THE CAULDRON

2018-2019
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The Divine Crow Awards are given each year to three exceptional pieces in *The Cauldron*. A writer from the extended Kalamazoo community judges the pieces blindly.

This year’s judge is Anne Cecelia Holmes, a Kalamazoo alumna currently living and working in Chicago.

The recipients of this year’s Divine Crow Awards are “Self Portrait in Botanical Garden” by Emiliana Renuart, “Hot Pot Days” by Maya Wanner, and “Countdown” by Uyen Pham.

The Stephanie Vibbert Award is given to one work which exemplifies the intersection between creative writing and community engagement. This award honors Stephanie Vibbert, a senior English & psychology double major who died in a car accident returning from a peace march in Washington D.C. in 2003. Stephanie’s life was passionately devoted to both creativity and to community service. This award was created to encourage Kalamazoo College writers to use their creativity to reflect upon and explore issues of poverty, human rights, sexual orientation, race, class, gender, and cultural diversity.

The recipient of this year’s Stephanie Vibbert Award is “Home/ jib/♀” by Kayla Park.
Preface

Initially, Robert Davis and I had thought of having this year’s magazine revolve around bodies. However, when reviewing submissions, I noticed there was a pattern: this was more of the body’s relationships rather than an isolated body. Thus *The Cauldron* is divided into three sections each dealing with kinship, survival, and agitation.

The first section, “BEYOND THE BLOOD,” focuses on kinship. The pieces in this section are an attempt to interpret, historicize, and document the authors’ bodies through the relationships they share with others. “BEYOND THE BLOOD” is about the family photos, memories, and stories necessitating writing to ensure their futurity. The title for this section is a reference to the relationships that transcend the blood, whether that be chosen kin or blood kin that is not defined solely by confinements of biology. It documents who we choose to remember and love. How beautiful it is to know we have the ability to form complex relationships we chose?

The second section, “STILL LIFE AND STILL ALIVE,” showcases multiple submissions that discuss survival in image heavy and/or metaphorical ways. This section highlights the importance of details to retell a story or memory through the means of imagery. How would we remember without images?

The third section, “PUTTING THE BODY” came to fruition as the closing section in this year’s magazine when I noticed something: the pieces belonging to this section challenged the separation of the body’s experiences and emotions from the political. Often, pieces like these are thought of as solely experiential; however, in doing so, there is an erasure of various identities and experiences carried. Thus, the title for this section is an Argentinian political expression used to highlight the importance of using the body as a tool for resistance. *Poner el cuerpo,* this section contextualizes the bodies that are often erased through the centering of their desires, transitions, generational struggles, marginalization, etc. This section is not meant to be hopeless, instead it agitates, clutches, and most importantly, is a celebration that leaves the door open for you.

I am honored to have worked on this year’s magazine, and I can not wait for you all to read!

*Yuridia Luciana Gutiérrez-Garcia*
My mom helps me slip my wings on before I go outside to play with the neighbors. We pantomime wizardry with twigs and the fallen tree in our backyard as the world's magic envelops our lean bodies. My wings' gossamer membrane catches the sunlight and refracts kaleidoscopic lace onto the trimmed grass.

Ava skins her knee and goes home crying; her brother follows, tail between his legs. But my sister still wants to play dragons, so we push fistfuls of pebbles together to make our hoard, never mind that I just learned in school dragons live alone.

When we tire of sorting rocks we play-fight until the sky purples. I make my sister be both the knight and the princess, and she takes turns rescuing herself while I roar at her, pitching my voice as deep as I can. Mom calls us in for dinner and we race each other up the hill, beating our wings for lift, careening through the door at the same time.

My sister shrugs off her wings and kicks her shoes off at the door, but I take longer, folding mine carefully and smoothing off the dirt before hanging them on the wall. I stare for a moment at the swirling colors, a leaping in my throat, before the smell of the food hits my nose and I run in.
Bonfire Blue
Madeline Lauver

Riddles tacked to the walls, I hear doors
daring _unlock me with your metal key._
knowing wood to be stronger than flesh.

They laugh,
Oh, the power to burn,
to stretch and contract with age,
to know the slow fight
for upward growth and light.
To smell beautiful in death.

I will stay stuck in this sealed cell until I choose to chop down the door.
That, or I can take the place of firewood, wild eyes melting out of sockets and locks.

Hot Pot Days
Maya Wanner

Back in our Hot Pot days, I was still an only child. My mother would crave her comfort food sporadically but consistently, but somehow I always remember it on Friday nights. After a long school week she would come home, barely unbuttoning her black wool coat and say, “Why don’t we go to Hot Pot tonight?”

“We can get you something on the way there again,” my mother would say with a smile. She’d help me put on my snow boots while my father went outside to warm up the car.

It was already dark outside as I looked at the lights from the buildings on the car ride there. We’d never go into the lights; our destination lay on its outskirts. But first we’d pull into the florescent lights of a Wendy’s. From my car seat I’d watch my father order my dinner.

“Hi, could I get a kid’s four-piece meal please?” He’d pull up to a window where a person inside the bright lights would hand him my dinner in a white paper bag. He’d hand it to my mother, and she’d place it in her lap as we moved onward.

We’d park the car in a dark lot across the street. The yellow sign lit up the dark street as my parents took hold of each of my hands to cross. The sign had two kinds of writing. The letters I was learning at preschool spelled out “Seoul Hot Pot” in blue.

The warm rush of air when we opened the door was a welcoming embrace from the biting cold temperatures outside. Sandy was always there to greet us. She reminded me of my aunt with her narrow face, long black hair, and dewy skin.

The restaurant was narrow and small, but the light was warm and soft. The restaurant was filled with five or six tables, the kinds that always seem to be uneven and wobble a little once you sit down. There was a cooler in the corner with canned sodas and sweet, candy-colored Korean drinks. Perched on top sat a T.V., blaring Korean soaps. Sandy would immediately pull out her notepad. My mother always knew what she wanted. She ordered in words I didn’t understand, but recognized after so many visits.

Sitting between my parents, I’d wait for the food to arrive, eyeing the white bag beside my mother where my dinner waited for me. Its grease seeped through the thin cardboard containers and bled onto the white bag in splotches.

The air was filled with foreign, yet recognizable aromas. It was the smell of my mom’s warning at home, “I’m about to open the kimchi jar!” It was a rotten smell, pungent and sour, and I’d crinkle my nose until I got used to the aroma wafting, unwelcome in the air around me. The restaurant had that same cabbage air, but mixed with scents of sprouts, hot bean paste, and fish.

The food arrived in bowls and plates of every shape and size, enough to cover our little wobbly table. One of the plates cradled a large yellow
pancake with hints of green peeking out from its sides, cut like a pizza. Small plastic bowls held green, yellow, red, purple foods. Larger, shallower ones had beef with thin strings of vegetables still sizzling in a pool of sauce, rice cakes red and speckled from the hot chili paste, and noodles with streaks of orange and green covered in sesame seeds. But the silver bowls always held rice. My mother would tell us about putting her own metal rice bowl on top of the radiator at school when she was little, so that when lunch time arrived, the rice at the bottom would be brown and crispy.

My mother opened the white bag next to her and placed the yellow cardboard containers with my fries and chicken nuggets on my empty plastic plate.

"Too little for this food, yes?" Sandy would say
"You know, she'll grow into it," my mother responded, stroking the top of my head while I devoured my french fries mindlessly. I watched my parents eat the red, foul-smelling cabbage I recognized from home with slices of tender beef over rice. My mother ate more of the food from the small dishes than my father.

My four measly chicken nuggets and fries dwindled down to nothing, and I'd sit satisfied and wait for my parents to finish their dinner.

"Do you think she'd like it?" my father asked.
"She might; it's mild," my mother said, cutting off the side of the last pancake slice sitting lonely on the yellow plate. "Here, honey try this. It's good."

I looked at the mushy yellowy-green sliver of food she held in front of me. It drooped between the chopsticks, bits of green and orange protruding from it.

"It's good, you might like it," she urged. I reached for the mush, reluctantly placing it between my lips and chewed. I raised my eyebrows in delightful surprise. The mush was warm and soft. It was different than a french fry, but evoked a familiar, comforting taste.

"You like it?" she asked excitedly smiling. I nodded, smiling back at her. She cut off another piece.

"Pa jun," she said.

"Pa jun," I said.

Yea I know Detroit.
The crazy old man
With the beer belly circling from Campus Martius.
And the Renaissance Building always
Reaching to the sky like
The Black power fists.

He always got some story about
The celebs he use to baby sit during the
Motown Record days.
Or the pet lion he had that use to
Roar so loud.
And don't get him started on how he can
Build a car at the snap of a finger.

You know he aint the brightest of the bunch.
Every school he attended literally started to cave in.
He had to call in some tutor named Charter.
Always got his hand out to his older brother Lansing.
And after filing bankruptcy,
He been renting out his backyard to some
Hippie named gentrification.

But his wife Coney Island
Sure can cook.
And his Hart is so beautiful
You kinda gloss over
The burn marks all over his skin.
Just a reminder of why he got Detroit vs Everybody tatted in the 1st place.

Yea I knew Detroit.
But he hasn't been the same
Since he turned in his Cadillac for the Q-Line
And started rockin Nike instead of Carhart.
Heard he goes by Détroit now.
Mother Tongue
Yasi Shaker

Mom, you have never stopped teaching me words
Maybe I guess you remind me of them nowadays
Language is such a unique thing
Always changing.
But what if my knowledge of it is changing too?
Mom, I tell myself it’s not my fault
I have been talking in English all day for three years
Mom, I haven’t been home in so long
Where is my home anyways?
My home is lost
My identity is lost
Isn’t that weird?
I have been here only for three years
I keep losing my language
I keep losing my communication to our elders
I am becoming foreign to a place that gave me my culture, my identity
The language is a broken thing
I am frustrated with myself
I am scared of forgetting
And the ironic part is language and tongue are the same word in Persian
Persian, Farsi, Iranian, whatever, My mother tongue

Call Your Mother Once A Week
Addissyn House

The sun runs away, making my shadow long. The leaves crunch under my feet, turning greenyellowbrownorangeredbrown~ead. But they are not dead yet and the snow is not here yet and I can still hear my mom’s voice from two thousand miles away. Now the leaves are rustling red diamond rain shakers rattling against the wind. And the brick street makes the cars seem close. I ask my mom to repeat herself. She says the beach will be waiting when I get back and the sunshine too. The sun is still out, for a few more hours, creating a silhouette. My mother’s voice is the morning sun and the lower it sinks into the buildings, haunting the fall leaves and turning the weather cold, the less time I know I have with her. Soon the line clicks dead and the moon rises above me, the leaves sound like ghosts above my head.

whirring, twirling ghosts
whispering I love you, then
night rising again.
After dinner they turn us loose in the field. Recreation. Twenty minutes. That was when I found it by the fence—sage growing.

