

The background of the cover is a photograph of a vast field of green, succulent-like plants, possibly sea purslane, stretching towards a horizon under a clear blue sky. The plants in the foreground are in sharp focus, showing their individual stems and small leaves.

INK

A Literary Arts Magazine

Issue 15

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Magazine

Issue 15
Woodland Community College
Spring 2020

Editors: Gurtaj Grewal, Onica P. Roman, and Ella Morrison
Cover Art: *Grass* by Gurtaj Grewal
Cover Poem: “Pressing Flowers” by Kylie Fuller
Printing: Mike Wieber, Yuba College Print Shop
Faculty Advisor: Kevin Ferns, Professor of English, Woodland Community College

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Strayed Lights - Twilight of Man

Henry Sevening

Life turned to decay, as lights quickly strayed
Black clouds choked the world in the dying light
Lost in disarray, yet mankind still stayed
Unwilling to fade to a demon's blight

Oh' the dead earth pale, the damned rise and wail
Saved by human hands and a rain of steel.
Behind iron veil, walls the damned assail
The last sparks of man are relit with zeal.

Echoes of strayed souls, merely the first toll
For the demons seek out the ending note.
Burning lands to coal, a fate they extol
Yet forgetting to go tear out the throat.

Thus they survive and for vengeance they strive
The end they'll deprive, by returning alive.

I cry

Onica P. Roman

I cry for woe
I cry for pity
I cry for the falseness
Of the beacon of Hope
Only an illusion of Time
For life will never rhyme
I cry for sadness
I cry for pain
The only true realist in the world
Demanding to be heard, seen, felt
Like the very beating of a heart
Refusing to be shunned
My reminder that happiness is
Only a visit from a best friend
A motherly hug
A fatherly embrace
I cry for the illusions return
Its grasp of ignorance and bliss
Holding my dear head
Under its guillotine of love
Tears never lie though
Under their fluidity
Truth reveals all
Better than my third eye
I see now
That there is no guillotine of love
But the one of reality
Chopping my head off to the crumbling world
In which I live
Feeling off with my head
One moment at a time

Solemnity in Paradise

Amber Thatcher

There was a revenge on the tip of her tongue that leaked into the atmosphere with every angry exhale she gave. Her chest heaved in the same hazardous manner as the dampened floors of our town's abandoned city hall, as she crawled against the gravel. We followed quietly, an assembly of caged souls, unsure.

No attempts at consolation would penetrate her barrier. We were only allowed to trail the active fire at our feet, aware that any words would certainly be the wrong ones. To ignite the flame as she lamented on the ground would be a grand fallacy, and only that.

My throat tightened as the smoke from her hateful inferno danced behind her. It tangled itself in my hair, scribbled against my eyes, and tripped my feet. Our knees scraped against stones as we continued on in a trance, and I was soon enthralled in the most familiarly alarming way.

She'd built a house that more resembled a roofed window than a home. "Everything must stay open," she would say wistfully. Wherever we looked seemed bright. Like Paradise.

This was the day that was never allowed to end. The teacups we drank from tinkled when they were placed down upon their saucers. We drank everything from these small chalices: Ceylon tea, ichor. Afterward we would fill the bird feeder and meet our new friends.

We led them in slowly, and only their feet were loud. Warm bodies never spoke, a strict rule of hers.

"They're very cordial, unlike our last guests." My head nodded up and down ridiculously as I spoke. She lifted their heavy arms onto the tea table, glancing up at me when she was finished.

"You don't say? Hm...well, I think so too!"

Of course she would agree, I was only mimicking her. Our seated guests' heads drooped forward slowly until they had each fallen out of consciousness. She used her fingers to blithely trace a horizontal line over the napes of their angled necks. Flesh unfolded wherever she touched. Souls simmered aimlessly underneath her incisions.

Slowly, their heads began to sink even lower.

The lines in my palms glistened a violent crimson. I blinked at them until I realized with hopelessness what had occurred. A blissful drunken feeling in the air mingled with my dread until my eyes shot up to her glowing face in the dark.

"You made me do it again."

My voice shook. My body quivered. My vision vibrated with rage.

She motioned for the others to help clean up *our* mess, while the sounds of heavy bodies dragging along the desert engulfed my creaky sobs.

Someone tugged at the corpse beneath me, whose small frame I now wore like a gauntlet over my fist. I flinched, grimacing in horror. The faintest *thump* of a heartbeat grazed my palm as I slid my fingers out of the temperate wound in its chest. My breath caught when I recognized what I'd found.

"Leave it. It's mine," I said, swatting their greedy hands away.

The souls hauled away the cadavers as I briskly carried the body to an oasis in the opposite direction, my ear pressed expectantly against its torso. The pulse was steady for such a minute frame. *Hope*. I placed my lips against its hair, grateful to hear a rise in its breath.

"Drink water, it's here. You have to go west, you'll find people who will help you."

Who will help *me*.

My eyes closed, and I prayed to whoever looked over this lifeless infantry that she hadn't wiped out the entire desert population. A hushed sob left the body's mouth as it retook its life.

"Tell them," I faltered, stifling a cry of my own despair. "Tell them we will be in Calvary. We'll be there soon.

"Once you're able to walk, you have to go west and tell them that."

My eyes filled with scorching tears, and I wondered exactly which of our lives I was trying to save. Quickly, I turned again toward the horde in the distance and began running back to her. She would be looking for me.

And soon they would be looking for her. *For us.*
This time I would finally escape her Paradise.

How Old Are You?

Isabella Morrison

How old are you?

a question with a straight-forward answer
and yet I struggle to find the right number.

I am sixteen, but I am also two:

My vocabulary and actions can all be summarized in one
word:

No, nah, hell no, heck to the no

No, I don't like authority nor do I have much respect for
figures of authority

No, respect your elders never felt like advice worth heeding

No, I don't like to take advice and think I can do most things
on my own.

I am sixteen, but I am also five:

I am constantly curious about the world around me, always
asking why.

Why is that the way it is? Why are you doing that? Why am
I this way?

I always need an explanation, I always want to know more.

The phrase "details please" was made for me.

I am sixteen, but I am also nine:

Never get caught saying "what" around me as "chicken butt"
will always be my response.

The world is my playground and everything is a balance
beam.

Doesn't matter if it is the six-foot high fence surrounding my house
or the line on the edge of a crosswalk,
I will be proving to the world that I was not gifted with balance.

I am sixteen, but I am also fourteen:
I fall in love quickly and easily,
jumping between people, passions, and places as if life was one big trampoline.
My head knows that most things don't last,
but my heart thinks every love is perfect, even and especially when it isn't.

I am sixteen, but I am also eighteen:
I am so antsy to be fully independent, but still long to be a child.
I am stuck between growing up and growing out.
I want independence and crave freedom,
but am still figuring out the ways of the world.

I am sixteen, but I am also twenty:
I am a rebel, a social activist, a liberal.
I don't like to conform to social norms.
I speak out for what I believe.
I am a full-blown queer individual.
I am a proud feminist.

I am sixteen, but I am also thirty-three:
I am constantly in a midlife crisis,
questioning my life's purpose and meaning,

wondering if I am living my life to its fullest potential,
wondering if I have wasted the best years of my life
or if they are still yet to come.

I am sixteen, but I am also forty:
The eldest of five crazy children,
I have always felt like a partial second mother.
I am constantly “parenting” my siblings, friends, and
students.
In every group I am in, I am known as the mom.
You need an extra hair tie or are dealing with a break-up?
Supposedly, I have all the answers.

