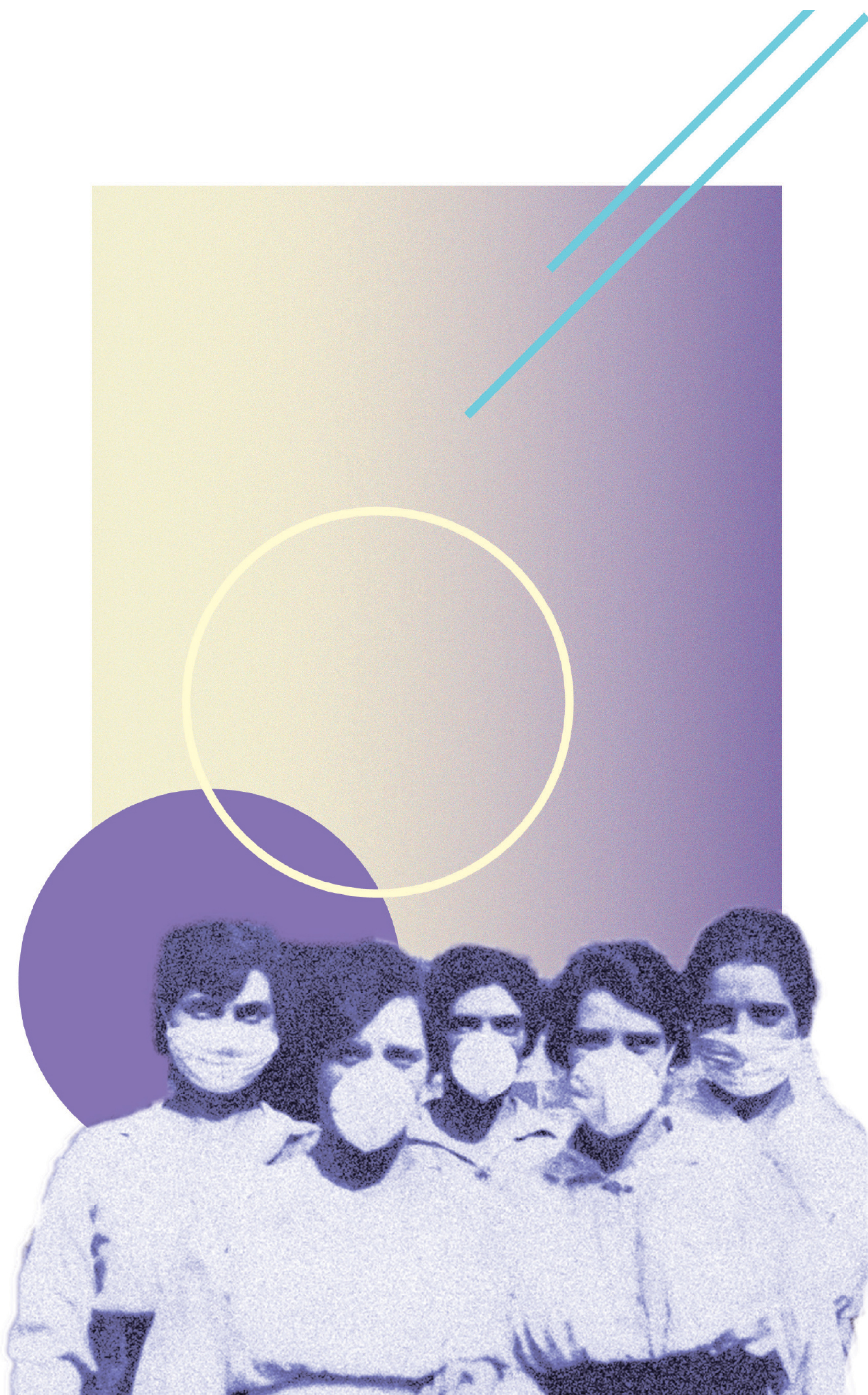


# ***BreakBread Magazine***

ISSUE 2 JUNE '21

FICTION • POETRY • ART • NONFICTION



# ***BreakBread Magazine***

Volume 1, Issue 2  
Summer 2021

---

a home for young creatives

## BreakBread Team

W. David Hall, Editor-in-Chief  
Jamie Danielle Logan, Managing Editor  
Shane Wells, Assistant Managing Editor  
Alexandra Beitia, Social Media Manager  
Rha Arayal, Social Media Literary Apprentice

Molly McGrane, Operations Manager  
Pearson Hague, Media & Outreach Coordinator  
Jami'L Carter, Outreach & Engagement Coordinator  
Mia Carranza, Outreach & Engagement Coordinator  
Eliza Wetmore, Development Assistant  
Jess Horwitch, Development Assistant

Crystal AC Salas, Poetry Editor  
Jennifer Espinoza, Assistant Editor  
Jay Baker, Assistant Editor  
Chrysanthemum Ahmed, Literary Apprentice  
RC Davis, Literary Apprentice  
Japman Kaur Aneja, Literary Apprentice  
Dana Blatte, Literary Apprentice  
Rebecca Choe, Literary Apprentice  
Jessica Kim, Literary Apprentice  
Alex Manebur, Literary Apprentice  
Ellie Smith, Literary Apprentice  
Sophie Szew, Literary Apprentice

Gyasi Hall, Nonfiction Editor  
Madison Durand, Literary Apprentice  
Emily Stull, Literary Apprentice

Cara Echols, Art Editor  
Phoebe Draper, Assistant Editor  
Susan Grochmal, Assistant Editor  
Gabrielle Backman, Literary Apprentice

Jamie Lyn Smith, Fiction Editor  
Charlie Eskew, Assistant Editor  
Carrie Hsu, Associate Editor  
Abraham Ajani, Literary Apprentice  
Bella Greenspoon, Literary Apprentice  
Kate Hutchinson, Literary Apprentice  
Julian Perez, Literary Apprentice  
Brooklyn Stewart, Literary Apprentice  
Emma Zoe Polyak, Literary Apprentice  
Saumya Sawant, Literary Apprentice

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A Special Thank You to The Poetry Foundation who generously opened an emergency grant fund to support poetry and art affiliated organizations in the U.S. through the difficult time during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an extension of their Commitment to [our] Community. Sixty-one organizations were chosen for the grant aid and we were fortunate enough to be chosen as one of the recipients. We want to thank The Poetry Foundation for their \$10,000 grant, their help, and their support to the artistic world.

We Would Also Like to Thank:

Giselle Juarez, Corine Huang, Alexa Renner, Jenn Uche, Raquel Frank, Katie Oberdier, Isabel Su, and Mrudhula M

Cover photo by Cara Echols

[breakbreadproject.org](http://breakbreadproject.org)

Copyright © 2021, BreakBread Literacy Project  
All Rights Reserved

[centralpcg.com](http://centralpcg.com)



# **Contents**

## **EDITOR'S NOTE**

**Page 7**

## **POETRY**

**Page 9**

## **NONFICTION**

**Page 18**

## **ART**

**Page 28**

## **FICTION**

**Page 30**

## **BIOS**

**Page 45**

## EDITOR'S NOTE

**W. David Hall, Editor-in-Chief**

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa, Oklahoma massacre, or nearly a century of the largest case of calculated amnesia this country has ever concocted. In short, a white woman accuses a young black man of inappropriate behavior. Within 48 hours, a wave of rage, jealousy, and hate whitewashed over one of the wealthiest, most prosperous areas for African-Americans in Oklahoma (and—most likely—the United States). “Black Wall Street,” as the area was known at the time, was, for all intents and purposes, erased. 100 years on, experts are still calculating the loss of property, wealth, and life. The greatest crime, though, is that the massacre had been wiped from our collective memories. And purposely so.

Admittedly, I wasn't much of a student of history when I was younger, but like many of us, I had no real concept of the massacre as a tangible part of American history. I discovered it when I discovered the HBO mini-series *Watchmen* earlier this year. This spiritual sequel to the DC Comics graphic novel centered on the decades-long impact of the Tulsa massacre. Through this show, I felt the terror, the sorrow, the hope of that moment in history. The show, this form of art, reflected more than just a memory of the event. As all art does, the series provided the spiritual truth of the experience.

It is this spiritual truth within memory that America is wrestling with, a spiritual truth that is vital now, more than ever.

Case in point (historically): Traditional history teaches us that America was “founded” somewhere around 1776, with the signing of the Declaration of Independence. However, artists and scholars who look closer move the mile marker back a bit, recognizing 1619 (the year the first groups of enslaved people were brought to this country) as the founding year, thus creating *The 1619 Project*. Yet, there are those who would forbid this historical narrative in the classroom.

Case in point (recently): In Minneapolis, community activists transformed the intersection where George Floyd was murdered into a community garden, nurturing the pain of the people as it grew into

something good. Yes, historians will record what little bit of justice came about (Floyd's murderer, a former Minneapolis police officer, was found guilty of three charges of murder in the case, with sentencing still pending at the time of this writing). But the garden, with its huge Black Power fist raised to the midwestern sky, will speak to the experience of the people, there and everywhere. Yet, bulldozers circle the garden like vultures circle fresh kill, just waiting for the right moment to strip the carcass clean, thus fogging up our memories of the event even further.

