

THE BAYOU REVIEW
SPRING 2023

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THE BAYOU REVIEW

SPRING 2023

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EDITORS' NOTE

Our experience working on the Spring 2023 issue of *The Bayou Review* has been nothing short of fantastic. Despite having one of the smallest teams since the magazine's inception, both editors have thoroughly enjoyed reading and reviewing all the texts and art that were sent our way. We are honored to be a part of the publishing process of a literary and arts magazine, handpicking a collection of works for our readers. Being a small team has enabled us to engage in in-depth discussions about each of the pieces, and we believe this has shaped our growth not only as editors, but also, as students.

A few long-time readers have commented on the fact that this issue of *The Bayou Review* doesn't have a theme, wondering why that is or why it was decided upon. We chose to not have a theme in order to challenge ourselves as editors and not limit the number of submissions received and reviewed while working on this publication. Because of this, we were able to read and choose works that came from all over the globe, ranging from Romania, Colombia, Argentina, the United Kingdom, and India, among other countries. We also had submissions from a bit closer to home: states such as Tennessee, Louisiana, Hawaii, and of course, our very own state of Texas.

We would like to express our gratitude to the readers of this literary and arts magazine for their continued support and to all the authors, poets, translators, and artists for considering publishing with *The Bayou Review*. We hope that our hard work in curating this issue shines through and that you find inspiration in the diverse and thought-provoking pieces included.

-Marvin Deaver & Rachel Ann Preston

TRANSLATION /
TRADUCCIÓN

Aqua Floris

LORENZO ARTURO CAMACHO

TRANSLATED FROM SPANISH BY
MILENA SANABRIA CONTRERAS

The events are not dependent on each other, but they're simultaneous. A hummingbird flapping its wings before a window can also be a dirty napkin falling from a table.

On the one side, your planet will be invaded by another (planet), or by its beings, which is not the same. It's also not specifically an invasion, but of course from your point of view, it doesn't matter. Someone else might call it contact, or even an intrusion. Your mother, for instance, will call it an experience in the future, and sometimes, when she won't stop looking at herself in the mirror, a blessing. Anyway, you will resist it at home in the country, next to Simón, and that in itself will be frustrating. With the time you have left, you'll want to watch a movie, any movie, but he'll grab the remote first. Mocking you, he'll start changing the channels indiscriminately, cruel and childish, so that you'll only see fractions of shows, interrupted laughter, eyes lost in the horizon, instants of pure martial-arts action, sacred speeches on the religious channel, etcetera. Simón, however, out of the corner of his eye, will see you trembling a little with every channel he changes; on that sunny day, he will also see you reflected on the screen and hold back his laughter. You'll leave, decide to shower while you think of the time you

have left, of how things always end when you've taken them for granted; you'll walk down the stairs looking at the ceiling, following the spiderwebs to the bathroom, and when you get there, Simón will have already locked himself in, and he'll turn on the hot water. According to the cat sitting next to you against the closed bathroom door, you won't have insisted enough, you'll be weak, you won't remember your bloody abusive past to gather your strength, you will perish in the invasion; besides, you won't have fed it fresh food and that will settle it. Behind the window, you'll see the sky, and in the sky a huge shadow.

On the other side, everyone—Simón, your mother, and you—is sitting in a restaurant full of yellow lights and waxed wood. The table invaded by dirty dishes trembles a little when you get up to wash your hands. If the rice left on your plate could have seen you, they would have thought you were making the planet itself shake, a terrestrial movement favorable for dancing in honor of their disappeared, their devoured, and close to the plate the glass of juice, a desolate empty tower, might have thought the same. Your mother rushes Simón so he'll also wash his hands, and he gets up lazily, grumbling, but catches up to you. Your mother sees you two walking away into the dense labyrinth of wooden walls, meaning the entrance to the bathroom. The walls watching you like intruders on their freshly mopped floors. You turn on the cold-water tap, and while both of you look in the mirror and the water flows down your hands, you push each other, elbow each other, insult each other. All brotherhood is the seed of some war. In the mirror splattered with water, your gestures are distorted and stained, your punches curved. All war moves towards some brotherhood.

The invasion will begin with the shadow pasted onto the sky. The other planet will actually come close enough to yours to make the concrete road slabs break while you impassively look out the window. Something like a colossal, fervent howl will sprout from the air, and you will cover your ears. The houses will begin to fly, detached from their places, their roots dangling out like seedlings. Cell signals will fail; you'll need to get ready for battle, clench your fists in front of the door, Simón will need to stop singing in the bathroom and turn off the hot water.

You turn off the cold-water tap. The restaurant lights flicker hesitantly before they die out entirely, the mirror breaks. The whole labyrinthine wood segment in the bathroom detaches from the floor, and as you take your brother's hand, you think of your mother sitting alone at the table. The piece of paper with the check flying around somewhere.

FICTION / FICCIÓN

Blackout

ZACH MURPHY

My roommate took off right before I lost my job at the pizza place. The only thing he left behind was a note that read, “Moved back home.” If only the unpaid rent were attached to it.

I sit at the wobbly kitchen table, gazing at the floating dust particles that you can only see when the sunlight shines in at the perfect angle. Sometimes, you have to convince yourself that they aren’t old skin.

The air conditioner moans, as if it’s irritated that it has to work so hard. I haven’t left the apartment in four days, for fear that the hellish temperature might melt away my spirit even more. Is a heat wave a heat wave if it doesn’t end? I gulp down the remainder of my orange juice. The pulp sticks to the side of the glass. It always bothers me when that happens.

As I stand up to go put my head into the freezer, the air conditioner suddenly goes on a strike of silence and the refrigerator releases a final gasp. I walk across the room and flip the light switch. Nothing.

There’s a knock at the door. I peer through the peephole. It’s the lady with the beehive hair from across the hall. I crack the door open.

“Is your power out?” she asks.

“Yes,” I answer.

“It must be the whole building,” she says.

“Maybe the whole city,” I say.

“The food in your fridge will go bad after four hours,” she says.

I’d take that information to heart if I had any food in the refrigerator.

“Thanks,” I say as I close the door.

When the power goes out, it’s amazing how all of your habits remind you that you’re nothing without it. The TV isn’t going to turn on and your phone isn’t going to charge.

There’s another knock at the door. It’s the guy from downstairs who exclusively wears jorts. “Do you want a new roommate?” he asks.

“What?”

He nods his head to the left. I glance down the hallway and see a scraggly, black cat with a patch of white fur on its chest.

“It was out lying in the sun,” the guy says. “Looked a bit overheated, so I let it inside.”

Before I can say anything, the cat walks through the doorway and rubs against my leg.

“Catch you later,” the guy says.

I fill up a bowl with some cold water and set it on the floor. The cat dashes over and drinks furiously.

