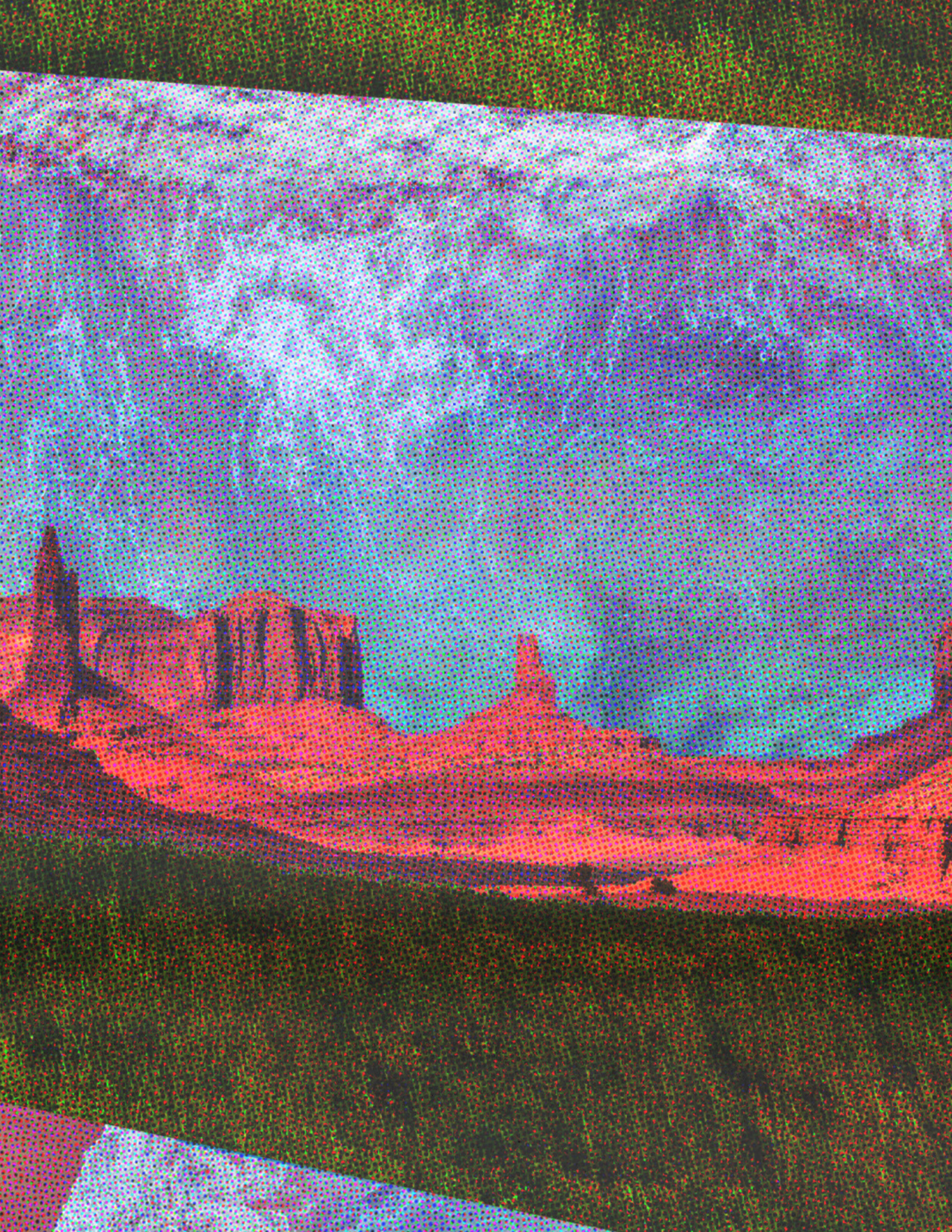


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mag



# *a note from the executive board*

if you're reading this: thank you.

this is our third print issue, and honestly, it's still hard to believe we ever even made it past our first. grain of salt mag is very much a bootstrap organization, and it takes the hard work, passion and talent of a completely volunteer team in order to make cool things like this come to life. it also takes the support of a community who believes in our team, our work and our mission to make these projects worthwhile and celebrated.

each print issue has its own special meaning to us. the best of grain of salt marked our first foray into print and celebrates all that we accomplished in our first year as a magazine. frozen adolescence was the product of an incredible grant from Fordham University, and the issue also served as a fundraiser for covid-19 relief in nyc. the magazine you hold in your hands, sublime, signifies change for grain of salt mag: a change in leadership, a change in processes, a change in how we are doing what we do. we are so excited to usher in this change because its synonymous with growth for the magazine and this issue symbolizes just the beginning of what to expect from us. we hope you stick around to see it happen.

sublime serves as a reminder of all that is good and all that will be good. it is dedicated to beauty, joy and tranquility. it is an ode to the sublime; the things in life — big or small — that ignite us with pure peace and love. this may seem like a lighter subject matter than some of our previous work, or topics we are known for discussing — but sometimes finding the good is harder than we think. it can take painful reflection and examination to pick back layers of old wounds and break down walls to finally find comfort. in times of political instability, mass death, economic failure and [insert whatever horrry that keeps you up at night here], it's difficult to seek, or even feel, free and loved.

if you're struggling, in whatever ways that are personal to you, we hope this magazine can be your moment of sublime.

happy reading, and thank you.

with all the love in the world,  
rita, faith, isa, maria and sarah

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# a bike ride around

Loose bits of pavement crackle beneath my freshly inflated bike tires as I flip up the kickstand and start pedaling furiously. I don't know where I'm going, but I know where to start; I hang a left out of the driveway and veer deeper into the neighborhood. My mom never let me ride into town when I was younger, and although I'm now 22 and no longer held to my mom's rules, I'm not in the mood to go there today. If I see one person I know it'll be too many.

It's June again and I'm home for another summer, except this time I've graduated college. A recent heatwave has receded, leaving it comfortably warm. The slanted late afternoon light illuminates ordinary objects, making them look drawn and colored by a careful hand. The leaves are greener. The fences are white. Wind plays with the strands of hair that have fallen out of my clip. I wonder how I look to the people passing in cars. I don't look inside them in case I recognize their faces, and I realize I'd be embarrassed to be seen.

I decide to make a big loop around the area surrounding my house and down to the water, avoiding spots that might be populated on a Friday night. Once I settle into a rhythm I feel the needles of shame I've come to know all too well this past month, and I begin to pick the feeling apart. Why? Why do I feel like a stranger here? These familiar roads welcome me with open arms, whispering the sweet memories of my childhood and the auspicious promises of my future. If I really committed to it, really tried, this place would reabsorb me happily and I'd never feel as though I was missing anything. The problem is that I severed myself from this life four years ago, my eyes intensely set on a larger, shinier prize. Life in the big city. What a joke. I'd read the trope, so terribly executed, a million times, and yet it didn't stop me from living it out myself. I believed I was the one that was going to "make it out." That I'd turn back and never see this place again. But as I ride past the houses of my old friends, I remember that none of them are here. I'm the only one.

I've felt such an urge to shed this place, to rip it off like an itchy sweater, and I've been vocal about my need to get out of here. Everyone's heard my grand plans, and that means if I fail, I'll fail publicly. Already, I feel like a fraudulent politician trying to double back on some campaign promise. Well, it was harder than I anticipated. There were complications and other factors at play, like rent prices, job markets and pandemics. I've had to answer so many questions already. Oh, god, the questions. Hurling at me like a volley of arrows, or like tennis balls coming out of one of those launcher machines. So, what are you doing now? How does it feel, being home? College is the best years of your life, you know. Enjoy this break while you can. I'm dashing, back and forth, smacking each one, sending it back over the net just to satisfy the sender. Oh, I'm interning. Working here and there. Getting experience and applying everywhere I can. Any day now. Yes, yes, a break like this is a blessing in disguise. Haha.



# and my home town

by Sheila Kiernan

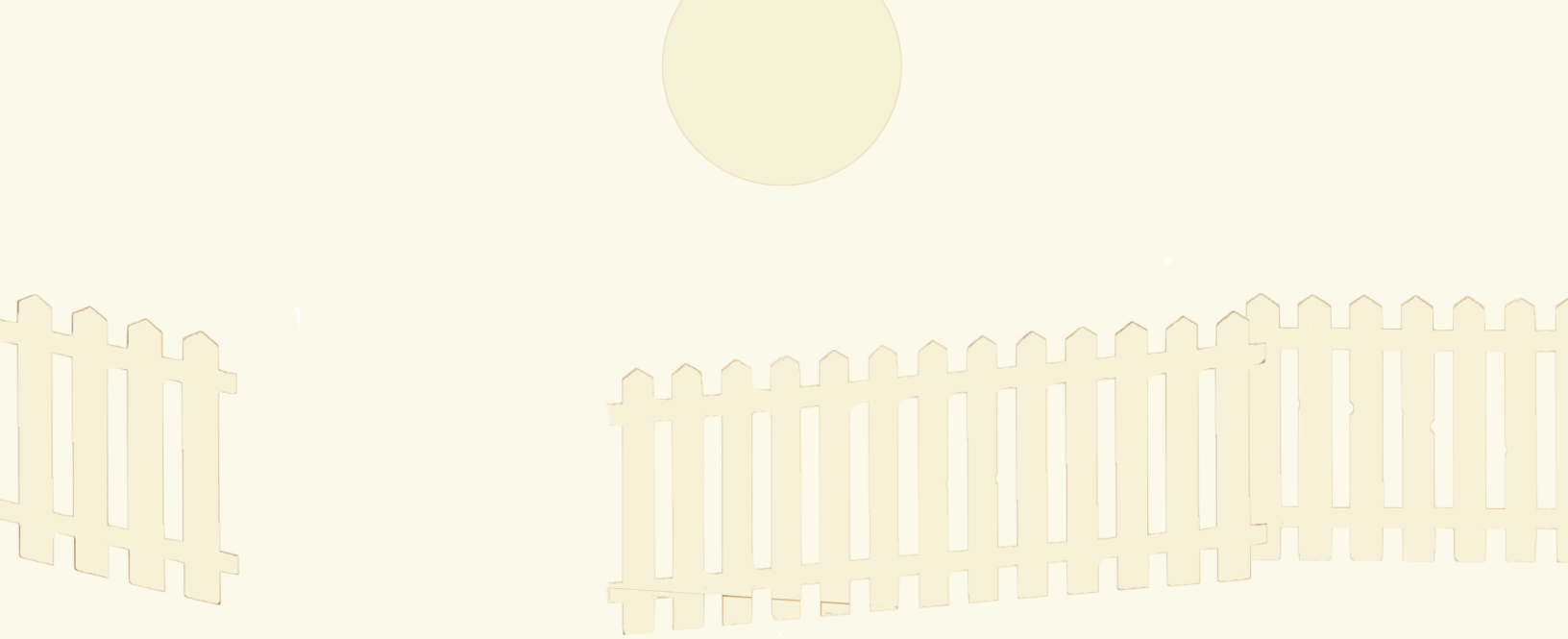
By now I'm close to the water. The air has changed, noticeably thicker and salty. It smells like the marsh, and it stick to my skin and weighs down my hair. I've got one AirPods in, and the music switches to a particularly nostalgic track, an extra poignant reminder of high school nestled in a playlist I curated back in 2017. So far my thoughts have concentrated hard on my future, but now they veer into my past. All of the summers spent riding around the neighborhood with friends, darting from one stomping ground to the next, the elementary school to the town beach to the deli nestled on a residential block. Sticky ice pops and air perfumed with honeysuckles, staying out until the last ray of sunshine left the treeline. The heart-break and the happiness, all so small, so contained to these few blocks, entire dramas lived out in the bubble I called home. I realize I don't really hate this place — I hate that it doesn't feel like mine anymore. Am I really so desperate to get away?

