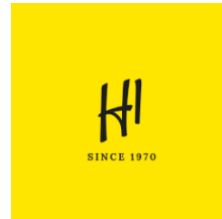


Harvest International
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Harvest International
Cal Poly Pomona Student-edited Literary Journal



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Dear Reader,

Harvest International is proud to present the Spring publication of our online issue. The collection of literary works you are about to read have been crafted, written, and harvested by many talented students at Cal Poly Pomona. We would like to thank everyone who submitted contributions for this issue featuring writers from the different fields of study across our community. We hope you enjoy them as much as we enjoyed reviewing them.



Late Boomer

By Featured Writer: Naomi L. Mageean

I grew up in West Covina California. Born at Queen of the Valley hospital; and thank you to Crazy-Ex Girlfriend for putting us on the map. There are over nine ethnicities that flow through my veins. My father is Mexican, Native-American, French, and Jewish. My mother is Black, Hawaiian, Irish, British, and Scottish—I'm sure there's some other stuff mixed in that my grandparents forgot, because I've seen my great-great grandmother's photo and I swear that she's Japanese. Because of the United Nations in my blood, I feel all people. It makes me see perspectives from angles that pull at me from so many directions. How arbitrary it is that we still divide over color?

When I was a young girl, I wanted to be Yentl. Yes—Yentl. Barbara Streisand's greatest achievement was making that movie. I wanted the Yeshiva, the discussions and debates, the Torah, and for all that matter —why not a guy to argue with like Mandy Patinkin too? But Christian girls don't get to go to Yeshiva; there was no school for the flame that burns in our hearts. We have seminaries, and colleges; instructors that teach you Spurgeon, Calvin, and how to interpret scripture; yet none of them know Hebrew or Arabic—go figure?

An evangelical Christian home in California in the 80s was something of pure bliss. There are probably hundreds of “non-denominational” churches here, where pastors wear Hawaiian button-down shirts with jeans, to preach to parishioners in flip-flops, California dreaming—church was something everyone did on Sunday. My Daddy worked as a truck driver for Fry Steel. Blue collar, brown hands and mommy stayed home. My father never finished college. He went to Biola University for a year and then realized it was no use. Middle class-income, 3 daughters, 50+ hours a week of work—it's too late sometimes to finish college in your thirties. He wanted to study Theology; you know Apologetics, Hermeneutics, Eschatology, all those big words that makes the Bible fit in with academia. He studied voraciously. I remember those early morning pees. You know those pees you have when you're a kid in the middle of the night. All you know is you have to go so bad, and you fall out of bed both eyes pretty much closed, but it's ok because you know the halls of your home and the light-switch on your right like a conscience. The same conscience that made it impossible to lie to your father when you were 5 and the one that makes it impossible to lie to yourself today. Those early morning pees, 3, 4, 5, a.m. you'd see Daddy before work in the morning, all these books sprawled out on the dining room table. Reading, studying, talking to

God— and all you knew was that you wanted God too. You wanted to touch the books to get closer to Him. What did all these words mean?

I was introduced to God by my Father. I remember some weekday night in the 80s. Weekday because Dad was still in his uniform, tucking us in like he always did. Our Rainbow Brite sheet set, bunk beds, cold dark tile floor; and me and my sister Priscilla, on our knees asking Jesus to come into our hearts. Not really knowing what that was, what that meant. But Daddy said it's called salvation. And if Daddy loved Jesus, he must be something great. Because Daddy is the greatest man I have ever known. Jesus would save us from hell. I didn't know it then that He meant the hell here on earth too.

My father had this real weird way of teaching us about everything in the Bible, even at a young age he held nothing back. We didn't just have the usual Noah's Ark or Jericho, David and Goliath stories. Oh no, we needed to know The Book of Revelation. He would bring home end time tribulation movies that talked about the mark of the beast, and the apocalypse. Most of the actors and actresses were dressed in the 1970's clothes. I was so afraid to be left behind. We had those felt boards that they had at Sunday school, the ones with the cloth Biblical character's that work like storyboards— the one's I still have today. And if you're reading this over the age of 30 you know exactly what I'm talking about. When you're a young Christian kid you pray "the sinner's prayer" every time you do something wrong— just in case. There's something about childhood. Now I think of Wordsworth as I type this:

“But for those first affections, those shadowy recollections,
Which be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing.”

When your parent's divorce when you're young it destroys your perceptions of love, and more significantly it can destroy your concepts of God. Yet, you don't know that yet. All you know is Mommy is gone now, you have to make your own lunch, your own dinner too—your own fill in the blank.” But mom, the laundry doesn't smell like you anymore, and I can't fold like you either.” “Naomi, keep an eye on your brothers and sisters, and even though you're 10, it's time to grow up.” Now we're moving to Ontario in an apartment, leaving our house, my every memory of us, of our family, of them, before they were split in two. I never thought God wasn't there, I just wondered so much why my mom did. Couldn't he send Jesus, an Angel, or Moses, a prophet—Elijah? He

resurrected the dead, and she wasn't dead. I never thought my prayers wouldn't come true. He parted the Red Sea. Surely he could take the thousands of prayers we prayed and send them to her ears?

My father went on disability after my mom left us. It devastated his emotions, and though we knew Dad was different, we knew he was sad, but the sacrifice he made to hide the weight of that grief, I'll never truly know. Though I remember sometime in my twenties when we were out to lunch I asked him why we never saw him cry. He said that he'd go into his restroom when we were at school and grab a towel as he looked out his small window and just cry. A towel, not a Kleenex, a towel. And as I type this, I still can't fight those tears streaming down after all these years.

Before my Dad went on disability he continued to work. Five kids, an 11 yr. old as a nanny, and Dad worked in LA. We were devastated and didn't know how to cope. We had lost our beautiful home in West Covina, our back yard with the playhouse Dad made, the tire from our beautiful tree, dirt, and the leaves I hated to rake up in the fall. Our bikes stored on the side of the house, the scent of mom's room after she showered, the sound of her voice when dinner was ready. The way her oil of Olay smelled when you kissed her cheeks. The hands that rubbed my forehead, those beautiful manicured hands always painted red. The same hands I look at today whenever I see her. My father's willingness to quit his job to love us back to health is the only reason I know I'm alive today. We went from comfortable middle-class family, to no money, and welfare for three years, ugly apartment with hand-me-down furniture, and they're still the happiest days of my life. "Unaware of what we didn't have", Lauryn Hill's lyrics flash in my mind.

There's something about being on welfare that jacks you up when you're eleven. Maybe it jacked me up because I've always been a stubborn child, a good child, I'm a Capricorn, we like rules, we follow directions, but I always asked why? A reason for everything I always want; and sometimes life, sometimes God, doesn't tell or give you one.

I've always been the independent one, the "I can do it all by myself I don't need anyone's help" one. Do you know the embarrassment of standing in the Food 4 Less line when your 11 with all of your brothers and sisters and having your father count out paper that is made to look like money, and hand it to the cashier as she pulls apart the perforated increments as if with every separation she's dividing her judgment? When you're no longer buying Tide and Downy because they're name brands and cost more, and it's not so much the name brand you wanted, it's just that's what Mom always bought, and now they're gone too.

I've always been the most awkwardly tall person all through elementary, junior high, and finally blended a little more in at high school. I hate my kindergarten picture because I'm almost as tall as my teacher. And they made me hold the flag too—

Really—why didn't they just put lights on me too? Sure she was pretty short, but still, it was embarrassing. I still remember Sean, my kindergarten crush; he had heart problems and was always having surgeries. I went to his 5th birthday party and I was the tallest kid there. Feeling awkward is already a huge part of elementary school, so when you tower over people, including every boy you've ever had a crush on—it just sucks.

My mother left because she got hooked on speed. My father had no clue, no one did. She hid it for three years before it became her life; before she finally couldn't stand being home. She told me just a few years ago, "Naomi, you don't make decisions when you're high, it's just a series of actions that you don't even notice, and you have no control over anything you do." My mother wears shame like a cloak; it's been so difficult for her to take her scepter back. I've virtually begged her too. On Mother's Day, I get hooked up from all my siblings, including my mother. I have no kids of my own, but I raised hers. Anyone that knew my mother before would've never guessed that she, PTA mom, responsible, no driving tickets ever, church mom, immaculate home mom, the take care of even your kids' babysitter mom, would ever do speed, let alone leave her family. She said one night her little sister came over, and she was exhausted. So my aunt offered her speed to give her energy—and the rest altered our future. To this day that aunt can be found roaming the streets of Pomona, and my mother over 22 years clean, still gorgeous, still wonderful, still beautiful hands, excellent credit, and a savings account that would humble most people her age. So it just goes to show you, it's all in how you get back up.

So my junior high and high school years were spent in the Inland Empire. Apartment living, it sucks when you've lived in a house your entire life, and then you move to an apartment. Nowhere to play. I swear if I'm ever a baller someday, I'm buying houses for as many apartment kids I can find. Something like George Bailey— something like Bedford Falls, make it a wonderful life for them; kids should always have a place to play. The upside to apartment living in the Inland Empire; everyone is in the same boat, everyone is paycheck to paycheck too, and there's something that connects you. It's an unspoken feeling that resonates, those hard times, those Charlie Chaplin *Modern Times*, and it can be the launching pad to success if you push through, or the closed door— you just have to pick one.

Montclair High School! I played basketball my first two years in high school. I totally sucked. People think you're automatically good in basketball when you're tall; that's so not true. But, I loved high school. I know, you would think based on what I've told you thus far, that I was the emo kid writing poetry wearing black? No, though some of my friends were. I told you already, I'm a Capricorn. One thing that I hate and love about myself is that I don't give up. I mean, I do, and declare I will never, ever try

again, but then I lie to myself and do. I don't stay down. Because of that, I flourished in high school. Burying yourself in school can sometimes be the drug that carries you. For me, school was a way out; it was the door that would help me put it all back together. So that when I buy my house, I'll never have to move again—I'll never have to live in an apartment again! Eventually, we moved to my Grandma's house when my father returned to work. One thing I love about my Mexican Grandmother, my Mexican people, we will live 30 to a house if we have to, we just know how to stick together—family is everything.

I tend to talk to everyone; it's a habit I got from my Dad— a habit he got from both of his parents. Because of that I was in ASB: Sophomore President, then eventually ASB President, I was in a zillion clubs, I was voted most involved in high school, I was so proud of it then, now it just sounds stupid. I had cholo friends I had known from the apartment, my AP class friends, my emo friends from the peer counselor club, the mothers against drunk driving club, the Christian Cavaliers club (yes, I was in that one too). One of my close friends Paul was like this hot football player that like all these girls wanted to date, and he was a Christian too, so that made girls flock to that club, (hey God can use anything) —thanks Paul! Anyhow, I had perfect attendance all four years in high school, attendance is very important to me, (seriously I still have the certificates). It's kind of weird the things that matter to us. I had a 3.8 GPA, won The Women's Auxiliary Girl's State for California, was a Who's Who Amongst American Young High School Students (do they still have that?), and was offered a scholarship to Claremont College that I didn't apply for.