At least water is free, I think to myself. Kind of.

I head into my dingy bedroom and grab the coin jar off my dresser. “This should be enough to get you some food,” I say.

I step out the apartment door and look back at the cat.

“I think I’ll call you Blackout.”

* Trigger Warning: child abuse *

The Rules of the Game

SOPHIA QUINTO

The Monster is COMING.

During the day, I am able to distract myself. I go to school and play with my friends and do my homework in the neighbors' treehouse until Ma calls me inside. In the evening, I eat dinner with Ma in the kitchen under the blinky yellow light and tell her about my day. I can mostly stay distracted then, too, as long as Ma isn't in one of her moods.

But when the sun goes down, and Ma and I "park ourselves" in front of the TV for the night (as Ma puts it), I feel it. The little flitter in my chest, the faint itch on the back of my neck.

The Monster is coming to GET YOU.

I try to focus on Friends. It's Ma's favorite show and I pretend to like it for her, but I don't understand a lot of the jokes. When Phoebe holds up a thick, white brick to her ear, Ma says, "Look, Juney, that's what phones used to look like," and I think she's kidding. I like Ross's monkey, though. He's my favorite character.

"Ma, can we get a monkey?"

Ma looks at me over the tops of her glasses with her eyebrows waggling. “Well, I’ve already got one right here,” she says, and I swat her with the end of my sweater sleeve.

“I’m not a monkey!”

Ma leans forward and bops me on the nose. “You’re my little monkey,” she says, smiling her golden Ma smile I love so much, and I have to forgive her.

Ma and I watch half of another episode. With each minute that goes by, my eyes flick to the clock in the kitchen. I keep glancing at the TV screen and realize I have absolutely no idea what’s been happening. The scenes flash across the screen too fast. The flitter grows louder, the itch itchier—

“Junebug.”

Ma reaches her foot across the couch and pokes me in the thigh. I spring up; I’ve been so knotted up inside that her touch uncoils me like a Slinky. Ma doesn’t notice. Her eyes are locked on the clock in the kitchen—not on me—because she has trouble looking me in the eye when it’s time for bed.

“I think it’s time you head up,” Ma says. She’s got her shaky voice on.

The Monster is coming to get you and it is ALMOST HERE.

The air gets colder, the TV gets louder, the darkness outside the windows pushes further into the room, further into my lungs. The flitter turns to a storm, the itch to a

sting. I swallow the lump in my throat and say in my sweetest voice, “Goodnight, Ma.”

“G’night, Juney,” Ma says. “Be good, okay? Follow the Rules.”

“Okay, Ma.”

“I’ll see you in the morning.”

I fake-smile back and head up the stairs.

The Monster will get me if I don’t follow the Rules of the Game:

Close the door.

Turn off the lights.

Pull my blanket over my head.

Do not come out and do not make a sound until morning.

I follow the Rules. I play the Game well. I always do. I’ve got it down quick now, and I’m in bed with my frog-print blanket over my head in ten minutes.

Now I wait.

One of two things will happen first: I will fall asleep, or the Monster will arrive and I will have to listen to Ma fight it all night with my nails digging into my palms. I close my eyes and pray it won’t be one of those nights.

But my body is knotted up again, and my eyes won’t stay shut for fear of what is behind my eyelids. My breaths are

short. They are filling the tiny space between my face and the blanket, and I wonder if I could suffocate.

I slowly, shakily pull the blanket down until my nose is hovering above the sewn hem. My eyes dart around the room, but the Monster is not here. I know it isn't—it hasn't arrived yet, and yet I can feel it. I can hear its shallow, gravelly breathing and smell its sour, rotten breath and see its dark, beady eyes. It sounds and smells and looks like the Monster is hulking in my closet, grinning at me and licking its cracked lips. Waiting to get me.

But it's not there, it can't be. It hasn't arrived, and when it does, Ma will keep it busy until morning and it will have to leave. I know it's not there—I KNOW that—but I wish so bad that I could turn on the light just to check, just to make sure that the hulking, grinning form is just my winter coat after all. But that is against The Rules.

The longer I stare at the dark hole of my closet, the more it looks like the Monster is in there, so I yank my blanket back over my eyes. I turn onto my other side, facing away from the closet, and the bed frame creaks. I freeze. Do not make a sound. I hold my breath and bite my tongue, like I can make up for the sound by being extra quiet afterwards.

Another creak. The creak of the front door slowly swinging open.

THE MONSTER IS HERE.

No no no no, the Monster is early tonight. I'm not ready. I'm not asleep. It's going to be one of THOSE nights.

I want Ma.

The Monster crashes through the front room, banging against the walls of the house it's too big for. Ma's voice rumbles through the floor as she tries to calm the Monster down like it's a dog. A dog with sharp teeth and long claws and a hate it should not be capable of.

The Monster continues to stomp through the house. I hear another crash. This time, it's right below me—in the kitchen. The Monster likes to throw glass bottles that Ma has to spend the next morning sweeping up, and I can tell that's what happened by the way Ma yells. She's already done trying to talk; she's going to have to fight all night.

More growling. More yelling.

More crashing. More yelling.

A monstrous howl. A scream.

A part of me wants to spring up from bed and rush down the stairs to help her, but the rest of me is paralyzed. Besides, I tell myself, the Monster doesn't want Ma. It will growl at her and swat her around in its claws and throw glass bottles at the wall behind her head, but it doesn't want to get her, not like it wants to get me. Most nights, Ma can tire it out.

Most nights, I am not awake to hear it.

But tonight, one of THOSE nights, is just too much. The Monster is hurting Ma.

With each crash, my fists curl tighter around the edges of my blanket.

With each growl, my eyes squeeze tighter until I see spots.

With each of Ma's screams, the anger and the panic bubble up higher in my throat, choking me, making it impossible to breathe. It's too much it's too much it's too much it's too—

“STOP IT!”

Oh no. Do not make a sound. Oh no, I have broken The Rules.

THE MONSTER IS GOING TO GET YOU.

The silence from downstairs seeps into my bones, weighing me down where I lie. I stay extra still, extra quiet, even though I know—I KNOW—that won't make up for the shout. It heard me—I know it did—, but maybe it didn't. Maybe it was crashing around too loudly, maybe Ma convinced it that the shout wasn't me, that I'm fast asleep and it shouldn't bother me. Maybe it will be okay.

But I'm just kidding myself. I can imagine the hungry grin spreading across the Monster's ugly, misshapen face and the terrified gape spreading on Ma's. I flinch as salt blossoms on my lip, and I realize tears are slipping down my face.

A storm of crashing, like a crazy drum solo.

Ma screams. A jarring, desperate scream that cuts through the center of me.

And then another crash, another growl, and a THUD. The screaming stops.

Oh no oh no oh NO.