I'm still headed south. Hedges grow taller and houses get larger until I reach the end of the block, a dead end that butts right up against the Great South Bay. I lift my face to smell the brine, trying to memorize the hues of sunset that cascade down towards the horizon, the way the boats trace foamy paths across the bay's surface. Like every smell and sight I've encountered along my way, I try to copy it neatly in my mind with no mistakes or distortions. But it seems useless. You can't encase a smell in amber, or the way water moves in loops of handwriting. Why am I living here like this place is about to disappear? This whole ride has been like I'm trying to summon the past, to desperately imbue inanimate things with every emotion I've ever felt while living here. A seance of sorts, rising moments from the dead and making them live again. Deep down, I realize I have a childish urge to just stay here forever, taking solitary bikerides every day, letting the sun crisp my shoulders and doing a lot of nothing. Pushing the limits of how long it takes until "recent graduate" becomes "college burnout." But it wouldn't work — it would lose its charm quickly. What makes these moments so special is that I don't know when they will end.

A seance implies there is something to be mourned. And perhaps I'm trying so hard to remember because I'm afraid. Afraid of what comes next, of letting all of this fade into a single image, a wish I will have when I'm sitting at a desk or standing on a crowded subway, when I've finally made it back to the city. Maybe I'm just as afraid of achieving my dreams as I am of not. I think of a line I read in a book in an English class my final semester of school: "She will lose something. She will gain something else." I mourn the inevitable tradeoff, that I cannot have both; I cannot have the future I'm fighting for and childhood in perpetuity. One way or the other, I will have to give something up. That is something to grieve, for sure. As I turn my bike around and start heading for home, I see things in a new light. I stop to appreciate certain things that strike me. The way two fawns prance after their mother on someone's lawn, flicking their ears and glancing at me curiously. The way the sun reflects on the windows of a vacant house, making it look like a large monster staring at me with fiery eyes. These things are peaceful, they spark my imagination and make me feel alone in a good way. I think to myself about how much I hate in-betweens and not knowing the answer. That feeling of being suspended in the air is so uncomfortable. But I also think I've made progress. Today was the first step recognizing that the in-between is a place in and of itself, a place that can even be enjoyed and cherished. I repeat that quote from English class in my mind, and I can tell it'll become a comforting mantra, maybe for the rest of my life. I will lose something. I will gain something else.

Twilight begins to take over the sky, and I steer towards home.





## A SUMMER BABY'S SONG

CHELSEA CHAET

The glow of the pavement illuminates my feet—  
one foot after the other.  
While the rest of the world fades from night to morning,  
the sunrise comforts me— much like a mother.  
I was born in the summer.

The shadow of my younger self dances along the picket fence,  
and I feel her presence guiding me home as it grazes the hairs on my head.  
I too can feel the rain drops of last night's sun shower flutter on my lashes  
like a kiss as I'm tucked into bed.

The crickets' soft symphonies croon me to sleep, promising dreams of the sweetest.  
The early June breeze puts me at ease as the rose buds emerge from the grass.  
Slowly they've bloomed— I can still feel the dew  
As night turns to morning and the people awaken.

I lie down in the yard of the home I grew up in  
and remember her braids, tangled from running and jumping.  
Hopscotch and faded chalk— pinks, yellows, blues— cover the ground  
embracing me, embracing you.  
And as I lay here years later with my eyes closed and dreaming,  
I can still feel her beaming.

Her rays are warm like a hug; inviting.  
That same little girl lays peaceful, reminded  
of magical summers spent under the sun.  
She is finally ready to fly.

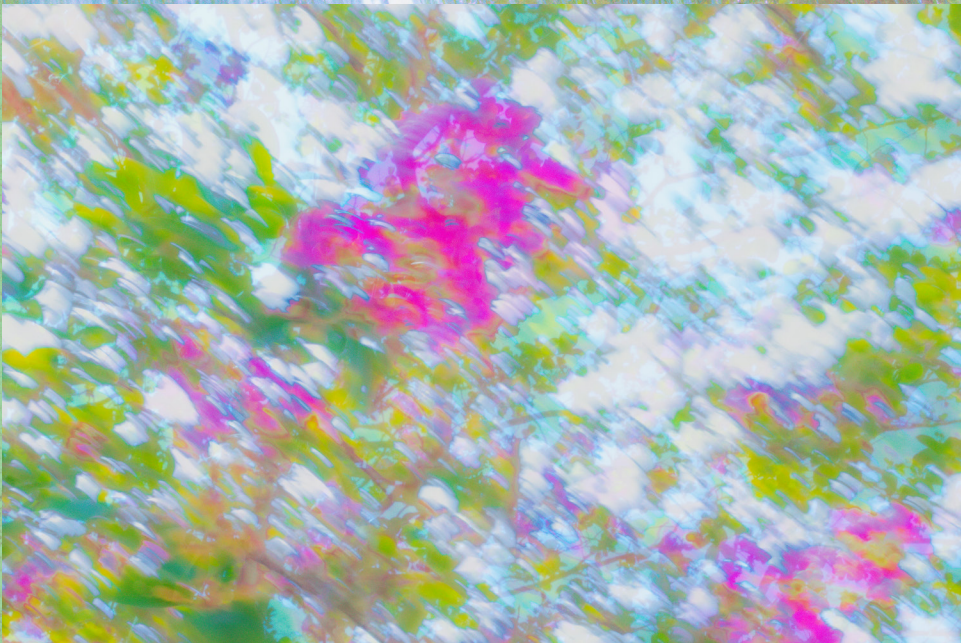




BREATH OF FRESH AIR



SUMMER BREEZE



PETALS IN THE WIND

BY CHARLIE KING



# SUMMER HOBBY REVIVAL

BY SARAH LAMODI

I've recently come to realize that my summers of freedom are dwindling. This isn't in reference to the various freedoms slowly being revoked from citizens of the United States, the yearly surge in necessary activism that comes during the summer or even climate change; while all of these very obviously embody decreased freedoms, what looms as puppet master behind each is the seemingly inevitable capitalistic churn of 40 hours a week. My senior year of college is two short months away – I'm technically already there. Just beyond that senior year lies what, exactly? Dreams coming true? Hopefully.

Corporate drudgery? More likely. For better or for worse, I'm putting off circumventing this suburban "American Dream" until it's staring me in the face.

In elementary and middle school, I spent my summers at various camps, usually ones that sent buses full of kids to local beaches or baseball games to sweat and collect sunburns like Pokémon cards. On a particularly eventful trip, I remember going to a high ropes course where I ziplined into a tree and dangled above the forest for 10 minutes. On another, we went white water rafting and were told to keep an eye out for sharks, a particularly unlikely sight in the Adirondacks. When I returned home from these exploits – feeling rather daring for a bookish 10-year-old – the time was my own. I spent it doing anything I liked – that is, everything I didn't have time for or otherwise was unable to do during the school year. I finished piles of books, taught myself how to modify my gaming consoles, produced more friendship bracelets than I

*TYLL BY DANIEL KEHLMANN*

*SECONDS BY BRYAN LEE O'MALLEY*

*SKIN DEEP BY E.M. CRANE*

*DUNE BY FRANK HERBER*

*WALDEN BY HENRY DAVID THOREAU*

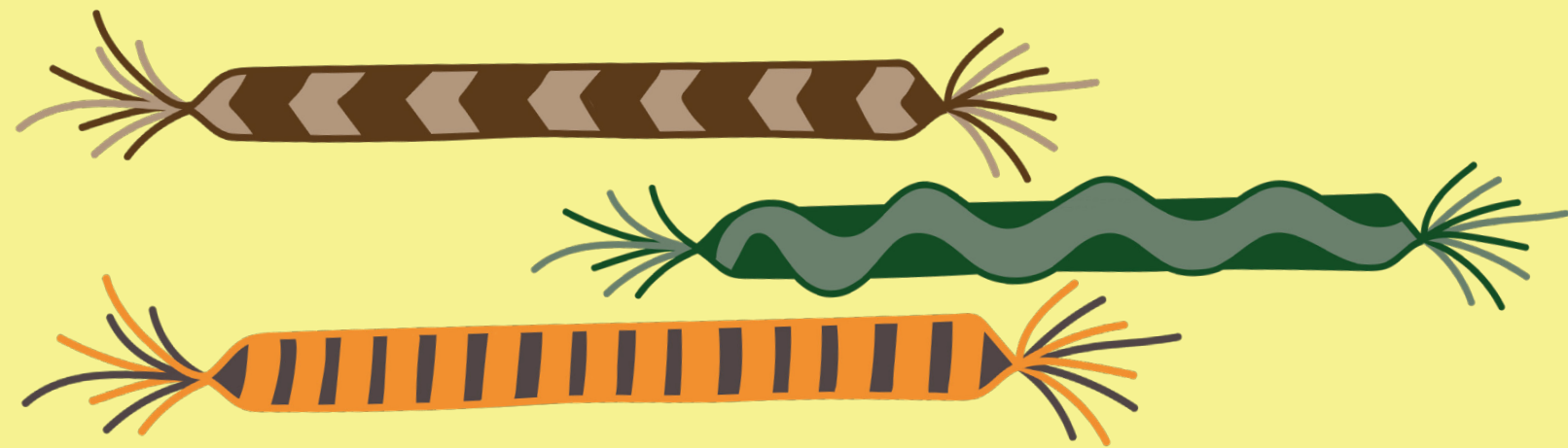
*SHIP OF THESEUS BY V. M. STRAKA*

*SWORDSPOINT BY ELLEN KUSHNER*

*THE PRINCESS BRIDE BY WILLIAM GOLDMAN*

*NOTES FROM THE BURNING AGE BY CLAIRE NORTH*

*THE PELICAN SHAKESPEARE - THE SONNETS*



could fit on my body and started various DIY projects around the house, most of which remain unfinished to this day (sorry, mom and dad!). This is the passion I want to return to, the summer obsessions with hobbies that, at a certain point, transform into obsessions with learning about oneself.

