



WEST 4TH STREET REVIEW

Spring 2018

New York University

THE WEST 4TH STREET REVIEW

The Literary Magazine of Liberal & Global Liberal Studies

Spring 2018

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We are inundated with inane memes, fraudulent reports, gossip about empty-headed celebrities and/or grotesque cartoon-men who claim to be our leaders. And yet, there is still a landscape of beauty and meaning to be found, even if sometimes it seems we must swim through a sea of trash to get there.

This year, I was struck especially by how many of our students submitted beautiful, meaningful poems and prose diving with considerable elan into the thickets of race/sexuality/family (*shocking*, I know, that our students should be moved by all the thrashing about in those areas with which our culture currently wrestles).

In **Lady Windermere's Fan**, Oscar Wilde famously observes, "We are all in the gutter but some of us are looking at the stars." These writers and artists know something about the gutter which seethes beneath us but their eyes are fixed firmly on the stars.

Thanks, as always, to all who submitted, the student editorial/reading board who diligently read and commented on the many many submissions.

Thanks to Emily Bauman for help with the Elaine Kuntz Prize, to Leah Guarino-Ramirez, Billy Helton and our new dean, Julie Mostov, for their support.

Onward Through the Fog!

Stephen Policoff

Spring 2018

Front and back cover art by Sara Miranda

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Dinner

Caroline Steudle

The tile in the kitchen slips beneath our socks
Everywhere is the smell of grilled chicken
and green bean casserole
You and I are young enough that we think this is gross

Dad tries out his new CD player:
plays that song that goes
“hey-na, na-na, oh-oh”
You sing along and we waltz
because we do not know this is not a song for waltzing
(and we don’t really know what a waltz is, anyway)

There is no special occasion, yet there is soda in the fridge,
and flowers on the counter in the good vase
You dip a finger in the mashed potatoes when Dad’s back is turned
and I dance all the way into the old kitchen table
I don’t mind the bruise that creeps onto my hip

The edge of the kitchen is lined with the living room rug
I don’t know yet that the word for it is “dated”
The walls have a fresh coat of pale green paint

I believe it is the same color as your eyes
You are spinning too fast for me to tell

More Pages

Michelle Cao

“a half-finished book is like a half-finished love affair...” CLOUD ATLAS

we are such different people. his life burst out of old uptown apartments where his best friend across the street would shout his name, before the era of phones, where he'd run all up and down the city trying to find people. he describes it with a happily wistful face, a natural result of young-age adventures.

I am a product of a suburban home where the ceilings are high and expectations are even higher. the leaves turn a lush autumn red every year and litter our yards, and everybody is much the same on the outside, having been raised on a diet of perfection, grace, and judgement. they know not how to hunger for more. one mile in Manhattan will get you twenty blocks and seven avenues, one hundred and forty different intersections that are never the same. one mile in Virginia will get you to the edge of your neighborhood.

he has ridden on the back of New York City trains. I couldn't say the same. My reckless is his normal, and his reckless is my dream. The worst things we could ever do in my childhood home were wander in the forest before dinner and climb tree trunks over creeks.

last night as we sat curled on light blue subway seats our reflections caught my eye, a faint impression in the glass window. his brown hair and hazelnut eyes look nothing like my raven locks and midnight irises, his nose strong and proud and mine shyly sloped. he's walked through the projects late at night hoping he doesn't get robbed and I've only ever sat safe in cars, sleeping on the way home. we hold different languages under our tongues, backed by countries that are halfway across the world from each other. he grew up on empty stomachs some days and I grew up wanting for nothing. my parents are still in love and his don't speak, but we are both undeniably our parents' children. he has his father's wandering eyes and scribbling hands, and his mother's sharp wit and gorgeous smile. I have my dad's warm demeanor and endless patience, and my mama's searching soul, forever dissatisfied.

his teachers have always hated his quick tongue and roguish tendencies, while everybody else who ever met him were delighted by them. my teachers have always loved my eloquent chatter and quiet disposition, while everybody else I wanted to impress laughed behind my back and eventually, to my face. he had his first kiss in the third grade and I had mine in the third year of high school. he's never known the definition of awkwardness and I am the embodiment of it.

he sees everything in pictures, his mind framing things as they are. I see everything in stories, my mind re-interpreting pedestrian things to make them worthy of reading. but both end up beautiful, and that's the important part. school has always been just another chore to him and always a first priority for me. but it doesn't mean we don't both love learning, we just seek knowledge in different places. he plays me rap songs and points out tags on the sides of trucks and concrete sidewalks, and I sit on his lap and explain laws of physics and dictionary definitions. it doesn't mean we don't both have something to teach the world.

he's known sadness in pieces, dark clouds that he struggles through sometimes. I've lived in the fog for years, but he doesn't act like that isn't deeply intertwined with who I am and I don't act like his is invalid. neither of us like pretending to know things we don't and both of us like to ask questions for the wisdom of them. “you can always learn something from everybody,” he says, earnestly. and in the end we want something more out of life but we won't ever take ourselves too seriously.

we are such different people, and yet somehow we end up being the same kind of creature after all. his sweet care and my unbridled honesty means both of us are shoulders to cry on. neither of us are afraid of being who we are, but sometimes we dial down the intensity for the comfort of others. nothing is glaringly “wrong” with either of us, and so we become perfect people for others to project their ideals onto, all our traits elevated to desirable in the most coveted way, and both of us know what it’s like to disappoint those ideals. we are the kinds of people everybody seems to fall in love with, but we both know they’re usually falling for what they want us to be, just because we are good people on the inside. they see the solid foundation and start to blueprint their castles, but who can make a home out of a stranger? open the door and you’ll see, it’s not a place everybody will be comfortable in. and so both of us will inevitably feel the guilt when we end up hurting others, despite our intentions, or lack thereof.

he draws a sphere to represent the earth and two protuberances rising from the ground, one for me and one for him. he tells me the way he sees it, we rise to just about the same height. he draws a little pipe that starts from the roots of both and meets in the middle of the two, and I can see it in my mind’s eye, that’s when they start to glow. and all over the sphere are other pairs that emerge and fasten onto each other, each on their own plane. it doesn’t really mean any of us are better than anybody else. it just means certain people tilt their heads certain degrees to see the same things from different places.

I take the notebook from his hands and turn the page, uncapping the pen with my teeth. I tell him the way I see it, people are like this: I draw a shifty outline of a person sitting on one end of a coffee shop table and say, “there are certain things that people have,” placing a Basquiat-esque crown on his head, because I know he’d like that. I draw another person on the other end with just a sad face above her. “and then there are facades they might project, whether they mean to or not,” I continue, pitching an aura around either of them, oppressive masks that cover the people under. “but on the very inside...” small hearts, beating the same between the two of them, and he can see it too, they start to glow. “they might be the same after all.”

“you know, the day I met you,” he begins, “I think I could tell...”

“...that we’d end up here?” I finish, and he smiles, tightening his grip around me. of course, we didn’t really know, but I think we could sense it all the same—something in the way you move, that you and me could be our own thing—and I let out a breath and look up at the ceiling. “doesn’t that seem comforting? that our bodies know things our minds don’t yet? that they’ll lead us to the people at our same height, with the same glowing cores, in the end?”

“you are one of the best people I know,” he says, and I hope he knows that means he’s one of the best people I know, too. he wonders if maybe we aren’t special, maybe we’re overthinking this, and I could agree to the possibility but somehow, I kind of highly doubt it.

but whatever the case, my fingers itch to write more. he pinches the seven pages I’ve commandeered and tells me to make them worth his while, because after all, he’s hardly written seven pages himself. and I smile, a promise, because there’ll be more pages to come and I’ll try my best to make them worth his time, because they’re sure worth mine. I seem to always be looking for the end of my sentence but now, I hardly mind how long it goes on for.

I just want more pages. more pages. more pages. more pages of yours. and I hope you want more pages of mine.



I Forgive You

Karen Wang

This Essay Won This Year's Elaine Kuntz Freshman Composition Prize

A scientific and psychological study called *Turning Points of Closeness in the Father/Daughter Relationship* was conducted by a Professor of Communications at Baylor University, Mark T. Morman. According to the observations of the study, there are turning points that define a daughter's relationship with her father:

1. Adolescence
2. Family crisis
3. Traumatic event
4. Daughters claim independence
5. Participating in activities together
6. Physical distance
7. Daughter matures and develops friendship with father
8. A letter

ONE

The first complication I had with my father revolved around time. Elementary school meant that students would have to be dropped off in front of the building by 8am; they would be brought downstairs to the cafeteria for breakfast. But my dad closed his restaurant in the Bronx at 10pm and cleaned up until 11pm. He got home at approximately 11:45pm from Mondays to Wednesdays, and 12:08am from Thursdays to Sundays. All this meant that I didn't get enough sleep for school the next day.

