

# GARLAND COURT

Review

2024



# 2024

## Authors & Artists

Trinity Allen

Vern Anthony Anderson

Heena Aslam

Jordyn Belli

Kevin Bonilla

Juan David Ruiz Borbón

Angel Brito

Lynn E. Burmeister

Daphne Calderon

G Jevon Covington

Ash Cross

James Craig IV

Keilyn Cruz

J-L Deher-Lesaint

Jasmin DeJesus

Vanessa Dela Torre

Jennifer S. Diaz

David Dominguez

Ariana Dorshkind

Triet Duong

Tori Engle

Kseniia Fabryka

Jaylene Flores

Rodrigo Flores

Ashley Garcia

gen

Phone Myat Htein

Charlie Jaimes

Brandon Jones

Mingyue Li

Hannah Lopez-Vignet

Katherine Martinez

Quintin Melgar

Julian Mendez

Daria Mescheriakova

Zitlali Molina

Anarely Molinero

Andrew Narvaez-Rodriguez

NILAM Taché Art

Diego Orozco

Immanuel Oyenuga

Alexandra Palomo

Guadalupe Salgado Vela

Patrianna Scales

Carmen Scott

Scumdrop

Chanel Simanton

Courtney Simmons

Diera (Rara) Slater

David Walton Smith

Valentine Solis

Syren

Valley Valentine

Ariba Vohra

Madeline Walsh

Laura Washington

Li Zhang



# Garland Court Review

HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

2 0 2 4

A curated assembly

of

Literature

& Art

**Garland Court Review Est. 1962** by Prof. Carolyn Rodgers.

The Garland Court Review is published in the Spring Semester of each year by the English and Art departments of Harold Washington College, 30 E. Lake St., Chicago, IL 60601.

**Call for Submissions** is announced in the Fall Semester. Both literary and art works are accepted for consideration. Please contact the **Garland Court Review Committee Coordinators** with further inquiries:

**Prof. Ukaisha Al-Amin**/ GCR English Coordinator [ualamin@ccc.edu](mailto:ualamin@ccc.edu)

**Prof. Galina Shevchenko** / GCR Art Coordinator [gshevchenko@ccc.edu](mailto:gshevchenko@ccc.edu)

**Cover Artists:**

Front Cover: **James Craig IV** *Tribal Princess* (digital illustration)

Inner Front Cover: **Kevin Bonilla** *Chicago 2077* (digital photo)

**Copyright** © 2024 by HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE.

Literary and Art works are copyright of the individual authors & artists. HWC reserves the right to distribute or otherwise use the enclosed materials for promotional purposes in support of the college or magazine. Unauthorized distribution by the public via any means, including but not limited to print or digital, is prohibited.



<< 2019-2024  
GCR digital

<http://hwcartandarchitecture.org/garlandcourtreview/>

**Grateful Acknowledgement** is made to the Harold Washington College community &

English Department Co-Chairs **Prof. Loretta Visomirskis, Prof. Sunny Serres,**  
**and Prof. Larnell Dunkley;**

Art Department Chair **Dr. John Metoyer;**

College President **Dr. Daniel Lopez;**

Dean of Student Services **Jacquelyn Werner;**

DMD tutor **Amanda Cervantes;**

DMD Workstudy Students **Zitlali Molina, Yousef Syren Fakharpour;**

BrightSpace guru **Tamara Middleton;**

Reprographics guru **Jean-Marc Alexis;**

Past GCR coordinators **Prof. Adam Webster, Prof. Jean-Laurent Deher-Lesaint;**

Long-time GCR editor **Prof. Jeffrey Daniels;**

HWC President Gallery Preparator and Collections Manager **Anna Pontius;**

**All of the amazing artists and writers who submitted work for consideration in this issue!**

Printed by **Sommers & Fahrenbach, Chicago, IL**

# Garland Court Review

HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

2 0 2 4

GCR English Coordinator & Copy Editor: Ukaisha Al-Amin

GCR Art Coordinator & Design Director: Galina Shevchenko

## 2024 Selection committee

### Faculty Members:

J-L Deher-Lesaint  
Megan Ritt Broenneke  
Zuri Washington  
Diane Williams

### Student Members:

Daphne Calderon  
Khari Forrest  
Phone Myat Htein  
Charlie Jaimes  
Hannah Lopez-Vignet  
Brian Noonan  
Emmanuel Oyenuga  
Juan David Ruiz Borbón

# Letter

from the

# Editors

*The issue you hold in your hands is the fifth one since the Art and English, Speech, Theatre and Journalism Departments joined forces to redesign The Garland Court Review—Harold Washington College’s literary magazine.*

*We sincerely hope this is the best one ever and hopefully, our faithful readers will let us know if indeed it is.*

*As always, Chicago shines in this issue. Our endlessly photographable city is proudly displayed in words and images: The Cloud Gate, Marina City, the many strange moods of our weather, Lake Michigan, and even the alley signs warning us of rat activity. It seems every contributor found a piece of Chicago from their vantage point and turned it into art. In this issue, we travel from Pilsen to Uptown, Downtown and elsewhere.*

*Sights we’ve all experienced differently on our ways to work and back home.*

*Our concerns show in these works: the threat of global warming, the effects of war in faraway lands, the need to question ancestry, life, death and love.*

*In these works, some people decided to swim, visit or leave home, engage in battle with a bear, and use a device to erase memory.*

*We loved all of them, and hope that you will as well.*

Ever Yours,

Ukaisha Al-Amin  
Daphne Calderon  
J-L Deher-Lesaint  
Khari Forrest  
Phone Myat Htein  
Charlie Jaimes  
Hannah Lopez-Vignet  
Brian Noonan  
Emmanuel Oyenuga  
Megan Ritt  
Juan David Ruiz Borbón  
Galina Shevchenko  
Zuri Washington  
Diane Williams



# CONTENTS

Letter from the Editors		ii
Contents		iv
LITERARY WORKS		2
Heena Aslam	<i>Sweet Tooth</i> (poem)	3
Patrianna Scales	<i>Burnout</i> (poem)	4
Valley Valentine	<i>2nd law of Cosmic Decree of Entropy</i> (poem)	5
Carmen Scott	<i>For the Next Time (I Can Love)</i> (poem)	6
Chanel Simanton	<i>Where I'm From</i> (poem)	7
Lynn E. Burmeister	<i>Leaving Home</i> (fiction)	9
Scumdrop	<i>In 24th Pl.</i> (poem)	12
Madeline Walsh	<i>Doll Hands</i> (poem)	13
gen	<i>Grass</i> (poem)	14
Carmen Scott	<i>I Love To Swim</i> (hybrid)	15
gen	<i>Rush</i> (poem)	16
Li Zhang & Triet Duong	<i>Fragments</i> (combined form)	17
Carmen Scott	<i>Pabla</i> (lyric essay)	20
Immanuel Oyenuga	<i>I Cut My Hair</i> (lyric essay)	23
Carmen Scott	<i>Shape of Fear</i> (poem)	24
Valentine Solis	<i>Violet Prayers</i> (poem)	25
Ash Cross	<i>Finding Your Bones</i> (fiction)	26
Immanuel Oyenuga	<i>My Heart's Odyssey</i> (lyric essay)	29
David Walton Smith	<i>Reset</i> (fiction)	31
Li Zhang & Keilyn Cruz	<i>A Particular Sensation</i> (combined form)	37
Alexandra Palomo	<i>Accepting What Is</i> (non fiction)	39
Laura Washington	<i>My Savior</i> (poem)	41
Daphne Calderon	<i>Ten Toma</i> (poem)	42
Valentine Solis	<i>Like Jelly</i> (poem)	43
David Dominguez	<i>Unseen Anguish</i> (poem)	44

Valentine Solis	<i>Hear You</i> (poem)	45
gen	"The only explanation I have for being so afflicted is my ancestors committed a heinous crime against God" (poem)	46
Guadalupe Salgado Vela	<i>Until she fades</i> (poem)	47
Scumdrop	<i>Vermillion</i> (poem)	48
Heena Aslam	<i>Swim</i> (poem)	49
David Walton Smith	<i>Blue Movie</i> (non fiction)	50
gen	<i>Takis Bear</i> (play)	53
GALLERY :: VISUAL ART		58
James Craig IV	<i>Tribal Princess</i> (digital illustration)	cover
Kevin Bonilla	<i>Chicago 2077</i> (digital photo)	inner cover
Zitlali Molina	<i>Just Meant to Be Pollinated</i> (digital painting)	59
Daria Mescheriakova	<i>Flowers</i> (oil on canvas)	60
Juan David Ruiz Borbón	<i>Presencia de un cuerpo femenino II</i> (charcoal on paper)	61
Valley Valentine	<i>untitled</i> (digital photo)	61
Anarely Molinero	<i>La Suerte</i> (linocut)	62
Juan David Ruiz Borbón	<i>Elogio a la tensión</i> (aluminum & steel wire)	63
Julian Mendez	<i>Skull Gambler</i> (digital illustration)	63
Quintin Melgar	<i>Warlock</i> (digital painting)	64
J-L Deher-Lesaint	<i>J-L Deher-Lesaint</i> (digital photo)	65
Charlie Jaimes	<i>Toluca Travel Poster</i> (digital/Adobe Illustrator)	66
Ashley Garcia	<i>Pool</i> (digital photo)	67
Hannah Lopez-Vignet	<i>Behind wide Eyes</i> (acrylic on canvas)	68
Phone Myat Htein	<i>Lady Chang'e</i> (digital illustration)	69
Kseniia Fabryka	<i>Ocean</i> (film photo)	70
Ashley Garcia	<i>Piñatas</i> (silver gelatin print)	71
J-L Deher-Lesaint	<i>Dense Bud Perspective #3</i> (digital photo)	72

Jaylene Flores	<i>tomatos cry too</i> (acrylic on canvas)	73
Brandon Jones	<i>Can't let go</i> (digital illustration)	73
Tori Engle	<i>Envy</i> (digital illustration)	74
Courtney Simmons	<i>The Void</i> (digital comosition)	75
Vanessa Dela Torre	<i>Enchanted lake</i> (acrylic on canvas)	75
Jennifer S. Diaz	<i>Allium</i> (digital composition)	76
J-L Deher-Lesaint	<i>Cloud Gate Fading</i> (digital photo)	77
Rodrigo Flores	<i>Loss and Beauty</i> (digital photo)	77
Vanessa Dela Torrel	<i>Medieval Toledo</i> (pen on paper)	78
Mingyue Li	<i>Untitled</i> (digital illustration)	79
Brandon Jones	<i>Contempt</i> (digital illustration)	80
Kseniia Fabryka	<i>Chicago</i> (digital/3D render)	81
Andrew Narvaez-Rodriguez	<i>Welcome to Echo</i> (digital composition)	82
Diera (Rara) Slater	<i>Trapped in the darkness of light</i> (charcoal on paper)	83
Jordyn Belli	<i>All Seeing Eye</i> (digital photo composition)	84
Juan David Ruiz Borbón	<i>Reflections on reality</i> (digital photo composition)	84
Daphne Calderon	<i>Muñequitas Moribundas</i> (fabric & mixed media)	85
Jordyn Belli	<i>Wavy in Manhattan</i> (digital photo)	86
Rodrigo Flores	<i>Curious Harbor Seal</i> (digital photo)	87
Jaylene Flores	<i>Squid</i> (pen & colored pencil on paper)	88
Ariba Vohra	<i>Collaged Realities</i> (acrylic on canvas)	89
Vern Anthony Anderson	<i>Master of Your Domain</i> (digital illustration)	90
Julian Mendez	<i>Richard Ramirez Wanted Poster</i> (digital)	91
Quintin Melgar	<i>Tarnished</i> (digital painting)	92
Trinity Allen	<i>Party Girls!</i> (digital photo)	93
Quintin Melgar	<i>Ghostcity</i> (digital painting)	94
NILAM Taché Art	<i>COVID Dreams</i> (acrylic & mixed media)	95
Katherine Martinez	<i>Home Sweet Home</i> (digital photo)	96
Daria Mescheriakova	<i>Sunflowers</i> (oil on canvas)	97
Syren	<i>Enlightened</i> (digital illustration)	98

Vanessa Dela Torre	<i>Jarabe Tapatío</i> (oil on canvas)	99
Jaylene Flores	<i>blep</i> (pencil & colored pencil on paper)	100
Daphne Calderon	<i>Flower Vase for Broken or Discarded Buds</i> (glazed ceramics)	100
NILAM Taché Art	<i>Proverbs 15:3</i> (acrylic & mixed media on canvas)	101
Katherine Martinez	<i>Bean Chicago</i> (digital photo)	102
Jordyn Belli	<i>A Strange City</i> (digital photo)	103
Trinity Allen	<i>Radioactive Dj</i> ( (digital photo)	104
Jasmin DeJesus	<i>The Reverie in Abyss</i> (digital painting)	105
Angel Brito	<i>Sleep+</i> (digital illustration)	105
NILAM Taché Art	<i>Guarded</i> (acrylic & mixed media on canvas)	106
G. Jevon Covington	<i>Fiberoptic Cables</i> (digital illustration)	106
Valley Valentine	<i>Untitled</i> (digital photo)	107
Ariana Dorshkind	<i>My Chicago Skyline</i> (lithograph)	108
Anarely Molinero	<i>obsession/possession</i> (graphite on paper)	109
Angel Brito	<i>Jynx+</i> (digital illustration)	110
Ariana Dorshkind	<i>Feel the Burn</i> (watercolor on paper)	110
Jasmin DeJesus	<i>Face of Illusion</i> (digital painting)	111
Kseniia Fabryka	<i>Flower Hibiscus</i> (digital/3D render)	111
Syren	<i>Eye Spy</i> (digital illustration)	112
Tori Engle	<i>?/Ur//oK/?/</i> (digital illustration)	112



Literary  
Works

Heena Aslam

# Sweet Tooth

If you pulled me I would give endlessly  
Your honey words stick to me  
Like I have a sweet tooth  
Give me mud and I'll trade love poems with you  
You forgot to mention  
Your heart was taken care of  
And your eyes set on her but wander from time to time  
Your lips speak of her awful hopeless romances with you  
Like honey your words stick to me  
Now all I think of are your unlawful boundless romances with me  
Honey attracts bee stings  
Honey is stolen labor  
And now my tooth is rotten  
Your words taste sour sweet  
I'm honey and you can't rid of your sweet tooth

Patrianna Scales

# Burnout

My cry for help was muzzled by the sound of your dismissive laugh. As if you knew I had to be lying, you laughed. But I shouldn't have been fazed by it, right? Wrong. You gave up on me like others have (and will continue to do). My eyes begged for you to see me. Not what others say about me and not what you think of me. See the person slowly losing herself to a game called 'am i enough.' It became a cycle. Anxiety attacks and procrastination, just to wake up and pass the test without even trying. Why do I stay up all night thinking of ways to change myself to please you? You didn't steal my voice. I gave it away submissively.

