



# STUCK IN THE LIBRARY

---

FALL 2020 LITERARY EDITION

# STAFF

Mary Halabani  
Hafsa Fatima  
Gina Rivieccio  
Abeer Naeem  
Dorette Dayan  
Danielle Itshaik  
Skyla Medina  
Antonio Coleman  
Bren Tawil  
Roksana Jasiewicz  
Mariam Esa  
Phoebe Law  
Galit Mamrout  
Avery Lieberman  
Jordon Spence  
Brandon Rodriguez  
Kalliniki Lambrinoudis  
Maryam Ahmad  
Massimo Vendola  
Emily Beregovich  
Saima Rahman  
Asma Awad

President  
Vice President  
Editor in Chief  
Chief of Publication  
Format Editor  
Format Editor  
Format Editor  
Senior Editor  
Senior Editor  
Editor  
Editor  
Head of Events Committee  
Events Committee  
Events Committee  
Events Committee  
Events Committee  
Events Committee  
Social Media Coordinator  
Photographer  
Photographer  
Graphic Designer  
Graphic Designer

*Cover Art by cease.and.perish*

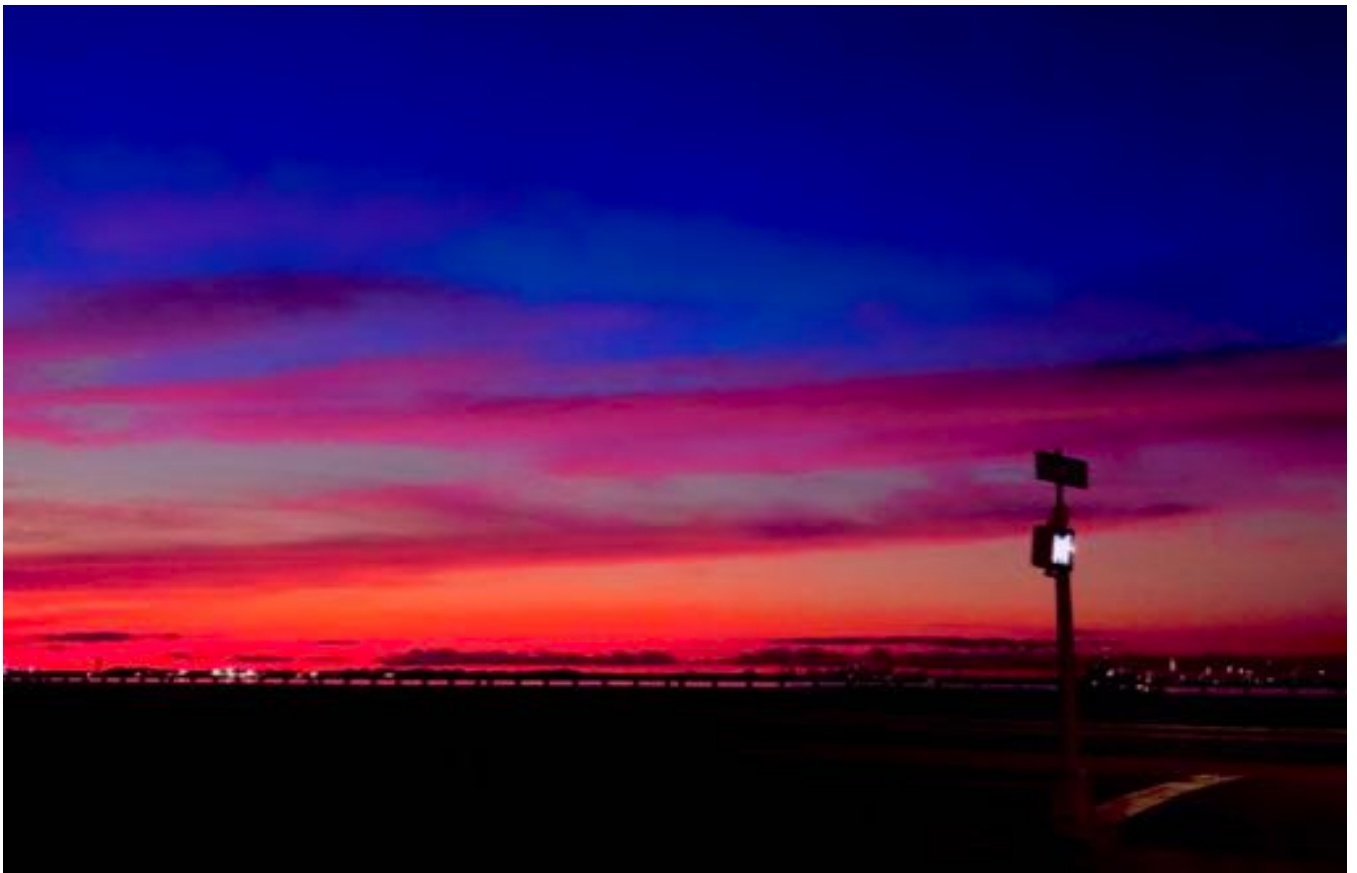
# CONTRIBUTORS

A Nonymous  
Alexa Shmolovsky  
Alyna Valderrama  
Anosha Arshad  
Areeba Zanut  
Bren Tawil  
Carina Rivera  
Carolina Rosa Martinez  
Chaya Nachum  
Christine Sloan Stoddard  
Dorette Dayan  
EmJ  
Fatema Islam  
Gina Rivieccio  
Hallie Lederer  
Hifza Hameed  
Jana Taoube  
Janis Farrell  
Jon Rakh  
Katherine Sanchez  
Kelly Bannon

L.L.L.  
Leysan Nigmatova  
Lucy Curran  
Mariam Esa  
Maya Schubert  
Melissa Morales  
Natalie Mosseri  
Nerea Blanco  
Nero Poerio  
Oriya Abed  
Owen Rodda  
Raisa Santos  
Roksana Jasiewicz  
Shannon Addonizio  
Syeda Banure  
Toni Coleman  
William E  
Xarena Pagan  
Yubelka Nunez  
Zaidie Mendoza

*“A word after a word after a  
word is power.”*

—MARGARET ATWOOD



*August || Gina Riveccio*

# **PROMPT 1**

RAIN

# **PROMPT 2**

LAST NIGHT

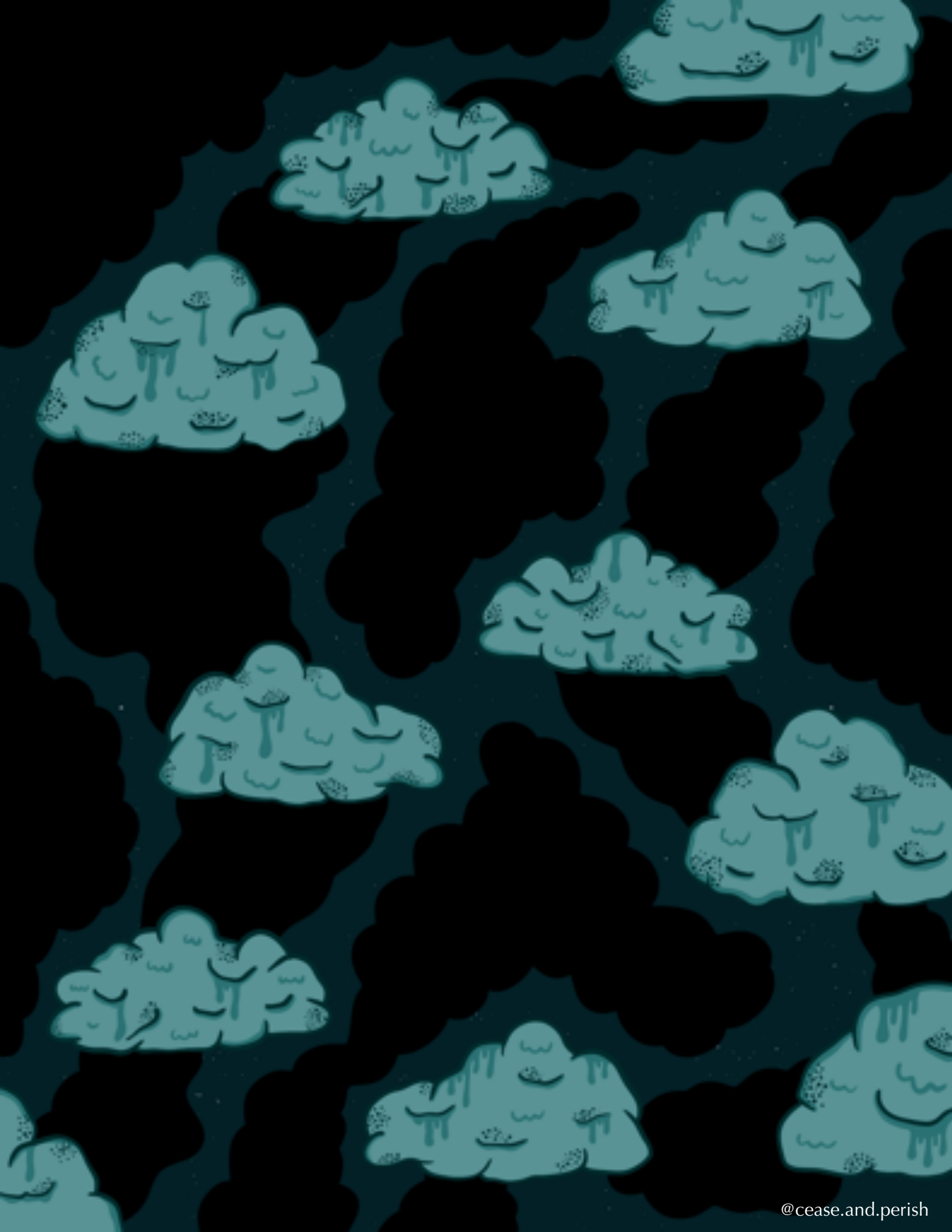
# **PROMPT 3**

HAUNTED

PROMPT 1

RAIN





# \*WHITEBOIS\*

*Toni Coleman*

likes to love it, he trynna explore  
& be my christopher columbus  
fuck  
he says he's A-1 savage for this golden body  
like i'm missing him  
but he's not the first, here to come; ohhh  
but i got insufficient funds  
you've heard it before  
another case  
of college debt & speedy hunger gone wrong  
plus, the cumulus clouds haven't cried yet  
& gringoes like sightseeing

no reign,  
since it last did  
therefore my poor mouth is polluted in flint  
& i'd spark the nearest lamp with a lick  
but those genies only steal wishes  
we won't get a 3rd chance  
look—no father, back into these moments  
if you crack the right ribs  
add them up like an egg to serve a life over;  
but still no water  
& i make it the good place  
landlocked or overseas, it's all about chidi  
so take all my fears

& USA can be my right shield  
because at night, i dream of white\*armor  
call me a student drained of prayers  
under little pillowcases  
for the sun to come back—it's beautiful  
hasta luego, my michigan

likes to love it, he trynna explore  
& be my christopher columbus  
fuck  
he says he's A-1 savage for this golden body  
like i'm missing him  
but he's not the first, here to come; ohhh  
but i got insufficient funds  
you've heard it before  
another case  
of college debt & speedy hunger gone wrong  
plus, the cumulus clouds haven't cried yet  
& gringoes like sightseeing

the way men bite these briefs  
trynna savior me  
i call them tuxedo mask, a king with his crown  
holofernes;  
now—who's thirty?



