



Synergies  
*The Nassau  
Literary Review*

*The Nassau Literary Review*

SYNERGIES

*Winter 2024*

The  
*Nassau*  
*Literary*  
*Review*



Winter 2024  
“Synergies”

# Dear Readers,

Amidst the chaos and confusion of our college lives, art-making offers a quiet space to reconcile the internal and the external: the physical materiality of an artwork takes its shape from the immaterial headspace of the artist, while nature reconfigures those interior worlds. Sometimes inner turbulence is soothed by the beauty and tranquility of a physical environment, like water rippling on Carnegie Lake, or sunlight filling the library during an early morning study session; other times, introspection provides an escape from the noise and tensions of our campus, when the aesthetics of natural phenomena escape our view. What does the interplay between nature and human psychology look like in the literary and visual artworks of Princeton students?

*Apulia* depicts a serene loneliness, aligning the cleansing effect of a whitewashed architecture with the simplicity of nature—a single lemon tree sits on the left, unbothered by time or place. Textured, messy grounds give way to the stability of a blue sky. Keyed not to the colors of an Italian landscape but to black and white portals, *Field I Lost* and *Bathroom Window in Valparaiso* consider temporality, the memory, and doubling: do the images depict literal spaces now abandoned by the photographer, or do they metaphorically represent a lost state of mind?

The poems in this issue—harrowing, alliterative, fiery—perhaps suggest both. The economical lines of “On Sunday” move with the same rhythm and precision as a wave, “eclipsing” thoughts outside of the immediate tide. The verb “go” appears only in the first and final lines, as if to realize the impending loss of the present and to seal a new memory—the oceanic world—with linguistic bookends. “Mariana,” in addressing that ecological system at its greatest depths, reminds us of nature’s extremities: how it leaves us knowing “nothing” of time but gives us losses to remember through poetic verse.

In “Zeugma,” the country of Mexico is a personified memory—in present and future—and the speaker addresses it like a lover. By confusing the distinction between person and place through a melancholy love poem, a sense of doubleness is created, similar to that of a *zeugma* in literary terms. Likewise, the short story “Chalkdust” interrogates the dual notion of home and the difficulty of belonging. Through the simplified lens of childhood, colors on a driveway provide solemn commentary on appearances and, at the end of the story, ephemerality, as the rain washes them all away.

This issue also recaps our 2023 National Undergraduate Art and Writing Contest by including the winning pieces in poetry, prose, and art, putting Princeton voices—both students and professors—in conversation with those from other states and colleges. Promoting contest submissions across approximately 50 institutions was one of our initiatives to revive NassLit’s pre-pandemic presence, externally and on campus.

In October 2023, we hosted the magazine’s 181st Anniversary Conference, which focused on diversity and representation in NassLit and Princeton’s literary archives. Discussions were based on an archival research project across NassLit publications, conducted by this year’s Editors-in-Chief and Managing Editors.

The conference featured readings and panels by Princeton faculty, alumni, and students from various disciplines, and was co-sponsored by the Humanities Council, the Department of English, and the Department of Comparative Literature, among others. We are thankful for these programs’ continuous support of NassLit and its mission.

The current publication is the first to include a land acknowledgment statement. We are grateful to Associate Provost Shawn Maxam for providing guidance on the final version.

As we approach spring, the pieces in this issue invite us to rethink combination, paradox, duality—the continuous fabric of internal and external remaking the present as the future. In reading, we hope you, too, can reclaim synergy, whether by savoring the environment around you, or finding comfort in your own company.

Rachel Brooks & Annie Cao  
Editors-in-Chief, *The Nassau Literary Review*

The Nassau Literary Review was founded on the land and ancient territory of the Lenni-Lenape. It continues to convene as an organization on these traditional grounds. Being a literary and visual arts publication, we recognize the artistic craft of the Lenape, endeavor to pursue opportunities for partnership and collaboration, and honor Lenape peoples—past, present and future.

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Cover art “Bathroom Window in Valparaiso” by Frankie Solinsky Duryea





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# Oakbaby

*Melanie Garcia*

You skid,  
cross the pavement,  
hop off the curb. Like  
stone against water. Concrete  
slaps your soles. Your cap  
pops clean off. You roll  
and hit soil. Stop; lie.  
Your head is bare and blooming.  
*Grounded,*  
says Mother Sun. *You little*  
*nut.*

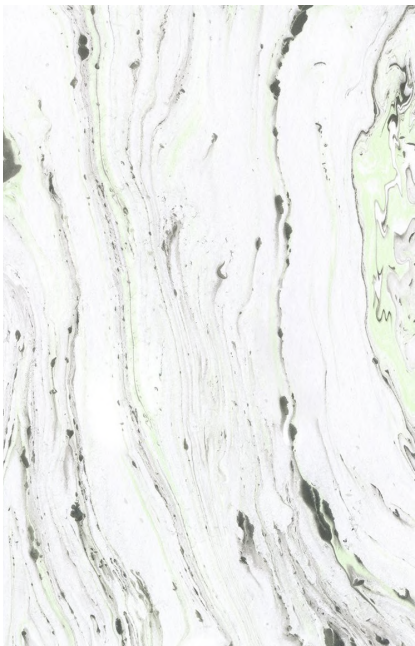
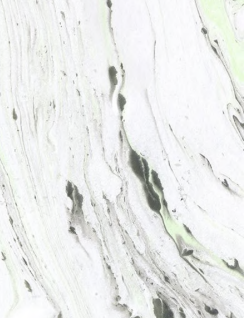
# Rager Teenager

*Andrei Barrett*

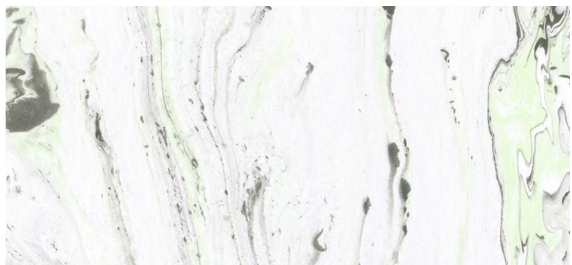


*Honorable Mention in NassLit's 2023 National Undergraduate Contest in Art,  
judged by Professor Colleen Asper*





we go to the beach for the first time in a while. The weather is poor, the clouds resting turgid and gray against the sea. Every surge looks like it could be a storm. My mother and I, we laugh at our bad luck. We let the salt air shuffle through our new short hair, let the blue nothing draw up close to us and fall back away. The last time we were here, I barely reached her hip in height, and I kept trying to grab her waist-length hair, black to the root and deliriously out of reach. A wave grows in front of us, so big that for a moment it eclipses the slate-sparkle sky. In reality, it only hits my mother's body where I used to stand, where it was perfect to rest her hand as we stared out at the sea. The force of the wave knocks us back onto the sand, but my mother lets herself fall further, lets the foam wash her hair into the shoreline kelp and blend in with her ivory temples. She smiles at me from there and opens her arms, the way I once asked to be held before bed. *Come*, she says, so I go.



**On Sunday**

*Claire Wang*

## *Nick Manetas* **Sprezzatura**

Banded fingers clicking on a crystal edged bourbon glass, a Marlboro red idling between bored lips, smoke curling round the glow of Mr. Ray Ban's gold rims. *Sprezzatura* is standing *contrapposto* in your *solaro* suit, buttons optional, is *la moda*, a kind of scholarship, *sin duda*, but don't you go and talk about it.

There's power in leather *guantis* lingering on pleated slacks, in the ace of spades snarling from the lip of your *barchetta* pocket.

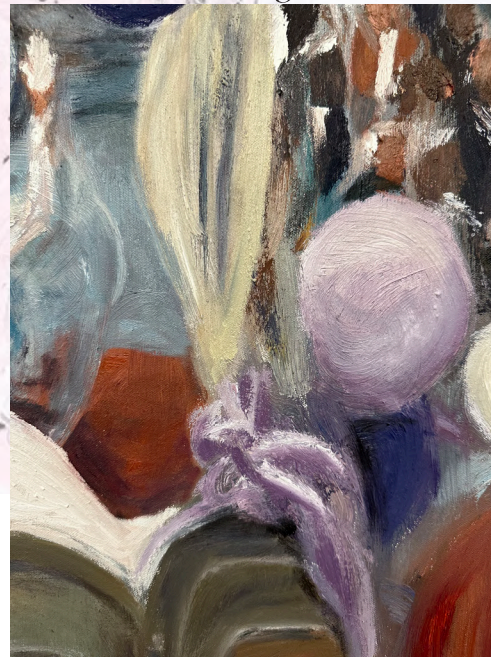
*Sprezzatura* is a wonderful thing to have in a college application essay, in the way a boy tosses his keys aside as he strides in the backdoor, in the way he spits hello to his mother, as she removes her glasses to rub her blurry eyes with bony fingers, because he missed her birthday dinner exploring the beauty of not caring.





