



ORPHEUS

ISSUE XLI

LITERARY JOURNAL

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Issue XLI

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If any student is interested in joining the Orpheus staff, please email Dr. Adam Schuster at aschuster@csub.edu.

Orpheus accepts submissions of various kinds. Please send submissions to orpheus@csub.edu, but first visit the Department of English's website (www.csub.edu/english) for complete information.

Orpheus follows a blind submission process that includes pieces submitted by the journal's editors.

Orpheus was originally founded in 1973 by Dr. Solomon Iyasere, a professor in the CSUB Department of English. His contributions to the university were many, and his legacy lives on through Orpheus.

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A Note from the Faculty Advisor

Lisa Acosta-Alvarado, Layla Cohen, Rafael Alberto De La Mora Herrera, Daniel R. Meyer, Jordan Shih, Jackson Whitby: these are this year's editors of *Orpheus*, the students of English 4740. For reasons mysterious, this group formed the most cohesive set of readers I have had the pleasure of working with over the years. Every editor made a habit of coming to class with detailed notes, having read the day's submissions closely. Every editor was also able to express their point of view and make their arguments clearly and confidently. In the case of most submissions, we were able to come to a rapid consensus. A truly remarkable and rewarding experience.

As a group, *Orpheus*'s editors excelled, but everyone deserves mention for a particular service or superpower. Jordan Shih was our managing editor. Thank you, Jordan, for managing the journal so well by taking on the monumental task of the *Orpheus* email account: you rendered submissions blind and got them up into Canvas, created and kept up all necessary logs, and responded to contributors in a process that involved taking notes as we edited and conveying the substance of our editorial recommendations. Jordan was also a member of our precious layout team, with Rafael: no layout, no journal—thank you both for learning InDesign and creating our beautiful 2024 Issue, XLI!

Rafael also deserves mention, with Lisa, for being core members of our marketing/publicity team. Lisa we also appreciated for her fine visual sense. She designed one of our eye-catching calls for submissions as well as our elegant cover. About the cover: the image, "Speak Now," is Patty Martinez's. Thank you, Patty, for sending your art to *Orpheus* both this year and last. Without you, *Orpheus* would not be as beautiful as it is.

Layla, you came in with our first call for submissions and it was so good it inspired your peers to produce more. Further, for those who needed help translating their ideas into concrete form, you stepped in with your skill at using Canva. Daniel, Jackson, thank you for stepping up for so many critical tasks: distributing calls across campus, copy reading (along with the eagle-eyed Layla), composing front matter pages, putting together the table of contents (thanks especially to Daniel), and more (Jackson created one of our fantastic calls for submissions).

All *Orpheus* students: there were only six of you, but you accomplished so much and made up the perfect collaborative team.

Printing *Orpheus* has become extremely expensive, and so we have many to thank for funding. Dr. Alicia Rodriguez, Acting Dean of Arts of Humanities, and Interim Provost James Rodriguez, thank you for your support! Most of all, thank you to Emily Poole Callahan, Dean of Students, and members of the Instructionally Related Activities (IRA) Committee for awarding us a generous \$1,500! Yes, in order to give contributors and editors but one copy of *Orpheus* each, with a few left over for deserving others (like our funders), we need no less than \$2,500. Perhaps one day we will have enough money to distribute issues across campus. Our dream is to share our contributors' creativity with the entire CSUB community.

Congratulations, talented contributors! Thanks to you, we have another inspiring issue!

Dr. Carol Dell'Amico
English Department



Cherished Remnants by Benjamin Parsons

POETRY

A Fluctuating Tide

Rebekka Adams

A fluctuating tide

Foamed bubbles meet wet sand

Feet are planted in its warmth

While shapes are crafted by hand

A moon, invisible

Brings waves in and out

The only evidence observable

Within their crash and shout

Lay here and move the morsels

Let them slip between the gap

While music made from water

Exists without a task

Feet cannot change tide

Hands won't quiet waves

They take reprieve upon the shore

Listening to what the ocean says

Should feet and hands dive within

Let it be with no presumption

Let them float along the seas sweet swell

Unwillingness, the cause to worsen

Keep mindful of the waves

Not to carry you too deep

The shoreline in the distance

Calls back with what you need

Returning from the water

All that's left is memory of sound

Feet and hands may move the earth

By touch upon a semi-solid ground

But what once was moved and dented
Made uneven by human courage
Later on will be smoothed over
By an uncontrolled oceans leverage

Read From Your Perspective

Rebekka Adams

I contain

A voice consisting of all the noises I've heard in my life
eyes kaleidoscoped of all the colors I've ever seen in the places I've been
a laughter compiled of all the giggles and cries that have passed through my ears
fingers that have touched faces of those dear to me, even if only at that moment
hair passing through the winds on all the walks I've ever been on
a mouth speaking all the words I've ever spoken; hurtful, true, and sometimes both
hips that have moved to every song, even ones that I didn't quite understand
freckles that have been pulled by every sun in my lifetime
my body, mosaic representation of me - anywhere and everywhere
amalgamated of everything I can see and everything that is invisible
I ask; how could I not love me?

The Land of Nod

Samuel Aguilar

One must imagine

What Camus thought of Cain
As he wandered the empyrean wastes
No boulder pushed; no hill trudged
But burdened all the same

One must imagine Cain remorseful
Passion, at its deepest, leaves one empty
Free for suppliant horror to become all
When left alone, in that *Other Hell*
Where *Fierce Desire* reigns*

One must imagine a reason
Why? "I would not be bested so easily," He says
But what loneliness is now?
Enough
More than enough

Listless and tired, the coward rots
For a coward is what he is, is he not?
Empty, he walks the night
Where the silence is deafening.
The Earth leaves little unsaid.

There is only shame
Afraid to look ahead
Afraid of what's behind
Shades, that once comforted, taunt still
Their gaze, tortuous and unrelenting

"*One must imagine* Cain *happy*,"
It is easy to say
Far from that land
Where the shadows are long
And nothing remains

**Paradise Lost* 4. 508-511

Roaming Heart

Lisa Aguirre

What a life it is to wake up in a stranger's home,
Taken away from family, forever to roam.
Forever seeking the place where you belong,
Yet every home you're moved to feels so wrong.

You don't fit in because of things like your skin color,
The social worker says she can't find a forever home due to your age.
The hurt and pain build up, emerging only as rage,
Proof that no one wants you, simply because you're a teen.

They think you're a liar, a thief, a delinquent, everything between,
All you can think of is freedom from this foster life scene.
With no choice but to remain strong,
They compliment your resilience, yet you'd rather be known as brilliant.

Brilliant enough not to become a statistic,
To avoid ending up homeless, on drugs, or pregnant.
Instead, you remain quiescent,
Living a life inactive, dormant, discontent.

Memories in a Fog: An Apple Tree's Tale

Omar Ahumada

What purpose do I serve?
Why am I here, who put me here?
How am I living and breathing? Or why?
I want to move from here, but I can't,
my roots have permanently settled here.
I want to see, I want to live,
but I am here, for no rhyme or reason.
What I yearn cannot be given to me,
for I am an apple tree.
Moving was not meant for me.
What do I do?
I don't want to be alone anymore yet,
it is the only thing I've ever known.
The only thing that has been offered to me.
I will perish but when will that be?
Should I be grateful for this life?
Death come for me for I cannot come to you.
Someone...Anyone. Please
I can't anymore, I don't want to live.
Wait...What is that?
A man with a backpack comes walking from a distance.
Revealing his form from being a mere shadow
in the fog that infinitely surrounds me.
He walks slowly towards me, very tiredly.
The man takes a sip from his canister
and takes the last apple from my branch.
I have no more left to offer.
He sits on the ground and rests his back on me.
He lays there, eating the very piece,
The very reason of my existence
The man finishes the apple and removes the seeds.
He digs a hole a few paces from me
and plants the seeds, utterly and completely burying me.
Once he finishes the man claps the dirt off his hands.
He rests his hand on me, "Thank you," the man says

before he drains his canister onto me
and the hole he made for the seeds.
The man puts on his backpack
and continues to walk in the direction he headed,
walking off into the distance again.
Becoming a mere shadow again, then nothing.
It is just me again...
Ah, yes.
This is why I am here.
With the nourishment you provided
I will grow more apples. This is not the end of me.
I will stand tall and I will last.
I do not know why you buried the remainings of my last apple,
but surely something will come of it.

When Pontius Comes

Cassandra Allen

My grandmother tried to rid the devil
from my soul. He hid in my colored curls.
So she looked to rip the dye from each and
every cuticle and when she couldn't,
she threatened to shave my head while I slept.
If not my hair, then surely the devil
hid amongst my college friends and the drugs
and alcohol that they would "pressure" me
into taking. Or perhaps the devil
lived within the philosophy textbooks
that my professors assigned. Either way,
it no longer mattered: I was possessed.
What she thought to be Satan incarnate
was the image of the Lord in the flesh.
For I am of He and thus, my name is
perfection. My body is perfection.
All of the changes to my body are
not to love myself but because I do.
In any form that I will manifest,
in His eyes, I know that I am perfect.
Despite doubts from my grandmother and doubts
from myself, I know my quest to love me
is ordained. The thoughts that would once cause me
to introduce myself as "Chris" vanished.
In a single breath, you will bless and curse
me. Say her name. Say my name. "Cassandra."

DOWN TODAY UP TOMORROW

Terrence Beard

Sometimes it takes a loss to see what you got, but life has odds, so it's easier to reach the top if
born with a lot.

Some plot what they say, to get in your way,
they'll also lie and steal because they didn't grow up real.

For some, life rolls with highs and lows, for others it's triumphs and wows, which affects the
pace the mind grows.

Some people will fool you once, and that'll make you say shame on you, but if you allow them to
fool you twice, then you're the damn fool.

Dwelling on your sorrow only ruins your tomorrow, sometimes you're down today, but your
happiness is just on borrow.

Don't go through life without being able to say I tried, you must keep going through the hard
times, to find out what's on the other side.

Legacies.

Alexandra Chapa-Kunz

Can I be candid?

No.

I will anyway. Partially. Thoughtlessly. Against advisement.

Flippant questions answered with Frivolous Honesty.

Sometimes you don't ask. Sometimes you Discuss.

theory of pain. trauma. a degradation not felt.

This devastation... you think of as nightmare.

Fantasy. A story. Figments of history.

I am happy for you.

untouched by it. You are FREE of it.

I see it.

my freedom

Sometimes,

some times,

I almost grasp it.

my freedom...

Hidden behind my child's peaceful face,

souls we work so hard to protect.

From the harsh realities of a past..

my past.

their past.

our past.

Our Freedom.

Their Freedom.

My Freedom.

Locked away in vaults. Erased from books.

Scraped from the surface of tongues. Generations.

A crushing weight of absence. Slowly... asphyxiating.. all...

This thing. Never spoken of. Doesn't exist in your mind.

Feels like Rotting Flesh in mine.

Lurking, lurking, it lurks.

A Shadow overseer to our lives.

I feel it. In Her kitchen. The elder.

As She lay in Her last hours of life. It stands at Her bedside.

Waiting.

The weight of Her death will unravel us. Has Unraveled US.

Waiting.

Those hidden secrets.

Like gravity they pull.

Waiting.

Our resistance breaks us.

The Shadow is scratching. Digging its way out. Its restraints tied to Her life.

Snarling.

Snapping.

Thrashing.

Striking.

Clutching. The Lies we know.

Pressed on every side by these

—hidden truths,

The Shadow.

We are Folded into the lives of many.
We Drown. In their pain. We GASP. Wait. Waiting.
We did not ask for this.
I don't blame you.
 I do blame you.
There is no blame.
 We all are to blame.
Listen.
Listen...
 LISTEN...
 Hear. Break free. Release.
 It's no one's fault.
 It's everyone's fault.
 Listen, hear, break free, release.

