



*Defunkt Magazine*

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**LURKING**  
CAMILLE JOSEPHINE



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# MEDITATION ON LOSING CONTROL

## AMANDA ORTIZ

leave all earthly occupations behind  
enter the body when the time is right  
understand that mental visions are only clairvoyantly seen  
which is to say we are only Inside of our own minds

which is to say we tend a  
dying child by seeking the  
unoccupied figures  
of our past, the longer you allow  
this cloud of depression to overtake you the  
farther away you wander  
from your own power of understanding.

I remember nights I cried  
out in terror, the people I crafted from  
thin air showed me a past life  
as it flashed by  
and in a moment of drowning

I wasn't gone yet, at the moment  
when I was so near death  
astonished by the most unlikely things

the phenomena of sounds  
revealed itself to be false  
and though I found myself in a new space  
safe the memory remained  
the after-death apparitions trying  
this lost piece of soul to someone  
still so present



# THE FIRST JABRAN ON AMERICAN IDOL

## CRAIG FISHBANE

In the weeks before his family left the country, Jabran always seemed upset during music lessons. Every Friday, my sixth-graders gathered in a semicircle around my desk as I played various styles of American music for them from my computer. A month of bebop and Chicago blues, another of Memphis soul and rockabilly. Officially, the lessons were intended to introduce my twelve ESL students to different aspects of American culture, but as the children liked to put it, this was also my chance to torture them.

“My God, Mr. Moody, turn it off!” Shukura shouted from her seat, Tomas and Julio nodding in agreement as John Coltrane launched into a typically atonal solo. Normally the most reserved kid in class, Shukura lost all her inhibitions at the sounds of free jazz, scrunching her nose as though there were a particularly awful odor emanating from the speakers of my laptop. “What are you trying to do,” she said, “kill us?”

Only Jabran derived no pleasure from despising my musical tastes. Dressed in a starched school uniform with a white shirt and a red bowtie, he stared at me from beneath an immaculate black pompadour with an expression that was equal parts perplexed and pissed-off.

“Can we finish our essays now?” he said. “I haven’t completed my second draft.”

Sitting at the edge of my desk in a black turtleneck and blue jeans torn at the knee, I gestured for him to go. Jabran was precisely the kind of student who would want extra time to finish his essay rather than listen to music. His piece on the American Revolution had won a schoolwide contest and his test scores were among the highest in his grade.

He continued his exemplary work even during the difficult period this winter when, according to gossip in the teacher’s lounge, his mother had been detained at the airport after a business trip. Rumors swirled about police visits and legal action but I never spoke about it with Jabran. As long as he kept up his grades, I didn’t think his private life was my business.

I continued to torment the rest of the class with Coltrane’s sheets of sound as Jabran started towards his desk. I heard him muttering a comment as he slipped between Julio and Shukura, some words that were loud enough for me to hear but not comprehend. Only when he had gotten settled and opened his notebook did he call out his question.

“Mr. Moody,” he said. “All this music you’re playing, why is everyone named John or Charlie or Louis? How come there isn’t a Vindi—or a Jabran?”

The rest of the children began to make the mocking sounds that indicated someone had just touched on a taboo topic. There were giggles and clucking tongues as I scrolled through the music library and played a new song.

It was a piece of bhangra music an ex-girlfriend had gotten me into a decade earlier, when an exotic blend of sitar riffs flowing over electronic backbeats was all the rage. Julio and Tomas bopped their heads to the rhythm but Shukura assumed her typical disgusted countenance, announcing that it sounded like the stuff her grandparents listened to.

“This musician was born in India and moved to America when he was your age,” I said, fudging some details of the biography to make a larger point. “He mixed the music of India with the music of this country to make a brand-new sound.”

I went on to give my standard stump speech about how immigrants from every culture in the world would eventually made their mark here, how it was just a matter of time before everyone in this class would find their place.

“Who knows?” I said. “Maybe you’ll be the first Jabran on American Idol.”

The rest of the class laughed but Jabran didn’t crack a smile. He glared at me as though I had slapped him in the face. He was gone two weeks later, discharged from school with a forwarding address in a village near Bhopal.

It wasn’t particularly unusual for my students to move during the semester. Families packed up and left all the time, finding cheaper houses or better paying jobs in other parts of the country. But it was not typical for a family to just give up and leave, go back to their home country less than a year after they arrived. It felt like a defeat, a failure. Here I was trying to be the cool teacher, some hip avatar of musical liberation while my students were being swept away in a maelstrom of travel bans and border detention.

In the weeks after Jabran’s departure, I tried to continue as if nothing had changed, tormenting my class each Friday with cacophonous selections from Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor. As Julio and Tomas covered their ears and Shukura shook her head in resignation, I couldn’t help but wonder if Jabran was enrolled in a school where he would learn about authors and artists with names similar to his.

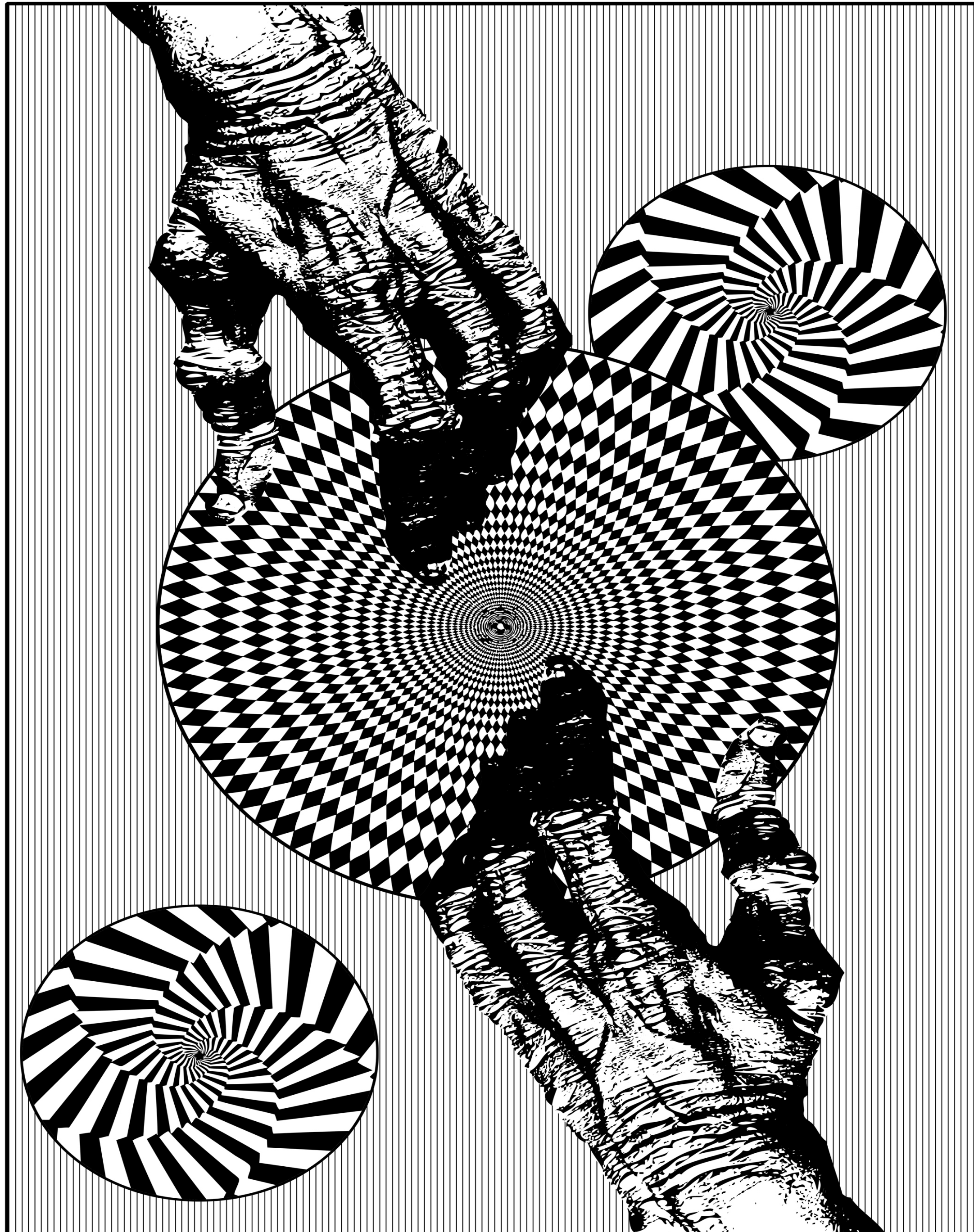
I never did ask whether he thought the music lessons were a cruel tease, an invitation to a party he knew he would never get to attend. I had my chance when we spoke at the end of class the day I joked about him becoming a TV star. He was still working at his desk, editing his essay with an orange pencil, when the bell rang and the other students started filing into the hallway.

“Jabran,” I said, “did I do something wrong?”

Shukura waved from across the room and wished me a good weekend, stepping outside with Julio and Tomas as Jabran closed his notebook and lowered it into his backpack, slinging a strap over his shoulder as he got up from his seat.

“No,” he told me as he started for the door. “You didn’t do anything. You didn’t do anything at all.”





