

NORTHBRIDGE REVIEW

NORTH RIDGE
REVIEW
FALL 2025

THANK YOU TO THE CONTRIBUTORS
WITHOUT WHOM THIS ISSUE WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE

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MASTHEAD

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Ozzy Markie Metzlar

Editor-at-Large

Jesse Illanes

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Georgia Kate Ryan

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Daniel Luna

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Lead Social Media Editor

Julianna M Hoyle

Assistant Social Media Editor

Teena-Marie McClendon

Special Thanks to the Spring 2025 Class

Ismael Dones, Madison Trujillo, Caroline Urbina, Jazmine Agregado, Patrick Smith, Georgia Kate Ryan, Camelia Baker, Maya Vasquez, Morayah Godoy Lenari, America Flores-Hernandez, Ry Slotar, Zoe Shelafoe, Bryan Antonio, Andrew Isagulyan, Kiara Braden, Ysabella Gonzalez, Ozzy Markie Metzlar, Robert Jones, Ray Birdsong, Grace Muller, Joseph X Casillas, Briana Estrada-Pimentel, Sophia Garnica & Susana Hernandez

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Northridge Review would like to extend thanks to College of Humanities Interim Dean Dr. Kent Baxter; Department of English Chair Dr. Tim Black, and Associate Chair Dr. Colleen M. Tripp; faculty members: Dr. Scott Andrews, Dr. Irene L. Clark, Dr. Leilani Hall, Dr. Charles Hatfield, Dr. Christopher Higgs, Dr. Rick Mitchel; Prof. Martin Pousson, Prof. Kim Young, Prof. Rae Spitler-Lawson, Dr. Nicole Solis, Dr. Tomo Hattori, Prof. Eric Barnhart, Prof. Gina Srmabekian, Prof. Amber Norwood, Dr. Shubha Venugopal; Department of English administrative team: Frank De La Santo, Kathy Draper, Ella Fisher, and Vanessa Mendoza; student clubs and organizations: Sigma Tau Delta, Iota Chi chapter, the Northridge Creative Writing Circle, and the CSUN Poetry club; CSUN Art Department folks: Michelle

Rozic, Michele Hatfield, and the CSUN Art Galleries; our friends in the CSUN University Library: Dean Emy Decker, Andrew Weiss, Gayle O'Hara, Ellen Jarosz, David Morck, Elizabeth Altman, and Katey Dager; the CSU publishing enthusiasts: Dana Ospina, Sarah Godlin, and Kyle Morgan; CSUN Reprographics/QuickCopies and Sign Shop; Jeff Coggins and Guillermo Cuevas.

Northridge Review could not happen without support from The Book Arts Lab, Instructionally Related Activities (IRA) funding from the Division of Student Affairs, Distinguished Visiting Speakers Fund awards from Graduate Studies, and the Academic Programming Fund from the College of Humanities.

2024-2025 AWARD WINNERS

The Northridge Review Fiction Award, given annually, recognizes excellent fiction by a CSUN student published in the Northridge Review. This year's judges were Gregory Leazer, an Associate Professor of Information Studies at UCLA, and Lisa Lepore, Director of Library Services at the Braille Institute of America. The recipient of this year's award is "Rapid" by Durena Burns.

The Rachel Sherwood Award, given annually in the memory of Rachel Sherwood, recognizes excellent poetry by a CSUN student pulished in the Northridge Review. The year's judge is Zuleima Ugalde, an edtoial assistant at Pantheon and Alfred A. Knopf. The recipient of this year's award is "Dum-Dum" by Sean Ahern

The Northridge Review is also honored to publish the winner of the Academy of American Poets Award. The recipient of this years award is "Soft Collapse" by Heidia Anavar.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

On the editorial side of things, this book—whether it's the physical copy or the online archive—can feel like an ending to me. Two teams, two semesters of work, two classes I took, from selection of pieces to edits to design to print, it all culminates in this issue as a finished form. For myself, it's hard to put out an issue of the magazine; I would work and tweak and perfect forever if I could. I would be trapped in *NR* purgatory forever for fear that I didn't squeeze out every ounce of potential. I'm afraid to let go.

But if I never let go, the issue will never get the chance to become something else, something new. Putting the book out into the world gives it a new beginning. There's the life the pieces take on as published works, and the life of the issue in the hands of each and every reader looking at it with fresh eyes. It's many CSUN students' first publication—myself included—which is just the start of an author's or artist's career.

Endings and beginnings can look suspiciously similar to each other in that way, and it does not go unnoticed in the accepted work this semester. There are pieces on death and the

afterlife, break ups, quitting a job, or starting a new tradition, where beginnings become endings and endings beginnings. They embrace change and capture glimpses of transformations.

For our cover, we embraced these themes in the image of a California Condor—an animal that not only looks death in the face every day as a carrion bird but is facing its own extinction. It's a bird that turns endings into its own beginnings and is beginning to come back from near extinction through conservation efforts. The California Condor is a symbol of hope and change, which is something we could all use now.

I want to thank everyone who has worked on this issue of *Northridge Review* from the bottom of my heart. Thank you to Sean for the guidance, for believing in the work we do, and helping us believe in it too. Thank you to everyone who submitted—this is your issue just as much as it is ours, so be proud of that. And thank you to my peers in English 412 Spring and Fall for the work you put in to set this issue up for success.

In community,

Georgia Kate Ryan

WELCOME SOUL PRINTING

BY DIEGO MOLINA

214,948,351

*Epson sits by a table in the library.
Kyocera is there to print out her homework.
Ricoh is the librarian.*

Kyocera
Ugh!

Epson
Are you like, alright?

Kyocera
Can you stop?

Epson
Stop what maaan?

Kyocera
Stop staring at me with that smug face.

Epson
Aww naaahh man, I think you might, like. Be misconstrued
or something. I don't stare with my face man. I stare with my
eyes... with my soul.

Kyocera
Well can you stop staring at me with your FACE-SOUL?

Epson
Oh, don't worry maan, I'm not staring at you. I'm staring at
those printers behind you.

Kyocera
What?

Epson
The printers maaan... Do you see them? Shhh. Listen.

Kyocera
Ughh my god.

Epson
The printers be talking maaan.

Epson
That was wicked.

Kyocera
Ugh!

Epson
Are you like, alright?

Kyocera
Can you stop?

Epson
Stop what maaan?

Kyocera
Stop staring at me with that smug face.

214,948,352

INTO THE DARK

BY LYN EISEN

Light as air in your absence,
Full of faith
 Floating
 Fantastic
 Free

Like a sinister fog you approach
Noting your nearness
 Nervous
 Nightmare
 Nauseous

You begin taking root,
Burrowing beneath
 Bleak
 Bound
 Bitter

I am you; you are me
Consumed completely
 Cynical
 Crushed
 Cadaver

THE VEILSIDE EXPRESS

BY EMMA STERLING

EVALIE boarded the train as the first inky dregs of midnight cascaded over the hills, hefting a sticker-smothered suitcase behind her.

Mist strangled the station outside. Through the train's smudged windows, she watched fog entwine itself between the benches and billow over the edges of the platform. Once the train's organs thrummed to life, the haze began to drift backwards. Gravity shoved her, sending her shuffling for balance, and her lungs hitched as distance consumed the station.

Dizzily, she stumbled forward. A long fleur-de-lis carpet led her down the aisle, where rows of burgundy-upholstered seats observed her from all angles. The quiet cadence of jazz music mingled with the train's chugging. Trunks and valises occupied several of the shelves above the seats, but Evalie

traipsed on for nearly a minute before any passengers appeared.

"You look awfully young to ride alone," crowed a dusty voice.

Evalie stopped to see an elderly woman studying her from one of the seats, clutching a pocketbook in her wizened hands. More faces slowly emerged from the rows ahead; in perfect sync, heads peeked out from between the rows to bare dozens of staring eyes.

"Um... I didn't know there was an age limit."

"Unfortunately, there isn't," the woman mused. Her gaze wandered to Evalie's suitcase. "You'll want to stow that. A long journey awaits you. Hopefully it is a pleasant one."

"Thanks. Same to you."

Evalie walked on, bowing her head to avoid the ogling of the other passengers. Their eyes followed her down the aisle

and burrowed into her skin like maggots.

A vacant row waited near the back. She hoisted her luggage into the corresponding shelf, willing her trembling muscles to steady. The faint funk of mildew puffed up from the cushion when she sank down—a sensory remnant of many years and many passengers. Evalie turned to the window, where tides of fog ebbed and flowed past the glass. Keys jingled in the distance.

“Welcome to the Veilside Express. Toll, please.”

Evalie jolted from her reverie and glanced up at the figure looming in the aisle. A double-breasted black jacket covered the stranger’s waistcoat and blouse, and a conductor’s hat perched atop her sleek bun. Beside her keyring, a pocketwatch etched with a scarlet rose hung from the belt loop of her slacks. The badge at her lapel identified her as Karen. Dark, shrewd eyes glinted through her wire pince-nez, fixing Evalie to the seat like a pinned butterfly.

“I’m sorry, I don’t think I—”

“You do,” Karen replied in a stable alto, tapping one black pump. “Check.”

Hesitantly, Evalie reached into the pocket of her faded jeans, then flinched away from the cold twinge of metal against her fingertips. She withdrew her hand to find it cupping a bronze token. ‘Veilside Express’ curled in delicate script around the star-shaped hole in the center.

“Voila,” said Karen. She reached for the token, her crimson nails glinting. Before she could collect it, however, Evalie’s fist snapped shut in sudden panic.

“Wait. I swear I don’t know how I got this, but... I think I’m on the wrong train.”

“This is the only train headed this direction.”

Evalie sighed shakily, trying to regain her paling

composure. “Which direction?”

“Don’t worry.” Karen flashed a gentle smile—the kind reserved for apologies and funerals. “If you have a token, then you’re in the right place.”

“But I... I don’t know where I am.”

“We’re approaching our next station shortly. Please remain seated and try to stay calm. In time, I promise the Express will take you where you need to go.” Karen took advantage of Evalie’s loosening fingers to slide the token out of her hand and slip it into her own breast pocket. With one last nod of encouragement, she brushed past Evalie and strode out of view down the aisle.

Evalie wiped her clammy palms against her thighs. What began as a gnawing pit in her stomach had imploded into a quasar, dragging everything else inward. Her stiff posture collapsed into a slouch, and her arms crossed over her chest as if a straitjacket replaced the sweatshirt she had boarded in.

Her eyes wandered to the window, searching every scratch and streak for hidden meaning. Her surroundings sharpened and crescendoed but offered no answers.

Finally, the train ground to a halt. The door at the end of the car skidded open, and several passengers rose and shuffled into the aisle. Among them, Evalie spotted the old woman she’d spoken with striding towards the door with empty hands and a sudden youthful energy.

“Ma’am,” Evalie called unsteadily, “I think you forgot your pocketbook.”

The woman stopped to face her with a thin-lipped smile. “Yes, it’s gone. Fortunately, I no longer need it. Safe travels, dear.”

Evalie watched, toying with the drawstrings of her sweatshirt, as the woman turned and resumed her path to the door. A billowing, foggy abyss awaited each passenger who filed out. The old woman exited last, her silhouette dwindling into

the gloom like a lost spirit.

The train hesitated for only a moment before jolting awake once more and closing its doors. Accelerating in seconds, it dove further into the haze with renewed speed.

“We now approach the tunnel,” Karen’s voice crackled over the speaker.

As if resurrected, Evalie’s surroundings flurried into motion. Whispers fluttered about in a swelling buzz of excited voices. Passengers swarmed to the edges of the car. They converged at the windows, squinting and craning their necks and pressing their palms to the cold glass. Evalie frowned and glanced out her own window. Rows of aged bricks blurred past in place of fog, soon giving way to darkness. Her reflection gawked at her from the windowpane, illuminated only by the warm lamplight from inside the train.

The cabin’s pressure shifted in the close embrace of the tunnel. Only a faint pop against her eardrums clued her in.

Crispened by the adjustment, the passengers’ murmurs merged with the train’s urgent clanking. Anticipation snaked its fingers around Evalie’s heart and wrung out every drop of blood. A hush seized the waiting group.

The bricks fell away.

A vast black sky swallowed the train whole, yawning on beyond every window—so infinite that it bypassed her eyes and echoed straight into her soul. Millions of tiny glimmers clamored to emerge from the inkwell darkness. Their starlight washed over her from somewhere past reach, past clarity, and even past comprehension.

The train’s pace suddenly smoothed. Evalie peered down to see each wheel gradually lifting from the track, spinning endlessly in the open expanse. A great groan rose and diminished as the train stabilized. It soared until starry skies surrounded the car in all directions. Sublime wonder melted every trace of tension from Evalie’s muscles. Fog encroached on the borders of her peripheral vision; a brief pang of alarm struck

before she realized it was only the condensation of her breath.

Voices gradually broke through her trance to filter into her ears. Giggles and sobs flowed into one fluid sound. Tender whispers joined with venomous shouts. The stars sang their dreams and fears and joys and sorrows in a timeless chorus. She brought her trembling fingertips to the glass and felt it vibrate to the same frequency that thrummed through her veins.

“Do you understand now?”

She turned to face Karen, who stood patiently in the aisle. Melancholy rippled through Evalie when she lost sight of the stars.

“I think so,” she replied.

“Simply step off at any station when you’re ready,” Karen continued. “Most passengers choose to wait until their baggage has been resolved, but there is no time limit. The Express can accommodate you for as long as you wish.”

“Has anyone ever stayed forever?”

“It’s impossible to tell. Countless passengers have come and gone since the beginning, but several still remain from times long past.” Stars played over the surface of Karen’s glasses, whizzing by in a blur of golden lights. “It’s just that we haven’t reached forever yet. Until then, your guess is as good as mine.”

Evalie focused on the carpet at her feet, then the aisle. Most of the other passengers had settled back into their seats, gazing out the windows in content tranquility.

“I still had things to do,” said Evalie.

Karen nodded. “Baggage. Hardly anyone boards without it. Some stow it away and others rest it on their laps. Eventually, they all realize that it no longer weighs as heavily on them.”

“But how?”

“I would say time heals most wounds, but I’ve been told

that's a cliché." Her coal-black eyes twinkled. "Forgive me. I haven't left this train since before it was a train."

"What came before the train?"

"Believe it or not, a beautiful horse-drawn carriage," said Karen. "And even before that, a rowboat. Maybe in a few years, it'll be a jet or a warp-speed spaceship or a teleportation device. The Express has always been here and always will be, in one form or another."

Evalie tugged at a loose thread on her sleeve. "I haven't seen it until now."

"Well, that's not quite true. Haven't you ever stepped outside in the evening? Glanced up at the sky, just to see what stares back at you? Convinced yourself a shooting star threw you a wink from all the way out there?" She paused, lips settling into a pensive smile. "You saw it all along. You just didn't know what you were looking at yet."

Karen's eyes drifted to the window. Evalie followed her gaze. She let her hands fall to her sides, steady at last.