"Two of our girls ran away... but they got caught.

I snatched an eager handful, the greygreen leaves felt familiar to me—I tied them into a bundle using a long piece of grass and hung it out of sight

They tied their legs up, tied their hands behind their backs, put them in the middle of the hallway...

behind my bed frame I knew that
I would never burn it. That night when the cold seeped in and I couldn't sleep I tried to remember its name in my language.

...so that if they fell, fell asleep or something, the matron would hear them

Come morning they called me to the matron’s office on her desk my sage and a paddle. Ten times for 'uncivilized behavior' ten more for 'speaking Indian'.

and she'd get out there and whip them and make them stand up again."

I bent over the desk for my civility lesson—through the clean office window and the wet heat in my eyes I saw the boy who sleeps a bunk below me go out to the fence with a scythe.
Papi's brown
Yuridia Luciana Gutiérrez-Garcia

knows love
as a soft bite to his callus.

Papi's brown stings him
like pencas de nopal.

Papi's brown is peanuts, avocados,
and garbanzos.

A slight orange and purple sunset
only in his memory.

Papi's brown is white.
That part hurts us.
It leaves a velvet residue
that tastes like abandonment.

Papi's brown traces a line
colored like café de olla con leche
from my sternum
to my navel.

Papi's brown divides
but doesn't conquer.
It bites the borderline,
kisses the corner of my shoulder,
and stains my heart.
when I flip the switch, through what little
banded sunlight presses itself into the room. It is lazy
and reminds me of the ash that fell from the sky outside
the library when the spring air was supposed to be turning over
for the first time; though this was not the library of my childhood
where I spent afternoons in the basement
filled with books and flyers for Mother's Day
lavender massage classes. The dust falls
and so is gone. I run my hands along the furniture my father
built until I tear my palms with splinters. A dead moth
and its wing-eyes stare up at me from the windowsill
and for a moment, just one, I begin to cry for it, its plainness
made ugly and bare at my window -- how reverence comes only
in its dying. If Diane were here, she might scold me for the beauty

I am trying to ordain over this moth, but Diane has never
been to this room so I afford myself this small luxury. I move
to thumb the lead outline of the stained glass angel, beer bottle
green with children's book moon yellow wings, which flies over
my late: buried and not. The angel hangs heavy with every
time my mom has signed the cross and wished me home safe
and I remind myself again that there is no use in cataloging
the remains, no time left to mourn dead bugs.

This is your room. This, the window. This is how you open it. But that doesn't
matter, it is always too cold to open. This is the fire alarm. Don't freak out.
People don't know how to make popcorn. These are snowflakes. When you
watch them from inside, you want to feel them. When you are out feeling them,
you want to come inside and just watch. These are your friends now. These, their
shoes, overturned. Don't straighten them. They like it that way. This is your
mailbox. Check it when your friends do. Your parents will not send you
anything.

This is your class. Tell them you are from Nepal. Add "I don't know if you have
heard about it though." That makes it less awkward. If you get a nod back, that's
fake. If they ask you if there's wifi, don't stare. If they ask you if it's India, take a
deep breath and let go. It is tough, but that's how it is.

This is the cafeteria, where you get food. Always carry a novel when you come
here. The fancier the name, the less tasty the food. This is the table, where you
sit while eating. Here, you have conversations. When they talk about "Asians"
don't look up. They only mean Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese and Koreans.
When they talk about grass, don't say you love it. English is not that simple.
Sometimes, the whole talk is about different sizes of penises. That's what the
novel is for. They'll ask you how Nepal is like. Tell them it can only be described
in Nepali. Trust me, I have tried in English and failed. When they get surprised
by your good English. Don't smile. Don't say Thank you. Nepalese can have
good English. They'll ask you about your love life. Tell them there are no dates
in Nepal, only marriages. Nobody will bother to dig deeper.

This is Friday night. Your friends want you to party with them. Don't tell them
you love to dance but not when everyone's touching you. Don't tell them you
love conversations but not the ones they won't remember the next day. Don't try
to explain what your comfort is like. Trust me, I have tried and failed. Don't tell
them it's never happening. Tell them, next time. Tell them you have four long
years. And then three. And then two. It might be harder on the last one. We'll
see then.

This is home. Daal Bhaat still tastes the same but your little sister has started
to color perfectly inside the lines. I know Aama taught you to spell it c-o-l-o-u-r.
Don't try to find out when it became color. You have changed and so has home.
Don't overthink. It's okay if some English comes naturally. You are not showing
off. You run out of some Nepali words. Don't get emotional. I know, they don't
have a Nepali major otherwise you'd do that too. But you don't need a major to
keep up with your roots. You need time. Take some time. Take some more time.
Talk to me. Who else will understand it better? I will teach you to switch back
and until it gets stable and it will. Trust me, I have tried and succeeded.
My Flower
Yung Seo Lee

Grandmother
Yung Seo Lee

Apples. Big and red. She uses a blunt knife the size of my forearm to cut them into pieces, servings too generous to be eaten easily. Pears. Weighty Korean pears the color of yellowed autumn leaves. Feel like them too, tough and bumpy. She cuts deep into them and refills the plate of apples. Something hisses from the kitchen. Steam pours from the rice cooker. Pots bubble away on the stove, and she ladles them into bowls while I take out side dishes from the refrigerator — pickled eggs and radish, stir-fried greens, three different kinds of kimchi ranging from pale to fiery scarlet. She fries pollack in a little pan full of oil, tiny hot spots splashing onto her wrists. In the freezer there is a rich tub of vanilla ice cream, next to it a bag of individually wrapped caramels. They are sweet, sugary, shot through with peanuts. They stick to her teeth as they do to mine. In the cabinet there are butter cookies, not as sweet but with a smell twice as fragrant.

I visit her in the nursing home. I walk through the corridors, so narrow and bloodless. She is thin and wispy as she embraces me in her room, slips a rolled-up bill into my palm as she whispers. *Buy yourself something nice to eat.*
All hands on deck

Maren Prophit

Life, recently, as 17 seconds in a movie

Evelyn Wagner

Cut to a sink, sunken in three places,
water screaming out of the faucet into the wide basin.

No turning on, just

screaming
out
and I'm staring at the stream, running into the basin and
down the pipes because the stopper is missing a piece.

Cut to a panic attack in the shower.

Water, always with
water.
Nothing beautiful: snot and nose-blowing into the drain and
makeup over a wet red nose before leaving the bathroom

that we might lose in
editing.

Cut. To a rainy walk down the street cut
to a strong drink

water.
Finally: a walk by the river

it?
and a chance encounter

How are you? Is everything okay?
Maybe it's you or maybe it's an acquaintance

or maybe it's you and I just don't

know it yet.
Of course, things aren't okay,
but they will be, now.

I never make it to the chance encounter

You lost me back at the panic

attack
(I did run a makeup brush over my blotchy nose and, no,

help)

I just stare at that basin and sink
into the stream while it screams, lightly, as it crashes
against the broken stopper.

There is no river –

–

but its shallow and heavy
with pollutants that make it crawl
along its path and even flow


Life, recently, as 17 seconds in a movie continued
Evelyn Wagner

backwards in some places, right at the edges where
the banks and obstructions and fishing lines slow it down.

No movement, I’m

saying
so I’m stuck in those seconds;
ever make it past the montage. Instead:

I stare again and
people are getting uncomfortable

I panic, for the fifth time, and
people are walking

out.

People want their money back and their time
and I don’t blame them because I want my time back

more than I want to be asked if I’m okay,

I want an ending.

(I want an end to this

poem)

I want a lot, but you
are nowhere to be found.

Not on the riverbank, Not in the rain, Not in the

steam and

panic.

Certainly not
down at the bottom of the sink

that’s broken, where I keep looking.

Keep the Kids Busy
Audrey Honig

Horrible Haman
wooden clacker and
the ultimate hamentashen

recipe roundup.

“Just say no to Jewish lies!”

With this pretend Passover dish
for toddlers,

No better time to

keep the kids busy.

“Reject Jewish poison.”

Use your mini torah scrolls
to make napkin rings,
cake decorations or

anything else you can think of.

Decorate if desired.

“Hitler was not wrong.”

So let’s get crafting,

Painting the stories that
The stones witnessed.

I can’t say enough about
The magic of watercolors

Screaming “All Jews Must Die.”

There is something about
Taking little strips of paper
and rolling them that is

Pure enjoyment,

So give it a try yourself!

“Jews will not replace us!”

Today, we liken ourselves to angels
and feathers are certainly

A great symbol for that, right?
Home / jib / 집
Kayla Park

I imagine what words I will use to tell my friends my harabogi is dying in a way that they will understand. Will I say "grandpa first, or end stage lung failure? Will osteoporosis make more sense than romanization? Ten years of friendship inked onto my skin and this is what I have to explain.

I'm going to be here in this homespace imagining my parents eating galbi and kimchi jigae and watching the houses of my childhood morph across my memory, wood-paneled walls and furniture becoming a jungle gym after my sisters and I finish eating Korean melons with those tiny blue and gold forks that halmoni kept in a jar. At seventy-seven she still has not needed to dye her hair; that thick black wave is an inheritance.

I blow-dry in the mirror every morning. What if I google how to be a pillar of strength in a family that hasn't yet conquered death in such close quarters? Oh wikihow, tell me what flowers to use in a tattoo design honoring a generational disconnect wide enough that I don't even know what colors I should wear at his funeral.
Papi Butterfly
by Yuridia Luciana Gutiérrez-Garcia

I looked for pictures of you
in your childhood house
in the depths of Mexico.

I found nothing, it was as though you were born
an adult. Tell me what does childhood mean?

The most I collected
from your nonexistent childhood
was a faint memory mailed to abuela labeled

Abuela says that is the first photo she received,
also the first documented photo of you.
A letter, simply saying you were alive in U.S.