Every night, the same chain of events would occur. My mother would tell me to sleep at 10:30pm; I'd obey and lie down next to her. The T.V. played in the background noise and acted as the only light in the bedroom. I'd close my eyes to think about all the things that happened during the day—or even create stories of the future. I didn't let myself fall asleep until I heard the beat of six steps, each growing louder in order to reach a stop. Keys jingled like bells and the turning of a knob followed. I felt a weight lifted off the bed. My mother always made her way into the kitchen and turned on the light; my father took off his dirty work shoes. Only then would I fall into a comfortable sleep, knowing that he was safe at home.

TWO

One night, I woke up from my sleep because I heard something fall in the kitchen. It sounded like glass; I hoped that it wasn't my favorite cup from Secret Santa Shop. I even thought about how that cup had an expensive price tag of three dollars. I thought about the angel pictured on the surface; she was playing a trumpet, wearing a white dress, and had wings that kept her suspended in the sky. Music notes covered the cup in circumference; the angel's music was all around.

Yelling followed the shattering of the glass. I heard my father ask my mother if he had done anything wrong by trying to help his family. His voice played music like the angel on my cup—it was the only sound and filled the entirety of the apartment. My mother said that we couldn't afford to keep sending money back to China; they didn't deserve the money, they didn't work as hard as my father did.

That night was the first time I saw my father cry. I stood in the doorway of the kitchen, watching my parents in their own trance of anger. My mother had her back to me; her purple nightgown was a silhouette of a woman with her arms flaring. She asked him, "why do you do it?" and he cried. He broke into the corner of my mother's body and his tears wet her neck. He told her that he wasn't enough for his family; he wasn't good enough, rich enough, or loyal enough. His family accused him of leaving them behind and only money could satisfy them. I caught a glance at the mess on the floor of the kitchen, just right under the sink. My father had broken my favorite cup.

THREE

According to the American Psychological Association, "The instinctive, natural way to express anger is to respond aggressively." My father was a man of impulse; he said and did things in the spur of the moment. My mother and I always joked that my father resembled a character from a Fujianese fable—the man who would claim it was his birthday, but the man's birthday never came. My father had talked about going on vacation with my mother and I. He wanted to go to see Mount Rushmore over the weekend; he postponed this trip for two years. My father always followed his instinct, to him it was harmless. He could promise things that would never

come because my mother and I would forget about it. He could make the jokes he wanted to make because my mother and I would laugh about it. But he couldn't express his anger the way he wanted to, because my mother and I would fight him back.

And because of that, I didn't want to be like him anymore. He woke me up again, years later. I heard the power of his voice from the room I moved into after my brother got married. I remember charging in between where the two of them stood. No matter how forceful I was, I was just air compared to the two of them. They were in the heat of the moment; my father only saw the color red. He threw the remote control of the T.V. across the room; my mother continued on about how my father's brother should go get a job. I was no longer sixteen. I became a little girl again, invisible to the world.

I woke up at 6:30am the next day and got on the M9 bus that took me to school. I wondered if anyone would notice that something had happened. I wondered if high school was actually as shallow as I thought it was. I don't know what made me feel more alone: the fact that no one noticed, or the fact that I didn't tell anybody. It was hard to put into words what I felt—but it was defined by an emotion. I felt disgusted; my father was a man who did not know how to control his anger; I saw that as weak. He was a man that kept sending money back to his family in China, a family who didn't see his value. I saw that as foolish. He was a man who was too selfless. My father didn't know how to choose between the family he started and the family he came from. I saw that as betrayal.

FOUR

Sometimes he'd ask me out of the blue how school was going. It made me feel like he was overstepping his boundaries; I was alone in this, he never cared to play that role and I knew what I was doing. Part of him always made me feel like I wasn't good enough still, especially when he asked me why I didn't get into Columbia. Part of him always made me feel like I belonged to him—that I owed him because he raised me. He claimed that I wasn't allowed to have piercings, tattoos, or dye my hair because I would be damaging the body he and my mother gave me. I remember hearing him say that and getting my cartilage pierced the day after; I didn't want anyone to own me. I wanted him to see me as independent, as a woman who had the potential to be more powerful and intelligent than a man. I didn't want to be that obedient daughter who stayed where she was supposed stay.

I think who I was really scared my father because he came from a society that honored men for being male. In China, men were the head of the household, the ones who made all the decisions. There was a shift of control when it came to me; I did what I thought was best for myself. I wanted him to accept that my life wasn't his decision. But my conflict with him was a dilemma. I hated my father for the way he saw me, but I wanted him to love me for who I was. Maybe he saw me this way because he was afraid of the fact that I did not need him, which expelled his purpose. But at the end of the day, I knew I loved him because he wanted the best for me. I knew that he was a hardworking man who needed a little help seeing that his daughter was capable of being an equally hard working woman.

FIVE

I think there were points in time that I attempted to fix the resentment I felt towards him. I remember taking the R train to 7th Avenue and barely seeing the historic brown building as a result of the rush hour crowd. It was the mid-summer's heat that made me question if the show was even worth the commute I went through to pick up tickets I ordered for a Father's Day show. I told myself I'd get back on the train, characterized by the smell of sweat and the feeling of discomfort, if it meant making my father happy.

A week later, I was back on the R train with my father. He wore a purple polo shirt after I told him the attire for the occasion was semi-formal. It looked lavender under the yellow lights of the subway car; he looked older than I last remembered. There were deepened lines passing by under his eyes as he aimlessly gazed ahead. He was unsatisfied. He was tired. He was losing himself to work and didn't know what he was working so hard for.

As Confucius said, "The parents' age must be remembered, both for joy and anxiety." Once again, a complication defined by time made me recognize how important my father was to me. I felt myself feeling guilty when I watched him on the train ride to Carnegie Hall. So much time had passed by, and I had spent it resenting a man who tried his very best. He was never a perfect father. He left me alone too often, and pushed me when I wanted to be left alone. But he was a good man. My father was a man who threw himself into work to give me a future. And I was a daughter who resented him because I didn't think that gave him a reason to define my future.

I didn't want to be the little girl who had immigrant parents but still became a doctor. I wanted to be the woman who cooked and cleaned, who established herself as a master of the human body, who practiced jour-



nalism in her free time. I wanted to be the woman who knew how to create programs for a computer, the woman who knew how to fix a fridge, the woman who baked delicious chocolate chip cookies. I wanted to be the woman who had no limitations to the greatness achieved.

When we got to the hall, families were filing into the theater. I had grabbed two handfuls of cough drops before heading towards our seats. He asked me why I did that, and laughed when I said that I like having candy. And while I ate them throughout the show, struggling not to fall asleep, he stayed alert and appreciated the music. In that moment there with him, I thought that there couldn't have been anything more satisfying. I thought back to my favorite cup and no longer cared that my father had broken it. The angel on the cup wasn't able to play music beautiful enough to compare to the way my dad watched the pianist. I realized that my father was a man who loved art, who loved music, who loved knowledge and knew that it was power. We were more similar than I thought.

SIX

According to Mark T. Morman's study, "the third most mentioned turning point for daughters was when they moved out of the house for the first time." Leaving the house for college put physical space between my father and I and I think for the first time, he misses me. I had called him the other day and asked if he had eaten dinner yet. He asked me if school was difficult and I said that it was nothing I couldn't handle. He laughed and agreed; in that moment I realized that he had accepted who I grew up to become. He told me he was proud I made it to college, despite the circumstances. I think the distance did us good because there was room for me to reflect on why I resented him in the first place. Maybe at times he did know better, and maybe at times I did. But now all that truly matters to me is the fact that he is a man that I can learn from.

My father sold his restaurant this past winter, and I think he did it for my mother and I. I think he was tired of being tired, and he felt his time running from beneath him. He keeps a picture of my mother and I as the screensaver of his phone. In the picture, I am smiling widely while my mother mimics my expression further back in the photo. I think my father loves this picture because of how happy we look; I think it reminds him that life is nothing without sharing in the happiness that family brings.

SEVEN

I try to call him every day because I know how happy that makes him. I try to get dinner with him once a week because I know in my heart that he is still afraid of letting his daughter grow up. He spends his days playing ping pong with old grandpas at the gym and takes my mother on shopping trips. I think he is a lot happier now that he no longer dedicates his days to working.