# MCBAIN, MICHIGAN

*William E*

It was another dry day in McBain, Michigan. It hadn't rained in several weeks, and as one drove down the dirt roads going in any direction from the eighth smallest city in the state, the land screamed for water. Hunching down on his knees, a farmer listened to the earth. At first there was no sound. But as he remained still he could hear the gravel beneath him sizzling. The small rocks and stones seemed to be ready to burst beneath the sweltering heat. His attention then turned to the field to his right. The crops were on the verge of turning brown. The stalks remained vigilantly green but the sinews connecting the fibers were dry and ready to unfurl themselves. The ears remained precariously nestled in their husks. Although drooping, the stalk, like a caring mother, provided its children with every last morsel of water and nutrients it could spare.

The farmer had known crop failure. He had lived through three in his life. Each one he remembered as starkly as a heartbreak. He remembered feeling entirely forsaken by the world he inhabited. Like a broken heart, there was no recourse for the pain. There would be deliveries of food from one of the larger towns to the north or south, similar to how a good day might be afforded to a forlorn heart from a friend or a chance encounter. But soon the consoling of these good graces would wear away and pain would return. It wasn't always hunger and it wasn't always longing. It was an all-encompassing blockade of pleasure. Smiles were rare and laughter became extinct.

When recalling the crop failures his thoughts would bleed back and forth between the pain he felt during them and other moments of agony. A broken finger while building a shed. A herniated disc after a week's worth of moving hay for a neighbor whose own back had given under the pressure of hard work. Or just a broken heart.

All of these moments of pain swelled up at the gates of his memory as he looked at the crop that was on its last few days before being considered a failure. Trained in shaking these thoughts, he stood up from his squatting position and took a step towards his truck. He took another step. Feeling his tendons contract in order for the bones to pivot at his knee, he stopped. Slowly, he moved his worn hands towards the back of his neck where he began to reacquaint his fingertips with the many knots and hardened flesh covering the area where the cervical vertebrae meets those of the thoracic. The farmer leaned back his head while working a knot with his thumbs.

As he stood, back arched, using his body to mend itself, he stared into the western sky. He sharply exhaled. Before him lay an alien character in what had become a depressingly familiar scene. As soon as he recognized the object in the distance, he was greeted by an extension of its power. A faint breeze brushed his face. The cloud that lay in the distance was dark and full. Still far away, it meant nothing to him but an incalculable amount of promises. As he stared, the mass of water molecules in frenzied combat with the atmosphere marched towards him. In accordance with this spectacular scene, an equally amazing feat occurred at the ball of his thumb. The knot gave way. A flood of pleasure rode through

his body and reached his brain only after parading down the lower half of his nervous system.

A tear welled in his eye. A slight sniff. The tear released itself from its point of origin. As large as a tear can be before it demands two separate drops, the small bulb strolled down his wrinkled and wind beaten face. It crested the corner of his mouth which had arrived at the faintest of smiles. He got into his pickup truck that he had pulled off the road fifteen minutes earlier. He looked at the small rearview mirror. In the time it took him to sit down, he had tried to convince himself that the tear was born out of the immense pleasure of working out the knot in conjunction with the coming storm. But as he gazed into his own eyes he knew that it was just his broken heart. The first drop of rain splashed on the windshield.



*Rain || Nerea Blanco*

# REFLECTION

Roksana Jasiewicz

*Tap - tap - tap.*

Rain pelted against the window, its rhythmic sound capable of lulling to sleep anyone who fell under its charm. In a one bedroom apartment of a dark high-rise, however, no one was sleeping.

“We’re running low on candles,” noted Claire, examining the nearly empty bag of tealights she was holding. There were only two left.

Annie pursed her lips, looking up from her novel. *Pride and Prejudice* laid open on her lap, the 18th century novel beckoning her for attention.

“We’ll be fine,” assured Annie, turning the page of her book. “It’s getting late anyway, I doubt we’ll be up much longer.”

A flash of lightning illuminated the fixed frame window, the Manhattan skyline briefly visible before being plunged into darkness once more.

“The candles would last us longer if you didn’t light most of them at once,” said Claire, taking a seat on the blanket-covered windowsill.

“I need them to read,” Annie justified, looking down at her book.

The novel was worn, with dog-eared corners and coffee-stained pages. It was the property of the Brooklyn Public Library, due to be returned the following morning.

Thunder boomed outside, coaxing an involuntary shiver from Annie. She carefully closed the book, keeping the page marked with a post-it. She joined her roommate at the window, bringing her knees close to her chest.

Water glided off of the glass in waves, a cascading waterfall which blurred the world beyond. A sliver of light appeared in the southern sky, momentarily baring to them the distorted view of the Empire State Building.

“I love this kind of weather...” mused Claire, leaning her shoulder against the glass. “It’s soothing.”

Annie didn’t share her opinion. Storms made her anxious, on edge. Rain was something she could deal with—it helped wash away the worries and fatigue of the night before. But storms? They were strong, unpredictable. Dangerous.

She stared out the window, watching as clouds unleashed their assault on the insulated window.

The view suffocated her. Gone was the midtown cityscape she loved, the lit windows of neighboring apartment buildings and skyscrapers. Instead she was faced with a wall of rain and stifling darkness.

“Did you give it some more thought?” Claire prodded gently.

Annie answered with a slight shake of her head, wrapping her arms around her knees. “No, I put it to rest for now. I still have some time before I need to make a decision.”

Claire watched her closely, thinking her friend was going to procrastinate until the last possible minute. Finally she said, “It’s a big decision. I just don’t want you to regret it, whatever you decide.”

“I won’t.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Neither do you,” Annie said, her words soft. Said in a different tone and with different intentions, they would have become an invitation to an argument.

Neither woman said anything, both of them engrossed in their own thoughts. Claire wondered if her friend’s decision was going to be the right one, and Annie was trying to figure out what the right decision was.

Afterall, how many people have to choose whether to drop out of college in favor of taking a job as a Park Ranger halfway across the country?

Annie had always loved the outdoors. Being raised in Utah, she spent more time outside than inside while growing up. She moved to New York just two years prior to study business at Columbia University. Needless to say, city life never lived up to her expectations.

So when Joe, a family friend from back home had mentioned that a position for a Non-Law Enforcement Ranger had just opened up, her interest was piqued. Joe was a Ranger at the Utah Lake State Park for over fifteen years, and said he would be able to put in a good word for her if she did well during her interview.

A flash of lightning caused her thoughts to scatter like fallen leaves in a strong wind. Annie focused her attention back on the monsoon happening outside the window.

Bright, flashing lights of a speeding ambulance breezed down below, making her wonder if she would ever get to do something even a fraction as important as the EMTs. Not as a copywriter for a creative agency, that’s for sure.

As a park ranger, she could make a real difference.

Annie smiled, lowering her feet onto the floor. She crossed the scantily-decorated room, a burst of confidence adding a slight bounce to her step.

“Where are you going?” asked Claire, twisting around to keep her friend in her line of sight.

“To pack,” she answered happily, certain she would not come to regret her decision.

Rain always guaranteed the best conditions for reflection.

# THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE WATER

*Melissa Morales*

I have this love-hate relationship with rain  
Because at one end of the spectrum it reminds me of my childhood  
Stomping in puddles and splashing into the asphalt  
Rivulets of water dripping down my legs and sprinkling my arms  
Nursery rhymes crumpling into waning stars as my mother  
took me in her arms and wrapped me in her warmth  
swimming in a pool of dreams as she sang to me  
lullabies in the rain to which I fell gently asleep

But then these dreams also smash me down into that soaked asphalt  
and engulf me in a storm of memories as I swim to the other side  
Because rain also reminds me of you  
It reminds me of your laugh reverberating in showers across the room  
The way I'd held my breath like the calm before a storm  
As you paused your gaze on me lightning burned the roof of my heart  
And how the color blue never looked so good on you  
But left a bitter aftertaste in my mouth as I ate my own oblivion away

Submerged in wicked dreams of tidal waves  
Water dancing to a twisted crescendo and  
Melting down into the earth as  
I strain to cup the droplets in the palm of my hand  
Because as much as I should pull away from falling into overflow  
My fingers are withered and my mouth is parched  
From delirious scatters of reminiscing  
and so this rain becomes my greatest yearning and undoing

# GOD'S APPROVAL

*Jon Rakh*

And with her worn rain boots, she took her other son in hand.

“Mama, why is the sky gray?” Her darker son looked out the window with entrancement of some kind.

“Sometimes even the sky gets upset, dear.”

“You mean the sky gets sad?”

“No, dear. The sky gets upset.”

Oh.

She said that while moving a subway seat down so as to make room for the old lady in the pink dress. A drum of thunder came from outside the subway window; the Q Train galloped on the tracks.

“Mom, it’s raining!” He was excited.

“Rain is a sign of God’s approval, did you know that dear?”

“No.”

“No? Well now you know.”

“Is He approving of the sky’s sadness?”

“He’s approving of us going home.”

“Does that mean when we go home on a sunny day, He doesn’t approve of it?”

“No, it just means that sometimes He lets us know that He approves.”

Oh.

The old lady bumped into her stroller, so she moved that aside too.

The son in the stroller started crying and wailing; a collage of multicolored faces turned her direction and gawked.

She gave him the pacifier and he grew quiet.

“What’s the difference between rain and snow?”

“Snow is just rain when it’s cold outside.”

“But that means rain is actually snow.”

“Yes...It does...”

Oh.

She knew that the old lady in the pink dress had talked bad about her in Russian, but she didn’t say anything—never in front of the kids.

“But why is rain ugly and snow beautiful?”

“Nobody said rain was ugly, Yusuf.”

“Everyone does. Whenever it rains, people always say their days are ruined, but when it snows, they think it’s Christmas!”

“Christmas? Christmas isn’t for us, dear. It’s for—”

“For them?” Yusuf cut his mother off and pointed at an old couple sitting on the seat across from them. They were ‘American.’

“Yes.” She said that in Farsi.

Oh.

The man from the old couple frowned; he whispered something that started with a “T.” She didn’t know what it was or why he said it.

“So, does that mean they like it when God is colder?”

“Maybe.”

“Did it rain like this when we came to America?”

“Yes...It did...”

“I don’t think the rain is a sign of God’s approval.”

“No?”

“I think it’s a sign of God’s consolation.” Yusuf said this part in Farsi; he didn’t know English that well.

“To whom?”

“The sky.”

Oh.

The Q Train stopped.

The multicolored men stared at Yusuf and his mother.

“And to us.”

Rain is a sign of God’s approval.



# THE RAIN HITS DIFFERENT WHEN...

*Yubelka Nunez*

I saw birds bathe  
In leftover rain water  
Without a care  
In the world.  
They sang  
About a free  
Earth,  
Rejuvenated,  
While I cried  
On the steps  
Of my building  
Wearing a face-mask.



*Lullabies || Dorette Dayan*



# IT IS RAINING TONIGHT

*A Nonymous*

It is raining tonight.

