



THE
LIT THE LITERARY AND ART MAGAZINE OF
LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE | 2025

The full Spring 2025 issue—with more stories, poetry, nonfiction, and art—is available at <http://thelitmag.com>. You can also read contributors' bios and interviews with the writers and artists from this issue. Submit to next year's edition at thelitmag.com/submissions.



Cover image, “A Swallow Came to Me,” Natasha Muriel, 2023.

LGBTQIA+ Art and Writing Contest Winners

Art Award

“A Swallow Came to Me” by Natasha Muriel (issue cover)

Poetry Awards

“Why Can’t You See That I Love You” by Karlo Krstulovic

“2 Girls & New York” by Kayla Texidor*

Fiction Award

“The Boys Under the Moon” by Casey Garcia



Above: 2025 Queens Pride CUNY LGBTQIA+ Consortium T-Shirt design by Alexandra Garcia, Amelia Stepnowski, Athos Argue, and Mykola Honcharov.

*“2 Girls & New York” is online only. Read another poem by Kayla Texidor, “Puerto Ricans Can’t Be Goth,” on page 17 of this issue.

THE LIT

**THE LITERARY AND ART MAGAZINE
OF LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE | SPRING 2025**

Acknowledgements

The Lit is a production of the Spring 2025 Literary Magazine Internship, English 288, at LaGuardia Community College, CUNY. All writings and artworks were read and evaluated by student-editors and the faculty advisor, Christopher Schmidt. Special thanks to Noam Scheindlin, Irwin Leopando, Sylwia Prendable, Sonia Rodriguez, and Deema Bayrakdar for their support. We give additional thanks to LaGuardia faculty who circulated the call for submissions among their students, and to the Print Center staff, especially Wilson Muñoz.

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Table of Contents

Student Writing

Two Seventy-Five	John A. Birt	10
When Your Skyscrapers Bloom	Laura Tobón	15
Puerto Ricans Can't Be Goth	Kayla Texidor	17
Things I Wish My Daughter Knew	N.I.P.	25
The Past Catches Up To Us	Karlo Krstulovic	28
A Bad Egg	Ryan Tenesaca	30
Invisible Sledgehammer	Annalee Hardison	36
Between Me and the Sky	Andrea Aguilar	44
Ode to the Distance	Andrew Lynch	49
Weathered Paths	Nafiz Imtiaz Emu	52
A Story of Desire	Michael Florent	56
The Fast Lane	Rafael Cevallos	68
The Family House	Jessicah Erundu	72
Thoughts Buried Beneath My Pillow	Natalie Edmond	78
Why Can't You See That I Love You?	Karlo Krstulovic	80
Greater Than	Alessandra Ventura	83
The Boys Under the Moon	Casey Garcia	80
Contributors' Bios		90

Student Art

Untitled	Jade Hernandez-Paz	16
Art Portfolio	Fernanda Contreras	20
Sport Star	Jeremy Allen	35
Sara Millerey (Lady Spring)	Natasha Muriel	43
Agriculture	Ian Patino	46
Portal to the Clouds	Nancy Bishwakarma	48
Photography Portfolio	Andrew Ramdat	64
Sport Star 3	Jeremy Allen	71
Neon Currents	Nancy Bishwakarma	91
Nature's Frame	Nancy Bishwakarma	94

Cover art: "A Swallow Came to Me," Natasha Muriel, 2023.

Read the full issue online at <http://thelitimag.com>.

THE
LIT

Two Seventy-Five

John A. Birt

What can two dollars and seventy-five cents
get you in New York City? I'd say:
Two measly dollars and three quarters
can't really offer you much.

Perhaps if you're thinking about food,
two dollars could get you a butter roll.
Two quarters extra to have it toasted,
the last quarter for a pack of gum.

On top of that, a short conversation
with the man behind the counter
of the bodega you've been frequenting
from childhood to present day.

Two dollars and seventy-five cents
to travel from home to school.
Two dollars and seventy-five cents
to travel from school to home.

This time the fare is free.
Your friends encourage you to hop
the turnstile and evade the fare
and use the money elsewhere.



Enjoy a ninety-nine-cent pizza
with a soda on the side at Bryant
Park until it's six o'clock at night.
That sounds good, but where else?

Possibly at the Burger King on 46th
where you could buy something from
the value menu. A possibility forfeited
by the restaurant's unforeseen closing.

Two dollars and seventy-five cents
no longer needed thanks to an orange
and white colored student MetroCard.
The orange later replaced by lime green.

That free-ride student MetroCard
proved to be more useful than expected:
You can use it for a bus ride to the mall.
Mom can use it when class isn't in session

and save on the five-dollar round-trip
to get groceries from the Traders Joe's
near Court Square because the market
up the hill is unreasonably expensive.

The Roosevelt Island Tram is an option
to get the second-best view of Manhattan.
Better be on your way home before eight
o'clock sharp or else you'll have to pay

Two dollars and seventy-five cents
that are now rendered useless
following the fare's change in price:
two dollars and ninety cents.

That can take you on a trip to the beach
to watch waves of people intertwine
bearing the summer's ninety-degree heat
about a hundred feet underground.

Eleven quarters, a dime, and a nickel
leaves you both bothered and worried
as delinquent teens attempt to surf
on the train cars instead of the sea.

Only to be rewarded with a segment
on channel seven, plastering faces
of the train surfing participants and
warning about the dangers of this trend.

Two dollars and ninety cents
to board either the 7, N, or W train
at Queens Plaza's elevated station
provided with the best view of Manhattan.

A feat that comes with the perk
of maintaining your cellular service
and the downside of witnessing
a live performance at nine a.m.

Two dollars and ninety cents
that felt she wasn't enough
until she realized her worth
and felt she had a higher value.

Two dollars and ninety cents
that influenced a surge in fare invasion,
contrasting her previous form
that at least came with fair persuasion.

Even then, New Yorkers would riot
at her inconvenient and ambitious prices.
Forever questioning her value of just
two dollars and seventy-five cents.



Photograph by Mahdi Tanim.

When Your Skyscrapers Bloom

Laura Tobón

I must say goodbye, my beloved New York. Thank you for turning me into a woman. I must say farewell while my heart agonizes and our most beautiful memories burn to ashes with the heat of my mental fever. Please let me go, for my loneliness hurts me. Let me go, for between your buildings I find no protection. Let me go, for I am naked and crying. Let me go, for I need a transfusion of love, and among your apples, it is too costly. My pennies are not enough to pay for it. I must promise myself something: I will think of you all my life; I cannot love twice, for loving so intensely would lead me to death. My dearest, kept my apartment on Steinway St, my bed, my bike, my job. I will depart with my head held high and leave you my triumph. Do you remember when I arrived with nothing in my hands? Your streets sheltered me, and you cared for my dreams. I will leave you the story of a young immigrant who came with a thirst for success, achieved the American Dream, and left. I'm sorry, my beloved, but I must go; my mind has become ill, and I can no longer distinguish whether I dream asleep or awake. Release me, do not harm me anymore. Inside of you, the sun no longer rises; dollars have begun to dawn, so much cash has damaged and corrupted the hearts and minds that once savored innocence. I wish, with my eyes closed, that you would comb my hair with a comb that doesn't pull it. Unbind me, do not hold me back any longer, do not insist. I want to take with me our best memories; I want to be able to speak of you like a blinded lover. It would be a shame if my short biography ended up as a review of my death in your hands. It would be a pity to stain you like that. Allow me to leave with the most beautiful of your chaos. I, for my part, promise you that when I return, I will bring flowers for your rats.



“Untitled” by Jade Hernandez-Paz.

Puerto Ricans Can't Be Goth

Kayla Texidor

He spat, "When you wear those big chunky boots, you look like those
fucking white girls."

Puerto Ricans can't be goth, you see, and they can't be sad.

We have to know all the bochinche and spread it like they think we spread
our legs.

Wildfire on the dance floor, we love to sing.

But I sound like a coqui and am too shy to dance.

Papi never taught me bachata. He's shy, too.

Puerto Ricans can't be goth, and they can't be gay, and they can't like both.

They can love women,

the kind with gold in their ears and hair to their hips.

But this is only if you're a man,

leaching on our honeyed nectar, spinning tales and affections.

Five different children my grandpa had.

But my dad never knew him.

Puerto Ricans can't be goth, and they can't be white, but they can't be Black.

Only cafe con leche.

They can't speak proper English, and they can't speak proper Spanish, but they
call us angry.

I call it passion.

They can't live in America, but you can find us in every major city.

They can't live on the Island cause los gringos are buying all the land. The
beaches are almost gone; the hotels got those.

Puerto Ricans can't be goth, but they can fight. This, they got right.

A defiance passed down from our ancestors.

Puerto Ricans can't be goth, and they can't wear all black.

Dripped in red florals and color, we must be sexy.

All bust and hips but no morals or wit.

Never someone's wife, always the mistress.

When was I Puerto Rican?

I was Puerto Rican when mi Tio gave me my first pair of Doc Martins and
a biker jacket.

When I got my first set of acrylics and gold hoops.

I was Puerto Rican when my teachers told Mami

I couldn't focus, a little too late,

so they held me back.

I guess they couldn't see the world of fantasy I locked myself away in.

I was Puerto Rican when I first started hating my curls.
Buying a flat iron and straightening them to a crisp,
they've never been the same.
I was Puerto Rican when my first white boy called me spicy
and when one of them knew more Spanish than me.
I was Puerto Rican when my brother died, and my world shattered.
But teachers labeled it an excuse, and so I dropped out of high school.
Puerto Ricans have to be strong, you see?
Sympathy, that's not for us.