I've learned that there will always be the past that constantly appears from time to time. The past is something inescapable because it is what shapes us to better take on the present. Indira Gandhi, the former prime minister of India, once said that "Forgiveness is a virtue of the brave." From what I've been through with my father, I realized that I was afraid to forgive him, because I was afraid he'd hurt me again. When it comes to my father, that risk is worth taking. And although our relationship cannot be structured by a scientific article, I do agree that certain turning points in life can impact closeness. I've turned away from my father, but I've also been pulled back towards him. I know that I will never leave him because he is the root that I sprang from. I've always wondered what it meant to love someone and become better through it; my father taught me exactly that. I learned how to forgive him for all his wrongs, and love him for all his rights.

EIGHT

Dear Dad,

You asked me why Claude Monet was one of my favorite French painters. Bridge over a Pond of Waterlilies is one of my favorite paintings because of the movement; the water flows towards the audience. I always thought of myself to be like the waterlilies: colorful and free. There is a sense of calmness in the piece, and I was the nature that maintained it. For a long time, you were the trees behind the bridge. You held the unexpected chaos that had the power to change my course. I have learned the fear only divides us, and chaos creates the opportunity to become stronger. Thank you for teaching me how to persevere. Thank you for taking me to the doctor for minor insignificant colds and brewing me a fresh pot of chicken and dates soup. Thank you for being a father who sacrificed his own life. I hope you know I will always be your daughter, a friend, a supporter, a caretaker. You are selfless, kind, intelligent, giving, and strong. Thank you for teaching me that I have no limits, and accepting that I've surpassed yours.

With Love,
Karen

philosophy class

jaxx artz

you know how you study in philosophy about all these different ways of thinking? and being? and you don't agree with anyone in particular because you don't really understand philosophy yourself, but it still makes you think? well, i guess that's the point so never mind.

but it got me thinking about you. this idea i have of who you're supposed to be and when we'll be together and how we'll be. will we sit on a bench in brooklyn? sipping yellow and red jarritos with my head on your shoulder? will my dress float along my knees, and will you think about the time i skinned them when we cartwheeled in the park?

look at my handwriting. see how it's shaking?

the postcard you sent is still tacked to my bulletin. people ask why someone would send something so strange, a girl with a monster head. i think they don't get you and me, but i really say that i don't know and change the subject.

sometimes i call you and hang up, like a little girl in the movies. i pretend my cell phone has a cord and twist the imaginary coil around my finger nervously, waiting for you. once you did pick up, but i didn't say anything and you angrily cursed me and slammed the phone down. the other times, she picked up. i didn't say anything then, either, but i could feel her reach through the phone and squeeze my brain. i had a headache for weeks afterwards and sometimes i still hear her smile.

at the end of the day, will you return home, to your girl in the jean shorts and the tattoos, and will you tell her you tried and failed? that i won't stop calling, even though you never asked me to stop, and that i won't stop bothering, even though you begged me to keep it up? *i can't lose you.*

i remember you whispering in my ear.

will you tell her anything? will i be an idea? all those pictures i gave you, where are they now? i imagine them tacked up to your bulletin, or taped to the mirror. but she would see, so maybe they're in the trash. would you throw me away? will my lipstick on your cheek cease to exist? will i exist?

Love Interludes

An Autobiography Told Through Drake's Discography

Tyiana Banks

“I know they say the first love is the sweetest/But that first cut is the deepest” - Karaoke, Thank Me Later (2010)

Okay. I realize that I'm only twelve and that people think I'm too young to be in love, but that does not mean that I am not in love with him. At least I think I am. And I think he loves me too. He high-fives me in the hallway. He waves to me at breakfast. He was even assigned by the teacher to sit in my seat when he has class in that room. That has to be a sign, right? So, if we're meant to be, why is he **holding hands** with her today?

“They know/They know/They know” - Headlines, Take Care (2011)

Sometimes I wonder if he thinks there's something more here. **I know** there's something more here. A possibility. A chance that we're both too afraid to take. It's the uncertainty that kills me. The thought that while I've planned our entire life together, he most likely hasn't planned past graduation. Today during lunch, I watched him play basketball on the roof with the other boys. Despite the constant moving and shifting, my eyes can always find him. Just once, I want him to find me.

“You're the girl, you're the one” - Hold On, We're Going Home, Nothing Was the Same (2013)

Except, I'm not. I'm not **the** girl and I'm not **the** one. But I would like to be. But what I want doesn't matter because now he's dating one of my friends. So I use school to distract myself from the boring monotony of my life. I write papers weeks before they're due. The reading for next Thursday is done this Tuesday. That presentation? Already signed, sealed, and delivered to my teacher's inbox. Today my teacher said, “Maybe you should get a boyfriend to fill up that free time.” The metaphorical salt met a very real wound. And is it me or did he blush a little at our teacher's comment?

“Still findin' myself, let alone a soul mate, I'm just sayin'” - Jungle, If You're Reading This It's Too Late (2015)

I am not bitter. I am not jaded. I just don't think I believe in love anymore. Or maybe love

doesn't believe in me. The older I get, the more the idea of there being this **one person** that I'm expected to spend the entirety of my life with sounds like bullshit. But then there's him and there's that small voice whispering, "...maybe it's not." I wish it would shut up. I also wish that I didn't have to spend Winter Formal tonight watching him and his girlfriend slow dance together. But wishes rarely come true. And we must accept the things we cannot change, right? Easier said than done.

"Why can't we work it out? Why baby? Can't we try?" - Weston Road Flows, Views (2016)

For a minute, I had it. Inside jokes. Straying hands. Borrowed clothes. Late night texts. Mid-day talks. Early breakfast deliveries without having to ask. He's the only person that knows my coffee order, as complex as it is. So how is it that we've spent the better part of a year walking the thin line between friendship and something much more, yet not addressed this one detail? A small, but apparently detrimental detail that happened to surface today because a friend felt spiteful. Funny how your **favorite person** can become a **stranger** in a matter of seconds. Despite him holding my face and repeatedly saying, "It's fine. We're fine. We'll get past it," I know we won't. Because I've spent a year memorizing **all** of him and I can tell when he's closing off. When he's already built a wall that I don't think I have the power or energy to bring back down.

"I'm runnin', but can't run away" 4422, More Life (2017)

New theory. If feelings were movie characters, love would be the serial killer. That masked villain that just won't die and reappears in sequel after sequel... love. I try to ignore it. It occupies my thoughts even more. I try to embrace it. It bites me (not in the good way). I refuse to respond to his texts. I can't leave the snapchats unopened because I don't want to lose the streak. When things between us are good, I run with them. I excitedly take two steps forward, then immediately **trip over a crack** and fall flat on my face. Fortunately, Drake is always there to help me back up. Today I listened to Drake's latest musical release in honor of his upcoming 31st birthday. Its worrying how much his music resonates with me. So much so that I just wrote a piece in his honor. Drake has the power to strum my pain with his talented fingers and sing my life with his melodic words. He isn't a Drake fan. That red flag is probably a sign, right? But for some masochistic reason, I've just come to ignore it.



Crawling Inside My Skin

Dylan Brown

“That’s your Mom? Oh.” His face contorted into a state of perplexity as he looked from my Mom to me. I could see the cogs turning, as if he was struggling to solve a multi-step math problem. I guess in some ways he was. My Mom is white and my Dad is black, which makes me half-white and half-black. However, my dark caramel colored skin, curly black hair, and hazel brown eyes complicated, and even contradicted, this equation. I was clearly not white, or by any means white-passing. So, what did that make me?

The answer to this question had already been defined before I even had a chance to grapple with it. I was ten years old the first time I was told I was “smart for a black guy.” How does one respond to that sort of statement? “Thank you?” This is a phrase I have heard more times than I would care to admit throughout my life. This compliment, if you can even call it that, serves as a reminder that no matter what I might achieve, no matter how successful I become, I am only a success for a black man. I am not just smart, but I am smart for a black youth. I am automatically placed in a box, which confines my achievements and defines the finish line before the race has even begun.

However, the authenticity of my identity remained a source of controversy growing up. I was a walking contradiction. I was not white enough to be born into their inner circle of privilege, but was I black enough? Did I have a right to claim ownership of the black experience, or was I an imposter encroaching on black spaces? After all, even within my own family and friend groups, I was constantly reminded that I was only “half.”