# THESE REMAINS

MARK ESHBAUGH

# OBLATIONS

REBECCA DANELLY

- I remember you

Sitting like a wise  
woman, steam rising around you -

Scrubbing shampoo  
into your scalp,

your eyes soft  
as lipids in hot water,

green-grey as  
coastal storm clouds,

you'd forget  
how the comb would pull

and catch when I'd  
comb out the dark nests.

How you would howl,  
writhing from me.

How persistent  
I would be, your daddy

working a blue  
plastic comb through your hair.

How staunchly  
I would tell you *be still*.

POETRY

I can still hear your  
cries, see your straight spine

feel you sob then  
against my chest, damp

head under my hand,  
all the tangles gone.

-

I remember after

An entire week  
of your jawbone

set like  
a pillar of salt,

endless arguments  
about God.

I called you a liar,  
an apostate.

Sitting in front  
of your plate,

eggs getting cold  
you clenched your jaw.

*What kind of Father  
is God? Are you?*

I pointed to the door.  
*Get out, I ordered.*



Knowing what that jawbone  
meant. How that straight  
spine would never bend.

- Now

Nothing disturbs my counting  
six hundred and eighty  
nine steps

from office to a silent  
house. Not the dove  
flinging itself

up from cracked  
sidewalk into  
the branches

of an aging water oak,  
not the possum  
scurrying along

the seven-foot fence  
surrounding  
a crestfallen bungalow,

not the city bus,  
stuffed with heavy  
coated commuters.

Not even when I think  
of you, how you might  
ride through the night

POETRY

with the others who have  
no home to go to,  
curled up like

the miserable corners  
of hoarded letters  
from long-gone loves,

curled up in isolation  
in the vehicle's bright  
lights, going nowhere.

The clock tower may ring  
out the hour, the sirens  
rise out of the street's

arrested traffic. Worry,  
like a sword may press  
against my gut--

fear that you walk  
with no place to arrive to  
or that it's your spirit

not your absence that  
haunts me, that will  
one afternoon erase

the numbers that keep  
the dread at bay,  
that I will know

why you have never  
been found.

- I could seat myself on the red-cushioned pew and pray,

pray to the god that through my voice  
banished you,

pray that he would return you to me, that one silvered  
morning

while I am sitting alone over my plate of cold eggs  
half hoping

you'd knock or just walk in as if you'd never left, that  
you would

stride in, back as straight, jaw as set as the day  
you left

and I would bark or murmur or mumble *I love you*  
and you

would say *Oh Dad I love you too*, or maybe *I've*  
*missed you.*

Maybe I would rise so quickly from my chair  
I'd upset

the plate of cold eggs and the scrambled mess,  
the broken

plate would be the barrier I'd step over to reach you,  
take you

in my arms. I could pray on the pew in the quiet  
church

POETRY

for this miracle, but when I hear the carillons  
ring out

*Breathe on me Breath of God*, I feel as if  
every bell

every hymn, every prayer meets only the silent radio  
waves

that ping from the center down through the eons  
to our

remote receivers. There is the silence  
of the missing

and the silence of signals we have no capacity  
to hear.

Now, the only belief I cling to  
like a man

struggling in the chop of too great  
a depth,

damned hands gripping a buoy whose bell  
jangles

as each wave lifts it carelessly  
and drops it

again, who hopes despite being  
too far

from shore that some fisherman  
might hear him

shouting, despite the clank of the bell  
and the din

that is the ocean - like him, the only belief I can cling to is  
the belief

that I will never stop, despite the fathoms I am  
pulled into,

listening for the sound that I have may have no  
ears to hear,

listening for hope I do not feel, for salvation  
that may not come,

for the love that I should have shown in that one  
moment

when forbearance would have kept you  
at home.





# CRACKED

SUZANNE BAILIE





**WAITING**  
SUZANNE BAILIE



# THE PLAYGROUND

## MELISSA HUCKABAY

The equipment was shoddy, the paint peeling, and I wasn't sure the swings were stable, but I brought the girls to the playground anyway because there, I could draw air into my lungs and loosen the bitter tightness in my shoulders. There, the breeze slipped across our skin and we were free.

I discovered the playground last Thanksgiving, after my mother stood too close to me, stared intensely and told me I couldn't get divorced. Not shouldn't, couldn't, as if I were too fragile, as if I would dissolve into dust should I dare leave a man's orbit. Should I dare speak the truth into existence.

I'd felt a constriction rise up from my chest to my throat as my mother stood there, her breath hot on my face. I nodded and then gathered up the girls. "I'm taking them to the park," I said, the words squashed and small. "I'll be back later."

We walked on a sidewalk broken by spreading oak tree roots, my daughters joyfully jumping over the fault lines. I stepped over the cracks cautiously, warning the girls to watch their feet. They never heeded my warnings. They weren't like me.

The neighborhood was unfamiliar. It didn't have the shabby, single-level houses I remembered from my childhood, but the tall, pristine condos that marked the spread of gentrification. Tucked away in a corner of the neighborhood was the playground, an "eyesore" not yet torn down. A maverick amid ostentatiousness, its weathered skeleton felt familiar to me, and apparently to the girls too, for they ran with abandon to climb, swing and spin.

I sat in a swing, wrapping my cold fingers around the rough, rusty chains and breathing deeply. Before we left, the girls gathered up pebbles and wilted flowers—tiny universes they stowed away in their pockets.

We returned there a year later, after my mother put her hand over mine and said that I couldn't be alone, that I must find someone-- must have someone to take care of us. Her eyes were frenetic, her hand cold, squeezing my knuckles until they ached.

"I think it's time to take the girls outside," I said.

"Where? What park?"

"Just a playground nearby."

"Not that ratty old one made of metal down the street," she said, the whites of her eyes becoming more visible. "That one's dangerous. They could fall off and break their necks or get flakes of lead paint on their clothes."

I mumbled acknowledgement while putting coats on the girls, who were eager to taste the cool November air. To run down the street, skipping over breaks in the sidewalk. To swing and feel the crisp wind on their unlined faces.

I was worried it wouldn't be there, but the bulldozers had spared it for one more Thanksgiving. My daughters gleefully shed their coats and scaled the ladder to swing on monkey bars and hang upside down. Their faces were flushed with freedom, and I could breathe.

My mother's words reverberated in my mind. You must find someone. You and the girls. Because all girls must be found, not left to languish in the wild. How many universes could we travel if we stayed lost? I wondered as my hair whipped in the wind.

The following Thanksgiving, we discovered the playground was gone, and the bones of a larger, newer one made of gleaming, polished wood stood in its place. Bulldozers and excavators flanked the structure, hard at work digging up the earth and casting it aside.

My daughters cried in disappointment. My shoulders felt heavy as stones.



I knew the old playground had been shabby and maybe dangerous. The newer one would keep my girls safe. I felt a tightness in my throat, surprised by a single, hot tear on my cheek.

On the walk back, my daughters still skipped over the fault lines in the sidewalk. They still tucked pebbles in their pockets. They weren't like me.

When we returned, my mother gave me the business card of one of my father's coworker's sons. He'll be calling you, she said. I took the card, feeling the paper's smoothness between my fingers before slipping it in my coat pocket.

My daughters had dropped their coats on the ground near the doorway. I picked them up, one at a time, to hang on a rack. I hung my coat next to theirs in a neat row, remembering the tiny universes still hiding in my girls' pockets.



REMEMBERING  
KAY TASUJI





**STRIVE**  
SULOLA IMRAN ABIOLA



# FINDING LIGHT

## CHIBBI

I used to carry shame like a shield, and all its weight  
Shouldered a Wyoming fence post station to station  
Hunched and hurting 14 years to Mount Calvary  
Walking straight with all that weight - eventually

A tomb where I could disappear, the closets,  
Where I put on costume and courage to walk  
This dark sanctuary in broad daylight, el único joto  
Solo, soltero, y asustado, I have seen the beatings

Heard the sermons bullets belts blessings to hail Mary's  
For each impure thought and a long shot wish  
To shed the shield, unholster history, but all its weight  
Felt like a burden, felt like oppression, felt like an island

In a small town where out and proud looked like X  
Marks the spot, I white-knuckled that shield, buried  
My nails into my palms, self-imposed stigmata, until  
I realized a barrier looks like a [bullseye] for bullies

And I was tired of being target practice. If I was gonna be  
Fodder, let me be juicy, let me be rich, let me drip  
Wet shine, let me be gold light and fighter, for fear  
has no home in my hunger. So I sharpened that shield

Into a spear, leather-bound and harnessed the healing  
Hands of history, black, brown, and brick, so  
Here's to the riots that changed everything, to the coded  
Language making it possible to find friends of Judy

This side of the rainbow, to the milk cartons  
Thrown at beautifully (flam)buoyant bodies  
To the bruises, the bloody lips, to the blood  
A grill of rubies, a string of pearls, a limp wrist and a hard

Cocky attitude serving shade and spilling T to the boys  
 Too fluid to walk a straight line losing cold nights  
 In a celibate jail cell, to the tenacity of love, to the audacity  
 Of a kiss, to the times I have said, I'm tired, but kept going

To the times I was too tired to keep going, to the nail polish  
 Chipped off before coming home, for those of us who couldn't  
 Come home, to the eyeliner turned black eye and the right hook  
 Instinctually buried in that pious jaw, to counselors, and experimenting

On college campuses, to reclaiming pink triangles and feeling  
 My fabulous faggoty self, emanating every shade of hair dye  
 To Alex, and HangOut, and StandOut and QPOC, to the girls  
 that were actually boys, to the boys who were actually neither

To the friends that listened, to the parents that never left  
 Us, to the family we found when everybody left us. For Matthew  
 And Bree, Merci, and Riah, For hundreds more buried without a headline.  
 To Harvey, to Marsha, to Baldwin, to Ginsberg, Guillermo, Gloria, Eddie

And Gianni, to Ani, and Elton, and Freddie, to Indya, MJ, Dominique  
 And Billy, to Bunny, to Ru, George, Ricky, Whitney, to Cher, Goddess  
 Almighty, light and fighters all. To the pain and struggle that binds us  
 To our past victories and the losses ahead, to the journey to the light

To the future, to the fighters, to those that throw punches, to those  
 That write memes, to the squad soldiering the steps of congress  
 To the shy and uncomfortable souls still searching, déjame decirte  
 El único joto ya no está solo. Somos luz. Somos luchadores.