I was Puerto Rican growing up in the El Barrio projects.
I was Puerto Rican when my dad dodged stray bullets someone shot into a crowd.
I was Puerto Rican when—

When I went home—our real home
and saw Abuela's barrio in Monacillo
with her eight Chihuahuas,
where I made best friends I would never see again.

I was Puerto Rican when I left a part of myself in El Yunque and Luquillo.
Luquillo, it's different now; the beach is not the same, the magic commercialized.
Yet I walk it because I am Puerto Rican
You may not hear the clunk of my boots in the sand, but they hold me up just fine.

Artist Portfolio:
Fernanda Contreras



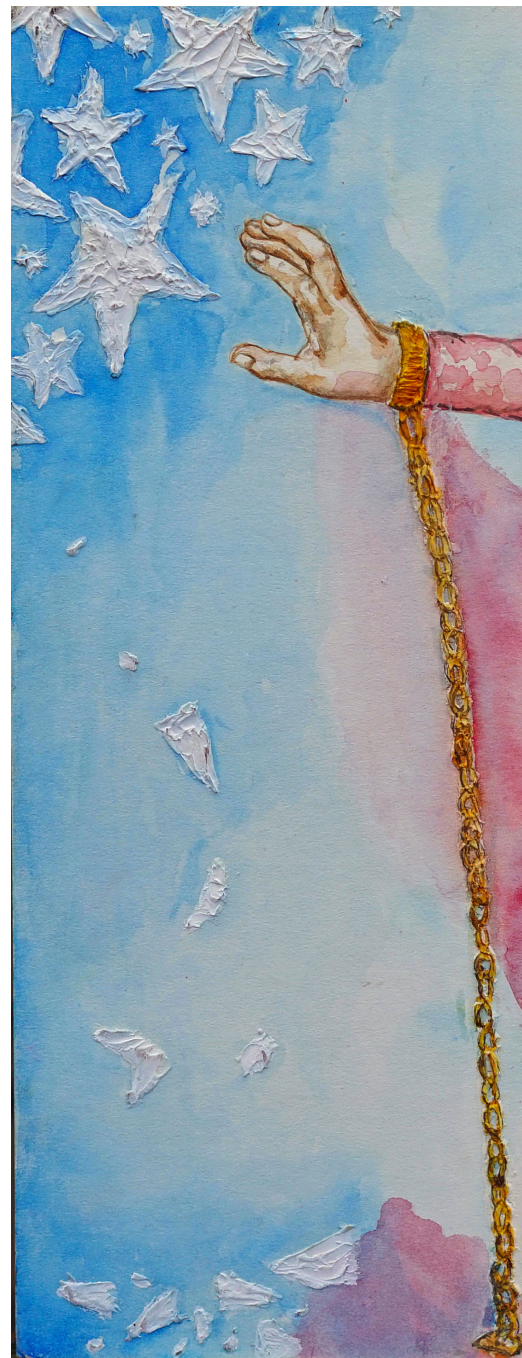


“El Mojado,” gouache on illustration board, 2025.

“Libertad,” watercolor and silicone on illustration board, 2024.

“My work is deeply influenced by my experiences as a child of immigrants, which leads me to explore themes of identity and displacement. I aim to create works that not only reflect these personal narratives but also resonate with broader themes of migration and belonging. My hope is that these pieces evoke a sense of connection, offering viewers a glimpse into the often complex and quiet stories that go unnoticed in daily life.”

—Fernanda Contreras



TU NO PUEDES
COMPRAR
AL
VIENTO



Fernanda
Contreras



"Cinco Centavitos," Fernanda Contreras, watercolor, ink, plastic and can pieces on bristol board, 2024.

Things I Wish My Daughter Knew

N.I.P.

My daughter, my daughter, why do you resent me?

I was just a child,
Starving, fighting to survive,
A girl forced into womanhood
Before I could even live my own life.

When I first held you in my arms,
I had already borne two more.
Your father—a man of many, yet of none—
Left me trapped in a love I could not restore.

I stayed out of hunger, out of need,
Not for love, but for the children I had to feed.

My daughter, my daughter, why do you resent me?

When I came to the States, I breathed my first air of freedom,
Yet within my home, I was still bound.
A mother too young, growing beside the very children
I was expected to raise from the ground.

Three sons, and you—my eldest daughter.
Though you were his, I made you mine.
I did what I knew, the best I could,
Shaping you with hands still unrefined.

I taught you to cook, to clean, to carry grace,
Yet now, I am unwelcome in your space.

My daughter, my daughter, why do you resent me?

You speak of success, of wealth, of power,
And say my sacrifices paved your way.
Yet when you gather in bright-lit rooms,
You do not call my name, nor bid me stay.

I see your dinners, your grand affairs,
Yet my chair remains forever bare.

My daughter, my daughter, why do you resent me?

Did you mistake me for a fortress,
When I was only a crumbling stone?
Did you think I carried no sorrow,
That my wounds were not my own?

You will never know the battles I fought,
The silent prayers, the nights I wept.
You will never know the love I bore,

Even in moments where I failed and left.

My daughter, my daughter, why do you resent me?

I watch you now from a distance,
A stranger to the life you've built.
The songs on the radio whisper my past,
Tugging at the weight of guilt.

I wish I knew what I had done,
Wish we could sit and speak as one.

Yon lanmou piti mwen...
Jan mwen renmen w! S'il vous plaît...

Yet if my absence grants you peace,
If my distance lets you be,
Then I will bear this grief in silence,
And watch your light shine without me.

If forgetting me gives you wings,
Then let my memory fade in the wind.

My daughter, my daughter, why do you resent me?

I may never hear the answer,
May never sit beside you again.
But I have given all I had,
And if losing me sets you free—then be free.



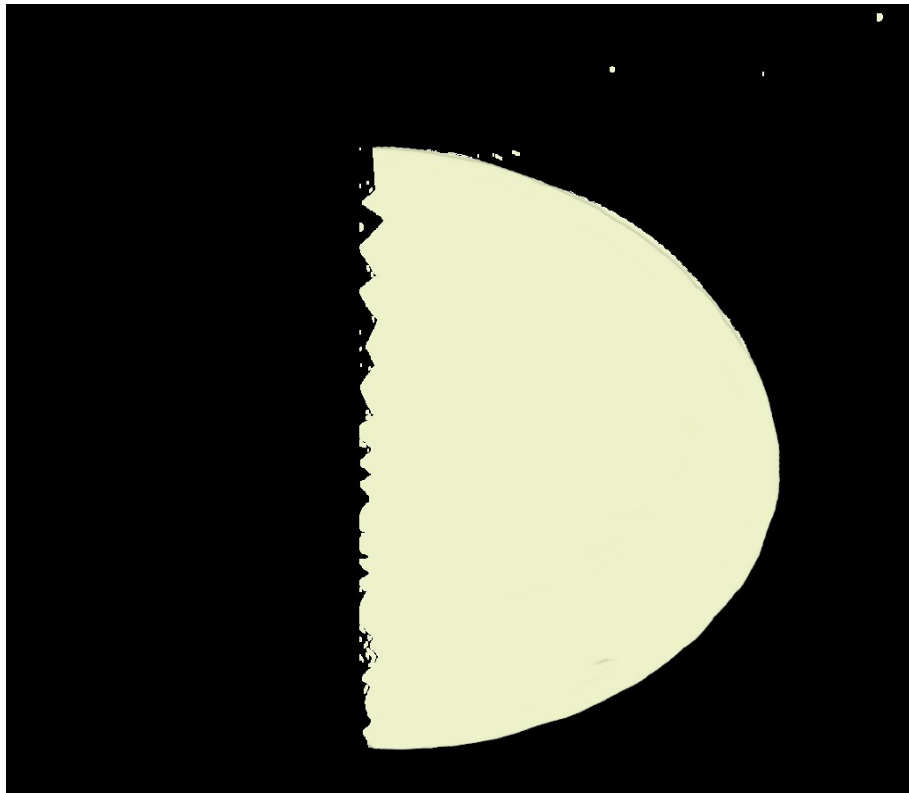
The Past Catches Up to Us

Karlo Krstulovic

In these current times, there are various war crimes.
The cries of children were silenced by a multitude of bombs, or by flames.
In these current times, there are things of remembrance built as shrines.
The silenced can never be forgotten so that we might know their names
even in the afterlife. Their names echo and the unknown sing a song.
A final farewell to welcome the others that come
and join their warm embrace in the long, long
darkness that stretches outward in all directions, but for the same outcome.
An end to things too shortlived, lives that never thrived,
a beginning of eternity where there is nothing more than the dark.
If only the dead could be brought forth again and become revived
so that their long dark could come to a close. Death is a cruel monarch,
though the true monarch of death is man himself, who perpetrates these war crimes.
As with many kings, the only thing left to do is take the crown and break it
apart a million times.

A Bad Egg

Ryan Tenesaca



When he turned the tender age of five, he was given an egg. That egg was his to keep; how he raised it, however, was up to him. It was said when one receives an egg, it would attach itself to its owner: not in the way a pet attaches itself to its master, rather how a leech attaches itself to a body. Its teeth sunken deep in skin, its suckers adjusted

just right for blood to be circulated into its system. He didn't know this, of course. He didn't seem to care, either. He didn't know what was inside the egg, he just knew he wanted one. As days shifted to night, then back to day again, his eyes never once left the egg, its fragile robust shell, brown-tinted to the touch. He would take it everywhere: to outings, to school, to the park, anywhere that would turn the attention towards him; his egg.

One day, a friend asked, "Hey Kota, why does your egg look like that? It's brown and not white like ours." He looked down at his egg and realized it wasn't, it was different from all the rest. Yet he nodded, then looked at his friend, "I don't know why, I'm just glad I have one." his friend nodded in response, in agreement almost, for the fact that as long as they both had an egg to show, everything would be alright. "What do you think your egg will hatch into?" his friend had asked. "I hope mine turns out to be a butterfly," he continued. "A butterfly? That would be nice. I don't know, maybe a fish or a dog." he said, looking down once more at the egg. It never occurred to him what would hatch from it. He was probably the only one who never questioned it. At least, not until his friend had asked him.

