



# WEST 4<sup>TH</sup> STREET REVIEW

Spring 2020

*Liberal & Global Liberal Studies*  
*New York University*

# WEST 4<sup>TH</sup> STREET REVIEW

The Literary Magazine of Liberal & Global Liberal Studies

Spring 2020

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## A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

In the Duino Elegies, Rilke asks,

*Who has turned us around this way, so that  
no matter what we do, we look as though we're leaving?  
Like someone standing for the last time  
on the last hill from which he can view  
his whole valley—the way he stops, turns, lingers—  
this is the way we live, forever leaving*

(He said it in German, of course; this is from the Gary Miranda translation)

OK, this year, this weird year, we actually did have to leave, some of us very abruptly, some of us with nowhere great to go to, some of us looking back longingly on what we left undone. But in this time of leaving, of uncertainty, of plain old panic and not-knowing-when-or-how-we-will-return, we need to know that some things last, and one of those things is the creative spirit, which animates all of the writers and artists within this slender (and somewhat abruptly truncated) project, the 2020 edition of **The West 4<sup>th</sup> Street Review**.

Elsewhere in the *Elegies*, Rilke speaks of the daring maneuvers of their high-flying hearts, a phrase I have always admired. He uses it to describe love, which you will also find in these pages (and, sure, hate, too, which is, after all, a corollary of love). But I have always thought of that phrase in relation to the creative act, a different kind of love (or hate), but a truly daring maneuver, especially in the unsettling confusion of the current moment.

It is quite possible that by the time anyone actually gets to read these words, things will have changed yet again, hopefully for the better. But no matter what, I assert here and now that the daring maneuver of the creative spirit lives and flourishes among our students.

Thanks to Amanda Braitman, whose creative spirit has greatly enhanced this magazine for the past 4 (!) years; thanks to Emily Bauman for her invaluable help with the Elaine Kuntz Prize essays; thanks to Billy Helton and Leah Guarino for all their help, and to Dean Julie Moustoy, for her support.

Please check out our new(ish) online venue, where additional works can be found:  
<https://wp.nyu.edu/w4thstreetreviewonline>.

Onward through the fog!

Stephen Policoff

Spring 2020

*Front and back cover art: The Astronaut Series 1 & 2, respectively, by Jikang Liu*



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# The Sound of a S-s-tutter

Srishti Gupta

*This Essay is the Winner of the 2020 Elaine Kuntz Prize*

I've come to realize that it is more cumbersome to introduce your stutter than it is to introduce yourself if you have a stutter. There is something so amusingly cruel about that word: the *s* sits heavy in the groove along your tense tongue for far too long before it grudgingly drags itself to the tip of your tongue with an audible hiss-s-s and spits itself out. By the time you utter the clattered *tutter* of "I, uh, s-s-stutter," everyone in the room has already heard the sound of your clumsy repetition. What isn't amusing is how difficult it becomes then to escape the awkward, hollow cavity that your stammer hammers in the room.

Why is a stutter so crippling, you might ask? A stutter, like most speech impediments, leads to inconsistencies in the fluency of speech. It is characterized by the unintended repetition of certain sounds, syllables or consonants within words or sentences (l-li-like this), or the occurrence of involuntary pauses in the middle of words or sentences. Think of a stutter as the constant possibility of each syllable that you want to pronounce anchoring deep down in the trenches of your throat right before you are to vocalize it, in no definite pattern or order, all against your will. Think of its experience as if the adhesive that keeps the *l p h a b e t s* in your words and the words in your sentences from drifting apart, a cohesion so natural you'd never think of it as a corporeal possession, was to lose its gravity.

I claim a profound ability in detailing these metaphysical details of a stutter, nuances that are felt before they are understood, perhaps because I've had one for as far as my memory of my speech goes. The earliest occasion I can recollect, one on which I was ever so astutely – physically and mentally – made aware of my impediment, is from primary school. I was reading for a part in the annual theatre production when a stumble disrupted the flow of my first dialogue: I stammered on the opening *d* of the word *declare*. This stumble trembled into a halt in the second: my words abandoned sound for a prolonged interval of twenty-eight seconds in the middle of a sentence. The fluctuations then split into continuous ebbs and flows in the third and the fourth dialogues. And by the fifth, I realized there was little room for me to keep going into the sixth. I do not remember the title of the play we were enacting, nor do I remember the part I was reading for. All I can recall, distinctly like it was yesterday, is how the script of the play crumbled in my hands the same way parts of my dialogues decayed on my tongue.

It is in how it deprives you of words – any words at all – and strips you of sound altogether that a stutter is rather more overbearing than other speech disorders. Of course, this is not to discount the physical and mental vulnerability that comes with, say, a lisp. A lisp is a speech impediment in which you end up pronouncing *s* as *th*. I knew of a boy from school who was so perturbed by the misarticulation of sounds that came with the nasal

lisp that he was born with, that he thoroughly withdrew himself from any co-curricular activity that required public speaking throughout middle school. The helplessness and frustration of not being able to translate your thoughts accurately are paramount in every shape and form and render you even more vulnerable.

Every successive memory I possess in association with my stutter post primary school is indistinctly of the same negative rush of adrenaline, of a complete transcendence of the same paralyzing anxiety. The memories are of the impatience of the same sea of pitiful eyes and reassuring nods, like when my mouth struggled to explain the d-d-distance between points A and B in the low-pressure setting of a physics class. Like on the l-l-lesbian of LGBTQ when I tried to explain my work with my school's campaign in the high-pressure environment of an interview. Like when I tried to r-r-reassure a crying friend in a situation so vulnerable. Like when I tried to elucidate my r-rhe(tt)oric at a soirée with a mood so casual. I've stuttered while on vacations and at parties, and on w-w-women and d-d-decisions, as if the sole purpose of my stutter has been to belittle every part of me.

A report by the University of Sydney has, in fact, found that “clinically, there is a consensus among therapists that anxiety is one of the many predisposing, precipitating and persisting factors that may play a role in stuttering” (Menzies, Onslow, Packman, 1999; Kraaimaat, Vanryckeghem, Dam-Baggen, 2002). If a stuttering interactant perceives that their ideas are going to be misconceived because of their misconstruction, a product of their speech impediment, they become vulnerable to anxiety and self-consciousness. This anxiety translates into an exaggeration of their existing speech misconstruction. In reciprocity, if the audience has a pending knowledge of the interactant's incoherency, and the interactant is aware of this, it predisposes a sense of discomfort in the interaction. This is because in the interactant's awareness, their impression on the audience has already secured a negative head start. This tint on their self-presentation renders the interactant anxious before the commencement of the interaction even. Anxiety and stuttering thus function as mutual casualties and aggravate each other exponentially.

What's good to know is that there's nothing about your stutter that cannot be fixed. Speech-language pathologists are experts in the functioning of human communication, and work with patients who suffer from a range of language, speech, and social and cognitive communication disorders. They employ researched and tested language intervention activities and articulation therapy techniques, and collaborate with your family members and professionals from related fields to help your elocution gain fluency.