Your hair sticks out in this photo.
Seventeen-year-old silver fox,
with ringlet hair,
thin to the core,
and a sass-filled hand on your hips.
I look at it and think,

“This is such grindr material.”
I imagine what your profile would say.
Something like:
“Efrain. 18.
Mexican Papi Chulo,
Butterfly in the making.
These gray hairs mean experience
[insert winky face emoji].”

I’ve never looked up what happens to caterpillars
if they do not become butterflies.
Do they go thru life as caterpillars, or die?
Which one are you?

It’s difficult to know
when you were never a child.
I understand.

How would you have the chance
when you were always
the man of the house.
STILL LIFE
AND
STILL ALIVE
Grin and bite the rotten fruit
let sour peach drip
down your chin
up point your eyes
as the canopy drops
summer's flesh to the
ground again

the incoming cold will break
violin strings
the floorboards and bones
of your house will creak
gaze at yourself
in the mirror now child
before that supple skin
melts from your cheek.
Above Water
Zoe Jurgensen

Water.
5 hrs of sleep,
Above water—
1.5 hrs from home.
Head above water.
4 friends, 2 away, 2 home.
Keep my head above water.
72 residents, 30 events, just me.
Need to keep my head above water.
3 classes, 8 hours a week, 10 weeks.
I just need to keep my head above water.
spoons are curved that is to say spoons are designed for scooping that is to say i could scoop out your eyes with a spoon because spoons are curved that is to say your eyes are curved like spoons that is to say your eyes could become my eyes that is to say we could both see the same that is to say eyes are used to see which is to say they go well with salt that is to say one spoonful of salt is hard to see that is to say i see salt and you see salt that is to say we waved passing in the street that is to say you saw me that is to say i didn't spoon out your eyes that is to say you're welcome.

Bulb
Lily Lauver

I found an old bulb sitting atop the frozen earth, dug up by a squirrel, its body picked at with abandon. And still kicking, so I brought it into the library for examination. Cold and heavy as ice, melted sticky juices when I set it down on a spare desk. The bulb was without wrapping: alien and pale, someone had stripped it for a nibble to see if it tasted poisonous or safe, and left it, bleeding, without reburial. Without clothes. And now on a desk, suffocating. Probably I will bring it home and put it in an old jar with water. Probably I will wipe up the juice with my sleeve. Probably I will not leave it here. Not to be thrown in the trash where it will not know better than to attempt to grow.
Veiled Impressions,
Oil on Canvas
Hannah Scholten

Porcelain walls and installations a capsule
hidden in the heart of the city.
And I wander through the halls of history
too far back I can’t count. I observe.

A plethora of doors, a collection of rooms.

Illuminated
by numbers
projected as light on the walls calculating computations
moving across the bodies in the room
swarming
and
spiraling
until they burst

into 1 0 0 0 pieces.

Each photograph was framed
in the same box
but if you look closely,
the people aren’t the same.
To the left,
a young boy
to the right,
an aged man
all in a moment
hanging on a wall before my eyes.

Intermission.

It takes a dark turn.
Chills up your arm.
The Willis.
Everything’s in a hazy fog
beautiful
layered in white tutus
of virginal brides
as they dance the men to death.
Chassé Coupé Chassé Assemblé
again

and again
until the curtain drops

And reopens
in Fair Verona
as we watch tragedies upon tragedies
and from the wings
I saw your eyes absorbing history.
But they’re only actors
who leave this life
when the lights
go down.

I looked into the reflection
of a gold plated mirror
suspended from the wall.
People watching people watching themselves
amongst a room filled with art.
My mom says my left arm looked normal until I was four. Apparently, I woke up one day and thought I had a purple raisin glued to my elbow. She tried to yank it off with tweezers but couldn't, so we went to the doctor's office. He told us that yanking it off on our own was a bad idea, and that we should let him deal with it instead.

I don't remember that day, but do remember my raisin being just that before it started to blow up. First it turned into a prune, then a strawberry, then an apple. Finally, it looked and felt like a big, red, squishy lemon. I asked Ms. Humboldt at school if lemons could grow red in nature and she said she didn't know.

For the past few years, I've had to visit the doctor's office every month. My classmates think that sounds horrible whenever I talk about it, but usually all that would happen was I'd sit in an empty white waiting room with my mom for an hour then follow her and the doctor into a smaller room with hot pink walls and a big comfy couch. The doctor would give me a lollipop and talk grown-up words like "ba-nine" and "hee-man-jeo-o-ma" with my mom, while I played with his truck collection in the corner until it was time to leave.

After last month's visit, my mom told me about some state law that'd allow the doctor to legally chop my lemon off when I turn ten, meaning that I wouldn't have to go see him anymore. I think I tried to smile after she told me that. I wasn't really sure how to respond.

I've spent a lot of time wondering why the lemon on my arm wasn't always a lemon. The other day, I asked Ms. Humboldt after class if it was possible for raisins to grow up to be prunes and for prunes to grow up to be strawberries and for strawberries to grow up to be big red lemons. She stared at me and my arm for a few seconds, breathed in deep, and said that a scientist would probably say no but also that scientists are usually wrong so it's entirely possible. I asked her if this meant I was a plant and she said no, you're not, don't worry. I went to the library after school, though, and looked up if humans could grow lemons on their arms and the website said no, only plants can so I think she's wrong like all the scientists are.

I also looked up if there were any plants that could sprout raisins that blow up into lemons as big and red as the one on my elbow, but I couldn't find any answers online that said exactly that. I think this means I'm a plant science hasn't discovered yet. I'm not sure how I feel about that.

Today, my birthday. I'm nine now. For the past few weeks, my mom's been asking me what kind of presents I'd like, and I've been telling her that I don't really want anything in particular and that I'll just accept whatever she decides to get me. She'd tell me that I'm being absurd and that all kids should want something for their birthday and I'd always respond with a no I honestly don't want anything and she'd shrug, bop me on the nose, and call me a weirdo.

Sometimes, I'll overhear the other kids in class complain how their parents only got them socks or sniff-it markers or a new air conditioner for their last birthday. I'll usually get something a little heftier like a nice new Sunday shirt or Xbox game every year, but I've never thought of myself as one to complain if my mom were to get me anything less than that. Besides, I like the feel of new socks.

My day at school was fairly typical. In the morning, I left the presents my mom wrapped for me unopened on her kitchen table and biked to school and walked into Ms. Humboldt's room and plopped down onto her railroad-printed rug ready to hear about the multiplication table for the number twelve or chapter eight of whatever book I kept forgetting I needed to read. Like always, Ricky Johnson sat behind me and whispered hey, elbow-bitch into my ear and squeezed my lemon so hard my whole arm hurt. Everyone around me laughed, and some kids said things like ew, gross, I forgot about that and scooted away from me as if my big red lemon was actually just a slimy red slug, in camouflage.

I wonder if Ricky Johnson does this to all plants. I wonder if he walks home from school and passes by the park a block away and eyes that beaming garden of sunflowers right by the swingset and smiles like a crazy man and takes his grimy fingers and starts poking and prodding at the flowers until they're all muddy and wilted. I wonder if his mom ever worries about him.

When Ms. Humboldt got up and started drawing what she called mammal cells on the board, I glanced around the classroom to see if anyone else had no idea what was going on. I looked to my left and saw Danny Sison sitting on a beanbag chair up front and biting at the leather like it was a dog toy. I couldn't stop thinking about how every time we do arts and crafts he always takes a big paintbrush and dips it in the paste jar and licks off the paste and then does that over and over until Ms. Humboldt tells him to stop, which he'll do but only if she lets him eat the construction paper instead.

I saw him staring at the paste jar in the crafts bin by Mrs. Humboldt's desk and had to look away so I didn't throw up my breakfast. I wonder why Ricky Johnson never says anything to him. Maybe he only picks on plants.

I swung my head towards the back of the room and saw Mary Noble sitting on the floor behind everyone else with her finger stuck up her nose and her bottom lip curled up right below it like she knew in advance that she'd end up crying five times before school let out. Whenever Mary cries, Ms. Humboldt always tells us to wait a second, and we'll all have to sit with our lips zipped shut as she goes up to Mary and comforts her and tells her that it'll be okay, everything will be okay, please stop crying it's all okay and today when she did that I looked across the room at Ricky Johnson expecting him to point at her and laugh and maybe call her a crybaby but he never did.

Ms. Humboldt spent so much time trying to get Mary Noble to stop crying that we had to forfeit our recess time so she could finish teaching us
about cells. I hoped my classmates all remembered how my lemon never wasted their time like that.

In gym class, we played dodgeball. Coach Finch let Harry Tankus and Dill Delgado pick the teams since they're the biggest kids in class, and everyone else had to line up on the other side of the basketball court and pray they wouldn't get picked last. I hid at the end of the line as far away from Coach Finch as I could but when I got picked he stood up, cleared his throat, pointed at my arm, and said to me wait, sorry, I forgot about you, I'll need you to sit this game out.

Coach Finch does this every class. I think that today was the closest I've ever come to walking across the gym towards whichever team yelled my name out, but I guess Coach Finch's eyes are just too big for me to sneak around. It always seems like he's holding his tongue a bit, like there's something more he wants to tell me but for some reason can't. Maybe he's worried that someone strong could fling a ball at my big red lemon and squeeze it dry and then someone else would slip in the resulting puddle of juice and get hurt. If that's what it is, then I wonder why he's never told me that.

For the rest of class, all I could do was sit on the sidelines and cheer half-heartedly as Harry Tankus or Dill Delgado pelted Ricky Johnson or Danny Sison in the face while wondering if my lemon was indeed a slug in disguise like all my classmates seemed to think it was and trying not to cry like Mary Noble would. I hate that dodgeball isn't a sport for plants. I should have worn long sleeves to class. Maybe then Coach Finch wouldn't have picked on me.

When I got home today, I saw a bouquet of neatly wrapped presents spread out over my mom's kitchen table. I didn't start unwrapping them just yet, since I knew that opening them would feel more special if I waited for her to get home too. I fiddled around with a television remote for about half an hour, and right as I thought that looking up the plot of the book we're supposed to read for class online so I could actually follow what Ms. Humboldt's saying when she teaches it might be a better use of my time, my mom walked in with a big uh-oh look on her face.

She told me that I left my bike unlocked outside leaning on the steps to our front porch. She said that it must have been the birthday luck of the draw that no one walked up and stole it. I hung my head low and said sorry. I began walking outside to go lock it up but she said she had already done it for me.

Her eyes seemed to sparkle up a bit when she said this. I think she decided to go easy on me because, "it was my birthday". I went to open some presents but she told me I should wait to do so until after we ate dinner. I was okay with that.