# Wedding Day

*Zehma Herring*





# Chalkdust

## Melanie Garcia

I squatted on the pavement, opened the beat-up green and yellow box, and turned it on its side. A small fleet of multicolored sidewalk chalk clinked onto the ground before falling off the curb and into the street. I snatched them up and gathered them into my self-selected sidewalk square before they could roll away forever, and I tried to start drawing.

There were three things wrong with this. First, it was too hot, and I was too old. Maybe that's already two things, but they quickly became a package deal as my bare thighs started chafing against my calves, which flexed with effort as I crouched, and an oily sun pelted itself against my back and sweat pooled in undesirable places. Maybe I wasn't fully grown, but my body had aged enough to find the heat unpleasant. And I could stand the fear of falling, burning, and/or scraping my leg against the flaring hot concrete.

Second, I could not—and to this day, I still cannot—draw. I had a mess of sticks of chalk loose on the ground and had no idea what to do with them. I twirled a piece of chalk in my hand pensively to give the illusion that I knew what I was doing, but still, nothing came to mind.

Third, clouds were gathering in one corner of the sky. If I somehow used up all the chalk before it started to rain, my drawing would be washed away almost immediately. But that was probably for the better, anyway; whatever I'd make would be an eyesore.

"Hey, Sierra." A pair of pristine red Jordans stepped into my vision, and I squinted up at a silhouette that was blacked out and backlit by the sun. The figure squatted next to me, and I was able to recognize him. Typically, Isaiah was all sweet-looking and round-faced—the kind of boy grandmothers like you to bring over. But now his face was pinched and furrowed in the sunlight. "Where'd all that chalk come from?"

"What are you doing out?" I asked him. "It's about to rain."

"I saw you outside and got curious."

"Careful with the dust," I said, pointing at the chalk residue that had spilled onto the ground. "You'll get it on your shoes."

Isaiah said nothing but slipped off his sneakers and set them on the steps that led up to his house—only a third of which was actually *his* house, since he lived in a multifamily. Then, only in his socks, he squatted next to me and repeated, "Where'd all that chalk come from?"

"Mami's cleaning out the house," I said. "I didn't wanna throw it out."

"When you move in again?"

"The twenty-first."

"And y'all are cleaning out already?"

"She's just trying to distract herself."

He nodded. "Mom's the same way. She keeps buying me colored pencils and crayons and shit. At first I told her I don't need them anymore, but—" He shrugged. "I think it's easier if she treats it like elementary school."

"She'd probably be fine if you didn't go so far," I muttered. Even to myself, it sounded like I was scolding him.

He gave an obstinate frown, but he looked upset, too. "They gave me the most money."

"Still though, Chicago? There's so many schools right in Boston."

"Why didn't *you* go to one of them then?"

"Cause Connecticut's right there."

"It's whatever," Isaiah grumbled. "Everyone's gotta get used to it anyway."

That was the extent to which either of us had talked about college since we'd chosen our schools.

"You wanna draw with me?" I asked.

"Okay," he said, almost in a whisper. "What are we drawing?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know? Why didn't you just let your mom throw it out, then?"

"Cause I didn't wanna throw it out."

Isaiah didn't respond. I looked at him and saw that he was watching a white couple jogging down the sidewalk. The girl was wearing a cap, and it was swishing back and forth like a golden pendulum on a grandfather clock. People didn't use to jog around here, but a few of those types had moved in over the last couple of years. Now a good chunk of the block wore Lululemon.

"You know Mrs. Connolly moved out last week?" Isaiah said. "Some college grads are in her apartment now."

"For real? I saw the U-Haul, but I didn't think it'd be her."

He nodded solemnly. Mrs. Connolly was this little old Irish lady who lived downstairs from

Isaiah and had five kids that all taught at the middle school down the street. "My dad said the landlord wouldn't let her keep the ramp on the stairs. That it's against regulations or something."

"Is it?"

"I don't think so. Anyway, she's moving in with her oldest. Andrew."

"I had him for math in seventh grade."

"I heard he was a hardass."

"Yeah, but he liked me."

"Prolly 'cause you're a tryhard."

"Yeah." I looked back at the sidewalk.

He sucked his teeth. "You don't even argue with me anymore."

"I'm tired." I wiped my forehead with my arm. "It's so fucking hot."

"It'll cool down with the rain." Isaiah frowned at the clouds. "Don't you wanna wait till after the storm to draw? It'll all erase."

"I know, but Mami will yell at me if I keep the chalk in the house another day."

"Fine. You know what?" He grabbed a piece of chalk, marched to the sidewalk square in front of my house, and colored the square solid yellow. He stood, his palms now dusty and the piece of chalk reduced to a tiny nub. "There."

I stood and walked to him. I stared at the sidewalk square, which looked like it was coated in instant mac and cheese powder. "Why?"

"You have any other ideas?"



“No.”

“Then?”

“Still,” I said, “why?”

“Why what?”

“Why yellow and why my house,” I said simply.

“Cause you’re sunshiney.”

I turned around, picked up a red piece of chalk, and filled in the square in front of Isaiah’s house. It was easy at first, but as the chalk got smaller and smaller, it became harder and harder to hold onto, and more than once I almost scraped my hand against the concrete.

When I finished and dusted off my palms, Isaiah frowned. “Why red?”

I shrugged. “It’s your vibe.”

“Let’s do Graciela’s.” Isaiah said. Graciela was the woman with four kids who lived above me. “What color?”

I thought about it. “Pink.”

Isaiah grabbed a pink piece of chalk and started coloring in the square next to mine.

“How ‘bout Pepito?” I asked. Pepito was the wrinkly old man in the apartment above Isaiah’s who made beef tripe soup for us when we were sick.

“Blue.”

“Light blue or regular blue?”

“Regular.”

I got to work on the next square. When Isaiah finished Graciela’s square, he called, “Quiara

and Davien?”

“Orange!” I scribbled in the last of Pepito’s square. “What should I do for Mrs. Connolly’s?”

“Leave it blank,” he said.

“The new people don’t have a color?”

He shook his head. “My mom asked them what kinda pie they liked and baked them one. I found it in the trash the next day. Plus they called the cops on Jaiden’s birthday party.”

“That was them?”

“Yeah.”

“Damn.” I made a white X over their square.

“What color for Benjamin?” he asked.

“Uh, red!”

“I thought red was mine!”

“We’re gonna have to reuse colors!”

He grumbled but complied.

“What about the Rosarios?” I asked him.

“Yellow!”

I scowled. “Asshole!”

We went back and forth that way for a while, wearing each piece of chalk to a thin little blade. The Vargases’ square was green, and the Martinezes’ was light blue, Mrs. Maguire’s was purple, and Mariely’s was black. We continued on until every apartment of all the multi-family homes on the block had a square colored in, with the exception of three squares crossed out in white. I straightened and stretched. Every

bone in my body popped, and my thighs and back were sore, and my hands, arms, knees, and shoes were all coated in chalk so I felt cakey and crusty all over, but I wasn’t as sweaty as I’d anticipated—in fact, it had cooled down a lot, and there was even a little breeze...

The sky rumbled.

Isaiah leapt to his feet. “Shit! My shoes!”

As a few raindrops fell, the two of us sprinted towards his house. Every step we took kicked up little multicolored clouds of dust, and soon Isaiah’s socks looked like tie-dye. The storm picked up quickly, and the drops turned fat and slapped the pavement hard, and our chalk squares started to shed their colors.

By the time we reached Isaiah’s front steps, it was pouring. My hair was dripping wet. Isaiah jumped onto the stairs, but they were slick with water. He slipped and would’ve fallen if he hadn’t grabbed the railing just in time. I grabbed his sneakers for him as he regained his balance, and we scrambled up the steps and took shelter just inside his building’s front door, which opened up to another staircase that led up to his apartment.

