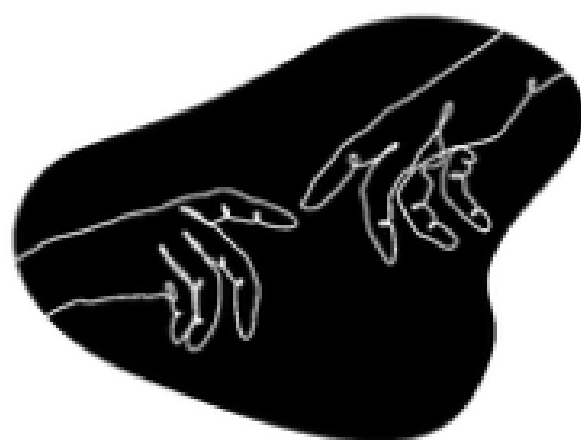




Thread Magazine

Volume XXII

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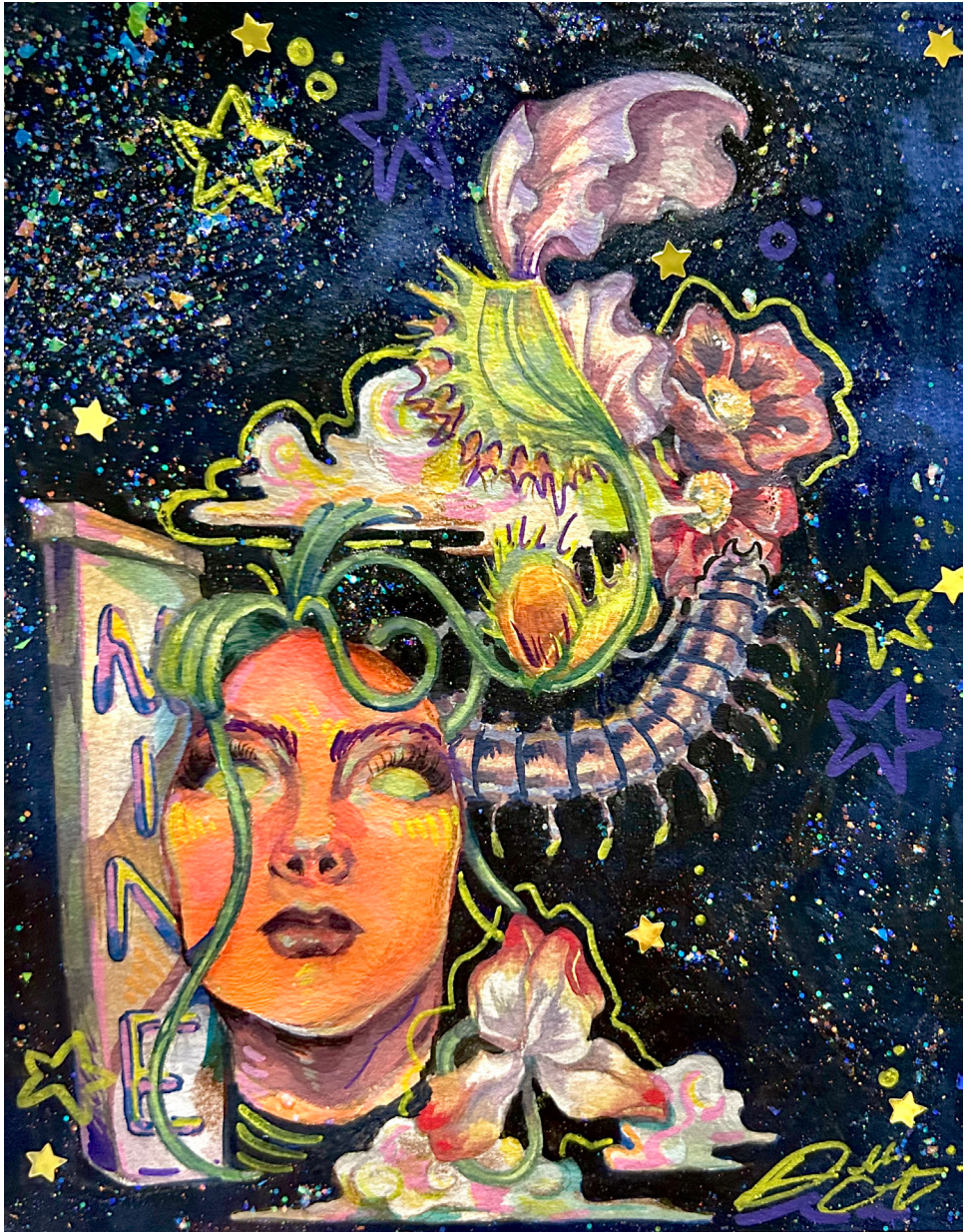
Fledgling

Poetry By Novella J. Bailey

A star is fleeing from the cosmos
with its tail between its legs.
It hurls itself between its brothers and sisters,
down, down, towards where I lay.
My back is pressed against the sand,
arms splayed, lips dry.

I have been laying here for years, and
every star has sat obediently
in the sky where I named it.
But here comes a stranger star,
bearing down onto my earth
directly into -

I cradle my open stomach
burrowed into by the fledgling star.
My body doesn't shrivel
or melt into the shifting sand
but tempers the fiery star, cooling it
to match the temperature of my blood
and weaves my belly back together,
capturing the star inside.
The sand parts beneath me,
the winds turn away to let me stand.
I inhale for the first time
and take a step.



