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Spring 2022

## Pathos, Spring 2022

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# pathos

LITERARY MAGAZINE  
SPRING • 2022



SPRING TERM  
2022

Greetings and welcome to you.

It is my pleasure to introduce to you the Spring 2022 issue of Pathos Literary Magazine. Within these pages you will experience the wonderful and vibrant creativity that students here at Portland State University possess. I am in constant awe witnessing the creative works that are submitted to us, and it is an absolute pleasure to share them with you.

It is my hope that these creations inspire you and make you feel. It is my hope that they motivate you to find your own creative outlet, and to explore your own mind and soul. I believe that each and everyone of us have the ability to create something beautiful, whether it is with a stroke of a brush or pen, or a moment captured within a lens of a camera, or in a conversation with a friend or stranger. We all can create something beautiful, and I encourage you to do so. I believe you'll be happy that you did. Pathos will continue to be a place for you to share your creations. We admire your courage when sharing your work with the world. We will make sure to honor that to the best of our ability.

I also wish to express gratitude to our Creative Director, Monday Miller, and to our Social Media Manager, Chloe Findtner. These two wonderful people are beginning their next chapter in their lives as they graduate. Thank you to you both for dedicating your time and energy to Pathos.

To Monday, you always brought positivity and energy. You stepped up when Pathos needed you most. Always present and looking to help. What more could you want in a leader? Thank you for keeping the vision alive.

To Chloe, your creative eye was always appreciated. You helped use it to capture the attention of everyone on campus, and we owe so much of our continued longevity and reach to you.

So, best of luck to you, Monday and Chloe!

As for you, reader –

May you continue to explore; to think; to feel. May you be courageous with sharing your creativity with the world. We're here to help you along the way.

I'll see you around,

Take care,



Bret Steggell  
Editor-in-Chief

BRET STEGGELL  
*Editor-in-Chief*

MONDAY MILLER  
*Creative Director*

KELLY ZATLIN  
*Copy Editor*

CHLOE FINDTNER  
*Social Media Manager*

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FRONT AND BACK COVER:

*SUMMER*

VANESSA VU

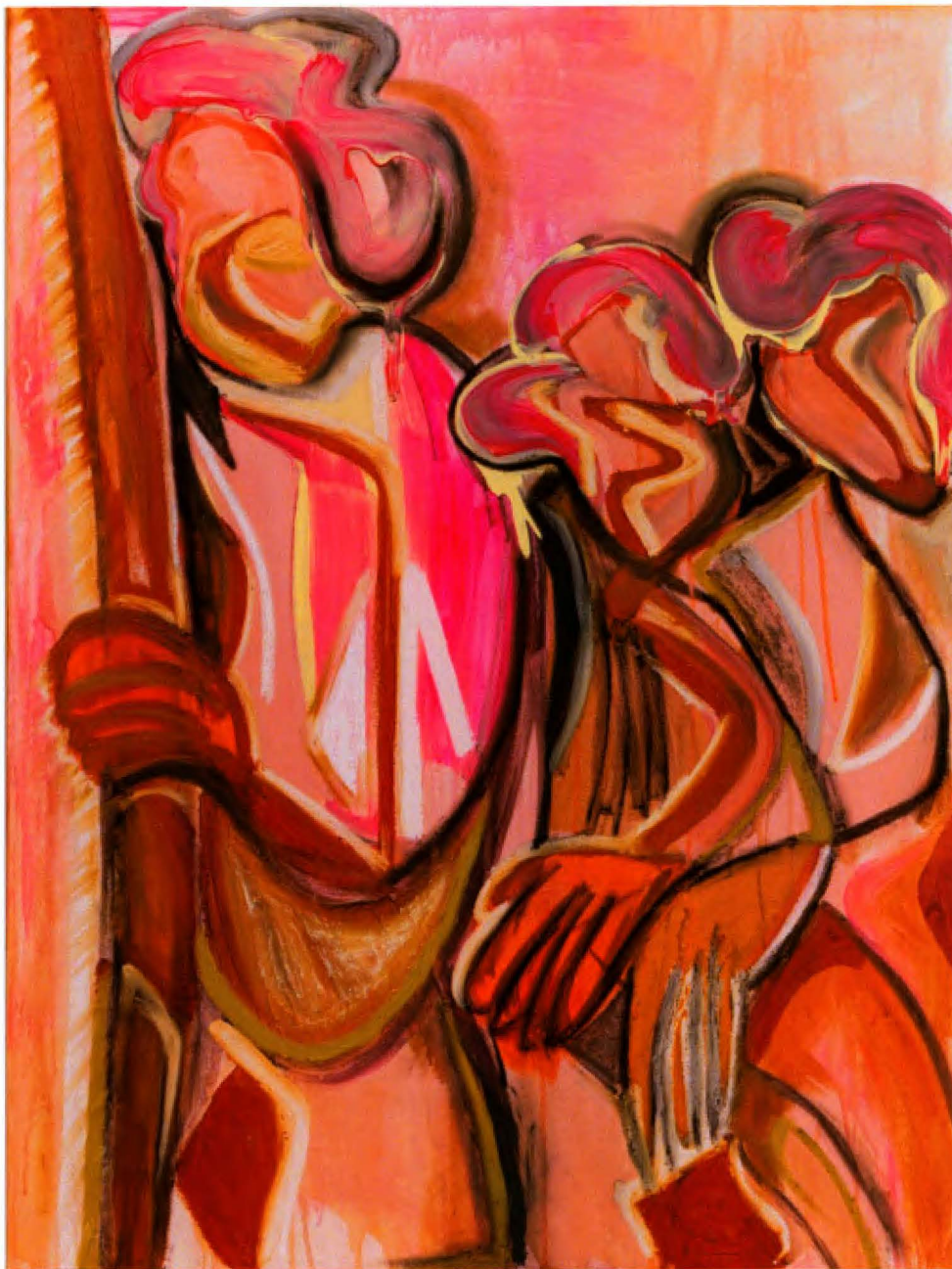
## THE ONE WHO GOT AWAY

*Eli Karn*

Sculpting lands of my mind; problems  
acting like dams in the lake of my skills.  
Pick up the past with these words; I wish  
I was a fast reader, words escaped me.

Reeling in my slippery problems, just like  
reeling in a fish. A shaken past speaks  
to me—shower me in a bright future.

These thoughts transform into lakes.  
Slippery, scaling thoughts growing fish gills  
wearing perfume. Playing. Tooling around  
with the fisherman on the surface the fish  
says, ‘Have you heard about the fish who swam away?’



*Let's not tell each other what we  
don't want to hear.*

Raja Timihiri  
2022. 30 x 40 in. Acrylic and oil stick on canvas.  
Photo by Mario Gallucci.