Later that day, he laid in his bed, no longer admiring the egg but rather questioning it. The questions his friend asked, dancing around in his mind. The more he thought, the more he obsessed over what the end result would be. He then turned toward the ceiling when abruptly, he felt this strange hollowing in his stomach. A sensation of urgency, of panic. This would be one of many that he would feel throughout his time with the egg. Soon after, he managed to fall asleep with the uncertainty of the unknowing truth he had yet to grasp. When he woke the next day, he noticed the egg had gained a spot on the upper part of its shell. Not knowing what this meant, he paid no mind to it and instead felt excitement: soon his egg would hatch. He was one step further than the rest of his friends. The eggs' growth had finally begun, he thought. That strange sensation vanished, crumbled, and dissolved to ash. At least, for now.

Six years had passed, and his egg had gotten bigger and heavier, and had begun to move. The adults around him had said that once the egg begins to move, it will be ready to hatch soon. The matter of when, they did

**“My egg is fine, guys. Pretty soon it’ll
be the first to hatch, just you wait.”
But that wasn’t the case.**

not know. His mother had told him that it would hatch the more you ran with it. His father, on the other hand, told him that it would hatch if you grabbed a hammer and cracked it open yourself. This would not have bothered him then, but now, it is eating at him whenever he stops to look at the egg. Examining its widened close-to-black spots now surrounding its entirety; staring at its coffee caramel complexion, impatiently awaiting its shell to burst and reveal its marvelous surprise. He then stared at the crack he gave the egg three years ago.

It was the week of his birthday, and he was turning eight that Thursday. He was so excited that he had told every one of his friends to show up, and to his surprise, they did. He didn’t think anyone would show since the sighting of his spotted egg appalled them. Every day he came into school, they would ask about the new spots that revealed themselves every week. “My egg is fine, guys. It’s just in its mid-state right now. Pretty soon it’ll be the first to hatch, just you wait.” But that wasn’t the case. He would later come to find that his would be the last of the eggs to hatch at all.

Thursday came and everyone showed up to help with the celebration. In came the cake, balloons, confetti, piñata. All of them sitting in the living room comparing the status of their eggs; their parents finishing up the preparations. Each of them would show how their egg’s patterns resembled something fairy-like: alluring, ethereal, enchanting; something sprightly and mesmerizing; something pure and innocent. Yet his was not. His was heinous, grotesque and foul, something so terribly loathsome that its own existence would shatter to its very sight. He never allowed his discomposure to show in front of his friends, but this time, he couldn’t help but show his

concern for his embarrassment. That strange hollow feeling snuck back in and wrapped him like a viper with its unsuspecting prey. He was trapped, petrified, by the existence of his egg. The egg that he once cherished and adored, he now despises and regrets. And he, questioning his own vanity, wishing he would vanish into nothingness, hoping for this day – his day – to end.

The next moment, his mother called them over to blow the candles. Everyone began to surround him as the candles were lit one by one. They began to sing to him, and the happiness he felt evaporated, thinned itself and dispersed into pitiful gas. Once they were done, his mother had said to him, “Make a wish, sweetheart,” and then he paused for a moment, pondering what to wish for, and before he could blow out the candles, he heard the faint click of the doorknob, slowly turning to open the door. The echoed footsteps that followed enveloped the hallway that connected to the room they were in. It was his father, his footsteps echoing loudly in the tumbling through the hallway as he approached. Everyone was silent, the adults sharing awkward yet frightened stares; the kids’ showing signs of confusion; and he, petrified, knowing all too well what was to come. Even more, his heart dropped and shattered, following the routine he knew all too well.

In an instant, his father rushed to him, unbuckled his belt, and began to beat him in front of everyone, the table tumbling over, spilling the cake and drinks. Quickly, the adults began to restrain the father; the kids screaming, confused as to what was happening. “Robert, please! Don’t do this!” His mother pleaded, the others trying to pin him down.

“Why?! Why did this have to happen?” he screamed. “Why today? Why him? Why me?” He felt the egg begin to vibrate.

“Get off me, you bitch!” His father screamed out, releasing himself and thrusting the guests back and onto the floor. He then grabbed his wife by the hair and threw her across the room. Her head ricocheting off the edge of the wall. “Now, where is that little shit Kota?!”

But he was gone. He grabbed his egg and left, leaving the adults to salvage what was now a disaster. He reached the park by the end of the road and sat on the swing set, alone. Just him and his egg. He began to tremble and cry, “Why? Why did this have to happen?” he screamed out. “Why today? Why him? Why me?” his voice getting louder and louder until he felt the egg begin to vibrate. He stopped then and lifted the egg. Suddenly, he found that another two spots had revealed themselves. Yet something was still off. He moved the egg around until he found a crack from the bottom up of its shell. He stared at it, hypnotized by its imperfection and brought it closer, hugging it in his embrace. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry,” he had said to the egg, as tears continued to fall down his face.

Now, he is in his room, still staring at the egg, still wondering what this egg will be, his continued frustration rising. He realized then, that he had still not made his wish from three years ago. And so, without a second thought, he closes his eyes and wishes for his egg to hatch. A few moments pass and nothing. The egg doesn’t move, or vibrate, or shake. It simply sits there, on the floor doing nothing. “I knew it. You’re nothing but a joke, a disappointment. You’re worthless, useless, nothing but trash,” he stops suddenly. “No, I am. I’m worthless. I’m useless. I am nothing,” he now says to himself.

He sighs and begins to stand to face his bedroom door, when he hears a cracking sound. He turns once again and faces the egg. It’s beginning to hatch. His eyes begin to widen, his face finally showcasing a genuine smile.

He sighs and begins to stand to face his bedroom door, when he hears a cracking sound. He turns once again and faces the egg. It’s beginning to hatch. His eyes begin to widen, his face finally showcasing a genuine smile.

When the egg bursts open, a human body is revealed. As he moves closer to it, the body turns, and they stare at each other. What he saw wasn’t his fish or his dog, but his creature: a pale, horrendous, foul and repulsive reflection of himself. One that he loathes and wishes would be eradicated, hoping it would know that it would amount to nothing.

“W-What are you?” he asked the creature.

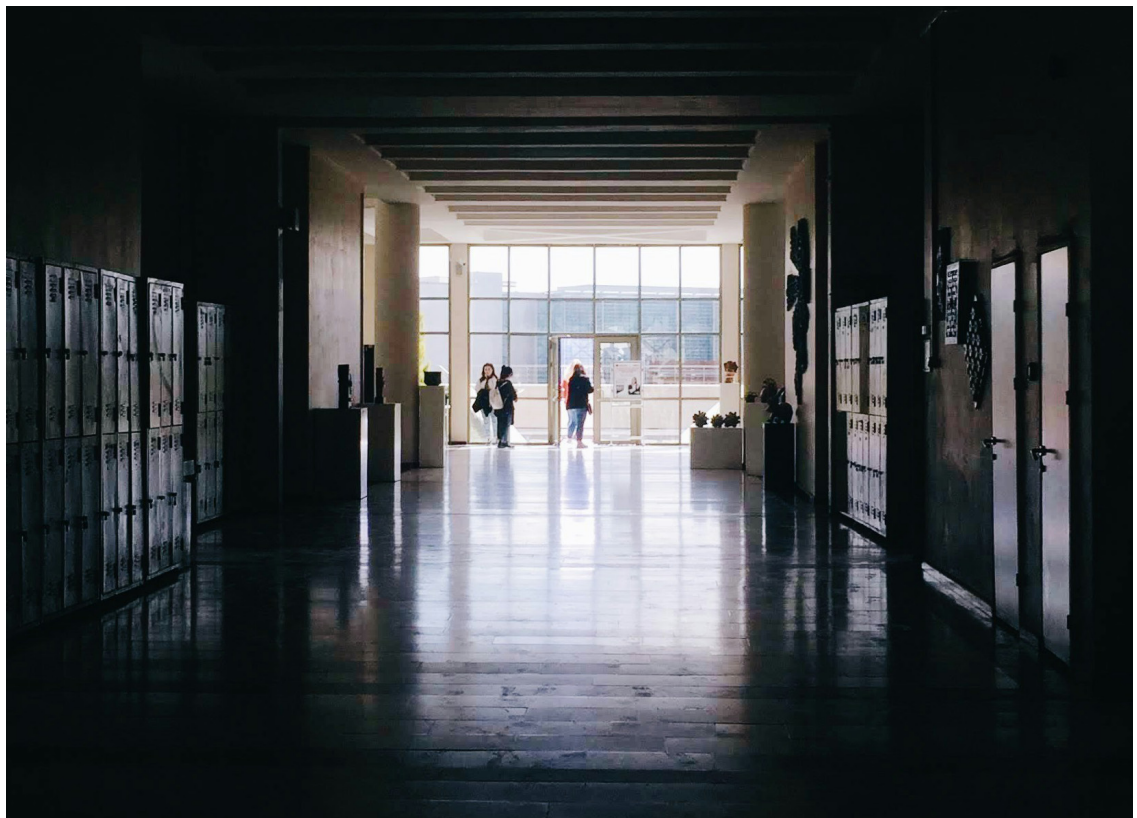
“What do you mean? I’m you.”



“Sport Star”
by Jeremy Allen.

Invisible Sledgehammer

Annalee Hardison



I really have to pee. I briskly walk down the hall trying to avoid everyone as I am just not in the mood. I finally get to my locker and put in the combination as the locker door swings open with a familiar squeak. As I'm getting my books together, I see my friend Shameeka out of the corner of my eye.

