

# WEST 4TH

*STREET REVIEW*

SPR  
2023



NYU | LIBERAL STUDIES

# WEST 4TH

SPR  
2023

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# A Mercifully Brief Note

*from the Faculty Advisor & Editor*

As I was sitting down to work on pulling the *2023 West 4th Street Review* together, the news and social media memes were filled with reminders that it was **THREE YEARS AGO** that the Great Pandemic began. I am sure I am not alone in feeling that it could be ten years or ten minutes since everything changed—empty offices, empty streets, palpable panic.

The relentless passage of time is, of course, a lesson we all learn over and over. I remember my father telling me when I was 14 that as you got older time went by faster, and I thought **NO WAY**. But even fatuous youth cannot stay fatuous forever.

And as I looked over the many many submissions to this year's magazine, I was also reminded that art/writing/creativity are among the few human endeavors which can stop time, or at least arrest it, and that how we regard the moments of our lives—how we honor them, create based on them, turn them on their little heads—is how we make sense of both dreadful events like the pandemic and of exquisite moments like finding unexpected love and beauty even in sorrow.

And that sense of stopped time, of pulling back to see what has happened to us, of savoring even the bitter taste of regret, that is what I hope and believe can be found in the pages of this year's magazine. "Remembrance of a particular image is but regret for a particular moment," Proust reminds us. But turning that regret into something evocative, haunting, insightful, that is what our admirable student writers and artists are doing here.

Thanks to all who submitted, all who helped read and decide what was going into this year's edition, and to our stalwart design team. Thanks to colleague Emily Bauman for her work on the Elaine Kuntz Essay Competition; thanks to Leah Guarino and Billy Helton for administrative assistance. And thanks, as always to Dean Julie Mostov for her continued support of our literary efforts.

ONWARD!

Stephen Policoff  
Spring 2023

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

"Little Island" | Luke Williams





**WINNER OF ELAINE KUNTZ PRIZE** | "A Reclamation of Space and Socereignty" | Sara Sharma **01**

"This Is When I Wanted Everything" | Evin Williams **05**

"Certificates of Sanity" | Stacia Datskovska **06**

"Two Fairytales" | Sidney Jing **07**

"At First Glance" | Zoë Espinal **11**

"Immurement" | Prithvi Subrahmanyam **12**

"정" | Minha Choi **13**

"Hair in the Drain" | Ava Gehman **15**

"Windows" | Ashleigh Weigle **18**

"The Mast of Memory" | Antigone Aidonis **19**

"Coffee Stains" | Isabella Masone **21**

"Good for your Bones" | Elizabeth Lira **25**

"China Dolls Don't Sleep" | Chanel Pulido **27**

**RUNNER UP FOR ELAINE KUNTZ PRIZE** | "Against Church" | Chloe Rodriguez **29**





# A Reclamation of Space and Sovereignty

*Sara Sharma*

*What do you think of when you hear the word "space"? Is it an untenanted and non-corrupt darkness? Is it a fluid or unbound expanse with the capacity to hold anything and everything you acquire? Is it non colonized? Is it yours?*

Frontiers, peripheries, and boundaries denoted my best understanding of "space." And space denoted land—an understanding that was always demarcated, divisioned, and ultimately:

*Partitioned.*

Partitioned as a result of communal animosity, of ethnic cleansing, of a divide and rule policy shaped by colonialism, as I had been told. Within these unfamiliar lines, the notion of land was a concept that was foreign to me—unknown and non-native, because ultimately, it was bound; it was outlined by political tension and territorial hostility that I yearned to seek sovereignty over through the progression of time.

\*\*\*

Every nook and cranny of my household is aware of what is going to unfurl. There was no room for conundrums: every interstice of space and matter in our proximity must be purposeful. This was her land, and she ensured, with every fiber of her being, she had whole sovereignty over it.

My *Nani* (Maternal Grandmother) is preparing her *Aam Ka Aachar* (Pickled Mangoes). Certain people are only called upon, and if you were: consider yourself enlightened. Bowls locked away on the top shelves of our kitchen are brought down. Soon, they were sent back up; they weren't the right size nor the right kind. She demanded the ones that came with an inbuilt sieve towards the bottom end. An agglomeration of mustard seeds and turmeric powder is cautiously placed on the earthen ground and then transported away to some corner opposing the windward side. Our communal wall fabricated of grapevines could not conceal the blatant truth that we were indeed petty harbingers: we had seamlessly emptied the local spiceries in an effort to sort through the best produce. Raw mangoes are shielded away in my *Tauji's* (Father's Elder Brother) room on the top floor: the quintessential location for drying the fruit with maximum sunlight, away from the other pesky young cousins who are also developing their sweet tooth. I am, too, being a nuisance. I am yanking on my mother's long braid that pools perfectly at her knees when she sits. For the umpteenth time, I let my mother know of my desperation to understand why the process of preparing mango pickles was this fastidious (Frankly, the sweetened dried mangoes were only laudable. The pickles? Not nearly.)

My mother sighs, and she replies, "This is the only time we're going to bring this up. Before India became truly ours, your *Nani* lived in the land above—yes, Pakistan." She extends her hand toward mine. "She was forced to move from there because the British authorities separated people before they left." She is tracing a long, vertical line drawn at the centremost segment of my forearm. "So, your *Nani* being your *Nani*, she smuggled all her belongings—her clothes, some stone mortars, and some gold—in mason jars." She now retracts her hand from my skin. "Then, some bad men from the land above took everything from her—except one jar. So, *Nani* prays

every year and holds this ceremony to thank Lord Krishna for his protection, which is why you and your sister are here. Now, that is enough. Go and finish breakfast, and change into that white *Salwaar Kameez* (Traditional Indian Garment) I have bought for you. Now. "

My sister was reciting her lessons about the India-Pakistan Partition and how the two countries were divided when the *British Raaj* (British Rule) left the subcontinent. My knowledge of the matter ends there. She had to recite a speech by Prime Minister Nehru for her class, too. It was called Tryst with Destiny, and I helped her memorize it. I put on my *Salwaar Kameez*, and I replaced the gold earrings my Nani told me to keep safe. I did not want to match with my sister today, and anyway, the crocheted flower ones looked better.

*I have been taught that the Partition was a division. Of Nations, yes. But also— line. A long line of people. I was not allowed to speak about it. It was a line I couldn't cross.*

\*\*\*

"While some people were forced to move because of fear of death, others sought to escape shame and humiliation brought about by the abduction of women, rape, and forcible conversions. Once the Boundary Line became clear, the numbers of refugees crossing Punjab and moving out of the state intensified frighteningly quickly. Between August and November, 1947—a bare three months—as many as 673 refugee trains moved approximately 2,800,000 refugees within India and across the border." My teacher relayed a litany of tragedies and massacres that ensued over communal violence, highlighting key important dates and historical figures before we discussed our next lesson. My family is unaware I am taking this module, which amounted to fewer heated debates in my house. It truly doesn't help that I will need their permission to study high school level history next year. For now, I am grateful that our report cards are sent back home in a surreptitious little envelope sprawled across from our broken mailbox. Additionally, my hand at mimicking my mother's handwriting comes to mammoth aid when committing trivial forgery.

My *Tau* (a reference to your father's elder brother as per Indian culture) is hosting us for *Baisakhi* (a celebration of spring harvest) at his cottage in Amritsar (a city in the northwestern state of Punjab, India.) Marigolds and pansy petals are meticulously laid out to carve a passageway at the entrances of his large mahogany wooden door. Pools of wet soil and clay are intricately dug, impending a harvest of fruits. One handful of soil covering the cavity we have just carved intricately holds the Banyan seed that has been handed to me, while a series of Peepal trees outline the circumference of my *Tau's* garden. This pebble-lined pathway has dutifully served as a running ground to support our feet as we endured endless racing games. The trees have served as silent accomplices for when we needed a perfect cover to light stolen cigarettes. The communal wall of hydrangeas and grapevines intertwine to fabricate a shelter of sorts, a pied-a-terre for music that could only strum from hoarse voices and a tattered guitar. This garden, however, did come with its own unbeknownst stipulations, presented in the form of a barren area completely sectioned off. Forbidden and almost inconspicuous, my *Tau* catered to each fragment of Earth accessible in our family garden except this foreign, verboden piece of land.

