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Phineas 2023 Award Winners

Every year, the *Phineas* student editors select all the written and artistic works in the magazine. From among the accepted work, qualified faculty members select pieces from each of the categories for first and second prize recognition.

Awards

Art

- 1st "Open Veins of Latin America" by Neeti Nayak
- 2nd "The Space Between Us" by Brisa Valencia

Fiction

- 1st "The Day Before" by Sheva Lee Absher
- 2nd "Hellraiser" by Candida Soghomonian

Poetry

- 1st "I'm Fine Not Breathing" by Maricela Quiroz
- 2nd "It Ends in a Storm" by Alondra Jimenez

Contest Judges

Art

Mandi Batalo
John Butterfield
Linda Fisher-Butterfield
Matt Wardell

Fiction

Edward Shea

Poetry

Joel Lamore

Phineas 2023 Staff

Editors

Emely Renteria
Maricela Quiroz
Joshua Lopez
Deciderio Gallegos

Faculty Advisor

Joel Lamore

Phineas 2023



🏆 Second Prize Art

Brisa Valencia

The Literary Magazine of San Bernardino Valley College

Number 53

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Phineas supports free creative expression, but any opinions or viewpoints expressed in the works in this magazine do not necessarily represent the views, or imply the support, of the editors, faculty advisor, English department, college or district.

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⚡ indicates 1st prize

⚡ indicates 2nd prize

Acknowledgements

The *Phineas* staff expresses its thanks to the faculty and staff who helped by telling students about the magazine and encouraging students to submit, or who in any other way provided support to this magazine.

We also extend our gratitude to the San Bernardino Community College District Printing Services for all their special efforts on behalf of this publication.

Our greatest debt is of course to the students of Valley College for contributing to this publication by submitting their art, essays, fiction and poetry.

I'm Fine Not Breathing

Maricela Quiroz

The sky is purple, dark and bright
Tiny specks, the stars, adding to the light
Of glittering full moon shining down
On us lying on the grass now
If we stay still I swear we can feel it
A floating feeling, like zero gravity
Every time we're together it comes
Along with a rapid pulse beating my chest
And the air taken from my lungs
I have no defense, no oxygen, no suit
To help me in this space of me and you
This feeling doesn't scare me

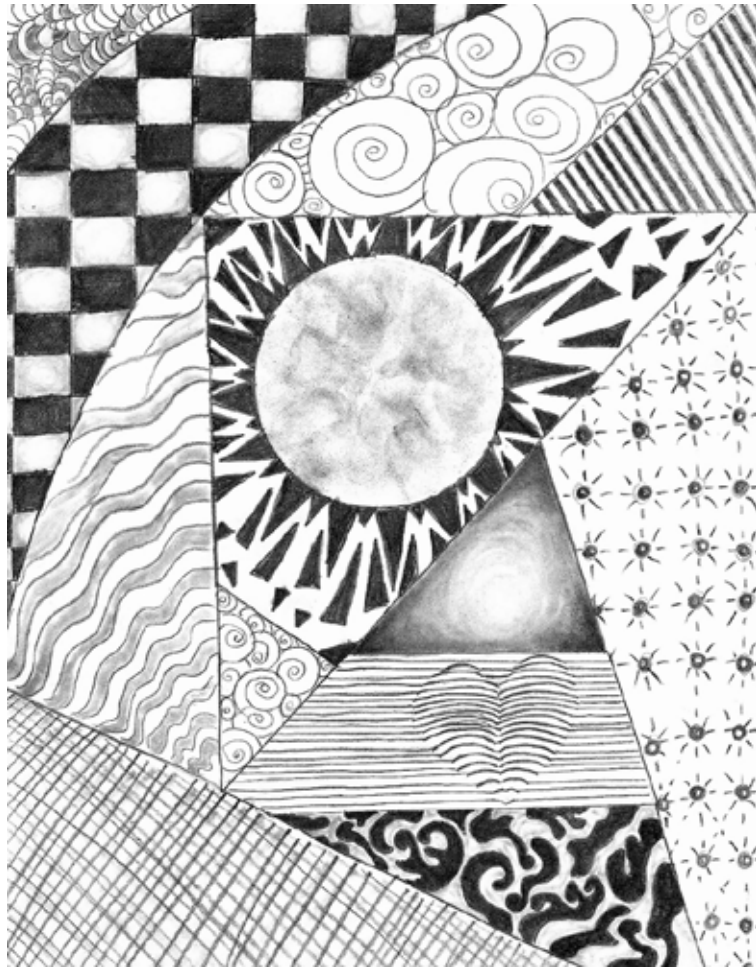


Outside the Observatory

Maricela Quiroz

The moon shined bright tonight
Her glittery dress sparkling in the light
The clicking of heels on starry floors
People still streaming in through the doors
Their footsteps echoing in corridors
Laughing and cheers throughout the halls
Music loud and lively bouncing off the walls
The night was when she was at her best
All alight reflecting calmness and beauty
No dark side to be seen only twinkling all around
Only giving light pure white and pearly

The Sun Amid the Chaos

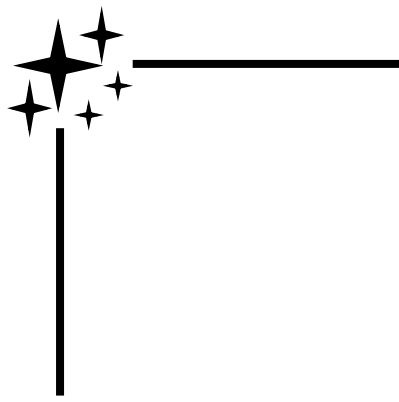


Ashley Arroyo

In A Dream

Alondra Jimenez

In a dream I saw a scene full of shining lights that gleam
The images escape me, but the feelings of wonder stayed with me
In my dream I heard words that spoke so sweet, I filled with glee
There was beauty in the night, sparkles lit the sky
River streams and moonlight breeze, what a beautiful dream I dreamed
It was all electrifying, all that magic in the air
There's a ringing in the distance, I hear its persistence
My mind offers resistance, it begs for another hour in this existence
I open my eyes and realized it was just a dream



Loving Dawn

Alexis Argo

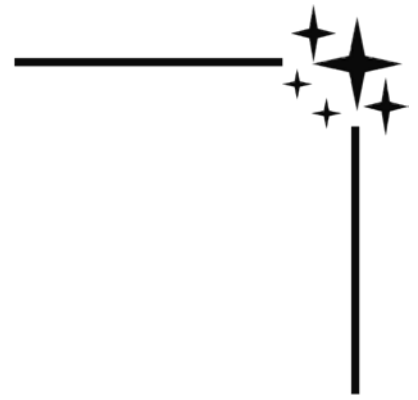
her dress glitters gold
and his tux shines silver
as they take the stage
the whole world shimmers
for a moment each day
they dance
spinning around in the constellation
as though it is their last
the sun
and the moon
star-crossed lovers
in the highest degree
the sun and the moon
dancing at dawn

Hills Have Eyes



Gabriel Ybarra II





The Chase

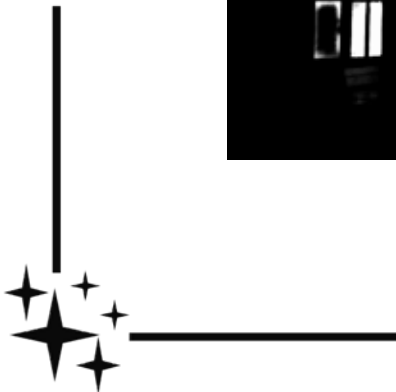
Sheva Lee Absher

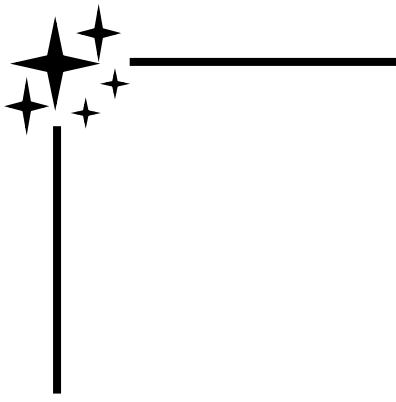
By the boulevard
Of setting suns
You were a lake
Still and steady
Untouched
By this city's buzz
Stumbling up streets
Bottle in hand
I performed indifference
and drifted to dry land
You trailed behind
A satellite above concrete
I touched others that night
And thought
Please
Challenge my retreat

Night Lights Night Life



Gabriel Ybarra II





Soloists No More

Sheva Lee Absher

The Ballad
Began
With you

Lone notes
Became a tune

Three
Was once
Two

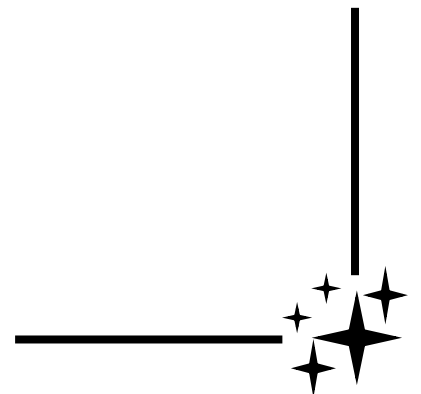
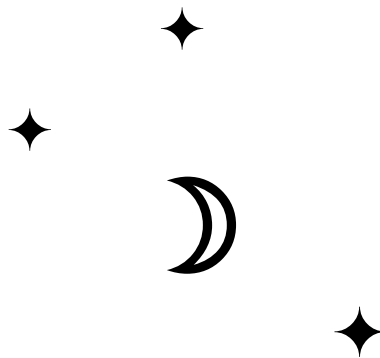
Duets disjointed
Missing a melody

And then
From stage left

Two
Became
Three

Now in Unison
High on Harmony
We croon together

Two soloists
Now a choir
Of Three



Antarctica: Misunderstood



Neeti Nayak



Am I Too Late?

Alexis Argo

When the girl was younger, her grandmother tried to teach her about things that mattered. Pieces of the heart that connected from their ancestors. It started when she was playing with her dolls at a small coffee table, lost in her imagination when she heard her grandmother's voice call.

"I have something to teach you, little bird."

"What is it?" the little girl wondered running to her grandmother.

"Dreamcatchers."

Grandmother had gathered the supplies and handed the little girl a hoop and a string.

"You're gonna show me how to make them, grandmother?" she all but squealed.

"Yes, darling, because these things have stories. These things have power." Her grandmother tried her best to teach her the way to never break your web, never break your circle. But little minds don't know why things are important. So the impatience simmered slowly. Nothing was working because the little girl got tired of trying. Dreamcatchers weren't made that day. The supplies got packed back away, and the two moved on with their day.

The years had passed. The little girl grew older, and Grandmother did too. Both of them aging with time. The girl, now an adult, remembers the dream catchers left unfinished. She had regretted all the time wasted on impatience. She decided to take a trip to the store and give grandmother a phone call.

"Grandmother?"

"Yes, little bird"

"I'm gonna stop by, if that's okay."

"Of course. See you in a bit, love you."

She approached the door with a box in her hands. And by her second knock she could hear grandmother opening the door.

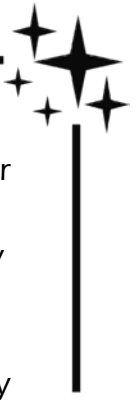
"Little bird, come in. Everything's okay, right?"

"Yea it's all okay."

They walk in the house and to the right for the living room, where the girl places the box down on her grandmother's coffee table.

