

under  
ground  
pool

13<sup>th</sup>

spring 2023





**BRIELLE WALTON,  
GRASS DANCE SERIES #2**



# underground pool

**issue thirteen** spring 2023

**editors** mac chandler, jules hostetter, & z murphy

**senior editor** john tom raczkowski

**designers** kayla laine klavins & genevieve wittrock

**cover artist** kayla laine klavins

**faculty advisor**

elise juska

**graphic design coordinator**

angela riechers

**illustration coordinator**

kevin mercer

UNIVERSITY  
OF THE **Arts** 

[www.uarts.edu/undergroundpool](http://www.uarts.edu/undergroundpool)





LOGAN SMITH,  
URBAN SASQUATCH



# letter from the underground

To be completely transparent,  
we struggled to come up with a theme for this year's issue.

We didn't want it to be too vague or too specific.

Then, we thought about what artists need.

And artists need transparency.

Honesty, transparency, vulnerability, are all critical in the life  
of an artist and in art itself.

We thought, as students and as growing creatives, transparency would be  
a challenging and eye-opening prompt for the school.



Jon Tom Raczkowski  
Senior Editor



Z Murphy  
Editor



Mac Chandler  
Editor



Jules Hostetter  
Editor



Kayla Laine Klavins  
Designer



Genevieve Wittrock  
Designer



## poetry

- 07      **beach day** by china rain chung  
08      **sublingual** by maple young  
14      **9/28** by randy stomberg  
17      **haven** by maple young  
19      **black eye, blacker bear** by jack siminerio  
20      **stickers** by lucienne parker  
22      **hooked** by jack siminerio  
25      **say *ahh...*** by jack siminerio  
26      **mom god** by jay smith  
45      **intrusive thoughts** by jameka wilson  
59      **bridges, metaphorically** by alexander khan  
62      **syndrome-ella** by jay clark  
inspired by **paper people** by emily perks  
64      **are you being transparent?** by avi fidler  
66      **prayer for the dead bird** by china rain chung  
69      **borosilicate** by jay clark

## creative nonfiction

- 10      **luke and i let it grow** by hayden eric  
illustrated by mads torres  
46      **alien lights and ejector seat** by jay smith  
illustrated by annica martz

## fiction

- 28      **keira and kenny** by sara coleman  
illustrated by jaclyn brice  
38      **alone** by courtney dunn  
illustrated by parker staud  
70      **bone-cleaning tips and tricks: episode 4** by jay clark  
illustrated by miles hubbard



## audio

- 57 **estranged** by discordant generation  
60 **the life** by jackson vincent

## artwork

- ii **grass dance series #2** by brielle walton  
02 **urban sasquatch** by logan smith  
06 **reflective ride** by annica martz  
09 **swan** by mel stowell  
13 **armored** by alex stevenson  
15 **portrait of a bubble** by elizabeth ramos  
16 **dust bunny** by alx leyton  
18 **selves** by mads torres  
21 **grumman** by josep cuce-bosch  
23 **underwater** by michela edwards  
24 **òkunkun ni pamò (hidden darkness)** by feyisara olalowo  
27 **cortez 9** by laela clark  
32 **i'm tired of dimming my galaxies** by destiny hall-harper  
36 **childhood dream** by michael staniz  
40 **worst pies in london** by michael staniz  
43 **bust on table** by china rain chung  
44 **an unspoken dilemma** by alexis finley  
53 **untitled** by alex medlin  
58 **extension** by isabella khan  
61 **discover** by holly jansen  
67 **everything ends the same, loop** by messiah king  
68 **felidae skulls** by kait waldman  
74 **grass dance series #1** by brielle walton  
80 **armor** by nijah blanton



CONTENT WARNING



MUSIC



ANNICA MARTZ,  
REFLECTIVE RIDE



# beach day

CHINA RAIN CHUNG

*I went to the beach for the day, wearing my bathing suit that was too small.*

*Normally, I am very uncomfortable in my body. This beach day, I was alone, making it easier to be mostly naked. Very excited to see the water, I thought about how my father often compared the ocean to “waters of the mind.” I don’t know what that means, exactly. But when I got to the beach I saw no water. I kept walking, thinking it was a bit farther— But there wasn’t any water, just sand. The lifeguard on duty came over to me and I grew self-conscious about my body.*

*I said, “Where is the water?”*

*He said, “The beach is closed on Tuesday.”*

# sublingual

MAPLE YOUNG



nag champa never leaves the corners of my room.

silk feathers heavenly over my lap  
charcoal fishnets  
what a catch and release

neroli tampers on my neck  
    go ahead  
    engrave the taste of your pheromones  
in a breath—  
hush.

slightly lucid flame,  
    dim,

molten  
wax  
d

r

i

p

d

r

i

p

drips into back dimples.

lips wept on limbs:  
crimson levitating whirlwind,  
gravity was convinced to leave.  
In your hand I am a guided quill,  
together we write melodies  
in a midnight heart's tempo.





MEL STOWELL,  
SWAN





ILLUSTRATED BY MADs TORRES

# luke and i let it grow

HAYDEN ERIC

Fourth grade lunch. I would always sit with the soccer players: the upper-middle class, annual ski pass kids. Luke would always sit at the peanut allergy table with the kids from the town over: the woodsy, Christmas tree farm, free-range chicken kids. Well, word got around I had aced the math test that day, making me the best-in-show at multiplication (really all thanks to my dad, who would give me extra homework at night). But turns out Luke had also aced his math test. And so the stage was set. I was to battle Luke in a game of wits. Or really, a game of seeing who had memorized more multiplication tables.

And honestly, I forget who won. It was probably a tie. But from that day forward, I no longer sat with

the soccer players.

Luke was cool. He was a hippie. Like a real fucking hippie. If you plopped him down in 1968 Chicago, he'd be friends with Abbie Hoffman. And so we would skateboard and snowboard and do parkour and go on hikes and write poems. It was our own little rebellious, bohemian renaissance underneath the playground slide. We wouldn't play at recess, no, we would watch other kids play at recess.

During this time, my father took me to get a haircut. And it was terrible. Easily the worst cut to ever have been haired. Godawful. That was when my mom decided it was time for her to become the sole person responsible for my hair, the Hair Czar, and that Dad wouldn't be taking me to Supercuts anymore.

I had gained a newfound power over my hair, and thus I decided to exercise this power...by refusing to cut my hair at all. Not even a trim. I just let it grow. Luke and I just let it grow.

And it got long. Like real long. Like down past my shoulders long. Like people thought I was a girl long. And Luke and I liked that. One time we were standing on the bleachers post-eighth grade

## **And then, almost without us noticing it, we drifted.**

band concert, talking about Tech Decks or something, and a gruff older gentleman with shit kickers on said "scuse me ladies" and sort of guided us out of his way so he could continue down the stairs. We looked at each other and said an internal "fuck you" to him...and shared a moment of almost being proud. Like we'd got him. Like we had successfully disrupted. Out of all the middle school boys in town, we were the ones with long hair.

And then, almost without us noticing it, we drifted. I started

hanging out more and more with my other friends and he started hanging out more and more with his other friends. And then we no longer ate lunch together and we no longer sat together in class. We even stopped saying hello to each other in the hallways. And so when a few weeks into freshman year I got a call from Ms. Nelson saying I was cast as the lead in our upcoming fall musical and that I'd have to cut my hair, I didn't think about Luke when I said yes. On Saturday I got a crew cut, on Sunday I got contacts, and on Monday at school, everyone thought I was a new kid. And they were right. I became cavalier and "popular" and louder and I wanted things from people. And my grades got worse and I became more unhappy and I got lost. And I think so did Luke.

At the start of my junior year, I moved to another town, far away from the peanut allergy table and the playground slide and the bleachers. But the last time I saw him, the last day of sophomore year, I looked at him for the first time in a while. I saw him across that cafeteria, and I looked, like really looked. And he looked defeated, but somehow still proud, under all that hair. And he looked right back at me and I wonder what he saw.



**ALEX STEVENSON,  
ARMORED**



# 9/28

RANDY STOMBERG

So angry—  
Wool pulled over my eyes.

Miss the days of shame's dormancy.  
Play in the backyard's mud.

Carried sleeping from the car,  
too small to reach somewhere.

Go somewhere,  
anywhere.

14



**ELIZABETH RAMOS,  
PORTRAIT OF A BUBBLE**









ALX LEYTON,  
*DUST BUNNY*



# haven

MAPLE YOUNG

Dawn whispers civil twilight goodbye  
visitor sweeps into my room alive  
caressed by light and wind,  
maroon silk follows her slim untethered  
in her quake.  
I only see her in my wildest apparitions.  
*Wear the veil and be the one to cross.*  
Bliss.

17

I am the cat, and she is the yarn. Knotted in fabric, our eyes became absent of iris.  
Elaborate static fractals cascade in hovering pastel.  
I stand blinded in the nave of a lofty cathedral.  
Through each lasting bell we stay.  
A gust of her energy rings the center of my skull.  
Through an eye never opened.  
Such pain could surpass hell.  
Nerves collapse on themselves.  
An orchestra of a thousand decks of cards shuffle my fate.  
Awe vanishes

Astonishment always seems so profound  
until it is your turn  
to wake.

MADS TORRES,  
SELVES

18



# black eye, blacker bear

JACK SIMINERIO

i cried and cried until my mom  
finally took me to the circus.

thick stripes of red and white  
swooped down from ceiling's center

tent protected me from darkness  
better than parents ever did

performing bear's muffled growl, muffled  
sob suppressed by metal muzzle

peanut shells crunched beneath  
unlaced light-up skechers...

i gravitated toward concession. darted  
to sweet, inviting aroma

butter scent wrapped greasy arms around  
my miniscule frame until

pointed corner of tall glass table  
a crystal fist to the eye, i cried

and cried and cried and cried until  
my mom told me to quiet down.



# stickers

LUCIENNE PARKER

It's so hard being young,  
beautiful, and  
free, when those things don't fit  
in my mouth...

Only old receipts  
smiley faces I meant  
to clean out.

20

Last week  
I cut my nails and  
this week I'm growing them out.  
The world is raising...

I wrote a love song  
on the softest part  
of your hand, but I can't  
remember it and you  
won't flip it over to let me see.

On the other side of the room  
there's pixies  
dancing  
I know it.

But we just washed off last month's spit.  
I'm gonna watch and wait a little longer.



JOSEP CUCE-BOSCH,  
GRUMMAN



# hooked

JACK SIMINERIO

you told me you wish you had  
a fish body, small enough  
to swim into my ear, wade my current  
of intrusive thoughts. know me  
in and out, in and out, in and  
paddle around the museum of carvings  
you've gradually engraved into the soft  
supple surface of my coral brain.