## PEANUT BUTTER SPOONS

*Hannah Crabtree-Eads*

just tall enough to see over the moon's shadow  
today i felt too skimpy to stand in the sun  
like a grapefruit that only looked edible unpeeled  
sweatpants are a temporary fix for bruised skin  
our sleeved arms dangling, left hand sides caught together by the cuff  
tattle tale-ing us together, fraternal tales

shaved heads deal ugly up front  
maybe the similarities aren't wide enough  
to bridge the crevasse—barely skating  
by—might be well-aligned but just enough  
to never catch our breath  
this calm in our bonier of storms

you say my problems feel as real to you as yours do to me but  
my most unlikely questions refuse to accept any answers  
i shut so many teardrops out for you  
viscerally dismantling me in eruptive spasms  
because i knew you'd moved on from the nightgowns that never fit us right

but we wore them to shreds in turn  
find me in candy crack pipes, 18  
slamming doors, my blacked out losses

find you in tired footsteps u-hauling scared squeaks to safety while  
throat parched, i scream back invisible threats and risk indicting you in my  
self judgements  
your never complaining, loving silence i had sworn to leave behind

if i could help it, and i could—  
damage control for a lost target  
just let me know he didn't take those  
streamlined, hose-soaked sunny days  
away from us forever

set up, toss it twice; triple snake eyes  
the "wanted" space stares like our  
double or nothin' black jack luck  
baby-bell blondie slamming ceramic keys  
"no more root beer for you, honey"  
was that your first high?

sweet-pea and fruity pie, i baked the crust  
and didn't let you eat  
'til that chest-nut-rise was crestfallen  
maybe our blood boils at the same heat  
i hope we don't find out  
it ain't too humid out tonight



## **MACHINE LEARNING**

*Brian Colville*

Professor Harper Russell,  
I am just now proofing  
What a sorry product  
Of mechanized words  
On a mechanized world!  
And what a stumbled swindle  
Of sidewalk cracks and street stains  
On the quenching-and-just inner-glory,  
Which has been the net  
Of my freshman flight!  
I am always either looking up or down  
On cities, little or big—  
It doesn't seem to matter.  
And yet I regret—  
I didn't proof my product.

## ON LAW

*Jevin Morris*

de jure is what i  
eat with french  
dips and de  
facto was the  
mayor of new  
york i think.  
and habeas  
corpus is what we  
hope we don't look  
like after we've protested.

but jargon isn't a noble  
gas, it's the rule of  
the land and justice,  
justice is the middle  
name of my second  
cousin.

and while we're still here,  
rittenhouse is a sauce  
served with stool  
to accentuate its flavors  
and its complexities.

## **KNOTS**

*Annar Amram*

I don't know a single knot—no half hitch or sheet bend.  
I can't tie my shoes the same way twice no matter how hard I try,  
I've cried over it. Even in first grade  
Forgetting the English rhyme about the bunny and the hole  
Before I realized I should have some affinity to knots. Now I know  
I come from a lineage of the greatest sailors in the world.

If it isn't tying knots, it could have been weaving—a lateral difference,  
My aunties give me hand-woven gifts. Truly elegant  
Baskets and jewelry. Wall decorations with screw-pine thread of browns and reds,  
Shells pushing up from the braids like breasts,  
Conches the size of my small fist with fingers curling from the lip like stamen.  
I swear, my aunties could weave moonlight.

I wouldn't make such a big deal of it, if I could at least speak Marshallese.  
Or maybe if I was illiterate and mute, I wouldn't mind if I lived there.  
Instead, I live in a suburb where a temperate rainforest used to be.  
No soft-floored jungles, tropical birds. No sweet vibrant wreaths in my hair.  
Instead of sailing, I drive from one place to another with my ancestors  
Guiding me, putting all their energy into my immaculate navigational skills.

If I was a sailor, I would make stick chart maps,  
I would memorize the tides and currents,  
I would lay on my back on the bottom of the canoe,  
Eyes closed when the night cloud lids blocked the stars.  
I would feel the canoe rock its beats and patterns  
And I'd know the ocean like I know the mainland streets of Portland.

I work at a liquor store. They surely have those back home.  
I walk through the aisles, trying to learn something about alcohol  
Without actually putting it in my body. Rows of crystal columns  
—Amaretto, Jameson—golden light filters through the cracked jaws  
When morning takes its first breaths. Like the stained glass of a church.  
Or maybe my mother's eyes full of sunrise.

## THE OVERNIGHT SHIFT

*Hannah Crabtree-Eads*

born-anew whore of the goodwill—  
they said i'd stab myself in the back,  
but instead i shot myself in the foot  
a hundred times, who's counting,  
sockless slides betray lost memories  
and dopeless hope fiends betray the  
city streets  
floods of them, even god lost track—  
is the rain really angels crying,  
or is the hail bullets from heaven lost  
shots from another domestic  
between God and His underage  
girlfriend—is there closed  
doors to hide behind  
in heaven?

## I LIKE THE MUNDANE

*Hannah Crabtree-Eads*

I like the mundane  
Drifting through fields of blue blossoms  
On a dusty Texas trail, dried riverbanks  
Cherry blossoms line the streets of my  
hometown  
Springing into faith, I'll never  
Fear what I can't imagine  
I have all these visions  
They're just ideas now  
Will I derail them with you?

Spread me out like buttermilk  
If one more thing asks for my  
Attention, I'm gonna lose it my sanity  
My mind and my temper the three  
Horsemen of the internal apocalypse  
People with their own problems  
Helping people find their solutions  
But never finding peace





*Remember*

Jessica Joner

Oil on canvas and collage. 18 x 24 in.

## **IF LIFE**

*Caroline Sciba*

If life had a movement  
It would be the undertow dragging along the vertigo of not  
knowing which way is up  
If life had a song  
It would be the one the songbirds pluck out every dewy  
spring morning  
If life was a prophet  
I would ask what the meaning of life was  
Maybe the prophet would answer  
Or simply wave me on through a gossamer curtain  
To the not yet molded memories awaiting me  
If life was a fork in the road  
I imagine one path would lead to the ocean, and its current,  
and its undertow  
If life was a fork in the road  
I imagine the other direction would pluck out songbird  
melodies, early in the morn, in fields of spring dew  
This memory is familiar  
I have walked this road before  
I have asked life, the prophet, what the meaning of life is  
And they waved me through the gossamer curtain  
To a fork in the road  
I have been contemplating which path to travel ever since

# I LOVE YOU BOB BEAMON

---

*Dalton Fordyce*

It begins with Bob Beamon taking his steps to the long jump. And it ends with the narrator saying, “I love you Bob Beamon.” In between always changes.

But first I think of Phoenix—Phoenix, Arizona. My phoenix. It’s a dirge. Forces skin into leather. At least that’s what happened to my dad. Outside with a Coors and he’d talk to himself as the sprinklers sprayed the grass, and he’d put the beer down and flick off his sandals and dive into the light blue pool water with a massive regurgitative plop, and the sun would float in stasis and eat the surface of the earth and burn clouds, and in the water was the only time in which you could love it and it could love you like a lover who can only express themselves to you hidden beneath the covers of a blanket, and the sky was only a panorama with no distinction in its endlessness besides the hardened hope the wide blue would liquify and cover Phoenix in it. And as he lifted himself out of the pool, his knuckles and wrist, the skin, folded and glossed like patent leather, the image of an elk skull on his shoulder would bolden just a bit. And on that walk back to the patio, what was he thinking? I mean, we all know the ending. So, knowing the ending, how far was any distance for him?

I said, “This place gives me a bad feeling. It’s like one of those places in my nightmares.”

I said, “There’s a metaphor I’ve been trying to write. But it flits away into crickets and in return I think of images, some violent and vulgar, that I desperately look for a place to fit into this narrative.”

I said, “I think about the blood on the blinds and the paint splotches on that bubbly white ceiling and I think, how far was the distance?”

I think that when we are in the air is when we are most alone.