"Why?" I ask my *Tau* blatantly. Ashy smoke rises from his hand-rolled Bidi (cut tobacco rolled in leaf or paper), thronging the air around us as the smell of tobacco reaches me. I demand a simple explanation in exchange for two small drags of his cigarette, and I meet his dithering glance with a shrug.

"If you look closely, there are remains of plants and fruits, some flora of some sorts. But, that land will remain untouchable—hey, that's more than two now. Good, cough. You won't get dependent then." I nudge him, but I know he's right. "Anyway, when communal rioting began around our area, not a soul and not a thing



was spared—plants and soil too. You open fruit and a stream of blood is poured out. Everything tangible and intangible was massacred."

The non licet ground seems just a little more unsanctioned. I am trying to be compassionate, yet also desperately try to expiate my viewpoint of how hostility is something that only grows and only nurtures. I am trying to establish a correlation between how the past affects us still in the present tense. I am trying to comprehend the degree of the past whilst delving into the political events of yesterday. I am trying with such great fervor to understand their reality, but *they*, too, do not understand mine.

*I now can see that The Partition is not just a line. It is also a boundary that I, alone, cannot permeate.*

\*\*\*

My mother is giving me her beloved typewriter for college, but she has now unfurled another tattered piece of metal equipment from the attic. Dust and gray particles circle surround us as if we're the sole two people in this tranquil continuum as we let ourselves be immersed in everything material memory has to offer in the context of our attic. She holds in her hands a battered down film camera: an Eight millimeter Olympus from 1940, still sitting pristine as ever in its hard-shelled case, A breathtaking piece of technology that will eternally remain priceless. My mother's lean fingers skim over the shutter, examining this Olympus' aperture as her inner child marvels at this rarity. She wears the strap of this instrument around her neck, utterly suffocated. The lens of this metal thing is splintered. Her fingers do not try to fondle the lens. She does not hold the instrument to her eyes; she does not relieve the button. I already know I am holding a device that captured the last few moments of my family before they were lost on "Death Trains." Khushwant Singh, in his novel Train To Pakistan, described these vehicles as, "Like all the trains, it was full. From the roof, legs dangled down the sides onto the doors and windows. The doors and windows were jammed with heads and arms." My mother has found the typewriter, as well, now, and we do not talk till we sorted through several other boxes. I think I understand *them* now, and I do not argue, but I am able to respect the gravity and trauma of the past while answering to the urgency of the present at a state of equilibrium.

*I knew that The Partition was an invasion of boundaries and a division of people; I now understand that it is an emotional segregation that works on the lines of balance between past and present coexistence.*

\*\*\*

Birthing from an array of painful arguments, a series of hurtful claims, a list of lopsided settlements, and several unanswered questions. A state of balance between *them* and *I* has now been found. Between the experiences of my elder family and mine, I have found grounding through a long drawn process of unlearning, relearning, listening and then explaining my stances. This equilibrium is accompanied with agony, anguish, doubt, and curiosity to be able to view something as personal as political perspectives from opposing lenses. Yet, this exhausting and meticulous process is imperative to be able to truly break down and then re-cement the words: space, land, and belonging. By retracing what was already demarcated to me as the best definition of "space," I am trying to find an understanding for conflicting opinions and viewpoints, acknowledge them as I make room for them mentally, while continuing to substantiate my opinions, even if that still implies heated political debates at the dinner table. An understanding of space and a sense of belonging is attained by scrutinizing what we believe is the truth. It comes from reassessing what we have been conditioned to and what we'd like to alter.

\*\*\*

I am now re-wearing my grandmother's inherited earrings once again as a reminder of empathy and as a note

to respect the past. I have now accepted the barren piece of land in my family garden as I walk past it without feeling unsanctioned as I attempt to find a balance between perspectives. I am now accompanying my mother to a camera store nearby as an attempt to fix our heirloom camera lens while reconciling our diametric differences. I am trying to discover and rediscover my understanding of belonging and space as I cement a novel foundation of land—a territory that for now remains rooted in my beliefs but uncharted in an attempt to listen and attempt to understand.



"Waterfall in the Andes" | Luke Williams

# This Is When I Wanted Everything

*Evin Williams*

I.

At the center of her was us.  
She died a few years before taking her last breath  
and I said to you  
please do not leave the same way.  
You called me untruthful and rotten.  
Ten years later, I cried while giving you the rest of my air.



II.

You weaved a polyester ribbon through my ribcage and held onto it.  
I only said that you could do it if it was made of silk (you said silk was too slick to grip).  
You never did listen,  
nor were you ever gentle.

Do you remember the girl who lived in the townhouses across from us?  
She told me to get away from you  
quickly but smoothly.  
I asked her why.  
She said that if someone wants to hold onto a piece of you (like a ribcage) that badly,  
they will rip you piece by piece until they possess all that was once yours.  
I didn't understand what she meant until you yanked the ribbon and took my lungs.



# Certificates of Sanity

*Stacia Datskovska*

once, i spent an entire day in bed. my mom went on a walk then  
and told me she prayed for me while watching a season turn.

which is to say she was afraid i might not climb out of  
my despair by summer. i also thought i might not  
and smiled.

my first panic attack was just me rolling around my parents'  
wooden patio, screaming  
at no one but the neighbors

who i was convinced were giggling, polishing their  
certificates of sanity on the mantle.

i wore my temporary mania like  
the opposite of a rabies tag.

“stay away, i’m feral,” it emphasized. “... but not forever,” it clarified.

a driver whose registration expired, i was biding my time until  
i had to join the world again.

something about having others pray for your betterment  
appealed to me so much

i delayed the getting better.

# Two Fairytales

*Sidney Jing*

My sister and I share a very hazy memory of a story told to us years ago. When both of us were so young that we didn't have homework on the weekends, our mother drove us to our grandparents' house every Friday afternoon and picked us up on the following Sunday. This night we were in the living room, situated by the front door. Our close proximity to this door unsettled us.

"What if a murderer comes in and murders us?" My sister poked the air mattress with her index finger.

"Nobody's gonna murder us," I responded, since the big sister was supposed to say things like that. But secretly, I thought it was a good question.

"I'm scared though," she protested. "Can you ask Grandma to tell us a story?"

"Why don't you ask since you're the one who wants a story?"

"Fine, I'll ask her." My sister turned to face Ba Ngoai. "Grandma, Sidney wants you to tell us a story." I huffed. What a dirty trick. "No Ba Ngoai, she's the one who wanted a story, not me!"

Ba Ngoai laughed. "Well, now you'll both get a story. How's that?"

That sounded pretty good to me. I really did want to hear a story, too. Ba Ngoai began to tell us the story of Cinderella. As soon as her audience identified it, we began to shake our heads. We didn't want Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty, those were boring. We wanted something we'd never heard before. Our Storyteller thought for a moment.

"Okay, are you ready?" A shuffle of blankets, the fluffing of pillows.

"Yes," we answered in sync.

The fairytale is a faint memory now; I can't read Vietnamese and I don't think it's been translated to English, but this is what I remember:

A man lived in a village, long before the French came. He was a farmer, and every week he sold his wares in a market past the mountain range.<sup>1</sup> One week, on the way to the market, the man walked past a cave that seemed illuminated from within. Curious, he followed the light into the cave. He walked and walked and walked, and the cave became narrower and narrower. But each time he turned to leave, the light tugged him towards it, so he continued.<sup>2</sup> When the cave was so small the man had to crawl on his hands and knees, the space opened into a cavern.<sup>3</sup> A beautiful fairy stepped into view and looked down upon the man.