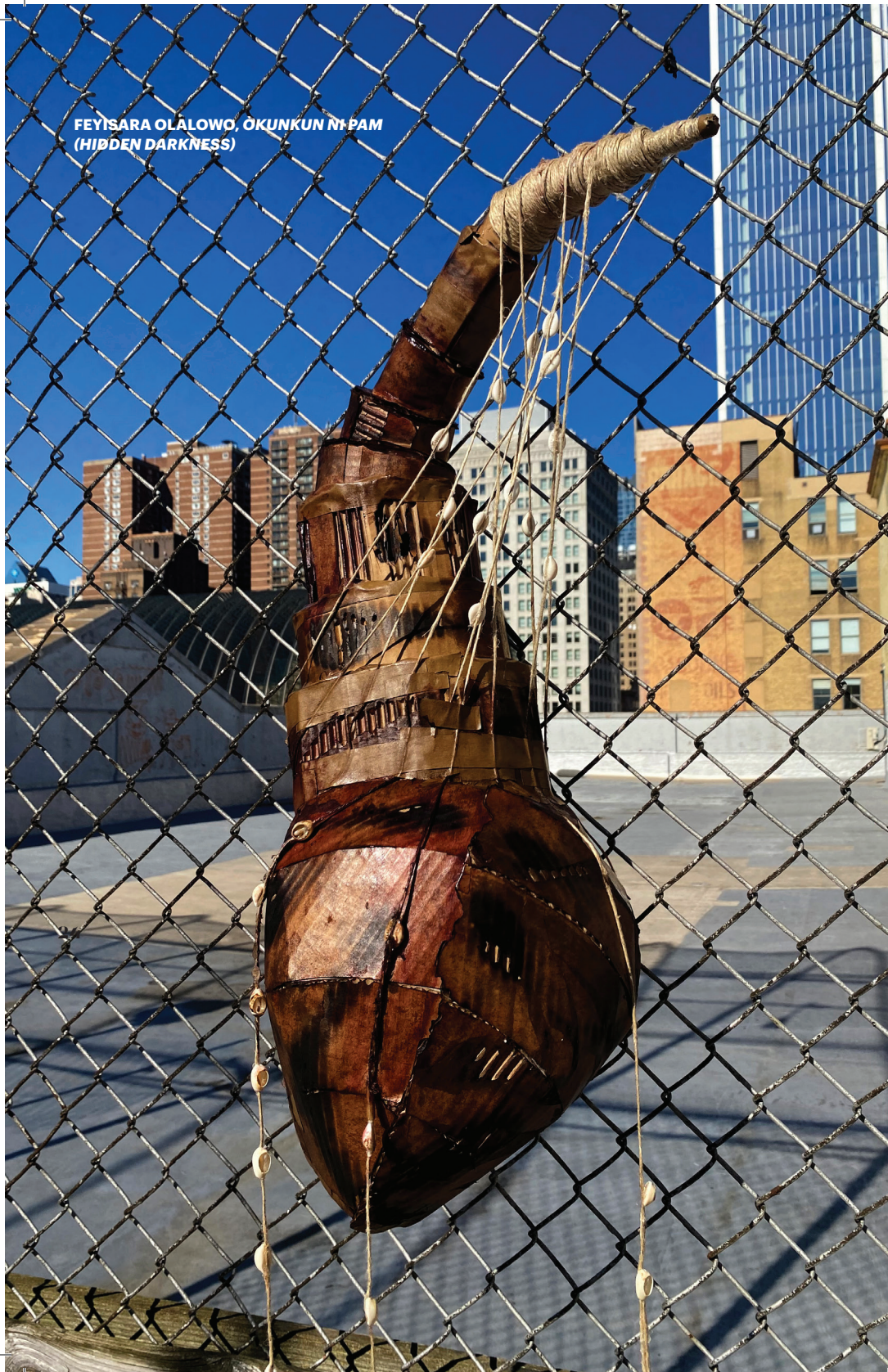


25

**MICHELA EDWARDS,  
UNDERWATER**



**FEYISARA OLALOWO, OKUNKUN NI PAM  
(HIDDEN DARKNESS)**





CONTENT WARNING: DEATH, SUICIDAL IDEATION

# say ahh...

JACK SIMINERIO

thin yellow paper crinkles  
just under chin, catching  
blood, sweat, slobber...  
blinding white above  
spotlights swollen-pink gums and  
this tube under my nose makes  
the glow grow... shrink... if this  
means death, i am ready. her voice,  
thick and warm, fresh spiced  
pumpkin cake, she feeds me more  
of the gas that tickles my brain  
to blabbering mush.

i'll let her open me up with a latex pointer  
i'll let her probe and peer inside and  
i'll let her keep  
the four wisest bits of me.

# mom god

JAY SMITH

Deep, deep, deep in  
the muddy forests  
I can't sleep because the lights are on.  
The lights are  
never on anymore  
in this big, big house.  
No big lights in this big house for my  
tiny, tiny body,  
so small my feet never even reach  
the end of the twin bed.  
I used to have a full,  
in my head it was a king.

When was I reduced?

Tuesdays mom works late so  
I feed my little brother, then myself,  
box mac and cheese on the gas stove.  
I tuck myself in—the lights out,  
out, out all day.  
I lay in bed  
and mom comes home and the lights turn on.

She's god.

Next Tuesday night,  
She comes home early, early,  
early, cries in the dark, dark.  
She never has to work a Tuesday night again.  
The lights stay off now  
and the big, big house  
shrinks in around us both, both,

both.





21

**LAELA CLARK,  
CORTEZ 9**





ILLUSTRATED BY  
JACLYN BRICE

# keira and kenny

SARA COLEMAN

The bell rang for recess, and we all raced out the lunchroom door. The fifth-grade girls who wore feather hair clip-ins were near the front of the yard playing rope. I'd hear them sing "Girl Scout, Girl Scout, do your duties now these are the rules you must obey..." as I walked by. Some of the boys tossed a football back and forth, using the now faded half-court line to divide the teams. We used to have a legitimate basketball court, but someone stole the rim so now there's just a rusty backboard.

Me and Kenny were just in the fourth grade. All we had to use from the playroom was chalk. I liked that it was colorful, but it got all over my hands. I didn't like things that made me look or feel dirty. My mama always told me looking dirty was for be' be' kids. Kenny on the other hand didn't mind. He didn't mind when he made a ketchup stain on his white uniform shirt. He'd just wipe it off and keep eating his French fries. He also didn't mind when my slick ponytail sweated out from him chasing me around the yard. He'd tell me I was pretty with or without straight hair. He was my man, and I was soon to be his wife. Even if all he could afford was a strawberry Ring-Pop.

We sat on the concrete further from the other kids so they wouldn't ruin our artwork. Kenny was drawing a space truck and I was drawing a purple flower.

"What do you wanna be when you grow up?" I asked him.

"Hmm, lemme think." He tapped his chin with his chalky blue finger. "I wanna own a restaurant!"

"Really?" I asked, grinning. "With what kind of food?"

"Anything you can think of." His eyes twinkled. "Pizza, cheeseburgers, chicken nuggets... All of it. That way I'll never have to worry about if I eat dinner or not."

I raised my eyebrow at him, but he was too busy coloring the wings of his space truck to see. He said it so easily that after thinking about it for a moment I too just went back to coloring.

Kenny loved food. He would always take seconds or thirds when we had breakfast and lunch at school. Sometimes I'd split my sandwich with him or give him my Fruit Roll-Up. He never asked for it, I just thought it'd be nice since his mama never packed his lunch.

"What about you?" Kenny asked me as he dusted the chalk off his hands.

"I'd be a nurse. That way I can

take care of people.”

“What if they’re mean?” He glanced over to the group of girls playing Double Dutch. I followed his eyes until they settled on Joyce.

Joyce was a fifth grader, and she was the leader of Pretty Girl Gang or PG Gang, as they called themselves. I met her when I was in the first grade. We were the smartest in our grades. We’d ace every test and turn in our assignments on time. Some subjects she was better at, like

## **“I guess mean people deserve to be healthy too.”**

History. But I was the genius in Math and Reading. I once tried to be her friend until she explained how I didn’t “look the part.” Joyce would come to school in fancy sneakers and fake gold hoops that she always claimed were real. To her, I looked average in my Chuck Taylors and Hannah Montana bookbag. Since then, I’d been the butt of her jokes for even daring to talk to her. Everyone would laugh and I’d walk away once she was finally done with me. Eventually she bonded with a few other girls who fit her requirements and reigned over all of the elementary school.

Joyce was taller now and more glamorous than ever. She had traded her fancy sneakers for sandals and an acrylic French tip mani-pedi.

“I guess mean people deserve to be healthy too.”

Kenny just looked me in my eyes and brushed his chalky hands on the side of my face.

“You’re the nicest girl I know, Keira.” He smiled so big the gap of his missing tooth poked out the corner of his mouth. At that moment I didn’t care much about my chalky cheek. I’d just wash it off later.

At the end of the school day, all the elementary school kids waited on the front steps for our parents. The middle schoolers could leave through the back doors since they were older. My mother made sure that she was always on time. Kenny’s momma wasn’t there yet.

Kenny and I walked up to my mother’s blue sedan with our puppy face on. My mother was in her grey scrubs, still wearing her home health aide ID.

“Mom is it okay if we wait for Kenny’s momma to come?” I begged. “She won’t be long I promise.”

Kenny helped by just sitting there smiling, showing off his gap some more. She examined him from head

to toe with narrow eyes.

"I don't know Keira, that afternoon traffic is going to hit soon and I'm tired."

I fixed my mouth to say something, but Kenny nudged me lightly in the side.

"It's okay," he said with a warm smile. "I'll see you tomorrow."

As Kenny began to walk back toward the security guard, I made a huge sad face, hanging my bottom lip as low as I could. She rolled her eyes.

"Okay Keira, but we can't be too long."

Now a ball of joy, I called after Kenny to wait up. We sat on the sidewalk by my mom's car so she could watch us while we waited. We played I Declare a Thumb War until that got boring. His curly hair was nappy in the back. We acted as if I was a hairdresser, and he was my client. Just as I started plucking out his tiny knots, Kenny's momma was getting out of her tan car. It was the same make as my mom's car just not as new, or clean. As she stood in the middle of her door, she waved for him to come over.

"Come on Kenny," she yelled. Her petite body didn't match her boisterous voice. She was tall and slim, and much younger than my momma who was pushing 40.

I climbed into the back seat of

my mom's car and snapped on the seatbelt. She hadn't said anything for a few minutes as we rode down the street. Then, finally, as we pulled up to the stoplight, she looked back at me through the rearview mirror.

"Keira, I want you to stop hanging around that boy," she stated in a flat voice.

"But he's really nice to me," I said in a small peep.

"I don't care. Do you not see how nappy his hair is? Or that junk his mother pulled up in? That's not the kind of company I expect you to keep."

"What does that mean?" I asked honestly.

"It means you are the company you keep. And that little boy is nothing like you."

I let my head hang, my eyes immediately darting to the strawberry promise ring on my left hand.

"And get rid of that ring!"

My head jumped up and I caught her glare in the rearview mirror. Obedient, I slowly removed the ring and stuffed it in my bag.

---

Going to school the next day I wasn't sure what to say to Kenny. He was a sweet boy and never teased me like most of the other ones in our grade. They'd make





jokes about how babied I was and how I carried a lunchbox and wore Twinkle Toes. The girls weren't too interested in me either, only if Kenny wasn't around. They would talk about him, how he smelled sometimes and would say he didn't own a washer machine. But everyone owns a washer machine, at least the houses I've been to.

At first it was easy to dodge Kenny. We had assigned seats and were told not to talk. I'd steer clear of him in the hallway as we went to different classes. But lunchtime came around quicker than I wished.

When I walked into the lunchroom he was sitting at our

regular table. It was usually just him and me. I took my time walking, scanning each table for someone, anyone else who'd let me sit with them. Suddenly one of the girls from class walked past me.

"Hey Katie!"

She turned with an awkward smile.

"Hey."

"Have any room for me at the table with the rest of the girls?"

"Oh finally you've asked." She hugged me tightly. I didn't hug her back. "You're not bringing that fugly boy are you?"

I forced a laugh.

"No. Just me."

She wrapped her arm around me as we walked.

"Okay great, 'cause he was bringing down your social status. You've lost major cool points hanging with him. But that's okay, now—"

She blabbed on some more, but I didn't bother listening. I was staring back at Kenny whose happy face turned into a sad face as I walked past our table.