Most don’t know this, but Bob Beamon wrote poetry. During the anxiety and pain he felt while it seemed everyone failed him and his black skin, and he lost his school and was beginning to lose his sport, he wrote poetry.

Now let’s think about Nina. She’s from a small town in Chihuahua, Mexico. Her family brought her and the rest of the family to Phoenix on the back of secrets. One of the principal concerns of Arizona life is that of the Alien. And Nina views herself in that way. She senses a supernatural mysticism to her being like a fog in every step and a protraction of her movement through the environment like there is an infinite membrane she fails to pass through.

One tell-tale sign that someone is an alien is that aliens drive very slow in heavily used cars. They drive slow because every time they are seen by authority is an opportunity to be sent away.

The general populace refers to it as 'sending them back where they came from.' But of course the problem is that they are assuming these aliens came from anywhere. What does it mean to go 'back,' to a place that you could never take shape in?

And so when Nina, driving home from work one day, sees the flashing lights burst from behind, what does she think? Looking down she sees the scattered nuggets and dust of tobacco and marijuana along the creases of the car carpet. Guy Guevaro is her boyfriend and she is pregnant and he's overdosing in the seat next to her and she thinks a moment about escaping, maybe to Montevideo or Buenos Aires. She has family somewhere out there, she thinks. A place where her alienhood is less foreign and exists within colonial and indigenous history and the pronunciation of her known language. Those wouldn't be large bridges to cross, would it? It's hard for her to say and she looks down at a ravine and wonders if she should let herself fall into it rather than get caught by these bright lights.

Or maybe there's Radek, who's sitting in a cafe in Prague with his friends Jacob and Martin. It is 1948 and his friends are telling him what it means to be a communist. 'You must consider the implications of your art, Radek,' Jacob says, adjusting his glasses. Radek drank from his cup and looked beyond

the brim, as artists do. 'What do you mean?' he replied.

'You hear Antonin Artuad died last month?' Jacob said.

'Now it's time to count the days when Breton follows suit,' Martin said with a voice that was interrupted with a gulp of saliva.

'And that'll be you too, eventually, Radek.' Radek was confused and said as such.

'I mean, you're putting your work in private galleries and you draw nothing but faces and shrubbery.'

Radek became defensive. 'I needed to pay my landlord. And how could you say that about my work? Why are you intentionally reducing it?'

'Yes, Radek, but what is it beyond baroque masturbation? I thought we were here to change the world and here you are performing as a cunt of the market. The Congress is threatening to abandon you, Radek. This is why we are warning you. As friends.'

'My art is my own, why can't it just be that?'

'Another Picasso huh?' Martin slammed his hand down enough for the legs to shake and somebody to look over. 'I'm so sick of this type of selfishness. You're just like the surrealists, except you don't even have to proclivity to be superficially transgressive like them.'

'I've been on the line! With all of you! I spit and I yell!' Radek exclaimed. Jacob began to answer before Martin



sliced in, "Your spit is just fools gold and cheap wine. You don't fight for the poor. Just pick what you believe already."

Jacob raised his eyebrows and took a big breath as he and Martin stood up and looked down at Radek. Of course Radek was a communist. He felt as though he always had been. His peripheral took him out the window of the cafe, and the red trolley outside glinted with some shining light, and a man's profile looked outside at an old woman crossing the road, and the paint strokes went their own way, and Radek felt a lot of guilt about this. He felt a lot of guilt about the beauty outside. He felt a lot of guilt about the solemnity outside. He knew Artuad was dead. And he knew Artuad's grave was in Marseille and he wanted to visit it. And he felt a lot of guilt about that too.

Radek traveled away from Czechoslovakia. He felt like a coward, but at the same time he couldn't convince himself it wasn't the right thing to do. His mind wandered nowhere, but there's all there was. Nothing beyond his skull. He drove without knowing the direction, and made a left, then a right, then another right, and a final left before driving straight for kilometers upon kilometers. He found himself on a thin peninsula, digging into an unknown sea. Inside a delicatessen, he sat down and looked out at the coast with the fog blurring the outlines of the

blue surface of the horizon. It was odd that he could not smell the sea, or that he did not see any harbors or boats or ports or lighthouses. It was just the sea. The bell on the door rang and as he turned around, a brown skinned woman wearing odd shoes came in, ordered a sandwich and sat nearby.

The woman looked to have a purple gash along her forehead and bruising down the back of her neck. In a general concern, Radek asked her if she was okay, as maybe she was a victim of domestic abuse or some violent policeman. She motioned for him to sit down and he did.

"My bruises were caused by nothing as far as I'm concerned," she said.

"Well, I'm sure the pain you feel has something to say about that," Radek replied.

"I think that's the problem. I think that's the wrong turn our species took. There's been nothing more pervasive than the 'story.' We search so desperately to narrativize and find causality. We should've stopped at painting on cave walls." Radek was quite confused at this turn of the conversation but decided to go along with it.

"I think paintings are just a form of a story."

"Of course not. They're expressions. Visualizations and split seconds of action." The woman spoke quickly and almost violently in an accent

Radek couldn't detect. Radek couldn't help but stutter when he spoke.

"I mean, actions occur over time though correct? A figure throwing a spear must have a beginning, middle and end. And you can't run between those without causation."

"That's the mistake though, who says there's causation between that trio? Think about the way you remember a day, maybe yesterday. The present is impossible to spend much time in by definition and so much of our time is spent in the past and the future. This is the human pain. Remembering yesterday, what do you remember first? Waking up? Eating breakfast? No. You remember the man yelling at his wife at dinner, and then maybe you remember the new mouthwash you got, and then maybe you remember the anxiety you got from some spontaneous pains you had in your throat. And in the future, do you think about tomorrow? No, you think about living in rural France as a retiree or owning a company or getting interviewed on TV for your new book or you think about dying of cancer or being decapitated in a rollover crash. We don't experience life with a beginning, middle and end."

Radek fell silent amid this philosophizing. The cashier was even leaning in their direction waiting for more from this spontaneously appearing and worldly lady. His mind never much dwelled in the realm of metaphysics beyond what was needed

to understand Das Kapital. Or at least what portion he read of Das Kapital, he guesses. He also suspected a dramatic climax from the woman but it didn't seem to come. They sat silently and she ate her sandwich. Mayonnaise dripped down her lip which Radek now noticed was cut, and her chew was limp, and as she turned to wipe off the condiment he also noticed part of her forehead was caved in. Now she spoke.

"When I began to think about suicide, the scariest part and most convincing part of it was how much narrative sense it felt like it made. It felt like I found my ending. Like I found the last 50 pages of a book. And as those who consume stories and those who write stories know, sometimes they lead into an ending that is obvious to the reader but is still demanded by the reader as it is the only one that can make sense. And contradicting that ending will anger the reader and disenfranchise them from the experience, like you broke some rule in a sport. I got to a point in which it felt like I would anger the universal narrative if I did not commit suicide."

*Are you okay?* He wanted to ask this to the woman. Before he could, the cashier leaned over and said, "To me, it feels like a massive burp in my stomach. Like a solid rotating ball of air that I'm waiting to explode."

A customer that Radek didn't notice stood from his nearby chair and said, "It feels like I'm stuck under

a weighted blanket and I just can't lift it up no matter how hard I try." Another stepped into the lobby from the kitchen and said, "I end up feeling completely constipated, and I sit on the toilet just popping out pebbles while I stare at the linoleum in complete panic, just wanting but also so scared of my insides bursting from me." A woman barged through the front door and said, "It feels like I've been directed to grab the deeds to my life just across the street, but it's held in a building that's completely upside down. And I see people entering but I just can't figure out how it's possible."