I am sixteen, but I am also sixty:
I love to sit indoors on a rainy day,
cuddled up with a cup of tea and a book.
I love to use a sewing machine and can cook up a storm,
both skills that have labeled me as a “domestic” woman in
my house.
I prefer phone calls to texting and still have yet to join the
world of social media.

I am sixteen, but I am also ninety-seven:
Always expecting death to be right around the corner,
always feeling like my days are numbered.
I look back at all the photos and memories of my life,
A life that seems so short and yet so long.

But I am also sixteen:
Caught in the throes of life,
not knowing whether to turn left or right.

Both questioning everything and feeling like I have all the answers.

Constantly making mistakes and adapting to new situations. Weighed down by social, familial, and personal pressures, but somehow still a playful mess.

I am sixteen.

Home

Beau Morrison

You can be everywhere and always moving,
But sometimes you are forever grounded,
Stuck in time and place.
Many people think of you as what we classify as a house,
While you can be this, most times you aren't.
You can be anything anywhere.
You are the place we feel the most safe at.
The place we want to return to after a trying day.
The place we would go if everything in life was melting away.
Some people have trouble finding you,
Sometimes you hide and run from people,
But you have never hidden from me,
You are always there for me,
There to protect me,
Comfort me.
The sun wore the seat of your bottom.
Engulfs me and hides me from troubles and fears.
Your spongy back lets me relax and rest when I need it.
You never move.
You just sit in your spot right on the edge of the pool.
At times you are shaded by the grand oak tree behind you,
But it seems whenever I need it you sit there shining in the sun
ready to warm me.
You are just a chair to most, but to me you are more.
You are getting old, I can see the wear and tear of my problems
begin to deteriorate you,
Your rocker now squeaks every time I sit in you and your paint is
faded and chipped,
But for now you are still here comforting me.

Strange Times

Cesar Frutos

Twentys, funny age to be in right now
Some friends got married some even got kids
And to be honest some are in jail. Wow.
And let's not forget those in love with cigs

Some have their apartments their own small place
Don't compare to others there's no hurry
Got to understand we all got our pace
Take your time and perfect your life story

So even though these times are a bit strange
And the difficulty settings went up
There is still some time for growth and some change
And success will come and it will erupt

Stop overthinking motivate yourself
Times may be weird but all is good and well.

My Ode to the Phone

Jenaveve Moreno

Cell phones are amazing.

They allow for contact everywhere I am able to keep in touch with all kinds of people

It allowed for me to meet and stay in touch

With people from afar

I can use my phone to call, text, snapchat, message and etc.

All this in one little device isn't that amazing

It hides who I am, and distracts me from the boring life i live

My online life is different from real life

I don't actually go to parties, as often as my instagram shows

The likes from each picture validate me

Remind how liked i actually am

I need my phone, it helps me feel confident

And liked by people, i not as alone as i would be without it

I'm glad my phone is here to keep me company

I am nothing without it.

Burned

Amber Thatcher

Spring comes so sultry in Northern Cali
Squinting over cold drinks, running to shade,
Helios leaps onto stage as winds flee
And he begins his rambunctious charade.
I've lassoed the clouds into my bedroom
In an effort to cage Winter all year,
Wordless and crammed over coffers they loom,
These cool hostages deliquesce my fears.
At high noon I'm shocked to find them leaving
Through some fault in my window they've now slipped
I burst out the door in sudden grieving
And in a haze of summer waves I'm gripped.
 My shoulders gleam, baring blisters so rude
 And I curse whoever cries, "Sun is good."

Don't settle for less

Diomercia Padilla

Typically women want a man in their life to make them feel one of a kind. That there is no other person in this world getting the same amount of love as them. They want to be treated like a queen with a beautiful blinding gold tiara sitting on their hair, but for me it's a little different. I mean, who doesn't want to get red roses every once in a while. Have the guy take you to the Cheesecake factory so you can get Parmesan Crusted Chicken served over pasta in a spicy New Orleans sauce and even cost 20 dollars. Yeah, that's all great and all but have you had a guy that would drive 2 hours right after a long day of work serving people 30 dollar dinner plates, 5 times a week from San Jose just to go see you. Give you advice when you are in a serious situation. Be the shoulder you cry and sooth you with kind words when you get out of an argument you had with your father. To all women reading this, don't settle for less. Most guys will give you what you want and not what you need. To all the guys reading this, please take notes. Money comes and goes but love never goes away.

Ocean View

Noel Hassan

I know a girl and her name is Ocean
In her presence, I always feel in awe and in peace.
Something about Ocean made you want to appreciate every
inch of her
Her waves in motion, vibrant colors outspoken and strength
very much potent.

When I met her on the Amtrak Train that day I had no idea
on how to compliment her
Her beauty overwhelmed me.

The way the sun made her glisten in its light
And how she moved to her own rhythm struck me.

She seemed so content with the world around her even
though it continues to do her wrong.

The people pollute her even though the animals are always
with her.
The weather controls her and the storms abuse her.

But in the end, she still manages to absorb all the grace in
the world.

When the sun was coming down, she embodied all the colors
of the sunset within her.
I'm still speechless to this day whenever I think about her at
that moment.

She made all the emotions halt within me and ignited the
bliss of life that I needed at that point of time.

But the hour passed by too quickly.
I was shaken back into reality the moment she left.
I never felt so disoriented in my life.
One minute I was perfectly at ease with her, then the next
second I was left like an abandoned child.
Reality hit me like a sucker punch.

But I hopped out of that train feeling hopeful.
I will strive to be the ocean
And to give love to the people that damage it.

When Two Women Love Each Other

Sydney Leahy-Hill

We are always coming out to strangers,
Bearing our raw, red hearts until they bleed.
Assuming we're straight puts us in danger,
As we are afraid because of your greed.

We expose our love to strangers often,
Wishing hard to come out on our own terms,
PDA is the nail in the coffin.
We are not sisters -- that I will affirm.

I'm tired of explaining who I am.
I'm scared to shoulder the truth of me.
I wish I could say I don't give a damn.
Truthfully, all of this terrifies me.

This isn't me saying that I'm not proud.
I just don't like the pressure of a crowd.

Colors of You

Isabella Morrison

Dull Rose Pink

The color of the Dutch hoodie

You always seemed to be wearing

The color you once had your nails done years ago.

Neon Fuschia

The color I painted Cade's shoes

The day I began bonding with "your boys"

The boys I was under strict orders to be a good influence towards.

Burnt red

The color of your ugly-ass car

The color of the sweater you wore on Thanksgiving

That you couldn't find because it was buried in your closet

The color of the seats in the cutest picture of you at Rick's Dessert Diner.

The odd combination of forest green and turquoise

The color of the many tattoos covering your beautiful body

The color of the case of your phone that you had with you everywhere you went

The color of the hoodie I wore with your name on the back labeling me as yours.

Cobalt blue

The color of the Kanye West album

You introduced me to and never stopped playing.

Light sky blue indigo
The color of your bedroom walls
And the shirt you slept in every night without fail
The color that I gave you crap for, but that I secretly loved.

Lavender
The color of my favorite t-shirt of yours
The one with the white writing
That conceptually went perfectly with your floral ink.

Caramel Brown
Your personal favorite color of your skin
That only lasted during the cooler months of the year.