I like being able to eat. The other day, I remember Ms. Humboldt telling us about something called "photo-sin-fasis" that plants do when they need to eat. She said that because of photo-sin-fasis they don't need solid food at all to survive, so now whenever I feel the chewed-up shreds of whatever my mom cooks for me tumbling down my esophagus into my stomach, I feel so much like a human being that I'll forget for a moment how I'm supposed to be a plant. I haven't found anything I can compare to that feeling yet.

To clear the way for my birthday feast, me and my mom brushed all the presents to one side of the table. She made me breakfast for dinner. She let me pour out half of the syrup bottle onto my chocolate chip pancakes because it was my birthday. She even said I could lick the whole plate clean. I asked her if I could do that every day for all the dishes but she laughed, shook her head, and asked me why I'd be okay with eating plate germs all the time. I think she didn't want me to get sick and have to visit the doctor's office more than I already have to.

Afterwards, it was time to open my presents. I know my mom likes to reuse her wrapping paper so I carefully peeled off the tape, unpacked everything, and stacked the paper on the side of the table like Ms. Humboldt stacks the book reports we're supposed to do every week.

I was okay with the first few presents I opened. I got a baseball cap that I think was a souvenir from some mountain my mom took me to on spring break last month, a new pair of headphones, and a box of Sugar Babies so hefty that I knew the only way she could have gotten them for me was if she drove to the warehouse two towns down, knocked on the front door, and asked the workers inside for the biggest candy box they could build.

There was one box about three times as big as all the others, so I opened it last. My mom seemed really antsy while I peeled off the wrapping paper and found a tupperware container full of a few clay pots, a big bag of dirt, and some small packets of what she said were flower seeds.

I stared at it all for a few seconds and then looked up. My mom told me with a big grin that she had talked to Ms. Humboldt at parent-teacher conferences last week and was told that I had taken to asking a lot of questions after school about plants, so she figured she'd get me the supplies I'd need to start growing some of my own in my bedroom.

I asked her if I could be alone for a while while I set everything up. She walked upstairs.

She seemed so content with herself I wanted to throw up.

I hate that I was born a plant. I hate that I'm going to get trashed for being a plant for the rest of my life. The last thing I want is for more plant friends to sit on my windowsill and creep their way into my eyes so they're the first thing I see every morning and force me to water them so they don't die and I won't want to do that so I'll let them die and then I'll feel guilty and my mom will think I didn't like the present she got me.

One lemon is enough. I'll never be enough. I want to be an animal, the
kind that can play dodgeball and only goes to the doctor once a year and doesn't get called an elbow-bitch by Ricky Johnson no matter how much paste or snot I eat.

After my mom walked upstairs, I waited a bit, stood up, grabbed the sharpest knife in the block on the side of the kitchen counter, and hacked my big red lemon off.

Now, I'm bound to a bed in a hospital across the street from the doctor's office I visit every month. There's supposed to be a big black scab where my big red lemon used to be, but I can't see for myself because the doctors put a bunch of cast paper and tape over it.

It's dark in here. I wish I could hop out of bed and roll up the blinds and let some more light in before the sun goes down, but I'm hooked up to a weird whirring box with tubes and wires and flashing numbers and charts all over it and I know that if I try to leave my bed and it tips over something bad will happen. I'd ask the doctors to roll them up for me, but I'm scared of them.

I've only seen my mom once since I chopped my lemon off. About an hour ago, she stumbled in with her mouth curled up like a bulldog and tears in her eyes that looked frantic, like they had no idea they were going to be there and only had split seconds to make themselves look presentable once she conjured them up. She stared at me for a bit, walked up to my bed, and pressed her hands onto my right shoulder. They felt clammy. I think she wanted to say something, but her tears were so heavy that they wouldn't let her. She left the room, after the doctors said her presence was distracting them.

I wanted to tell her not to cry. I wanted to tell her that everything will be okay because I'm pretty sure I'm not a plant anymore. I wanted her to know that she had nothing to worry about because I can be as disgusting as Danny Sison or Mary Noble now and no one will lift a finger at me. I didn't want the doctors to hear me, though.

A few minutes ago, I heard her voice in the hall right next to the wall right next to my bed. I think she was talking to someone on the phone. She kept mentioning that I might have to visit the doctor even more frequently from now on. She talked a lot about how she was worried about money. I thought that was a bit weird, since it's not like money is a person or anything.

She also talked about how what I assume was my big red lemon was going to grow back even bigger if the doctors didn't "am-pyu-tait" my arm. I'd be all for that if it means that nothing grows back there and I won't be a plant, but I'll have to ask Ms. Humboldt what that word means when I'm well enough to go back to class.

I hope this means I'll never be a plant again.

I hope my mom knows I'm happy now.
Like Dead Skin
Emma Fergusson

It's the hacksaw in my mitten,
digging in where is doesn't belong.
I tried to find a place for it
somewhere among the stars.
The glittering bits of blade which
drop and sever the dreams
of unsuspecting boys in
church suits.

I wish I could
take back the time spent
winding rose stems around my fingers
like they could protect me.
Spend it on wool mittens instead.

Before dusk
the chapel is frozen over with
creeping vines that knit themselves together
and imprison salvation within.

But don't forget about the basement
with its vats of acrylic paint, the color of
eyelids.
The people anoint their hands,
dip and coat them three times
to hide
the truth of their fingerprints.

You can burn anything to cover the traces
but you can't watch the
innocence
flake off
like dead skin.

i am the bluebird
Kayla Park

i am the bluebird, or i am trying to be. i write you
letters in the contrails of dew from my bonny wings
and stock five piles of seeds for the winter. i perch
on your shoulder singing wordless songs, ignorant
to how they are received. i have learned to subsist
on rayon leaf and scrap paper, to harvest
energy from artificial lights. i want to teach you
survival like this too, throw you to the ink-splattered
wolves to discover the compassion that evolution
demands. i will be your guide if you only ask. let me fly
us under the red glare of aldebaran, our escort, until
we're close enough to alight on his curved horns.
countdown
Uyen Pham

1. He thinks, in pauses, if Khanh is a book he's reading, and wonders if the story had already ended when its climax began.

2. Beginning was when they first met in Giang cafe and ordered the same tea. Khanh laughed at everyone's joke including his no matter how lame it was. Khanh smiled into spaces. Traces of Khanh printed his warm hands and dry throat. Later, when Khanh let him kiss her for the fourth time, he would find out that she always orders the first thing on every menu because her hands start sweating if a waiter is staring at her. No one cracks jokes at the dining table Khanh and her parents sit around every night anymore. When Khanh smiles into spaces, she sees her brother.

3. This must be what Khanh's parents feel like raising her brother and then her: roaming their hands inside a box of Mentos to pick and bite into a pill. In third grade, Khanh wrote in a yellow origami paper how she wished her brother would catch the bird flu and die. Half of her wish came true.

4. Khanh loves playing two truths and one lie. Alright, Minh, here goes, she says to him. I killed my brother. I have AuPD. And I love you.

5. Would you still love a family member if they were not your family and just a person you know? Khanh asks him when she stops laughing. See, the thing is, she says, when it comes to family, everything you have has to be enough.

6. Enough anxiety could result in short-term memory loss, said Khanh's psychiatrist. As the house was burning down, they found her sleeping in the third floor bathroom where the fire had not yet touched, having just enough air to make it out alive. Right above the kitchen, her brother's room became black ruins. The siblings were arguing again the night before when cooking ramen and Khanh could not remember who was supposed to turn off the gas. When her mother pushed her against the gate of their house, her spine pressed against cold steel, Khanh realized she did not remember her brother's last words.

7. Her brother comes back to her so often it feels like last words do not need to exist.

8. Existing is what Minh does, just merely survives, his head above the water while his body is drowning in her universe. He loses count of how many glasses Khanh throws away no matter what kind of smoothie he makes. Minh does not stop grinding her meds. Sometimes it works. Some other times, she talks to her brother.

9. Spoken words define the present, momentary but naked and nonfictional. If Minh finds bits of himself in the lyrics Khanh wrote, they are either in the past or future tense.

10. In the future, the bathroom door will still be closed. Minh will tell himself to stop counting how many nights before it has closed in front of him. I can fit in a small space, he will say again. You can open it just a little. I love you is what she will not say.

11. Khanh said this once, when they first met, that she loved how he majored in political science because he's so good with metaphors. Now Minh is running out of them.

12. Running is what everyone tells him to do when they hear who he's dating. Running is what he does when Khanh does not pick up her phone, when he sees his closet lacking all her clothes and some of his t-shirts.

13. From the closet, a speaker plays a record repeatedly, the sound of ukulele raw and bright. Her breathing in pauses soaks up all his oxygen.

14. Minh does not know what page he is in. Darkness swallows the light from his lamp.
Look at us, with pointed fingers!
I sent the rent check for the bulldozed house,
the lot's been flat ironed, roller rink bowled over.
We have to make more room in our stomachs.
Mine's the one covered in orange plastic.
I wake up holdin' my own hand.

*I'm lookin' for a quick fix.*

Let go of my ankles! I can't wade,
this pond is bogged down with peat.
I can only pivot left so far before you're out of reach.
Give that here, put that so, fix your knees.
I'm sleepin' with my arms above my head
Just so you can tug me goosey.
No thanks, I don't need any more lumps.
Holy father, comfort me.

*I'm lookin' for a quick fix.*

I'm twice baked and full of glean.
Your veil stopped coverin' us both long ago.
Let's play castaway in the suburban vegetable patch!
Who used the last of the napkins?
You say you heard scrapin' at the bottom of my spine,
it's a symptom and a side effect.

*I'm lookin' for a quick fix*
Even the choice to swim to shore is loaded.

Madeline Lauver

Even the choice to swim to shore is loaded.
As I tire in the tides, ragged breath begs
to betray brain. I pump legs
through heavy flow, hope further eroded
with every stroke pushed back out. I've been in the water
this whole time, content to float and soak, skin gray
and waterlogged, surely. Does trouble weigh
light against my eyes? I cry at the thought of daughter
now, I swallow and add to the lake. I'm waiting
for my skin to slake down. My arms pause,
legs too, and my head sinks first, jaw
scrapes against sand floor. My shell creating

a bone home, a heart-shaped bowl, a dear
dear shape for sea slugs to feed.