"I'm sorry I couldn't see what this meant in the past. Am I too late for you to teach me?" she said, offering grandmother a view of supplies while sitting down beside her.

"Of course not, my dear girl," Grandmother replied, smiling up at her.



Grandmother had reached a hand to the girl's cheek, and they looked each other in the eye.

"I have dreamed of you from before you were earthside, and I've loved you every day since. I want to teach you everything I know, so my knowledge is yours."

She watches Grandmother's look turn solemn as she moves to hold her hand.

"Because one day I'll leave you, and all my stories will no longer belong to me. My history will be yours to keep, this is simply where we start. The stories that aren't mine alone, little bird," her grandmother explains.



⌘ Second Prize Poetry

It Ends in a Storm

Alondra Jimenez

How romantic is it to romanticize
You bring sunset skies and moonlight nights
How traumatic to realize that it was all a lie

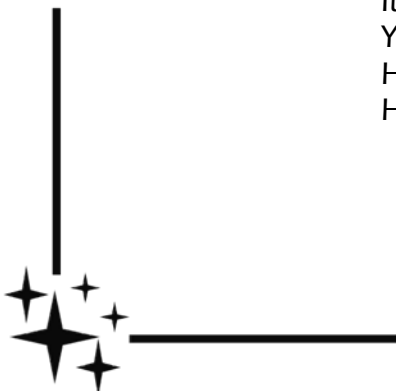
The feeling of river flows and mountain highs
You bring out pink clouds and silver lines
How romantic is it to romanticize

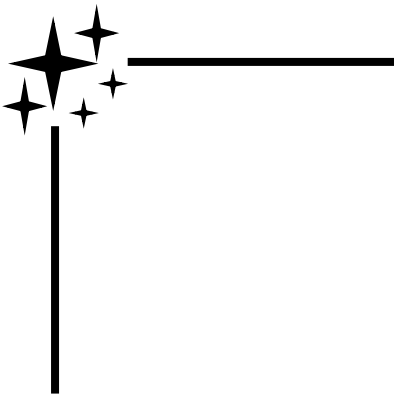
You were everything to me in this life
Now you're dreary nights and long felt sighs
How traumatic to realize that it was all a lie

Ocean breeze and feelings of ease is what you brought to me
Summer nights with fireflies lighting up my life
How romantic is it to romanticize

Now you're thunder skies and lonely nights
Raining down and flooding me, a violent storm you are to me
How traumatic to realize that it was all a lie

It was all beautiful in my eyes
You were a soaring high and beautiful white lies
How romantic is it to romanticize
How traumatic to realize that it was all a lie





Anxiety

Sabrina Urias

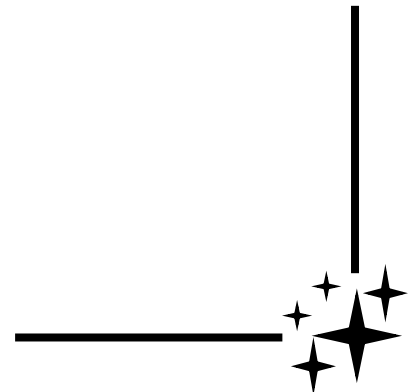
Sitting here feeling fine
Then the anxiety creeps up as if it needed to be noticed
It's as if another person in my head is telling me everything is wrong,
but it's right
It's as if I enter a room and everyone looks uptight
Anxiety finds a way to haunt me no matter how I try to feel
It won't let me be, nor will it let me heal
Every time I feel like my self-love is showering me
Anxiety likes to explore me



The Feelings of Words

Alondra Jimenez

What is a poem? A poem that flows
A poem that voices my feelings as they flow
The feelings of sadness as they grow the words start to form
My heart is breaking let me show you in words
Every shard is a stanza you'll feel to your core
As the tears graze my face the phrases start to make their way
The feelings of happiness are a sonnet ready to be written
I express and I stress my joy in each word
You'll see my speech full of cheese it's just that feeling in me
This is a poem, a poem made completely of me





A Disaster in the Making

Alondra Jimenez

It's not you it's me, a tale as old as time
 I'm telling you, it's really not you it's me soon you'll come to find
 You shine so bright, but I'm an endless moonless night
 You're calm waters and blue skies, I'm the storm that ends your light
 You say you have time, but it's never enough for me to be alright
 It's not that you aren't enough, you're more than enough
 You'll see in time I'll take, and I'll take with no end in sight
 Please for your sake, make a clean break
 It's not you, it's me you see
 I'm just an empty shell, it could never be

Lament of the Dog



Adriannah Quiroz





The Sensualist

Candida Soghomonian

I want to melt into the void with you
I want to taste the eternal,
ephemeral force that binds our physical bodies
to our consciousness.
I want my senses immersed in deeper waters
filled with infinite possibilities of kisses
strangling your mouth.
I want my tongue so far down your throat
my teeth scrape your lungs.
I want a touch to cradle the axis of both heaven and hell;
to annihilate and form.
I want to smell you as smoke
from the funeral pyres of your faults;
to breathe in your shadow self whole.
I take all of you as you are.
I want you to feel the innocence
of consummation,
the aberrant depravity of skin to skin.



Loving You

Alexis Argo

i learned to love you from a d i s t a n c e
'cause that's the only way i can
loving you is the adventure
the lets jump
off the cliff together love
loving you driving a car you know is gonna crash
as soon as you're sober
loving you is growing a garden full of dandelions
beautiful
but still weeds
i will forever love you but it's okay if you forget me
kind of love
so i learned to love you from a d i s t a n c e
because loving you became a natural instinct
that i couldn't survive anymore

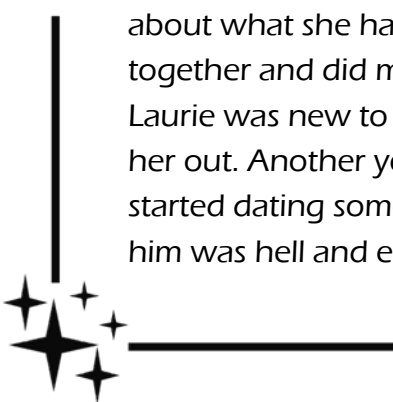


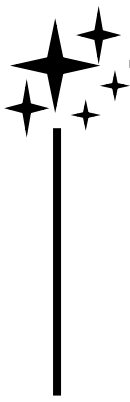
Creep

Lizabeth Antonio Garcia

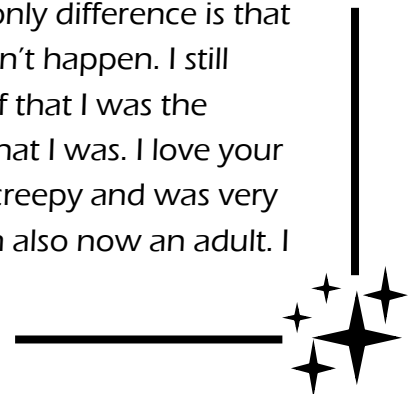
Dear Valentine,

I was 11 years old when I first laid eyes on you. Your height made you very noticeable from the rest of the kids in our school. You were an 8th grader, and I was a 6th grader. I was hoping it would just be a puppy crush. I really hoped what I was feeling for you would just go away. I didn't mean for it to go this far. I was just a child...at least that was my excuse. You never wanted anything romantic with me, and I didn't respect that. You were just too nice to let me down. I never asked you out, but the signs were clear. I watched you throughout your whole 8th grade school year. Our 4th period PE class was probably the most nerve wracking yet most exciting class I ever had. Just seeing you there made it my favorite class. I became depressed once you left for your freshman year of high school. The last two years of my middle school years were torture. I tried forcing myself to forget about you. I even forced myself to try liking other guys, but no one excited me. You had exactly what I wanted. Your precious soul. You were beautiful inside and out. Unfortunately for you, your little sister began to attend my school. I swear I had no idea she was your sister. However, fate led her and I to each other. We became super-close friends. Unknowingly to you or her, she was keeping me updated on you. You weren't able to escape me. I don't care that you're in high school. You're not going to be able to get rid of me. The demonologists say that once a demon attaches themselves to someone, you can't get rid of them. No matter where you go, I will always be there. A year passed and you started dating a very beautiful girl named Laurie. I was heartbroken. I didn't know how to cope. I haven't even finished puberty yet but according to Laurie's pictures, she was already filling out. I was barely 13 years old. I kept telling myself that I will be as beautiful as her when I get to your age and grade level. Just knowing that a beautiful girl like her was able to grab your attention and love so easily broke me. I became so insecure about the way I looked. I hated my eyes, my eyebrows, my body, and my teeth. I kept comparing myself to her and began looking into what I can do to improve myself. It's not your fault that I became this way. I just know for a fact that you only fell for her because of her looks. You never cared about what she had to say until after you guys began dating. I put two and two together and did my calculations. According to your friends that I was friends with Laurie was new to your school. You literally only knew her for like 3 weeks before asking her out. Another year passed, and you are still dating her. I became an 8th grader. I also started dating some emo kid to try and forget about you. Although my relationship with him was hell and enough to be distracted from you, it didn't work. I guess you could say





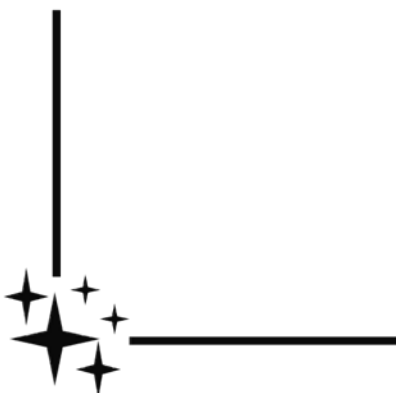
I became emo too, also better looking, I guess. I got braces, and I began wearing eyeliner. I discovered more about myself and realized that I'm kind of sick in the head. I was excited to leave this school, so I can reunite with you. Or at least watch you from a distance. I spent my free time practicing how I would speak to you if I ever had the chance. However, once I began attending your school, my dreams of speaking to you became shattered. You were walking hand in hand with Laurie. Oh, how I wish that was me. I did my best to look good every day at school just in case you ever saw me from a distance. It's not your fault you never looked in my direction. I started going to the gym with my brother to get myself in shape to get your attention. What a surprise that it didn't work. By this time, I already became aware that you'd been intimate with Laurie. My soul was crushed. I never hated someone just because of their beauty. You've brought hate out of me that I didn't even know I had. I became very territorial of you from the very start. Laurie knows about me, and we even became friends. She was super sweet and passionate about everything she spoke of. That was what I believed until I saw Laurie's true colors. Or at least witnessed her true colors. I should've listened to your friends when they said she was crazy and hateful of all your female friends. I had super long beautiful healthy hair. You guys went on a break. I stupidly got my hopes up. Laurie came to me one day and told me you liked girls with super short hair. She used my obsession against me. I chopped it all off. I did it for you. Two weeks later both of you guys were back in school hand in hand. It's not your fault I cut my hair. It's not your fault you didn't notice either. Another year passed, and it was the hardest for me to cope with. It was your senior year, and my sophomore year. I'm glad that you realized that you and Laurie weren't meant to be. She didn't deserve your love and affection. I gave you a bracelet that meant the world to me. To my surprise you, actually wore it. You even posted a selfie of you showing off the bracelet. I knew it was a friendly gesture, but it meant everything to me. Thank you for never being rude to me. I was surprised that you would say hi to me during the passing period. Although it seemed harmless at the time, you made things worse. Every kind gesture you made towards me left me with high hopes. I became pretty confident of myself. My teeth were now straight, and I looked really pretty. I would do some nice simple makeup, and dress way better. I was pretty popular with the boys at our school, but I didn't want them. I wanted you. Your sister is one of my best friends now. I know where you live. Watching you in your graduation gown was one of my biggest dreams. The only difference is that I would imagine you proposing to me at your ceremony, which didn't happen. I still have the recording I took of you walking on that stage. I have proof that I was the loudest who cheered for you. Your sister even confirmed with me that I was. I love your sister so much, and I am very grateful for her. She never found me creepy and was very accepting towards how I felt about you. You are now an adult. I am also now an adult. I