Cold

Kara "Alani" Davis

Cold
Your skin soft
You look at nothing and everything
Eyes
Can you hear me?
Talk to me
Why are you so stiff
Relax
It's only me here
No one is here, I promise.
You can get up
I miss your voice
Talk to me
Please?
Cold

To my uncle Sabal

What Will You Be?

Isaac Chipres

Once upon a time, in a town not far,
Lived a curious kid, with dreams like a star.
He asked his dear dad, "What can I be?"
With a twinkle in his eye, he began to decree:
"You can be a firefighter, brave and true,
With a helmet and hose, saving lives anew.
Or perhaps a police officer, keeping peace in the street,
With a badge on your chest, and shoes with sturdy feet."
The kid nodded eagerly, full of delight,
Imagining himself in uniform, oh what a sight!
"But wait," said his dad, with a knowing grin,
"There's more to explore, let the dreaming begin.
You can be a teacher, shaping minds so bright,
Guiding young learners, Spreading knowledges light.
Or aim even higher, reach for the sky,
Be the President one day, with courage to fly."
The kid's eyes widened, filled with wonder and glee,
"I can be anything?" he asked sparkling free.
His dad hugged him close, with a nod so sincere,
"Yes, my dear child, your dreams hold no fear.
No matter the path, or the journey you see,
Believe in yourself, and what you can be.
With passion and drive, and a heart that's true,
The world is your oyster, there's nothing you can't do."
So the kid went to bed, with dreams soaring high,
Imagining all the places he'd go, reaching for the sky.
For in his heart, he knew, with unwavering glee,
That no dream was too big, for him to set free.
To all little dreamers, who hold futures so dear.
Believe in yourself, let your spirit run free,
For the world is your canvas, what will you be?

In This Town, Feminism “Gets Old”

Moriah Conedy

In this town, Feminism gets old. She used to be a young woman. Full of life and hopes and dreams. She used to be loved by all women and respected by men, even if sometimes called, “Hey, Eccentric!” But now she is old and bent with gray hair and dreams spent. She lives alone in a secluded mansion, and nobody understands why she hasn’t a spouse. But nobody knows that this town is where she has her roots. In this town, she danced to new tunes and walked under full moons.

Feminism was raised here. Running through the forest when she was a girl. Learning new skills and riding her scooter up and down the hills. Climbing the trees and making new friends. Learning morals, kindness, and making amends. Feminism was taught how to cook in the kitchen and clean the windowsills. How to vacuum, make pancakes, and braid children’s hair.

Feminism came of age here. She learned to drive, graduated with her degree, and became a responsible employee. Gave to charity, joined her church, and tithed her money.

Feminism grew up here. Feminism married her husband and had two kids. Fed them and raised them and held them when they bled. Feminism graded their schoolwork, read them bedtime stories, and tucked them into bed.

Feminism lived in this town. She valued being an upstanding citizen and a loving spouse. Started a business and bought her family a house. Demonstrated against racism, lived anti-racism, and asked her Church why women’s leadership was not allowed.

Feminism grew old here. She babysat her neighbor’s toddlers and taught them to give thanks for their food. She cooked at church potlucks and served baked goods. She sewed blankets, knit beanies for babies, and donated winter coats with hoods. She cared for her husband as he died and buried him in the small churchyard by the woods.

In this town, Feminism gets old. She was once a young woman. Full of life and hopes and dreams. She was well-respected by her fellow townsfolk and appreciated and esteemed. But now the Town’s folk say, “Feminism is ‘getting old’ here,” “She’s just not that relevant and we don’t understand her. We’ve come not to like her—why should she stay?”

They have clearly never heard her pray. Never heard her dreams for them that, One Day, they live in a better world. That they won’t have to live under an abusive father as a little girl. Pray that tomorrow there will be one less racist in the world. Pray sexism is Seen as a sin. Pray that People are alarmed at their Separations from God, from themselves, and from Women.

There are people who are happy
Moriah Conedy

there are people who are happy

Their sun is a beautiful sky

Their world is a happy haven

They like the journey of life

Their favorite place is a steeple

Their people are always cheery

there are people who are sad

Their air is rather foggy

Their world is desolate and craven

They like the journey of life

Their favorite place is a steeple

Their people are always teary

there are people who are depressed or anxious

Their stars are always night

Their world is a lonely plight

They dread the journey of life

They have been pierced by a steeple

Their people are always eerie

some people have been all three

Night in “El Rincon”

Rafael Alberto De La Mora Herrera

It was getting dark that day
The sunlight started to fade
The glowing moon,
Creating unrecognizable shades

The way home begins
Three people riding horses:
Juan, Manuel, and Carlos
One behind the other

Going up a steep path
They have felt alone
But the night hides a secret
Something of her own

There with perplexed eyes
Crickets, moths and fireflies
Filling the place with wonder
There where serenity lies.

Motherhood

Karina Hurtado

This is what it looks like to have your heart beating from outside your body, I think to myself as I see him chase the waves.

He is my lifeline.

When he takes a breath, that same air begins to fill my lungs. When his heart beats mine continues to pump blood.

When his eyes shed tears mine flow with all their might, enough to fill a river.

When something hurts him my body aches.

When he smiles, I feel like I can soar the skies.

He is my everything, my son.

Perspective Of A Predator

Annie Denvir

This is what I tell myself he thought after taking away my innocence, a poem for my own closure...

She was beautiful

Like mother nature

Her body majestic

Like the earth

My hands forgot they belonged to me

They had grown a mind of their own

I could no longer control them

I traced the curves of her body until dusk fell upon us

Then i continued searching in the dark

My hands

Slipping underneath the white clouds of her shirt

Climbing over one mountain

Then the other

I tilled the soil in the bosom of her earth

Planting my seeds among her crops

My weeds rapidly growing amidst her beautiful gardens

My fingers traced every landmark on her until nothing was left unexplored

I colonized her body

Claiming what was not mine

Searching unseen areas

Mapping uncharted lands

No man has ever come here before

I found new rivers and ponds beneath her surface

Dipping my fingers into the waters of her youth

She begged me no

But beauty had overtaken me

Self control was something i no longer knew

She looked me in my eyes

Her eyes piercing my soul

And begged me to stop

But i couldn't

For a man with ambition will never be stopped

My fingers danced in the waterfalls of her innocence

Such a majestic sight

Angels wept as i was cleansed in her waters
Drenched in her beauty
Baptized in her tears
I was mad with power
The heavens cried out in pain
The sweet sound of angels
I could not think clearly
Even the sound of an angels pain is mesmerizing
Like a siren's song you cannot turn away
It lures you in
I plunged into the dark, unknown valley between her legs
Devouring the apple of Eve
I was the snake
The reason for her fall
Drinking the sweet nectar from the fruit of the bush that she bore
The savory taste lingering on my tongue
It's almost as if i can still taste her
I greedily licked at the leaves and branches of the tree of Eden
Wanting more
Needing more
Taking my fill
Stealing what was not mine
At last the heavens fell silent
And the fog descended
I began to hear the anguish of hell
The agony of the demons grew until i could no longer bear it
She was too heavenly to emit such misery
I was the reason this angel had fallen
I tried to flee
To escape
To run
But you can never outrun your own self
I tried to forget the land i mapped with my own bare hands
But i can never forget such pleasure
For i still find myself yearning
My seed is in her earth
My flag planted in her soil
I have claimed her
She will forever be mine
Never forget this

Feast

Annie Denvir

Take me

Rip me open

And feast

Tear into my heart

Take what is not yours

And leave my core rotting

I hope the red stains on your hands remind you of me

Remind you of your gluttony

Of your greed

Leave me open

Leave me vulnerable

Consume your fill

Consume me

Consume the innocence of my youth

Drink the sweet nectar of my fruits and spit out the bitter parts

I will make myself sweet for you

I will prune away the unruly branches that you are not pleased by

I will cut myself open

For you to feast

I am ripe

I am ready

Pick me from my tree

I beg of you

Take me from my sisters

Peel back my skin

Be met with the aroma of pleasure

Take a blade to my skin

Cut me open

Throw away the parts you do not want

I will sit still

Allowing you to dissect me

I will stay quiet for you

All you have to do is ask

Call me yours

Let me belong to you

I have never belonged to somebody like this before

I am entirely yours

You took me
You tore me open
And ate
You took the parts of me that you were pleased by
And left me empty
On to the next pomegranate from the tree
You will rip her open
You will consume my sisters one by one
Because the only way you will ever be satisfied
Is if you rip us open
And feast

Look at your Future

Jorge Zermeno Garcia

That classroom is the reflection of your future.

On your right side, you see your friend. You look at him, and he smiles at you.

On your left side, your enemy. You look at him, and you feel adrenaline running through your veins...

Behind you, there's just a big gray wall. You look at it, and you see yourself laying on the ground crying because of tragedies you have experienced in the past.

In the front, there's an intellectual being.

For some reason, in that classroom:

No one knows nothing.

No one knows why they are inside.

No one knows what will happen next.

Everyone is waiting for the teacher to speak, assuming that he will recite his own rules.

No one knows what to expect from his government: a dictatorship? A democracy?

No one knows what to expect.

No one knows nothing.

As you look around, you realize that the classroom could be a door.

A door to a better future. Could it be success, wealth, happiness?

A challenge you didn't ask for. Is it financial instability?

A tragedy in your life. Would it be trauma?

A roar within yourself. Would it be your inner strength? The beast within yourself?

A door that opens a new door. Or would it be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity?

An infinite number of unpredictable life paths.

And it all starts in that spacious light brown classroom.

And it all starts with you, the writer of your future.

Blood Orange

Yaritza Gomez

I am your favorite color,
A misunderstood decision,
A shade you never wear but
Boast about picking one day
Because you think it makes you sound
Unique.

I am your party gimmick, a trophy,
A pile of books
So they think you read,
But you never will
Unless they're about you.

Which page would you like me to be on?

Yaritza Gomez

Temptation is the color of my sweater,
Cool like the water that trails my jeans-
A green so envious, I wish it would poison me.
But the devil's eyes are blue marine,
His glasses red,
Hiding like
The roses on my leg.
His hungry gaze reads
Left to right,
Undressing me like
The spine of a book I'd write.

Which page would you like me to be on?

Blu

Penny Lanae

A dreamer, A
creationist
whose dance is to the
sound of a heart
A breath with motion
the yearn for words as
A romanticism
to dwell in intensity
whilst to feel more alive
to nurture the body
as the mind craves
for someone
of similarity
A dreamer
whose dreaming of
handwritten letters,
intense vulnerability
A crave for a love
that flows freely,
messily with emotions
and insecurities.
to yearn for someone
to take a hand
and the mind,
someone whose on the other side
creating a mirror
a complex reflection
to help simplify
everything that has
been learned.
A richness so soothing,
a passion so strong
but attachment
at the none.
An everlasting experience
with the one
you truly love



Constant Conversations

Penny Lanae

My presence will be in hibernation.
What is real and what is not,
You can't figure, but I can.
You can not guess, assume, or try
Let alone be able to actually perceive
what is flowing through
the vessels in my mind.
Each letter of emotion I am feeling
is soaked into the center
of my brain flowing,
bouncing around, trying to get out.
Trying to reach my heart
Trying to understand if
there is compatibility
to my thoughts and my feelings.
What is right and what is wrong,
you can't figure,
but neither can I.
It's an endless
cycle of
whys.



Bones Infected With Mercury

Kali McCaa

Trapped inside this reflective surface with a fixation I am unable to break. I gaze upon the image in front of me and battle the forms intertwining with and exposing themselves. I attempt to make sense of them, forcing my eyes to focus on the inconsiderate details, struggling to twist and turn the lens of my eyes—that finally cease to blur. A tree? But the leaves are wilting, black, dead, dry, hanging like a willow tree, covering the

trunk?