Somos lo que somos.  
 We have found our home.  
 We have found each other.  
 We are light and fighters all.

# SHADES OF RED

## BAREERAH Y. GHANI

A candid shot doused in sepia.

He is looking into the camera, his lips stretched to both ends of his face, revealing his flawless set of teeth. Perfect, like him, like the image of him. Sharp nose, sharper cheekbones and a head full of thick black hair that falls loosely over his forehead. Kind of like Jesse Katsopolis. His hair, not him. Although I can't be too sure. My mother did say he had a lot of girls run after him, lovesick.

In the picture, he has eyes like the sun; warm, and bright. His smile, like the lake that shimmers, reflects the sultry daylight. Innocence is folded into the crevices of his skin. Untainted because he is not yet twenty-four, he has not yet lost his father, not yet lost his newborn daughter, both of which will happen in the space of two weeks. His shoulders are broad but light, unburdened by life.

He is wearing a milk-chocolate colored shalwar and kameez. I'm not surprised. His love for the monochrome fabric has stayed constant like the changing of seasons. In his case, the colors have varied through the years, from shades of brown and black to white. Every cloth worn now is pure, saintly. Jesus, free of sin, wore white too. So did Muhammad.

A plush leather sofa. He is sitting on the edge of it, bent over a white desk in front of him. But the desk is not as tall. It barely comes to his waist. Or maybe he is just too tall, and the desk has adapted to the environment and knowingly made itself small in front of him. Shrunk, compact, meant to consume as little space as possible, otherwise it risks rejection. Expulsion.

A thick journal, like the many accounting ledgers on his study shelf, is resting on the left side of the table. My left, his right--point of views we have yet to align.

There are hefty books piled, one upon another, beside him on the sofa. Four others resting on the head are stacked against the wall behind him. Surrounded by hardcovers and notebooks, a graphite pencil in hand, the staple yellow highlighter resting by his wrist. Indeed, some habits don't change.

The leathery couch shines like his skin. Except his color is wheatish and the sofa, a dark, dark, dark red. Maybe this is where it all began. The color seeped into his flesh, unintentionally. Parasitic. It wasn't his fault, my mother says.

It wasn't his fault, she said trying to piece together the ceramic plate with trembling hands. There are more pieces, glinting by our feet. The dining room in my memory, drenched in sepia. Just like this image of him.

It wasn't his fault. My sister said, placing a hand on mine. Her nose no longer crooked, no longer bleeding. My room, that used to be hers, is a dark, dark, dark purple-red. Like the bruise around her eye.

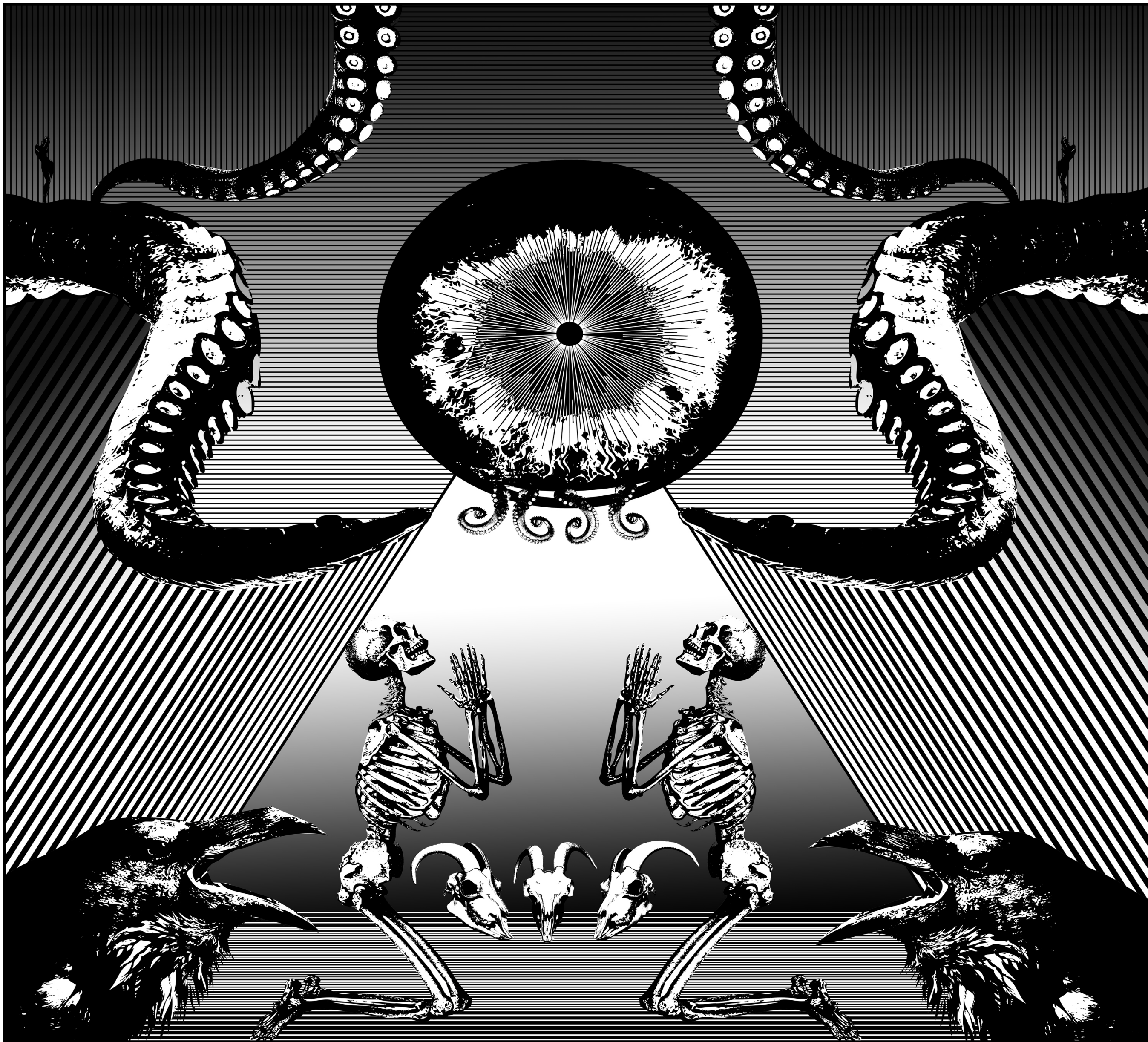
It was mine, I said. My head hung low, cheeks wet, and fingers grazing the canvas of my wrist, wine-colored stains then, now white-washed.

My mother tells me I am my father's daughter. But I don't see it. He sits there with his books, on the mahogany couch, a reddish-orange rug by his feet, a blood-orange wall-hanging in the background. Surrounded by all these shades of red, and yet he smiles, his skin intact, shining brown and proud, blemish-free.