When you grow up in a family where higher education isn't an expectation, it leaves the door wide open for it to be measured monetarily. And when you're 17 years old and you just graduated from high school, your mother left you all 6 years ago, you're the oldest of 5, it's been only 2 years since your father went back to work, and you're living in your grandmother's 40 year old home in La Puente, money isn't something you consider, it's a necessity. And it's not pressure I felt, it was an overwhelming sense of responsibility to help my family, to pick up the slack—it's something only a firstborn can relate to, that rising up when you know you must take the reins. So college I told myself could wait, I'll go back soon— right now I have to work.

So I worked like crazy. I was hired the summer of 1996 at Blockbuster Music, and within 6 months I was an Assistant Manager, and by 20 years old I was one of the youngest store managers they had. Viacom sold the company, and eventually Transworld Entertainment (out of Albany New York) became my new home. One thing about retail, so much is predicated on your work ethic—especially if you're in sales; because numbers don't lie. I had the number one store in sales in Orange County until the company went out of business. I took great pride in the fact that our company let us run our stores as if they were our own. We were given autonomy to run most of the financials, and this allowed me to control payroll, supply budgets, expenses, and train employees

that were efficient. I received bonus checks constantly because of the incentives, and my bosses took notice. I was training to be a District Manager right before Apple decimated the music industry. Downloading had single-handedly collapsed the music industry. Here comes my preaching, just a warning. If you value art, if you only knew what goes into making an album. If you love an artist, singer, band...please buy their album, CD, or go to their show and buy a t-shirt or something there. It's their livelihood. I have so many friends and colleagues, who worked for pretty much every major record company, were making baller money, all lose their jobs within a year's time.

I've virtually met every singer or band that I've wanted to, except for Bob Dylan; he's a hard one to meet. But I did almost stand next to him at a Wallflowers concert, he snuck out the back, (I think he was there to see his son Jacob Dylan sing)—but at least I caught the glimpse. One thing about working in music, you sponsor shows, autograph signings, you name it, and it's pretty exciting. I'll tell you one of my favorite stories, because this one is about a local gem.

I've been a Ben Harper fan since I was like 20. Love the Innocent Criminals (his band). So, our Urban Buyer Violet Brown (who's job I was defiantly in line to seize one day), called me up at my store and asked me if I wanted to go to the Dust Brothers Recording Studio and see the band recording their new album; which at the time was "Both Sides of the Gun." So, I drove down to the studio heart pounding. Now, I don't get star struck, I just don't. I've met everyone from Metallica to Quest love from The Roots, but to be in a studio with your favorite band is just something that never happens. I've met Ben Harper many times, genuinely nice guy. Always humble. I even gave him my only copy of Bob Dylan's "Saved" record outside one of his shows. He didn't want to accept it, but I asked him to someday cover my favorite Dylan song "Covenant Woman." He took the album, so I'm still waiting. This studio is disguised as an apartment building, and you can't even tell. The Vice President from MCA was there and all these important people, and none of them were fans; just ballers, everywhere. It's usually like that at music events, just so many beautiful important people everywhere, and never the fans. No one really knew their music but me—it was so cool. I'm no one important, but it's kind of awkwardly quiet, so Violet tells the MCA President guy, "she knows all their stuff"—and Ben calls me to the front of the soundboard and now everyone is facing me. I start rambling about my thoughts on the last album. I tell him a poetic description of one of my favorite songs, "When she Believes," Ben tells me he's speechless, that my description was beautiful, (that was even cooler than when Al Green kissed my right cheek when he met me). Then he told me a personal story of how he came up with the title. It was just a beautiful tender moment I'll never forget. It's those moments that made me really love my job, and when I think about it now, sometimes detours are necessary.

Side note: If you live in the I.E. and you don't know who Ben Harper and the Innocent Criminals are, take a stroll down to Claremont and check out the Folk Music Center that's been there forever that Ben's Grandpa (Charles Chase) started years ago. And if you're gonna buy one of their albums, buy it across the street at Rhino Records. *Burn to Shine* is my favorite, *Diamonds on the Inside* a close second, and *LIVE from Mars*, to die for!!! And I'm sorry, but Ben Harper's version of "Sexual Healing" on *Live from Mars* is better than Marvin's— hands down!!

After the company I worked for closed virtually over 2/3's of their stores, I decided—time to finish the degree I started years ago. However, returning to school in your thirties is an entirely different experience. I was intimidated to return, feeling inadequate, old and worried that it was too late. But what I've learned is that my pride can stop me in my tracks all the time if I let it. It can paralyze me even when I don't want it to. When you're in your thirties in college, it's a very different experience. Long ago were the days of midnight papers, busy weekends, and poor planning. You are essentially more grounded. You actually read your assignments; you take education seriously. You hopefully, think more critically. And by this point, you should've read enough to know that there's so much to learn.

We're all here at this college, in Pomona California to reach for something, to complete something— begin something; some are even ending something. I didn't realize I still wanted what I had wanted 15 years ago. I didn't realize there was a whole other life out there for me. One that was no longer music, but was like a melody to me; it speaks deep in my soul— you know, the echoes of authors that resonate in you. Those novels that become a part of you, they become part of your language, your speech, the rhythm of you. I recently ran across my 1st grade report card from South Hills Academy in West Covina, and I just laughed, I scored the highest in word analysis. I mean, I guess it's written in my DNA somewhere. I guess I was destined for this English Degree some way or another. In all my journeying to get to this point, all the missed opportunities that are so easily lamented, the mistakes and failures that have hindered me. The inadequacies, the so many flaws that have left me feel so undeserving—it's my mistakes and detours that have ushered me here; to this point in my life. It has been the weaknesses in me, the stubbornness in me, and the lefts when I should have went rights, that have carried me here—to Pomona, California to earn that degree, to teach those classes someday, at some college somewhere. And who knows, maybe there's another Naomi that will be in my class, that will feel the same inadequacy, and if all of this, if any of this inspires one student, one person, to not be afraid to walk in the direction the heart pulls, letting the wheat from the chaff be the business of the wind, and keep pushing—it's all been worth it. It's always about the journey; it's always about where you're headed when you're growing, when you're following that voice in your soul. Peace!

Gone, Gone
By Vanessa Garcia

Wind comes carrying the scent of seasons –

Gone

What have I got to show for it

The moon gives me her back

Glinting on the pacific sea

The snow builds its monuments

The sun is all the more diligent

The trees light themselves on fire

And what have I got to show for it

Even the pansies push through

And what have I got to show for it

Time has traced his name across my face –

Gone

Ripple Effects
By Vanessa Garcia

A faceless young man skipping through the halls

A pebble edged into the pond among many

Taken for granted, the pulses and palls

Despite being so unlike any

Only in death do I see him pass

Sharp, quick-witted black eyes

Through the painted window glass

Ripples of laughter turned sorrowful cries

The ripple effects his death leaves behind

The same his life had, far from irrelevance, all along

If only we could all see, if it weren't for the blind

Still, as his sigh in eternal sleep not a day goes by is his song

Destination Luna Mimbres
By Vanessa Garcia

That morning Giselle Olguin awoke in a paralyzing pool of dread. She lay in bed dreading the fact that she was awake. That her father wasn't in the kitchen making his morning coffee before he left for work. Saul Olguin wasn't at work, he wasn't coming home from work later. He wasn't coming home at all. The feeling gripped her body again making her stomach and legs feel all watery. She wished she could just sink into her mattress and let it swallow her up whole. But the more she lay there, the less she could stand it. When she eventually got up and tried to coerce herself into enacting her regular routine, she found it difficult to do so. Everything that her body almost instinctively did was hesitated with second thoughts. Did she usually make her bed before or after breakfast? She went into the bathroom where she brushed her teeth. Then she went to the kitchen and made herself coffee.

Fatima Olguin wasn't even stirring in her bedroom yet. Giselle wondered if her mom would get up at all. Was she more successful than her in sinking into her mattress? She drank her coffee and stared at the small TV they kept in the kitchen. The one where she'd watched countless movie marathons during the holidays. The one her dad used to watch Sunday morning soccer games. It now looked foreign and threatening somehow. Come to think of it the whole house she grew up and lived in for almost twenty-two years suddenly seemed alien. Was it the house or was it her? She looked down experimentally at the pale hand that was wrapped around her phone.

August had texted her earlier that morning, at five AM – it was probably later where he was, sunny and so far away in a completely different dimension. She wasn't awake then to reply and now that she was she didn't feel like it. He's probably soaking up the sun. Playing in the sand with his younger brother, Mark. And both of his parents.

She finished her coffee and set it in the cold, empty, sink and tiptoed to her mother's bedroom where she peered in at the lump accumulated on the left side of the bed. The covers were pulled all the way over, covering the face completely. For a second Giselle wondered if her mom had died as well. She could've suffocated herself in her sleep – on accident or on purpose. She could've had an aneurysm. She'd be an orphan then. Nobody would call her that of course but she'd be one, nonetheless. The lump stirred slightly, Giselle walked quietly into the room and stood awkwardly at the foot of the bed waiting to see if her mom would wake up.

She glanced at the other side of the bed; it was pristine. Empty. Un-slept in. A pang hit Giselle in the chest. The watery feeling didn't come back – it was always there, now it just intensified, like a high tide reaching out and touching every limb in her body. She stood there a while longer feeling like a toddler who had just woken up from a nightmare and had ran to their parent's room for comfort. She didn't find it.

The lump stirred again as her mom began to wake up. Fatima pulled the covers down, revealing red swollen eyes and nostrils. She blinked at the figure standing at the foot of the bed. Giselle blinked back unsure of what to do. She came in here for a reason but now she just wanted to turn back into her room and mourn by herself.

“Giselle?” Fatima’s voice sounded hoarse. The watery feeling travel through Giselle’s navel down to her bladder, she thought she was going to pee herself. She stood there a second longer clasping her arms around herself.

“Come here,” her mom said sounding slightly less hoarse. Giselle went over to her mom’s side of the bed. Fatima scooted over letting Giselle sit in the bed next to her.

She looked at her dad’s side again. Was she was purposely avoiding it? And did it still smell like him? Her mom complained all the time about the smell. It would perspire through his pores. It hung onto the collar of his shirts. When she’d stand next to him in mass, she thought she could smell the liver rotting away inside. His words and sighs would carry the pungent scent to her nostrils. No more complaints now. She didn’t know what to say to her mom, a string of questions formed in her mind – how did she rest, did she want breakfast, do you miss dad – all of them seemingly inadequate.

Instead, she said, “Remember that museum in New Mexico?”

“The Luna one?” Fatima yawned, putting a hand up to her mouth and blinking a couple times. A red beaded rosary was strung through the fingers of her other hand lying on top of the white bed comforter.

“Yeah, on the way to Jalisco.” She paused, “We should go there.”

“What, now?”

Giselle shrugged and then shook her head after some hesitation. All of a sudden the idea seemed to fizzle out in her mind.

“We can get there by seven tonight if we leave now,” her mom squinted at the digital clock sitting on the bureau across the room.

They had each packed up a few toiletries and a change of clothes. She sat in the passenger’s seat of the car ignoring August’s yet unanswered text. It felt weird being in the car with her mom. It made Giselle think back to other times she was home during semester break going grocery shopping on a regular eventless day. Except now it’s seven in the morning and they’re going out of state just to visit some museum in the middle of nowhere. The idea seemed crazy like just the sort of thing an actor in a movie would do. She scoffed to herself – or at herself. But that didn’t mitigate the feelings stirring within her.

“I suppose it has been a while since we’ve been there. I mean, all together.”