A gifted student  
never truly leaves the cell  
we call a classroom.



Valley Valentine

# 2<sup>nd</sup> law of Cosmic Decree of Entropy

In the realm where science's whispers play,  
Lies the second law in an eloquent way,  
Entropy, a measure, in disorder's embrace,  
Says the universe must change its face.

With every tick of time's relentless sway,  
Order transforms, it cannot delay,  
A dance of particles, chaotic and grand,  
The world unravels, as it was planned.

The second law, a cosmic decree,  
In the universe's vast tapestry,  
Entropy grows, it must ascend,  
Disorder's song, without an end.

So, In this world of disarray we find,  
A truth of nature, in every kind,  
In entropy's embrace, we all shall see,  
The universe's ever-evolving decree.

Carmen Scott

# F or The Next Time (I Can Love)

Things keep moving around me. A sitting stone in white water rapids. Buried in sediment with only one face shown to the sun. Sometimes submerged but hopeful rays breach the frothy current and warm me enough to tease. Poke its heat into my dimpled surface.

My mass is entombed. Enviously rooted to some, not knowing where my form ends. Encapsulated in silt and gravel. I am unsure if my mass has implanted into the bedrock or if I can be dislodged before I erode. Maybe my sun-tickled top will break off from a strike by a stone that was lucky enough to helplessly navigate the rush.

Your surface is much like mine. Scars from previous encounters. Embellishments signify our similar struggles. I wonder if whoever unearthed you looks like us. You maneuver the restless water with hubris. Gambling with how close you are to the bottom. Empowering luck to keep you from sticking behind rocky places. Will you become embedded again? The service of us depth dwellers is to be risky. Bump against the lost and watch ancient rebirth. I'd rather work in the trenches than mask as untarnished.

I will hide the site of my freshly shed fracture. It's easier to show a constellation of craters than the new scuffs and chips that quickly accumulate on my smooth belly. Un-inhibited evolution is a blessing gifted by time and love. But tumbling should be easier than this.

Move up in grit as my tissue sloughs off. I am smoothed to a pebble. I am easier to carry now. Lighter. It took patience and the help of others to circumnavigate earth's challenges and fly in waterfalls.

I hope you made it past that bend. Maybe I will see you in the delta. Smooth now like me. Almost unrecognizable. Though we are made of the same minerals. Recognizable.

We will soon become the grace of the sand.

Chanel Simanton

# W here I'm From

sometimes,  
stereotypes really are true  
i think,  
allured by the fragrant aroma of jasmine,  
soft inviting heat of the steam  
eating rice with my hands  
pre-colonial savage style.

every  
breakfast  
lunch  
dinner  
my favorite, dessert  
inseparable from the concept of food  
my rice cooker  
sings nursery rhymes to me

in chicago winter  
i dread  
how the wind bites my skin  
the dark gray skies  
my hands freezing solid.  
i walk against the biting wind  
i learn how loneliness really feels.  
do you know what it's like?  
feeling like i could cry  
at the grocery store  
Hello, auntie.  
you remind me of my mother  
that makes me both happy and sad.  
salamat  
is all that i can say to you

during the winter,  
i crave rice.  
while i'm at the food court  
eating dinuguan  
while i'm at home eating adobo  
that's never as good as yours  
i remember how you would call  
telling me to make the rice  
before you got home from work.

it's funny to think about now  
because despite everything  
i miss eating rice with you

Lynn E. Burmeister

# L eaving Home

It happened at night. The sound of bombs was getting closer, and gunshots could be heard in the village. Elisabeth woke to knocks and loud bangs on the door to her family's kitchen. The next thing she heard was people talking, men's voices angry and loud, women's voices whispering and crying. She sat up in her bed and tried to understand what they were saying, but there were so many voices talking at the same time, it was impossible to understand them. Quietly, she crept out of the bed she shared with her sister, tiptoed across the hallway passing the room where her brothers slept, and sat at the top of the stairs straining to understand the conversation. Her father and a few neighbors were talking about what the Russian soldiers had told them earlier that evening. The soldiers had warned them that the German soldiers were approaching, and they had explained that their village would be a battleground for control of the front line. The soldiers further explained that they needed to "get away from here as quickly as possible" because as ethnic Germans living outside of Germany, they would be the first to be killed. Knowing that they had little time to make plans, the families decided that they would leave quickly and go to Austria where they might find work, a place to live, and most importantly, where everyone would be safe while the war continued to ravage their homeland.

The men devised a plan to bury their valuables and to take only the tools they needed to work; the women talked about food, water, and other staples they would need until they could replenish their supplies. They talked about keeping the suitcases light, which would make the journey easier, and that the children would be able to help carry smaller items. Elisabeth heard them say that the roads would be heavily guarded, and that they would have to do most of the traveling at night, through the Csarna Valley, Hungary's forest. She quickly thought back to the last wagon trip she took with her father to Austria and remembered it took them over 5 days to get there. That time they had two horses pulling the wagon filled with the cabinets he had made for a friend's home in the Austrian Alps. They had picnic lunches along the way and slept peacefully under the night sky wrapped in blankets, squeezed in between the new cabinets. She had never spent time alone with her father before, and that two-week trip with him was extraordinary. No young brothers or sisters to care for, no chores, and no other distractions. It was bliss.

"This trip sounds awful and scary. And hard", she thought. The conversation

downstairs quickly moved along to a decision to leave that night, intending to be gone before the German soldiers arrived. Settled in Romania during the 17th Century, the Germans living in Romania and surrounding Baltic areas had few safe places to go during World War II. No country, including Germany, would offer them refuge. Getting away from the front lines was most important for their safety and Elisabeth understood that they had to get out quickly and quietly.

She heard the other adults leave one by one and knew she should go downstairs and help her mother get started with the cooking and packing of food. As she went down the stairs, she saw her father holding her mother in his arms as she cried. Elisabeth had never seen her mother cry before and suddenly realized that even her parents were scared. She took a deep breath, walked over to them, and said "Es wird alles gut, Mutti", everything will be all right. "Ich werde helfen", I will help. Her mother quickly pulled away from her father, wiped her tears with her apron, and told Elisabeth to start packing the root vegetables.

Elisabeth walked across the yard, past the apple trees and wooden table, to the barn where the root vegetables were stored, she saw the animals begin to wake up and walk out of the barn and their pens. "I wonder what is going to happen to them when we leave," she thought to herself, but knowing she needed to hurry, she kept going. (Later she would learn that her father sold them to a Romanian family down the road. That money would help pay off soldiers that they encountered as they crossed the border into Austria).

Her arms full of sacks of potatoes and carrots, onions and kohlrabi, she walked back into the kitchen, set the sacks on the table with a thud, and saw that her mother had begun cooking. The smell of the food cooking was so familiar that for a moment Elisabeth found comfort in the smell and forgot what was happening. Suddenly, she heard her father's shovel hitting the ground in the side yard and walked outside to see what he was doing. She turned the corner and saw that he was burying all their crystal and porcelain dishes. Covered spots on the ground meant that he had already buried their other treasures, gifts from their families and friends through the years, pictures, and other things that helped tell their family story. She looked beyond the yard and saw that the wagon was packed with his tools and that there were already sacks of clothes on the ground next to it. He had tears streaming down his face as he quietly worked and gently placed the picture of his parents into the hole in the ground. Knowing that he would never want her to see him that way, she turned and quietly walked back inside.

As the sun began to make its way over the horizon, the birds began singing their morning songs, and her brothers and sisters woke up. She heard them as they ran down the stairs for breakfast. "The smell of the cooking food must have woken them up", she thought. Quickly she walked into the kitchen to prepare something for them to eat outside on the table under the apple trees. The table that her grandfather built for her mother and father when they were married. That table where the family ate most of their summer

meals suddenly represented so much of their family history. As she placed the food and dishes down on that table, she called them and told them to eat quietly, clean up after themselves and most importantly stay out of the way. "Mutti and Fatti sind beschäftigt", mommy and daddy are busy. She told them that they were going away from the bombs and the soldiers and that everyone they knew was leaving their town. "They are so young", she thought to herself, "this is so scary for the grownups, it must be terrifying for them". She gave them each a fast hug, and kiss on their cheek, and told them that everything would be okay. They would treat it as an adventure and help each other find interesting things to see on their journey through the forest.

By now, the sun was shining brightly, and the bees were buzzing in the garden. Elisabeth grabbed a few baskets, plucked the tomatoes and cucumbers off their vines, cut some herbs, and gathered the peppers. She filled a basket with apples and pears and filled jars with raspberries. After she was done, the garden looked like someone had already forgotten it. Broken stems, plants pulled up in haste, and blossoms lying loose on the ground. She glanced at the garden one last time and walked back into the kitchen with her baskets of vegetables. Her mother was packing up the cooked food and asked her to start carrying the baskets and sacks of food to the wagon.

"Have your brothers and sister help you Lissi", she said and kept on with her work. Elisabeth called her siblings in and told them to grab what they could carry to the wagon. For the next several hours everyone was packing up the wagon and preparing for the journey. Once the wagon was packed, and everyone was exhausted, they sat under the apple trees one last time, ate a quick meal at the wooden table, and walked through the house to make sure that all their precious pieces were safely removed and buried. "It already looks like a stranger's house", Elisabeth thought. She saw pictures missing from the walls, empty cabinets, and a messy kitchen, things that she never would have imagined before. She saw her youngest brother's favorite blanket lying in a corner on the floor, picked it up, tucked it in her pocket, and walked out of the house. At dusk, they were on their way.

As Elisabeth walked with her family beside the wagon on the road out of town, she tried to create a picture in her mind to help remind her of her life in Romania. The road that would lead them to Austria was long and dark and it led them to the future that no one knew. She glanced back one last time and saw the table under the apple trees, birds hopping around eating the crumbs from earlier. She sighed and wondered if they would ever sit there again.

As they went through the gates of the town, she saw her father take her mother's hand and heard him whisper to her, "Wir werden eines Tages wiederkommen", we will return someday. When this war is over, we will come back here and start again.

## Scumdrop

| n 24<sup>th</sup> Pl.

Ten more days  
of hospital sirens,  
no shops to see,  
of litter-bugs crawling,  
eyes sunk into your

skin.

Watch the cold creep through  
each door.  
The gap that never took,  
only gave.

Racks, too strong for cheap crumbling drywall,  
army-ants adding additional armaments.

The Parasite dangling destitution;  
Feverdreaming through necessity-deprivation.  
Inexorable without a "fee."

We're at the mercy of the asinine,  
*I tell ya'h what...*



# Madeline Walsh

## Doll Hands

All around me are plastic dolls  
Perfect hair, necks, eyes, mouths  
Compared to my bushy hair that's hard to brush, a Trach In my neck,  
eyes that refuse to blink sometimes, and a mouth that always shows  
my two front teeth

I'm new to the toy store and I can't help thinking that I don't belong here  
Can't help thinking that the people who manufactured me made some  
kind of mistake

For all the other dolls, you pull a string that's attached to their back And  
their perfect mouths move

For me, you pull a string and your eyes squint in confusion  
You pull my string again and again  
You yank my mouth open

You tell people that I need fixing  
That I'm a broken toy  
Not plastic like the others  
But real and something about that  
Scares you

But I'm not real  
I think to myself  
I'm a toy here  
To entertain people  
Like you



gen

There is a task: grow grass.

govern gardens?

set Rome ablaze,

swim across the river Lethe— and sink with the Titanic?

Nothing to govern, to set ablaze, to swim— nor to sink, no. Nothing  
except: grow grass.

The sun's skies, pale and blue, watching over the world,  
earthy sprouts unfurling under cover of golden fallen foliage, stretching  
upward within an evening's mirage,  
searching for a sip of the sun, a taste of electromagnetic nectar.

Not the sky, the sprouts, the foliage nor the sun. Simply grow grass.

Buy secondhand clothes, buy mulch and fertilizer; see what grows:  
Grab your trowel and dig it into the ground like your dad kneading  
bread,

Grass

like when he was rubbing shampoo into your fresh scalp with his  
burning steel fingertips,

like when he was clipping your fingernails  
so rough you were holding back the tears,

like when he would trim the leaves far too short but it looks fine and it'll  
grow back and you'll need another haircut soon anyway,

The grass grows:

fertilize with mulch and clothes,

bake bread with burning steel and dough, nails and hair will grow if  
allowed,

Grow grass

Buy some time; let it pass—

Carmen Scott

## Love To Swim

Yeah, I love to swim. I can dive in and move with these feelings. I stay in the water until my lips turn blue. My shivering won't stop. I just as easily stay there too long, past pruning; melancholy creeps in quicker than I realize. I end up feeling like driftwood. I am waterlogged. Full enough that it reaches past discomfort and towards bursting. Oversaturated and heavy with the pressure splitting my roots like lightning. I sit there and lose time. I become full of bacteria. It lives in the cracks building cities. The longer I am motionless in this place the deeper the decay. Eroding at the bonelike structure of my roots. I become more brittle than the wrought nob's are able to show. But I still love to swim.