met you when I was 11. When I became 19 years old, you moved to Seattle for a year. I was engaged to my boyfriend at the time. It felt like literal hell. I felt forced to marry someone else because I didn't know if you were gonna return from Seattle. I even planned on leaving everything behind to move to Seattle. However, you did return a year later. You got yourself a cute Z4 BMW. My family and I moved into a nice neighborhood. A month later I turned 20 years old. I am now single and still waiting for you. I found out from your sister that you guys moved nearby my neighborhood. I didn't want to run into you though, at least not yet. Not until I lost more weight. Not until I got a new car. Not until my hair grew longer. Not until I had the room I wanted. Not until I had a respectable job and enrolled into college. Not until I felt like I was enough. That was until summer of this year. I became a freshman in college majoring in English Creative Writing. I started going to the gym again. My hair got so long since we moved into this house. I went from dealing with customers at Jack In The Box to cashing out thousands to patrons at my new job. I went from driving my sister's old car to rolling up in a new whip I recently purchased. I truly feel like I am enough now. Maybe even too good for you. Did I mention I turned 21 years old two weeks ago? After 10 long years, I know I'm enough. However, I don't want you anymore. I ran into Laurie 3 months ago. She's changed. She's a newly married woman to a much older man. Both are members of a Christian church. I started seeing life differently. I've been blessed with so much that you didn't even matter to me anymore. Where were you during all of my accomplishments? I wanted to share those moments with you. However, I got them all without you being by my side. I learned that there is life without you in it. Even though you never cared, I just wanted you to know that I am grateful to have met you. You unknowingly pushed me to be a better person. To better myself in general. I also want you to know that even though I went through hell because of you, it's not your fault. I put myself in those situations.

Love, Lis.





Like Me

Alondra Jimenez

I wish you'll never see like me
You'll see flaws in all hearts and faults without cause
You'll see your face and be afraid to face the you you have become

I hope you never feel like me
So alone in a room full of people you know
A longing to be able to be one of them and never feel alone

I hope you never think like me
I hope you never doubt like me

I hope you always see the world for what it could be
I hope you always know you're free to be more than what they see

Gloria Meets Goria



Adriannah Quiroz

Soft Cannibalism

Candida Soghomonian

The matter of consuming human flesh is taboo
eternally;

Desecrating the body,
manipulating the insides,
the muscle tissue, the fat,
the marrow within steadfast bone
strong, healthy.

It's frowned upon. Why?

What's the difference between
the consumption of love and flesh?

The body is a vessel, a hollow shell,
a funerary ornament.

Why can't I consume you sensually,
if a part of you is already dead?

If you destroyed the soul within the body,
I'd much rather take that.

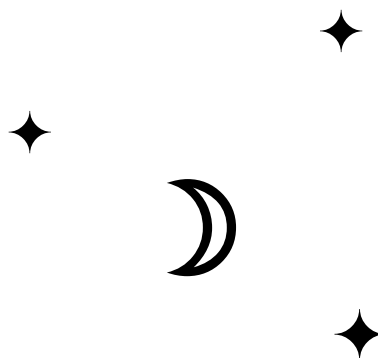
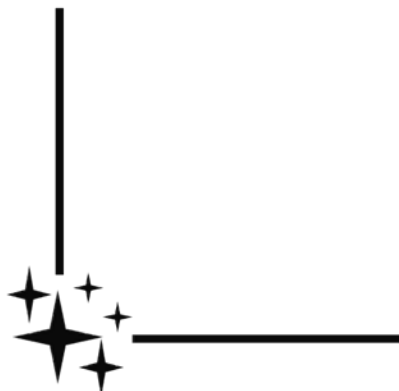
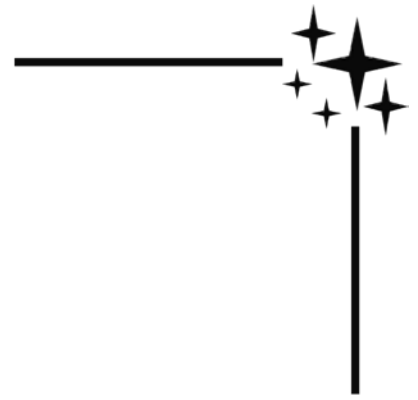
However,

I'm a carnal woman who relishes skin.

I worship your heart like a great pagan god.

I want the blood dripping from my chin,

I lick my fingers tasting the love you couldn't give.





Ramo D'Olivo



Allie Rosen

Lovely Poison

Alondra Jimenez

My mother likes poison, the type that's sweet in the mouth and goes down like honey.

My mother likes poison, the type where you can still taste the sweet tart even after it goes down the poison lingering

My mother loves that poison, the kind only men like that can make
Being that the sweetest type can only come from their lips.

My mother loves poison, she intoxicates herself with it.
Because love is the sweetest poison.
She immerses herself with it.

I love my mother, but my mother loves the poison only men like that can give.

Addiction

Sabrina Urias

To the people I've hurt
I sadden for
You are the ones, I truly adore

Breaking promises
Telling lies
By the end of the day, I always lay down and cry

I wasn't in my right mind, and this is no excuse
I've mistreated and used

I smiled in front of your eyes, yet later I had tears of tries

Tried to be perfect
Tried to hide my addiction
Why did I lie? I always felt I should have been in prison

Punished myself for all my wrongs
Sat alone as I watched the fog

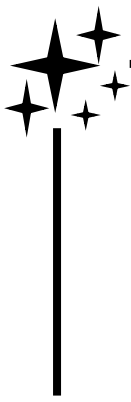
My sadness increased
I will forever try to make peace

To the people I've hurt
I sadden for, you are the ones, I truly adore

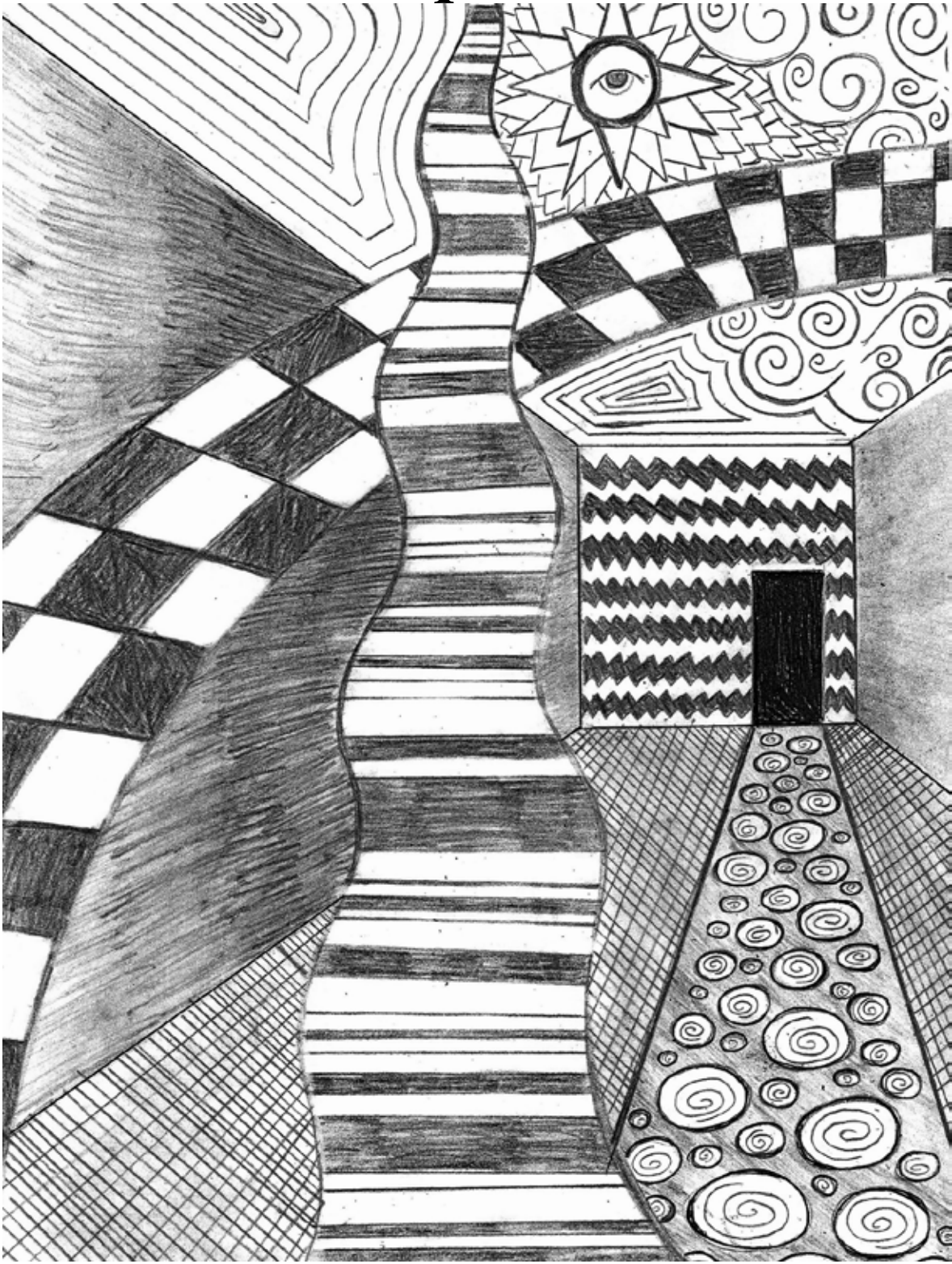
Flowers Posted on the Block



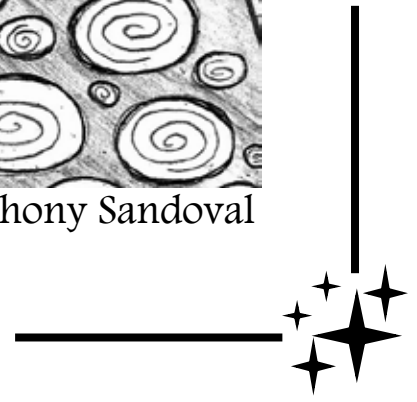
Gabriel Ybarra II

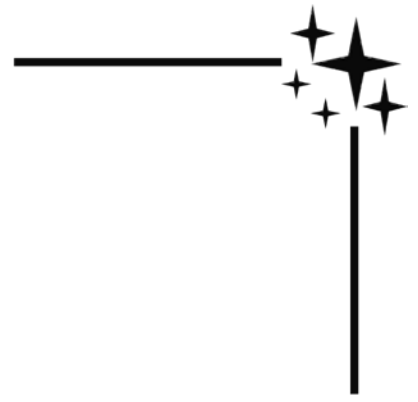


Door of Perception



Anthony Sandoval





Red Queen

Alexis Argo

Red Queen, Red Queen
you painted the garden in lies
Red Queen, Red Queen
you made him say goodbye
Red Queen, Red Queen
time to lose your throne
you're crazier than hatter
and now it's time they know
Red Queen, Red Queen
ruining the past
erasing it distorting it
till it all turned black
Red Queen, Red Queen
nothing left to say
sit back and watch it all decay