But perhaps the four-by-four, perfect-child cubicle my parents wanted to raise me in, one that had umpteen room for perfect A's, rigorous training in classical dance, proper etiquette and a career in the sciences, was never built to accommodate B's and speech correction classes. A stutter, my mother would tell me, was the pompous wit of my imagination, and “if you just breathe, in and out, and make eye contact and stop shuffling your feet and stop fidgeting, your stutter will go away. There is no need for therapy.” My parents were well caught up with the cultural stigma attached to psychotherapy, and speech correction classes had the same connotations. And so, I practiced just as you told me to, Mom: I practiced deep breathing, in and out, and I maintained eye contact, and I did not fidget or shuffle my feet, but my stutter did not go away.

Interestingly, and I discovered this very recently, family dynamics have scientifically been attributed as contributing to the development of a stutter. According to the Stuttering Foundation, genetics are a dominant cause of the condition for about 60% of those who possess a stutter. American psychologist Wendell Johnson went on to explain how “a history of stuttering in the family generates strong emotions that drive parents of young children to both act and react in ways that interfere with the child’s normal speech [...] which leads to stuttering” (Kraft and Yairi, 2011). My near-credible memory leads me to believe that the clinical causes of my stutter were inconsistencies in the early stages of my neurological development and high parental expectations, both of which follow next in the list of plausible causes.

The neurophysiology of this condition is such that those who stutter process language and communication very differently than those who don’t. Studies have shown that in people who stutter, a region in the frontal brain of the left hemisphere is hypoactive and the same region of the right hemisphere is hyperactive. The hyperactivity in this right inferior frontal gyrus hinders the functioning of the brain areas that are responsible for speech movements. The left inferior frontal gyrus that processes the planning of speech movements is one of these areas. The sporadic neural inhibition of these processes in the left gyrus results in disruptions in the flow of speech (Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences). And so as much as focusing on your breathing and manipulating certain movements of your body can help in taming your speech impediment, the mechanics of your stutter are so deeply ingrained in your neural system that it is not possible for you to merely clear your throat of a stutter or wake up one day with a fluent elocution, Mom. A stutter is as much in your head as it isn’t, just as a stutter is as much in your control as it isn’t.

The incidence of speech impediments too is as erratic and confounding as the impediment itself. There is no elaborate raffle where you get to pick what letter or word you will end up stuttering on. Actor Samuel L Jackson has “G days, [he has] P days, [he has] B days, [and he has] S days.” Then there are days that are perfectly fluent and articulate, and there are days handicapped with transcending silence. Swear words are stutter-free because of a complex bypass that the brain performs when your speech employs profanity. Colin Firth’s cathartic rampage of “Fuck. Fuck! Fuck, [...] and bugger! Bugger, bugger, buggerty [...] arse! Balls! Balls, [...] shit, fuck, and tits,” from the movie *The King’s Speech* is a classic insight. Singing significantly reduces the stuttering frequency too, primarily because the focus of the neural system shifts from the choice, retrieval and pronunciation of words to the intonation of a memorized chain of words and melodies.

Over the years, I’ve successfully employed profanity as an assistant to my stuttering speech, as if the addition of each swear-fucking-word has implied more honesty and truth to my stammering sentences. Another coping mechanism I’ve used is transferring the tension mounting on my face onto my hands and doing those annoying gestures instead. I’ve also always tried to have the exact string of words that I want to pronounce rehearsed in my head beforehand, so that I don’t stumble. These tricks have worked perfectly sometimes, but sometimes they’ve embarrassingly failed. As a result, I’ve possibly given the impression that speech impediments can be self-regulated.





*Valentine*

Speech impediments frequent in the narrow ridge between mental and physical illnesses, given their neurological origins and physically impairing results. And there is a consistent effort to trivialize them from both ends of the spectrum by assuming that they can be manually and voluntarily controlled in some way. As someone who's stuttered on the first two letters of their own name so frequently that she has eventually refrained from introducing herself at all, though, I want to tell you that a speech impediment cannot be controlled. A stutter is not a choice. It can humiliate and paralyze and handicap, but it cannot be regulated. It is a hole that digs itself for you to bury your self-esteem in.

This is not to say that it is not possible for stutters to be practiced away over time. I have, as a result of my parents' disregard for therapy, learned to balance my speech by consistently stumbling and faltering and halting and then getting it all back together for years. But embarking on the journey of speech-correction by yourself entails a kind of physical and mental exhaustion I wouldn't want anyone else to sustain, especially when speech-language pathology and speech therapy are scientifically known to have yielded positive results. And while those who stutter enroll in speech-correction therapy, as they should, the rest of us should take some time to acknowledge that it's not very taxing to accommodate someone's stutter in our vernacular. The sheer number of times I've stuttered my way through a well-rehearsed string of words and sentences due to the tension that the other interactant predisposed in the environment is staggering. Start with these:

*Resist the urge to finish their sentences for them?*

*And try to not tell them to speed up?*

*Just wait for them to complete after themselves?*

You'd think that after all these years of practicing my stutter away, it would've become easy to gain voluntary control over the flow of my speech by now. And my elocution has gained fluency over time, no doubt. But every time or the other that I see the dispersal of w's and r's and p's and d's—letters that have consistently troubled me the most over the years—over a text that I am required to read out loud, outside my head, my speech still halts and drowns. Speech impediments like a stutter, in most cases, are not chronic conditions, and I don't think my stutter is chronic either. What my stutter definitely is, at least the part of it that refuses to leave, is crippling. It is a smokescreen of fear in the face of every interaction. An ugly artifact that attracts unwanted attention. An annoying nudge to remain silent. A reminder of all the opportunities not taken. A reminder of all the things not said. And it is a cripple that handicaps me without warning.

Perhaps a part of embracing my stutter and letting it not define me has been learning that it's ever more important to finish my sentence, even if that requires having to make a few stops in the middle. It is as spoken-word poet Erin Schick so very beautifully articulated in her *Honest Speech* about her own stuttering experiences: "It is how I know I still have a voice."

# peanut butter and honey

Kim Johnson

spread the peanut butter on the toast

drizzle the honey on top

exactly how mother used to make it

in my memory

together, the tastes greet me

with the same warmth as mother's hug

the peanut butter soothes me

the sweet touch of honey delights me

just like her comfort

back when she would make me toast with peanut butter

and honey

but only in my memory.







# Avenida Juncal

Sarah Strohecker

I saw the union man marching down the street as he does every morning at roughly 8:30. He proudly sported his union jacket that had in white, embroidered lettering ‘sindicato de la fraternidad’ scrolled onto the back. He wore clean, white painters’ pants and his weathered and worn hands carried a bucket of paint. Atop the plot of salt and pepper hair sat a camel-colored, leather golf hat slightly askew to the right side and smattered with white paint. He had intelligent eyes and a face that was smiling and inviting and proud.