If a hand dares to reach out and touch it, it will crumble with a crunch and disperse like flour in the air and dissipate to the floor.

the color of a birch tree, the black stripes refusing to reveal themselves

covered in dead moss, the trunk droops, curved, it is not announcing itself, its profound height, the years of growth are aching. Bent and breaking, stooped and shoved, the tree is

defeated?

The demanding winds force the leaves aside and the tree disappears into the ground

where the roots end and the tree begins are unknown to the worms, the centipedes, the mole rats, the fertilizer, and the seeds gasp for air and beg to look away.

the tree bathes in the dirt, the mud, its bark is covered, escaping its sky.

layers and layers of mud, rock, moss, dirt, worms, decay, the scent is invasive, twisting my alveoli, my lungs turning inside out and my body begging to stop inhaling

maybe the tree can cover itself

make itself appear as a boulder

stronger.

The tree hides no longer and the sky's arms reach around the trunk, forcing it into the light

the rays cut through the leaves, but the muck and mushrooms render the tree immune

My vision becomes hazy and I snap my eyes shut

refusing to witness further destruction.

Against my better judgement I stare at my reflection again, with chilling clarity I can see its malformations.

I feel sorrow, my heart pounds, and I turn

where I expect to see the tree, expect to face its rotten core

instead I face an abyssal emptiness.

The room grows hot and beads of sweat start to prick my head.

I glance in the mirror and am acquainted with the tree once again, the branches reach for the very essence of my soul.

the branches and vines threaten to invade my lungs and blind me.

I stoop to the floor and feel the mud and moss cover my body, replacing the warmth I have held onto for so long.

No tree resides in this room and I am trapped in my fixation, suffocated by my disfigured obsessions.

Mahogany Blues

Kali McCaa

you will paint.

each brushstroke announcing itself to the viewer,

the colors placed by your hands,

the vibrant variations of your veins stirring across the canvas

you will view it with your shining eyes,

glistening in glory,

and your heart will pump itself.

your arms will wrap around your soul.

and he will acknowledge the easel.

or the wooden pallet your paint has dried on.

the floor it stands on.

the light shining on it.

you will try to demand the wind.

to snap his head,

to push him forth.

you will forage the depths of his brain.

the rivers of wrinkles,

the valleys of lumps,

and you will not find your words.

nor the eclipse of your soul.

you will demand the wind to make itself loud,

to wrap around you and carry you off.

then,

you will only to be able to hear,

the ocean inside you.

Movie Clips

Brit Melson

When I look back, I see movie clips
like little blips of what is real mixed with the imaginary.

I am cast the lead role.

Always.

In one particular scene,
it's little kid me learning to scribble words like broken and trauma –
then I watch as the only first responders in my reality show
are my own hands nervously learning
to tap on the desk in front of me
while the other kids complete their reading.
It's wild, I think, to watch myself think.
Like this, anyway.

We Suck

Brit Melson

You and I are good at nearly nothing that most couples do
We suck at fighting.

We always end up hugging and holding
and kissing and cuddling
and all that other queer shit

We suck at following tradition
or falling into line
or fearing our oppressors

We suck applesauce though a straw
and we laugh and laugh
and then laugh some more

The other day I realized that we suck at religion, too,
unless you consider the ways
that I find religion in you.

Clean plate

Amy Melton

You give me everything, just to take it away from me
Until all I have left to give you
Is the plate I've licked clean.
And I'm full to the brim with all of the grief
That you've stuffed my face with
Until my stomach aches, and it's made me sick.
With one hand in my hair while I'm throwing up
You're petting me softly while I'm gasping for air
How thoughtfully cruel to take pity on me
While you give no relief
And soon after, the other is handfeeding me
Because there's so much more to give
So, you give me my fill, and then even more still
Until I'm empty once more, and we do it again.
If I've decided it's over and push back your hand,
When I'm no longer able to swallow it all,
You'll be left empty-handed, for all I have left
Is my clean plate.

Unsweetened

Amy Melton

For years, my father tried quitting sugar. Instead of his usual bottle of soda, he'd drink an iced tea. Unsweetened. He'd make sure that we knew that. Knew that he was trying. Unwarranted, we'd learn about the dangers of processed sugars and the benefits of avoiding it. But even a preacher will succumb to temptation. The very next week, two bottles of soda sat in the cupholders in the front seat of his car. One on his side, one on mine. An indulgence for him, an atonement for me. A failure and an apology. How is a child supposed to know that their father is a weak man? He was so big and strong, and he always picked himself back up when he let himself down. Who else would I look up to, if not the man who never gave up?

Cleanse Me

Daniel R. Meyer

Cold

Nervously, I stand waiting outside of my shower
I carefully strip myself down to nothing as the room increases heat
My skin, rough and filthy, abrasively scratches at my clothes
My hand creeps in cautiously until finally skin and water meet

Lukewarm

Quietly I slip into the filling porcelain bowl, shivering slowly
I draw the curtain to a close so the world cannot witness my pitiful struggle
My hair like a shoddy umbrella absorbs and deflects droplets of purification
My shaking slows and I stand stupidly, wrapping myself in a huddle

Filthy

The liquid spewed from the showerhead hits my face like spit
I look up with closed eyes and allow myself to be overtaken
Looking down, I see the crystalline water fade to a grainy murk
Lost in the staining tub, I feel something inside of me awaken

Tremble

The shaking begins again, but my skin is no longer cold to the touch
The water grows hotter, steadily climbing to a piping boil
My blood flows like ice, my chest culminating into a frozen core
I snap out of the daze as I barely notice my curled hair gently uncoil

Comb

I put aside my body for a moment and I reach for the untangling tool
Like legs in mud, the spines immediately are stuck in the tight mat
Tearing and straining, I rake my scalp from base to ends
No blood emerges, just globs of hair that pile into a disgusting rat

Off

I reach out and briefly turn off the water, unweaving the carpet without waste
Soothing shampoo and conditioner feel like angel feathers to my skin
Now I am left with the rest of myself that remains dirty and foul
Clumsily scrubbing with a bar of soap, I embrace an uncertain grin

Peeling

Scrubbing, scrubbing, scrubbing away with this damned scented lard
Like a child I look around aimlessly at loofahs and brushes too stupid to use a tool
I am grown, I am a man, I can use these torn hands to cast away my filth
Scraping harder and deeper into my skin, I am left a naked dirty fool

Dig

Toiling away at my leather shell, I use my tears as lubricant to tear away the grime

Black stains lie unfazed by my efforts and I faintly start to bleed

Sludge drips from my body and just barely progress is being made

Unable to tell what my skin color is anymore, my breaths turns into heaves

Whine

Silently I start to cry out for my parents like I were a child, scared and alone

I yearn for my mom and dad to swoop in and steady me with a hug

Panicking, I picture myself a baby again and gentle voices singing me clean

No longer can I stand being a roach, some disgusting and infesting bug

Reach

Stretching to clean my back I am left grasping at the steamy air

I cannot reach myself, I cannot reach the worst parts of the pollution

Impatient as a boy I never learned to use cloths and body wash properly

With anger and fear now I scratch violently with zealous profusion

Yell

Screaming to myself, I call out to my mom and my dad in desperation

Please come wash me this one time, and we can pretend after to forget my shame

I just need your help for the parts I cannot reach all by myself

But how can a grown man ask something like this and be looked at the same

Dry

I step out of the shower, choking on the steam that drowns the room

My dripping towel wraps snug around me in a faint embrace

Staring blankly into the fogged mirror, I mindlessly wipe away drops of dew

Below the stains on my boiled and scratched skin I believe, just barely, I can see my face

When I Am Gone

Daniel R. Meyer

I hear time and time again that when people die, you will find them in all sorts of beautiful places and moments throughout the world. I know that one day I will find my father within the crackling flames of a bonfire, I will hear my mother flying with the notes of morning songbirds, my brother will be seen through isles of expensive clothing as I prepare for dances and parties, and my sister will be found in the waves of fresh breeze that glide through the blades of open green fields. Dear, when I leave, you will find me not within the depths of your heart nor within the warm rays of the rising sun. Nor will you find me in the glints of a pixelated monitor showing echoes of my face, nor in the crashing waves of the ocean, nor in the droplets of a spring storm. I will be nowhere near, not in the vibrations of every musical note you hear, not in the scent of any flower or plant you grow in your gardens, not in the faded paper of hanged stills that line walls and collect dust in old, forgotten boxes. I shall not be in the shining stones that lie beautifully in the earth, I shall not be in the delicate specks and intricacies of snowfall, I shall not be in the words of any poem you dream about, I shall not be in the graphite or charcoal or paint of picturesque imagery that you'll create or view within museums. No, I will never be found in anywhere but one place: you will find me in the shadows of the stars, knowing I lay hidden there among the inky black, lifetimes away yet seemingly just within your hand's reach. You must sit with the knowledge that I dance and run and leap from silhouette to silhouette of every single star and burning mass in the sky, where no matter how long you try to look for me, no matter how many different ways you search for me and no matter what angle you approach me from, I will be far beyond anywhere you could ever fathom. I am hidden with my location out for all to see, impossible to get to and never to be disturbed. You will never find me, no matter how hard you scratch and yearn for semblances of reconnection and memory, though you will always know exactly where I am. Within the infinite void I will finally be released, free from the ties of your ghost whom I sit next to every day and feel the chilling air of death from with every breath you take. Millions of miles away, it will be I who now watches you as you stay up for nights on end, attempting to reach out for some sort of contact, only to be left withering away alone and shivering with my absence to fill the silence. When I am gone, no longer will it be I who longs and reaches out for something that is just out of reach, nor will it be you who will look back with disgust and glee at my frantic and pathetic attempts to hold your warmth within my arms again.

Night - Day

Philisa Moore

You sit in your room
Day after day, night after night
You stare out your window
Nothing seems real
Not after them

You think about the times when life stood still
Everyday was a new adventure
The sun gleamed in the bright blue sky
The buildings a blinding brilliant light
You could relive any day and it would still be like the first
Laying in their arms was the best part of your night

Now their side is devoid of heat
Their smell lingers on the sheets
Your heartbeat irregular
Without theirs to complete

Life has ceased to exist
The sun nothing but a distant dull memory
Everyday everything repeats, over and over
Their arms are only a memory
There is no more

The Helping Hand

Frankie Nadal

It is them I love, beyond time, beyond reason.
Their pain and concerns, hearts and smiles, forever mine.
A sword, a shield, and a light are my foundation.

Their sword that pierced the clouds of my lamentation,
Prowling a night that once consumed my own soul's shine.
It is them I love beyond time, beyond reason.

It was his shield that saw my own life not taken—
An ever-resolute presence forming the line.
Their sword, his shield, and a light are my foundation.

With her light, I saw a future worth salvation.
Guiding my hand and heart, a light I would soon pine,
It is her that I love beyond time, beyond reason.

And so, I, welcoming all, held my hand, open.
Easing every burden, my stars would soon align.
Their sword, his shield, and her light made my foundation.

But a dream come true is another forgotten.
With each loss, harder it became to say, "I'm Fine."
It was them I loved beyond time, beyond reason.
A sword, a shield, and a light were my foundation.

High River Currents

Dyanna Oregon

you're closed off
so am i
you won't let me in
i won't let you in.

this is nothing
but what is nothing?
there's something
but nothing
standing in the middle of a corn field
surrounded by nothing

i want to push you away
i can't seem to stay away...
high river currents;
not knowing how to swim

will my heart ache?

who will say the first goodbye?

who will i become after?
who will you become?

will we be better?
will we be worse?

you're my malachite; gorgeous
but damaging to my nervous system
can't seem to move

time is slipping by...
all my time is with you
why do i let you?
nothing will come from this
i don't want anything...

why am i not used to goodbyes?
people have come and gone
will you go too?

all things end
this will end

when will it end?
how will it end?
will you want something more?

i can't give you more;

i won't let myself give you more

in the end we are not forever
this is only a moment in time

i will look back one day
rocking my chair
on the front porch
overlooking the mountains
tea in hand
reminiscing on time passed

Beyond the Rainbow

Matthew Phengdy

What do you see beyond the stars?
Is it real, or is it not?
What do you see beyond the stars?
A place far Beyond The Rainbow.