The writer Zadie Smith is a great navigator of the intersections of identity and the idea of ownership of the black experience. In her essay, “Getting In and Getting Out,” she analyzes racial identity, and how it relates to the depiction of black pain in American culture. The essay is rich with complexity and uses Jordan Peele’s horror film *Get Out* as a vehicle to show how identity and background affects artistic expression. This film depicts a young interracial relationship, in which a black man goes to visit his white girlfriend’s family home. During his visit, he uncovers a plot in which the older white people are stealing the lives of young blacks in order to occupy their bodies. Upon review, Smith writes, “Peele has found a concrete metaphor for the ultimate unspoken fear: that to be oppressed is not so much to be hated as obscenely loved.”

Smith deconstructs the messages in *Get Out* to show how the black man is a source of fascination and intrigue. Brown skin is like honey-coated chocolate, desired for its sweetness. However, the desire for this sweetness only runs so deep. In the words of Teju Cole in his essay, “Black Body,” he says, “Throughout the culture there are imitations of the gait, bearing, and dress of the black body a vampiric ‘everything but the burden’ co-option of black life.” Black artists are gifted with the ability to transform their pain into resounding vocal runs, tear-jerking monologues, and spoken-word stanzas that captivate everyone who listens. African American artists dominate mainstream music, film, TV, and other artistic spaces.

However, as the popularity of black artists increases, non-black people demand doo-rags and dreadlocks, throw up gang signs, and say the n-word as they sing along to Kendrick Lamar’s “Alright” on their Spotify ‘hype’ playlists. As certain aspects of being black continue to be “obscenely loved,” as Smith says, it begs the question, where does appreciation end, and appropriation begin?

The answer lies in Kendrick Lamar's song "Alright." He raps, "All my life I had to fight, nigga... Homie you fucked up, but if God got us then we gon' be alright!" I stood in the middle of the Oracle Arena in Oakland, California, as Kendrick Lamar performed this song. I was surrounded by a mob of adolescent white males moshing in circles dressed in basketball jerseys and jeans. They stood united; drunk on their own privilege. I looked on in disbelief at their disrespectful disposition as they sang along to Lamar's lyrics full-heartedly. My mind began to spiral.

What made them feel they could reclaim the word "nigga" as Kendrick had? They were not black, and the ticket price alone to attend this concert allocates a certain amount of economic privilege to everyone in the arena. Did they understand the context in which this song was written? Then it hit me. They did not care whether his music was meant for them or not. They wanted to own Kendrick, to claim him and his music as part of their culture.

I guess I should not have been surprised. After all, hip-hop, rap, even rock-n-roll are all artistic expressions of black pain that received validation as an acceptable form of art and were later co-opted by the white majority. I find myself returning back to this idea of "everything but the burden" that Cole presents. Being black is seen as a costume, something that can be put on when it's convenient. Where are the people who love Kendrick Lamar, Chance the Rapper, Beyoncé, and other black artists in moments when black lives are being lost to police brutality? Why do they only care about our art and not the pain that fuels it?

I grew up in an era when black art was celebrated, but the black body was, and continues to be, marginalized. I remember when I was twelve years old and turned on the TV to find out Trayvon Martin was fatally shot. Initially, I was confused. How could this happen? We could have a black man hold the highest office in the land, as President of the United States, but we could not have another black man walk down the street in a hoodie? I did not understand it. It was only later that I learned that the black body, with its intoxicating brown skin, faces a duality of being desired and targeted at this time in our country. That being said, even when blackness is desired, it is seen as a source of profit to be made. However, what happens when non-Black people, even with the best intentions, attempt to depict blackness?

The crux of Smith's essay lies in her reflection of Dana Schutz's painting, *Open Casket*, which depicts the body of teenager Emmet Till after he was lynched for supposedly flirting with a white woman. Smith writes, "The painting is an abstraction without much intensity, and there's a clear caution in the brushstrokes around the eyes." There is a sense of distance between Schutz and her work. As Smith puts it, there is a "clear caution in the brushstrokes." As a white woman, Schutz's caution is a manifestation of an uncertainty of how to depict this experience. She is an outsider, looking in, attempting to describe a pain she has never experienced. Many have critiqued Schutz's work as making a spectacle of black death, and declared her work to be cultural appropriation. Hannah Black's *Open Letter to the Whitney* even called for the destruction of Schutz's work. Black's letter was signed by numerous black artists in order to provide a collective voice condemning Schutz. Unity in the black community is necessary in times of social strife to forge a path to our own liberation.

However, just as the black experience is not uniform, not all black people think the same and always have to agree. In response to Black's letter, Smith expresses an opinion divergent from Black's views. Smith explains, "But it never got that deep into me, as either representation or appropriation. I think of it as a questionable successful example of both... the letter lives in a binary world, in which the painting is either fancily celebrated as proof of the autonomy of art or condemned to the philistine art bonfire." Unlike Black, Smith does not believe Schutz's work

should be destroyed. Destruction of any type of art sets a dangerous precedent. That being said, Schutz's work is rather lackluster. In comparison, *Get Out* is clearly a superior piece of art. Unlike Peele, Schutz does not have the lens to accurately depict black trauma in any way that is not superficial in nature. Peele's experience as a black man in America allows him to express the complexities of race relations in *Get Out*, in a way that Schutz never could in her art.

As Smith says, "*Get Out*—as evidenced by its huge box office success—is the right movie for this moment... It reveals race as the fundamental lens through which everything is seen." Upon reflection, Smith's analysis of these two artworks raised the question for me: how is pain felt? Black artists have a lens through which they see the world that expresses the visceral pain of death and trauma unlike any other. It is not "playing the race card," it is simply observing from the position through which one exists. Growing up black or being raised in a black household will provide certain insights that shape the way in which you see the world. This allows you to see and depict things that others cannot. However, does only being half-black gift someone with this insight? Does Smith, or myself, even have a right to discuss black pain?

Smith does not claim to be the voice for all of Black America, but discloses her own identity as a biracial black woman and her own reckoning with the portrayal of blackness. Smith writes, "To be biracial in America at that time was almost always to be the issue of rape. It was a literal sense to live with the enemy within, to have your physical being exist as an embodiment of the oppression of your people." Smith discusses the internal resentment of one's identity that is still prevalent in the biracial community. I know from my own experience. While I identify as a black man, I still catch myself feeling like an imposter in my own skin. How can I organize against white supremacy, when whiteness is so clearly inherent in my upbringing?

My existence as a biracial youth will always be entwined with whiteness, but perhaps this is more universal than I initially thought. Smith explains how the black experience in America is intimately connected with white communities. In her words, "Families can become black, then white, then black again within a few generations... There is no getting out of our intertwined history." Like Smith, I am a biracial youth who grew up in a loving household in which I was taught to celebrate my blackness. We are living proof that a "final cathartic separation between us and them" as she states, is impossible. Blackness is not an undesirable quantity that needs to be measured out. Similarly, my existence is not a mathematical equation, waiting to be balanced.

Being biracial means I am constantly in court. At any time, I could be called to the witness stand and forced to prove that I am what I claim to be. My peers can put me on trial to determine how black I really am. What gives them a sense of authority to define my own experience in the black community for me? Do they own my skin? No, they don't, but they want to.

I have never felt uncomfortable talking to my Mom about race, even though she is white. During my childhood, I assumed that this was natural; it must be what all parents did with their kids. I later learned that this was not the case. When some of my childhood friends found out my Mom was white, I could see their view of me change ever so slightly. A brief moment of realization about who I was that was later processed and ingrained into their perception of me made me feel as if I lived "with the enemy within." I felt ashamed, and I did not know why. I love my Mom. She has always been very honest with me about the limitations of her experience, and encouraged me to find my own voice.

So, why did I feel embarrassed? Being biracial makes it difficult to root yourself in an identity, especially when both black and white people are dividing your existence into fractions.

My family does not exist in a binary world, in which we were all either white or black. I live in between, which is precisely what allows me to organize against white supremacy. I have lived firsthand in a loving, multiracial family and have seen the evolving capacity each person in my family has for racial and cultural understanding.

Part of understanding how to promote racial justice in our world is understanding your role within a movement. My role in the movement for black lives is different than that for my Mom or any of my white friends. They are allies. There is a popular adoration for the vague and far-reaching idea of ‘social justice’ and achieving the status of “being woke,” in our country currently. However, in reality the process to become an advocate for social justice issues is invasive, constant, and requires honest self-reflection. All parties involved must examine their own privileges in their life. This is not easy, especially if you inherently profit off of a system that keeps others oppressed. This type of self-reflection can be painful; it requires looking in the mirror and being brutally honest about what you see.