I passed the newsstand on the intersection, the green paint of the shoddy frame peeled and chipped revealing the tan color of the plywood it had been constructed with. *They could use a painter*, I thought. The stand was filled with magazines and newspapers and a few small toys. Leaning over the display was an old man with hair thinned and grey; he inspected the inventory of the stand and smiled at the face of the young boy that ran it. Funnily enough, the boy too was taking inventory, marking on a small slip of paper which publications he would be buying for the coming week. The boy couldn’t have been more than twenty one years old and was the perfect opposite of the man standing before him. His hair was an onyx black that accented the caramel color of his skin. The potential customer, quite literally, paled in comparison.

As I continued down the street, I passed the kindergarten and the lines of children accompanied by their parents attempting to usher them into the classrooms. I passed the local man that walked the herd of neighborhood dogs, not one of them strayed far, not one of them wore a leash. When I reached the plaza, I came across the flower stand that sets up that time in the morning.

The flower stand was run by a Bolivian woman and her husband; their skin held the memory of Cochabamba’s sun even in the perpetually cloudy Buenos Aires. They worked hard to make their flower stand a success and closed for only a few hours during the night and stayed open for the rest of the day. The couple had also taken pity on a homeless man that had been coincidentally sleeping on the same stretch of street before they had set up shop there. Every morning they would walk over to the mattress he had managed to salvage, bringing him coffee and a small croissant to eat. When he woke, he would fold the blankets and place the mattress on the inside of the flower stand. Then he would begin to help the couple arrange their exotic plants in new and aesthetic ways, such that, when you walked down that stretch of Avenida Juncal it always smelled like fresh azaleas and geraniums. Whenever I had a few extra pesos I would stop by the stand at the end of the day and buy whatever leftover flowers remained. The couple would pick each individual flower and, with nimble fingers, bind the stems together with twine, making a beautiful bouquet of even the wilted and the downtrodden flowers.

# Little Brown Girl

Anushka Lakhani

The pungent scent of weed embraces me, like a newly familiar friend. A friend I just met but feel like I've known for a long time. I nod along to an aspiring rapper spitting lyrics I've never heard before. Strolling past the fountain, little water droplets land on my left elbow. I gag, thinking of the homeless people who may have peed here. I clench my fists, stuff them into the pockets of my violet NYU hoodie and ask myself, "How can *this* possibly be summer?" Back home, the scorching 52 degrees (oh wait, that's celsius...125 degrees Fahrenheit) heat would keep me confined in the comfort of my air conditioning all summer.

*Back home* –a phrase I've been using abundantly since arriving in this new city.

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Twirling my hair, I admire the 6' 2 brown-haired beauty standing before me. As he approaches, I feel my heart racing. My mind, on the other hand, is racing even faster... and in questionable directions. *Could this be my dream boy? Is this my Bollywood movie moment? How do I look? Have I really found love so soon? So those stories about New York being the 'city of dreams' must be true...*

After several minutes of flirting, the conversation finds its way back to one very consequential question...

"Where are you from?" he asks.

"India," I respond.

"Really? You don't sound Indian at all."

... and his response determines the (lack of) future of this "flirtationship."

*WARNING:* *Proceed with caution; your Bollywood movie moment has reached its intermission.*

I pause, almost reliving the 'trauma' from my childhood. But that wouldn't be right. I've been asked this question far too many times by now. *Shouldn't I be used to it? Why does my mind still jump back to third grade every time these words slip out of someone's mouth?*

You. Don't. Sound. Indian. At. All.

You. Don't. Sound. Indian. At. All.

You. Don't. Sound. Indian. At. All.

Age 7, you stand there for several minutes after class. The sound of the school bell pervades the hallways, and a plethora of sweaty middle-schoolers rush past you. Until that moment, you had never considered your accent to be something that would restrict you. Rather, you had never considered your accent at all.

Water. *Vaw-ter.*

Voice. *Woice.*

Video. *Weedio.*

*Were you really pronouncing everything wrong?*

The chuckles of your classmates replay in your head. You don't know what to make of your "best friend" telling you that perhaps if you faked a western accent, more people would want to be your friend.

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

Search: "How to learn an American accent in 1 week."

You sit in the silence of your bedroom, repeating the same words over and over again that night. *That* night. And every other night.

*If the words you were saying were the same, why did the voice with which you said them make all the difference?*

\*\*\*

I always get a little uncomfortable when people mention sex in conversation. Perhaps, it's because I don't hear the word at home often, or maybe it's because the few times I do, I have been told it's forbidden. For the majority of my teenage years, this was irrelevant; nobody really talked about *it*. But as I entered early adulthood, *it* seemed to become a central topic of discussion everywhere I went.

"So, what was your first time like?" she questions.

"My first time doing what?"

"...having sex"

"Oh, I haven't..."

Every time I found myself in such a situation—which was more often than one would expect—my mind raced back to the same conversation with my mother.

She sits you down. And with a straight face, she asks, "So, have you two kissed?"

Confused, you ask her to repeat herself. She clarifies, or rather, simply repeats, "Have you kissed him?" Blatantly, you say yes. Shocked—and noticeably worried—she asks, "So, is it *long* kisses?"

You burst into laughter at the silliness that is this conversation.

She doesn't seem amused.

The look on her face intensifies, and she starts asking more questions. Two hours later, you find yourself nodding along to a lecture about your Indian cultures and values. The memory foam on the couch has adopted the shape of your butt cheeks, the mental image of which you are unable to erase even years from now.

CALLING FOR HELP: *How do I silence the tape of my mom's voice that replays in my head every time I'm with a boy?*

\*\*\*

My friends in India feel pride about their national food, often arguing over who can eat more *gol gappas* with their bare hands or whose *chicken 65* tastes spicier. Growing up outside of India, I shared a very different experience.

“What’s that nasty smell?”

A potpourri of flavors escape your lunchbox. The striking curry leaves mingle with the *masala* until a ubiquitous aroma fills the entirety of the classroom.

Or at least that’s how it plays out in your head—at first.

Looking around the classroom, the excited smile fades off your face faster than a wiper smears raindrops off a windshield.

You notice the instinctual crinkle in your friend’s nose. The distinct chatter coming from the side of the room grows louder. Your classmates are starting to get up and leave their seats in search of this “ungodly odor.”

“Whose food is that?”

You silently slip the lid back on your lunchbox and seamlessly place it back into your bag, zipping away the food along with years of your cultural upbringing.

When asked by the teacher what you brought, you claimed to have forgotten.

It was either a remark on your record or humiliation for the rest of the year. You chose the remark.

*If I could do it all over again, would I do anything differently?*

\*\*\*

I feel a gentle tap on my shoulder, disrupting my long-winded train of thought. Amongst the loud roars of MacDougal Street, an unrecalled Indian accent catches my attention.

“Excuse me, what way can I find the arch?”

An involuntary smile masks my face, and I catch myself saying, “I can walk you there.”