This is what I have been trying to revive this summer.

For anyone looking for tips on how to have a more obsessive personality, I'm accepting students! I've found that taking on new hobbies on an almost bi-weekly basis helps make the most of every new fixation, to truly make the most of the time you own. At the start of my summer, it was plants. I was obsessed with learning about plant species, recognizing the trees that grow outside my window, deciding which houseplants best suited me and my lifestyle, figuring out the best location for my houseplants and even what music might encourage plant growth. A week later, it was redecorating. I mapped out my apartment, making too many Pinterest boards on what I planned to do with my space, scouring Facebook Marketplace and local second-hand stores for things that would fit. My love for books then came back full force, throwing me headfirst back into my bookbinding and papermaking hobby, only to make way for a two-week (unfinished) journey to find the best record stores in the Boston area. Now, barely halfway through the summer, I've become debilitatingly into film photography and analog equipment, repairing a 1968 Konica I found a decade ago and preparing to transform my bathroom into a darkroom.

This spiel runs the risk of becoming self-aggrandizing, but sometimes it's beneficial to be selfish – to pour everything back into the self when you've lost it and before you lose it again. I predict that, in the two months I have left, I'll make collages, pick up a new instrument or get too into my old ones and maybe turn back to the world of embroidery. At this point, I've accepted that most of my projects will remain unfinished, my apartment looking like a jack-of-all-trades, master-of-none clusterfuck, but – cliché warning! – the process is certainly more fulfilling than the outcome for me. There's something childlike about throwing yourself fully at the task of learning something new, something intensely personal about doing it all on your own, on your own time. There's certainly no time like the present. I've realized all too late that there is little time left, so I might as well take these blissful, sublime moments in the summertime of my life and make the most of them; the upheaval of corporate hellscapes can wait until the fall.



# some things

## Mallika Chennupaty

Summers punctuate each year with a pleasant warmth. Time feels still, my mind empties out and then the boredom – the kind where even books and TV and art projects and phones get boring – sets in. But this summer is different. I just finished college. For the first time in 22 years, there is no grade to move into, no summer job to get, no degree requirement to fulfill.

As I write this, I'm sitting in my bedroom. Actually, I'm in the guest bedroom since my sister moved into my room when I left for college. I am back at the house where I took my first steps, where I practiced dance, where I painted ceramic figurines, where I watched my little sister grow up, where I'm watching my parents grow older, and where I lived for 18 years.

Yet I crave the comfort of the college room I rented for just nine months. The three blocks around campus feel more familiar than the trails behind my house. I want to be around the friends who became my community over the last four years.

To make myself more at home, but also to avoid thinking so much about graduation during the month since graduation, I've decorated my makeshift room with things I've accumulated over the years.

### 2019

In my jewelry box is a pair of red and silver earrings. They were a birthday present from a college friend. I met her at the start of freshman year, but we became close during the first summer I was in California instead of Oregon. I spent June in an apartment near campus, taking a class. I was unsure of whether Berkeley was the right choice for college. Everyone seemed settled, with their friend group and a major they were passionate about and goals they were

working hard to achieve, but I felt untethered. Some evenings I would walk around campus, then watch the sunset while eating dinner alone. One evening, I met that friend (an acquaintance at the time) for dinner at a pizza place. I don't remember our exact conversation, but I do remember the immediate comfort between us. Talking to her was simple. She was present and open and kind. We ended up living together in our senior year. Afternoon coffees became a daily ritual. So did trips to the gym and walks to class. Instead of eating at Sliver, she made us homemade pizzas for dinner.

### 2012

The other day, while sorting through my old clothes, I found two rumpled tie-dye shirts. The summer when I was twelve and my sister was six, my parents decided that we needed to spend time at home with our grandparents. Without school and piano and dance lessons, it became hard to fill the day. So one afternoon, we decided to tie-dye. We sat outside, inking two shirts into supposed works of art. Later that evening, my dad brought home a water balloon kit. We ran around our backyard in matching shirts, braids heavy with water. She aimed a balloon towards my arm and missed. I threw two at her back, watching the darkening spiral of blue and pink on her shirt. Then her face, flushed with delight, came into view. She barreled towards me, laughing hard.

### 2016

On my phone are a bunch of audio messages from a friend who became more than that, at least on my end. Because we lived on opposite coasts, we FaceTimed. Time would

disappear when we talked.

I'd sit at a nearby park, and a child screaming down the slide would remind me of their brother.

I'd lay in the grass on a picnic blanket, skin warm and eyes droopy, wondering if they would like the lyrics of a song stuck in my head.

I wrote down a list of things to talk about so that I wouldn't forget. The next time we called, we would either talk through the list or go off on a random tangent, late into the night.



### 2018

A birthday card is pinned above my desk. My friend gave it to me the day before I left for college. It's covered in the ticket stubs of all the movies we watched during the summer of 2018. Going to the theater was our favorite activity. I'd buy myself Sour Patch or Nerd Rope, but she would get Dibs or Buncha Crunch. Usually I watched movies in silence, but with her, I would talk nonstop about the actors' outfits, the books she was currently reading or whether we knew anyone in the theater. Before college, we decided to watch one movie together each month in separate theaters in separate states. That never happened. I was struggling with an essay when she wanted to go, or she was busy in the lab when I wanted to go. What replaced it were Facetimes with silences and long conversations, small gifts and sum-



mer visits where she comes back to Portland or I go to Seattle.

## 2009

A binder with Telugu prayers sits on my bookshelf. I filled it with paper the summer I spent in India with my grandmother. Every afternoon, I'd lay on her bed. She would recite five prayers from a yellow book which we would then practice together. Two hours would pass as follows:

She sings a verse.

I repeat the verse.

She corrects my pronunciation.

I try again.

She corrects my pronunciation

again.

I try again.

She gives up and motions to the paper.

I scribble down the verse, phonetically in English, for the next afternoon's practice.

We sing through the whole verse together. I echo her, stumbling on the same few words.



## 2015

There is a set of gajalu tucked away in my closet. I don't look at them anymore because it reminds me of the summer I prepared for my first solo Kuchipudi performance. I practiced for three hours a day with my teacher. It was tiring, sometimes monotonous. But I still woke up everyday ready to submerge myself in every story I was telling with my body. I asked my teacher about the history behind the art form. I copied her movements, adjusting each tilt of my head, foot step and expression.

Driving home from practice, the wind from the open windows chilled the sweat dripping down my back. I'd eat lunch, watch TV for the rest of the day and then wake up to do it all



again. I don't really want to dance anymore, so I haven't in three years. But I do wonder if I'll find the contentment of feeling most like myself again.

## 2004

There are two windows in my room that look out into the backyard. When I'm procrastinating or bored or my eyes hurt from staring at a screen, I look outside. My mom loves plants, so the garden grows fluffy roses, dark and light purple clematis, tall calla lilies and giant zucchinis. My favorites are the orange-on-the-inside-and -pink-on-the-outside roses, ones that have been around since I was three. Every summer, the garden becomes my mom's project. In the evenings, after work, she goes outside with her clippers in hand and a sun hat wide enough to cover four heads. I like to watch her tend to the plants. She seems serene, not bustling behind me or my sister or my dad or my grandparents. If my window is open, I can hear her talking to the flowers just as she once whispered to me when I couldn't fall asleep.



## 2021

An old candle jar sits on my desk. It still smells like lavender, but now the wax is replaced by a bunch of crystals. One time, on a New York trip with a friend, I mentioned that I



liked crystals. A few months later, she bought some at a flea market in New Jersey. In the jar sits a yellow fluorite that encourages

partnership.

An amber which eases stress.

A lithium quartz for good relationships.

A citrine that helps with creativity. And a malachite for peace.

Sometimes, when my heartbeat is too loud, and my palms are sticky, and my thoughts come so fast that they collide and compress and crush into each other, I pick a crystal from the jar, and hold it closed in my palm. The texture of the stone's surface, sometimes smooth or sometimes rough depending on the one I chose, is calming. I wonder what she would say. I switch the stone from hand to hand. Eventually, my mind slows and my breath is steady. I put the stone back in the jar and go about my day.

## 2022

Nowadays all these memories seem distant from each other, so I feel like a spider splayed within its own web. But these things that I've collected are grounding. I may not be in the same state as my college friends again, but the earrings will always remind me of the warm evening walk home after I found my first friend in a new city. Whenever I wear the tie-dye shirt, I'm comforted that though my sister and I now spend more sun-soaked afternoons with our friends than with each other, her laugh is still the same. Or every-time I write a birthday card, I'll try to recreate the ease of sitting with someone who can finish my sentences. This summer, my makeshift room has become an amalgamation of the past twenty one summers that I get to sift through once again.





# Rules by Emma Meyers





17 of 25 by Emma Meyers



# I've Been Meaning to Tell You, I No Longer Think the World Is Ending

By Maggie Kaprielian

It's past midnight and the sky  
doesn't repent at  
flooding my garden with a colossal affinity of raindrops.

We are standing in an oasis of greenery,  
as water stagnantly plummets downward  
onto fresh evergreens wrapped around our limbs,  
pulling our bodies closer together.

I've never been religious.  
Nonetheless, when your dampened hands latch  
onto my cheeks as we mount in late June's solitude, it's no longer unfathomable  
to believe in  
the possibility of divine intervention.

See, I always thought my life was bound to agony.  
That I've perpetually been on the threshold for misfortune.  
I've never known peace. It's only been described to me  
as the most lustrous notion one could desire,  
like when you kiss a boy for the very first time.

But in this moment with you, as swimming  
pools overflow  
and I kiss a girl for the very first time,  
I've finally succumbed to  
peace.





# LEMON TREE

BY JULIANNE HOLMQUIST

These soft white petals parted way  
For thick skin  
Covering up sour fruit.  
Trying.  
Bitterness grows and I shield the world  
From all that's in me.  
My patience for pleasantries winters.  
Those who try to take a bite  
Will squeeze their eyes and  
Pucker their lips.  
I will not grow sweeter with time.  
When ripe I am not for consumption.  
You'll leave me thinking  
"They should serve sugar with that girl"



# and it was almost night

And you were walking down Collins and 79th, parallel to the beach and you were walking behind the rest of the group. The smell of flowers, beach salt and sativa fill the air, the signature scent for a summer evening walking down Miami Beach.