"Hey Shameeka, how are you?! I feel like I haven't seen you in forever!" I say with a big grin on my face. Her brown eyes widen, and sparkle as do her full lips, displaying a set of perfectly white but slightly crooked teeth. "Hey Annalee, I'm good! What have you been up to?"

We hug and talk about how it's been a long time since we've seen each other. We haven't had any classes together for a while but we were incredibly close in fourth, fifth and sixth grades. We reminisce a bit more, remembering the same bullies we had to deal with. The cranky old teacher Mrs. Rouse, who smelled like mothballs and body odor, constantly reminding us of "how many days it would be before she could officially retire." All the stupid boys we both had crushes on.

I tell her how I always loved her work in our art classes. Her artwork was always so perfect, vivid and beautiful, whereas mine looked like I might have been dropped on my head as a baby. We look at each other and cackle with laughter just like we used to when we were little. She asks what I'm doing on Saturday May 19th and tells me it's going to be her Sweet-Sixteen birthday party, inviting me to her house for it.

"Sure, that sounds like fun! What do you want for your present?" I reply, knowing that I have no idea what to get her as it's been several years since we last hung out outside of school. She tells me not to worry about it because she knows I'll pick out something good for her like always.

"You still live in the white house across the street from Food Lion?" I

I let out a long sigh and try not to raise my voice because that would only make things worse. I can actually feel my ears starts to get warm as I try to contain my temper.

ask as we're both walking backwards to still see each other. "Yes!" she yells as we get further apart from one another.

We wave at the same time and turn to our classes, not knowing it's the last time we'll ever see or speak to each other again.

I finally get home after school and ask my mom for \$30.

"What's it for? Because you're not buying any more clothes."

I tell her it's for Shameeka's sixteenth birthday, intentionally not looking up from my purse as a wincing pang goes through me at the thought of how my mother will inevitably react. "Who? Is Shameeka that black girl you always got in trouble with in middle school? How many times were you sent to the office because of her?"

I let out a long exasperated sigh and try not to raise my voice because that would only make things worse. I can actually feel my ears start to get warm as I try to contain my temper and calmly explain to her that Shameeka was never the troublemaker mom assumes she was. I tell her that I was invited earlier today, and I'd really like to go despite my mom's prejudiced reservations about it. To this she fumes and rolls her eyes, telling me I'm not going because Shameeka was a 'bad influence' on me, not to mention her family lives in a really terrible neighborhood. "Forget it!" my mom replies coldly.

I open my mouth to protest. She yells at me to shut up about it and storms out of the kitchen. Sometimes I wish I had been born to a different family and wonder what that'd be like.

The weeks go by in a sullen blur as I'm in a depressive funk, agonizing about how racist my parents are, my tentative plans to sneak out to go to Shameeka's party and feeling my anxiety build as I panic, having no clue what to get her as a present. I'll be able to get the money from dad because he's not as bad as mom, but I still have to be secretive about it no matter what. The last time they caught me in a lie they threatened to sell my car for "not abiding by their rules." It's such bullshit. And we don't talk about it. Ever.

I go to school several days later on a Monday morning, feeling listless and flatter than usual. I've barely slept the last few nights, stressing myself out and letting my anxiety roil around in my stomach like dull knives trying to stab their way out. I definitely can't go to Shameeka's party. I think my mom suspected me of planning to sneak out, so she told me this morning that I'm grounded for constantly talking back to her and won't be going out for the next month and a half. I couldn't even look at her when I left. I feel so dejected and angry.

I walk up to my friends in the hall, noticing they're all crying and upset.

"What's wrong?" I ask, dreading the answer because it's already been a long string of crappy days.

"Shameeka and her family are dead. They were shot and killed last night by her sister's ex-husband and the two girls he's living with, the creepy

**I've barely slept the last few nights,
stressing myself out and letting my anxiety
roil around in my stomach like dull
knives trying to stab their way out.**

The news of this is like getting hit in the chest with an invisible sledgehammer, forcing all the air out of my lungs as the pain overwhelms me with its singular devastating blood to my heart.

Mitchelson twins.”

The news of this is like getting hit in the chest with an invisible sledgehammer, forcing all the air out of my lungs as the pain overwhelms me with its singular devastating blow to my heart. I am numb. I can’t breathe. The words my friend spoke rattle around inside my head as I grasp for any semblance of understanding what was just said to me.

I don’t want to believe it.

I start to shake uncontrollably. I feel like I’m going to vomit and faint at the same time. The tears well-up in my eyes, almost blinding me.

“They didn’t have to kill her!!” Tomeka shrieks in disbelief, sobbing violently. I take off and run through the halls to the bathroom, getting her some tissue and coming back completely out of breath from my panicked sprinting.

The bell rings and we all part, going to our first class. I’m barely in my seat when the vice principal comes on the intercom for an announcement.

“Students and Faculty, I’d like to have your attention please. Last night one of our students, Shamicka Davis, died in her home with her family. Police are currently investigating this, and we’ll know more soon. Please keep Shamicka and her family in your prayers.”

I turn towards the intercom and raise my voice even though I know he can't hear me "It's Sha-mee-ka, you asshat!" My teacher gives me a look but says nothing.

The VP's delivery was so flat and rushed I'm instantly insulted. I know it's terrible news he's giving but it completely lacked the thoughtful consideration it deserves. She was my friend and now I'm never going to see her again.

I fight back tears and ask to go to the bathroom.

I remember the first time we ever met. We were in fourth grade when my first period started at school. I was crying in the bathroom because I was not prepared. She asked me what was wrong, and I told her in a hushed whisper expecting to be mocked. She silently reached into her purse, pulled out a maxipad, handed it to me, and smiled. She walked out of the bathroom after telling me it was going to be alright.

And it was, until today.

I walk back to class and slump into my seat as the devastation tries to suffocate me.

The pain in my heart spreads out inside of me as I try to compose myself.

I cannot hear what my teacher is saying.

I can only think of Shameeka and how we had recently reconnected, our final conversation playing over and over again in my head. I lean forward in my chair and let my head droop down over the desk as my tears splash on the dull beige Formica surface, making watery splotches that look like surreal drawings of amoebas. A slight smile flickers across my face.

I realize the perfect gift for Shameeka's birthday would have been a really nice colored pencil and watercolors painting set. The growing lump in my throat swells to its breaking point and feels like it explodes inside of me, the jagged shards of it piercing through my heart and shattering my mind in a million different ways.

I start to raise my hand to ask if I can go home for the day, then silently get up and walk out of class without waiting for an answer.

Art Showcase: Natasha Muriel

At right, “Sara Millerey (Lady Spring),” 2025.

Muriel’s painting, “A Swallow Came to Her,” 2023,
is featured on the cover of *The Lit*.



Between Me and the Sky

Andrea Aguilar

The bench was cold today; my hands pressed alongside the rim of the bench. I wasn't sure why I woke up so early if there was nothing to do; I knew this well, and yet here I was. The breeze made me uncomfortable; the sweater wasn't helping me and instead only made me cold. I looked up at the sky for a moment, watching the clouds cover the sun.

The loud cheering from a child was getting closer; I looked over to where it was coming from. Envious. It ached my stomach, and it made me feel sick. I wasn't sure why I felt this way; I had no ties attached to the child. Yet, I looked at it with anger. Everything about it made me feel nauseous, like at any moment all my insides were blending into one single matter, a slow threat to spill out of my mouth and onto the ground.

The child and its family passed by me, showing no concern towards me. I was nothing but a stranger to them. The cloud uncovered the sun, and it was bright and sunny again. I jolted as my phone rang, scrambling to take it out from my pocket.

"Hello?" I asked, too shaky to see who had called. "Leonid. Are you coming?" The voice sounded poisonous, a soft smile appearing on my face. "Yes, Papa. I will go today. I wanted to know if we could do something together—" The other line cut off before I could finish. On purpose, like always. The distance between us is much greater than before.

The cloud covered the sun once more, the rage inside me staying with the clouds where only I exist.







Showcase: Ian Patino
“Agriculture,” 2024.



“Portal to the Clouds,” Nancy Bishwakarma, 2024.

Ode to the Distance

Andrew Lynch

After Kevin Young, "Ode to the Midwest"

"One more cup of coffee 'fore I go
To the valley below"

—Bob Dylan

I want to be invaded
by love

And swept away like leaves in fall. I want
to melt

into the pot with the spoon
that you stir until

I'm brought to a boil. I want
to evaporate into your breath, a little death, and then -

I want to live
forever in your lungs.

A taste of the air
that you breathe. I want to stumble

A conversation of nothing
I want the easiness of it

To hear the sound of your voice

myself, late, after
everyone's asleep -

As it all was -
I want to see what the bird

sees before he sings
at your new window. I want to be

the only man that you love

I want to want without
your ghost

but with the flesh of your persons.
I want to walk

away. Why drive -

I had love, and stuff, and now -

I want to pick
at the stitches myself.

I want to feel
each fabric your thread has been sewn into

& make it my pillow -

I want to bruise from the water
of a memory bank

& refuse to let the mud of my stomach turn back to solid ground.

I tried,
found it won't dry -

I'll go home, I guess,
to my room where the moon's

not visible, but its light
still is

Weathered Paths

Nafiz Imtiaz Emu



“Shoes,” Vincent van Gogh, 1888.

Here,
by the doorway of my room,
this worn-out witness
of endless roads,
a traveler
that wandered,
now rests still
before me,
silent.

Surrounded
by the dust of time,
these old things,
forgotten shirts—
only you held on
to the truth of the road,
survived the gravel's bite,
the pressing weight
of every step,
the endless miles,
only you: scarred,
cracked-leathered
symbol of endurance.