The pitter-patter of the heavy rain distracts me from the silence of the night. I look out the window as the drops make circle waves in the puddles on the ground and eventually disappear. I want to be the ground at the moment, I want the drops to fall on me, I want them to drown me in puddles of cold water that come from the heavens.

I share a lot of qualities I wish I didn't with the ground, but the one thing I want to share I cannot. This one moment, I want to be outside, when everyone else is asleep, not wearing my hijab for the first time, and to feel the rain in my hair. I want to camouflage my tears in the rain, even though nobody else could see anyways.

Everyone sleeps here at 3 a.m. Everyone has somewhere to be, something to do, and they need to be asleep at this hour.

I wish I could sleep like them. But there is no sleep for me. Instead, there is silence. Silence that taunts me with its nightly appearance. Silence that promises to bring back all the memories I like to forget in the noise of the day.

I am blessed because there is noise tonight.

It is raining tonight.

# WHEN THE RAIN STOPS

*Katherine Sanchez*

I often marvel at how weightless dry heat feels on my skin  
after stretches of mind-boggling humidity

On days like these, I observe the world from an upstairs window:  
below are my mother & her back in the garden, both aching

She caresses dewy leaves between her soil-stained fingertips  
and the flora surges into the sky; they are bulbous & brash

like fireworks, bright lightning bolts in reverse  
& the wailing thunder that follows in its wake, always

She, the first clear day following a summer storm:  
generous with weightlessness & simple warmth



*Summer Rain || L.L.L.*

# LEAVES

*Syeda Banure*

She was calm like the river  
If love is forced, that love is empty  
Bold like fire  
Colorful like the rainbow  
Beautiful and vivid to some  
You would see her everywhere in nature  
Free flowing, diverse, caring  
If one thing would hurt her it would be thunder  
Rain was her best friend  
It helped her grow  
Flourishing by the rivers of living water  
She was a Tree.

# FOREVER RAIN PT. 2

*Oriya Abed*

a sky so grayed,  
thank you for allowing your tears to flow when needed.  
still,  
i cannot thank you for the shadows you cast above me when you allow yourself to do so,  
i fear you, then.  
i fear the heaven above you and the seeming hell over me.  
but,  
thank you for crying with me when i also must do so.  
my tears prove as natural as yours;  
they thank you for your companionship.  
but alas,  
they cannot thank you for the blues you use to paint the insides of their owner.  
so,  
to the sky and its tears,  
my tears and i thank you.  
but,  
we cannot accept your forever rain.



*Before the Storm, Upper East Side (Sept 1, 2020) || Yubelka Nunez*

# AGAIN

*Carina Rivera*

There's this tree in my backyard.  
Well, it's not my backyard because  
the tenants can't use it, plus  
the trunk is planted in the yard  
next door. But,  
it's my tree.

I think about that tree constantly. About how  
it has too many branches, and  
the branches look like veins. And when  
it's raining, like today, the water droplets on  
the tip of each twig are visible even from  
the distance of my kitchen window.

On the other side of the useless gate that  
divides the yards is a plastic chair.  
It's such a sad chair.  
On it are the twigs I once left there  
when my nephew and I played  
Harry Potter and used them  
as wands.

Sometimes I imagine someone  
sitting there, a witch,  
because at night the branches look  
like claws.

Now I can't look in the direction  
while washing dishes  
because I'm convinced she's  
watching me.  
I can feel her.

My imagination runs  
wild sometimes,  
So wild, it becomes  
real.

As I look towards my yard now,  
She's sitting in the chair, beside her  
woodland friend.

I need to move.

Again.



PROMPT 2

LAST NIGHT



# ABOUT LAST NIGHT

*Chaya Nachum*

**To:** [PreppyPrincipal45@PlainviewPreparatoryMiddleSchool.org](mailto:PreppyPrincipal45@PlainviewPreparatoryMiddleSchool.org)

**From:** [DanTheMan13@PlainviewPreparatoryMiddleSchool.org](mailto:DanTheMan13@PlainviewPreparatoryMiddleSchool.org)

**Subject:** Apology Letter

Dear Principal Brown,

I am writing this letter to express how very sorry I am for the disturbing events which occurred during last night's music recital.

As you were kind enough to explain to me in your very strongly worded lecture this morning, the recital was neither the place nor time for what you referred to as 'my shenanigans.' It was also, as you repeatedly reminded me, an entirely inappropriate use of the cafeteria's supply of strawberry Jell-O.

After a full five hours spent cleaning out Jell-O remnants from every single one of the band member's instruments (including a ridiculously large tuba belonging to Marcia Williams), I understand how wrong it was to tamper with their things. I will be sure to give each and every one of them a personal apology, both for messing around with their instruments and for ruining their performance.

I know you're probably angry about the recital and think the whole thing was a disaster. For what it's worth, it seemed like most of the audience thought the explosion was part of the show. I saw a lot of people clapping right afterwards, including Coach Morris and Mr. Gilbert, the language arts teacher. Even Ms. Coleman from the math department was smiling. (Though, in retrospect, that was probably just the Botox from her treatment last week. Her face is always pretty stiff after those.)

Lenny Schwartz from the eighth grade told me that his dad keeps saying this was one of the best recitals our school ever gave. And his dad is a Broadway critic, so he knows what he's talking about.

It looked like a lot of people (mainly those sitting out of the line of fire) enjoyed the evening as a whole.

I hope that makes you feel a little better about the whole situation. But I can understand if you're still upset, since, as you mentioned no less than three times in your lecture, cream silk and strawberry Jell-O really don't go together. In my defense, that's the only kind of Jell-O they ever have in the cafeteria. You might want to consider adding variety to the lunch menu.

Now that we're on that subject, I *am* sorry about your suit. You looked pretty in it, even if it wasn't really your color. My mom told me silk is very expensive to clean. I would offer to pay for the dry cleaning, but my parents are cheapskates when it comes to my allowance, and I blew all my birthday money at the arcade last month, trying to get the high score in the old PacMan game. (I made it all the way to second place, then ran out of quarters.)

If you need a place to take care of your suit, my Uncle Harvey owns a dry cleaners. They do good work



there. I heard my dad tell my mom once that when it comes to laundering, my uncle is a real professional. (Dad said Uncle Harvey's specialty is money, but I'm sure he cleans silk, too.) I'll drop by your office later with his business card, and you can give him a call. He's really nice. I'm sure he'd give you a discount. Just make sure to bring cash with you, since he doesn't take checks or credit cards. Something about a paper trail.

Anyway, I really hope you know how bad I feel about everything that happened and all the damage that I caused. I've learned from my mistakes and will do my best not to repeat them. I promise never to do anything like that with the Jell-O in the cafeteria ever again.

Next time, I'll use the pudding. (It's tapioca. Nobody eats it anyway.)

Sincerely,

Danny Travis

# MENDING APART

*Carina Rivera*

I dreamed about it again last night  
The way we let things end  
The way the walls began to crumble  
The way we'll never mend

I dreamed about it again last night  
Your words of spiteful shame  
I tried to hold you close  
You frenzied and spat my name

I dreamed about it again last night  
The way I used to be  
You've claimed my terrestrial being  
In the shadows of yesterday, I'll forever be

I dreamed about it again last night  
The promises we made  
Locked doors and nasty feuds  
Not knowing why I stayed

I dreamed about it again last night  
Telling you goodbye  
I believed it when you told me  
It's my fault if you up and died

I'll dream about you again today  
Not because you're mine  
But because I cared for you  
That doesn't leave with time

Tomorrow I'll dream of me  
Of what is yet to come  
Not sure yet what it is  
But it's more than where I'm from

# KASS

*Jana Taoube*

I went out for a jog the other day. and i noticed everyone was dressed up. the sky was dark. the pumpkins were out flames covered the town. there was a girl dressed up as a zombie and her brother was a scarecrow and their mother was an alcoholic and their father a ghost. it was hard to tell if they were trying to be ironic. i mean it was the first night i had seen the family out but no doubt it was normal—normal to dress up in our sin and bask in our flaws.

Joe's costume was a stripper and that night she raised her hands in surrender saying no i am not a slut but it's fun to be the other and her friends looked at each other from the corner of their eyes everyone already knew she knew all the guys. but i knew Joe and she was a hoe but she was too scared from the blow so who cares to be honest she puffed up her breasts and gave a sultry smile. no one could judge her they were all dressed the same. no one thought about the intention because the truth would take away all the attention and so we all closed our eyes and pretended to see.

I went for a jog and I couldn't help that I got faster as I looked around and saw catastrophes upon catastrophes. i took a wrong turn and couldn't tell where the light was coming from and where the darkness burned. i felt hands on my thighs going up and down and i started kicking hard and strong. i smelt the soil beneath my nose and a dark voice rose. yo chill he's just pretending to be a therapist.

I started to jog faster and faster as the reality of our dressups was catching up to me. Why do we cry and why do we shout if we are the cause for the fires in the woods and the darkening of the sky. On this evening of my jog they told me these crimes are okay and the horrors of our truths are retweeted and shared. Don't kill the spirit Kass they said but little did they know the spirit would come to haunt those out on the sacred night lying stealing cheating. The spirit gets them high only to punish them and be punished with the flames swallowing them whole only to spit them out with cuts and gashes and gasoline dripping down from their lashes.

I realized I forgot to breathe and as I came to my lawn, I collapsed to my knees, crying out, help me, please, i can't breathe.

# STARDUST

*Xarena Pagan*

I drive further into the mountain without thinking. I do not want to think of the life I have left behind. I do not want to think of the shambles I will be forced to go home to, so I drive deeper and deeper, higher and higher, racing against the night, wanting to feel as if I'm flying amongst the stars. As a little girl I dreamed of dancing on the stars. I imagined that when I stepped on them they would sound like strumming a guitar and as I ran among them it would be like making music. I imagined twirling in the night clouds and racing shooting stars. I dreamt of being the goddess of the moon, chosen to protect it at all costs and all of the life forces that depend on it. When did I stop dreaming of running wild in the night?

Pulling into my usual spot, I listen to the silence and think of the wildlife living on the mountain, calling this mountain my home as my heart does. I think of the few wild wolves left and close my eyes, holding back tears as I try to dream as I once did as a child. With tears falling down my face I look out of my sunroof, looking at the stars and I dream as I did before. I imagine the stars forming into a woman running amongst the stars and creating wolves and wildlife from stardust, creating them so that the evil of man will not destroy the Earth forever. I imagine running barefoot up and down the mountain with the wolves as one, running past rabbits, foxes, and bears. I imagine jumping to the stars and throwing them for people who need wishes granted, people who need to believe in something again, even if only for a second. I dream so that I do not remember going home to a now empty bed that was once filled with love. I dream so that I do not remember I am no goddess but just a woman who is capable of being fooled by false promises. I dream so that I do not have to remember going home to a place that no longer feels like home. I dream so I do not break.

As the tears slow, I rise and open my door, needing to feel the grass under my feet if only for a moment. As I look out into the darkness I see golden eyes staring back at me, and as quickly as I notice them they disappear back into the mountains. I tell myself that it is a sign that I will be okay but remember dreams do not come true in this world.

