

# capitol letters



SPRING 2023

VOLUME 46

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# capitol letters

SPRING 2023 | VOLUME 46

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THE GEORGE  
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# ORIGINS

*Kiana Roman*

i am from the broken wings of monarch butterflies  
i live among the trees,  
and high-rise buildings  
and the swings that used to feel like rockets  
the ground and i just never really got along.

i'm from the sound of the streetlights and the silent chaos that lives in every  
corner of my heart.  
my hands only know words,  
and my tongue only understands poetry.  
they speak different languages,  
but they always manage to understand one another.

i derive from the vibrations of panderos  
and the clicks of the castanets.  
with hector lavoe playing in the mist,  
and flags that don't need wind to fly  
i am music strung into human form.

my heart is a loud whisper  
always trying to save those at the edge of the cliff,  
even by the time i get there, we're both on different paths.  
i just hate to see things break.

my life is an open book,  
but many have failed at understanding it.  
seeing the chapters for what they *truly* are  
some couldn't even make it to the table of contents.  
some get scared by their titles,  
others just don't speak the same dialect that i do.

i am from poetry  
and prose  
limericks and haikus  
words that have survived every war,  
every pandemic, and every economic crash.

my coffee eyes come from generations  
of people who were told no.  
my lips were shaped by  
the stories  
and storytellers  
of those who came before me.

i am from emeralds and larimar.  
pieces of stones that drift onto the shores  
of two lands  
that i call blood.

i am a result of a love story.  
where romeo and juliet make it in the end  
i've only ever known and believed in love,  
and i know it when i see it.

i am from logic and magic  
both the real and fictional.  
i am fairy dust  
and flesh.

i am from blood, sweat, and tears  
of seventeen years.  
and i know enough  
that when the caterpillar turns butterfly,  
it means that they are grown.  
but once that cocoon is off, there's no reversing time.

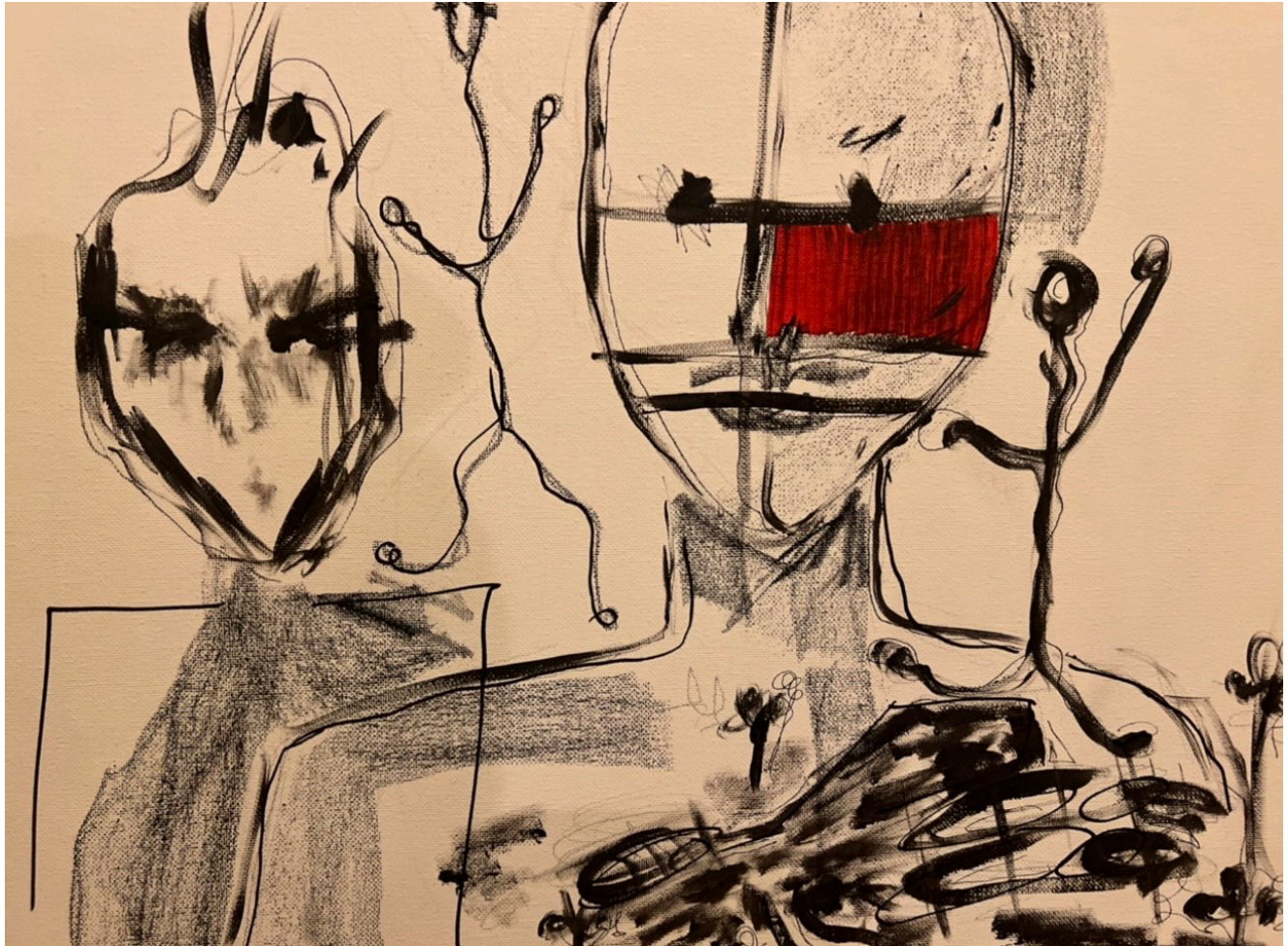
so i am the type to sit back and binge-watch my environment  
knowing that i hold the power to either keep it the same  
or change every inch of it

in realizing this power, i have also come to figure out  
that not everything can be so easily forgiven,  
or easily forgotten  
words hold enough fire to scorch my heart,  
but they also have enough warmth to hold it.

the rings of a tree represent every year that it has survived this world.  
and with every passing year,  
that i add another ring to my collection,  
i know that my origins are blissfully dancing  
in the history books that have yet to be written,



*\*Panderos: Puerto Rican Drums*



# SELF EXPLORATION

*Isabel Giordano*

# Former Poet's Impression of Poetry

Casey Aimer

These words are a former  
poet's impression of poetry.

So let's impersonate the role better,  
prime the pump and rip out the pull start  
until something, or someone, fucking breaks.

Still I wish I had become a songwriter  
and there was beauty in my honesty.  
Instead of endless hazy metaphors  
of enigmatic insanities hiding feelings  
I'm too afraid to confront, just wishing  
one line will lead me to a proper truth.

But maybe that's the trick.

Having to muddy reality so I look closer  
and grasp some damn understanding.

I'm a silent musician with an unplugged air guitar,  
what's the point? My pen's not empty of ink, just  
clogged, dredging up poetry of who I think I am  
while everyone reads between the lines and  
tells me who the hell I actually am.

I'm screaming behind iron-curtain trauma  
not thought about in thirty years.  
I'm a letter to myself stuffed  
inside the Berlin wall  
in need a sledgehammer,  
but instead I'm walking into  
my own cloud of pepper spray.

When clocks strike 11:11 I want to see some god  
damn wishes loaded underneath my throat again.

I want to find what the bridge between  
recuperating and recovered looks like.

I want to skip across metaphors and  
*experience* again, want to know only  
half of what I'm saying but  
every single thing that I mean.

I'm tired of compromising with my past  
then bargaining with my own future.

I can never simply exist, only  
extrapolate and theorize  
trying to anticipate headspace and the  
reactions of others like a Nobel chemist.  
There's a hung tension inside me that needs  
to be cut not using knives but with chainsaws.

My baseline existence plays defense against  
borderline psychosis. Against knife attacks  
in my home and significant  
other ovarian cancers.

There's no poetic story in cynic  
who used to be a romantic—  
not until after the resolution  
turned metamorphosis. But  
if these words were a series  
they'd be the forgotten middle  
book. They serve a purpose but

I crave being younger and not knowing  
how it all turns out. Want to fight back  
the world again before it wins, place  
my head back into the stars and explore  
like I'm James Webb, telescoping back  
my former worldview into poetry again.



## sack, cloth, and ashes

*Benjamin Connor*

oh to be the tree, back broken  
become the seat for sinners to repent.  
leave their sweat smeared like blood  
in the edges where dust screams  
into open air. echo into silence,  
a chapel borne from cracked velvet, stained blue:  
an ocean to be drowned in. as masses  
atone for crimes committed against  
their body, by hands lost in shadows:  
banished by faith.

iridescent in the light, a kaleidoscope  
before the eyes, turned to arches,  
made wooden or stone, made golden  
of tears. and sun diluted in the blur  
of colors. breath caught,  
to be a place of ecstasy  
once again; captured in the  
reverent touch, cross to closed lips.

