room. He smiled at me like he was glad to see me, like he was glad to see another day. I couldn't imagine the pain he was in, though I'm pretty sure he looked the same as yesterday. That's what they always said; that it started off really bad, and then got worse, and then it just settled in, the pneumonia or bronchitis or whatever it was that targeted us. That targeted them. None of the lesbians in the clinic or the ones I knew had ever contracted anything like it. We all wore protective gear of course, whatever we could afford, whatever we could scrounge up, but I had never known a lesbian to catch it. We didn't know why, but that didn't make it any less real, any less scary. Yes, they had called us "fish", yes, they had mocked us constantly, but we were the only family any of us had. We had to stick together, or else we would be out there dying on the street, just like the baby bird.

I nearly flew out of the clinic that day, and counted my breaths and steps extra fast as I made my way back to the apartment, to the oak tree, to my baby bird. I could see the oak tree from all the way down the block, and had to do everything in my power not to run all the way there. Maybe the mother had come back only moments after I had left for the clinic that morning. Maybe everything was okay. Maybe God would actually forgive us; and if not us, maybe he would forgive the birds.

I finally reached the tree, bent down slightly, and peered into the nest, holding my breath.

The mother was there, or what I presumed to be the mother; a large, plump bird whose girth covered almost the entire top of the nest. My heart nearly plummeted into my chest when I realized I didn't see the baby bird at all, but then I noticed, just underneath the mothers' heavy layer of feathers, something small and quivering, brown and fuzzy. I couldn't help it; I burst into tears.

That night, I dreamt of motherhood, of a small child wearing green gardening gloves and my eyes, following around a woman with no face. Everything was fuzzy, vague, but it felt so real, as dreams often do. The first few minutes after I woke up, I stayed with my eyes closed, trying to fall back asleep, anything so that I could fall back into the dream, but the knowledge of it faded with every second that passed, until I couldn't even remember why I had been lying in bed for so long, or why I felt so exhausted, so drained, and so hopeless.

I went downstairs, stepped up to the oak tree, and bent down to look inside the hollow. The mother was there, sitting on top of her baby like it was still an egg. If I had known anything about biology I might've thought that was a bit strange, but I thought nothing of it. After all, I was already late to my shift at the clinic. They needed me more. The baby had its mother now, didn't it? Perhaps the mother was just trying to nurse the baby back to health. Perhaps the baby was cold. Cold, yes.

New patients again. It was all a blur of eyes slashed towards the floor, eyeless patients, bloodshot eyes, tired eyes, death. I went to Jon's bedside, filled up his glass of water. There was word of him possibly needing a feeding tube. There was fluid in his lungs. Hadn't there always been fluid in his lungs? Wasn't that what pneumonia was? But it didn't matter what pneumonia was, because he was gay, and no one was going to help him except for a couple of lesbians playing doctor, or more appropriately, playing nurse. I didn't say anything, just listened as they spoke of Jon's impending death. I thought it was strange; they spoke directly to the floor. Couldn't Jon hear them, or had his ears gone too?

The afternoon came, and I had moved on to my other patients. There were more and more of them now, and the days got longer and longer. I felt horrible after thinking I would be too tired to take care of them all, that some of them had to be let go. What were we even trying to do here? We could never have saved them.

Jon ended up passing away right before my shift was over. I stayed to watch him become covered by a black sheet, trash bag. What would they do with the body? I found myself wondering, and then realized I didn't know what they did with any of the bodies, where they were disposed of. No one wanted a gay body, dead or alive, not even their families. Not even their mothers. So where did they go?

I decided once again to avert my eyes, to not think about anything other than the fact that Jon was, finally, no longer in pain, but even that felt like a lie. I counted my breaths and I counted my steps until I was right up against the base of the oak tree, but this time, it wasn't dusk like it normally was. It was past dusk, but not quite nighttime yet; a gathering of darkness, you could say. I peered into the hollow, saw the mother in the exact same place, the baby, quivering, fuzzy, brown, underneath her once again. It only took a few seconds to check on them, and I felt happy. At least they had made it.