*Blasphemy!*

## Love Poem No. 2

Nicky Nenkov

“What’s the greatest love you can imagine,” you asked me,  
your hand soft on my cheek, we were lying face to face  
after the first time we had sex. Your bed was too small for  
the both of us, our knees rubbed against each other, I could  
feel your breath warm on my skin. I didn’t know how to say  
I thought love was not great, I thought love was small and  
quiet, I’d grown to know a fearful, unseen love, not the  
metaphors that roar in western poems but the words my tongue  
is scared to see in writing. I maybe took too long to answer  
and I’d been looking at you, the rough hairs on your lip, the red  
spots on your cheek, your nose rising and falling like  
the open sea, my mouth went to say something but nothing  
was said and I stared until you kissed me, warm and wet, your  
fingers digging in my neck, “me too,” you said, pulling away, “me too.”

# LUNAR PHRASES

Michelle Cao

## A METAPHORICAL ILLUSTRATION OF ONE WOMAN'S BIPOLAR CYCLE THROUGH THE USAGE OF THE LUNAR CYCLE

### FULL MOON:

She is beautiful and glorious. I talk about the goddess in hushed tones—she, not I, because I have been consumed by her and her capacity for everything. I love her, I admire her, I worry for her, I cannot compete with her, I want her to stay, I want her to go. I can't handle her, but I love the way she handles life. No longer tossed around and spun about, she is not someone that things just happen to. She is something that happens to other people, uncontrollable and unpredictable, the hazy jolt of realization as the sun comes up after you watched it set those endless hours ago—the sun! The sun! Oh, it's time to sleep, isn't it?

She doesn't sleep. She is fire, fire, fire.

If I had to pick a word to describe her in those times, it seems obvious. The word fits her like couture, tailored and made to measurement. *Violence*. Her heart threatens to burst like a ripe clementine in the fist of a 7-year-old, violently, carelessly, delightfully. She's all Shakespearian tragedy in her limbs, the way she plummets dramatically onto the floor, all too aware the way her hair scatters in the silence. Then she peels one eye open and grins, her friends all laughing at her antics. But though the violence wears a pretty face, she still has bruised knees from the way she fell and another one behind her hip and another one just under her lip and another one another one another one—

But all can be endured for the way they look at her, mirth in their eyes. She feels loved and her desire swallows it so whole there isn't even a tiny bit left for the rest of her. It isn't enough, no, never enough.

She is fire, fire, fire. And she burns through it all.

She is her own narcissism and everything that entails. People search for purpose, but she has hers; devoted worshipper at her own altar, she is her own lighthouse and her own nightlight and her own god and her own savior and her own villain and her own hero and she is her purpose. I exist for her. She exists because it is her right. I am at her whims, her beautiful caprices, and if she were real I'd be hopelessly, endlessly in love with her. I mean, I guess she's real. I guess I am in love with her, but it's just so hard to know, when she comes and goes, when I stop loving her again, again.

She's always wanted to be beautiful, but recently she's realized more than ever that she can never be marble features set in stone, carved to perfection. She exists in movement, soft to the touch, sunlight dapples







skin and skin gives way to red and cheeks and fingers and touch her, touch her. She's begging to be experienced. Don't take a fucking picture, it's a travesty. You can only see that she's beautiful when she moves and smiles and follows you round like those summer thunderstorms that sort of always seem like a dream.

You'll love her, I swear it by all the cattails by the riverside, counting down the days till you see her again. Oh, the way you love her, it'll be violent, it will. And you'll love that too.

### **WANING/WAXING GIBBOUS:**

i am nobody and i want it  
she hates to cry in front of the masses but she's stumbling into your arms now  
takes what she needs and gives more than she can  
giving her bits of gold to chew on  
is this the face of a woman insane?  
she's never been so beautiful  
when she cries the light catches the little glass drops  
you can hear the sound of destruction  
it sounds like violins and the shattering of vases  
he says "i could never hate you"  
this is worse than her reaching her hand straight into his chest  
the blood trickles down her arm, oh how she hates the worst of it but it's all she knows  
she wishes she could say that to herself  
but there she goes again  
already in the throes of hatred  
that's why she's doing this after all  
she dances around her room  
and pretends to know ballet  
so the spiral downwards  
looks a little like a plié  
the yellow leaves stained on the ground by the rain  
are her only treasure  
and she's back to embers

### **HALF MOON:**

Honestly, I think this is the best you get when it comes to me. She's got enough energy to fulfill her responsibilities, she gets eight hours of sleep. She remembers to call her boyfriend and get something to eat. She's so normal it hurts, repeat, repeat, repeat. She's a sentence with perfect grammar and dated notes on her laptop. She's blinking the correct number of times per minute and never fiddling with her hands. She's telling jokes that are sweet and innocent and funny nonetheless. She can listen to Tchaikovsky and also whatever's on the radio. She wants to be better, but she's grateful she's not worse. She feels loved, for the most part. Sure, sometimes she

cries a little when she feels ugly, but that's normal. That's normal, it's normal. Is it normal? Well, it's not for her to know. And this is the only time she's okay with that. I think, she's okay with that.

The rest of it belongs with falling stars and nightingales, and palaces shrouded in mist

gold specks in her eyes

a little sunflower dying

and tears and mascara in free fall

it's me and i'm small again

I always come back to her

face painted like a butterfly

not knowing how to tell her that I've failed

"you still don't love me?" she asks, her voice trembling through the mirror

I want to, I do, I touch a fragile wing

No, I guess it ended up being a dream, anyways. She changes by the goddamn minute, that bastard. She's supposed to be prose but her baser instincts fall into wretched, shitty poetry anyways. It smells like smoke in the air after the candle's been blown out.

### **WANING/WAXING CRESCENT:**

He said, you seem a bit sad today. I smile, a little bit sadly. He's only known me for two weeks, after all, and I'm not sure if it's untrue to say I've been lying all this time. Those two weeks of mania obscure the truth of what I am. Thus far I look like someone people write love letters to. I look like I'd read them and scoff and throw them in a pile along with all my other forgotten fancies. The truth is I'm the only one writing love letters and they all come back, stamped over, the addresses unreachable, RETURN TO SENDER I DON'T LOVE YOU ANYMORE LEAVE ME THE FUCK ALONE. And of course I pretend it doesn't hurt. And of course it always does.

We're speaking French, and of course I don't have the words, fuck, I barely have them in the languages I do know. I slide out words like *triste* and *fatiguée* and hope he doesn't trip right over them. I don't want him to think I'm a sad person, even if it's a little bit true. He asks if there's anything he can do, for the next two weeks. He says, *pour les semaines sans sourires*.

I close my eyes. It sounds about right. There's no dread when I know what's coming. There's only resignation. *Sans sourires*. It sounds so lovably pathetic, but the truth is it's what I know. The smile-less weeks and the colorless summers and the merciless winters, they don't ever change. I just keep on feeling sorry for myself, like always. I just keep on constructing who I think I'm meant to be, asking others what they think. I've built myself





*Redemption*

up through the opinions of others, which is why I'm so easy to defeat. One bad patch spreads like the plague, like a group project soured by a non-cooperative partner. Is it just a fantasy to believe I exist outside what others perceive me to be? Is it ludicrous to hope that someday I won't need anybody?