Watch Your Step

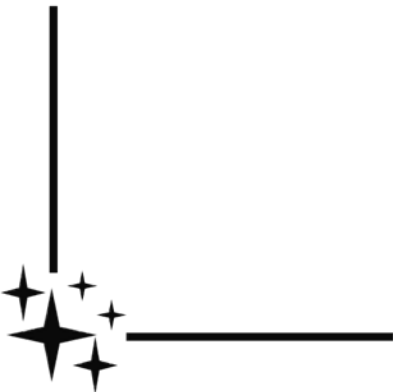
Maricela Quiroz

In the woods the oaks grow tall
Old and wise they watch over all
Though they give no warning
About the circles in the woods
Made by mushrooms so cute and small

They do not warn you not all
To watch your step lest you go
Within the circle and take a trip
Into the realm where the faeries roam

They'll serve you tea and the oaks will see
But not give heed to not take the drink
Should you wish to go home eventually

The old oak trees stand and watch so tall
For all their wisdom they give no warnings
Rely on your own eyes to watch your steps
Lest you trip and can't make it home

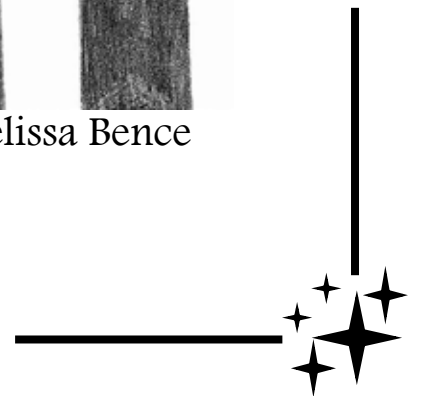




Bridge



Melissa Bence



Heavenly Disastrous

Donna Arteaga Alvarez

I walk through green pastures,
destination unknown.

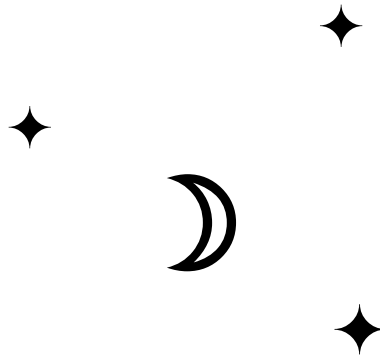
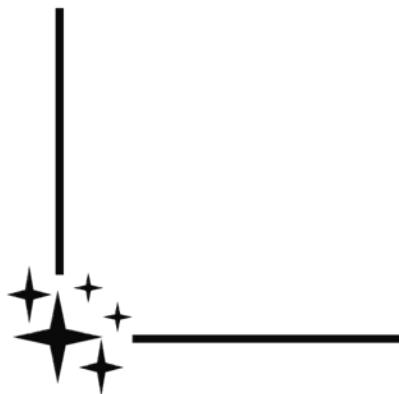
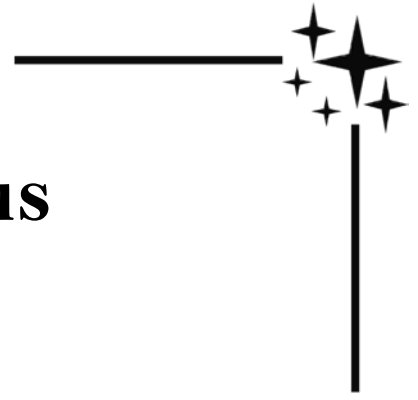
My heart knows no fear,
my head nothing but doubt.

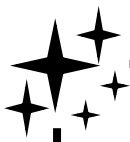
I arrive at a broken path
to a garden filled
with red blood poppies.

Soon it all dries.
The leaves shrivel up,
and the petals fall in unison.

A fallen dove coos for the last time,
and the whistling of its wings
can no longer be heard.

Falling out of heaven,
bring forth my awakening
to this fallen world.





Favorite Zombie Girls



Adriannah Quiroz





Create or Conform?

Alexis Argo

A writer starts by creating
By the pen moving
Faster than their thoughts

I try to be a writer
Yet you say I speak nonsense

Do I conform?
Or do I create?
Where is the line
That connects the two?

Do I create for the journey?
Or do I conform for glory?

I want you to see the poet
In the poetry
Not just words on paper



Duality

Candida Soghomonian

The power of possession is totality in a naked shroud;
I do not wish to belong beneath the stars
or to be tied to a torso,
I choose to fold under my own volition of night.
Escapism to me,
is wherever you lay down your soul
to bathe in the natural darkness of wonder.
I meet you there at a crossroads, over and over again.
I tell myself that what I desire is possession;
I often claw at my being,
see the bruises sitting on my shoulders,
the whites of my eyes transform into black pools.
I want out of myself
and inside the burning nature of vacancy and surrender.



Seamstress

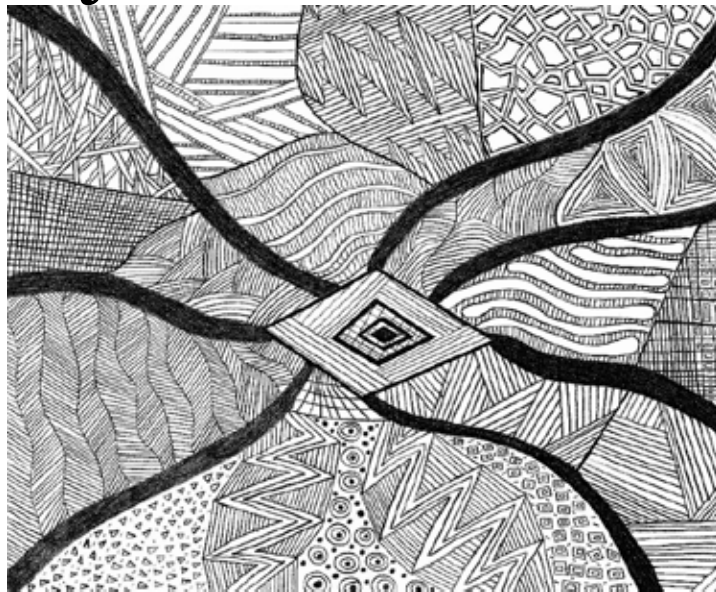
Alexis Argo

because your storm clouds
trifled too long
to diminish your pain
you made sure to find another to blame
it's all so clear to see
this painful pattern, dear

and as though
she was the world's greatest seamstress
she tried patching you together
stitched you into her life
webbed your soul to hers

yet, it was never enough
it was never going to be "enough"
because loving you is a conditions list
that couldn't be kept
it's breaking her at the seams
you hating her for loving you
in the only way she knows

Beyond Possibilities



Brayan Hernández

Playing Pretend

Alondra Jimenez

I was seven, eight, nine, and ten
I looked to you back then

You seemed so unbreakable, but you broke in the end
You stood so tall, but I watched you crumble time and time again
Always laughing it off but I watched you cry at break of day

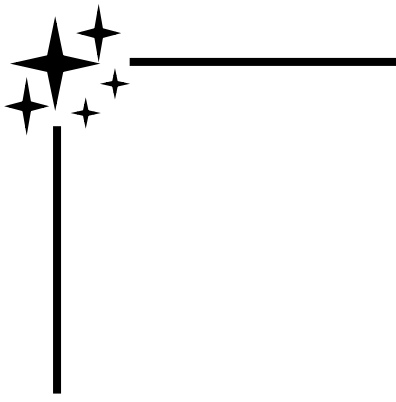
I thought strength was the easy lie and hidden faces
I learned from you all my inner hiding places
My heart full barriers getting thicker with ages

I learned from you how easy it is to deceive
But in the end, you couldn't even believe me
My pain was my own, too well hidden for you to know

Can I See the Mountains?



Gabriel Ybarra II



Insomnia Maybe?

Alexis Argo

the ghost of panic whisper
they taunt
they terrorize
they make sleep vanish like fog

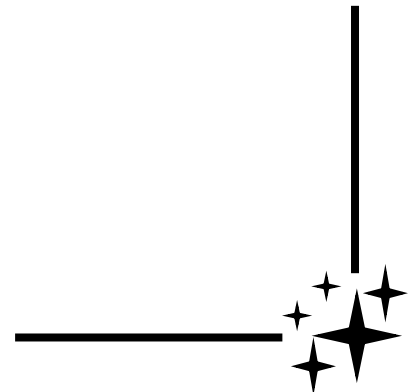
insomnia maybe?
i'll never know
but they're here again
showing the undecided future
and the regretful past

past,
i can't get past how fast
my heart is beating
thump thump thump

pounding in my chest
similar to the way
they're knocking on the truth

insomnia maybe?
just one more episode
of that show
the one i've seen ten times over
but it still drowns out the noise

insomnia maybe?
it's half past three
for the third night this week
and here we are again



Sinister Serpent

Robert Mejia



A sinister
serpent that says

to me,
"Surely, you've
tasted this
pleasantry"
And dismayed
by its claim,
I did
fail to
refrain
And forever
I sleep
unintentionally.

The Day Before

Sheva Lee Absher

She leaned against the black BMW feeling comforted by the heat of the driver side door and squinted as she read the chipped but cheerful welcome sign, “El Dorado Estates: A Nice Place To Live!” Half a decade later, it still made her chuckle. As if a 900 square foot lot and a home on wheels qualified as an “estate.” She shook her head slowly and took one last drag of the Marlboro Light she’d stolen from her mother’s purse earlier that morning.

“You better quit that shit, June!” Aiden shouted from the passenger seat. He was looking up from his phone now, eyes wide and forehead wrinkled in feigned outrage. “It’s fucked up you’re still doing that. Considering.”

“I’m grieving,” she said with a shrug.

“Jesus Christ, June. He’s still alive. Have some fucking respect.”

“Not like he ever did,” she mumbled through disappearing smoke.

She snubbed the cigarette out between the dirt and the heel of her black boot then ducked into the car.

“I’m ready,” she said, closing the door behind her.

She and Aiden stood on opposite ends of the small living room, their gazes turned downward to the yellowed linoleum floor. Aiden’s hands were sunk deep in his pockets and every few moments he expelled an uneasy sigh. Though he was 2 years older than June and well over 6 feet tall, he appeared small in this space, as if the imminent presence of their stepmother made him visibly shrink.

June lifted her eyes and peered around the cramped room. Nothing had changed, and she half expected her father to enter through the narrow hallway and settle into the distressed blue Lazy Boy that was sunken in his shape.

Instead, Agatha appeared, purse and keys in hand, moving towards Aiden with authority. She looked fatigued and unkempt in a shapeless lavender sweatsuit that resembled sleepwear.

“I’ll be gone for an hour,” she said sternly as she fumbled through her purse. “He’s asleep now,” she added, her eyes darting to June who was looking blankly at the blue chair. “Don’t disturb him,” she said, making no effort to conceal her contempt.

Agatha looked away then with uncharacteristic resignation and added, “He hardly talks anymore anyhow.”

Her dusty blonde hair was unbrushed and pulled into a sloppy pile atop her head, exposing an inch or more of grey at the roots. This general dishevelment made her seem less threatening, and June felt a fleeting and unfamiliar prick of pity for her stepmother.