“Well, I haven’t been home long enough to go to Mexico with you guys.”

“Your dad always missed not having you around when we went. He wanted to show you off to your aunts and uncles.”

Giselle winced at that. She didn’t have to say that. And Giselle didn’t have to go back from break each time so soon. But she wanted to and she paid for it now with a torment of remorse that welled up inside her. Remorse for being angry and unreasonable even though Saul always brought it out in her. It was because he demanded that she go with them that she was so stubborn about never going again. And then what was the point? To watch him drink his life away in a different country? He drank in America to remember Mexico and he drank in Mexico to celebrate. Celebrate what?

“I know he could be difficult sometimes . . . but he never meant to push you away.”

“Sometimes? He was always difficult.”

Even after she said it she knew it wasn’t necessarily true. Everyone loved Saul. Half the world was there at his funeral, people kept coming up to her and lamenting the loss talking about how great he was. A standup guy. A real man. People that had never had to live with him, people who knew nothing. She wished she had that luxury, to be able to see him like they do. She frowned out the window at the passing shopping centers.

They stood as proof that the world really didn’t stop. Other places and people still existed even though Saul didn’t. And yet Giselle wasn’t so sure about that. There were no people in sight in the centers and she kept looking for the houses. Of course, they weren’t there. Still the centers looked like an illusion to her, a thinly veiled false comfort that things were okay even if she didn’t feel like it. She glanced at her mom now half expecting her eyes to be replaced with black buttons.

Soon that view, the lush shrubs that perfectly lined the highway gave way to gray dirt and yellowing tufts of grass as they reached Joshua Tree. They drove past mountains of large rocks. It seemed to Giselle as though it had snowed grass where the green was sprinkled in between the stacks of the yellow boulders.

As she was drifting off to sleep Giselle got the feeling that they were somehow simultaneously going towards Saul and away from him. Vulnerable, she gave herself up to the splitting as she drifted. She had been asleep when they passed through Phoenix and Tucson. When she awoke it was to the sight of more grey dirt, washed out flecks of green cacti, yellow grass, and desiccated tangles of twigs. For a second the motion of the car lulled her into a false feeling of safety right before her thoughts seeped into her mind, piling up and weighing her down once again. In contrast, her body felt weird and floaty, untethered. Giselle didn’t feel like she was going to the grocery store anymore. She didn’t feel like she was going anywhere.

Her surroundings slowly seeped into her consciousness. The humming of the radio turned into words, Spanish words on some Catholic station. Her mom was still driving, her red-ringed gaze concentrated on the barren road ahead of them.

Giselle's phone rang in the cup holder between them. Fatima turned to look at the source then glanced at Giselle who was staring straight ahead at the road.

“Is that August?”

“Probably.”

“What's wrong? Did he do something?”

“No, nothing's wrong. He never does anything.”

“How is he anyway?”

“He's great. He's in Belize.”

“Belize? I thought you said they were going to Spain this time.”

“Guess they had a change of plans,” she shrugged.

“Well, that's good, must be fun.”

“I don't know.”

“You have to enjoy your life while you have it. You never know when God is going to call you back to him.”

“I have to pee.”

It was night time when they finally arrived in the dust town of Deming, New Mexico. Instead of checking into a local motel for the night, Fatima and Giselle parked near a truck rest stop – the whole town was practically a rest stop – and prepared to sleep in the car. Next to the rest stop was an abandoned “Cactus Café.” It wasn't visible in the night time but she knew the squat, square building was the same bland color as the dirt surrounding it for miles. The parking lot was empty and dimly illuminated by small streetlamps. Some of the lamps were broken or not lit up at all. One of them flickered incessantly like a cheap haunted house effect. The pathetic thing

was that it actually managed to spook her. Giselle's mind wouldn't stop picturing figures appearing in the shadows. If Saul were here, she probably wouldn't feel scared. If he were just alive the world would've seemed infinitely less scary.

Her mother closed her eyes in the front seat in an attempt to rest. Giselle had a sudden childish urge to shake her mother awake to make her keep her eyes open, to keep talking. She gripped her phone to her chest and sighed. August had texted her again that night. She wanted to tell him that she hopes he's okay too. That she loves him too.

The feeling traveled down her legs and through her arms. No matter how hard she tried to relax, it felt like electric currents were going through her limbs all through the night.

She dreamed a memory. Of being at the beach with Saul. Wading into the ocean where the sand ran over and under their feet pulling them, like a slow conveyor belt, deeper into the water. She clung to the pillar of his arm at the slight vertigo sensation she got. "I'm not strong enough," he said, "I can't stop it from pulling us in. The ocean is much bigger and stronger than your papa."

The Luna Mimbres Museum somehow remained exactly the same as every other time they had visited it in the past from when Giselle was seven years old to now at twenty-three. She could practically hear her dad explaining the antiquated tools on display dropping knowledge about how the Native Americans used them. Knowledge that he somehow had despite the fact that he never went to school. Each corner she turned she kept expecting to see his stoutly figure standing there looking pensively at a display, his thumbs hooked into the pockets of his worn jeans. He'd do a slight head nod as he read and studied the artifact before blinking and turning to walk away. Then when he was a couple steps away he'd turn around and run a hand over his dark beard preparing to explain what he just read and why he knows its bullshit. "They don't tell you stuff like this at school but I've learned from the school of life," he might say.

"Didn't he have one of these?" Giselle pointed to a Navajo sharp stone knife that was on display.

"I think so but who knows if it was real. I think it's still in the garage."

"Bunch of junk," her mom added with a sigh.

Her dad probably got that knife from the swap meet or from one of her uncles who had a collection of a bunch of random artifacts accumulated throughout the years. His whole house was decorated with all those random things. At least Giselle's house never looked like that. Her dad kept his collection of things in the garage.

She passed by a vintage cowboy calendar that was perpetually stuck on the month of August. It had a hand painted scene of a cowboy and his horse warming up by a campfire under the starry sky. Giselle kept walking through the museum through a room that had a

vintage mint colored car on display to another room that was dedicated to a collection of alcoholic drinks. These things reminded her all too much of her dad when he'd sit in his garage for hours after coming home from work, drinking a 6 pack and listening to old rancheras. He'd come into the house later in the night and she'd only see him for a minute on those days if she was lucky. Or unlucky depending on his mood.

Giselle started driving back that same afternoon while her mom sat in the passenger seat. The sun was a bright orange hazy ball suspended right above the blue-gray horizon. The sides of the road were desolate, flat, and dirt packed. All that was missing was a stray tumbleweed bouncing across the path to complete the old western look.

Fatima started yawning in the passenger seat trying to blink away the sleep from her eyes. Giselle frowned at the straight road trying to come up with something to say. Anything.

“I don't want to go back.”

“Go back where?” Her mom squinted out of the window.

“To school. I don't have to go back anyway. It's not like I can't take a semester off. Or a year.”

Her mother pursed her lips, frowning for a second. Giselle tried to clench her stomach against the anxious squirming feeling that always seemed to ebb and flow from there.

“I don't know what your plans are, but you can't just leave school.”

“But what are you gonna do?”

“What am I going to do? I don't know,” she sighed, “but we all have our responsibilities. Work, bills, the house.”

Giselle frowned out at the road.

“I can't tell you what you should or shouldn't do, you're grown up now. If you feel like you have to take a break go ahead, but only you know what is best for you.”

Her mom fell asleep a while after that leaving Giselle driving alone down the dark, desolate road. The sounds of the car running over the road served as a sort of comfort. The sun had set now, leaving behind a painted dark blue-black sky. The stars shone bright overhead unlike in California where seeing even one star was a rarity, most of the stars she saw there were more likely to be satellites.

When she was younger, she'd look up and point to one of them and tell her dad that one is her uncle that had died way before she was even born. Now she looked up and saw too many, it was dizzying. She felt like she could almost fall into the void of it.

Suddenly the feeling gripped her body again she felt a bile rising from the anxiety coiled in her stomach reaching out and grasping at her throat. She kept looking around the sides of the road into the pitch blackness. Her fingers started tingling as she gripped the steering wheel. She didn't want to keep driving but she didn't want to stop either. The motion felt good; it kept the churning feeling in her stomach away. She never wanted the car to stop moving. Maybe if she kept going then she'd be okay. Her mom – everything – would be okay. She could do it – keep on driving forever. Yes, she could.

The signs on the road flashed at her as she went by them. Anyone of them could lead her on a road that stretched on forever. She didn't have to keep going down this road back home. Time didn't have to catch up to them if only they could just keep on moving. She thought about Mexico the proverbial land always sought after always shrouded in bittersweet nostalgia. If she could just drive back, there . . .

Hours later Fatima awoke to find Giselle driving, the road ahead of them illuminated by the car's headlights. She yawned and sat up blinking in the darkness. Giselle was frowning out the windshield, her eyes ringed red. Her mom sighed as she assessed her surroundings and told Giselle to pull into the nearest gas station.

The station's lights were bright and penetrating in the sea of nothing. There were truckers at one end of the station filling up their trucks, standing around smoking or burying their hands in their jacket pockets. Giselle's mom went inside the mart while Giselle sat in the car trying to contain the anxious watery thing in her stomach.

She looked around at the truckers faces, none of them looked like her dad but looking at them made her want to cry. Her dad was a man too. Walking and breathing. She shut her eyes against the threat of tears. She felt the thing traveling into her limbs making her hands and legs shake. The anxiety-filled her up, like some demon turning her inside out. Instead of running after her mom like she desperately wanted to, she reached for her phone and dialed August's number.

A Valediction
By Noah Gallego

Bless the celestial breadth
ere I've breathed my last breath;
Enshrine th' immortal firmament
ere the stars etiolate: an astrologer's lament;
Consecrate th' orb, birth a new green
ere her breast falls to the fiend;
Venerate the supplicant palms
ere *they* suffer infernal qualms;
And do coronate me, Father!
—in thistle and lovely eglantine.

Oppressed or the Oppressor
By Crystal Montzerrat Robles

One given the privilege one treated as lesser
Animals, Aliens, anything but human
Locked in cages
told it's a parental decision
This Administration used racism with precision
capitalized on the ignorance of millions
and dehumanized families and children.

Does it feel good to be on top?
Does it feel good to say, "All lives matter!"
Only when it's convenient?
What if it was you?
The one treated as lesser
The one dealing with the pressure?
I bet you're happy it's not
You know it would hurt to see your children tied up
in knots and put in cages.
I bet you forgot how the U.S came to be
Home of the brave, land of the free?

Tell me
does that look like the U.S today?
When those meant to serve and protect
have people looking over their shoulders,
scared of being targeted by their race?

Oppressed and the Oppressor

These are the labels subscribed to by both sides, but change is coming quick.

Chicanos are about to forever change the tides,
organize, and humanize with one little thing called love.
Love for each other, love for our neighbors,
love for the flower vendor down the street
we've never actually had the chance to greet,
and love for the thousands of children going to sleep tonight
without their parents by their side.

Tell me
You can't be on top without standing on the shoulders of others?
Without hurting those you see as lesser
Look at yourself in the mirror and think
Will you see an oppressor?
Challenge yourself to look deeper to see the human in you, but most importantly to see the humanity in others
those of different races, those who have come from different places.

Oppressed or the oppressors
These labels we subscribe to mean nothing
when we realize we are all human
We all have hopes and aspirations
Why not connect instead of using walls as separations?