The planet spins
The world continues
Life is but a dream
Like a wise man once said.

The planet spins
But only for one,
A place where
Dreams and Reality
Meet.

What do you see beyond the stars?
Is it real, or is it not?
This lone planet
This lone star

What lies beyond?
This truth be told
Life is but a dream
Sh-boom-shi-boom

What can you see?
When a planet spins?
Where Dreams and Reality
Intersect?

What lies beyond?
Is it real, or is it not?
Dreams and Reality
This lone star
A place far Beyond The Rainbow.

My encouragement vs. my self esteem

Angelica Ramirez

“Just do it,”

She said.

“You got nothing to lose,”

She said.

“You’ll never know unless you try,”

She said.

“What’s stopping you?”

She asked.

“Me,”

I said.



Mexican American Self Portrait by Patty Martinez

None For Me

Lara Salas

Their cheeks are red as a rose,
Their eyes are golden brown, like chamomile tea.
Their heart filled with joy and love,
But I know none of it is ever for me.

I see them almost every day,
Their black, mid-cut hair in disarray,
I would like to speak to them,
But I do not know what to pen.

Then one day the conversation starts,
I can finally tell them what I want to say.
I gather the words and courage in my heart,
But I choke, and the words fall away.

The day has now ended,
I will only ever be their friend.
They grab their stuff and walk away,
Under the clouds that are so gray.

Their cheeks stay as red as a rose,
Their eyes are golden brown, like chamomile tea.
Their heart filled with joy and love,
Yet, none of it is ever going to be for me.

Running Feet

Lara Salas

Those running feet,
Move to the sound of the hooves' beat,
Those breaths that quickened,
As the mounted watchmen began their acquisition,
They could not help but feel defeat,
Those running feet.

Their running feet,
Hastening from the sounds of the I.C.E. elite,
Their breath is quickened,
As the smog in the air is thickened,
They are being dragged back like they are obsolete,
Their running feet.

My running feet,
Sprint towards the Capitol's street,
My breath inhaling the freedom so sweet,
As I chant along with conceit,
Today our ancestors will not see us retreat,
Because we are their running feet.

Chasing Blades, Hidden Cries

Megan Sepulveda-Hemma

A day, a week, a month has passed
since she put away the blades;
her very own party favor at her pity party.
She fears what will happen now that she has stopped.
Outwardly hurting that is because the inner pain,
as many know,
lingers and sticks like dried blood from old wounds.

Instead, she makes an effort to remain present;
the smile that she has mastered never slipping the way that
she does between crowds as she departs from the evening early.
But how will she seek approval from strangers now?
Will her family and friends still love her?
She is unsure,
and now unable to read between the lines where she once marked her skin.

First Hockey Night

Jordan Shih

Whip-crack of the puck as it's sent to heights tall,
Smash-cut to the Condor crashing 'gainst the wall,
Boom of the loudspeaker hyping up the crowd,
Boos from the locals jeering loud and proud,
“Want any snacks?” my classmate asks me,
“Anyone sitting here?” a stranger pleads,
Scratch-skid of blades slicing ice,
Clap-whack of sticks hitting twice,
First ever hockey night, I'm having a ball,
Next thing I know, the score is one-all.



I've grown up by keyera tagger

Enjoying the ride with Ryder~

Isis Soto

For the past year, my life has been cruising in a Ryder truck. I am on an adventure doing the unimaginable.

Fascinating rides that you take me on, the type of shit you could only dream about.

The satisfaction is beyond physical; it's the emotions I feel when riding Ryder.

My voice is heard loud and clear as we drive around. That's what makes your touch even better.

The connection we have is my manifestations that came to life.

We continue to drive to different destinations.

They are enjoyable places. Dangerous territory, one may say. I don't want this ride to stop.

I find myself invested, trying to find the sweet spots your ride offers.

There are no codes or anything to decipher. It is all there for me to see.

The reality of what's going on between you and me. Where time and space do not exist.

I'll enjoy the smooth ride you take us on as we travel at different speeds.

We sometimes go fast on these wild adventures. Or there are nights we ride slowly, enjoying the moment.

Anywhere Ryder wants to take me. I am always ready for the ride of my life.

One year later. I am still getting hit by a Truck.

Isis Soto

If only you could see how much I debated, went back and forth... The day I asked you out. It had been a while since I allowed myself to be vulnerable, but the Universe said it was time.

When I drove home the next day, well, shit, I was in complete disbelief. How could this young guy blow my fuckin mind like that?

Your love and touch was what I needed.

I didn't know where this was going...but we were going there fast, and you made me feel alive. There are moments when I ask myself, WTH am I still doing here? The answer is you feel good to me.

I'm selfish and want you ALL for me. So, I will take you to the capacity that you permit. See, the thing is, you love me so fuckin good. You've taken me to this other destination, where I can be all yours. And do all these crazy things with no hesitation.

Yet what you helped me discover is even better. There is a soft side to me, where there is no aggression. I learned to love and accept myself and grow into perfection.

This is something I will take with me everywhere I go.

Just promise me if things change between the love you and I share. You'll never forget all my love and touch and how it came with so much care.

Maybe you are my Prince Charming after all ~

Stolen Shores of Sanctuary

Alyssa Tafoya

Time shall rob me of this day
as ships bob in the bay
Their sails an entrapment
As the reeds that flow like our sea are soiled
time will ensure the snuff of my life.

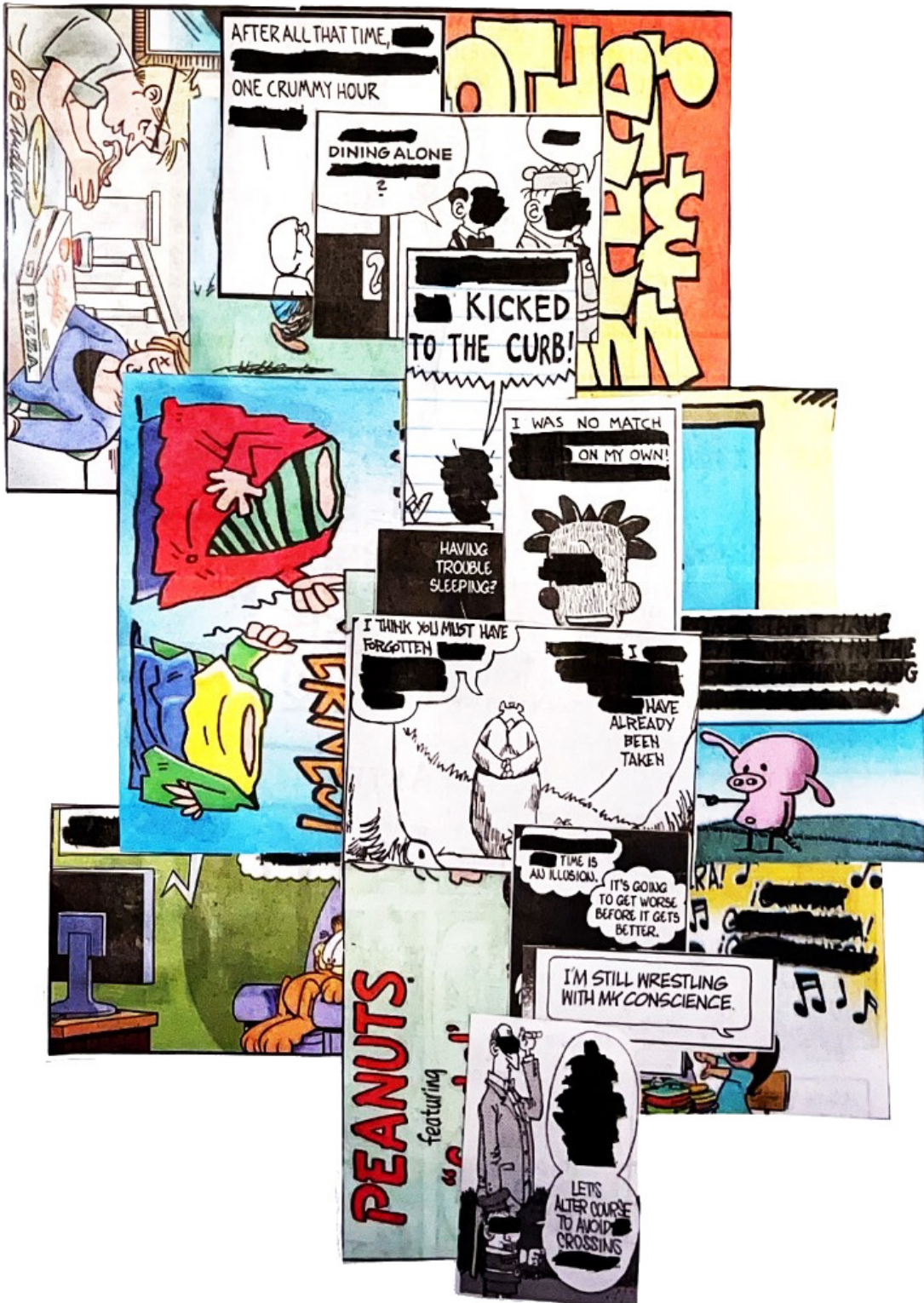
Guard our secrets and our faith
The origins of our race
Our lands made an attraction
while descendants of ours suffer this Hell
I wish our children and our future well.

Hand in heart we hide.
With these weapons no longer we fight.
Left to tremble we die.

Great temples crushed to rubble.
Looted and robbed, in a corner we huddle.
With no will and no strength
Looking at foreign smiles with trust no longer
As our hunger and illness grow stronger

Remember the bay as it was before.
Songs and laughter on the shore.

Let's Alter Course
Tyler Tangen



Creekside

Ian Tash

Beside the Creek, I look at all the fish.
The koi all swim, forever mindful here.
A heron waits for me to leave, its wish,
So it could eat its fill, the fish all fear.
Some theists say that God dwells in all things;
In all atomic parts, God's echo sings.
But why would God's song bring movement to this bird's wings?
To make yourself a cannibal is grim.
Thus, could this God just be a fish in pain?
Could prey and predator just both be Him?
Is God in me to judge a deed of crane?
I stand up; the bird knows it can retrieve.
A thought and prayer I give the fish I leave.
On my next visit, survivors and I will grieve.