Katie's table was sort of fun. We all shared snacks we brought, and the girls shared who their big secret crush was. They all agreed Naeem was the cutest boy in class because he had long hair like Ray Ray from Mindless Behavior. I thought he was okay. Then we talked about Katie's upcoming birthday party. I was invited as long as I stayed away from Kenny and didn't make them look bad. I nodded when asked for my commitment to the oath.

I glanced over at him while the girls chatted. He had already finished his lunches and now was sitting there with his chin resting on the table. I watched him as he played with his fingernails, then fiddled with his watermelon Ring-Pop. I felt bad. Kenny had done nothing wrong, at least I didn't think he did. I thought about what my mom said. Were these the kind of people she wanted me to hang with? Maybe it was because Kenny's a guy and she thinks I should have girl friends. But I'm not sure I fit in with those obsessed with Polly

Pocket and Justin Bieber.

Today was game day in gym class. Coach D gave us two options and we'd collectively take a vote on what we wanted to play. Today it was either dodgeball or tug-of-war. For the first time everyone voted for the same thing. Dodgeball.

Coach D picked the two captains, Joyce and Naeem. They were considered the most athletic

## **Kenny and I were the last to be picked.**

kids in the elementary class. I didn't wish to be on either team more than the other, I just wanted to play the game. Naeem was one of those boys who just knew he was cute. He'd wink at the girls and smile. They all liked him, except for me. To me his flirty eyes and quick smirks were corny.

Kenny and I were the last to be picked. It felt weird standing beside him. It was the closest we'd been all day. I kept my eyes ahead, refraining from giving him any attention. Suddenly, I felt the iciness of Kenny's fingers swiftly pick up my left hand. He rubbed my ring finger and as I looked back into his eyes there was an emptiness. Like I had taken the world from him. Then Joyce picked me, and Kenny was left for Naeem. We floated to opposite sides of the room.

Coach D lined the balls up in the center of the gym. We all held one

hand on the wall with one foot in front, ready to take off. When they blew the whistle, Naeem's team got the balls first, but they all had terrible aim. A few of us on Joyce's team caught a ball so there were some easy outs. I was good at dodgeball. Joyce and a few of the other kids noticed so they would throw me a ball here and there. It felt good being an asset to my team. In some way I felt accepted. Maybe they'd realize I wasn't as dorky as they thought. Eventually, I noticed that our team had more people than Naeem's. Naeem wasn't even in the game anymore. All that was left was Kenny and this girl who wore glasses. The gym phone rang, and I saw Coach D go into the gym office.

Joyce got Jess on the side of her leg and then it was just Kenny. He narrowed his eyes at me and the competitor in me grinned with adrenaline.

"Come on Keira. Can you hit me?" He jolted back and forth.

I flinched as if I was throwing the ball. He ducked the invisible ball, but I got him in his booty with the real one.

"Woohoo! We won!" I celebrated.

"Hey, that didn't count. The butt doesn't count," he joked.

"Well does this count?" Joyce grabbed a ball from off the gym floor and threw it at the back of Kenny's head.

My eyes widened with concern.

"What are you doing Joyce? The

game's over!" I said as I jogged over to him and scanned for any injuries.

"Let's get dirty boy!" She shoved me to the side and all of PG Gang started to throw balls at him.

## **Now the attention was on us, and the kids traded hurling balls for spectating a UFC fight.**

"Stop it!" I yelled as I pushed some of Joyce's followers. I ended up getting hit with a few balls too. Kenny covered his face as the balls beamed toward him. Joyce grabbed me and threw me to the ground. She smiled as I caught myself smack flat on the floor. No one had ever put their hands on me. I got up and pulled her by her hair, swinging her body to the floor. Now the attention was on us, and the kids traded hurling balls for spectating a UFC fight. The next thing I knew, Coach D and another teacher were pulling us apart.

Me, Joyce, and Kenny waited in the main office until our parents came. I'd never gotten into trouble at school. I figured my mom wouldn't be happy.

"Keira Arnesia Wright!" My mother's Crocs squeaked angrily as she approached the front desk. She seemed more upset than I thought she'd be. I thought she would at



least hear me out before being so mad. Kenny was sitting beside me in front of the principal's office in the back. Joyce sat across from us. My mother took one look at Kenny and rolled her eyes. Then she came for me.

"You better have a good reason to be in this chair," she stated with her pointer finger.

I swallowed silently. Kenny's mother shuffled in not too long after. She seemed like she had just woken up. Her pajama pants dragged on the sides of her house slippers. Then came Joyce's mom and dad. We were all called into the office and asked to sit with our parents.

Miss Green, the principal, was a middle-aged woman, older than Kenny's mom and younger than mine. She was always so serious when she visited us in class. I had never seen her smile. That still hadn't changed.

She laid out our incident summaries and Coach D's report.

"We are all gathered here because of a dodgeball game. A game that your children don't know how to play," Miss Green tended to be sarcastic and speak with a snippy tone even when trying to be professional.

"According to our gym instructor, Coach D, the game was over when Keira hit Kenny with the ball. But suddenly Joyce started a new game which involved beaming the balls at Kenny, along with some other kids."

Kenny's momma loudly interrupted, "Well where dem kids at that was throwing the balls at my son 'cause—"

"One moment," Miss Green said.

Kenny's momma sat back in her chair.

Then little Miss Keira here decided to take matters into her own hands and began fighting Joyce and the other kids."

"But she hit me first!" I yelped.

My mother gave me the "be quiet" look. I felt defeated. Even my own mother wouldn't listen to me.

I looked over at Joyce's parents. They were just like her. Her mom wore a black pantsuit with heels, red lipstick, and black shades that almost covered the bruise around her eye. Her acrylic nails were longer than Joyce's. Her father wore a fitted cap, a snug athletic tee, and a gold watch and chain that actually looked like real gold. They could've been the perfect family.

Joyce's mother, in a tired voice, asked what the repercussions were. Miss Green explained all of us would get a three-day suspension. I gripped onto the arm of the chair. None of this made any sense. Why were me and Kenny still being punished? There would be a talk held with the whole school about fighting and how it wasn't tolerated. I didn't like how we weren't allowed to speak during this meeting. My hands grew sweaty as I clenched harder. It let the adults create their



own narrative. Coach D wasn't even there when everything started. I dug my nails into the chair and scratched.

"But it's just not fair!"

My mother slowly crooked her neck and stared at me with scary wide eyes.

"I know you did not just raise your voice in here like you're grown."

I couldn't back down though. I'd never talked back to my mother, but I had to say something.

"We're not all here because of a dodgeball game. We're here because everyone is so judgmental towards Kenny. All the kids make fun of him. And Joyce, you"—I pointed at her—"are the ring leader. No matter how much Kenny turns away, you and your friends are always up to something else."

I turned back to Miss Green.

"Even me Miss Green. Joyce bullies me too! But, but... that's not the point. Kenny is nice and doesn't bother anyone. In fact, he's the only person I can call a friend in the

whole elementary class. And it's not fair that he's being punished."

I nervously turned toward my mother.

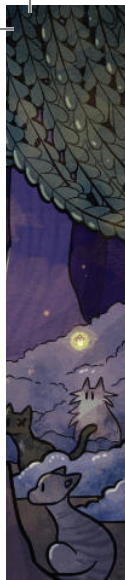
"And just because he doesn't look like the company I should keep, doesn't mean he isn't."

She made an expression on her face like she was impressed. I then looked over to Kenny who made a soft smile with the side of his mouth. His mother wrapped her arm around him and nodded toward me as she grinned with just her lips.

Miss Green appreciated my kind words about my classmate but said it still didn't change the consequences of our actions. It didn't matter if he started the fight or not. Kenny would still be suspended.

After the meeting, all the parents had to sign the suspension form and early pick-up sheet. We all waited in the main office by the door. I broke the silence.

"Kenny, I'm sorry about today. I



didn't mean to hurt your feelings or make you feel like I didn't want to be your girlfriend anymore," I said with my head slightly hanging.

Joyce just stood there silently observing us.

"It's okay, Keira. You're still my favorite girl."

I smiled. I wanted to hug him, but I didn't want to get in more trouble. My mom walked over to get me.

"Say bye to your friends, Keira." She glanced sweetly at Kenny, her tone much different than before. I waved at his dazzling eyes.

My mother and I walked to the car in silence. I trotted behind her, unsure if she was still mad at me for getting suspended. As we approached the back seat, she swung open the door for me and

## **I wanted to hug him, but I didn't want to get in more trouble.**

I hopped in. She always waited for the click of my seatbelt before taking off. This time she didn't pull off right away; we just sat there. She adjusted her rearview mirror to get a better look at me. I could only see her baggy eyes.

"Keira," she said in a calm voice.

"Yes," I almost mumbled. Then she turned around to look at me. Her cheeks were reddening, and eyes began to water. I panicked.

"Mommy, what's wrong?"

She extended her hand to the

backseat and rested it on my knee. She looked into my eyes as a tear slid down her cheek.

"Mommy is just so proud of you. You did a really good thing today. Even better, you taught me something. That everything isn't always what it seems and that our judgment, even Mommy's judgment, isn't always right. Remember this moment and continue to lead with your heart."

Her tender smile calmed my inner frenzy. I wiped away her tear and promised her I'd never forget the one time I was right, and she was wrong. We laughed as she proceeded to take the car out of park.

As we drove down the street and reached a stoplight, Kenny's momma's car pulled up beside us. I looked for Kenny in the backseat, but he wasn't there. I sat up some more to further assess the car. Then his head popped up and he laughed at my worried expression. I let out a chuckle, covering my mouth. Then I quickly rummaged through my bag and put on the now-furry strawberry Ring-Pop. I showed him my hand and his eyes blinked with joy. He put his hand up on the window forming one side of a heart. I put my hand up on the opposing side to complete it. At that moment I knew he was the one. Me and Kenny would be together forever. Our car pulled away and I stared back at him thinking, *my man*.





CONTENT WARNING: NUDITY, SEXUAL CONTENT

# alone

COURTNEY DUNN

58 The shower is lukewarm because it never gets hot anymore. I turn up Doja Cat on my speaker to hype myself up. I try to squirt out the last bit of body wash but it's all gone so I use shampoo to shave my armpits and legs. I shave until my entire body is smooth and then step out of the shower and dry myself off with a baby pink towel. I rip through the knots in my hair and moisturize my arms, legs, breasts, and ass with a coconut-scented lotion so I'm smooth and sweet. He's seen me without makeup on before so I don't bother to apply any. We don't hang outside of the bedroom. I don't know if I'd consider us friends.