January

Rebecca Chan

I awake to morning,
melting into white satin.
Dawn paints the ceiling
gentle rose.
I find myself
conscious yet unaware,
recalling night's escapades
yet vulnerably immobile.
The moment writhes, shrieks,
recoils. Perpetually fading,
it surrenders and allows
the next to take its place.
Syncopated clocks chime
duality.

I arise and recognize
a resurrection.

I awake to mourning,
melting into black satin.
Dusk paints the ceiling
gentle mauve.
The moment finds itself
conscious yet unaware,
recalling day's escapades
yet vulnerably immobile.
I writhe, shriek,
recoil. Perpetually fading,
I surrender and allow
the next to take my
place. Syncopated
clocks chime
duality. I

arise and recognize
a resurrection.
And what if the squirrels, collecting acorns careful so that they might remember in their muscles where they’re buried, what if they feel, too, that new warmth of dying leaves—sea of yellows amplified and transparent in the sunlight like frosted windows—if they feel in their love muscle a deep leap of I want to bathe in you, Leaves. Like the leap from thin branch, swaying in squirrel step, to another that sweeps groundward the way the weight of the squirrel in down-coming begs the branch, fractaled from trunk to twig-flimsy, give out nearly until its bounce back, da-dum, what if the squirrel, swimming its work through the yellow, feels in its muscles of that beauty.
Mercy of the Human Animal
Sophia Hill

Another 4am march to the kitchen
drowsy groping for a glass
to drink from I see
a carpenter ant he has been
crushed
but not by me and certainly
not to death writhing
in the blue light that spills
from my window
I nearly spilled my glass
at the sight of him
wretched thing I ought
to end his suffering but
then again
time will soon expire him for me
and I feel I shouldn't meddle

A new light shines in the kitchen
stumbling this time for coffee I see
the carpenter ant
unmoved
and at the same time
moving in wretched spasms as before
I could have given him stillness
how could I?

Cell Block Solar System
Emiley Hepfner

The sun has nothing
On the three fluorescent light bulbs
That sway just out of arm's reach.
Day in day out
They swing back and forth
You could go mad watching them.

The comforting vastness of space
Has been replaced
By the cracked cement walls
You know every corner of the building
You've counted every brick,
And named every room:

Mercury has the newest steel door.
Venus, there was a woman across the hall once.
You never saw her again.
Earth, this is where you spend most of your time.
Mars, there is still rusty blood on the wall
From when you convinced yourself,

In a battle between cement blocks
And human fingers,
You could win.

Jupiter, the biggest of the rooms,
More of a yard than anything else.
Barbed wire swirls at the top of the wall,
Like the infamous storm, the Red Spot.

A lifetime ago in Saturn
They held boxing matches,
Taking bets as though these were not people
Bleeding and bruised
But cows being lead to slaughter.
Uranus, where the floor is uneven,
Cracked, and cold.
Your fingers turn blue just thinking of it.
Neptune will drive you mad,
The ceiling leaks in sporadic drips
Water puddles in the corner and slushes.
It is no warmer here.

Pluto you hope you never return to
There is nothing there
Beyond four walls
Packed so tightly together,
You had to curl into a fetal position just to lay down.

And still the lightbulbs sway.
Day in, day out.
The fifth grade teachers ushered their students into a single classroom one by one, instructing the children to sit in groups with other students from their class. The room was relatively small. The walls were lined with mini tables and chairs, the perfect size for 10 year olds. The center of the room had been cleared so that all the children could sit on the floor facing a large blackboard which covered two thirds of the wall. Giant foam puzzle pieces connected with one another to create a carpet on the floor. A hush fell over the crowd of approximately 25 kids as Mrs. Marple, the oldest educator ever, took center stage. In shaky letters large enough to fill half of the board Mrs. Marple wrote 'THE MIND VOICE'. Mrs. Marple's bingo wings flapped violently like a bird trying to take flight beneath the sleeves of her flower pattern dress. The dress itself was definitely too tight for someone whose age crumbled at the same rate as dinosaur bones. The children whispered excitedly to one another until Mrs. Marple turned back around and began to speak.

"Can anybody tell me what a Mind Voice is?"

The snooty kid from Miss Frank's class raised his hand and stood to answer. "My tutor says that the Mind Voice is the voice you hear when you read or think to yourself. It's what's called the subconscious and everyone gets it when they turn ten years old."

"It's pronounced subconscious, Timothy, but yes, you are correct," Mrs. Marple rasped, her wrinkled jowls bouncing up and down as her mouth moved. "Everyone has a Mind Voice; it informs you of what you need and works as your moral compass. How many of you have seen the movie Pinocchio?" Everyone in the room raised their hands.

"Jiminy Cricket is Pinocchio's Mind Voice. He helps Pinocchio tell right from wrong and guides him through life. Does everyone understand?"

Mrs. Marple's beady eyes raked across the room. She must have imagined nodding heads, because she continued.

"Some Mind Voices are inherently good because the person they live with wants to be good." She turned to the board and drew a crude stick figure with a smiley face on the forehead. "And some Mind Voices are inherently bad." Mrs. Marple drew another stick figure, this time with an angry frowny face.

A hand shot up from the crowd. A boy with sandy hair stood up, asking, "Mrs. Marple, what does 'inherently' mean?"

"Basically, it means that the Mind Voice is born that way and can't change. That was a good question, George." The sandy haired boy sat down with a smile as Mrs. Marple continued. "The people with good Mind Voices will grow up to be strong nice people, like Batman." She pointed to the happy stick man. Her hand slid over to the angry stick figure, and she said "The people with bad Mind Voices will grow up to be nasty, mean people, like the Joker."

A small girl stood up in the back of the classroom. "What if I don't want to be like the Joker?" she whimpered, tears threatening in her doe eyes.

"It's impossible to change the nature of the Mind Voice, but if any of you have bad thoughts or your Mind Voice is telling you to do naughty things, then tell your teacher at once, and we can help shape you and your Mind Voice into a better person. We can teach you to tune out the evil thoughts and follow the nice ones."

Mrs. Marple paused to survey the group, her yellowed eyes weaving through the rows of students. "If your Mind Voice tells you to do something and you don't know if it is good or naughty, then ask. It's always better to ask then to do something bad, because every time you are naughty you become more like the Joker."

She flashed a huge toothy grin, trying her best to imitate the Joker and doing such a good job that some children gasped. Whispers erupted as the other kids frantically compared what they thought was good and bad, desperately trying to find out if they were Batman or the Joker.

"Does anyone have any questions?" Mrs. Marple barked to be heard over the whispering. "Yes, Violet?"

I stood up, causing my raven curls to bounce around my face. "Mrs. Marple, what if-what if someone has two- has two voices in their head?"

I managed to stutter through my nervousness.

"Mrs. Marple's yellow eyes sharpened, boring into me as she replied, "Are you stupid? Were you not paying attention? Everyone only has one Mind Voice. No one ever has two. Next time think before you open your big mouth." She paused then added with a dismissive hand wave. "And don't stutter."

The room roared with laughter as I sunk back into my spot on the floor in shock, my mouth open so wide I could catch flies. My shoes blurred before me and I had to blink hard to see clearly again. My hands fidgeted with the laces of my shoes in an effort to distract myself from the voices around me.

"What a stupid girl."

"Have her parents taught her nothing?"

"I've seen her before, she's from Mr. Taylor's class and has like zero friends."

"Everyone avoids her because she talks to herself and it freaks people out."
Mind Voice continued
Zoe Jurgensen

"Freak!
I'm sure I heard one of the younger teachers snicker from behind me, "If I were her parents I would be ashamed, who would ask such a question?"
"Idiot!"
A few teachers tried to speak out and calm the classes but their voices were lost on the crowd. No one did anything to stop the noise.
"Just ignore them, Violet. Mrs. Marple is a no good, ugly, smelly witch who is stupid and dumb."
"It's not nice to name call, Ella. It's not Mrs. Marple's fault that she is so ignorant and closed minded."
"She made Violet cry, Logan! I have every right to call 'Mrs. Fartple' any name I want!"
"Name calling doesn't fix anything! Violet, you should confront Mrs. Marple and tell her that she hurt your feelings and that you deserve to be treated with respect."
"Or," Ella interjected, "we can keep calling her names and glue tacks to her stool."
"That's a horrible idea and will only make the problem worse! Violet needs to confront Mrs. Marple."
"No, Violet needs to get revenge and show Mrs. Marple that she is a force to be reckoned with!"

A sad smile dusted my lips at the bickering of the two voices in my head, who were drowning out the students' laughter. The giggling faded as soon as the teachers called for recess and began ushering the students outside.

"Maybe I should just leave it alone. I've caused enough trouble already," I mumbled to myself, trying to time my words so my voice would go unnoticed among the young stampede.

Recess was my least favorite part of the day. No one ever wanted to play with me, I was always the last picked for dodgeball teams, and no one ever called me over during Red Rover. I would talk to Ella and Logan to pass the time, and I always tried to stay away from other kids so they wouldn't laugh at me. There was this ginormous tree on the outskirts of the playground that used to be perfect for climbing. I was too scared to go higher than the third branch, but, even from that low, I could see over the single story red brick school building and glimpse the small pond just beyond the roof shingles. After climbing up to my favorite branch, I wrapped my arms around my bended legs and rested my head on my knees. Closing my eyes, I waited for Ella and Logan to speak.

"You can't keep doing nothing, Violet. Mrs. Marple will keep bullying you if you don't speak up," Logan's voice sweet, her words as calm and steady as a beating metronome.

"Yeah Violet, you can't let people walk all over you! You have to stand up for yourself or you'll never be able to take over the world!" Ella's voice rattled through my head, bouncing from place to place like a toddler after too much birthday cake.

"World domination isn't everything, Ella. Besides, Violet is only ten. She needs to focus on her times tables and making friends."

"Boooowwww! You are a party pooper, Logan! Party Pooper, Party Pooper, Party Pooper!"

"Wow, Ella, real mature."

Ella and Logan only ever agreed on one thing: they didn't like it when I did nothing. But they didn't have to face Mrs. Marple or the bullies everyday like I did. It's my face that the world saw and my voice that the people heard. What if I confronted Mrs. Marple and she got even more angry and I cried again? I'm sure smoke would pour out of her ears if I had placed tacks on her chair. Ella and Logan didn't understand what it was like to actually live with the information that they gave me, the choices they forced upon me, Logan with her honeyed words and Ella with her sharp tongue. They are disembodied voices in my head, but me... I am real.