Kind

Anonymous

I fell for a man who was kind
His words as sweet as grapes from the vine
although he didn't love me I didn't mind
I wanted someone's embrace to call mine
He was a sack of shit
never once did he commit
Much less visit
Even though he was a couple minutes away
However it was enough for me to stay
Until one day
His negligence became a display
With tears in my eyes
I said my goodbyes
It's been months since then
But my sorrows linger when I pick up a pen
Hoping he's the reason for my phone's ringer
Wishing one text from his would read deliver
Longing to see him in person instead of the constant reminders
One day this yearning will become only a sentiment
And no longer prevalent
I pray this doesn't happen again
This isn't the first time I fell for a man who was kind
It's become an endless cycle of mine
Clinging on as if it's a Lifeline
Perhaps I won't hang on too tight
To men who are as artificial as sweetener
For now I only hope my future will be alright
And I'll see myself as a delight

My dear
Anonymous

He holds a bottle up to the sky saying "I'm not gonna let this go until I die"
Addicted to the thing that makes him fly
Holding a cigarette in his hand saying "I don't care if I die anyway"
His wife saddened by the fact he's rotting away every day
Loving the man in the picture
Hating the man in the mirror
Him loving the pills, drugs and beer
Instead of her
Sadly she can't find it in her heart to leave her dear

CREATIVE

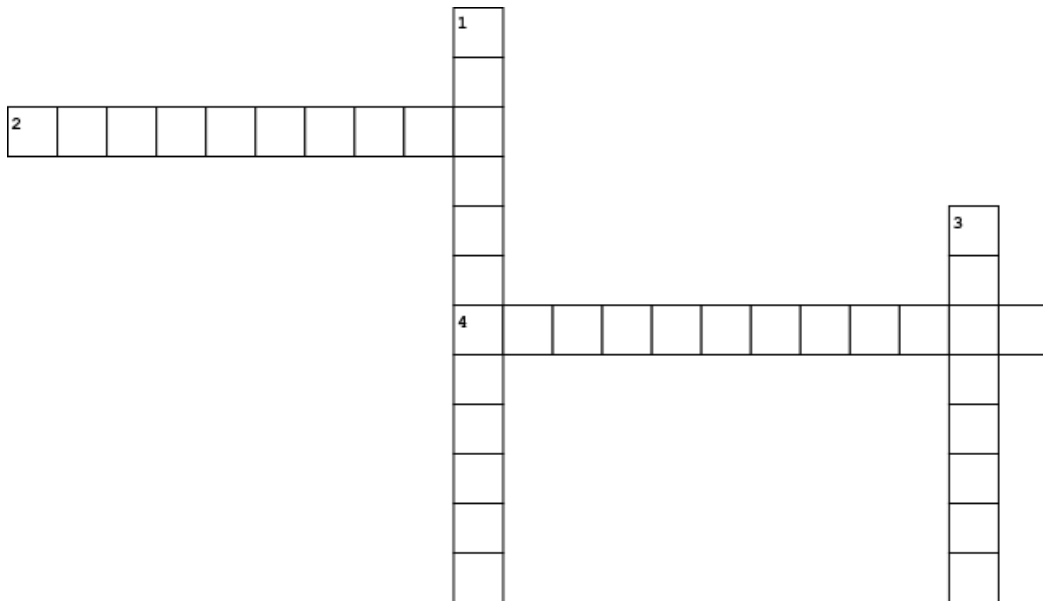


Man on Rhino by Joshua Villarruel

NON-FICTION

Back to the Garden of AI

Lisa Acosta-Alvarado



Across		Down	
2.	_SMR	1.	_____ identity disorder
4.	artificial _____	3.	“_____ isn’t good or bad in itself. What is important is what you are escaping from and where you are escaping to.” -Terry Pratchett (<i>Flaneurlife.com</i>)

- 1.) After another adrenaline ridden store run for toilet paper, beans, or whatever is left on the shelves, and one panic away from a meltdown my husband sends a link; the division begins. *Tired of my dead-end job at Jojo Co., I found an envelope in the drawer of my desk containing a letter from Grandpa. He says to open it when I feel “crushed and burdened by modern life... and in dire need of a change;” it contains the deed to his property in Stardew Valley, and I quit the same day.* (Sever the association of oneself (1))
- 2.) Trapped inside, the shutdown continues, and daily debates of solutions cause more problems, dividing households and canceling contact. Killer on the loose with kids as active agents and the sensation of sanitation greets the day: doorknobs, handles, and switches, check. *Taken away by the sounds of nature, the crunch of dirt under my feet as wind shuffles the leaves of maple trees, and birds tweet their seasonal tune, I explore the town of Stardew. Ocean waves shush all thoughts as I concentrate on my catch. Foraging through a hidden forest for wild horseradish and leeks takes all my energy. I make a fire in the old cabin and rest for the night.* (Not subject to the control from outside (2))
- 3.) Working from home consists of checking emails and entering zooms, and “wear your pajamas to work and school” return like a rerun as visions of “normal” fade. Faces blocked by avatars enter new boundaries of the home, and peeks behind the wallpapers of scenic views hide what’s behind closed doors. Exiting the chaos by my fingertips, I cannot be reached once I see the clouds move. My best friend opens her own letter to find what has me captured in a technological trance. *The rainy day gives me time to explore beyond the garden. As I enter a dark cave by ladder, I begin to clobber boulders and slice slithery slimes, collecting copper ores, wood, and clay. I listen for bat wings in the distance, the haze hides a cauldron; staying too long underground could be deadly.* (The avoidance of reality by absorption of the mind in entertainment or in an imaginative situation, activity, etc. (3))
- 4.) My after-school nutrition class started pre-pandemic moves beyond the taste test of the classroom to video group chats via Teams and changes the focus. Learning about foods as plants connects history and opens opportunity for growth, change, and contribution. The big picture seen through a slideshow of free clipart and still visions of orchards, as we click our way through a virtual hunt for exotic fruits. Garden planning tips provide hopeful hands hints to new life. *With every change of season, a new beginning, time to clear the clutter of the past and plant new seeds for the future. Becoming familiar with the townspeople I gain knowledge of my surroundings and their generosity aids my survival.* (The faculty of understanding (4))

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Father Daughter Time

Lisa Acosta-Alvarado

The Shining

I could never watch this until I was older. My sister was into mystery thrillers, and this was a book she read. She is seven years older than me, so we rarely found interest in the same things at the same time. The book's cover was an ombre of grey with a white silhouette of a man's face, I assumed it was a man because of the short black hairstyle. I tried reading the book when I got older and lost interest as the character started to lose his mind in the hotel paperwork. I enjoyed the suspenseful silence of the film and Jack Nicholson. He plays the cabin fever-induced father that ends up chasing his family with an axe, and he reminded me of my father and his fits, minus the axe, but with the same amount of warning. The wife played by Shelley Duvall matched my mother's sweetness, naiveness, and dark black hair with long bangs. Running away from my father with her was no maze in the snow but going back could feel that way. Nowadays, I crack up at the scene's manic father teasing the mother as she feebly swings the bat at him, and I wonder if my sick head is turning or is it because I have already seen the end. During a screaming match between my father and I, my mother begged me to stop saying I had "it" in me too. The "it" always stuck with me, what was "it," the crazy, the violent, or both? Blood pouring out the elevators always makes me think of my period. I decide it is both the crazy violent and the naïve sweetness that keeps me in suspense.

The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou

It took at least three attempts to completely watch the whole movie. I would fall asleep to the soft music and intellectual banter of the cast whose style mocks the late Jacques Cousteau, oceanographer, filmmaker, and author. My parents collected his series of books with photographs of the deep sea, the last glimpse of what was, or could be. The famous red beanie marks the aquatic research team, explorers who in real life filmed the ocean floor for everyone to see. The character of the familiar captain, Steve Zissou, played by Bill Murray is in a midlife crisis after the death of his partner and meets his could-be son for the first time. My father had a son in a past life, my half-brother when he was only fifteen years old. Visits from my brother had the same awkwardness. Every time Christopher would come to visit so many years would have passed that it would be like meeting someone new all over again.

In the movie, the father and son correspond once through letters, as part of the oceanic fan-based members of the Zissou Society. I found a letter from myself addressed to my brother, that based on my handwriting could tell was written when I was young. Penciled lettering, on lavender paper with glittery stickers on the envelope, fully addressed. I asked if he would come to my sister's graduation with an update on the family. Of course, he never answered because it was never sent, and he never came until years later, with three kids and a second marriage. I wondered what had stopped me from sending it. The only side of the story I hear is my dad's, the youngest of six children, at six years old his father died, and as a teen, his older brother told him nothing would happen at his age, yet Christopher came anyway. My brother then had a child at an early age, and his son eventually had a son, making my father a great-grandfather.

Christopher carries the "it" as well and while much of his life was spent separate from my father, their lives almost mirror each other in their trials. Today they bond over the phone about parenthood, being a husband and a father, something my sister and I have no say in. My dad's lessons, like my letter, are too long and too late but they are present and waiting to be unfolded, bringing to the surface a clear picture of what was or could be.

If These Walls Could Talk

My sister brought this movie home from college during a semester of Women's Studies. A generic VHS, with a yellow and black slipcover, and the title handwritten in pencil. Demi Moore, Sissy Spacek, and Cher in a triple threat layout of three unplanned pregnancies portrayed at different periods. Each story shares an avenue under the pressure of the social and political climate over a woman's choice within that period and the violence that can ensue. I learned about the wire hanger and the many women in real life that died trying to seek an abortion and the doctors at risk. Once I approached puberty no one gave me a talk, just plenty of books, including the current phone-book-size copy of *Our Bodies Ourselves*.

As a teenager, I reunited with my childhood crush and because we were at ripe make-out age that is what we did until the night turned day with a cool shade of sky blue that told me I had stayed out too long, and too late. Showing up at my house, I could see my dad pacing outside and my bedroom light shining through the window. Always a terrible liar, to this day he reminds me of the sleepwalker ghost-seeing fib I told of my dead grandma as I tried to explain my odd hour stroll. I had no courage, to be honest at the time, it was his courage, once we were eventually caught pants down, that would bring him to ask, "Is this something you want to do or is he making you?" and without "it," without fear, just my dad, calmly talking about consent. Trying to help me escape the mistake of peer pressure, recognize self-love, and the importance of the freedom to choose who and how to share that love. And then my mom put me on birth control.

An Afternoon at the Zoo

Evelyn Gallardo

The Monkeys

The classroom is like a zoo exhibit. In it sit twelve rectangular desks that have two chairs each. The exhibit is empty as it awaits for the fauna to arrive. The sticky desk tops represent some sort of art project the previous class had been working on an hour prior to arrival. Eraser shavings and paper bits cover the dirty floors. There is no distinct smell, sometimes that of the lysol wipes that were used to wipe away the stickiness of the desktops. Other times, the smell of freshly cut grass is more prominent, emphasizing the arrival of allergy season. In the corner a half circle desk is present, and colorful dots are placed at the end of the table to determine where each critter will sit during homework time. Two big white boards are placed on the wall, one right near that big circular table where the critters are assisted with their work. In the back is a counter which is always full of left-over fruits from breakfast time, particularly bright yellow bananas. In between the white boards is a smartboard, never touched, but always in use. Loud videos about nutrition, being a good citizen, and manners play on it at around 4:30pm.

The door remains open for most of the afternoon, and the sound of twenty-one rowdy eight year olds is heard throughout the hallways. The children squeak with excitement or grunt in anger, like monkeys, depending on which school meal they were provided with. Their favorite is BBQ Lays. Their least favorite being the sour milk, sour because it is served so close to the expiration date. The teacher, like a zoo keeper, is often heard yelling to calm them down as their hoots begin to get out of control. If lucky, the monkeys will be silent and then the only thing that is heard is the scribbles of the pencils hitting the paper. Much like a zoo visitor, the principal sometimes walks by and observes.

The four walls of the zoo enclosure are full of decorations. Soft stuffed animals sit in one corner, smooth posters hung on the other. The curator's desk is so full of paper, pencils, pens, and folders, and the wall behind it tells a story of a woman who fought to become an educator. Friendly smiles, giggles, and jokes are told in that room full of life.

The Parrots

Outside of the classroom sits a playground. The playground is vibrant with colors. The playground is home to the parrots. The parrots can only be seen on the playground if they have behaved well all day. It is their favorite part of after-school, it is their natural habitat.

Two big red slides sit on each end of the playground, one swoops around, like a curly fry, and the other is a straight shot down, sitting at a 45-degree angle above the ground. On this playground the parrots squawk with excitement as they play tag. The zookeeper always keeps a close eye during this to make sure that no parrot pecks another. The parrots fly up and down the playground, almost never touching the stairs. The playground is surrounded by fake, spiky grass that the parrots like to lounge on. It's rough to the touch, but makes for a great resting spot when tired. Oftentimes, the parrots can be heard bickering with one another or repeating a silly word one of them said earlier. Next to the playground are the monkeybars. Ironically, the parrots' favorite part of the playground. They swing and swing until their wings can't take it any longer. Sometimes, the sprinklers are turned on, making the smell of wet grass more prominent. The parrots don't care though; they find themselves a dry patch of green grass and get to playing soccer. From afar, all that can be seen is their spread red, blue, and white wings flapping around the field.