Why must we repeat history instead of changing for the future?
There is no logical answer for what this Nation has done
No political justification or economic calculation can reverse the trauma caused by this Administration

Oppressed or the oppressor
One given the privilege one treated as lesser
Once we finally get rid these labels from our society and minds,
our days will get better

Mi Raiz**By Crystal Montserrat Robles**

Es difícil encontrar mi raíces cuando me dicen
que no estoy aparte de este árbol.
Que nomas estoy un hoja cayendo
Porque Mexicanos real hablan espanol

Pero puedo decir esto

Mi mama me enseñó hacer tortillas
Ella me quedo mientras yo doblo la masa en un blanco desastre
Pero Ella nomas los calentó como la manera que mis manos deforme
Su cultura el miso manera mi lengua deforme su lenguaje
estaba diferente pero no estaba mal.

Nos sentamos en la Mesa y Ella me contó historias de su vida en Jalisco
Historias de su Mama lupe enseñándole hacer tortillas misma
Historias de su primer encuentro con mi papa
Y la historia de su llegada en un país que no tenía raíces en.

Mi mama es mi raíz
Todo que yo sabe de mi árbol es porque Ella me enseno
Y a la mejor estoy una hoja cayendo
Porque en el suelo estoy más Cerca de mi raíz-mi Mama.

Te Amo Mama- Montze

Montzerrat Robles
Poem inspired by the Daughters of Bilitis Mural.

pulse

Our sins are cut from the same cloth
Yet you decided ours deserves to be covered in blood.
Fifty lives lost because they wanted to show pride in the ones they loved¹.
My phone turned into a mirror reflecting every single one of my fears.
New flashing on the screen like bullets pointing at the ones typing,
“Mommy I love you”x3
people say it was caused by mental illness²
or isis and not homophobia because they fear to admit they have the same plague in their heart that caused fifty lives and a
whole community to be torn apart.
I'm speaking to you, Pastor Roger Jimenez. You preach on and on that, “Thou shall not kill” is a true commandment³
I wonder if it still matters to you when the ones who get murdered are called “Dykes and Faggots”
Call it like it is, a hate crime produced by every anti-gay bill passed in legislation.
A crime caused by pointing fingers at two lovers and calling them an abomination.
A crime caused by homophobia that still sweeps this supposedly great nation.
There is nothing great about waiting 16 years to get out of the closet

¹ These are the victims from the Orlando massacre. (n.d.). Retrieved February 22, 2018, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/orlando-shooting/victims/>

² Goldman, A., Warrick, J., & Bearak, M. (2016, June 12). 'He was not a stable person': Orlando shooter showed signs of emotional trouble. Retrieved February 22, 2018, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/ex-wife-of-suspected-orlando-shooter-he-beat-me/2016/06/12/8a1963b4-30b8-11e6-8ff7-7b6c1998b7a0_story.html?utm_term=.c0520d92cfd4

³ Goldman, A., Warrick, J., & Bearak, M. (2016, June 12). 'He was not a stable person': Orlando shooter showed signs of emotional trouble. Retrieved February 22, 2018, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/ex-wife-of-suspected-orlando-shooter-he-beat-me/2016/06/12/8a1963b4-30b8-11e6-8ff7-7b6c1998b7a0_story.html?utm_term=.c0520d92cfd4

I thought I did it out respect and sanctity.
But really it was you denying my humanity
Telling me it was just phase
Just a blink of an eye
I haven't met the right guy
Just give it some time
Don't walk out of line- phase
Like who I am has an expiration date-phase
But I can tell you now we are here and we will not be erased.
We will lift our naked, beaten bodies from fences
And love ourselves for our so-called offenses
Because we are the Daughters of Bilitis
We are the closeted daughters and sons
Light dimmed but never gone.
And we stand hand in hand with our fifty brothers and sisters no matter where we're sent. So, I ask of you, will you be there
too with a hand to lend?

Knives in the Hands of the Gentle
By Stephanie Weiner

I turned the corner out of the pasta aisle
and ran into her and her daughter.
immediately I was rendered mute.
I froze, like a deer in her headlights as she gazed at me with love.
“Hi, how are you?” her voice was more gentle than a soft rain.
“Great.” I wasn’t great.
how had her daughter aged ten years in only two?
I remember holding her when she was born.
the daughter reached to hug me but I stood still.
her arms drifted back to her sides and she wouldn’t meet my eyes.
“Oh, spaghetti night?” her mother asked.
she asked like I was at her house yesterday making jam with her and her six kids.
like she knew me.
I looked at the jar of tomato sauce and package of noodles in my hands.
“Yup.” I couldn’t say more.
she saw that.
I felt too aware of my ripped jeans and slouchy cardigan, my wild hair and greasy skin.
she was in overalls and had a bandana around her butter yellow hair.
she looked fifty but I knew she was only thirty five.
her daughter was almost her height.
she said goodbye and drifted away with her girl and I felt nothing.
I walked in a daze to the long grocery line and tasted panic grip my lungs,
strangling me, making me want to scream.
run run run, hide hide hide.
there was nowhere to go, my mom needed me to buy dinner.
I felt a hand on my back and I turned to see the mother again.

she was wearing her smile that had the corners turned down
like she couldn't decide on whether to be happy or sad (you know the one).
it was her comforting smile.
she continued walking by and I wanted to shout at her back
“you were the one who cut me. you.”
Her kindness muddled me.
I was filleted open, my heart bared there for all the customers to see,
in all its rotten glory.
hands shaking, I drove home.
tears screamed down my face
as I realized after two years of hate and anguish that they were not monsters.
they were just people.
and that was so much worse.

Circles**By Stephanie Weiner**

blue bloody bumbling baboons
red raving rummaging racoons
purple pummeling parading piranhas
scarlet scrumbling scaling samaiyahs
round and round and round we go
nothing to say, nothing to know

True Lies
By Victor Macias

True lies no lies, it lies in the truth
There's no time for an excuse
Seek guidance within the roots of life
If you chose to fight for what's right
On the opposing side of oppression
Pulling in the opposite direction
Within this tug of war
Who wants It more
Better grab this guide rope with a tight hold
And get a grip because many will slip
In a bottomless pit
As time persists

Bubbling Cauldron
By Victor Macias

Utilizing time as enlightenment

That's what is keeping me alive in this environment

In a lost world, there is a lot more locked doors on wrong floors

Some wander and ponder in the wonder

Others slumber and stay longer

But you have to be stronger when it comes to mind over matter

Capture answers with common sense

Don't contradict

There's a consequence for all that mess

All that is, is false promises

And self-honesty is the policy

So how are you possibly evolving

I'm lying in the cut problem solving

Realizing it is all revolving

Until the final calling

Identification Please
By Vanessa Ramirez

Nowadays

I find that I'm slowly losing the ability to identify what makes me myself

Like I used to do when I was younger.

Then

Does it have to do with the way I look?

Is it the words I choose to say?

Or is it something else

Within me

That can only be seen by other people?

Well

If that's the case, then open your eyes and awaken your mind;

Come explore what I have to offer.

Tell me exactly who I am.

Because no matter what I think

No matter what I do

And especially no matter what I feel

you ultimately have the final say in who I am and what I will forever be.

Harvest International- **Spring Issue 2019**

Mama

By Vanessa Ramirez

Were you always this unhappy?

Did you secretly cry tears of despair as you hugged

Smiled

Laughed with us?

When you softly stroked my hair

Caressed my brothers' cheeks

Saying that we were enough

Were we actually not?

Was a big family really that important to you?

Were we not plenty enough to fill a house, a home?

I guess losing not one

But two

Unborn souls finally took its toll on you

Me

Us.

I let you blame me for nothing, for everything

To help ease your pain.

But in the end, I couldn't save you.

And now I too secretly cry when I smile

Laugh

Live.

Was I always this unhappy?

Harvest International- **Spring Issue 2019**

The Bubble
By Vanessa Ramirez

Oh, how bright our bubble is, lighting up the way,
shining magnificently as a pearl
under the sun's strong ray.

As I walk along the streets, which give off a golden hue,
my neighbors pass me by,
with smiles stuck to them like glue.

Every day is just the same. From Sunset Boulevard to Park Avenue,
we are shielded by our bubble's wall
with nothing going out or coming through.

This paradise given unto us is where we choose to stay.

From time to time, however, I see emotions begin to sway
back and forth, side to side,
leading folks to stray.

They begin to wonder, "Is there a different view
of what the world could be,

lying far beyond what we hold true?"

In the shadows of the night, when in the darkest blue,
they try to sneak a peek, past the edge,
only to never be seen anew.

Oh, how kind our bubble is, placing all our doubts to lay.

We know we are safe forevermore
as long as we obey.

Our hearts will never worry, we only look to you
who never lets us down.

We humbly subdue.

Every day will be the same. From Sunset Boulevard to Park Avenue,
we will be shielded by our bubble's wall
with nothing going out or ever coming through.

This paradise given unto us is where we choose to stay.

“When Mexico Sends Its People”

By Jasmine Nevare

It's true,
My brown people smuggle.
Smuggle strength
That aids the struggle.
Struggle with jobs
They have to juggle
In this jungle.
I smell trouble
Or is that *hustle*?
I can't tell
In this bustle.
In the fields
Where they tend the land,
In the streets
Where they're working the stands.
But what man in America
Stands for them?
So, yes, they smuggle.
And it's true,
My brown people steal.
Steal time off their wrists.

Like slits of sun
Hitting their backs
As they're working in shifts.
Taking miles off their lives
Till they're worn out soles.
Sneaking youth
From their children
Who wait up late
To ask papá about his day.
Whose tummies ache,
What to make for dinner?
These thieves are sinners.
But what man in America
Will make them dinner?
So, yes, they steal.

Padres de Seis y Más**Padres de Seis y Más**
By Jasmine Nevarez

My mother is a project of the Projects.
Queen of the cities she's conquered,
An inherited title,
Crossing borders like her mother.
Heel to toe, to and fro,
Her strides as strong as a choice
And her voice as she yells,
From the car,
Down the hall,
Across the table
She has filled with children
Who are hungry for their chance
To claim their own cities.

My father is a beat you can't miss
Or you'll throw off the groove.
He's got too much heart to sit still,
Yet he's still
Like a night in winter
When he's made up his mind.
But he's kind, he's the kind
That's been warmed with a love
Passed tenderly from the hands of his father.
Hands that have gathered his children
Like notes, held together
On the back of a tune
That he wants you to sing along to.

|

¿Bilingual?**By Jasmine Nevarez**

In my mouth I hold two people

But one cannot speak.

Behind my lips

She sits in holes

Of open cavities.

She claws at my throat

Itching to be free

But her muffled, mumbled moans

Don't make it past my teeth.

They are swallowed up like secrets,

Tucked behind a tongue

That was young

When I learned to keep

Her hidden in my cheek.

Chewing on her words

Until I was crippled,

Tripping over my accent

Made her weak.

In my mouth I hold two people,

But one of them can't speak.

Incubus in Love By Michelle Gatewood

Make me a ragdoll baby, like limp limbs and lighter than my sadness makes me feel. Carry me into the ocean and leave my happiness underwater where I'm helpless and I need you. I dive and you pull me to the surface.

I thank you because you save me and I don't know that there is water in my lungs, only that there is a burning in my chest -I think it is from this liquor you feed me.