God: bleed me of my anger, humanity  
turned deadly in its saccharine flavor.  
still, the only thing worth letting settle  
on my tongue. poison fruit, yet sneak  
tastes. again, again, again

i lose myself, in the sun  
this was once  
a beautiful place.

*Amen.*







# TOUCH

*Ella Hattem*

## THE GREAT

*Nadia Wachira*

Was it the mosquitos?  
Or was it the liquor that sent you to the bed  
Just to turn your nose and whine at the doctor?  
They tried to save you,  
But you did not want them to touch a god,  
A priceless man. Did you know what you would become?  
An artifact, a dusty book on the highest shelf that no one can reach.  
Blessed by above to be on earth and you waste it  
Because your stomach is starved for power as your liver cries  
To your wives and unborn child.  
But doctors can't be trusted to deal with sickness or drunkenness  
Or the poisoned.

My body is not mine.  
My body exists through your eyes,  
Your mind.

What I see in the mirror,  
What I see—

I see her pinked flesh,  
Picked fresh, rosied—  
From the grocery store to my vase, And

Her face, perfectly poised,  
Evading looks, succumbing to the noise.

And I bet fragrance lifts off her body,  
An intoxicating aura and all she embodies,

My mind spins,  
My stomach knots.

In the dark, in the pulsing light,  
Late at night— my  
Eyes lock on her,  
Flesh morphing, twisting,  
Melting back into the crowd.

My body is not mine.  
My body exists through your eyes,  
Your Mind.

# RED

*Elodie Nix*

I make my bed in scribbled footnotes,  
On the edge of every room,  
Feelings bleeding together,  
Smudged bare to time.

I scrub your lips from my flesh,  
I replace the lingering taste of vodka with  
A crisp winter mint— A reset.

I lather my body in soapy rose bubbles,  
Scrubbing the flesh raw,  
Removing every physical trace  
You left on my body.

I scrub                      I scrub                      I scrub

I feel your hot breath on my neck I scrub,  
I feel your sweaty hands around my back I scrub  
On my face, salted tears stream together  
With scalding spit I scrub  
Teeth clashing, I taste rot in my bones— it  
Feeds on my memories.

I scrub                      I scrub                      I scrub

Until I no longer look whole,  
A reopened wound because I  
Could not wait 7 years for all my cells to die  
And be born again— A reset.

My body is not mine.  
My body exists through your eyes,  
Your mind.

What I see in the mirror,  
What I see—

I see skin rubbed raw—  
I see **Red.**



# SYDNEY

*Elise Stankiewicz*

In a perpendicular universe I am sure  
I would've arrived at the same place but  
coming from a different angle. They'd call  
us "the twins," (what we've always been) with

specificity removed. I don't know if his name  
would come first or mine, though I think  
Andrew and Sydney sounds better. I'd make  
the same mistakes as now but sooner. I want

to believe I'd be better because of it. A little  
girl on a swing set with her father's guiding  
push, cheering like she was born to do,  
delighted, so unafraid of falling down.

Experience is the greatest teacher, but  
it doesn't have to be the only one. My father  
could motivate by a carrot or by a stick,  
though neither are effective with his hands

shoved into his pockets. Silence is his  
only authentic form of (dis)approval. I'm  
sure he wants to help, now that the carrots  
are rotten, the sticks, kindled in a bonfire

many many winters ago. His empty palms  
trying to give his little girl a starting push  
eight years too late, now that she already  
knows what it feels like to fall by herself.







## EUPHORIA DINER SCENE

*Caroline Roche*



# monster under the bed

Sydney Schmidt

You woke me, peaceful, with a jolt.

“You were screaming,” I saw it in your eyes, felt my tongue at the back of my throat, but it was slicked over and painless, soft on the cherry burning like a dead-skull night.

do you remember that dream I had?

I was

reading your diary

I was

knowing what you thought of me

and I was

seeing how you placed the time bomb in my mind.

window pane cracked, a devil like me slinked from beneath the covers  
to drop the ashes off your cigarette.

parasite-beloved, a devil like me laps up your nicotine, even as you write  
DEAD WEIGHT. in your diary, I read, against my better judgment,  
against the skin of my own teeth,

a floating zombie to the shore, I read you wasted,

you drunk, you in your mother’s bedroom, scalpel in hand, hovering over her chest.

you, mother-fair, mother-queen, just had to know if her heart was shaped the same as yours  
—why wouldn’t it be?

You love a devil like me,

wrote it in your diary,

head rush and twisted-on smile, where did you write my better parts make up your favorite child?

who gulps down, gill-less, on saltwater for the sting in my lungs,

who nips at the hand that feeds me, teeth sharp but not sinking,

who chokes, motion sick, on the spit you left for the bedside table to slicken your diary,

where you wrote in a dream:

*Lord, forgive me this one sin. I breathed to life a hated thing. I breathed to life a devil like me.*







## it's the hope

*Farida Galal*

it's the hope that makes you believe  
there's a what if  
a what could be

it's the hope that has you latching on to every compliment  
every glance, smile, and lingering hand

it's all you can hold onto

it's the hope that grows a pit in your stomach  
when you do not see the outcome you wanted

it's the hope that leads you down  
a path of self destructive swirling thoughts  
doubting every word you utter  
looking to appease the other

it's the Hope  
that kills you

# I SAID

*Anonymous*

I said, "Mom, I'm living through history."

She replied,

"So did I."

I said, "Mom, I practiced hiding in school corners, hoping I wouldn't suffer."

She replied,

"I learned to 'Duck and Cover.'"

I said, "I was thirteen the first time my friend took their own life and died."

She replied,

"Well it's a good thing you're on SSRIs."

I said, "Mom, 1 in 4 women have been sexually assaulted."

She replied,

"I have 4 daughters," and that thought would leave her haunted.

I said "I can't watch the fireworks anymore."

Is the sky glittering gold or the ground splattered red?

We can't help but caress all the pain we've taken to bed:

A tucked in shadow of missed goodbyes.

Now I see her face when I close my eyes.

Some days it feels like a crime to be happy.

My mom said she can't understand what went wrong with our generation,  
said she'd never known one to take their own  
Until she was fully grown.

And I think back to thirteen  
When already there had been one too many.  
Hushed voices and turned down heads  
Afraid to look in the eyes  
A feeling we were taught to disguise.

I said Mom, I don't feel twenty anymore-  
Rain drops of death landing on each shoulder.  
I said I am tired  
No, not tired, exhausted  
Like each bone in my body hollowed itself and aches  
Trembles under the weight  
Shakes at the beating of headlines  
Swarming and pervasive

Breaking news does just that, it breaks.  
And I lay broken amidst thunderstorms, drowning on concrete.

I said "Mom, I feel broken, No one looks whole anymore."  
And just when one piece is wearily stitched back together, another seam rips open.  
I said my fingers are calloused and raw from threading the needle over  
And over

I said  
gasping for air, for a breath not there, I heaved, my lungs filled smoke,  
mental cages are still just that-  
cages.

I said

I said

I said  
and the words wouldn't come

I said

I said

I said, "Mom, I think I want to die." She didn't reply.

# CLOTH AND WIRE

*Ali Lightfield*

“ I have been seeking out a **cloth mother** for most of my life, but **mine was *all wire*.** ”

At 9 years old, I thought I understood my mother.

She would gather my hair into a ponytail in the morning, or sometimes just wet it and put a headband in. She and my dad were freshly divorced. Going from house to house, I could tell whose idea it was, as my mom made herself coffee in the morning while my dad struggled to even leave his bed. I had a bubbling anger for both of them, at my dad for sucking the life out of a whole studio apartment, and at my mom for causing this whole mess. She was seeking happiness. I saw it as a threat to my own.

At 13 years old, I thought I understood my mother.

She saw all my flaws, pointing them out in subtle ways until I'd be crying in the mirror. Nobody else understood what was happening between us, but I did. I would get angry and snap at her, and then cry when she snapped back. I would say, "I'm sorry, I'm just tired." She would say, "You don't think I'm tired, too? Everyone's tired." I wanted to say that no, I'm not just restless, I'm exhausted. I'm deeply, emotionally, suffocatingly tired. Looking back, I think my mom understood what I meant. And she was tired, too.

At 15 years old, I thought I understood my mother.

Things were starting to smooth out, but the house was filled with tension. She was now two marriages down. I could feel it in her bedroom and in the living room and in the kitchen- her forties were approaching and she was getting weary. Every sentence was punctuated by a deep sigh. I was reaching the midway point of high school and the world was becoming an overwhelming force. She'd try to care for me, but I wasn't an easy case. We both were tired. We both wanted me to be better.

At 17 years old, I thought I understood my mother.

Her friends ordered a strawberry shortcake, her favorite, for me to pick up on her birthday. I drove to the shop, with its candy-colored walls and cursive font on the windows, and smiled when I opened the box. When I got home, my little sister and I brought her birthday cake in bed, and I watched as she teared up while opening the box, taking pictures and sending them to her friends. She hugged me and thanked me, and I was happy. I understood. She was born with an insatiable desperation for love. So was I.

At 19 years old, I think I understand my mother.