A new deluge of information flooded her heart with every beat. She imagined unlatching each chamber like a suitcase compartment and drawing out its contents. Rage flowed from her veins in abundance, as if eager to escape the cramped confines of her body. She extracted reluctance from her psyche with slightly more difficulty. Relief concealed itself behind the others, but failed to mask its true face.

Last of all, she recognized the shadowy form of regret. It twinged like an exposed nerve when she approached it—a tumor clinging to her ribs and dulling her pulse.

"So..." Evalie forced out her remaining words as tears prickled behind her eyes. "How long have you been doing this?"

"Eons." The conductor laughed to herself, straightening her pince-nez on the bridge of her nose. "The name on my badge isn't exactly right, but most recent passengers

understand it. They almost had it a long time ago... somewhere in Greece, I believe. I admit it's been so long that I've forgotten my true name."

"I'm sorry."

Evalie closed her eyes, letting the train's hum swirl around her. She breathed in the faint scent of cedar and felt her lungs hitch.

"Do you think anyone will miss me?" she blurted before she could check the impulse.

"Why, certainly," said Karen. "It's difficult not to be missed. Loved ones. Those you once saw every day, even if you never spoke with them. The air around you, the atoms that once shifted to accommodate your presence. They all mourn."

Evalie's eyes peeked open. "The atoms mourn?"

"Of course. Haven't you ever felt it—a stillness, a

heaviness, like an electrical charge shifting against your skin? Like the world is keeping a secret from you?"

"I guess so."

"Then how could you ever doubt that you will be missed?"

Evalie fidgeted in her seat.

"I don't mean to embarrass you," Karen went on. "It's just that many others have sat where you are now, believing nobody will notice their absence."

Outside the window, the stars faded into bricks once more. The car jolted, rattling Evalie in her seat. Metal rasped against metal. The tracks, ever reliable, reappeared.

"That's touchdown," said Karen, readjusting her hat. "Unfortunately, I'm needed elsewhere. We could be welcoming some new arrivals shortly."

“Thank you.”

“Of course. That’s why I’m here.”

Karen turned to tread back down the aisle. Her golden pocketwatch chain swung beside her hip, catching the light in short glints. Evalie absorbed the watch’s sound for the first time—a staccato ticking that slowly faded into the background along with the conductor.

Fog rushed past the windows as it had when she first boarded. Evalie tore herself away before it could entrance her again. Instead, she pulled herself to stand, resisting the drag of gravity, and stretched her stiff limbs. She hadn’t noticed the numbness in her toes and fingertips until blood rushed back into each extremity.

Her eyes meandered to the spot above her seat.

In place of the bulky suitcase she’d lugged on alongside her, a smaller duffel bag waited on the shelf. She surveyed the

scuffed canvas, the cracked leather handles, and the familiar collaged constellation of stickers plastered across its surface.

The train uttered a single whistle, parting the fog with the first echoes of hope.

THE GIRL AMONG THE MARIGOLDS

BY MICHELLE GUTIERREZ

EVERY year, on the first of November, the village of San Amaranto turned into a glowing sea of gold and orange. Bright marigolds, the cempazúchitl, the flowers of the dead here lined the streets and covered the doorways. Their sweet scent filled the air, soft and warm like a memory. The whole town came alive. Families lit candles, placed pictures on alters, and shared food with the ones they had lost. Music played in the background, and the scent of pan de Muerto and tamales drifted through the streets.

In the middle of it all, a little girl named Isabela wandered happily through the marigolds. She was no older than eight, with dark braids tied with yellow ribbons and a smile that lit her face. Her dress twirled as she ran, and she giggled as flower petals brushed her arms.

Every Dia de Muertos, Isabela came back to visit her family's altar. It was always the same. Her mamá would be lighting candles with care. Her abuela would sing soft songs,

and her papá would place her favorite things on the altar: sugar skulls, her toy bunny, and a chocolate bar half unwrapped, just the way she used to leave it.

Isabela loved the marigolds the most. Their bright petals always seemed to dance in the wind, and their smell filled her heart with joy whenever she would press her face into a bouquet to breathe in deeply. It made her feel safe, as if the flowers were speaking to her in a language only she could hear. One year, the air felt cooler than before; the sky darkened while candles flickered like tiny stars. Even still, Isabela rushed toward her house, her bare feet soft on the stone path.

"Mamá! Papá! I'm here!" she called as she ran inside. She wrapped her arms around her mamá in a tight hug. But her mamá didn't move. She didn't look at her or speak. Instead, she stood silently in front of the altar with tears in her eyes.

"I missed you," Isabela whispered. Her mamá brushed a tear from her cheek. "Oh my sweet Isabela," she said quietly. "You always loved marigolds." Isabela smiled. "Of course I do! They smell like home!" But when she reached for her papá, her hand passed right through him. Like smoke. Like air.

Her smile faded. “Papá?”

Her abuela gently placed a photo on the altar. It was a picture of Isabela, smiling wide, with marigolds in her hair. The frame was decorated with paper butterflies and petals. Isabela looked at it curiously. She didn’t remember the photo being taken.

She also didn’t remember the accident. It had happened five years ago, but her mind didn’t hold onto that part. A stormy day. A bicycle ride. A moment too fast to change. Her memory, like the petals in the wind, had floated away.

Still, the truth didn’t make sense to her, not really. Instead of feeling scared or sad, she turned back to the flowers. The marigolds seemed brighter than ever, their glow wrapping around her like a soft blanket. To Isabela everything felt right; she believed she was still alive because the flowers made her feel happy, that her family’s hugs could reach her due to their love in the air. The candles, the music, the food, it all felt like a part of a beautiful dream.

Outside, the village was full of laughter and music. Kids

carried lanterns shaped like animals and skulls. Dancers in skeleton costumes twirled in the streets. But inside her house, everything was quiet and still.

Her family never saw her, not really. But sometimes they felt her in the flicker of a candle. An impression in the soft breeze that passed through the room or the warmth that filled their hearts. They didn’t need to see her to know she was there.

As the night grew deeper and the candles burned low, Isabela stood by the site one more time. She looked at her photo, smiled at her bunny, and picked up one last marigold. “I’ll come back next year,” she whispered.

Then, like the petals floating on the wind, she slowly faded away. Her small figure became part of the golden light that filled the room while the marigolds swayed gently as if saying goodbye. Every year after that, her family made sure to build the altar with extra care. Her mamá placed her favorite candies in the same spot. Her papá brought home the biggest, brightest marigolds. Her abuela sang the same songs, the ones Isabela used to love. And each year they never saw her, yet still felt her in their hearts.

Isabela didn't need to know everything. She didn't need to understand. In her world of marigolds and memories, she was happy. She was alive. Surrounded by flowers that smelled of love, family, and forever.

SMOKE WOES

BY DEANNA DAVIDSON

Smoke, smoke cascading through the air,
weaving back and forth, back and forth
in the blowing winds.

Smoke, smoke drifting around dancers,
partiers, friends and foes,
entrapped in the folds of an iron whip.

Smoke, smoke to the far left
and to the right,
curling around in soft tendrils.

Smoke, smoke the color of storm clouds.
Starting white, then changing from light to dark grays,
muddying my thoughts, blurring my senses.

Smoke, smoke raking through my hair
spiraling in waves,
suffocating me like the coil of a rattlesnake.

Smoke, smoke in my eyes
burning, stinging,
blurring my vision.

Smoke, smoke traveling through my body,
a deep well straight to my lungs
until I choke, struggling to catch my breath.

Smoke, smoke sweet and tangy,
senses bombarded once again,
flavors caressing my tongue.

And yet,

Smoke, smoke capturing me
always, once again
in the woes of addiction.

I HEAR THE WIND

BY DEANNA DAVIDSON

I hear the wind blowing;
it's keeping me awake.
Each time I try to close my eyes,
things rattle against the panels,
trees begin to shake.

I hear the wind creaking
against my open window.
Like a small little mouse
creeping around at night.
A mouse stays hidden though.

I hear the wind rattling
the trash cans in the yard.
I try to sleep,
really I do,
but tonight it's too damn hard.

I hear the wind groaning
like a child that is sick.
Smashing against the
weathered house,
so I still can't sleep a lick.

I hear the wind slowing,
finally easing up.
Grateful to Mother nature for the changing sound,
at peace for the first time tonight,
finally a stroke of luck.

I no longer hear the wind;
it is as still as it can be.
After hours of listening to the sound,
I may actually be able to
get some sleep.

COCONUT COVE
BY MELISSA TERMINI



Watercolor plein
air on paper,
6"x8",
2024

CICADAS ON THE PRARIE

BY ANJEL GARCIA

My friend and I used to head to this big field over the hills at the end of our neighborhood. He found it when we were in middle school, and not long after, he showed me. He forced me to close my eyes as we walked through the path he haphazardly made; he kept it as a surprise for my birthday. We had this kind of unspoken oath that we would never bring anyone else but ourselves here. I love those types of things; shared moments that could only be cherished by your eyes and mine. It gave a certain warmth in my heart like no other memory could.

We went to this spot near a grand tree and would often camp near it when we wanted to be together. My friend, he would bring all sorts of different games and materials for us to mess around with. He brought wooden planks, nails, and a hammer with some rope, and we managed to build two swings on both sides of the tree. He had this huge plan for a treehouse overlooking the prairie, and always told me about how cool it would be to have a spot of our own. I loved every one of his

ideas. More often than not we just laid down in the sun, playing board games or talking to each other about whatever was on our minds while he smoked his cigarettes. Eventually we had a whole ensemble of random things: a guitar lying on the easel with an endearingly poor landscape painting, planks and rope scattered around, and a campfire with a pan on it and plates with half eaten chicken and crumbs of rice on it.

Around halfway into the summer after our senior year of high school, we realized that cicadas had completely taken over the prairie. We would see them flock over everything we left, and when I got rid of them, they would appear the next day, taking up more space than before. I was deathly afraid of bugs, you see; I would bring a broom so I could brush them away from all my stuff. My friend never liked how I did this. He didn't say anything, of course, but he always made a sort of uncomfortable face when he saw me carelessly knock all the cicadas off the guitar. I remember how he would let each cicada on to his hand, lowering them from the swing set one by one without a care of how inefficient it was. I would watch him do this while sitting on my swing—which was cicada-free already—and once he was finished he would see me and turn a little red. Then he'd smoke another cigarette.

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One day we were cooking food in the middle of the night on the pan we stole from his parents. I can't really remember why, but I was in such an irritated mood that day. I think it was one of those days where nothing goes your way. But what had happened was that a cicada had unknowingly gotten one pace too close to our food. I, out of some anger and desperation to have control of anything that day, stepped on the cicada with my worn-out boot. As if my lust for power wasn't already apparent, I decided to twist my boot left and right so that this cicada knew its place in the world. I don't think I've ever seen my friend as angry as he was that day. He stood up and asked me, "What the fuck was that for?"

What little empathy I had for the cicada at the time went away as he asked this, being steadily replaced by the growing animosity I had for my friend. I defended myself the best I could, but I lost sight of what I was arguing for. I ended up saying a lot more than I should have. After some back and forth, I stood up yelling, "I don't care about whatever this stupid fucking bug was actually trying to do, I'm not going to let it infect our food and I'm definitely not going to hold its gross

ass body like I'm some new generation saint who lets bugs walk over *our* fucking food you self-righteous bitch." I didn't mean any of that. I hope he trusted me enough to know that.

I don't remember what he told me after that. I never liked thinking about it, since I already knew that everything I was saying beforehand was bullshit. But to face myself and my own selfish, arrogant stupidity, is a hard thing to do. At one point, he threw his half-smoked cigarette on the floor and stomped the glowing light down exactly like I had. That uneasy feeling in my stomach turned into a violent frenzy; my vision shook and I had to look away from his beet red face so I could compose myself. But to be honest, I had begun feeling so detached from it all, detached from his words and the world around me, and before I knew it I was on my own planet. At that moment I was in an odd sanctuary of peace, one I felt that was fortified against any form of deterrence or unnecessary distraction from the world which I once was a part of. I saw the world as if I were in space; I was not there, and I could not be touched.

It was probably the third or fourth cough that pulled me away from this unreal detachment I had felt. Once I looked

back at him, I saw him on his knees unable to stand up, and I immediately went to help him. He shook uncontrollably, and had violent muscle spasms every time he coughed. I offered him my support, letting him hold my shoulders as he coughed in my chest. Once it was over, he slowly lifted his head from my bloodied shirt and locked his eyes on me. His lips were red, and so were his eyes. Both parts of him quivered with a unique fear that I had never felt in him.

I hiccupped. Then I vomited.

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My friend told me about what had happened after I left him in the hospital a week after everything had happened. I actually visited him during that week, but he only told me that he was doing well, and that I didn't need to worry. I knew he didn't want to talk yet, so I gave him space. Although, I have to admit that I was worried sick about him for those few weeks. I was haunted by recurring nightmares every day. I was there in the gothic chambers of a dead silent cathedral, disturbed by the tumultuous rings of an ancient bell that sounded in the same pace of those coughs I heard that night. Even after I woke, I still

felt the vibrations from the ringing bells, causing me to feel just that more anxious

After that, he invited me to the prairie again, and told me about it there. He seemed like himself, but just a bit more fragile than usual. A little pale too. I told him that I had thought it was something to do with his smoking habits. He laughed a little weary laugh, and said, "Yeah, that's a good part of it." He sort of looked away from me for a second as if his attention was taken by the beautiful day that it was. And it *was* a beautiful day; the sky was as blue as his eyes were, and the clouds made vine shaped patterns across the sky that wrapped around our bright yellow star.

He lookeazd back at my eyes again.

"I've got cancer. In the lungs."

I hiccupped again. He laughed a little, held me and said, "Okay dude, don't vomit like last time." I laughed a little too, and I hugged him. I felt his eyes bury into mine, and soon enough I felt tears seep into my brown striped t-shirt. I started saying, "Look, I'm sorry for everything... for—" but he cut me

off, said “I know. It’s okay.” He kept on wilting. I stared at the cicadas on the tall grass, but I could not hear their sound. I could not hear anything in fact, except for the slight buzz that the wind brought. I wasn’t even focused on the cicadas. I was simply just not there.

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After that day we hung out like we always had, just more than normal. We began to seriously work on that treehouse we had always wanted to build - it was on his bucket list - and the cancer was never really brought up. He had quit cigarettes, which made him very restless, so he felt more than happy to work on it all day. More often than not we slept at the prairie, and every night we did we would stargaze for an hour or two, talking about our parents, my plans for college, and other things on our minds at the time. He told me it helped him sleep better, since he was having trouble with it at home. We were able to see Jupiter one night, and I pointed it out to him softly and guided his pale finger over to where it was. He said, “That’s where you go to get stupider,” giggling from his own joke. I laughed a warm, blissful laugh. A cicada touched my arm, and I reactively put it around his waist. It stayed there. He stopped

shaking his legs after a bit, and his breath matched my own comfortable pace. I was happy.