But when I turn to the mirror, all I see is flesh. Inside out. Layers and layers of bloody vessels and arteries out in the open. A human shedding skin and recreating, shedding and recreating, shedding

~~~~~





# THE RITUAL

MARK ESHBAUGH



# A GHAZAL SINCE I DON'T WANT TO GO UNDER THE KNIFE

LILY WULFEMEYER

A fish rots from the head down but I'd lose  
my head if it weren't sewn to my flesh.

If I am woman hear me, soft,  
fracture under the weight of my flesh.

A poem is a body / a tree is a body. How to have a body?  
Imagine two souls trapped in identical flesh.

All of my portraits look like women who look like me.  
I have yet to move into my flesh.

Picture two cameras facing one another. We have / we are  
separate monsters bound to the same flesh.

Did you know / hermit crabs use doll heads for houses?  
I could let them take her / move into her flesh.

She & I climb a sapling & meet at the top. We share a family  
tree / but I snap / I can't hold her body in my flesh.

Even I gender my body as breast / hip / clit—  
can only surgery evict her from my flesh?

If I scrub myself with detergent & a sponge,  
will you see you see me / doppelgänger / in my own flesh?

I buried my pet fish beneath a red hibiscus / wished  
that I, too, could let the soil reabsorb / translate my flesh.



Give me six days to remake myself & on the seventh  
I will be queer / ed. The morphing matter of flesh.

I am speaking to you. I can bake & knead & braid but I need  
care to work with / to mold the home of my flesh.

Sit down. Watch me stride like a panther / shed  
my negative flesh.

Call me, finally, they / them / their  
flesh.





**AWAKEN**  
KAY TASUJI



# INSTEAD OF DELETING FOUR YEARS OF MESSAGES & BLOCK- ING EACH OTHER ON SOCIAL MEDIA

LILY WULFEMEYER

*After Lauren Haldeman's Instead of Dying: Poems*

—we graduate & make / a porn blog on Tumblr. You like how easily I bruise / but you don't abuse it. Our first time / you hold the phone over me POV style & rub your packer against my clit & I get so wet I drench the sheets / in a shape that reminds you of Romania, the country where you were born / into an orphanage & my breath / is muffled by a pillow you put over my head with a floral case stuffed / with your belt buckles & crumpled pages of trans sex / guides I printed off because in this version of the story / I'm not scared that you'll keep pressing until I'm gone.

We don't post the video. / You dropped the phone on my pelvis & the camera captured / my infected ingrown labial hair. We try again / & again & on camera, I moan loudly / you always penetrate me / neither of us cum & I wear the fingerless gloves that my teacher knit me in high school to soak up my anxiety / sweats before violin auditions. Off camera / you get turned on by pesto & completing / 1,000-piece puzzles. You take off your shirt / & your binder & I see / how your adoptive dad tore your back with the bad side of a belt. I can't unwrite your dad in this version / so I grip the shiny-white-wrinkled scar-flesh like handlebars when I cum. We post / nothing on the blog & it feels like there's nothing / else we could possibly do / invent together. In this version of the breakup / we don't open each other's rib / cages to let loose the buzzing wasps & the wild animals & my mother / doesn't lock me in my room for wanting / to kiss you. Our breakup isn't like a phone screen shattering / the glass shards embedded in our palms for years / the nearly expected destruction of two queer kids' hearts.

Instead we find our ways apart / quiet & easy / promise to stay in touch. (I love the word / "once" / sounds like "touch" / a kind of ghost.) Is there a version where we hold / each other? Can we perform / with the camera on the bedside table? You can / answer as well as I. There is no reason to ache as tree knots tie moonlight like bows around their waists. / I delete our account. Take my suitcase. & we each keep / going.





**SELFIE**  
ANNELIEK NIEUWLAND



# MADONNA WHORE

## RACHAEL BIGGS

It's been over twenty years since I slept with a husband that wasn't my own, vowing never to let my heart get involved in something so messy again, but my heart is nowhere near this.

At first, it gives me anxiety, but no worse than the paralysis of not knowing how I'm going to pay the rent or being \$32 short for my hydro bill. I've been through countless jobs and back to school several times, racking up debt along the way, but the weight of my inner world has become too heavy to put up with the indecencies of working for a living.

Having someone take an interest in me feels good, even if it is just sexual. He's flashy. Jersey Shore rich. Not my type, but I fool my body into thinking he is long enough to recalibrate the crippling depression of being dropped like a reeking trash bag by a struggling musician with poetic vocabulary and beautiful hands. He said I was codependent, a word he'd learned from my replacement with her ironic glasses and facial piercings. She's a Vlogger. I'm a wreck.

Maybe the husband's wife would understand. She snatched him from his previous one. Maybe we'd laugh about it, or perhaps she'd slit my jugular after publicly outing me as a home wrecking slut. Her profile told me she liked trips to Vegas with girl gangs who mirrored her fake eyelashes and silicone tits. They took pictures of themselves toasting Dom Perignon in very small dresses, their \$5,000 handbags perched in front of their alcohol-bloated bellies. I've had the same purse for at least twelve years. I got it at a thrift store on the pier and I still get compliments on it, but not from women like them.

When I ask my therapist why men cheat, she brings up the Madonna Whore Complex, and since his wife was an escort, I guess that makes me Madonna. I will consider this pious label more carefully next time I'm coming in his mouth.

# FOR ADRIENNE RICH AND MYSELF

CYMELLE LEAHA EDWARDS

*For Adrienne Rich and Myself*

Wouldn't you like to see Me baptized—Be the one who measures  
depth With the length of my—Body inches into the Body you  
stand in—And answer whom is The massive thing—Where you  
tuck me among Those nameless myths—I have seen the wreck  
With my hands—And now: it is easy to forget That my ghost has  
lifted—Because you said always Staring toward the sun—But I am  
carving flesh waves Into map—Into water—And the sun does not  
Speak at a burial like this one—





# CORNERED

CAMILLE JOSEPHINE



# LA NIÑA SIN HUARACHES

## MAITE DON

la tierra que cubre sus pies  
pequeños combina con su piel,  
formando una sombra hermosa.

el sol ya no la molesta  
y lo caliente del verano  
lo espera con sus brazos  
abiertos,  
lista para saltar  
al arroyo que se desliza  
por todo el ranchito  
donde no tiene casa.

lo único que tiene a su nombre  
es un vestido verde que cubre su  
espalda  
donde sus huesos tratan de echar  
un codazo  
mediante su piel  
un moño descolorido  
y unos pesos que suenan  
dentro una bolsita morada  
cada vez que camina.

□□

aunque su familia la dejó  
abandonada  
bajo el techo de la escuela cuando  
era una bebe,  
ella nunca lloro.  
y aunque la gente del rancho la  
trate mal,  
nunca deja que las lágrimas  
dejen un camino pintado en sus  
cachetes.

ella juega con los niños  
que no se molestan que no tenga  
hogar o familia.  
ellos solo miran otra niña con  
quien correr y divertirse.  
y la niña se divierte también,  
con su pelo enmarañado  
volando con el viento  
y su vestido verde  
la hace sentir  
como si estuviera flotando con las  
nubes  
cada vez que salta.

□□

y cuando llueve,  
nadie sabe  
donde se esconde la niña.  
los únicos testigos son la noche  
que la cobija y acurruca  
y la luna que mira con tristeza  
como las lágrimas que la niña  
nunca deja derramar  
finalmente caen al suelo,  
la lluvia misericordiosa  
escondiendo las con sus gotas  
porque no sabe cómo regresarle  
la inocencia que se le fue robada  
desde el día  
que quedó sola en el mundo.

□□





# STRANGE AFFAIRS

MARK ESHBAUGH



# LAS DOS FRIDAS

CHIBBI ORDUÑA

*Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, Mexico's most famous couple, divorced in 1939. That same year Frida painted Las Dos Fridas, a double selfportrait.*

A European Frida / In a white Victorian dress  
Holding hands

A Mexican Frida / Wearing a traditional Tehuana costume  
Hearts exposed

She bleeds out because her love cannot love all of her  
80 years later Las Dos Fridas viven

The mouth / the heart: Americans cannot swallow all of me  
Assimilation feels foul: cactus thorns piercing between teeth

We are asked to divorce our culture, to give up a piece of ourselves  
To fit in: *Quitate el nopal de la frente*, a sacrifice

To the white god for the privilege of living \in this country\  
Like Frida we bleed every time we are told to hide our accent

To only speak one language, we bleed when the features  
That foreign us are seen as stains and we believe

“White-passing” is the goal, we bleed, we are told  
how to look, what to wear, what to eat, who to be, we bleed



Every immigrant lives with these two Fridas inside them, one foot  
On each side of the border, a balancing act of identity

[Immigrants aren't the only ones asked to edit their differences  
To Photoshop themselves into the perfect picture of white America]

Isn't it funny how we paint ourselves in different lights? How even Beyoncé  
Has to bounce between being black and pop? How even Beyoncé

Has two Fridas, but no freedom?  
Code switching: a compromise to avoid persecution

We've become master manipulators of image, cropping ourselves  
Into smaller and smaller boxes: be ashamed, hide from the sun

For fear of turning a deeper hue, lighter means less threatening  
Same / Equals / Safe

\America\  
thrives on bleaching color to the bone  
severing a symphony down to a single note

\America\  
profits from picking fruit trees clean  
strips the bark off our roots

\America\  
favors filters over the facts  
Face-tuned skin tones and smiles

\America\  
Don't we look happy to be here?  
To be just // like // you?



POETRY

\America\  
Why are you so scared of color?  
Demand varnish with bleach

\America\  
Pulsing brushstrokes dissolve  
Into watery scratch

Why do you want a white canvas  
instead of a masterpiece?





# GUARDING MYSELF

REETIKA BHALLA



# THIS FIFTH KINGDOM

LAURENCE DAVIES