I remember reading in psychology class that monkeys, when given the option between a cloth mother with no function or a wire mother that gave milk, would always opt for the comfort of the cloth mother, even if she didn't do anything else but stay soft in their arms. I have been seeking out a cloth mother for most of my life, but mine was all wire. Even if she wasn't the most nurturing or soft, she provided, and she tried her best. It isn't her fault that she was born of twisted metal and sharp edges. I don't think I was born of cloth, either.

At 22, I may understand my mother.

I'll be the same age that she was when she first got married. Imagining myself three years from now, I wonder how on earth I could ever commit to anything at that age. I'm still shifting as a person, as she was then, too. If anything, I will understand her less.

At 23, I may understand my mother.

I'll be the same age that she was when she had me, when her life now bent at my whim and she became the woman I know now. Imagining myself four years from now, I wonder how on earth I could ever take care of anything at that age. All I know is that in my early twenties I'll be taking care of myself for the first time. Mom once told me that she always knew that she wanted to be a mother. I happened to be the exact opposite. I can't help but wonder if it's because of her.

I'll keep going on and on, in my twenties and thirties and forties. I may never understand, but there are a few things I know to be true.

I know that she's me, and I'm her, but I'm also not her enough, but I'm also everything that she wanted to be. It's all so simple now.

trapped  
within my  
little body  
is more than  
enough love  
to set the  
river  
loose to  
destroy the  
dam that my  
skin has be  
come so I  
dont hurt  
everyone  
the sum  
of my  
emotion  
can topple  
kingdoms my  
bones will pierce  
the walls that let  
the others live they  
will be inundated by  
my sweet  
tender  
flesh  
and  
blood  
for  
they  
did  
not  
exp  
ect  
of  
me a  
flood.

*Elise Stankiewicz*

## FLOOD WARNING



# UNDERWATER ENTITY

*Caroline Roche*



# The Bread of Heaven

Julia Kerrigan

“You look so pretty,” Delia’s mother whispers, smoothing out the white tulle skirt of Delia’s itchy First Communion dress. “So, so pretty. Now you stay still in that seat until it’s time to leave for church, I can’t have you staining this,” she says gently, poking Delia in her belly.

Delia nods diligently in response.

“Here, you can even put on some lip gloss while I put on *my* face.”

She places a squeeze tube in Delia’s little hand and whisks herself away, leaving a cloud of flowery perfume in her wake.

Delia sounds out the words on the side of the clear tube:  
“Vuh-nill-uh...sw-irl.”

She fumbles to unscrew it and is instantly hit with a wave of delicious sweetness. It smells like the frosting on cupcakes sold at Safeway, sugary icing topped off with a plastic ring. Her stomach grumbles loudly. Delia applies the gloss like she has seen her mother do and lets her tongue dart out experimentally. The chemical sweet smell really did translate into taste of something just left of vanilla.

All morning she had been confined to the kitchen chair, unable to eat breakfast or run around outside because of her pure white dress and white patent leather shoes. She had been distracted from the twist of emptiness in her stomach by the nerves of eventually standing in front of

the congregation. She had also been soothing herself with the knowledge that her mom refused to eat on days of formal events. Now all Delia feels is undeniably hungry.

Delia grabs the tube from the kitchen table and secrets it to her room, alone at last with her first treat of the day. Going slowly, uncertainly, she squeezes a quarter sized glob of the gloss onto her tongue. She squishes the gloss against the roof of her mouth, closing her eyes to savor the sugary taste and smooth texture. It’s even better than she had imagined it would be, better than the cherry cough drops she stole from her teacher’s desk, better than

her mom’s caramel Viactiv vitamins in the bathroom cabinet. If those treats make them feel like women, the lip gloss makes Delia feel like a goddess. She goes back for more this time, piping the lip gloss straight into her mouth like frosting and tipping her head back to catch it all. It builds up on her gums and squeezes out of the side of her lips, and the tube makes popping noises as the gloss slowly runs out.

“When she smiles widely, her teeth are gleaming and dripping with gloss, too. It looks beautiful, and it tastes

*heavenly.*”

She flips open the lid of her music box—so many times, she had opened it to listen to the resonant and tinny melody without even noticing her reflection. But now she wants to examine herself in its warped plastic mirror. Delia sees that some of the gloss has made it onto her lips, like it is supposed to be. When she smiles widely, her teeth are gleaming and dripping with gloss, too. It looks beautiful, and it tastes heavenly.

Delia wonders about the other things in her room she could eat. Everything in it is bright pink or yellow, all of it so cute that it is begging to be eaten. There is an eraser shaped like a birthday cake at the bottom of her backpack, which she had been awarded by her art teacher and



hadn't dared to use. She digs for it and turns it over in her hand, trying to imagine how it might taste. There are lots of boys in her first-grade class who chew on their pencil erasers all day and seem to like the flavor, so it must be good. When she bites in, the eraser refuses to give at first. She clamps down her jaw and the outer shell yields a soft and squishy inside, much like year-old taffy. Delia's noisy chews resound in her ears until the eraser is half-way gone, until there is one bit left, until she has eaten the whole thing.

Texturally, the eraser was really pleasing. But it lacks flavor, so Delia scrambles for her stash of Scratch 'n Sniff stickers that come in the monthly *American Girl Magazine*. She frantically drags her nails across the different foods, breathes in deeply, and pops them into her mouth, one after the other. The Lemon cake sticker's sweet smell makes it go down nicely. The pickle sticker makes her salivate and she lets it sit in her mouth until the sticker paper has turned into a clump. The butterscotch truffle sticker makes her nose tickle, but she eats it, nonetheless.

There are all sorts of things in this world that you could eat, but you don't. Maybe you know better, or maybe you're just barely restraining yourself from trying to. But our brains are powerful enough to simply imagine, in a close approximation, what something might feel like on our tongue. If you have even thought about eating playdough, you can already sense how it might squish between your teeth. You can intuit how the crayon may rebel against being crunched between your molars, or the way your sister's chocolate scented eyeshadow would stain your teeth and tongue. Why not experience all these sensations for real?

Underneath all the stickers, Delia sees the sparkling marble she had found under the chain-link fence of the playground. She turns it around in her hand, contemplating if it's worth more to her inside or outside of

her stomach. Her decision made, she pops it into her mouth and swallows it like she has seen her mother take pain medication. The remaining lip gloss helps it slide down her throat.

"Delia!" her mother calls up the stairs. "Car, now!"

Delia grabs a final glance in the music box mirror. Her other treats had left her with mostly clean teeth and an acceptable amount of gloss on her lips. The uncapped tube of lip gloss sits discarded on the floor, devoured.

She feels full on the drive to the church. Smiles proudly when the other first communion girls *ooh* and *ah* at her vanilla gloss. Delia is careful not to lick too much of it off her lips, telling herself that she has already had enough to eat.

As she kneels at the altar, her stomach churns, like it has been flipped upside down. Delia grimaces as she waits for her turn in the line of kneeling children, focusing on the priest's murmurs.

"The body of Christ, the bread of heaven."

The kids to the left and right of her whisper their *amens* in response and let the wafer slowly melt on their tongues.

When the Father reaches her, Delia tentatively places the wafer onto her tongue. It tastes of nothing, and yet it upsets everything in her stomach. She feels the foaming of saliva in the back of her mouth and turns out away from the tabernacle to vomit. Delia only hopes she can keep the throw up off her white dress.

The congregation is so silent, they can all hear a sparkling marble rolling down the aisle, making its way out of the contents of Delia's stomach.