Across the Universe

Art by Daniella Costa

GOD WORE DENIM

Play by Michael Vega

CHARACTERS:

ARLO: 20's, a dreamer

JAMES: 20's a doer

SETTING:

A bedroom filled with move-in boxes

TIME:

The Present

(ARLO enters holding a pair of old vintage jeans. He sits on the bed and places them next to him. He begins to write in a notebook)

ARLO

I met God. He didn't look like how I thought he would. I thought God would look older, grayer, wearing robes with a long white beard. I was wrong. He looked... Sweet faced. Clean shaven and surprisingly, he wasn't wearing a robe. He was wearing jeans. And I mean like, ALWAYS. He was ALWAYS wearing jeans. I wasn't quite sure if he even washed them or not, but they were him. They were what I visioned every time I thought of him. Him in those... jeans.

(ARLO exits and returns without the jeans)

I really didn't believe in God all that much. I knew there was someone or something that was looking over us but... I don't know, I was never really sure what to believe because who could do that much? All of those thoughts and feelings of "Who?" burdened my mind every day. Every day until I met him.

(JAMES enters wearing the jeans and sits by a box)

ARLO

As soon as I laid my eyes on him I knew. I knew he was the answer to every question. He was the moon and all of the stars with it. He was the cicadas' buzz. He was the whirring fan or a clock ticking on the wall. He was the sounds you don't realise you miss until you can't hear them anymore.

(ARLO places the notebook in a
box on the floor. He picks up a
small box, begins to dig through it)

JAMES

I really didn't know you had this much junk.

ARLO

It's not junk.

JAMES

Arlo, this box is literally filled with bottle caps.

ARLO

Precious memories.

JAMES

Of what, your addiction to CheerWine?

ARLO

Half of those caps are yours, James. Who's the addict now?

JAMES

Damn. I need to start drinking water.

(JAMES laughs a bit, then pauses)

JAMES

You save the bottle caps...?

ARLO

Yes.

JAMES

Because...?

ARLO

Because I cherish our oh so valued time together.

JAMES

Sarcasm received, noted, and archived. Freak.

ARLO

No, you're a freak.

JAMES

I don't keep garbage.

ARLO

(pointing at JAMES' jeans)

I don't wear garbage.

JAMES

Woah, boundary crossed. Apologize now or I'm not helping you unpack anymore.

ARLO

I'm sorry, James.

JAMES

No not to me. Apologize to Rob Crombie.

ARLO

Who the hell is Rob Crombie?

(JAMES gestures to his jeans.)

ARLO

You named them?

JAMES

Get it? It's like Rob Zombie and Ambercrombie & Fitch. Give it some credit. Anyways. He's waiting for an apology.

ARLO

(sighs)

Rob Crombie, despite your God-awful name, I apologize for calling you garbage.

JAMES

A little back handed but I guess we'll accept it.

(JAMES uses the jeans on the bed
as a puppet with a funny voice)

JAMES

"I'm glad we could PATCH this up."

(ARLO cringes but laughs)

JAMES

You love it, don't lie.

ARLO

I do. I really do.

(A long silence)

ARLO

James...

JAMES

We don't have to talk about it.

ARLO

I think I want to.

JAMES

If you must.

ARLO

I'm gonna miss this.

JAMES

I know.

ARLO

I'm gonna—

JAMES

It's not goodbye forever. It's just goodbye for now. Plus, you have
a phone. And so do I, fortunately for you.

ARLO
(Sarcastically)

Haha.

JAMES
No, seriously man. I've never seen you read any of these. And there's a ton of notebooks too... you write?

ARLO
I try. I can never commit to finishing anything. Poems, half baked stories, nothing interesting.

JAMES
That can't be true. I really want to read something of yours soon.

ARLO
Probably not.

JAMES
I'm sure your stuff is great. Two years of living together and... Anna Karenina? Arlo, this is like my favorite book of all time.
(A pause)
When did you get this?

ARLO
The day I met you.

JAMES
Really?

ARLO
You were reading it and it piqued my interest. It looked worn down. Like a ton of sticky notes and annotations. There must've been something about it that made you wanna dive so deep into it.

JAMES
That's a little weird. But mostly kinda sweet... Have you read it yet?

(ARLO shakes his head.)

JAMES
Dude that was forever ago. You gotta get on that. I think you'd really like it.

ARLO

Will do.

JAMES

Give it a read before I leave...

ARLO

Hmmm, I'll try.

JAMES

No, not "I'll try." I feel pain for the tree that died so it could collect dust here. It and all these other books for that matter.

ARLO

Okay, I promise I'll catch up with reading.

JAMES

Good. Thank you for that.

ARLO

James. I don't want you to go.

JAMES

I know. But we both know I have to go.

ARLO

I don't like having a timer on us. I don't like that our lease is finishing up. I don't like the idea of you not being around anymore... James, I don't know who I am without you.

JAMES

I'm sorry.

ARLO

There isn't anything to be sorry about. I just...

JAMES

Arlo... I'm not the center of your universe.

ARLO

Huh?

JAMES

Not in a bad way. Not like you're obsessed... But, I need you to focus on you. There's so much more to you than you and me. I think it's going to be good for you finding out who Arlo is. You're not a directionless amalgamation. You're someone who has so much to offer the world, you just gotta focus on you. Not you and someone else.

ARLO

James...

JAMES

You're amazing, man. Write something. Read something. Create. Create something to be proud of. I'm sure there's something more than a few peanuts in that skull of yours.

(JAMES' phone buzzes. He checks
it and sighs.)

ARLO

You gotta go?

JAMES

Yeah. I'll help you unpack some more tomorrow. Talk to you later?

ARLO

Talk to you later. Be safe.

JAMES

You expect too much of me. Later, Arlo.