The strangers had landed two hours from Quebec City in the Parc Provincial des Laurentides, driven three park rangers mad but otherwise kept to themselves, and were in some way responsible for the disappearance of every visible fungus in an area of six square kilometers. Because they'd come for mushrooms, Annie Owens knew just what to do. Because her colleagues, Johnny Cope and Fred Douthe, were wrong or scared, she did it on her own.

Not since the killer peppercorns had she felt so prominent, so necessary. Trying not to jostle, she squeezed past the famed brawling novelist, the President of Nigeria, and the first woman to reach the South Pole on skis. They looked, the lot of them, like ten-year-olds enduring their fifth wet Sunday in a row. In the trampled bister mud of the field surrounding the base, eight hard-hatted women and as many men were coaxing a temporary stage into standing on its own four feet. *King Lear* from the Royal Shakespeare Company on that stage tonight and tomorrow, and in case that gave the wrong impression, *As You Like It* would chase the shadows of a puppet play from Bali. Feeding the plays, a carousel and a restless laser sculpture with fat cables snaked around it from a power truck.

One of the cables tripped Annie Owens. She stumbled, missing by a palm's breadth a fakir stretched, in ecstasy or expectation, on his bed of nails. It was time to set off on her voyage. The scent of balsam fir, the brusque commands of the construction boss, the humid light of a morning in late August came to her more faintly as she stood, head bowed, breathing too fast. Here, so close, she felt the absence as a vacuum that sucked at her mind and sent it spiralling, a witch ball in a maelstrom. She braced herself to ride the vortex.

Immeasurable heights, impossible depths, she slithered on a wall of molten glass. Lungs crushed and stomach wrenched, she struggled to jettison every piece of clutter in her mind, flinging it overboard until she had no more to fling, until the very idea of cargo went as well. Lost and empty in the void, Annie Owens thought of mushrooms.

Of a sudden light in mossy woods, life cascading from a dead beech, comb upon fragile ivory comb. Of golden horns, fluted and filigreed, poised in nonchalant asymmetry. Of the finest of rusty webs floating between cap and stalk. Of *Pilobolus* shooting volleys at the sun.

She had come through. In place of the whirlpool there spread out a copper sea ruffled only by the slightest and oiliest of waves. Bodiless voices in a score of languages whispered and pleaded:

*Nuestras vidas son los rios.* Jen-min jih pao. One nation indivisible. Todesfuge. Obatala. Lima, eva, fitu, valu. Ces espaces infinis. Quia impossible est. Man's unconquerable. Shema Yisroel. Internal combustion to nuclear fission in only. Nur ein Gleichnis. Rest mass equals. Love, glove. Satyagraha. Over ninety billion served. Chomei.

The waves rippled on toward a hidden coast, the sun smoldering above it. In the halo of the sun, a head broke the surface, water streamed from shoulders; a colossal form breasted the ocean.

Giddy again, Annie Owens focused with desperate concentration on her bait. It was a glossy, red-capped, bone-stalked *Russula* whose grainy flesh would shatter at a blow. Crowding together twelve years' experience in the field and on the bench, she enlarged the image. Some of the gills had flaked away and some were pitted with grub holes, but the long-short radial pattern stood out clearer for



its imperfections. Between its gills were a valley of chalk cliffs. Enlarged again, and the spherocytes came into sight, so densely packed, so ready to slip past each other. Club-shaped basidia fired their warty, lemon spores.

“You understand this fifth kingdom?”

The voice shook her bones. Rather than hearing the words, she soaked them in. Rather than saying the words, they laid them in her mind. “It is my work to study them,” she said.

“Let it be your work to show us. Are there no more like you?”

“Yes, but timid.”

“You are not?”

“Your species doesn’t scare me.”

“Yes, our species. Come inside.”

She came to, still standing in the mud. A door opened. She moved forward. To the left and right, earnest scarecrows tried to cross the absence. They davened, some of them, prayerfully, and some stood still as a reaped field. She left them all behind.

## II

The world of men and women passed by in an octagon of blue polymer thirty feet above the ground. During the long spells when her mind was left alone, she watched the postulants. Day after day they came to cut their capers in the hardening mud. The door never opened.

“I want to know. Would you please tell me why? The ecosystem of your home?”

At first, delay. Words, concepts hovered. She saw trees pointing at an aquamarine sun, the trunks of other trees sprawled on the ground like spilled matches. Time propelled forward. She watched the standing trees topple. Some of the more weathered fallen trunks began to blur, and if they lay on uneven ground, to sag. A sluggish ichor trickled from them, draining into the earth. When only a fibrous husk remained, the husk crumbled and blew away in the wind as saplings began their reaching for the aquamarine sun.

Now there was a lake, fish swimming in it, three-eyed and razor-finned. Some of them moved stiffly through the water, as if their backbones had begun to petrify; around the failing gills bloomed thickets of mold.

Then nothing, void.

*No higher forms? But, surely, elsewhere?*

A slowly turning diorama of fungal shapes bloomed in her mind. A crowd, a procession of animals marching past on all twos and threes, and fours and fives, in a Triumph of Exploration. They carried knives, flowers, blueprints, instruments unguessable. They crawled, gesticulated, strode, swam, leaped, hobbled, sidled, galloped, fanned membranous wings. Some bounced along like tumbleweed; others trod with the unstoppable deliberation of middle-aged elephants. After an hour or two, the very heterogeneity of smiles, snarls, grunts, farts, rhythmic and arrhythmic, dancing necks and heavenly singing began to weary her. The crowds came on more thinly and more slowly. Sounds slurred, angles slewed, the moments of dreaming madness before true sleep.

The copper sea again. Far in the distance a gigantic back turned away.

“Listen, damn you. I am Annie Owens, mycologist, thirty-four years old. I live, I live, I lived in a triple-decker just over the Somerville line. When I was a girl we had a goat called Betsy Ross. Tabasco with my eggs, please: boiled four minutes, give or take. Five foot five, a prolapsed left nipple, and green eyes. 25 co-authored papers, and a monograph on aflatoxins. Nine gourmet diners dead in Santa Barbara,



and I knew why. More mycelia than peppercorns.”

The head, all that was visible now, stopped moving.

“Found a new bolete,” she said, “mycorrhizal with wild cherry. *Tylopilus doutheii*. Named for my advisor: he wanted to fuck me, but I used his name instead. Could that happen on your blue world? Born in Delaware, married one and a half times, read the whole of Shakespeare, even *King John*. One thirty-five in a school zone, one no-left-turn in the previous two years. Let me tell you a tale, a tale of Scheherezade.”

The last bristling hairs sank beneath the surface.

### III

They went out bat-like, flitting. For all the criss-cross lights and restless lenses, no catching them.

In the woods and in the meadows, luck or her mushroom sense found what she needed, always. Every time the fruitings came, jauntily, miraculously, but if nothing else had fruited, if nothing else, ladders of *Piptoporus* climbed the ghostly birches, and varnished *Ganoderma* shone in the dark of hemlock groves. Every time till winter comes.

### IV

She was watching a game of dim blue soccer the day her colleague found her. There was a striped team and a plain team: the stripes wore peaked caps and waved their arms; the plains wore baggy shorts. The ball trundled leadenly from foot to foot.

Undershot jaw, lunging walk, black, sleepy eyes behind wire-rimmed eyeglasses, Johnny Cope found had found his courage. Under his arm he carried two fresh baguettes, and in his freckled hands, a pot of beach-plum jelly and two sticks of butter, unsalted.

“They might take me along when they go,” Annie said to Johnny, “but I’ll have to try harder. When the winter comes, there won’t be so much to show them. Right now, where would you go for *Dictyophora*? Oh, and the jelly was nice of you. Sometimes they forget about food.”

He needed her level of concentration to stay. *Gyromitra* did the trick: nice big ones, rife with toxins. It was like a rough crossing to Nantucket. Cookies nearly came adrift. Worth it anyhow. He had it figured out: concentrate, and you’d get the call.

Within two days, Johnny was spent, lying in the blue light, reining in his breath. How had he gotten along before he worked with stinkhorns?

“There went my *Clathrus*,” he said. “It just fell apart. I could see it all right, good and red, nice, well-built lattice, but then the smell. Oh God, I could hear the blowflies fussing and the smell stuck in my throat so I gagged, and the flies turned greener; I could feel the smell against my palate it was so thick, and thinking about it just made it all the stronger, and if I didn’t think about it, the lattice would crumble, and I lost the picture, and that smell.”

“Fred Douthe had tried as well,” Annie confessed, “but he got whisked away in an ambulance yelling that his head was caving in. Can’t have known how to focus. Dirty mind.”



## V

Annie stared at herself: her straw-stuffed pants and shirt batted to and fro by a kittenish wind, a small derby jammed low on her forehead. At twilight she caught fire, roaring soundlessly to heaven. Pieces of her scattered like shrapnel and laid in the smoking, purple archipelagos. By midnight she was out; only the stars burned on.

Johnny would have liked the show, but Johnny had gone back. To Cambridge, to New Haven; she didn't know. All she knew was the last sight of him, stumbling from the base.

"Why, why, why?" Annie had said. "I'm here for you. And you for what? You'll be all alone. They'll throw you out like a bolete full o' maggots. What good's a mycologist with no fungi?"

## IX

They hanged her in effigy, and within a week some of them hanged themselves. Others favored knives, poison, even gasoline. But the base had seen that, too. The ocean shivered a little and subsided into doldrums. Seen that, many times before. But Annie, she could offer something new, offer it up till the smokes pleased heaven, until the winter came, until the Caliph lost the story.