We have been hanging out for about five months now. I hit him up first when I was feeling lonely, horny, and exhausted from the process of dating. When he comes in, he sits down on my couch like he usually does. He doesn't wear much cologne. There's not a distinct scent that reminds me of him. He likes the fact that I smell sweet and he also likes when I dress up for him in

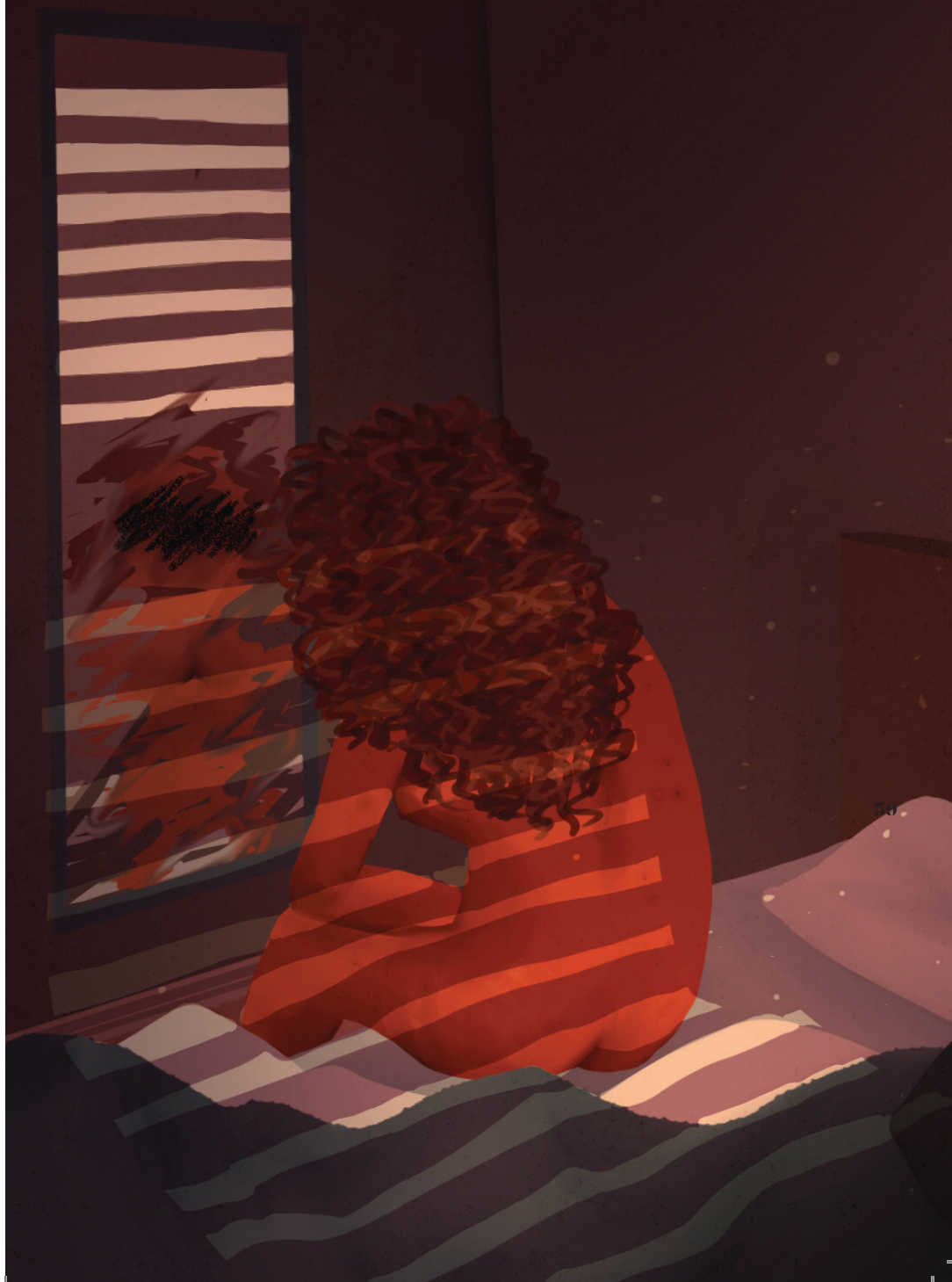
lingerie. I like him because he is tall, tan, and uncircumcised. I sit down beside him on the couch. We don't bother with small talk anymore.

---

I'm twenty-three now but the first time I had sex I was fifteen and he was nineteen. We worked at an after-school program together and one day he invited me over to smoke. Getting high was new to me then. It was something I did to be cool. I did feel cool, smoking in his bedroom and blowing the cloud of smoke out the window. When I first started, I'd get fried. Sometimes I'd laugh my ass off and other times I'd have an anxiety attack. I thought it was nice of him to smoke me up. I thought it was cool to have an older friend.

I can still see it all in my head. I can feel how it felt. Not ready but pressured to. Feeling suffocated while he was on top. I kept my eyes shut because I was scared to look up. I was in pain but that's not cool. I figured it was better to get it over

ILLUSTRATED BY PARKER STAUD



**MICHAEL STANIZ,  
WORST PIES IN LONDON**

40

His sweat dripped into my eyes and he smelled strongly of Axe body spray. When I smell that now I can't help but be disgusted. I remember him telling me the same phrase all guys say to me.

To this day I'm not sure if that's

---

He is wearing grey sweatpants and I'm ready rip them off him. I think he is more attractive than me. I'm pale, weak, but I have big breasts. Recently he told me that they felt bigger. I wish they were smaller and less of a pain. I usually let him make the first move. He kisses my neck and ear and I feel up the bulge in his pants. He comes



over weekly except for when I'm on my period. I hate having a week off from sex but at the same time, I'm grateful to know I'm not pregnant. I wonder if he's fucking anyone else. I haven't told him about the few times I've hooked up with the bartender from the club near my apartment.

---

Over the summer I had been drinking excessively, enjoying my freedom after the semester ended. It felt good, not having to worry about deadlines. Having a club nearby was convenient. All the bartenders and bouncers knew me. Looking back, I'm not sure that was a good thing. I met him one night when he wasn't tending bar and was drinking there instead. I was out with one of my best friends who drinks excessively like me. I wasn't wearing any makeup; it was a last-minute decision to go to the club on a Wednesday. He was tall, skinny, and also uncircumcised. His cologne smelled too strong, like he'd doused himself with musk. We danced together and I agreed to go out with him the following day.

We met at a restaurant bar for happy hour. Talking to him was easy but he drank heavily. I stuck with hard seltzers and ciders and tried to keep myself from getting too intoxicated. We had a few drinks, then he suggested we try another restaurant bar, and then another after that. I agreed to let him show

me his favorite places. He paid every time. I'm not an espresso martini girl but I had one because he said, "This place has the best."

I felt guilty as the bill racked up but he didn't seem to mind. I offered to split the bill but he refused. He was trying to impress me. Trying to see if I could keep up and I did. Around nine, I started to feel a little more than tipsy and suggested that we call it a night.

"I can give you a ride home." He didn't seem drunk, but was probably over the legal limit. The Uber back was pricey so I accepted his offer. We walked together back to the parking lot. His Dodge Charger seemed hidden between two Jeeps. When we got into his car, he immediately started bumping Drake. The street lamp flickered above and we sat there for a moment. I felt a giddy nervousness in my chest. A part of me felt a little awkward sitting there waiting for a move to be made. Eventually, he leaned in and kissed me.

I made a promise to myself not to sleep with him on the first date. I let myself break that promise. He was cute, but the five minutes wasn't worth it. I don't know why I have such a difficult time saying no. I don't know why I feel obligated to say yes. I guess I feel like I owe them something. I feel like I'll be judged either way and maybe that's just the double standard at play. The times I

did have the courage to say no I still felt pressured, or our text conversations eventually faded away. I don't know how to make anyone care for me but I know how to make them want me. Sometimes it feels easier to sleep with them. I feel beautiful when I can make a man's dick hard. I like to hear them compliment my body, which I think is so ugly.

Afterwards, he dropped me back off at my apartment. For the rest of the week, he would send me good morning texts but the

## **He made a margarita for me because he knew they were my favorite.**

conversations felt dry. We went on one more date, then I grew tired of him ignoring my messages and his one-word responses. I didn't see him again for a few weeks.

I had been drinking all night with my friend and her boyfriend. I zig-zagged my way to the club he worked at. They had to convince the bouncer to let me in.

"Make sure she has some water."

Drunk me was excited to see him. "I'm sorry for ghosting you," I slurred.

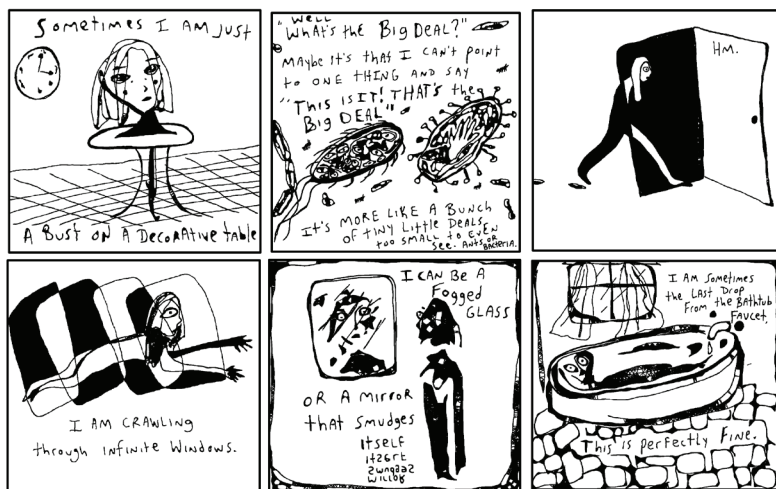
He made a margarita for me because he knew they were my favorite. I put my card down on the bar but he slid it back. My friend tried to take the drink away but I clutched the cup. "I'm fine."

We danced for a bit until my phone buzzed and he messaged: meet me in the bathroom. It was a single-person bathroom that smelled like shit. We made out and then he bent me over the sink, thrust twice, and came in the toilet. Another moment I can add to my list of regrets. I didn't want to tell my friend and her boyfriend what happened. Instead, I told them that I got sick in the bathroom and they walked me back home. I know she would have told me I was being taken advantage of but I didn't want to hear it from her. She had been with her boyfriend for a few years, and before that she was in a different relationship. She wouldn't understand. She hadn't wanted to hear it from me when I told her to leave her boyfriend after he cheated.

"It's different," she told me.

I guess, after being single for so long, I wouldn't understand. Maybe it's better to let a man take advantage of you as long as he loves you. Maybe it's easier to stay than start over. The dating world

**CHINA RAIN CHUNG,  
BUST ON TABLE**



can be so cruel, but I'm still waiting for my chance to play.

I'll admit I feel a little grimy letting so many men use me. Sometimes I feel like I'm using them too, and other times I feel tainted. I am something given and taken and maybe this is why I'm not capable of being cared for. I don't have boundaries. I want to feel something even if it's for a moment.

That's why I keep letting Mr. Tan, Strong, and Uncircumcised over. He makes me feel sexy, like something worth having, even if it's just for a moment. The pleasure distracts me.

It fills my need until I eventually find what I'm searching for.

He wants to fuck me in front of my full-body mirror. He thinks it's hot but I don't. I don't feel attractive, but there must be some reason he keeps coming over. I watch him fuck me in the mirror. I am so ugly, so unlovable. I ask if we can go back to the bed, and he agrees. I clutch him tight while he's on top and rest my feet on his shoulders. I don't want to think about what I look like. I want to look at him. I used to close my eyes but now I watch as his dick goes inside me. I want to feel desired. I want to not feel so alone anymore.



ALEXIS FINLEY,  
AN UNSPOKEN DILEMMA



# intrusive thoughts

JAMEKA WILSON

I never drink tea,  
thus I never make tea—  
but you do.  
And I thought that was quite admirable of  
you.

I often find myself here, in your kitchen,  
doing things I don't normally do.  
Like 69ing, eating casseroles and flavorless  
chicken.  
I am a trooper.

I like letting you take control.  
Soft steam emitting from the oven as you  
fan a mitt at the fire alarm.  
I finish my tea.

Slow sips.  
We are living slowly now.  
We've decided to take on a life of nature  
walks and nature bars  
that crumble in your palms before the first  
bite.  
I have decided to let you make me tea  
every morning.  
But the kettle kills me—

I don't agree with the whistle.  
It's much too loud,  
my brain can't take the impact of the  
sound.  
I want to go home,  
but home is with you now sweetness.

Do you need help with the knife?  
You dig into the cutting board much too  
deep.  
Are you frustrated?  
Something going on with work?

Need to take a breather?  
Let me  
help you.  
Help me turn this kettle off.

"Simmer down," you tell me.  
I forget how funny you are darling.

How could I forget?

I don't like the kettle.  
I'd like to take it back to Sears.  
Un-pop the bubble wrap, re-tape the box,  
and  
Ship  
The  
Sucker  
Off.