What do you do if what you see is not easily classifiable? What if you identify as black, but have blue eyes, blonde hair, and could be considered by some to be white-passing? In writer Thomas Chatterton Williams’s essay, “Black and Blue and Blond,” he asks, “What exactly remains of the American Negro in my daughter? ... Is it possible to have black consciousness in a body that does not in any way look black?” Williams contemplates whether his daughter’s privilege of being white-passing negates her ownership of black heritage. Williams’ commentary highlights how the construction of one’s identity is layered with complexity.

Nothing is clearly black and white, so we learn to operate in the grey. But what if some things are that simple? That people can be harassed, degraded, and even killed for no other reason than being perceived as black? We are living in the age of the Black Lives Matter Movement, which emerged after the death of Trayvon Martin and continues to rage on because black life is treated as if it’s disposable in comparison to white people. This division in our society remains clear.

At its core, I see Smith, Williams, Cole, and Kendrick’s works as expressions of the complexities of the black experience. In Smith’s words, “black is in fashion now.” From a cultural standpoint, blackness has become an object of fascination. They see us dancing on the subway, hear us singing on the radio, and as Smith puts it, “They want to wear it like a skin and walk around in it.” I have realized that being ‘othered’ in my own skin is society’s attempt to crawl inside it. By making me feel insecure in my identity, the inferiority of my blackness is reinforced. I will not allow this anymore. My people were stolen from the shores of Africa, forced into slavery, then convict-leasing, Jim Crow laws, and mass incarceration.

I am gifted with this vibrant heritage rich in food, music, dance, and a sense of resiliency that evolved from a need to survive. While my dark complexion bars me from certain privileges, it is something I would never give up. In short, my blackness is not for sale.

I Remember Those Faces of Malaysia

[Whitmanic Photography Project]

Dina Kim



Photo 1: The dishwashing man, out in the backstreets where no one visits, he smiles tirelessly, but his body speaks something else



Photo 2: The woman with the visor, surrounded by all the chicken, she concentrates with pursed lips as her son tugs on her apron



Photo 3: The girl fumbling with the newspaper, waiting for her father to close the stall, she shyly gazes towards me, but her eyes twinkle with curiosity



Photo 4: The three boys who holler to sell cikus, they look directly at me with infinite confidence, but they fail to seduce me



Photo 5: The silly man who chops pig

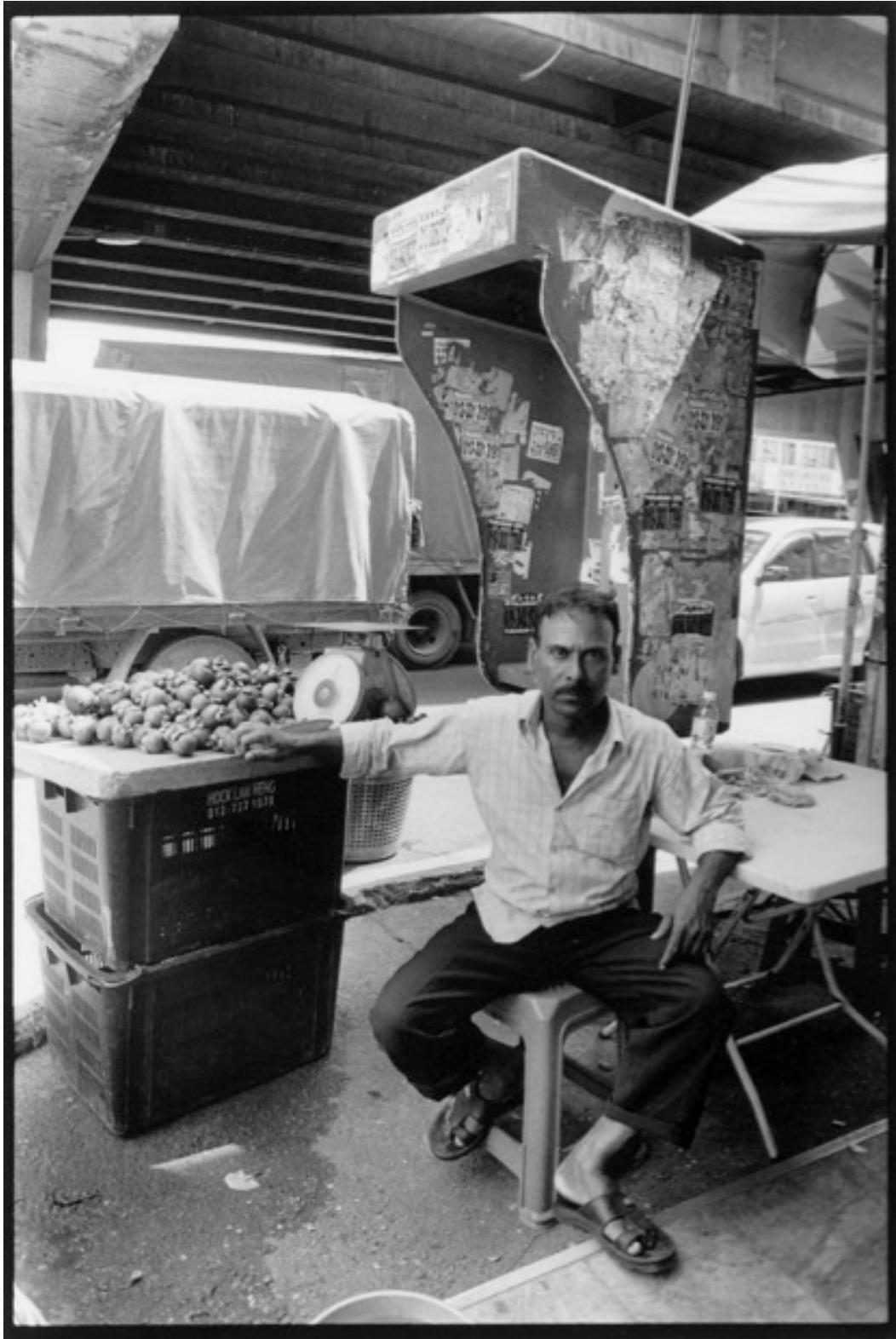


Photo 6: The fierce man who sells passion fruits



Photo 7: The grandma who is annoyed by the heat

The Epiphany of Narcissus

Francisco Attie

You are what you chose to be, when in fact you are nothing but what is said about you

You are confounded in a plane that was tempered long ago by the guardians of form

You cannot lead the army of selfishness upon the sadness of people

You know that the music of the skies has no room for apathetic disguises, yet

You must accept the heavy accent of metal scrapping your soul

You have to accept the wicked for what they are: the anachronistic expression of
disentanglement

You are forever bound to your imagination, which reality has no fixed agreement with

You must continue your mental constructions without care for destination

You must turn your ideas into music, music that breeds excitement and disordered thought

You, who has no matter, cannot see

You, forever the unworthy prince of melancholy, are not pure in originality

You, who has been exploited, are trapped, inexistent

You, forever the breathing impulse of pleasure, are not deserving of wings

You, who loves the straight surrender of forgiveness, fail in apologizing

You have lost touch with the sadness of blurred souls

You have lost love in kindness, still

You are the wild sound of life, the tuneless trumpet of beauty

You are all that you wish you weren't while attempting to be all that you see as perfect

You are the tragic realization that control of life has been abandoned by humans in order to cast
meaning to its unbecoming and absurd existence

You are, for this brief moment, even if not forever, real.

The Lost Invisible Key

Jasmine Miller

This Essay is the 2nd Place Winner for This Year's Elaine Kuntz Prize

I

“You were a happy child, you didn’t dwell like you do now.”

My mom searched for happiness in my twelve-year-old eyes like it was a lost key. A key that maybe, if she found it, would unlock the door to my chest cavity and let out all the unruly butterflies, birds, and airplanes that made their home here. Or maybe it was a key that would fit right into the base of my skull, slide its way past my spinal cord and locate the depths of my amygdala. Crank it a couple times and my hands would stop wringing themselves out like wet rags. Crank it around a couple more times and hopefully the furrow of my eyebrows would soften and the monotonous sway of my body would cease so my mom could look at me without her eyes swinging like a pendulum.

I rocked myself slightly like a mother rocking her child; my own reassurance past reassurance. The sway was my comfort, I realized later. My mom’s eyes didn’t find my misplaced set of golden keys at that time—lord knows I need more than one. That day, my hands wrung themselves dry and my increasing centrifugal force pushed my stress to the outside of my skin but it hung on like a leech. Requiring them to wiggle their way back to my brain stalled them, but it was long enough for me to locate my key and enjoy the warm candor of happiness.