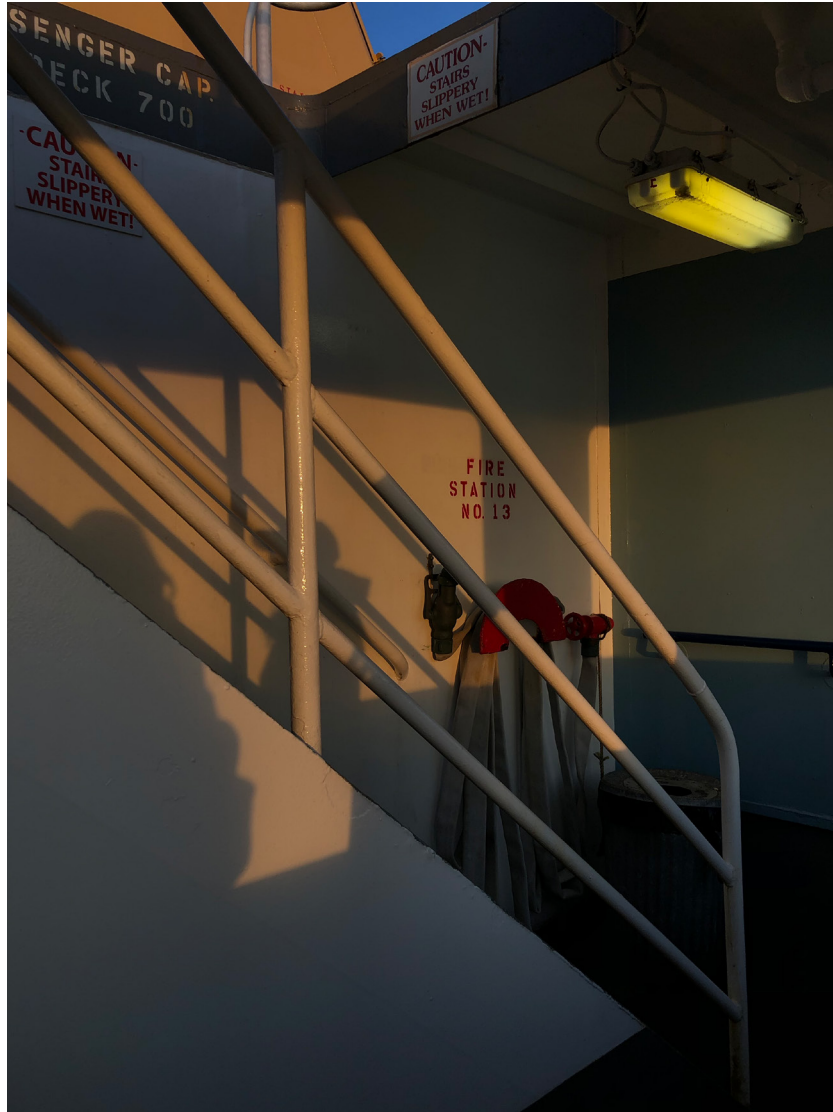
**ELLA HATTEM**

**BODY**

**LANGUAGE**







# BLOCK

*Gabrielle Kirk*



## this is an elegy

*Elodie Nix*

this is an elegy  
to all that is lost in time  
subdued and frayed out  
to the blurring current

static glitches run down  
through my arms  
into my toes

and for a moment  
i am but  
a system in suspense

as clocks rewind and  
strange faces appear in shadows

fragments of the past sliced with  
reflections in the mirror  
hands placed upon my shoulders

visions of shattered lives  
sewn together:  
jagged edges  
familiar eyes

*can ghosts exist for someone who hasn't yet died?*

# Mourning Sun

*Gabrielle Kirk*

Pocket-sized sunflowers sit on my windowsill  
Towards sun that never reaches this side of the house.  
Broken necklaces hang heavy from their necks,  
Clear glass beads haunting green skin.

Dead spiders line the terracotta pot,  
Long limbs curled into themselves like sleeping palms,  
And their webs weightless between buttery petals.  
They never could catch enough flies to make a full meal.

Ghosts of patient spiders leave footprints  
Across mounds of dry chocolate dirt,  
Overcooked in the dusty terracotta pot.  
My sunflowers droop with the abandoned nooses of necklaces

Woven and threaded, beads passed through each finger  
Of a forgotten friend and tied with broken clasps  
Now poking through crumbling dirt  
Like gravestones for starved spiders.

My sunflowers slouch and mourn.  
The cemetery waits beneath failing petals,  
Patiently pocket-sized in the rising and falling  
Shadow of the sun.

## KOREAN WAR

*Matthew DuBois*



## In the Face of Grief

*Jillian Mackuse*

I am told, “be grateful for the time you had,”  
As if those seven words are a sort of magic fix  
To the suffocating weight of the twenty-one years of memories  
That long to be accompanied by just a couple more.

# RED LIGHTS

*Matthew DuBois*



# ALZHEIMER'S CHRISTMAS

*Casey Aimer*

*Come they told me*

I spent Christmas with you, Pa,  
rekindling memories alongside loops  
of your favorite song, Little Drummer Boy.

*A newborn king to see*

Your mind is Zeno's paradox in action,  
each day half the man you were before  
but never not the grandfather I love.

*Our finest gifts we bring*

When I arrived with Ma you grinned  
with the automatic beams of a man  
whose body knows to instinctively  
receive his wife of sixty years.

*I am a poor boy too*

The Yuletide melody I promised was forgotten,  
my calloused string-fingers unable to memorize  
notes for you, ashamed my failure  
would be remembered in your marrow.

*Shall I play for you*

You taught me to sing unafraid, out of key,  
loudest and proudest in all the pews.  
But I don't know how to sing with you  
when I'm too busy gurgling tears.

*The ox and lamb kept time*

When Ma reached her fingertips to your cheeks  
you told her: "I thought you had left me."  
She reassured you eternally: "No, Pa, I'm here.  
Always before you remember that it's tomorrow."

*I played my best for him*

Fixing the crooked Santa hat  
orderlies placed on you, I tapped  
my fingers on your knee to the beat.  
I'm sorry before now I kept my distance,  
so afraid of collapsing my own heart  
that I forgot all about yours.

*Then he smiled at me*

# CALL ME \_\_\_\_\_

*Casey Aimer*

Call me Jean Valjean, owning no name  
merely alibis. My past hunts me while  
I'm disguised behind an altered hide.

Call me Ursula's Earthsea wizard Ged,  
uncovering my *true name* so I can  
finally wield power over myself.

Call me a Cynical Civic, a contradictive  
urban-born communist, the first child  
in fourteen generations to leave  
soil and forego farming as lifestyle.  
I tend to till myself still in the a.m.  
when worlds are silent and pick  
Texas cotton from my bloodline.  
Green scabs scar and salute my skin  
but I've only ever pledged allegiance  
to myself and my Amber-colored love.

Call me Backpedaler, a reverse  
descendant of my ancestors  
fleeing East to find commune  
comforts and revelations in  
false-start city revolutions.

Call me Mediator, of speculative  
ghosts who don't respect me  
enough to show, who balk at  
talk and would rather stalk  
the entrances to my future.

Call me Trauma, because I left myself  
out west amid sent cease and desist  
letters, torn defamation suits data-  
mining my self-definition 'til I'm called

Damage: soul screaming unlabeled  
trauma because the marking gun  
was out of stock, parallel to my  
scorched social profile.



# SELF PORTRAIT

*Caroline Roche*





# AMBEDO

*Ellianna Gelardi*

*n. a kind of melancholic trance in which you become completely absorbed in vivid sensory details.*

Legs crossed on the black leather seats  
of our family car, shoes scattered below

our exposed toes. The wetness of the windshield  
is a loose attempt at silence as the wipers

hold steady to the beat of the radio.  
Distant tail lights guide us

towards the road ahead, eyes remaining weary  
on the falling rain drops

dancing on the passenger side window.  
Our destination is close

but the race between the once  
drizzling evening that came from the tired

sunny afternoon teeters on the edge  
of a downpour. To watch

my mother's delicate fingers brush away  
tears gliding past the cheeks of

my father as I follow the soft monotonicity of his innocent weeps  
meshing with the sound of the pounding

misfortune of his ever consuming life.  
Glancing up towards the descending whirlpools

puts me in a trance of indistinguishable  
thoughts, where my brother sits in silence,

so I forget to try to understand,  
the blisters on my heels

from the black ballet flats,  
that were too tight

but I knew that troublesome  
complaints would fall short

of the perilous rain  
holding my childish callousness.

So I let adolescence tug at my dress,  
as my mind races between

the two raindrops on the tempered glass  
as they chase each other to their own demise.

The engine rolls to  
a stop and I slip out of the car

just to realize the rain falls a little harder  
when people shake my hand,

hold my shoulders  
allocating their deepest sorrows

for when I place a rose on polished  
mahogany looking over at the marked

gravestone and wonder why the clouds  
dispense fury so easily

yet my eyes stay dry,  
so I let the feelings slip

focusing on the collection  
of meager puddles

that settle by my feet  
as the person I was

so sure I loved  
becomes a deluge

with the August storm.  
And my baby hairs

become matted to my forehead,  
as I turn towards my brother

letting my shoes  
land back on the car floor

hoping he would allot a sign of remorse  
yet all I see are his eyes following the swift

condensation of the little grasp  
we had on the inevitable end of the downpour.

# FOR KATE

*Hattie Wall*

Dear Sara,  
If your daughter feels like my sister,  
am I yours too?

Sometimes I fear I'll find who I am in the lives you've lived  
But, I am not a puppet by the strings of your DNA,  
So I must help Kate unravel her's,

And,  
Since you are gone,  
In memoriam,  
existence without executive function,  
You must trust in me now.

I fear,  
That you imagine  
These tears I shed for you, to taste of salt.

They do not.

They burn red,  
Hot forever  
Scabs that scar  
From where you left your touch  
Unresolved  
From not saying goodbye.

## TIDAL BASIN BLOSSOMS

*Lily Speredelozzi*



When I cry  
Your spirit stings.  
Screaming I love you  
From thousands of miles away  
But you got to die so close to her?  
Not withering,  
As you whispered through the phone that you chose to take your last breaths.

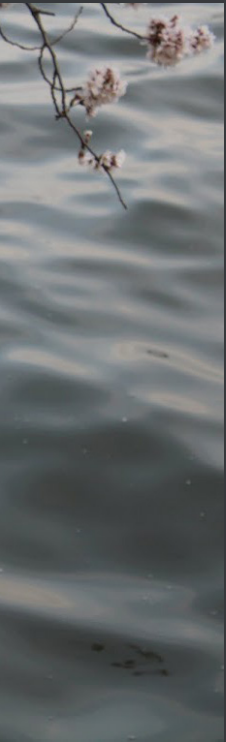
Isn't it curious then,  
How Kate always fights like hell?  
But I imagine you knew that,  
Always so surprised that you were the one to hold her  
For two hundred and seventy three days sober.