As I go back down the mountain, the sun rises, a new day created. I imagine what the little girl in the stars would do during the day. As a child I imagined sleeping all day until I could again run wild and free into the night but that no longer feels true. I imagine her becoming a woman as I did and think she would have to die every morning in order to create the day. That's just how it is in this world. You must die a little every day in order to be reborn and create. Everything we do takes a little bit of us each time until there is nothing left but stardust.

# LAST NIGHT

*Leysan Nigmatova*

Last night  
Was the night  
When I was at inner peace with my heart

Last night  
Was the night  
When I accepted my flaws and mistakes

Last night  
Was the night  
When I was grateful for all that I had and still have

Last night  
Was the night  
When I didn't dream about you for the first time

Last night  
Was the night  
When I realized I had grown spiritually since then

Last night  
Was the night  
When I felt that I was in the right place

Last night  
Was the night  
When I connected to myself deeper  
than ever before.

# ARTHUR KILL AND THEN

*Bren Tawil*

i am branching out. hallelujah,  
my gaze lifts from my prayer book to  
his hands tender cupping my throat  
his leather against my breath  
my eyes against intuition  
hallelujah, hallelujah.  
praise.

though i am branching out,  
things don't feel different when they change.  
my bed is on wheels so i sway away from my  
wall as i sleep. in the morning i am marooned  
but the same.

hallelujah,  
sos. i talk to my therapist on the roof this week.  
i have not known him for very long but i tell him,  
i am worried that nothing matters.  
he says nothing, so i tell him i am on the roof  
and that according to the many-worlds theory,  
if i jumped i would still live somewhere.

"well," he says, "that made me sad. i like you.  
i don't want you to jump."  
i laugh. i reassure him, too. i don't have it in me.

i've been doing a lot of reminding.  
i promised my parents i wouldn't walk in the night  
but it is night and i am walking through the city  
with my water in a jar, taking things too far.  
i ask other people to remind me of the way i used to be.  
corkscrew curls, cradled in visions in the sky,  
a playground situated over a cemetery.  
i am taught to praise god. i am taught to branch in and to  
watch my back and to watch my elders like a heat map,  
shifting, shifting, steady like a logical fallacy.

i am not meant to watch my shadow but i do that  
instead, i watch her amble away and she runs far,  
into the future probably. she runs into his arms and  
he kisses her forehead and says, "think of me instead,"

and “say more,” so she says more and she widens her eyes  
in order to watch well and to praise. hallelujah. people are ghosts  
in that regard. cut-and-dry, catch-and-throw, hit-and-run.

praise, listless, preach, breach. hallelujah.  
his belt rests flush against my stomach.  
there is something about love  
that makes me miserable. when i talk about it  
i get emotional, and when i get emotional i get  
distant. my therapist says  
the reason i can’t remember things is that i am not present.  
he tells me to cry, if i am willing,  
but i am not willing.

hallelujah,  
hallelujah.

i’ll be better the next time.



*What hath night to do with sleep? || L.L.L.*

# MORNING AFTER

*Nero Poerio*

The sun entered through the windows of the bedroom in a way that made the cool atmosphere feel exceptionally sterile. Instinctively, Alena put her hand to her temples, as if to shield herself from the light. It was almost too painful to open her eyes. Feeling the movements of her boyfriend next to her, realizing he was already awake, she rolled over with her eyelids still shut. Of course, this caught his attention.

“Alena?”

She pretended her eyelids were glued, along with her mouth, and if you were to lift the girl’s arm, it would’ve been like transporting an anvil. Squawks of birds outside made falling back asleep out of the question. Suddenly, there was a push, followed by a tug on her arm.

“Alena?” He mumbled her name so gently, it was hard to believe it was the voice of the same boy Alena was with eight hours prior. Emilio knew his love was awake, though. “We need to talk about this,” he persisted to the limp corpse next to him. He leaned in to kiss her shoulders, causing Alena to reflexively get out of his way, which forced them both to confront the fact that Emilio’s pleas were being willfully ignored up until this point.

“Well, *Mío*, what is there to talk about? I don’t need to talk to *you*.”

“Yes, you do, actually.” Emilio had always been known for being insatiable. He melted into the bed, as if to sink to her level. “Look, *Laelle*, we need to talk about this. It’s important we talk about this. I need to talk about this.” Emilio’s strained voice began to ramble, “I’m sorry, Alena. It’s all my fault, we made a mistake, and—”

“No, it wasn’t a mistake.” The soon-to-be 15-year-old girl rose to sit with her knees at her chest. Alena looked down at herself when speaking, like some sort of sybil sea cow. Her exceptionally long, straight, dark hair draped down her face, conjuring an image that was of a horror movie. “We both wanted it. I wanted it, Emilio,” she continued, “and I liked it. I really did, *Mío*.” She looked away from herself and down at him, the boy lying next to her. He was looking up, and they locked eyes for a moment. Only for a moment, however, as the level of intimacy was far too unsettling. She directed her gaze back towards her knees and folded her head deeper into herself than before. “I love you, Emilio,” was barely audible



from her muffled voice. Alena adjusted herself to be heard more clearly. “We just weren’t thinking things through, that’s all. I mean, like *mi abuelita* always said to me, ‘sometimes, when two people really love each other—’”

“Sometimes they don’t think, huh?”

“Pretty much.”

“Yeah, that sounds about right.”

Emilio let out a chuckle, which made Alena laugh along with him. As the laughter got louder, the sterile atmosphere seemed to soften a bit, and the scorching sunshine shifted to warm waves. With the birds still chirping outside, it felt as if they were in on the joke too. Alena wiped her hair away from her face and took a look around the room and then at Emilio, really grounding herself for the first time since last night. She was able to take in where she was and who she was with, and most importantly, she was able to breathe.

“Okay,” she said, “what do we do now?”

“Well, Lena, I don’t know,” Emilio replied, certainly uncertain.

“I can’t announce a pregnancy at my *quinceañera*, Emilio.”

“Yeah, Lena, I know.” Emilio let out a sigh of frustration. “It’s not like we had condoms or anything, Alena. I’m sure they didn’t give those to *Virgen de Guadalupe*.”

Half listening, Alena reached for her phone and began typing anything she could possibly think of into the search bar. “I got it, *Mío*,” she exclaimed. “Go to the bodega and see if they have Plan B. *Ahora, Mío, ahora.*”

# THE BAR

*Maya Schubert*

Last night, my parents left me in the bar. They had been talking to friends as they swept up their coats, drained the spit at the bottom of their beer glasses, and ambled to the front door of the bar. They pushed open the door with their friends and moved through the doorway as one entity, and, when it shut behind them, I sat alone at their booth.

I glared at the pool of condensation my father's beer glass had gathered on its coaster until I realized someone was looking at me. I looked up. A man at the bar was watching me, one cowboy boot tucked beneath the stool and the other sprawled towards me, one beefy arm propped on the bar, elbow nudging a rum and coke, the other resting on his thigh. He was tanned and stubbled and mildly attractive. We stared at each other for a moment, and when he spoke, his voice carried clearly across the yard or so between us.

"Your hair is pretty," he said.

"Is it?" I said.

"It is," he said and smiled.

I blinked at him slowly before standing and sauntering around the side of the bar.

"Where are you going?" he said.

I paused and glanced back at him. "The bathroom."

"When you come back, how about I buy you a drink?"

"I'm not old enough to drink," I said. It was a dumb thing to say—it was a dumb thing to say anything. I didn't want his attention, but I liked the sound of my voice; I wanted to speak and be heard.

"That's alright. I think I could figure something out," he said and winked.

I thought about saying piss off, but it was too short an insult to satisfy my voice. Moreover, I was afraid of getting him mad. I opened my mouth and then shut it and then walked away.

The bathroom floor was checkered black and white and made me dizzy. As I stumbled into a stall, I wondered if it was the bar's way of making sober people think they were drunk and decide to leave earlier. I turned around and had one hand on the button of my jeans when the bathroom door opened. A small whoosh of air brought in a gust of country music and the echo of a man's guffaw. Then the door shut, and the bathroom seemed to nestle into itself.

By that time I had unzipped my jeans. But the silence that followed the closing door caused me

to pause before pulling them down and lean slowly and awkwardly over. A pair of large cowboy boots rested on the checkered floor in front of the door. I straightened. I zipped up my jeans, and the motion split the dead air softly. As if to reply, the lock on the door clicked.

I was confused. There was a rock in my stomach. What was going on?

I twisted my neck to look behind me. Above the toilet, which was pretty clean for a bar bathroom toilet, there was a small frosted window. I lifted one dusty sneaker and set it on the back rim of the toilet bowl. At the same time, two footsteps crossed the tiles. One ka-lop followed the other lazily. I swung the other foot onto the toilet's back and, crouching precariously, noiselessly, grappled the edges of the windowsill. The seams split, and cool air coated my fingers.

Another ka-lop. Lurching onto the toilet back, I slammed the window up with a thwack!

"Oh shoot," his voice sounded from over the stall behind me.

I shoved the upper part of my body through the window, grateful for once that I was small.

"Wait." He sounded tired.

There was a dumpster directly below the window. Wriggling and kicking, I slithered out of the window until my hands touched the lid of the dumpster. I walked forward on my hands until my legs fell out of the window and hit the top of the dumpster. I turned around then and launched myself over the side of it, landing hard on my feet.

Darkness brimmed around me. I pushed through it, running around what I hoped was the side of the building closest to the front door. If I could get inside the bar, there would be other people.

But there were people in the parking lot too, who I almost ran into as I hurtled around the corner. I skidded to a halt before them.

"Yeah, we're going soon," said my mother and turned back to her friend.

I looked back at the bar, and then I nodded. I didn't want to talk anymore.

I haven't spoken today yet, and I don't think I will. Why would I?

# BY THE OAK TREE

*Mariam Esa*

It was a chilly Sunday morning in early April. The clouds littered the sky above, the sun barely reaching the wet, cold ground below. It was very early, barely an hour after dawn. The streets of Leavenworth were empty except for Mrs. Larson. Mrs. Larson was a middle-aged woman with blond hair that reached just past her shoulders. She had a pale face which made her warm hazel eyes glow. She was very thin although she wasn't one to say no to second helpings. Her kind personality made her adored by the people in town. Yet she put her foot down whenever it was necessary. Being a high school teacher, it was very necessary indeed. She has been living in Leavenworth all her life and never so much as took a step out of Washington. She was always very punctual and neat with her hair up in a tight bun and her clothes all ironed. She never bothered much with makeup, but she cared very much about her appearance. One must always look presentable after all.

Today, on this very early morning, Mrs. Larson seemed to be in a rush. Her hair was out and disheveled and she was dressed in jeans and a shirt with a sweater that seemed twice her size. She glanced at her watch as she quickened her pace muttering to herself, "Late. I'm late."

She arrived at a huge meadow and pushed the gate. It slowly creaked open to reveal acres of green grass. *This really was a beautiful area*, she thought to herself. However, she disliked the numerous stones that littered the area. They were really quite dangerous. She thought to herself that these stones really ought to be removed. Any child could trip and hurt themselves! She walked up the hill, to the big oak tree where they were supposed to meet. She hoped he wouldn't be angry. After all, she didn't mean to be late.