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Eventually, his condition worsened to the point where it was beginning to get difficult going over to the prairie. His body was growing weary, and he was now unable to walk long distances on his own; he needed a wheelchair. I cleared the pathway that he created for my birthday so long ago, and made it smooth enough that his wheelchair could safely cross it, with a few arduous moments along the way. He still always wanted to go, and he still had that same laid-back personality that I loved so much, but I could see that life was taking its toll on him. He looked a lot paler, and the coldness of the winter gave him this frightening shiver. We started going less and less, and the world grew a cold, winter’s blue tint. My days started blending in with each other.

On the last day that we went to the prairie together, he wore this light blue crewneck sweater and the crochet hat I made for him (I learnt how to crochet just for that). I asked him if he didn’t want to wear anything warmer, but he insisted that

this was just fine. Throughout the trip towards our usual spot at the prairie, he was awfully quiet. He would nod and respond shortly to whatever I was talking about, but it seemed there was something on his mind that he couldn't shake. I was going to ask about it when we got to the prairie, but we only got halfway through the grass field when he told me to stop pushing his wheelchair in an exasperated tone. I stopped. I asked, "What's wrong?". He just stared off into the distance. I looked around to see anything that was different. The world still had that same winter tint, and I started paying attention to the way my breath was visible. This reminded me of how cold my friend must have been. "Hey, do you really not want my scarf or something—"

There was nobody in the wheelchair.

I looked around in a panic and saw him stumbling through the middle of the prairie, looking frantically with those azurite blue eyes. His walk was unsteady and haphazard, but he kept on moving faster and faster with quickening breaths as if he were a baby taking their first steps. I yelled his name and started chasing him. He did not notice me. He kept on moving faster. Eventually he grew a pace too quick for his poor body, and he stumbled and yelped while falling to the grass bed. I was

quick enough to catch him so that he didn't fall face first into the ground, and I asked him, "What the *fuck* are you doing?" He was breathless and hyperventilating, and the cold crisp of the winter air tore through his fragile lungs like daggers. I cringed at the pain he felt, but he didn't seem to care.

He said through harsh breaths, "Where are they?" I didn't understand.

"What? Who?"

Through even harsher breaths,

"The cicadas...The cicadas..."

I thought to myself, *was this really what he was running around for?* I responded, "You're hurting your whole body just to see some cicadas?" But he did not listen to me. He just kept on asking where they were, where they had gone, where their song was, if they hid from him specifically, if they're gone forever. I did not understand him at all. But I knew this was more than what I thought it was.

“They’re gone for the winter,” I began. “They...They kind of do that. It gets too cold for them to be able to chirp or fertilize or live. I think. But I do know that they’ll be back next summer. And you’ll hear their chirps, and you’ll see them everywhere in the treehouse that we’ll have finished by then. You’ll be able to place them gently down to their grassy homes, and they’ll repay the favor by singing their song. You’ll see them everywhere, and they’ll see you in everything, because they love you the way you love them. They want to repay that love you gave them all that time. The cicadas will come back, my friend. They always come back.

His breath began to match my own not so comfortable pace. I was happy.

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I had not been to the prairie since that day for roughly two years. For the longest time I had this idea that if I went back there, I’d regret it for some reason. Those two years were completely and utterly barren. I went to the funeral that happened a month or two later that day. I visit his grave every month and give it a new batch of lilies, which were his

favorite. I frequently talked to people who knew him, who told of his stories with them and of his charming personality that I knew all too well. I never harbored any emotions during those moments other than a dull buzz in my mind. This translated to my friendships with others as well. I was going out to parties and events and hanging out with family, but my mind was sparse and elsewhere at all times. I was never really there. I was never really anywhere. Of course I acted like I was present for everybody to see; I actually thought this was how people did it. Eventually, I thought to myself, I would believe that I was happy and fine. This was how people did it.

Eventually, when I visited my family for the summer, I found myself passing the pathway that me and my friend used two years ago. There was nothing particular about this day. It was pretty much the same as all the other days before this. But there are feelings that cannot be explained. There are feelings that I could not begin to explain to you nor understand why they are. Our minds are an enigma, my mother would often say, and sometimes our feelings have no reason; they just feel right, and that’s good enough. Today I felt like going back to the prairie.

I followed the path.

It was overgrown, returned to its former glory before my friend discovered the prairie. I, of course, remembered the way back to our spot. It looked the same as it once had before, just that one of the swings had fallen off the rope, leaving the board lopsided. Must have been the wind, I thought to myself. There were no cicadas. I carried on.

I kept on walking through the prairie. I was subconsciously looking for the cicadas, yet I had not fully realized it yet until I broke out into the very same run that my friend had. I ran around the field until I ran out of breath completely. I let myself fall, then stared into the sky of blue. There was just some unspeakable urge holding me through all of that, guiding my actions and leading me to this very spot. I grew scared, and I honestly thought I was going to lose it here.

But then they came.

I felt a cicada on my arm, and despite every sign my body gave, I kept it still. Then the cicadas came onto my legs, my wool sweater, and my hands, eventually covering my whole

body. Then, one by one, each cicada began singing. They began as a cacophony of sounds, reverberating around the world as if it were all crashing, and I cowered in fear, scrunching my face by the utter tragedy and terror these cicadas were conveying through their blessed bodies. The cicadas songs and clashing rhythms pitted against one another, fighting and arguing and biting and choking until they compromised, understood, accepted and then loved, and I realized then that what was once an undeterred siren of wails and sounds had become this harmonious symphony of cries from the old violin that your mother would play to you, that resonant song that would remind you of the unbearably beautiful pain of loving someone too much. I cried then for the first time I had cried in years while listening to the cicadas beautiful hymn of life and solitude, love and hatred, a tale as ancient as they had lived, and I find myself wailing as loud as I possibly could, crying that ugly cry I always hated crying, trying to drown out the cicada's beautiful melodies to no avail as their melody goes past my cries into my soul. At this point I am here, I am really here on this Earth, and I think that this is where my friend is, this is what my friend saw, and I think about how I can't recognize the man I had been for the past two years. I will never live another day like the man I once was, cowering under the false oasis of

the other planet that held me in such solitude from my own emotions.

I am truly, undeniably alive, my friend.

MICRO REVIEW: DAVID TRINIDAD'S "ODE TO DUSTY SPRINGFIELD" AND LEARNING HOW TO LIVE (WITH YOURSELF AND DEATH)

BY ELIZABETH ROSE

Serving as the introduction to David Trinidad's newest published collection of poems, *New Playlist*, "Ode to Dusty Springfield" introduces readers to two core themes of the collection: living, and simultaneously, death. One could argue that it is impossible to consider life without death, and in regard to this poem, I'd argue that Trinidad would agree. At the very least, mentioning the former is destined to drum up thoughts of the latter.

The poem weaves in death as its undertone from the very beginning – its title containing "ode to" gives it the air of a memorial, an implication that the person being addressed is no longer alive. It reads as something akin to a confession, a letter

that you would write to someone and then shove in a drawer, never to be seen by anyone but its creator. Trinidad himself asks within the poem if he should be embarrassed for admitting as much as he does, which grounds his words and offers a sense of relatability.

"Ode to Dusty Springfield" is arguably one of the more complex poems in *New Playlist*, offering a lot of meaning to those willing to dig past its initial appearance. The poem itself seems to follow no traditional format, structured by long, skinny stanzas as if he'd only had a sliver of scrap paper to work with but was too determined to put thought to paper to go in search of an alternative. If performed, it might sound like the ramble of someone who's finally had the chance to speak to someone they idolize, their mouth moving faster than their mind and causing a flurry of short, broken thoughts that ultimately make sense when looked at on paper. Again, this pulls in that sense of relatability, this awkward excitement to acknowledge someone that you've never thought to be capable of reaching. Trinidad had the unique opportunity to find himself in the same room as Dusty Springfield not once but

twice, bonded by their complicated relationship with alcohol, a subject that often leads to discussions of death in extreme circumstances.

A closer look at the poem reveals similarities in the presence that both Springfield and the AA meetings had in Trinidad's life, as well as how one bled into the other. They served as anchors, constants in a time of unstable footing and blink-fast decisions that could end in disaster. Long before finding solace in alcohol, Trinidad would let himself be lost in Springfield's music, a reflection of simpler times and juvenile emotions. As he trekked up the mountain of sobriety, he rediscovered it - and by proxy, her—by happenstance, a complete coincidence that saved him from potentially falling back into poor habits. Trinidad himself admits in the poem that the voice that had once filled his young heart with a flurry of emotions now motivated him to continue down the path to betterment. To this day, he recounts slogging through hours of boring radio just to hear a single song of hers. To recognize how okay he is doing now, he's forced to acknowledge how easily he could have not been okay back then had Springfield not re-

entered her life, and that's a line that the poem walks delicately enough to avoid tripping off the tightrope into depressing thoughts.

"Ode to Dusty Springfield" is not only a poem dedicated to Springfield's singing, but to her spirit, the same spirit that pulled Trinidad up from the depths and encouraged him to keep going. His hope that Springfield's star quality would travel down the leg of her plastic folding chair and cross over to him was fulfilled; if nothing else, the inspiration that the close encounter imbued in him ultimately brought about the creation of this collection. The poem, brought on by her death, bringing on its own creation and the subsequent building of *New Playlist*, falls into itself and echoes the cycle of life and death.

Among all the poems in *New Playlist*, "Ode to Dusty Springfield" is the longest poem in regard to the number of pages it spans across. In relation to some of Trinidad's other entries, we see the themes of living and death interchange frequently - "All Things Must Pass" recounts his relearning to appreciate movies that he'd neglected appreciating in favor of

worrying thoughts consuming his mind; “The Pen” shows a desire to reclaim a past joy in the form of a multicolored pen, akin to Trinidad turning back to Springfield as a grounding point and reliving the feelings her music originally stirred; “Periwinkle Blue” directly correlates life with death and living with bearing the memory of the death of others.

“Ode to Dusty Springfield” also introduces another pattern in *New Playlist*: the immortalization of celebrities. Throughout the collection, we are reminded of the mortality of the people these works have been dedicated to, as well as the impact that their legacy has left in Trinidad’s mind. He appreciates Kay Francis in a poem of the same name for acknowledging her humanity amid her inherent popularity; “Sylvia Plath’s Recipe Cards” weaves practicality and personal moments together into a new entity bearing the poet’s resemblance.

When reading Trinidad’s prose with these key themes in the back of your mind, it’s clear to see just how many entries in *New Playlist* follow in the footsteps of “Ode to Dusty

Springfield”. Trinidad creates a stand-out introduction that invites readers to open their minds to this modern revival of his history, aptly alluded to in the collection’s title. “Ode to Dusty Springfield” is not only a nod to Springfield’s life, but to that piece of Trinidad’s life, and its placement at the forefront declares that he still has plenty to say.

NENA

BY NICHOLAS RODRIGUEZ

Y tu quien es?

Cuban coffee every morning.
Too young to understand
why you made it every day.
They say coffee helps the memory,
Right?

Parents sipping from a bitter obsidian lake.
The daily intake ceased.
Since no one makes it quite like you.
Or maybe fear blockades the port of espresso.

Memory faded 5 years ago.
Somehow, fading again.
This time
I'm at fault.
A new person in every old video.
That I find trouble remembering.

I remember you were a nurse in Cuba.
Wearing blue scrubs stained with coffee grease.
Of course, you couldn't work without it.

The last years accrued the highest toll.
Yet you paid the greatest price.
Forgotten existence is heart breaking.
What is worse,
an empty heart
or an empty mind?

Just 4 Spanish words.
Cut deeper than any novella you watched.
Never knew what you were talking about.
And every time you smiled.
It brightened up the room
giving semblance
that maybe you finally remembered.
But not once did you.

I disassociated with your memory.
A defense mechanism.
Turning a once Iced Cafecito into
a diluted drink left on the counter waiting to be thrown out.
And I'm left sitting in the backyard
under guava trees you picked.
But for some reason were never eaten.

Because while your brain filled with plaque.
You looked stronger than a bull.
It made me forget.
That your time was finite.

You couldn't recognize me
and that question became standard.
I wasn't your grandson anymore.
The memory of him is a pastime.
I was a stranger
Now you seem like one as well.

Every holiday, dad cooks pierna.
Not quite the way you made it.
We all can't be as good in the kitchen as you.
I should make some Cuban coffee for my parents.
Paying homage to you of course.

Plus, it's good for the memory.

CHILD SLAVE

BY ANGELA THOMAS

I was a child slave.
Raised to serve and do only what I was told.
“Cook dinner,” they say.
“Wash clothes,” they say.
Do this, do that.
Every day for 15 years, I did what I was told.

Did I ever get paid or rewarded for this?
Yes.

By being beat with extension cords and paddles made of wood and leather belts.
Did my abusers ever care?
No, they laughed as they beat me.
Laughed at my pain, laughed at my tears, they laughed at me.
So, what does a child slave do?
Grow up into an adult slave.
“Hey, girl, do this.”
“Hey, bend over this way.”
“Hey, give me a kiss.”
They would say.
And I would do as I was told.

Because that's what love is, right?
A series of commands barked at you by people saying they love you, right?
"Yo, girl, come here. Let me feel on you."
"Shut up! Who told you to speak?"
"Come here, you don't have a say. You do as I say."
They yell at me as they slap me. Hit me. Rape me.
When do I have a say?
When does my voice become loud enough for them to hear it?
When do I take back what's mine?

Now.
The time to take back what is mine is now.
I wasn't made to be abused.
I wasn't made to be taken advantage of.
I was made to be loved.
Not through hate or abuse.
But through compassion, humility, and kindness
My body and mind were not made for you
It was made for me
Because only I know how to take care of me.

FOUR GENERATIONS REMOVED

BY ANGELA THOMAS

I was four generations removed from slavery
Four generations from my ancestors wanting the best for me

Four generations of a lineage they tried to erase.
A group of people they tried to replace

My mother is three generations removed
She did not take advantage of the opportunities presented to her
She let them slip through her fingers.

Grandma too.

Great-grandmother was one generation removed
One generation from being beaten to her tomb.

One generation from a beating she would catch
But not enough removed to remember the smell of burning flesh.

POEM #5

BY ANGELA THOMAS

The flower blooms in the sun and I know it's time to get up.
As I climb into my car, life waves hello to me in my missing rear view mirror.
I scream curses to the sky as if someone will fall from it and fix *it*.

But no one does, no one ever does.

I continue to make lemonade out of the lemons life keeps throwing at me.
But it comes out bitter/sweet.
But I keep drinking it as if it's my life blood.
As if every drink is good to the last drop, when it's not.
I keep smiling until it hurts. I wear the mask until it breaks. Until I break.

I try to pick up the pieces but they dissolve in my hand.
I can't hide anymore, I can't hide the ugly truth anymore.
That I am a black woman.
A Black American living in a world that hates and does not love.
That exploits but does not care.
A world that I can not escape.