It hadn’t always been so hard to keep my happiness in my grasp. The taller I got, the more people’s teasing words set up camp in my head. My ruminating thoughts filled up my cranium and created typhoons not even Moses could survive. When my head only reached the doorknob, my golden key was grasped in between my crumb-snatching hands and generally I was the happy child my mom remembered. My mom blamed my unhappiness on the move to the monotonous life of Delaware. Cincinnati, Ohio is where I ran and played for so much that the stress couldn’t grab hold of my chocolate skin. Everything was something to be happy about. Especially when it snowed.

II

Bundled in my mom’s mint green Toyota Camry, I peeked out beneath the purple fur on my hood to glide my eyes up to the rearview mirror. My mom’s brown eyes narrowed at mine and she looked at me expectantly in silence.

“Are you listening to me?”

I wasn’t. The world outside was shining too crisp and white with un-touched snow as tall as my knees. The cries of the outside reverberated in my skull, and traveled down to my little toes making me squirm. She had been talking, but my six-year-old attention was on my excitement and it left no room for my mom’s specific warnings and instructions about how to get home, when to come home, and blah blah blah.

“Look at that Mum, oh...uh yes...?”

I smiled at her reassuringly and her lips curved into a smile at my frequent glances outside. I heard her sigh and reach toward the lock of the car. Like a starting bullet, the release of the door locks sent me in a fury of motion to join the neighborhood kids outside. Any subsequent words that were flung at me dissolved on impact and became inefficacious like warm honey. I grabbed hold of the rope attached to my sled and broke free of my seatbelt restraints to open the door. My cheeks and my nose

reddened almost instantly when the gust of wind slapped me across the face and I sucked in a breath that made me feel like I was swallowing ice cubes.

“Come home with Eshirah!”

I didn't look back at the car, but I nodded in understanding. Eshirah was my neighbor who was around my brothers age, 8 or 9 years old. I logged it in my head to follow her home; when she leaves, I'll leave, simple. I ran to the source of the childlike noises and arrived in a backyard of one of the kids in the neighborhood. I looked for Eshirah's baby blue coat and reminded myself that I should locate her every couple of hours. Other than her, a gang of unfamiliar faces filled the backyard, but to me it didn't matter. What mattered was my neighborhood Mt. Everest that loomed in front of me and my circle sled. To my right and left, kids were running up this monster and flicking snow in the faces of their comrades. Upon reaching the top, their wide eyes and red nostrils widened in anticipation before they scooted over the edge and flew down the snow-covered hill feet first.

My adrenaline was close to making me hop out of my pink coat. The puffiness of my pink shield added ten pounds to my body visually and would have made me sluggish if I was lazy, but I used this pent-up energy to attempt to run up the hill in front of me. My gloves made my fingers almost useless but somehow, I wrapped my right digits around my sled and my left digits clumsily around my imaginary golden key that I kept close. Step by step, I planted my feet in front of me and trudged up to the top. My feet would first break the icy film covering the top to plunge into the powdery water beneath it. The ground seemed to extend beyond reality and my legs got lost in the white abyss. I persisted, yearning to leap out with the rest of the kids and fly down at my own will.

Heaving a breath into my lungs, I wiped the sweat away from my brow while standing on the top of the hill. I surveyed the deep slope and settled on a strip of snow a distance away from the screaming kids to avoid getting run over by their heavy bodies. Setting my yellow and orange circular sled down in front of me, I backed up a few paces to focus on my target. I breathed in deeply and took off running full speed at the tie-dye sled ready to pounce like a tiger. My right foot planted itself a foot from the sled and I dived down onto the surface to propel me over the edge. Elsa kissed my cheeks and the breeze traveled around the outer curve of my ear and snuck its way into my cochlea, tickling the hairs. I felt myself reach maximum gravitational force and debated on leaning backwards to see if my momentum could lift me off into space.

And just like it started, it was over. The wind died around me and I came to a halt just below the back steps of the stranger's house. I sat for a moment in the shade of the monumental home and turned to look at the kids around me. Their flushed faces were contorted in various stages of exuberance: yearning for the flight, anticipation of its speed and swiftness, and complete blinding happiness from sledding down the hill without a care. The wind seemed to breathe down my neck and coax me to stand. Earthly forces grabbed my hand, walking me back to my spot to sled.

What if I lifted off this time? What if during my time up there in the cold January sky, my arms would stretch out and I'd grow long yellow feathers and fly over the world? I flicked my hood off in determination and scaled my neighborhood Mt. Everest again and set off on the slope that I would be sliding down for the next couple hours. My determination was unwavering and unlike the setting sun, my spirits were high until I noticed the lack of childish banter around me. Moments before I plunged myself down on my sled for the millionth time that day, I looked around and saw the lack of children around me. Many were filing out of the backyard to cars parked invitingly on the street and I zeroed in on an object close to one of these cars.

A street lamp.

A *lit* street lamp.

I frantically swiveled my head and tried to locate Eshirah's baby blue coat, but the only blue in sight was the deep navy of the sky against the sunset. My hands became solid rocks and my heart slid down my esophagus and settled into my stomach. She wasn't here. My golden key was long forgotten and I grasped my sled to run recklessly down the hill, almost face planting against the momentum before I made it to level ground.

Eyes followed my figure out the backyard and a new sense of unease settle onto my shoulders. I breathed in a new breath of air and icicles stabbed every part of my little body. The feeling in both my hands and feet no longer registered in my brain, like the connection between them had been stolen by the setting sun. The farther I walked down my block leading to my house, the more the squish-squash of my feet in my snow-white boots amplified in my ears. The sound was incessant proof of my mistake and impending punishment so I kicked off my shoes in protest just to make it stop.

What if I became a snowman? Mum wouldn't be so mad then, would she?

I placed my boots into my sled and staggered past the last remaining houses to my front steps. I timidly raised a frozen finger and jabbed the doorbell so that I heard ring reverberate through the house. I heard thumps and the sound of hurried feet making their way to the door. I closed my eyes when the gold bolt lock adjusted itself and the door squeaked open. Warm air from inside my house perfumed my face when my mom's arms embraced me. The dam behind my tears shattered like glass.

"Where were you, Jas!?"

My mom's voice was laced with worry, which made my salty tears flow faster into my mouth. She tugged me inside and began peeling back my soggy, glacial clothes like layers of an onion until I was only standing in my undergarments sobbing in the foyer. Without a word, I was lifted and carried up to my bathroom. My mom twisted the shower knob on and the steam from the scalding water seemed to envelope me.

"It's okay, sweet pea."

I climbed into the shower and the water made it feel like needles were etching themselves into my skin. The worry that had settled onto my shoulders mixed into the water and swirled down the drain and my body began to loosely thaw out. My golden key slipped under the doorway with the sweet wafts of brewing hot chocolate. I pulled back the shower curtain, caught it with both hands, and held it to my chest.

III

How easy it would have been to explain to my twelve-year-old self, that her awkward moments weren't the end of the world. As I grew up, the glass behind my eyeballs thickened and kept my salty tears at bay. Overtime the tears filled my skull and made every embarrassing memory and mistake swim in and out of my head and magnified them to be examined. I held more onto these memories of doubt and failure more than I should have.

During the summer before high school, I thought about how many memories I could reflect on from my childhood, and how many things I could remember about embarrassing moments from other people's lives. The quantity of the latter couldn't compare to my own and I realized the only thing holding me back was myself. My mistakes had been trivial and no one was giggling behind my back or thought I was idiotic because of them. I was my worst critic. Mistakes deserve to be made and failures are nonexistent if you learn from them. Don't dwell on them, just learn from the experience.

Once I realized this, it was as if around my wrist my golden key became securely attached.



Watershed

Noah DeFrancheschi

my heart vanishes from my chest
it has expanded beyond me and become all
although it means i'm growing
i can't feel my consciousness
or see my hands

i see the organ of my soul
suspended in the frozen air
heat pulsating
 irregular beats
 a meaty, living thing

humming blasts and thuds through my ears
as a deep throbbing floods my being,
 my corpse

the organ's insides glow with iridescent light
bioluminescence
 neon shades of blue
 electric colors crackling with audible energy

outer layers of fleshy pink peel away
leaving raw insides open and vulnerable
and crumbled piles of ash underneath

i am no more than this blue,
my limbs have dissolved into the dirt,
my lifeline has been untethered

without wings, i fly
i float above earth
seek the reflective light
and soft glow of the moon

Dalida

Eliette Chanezon

Swinging in the red hot notes of a disheveled Montmartre bistro
she wants to be held
wants to be the light at the end of a man's unfiltered cigarette
a man as disarrayed as the wooden walls of the bistro, miserable,
on the verge of falling apart, maybe,
a man so pessimistic, troubled and dark
but warm
so that at night behind the patterned curtains of a shabby motel room
she won't be alone.