But we didn’t go any further. I sat down on the first inside stair, and Isaiah sat down right next to me. I set his sneakers down two steps behind us and leaned back, my chest heaving and my throat burning.

Isaiah laughed. “When’s asthma gonna stop beating your ass?”

“Shut the fuck up.”

He laughed even harder. I shook my head and watched the rain. The street was on a slight slant, so all the water streamed downhill, slowly taking little grains of chalk

with it. It made it look like the street was melting. Or crying.

I leaned my head against the wall.

“Do you think you’ll move away after college?” I asked.

Isaiah rubbed his knees, which were still blue and orange. “Maybe. Depends.”

“Do you think we’ll still belong here?”

He tried to wipe some chalk from his face, but his hand left a new red smear against his cheek. “Would we belong anywhere else?”

“I don’t know.” I stood up. “I’m a go help Mami clean up. But we’re making sancocho later. You wanna come over?”

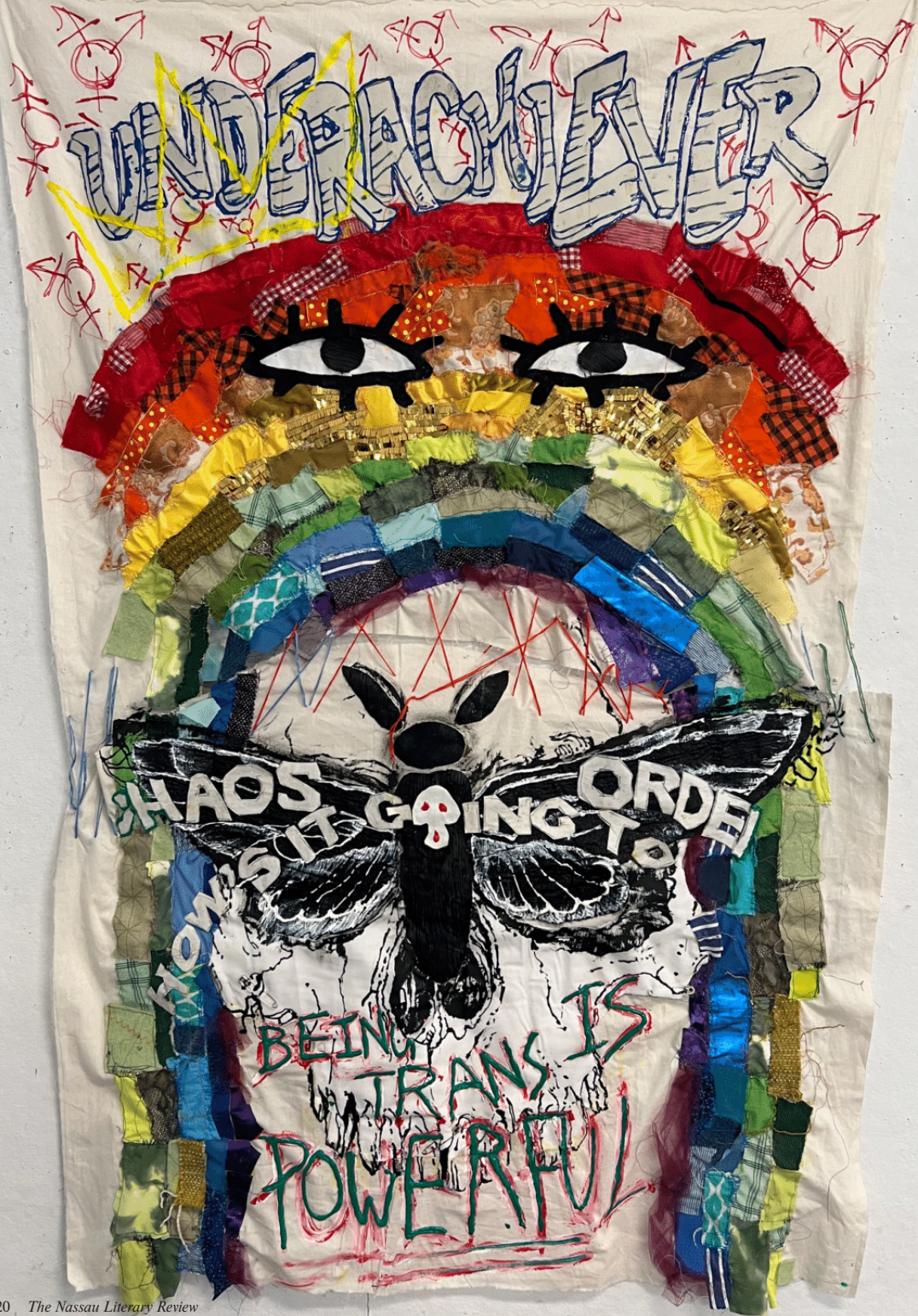
“Yeah, I’ll see you.” He stood up, too, and he gave me a hug.

I felt myself starting to cry. “Have you started packing yet?”

For a few seconds, he was quiet. Then I heard him swallow. “No.”

I drew back and nodded. “I’ll be back tomorrow to help.”





Winner of NassLit's 2023 National Undergraduate Contest in Art,  
judged by Professor Colleen Asper

**Colleen Asper on Jude Kaveh**

"Trans Aggression" combines direct and forceful language and symbols, with a playful and provisional materiality. I chose it because of its exploratory approach to both form and content.



# Trans Aggression

Jude Kaveh (New York University)



# Zeugma

*Malia Chung*

I'm here, Mexico, like I told you I'd be, but I keep hoping you'll call anyway, ask me where I am—some convoluted message of missing. Yesterday, I learned the word zeugma. Yesterday, in line at a bakery, I saw a man bite the gentle neck of his lover. Mexico, I love pan dulce, and, still, I love you even though you don't call, even though you don't bite in public. Some zeugmas for you: he lit me and my cigarette; he rendered my heart and my sweatshirt; he craves me and space from me. What do you want? When you buy salt & vinegar chips and let me eat half of your burger at 2 a.m., are you sharing? You're convoluting. Are these just chips? When you leave again, I'll want my shampoo. Yes, I know I have straight hair, but I'll want my shampoo back and this necklace I'm about to buy you: its reds and pinks and yellows. Mexico is beautiful, dulce. And you, enough; enough now.



*Runner-Up of NassLit's 2023 National Undergraduate Contest in Art,  
judged by Professor Colleen Asper*

# Up All Night

*JiHwan Park*



# Again, the window

*Daniel  
Viorica*

So here where the sun sets and sunflowers grow and wilt the old woman sits on her porch on the faded whitewash bench, watching cars go by. Mijo, she says. They're going too fast. Maybe she would have shouted but now only turns her head to the side and closes her eyes and feels with strained air in her lungs, in and out. Mijito, she says. I'm getting old. The boy does not understand.

For the five years Gabi has lived at this house, the cars on Zimmerman Ave. have not been faster or slower than cars in any other part of the city. Maybe he's too young to tell the difference. Maybe she, Erlinda, his grandmother, is too old—eighty-three or eighty-four and who knows how well those milky eyes

work anymore—but that's only what her daughters have been saying. Neither she nor he at this point care. Happy enough late summer to sit on the porch and run his hands against the whitewash grain and run his hands against the cheap off-white stucco, and its spiderwebs, and to sit with the old, small, and wrinkled woman who never shades her eyes from sun.

Every time a car goes by—no matter if it is grey, red, or white, no matter if its hood is peeling or new and sharp, whether its windows are tinted or untinted it sends a glint of light to Gabi's eyes, like a knife. He shakes his head. He asks, can we go inside? and she says, no, I'm watching the cars, mijo. And he sits on the porch stewing and remember sun on the flowers, still-blooming pink penstemon silver leaves of yarrow, the plum tree and how the gold melts across green and purple edges, making them soft, making them fine. Sun on the rust fence, sun on the hollyhocks and apricots across the street. Then a car drives across again and his grandmother shouts and again he has to close his eyes.

Erlinda knows his mother will be along soon. But there's that other daughter coming around, not from next door but two doors down, with those two dogs of hers. Mutt and Jeff. That's what Erlinda called them: Mutt and Jeff, the big one and the little one, but she can't remember which one was Mutt and which one was Jeff. Stopped coming in the Sunday Journal. Who knows if they'd be back.