Case in point (you are holding it in your hands): In this second issue (the FIRST IN PRINT! YES!), the spiritual truth of our push-through-the-panic understanding of this past pandemic year shines brightly. You experience it in Cara Echols' covers of a small cadre of essential workers, eyes both Saturday matinee zombie and workaday all-too-human, at the front, with a couple all masked up for a night out--actually OUTSIDE—on the back. Has that not been our year? You can't unfeel the shivers of COVID-19 death counts after reading Alexandra Dauchess' future pandemic-esque "Lethe." You can't deny how poet Mallika Khan sees that these days we all, on some level, come from coded lines like "Ordering pizza/pepperoni and/police on the phone."

All art. All reflect memory. All spiritual truth.

#

A note to Whoever Reads This 100 Years Form Now: You hold the spiritual truth of a tumultuous experience of whatever The Powers That Be tell you is history. Read these pages. Embrace these pages. Then, and only then, will your memory of this time be complete.

W. David Hall

June 9, 2021



## FOR THE REAL WORKING CLASS

Emiliano Gomez

where noise complaints mean  
cropdusters and insecticide  
inside lungs roaring and turning green  
pregnant mothers and gentrified  
refugees without clean water and no sips  
so the farm workers where're their tips

when long nights mean  
three-hundred-more-miles and no stops  
outside rain sheeting or black-icing unseen  
absentee fathers and pejorative knocks  
men with young daughter getting hips  
so the truck drivers where're their tips

when farmed fresh means  
governor doors and congress' steps  
ahead progress making and eating beans  
megaphoned assassinations and reps  
change-makers without representation lose lips  
so the environmentalists where're their tips

where customer service means  
fulfilled packages and daytime miscarriages  
floor managers whipping and loving leans  
cardboard promises and tumbling straw bridges  
each lie without a care package ships  
so the factory workers where're their tips

when working means  
a thousand degrees or hospital beds  
no one's blinking and frustration seems  
endless timeless *murriendo con sed*  
dreamers with grayscale rainbows so i ask  
mister happy-go-lucky miss pip  
and every person breaking their back where's

their  
tip.

## FRUIT OF MY WOUNDS

Desiree Hensley

I lay the fruit of my wounds  
on the kitchen table  
airing out,  
rinds rendered in vinegar,  
seeds dried on newspaper,  
for next season.  
Sliced and strung up like summer garland  
on a mosquito heavy porch.

this is not holding on,  
It is

opening in the sun,

In the sun  
a grape wrinkles to raisin,  
sweetness  
condensed.

## SELF-PORTRAIT AS ITHACA NEW YORK

Emma Karnes

Oh, the oscillations of departure. Go a monarch  
with corrupted wings. Go back a bird

in the atrium of a storm. No matter where the going—  
such a nascent shame. I bring Alden home with me,

to my four hills, my gash of a glacial lake, my drug addicts  
dancing in the streets, my dusts & shower

mists, my corners of smashed ants, my stinky  
matches & pan-burnt fish, my fitted & particular

descents. Out of what excess do mythologies grow?  
I tell Alden, Ithaca's where he thought of it!

Yes, the Yellow Brick Road! Some sun hit  
the asphalt with the ecstasy of another world.

## WE COME FROM CODE

Mallika Khan

We come from code.  
The lines of loose stitches.  
A house you can't visit.  
Binbags of scrunched up  
hellos and help mes  
before he sees it.

We come from code.  
Fed captors for soft blows.  
A tongue you can't hold.  
Ordering pizza,  
pepperoni and  
police on the phone.

We come from code.  
Cornrows plaited with rice.  
Email prayers you can't send  
Christ. Fainting in airports  
to stop hotel rooms  
and paying in nice.

We come from code.  
I can only give clues.  
See what women must do  
without our freedom.  
Wonder what we'd own  
if we got to choose.

## AND I WOULDN'T CHANGE IT

Jaime Lam

spiderwebbed walls break up / "don't touch it; you're gonna make it worse" / the ceiling-fan wing  
bends / where the battery slides to the left / with wooden floors that buckle / with wooden floors  
that squish / with wooden doors that bubble / bucket of water poured in to make the toilet  
swallow / shampoo and conditioner bottles full of cold foam / black mold blooming on the  
window / gas station water boiled on the stove for bathtime / "in and out; so it's warm for your  
brother" / dinner is another box another box another box / barren shelves at the end of the  
month / space heaters being kicked over by a dog or a cat or another dog or another cat /  
the oven that never works because it's mouth is always wide open in winter time / wet socks  
from piss or the washing machine flooding / how the bathroom and kitchen floor come apart at  
our toes / nine in a home finding some way of living / the way trash unearths itself in summer  
time / the paint chips and gets away / the kicked in porch / how the generator powers up half  
the house / a basement that can drown the first five steps / the cot's pole pressed against my hip  
becomes bedtime / ants dropping to our skin / how the window's light breeze becomes a night  
sleep's lifeline / when there are no lights / no water / only us / my sister's shadow curled up in a  
chair / "if you hold really still for ten minutes, you'll fall asleep—"



## SECRET

Sophia Liu

1.

In Chinese, rice and secret sound the same.  
Rice, pronounced mǐ, is my  
Chinese name. For all I know,

I was named after Mama's  
pregnancy craving—mung bean soup—in which  
bean is the base and rice, if even added,

presses down to the bottom.

Rice sinks in wells and enlarges when  
binded to water.

2.

After dinner, running a knife under tap water,  
I think about stabbing you. A passive thought, I think,

like when I press an eyelash brush too deep  
into my socket to see how I would look

double-lidded. Or perhaps not—when there is a pink indent  
above my lacrimal.

I clutched that knife, freshly sharpened, under the gleam of  
the kitchen light, parallel to your elbow. I could have struck so easily.

You're chopping tomatoes and they break open like young girls passing  
secrets. Like that, you know the inside of the fruit slips out,

all puddled, runny, almost red—close, but not human. Inside of you,  
I dreamed there would be opaque, glistening redness—but more

importantly, blade in your abdomen, your voice would strain. Your eyes  
would soften like a capful of oil puddling over the naked

stovetop. Shouldn't it be innate that we're the same?  
Your forehead veins tell me nothing.

3.

Sometimes I wonder who I would be if  
Mama dated. And whose car I would ride in,

whose hands would throw me  
month-old hawthorn and

tell me to eat it.

4.

In the shower, I shave my mid-phalangeal hair and  
slice open my knuckle.

I already know—I will never look like the Luo River goddess but again,

there is an ache.

Similar to that knife, that nick on my eyelid.

In the Luoshen Appraisal Painting, the goddess waited at the Luoshui River  
for a man who parted her in silence.

The grass, no thicker than her neck, waved  
like idle doves.

You say silence makes a man, but it broke you.

Silence was clamped under everyone's fist as they bent down and  
called this painting a beauty, as they told mothers to put their daughters to bed.

Why is everything that is beautiful soundless.

How could love exist in stillness, Mama?

How could a stone man be loved?

5.  
This is what I mean when I say I want to  
cut you open. & I  
want your heart to taste of  
ginger porridge.

6.  
Mostly I wonder who Mama would be if she  
dated.

7.  
Not an ache, anymore: a desire.

8.  
But like rice,  
I only float down.

9.  
It rained all Wednesday.

In the fog, tomato plants look like faded rubies, or like the  
blood eyes of their trees. But I want the rain to swamp my nostrils,  
gush into my mouth—pour into me so

I can be portioned, feasted on splintered hands,  
then spilt out of a fishbowl pot  
cracking with age.

10.  
I place the knife into the drying rack before you will ask me  
why I have paused. I just look.

Tomato juice rests on your fingertips like the blood from a  
past life.

What does it mean when the rattling cutting board makes the  
most noise in this room? What does it mean  
when an underripe fruit provides the most color? At last,

I am weeping  
inside a house  
too cold for any blood to run red.

## TWO POEMS WRITTEN ON CHRISTMAS EVE

Matt Moment

*I*

The scales fade away. Equal power  
on both sides: perfect respect. Dad  
makes a fire while I listen to the  
radio. O, Libra is a king unto his  
ancient high school years. Motorcycle boy  
of the constellation'd sky, the train tracks &  
the main street bars. He lays, droopy eye  
of holiday evening before a fire? *No*. The hands  
wash clean with very warm water.  
The fireplace sits unlit. Potential energy  
or losses cut? On this track,  
the record's starting to run flat. *OK, well—  
that is quite too bad*. In morning, I will roar aglow.  
Ask a child what fire is. They will surely  
clue you in as to where it is that I have gone.

*II*

My friend sends me a thank you text  
because I wrote her  
with condolence at her mother's death.  
Last night, the planets Jupiter and Saturn at  
their closest, holding captive the entire  
of America. I fell in love this year,  
which makes it sentimental—watching  
two gigantic bodies find their closeness—  
*Ah... relief*. Solstice comes, and now  
the every day is tulip brighter. So do  
I around her glow. Even as the planets part  
springsprouts are only closer to debut. &  
That is this year's *Times* review: a looking forward.  
Torn apart immediate past. My friend's  
without her mom tonight, and then on  
Christmas morning, collision (*noun*): meaning something else  
for her. Another year has come  
for both of us.

## GIRL, THIS IS FASHION NOVA!

Claire Myree

“You don’t have any *drip*, Claire,” Hailey said with an exasperated sigh accompanied by an eye-roll. As she spoke, she looked disapprovingly at my baggy gray joggers, dingy white Fruit of the Loom crew neck, and run-down Nike running sneakers.

“This is a perfectly good outfit!” I retorted, the presence of the coffee stain below my collar jumping back into my memory and sending the heat of a slight twinge of embarrassment to my cheeks and neck. By now, I was used to my friends reminding me that all of my clothes and resulting outfit choices lacked “swag,” “drip,” “heat,” or any of the other slang terms that referred to cool clothes and a trendy fashion sense.