BRONZE LIMBS AND CONCRETE DREAMS

A POEM IN THE VOICE OF JOSEPHINE BAKER

BY ANGELA THOMAS

I was born where the pavement sweats,
where the sun drapes its gold on the backs of brown girls
who learn to dance before they learn to dream.
Where the sirens wail like lost souls at midnight,
and the streetlights hum secrets only the stray dogs know.

Mama worked her fingers into threads of prayer,
stitched rent money into the seams of secondhand dresses.
She taught me how to smile with my whole body,
to move like joy had no cage,
like the world was an open stage waiting for my feet to claim it.

South Central taught me rhythm before love,
how to sway between cracked sidewalks and stolen glances,
how to spin away from hungry hands and whispering corners,
how to laugh in the face of a city that didn't always love me back.

The boys on the block called me trouble,
said my hips spoke a language they weren't old enough to understand.
I told them I was made of music,
of jazz notes and Sunday morning hallelujahs,
of the stories my grandmother carried from the Delta
and the freedom I knew was waiting somewhere past Crenshaw.

I dreamed in sequins, in feathers, in soft-lit stages
where the only bullets were the ones shot from cameras,
where the applause was louder than police knocks.
Where my body belonged to movement, not survival.

So I danced.
On the pavement, on the bus stop benches, in the aisles of the corner store.
I danced until the city couldn't hold me anymore.
Until my name was more than a whisper.

And when I left—
when I flew over the cracked streets and neon liquor signs,
over the boys who swore they'd marry me someday,
over the prayers Mama stitched into my coat—
I carried South Central in the arch of my back,
in the tilt of my chin,
in the way I made the world watch me
without ever asking for permission.

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SAY IT AGAIN

BY JOSIE JOSE

CHARACTERS

JULIA: Put-together (until she isn't.) Mid 20's.

WILL: Julia's boyfriend. Mid 20's.

WILL CLONES: Same build, same hair, same clothes, different voices.

SCENE 1

JULIA is sitting alone, center-stage, in a plastic chair.

JULIA

Well...we went to the store, and my boyfriend was like, "Oh let's get some bananas!" And I was like, "No, Will, those are way too yellow, get the green ones." And he was like "nah I don't wanna wait—" which was so like him, you know, just so impatient, and he was like—"I'm gonna eat them all, don't worry" ...and then they'd sit there! And ROT! And every time we'd go to the store I'd be like, "Hey maybe we should buy some new bananas, since

the others were rotten" And he always had the better idea, and was like, "It's okay, I'm gonna make banana bread!" HE. NEVER. FUCKING. MADE. BANANA BREAD!

(pause)

He never made anything... I don't even like bananas.

SCENE 2—Denial

We are in Julia's memory—in JULIA and WILL's apartment. JULIA is sitting on the couch flipping through channels. WILL enters talking on the phone between his ear and shoulder, holding grocery bags.

WILL

No, Mom, we've got a lot to do this weekend so I don't think we can...Yeah she's—

(looks at JULIA who makes a 'no' gesture)

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WILL (cont.)

She's taking a shower. We were thinking May...

(JULIA shakes her head and mouths "JUNE")

June! We were thinking June!

(beat)

Okay gotta go so... Yup, yup, sounds good! Love you too, buh
bye!

(hangs up the phone and finally sets all the bags down)

JULIA

You literally told her June last week!

(JULIA gets up to help unload the groceries)

WILL

She's getting old, babe.

JULIA

Okay, but *you* forgot and said May-

WILL

I'm getting old.

(pecks her on the forehead)

JULIA

I can't do May, remember?

WILL

Riiiiight. Because of...The...The thing—the important—

JULIA

The gallery, Will. I told you to take off work—

WILL

Yeah! I did! I will. I did.

JULIA
There's a painting I've been working on—

WILL

(unpacking the last bag)

Voila!

(WILL holds up a bunch of bright yellow bananas)

JULIA
I don't think you've seen it yet, but—

(WILL tosses old black bananas in the trash)

Yeah. I'm just excited for you to see it.

WILL
What?

JULIA
The painting.

WILL
Oh yeah, I'm sure it's gonna be beautiful!! Just like my beautiful girlfriend!

(WILL picks up JULIA and takes her to the couch)

Everything is going to be perfect. Just like you. That's why I have to do—this!

(WILL starts tickling JULIA)

JULIA

(laughing)

Ahh! Will, stop! Stop!

The lighting slowly fades to blue. Once the stage is fully blue, WILL stops tickling JULIA and sits upright

JULIA

(to herself)

Dammit. I don't remember what happened after that...

(turns to WILL)

What did you say?

WILL
I don't know.

JULIA

What? Did you....forget?

WILL
Julia, I only know what you know...

JULIA

(pause)

Where did you go?

WILL

(looking at each other)

I'm right here.

Fade to black

SCENE 3 - Anger

(beat)

Lights are back to normal. JULIA and WILL are in a different memory, they are eating breakfast at the kitchen table. The bananas on the counter have spots.

WILL

So what did the doctor say?

JULIA

Just stuff I already knew...That they're sorry...

WILL

(mouthful of banana)

I'm sorry—

JULIA

Bleeding and cramping the next few days—

WILL

I uhh...told my Mom.

JULIA

Why? What did she say?

WILL

Just that she's sorry—

JULIA

I told mine too.

WILL

(surprised)

You called her?

JULIA

She wants us to get married.

WILL

(scoffs)

That's...not gonna do anything.

JULIA

(beat)

When's your meeting?

WILL

(eating much faster, mouthful of food)

Fuck, I'm gonna be late.

(Pecks her forehead)

I'll be back by dinner.

JULIA

Maybe we should think about it...

WILL

Jules, you know we can't get married right now—

JULIA

Why, Will? A child needs parents, it needs support—

WILL

Pfft support—How's your gallery?

JULIA

What the fuck is that supposed to mean?

WILL

We can barely support ourselves.

JULIA

Just because you go to meetings and wear a suit, it doesn't mean
I don't work as hard as you—

WILL

That's not what I'm saying. You're not listening.

JULIA

You're not listening!

WILL
Why are we talking about this?

JULIA
Because imagine if I had to be a Mom—

WILL
Well you don't have to...imagine!

JULIA

WILL (cont.)

(walking towards the door)

I need to go—

JULIA
Great. Yeah, just fucking leave!

(WILL opens the door)

(pause) **SCENE 4 - Bargaining**

I want to. Eventually.

Abruptly, the lighting changes to blue, we are now in JULIA's mind.

WILL

JULIA
Stop! We have to do it again.

(sighs)

I know. So we will get married...Eventually.

WILL
Which part?

JULIA

You keep doing it wrong—the part where you say I don't have to be a Mom. It was...different.

WILL

Okay.

JULIA

I feel like you said something else...like it was a sign...that I wasn't meant to be one—

WILL

Surely, I didn't say that.

JULIA

(beat)

No, you're right, you didn't. Okay let's run it again?

WILL

From the top?

JULIA

No...just...from the part where I tell you to leave?

WILL

Okay.

(opens the door)

JULIA

Great, yeah, just fucking leave!

(WILL begins to leave)

Okay, wait.

(WILL looks back at her and freezes)

And then... close the door.

(There is a long silence as WILL backs up and closes the door.)

JULIA (cont.)
And then say...you won't leave me.

WILL
I won't leave you—

JULIA
No, like...say it better. Say "I'll never leave you."

WILL
I'll never leave you.

JULIA

Say it again.

WILL
I'll never leave you.

JULIA

(upset)

Again!

WILL
I'll never leave you Julia.

WILL holds JULIA on the couch. They repeat this sequence three more times as the lights fade to black.

SCENE 5 - Guilt

(pause) *Blue lights come up. It's a different day. JULIA fell asleep on the couch, her eyes open to see that WILL is gone.*

JULIA
Will?!

The lights begin to flash between blue and white. The lights go black for a moment, three other actors that look exactly like WILL—including WILL's original actor—appear on stage. Suddenly the lights stop flashing and remain blue

WILL & WILL CLONES

I'm right here.

JULIA

(gets up and examines each WILL. Stops at WILL #4)

Say my name.

WILL #4

Julia.

JULIA

You—

(points at WILL#2)

JULIA (cont.)

Say my name.

WILL #2

Julia.

(JULIA, panicking, points at WILL #3)

WILL #3

Julia.

JULIA puts her head in her hands in great despair. All of the WILL clones say "JULIA" at the same time. JULIA cries and goes up to the original WILL

JULIA

I'm so sorry.

She holds the original WILL's face in her hands. He is still and emotionless.

JULIA

I—I've forgotten. Please...Please say something. Let's do how we met again—Remember??

(WILL #3 EXITS)

Or the pregnancy test?

(WILL #2 EXITS)

The miscarriages? We can do phone calls too—

(WILL #4 EXITS)

Fuck. Let's just go to bed. Okay? Maybe you'll talk in the morning? Can you talk in the morning?

JULIA is hugging him as he stands still, she moves down to his ankles and hugs his leg, sobbing.

JULIA

I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry.

*Black Out***SCENE 6 - Depression**

There is a still-life painting leaning against a wall. The painting is of black bananas. There is trash all over the floor. JULIA looks disheveled. WILL is standing in the corner of the living room under a blue spotlight, watching JULIA. She flips through the channels on the TV. The phone begins to ring. It rings seven times, and then it goes to voicemail...The voicemail plays: "Are you okay? It's Mom, again. I know this hard—" JULIA picks up the answering machine and presses a button, it plays aloud "Delete message?" she clicks yes. She goes to an old message, it plays aloud: "May 17, 2003, from WILL ROONEY— (WILL's voice is garbled up and hard to decipher) Hi babe—bad service—sorry—can't make it to—love you—good—luck" (She rewinds and plays it again three more times)

SCENE 7 - Acceptance*(pause)*

JULIA is sitting alone, center stage, in a plastic chair. The painting of the black bananas is now hung next to her.

JULIA

Sure, yeah, hi, thank you for coming! Um, yeah, so, I painted this about a year ago. It's oil on canvas...and, it's supposed to be how I feel about...how....time...is fleeting, and we all eat and get eaten (nervous laugh) - sorry, that doesn't really answer the question (laughs)! Um, yeah, well...we went to the store, and my boyfriend was like "Oh let's get some bananas!" And I was like, "No, Will, those are way too yellow, get the green ones." And he was like "nah I don't wanna wait—" which was so like him, you know, just so impatient, and he was like—"I'm gonna eat them all, don't worry" ...and then they'd sit there! And ROT! And every time we'd go to the store I'd be like, "Hey maybe we should buy some new bananas, since the others were rotten" And he always had the better idea, and was like, "It's okay, I'm gonna make banana bread!" HE. NEVER. FUCKING. MADE. BANANA BREAD!

He never made anything. I don't even like bananas.

S

BY EMMA CARROLL

I softly settle against you,
sparking sweet nothings,
slowly saddling up to you.
Your smooth, sun-kissed skin
scintillates in the space we share.
Swift kisses,
strong arms.
Your heart sings to mine.
Their chords strum
at the same time.
Sweating bodies slide together,
spiraling and stirring into
a sacred S.
Life lines strung together
by a sweet,
sublime,
soulful
string.

BREATH

BY SAMANTHA JULIO

In efforts to see the world with fresher eyes,
fragile child, do you wish to be reborn?

I breathe earth into your chest.
Inhale, exhale—
the grass, the fields, and the trees
that fail to bring you life.

I will be your resurrection, your savior.
I will make sure you see tomorrow,
and the tint of blue fades to pink
as your body transitions to day.

Sweet child, I will not give up on you.
Please, do not give up on me.

BABY DOLL

BY NINA

BABY DOLL HAD A WANDERING EYE. Not that it ever really got him into trouble. Don Benigno let him get away with whatever he wanted because he was sturdy, reliable, and never talked back. Children approached him with their sticky hands intertwined, nervous glances at one another, cautious in their steps towards him in order to ask for one of the many colorful balloons that he held in his hand. He liked to find dirty spots on their clothes and wonder where the mess had come from, and he spent his shifts on carnival grounds counting how many children wore their shoes untied and how many wore velcro.

When he did get caught, on occasion, staring holes into the side or the front or the back of people's heads, he would smile – his crooked smile with its many crooked teeth, some his, some borrowed, some stolen – and imagine that it was a gentle smile, a soft one. He imagined that the pounds of white greasepaint and baby-pink blush surely made him human.

From the gilded cage of his own mind he would ignore his own clawed hand as it curled carefully around the string of a balloon, would pretend he could not feel the soft dirt give under him as he kneeled down to hand it over. At the right time of day, from the right angle, even his shadow could pass for that of a much smaller being.

Recently, he had nailed a strange new creature in-between his eyes. Don Benigno had rounded out the carnival's side-show performances with a fortune-teller, a fire breather, and a sword swallower. Hachaliah had arrived on carnival grounds a month ago around midnight. Sopping wet from the rain, with only the clothes on his back, and a worn rifle-case full of swords in his hand.

Don Benigno had shoved him unceremoniously into Baby Doll's tent, rumbling and mumbling about tardiness and irresponsibility. Hachaliah's long dark hair clung to the sides of his face, but he received the sight of Baby Doll's half-naked, ball-jointed body with a polite smile and only a bit of embarrassment. He spoke in a gentle tone, and when his

handsome face smiled it revealed two perfect rows of delicate white teeth. He was tall, but Baby Doll was even taller.

Don Benigno made the promise of getting Hachaliah his own cot, but Baby Doll knew he was more faithful to his shoe-string budget than to any man or woman, so they would not be seeing another cot anytime soon. They had squeezed together into the cot that night and every night since. Which Baby Doll did not mind. As it turned out, once Hachaliah grew past the initial embarrassment of bed sharing, he slept like a rock under Baby Doll's shameless staring.

They rarely saw one another during the day, busy all around with carnival duties, and more often than not Baby Doll came back to his tent at night to find Hachaliah already asleep. Hogging his blankets for that matter. Still, some nights Baby Doll returned to find him half-undressed. Hachaliah only sometimes wore shirts, but never at the same time he wore pants, and owned no underwear. Lithe and strong, ropes of muscle all carefully crafted to allow one, two, sometimes three weapons to slide right down past his heart to graze the bottom

lining of his stomach. Baby Doll wished he could turn into a broad sword. Baby Doll feared he would unscrew his head off his shoulders permanently, that the thick rubber band that held him together would snap, but his favorite part was the staring and he was content to maintain the narrow groove in their cot for as long as possible.

The first to go was Paulie. He had vanished as easily as he could twist and turn his body into all kinds of different angles. Francesca and the rest of the acrobats checked each and every chest, barrel, box, and drawer to no avail. He was gone. Francesca came to Baby Doll sobbing, staining his colorful overalls with her tears. He turned the big top tent inside out, peered down the mouth of the tiger, stalked any man he deemed suspicious to the edge of the lot, but there was no sign of Paulie anywhere. Wherever that little boy had gone, Baby Doll's wandering eye could not follow. Once two whole weeks had passed Don Benigno packed up all of his belongings into a box and drove into town to sell them for cheap.