*Welcome to my fairy kingdom, she greeted him. Would you like to join our party?*



"Salt of the Earth" | Luke Williams

- 
1. A Woman lived not in a village but a city, long after the French had warped it in their image. The Woman was the heiress to a grand hotel, and she lived a lavish life of chauffeurs and pet monkeys and delicious fruits.
  2. The Woman fled her home "right before the fall" of her city Saigon (quoted from the Family Story). She didn't want to leave; she was close to being a lawyer and her husband was already a doctor, but her home was falling.
  3. The Woman arrived in the Fairy Kingdom of America. She lived in a tent with her family, with other refugees from war. This was not yet home.
- 

"Wait!" My sister interrupted. I shushed her (how dare she interrupt the story?) and she glared at me before continuing. "Were the lights in the cave stars?"

Ba Ngoai shrugged. "Sure. Are you tired yet?"

We shook our heads. We were, but we cared more about the kingdom than sleep. Our Storyteller sighed and continued on.



The man said yes, because who doesn't want to party with fairies? The queen guided him to his feet and into the palace. There, he and the fairies dined and danced for three days and three nights. The man had never seen such extravagance, plates piled high with fruits he'd never seen, gossamer gowns that floated with the fairy dance.<sup>4</sup>

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4. The Woman gained a sponsor, a church in rural Nebraska. A real home, with warmth and a community. And snow.

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On the third night, a fairy told the man, *Congratulations on your marriage to the queen!*

The man was shocked. He was also flattered, but he was beginning to miss his family. He had a life at home, a wife and children and friends that probably missed him. Plus, maybe he could bring them to the fairy kingdom. They would definitely enjoy it. He brought his concerns to the queen.

*Sorry about the miscommunication, she began, but it might be too late for you to go home. We don't have to stay married, but you should know that the home you left is not the one you will return to.*

The man dismissed her comments. He knew his way home; he wouldn't get lost.

On the morning of the man's departure, the fairies gave him a bag full of food and gifts to bring home. He thanked them for their hospitality and ventured into the cave. The man ran through the cave, down the mountain, into the village, all the way home.

He knocked on the door of his house. It looked different from what he remembered, a new chair on the porch and flowers on the windowsill. An unfamiliar woman opened the door.

*Why are you in my house?* The man asked, too surprised to be polite.

The woman crossed her arms. *Yours? This is mine. Who are you?*

The man gave his name.

The woman shook her head. *That's not possible, that man's been dead for hundreds of years.*

*That's not possible. I was only gone for three days,* the man argued. He tried to look over the woman's shoulder to see inside the house, but he couldn't see anything familiar.

The woman shrugged. *I hope you find what you're looking for, but it isn't here.* She closed the door.

The man knocked on every door in the village, but no one was familiar. Even the houses were not what he remembered.<sup>5</sup> After knocking on the last door, the man gave up any hope of finding his family. Maybe he could go back to the fairies. Maybe he could still marry the queen.

He ran out of the village, up the mountain, into the cave. But the cave was just a cave. No glowing stars, no fairy kingdom. Just darkness and bats. The kingdom was gone.<sup>6</sup>

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5. The Woman tried to return to her city, but there was nothing familiar. Family and friends were gone. Her grand hotel was ruined; the communists tried to take it, but they “ran it into the ground” (quoted from the Family Story). Even the name of her home was different: Ho Chi Minh City.

6. The Woman had left her first home, but she was able to return to her Fairy Kingdom of Nebraska. So, she did.

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Ba Ngoai clapped her hands. “The end. Are you tired yet? It’s almost 9:30.”

To us, 9:30 might as well have been midnight, but we sat straight up anyways. There were questions to be asked. “Why didn’t he stay with the queen?” “What happened to his family?” “Why didn’t someone tell him he was getting married?”

Our Storyteller took the rapid-fire questions in stride. “He didn’t stay with the queen because he missed his family.” “His whole family died.” “Someone dropped the ball on the whole telling him it was a wedding thing.”

My sister and I nodded wisely. Someone indeed had dropped the ball.

Finally after our curiosity was sated, I was ready to sleep. My sister laid awake beside me.

“Sidney?” She whispered into the dark. “Did that actually happen?”

I rolled my eyes even though she couldn’t see. “No. Duh. Go to sleep.”

The Woman, Ba Ngoai, might have made the story up on the spot. Maybe it truly is her story. I could pick up the phone and ask any time, but wouldn’t that ruin the magic?

# At First Glance

*Zoë Espinal*

Soft shines of innocence lie quietly like flowing water.  
From the void come dreams so rich,  
dreams of a land where swans swim low, and doves fly high.  
A scene of joy frozen in time.  
You, child, torn between compassion and mischief,  
the warmth of spring flourishes in your embrace.  
Eminent one hear me so,  
Grant me pleasure not pain,  
For warmth is all I seek, warmth is all I desire.  
Silence fills the atmosphere,  
delicate steps and tiptoes.  
Only a breath, a hushed murmur of the wheart echoes through the air,  
from the skies a voice speaks out  
“Don’t wake the beast  
For wrath will come  
And plunder, and bash  
As the world comes undone!”  
Through my body these words thud  
humming a melancholy tune,  
what is to happen when the beast has arisen?  
A monster hides in purity and tenderness,  
captivated by slumber.  
Keep dear to mind, this vision of tranquility,  
for what you desire might come one day,  
so stay in goodwill with the winged one they say...



"Evening Grass" | Claire Gartner



# Immurement

*Prithvi Subrahmanyam*

I stare  
for hours, day upon day,  
at the empty walls,  
eggshell and covered in plaster,  
cracked and peeling  
like charred skin.

Every mark, every scuff, every stain  
is a scar,  
a reminder of the time  
that has passed  
within this four-by-four box.

The ornate chandelier throws  
shadows in six directions,  
its six fluorescent bulbs  
beat down on me,  
sap me of my energy.

The shadows stretch  
into eternity,  
afraid of the total annihilation  
that the light brings.

Vestal virgin, broken vow.  
I cannot lie  
and say that I have anybody  
to blame  
but myself.

The silence is deafening,  
thoughts drill into my skull  
from every direction.  
There is no escape,  
no salvation,  
from the confines of my own mind.

At first  
you think you'll be okay.  
You believe that

this too shall pass.  
But eventually you'll realize

you're not as strong as you think you are.  
You don't have the willpower,  
the drive  
to break down the wall  
that's being constructed in front of you.

Brick  
by brick  
by brick.

You are powerless.  
You do nothing but watch.  
Mouth agape, you make no sound.  
Your screams are lost in the abyss.

You can try clawing your way out,  
cracked nails caked with dirt and dust,  
but brick and cement don't give up as easily as you do.

You can hold out hope,  
make up scenarios where somebody comes to save you  
from your fate.  
But, in reality,  
they'll all continue their lives on the other side of that wall.

Alas,  
all this thought  
and speculation  
tires me.

My chains grow heavier and heavier,  
as do my eyelids.

The days without food or water have taken their toll.

I only pray that one day  
some poor sap,  
renovating his house  
500 odd years down the road,  
stumbles upon whatever remains of me  
and reads my story.

# 정

*Minha Choi*

## I.

정 (Jung)

According to Google Translate, 정 translates to the English word “affection.”  
According to me, this is the grossest, most watered down version of what 정 could mean.  
Affection is something you can control; 정, you cannot.

We Koreans throw around the word 정 a lot.  
As a sentence, we say, 정들었다. The phrase is said in the same way we would describe a ghost that has taken possession of a body.  
Which is to say, 정 isn't something you have, but something that possesses you.

정 is something you should fear.  
Because to us Koreans, the scariest thing that can possess you is 정.  
Once it possesses you, it never leaves.  
It overflows.

## II.

My mom used to always say to me: 너는 정이 너무 많아. You have too much 정.

And she's right: I am no stranger to 정. I've seen it in my parents' eyes when they discuss what they'll have for dinner everyday. I've seen it in my Mom when she could call my Dad everyday when he was in Korea for work. How she would smile warmly when he came back. I've seen it in my Dad when he held my Mom's hands once in a while. How he would hold them so tightly, as if checking to see if she was still there.

But 정 isn't always affectionate. Which is something I learned on the days my parents fought. How my Dad would stay in the living room, while my Mom in their bedroom. The silence would be cold, and on those days I'd stay in my room.