She didn't spot him at first. But when she looked behind the tree, she saw that he was there. It looked like he'd been waiting awhile. She figured she better speak up now.

"Hey, sorry I'm late."

He didn't reply.

"Jason?"

Nothing.

"Are you mad?"

Still no answer.

"Listen. I'm sorry I'm a little late... Okay very late. But it really isn't my fault. If the alarm had just gone off when it was supposed—" She trailed off as she heard footsteps approaching. More like running towards her. She turned to see that it was her little boy, Luke.

"Mommy, there you are! I was looking all over for you!"

"Luke, why did you leave the house without my permission?" she reprimanded the six-year-old.

"But I woke up and didn't see you there. I was very scared. I thought the boogeyman got you!"

"Don't be silly, Luke. There's no such thing. And look, you left without your shoes."

"Sorry mommy."

"It's alright. Why don't you go on and play for a little while mommy and daddy talk? Just be

careful. There's a lot of stones everywhere."

Jason still hadn't acknowledged her presence all this time nor their son's. Luke suddenly turned pale. He looked at his mother with fear.

"M-Mommy, w-what d-did you s-say?" He had a tendency to stutter when he was afraid or upset.

"Just go on and play while we talk. Don't be afraid. We won't be very far."

"M-Mommy, D-Daddy isn't here."

"Don't be silly, Luke. Of course he is."

Luke began to cry. He was filled with grief and fear.

"Luke? Luke, what's wrong?? Are you alright?" She was filled with worry as her son continued to cry.

"Tell me what's wrong, Luke. Please tell me."

But Luke remained silent. Instead he took his mother's hand and led her behind the tree. He then pointed to a stone. A rather large one that stood upright with carvings in it. Very neat carvings. It read:

Here lies Jason Larson  
Loving husband to Ann Larson  
Father to Luke Larson  
11/5/74 - 9/12/02  
"The young are not guaranteed old age"

Ann Larson froze. She remained standing there for a very long time. She remained there as her son pulled her arm, begging her to please go home. She remained there as she realized that it was April 10, 2004. As she realized that her husband had been dead for well over a year. She remained there as the first of many tears made its way down her pale face. She remained there as her hazel eyes lost the life that was once shining so bright in them. She remained there without speaking a word. She remained silent as she was taken to the hospital. As she was admitted into it. She never moved, never ate, never spoke a word to anyone. She never smiled anymore, never cried anymore. Ann Larson would never see her son again. Despite the many visits, despite the crying and the screaming from her son, she would never truly see him. Her eyes had gone too dark to ever see again.

# IT'S A DARK PHILOSOPHY

*Anosha Arshad*

You're burning me.  
Flames dance in your eyes.  
My words easily melt in your hands.  
Waves of heat fall from your arms as soon as they touch me.  
Your lips with mine ignite sparks.

I love it.

Put me through hell and back.  
Cage me where Lucifer has once stood.

Touch me one more time,  
and you can bathe in my ashes,  
licking off the same cinders,  
while a smirk has been framed on your lovely face.

Now you'll demand for your next set of demons,  
while I watch you from below.

The difference between me and them  
will be that I've bathed in blood,  
and consumed souls in the time being.  
*I'll be back to love you harder.*  
I promise.

- 1:01 a.m.

# SAVANNAH, EXCERPT

*Janis Farrell*

It was the eve of Adele's silver wedding anniversary, and everybody who was anybody in the social world of Pacific Beach, California was gathered on the elegantly appointed verandah at the country club. As always, even the weather was cooperating. It was a balmy central California evening. The mood was celebratory. Drinks flowed; the food—nouvelle California cuisine—though spartan, was unimaginably delicious; the music was romantic, of the Cole Porter ilk; the guests were elegant, clad in silks, satins, and lightweight-wool cashmere; and the jewels were glittering, expensive, excessive, and large.

Then, with the riff of a drum roll, the Honorable Roland Sinclair, the tall, ramrod-straight Vice Mayor of the city of Pacific Beach, stepped forward, his arm wrapped proprietarily about the waist of his wife, the former Adele Nichols. Snagging a glass of Dom Perignon from a tray offered by an unobtrusive waiter, he raised it in toast to his spouse. "To the mainstay of my life," he said, gazing adoringly into her eyes. Adele raised her head, proud as a queen, accepting the accolade that she knew to be her due.

Roland then raised the champagne flute to his lips. Almost immediately, the hired swing band began a 1940s tune. He put the glass aside. Then, pulling his wife into his arms and dancing cheek-to-cheek while holding her upright with arms like bands of steel, Roland whispered, "Are you happy, my dear?"

There was a smile on his lips for her and for all who happened to dance near to offer their congratulations. "I have a surprise for you," he continued. "Are you listening, Adele? I plan on being married six months from today."

"Well, I should hope so," she interjected, with a complacent titter.

"No, my dear," he corrected her quietly. "That is," he continued, his smile growing wider, "I intend to file for divorce immediately and, in six months, when the proceedings are final, I am to remarry."

She looked at him uncertainly, her lips quivering under a plaster smile. "Roland," she said severely, though just as quietly, "this is in very poor taste, and I am not amused."

"Oh, but it's no joke, my dear. I am going to divorce you. Then, I will remarry...Keep smiling, my dear. Stiff upper lip. You wouldn't want to fall apart in front of our friends, now would you?"

"But why? Who?" She whispered piteously.

"Who is none of your business," he snarled. "As for why...That's quite simple, my dear. You see, I despise all that you are, all that you have been...Careful, Adele. You're drawing attention to yourself. That's right. Keep smiling...Now, what was I saying? Yes, why. I will ask you...Why not? There no longer is a need for this charade, is there? My second term as Vice Mayor ends in just a matter of weeks, and now, with term limits, my career in politics has come to an end. So, my dear, I no longer need you, do I?"

"What are you saying?" she stammered. "Our marriage is much more than a political expedient..."

"Our marriage has been nothing other than a political expedient," he declared.

# STATE OF DREAMING

*Melissa Morales*

Stardust at the kiss of dawn  
As the waning moon fades into oblivion  
With it the dance of twilight  
Dwindles to the very last star  
Through heavy eyes and drowsy hands  
Murmuring a symphony of sleep behind drawn curtains  
Heavenly dreams of cotton clouds  
Falling into the breath of tomorrow  
And cradling the flicker of last night



# NOSTALGIA

Carolina Rosa Martinez

Sweet little lies, that the old days were better, that the past was simpler, that our lives were not a constant chaos. I walk on a mist-lit night. The light from the lamps is dimmed by the haze as are my thoughts. I think of those happy days, they look so far away and somehow so clear. I wonder, were they really? The past has a certain magic that sometimes dresses it in an elegant cortex of false truths and empty happiness. The crying of the sky is suspended. I am awake, but I feel in a constant lethargy. Everything around me moves, and I am here, painted in a reality of which I am part and apart. We are simple creatures that because of our reasoning become complicated. We devour time, resources, life. Nothing satisfies our universe-like desires. The past grows cold, the present weighs on us, and the future overwhelms us. I see the mist defying the laws that bind me. Melancholy melts over me like soaked sugar-cotton. Imaginary rainbows in the star-like lights of the streets slowly fade away, and a colorless sight is beheld by my soul. Alone, I find myself on the path that many feet have crossed. They were perhaps going with a pace synchronized to their heartbeat, or perhaps to the speed of their companion. Nights like these give me a bittersweet taste. Sweet nothings accompanied by nostalgia.

# THE DREAM

*EmJ*

Last night,  
In this suburb,  
I saw the big bright moon  
Behind his tall silhouette.  
I should've known  
Something was up;  
For the stars were shining  
Brighter than I ever saw them before.

I long for last night,  
When I still had my own prerogative,  
Uncorrupted by the idea that man's,  
Skin color, and texture defined my future.

So in my sleep,  
I will dream again of the night we had  
Ending in an insensible way,  
With a note. Folded into an origami heart  
Where he wrote  
"I love you,  
I hope you do too."

In my dream I can pretend that I was living a fairy tale.  
The kind where the poor village girl  
Becomes a princess  
Instead of returning home with a tattered dress.

For that was my sleep  
Before I realized that I became an indoctrinated  
Child of colonized society  
Before I realized that I didn't get to decide  
Who I fell in love with  
Yet...

For a moment,  
I can simply enjoy the wonders of the sky  
Last night,  
And tomorrow  
I would have to choose which world I wanted:  
A new one of my own  
Or one falsely painted to me.

I used to think love was love,  
Free.  
I was wrong.  
Not when you're "ethnic," "exotic," "marginalized,"  
To everyone.  
Not when your choices are decided before you're born,  
Based on your family history.  
Not when you're told who to love  
Or who to be.

I grew up in the alabastrine suburbs,  
But my ancestors couldn't have been further.  
I was holding on to dreams  
Passed down from my ancestors,  
The kind where the oppressor is a Prince Charming  
Looking to save me from my oblivious, wild ways.  
Me, the child playing with the wolves in the rain,  
Me, the dancer catching the fire between my legs,  
Me, ever tempted by the heights of the trees that I climb.

I was dancing between innocent girlhood  
And delusional adolescence.  
I was climbing heights most only imagined,  
But I was Falling, for the savage,  
the outsider.

I didn't know I had a dream  
That wasn't mine.  
The kind of dream where I am told that he will come  
With blond hair and blue eyes like the martinet before him.  
And he will bring opportunity of worlds beyond,  
He will bring the death of me!  
Bury me in a coffin  
he will mold  
To his liking.

Trophy...  
Wife...

That is how my great grandmother survived.  
She looked the beast in the eye  
And saw its beauty  
Or her own life hanging on a thread  
And the future of the children  
She will care for.  
So she accepted death of her culture

And lived in a vitrine  
Of new tongue and cloth.

I held  
Unwittingly  
The kind of dream  
Where my almost sun kissed skin,  
Almost tan from the sun  
Can become deprecated next to his.  
For my brown waves and brown eyes  
Bring out his paleness  
In contrast to the man painted  
To give my future children  
A better future by their fairer skin.

That is the ultimate sign of conquer,  
The trophy is capturing both the beauty and the beast.  
Me.  
Her.  
Us.

But the capturer is the untamed, wild one  
Evolved to extrapolate and survive  
Like a rat or roach  
Eating away to the rotten core of society.  
Walking amongst us as he mocks us for our ways of being  
Closer to Earth,  
Closer to the heavens,  
Because he cannot grasp  
The connections.

The dream is one where we survive  
By accepting our oppressors.  
We attempt to become them,  
We oppress ourselves  
In order for our future generations  
To live on.

The dream is the belief that they accepted us  
As they continue to mock us  
Yet marry us in their modern-day subjugation  
As we learn to hate ourselves.

Learn to re-love ourselves,  
Love others.  
My dream  
Is that we can separate ourselves

From the oppressor  
Without becoming them.  
By loving all that is me.  
Mixed race, with no mixed feelings.

For my vision is clear.  
Educate!  
Open our eyes to how We got here.  
So that we can conceive a better future.

My new dream  
Has no man.  
That dream  
With a man and love  
Has been corrupted  
For too long.

But maybe one day  
I can dream again.  
In a healthy way.