Then I remember I have to consult your  
feelings  
and that is much worse  
than that electric-blue water heater.

It's like a sportscar on our stove!  
I wish to be rid of it,  
but I'm afraid if I dispose of it you might  
disappear too...  
I'm weighing my options.

Now we are slow to argue.  
We sleep with empty minds and clear  
conscience.  
I like this way of living.



CONTENT WARNING: ILLNESS, DEATH

# alien lights and ejector seat

JAY SMITH

46

"He's gonna die," I tell her over the phone, sitting outside on the front porch, old and brick and rotting from the inside, but it's the only place that nobody else in the house would see me cry. I'm turning twenty-one next week. Mom doesn't say anything, so I tell her again in case she didn't hear. "He's gonna die, I know it." The rest of the conversation fades from my brain, but I knew the second I got the call telling me he'd caught the virus. Six years battling stage four cancer and some hopped-up flu is the shoe that'd kill the cockroach. And that's what they've been telling us, right? It's just another flu, another kind of cold. They don't tell us it's some kind of contagious rot, a cancer with no cure.

Just the other week we'd picked him up from the hospital, before we

were wearing masks and staying inside was your only viable option for survival. Mom ran into the grocery store, picked up his favorites: avocados, bananas, peanut butter, eggs, milk, oats. All the things that could blend up into a sick sloppy muck, but at least he could eat that way, gain his little nourishment for the day, even if it did come in the form of a brown grey sludge when it came out of the blender. It didn't matter. The radiation took his taste too.

She didn't want me going in with her. She was too scared I'd catch it and with my asthma... They say it's your lungs that take the hit, after all. She went in alone and stocked up the trunk, and we fought over who would pick him up from the hospital.

"We can't! We've been too



ILLUSTRATED BY ANNICA MARTZ



exposed." I hadn't even been furloughed at that point, still going into work every day, conversing with the public. I tried telling myself most people were too scared to brave a retail visit at this point. I'd be fine. He'd be fine. The unease still scraped at the walls of my stomach.

"Who else is gonna pick up Dad if we don't?"

We met him at the hospital right at the front, at patient-pick up. "You bring up his groceries. Leave them in his hallway. Don't go into his apartment." She made sure I heard.

"Okay?"

"Yeah."

A nurse wheeled him out to the car, slippers on his hovering feet and the grey knitted sweater with a half-zip at the collar draped over his torso. I got it for him last Christmas. The nurse helped his little frame into the backseat. "Thanks, Lin, for picking me up. I really appreciate it."

Mom nodded, and while she ran into the CVS across the street to get his meds, he told me about his two weeks in the hospital with pneumonia. Although he swore it had only been one week. He laughed and laughed, and he smiled even though he looked so small. He told me about how one of his roommates died, and then he laughed some more. I didn't think it was very funny, but I guess all you can do is laugh. He told me how happy he was that we came to get him.

Mom came back with prices, and Dad told her what he wasn't going to take. It was the heart medication, a thousand dollars for a month's worth of heart medication. She told him about some cheaper options because she's a social worker and she knows these kinds of things. He said he'd get them, but I knew he wouldn't.

I remembered years ago, when the cancer was getting bad and the pain started settling in—I didn't

**He laughed and laughed, and he smiled even though he looked so small.**

want to know what radiation did to the body—he lay in his hospital bed, brows knitting together on his bloated sunken face as he begged the doctor for more pain medication. The doctor refused, and my dad's then wife started to argue back. She never understood things like this. After the cancer treatment ended, he told me he went through withdrawal again after almost thirty years of sobriety.

I brought his grocery bags up and gave him some homemade masks. I thought about not going into his apartment like Mom told me, but I did anyway, and I hovered just for a moment. We stood next to the

bags, and I asked if he wanted me to unpack them. He said he'd do it, but I put away his eggs and milk anyway. He just stood there with his arms crossed, not crossed like he was mad, crossed like he was tired and cold, and when our eyes met, they glistened just slightly with soggianness. I only ever saw my dad cry once before, when his own dad died. It happened right when he and Mom separated, but she still hugged him and called him honey. I pretended not to see. I was nine.

He didn't cry this time, but he almost did as he told me, "I'm scared, man." I'd only seen him cry once, and I've only seen him scared once. He didn't get scared ever because everything was too fun for him; everything was funny. "I don't wanna catch this shit." Being scared just wasn't in him.

"Don't go out, not to work, and not even for groceries. If you need something, you call me."

He shook his head. "I'm not going out."

"We shouldn't hug. Here—" I held out my foot. "Ankle tap. That's what people are doing now."

"Yeah?" And we tapped ankles, and I told him I loved him, and I left.

We're both the babies of the family, him of four siblings and me of three. He has two older brothers and a sister. I also have two older brothers. No girls live in our house, even if we all thought there was a

little baby sister here for a long time. I never acted like a little baby sister. We all beat each other up. When we were small, not quite grown up but not quite babies, Dad would push our heads into the couch over and over and yell, "Turnbuckle! Turnbuckle!" We would scream and laugh because it was all nonsense. It was always nonsense. Even when we got pummeled into the sofa it was funny. We picked that up from him, I think. My brothers did anyway. Because I was the smallest, they adopted the turnbuckle too, smashing my head into the cushions.

Dad got the same when he was my age. He probably got it worse. He shared a room with his brother, two twin beds on opposite sides. One day, his brother lay back on his bed, feet in the air, and he told my dad to get on. "It's a new game! It's called Ejector Seat!" his brother said. Dad obliged and crawled on top of his brother's feet only to be launched onto the other side of the room. Instead of landing on the bed, he ended up falling in the slim space between the bed and the wall.

It's hard to hold parts of yourself in when you're not allowed to leave the house. There's talk of a vaccine, but the thing itself is still so far away. It's been four months since I've seen Dad. He went back on the Monday after Easter, only a week after we'd picked him up from his two-week pneumonia visit. It's August now,



and they keep him tucked away in a Bergen County hospital, and nobody but the doctors and nurses are allowed to see him. It's been four months since I've seen him, and I come out to my mom for the second time with a shaved head. I'm making second rounds, the first for sexuality and the second for gender, and I tell myself that it can't be as bad as the first time. It can't. It won't, and I'm right. It's not great, but it's better than the last time. I knew it

me that I wouldn't ever get angry with Dad for things that I get angry at her for, but what she doesn't understand is that we've reached a level of comfort with each other that I don't have with him, and I'll never have with him now. What she doesn't understand is that confronting being angry with someone that you love takes a certain comfortability that not everyone has. What she doesn't understand is that there are different things that I'm scared to tell both of

## **“We shouldn’t hug. Here —” I held out my foot. “Ankle tap. That’s what people are doing now.”**

would be, but the tension persists anyway. We end up going to therapy together because neither of us know how to act around each other about something like this.

It'd been easy with Dad, both the first and second time. He didn't always get everything, but he was good at doing his research and always wanted to listen. I think Mom resents us for that a little, for the easy relationship we had, but I can't blame her because I always resented her for not falling headfirst into support like he did. Over time we grow, and things work themselves out the way they do when time is on your side.

One night she gets close to telling me, though. She gets close to telling me that she resents us for our easy relationship. She tells

them. Different people have different relationships; that doesn't make them better or worse. It just makes them human.

I want to tell her this but I don't have the words, so I go for simple denial instead.

Days later, I sit in Dad's hospital room and wait for the nurses to leave so that I can talk to him in private. This is the first time I've seen him since the pneumonia, and now he's got it again, along with a slew of other things. Time passes strangely when someone you love is sick and in the care of doctors and nurses you can't possibly know. Time passes even more strangely when the only thing to do is sit and wait because the entire world has shut down.

During his cold four months

without any of us, they let us video call, but it wasn't the same. The nurse would stand there and hold the camera up to his unconscious face and listen to us cry and tell him we love him while he lay there with lazy eyes and an agape mouth. On Tuesdays, his sister would call and read to him. Often, it'd be my own work. She'd play his favorite songs.

Occasionally, we'd get updates from the doctors. They started off as weekly and slowly became sparser and sparser. It's his heart. It's his brain. It's the bedsores. It's his lungs. The doctors would give us a different story every time. They do this because they don't want us to know that four months ago they made a barely-conscious sick man sign his own consent forms for surgery, and upon intubating him, failed to recognize that he'd previously been through half a decade of throat cancer treatment. The tube would get stuck on the scar tissue in his esophagus, and he'd go whole minutes without any oxygen at all. We don't find this out until he's transferred to another facility, and we have to beg for the release of his medical records.

"You can touch him. Don't be scared." The nurse tells me, and I shift strangely in my mask and gown and gloves because that's the only way you're permitted to visit now. She tells me to talk to him too because they can hear it, but I

hope he can't. I hope he hasn't been sitting in his own brain all this time. I still just want her to leave, but I reach out anyway and hold the rose etched into his forearm. He got it years ago, with my chosen name beside its stem. I used to hang on these arms as a child. It didn't matter if he was chubbier than he'd ever been or just started a new diet and weight routine. He's superman. My fingers wrap around his arm again now. My thumb and forefinger meet on the underside this time.

"There you go. I'll leave you be for now." It's just me now. Me and him and his half-conscious roommate. There's a tube down his throat and when I talk to him, his vegetable eyes scan the room, across and across and sometimes they go up and down, but they never look at me. It's like this always. It's like this every

**I shift strangely in  
my mask and gown  
and gloves because  
that's the only way  
you're permitted to  
visit now.**

time I visit after. The doctors call it being nonresponsive, and I call it carelessness.

Every time, I wait for something to happen the way it does in movies, a sudden gasp of air, a garble of

words, for his eyes to focus on anything at all. It never happens. I resent that he never saw my shaved head. I hope that he dies instead.

---

Way before the cancer but right around the separation, I would get up earlier than early to go to work with Dad, so early that it would still be dark out when we got in his van. One morning, we got in the car and he said, "Check this out," hands moving to the center console to turn on a short string of little blue lights.

"What are those?"

"They're the alien lights, so the aliens don't get us."

That was my favorite part of four-in-the-morning drives to work. I liked it even more than the Dunkin' Donuts we'd always get on the way.

I still think about the lights sometimes. Sometimes, I want aliens permanently etched into my skin with bright blue ink. Sometimes, I let my flowers sit out in their water for a little too long and Mom yells at me when they start to stink, but I can't help it when they remind me of the faint smell of dirty buckets of flowers strewn across Dad's shop and tucked away in the big walk-in refrigerators.

---

My brothers are here for Dad's birthday weekend. He's been transferred to a rehab facility that's

much closer to home. I don't go to see him very much anymore though because he scares me. Mom tells me I should see him while I still can. My two brothers and I are at the hospital on his birthday. It's a Sunday, five months and three weeks of lying in the same bed with the same socks, the ones with stickies on the soles so you don't slip, but he hasn't moved a single limb for five months and three weeks. I ask myself why he's fighting so hard. We fill out our visitor forms and wait in the lobby for a nurse to come get us. The hospitals themselves don't scare me

## **I still think about the lights sometimes.**

anymore; we have masks and hand sanitizer, and I've been back at work for a while now.

"Only two per day," is how the nurse greets us, and I tell my brothers to go. It's the easy choice because I live so close, and they're only here for a day or two. I go outside to cry.

That same week, my brother gets a call from the hospital. They tell him that Dad's had another heart attack. They tell him it doesn't look good, but it hasn't looked good for the past six months. We spend the next hour calling relatives, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles. My mom scrolls through funeral homes on





ALEX MEDLIN, UNTITLED

her phone. An hour passes by, and the hospital calls again to apologize because they called the wrong family, and I mourn what could've been.