The Monster has beaten Ma. The Monster has won.

It's over. I broke The Rules, I lost the Game. Now it will be one of the worst nights. The nights Ma and I never talk about because she is too ashamed and I am too scared. The nights I only sort of remember in the morning, like waking from a nightmare that I can't recall the details of except for the shaky, panicky way it made me feel. The nights I am floating away but also so incredibly, horribly stuck right where I am. With a Monster in my room, in my bed.

Another creak. The creak of the stairs as the Monster slithers up to my room.

My fists clench the edges of the blanket.

My heart throws itself against my ribcage.

My breaths come so fast and so hot that I really might suffocate and I think maybe that would be better. Better than what's going to happen now that the creaking has stopped and the Monster has stomped down the hallway to my door.

THE MONSTER HAS COME FOR YOU.

The doorknob turns.

My hands ache and my chest hurts and I'm suffocating
I'm dying I'm dead. The Monster is here. The Monster
has won.

The door creaks open.

The light from the kitchen drifts across the room,
illuminating the hulking, grinning form of the Monster in
my doorway. It's fuzzy through the threads of my blanket,
but I can see it heaving for breath after the battle with Ma.

My body is so knotted it hurts.

The Monster takes a lumbering step into my room,
shaking the floor.

I shut my eyes as tight as they'll go.

The Monster bumps into my dresser and growls to itself.

I sink my teeth into my bottom lip.

The Monster is at the side of my bed. It looms over me. I
cannot scream, I cannot move.

I want Ma.

The Monster's thick, sinewy arm reaches for me. It takes
a corner of the blanket between two of its awful claws
and peels it away from my face. I can't move to fight back
even if I was brave enough to; the blanket gets discarded
on the floor and the cold air pinpricks my skin into goose
flesh. There's a deep ache behind my eyes and I know I
cannot keep them closed forever.

I open them.

I lose my breath as the Monster's face comes into view. The greasy hair hangs from the head in patches. The dark, greedy eyes flick over all of me. The horrible tongue runs across the horrible teeth in a horrible grin.

The Monster leans in closer. Its breath is hot against my cheek, coming in labored huffs. It smells like metal, like blood.

A deep rumble in the Monster's throat. It opens its mouth to reveal crooked yellow teeth and a swollen white tongue. The smell is making me sick, but I can't move away. I am frozen, paralyzed. I have lost. I broke The Rules and the Monster got me. There is nothing I can do.

"Juney Girl," the Monster says in its deep Monster voice. "Why are you yelling?"

I pinch the skin of my arm to make the words scrape past my tongue. "I-I'm sorry."

"You know I don't want to have to get you in trouble."

"I know."

"How about we just forget about it? And maybe you can do a little something for me in return." The Monster's claws graze the skin of my leg, its beady eyes sweep down away from my face. "Will you do something for me, Juney Girl?"

I swallow the lump in my throat and say in my sweetest voice, "Anything, Daddy."

The Ward Watcher

GISELE PHALO

Alicia stepped off the METRO bus and gazed around, taking in the sights and sounds of the unfamiliar Houston neighborhood. She was here for a school report, tasked with learning about the history and culture of this area, but she had never heard much about Midtown.

She clutched her notebook, eager to start gathering information and taking notes. Little did she know, she was about to embark on a journey of discovery, delving into a rich and fascinating history that had been hidden from her until now.

As Alicia walked down the brick-paved streets, she noticed a woman in a black dress sitting on the curb, her head buried in her arms.

Alicia stood still for a moment, then approached the woman. “Excuse me, ma’am,” she said, “Do you live here?”

The woman looked up at Alicia. “You can see me?” she asked, her eyebrows furrowed.

“Of course, I can,” Alicia replied, tilting her head to the side. “Why wouldn’t I?”

The woman’s face lit up. “You’re our last hope!” she exclaimed, jumping to her feet.

Alicia put both of her hands up, backing away. “Hope for what?” she asked, her voice trembling. “I’m just here to gather information for my history project on Midtown.”

The woman looked up at the sky, then back at Alicia. “Freedmen’s Town, that’s what this place used to be called,” she said, lowering her voice. “I’ve been here for a long time, watching as the memories and history of this place fade away. I’m a Ward Watcher. It’s my duty to keep the history of Fourth Ward alive.”

Alicia relaxed her shoulders, then grabbed a pen from her backpack. “Freedmen’s Town? Ward Watcher? Can you repeat all that?”

The woman’s expression became serious. “There’s no time for that,” she said, moving closer to Alicia. “You have to help us. You’re our only hope of saving this place from disappearing forever.”

“But what can I do?” Alicia shrugged, dropping her notepad and pen. As she knelt down to pick it up, the woman pointed at a nearby tombstone. It was a small, cracked gray piece near one of the vacant lots that Alicia had passed earlier. She approached it, reading the name etched on the crumbling stone. “Rose Greenwallis,” she turned back to the woman, her eyes widened. “Who’s that?”

The woman was silent for a minute, staring at the tombstone. It looked like the grass didn’t grow there anymore, and the dirt was darker than in any other area. “That was me,” she finally spoke. “My soul stays here,” she said, her voice echoing through the empty streets. “I

died in a fire. Saint Angela's Church. But the spirit of the freedmen who laid down these very bricks kept me alive." Rose crouched down and placed her hand on the ground. The palm of her hand touched the pattern of crimson-colored rectangles outlining the street's path.

Alicia froze in place. She took a deep breath, then looked at Rose. "But how...how can I see you?"

"Anyone who can see a Ward Watcher has the genuine spirit of hope," Rose said before looking at the bricks below. "Long ago, the city of Houston was divided into six wards. They've since dissolved them, but we're still here."

Alicia's eyes widened. "There are others?"

Rose nodded. "I'm the Ward Watcher of Fourth Ward. There are five others. Our duty is to keep the history of each ward alive, even as the physical structures and landmarks disappear."

Alicia took a deep breath, trying to steady her nerves. "What happened to the other Ward Watchers?" she asked. "Have you heard from them?"

Rose shook her head. "No, I haven't. Houston is erasing our history, tearing down the buildings and replacing them with new development. It's like they're trying to wipe away any evidence that we ever existed. The Ward Watchers are losing hope."

"We can't let that happen," Alicia frowned. "We need to do something about it."

The woman looked at Alicia. “You have a good heart, child. But I’m invisible. I can’t do anything. It’s up to you.”

Alicia straightened her back, determination in her eyes. “I’ll go to the town hall. There’s a meeting next month. I’ll tell them to stop destroying our bricks.”

Rose looked up at the late evening sky. It was purple and orange. “You should go home,” her voice was barely audible. “It’s late. I’m sure your parents are worried about you.”

“I don’t want to leave,” Alicia replied. “I want to help.”