Autobiography of Imagination

Sarah Cheaney

A hidden, mysterious place
Seen upon a child's face
Full of passion and beauties
With Kings and duties
All creatures of myth and old
Wonderful inventions to behold
Like a master of art
They build and tear apart
Controlling all within their power
From large to small and every hour
They stay forever and lose no time
Continuously to fall and climb
Worlds that are larger than life
Those of happiness and strife
But slowly as reality moves on
Little by little they lose that song
Of blissfulness and euphoric noise
That is forgotten with toys
Till all of a sudden the lands disappear
Their air full of a doubtful atmosphere
Creatures that were once dear
Are forgotten; no longer near
Replacing joys came harsh dark
Silencing canaries and quieting larks
Things of enjoyment are soon forgotten
Left empty, old, and rotten.

Pressing Flowers

Kylie Fuller

They say flowers are the finest
When in the ground.
The moment you pluck one, violent,
Is the moment their beauty is drowned.

They say time is brutal.
It destroys most anything.
Fighting it is futile,
Everyone feels its sting.

Knowing this to be true,
I pressed our love in a book
The moment that I picked you.

Pressed in the pages
Was the perfect preservation.
Time brought us no changes,
Your beauty saw no regression.

The flowers died in winter,
And yet our love remained.
Paper-thin, we shivered,
Yet through the frost we stayed unscathed.

Our love was a time capsule,
We clung to a memory
Which everyday seemed more fragile.

It's hard to breathe
With pages crushing your ribs.
It's hard to think
When a book has you pinned.

We never did wilt,
But also never grew.
I was consumed with guilt
For ever picking you.

You tell me that you're drained
From all the pressure our love
Needed to be maintained.

The story of my beloved country, Mexico

Giovanna Gomez

This is the story of their lives, my life,
A place where I spent 15 years running
A country, if you don't carry a knife
You could be in danger, women dying
Because of these men, is this going to stop?
Marches, protests, even "day without women"
This hurts me much, I even want to drop...
I wish we could all be superwomen
Why are we the ones being punished, bullied?
Think, it could be your sister, your mother
They are being raped, they are being killed
I hope that we can make change, together
And yet, I still feel love for my country
Even if they kill 500 monthly.

Prison of Light

Beau Morrison

The sunlight shines off the glass building as I squint my eyes, searching for the ball, I know he threw. Ahh! There it is rocketing towards me, breaking through the sunlight. I jump for it, reaching my hands up in the air to grab it, but a hand comes out of nowhere and snatches it before I can get to it. I look around trying to find the thief. I can't see anyone. The sun is more intense all of a sudden. All I can see is the bright light. All of a sudden the buildings are gone and in their place is pure light. The light is everywhere, shining off the water into my eyes. I continue to look for the thief, yet I still can't find him. The light begins to close in on me and surrounds me, I start to panic, spinning around and around in circles, trying to find a way out. Then it is all gone. The light is gone. I am in a cold cell with no doors or windows. Where is the sun? Where is my freedom? I now long for the very thing that I just tried to hide from. I pick at the concrete walls surrounding me. My hands become bloodied with bruises and scars. I am making no progress but I continue to scrap not willing to give up. All of a sudden a tiny bounce pierces through the silence, another one. I wait in anticipation. The walls crumble down and disappear. The ball drops into my hands. The light is back, this time reflecting off my brother's smile. I yell at him to go long and throw the ball as far as I can wondering what just happened. I look back at my family; the light is now less intense and I am able to see them. I turn back to the voice of my brother as he throws the ball back to me and follow the ball the entire way back to my hands, my no longer bloodied hands.

Sundays

Cesar Frutos

Sizzling and oil popping hits my ear
The scent of greasy bacon penetrates my nose as I inhale
deeply
Sounds of scraping against the stainless steel pan as Mom
whisks the eggs
Man, I love Sundays

Hispanic music from the 50's blasting in our backyard
Dad must be working on a house project
The banging of iron on wood and whirling raucous coming
from the jigsaw blade only strengthen my guess.
"I remember my father would always listen to these and
sing" Dad constantly reminisces.
Nothing but calmness and love is felt in the house
Man, I love Sundays

Moments

Jenaveve Moreno

Greasy Chinese food, and “General Hospital”
Those nights were always so amazing
We could spend hours watching “Law and Order: SVU”
Or the “Bachelor”, the same thought would go through our
head
“God these girls are desperate.”
Or nights where I would lay my head on your chicken legs
And you would run your fingers through my hair
Your ring would get stuck, and scratch me but I never
complained
You loved my hair, always told me how beautiful it was long
And would hit me every time I threatened to cut it off
You were a lot at times, always knew how to fight off my
smartass comments
I know the words could get to you, that's why I always
apologize afterwards
I loved the car rides filled with reggaeton music,
And the constant questions of what does any lyric mean
Anytime these things are around me
I am filled with you, your presence engulfs me
And I am happy again

Six

Kylie Fuller

Six and I'm pinned to the plush floral rug as you delicately wrench off my Disney Princess band-aid. The same one you applied with a kiss on a starless night, weeks ago. In days my little wound was healed but I steadfastly refused to remove my bandage, even after weeks of grime, dirt, and sweat left my finger inflamed and infected. Days before the fateful removal and we're cramped under the canopy of my twin bed. I can still feel you trace constellations along my freckled arm. I can still remember counting the stars drawn on your cheeks. I can still hear you ask me why I couldn't take it off. I wanted, so desperately, to convey my bone-deep dread but I couldn't. I was lost in the condensed galaxy scattered on your face and everything was so impossibly big and I was so small.

Winters

Yeni Cruz

I skip along the concrete path spanning over the framework
of wood and steel,
It feels like the footbridge was made for me, to escape my
deep thoughts,
Funny, usually when I'm in silence by myself I get attacked
by so many concerns somehow in this place that's different,
No worries of the amount of school work I have to do, no
thoughts of failure, or of the problems that seem inescapable,
Suddenly a burst of fresh cold air causes chill bumps to rise
on my skin,
The breeze rustles the leaves, I see their trajectory,
The fallen leaves are imaged in the stillness of the water,
I look far in the distance and notice a swing, roped around a
branch hanging from a tall tree,
As I make my gaze up I am entranced by the sky,
Gloomy imminent clouds lie overhead in the distance,
The spot directly above makes itself apparent, with no
clouds
A display of colors lodge around the sky, from purples to
oranges as the sun sets,
This reminds me of home, maybe that's why I really like it
here, it's an escape from the sound of cars, of people,
I can't help but miss my family, that's where home is,
Back home, my house is a corner house and to the right, it's
just endless vast land, each afternoon, I am blessed with this
type of sunsets,
There I stand tasting the sweetness of happiness, as I
reminisce a typical afternoon in my front yard,
Wishing I could stay here forever.

An Afternoon at the Dog Park

Anna Hill

A sunny afternoon at the park with my pups.
Gallop and spring like the noblest of steeds.
Sniffin' and snortin'; disrupted by jumps!
Fences and rules? There isn't a need!
A tackle from the left; "How dare you sneak!"
A tumble and turn, a nip and a "yipe!"-
"Hey there pal! Let me get to my feet!"
"Oo! What's that, can we have a bite?"
A paw meets mine with sincere recognition.
A biscuit, a bite, just a quick little snack,
for their pangs that require my utmost attention.
A little fuel for their next mighty attack!
Time to go home, the leashes I bear.
No words could measure the look of despair.

Our Potential

Xavier M. Olivares Pinelo

What have we made of the love and the fear,
Which has hardened all to act on their wills:
Through a blizzard with its cold, ever sheer;
The condition to care for those with ills.