"You two don't understand!" I screamed at the muted auburn leaves. "If I waited long enough, Ella and Logan would come back. I didn't mean it. Ella and Logan were my only friends. The only people I could talk to, the only people who understood me. My lips tasted salty from the tears streaming down my face and my cheeks burned.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean that... I just... I don't know what to do... I'm so sorry."

Nothing. For the first time in months, my head was completely silent. Ella wasn't rambling on about world domination or seeking revenge for everyone who wronged me. Logan wasn't whispering sweet compliments or encouraging me to stand up for what was right. There was no bickering, no fighting-- no sound.

"Ella? Logan? I'm really, really sorry, please come back! I didn't mean what I said. Please don't leave me alone!"

The only sound was the rustling of leaves and the cracking of tree branches as the wind forced them to wave. Somewhere in the distance, a whistle blew, signaling the end of recess. Reluctantly, I removed myself from my tree's warm embrace, brushed the tears off my cheeks, and shuffled towards the school doors. I feared Mrs. Marple's reaction to my absence more than the silence in my head. If I waited long enough, Ella and Logan would come back. They had to, right?
Do we re-learn to swim? Do we love
the floating, do we pee in it? Do we know
the current will pull us in circles? Do we choose
to drown instead? Do we look up through
the water at the sun and remember warmth?
Do we smell the stinging in our face, do we taste
lake as our swallows hope for air? Do we cool
as we sink deeper, do we forget our arms
and jelly legs when we touch soft loam?
Do we bury our body, do we feed the leeches
living in the decaying decay? Do we like it?
Do we rise, old squishy shell abandoned, do we
unfurl leathered wings and splash through the surface? Do we see gnashing water turn to glitter
underneath our claws, deep down, do we feel
the sun on our backs and breathe out out out?
Do we hear the fisherman happily paddling
just above the crashes, do we hear him tell us
Hey baby, smile for me?
Reflection
Rebecca Chan

i (the author)
looked into the mirror
and saw the backside of
myself,
not the alien face

the author
has learned, with trepidation,
to call a home.

the author
gazed into an endless
stream of reflections
oriented the unfamiliar way,
a cascade of anxious selves
entering an abyss of thoughts

the author
dares not think,
turned away,
afraid to confront
the original visage.

the mirror
became a realm
shocking
in absurd revelation,
a realization of the self
from outside the self,
an objective perspective
alarmed
with sloppily constructed biology.

the author,
in fearful impulse,
threw her head
into the mirror,
a battering ram restoring the barrier
between isolation and detachment.

the author
saw
my hand,
my eye,
my chin,
my leg.

the petals
fell to the ground
and settled as dust
after Jericho.

the author
looked down and observed,
in the fragments,
my face peering back at
the author,
my backside no longer

the reflection.
reality, the order, the normal
was restored by a
batterying ram
outburst of spite.

i (the author)
realized there, that i
am breakaway glass,
not meant to be
put back together.

(the i author)
felt most myself,
there, shattered,
reduced to shards
of sanity, silently
reflecting on the bathroom floor.

the author (i)
may as well be dust.
paper man
Kayla Park

paper man lives on my back. paper man wraps thin fingers around my throat and clips the edges off my words so they come out pinched and reedy. paper man holds my eyelids open at night because paper man is afraid of the dark. paper man pours poison into my ears as i sleep. paper man's poison gets all over the shelves where i keep my self-surety, wrinkles the pages where i keep the good words, then runs up to my doubt and wrings its hand up and down. we are business partners now, says paper man. my doubt says sounds good to me and they are off. my doubt and paper man devise targeted, multi-step strategies for undermining each of my goals. paper man and my doubt construct a web inside my chest that strangles my breath and makes my heart sprint like a starved jackrabbit. paper man and my doubt systematically white-out every memory of people smiling at me. paper man and my doubt stuff cotton balls into my tear ducts, stopper all the bottles that hold my emotions, and i walk around oblivious with anger and terror and grief fermenting inside my skull. when i finally trip and shatter against the concrete edge of the staircase, paper man and my doubt high-five. they smile proudly at my shaking hands, adjusting their ties as i unspool,

i unspool,

i unspool.
Here's a story about what comes after. There are four characters, who I'll call by the names of body parts. Hand doesn't know how to cut off her fingernails. There was a time when Foot stepped on ink. Knee was born with wrinkles. And Ear only speaks echoes.

When I say what comes after, I don't mean an end to a beginning. What I'm saying is the continuity of a beginning, an interlude of beginnings with no ends, and a wishful ending in the continuity. That being said, perhaps these body parts don't belong in the same timeline.

Nobody asks Foot whether he tried washing out the ink after. He's the outdoorsy type, constantly moving, his body has laid down on sponges, limestone and dead leaves. He loves stargazing. As his back lies flat on cement, limbs scratching themselves and the sky is as black as it is white, he almost admits what is not easy and what isn't over.

Have I told you about the time Knee hoped Ear would lean towards the sound of her bones cracking? It's long, long ago though, like a once-upon-a-time thing, but still now whenever it rains she brings herself upward until she reaches his lobes. Ear never has any piercings. His father did, though, maybe that's why he doesn't. Hates the idea of anyone – silver or iron - digging inside his flesh, like he needs that to feel beautiful. I forgot to tell you about Knee's bones. She draws on her skin from time to time, so people mistake the fractures for tattoos. Today, it seems like Ear doesn't hear her again. They have been listening to the rain together for a while now.

I'm not sure what to tell you about Hand. How does one acknowledge or dismiss an ache before it's coming? She doesn't shred herself with her nails, but occasionally bites them. She can't tell if they're parts of her.

What comes after four missing body parts of different bodies? I see them tracing their skin in and out now, looking for freckles.
PUTTING THE BODY
Because sometimes I'm bad at directions, because of the scars on my arm, because I can't roll my R's, because in the American Girl Doll puberty book none of the girls looked like me, because in seventh grade they said, "He would never date a Mexican," I didn't think I would ever be enough. I'd like to think I am because I remember everyone's birthday and my mom whispered to me on Christmas Day that I have always been her favorite. I rub my best friend's back until she falls asleep, even when my arm gets tired, and I say a Hail Mary whenever I hear sirens in the distance.

When I was younger I liked collecting rocks off the side of the road because I didn't want them to feel unwanted. I picked weeds for my mom instead of flowers and she thought it was an accident. In middle school I used to think that drinking alcohol meant you start hitting the people you love. In my mind I painted my mother and my abuelita in blues and purples given to them by the hands of my abuelito. When I first saw my dad drunk and he kept calling my mom beautiful, I had to change my mind. I thought I understood what love was.

Because my hands knew exactly how to hold the knife, because sometimes my head would hover above the toilet, because I drove too fast around the curves of backroads, because I wouldn't stop crying and spitting on the shower floor, I became scared of myself. I wore long-sleeve shirts in June and no one asked any questions. There was a summer I had to force myself to eat and it was the only time people referred to me as "skinny." I became scared of crossing the street.

This past summer we went on a camping trip and we all got high on the hiking trail. We all laughed and laughed and laughed, but I was afraid to stop. Logan put a flower behind my ear and told me to be careful with it. At the end of the hike the flower was gone. I cried in my sleeping bag.

Because of freshly washed sheets, because of parked-car conversations with slushie-stained teeth, because of the dimple on my right cheek, because of the smell in the air after it rains, I could feel happy. The longest I've sat at the boat launch in town watching the lake dance was five hours and I thought I learned peace.

I don't mind that my laugh is loud anymore – it's better when I'm throwing my head back. Dancing alone in my room doesn't feel lonely at all. I feel strong when I'm running through the grass barefoot. I feel stronger when the sun is settling on my skin. I can feel beautiful in dresses and it's even better if they have pockets.

I can sit by a lake for hours and never feel bored. I can listen to the same song all day, but sometimes I get scared when I know it's going to end. I like wearing sweatshirts that are too big because it's a kind
Polaroid Photo of Red Man with Fringe and Stage Makeup

Sophia Hill

Business suit man hi hello
this is not the same script
that you gave me to memorize I say

and he smiles at me like the way he smiles
at the trained dogs after
they roll on their backs he says that's
show business for you but
wait
while you're here I have some pointers
on how your performance could be
even more convincing.

So this time when the camera rolls
while I bastardize war bonnet I shall think
noblesavagenoblesavagenoblesavage
furrow brow tuck chin stand up proud
red man speak deep and never complete
your sentence fragments only cut!

Business suit man yells
through the congealed humidity
that I am not acting
Indian enough

is enough I remove my
heavyfeather burden and walk
past set cones
down the road and away

Those Hollywood men must be mixing
their makeup special designed to hold
I tried to wash my face in the river
then again
in the sink at home
Pledge for Faggots Against Our Exploitation by Corporations
Qynce B. Chumley

I swear to every power, spiritual and scientific, that if I see praise for one more rainbow dripped advertisement or clothing commercial featuring two twinks wearing sweater vests and skinny jeans kissing and laughing because their life has been made good made safe and comfortable and joyous been rid of jeers and snide remarks, shoulders bumped in sidewalks that weren’t crowded, been purged of housing insecurity, and filled with protection under the law under God (all thanks to the Gap) I’m going to rip my liver out of my gutsack and eat it so that I may regurgitate it back up and eat it again.
I swear to every dyke and trans woman every nonbinary bitch and every fag our fight will not be fought in the name of brands money has no place in the queer future.

Ode to Las Perras, Putas y Pendejas of 26th
Yuridia Luciana Gutiérrez-García

We, wake wrapped in second-hand bedsheets.

We, black-haired baby bitches break and make.

We, badass dance over sun blood-boiled soil.

We, side fist fuck up men whistling.

We, lull to lullabies of police sirens in the wake of insomnia.

We, hear the westside streets cry like our mothers do

and we refuse to do so.
Divide
*Samantha Lamrock*

Eyes flit open, tears mixing instant with water.
*Madeline Lauver*

Eyes flit open, tears mixing instant with water.
I make a magic pupil potion, it flows
around my face; I spin alone in warm waves.
Silver fishes weave between my legs
as I look up, seeing the sun through the lake.
I love a sweet morning. I love
thinking that because I am in the water, I am more
fluid than most.
This piece of letters turned to words turned to phrases turned to a poem for class
is for hoop wearers, bus takers, and knee shakers
Whose healing is getting your tears kissed one by one
As they gravitate to your chin
Not erasing the memories, but reimagining how they make you feel.