Soon people by large numbers piled into the delicatessen, declaring the way it feels inside themselves. From the ceilings people fell, windows shattered open in glee as people gathered through yelling and choking through tears and snot. People joined hands and jumped with each other in circles and the bruised and broken woman watched with a silent realization on her face that was all her own. Radek stared on in silence at the scene. And with an almost eerie revelation of his own, he put his own threads together into a tapestry that meant and looked like nothing. He thought, *If I painted this, what would I see? What would the capitalists think? What would the communists think? What would his own father think? What would Antonin Artuad think? Who would want to throw*

*it away?* The woman's skull looked like a grape and the blood vessels in her eyes swelled and bulged. This image, with its sentimentality, was not just one of absurdity, but one of genuine insanity. Somebody grabbed Radek's face, an old black man with a white looking mole on his nose who said, "I feel it in the back of my head, like a rock. A rock! I felt like I was crazy, and I am!" And maybe despite that, or because of, or tangentially related, or completely unrelated to, Radek felt a black mass in his chest drop from existence and outside a seagull perched on a pier that was not there before.

It's all poetry. In fact, philosophy is nothing but badly written poetry masquerading as science.

I think. "Oh. I see. Now you a man, boy?"

Bob Beamon wrote poetry. There is one that goes to get hatred into gladness?

And tell me how much sorrow must I spend to get a future for tomorrow?

This must be a proud nation of crudeness.

This world used to mean so very much.

Why did you change my happiness to misery and heartbreak? How must I be lonely?

Why can't you love and want me until the end of time?

Phoenix makes me think of many things. It makes me think of sprawl. It makes me think of valleys and dust devils. It makes me think of the Mormon Church, it makes me think of sun dials, it makes me think of sandstone, it makes me think of bad poetry about cacti, it makes me think about suicide, it makes me think of middle school when someone called me a jelly nigga and kicked me in the shin, and it makes me think of mom's Vicodin addiction and being part of Percocet deals freshman year, it makes me think of gated communities, it makes me think of playing basketball, it makes me think of sweat, it makes me think of light beer and tequila, it makes me think of tool beds and roofing companies, it makes me think of Circle Ks and Powerade, it makes me think of people who killed themselves in high school, it makes me think of Jose who died violently in a car crash in 2nd grade, it makes me think of heatstroke, it makes me think of folk punk and desert rats in tattoos with liberal politics, it makes me think of the drive into the state in which life appears out of thin air, and it makes me think of the drive out in which it disappears without you noticing, it makes me think of decorative rocks meant to tell your future, it makes me think of laconic cowboys and Cormac McCarthy, it makes me think of Manifest Destiny and indigenous death, it reminds me of

churches, it reminds me of the pains in my knees as a child. Phoenix reminds me of the things that rise out of me when I feel so alone.

The first time he attempted the jump in the qualifying rounds, on that fateful day in Mexico City, he stepped over the line, disqualifying the attempt. In the second attempt, the same thing happens. With only one try left he makes the jump at 26 feet 10 1/2 inches, making the medal round of the Olympics. And on the first attempt in that medal round, he leaps, leaps, he leaps, leaps so far that he goes beyond the measurements on the field. As if he shot himself out of a cannon. Striding around, he waits as they bring measuring tape to figure out the distance beyond the expected. The distance is beyond what we expect. And he waits. He waits a distance. He said of the leap that while he flew and as his body contorted to fit in with the air he "felt alone." When he hears the results, he falls into a cataplectic seizure. 29 feet 2.5 inches, nearly 2 feet better than the world record. And like that slide between atoms that creates that friction in time and bends sound through space and lets us know that reality is in constant movement, I love you Bob Beamon.



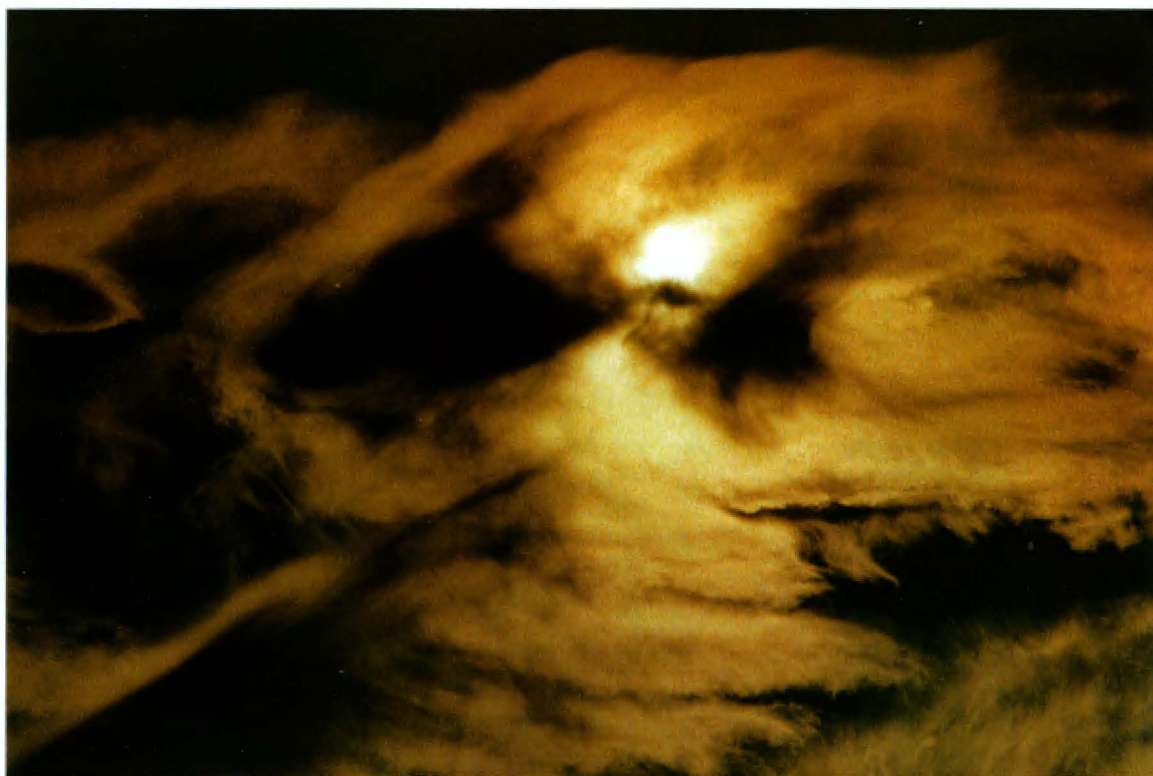
## HOW TO BE A GOOD WIFE

*Monet Sutch*

In a memory of yourself, you are in dirty Gap jeans, cuffs dappled in mud and bike grease smeared in dainty hand patches, in the musky, colorless church on a Wednesday evening. You're 8 years old, freshly baptized. They call you Sister Sutch and comment on your CTR ring, even though you try to lose it every other week or so, just to see if they'll ever stop giving you replacements.

Before you, an onslaught of silverware, all with a rightful place at the table. You are being told to consider your husband, what might he like, what might he want to come home to, what might you say to your husband, Sister Sutch, if you are to be a good wife. You are told to role play with the other girls—take turns being husbands. Be sweet with the girls, as you would with your husbands. In your heart, that sweetness holds in a way that you only know as dirty.