That night I dreamed of a graveyard, and I knew I was looking at the graves of my family, the ones from the dream the night before. The faceless, eyeless woman, my partner, the mother of the little boy with garden gloves, the one who wore my face. I was the mother too, but I was also looking at my own grave. I woke up with tears wet on my face and I screamed and screamed until my throat was raw and I was sure my neighbors wouldn't wake up and call the cops on me. It was just enough and not enough. Why couldn't I ever have enough? Why couldn't I ever be enough?

I stayed up so that I wouldn't see the graves, but every time I closed my eyes they were there, just at the back of my eyelids. I ignored them and tried to keep my eyes open for most of the day, tried to not even blink. I forgot entirely to check in on the birds that morning, but part of me was glad that I didn't see them. Their love and happiness would be too much for me to bear.

Instead, I busied myself at the clinic like I always did. A dozen new patients today, and some new information about the virus. Another volunteer sidled up next to me as I was walking between the curtains and said they finally had a new name for the virus that wasn't "gay-related immune deficiency." She said it was now proper to call it AIDS, or acquired immune deficiency syndrome. The volunteer had curly auburn hair and smelled of coconut shampoo. She walked away before I could say anything, and before I could think not to, I blinked and saw the backs of the graves etched against my eyelids.

I stood completely still for a moment. What did a name mean? Did it mean they cared about us? Did it mean they cared about the ones who were dying? The ones who were already dead?

No. I certainly knew better than to think that way. But I couldn't take it. I saw my child, all my children, being wheeled out of the clinic, their body parts stuffed in black trash bags, saw my wife, my partner, faceless and screaming, pulling at her sockets, until she too was wheeled from the room, her body dumped into a sewer, or burned, incinerated, the ashes only to be forgotten and thrown away, onto a huge pile with all the rest. What would happen to them? What would happen to the birds?

I excused myself and threw myself from the clinic. I ran down the block, faster and faster, the number of sidewalk panels throwing themselves up against my brain. I kept my eyes peeled open, and I saw no darkness except for the outline of the oak tree against the blue, blue sky. It was too blue, too happy. Nothing should be that blue.

I made it to the tree, and lowered myself to the ground, turning away from the mouth of the hollow as I heaved and panted. I didn't want to scare the birds away. Once I had finally regained an ounce of my breath, I turned and looked at them, into the mothers' wild, wild eyes. They had not moved an inch since last night. I felt furious. I wanted to fling them both from the tree, the baby gently, the mother more roughly. I wanted to shake the feathers from her body, pluck her like a chicken. Why hadn't she gotten the baby any food? Why hadn't she left the hollow in days? What was going on? I knew she didn't fly away while I was gone; she never went anywhere. Why was she sitting on her baby like that, like it was already dead? I dared not move her to check, but I knew with all my being that I hated that mother bird, that I hated her more than the people that hated me, that hated all of us, that caused us to die, that didn't care enough about death to find a way to stop it, but only could think about it long enough for a name, a more a suitable name...

I stood up, wiped my face on my sleeve, and walked my way, slowly, to the clinic again. I still had a few more hours of time left there, and I had probably wasted far too many minutes being gone. The birds were fine and I had to accept that. They were fine without me.

By the time I had finished my shift, I had seen the volunteer with the auburn hair four more times and six more patients had died. I guess now I could say for sure they died of AIDS, but somehow those words together in that order seemed like a poison, like their lives were cheapened due to the term. I could imagine why it felt that way, tried not to think about it, and averted my eyes until the sun dipped behind the clouds.

That night, I walked home far slower than normal; or maybe it just seemed like it after my rage-induced run during the afternoon. Jon was dead and gone. My imaginary family was dead as well, but that one was far worse because they had never even existed in the first place. They would never exist. They could never even hope to exist.

I traipsed my way up to the oak tree, slowly, as if a part of me never wanted to look inside the hollow ever again, as if my body had developed a natural aversion to the entirety of the tree. A cricket chirped nearby, announcing the arrival of night. It wasn't quite nighttime yet, but it was past dusk; a gathering of darkness, you could say.