Perhaps sensing this, Agatha cleared her throat and straightened her back, as if

returning to herself.

"The nurse left this today. You should read it," she said flatly as she slapped a folded pamphlet down on the coffee table between she and Aiden. "Both of you," she finished with another sharp glance in June's direction.

Aiden and June nodded obediently, waiting for Agatha to depart before making any moves.

"And keep this door shut, we don't need the dog getting out again," she snapped in her signature snide as she pulled the door closed behind her.

Aiden exhaled sharply with annoyance.

"She's *such* a bitch. I will never understand why dad married her," he proclaimed.

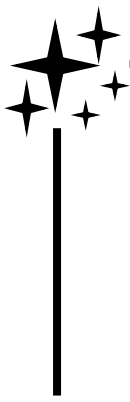
June drifted to the coffee table and picked up the pamphlet, reading its title to herself, "When The End Is Near- A Guide For The Days Before Death."

"At least he's not alone," she said quietly, tossing the pamphlet down and making her way towards the door, fresh cigarette and matchbook in hand.

Lord of the Dogs



Adriannah Quiroz



4th Excuse for a Barbeque

Maricela Quiroz

Roses soft and bright almost blinding in the light
Formed a glowing halo around the park
Flowers colored pink, the bees taking flight
Later the fireflies will come when it's dark

Blankets laid throughout the field scattered about
Families relaxing before the show
Kids playing ball, being called with a shout
It's almost time to see the fireworks blow

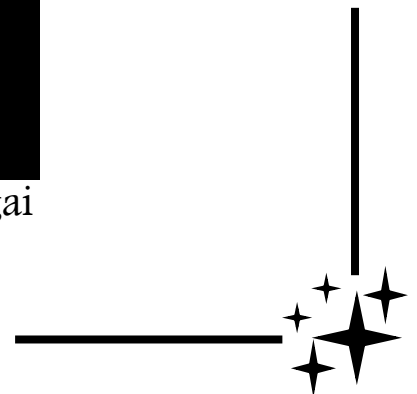
The moon is out, the grills fire up now
Fireflies here and there soft light shining
Coming together, ready to sit down
Looking up at the whistling up high

Fireworks explode throughout the night sky
Hope a spark doesn't fall and set things alight

F---! USC



Kelli Sugai



Hurricane

Alondra Jimenez

Anger issues, having a temper, prone to violent outbursts is what has been said about Ariel when it comes to her personality. But she would rather think the term tempestuous, synonym to passionate, is better suited to describe her. Sure, you can find turbulent right there next to it, but who doesn't have a short fuse when faced with unfairness or bullying. Sometimes the storm inside her is just too much, so it has to be let out.

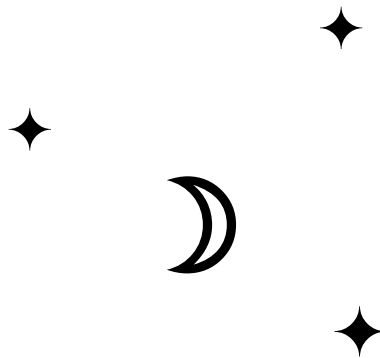
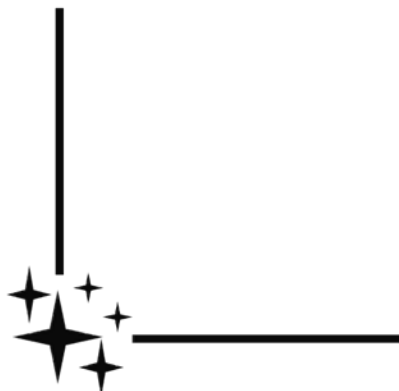
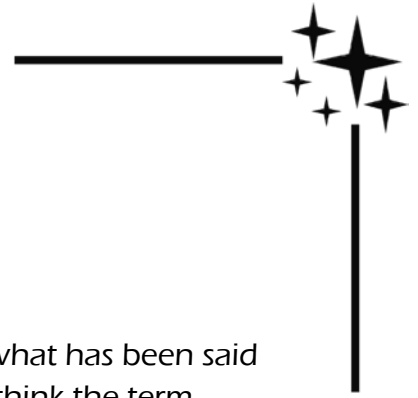
Ariel was on her way across campus trying not to limp because of how much her muscles ached after an intense swim practice. Already late to class, she scurried up the stairs resisting the urge to go 'ow' the whole way up only to find out the only available seats were in the front row right where the professor would surely notice her tardiness.

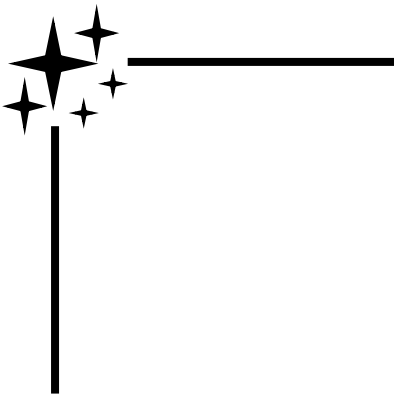
"Miss Fisher," the professor says with his back still to the class. "What a pleasure for you to join us."

"Sorry, professor," Ariel mutters making her way to an open seat.

"Get up to speed from Vanessa," Professor Scully says, ignoring Ariel's poor apology. He was already used to her being late. "Vanessa has my notes." He pointed at the girl she had sat next to.

Ariel couldn't believe what she was hearing. How could this Vanessa have the notes when she herself had asked Scully for the notes on multiple occasions when she had away meets. She'd heard that Professor Scully wasn't fond of athletes, but he could give his notes to other students with no issues. She could feel her heartbeat thundering and her anger rising. Her life was so unfair.





The Thread of Life

Donna Arteaga Alvarez

"Be fair to my unborn child
as you spin their life to be."
A mother prays to Clotho.

Clotho twists the thread
with golden fibers.

Upon a spindle
the mother winds fibers of wool
onto the bobbin.

Night befalls her humble home.
The mother gives birth.
A son is born to her.

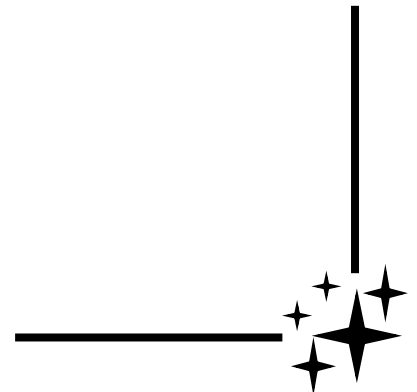
Her hips and thighs throb with pain.
Her knees are weak.
Still the mother stands
and lifts her hands to the sky
with her remaining strength.
"Lachesis, bless my child
with enough days
to reach wisdom."

Lachesis measures the thread
with the length of an owl's wings.

The child becomes a man.
A man whose path
was written long before he had reason.

From student to teacher,
this Athenian becomes an old man.

A rugged old man
with a beard to his chest,
fog in his eyes,
pale skin, and cotton hair.



The wrinkles around his mouth
portray the joy
he's had in life.
The soles of his sandals
tell of his journey.

The man prays to Atropos,
"Cut my thread
and praise your sisters
for the life I've been given."

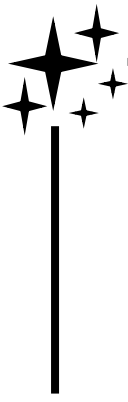
Atropos sharpens a raven's claw
and with a single cut
sends this soul to Charon.

The soul hands Charon an obol.
With his fare paid,
Charon ferries the soul
across the River Styx.

Submit



Adriannah Quiroz



Limitless Inspiration

Vincent Brewer

Don't say things that will only push us down
We will get back up and form a unified crowd
Our moral vision is guided by pure confidence
Sure, ignorance is bliss, but ideas are endless

Inspire us in order to focus when we feel lost
In thought, we walk a journey blind through spots
We search for a purpose that's simply righteous
Even your destiny and dreams will sync in likeness

Talk to the lonely boy with the willpower of a hero
He wants to help you escape fears you burrow
But he hides his emotions to protect his pride
Wonder why you should try when it's all just a lie

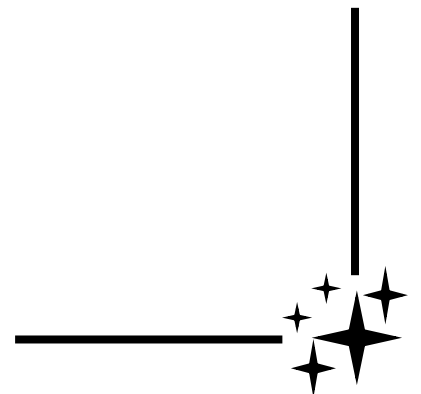
Influence him to think about being musically inclined
In time, that all those rhymes will be defined
The sounds of his flute whistles like a foreign bird
Roaring like a lion over the horizon throughout the world

Listen to the insecure girl about her blunt trouble
She wants to speak out without having to mumble
Courageous just like the heroic music boy
She sings a song that brings tears of joy

Inspire her to care less for what they think is best
Instead, care more, for her voice is just so blessed
But make sure she does not act so arrogant
Show her the rainbow of hope is also unlimited

Give into integrity and you could change others
Hold hands and dance with a sister and brother
Enlighten yourself by making sweet music
Hearing it spaciouly flow inspires positive movement

– Mr. Enlighten





Guidance

Julie Jones

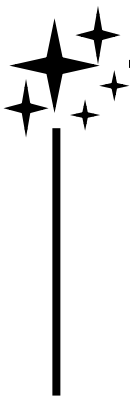
Be slow of running to gossip,
Watch the pitfalls of trying to be hip;
Walk in the delight of the Lord,
Learning grace gives you a start;
If your life has no goals,
His blessings will flow,
To those who study his word;
Now listen to me,
He gave life for thee;
Now all the world and universe knows,
Every race he controls.

Metropolitan Gospel



Kelli Sugai





The Perception of Good and Evil

Jerod Williams

The moon shines brightly amongst a black sky and swirling clouds. It hangs above a mansion raised on a hill as if chained to it. This mansion is home to a demon who has two reputations. Many cannot agree on whether or not he is good or evil. That demon is to be visited by two people who have opposite opinions. One is a Knight, a well-respected member of his community who hates all things sinful. He was tasked by a round table of priests to slay this demon. The other, a witch and prostitute. She seeks protection from the Devil.

The two enter the mansion from opposite ends and at the same time. Upon entering the house, they are both hit with the aura of the Devil. The knight feels exposed and on edge; he prepares himself for battle. The witch feels safe for once in her life. The two are then greeted by a group of ghostly figures reaching out their hands to greet them. The knight consumed with fear guised as anger, strikes them down without question. The witch takes their hands, and the ghosts hold her as if to reassure her that she is safe her

The two keep going down the hall until they enter the devil's throne room. They met this demon face to face. He is exalted high above them, sitting on his throne, enjoying a glass of blood red wine. He takes notice of the two and inquires about their reasoning for visiting him.

Devil: What is your purpose for seeing me?

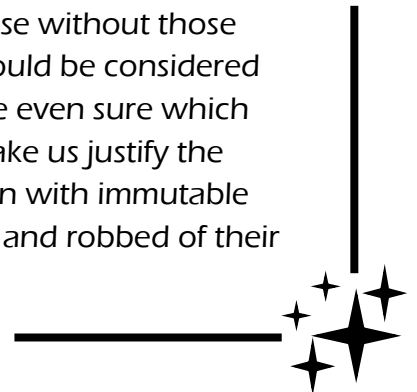
Knight: I came here to kill you. Degenerate monster! Your kind doesn't belong in this fine town. I will personally rid the world of your disgusting evil once and for all! And then I'll take the witch's life.