You're in one of those sour moods

you seem to find yourself in lately. The one that turns you off from everything else going on. It happened right after dinner, and on top of that, you're sobering up and crazy bloated. Fuck. I shouldn't have worn these shorts. The AirPods you have on are starting to ache and dig into your ears. You're perpetually five paces behind the rest of the group. It's 8:15. Maybe 8:10? It's not completely dark yet? Your feet hurt. You wore the wrong shoes for this. But there's no stopping so you keep walking even though your soles hurt. Looking to the left at one of the beach entrances, you see the horizon line. The ocean and the sky almost blend together creating the warmest shade of blue. The lampposts turn on as you turn your head back, glowing the same shade of orange you used to hate but recently started dreaming about.

When will I be inspired?



and there was wind

SE ALEXANDER ST

ST 229TH AVE

I'm so tired. I should've changed already. Miami is known for its absolutely abysmal summers. You've lived here almost 20 years but you'll never get used to it. The kind of heat that sticks to your skin even after you've finished making the voyage indoors. One that berates you endlessly so that even the highest A/C setting won't save you. But tonight, by the beach, the breeze is kind to you. You hated walking outdoors in the summer. And now ... now ... Hmm ... this is nice. This is good.

"No, you love this city. Look how you talk about it," you had a friend once tell you. It was a shock. Do I really? Is it easy for other people to tell when you love something? Is anyone really capable of knowing what they love? Despite the city signs not permitting wheels on the sidewalks, two kids ride on scooters. They're yelling at each other the way siblings do. Their parents walk in front of you. They're holding hands. As they pass you, you can smell the white sage radiating off their bodies. It smells like your childhood home and what your family used to burn to keep the ghosts away. The woman, in talking to her husband, has her gaze drop to his lips, just before meeting his eyes again. Maybe you just know. I'm falling behind.

You walk a few more blocks, the sidewalks lined with beach sunflowers. A biker passes you. You only realize afterward, but the bike is the best shade of orange.

juana moya

"It's just like the world doesn't stop," one of the members in your group mentions. I think it does. You have work and school but ... it doesn't exist. Not right now at least. It's gone, and it'll be there, but. Right now. I think. I think you might be fine. It seems to be fine. At least right now.

You're still on Collins Ave. People will say it's touristy – and it is, no denying that – but the art deco buildings have always held your heart. They were going to tear it down, you know. Once upon a time. Someone decided it was important and beautiful enough to stay. Now it's a designated part of city history. It's all done from care and attention.

It's easy to stay stuck in the monotony of feeling stuck. It's easy to stay strung up and tied upside down. You're the hanged man. Stagnant. God knows it's easy to wait and hope a spark of something falls into your lap, so you can feel like yourself again. I miss my cat. I miss my roommates. My brother. My childhood. My best friend. Him. You can miss how music used to sound to you. You're walking behind your group and wondering if you're built right for the size of love you want to carry. If it's possible at all.

Again. The frustration and the resignation at feeling stuck and uninspired are easy. You never know it's there until all your pages lose their color and the love you have tastes stale.

It's not hard. You went by weeks feeling it. And though you don't want to hear it, you fell in love endlessly today. You're full of it. Your belly is going to burst from yummy food, your favorite colors follow you endlessly and the beach is kind to you. Love exists in strangers, music and history; aren't you lucky to just be alive in proximity to it?

I ... I think that maybe love is in recognizing it

when you think think that even and it's supposed tion doesn't drop it's something when you look for as it is, a lot of it know? I am able am able to be at a moment. Even despise the most, me and hides the smallest most gestures, you look love. You might you inspire love. right for this.

You start making back to the car. still leads you, but feeling as lonely. walking back down you've known your and you pass by the your dad lived in parents first split. flowers make you even deeper, and shares this breath as out from behind blanket. I think changed. I think all needed was a breezy you to know it. You're at the car, and now ache at the hips and stride, but you don't wind hits your face, hair past due for a weightless on your It's cool. Especially You'd think that in the pain and resistance wind you'd want to could walk a hundred you wanted. I think it'll Something tells me bad.

it's not there. I when it's hard, to be, inspira- in your lap but that meets you it. As elusive is just will, you to stop time; I ease, even for in the things I love surrounds within it all. In insignificant for signs of not see it, but Maybe I am

the walk The group you're not And you're a street whole life, apartment when your Florida citrus breathe the moon she peeks her cloudy you've that you walk to get nearly back your legs with each mind. The and your cut feels shoulders. for June. face of from the stop. You miles if be fine. it's not all

# stellar fling

by: Anngelina Minnittee

The light crested atop her head  
as I pressed a kiss on her soft brow.  
Haloed by the falling of the sun,  
the heavens themselves seemed to crown her  
a stained glass angel worthy of worship.

It began to disappear in the horizon behind her,  
nestling beneath the dark orange sky.  
The gentle glow rested between two rounded hills,  
coddled by the clouds rolling by.

Cicadas expanded their tymbals  
and chirped as the summer heat  
was brushed away  
in the mellow breeze.  
I could feel my eyelids drift close.

Her image is burned into me forever.  
Her embrace set my body ablaze,  
as if walking on the sun itself.  
My soul turned to ash when I was with her,  
only particles were left lingering in the air.

Until the star finally exhausted its core,  
and there was nothing left to keep our  
bodies together.  
As we were sent drifting, apart, into end-  
less space,  
and beautiful distant memories,  
dancing in the supernova

of an old summer fling.





**BEACH  
BABES** BY **LIV GARBER**



# THE WIND

by

*Sirota*

is a 23-year-old independent singer/songwriter born and raised in South Brooklyn.

Why do the positives  
feel neutral?  
I can turn a problem to its plural  
Always regret it  
Open up my phone it feels  
I'm prone to scroll through  
camera rolls  
I find new ways to feel wrong  
Impulsive, ironic 'cause  
I ooze and overflow

With self-control when  
It comes to brighter things  
like chasing joy  
I get so frozen It's like  
I never let my confidence get going  
Is this shit broken?

**[CHORUS]**  
**Oh, I need to stick my head out  
the window,  
To feel like I'm not someone's idea  
Why do I need the breeze on my  
shoulders  
To feel more regret?  
It, it's unclear**

Well, I think I'm taller than  
most people that I meet  
I've got more wisdom in my  
pinky than you'll ever see  
But then it comes to when I'm  
alone with me  
Can't help feeling that I only  
make it to the knee



# OW SONG



## Sirotá

*If you personified a juice box from your fourth-grade lunch bag, gave it a love for R&B, and terrible hand-eye coordination, you would wind up with something resembling the five-foot-zero songstress.*

### [CHORUS]

I've been told you'll get yours, I'll get mine  
There's no point comparing, the sun shines  
You don't like me baby well that's fine  
Just get the fuck out of my skyline

Can you find me  
and remind me that I,  
I'm deserving of a  
sure thing at night  
When it's blurry and  
I'm circling provide  
Me a sweet dream,  
a method to breathe,  
and I...

'Cause my own is my own is my own  
And I carry heavy bags all on a tightrope  
And sometimes we all feel like fool's gold  
It's alright we'll make it as we go  
I see your face and exhale  
Safer place for fresh air  
I see your face and exhale  
I'm letting go of warfare  
I need to stick my head out the window



# Thank You, Mother

by sydney sirkin by sydney sirkin by sydney sirkin by sydney sirkin by

It is difficult to reach sublimity. The most primal, most basic urge to feel nothing and everything at the same time. To breathe as one with the leaves that have created homes in the tree you sit beneath, roots laid out as a throne. Stomata rising and falling in time with the beating of your heart, fueling each other with life. Thank you, my plant friend. I will no longer take you for granted, for you keep me alive. Sometimes I ask you, do you have to?

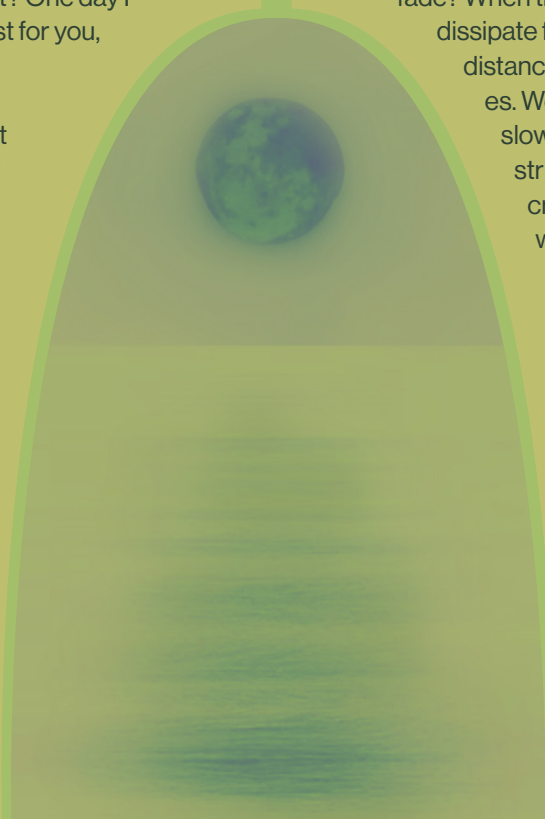
It is difficult to reach sublimity when the people we orbit are insistent on dropping us into a world, pins on a map, that denies grace and love and divinity. Have you ever had your heart broken? Mine breaks every day when my eyes open. Scroll. Scroll. Scroll. Vacant eyes. Head nodding but thoughts anywhere but. Worry for the future, forget about the moment that lies like a carpet in front of you. Do you think it's a red carpet? One day I think it will be red. Plush. Velvet. Just for you, just for me.

It would be sublime to say the heart is healed again when my eyes shut under the moon, but it filters into dreamland, anxieties and sadness and fragments of hurt. The past is behind us, they say, but is it? Does the past not contribute to every thought, feeling I will have in the future? Does the Mother of the Earth pry it from our grip to present us with sublimity? Could I go talk to her, do you think? Jump in her lakes and touch the bottom until my breath gives out, but before then, swiping the sand and admiring the colors that have been buried by shades of tan and beige?

I didn't know this existed, this swell of beauty and everything that is good. But Mother says I can't stay down there forever, but why not? This is my sublime; the bottom of this lake that appeared before me in the most unexpected way. When you don't look for it, it will find you. That's what people keep saying. And so here I am, why can't I stay? Mother? Why can't I stay? She guides me gently back to the surface. She gives me only a moment, not a lifetime. I want a lifetime with the colors of the lake no one else can see.