## X

Deep in an oak-wood grew a *Chanterelle*, bright as the terrestrial sun and smelling, yes, of apricots.





# GOR

DEREK ROPER





# TSATHOGGUA

DEREK ROPER



# NUESTRA PATRIA

NATASHA CARRIZOSA

holy mother  
of God

seated in stone cloud  
red and white prayers  
slow burning embers  
dripping from mouth

leaden lagrimas  
nailed sun bloodstains  
salvation and sacrifice  
suspended glory  
her eyes brimming  
purgatory  
es una lástima

where will her poor children run  
when it rains blood fire in the streets?

what happens to a rich man's soul  
when an angel folds her wings?

holy mother  
of wolf and lamb

el lobo se traga a los pobres



elite read  
from milton translation  
glass mansion retreat  
paradise lost  
the good book of retiro

no one here  
knows of ghent  
everyone here  
will testify  
beyond  
poverty line  
del grupo mondongo  
milagro

it reads  
como red words in bible  
it binds como red chord famine  
corrugated sheet metal  
congregation  
barren barrio choir

singing oraciones  
below black wires

wicked men like poor women  
never sleep  
preachers like politicians  
sell souls for babylonian dreams

holy mother  
of labyrinthine alleys  
blind faith y guitarra  
of scavenged bricks  
y las jarras



POETRY

holy mother  
of cocaine paste paco  
y pintar de negros  
of plastilina cera y alquitrán  
acero e hilos de algodón  
sobre madera

holy mother  
of slum altar  
of violence and rebellion  
of entrapment and innocence  
of rags and eye of Ra  
salt water

holy mother  
of villa 31  
nuestra patria  
del espejo y del humo

cierre el ojo  
open the sky



## JESSICA CAROLINA GONZÁLEZ



# TWO BY TWO

NATASHA CARRIZOSA

this morning  
this morning i  
this morning felt like  
this morning my skin caught  
this morning fire. engulfed by anger.  
this morning smoldering white at the end.

the end  
the end burns  
the end like ocean  
the end water in eyes  
the end is. salt water sting.  
the end is drowning. deep blues. prayers.

prayers are  
prayers are unfulfilled  
prayers: blind-eye fishes  
prayers swim/ be upstream wishes  
prayers be pearl necklaces. mercy me.  
prayers found. sinner soul. foundation. sand. land.

land is  
land. i land  
land. feet planted in  
land: sacred ground. surrounded by  
land - sunbeam circumstance. held. GOD's hands.  
land. touched by no man. I AM.



I AM  
I AM created  
I AM. HER image  
I AM fire. wind. unseen  
I AM holy water. fish. believe.  
I AM. smoke to eyes. vinegar. teeth.  
I AM. rise up kingdom. seek ye first.

this morning  
the end  
prayers are  
land is  
I AM





**STALKED**

CAMILLE JOSEPHINE



# MERCADO CARAGUAY

## LAURA LUCIA QUINTON

You go to buy two racks of crabs. Upon arrival  
you are in a scene worthy of b-roll for an episode

of Chef's Table. Salt fills the air as it does  
when you walk along a beach's shore. Water splashes

onto your bare toes, there is no sand just leftover guts.  
An assortment sea creatures that display erosion

spread onto tables. They move, yearning for the sea  
they've been taken from. Le vendo, le vendo, a chorus.

A woman touches your arm, *¿Que quiere amiga?* You smile,  
shake your head, don't pull away or jump at her touch

as you might have in a city where no one makes eye contact.  
These were places you did not inhabit as a child. You find

yourself a tourist in a land you crave when away.





# HATCHET JOB

K.A. CLEMENT



# SELF-PORTRAIT

ELSA PAIR

In my head, I am  
a magnolia blossom.

I am a bath full of water,  
a dark pool, bottomless.

I am held at arm's length  
where I cannot sink my teeth

into the tender flesh  
of your thigh.

I am the phantom at your window,  
waiting,

pressing my hand  
against the glass

and hoping you'll press back.

I am pliant; sweet. Pretty  
when you squint.

Not the bitch who drew blood  
when she kissed you too hard.



## POETRY

In my head, I am  
something from a horror film,  
something seething beneath  
your bed,

grudges clenched in my teeth  
like a dog with a bone.

I am unforgettable, unknowable,  
tearing your carpet to shreds.





# THE HANGER

ANN PRIVATEER



# THE CORNERS OF MY MOUTH

JENNIFER NESSEL

*Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.*

*There is no happiness like mine.*

*I have been eating poetry.<sup>1</sup>*

## b u t t o n s

When he finishes, he turns over, tearing the comforter off of my legs and exposing them to the biting chill of the standing fan. At the sound of his snoring, I sit up and part my hair from my face, accidentally marking it with lubricant as if to say *Yes, he has left my body and entered his<sup>1</sup>*. I look down at my legs, overtaken by vines of scratches trailing and spilling over the sides of my hips. This room feels foreign despite the hint of distant rain, an underbelly of cloud stealing its way over the orange tinge of the afternoon like an unwelcome visitor.

The men invited to my room fill me with salvageable things; things they might find in an alleyway beside a coffee shop or nestled in between someone in line at the DMV. I take this lint or cheesecake or playing card with both hands because that is the proper way. I sit cross legged beside the bed and thank them, situating myself in between their legs, my long hair coming to a point at the bridge of my collarbone. *The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,/Glowed on the marble.<sup>2</sup>* There is a woman in the bedroom mirror, but I do not look at her. She is covering her eyes.

## d a n d e l i o n

I had always needed filling. When I was young, a small boy approached me with a dandelion he plucked while waiting for the school bus. *In spring/ the moccasin flowers/ reach for the crackling/ lick of the sun/ and burn down.* I was never told how to respond, was never given the instructions to look him in the eyes, to press my fingers together. I nodded solemnly, taking the shoot and plunging it into my mouth. I chewed while he ran away and chewed while the teacher made me write my name on the blackboard three times. Once for when I took the flower. Once for when it went in my mouth. Once for when I spit it back into the Earth.

On leaving bed, I enter the hallway, where snaking strings of yarn sit atop a coating of construction paper on the floor like fallen leaves. On the way to the bathroom, I search the floor for the clothes my body had once clung to, tracing my eyes over the canopy of white like a displaced lover. *Because of their great beauty, young men sometimes follow the antelope and are lost forever. Even if those foolish ones find themselves and return, they are never again right in their heads<sup>3</sup>.*

<sup>1</sup> Strand, Mark. "Eating Poetry."

<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare, William. 77. Cf. Antony and Cleopatra, II, ii, l. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver, Mary. Moccasin Flowers.



## b l o o d

In the bathroom, I lie beside the empty bathtub and listen to the water pour out of a broken pipe that grows fatter and heavier until—all at once—it screeches from within the wall. I stare at the broken soap fixture, intent on the cluster of residue that trails the side of the grout. *What are the roots that clutch/ what branches grow out of this stony rubbish?*<sup>4</sup> There is only me and the groan and the itching feeling of the bathtub against my tit so I pull myself up from the siding and strain to ignite the cupcake scented candle on the corner of the peeling tub. Momma had once told me not to make problems where there were none. I had looked at her stony face and said watch me.

I wait for the steam to bubble the paint on the ceiling before climbing in. The woman in the mirror appears as bits of me dissolve into the hot water. Her lopsided, sunken eyes hike across the hills of gray skin. I pull my hair over her eyes to avoid her hideousness. Instead, the strands cling to my face like one-thousand small arms reaching out over my mouth, saying no, no, no don't you dare let the words out. She asks why poetry rises like sick in my throat. *I tell her I sing roses, too/ my hands in dirt where she blooms forever*<sup>5</sup>. I respond that there are no longer places to hide it. The words land upon my bulging stomach. Hold them, the grout says. Cling them to you 'till they harden on your side.

## s o a p

He asks, are you coming out sometime soon? I cannot respond, so I submerge my head underneath the water, pretending to wash my hair. When I rise again, I tell the grout that there is a woman in an apartment in northern Alabama pretending to be me, staring at the lifelines of grout on the bathroom wall and picking at her nails. It tells me to wash my body with soap to rid myself of her. *O my much praised but-not-altogether-satisfactory lady*<sup>6</sup>. I put the bar of soap to my mouth and rake my front teeth across its topside. The pieces dissolve across my tongue. A smile grows across the woman's face in the bathtub fixture, who comments on how big my stomach has become.

Eating soap or skin or buttons reminds me of Momma, who had been alone for only a week before the mobile home had emptied itself of Daddy overnight. *Home is so sad./ It stays as it was left/ Shaped to the comfort of the last to go/ as if to win them back.*<sup>7</sup> I was young and not young when I learned that there was another woman Daddy was loving. That it was Momma's fault because she had known about it from the moment they married and hadn't said anything about it. Not to anyone, not to me.

## p a p e r

*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.*<sup>8</sup> Shortly after Daddy left, I was sitting at the kitchen table eating cereal seeing Momma had forgotten to take me to school. Momma was on the phone, wrapping and unwrapping the cord around her

<sup>4</sup> Linderman, Frank. Pretty Shield, Medicine Woman of the Crows.

<sup>5</sup> T.S. Eliot. "The Waste Land."

<sup>6</sup> Pond, Ezra. "The Bath-Tub."

<sup>7</sup> Larkin, Phillip. "Home Is So Sad."

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:11



finger. Momma turned and looked at me intently, waiting. She had nodded and said, I understand, before hanging up the phone.