I looked inside the hollow tree and saw immediately that the mother bird was no longer there, though her shadow still remained, etched upon the bark like some sort of permanent looming ghost. I looked down farther into the nest and saw the sharp outline of the baby bird, but something was wrong; it was dead, and it had been long dead, a few days at least. The tiny white bone of the beak was starting to peek through the decomposing brown fuzz, and I could see the skin beginning to fall away from the ribs. Inside the stomach, a few wasps buzzed and ate their way through. The baby bird had been dead for days.

And where had the mother gone?

But that night, despite it all, I dreamed of doves nonetheless.

# WHISPER IN THE WIND

### Keaghan Banaitis

Asteriea exists, yet she does not.

She did once, in a village that no longer lives, in memory or word. She was a daughter, a sister, a friend. But, long ago in that village that she alone knows the name of, she made a deal. Or, not a deal exactly, but whatever best describes the moment when there is only one option but it is still presented as though there are two.

Her fate is her fault, though she likes to blame it on a bad bet or divine punishment for her greed. She rages against anyone she can think of as she slips between trees and houses and the spots where this world intersects the next, never quite able to blame herself.

In rare moments of introspection, she can admit she tampered with the lives of her friends, though they got to live. Cormac and Rowan and Moira and Isolde, all as forgotten as the village, were allowed to grow and age and love while she rots, forgotten.

She does not have the worst luck, supposedly. Seamus gave his life.

Then again, is a half-life without need for nourishment or sleep any kind of life at all?

She longs for the nothingness Seamus fell victim to. For she knows, truly, deeply, that there is nothing after this existence except darkness. No loving reunions, no palace in the clouds, no greater punishment for her sins.

There is just endless night.

Once upon a time, as stories go, Seamus found a book.

Out hunting mushrooms or truffles or adventure, as twelve-year-old boys do, Seamus stumbled upon it in the woods. Unassuming and bound with a red cover made of leather, it was easy to see amongst the green of the forest.

It was Asteriea who wrote in it.

He gifted it to her, red-cheeked and nervous until she accepted it with a grateful smile. Seamus was kind and comely, but Asteriea longed for more than their village. He would have been an anchor, burdening her with love and children and labor.

She used the book as a diary, practicing her letters and sketching the flowers that grew between the stones of the street. It never seemed to run out of space, no matter how much she wrote, but even then it took Asteriea until she was six and ten to realize that something—the old gods or the new, the eyes in the forest or the whispers between houses—had enchanted it.

As a child, she had written half-demands, petty boons. She wrote about her father's complaints about a dry season, about the heifer bearing twins on Cormac's farm. They weren't wishes (or prayers, if the gods were to have meddled, though she knows now they didn't) but the book still listened and improved the lives of those around her.

And then, naturally, Seamus asked Asteriea's father for her hand. She did not want to give it, for it was *hers* to give away. She had seen so little of the world. But Seamus was a firstborn son and heir to a prosperous farm.

So, at first, she prayed. To the new God that she was told to believe in; to the old gods that spinsters and witches still worshiped with hand-carved altars. She lit candles and gave up sugared sweets and begged her father to reconsider.

To no avail.

Foolishly, in retrospect, but desperately in the moment, she poured her anger onto the pages of her diary the night before her wedding, leaving scathing indentations and deep black marks on the curve of her hand. Words spilled out, white-hot with anger, slick and freezing with sorrow.

As her eyes grew heavy, her hand seemed to move on its own as she wrote—without meaning, without knowing the weight of words—that she wished that Seamus would die so she would not have to marry him.

And he did.

And she was free.

But one brush of power wasn't enough.

Moira had loved Rowan in secret so Asteriea used the book to nudge them together. Cormac wished to attend university in the capital so she lined his pockets with enough gold. Isolde, sweet gentle Isolde who had carried and lost babes thrice over, wished for her fourth child to live.

Asteriea gave them all they asked for and more. Money, love, knowledge, family—none of it took away the sin of killing Seamus, but soon enough she was able to forget the transgression. She was benevolence, she was power, *she was a god*. Gods do not suffer the emotions of man.

And then, Gregor came.

Asteriea was one and twenty. He looked older, by a bit, with ruddy gold hair and deeply pockmarked skin. He stole into her home—larger now, after listening to her mother bemoan the holes in the thatched roof, her sister complain of sharing a bed—in the dead of night on feather-light feet and smelling of the crisp ocean air.