Put your lips on me baby so I can taste all the poison you've drank and be closer to you.

Now, I only see you in my dreams- where you've bred a new nightmare.

It haunts the part of me that abandoned you.

I think if you drowned yourself in the liquor you prescribed for your sadness, I would blame the incessant force that drove me to save myself in all the bits and pieces I could collect.

From the floor of your bedroom- listening to your induced sleep, heavy and deep.

From the inside of a locked bathroom- hands on knees careful not to rub the tears, don't make the eyes swell.

From the driver's seat of my car- park down the street, pretend to beg myself "just go home."

From the curb outside your house- where you scream at me to leave then call me again the next day. And every day I answer.

These places I made familiar to hopelessness. These pieces that are still me.

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I keep them like heirlooms. Like the traits I think I inherited, the ones that made me find you. I display them on a shelf called my body.

Here on my mouth is learning to keep quiet- choose your battles because you lose them all anyway.

Here on my hands there is surrender, or more like I love you so I must endure it.

And here, on my face there is shame.

Because I know better. Because I know respect. Because when people ask me what happened I tell them we just didn't work. I defend you so they won't think less of me and it will take me two years to see it.

Not until I start to feel real happiness again and it sends me into a crisis because I could feel how long it had been. My heart knew why but my mind had trouble accepting. Because I know better- that isn't something that I would allow.

And then I remember those words that slipped from your lips like desperation between pride and power- you said, "no one knows you like I do, not your family, not your friends. Come home." And I heard it like translated from another tongue. A message of manipulation.

Everything was clear.

Despite my worse days, self-hatred isn't home.

And home is far from you.

In Memory of My Past Life
By Parish Niwa

Some days are fine,
the briefest glimpse of
what I once had; but
then they slip away
from me indefinitely
to some land that I do not recall.

And, when I wake,
the weight is back
to bring me down
where I belong.

I'm tired of living this way,
my wishes are for it to end.
But genies do not exist
and leprechauns are nowhere

on land; rainbows are real,
but only exist as such and
sadly colors do not function
well as an emotional crutch.

My heart lingers in the past
with everything so strong;
but my brain tells me that
I am not for this world long.
Nostalgia deceives me by
recounting everything dead,
and the bitterness greets me
by saying happiness is in my head.

Hold onto me tight,
and remember what you smell
because I doubt that you'll see me
once I've gone down to hell.

In Absentia
By Parish Niwa

These years have worn me very thin
and forced my countenance to constant grim.
For if all that is beautiful fades,
what may I rely upon for better days?
To whom shall I express
my feelings of sorrow or duress?
What shall I look for
when black and white make do no more?
Survival is not worth very much
when it lacks happiness or things of that such
I do not wish for rubies and gold
or beautiful things to simply hold,
what I seek is so much more:
the void left open when there is no door;
the pulse that lies within a hand;
an eager mind, hoping to understand

I look for you deeply,
but I never seem to find
the one who completes me;
the other half of my mind.

To Be Unloved
By Parish Niwa

He cracked open his own heart
In order to see if he could fill it with more love,
For she was never satisfied
With the amount that he was giving up.

And, in the jagged corners of his shattered soul,
The man found the power to let it all go.
Scarlett turned vermillion and the vigor was gone
For he had sacrificed it all when she was never the one.

Blue**By Rebecca MacLean**

You looked so fake with your smug lips wrapped around that
brand new electronic cigarette.
Like a blueberry flavored badass.

Maybe I wouldn't have been so resentful if you weren't my ex.
Or
If we didn't just have sex.

Sitting in your putrid sickly sweet cloud
I wish we had walked outside,
To where the cars splash water from
The broken sprinkler.
To sit on the hard curb where I
Kissed your chin for the first time
Because even on my tip toes
I could never reach your lips.

Outside is where you told me that
You hope snails are all going somewhere
Somewhere real important

Somewhere that's worth it.
I would pull your hand away from the
Brown blades of grass that have worked
Too damn hard to push through the cracks
In your sidewalk. They say everything
Eventually makes its way down to the ocean,
And I wonder if our love floated down this gutter.

I wish we had gone outside
Where your hands are finally steady
And I swear I can hear the disapproving tisk
Of my mother every time you flick ash
From that slow burn between your fingers.

For a moment I thought about telling you
That me being here was a mistake.
Instead; I sat next to your sticky chest,
Watched the little light in your
Plastic dose of nicotine
And tried not to breathe.

Pale Visions
By Evelyn Pena

Driving through the streets,
Clouding the windows
with the Mist of my mind.

Faint yellow flowers
Sprinkled along the roadside.
I am mindful and mind full.
Is there a better place to be?

Slithering around in between
Tall grasses and midnight masses,
Gliding through moments,
Swinging over time.
Buoyant on the Body of Dreams.

California Poppies
By Evelyn Pena

"Copa de Oro", is what my Grandma used to say when we'd pass wild poppies on the highway when I was younger. The literal translation is Cup of Gold, the official flower of the state of California. The fascinating thing about these flowers is that their delicate petals close during sundown and won't open up again until the break of day. California Poppies had once always brought me joy, but that was a long time ago ... After the recent drought lifted in California, poppies were emerging everywhere. It was an official sign that the drought was over and people celebrated by uploading picturesque posts on Instagram.

So here I was, sitting with Ryan in the middle of one of these poppy fields, a little flabbergasted. We had walked hand in hand up a winding trail to a bench at the top of the hill. We'd been here two years before yet there was about one poppy every few yards. This time, there were an abundance of them and the conversation was different.

"How come you refused?" Ryan said quietly.

The bitter wind was whipping my long hair all around my face. I put my hood over my head. I could feel the skin on my nose freezing up from the blasts of icy air. I thought about the way this past year has been. My depression, our tears, our qualms, our disputes, his lies. . .

I wrapped my arms around myself. My foot was tapping the ground. I looked around, there were no cups of gold. The poppies were closed, like they were holding themselves. Swaying rapidly in the breeze, as if they were dancing to keep warm. The sun was barely rising and the sky was grey with a hint of gold.

"We've gone through so much this year and there is a lot to forgive," my eyesight started to blur, "there is much that I still haven't forgiven." I blinked and a frosty tear rolled down my cheek. I looked over at Ryan, his eyes were red and swollen. There were fresh tear tracks running down his cheek into his beard. His back hunched over and hands in his sweater pockets. The smile that he always wore was nowhere insight. His soft brown eyes looked up at me, he resembled a miserable lost puppy. It was the most I had seen him cry in the past eight years that we've known each other.

"How can you just shed one tear, and that's it?" questioned Ryan, his face pouting.

I shrugged, "I just can't cry right now." I thought about how I cried myself to sleep the other night. I looked away from his gaze to the sunrise. The dark grey clouds hung over the endless orange speckled poppy field. Finally, I was able to say, "just because times are tough doesn't mean that you can put a ring on it and everything will be okay, that's not how it works," I could tell that he didn't understand, but he was trying to. "We'll be okay, let's just go home," I said as I touched his damp beard and stood up. I could hear the wind whistling through the tall grass and wild flowers as we walked down the hill with some distance between us. I looked back at the sunrise once more, it was brighter out but the golden poppies were still closed.

Sandcastles**By Andrea Tulcan**

I've been building sandcastles my entire life.

It's hard work and the days are long.

The sun beats down on my tired body.

But it's worth it because you look down and say, "This is good."

I work the sand between my fingers, it dances down to the ground below and takes form.

But sooner or later, the waves come.

They used to come after my sandcastle was finished, and I would smile.

Because even though the waves confused me, I knew there was time to start over

-And make it better.

But lately the sun has been so hot.

The sand drops like bullets.

It feels shapeless and dull in my tired hands.

And I look out on the horizon and I see know one.

I am not alone, but the sun blinds me to your presence.

And the waves come faster and faster.

It seems now that the moment I start to rebuild, another wave comes and knocks me to my knees.

I am lost.

These were good creations, and you helped me with them. And you said they were good.

Why are the waves so strong? I cannot rebuild on my own.

The Mirror
By Andrea Tulcan

It's a strange feeling to look at your own reflection and not recognize yourself.

To look into eyes that are familiar, and not recognize them as your own.

It's even stranger to be so used to seeing a stranger in the mirror, that you are almost frightened when you catch a glimpse of yourself.

You'd become so used to this person in front of you.

And they aren't unfriendly or mean, or negative at all.

They simply aren't you.

But you've grown accustomed to each other. You share contemplative silences and the occasional empty gaze.

But sometimes you find yourself wondering who you used to see in the mirror.

And you begin to doubt that there was ever anyone else at all.

But one day, you look up, and out of the corner of your eye, you see something that makes you take a second look.

It's you.

You're hesitant to look again, because you're afraid it may have been a trick of the light.

But there you are in the mirror, clear as day.

There's a warm confusion in your eyes, and you put your hand up to the glass- just to be sure.

And you realize how much you have changed, and how much you missed your own smile.

It's a strange feeling to look at your own reflection and recognize yourself.

Untitled
By E.R. Alvarez

I feel grounded
Like the roots
of a tree
spreading its branches
into the open air
as autumn leaves
float gently down
to the soil, where
leaves of grass
softly sway
in the wind,
which comes
and goes--
but never remains
the same, like
sacred rivers that
wash the body and
cleans the spirit
emitting the
eternal frequency
of life--itself.

Welcome to the U.S. of A.**By E.R. Alvarez**

Work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume
The American dream lost and set up for doom.
Television, cars, money, fame, the media, and propaganda.
The American dream bewildered and conforming
to the land of
Rules, regulations, power, authority, corrupt and
full of greed
assassinating martyrs and ignoring those in need.
Disorder, strikes, chaos, riots, revolution, and Heaven
Take a stand for what you believe in
or the wrong direction is where we're heading.
Life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness
This is America home of the free
and nothing less.

Jazmines
By Julian Zaragoza

Vapores viscosos de miel
Pasearon por mi nariz
Calmando mi alma broncada
Y disolviendo la
Cruel temporalidad

En ese instante tuve el placer de no existir

“Old Wounds”
By Destinee Davis

I'm not over you

As much as I try to pretend

All the emotions come back at the mention of your name

Why can't I get over you

My benign tumor turn malignant

Invading my emotions

Consuming my heart

You are my cancer

Stage 1: meeting you

Stage 2: kissing you

Stage 3: loving you

Stage 4: missing you/ cutting you out trying to fight my emotions with logic

Poetry my chemotherapy

No cure

How do you treat a cancer that's in your heart

I am not sure but I know being around you is not smart.

A Collection of Limericks
By Sarah Petras

Expectations Not Met

There once was a girl named Simone Who's lack of lovers she did often
bemoan
But she dated a guy
And not three days went by
When she realized she'd rather be alone

The Writer's Lament

I once found Charles Dickens a bore His works would cause me to
snore But then it came to be
That I wrote much like he
So I found myself liking him more

Rainbow Ears
By Alex Berk

I'm at Disneyland with my girlfriend, more specifically California Adventure. She holds my hand and shuffles me through the crowd as I stare wide eyed at the changed Pixar Pier; the sun beats down on us and we are heading for a frozen desert when I spot them. They're a lesbian couple, wearing the new rainbow ears and holding hands across the table. I point them out to my girlfriend, and for a moment I feel our hearts reach out to embrace theirs. They are not the first queer couple we have seen, or even the first older lesbian couple, but these two outside Boudin Bakery are different because they have kids. And I'm not ready to get down on one knee and propose to my partner, let alone be a parent, but I have to stop for a moment for the same reason I look up dapper weddings on Pinterest, the same reason I'll watch a movie just for ten seconds of queer content. This family is a lantern in the darkness of suicide and night club shootings, they are proof that we have a future, that growing up is not just a fairytale fantasy reserved for straight people. And although we can talk about the massive corporation that has given us rainbow ears and nothing else, this family with their rainbow ears gives us hope that our love is not just about survival.