---

In high school, I would visit my dad on the weekends the way you do when you're a child of divorce. I would wake up to Andrea Bocelli. He played it like it was the only CD he had, and he played it every morning before work, loud and operatic. We went grocery shopping almost every time I visited. There was a Shop Rite on Route 3. It was shitty, but it was close. We saw an old woman dancing as the Electric Slide played on the overhead speaker. He joined her. They side-stepped and hopped around the snack aisle, and I pretended not to know him.

---

I don't see him much over the past month or so and it makes me feel like shit. He's closer than he's ever been physically, but I can't bring myself to look at him anymore. He's been to the hospital more times over the past six years than I can count on my ten fingers, but I want to see him the least now. This time feels the least safe. Mom pushes me, though. She does again and again. Go while you still can. So I agree because she says she'll go with me on her lunch. I can drive myself, but I've regressed

to the fourteen-year-old I was when he first told me he had cancer, fourteen and riddled with separation anxiety.

I sit on the floor in the hallway while Mom gets ready in the bathroom mirror. My phone rings and by now I'm so accustomed to it that every time family names pop up, I become a little more depressed. "Things aren't looking very good," my brother tells me. And I want to tell him that things haven't been looking good for the past seven months, that the nurses don't do a good job of trimming his beard and his hair and nobody bothers to clean the crust and muck built up around his mouth where the tube sticks out, and he's so skinny, even more skinny than when he was at his worst with the cancer, when he was rolled out of his apartment in agony, and he admitted to me that was the first time he'd ever felt depressed himself. At least back then he looked bloated with chemo. Now he just looks dead, with a brittle rotten body and hazy eyes that wander around his room absently. Nobody told his wife the golden rule of cancer: you don't leave someone when they're sick—not after nearly a decade together and not after taking your legally binding vows. She led him on until the day he died. She only ever talked to me when my dad wouldn't answer and she didn't have a direct pathway of manipulation. I see her

again for the first time in years at the hospital. She hugs me and tells me to come visit her in New York. I wish I'd told him to leave her.

The worse Dad gets, the worse the world gets, still vaccine-less, and what little hope is left in our depleting minds and hearts grows

**This time seeing him is only different because there are no tubes in him and I can hug and kiss him all I want.**

weaker and weaker by the very second. The TV down the hall tells me that in the past seven months, seven hundred thousand people died and forty-four million others are sick in America alone. I hate the people who live and carelessly catch it again, end up in the hospital again, and who live again.

I'll see him soon, even if he scares me the way the hospitals used to. As I stand to leave, I feel my phone buzzing in my hand again, and I know like I knew the day he tested positive. I answer my brother anyway. "Hey. Don't bother going. It's too late." I don't tell him anything but I love you. When Mom asks what's wrong, I just shake my head. She doesn't understand what that means.

"What?" she asks, like we all haven't been waiting for this day to come.

"It's too late."

"What?"

"He's gone."

"What?"

We go see him anyway. The nurse greets us in the lobby. She's so nice, but I won't talk to her. I can't. The only thing I can focus on is holding my own sweaty hands. She's very nice, but she's nice in a way like my father didn't just die five minutes ago, and maybe that's why I don't talk to her.

This time seeing him is only different because there are no tubes in him and I can hug and kiss him all I want.

---

My aunt is admitted into the hospital the day of his funeral. She, along with her brothers and mine, went to see my dad at the morgue in the funeral home that morning, and her mind doesn't want to know that her little brother is dead. It snaps only for a week.

At the funeral, his would-be-ex is there, the one that left as soon as the cancer got bad. I've ignored her texts for months, but she gets up as soon as she sees me and holds on tight. She's the last person I want comforting me. She can't comfort me. She's a backstabber. A fake. A fraud. A bitch. She hurt him so bad. I want to call her a bitch. She ignored



him for years and now she's here like it's okay. But Dad didn't hate anyone. He loved her, and at one point I did too, so I don't push her away. I just stand there, limp and soggy. I don't make any move to reciprocate her hug.

After I break free, I make my way around the room of only twenty-five people because that's all we're allowed in our diseased world. Every single one of that twenty-five has brought flowers though, the kind I'm familiar with, the kind I used to watch

## **Dad is missing his own funeral, and we laugh.**

him make. The kind that stand as tall as me on big, easel-like contraptions and say To a Loving Father or Sorry For Your Loss. The trick to getting the carnations to stick on their Styrofoam bases is toothpicks, one end in the head of the flower along the stem and the other in the foam. I can only thank the flowers so many times before it starts to lose its meaning.

I pick up his box of ashes at the altar. He's light. Too light. My brothers and I come to the conclusion that he's not really in there.

Dad is missing his own funeral, and we laugh.

A week later, my aunt tells me that when she visited him in the morgue, it was cold. It felt so cold. They laid him out on a table with a sheet over

his entire body, head to toe. A hole was cut out in the sheet for only his face like an old skeleton nun.

I don't realize how long it takes to burn a body properly until it's two weeks after his funeral and I'm picking up his ashes. It's the same box that sat at the altar, but it's heavier this time, so heavy, like there's no way he even weighed this much in his hospital bed kind of heavy. My brother and I open it to separate him into three urns, small and red with silver roses. We both look down at the grey dust in the plastic bag, and we laugh because we're both in denial that the dust is Dad. I knew he died on that Monday after Easter, but now that he's all dusty I'm not all that certain anymore. Maybe he's like Elvis, not actually dead and running around Hawaii or something.

I make sure to scoop a couple of grains of him into my new moon-shaped necklace. Only a couple of him will fit. I try to remember to take him with me everywhere I go, every day, vaccinated now from the infected air outside, yet still making sure my mouth and nose are covered and still hoarding hand sanitizer, like if we finally cleanse ourselves and move on maybe he'll come back. I wear his old Superman shirt to the gym. The first time I wore it, it smelled like him. The second time I wore it, it smelled like him. The third time I wear it, I can't smell him anymore, so I get his inky rose scratched into my arm instead.



MUSIC

# estranged

DISCORDANT GENERATION

I long to go back and fix mistakes  
I long to go back and not partake  
and after all this time in love's long drought  
I wonder if you killed me as your way out

and I wish I could've touched you in the end  
touched you one last time not as your friend  
and I wish I could've held you to amend  
when you lied and said it was pretend

I feel as empty as your promises  
but still not empty as your excuses  
I thought I found someone who cared about me  
I thought I found someone who wouldn't leave me alone

and I wish I could've touched you in the end  
touched you one last time not as your friend  
and I wish I could've held you to amend  
when you lied and said it was pretend

You are changed  
You're all the same  
You are deranged  
You've become estranged

and I wish I could've touched you in the end  
touched you one last time not as your friend  
and I wish I could've held you to amend  
when you lied and said it was pretend

You are changed  
You're all the same  
You are deranged  
I've become estranged

57

LISTEN:



ISABELLA KHAN





# bridges, metaphorically

ALEXANDER KHAN

sometimes I don't recognize my own laugh  
and I know that means there's  
something wrong with me

the funny thing about routine to an  
ill person is that all it takes to destroy  
progress you've made is a day, an hour

I take my meds on routine for three months,  
miss a week in the middle of October  
because I've come to rely  
on the grapefruit dispenser to keep me in  
line keep me on habit - I got too busy,  
stressed, to refill it on time  
and now we're edging December  
I haven't been medicated in over a month

it shows in hush moments,  
my best friends word choice in a text is off,  
now I'm planning ways  
to burn our bridge before she can cross she  
doesn't get to hate me or be mad it's my  
control my choice -

she texts me about the playlist she made  
me I recognize the spiraling  
my shower towel wields loose hair, broken  
follicles fleeing attempt,  
things are getting ugly again  
and everyone can see it

but me

rub until the tears disappear  
eyes burning from the way  
I forgot how to cry it feels unnatural like fear  
crackling up my back,  
runaway flame bubbling volcano  
take your meds take your meds  
take your meds take your meds

## TAKE YOUR MEDS

I want to say I take my meds  
and I do, take them,  
for the week I have  
but I'll forget again,  
and again, and again,  
unmedicated  
cycling through false emotions  
dry tears

sometimes I don't recognize my own laugh  
and I know that means something's wrong  
again, but I don't know how to stop it

walking the same circles  
bare feet hot coals

take your meds take your meds take



MUSIC

# the life

JACKSON VINCENT

I don't want to remember  
Your face this time tomorrow  
I just want the night now  
I don't want to feel alone

I'm trying to forget her  
The one that I swore I loved  
Don't think you're my new one  
Don't think of me at all

My sins will set me free  
Don't you dream of me

New girl every night  
I thought it'd be the life  
But I'm so alone deep inside don't you know  
That I'm still just a man learning to hate you on command?

My sins will set me free  
Don't you dream of me

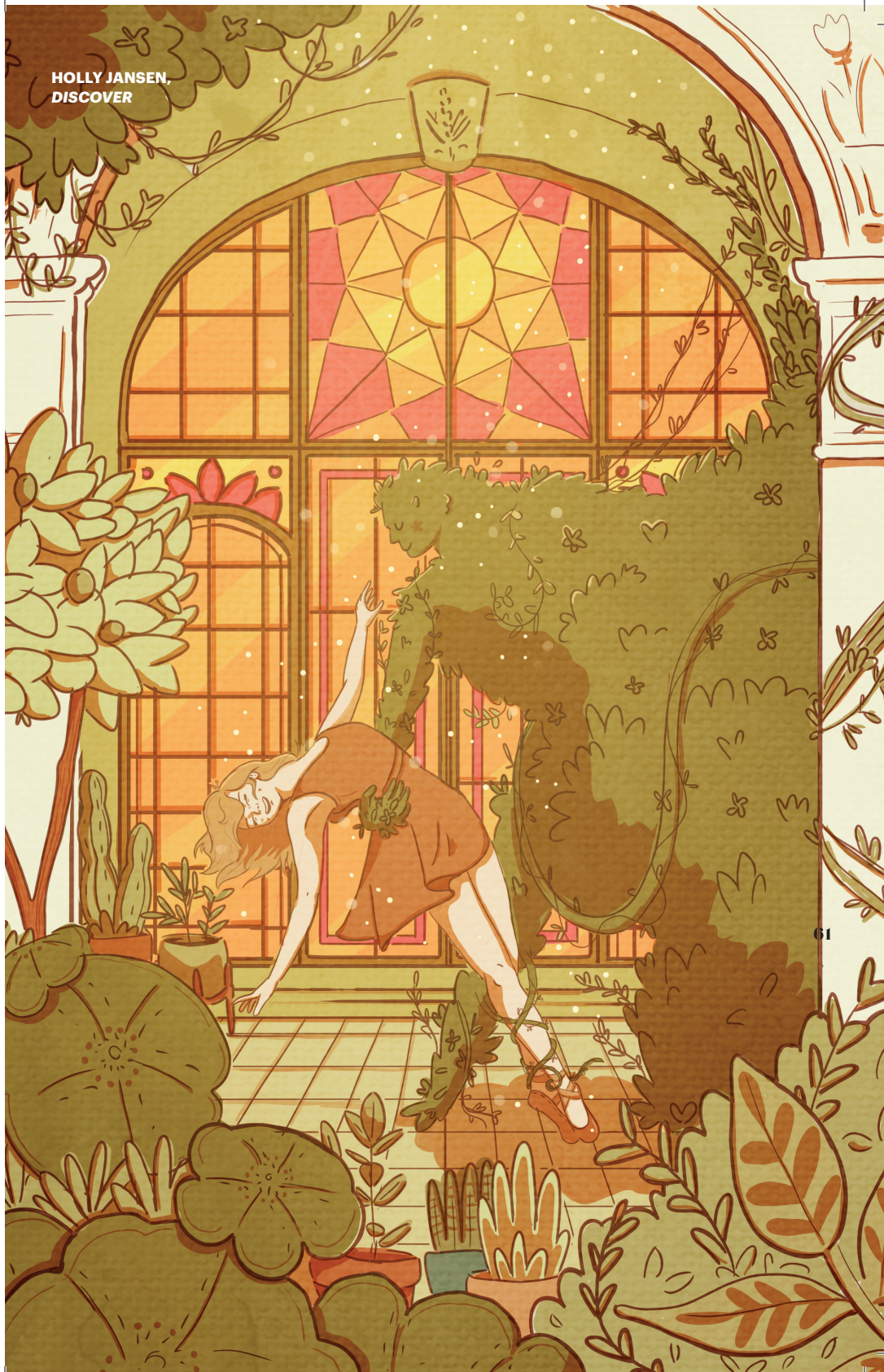
60

Don't you hate the dwelling by the phone?  
Don't you want somebody else to know  
How it feels to sleep there next to you  
Or how it feels to get broken in two?