She did not run or call for help.

His voice was silk, was the night, and crawled down her spine like a thousand ants. "Asteriea Ó Foghladh. You have taken what was not yours to take."

Her voice did not shake. "I know not what you mean."

Between one blink and the next Gregor was at her side, prying open the lowest drawer of the vanity and removing the false bottom.

"It was a gift," Asteriea insisted.

Something flashed across his face, akin to understanding. "And who gave it to you? Where is Seamus?"

"I—he died," A half-truth. The words caught in her throat, painfully tight.

Understanding gave way to satisfaction. "Then you must pay."

"Pay?" she echoed, fingers tightening on the golden comb in her hand. His eyes flit down seemingly amused at the sight of a makeshift weapon, and her grip slackened.

"Seamus agreed to take my place."

Asteriea knew that Gregor was not lying, but she was loath to admit it. Power had made her headstrong and untouchable. "Seamus was *twelve* when he gave me this. You cannot—"

"And he was seven and ten when you murdered him," Gregor interrupted, voice laced with the power of a thunderstorm. A greater force than she could understand was at play.

"Why do you need me, then?" Asteriea demanded. "Seamus and his debts, whatever they may be, are buried in the sea. I have no quarrel with you."

"The book must always have a guardian."

"What?"

"Magic like this is dangerous, ancient. It is not of this realm, but someplace more sinister. It cannot fall into anyone's hands with impunity; it is my duty to keep this world in balance."

Asteriea glanced down at the book, heart pounding, palms slick. "Yet you were tricked by a child."

"Seamus had ten years before I claimed him. I am not in the business of being cruel or unjust, Asteriea Ó Foghladh. I do not wish to trick others as I was tricked myself. Ten years to arrange his affairs, that was the deal."

"So you manipulated him, then?" Asteriea said, lip curling.

Gregor laughed, though it was cold and brittle. "I offered him what he wanted. It is not my fault that twelve-year-olds are single-minded."

"And if I had married him?"

"The affairs of mortals are of little interest to me anymore. With time, they will disinterest you as well."

"Why is it my debt to bear? Why not his sister or mother or father? They share his blood."

Gregor dropped his head to the side as if faced with a particularly difficult word problem. His eyes, which she could have sworn were brown, gleamed deep green. The exact shade of Seamus's. To mock her, Asteriea concluded bitterly.

"You killed him, Asteriea Ó Foghladh. Nature demands balance."

"Where were you then? When I was—when everything with Seamus happened. Why not intervene and stop me if I've disrupted nature?"

Gregor's mouth thinned in annoyance. He reached out as if to cup her cheek and Asteriea, too slow to dodge, flinched when his hand made contact with her bare skin. Images flooded through her, dark creatures with legs bent the wrong way and eyes that glowed like embers and fangs as long as her forearm.

"This is what you must protect the world from," Gregor said simply, as if he was discussing the weather. Asteriea's stomach roiled. "As I said, the affairs of mortals are of little importance when the boundaries of this world are threatened."

She opened and closed her mouth, words lodged in her throat. They clawed at the soft skin of her esophagus, leaving deep gouges to fill her mouth with copper and iron. "And if I refuse?"

"Do you think your neighbors will take kindly to knowing you manipulated the world around them? Or perhaps you would like Isolde to die in childbirth, Cormac to be killed in an accident at school, Moira and Rowan to be torn apart by infidelity and murdered by grief? I offer you

freedom in oblivion, in eternity. But, I am all too happy to sow discord until you are alone by your own designs. I grow impatient, but I can wait a year or two more."

Her blood heated, burning from head to toe as rage pulsed through her. How dare he? Who was this man, *this creature*, meant to force her to sign away her life? "You have no right to come into my home, to threaten me, to—"

The walls around her fell away, turning to silt and drifting like dust. "I am not asking Asteriea Ó Foghladh. This has been my burden to bear for nigh on two hundred years. I have grown weary. I crave the escape of death."