But the one time I didn't, I saw my mom crying while sitting on the floor next to the bed. I quietly crouched down next to her, and asked: Mom, why do you stay with someone who makes you cry?

She scoffed at me, as if the answer to that question was obvious. She said: 미운정이지 뭐.

To think that the words hate and 정 could exist together confused me. I was too young to understand that too much 정 already flowed into my mother's heart, with nowhere for her to empty its contents elsewhere. Which is to say, she was possessed.

## III.

Sometimes, when I hold her hands the way my Dad holds my Mom's, I think of what my Mom said to me: 너는 정이 너무 많아. You have too much 정.

Looking back, I think that was my Mom's way of saying to me: Don't let 정 possess you.

And she was right to warn me. Because when I look at her, I understand now that over the years 정 had slowly flowed from her heart to mine. And then it possessed me, and then it consumed me, and now my heart overflows. Too much of that 정 had flown into my heart, with nowhere for me to empty its contents elsewhere.

Because when I look at her, all I can think about is the night that I kissed her for the first time. It brought me back to all the times I've fought with her. All the times we were apart from each other. All the hurtful words I've poured into her heart. All those nights spent as the 정 in me mourned, begging me to bring her back.

How everytime we fell apart, 정 would drag me back to her over and over again.

The first time she told me I was beautiful. Every letter she sent me. Every letter I sent her. And how every minute spent with her, I used to imagine us in the future. Every text. Every phone call. Every moment spent apart.

And then realizing, every time I look at her now, I know.

정들었구나. I'm possessed.



# Hair in the Drain

*Ava Gebman*

## I

Janice tells me it's better to talk about things. Do not hide, embrace and feel. She says, *you should work harder to fill up the hour. It's lucky you aren't paying for this.* I know she wanted me to join her in laughter. She thinks we have that kind of relationship. I only laugh at her misunderstanding. *She tells me, getting clean isn't easy, but you are more than capable.* This makes me not even want to try. She thinks she can help me, but I know she can't. She thinks I don't have a choice in this. I know I can do it whenever I want, soap down and wash it all away. I have the power to change. It's just not my time yet.

## II

6 a.m. and late for school.  
You look at it.  
The blue curtain,  
chipped white tiles,  
almond soap,  
shiny silver head.  
You can only recall bad times.  
You can't get into it.  
Both feet still.  
Toes squirming around,  
wanting freedom from the cushioned mat beneath them.  
When memories turn physical,  
they want to hurt you.  
They like it.  
Father and Uncle and what they did so many years ago.

## III

Hair drenched, covering her naked, stretched out body. Standing there, Mother thinks:

*I was made for this.  
A girl mean and never wanting to share.  
I punched the teacher when she annoyed me. Laughed afterward, too.  
I stayed mean, nobody ever knew. Uninterested in my own daughter. I wish I hadn't made the mistake. I see myself in her. I should have taken care of it when I had the chance. I grew up  
mean  
and ugly and flat and without an index finger. Never could get a grip. Should have just cut them all off. I am  
violent and angry.  
I wish I was nice.  
I wish not to be woman anymore.*

She turns the water to freezing, lets it run down her back.

#### IV

Crystallizing in the womb of her, my favorite leather jacket along with me. Bones burst from a seed, encased by pale skin. Limbs float around then become attached. I develop. Fingers grow at a slower pace. Drawing a breath, it has nowhere to go. Air bubbles get caught, making space in thick liquid. I can move my eyes. Left and right only. I cannot look down to see what's in between. At this point, Janice, I am unknown to myself. That is how it all started.

*No, Marina. I'm sorry. I am so glad you came in today, but I am wondering about the emotions you've been feeling lately. How did they all start?*

She gets angry at me, not realizing I am part of her.

#### V

7:30 pm. 10 years ago. You are in your fuzzy white bathrobe, pink cat ears perked on the hood. There is no *ocean* drawn for you today. *Mommy, where is all the water?* She tells you, you've reached that age. But you ask her again and then some more times, *where is my ocean?* She tells you, it's time to grow up.

#### VI

Hi, Grandma. I'm sorry I may have to call you back. I am in the shower right now. No, please, just stick your head outside the curtain and talk to me. It's been so long since we last spoke. I miss you.

Yeah I know, I'm sorry. I've been so busy with school and stuff this month. How are you? Remember the man who ran the Nabisco Store down the block? On the corner of 1st and Penn? Mr. Jones? He passed away last night.

Oh no. I'm so sorry Grandma. That's so sad.

But you remember him right?

No, I don't think so. *I do remember.*

Yes, you do. He was the older gentleman who you spent so much time with as a little girl, whenever I brought you in to work with me. He would always ask for you whenever you weren't there. Remember? He would demand to see you. To come to his office and look at things. You never spoke much on the way back home though, after my shift ended. I guess you both just talked so much, you didn't have any words left for me. And you always looked kind of sad too, afterward. I guess you didn't have any smiles left either. He loved you so much. It's such a shame, losing someone like him without even saying goodbye.

#### VII

Showering is of monstrous descent. Ugly and Frightening. You choose it only when those around you are sick with worry: the moment before calling the law. Then you consent. Mother strips you, carries you in. Places you on the tiled floor next to the drain, only able to feel the water hit your head and do nothing about it.

## VIII

7:35 pm. 10 years ago. *It's raining inside, mommy. Why is it happening? I'm scared.* The drops like razors. Forcibly shedding your skin. Worried you'll leave the bathroom with half the hair you entered with. Then the other girls will have a reason to make fun of you. She told you, hurry up and stop all that complaining. No need to waste more of my time.

## XI

She gets angry at me not realizing I am a part of her. I do my homework at the island next to the stove. I check if the pasta is ready in between math problems. She comes home slamming the door and whipping off her heels. I smell her cigarette before witnessing her face. It pinches my nose, I can't breathe. My name exits her mouth in a howl as she heads toward the liquor cabinet. She used to be a woman who taught tomato seminars at the local library. She grew them in the garden until she turned cold. My body, the victim of her escapism.

## X

1. Get undressed, don't look at yourself in the mirror. Avert your eyes when the reflection creeps about.
2. Step in, change the water temperature. Hot, cold, too cold, a little warmer.
3. Have someone join you, in thought or in reality. If there is even another person to call.
4. Have them please you, however you wish to be pleased.
5. Wash up afterward.
6. Finish, then get out. As fast as you can. No thinking. No waiting until the right moment. Get out and shut the curtain behind you.
7. Leave that hair in the drain for another time.



# Windows

*Asleigh Weigle*

Across from my window there is another. It's three floors down so you have to squint. But I can see through my blurry vision, a woman. She's doing woman things like effortlessly flipping through the pages of a book. From here the pages look blank. I fill them in my mind with a juicy romance scene that is the highlight of her night. *I wonder what actually is.*

She gets up sometimes, naturally. But without fail when she returns, the couch is met with a heavy flump. She sighs, at least I imagine she does. You can't tell from here.

I watch her and I start to think how divinely feminine she is simply in her being. Her delicate fingers. The graceful get up. The not-so graceful sit down. I could totally see her tucking a strand of hair behind her ear, or sneezing the way you think a princess might.

I also start to think she would probably see me as a creep. A weirdo who watches her and her routine through two glass panels and about 300 feet of space. I don't know exactly. My depth perception is terrible.

The difference between me and Susan, that's what I've named her, is that if I found out someone had been watching me, admiring the femininity I didn't know existed, I would feel a guilty pang of excitement. I would feel special. That's messed up of me, isn't it. Because in all actuality it is creepy.

How do I get there? Into that apartment. Holding that book and flipping through its pages. How do I become the watched instead of the watching?

There's a second window too. Of course there is, we're in New York. But this one is to the left and two floors above Susan's. And this one is nice. It has a terrace. Every so often you can see a blinding white light, a small glowing dot. It glares right at me.



I think artists live there. It's draped in tarps and the overall vibe is very hipster, at least from what I can tell. The light is probably a tripod, or some sort of state-of-the-art technology I know nothing about and don't care to. My brain tells me the light is a camera, peering straight through my window. I look at it obsessively, as if something will give away that it is looking right back at me. But I always make sure I look pretty when I do it, just in case. I wish I didn't do that. I wish I was Susan.