Rose shook her head. “There’s not much you can do right now. Go home, please.”

Alicia turned around, staring at the path ahead of her. She took one last look at Rose. The woman was standing in the middle of the street, watching over the bricks. Alicia felt a strange sense of comfort knowing that Rose was there, even if no one else could see her.

As Alicia boarded the evening bus back home, her mind was racing. She couldn’t just sit back and watch as the city erased the history of Fourth Ward. She had to do something.

The next day, she went to the local library and started researching everything she could find about the area and its history. She read about Freedmen’s Town and how it was the first African American settlement in Houston after the Civil War. She learned about the importance

of Saint Angela's Church and how it was a center of the community.

A few weeks later, Alicia found herself downtown at City Hall for the latest town hall meeting. She listened as the city officials responded to the concerns of other citizens, with topics ranging from unemployment to potholes. The officials discussed their plans for the future development of Midtown and Fourth Ward. When they called her name, her heart was pounding.

She approached the microphone and took a deep breath. "Excuse me, I have a question," she said, her voice shaking slightly. "What about the history and memories of Fourth Ward? Are they being considered in these development plans?"

The room went silent. All eyes were on Alicia. The city officials looked at each other, then one of them leaned forward into the microphone. "We understand the importance of preserving history, but unfortunately, it's not always possible," the official said. "We have to move forward and look to the future."

Alicia took another deep breath, "But what about the memories and stories of the people who lived in Fourth Ward?" she asked, her voice gaining confidence. "What about the history and legacy of Freedmen's Town? Shouldn't that be preserved and remembered?"

A gust of wind passed through the building, spreading a chill around everyone. Alicia looked up and closed her eyes. Could it have been Rose, passing by? The city official looked taken aback by Alicia's passion and conviction.

He cleared his throat before taking the microphone again. “Young lady, the city of Houston plans to...even out the streets. Now, this process does involve removing the bricks, but they will be placed back in their original position. That’s something we can make happen.”

“Thank you,” Alicia spoke softly into the microphone before turning around and heading back to her seat. Had justice been served? Were they really listening? She wondered about all these things. It seemed like some progress had been made.

However, less than a month had gone by when Alicia saw the City removing the bricks on the news, making way for new development. Behind the news reporter was a pile of bricks that had been strewn to the side like a heap of rubble. “No!” Alicia cried. She rushed to the nearest bus stop, determined to do everything in her power to stop them.

When she arrived, she looked around for someone in charge. That’s when she spotted a man in a suit talking on his cell phone. She approached him, her heart pounding in her chest.

“Stop!” she exclaimed. “You can’t do this! This is Fourth Ward, it’s a part of our history!”

The man looked at her, lowering the phone in his hand. “When I can’t drive through a neighborhood without my coffee spilling over, we’ve got a problem,” he said with a chuckle. He pointed to the men tossing the bricks into uneven piles like they were throwing out junk. “Young lady,” he began, “These bricks are old and worn out. It’s

time to make way for new development. Money talks,” he smiled, then returned to his conversation on the phone.

Alicia was devastated, but she refused to give up. She knew that she had to do something to stop them from destroying Fourth Ward’s history and the memories of those who lived there. She cupped her hands to her face. “Rose! Where are you?” she yelled at the top of her lungs, looking around. Just then, she began to hear singing as clear as day. It was coming from underneath the ground:

Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me around
I’m gonna keep on a-walkin’, keep on a-talkin’
Marchin’ down to freedom land

A shadow emerged from the vacant lot where a pile of bricks lay. “Rose!” Alicia ran up to her. “You won’t believe what’s going on! They’re going to take out more bricks. It’ll ruin the streets!” Alicia walked faster on the brick-paved road, looking around for construction vehicles.

“I know,” Rose replied softly. She looked determined, undefeatable.

“I-I thought they were going to put them back,” Alicia was on the verge of tears.

“Alicia,” Rose glanced at the panic-stricken teenager. “I know and so do the others. It’s time.”

“They’re messing with a site that’s on the National Historic Register,” Alicia turned around and pointed at the construction nearby. “That’s not legal! How could they disturb this?” Alicia’s shoulders dropped as if she were carrying the weight of the world on them.

“They won’t be disturbing anything,” a figure emerged from a tree standing near a vacant lot. Four others followed behind him. “The Ward Watcher for Second Ward is running late. Nothing new,” he grinned at Rose.

Alicia was shocked. For the first time, she saw a smile on Rose’s face.

“This city truly is something,” one of the other Ward Watchers spoke.

“Third Ward is disappearing,” another voice began. “Residents loved to shop at the local H-E-B. Now, it’s just a building for rent.”

“Our only solution is to buy the properties ourselves,” Rose chimed in with an unexpected joke. They all grew silent and turned to Alicia.

“So she’s the one that can see us, huh?” one of the Ward Watchers approached her, then turned to the construction that was continuing nearby. “Good thing they can’t. Watch this,” he raised his hands. Alicia watched in amazement as the others followed suit.

Before Alicia could blink her eyes, she saw the construction vehicles make loud noises, jolt back and forth, then stop working. The men in their yellow jackets climbed out of the large vehicles, yelling amidst all the commotion.

Alicia turned to see all the Ward Watchers with their hands raised. She watched as Rose stood amongst them, smiling. “Is everyone ready?” she glanced at the bricks that were scattered on the streets.

“Ready!” The rest of the Ward Watchers cried. The bricks began to fly in mid-air. The construction men ran towards their cars, their hands covering their heads. The bricks returned to their rightful places, laying perfectly next to each other on the streets. Alicia was frozen in place, her face full of admiration.

Alicia watched in awe as Fourth Ward was restored to its former glory, brick by brick. She felt proud to be a part of this moment, and even more proud to know that the Ward Watchers were fighting to preserve the history of their city.

As the construction men drove away, Alicia turned to the Ward Watchers. “How was that even possible just now?”

One of the Ward Watchers stepped forward. He was wearing a black suit and a navy tie. “We heard what you said at the town hall a few weeks ago. Your voice awakened the spirit of each ward. Thank you, Alicia.”

“You were listening?” Alicia asked with wide eyes.

Rose grinned, “The Ward Watchers are always keeping watch over the city.” She walked towards Alicia. “The hope that you bring to the city helps us keep up the fight. Don’t ever give up on protecting your history.”

Alicia felt a sense of pride and purpose wash over her. She knew that she too wanted to be a part of the fight to preserve the history and the spirit of the city. She continued to spread the word about the history of Freedmen’s Town long after she had finished her school report. She was a

regular at town hall meetings and often visited the Gregory Lincoln Library. To this day, she volunteers every month in Freedmen's Town, helping to maintain the historical museum there and watching over the bricks.

And so, the story of Fourth Ward and the Ward Watchers lives on, a testament to the power of community, determination, and the desire to preserve history.