“Serre-moi”

Cough syrup sticks to the rougher parts of her lips like mint gum in an expensive fur coat
insides of her cheeks engraved with doses and diseases
in tentative, cursive letters.
Pills inch their way down a cramped throat
each one a bullet
each one a sigh
she yearns for their roundness
like a lover's fingers around her neck.

“Serre-moi”

She is like the trombonist,
moments before his last solo
he pictures blowing himself right into the trombone,
one robust breath and he's
dancing inside of it,
shiny shoes sliding against brass floors.

“je suis à toi”

This man's got hands like old linen gone soft.
Happily pathetic,
she pulls curly strands from lilac lips
tacky from gloss
and apprehension.

“toute à toi”

What Cadence Saw

Amanda Braitman

The wind whistled a soft tune that brushed against her bare legs, fluttered her skirt and tickled her neck. It was eight o'clock, the end of a mid-July day. Paris was hot, and Cadence had waited for the feverish weather to break before venturing out. She walked down Quai de Bourbon, along the river Seine. The green of luscious summer trees turned the water a pleasant color while passenger boats rippled their own reflections. The air was mobile and bright with a breeze, the whole city rustling slightly with it. The stone bridges gleamed white in the light of the setting sun and the sky was painted with puffed clouds. Lovers lay on their beloveds' laps, staring up at their beloveds' chins and past them to the clouds.

No one paid Cadence any mind. Everyone seemed wrapped in their own bliss, each person taken with the beauty of their city, turning their faces towards the breeze. They knew that the Seine was filthy and rats ravaged the streets at night and the stones were old and disintegrating, but at this moment, as evening was ushered peacefully in, the city glistened gold.

It was in this elevated state, turning down Rue le Regrattier, that Cadence spotted a crumbling hole in a stone block at the base of a building. It was about the length of her forearm. From eye-level she could see that it was spacious inside. As she bent down to get a better look, the breeze kicked up and blew her hair in her face, obscuring her vision. She had to put a hand on her skirt to keep it from billowing out. She thought she saw a flash of movement, but when she pushed her hair out of her eyes, there was nothing.

She heard old jazz playing from the restaurant in the converted boat on the water nearby. It mixed with the sound of the breeze ruffling the trees and skittering leaves along the ground. She smelled the scent of her own shampoo: coconut, tropical. She saw her shadow against the wall: the outline of her A-line skirt giving her a triangular figure, her hair a little wild, flyaways everywhere. Two people walked past her into the setting sun, speaking in sign language. Men and women clinked glasses at the floating restaurant. Mini motorbikes slept under their covers. A singer's slinky smooth voice wafted over the water from somewhere down the river.

What could possibly be in that hole? She thought of the flash of movement. She guessed it was a small mouse, cozy in its little cornerstone. Cadence's architect brain balked at the thought of a crumbling cornerstone, a crumbling foundation.

She started to imagine a little home for the mouse—little rugs where it could rest its paws, a tiny kitchen where it could cook its dinners: a scavenged slice of creamy camembert on a crouton, paired with a crisp pinot noir—this is Paris, let's not forget, even the mice drink wine. The kitchen would have those sleek white cabinets that open when you press your hip against them. And stained glass sconces.

She was leaning, dazed, against the wall when a woman shuffled by. She snapped out of her daydream and looked at her delicate gold watch. She'd just spent a good ten minutes dreaming up a high-class hovel for a *mouse*.

What was in that damned hole? She bent down to take another look, but before she could see

anything, a piece of paper flew at her face. It landed on her cheek and stuck, like a kiss. She ripped it off and it fluttered to the ground. She thought she saw the words *Cadence, my love*, written on it in red ink and her mind jumped to Gabriel. Maybe he'd written it in a fit of passion and apology; he'd changed his mind, he *did* love her. Maybe—it was unlikely, she knew, but she couldn't help hoping in the feverish state the paper had left her—maybe he'd written it and placed it in that hole, just for her. He'd somehow known that she would be walking down this very street, at this very hour, that she would see the hole and become curious. She half-expected him to come around the corner and wrap her in his arms. *Oh, Cadence*, he'd cry into her hair. *Oh, my dear, sweet, Cadence! What wrongs I have done you! How I have regretted the last five years! I have loved you ever since I left you for that daft Isabella. She was such a bore! Will you ever take me back?*

Her heart swelling, she plucked the paper off the ground. She held it gingerly to her nose, trying to catch a whiff of Gabriel's cologne. She lowered her eyes to the paper. It was not, as she'd hoped, filled with his looping letters of love. It was a receipt. A Monoprix receipt. For bananas.

She tried once more to peer into the daunting hole. Another determined summer breeze blew her skirt in her face, and again she was momentarily blinded. She could have sworn she'd seen a small bundle nestled there, a new little life wrapped in a paisley blanket. And there, on the wind—wasn't that the sound of a baby's soft gurgling?

All at once Cadence fell against the wall and retreated inside herself, transported fifteen years back in time. She had just finished her first year of university. She lived on stolen kisses and roamed the streets at night with her lover. She had no inhibitions; she had never been hurt before. They weren't careful, and she missed a period.

She wanted to keep it. He loved her, didn't he? He was studying to be an engineer. He was older, he already had a job lined up. He could support her. Them. Didn't he love her? She told herself she was ready to give everything up for this baby, for him. Her life had barely begun, and already she would give it all up.

But he wouldn't let her. He told her he'd leave her if she didn't get an abortion, so she did, and he left her anyway.

Cadence was angry now. She smoothed her skirt with determination and got down on her hands and knees. The pavement was warm and rough against her skin. The wind furiously whipped against her, a sudden summer storm, but she paid no attention to it. She crawled to the hole and stuck her entire head inside.

A face stared back at her. Heart-shaped, punctured by puckered red lips. A sharp nose. Almond brown eyes, eyebrows arched in surprise.

It was a mirror. Compact, like the kind her mother had always carried in her purse and used to reapply lipstick on the metro. The paint had been scratched away at exactly the same spot as on the one she'd seen between her mother's slender fingers so many times.

Cadence became aware of the gravel digging into her knees and palms. She carefully backed out of the hole. She stood up and dusted off her skirt. Dried leaves were settling back in their gutters; the wind had died down. She looked both ways before disappearing into the muted night.



Chosen People

Sariah Bunker

I see
Closed eyes and flesh on tongue.
I see
Vinegar tear drops condensing on windshields.
I hear
The speaking in tongues masking authenticity.

Three days have passed; I smell rotting flesh.

God, you broke your covenant,
You promised healing with a simple wash.
All ten, and I am filth.

We rehearsed the invocation;
We pleaded at your doorstep.
But your verses shunned
Your own masses
Your doctrine flung us out of
doors.

Your iron crosses condemned us.
The stone tablets guard windows of our previous homes.

There are locks now,
Separations, kingdoms, chosen people.

I claw at the door with my empty oil lamp in hand,
I wish for the pearls of great price nestled in the
White satin bag in my Mother's closet.

The strings that link generation to generation.

I have lost the hidden wisdom of my family,
The comfort in the life they have been given.

I have lost my birthright.
Exchanged for a mess I shared with another woman,
All because I forgot my god.

And God, you sit with your back against the hard wood.
The feet we washed and the palms we kissed outstretched.
You mock our communion.
Settled in your palace,
You shun our scratching at your door,
Our grabbing at your clothes.

I am left with my sin in the streets.

Flâneuse

Coco Fitterman

Art makes me less crazy
It should be looked at
Not discussed
It's an honest joy
To be shocked by beauty
In 2017
I was shocked when my girlfriend was caught stealing
From Whole Foods
I was thinking of a line
By George Oppen
About the ocean
The manager stopped us
We just went to a different store
Poetry
A canticle for smut, pain, opulence
I cannot take your ex-girlfriend's
Antisocial Social Club hoodie seriously
My skin like the wrong clothes
And every image on your phone trembles
Look at it
All these burnouts
Boring sex tales
Details of a friend's friend's dream
Vermouth sweating
Like Death
All summer long
In the margin
The awful margin
That I told you about
I wish I could afford
Products from Sephora
Sometimes when I drop
A lipstick in my bag
The saleslady turns
A beautiful blind eye
I live inside it too
I am at Topshop
Buying lingerie
And after I paid
I stole a fur coat
A surprising second orgasm
Like when you're fingered
After you've just finished
And you're never done



A City of Mirror

Seleny Xie

I have a dark blue dreamcatcher hanging beside my window. It has the same color as the Heart of the Ocean in my favorite movie *Titanic*, carrying dreams of hundreds of voyagers who traveled for thousands of miles to go to the place of heaven, New York City.