Witch: I have come seeking your good will. Because of who I am, I have been outcasted, and sentenced to death. There is a knight who seeks to take my life, and I have nowhere else to go.

Devil: Evil...Good.... It's interesting that you see me that way

The demon gets up from his throne, finishes off his wine, and hands the glass to a specter for it to be taken away. As he climbs down the stairs to meet them face to face, he monologues something relevant to both of them.

Devil: Good and Evil... often rather limber concepts, usually determined by those with the power and influence to do so, and out of the hands of those without those privileges. Morality is too often a matter of perspective. An action could be considered good or evil depending on who it hurts and who it benefits. Are we even sure which side of the scale we land on. Our desire to be seen as Good, can make us justify the most evil of actions. Others, simply for existing, simply for being born with immutable characteristics, or for simply not being of the norm are deemed Evil and robbed of their

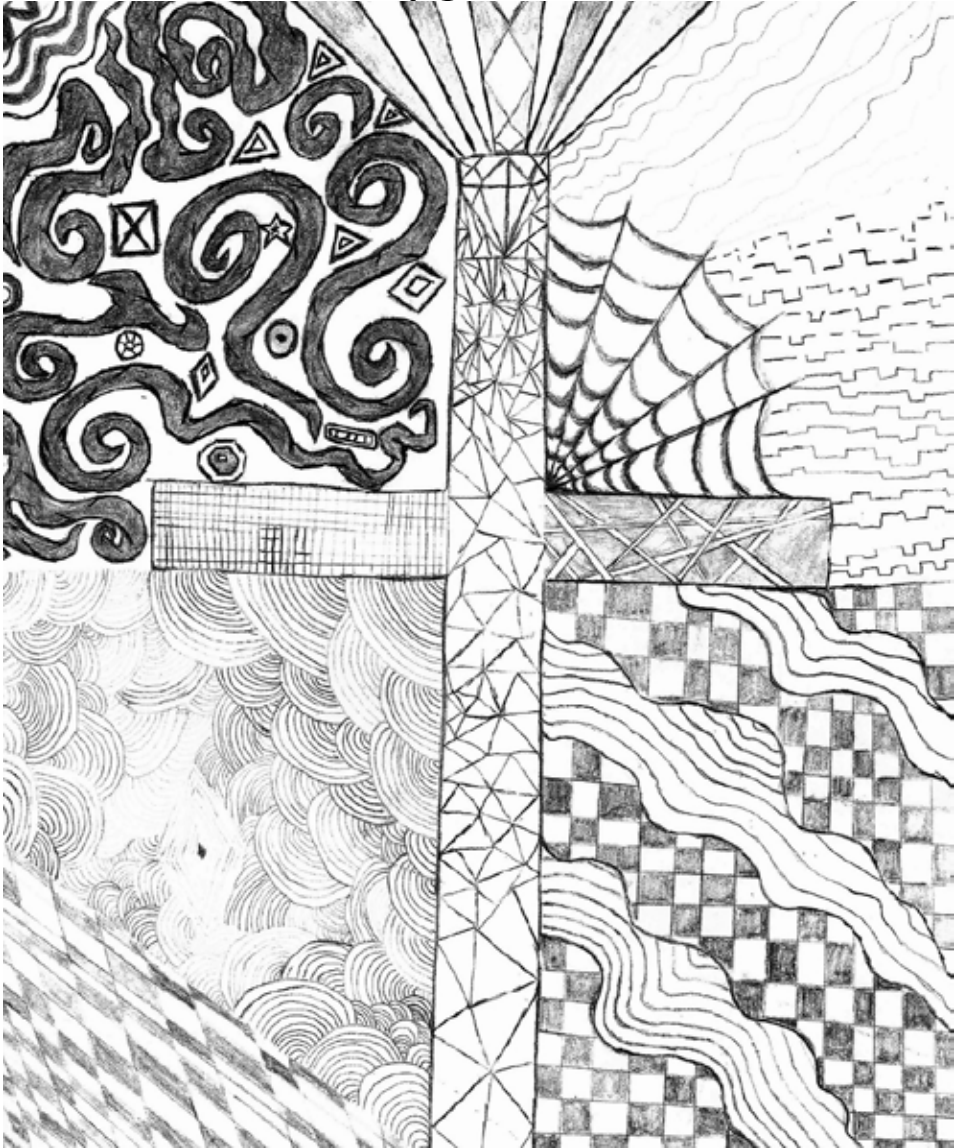




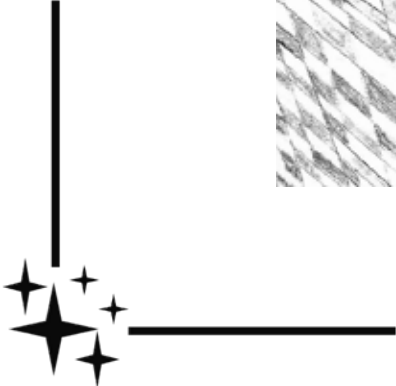
humanity. We are like the sun in that regard. The sun has both the potential to harden and melt certain materials. A block of concrete becomes harder when in contact with sunlight, while a block of ice dissipates. In this scenario, the concrete sees the sun as its savior, and the ice sees the sun as its destroyer. I am akin to the sun as well. Some think I am the Devil's reincarnation, a being who brings degeneracy, and wickedness to this land.

Others see me as the Sinners Angel, a guardian for the outcast, and the marginalized. My question to you is... Who do you say that I am?

Cross and Quadrants



Abraham W. Robles





Apprenticeship

Alondra Jimenez

Azrael worked at a diner, and he hated it, but he hated it more when it was time for closing and that last person just wouldn't leave. Azrael watched the man in front of the counter. He found it strange how the man was in an all-black three-piece suit and wearing a fedora to match, and yet here he was sipping on his fourth coffee in a diner that didn't even have that great of a coffee. His movements were slow, almost like he was teasing him.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I'm in a bit of a rush, and we're closing soon." He gestured to the clock on top of the counter. The clock's numbers were shining bright red 11:30, pm and they closed at midnight. "If you'd like, I can put that in a to-go container."

"Azrael, what a peculiar name," the man said ignoring his suggestion.

"Yes, so I've heard. If you wouldn't mind, I can start getting you going."

"Do you know what your name means?"

"Angel of death. I know the meaning." He didn't like having to talk about his name, the subject made him uncomfortable. His mother had died a week after giving birth to him. He didn't know the details of the complications that led to her death, but his name was her parting gift.

"I'm thinking of taking a vacation soon but in order to do so, I need someone to replace me for a while." The man said slowly turning his head towards him.

Azrael had never seen eyes so devoid of color. They were bleak, cold and completely black. His skin was ghostly pale and his hair that was hiding under his fedora that had fallen with his movement was just as black as his eyes.

The man's gaze was so piercing that he was paralyzed from it. When he was finally able to formulate a response, he was pretty sure it was an incoherent one.

"Azrael, you're just the replacement I've been looking for. Let me introduce myself," the man said, putting his hand out. "My name as you'd better recognize it is Death, and I choose you to be my apprentice."

Azrael was pretty sure he shit his pants. He didn't know how he knew this man wasn't lying, but as the clock turned midnight announcing his 18th birthday, all he could think about was where would Death even vacation? And how much does would it pay to be Death?

"I'm still in school," Azrael notified him. "And I want to go to college."

"Yes, that would all be fine, but you wouldn't be a normal person anymore. All your time would be devoted to the collection of souls"

"Does it pay to collect souls?" Azrael said, eyeing Death's suit. "Because if it does, I'm on board."

"No, it does not pay."

"Is there any chance that I could get paid, though."

"No, I just said it does not pay."

"Then how am I supposed to live!"

"You've done fine up until now," Death said looking him up and down. "I can't have you be too distracted; this job requires your full attention."

"It's not a job if I don't get paid!"

"We'll keep in touch," Death said standing up. He pulls a one-hundred-dollar bill from his pocket and throws it on the table "Keep the change, call it a birthday present."

"Wait! How do you have money!"

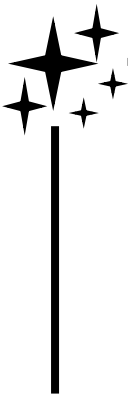
"Goodbye, Azrael, I'll see you soon."

Azrael ran after him, but as soon as he blinked, the man was gone

Infestation



Adriannah Quiroz



Hellraiser

Candida Soghomonian

The forbidden shapes appeared bringing with them a familiar sweetness, hues of peach, the smell of white rose petals. They guided my memories through a fog, where they showed me my innocence. Parts of my life that were fleeting and kind. The parts that I wasn't ashamed of. My life as a child spent on the northern coast. Mornings with my mother watching her paint the brilliant expanse of trees that line the CA 1. My first communion. The night that I discovered Kubrick. The trivialities of high school. Meeting Grace for the first time, her velvet black strands hiding her face like a royal shroud. A derelict fear swept through me upon their arrival. They placed a breeze on my cheek, soft fever dream of a kiss. It was to subdue me. For the darkness that they know I possessed deeply; I couldn't help but shed it willingly in their presence.

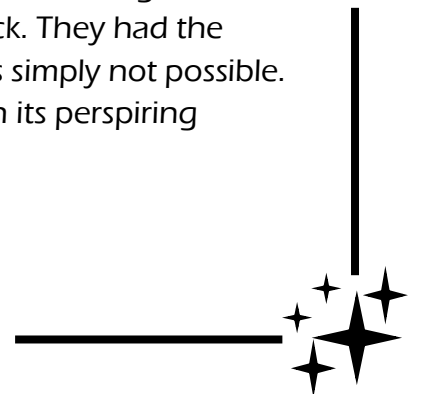
Was I to atone for what I had done? The one figure directly in front me began slicing ribbons of flesh from sharp, dagger-like lucid fingers. I felt my skin slip off of my shell gracefully. Uncovering the deep pink and red tissues, fissured grayish by time that convalesced underneath for years. What were they trying to accomplish by this act? Instead, they observed me flayed for a moment, arms hung at my sides, palms turned upwards as a Christlike figure free from mortal flesh. The lack of incandescence only made me realize that I am a consciousness within a body. Is there beauty in me and outward, still? If there is, it seems nonexistent in this state.

They became full now, apparitions no longer. There were 3 of them surrounding me. I would have never fathomed that anything like this could exist in my reality. Across moonlight shards, I could see their true form. Paled, enchanting, terrifying. They fit perfectly in the desolate landscape of highway road, broken up asphalt protruding beneath the space as they levitated above the earth. If I had truly summoned them thus, then I was undoubtedly unaware of the power that was locked within me. Before, they were only imagined as a plea for guidance, now they were as real as ever, whispering gently through synaptic nerve endings spurring speech and sound in by brain. All I could perceive was the humming.

I shuddered and felt exposed muscle twinge.

"You've come..." I resounded breathlessly.