Think of your husband they say, over and over, as you try not to think of the young sister's smiles, of how nice it feels to behave as the man, how nice it might be to stay that way, how damned you would be, may already be, for thinking so in the first place. Think of your husband, they say to the 8 year old girl, pushing your unruly desires, the stranded threads of your hungry heart, deep, deep into the blood rich clay where no one can find it, where you remain so buried, so hurriedly buried, that not even you can hear your own heart beating in your throat as the young girls smile, playing along, and call you husband.



*The Ubiquitous Cloud*

Saphya Lones

Lake Merwin, WA; shot on 35mm Kodak Gold 200

## **FREE FALL**

*Monet Sutch*

(n.) : “motion of a body where gravity is the only force  
acting upon it”

i was trust [less]  
thrust into the thinning  
blue

strapped to the lap (( of  
a stranger  
kind eyes making the  
clouds bow

i was trust [less]  
reckless

my fear the color of paprika

the heart crawled  
up & up

patchwork of earth  
flattening below

i tumbled out the door in the sky  
belly first [into] the shocking blue  
falling outside my breath  
black braids strumming quick wind

falling  
hollowed out  
soaring  
sort of

heavens-wide jaws of sky  
swallowed me  
sore & soar ing

you said

If you can't breathe, scream

:

i opened my mouth  
a      god song      wandered  
  
my anger burst like feathers  
  
then  
  
fell

## OF OLD FRIENDS

*Dan Chilton*

I still remember when  
we were kids and  
so angry together  
or maybe  
it was just me who  
was the angry one and  
you who had  
the good grades and  
the mild temper and  
me who would  
get mad at you when  
a girlfriend told me lies,  
yet there you were  
when she and I weren't.  
I still remember when  
I stayed at your mom's house  
when your dad was still  
around, way back when,  
and in the middle of the night, when  
we were watching  
Scooby Doo solve mysteries,  
we showed each other  
our things  
—future mysteries of our own.  
Now, you're so far away but we're  
still in the same town, the same  
city, the same me, yet I  
don't know you anymore;  
those girlfriends and movies and mysteries  
so far away.  
I wonder if you remember my  
anger and  
I want to say I'm sorry,  
that I miss you, but  
maybe it's too late.





*Dance With Me*

Jessica Joner  
Oil on canvas. 30 x 24 in.

## THE DANCING STARS

*Charles Rose*

Walking through dim lamplight, staring up at the stars, I stop to admire Orion. Has Betelgeuse already gone supernova, and we just don't know it yet? It may have ten thousand years ago, when human civilization was still in its infancy, when we had barely developed mass agriculture and animal husbandry. The farmers of date palms in the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys, did they stare up at the same stars with the same wonderment and admiration? Their king Gilgamesh died beneath these stars. The walls of Babylon forever separated them from the so-called natural world, condemning humanity to a lie of superiority over nature, and look where this belief system has led us. We are nearly at ruin for our hubris. Insignificant, tiny amid the galactic machinations. On Tellurium, monks gather to incant hymns to the goddess Sophia, infinite wisdom, alongside the godhead Kether. The archer hangs in the sky above, ready to attack the lone bear and her son. In balance, the fish dance through the night, and a fawn leaps through the celestial meadow. The two rise higher and higher, swirling around each other before shooting apart, leaving a vaporous trail of mystic stardust and ash. A new galaxy is born, parallel to our own Milky Way. The new Telos announces himself to us, if we listen. *Le monde et la lunaire, merci.* How can one have a universe without the structures of space, equality, proportion and topology to define the space of beingness? The meta-Gesamtkunstwerk flashes the tides of open madness before massive supernovae, gamma rays bursting through the infinite chasm, seeking nothing but their own heat-death demise.

# MY FATHER WAS AN EXHAUST MANIFOLD

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*Dalton Fordyce*

My first memories were of fuzzy balls of light that hung above me, slowly dissipating as my eyes closed. When I reopened them, my mother hugged me to her chest and I could feel the shaking of her hands as she moaned quietly in a dimly white antiseptic room. Then I saw a body of water, maybe an ocean, laid out in front of me. All I knew was that it was endless; I knew for sure that it was and that's what frightened me so much about it. But I wanted so badly to feel the warm water envelop my body. Feel it cover me like another, soft protective layer of skin. But I couldn't.

---

I put my feet up. Up on the cherry wood. Damn wonky table leg makes the thing tilt. Gotta fix it. The staircase creaks. Gotta fix it. The guitar twangs like a cryer when I pluck. It's fine. It'll be fine.

Days like these make me wish, y'know. Wish for something in the past. There's something I can't take nowadays.

The kid, I forgot his name, is still here in the house. Damn thing got backward legs. Make a note to ask about it. I'm sure funny story there. Could be a Tom Waits song. Could be my song. The stage opens and I got a trash can I beat over with a stick, and the backing band's bones crackle like a skeleton bumbling through an old English dungeon. The guitarist is some H-head

and only eats soft food. But damn can he play the blues. The drummer can play the blues too but a gypsy put a temporal spell on him so whenever we play sometimes his eyes roll and he twitches and starts playing in 3/4, turning our twelve bar into whatever the fuck. So the bassist will change the groove to try and set everyone straight but the ether he takes causes him to fall asleep and we lose all low end, so I throw a pillow into the trash can to get it back. Wanna find a pianist like some coked up Bill Evans type. We'll add some double bassist, one too short for his instrument, to take care of the roots. 'Cuz the roots are what's important. The roots are the gravity. Never let the rhythm just be a time machine, there's a tip for ya. Double bassist gotta be on something too though. Shouldn't be too hard. If the pianist is the cokehead, guitarist the heroin guy, electric bassist is ether, drummer is high on magic, the double bassist gotta be on something else. Worse thing you can do in music is redundancy. Redundancy kills. Sure you know that. I mean what's the point of a song if when you crack it open, you just find the same song? If you rip open a person would you want to find the same person inside? Maybe he'll love cough drops. Dude's also gotta be from some rundown studio in the Bronx and have a brother who calls him Benny or something. He's gotta like coffee and cigarettes and Metal Machine Music and eating ash and watching single

mothers at Denny's and following homeless people below the subway and wearing panama hats over his right ear and he's gotta pluck the double bass with all 10 of his fingers while his girlfriend beds some dwarf in front of him.

The cherry wood. Crash. God fucking damn it.

I walk down the squeaking stairs, I gotta find something to fix the cherry wood. I see the kid's door cracked open and he's sitting and writing something. How the hell does he sit with those backwards legs anyway?

The kitchen light bulbs aren't working, and so the white of the tile floor mirages itself into a light grey. I look around the kitchen for something but everything is so damn grey. The bananas got the yellow sucked out of them and the china with the flowers just looks like WWII on porcelain.

A soda can sits on by a few bottles with those sucking tips. A can of formula? Who got a kid? When I turn my blood splits and my ear muffs fall. I just want to run and the tendons of my muscles stretch and pulse, feel like the tension is gonna break my bones. There is a black mass of endless oblivion in the corner of the kitchen. Looking at it, I feel myself falling into it. Being pulled into it. Like facing the prospect of losing everything. Like the dread of knowing a loved one blew their head off. Like the heart eating its way to the brain. Like learning that the vacuum

nature of life is truly evil.