“You’re too pretty to be dressing like this,” Hailey continued. “And you’re not poor either, so I don’t get it.” Even though the words sounded harsh, I knew that they came from a place of genuine concern over whether or not my poor fashion choices would inhibit me from finding a husband or from finding any other form of success in life. Yes, it was that serious. Hailey wore light-wash high-waisted mom jeans that fit perfectly to her slim waist and long legs. Her Air-force 1’s dazzled white against her even whiter Nike socks; the black check mark standing out prominently, silently asserting the superiority of all things name-brand. The beige cropped turtle neck she wore came to rest just above the belly button of her toned stomach while the neckline came to rest tastefully above her collarbone. The little golden cuffs that individually adorned each of her box-braids reflected the overhead lights of the university dining hall in which we sat. She looked like she had just stepped out of the latest viral Tik-Tok or an Instagram shopping ad; perfectly styled and on trend.

“There’s no point in me dressing cute during the week,” I said, trying to convince both myself and her of the logic of this statement as I dumped the small bag of french fries I had gotten with my salad onto the portable food scale that I carried around in my bookbag at all times. “I work out in the mornings, and it’s easier to throw on sweats afterwards than trying to squeeze into jeans when I’m sweaty and trying to hurry off to class.”

“No,” was all Hailey said curtly back to me as she stood up from the table to go get more soup. As she walked by me, I caught a strong whiff

of her Victoria Secret Bombshell perfume. Hailey and my roommate, Ruby, were up to date on all the latest fashion trends as they demonstrated by their wardrobes and accessories. I, on the other hand, was quite the opposite as I still routinely wore outfits and clothes that I’d had since high school. However, Hailey and Ruby had made it their life’s mission, over the past three years of our friendship, to turn me into a fashionista just like them. I imagined that they thought of me like Anne Hathaway’s character in the *The Princess Diaries* as she buds from the frumpy girl-next-door to a stunning, glamorous princess. I appreciated my friend’s concern and effort, but I still wasn’t willing to embark on the daunting task of establishing an acceptable sense of style by spending loads of money and time scouring fast fashion brand websites like FashionNova, SheIn, Pretty Little Thing, Forever 21, and Misguided. I was often able to fend off my friends with a laugh and an empty promise to buy a pair of Air-Force 1’s with my next paycheck. I rationalized my hesitance to buy into the ever-evolving contemporary fashion movement by telling myself that it that was superficial and stupid to get so caught up clothing and accessories, but I knew that I was lying to myself.

The truth was that I wanted to buy in, but I didn’t think that I was ready or good enough to do so because I wasn’t skinny enough or pretty enough to be able to buy in all the way and look the way in the clothing that advertisements indicated that I should. After I lose this ten pounds I’ll finally order that dress, or that top, or those bottoms, I’d thought to myself on multiple occasions.

When Hailey came back to the table she informed me that she had a plan to fix my flawed fashion sense.

“I’m going to style you for a week,” she said. “Then you’ll know how to pick out a cute outfit. I’ll come to your room tonight to go through your closet.”

“Okay,” I said with a laugh. “It’ll be like an episode of *What Not to Wear*.”

Hailey took a deep breath and exhaled deeply while shaking her head, as the realization of the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility, of the task before her dawned on her.

“If you don’t have anything in your closet you can just borrow some of my stuff,” she said.

“I have some cute stuff,” I scoffed, offended and trying to sound as convincing as possible.

Haley pursed her lips and gave me a glance that looked like a sarcastic wince. “I will get you right,” she said.

“Can’t wait,” I said sarcastically, but I was actually really, really excited.

#

That evening for my Capstone class we were assigned to watch a movie called *T-Shirt Travels*, a documentary-style film that followed a young Zambian man who made a living for himself and his family by buying and re-selling second-hand clothing that was donated and imported from America. The focus of the documentary was to explain that the high volume of second-hand donations from America plays a large role in the stagnation and destruction of the Zambian textile/clothing industry. Once the donated clothes reach Zambia, they are sold by Zambian sellers for cheap prices. The issue with this second-hand clothing market is that it makes the Zambian textile industry obsolete because there is no need for Zambia to manufacture, sell, and distribute its own clothing when cheaper second-hand clothes donated from America can be bought cheaper and more conveniently. This narrative is the same for many other African nations. The documentary cuts from Zambia to America where they ask Americans what they think about donating clothes to places like the Salvation Army and Goodwill.

Most of the interviewees give answers that are along the lines of, “It’s a good thing to donate old clothes to those in need,” or “I’ve never really thought about where my clothes end up after I donate them; I guess they could end up anywhere.” The last interview shown is that of a Black woman who acknowledges that “there is a lot of controversy over people shipping clothes overseas.” The next scene in the documentary cuts to a talking head of Barney Lehrer, an export agent from Brooklyn, who explains that, even though the Salvation Army has retail stores all over the world, the clothes that we see inside of these stores only make up about 5 percent of total donations. The other 95% is not even unpacked because they are immediately sold to dealers, factories, and sellers who buy the clothes in bulk for 10-15 cents a pound and then ship them off to be sold in third-world countries. He ends by saying that the largest export product from the United States to Africa is used clothing and that it is a huge, multi-billion dollar business for the companies selling these clothes overseas.

#

The night sky is dark and distant as it escorts me back to my dorm room after class. I drag my feet slowly along the cement ground as I walk. Images from the documentary of little African children wearing Guns N’ Roses t-shirts and New York Knicks ball caps flit through my mind. When I get back to my room, Hailey is already there rummaging through my closet, pulling out shirts and pants and arranging potential outfit pairings neatly on the floor. As I look at them and realize that they are super cute, the African children leave my mind.

#

“Wow, Claire,” Hailey says, holding up a lace bralette that she pulled out of one of my drawers. “You’ve actually got some pretty cute stuff.”

“See, I told you,” I reply, but I am actually just as shocked as she is. Some of the garments that she pulls out of my closet are things that I don’t even remember buying. I wonder, with a twinge of guilt, how many other clothes I have at home that have been sitting, unworn, for years. By now, Hailey has selected the seven outfits that I am to wear; one for each day of the week. She has even put accessories with some of the outfits: sunglasses, scrunchies, a necklace, and a few bracelets. As I look at the finished outfits, I feel another wave of shock as I realize that these are items that came out of my closet; I had stylish, cute clothes and didn’t even know it.

“Okay,” Hailey points to a pair of high waisted jeans paired with a long-sleeved V-neck crop top with a ribbon-scrunchie and two Pure-Vida rings as accessories. “Change into this after you work out tomorrow. Just bring lashes, glue, and mascara in your gym bag so you can get ready in the locker-room after you work out. Try all the outfits on now though so we can see how they look.”

“Alright,” I say, slowly bending down to pick up the first pair of jeans. I feel a sensation of hope, elation, and excitement swell inside me as I try on each of the outfits and undergo what feels to be a complete transformation.

#

The rest of the week passes in a blur of cute outfits, selfies, mirror pics, and compliments. The sharp uptick in my confidence is intoxicating. However, as the week draws to a close I begin to feel a sense of panic over what I will wear next week, and the week after that, and the week after that. Hailey had been able to extract enough cute clothes out of my wardrobe to fuel me for a week, but I was certain that there wasn’t enough there to do so over and over again. Re-wearing the same outfits was unthinkable, which meant there was only one thing left to do: Go shopping.

#

“I need to go to the mall to get some new clothes,” I told Hailey the next day.

“The mall? Are you a boomer?” she retorted back with disgust. “You’re not going to the mall for new clothes, just shop online. SheIn, FashionNova, and Pretty Little Thing are having sales. We will look tonight.”

That night Hailey peered over my shoulder as I scrolled through a plethora of fast fashion brand websites and Instagram boutiques. My electronic shopping cart filled up quickly with 4 dollar tank tops, 12 dollar

jeans, and 6 dollar jewelry. The previous week had given me a taste of what it feels like to be trendy and stylish, and I was determined to continue to do so even if it meant recreating my wardrobe multiple times a year. Luckily, fast fashion brands made the process of wardrobe re-creating affordable, convenient, rewarding, and fun.

#

The rise in popularity of fast fashion is the embodiment of the twin problems of capitalist consumerism and unsustainability. Fast fashion refers to the “the mass production of cheap, disposable clothing. Countless new collections per year make us feel constantly out of date and encourage us to keep buying more.” [Sustainyourstyle.org](http://Sustainyourstyle.org) goes on to deem fast fashion “the monster in our closet.” Thanks to fast fashion, cheaply made replicas of the styles that we see celebrities and influencers wearing are pumped into stores, both online and physical, at rapid speed allowing consumers to easily stay up to date with the ever changing trends. Much of the success and influence that fast fashion brands have acquired can be attributed to social media and the pervasive presence that these brands have on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

For example, immediately after scrolling through fast fashion brand websites with Hailey, ads for similar styles from similar brands with beautiful models popped up on my Instagram feed, prompting me to keep scrolling, shopping, and buying. The underlying message that I received, and continue to receive, from these advertisements is that if I buy the clothing I too could achieve the style, beauty, and status that cute clothes appear to give. After experiencing the positive reinforcements that came about as a result of Hailey dressing me stylishly, I was more than ready to buy into the fantasy. In this way the interactive algorithm that we consent to by using social media interacts with consumerism and fast fashion in a way that continues to facilitate the societal pressures that lead to copious amounts of fast fashion shopping. Thus, the fine line between dressing cute for self-confidence in the effort to “treat yourself” blurs with the darker side of toxic consumerism and unsustainability.