To those with secret moles that only people who eat you out can see
To those with scars of consequence to their stubbornness
To those with acrylic nails that hinder their typing
And kill their nail strength
To those who refuse to suck dirty dick
To the hairiest of hairiest that stopped shaving

To those who are bitter
Stay fucking bitter!

I dedicate this poem for those who pray for stability
Not for those who say money can't buy happiness
Because fuck you, you weren’t raised cynically

So walk with me onto an uneven field
Where the limbo of my thoughts unravel
For all them andariegas who haven’t healed
Where I can’t sleep because of 10 hours of time travel
Holy water greases our asses.
Says holy is the ass hit
from the back.
Says hide your onyx blade
under your tongue
for bloody, forced kisses.

Holy water sanctifies our asses.
Says you know I don't wanna,
you know I don't wanna.
Says I tell you to stick it
soft. Says Chicago mother
fucking bitches.

Holy water pop, locks, and drops our asses.
Says pop that pussy
outta here. Says tell your
Mami you're a mami to
someone's crotch. Says
never tell mami.

Bounce n break yo back.
Bounce n break yo back,
you bounce so hard.
you break yo back, girl.
Domesticity
Sarah Whitfield

I.
Around his waist a grey towel, hugging hips loosely and damp from roughly drying inundate locks; instead of limp hanging across forehead, droplets heavy, dripping down his nose, they stand upright, angled, shocked into staticy tufts. His bare chest is showcasing glistening beads balanced on tantalizing collar bones. On his lips, an endearing smile through mirror flickers at me; a warm embrace in air. Lathering his chin, reaches for razor and pulls down cheek; quick, precisioned flare.

Despite the care, little patch was not seen—on tip-toe, I shave and wipe the spot clean.

II.
Cousin fog, bastard of icy sleet and summer steam off pavement, the rain couldn’t actually rain like it should. Smudging the treeline into the sky pitch blackness of northern Michigan ate even the floodlights of the gas station fifty yards down and right. Pulling in, forty miles left midnight heavy on our eyelids, I fumble, thin sweatshirt covering palms, to pump heat back into the truck. Disappeared for toilet or coffee, your silence crouches behind tinted window.

Slipping in and switching seats, relieve me from duty, leave me surprise sourpatch kids.

Composting: An Aesthetic Perspective
Euan O’Donnell

We don’t mean to shift the burden of environmental consciousness onto the consumer, but don’t you want to contribute to how pretty this is?
Fly By

Cecilia Barkume

Emma stepped, one foot in front of the other. The wind on her back beckoned her. The street was 600 feet below and its people were smaller than ants. They were more like mites. She was an eagle in the sky, and Steve the stick was her wingspan. Steve was ice cold, and he began to freeze her concentration over. No, she thought. It’s just like being in the backyard. Tightrope walking in-between two buildings isn’t anything like being in the yard, but lying to herself was like riding a bike. If she takes one wrong step in the yard, she won’t die. She didn’t have that luxury now.

Whenever Emma made her weekly trek to the coffee shop by her house, she wondered if other tightrope walkers felt a similar relationship to their pole. Most don’t even go as far as to give theirs a name. It always confused her. Steve the Stick was her muse, and she had fallen for him years ago. Don’t baseball players have a special relationship with their glove? Emma’s dad kept his faded green glove from childhood. It’s not every day you see a green glove. It seemed like the sort of thing a coach would yell at a player for. She imagined everyone on the team with matching uniforms, matching socks, matching shoes, but one player has a green glove. The players would call him Greenie, and the coaches would join in, too.

When she watched other tightrope walkers, they were always so confident. Sometimes they put on a show, by breathing heavily, or complaining about the dangerous weather conditions, but they were always fine in the end. Without the possibility of death, no one would want to watch. The tightrope walkers knew what they were doing, and they could stand on the rope for hours. They would pass out from exhaustion before falling off.

She was about two-thirds of the way across the rope, but something was off. That familiar thought crept its way into her skull. What if she was walking for the wrong reason? She often feared that this thought would show itself during a walk again. Is this sensationalism? Am I doing this for fame? She wanted to seal her brain and stop the dam of doubt from bursting. Her mind stopped cooperating, and her feet ignored her commands. She slid from the rope, and she was parallel to the ground. Before she knew it, her descent began.

600 feet above the ground. Emma felt herself become weightless. The tightrope that represented strength and reliability earlier was now a symbol of regret and failure. She grabbed for the rope, attempting to close her fist around its white fiber on her way down. That was the plan, anyway, but she missed, and now her eyes were facing the street. In her attempt to grab the rope, she moved Steve to her left hand. Her adrenaline nearly caused her to let go of him, but she clasped her clammy hands around him, just in time.

500 feet. She had fallen before. When she was fifteen, she and a friend went to the park together after school. They planned to study for physics, but Emma was immediately distracted by the black fence outlining the perimeter of the park. As the story goes, Emma started to "make a scene" by walking on top bar of the black fence. She circled the playground six times, but seven was apparently one too many because her friend was gone, and a crowd gathered in her place. Children tried to watch while their mothers pulled them away. Her selective hearing skills prevented her from losing focus.

“This is boring," said one of the unsupervised children. “Walk up there!" He pointed toward the cable connecting the playground structures.

Pot heads and children from all over congregated at the playground on the corner of 8th and Dogwood. The kids ruled after school but before bed, and the burnouts were handed the baton promptly at ten o’clock. Even when the cops scared them off, a permanent psychoactive cloud hung over the area. The structures were messes of splinterly, brown wood. They must have been thirty years old, but the yearly repaints kept the parents from petitioning for its destruction. A long cable ran between the black pyramid-shaped tops of the two tallest playground structures. Emma daydreamed about taming the playground, and this was her chance. She climbed to the top, and the chanting only grew louder. It felt wrong. This wasn’t tightrope walking. It wasn’t some daredevil stunt that people do for attention, it was more than that. Emma didn’t really know what it was, but that didn’t matter. Once she decided to back down, she was already in the middle of the cable. Her plummet began a few seconds later.

400 feet. Emma blamed her fall at the playground on Steve the Stick’s absence. Tightrope walkers will probably tell you that they use their pole for balancing, but she knew that it was really for moral support. When Emma pillaged the clouds, it was comforting to have an accomplice. When Emma told friends that she was preparing for her most incredible walk yet, they gasped and tried to persuade her into staying grounded. Steve never did that. Steve understood what had to be done, and he was willing to help, at any cost.

Even in her final moments, Steve was there. He gave and gave, and she never thanked him. How did Steve feel right now? Did he understand the gravity of the situation? Did he let the fear build inside of his wooden body? Emma hoped that once their bodies splattered and splintered on the pavement below, Steve could be reborn as a human, and he could finally live out his tightrope walking dreams. Nineteen years of sitting on the sidelines, and now he was going to be the starting quarterback.
Steve could be the esteemed tightrope walker extraordinaire, and Emma could be his sidekick. It was only fair.

300 feet. Emma wondered what followed life. Sure, it was nice to think she could be reborn as an inanimate object, but maybe she would exist in everlasting darkness. Maybe it's just sleep that lasts forever. Her stomach dropped at the thought. Thinking about death seconds before experiencing it wasn't the best idea, so she thought about life instead. She averted her eyes from Steve to the mites below becoming ants, and the ants morphing into people. She thought about their fears, and their dreams. What was that word for the sudden realization that everyone else has a life that is just as complex as hers? She wouldn't have the chance to think of it.

When Emma thought about the people below, she pitied them. They carried briefcases and walked swiftly to whatever company their college degree got them in to. She focused her attention on a tall man with grey hair in a black suit. His outfit must have cost a month's rent. Sure, Emma was going to die today, but he wouldn't die doing what he loved. What could he possibly love, golf? Clearance sales on socks? Looks like a heart attack, Emma thought.

Another man, this time in a green suit, with pink pants. It's not often someone can make pink pants work, but this guy nailed it. His tie looked like Christmas vomited on it, with Frosty the Snowman and the Grinch opening presents together. Emma didn't realize some companies also do casual Tuesdays. This guy wasn't as boring as grey hair guy, but he wasn't great either. Car accident, Emma thought.

A third person, a woman this time, sat in a wheelchair under the awning of a fruit stand. She had a cardboard sign that Emma couldn't make out. A fast food cup was in front of her and it was filled with crushed dollar bills and pennies. The occasional passerby threw her some spare change. Emma's father echoed throughout her mind. "That homeless guy will outlive all of us. He'll retire at 50, and who will be laughing then?" Whenever he said that, Emma hoped he was right.

Medical complications, she thought.

200 feet. Emma remembered seeing an interview with a 107-year-old dude who said something like "Treasure your life, because it flies by." Emma wondered why people say that. Her life didn't fly by. It was glacially slow. How can your life fly by when it was the longest thing you've ever known? Of course people think that once they're on their deathbed, because their entire life has led up to their final moment. They can remember everything in an instant, but it takes a lifetime to experience it.

Sonder, she thought. The realization was as beautiful as the complexity of the people below. She basically cheated death. If that had to be her final victory, Emma was cool with that. At least she wouldn't die frustrated. But she was going to die, which was a bit of a bummer. Emma noticed the people below again, and she thought about how long she had been falling. She could never remember the fall at the playground. She just wobbled, inhaled some of the fumes, and she was in a hospital bed. This seemed to last far longer.