Their heads were malformed with elongated skull-like transmissions extending behind the ears. Creating a silhouetted hood angling toward the lower back. They had the appearance of humanity with a common torso and limbs, yet it was simply not possible. Their skin, a translucent putty, encapsulated black veins underneath its perspiring



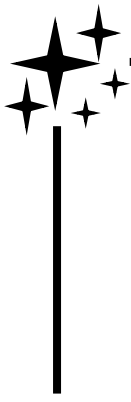
surface. They appear glistening. Intimately tilting their heads toward me, I could feel that they began to touch me. Coldness fell upon my shoulders, snaking toward my neck. My wrists were then wrapped, and I groaned. Why had they shown me this, only to leave me exposed? Is this what I asked for when I became acquainted with death?

-For Clive Barker

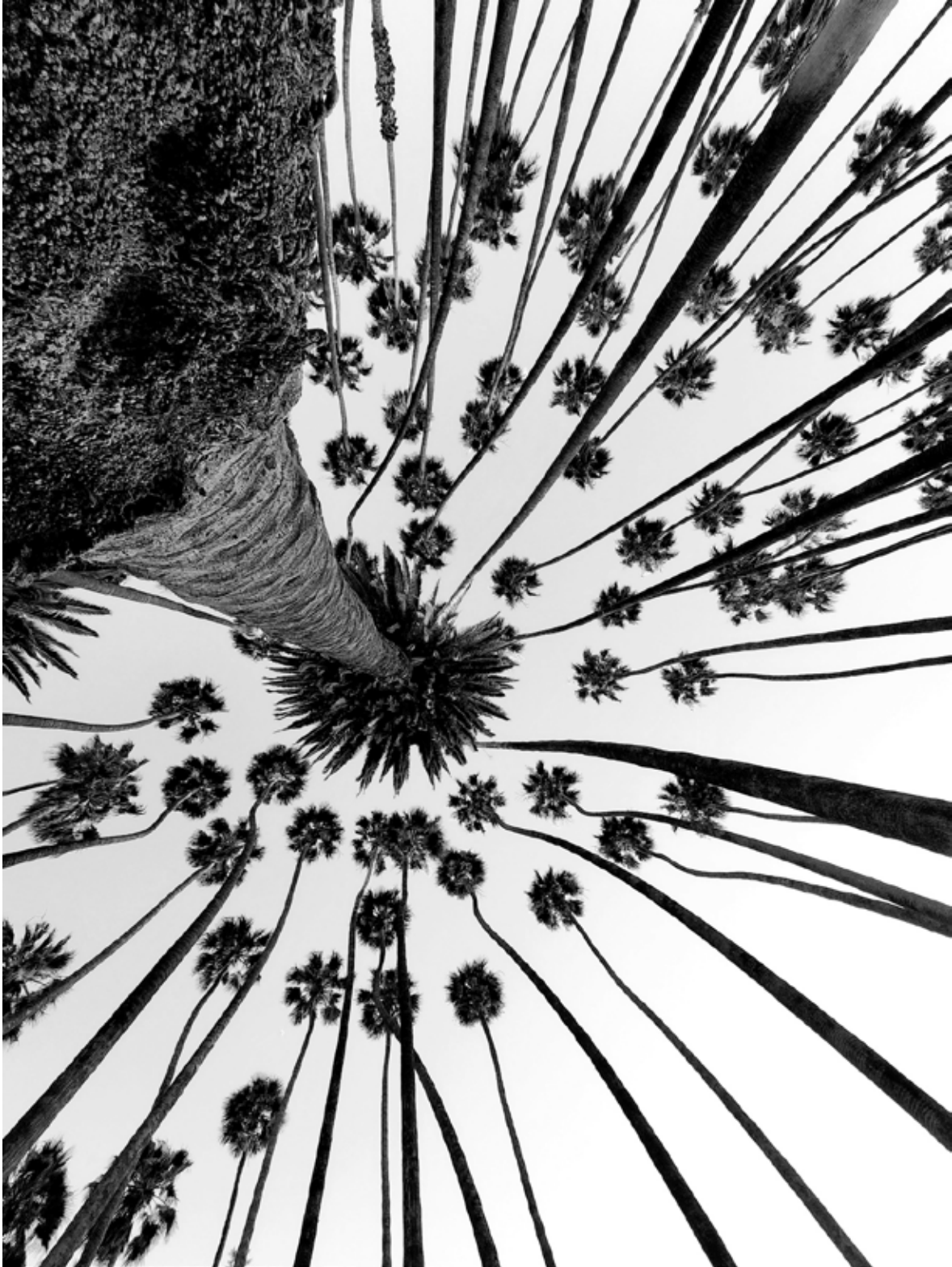
Bug Girl



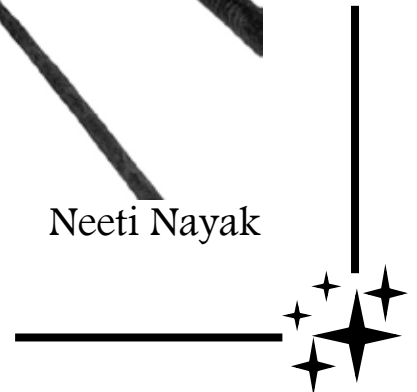
Adriannah Quiroz



Open Veins of Latin America



Neeti Nayak





The Great Deformity

Candida Soghomonian

I have a soft skull
as if I'm still an infant whose fontanelles have ceased to fuse.
The crater sits atop the crown
where it's begun to bulge out into my forehead
It is a deformity that I can't place
I feel less human, less animal, and more brain,
more singular and not plural.

Feeling like myself hasn't felt like much of anything
except that when I don't feel myself,
it's just as troubling as the deformity itself.

A constant universe of dualities
the stars of perceived thought take housing upon my head.
Flash Currents of neurons guiltily protected by a caved-in skull
unable to explore the vast necessity of the penultimate gift.
Separated by this ever thinning and thickening partition of consciousness,
cut off from the garden.
My fingernails filled with dirt from the untilled soil that lays the land outside of it.
Outside of me.

I question my fertility amongst the synapses that deposit the dopamine
I taunt it by disassociating the great mysteries of memory
of time and space.
I do not wish to be removed from the body,
this great deformity.

I merely long for the beauty of creation,
I say it like it's insignificant
trust me when I say to you that it is not;
even though I am an unreliable narrator of soul.

I don't think about ending my life
yet, it's strange when the bulging brain has other plans.
The horizon is hazed with darkening smoke,
lightning storms thick with a lingering metallic taste of bitter ash
experienced not by the tongue or the nose
but by the deformity.
It simply feels ugly *here* inside of this deep, cavernous plate.



The Barefooted Boy

Robert Mejia

The snow has been continuing to pile up since last Saturday, and I still have not seen the barefooted boy. When I do see him, I am going to let him in, but first I need to make sure Pops is asleep. It's 11:57 p.m., and I walk down the hall to make sure Pops' door is closed before searching for the boy. Tiptoeing, I find his door slightly cracked and surely enough Pops is sleeping, spread out on his bed like the old man he is. I gently close his door and with my fingers crossed that the boy hasn't shown yet, I hurry back to the living room window.

Hrrmmm... I count every second, listening to the glass shattered antique clock's quiet ticks, and the howl of the icy wind against the weak rusted iron window that rattles the old worn jalousie. I hang over the hole-ridden sofa with its back facing towards the window and face the cold air, staring aimlessly out the aged window as the cold air seeps through and surrounds me like a blanket. Turning back to my left at the clock, I see it is now 11:58 p.m. I think to myself, what can I get the boy. I move my knees to turn around behind me, glancing for any trinkets Pops might have laying around. Seeing nothing, I slide my knees off the sofa and head towards the dining room only a couple of feet away from me. I immediately notice the only trinkets around are the empty Corona bottles on the dining-room table, a faced-down picture frame, and multiple medication containers all scattered on the dusty table. I reach my arms over the quite tall dining room table and prop up the frame to place. Once propped up, I wipe the dust off the glass screen and see my mom and dad together – they look happy. I fold my arms into each other and place them on the table, resting my head over and admiring the photo. I look at my mom; I think of how beautiful she was: her emerald green eyes, light colored skin, and soft black hair.

She must've been happy in this photo...

After that minute of admiration, I remember I need to find something for the boy. I look over to my right to see the antique clock's time is at 11:59. I unfold my arms, sliding them carelessly off the table. Accidentally, I swipe a bottlecap from one of the beer bottles onto the floor. Oops! I try to catch the bottlecap but it hits the cold concrete floor. The sound of the cap hitting the floor echoes in the room and silently, I bite my bottom lip, holding my breath, and closing my eyes hoping Pops stays asleep. I count down the seconds in my mind, feeling the cold yet dry sweat break out on my forehead. After waiting for what felt like minutes but was only a couple of seconds, nothing happens. I release a deep sigh of relief, it's a good thing Pops sleeps like a dead man. I immediately continue my search and see the bottlecap that fell in the corner of the room, I walk over to the cap and surprisingly I find a pair of dark blue and green Skechers. I check the shoes and they are boys' size six. I guess shoes would be the best



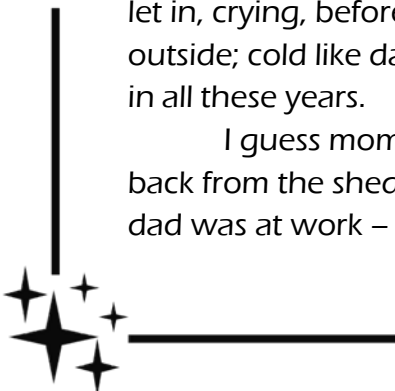
gift for someone barefooted. Unsure of the barefooted boy's shoe size, I grab the shoes anyway hoping they will fit him, and quietly head back to the sofa, resting my knees against the cushion and facing the outside of the window with the shoes on the cushion next to me. I wait, anticipating the moment the clock will strike 12:00 a.m.

Knees against the sofa's seat cushion and chest pressed against the broken back cushion, I turn my head to the left to look at the clock. I watch the clock tick as seconds pass and get closer to 12:00 a.m. Admittedly, I only have 12 a.m. to check for the boy, before mom gets back from her secret night work and dad's "medication" wears off. If I get caught mom could tell dad and... and.... Struggling to imagine what could happen to me if I mess things up, I suddenly and unwelcomely am reminded –Ack! The clock sets off every half-hour! Uneasy, I try not to panic and run towards the clock.

Fortunately, it is only hanging by one nail. I lift the small wall clock, sliding it over and away from the nail on the wall, watching my fingers as to not cut myself on the broken glass, and – dang it! It fell! Crunching against the hard floor, the old clock's wood cracks in half, the remaining glass protecting the face of the clock shatters, and the cogs spill on the floor. I'm going to miss the boy! Without knowing the time or considering Pops' sleep I head towards the sofa. I try to maneuver around the broken pieces of the clock to make my way towards the window but begin to fear as the wind begins screaming and the snow begins to sound like stone being thrown at the window. Shivering, not because of the cold, but because of my fear, I slowly approach the window. The jalousie is rattling, seemingly almost ready to fall off, and the window's seams sound like the cracking of nutshells looking as if it is going to crack open revealing the cold outside.

As I approach the window, I see a silhouette getting larger as I make my way closer to the window. It must be him! I tighten my stomach, face my fear, and finally make it to the sofa, the silhouette getting larger as I get closer. I place my knees on the cushion to look out the window. I see nothing but a blurry reflection. Concentrating on the image, freezing cold hands begin to choke me from behind. Struggling to breathe, I try to remove the hands off of my neck, and as I put my hands over the hands on my neck—they are large. I try to turn away from the window to look behind me, but can't as the large hands wrap around me tightly. I start crying, only able to look forward the silhouette that was me reflecting through the window reveals itself, and behind me, my beautiful mother. I look into her beautiful emerald green eyes; the eyes that would watch me walk home barefooted through the snow, after she locked me away in the shed miles away from home. Her eyes that would watch me bang on the window to be let in, crying, before she closed the jalousie on me. Her pale skin, cold like the snow outside; cold like dad's lifeless drugged up body; cold like the snow I have taken haven in all these years.