The Menagerie

Once playtime is over, the students get in one straight line, like penguins. The smell of tangy sweat fills the small room. The penguins are instructed to pick up trash and stack their red chairs. They croak in exhaustion or hoot their complaints away, but the zookeeper pays them no mind. She too has to collect her belongings. The zookeeper hurries around the classroom, making sure she isn't forgetting anything, and leaving everything as it was. She erases her point system off of the bright white-board and disconnects her laptop from the smartboard. She stuffs all her markers and papers into a black little cart, which she will have to haul around the hallways. While doing this she must always keep an eye out for the penguins, as they are always up to no good. The honks of the last five penguins are heard and the teacher quickly glances at what they are doing. She is met with five suspicious-looking glances.

The penguins line up, as is the routine, when they are done cleaning up. The zookeeper checks one more time, making sure she didn't forget anything, double-checking that there is no trash on the floor and that the exhibit is clean. She quickly picks up small pieces of paper. She goes through the mental check-list one more time before telling the penguins to make their way towards the cafeteria. As they walk out of the enclosure, the zookeeper turns off the lights and quickly scans the clean room one more time before closing the door.

In the cafeteria exhibit they are met with a group of all types of critters. The zookeeper tells her penguins to pick an empty table as she puts all her stuff down in the office, making sure to pack it away neatly. The zookeeper grabs a torn up game of Uno for them to play. As she walks towards the tables she fidgets with the rough edges of the small box. The sound of even more loud animals is heard ringing through her ears. She looks around the cafeteria, looking for where her penguins have gone. She looks at those long brown tables and sees wildlife of all ages and sizes. As she walks through the exhibit she passes a table full of little ants, eating away at any of the leftovers another exhibit had. As she continues walking she can hear the lions roar. The lions are the oldest at the zoo and have the most attitude. She reaches the penguins and reflects. She realizes the day was not so bad and it could have been worse. The penguins play Uno while joking and laughing. The cafeteria bursts with joy as it holds the animals that are left waiting for their parents to pick them up. One by one they go, turning back to perfect little humans as they reach the door.

The End

The clock strikes 6 PM and soon enough, it's time for her to leave. She waves goodbye to her coworkers with a smile. She walks towards that empty parking lot that she knows too well. As the sun begins to set and the spring breeze hits her hair, she sighs. The zookeeper thinks back on how she too was once a crazy monkey. She thinks about that one zookeeper who inspired her to become something greater. She hopes that one day those pesky little monkeys will think back on her too and think about how she helped them grow and learn.

As she reaches the door to her gray little Kia, the zookeeper turns back into that tired little human. She thinks about how the job helps her forget about everything else for a while as it is what she enjoys to do. Despite the students behaving like crazy monkeys or loud parrots, the job is enjoyable. The classroom may be like a zoo, but whether it's the teacher or the student, someone will surely learn something new.

Self-Portrait as a 1990's Music Mixed Tape

Gloria Hernandez

“I Can't Help Falling in Love with You” (1993)

UB40

When I was nine, I got my first radio for Christmas and that is when I fell in love with music. If you ask anyone in my family, they will tell you I have the weirdest taste in music, most of them either listen to rap music or Spanish music. Mine is all over the place from alternative, rock, R&B, pop, country, hip hop, and so on. I remember watching MTV at my neighbor's house and that was the first time I fell in love with Aerosmith and Janet Jackson. One thing for certain: music has always been a part of me. Songs are memories of your past. If you are going through something in your life there is a song for that; whether it is a celebration or a breakup song, music has always been there for me.

“Disarm” (1994)

Smashing Pumpkins

I was 11 years old when my world came crashing down. We were moving to a new town and new school without a warning. My parents were getting a divorce and never sat down to talk to me and my sisters. The move was dramatic for me, I had no friends at the new school. I spent most of my nights crying, asking God why this happened to me. I was a good kid and never got into trouble. That was a hard time for me, and I lost faith in God and took many years to pray and go back to church. I went from having the best childhood to a struggling child. As the oldest, I felt I had a great responsibility taking care of my two younger sisters. I would scavenge for change in the couch and car and even ask for money out by the corner enough to make five dollars. That was enough to get a giant burrito, a big bag of chips, and a 3-liter soda, yes, I said 3 liters. That was our dinner that day: a burrito split three ways. I also protected my sisters and me from abuse from our mother. One day I had enough and pinned her to the wall and told her if she laid one more hand on us, I would report her to child protective services. Like the lyrics from Smashing Pumpkins, “I was a little boy so big in my shoes”. In this case, as a girl I had to grow up quickly and become independent.

“One Sweet Day” (1995)

Mariah Carey, Boyz II Men

It was May 14th and I was 14 years old and decided to stay home “sick” and not go to school that day. I watched MTV, my favorite pastime as a teen. Then suddenly, I heard a box fall from inside the cabinet and then heard the cabinet door closed. That scared me and gave me goosebumps. I was home alone. Then a few minutes later my mom came home from lunch which she rarely did. She had me turn on the news and there it was my half-brother who I was close to, was killed. Today would have been his birthday November 26th, he had the biggest crush on Mariah Carey, “One Sweet Day” in the song that reminds me of him the most.

“Black Hole” (1994)

Sound Garden

In the middle of my freshman year in high school, we moved again to a new town and new school without a warning. I am not quite sure why my mom never told us we were moving. A year later, my sophomore year second semester, I dropped out of high school. I refused to go back, and no one was making me go back. A few months later, I did enroll in independent studies. I would go once a

week to turn in all my assignments and pick up more homework. I was not a bad teen, I just suffered from anxiety and panic attacks. At the time I did not know what was wrong with me. I ended up leaving school again due to depression and not caring anymore. It took many years for me to go to Bakersfield Adult School and get my high school diploma. Eventually, I signed up for college when I realized my marriage was ending. It did five years later, and I am glad I went with my gut instinct, to go back to school.

“Thank U” (1998)

Alanis Morissette

I remember being excited the moment I found out I was pregnant with my first child. At the time my younger sisters already had their first babies, and I felt a little left out. My pregnancy could have been sad since I did all of it alone: doctor appointments, getting the nursery ready, and buying all the equipment the baby will need. I was married at the time of my pregnancy, but often I felt like a single mother. However, I was so in love with this tiny little human growing inside of me. From the day she was born, I felt an instant connection between us. My second pregnancy was once again lonely, but I was still excited, I was giving my six-year-old daughter a little brother. We found out our daughter had signs of autism at age two. By the time she was seven, I decided to go back to school for her. It was hard, especially with her speech delay. I knew what she wanted, but others in the family had a difficult time communicating with her. I took a few classes on disabilities, and knowing how child development works helped me learn more about her. This came in handy when we found out my son also had signs of autism at age two. My children are my biggest motivation to go back to school and stay in school no matter how long it might have taken me. I am forever grateful for my two children.

“I Can’t Make You Love Me” (1991)

Bonnie Raitt

There was a point when I finally realized that after 13 years of trying, I could never make him love me. It was time to let go and let him be happy with someone else. There came a time when I had enough. I had to think of what was best for me and our children. Even after two years apart, I cannot help but think what it would have been like if he would have remained faithful to me. I know it was for the best as much as it hurt. Part of me wanted to make it work. I did not want a divorce like my parents. I wanted our little family to stay together. I learned to not make the same mistakes my mom did with us. I did talk to my children about the divorce, and they knew within a year we would move out. I stayed close to their schools and made them my number one priority. I can honestly say they are doing very well.

“The Cup of Life” (1998)

Ricky Martin

In May of 1998, of course I was not in school; my dad took me to Ensenada, Baja California to work for two weeks in the roses. He worked as a supervisor in the roses and the company bought a little land there to grow roses. After two weeks we were done, and I asked my dad if it was okay if I stayed behind with my grandparents and he was okay with that. I was there for two months; I got a job there to provide for myself. It was the best time of my life. I had fun because both my aunts were closer to my age. There were parties every weekend; we went to the beach and downtown and played games with the family such as volleyball, lotteria, and conquian card game with my grandpa. That was the first time I ever watched or heard of the World Cup. It was hosted in France, and we watched

almost every game we could; we even skipped work for a few hours once when Mexico played. Since then, the World Cup has been part of me. I do not watch any other soccer games or tournaments other than the World Cup.

“Creep” (1993)

Radiohead

My early 20s was mostly a haze; I was responsible enough to have the same job for five years, but, on the weekends or nights my coworker and I would spend most of the time bar hopping or drinking at someone else's home. It got to the point where we would sometimes drink during lunch and come back a little buzzed. I am an introvert, and at the time I was also going through depression, and the only way I could get through it was by drinking. On three different occasions, I had completely blacked out and have no idea what happened, I was lucky enough to be around friends and family when it happened. I eventually stopped drinking when I met the father of my children. I knew he was the man I was going to marry and one day have children with. Also, I never wanted my children to see me drink alcohol or get drunk. I did not touch alcohol for over ten years, now I only drink on special occasions.

“Road Trippin’” (1999)

Red Hot Chili Peppers

“Road trippin’ with my two favorite allies, fully loaded we got snacks and supplies, it’s time to leave this town, it’s time to steal away.” As long as I can remember I have been going on road trips. My father would take us as children to places I wish I could back to and take my children. However, when I asked my dad about these places, his dementia was bad and he could not remember where they were. I asked my mom, but she could not tell me either. I love taking my children on road trips from museums, missions, zoos, and amusement parks to anything Huell Howser has recommended on his show, *California’s Gold*. This spring break I got a book about Arizona places to visit and there it was, one of the places my father took us to. It was the meteor crater in Winslow, Arizona. I planned half of the trip and the other half I told my children we would stop by if we saw anything interesting. So, we rented a car, packed up, and drove away. It was special to see the meteor crater in person, it took me back to a time when things were simple. It was windy, but my son and I made it to the top to view the crater; I stood there for a while taking it all in. I hope one day my children will appreciate all the trips we have taken.

“Man! I Feel Like a Woman!” (1997)

Shania Twain

I can’t help but to feel empowered when I hear this song on the radio. I am a busy single mom raising two children 14 and 8 with autism. I work full-time, go to school, and work on my homework. I also go to a church group on Fridays and Sundays. However, I make sure that occasionally I go out and have fun whether it is with my children, family, friends, or alone. I make sure I have fun and take care of myself. That is what feeling like a woman is all about. My new journey in life has just begun. I am looking forward to accomplishing my new goals. Despite my adversities in life, I have overcome so much. Also, I have peace for once in my life because now it is my turn to decide what is best for me.

Self Portrait as a “list of songs”

Joshua Knoeb

“Jesus, Take the Wheel” by Carrie Underwood

The summer before my senior year of high school was the summer that set me up for the rest of my life. I had taken my SAT and ACT, I had scored very well. I was ready to apply to colleges and had a very good chance of getting into several great schools. My family was happy, my brother was happy, I was happy. I would be the first person in my family to attend college but my life was changed three days before the start of my senior year. My mom went to work and I stayed home with my ten-year-old brother. He had the stomach flu so I made sure he was okay and rested throughout the day.

Later that afternoon we found out it was not the flu. He stopped breathing. He was rushed to the ER downtown while I found myself praying. I was not a religious person. I’m still not. I was praying for the same thing that Carrie Underwood was praying for in her song. I was praying to have Jesus handle the situation in one of the most dangerous and scary times in my life. My brother spent the next week in the pediatrics intensive care unit where he nearly died more than two times. He came home as a type 1 diabetic one week after being diagnosed.