In addition to the harmful societal implications of the fast fashion industry, there is also a host of environmental issues that go along with the industry as well. By preying on the insecurities of consumers—primarily young women—fast fashion brands are able to leverage their advertisements and social media presence into a lucrative and never-ending demand for their products. This demand allows for the environmentally harmful production practices of the fast fashion industry to continue. [Earth.org](http://Earth.org)'s Rashmila Maiti explains that, “among the environmental impacts of fast fashion include the depletion of non-renewable sources, emission of

greenhouse gases and the use of massive amounts of water and energy. The fashion industry is the second largest consumer industry of water, requiring about 700 gallons to produce one cotton shirt and 2,000 gallons of water to produce a pair of jeans.” Fast fashion makes it easy to cheaply consume and accumulate stylish clothing. However, as trends and styles continue to constantly evolve within our consumer society, waste is produced as clothes that are no longer “in” are replaced by those that are. The result is a never ending cycle of buying clothing, wearing it for a short time period, and then casting it aside—fueled by the demand of insatiable consumers’ desire to abstain the beauty and image that fast fashion advertisements promise.

#

A couple weeks after my “fashion awakening,” Hailey, Ruby, and a few of our other girlfriends decided to dress cute and go out for a nice dinner. We made the plans on a Monday, which meant that I had a week to figure out what I was going to wear before the dinner occurred on the upcoming Saturday night. Without even looking through my closet, I knew that the best way to ensure that my outfit was cute enough to take pictures for Instagram was to buy a new one. That day I spent the majority of my free-time scrolling through FashionNova for the perfect dress; if I wanted it to arrive in time I needed to order it as soon as possible. I was looking for a tight-fitting body-con dress, and I knew that FashionNova was the perfect place to look.

#

After consulting with Ruby and Hailey I finally decided on a black mini-dress made from a latex-like material. It looked perfect on the model as it wrapped around her perky breasts, perfect cleavage ratio, small waist, and shapely hips.

“Oh, hell yea,” Ruby said as I clicked “confirm order.” “You’re about to look fire; we’ve gotta take pictures.”

“Yes!” I exclaimed in excitement. “They’re going to do numbers.”

“Bad bitches link up!” Hailey shouted with equal levels of excitement waving one hand in the hair and using the other to crank up the volume on her JBL Bluetooth speaker. We all danced to the Drake song that came booming out.

#

The dress arrived on Thursday evening. When I saw the orange package slip in my campus mailbox I hurriedly put in my combination, yanked the slip out, and dashed wildly to the mail desk.

“I have a package,” I said, heaving wildly, to the girl behind the desk and shoving the orange slip towards her.

“Okay,” she said with a smile. “Sign the slip while I go grab it.” I

scribbled my signature onto the stiff orange paper and waited, bouncing up and down on the balls of my feet. It seemed like it took her forever to come out of the back with my package, but when she finally returned I snatched the package out of her hand and sprinted excitedly back to my dorm room.

#

The dress fit like a glove. I was elated. As I looked at myself in the mirror I marvelled at how the shiny black material cinched in at my waist. The dress matched perfectly with the black strappy heels I had paired them with, making my legs look shapely and womanly. As I twirled around in the mirror, posing and puckering my lips, my roommate walked in with our friend Jamie. They both oo'd and ah'd as I modeled the dress for them.

"You look hot!" Jamie exclaimed, slapping my butt playfully. "Where is the dress from? It looks expensive; is it from Free People?" Free People was an expensive clothing brand. I gasped with flattery at the idea that my cheap dress was giving the illusion of an expensive one.

"*Girl*, this is FashionNova!" I shrieked excitedly, clapping my hands and jumping up and down.

#

My friends and I were able to achieve our goal of taking Insta-worthy pictures of ourselves in our cute dinner outfits. I sent my mom some of the pictures and, in typical mom fashion, she called me to give me her response instead of just texting back.

"Very pretty," my mom said cheerily as soon as I answered the phone.

"Thanks," I said. "The dress was new; I ordered it online."

"Cute," my mom said, but I could sense her tone about to shift as she began her next sentence. "You were showing a lot of legs and boob though."

"That's the style now, mom," I said with a sigh and an eye-roll. "It's a cute outfit."

"I agree it's a cute outfit, but you should wear something because you like it, not because you think you're supposed to like it."

"I do like it," I replied curtly.

"Okay, okay," my mom said, her tone becoming light. I could tell she was trying to back-track before an argument started.

#

After getting off the phone with my mom, I thought back on the comment she had made about me wearing the dress. The more I thought about it the more annoyed I became. Why is she trying to make it seem like I'm some mindless sheep just because I'm wearing something that's "in," I thought. Obviously I like the dress for that reason.

#

The conversation I'd had with my mother stayed with me the following Monday night as I sat in my Capstone class. That evening the class decided on a topic for our class project: the unsustainable life-cycle of clothing and the harmful environmental implications behind it. The professor dispersed the class and assigned us the task of conducting some research about our topic. One of the first articles that I came across was from Business Insider. The article rattled off fast facts about the environmental impacts of fast fashion: "85% of all textiles go to the dump each year;" "Fashion production makes up 10% of humanity's carbon emissions, dries up water sources, and pollutes rivers and streams;" "On average Americans are only keeping their garments for half as long as in 2000." As I read, I could not help but think about all the clothing in my closet that I had forgotten about. My mind drifted back to when Hailey was rummaging through my closet and pulling out garments that I didn't even remember buying or having.

I recalled the way that I had been online shopping in the weeks since Hailey styled me, buying new clothes that were pushing those I already owned further into the recesses of my memory. I had no doubt that soon the new clothes would meet the same fate. The *T-Shirt Travels* documentary popped back into my mind, and I thought about what would happen if I tried to "do the right thing" by donating my old clothes to a second-hand clothing organization. I would feel warm and fuzzy inside, but the reality is that even though the clothing would be out of sight and out of mind for me they would further serve to dipiltate the textile economy of whichever third-world nation they landed in.

I remembered a quote from Dambisa Moyo's article, "Why Foreign Aid is Hurting Africa," in which she states, "the insidious aid culture has left African countries more debt-laden, more inflammation prone, more vulnerable to vagaries of the currency markets, and more unattractive to higher quality investment." The image of a small African child wearing the black mini dress I'd ordered off of FashionNova popped into my mind, the dress fitting baggy and awkward as it hung on the small child. The absurdity of the image caused me to release a chuckle, which was then followed by a pang of tangible, powerful guilt.

#

When I think of fast fashion and its powerful presence and environmental impact, my mind immediately goes to the brand FashionNova. All, and I quite literally mean every single one, of the most popular social media influencers have, at some point in their career and in some capacity, served as a FashionNova brand ambassador. For example, go onto Kylie Jenner's Instagram page and you will undoubtedly see her

striking a bunch of sexy poses in sexy clothing with “@fashionnova” tagged on the pictures and “#fashionnovaambassador” as the last line of her caption. The same is true for Addison Rae, Lyric Galore, Ari Fletcher, Megan Thee Stallion, etc. My observations here are not to deem FashionNova as any worse than any of the other hundreds of fast fashion brands that use celebrity endorsements, cheap prices, and social media advertisements in order to turn a profit. Nor do I mean to “throw any shade” to the beautiful women who wear and endorse these brands.

As I made these reflections, I typed “Why is FashionNova bad” into my Google search bar. I clicked on the first result and was taken to an article on ThePrettyPlanteer.com that was titled “30+ FastFashion brands to avoid for a more sustainable future.” I scrolled through the brands they had listed; in the section dedicated to FashionNova it read, “Fashion Nova has received the worst rating by *Good On You*. The brand scored ‘very poor’ on environmental impact, labor conditions, and animal welfare. We have to admit, FashionNova is very good at influencer marketing. But otherwise, it sells cheap clothing that was made by underpaid workers in Los Angeles in quantities our planet can’t support anymore.”

Before I could finish reading, a pop-up ad for a FashionNova sale lit up my screen, obstructing my view of the article. The ad featured a graphic of pretty women posing in the various styles while the flashing black letters read, “It’s the body for me! Get into this pre-summer sale!” As I clicked “X” in the top right corner of the ad to close it, I thought back to a tweet that I had seen a few weeks prior: “The devil works hard but FashionNova’s marketing team works harder.”

#

When I saw Hailey the next day, I told her about the articles I had come across and asked her what she thought.

“That’s terrible,” she said. She paused before continuing on. “But I don’t know how I could ever stop shopping.”

“Why,” I said with a laugh. “You like it that much?”

“No, it’s not that,” she said thoughtfully. “I’m insecure enough as it is, so not being able to dress cute would send me over the edge.” The weight of this statement caused an awkward silence to fall between us.

“Well,” I began slowly. “I don’t know what to do about it either.”