The Blue Jay**By: Bang**

A blue jay sat at my window singing a song

A flock of blue jays came and sat along

Look at that blue jay with his coat so dark

“Look at him singing and there, he squawks”

A blue jay who sings but not the blue jay song

A blue jay sat at my window singing a song

A crow with his wing so true, flew by so blue

“Look at that crow, so little he’s no crow”

Skin so dark like a tree bark, and yet he doesn’t grow

Poor little crow, so small, so cute only if he grew

A blue jay sat at my window singing a song

“Poor dark blue jay there he squawks and barks”

“Poor little crow there he sits small and dark”

“Bind him! Color him! Make him sing our song!”

“Feed him! Strengthen him! Let’s bring him along

A blue jay laid at my window singing no song
The blue jay tried and tried with all his might
The blue jay tried until light became night
He was colored in blue and covered in red
But, "You're no blue jay nor a crow" they said

A blue jay's a blue jay no matter its song
Even if his song just did not belong

Notre Dame is Burning
By Karina Dominique Ruiz

When I think of that day
my mind buzzes with the breeze
My friends, 2 girls I spent every day with,
and a new one we found along the way,
smiling in our Breton tops before Notre Dame
a souvenir to say,
“yes, we’ve been there.”
We walked all over Paris that day
learning the Latin Quarter
like we were the natives,
and they were the visitors.
I bought a ring that day, gold-plated
in the shape of a girl I wanted to be
from a shop called Les Métamorphoses
on the Rue de Petit Pont.
That was the first time
I’d ever bought myself jewelry,
the kind that lasts a lifetime
and in that same spirit I thought that you would be there for my lifetime
your spires pricking the sky, gothic and beautiful.
That was the day I remember the most from Paris
the used bookstore with titles I couldn’t read
the escargot at a candle lit dinner
and the church I never went into.

One Day At A Time

By Sabria Sparrow

When you begin college, the initial thought is that it will be easy. That you'll go to school, and be a stellar student, and get stellar grades, and after four years you'll waltz out and get your degree with flying colors. You think to yourself, how hard can it be? With 3-4 classes from 2-3 days a week, it will *almost* be like summer *all the time*. And for a moment, it *is* easy. For a split second, it actually feels like things will be just fine, that you have it all together, that you're keeping up better than expected. But it only takes that moment before life hits you like a bulldozer and you find yourself face flat into the ground and you come to realize that this isn't like summer or high school or anything you've ever experienced at all. Suddenly you can't breathe because you're drowning in assignments and when you try to gasp for air all you get is a mouth full of anxiety. Procrastination becomes your best friend because you'd rather binge watch Grey's Anatomy and scroll through twitter than deal with your failures, and suddenly, it's not so easy anymore.

What I've learned to do when it seems like I'm being bombarded with essays and homework, is try to breathe. When I am so worried about time that I excessively write out my schedule and adjust my planner trying to figure out when how between work and classes I'm going to get things done, I take a step back. When I begin to think that maybe I should just give up because I've never

actually been the scholar type anyway and all of my classmates are so much smarter than me and all of my professors must think I'm a mess and I mind as well just face the fact that I'm going to have to work at Macy's for the rest of my life, I stop. And I call my mom. And I have a breakdown in my car in the school's way too crowded parking lot and tell her that I'm dropping out and becoming a stripper. At this point, my mom tells me to calm down and I can hear in her voice that she's a little amused and that annoys me. She tells me "You'll be okay, just take it one day at a time."

And you will be okay too. You will go to school, and you will be a stellar student, and get stellar grades (or we can imagine you will), and you won't exactly waltz out, but you will get your degree. You will survive the impossible midterms and the all-nighters spent on group projects with people you hate and you will survive the days it feels like you're going to die from lack of sleep because you spent the whole night studying for an exam. You'll cry and laugh and procrastinate and make mistakes. You'll ace tests you didn't study a day for and fail tests that took everything out of you. But that is what college is about. College is about trial and error. It's about giving your blood, sweat and tears and still surviving. It's about feeling like everything is going to fall apart only for everything to work out in your favor. And sometimes, you will actually fall apart. But you will get your shit together. And when you walk across that stage and you look in the audience to see the professor that gave you a C when you had a 79.99 and contemplate sticking out your tongue, you won't because you'll remember all you've been through, and you'll realize you've finally made it.

If you look around, I think you will see that you are not the only one who feels lost sometimes. If you speak to a classmate, you'll find that they didn't quite understand the reading either. If you scroll through your feeds, you will find funny memes dedicated to emphasizing our pain through humor. Nobody just goes into college knowing what they're doing. Everybody has to adjust; some

are just better or faster at it. We've all fallen and had to pick ourselves back up. We are all just winging it, and we're all just taking it one day at a time.

The Place from Back Then
By Tobias Harrington

There are things I need to see,

Before time runs out.

Like the block of wood I painted 19 years ago

During a time when I wanted to change my name.

And the boat I would climb into and

Pretend I was on a deep-sea voyage.

Or the backyard,

Where the imagination in my adventures

Would run wild.

I need to see the house

Where I spent my summers as a child.

And I need to see their smiling faces

Once more,

Before time runs out.

Harvest International- **Spring Issue 2019**

Oh

By Taylor Ikehara

Lying, unasleep, with the ceiling on my feet.
I wish the see oh monitor would start its incessant beep
I wish my breath would fill the room and drop its second oh
And so the monitor would go, and so my breath would slow
And maybe then I'd get some sleep
Who knows what dreams my brain might keep.

Procession
By Taylor Ikehara

Under the spotlights of the sky,
 The circus top spins twice and stops.
 The veil'd crowd twins in-fermity
 As they hear and feel and gawk.

The trumpets sound! The brassy shots
 Of war and right and left.
 The circus master can't be found,
 But look! The curtain's cleft!

And storming out are elephants!
 On tricycles, with paint.
 And flat-foot fools with deep chagrin
 Lead on, bravado fake.

Up next, the mules, of white and blue,
 And whipped, although they're fed.
 The men who drive them smile and sneer:
 Mixed upon their heads.

Trailing the beasts are carriages,
 And palanquins of gold,
 And cars that shine with chrome and spit;
 All pass with windows closed.

Finally come those forgot,
 The children, red and black;
 Exotic beasts in heavy chains;
 And those who clearly lack.

Around they go, in circles now,
 A rhythm to their spin.
 But wait! The players gaze skyward
 The lights begin to dim.

A single spotlight shines.
 A single person finds the line
 And walks across the sky.

Unsteady, slow, no net below,
 They must balance or they'll die.
 The crowd that stares is breathing slow,
 The crowd can't blink its eye.

And the trumpets blow
 And the players below
 Continue their march around.
 And the circus master can't be found.

Harvest International- Spring Issue 2019

Falling Son
By Taylor Ikehara

This poem is in internment;
My thumbs feel tied to my pinkies
Held hostage by my brain playing shrink
Like how I hold my heritage hostage.
I don't know how to tell people I'm here
Shall I hold up my last name for identification like today's
newspaper
Like some proof that I exist?
My skin keeps everything inside.
I can't write this poem because captives can't write home
And I feel like I have no claim on this poem
No claim on this identity,
Because I've kidnapped a Japanese kid and stuffed him into my
head
And zipped him up.

This poem is a lie
Because I don't know how to feel.
I don't have to succeed my father's expectations and
achievements,
But I got made fun of in middle school for having a small dick
And playing an instrument
And being studious
Because they thought my dad would call me "dishonorable."

And now when I hear Japanese from kids who look like my dad
The kid in my head cries and wants to be out, but
The kid knows he's seen his captor's face.
Asian boy painted white.
I've never felt Asian,
Save that my white skin marred my last name
Like a red pimple on a white forehead.

Harvest International- **Spring Issue 2019**

Her Story

By Taylor Ikehara

*Dedicado a mi novia, mi única, mi grande arenita, mi patita, y el amor de mi vida,
Sandra.*

*Feliz navidad, y **te amo.***

Prologue.

Wintertime in Los Angeles, 2087.

. . .

The night was quiet and that was what made it terrifying

And the sky was thick with tension and smoke.

I heard the careful footsteps and I looked at him with worry

And when we ran, and the footsteps became shouts

And running and the clicking of safeties being switched off of guns behind us,

I looked at him and he was scared but I only knew I loved him.

And when the air punched into my back, and I stumbled,

He screamed a scream that brought tears to my eyes.

But I only smiled at him,

And stood up and pushed him towards the edge of the city

And I watched him run, and look back at me, and I was happy that he would live,

And sad that he would live without me. . .

Part One.

I woke up with tears in my eyes, clutching the side of my ribs where I'd sure I had been shot.

The nightmare had been vivid with horrifying clarity, and usually dreams fade in the morning light, but this one, with the smoke and the guns and the sight of my own blood seeping into the sand was etched on the backs of my eyes.

I took a deep breath, wiped the corners of my eyes. My head still on the pillow, I glanced at my alarm clock and saw that it was exactly two in the morning.

Groaning, I sat up in bed, scratched my head, and then stared blankly at the paper-covered mirror in front of my bed that doubled as the sliding door for my closet.

He looked familiar.

The knowledge collided into my thoughts and stuck with me.

Why did that man look familiar?

I'm not even straight.

Besides the guns and blood on the sand, that was the next most unsettling aspect of the dream, and, thinking that, I snorted at its absurdity. I wasn't a kid; I didn't really dream any more, much less about dying for a man.

But he looked so familiar, and I felt. . .

What did I feel?

I saw myself through an intentional gap I left in the clutter on my mirror, so that I could check to see how I looked before school. Through the overlapping band posters and print-outs of poems I liked, I could see that my hair, bleach-blonde and chopped short where it stretched down to my chin, was tangled and matted on the side of my head that had left a head-shaped indentation in my pillow. I looked pale in the light and, as I rubbed my eyes, I could feel the sleep-sweat begin to sink in. It would accumulate in new pimples that would glow angry and red on my light skin.

As I dragged my hands off of my face, I looked into my own familiarly honey-brown eyes and saw that they were full of worry.

I felt love for that man.

It was a long time before I felt comfortable enough to let sleep wrap itself around me and drag me back to peaceful unconsciousness.

. . .

As I stepped out of my house, I saw how the sunlight beat brilliantly upon the photovoltaic rooftop of my home, and I knew it would be a white Christmas.

My mom climbed into her car, and the reality of what I was going to do today hit me in concurrence with the slam of the car door and the blinding light of the sun that left sunspots on my vision even as I hid behind sunglasses.

I'm going to ask her today.

My mom opened the car door, poked her head out and called, "Ariana! Come on!"

I looked down at myself under my white sun-brella, at my combat boots, my sun-bleached jeans, and my oversized, long-sleeved shirt that let me hide confidently inside its amorphous shape. I had put in some silver hoops my mom lent me, and I matched it with a silver glitter eyeshadow. I felt ready.