I am afraid of deep water. I always have been. I used to look at pictures of beautiful places in magazines. They had these soft whites and aqua encircled by turquoise with night blues tightly packed outside of them. This unsettling feeling would always rise from my stomach and up my throat. I had to start flipping over the National Geographics so every time I walked past I didn't need to look at the covers. Whenever my nerve centered and my curiosity molded around it I would look again. the same result every time. I would flip it back over and say how those places in pretty pictures don't look real. They don't really exist.

So yeah, I love to swim. I took a trip to Walden Pond with my partner at the time. The water was still and warmer than I expected. Once I was already knee-deep I realized that there were tiny fish swimming around my legs and in between my toes that hadn't yet been covered in sand. I'm afraid of fish, but I could see them and I was able to let that pass through me. I yelled but I stayed.

My partner, Mars, dared us to swim across the pond and back. It didn't look far. I'm a good swimmer. I ran in with the understanding that I didn't have to deal with the minnows at the shoreline if I didn't stop moving. My momentum took me nearly to the middle. It was sudden. The water sucked the heat from my body. I couldn't see more than an inch below me. I had the breath but no nerve. My senses dulled. My eyes lost focus. My lungs ached. I came back. My fear of dark water always conquers my innate ability to swim. They couldn't cross it either. I guess they are afraid of dark water too.

# Rush

gen

cycles cycles cycles; Cycle!

Toes, Fingers, Laces, Keys

Spin the legs, Drive your knees!

Run the errands, Run with sound. Run your very self into the ground

Cross the road at night. Frightened by the headlights, jumping like a deer fifteen feet straight up into the air, turn around and run back across the interstate

Jump on a car, dent the hood. Break the windshield, break a leg, break a wrist— break your heart.

Fall into the wind:

let it carry you—

let it tear into your skin, into your pores, let it rifle through your jacket and steal your pocket change, let it caress your face and unbrush your hair

Land back on the Earth.

Anchor your feet to the ground. Stable? Stable enough—

Know these things:

the silently moving starry night and the sparkling snowy footprints and the glistening clouds of breath and your frozen rosy cheeks—

They'll end when you walk through the doorframe, returning to a straightjacket desk. It's okay

Nothing lasts forever

# fragments

a poem by Li Zhang  
designed by Triet Duong

At  
a time

l o n g , l o n g ago,

in a village  
far  
far  
away

**far**

far  
away

lived my **grandma**

in her *seventies*

with her deformed **bound feet**

who took care

of a  
three-to-six-  
year-old  
naughty me

**Farmers working**

**night** and day

**SUN** and **MOON**

electricity

Straw

Kerosene Lamp

devices

Leaves

Hands

appliances

Living in **mudhouses**

poplar trees

stationed like **sentinels**

“No good for furniture,,

**Grandma** said

**BUT**

I **admired**

Sun-smelled  
drying clothes

Wind licked  
dancing  
sheets

# A symphony

I snuck in between  
singing *a lullaby* in whispers on tiptoe

What a crisp and delicate sensation

“WATCH  
YOUR  
DIRTY  
HANDS „

THE SOUND PUSHED ALL THE WAY  
*from dear grandma*  
through the crackling sheets but

I couldn't hear

corn,  
beans,  
grain  
all cooked by the

SUN and MOON

*rich and ripe*

what a compelling taste

*e'usive reminiscence*

*lingers*

Straw mattress cushioned  
under cotton sheet

*Grandma* bathed them in the SUN  
*day after day*

“for disinfection and comfort „

I bounced up  
Me and mom  
night by night  
Straw like a mountain and a trampoline

until my **Moon**  
d r i f t e d into  
my dizzy and misty dream

hugging my **mom**  
out of reach  
and **Father**  
in eternal peace

---

I woke up  
from  
my retreat  
of  
healing rest

with my son beside me  
and in between the sheets

# Pabla

Carmen Scott

Were you allowed to mourn?

Tears and tequila, like me? Was it public?

Was he there for you?

Did he shame you?

Did he use your body without protection from a mother's loss?

Was he a good man?

Maybe you were reckless too, but do "good men" put you through the repeated trauma of loss?

You are a figment that I weigh my values against. An unfair foil. You are my perfect fraught ephemera. All of my unseen parts. Just as unknown as you, yet still embodied. Beloved.

Does my invested grief strip you of your personhood? Did your people see you as a fable too? The chimera holed up in the castle in the sky? Stripped into a character.

## — The Monster —

The woman without a care. Okay with repeated consequences. Full, Empty. Full, Empty. Your womb was a factory of loss. How many babies did you deal this hand to? Birthed into a void. You became the creature of my nightmares. The looming figure made up of the shadows. You are the lack of light. The demon crushing my chest while I fell asleep. Staring. Clenched and unmoving. Stuck and motionless. Darker than closing your eyes. Darker than my drawn blackout curtains. The darkness of a temperature drop. How are shadows cast in a still dark room? Unmoving space. Now shrunken but highlighted by the day's illumination. There has never been a room bright enough that shadows don't exist.

## — The Maiden —

The woman the vanguard of my personhood. I wouldn't exist without your decisions. Not only do I have life, but I have my life. The sacrifice of nine months turned now into the loss of thirty years; your vision of happiness. Of potential. Of potential happiness.

The orphanage gave me matriarchs. The nuns gave me to my father. He gave me the United States. This country gave me a new family, my first confusions. My dislocation calcified through an unknown language and unfamiliar faces. But that can't be your fault. Having glasses to see, the privilege to eat, a bed, and a roof covering more than a dirt floor; that's what you gave me. The realm of possibility.

The women around me told me that a strong woman is built upon sacrifice.



That motherhood grapples with the loss of autonomy and the loss of motherhood contends with shame. A strong woman is the warrior of kindness. Not niceness, kindness. The kindest act was to try and give me better. Even if it would have been nicer to hold me.

### — The Crisis —

My home after you wasn't what The Monster nor The Maiden would want. Even a monster wouldn't want their kin to experience hunger. The Maiden would never ask for physical abuse to be left unattended.

A child sold, or stolen, for nothing. Promised everything and given a few. What a conundrum of modernity. What a figment of colonization that tells us that hope is more valuable than life with you. A life without history for a life plagued by one.

### — The Ancestral —

Torture? Sometimes I think in nothing but our pain.

Carving skin across muscle. Force, butter, glide, into, out of, absolution, fear. My ancestors felt fear. What else? A people subjected to genocide. What does joy look like? Is the root of our joy something that I grew into this being without.

Is it the meals shared with generational familiarity? It's wet air, glowing brown skin, and the proof of perseverance. It's arrogance to the value of a mother's touch. A history of care triumphing over hardship. Celebration. A tribute to my loss.

I mimic the paths drawn through our bodies. Mine now as yours once was. Standing on a bridge for reasons different than you. Although loss feels the same. You had me and I have always chosen to continue. We chose to continue. Only now without you and without me.

What is me without you? Someone in a perpetual state of waking dream. What is you without me? A question I will likely never know the answer to. What is me? A fantasy. Only dreamt of with unnamed parties reminisced. Only a fetal dream without memory. Moved along by a forced promise. Dreams.

### — The Reality —

You're always harder to find here.

You've never existed in this place.

We have never walked the same streets.

The reality is I never will.

The reality of our story is loss.

No resolution. No pretty bow on top. No celebrations spent hearing the annoying details of my birth. No shrugging off your wisdom. No watching myself slowly become just like you. No resilience through our differences. No triumphs. No held mourning.

Only my imaginary mother. Only deprivation. Only blind hope. Only mystery. Only thanking loss for my reality.

— The Truth —

It's what I avoid. I use my words to talk circles around it. The loss of my birth mother shrouds much of my life. Her name is Pabla Baez. At least I think it is. Is? Was? Stolen? Given?

I am an international adoptee from South America, Paraguay. I have a birth brother raised somewhere in the Chicagoland area that my family has lost touch with. I have not seen him since I was two. Back when our little faces still made the same expressions. Awe. Fear. Understanding. Mostly awe. Showcased by our big brown eyes and framed by our thick, curly, black hair.

We were deprived by oversight. Then further pulled apart by time. I wonder if we ever shared streets. Has your name changed as many times as mine? Did you ever learn our native tongue? Do you write about our loss? Maybe our story won't be grief.

The truth is my reality is made of ghosts. Not satisfying but good enough.

Immanuel Oyenuga

## Cut My Hair.

“Unshackled: The Liberation of Cutting My Hair”

I cut my hair. One act of courage changed the course of my life. I let it all loose, drinking from the cup of past wounds. But now, I free myself — I cut my hair. It was bushy, at times pushy, never allowing me to truly be me. With sadness in my heart, I let go of the thing I held onto the most. Forget the women and gold; this is the reason why I gloat. Yesterday, I cut my hair, freeing myself from 19 years of shackles and grip.

I untied the knot with my crown. The one person who was lost was found. Immanuel, an identity hidden for so long, was discovered beneath the bundles of black woven hair and stranded thoughts. He had been searching for a way to emerge from the darkness. For years unending, he sought an escape, but truth wouldn't release him until an unfortunate incident with the barber led me to cut my hair. My precious baby was gone. Yet, in losing the thing I treasured the most, I found the person I would now love the most.

And no, this isn't about the black strands of beauty that lie upon our heads. This isn't about a man pretending. This is about love finally found at the end — a love that involves embracing oneself and challenging the king and queen within your spirit. This is self-discovery — letting go of every ribbon tied to the hip, removing that heavy crown so you can finally breathe. Believe that in the end, you will sincerely see the reasons why you should cut your hair. Cut it all off, my friend — those people who bring no benefit to your growth, the lover who inhibits your true self, the family who fails to act like family, and those who stifle your authenticity. Cut them all off, and yes, it will hurt. You will cry, pain will linger, but I promise it's only temporary, for underneath the darkness comes the light. You will find yourself laughing more, singing tunes of freedom, and dancing to the melody of your expression. Now, you can finally be free. Nothing holds you back anymore. They no longer have a say in how you live your life. You can climb the highest mountains and cross the deepest valleys because you decided to cut your hair.

### **Be Free.**

Today, I went to another barber, and he asked me if I wanted to grow my hair back out. I laughed in clarity, for I understood that the person who once craved an afro now embraces a low cut. That old man has been put to bed. I no longer seek to look trendy or hip. I embrace the simplicity of my new hairstyle and accentuate it with some waves. This is the new me — a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a chosen generation set apart from the rest to do profoundly impactful things in the world. So, with a smile on my face, I replied to my barber, “No, I'm enjoying my new cut.” And for the first time in my life, I blessed the barber who messed up my hair.

Growth is a painful process. Sometimes, you must let go of certain things to become a distinct being. Don't let anybody fool you — it's never easy. But just as I rock this new hairstyle with glowing skin, you will emerge from that drastic change shining like never before.

Carmen Scott

# Shape of Fear

Fear hits first. Cold.

Shifting from a new end to a ominous beginning—renewed in a period of mourning.

Leaving the light for the darkness.

Hoping that the void you're facing is just cast by your own silhouetted shadow.

Treading gently on the first creaky step into the unlit basement.

Running down the stairs so the despair can't catch you.

Every footfall taking you closer to the pull string at the bottom.

The bulb's out.

The fear of loss is permanent. Hope ambitiously tags along.

Always a tastebud away from the bitter flow of harsh words.

Moments away from catching your breath.

You're in the eye of grief now.

Does security conquer fear?

or define your shadow?

Accentuating how loss permeates. The desperation of a silver lining wishing to capture darkness in her calming grasp.

How does it feel knowing your whole life could be happiness

but you're still embodying fear's sickness. Guaranteeing that fear remains held.

Swaddled in camouflage, hidden in plain sight, invisible to predators, cocooned, ready to emerge.

Valentine Solis

# Violet Prayers

so far from sweet real things my thoughts had strayed, I had forgotten wide fields and clear brown streams.

the herons were no longer safe in the sky,  
they fly with a single prayer, then fell to us like gray angels. It's already cold.

What do we do with this unfinished prayer? I say,

decades after the war, we enter the sniper's hole again, sewing  
the sandbags that drown our feet, surely this is where we fall cold too. On the  
wall we write,

"I see a florists' shops, around us perfumed papers, bows, pins,  
and garish lights, cabarets and soaps, and older than time wine..."

in this museum of memory, the missing begin to accumulate, they shoot out of  
the tiles like grass blades,  
damp with unfinished prayers.

Do you see it now? the photo of two lovers gifted with a burning desire.

now—unwittingly, I dream  
of violets growing in my hands, and there something shines

this soul's forgotten gleam.

# Finding Your Bones

*Even when I'm dead, I'll swim through the earth, like a mermaid of the soil, just to be next to your bones*

*The Archipelago Of Kisses | Jeffrey McDaniel*

There are an uncountable number of dead bodies buried in the earth. No one is certain how many have been buried, and even fewer are certain of how many have been cremated or had their bodies taken care of in a different way. But rest assured, most of them have been there long enough for even the earth to forget them.

Most of them have become the dirt you walk on. A million-million people you walk on every day, and neither you or they know it, because the dead forget they're alive.

But one skeleton, buried in a shallow grave in a dark forest, remembers. She doesn't remember much, but she remembers enough.

The skeleton isn't exactly alive. Certainly not. She's been buried in the ground for longer than you've been alive, but she's not exactly dead either.

She's stuck in a promise she made when she was alive. So, she sits, the dirt piled higher and higher on her, as the tree roots curl between her ribs tighter and tighter.