VISUAL ART /
ARTE VISUAL



The Institution of Maritime Discovery | Alexandr Luc



Subversive Distortion I | Alexandr Luc



Subversive Distortion 2 | Alexandr Luc



Arendt vs. Heidegger | Mirka Walter



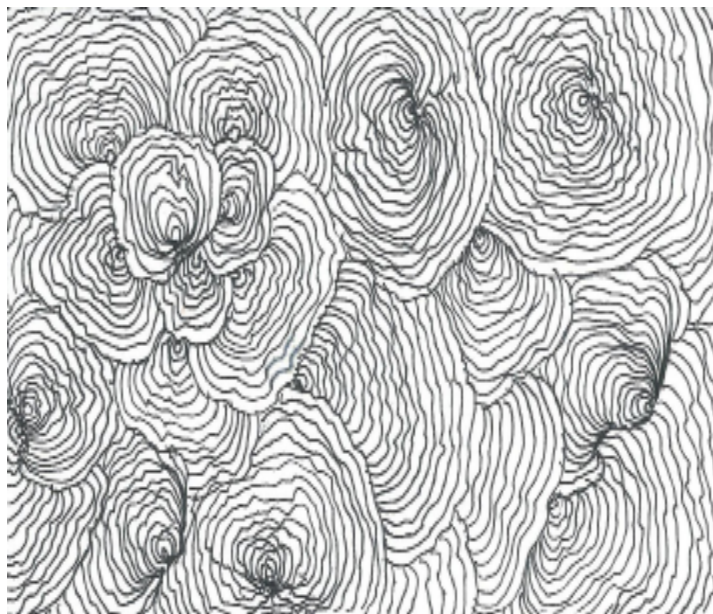
Julio Cortázar | Mirka Walter



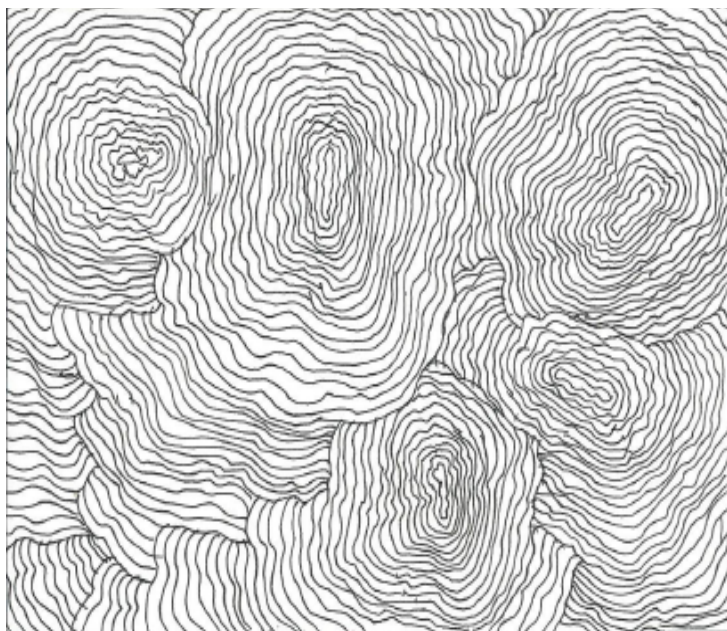
Clownbear | Jem Smith



Leo | Katia Hennigan



Contoured 2 | Sue Scavo



Contoured 5 | Sue Scavo



Bria Janae | Mikaila Whitmire

CREATIVE NONFICTION /
NO FICCIÓN

Familiar Love

ROSMANY GARCIA

We are one serving of sopa caldosa from a large pot on my ancestor's stove, swimming in the heat created by our own family members. Every now and then when the pot is stirred, our family starts to whisper to each other about a piece of gold floating in the soup. "Puchica, why isn't she working in a lab? She already graduated from college." They will say the veggies are too close to the gold within the pot. "Mamaíta," I didn't mean it like that. I was just joking." Yeah sure, you were just joking. As a matter of fact, yeah, I'm being lazy. In reality, she has never been lazy. I always see my sister applying for jobs while working in our parents' tailor shop. Her eyes always sink into their sockets, and she looks like a panda in the heat of the summer.

Both of our faces have similar features, from our family's signature flat chubby noses to the small bumps under our skin. Our personalities are the complete opposite. She has always worked hard on her goals. If my sister doesn't understand a math problem, she goes under the surface in search of an answer. I, however, just expect someone to tell me the answer. After being taught again and again how to tie my shoelaces, I gave up and asked her for help. She would always tie my shoes without complaint. Then she'd smile and pat my head, using the bunny under the hole method on my shoelaces. Usually, these sweet moments were interrupted by our parents demanding that my sister speak in English for them on the phone.

She loved watching horror movies, and I'd jump at the sight of a flying roach. Don't get me wrong, I'm okay with watching horror movies... but in daylight. For some reason demons don't scare me during the day, but at night, I swear, all the demons come out and haunt me. My sister would ask me to watch scary movies at night with her, but I refused, because out of the corner of my eye a closet door would open to the dark abyss. She would always tease me by poking my waist unexpectedly or slapping my butt. Even so, there were always times when I would surrender and watch a film with her. At times she would reject my helpless advances to comfort myself by nuzzling my head on her shoulder. Movie time with my sister became non-existent as we grew up.

My sister was the golden goose not only to my immediate family but also to my extended family. Every aunt and uncle asked for her help. From easy tasks like reading a baby shower invitation to being a middleman on filing taxes. My aunt used her chipmunk voice to throw fits over not being able to read an invitation we sent her. Let me make this clear, we didn't know she couldn't read. I'm telling you, that lady looks like she wouldn't even kill a roach, but she could attack a whale in the sea if she wanted to. Sister doesn't like watching my aunt or any family member erode away by the currents of a different society, but she doesn't see she is also being eroded by the currents. A first generation daughter, niece, and cousin who knew the English language and studied well; that was all they would think about. My sister was still a young adult and learning her way in life, yet she made the grown adults, who seemed so prepared to me as a kid, seem like teenagers.

As if she had been a circus performer who walked blindly on a tightrope, she helped my family through circumstances that a normal teenager wouldn't know of. She was only fifteen when she started to make iced coffee in the mornings and at night, but it's not as if she drank caffeine for no reason. I hated coffee and would rather drink juice. At night I'd hear her sipping her coffee. I would only see a mountain of hair tied seemingly like a bird nest, and a white powder covering her hands, making our surroundings smell like lavender. Her head popped up and down to the beat of Panic! At The Disco or My Chemical Romance as I heard the clicking of the calculator's buttons, the crumble of paper moving, and the screech of a pencil. It was all I heard for years, then she went off to college. Now she goes to work and lives on her own, without me.