Broken across the smallest histories,
People asking, begging, "Please let us go."
Hoping children will not be on their knees;
Loves and fears of families, pushing so.

Both derived from all nature around them,
It is of chaos and tranquility.
Within the first nature, need not it stem:
It leers and lurks in the vicinity.

Famines and meadows, from which we are born;
We are our love and fear: we are torn.

Understanding

Erika Reyes

On the long walks of life I saw the need of light
The thought fueled me inside and it blew my mind
I raced with speed before the end of night
Sight on the goal to unblind the unkind
January blew a fresh new start
We believed we had won a chunk
But hastily it all came falling apart
The clear road in a blur debunk
I knew the words as they touched my heart
A pile of pieces that did not fit the thought
Each breath filled my head, the fog blurred the dark
Noise distressed and ached as I reached and fought
What is left? but hope to stand to strive
Here comes one more time accepting to revive

Lessons From Places of Residence

Isabella Morrison

Each place I have lived in has taught me a lesson worth remembering. My first few houses taught me about the fluidity of family, which can be seen so vividly in photographs I have of these years. All I have of these times at these places are photographs of family get-togethers containing people who were once family, family that I now don't see, and friends who were essentially family. Another house taught me to learn from nature. I learned how to pick up bumble bees and not get stung. I learned how to feed hummingbirds. I learned that children cannot fly like bees and hummingbirds. One house taught me about the dangers of conformity. When every house looked the same for a five-mile radius, it was very easy to get caught up in making sure that you looked like every child for a five-mile radius. I learned that being different wasn't easy, but the right choice was rarely the easiest one. Yet another house taught me that bigger isn't always better. In fact, more rooms simply means more vacuuming and mopping and sweeping. I learned that keeping things simple made more time for the important things, none of which involved vacuuming or mopping or sweeping. The place I lived for the shortest amount of time taught me how to let go. I learned that some things are not meant to last, no matter how beautiful they are. I learned that goodbyes are the hardest part of any relationship. I learned that no matter how far away you go from something, a piece always lived within you. But from all of these places, I learned to cherish the photographs and memories of family, family that will not always fly away because they are okay being a different kind of family who do things that they love for however long it lasts.



Springtime Feels by Onica P. Roman



Gujjarwal by Gurtaj Grewal



Image0 by Margarita Barajas



Punjab Fields by Gurtaj Grewal

Clock Work

Beau Morrison

Why do we count the clock to tell the time?
Why does it have the most say in our day?
We plan our day with the sound of a chime.
We follow the small arrow through the fray.
Why not follow the sun as it sinks down,
Letting the stunning colors be our clock.
Or wake up to the speckled roosters countdown,
And not be the first to rise on the block.
Why not follow the breeze through the old trees,
Or let the sun tell us what time it is.
Why not let the clock float away in the breeze.
Or toss it far into the ocean fizz.
Yet when time comes I will choose the ticker,
I find it to be a problem fixer.

Strip

Edgar Garcia

Took me by the hand, let me touch his body
The silk skin of his body, clear like tequila blanco then
mixes with my brown skin,
Spiced rum liqueur mixes with warm tequila dance upon the
night.
His body firm like the ground, hands made of nets to catch
me if I fall
At the end his lips,
Yet his scent speaks of paid adventures.
Though I dare ask him to Love me,
Love me enough so I forget the arms of a lover.
So he Spreads my wings so that he can feel the splendid love
I hold
Kisses me with lime lips tequila shots salty sweat makes me
disappear within his skin
Passionate night within locked lips all with the taste of liquor
dripping from our backs.
It's enough to numb the heartache that pulses my ex's name.

Flatline

Diomerica Padilla

I will always be with you.

I always work when you just want it to stop.

I can run up to 100 mph.

as-well as 5 mph.

On a good day, I beat 50 times a minute.

We have been through our first rollercoaster ride.

Me moving so fast through your chest when we get to the top and then all of a sudden fall.

You scream your lungs out while I feel the blood pumping through me.

Have given you warmth when a new guy has grabbed your hand on your second date.

Have been through every heartbreak.

Would always try to piece myself back together while you pour your heart out with tears.

Feeling desperate to make you not feel this pain.

I'm the most important thing you have.

Many people try to get in.

But not many will.

You can always feel me but not have your hand touch me.

However, you give me warmth.

People say you always need me but in reality, I need you.

We will grow old together.
I can't wait for that moment.
But everything comes to an end.
And ours will be together.
I will be going slower
And slower
And slower
While you
start to
shut down.
And then,
it stops.

My House

Kylie Fuller

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact manner in which my house fell to disrepair. Maybe it was slow, small fractures branching off and creeping timidly along glass until it shattered. Maybe it happened all at once, a storm blew through in the middle of the night. Or maybe it was always like this, broken and in shambles, I was just unable to see it.

Whatever the case may be, I grew fond of my blue Victorian on the hill, battered as it was. I could see the ghost of what it was or could have been before the mold and rust and the cracks running the length of the rafters. They never did see what I saw in the house, but maybe I'm getting ahead of myself.

I thought I was truly alone up on my hill. I had no neighbors. I had no visitors before he came that fateful night. I could scream and only the weeds would hear. I could fall dead and only the rats would care. I could set fire to my home and then watch nature blot it out of their history. I could do all this, instead, I whispered.

At first, I whispered out of a longing for company. I would speak of last night's dreams to the creaks in the stairs. I would summarize book plots to the leaky faucet. I would tell jokes to the matted carpet and secrets to the squeaky doors.

When the weather was nice and the house was stuffy I would venture outside and sit amongst the wild daisies. They were so bright and vivid and alive, I liked that about them. I would recite poetry as I twisted flower crowns and sang off

key as I picked bouquets. I littered my home with bunches of the daisies and would grin every time I saw them.

All of this to establish that I was sane. At least at one point in time I was content and at ease with being alone. There was a time, in my battered blue Victorian, where I was fully myself. I lost myself at some point.

I whispered so much my voice became its own separate entity. A paranoid, fearful being living in my house. My every fear given its own wants and voice and breath. I think I knew, for a while at least, that the voice was my own but I couldn't shake a deep down sense of otherness.

It was around this time that I came to suspect the house was an extension of myself. Each room, each piece of cracked and splintered wood belonged to me. Each gust of wind that came through the windows was a breath in my lungs. I felt each crack and bump and chip as bruises and cuts and welts. I internalized the pain of my house until it became my new normal.

The voice was constantly worried about the house. I never got a full night's rest, it screamed so.

"The roof is going to fall in while you sleep!" It would yell, urgent, as I climbed into my bed.

No sooner than I shut my eyes, it would begin in earnest, "The roof, the roof, the roof!"

Its wail would consume my house, my mind, occupying every empty space. The echo would rattle my veins and the old windows. I was powerless to the voice. All I could do was pray it would stop, suddenly and absolutely, as it did sometimes. If not, I prayed that the pounding in my head the next morning would be minor.

The days were better, usually. On a good one, the voice would weave me stories of the house in its full glory. Of grand staircases and pianos. Of extravagant parties and walls that swelled with music. Of shining marble and chandeliers. Of gasps of wonder guests would take when they first stepped in. The voice spoke so softly, so delicately.

On bad days, the stories would turn sinister. It would tell me nightmares of rust-filled wounds. Of missing stairs and fractured skulls. Of water choking the drinker. Of air that stole your breath.