Well, cheers to the bottle in your glove box  
While our hearts lay in the backseat,  
Her tears, like mine, were warm to the touch,  
By christmas the glass will freeze,  
But gold on the inside will rock.

As this chariot speeds towards purgatory  
I wish you were still here to take a sip.

Like the pills you had to swallow  
All you did was pass down your battles  
And what if one day she gives up  
Cause all you did was run and run and run and

Gutted everything around you  
Under the guise you were having fun  
How fun is six feet under not able to look up  
Blurry figures in black who decided to show up.



## PROCESSING

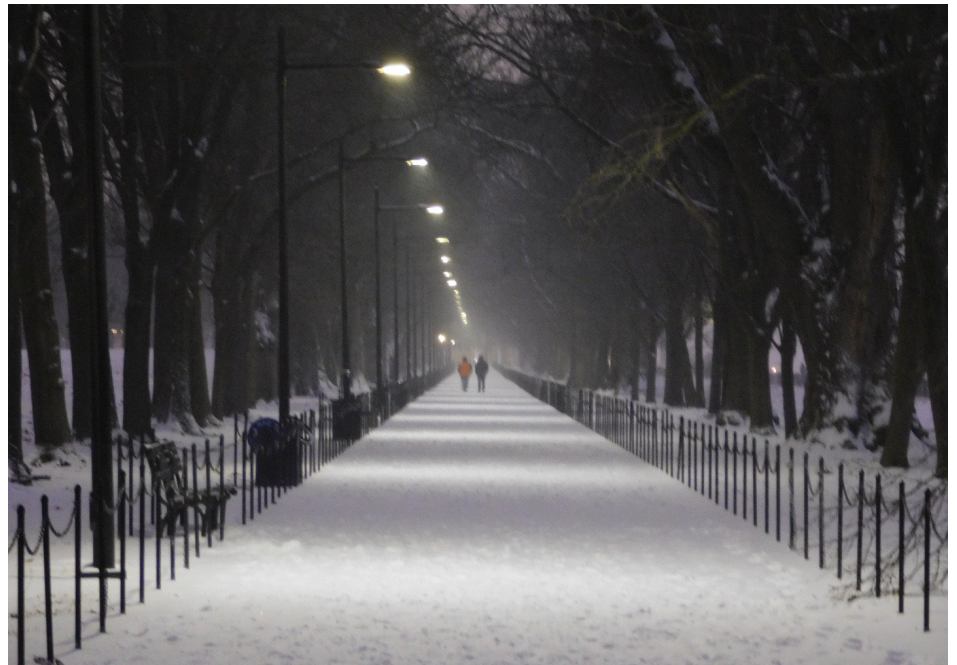
*Nadia Wachira*

I was not sure what you meant  
Or what you even said,  
For that matter.  
All I heard was static buzzing in my  
Right ear like an old TV turning on.

I do know how it felt, what you  
Had said to me that is. It made me feel  
Different. What best could be described as  
Maggots wiggling up my throat and  
Nibbling—no, *devouring* my flesh  
From the inside out.

I am sorry about it. I really am.  
But, when you wanted to talk,  
I was under the assumption it would be  
About—

**SNOW**  
*Matthew DuBois*





# CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEFS, I HAVE MY HURTS

*Sylvia Jones*

On Saturday at the bar, every time I went to order drinks, I kept lifting my right leg, as though there was a step beneath the counter—between the bar wall and the floor tiles. As though there was an invisible stair waiting for my languishing foot to punch it down. First time I caught myself was before the couple left. Then upon asking for another “espresso-martini-ish” for you. I had cottonmouth and hated my seat. Your smile was bright and warm. Our table was wobbly.

# ISAAC

*Arden Reynolds*

There was no father to sacrifice him  
Alone in that net he decided to do it himself<sup>1</sup>  
Imagine punching the knife through your own neck  
Goats went out of fashion centuries ago

He didn't even know that God was busy  
Away with some bimbo, or himbo, getting busy  
Writing His Genesis in their guts<sup>2</sup>  
Bemoaned breath snagged on the wind

He was supposed to die on that hill,  
No one told him to<sup>3</sup>  
He grabbed the knife  
He cast the net  
He screamed for mercy  
He played his part perfectly  
Someone give him an Oscar if they can be found this millennia

“And the Award for worst supporting mentor goes to...  
I don't believe it, it's a perfect tie between Abraham and God!  
Come on up and pay your penance!”<sup>4</sup>

Abraham was busy with the “it was only once Sarah”<sup>5</sup>  
I already told you where God was  
You'd think for a miracle, they would pay more attention  
The first tears from Isaac were like those for a childhood pet. The last ones too<sup>6</sup>

*1. If he'd followed through it would have been gruesome and/or awesome*

*2. I don't know if it would be an Adam or Eve, but Mary will be pissed*

*3. No one told him not to either*

*4. It will be a Hail Mary at worst, but probably more Bloody Mary's*

*5. It was much more than once, but much less than thrice*

*6. No one knows for sure, but they looked the same as the first*



The knife missed the neck. All that was found was  
a net with holes it wasn't supposed to have.

We lost track of Isaac after this<sup>7</sup>  
Had to have his own Exodus just to escape it all  
No one believes me when I say things  
Like I found his name, rusted and shattered, decrepit and well-worn

Presumed lost to the desert, there's nothing out there  
He never collected his Oscar<sup>8</sup>  
He never came from anything just nothing. Disappearing is just like going home

*7. Sandstorms shred evidence and stories into incoherent ramblings; most call these "myths"*

*8. We found the speech in the desert, there was a thank you only to the Academy*



# **SPRINGTON**

*Gabrielle Kirk*



# To Flood a Draining Heart

*Max Feng*

I stand in the rain, umbrella in hand  
An umbrella that's built for the sea.  
It's made to last, to protect, to withstand  
But the umbrella is not for me.

It opens for others, for anyone else near  
I should drown so long as they're dry.  
For them, I hold it, on their left and to their rear  
While I weather the callous sky.

Wettest is my cheek, coldest is my chest  
Still nobody sees how I shiver.  
Down my face, the streams fall, my tongue does a test  
Proof that there is salt in the river.

The pain of the storm, it might never end  
And I've yet to be given a chance.  
I'm left longing, for a stranger, or better a friend  
To embrace me in the rain for a dance.



CAROLINE ROCHE

CHICAGO

you left me belowdeck  
to nurse what remained  
in the contents of my stomach

when we first set out, you carded fingers  
through the tangles of my hair  
let the rain kiss my sweat stained brow as I heaved  
and whispered, *soon you will settle with the sea*

as i clutch my throat and wish  
the bile back down, how long before you come down  
to fetch me. if at all.

the darkness only covets more corners  
which to collapse, so i slam into the hatch  
praying it opens. i wonder if you have locked  
me in.

the sea is consistent in her turmoil, but there you stand  
romrod straight at the prow. i made it next to you.  
you do not turn. finally, your eyes meet mine, and i wish suddenly to jump in the ocean  
perhaps you would rather push me

your lips curl in disdain as you say, *have you quite finished my love?*

i find your eyes again  
and i curl forward to vomit  
on your shoes.

# SEASICK

*Benjamin Connor*



# I KNOW

*Gabrielle Kirk*

It's morning  
before the light even hits my face.  
I can sense the tenderness  
of the sun and you –  
the moment you hold  
between yourself  
and the damp morning,  
when the sun is an impossible  
pinprick, years away.

I know it's morning because  
I can hear you rummaging  
in the junk drawer again,  
searching for that one  
piece of me that you keep  
asking about, like it's your  
extra set of keys  
that you asked me to hold  
onto.

I know it's morning  
because I'm afraid  
to open my eyes,  
and see you fumble  
for words like loose change  
in your pocket.

I know it's morning,  
because you leave  
without saying goodbye,  
like you knew I was awake all along.



## SUNSET SHADOWS AT THE KENNEDY CENTER

*Meghan O'Neil*

“ ‘Because every normal person buys a **10-pound bag of fish** on their *good days.*’ ”

## ABOUT FISH

*Rita Seidl*

Emma was at another college party where the hosts had forgotten to play music. No one else seemed to care. The roar of conversation and people playing drinking games filled the space, but to Emma the lack of music removed the thin romantic film that had once veiled reality, revealing what had been true since before she walked in and would remain true afterwards: this party, like the last one she had been to and the one before that, was lame as hell.

After 45 minutes of standing by the wall having the same conversation over and over with people she would likely never speak to again, some guy approached her, and she had to admit he was pretty hot. *This could be good*, Emma thought.

“So what’s your major?” he asked. Of course he did.

The question was so robotic, so devoid of meaning that Emma’s loneliness struck her then in a way that was so palpable and suffocating that she turned and left. In her dorm, she went online and spent almost all of her money buying a plane ticket to Seattle and the cheapest hotel room she could find.