I keep wondering when my moment of peace will end. Or when the next moment will arrive. And then end again, as suddenly as the last one. When I will go cry into a pillow because it has passed, it will never return, it is now housed in memory. But when will that memory fade? When the touch of your hand in mine will dissipate from my cells, my nerve endings. It distances itself further as each day passes. We gave you sublimity, now we will slowly take it away, a painter peeling strips of color off their canvas. They cry as they do it. This is their life's work, but it must be done. The canvas is blank once again, more white than it originally was, but the painter can't bear it and leaves it in the dumpster outside. So, I remember and speak the words you said to me out loud so the trees will never forget them, so my leaves can breathe the words back to me when I start to forget.

But the trees will die someday, and the words will be gone, and the moment never happened at all, did it?





Because my brain and my skin and my cells don't remember, and the trees and the clouds and rain cycling endlessly through the sky only look at me blankly. It lives underground now. Maybe it would be worth it to visit Hades if it meant I could uncover and pet those moments once again.

It is difficult to reach sublimity. But when you do, it wraps its arms around you, holding you tightly and for a moment you feel like the single most important thing in the world, you and only you, this world is yours. Living isn't so bad then. Why, the other day in your bedroom at a minute to midnight, did it feel imperative that you leave this earth immediately? This moment would have disappeared as quickly as you. Euphoric. Otherworldly. Kisses on cheeks and dancing, or birds chirping and silence and the smell of grass growing in a place where lawn mowers don't exist. Give me someone else to share this moment with. Or don't. Just don't let me fall off again, into the spiral of aches and pains and words that feel like daggers. But not daggers that are wrenched into your body. No, ones that barely graze the skin, making you aware just enough that you are living, this is your life, you can't escape.

The room goes cold, the sky dark, so I begin to close the window. The breeze jolts it back open, wrapping itself around my face. I am the sublime you seek. Why are you ignoring me? I open the window again, hang my head out. Wait slightly impatiently, it's growing cold. A sensation on my nose, a flake of snow. Neighbors are simultaneously clicking on their twinkle lights, having counted the minutes until the sky would open up and dump their life, their love, their next moment of peace. We sit in respective homes, separate but together, and the concrete of the street settles, breathing into the earth. The breeze was right, as it always is.

Thank you, Mother, for not letting me fall.





# *A Winter Night Near Bronxwood*

*By Brianna Levy*

Hundreds of grains sit atop the head  
of a woman as she walks  
down this black borough lane.

Black boughs shade her and her daughter,  
whose small hand slopes up, like the branches, like the woman.

I wish I could see them where they could have been:  
leaves and heat, buns with spice,  
oil from palm, and mongrel on roads.

But still, it was a beautiful sight, mother and daughter,  
hand in hand under black boughs,  
two puffs on the girl, dozens of meals on the woman,  
jackets, light blue and black,  
and myself, huffing in burgundy, lugging my school books behind them.

It was a beautiful sight, mother and daughters,  
all walking towards Bronxwood, loved black girls under black boughs.

I wish I could see all three of us on dirt roads, just for a second;  
but the way we dot the concrete together,  
the way we carry our books, meals, lives with pride –  
almost makes up for it.

# baby names

by subin lee

wrapped around each other  
i love and am loved by a lover

they are as kind as i am  
i am as kind as i wish to be

the grass in the yard is green  
the floor is hardwood

the oranges are overflowing in the sink  
and the cats don't bite

but when the cold does  
we bring the kids out

into the living room  
to light the fireplace

where the bookshelves  
are filled with books

and the guest room  
filled with a friendly guest always

all of us we hold hands  
as often as we can

to fight the powers  
that be and we

do not hurt each other  
and i am no longer afraid

i am no longer waiting  
for that song  
to save me

and no longer  
does god  
want me dead

# You May All Go to Hell,

The first sign of summer emerging from the brown Texas hill country winter comes in a pop of blue. The first time you see it, you'll think your eyes are playing tricks on you— **there's no way the dead grass could've given way to the weed so soon.** And then, almost overnight, bluebonnets are everywhere. Baby deer wander down dark country roads, ears alerting to the hymns of Dolly Parton and Loretta Lynn; only for them to dash into overgrown farmland. High school and college graduates flood to small town centers to take graduation photos; cars honking in a form of southern hospitality. But the number one thing that signals the shifting of seasons: the heat!

There's not much in Texas that happens fast. A majority of my life has been spent between getting trapped in the produce section of H-E-B talking to somebody's Mimi and being stuck in mind-numbing traffic on I-35. The arrival of summer and her blistering sunshine are the only exceptions. All at once, a religious-like pilgrimage begins to places like Canyon Lake, the Comal River or Lady Bird Lake to receive a little relief from the unbearable heat. Yet, despite the heat, there is also something so colorful and beautiful about a Texas summer.

You'll see fruit stands pop up on the side of country roads advertising "**the sweetest watermelon this side of the Mississippi!**" Paleteros become your savior with their fruity popsicles and Vero mango candies, which taste like a slice of heaven on a hot day. Little, cheesy southern boutiques will draw you in with air conditioning, and you'll no doubt leave with a Texas-themed t-shirt. Activities like going to the drive-in to see a double feature and then going to the oversized Buc-ees or Whataburger in the middle of the night become routine.

# But I Will Go to Buc-ee's

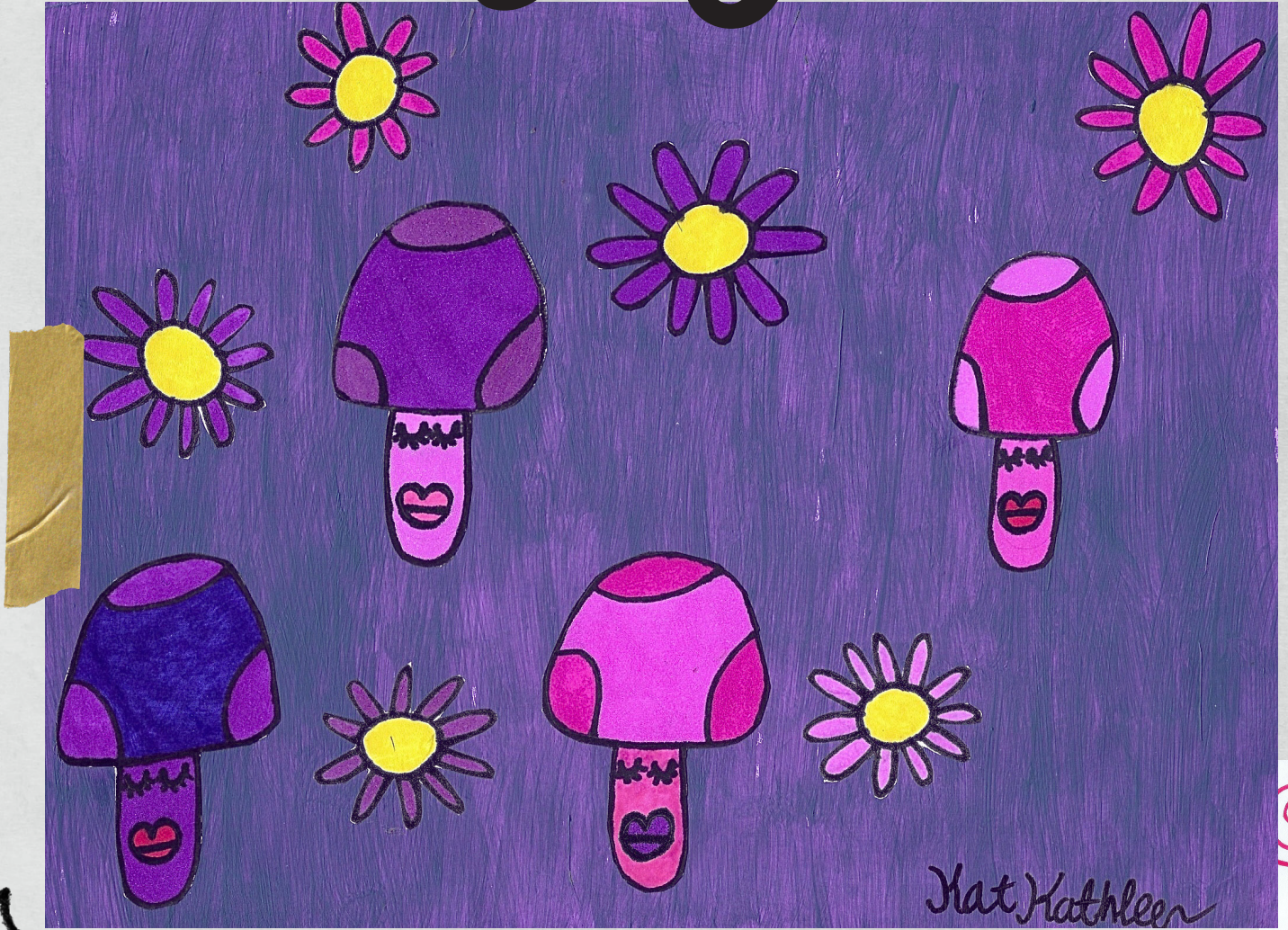
By Madeline English

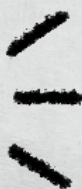
I love Texas, and I love a Texas summer, no matter how scorching. However, it feels impossible to talk about my love for Texas without talking about the other side of it. Homegrown Texan and icon, Lizzo, once said, “I’m proud to rep Texas, but I’m not proud to rep Texan politics.” As a queer person, I deserve a place and a home here just as much as anyone else, but when geriatric men make decisions about my body, marriage, wages, etc. – it makes it hard for me to want to stay. A lot of people, many of whom I love and admire, have already begun to make their way out of our home state and into safer, more welcoming environments. So, why do I stay?

I stay because, much like Texas summers, **Texas anger is remarkable and fiery and unrelenting.** Calls for action radiate from the streets of Austin to the deserts of El Paso, Amarillo to the coasts of Galveston, and down to the Rio Grande Valley. When Texans feel passionate about something, they let you know. They are like the bluebonnets sprouting from dead grass: at first, you think there’s only one, and then there are thousands of them, resulting in a wave of blue. I stay because my families, both of origin and chosen, have grown up under a Texas sun. I stay because I am helping to raise the next generation of Texans. I stay because I am a Texan.

So, if you ever find yourself down in Texas during one of her summers: pull up a chair, drink a Ranch Water, listen for notes of The Chicks, or Tanya, or Johnny and June and know that us Texans are gonna be just fine. The bluebonnets always manage to come back, don't they?