I guess mom got home from work early; I really should've never walked home back from the shed that day and peeked through mom's window finding her – when dad was at work – alone with some random man. After mom found out, I could tell she



was angry, but she didn't hate me. She told me if I kept it a secret should, she'd let me sleep in the house at night instead of that shed. I should've never disobeyed mom... I shouldn't have been here right now looking for an imaginary boy anyway, because when I look out the window for the boy now, at 12:00 a.m., I find out that I am, and have always been, the barefooted boy. Now, I look through the reflection of the window to see the snow falling like the tears streaming down my face. Everything begins to fade to black; it reminds me of my mother's soft black hair. I hear the snow hit against the pane of the window and the cold breeze seeping through its cracks engulfing me. As the reflection becomes harder and harder to make out, and I am no longer able to see my mom, I smile, remembering her beautiful image before I die.

Guardian Bunny



Adriannah Quiroz



Carnality

Candida Soghomonian

Restless is the arcane night
autumn has the power to execute me
amongst its burgundy leaves falling slowly,
intimately.
Skin scathed by crisp air,
a feast for October.
It's not death that I fear,
I can handle the abyss.

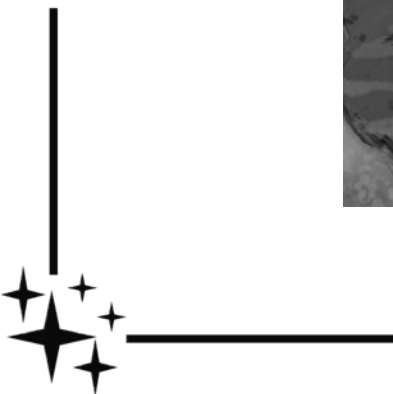
Mouth full of teeth,
fingers full of hair,
teeth full of flesh.

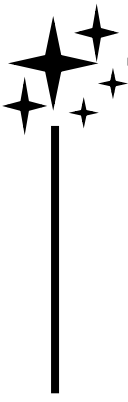
Burn with me tonight.

Lord of the Prey



Adriannah Quiroz





Not the Happiest Place

Alondra Jimenez

To be able to visit a magical place where nothing goes wrong, what a wonder that would be, Belle thought as she and Peter made their way down the jam-packed highways of LA. Belle thought this because LA is not magical, she didn't care about what was written on those travel sites or said about on YouTube videos; it's over glamorized and too crowded, making it impossible to get anywhere.

"At this pace we're never going to get anywhere," Belle said with a defeated sigh to her boyfriend Peter.

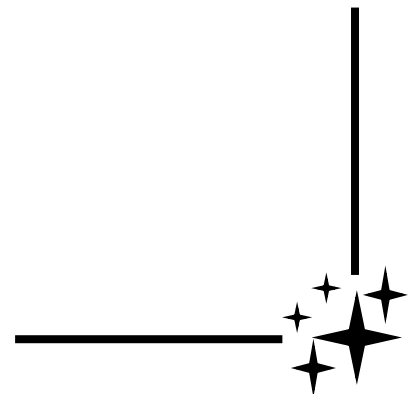
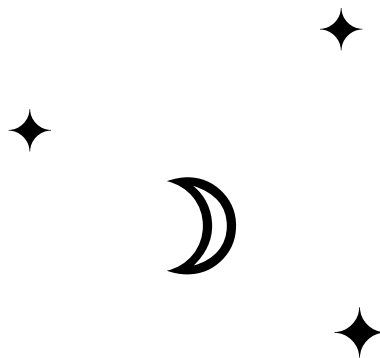
They had been driving for hours and the traffic was bumper to bumper, with every minute seeming endless. There were at least three accidents that she had counted, and the sun was at its meanest, cutting through the windows and burning her skin.

"Think about this, soon you're going to be in the happiest and magical place on earth."

"I don't know about that, at the rate we're going, it'll be at least another hour."

"Don't be so pessimistic," Peter replied seeming unruffled with the situation.

Belle didn't know how Peter could remain calm when she was ready to burst at the seams and break out of the car and dash through the throngs of cars feeling that would be a faster way to get to their destination. She had never been a patient person, but that's why her and Peter worked they balanced each other out. But right then she was not in the mood for his sunny disposition, so she closed her eyes and hoped that by the time she opened them again, they would have arrived, and everything would be smooth sailing from then on.





The Lost Soul: Guarded by Four

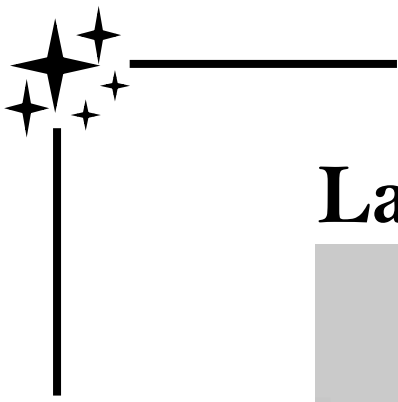
Deciderio Gallegos

There is a glow of fire on the horizon as the sun sets to the west. The 112-degree heat recedes as the night chill emerges. The glow of fire becoming darkness. In the middle of the desert field there lays a green 1998 Chevy Silverado, the only shelter for miles. A young man sits in the cab, staring to the horizon, waiting with anticipation for darkness to emerge. He is alone and yet full of company as his four guards, two Doberman-Boxer mixes and two Pitbull-Shepard mixes, sit in their posts ready to guard him for yet another night.

The leader of the four lies on the roof of the trucks, staring at the distance, smelling for any changes, only leaving his post to conduct perimeter checks, always returning. Second in command lies under the truck facing the opposite direction, waiting for any disturbance, keeping post as his commander conducts his checks. He is second in command, and the fall back in the event his commander gets injured. This has already happened once, when Leonidas, the leader, required surgery and was out of commission for over a month. On each side lie the real warriors, ready to attack and protect, the mothers of the litter. They were the support that stood watch as the commander and second in command rested.

They were guarding a poor soul, lost in his daze. Inside the cab, the only protection against the wind was the tarp that lay on top covering the front half of the truck. The night terrors disturbed his sleep. His only form of electricity was the battery to his truck and the cellphone he used to listen to music. During the day, he would drive to the city to buy food and water, mostly relying on canned beans, a hot sauce bottle, fried tortillas, and the daily 12 pack of beer to help him sleep at night. His guards hunted the wildlife of the desert during the day, so he only had to provide the water.

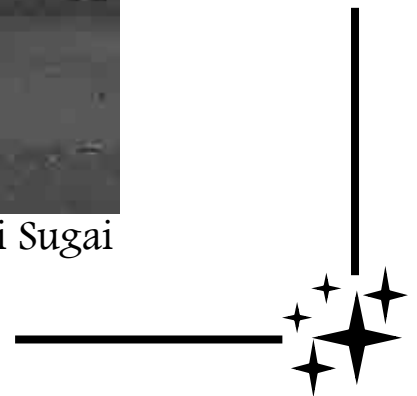
The four guards were taking care of him, not the other way around. They oversaw his life, not him. They made sure he woke up every day and would not leave him alone wherever he went. Every night he begged for a new day to come, to change his circumstances. And every day he feared losing the guardians that kept him alive for yet another year. Eventually three died, leaving only the leader, Leonidas who refused to give up. This young man has not returned to the field and yet his soul is still there, waiting for the day when it can move on to a better day.



Last Night Was Crazy



Kelli Sugai





Slow and Sudden

Sheva Lee Absher

She stood outside the familiar room, peeking through its cracked door. She was under strict instruction not to enter, but it wouldn't be the first time she failed to heed Agatha's orders. It might, however, be the last. She was reluctant to admit how much this thrilled her — angering her stepmother one last time, proving just how little authority she had in the end.

She slowly pushed open the particleboard door and squinted as it let out its trademark sharp squeak, hoping it didn't alert Aiden who was howling into his cell phone in the living room.

The already cramped space was even more confined with the oversized hospital bed replacing the small tweed pullout sofa on which she and Aiden had slept alternating weekends and holidays for most of their youth.

A jaunty jingle advertising an auto mall hummed from the thick old Panasonic packed in the dark wood credenza just inches from his feet.

The air was hot and thick in the late afternoon sun and she considered closing the heavy blue floral drapes hanging from the window above him. Instead, she moved resolutely to his side and stood above his nearly unrecognizable figure. He looked small and childlike with bruised and translucent skin covering his frail frame.

The saccharine-sweet scent of harvest potpourri was now overwhelmed by the stench of decay, as sharp and putrid as it was sterile and stale. The combination was disorienting, and she felt a wave of nausea wash over her with each breath.

She touched his arm lightly and was startled by how frigid it felt. A familiar heat burned behind her eyes and her face began to distort in anguish.

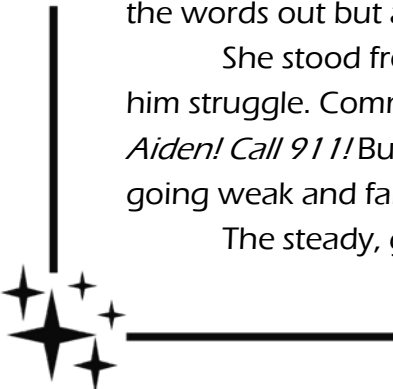
"Dad," she said her voice cracking and more tender than she anticipated. His blue veined eyelids fluttered as his cracked, colorless lips parted.

Startled, she pulled her arm away and stepped back swiftly, stumbling into the wood-paneled wall with a thud. His eyes opened wide and locked on hers.

"June," he rasped, his voice choked and coarse. He moved his lips again but no sound released, only dry and incoherent syllables. He grabbed at his throat as if coercing the words out but all that expelled were parched, frantic gasps.

She stood frozen, her back collapsed against the wall, paralyzed as she watched him struggle. Commands floated through her head at a dizzying speed, *Go to him! Get Aiden! Call 911!* But she just stood there, watching as his arms flailed desperately before going weak and falling to his sides.

The steady, graveled rhythm of his breath ceased then. His head remained turned





towards her, his weathered blue eyes still agape, never having broken her gaze. The light buzz of the television continued, but beyond it there was a silence, as heavy and thick as the air in the room. She longed for the loud and steady sound of his ventilator now. What was once a symbol of his fragility now seemed a hopeful sign of survival, its absence signaling forfeit, its vacancy predicting the inevitability of this moment.

North America: The Performance Of Freedom



Neeti Nayak



Midnight Writer

Alexis Argo

You were never sunshine
Simply the stars
Bright and beautiful
Shining in the darkness
Waiting for the day you'd shine as bright as the moon

Darling, you were never the sunshine
Simply the stars
Cascading in the sky like hellfire
Showing there is always something else
Swimming in the cosmos

No, you were never the sunshine
Only the stars
That glitter in the deepest hours of the night
A guiding light pointing
In whatever direction you'd chose

You were never the sunshine
Too attached to the moon
And the darkness in between
You were the stars
Watching the sun before it ever rose



San Bernardino
Valley College

Love Thy City



Gabrial Ybarra II

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