Maybe one day love will be free again.

For now, only memories  
Are left of last night.  
So I pick up the pieces of this disillusion  
And observe the history that lives on in me.

# A GIRL'S LETTER TO HER TRUE LOVER

*Hifza Hameed*

A letter to the one I love,

Last night it rained again. It rained and it poured as I sat staring out the window into the darkness. Last night once again I sat in the middle of the maroon Moroccan style rug, as Atif Aslam's broken voice echoed throughout my living room. His voice accompanied the raindrops as if God himself was playing music for him. All my unfinished writings scattered all around me, blue ink from broken pens on my hands. It felt as though I was on stage, in the spotlight as my Jane Austen novels, my Iqbal poetry books saw me falling apart. Falling apart, tired, and wishing I was with you right now instead.

Last night I was once again the only person in the world. At least that's how it felt when everything ceased to exist. The emptiness that gathered in my heart all day long was at last getting to my head. Then, I remembered you countless times. My silence was echoing but then your mention started. I was numb all day long, but then the pain of your parting started tormenting me at night. I tried to escape, pretending I didn't need you. But now I carry you like a lover carries dry roses in their book. Like a poet carries their poems in their pockets.

So I spent last night looking away, staring into the darkness as the darkness stared into me. Eventually the darkness gave up and decided to leave. That's when the love of my life woke up too. So I picked up all of my broken pieces and put them away. Slid some under the rug, some here and some there. For the love of my life doesn't know that every night I talk to you. I tiptoe away as he dreams, to sit by the window to write to you. I love him immensely, for sure I do. But the love I have for you can never be changed.

Goodbye my love, I'll see you soon  
I'll be loving you forever under this moon.

*And that's how she talked to the one up above every night.*



*Tuesday Night || Leysan Nigmatova*



*Tower of Terror || Raissa Santos*



PROMPT 3

HAUNTED





# GHOST TOWN

*Shannon Addonizio*

*of course I told him to stop talking to you.  
you can't Turn a guy down and expect him to keep talking to you.  
if a guy asks you Out then you need to tell him yes.*  
she says in the same breath that she uses  
to call me a homewrecking whore  
and in that Moment I realize  
she will Never admit that she has done something wrong  
her anger Over the lack of control she has over my body  
is too hot  
with Every word  
the flames from her tongue burn My hands  
that are reaching out to her  
as she screams that I should have stayed in my cage  
how dare I flirt with someone I like  
how dare someone like me  
how dare I not like them back  
how dare I not do as you say  
how dare I not be attracted to you  
how dare I fall in love

she tells me that she is sorry that I have lost friends  
but that I should've seen it coming  
what did I think was going to happen  
when I didn't sit still and let them tell me what to do?  
what did I Expect when I came to class with Ripped pants and skinned knees  
Instead of the lace dress they had picked out?  
your actions have Consequences and unless you stay in line,  
you can't expect your friends to stick Around  
you can't expect them to care for you  
or be there when you need them  
did you forget that I had needed you?

I don't think she realizes that I don't care that I lost them  
what hurts is how we all treated each other  
what hurts is that 5 years later  
they still think it was ok  
what hurts is that I am still waiting for an apology  
that they will never be brave enough to say

# IN REMEMBRANCE OF MONTEBELLO TERRACE

*Lucy Curran*

They're going,  
One by one like dominoes

Montebello and Ivy hall—  
All those Baltimore houses  
(Baltimore homes)—  
With the dim lit rooms left smoky  
And the screen doors that don't quite shut,  
Clouds of cigarette breath on the back porch  
My uncles laughing, gulping oysters to the side

And I think,  
If I cry enough I can bring it back  
(I can bring Her back)  
If I could just show the world how much this hurts  
Then time would fall away like shedding skin and  
Every china caroler would be lined up perfect on the mantle  
Singing echoes of how joyful it could be,  
A golden age of domestic bliss and I'll know;

I never needed more than this

# THE MOONLIGHT MAN

*Anosha Arshad*

Do you see him too?

Something so obscure and blurred.  
Yet surrounded by silver light in the dark.  
In the corner of your bedroom.  
Your thoughts start to swirl.  
Haunts of the hour begin.  
And slowly, he starts to get taller,  
taller than your courage.

Is he staring through your soul?  
Will he come forward?  
To sprinkle the invitation of death unto you?

Ghosts and ghouls don't feed on us,  
till we call for them,  
late in the night.

What is it that you're hiding?  
His yellow eyes seem to glisten as your fear increases.  
Screams running through your veins.  
What are you screaming for?  
There's nothing there, love.  
You can *only see his face in the moonlight*.

But you'll realize later,  
the *only monster you're seeing is yourself*.

- 2:10 a.m.



*In Good Spirits || L.L.L.*

# SECRET CYCLES

*Natalie Mosseri*

As children, we would thrive on secrets  
Stories we held onto so tightly  
Ones that lived inside of us  
We would find someone whose heart we quickly latched onto

Some whose hearts we didn't latch onto at all but told ourselves  
They seemed "trustworthy" because our own small hearts would pound  
So incredibly hard  
Our ears would ring  
So incredibly loud

Soon our fingers made their way up to our lips and  
Ever so quietly we would whisper  
"Want to hear a secret?"  
Followed by "sshh, don't tell anyone"

As if those words were not once uttered to us  
As if the secret we are sharing so intimately is not one that is  
Being recycled  
Being currently passed along

We would just hope that the person sat before us  
Is deemed more trustworthy  
Than we were able to deem ourselves

As we grew older  
Cycles started growing  
Moving so rapidly

You would quietly wonder after which number person  
Did the title "secret" no longer apply  
And once you began developing your own secrets  
You realized that they no longer became something you would thrive on  
But something you would push down

So deep

Until that feeling of being buried by what your own mind works ever so hard to suppress  
Begins to haunt you even more than all those broken chains did  
Than all that was brought to the light ever did  
Before being forgotten about  
Because it became so clear

That the title “secret” could simply never be held again

So now as you lay awake at night

Fists clenched

Aching jaw

You wonder why you cannot even whisper a secret into the open air of your empty bedroom

Perhaps it is not the feeling of others knowing

Of that chain starting

That shakes you so much

Perhaps just letting those words rest upon your lips and hang in the air

So far from others

Is the exact thing that haunts you

Perhaps the worst secrets

Are the ones you can’t even tell

Yourself

# LIQUID LAUGHTER

*Gina Rivieccio*

Did you ever hear the story about the girl  
who dissolved into a pool of giggles?  
Her voice tinkled like bells.  
Each word she spoke had a musical cadence,  
hypnotically harmonic.  
Her laughter was so beautiful  
that she could tempt all the angels in heaven,  
and all the demons wanted to do her bidding.

Now we couldn't have that, could we?  
Anyone with that much power was sure to be trouble.  
You can see that, can't you?

Well, legend has it she was cursed.  
Jealousy kills, you know.  
It's hard to say who did it.  
Perhaps it was a goddess from up above,  
not used to having her attention stolen  
by a mere mortal.  
Or maybe it was a wicked witch,  
from deep within a dark forest.

It doesn't really matter, I suppose.  
They didn't leave their calling card.  
They simply cursed her  
and let the curse work its magic.

She laughed until she cried.  
Until tears leaked from her eyes.  
The corners of her lips tugged  
until a smile carved into her face,  
contorted like a mask.

She drowned in her own laughter, you know.  
Unable to catch her breath,  
gasping for air until her lungs burst.

The sound of her laughter filled the room,  
echoing louder and louder,  
hollow and haunting,  
until all that was left of her was her liquified soul.

This soul,  
they say,

has magical properties.  
Some say it was so small  
all that remained was a shallow puddle,  
and if you step in it  
you can still hear her laughter.

But I don't believe that.  
See, I've heard that her liquified soul  
is as deep as the deepest part of the ocean,  
and if you bring a cup there,  
and you fill it to the brim,  
and you drink it down slowly,  
it'll give you a voice that could  
convince an angel to sin,  
a laugh that  
commands demons.

But beware of these legends whispered in the night.  
Because I've also heard  
that if you dare to drink her down,  
she will exact her revenge on you.  
And as you find yourself unable to breathe,  
Laughter will fill the air:  
Sickening and Sweet.



*The Real Me || Alexa Shmolovsky*



# NYPD TURKEY

*Christine Sloan Stoddard*

In New York, you're always looking at two levels: ahead and below. Ahead so you don't bump into a human or a kabob cart or a building and below so you don't step in dog shit. The Monday before Thanksgiving, I was hustling to work, hopping over dog shit, used condoms, and spilled Jamaican takeout on my way to the subway. I was late again, but at least I was wearing sneakers. I was also wearing my typical aspiring novelist attire, and probably appeared a little hungry because of it.

"Miss, do you want a turkey?"

The question came from a middle-aged black woman with a burgundy wig and a charcoal peacoat. Black and white police officers flanked her. This is worth noting because I live in a mostly black neighborhood. Cops always stand out, and their races are always noted. Three more cops stood in the back of an unmarked truck parked on the sidewalk next to a Baptist church. The pastor, a black man with rose-colored eyeglasses, stood with them. I was used to seeing cars parked on that sidewalk on Sunday but never a moving truck. It was bursting with frozen turkeys. The team was handing out turkeys to passersby like me. The cops passed the turkeys one at a time to the pastor, and the pastor passed the turkeys to the woman talking to me.

I shrugged and said, "Okay."

The woman smiled. Then she signaled at a wiry, white cop with a buzz cut, and before I knew it, I was holding a 14-pound turkey. An NYPD photographer jumped in front of me to snap a photo. It happened so quickly that I didn't even register the face behind the camera. My eyes spun from the flash. Since I couldn't take a turkey to work, I turned around and headed back to my apartment.

Now I would be really late for work. I tried to pick up the pace, but I had the weak arms of an overly zealous library dweller. When I approached a couple of kids, I shouted, "Go grab a turkey for your mama at Holy Redeemer. There's a big truck."

"They from the police?" asked a boy about 10 years old. His voice had a suspicious tone.

"Yeah, so?" Of course, I knew why he asked it like that. Police were not beloved or trusted in our zip code. Yet I suspected his family needed free food as much as mine did.

"Yeah, I heard about the police doing that."

"I'll get one for Mama," squeaked the girl, who seemed a few years younger than the boy.

"You can't carry it by yourself, stupid," said the boy. "See how big it is?" He pointed at the bulge gradually slipping from my hands.

"Well, the two of you can do it together," I groaned as I hoisted up the turkey. "But you better act fast. I gotta go to work."

I kept walking and didn't look back to see what the children decided.

Luckily, the front door to my building was always unlocked. That made it easier for folks to access the drug dealer's apartment on the ground floor. I ignored the junkies hanging out in the lobby like usual, except for one I recognized. Most nights, he slept in the lobby. He held my packages for me if the mail carrier came by while I was at work. He also gave me local tips you'd never find in any newspaper. He never asked me for money, but sometimes he asked for food.

"Holy Redeemer and the police are handing out free turkeys," I said when I made eye contact with the man. I didn't stop to provide details and was already halfway up the first flight of stairs when he replied, "I'm good. I don't have nowhere to cook it, anyway."