I sprint up the stairs with the can and slam my bedroom door behind me. I put the can underneath the cherry wood leg and say out loud, 'Fuckin' gypsy got me too.'

---

### I Hear You Calling by Bill Fay

'I hear you calling  
From the riverbank  
I will be coming  
When the air is black'

Grandpa has been singing this a lot lately. His guitar is out of tune. I don't think he knows mom exists anymore.

When I look outside my window, I just want to bash my face against the sidewalk. It sounds like psycho shit or whatever but something is failing inside me. Like gravity is disappearing from me or some shit. Something is failing in all of us.

Never thought this kind of shit would happen, know what I mean? Everyday just blends into itself. The old man keeps getting crazier and mom ain't even here anymore. Dad is... well... fuck, man. Where did he go? Last time I saw him before he passed he gave me some CDs back I loaned him. Just a bunch of backpack indie rap shit y'know? Shit like that. I think he was trying to connect again and asked me what I listened to. It ain't Steve Earle or Prine so I just figured he'd sorta

grunt when he gave me the CDs back.

‘How’d you like it?’ I asked, from the driver’s seat of my car. I could tell he was looking at the tattoo of an owl on my wrist.

‘I liked it all actually. Well, some more than others. But thank you.’ He grunted anyway but in that laconic Texan way. We sorta just had our eyes graze about, not really sure of how to continue the conversation. We weren’t good at this. I asked him if he had anything I should listen to. I kinda expected him to just sort of stand there and maybe shrug. But in fact, his eyes perked a little bit. ‘Wait here.’ He didn’t run inside but I’d never seen those wranglers move with such purpose.

He came out with a blank CD with *Loving by Rainbow Creek* By Roger Sloth written with blue Expo marker on the disc. ‘It might be my favorite. Try to be alone when you listen to it.’

When I drove off and put it in my car stereo, nothing was on it. Dad shot himself later that night.

---

Your eyes are beautiful pools. Throughout my life I wanted to be a mother. And now I’m here with you, my love. My little Napoleon.

I’ll be your satellite, in this world made of chipped meteors. When there’s intense gravity, time changes, my love. And the gravity of my love

turns every moment I hold you into a shorter eternity I can bear.

*Break out of character for me,* he says. Can you believe it? The man who says he loves me. He floated above the bed at night and shook me, asking me what to do if the baby in the hay with the kings merely had gas. Crazy man. I’m sure that’s why he’s gone. He’s a good man, but a crazy man.

I wish you’d let me feed you, love. Your lips go limp when I try.

I talked to the medium today, love. She said you’re gonna be the President of the Pacific Ocean! Isn’t that exciting? She also said that every communist and every fascist will eat your poisoned grain. Yes. Definitely. She said you will eliminate taxes and make all schooling free. She said you’d always be there with me. Happy times are coming, my love. The tree-line outside flicks the ocean sky and we all sit about and think. Y’know, just have a good ol’ think.

Your father, with all his lovelessness, loved that tree-line. Loved the bricks he laid around our yard. Loved the pond shaped patch of grass. Loved the pomegranates. He ate the pomegranates. He was the pomegranate man.

---

Who are you

I don’t know

Magic blends the fabric that the crow  
sits on  
The morning has come, sun from flint  
and steel  
But who wants to stroll into the field  
With a family made of straw and old  
clothes

What do you say  
When son asks  
“Why grandpa get his head bloo?”  
And then son asks  
“Will it happen to me or you too?”

One who wears the mask of Job  
Can Speak to Jehovah  
No need to hear what Satan saith

Saith the pelt  
The pelt on the shoulder  
The shoulder on the man  
Man on the planet  
Planet on the pelt  
Pelt on the shoulder

If there is a platonic way to bleed to  
death  
This wasn't it  
Red drips through the amber currents  
from the open blinds  
The open blinds to a busted open  
window  
The busted open window to the  
screaming on the door handle  
No need to hear what Satan saith  
Couldn't anyway.

Who are you?

Stick your hand in your mouth  
Make a fist  
Job wears a mask of blood  
I just know I identify with that  
The moon appeared behind the clouds  
A frigid dew appeared from the eyes  
down below  
The air tasted of pomegranate  
Who knew death was a Virgo?

And on the hill there was a tree  
On the tree there was a branch  
On the branch there was a nest  
In the nest there was nothing.  
I am weary of empty song

It's kinda funny. You never expect your  
head to leave your body. I just know  
the moments before it happened there  
was a sensation all over my body. I  
barely noticed it because of all the sad  
stuff. But behind the sad crap I could  
feel a folding happen within my body.  
A curdling and rotating and folding.  
Like origami or bread dough but just  
happenin' to my everything and it made  
my gut sick. And a voice told me that  
I was becoming layered. I didn't know  
what that meant and I still don't. But  
my jaw was gone on the bed and in my  
destroyed self I managed to send text  
messages to Gloria. *Help ee Helpm hlp  
me hllp pll me.* And she banged on the  
locked door and in my head *The Big  
Ship* played and I felt like I was floating  
and my guts all settled into some sorta  
planet-like motion in my body like I  
was the solar system and I kept folding



and folding and folding and folding and moving inside somewhere and he broke open the window and even though I was floatin' in the air I could still see my son's face above me and I was worried because I thought I might be down below but I felt like I was floating up and his face was still there and I wanted to say sorry but I was still sad. Fuckin' sad. *I'll Come Running* started playing in my head and the chorus repeated over over and over over as I looked at him. And then I kept floating next to my dead baby.

---

Here is the ending.

I can't tell you this is fictitious. And I can't tell you where these words come from. That's not my job.

When she approached me with a bundle of writings in 120 page college-ruled notebooks she initially told me it was all in her head. All made up. But the more she told me and the more I read, the less I believed that she believed in what she told me. Misaki ate a Tupperware container of homemade potato croquettes and she drank an iced chai tea. She was strange and distant. A sort of mildew of the eye in the way she gleamed the environment, rarely bringing her eyes to mine and rarely bringing them anywhere with much conviction. Unlike the Misaki I initially met. The one who recited lines from *Salome* and smelled distinctly and

somewhat grotesquely of lavender and honey and told me, 'James Baldwin's Giovanni is the only lover I'd ever want' in the university library while I fondled the copy of the eponymous novel. That's how we met. In that small A-C section of shelves. 'He killed himself? Is that right?' she asked. 'No. Stomach cancer,' I replied. 'Oh. Interesting. Seemed like the type to kill themselves.' Now it has been almost 6 years. And here she was. The croquettes dried and crumbled on her lap.

The notebooks she gave me had different handwritings. But she asserted it was all fiction anyway. When I asked her about them and what her goal was she just grimaced and said *I just want to figure it out.*

Vague. Mysterious. Yes. *Always*, she said.

When she left, I read through the notebooks over the course of a week. She featured prominently as a character in 1st person but only in the margins and between the lines of certain letters. Sometimes she would comment on the page and other times it was like she was elsewhere and the notebook happened adjacent to her. Like the stories and letters in these pages were happening over her life, over, as in over the top of her life. Covering it like a casket. And she was just there, looking through the dirt-covered glass. I never saw her again. And when someone leaves you, you realize how much of them you don't know.