# Το κατάρτι της μνήμης

*Αντιγόνη Αϊδόνη*

Χρυσοπράσινο

φύλλο της ελιάς.

Γλυκιά αμύρα

της θάλασσας.

Η ταξιδιάρικη ψυχή μου

σας νοσταλγεί,

την ώρα που

το βαθύ κατάρτι της μνήμης

βυθίζεται

στα γαλανά νερά

του Αιγαίου.





## The mast of memory

*Antigone Aidonis*

Golden-green

leaf of the olive tree.

Sweet saltiness

of the sea.

My traveling soul

longs for you,

the moment that

the deep mast of memory

sinks

In the blue waters

of the Aegean Sea.

Luke Williams



# Coffee Stains

*Isabella Masone*

Rain was coming down in sheets, pouring onto the sidewalk and overflowing into the street drains. I watched the road for my Uber from inside the lobby, my shoes still wet from being out a couple hours earlier. It was a Thursday and, out of boredom, on a last-minute invite, I was going to see some guy I'd met the week before at this campy college bar in Chelsea. *La Grenouille*, it was called. The car pulled up at the curb on the other side of the road. There was no doorman tonight. I pushed open the door and raced across the street, my poorly bleached hair frizzing up in the dampness of the night.

*La Grenouille* was hidden under a scaffolding, in the middle of the block. Paper lanterns were strung up on the outside around the main entrance. Close to the front, around a table, I noticed my roommate and a couple of her friends sipping beers. I turned my back to them when I walked in hoping they wouldn't notice me. I flashed the bouncer my grossly fake ID then pushed my way past the initial crowd to a room in the back decorated with strange psychedelic paintings.

"I wonder who buys these sorts of things."

I whisked around. There he was, already sitting, taking quick sips out of a drink in a highball glass. His name was Jonathan, but he went by Jack. That's what he told me last week anyway. Jack had on a large grey overcoat, wearing a prickly looking sweater beneath it.

"Probably the nouveau riche," I smiled. "It screams I have money and no taste."

He moved over and motioned for me to sit beside him on the sofa. I dropped my little Canal Street baguette bag down first, then sat and picked up the menu.

"There aren't any drinks on here."

"Don't worry about that," he grabbed the menu from out of my hands. "You can order whatever you want here, they don't make specialised drinks."

"Oh," I replied, half-startled.

He flagged down the waitress.

"I don't usually order cocktails," I continued. "I wouldn't know what to get."

"Another round of gin and tonic and a cosmo," he told the waitress, handing her his now empty highball glass. He turned to me, grinning: "You'll like it, it's sweet."

The cosmo came in a larger than normal martini glass, an orange slice fixed onto the edge of it. I picked it up slowly, nervously bringing the glass to my lips. Why was it that every time I had to hold a martini glass, my arms suddenly turned to jelly?

“So, what do you think?”

I hadn't tasted it yet but shook my head in approval, nonetheless. I shrugged off my coat and leaned back into the sofa, watching people stream by us in groups, hopelessly searching for a free table. The place was surprisingly packed, mostly with college students who seemed to be pre-gaming the weekend ahead of them. The cosmo was sweet, almost too sweet. It tasted like the prelude to a nasty hangover, only slightly bitter with its sour touch of lime. I drank it all anyway, fast because I felt too sober, and slumped forward over the little glass coffee table, suddenly tickled with a wave of giddiness.

“Do you like cats?” he asked.

“What?” I moved my head closer to him so I could better hear what he was saying but he took it as an incentive to wrap his arm around my shoulder. I bit my tongue and slouched.

“I have two kittens at home, Cointreau and Cranberry.”

“Oh, that's cute,” I mumbled. He showed me a picture of them intertwined and asleep on a plush comforter. The one with the white stripes reminded me of my own childhood cat who'd passed away shortly after we'd found him. He had the same two dots over his lips too.

“I could take you to see them in person if you want. I only live about a couple blocks from here.”

It was a self-sabotaging sort of idea, but I followed him out of the bar without saying a word, combing a stiff hand through my hair, expecting it to feel stringy. The dark wet road glittered under the reflection of the moonlight. It wasn't raining anymore but you could still feel a spray of mist slowly wash over your skin like brisk layers of morning dew. Chelsea was a quiet neighbourhood compared to my own. It was only one in the morning and yet, not a single car had driven past us. Besides a few drunk girls who were loudly planning out the rest of their night by the deli, there weren't even that many people outside.

Jack's building sat on a corner beside a parking lot filled with abandoned shopping carts and rusting cars. The door leading into the mail room was already propped open, just past it was the stairwell. He led me up four flights of stairs then, stopping in front of a door with the number seven painted big and in bold on the front, gave me an apologetic stare.

The apartment smelled of cat litter and smoke. I kicked off my Converse in the living room and walked over to the potted plant by the kitchen. Cat shit, in the dirt. Standing out in the hall, door shut, you couldn't smell a thing. No one could guess the filth that this man bathed in on the daily. The bedroom was worse. Cigarette butts and ash stained the floor, dirty laundry hid the sofa that pressed against the wall, coins and old poker chips were loosely scattered along the bottom of open drawers. The closet door was off its hinges, the mirror inside of it already chipped, the bedspread was falling off the mattress, now brown and pink more than white. I pointed to different spots on the sheets and Jack would tell me what they were: “that's a hot sauce stain,” “that's blood,” “that's soy sauce,” “that's last month's milkshake.” I peeked under the bed; there were two televisions, more dirty laundry, some Ziplock bags, a shattered bong, cat toys, soda cans, beer cans, hardened cloth rags, scraps of toilet paper, an ashtray, some engineering textbooks, a faded orange keyboard and an empty box of Skyns that had been stuffed with wads of cash.

“Sorry about the mess, I didn’t really expect to have anyone over,” he muttered, picking up an empty cereal box from off the middle of the bed. He chucked it across the room, it smacked against the wall then landed with a thud in his half-open closet.

I told him it was alright, but I was silently horrified. Glancing down, I noticed the white striped cat scurrying past me to dig out a toy from under the bed.

“Oh, that’s Cointreau,” Jack exclaimed, picking up the cat and holding him out for me to pet. Cointreau didn’t seem to like being held, he thrashed back and forth in Jack’s arms until Jack finally let him drop onto the bed from where he scurried off and out the door.

“Do you like Sex and the City?” He reached over his bed frame and pressed a few buttons on this unsecured white projector. It suspended over our heads threateningly. I stayed on the edge of the bed; afraid the projector would fall and knock me out.

“Sure, yea,” I replied. I’d binge watched the show with my girlfriends in high school before our annual trip to New York, but we couldn’t even get through the first season without dreading the poor development of Carrie’s character.

The projector displayed a wall-sized projection of Samantha undressing in a firehouse, I was beginning to sober up out of my tipsy daze. The other cat, Cranberry, hopped up onto the bed and burrowed under the sheets by my feet. She was smaller than her brother, but apparently older. She was also a lot more playful than he was. I could feel her claws batting at my foot from the other side of the blanket. It didn’t hurt, I actually thought it was kind of funny and even kicked my foot around a bit for amusement’s sake.

I was beginning to feel the onset of a migraine when Cranberry eventually gave up the hunt, so I desperately searched my purse for ibuprofen and realised that I had taken the rest of them last weekend after a party at The Sutton. I had never bothered replacing them because, at the time, I was entirely convinced I would never drink again. A repeated mistaken assumption. I sighed, exasperated.

The neighbour’s kitchen light poured into Jack’s bedroom through his balcony window which, of course, had no shades or blinds. It made the room feel warm, like the ample glow on the inside of an oven when it’s turned on. Forced to give up my search for the pills, I tossed my purse to the side, ignoring its docking site. Then, I pretended to be asleep so that Jack would stop trying to talk to me about the dynamics of computer science and Python coding. He didn’t seem to notice at first, when he did, he poked my ribcage and kissed me on the cheek. My eyes stayed shut. He finally resorted to plugging my nose and mouth which eventually forced me to open my eyes again.