Next was Warren, the fiddle player. Hachaliah appeared

over Don Benigno's shoulder one evening, wondering where Warren had gone. He was on duty to help with dinner. Couldn't find him anywhere, had asked around to no avail. When Don Benigno checked his tent he found all his things gone too, except for the fiddle, so in a fit he assumed that Warren had hit the road real sly. Fuming, Don Benigno handed the fiddle over to Baby Doll and instructed him to take over any of Warren's performances for the foreseeable future. Perhaps it was because his things had gone with him, or perhaps it was because Baby Doll managed to play a pretty good tune, that soon enough no-one could remember Warren nor Paulie at all.

Francesca was a sweet little thing. She led the acrobats not because she was the oldest, or the most beautiful, but because she was the best. She was turning twenty-seven soon, but Baby Doll had known her since he'd first found her pickpocketing on carnival grounds, many years ago. When she was young, she clung to him often, bumping her head into his side. He would lift her onto his broad shoulders where she would spend the next hour or so tangling his long orange hair until she fell asleep. He would never admit it, but he felt a sense

of duty towards her.

Francesca sat next to him while he turned out balloon animals for a gaggle of teenagers. She often hid in his large shadow to smoke without drawing too much attention. She liked to gossip about all goings-on, and she had chosen Baby Doll as her confidant due to his deafening silence.

"—so in the end I broke things off with her. I'm not very good at sharing, and apparently neither is her husband. You know how men are, Baby."

He did not, but he could imagine. He twisted the leg of a balloon giraffe into place and handed it over to a young girl. Francesca went on: "I wanted to take Lila out for dinner tonight but I haven't been able to talk to her. She's been playing doctor with the clowns all morning. Apparently Marnie, Vince, and a few others got into it. Your darling boy too, Lila wrapped his hand."

At that, Baby Doll frowned, which made Francesca laugh.

"Maybe you can kiss it better for him, if you watch your teeth." Baby Doll whacked her softly with a balloon sword. Francesca finished another cigarette, filling Baby Doll's ears with more gossip until her performance neared and she whisked away, leaving only a trail of smoke and glitter to follow.

Baby Doll found Lila inside the clowns' tent with Vince. He lay up to his neck under heavy blankets. His face was flush and sweaty, and his breathing was hoarse. Lila, who walked the tightrope, wrung out a small cloth into a bowl before placing it onto Vince's forehead again.

"Oh Baby Doll, I don't know what to do! He got caught between Marnie and Hachaliah earlier today. He's freezing cold," Lila said, "And I think Don Benigno needs to call for the doctor, look at this," she lifted the blankets off him, and Baby Doll's eyes widened at the sight of his arm. Baby Doll didn't bleed. He couldn't even cry. He found wounds all kinds of fascinating. It had swollen from his fingertips up to his elbow. In the middle he could see four thin scratch marks from which a thin spider-web of black veins bloomed. He imagined his own sharp nails

ripping into Vince's arm and shuddered. Baby Doll left the tent immediately to find Don Benigno. He cornered the man in the back of the big top tent, tightening a hand around the back of his neck until he agreed to call for the doctor first thing tomorrow.

He returned to his tent to find Hachaliah sitting in a corner, rearranging the swords he kept inside his rifle-case. All shapes and sizes. Hachaliah looked up at Baby Doll and smiled politely. "Evening," he mumbled.

Under the yellow gaslamp a row of black stitches crowned his brow. His skin shone with the sweat of infection. Baby Doll looked down to find Hachaliah's left hand was wrapped carefully in gauze. Hachaliah wrinkled his nose at him. "Marnie and I had a little run in, but it's nothing to worry about."

Marnie, one of the older clowns, doubled as the crew's tailor for any costume related business. He was broadly considered to be a functioning alcoholic. Baby Doll liked

Marnie enough, but he knew that catching him in a bad mood, especially if he smelled of gin, always spelled disaster. He figured that someone would have let Hachaliah know earlier, though.

Baby Doll walked over and sat down right by him, bumping their knees together. He twirled his finger in the air, motioning for Hachaliah to undo the dressing. Most of Hachaliah's hand was red and swollen, two of his fingers wrapped tight against popsicle sticks. There was no open wound for Baby Doll to gawk at, and he frowned. Hachaliah, perhaps under the impression that Baby Doll was upset on his behalf, patted him on the shoulder. "I'll be alright. You should go wash up, Baby."

Baby Doll emerged from their tent to wash the greasepaint off his face in the showers by the tiger's cage. He wandered over slowly, thinking of Vince's scratches and Hachaliah's broken fingers. It was then that he found Marnie by the showers, sobbing grossly and smelling of vomit and alcohol. He stared at Marnie for a while, until Marnie found it within

himself to focus his eyes on the towering figure in the dark next to him.

"*Baby Doll*," Marnie gasped, "Something's wrong with that boy."

Baby Doll tilted his head to the side, suddenly a thousand times more interested in their entire debacle. Marnie wiped his nose against the back of his hand. "He's got something wicked behind his eyes, Baby. Whatever came into my tent wasn't him. He said the others were looking for me and he grabbed me by the elbow with a strength like nothing else I ever felt. And his eyes were the devil's eyes. I was so scared, and I was fighting him off and he *bit* me," Marnie lifted his sleeve to try and show Baby Doll a bite mark in the darkness, "When Vince and the boys dragged me out and pulled me off him, there he was. Just a boy, thin as a whistle," Marnie let out a wet cough. Baby Doll sighed.

Yes, Marnie was a drunk and a short-tempered idiot, but he was nobody's fool. The bite-mark was there, hard to see as it

was in the night. For now the only thing he could do was wipe Marnie's face down with a wet rag, force him to drink some water, and carry him back to his bed. Finally, when he returned to his tent, he found Hachaliah uncharacteristically awake. Curled up into a little ball on his side. The rifle case tucked up against the edge of the cot.

"Evening," he said.

Baby Doll slowly nodded. He walked over to their shared cot, untying the silk ribbons that held his hair back from his face. He undid the buttons on his overalls, letting them drop to the floor before he kicked them to the side.

Hachaliah looked up at him through beady eyes, but said nothing. Baby Doll took his undershirt off as well, tossing it over his back. Then he turned off the gaslamp, and plunged them both into darkness. Hachaliah sighed, Baby Doll felt him curl tighter under their shared blankets, the groove in the cot shrinking. They lay in silence for a while, with only the song of the bugs outside to lull them to sleep. Baby Doll heard

Hachaliah shuffle even closer. The young man rested his cheek on Baby Doll's shoulder. "You're not upset at me, are you Baby? I know Marnie and Vince are friends of yours."

They were all long-time co-workers at best, acquaintances at most. Baby Doll took care of everyone he knew. Hachaliah continued mumbling, "I apologize if you are.

Rest assured it won't happen again."

Baby Doll thought about the fever Vince was nursing right now, and he stretched his arm under Hachaliah. With a small laugh, the young man went on. "You know, my grandmother used to say that quiet people are the best because they are like tombs. Sealed shut. And you can share all your secrets with them because nothing gets out." Under the cover of darkness, Baby Doll rolled his eyes. Hachaliah nuzzled in even closer. Baby Doll could feel his breath. It was cold. "He saw right through me. Occasionally people do. Those who are more in tune with their senses. Francesca doesn't like me much either but she can't put her finger on it just yet, and the animals steer

clear from me too. But you're big and dumb, lumbering around carnival grounds all day like the behemoth of old. Trailing the lace hems of skirts, and the footprints of children. Looking at *me*."

Well, yes. Still, Baby Doll only enjoyed others from a distance, he enjoyed *the staring*. He enjoyed Hachaliah's reflection in the cracked little mirror of their room, but not how Hachaliah slid his hand across his chest at the moment. In a single motion, Baby Doll rolled over and onto his knees, straddling Hachaliah underneath him. Pinned to the cot, Hachaliah smiled.

"It always starts this way," he said, digging his hands into the side of Baby Doll's thighs, "A small slip up, and then everything else around me begins to fall apart too. I ran from the last place because they found me out. I drank too much too often. I'm greedy by nature. And you're lucky, Baby. Lucky you're made of yarn and porcelain. You're so dang big I could have drained you down to empty and lived for a year," Hachaliah bared his teeth at him, and for the first time Baby Doll saw the

fluorescence of his elongated canines in the dark. Baby Doll reached to grab him by the throat.

"How did you find Marnie?" he asked, fighting off the grip on his neck, "Not too bad I hope. The first poisoning of the blood is always the worst part, but in a day or so he'll be over it. If his body is strong enough. Vince I'm not so sure about. I didn't mean to scratch him, I was just pushing him around."

Baby Doll frowned. With his free hand Hachaliah swatted at him. Baby Doll grabbed both his hands in one of his own and pinned them up above his head. He wriggled around underneath Baby Doll's grasp, kicking his legs out to no avail.

"Let me go, beast!" Hachaliah yelled, "Let me go!"

In their tussling, Hachaliah kicked the old rifle-case halfway across the floor, swords clattering about. Baby Doll held Hachaliah down with one hand and with the other he reached for the sword closest to him.

Without much care he plunged the sword into the first spot he found. Hachaliah let out a terrible scream as the sword sunk deep into his side, pinning his body to the cot. Blood began to pour out from the wound. Baby Doll grabbed another sword then, and sunk it into his chest. Another howl, Hachaliah attempted to pull the sword in his chest out but Baby Doll pinned one hand through the cot and then the other. He stopped only when all ten of Hachaliah's swords were impaled into some part of his body. He whimpered and groaned like a dying beast. For a second he sounded just like Wilhelmina. All around them there was blood. A deep, black blood that made Baby Doll's eyes sting. He sat down next to Hachaliah's skewered body, doing nothing but spreading the blood on his face around more as he failed to wipe it off.

All night Hachaliah moaned and pleaded with Baby Doll to be let go. He could not speak above a whisper, but he rambled about great riches and immortality, tempting Baby Doll with any and all earthly pleasures he could conjure. He whispered tall tales of blood drinking monsters that bathed in the moonlight. He whispered of the dead earth that had birthed his kind, of

debauched feasts of flesh and lust, and eternal life. Baby Doll grew tired of his nonsense. He sat down on his heels opposite the man's head. Looking at him upside down. Baby Doll framed Hachaliah's head with his thighs and grabbed his face in one of his hands. Hachaliah attempted to struggle, but it was no use.

Baby Doll tightened his grip on his jaw, forcing it open. Slowly, Baby Doll dug a clawed finger into Hachaliah's mouth, piercing into the soft flesh of his gums. Hachaliah lay helpless in his grip, his body convulsing on occasion if Baby Doll dug the finger in too deep. Blood began to pool at the back of his throat. Baby Doll hooked the end of his claw underneath the tooth he wanted and he slowly pried it loose. He did it again, and again, and again, until all four of Hachaliah's wicked canine teeth rested safely in his palm. Then he covered the young man's face with his hand until his breathing evened out, and he let him fall unconscious right where he was.

As it turns out, Don Benigno found a veterinarian to be cheaper than a doctor. She arrived the next morning with a leather bag full of terrible tools. First she lathered Vince's

arm in salve, and wrapped it up in gauze, instructing Lila and Francesca to make sure it didn't slip off. Then, she fed Marnie a bit of laudanum and she cleared a space on one of the dinner tables to set up shop. Baby Doll stared unblinking as the vet tied a strip of rubber halfway between Marnie's wrist and the crook of his elbow. The veins that ran down his arm all different kinds of green and blue-black. The vet took a crooked saw out from her bag and with one hand gripping Marnie's forearm she sliced back and forth and back and forth until a sick wet crack let everyone in the tent know it was over. Before the veterinarian left, Baby Doll handed her four canine teeth, much to Don Benigno's chagrin, and with Francesca's help asked to have his own replaced.

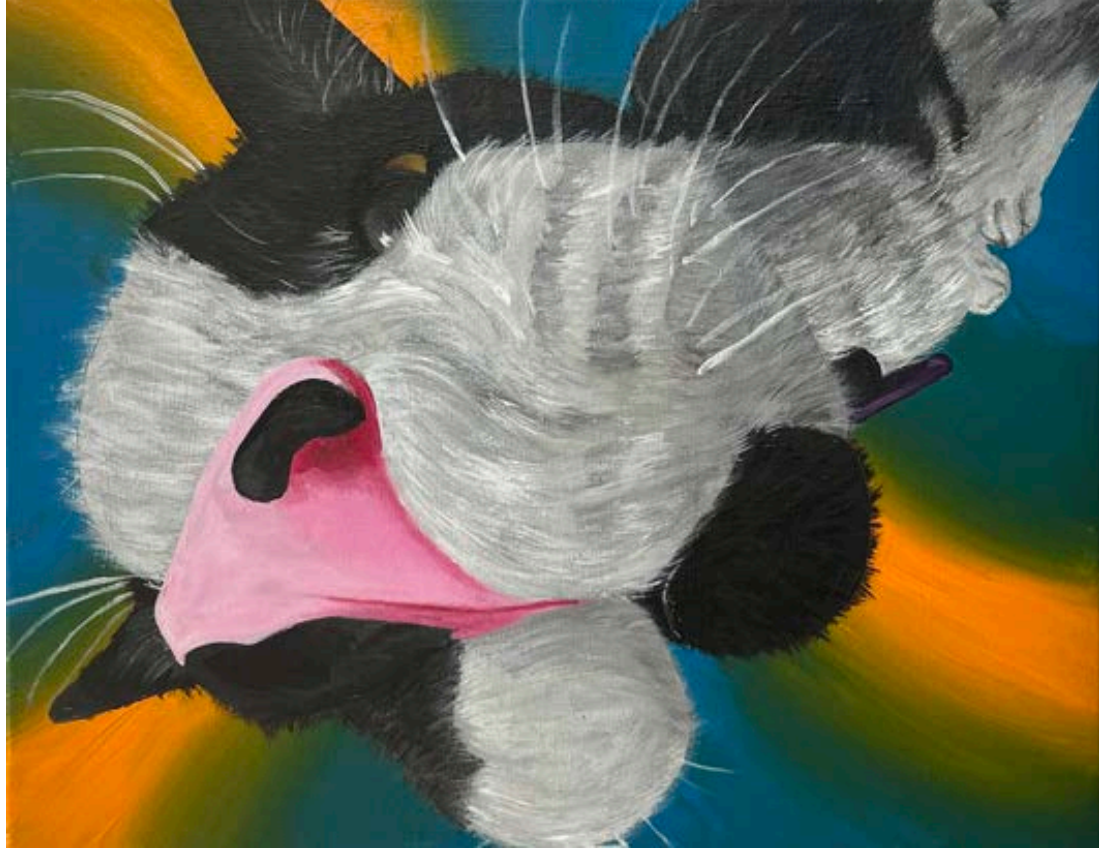
The day had grown long between performances, with Lila, Francesca, and himself rotating around Vince and Marnie's pain. Don Benigno, upset that he was down two more employees found Baby Doll tuning his fiddle behind the big top tent. He walked right up to him and poked him in the chest.