There are the dogs, bumbling along ahead, the big yellow one with white around his eyes like a train bandit; the little one, long and short and brown. The first time they'd brought her around she snapped at the boy for trying to touch her tail, thin and bare of any fur. Then she pissed all over the carpets, which already smelled like burning linoleum and now also smelled like dog piss.

Has Becky been by yet? This was the daughter, Mary, who's stopped outside the yard, apparently just to ask that question.

No, says Erlinda. Don't you see that mijo is still here with me?

Alright, she says and waits. We need to get your hedge trimmed. If that would be okay with you.

You can call the people whenever you're ready.

Mary waits again like she expects poor old Erlinda to say something else, then shakes her head, keeps walking with

those two dogs of hers, Mutt and Jeff, Erlinda thinks, with their tongues out and lolling. Mutt and Jeff. One of these days she would figure out which was which. Or figure out what they were actually supposed to be called. One of them—the little one with the tail—wasn't really Mary's dog, it belonged to that son of hers who was twenty-three and rode a motorcycle and had too many things to worry about to take care of his own damn dog. That motorcycle. He rode a motorcycle and only sometimes—sometimes—wore a helmet and went way too goddamn fast. She'd tried to warn the boy about that. Sat him down and said, no matter how cool he looks on that black motorcycle of his, going fast without a helmet, he is *not* cool. But then of course the boy just tilted that curly head of his as if to say, I don't find him cool. Or maybe, I have no clue what you're talking about. So maybe it was a lost cause, anyway.

Come on in, she says. It's getting dark.

And even as the sky changed—sun making pink, stealing light from the edges of plums and hollyhocks, sharp black shadows on the gravel fading to just another piece of earth—the greater change would always be, for Gabi, stepping through that door. Noise of the television screen and garish color (much later he would never be able to how large it was or where it was except maybe somewhere by the south wall); there is the carpet, once new, now old, very old, white and brown, the color of wild rice and gritty under his feet. There are lamps with shades diminutive, ornate, and billowed; light, murky,



# Apulia

*Zehma Herring*

or clear; yellow and pearlescent and white. Gabi will remember best one with a shimmering gold base, one that hurt him if he touched it. Was it there? On the stand next to grandmother's upholstered chair, there with a piece of soapstone carved in the shape of an angel? He thought so. But when he closed his eyes it trades places, first with a white-based lamp that lived by the window, again with a gaslamp from the back room where his mother will sleep five years from now, when grandmother is dying, and all the lights, all the colors and textures have vanished. They are here; they will be lost to time.

Erlinda takes him to the sitting room—somewhere between the kitchen and the den—feeds him a candied orange slice from a cheap plastic container on the table. Boy thus satisfied she can find herself walking around the house looking for—what? what was it? Getting old. Not getting old, done this since my twenties walking around and round not knowing and there are linoleum tiles in the kitchen, like little lanterns, I always thought; flourbowl with fruit on it, apples bananas and pears all of them smiling, and a little baby lemon, yellow and snug, asleep in the back. And Erlinda smiled, did it really matter why she forgot why she was in the kitchen. Tramp across the living room across that carpet—damn carpet—TV wasn't on probably no basketball on right now. Duke. She hated that Duke. Always beat the Lobos. UNM. Where her daughters went to school. And there is the boy,

sitting by an open box of orange slices looking right at her.

Where did you go?

I didn't go anywhere, mijo. I was here the whole time.

He shakes his head. No, Nana. You went away this time. I couldn't see where you were.

Mijo. She walks up to him, puts her hand through that curly hair. So light. Almost blonde. Her daughters had had hair like that. Not anymore. Dark brown and Therese's even starting to grey. Mijito. I did not leave, I was just in another room. You know that, right, mijo? When someone is in another room you can't see them, can't talk to them unless you shout and that's very bad. So I wasn't gone, even if it seemed like it. Anyway. Doesn't matter because now I'm here again, right? Right, he says. She turns her head; it gets caught in the lamplight. Maybe once her hair was dark but now it's spiderwhite, falls across her cheek. Look, she says. Let's go to the couch. We can wait for your mother. She'll be here. Any minute now. And as they settle down inside, only a window away from where they'd been sitting on the porch, Mary comes back around, walking her dogs.







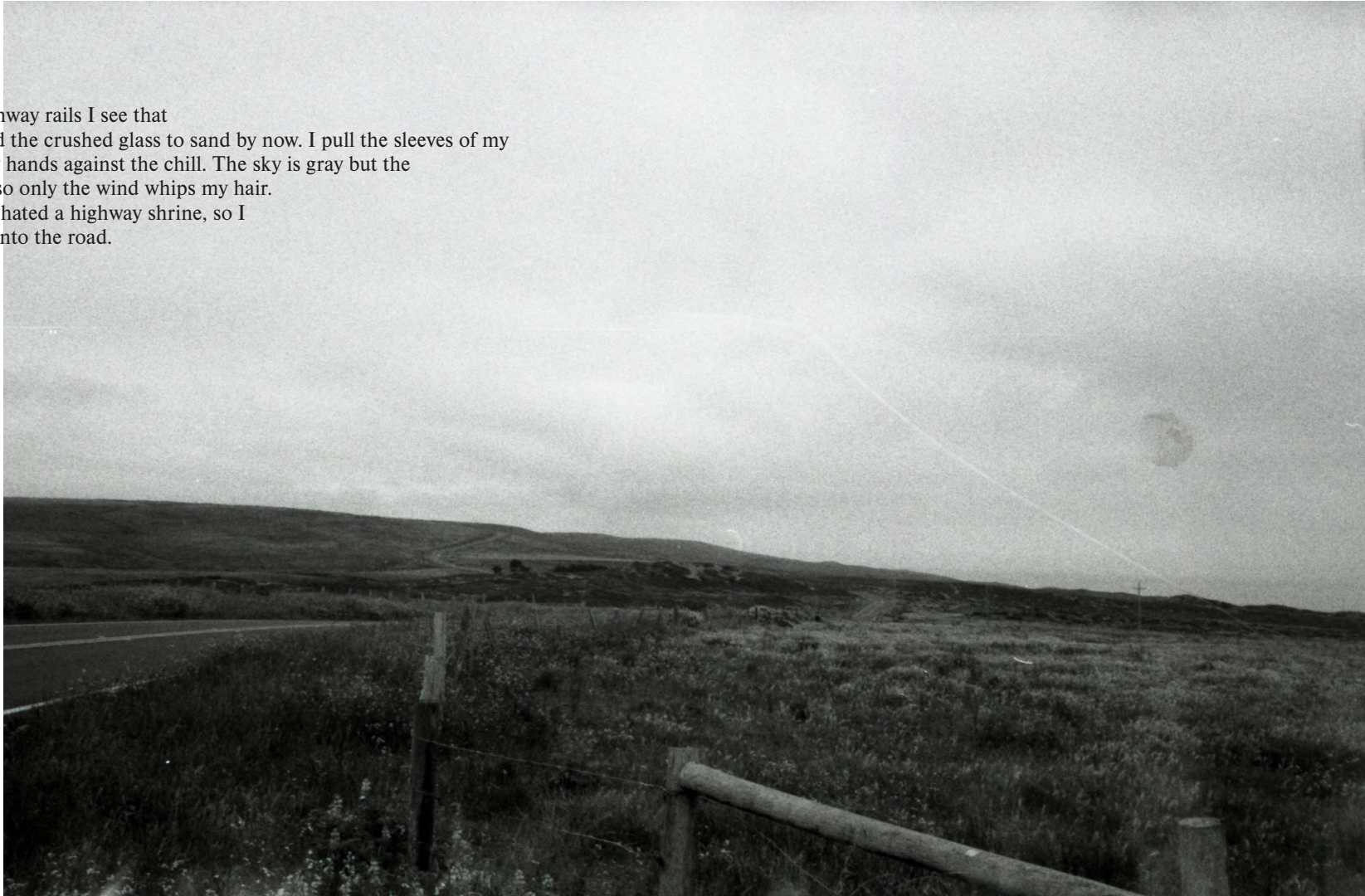
**Circular Circus** *Kellen Ducey*



# Punisher

*Roya Reese*

Climbing over highway rails I see that  
wheels have turned the crushed glass to sand by now. I pull the sleeves of my  
sweatshirt over my hands against the chill. The sky is gray but the  
pavement is clear so only the wind whips my hair.  
And you would've hated a highway shrine, so I  
throw the flowers into the road.