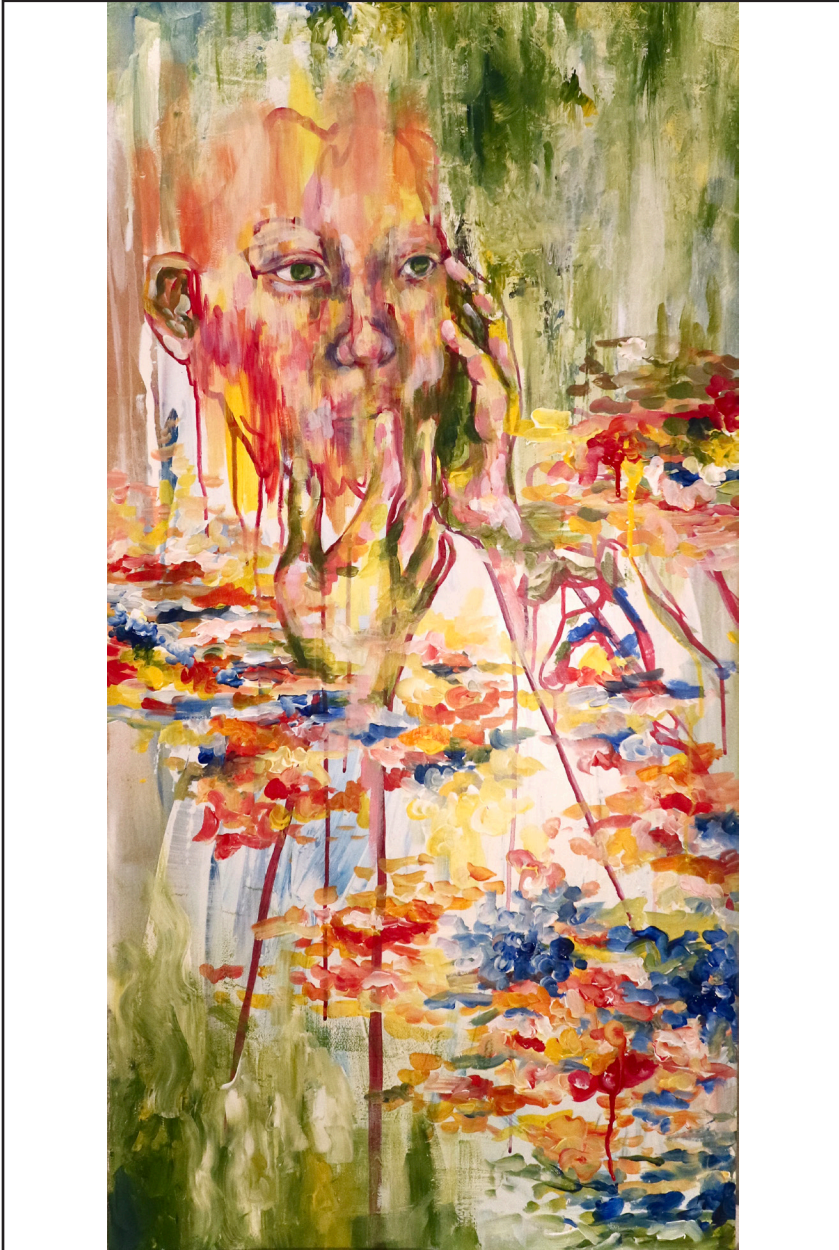
“Maybe we could donate our old clothes or something,” she said, with a spark of excitement reanimating her voice. I thought carefully about what I should say next. I had already begun this conversation by spewing out facts about how environmentally harmful fast fashion was—facts that I had only come across because my professor had told me to do so. I was hesitant to come across to Hailey, an adamant online shopper and fashionista, as

a “holier-than-thou” jerk who was trying to shame her out of her habits, which might be the result if I launched into a rant about how donating wasn’t necessarily a solution either. It then dawned on me that I had not even thought to Google what some possible solutions might actually be. I had simply Googled the problems and stopped there. A sudden wave of exhaustion washed over me.

“Yea,” I said with a sigh, casting my eyes downward. “Maybe we could.”

**SELF VALUE**

Hyewon Cho



**5TH AVENUE**

Danielle Sung





## LETHE

Alexandra Dauchess

Raya has no good memories. It's not her fault; she was born at a bad time. Her whole life has been cold, sterile, and claustrophobic. Full of respirators, fear, and an iron sky.

Everyone else has beautiful memories. Raya often catches glimpses of them—displayed on little screens hanging on the wall beside their slumbering owners—whenever she comes by to clean the small glass windows looking into the memory pods. She likes the colorful ones best: *the fields of rainbow wildflowers, the pastel sky soaring above flashing waters, the lightning bugs pulsing in and out of a purple haze.* They look like scenes out of the picture book she had in her small, cramped room as a child. The memories are so different from the world outside the Lounge's sliding glass doors—low houses of grey set against rivers of dull, black asphalt that divides the city into perfect gridded squares. The buzz of red and black robots soaring through the air, ready to poke and prod for infections at every turn. All of it dwarfed by the towering iron sky, hanging above their heads hundreds of meters up. Raya's never seen the real sky. You need a pass to get in and out of the dome. And only people like farmers and politicians and prostitutes have those little white cards. Raya doesn't know anything about plants or nuclear war, so that's a non-starter. She could try and become a prostitute. But no one wants to make love to a janitor.

Raya always watches the memories, imagining what they must sound like. She never hears any of the noises that go with the memories—the Pods are soundproofed with military level equipment. Those aren't Raya's words. She's not a scientist. She wouldn't know that if it weren't for the sign hanging above the crisp, glass doors leading into the Lounge and the information on the flyers they hand out to prospective customers.

AT THE LOUNGE, PRIVACY IS OUR PRIORITY. WITH MILITARY-GRADE SOUNDPROOFING EQUIPMENT, YOUR MEMORIES ARE SAFE WITH US.

The Lounge promises to keep everyone's memories safe. Safe from curious eyes, coveting an unrecognizable past.

#

The glass cleaner splutters as Raya readjusts the nozzle.

"You're squeezing too hard," Park says from the other side of the corridor. He is already finished with most of his doors, spraying and wiping them in one fluid motion. Park never looks twice at the memories. He seems to think he has enough good memories of his own. But Raya knows that can't be true. He was born only two years before her, back when everyone first moved into the biodome. Raya knows he has no good memories, no matter how he'd like to pretend.

"The nozzle is busted," Raya lies.

"You're not paying attention," Park says. Raya can feel him sneering at her. He always sneers. Raya doesn't know if Park knows how to smile.

Raya scowls into the glass. Park is a prick. He wears cheap clothes made to look fancy and gets his hair cut all choppy like the kids in *STERILE* magazine. Plus, he always takes the nice spray bottle with the not broken nozzle and the cleanest rag. He thinks that makes him better than the other janitors. Really it just makes him a prick.

Inside the pod, the remnants of a mountaintop wedding flicker across the screen. Raya can't look away. The colors are too brilliant, the smiles too bright, the imagined laughter too animated. She wishes Park could just mind his own business for once. She wishes he would finish his doors and throw his rag over his shoulder and head back to the break room so she could be alone to gawk at the memories.

Raya sprays the glass with the murky cleaner. Park mixes the cleaner himself. He calls it "sparkle water" because it makes the windows sparkle when they're washed with it. Raya and the other sanitation specialists call it frog shit. None of them have ever seen frog shit—wildlife is something they had to leave back in the outside world. But they imagine that's what it smells like. Droplets fall like rain on the window, transforming the wedding scene into a kaleidoscope of impossible shapes and colors. Raya can feel Park's eyes on her as she works. She wipes the glass as slowly as she can. *The new husband and wife twirl together on the dance floor, framed by the setting sun.* Raya wipes left, right, up, down, left, right, up, down—

"Raya. We don't have all day."

Raya wipes once more to the left. *The handsome best-man raises a toast to his newly wedded friends.*

"Raya."

It takes all of her strength to look away. Raya adjusts the nozzle on her spray bottle and moves on to the next door. *A baby rolls around in a crib, its eyes fixated on the carousel of zoo animals that spins in circles above it.* Raya sprays and wipes the glass. Park's eyes follow her every movement. Raya wonders what happens if sparkle water accidentally gets sprayed in someone's face.

Pain, she hopes. Lots of pain.

#

The keypad on the door blinks green. Raya stands at attention in the corridor, rag and keyring in hand. She is feeling worse than usual. But it's understandable she tells herself. A Tuesday in the middle of the Great Pandemic was not a good time. Tuesdays are never good. She is wearing one of the grey hazmat suits they were required to have for pod cleaning. She looks like a deflated balloon. She fiddles with her gloves as she waits for the customer to emerge.

The door slides open. A well-dressed middle-aged man—probably a politician or broker—stumbles out of the pod, a smile on his disoriented face. Hart, the pod's technician, leads him out, supporting the gentleman as he sways forwards and backwards on the even floor.

"Leah?" The man squints against the bright lights of the outside corridor. Raya steps aside so he can steady himself on the doorframe.

"I'll show him out. He had a bit of an adverse reaction to it," Hart says.

Hart is kind. He always lets the customers spend a few extra minutes in the pods, even after their sessions have expired. He once offered to do a session with Raya for free. But Raya said no. She has no memories worth revisiting.

Hart takes the man's shoulders and steers him towards the exit. "You can go ahead and start," Hart says to Raya. Hart's eyes dark twinkle when he speaks to her. Maybe it's because he is dying for some human interaction, or maybe it's because he is naturally good-natured. Park says that Hart has a crush on Raya. Raya knows it's probably true, but she still takes the opportunity to step on Park's foot. That's usually the best part of her day.