"I'm coming!"

As I got in the car I saw a shooting star careen across the still-dark edges of the morning sky. It stretched and seemed to crash into the sun, the blinding diamond in the sky.

My mom put the car in reverse and, turning to look behind her, she glanced at me and smirked. "You look pretty today," she said casually, backing the car out of the drive.

I rolled my head away from her on the car seat headrest.

"Mo-o-o-o-m, stop it."

As she tried to act like she didn't know what she was doing, I looked up through the double-tinted window, and, as I watched, a rare cloud crossed the sun like a veil, and for a second the sun dimmed, spotted with black and grey, a shining koi swimming in the milk of the sky.

But it only lasted for a second.

And as my mom continued to try and pry as she drove me to school and towards the moment I had prepared myself months for, I found myself wishing there would be another shooting star, another cloud, and I tried not to think of the guns and the man of my nightmare.

. . .

Classes that day were especially long for two reasons. The first was that it was the Friday before Christmas, and I had already finished my essays for my humanities classes and my tests in my S.T.E.M classes.

The second reason compounded on the first, because I had nothing to do in class as we wrapped up the semester with movies and small talk, except, of course, to think about sixth period, when I would ask Carmen to come to the movies with me.

This made the lack of content in my classes considerably more anxiety-inducing. As the day passed, and as classroom acquaintances around me texted and talked about meeting up over break to get food and maybe sneak some alcohol out of someone's parent's cabinet, I thought about all the ways in which Carmen would say no, or say nothing, or maybe - *oh my god* - say yes.

I made my way to my friends' lunch spot by some benches besides the theater building. I could feel my stomach start to churn - sixth period was only a lunch break away - and I knew I wouldn't be able to eat anything.

Kylie and was already there, talking to my other friend Andrew. We had all met through the Gay-Straight Alliance club on campus, something I tried to keep quiet about. To my parents, and to anyone that asked who wasn't in the know, we had all met in class.

Andrew saw me coming and he grinned and pushed Kylie's face playfully towards me with his hand. She started beaming too, and despite the ball of lead I felt in the bottom of my stomach, I grinned back.

"Hey-y-y-y look who it is!" She waltzed up and gave me a brief hug before she pulled back and looked at me. Her eyes were blue and warm and kind and they made me feel better.

"Are you ready?" "No, but fuck it, you know?" I said, laughing nervously.

Kylie laughed and we walked back under the shade of the theater building's alcove.

Andrew was eating french fries and he wiped his hands on his pants before giving me a hug.

"Oh my god dude, how are you? Don't worry, she is absolutely going to say yes."

I sighed and pulled at my sleeves. "I hope so. Otherwise, Merry Christmas to me, ya know?"

He laughed and offered me some fries. He was mutual friends with Carmen, and she came by sometimes to eat with us, but it was just the three of us today, a fact I was grateful for. Andrew had introduced me to her in sixth period English, and the three of us had sat next to each other for most of the semester.

"By the way," he said as he sat down to eat more fries,

"Did you pick a poem to read today?"

I froze, a fry on its way to my mouth. "What?"

His eyes widened sympathetically. "Oh no, did you forget?"

I'm so sorry"

"Fuck, is that today?"

Kylie frowned and gave me a pat on the arm. "Shit, I guess you were thinking about other things, huh?"

I forced a laugh out, but my mind was whirling. I sat down next to Andrew, breathless, and pulled out my phone. In my obsession over what would happen with Carmen, I had completely forgotten that our teacher, Mrs. Brown, had asked us to bring poetry in to read for the last class before Christmas. As Kylie and Andrew ate lunch around me, I

scrolled through the notes on my phone, trying to find one I felt comfortable about reading.

I don't think I've ever read poetry in front of people before. Fuck.

*In front of **her** before.*

And as the bell rang for lunch, and Andrew and I walked to English class, I still hadn't decided on a poem.

. . .

"Carmen."

As Andrew made his way back to his seat, having just read his poem and called on our friend to read hers next, Carmen rolled her eyes at me and got up. She muttered a "Thanks a lot," as she passed Andrew, who smirked at her in response.

Watching her stand in front of class made my heart beat about ten times faster. Her hair, black and smooth and long, draped itself around her shoulders. Her bangs were cut just above thick, blocky eyebrows that made her dark, deep eyes all the more intimidating. Below her eyes, though, was a perpetual smile that never failed to make me grin back, despite my stomach twisting every time I saw it.

Carmen was wearing a green bomber jacket covered in patches and pins over a striped tank top that reached down to the top of her belly button, and as she got to the front of class she pulled a crumpled piece of paper out of her jacket, cleared her throat, and said, "This poem is called, *Heartbreaker*.

"The sun shines bright, but not as bright as you

You, who could never not warm me

Or reach me

And blind me and burn me.

Your radiation touched my skin and it touched my soul

It mutated my soul

And I thought it healed my soul

But you when you went to sleep behind the horizon you left me

You left my soul an irradiated tumor and it weighed me down

inside.

It was a long time before I realized I needed surgery, But by then it was

morning and you came back.

And it wasn't until the night came again
That I realized I didn't need surgery
I just couldn't be changed by your light anymore
By your heat
By you."

The class applauded and I felt my face heat up as I gave her a whistle. She looked at me and smiled, then looked at Mrs. Brown, who said, "That was excellent! It was very, as you said, *heartbreaking*."

The class groaned.

"Now, would you like to pick someone to go next?"

Carmen didn't even hesitate. Her head swiveled back to meet my eyes and she grinned that grin I liked so much and she said,
"Ariana."

Oh shit. Here we go.

Andrew chuckled as I got up. My hands were shaking as I passed Carmen, and I looked up at her and I whispered, "You were amazing!"

She leaned in and said, "Yours will be better," then walked back to her seat and sat down, looking at me expectantly and smiling.

I could feel how red my face got. I stumbled to the front of class, turned around and pulled my phone out of my pocket. My other hand was nervously gripping the ends of my sleeve and my knees were wobbling.

I looked up, surveyed the room, looked at Andrew, glanced at Carmen and then quickly looked down at my phone.

"My poem, uh, doesn't have a title."

I looked back at Andrew. He blew me a kiss. I cleared my throat.

"I was a pebble, hoping to be wedge myself in the soles of your shoe.

I was a burr, waiting to catch onto your shirt.

I was a fly on your wall, and I was a bee on your arm, Just wanting to be near
you.

Because, if you'll let me, I want to the sun-brella shielding
your skin

I want to be the rings on your fingers and the lipstick on your lips

And I want to be the breath in your lungs

And the light in your eyes.

But I don't want to be another weight on your shoulders;

I don't need you to look at me,

Or touch me back and love me.

I just need to be yours

If you'll have me."

My cheeks were hot as I finished and looked at my feet and heard the class clap for me. I called up a kid I didn't like, my eyes still earthbound with embarrassment, and went back to my seat.

As I walked back, Andrew gave me a high five, but Carmen's smile was wide and honest and she grabbed my hand and squeezed it as I sat down. She locked eyes with me and she said, "See? I told you yours would be better."

Carmen's caramel skin meant that she didn't blush much, except on her forehead, so there's no way she didn't notice my pale cheeks turn even brighter red than they already were when she said that. As she let go of my hand, I stammered out a thanks and tried to return her smile, and looked down at my phone and instantly messaged Kylie, not just because she had to know that Carmen just held my hand, but also because I needed

something to do with my hands or I'd just about bite my nails off. As the kid I didn't like mumbled that he didn't bring a poem, the fingers that Carmen briefly held seemed to glow with heat and light, a miniature star forming in the palm of my hand. . . .

As the bell rang, Mrs. Brown tried to continue talking, but she soon realized she was drowned out in the sound of backpacks and purses being zipped up, and she dismissed the class and wished us a happy holiday.

I had been sitting awkwardly in my seat, stiff and unmoving ever since I had sat back down from my reading. My palms were sweating all over my phone and I was pretty sure my stomach was doing backflips.

Andrew and Carmen stood up, chatting about the break, and Andrew shot me a glance that said, "This is your chance." He made some excuse to Carmen about needing to talk to his physics teacher, and walked out the door ahead of her.

She looked at me, shrugged at Andrew's receding back, and got her stuff to walk out.

I stood up, my knees popping, my back damp with sweat. I followed Carmen out of the door, my mind rushing to every emotion. Once we were outside, walking down the hill in a

throng of high-schoolers, I blurted out, "Wanna walk use my sun-brella?" at her, too loudly. She turned to smile at me, surprised. I quickly added, "It's already out, so."

"Yeah sure!" She grinned at me and came over. She was taller than I was, as she hunched to get underneath the sun-brella, she leaned close to me and I could smell the double-strength sunscreen on her skin and a fruity perfume underneath.

"Oh!" I blushed even more than I already was. "Sorry I didn't think about that--"

"No worries!" She laughed. She said, "Can I hold it?" and as her hand reached out and grabbed the hilt of the sun-brella, she brushed her fingers against mine again.

I looked up at her and my mouth was open like an idiot, but she just gave me another smile and my heart melted and I passed the sun-brella to her.

We walked together for a little while in silence and my heart was drumming on the inside of my chest. My throat felt like a nearly empty tube of toothpaste.

"I wasn't joking about your poem, by the way," I said. "It was seriously beautiful."

"Hey thank you! I try my best, but I feel like it all turns out gross and dramatic, you know?"

I laughed a little too hard. "Yeah I know what you mean." There was a pause, and my heart leapt into my throat. "Hey, um, can I ask you a question?"

We stopped walking. We were just outside of the quad of classrooms that made up the English and History buildings, and we moved to the side to let the crowd of kids pass.

Carmen's eyes were shining as I looked up at her. "Of course! What's up?"

I swallowed, hard. "Um, are you doing anything this Friday? There's this movie by a director I really like, I don't know if you've heard of him, but, uh, would you want to go?"

As I looked down at my feet and sneaked a glance at her, and my the lead ball in my stomach melted and covered everything as I saw her look away, visibly deflated. "Oh, fuck," she said, sadly. "I would love to, but I already have plans this Friday. . ."

My eyes fell back to my feet. I could feel my heart drop down into my chest, and my stomach had never been so still in my entire life. *Shit, fuck, no. . .*

"That's ok, no worries, I hope you have fun-" "What are you doing next Tuesday though?" Carmen asked.

She was looking at me as my eyes shot to hers. I wasn't breathing, and as I looked at her I saw that she was grinning, but this grin was different. It looked like she was nervous. "I, uh." I swallowed. "Nothing, I think. Wait, is that Christmas Eve?"

"Yeah! If you're not busy I uh," and she looked away, and scratched her head. "There's this open mic that I go to and the last one of the month is this Tuesday. I really liked your poem, and if you want to come with, I bet everyone else there will like it as well. Or whatever else you bring, it doesn't have to be the same one, but that one was so good and I just thought--"

"Yes!"

I said it too quickly and I knew it but I didn't care. I had remembered how to breathe and my chest was heaving. Her dark, deep eyes locked with mine and the corners crinkled as she gave me the widest smile I'd ever seen. "It's a date, then."

She quickly gave me a hug, and handed me back the sun-brella, and walked into the crowd of people. She turned back, and called, "I'll text you!" and then she was gone.

Intermission.