She doesn't even know it. She, herself, thinks she's dead, because what is death, if not dark and cold and waiting, and waiting, and waiting. And the earth is nothing, if not helpful to quicken her forgetfulness.

But even the earth can't stop a promise.

Far, far, far away, an old woman is buried into the ground. Old and loved, her family surrounds her grave and shovels the dirt onto her.

As the final shovelful of dirt falls, the skeleton who remembers, but not much, wakes from the lull she's been in and remembers, really remembers, what her promise was.

She had promised to find her way to her love again.

So, the skeleton moves and struggles against the dirt and roots, who grip her hard. Not hard enough though. She escapes the dirt and soil like water to her, and wrenches the roots away from her bones.

No, you're supposed to stay here, the trees and soil whispered, curling tighter around her once again.

The skeleton had no way to speak, the soil ate her tongue years ago, but she's never needed her words.

The roots wouldn't be budged so she ripped them off her. The soil was nothing compared to the promise she intended to keep.

And so the skeleton crawled and clawed and forced her way through the earth, the dirt and rocks and trees doing everything in their power to stop her.

The trees combined their roots into walls, and held tight to her bones. The rocks were obstacles she couldn't push past. And the dirt pushing, and pushing, and pushing.

All the while whispering to her that she was making a mistake, she should've stayed where she had been, that she shouldn't make a ruckus. She's disappointing everyone else. How's it fair that you get to be selfish, when no one else is? They whisper to her.

It got to her. Who was she to be so selfish? Hadn't she always been this way? Everyone would be so disappointed.

She looked at her hands. Hands that in life had been calloused and hard, were now just white bone. They could be called fragile, with how thin and small they were, but she knew they weren't. Because they were her hands. Her hands that held her lover's hands.

Hands that were simple bones now, that were still attached to her wrists, nothing but bones now too, that were attached to everything else, that had simply become bones.

She looked at the rosary in her skeletal hand, the one she held as she died. The one her lover gave her.

*"I've heard that the people in town think you're trouble. I wanted to give you something to look at whenever you think of doing something... blasphemous,"* her lover had said, all secret smiles and shining brown eyes. They kissed in the back room, and she kept the rosary close wherever she went.

She couldn't hear the whispers after that. The soil parted easily now, the trees seemed to move out of her way. She was swimming it seemed. They loved swimming.

She never thought to think about not knowing where her lover was, so when she finally was stopped by a casket, she just knew. Every other casket moved out of her way, but her lover was even more stubborn than her.

Her lover was buried in the casket. It was beautiful, intricately carved, she doesn't

think her love would have liked it.

Opening the casket was nothing compared to her journey, and the sight of her lover, even old and dead, made everything worth it.

The soil spilled into the casket. Happy to be able to get to someone else.

She layed down, and grabbed her lover's hands. Her lover's hands had been small and delicate, and always soft and clean, but they were no longer that. The skin has started to rot, but the wrinkles from her life were still there. The skeleton wished she had been there to kiss every wrinkle when they appeared.

Her lover's hands were placed on her chest, so they had frozen like that. But the skeleton was not the one who grasped her lover's hands first.

*You're here.*

*Of course. I promised I would find you.*

And even as the earth cleaned away the rest of their skin, and organs, and everything that was so important in life, it would not be able to take the love away from their bones.

If archeologists or perhaps grave robbers were to dig up this particular grave, they would find two women curled into each other, a rosary holding their hands together.



Immanuel Oyenuga

# My Heart's Odyssey

## *Navigating The Maze of Love*

*Odyssey according to Merriam Webster Dictionary is a long wandering or voyage usually marked by many changes of fortune. It is also defined as an intellectual or spiritual wandering or quest.*

**I present to you My Heart's Odyssey, a suiting piece of love, drama, pain and joy that concludes with a love poem.**

Show me the ropes of understanding my hearts cravings. I know what I desire, yet I'm as lost as a leaf in the wind. My course is unpredictable. When the weatherman bets on south, I dance north. My heart skips a beat at the sound of her voice. Then, a familiar face pops up on my delicate phone screen, and suddenly, my hair is doing a joyful dance, like a dog's tail greeting its owner.

Love remains an enigma for me. They say you can only be in love with one at a time, all things considered. I agree, but there are moments when I can't pinpoint whom I'd call home. I'm torn, indecisive, and I crave a guiding hand to steer me right. I ask God for directions, but He just smiles, leaving little notes at my door—tiny signs to point the way. Because, you see, matters of the heart are ours to decide, even if opportunities and people come knocking. A man must choose where to devote his life.

Oh, love. You're a wild and impulsive force, leaving us yearning for more. You disrupt the paths of discipline and trust. Amidst 7 billion souls, I yearn to discover whom to commit to. The margin is wide, yet the scale is narrow. I'm selective, and when I do commit, what if it isn't reciprocated? What if she dwells miles away from my home? What if the internet can't keep our bond strong? What if she loses interest, abandoning me in the absence of my most cherished connection? What if she eludes and flees from my sincere expression of love? What if our hearts are too frosty for love to kindle? Just what if?

We've seen too much pain to embrace it fully. Our past haunts us, and in our folly, we become callous, numbing our emotions. Society deceives us, praising the virtue of independence. Our parents, even when they got it right, haunt us with their perfection, and we wallow in our imperfections.

"I've run out of ideas," we confess, turning to our phones for advice on matters of the heart. We seek connection through wires, not soulful conversations or silent musings. The once vibrant grass seems dull for us to walk side by side, holding hands and listening to nature's songs. Birds sing praises, stars illuminate our flaws, and squirrels' gossip, nodding approvingly at our small walks leading to children's laughter in the park.

The world is in disarray, love has lost its way. We toy with our hearts like puzzles, overlooking the depth of value in partnership. A lifelong friendship with one person—building bonds, creating memories, having fun, and embracing each blessed day. Time on this planet is finite, so why not spend it with those you love?

# R reset

Jen didn't really know much about the device; where it came from, who made it, or how it worked. What she did know was that it appeared on her doorstep one day with a note that read "for starting over." It was simple in its design – a plain box with a large single button atop it – but it was a sophisticated and almost unfathomably complicated device.

Standing there by her front door, she pressed the button.

As far as she could tell, nothing happened the first time she pressed the button. She pressed it a few more times, but still, it seemed to do nothing.

Weeks later, while cleaning out her closet, she stumbled upon the device. "This thing," she muttered to herself, "the heck is it?" She sat on the edge of her bed, lifting the device slightly above her head to inspect it. She sat it down on the bed and pondered for a moment.

Then she pressed the button and vanished into thin air.

---

Years come and go, just as friends and partners do the same. But Jen is happy now, living with Colin. Their second anniversary is approaching and they have a camping trip planned. Jen prepares packed lunches for the drive while Colin loads the last of their hiking gear into the car.

"Hun, where'd you say the sleeping bags were?" He yells from the bedroom.

"Did you try the closet?"

"That's where I'm look..." he trails off, distracted.

"Find them?" She asks, to no response. She wipes her hands on her apron before heading down the hallway to the bedroom, calling after Colin.

Rounding the corner, into the bedroom, she sees Colin sitting in the middle of the floor, his back turned to her. Startled, she approaches him and places a hand on his shoulder. "Colin?"

He turns just enough for her to see that he's holding the device. She raises her hand to her mouth, but not fast enough to stop "shit" from escaping her lips.

---

"I wanna know what it is," he demands.

Jen stares into his eyes, but struggles to form a response. For one, she doesn't really know the answer to the question.

"Jen!"

"It's nothing!"

"So why are you acting so weird? Why did you say 'shit'?"

"Shit... because I forgot I had it, but it's nothing," she says pleadingly, hoping he'll drop it.

He reaches his hand out to press the button.

"Don't!" She screams, startling herself as much as Colin. She scoops up the device in her arms and scurries down the hallway, Colin in tow.

"What is going on, Jen?"

She puts the device back in the closet, slams the door shut, and barricades it with her back pressed up to it. He's about to ask something else, but she bursts into tears.

Colin tries to comfort her, rubbing the sides of her arms before trying to hug her, but she places a hand on his chest and says "no, it's ok."

"I can't begin to explain what it is, she begins, "and I don't expect you to believe what it does. But I can't think of a more believable lie that will satisfy you, so I'll just tell you the truth. And it's up to you whether you wanna think I'm crazy."

He's drawn-in now, captivated with anticipation.

"If I push that button everything restarts. Everything we've ever shared, erased. Everything we ever said to each other, forgotten. If I push that button, I go back to the day that device first showed up on my doorstep – the very moment I pushed that button for the first time. And you'd be none the wiser."

"And you," he begins with a skeptical smirk, "you'd be the wiser?"

"Yeah, I'd remember everything, but you wouldn't. To you, I'd be a stranger. To me, you'd be a memory."

He sits on the end of her bed to contemplate what he's just been told, shaking his head in disbelief.

"Look, I told you you wouldn't believe me."

“So it resets you back in time to the first moment you pressed it?” He asks, she nods in agreement. “So, how do you know this?”

“I didn’t know, at first. I pressed it a few times when I got it, but nothing seemed to happen. But then a few weeks later I pressed the button and, in an instant, I was back standing by my front door where I pressed the button the first time. Not just where, but when. Like, weeks earlier.”

His head spinning, he asks, “so how many times have you pressed it before?”

Before she can answer he cuts her off.

“Wait. Have you used it on us?”

“No, no!” She tries to assure him. “I forgot I even had the damn thing! It’s been in the back of my closet for years.”

“But you could.”

“What?”

“Use it. On us. On me.”

She stares at him in disbelief. “No, Colin. Why would you say that?”

“I’m not saying you would, Jen, I’m just saying you could. When shit gets a little rough, you just hit the reset button, right?”

She shakes her head, pleading with her eyes, trying to reassure him.

“Why haven’t you destroyed it, Jen?”

She’s frozen in her tracks, put on the spot by a question she’s truly never considered.

He gives her no time to respond, “You have to destroy it. If you truly love me.”

“I do love you!”

“Ok then,” he says defiantly before pushing her aside. He reaches for the device – “No!” she screams, grappling with him. But he brushes her off and makes his way down the hallway, into the kitchen, where he opens the window and tosses out the device. It plummets down 3 stories before smashing into a hundred pieces on the street below.

---

A year later, another anniversary. “Hun, we should get going,” Colin calls from the other room.

Jen checks her make-up one last time before flitting across the room to grab her purse and coat. In the living room, she's surprised to see Colin standing holding a gift in his hands.

"I thought we said we weren't buying presents?" She playfully inquires.

"Well, I technically didn't buy this," he responds, gesturing for her to take the gift. "Go on, open it before we go."

She excitedly tears the gift wrap then lifts the lid delicately, trying to draw out the anticipation. Realizing what's inside, she draws a deep breath and removes the lid fully to reveal the device, fully repaired.

"I felt terrible for overreacting, so I spent the better part of the last year putting the pieces back together."

She slowly shifts her gaze to Colin, her ashen face holding back tears. "Why?"

"This is me, trusting you."

"Stop!" She slams the box closed, "I don't know how you even did this, but I can't accept it. I don't need it anymore. You should've left it alone."

"Ok," he snatches the box from her, "fine then. We'll destroy it. But at least sleep on it."

"I don't need to sleep on it," she quips back at him.

"Alright, I hear you. For me, though, will you? Sleep on it?"

She feigns an affirmative nod.

---

The restaurant is a dimly lit, elegant space. They're seated at a small 2-top by the window, illuminated by the reflection of the L-Train whizzing by overhead.

"Relax," he assures her, as she leans in to kiss him on the forehead before heading to the bathroom. Staring out the window, he sees passersby scurrying to avoid the sudden downpour of rain. His phone dings to indicate a notification: Reminder – Cleaning lady.

Jen returns, slightly more relaxed and composed. "Miss anything?"

He shakes his head and reaches for her hand. She tilts her head and smiles.

Suddenly, a look of concern wipes across his face and he reaches into his pocket.

“What is it?”

He pulls out his phone and reads the notification again: Cleaning lady.

“Oh my god.” he looks up at Jen, panic in his eyes. With the phone now up at his ear, he says to Jen, “The cleaning lady is at our house now.”

She looks at him as if to say “and?”

“The device is sitting out on the coffee table!” He jumps to his feet, “I can’t get her on the phone. Keep trying her, I’m gonna run home!”

---

He struggles with the apartment building’s front door, dropping his keys in a puddle. He then hurdles up the stairs, all three stories, slipping and sliding on slick polished floors. Then the lock on his apartment door – he can’t get the key in the hole. He slams on the door. Bang! Bang! Bang!

A moment of silence, then he raises his hand once more when the door swings open, the cleaner standing in front of him, pulling her headphones down to her neck.

“The device. The button, did you touch it? Did you push it?” He asks the confused cleaner before brushing past her into the living room. He looks down at the coffee table where they left the device but it’s not there.

He turns to face the cleaner, gesturing where is it?

“Yes, I had to move it to clean,” she explains, glancing over to a cabinet where the device now sits.

He runs over to inspect the device and then asks again, “did you press this button?”

---

Jen sits alone at the restaurant, trying to call Colin, but it keeps ringing out. She puts her head in her hands and slumps down onto the table, only to be startled back to attention when Colin plops the device down on the table.

“What’re you doing with that?”

He doesn’t answer. A grin grows from ear to ear and then he quickly slaps his hand on the button, again and again.

Jen shrieks, grabbing the device. “Are you crazy?”.

“No! Don’t you see? It doesn’t work.”

She stops to contemplate this.

“You’re still here!”

She lets out an awkward, stilted laugh, gradually putting the pieces together in her head.

"The cleaner pushed the damn thing, but you're still here!" He assures her.

Jen places the device back down on the table, looking at Colin as if to ask for permission. He nods, and Jen places her hand above the button on the device.