"You know I don't care about what you do as long

as your work is done and this carnival runs smoothly. Put Hachaliah back together by tonight and have him ready to go by tomorrow. You are all getting too expensive for me."

Baby Doll returned to his tent as the sun began to set past the horizon. Hachaliah lay where he had been left pinned to the cot like an atrophied butterfly, his face swollen and his skin pale. He stared up at Baby Doll with glossy eyes and wheezed. Baby Doll undid the ribbons in his hair and he smiled. Four wicked canines glowing under the gaslamp. Tomorrow he would unpin Hachaliah from the cot, carry his body to the showers and wash him down, put him in a nice little outfit and send him off with his swords, but for tonight Hachaliah was his to stare at for as long as he'd like.

BOOP
BY VERONICA GUTIERREZ



Acrylic on Canvas
11"x14"
2025

GRIZZLY BEAR LODGE

BY HENRY HARTMAN

The snowstorm outside swirled in a mass of white winds and shrill howls, where lonely lights glittered from lost houses and distant mountains lorded as spectral shadows. Beyond the tall windows of the Grizzly Bear Lodge Hotel I watched a silhouette trudge against the wind. I took a small careful sip of my hot chocolate and let the warm milky taste lie on my tongue like some do with fine wines. I do not care for alcohol, nor coffee, nor even soda, and in any circumstances in which I'm expected to drink any of them I choose water or nothing at all. I only truly enjoy one drink, and the Lodge offers it for free in its lobby.

Outside, another man in thick furs ran with the storm behind him, and when the two were about to meet the newcomer pulled what I presumed to be an axe from the gloom and sunk it in the chest of the other. The wind dulled any yelling, but the man fell quick, and from his body the killer wrenched out the axe and brought it back down again in a great arch. And he did it again. And then he ran away.

I swirled a little coffee stick around in the little paper coffee cup, and took another sip of the cocoa within. Strange, isn't it?

The clerk, a girl barely out of college, sat close by, and I had half a mind to tell her about the incident, but I didn't care enough to move from the window. I could feel some of the cold from outside, which made it all the more comforting to drink the hot chocolate.

I watched the crumpled form of the man for some time (and emptied nearly all of my drink) before at last the man began to move again. When he finally got up, I watched him stumble towards the door.

A little waft of snow fluttered in followed by the man in a black coat torn by two great gashes. His pale face was cleaved nearly in two—one eye hung precariously at the edge of the socket, while the other searched the lobby.

The clerk looked up, took a still breath, and bolted away. I heard her footsteps fall away down the length of the hall, and the noise of a billiards game cease and start again as she passed

them by. The dead man looked at me, confused.

“What’s happening?” he asked.

I stepped away from the window, and pointed to the gore over his face and chest. “It appears you’ve died, sir. That axe got you pretty good. Saw it all. Very sorry.”

He touched his face with a still hand, and watched the blood fall from his black glove. “I’m dead?”

“Appears so.”

I noticed he no longer blinked, nor breathed, nor shook from the cold. He put his head down. “What... But— Is that it?”

“What’s it?”

“Death. This is it?”

“Seems so. Never died myself, so I can’t be sure.”

His eyes darted around the room in search of an answer, and he tried again to speak but only babbling nonsense escaped his lips. There were no tears, but he seemed so small and so confused I finally took pity on him, and held out the last of my hot chocolate. “Here. Have this.”

He took it tenderly, and sought permission in a glance of the eyes before lifting it to his nose. He sniffed, and his face softened. His first sip was small, but soon he threw back his torn head and downed the rest of it. And as the last drops of the sweet nectar flowed down his churning throat, I went to the coffee machine. There I ignored the many little pictures of many little coffees—the black bubbling mixtures of rancid swill—and as I slipped a cup beneath the nozzle, let cocoa flow with steam and delicious smells.

I prepared two, and led the dead man to the fireplace, where great soft sofas lay nearby. When we sat down, I handed him his drink. The blood and flesh of his face glowed in the haze of the fire, and he stared down at the cocoa with blank emotion. He held it, but did nothing with it.

I already regretted sitting by the fire with him. The

sweaty heat from the hearth sank into my flesh and sickened me to the point I couldn't drink a drop of the hot chocolate. After sitting with him for some time, I took off my outer coat, and unzipped my inner one. I felt naked. I savored every chill bite of wind—each whisper of cold air soothed and grounded me and called me back to the window. I assumed he would be most comfortable by the warmth of the fire. Most are. But his stare remained empty, his hot chocolate undrunk.

Just as my fingers churned the edge of the armrest with more and more frustration, and sweating grew more uncomfortable, he asked, "Why didn't you run?"

My anger broke. "What? Why would I have run? You're no threat to me."

His lack of expression remained unchanged. "I'm dead. You're supposed to run. Be scared. You're supposed to be scared or grieve for me or hate me."

I looked back into the dance of the fire. "Why would I do any of that? Because I'm supposed to? I don't feel anything for you, cadaver. I just met you, and frankly, I'm already sick of you.

Maybe you should be running from me."

He rose, and sipped his hot chocolate as he walked down the hall, steam curling around him.

The wind outside laughed, the billiards game continued, and I found I didn't have the strength to get up. I put the drink to my lips, sipped, and quickly tore it away. I know I prepared it correctly, but the hot chocolate tasted like sand. No sweet warmth and no savory flavor. I didn't want to drink hot chocolate anymore.

UNDERNEATH US

BY MELODY HENRY

Hidden eyes in plain sight
and filled with gazing daggers.
They scream in silence
birds with broken wings
and blistered tongues - they're perched,
in huddles on dead wood,
governed by deafening footprints
that scatter in blurring patterns
above the surfaces
of shared earth.
Worlds apart in distant reach
they remain unheard and crowded,
and wearing tired faces
decorated in neighbored embroidery
they gather in buried masses,
fading into focus
underneath and all around.

United we stand.

70 A MAUI BABE
BY VERONICA GUTIERREZ



Acrylic on Canvas
24"x36"
2025

SOLITO: MICROREVIEW

BY LIZ LUMBRANO

S*SOLITO: A Memoir* by Javier Zamora, a book that was published in 2022, is based on Zamora's life specifically pertaining to his journey to cross the border at the young age of nine. His parents had already crossed safely, and after some time apart they finally decided to set up Zamora to cross as well. However, Zamora would be grouped with people he didn't know, following the directions of multiple coyotes, little money and stretching his food for days. After the first chapter, as a reader, we are hopeful young Zamora is able to see his parents safely as he expressed how excited he was to finally leave his hometown of El Salvador and be together again in the USA. Heartstrings are tugged after each chapter, and after finishing the book my heartstrings were completely pulled. Zamora writes about the trauma of being trained to say he was from another country, memorizing a new identity, being questioned by border patrol, being stripped of their money by officers, hiding his native accent from locals, the hot

scorching heat of the desert, the safe houses, walking for what seemed like endless miles, and so much more. Reading through Zamora's trauma and experiences, my heart sank each time as I remembered this was a nine-year old boy. Alone. Placed in a situation where thousands of people die each year. The fear he experienced is written underneath the words on the page and I could picture myself holding this little boy's hand through it all. While he was without family, Zamora linked himself with a mother and her daughter, and eventually a young man joined them to play the role of a family. As days passed, young Zamora really began to believe this was his family— a feeling he couldn't wait to experience with his own parents but also accepted the reality that he might not be able to as well. This left me completely heartbroken. As much as he tried not to cry throughout this grueling journey, my tears flooded for him. This was a very emotional read for me, but definitely a must read to better understand the complexities and dangers of crossing the border and the trauma that comes after.

BADASS BONITA: MICROREVIEW

BY LIZ LUMBRANO

BADASS Bonita: *Break the Silence, Become a Revolution, Unearth Your Inner Guerrera*, a book written by Kim Guerra and published in 2024, serves as a self-reflective guide on how to heal your inner niña and the critical steps needed to advance oneself from generational trauma and expectations. This book gives you the tools to begin discovering your individuality and being unapologetic about it. Guerra focuses on Mexican culture and the traditional roles and expectations of a young girl/woman. For generations, many of these expectations include cleaning up after everyone before you clean up after yourself or making sure your partner's lunch is ready for them in the dark hours of the morning. Basically as a young girl/woman in the Mexican culture, our future is decided for us- a caretaker, housekeeper, mother, and wife. We are taught to never express our true emotions about how we feel about something, and if we do, the answer is typically somewhere along the lines of "that's just the way things have

been" instead of offering new, different approaches to conflict. Guerra gives the extra push needed to find our voice and reminds us of how it's always been there, however we were never taught on how to use it. Through every chapter, I felt seen and heard, a feeling I had been longing for for most of my adult life. This book really gives Mexican-American young girls/women the validation we've been seeking for. We are taught to brush off our emotions, thoughts and feelings but Guerra validates all of our insecurities and teaches us how to rise above the culture and create a new perspective of our experiences. Regardless of what the culture may believe in what is right, we are capable and most importantly, allowed to say "no" to what they think is best for us. One of my favorite chapters titled, "The Niña Before She Needed Healing" was an emotional one for me to read and the most impactful. I was completely floored by the connection Guerra guided me to create with my inner niña and simply tell her that none of her trauma was her fault and she is safe now. This book is a refreshing perspective, as it certainly gave me the validation I had been looking for. The beauty behind the validation? I had the power all along.

BODYPICKING AND BAD POSTURE

BY ASHLEY HOWARD

I could have been so beautiful

But I'm not.

Instead I hunch on and over bathroom counters listening to avoid getting caught.

Under clinical LED slabs, lightbulbs in knots, or just any that provide a clear view of my skin.

Not smooth like porcelain or pristine like fair maidens

Instead I madden over every bump, rise, and discoloration.

In a trance without a trace of what's to be done and waiting on my to do list bar none

I dig, scratch, rupture, all I see fit.

Where I could have stood like the enchanting Greek statue

I slouched and slagged any assests that could've properly grown into their size.

Instead I am the envious Medusa

Grotesque and experiment-esque as an unfinished sketch

with face, arm, legs and breast wrought with pencil strokes curved as nail imprints,

splayed out on crumpled sand-toned paper

Regretful I never straightened myself out.

EIGHTH BIRTHDAY: (BIGOTRY)

BY MATT MIEHE

I didn't look much like a girl when I was younger. I blossomed out, but from three until I was fifteen, I was in that awkward phase like a half-shapen clay bust; my details still working their way out. Blocky face. Rigid torso. Short hair. I'm being a bit harsh on myself, but it was true. I used to be ambiguous, and my parents made me more ambiguous by breaking the stereotypes: pastel boiler suits or overalls—*good on them! It didn't work out in the end.*

My features eventually found their true home when I turned seventeen. Softer face, smaller build, shoulders less broad. *Other things like that.* But I still overcompensate and overdress and over do with eyeliner and mascara and lip gloss and tight clothes and corsets and high heels and girly colors and womanly brands and hefty purses and long hair and hair dye and tampons and pads and razors and expensive toiletries and pills and all that all over again and again.

#

It was my birthday and we were out at a restaurant. It was just me and my parents, I was the only child and they wanted a 'personal' birthday: no friends. This was in the midst of my body being unsure of what to do with itself. I just turned eight. While I would usually go about wearing boiler suits or overalls, tonight they had me wear a dress. Which was alright. I didn't care about clothes at this time. And while I liked it, they would constantly ask if I preferred it over my other clothes; to which I would always say *I don't know...* I don't think they knew what was going on with me either, which is fine.

Dessert came. And even now, I look fondly at ice cream cakes with sparklers and my name written out in bold dark chocolate lines: **MARISSA**. *The best thing about being older is that any day can be your birthday.*

I blew out the sparklers, smiles crossed my mom's smoothed freckled face and my dad's stubbly white-black beard. I couldn't get a bite yet. My mom wanted me to wash my hands.

Another thing about being older is that you don't need to wash your hands before you eat.

We made our way to the woman's room, which was tucked away by the entrance in a dead-end hallway. We were about to enter when a big burly guy came out of the men's room. He gave me and my mom a faint quick smile like anyone else who sees us, but he did a double-take and kept his eyes on me. He turned cherry red and his eyes sullen.

He said something like, "What did you do to your son!?"

Which I found funny. Because I'm a girl. I thought he was being weird, silly, trying to banter with my mom like most random strangers—or hawks—being funny. She made a face at him, as if she wasn't in on the joke. But as soon as she took a breath, he jabbed my mom across the face and knocked her down. He was quick to grab me by my arms. He pulled me toward the exit, big strong hairy arms crushing my wrist like a can, just like what my dad would do to impress me. He was also quick to be knocked down by another man who did way worse

things to him than he did to my mom. I can't visualize it. ...*Eh*.

The managers cleared our bill. But I didn't know that, I didn't need to know that. All I did need to know at the time was that the power-lines outside the car window looked nice, so I stared out at those power-lines, catching glimpses of red lights and angry figurines in cars, looking away from the ice pack cushioning my mother's red-bruised-magma face. My dad was right, they did look nice.

We brought the ice cream cake home with us. It still had my name on it, but the chocolate line-work of 'MARISSA' had melded and melted and fallen and sunken and sagged and depressed and yearned for freedom from the melting, slurring cake base. It rotted in the back of the freezer.

When my parents' found it again a year later, they threw it out. But something must have happened while I was at school, because when I came back they gifted me all boys clothes. Which is fair; no one pays attention to boys. Boys get to shoot the shit and boys get to play games and boys get

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to toy and boys get their way and boys never get in-trouble
and boys get to do what they want and boys can be immature
and boys don't bleed between their legs and boys don't suffer
consequences and boys are not watched by hawks and boys....

MACRO COOPER

BY OWYN CADIEUX

THE auto-pilot chimed for Damian's attention after he'd finished his meal—rice and septic-grown beans. The company ship—a hulking, pickup-style, twelve-cylinder—had arrived at the client's address: a lone lithium mine just off Jupiter's moonfield. Already parked on one of the few landing platforms was a wholly different kind of ship.

Painted a glittery forest green and sporting two—completely ornamental—triangular wings was the first MACRO Cooper that Damian had ever seen. Its boxy frame and two-door construction was reminiscent of the hovercars he'd seen back on Earth of the same brand, but this was no hovercar. It was a spaceship. Easily five tons, maybe ten, and equipped with all the newest bells and whistles, the MACRO Cooper was the most expensive spaceship ever to be on the market. It even had its own warp core, usually reserved for commercial vessels.

And here it was, alone, on a cold, empty rock a million miles from Europa.

Damian put the company pickup down on the adjacent landing platform and suited up. As he disembarked, two figures in similar spacesuits approached on the landing platform. One had her arms at her sides uneasily, as if she should be doing something with them. Her face was framed in her helmet by long, dark hair and her expression was one of constant dissatisfaction. The other was a balding man, the hair that was left swept across the scalp in an attempt at a side part. Despite his striking likeness to old terrestrial snapping turtles, he walked with a self-important confidence. He was the first to speak once they connected their audio channels.