Raya nods and Hart leads the man down the corridor to the lobby. She waits until they are out of sight before stepping into the pod. Her footsteps echo in the small room. She inserts her key into the control panel by the door. Two turns to the left and sprinklers descend from the ceiling. A final turn to the right and disinfectant rains down, covering everything in a fine, chemical mist. Raya works her way over to the cushioned reclining chair in the center of the room where the customer was sitting. She wipes it down with a dry cloth. Then she wipes down Hart's chair. It's silly, really. He's the only technician who ever uses the Pod or the chair. But it's protocol. Everything must be cleaned, even Hart's non-lethal butt germs.

Next, Raya turns to the control panel. Dozens of buttons and colorful lights sit in rows. A colony of levers and switches clutter the sides. The system whirs as Raya holds in the green and red buttons. Janitors aren't supposed to touch the control pad, but Hart trusts Raya. He taught her

how to work the whole thing during a lunch break once. He said maybe she could be a technician someday if she stuck around. Raya thought she'd like that. Then she could watch the memories, uninterrupted by Park and his stupid sparkle water.

BEGINNING SYSTEM REBOOT.

The control panel vibrates as the system starts transferring the memory information back into its silver canister. The small screen below the main controls still displays bits of the last memory as it scans through it for signs of contamination or inconsistencies. Raya gasps.

*A seaside city sprawls below a mountain peak. The water glints in the golden evening light. Crystal droplets rain on the mountaintop as a summer storm splutters to an end. A dark-skinned woman in a white dress looks out at the city. She is laughing and saying something to the viewer, arms outstretched, her damp hair curling in the ocean breeze. The woman turns her eyes toward Raya—dark and quizzical, glinting from beneath silver lashes.*

The screen goes dark. The control panel stops whirring and the room is quiet again. Raya can hardly move. She stares blankly at the spot on the screen where the woman's face had been. The sprinklers finish spraying and retract back into the ceiling. The panel on the other side of the room blinks red.

CLEANING COMPLETE.

Raya is supposed to hit the green button to indicate that the cleaning is indeed finished and that the Pod is ready for the next user. She's supposed to take the memory canister out from beneath the control panel and take it over to the depository on the wall that will suck it up into a great maze of tubes and send it back to storage. But she can't move. All she can see are those eyes—dark and quizzical, glinting from beneath silver lashes.

There is a sound at the end of the corridor. Hart is saying something to Park.

"He'll be fine. He just needs to walk around a bit."

The canister ejects from the panel. Across the room, the depository door rotates open. Raya looks from one to the other.

"Some people just can't handle the past," Park says.

"It has to do more with the drugs. Sometimes it makes waking up hard," Hart replies. He's halfway down the hallway now. Probably speaking over his shoulder to Park like the technicians do when Park starts to annoy them.

"I was fine when I came out," Park shouts to Hart.

Raya goes to the depository on the wall. The hand holding the canister twitches, as if the memory is desperate to return to its resting place.

"Good for you." Hart's steps are faster now. He's eager to get away from

Park as usual.

The canister hovers above the depository. Raya thinks of the woman's eyes. She thinks of the sea, flashing and bright...

Hart whips around the corner, through the open door and into the pod. He shakes his head, as if trying to get Park's voice out of his mind.

"You done already?" Hart says. Raya nods. There's a beep and then a puff of air. The depository shoots its contents up into the tubes and back into the storage room to be sorted and put back on its appropriate shelf until its owner comes back to visit it again.

"Thanks." Hart smiles at Raya. He has nice teeth. He's a nice boy, but boring. Like all the other boys that have grown up in the dome. Pale and small with little interest in the outside world.

"Park's such a tool," Hart says, sitting down on his newly cleaned stool. Raya nods stiffly. "I don't know how you stand him."

"I don't really."

Hart smiles. His eyes wrinkle up on the sides when he smiles.

"Well, my pods always open if you need to get away from him." Hart looks down. His cheeks are red now. Hart often gets nervous around Raya. But Raya doesn't have time for Hart's blushing. She is perspiring. Her hands are shaking and sweat rolls around inside her suit. She needs to get out of the Pod.

"I have more Pods to clean."

Raya darts out of the room, her suit squeaking, arms hugging her chest. She hears Hart sigh and curse under his breath as he spins in his twirly chair and presses his buttons and flips his levers in preparation for the next customer. Raya shuffles through the corridor, to the break area and back into the utility room. She doesn't stop shuffling until she is shut safely in the mechanical closet. Alone with the wires and gentle hum of the computers, she unfolds her arm.

The memory canister shines bright in the fluorescent lights. She laughs thinking of the boys in the storage room pulling her bottle of sparkle water from the tube and wondering how it got there. Raya thinks of Park looking frantically for it while doing his nightly inventory. Raya smiles. What she has is much better than frog shit.

#

Raya's grandfather used to tell her stories about life before the dome. About sunsets and fields of flowers, towering mountains and endless valleys. He spoke most fervently about the sea. He said it was in his blood—that the seawater was what made his heart beat and what supplied his lungs with air. Raya would sit on the other side of the glass and listen to him talk about the sea for hours. He told her about boats and the tides

and sand and storms. He told her about the little town where he grew up—full of red-roofed houses and winding cobblestone streets. Where the air smelled like laughter and everyone was beautiful.

"Someday, I'll show you," he would say, eyes closed, and body bent deep in concentration. Raya thought the job at the Lounge would finally give her a chance to see it. Memory sessions were expensive, but the employees got a discount. She had hoped that when her grandfather got better, they could go. Hart could hook him up to the machine and Raya could hold her grandfather's hand as they walked together through his memories of the beautiful town. But he died at the Health Center only a few days after Raya got the job.

He drew Raya a picture of it once. Of the grey mountains and the white sea and the little red-roofed houses. He'd slipped it under the glass when the sanitary officers weren't looking. She kept the picture tacked up in her locker at the Lounge to distract from Park's constant, overbearing presence. She would often take it out and trace the sweeping lines with her fingers while dreaming of what it would've been like to see it for real, just once. Just once.

#

Raya feels bad about manipulating Hart. He's kind to her, but he follows the rules to the letter. And trying to enter a foreign memory is stupid and dangerous. She needs privacy to pull this off. While cleaning his Pod earlier, she mentioned that she wished she could have some real coffee—the kind the technicians have in their break room. Raya didn't know what kind of coffee they had or if it was better than the coffee the janitors got in their break room. Raya doesn't even like coffee. But Hart likes Raya and she knew he would do this for her.

As soon as Raya sees Hart's heels disappear out of the pod, an extra skip in his step as he rushes away on his mission, she starts getting ready. She reboots the system and loads in her stolen memory canister and locks the pod door. She pokes herself with the sleep-inducing IV and sits down on the chair and waits to drift off into peaceful sleep. She knows Hart will probably get in trouble: nobody is supposed to be in the Pod alone except the technicians. But they probably won't fire him. He has nice teeth.

Raya isn't sure who found her first, Hart or Park. She can see both of their faces pressed up against the glass window as she grows sleepier and sleepier. Park has a smug little look on his face. Hart looks like he's going to be sick. Someone is banging on the glass. Raya assumes they must be shouting, but she can't hear them. The soundproofing equipment takes care of that. Someone trips the alarms. Raya can see the warning lights flashing

in the corridor. Red and then a bright white. Red and a bright white. Red and...

#

The biodome is a good thing. That's what the politicians and scientists and important people told them. They plastered it on the side of houses and handed out flyers on every street corner. The biodome can protect us, give everyone a safe place to live away from diseases and germs. We can regulate the air—control everything that floats around in it, so you never have to worry. Raya always believed them. Believed the biodome was an advancement. That science was making the world a better place. But standing on the cliffside overlooking the long-lost city of red-roof houses with the breeze in her hair and the sun on her face and the flashing sea twirling gently below her, Raya knows that was a lie. The biodome is an empty shell. Because all the beauty in the world, all its millions and billions of pieces are here, concentrated in the town and on her. The woman. Dark hair. Quizzical eyes. Silver lashes. Perhaps she was a goddess—come down from the sky to see the world she'd help to create. Or she was a model, tired of white rooms and flashing cameras, run off to the sea to find herself. Whatever she was, she was perfect. Anyone could see that.

“Le mer, Thorn. Comment ça ressemble aux étoiles.”

The woman is speaking over her shoulder to Raya. Or to the man who owns the memory. She throws her head back in the sea breeze and looks up at the sky. Heavenly blue. Nothing like the weak imitation projected on the roof of the dome. Real clouds. An endless horizon.

The woman turns to Raya. Her expression falters. The dark eyes grow confused. A searing pain rocks Raya's body. Back in the Pod she is screaming, back arched, tears streaming down her face. Her mind is reeling, searching for the neurons associated with the memory. But she doesn't have them. Raya's head is splitting in two. The sky grows dark as her mind tries to replace the elements of the memory with her own. She fights off the iron sky.

“Who are you?” The woman asks. The accent is gentle but pointed. She's from somewhere far beyond the dome.

“Raya.”

The woman shakes her head. The city melts away below their feet. Raya's body is trying to send her back into reality. It's running from the foreign memory. But Raya doesn't want to go. She holds herself there. Anchored by the dark eyes and the flashing sea.

“What's your name?” Raya is shouting above the swirling current of her mind.

The woman takes a second to respond.

“Leah.”

Raya smiles. Outside Hart is shouting, banging, cursing. Park is shaking his head. The mechanics are trying to pry the door open.

The pain in Raya's head is excruciating. She can no longer fight the other memories flowing in through the cracks of the stolen one.

*Raya stands in line for the vaccine. Raya falls asleep to the sounds of eco-engines. Raya fills her spray bottle. Park sneers at her.*

Leah is fading away. Raya has no choice but to let her. Leah bats her silver lashes as she disappears into oblivion.