Somewhere in the air on the flight over, Emma switched time zones and gained three hours. She got this idea in her head that if she never went home again, she would never have to give them back. She would die three hours after everyone else, with the knowledge that she had thwarted time completely and had the last laugh.

Pike Place Market was packed, and Emma breathed deep and freely, feeling no small amount of relief at the anonymity this brought her. In a tiny stall on the lowest floor, she found a Vintage bomber jacket with a soft hood, the kind that would look super corny if you bought it from some fast-fashion retailer, but not if the material was old and thick and you could pretend you got it from your dad.

“Would you like a bag?” the vendor asked.

“No thanks,” Emma said. “I’ll wear it.”

Upstairs, Emma saw a purple sign, trimmed with

fake gold leaf and with the words *The Mysterious Gerimilia: Tarot and Horoscopes* scrawled in some cricut font with like 14 tails per letter. Emma had nothing better to do, so she decided she could shell out \$5 to see what this woman thought about her future. The waiting was uncomfortable and her hair stuck to the back of her neck, but she looked out the window at the bay and tried not to fidget.

The guy in line in front of her was holding what had to be at least a 10-pound bag of fish. He was tall, but not very attractive, mostly because of his posture: the way his shoulders sloped in. His body was turned slightly, and he glanced nervously at Emma, then down at the fish, then back up at Emma. After a moment, he spoke.

“Getting a tarot reading, huh?” he asked.

“Yeah,” Emma said. “Never gotten one, I figure why not.”

There was a long pause. He was clearly racking his brain for something else to say. A large part of Emma wished he would just turn back around.

“Same, same,” he said. “That, and my life’s falling apart. Hence the bag of fish.”

This didn’t make a whole lot of sense to Emma, but it was more interesting than anything else going on at this particular moment. “Right,” she said. “Because every normal person buys a 10-pound bag of fish on their good days.”

He laughed. There was another long pause. “Well, when you drop out of college and get fired from your job on the same day... sometimes things happen.” *Yikes*. Unsure why this guy had decided on

her to be the confidant of all the softcore trauma in his life at present, Emma decided to change the subject.

“I really think tarot and stuff is bullshit,” she blurted. “Horoscopes, too.”

“Why?” He shifted his weight, rustling the fish, and his nervous energy almost emboldened Emma to be honest, like he would accept whatever she said as long as she kept talking to him.

“All the obvious reasons.”

Fish-man smiled. “You mean, you don’t believe the interpretation of some woman drawing at random from a deck of cards will resonate with your experience and make clear some vast truth about your life? No matter how spooky and elaborate the illustrations are?”

“No matter how spooky and elaborate the illustrations are,” Emma said.

“And you don’t think ancient patterns written in the stars dictate who we are and what happens to us?”

“Right.”

“Ah,” he said.

The sounds of the market were growing louder, as the morning wore on and more people clambered through the stalls looking for something specific, or something unique, or anything at all.

“I guess I just never believed in any of that stuff,”

Emma said. “As cool as it sounds, or as much as I may have wanted to when I was like, 14, I’m just not that kind of person.” There was another long pause. Fish-man hesitated several times before he finally spoke.

“Can I ask your name?” he said.

“Scarlett,” Emma said.

“Honestly, I agree with you. Like statistically, probably bullshit. But Scarlett,” he said, “Why do you think you have to believe the same thing forever?”

He looked at her, and there was some deep meaning behind his eyes. Emma didn’t ask him what it was.

Neither of them got a tarot reading that day, because at that moment, The Mysterious Gerilimia burst from behind the curtain, engaged in a screaming match with a middle-aged woman who was lulemon clad and clutching a yoga mat. The woman’s bleached blonde hair stood out against her skin, which was red from anger as she asserted, seemingly to everyone in a 3-mile radius, that her husband was *not* being unfaithful and the Mysterious Gerilimia was a cracked-out con-artist who had no place in any respectable space of business. Emma was mesmerized, already thinking of the most comedic way she could relay this scene in a text message. When she looked up, she saw that Fish-man was walking away, toting his ginormous bag of fish. The thought sprung forth that she hadn’t even asked him why he had it.

The next afternoon, Emma realized she had to go back to school. She walked the sloping, numbered streets, clutching her new jacket around her. The

October chill was colder than she had anticipated. Her headphones were on, and she was listening to some 80s band that she would ordinarily not really spend time with, but in her present circumstance kind of made her feel like she was in a movie. Her strides lengthened and quickened, until she was moving so fast that her personal draft felt tantamount to the Seattle wind. She couldn’t help thinking that if she really was in a movie, the director would shoot this moment in a way that would make her look really fucking cool, but like effortlessly. She wondered what it would be like to not have a panopticon-like sense of constant performance, even in moments of complete solitude.

Her speed slammed her directly into someone turning the corner. For the split second after she hit the ground, Emma imagined that she had just collided with a sexy, mysterious stranger, and they would immediately strike up a clever reparté that would spiral them headfirst into a tumultuous and thrilling love affair. He would whisk her away to Monaco or some place equally as far, and they would sip Prosecco on a yacht and look out at the glittering sea. They would fight over deep moral quandaries yet never lose their undeniable spark, and she would win over his old-money family and someday have babies and raise them rich and oblivious to the world around them.

When she looked up, though, she saw that it was just the guy who had had the fish at the market. Somehow, this was even better.

“Hey,” she said. “What did you end up doing with all that fish?”





**TWO BEST FRIENDS  
AT DINNER**

*Meghan O'Neil*

# RICH PORT

*Kiana Roman*

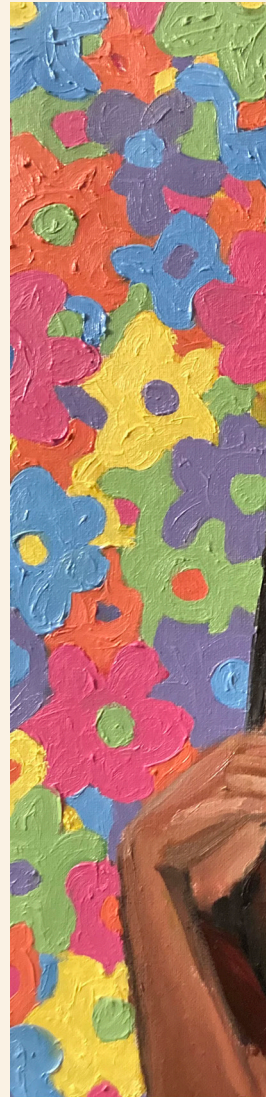
50% of me is from an island  
a little island called puerto rico,  
rich port in english.

we may not have gold in our veins, but rather smiles behind pain  
because our wealth is measured in strength.  
we are rich in ways billionaires still can't figure out  
because we don't see wealth the same way.  
we are the sunflowers that never die.  
the ones that survive hurricane after earthquake  
and somehow we're still standing.

we've got one foot in the states,  
and the other on our island  
because home is where the heart is.  
we dance to hector lavoe, porque "todo tiene su final"  
but us puertorriqueños never write stories for the ending.  
we write so that the next generation  
can follow in our ink stains  
and relish in the paintings that we created from nothing but 27 letters

we are storytellers in our own right.  
we built buildings with nothing but the bricks thrown at us.  
and planted gardens with the hoses  
that were used to try and wash us away.  
there is no erasing what will live forever.

we are anything but silent. cause coquis are our mascots,  
and they represent everything we are.  
the unsuspecting noise hiding behind the bushes.  
you may not notice us,  
but we are always there,  
whether you acknowledge it or not.





# GRISELDA

*Ella Hattem*

los boricuas.  
the nickname for  
the ones derived from puerto rican soil.  
the ones who grew in the scent of the hibiscus.  
the ones who dreamt under the stars.  
who danced in florescent lighting  
with not a care in the world for what tomorrow might hold  
because we live for today first.

we walk with confianza.  
we strut our coffee skin,  
whether you take yours light or dark  
because we come in all types of crayola colors baby.

puerto rico.  
rich port.  
the ones whose sueños  
are bigger than the path we set for ourselves.  
we know no better than to dream  
because that's what we do best.  
we dream.  
we are the dreamers that never wake up.  
not because we don't want to,  
but because the world we're living in wasn't ours, to begin with.  
so when we sleep,  
know that we are not sleeping to survive,  
but we are sleeping to conquer,  
because that's what dreamers do.