“Do you want to have sex?”

He seemed overly eager, and it made me cringe. But then the thought of my ex probably making out with some sorority girl back home at the state college popped into my mind and I became livid. It was almost winter, and I hadn’t slept with anyone since our breakup this summer.

“Ok.”

I wasn't sure why I had said yes because I didn't fully mean it. But I let it happen anyway and stared up at the yellowed ceiling tiles all the while. There was one brownish tile where it looked like someone had tossed up a jug of mixed watercolour paint, or maybe tea. I never understood how those sorts of stains got there in the first place. They were all over the ceilings at my old elementary school too. I used to call them coffee stains and would picture my teacher tossing her old coffee filters up at the ceiling like the boys did with wet paper towels in the bathroom. The show was still playing in the background, when I tilted my head to the side I could see Jack's figure casting a shadow in the centre of the image, splitting Mr. Big's face in half. I looked back up at the ceiling, watching the coffee stain as if it would somehow move if I stared at it long enough, then remembered that I had forgotten to call back Lee about getting an interview for that barista job uptown.

The whole ordeal was over pretty quickly. I picked up a box of tissues on Jack's nightstand and wiped my stomach clean. All I wanted was to go home and rinse off in the shower. I felt sticky and infected both from the terrible weather and the equally terrible sex.

"Wow. That was, you were amazing," he puffed. "Did you like it?"

I smiled at him sarcastically and slipped my jeans back on, walking away to rummage for my jacket through the hill of laundry on the sofa. Truthfully, I thought I'd feel better about myself if I went on this date but somehow, I felt lonelier and even wearier than before. Jack gave me a hug and tried convincing me to spend the rest of the night with him, but I stepped back outside into the cold and began my long walk of shame back into the Village. I stopped for coffee on the way, the shitty kind the deli makes. It was the only place that was open this early on a Friday morning. I sat down and drank it on the curb by my building, watching my hot breath appear in the frozen air like little clouds of white smoke.

# Good for your Bones

*Elizabeth Lira*

I want you to know that I've longed to see you cry [in fact, it's been a wish of mine for years]. I wanted to see your eyes turn red and your deep voice crack. Wanted to hear the sentence "In this deep story about my personal life...." trail off suddenly with an air of incredulity; you'll ask yourself, *Am I fucking crying?* But the question will come too late, and the greater forces of nature would already set in motion the opening of the so-called "waterworks" [he'll probably just shed a tear, but that will be enough for me]. I'll stare at you with a mouth slightly agape and saucer eyes [that he gave me, after all]. I'll think, *What do I do?* In the end, I wouldn't do anything. I won't console you [he would shake me off, he won't need my pity], I'd probably give you a half-assed hug that was deliberately half-assed. Half-assed affection after all translates to the greatest acts of love. Picture our love language: frail arms in a lazy hug, a mention of "I love you" so quickly you don't believe you heard the words. Our love lies upon the shaky foundations of the possibility of full-fledged love. We know the potent love is there, but there is something preventing us from crossing the "I don't know what I would do without you" threshold.

I want you to know that I want to see you fall apart. I long to see you briefly collapse just once because when you collapse you become human. It's a chain reaction, a complicated equation with a single variable: when your time to cry will come. The equation will be set equal to a personal and deeper understanding of you. For now, and in the foreseeable future, this will remain clouded by bad conversation over dinner and painfully terse goodnights. But when you cry, it all will fall into place.

I want you to know that I'm not the only one who wants to see you fall apart. In the car rides to kindergarten mom would expose you. Twin and I will ask when the last time mom saw you cry was. In all honesty, she would expose your darkest secret in an elaborate story that Twin and I longed to hear over and over again. This was our primary form of entertainment. It was such an anomaly, such a mind-boggling thing to realize: you have cried before. The tears were a part of a cliché [when my brother, the oldest, was born], but this story made me hang on to the belief that my day with your tears will come.

I want you to know that I hate stoicism. What I hate even more is Machismo [for some reason both have become synonymous in my mind with equal toxicity]. Either way, I loathe them both. Especially seeing them in your far-off tone asking about my day. Or you calling me sweetheart. Or you explaining what you ate for lunch at the office [the answer is almost always that he didn't have time to eat]. The Machismo / Stoicism comes out especially with your infamous refrain, "crying doesn't solve anything."

I want you to know that you, dad, are sorrily mistaken. Crying solves everything. Crying is good for you like the two percent milk is apparently "good for your bones." Crying is what takes the tonnage from work, family, lack of family off your shoulders. Crying is a necessity you've deprived yourself of, and now I want nothing more than to see the tears stroking your chin, the need finally met.



I want you to know that I see the fight or flight behind your eyes when *I* cry [it's hard not to with his rigid stance, slow glance at mom almost to say what's the protocol?] Uncomfortableness fills the air and rises to a level equivalent to silent panic. If the timing wasn't inappropriate, we would burst into uncontrollable laughter. We would clutch our stomachs, roll on the kitchen floor. The whole situation could be comical. You've learned to console from this awkward nonchalance. A glance is all you'll give me.

But I want you to know that a glance is all I'll give you. It won't turn into a big ordeal at the moment, although I will never be able to forget it later. I'll furrow my brows as if I'm seeing human emotion for the first time. If you had cried any harder I would pretend to roll my eyes. This acknowledgment is all you need.

I want you to know that I would want to do more: hurt whoever made you cry, give you a hug. Maybe even tell you how much you mean to me. But acknowledgment is all you would want or need. So, acknowledgment is all you'll get.



# China Dolls Don't Sleep

Chanel Pulido

When I am so small Agong's arms hoist me up onto the bike seat, it's twenty past three and the children are squealing and running to get a

taste of the one-yuan milk-flavored popsicles. Agong sees temptation in my eyes, chuckles, and hands me two yuan, one for

me and one for my baby sister, who stumbles over to him from behind and tugs at his pant leg, asserting that

she is there. In the elevator, Agong smiles warmly. He enlightens us with his secrets for a happy life, the simple life he wanted

for us. *Eating, pooping, sleeping, growing.* Tomorrow he will tell us his mantra over again. *Eliminate*

*your worries and go back to bed, my sheng nu er. It is easy to overcome jet lag if you think you can.* When I was

a girl, I believed that I could fall asleep with sheer will. Now, I'm a complete insomniac. *Yeah, I'll get more sleep,* but I don't really

know how to stop the crying when March 16 plays over and over again. Bad people hurt girls, even in groups, Agong warned. *I'm only out during the day,*

I lied, knowing he would lecture me for hours if I told him I walk alone in the city at night, watching him

in my peripheral vision, heart beating when he crosses the street, and flinching when he pivots right behind me. I hate to do this,

to "let it affect me," to be "paranoid," to generalize. But if it is a generalization to fear every white man that gets too close, what

is it when a white man sees me as China doll/geisha/seductive masseuse he can't stand? I can't stand it. So this is what I did.



"Patterns and Cycles" | Claire Gartner



## Against Church

*Chloe Rodriguez*

This is not a commentary about God. Nor is it a commentary about Jesus and the Holy Ghost. This is not a commentary about love, kindness, peace, forgiveness, or anything practiced and preached in the Bible. Nor is it a commentary about Christianity as religion itself. This is not about Christians as people, American or not. This is not about the many interpretations of the gospels and which one is probably true. This is not about the validity of a higher power. Not about that girl you knew in high school who would spend Saturday nights partying and Sunday mornings worshipping. Not about your parents that would yell at you to get ready for church and then nod in agreement when the pastor says something about treating others with kindness. Not about the families who would only bother to show up on Christmas Eve or Easter or any other slightly important Christian holiday. Not about your greasy, old bishop that asked you about masturbation. Not about the wars declared in the name of Christianity's God. Not about hatred in the name of Christ. Not about hypocrisy. Not about racism. Not about homophobia. Not about transphobia. Discrimination. Hoarding wealth. Fearmongering. Bigotry. Typology. Misogyny. Scandals. Politics. Terrorism.

Rather, this is a commentary about power. This is a commentary about how higher-ranking church members abuse power. This is about the culture of abuse created in church by those who are closer to God.