# mushy girls





by Kat Kathleen

# *How Antidepressants Saved My Life*

by Ritamarie Pepe

My childhood bedroom is a memorial to my adolescent years. Much remains untouched from when I packed my bags to move into college four years ago: the 2012 One Direction poster hanging on my wall, the dried corsage from junior prom sitting on my shelf and the stacks of dusty books I never got around to actually reading. The only changes that indicate it functions as a living space rather than a museum to my high school glory days are a new iPhone charger and a crack in the wall from when I tried to kick through it.

The wall never did anything to me. In fact, those baby blue boys deserve some recognition for the wear and tear of Scotch tape and thumbtacks they endured over the years as I cycled through new posters with each phase I entered and subsequently exited.

At best, I'd like to say I fell into the wall, and at worst, I'd rather say I had a white boy moment where I punched it in frustration and anger. To me, the latter is less shameful than the true reason – and that's saying something.

The truth is: I wanted to fucking feel.

Although I've struggled with mental illness, including depression, for all of my life, the way it has manifested in my day to day has dramatically changed over time. While it was one of my more manageable disorders throughout my childhood, when I entered college, it crept out of the cob-webbed corners of my brain and quickly turned me into its sick little puppet.

So when I kicked the wall – once, twice, three times – and expended the very little energy I had mustered up after lying in bed

all day, it was because I just wanted to feel. I wanted to feel something to remind my numb, decrepit body that I was in fact a real living breathing girl, and not Pinocchio's estranged, strung-up cousin. I wanted physical pain to match the emotional turmoil and mental fatigue I felt inside.

It didn't work. And that wasn't even my lowest point. It was the foreshadowing of my final descent.

When I took my depression out on my walls, it was the height of quarantine. Days crawled past. Months flew by. I claimed the bench by the front window as my permanent spot. I sat there all day, watching the clouds inch by to avoid looking at the clock and wondering when night would finally fall – the end to a monotonous day that I would just repeat tomorrow. And the next. And the next. And then in a blink the days became longer and warmer, and maybe I could open a window for a breeze, but I still sat on that bench. Decaying. Avoiding texts and calls. Talking to my therapist about the same old fucking problems that I did the week before. No change; no movement. Stagnation.

At summer's end, I left my childhood home to move into an apartment with a roommate. I scrubbed that place clean, arranged the furniture to my liking, and found my go-to neighborhood coffee shop. I still felt like a shell of a person controlled by the pit in my stomach, but it was the first time I had felt like I had made a movement in the right direction. Things weren't alright, but maybe they could be.

Then my best friend, the person I considered my other half and soulmate, sent our near decade long friendship up in flames.

This loss was the final crack in my crumbling armor, leaving my mental health vulnerable and exposed. I had been in therapy consistently for about a year at this point, but every weapon in my CBT (cognitive behavior therapy) arsenal was futile. Meditation, self affirmation, and cognitive





restructuring were no match for the sick little monster in my brain. From the moment my eyes opened every morning to when my head hit the pillow at night – given I wasn't hit with a spell of insomnia – I was in excruciating emotional and mental pain.

It got to a point where it was too much. I wanted my insides to match my outsides; to find a hurt that would distract myself from the eternal scream in my brain. I banged my head against desks. Punched walls. Wondered what would happen if I put my hand into the stove flame. Dug my nails into my palm to try and break skin. Screamed into my pillows until my throat was on fire. Fantasized about pulling my curtains around my neck, tighter, and tighter, and tighter.

If I didn't find help soon, I knew there was a strong possibility I would not make it to my 21st birthday. As sad as I was, that thought frightened me to my core. A couple of months later, I began taking antidepressants.

My psychologist had suggested antidepressants a couple of times since we began meeting, but it was always a conversation I avoided for a number of reasons: my mother was hesitant about me taking antidepressants; I bottled up a lot of internalized stigma about my own mental illness; I was caught up in a narrative that antidepressants would turn me into a pill-popping zombie.

The truth is: antidepressants not only saved my life – they increased the quality of it.

It's important to note that everyone's experience with medication is very different. What works for one person may not work for another, and for some people, it requires trial-and-error with multiple medications at different dosages. It is also vital that this is done in partnership with professionals who are certified in medication management. In my case, it took a couple of dosage trials with Lexapro closely monitored by my doctor and psychiatrist before it worked for me.

And by God, did it work.

It's been about a year and a half since I started taking medication, and I am incredibly appreciative of the younger version of myself who, despite being extremely self-deprecating, still believed in herself enough to seek out another solution.

Of course, medication is not a quick fix for mental illness. My depression still exists in my unbalanced brain, and life hasn't gotten much easier since then. But I've experienced a dramatic shift within myself when I am

faced with my toughest battles. Instead of completely succumbing to my internal monologue and spiraling into a storm of self-hatred and sabotage, I am more prepared and willing to engage with the techniques I've learned with my therapist.

I approach my problems with logic rather than leading with my feelings, and can spend more time interrogating my thoughts, feelings and guilt complexes without being overwhelmed by my findings. I am now able to approach myself with the kindness I've always deserved, but never wanted to show myself. It's a work in progress, of course, but the progress I've made and the peace and happiness it has allowed me to find is all that I've ever wanted.

I woke up the other day and actually thought, "Wow, I'm excited to see what today brings." I know that sounds right out of a cheesy movie – it even made myself want to throw up. I didn't even have anything eventful planned for that day. But then I thought about it: I've lived so much of my life without that lust for life, that appreciation for knowing that I could mold this day into whatever I wanted by just doing.

I could walk to Riverside Park and see the sun set over the Hudson River. I could check out that Hawaiian food spot with the lunch special I've been meaning to try. I could take a train into Brooklyn and go visit my friends back home. I could explore a new cafe and order my usual cold brew with oat milk and a pump of vanilla. I could finally start pickling vegetables. Grab a drink with my friend down the block. Watch a movie with my roommate. Go to the gym. Grocery shop. Clean my room. Swim at the beach. Read. Laugh. Eat. Drink. Heal. Breathe. Find my sublime.



# floating



I'm laying in bed, sleeping in far past noon.  
The sun beats against my window, calling out,  
"Come see me, please, let me touch your skin."

Fine, I say, feeling guilty. I rise, sliding on a pair of shorts and a  
ratty old tank top. I slip into my car and roll the windows down.  
I slide the cassette into the radio and watch as music fills the  
car, like lemon ice, smooth and refreshing.



I drive and drive and drive and then  
A single puff floats on through my window, it's dancing to the  
music, up and down to the rhythm  
And I think about my life, the pressure of having a path, a  
grand destination, a perfect ending to the journey,  
but what if this is it?

To be driving feeling the sun kiss my skin, and watch-  
ing as the world dances along to the music



*by Brittany Esposito*

by Rachel Nolan



'oodles of blue was a piece that i made surrounding changing emotions. everyone has moments where they feel sad or lonely and they just cannot soak in the happiness around them.'

# oodles of blue



# Opening Up:

## The Beauty of the Female Orgasm

by Kennedy Brooks

U recently heard Donna Summer's 1975 hit "Love to Love You Baby" for the first time. The album version of the song is over 16 minutes long and the backing track of the vocals includes the sound of Summer moaning in ecstasy. Reportedly, Summer recorded the song by sitting alone in a dark recording room and touching herself. Though the song received critical acclaim at the time of its release, some conservatives were incapable of seeing the beauty of Summer's exploration of sexuality and instead wrote it off as trashy — in its December 29, 1975 issue, Time magazine wrote that "Summer could be heard enjoying 22 orgasms" —as if that's a bad thing. But truthfully, it's one of the most beautiful songs of all time due almost entirely to its focus on love, sensuality and the beauty of the female orgasm.

Playing DJ for an empty club. Dialing the rotary phone. Auditioning the finger puppets. Getting yourself off. Whatever you want to call it — masturbation and the female orgasm are beautiful things. An orgasm is a reflex of the autonomic nervous system, meaning it is not a reaction we can necessarily control. However, there are ways to stimulate it. Of course, there is genital stimulation, but sexologists have identified up to 35 different erogenous zones: your nipples, your neck ... the list goes on. Tantric healers believe that the orgasm evanesces your identity and your ego, issuing in a spiritual connection to one's most basic self. When a woman orgasms, her body releases all sorts of happy chemicals like oxytocin and dopamine that can improve mood, decrease stress and heighten alertness.

While you can achieve those benefits from partnered sex, many women can attest that sometimes it's better to take pleasurable matters into their own hands. In a study published in 2019, psychologist Laurie Mintz found that out of 800 female college student participants, 32% reported that they always orgasmed during masturbation while only 6% reported that they always orgasmed during sex with a partner.

While orgasm does not have to be the end goal of masturbation, there is beauty in taking time to independently explore the capabilities of one's own body and pleasure. For some women, masturbation allows them to give their bodies the love that is typically only thought to be given by a partner. To others, getting to know the road map of their body through masturbation helps them understand and appreciate the body in a way that improves self-worth. In her essay "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power," feminist author Audre Lorde asserts that erotic self-discovery is a means of coming into your power. In a similar vein, the 2021 TENGA Global Self Pleasure report found that a majority of American women who participated in the survey believed that masturbation improves their body image, self-confidence and sex appeal.

Despite the beauty and boon of the female orgasm, sexist stigmatization of female masturbation creates an obstacle to sexual celebration. According to a sur-

vey by Glamour Magazine, 82% of respondents felt as though there was a sense of stigma or shame attached to masturbation. This stigma can be traced all the way back to sexist medical practices during the Victorian era. According to medical records, at some point during the 1800s scientists determined that the female orgasm was not necessary for conception. This inspired the narrative that the female orgasm was useless and expressions of female sexuality should be quelled. Thus, women were completely stripped of their sexual agency. Women were routinely diagnosed with so-called “Female Hysteria” if they were caught masturbating or expressing themselves sexually, and the policing of female sexuality ramped up under the guise of medical validity.

The narrative that female masturbation is deviant or unnatural stems from the patriarchal detachment of women from autonomous pleasure and the stigmatization of female sexuality as a means of social and gender control. According to a study by Indiana University Bloomington, 92% of women over the age of 18 have tried masturbation at least once. And yet, it's still seen as totally shameful for girls to get off — even though that same shame doesn't extend to male self-pleasure. Unbound's Sex Report found that 45 countries have importation bans on vibrators in an attempt to protect their citizens from any so-called “indecent behaviors.” If propagandist policies weren't enough to turn someone off, countless myths have circulated about the consequences of masturbation — like she would no longer be fertile or she would lose her eyesight. This misinformation has only reinforced the stigma.

And if you're a woman who feels guilt regarding self pleasure — that's ok. It only reflects our societal programming and internalized misogyny. In order to deconstruct this shame, the number one thing to remember is that masturbation is completely normal. If the problem is that you dislike your body, you can try brainstorming five to ten things that you like about your it and let that guide the way that you interact with it. However, the most important thing about learning to become comfortable with personal intimacy is to remember to take things at your own pace. The beautiful thing about learning to love yourself physically and emotionally is that the experience is entirely dependent on you, so you can do it on your own time table.