## *Key:*

*porque "todo tiene su final": because "everything has its ending."*

*puertorriquenos: puerto ricans*

*coquis: national frog*

*boricuas: person from puerto rico by descent or birth*

*confianza: confidence*

*sueños: dreams*



# COMPANION

*Jillian Mackuse*



## COMING HOME

*Gabrielle Kirk*

*Feels like the tickle of a sore throat  
or a leather jacket,  
buttons worn in by worrying thumbs.*

*Sounds like a sneeze in the woods  
while the sun sets  
before you have time to think.*

*Crinkles like a paper bag  
filled with my clothes because I don't have a suitcase.  
Coming home is quiet-*

*Like nail polish over smooth nail,  
brush spreading thin,  
accepting you into the order of things,  
and quietly inviting you back.*

# SEE ME

*Brenna Class-Welch*

I'd like you to see me now,  
Dancing circles under the stars  
Crying at lines in TV shows  
Chirping along to love drunk songs

I'd like you to see me now  
Because your memory has been placed  
in a pile of forgettable things.  
And though you linger,  
Seeping a sick odor  
Like an overdue trash can,

I'd like you to see me now,  
amidst this flurry of spring cleaning:  
While I dust off my collarbones,  
Sweep under my nails,  
Sand off my heels  
Vacuum my waist  
And scrub my knee caps

I'd like you to see me now,  
Since I've heaved the hefty  
Weight of your unkindness  
Out the window, onto the junkpile  
Two stories down

I'd like you to see me now,  
Sitting on a floral chaise,  
Soaking in morning sunlight,  
Sipping piping hot chamomile tea  
My legs draped over my beloved  
Looking at Frames for the pictures  
That will soon grace my walls

I'd like you to see me now  
In the furnished house  
Of my own creating  
That will one day become home.





## KNIVES

*Brenna Class-Welch*

there are somethings,  
you'll just have to get used to,  
I leave half full mugs of cold tea  
on every countertop  
I always put the knives in a different drawer  
than the rest of the silverware  
just the sharp ones, the butter knives can stay.

I know myself well enough  
that one day I'll reach in  
without looking  
and cut myself searching for a spoon

I'll be quiet when I'm tired  
and when I think you're mad,  
because my mother taught me not to be forthcoming,  
but I am honest,  
so if you ask-  
I'll tell you  
in which drawer I keep the knives

## DAVID

### IV.

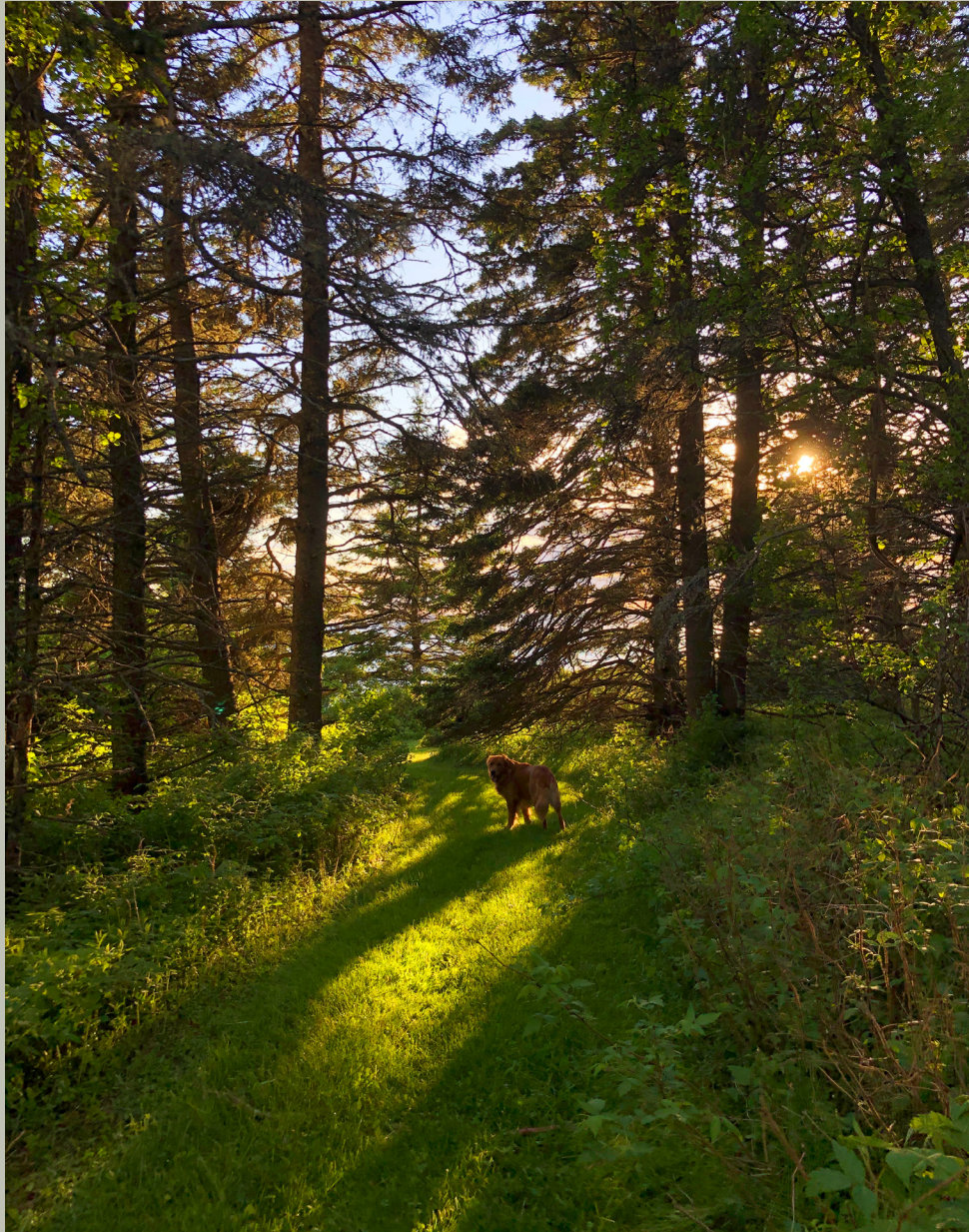
*Benjamin Connor*

i love myself through your body, i draw  
feeling to the tips of your fingers, and rest  
them at the crux  
of your mouth. you should taste  
your own delicacy      better yet

i wish to drag  
my tongue over the bridge of your nose  
to catch the sun's kiss left there for you, press  
it to your lips. this is a fault of mine.

i yearn to be closer. i would soil  
your sweet flavor with my bitterness  
for a moment to

intertwine  
my body with yours, and realize.  
being loved like this      is a life  
of indulgence.



**KODA**

*Gabrielle Kirk*

## HIBERNATE

After *Wild Geese* by Mary Oliver

*Benjamin Connor*

lumber through coarse grass  
shorn by sweet autumn forest fire  
new buds will spring green from blackened bark  
once you rise from rest, next season.

soon, the snow. a blanket over restful eyes  
you will never see the world untouched like this  
frozen picture before footprint breaks into new world.  
you have not seen the ocean, heard crashing waves

only open sky, when you lay in wild-flower-field,  
only darkness behind eyelids as you sleep through winter.  
    yet you have found the end of this endlessness:  
when you close your eyes - when you open them.

before that, birds. first thing to return after natural  
cleanse, flutter of wing, tree laden not with fruit or leaves  
but song. this is something you will wake up to,  
this is something to wake up for.           they return to build nests  
soot and coal perfect for the cradle  
no better foundation for new life, than to be remade.

take to your untouched den, and comfort  
in same rock-dirt-root, same paw-fur-claw, different earthworm  
curl to gaze at last sun sliver before slumber.  
become boulder in dreaming, and we will see when you awake  
    who you have become. new grass and flower  
    emerging, new clouds coming over the horizon.

# INSTRUCTIONS TO FOLD A PAPER CRANE

*Olivia Curran*

Here are some instructions to fold a paper crane. It is a serious thing to do, so pay careful attention.

Step one: select a perfectly square piece of paper. It must be square. If your paper is rectangular, make it square by folding the corners and tearing off the rectangular edge. I saw you in a dream, so I know you'll have a perfectly symmetrical nose, but an imperfectly crooked right pinky. I love them both already.