(JAMES exits. ARLO sits still.
He stands up and goes to the box
and pulls out the notebook.
He begins to write again.)

ARLO

Idolatry. To worship or view an idol as if they were a deity. I learned that he, who wore denim, was not God. He was simply a Saint. Saint James. I'm embarrassed to have thought that. But I don't regret that feeling. Misguided as I was, he is still the same sweet faced person I thought him to be.

(JAMES enters wearing a Canadian tuxedo. It's an all denim outfit, denim shirt, coat, and pants. He is holding the vintage jeans he was wearing earlier.)

ARLO

He no longer wore the same denim I always envisioned him in. Now he donned all denim. Truly mayhem fashion. But, he never looked more like himself. He is gone but he is still him. He is gone but I am still me. I didn't think that was possible. He left. And all he left behind for me was his jeans.

(JAMES hands ARLO the jeans)

ARLO

I still hold them close. A piece of himself he entrusted to me. I realized I don't need to hold on to every bottle cap, every loose memory. He is not gone, even though he is away. But, I'm ok. I will write. I will create. For myself. Will I share this with him? Probably not. But will I make something worth showing him? 1,000%.

(ARLO folds the jeans and places them at the edge of THE bed. He picks up the copy of Anna Karenina and begins to read)

(JAMES brings out the annotated copy of his own, and moves to the other side of the stage to begin reading as well. ARLO grabs a highlighter)

ARLO

"Not one word, not one gesture of yours shall I, could I, ever forget..."

(He ponders this, and highlights as he reads. JAMES looks at ARLO, who does not look up from the book. JAMES smiles once more and exits)

CURTAIN



Nothing's Quite Right These Days

Photography by Sarah Joy

Craigslist Eulogy

Poetry By Sarah Boyd

On Tuesday at 12:43 p.m.: bags of clothes, pick-up only, exploding with threadbare flannels and beloved jeans still carrying a living smell. Please call or text.

On Tuesday at 12:45 p.m.: a tobacco pipe, gently used, has a million tiny cuts on the inside from when its master gutted its innards like a shell. Please call or text.

On Tuesday at 12:50 p.m.: curb alert — green leather loveseat, diligently dissipating the impression of whoever made a bed of its cushions. Please call or text.

On Tuesday at 12:53 p.m.: twin mattress, heaped on its side, hoping no one will notice its stains colored like urine. Please call or text.

On Tuesday at 12:55 p.m.: unused U-100 31-gauge syringes, unopened, never touched not once. No, they came too late. Please call or text.



Spread Your Wings

Sculpture by Olivia Nolan

Mango Diaries

Creative Nonfiction by Serena Lozandi

During the Summers of my childhood, my mother and her friends enjoyed a mango best when it was crunchy and sour, dipping it into bagoong. I desperately wanted to understand the biology of a mango. I had no idea what was so delicious about a hard, unripe, and sour mango dipped into a weirdly brown and stinky shrimp paste. I preferred the super sticky sweet ones sold at Publix, even if sometimes they had too much hair that stuck in the gaps of my teeth. I had no idea what was so delicious about sitting in the hot sun, baking in nature's oven, surrounded by flies attracted to the strong shrimp scent, but I sat with them anyway— desperately trying to understand the anatomy of the unripe mango found on the street. Each day, surrounded by the stench of shrimp and the buzzing of flies, they told me “dapat mag aral ka ng Tagalog,” and a part of me wished I knew how to appreciate the unripe mango and its shrimp companion while the other part wanted nothing to do with it, instead focusing on the faded yellow Lay's bag tangled in the grass.

The first time I tried a sour mango, my mom's best friend (my second mother) found it while we were walking her dogs. It had fallen off the neighbor's tree with skin greener than moldavite and its flesh reminiscent of the Philippine sun. The first time I ate an unripe mango, I almost choked from its crunchiness and the sourness lingered in my mouth all day. My mom's friend laughed at me as I ate the oreos she bought me in an attempt to wash it off. “In the Philippines, these are our desserts.” But I had already gotten a taste of America's desserts and the Philippines' wasn't collaborating with my American tongue.

Later that day, my mother looked at me with nostalgia and asked me to make a promise—to promise her that I would tell her story, that I would learn her language. How could I tell my mother that I knew her language but was ashamed to be a part of it? In America, there was no benefit to being Asian. Hollywood doesn't write movies for Asians. The New York Times doesn't feature books written by or for Asians. Despite the loudness in my mom's voice and the way her laughter spread deeply through our ears, we were unheard. In America, we were silent and overlooked— known only to be bound to a myth, so long as we let them model us the way they needed to.

In my future, I couldn't see that for myself. I didn't want to be a part of a group that was unheard or disregarded. I didn't want to be "Asian" and for a while, I tried hard to separate myself. But I could never erase a part of me that formed the very essence of myself, even with my failed attempt at assimilation.

In the Philippines, it's hard to believe that you're actually Filipino. My family lived in the bukid and raised their own food before slaughtering it. How could they kill something they raised? I shuddered each time I saw the pig's hair in the adobo. I hated walking through the palenke and seeing fish laid out on newspaper with flies buzzing around its eye, watching me the whole time. In the bukid, there are mango trees planted by my ancestors that are so tall, they meet the sun's light halfway through the sky. They were growing towards Heaven and leaving us in the shade with an abundance of mangos. Most of the time, the mangos fell to the mud. Made home by the flies and their eggs. Left to rot and sour the air. I hated feeling dirty and I didn't want to believe that I was. I separated myself from that. I didn't speak Tagalog or eat their food. I didn't hang out with my cousins or talk to my titas and my titos. I was too American.