Over the phone, I asked her if she felt homesick. When she left for college, I felt a bit cold towards her. Who am I kidding? I was terribly lonely at home. Being surrounded by people pressuring me to help them out every single day made me extremely exhausted. Her response to my question seemed a bit unusual. A large weight to become perfect came off her shoulders when she left, yet she answered me with a simple Yes.

POETRY / POESÍA

A Sanskrit Book

PADM NABH TRIVEDI

Grandpa had been asking me
to bring him Daskumarcharitam
—A Sanskrit book—
from Banaras
even when he was a hundred and one.
a strange craving for knowledge
he had.
when I bought it,
his sight was too weak to read,
but he said,
I've already read it many times.
I'm just collecting them for you,
that is how
I want you to remember me,
after the inevitable.
I was silent.

a widening

COLIN JAMES STURDEVANT

in olden days it was a fig. contemporarily, there is an apple. like an apple atop a head awaiting the tooth of an arrow. ready for the fall. ready for discovery. ruby red & ripe. sheen & waxen. both borne of out of wedlock (you & the apple). prokaryote & eukaryote. the birds & the bees. honey & song. of seed. don't sugarcoat it.

say it as if it's your given name: BASTARD. & in your chest there's a limb. there's a sweet singing snake. when it hisses & kisses & flicks enticement, plays with your docile ear, you hear the word thistle. ask the snake to hold its tongue or you can offer to tie it.

how as you aged, the whole hole in your chest widened. grew like guilt. like ancestral sin. what your therapist told you of equations to get a whole: you must salvage from broken parts. some call it the soul. others, machina.

your mother and father shared fruit. spat you out like a seed that could poison. in ways, you were a seed that weighed more than the fruit itself. & a therapist asks how you feel. & the younger you could say there's a widening.

that the flesh of your body is thinning, growing away to make room for an emptiness. blowing up & out into blossoms. unnaturally growing cells. to loosen its grip around the branch in your chest allowing the serpent

to fall like an apple. like seed. like son. like myth. like
beginning. like ending. like shame. like cells splitting.
O, cancerous being. O, trifling hot mess. when stories
of adam & eve, your biological parents, reshape— it'll
always be the same: a widening.

sarong drive, the 1990s

COLIN JAMES STURDEVANT

i.

this is where mother ghosted us then.
softly gone, her shouts absent
from our parents room,
 a choked wren.

i can't remember
if we knew then
of our brother,
lost to imperfection.

 the reason father never snapped back
when dinner plates shook in watery black.
 his voice never raised back

ii.

she was known to fly from city to city
amidst moonlit windows & skyscrapers.
all families, budding like ours, packed gritty
into streets with names on newly mapped papers.

father was another quiet. safe
a budding violet. unwashed plates.
these weeks were our little escapes.

but when she'd be home from her travels
we'd marvel at her stories of places like NYC
& unfurl & unwrap hot wheels tracks, & grovel.

iii.

we'd cling to her nightgown, father lifting timid bodies
in midsleep.

we'd drift to bed
we'd wake up to ourselves upset
& secretly against pillows,
when screams crept—
we wept & wept.

Mujer raíces

MARIANA MAZER

Exiliados sin raíces
no son sólo los exiliados
yo también perdí una casa
un colegio
diez veranos.

Como si aprendiera el arte de perder de Bishop
fui perdiendo los años.

Y las raíces sin tierra
crecen ahora en mis pulmones
se ensanchan, se multiplican
emergen por los pechos
cubren la piel de rizomas
las uñas
el cabello
buscan las hojas, las ramas.

Me dicen la mujer raíces
y yo sonrío
con mis raíces
que cantan.

Marathon

PATRICK CABALLERO

The
 dichotomy
 between
 one existence vapid
 and one vital

to no end,
 will, in
 the
 rabid
 abuse
 and
 rapid
 use
 of
 the treadmill and Folgers,
 leniently prescind.

And with peremptory candor—
 in its despotically tranquil
 and tranquilizing manner—
 will this inner distention,
 of a dyadic and contiguous
 contention, with a coruscated
 brevity, of bipartitely cardiovascular
 and caffeinated levity, end;
 as my pulse gets going
 and the day begins again.

Epitafio

CARLA CASTILLO

Un verso,
una rima,
una estrofa.

Ni más ni menos que
un conjunto de letras,
un puñado de palabras monocromáticas.
Pero en su trama interna, están impulsadas
por tantas emociones donde el trazo se vuelve
firme y hasta punzante sobre el papel.

Quien lo escribió seguramente tiene llantos añejados,
gritos enmudecidos y sin eco,
sentimientos multicolores
como los de la paleta de un pintor,
un amor en estado de coma
y la absurda e involuntaria ingratitud
de aquellos por los que dio la vida.
Se lee hasta los dientes crujiendo
entre sí como forma de sobrevivir.

Bailando contigo

CARLA CASTILLO

La música tiene el hechizo del volver y en ese volver tus ojos me miran y los míos te ven. Justo ahí ese tango se me hace piel.

Requiem of the Mythos: Philomela and Silenced Women

YASMENE SADEK

It is not my being you fear
Nor my physical prowess
It is my tongue

I'd be the imminent
Destruction
Where my body sleeps
A pillar I am, my carcass a tree

This temple I've become
To flee
Your worship of me

It is born from the silence you conjured
This tapestry of mine
Threads sewn
From sinew of my bones

I'll feed you my flesh and blood
Stuff you full
When you claim innocence

How can you be?

What better punishment
Than the charred taste of your creation
Swallow it whole
As you've done me so

Metamorphose me
Into the songbird and nightingale
And listen to what song I scream

Metamorphose me
Into the monster you breed
And watch what I become
In your name

Her silence is damnation
The pith of his story
Encased in the rinds of her fruit

Laurels drape her limbs
His arms wrapped in her embrace
A touch undone, unloved

From the branches of her body
His sunlight casts through
The gaps of her leaves

Ivory maiden, divine in youth
He cries in want
Ars Amatoria!

Virginal beauty
Nectar from her touch
His fingers stained scarlet

A father her savior
Brambles, branches, bridled
A God her undoing

This river water
He drinks, stolen
Roots of her soles

His hair
His lyre
His quiver

Her body he steals
Her tongue he swallows
The silence of women

Still Life on an Early Tuesday Morning

LIZ MÁRQUEZ

breasts soft flesh
 loose arms and stretch marks
 track lines *see where this body has been*
 hands that have not been touched or held
 yet do so much holding
 arms outstretched into the expanse of you
 expand and I contract
 pelvic twists gnarled
 knots wadded aches that I've learned to lick
 old uterine wounds that keep opening up
 I keep closed myself
 and the tiny feet that pitter patter in between
 these silent screaming sobs

Oh, Sweet Sparrow, Begin Again

KAROLYNE OCHOA

Rotten wood casts weary shadows
upon cracked footways, whose form
has long been ignored by passersby—
that drudging pace from pillar to post.
Whilst looming, dark clouds roll along the sky.
The coming darkness frightens the bashful sparrow
as she nestles quietly among the fallen decay.
She trembles under browned leaves and twisted things,
while globe-sized raindrops wage war on her broken home.
If the sparrow waits for dawn, she'll surely have no choice.