I don't need anything, I tell him. One wobbly baby step after the next. Until the fall.

## **NEW MOON:**

I run out of words. I lie in bed. Two hours. Six hours. Fourteen hours. The world disappears. Three days. Five days. Nine days. I think I cry. I think I dream. I think he says, *mi amor, are you okay?* I think he worries. I think they all do. But I can't know for sure. I think I lived a million lives before I woke up. I think the world goes on, but I don't. I think my love and fear and anxiety and euphoria and hopes and dreams and desires and intricacies are all buried in a place no one will go looking. But I can't know for sure. Twenty hours. Fourteen days.

And then I see the sun.

And she sees me.

And we go around, and around again.

## **TIDES:**

You ever had your heart broken? You ever went through one of those gut-wrenching, think-about-it-every-second-every-day breakups? You ever see something and your heart just drops straight out your stomach and you can't breathe? You ever cry so hard it just sounds like gasps falling one after the other, like a domino effect of gulps and hiccups? It's not pretty, is it?

That's how it feels, every time she leaves me. Come morning the goddess turns to a mortal and it never hurts less. And every time she comes back, it's knife in the scar, slap to the face, resentment and anger and unfettered lust, open wounds carelessly smeared. I want her like something fierce. But I can never forgive her for abandoning me, over and over and over again.

I am soft and lovely and ice and deadly. I am red mouth kisses and slaps on the thigh and cold cold feet and shades of navy. I am sweet baby roses and lush orange leaves and bitter envy and burning guilt. I am trying my best and scared of what I could be. I am sunshine smiles and turning to snow. The moon calls out to the tides but the ocean is still yet to be known.

I am fed by starlight and I starve in the depths.



## the loose threads

Ashley Irizarry

I am going to try that thing again  
in which I  
locate the loose threads of you,  
woven into the cloth, the fabric of  
my life  
and remove them, pluck them  
one by one, from my sight  
until there are no more.  
I am doing a great injustice  
to myself, keeping you around;  
holding a dial tone  
to my ear. carrying around an  
empty envelope, crumpled  
in my hands.  
I do not want to  
keep checking on you, anymore.  
looking out for you. hoping you  
will speak to me in morse code,  
in secret symbols, hushed tones.  
whispers in the wind. I do not want to  
listen to the empty wind, anymore.  
and I don't want you checking on me, either—  
I don't want you to know  
what is going on with me, how I'm doing  
I don't want to give you the right  
to my life, and its branching, stretching  
outward, touching and growing  
new things, new fragments.  
I am going to take the pieces of you  
that are tangled up in me, the roots  
that have soaked in your rainwater, lay them  
in the drawer, out of sight  
just for a little, just for awhile.  
just to see if I can  
breathe on my own again.  
maybe you can live without me  
but I cannot do the same.  
it is me or nothing.  
I have to be here for me.

# Victor

Bernard Vega III

*This Essay Was the Runner-up for This Year's Elaine Kuntz Prize*

“Mama, why are people mean to me?” asked my brother. “Because you’re special, Victor” replied my mother. My brother gazed through the car window with confusion as he watched the rain drops cascade down the windshield drop by drop. His eyes then rolled and his mouth opened. He started to mouth words: Victor entered his world again.

It was approximately eight years since Victor’s diagnosis, and we were on the way back from school. I was embarrassed to have a brother like him and I certainly didn’t enjoy people speaking about his mental disability. Thoughts constantly ran through my head: why can’t I have a “normal brother?” Why did God have to give me a mentally handicapped brother? I was utterly embarrassed and detested the presence of my brother.

One night, I was sitting in my living room with both my father and my mother. We were watching the TV and soon my dad started to speak: “Bernard, you can’t go about with that kind of attitude about Victor. You must accept the way he is, because God is trying to tell us something about him. There’s meaning in having Victor.” Both my parents gazed at me with a concerned, yet sound expression. I stared back with disdain. And after what seemed like a lifetime, I stormed back upstairs and went to my room. My mind was in complete disarray, I just couldn’t fathom why I had a brother like Victor.

It was one afternoon during a lunch hangout with friends when the subject of having siblings came into the conversation. One of my friends expressed the challenges of being the youngest and another one complained about having the most annoying sister in the world. Then, they all turned to me. One of them asked: “How about you, Bernard? Don’t you have a brother? What’s he like?” They caught me. The spotlight was on me. My internal dialogue began to rumble with thoughts of contempt. I stared blankly into the distance and gave the question an unnecessary amount of thinking. I hesitated a bit as I started to murmur unclear words. My friends looked at me with perplexed appearances. The atmosphere was tense until I collected myself and uttered: “Yeah, he’s alright, I guess.”

I didn’t know what to feel bad for the most: the fact that I had a brother like Victor or the fact that my friends found out how I really felt about him. At that time, my distaste intensified more and more. I just couldn’t accept him. I vowed to never even consider him to be a brother of mine.

---

It was not until a few years ago that my perception started to change. Being more mature at that time, my negative sentiments weren’t displayed emotionally; instead, I opted to keep my brother’s presence on the low. Because of that, not a lot of people knew I had a brother.

I watched a Ted Talk one afternoon and it was by an autistic woman named Temple Grandin. She was a Professor at the University of Colorado and, prior to being a well-renowned educator, she supposedly devised an efficient way to slaughter cows due to her visual thinking: she took note of various things from what sound made the cows move, to how the trail should be paved. I didn’t really pay much regard to her talk. I found her to be another one of those cliché “inspirational stories.”

After watching the presentation, I, unknowingly, decided to look her up on the internet. Her content on the web seemed pretty standard: there was a movie made about her and she authored several books on animals and autism. Then I came across a quote she once mentioned: “There needs to be a lot more emphasis on what a child can do instead of what they cannot do.” That quote resonated. It gave me food for thought.

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One afternoon after school ended, out of curiosity, I decided to see my brother. I sauntered across the hallways of my house and stopped in front of Victor's room. I paused and took a deep breath. I knocked on his door and slowly turned the door knob. He was sitting on his desk with an intense focus as he was meticulously crafting little clay columns. He didn't take note of my presence. On his desk was his computer with a picture of the Hogwarts Castle from Harry Potter. Victor's eyes were fixed on the half-inch sized pieces of clay and his hands were outstandingly steady as he pushed along the sides of the structure to straighten it. He then escaped from his work and turned to me. With round eyes gleaming with innocence he murmured: "Hey." I paused as I responded with a gentle nod of the head. He immediately turned back to work.

I continued along his room which had a rather synthetic smell: like the smell of graphite, oils, and paint infused together. I walked beside a wall in his room and glanced at his paintings; I knew some of his old works like the one portraying a garden in the spring and a closeup of a leaf. But then I came across, what looked like a new painting. It depicted a sunset with an orange shade of sky. The sun glimmered its beams across an azure colored ocean as it made its way down touching the horizon.