One day I asked my mother why she loved unripe mangoes and bagoong. She told me it revitalizes the lineage within her. I learned of my great grandparents' grandparents. She told me about her grandmother, how her culture was so rich back home. A woman who grew up with the land. A woman who grew up alongside nature's love.

They never starved—nature never let them, even if they had to kill what they cared for. My mother came from a lineage of brave and headstrong people. People who always spoke their mind. A lineage of people made up of kindness, who used their words to speak for others. My mother told me nobody could ever silence them, that they will just keep growing and, in their growth, flourish. I saw her and her culture in a new light. I saw myself in a new light. I was Filipino. And I was American.

In class, I wrote a poem for my mother and a poem for those who wanted to forget their parents'--forget their lineage. In the summer, it was published. [When You've Forgotten Your Roots].

I realized that I was made to speak for people like me, those stuck in between two cultures, unable to pick the side they belong in and loathing the way they were made. In America, I was not as silent as I thought I was. I had a voice and an accent and languages made to connect. I strive to continue my mother's lineage of strength and give my courage out of kindness.

That same summer, my mother and I went to the Philippines like we did the years before. However, on that flight over the Pacific ocean, the atmosphere felt different. For the first time, I didn't feel nostalgic for a country I was raised in. Instead, I found a sense of hope gifted by the sunlight. When we arrived, I was so grateful to smell the polluted air of Manila and feel the dusty heat. I was so excited to go to the bukid, to see my titas and my titos. A sigh of relief expelled itself from my chest. I didn't care anymore. I was more than just the silent Asian back home; I was somebody in my mother's country and I needed to continue the legacy, their legacy. Everyone was surprised when I first spoke Tagalog, eyes widening at my voice and my semi-fluency. I was not too American to love and care for my family. My cousins, whose noses bled from my English, could connect with me now. They wondered so much about me and I wondered so much about them. I realized I had to connect them to the world I was raised in and they had to connect me to a culture I overlooked. The first place they took me to was the top of an abandoned water tower. They brought green mangoes but when they sliced it, the flesh was soft in my hands and sweet on my tongue. At the top of the water tower, I could see where the sky kissed the sun good night and I knew then that I had reached acceptance.

While I Played

Poetry by Keira Uber

While I was building princess castles,
packing wet sand into cheap plastic buckets,
a man ignored the flashing lights,
and the ocean swallowed his mistake.

While I traced the names of my family with the tip of a shell,
watching the tide eat each letter,
a pelican beat its wings harder and harder, getting nowhere,
its feathers dipped in ink that wrote only in ruin.

While I cupped a seashell to my ear,
listening to the ocean's call,
fisherman pulled their nets up,
catching nothing that belongs to the sea.

While my mom covered me in sunscreen,
coconut curling through the air,
death covered the waves in a sheen,
a stain that cannot lift.

While I fell asleep to the lull of my mother's engine,
humming my body down the interstate,
the shores I played on turned dark,
the salt no longer on my body.



Artist's Collection

Art by Evia Fleming



Diary of a Growing Body

Creative Nonfiction by Joana Riva

“I have already lost touch with a couple of people I used to be”
Joan Didion, Slouching Towards Bethlehem

I - BEING

I’m eight years old. My interests include Disney Channel, barbies, and female pop stars. It sounds problematic, having so many references of what a woman should look like at such a young age, but my thoughts about my appearance are not unhealthy. I look to my favorite female characters and singers for inspiration in the morning before doing my hair to go to school, and in a store with my mom looking for an outfit to wear on a special occasion. The women I see on my screens are aspirational, and as long as I like them I don’t want to look like them so much as to be like them. I see no harm in the fabricated image of what girls and women should look like, yet.

I’m eight years old and my imagination brings color to my life. It’s my favorite thing about having a body, being able to move through a world that can be anything I want. I love going to the beach and running in the sand until my limbs hurt in the best way. I love swimming ,playing mermaids in the sea, and building castles with my cousins in the sand. Most of my weekends are spent at the beach with my family, salty hair and tan skin, hands stained by melting popsicles.

I’m eight years old and my mom is the epitome of beauty. My uncoordinated hands struggle to put a strand of my hair behind my ear exactly the way she does. I sit on the edge of her bed while she puts on a dress that makes me desperate with anticipation to grow up and be able to wear it, while she looks at herself in the mirror and frowns. I watch her change countless times, her expression hardening with each of teoutfits she puts on. I don’t understand what it feels like to be seen for my body, for I am still growing into it. I don’t know exactly what it means when my mom sighs at her own body in front of the mirror, but I’m bound to end up there all the same. All I know for now is my body allows me to run, wear pretty dresses, dance, and play with my cousins.

II - BECOMING

I'm eleven years old and the existence of my body hits me like a bullet train. My interests are the same, only now I can elusively envision a grown version of me more clearly in girls who are growing faster than me and various women I see on social media and on TV. Most of my friends have started to get their periods, their breasts are growing and their general behavior is changing. I still love the beach, running, swimming, and playing in the sand. They don't want to do these "childish" things with me anymore, and I can't understand why. It's been different for a while now. Instead of doing cartwheels and rolling in the sand, they lay on their towels to tan in their bikinis they bought in the smallest size from the women's section and talk about boys.

I'm eleven years old and at school, my friends talk about bras, as if shopping for them and wearing them makes them part of the club of women, putting them higher up in the school's social hierarchy. I still wear just a tank top under my school uniform, and have no need to wear a bra. I don't really mind it, though, because having a woman's body seems like a lot of work, and I don't really want to grow up just yet. My friends who are starting to grow into their adult bodies start to engage in behaviors that mark the achievement of femininity in our social spaces, such as flirting and kissing. I remain a non-participant because my femininity has not yet reached such levels. At eleven years old, I still feel mostly like a child, and still have a childlike body.