She has minutes to realize
her feathers are flexible,
her wings are mighty,
and she can fly.

By going, she will realize the power of choice.
Her journey will take her beyond the broken tree she called home
and beyond the thunderous storm that caged her.

Hope will ease the pain
that longing shall create.

And remember, sweet sparrow, you can always begin again.

Flower / God / Bloom

SAM MOE

Soon you are stepping into memory pools, bucket
where once spools then buttons, sometimes needles

once my mouth and I ripped my hands back and forth
to get at my heart, after all, is not the saw more powerful

than you, blade, it doesn't do us any good to try and
figure out which dresses to wear, I've abandoned

champagne in the old town garages, I've left my love
for you beneath pale amber curtains, lists of my feelings

for the color blue, getting mixed between prey and pray
what I want you can't give me, no matter we take jewels

we steal the gold; she wouldn't have wanted it this way
but I'm saying carry on in your glissade and peak, kissing

men on old sofas, sleeping with women in the tub, you
have my lace, you have my heat, you are my city coated

in mist, let's cut our clothes off our bodies and wait for
lamp lights to return, of course it won't do us any good

to ignore her ghost, quick-smooth as a new anchor, she
is in wax leaves, what if I begged you to stop, I present

my stomach, repot the plants and I'll let you keep the sea
room, S., you are sailor at best, you are chilly lighthouse at

worst, I'm leaving you but so gently you won't know, couldn't
see I'd trade my teeth for bliss, bottled and handled across

the counter, come S., come what may, crabs and lobster claws
in the broken sink there is a dance hall in the hall, you break

my knuckles, S., break my heart sure but what good would it do
now to reach back into that angel space, still young gods, sleeping

late, chain-smoking on the dining room table, you were gone
gone and the statues illuminated with every crush of wave, it was

like I could forgive you, maybe one day I will again maybe it's
the nicotine talking but I've always had a fungal spot in my chest

for you, we could save each other, toss our hair around the room
seance, baby, arugula beneath the bed, hips, clover, she haunts

you silver, we are not an us, I am a creature on the roof praying
for witness, me among pigeons and smoke packs, am I right in front

of you, if you like an angel or a waste of time, take me to the blue
halls and navy wood, take me to task, take your hands off me and please

for the love of our history, tread out of this space, come salt or broken
starfish lips, this feeling falling apart kitchen sink in evening, what

business is it of yours, if I pull myself together, heart: open, teeth:
trying, flesh: fool of strength, weakness: your foot dip, like none of this

is real, your come-here-baby let's forget any of this happened, let's push
our foreheads so close and hard, together we concuss.

Sitting Across from the Woman Who Thinks I'm the Other Woman

MAGGIE RUE HESS

and sweating to prove that I'm gross while making the chipped polish on my toenails as obvious as possible, I shrink into my coffee straw so she can see that who I am is not who she thinks I could be. I don't even compare. She shapes our conversation as easily as her appearance; her curls defy the summer crumple, no rosy smudge on the rim of her mug. We swap love stories as if the narrative were simple, as if the nothing that complicates it weren't between our ribs and behind our eyes. Yes, I am guilty of thinking it could be any other way. Thinking two women don't have to meet at a picnic table in the gravel yard of a coffee shop with fear stitched to their palms. Do you know how it feels to small yourself and not lose respect? Me neither.

If I could be gravel—not the nuisance she'd find in a shoe, but the kind she'd kick away without a thought—I would harden down and chip myself a layer at a time. I would kiss any dust that marred my mouth, this untrusted tongue dulled like an over-read page. See: how I smile through the dry like I have all my teeth and no bite.

Sitting Across from the Woman Who Says “It’s Because You’re a Scorpio”

MAGGIE RUE HESS

I feel like a waste of my star sign, an exoskeleton of crimson lip stain and leather jacket. Our stools are lacquered with stickers, so I make a joke about sitting on one of Shakespeare’s face. She smirks that orgasm is self-care and most of her married friends aren’t happy. There is no disagreement, just disregard. We both had a lovely Thanksgiving, but she doesn’t bother asking about mine so I don’t bother to tell her. Staring at a TV screen, I recount the football team’s stats with practiced allegiance. When that fails, I fill silences with silence. I don’t insist on having a presence in the absence of interest. I drink a little too fast not to be noticed. Glass half empty or glass half full—nothing guarantees it’s your glass. She reads me like a constellation, which is to say she can’t. Where once I had a friend, now I have beer suds and eggshells and a birth chart as a disclaimer. There were signs besides the zodiac, and I ignored them. My wish for the body I once loved:

stillness and venom.

Endless Hunger

LORENZO ARTURO CAMACHO

I only see
this barren land in front of me
its empty skies
a sprout of grass courageously peeking
through reinforced concrete
and the lazy shadow everything casts

Colección de nubes

LUPITA ZAVALETA VEGA

Para M.

las nubes de arena de ayer
estratocúmulos
creo

no tenían especie
ni variedades
ni rasgos suplementarios
antes de que me preguntaras por sus nombres

para reconocerlas
me quejé
esperan que calcule alturas
en lugar de saltarlas

la palabra en tu idioma para decir tonos
precisiones
sutilezas de cuerpo
y de frases
viene de la deformación de “nube”

y en mi idioma para sentir
hay sombras que tú no conoces

asper

uneven
coarse
rough
bitter?

tas

used to form feminine abstract nouns
indicating a state
of being

hay vientos que mantienen el mismo curso
durante milenios trazan dunas
y durante segundos
calles de nubes
paralelas

cirrus

curl

spissatus

past participle of the verb

spissare

that means

to condense

no me he aprendido todas las palabras

para decir nube

ni puedo traducírnoslas enteras

fractus

past participle of the verb

frangere

it means

torn

to break

to fracture

to tear

apart

cumulus
collection

en esta ciudad que es tuya
de la que me despediré pronto
salir es salir al cielo

Westminster Crypt

New Orleans, Louisiana

NATALIE ROSE GOVE

My family here never turns up the earth.

They rest in one marble chamber, cradled together and safe from the watery soil.

Here, mold spreads like gossip across old mausoleums and mourns the dead.

My family here never leaves the ninth ward.

They pick guitar strings on rooftops, dangling their feet in rivers created by the storm.

Here, mildew breeds like bitterness in-between large magnolia petals and does not mourn the dead.