100 feet. She turned to face the peaceful sky for one, last time. The tops of the buildings distanced themselves from her. She didn't wonder about who would feed her cats, or what would happen to her car. Maybe a sane person would think of logical things like that, but not Emma. Her thoughts were filled with green baseball gloves, Steve, reefer playgrounds, rebirth, Christmas vomit ties, interviews and sonder.
Boy don't call me refugee when you don't even know what that even means
Just because you are louder, bigger and whiter than me it doesn't mean you can bully me
Don't tell me I don't belong in this country
Go check out your own history
Don't call me "Refugee"
It feels like I don't even exist in this world,
As if I'm a migrant bird far away from my home
Dividing the world in us and our enemies
Creates fear and justification for aggression
I am broken as I pass by you tonight
humbled by my ancestor's infinite heart.
How can I not return?
There, Iran, my refuge
there, my brother's open arm
There, where my mom prays for justice
There, where my dad catches the early busses
The mosque, The mihrab
The sword is waiting to kiss my head
My sword is the same poem, more powerful than every sword
With this powerful weapon I do not want to pour blood
I've gone through the worlds, who knows
What I have in my the backyard
You do not have a heart and you do not mind, but me
I like to at least have a reason to hate
I got a shawl of love around me
My parents taught me kindness and appreciation
And boy those are some solid foundation
Ode to My Nepaliness

Mansi Dahal

You are the brave gurkha blood that has freshly been pumped in my body,
the rhododendron about to burst with fire, the profound smell of yak
cheese growing more intense with age, you are the edge of khukuri
You are the aroma of exotic tea leaves lingering in between the
Himalayas. But you are not about the crest of the Everest,
you are rather the woman waiting at end of the line
for water, thinking about her cattle.Yes, you
are about peace but not without the chaos
before. This ode is not about chaos
though. It's about spiced momo
pickle. It's about the tender
hand whirling the series of circling
wheels around the stupa. I was not born
with you, you were poured in my scalp like
the warm mustard oil by Grandma. You are not my
first, nor my last, but the rectitude that has always been
reverberating. You are not a part of me, I am a part of you.
You tuck me inside like I tuck dreams under my pillow. And they tell
me I will get lured by luxury? They really ought to meet you and when they'll
ask why, I'll tell them it's not about why, it's more than that. It's about the soft voice
meandering
gently
like
the
bride's

Scheherezade

Audrey Honig

I have no stories to tell you
tonight,
don't look away when I am boring.

I ask,

"Do you love me
in the quiet?"

Wishing I knew better.

Occasionally, I suspect the Murakami flowers with their red, half-moon grins
insult the daisies who do not have mouths and do not love the sun the way we'd expect.
One of the best academics of my time, Zora Neale Hurston, once said “If you are silent about your oppression, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it.” As one of the first Black anthropologist who took a radical pedagogical approach to researching and documenting the culture of Black folks, Zora Neale Hurston was buried with an unmarked grave. It wasn't until Alice Walker discovered Zora's buried work in a library that Alice took it upon herself to buy a tombstone to acknowledge Zora's life. As a Black woman in academia this process of recovering and discovering the life of other Black women seems to be a task I have unconsciously assigned myself. However, this is not just to memorialize them but to also keep myself alive. In my journey I have learned that other Black women are the only ones who acknowledge and speak to me in their work. They are the only ones who had the intentions of me reading and engaging with their work when they crafted masterpieces. They are the only ones who thought that my opinion and my spin on their work had value. They are also the ones I have to continuously engage with in a game of hide and seek within academic spaces. It is like having to always ask the waitress to bring a bottle of hot sauce to the table. Eventually I had to start carrying hot sauce in my bag.

Some may see this as a struggle of inclusion, but it is more so that of knowledge and radical pedagogy. It would always be great to have a more diverse staff, but appearance is not enough. It is about the content and quality of what the diverse teachers are teaching. This problem was highlighted in Precious Knowledge and Walkout. It was not enough to just have Chicano teachers, although it was helpful when it was time to organize, it was about the lack of learning and teaching things that incorporated and liberated the students. Teachings like the history of Chicanx people, reading literature that exemplify the strife of being Chicanxs, and learning about politics and how it directly effects the Chicanx population. Teachers of color do not make a big difference if their syllabus is carbon copy of those of white educators. It is just a quota to further the agenda of the buzzwords of inclusion. There is inclusion in the staff room but a lack of inclusion in the curriculum.

Because I went to a majority Black school, in terms of staff and students, it was hard for me to identify my thirst for Black knowledge and a radically Black pedagogy. My concerns were dismissed under the accomplishment of diversity. I did not know my void of radically Black pedagogy until I discovered the art and craft of Black women in academia and literature. This is a discovery I had to make on my own with a little aid from my mother who was making the same discovery simultaneously as me. I made excuses for the lack of presence Black
women had in my classroom curriculum with thoughts like maybe Black women just do not exist in this field or do not write on these topics or just not credible enough to have an opinion on this subject. It makes me angry to know how far from the truth this is. For example, in my English Class, it would have been just as easy to read the canon work of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Toni Cade Bambara, as it was to read William Shakespeare and Allen Poe. Furthermore, the intersectional analysis that is offered by Black women would have been more essential and beneficial for the Black students in the class to utilize in their everyday framework in life. This may have also affected the engagement of students. As seen in Precious Knowledge, when the people the students are learning about reflect the identity of the students, the students tend to care and engage more. In high school, I was barely aware that hot sauce was an option or something that I should be asking for. I was given watered down hot sauce and didn't know better existed.

Coming into Kalamazoo College, I had a naïve expectation that there was a variety of hot sauces at each table. I thought the availability of different types of pedagogy would be available in each department. Even if that wasn't the case, I thought I would at least have the comfort of a Black teacher. Instead, I got the choice of a Black woman in STEM, Kyla Day in psychology, and the other two Black women professors, Dr. Baptiste and Dr. Brock, on sabbatical my sophomore year. I did not understand the implications of Kalamazoo College being a predominantly white institute (PWI). All of my courses, even the ones that center Black identity, seem to be taught with the idea that the students that are being taught are white. Within the minute opportunities I have to take a course about the Black identity, I feel like a guest student. It is as if the professor never took into consideration that a Black student would occupy this space. Because of this, my academic growth seems to become a secret love affair that exist separate from the classroom. This looks like me reading Parable of the Sowers by Octavia Butler during my Black Religious Experience course because the novel satisfies the course objective better than the professor's lectures and syllabus. This also looks like site visits being an essential part of the Black Religious Experience course because there is an expectation that the students would be non-Black although it is known that religion is a big part of most Black households. My experience at Kalamazoo College has left me ostracized in the process of academic growth and spaces when I am here to do the exact opposite. Like the strife of the students within Precious Knowledge, they were paying tax dollars to still be denied the education they wanted and deserved. I have grown frustrated with having to learn on my own when I am paying thousands of dollars to have aid in

my learning from my professors. I didn't bring my hot sauce because of the broken promises that hot sauce would be provided. So here I am now, digesting bland food.

A socially just education works with a framework of hot sauce being essential not an add-on. Hot sauce is a staple of my culture. It is something I need with every one of my meals. Without it I have a lack of appetite. This is the same with the lack of Black women in my curriculum. Without their perspective and reasoning within a subject or topic I feel dissatisfied and incomplete. There is lack of engagement and enjoyment of what I am learning. A socially just education is an absence of this feeling and a need to do extra work to get the nourishment I need to grow academically. As stated in El Plan de Santa Barbara, "At this moment we do not come to work for the university, but to demand that the university work for our people." I should not be the one that always provide the hot sauce, but the university should always have the hot sauce readily available. Black women should be present and represented in all curriculum prior to me having to justify why their perspective is important and essential. Also, the decentering of white students is socially just. As Elon Dancy reminds us, "It is important for students of color to remember that predominantly white colleges and universities are still historically white." It is nearly impossible to forget this when the majority of all curriculum is targeted to them. The game of catch up that Black students have to endure, even in courses centering their identity, is an acceptance of white people cultural incompetence that is embedded in white privilege. This allows the message that I was never intended to occupy this space be heard loud and clear.

As a sophomore student I am unsure of how to implement a socially just educational framework. However, I am sure that others get paid to figure it out. And if they were held accountable to do their job I wouldn't have to feel like a failure because I was unsure of how to implement a socially just educational framework. It is becoming more difficult to continue to resurrect the Black women who deserve to live and thrive in these spaces on my own. This is not only due to the lack of resources, but also there is an emotional toll of feeling unreasonable for having the demand that they have a space to live and thrive in at Kalamazoo College. It is a heartbreaking experience that I feel so isolated that it has become overwhelming. Throughout this paper I noted the lack of academic growth but after being diagnosed with depression in the Fall quarter of 2018 I am starting to recognize how much bigger it is. Always having to carry hot sauce in my bag is starting to weigh on my back.
I realized I don’t really take pictures once I come home. I take videos, silly ones, crazy ones, the ones that only make me laugh and no one else. The ones I need to survive when I will question my purpose in Michigan winter next year. I like motion over stillness, always. I guess finding aesthetics at home is hard, do I even look for it?

I started going through my phone trying to see if I have any pictures since I came home, except for some wedding pictures and Bartika Didi singing in Dharan there were few pictures from Pokhara. That view of Machhapuchhre from the window seat and that stroll around Fewa, not something I get to see often even being from/in Nepal.

I am surprised how I didn’t post any of those. I am surprised how Pokhara had to happen. Sometimes I think what it would be like to be from Pokhara. Biratnagar is the last place people would imagine what Nepal would be like. No mountains, roads and roads and roads and fields and fields and fields. If your hometown is not a tourist destination, are you even from Nepal? Other times I think what it would be like to become independent in Biratnagar, not Kalamazoo, not New York, not Rome. Every year I learn a little more about a new city, it is another year I don’t learn about my own.

Sitaram Dai ko dokan has an official board that says Koirala Kirana Pasal. Ranju didi has got a new yellow scooty and both of her daughters go to boarding school. There’s a new parlour outside Mandip’s house. I met Prithu and Suyog strolling outside, they have grown up to be big boys.

They ask me how long I am here for as if I have to leave, maybe I do. When people come home, they post pictures of food, I barely do. Don’t argue with me where you find the best Sekuwa, Lama Sekuwa corner, Tarahara. And I don’t have any pictures of this place either or the road leading to it or Abbu telling his epic Dharan road stories, about Anil uncle and the elephants, about Man Bahadur Uncle and wild boars. He tells these stories as if he is telling it for the first time, as if we have not heard the same story hundred times already, as if to tell that story is the only thing he lives for. Who knew happiness would be hiding inside the closed car waiting for his stories to come out? Or under the blankets waiting for us to cuddle together? Or inside the packet of Dairy milk that Aama brings back from Jogbani.

As a kid I always wondered what Jogbani would look like as Aama would always bring chocolates from there. I don’t remember the first time I went there but yesterday it was messy and busy. Maybe certain things are only beautiful when you think about them and maybe the curiosity to visit such places should be controlled by the idea of how beautiful it already is in your imagination.
Aama keeps on asking me what I am studying. Even though she knows what it is, maybe she hopes that I will tell her that I switched someday. Mummy tells me I should definitely get Masters because half filled gagri is useless and of course in some subjects that is useful. And I think two more years in America means two less years in Nepal. Kaya keeps on asking me what I want to become when I grow up, I wish I could suggest her to read Becoming. (“as if growing up is finite, as if at some point you become something and that’s the end”)

I want to make films and write books. Someday. Someday.