The cool winds of autumn kissed her cheeks, stealing away hot tears. She imagined her sister, away at their aunt's with her mother, and her father in town visiting the pub with friends. She wondered what they would say if they were to come to a house of ashes and a witch of a daughter. The shame weighed around her neck like a yoke, dragging her off her cushioned stool and to the ground.

"What am I to do?"

The anger and urgency on Gregor's face gave way to sorrow. "Merely sign the book in your blood. Scratch out my name, and free me from my servitude, Asteriea."

Her name was a whisper on his lips, a promise of adventure and life to come. Her stomach twisted. Her skin chilled.

What could she do in two hundred years?

What could she do with more?

So she took the book from the drawer, and the quill he had procured from everything and nothing, holding both in her lap. "I have never seen any other names in the book. Nothing except my writing."

"Open it."

(When she tells this story, Asteriea says she had a choice. She says that she offered to trade places out of the kindness of her heart. She never mentions the fact that, once again, she had no other choice but the one thrust upon her.)

Asteriea opened the book. Written in thick dark ink—blood her mind supplied, and she suppressed a shudder—was the man's full name: Gregor Yarwood. There were three above it, faded and flaked with age. Her head hurt trying to read them. Gregor handed her a narrow blade, and for a moment she wondered what would happen if she simply thrust it into his stomach.

Would the rest of her world unravel until her life was a husk of the fantasy she had created?

So, Asteriea pressed the tip of the blade into her thumb and wrote her name neatly under Gregor's. The wind whipped her face and Gregor let out a sound between a sigh of relief and a scream of agony. Holes punched through his skin like he was a pincushion, and then he was simply gone.

Asteriea has guarded the book for four hundred and seven years. She has watched the world unfold and refold, shaping itself as empires fell and the common folk rebelled. She has seen nearly every inch of the earth, as far as she knows: mountains capped in snow and deserts with sand as far as the eye can see.

Sometimes, she is summoned by children at sleepovers playing with forces they do not understand. Sometimes, wayward souls beg her for the book, wanting to cheat to improve their lives. They offer themselves in her place, pretending to know the cost of immortality, but she refuses.

Asteriea does not regret what she did to Seamus, not entirely, but after four hundred years, she does not wish the cost on anyone.

She has become all too aware of the thinness of the barriers that seal off this world from the next. Of the creatures strong enough to break through to barter and mislead the foolish. She spends a century keeping them at bay before relenting and policing the ones that do come through. There is little else to do as immortality takes root within her.

The cost for such a fight is her human appearance. Her once brown hair turns mossy, like the grass beneath her feet. Her fingers and toes grow, gaining an extra joint. Her eyes become too wide, her teeth become too sharp, and her voice is a whisper in the wind, no matter what language she speaks. She never notes losing her humanity.

Eventually, she realizes it died with Seamus.

Like Gregor, she tires. It takes twice as long, but her feet grow heavy, her breath labored. When she meets Salem, sweet Salem, he is unlike those who have plied her for the book before. He finds her in the woods and does not make demands. Instead, he peels away four centuries of caution with kind words and sad eyes, until she finds herself giving him the book as a gift.

He misses his friends, she tells herself. They have abandoned him, as she once abandoned Comac and Moira and Rowan and Isolde. He has no one, as she does now.

Perhaps she is foolish or perhaps Salem is more conniving than he seems to be.

Perhaps it is the fact that he has Seamus's green eyes and black hair and strong nose. Perhaps he *is* Seamus, sent by the old gods or the monsters in liminal spaces to punish her for what she did.

But she gives him the book and makes him promise to visit her once in a while. She does not tell him the nature of the curse, knowing deeply, instinctively, that he will abandon her if she does. She resolves to tell him of the life he has condemned himself to when he returns, about the eventual isolation that will envelop him.

Asteriea will be benevolent, she decides as she folds his hands around the book and whispers instructions in his ear. She will give him twenty years, or perhaps thirty, before she collects his soul.

Salem does not come back.

He tears apart the fabric of the world at the seams, more greedy than she ever dared to be. Than she ever imagined she could be.

He wards himself from her with words, creating walls of steel and tungsten and pure magic to keep her out.

And Asteriea rages, heartbroken and all too aware of her faults, condemned to walk between the trees and houses and spots where this world intersects with the next forever.