The World Health Organization's Declaration of Sexual Rights states that everyone has the right to accurate sexual information and pleasure. By deconstructing outdated masturbatory myths, we are able to move towards exalting the connection between the body and the self. Dr. Betty Dodson (one of the most prolific sex educators of all time) once said, “Masturbation is the foundation for all human sexuality.” Her sentiment reflects the benefits of knowing one's self before engaging with anything or anyone else sexually. This isn't to say that you have to have experimented with masturbation before being intimate with anyone else, but research produced by naturopathic physician Dr. Sharon Stills found that women who masturbate actually actually have more fulfilling sex lives with partners.

As Alexandra Katehakis says in her book “Mirror of Intimacy”:  
“Masturbation is ... an inherent gift. The design of the human body gives us free access to our genitals ... it's clear this function was granted for our enjoyment.” The female orgasm creates a beautifully emotional, mental and spiritual reaction that does not deserve the shame and taboo it elicits. Much like Donna Summer, I see the beauty in my body and what it's capable of doing — I hope you can too.





X

*cattails II*

*Mara*

# without me

by Isaac Schiller

The world moves on  
And I never will.  
They are the silt and I am the stone,  
Eroding ever slowly,  
Ever drifting away in bits  
And keeping an ever-shrinking core.

And still, on your timeline,  
I am eternal,  
Oh! Eternal,  
And you do not bother to wait for the mountain  
Nor the sky, so why wait for me?

The world moves on,  
And I never can: The hawks and eagles circle  
above me, but it is not my flesh  
They pick at, but yours;  
And how I mourn for this,  
Plead for difference in indifference.

I am begging you to rest your weary bones  
Upon me and to cease your motion,  
To calcify with me, to never change—  
Not like they change—  
And to still be looked upon as metamorphosing  
Together, in sync,  
By the sun, the moon, and the laughing stars.



hope  
reels  
the

NON  
revolution  
aive

Waxie Justice  
Use Dms  
as Rebellion

by Megan Robertson



# It s the end

of 2017 in Phoenix, Arizona. In this desert metropolis, known for its heat, culture and conservative political landscape, Latinx students are harassed at school as President Trump adamantly pushes legislation for a border wall in this state. Meanwhile, high school sophomore Julian is getting ready for the Winter Formal dance. Despite being the only Mexican and openly queer person at their school, they impulsively put on a pair of velvet, purple wedges – and everything changes.

That night, Julian became Jayde Justyce. Jayde is a 20-year-old, Arizona-based drag queen whose mission is to combine the visuals and storytelling of drag with political resistance.

“I was alive. Oh, my gosh, I was alive! That’s when I became Jayde Justyce,” they said. “I loved it. After that, I was like ‘For Halloween, we’re going to come to school in drag,’ and I did! I wore Lady Gaga’s VMA red lace outfit, the one she wore before she announced ‘Born This Way.’ I had no lashes, some cheap Spirit [Halloween] nails, some cheap Spirit [Halloween] eyeshadow, and I thought I was the one. After that it just kept kind of growing and growing.”

Since their sophomore year of high school, Julian has been professionally pursuing drag. They have performed for four years in the Arizona area, and have their own line of merchandise through their production company “House of Justyce.”

Their drag performance can look like fun, self-expression, but it’s so much more. That’s the brilliance of it, and it all comes down to Julian’s stage name.

“I chose Jayde Justyce because, like the documents say, ‘with liberty and justice for all’ – we need to live up to that. I started to see that I could combine drag with my politics and create it into one. It’s when I’m in drag that I’m the most passionate, the most provocative. The whole point of me doing drag is to say, ‘Look at me; hear my story.’”

In this way, Jayde Justyce is completing the ultimate goal of artists everywhere. By watching Jayde, people can see Julian and the Latinx and LGBTQ+ communities represented through them in a radical way. The political becomes personal (and it’s enjoyable). Drag becomes a vessel to bring awareness and advocacy towards state and local legislative issues, while simultaneously raising funds for communities impacted.

In the past year, Jayde has organized for the Transgender community in Texas against Senate Bill 1138, which bans physicians from providing gender-affirming treatment to youth and blocks an already difficult access to hormone therapy. In conjunction with this advocacy, they have promoted the “Trans Spectrum of AZ” as they work to provide support and resources to the Texas transgender community. Jayde

is also passionate about decriminalizing sex work, eliminating the gender wage gap and creating more environmentally sustainable agriculture practices in Texas. This advocacy work is all in addition to their drag performances, which inspire political reflection and resistance.

“I’ll do a fun, little campy number. Then all of a sudden, we’re gonna bring it back. I’m going to introduce politics into it,” they said. “I have a number to Taylor Swift’s ‘London Boy,’ but really, I make it about the invasion of Mesoamerica.”

“I want you to laugh about these things, because sometimes that’s all you can do. Hope keeps the revolution alive,” Jayde said. “I know a lot of Gen Z likes to have this pessimistic spirit of ‘Well, it doesn’t matter, the world’s already burning.’ But that’s the system talking to us! As the late Dr. King said, ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.’ We have to do it together. So laugh, have fun – but remember that you’re in this fight for a reason, and get to work.”

For Jayde, hope is the backbone of their work. “About two years ago, my mother had another baby. That baby, when she came into this world, we were in the midst of a pandemic, and racist police brutality was rising. She is the reason I continue this fight. Because I want that baby, that grouchy irritable little baby, to live a life that I wanted,” they said.



In addition to being the only Mexican and openly queer person in their school, prior to finding their passion in drag, Julian found themselves in and out of Child Protective Services.

I don’t want my sister to live that life,” they said. “She’s the reason that I keep fighting. I want her to grow up in a world where she doesn’t have to worry like I do. It’s also people who look like me, whether they’re Mexican or queer. They keep me in the fight. There is strength in numbers. Now, a lot of Gen Z say, ‘Voting doesn’t even matter; I’m just gonna vote for the lesser of two evils.’ You will vote for the lesser of two evils, that is true. But, if voting didn’t matter, the Republicans wouldn’t have tried to take it from us. There is strength in numbers. I think that just seeing the joy, the fight in Gen Z, is what keeps me going. Think about how your life was as a child, so free, so colorful and fun. Let’s create that world for the kids below us. There’s always somebody in our families. For me, it’s my sister.”

Community is integral to Jayde’s work. “When I’m surrounded by my people, I can do anything. My mother, brother and college and high school friends are my biggest supporters. Also my production team, the House of Justyce, which includes my brother, has helped me create my

line of merch and to network through social media,” they said.

“I honor them. You know, my best friend, I honor her everyday because she was there from day one. She taught me a lot of how to stay in the fight and keep having hope. I haven’t always been as happy. That’s what I feel like we need in our world right now. We need to be connected. We need to be kind. We’re all victims under this institution; we’re all victims of capitalism. Democrats and Republicans, progressives and conservatives – we’re all suffering under this system,” they said. “Everybody has to be set free from capitalism, from corruption, from conspiracy, if you will. We have to be able to all be free.”

**“So laugh, have fun  
— but remember that  
you’re n the s  
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and get to work.”**

Jayde’s ideology around community care and existence as rebellion comes from a few of their biggest inspirations: Angela Davis, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, University of Seattle Professor Dean Spade and of course the one and only Lady Gaga.

“We have to band together,” they said. “Help your neighbor; know your neighbor. Get off of social media, or if you’re on social media, talk to your peers, because talking and connecting with people is the way we’re going to get through this together. We can’t keep living this isolated.”

“We’re raised in this idea that as an American, and as an individual within the American society, it’s all about competition, climbing to the top, making it to the top. Focusing on yourself. We isolate on our phones, build walls around our properties, within and around our schools, in gated communities. So much of Gen Z is educated, brilliant, technologically advanced and passionate, but we don’t know each other. That’s what we need to do today. We need to learn who we are. We learn twice as much when we sit and listen to somebody.”

That is the core of drag for Jayde: community connection, joy and political resistance.

“We have to stay hopeful. So, come to a Jayde show. Get loud, laugh, have fun! But then at the end of the night, remember that there is no justice, no peace until we take this down.”

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Follow Jayde on Instagram at @justyceforall\_ to see their work and upcoming performances. •

# Being With You and Simply Being

by Ruby Bloom

We are by a river, we are young, and we are free. Music blurs around us, tinny through the shitty speaker you insisted on bringing, and you are dancing, hair tangled behind you, wet from our dip in the river the hour previous. The lines of your body are soft, and they curve with the wind as you sway, and reach out to me with fingers coated in chipped blue nail varnish.

*I love you.*

I swallow the thought. A laugh bubbles inside of me, spilling from my lips like water as I grasp your soft hands in my own calloused palms. Your smile is a thing of beauty, and I wish briefly that I could trap it – you, us, this moment in a bottle to look at when life feels dull and grey. Now everything's in colour, and I am happy. My body sways in time with yours, the two of us a tangled mess of limbs and laughter. You shriek as I knock a glass over with my flailing arm, and it clatters to the rough ground, shattering on impact. My heart skips a beat and I yelp, but you flick me a grin and pull me away. We'll deal with it later, you say. I pretend to be reluctant as I let myself get dragged away by the pull of your tide.

*I love you.*

We are celebrating. There is a bottle of champagne balancing precariously on a rock, and though it isn't strong, we are tipsy enough that everything seems a little softer, a little funnier, a little more real. And then we are laying on the picnic blanket I spread out over the ground, and my hand is clasped in yours, and our fingers link perfectly as the sky glows soft pink with sunset. We are talking, giggly and totally open, a way I haven't been since the sleepovers we had back in school where we'd stay up whispering secrets until we both dropped off mid-sentence.

"Tell me a secret." I say.

"I stole a nail varnish from a shop  
when I was twelve. Now you."

"I'm claustrophobic."

"I'm scared of the dark."

"I like girls."

I breathe in, out.