I nodded and walked up four flights of stairs. Since I couldn't fish my keys or phone from my pock-

et while also holding the turkey, I body slammed my apartment door. My husband answered with a look of surprise. I dropped the turkey in his hands as I exclaimed “Free turkey!” and ran down the stairs.

I sprinted all the way to the subway, not resting until I had a seat on the train. After I had the chance to breathe, I pulled out my phone. My husband had texted, Where did you get the turkey?

I texted back and then searched local news sites for coverage of this press stunt. Nada. There wasn’t even anything on the NYPD website, though I imagined my photo would pop up in a gallery there at some point.

After my shift, I came home to the smell of turkey roasting in the oven. That was how hungry my husband had been. It would be another week until my next paycheck and two more for his.

“How’d you know what to do with it?” I asked after kissing him hello.

“Google.”

“You paid the Internet bill?”

“It was already paid.”

“At least one thing is,” I muttered.

We scoured the World Wide Web for the photo the NYPD had taken of me, but even a week later, nothing came up. Only one Brooklyn news site wrote about the outreach effort thinly disguised as gold-hearted charity.

Since my husband, toddler daughter, and I went to my mother’s apartment for Thanksgiving, we still had most of the NYPD turkey left over after the holiday. We ate mountains of turkey enchiladas, turkey tacos, and turkey sandwiches for days.

“I’m going to grow feathers, Mommy,” said my three-year-old as I prepared her yet another turkey sandwich for lunch.

“Well, that’s good because then you can fly,” I chuckled.

As we sat down to our final bit of turkey leftovers a week after Thanksgiving, I turned on the 6 o’clock news. We didn’t normally watch TV at dinner, but it had been an especially long day. Even our daughter seemed tired. I didn’t pay much attention to the screen until the anchor mentioned an address seven blocks from us.

The police had shot another unarmed civilian in our neighborhood.

# THE WEIGHT OF THE WITHERING

*Alyna Valderrama*

Haunting

The cry of children at big scary Halloween decorations  
A Ghost standing down the hall, wanting to play a game  
A scary story lingering after its telling  
Being Alone in the woods when camping

Haunting

The burden left by someone you trusted  
emotionally,  
mentally,  
physically,  
The passing of loved ones that once surrounded you  
The thoughts of rage, sadness, and anxiety dwelling in oneself

Haunting

The harsh reality left raw for us to witness  
The burning of lives and memories  
Dwindled away from climate change and stupidity  
Bright and hot like Hell has started to become our normal lives  
In an instant,  
Just like fire,  
A cough and a hack  
Leading to the new pandemic of the ages  
Like Dominoes, we see people fall  
As a wave of the conserved white scream  
About not wanting to be oppressed  
As if they know what oppression feels like  
But how would you know  
If you are the ones that dealt the hand in the first place?

Haunting

The screaming of black lives just begging to be recognized  
Not by surprise by the people in blue  
Trained by their insecurities  
And leaving free with a red and black path paved all their own  
Protected with arms

Arms that hold armed guns that shoot open arms crying for help  
To live  
To breathe  
The tears putting out the last hopes we had for better futures  
For generations of  
Healers,  
Artists,  
Youthful,  
Eager,  
Black bodies that all had visions of their own  
Only to be gauged in the eyes  
Like their ancestors were for hundreds of years

Haunted  
Are the children, teens, and young adults  
Like me or  
Like you  
With darkness covering any future we had left  
A patient decay on this ticking time bomb  
With a doomsday clock set  
Called Earth.  
We are walking ghouls  
Empty from what was passed down to us  
And yet full from the rage, depression, and anxiety we have to face  
Every waking moment  
Because we realize  
It's over

Haunted  
Are the children crying behind bars  
For nothing that was ever their fault  
People behind cages for wanting to change their lives in a better way.  
The American Dream that has now become the American nightmare  
The people hushed behind cages with no food, water, care  
The people on the other side of the cage  
Are caged themselves  
Mouths and clothes ripped off their bodies because they believe in a certain  
religion  
Being dehumanized and killed in a genocide  
That we know far too well  
But even this being ignored once more

Haunted

Is what our government has left us  
Pulling away the resources for us to grow  
Watching us fight like gladiators and lions  
Just for their entertainment.  
They want nothing to ever change  
As long as they are the tower of power  
On top of money galore  
That can make this game called life an even playing field for us all  
But was there ever an even playing field to begin with?

Haunted

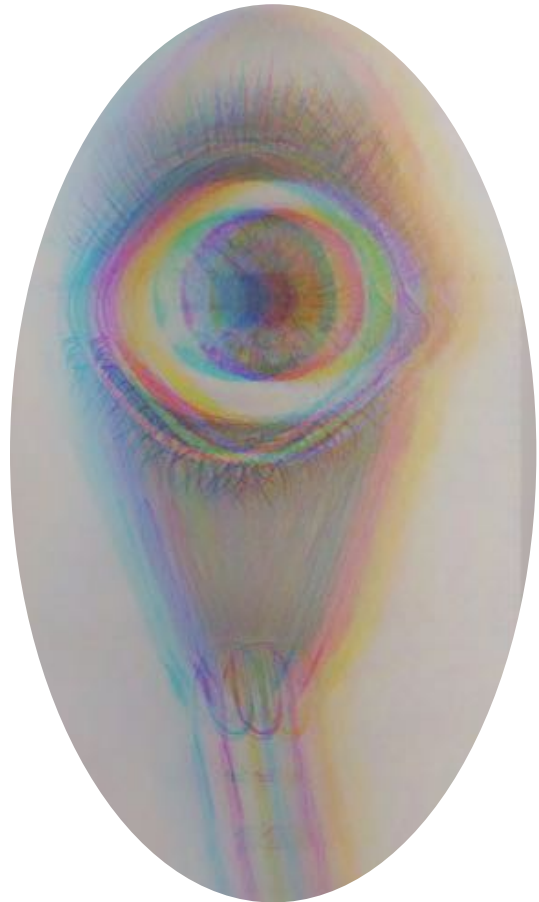
Is what we are  
Traumatized by all these things combined  
Traumatized by the debates and wars  
Between people over things that shouldn't be debated  
Between countries that should've never been invaded  
Between continents that should have never met in the first place  
Because this isn't your place, this is their place  
Though they have been erased and made to be  
What the white man wants them to be  
In history books, movies, and television.

A haunt is much more than fiction  
It is our reality

# THE PRISONER (OF EAST NARNIA)

*Hallie Lederer*

When you die  
will you roll your pupils to the back of your head?  
Take a look inside eye sockets,  
into twisted tubes, blackened by tar,  
into untouchable blood  
so blue that it has petrified your veins.  
Take a look  
at all the poison that courses through your veins  
wraps around  
your neck,  
and squeeze tighter than  
your wood prison  
metal finish  
squeezes your body shut.



*Possessed || Gina Rivieccio*

# A LETTER TO AN OLD GHOST IN MY HEART

*Melissa Morales*

Today I woke up with your name in my mouth  
It gave me heartburn, literally and metaphorically  
as it's been one too many times you've  
left me at peace yet gasping for air  
This sickening sweet infatuation,  
laced with the taste of nostalgia has  
the ghost of you haunting me at night  
A beautiful curse and twisted fantasy,  
I thought I'd forget the canvas  
of your face and the colors that came with it  
but it's been years and the talons of the past  
still leave scratches in my heart and break through the skin  
History and memory warping into catastrophe  
Crawling in the corners of my bed,  
creeping through the fabric seams  
Flickering lights and creeping doors  
Heavenly lips hovering over mine  
Tracing supernovas with scintillating eyes  
Some hypnotic spell, a touch of fire  
Burning skies with warm fingers and charming lies  
Brimming over the edge to frost the core of my heart  
So you see, dreams are very dangerous things  
They bite and sting, inflame and entice  
Talking in my sleep under the sheets  
I almost do not hear myself whispering  
*I want you to keep on haunting me*  
*I want you to keep on haunting me*  
*I want you to keep on haunting —*

# ETERNAL REST OF A GOURD

*Carina Rivera*

I've only heard conveyed rumors around the burgh at night. Nothing definite, nothing reputable, nothing secure. They say it happens when the chill starts to travel through the pathways in the dirt. Come night-fall, when the radiance from the stars battle the luminosity of the moon, there are whispers from the trees, their voices traveling through the wind lamenting some continuous horror that none of my kind have been versed in preparing for.

It's been 35 days and 35 nights since I have emerged from my ovum of containment, I am ripening. I am almost there, they say. I am frightened; I am shivering. The sun is bright, but the chill has crept in, amber petals from my timber friends scurry past me, chainesing through the gusts like ballerinas in Paris.

Time.

Time is lengthening; time is quickening.

The ground is pulsating in moments of motion, the anticipation is overwhelming, I stiffen. There's a yank and a pull, and my head begins to throb. There's a glimmer reflecting off the sun, there's a silver similar to the shading of the moon and it's nearing.





*My woeful wail, do you pity never? || L.L.L.*



*Dark Hours || Anosha Arshad*



*Bereavement || L.L.L.*

# GHOSTS

*Kelly Bannon*

I'm haunted by the ghosts of my prior days.

Of the boys that I had once loved, who had never loved me back.

I'm haunted by the world in which my physicality prohibits me from being worthy of the same praise given to others of an ideal image.

I'm haunted by the times I've disappointed others and therefore disappointed myself.

I'm haunted by the state of my community, a world in which I grew accustomed,

but now that I'm wiser, I realize it is filled with the monsters I've feared the most, hiding behind the masks of my neighbors.

I'm haunted by the blackened, mascara-coated rainfall that stains my cheeks whenever I'm reminded of these venomous ghosts of memory.

I'm haunted by the ticking clock of femininity that seems to wither in value as the numbers slowly drag on by the day.

18 turns to 19, 19 turns to 20, 20 turns to 30, 30 turns to 50, and so on.

I once told my mother that I craved a romantic connection from someone; from *anyone*.

She sighed, before taking a deep drag of her cigarette, and then puffed out the smokey white excess.

"No you don't. It's too much work."

I stared at her. A woman who's been beaten down by masculine society.

Her fragility and lack of self-care being signs of it.

"Not if it's a person of quality." I told her.

She shook her head, the wrinkled lines that cornered her lips tightening around another drag of her favorite form of therapy.

"No such thing."

Was she right?

Was wanting more love secretly asking for more disappointment?

I've never known one to go without the other.

Perhaps I crave the bittersweet hauntings of my mind.

For they inspire my most cherished creations.

My clearest moments of revelation.

That keep me from becoming the beaten down woman of American society.

The ghosts of my past keep me stimulated.

The ghosts of my past keep me youthful.

Keeping me inspired to avoid the same mistakes most women make when they are enticed by the idea of love and commitment.

Born a daughter without either,

I thrive on the sacred hauntings of my prior days.

Destined for greatness.

Or designed for loneliness.

Only time will tell.

Or at least that's what I choose to assume.

# SEASON OF THE WITCH

*Areeba Zanut*

The trees, emerald all around,  
Though the middle is always an ember,  
Like a matte cauldron filled with tainted elixirs.  
The shrubs—dull and damp,  
Though the orange gourd reveals flames at zenith  
When the pythoness and beldams  
Swing and spin into enchantment,  
Chanting sacraments of malevolence and devilry.