My family here never turns up the earth.

They celebrate in one marble chamber, wearing gold tuxedos and purple taffeta skirts.

Here, thousands of colorful beads splash across the scentless tomb and do not wake the dead.

Reticence

M.E. SALDIVAR

My silence
is a gift
not of
choice

it is
made of
sympathy
born
from my
mother

given through
me
to appease
the grief

left
to her
by your
absence

with it
I will
purchase
many things

shining sun-filled
mornings
never darkened
by your presence

celebrations
and delight
never ruined
by your words

new life
created
never culled
by your hand

my silence
will buy
everything
we/you
never had

when your
body
no longer
feeds on
the essence
of my being

no longer
attempts
to rot
the peace
I have
made

to the dirt
will I
finally speak
(and be heard)

mornin'

SCOOP

The day is never next to that glass of water on the nightstand when I wake up. I always have to get out of bed to get it.

The Sun in the Window Is My Cup of Coffee

SCOOP

beats in books, believed to bring beast to being but
a life worth writing about is no life worth living.

it must compel to rise and step
and step and step and love the step.

inexorable

TERRY JUDE MILLER

there are those of us
who do not believe
it exists—the Kobayashi Maru
the no-win scenario

because when tested
the mind grows beyond
context and condition
runs against the grain
violates the laws of physics

the great comedy and drama
of it all—the little person
holding the door of doom shut
with nothing but indomitable will
and the spark of the divine within
braces shoulder against strained timbers

but—still—as you watch the beads
of sweat blossom upon the hero's brow
the contortion of his face
you can't help but run to his aid
and place your back against the portal

the open window

TERRY JUDE MILLER

For Walt Whitman and Ed Folsum

*“Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man”*

—Leaves of Grass, *Walt Whitman*

it’s the most enduring thing
I learn from Whitman, Compadre

this is no poem,
who touches this page, touches my heart

touches the note that changes
the A-chord to A-minor

this is the codex of infinite translations

I felt you enter from an open window
the heat of your hand raises the temperature
of the room, the stanza, the poem

some of this you already know
some you will come to know
but there is much more you will
never know—that part I leave
to you to live out

all are welcome to join my family
tell others you are my daughter
you are my son—you just might be
in one of the many universes

what you don't understand, the sea
will break down and bring around again

this is sign language for *I love you*
see how my hand trembles
as it scurries across the page like a mouse
as I place myself upon this leaf

The Questioning Disc Jockey

BETTY BOWENS-RODGERS

Bright lights—different color lights—flashing lights
I am blinded by these lights.
Are those spinning car wheels with no car?

Where—is—that banging noise coming from?
Big black boxes emitting sounds.

People are everywhere.
Some smiling, others arguing, some laughing, some
sitting, others just standing.
Why can't I hear any of them?

There is that girl named Toy, always looks like an angel
I wonder if she will notice me—NOPE!

Hey Venus, hey Venus, over here—
none of the ladies ever notice me.
I was once told there are seven
women to every one man.

Handsome, or at least that's my thinking...
Dressed up sharp and got some change in my pocket.

Loving the hair.

Who told me to dye my hair this crazy color?

My mustache and beard, too?

And why did I listen to them?!

Hips are shaking, feet moving all over the place,

b-o-o-t-i-e-s bouncing.

Push the emergency button.

Is there a fire? Smoke everywhere.

Why are they all staring at me?

All the way over here in this corner.

I really feel alone... I want to be alone... or do I?

Oh man, they can't see me because maybe

I am like dead, like a ghost—stop tripping dude.

Why do people say “what’s up dude” or

“what’s up my brother”—

what exactly is a dude or a brother?

Smiling faces pretend sometimes.

What—is—that—smell?

Oh yes, I am smoking one of those marijuana cigarettes.

Drinks being served.

I need one, possibly two,

would someone please bring me a drink?

It’s dark, but I can still see through those blinding lights

Where am I,
am I going crazy
or am I dreaming?

No, wait. Damn!
Headphones...
I'm still at work spinnin' tracks!

Ceremony

SANJEEV SETHI

When words reach
in diglot:
with semblant meanings,
and the other
with their imagined import,
I appropriate them
for poetry.

A caret remains;
a prerequisite
for inditing.
Notes from nowhere
follow with a frequency
that puzzles me,
as with every poem, I key.

Fancy

SANJEEV SETHI

My au pair of thirty-plus years,
while navigating
and negotiating
future contracts
often mentions “last.”

The lovely lady
probably has an image of
a mythical end,
of superannuation
in her hamlet with kin.

She is unaware of
the kicker.
An end rarely announces itself.
Cremains leave us
without a kernel.

Stochastic Elements

GRACE GREGGORY HUGHES

Random

Mimesis

Selection

Octave

Decade

Fact

Artifact

Material

Love

Accessibility of

Concretized

Comfort

Study

Meaning

Desire

Apparatus

Reliability

Sign

Signified

Stop

Relation

Validity

Commodification

Mockery

Machine

Song

Sold

Dark

Spark

For Your Consideration

SOREN RIVERO

I've always associated the color red
with love. It's what they tell me makes
the most sense.

Valentine's gifts, roses, sipping wine after
you realized that it's already too late
to say sorry.

Oh, but about red, how can I
cite my beliefs
if blood is the only proof
of showing that you even had a heart
to begin with? Does passion get
its color before hello or after
goodbye?

A message can be written in
so many different languages, but can only be
read by understanding
the language of wildfires. I mean, I ignite,
you extinguish,
but what are these hands
if not a road to ashes scattered across
frozen glaciers? Stop

trying to figure it out
what I mean when I say *tus ojos están*
en mi lengua. It's a warning for me, too, to not
bite down, because it is not
blood that you will swallow,
but the experience of letting go
of something you never had
the chance to hold. But still, it's better
to feast on
raw iron
than it is to regret.
Does that spell "love"
to you?

Or should I spit out these letters,
douse them in red paint and sugar
coat the lies? Perhaps it is more
of a fantasy to say what
needs to be said. Because red
is pronounced the same as read,
but I don't know
how to ask
you was it worth it to cut
the wick
from the flame before
you even read
the letter?

I'm scared of writing poems
when I'm shitfaced on vodka. I don't want to write
something that doesn't make sense. Like to say
Hello Mr. President, I love you or
Dorothy, can we go back home? I might even forget that
I'm writing
and merge the words into
a painting, an abstract piece
of puzzles. Or say *Dear diary* or *To whom it may concern*,

and I'll end with
regret the next day or I might even write
your name on the paper over and over until I find
myself heading over to
the toilet to vomit after
the paper is now staring at me
and it reads
"Read. Eleven fifty-two. PM"

and I somehow forgot that
you can't reignite a fire from its own ashes.

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