The voice would persuade me to count the steps on the stairs and waste a day double and triple checking the number I had gotten. It would convince me the water was unsafe, leaving me parched in the sweltering summer heat. It would pester me until I spent the day sitting in the open doorway because the air inside was toxic.

In this manner, I lived. For I don't know how long. Not knowing the lines that separated the voice and my house and myself. Not knowing which one was out to get me, as battered and decayed as the home I lived in.

But I wasn't completely lost when I met him. He knocked on my door one day, I felt each rap of his knuckles reverberate against my chest. I fought back with the voice who begged me not to answer. I answered.

I don't remember much of that first interaction but he would tell me, much later, that there were tears spilling over onto my cheeks. He would tell me I was shaking. I can believe that.

I remember his eyes. So full of concern and worry and something bordering on amazement.

He cleared his throat, “I didn’t know someone was living here...” His eyes went past my face and I saw him scan my entryway. I barely registered it though, I was consumed by the sound of his voice. Smooth, like a stream rounding out rocks.

“My wife and I bought some land down the hill, we’re building a house. She’s expecting. We wanted to raise our kids in nature. She’s actually the one who noticed your house. I thought I would check it out...”

I nodded slowly. He gave me his name, his wife’s name. The voice gave my name. I can’t begin to describe the shock I felt as he watched my face when the voice spoke. I can’t articulate the surprise I felt as he saw the voice and I as one and the same.

He would tell me, much later, that he left after promising to visit again soon, saying he’d bring his wife next time. I didn’t hear anything. I shut the door.

Everything returned to what it was before the man. The voice continued to keep me up and continued to tell me stories. I continued to listen to the voice. Follow its commands. Everything was the same, expect for a memory that kept replaying in my head. I saw him watching my face as the voice spoke.

One night, as the moon was rising, I crept down the stairs and sat crossed-legged in front of a gilded mirror. I watched, transfixed at the curves of mouth as the voice spoke. I desperately tried to see what he saw, tried to reconcile my reflection with the words that surrounded me. The sun was high when I stopped.

When he knocked on the door for the second time, I don’t know how many days later, I was only mildly

surprised. I opened the door. He was standing there with his visibly pregnant wife, a plastic wrapped bouquet in her hands.

“Good to see you again.” He said. “This is my wife.”

I nod.

“Can we come in?” She asked. “I’m crazy over Victorians, they’re beautiful.” I opened the door wider. She offered me the bouquet and I took it. “Just a little something for your home. We’re just so happy to have a neighbor.”

Her eyes were sad. She smiled weakly. I led them to the living room. Each of their steps bruised my arms. I rubbed at them, wincing.

I don’t know how I expected them to react to my home. With delight? Wonder? Instead, their faces fell. They turned every which way, taking it all in. He took a sharp intake of breath. She covered her mouth with her hand. Their reaction unsettled me, crawled under my skin.

They sat, side by side, on the dusty crushed velvet couch. We watched each other in silence for some time.

She broke the silence. “Look. I don’t know you. I don’t know your situation. But I want you to know we are willing to help in any way we can. I want to give you my number. Do you have a phone?”

I shook my head. She looked over at her husband. She whispered something in his ear. He nodded. “We’re staying in town, two hours away, at a hotel. We can get you a room...” he said.

“I’m not leaving.” The voice said through gritted teeth.

He sighed, looked at his wife. “Okay. We’ll be up here again tomorrow around the same time. Can we visit you

again?" I nod. They rose to leave and I trailed them to the door.

I started shaking when I shut the door. I stared, unblinking, at the bouquet until the colors began to bleed together. They were too polished, too perfect. I opened a window and tossed them out.

The voice quieted its screaming that night. I couldn't fall asleep. The bright moonlight blared into every crevice of my home. I tossed and turned until I had enough and dragged myself out of bed. I descended the stairs. Standing in the middle of my living room my stomach sank.

There was mold crawling up the walls, rust eating at the metal. A rat scrambled by. It...*smelled*. I walked, dazed, through each room of my house. With every room came a new wave of revulsion, of disbelief. Maggot-filled sinks, moth-bitten sheets. Spiders, nests of them, lived in my cabinets. Beams were near splitting, destroyed by termites. *My house*. My house. *My house*.

I walked outside for the first time in, I don't know how long. I sat in the wild daisies, the mere sight of them caused tears to spring up. I looked at my house and saw it for what it is, rotted and destroyed.

I was more than my house. I lived, survived in this home but it is not who I was, it was not my brain or heart. I was more than the bruises and the rust and chips, those things don't define me. I plucked a couple daisies, pressed them in my palms.

"I can see it now."

I knew the voice was my own.

Beads

Edgar Garcia

Michael reaches for my hand. Like a child, seeking love and acceptance; a certain type of affirmation that love is within just a simple gesture of holding hands. Yet I pull away as I see people walking by.

“What the fuck David?”

In the back of my mind I knew what I did. I knew the mistake that just happened. Though it wasn't intentional it just happens. As if god and la virgen maria just saw it take place and my culture instinct was to pull away from sin. Yet I answered with calmness, “What do you mean?”

“Don't play stupid David you know what you did!”

“Michael please don't make a scene, just wait till we get home please!”

“You know what David, fuck you walk by yourself. I'll see you at home.”

Standing alone on main street I walk a couple blocks, dreading to see the red brick building. I count the blocks 1,2,3 until the pavement leads me onto the steps of the dreaded building.

I open the door and let the odd smell of a transient city crawl into my nostrils. I decide to take the stairs and make the journey into what I know will be a fight. Finally apartment number 204.

I slide the keys into the lock gently and jiggle it enough for me to open the door. The smell of my paints and dry brushes fight against the smell of curry that the neighbors cook, a type of home dish that is a type of invitation to their dining table.

I soon face Michael as he puts the fresh produce from Whole Foods away. He turns away to place the bananas on the center of our table, his face built with anger, a type of dam that has spilled a leak and soon will collapse.

“So are we going to talk about what just happened David? Or are we just going to shove it under the rug like always?” I let silence out of her cage, she spreads her wings so angelically that she does that talking for me.

“Are you fuckin serious David? You’re not going to talk?”

“Talk about what?”

Like trying to push his buttons but not intentionally, I just wasn't raised to speak about our inner emotions. It's not as if I can just speak about my self doubts, my inner fears, and my being self-conscious about not being loved enough or God not accepting who I turned out to be. The dam spills not with calmness but with a burst that would ravish a whole community.

“Are you fucking kidding me David? What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“I’m fine, it's you who's freaking out, who's attacking me for something so insignificant”

“Fuck you David, Fuck you.” He drops the oranges on the table.

“Michael, what do you want me to say, that I still can’t hold your hand, that I can't seem to be as comfortable as you?” Silence cuts between us as I try to make my point clear.

“That I can't wear pink in public or carry a bag like a purse or wear what you wear.”

“Well say it then just say it that I’m a fuckin’ fag and that you’re just ashamed of who I am.”

“See, how do you go and make this about you, Michael? You always find a way, always.” Looking into his eyes I can tell another piece of us breaking. His silence speaks for both of us.

“I can't, David, I just can't. I would have thought that by now we would be able to do so much more, yet you hold us back.”

“So I hold you back then?”

“That's not what I meant David.”

“Oh no Michael, you said what you said, let it be in anger or drunk. The truth always spills either way.”

Michael stands with knife in hand and I stand with the open wound that bleeds a realization of what's to come. I throw the rest of the groceries aside along with the house keys and head to my studio. Michael runs after me but I push the door and lock it, putting my back to the door and hear his voice: “David please, I'm sorry, I really didn't mean it. I'm just tired of hiding in the shadows. Like we're some type of freaks that are so grotesque that we can't be seen in public. I love you David and I'm sorry please just speak to me please.”