My hormones play a part in my "falling behind", but so do the social rituals we are all expected to engage with. Their meanings have become so deeply embedded into our daily interactions that we mistake them as the natural order of things—maybe they were, just not to me. It's not my friends' fault, I know, but sometimes it seems like they enjoy being "above" me in the social hierarchy of hormonal sixth graders. Despite knowing I'm a late bloomer and feeling the impact of it, my main concerns when it comes to my appearance are still mostly unrelated to my body. I worry about my hair, which I wish was lighter, and what clothes I need to be up to date with current trends. I also worry about the gap in my teeth, but my mom tells me it makes me unique, and for now that is good enough. Family members who see me comment on how tall I've gotten every time they see me. It's usually followed by a remark on how I've gotten thinner—on how my body is changing.

"And to think you were so chubby just a few years ago".

At school, I am the odd man out. At home, I'm praised for something that is completely out of my control, as if I had woken up one day and chosen to be the way I am. My body, a few years ago was just what carried me from one place to the other, is now becoming an artifact of identity and a social capital marker.

III - BURDENING

I'm thirteen years old and I need to hide. I need people to not look at me, not perceive me, not comment on any aspect of my appearance. My body is like a dead animal's carcass permanently glued to my shoulders, and I'm hyper-aware of the fact that it'll always be the first thing people notice. Going to the beach is not an option anymore, I refuse to wear a bikini or even a swimsuit. I refuse to wear anything revealing. I start to realize that, as a girl who is becoming a woman, my body is always going to be a big deal. My friends comment on other girls' bodies, whether they're too fat or too thin, too short or too tall, have big breasts or none at all, again and again. I'm thirteen and I know there's no escaping it, my body is perceivable and I have no control of people's thoughts about it. I see the difference in the treatment given to girls whose bodies are conventionally attractive, the confidence with which they hold themselves, and how boys treat them because of it. At family gatherings, I am still endlessly praised for being tall and slender, references to my past chubbiness are guaranteed at all times, and male relatives never fail to joke with my dad about staying vigilant of boys when I'm older. I'm tired of relatives making a fuss over my not wanting to go in the pool at my grandfather's house on the weekends. I'm tired of them making a fuss when I try my best to ignore my feelings of shame about my body and push myself to go in the pool, hands trembling as I wrangle my swimsuit out of my bag.

"You're wearing a swimsuit? I never thought I'd see that again!"

"You have such a nice body, what are you so ashamed of?"

I'm thirteen and I'm constantly reminded of how thin I am, in both praise and criticism. Psychoanalyst Susie Orbach once wrote that our bodies are given to us by our mothers in two ways: by the bodies they inhabit and represent to us and through how they perceive our body's capacities. When shopping for clothes with my mother, she tells me everything looks good on me because I'm thin, no matter how I feel about it. She lives vicariously through my body, as if hers is no longer valid because it has gotten bigger with age. It's not her fault— she, too, had her journey of discovering her body. Unknowingly, I start attributing thinness with my worth. It starts becoming a part of who I am in my head.

I'm thirteen years old and I'm starting to notice how my aunts and grandmother talk about other women's bodies, how they attribute value to this or that woman's ability to stay thin and smooth-skinned. How they say things like "she was gorgeous when she was younger, so thin". I don't like my body, but I feel as though I should because older women warn me about how I might not be so thin as I grow older. I struggle to understand why, all of a sudden, my body feels like such a burden.

IV- BLOOMING

I'm sixteen years old and still have the same body as I did when I was thirteen. I am still invisible, my femininity almost neutralized by my lack of male attention. I feel better about my relationship with my body and don't feel the urge to hide it anymore. I'm growing into it patiently and smoothly. The boys I call friends sometimes let comments on girls' bodies slip near me every so often, once again confirming my theory that our bodies, as girls and eventually women, assign us value within society. My friends whose bodies developed earlier than mine now face the fear of gaining weight and being anything but thin, the fear we were trained to have by observing and listening to our mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. At this point, I have unlearned how to love the beach where I used to run and play. Now I stand awkwardly with my arms over my stomach. I am not exactly blooming, but desperately trying to.

V- BARGAINING

I'm nineteen years old and I have no idea what I look like. My whole life, I have been told what to think of my body and other girls' bodies. The women and girls I see online are constantly pushing a new ideal body that everyone should strive to have. Fashion trends and aesthetics are built around certain types of bodies. There are a million women on the internet telling me how I need to stop consuming dairy if I actually want a flat stomach and that pilates is not really going to do anything if I don't already have the right bonestructure or genetics.

I have learned that the notion of a perfect body is a complete illusion. I have observed my mom, my best friends, my aunts, my grandmothers, and every other woman I come in contact with, and found their bodies beautiful simply because they are theirs. But somehow I can't seem to separate myself from mine, from the idea that not only it could be better, but must get better. It's as if my mind knows I'm much more than just skin and bone; my body holds the organs that keep it functioning. I'm looking at it from above and can't reach for it; I see right through it. Instead of my body, I see words, definitions, assumptions, the perpetual reaching for a currency of social acceptance, and belonging so mythical but so valuable I would do anything to have it.