*The room was white and bright with sickening light
That sapped the energy from my muscles as I looked up slowly
from my hands,
My neck strained and cramped and old.
Her hair was nearly gone and she was so, so thin
And so, so pale
But she opened her eyes and I knew she was my one love
And she smiled as best she could with the tubes in her nose
And tears slid around the wrinkles by my eyes and down my cheeks
And some fell down my nose and into my mustache and beard,
White with weariness and with want for more time.
And she reached out and I gave her my hand -
Her hand was so, so thin -
And she squeezed it lightly and she looked at me and mouthed,
"You were everything to me."*

And then something left her eyes.

And darkness came over mine, and I could feel my hands come to

my face

And the tears came, stinging and hot,

The blood of love lost. . .

Part Two.

Of course it was tonight.

I woke up, again with tears in my eyes, clutching my face, this time, in sadness.

That woman looked familiar.

I sat up in bed, wiping my eyes on the hem of my shirt. I sighed a shuddering sigh, tried to get all of the nerves out.

I looked at my clock and it was exactly two o'clock and for some reason, I wasn't surprised at all that I had had another nightmare tonight.

It was Tuesday morning, Christmas Eve, and ever since Carmen had invited me to the open mic, I had spent my days in a state of bliss. Beyond Andrew and Kylie pressing me for details and helping me pick out an outfit and giving me tips for the big night, I had been texting Carmen more often, and it was actually going well. I found out how

excited she was about poetry and how angry she was about politics, and how she wanted to run for Congress one day. More recently, we had gotten to talking about tattoo culture (Carmen told me she wanted another one) and how more and more people get them just to look more “inaccessible” and “desirable” for their job interviews.

But why the fuck am I dreaming about people dying?

Also, did I just dream that I was a man? What's going on? I chewed on my thumbnail in the darkness of my room.

That woman looked familiar.

I couldn't get the look the woman gave me in my dream out of my head. It stuck there like a sticky note; I kept expecting it to fall and drift away at any point, but it kept hanging by some odd strength. I wanted to reach up and rip it down but for some reason, I couldn't.

I sighed and flopped back on my pillow.

Maybe this is my brain telling me I need to write about more sad shit.

I grabbed my phone off of my nightstand and unplugged the charger. Rolling onto my other side, I opened up the notes and scrolled through all of the drafts I had written for the poem I wanted to perform later tonight, on my

DATE

with Carmen. "Excited" wasn't the right word to describe how I felt, but neither was "nervous."

It's somewhere between joy and dread, I thought, smirking to myself.

That woman looked familiar.

I sat up suddenly in bed, my breath quickening. I looked up and saw myself in my mirror. My eyes were bright and wide and I looked back at my phone and I knew what to do.

I started typing, and before I knew it, it was three in the morning. I yawned, and decided that some rest would do me good before the big night.

Right before I fell asleep that night, I could feel the man and the woman of my dreams swirl around me and look into my eyes, and I saw that they were perfect clones of each other.

. . .

Normally, my mom wouldn't have let me go out wearing eyeliner, or glitter on my cheeks, or a tank top, or shorts, but I told her that I was just going to the open mic with some friends and she relaxed.

"You'll be back for Christmas Eve dinner, right?" she asked as she hugged me goodbye, the force of her hug rattling the silver hoops in my ears

I rolled my eyes behind her back so she didn't see me do it, and pulled back and said, "Yeah mom, the open mic will be over at seven."

My mom pouted and put her hands on her hips. "Ok, we'll wait for you, so don't be late," she said, looking at me accusingly.

Carmen was already waiting outside in her car. My mom, frowning in the door at the thump of music coming from the car, waved goodbye as I opened the passenger seat and got in.

"Hey!" Carmen said as I got in, and she gave me a hug over the gearshift. She looked amazing, with perfectly winged eyeliner, purple eyeshadow and red lipstick. "How are you? Is that your mom?"

I looked out the window at my mom, still waving goodbye and mouthing something I couldn't make out at me. "Yeah, that's her," I said. "She can be a bit, um, much."

Carmen groaned sympathetically, and put the car in drive.

"I know what you mean."

She was wearing a red, low-cut tank top and black jeans with holes in the knees, and her long hair was up in a bun. My heart was warm and beating hard, and I couldn't believe I was out on a

DATE

with her. "By the way," I said, as nonchalantly as I could, "You were saying you want another tattoo. What's your first one?"

She grinned, and as we pulled up to a stoplight, she said, "Lemme show you." She reached down to her tank top and lifted it up. On the right side of her body on her ribs was a koi fish, swimming next to two clouds.

"Holy shit," I said, my heart pumping faster by the second.

"I mean, uh, that's super cool. How'd you get that done?"

Carmen said, "My dad's a tattoo artist," and winked. "He says no more tattoos until I'm eighteen, though. I'm lucky he did this one for me."

"Can I ask? Why a koi fish?"

The light turned green, and she chewed her lip as we accelerated. "I've always liked koi fish, ever since my dad took me to this one park that had a Japanese garden. I don't really know why I like 'em. But I hope to be reincarnated as one, to be honest."

I laughed. "Really?"

She smirked. "Not really. I don't really want to be reincarnated as anything, but if I have to be anything, why not a cool, colorful fish?"

I snorted. "It's definitely nicer than spending eternity with a bunch of conservative Christians."

Carmen laughed, her lips full and happy, and the fact that I made her laugh made me feel good. I grinned at her, and she looked over and grinned back.

. . .

The open mic was in a small studio space in the town square with a small stage about the size of my bed at home. The rest of the studio was taken up by rows of folding chairs, and seeing how little space there was between the stage and the audience made me nervous.

As we put our names down on the sign-in sheet and found some seats at the back, I glanced up at Carmen. "When did you first start coming here?"

She thought for a second. "Not really sure. My dad's been taking me ever since he and my mom split up. I think it was an attempt by him to be a 'cool dad,' but you know what, it kind of worked." She smirked. "I don't know. Have you ever been to an open mic?"

I laughed nervously. "No, not really. Before last Friday, I had never even performed in front of anyone, not really. Kylie and Andrew don't count."

Carmen gasped. "Oh my god! This is so exciting!" She looked at me and smiled. "You'll do so well. I'm excited to hear what you brought!"

I looked back at her, nervous, but managed to hold her gaze. "Thank you for inviting me! It's really nice to be going with you."

Carmen smiled even wider, and if I didn't know better, I'd say that she looked a bit flustered.

A woman wearing a beanie and thick glasses got onstage, and announced that the open mic would be starting soon.

Carmen leaned forward, her hands on the edges of her seat.

God, I want to hold her hand.

She turned to me, saying, "So, I know that it can be a bit intimidating reading in front of a bunch of strangers. But everyone here are always really encouraging with the new faces." She winked at me. "You'll do great!"

"Thanks," I said, my voice hoarse and thin.

She looked down, and leaned in and said, "By the way, thanks for agreeing to come here with me. You look really good tonight."

She looked up at me, and I saw that her forehead was flushed. My cheeks started to burn. I suppose they didn't want her forehead to feel alone.

"Oh god, no I don't. You look amazing, though," I said, nervously twisting a long lock of hair that tickled the base of my neck.

She smiled at me, and was going to say something when the woman with thick glasses got back onstage and announced the first person to perform. The lights dimmed, a spotlight on the mic, and the open mic began.

. . .

Everyone was really good, and it was just as intimidating as I thought it would be. There were poets who made me laugh, some who made me want to cry, and there was one, a middle-aged man, who recited his entire poem from memory. It was about how he learned to

be confident in an ever-changing world, and I was struck by how beautifully he managed to piece it together, seemingly pulling extended metaphors and beautiful analogies from thin air. When he spoke, hands behind his back, I felt as if he was talking directly to me, and that's when I realized how much I loved this. I loved the small studio space, I loved listening and reacting to the experiences of strangers who got together to share themselves with others.

But I didn't know if I would love performing, and yet, Carmen was at my side, snapping her fingers and cheering when poets finished, and I thought of her koi fish, and, as if a wave of cool water flushed out my system, I wasn't worried anymore. I was still nervous about performing, but it would happen, and however it went, it wouldn't affect the night. *Carmen is having a good time, and I am too*, I thought, surprised at the realization. *I'm having a fun time tonight*.

"Next up, Ariana!" the woman with thick glasses said, and Carmen turned to me and whispered, "Break a leg!" and she gave me a wink. I smiled back, and I didn't feel my legs as I stood up but somehow, through the applause and the dim light, I found myself standing onstage before a sea of faces.

I took a deep breath and exhaled right into the mic. The sound of my breath reverberated throughout the studio via the speakers, and I winced with some other people in the room.

"Sorry," I stammered. "My poem is called *Familiar*. I hope you like it. This is my first time here."

Carmen whistled at me and some people clapped. I cleared my throat, held up my phone, and began.

"When you looked at me I felt like I wanted to melt into you.

And I know what people say. Everyone tells me,

'Don't melt into the first person you meet

Because it's hard to find yourself when you're part of a larger

whole.'

And to that, I ask,

How am I supposed to know how to melt if I always stay solid?

If I avoid every candle lighter, and every other candle?

Besides, when you looked at me,

When I wanted to melt into you,

All I thought about is how familiar you were to me. All I thought about is what if we had been a larger whole, a

taller candle,

Nights and years ago, suddenly split in two, And we finally found each other again?

Who can say how many times I have been separated from you, Who can tell me how many times I've melted into you again? Candles can't ask the candlemaker where their wax came from, And I won't try.

All I know is,

You are familiar to me,

And I find out why."

I lowered my phone. I had stuttered a couple of times, mostly when I talked about "melting," and in my nervousness, I spoke hurriedly and without a lot of inflection, and so it was over as suddenly as it began. A familiar hole opened up in the bottom of my stomach.

But as I looked up from my screen, and my eyes met Carmen's, the hole closed right up. She was on her feet, clapping and grinning that grin that I would grow to love even more than I already did, and other people side-eyed her as she stood alone, and I was elated and I was smiling a smile wide enough to match Carmen's and I made my way offstage.

And when I got back to my seat, Carmen gave me a hug, and whispered, "That was so **fucking** good," and we sat back down.

And when she leaned forward in her chair as the next person got onstage, I reached out and turned her hand and held it.

She looked at me, her dark, wonderful eyes piercing mine, and she leaned forward and whispered,

"You know, I'd really like you to kiss me now."

And I did.

Epilogue.

I woke up smelling batter and bacon, and I smiled to myself,

under all the covers in bed.

*I sat up and I knew you weren't in bed before I saw drool spot
on your pillow,*

*And I got out of bed and pulled on a robe and looked in the
mirror:*

*Same hair, same eyes, same middle-aged wrinkles on the sides of
my mouth*

From the laughs and kisses we shared.

*And I made my way downstairs and found you in the kitchen,
humming with your back turned*

And then you turned

*And my eyes and my mouth filled with happiness as I joined you
in making breakfast.*

And that was our love.

Harvest International- **Spring Issue 2019**

Harvest

By Emiliano Rizo

What does one desire? How does one culminate their dreams?

When searching for truth is the mind left serene.

I desire not tranquility, nor serenity at that...

I desire a world that exposes the truth

I desire a world that Eliminates sorrow

I desire a world that has me hoping for a wonderful tomorrow

When the harvest is just over I will still be starved

When the harvest is over the feast will have just begun



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