I let his speech soon become a whisper and I walk towards a blank canvas. Something never touched by humans. Something new that has no scars or no traumas. I look to my right and see my little wooden box. Decorated with flowers that hold secrets only my paints know. I open it and take some LSD, place it upon my tongue, let it sit there, and hope that it will take its course.

Take away the pain and the eyes that look down upon me. The shame most of all. Deep inside the hollow parts of the canvas I lose track of time. The moon has taken its nightly walk and the sun will soon scurry it away.

I then hear creaks upon the hard wooden floors as if at this time of day bodies walked around. I stand up from my chair and head to the door. I open it and turn to my left to see Michael asleep.

No steps, no bodies, just the ghost of good times past. Then a slight breeze cuts through the cracked window behind Michael which blows the curtains that decorate the arched windows, they flutter above Michael and slowly shower down on him, drenching him in blood red fabric. The Sunday morning sun then leaves a scent of a storm brewing within the heavens. Thunder above soon roars so loud that the walls vibrate and with them they bring God. I turn back around to face my studio and the paintings when the walls begin to move. The texture of them soon turns rustic and the smell of Christ begins to crawl within them. I turn back around and soon hear voices coming from the right. The darkened hallway seems to have elongated. The voice soon calls out. "Walk towards me David I need to speak to you, don't be scared or startled. It is I, your holiness who needs to have a word."

Chills crawl upon my skin like roaches searching for darkness. The pumps of my heart begin to sound louder competing with the thunder that strikes down onto us. My mouth, desperate for water cracks and whimpers a word. "Father?"

"Yes son it is I, the one who you pray at night, the one who glances at you with a watchful eye. Who lays

within every bead when you say a little prayer for the day. Who speaks of eternal salvation if you repent.”

Frozen mid hallway, I stand listening to the words of Christ pour onto me. The thunder has eased and all that echoes within the sound of his voice. The smells of paint have faded as well and all that lingers in the air is the smell of holy water and with her she brings the smell of divine bliss.

“Walk towards me don't be scared we must have a word.” I follow his voice into the darkness of the hallway. Soon the realization of damnation comes upon me. The words of my mother and father yelling at me that I've signed my soul into the depths of hell crawl upon me.

Sweat starts to drip down my forehead and the temperature increases as I seem to get closer and closer to the end of the hallway. As I arrive at the end of the hallway, the silhouette of a cross stands tall. The dark room paints it black and the smell of rotting flesh floods in from every corner. Then he speaks.

“David, I am glad you are here my son.”

“Father, if I may speak?”

“Go ahead, speak my son.”

“Why have you appeared to me?”

“David, I have appeared to you and made you come here because we must speak about what lingers within your soul.”

“What do you mean your holiness?”

“I hear your worries, your darkest moments, I know that you rebuke the sin that follows you since you were a child.”

“Holy Father, it's not that I rebuke it, it's just I can't seem to find my way within the tunnels of this new life.”

“My dear David, you mean to tell me that you accept the sin that eats at your flesh?”

“It's who I am, father I can't deny it, I've tried, you know it more than anyone, I've walked away, I've gone to church and prayed for my soul, I've gone to your people who promise change. Yet nothing has helped!”

Tears begin to appear gently down my cheeks as I remember the times my father took me to camps and prayed to god for the sin to go away. As if in one night and one prayer the sin would vanish and the shock therapy would be the cure needed for me to be holy again. His voice deepens and cuts my memory.

“That's because that man that lays next to you is keeping you away from me, he feeds you lust and flesh, he's just one of Lucifer's helpers to take you away into the depths of damnation.”

“But father...”

“You dare contradict me?”

“Have I ever swayed you to the wrong path? Have I ever abandoned you when you most needed me? Have I not been by your side in every hail mary that you've preached? So now you dare contradict me because of a man?”

“No Holy Father.”

“Then!?”

His shout was so loud that the sky let out a huge rumble, the walls shook and made light break into the darkened room. The lights illuminated the room and placed Jesus on the cross. He laid upon the cross, alas still crucified. My eyes widen to see him with his thorn crown and nails

still carved into the palms of his hands. Blood dripped down from his body and the cross as if his crucifixion was still fresh. Then from his body a piece of flesh came down, dripping from his body it sluggishly made its way down onto my feet. I cringe and look away as I see his ribs and the maggots that burrow tunnels feasting on holy flesh.

“Don’t look away David, this is what you’ve done. The blood that drips onto the grounds you stand, the crown that still penetrates its thorns inside my skull are all your doings. Each nail that is engraved on the palms of my hands is because of your sin. The reason I still lay here upon the cross is because you won’t repent and choose salvation over the flesh of that man!”

“But Father, can’t you see that this is my happiness, that he healed broken parts that haunted me for years, he made me a better person.” Though in the back of my mind the cutting words, the slammed doors and the holding back swim closer to mind.

His Voice drops low disappointed yet ready with his gavel. “I see you already picked a side, therefore let me rot on this cross and don’t look back but when the gates of hell call out your name, do not preach my name or any those that serve me well.”

Thunder rolls and with it, it brings the serpent that tricked Eve, slithering down the cross where Jesus had laid, the demon came towards me. Its body curling around the cross, it neared closer and closer to where I could feel its tongue and breath. As it then laid its entire body on the ground it burst into flames and transformed into a demon. It stood at my height, its skin still full of scales. then came towards me, its breath of rotten flesh it spoke.

“David?” I didn’t think, I didn’t hesitate, as soon as it got close enough, I took off my rosary and wrapped it around its neck. I closed my eyes and began to pull. The cracking of the beads as they compressed around its neck made me only pull harder. It tried to fight with its claws and pull away from the beads of God, but I pulled harder. Hearing every breath be cut out of his body. His cries for help were being silenced by blessed beads.

I couldn’t bear to open my eyes but I could hear as he kicked the ground and scratched the floors, knocking down everything he could reach from the room. Then after a while, the breathing and kicking along with the scratches stopped. It was done.

A sigh of relief along with the rain and thunder came back to the room. The demon was dead, I could open my eyes. Letting go of the rosary, I felt his head fall onto my lap. I look down and...

It’s Michael.

Thunder shakes the condo one last time as he lays dead on my lap.

Sonnet

Destiny Holcrow

Corona Virus has hit the streets bad
Schools are closing, my kids are all home
Toilet paper sold out, the worlds gone mad
Should be planning, instead I write this poem

Believe me, I love my children and all
But an entire month of them stuck inside
Tensions will rise, I can foresee a brawl
Gonna grab my wine, find a place to hide

Kids eat twice as much food than when at school
Peanut butter jelly all freaking day
If they would just clean up, that would be cool
By day three I will be drinking cabernet

I must sound horrid for writing this poem
Just pray for us parents with our kids home.

June 19

Diomerica Padilla

“He is gone.”

Those were the words that kept repeating in my head after the phone call I received from my mother.

That’s when my whole world stopped completely.

Feeling like someone is ripping my heart in slow motion.

And that they knocked the wind out of me.

Not noticing the tears running down from my used to happy brown eyes.

Felt numb. Felt helpless.

Remembering every memory that I had with him.

All the times I have yelled at him for doing something wrong.

Even the last time I said Goodbye and that I loved him.

Next thing I knew. I was on my knees crying my heart out.