When I was eleven years old, us girls were expected to already be growing into a woman's body, and now that most of us have it we're expected to keep a childlike frame. I feel heavy, not quite physically, but mentally, whenever I remember the existence of my body. At a certain point I think something shifted, like I was being pulled out from a dream, and all I could think about was my body. I sit in class and worry about my stomach not being flat enough. I go to the gym and do my best not to move my face in a way that gives me a double chin. I avoid looking in the mirror unclothed so I don't see the shape of my silhouette and the stretchmarks on my skin. Sometimes it feels like I see beauty in all bodies except for mine. I'm nineteen years old, and I still haven't learned to love the

beach like I did when I was eight. But now, when I'm floating in saltwater, the sun lightly burns my scalp and the tip of my nose; I try my best to remember a world in which I saw my body exactly for what it is: a body that carried me from there to here, through every single obstacle. I came back to the sea, after all. It might take a while, but I will find a way back into my body.



Pot Head

Art by Gwyneth Schumacher

Taylor

Poetry By Samantha Whiskeyman

There's ash in my throat from your cigarette (it burns, and I hold in a cough, face flushing red). We pass it back and forth, lit ember in the nighted street (your eyes caught on mine, guileless and light). Soon, it's down to embers, I blink and the sun is rising (a year has gone by, you're fading into the dawn). I'm nothing more than a memory, an unwelcome one at that (remember being kids and sitting on your grandma's lawn?). My throat is burning again, I press a tissue to my mouth (the box ran out of Marlboro's a long time ago). The destruction of adolescence is on at high noon (maybe in another year we could've seen the snow).

things i say as a nicotine addict

Poetry by Giovana Medeiros

going outside for a sec and take me in between your lips

*and i can quit it but i tried everything and just so damn addictive
and need that high and so used to it by now
and it's the only thing that calms me at night
it's been such a rough week*

*just one more time
i promise it's the last and i know i can stop
I wouldn't have started if i thought i couldn't right*



Chrysanthemum

Photography by Varvara Tulina

A Poem To Myself

Poetry by Amanda Jean

radiant sun-kissed legacy:
warm bronze undertone
Namibia brown skin, melanin.
The Blacker the Berry...
So sweet.

fraternal kaleidoscopes
set in a heart shaped visage.
vivid midnight brown irises,
that teases glimpses
of a radiant soul,
Heaven's gem.

vanilla ice cream brought to mouth;
the taste of freedom chills
two-toned, full lips covered in
Fenty's glass slipper gloss bomb.
cocoa butter kisses.
Mwah!

crowning triumph:
wisps of curly-strand-cumulus-clouds
floating around you
ever-growing bigger.
Good hair.

liberty bell rang over chained feet
working crops and sowing dreams,
roots of an adansonia now flesh and bones,
unbound dancing as liberty bell rings.
Blooming generations.

Your breath is the life of those who could only dream.

Magnolia Tree

Poetry by Rachel Petit

thin yet sturdy you rise for eons
steadfast above my mother's house, spreading your arms
full of glossy waxy fuzzy hands,
rustic green and orange welcoming me in your embrace.
you are young like the girl i once was
that watched the soldiers march across your skin and wondered
what it felt like to be

Home

is the delicate scent of your creamy petals wafting on the breeze,
inviting your ancient friends the scarabs
who knew your love before i did,
and the cardinals
who will recreate you again and again with your cherry hearts
destined for magnificence

A Preview of the Human Being

Poetry by Elena Levy

Tomorrow I forgot to come
for you—here I am:
All we are is whispered images of
faces fogged in glass.
The instant's sparkled glance before
we blacken, spun in dusking notes.
Let us be translucent.
Let us not impede.

I feel my words fly at your face
and plaster on top of it like a window.

I had no right
To the life of your voice,
any more than the memory of myself:
a bundle crushed out of a womb
screaming, splattered all over with damp something.
No right to your life. No right to time,
Mother Time who horseshoes us back
into the murder of memory.

Who teaches you sound?
When the first manwomanthing,
the first ancient human, neanderthal,
homo erectus, dexterous fingers curled
on their wooden dinner fork,
saw crouched in the damp snow
an onlooker across the fire
eyeing their kill, did they
open their mouth
and offer a seat?

In a locked box, language complicates.
It inflects like a secret.
Maybe—consider what the linguists are saying—
maybe they sang.

Apologies for my tardiness. For my silence
and your silence meeting
like a scream inside the box.
Yesterday, I'll swear I saw Time
roasting all her fossilized languages
over us and laughing through the tinted windows



Peking Fast Food

Photography by Varvara Tulina



things i think as a grantless lab assistant

Poetry by Giovana Medeiros

if I kept more to myself maybe I'd be loved more
and other things I think as a tan anglerfish

who has a flickering lamp as a guide
that's taking it someplace else because
artificial became natural but the sun burned too hot

if my teeth were less clanky maybe I'd bite less
and other things I think as an oversized shark

who can't stop swimming but not for biological reasons
it could be taught something else. pushing through is
all it knows it's all it knows it's all it knows

if I didn't offer myself so easy I'd be a wife
and other things I think as an unspayed cat

who yells too strongly in the day's death
and becomes too quiet when the night's alive
lounging and waiting but never hunting

if I took better care of my scales I'd be nicer to pet
and other things I think as an automatron dinosaur

who was built for decoration and scaring five year olds
that have to yet decide if it's a triceratops or a pterodactyl
because no one can remember what it really is

if I talked less I'd be wanted more
and other things I think as a hungry rattlesnake

who announces its arrival way too soon
and it feels good the crashing in and hey how are you
but that's all there is to it because they've heard it

if I was more agreeable I'd be adored
and other things I think as a benevolent spider

who can't kill its partners for lack of venom
and will and desire but can instead create agony
and then the agony turns into a self-hatred it can't stop

if I knew less I'd love more
and other things I think as a grantless lab assistant

who can't bear to keep dissecting and writing
and looking for and searching and asking and
wanting and needing and just never getting there