Through the lines in the web connected by handmade translucent jewelries in my dreamcatcher, the city was broken into different versions. I stood beside the window, closing my eyes and feeling the texture of the web. I felt like I was touching the entire city.

This is a translucent city. We see what we choose to see while ignore the others being hidden in the infinite blur. Many times, I was trying to tear apart the veil of the city being covered by vanity but ended up sitting in Central Park, losing myself in the fantasy.

Rain drops fell onto my head as I was still wandering through my mind, listening to my heart beating with my soul while walking on the little path filled with yellow and red trees with golden carpet made with falling leaves. Without tourists who would rather stay inside the room in such a rainy day, Central Park became gentle and soft. It was returned to New Yorkers by the chaos.

‘What are you thinking of?’ A guy with a violin looked at me and smiled. He had a long white beard and was wearing an old blue jacket with a grey and white grid patterned duckbill hat. His voice was so deep that it dissolved into the sound of the rain.

‘I am trying to feel the city in the rain,’ I said.

‘Wow, you are the first girl I have ever met to say that.’ He naughtily winked his eyes, ‘In case you will not lose your way in the park in such a ‘beautiful’ day, let me show you some tricks.’

He then walked in the rain, throwing away the falling leaves covering on the bottom of the street lamp. A line of numbers immediately showed in front of me. ‘The first number indicates the street and the second, the avenue.’ He said, ‘If the first number becomes bigger, you are walking towards the north.’

‘And if the second number becomes bigger, I’m walking towards the west.’ I continued his words. ‘There you go.’

He smiled, ‘one step closer to being a New Yorker!’

I smiled.

But how to define a real New Yorker? We all fiercely try to fit into the city. We commend someone that his walking pace is like a New Yorker's, that he dresses like a New Yorker, or that he crosses the street as the New Yorkers do, but instead we only touch one percent of the entire page. People from all over the world come to this city for their dreams. They struggle on the rope tied to the top of the abyss; however, after a little while, they find that beginning at the same level, some are still heading up, fighting on the rope while others back to the bottom and decide to choose another path. ‘Who are they?’ they usually ask themselves in a ridiculous way, ‘and who are we?’

‘You know I’m a filmmaker,’ a young man talked to his friend and sat beside me in the rustic pavilion beside the lake in Central Park, ‘the crew I am now working with is like a family. Everyone is professional and caring. I like that kind of atmosphere.’ I overheard their conversation and

unconsciously thought of the words my friends once told me.

‘I wanted to be an actor,’ a boy said, ‘but it’s not gonna find me a job.’

‘I wanted to be a music producer, but I have to earn money for my family, ya know.’ A girl smiled at me.

‘I’m jealous of you. You know what you wanna do and you stick to your goal even though it’s gonna be really hard.’ They said almost the same words to me.

The rain became heavier. The huge rain drops fell to the originally serene surface of the river, splashing the water up to the dry ground. Some couples came to the little stage to shelter from the sudden shower; some people, like me, a quirky person who loves seeing everything in the rain, stared at the other side of the river where the rain covered the typical office buildings with a translucent veil. I sit in the pavilion, listening to the rain drops pitter-pattered on the water, wondering uneasily when I will be strong enough to tear away the veil and to see the real version of New York.

Located in the center of Central Park, the little pavilion is the center of the crossroad. People gather here for the same purpose (to search for a ‘shelter’) and after sharing the same air for a little while, wishing each other good luck and having a good day, they leave for the path they choose.

“We come, we walk, we sit and relive many fond memories we shared in this park since 1976. - John and Maryann Gilmartin.”

I looked at the words on a sign being nailed on the chair. Forty years have passed. Time shuttled through our fingers, through the falling leaves on the park, through the warm left on the chair by the last voyager, through the webs of the dreamcatcher.

‘The city never changes.’ The violin guy’s words singing in my brain, ‘it’s people who are changing.’

New York City exquisitely wraps Central Park in the middle of this wonderland. The skyscrapers overlook the park with their unchanging haughty expression. With their perfect disguise, they tease and lure millions of dream catchers.

The other day when I revisited the park, it was late at night. The dim street lights covered the park under a mystical atmosphere. I walked on the edge of the park. The serenity inside the park made a tremendous contrast with the chaos outside. Girls wearing high heels and little black dresses got off the yellow cab and followed the waitress into a building with a big sign on the top—JW MARRIOTT ESSEX HOUSE; the elder couples walked solemnly on the street, ignoring the bustling streets while at the same time giving you a polite and elegant nod when occasionally making eye contacts with you.

‘Can I have a nuts 4 nuts please?’ I told the man in the food truck at the South entrance of the park.

‘Sure. 1.99 dollars.’ He replied.

‘Are you from New York?’ I gave him the money and asked.

‘I’m from Egypt.’ He said with an accent, ‘People usually asked me why I choose New York. They wanted to hear the specific answer. But I... I don’t know. I just follow my heart and I am here.’

I looked at him and smiled, ‘You made a good choice.’

I felt my hand unconsciously stop tearing the veil of the city. Why am I so eager to see the true version of New York? People came here, chasing for their destination; people came here, giving up their original dreams and walking towards another direction. There is nothing to be blamed. There is nothing to be ashamed of. I can still remember the eyes of my friends who told me how they gave up their dreams of becoming an actor and music producer and chose maths and economics instead. I can see regret and sadness, but there is something more hidden behind, something similar with that I feel from the conversation between the young boys who sat beside me in the pavilion, from the smile of the violin guy who performed in front of the cameras from pedestrians who were moved by his music, from the words coming from an Egyptian man selling nuts 4 nuts every day on the street. I see the sense of determination and confidence.

It was another sunny day. I sat in the park, enjoying the sunlight shining directly onto my face. Everything was in complete silence. You could only hear the sounds made by squirrels pushing aside the falling leaves, trying to find something to eat. Without any people in the park, I walked alone in the woods. The city was still sleeping, unable to wake up from the hustle and bustle in the previous night. There, beside the river, came an old man carrying a red suitcase. He stood still at the end of a path, slowly opened the suitcase with his aged hands and pulled out a golden saxophone. He was the first man I met in the park. We were the only two people in this area of the park. A piece of melodious rhythm floated into my ears. I looked towards the direction of the music. The old man was closing his eyes and swaying to the music he made for himself.

The water remaining on the leaves by the rain in the previous night fell to the puddles beside the chair I was sitting in, making rings of ripples in the middle of the puddle. There was a huge maple leaf lying on its back side at the top at the edge of the puddle. I kneeled down, picked up the leaf and was shocked by the amazing red it had on its front side. “Your beauty within will always stay with you, no matter what choice you make—lying with your extraordinary front side or the ordinary back side.” I wrote in my journal as I was still in shock by the color of the leaf in my hand. I carefully put it back to the edge of the puddle where it belonged and turned the front side down. I respected its own choice. The old man was still playing saxophone at the end of the little path. I sat back in the chair, drawing the city in the map of rhythm.

This is a translucent city; this is a city of mirror. Everyone has his or her own dream before coming to this city but they carefully hide the pinky lovely dreams deep inside their body. Instead, they see what they truly want to become through the reflections in the city mirror and fight for the paths they choose for themselves. The city doesn't grab away their dreams; the city shapes them into the one they truly want to be. The city doesn't change at all, but it is the people who change, whether they are commuters, visitors, or natives as concluded by E.B. White in his article *Here is New York*.

The dreamcatcher doesn't divide the city. Instead, it carefully wraps up the dreams of dream chasers and generously allows the paths they choose for themselves to pass through the webs.

There is another sign nailed on the chair I was sitting at in the park that morning, and it says the following:

The Sun Will Rise, Open Your Eyes, Realize Where The Power Lies.

MITCH KESS

Musician, Writer, Carriage Driver

Loved and Missed By So Many





CONTRIBUTORS

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Dylan Brown (GLS '21) was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. In his essay, "Crawling Inside My Skin" he uses the works of Zadie Smith, Jordan Peele, Teju Cole, as well as experiences from his own life to discuss the formation of identity as it relates to Blackness. Dylan hopes this work causes readers to think consciously about how black culture is consumed, and challenges them to actively work to decolonize their minds.

Sariah Bunker is a junior studying Global Liberal Studies and Sociology. They enjoy adventuring in the outdoors, painting, writing, and drinking tea on their roof in Brooklyn.

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