Screaming like no one can hear me.

Cry like no one was watching.

Destroying everything I saw without a care in the world.

Then there was silence.

No sound other than the rattling noise of the old washer we have owned for years.

I stayed there on the side of my bed not doing anything other than sitting.

Staying like that for a few hours, until my mother got home from work.

Till this day, when June 19 comes along, it's the longest day of my life.

Still feel numb.

I still think about him every day.

Even though our relationship wasn’t the best it was still the most valuable thing I have in my treasure chest of memories.

Te amo Papa Nacho.

A Father

Beau Morrison

Greasy palms gripping the door handle to steady himself as
he pulls off his worn work boots.

Making sure not to get grease on the white walls.

Oh the white walls, perfectly spotless,

Not a stain in sight.

He steps inside with his work pants and shirt still on.

The tattoo running the length of his arm and his bald head
glisten with sweat.

As he passes me on his way to his room, he holds out his
hand for our hand shake.

High five to the left and then a fist bump.

I can hear the floor creak as he walks down the hall and into
his room.

I can hear him talking with my mother about his day,

His voice is not loud, but it is definitely not silent.

It tends to have a little roughness to it but not much, just
enough to tell he has been working hard.

The one thing about his voice is it always conveys his mood.

Today he is happy and content with work.

I go to join him in the pool and race my brother to the edge.

The water sits so still reflecting the setting sun's light into the
hummingbird feeder on its side.

The oak tree towering above the pool has not dropped a leaf
into it today,

And the countless pieces of bark running along its edge have
not fallen into the pool either.

As my dad cannonballs into the deep end, water washes up
on all the edges and splashes up into my face.

He laughs and yells at me to come in.
A back up a couple steps to get a running start and then run
and jump in,
Trying to splash him back, but missing,
Only managing to soak the fence behind him.
He is one of the best splashers I know,
And knows the perfect technique for a splash war.
These days are the ones I look forward to the most
where he is just having fun and playing with me,
But He is not just a playmate.
On the way to soccer games, cruising down the freeway or
cutting in and out of streets,
He always has the music turned up loud and is always
singing along.
He knows this gets me excited for the game and he continues
singing until the song lets up or
The embarrassing stories from other drivers make me tell
him to stop.
On the ride home from longer trips, he always floors the
accelerator on one stretch of road to wake me up from
sleeping.
He laughs and I wake up with a grin on my face

Temple

Edgar Garcia

Left with nothing but just myself and my thoughts finally
settle in

What if I'm not okay with who stares back in my reflection

Who I've build up to be was based on who caged me in

Falling through the fingers of those who play with clay build
parts of who I think I am.

What if who stares at me when I smile for a picture isn't who
I want it to be

The strings attached to limbs of 30 years base off of those
who build to satisfy needs desired

What if sitting in the belly of unknown shame I find out that
I'm not better than those who build me

What if the architect who built the walls shaped the smiles I
give made the arches of my

eyebrows to see clearly through my windows, painted laughs
that echo your humor, made a

mistake

What if he build this empty shell to only reflect the beauty of
others but alone it crumbles

What if who I see as I walk by mirrors isn't who I recognize.

That all the body parts the habitual twitches are all just a part
of a man who isn't me.

That as I take my first walk without a man, I don't recognize
my own walk.

Put together by many hands

stitched by egos, pain, trauma a quilt of a body.

So I tear it down build from something new, hoping to
accept my own reflection.

Weeds

Kylie Fuller

Here's to us, weeds trying to grow in cracks.
Fitting into places we're not wanted,
Surviving their attempts to prune us back.
We will embrace our confines, undaunted.
Go on and judge our reckless existence,
No one gets to pick where to be rooted.
Go on, be baffled at our persistence,
We remain, even when prosecuted.
Here's to us, adding green amongst the gray.
We bring color to the dull and dreary,
We are sparks hidden in the world's ashtray
And the life between the old and weary.
Here's to us and beating all of the odds,
May we always grow recklessly and broad.

Neza

Cesar Frutos

Every morning would start the same
Woken up by the music and shouting from the merchants all
coming from the flea market down the street.

This became my natural alarm clock letting me know that I
have to rush and beat my cousins downstairs for breakfast.

Tamales and eggs would be the usual.
If we were to run out a lucky winner would be chosen to run
down to the market for more.

Neza, the place where family will always receive us in open
arms. The place where all it takes is a couple of bricks and a
ball for an afternoon full of fun.

The place where the streets hold stories about Dad and his
brothers and their mischievous childhood.
The place where I would spend hours helping my uncle sell
fireworks on Christmas and New Years. Where we could
party until the sun shows its face again.

Neza, the place where Dad and my uncles reminisce about
their parents. Where memories and lessons are valued and
passed down to the next generation. Only to keep that cycle
going.

Neza, a place that I'm glad to call my second home.

I Miss You

Yeni Cruz

I want to be able to watch movies with you, then gasp at the pinpricks of light penetrating through my window indicating that morning is near.

Movies, like the one we saw, Before I wake, and you laughed every time I would cover my eyes with my “small chubby hands” as you would describe them. You telling me things about yourself, your work, your life, life in Malaysia, just the way you used to.

Like that one time, you “took me out for a drive,” and by that I mean, how you would take your phone for a drive and I would be observing the scenery through my phone picturing that I was there.

Or when you had to stay in a hotel while you worked on the building project with your group of Engineers, and every time after work you’d come back to your room shower, then skype me while you ate and played that annoying song, Last First Kiss by One Direction just to annoy me.

But we can’t because you always disappear.

If a problem arises between us, instead of solving it you just leave, don’t message back.

I want to see you, I’m tired of just looking at a still image of you that I haven’t been brave enough to delete from my phone.

See your autumn brown eyes, and your full long eyelashes that I always was so jealous of, your

golden delicate skin and your radiant smile with the dimple
on the right side of your face.

Not needing an excuse to message you, messaging you just
because I can and want to.

Messages about, our favorite group, BTS, their new songs or
videos, messages about our day.

Now I'm here all alone.

So I thought, then you came back, writing my name on sand,

I question as to why you would do

such a thing if we don't even talk, you say you miss me, but

I think it's way overdue.

Baby Lessons

Isabella Morrison

As she boarded the subway on her way home from work, Ellis felt her phone buzz in her hand. She looked down to see a text from her sister, Liz, asking for her address so that she could send her a Christmas card. Ellis thought this was strange because it was late January, but she knew how unpredictable and unorganized her sister could be. After responding with the address to her shared apartment on the Upper East Side, Ellis put in her earbuds, hit play on Beyonce's Lemonade album, and prepared herself for the hour long ride home. She needed something positive to listen to after her awful day. She had arrived late to work, she wasn't prepared for her staff meeting, and her seventh graders hadn't done any of their work with the substitute the day before. After getting off the subway, Ellis swung by the local grocery store to pick up some last minute things for dinner. She was rushing because she wanted to get dinner going by 7:10 so that she and her partner Sarah could eat, clean up, and watch the new Law and Order Special Victims Unit episode like they did every Thursday. Ellis was a creature of habit and hated to disrupt the routines she and Sarah had developed the last six and half years of their relationship.