LISTEN:



HOLLY JANSEN,  
DISCOVER







**EMILY PERKS,  
PAPER PEOPLE**

# syndrome-ella

JAY CLARK

cinderella sheds her exo  
skeleton like a  
cicada in the hot summer months but  
she is not  
emerging she is collapsing no  
she is slipping out of the bottom of her

dress up the flight of stairs back  
into the corrugations she hides  
her street dirtied hem and  
settles on the steps  
waiting for garbage day  
where she will be whisked up up away  
into the teeth of the yawning compactor and oh,  
come and see  
princess-packing-peanuts be  
shredded and shoved  
into the next delivery

# are you being transparent?

AVI FIDLER

## ARE YOU BEING TRANSPARENT?

a flyer pasted between elevators beckons, teasing.  
let's see. am i?

### **trans-par-ent / tran(t)s per nt/**

*1) (of a material or article) allowing light to pass through  
so that objects behind can be distinctly seen.*

Can you see through my body, my substance, my self? Do you look past me in search of others, no matter how hard I work, no matter how much I try, how badly I want to be seen? To be loved?

I think that you can.

I think that you do.

Even my dog sits by the door after greeting me,  
as if waiting for someone important to walk in.

*Just me, I tell him.*

*Always just me.*

*Sorry to disappoint.*

The road crossings used to say WAIT when I pushed.

Now they've gone silent as the fall of snow.

Like I'm not worth wasting their virtual breath.

An audition video sits on my YouTube page.

One subscriber - my other account.

0 views. 0 views. 0 views.

*Going viral soon, I think.*

I don't seem to cast a reflection in sidewalk windows anymore.

Or maybe it's just that I stopped looking.

I never liked what I saw there anyway.

## ARE YOU BEING TRANSPARENT?

a cryptic instagram caption questions me.  
let's see. can i?

### **trans-par-ent / tran(t)s per nt/**

*2) easy to perceive or detect.*

Can you spot me in a crowd? I don't think so. Painted in bright orange, I still fail to stand out. I walk toe-to-heel in impossibly light footsteps. Freshman year, my movement teacher says:



*"It's probably because you believe you aren't allowed to make noise."*  
People don't hear me enter, or just aren't listening. They jump when I speak, as if I wasn't there. *I'm not trying to scare you on purpose. I promise. I just can't fathom being a bother.*  
I'm like a phone call made of silence, echoing in an empty room.  
*Anyone home?*

...

No one.  
Or at least no one  
Who wants to pick up.  
*If a ringtone goes off and no one hears it, did it make a sound?*

The only mark I'll make on this place is the holes in the walls where I pushed thumbtacks in.  
Putting up other people's art to make my existence bearable.

I've gone to concerts, but only as one of thousands.  
A voice in the crowd, indistinguishable from the throng.  
I don't let people hear me sing anymore.  
My only fan is the one in my A/C unit.

65

### **ARE YOU BEING TRANSPARENT?**

restless in bed, the message flashes before my eyes. A call to artistry.  
*your mission, should you choose to accept it... let's see. will i?*

#### **trans-par-ent / tran(t)s per nt/**

*3) having thoughts, feelings, or motives that are easily perceived.*

Ay, there's the rub. For an open book, I still have blank pages, secrets written in invisible ink. Sharing drinks and insecurity isn't the same as being actually honest with someone or myself. After all, being true would make me opaque. Witnessed and invisible, all at once in plain sight. In the end, I could not become solid and seen.

# prayer for the dead bird

CHINA RAIN CHUNG

1  
Mom did not like peace signs,  
She thought they looked  
Like a broken cross.

2  
Every illusion  
bends its knees  
to the same  
Sordid God,  
A Fake God  
who is some  
wild refraction  
of light-----\*\*\*\*\*

The prayers  
have been bouncing  
straight back down  
for years now,  
each temple built  
facing the wrong direction—  
Like a radio tower  
projecting upside-down  
sending waves  
to a deep unhearing center.

3  
Waiting for the day to end  
my shadow meets me,  
chewed, pulled apart  
like yarn  
strewn across the yard  
in the sunlight  
numbing over the mountain.

4  
I found  
every sacred place  
closed down  
one muted afternoon—  
Not so surprising.

5  
Look—  
All my body  
is a long outward stretch  
to meet your empty.

All the Wingbeatings,  
The Strainings:

Toward  
a cavernous body  
for my cavernous body  
to yell into echo.

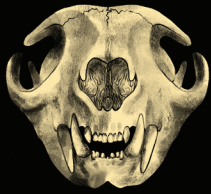
6  
The body is brailled,  
and a starling is starving sick,  
dying on the sidewalk,  
being pulled down  
to that hot core center—

Every bird melts  
straight to the middle earth,  
after all the flying.







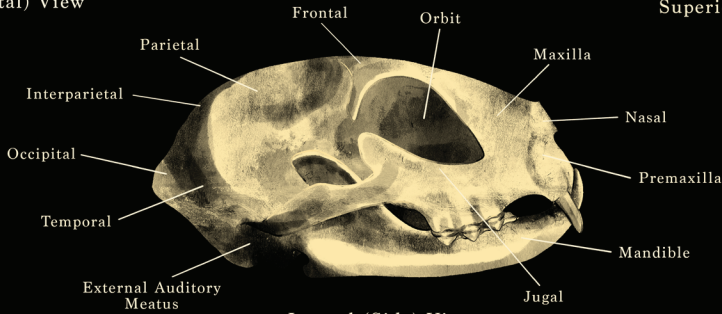


Anterior (Frontal) View

# Felidae Skulls



Superior (Aerial) View



Lateral (Side) View



6



7



8



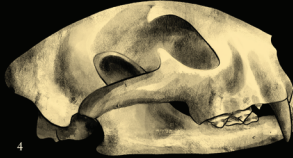
9



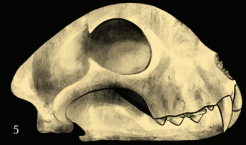
10



3



4



5



1



2



11



1. *Panthera Leo* (African Lion) 39.4 cm x 28 cm x 19 cm
2. *Panthera Tigris Altaica* (Siberian Tiger) 38.1 cm x 25.4 cm x 15.2 cm
3. *Panthera Pardus Pardus* (African Leopard) 24.3 cm x 14.3 cm x 10.4 cm
4. *Puma Concolor* (Cougar) 22.54 cm x 16.03 cm x 12.07 cm
5. *Acinonyx Jubatus* (Cheetah) 18.9 cm x 12.4 cm x 9.4 cm
6. *Neofelis Nebulosa* (Clouded Leopard) 17.9 cm x 11.8 cm x 9.2 cm
7. *Leopardus Pardalis* (Ocelot) 15.2 cm x 10.2 cm x 7.6 cm
8. *Lynx Canadensis* (Canada Lynx) 13 cm x 9 cm x 6.5 cm
9. *Leptailurus Serval* (Serval) 11.7 cm x 8.2 cm x 5.7 cm
10. *Felis Catus* (Cat) 9.3 cm x 6.7 cm x 4.7 cm
11. Conjoined Cat Skull 9 cm x 7.5 cm x 4.5 cm



# borosilicate

JAY CLARK

My lab-grade,  
blown-glass stomach  
boils and bubbles and spits.

They drop everything into it  
and watch it dissolve.  
Food and flesh,  
bones and stones.

They trust me to refresh the solution,  
top it up myself,  
so they can test  
what I can keep down.



CONTENT WARNING: GORE, BODY HORROR

# bone-cleaning tips & tricks: episode 4

JAY CLARK

Hey, what's going on guys.

Today I will be giving a tutorial on how to do a good bone-cleaning on your hands.

I've gotten a couple of comments on my other bone videos asking if there are any specific details for hands, since they're so complicated and there are so many horror stories out there of putting them back together wrong. So, I'm just going to go through my cleaning process and hopefully, you'll find some strategies of your own.

As always, I'd like to preface that while I'm pretty well-trained in this area, I'm not a professional. If you really need a deep cleaning or if you're unsure how to do one at all, you're better off going to an expert, even if it's just once. A lot of them are happy to talk you through the process and give you some tips and tricks, and, like I always say, *there's nothing like hands-on experience!*

So, without any further ado, let's get right into it.

First thing you're going to do, as always, is get all of your cleaning supplies ready. I have them all laid out, as you can see:

- 1) my glass dish full of soapy water right here, with the hand skeleton laid out under it
- 2) a separate bowl of distilled water
- 3) some soft microfiber cloths
- 4) a new toothbrush
- 5) a bunch of Q-tips
- 6) some clamps and rubber-tipped pliers.

All of them I've sanitized with isopropyl alcohol. Just a reminder that if you're thinking of doing regular cleanings, especially on more delicate things like your feet or hands, you should get some *good* pliers. The hardware store metal ones are okay once in a while, but they can crunch up surfaces sometimes, and let me tell you firsthand, that's really unpleasant. Off-camera, I also have my box of rubber gloves, and I'm just going to glove up the hand I'm not going to be working on.

We're all ready to go. I have my lamp on just to be able to see



everything in there better, and I'm just going to start by unzipping my fingers. Personally, I like to work from the tips of my fingers up, though some people like to go finger by finger. Do whatever system works for you as long as everything soaks for about half an hour and you keep everything organized, especially

since we only have one operable hand the whole time.

Now that I'm all unzipped, as you can see, there's a little bit of buildup, particularly around my joints. It's been about a month since I did my last cleaning, so this is pretty typical.

First things first: I'm going to grab my pliers and start wiggling

the bones at the tips of my fingers out. These ones are your distal phalanges, and they'll typically pop out pretty easily. It—*ugh*—takes a little bit of wiggling, but that's normal. I'm just being careful not to force anything, and I'm just sort of wiggling side to side while pulling away from the rest of my finger. I'm being especially careful to not bend it back. That's no good. I'm just sticking to my normal range of motion and stopping when I feel any sort of pain. There should be heavy pressure at most.

It's taken a bit of elbow grease, but now I have my thumb's distal phalange separated! I'm going to set it down in my tray of water and try to generally line it up with where the phalange is on the diagram. It doesn't need to be perfect, but I've found a glass dish with the skeleton underneath is a great way to keep everything in order.

I'm just going to do this for all my finger bones, and then we're going to move on to the hand!

Now, I will unzip down the back of my hand and be nice and gentle with getting my skin out of the way. I only need to have the very base of my radius and ulna exposed, and I know I've gotten there when there's this little band of muscle and cartilage. And just like with the fingers, I'm going to keep going down through all these metacarpals, and I'm going to make sure they get laid out the right way.