**Field I Lost**

*Frankie Solinsky Duryea*



# West Coast Ghosts

Margaret Dunn (*University of Pennsylvania*)

Winner of *NassLit's 2023 National Undergraduate Contest in Prose*,  
judged by Professor Daphne Kalotay

Lloyd asked me to look after his house while he was away. Shooting was scheduled to wrap in July but he wouldn't be back until August, he said. You know how it is. These homo directors like to beat dead horses so much that they become glue. I nodded and he threw me the keys. When the car came he was cursing and sweating, stopped to press his lips to my cheek. Left a blemish of wetness that I'd later wipe at as they pulled out of the drive.

The house itself was nice, one of those minimalist types. Cold and uncarpeted with windows that look out over the valley. Photographs of women lined the walls—mostly naked and foreign-looking, like they had an accent you could just whack off to. That first night I ordered in and got high, gave each of the naked women names. Marisa Martha Maddie Mae Judy. Then I started to hate them and took several down and stacked them in the pool house.

Those early weeks of the summer were hot and uneventful. I worked out and listened to a lot of EDM, played a game of phonetag with my mother that I didn't intend to win. Someone died on a side street off of Sunset and I watched them wheel the body away.

"Drugs?" I asked the cop.

"Dehydration," he said.

So I hated leaving the house. Even more,

driving out to my apartment. It was a four-floor walk up out in Studio City that depressed the shit out of me. My agency still forwarded my mail there at Lloyd's insistence, though. Residual checks from a Boston Market commercial and the like.

"Things are coming for you, kid," Barry had insisted. He was one of those wet-voiced agent types but a real pro, people said. Called me a young Tom Berenger. "But they're coming slow."

So I took it slow. Watched movies and worked out, like, a lot. Perfected my Walken impression. Googled Lloyd. Lloyd on set in a black t-shirt, Lloyd in a golf cart. Lloyd out to dinner with his co-star, that Spanish actress with the rack. There was one where they were crossing a street. It was blurry but when you zoomed in it looked like his hand was on the small of her back. I screenshotted and sent it to him.

"Tap that yet?"

He didn't respond.

\* \* \*

Then there was that night in June when I found a woman in the yard. A party was going on next door. You could hear the music and I hadn't spoken to another person in three days. I went to poke through Lloyd's medicine cabinet to find something fun and that was when I saw

her—a woman in a kaftan, crawling across the lawn.

By the time I made it out there she was curled up, seemed valium-drunk with one heel on, the other in her hand.

"You seen my boy?"

"What?"

She asked again, taking off the other shoe. I wiped the dirt from her forehead.

"Sure, I have. I've seen him."

The couple hosting next door were a respectable kind of mortified. I commended them for that, the way they pressed a damp cloth to her temple, spoke softly about calling her driver. I'd be laughing and kind of was. The husband gave that type of handshake where they hold your elbow.

"No worries, man. It happens," I said.

"Is Lloyd here?" the wife asked. The woman had vomited a bit, left a sheen on her lips. She stroked her back. "We want to apologize to him, too."

"He's away shooting, actually." I smiled. "Aruba."

Of course, they said, of course. I worried they would ask more but they just guided their friend up by the elbows. Reminded me of a calf, the way she walked. All weak-kneed. As they crossed back over the lawn the wife turned and waved. I waved back. When I brought the woman back onto the patio she had tried to kiss me. I didn't tell them that, though.

\* \* \*

Their names were the Ramones. Like the

rock band, Lloyd said, but not. I said that was a bummer and he asked if I could name a Ramones song. I couldn't. The wife came by the next day with an armful of hydrangeas. I told her you shouldn't have! Because I felt like that's what I was supposed to say and put them in the sink. She took them out and got a vase from a cabinet, said to call her Josie and that it was no trouble.

"We're really sorry, again. Ambien and liquor, not a good idea."

I kind of nodded. She bruised a leaf between her fingers as the vase filled with water. "Are you Lloyd's son?"

"Son?" I laughed.

"Yeah—I don't know! Sorry, sorry. Didn't mean to offend."

She had that kind of look in her eye and there was this heat rising in my face and then I was explaining that I was his cousin.

"Kid cousin, really."

"Mhm," she replied, it all coming together. "I can see it in the eyebrows."

\* \* \*

My mom had been calling a lot. Growing up it was just the two of us so we used to be pretty close. These days I don't know what else she does except church and work. Call me, maybe. I tell her I have a job as a waiter even though I don't. She'd asked to come out to visit once or twice but I couldn't think about her coming into my apartment, seeing the mattress on the floor. Once I made it, sure, she could come and visit. But I'd have to do away with Lloyd and all that. Couldn't think of her realizing what we were, either.



After Josie came she left another voice-mail. I only read the transcription. Most times it'd be that she saw on the news there was a shooting in my area of LA and wanted to see if I was okay. This time it was a rape.

\* \* \*

That night I texted Walker because I needed to black out. We'd met at an audition a few weeks earlier and he had the best weed. Decided to go to this one bar where a buddy of his works, and he promised the girls were all thin and wore low-riders like it's 2007. In the Uber there he was going on and on about "them" and "the system" and that kind of crap.

"That's the difference between us and them. It's a fundamental thing. You ever read Marx?"

Walker was the king of almos. We all had almos, some of us had a few. But Walker must have had seven or eight. He was a good-looking guy, a Kentucky import and spoke with that kind of twang. Almost got the lead in the spy franchise, almost was the guy who bangs Sydney Sweeney in that HBO show. The subsequent rage manifested itself as philosophizing about class division.

"But I don't know, kid. I think if you discount the rack, Sydney isn't all that," he was saying. "Butterface."

When we got there he ordered us vodka sodas. There was a girl with pink hair that I kind of recognized standing in a booth, a group of guys that might be on the Dodgers but I kind of hoped weren't. "Talent is decent tonight, at least."

"Won't your old man be mad?" Walker murmured.

"Whatever."

The next morning I woke up in Lloyd's bed with Walker's arm around my waist. A brown-out kind of night—I had a faint recollection of us on the bathroom floor. One of us was crying and I was pretty sure it was him. I played CandyCrush with the sound on until he woke up, and there was the song and dance of "I don't usually do this." "Relax, man. It's not that deep."

Walker lingered around after, looking at the house—the empty spaces on the walls, the "Ganymedes" statue in the foyer. Watched as I ate peanut butter from the jar in the kitchen.

"You live here with him?"

"No. Just house-sitting."

He nodded. "Right. And that actress he's seeing?"

I rolled my eyes. "Huh," he said, rubbing at his chin. "Politics, I get it."

"Optics, more like."

"That annoy you ever? Think I'd be pissed with all the secrecy."

"It's a nuanced situation."

"Those sound like his words," Walker replied, reaching for the jar. I got to it first.

"You just talked yourself out of peanut butter pancakes, bro."

\* \* \*

He kept coming by a few times a week after that. He was kind of funny, had that laugh where he'd throw his head back. We'd lie in bed doing audition prep, reading sides. He would put his hands on

his chest and told me to count to twelve then back to one, then back to eleven, and so on. "An old Hindu breathing exercise," he said, "Picked it up in Dvaraka. Spent a summer at a temple there, learning to live."

The roles Barry sent were all jokes. He agreed.

"Nice to have some support," I'd say. In the afternoons we would lie out on the patio and get stoned, eat the bird food he called "clean." "Lloyd can be stand-offish, or just a fucking asshole. And my mom thinks I'm a waiter. Probably wants me to get a real job—little does she know."

"She's not from around here, I sense?"

"No. Originally Saltillo, north side of Mexico, but lives in Arizona now."

"Well that's not far."

"Might as well be Dvaraka," I replied.

He nodded, squinting at the sun. "She a taker or a giver?" I asked what he meant. "In my experience people fall in one of those two types. But then there are also the people who don't know they're givers—cause the takers do it all sneaky."

"Giver, for sure," I swallowed. "And once I get a break I'll make her a taker."

"You're a good kid."

I wrinkled my nose. "Not really."