Something about the painting caught my attention. I squinted my eyes to understand it. Looking at the painting intently at various distances, I then asked: "New painting?" Victor swiftly replied: "Yes." The overall picturesque piece reminded me of a typical Claude Monet painting; its rough contours and colorings gave it a considerable distinction while its overall presentation still possessed a collected structure. When I looked too closely at the painting, the illustration seemed to be in disarray and confusion; but as I perceived it at a further angle, the piece seemed to fall into place. It was as if expanding my peripheral vision gave me better understanding of other components which contributed in making the painting a wonderful piece. As I viewed the expanse of the canvas, I was given the strength to tackle the stubbornness of concentrating on the defects of the piece when viewed at a fixed distance. The painting seemed to signify that openness to anything in life would, ultimately, give you the ability to see things rather differently.

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It was the night after Victor's last day of school and he came home with his report card. My parents and I were in the living room watching TV as my brother ambled his way with a folder in his hand. My father saw him walk in and asked: "What's that Victor? Is that your report card?" With soft and candid words my brother replied: "Yes, but I don't think I did good." My father extended his hand and Victor handed the folder. I looked over my dad's shoulders and saw the big fat letters: C for Science, B for Math, C for English, D for Social Studies and so forth. Then one part of the report caught my attention: A for Art. My dad sighed and placed the folder on the coffee table. A sudden silence struck the room. Inadvertently, I broke the quietness and said: "Good job." My parents looked at me astonished and puzzled. I continued: "You got an A in Art and that's good. You should keep on improving your Art skills. You have the talent." My parents' bewilderment intensified. They were stunned by what I said. Victor looked at me with a mildly assured expression and responded: "Okay." He then walked up to his room.

---

One cloudy afternoon I was in my school's library doing some work. Graduation was around the corner and I received the privilege to give the commencement address. Attempting to seek insight, I browsed the web for some quotes, speeches, and interviews. The content I looked at ranged from JFK's inaugural address to business quotes by Warren Buffett. Then I came across some Christian sayings and prayers and scrolled through the website. Skimming through sentences, I found one prayer that seemed interesting. I paused and thought deeply about each phrase: its application to life and relevance to success. The prayer purports an outlook on life that is graceful, yet encouraging. It was called the "Serenity Prayer" and was coined by the famous theologian Reinhold Niebuhr:





God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.

Time seemed to freeze as I thought about it hard. I was motionless and was in deep reflection. The idea entered my mind the way light would illuminate a dark vacancy: the blurriness became focused and the chaos became order. It all became clear. I collected my thoughts and thought of Victor; how I've repressed his existence in the public eye; how I've disregarded his inner goodness and strengths; how I've removed him from my identity. Of all the things I've done, I have merely attempted to erase a gift sent by God: a gift that is invulnerable, yet meaningful.

I was ignorant and failed to realize that it is the imperfections which make some things perfect: Victor was not perfect, but I learned to embrace that that's who he is. Finally, I gracefully accepted this divine blessing.

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It was a sunny afternoon in our vacation home up north of Indonesia. I was walking down the jetty; the gentle ripples of waves washed against the wooden poles holding the structure and retreated from the sands back to the warm waters of the Pacific. The clouds were thick and iridescent, and the sun made its final glistening appearance before touching the horizon. I stood on the edge of the pier and gazed over the sparkling ocean. I indulged in the serene atmosphere for the last time as I was soon bound to go to college. I heard clumping footsteps coming from the walkway behind me. I looked back and saw Victor glancing left and right with an open mouth. His face was beaming with sheer awe at the picturesque scenery. He stopped next to me and stood there.

With both of us looking forward I said: "Looks nice huh? It kinda looks like the painting you made, remember?" Victor then replied: "Yes, I know, it does." His eyes then rolled and his mouth opened. He started to mouth words: Victor entered his world again. I put my arm around his shoulder. I watched his pure eyes twinkle under the luminous sunset; I smiled.



Photograph of Victor taken during a family trip to Paris, France (August, 2011). The saying on his shirt reads: "I know I'm in my own world, but it's O.K. they know me here."



## shades of red

Emily Schindler

she is  
mouthing off to some  
son of a bitch who  
could never understand that  
a work of art takes  
time before it becomes a  
masterpiece

she is a fragment  
of some long ago composition  
whole and promising  
now, chipped and cracked

she thinks  
*who would take the time to fix*  
*this, when they can just go*  
*to the store and*  
*buy another one?*

he is  
humming love songs  
soft and sweet  
singing to  
the one he loves  
who has never given him  
the time of day

he doesn't mind  
being the glue  
to put others back together  
but the broken don't want  
to be whole

he thinks

*are we*

*changing*

*when we should just*

*stay the same?*

love or lust

or somewhere in between

the crimson that flushes our cheeks

is the same that flows when

we bleed

she is

he is

they are

*who cares*

because the ones who

say they were never

one for fire

have the flames behind their eyes

to prove otherwise

# The Killing of a Sacred Snake

Francisco Attié

## I.

At 4:30 she woke up, though in truth she had barely slept the night before. In her dreams, Rô was haunted by her childhood. Solitude had convened her for the night, and repression had shaken her awake. She needed to talk. She opened her door and smelled coffee, and walked down the hall.

“Father?”

As she got closer to the kitchen, Janaína’s humming got more pronounced. She liked when the housekeeper hummed her songs; she felt warmth in the way they could easily fill the rooms of the house.

“Do you want some fruit?”

“How did you know I was here?”

“I see everything.”

“Where’s my father?”

“He went outside with your mother.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“I thought you knew everything.”

“Only what I see.”

Lately she’d been waking up early, like she did as a child, and slipping out back to the stables to watch the stablehands groom the horses. Showers were particularly beautiful moments, she thought. One time at a museum she saw a movie where scenes of a race horse being bathed were interwoven with scenes of men fighting jiu-jitsu. Though there was always some aggression on the screen, she thought it strangely meditative. Like the horse, one of the men always seemed more passive, but because they decided to be so—as if they were measuring their moments, using passiveness as a strategy. The fighter gave away immediate control of his stance in order to entrap his opponent into a fatal move; the horse ceded his image to man, so that in the track, in that split second of freedom, it would be allowed to run like it never had before. She wondered if the horses kept their eyes open as the soapy-water ran down their faces on purpose—were they worried about closing them?

This morning she stayed inside though. She looked out from the kitchen window as her parents stood by the stables, talking. Her father looked especially strong—his white shirt tucked in his *culotte* made his chest look wider. Her mother looked small by his side. While she couldn’t hear what they were saying, her mother was gesturing a lot, and his indifference while fixing his belt made her look frantic.

“I wish she’d grow out of this tomboy phase.”

“She likes riding horses, what’s wrong with that?”

“She should be playing with her sister!”

“Your son only cares about music, it’s good to have someone who’ll ride with me.”

“I don’t know why I still buy her dresses when all she wears now are jeans.”

“At least she’s interested in the farm, *Bia*.”

“Fine. I don’t care. Just be careful.”