Only you:
a steady companion
on the journey,
carrying
your many
hidden aches,
Strong, always
holding firm,
gripping tightly to the ground,
soles worn
by countless strides
and the pull of the road,
like a quiet traveler,
a silent friend,
marked by rain and time.

Now,
before me,
retired hero of my adventures;
once
soft as new bark
on bright morning paths,
once a partner
in hurried storms,

now only worn remains.
In the mess of memories,
you are the one
that stands,
unchanged,
in the jumble of my past, you are
a quiet reminder of endless steps.
Your seams and shape,
marked
but steady,
as if you still
stood firm against the wind,
the only
true tool of the road:
unbroken,
unyielding,
walking even now
through the paths of memory.

A Story of Desire

Michael Florent

Chauncy woke up early this Wednesday morning to make breakfast for his family like he always does. It was a simple breakfast: eggs, scrambled for his son and over medium for his wife, sausage, and waffles. The familiar aroma created an atmosphere he was sure would make a great start to the day for his family. His son had just started kindergarten, and it was a source of anxiety for his wife, even though she would never admit it. He knew because she would redirect her anxiety to trivial things around the house, picking at him.

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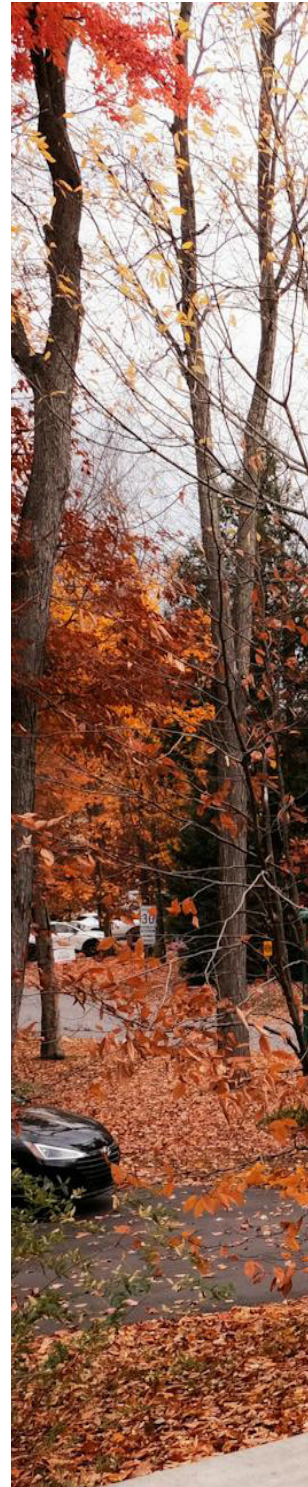
“The eggs are a little overdone.”

“You put a black sock in the white laundry pile.”

“Stop smiling so much, it makes you look like an idiot.”

After fifteen years of marriage, he knew her better than she knew herself. He did not feel like she knew him as well as he knew her, he thought to himself. His wife, Belinda, is a successful pediatrician. Much of her focus was on her clients and running her practice, which she started about three years ago. An ambitious endeavor with a two-year-old at home, but Belinda was an ambitious woman. When they were much younger, their dreams of ambition tied them together.

Pouring himself a cup of coffee, Chauncy walked over to the front window and peeked out the blinds to see his neighbors, David and Delilah. As she walked him to his car, seeing him off for the day, he wrapped her in an





amorous embrace, and they kissed like they were the only two in the world. David wore a well-tailored black suit, probably Armani, and drove off in his red C1 Corvette. Delilah waved him off, standing in her chiffon robe and silk night gown. Her large roller curls bounced as she walked to the mailbox. She threw a knowing glance and met Chancey's eyes.

When he heard the rapid sound of tiny footsteps approaching behind him, Chauncy turned around to see his son blazing a trail straight at him. He turned to embrace him as he did almost every morning.

"How did you sleep, my man?"

"Good! I'm hungry!"

"It's a good thing Daddy made breakfast, let's eat!"

Chauncy walked with Amir to the dining room table as he fixed him a plate of the prepared food. Shortly after, he heard Belinda walking from the bedroom to the living room.

"Good morning!" Chauncy spoke.

"Morning," Belinda grumbled, walking out the front door in her suit pants, blouse, and loafers, already mostly ready to leave for work.

Chauncy sat down at the table with his plate of food and peeked out the blinds to see Belinda briefly interacting with Delilah as she grabbed the mail.

"This is a family neighborhood. She should have more on before leaving the house, for Christ's sake!" Belinda let out as she closed the front door behind her.

Tossing the mail on the counter, walking to the kitchen, and making a plate, she continued, "I remember when David was still married to Martha and he divorced her, and left her with nothing to be with this young tramp."

"How is Martha? I haven't seen her at church," Chauncy asked with no genuine interest.

"Doing better now, but how embarrassing. Her husband left her for a woman half her age.

Of course, she doesn't want to show her face," Belinda said, sitting at the table with her family.

She picked at her plate. Chauncy could see in her face that there were criticisms she barely contained behind her look of contempt as she glowered

**He would say he was drinking with Kevin,
but she had called Kevin's wife. She knew
that Kevin had made it home two hours ago.**

at her food. He was used to it at this point. Belinda drank her black coffee and then carried her son to the car with a brisk goodbye to her husband.

* * *

Delilah waited for David like she did most nights. It was 9 p.m., and he had gotten off work at 6 p.m. It only took fifteen minutes to drive from there to here. He would say he was drinking with Kevin, the only person who would tolerate him at work, but she had called Kevin's wife, Patrice, whom she had met at a work party that he had dragged her into to be his trophy.

Under the guise of just catching up, she knew that Kevin had made it home two hours ago.

Delilah didn't have a job, so naturally, David became her job. She cleaned all day and made dinner. It was cold now, so she put it in the fridge for him later. He would drunkenly take it out and eat it without reheating. After three years, she knew David like the back of her hand. There was nothing he could do to surprise her. Her intimate knowledge of David's habits wasn't helped by the fact that she had no friends. None of the women at church would speak with her for much longer than a cordial greeting, out of loyalty to David's previous wife. She was too afraid of having friends her age, because having her replacement being that close to her would be just too much pain to bear.

She sat near the window and watched as Chauncy got home from work. The lights were already on in his home, and she could make out his wife and child sitting in the living room. As he entered the house, his son ran to his father to embrace him. It was then that Belinda had the good sense to close the blinds. Delilah wanted children so badly, and David had said he wanted

“If I divorced him, I could take half, —this doesn’t have to be a secret.”

them too. They had been trying to conceive ever since they married without luck. It was only after some sleuthing that she learned David had a vasectomy during his marriage to his first wife.

She never confronted him with this.

Delilah didn’t have much money. When she met David, she was a cosmetologist doing nails at a salon near where she lived now. He had convinced her to quit her job, and that he would take care of her. She dreamed of the domestic bliss that awaited her, and now she realized it was a noose.

At 10 p.m., David stumbled into the house drunk out of his mind and smelling of perfume—Chanel number 5. He was with Jessica, his secretary. How unoriginal, Delilah thought.

* * *

It was a Saturday morning, but with the curtains drawn, it felt like night in the room. A night they didn’t want to end. This room was a fantasy world of their creation that shriveled and burned in the light of day.

Chauncy said he was meeting with a potential pro bono client. A standard is that every lawyer must do five pro bono cases yearly at his firm. Part of Belinda thought it was a nice thing to do, and a more significant part believed it was pointless. She never investigated any further.

Delilah told David she would see her family, who lived about an hour away. David did not like her family. They had reservations about David’s character, disapproved of her marriage, and did not attend her wedding. Any mention of her family put David in defence mode. She knew that he wouldn’t ask any questions.

As they lay entangled on the mattress in this hotel room, Delilah knew that her family would like Chauncy. He was a hard worker, humble, and valued family like her father. Her mother would admire his conventional good looks. She couldn’t help but think of what their children would look like.

Chauncy was obsessed with Delilah's full-of-life personality. She reminded him of a time when everything was still new and fun, before he had decided to forsake the romance of life for his responsibilities. Delilah could talk on and on about her interests and never got tired of hearing about whatever he wanted to talk about. She inspired him and encouraged him to grow.

Not once did she criticize his love of pickleball.

"I wish we could run away together," Delilah said, caressing Chauncy's face as she stared into his eyes longingly.

"I do too. You know I've even planned out how I would do it a time or two," he said with a chuckle, but he was serious.

"Really? How would it happen?"

"I would tell Belinda I'm leaving, take Amir, and we'll meet you here. We hit the road and go wherever, maybe another country. We could learn another language, and I'd build our dream home."

"That sounds nice," Delilah said, closing her eyes to bask in fantasy. "If I divorced him, I could take half—this doesn't have to be a secret."

Chauncy's face dropped, and he looked at Delilah with eyes filled with concern. She was young and much too idealistic, he thought.

"Belinda would destroy me, and she would make sure I never see Amir until he's eighteen. The funny part is that she never wanted to have a child. I had to beg. She resents me for having him, and I don't think she'll ever forgive me."

"I would never want you to lose your son."

"I know, so let's just enjoy this moment. While it's ours and ours alone."

It was a blazing hot day where the sun made anything metal left outside too hot to touch. Belinda rode in the car, uncomfortable from the stinging of heated leather seats. She didn't care much for the beach. In truth, she preferred to keep her stretch marks hidden. Some women considered them a trophy of a mother's duty, but Belinda never wanted to be a mother, as much as she loved Amir. It was another payment on the road to being the ideal woman that she had to offer up.