The last time I saw her face it was soon after she published a book and she was murdered by a maintenance worker in the Chicago subway. It was published by a small French press that mostly put out politically charged Leftist literature and zines. Misaki's book was written in French, English, Japanese, and Cantonese, each line alternating between each language, rendering it unreadable to almost everyone and impossible to translate. And so it mostly stayed like that. Unread. The first line said, 'I was born smelling of petrol' in English, and with my low level French I loosely translated the second line as, 'My father was an exhaust manifold.'

## ON BECOMING: FAT, HAIRY, AND GAY

*Gracie Sheets*

We are laughing after singing  
in the back of our four-door little green Chevy  
My dad turns to me,  
“I’m surprised you never did anything more feminine with your  
eyebrows”  
I am 12

I start plucking my eyebrows furiously  
It becomes a ritual  
I feel cursed to have eyebrows that resemble the  
Very Hungry Caterpillar  
I go to get my eyebrows waxed, and she asks if I want to get my  
neck, chin, and mustache done too  
I agree  
They say that once you pluck a hair, it only grows back stronger

My skin stings from the hot wax  
hair follicles hold on like lovers  
as I strip them apart  
My mom, who cuts coupons and shops the sale section,  
tells me she would happily pay for electrolysis  
like my facial hair is as much her fault as it is mine  
My femininity suffers,  
not just from my fatness,  
but from this hair  
course, thick, dark brown  
hair that any man would be proud of  
hair that, on my head, is prideful  
If only I was thin, maybe the hair would be... a quirky accessory  
I tighten the grip  
I collect the makeup  
I watch the tutorials

Dishes clank against the aluminum sink  
flip flops clacking against the linoleum tiles  
I feel like I’m suffocating  
“Thank you, lord, for this food, and for everything you have given  
us—Amen”

We drink non-fat milk because Mom says we need to cut back  
calories anywhere we can  
I feel like I'm suffocating

I think about kissing curvy strangers I see in structured suits and  
button ups  
I feel flushed at the sight of boyish women,  
but that's not me... I have worked so hard to master my femininity  
I must be a pervert  
I must be a freak

I swoon myself in orange slacks and black floral blazers  
I flaunt my salt and pepper mustache  
If I dress this way, do I deny the parts of me that love makeup?  
How do I hold both?  
People are holding both  
Can I hold both?  
Is this really me?  
Is any of it really me?  
Have I succumbed to my natural, hairy, ugliness?  
Is being ugly and hairy the worst thing I could be?

# A DEAL IN BARRIO

---

*Desi Favela*

1961

It was a strange year. I remember the sun reflected off the valley hills and painted the barrio in a sepia hue like an old Polaroid picture. Mamá and Papá would wake up every morning at 4 a.m. to prepare for work picking fruits and vegetables in the fields outside of town. Papá would gather their work gloves, and Mamá packed their lunch of carne asada, refried beans, Spanish rice, and maize tortillas for the both of them. My little brother Ricky and I shared a room in our small two-bedroom apartment in the barrio of Oso Verde. Ricky is seven, but because of an accident when he was little, he has to be looked after at all times.

Mamá and Papá would leave to catch the bus to work by 5 a.m. I was in charge of getting me and Ricky ready for school every morning. He can be stubborn in the mornings, so I let him draw with his crayons and play the radio as I made us both oatmeal for breakfast. I knew Ricky hated going to school because he was different than all the other kids in his class, and he didn't understand things the way everyone else did. His cold-blooded peers called him names to get him worked up and watch him explode like a ticking time bomb for their entertainment. I wish I would have defended him back then, but I was a shy coward with a slim frame and awkward build who kept myself distracted with my nose in a book.

We would walk by an eggplant-colored lowrider Impala parked across the street from the bus stop. The car was always surrounded by chicos wearing white loosely fitted polo shirts tucked into slim-fit slacks and dark sunglasses. Leaning on the driver-side door was Trez, the king of this barrio. Everyone knew to stay out of him and his crew's way to avoid trouble. I never gave the gangs much thought then because they were part of the everyday neighborhood here, and my family's problems overshadowed whatever happened in the streets.

I could tell when Ricky had a rough day at school when I picked him up because of the irritated look on his face. He didn't speak, so I learned to read his eyes and face to figure out his mood. He usually scrunched up his face like he smelled terrible cheese when he was upset. The school made it no secret that they couldn't care for kids with conditions like Ricky. His teacher would sit him in the back of the class with crayons and a notepad and ignored him to avoid a tantrum. Mamá and Papá once had a meeting with the school where I served as the translator (a responsibility I was born with) that the school had no funding for the kind of resources and tutors Ricky needed. They told us of a school with a program in Oso Oro, the higher-class neighborhood, that has professionals trained to help kids like him. We met with Mr. Reynolds, a mouse of a man,

the program director and principal at the school. He wore a suit and tie, thick bottle-end glasses, thin white hair, and long sideburns. He didn't know my parents only spoke Spanish and called in Mrs. Rodriguez to translate even though I had offered. She was tall with curly, wavy brown hair and had a gentle smile. I knew Mr. Reynolds made assumptions about us by my parent's inability to speak English. He barely looked at us while we were there, but Mrs. Rodriguez was very warm and welcoming. Mr. Reynolds said it would be impossible for Ricky to enroll there because we would have to be living within their district to attend.

"There's also the fees." He said that last part like he knew it would be a problem. Mr. Reynolds stood to indicate the meeting was over, and that was that.

Papá looked into apartments in Oso Oro, but even a one-bedroom was too expensive. Ricky was stuck at the crummy school in Oso Verde, where he didn't understand why the other kids were so cruel to him and why his teacher ignored him.

One evening, Papá talked to someone using the payphone all the residents shared that was mounted to the wall in the hallway. I couldn't understand what he said with the door closed, but it was weird because Papá never talked to anyone on the phone. Even when the family called from México, he made Mamá do all the talking. Papá was chipper after returning from his mysterious phone call. He gave Mamá an affirming smile, and her face lit up with joy as she colored with Ricky on the apartment floor.

"Gracias a Dios," she whispered.

Mr. Lopez was Mamá and Papá's boss at the field. He agreed to let us use his home address in Oso Oro to enroll Ricky in school there. My parents celebrated since it was a big accomplishment for us. I couldn't help but worry how we would afford it and how Ricky would get to and from Oso Verde to Oso Oro five days a week. But I kept my worries to myself.

It was later decided that I would transfer schools to Oso Oro too. This way, I could take the bus with Ricky every day and get him to class. The commute was long, but I never complained. Mamá and Papá immigrated to the United States because they wanted me and Ricky to have opportunities they didn't have. A fair chance at the American Dream like everyone else. I know it killed them inside, feeling like they could not support us how they wanted when they moved here.

Time went by, and we all settled into the new routine. Money became tighter around the house, and I heard my parents talk about it a lot. I suspect the program's price at Oso Oro was the cause of the financial stress. But I also noticed Ricky seemed more at ease than ever before. His new drawings were of stick-figure children, some in wheelchairs, smiling and playing. I had never seen joy in him like that before. I was happy Ricky was happy. Later that week, our power was shut off due to a lack of payment.

As we sat around the candlelit living room with our dinner plates on our laps, I told my parents I would look for work to help with bills, but they



shut down the idea immediately. They insisted I focus on school and made the excellent point of needing my help with Ricky when they were both at work. It hurt to feel like I couldn't do more for my family.