\* \* \*

Lloyd landed me a lunch meeting with a producer. I didn't know if it had to do with Walker—those cameras would have seen him coming in, leaving in the morning—but I don't care either way. I got my

eyebrows threaded, practiced anecdotes and smart-sounding things to say about film as a craft.

Be fun, Lloyd texts while I'm in the Uber there.

Wdym

?

Be fun. The guy is a bit shy.

Shyguy is a big deal, is what he is, I wrote back.

The producer had done a few arthouse-y films, one in Swedish that had taken top prize somewhere. Lloyd called those film festivals gay and pretentious but somehow this guy didn't qualify. The hostess sat me at a table by the window. While I waited I did those breathing exercises—those Hindu ones—but lost count somewhere. He came in late, sweating and wiping his hands on his lapels.

"Nice to meet you—I've heard all the best things from Lloyd."

We talked weather and the latest at the box office. Grilled octopus for him and I got a salad, one round of Mexican mules and then a third. I tried to be funny, likable. Ran my hand through my hair, said things like "Marvel movies—the Hitchcock films of the future" and his laugh would be guttural. At one point a tentacle fell from his spoon, left a pale sheen on the white of the table cloth.

"I'm doing something newer now—" he leaned in. "Probably shouldn't even be talking about it. Could use a charismatic, good-looking kid like yourself, though."

"Oh yeah?"



He had sides back at this place he was renting by the beach. I could just Uber back home after. We talked Dodgers during the drive. He had box tickets, he said. Would have to send them my way. The house was nice, a little smaller than Lloyd's, but it looked out at the ocean. He'd get the sides in a minute, he said. Just wanted some blow first. It looked good so I did some, too.

Script was some remake of a Fellini film—all ancient Roman and weird. We read out a few lines together but it was hard to focus on the words, get a real grasp of motivations, desires, needs probably because I'd drank so much and done that other stuff that might have been cut with something I didn't know what.

Good actors make bold choices, I kept thinking. The den was so spacious my voice carried and echoed. There was something about a wolf or a whore and we were halfway through the scene, and he's really going for it, hands warm on my chest, under my shirt and his face closer. And then I was off the couch, saying woah and I'd dropped the script. Leaned down to pick it up but the pages were all shuffled and out of order from the fall, and he said or just leave it. Good actors make bold choices, he said, breath hot on my cheek. So I guess I left the pages there on the floor.

\* \* \*

#### Daphne Kalotay on Margaret Dunn

*This moving, if painful, story amazed me on multiple fronts. For one thing, it is daring, its young narrator—an aspiring actor in contemporary Hollywood—at first appearing to be despicable. Only as we continue to read do we gradually (seemingly magically, so deftly is this done) understand the full desperation of his situation: self-loathing, semi-closeted, forced to hide his primary (highly inequitable) relationship due to the continued homophobia of the American movie industry. Without being didactic or melodramatic, the author presents a realistic, if nearly dystopian, world of “takers” and “givers” in a touching and ultimately satisfying story.*

The next day the internet had new pictures of Lloyd. Lloyd taking selfies with fans. Lloyd stepping out of the ocean water. Lloyd at a restaurant, one of those beach side ones. Drinks with a woman hidden in a sunhat—an old flame, could it be?

My mom had left me two new voicemails.

\* \* \*

I didn't leave the house for about a week after that and ran through the gabapentin prescription. Walker came by after I'd asked him to go to the drug store for me. Brought Lean Cuisine, Advil, Gatorade—

“I said gabapentin, not Advil.”

“Well, reckon I'd have to be Lloyd to pick up that script, no?”

I shrugged. He told me I smelled horrible, asked if I wanted to go for a drive. “Not really,” I replied. “I want you to go, though.”

The week before Lloyd was back I decided to lose fifteen pounds. Saw videos of Patrick Bateman on TikTok and decided to emulate that routine. Cold spoons over the eyes, five-hundred crunches each morning. I'd work my way up, I knew. He could do almost a thousand.

“You see a difference?” I asked Lloyd, flexing my stomach.

“Yeah, you look like teenager. Eat a burger.”

“I am a teenager.”

That shut him up. I moved back to the flat in Encino, with its shitty mattress and its forty-seven stairs. It wasn't all that bad, though. He got me a car—a nice one, brand new. Promised me the engagement between him and the Spanish actress would be called off sometime in the winter.

“And maybe—we'll have to see, but maybe we can go public sometime in the spring.”

And that made me feel a bit better but still wasn't doing too hot. Thought about my mom a lot, once wondered if she'd die before then and felt so bad that I vomited all over the floor. Called her after to tell her I loved her, and she talked about birds that had been nesting in our garage. As I listened I counted my ribs in the mirror. I'd booked this Calvin Klein campaign where they had to bleach my hair. Lloyd started saying he wanted to get me to see his psychiatrist—*his*, he stressed, not someone on my own. I went out on long drives around the city, circle the blocks around Sunset. There was this one homeless woman I kept coming back to. She wore two different shoes and held a sign that read “Please help me Jesus.”

\* \* \*

Walker and I still hung out some, only when Lloyd was busy. Told him I didn't really know how I felt about acting anymore. He nodded like he understood.

One night I was in my studio in Encino and Lloyd told me to come over. I was already pretty loaded and told him so but he insisted, said to bring something fun. So I left the house with a little thing

of blow in a takeout bag from an Indian place, tripped and cut one of my palms open on the pavement. The car was nice, red and nice and on his insurance because I couldn't afford it. Had a little hood ornament of a rooster on it—I didn't know why. I'd named him Ferdinand. In the reflection I looked bad. Ugly and fat and like a fucking idiot, sucking at my palm. His beak was open, as if to speak. What are you saying? I stroked its gizzard. Well, what's your life like?

\* \* \*

When they pulled me over that night on a side street I started crying. All hot and heavy, just straight bawling and couldn't breathe. And when they found that takeout bag they just walked me over to the backseat of the cruiser, no cuffs or anything. I cried the whole way to the station.

On my one phone call I called Lloyd. Told him how they'd been asking about the car registration, stuff I didn't know how to answer—why his name was there, on the documents and such.

“Are you trying to punish me for something?”

“I—what?”

“Trying to ruin my fucking life?”

He put up my bail but didn't come to the hearing. Walker came in a cab and got me. I sat next to him in the backseat and watched the meter tick up. There were stories on the internet—my name, my picture next to his. My phone was going off in my pocket. They were rumors, then. Little things that would grow in the coming weeks, I was sure. But nothing from Lloyd, nor my mother. I did the Hindu breathwork and felt the blood rush to my head.





## Sheer Incarceration

*Kellen Duccy*



# Disruption

*Madison Davis*



# Mariana

*Nick Manetas*

Staring down black water, I spoke  
to the Mariana Trench.

I asked her how it felt  
to keep a secret, and she echoed

in thunderclaps and ocean hiss,  
froze my skin in painted drops,

flung me to the peak of Everest and bade  
me jump off, bade me know the depths

of an ice fractal canyon. When the wind  
knocked me, my body a rag doll, suspended

in a six-minute death date,  
Mariana roared: still I knew

nothing. Nothing will come  
of nothing, of falling from Everest,

Mariana always the deeper  
of the two. Slipping from the sky,

oh Lucifer, Mariana bellowed in the rumble  
of a bomb exploding: I will fall

until I know its depths, know  
the coldness of an absent sun,

the permanence of ice in darkness.  
Staring down black water,

I whispered my terror and prayed  
for Giverny: for water lilies & ivy

bridges & row boats full  
of hyacinths, for the warm fuzz pedal

of the cherry blossom. Mariana rose  
and swallowed me, my leg tethered

to fishing wire cast upward, reeling me  
down, past angler fish & sharks & giant squids,

lower where light becomes as thin as spiderwebs,  
where extremophiles light the black in crimson &  
turpentine,

glowing, a cold injected directly into bone,  
and the trench rumbled you know nothing

of age, or depth, snapped tether,  
drifting me down in consuming dark

eons more to fall.



# Love, Grandma

*Helena Drake*

"It's my birthday in three days," Jean told the mailman. She wiped her small fists, sticky with apple juice, on her overalls. "Are you going to get me a present?"

"Jean," said her brother, mortified, "he's the mailman. He's not going to get you a present."

The mailman laughed and handed Tom their mail, which he sorted through apprehensively.