---

The cleaner struggles down the apartment building stairs, her hands full of cleaning supplies. A friendly neighbor holds the front door open for her and wishes her a good night.

She sets her things down on the sidewalk and reaches down to open the trunk of her car, but it is gone. Her car, her supplies, even the street she was standing on.

She shuffles her feet back and forth to feel the asphalt underneath, but it is now carpet. She looks down at her hands and it's no longer car keys she's holding, it's a feather duster hovering over the device.



# A Particular Sensation

By *Li Zhang*

*Illustrated by: Keilyn Cruz*

In terms of lunar calendar,  
two spring terms *came and gone*,  
one was  
on February 4th  
the other was  
on February 19th

立  
春

Spring comes.  
Messengers are everywhere.

Earth *wakes* first from its hibernation.

Soil softens.  
Grass sprouts,  
rarely discernible at your first and quick glance,  
until you walk up and back and pay your heed attention,  
a tint of **light green**

*elusive*

*deceptive*

catch your eyes,  
touch your heart,  
and massage your whole body,

立  
夏

*so tender,*  
*so comfortable,*  
*so amazing*  
*so speechless*

Once they are registered in your eyes,  
they will never escape,  
you become **spring messenger**,  
more than *willing* and *happy*  
Way ahead of its arrival of next spring  
you sense its scent and texture,  
*germinate*  
in the mud

echo to the creek of rainwater  
drift in the **a i r**  
radiate from the sky  
**shine** on the tips of bushes  
manifest on the moss

立  
秋

Earthworms squirm  
sun squints  
a pleasant voice  
in every *breeze*  
a joy lurks  
in every bird note  
even if daffodils break ground early  
snowdrop bloom  
tendering **white** and **serene**

the *blind* can see  
and  
the deaf can *hear*  
Law and Order  
a harmony between  
**Supreme Nature**  
and  
**Great Human Minds**



**Sun** unbuttons winter jackets  
Wind tight it up  
Snow **shuts** doors down  
Rain washed sky lures them *reopen*  
a deadly charm of a magician  
**deceptive**  
*elusive*  
the value of uncertainty

dried *leaves* and *flowers*  
sticking to its stems   
ready to step off the stage  
passing the **spotlight** to its successors  
a morale in chilly spring  
is on the way  
on March 6  
messages everywhere

立  
冬

# A

## Accepting What Is

You know that feeling you get when you know if you look for something, you will find it? That feeling was so persistent that I could not ignore it.

I entered his name into the search bar, Charles Raymond Allen, and there he was. I was seeing my brother for the first time. I knew it was him because he looked exactly like my other brother. As I kept reading all the links Google provides, I was looking to get some type of glimpse into his life. A life I was never a part of because of his adoption. The title of one link made me freeze completely. I was staring at his obituary. I had no sense of how much time had passed after reading it over and over. My heart had this feeling of being full, as close as complete as it ever might feel to being shattered, all in the same instance.

Life is not fair. For many people, life throws one thing after another, and it becomes a struggle to accept a new reality. When people die unexpectedly, there are often unanswered questions that will eat away at you. Always thinking about the what ifs and the whys. In my case, we both missed out on each other's entire lives. I will never meet him, hear his voice, never laugh together; he will never meet my kids; we will never argue; nothing. He may have never known my name. Another unanswered question.

I found his adoptive mother's email and decided to write. I was not sure of what to say or how to start, or how to offer my condolences. Do I ask questions? Do I have the right to know anything about him? Looking at the date of his passing, I realized it had been almost two years. I typed out my email and re-read it over and over, to make sure I was saying the right thing. But what can you say to someone who has lost their child?

Eventually, his mom wrote back and let me know the type of person Charlie was. He was struggling with his mental health and decided to end his life. Why? Another unanswered question. I am stuck with this feeling of immense grief, and it completely consumed me. How could I mourn someone I never knew? I was grieving what could have been or even what should have been. I was told he was always encouraged to reach out to his birth family, but he was not ready yet. I was always ready as soon as I had found out about him.

Grief is something almost everyone must experience. No one is exempt from death and their loved ones are not exempt from the feeling of that loss. There are five stages of grief, as I am told, and everyone experiences those stages in a different order. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

A deep depression and anger set inside me. I was angry I never got a chance to meet him. I was angry he was given up for adoption. The list went on. But plain and

simple, I was just angry. The depression came in waves. Deep sadness for days on end, with no way to explain why I was just not myself. In dealing with these emotions, I realized that I needed to work toward acceptance. How long does this process take? I doubt anyone can answer that.

What I did know was that this was something I could not change. There are things in life that cannot be changed or stopped. How you react to those changes is what matters. At first, I reacted like my world was crashing down on me and there was no way for me to survive this loss. At times I felt foolish that I was so upset over someone I never knew. But then I realized that I was not given that chance to know him and it was out of my control. Charlie also was not ready to reach out to a family he never grew up with. I will always respect his decision when it comes to meeting our family. I will never know how he felt or why he felt that way. Acceptance is hard to obtain with so many unanswered questions. Always thinking about what could have been. I needed to find comfort in the here and now.

From what I do know about Charlie, he was funny. Something we have in common. He was the life of the party, as am I. He was kind, thoughtful, and loved. Again, something else I am missing. When I found out about his death, I was in a constant state of research. Looking for where he lived, where he went to college, and what he was studying. I even called the funeral home that handled his service and explained my situation and my relationship to him, to see where and if he was buried. I could potentially visit him. The woman on the phone sympathized with me and let me know that he was cremated. Again, more anger. I will never get a chance to be anywhere near him.

With everything that blocked me from knowing more about him, I had to remind myself of what I did know. I know how people have described him, I have some pictures; she had a great smile, and he was loved by so many people. I am proud of the fact that I can be included as one of those people that loved him. I have the comfort in knowing that there are some things that I have the fortune of using to console me in my grief.

The stages of grief are often hard to process and a constant struggle. There is no timeline of when it ends. But I know you can either let those stages control you or you can control them. I have had good and bad days, as does everyone on this journey. I will never forget his birthday or the day he passed away. But I will always celebrate his life, even if I was never a part of it. I have learned that grieving is a process, and one day at a time things will get better. I had to shift my focus to what I had instead of what I felt was missing. There will always be something missing, and I have accepted that.

You must accept what is and let go of what is not.

Laura Washington

# M<sub>y</sub> Savior

He spotted me in the store with my Mother and brothers.

I spotted him next to his brothers and sisters.

He was different from them, sporting a brown coat of a different texture and appearance.

I was different from my family, being awkward and mentally challenged.

He was drawn to me, staring at me with those big black eyes.

I was drawn to him, staring at him with my big brown eyes.

He told me to take him from this place.

I told him I didn't have any money to purchase him.

He wanted me to hide him somewhere, begging me not to leave him there.

I wanted him to come home with me, as his difference drew me in, and I had to have him.

He hid in the bottom of the cart we were using.

I hid my mischievous intentions from my Mom.

He was found at the register, my Mother stared at him in surprise.

I was found to be the culprit in this operation, she turned to me with an eyebrow raised.

He watched as my Mom sighed in response.

I watched as my Mom caved and bought him for me.

He was ecstatic as he went into the bag.

I was ecstatic as I took him to his new home.

He was taken out of the bag and into my room.

I took in the sight of his tiny body.

He had a big head, a white birthmark on his head, and big feet with horseshoes on them.

I had a big head, caramel-to-milk chocolate skin, and a thin frame at the time.

He had hair that was brown, fluffy, and soft.

I had hair that was dark brown and afro-textured.

He was always there whenever I needed him.

I was there whenever he needed me to hold him.

He is my savior, bringing me back from the brink.

I am saved, still living to this day.

He is my Horseshoe, my lucky charm.

I am his best friend, the person he knows will never neglect him like all those years ago.

He loves me.

I love him.

We will love each other until the end of time.

Daphne Calderon

# Ten Toma

Ten, te regalo mi vista ;  
La vista que me regaló un corazón finado.  
Toma mi mano,  
Juntas siguiéremos enamorándonos.  
Escuchas mis pensamientos :  
contigo no me dan miedo.  
Acepté tus partes, con todo y defectos.  
Y las dos, continuaremos siendo un ser perfecto.

# Ten Toma (English)

Here, I gift you my sight.  
The sight that a dead heart gifted me.  
Take my hand,  
together we will keep falling in love.  
You hear my thoughts,  
with you they don't bring me fear.  
I Accepted your parts with all its defects.  
And as two we will continue creating a perfect being.

# Valentine Solis

## L ike Jelly

his arms so thin his mother worried that the wind would take him away from her  
his father had gone on a trip

to find his other passion.

the one for god and self righteousness, his sisters huddle in a bunch  
of three and his brothers wandering off

in a maze of questions.

his brain like jelly and hair like waves, eyes made of glass and fear.

so he ran to the sea that seemed to call his name through the dreams and static of this  
hell.

David Dominguez

# Unseen Anguish

The dense fog persists in the sky with a reeking smell.  
Scarlet flames burning away the flesh and bones into ashes.  
At least those laying on the ground have seen the end.  
Loud screams that become overpowered by explosions in the distance.  
Unfamiliar faces traumatizing each other for eternity.  
On our chest lay a pendant inscribed with our names for identification.  
Will we ever be found?  
Those who believe in the man above might, but today no one is certain to escape hell.  
In my trembling sweaty palms lay a gift given to me.  
Its' sole purpose is to take unknown lives.  
I call it my best friend.  
My only hope to witness another sunrise.  
In the field unfamiliar faces filled with uncontrollable anger.  
But hearts full of intention to survive.



Valentine Solis

# Hear You

your door is like a war plunked between us, it is true and horrid.

it gets in my vision of you - so tell me,

tell me what you're reading.

i want to hear your sweet throat tell me what's on every page.

i want to hear your voice surrender to the silence.

you can get me there  
like a single night of rain.

i promise i will never stop writing poems outside your door.

“**T**he only explanation I have for  
being so afflicted is my ancestors  
committed a heinous crime against God”

The bent and worn from footfalls Stairs,  
bring me up to the platform.  
a kingdom of cigarettes and piss  
the Train is summoned and rushes past and— whipping hair and wind  
across my face the Train stops— I board.

I open my book and predictably, not but within a single sentence, as if  
reading incantation,  
I am struck ill.

My ears are fragile and their drums are uncalibrated. A generation curse;  
an inherited defect.

Passed on by my father I  
have forever been barred from roller coasters

and turning teacups— my childhood I resigned those blasé pleasures.  
But this is no indulgence!  
No selfish desire but a utility,

the societal function of mere transit.  
Yet motion sickness is no gentle mistress

and refuses to differentiate,  
despite my pleas.

She torments me,  
my eyes blur. the swaying Train  
wrecks my vision and robs my cogency. She places a penny on the  
tracks and the Train leaps into the air.

My hands my head falls into;  
These shallow breaths are a murderous dagger.  
My abdomen contracts and,  
like Kennedy, my body arches,  
my head snaps forward I spill my brains onto the Train car floor.  
Hacking, trying to control  
the vomit, I clutch my throat. Futile.  
Feverish. Frantically, scouring my bag  
beneath a pile of optimistic books for  
a tissue to wipe my Mouth,  
and then the Floor,  
if there'll even be enough of me  
left to care.

Guadalupe Salgado Vela

# U ntil she fades

The bodies floated on the water's surface.

And there she stood overlooking them.

Why had they drowned?

Hadn't they wanted to live?

She stepped closer, standing on the edge.

Then the wind struck her spine and she fell.

Trapped in between the forcible waves and those inside.

She kicked, but she could not swim.

Then she saw a figure ahead.

She could do it alone.

So she fought.

But the ocean was stronger.

She sank deeper.

She screamed, only it was too late.

She was already fading.

Her words left undeciphered.

Her cries left unheard.

Another girl approached.

Hadn't she been swimming?

# Vermillion

Birds, ascending to greet the hole in the sky.  
Clouds, lugubrious, smug, and smog now await  
to oblige the tiny bronchioles from weight  
shaped as fowls. Feathered friends simply cannot lie.

The Sun is fire-burning vermilion orange  
and adores the way wood crackles being burned.  
This infatuation should alarm. Concerned  
for our coughing mother. Where is her lozenge?

"Here it is!" Screamed a sagacious and shrewd mind.  
This is just an echo. To or from the void?  
In hindsight, the epiphenomenon has  
been known, alas, greed and lust shroud eyes with fine  
epicurean trinkets. Our hearts were toyed  
without having ray-absorbing chloroplast.

Heena Aslam

# S wim

Swim

The water is fresh and vast and holds you completely

Swim

The waves reach to you

Swim

Even when the current pulls you

Swallows you whole

Spits you out onto hot sand

Lay there a while

The sun will heal you

Until it burns you

The water will call you once more

Dive in

David Walton Smith

# B lue Movie

I moved back to Scotland in the summer of 2002. It was going to take a year to reclaim my permanent resident status so I could go to University for free so, at the behest of my dad, I got a job in a factory.

“Learn a trade,” the cry of every Scottish father.

Perhaps I wasn't cut out for the hard graft, but I didn't quite make it a year back in Scotland. Six months after leaving I was back in sunny South Carolina. Unbeknownst to me, I'd become an American in my teenage years. When you're away from anything long enough — even Scotland's infamous wind and rain — you can recall it with romantic reverence.

The best thing about those months was reacquainting myself with my extended family. My uncle Ian became a father figure while I was in Scotland, imparting a bit of Glaswegian philosophy and tough love when I needed it — in exchange for whiskey, of course.

One time after polishing off a bottle, I staggered home while he proceeded to drink until he blacked out, fell forward onto his knees and, steadying himself with his face, created a tripod on the carpet. As the drink loosened his faculties and muscles, he started to slide apart and his face raked across the carpet like a Hoover. He had friction burns down his face for weeks and I think my aunt Betty was more pissed at me for enabling him than at my uncle for getting absolutely blotted.