### **/EXILE**

Of war and the regime which holds child abuse constant, sings Shuhada Sadaqat. That beneath the papal mantle hides a shivering boy with eyes of fear and skin of silence. The close-mouthed children suffering through faith, questioning their pain, and praying for forgiveness. Help me sing this song.

It was Saturday October 3rd, 1992 when Shuhada Sadaqat sang against the abuse within the Roman Catholic church. Perhaps the first of her kind. When she was just known as Sinèad O'Connor and acting as the musical guest on *Saturday Night Live*. Performing an a cappella cover of "War" by Bob Marley and The Wailers with a sure shift in lyrics.

"Everywhere is war," she sang, "until the ignoble and unhappy regime which holds all of us through child abuse.. Has been toppled/utterly destroyed" ("Tim Robbins"). She sang of how we will never know peace until we fight for the sake of children. That this fight is necessary, not optional. That we know we will win.

In her closing lines she sang, "we have confidence in the victory of good over evil." She held up a photo of Pope John Paul II and tore it to shreds.

She sang, "fight the real enemy" ("Tim Robbins"). The crowd was silent.

## **/HOMECOMING**

I stopped going to church regularly on Sunday August 22nd, 2021, the same day I turned 18, not because I wanted to but because I was busy packing for college. And I would continue to be “busy” every Sunday after that. Still, I would regularly pray every morning when I awoke and every night before I fell asleep. Still, I would tell myself that my relationship with Christ was the same regardless of my church attendance. Still, I fell. One day I found myself so far removed from Christ that I decided I had to return to church.

I decided that the faith I have in my religion was entirely dependent upon participation. That my beliefs are solidified through the recitation of the gospel and prayers. My relationship and remembrance of Christ was only possible with the consumption of bread and wine, the body and blood of Him: the receipt of the Holy communion. I had decided that there was no distinction between religion and church.

I remember sobbing through the entire service. I wasn't alone. A middle aged man in the pew across from me struggled to catch his breath between cries. I've seen him every Sunday since. I wondered how church could cause so much pain from attending, so much guilt from not attending, and so much sorrow from returning. I wondered how something so inherently good could also cause so much pain. I wondered how many people have suffered at the hands of their church.

Still, I was bold to say...

## **/1PROPHETS**

It would be another decade before anybody understood what Sinèad O'Connor was singing. When reports of abuse would finally reach the public. A decade before anybody would know about widespread church abuse. Before anybody would even begin to accept it.

The movement against church would begin in Boston with a scathing article published in the Spotlight section of *The Boston Globe*. The article followed former Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston priest John Geoghan as he prepared for trial on multiple sexual molestation charges in 2002. Over 130 individuals had reported that Geoghan had sexually assaulted them while he served in six different parishes. Most of his victims were just school boys. Boys who believed these acts were confessional; instructed to keep quiet. One was only four years old (Rezendes).

Geoghan was first ordained in 1962; based on Church documents, it is evident that he began abusing children as early as then. While working alongside Geoghan, former priest Anthony Benzevich reported this abuse to higher-ranking church members. Upon articles first being released about Geoghan's abuse, Benzevich recalled Geoghan taking children into his rectory bedroom, often “wrestling” with them and dressing them in “priest's attire.” He also reported that officials threatened to reassign him to South America for speaking out though this statement was later contradicted by Benzevich in October 2000 during a pre-trial deposition—; while under oath. Geoghan was later reassigned to a different parish in 1966; his new assignment only lasted seven months (Rezendes).

In the midst of his third assignment, a man accused Geoghan of molesting his son. Geoghan was sent to an institution by the church to treat his pedophilia. This cycle of reassignment, accusation, and counseling continued in the Archdiocese of Boston for another three parishes. He remained in parish duty until 1993. He wasn't defrocked until 1998 (Rezendes).



## **/GOSPELS**

Elder Ellsworth gave his farewell address two weeks before my 18th birthday. He was about to start his missionary training in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Learning to speak Spanish. Preparing for the next two years in Argentina. Devoting his life to the Lord. Leaving all his personal relationships behind. Something he had always dreamed of doing.

Perhaps the only things I remember about the church itself was how white Jesus looked in the paintings on the walls or how musty it smelled. Or the eerie feeling of familiarity within the walls of the vaguely unfamiliar. I was probably the only non-member there; Elder Ellsworth's last chance to get a stranger to accept the gospel before he was doing it full time. I don't think I felt uncomfortable once. I felt fine.

I thought back to all the other short memories I had at that church. All just distant photographs longing to be touched again. Pickup games of basketball in the parking lot when the gym door got jammed. School exams or standardized tests and joking that God would give me all the right answers. Running across the street to my actual church after getting the perfect Sunday best photo for the church moms' Facebooks. Four years earlier when Elder Ellsworth's older brother was giving *his* farewell address.

The downside of being the only non-member was that I was the only one crying. The only one not used to sending someone off for two years of uncertainty. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh," says the gospels according to Luke (*Holy Bible*, Luke 6.21). Which is a nice thought till one realizes how many tears you have to shed before you start to feel better. Before one finds themselves in the middle of the ocean wondering where God is. Elder Ellsworth hoped my future was more than everything I've ever wanted.

Hope. What a dangerous thing to have.

## **/2PROPHETS**

Journalists in the Spotlight team at *The Boston Globe* continued to track the pattern of abuse within the Catholic Church in the early 2000s. The pattern of abuse also revealed a pattern of abuse coverups by higher-ranking church officials. Documents released by the Church during the Geoghan trial found that for each case of abusive priests, there were at least two cardinals, bishops, and prelates "who transferred him without alerting his new superiors that he was a danger to children" (Farragher & Robinson).

The exposure of child abuse within the Church prompted others to tell their stories. Following the initial scandal of Geoghan, more than 300 new victims in the Archdiocese of Boston alone came forward with stories of abuse by priests (Robinson). Additionally, it caused other Christian denominations to report clergy abuse. The United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Methodist Church, and American Baptist Church all reported allegations of clergy abuse and coverup following the Catholic scandal (Paulson and Cullen).

This proved that the Catholic Church was not the only church cloaked in a culture of clergy abuse; that beneath large institutional churches lay something rotten. Church was not the house of God and priests were not the mouthpiece. This proved that church is capable of evil in the name of something good.

Hundreds of victims. Hundreds of abusers. Hundreds of enablers. One thing in common: Church.

## **/REPENTANCE**

I find it quite difficult to be against something that has given me so much throughout my entire life. Rather, I find it quite hypocritical to be against something that has given me so much and in which I continually choose to participate. I have felt nothing but feelings of love and acceptance within church. I have found nothing but welcoming communities. Church has given me life and a way to navigate through it. Every memory I have of church is one of joy. Personal stories of abuse in church: I have none.

I have never been fondled at the hands of church. I have never been raped by a priest. I have never been molested during confessionals. I have never seen the rectory bedroom. I don't think I know anybody who has either. But this doesn't compensate for the thousands of children who have.

For all the comfort church provides, it also provides discomfort. For all the love, it provides hate. For all the enjoyment, it provides suffering. And none of it should go unacknowledged or unquestioned.

Maybe I'm just Protestant. Protesting church's authority in my relationship with God is what I believe in. Maybe being exposed to the cultures of three different churches has confused me. Only being considered worthy of receiving communion in my church and no others has brought subconscious disdain. Maybe my memories of church aren't as fond as I believe them to be. Nostalgia is a dirty liar; she convinced me that anywhere before now is where I want to be. Maybe I'm not faithful. I want to leave church but don't know how to do it. Maybe I'm just angry.

I don't think I'll grow out of it.

## **/APOSTLES**

It seems the institutional coverup of abuse in churches is not uncommon, although it should be. But there are a number of churches that aren't institutionalized. Churches that cannot benefit from a hierarchical coverup. Churches that do not reap power from the secrecy that they sow. Churches that cannot easily get away with abuse. Still, they do.