*Raya throws rocks at the sky. Raya throws up some synthesized tuna. Raya's father leaves the dome and never comes back.*

The paramedics are trying to revive her. They're shocking her. Ripping out the IVs. Trying to flush out the memory.

*Raya falls off her hover bike. Raya shivers in cosmetic snow. Raya is fitted for her first hazmat suit. They take her Grandfather's body away.*

Raya concentrates on the sea. She watches the waves surge forward and pull back.

Raya would like to have a house by the sea. She'd like to settle down with someone and have babies. She'd like to play ball with conch shells. Drink cups overflowing with sea water. Fall asleep in the crashing waves. Sneer at Park from the towering cliffs. Throw rocks at the church steeples. Barf up some fresh caught tuna. Tie her hair back with a fishing net. Dive off the end of the pier. Turn blue in the frigid water. Run naked across the beach. Smile at Leah and her dark eyes.

Raya smiles at the sea. The sea smiles back.

“We're losing her.” The paramedics are shouting from somewhere above.

“Serves her right.” Park is gloating.

“Raya.” Hart is moaning.

“Leah.” Raya is smiling. Smiling at the open sea.

## ONCE THEY WERE

Sonia Mehta

Dev nuzzled the lead ball against his neck like an old girlfriend. Not that he had an old girlfriend. Nor a new one. At the moment, Dev's thoughts were not of romance but of revenge. He stared at the flag twenty feet away—inches beyond his best throw—and imagined it was his coach. The man weighed at least 400 lbs and did not look like he could run a hundred meters or throw a shot put ten feet, let alone twenty. That had not prevented the coach's insults two days ago.

"Half of you are too weak to be in this team. I have to keep you though, 'cause it's no-cut. That doesn't mean I have to let you compete. Shot putters, don't even think about showing up on Saturday if you can't make twenty feet."

Dev clenched the muscles on the right half of his body and prepared for his moment of victory, to prove that he belonged. His scalp tingled: someone was watching him. He looked past the shade of the oak tree that stood to one side of the stadium surrounding the oval track. Athletes' legs paced in the distance. The throwing sports were in the farthest corner of the school grounds. On the other side of him were thick hydrangea bushes and a parking lot. The violet blossoms on the bushes rustled.

"Who's there?" Silence. "I'll call the school officer."

"It's sixth period, Dev. Officer Tarrow leaves at lunchtime."

"Ahmed?"

From behind a thicket crawled Ahmed Jalabi. Standing next to Dev Patel, the pair were a study in contrast. Ahmed was short, plump, and sported a thin mustache. Dev had similarly tanned skin and cropped black hair, but he was lanky with baby skin on his cheeks.

"Why are you hiding?"

"The Patriot Boys are after me. They told me I'll wish I'd stayed in Pakistan. What's that mean? I was born here. I've never been to Pakistan."

It was known in the school that the Patriot Boys Club members disliked anyone with skin darker than styrofoam. They had been tormenting Dev and Ahmed for years.

"What did you do, Ahmed?"

"Nothing. They say I was making fun of the 9/11 victims."

"Were you?"

"No, I mean, I might've groaned slightly when my history teacher asked us to write a commemorative letter—again. We've been writing these letters every

year since first grade. But I wasn't being disrespectful. I just didn't want to write another essay. Now people are saying that I stood and yelled 'Down with America.'" His eyes darted around as he spoke.

The two boys avoided each another's gaze.

"They're bluffing, Ahmed."

A truck door slammed in the parking lot.

"I'm sure I saw that Paki come this way." A familiar, high-pitched voice squealed through the air.

A chill ran down Dev's spine.

"Dev, it's them." Ahmed's eyes widened with fear.

"The field house is open. Hide there."

Four members of the Patriot Boys Club came from the parking lot. Their leader with his perpetual sneer on his crew-cut adorned square face spotted Dev. He waddled toward the solitary figure on his bowlegs. Behind him were three taller companions.

"Look, it's Dave with an E," the pasty leader screeched, puffing out his plump chest like an imposing drill sergeant.

"Isn't every Dave spelled with an E?" Dev replied.

The Patriot Boys paused for a second and exchanged glances. Dev swallowed. He had never talked back to the gang.

"What?" the leader snarled.

Dev lowered his eyes. The quartet surrounded him.

"Where's our little Paki terrorist?"

Dev had many courageous responses in his mind. From 'I'm not telling' to 'Leave him alone, he's as American as you.' Instead, Dev backed up and bumped into one of the companions. Two hands shoved him forward. His 12-pound shot put dropped with a thud on his foot. In the grip of fear, Dev was numb to the pain in his big toe. All he felt was the pounding of his heart. The faces of his tormentors merged into a blur. His eyes flicked from one harasser to another and, for a split second, toward the field house. That was enough. The quartet ran to the field house to find their quarry. Dev cursed his body's betrayal. They pulled open the rusted door and disappeared into the dark interior. Dev stood, his feet as heavy as his shot put. Should he run for help? Should he follow Ahmed?

In grade school, Ahmed and Dev had once been surrounded by these taunting bullies, who had backed them to a wall. Dev and Ahmed had kept their shoulders pressed like magnets.

"One of you hit the other, and we'll let you go."

Dev and Ahmed had stood resolute, refusing to cower, drawing courage from each other's presence. Eventually, their tormentors had tired of their fun and left.

*When did things change?*

Dev limped home; his eyes never left the ground. It was Friday and Labor

Day weekend. He would have three days of solitude. Three days to forget.

#

The family dinner was subdued that Sunday. Dev stared glumly at his plate of paatra. Normally, he enjoyed the green crispy leaves, but he had no appetite that night.

“Did you hear what happened to that Jalabi boy?” asked his father. “Some thugs roughed him up.”

“Was he hurt?” Dev asked.

“No one called the police.” The father shrugged. “The whole family moved.”

“Where did they go?” asked the mother.

“To a big city, if they have any buddhi in their heads. They should’ve gone years ago. You can’t be a mussalman in a small town like ours. The Jalabis provoked everyone. The mother covered her head with a dupatta. And the father always had his Muslim kufi hat on. They were asking for trouble.”

“For what?” Dev’s sister, Rea, snapped. “This’s America. You have the right to dress and believe what you want. Don’t people stare when Grandma wears her sari?”

“Beti, you don’t understand. They provoked people. They made it bad for all of us. How many times have people looked twice at us? What have we done? We’re not Muslims,” replied Dev’s father.

“What have they done?” Rea shot back.

“They brought attention to themselves and to us. Things will be peaceful now.”

“Until they come for us.”

“We’re loyal Americans. Our neighbors will protect us.”

Dev pushed paatra around his plate with a clenched fork. The metal squealed on the porcelain, just like the sound of protest the field house door had made when the bullies pulled it.

“The way we protected the Jalabis.” Rea shook her head.

“Jalabis are cowards for leaving,” the father said.

Dev bolted up and ran to his room.

“What’s wrong with him?” Dev heard his mother’s voice.

“Who knows what’s going on in the heads of these kids,” his father said.

“Pass me the chicken tikka.”

#

Dev stood by his bedroom’s window, looking in the direction of the Jalabis’ deserted house. He could not see it in the darkness. His reflection stared back.

*When did I change?*

“Coward,” Dev whispered.

Dev tried imagining Ahmed’s face at the field house. Instead. Two invincible grade-school boys. Shoulders pressed. Their backs to a wall. Once.

## DESPONDENCY

Zainab Raza

It was a Sunday when I heard.

A despondent Sunday, as most Sundays are. Monday looming over us like a storm cloud or a tombstone, inevitable and hopeless. I heard the news under that storm cloud, reading by the window. I suppose I didn’t mean to hear it. My father was talking with another man and their raucous voices carried. I didn’t question the man’s presence. When you’re a child, as I was then, adults are insignificant. They stride in and out of your view, stopping for a brief moment before going off to buy a car or pay a tax. My father knew plenty of other adults, through the inexplicable way adults knew one another, and so there were plenty of other adults in the house at times. The voices were disturbances which tended to pull me out of my books, grabbing me away from an underground adventure or flying above the clouds. This happened on that Sunday.

“But that can’t possibly be true. The nerve that man has, he already bought away the swamp territories! It was a beautiful place.”

“But it is. His offer is a sizable one. You must consider it. Think of Florence, you’d be paying her tuition. She would go to a respectable school. One in London, perhaps, or New York.”

“Florence is my daughter. You do not have a say in this.”

“I’m simply offering a perspective. This is an opportunity not many people get.”

“You aren’t seriously proposing I sell the woods? My land?”

This is the line that caught my attention. Sell the land? I hadn’t known that to be possible. Land could be sold? I had thought only little things could be bought, like food or books or medicine. Surely you couldn’t buy and sell the earth like it was a suit of clothes.

I must have misheard.

I set aside my book and stepped out of the bay window. I crept behind the door to my father’s study.

“They’re digging up the swamp. Installing expensive housing. Putting in that fake grass, too. They would do that to our woods.”

“The world is changing, Allen. They’re doing this everywhere. You won’t have this land forever; if you don’t sell it, someone else will do it. And they will inherit the profits.”

“Florence will get the land, and her children, and their children.”

“Yes, and—”

“Corrine loved this land. She worshipped it. She would take me on twilight walks, barefoot. I never truly saw what she saw when she pointed at the trees and the dirt and the stars but I saw her eyes, and I saw that she loved it.”