She came back to the table and for a long time we sat there without saying a word to one another. The sunlight spread over the red roses on the table cloth, ushering Momma to rise from her seat, stand behind me, and rub my shoulders. I looked up at Momma and asked, what's wrong—why are you upset? Mrs. Kitteridge from down the street told her that our church, St. Augustine's, didn't want us coming. We weren't welcome, what with Daddy leaving and all. In response, I stared into the bobbing heads of my uneaten Cheerios as I heard my mother shuffle down the hall, closing the door to her bedroom.

### c l o t h

When Momma retreated to her bed, the men learned to follow. I remember how the house would grow when Michel would visit, his shadow trailing over bunny-eared slippers and Power Ranger pajamas. He was the Second Coming, the Second Father. Quebecois began to seep across the dinner table at odd moments, no longer pass the bread, but *donne-le moi*. The days were filled with waiting, he told me as I kicked my feet against the wooden kitchen chair to the beat of Dragon Tales. He promised me that behavior equaled reward. I knew not to cry when I saw him at the edge of my bed. He was outside more than inside, but he was inside, too. He prepared the skin for insertion, tracing his fingers across hills and valleys of flesh. He assured me that him being a doctor allowed flesh to mean flesh. Touch was an icy February moon splattered across black curtains. Michel saying, *Non, ce n'est pas le moment*.

And just like that there were mornings, too. Alone, I crept out of a closet-turned-bedroom towards the dust-pale blue of April. There were no consequences for breakfast besides sitting across from him, sharing his meals.

*Ta mère rend visite à sa soeur*

Yes.

*Peut-être tu veut faire les courses avec moi?*

No, I don't think so.

Ok.

### s a n d

The button was the first. I found it lying face down on my bedside table. Tortoise shell like a cat I once saw roaming at the bottom of the hill near my mother's mobile home, beside the man made lake where, sitting atop of the misshapen rocks, I had once watched the water ribbon with fallen leaves riddled with pinpoint holes. I was pressing my hands to my face, looking at the button when I noticed the rumbling in my



stomach. The button slipped to the back of my throat easily enough, except that I paused before swallowing to take a breath, forgetting that I had gotten braces only days prior. I had hoped to choke on it as my tongue cut into the metal on my teeth, a solid force of plastic washed in blood. The button fell into the black pit as if to *x* how

## f l o w e r s

My Momma was somewhere in between the boyfriends, the alcohol, and the series of mismatched friendships as a shape of color from bedroom to kitchen to bedroom, again. Michel begat Howie begat David who begat Bryce who begot men whose names were barely mentioned, and all the while, my stomach grew with the objects that made it their home. *As you from crimes would pardon'd be, / Let your indulgence set me free*<sup>9</sup>.

The woman is silent as I unplug the drain. I lay on the bathroom floor and wait for the cold to seep into my insides. The door locked and the groaning pipe silent. It is too much to slip clothes back over my head, to find the arm holes, to crawl back into a mess of multi-colored skin. *While I spoke, / The thought I called a flower grew nettle-rough— / The thoughts called bees stung me to festering*<sup>10</sup>. My finger finds its way to my mouth and I begin to rip against skin. It pulls too far, trails up the side. Breaking a seal is much easier than easing those corners back together again.

## h a i r

When I leave the bathroom, I find him standing by the fridge, saying there is nothing to eat. How can there be nothing to eat? I wonder when he might have woken up and dressed, and what intimacy was left behind in the sheets. Wrapping my arms around him, I tell him that what he could eat cannot be contained in him. Still naked, I lead him to where the secrets are kept, deep in the throngs of a misshapen bed where I lay. I am eager to tell him of the moments that have come to pass between bedroom to kitchen to bedroom, again. Head to shoulder, I whisper how the woman in the mirror has been smiling recently, how it is uncommon for men in my bedroom to learn of this. But I hear his breath shudder, and he does not pause for me. I pull his hair taut as if to say *mush, stay, stop*. He does not hear me. His shadow does not look the same way it did when it came into my bedroom, and I wonder if this is how it felt to watch my Momma die in pieces like I always thought she would.

<sup>9</sup> Shakespeare, William. *The Tempest*. Act V, Epilogue, 19-20.

<sup>10</sup> Barrett Browning, Elizabeth. "Pain in Pleasure"





# THE CONSTANT MONOLOGUE

SUZANNE BAILIE



# NEW FLESH

AMANDA ORTIZ

Father, I am not asking for forgiveness,  
this time, I am beyond expecting understanding, nor do I  
wish we were closer, because I know  
better now, I do.  
I do not want to keep doing the things you expected of me,  
you didn't know me then and you still won't.  
All I want now is the strength to be the person you never were for me.

\*

God looked nothing like herself that night in the club, which is to say she looked exactly how she wanted to  
under all the moving lights, glitter on her eyes transfixing everyone to anything but her direct gaze.

God was very nearly lost, too far gone she realized, closer to the edge than she had ever been but she was  
pushing on.

God snakes her way through a crowd to slam her card down at the bar, a White Claw, black cherry, and two  
shots of grapefruit vodka for one, she thinks the challenge is fun.

God can't know what she doesn't know and she's never needed a come-to-Jesus moment, she can't fathom  
what that could look like for her, this running is all she's known.

We find God a few moments later, not far from the bar, taking an exo from an ex, she doesn't see herself for  
the rest of the night.

God takes an Uber home, we don't know how many hours later, but this being in the back seat is  
unrecognizable, how much longer will she be lost?



\*

The man in my dreams tells me to  
put salt and lime in a wound

and pray that I heal.  
My flesh holds layers of grief  
and I scrub myself raw. The acid makes  
my skin new.

When juice runs down mixing with blood  
I find no scars.  
The glass here is never empty.  
When I call out,  
thousands of voices echo back.

I remember the way he taught me to drink.  
Watching bottles and bottles, the kitchen littered  
with limes and circles of salt  
around my solitary figure,  
I wait for the ritual to expel demons and protect myself.  
I spin until the kitchen blurs and I'm not here anymore anyway.

I see myself in a new lover,  
see the way we walk away from help  
and let addiction swallow us whole  
We chase the stars every night— we  
soar higher and higher.  
I think of the impossible loneliness of the sky.  
I pray that I'm able to heal.



# ART CONTRIBUTORS

**Sulola Imran Abiola** (The official Sulola) is a Nigerian photographer & poet, a lover of art & a public servant in his early twenties. He is concerned about telling tales about everything in an elaborate manner. His works have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Quills*, *Undivided magazine*, *Rasa Literary Review*, *Kalopsia Lit journals* & elsewhere. If he's not writing, he's savouring the sounds of phone shutters.

**Suzanne Bailie** is an artist and writer. Since childhood Suzanne loved manipulating paper. Her first creation was a covered wagon made from orange construction paper and all the tape she could find in her parents' house. Her award-winning collages are vibrantly whimsical or darkly disturbing. A published poet, her writings look at the world of everyday people with compassion and confusion. Suzanne wrote her first play while living on a coffee farm in the jungles of Hawaii. It was produced by a local theatre company and she hasn't stopped hitting the keyboard since. Her creations are described as in your face reality whipped together with humanity, truth and unexpected laughter. [www.SuzanneBailie.com](http://www.SuzanneBailie.com)

**Reetika Bhalla** has done her BFA in painting from Amity university noida. She is currently pursuing her MFA in painting from Amity university noida. She has participated in 4 annual exhibitions held at Amity university. She has participated in *Delhi Art Marathon 2020*. She has received a special award for being selected in top 32 artists in *International Online Miniature Art Contest 2020*. Her works are amalgamation of realistic and surrealistic objects. Her compositions deal with scenarios that are happening around her or with her.

**K.A. Clement** is an ESL instructor and sometime visual artist based in Houston, Texas. He has studied drawing and painting, but in recent years has been interested in creating art form everyday things that might be found in a junk pile or lying in the corner of a dirty garage.

**Mark Eshbaugh** has been a working artist for twenty years. He has a Bachelors of Fine Arts degree University of Massachusetts- Lowell and a Masters of Fine Arts degree from the Savannah College of Art and Design. Mark has taught workshops in the United States, Mexico and Europe. He has taught at Bridgewater State University, St. Anselm College, Montserrat College of Art, Anna Maria College, and the University of Massachusetts at Lowell. HE exhibited his images in several solo exhibitions and over 100 group exhibitions worldwide. As an illustrator, he explores dream states, anxiety, fear, desires, and the subconscious with elements of surrealism and optical illusions in multi-focal point imagery. As a photographer, he was among the first to explore split images over multiple rolls of film in a single exposure in a significant way. He authored a textbook on alternative processes and excels in PT/PD printing, chrysotypes, cyanotypes, and gum dichromate printing. He has given public lectures on his artwork in galleries, museums, and on television. Mark's work has been shown in museums and galleries around the globe and has received Juror Awards in a number of exhibitions. Mark's images are included in several private and public collections.