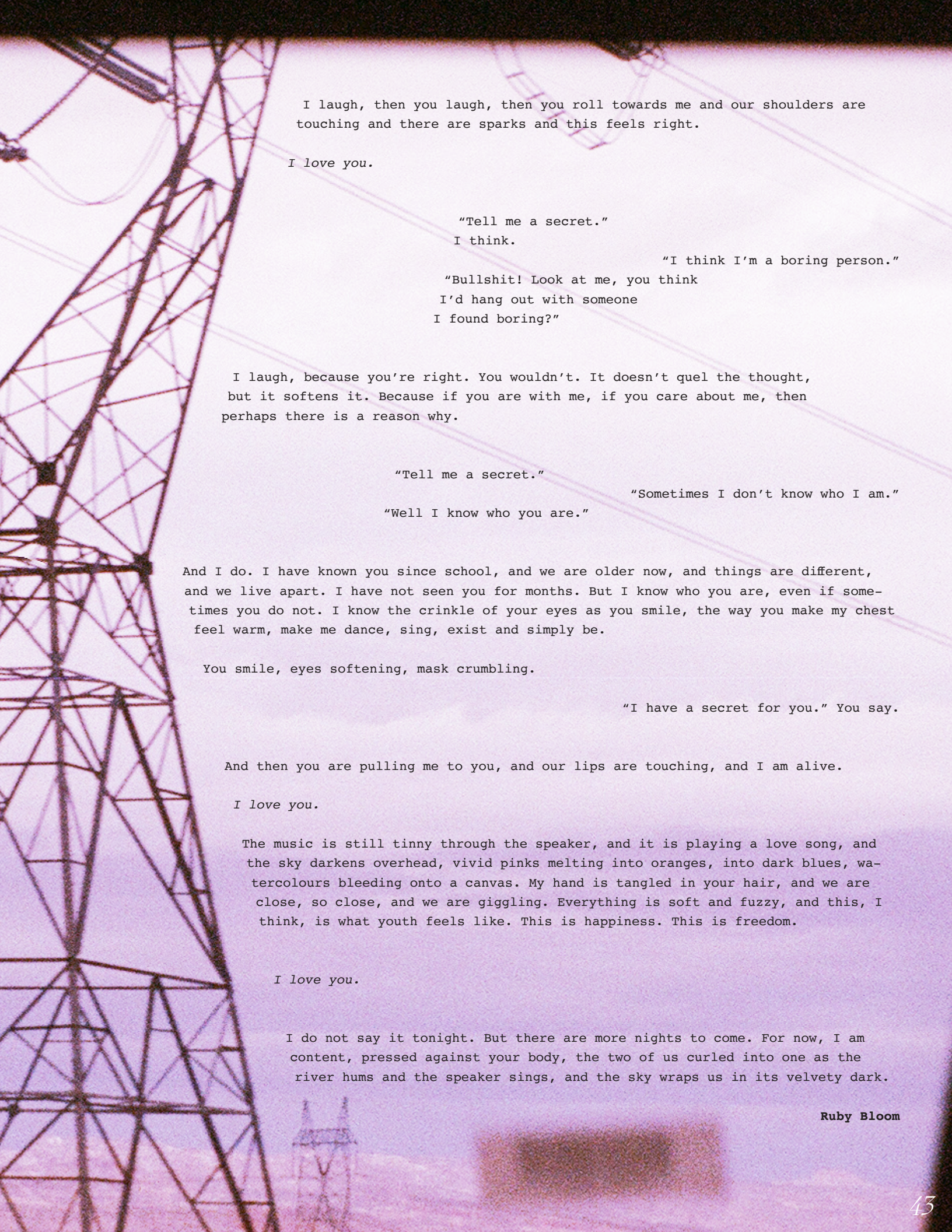
"So do I."

"I believe in soulmates."

"I absolutely don't."

"Why?"

"Because it's bullshit! If I spend the rest  
of my life with a person, it's going to be a  
choice, not some fucking universe  
ordained connection."



I laugh, then you laugh, then you roll towards me and our shoulders are touching and there are sparks and this feels right.

*I love you.*

"Tell me a secret."

I think.

"I think I'm a boring person."

"Bullshit! Look at me, you think

I'd hang out with someone

I found boring?"

I laugh, because you're right. You wouldn't. It doesn't quell the thought, but it softens it. Because if you are with me, if you care about me, then perhaps there is a reason why.

"Tell me a secret."

"Sometimes I don't know who I am."

"Well I know who you are."

And I do. I have known you since school, and we are older now, and things are different, and we live apart. I have not seen you for months. But I know who you are, even if sometimes you do not. I know the crinkle of your eyes as you smile, the way you make my chest feel warm, make me dance, sing, exist and simply be.

You smile, eyes softening, mask crumbling.

"I have a secret for you." You say.

And then you are pulling me to you, and our lips are touching, and I am alive.

*I love you.*

The music is still tinny through the speaker, and it is playing a love song, and the sky darkens overhead, vivid pinks melting into oranges, into dark blues, watercolours bleeding onto a canvas. My hand is tangled in your hair, and we are close, so close, and we are giggling. Everything is soft and fuzzy, and this, I think, is what youth feels like. This is happiness. This is freedom.

*I love you.*

I do not say it tonight. But there are more nights to come. For now, I am content, pressed against your body, the two of us curled into one as the river hums and the speaker sings, and the sky wraps us in its velvety dark.

Ruby Bloom



BY LIV GARBNER QUICK TRIP

# Lonestar

by Korie

22



ISNT THAT FUNNY?

THERE IS A LOT TO BE SAID ABOUT BEING IN A SORT OF LOVE WITH YOURSELF AND OTHERS. THE WAY YOU TOUCH YOUR BODY WILL NEVER BE AS SOFT OR AS HARD AS ANOTHER PERSON COULD BUT, YOUR FINGER TIPS DONT LIGHT THE SAME FIRE IN YOU AS SOMEONES EYES WOULD. YOU MAY KNOW ALL YOUR FAVORITE SPOTS TO MASSAGE YOU SHAVE BUT OTHERS SEEM TO TOUCH SPOTS THAT NEVER SENT A SHAVE THROUGHT ME. I SPENT SO MUCH TIME TALKING AND THINKING ABOUT HOW SOMEONE RIPPED APART MY FLESH AND NOT THE ONES THAT HEAD IT SO SOFTLY. I SPENT SO MUCH TIME CAUGHT UP ON SOMEONE THAT DIDNT EVEN CARE TO APOLOGIZE OR SEE ME. I WANT TO TALK ABOUT HOW THE ONES WHO BRACH FOR ME DO IT SO GENTLY. THE WAY THEY HOLD ME SO SWEETLY. I DONT CARE IF ITS FOR ME. IN THAT MOMENT... IS? FOR ME.

# moments of being, with you

louise kim

i have never been good  
at strategy games  
before i met you. now,  
our backgammon wins are tied.

in the kitchen, we blend  
frozen açai purée packs  
with banana, with apple,  
with strawberry, mango, and passion-  
fruit  
from the freezer.

everything is spotless, and you  
can thank my compulsive cleaning  
habits.  
everything, save for a small stain  
of your blood absorbed into the hard-  
wood

from when you laughed at my joke  
and cut your finger  
with a santoku knife  
while dicing an onion.

but i'm still terrified of the vacuum's  
roar  
and you know this.  
every other day, you tell me  
go into the room and listen  
to some chopin on your headphones  
for awhile. i'll be back in a few.

during the advent season  
we nibble our way through  
individually-wrapped dark chocolates.  
on the night you get off from work for  
the month,  
i prepare for you  
a cup of thick hot chocolate,  
and chantilly cream, spoon on the  
side.

on our outing to central park,  
belvedere castle and turtle pond,  
tourists and flâneurs amble along.  
we lean, slanted, on the granite wall.  
you point out the cloud that looks  
unmistakably like a duck and identify it  
as a worm. i counter. we laugh.

your laughter is like  
being wrapped with warm towels  
fresh out of the dryer.





MIDSUMMER  
BY LIV GARBER

# Sunshine and Ladybugs

By Melanie Hucklebridge



We've been laying in these clovers for hours; the sun has begun to set, and the wine has warmed to the temperature of skin. There are little bees hard at work around us, humming in that warm wind of summer. We have been sipping from cans and bottles, shooing flies from olives and basking in a mutual love of the world around us. Giggles and smirks have been shared across a white sheet while a duck passes. You shift closer to me, and the sunlight has seemed to gather into a singular being.

*Our special set of sunbeams have come from long days of bliss,  
Of waking up beside you and feeling you slip into my arms,  
Of grabbing breakfast and the same dirty chai,  
Of touching cow rays,  
Of peach and dragon's blood snow-ball juice dripping down chins,  
Of people watching and wedding viewing.*

These days feel as if they are suspended in honey, slowly slipping by but somehow still too fast for my taste. Hyper-sweet memories are tucked away into little pockets, pollinated by pink roses and red carnations, waiting for the next charcuterie board to be brought out for the party. I wonder if these sticky nights will attach themselves to my bones the way that you have. Will that same ancient syrup cover us the way that it has all my fondest memories?

*The little reminders of finding air conditioning in art museums,  
Of wind blowing through hair and under skirts,  
Of kisses on idyllic bayou bridges,  
Of recruiting ducks and geese into sororities,  
Of lavender ice cream and pear tea,  
Of bottles of red wine and half-watching movies.*

My spring – and perhaps all my other seasons – will not be marked by astrological events, holidays or markers, but by the way your summer sunshine has filtered through the wintry branches of my being. Roots that are carefully loved by pure water, ivy encouraged to climb high trellises. We are marked as the beginning and the end of things. Creatures of winter and summer, somehow intertwined. This beginning is something I hope will outlast the rest of the world. Honeyed edges that will last as long as the stars that have graced your back.

*The sun is setting later so the nights are full of laughter,  
Of dirty Shirley Temples and gin and tonics,  
Of suspiciously high chances of winning bingo,  
Of dingy bars and smoking on gravel patios,  
Of semi-erotic poetry and warm pasta,  
Of dancing in pajamas while summer rain pours.*



The sun has finally dipped beneath the horizon, but it's still lying beside me. I count its breaths before it stirs. Some beats are nearly too soft to feel, and the sound of faulty fans drowns out the problems of the world. The bed of clover has been replaced by green sheets and pink satin pillows and I watch the sun shift to the other side. Even halfway across the world, her hand reaches out and grabs mine before the sun settles back to sleep.

*"My gorgeous, gorgeous girl" has never sounded so pleasant coming off of anyone's lips but yours.*



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# *our mission*

grain of salt mag is an online publication for people who just want to blab their fucking mouths. it is a space to throw your shit at the wall and literally see what sticks.

in a culture that defaults to the male gaze, those brave enough to create, without those constraints are forcefully ignored, belittled and scrutinized. there is no such thing as a perfect first try, and grain of salt is a place to reclaim and explore your creativity freely. from young creatives of marginalized gender identities that have never been taken seriously, we approach topics about culture, lifestyle and current events. in unapologetically sloppy takes on the world around us through art and writing, we remove the pressure to have perfectly crafted ideas about the things that matter most.

be loud. be bold. be unashamed. because it's all taken with a grain of salt anyway.

*wanna check us out online?  
scan the qr code below!*