She climbed the three flights of musty stairs to her floor, breathing heavily with the additional weight of the groceries along with her satchel and backpack full of her lesson plans and class materials. As she walked in the door of their small apartment, Ellis heard bath water running, which was odd because Sarah didn't like baths and Ellis

hadn't cleaned the bathroom yet. She did that on Saturday mornings. As she went to set the groceries on the counter of the microscopic kitchen, she noticed an open jar of applesauce with the lid left haphazardly next to it. She carefully laid all her different bags on the mismatched chairs around the table before dealing with the applesauce. She put on the lid and then found a spot for it in the door of the fridge. She wiped down the countertop and then started walking back to their shared room from which the sounds of Jackson 5 were coming from.

Ellis was glad she was no longer holding anything because the scene that greeted her would definitely have resulted in a broken something. Around the once orderly room were diapers, 8-month onesies, and paper. Lots and lots of paper. Situated amongst the fray was Sarah who was cleaning up a baby whilst singing "I Want You Back".

"Uh...Sarah?" Ellis was completely unsure of what was happening, but she knew she couldn't just let the mess be, even if there was an unknown baby in their apartment.

"Oh hey love!" Sarah looked up and smiled at Ellis who was busy trying to gather all the objects thrown around the room. "This is Charlie."

"And Charlie is who?" Ellis wasn't sure how this was helpful.

"Well I think he's your nephew." Sarah said with uncertainty as she lifted the naked baby and began walking to the bathroom.

Ellis was speechless as she followed Sarah, still holding diapers and onesies. "My what? Nephew?" Ellis finally found her words as she sat on the toilet while Sarah lowered Charlie into the tub full of bubbly lukewarm water.

“About an hour ago I got a call from Mrs. Roose, you know the old lady who lives on the first floor, and she said she thought it would be best if I came down to the lobby immediately. When I got there, there was this baby in a box with a folder taped to it. It had both of our names in Sharpie on the side.”

“Who dropped the box off? What was in the folder?” Ellis was overflowing with questions, but a certain kind of dread and knowing was creeping into the pit of her stomach.

“Well there was Charlie’s birth certificate, a form labeling you as his legal guardian, and a note from your sister.”

“This is Liz’s baby?” Suddenly, Ellis remembered the text from earlier. “Wait, and I am his legal guardian? How is that even possible? I didn’t even know Liz had a baby. What did the note say?” Ellis’s brain was working double time trying to keep up with the chaos of the situation.

“The note was short and sweet. It basically said that Liz couldn’t take care of Charlie anymore and she knew we would. It is on the bedside table if you want to see it. The form had some testing attached to the back. It appears like Liz is using again.” Sarah pulled a wet Charlie out of the bath and wrapped him in a towel. “I called the police immediately, but they said that the form type is legit and there’s not much they can do unless we don’t want the baby.”

“What about Liz? Do we know where she’s at?” Ellis knew her sister, and if she was using again, which seemed highly likely, she would be off the grid for a good long while. This had happened when Liz aged out of the system, but there was no baby involved then.

“I tried calling her a bunch of times and it went straight to voicemail. The police said we could file a missing persons report, but until we did that, they wouldn't do anything.” Sarah brought Charlie back into their room, put on a diaper, and picked a onesie for the little one to wear.

Ellis picked up the note on the bedside and read it quickly. As Sarah had said, there wasn't much in it. “What about a father? Like on the birth certificate?” This was all too much for Ellis. It brought back flashbacks of her childhood in the foster system. She scrambled to pull the birth certificate from the brown folder next to the note. Of course, the “father line” had been left blank. Ellis sank onto the bed, trying to process all the information that had just been dumped on her.

“I know we need to talk about this, but I want to get Charlie fed and put to sleep first. A crying, hungry baby is the last thing I want to deal with.”

“And a baby is the last thing I want to deal with!” Ellis couldn't keep it in any longer. “I had one of the worst days ever at work and then I come home to find that my addict of a sister has gone and had a baby, but of course she won't deal with it. She's never dealt with any of her shit. She always lets me deal with it. She's my big sister! She should be looking out for me, but nope. She couldn't even do that.”

“And you think I want to have a kid? We aren't even married, Ellis, nor do I think we are financially stable enough to care for this baby. We never really talked about having children. But like it or not, this baby is family and he's got nowhere else to go. I am not going to just turn him over to the system. We both know that is not the best thing for him. I thought you of all people would get that.”

“Oh don’t you go and blame this on me! You think because of my past that I can just handle everything? Spoiler alert: I can’t!” Ellis began crying.

“Baby,” Sarah sat down next to Ellis on the bed and wrapped her free arm around Ellis’s shoulder. “I don’t think either of us is equipped for this nor am I blaming you. No one is really to blame here. It’s just life, but we’re going to get through this and figure it out.”

Ellis suddenly stood up and wiped her eyes. She turned and looked at Sarah who was holding a forlorn looking baby who had her sister’s nose and mouth. “I’m going out.”

“Ellis, wait.”

But Ellis was already on her way out. She grabbed her satchel and coat before practically knocking the door off its hinges as she slammed it before sprinting down the stairs. As she came out on the busy street, she put in her earbuds and hit play. The sounds of Beyonce’s “Daddy Lessons” filled her ears and she headed to the subway.

Voice In My Head

Kylie Fuller

Listen to me.

No one gets you the way I do.

I know

Your fears and dreams blur together,

Everything you've ever treasured,

Each of your aggressors.

I have been through your every endeavor,

I have seen you in every hue.

Listen to me.

It kills me every moment we're apart.

I want to always

Be near you,

Steer you,

Dear you

Know I'm the only one who

Has your best interest at heart.

Listen to me.

You've been burned before.

Don't act like you weren't warned before.

All I want is to

Protect you,

Correct you,

Direct you,

Give me the respect that's due,

Please don't shut the door.

Listen to me.

I promise you're not a pawn.

Let me

Caress you,
Arrest you,
Possess you,
This is just a test to
See what lines you break along.
Listen to me.
I know that I'm not crazed.
You can pretend to
Abhor me,
Ignore me,
Deplore me,
Let's just both agree,
I only talk because you always
Listen to me.

Longing For Your Touch

Yeni Cruz

I see as you grab everything else but me.
Your car keys. Perfume. Lotions. Lipstick.
Longing, longing, longing! for your touch
You used to hold me tightly as your eyes scanned the black
ink engraved into me.
Now I'm just another one of your books,
Remember when I was your favorite?
The- just the way your eyes would open widely at something
exciting
I remember, but you don't! why can't you see?
Every time you would flip me, I would lose sight of you for
a split second,
But now, I have lost sight of you for months.

Meet Your Editors

Gurtaj Grewal

A student at WCC who is active on campus and a Communication Major. He plans to transfer to UC Davis and double major in Communications and Community and Regional Development. He enjoys reading in his free time and watching the news on TV.



Onica P. Roman

This is Onica's 3rd semester as an *INK!* editor. She is an English major at Woodland Community College who enjoys reading, hopes to become a writer, and hopes to join the Peace Corps. She plans on transferring to Sac State or UC Davis. When she is not writing, she's a pet mom to Princess and Lafayette. You can also find her getting lost in nature away

from society or napping.

Isabella Morrison

This is Isabella's first semester as an INK! editor, but her third semester at Woodland Community College. As a high school student, she is working towards her high school diploma, but hopes to study English and Law in the future. In her free time, she loves to read, write, dance, and eat!



**They say flowers are the finest
When in the ground.
The moment you pluck one, violent,
Is the moment their beauty is
drowned.**

**They say time is brutal.
It destroys most anything.
Fighting it is futile,
Everyone feels its sting.**

**Knowing this to be true,
I pressed our love in a book
The moment that I picked you.**

**From "Pressing Flowers"
By Kylie Foller**