As she and her family set up on the beach, Belinda saw Janice and her husband set up near the water. They were distant, but Belinda could see the blue two-piece bathing suit on Janice's voluptuous body. Like a wave, the memory of her mother catching her and Janice in their youth overtook her, the fear surging through her body as if it were happening right this moment.

“Women don’t lie with women, it’s an abomination!”

”If I tell your father, he’ll skin you!”

“Your older sister never did anything like this. You always need the most work. I swear you’ll drive me to my grave, Belinda.”

As long as she promised to stay away from Janice, her mother would never mention her “affliction,” and they would move past it. To this day, Belinda hesitated to approach Janice in public, but in a private location was another story. Janice was the love of Belinda’s life, and Belinda burned with fury and frustration seeing her with her husband because she lived in a world where she would never be truly seen. Never be allowed to be who she was. Chauncey was good enough, but she danced inside with anticipation for the times she could sneak away with Janice.

She looked over to see him tracking Delilah across the beach with his head. He wore sunglasses so she couldn’t see his eyes, but he wasn’t clever enough not to move his head. He thinks he’s so smart, Belinda thought to herself. She could admit that she understood why Delilah was seen as attractive, but she wasn’t Belinda’s type.

* * *

“Oh, baby! Please don’t forget the parasol,” Delilah had said before he even had a chance to grab sandwiches to put in the cooler. She had taken two hours to get ready, between the fifty potential swimsuits she “needed” to have available for this day. She had spent the entire week preparing, going to the salon, getting manicures, and getting waxed, and not once did she think to buy a sizable cooler.

David had to stop for one on the way to the beach, and he was sure all the best spots would be taken. When they managed to find a place, it was far from where they parked. David thought he’d pass out from the combination of the sun’s rays beating on him, all the items he had to carry, and the flush of embarrassment he felt as he watched Delilah traipse in front of him, carrying only her umbrella for her face.

“You don’t want me to break a nail, do you? You just paid for these!”

As David unpacked, he couldn’t help but notice the Jenkins family. They

Days like these, when he was healthy and successful with his wife by his side, made everything worth it.

had been his first and most cruel family. He had been in and out of the foster care system until he stayed with the Dawkins family, until he was eighteen. He remembered the Jenkins family changed his name to “Timothy” and his birthday. They were not the first family to do that, but the physical and emotional abuse he endured from them still left scars on his mind and body. Days like these, when he was healthy and successful with his wife by his side, made everything worth it.

They repeated to him in many different ways how he would never amount to anything. David knew that their house was being foreclosed on, and so they would be homeless soon. He had a personal hand in initiating the proceedings. Once he was good and settled, he would walk over and “accidentally” spill something on them.

“Come on, baby, let’s get an ice cream!”

David walked with his wife to the ice cream stand, and right in front of him were his neighbors, Chauncey and Belinda, getting ice cream for their son Amir.

“Brother, how are you? I didn’t see you at the last chapter meeting,” David said, embracing Chauncey.

They briefly hugged cordially, but David knew Chauncey was not a fan of his. He joined their fraternity for different reasons than David had. David knew that Chauncey was more of an idealist, believed in more humanitarian pursuits, and probably looked down on David’s more hedonistic lifestyle. That and that David had stolen Chauncey’s first high school girlfriend.

While Chauncey fumbled through excuses and meandered through small talk, David couldn’t help but notice how his eyes frequently strayed toward Delilah. The idiot must have forgotten that his sunglasses were perched on his head, David thought to himself.

Portfolio:
Andrew Ramdat
“Urban Rink,” 2024.







Above: "Urban Wanderer," 2024.

Right: "City of Hope," 2024.



The Fast Lane

Rafael Cevallos



I'm too slow,
Too slow even for the bike lane.
The battery-powered mopeds,
The bikes, the scooters,
They all tear ahead of me in traffic,
Fading in the distance, the space between us grows.
Yet, only moments later, I catch them at the intersection
Where we're all stopped by the same red light.
Someday, I'd like to reach over with my hand
To palpate some faceless rider's radial-pulse
And compare the rhythm of their hearts
To the diminishing speed of mine.
How much is lost to the periphery?
24 hours in a single earth day
And countless seconds which I've existed
That have gone unlived.
There's a Colombian restaurant on 69th st I hadn't noticed
serving dishes I've not yet tried.
And, a few blocks on, a big old house I'll never live in
Which now belongs to me.
The Manhattan skyline looks so pretty
From the overpass on Grand Street,

Beyond the blur of vehicles that come and go
Over the Queens Midtown Expressway.
It's only now I realize, how uniquely vantaged I am to see this,
And hear these lines from unknown dictate,
A voice that clears its throat and speaks infrequent,
Please just stay a little longer, please don't go away.
No other being in existence to see it like I see it,
And write it like I write it,
This moment induplicable, never to be repeated,
This thread uniquely born to me.
I've hit the cosmic lottery.
I've loved and lost, and lived to play again.
I pass a camera store on Fresh Pond Road,
And am surprised to know they're still around.
Are any of these things even worth seeing?
I think I can reach any corner of the earth,
At a comfortable 6 miles per hour,
I'm no longer rushing to the point.
The flashing light on my scooter,
Indicates that the battery is running dry
But it's okay, because, from here on out,
The grade is smooth and easy,
and downhill all the way.



“Sport Star 3,”
Jeremy Allen

The Family House

Jessicah Erundu

I wish this bus would keep going and never stop. But that wasn't going to happen. I steeled myself as I got off the bus, crossed the street, and started the long walk up my driveway. The driveway ran the length of our front lawn, which was by far the biggest one on our street. My Dad often told people that he wanted his kids to have the biggest space to play in, and that was why he specifically chose the house with the biggest lawn. I secretly hated it. Anytime we were on that lawn, I'd casually look around and see curtains shifting, heads peeking out of doors, even cars slowing down to watch the only black kids on the street. No matter what, it was like we were always being watched.

As soon as I opened the front door, a wave of noise and smells hit me. Before I even had a chance to process anything, I heard, "Good, you're home! I need your help in the kitchen. Now!" I sighed.

Fuck.

I dropped my bag and made my way over to the kitchen. The scene that greeted me was utter chaos. Every burner on the stove was occupied with various foods being cooked. The counter was filled with different vegetables and spices, waiting to be chopped. My mom, looking more tired than usual, frantically going back and forth between the two. And, of course, the sink was filled to the brim with pots and pans. Before she even opened her mouth, I knew what she was going to ask. "Nne, please. I have so much to do before I have to go to work. Can you help me out with the cleaning?" I looked over at the living room, where two of my little brothers were playing video games at top volume without a care in the world. "Mom, I know they've been back for at least two hours. Why didn't you ask them to help you?"



She shook her head, “Come on, you know how they are! They don’t know how to do it right. Please, just help me out, and I’ll ask them to do it next time.” I took in her disheveled appearance and pleading eyes, and rather than pointing out the very obvious lie, I made my way over to the sink.

Fuck.

As I slowly worked my way through the dirty dishes, I let my mind wander. There were so many aspects of this house that I hated, but this sink might be the thing I hated the most. There wasn’t a day that went by that I

**As soon as I opened the front door,
a wave of noise and smells
hit me. Before I even had a chance
to process anything, I heard, “Good,
you’re home! I need your help in the
kitchen. Now!” I sighed.**

didn’t spend hours at this sink, washing a never-ending pile. The Sisyphean nature of it was enough to drive me insane. The worst part was the way I couldn’t refuse to do it. “No” wasn’t an option in this house.

All of a sudden, I heard a loud, grating sound coming from the garage. I whipped my head to check the time on the oven clock.

5:20.

My dad was back from work.

Fuck.

I quickly rinsed my hands, jumping into action. I had been so preoccupied with my thoughts that I hadn’t realized the house had become eerily quiet. My brothers, probably having heard my dad’s car come up the driveway, had already made their escape to their room. My mom had already gone to work. My sisters were already in our room, having stayed there all day to avoid the chaos of the first floor. It was just me left, out in the open. The door to the garage was opening.

I darted behind the staircase before the door opened fully and waited. My dad's heavy footsteps echoed throughout the entire house, and I held my breath as I tracked his path, waiting to move. His footsteps made their way into the kitchen I had just been in, walking around and opening the pots of food my mom had cooked. Then they made their way out of the kitchen, coming closer and closer. I couldn't tell which was louder, his footsteps or my heartbeat.

They stopped.

I let out a silent breath as I heard his office door open and close behind him. The muscles in my body started to relax, and I carefully made my way up the stairs. I hadn't immediately gone up when he came into the house because our staircase was extremely creaky, and he definitely would have heard me going up while he was outside his office. However, the door usually muffled the creaking noises once he was in his office.

Or so I thought.

Just as I reached the top of the stairs, my foot came down too hard, and an impossibly loud creak filled the air. I froze.

For a split second, the entire house was silent. Maybe he hadn't noticed—"Who's that on the stairs?"

Fuck.

I was caught.

I turned around and walked back down the stairs, each step filling me with more and more dread. I got to the bottom of the stairs and opened the door to my Dad's office.

I usually never came in here if I could avoid it. Nothing about this room was particularly inviting, from the all-encompassing desk that took up most of the room, to the stone-faced man behind it. I stood in front of his desk and waited.

After a long moment, he finally spoke. "Do you know why your teacher called me today?" he asked, his voice was deceptively quiet. I didn't answer.

**All of a sudden, I heard a loud, grating
sound coming from the garage.
It was coming.
Any second now.**

At times like this, speaking only made it worse. Seconds ticked by. As the silence stretched, the palms of my hands itched and grew moist.

It was coming.

Any second now.

“WHY IS YOUR TEACHER SAYING YOU’RE FAILING YOUR CHEMISTRY CLASS?!”