I don't know if the camera is

picking it up, but you can see that some of the gunk on those first phalanges in the tray is starting to lift off. It looks gross, but that's normal. This is just about a quart of water with a little squirt of dish soap in it, which is more than enough. You don't need it to be very foamy at all, and honestly, I've done it without the dish soap and it works just fine.

So now that we've reached the wrist, you'll know I do my wrists probably every other time I'm cleaning my hand, just because there's a whole lot of bones in a little space, eight that all look fairly similar, and they can be a little bit tricky to put back together. My diagram under the tray separates them out a little bit so that you can keep them all nice and organized. I threw this diagram together myself, so there'll be a link to download it in the comments section. There's a page for both the left and right hands, and I've found that it fits nicely under a nine-by-thirteen baking dish.

I'm going in again with my pliers, being especially careful not to crunch any cartilage while I'm in there. Having to get it reconstructed is a really painful process, so just be careful while you're working and take it nice and slow. If you hear anything crack or something starts to feel super-weird, just back off, take a second, and come at it from a different



angle. This part takes some patience.

Once we have everything soaking, it's time to start scrubbing and rinsing. I'm starting with the tips of my fingers, the distal phalanges, because they've been in there the longest. I'm just going to take them out with my pliers, clamp 'em down, and gently use my toothbrush to scrub off any crud before I give them a little swish in distilled water and lay them out to dry for a bit. Don't worry if you can't get some of the staining out, that's totally normal.

The clamps are honestly going to be your best friend while holding stuff down. It takes a little bit of fiddling to do with one hand, so I recommend you practice how to do everything before you go at it for real. By the way, I'm just gently rubbing these phalanges dry, and we're going to lay everything back out on this towel as we clean it off. While we wait, I'm just going to go into each socket with a clean Q-tip and rub gently where I see any grime, being careful not to press too hard.

Once that's all done, we're going to put everything back together. Starting with my carpals—those are my wrist bones—I'm just working my way back up. The most important thing here is to not force anything, especially on your wrist. Since I've been so careful with my cartilage, you can see how everything wants to sort of slot

together, and I'm really using that to my advantage. If something isn't immediately settling back in place, I'm just spinning it in a few different directions until it pops back in place. Just like that, I'm going to keep moving back up my hand, going nice and slow.

So we have every bone put away, what's next? I'm going to fold all my skin back into place before I zip it back up, to put as little tension on it as possible.

As a final step, I'm just rolling out my wrist and flexing each of my fingers to make sure everything went back together smoothly. As you can probably hear—oh, yeah, you definitely can—there's some gnarly crunching coming from my wrist. It doesn't hurt at all, and that's just bubbles of air in the joints working themselves out. All of my joints are pretty noisy after I clean them, and that's normal. You just want to make sure you're not in any sort of persistent pain. The great part about being able to disassemble is that if something is together wrong and hurting, you can always unzip and poke around until you figure out what's out of place, and then get it back together.

I think that's pretty much it for this video! If you enjoyed it, leave a like, drop what other cleanings you'd like to see in the comments, or your own tips and tricks, and you can always subscribe.

See you around.

**BRIELLE WALTON,  
GRASS DANCE SERIES #1**



# bios

## EDITORS & DESIGNERS

**Mac Chandler (Editor, Creative Writing '23)** is a senior Creative Writing major. She has been published in *HASH Magazine*, *Rappahannock Review*, and *High Shelf Press*.

**Jules Hostetter (Editor, Creative Writing '23)** is a 22-year-old poet from Pennsylvania. She loves the ocean, roller skating, and listening to music. You can find her work in *Voicemail Poems*.

**Kayla Laine Klavins (Designer, Graphic Design '23)** is an interdisciplinary artist originally hailing from the Sunshine State, but now calls Philly (and its design scene) home. They love being bald and smoochin' bugs!

**Z Murphy (Editor, Creative Writing '24)** is a multiracial multimedia artist from the tri-state area. She is a writer, an award-winning performer, a retired child, and a licensed makeup artist, and very grateful to have the opportunity to be an editor for her school magazine. Cheers to art and transparency!

**John Tom Raczkowski (Senior Editor, Creative Writing '23)** is a writer and poet in the city of Philadelphia. Outside of academia, he is an Editor and Submissions Reviewer at *Saturnalia Books*, Contributing Review Writer at *Publishers Weekly*, and Zine maker. He has recently developed an interest in mixed-media painting.

**Genevieve Wittrock (Designer, Graphic Design '23)** is a designer and visual artist who embraces experimentation and taking frequent trips down the rabbit hole. She is fond of nice people, good food, new lessons, and laughing in loud barrooms.

15

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Nijah Blanton (Fine Arts '25)** enjoys painting, listening to music, traveling, and trying new foods! She loves sunny days, starry nights, and anything involving nature and adventure.

**Jaclyn Brice (Illustration '24).**

**Jay Clark (Creative Writing '26)** is a writer (sometimes), an artist (sometimes), and a body horror fanatic (all the time). If he's not writing, he's probably thinking about

it, though he might just have werewolves on the brain again.

**China Rain Chung (Creative Writing '23)** is a writer and interdisciplinary artist inhabiting a 24-year-old body, experimenting with mediums, reading poetry, and feeding birds.

**Sara Coleman (Creative Writing '23)** is a North Philly native whose writing is reflective of the lives and stories of those who have been and continue to be silenced.

**Josep Cuce-Bosch (Illustration '23)** is an illustrator with a fondness for the dingy and the bizarre. When he's not drawing little men with big guns, he enjoys maintaining his pigeon flock, dabbling in taxidermy, and catching up on the latest paleontology news.

**Laela Clark (Graphic Design '23)** loves lemonade, hiking, and designing.

**Courtney Dunn (Creative Writing '23)** is a proud cat mom and Jersey girl at heart. She enjoys writing realistic fiction with feminist themes and drinking White Claws.

**Michela Edwards (Graphic Design '23)** is a student who is fond of drawing, painting, tattooing, singing, dancing and anything along the lines of freedom of expression.

16

**Hayden Eric (Film '24)** is an all-rounded theater maker who likes to dabble in everything from skateboarding to watercolor to game design. He pretends to be a Philly native when he bikes up 13th, but really he's just from New Hampshire.

**Avi Fidler (Acting '23)** is an Acting major who would rather be known for anything other than being an Acting major. In addition to writing poetry, they paint, collage, swordfight, and build sets.

**Alexis Finley (Interdisciplinary Art '25)** is a musical and visual artist from New Jersey. Her hobbies include watching *Les Misérables* an unfathomable number of times and actively avoiding starting her much-needed art Instagram account.

**Joel Grebler (Creative Writing '25)** is just jonesing. He likes the stuff Matt Hilton



likes but also Batman, writing sci-fi stories, and everything else, which of course includes being in Discordant Generation with Matt.

**Destiny Hall-Harper (Illustration '24)** is pretty much a cartoon character. Just a girl from the 80s, she is trying to navigate her own head. Potentially with a pink spotted dog by her side.

**Matt Hilton (Creative Writing '24)** is a singer-songwriter and producer who enjoys writing poetry, short stories, and most of all rock and roll, and more than most of all being in Discordant Generation with Joel Grebler. Discordant Generation has opened for the Misfits, the Vibrators, and Black Flag.

**Miles Hubbard (Illustration '24)** is someone who likes reading and drawing comics as well as making art based on video games. For more cool art go to @thatblackdiabetic1 on Instagram.

**Holly Jansen (Illustration '23)** is a silly little guy who loves illustrating foliage-filled landscapes to live out her (unrealistic) dreams of being a successful plant mom <3

**Alexander Khan (Creative Writing '23)** is a poet from Philadelphia. He finds inspiration for his poems in flammable objects.

**Isabella Khan (Photography '25)** is an image-based artist who loves sushi, corgis, and the color green.

//

**Messiah King (Graphic Design '26)** is an introverted artist who experiments with different design elements to create unique artworks. He enjoys listening to soundtracks from musicals while he works.

**Alx Leyton (Illustration '25)** is a mixed-media artist who strives to do a little bit of everything in their lifetime. A curly Q based in Philadelphia.

**Annica Martz (Illustration '24)** is a visual artist, designer, dancer, and writer who refuses to take off her headphones. She is a big concert and theater enthusiast and is probably obsessing over some TV show at this very moment.

**Alex Medlin (Painting '25)** was raised by his single mother in a rural area of upstate New York. A deeply isolated, desolate, and almost anachronistic upbringing spawned a deep appreciation for surreality and stillness, with overactive daydreams being the primary source of inspiration.

**Feyisara Olalowo (Fine Arts '26)** is an African sculpture student from Nigeria. Through multimedia, he explores different aspects of design, with a bit of an obsession with boxes.

**Lucienne Parker (Dance '24)** is a dance and performance artist who enjoys grapes, semi-permanent tattoos, and long walks on the beach.

**Emily Perks (Fine Arts '25)** studies painting and education.

**Elizabeth Ramos (Fine Arts '23)** is a studio painter, mural assistant, and sometimes curator living in South Philly. She likes sparkly trinkets and dancing to disco music.

**Jack Siminerio (Creative Writing '24)** is a creative writer whose work bridges the gap between sex, body horror, and all-around dark humor. They write and perform music under the stage name Jack Valentine, but most importantly, have an undying affinity for all cheeses.

**Jay Smith (Creative Writing '23)** is a Creative Writing major who loves painting and knitting and, occasionally, writing. They really like bats and rats but not so much cats.

**TS**

**Logan Smith (Sculpture '25)** is an interdisciplinary sculpture, blacksmith, and bonsai hobbyist. He's from rural California and moved to Philly to try living somewhere different. Check out his work at @logansartdump on Instagram.

**Michael Staniz (Illustration '24)** is an illustrator from Philadelphia who loves making art and worm-on-a-string and hates commuting. His commissions are always open and the money will go towards unfathomably stupid things.

**Parker Staud (Illustration '24)** is a cryptic illustration student with a passion for character design and concept art. They are a jorts enthusiast.

**Alex Stevenson (Photography '25)** is an artist of varied interests including photography, poetry, printmaking, reading, and discussing all things Star Trek and Jim Henson. She is originally from Maryland and their biggest inspiration is Oscar Wilde.

**Randy Stomberg (Creative Writing '23)** is a creative writer simply doing their best. They love torturing their characters and pushing deadlines.

**Mel Stowell (Illustration '23)** is a character and background artist looking to go into book jacket illustration after graduating. When they aren't drawing, they enjoy spending time with their five chickens, four cats, and one poodle.

**Mads Torres (Illustration '24)** is a full-time illustrator and part-time barista who loves cats, comics, and herbal tea in that order. Mads can usually be found hunched over an iPad screen at its brightest possible setting, listening to My Chemical Romance's "Three Cheers for Sweet Revenge" a solid three times in a row.

**Jackson Vincent (Photography '23)** is a photographer and songwriter who often discusses themes of permanence and identity. His work has come to be known for its dark and ambiguous qualities, presenting both his visual and audio works as ghost-like in nature.

**Kait Waldman (Illustration '24)** is a fish freak who enjoys illustrating animals and going feral in the woods. She enjoys acquiring free things off the street and decorating her room like a crow/raccoon.

**Brielle Walton (Photography '25)** is a digital and analog photographer, occasional poet, and musical nerd who loves Disney movies and is studying to be an art teacher. Follow her on Instagram @art\_by\_brielle12.

79

**Jameka Wilson (Acting '23)** is an actor, writer, and tastemaker the consistency of a Klondike bar. Their favorite movie is Death Becomes Her and it shows.

**Maple Young (Crafts & Materials '23)** is a woodworker and fibers artist who somehow stumbled her way into a poetry class. She is superstitious and likes license plates.

**NIJAH BLANTON,**  
***ARMOR***









ADVANCING  
HUMAN  
CREATIVITY™