In a 2018 interview with *Washington Post*, Former Florida Assistant State Attorney and grandson of Billy Graham, Boz Tchividjian, suggested that "sexual abuse in evangelicalism rivals the Catholic Church scandal of the early 2000s." While acting as a prosecutor, Tchividjian oversaw dozens of evangelical abuse cases and how the church failed to respond. In one instance a pastor didn't report a sexual offender because the abuser repented; it was only until the man abused five more children that he would be arrested (Pease). Tchividjian finds that part of the issue is the attitude toward sexual sin, a sin large enough to prompt coverups. The larger part of the issue is the attitude of church leaders, claiming "They say: 'I'm the man God's placed in charge'" (qtd in Pease).

They are the men that God has placed in charge. The men given the authority of the Divine. The men abusing that power.

## **/RESURRECTION**

It was the winter of our senior year in high school. In his second month of being eighteen, newly temple-endowed Elder Ellsworth wanted to celebrate his priesthood with me. Let our celebration count for Valentine's Day, too. A clandestine rendezvous to the top of the world; where we could be ourselves. The only Kingdom we were allowed to be in together.

I admired how dedicated Elder Ellsworth was to his church. Blessed at eight years old; baptized at ten years old; Eagle Scout at sixteen years old; now temple-endowed at eighteen years old and about to submit a mission recommendation. I knew how much faith he had in his religion; how much faith he had in his Church. I knew how much I hated how his religion and his church kept us apart. I wanted to know why he had to believe in a God that wouldn't let us be together.

*It's starting to rain,* he said, *I should probably get you home.* The sound of gravel churned beneath us. We probably spent the next twenty minutes in a comfortable silence while a blizzard worth a thousand snows fell. February embers, hold my hand and get me home safely. We were still a mile out from my house. I remember the feeling of losing control of something I never had control of in the first place.

I spent the next few minutes blindly crawling out of Elder Ellsworth's upside down truck on the side of the highway. I felt the scratch of a hundred tiny shards of glass on my face; everything else was fine. He didn't even ask if I was okay before he said that God kept us safe in the crash. Before he said that it was his *priesthood* that kept us safe. I threw up in the fresh snow and started to walk the mile home.

I remembered how safe God kept us when I was picking glass out of my hair and face the next morning. When I started coughing up blood a few days later. When I was wincing in pain from laying on my purpled torso every night before I fell asleep. When I told Elder Ellsworth that I thought I was injured in the crash and he told me that wasn't possible because he protected me. And I wondered why God couldn't have just kept us from crashing in the first place. I wondered why Elder Ellsworth's priesthood couldn't have given him a revelation to leave before the weather got ugly.

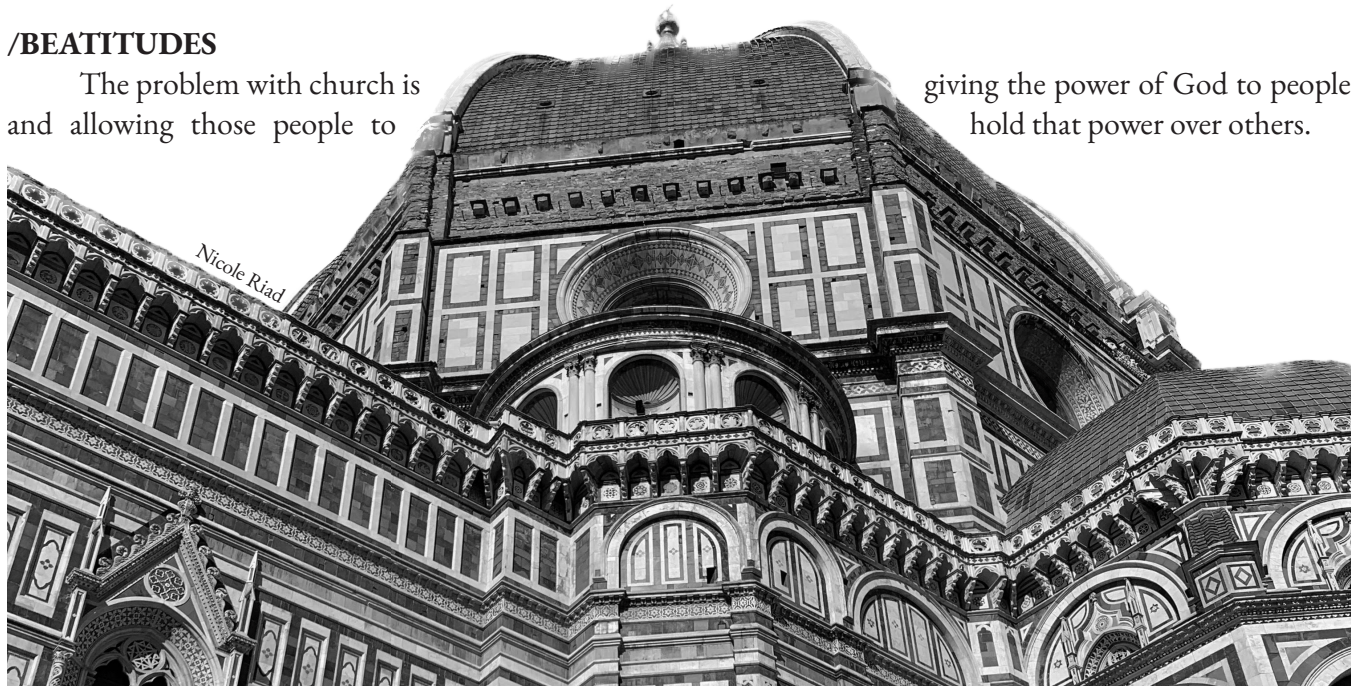
I thought about how often God fails to keep people safe. About how often higher-ranking church members put people in danger and justify it through God. About how a blind faith in church can cause so much hurt. I started to question my own relationship with Church through Elder Ellsworth's relationship with his.

Elder Ellsworth's truck rolled over three and a half times with us in it. We survived. Thanks be to God.

## **/BEATTITUDES**

The problem with church is  
and allowing those people to

giving the power of God to people  
hold that power over others.



# Contributors

## *Authors & Artists*

**Antigone Aidonis** was born and raised in Athens, Greece. She is interested in literature and poetry and has found that it is a beautiful and cathartic way to express herself.

**Minha Choi** is a third-year English major with a focus in Creative Writing. Many of Minha's poems focus on the cultural identity of a Korean-American living in the U.S.—especially in the untranslatable aspects of Korean culture in English.

**Zoe Espinal** is a first-year student from Whittier, California, who plans to major in Computer Science. She aspires to live like a character from a Studio Ghibli film.

**Stacia Datskovska** is a Journalism and International Relations major graduating this December. She writes freelance pieces for outlets like Teen Vogue, USA Today, HuffPost, Bustle, and more.

**Ava Gehman** is a second-year student, lover of film, and passionate re-visitor of her favorite works. After Liberal Studies, she plans to study Dramatic Writing at Tisch.

**Sidney Jing** is a third-year student studying Philosophy, with double minors in Psychology and Creative Writing. She is from Dallas, Texas, but lives in New York, and is currently studying in Berlin.

**Elizabeth Lira** is a first-year student. She enjoys getting lost in subway stations and Damon Albarn.

**Isabella Masone** is a second-year student in GLS from Washington DC, intending to double major in French. She loves language and is interested in continuing working with creative writing and translation after school.

**Chanel Pulido** is a fourth-year student in GLS who is pursuing a minor in Film. When she is not working on her thesis screenplay, she enjoys baking, cooking, and walking dogs.

**Chloe Rodriguez** wrote "Against Church" for Professor Dohrmann's class. It is the runner-up for this year's Elaine Kuntz Memorial Writing Prize.

**Sara Sharma** wrote "A Reclamation of Space and Sovereignty" for Professor Baker's class. It is the winner of this year's Elaine Kuntz Memorial Writing Prize.

**Prithvi Subrahmanyam** is a second-year student in GLS.

**Ashleigh Weigle** is a first-year student. "Windows" was inspired by the woman across the street, and is meant to show the duality of femininity.

**Evin Williams** is a second-year student in GLS concentrating in Critical Creative Production. She creates poetry, prose, and visual art.





LIBERAL  STUDIES

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