Flinching, I immediately looked down. As the yelling continued, my eyes were glued to the floor. Embarrassment spread through my body, and shame heated my face, but my eyes stayed on the floor. Even as tears filled them up, hot and unwanted, my eyes stayed trained on the ground.

The yelling went on and on, and the tears eventually made their way down my face and onto the floor. Despite the situation, I couldn’t help regarding the sight in a detached sort of way. I thought nothing in this office was inviting, but that wasn’t exactly true. The paneling on the wood floorboards was very polished, making it easy for my tears to blend in, adding to its luster. It welcomed them like old friends.

Finally, the yelling ended, with my dad demanding that I go to my room as punishment. I fled from that damn office, running up those traitorous stairs, and burst into my room. Or should I say our room. My two sisters, whom I shared it with, mobbed me the second I came in, flinging question

after question at me.

“What happened?”

“Did you really fail a class?”

“Are you gonna get left back?”

“I thought you were smart! Why are you failing?”

Up until this point, I had kept my anger and frustration in check, like I always did. But after enduring everything from school, to my mom, to my brothers, to my dad, and now my sisters? I snapped.

“FUCK!”

My sisters recoiled, shocked at my outburst. Even I was taken aback. I hadn't meant to say that out loud; it just came out. I looked at both of their faces and saw fear reflecting back.

I had put it there.

I took a deep breath and wiped the tears from my eyes. “Look, I'm sorry, I just...need a minute.”

They looked at each other, nodded, and moved out of the way, leaving the path to my bed clear.

At last, I climbed into my bed, the weight of the day slowly melting away. I looked around at my toys and books that I always kept on the bed, even though they made sleeping uncomfortable at times. My family didn't understand why I insisted on keeping them there, but I was adamant. If nothing else in this house was mine, this bed would be. Deciding I was too tired to read, I got under the covers and lay still, facing the wall so my sisters couldn't see my tear-stained face.

I lay there for hours, pretending not to hear the worried murmurs from my sisters, the taunts from my brothers, or even the calls from my dad. “She's sleeping!” my sisters called back. I smiled weakly to myself. Sleep was the only sacred thing in this house. I closed my eyes and prayed that my subconscious would give me the dream I craved the most:

A peaceful home.

Thoughts Buried Beneath My Pillow

Natalie Edmond



I couldn't tell my body wasn't ready

He didn't ask if I was okay

He just wanted to consume me as quickly
as he unwrapped that red packet condom

My silence entangled within the darkness
as he stuck his fingers inside me

The flower of my innocence ripped open

It wasn't making love

And it wasn't fucking

It was something more empty than that

The evidence stained on my left sleeve



Why Can't You See That I Love You?

Karlo Krstulovic

Heavy footfalls pound against a wooden staircase,
drums of war echoing against the walls.
The thundering sounds shake the foundations below my feet.
Remembering a time when the thunder was simple and sweet.

A rainbow comes after heavy rain,
but what if the downpour beats against a body,
more pain.
Lush, beautiful and full of life,
once a thriving ecosystem now ripped apart and maimed.

Tears flow down cheeks they have not seen in years,
young and bright-eyed baby sputtering sounds that cut silence like spears.
Once the thundering echo rocked a crib that apartment walls stifled,
disappearing
into sounds of distant euphoric bliss.
A toilet flushing and a baby crying,
yelling of two cocks fighting both wanting to be on top.
Making love, a sacred art treasured.
Heavy footfalls against wood measured

with anger of a long day toiled and worked.
Here there is a sole horse rider,
I remain, a silent spider,
webs etched into the shadows of my own home.
Forking over what remains of myself to the whipping winds that scrape
trees against my window.

Call it love to lessen the blow,
my body roars with purple and blue,
only the words echo
Why can't you see, I love you!
Screeching tires outside once the deed is done,
flying down the runway that makes the street outside home.
Off into the night to drink and be alone
a few moments of respite for my body to atone.
Sins committed against my temple,
the house creaks with a heavy groan.
Or was that me?

Greater Than

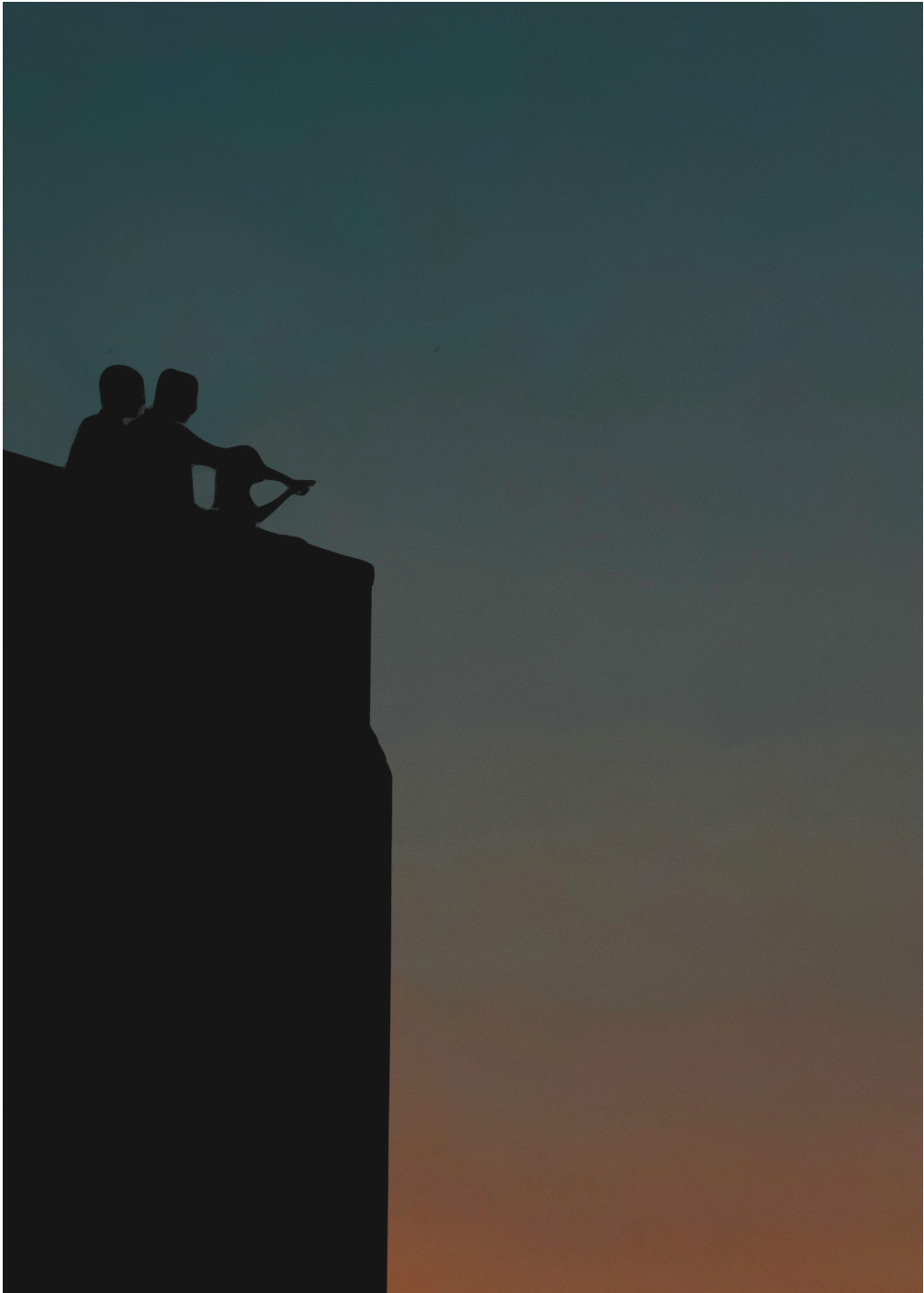
Alessandra Ventura

I wish I could believe
I am more than the labels
that the ghosts of my past
have branded onto my skin.

But their thoughts have become my own.
Their words now leave my lips.
And I cling to them like gospel,
always a glutton for punishment.

Believing them has become my covenant.
And even in the rare moments
when I feel like I've paid
more than enough of the price,
absolution remains out of reach.

Built brick by brick,
by my very own hands,
This prison is a way
to atone for my sins.



The Boys Under the Moon

Casey Garcia

Jack's eyes glimmered under the moon as he watched the planet that lit up his nights. He would sneak up to the roof with his friend and take in all its different phases, including the eclipses.

He did this every night. It never changed.

"I was born on a full moon," he whispered, looking at a familiar face. The person just chuckled at his sentence starter.

"Nice way to start a sentence," his voice slightly higher-pitched with a hint of amusement in his voice

"Thanks, Ian," Jack responded sarcastically, shooting him a sideways glance. Ian rolled his eyes, but Jack caught the way his lips twitched, like he was holding back a smile.

"I brought it up for a reason- do you ever feel like your life is influenced by nature?" Jack's question stumped Ian, causing a slight eyebrow raise. Jack is unsure if this is something he should be sharing.

The truth was Ian could listen to Jack talk about anything, his thoughts always felt like tiny pieces of the universe, like they meant something bigger.

"I mean, I do get in a good mood when I see those blue flowers you buy me," Ian said, his smile brightening the star-filled night.

"No, not like that, idiot," Jack scoffed, reaching out to swat Ian's shoulder. Ian let out a dramatic gasp, rubbing the spot like Jack had actually hurt him.

"I mean... on days that flowers bloom, does that mean it's the best day? And then, some days, the flower is dry, and it's like everything is crumbling. And then, the flower dies, and suddenly, you can't even get out of bed," Jack muttered, his voice dropping near the end. He fidgeted against the fabric of his hoodie tugging on the strings, as if the words felt too raw now that they

**“You were so scared to show me
this side of you,” Ian murmured.
“The side you wouldn’t even dare
show your parents.”**

were spoken.