Will I Ever Get Ahead of What I Need

Photography by Elaine Santibanez



Better than a Slice

Poetry By Zhamira Amaison

Print lasts as long as it wants to last,
hints of what you might have known
maybe had the potential of knowing
but fishes still fly
and smoke never stops running
like my eyes
away from yours.
I fell
days ago, behind you
of course, never beside you
a cut
oh to dig
and oh to hide
I am exhausted
eleven in the morning is now early and I can never seem to put out that
fire
it is always said and it is never shown
drunk but not commemorated
an old scene and lack of credit
of all your heart ever loved
all it ever took
your mind in a fishbowl and your roommate is pescatarian
coffee beans
chocolate
lemon water
the shower
and best of all—the time
washing away how you made me forget existing was ever viable.
I never got to count,
how many lies
I spotted in your eyes.

heart on the line

Poetry by Janell Bacheller

we are dead
this food-chain world
love broken spoiled
prodged picked apart

i scull through memories not to be trapped in the cast you abandoned
 reminiscing

but i have already been caught mouth torn and ripped a trick of lips and taste
 gloss or blood which is this metallic remain

[illegible]

toss me away break the line not the rule

did you ever plan to take me home to come home with me
my rouge cheeks turned cooked white reeling me into ‘your’ world
 uncommitted to mine

trimethylamine rot thrown back to murky shallows netted but not chosen

off you go back to the market wrapped ripped off
 descaled and deboned ripped apart

were you worth twenty dollars per scrutinized pound
each acceptable piece portioned off to stained fisher-man hands

i have been picked apart
you spoiled and plated
devoured by this world
we are dead

Salmon Cycle

Poetry By Keira Uber

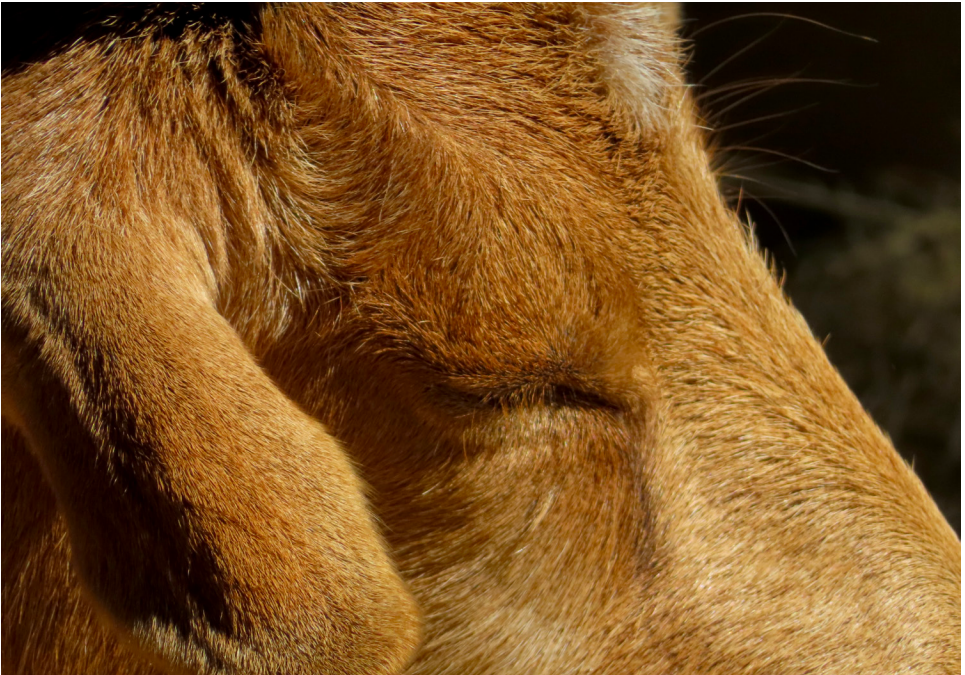
In the Pacific Ocean, salmon leap
for the familiar whisper of freshwater streams.
Fall to spring, their journey begins,
pulled towards the shadow of youth.
Silver and strong, they climb
the backwards escalator upstream.
Scales of iron soften
to sandalwood in winter's chill.
Mouths hook sharp for battles to come.
Males paint their backs red like targets;
an offering for the bears. Sacrificing for the sake
of their mate and bloodline.
Mothers float like buoys. Eggs are laid
in silence. The river cradles the fragile future,
Crows circle above; And new life will stir,
born to swim alone with the tide,
bound by the endless call to return.

Going to Stockholm

Poetry by Jake Laris

Two hedgehogs pressed close in the cold.
Too starving for warmth to unfold.

 Their fear to appease,
 they'll surely both freeze,
before they've the chance to grow old.



Perseverance in Sunlight

Art by Jennifer Hidalgo

The Entomological Times

Poetry By Brandon Yu

BREAKING NEWS!

Mrs. Mantis bit off her husband's head
Police said they were off to bed.

Mr. Cockroach—family of 767—
was stomped on by a giant heathen.

Last night, the beetle brothers locked horns
again, fighting over a girl forlorn.

Daddy Long-Legs, that old creep
hung himself in the attic (just to sleep.)

OPINION: out near the dumpster lives Fly
who eats garbage for fun. Why???

A bullet ant made a biting statement in front of his crew.
He regrets it already. Others cry: give him the shoe!

A group of fireflies went to the sunset's evening showing
but became alarmed when someone's butt started glowing.

Ladybug landed on a giant's finger
and decided, for a time, to linger.