On another occasion, I showed up at his front door with a bottle just as he was leaving to see a former patient who needed some company. See, my uncle was a social worker, just retired. He could see that I had nothing better to do, so he invited me to tag along.

I don't recall the fella's name, and it's probably best I don't for his privacy and all, so let's just call him Rich. We met at his home which was just around the bend from a pub. I extended my hand, “hello, I'm David. How's it goin'?” to which he replied, “not great David, my wife just died.” I felt a sudden flushness on my face — part embarrassed, part sad for the man. Rich fetched his coat and we made our way to the pub.

I was a silent observer, letting my uncle do all the talking and counseling. But here's the thing, the more I listened, the more I gleaned that yes, Rich's wife had died, but it happened years ago. Who the hell tells somebody about that just when they meet?

Rich was, as we say in Scotland, a whinger – a complainer, a wet blanket.

"Want a game of pool, rich?"

"Nah mate, I'm shite at pool."

"Or darts then, pal?"

"Nah. Shite at that, too."

The drinks kept coming and, as I loosened up, the more my body language showed my disdain for this guy Rich. Now, I know what you must be thinking; that I'm a heartless bastard. After all, this poor fella is lonely because he lost his wife. But no, there's no alternate timeline where Rich wouldn't be miserable.

Had I met him while his wife was alive, it would've been "my cat's got leukemia," or "I just got the sack," or "I'm a Hamilton Accies fan." Only Scottish folk will get that last reference. If you're American, substitute Hamilton Accies for Cleveland Browns and you'll catch my drift.

"You aw'rite son?" my Uncle asked me. He could see I was drifting off and, with that, we were standing in the pishing rain waiting for a kebab — Ian and I making an effort to stand under an awning, Rich miserably basking in the downpour.

"I've still got those Blue Movies," he tells my uncle.

Blue movies? WTF are blue movies? The wee voice in my head inquired.

My uncle's eyes lit up and a cheeky grin grew across his face. Back to Rich's we went. "Right, get the video on, Rich!" cried my uncle as he positioned a pillow on his lap to rest his kebab n' chips. I looked down at my food, put off by the stench of cigarettes and mothballs that permeated the wallpaper in the room. Rich turned on the T.V. — an old tube one that sounded like a mini-explosion when it was turned on.

"We are the sultans, we are the sultans of swing..."

The T.V. was set to an episode of classic Top of the Pops and Dire Straits was the featured act. As if he'd just been awoken by smelling salts, Rich sprung to life, jumping to his feet and singing along with the TV. Caught up by the sudden burst of euphoria, I sang along for a few bars which stopped Rich in his tracks.

"You like Dire Straits, Davy!?"

"Aye, they're no bad, I suppose"

He darted off into the next room and started rummaging around.

"Rich! Get the fuckin' video on!" Ian tried to blurt out with his mouth full of chips.

Rich came flying back into the room with a box in his arms. He dropped the box at my feet and got down on his knees like a giddy child opening his Christmas gifts. He pulled out a vinyl and handed it to me. "This is their first studio album." And then another. "And this is an original pressing of their single, 'Money for Nothing.'" It was as if I had just awoken the man from a coma. He simply wasn't the same guy.

Ian was now on his knees trying to figure out the VCR on his own. "How'd you work this effin' machine, Rich!?"

Rich had darted back into the other room, leaving me cradling a stack of records. "You have to hear this one, Davy!"

Then applause and whistles from a live concert slowly rose in volume, overpowering the music coming from the television. Rich stood in the doorway, his eyes closed, his head raised, and his hips swaying. "Now this! This was a show!" he assured me with two thumbs up.

Beneath the sound of Dire Straits lay a funky bassline. "I've never heard this one before," I thought to myself. "They must've had a disco period, just like Kiss," I considered until I realized that my Uncle Ian had figured out the VCR and now the T.V. was displaying more bush than the Australian Outback.

And that's when it dawned on me. Oh! That's what blue movies are!

The moral of this story? Maybe it's that we can all find some kind of happiness in this world. Or maybe it's that only miserable sods love Dire Straits.



# Takis Bear

## gen

**TW: This script contains explicit language and violent content**

**Setting:** A campsite in Michigan's Upper Peninsula

**Set:** a tent, three trees

**Props:** a cooler, a bag of Takis, aerosol body spray, mannequin arms/legs

**Characters:** College students on spring break and bear

**CALEB:** engineering, swears a lot, live fast die young

**JENNA:** pre-med, practical

**SHANE:** environmental science, outdoorsy adjacent, reckless

**BEAR:** a black bear

*[It's dark out. All three characters are in the trees above their campsite.]*

**CALEB:** You know what? Fuck you, Shane.

**JENNA:** Yeah Shane, you're the reason we're hiding in a tree right now.

**SHANE:** Aww, thanks guys. Sorry for taking time out of my schedule to plan this camping trip for us.

**CALEB:** Yeah no, seriously, fuck you for that. I said we should just go to Miami and at least get some sun for spring break. I don't know how you convinced me to spend my fucking spring break in the fucking woods in the fucking UP.

**JENNA:** I don't know why we just didn't go to Miami.

**SHANE:** Cause every college kid in the whole country is in Miami right now, that would be a terrible idea. The beaches would be crowded and you wouldn't be able to move an inch without bumping into some drunk frat gym bro.

*[JENNA and CALEB glare at SHANE.]*

**JENNA:** I think even I'd rather deal with frat guys than be in this tree hiding from a bear.

**SHANE:** Look, I'm sorry. I didn't realize there were bears here. I'm sorry we're not in Miami right now.

**CALEB:** No, fuck you! You always do this. There was the shitty volleyball tournament, that stupid fucking hay ride at the stupid fucking barn and the godforsaken hike we went on in Grand Haven. You're always fucking making up some stupid plan and it always turns out shitty.

**SHANE:** No, don't you fucking give me that! I'm the one who takes initiative and at least tries stuff off the beaten path to have fun. Besides, it's not like I forced you to do any of that stuff with me. I'm just trying to live my life man. And fuck you, the trip to Grand Haven was great. If you hated my grandparents so much, you should have said so. Besides, it's not my fault the there were so many mosquitoes. It's not like I could have foreseen that.

**JENNA:** Yeah but you sure could have foreseen the fucking bears here. I thought you went camping here all the time. How could you not know about the fucking bears?

**SHANE:** Really, Jenna? I don't need this from you of all people. I'm not the one who dumped her chili in the bushes and lured the bear to our camp in the first place.

**JENNA:** I have no clue how you guys actually ate any of that stuff. At least the dining hall chili doesn't have beatles and grass in it. Anyway, I'm not the one who threw a rock at it because "black bears are pussies and get scared easily."

**CALEB:** You didn't like my cooking? You didn't like the chili and dumped it in the bushes? THAT'S THE REASON WHY WE'RE SITTING IN FUCKING TREES RIGHT NOW?

*[BEAR rustles around off stage.]*

**SHANE:** *[whisper]* Quiet down, I think it's back.

*[All three quiet down. CALEB leans over to whisper to JENNA.]*

**CALEB:** Shiit Jenna, you could have just given me your bowl, that chili was fire. And black bears are pussies. I dunno why this one is being such a bitch, they're the ones you're supposed to be able to scare off.

*[CALEB leans back over but his shifting weight snaps the branch. CALEB falls to a lower branch, dangling]*

Shit!

*[BEAR climbs tree, grabs his leg, and pulls him down.]*

Shit fuck, shit fuck, shit fuck, Shane help me! Fuck! AAAHHHHHH!

*[BEAR drags CALEB offstage and eats him. CALEB continues screaming and there is lots of blood splattering. Bloody appendages fly back onstage.]*

*[JENNA and SHANE, speckled in blood, stare at each other for a moment, speechless and shaken.]*

**JENNA:** Oh my God. Since when were bears able to climb trees like that?

**SHANE:** Holy fuck, what the shit. Oh my fucking god, Caleb just got eaten by a bear. What are we supposed to do?

**JENNA:** I don't know!?! You're the environmental science major – we're in the environment, do some science and get us out of here already.

**SHANE:** Yeah fuck you, I'm studying the effects of urbanization on costal environments, not how to stop angry bears in the middle-of-fucking-nowhere Michigan. Besides, you're biochem, why don't you make a stink bomb out of pinecones?

**JENNA:** Because I'm not chemical engineering biochem, I'm pre-med biochem, you idiot. And even if I was, it's not like I have the lab in this tree, which is a sugar maple and doesn't have pinecones, Mr. environmental science.

**SHANE:** Okay then, Mrs. pre-med.

*[SHANE pauses, wiping a drop of blood from his face and looks at the blood on his finger.]* Do you have any like pepto bismol? I feel like I'm going to throw up. And the raw sewage Caleb called chili isn't helping.

**JENNA:** Pepto bismol is only going to help you if you take it beforehand. Anyway, after seeing Caleb get turned into chili himself, I don't think any amount of pepto bismol is gonna help.

**SHANE:** Well do you have anything?

*[JENNA looks down, scanning for anything useful and sees the cooler.]*

**JENNA:** Well I don't have anything that will help, but did you pack anything spicy for your day?

**SHANE:** My what? I don't need anything spicy right now, Jenna.

**JENNA:** Your meal day? You were gonna cover meals tomorrow, right? Did you pack anything spicy? It's not for you, it's for the bear.

*[SHANE slowly realizes what JENNA is thinking.]*

**SHANE:** Wait! Well, I was just gonna make more chili, but I also brought Takis Fuego.

**JENNA:** Great, are they in the cooler? It's right below my tree, I think I can grab it with a branch.

**SHANE:** Ahh, I'm not sure. I had them in my backpack but I think Caleb was trying to consolidate the food into the cooler so we didn't attract any animals.

*[SHANE glares at JENNA. JENNA ignores him.]*

**JENNA:** Okay, I'll check the cooler.

*[JENNA uses a long branch and knocks the lid off the cooler.]*

I don't see them in there.

*[JENNA glances back at the tent, eyeing the distance.]*

I can't get to the tent from here, it's way too far. Not without getting back on the ground.

**SHANE:** Yeah, well, you saw how quickly the bear climbed the tree to get Caleb, right? I don't think being eight feet off the ground is going to help you much.

**JENNA:** Well, if it doesn't help, then why don't you climb down from your tree and get it yourself?

**SHANE:** You know what? Sure, fuck it –

*[SHANE jumps down from tree and runs inside tent.]*

**JENNA:** What are you doing Shane, I don't think we can actually scare off the bear just with Takis!

*[BEAR rustling off stage.]*

Quick, I think it's coming back!

*[SHANE emerges from tent and scurries back up tree.]*

**SHANE:** Yeah, I also got his body spray. I figured that would be our best bet at making a propellant for a bear spray.

*[SHANE opens the bag and crushes the Takis.]*

**JENNA:** Do you think it will actually work?

*[BEAR enters.]*

**SHANE:** No time like the present –

*[SHANE jumps down from tree but collapses, grasping his ankle.]*

SHIT! Fuck, fuck!

*[BEAR rushes over to him. SHANE throws crumbs of the Takis into the air and sprays the AXE through the powdered cloud at the BEAR.]*

Die, bitch!

*[BEAR rears on hind legs, curling its nose. It turns and runs off stage.]*

Holy shit, that worked–

*[SHANE tries to stand but collapses. He sprawls out on the ground, panting.]*

Fuck, my ankle hurts.

*[JENNA climbs down and goes over to SHANE.]*

**JENNA:** I'm glad the bear is gone.

*[JENNA examines his ankle.]*

We're gonna need to wrap that or get ice at least. I think you've fractured your tibia. There should be a first aid kit in the car, then we can get out of here.

*[JENNA helps SHANE up and they stagger off stage. 15-20 seconds pass and there is the sound of car door opening and JENNA rummaging around, looking for the first aid kit.]*

**JENNA:** Oh my god, he never told us he had a GUN in his car!?

**SHANE:** Ayo, what the fuck? Bitch deserved to die.

**END**



Gallery



Zitlali Molina *Just Meant to Be Pollinated* (digital painting)



Daria Mescheriakova *Flowers* (oil on canvas)



Juan David Ruiz Borbón *Presencia de un cuerpo femenino II* (charcoal on paper)



Valley Valentine *untitled* (digital photo)



ATP

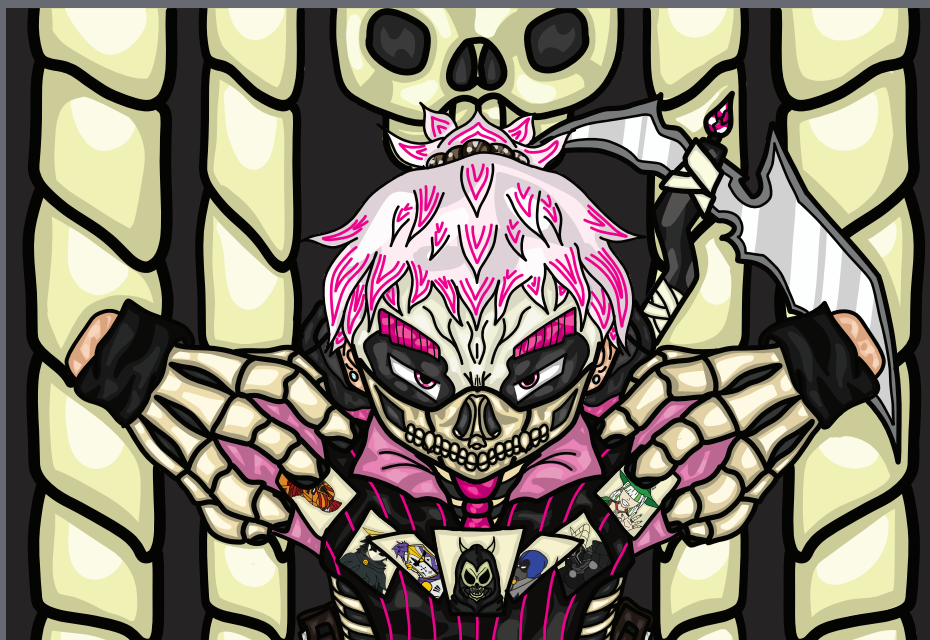
Anarely Molinero

Anarely Molinero *La Suerte* (linocut)