As her mother moved toward the house, Rô sneaked out the kitchen, back to her room.

“Was she just here, Janá?”





“No, ma’am. I think she’s still asleep.”

“I saw her in the window. Why are you covering for her?”

“I didn’t see her, ma’am.”

## II.

Mounted on her horse, firmly now, she rode behind her father towards a place unknown to her. As often as they would ride together, she’d try to forego knowledge of direction, she felt like she could enjoy it more that way, as if she were still young. They passed the horses in the pasture very quietly, as to not wake them up.

“Wild horses sleep upright,” her father said, “these ones are lazy.”

As they distanced themselves from the dozing herd, the brightness across the vail changed. The naked crops, stretching as far as the feet of the hills, began to light up with the few sun-rays that could break through the peaks. At daytime, the essence of the dirt starkly contrasted the green hue smoldering from the mountains, but in the darkness, or in that beginning of morning they were witnessing, the two would mesh nicely around the same shades of blue. At one point, Rô thought, the dirt wouldn’t have stuck out as much. She recalled there being flocks of trees filling the vail before her father built the farm. She would always mention it to her friends growing up, until her mother told her they had bought the farm from somebody else, that that place couldn’t ever have been as green as she remembered.

But in a few months the crops would come back—sparks of color would lightly weave their way through the dirt. They’d rise together within their season, and their only competitor was time. The farmer worries about his yield, but the fruits are unaware of this bigger competition, that they were part of a game whose rules hadn’t been made manifest to them. So too suffered the ‘lazy’ horses, who had been long conditioned into their roles in that game. Instinct for them, had been lost many generations ago as they renewed their vows with men.

“Do horses dream?”

“No, horses are animals. Only humans dream.”

“So what happens when they’re sleeping?”

“They rest, so they can be ready for the next day.”

“And they have *no* dreams?”

“No, they probably need to stay alert in case a predator shows up.”

“Even the ones sleeping on the ground?”

“I would think so. It’s the way it is, Rô.”

She enjoyed how final he could be sometimes. They both understood he didn’t know certain things, but he’d been working with animals for so long that it would be rude for him to ask about these things at this point.

“I had a weird dream last night. It was about the past, *my* past. I woke up feeling like all my life had happened only in my dreams, and I’d just woken up in the present.”

“You dreamt of your childhood?”

“Not the whole thing. Just this one morning when I was little. Back when we used to ride more often. I was looking for you. I walked down the hall and it felt interminable. Room after room, the doors were all closed. When I finally got to the kitchen, one of our old housekeepers was there.”

“Which one?”

“I don’t know, she had no face.” He gave her a puzzled look.

“Yeah, I don’t know. Her face was just skin, with no bounds or ends. She said you weren’t home. You had just left for one of your hunting trips. So I went outside to see if I could catch a glimpse of the car driving away.



But it was all very still. I went back inside and mother sent me to my room. I tried to talk to her, but she wouldn't let me. And I woke up."

Rô knew her dad wouldn't probe in her mother's direction—he'd always been awfully silent about the women's relationship. She'd overheard him defending her before, but he only did it when she wasn't in the room.

They rode on as the sun crowned fully over the peaks. The clouds from the previous night's rain still infested the sky, leaving few blank spots where warm light could probe. That morning tint was almost foggy, and the valley's liveliness wasn't very pronounced.

### III.

What was good, ended soon. Without warning the wind shifted in a waft of remembrance and with it the clouds grew dark. Lightning struck the land many miles ahead, and drop by drop the clouds doled out their essence.

"Let's ride left now."

"That way?"

"Yeah, we're gonna need some shelter."

Summer rain happens in a split second, and ends just as quickly. For the few thunderous minutes it pours, a dark glow encompasses nature; its smell is heavy, the first sniff almost drowns the nose. But as the air pushes deep enough, the lungs absorb the humidity, and a revitalizing breath echoes through the body—a contradiction of grace and friction.

Rô pressured her foot into her horse's belly, but without spurs it always took longer to get into gallop. Steering a horse at great speeds is harder—it requires a mastery of deceit. As the horse accelerates, the rider has to make him believe he's gaining back control, and slowly, independence. Otherwise the horse self-sabotages, slowing himself down.

Father and daughter sprinted across the land, as water and air blurred their sight. The tears that flowed down their faces did so involuntarily; a biological reflex to the matter infesting their eyes. The horses cried too. Rô bowed her head to avoid the wind and rain. As she regained control over her sight, she started to notice the change of colors below the horse's hooves—the stark brown was beginning to fade into darker shades of green. The closer they got to the forest, the less the soil was affected by men.

### IV.

Unmounted, they pulled their rides inside the forest. They walked through the vegetation with ease; the foliage, in an act of kindness, seemed to open itself for them. As they pushed further in towards the river, Rô hoped to see animals peeping out of their hiding spots, testing the air for rain. But the animals that had chirped in these woods were sheltered. They found the river when the rain stopped. Strangely, it seemed to have receded into itself. As they got closer, the horses jerked powerfully and stopped moving.

Right by the bank *Boiúna* stretched herself, her dark body blending in with the wet dirt. If it hadn't been for the hesitation of the horses, they probably wouldn't have seen the snake. But for the slight spasms of her neck, *Boiúna* lay mostly still, swallowing a frog, too fat for her size.

Though the snake looked worn out, the girl found her hypnotic; she was struck by the crackled shades of blue emanating from the reptile's skin, and failed to realize the grotesque ritual at play.

She dropped the horse's rein and grabbed a fallen branch before walking up to her. Tauntingly, the

reptile slithered closer to the girl and stared at her with the frog halfway down her throat. The girl stared back, frozen. The overbearing *Boiúna* ruled her forest through fear, and Rô could feel her weight. Perhaps the animals had been hiding from the snake. Rô thought of them in that moment, and the repressed lives they must lead. She did not notice how her arm instinctively moved the branch over the head of the snake, where it stopped, as a threat.

“Don’t kill the snake.”

*Boiúna* could sense the atmosphere. She dropped her hapless prey, and bent her neck to face the girl. Rô turned her gaze to the fallen frog, and *Boiúna* took the chance to back away. She poked the frog with the branch and the animal’s pallor began to dust out of its skin: its pores, oozing a heavy liquid, painted color back into its complexion; its eyeballs, once frozen in rigor mortis, now spun hysterically in their socket. The frog’s backside sparked with green and quickly shifted to red; small purple spots sprung upon its skin. So intense was the kaleidoscope, the girl’s iris, benumbed, fell to sleep.

*Boiúna* dipped her tail in the river and contorted herself into a ball. Only her snout broke the round shape, fiercely pointed at the girl. The water ran on her body and the snake’s head lost all its color: the dark blue faded into a brown-ish tint, from which black eyes were the only contrast, shining like cold flames, emanating brightness that far exceeded the light available in the clearing. Below the surface, her face began to crack. The river held tightly to her tail, and through the gaped mouth, her head slid out. Dark and viscous, this new blue snake slithered, drenched in afterbirth; *Boiúna*, reborn, had shed her past graft. Sprightly now, her body contorted effortlessly forward with an increased range of motion as she advanced toward the girl, primed to pounce on a new body.