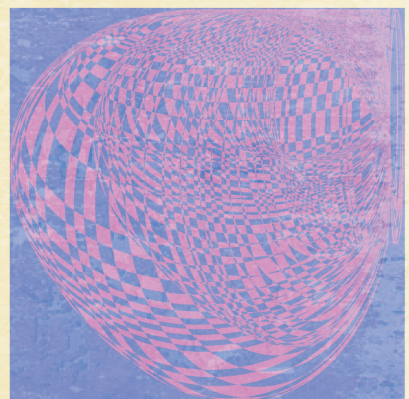
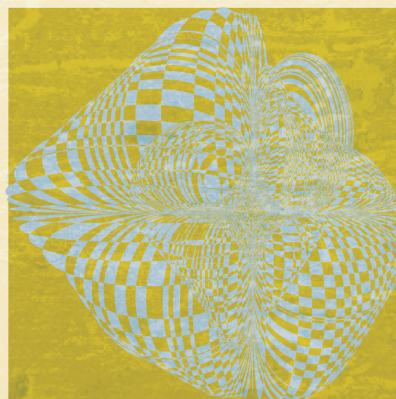
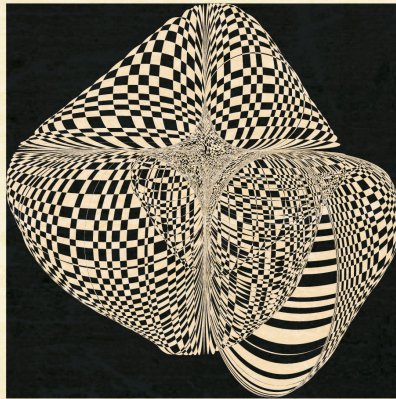
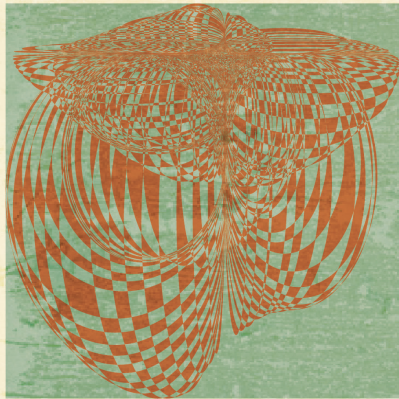
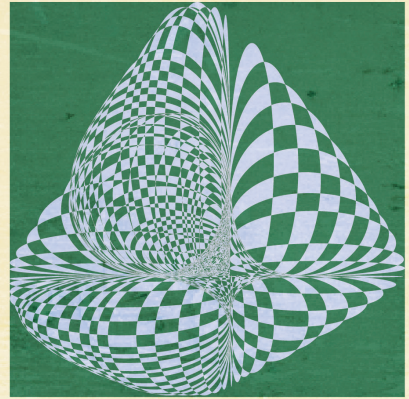
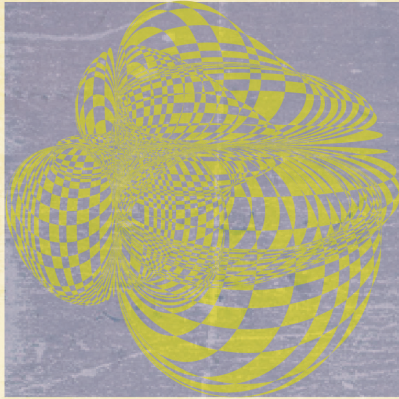
Step two: fold the top corner down to the bottom corner. Then unfold it and do the same to the other side. There'll be a lot of that, folding and unfolding. Each mark we leave on the paper will be useful later. It may seem like we're ruining a perfectly good piece of paper with all these creases, but each will show its use in time.

Step twenty-five: this is important, you start building your wings in this step. The wings must be strong enough to carry so much. There is a story about the Lord Crane that says he used to carry all the souls to heaven, but souls are lighter in death than they are in life. Our feet stay on the ground because our souls are heavy when we're alive. When you open your mouth for the first time to scream, or cry, or just say hello, the weight starts pouring in. Or that's how I imagine it because your soul can't be heavy yet. If it was, I don't know how your mother would manage to stand.

Step forty-eight: now it's time to fold the head. Our crane won't have eyes to see, or a nose to breath, or a mouth to speak, but he can fly. I would give up my eyes, nose, and mouth to fly just for a moment. It must make your skin prickle and your stomach lift. When you get bigger you might feel that feeling when you jump off a swing at the peak of its arch or on those carnival rides shaped like a boat.

Step fifty-two: fold down the wings. You're finished. Set your crane wherever you like, but don't be surprised if he flies away.





**MATRIX**  
*Elodie Nix*

## TESTIMONY (WALKING GENTLY ON EARTH)

*Grace Dougherty*

Wood creaking:  
Aspen, Ashe, Beech.  
Dry soft rustling-  
leaves in gentle wind.

Wide roots curling over  
green moss, clover clusters.  
Dandelions-  
seeded, rippling away.

Grass shuffling.  
Flashes-  
soft fur, rabbit's foot  
kicks up dirt.

Cool boulders,  
shale, claystone.  
Frantic black dots-  
ants in a line.

Sunlight, pale halos  
crowning every Soul.







**GRAZE**  
*Jillian Mackuse*

# CONTRIBUTOR

**Casey Aimer** is a graduate student in GW's Publishing Master of Professional Studies. He also holds a Poetry MFA from Texas State University and co-founded the anarchist science fiction publisher Radon Journal.

**Brenna Class-Welch** is a junior hailing from Seattle, Washington studying philosophy with a minor in biological anthropology. Outside of classes they enjoy reading fantasy books, burning baked goods, and attempting to act in GW productions.

**Benjamin Evander Connor** is a second year from Boston studying Human Services & Social Justice, and Peace Studies. He is often found pouring mugs of tea and waiting for them to get cold, and thinking about unlikely animals being best friends.

**Olivia Curran** is a senior from Johns Creek, Georgia majoring in Criminal Justice and English. She loves to travel and is excited to move to Spain next year to teach English.

**Grace Dougherty** is a Junior studying PoliSci with minors in Law and Society and History. She would like to thank her mom for endlessly supporting her and challenging her to explore new ideas in equal measure.

**Matthew DuBois** is a senior pursuing a major in Geology and minor in Naval Science. Enjoys wandering around new places and good novels.

**Max Feng** is a sophomore studying systems engineering with a naval science minor. He is an average hard green grape and copybara enjoyer, and can often be found dissociating—staring at “birds” recharging on the power lines—as the sun sets on a decaying middle class America.

**Farida Galal** is a graduating senior at GW born and raised in Cairo, Egypt. She enjoys reading by the Red Sea, baking intricate deserts, and listening to rock music.

**Ellianna Gelardi** is a freshman from Framingham, Massachusetts studying English and Philosophy. She takes inspiration for her writing from childhood nostalgia, nature, and random conversations.

**Isabel Giordano** graduated in December 2022 with a major in Psychology and a minor in WGSS. They enjoy parenting plants, listening to Taylor Swift, and experimenting with a variety of creative mediums--including a needle-felting phase.

**Ella Hattem** is a freshman from New Jersey studying archaeology, art history, and classics. Her hobbies include having strong opinions about books and crocheting a high volume of terrible quality hats.

**Sylvia Jones** is associate poetry editor at Black Lawrence Press. She lives and writes in Baltimore and teaches creative writing at George Washington University and Goucher College. Her writing can be found in: Smartish Pace, SHENANDOAH, The Hopkins Review, DIAGRAM, Revolue, The Cortland Review, Sprung Formal, and other notable publications.

**Julia Kerrigan** is a senior from KCMO studying Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences. She denies any allegations of harboring two American Girl dolls in her off campus apartment.

**Gabrielle Kirk** is a rising senior studying Creative Writing and English with minors in Linguistics and WGSS. She is an avid reader, writer, daydreamer, and orange cat lover.



Ali Lightfield is a sophomore at GW majoring in political communication with a double minor in philosophy and journalism. She can be found eating at the Deli, reading Shakespeare, or sitting at her desk pretending to do work.

Jillian Mackuse is a junior from New Jersey majoring in Public Health and minoring in Biology. She loves dogs (especially her own) and often uses them as the subjects for her paintings and photographs.

Elodie Nix is a senior studying Geography, GIS, and Sustainability. She can often be found bouldering, listening to Taylor Swift, and thrifting.

Meghan O'Neil is a sophomore from Connecticut studying International Affairs and Public Health at GW. She enjoys photography, reading and learning about language in its many forms.

Arden Reynolds stumbled into Creative Writing on accident after a falling out with Political Science. Arden is a peer-certified nerd, proficient in Star Trek, the Civil War, and Dungeons & Dragons, and a sucker for a good burrito.

Caroline Roche is a current Junior, double majoring in Fine Art and Political Science. Her favorite mediums are painting and drawing, but she also loves to experiment with many different materials to create art.

Kiana Maria Roman is a Freshman from New Jersey majoring in Creative Writing while minoring in Journalism & Mass Communications and WGSS. She has been writing poetry for the past 12 years, and has performed on off-broadway New York, California, and New Jersey. She loves to indulge in music by the likes of Taylor Swift, Sade, Jessie Reyez, Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole, and many more.

Syd Schmidt is a third-year undergrad studying journalism and international affairs at GW. Originally from Oakland, California they enjoy hiking, doodling, and searching the planet for the best cheesecake.

Rita Seidl is a sophomore studying Political Science and French. She loves music, bears, and the color green.

Lily Speredelozzi is a sophomore from Providence, Rhode Island studying Photojournalism and Political Science. She loves Mexican food and her Boston Terrier, Nikki.

Elise Stankiewicz is an undergraduate student from New England studying psychology at The George Washington University. She strives to uplift the multi-racial and genderqueer experience through her creative work. She is a horrible rollerskater and currently lives in Washington, DC.

Nadia Wachira is a sophomore from Lancaster, PA, studying history and education. When she is not writing, you can find her getting inspired at the National Gallery of Art.

Hattie Wall is a Sophomore from Salt Lake City, Utah majoring in American Studies and Geography with a minor in Spanish. She is new to the world of creative writing but has had so much fun exploring it this past year with Capitol Letters.

# BIOGRAPHIES

**Capitol Letters** is an annual publication and is open to all members of The George Washington University community. Undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, alumni, and staff are encouraged to submit their poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and art. For more information or to submit, please contact:

[gwcapitolletters@gmail.com](mailto:gwcapitolletters@gmail.com)

You may submit five literary works and five pieces of artwork each semester.

*Note: Capitol Letters was formerly known as Wooden Teeth.*

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