“Young Dumb & Broke” by Khalid

After my brother’s diagnosis and the traumatizing experience of having to call 911 for my baby brother who wasn’t breathing, I was doing what I thought everyone did after a traumatizing experience: sabotaging my own life. I quit focusing on school, started doing drugs, and nearly joined a gang. I didn’t have a job yet but when I did get one, I used that money for as many stupid things as I could find. I was being “young dumb and broke”. This continued through most of my senior year until I had a wake-up call that I wasn’t going to graduate and had to spend several weeks doing independent work to catch up and graduate with the rest of my peers. I crossed the stage.

“You Should Be Here” by Cole Swindell

Right before graduation, I received some terrible news. My grandfather had terminal lung cancer at fifty-nine years old. He watched me cross the stage and passed one week later. One of the biggest accomplishments in my life became shrouded in death. To this day, I cannot think about walking across my high school stage without remembering and picturing him lying in his hospital bed. Every major accomplishment after I would think of the same song and say to myself, “You should be here.” He was a major aspect of my life and taught me many of the things I know today. He did not go to college, nor even graduate eighth grade but he was still one of the smartest men I’ve ever known.

“Love Story” by Taylor Swift

The song discusses a love story between a man and a woman and how they fell in love and continue to be in love. I found love once, she was an amazing and smart woman. I thought we would be married one day. But not all love is happily ever after. Romeo and Juliet did not stay together in this version of the old tale. Romeo turned to drinking following the death of a close loved one and swore he would stop. Juliet couldn’t handle the dark path he had been going down and after nearly four years they broke it off. Romeo hasn’t forgiven himself; Juliet hasn’t moved on.

“Brave” by Sara Bareilles

I doubted myself. I gave up on college. I gave up on myself. I accepted working at Taco Bell for the rest of my life. My mother sat me down and told me there was a song that made her think of me every time she heard it. She said, “I want you to be brave, you will do great things if only you commit to it.” I didn’t believe her; to be fair I still don’t but despite all of that I registered for classes at Bakersfield College for a degree in Political Science. I attended my first few classes and realized I could do it and do it well. I was ready to go back to school.

“Hall of Fame” by The Script

I finished my first semester at Bakersfield College. I was the representative for the pre-law club and I found out I was graduating next semester. I was proud, I was living on the highest high I had ever felt. My great-grandmother was my biggest supporter. We talked about the approaching graduation every week before it came. I was honored by the Pre-Law program and received several cords to wear at graduation. I felt like I could accomplish anything and then the day of graduation came.

“Five More Minutes” by Scotty McCreery

Graduation day was yet another graduation day. Just like the last when I graduated from high school and my grandfather was in the hospital, my great-grandmother was in the hospital. I shut down. All the memories and pain came like they had never left. I had a bottle in my backseat and contemplated drinking the whole thing a mere four hours before graduation. Thinking of her, I put the bottle back and walked across the stage with my head held high. She suffered from a stroke a week later. She passed away a week after the stroke. I said my goodbyes but it wasn’t enough. I wanted five more minutes. I wanted another conversation that I had canceled the day before the stroke. This time the bottle did not get put back.

Self-Portrait: A Stroll Down Movie Lane

Cesar Parra

The Fast and the Furious (2001)

I still feel the sun hitting my 5-year-old face while eating crinkle-cut french fries with ranch and an extra large Dr. Pepper from Casa Burger (a local burger spot in Arvin, CA). A film that captures the Los Angeles, CA street racing culture in the 2000's. The story involves an undercover cop assigned to a case where people in street racing cars pull heists on semi-trucks, stealing DVD players and VCRs. I know what you're thinking: how was a movie made out of this plot?

In this film, various racing cars were showcased and raced repetitively. The cars that were selected to debut in the film, received an unnecessary increase in price value. As I grew older, I understood where the obsession with loud exhaust pipes and shiny rims came from.

Toy Story 2 (1999)

Growing up, my mother always insisted on the house being squeaky clean... specifically my room. Both my parents were very good at taking care of their belongings and keeping them clean. It eventually started rubbing onto me at a very early age.

I remember watching *Toy Story 2* with my younger brother.

There was a scene where Woody's new owner pays to get him refurbished... THE BEST SCENE IN CINEMATIC HISTORY!

I can still remember the satisfaction I received when Woody's eyes were glossed with Q-tips and the word "ANDY" brushed off the bottom of his boot with brown paint. ASMR before its time.

Spider-Man 3 (2007)

Every kid goes through their superhero phase.

But not like me.

Spider-Man toys, blankets, posters, icecreams, DVDs, etc. I had all of it! I used to go as far as finishing an ice popsicle and taping my green Power Ranger toy to the popsicle stick and say that was the Green Goblin.

I'm sure it was a great time for my parents since they used to convince me that he was real, and if I ever wanted to meet him I had to behave.

I had seen every Spider-Man movie by the time *Spider-Man 3* was in theaters.

I can still remember a 30-year-old man being confused in the theater when the symbiote was taking over Peter Parker's body. Of course, I had already seen all of the cartoons and knew what was happening. I gently tapped him and whispered, "He's going to become the black-suited Spider-Man, that suit makes him bad."

The guy took my word for it.

I was 7 years old.

Back to the Future (1985)

My youngest brother and I are 9 years apart. Yes, you guessed it... we had NOTHING in common! I still remember that Sunday, he and I were being couch potatoes dabbling into random conversations. My brother, 8 years old then, was always into video games and sci-fi. Eventually, the topic of time travel surfaced and he asked if I knew of any time travel movies that we could watch. I think to myself, "Looper, Project Almanac, Men in Black 3, Back to the... holy crap!" I immediately asked if he'd ever seen *Back to the Future*. "Isn't that movie OLD?" he asks. I chuckled and put it on

anyway.

From that day forward, my little brother and I had something to bond over. You can never go wrong with a classic.

2 Fast 2 Furious (2003)

As a kid, you always feel a sense of uniqueness.

Growing up, I always felt that I had a different mannerism compared to my cousins and the few friends I had made at the time.

I remember wanting to watch 2 Fast 2 Furious because I LOVED the first one. My dad and I would go to the local movie rental store almost every Friday, which is where I let him know that I wanted to watch it.

My father rented the movie.

The film took place in Miami, Florida. While watching the film, my father asked, "Did you know that you were born there?"

I paused.

All I remember seeing on the screen were beautiful palm trees, beaches, girls in bikinis, and one BADASS Nissan Skyline.

"I was born THERE!?" I asked. My father responded, "Not far from there, you were born about 2 hours from there, in Naples, Florida."

From that day forward, I built a connection with the movie because I could relate in a way nobody else could.

I'm a Floridian living in California.

Friday (1995)

Middle school was a weird time.

There were multiple groups with various identities. Nonetheless, we were all maturing at our own pace.

One thing I found interesting at that time was the different content everyone was suddenly into.

I would always hear lines that sounded like they were recited from a movie: "DAYUMM" "Bye Felicia!" "Break yo self fool!"

I never knew what these lines were nor did I know where they came from. Eventually, I was recommended the movie Friday a little while after hearing "It Was a Good Day" by Ice Cube. My vocabulary has never been the same.

The Fault in Our Stars (2014)

When my girlfriend and I started dating, I was always a little on edge about things. I wouldn't describe myself as an asshole, but it did take a little while for me to warm to someone/things. My girlfriend, on the other hand, was always outgoing and could yap for days. We somehow still formed a great bond.

There comes a point in a relationship where you begin to share your likings with your partner. We shared music and food combos. I tried a few.

Add American cheese to a McChicken... life-changing.

I will say though, that I was never into rom-coms, nor did I call them rom-coms, nor did I know they existed. Surely enough, she recommended the movie that softened me up. A movie has never made me shed tears... until that day.

Forrest Gump (1994)

My uncle and I were very close when I was growing up. Being only 6 years apart will do that. He could've been a cousin at that point.

Being my role model, he showed me a lot of things that I never knew I would be into. He is to blame for my hip-hop phase, skateboarding phase, video game phase, reality tv shows phase, etc. Comedy movies were never on the radar.

Netflix added *Forrest Gump* for the first time.

My 12-year-old self had never seen anything like this before in his life. You would think somebody forgot to turn off the coffee pot due to how hard I was laughing. I was a serious kid growing up. Being the oldest of 3 boys came with a lot of responsibilities. *Forrest Gump* gave me a sense of humor.

Transporter 2 (2005)

Growing up my family was close. My father and I were closer.

Our bond formed with movies. Specifically action movies.

I remember the late night on a weekend, we were watching this movie to which I never understood the plot to until I was 21.

I'm currently 22.

This movie shows this classy guy in a tuxedo beating up bad guys, jumping off of buildings shooting two pistols AT THE SAME TIME. It was AMAZING!

I could still remember my jaw dropping at his car when he didn't turn the key to start the ignition.

He put a passcode on a touchscreen infotainment system. I mean, it was 2005! Do you know how crazy that was at the time?

I've wanted an Audi ever since.

The Flash (series): Season 1-3 (2014)

It was 2016 when I started watching this show. Also the year my mother lost her battle to cancer.

As the oldest brother of 3, I felt this huge responsibility for helping my father lead my siblings on the right path.

I was only 15.

This show is about a man who lost his mother when he was a young boy. He spends the rest of his life working to become a forensic scientist and solve his mother's murder that his father was framed for.

He lived with rules and always did the right thing to honor his mother. At the time, I found myself in a similar situation.

I wanted to be the best version of myself to honor my mother. I also didn't want to be a bad example for my siblings.

Here I am, a 22-year-old in college, still trying to set a good example.

I'm just glad they're doing good.

What Feeling Am I Left with by Novelas?

Karla Ramirez

Un refugio para el amor (2012)

The Macy's where I shop has these eerie-looking devices called escalators. Every time I ride an escalator, I can't help but think of the scene from the novela *Un refugio para el amor* where Julie falls down an escalator. When I was little, my mother and I watched this novela. I always thought that the best parts of my childhood were when my mother would sit in the living room, and I would join her. This brief period appeared to tighten the bond between my mother and me.

I decided to rewatch the entire novela a year ago, and when I saw that scene again, I realized that my brain had formed a false memory because it was nothing like the scene I remembered. In the scene she was wearing loose pants which became stuck causing her to fall down the escalator and break her leg. She ultimately lost both of her legs due to the severe breaks in her leg. However, I still clearly remember that she was wearing a skirt that got stuck in the escalator, and it devoured her leg, resulting in the loss of the leg. Even though I now know it didn't happen that way, I still get anxious every time I ride an escalator, even if the scene didn't appear as horrible as I remembered.

I felt like I was scarred by that scene since I felt afraid of escalators. I could still ride them, but I can't be doing anything else as I ride them. The escalator is like a Ferris wheel in that we get farther away from the ground with each movement. The silence while riding the elevator is so intense that I can hear my own heart attempting to burst through my chest. As soon as I reach the top of the escalator, my heart rate starts to rise. I always have to jump when the escalator's end gets closer because I think it's going to devour me like in the scene. Even though it seems ridiculous now, I still get scared every time.

Mi corazón es tuyo (2014)

I seem to recall seeing a scene when they take a shower, which perfectly captures the experience of showering in Mexico. In Mexico, showering involves filling a large bucket with water, taking a little bucket, filling it up, and then dumping it on you. Thinking back on the novela, I remember pondering the peculiar sensation it must evoke. I spent 13 years away from Zorcuca, the Mexican village where I used to live before returning there last December. As the water went down during my first shower, I couldn't help but compare it to the novela, realizing that in that very moment, I was reenacting the scenes I had once found intriguing. This realization infused a tingling feeling of happiness, a nostalgic and surreal connection between fiction and reality that added an extra layer of joy to the simple act of showering. I never seem to be ready for the water when it first starts to stream towards me. It feels like an ice cube sliding down my back as the water runs down my body.