Juan David Ruiz Borbón *Elogio a la tensión* (aluminum & steel wire)



Julian Mendez *Skull Gambler* (digital illustration)



# WARLOCK



Quintin Melgar *Warlock* (digital painting)



J-L Deher-Lesaint *The Body Artist, Millenium Park* (digital photo)



Bienvenidos a

# TOLUCA





Hannah Lopez-Vignet *Behind wide Eyes* (acrylic on canvas)







Kseniia Fabryka *Ocean* (film photo)



Ashley Garcia *Piñatas* (silver gelatin print)



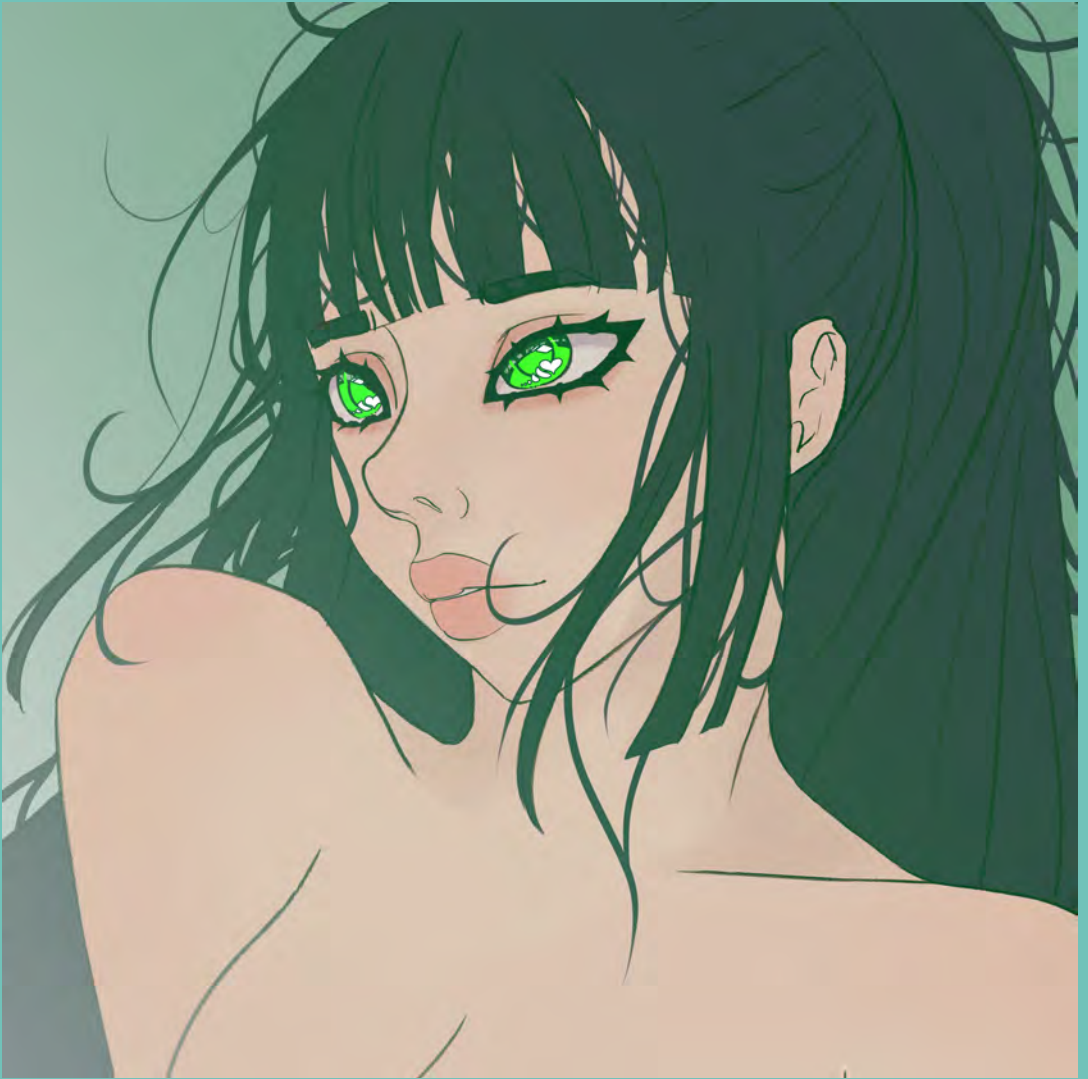
J-L Deher-Lesaint *Dense Bud Perspective #3* (digital photo)

Jaylene Flores *tomatos cry too* (acrylic on canvas)



Brandon Jones *Can't let go* (digital illustration)





Tori Engle *Envy* (digital illustration)

Courtney Simmons *The Void* (digital composition)



Vanessa Dela Torre *Enchanted lake* (acrylic on canvas)



---

Jennifer S. Diaz *Allium* (digital composition)



Jean-Laurent Deher-Lesaint *Cloud Gate* Fading (digital photo)



Rodrigo Flores *Loss and Beauty* (digital photo)





Vanessa Dela Torre *Medieval Toledo* (pen on paper)



Mingyue Li *Untitled* (digital illustration)



Brandon Jones *Contempt* (digital illustration)



Kseniia Fabryka Chicago (digital/3D render)

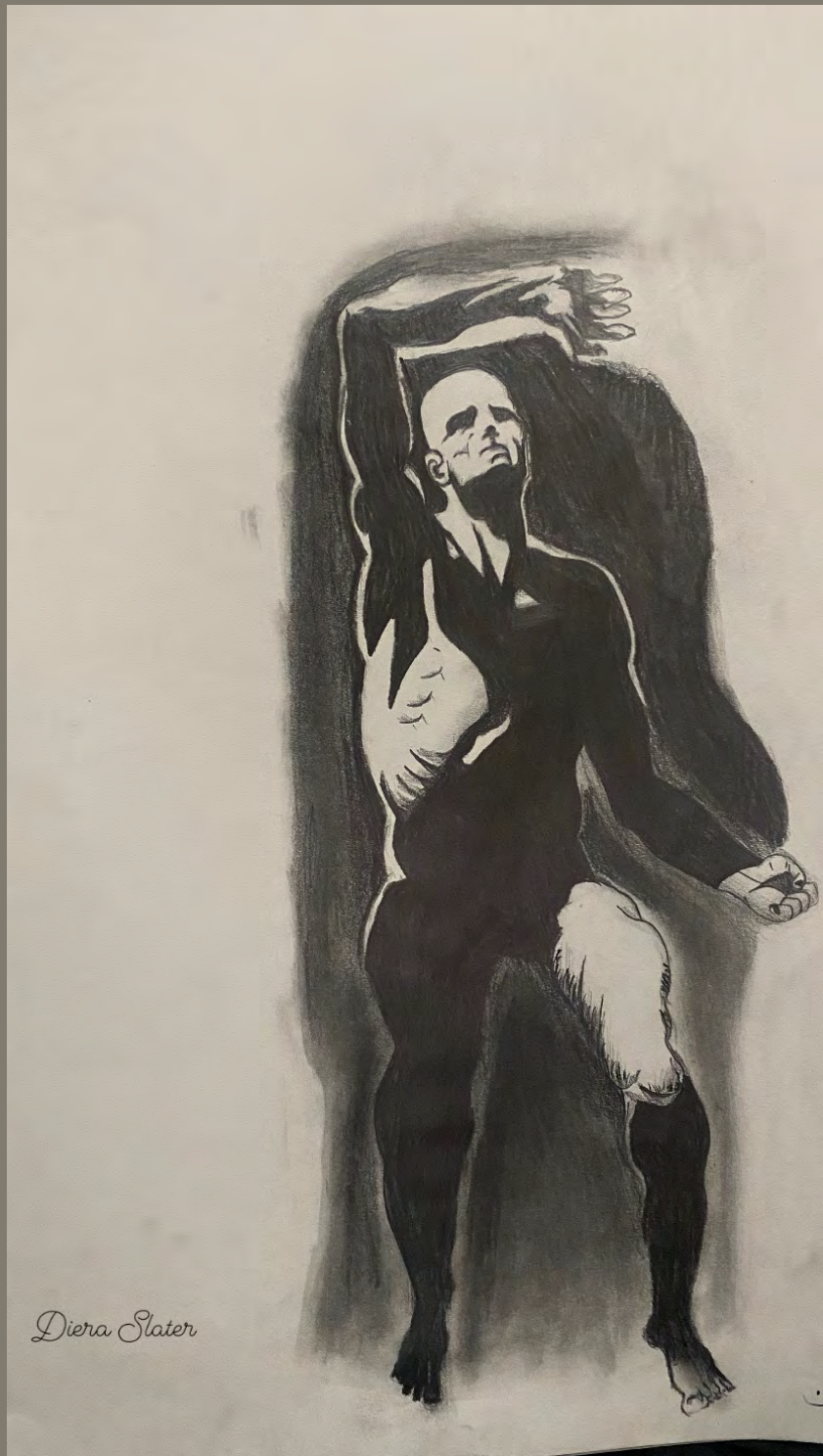
# ECHO UTAH

“BREAK THE CYCLE...”



Andrew Narvaez-Rodriguez. Welcome to Echo (digital composition)

Diera (Rara) Slater *Trapped in the darkness of light* (charcoal on paper)





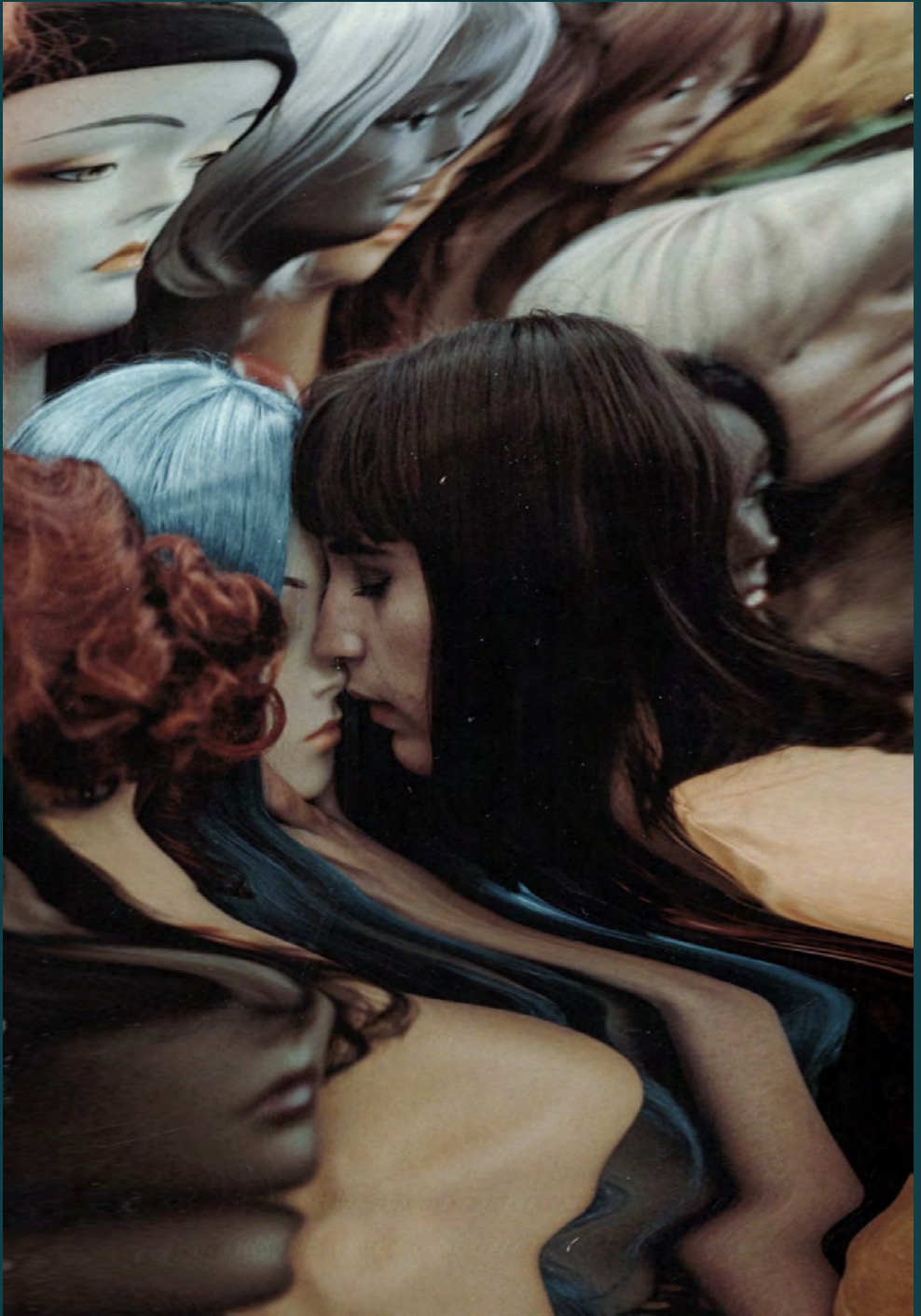
Jordyn Belli *All Seeing Eye* (digital photo composition)



Juan David Ruiz Borbón *Reflections on reality* (digital photo composition)







Jordyn Belli *Wavy in Manhattan* (digital photo)



Rodrigo Flores *Curious Harbor Seal* (digital photo)



Jaylene Flores *Squid* (pen & colored pencil on paper)

Ariba Vohra *Collaged Realities* (acrylic on canvas)