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Jessica Carolina González** is a multidisciplinary artist from Houston, TX. She has a BFA in Photography and Digital Media, BA in World Cultures and Literatures: Global Modernity Studies, and Spanish Minor from the University of Houston. In her work, González utilizes traditional archives and the archives of her bloodline, to explore conflicts of representation in a post-colonial landscape. Her work has been featured at Art League Houston as part of Latino Art Now Here Ahora! and Día de los Muertos Community Altar: De Amor, Nadie se Muere, for Pangea World Theatre in Minneapolis, MN. González was a featured panelist in Caged, Enraged, and Engaged: Challenging American Immigration Policy at Texas Tech University in Lubbock, TX, and has produced translating work for Ediciones Vigía in Matanzas, Cuba.

**Camille Josephine** is a commercial and fine arts photographer currently based in Houston, Texas. She earned her Bachelor's Degree in Photography and Media Arts from St. Edward's University in Austin, TX, and graduated in 2020. Her work ranges from event photography to alternative process prints made from analog photos. She has worked for companies such as SXSW and Austin City Limits, while also having work exhibited at the Houston Center of Photography and the St. Edward's University Fine Arts Gallery. Camille has a wide photographic vision, and is able to produce work in a multitude of genres.

**Ann Privateer** is a poet, artist, and photographer. Some of her work has appeared in Third Wednesday and Entering to name a few.

**Derek Roper** has dedicated his creativity and ingenuity to the cosmic mythos. The Mad Artist focuses much of his work on the mysteries of comic horror. Some of his favorite classic cosmic horror stories include the Call of Cthulhu, The Shadow Over Innsmouth, and the King in Yellow. Of course, there are many more! His passion for these stories and the mythos drive his creative processes. Derek primarily works with digital art, but also has a passion for clay work and wood burning. He is always working with new mediums to portray his art.

**Kay Tasuji** is originally from Iran. She has received her BFA from the University of Houston and currently lives and practices locally in Houston. Her whimsical and poetic landscapes are triggered by the cultural subtleties of her unique background. She looks at both cultural and social themes, in which she reflects on the complexities of her own personal story as well as the surrounding historical and political context. Kay tries to portray the emotional depth and intensity of experience through this cultural lens. Her paintings and drawings reflect a mixed identity of interaction, collectiveness, solace, isolation, struggle, chaos, and turmoil on a constantly evolving stage. She is interested in the intricacy, flexibility, continually changing or sometimes seemingly static state of individuals and the inconsistencies and contradictions that human life can unfold. Her works on yupo are detailed and meticulous drawings that combine soft lines and strong rich colors that daringly invite the audience into this interpretation of the world. Kay's landscapes galvanize the viewer to become a part of the narrative. She uses organic lines, natural forms, and distinct points and dots that form soft shadows and shapes in her pieces. She loves to use bursts of vivid colors to evoke emotional invasion against a backdrop of calmness, stillness, and apparent uniformity. Each illustration depicts a piece of an unfinished story where the audience's senses are asked to follow parts that are moving, twisting, decaying, and growing.



# POETRY CONTRIBUTORS

**Chibbi** is a Mexican-born, Texas raised poet, actor, and makeup artist. He started performing poetry in Austin in 2006, is the founder of Laredo BorderSlam, and a founding member of the Houston poetry spot, Write About Now. He has self-published 2 books, and was the co-editor of the anthology *Contra: Texas Poets Speak Out* (Flowersong Press 2020). He is a 2 time San Antonio Slam Champion, and his team took 3rd place in the 2017 National Poetry Slam Group Piece Competition. In print, he's been featured in the Houston LGBTQIA magazine *OutSmart* and in the 2020 *Latino Book Review Magazine*; online, his work can be found on *We Are Mitu*, *George Takei*, *Write About Now*, *Button Poetry*, and *SlamFind*.

**Natasha Carrizosa** is a poet, writer, emcee, and speaker. Her work is deeply rooted in her childhood and life experiences. Raised as the daughter of a fierce African-American mother and Mexican father, her writing reflects the dichotomy of these two rich cultures. She is author of *mexiafricana*, *heavy light*, and *crown*. Her work has recently been published in *iManteca!* - an anthology of Afro-Latino poets and *R2: The Rice Review* (Rice University.) She has performed her work and conducted workshops for audiences in Madrid, Paris, St. Lucia, New York, Chicago, Houston and countless other cities.

USAF veteran **Rebecca Danelly** attended the University of Houston where she received her BA in Creative Writing. Since then, she has been a stepmother, taught, trained dogs, and has had poems published in literary journals and anthologies. In 2019, she co-founded Poetry Around Houston, a free monthly generative writing workshop. In the wake of COVID-19, the workshop continues online and now features quarterly readings, as well. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Poetry at Texas State University, a lifelong dream inspired and supported by the workshops, conferences, and people in the Houston literary community.

**Maite Don** is a recent undergrad from the University of Houston and graduated with a BA in English with a focus on Creative Writing. Her passion for writing began when she was 10 years old and has continued since then. She hopes to one day become a voice other people can relate to no matter what background they come from and she has a lot of fun bringing her Mexican culture to life through her words and wants to spread her love of writing even more.

**Cymelle Leah Edwards** (she/her) is a poet from Flagstaff, AZ. She is the author of *Coordinates* (forthcoming from *Dancing Girl Press*). Her work has been published in *Elm Leaves Journal*, *Contra Viento*, and *Ghost City Review* and has been honored with the Diana Gabaldon Graduate Creative Writing Award. She is an MFA Creative Writing candidate at Northern Arizona University where she closely examines the “sound-specific” ethos of poetry and performative arts. Edwards also serves as poetry editor of *Thin Air Magazine* and board member for the Northern Arizona Book Festival.

**Amanda Ortiz** is a poet and educator living in Houston, Texas. They graduated from the University of Houston's undergraduate creative writing program and have since gone on to become a work from home cat parent with a passion for making the English language accessi-



ble. Find their words and more in one of their many self-published chapbooks available now.

**Elsa Pair** is a recent graduate from the University of Houston, where she received Bachelor's degrees in English and psychology. She was the poetry editor for *Glass Mountain Magazine*, where her essays "Modernist Alienation in Tommy Orange's *There There*" and "The Swamp Between Her Legs: Ideals of Femininity and Womanhood in Helena Maria Viramontes' *Under the Feet of Jesus*" have been published in issues 22 and 24, respectively.

**Laura Lucia Quinton** is an Ecuadorian born American poet. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Creative Writing from the University of Houston. Laura's work is often centered around her identity as a first-generation immigrant and Army Veteran.

**Lily Wulfemeyer** is one of those liminal job-hunting beasts who graduated college in May of 2020. They studied English, creative writing, and museums and cultural heritage at Rice University, where they received honors for a mixed-genre thesis exploring trauma in the teenage years, what it's like to have and mold a physical body, and being genderqueer / an inbetweener. Lily's work reflects an artistic practice that functions as an act of healing or resolution or maybe just respite in the face of diagnoses and mental illness that institutions have failed to treat. Formerly, they were the editor-in-chief of *R2: The Rice Review* and the editorial and design assistant for T E X L A N D I A.



## PROSE CONTRIBUTORS

**Rachael Biggs** is an author whose memoir *Yearning for Nothings and Nobodies*, published in 2012. She studied creative writing at Langara College and UCLA and holds a screenwriting diploma from Vancouver Film School. Her fiction has appeared in *The Dalhousie Review*, *Door is a Jar*, *Horror Sleaze Trash*, *Charge Magazine*, *5 on the Fifth*, *Cliterature*, *Adelaide* and *Waymark Magazines* as well as *Train River Publishing's 2020 Anthology*. Her short fiction anthology *Forlorn Unicorn* will be available through Adelaide Books in October 2021. WS: rachaelbiggs.com IG: @rachael\_biggs\_author

**Jennifer Nessel** is an emerging writer based in Baltimore. Her stories are published or are forthcoming in *Defunkt*, *Apple in the Dark*, *Flash Frontier*, and others. Her book review blog can be found on Instagram @ajennyforurthoughts.

**Melissa Huckabay** is a poet and multi-genre writer based in Central Texas. She is pursuing an MFA in poetry from Texas State University and previously worked as a high-school teacher and journalist. Her story "The Playground" won the Spider's Web Flash Fiction Prize from *Spider Road Press* in 2019, and her poetry has been featured in *The Remembered Arts Journal* and *The Inkling*.

**Laurence Davies** is Welsh and now lives in Scotland, just south of the Highland Line. He has also lived in London, Melbourne, New Hampshire and Vermont. Among many other venues, his fiction has appeared in *New England Review*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Contrast*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Diagram*, and the anthology *Ghost Writing* (*Invisible Cities Press*); he has also contributed to the podcast *Bound off*.

**Craig Fishbane** is the author of the short fiction collection *On the Proper Role of Desire*. His work has also appeared in *New World Writing*, *the MacGuffin*, *Hobart*, *the New York Quarterly*, *Lunch Ticket*, *the Good Men Project*, *the Atticus Review* and *The Nervous Breakdown*. His website is <https://craigfishbane.wordpress.com/>

**Bareerah Y. Ghani** is an MFA candidate in fiction at George Mason University. Her work has appeared in *The Daily Drunk Magazine* and is forthcoming in *Second Chance Lit*, *The Desi Collective*, and elsewhere. You can follow her on Twitter @Bareera\_yg where she usually whines about first drafts, and the stress of having an ever-growing TBR list.