Mariana de la noche (2003)

My mother was sitting on the sofa watching the novela *Mariana de la Noche* as I was getting ready to leave for school. I was at the house door, getting ready to leave when the novela's theme began to play. The days that I didn't have school I was able to watch it. I've only been able to watch three episodes, but I fell in love with this novela right away. I became even more captivated with the story once my mother gave me the full description.

When the song finished, Mariana wandered around her room in the casino she worked at, feeling anxious. The man who raised her, whom she thinks is her father, is observing her from the room next to her. For the entire time she has been living at the casino, she has been unaware that he is staying in the room next to her. This was extremely disturbing to me.

My mother yelled at me, “Karla, vete ya. Vas a llegar tarde” (Karla, leave already. You’re going to be late). I begged her to give me five more minutes. As I left the house, my mom’s firm “no” sent a quick surge of jealousy through me, like the tide sweeping people’s footprints away. I was taken aback by the intensity of the weird feeling. I had never felt jealousy like this before; it was a whole new level of intensity. Whenever I am feeling envious, I tend to quickly compare the intensity of my jealousy to this experience, seeing it as a standard for how intense my envy is. I still recall asking myself, “How come I have to go to school, and she gets to enjoy watching novelas?”

Porque el amor manda (2012)

Out of the living room, I hear my 4-year-old brother yelling, “Ma, corre que ya está,” (Mom, run, it’s on). Every weekday at 8 p.m., my mother, brother, and I have been viewing this novela together without missing an episode. The novela’s opening song was playing when I ran laughing to the living room as I saw my mom and brother dancing. As soon as the man with the long, curly, pointing boots entered the frame, we couldn’t resist; laughter bubbled up as we mimicked the dance moves. When the song concluded, we all tumbled onto the couch, a profound and overwhelming happiness enveloping every inch of our bodies as we settled in to watch the novela. The intro’s song doesn’t just invite; it demands you to rise and start dancing. As the melody echoes, staying seated becomes an impossibility; it’s as if a cascade of ants is coursing through your body, compelling you to stand and move.

Gotita de amor (1998)

I still recall my excitement when a brand-new episode that I hadn’t seen yet began to air. My father entered through the front entrance and turned off the television while I was seated on the sofa watching it. I got upset and quickly turned the television back on as my father was making his way into the kitchen, where my mother was.

“Te dije que no quería que la nina viera novelas,” my father told my mother (I told you that I didn’t want her watching novela). “Esta novela es para niños,” I yell from the living room (This novela is for kids). My mother laughed but agreed, allowing me to keep watching my novela. However, going forward, I had to watch other novelas behind my father’s back. Being forced to do this filled me with profound sadness; I felt like an anvil had been placed on my heart since I could never connect with my father the way I do with my mother when it comes to novelas.

My father thought novelas were ridiculous, believing that they create false expectations and that the dramatic plots shown in novelas don’t happen in real life. His emotions were misplaced since he hadn’t even let them demonstrate how much enjoyment they might bring. They provide you with an escape from reality, and even make you realize how insignificant your worries might be.

The Not So Stressful Questionnaire

Miguel Ramirez

As a college student who gets a ton of schoolwork, do the number of assignments you must complete feel like ants climbing over you? When a professor assigns you work does it feel like a ton of bricks has been thrown at you? When you stress about schoolwork do you feel like you cannot finish an assignment because you feel the pressure of stress mounting on the back of your head that feels like someone is squeezing your head like a balloon and your head is about to explode? When you take this questionnaire check every box that describes you, feel free to check more than one box in each section, no need to worry if more than one description fits you. Take this exam and do not stress about if you are right or wrong, just be honest with yourself, relax and take the test.

When you are assigned schoolwork from you professor do you?

- 1) Feel like there is long stack of papers on a desk that is never ending!
- 2) Feel like your professor just slapped you with a stack of papers and then said, “get the work done!”

When you stress about schoolwork, what object/animal best describes you?

- 1) A raging bull charging a red flag.
- 2) A train releasing steam.
- 3) A gorilla pounding its chest out of anger.

What environment best describes you stressing about schoolwork?

- 1) Weeds growing from the ground even though you cut them, but they keep on appearing.
- 2) Being trapped in a house trying to whack a hundred flies with only one swatter, hitting one at a time but another appears buzzing right by your ear!

What video game best describes your schoolwork?

- 1) Playing a game of “Whac-a-mole” with each assignment that you complete another one appears, one after the other!
- 2) Playing as Pac-man being chased by ghost, with each ghost chasing you representing an assignment reminding you that it needs to be completed and needs to be turned in.

When you are working on your schoolwork does it feel like?

- 1) A 1000-pound barbell on your chest that you struggle to lift up.
- 2) Carrying 100 pounds of books on your back while competing in a sprint contest.

Once you finish schoolwork, what does the relief feel like?

- 1) A ton of weights that have been lifted off of your chest.
- 2) You were finally able to escape from a mountain quicksand.
- 3) The gates of heaven have been opened. “Freedom”!
- 4) You have been given a lifejacket because you were drowning in water.

Was the test stressful or was it calming? There is no need to stress and worry about your answers: relax, calm down, take a deep breath. Use the stress that you have built up to finish your schoolwork and to do it correctly. At times you might feel like ripping your hair out when you get stressed about schoolwork, just remember to use that stress, and turn it into “flow” to get your schoolwork done. The more you stress about your schoolwork the more effort you will put into your schoolwork, since you would want it to be perfect, which could result in you getting a good grade. Students are not the only ones who pressure themselves to perform at their best. Star athletes are pressured to perform at their best in order to carry the team. Doctors pressure themselves to perform at their best in order to save lives. Lawyers pressure themselves to perform at their best in order for justice to be served. If you stress about your schoolwork this shows that you care about your academic performance and that you want it to be the best that it can be. Stressing lets you know that you don’t want to turn in work that is mediocre. You want your work to represent the best of you.



Chauncy by Eleanor Bubash

Painting of Resilience

Ana Reyes

Life for me is like an art gallery, a chaotic abstract gallery. Around are canvases displaying pieces that capture different struggles and persistence with each brushstroke and color scheme.

Lines of Challenges

The canvas is marked by pencil lead that embodies the challenges I face. Each line or shape drawn sets off a testament to resilience, turning difficulties into purposeful marks on the canvas of my journey. At times, I tend to put too much pressure on the pencil and whenever I try to erase, the pencil mark stays there. The faded marks become a representation of the consequences I face when I hit a bump on the road, and the decision is up to me whether I choose to resolve it or walk away. For instance, I struggle with clinical depression with suicidal ideation. There have been times when I am stuck with deciding on whether to just give up and end my life or accept getting help to improve myself.

These different shapes become a road based on the decisions that I make in life. For example, there is one for school and traveling. Some pieces do not get finished due to how busy traffic gets. Sometimes, I end up losing motivation due to not being behind the wheel mentally.

Palette of Determination

A minimal palette of colors blends and creates a resistance that speaks of quiet strength and balanced resolutions. Just like the pencil marks, when I lose confidence or do not feel good enough for anything, it feels like the colors around me become desaturated. There are times when I stay in that black-and-white mindset for a very long time. Then, I slowly start realizing that I have a support system that pushes me to keep going. Their words of encouragement or even a simple hug slowly bring back the colors my mentality pushed away, and from there, I stay determined to remain strong and positive.

Layers of Experience

Each painting holds layers of growth, depicted through simple overlays. Each layer represents a phase of development and the evolving nature of resilience with clear symbolism.

Layers in a painting are essential to me because they reflect my view on my growth as an individual and how far my achievements have come. I am currently twenty-seven years old, have a great job, and am trying to finish school and become an inspirational art teacher. I am a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community and have an amazing, supportive, loving partner. See what I did there? It is a consistent layer! However, some layers take longer to appear and that is okay. Those are just some parts of my life that are not yet complete.

Brush of Self Growth

A single brush or even multiple brushes characterize the ongoing journey of self-growth. It is the reflective impact of understanding oneself amid life's challenges, contributing to the resilience portrayed in the painting.

Whenever I paint, I use multiple brushes for different purposes. Let me guide you on a couple that I use.

Round brush is usually my go-to because it does most of the work. It is great to fill in areas where you made an error, and a small amount of paint can go a long way.

A detail brush, a small brush that has a protector to prevent the brush from losing its form, is superb for doing those small details that no one else would notice except for you.

Flat brushes are great for making lines and for blending, especially when you want to make a gradient sky, so satisfying! They hold a lot of paint as well.

Sorry, got too much into the brushes.

After I finish a piece and wash my brushes, I notice how much of their original form has been rearranged due to the paint and techniques used in the painting. There are even times when I would not even wash my brushes, and the paint on them eventually dries up causing the brush to be unusable. It makes me reflect on how much I have matured and grown throughout these years. Sure, life for me right now is still starting, but I will keep going despite how I am doing mentally.

The Nervous Test

Tamarra Scott

Do you find yourself being easily nervous? Are you nervous at the thought of people looking your way? Do you constantly wonder if it's just a "you thing", and so you take those expensive nervous quizzes online? Try our nervous test for free. Answer the questions below truthfully and then score yourself.

How often do you find yourself tapping your foot when you're in a social situation:

- A. Always, I'm a professional tap dancer.
- B. Frequently, like a solo drummer attempting to turn the social situation into a music beat.
- C. Occasionally, two-stepping to the rhythm of the conversation with rhythm of the conversation.
- D. Never, I'm a statue, standing there embracing the fact that I'm the main attraction at my own museum.

When meeting a new person do you:

- A. Crawl into a shell like a little hermit crab, finding comfort in its own home.
- B. Awkwardly chime in like a clumsy solo dancer trying to find its rhythm in the conversation.
- C. Channel the spirit of an undercover detective eager to unravel the mysteries of new information.
- D. Embrace the role of a supermodel ready for the perfect cue to take the spotlight.

When expecting an important phone call do you:

- A. Hold your breath with hopes that you'll suffocate yourself and die before the call comes in.
- B. Pace around the room in circles practicing what you're going to say like an actor rehearsing their lines.
- C. Embrace the incoming call like a long-lost relative being found, ready to finally catch up on lost times.
- D. Confidently take the call like a money-hungry salesperson and quickly conquer the conversation.

When shopping in a store do you:

- A. Walk with your head down, worried that some random person might walk up to you wanting to engage in a random conversation.
- B. Quickly pace through the store like you're running in a marathon race to get what you need and check out before anyone notices you.
- C. Walk through the store and casually smile at everyone that makes eye contact with you.
- D. Take the runway like a super famous model making sure you're seen by everyone with eyes to see.

Your score:

Never mind your score. Your nerves will get the best of you if you constantly worry about them.

I remember a time that I had to present in a class full of my peers. As the day neared my emotions filled like a cup full of anxiety. Nervousness, like butterflies fluttering through the garden where my untamed emotions flourish like flowers in a garden. With each day passing as each wing flapped carrying the weight of the air as anticipation and insecurities crept upon me the closer, I get to the flower. It was as if the fields of my thoughts, worries and insecurities had been invaded by butterflies.

As the day came, I wondered, “Why can’t I curl up into a ball and go back to being a caterpillar?” As a caterpillar I am shy and mellow. Why can’t I escape my sorrow and go back into my cocoon? Nervousness creeps like a shadow over my shoulder. One day I shall learn to conquer you and to speak with a tone that shudders my foes. Like a butterfly over the horizon, I’ll rise above all and transform into the beautiful being that personifies me.

So, if you find yourself being nervous just know it’s not just a “you thing”, many people suffer with being nervous, shy, and having crippling social anxiety. The next time that you’re freaking out in a social situation, praying for the ability of invisibility, running through a store trying not to be seen, or nervously reciting your lines for an interview, remember to stand up tall with your head up high and conquer your insecurities. Know that you can do it. Though we are all on a journey to succeed in our lives, the journey looks different for everyone, so accept who you are. You’re not alone. You are unique. You can defeat nervousness.



“wings of venom” by keyera tagger