"You must be Damian. I'm Mr. Clearwater, but you can call me Titus. And this is Vicky—"

"Victoria," she interrupted. Titus paused for a moment, as if shocked with a hefty amount of static. He began again.

"She's the chief supervisor. If you'd like, Damian, we can get started right away."

"Sounds good to me," Damian agreed. He never liked to spend long on-site for contracts like this; they tended to be a depressing sight. Too many non-union workers this side of the asteroid belt. Wherever the unions weren't, the bureaucracy could get to you. Titus turned back the way he'd come, motioning for Damian to follow. He did, leaving the pickup on the landing platform sporting his company's "DIGITAL FORENSICS" banner. It looked like a bruise on the landing pad's face next to the MACRO Cooper.

Titus led the way for Damian and Victoria to the office buildings excavated into the rocks of the lithium asteroid, not far from the landing pads. The gravity wells installed in the floor hummed as the airlock cycled. Titus made sure to fill the silence with chatter about the last time he'd been back to Europa (for tea with some vaguely important figure whose name Damian didn't recognize). Damian nodded and made attentive noises despite his rapidly decreasing appreciation

for the man. Victoria said nothing. She made no eye contact, instead standing in all but open hostility away from Titus. The light flipped to green to indicate a safe atmosphere. Damian had his own oxygen meter installed in his suit, self-calibrated. He checked it before pulling off his helmet and they proceeded into the structure.

The place felt empty. Bases like this were usually the hub of an asteroid mine, complete with dorms, a cafeteria, and rec rooms. In this one, many of the lights in the rooms they passed were off, the spaces unoccupied. They passed a locker room with some twenty small metal doors, all open save for one. No dust had collected in the open cubbies, they hadn't been vacated for long. The control office was near the mine's proper entrance, which was hidden beyond another airlock. Damian felt the occasional *whirr* and *chunk* of heavy machinery resonate through the floor now that they were closer to the real work sites. Titus held the door as they entered the control office, where direction could be given from a bird's eye view and the heavier machines could be switched off in an emergency.

Damian was not surprised—only terribly disappointed—when he looked across the camera screens before him and found no humans at work. Instead, a troop of bulky, four-legged constructions of matte metal and carbon fiber diligently buzzed about in the various sites, operating larger machines with their fully dynamic arms and hauling ore back and forth in the cargo beds installed on their backs. The Krynnic K-160 was a remarkable machine and was still changing mining after ten years in circulation, but his job was proof enough that they and many tools like it had plenty of faults. Most often when they malfunctioned it was from programming mis-inputs or radiation interference, but even the smallest mistake could lead to catastrophic errors in tools this complex. In the worst cases, it could be lethal. Damian preferred his own toolbelt, full of pieces that were either fully analog or programmed by him personally to perform a single function. With machines and people, Damian found that a moving part meant a point of failure.

“So what went wrong again? I read the report, but telling it two different ways might help with the work.”

Titus shook his head ruefully. “We’re not sure how, but the Krynnics sent a batch to the wrong location yesterday. We have a waste chute that empties outside the gravity wells and they sent it there.” His voice was prickly with vexation, “that was three and a half tons of ore.”

Damian wrinkled his nose. Waste ejection had been proven an awful practice for about as long as the K-160 had been on the market. The asteroid belt was harder to travel these days because of it, places like Europa and Titan got less sunlight on average than last century, and average temperatures and solar output were dropping. He didn’t bother to ask Titus if he knew, he almost definitely did if he owned an asteroid mine. He probably just didn’t care very much. Why would he when he was making enough to afford a MACRO Cooper? It was still a little surprising, though. Damian thought he remembered hearing about Asteroid Workers United cracking down on that, but Titus certainly didn’t strike him as a union enthusiast.

“I don’t much like these machines, to be honest,” Titus said half to himself, “They give me the creeps a little

bit. Still, I can't deny how much they're improving things around here. I would've just tried fixing them myself if some of my stockholders hadn't made noise about some kind of certification."

"That wouldn't have gone well," Victoria snapped, "Remember when you tried to fix that T-30 yourself?"

Titus shook his head. "That was a special case—"

"Special cases are what you hire *people* for."

He sighed, making a show of his torment in the growing silence. "Do we have to do this now, Victoria?"

She said nothing, but her eyes blazed. Damian said nothing either, thinking about those empty lockers, about people who might never find mining work again.

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Some time later, Titus had excused himself to look after his administrative duties and Damian was combing the instructional code for the K-160s in search of errors. Victoria had her back to him, monitoring work while bouncing her knee and rubbing the same part of her palm with her thumb over and over.

What Damian found was odd. Not only was the pathing implemented wrong, there was an error indicator from the program, overridden with the admin password. Not only was the program set up wrong, but it must have been knowingly. He pasted the code into his list to bring to Titus. Maybe it was the owner of one of those empty lockers who sabotaged this. He made a mental note also to check pass-through, the clause for human presence in a worksite. Protocol required he check that section whenever the code was altered in any way.

"Did he fire everyone else?" Damian asked quietly, hesitant to break the silence carried by the humming electricity around them. Victoria tensed even more.

“Who?”

“I’ve been to a few other asteroid mines this year, a lot of them are running on skeleton crews now. This is the worst I’ve seen, though.”

“We had a crew of twenty at the start of the year. Last month we were down to five. The rest quit. I don’t have... bills still need paying.” The bouncing knee stopped abruptly, as if noticed and suppressed.

Damian shook his head, taking his hands from the bulky keyboard before him. “Some days I wish we lived back in the 2100s, y’know? Before people moved out past the asteroid belt.”

“No lithium stations, huh?” Victoria said, “What an idea.”

“Why do we keep giving them everything?” Damian threw his hands up, “They have enough already.”

Victoria made no move to get back to work. Neither did he. The electric hum dominated for far less time than it seemed, right up to the moment Titus burst into the control office, comb-over flapping with urgency.

“They’re trying to send another batch to the waste chute. Shut it down!”

Damian scrambled forward and flipped the guard off the stop button, slamming his hand downward. Onscreen, a K-160 left unmonitored, approaching an open-top cart with glittering lithium ore, froze in place halfway to dumping its load. Victoria, turned, suddenly tense. She looked ready to pounce on the controls.

“Victoria,” Titus said, trying to catch his breath, “Can you go down there and redirect that cart? We’ll run a manual reset once that’s out.”

“Going into the worksites isn’t in my job description.

I don't have the waiver anyway." Victoria's voice was cold, on edge. "You know that."

He threw up his hands, then looked at Damian hopefully. When he shook his head, Titus huffed.

"Just make sure those things are in pass-through mode, then. I gotta do everything here." He swung the door out, walking down the hall grumbling to himself about "lazy fuckers."

Victoria shot up as soon as the door swung back closed and shooed Damian out of the control seat. He fended her back as he typed the command, trying to explain he could set the machines to pass-through himself.

"You don't get it! Pass-through isn't programmed right. Let me reset it!"

Damian felt his stomach drop as he stopped himself too late from pressing the ENTER key. Victoria's eyes were welling

with tears as he relinquished the seat, stunned. "What do you mean it's not right?"

"I didn't actually want to!" She sobbed, "We weren't supposed to need pass-through anymore!"

Damian stood, grabbing Victoria's shoulder. "What did you do?"

Tears streamed down her face and he realized belatedly that his own cheeks were warm with them. Titus cycled through the airlock into the worksite.

"I programmed the waste chute error. I did it. I learned the code because I needed to be *fucking useful* so he didn't kick me out! I messed with the pass-through—y'know, like writing death threats in a letter and then burning it... but I was gonna fix it! I was gonna fix it."

She clicked desperately through files, trying to find the default settings for pass-through mode. Titus appeared on the

first surveillance camera. Damian watched, powerless.

“What’s gonna happen if he gets there?”

“They— I—,” Victoria stammered, trying to articulate while downloading the correct file. The bandwidth this far from Europa made the process painfully sluggish. “They go back to work.”

Damian’s heart dropped through his feet. The governing functionality in the Krynnic K-160 was by detecting the passive radiation from the lithium element. Pass-through was necessary because the machines couldn’t discern that radiation from human body heat. Titus entered the worksite amid the frozen machines. As soon as they detected him in their sweeps, he’d be mistaken for a chunk of metal.

“Why the fuck would you mess with that? If you know *anything* about the K-160 it’s that people *die* in active sites.”

“Why do you think I did it? He’s FUCKING US. I can’t *stand* the way he *kills* me every fucking day.” She peered through tears at the screen as the upload began, “I shouldn’t have written it, I shouldn’t have uploaded it. But it was the only thing I could do without cussing him out to his face.”

The Krynnic K-160s whirled to life as they detected uncollected lithium. The one that was about to deposit instead leveled out, reaching its carbon fiber arm down to Titus. He tried to run, tripped on an uneven outcropping of rock. The claw closed, Titus struggling in the titanium fingers.

The file was uploaded, but it had to be compiled. Victoria’s knee spasmed and she drew blood in her palm.

The K-160 had collected the errant piece. The bed began to tilt.

Damian stood, shaking.

The K-160 deposited its load, sending vibrations of the

crushing weight of several tons of ore resonating through the facility. Its smaller, articulating arm pressed a button on the cart. Titus' broken body, helmet cracked and leaking oxygen, was visible for a moment among tons of glittering rock before the cart shot down the shaft to eject the waste.

The code compiled. The machines went still.

Damian still stood where he'd come up from the floor. His tears had ended with the shock. Neither of the two said a word for a long time.

"What did you do?" Damian whispered, unsure what else he could possibly say.

Victoria's voice was cold metal, her face still turned away. "Do you have to report this?"

He said nothing. Legally, it was one of his chief purposes in being out here to report any incident: intentional, semi-premeditated, or otherwise. On the other hand, what did the

world lose without Titus?

"*Do you have to report this?*" Victoria repeated, turning to face him with a tear-streaked, grim face.

"I—" Could he? "I'm supposed to."

She faced him, determination fortifying her eyes.

"I mean—fuck. Who's waiting at home for this guy?"

She responded almost before he finished, "Nobody. He was a washed up prick with no life. Nobody actually cares."

Damian felt bile begin to rise. "I'll see what I can do."

Victoria's resolute expression melted and her body wracked with sobs. She collapsed back into the chair she'd fought to claim.

"Why the fuck did I put that code in?"

“The world’s better off without him,” Damian said hoarsely.

Victoria looked up at him, her expression unreadable amidst fresh tears, “What?”

“He only took. Am I right? The only things he ever gave you were the things the law forced him into. He was a middleman and made too much from being useless.”

Victoria’s eyes didn’t turn to rage, but he saw her try. Instead they looked hollow. “Before the K-160’s he worked us like dogs. I didn’t even know there were unions on the inner planets until last year.”

Damian had nothing else to say, nothing that mattered at least. He took the first step since his fall, a step that brought him to the office door. “Wait.”

Damian stopped, hand on the doorknob.

“I don’t have—” She swallowed another sob, “I don’t have a ship.”

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The company pickup gurgled to life. Victoria perched on the co-pilot seat with her small luggage, flaking off bits of the dried blood caked to her palm. Damian paused, watching the base airlock as if a ghost would appear. He tore his eyes away from it, and they landed on the MACRO Cooper, parked primly on the adjacent landing pad. The stars reflected off its forest green paint and crystalline warp-grade glass.

“What do we do with that?”

Victoria followed his gaze. “What can we do? There’s no way both of us could *pretend* to afford that put together.”

Damian didn’t have a response. Instead, he put the company pickup into gear.

They left an asteroid adrift in space, bearing a shell of lifeless industry. The K-160s within remained dormant, watching for the next piece of loose lithium until they lost power. Atop the shell stood the greatest trophy of the rich, resplendent with cosmetic wings and capable of impossibilities. The shell and its adornment, after some hundred years, rejoined its brethren in the asteroid belt.

LEMON SHOTS

BY SAMANTHA JULIO

this morning we woke to cluttered skies
to the thud of fruits falling to their deathbed
to the rotting citron smell of their skin

today I witnessed you
glossed eyes looking up
slack-jawed
at the spots where heaven peeked

I understand now why worms linger in the freshness of storms
ending

I understand why staying meant everything

like waves receding with a promise to the shore

I will come back and wash the ruins they have left you with

because I know better than to let you confuse footprints with
permanency

and if ever the clouds get too heavy

there will be a basket ready

filled with freshly picked lemons

waiting to shoot the sky

calling for more blue

THE PEN; NO MORE INK

BY ELEN HARUTYUNYAN

DAVID Trinidad's new collection of poetry called *New Playlist*, is a gold mine for all those who love a good 90's pop culture reference. This book contains many forms of poems that reference singers, actors, movies, and even poets. Just like serial killers, writers also have a signature; something unique in their work that repeats in their other works, which is done almost unconsciously. One poem specifically, out of all the ones in this book, stands out and is the central theme/idea of this work; that poem is "The Pen."

"The Pen" is a prose poetry that is structured in the form of a block of text; that is a contributing factor to the overall steady and calm tone that the poem attracts the reader with. This beautiful piece uses descriptive diction that creates this imagery of something as simple as a pen, and yet by the time you finish the poem that pen turns into something so much

more; by the end, it represents to you whatever you feel you have lost and what you long to find again. To me, the pen represented everything that I have lost: my childhood, peace, innocence, joy, pleasure, and happiness.

The more you read the poem and the more closely you evaluate it, the sense of loss mixed with extreme longing washes over you, pulling you into it until all you can think about is what you have lost. This poem reminded me of a little pink toy I had as a child; I used to lose it a lot and never realized it was gone until I found it. But every time I found it, I was overwhelmed with joy and excitement. I don't think I have ever been that excited for anything ever again in my whole life. On the other hand, when I remembered about its existence and found the exact one, recently on sale on eBay, I was over the moon. Reading "The Pen" I realized just how much my little pink Polly Pocket meant to me. I discovered every good memory I ever had from my childhood was tied to that little artifact; that toy *was* my childhood, my joy; it contained a big part of me inside it. Just like my Polly Pocket, the pen in the poem represented to the poem's narrator his childhood, and not only

his childhood, but all the colors of his life; a beautiful metaphor concealed behind the phrase, “each filled with a different color ink: light blue, yellow, green, pink, purple, red” (Trinidad). By the end of this poem, all that the narrator is longing for is bringing back any “traces of purple, of yellow, of pink,” of any color that he can find and paint his life anew with (Trinidad).