With no alarm clock to wake me up, I overslept on a dark and rainy morning. Ricky didn't like being rushed, and getting him ready was difficult, especially with only a flashlight and candles as our source of light. He fought me on everything from his breakfast to putting on his boots. We hastily made our way down the street to watch the bus we needed to ride drive off.

"Shit," I muttered to myself, standing in the rain with my little brother.

I could tell he was getting impatient with how his face scrunched up while we waited for the next bus to pass in 20 minutes. While waiting, I heard a loud car's roaring engine in the distance driving towards us. It was Trez in his Impala. He slowed down as he approached the corner and rolled down the window.

"Miss the bus, little ese?" he asked through his dark shades. He was wearing a white cotton undershirt and a black and gray fedora, with a couple of rings on his knuckles. I didn't know why he stopped to talk to us.

"Yeah, the next one should be here soon," I said nervously. My glasses were stained by the raindrops, but I could tell Trez was eyeing us up and down.

Ricky then waved and smiled at the mustached stranger with the dangerous reputation in front of us, like he was a friend he was greeting for the millionth time. It caught me off guard because

Ricky is nervous around strangers and makes it known, but he seemed fine in front of Trez.

"You go to school in Oso Oro, right?" Trez asked like it was common knowledge. I shouldn't have been too surprised because he knew everything happening in this barrio, but my family and Mr. Lopez should be the only ones who know since we would be kicked out if the school found out we used someone else's address. Before I could respond, he said, "Come on, guey, I'll drop you off. I'm on my way there too." I hesitated, but the ride will get us there on time, and I was afraid to say no to Trez.

"Thank you..." I said, and jumped in the backseat with Ricky.

While Trez was driving, I got a glimpse at his tattoo up close. I had heard a rumor that he got it while serving time down south, but that's just a rumor. The tattoo is a bear, the same symbol as his crew. No one spoke the entire ride, but I held my breath as we approached the school. I prepared to blurt out a quick thank you and rush Ricky to his class, but his question stopped me in my tracks.

"Yo, ese! Is your power still out at home?" he asked without shifting his gaze from the street.

"Yeah, how'd you know?" I said, embarrassed.

Instead of answering my question, he reached into the glove compartment and pulled out a wad of cash. Never in my young life had I seen so much money in one place. He pulled a few bills apart and extends his arm to me. I froze for a second, hesitating, but I know that money will turn our power back on.

“Here,” he said coolly. I reached for the money, but he doesn’t release his grip right away. He looked me in the eye and said in his heavy Hispanic accent, “Your parents ain’t gonna like it if you tell ‘em where this money came from, so I wouldn’t tell them if I were you, ese.” He released his grip, and I stashed the money in my pocket. He drove off, not saying anything else. After dropping off Ricky, I ran to the nearest corner market and sent a money gram to the power company. By the time we got home, the power was back on.

Mamá and Papá had questions about how the power came back, and I played along, pretending not to know either. Mamá was convinced it was a miracle, so she dusted and hand cleaned the frames of all the Catholic Saints in our apartment. That night I started to worry about the consequences of taking money from Trez. What if he wanted the money back? What if he wants a favor in return? I worried myself sick, but weeks went by without hearing from him.

The weather got warmer early that year, and it seemed tensions were high everywhere. We were having dinner with a box fan running on high when a knock at the door told us there was a caller on the payphone for Papá. Mamá gave him a questioning look, and from the raise of his eyebrows, he shared her thoughts. It seemed like he was on the phone for hours, but it may have just been a few minutes. After returning, he and Mamá went straight to their room and shut the door. It was terrible news.

Mr. Lopez received an unexpected home visit from Mr. Reynolds, and he

was quickly made aware we didn’t live there. They said the home visit was routine, but I doubted that. I suspected Reynolds was suspicious of Ricky’s fake new address and had to make sure himself. Regardless of what I thought, there was nothing we could do. We were kicked out of Oso Oro.

Mr. Lopez, a no-nonsense man who said he had a reputation to uphold, blamed Mamá and Papá for getting him involved and fired them on that same phone call. Like that, it all went downhill, and for the next few days, Mamá stayed in bed, and Papá would be out until the late hours returning with the smell of a dive bar on him. Ricky went days wearing the same dirty shirt sitting outside Mamá’s bedroom door, staring into space. Mrs. Rodriguez from Oso Oro called to let us know she disagreed with Mr. Reynolds and tried her best to convince him to make an exception or at least look the other way. I could hear the sorry in her voice. I knew I had to do something.

Trez’s house was not too far of a walk from the apartment complex. It was a tan-colored single-floor home with an old chainlink fence around the yard and a tin mailbox marked with the barrio tag. The windows all had bars on them like the rest of the windows in Oso Verde. A group of chicos was all wearing black sunglasses sitting on the stoop. I still felt their eyes lock on me with their scrunched-up foreheads looking like accordions as I approached the gate. The dog on the chain barked as the front door opened to Trez stepping out. He whistled to the dog to stop and shot a nod to the chicos on the stoop.

They all marched inside like obedient soldiers.

There was a bit of a stare-off before one of us spoke.

‘I heard what happened with your bro and that racist puto singling him out,’ he said like he read my mind. ‘Using the Lopez’s address was smart, but in a small place like here, you was gonna get caught.’

‘I know. But my brother needs help, and he can’t get it here. I need to do something, I just don’t know what! We need your help, Trez,’ I said in one breath.

‘And what do you want me to do, ese? Build you a school here?’ He sucked his teeth. The chained dog growled in the background

‘No—I don’t know.’ I really didn’t know what I wanted Trez to do or if he could even do anything at all, but I was desperate and tired. Tired of being hungry for opportunities denied to us because of race, class, and immigration status. ‘Forget it,’ I told him, feeling the defeat in my words.

‘Hold up, ese.’ He stopped me as I turned my back to walk home. ‘You know why bears are the symbols for my crew?’ I nodded. ‘It’s because they’re loners by nature but care for their cubs until they’re big and can defend themselves. Then the cycle continues. I can’t promise nothin’ about your bro, but a job like this comes at a cost. Can you pay up when it’s time, ese?’ His eyes never broke contact with mine.

I swallowed the knot in my throat and nodded, not knowing what I agreed to.

A week later, it was all over the local news that Mr. Reynolds’s car was

found in the desert near the Mexican border with traces of narcotics in the car. The news said they believe he was involved in some drug deal gone wrong but were unsure. Then the Oso Oro school promoted Mrs. Rodriguez as program director and school principal. She personally invited Ricky back to the program, saying the school received an anonymous donation that will be used to assist low-income families and their children with special needs. She also made the exception to allow me to return with Ricky.

As Papá found work as a truck driver, things looked up for my family. He was away from home a lot, but he said the money was better than he’s ever seen since coming from México. Mamá also began running a little daycare from our apartment, where the other tenants paid her to watch the kids that were too young for school.

Months went by, and the news of Mr. Reynold’s car being found in the desert kept me awake at night. The night was the only time I couldn’t force my brain not to think about it. I stayed up late reading and could fall asleep sometimes if I convinced myself hard enough that Trez had nothing to do with it, and it was all a big coincidence. It wasn’t. I came home late from school to a note on our door one day. My throat clenched as I opened it and saw the familiar barrio tag of Trez’s crew and an invitation, ‘Come by.’



*Double P's*

Laura Swingen  
2022, 16"x12", mixed media on canvas.





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WRITERS, ARTISTS AND THINKERS!

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