Rô stood entranced, transfixed still by the color ritual exhumed before her eyes. The trees however, noticed the danger and shuffled far for help. Deep in the woods the urutau awoke, and its cry burst through the foliage. The snake inched closer as the bird continued with resolve. His song reverberated in the trunks, encircling the girl in echo until word finally broke through. Rô shook herself awake, as the frog blew up in a purple haze before her eyes. In the settling smoke, *Boiúna*’s royal darkness glistened starkly. Her body went rigid; tissues contracted as her neck stiffened. She began to raise herself, splaying her chest, like a rooster before his females. The snake balanced herself, nostrils intently pointed at the girl’s legs. Rô drew the wood and the snake her fangs.

The moment she acted couldn’t be heard. She dropped her arm and the head fell with it. Under the branch, the blue snake now bathed in crimson, as the girl witnessed *Boiúna*’s last pulses.

Ceased the death march, a dense silence permeated the lake—so heavy, in fact, Rô could feel it weighing down on her ears.

It was the puffing of her horse, like the shot that slays the pheasant, that disrupted the inaction. The urutau sang again, and beatings of wings could be felt all around her. Appreciation for the act seemed to reverberate in the forest. Yet, life’s chatter faded quickly, and the urutau’s word echoed as a whisper in her ear: *mãe*.

“Did you hear that? Father, did you hear that?”

She turned around to face him, and saw nothing.

In her confusion, a chilly waft ran over the forest, and for a second all the smells absconded. In her breathing, clarity turned to darkness. Night fell unforgivingly upon her, and the wind blew harder through the trees, carrying only a word within its howls: *mãe*.

## Two Poems

Jazmine Nogueira

*When things fall into place*

My hands shook until my palm  
covered the curves of your back

My fingers felt firm...

Rested, grounded, no pain.

You were my cure

The cure no one knew existed except me.

*Blinded*

It had been less than a week

I couldn't stop spelling out your touch,

the motion through ocean blues

Or how my body went through seasons

At the thought of you.





# Dear Abuser

Iyoniah Teague

There are purplish welts on my skin.

Marks where you have

Bruised me

Broken me

And scarred me

Scars that can't be seen by the human eye, because they are buried deep inside my flesh.

Rotting me from the inside.

The fist that flies past my swollen mouth.

Isn't made of bone, blood, or even skin.

But by the violent intent of your words.

No words or opinions can slip past my swollen lips.

The force of your hits silences my oppositions against you.

More destructive than any physical hits you could give me.

You beat off the security of my clothing.

Exposing my vulnerable body to the cutting chill of your words.

Exposed to your name-calling and your shallow and hateful insults.

Fatty

Selfish

Whore

Names that leave me bloodied and battered.

You use my love and trust of you as an escape.

Knowing that when you laugh it off.

I will make excuses for me.

I would even forgive you.



But deep inside I'm bleeding out.

And the source of the wounds is the sharp edge of your words.

You are the only authority figure that I've ever knew.

The one that I have always looked up to.

But how come by looking up to you.

I look down upon myself.

In those hands of yours, you hold the ability to flourish or destroy my young mind.

My capacity to love, my confidence, and my future rest in the grasp of your hands

But you choose to beat your hatred into me,

Pummeling me

Leaving only fragmented, shattered pieces behind

and then you expect me to thank you.

Thank you for ensuring that I always believe that I was never enough because

I'm not skinny enough

Smart enough

And I'm not light enough for you

Thank you for the ugliness that I see reflected in my mirror

And the hatred and revulsion I feel when I see myself

Thank you for the suicidal thoughts that threaten to push me off the edge.

Thank you for tainting the image that I had of myself with your words that scream inside my head.

Thank you for the emotional and mental scars that stalk and hunt every ounce of confidence I have

Ripping it to shreds as blood gushes between the pieces of flesh that I try to hold together

That I try to make whole again

Thank you for the nightmares that plague my mind

Instead of dreams about my once beautiful future

I hear a familiar voice

A voice echoing the words

The words that I heard from you



*Death of the Opera Performer*

# CONTRIBUTORS

**Francisco Attié**, a graduating GLS senior and writer, was born in São Paulo, and digs films and music.

**Amanda Braitman** is a graduating senior in GLS. This magazine has been an incredibly valuable part of her experience at NYU, and she is glad to have had the opportunity to work so extensively on it. It was a labor of love that she looked forward to every Spring semester. She is sad that it is over, especially under these (viral) circumstances, but hopes this issue might bring the reader a moment of joy, connection, and contemplation.

**Michelle Cao** is a GLS junior who hails from the foothills of Virginia and has a variety of interests that span novel-writing, crocheting, baking, painting and hanging out with her dog. She likes to chronicle her various mental states through prose and poetry as a way to deal with the absurdity of her neuroses and also life in general.

**Srishti Gupta** won the Elaine Kuntz Freshman Composition Prize for this essay, which she wrote for Professor Dohrmann's class.

**Ashley Irizarry**, a nineteen-year-old poet from Staten Island, New York, has been writing poetry for almost six years, and has completed two manuscripts.

**Kim Johnson** is a GLS freshman from Southern California.

**Olivia Kassaei**, berlincitygirl, LS/Gallatin student, admirer, listener, steppenwolf. takes pictures sometimes. wild and familiar. can time travel.

**Anushka Lakhani** is a GLS freshman.

**Jikang Liu** used to be an aspiring artist. They once tried to shove their passion for the fine arts aside when they started studying business (gosh) of all things. But that futile attempt was over in less than three minutes. Now they pride themselves as an amateur doodler.

**Nicky Nenkov** is a junior in GLS from Bulgaria. They spend their time avoiding writing (unsuccessfully) and are known around the office as "eccentric," "esoteric," and "always here for some reason."

**Jazmine Nogueira** is a GLS Junior from Florida, forced to flee Berlin.

**Emily Schindler** is currently a sophomore studying English and creative writing. She was born and raised in New Jersey. She loves dogs, women writers, and drinking tea.

**Sarah Strohecker** is a Chicana woman, whose writing focuses on reconciling her ethnically mixed background and reconnecting to her heritage through activism and tradition.

**Iyoniah Teague**, from Greensboro, North Carolina, plans to transfer to CAS, majoring in English on the Creative Writing Track and minoring in Anthropology. She hopes that through her words she can bring awareness to other people's experiences and struggles.

**Bernard Vega III** was the runner-up for this year's Elaine Kuntz Freshman Composition Prize, for this essay, which he wrote for Professor Goldfin's class.

**Lingyun Zhu**, an LS freshman from China. Just a maniac doing that thing called art, and a little girl who dreams of something big. She views herself as a photographer, piano player, tap dancer, and yoga lover. She wants to be a bold, beautiful, and unapologetic womxn and to create worthwhile art to the world.



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