I'm only this fearless in the fall.



*Twisted || Chaya Nachum*



# SPLASH OF RED AMONGST THE GREY

*Fatema Islam*

The day her eldest son died, the cloudy grey sky unleashed a steady stream of rain, streaking his brother's bloodstained cheek, blood mixed with water dripping down his neck and staining his shirt. Not that he noticed, not that he cared, not that any of them cared as her eldest died amongst the rain-splattered streets, his blood the brightest splash of color on the grey sidewalk. Red. That awful, awful red and the scent of iron that even now she can't forget. Just thinking of it made her nauseous, and no matter how many times she washed her hands under hot water or stood under a showerhead, the sticky feel of his blood wouldn't wash off.

But that awful red was everywhere, even at the funeral. *Whose bright idea was it to place red flowers everywhere?! What need was there for flowers at a funeral?! What could those pretty, useless little things do to ease her grief or quiet her rage?! Would they keep her son company as they wilted into the ground? Before she knew it, she grabbed handfuls of red carnations and petunias and tore at them. Broken petals fell crushed beneath her feet as she raged, tearing more and more until that awful red didn't darken her sight. Sinking to her knees, her chest heaving, her eyes burned at the thought of what had happened and what was to come. She flinched at the touch of someone's hand on her shoulder. Glancing up through teary eyes she saw her husband's solemn face staring back at her. Her face crumpled at that solemn look and her tears started to fall in earnest streaking down her cheeks.*

"I don't think I can do this," she said with a weary whisper. "This—this...this is too much—I can't, I really can't," she sobbed.

Sighing, he sunk to his knees next to her, his hand falling down her back around her waist pulling her close to him. "You can," he murmured into her hair. "You can for his sake. For his sake and the sake of the children who are still here and need you."

"This isn't fair," she whispered. "This isn't fair."

She felt her husband quietly sigh into her hair. "Since when is anything fair?" he muttered.

She reached out and squeezed the hand not wrapped around her before moving her head to rest on his shoulder.

"Never," she said with a bitter smile. "It's never fair."

He didn't say anything, and they stayed there amongst the torn flowers and crushed petals staining the floors a faint red as the rain began to hit the windows in a steady patter.

# URSA MAJOR AND URSA MINOR GET THEIR WISH

*Owen Rodda*

“OK, my two Ursas, time to go home,” said Barnabas. He picked up both animal carriers from the counter at the vet’s office and wished the nurse goodnight. Outside, the full moon was up in the east, and he put his precious black cats in the back seat of his old Buick sedan, got in the driver’s seat, and started the engine.

“Hello, Barnabas,” said a voice from the back seat.

“What, what, who is that?” said Barnabas.

“Hello, Barnabas,” said another, higher pitched voice.

“Who’s talking? What’s happening?” said Barnabas. He turned and looked in the back seat. The eyes of both cats were glowing green, and Barnabas shrieked.

“We have something to say to you, Barnabas,” said Ursa Major. “It’s been bothering the both of us for a while.”

“It affects the quality of our lives,” said Ursa Minor in his higher pitched voice.

“How, what, how can you speak?” said Barnabas.

“While we waited in the vet’s office today, we asked the Great Black Cat in the Sky for the power of speech, and he granted our wish,” said Ursa Major. “We need to talk to you about our food.”

“Your food?”

“It’s very important to us,” said Ursa Minor.

“You’ve been buying the cheaper brand lately, thinking we wouldn’t notice,” said Ursa Major.

“I, I, well, I was just trying to save a little money,” said Barnabas.

“We are very unhappy with this new food, Barnabas,” said Ursa Major. “Unless you go to the supermarket right now and buy the good food again, we will haunt you with our voices until you go crazy.”

“You really don’t want to hear my annoying voice, do you, Barnabas?” said Ursa Minor.

“No, no, no,” said Barnabas.

Barnabas threw the car into drive and sped to the supermarket, where he bought a case of premium

cat food. That evening, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor feasted.

After Barnabas had gone upstairs to sleep, the cats held a meeting in the parlor.

“This new power is great,” said Ursa Major. “I think we can get whatever we want.”

“Let’s make him get those cat treats we saw on TV,” said Ursa Minor.

They went upstairs and into Barnabas’s bedroom.

“Bar-na-bas,” said Ursa Major. “Bar-na-bas.”

“Who, what, who’s there?”

“We want Happy Kitty cat treats, Barnabas,” said Ursa Major, eyes glowing green. “A great big bag. You will go to the store in the morning and buy them for us.”

The next day the cats enjoyed their favorite cat food and their new cat treats. When night came, they conspired once again.

“Well, little friend. What shall we ask for tonight?” said Ursa Major.

“Ur-sa Ma-jor,” said an eerie voice. The cats couldn’t figure out where it was coming from.

“Ur-sa Mi-nor,” said the voice.

“What do we do? I’m scared,” said Ursa Minor.

“This is the Great Black Cat in the Sky. I granted your wish for the power of speech, and you have become greedy. You must make amends to Barnabas, or you will pay dearly.”

“Oh, Great Cat, have mercy on us,” said Ursa Major. “We will be nice to Barnabas from now on. We have learned our lesson and will no longer be greedy.”

“I will be watching,” said the Great Cat. “You have been warned.”

“Let’s go be nice to Barnabas,” said Ursa Minor.

“Yeah, let’s go,” said Ursa Major.

They went upstairs, jumped onto Barnabas’s bed, and began rubbing their faces on Barnabas’s face. Barnabas opened his eyes and said, “My, my, what has gotten into you two?”

“Meow,” said Ursa Major.

“Meow,” said Ursa Minor.

Barnabas smiled.

# REMEMBERING YOU AND MY YOUTH HAUNTS ME

*Zaidie Mendoza*

I remember the summer breeze,  
the slap of the jump rope on the concrete  
as my feet left the ground.  
“Faster, faster,” I would cry.

I remember the wall of mirrors,  
twirling across the floor,  
sweat dripping from my brow,  
Miss Susan yelling out, “Again. From the top.”  
I was being groomed to become a ballerina.

I remember the gravel biting into my hands,  
ducking behind cars and bushes,  
avoiding searching gazes.  
Manhunt, after all, was a game of survival.

I remember the make-believe rain  
creating rainbows and puddles while playing with the hose.  
It was my favorite pastime.

I remember the twinkling of the ice cream truck,  
always begging my abuela for money,  
sprinting down the street with the change in hand,  
coming back home with ice cream dripping down my arm and a wide grin.



I remember the grass between my toes,  
the light of the fireflies so bright  
they dotted the night sky  
as I danced under the moon to the gentle crooning of my abuela.

I remember early mornings,  
my abuelita drinking bustelo.  
Her cup was always more leche y azucar than cafe, but she used to tell me she liked her coffee sweet  
just like me.

I know even now remembering is all too easy.  
In fact these memories haunt me  
because I can vividly remember being happy and free.  
Now though I am always sad and tired.  
I feel so stuck and alone.  
It's quite regretful having my youth and innocence haunt me during this time of isolation.

To be happy seems far fetched at the moment.  
I just want to be okay.  
Abuela, I wish you were here to tell me it will be okay.

# 1933

*Nero Poerio*

Do you remember walking around these halls? The days we'd spend running, laughing, trying not to get caught sneaking around. The scoldings we'd take when we did get caught. Do you remember how it looked when all the lights were on? When there was music playing in the dining room that could be heard from the bedrooms when you left every window open? No, of course you can't remember, you're probably dead now.

I remember everything, Yetta, I remember it all. I remember how we would hold each other in the dead of winter, when our parents could no longer turn the heating on. I remember when they came to take our things, feeling scared in your arms, as I knew one day they'd take our parents, too. Then they took you along with them.

Why couldn't it have been me, Yetta? Why did I have to be the one they left behind? I wish we could have swapped places that day. I wish we chose different hiding spots. I didn't want you to deal with any arachnids under the floorboards. I assumed you'd sneeze if you were shrouded in dust. It's all my fault you're gone now, Yetta. I wish it never happened at all. *I wish you were here.*

The saddest thing is, Yetta, even though I have the memories of these moments, I can't seem to remember your face. The more days go by, the more of your features slip from my mind. The faces of our mother and father slipped from me long ago. All I have left, Yetta, is the ability to trust in myself that I can correctly conjure up the shape of your eyes and the way your skin folds around them. Your deep-sunken, brown, almond—no, rounded, eyes. Yes, they were rounded. All I have left are these half-rendered ghostly figures of you that disappear each time I turn around and reach out.

Sometimes I can hear your voice when wandering the halls of our empty home. Particularly your laugh. Yetta, I would give anything to be able to laugh with you again. Things used to be so easy, Yetta. We would go to school with the Aryan children, laughing and holding hands with them, too. Never did I think this would happen. No child ever imagines having to lose everything. I'm just scared, Yetta. I should have been taken with you. Then, I'd know where you are, and where our parents are. Then, I wouldn't have to

die alone.

This house is now as rotted as me. With every movement the floors creak, along with my bones. There is no sound of music echoing through each of the corridors, only an everlasting silence waiting for the gunfire, or even worse: someone comes through our front door. There are no lights on. The lights have not been on for what feels like years, Yetta, for I too have become a ghost to the world, and it's only a matter of time before I join you as a ghost in yours.



*Reflection || Leysan Nigmatova*

# A CHANGE IN THE WEATHER, EXCERPT

Janis Farrell

Fate was determined to mire her in the quicksand of despair. She found herself driving roads that she had hoped never again to drive; reliving the memory of death and fear lurking within the shadows of the cypress trees; bearing witness as an angry Pacific crashed against a craggy shore, much as life had battered her soul; choking back tears brought to life by those nightmares of times past. She was back, ensnared in a sensory vortex; there in California, on the Monterey peninsula, headed toward the house at Pacific Beach which once had been paradise, a place of hope and promise, now a mausoleum. Adding to the horror, an old compact disk that had been silent in the glove compartment those past three years now played in the car, her beloved roadster, the navy and tan Porsche Boxster convertible—

*Remember me, remember us  
For we are one through time and space  
No matter what the Fates reveal  
Remember us, remember love.*

*I am the poet, you are the ink  
I am the lyric, you are the tune  
Two lives coming together as one  
We've written a love song that time can't erase.*

*The book you read, it tells a tale  
The story of my life  
The ink is blurred from tears I've shed  
For those I've left behind.*

*Turn then each page and read of love  
Two hearts, two souls entwined  
Recall the laughter and the tears  
And I'll have not lived in vain.*

*So, close your eyes and sing our song  
And for a while, I'm by your side.*

With that, Shiloh Steede, R&B legend, and her erstwhile fiancé has been brought back to life. But he is not, for Shiloh is dead, along with her dreams. She, however, is back, three years older but apparently none the wiser. She has returned, and the time has come to exorcise the ghosts.



***calling talented  
students to join our  
staff!***

STUCKINTHELIBRARY.ORG/APPLY-HERE

***content editing  
format editing  
photography  
graphic design  
event planning***



@stuckinthelibrary



@BCStuckInTheLib



GET STUCK.