Vern Anthony Anderson *Master of Your Domain* (digital illustration)

# WANTED



**RICHARD RAMIREZ**

**THE NIGHT STALKER**

# TARNISHED



Quintin Melgar *Tarnished* (digital painting)







Quintin Meigar *Ghostcity* (digital painting)





Katherine Martinez Home Sweet Home (digital photo)



Daria Mescheriakova *Sunflowers* (oil on canvas)

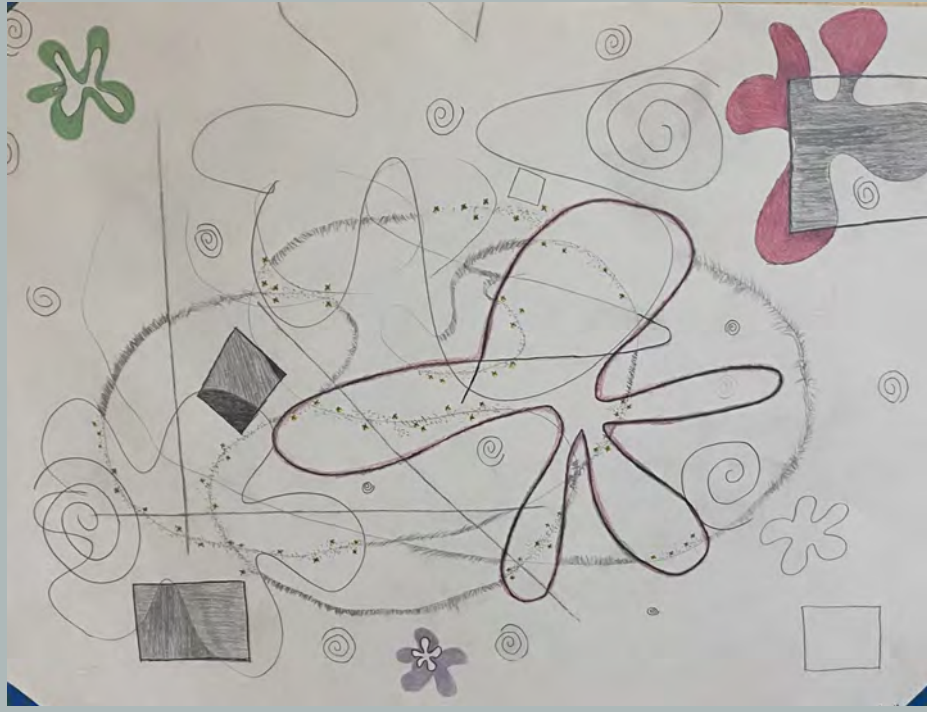




Vanessa Dela Torre *Jarabe Tapatío* (oil on canvas)



**Daphne Calderon** Flower Vase for Broken or Discarded Buds ( glazed ceramics)



**Jaylene Flores** blep ( pencil & colored pencil on paper)





NILAM Taché Art *Proverbs 15:3* (acrylic and mixed media on canvas)



Katherine Martinez *Bean Chicago* (digital photo)

Jordyn Belli *A Strange City* (digital photo)





Trinity Allen - Radioactive Dj (digital photo)

105 Angel Brito *Sleep+* (digital illustration)

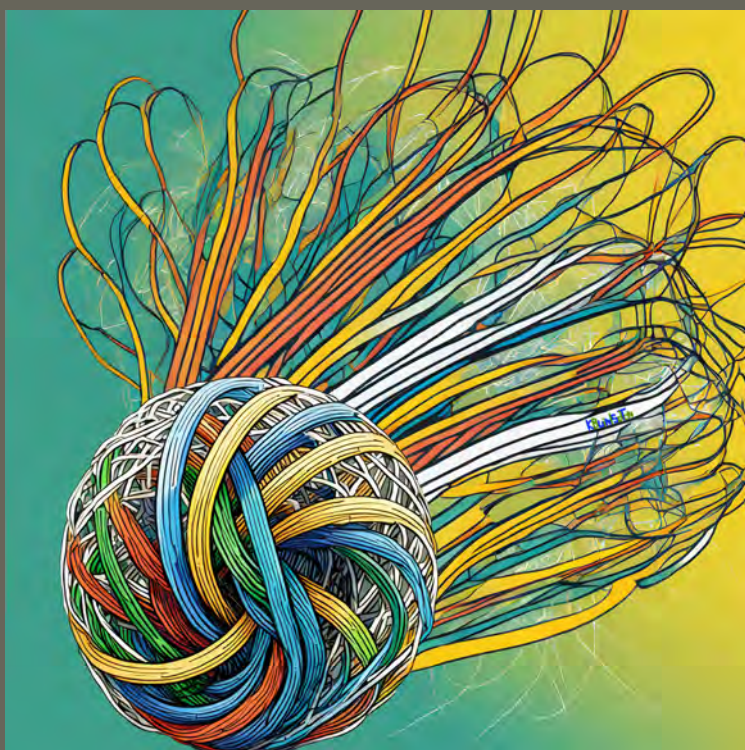


Jasmin DeJesus *The Reverie in Abyss* (digital painting)





NILAM Taché Art *Guarded* (acrylic and mixed media on canvas)



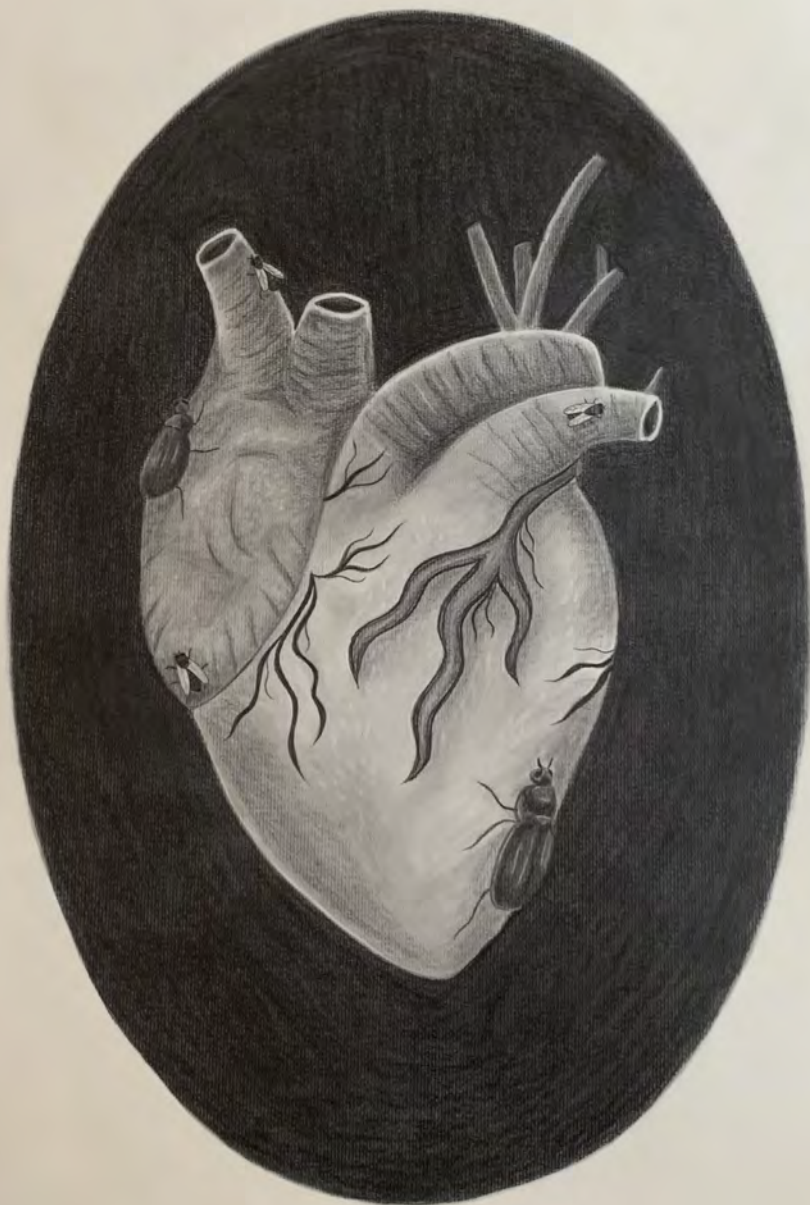
G. Jevon Covington *Fiberoptic Cables* (digital illustration)





Ariana Dorshkind *My Chicago Skyline* (lithograph)







Angel Brito *Jynx+* (digital illustration)



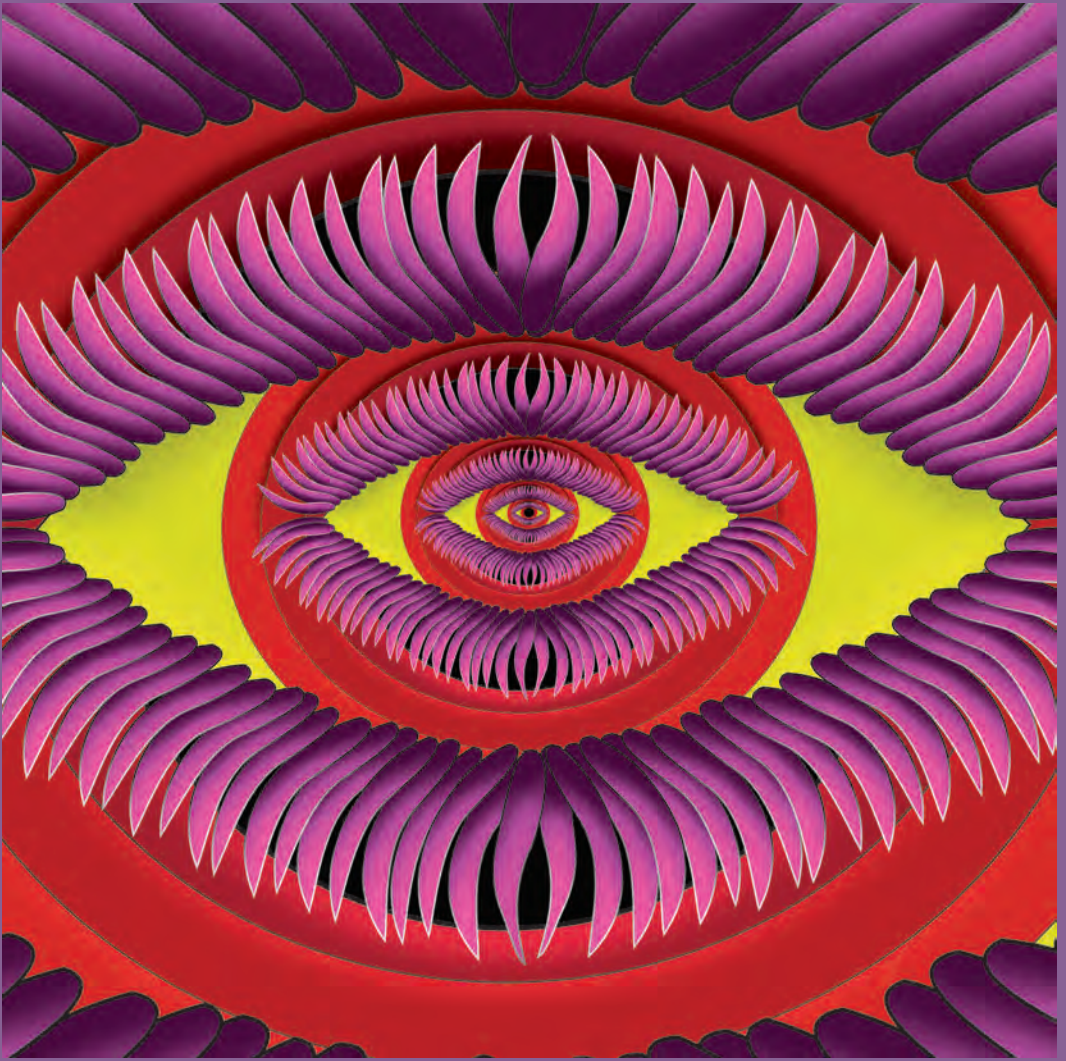
Ariana Dorshkind *Feel the Burn* (watercolor on paper)

**Jasmin DeJesus** *Face of Illusion* (digital painting)

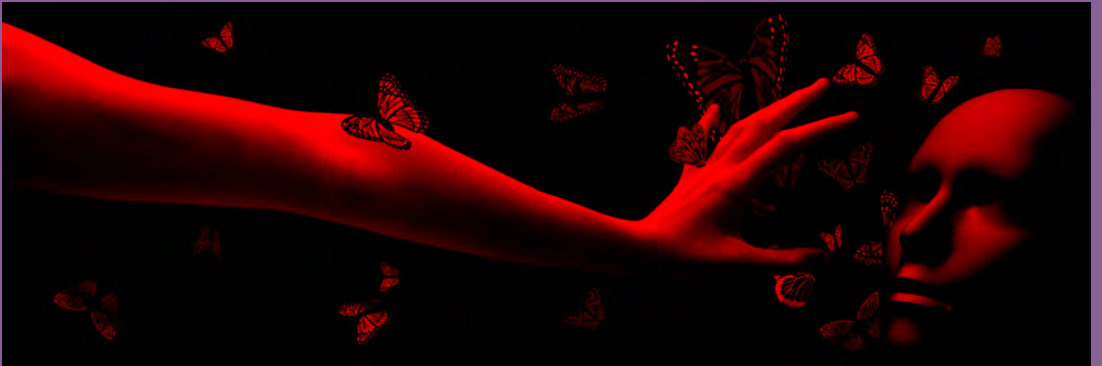


**Kseniia Fabryka** *Flower Hibiscus* (digital/3D render)





Syren Eye Spy (digital illustration)



Tori Engle ??/Ur//oK/?/ (digital illustration)