"Happy early birthday," the mailman told Jean. "Maybe I can bring you a card or something. How's that?"

Jean frowned. "Just a card?"

"Jean!" said Tom.

"Will it have any money in it?" she persisted.

The mailman grinned. "How old are you going to be, Jean?"

Jean held up five grimy fingers.

He whistled. "Five years old! Well, that's exciting. I've gotta be on my way but I'll see what I can do. Goodbye, now."

Jean shut the door and Tom said goodbye. She snatched the mail from his hands and delivered it to his mother, who spent her Saturdays folding laundry for Tom and his younger siblings.

"The mailman said maybe he'll bring me a card," Jean told her mother.

"I like that mailman. That's nice of him."

"There was something for me," said Tom, and his mother handed him an envelope. "I think from school."

"Are they giving you any more scholarships?"

Tom tore open the envelope and unfolded the paper inside. He read the letter quickly. "No."

"Well, it's not like you can't pay for it yourself. You do have the money for it."

"It's going to be everything I have."

"You have to learn responsibility, Tom. That's what you have money for."

"I sort of wanted that new bike," he said. "For school. The campus is pretty big. When I visited, it was huge."

"You don't need a bike for school. Besides, if you really want one you can get an old one from Mr. Capello. He's got plenty."

Tom folded the letter and put it back in the envelope. He heard Jean running to his other siblings in the living room to play astronaut. They had played it

about every day since the moon landing last summer and showed no indication of stopping. Their shouting irritated him. When he was their age his mother had always made him play outside in summer, whether he liked it or not.

"It's my first year of college," he said, "and I wanted a nice, new bike. Maybe you could get me one as a gift. A sort of going-away—"

"You're cheap, Tom," said his mother. "If you want the bike, you'll have to buy it yourself."

\* \* \*

Tom walked past Mr. Capello's shop on his way to visit his grandmother. The rusting graveyard of bikes chained outside to metal racks were objects of pity, not anything he could seriously be expected to purchase. Inside gleamed the new ones, fire-engine red and banana-yellow and sea-teal—that was the one that mattered. The Schwinn Deluxe Tornado, 26" coaster brake and a luggage carrier, sea-teal and ivory. Its coat of paint winked at him through the window as Mr. Capello lit a cigarette and guided a customer to his newest arrivals. He wouldn't sell it for less than fifty dollars, even though Tom had pleaded with him. Tom could technically afford it, but then he wasn't sure how he would get his textbooks and maybe he'd need another job. Maybe it would be worth it.

He let his hand rest on the polished-glass window until Mr. Capello waved him angrily along and tossed his son a rag to clean the mark Tom had left. Tom scuffed his shoes against the pavement and kept walking.

His grandmother lived a thirty-minute walk into the part of town that was a little busier, thirty-five if Tom walked slowly. It would probably take five minutes to drive but Tom could barely afford a bike, much less a car.

He walked into the stark building with two geranium plants on either side of the door and waved to the lady at the desk. He passed some nurses arguing over medicine and two old women melting into their wheelchairs. Their faces brightened at the presence of a young person and he smiled at them uneasily. He didn't want them to talk to him. He came here a lot but he didn't exactly like it.

He knocked on the door of his grandmother's room and then entered. She was splayed on her bed, which was bad. It was afternoon and she was supposed to be in her wheelchair. Now he couldn't take her outside. And she was never able to talk very much when she was in her bed.

"Hi Grandma," said Tom, pulling her blanket over her bare legs. He had stopped being embarrassed by them sometime after he realized that sometimes his grandmother needed help getting dressed and sometimes the nurses forgot or didn't care. He sat in the chair beside her bed and took one of her translucent hands. Soft veins roped through it like cords of blue velvet.

"Hello," she said, wrapping her fingers around his.

"How are you? Gotten out of bed today?"



Her eyes moved from his face, then back, then she looked afraid. "I don't remember."

She had used to remember things like that and she knew it, too. Tom changed the subject quickly. "Well, I'll open the window. Probably nice to get some fresh air in here."

He walked to the window and struggled with the lock as he searched for something to say.

"Nothing much has changed at home. I've just been getting ready for school and trying to get some scholarships. I'm sure gonna miss you when I'm at school."

He glanced back at her to see if the mention of his going away had upset her, but she was not looking at him.

"It's almost Jean's birthday," he continued. "She won't stop talking about it."

"Jean?" his grandmother repeated.

"Yeah, Jean." Tom opened the window and stared out at the road. He felt ill at the prospect of having to explain who Jean was. "She—"

"It's her birthday?"

Tom relaxed. "No, not yet. Three days."

"Oh." She looked afraid again. Her dry lips trembled. Black whiskers curled above and around them, whiskers he wished he could pluck out because she never used to look like that—before her son had died and before she was confined to this bed and before she forgot her own grandchildren. "Did I make her a card?"

"I don't think so," said Tom. "Would you like to?"

"Yes." She stretched a hand toward her desk where a notepad rested. She picked it up and turned it over in her hands twice before she tore a sheet from it. She set the notepad down and looked at the sheet in front of her.

"I'll get you a pen," said Tom.

He found one in the drawer and handed it to her. She ran one finger along the smooth plastic, studying the words that had used to be printed on the side but had long since worn off. After a moment she made slow, careful loops across the sheet, and Tom walked to the window. He waited two minutes and checked the clock impatiently. When two minutes had passed he returned to her side and glanced at the sheet. The scribbles were illegible. He thought maybe it had been meant to spell his grandmother's first name.

"Is this for Jean?" he said finally.

"Jean?"

"For her birthday?"

"Her birthday?"

"Yes. In three days."

"Oh," said his grandmother. "Did I make her a card?"

Tom took the notepad and pen. "I'll bring you one tomorrow. I'll buy one from the store and you can sign it."

She shook her head. "I don't want you to buy me anything."

"Okay. I'll bring some paper from home. We'll make one." He looked at the wheelchair in the corner of the room. "How about we get some fresh air?"

\* \* \*

Tom stopped at a corner store and bought a card. He could have saved a little on making one himself (the card was more expensive than he had expected), but he was no good at art. And he didn't want it to be his card. He was so annoyed at the price of the card that he almost went home without the candy he had been meaning to get for Jean's birthday—he was already spending money on her, wasn't he?—but the card was from Grandma. And what kind of older brother was stingy about his little sister's birthday? So he bought some candy in a brown paper bag, the kind Jean liked, the kind coated in sugar, and paid for it with a bill he wished he was giving to Mr. Capello at the bike shop instead. He went home and hung his jacket on the wall, hung up Jean's that she had tossed on the floor, and went to the kitchen. His mother stirred something on the stove that smelled of meat and potatoes.

"What's for dinner?" he asked.

"Stew," she replied. "Did you visit Grandma?"

"Stopped by."

"How was she?"

Tom hesitated. The notebook and pen weighed in his pocket. "She wanted to make a card for Jean."

"Oh, really? She remembered?"

"Sort of. I mean, I reminded her." He fished the notepad out of his pocket and set it desperately on the counter. "She tried to write a message but she spent about two minutes writing this."

His mother glanced at it and sighed. "She's such a mess. Doesn't that just make you depressed?"

Tom put his hand over the notepad and slid it back into his pocket.

"She used to be a real nice lady. I remember when I was first dating your dad I thought she was a real nice lady. She was too lenient on your dad, I think, but she was real nice."

As though Tom couldn't remember his grandmother before she was like this. His mother always spoke like he couldn't remember.

"I guess it's not like anyone could ever tell your dad what to do anyway," she continued. "You know, I always told him if he ate the way he did it was going to give him a heart attack someday. I knew it and I always told him. But I guess he probably never listened to her, either. How long did you say it took her to write that?"

"I don't know," said Tom quickly. "I bet she could've written it fine if she had just been in her chair. She was in her bed."

Tom's mother set the lid on the stew. "I always hope I don't end up like that."

\* \* \*

Tom went to his grandmother's the next day and found her in her wheelchair.



She sat in front of a small table, with a napkin on top of which she reached for with one hand. He squeezed her other and sat in the chair beside her, the chair the nurses kept in her room even though they knew she couldn't get into it, even though they weren't going to go through all the trouble of getting her in that chair. He saw crumbs gathered between the folds of her shirt.

"Hi, Grandma," he said. "How are you? How was your lunch?"