This seemed to shut the other man up.

The rest of their words held no meaning to me. Boring goodbyes, formalities that made no sense to children. Adults were inexplicably in love with propriety. Nonetheless, it was true. People did mean to buy the land. Rip up the trees. Put in houses.

It seemed deranged. The woods belonged to no one; they were a home, a home that outstretched its arms to anyone in need of one. There were deer there, and owls. Where would they live? They wouldn't enjoy those expensive houses, I'm sure. But father denied it, so I was able to go back to my reading, still a bit disturbed by the idea of land being property.

#

It was raining the next time I heard talk of this. The despondency of Sunday had passed and rain had moved in, banging against the windows with vigor. I was reading in the window again, overcome with the free time summer bequeaths upon the repose of childhood. This time footsteps carried, rather than strident voices. It was my father.

“Florence.”

“Yes?”

He bent down onto his knees next to me, to where he no longer towered over me. He took the book from my hands, gently. “*Heidi*. That's a good book.”

I nodded. “Yes it is.”

He looked out the window. “It's raining hard out there, isn't it?”

“Yes it is,” I repeated. I was terse. I suppose it was because I knew what he was going to say. Maybe on some deep subconscious level beyond the maturity I possessed at seven years of age.

“You're getting so big, you know that?”

I did know that. I couldn't fit into my last-summer sandals this summer, and I had to get a new church-dress because my old one fell above my knees. I was growing, getting taller and wider and heavier. I was becoming a grown-up girl, like the girls behind the counter at the movie theatre and the high-school girls who kissed boys behind the city hall.

“You are,” he continued, “and soon you're going to go to a big school. One for young adults.”

“Like St. Peters?” I recalled the old college building my father showed me last fall. He said I would live there when I was a young adult.

“Maybe. Or you could go to a big one. In London or New York. I know you're smart enough, much too smart for your own good, with all that reading you do. I know you could go.”

I nodded again. “Yes. I could.” I had full confidence I could go anywhere, do anything. There certainly wasn't much stopping me.

“Well, that costs a lot of money. But I could get that money, and I could send you to school in London or New York or Paris or Tokyo, and you could become a doctor or a lawyer or a writer, if you'd like. A good one.”

“But then you'd have to sell the woods.”

He was taken aback by my terseness. “Yes, yes I would.”

I became angry fast. Yes, yes I would. Father was so clear about it, so concise. He showed none of the resolute anger he gave the other man. He really was okay with it, with ripping up the trees and killing the owls. All to send me to New York or London. There were no trees in New York or London. No owls. I certainly didn't care for a place like that.

“No.”

But it was quite obvious that my “no” wouldn't suffice. He would sell the woods anyways, because he was a grown-up and it was grown-ups with all the power and all the potency, and a child could say anything but it was no matter, because our screams are all scrambled in the ears of grown-ups and by the time it reaches their heads it's been lost. They hear nothing but a buzzing insect when children speak, and if they are to be influenced, it will be from another grown-up, and children can do nothing but allow themselves to be swatted away like a pesky fly.

I had no business sitting helplessly by my father when he wouldn't hear anything anyway, so I left. In my rage, I didn't bother with boots or a coat, so it was with my bare feet I went out into the mud and into the woods.

I stepped below the trees for shelter, and they promptly offered it, pushing and weaving their tops together like a crochet blanket. I walked through the dome aimlessly, until a voice called out to stop me.

“YOU!”

I looked up, and perched on a tree branch was an impertinent owl. “What? You don't know me. You have no business calling out accusingly to someone you don't know.”

The owl cocked its head. “Oh, I wasn't accusing. I just didn't know your name.”

“I'm Florence.”

“Oh. Well, that's nice. The trees like you, you know. They wouldn't give you shelter if they didn't like you.”

“Well, they have no business giving me shelter, though I appreciate it. I can't save them.”

The owl stared at me blankly. “Why must you save them? They're happy as they are.”

“They won't be.” I scoffed. “They're going to be ripped up. People are going to put houses here, expensive ones. They have no business doing so.”

The trees heard me, and the leaves ruffled with fear.

The owl narrowed its eyes. “Most certainly not! Why would they do that?”

“So I can go to New York! I have no business in New York.”

The owl shook its head. “You certainly don’t. There are no trees in New York.”

“No trees in New York?” Another bird piped in, a shrike, from a tree across. “Where do the birds live?”

“On rooftops,” said the owl, solemnly, “and on fake trees.”

The shrike shivered. “Poor birds.”

“That will be you, soon. Unless you want to live in expensive houses,” I said.

The owl nodded. “They’re ripping up the trees.” The leaves rustled once more.

I put a hand on one trunk. “I’m sorry I can’t save you.”

“But you can,” the shrike accused. “You’re a person. You can stop them.”

I shook my head. “Only grown-ups can do that. Grown-ups don’t listen to children. They never consult us when they buy cars or pay a tax or rip up trees.”

The owl blinked at me. I blinked back. “I’m sorry. I really am.” The owl didn’t respond, but looked downwards. The trees seemed to shrivel a little. I found I had no more business beneath them, and I should leave them to grieve peacefully, and I did.

I began my journey home.

The house was quiet when I returned. No more strident voices or shouts that carried to my bay window. I peeked into Father’s study, where he was composing a letter. I turned away, too resentful to wish him good night, and went to retire in my room.

I saw them rip up the trees. I sat at my bay window and witnessed the destruction firsthand. It was a massacre. The trees shook and writhed in pain while the axes came down on them. The birds flew away to solace.

The money made my father happy. When the killing was over and the houses were finished, there was a glow in my father’s face I hadn’t seen since my mother was alive.

You’re going to go to New York, he said, you’re going to become a writer.

I had no business in New York.

But I suppose I did have business as a writer.

#

My apartment in New York was small and high with a bay window, and when I sat at that window it felt as if I reigned over the city like a king or a bird or a very big giraffe. It was another despondent Sunday when I had finished writing my essays that I decided to retire to the bay window with a book. I chose *Heidi* in remembrance of my childhood, a book I had loved so much. Lost in the book and the blankets by the window, I barely heard the rustle at the sill.

Perched on the window box was an owl.

Emiliano Gomez is from rural Northern California. He is currently thinking about American civilization, simulacra, and space.

Desiree Santana Hensley is twenty years young and currently based in the Tidewater area of Virginia. She is a student of Old Dominion University pursuing English and Linguistics. A lifelong writer and devourer of books, she is just beginning to share her work publicly.

Emma Karnes is a fourth-year student at the University of Virginia studying poetry writing and public policy. She began writing poetry in second grade when her teacher, Ms. Everitt, introduced her to poetry through rain haikus and poems about the school playground. Her work has been previously published in *Rattle’s Young Poets Anthology*, *The Healing Muse*, *Tilde*, and elsewhere.

Mallika Khan is a 22-year-old queer poet from Bristol. They study Psychology with Criminology at the University of the West of England. Where sorrow lies, resilience is there too, and this is the focus of Mallika’s work. Their poetry has received recognition from *Brain Mill Press* and *The Survivor’s Zine*.

Claire Myree is an essayist and short story writer from West Chester, Ohio. She completed her undergraduate studies at Bluffton University. Her work has appeared in *Bridge* and *Shalith*.

Sophia Liu is a high school sophomore. Her poems and art appear or are forthcoming in the *Perch*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Sheila Na Gig*, *Whispering Prairie Press*, *Eunoia Review*, *opia*, and elsewhere. She volunteers as a teacher for the Princeton Learning Experience and wants a pet cat.

Matt Moment is a poet and performer from Monroe, NY. When not writing, he may be found waiting tables or listening to Joni Mitchell.

Jaime Lam is a biracial misfit out of five children. She is a senior at Knox College. She daydreams of grad schools, walls of trees, and endless mugs of tea.



Hyewon Cho is a junior attending Korean International School in Seoul, South Korea. When she is not making artwork, her hobbies include making jewelry and experimenting with old film cameras. She is currently building a portfolio for university.

Danielle Sung is a junior at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire. Sung has won recognitions in several art competitions, including winning Gold Medals in the National Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, being selected as the American Vision and Voices Nominee, and the winner of the 2019 Congressional Art Competition.

Alexandra Dauchess is a senior at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia where she studies film and creative writing. This is her first publication. She is excited to share her writing with the BreakBread community and encourages others to tell stories about their unique experiences with mental health.

Sonia Mehta is a junior in Dublin, OH. Her stories have been published in *Blue Marble Review*, *Apprentice Writer*, *Telling Room*, *Ripples in Space* and other magazines. Ms. Mehta has been recognized at the Scholastic Art and Writing National Awards and the William Faulkner - Wisdom Creative Writing Competition.

Zainab Raza is a 14-year-old Pakistani high school student and writer from New York. She is an avid reader of every genre, and wishes to express the things she can't seem to say out loud through poetry and prose, the way of Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf. In February, she founded her own literary journal, *The Vampire Poet*, and its first issue will be released this spring.



***BreakBread Magazine***

**VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2  
SUMMER 2021**

**POETRY BY  
EMILIANO GOMEZ, DESIREE HENSLEY, EMMA KARNES,  
MALLIKA KHAN, JAIME LAM, SOPHIA LIU, MATT MOMENT**

**FICTION BY  
ALEXANDRA DAUCHESS, SONIA MEHTA, ZAINAB RAZA**

**NONFICTION BY  
CLAIRE MYREE**

**ART BY  
HYEWON CHO, DANIELLE SUNG**