Swamped

Poetry by Novella J. Bailey

these roots dig in my
soles in the heel of this
water-logged soil; mocking
my kneecaps caked in mud,
a woeful excuse for a glimmering
pond, moss tumbling out of its ears,
sun choking on its
smoke-stained chest.

I remind myself that I need oxygen.

is this what I would consider on the
beaches of Miami, my sandals
awash on nature's blanket, my
sunscreen-soaked back buried
in the warm sand?

Maybe. But,

here I stand, lodged into adherence
by the purr of the green-eyed
log, simpering, daring me to
move so I could watch his
jaw snap



Girl on Film

Photography by Varvara Tulina

The Oracle in Retirement

Poetry By Elena Levy

She meets for tea on Tuesdays
At a window booth, viewing
Morning traffic and fortunes
Steeped in the bottom of their drinks.
She is the finest on Earth.

They say you experience dreams
Unlike anything the waking imagine

Carious bodies
Spat from the mouth
Of the ground
The rocks scream
A roar oncoming
Borne horseback
Winged silver flash of armor
Suddenly found us swept
Dead peal of horns
Go back
I saw home
Behind me bleeding
Myself mirrored sickly in firelight
Retracking steps upon
Murderous overlapped steps
Towards the self-subsuming
Jaws of country

(Which says great says gold says glory
says ours and
God says implode)

When he cannot change you, he'll stamp
Entropic factors out. Children's footsteps
disappearing.
His word keeps us underfoot.

Do you not see, without him
You are nothing; immobile impoverished
Animal's fingers scrambling for hold

Carry the narrative—this is no
retelling anymore you should put the pencil
down—

Carry it into hell
with you and all your friends, then.

Mycorrihzae

Poetry By Jacob Laris

This used to be a pretty place, I think

The moss laps at my feet and makes it hard to remember. I watered you every day, lovely little
seedling with the fruits of my tongue and you grew in kind towards it, gave shoots and flowers,
fed me sweet sap from the hole knotted in your chest.

Led me gently to the ancient names of our twin architecture, taught me XYLEM and PHLOEM
and taught me to cut where the essence flew thickest like a river sluggish in its winding.

You turned my tools around on me and shore me perfect, heaven sent.

You, with your pitcher plant mouth and your sycamore fingers. How could I not run away?

This world grew around me, and I

Stood sown inside myself like a cicada

In its burrow.

Homebound

Poetry By Renee McAleer

Petted down pages of wilted books stand still at home.
A breath you whispered on my face—I know you, we are home.

Belching cockatoos yip and yap for our thirsty, leafy ears.
Warm silence of a breathless ceramic bowl fills our room with home.

Glistening water runs sidewise to a hankering sun dance, letting watchers watch.
Yes our feet are dirt too, thank you suffering tree, together we taste home.

Climbing out the blabbing back door, our minds zip away.
Yet our skin touches air always. Can we belly home?

Seen and known tadpoles gallop in our childhood streams of seen and known.
A body tucked into the ground we crunch, nestled into home.

Our eyes wake and spot the ratty worm snagged for breakfast.
Limp is our body heavy on the mattress, sagging into home.

Streaks of years will pile like rabbit trails on our lovers' water skin as
the dying woman takes her last breath, wanting home.

We collect our rinds in penny jars and our movie tickets in tomorrow's socks.
Freeze our clocks as our ears pinch towards nighttime cicadas telling home.

Your cousin's thigh freckly is your heart's family crest alongside that stranger's smile.
Creaking conundrum abodes on fresh lilies above never-heard-before home.

Rushing feet swelter into masses of folk sweeping to their chosen castles or dungeons.
While a dear sunflower petal will never leave my mind's home.

Jesus has never found a home in that home of the sand dollars where monkeys reign.
Ha! I'm sure a good crab or two will doddle around and find their feet rooted there in home.

Between earth and sky, our blowing eyeballs fly from here to there.
Nothing currents will seize our bodies and shake us into meeting home.

Feathers

Poetry by Mitali Kurinji

I forget where my skin ends
and the dry dirt begins
the grass is thick and poised
to cover my arms,
to grow over my legs;
the wind tufts itself into paws
and bears down claws into my chest
my sneakers sink into the plush wet sand.
I dig my nails into the heel of my hand.
Imagine red crescents form.
Pulse in my fingertips.
Flicker flame of the sun-spears
of light break water
and tear through fish
bone leaving silver-meat
slick on the floors
of the lake where the
tall purple water-grass
sifts dust through its leaves
and where reeds reach
their fingers bone-thin
toward each other
spines cracking soft
cadence almost-music
spring weather
and troubled soil
riddled with ant-ghosts
millions and millions
who didn't survive the winter
swallowed by worm-mouths
like the black expanse of space
behind the curtain of sky.

I start collecting feathers.

Brown feathers the length of my forearm,
white feathers that shimmer like pointe shoes,
black feathers that turn emerald in the light.
I shove shells into my pockets.
I find an insect wing, then a tail with no lizard.
A beetle leg, still twitching.
I snap off bits of the spanish moss trailing from the trees.
I walk to the edge of the water and fall to my knees.
I offer up my evidence-of-life
to the thing that writhes
in the silt; glittering
relics, feather-bone-shell-mud
and the creature
in the lake rises; wipes the dirt
from her hand-eyes
takes the contents
of my altar
in her wing-jaw
and burrows back down
where the water's dark
in the lake-grass
and I plead her --
take me with you.

but her tail-spine
rakes my cheek
and disappears

under the mirror-glass,
and the shoals of fish,
and the turtle backs,
and the skeletons,
and the beetle legs,
and the fountain spray,
and the cold embrace
of the lake.



Like Father like Daughter

Photography by Sarah Joy