She looked at him, then nervously toward the door as though the word "lunch" had frightened her.

"Good?" he continued. "I'll bet you were sitting with your friends. I know you have those friends you always sit with. Nancy and who else? What's his name? Rich? It was probably nice to see them."

"I don't know their names," she said. "Tom, are you warm enough?"

"I'm fine. It's not cold in here. Not for me, anyway. Are you cold?"

She shook her head. Traces of something sticky and sugary stuck to her chin and around her lips and he wondered why no one had helped her. He kept waiting for her to lift the napkin to wipe her mouth, but she was folding it instead.

"Well, I brought you a card to sign for Jean. It's got a message inside already, so you can just write Jean's name at the top and yours at the bottom."

He set the card and pen on her table and waited. She smoothed one side of

the folded napkin and folded it in half again.

"For who?" she said finally.

"For Jean, for her birthday. Here, I'll take your napkin."

She handed it to him, bewildered, and took the pen. The back of her hair stuck up, untouched since she had woken up this morning. Tom tossed the napkin in the trash and found a comb in the bathroom.

"Here," he said, "I'll fix your hair."

It was greasy, and chunks of dandruff stuck around the teeth of the comb as he ran it through. He didn't know how to make her hair look better so he just combed it down. His grandmother looked at the card and opened it, read it over two or three times, then closed it again. She looked at Tom, who was putting the comb back in the bathroom.

"Where do I put this?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"My card."

"Did you finish it?"

"Finish it?" she repeated.

Tom opened his mouth to explain but gave up before he started. He dug out the notepad from his pocket. He was wearing the same pants as yesterday because he did not have that many pairs of pants, and he also did not want to buy new ones because he wanted a new bike more than new pants. "Here," he said. "I'll write on this notepad what to

write, and you can write it."

He wrote, "Dear Jean," and "Love, Grandma." He put the notepad in front of her and opened the card sharply. After three minutes she had produced a series of incomprehensible lines on the notepad beneath his writing.

"I can take the card," Tom decided, feeling heat in his face and stinging in his eyes. He turned his back, wrote "Dear Jean," and "Love, grandma" on the card, and closed it.

"For Jean?" she said abruptly. "I've got some money to put in the card."

Tom turned around and blinked several times. "Oh," he said, "sure. Where is it?"

"In my purse."

"Your purse? Do you know where—? Oh, it's over here. Okay. How much do you want to give her?"

"How much is in there?"

Tom opened the purse and found a pair of glasses, a folded napkin, and another notepad with illegible writing. One piece of wrapped candy winked at him as it caught the light.

"A ten dollar bill," lied Tom.

"Oh, wow. Ten dollars?"

"Yes."

"Then will you give her two dollars for me?"

"Sure."

"Take another two for yourself," she said. "Buy yourself something nice." Tom nodded and closed the purse.

\* \* \*

On Jean's birthday, Tom handed her a crisp, white envelope. "This is from Grandma," he said. "She got you a card."

Their mother, sticking five candles in a cake, did not hear him, though he had really been speaking to her and not to Jean at all. Jean looked disappointed at the lack of a present, but accepted the card anyway. Tom handed her the candies in the brown paper bag quickly.

"And these are from me."

Jean opened them and looked inside. "Thank you," she said, and opened the card. Inside were two crisp dollar-bills, which she removed and smoothed on the counter.

"It's nice," said Tom, again so his mother could hear, "that Grandma gave you some money."

"Well, Aunt Denise got me three dollars."

Tom's mother was lighting the candles. She wasn't even listening.

\* \* \*

The next day, Tom walked into his house with a big smile across his face. "Jean," he said, "you'll never believe it. You had better come outside on the driveway and see for yourself. Grandma bought you a brand-new bicycle."



In the morning, I watch over the edge.  
My arms, in shadow, look for ways  
to hunger anew. The physics of slow  
water, finding your face in the moonlight.  
Listen, the garden—a simple turning,  
I am the creature crouching among the leaves.  
The part of the woman to consume; her  
straight sharp teeth, humming above

the twilight. Listen, I hunt  
the mouse in the floorboards,  
white knuckle, brimming midnight;  
the truth that prefers not to speak.

## Thought Experiment

*Callan Latham (University of Iowa)*

*Winner of NassLit's 2023 National Undergraduate Contest in Poetry,  
judged by Professor Katie Farris*

### **Katie Farris on Callan Latham**

*The language and syntax in "Thought Experiment" walks the delicate line between clarity and astonishment: for instance, in the second sentence of the piece, "The physics of slow water" surprises while producing a robust image, as does the line "her/ straight sharp teeth, humming above/ the twilight." The final sentence of the poem, comprising nearly the last two stanzas, seems to me to be both a satisfying conclusion to the narrator's arms looking "for ways to hunger anew" from the second sentence of the poem, as well as an almost metapoetic meditation on art, which could be called, as the author calls the mouse in the floorboards, "the truth that prefers not to speak."*



*Runner-Up of NassLit's 2023 National Undergraduate Contest in Art,  
judged by Professor Colleen Asper*

## Corsetry

*Harley Pomper (University of Chicago)*



# Art

**Andrei Barrett (New York University '25)**

**Zehma Herring '26** is a sophomore from Richmond, VA. She enjoys making art of all kinds, but has a particular interest in painting and photography. She can most often be found painting for hours at a time in the vis building or out and about taking photos for @thepeopleofprinceton.

**Jude Kaveh (New York University '26)** (he/they) is a Sri Lankan interdisciplinary artist who lives and works in New York City and is pursuing a Studio Art BFA at New York University. He has shown and performed artwork internationally, including a performance at The Hearing Voices Café at Colomboscope 2022 (Colombo, Sri Lanka).

**JiHwan Park (New York University)**

**Kellen Ducey '26** is a sophomore studying electrical engineering, with a dual passion for the visual arts. Her partner in crime is her cat, who blesses her with a meow when she sneezes (allergy season is very noisy).

**Frankie Solinsky Duryea '26** is a student of Comparative Literature, from the California Bay Area. He loves freezing his thoughts in photos and words, but film is expensive so he's looking for a job.

**Madison Davis '26** is a Sophomore from the scalding South-West Florida Coast. They are going to declare the Practice of Art track for a major, because, to them, everything is an art. Likes: books, forests, art, clothing, stupid little poems. Dislikes: math, shrimp (allergic).

**Harley Pomper (University of Chicago '24)**, a social-sciences student at the University of Chicago, likes to paint. Outside of studio art, they dedicate their time to the intersection of education and environmental abolition. Pomper is also a writer, avid pacer, and occasionally, a stranger on the bus.

# tributors



# CONTRIBUTORS

# Poetry

**Melanie Garcia '26** is a sophomore from Lawrence, Massachusetts (no, it's not really close to Boston) studying English, African American Studies, and creative writing. She watches too many cartoons and is an oatmeal defender.

**Nick Manetas '27** is a freshman from Richmond, Virginia interested in International Affairs, History, and English. Renowned for his lively salons in the Forbes annex, he enjoys playing guitar and writing poetry.

**Claire Wang '27** is a first-year prospective English major from Charlotte, NC. When she is not writing, she is most likely sleeping with a book by her side.

**Roya Reese '26** is a sophomore from Philadelphia in the English department. She is a proud member of Princeton Club Swim and sings weekly at Coffee Club. She is always reading something, and more often than not it's Joan Didion.

**Malia Chung '25** is a junior from Boston, Massachusetts. At Princeton, she studies English and Creative Writing, spending much of her time in the world of books. Malia is very thankful for the opportunity to participate in NassLit and other writing communities around campus.

**Callan Latham (University of Iowa '23)** is a poet from the Midwest. Her work has been published in places such as Oakland Arts Review, Santa Clara Review, Sybil Journal, and others. When not writing, she can be found baking, knitting, or reading anything she can get her hands on.

# Fiction

**Daniel Viorica '25** is from New Mexico.

**Helena Drake '25** is a junior from South Bend, Indiana, studying comparative literature with a focus on French and Russian. In her free time she enjoys creative writing, iced chai lattes, and listening to Taylor Swift.

**Margaret Dunn (University of Pennsylvania '23)** is a double major at UPenn in English and Classics. She recently completed a collection of short stories titled Babies, which won Penn's creative writing honors thesis award. This fall she will be working as a freelance writer based in NYC.



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