This poem ties in beautifully with the rest of the poems in this book, even with the book’s title. Throughout his poems, Trinidad references people and works of art that have long been a thing of the past now. In relation to all the other poems in this book, this poem is about loss, of all those who once were and now are not. I am 21 years old and know nobody who has ever heard of the film *Rosemary’s Baby*, or the singer Dusty Springfield, not even the actresses Kay Francis, Isabel Jewell and so many more that I had to use the internet to learn about. The reason I have never heard of these people is because they died years before I was even born. “The Pen,” along with the repeated references to people and entertaining works of the past, is one big attempt of holding on to what is already gone, one last attempt of taking something old and trying to bring it back and

pass it off as something contemporary. No matter how many pens you buy on eBay, it won’t replace the one you used to have, just as if you take an old playlist and title it as the “New Playlist” it won’t make it new. Those actresses, singers, and works of art that used to once be very renowned already gave a whole generation of people everything they had. It is time for them to rest in peace. Everything eventually comes to end.

Even though “The Pen” is in the form of a prose, it reads as an elegy. Trinidad took two forms of poems and made something new: a Prose Elegy. A poem that has all the structural and visual representation of prose but has all the loss, grief, and mournful elements of an elegy. This is what makes Trinidad’s poem and his overall book so unique, he combines prose with elegy; the old with the new. He is subverting the traditional prose, revising a poetic tradition and creating something new while discussing the old. This was Trinidad’s way of letting go, grieving and thanking all those who once used to be and who gave people like Trinidad meaning, purpose, and something for them to look forward to.

SOFT COLLAPSE

BY HEIDIA ANVAR

Talking about the sad parts of growing up, me, coming of middle age, and he, poised to make it to a hundred, we round the corner in his coastal village and he says, “leave the past,” just when we come upon a perfect baby black bird splayed on the sidewalk. Her feathery fuzz looks warm, her eyes are open, her tail flutters—is it the breeze? I’m desperate for her to be alive. To what end, though, at what level of damage?

Maybe she was edged early out of the nest. I’m pulled to gather her, place her somewhere sacred, green, less brutal than concrete, but my father says, “leave her,” as if once more demanding I leave behind my childhood. His unease looms when I use his phone to create a record of her death—a maestra of flight reduced to concrete and a click.

My parents did better
than theirs, and their kid
who had kids
did better than them,
while I played it safe
as the cool aunt, basking
in my second chance's
childhood. The way my life
went the way
of the destitute for a spell, I
could've sold my
eggs to the infertile
but for the injustice of
a child out there
with my lot's paragenetic
quirks, without
me—in the know, by
virtue of bloodline—
helping it along. Baby bird,
I dream of your real self
leaving your body before
you fell instead of flew.

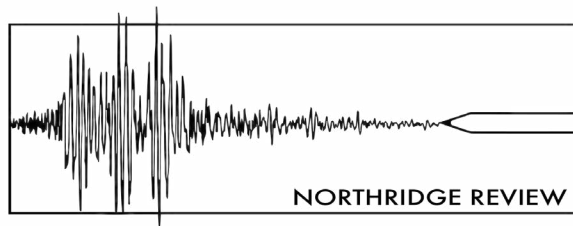
Flying home, my eyes open
to the assembly of black bird
art lining my nest. "I
wrote a poem inspired
by your style!" texts my niece,
the better version of me, my vicarious do-over,
a teenage toe dipped
in fairytale yet more adept than her aunt
at life: sprinkling
"love-feathers" in her poem
to break her fall, she ends up
sheathed in a feather shawl.
Much better than all this...
concrete.

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<https://www.csun.edu/humanities/english/book-arts-lab/>

The Book Arts Lab helps students pursue book object and publishing projects in Sierra Tower 727 & 731. Founded in 2016 in a cardboard box, the lab has expanded to support the development of zines, journals, artist books, mini-

comics, pop-up and moveable books, and a variety of other wonderful projects. Print, bind, digitize, and distribute!



BECOME AN ENGLISH MAJOR!

English offers a variety of both majors and minors, with options concentrating in Creative Writing, Literature, Subject Matter and FYI/JYI (for future teachers), and Honors. Minors include Creative Writing, Literature, Popular Culture, and Rhetoric and Writing. English majors and minors develop essential skills for the successful navigation of an increasingly complex and changing world, including the ability to read and write critically and creatively, to communicate clearly and effectively, to use technology inventively, to develop real-world problem solving skills, to collaborate and work well in teams, and to think globally and act locally.

Students in the English department work with nationally recognized scholars and writers in small classroom settings. They gain a broad understanding of the field and more specialized knowledge, skills and experience in their options. And they are encouraged to complement historical breadth with a range of explorations in such current fields as popular and cultural studies, literature and film, and new media.

CONSIDER THE ENGLISH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM!

The English Department provides an internship program for students who are interested in entering the professional writing field. The semester long off-campus internship (ENGL 494/IP) course will provide both the training and experience students need to make the transition into the workplace, research, or teaching.

ABOUT THE TYPE

This edition of Northridge Review utilizes two font families: Discourse and Alda.

Discourse—a type superfamily with 24 faces designed by Dave Bailey for Delve Fonts—was used for the titles, author and artist names, headers, and page numbers. The half title page as well as the running header and page numbers are in Discourse Wide Heavy Fill. The title page is in Discourse Wide Light Fill. The titles of all pieces as well as author and artist names are in Discourse Narrow Light Fill.

Alda—a type family designed in 2008 by Berton Hasebe for Emigre—was used for the body text throughout this volume in Alda OT CEV Regular, Regular Italic, and Bold.

ABOUT THE COVER

The cover of this issue along with the center fold, featuring a California Condor, were designed in tandem by two editors of *Northridge Review*

The concept art was painted by Georgia Kate Ryan and the design was digitized and finalized by Daniel Luna.

NSRT number 4

WORDS+PICTURES

Exhibited March 18–April 18, 2025

Manzanita Hall Gallery & Jerome Richfield Display
Closing Reception, April 16, 2025

Curated by Erik Mark Sandberg and Sean Pessin,
coordinated by Mich Hatfield

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Mich Hatfield

Exhibition Blurb

All media are mixed media.
— W.J. T. Mitchell

This exhibition brings together artists from the CSUN community who join words and pictures in rich and unpredictable ways. Working in varied disciplines (illustration, design, poetry, and more), these artists create strong statements that test the expressive possibilities of text-as-image and image-as-text.

Fittingly, this show is a collaboration between departments, co-curated by professors Erik Mark Sandberg of the Department of Art and Sean Pessin of the Department of English.

You can view the other part of this show at the Manzanita Gallery (the second floor of Manzanita Hall), right next door.

Exhibited Works

Jose Galvan Martinez
Road Work Ahead



Cambri Morris

**Found: Collected Poems and Writings on the
Death of an Estranged Father**



Josh Jimenez
Untitled



Maliahguiya Sourgose
Map of Silkscreen



Veronica Gutierrez
For Good



Decker Jimenes
Night Life



Natalie Garcia
Nopalera



NOPALERA

They call me la nopalera
I grow wildly in the desert fields
With flowers y espinas
Soy la nopalera
It's a symbol of my legacy
I wear it en la frente para que todos los sepan
La sangre Michoacana siempre corre por mis venas
Barefoot I walk to connect to this indigenous land
A land I've known for many lifetimes
Me llaman la nopalera y nunca se me olvido
El apodo nunca me ofendido
I embrace las raíces de nopal
Soy como mis abuelas y las abuelas de ellas
Con un gran honor
Es mi sello de amor y valor
Soy la nopalera
Y lo digo con mucho orgullo

Frankie Gutierrez
Untitled



Max Gershon
Whimsical



Savannah Garcia-Araniva
My Existence is Resistance



Savannah Garcia-Araniva
My Existence is Resistance



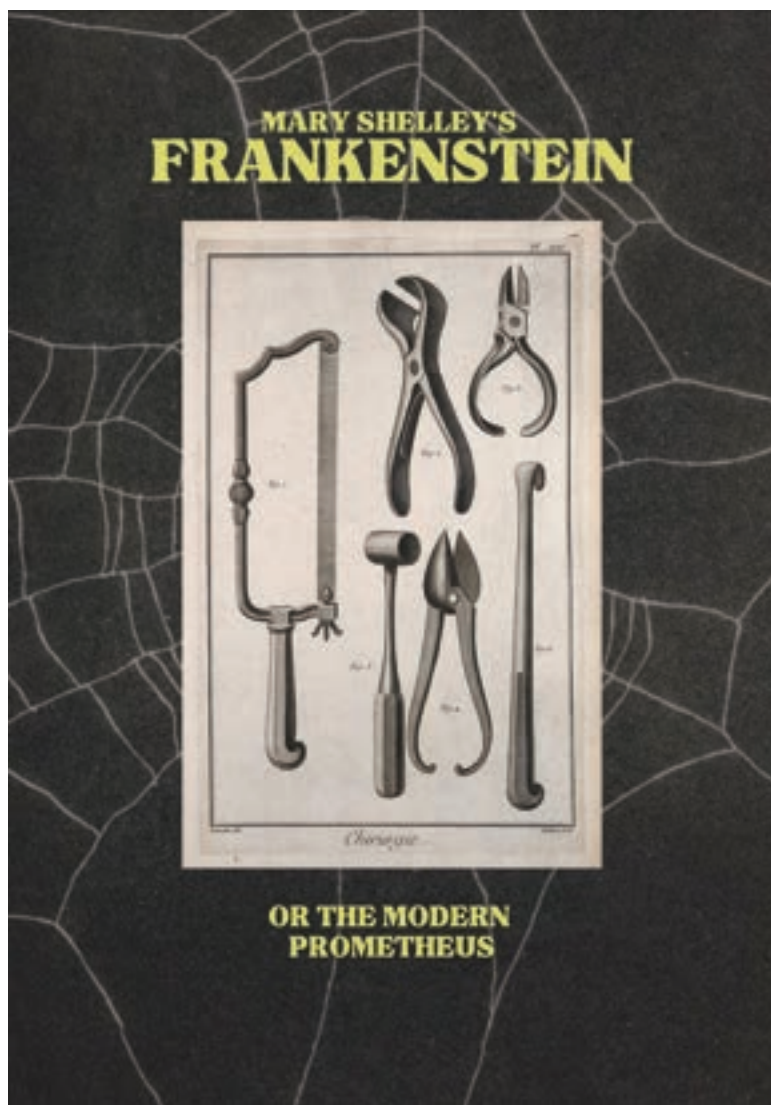
Susana Radillo

Ni de aqui ni de alla



Christina Marriott

Mock Frankenstein Cover (front)



Dale Voelker
Engine Speed



Dale Voelker

24000 Volts of Picture Power



Graciela Arancibia
Anxiety Sequential



Serli Amirchian
Laud To My Lips





Daniella Nouri

The Uncomfortable Phone Call



Caroline Urbina

The Seven Stages to Grieving a Little Songbird

Little
Songbird
Tune to life's
disparity. Fly
ing closer to the
clouds mesmeriz
ing our ears with
your chips of
gin. It is as
though your voi
ce vibrates thro
ugh nature ever so
playfully. Sing your
song, and match ou
r eternal love for yo
ur voice and how lo
st glimmering rises
seem without you.
The winds move me
nts are not compara
ble to your chimes. Y
our rhythm, and lega
cy left behind for us
to piece back togeth
er and cherish. We
know not how to
cope with missi
ng your radiant
smile, and warm
presence. We can
only muse over your
likeness, but we wo
uld be able to ident
ify the contrast. Ste
p by step
towards your absen
ce, our mind
Leaving t
earstained
memori
es. For we
did not lo
ve you eno
ugh when
sang to us
harmonie
s, of yours
culliness
forgive us,
for not prot
ecting you
r soul when your hear
thum ping
t was still
away

filled my heart so tenderly. Voices so
contagious that it hurts my chest whenever
I hear it, it all feels so
painful to live without you here. My
voices call, booming my name through narrow
corridors. My shoulders scraping against the walls
of this room brimmed with sorrow. Almond

Stilled in time my mind knows not
what to do. Heart magnetized to the
ground but disbelief stiffly leaves my lips.
As I imagined a lingo to hear your
tone but scared of the endless ring
that will follow. Why was it your
life that had to be taken? All

that is left are images trailed in
my heart of your smile and laughter
ironed into my memory. It doesn't seem
plausible because you were supposed to live
endlessly, were you not? Who allowed you
to leave so rapidly like flames extinguished,
leaving flickering embers blowing away with time.

My head pounding, lungs enraged and stomach
ached with stress. How much will it
take to bring you back, because I
can't imagine life without you here. Clear
my fears, faith and love—take it
all. Please tell me it's not true,
who do I pay off to take

it back. Your life carried more value,
so, I beg, please come back. I
know, my heart is manipulating my appetite
and my mind is weighing me down
against these insoluble quilted sheets as these
moist cases rub against my dampened cheeks.
Bring me back to when your love

mezal is not what I needed but
grief craves in my desperate solace. Forced
to live another day without you, but
meant to spend eternity loving you so.
There are no ending credits that play
after you're gone. So, goodnight, you hold
part of my love encapsulated in time.

Elijah Gaskins-Geller
Anansi and Brother Death



Emmanuel Ruiz
For the City

pgLang
PRESENTS

PERFORMING LIVE
**HOLLYWOOD
PALLADIUM**

**MARCH 15
2025 @9:00**
PRE-SALE TICKETS COMING SOON

FOR THE CITY

**KENNEDY
LANE**

BEST RAP PERFORMANCE
BEST RAP SONG
BEST MUSIC VIDEO
RECORD OF THE YEAR
SONG OF THE YEAR

**5X GRAMMY
WINNER**

DOORS @7:00

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT
WWW.AXS.COM

G

How to (Not) Queer the Poem

How to (Not) Queer the Poem

Start with a line, don't be afraid.
 you know the rules and how to
 write. You know what a poem is
 supposed to be. How it's
 supposed to function.
 Why are you hesitating?

Just	
let	go.
Feel the poem's rhythm.	How
she breathes as you trace	your
hands along her skin / listen to her pauses and sighs / a song only for you. / Decorate the floor /	
with her clothes / as you take in her form. / Remember to have a taste, / listen to her praise /	
rolling off your tongue / as you reach her core. / Find every way to make her / bend and break,	
anything / to see her laid out on the sheet / and when she comes down / remember to hold her	
close /	and
mark	her
	yours.

Shawn Dettenmaier
Bad Roommate



Marc Bullock
Sister Midnight



About NSRT

NSRT is an occasional and experimental publishing supplement to *Northridge Review*, the literary magazine published by the Department of English at California State University, Northridge since 1962.

The first *NSRT* was documentation of an exhibit showcasing the works of Professor Michelle Rozic's graduate MFA seminar students and Professor Leilani R. Hall's Graduate Studies in Creative Writing students. It was a call and response collaboration between two groups of artists, using different mediums, styles, and techniques. It was designed and printed by Sarah Densmore and sam goli.

Both the second and third *NSRT* focused on the art and testimonies of undocumented students throughout the California State University system. Both were curated by David Cruz Quiroz.

A full-color digital edition of this book is available in the Fall 2025 issue of *Northridge Review*:
<https://journals.calstate.edu/nr/issue/view/491/>