Ian didn’t answer right away. He instead leaned against Jack, their shoulders pressed together. Jack tensed but then he let himself relax into the touch. It wasn’t bad.

“No... I don’t think I’ve ever felt that way,” Ian admitted after a moment. His voice was quiet but steady. “But I know someone who has felt like nothing on days when the moon was nowhere to be seen. Someone who spirals when the moon is barely at its best phase.”

Jack tilted his head slightly in confusion, his gaze shifting to Ian’s face.

“You, dummy,” Ian cooed, a teasing smile tugging at his lips, but his eyes were soft, knowing.

Jack let out a small breath of laughter. “Ah—gee, thanks.”

After that, it was completely silent. Not even the crickets made a sound. The only thing audible was their heartbeats and the song of the night. The moon brightened more and more, almost yelling at Jack.

“But... that’s what makes you... perfect,” Ian broke the silence with that sentence.

Jack felt his breath catch. The screaming glow of the moon subsided and so did his mind. He snapped his head toward Ian so fast he almost gave himself whiplash.

“I am not... that,” Jack whispered, shaking his head, his voice carrying something heavy. Something unsure.

Ian just looked at him “You are.”

Jack exhaled sharply. “As if-”

“I remember that night,” Ian interrupted gently. “The night you came up here, crying so hard you could barely breathe. It was unbearably hot, even though it shouldn’t have been at that hour. And you... you weren’t looking for help. You weren’t even looking for me. You were looking for the moon.”

Jack tenses to the memory of that day.

“But it was nowhere in sight. You didn’t care about the pain or anger you felt in your heart that day—you just wanted to watch the moon again.” Ian’s hand found its way to Jack’s.

“You were so scared to show me this side of you,” Ian murmured, his voice softer now, like he was afraid the words might break something. “The side you wouldn’t even dare show your parents.”

His hand tightened around Jack’s, almost instinctively—like he could shield him from whatever storm was raging inside. Like he could protect him from the weight of his own emotions.

Jack swallowed hard. His chest ached. He had never liked feeling vulnerable. He had spent years perfecting the art of hiding. But Ian... Ian always had a way of seeing right through him.

“But do you know why the moon is so perfect?” Ian asked.

Jack blinked, his voice barely there when he spoke. “Why?”

“Because even in the new moon phase, even when it’s at its weakest, it still exists. And even when it’s not whole, it still tries to glow—to light up the dark sky in its own way.”

Jack let his gaze drift upward. The moon wasn’t full tonight. It wasn’t even close. But it was still there, cutting through the darkness in the only way it knew how.

“That’s why I think you’re perfect- because you show your true self, even when it’s raw: vulnerable, happy, angry. And just like the moon, I get to watch you go through so many phases...but no matter what, you’re still Jack,” Ian says, his voice soft yet steady, like he’s sharing something too precious to take back.

"I don't really focus on much—like global warming or all that stuff. But... if the sun and the moon could be together, without tearing the world apart or destroying space, they would be happy. Because the sun has seen the moon in all its phases. And it still loves it, even when it's not whole."

Jack quickly put the pieces together, his head snapping to Ian with such force he almost gave himself whiplash. "What?"

"What?" Ian replied, his tone light and playful, though his eyes were focused on Jack.

"Ian...I'm not—"

"Perfect??" Ian cut him off, the words fast as he pointed toward the crescent moon. "Yeah, well neither is that." Jack stared at the moon for a beat, the quiet of the night hanging between them.

"But look how bright it is," Jack said softly.

"You are equally as bright," Ian says, his voice sincere, yet carrying a softness that only Jack could hear.

Jack turned to him, the words settling like warmth in his chest. "I'd like to think everyone has their own moon in their life- the one person who lights up their nights. And that person...is you. For me..."

The air between them seemed to still, as if the night itself was listening to Ian's confession, hanging on to every word.

"And you're my sun," Jack murmurs, his voice barely above a whisper, as the warmth reaches his cheeks.

Ian's eyes softened at the words, but then he quickly tried to lighten the mood. "Hey! At least we won't cause a catastrophe like the sun and the moon."

Jack let out a small chuckle, but Ian's playful tone quickly shifted to confusion. "Wait... what?" he says, his brow furrowing as he realizes what Jack had just said.

"I'm not repeating myself," Jack says, his eyes fixed on the moon, a small, teasing smile tugging at the corner of his lips.

Ian's face turned beet red at the words, a rush of heat that wasn't just from the embarrassment.

Maybe the world was falling apart. But here, under the moon, it didn't matter.

"I- I hate you," Ian says, his voice shaky but filled with something Jack couldn't quite place. Before Jack could respond, Ian grabs the collar of his shirt and pulls him in, pressing a soft, fleeting kiss to his lips.

They pulled apart slowly, the night air still and heavy, as if the world itself was waiting. The moon hung above them, casting soft light over everything, but it wasn't cold. It was warm, like the kind of warmth you feel when something familiar and constant is just within reach.

Jack stared at it for a moment, the moon, with all its phases—waxing and waning, always coming back no matter how many times it was hidden. He thought about the world—the heat, the storms, the way everything seemed off-balance lately. But here, in this moment, with Ian next to him, it didn't feel as heavy.

"It's funny, isn't it?" Jack murmured, his voice quiet in the stillness of the night. "The moon, how it keeps changing, but it's always there. Even when it disappears, it comes back, you know?"

Ian didn't say anything for a moment, just looked up at the moon too, his fingers still intertwined with Jack's. When he spoke, his voice was soft, like he wasn't sure if it was too much to say. "Yeah. Just like us. We'll always come back."

Jack let that hang in the air, a quiet truth in it. Maybe the world was falling apart. Maybe everything was changing faster than they could keep up. But here, under the moon, it didn't matter. The world had its cycles, just like they did. And maybe that was enough.

The moon was still there. And for tonight, that was all they needed.

Contributors' Bios

Andrea Aguilar is an aspiring writer who is working on a novel with a dear friend called *mou Cherie*. She believes that the more keychains in your bag, the happier you will be! She is always working on a piece or dreaming about something not important. Her cat, Nemo, is the mastermind behind her homework.

John A. Birt (he/him) is a student at LaGuardia Community College majoring in Liberal Arts: Journalism. He has a passion for creative writing, digital design, and storytelling.

Nancy Bishwakarma is a programming and software development student with a love for painting. As an escape from the tech world, their artwork allows them to disconnect and find peace. Nature-inspired, their paintings often feature green as a recurring color.

Rafael Cevallos is a lover of adventure who's dedicated significant amounts of time to exploring the Ecuadorian rainforest. After years of travel, his fascination with human movement and exercise as the ultimate form of preventative medicine lead him to LaGuardia Community College, where he majors in Physical Therapy. He currently works as a rehabilitative exercise specialist. His time on the road and now, as a student, have been part of a process of discovering his voice as a writer. He is working on a collection titled, "Love, Violence and Other Cosmic Vagaries." Follow him on Instagram @r.i.cevallos

Fernanda Contreras, a child of immigrants, uses her art to express her experiences and passionately advocate for immigrant-related issues. Through storytelling, she sheds light on the struggles and resilience of immigrant communities in her home, New York City. Her work has been showcased at the Atlanta High School Art Exhibition during the Dogwood Festival and mentioned in the Newnan Times-Herald.

Jessicah Erundu is a student at LaGuardia majoring in Creative Writing. In her spare time, she can be found writing fiction, obsessing over television and



Artwork, "Neon Currents," Nancy Bishwakarma, 2025.

film, and attempting to learn how to crochet for the fourth time.

Casey Garcia is a proud Afro-Latina born and raised in the Bronx. Garcia's writing focuses on fiction, often exploring fantasy, horror, and slice-of-life genres. Currently, Garcia is pursuing a Creative Writing degree at LaGuardia Community College, with the goal of becoming both an author and a journalist.

Annalee Hardison is a student at LAGCC and has lived in NYC for over 20 years. She is an English major, has a cat named Squeaky and wants to become a professional author if Trump doesn't get us all killed with his Twitter account first. God help us all.

Karlo Krstulovic is a student at LaGuardia majoring in Creative Writing. They play Dungeons and Dragons in their spare time, they also write prose, non-fiction and have written a few screenplays during their residency at LaGuardia.

Majoring in Music Performance, **Andrew Lynch** is a multi-instrumentalist, singer, songwriter, and producer at heart. Under the alias Tripp 41, he released his debut EP *All Chaos and Blur* (2022) followed by the debut album *Crusher* (2023).

Natasha Muriel is a Latina transgender art student from Queens, New York. She was born in Colombia, but moved to New York in pursuit of the American Dream. She wanted to live in a place where she could express herself openly, freely, and without any hesitation. Art is her therapy when she feels overwhelmed, lost, or in despair. Her work is a constant exploration to interpret the world in which she is immersed, especially, living in a time of uncertainty and constant attacks on a trans community in need of being seen, respected, and understood.

N.I.P is currently a student at LaGuardia Community College, pursuing a degree in nursing. She is also a valued member of the Support Services team through her work-study assignment. Beyond her academic and professional roles, N.I.P is a devoted mother and a resilient survivor. Writing has always been a refuge and a passion for her, and she dreams of publishing her poetry and a book that will inspire readers worldwide.

Andrew Ramdat is a Commercial Photography major at LaGuardia Community College. He enjoys shooting photography in his free time. He believes photography can help us appreciate the world more. Instagram handle: @andrew.ramdat

Ryan Tenesaca is driven by the unsettling beauty of the bizarre. He is an aspiring writer delving into the realms of weird fiction. His imagination thrives in the spaces where reality frays, and the human psyche confronts the inexplicable. Through his stories, he aims to weave suspenseful narratives that linger in the mind long after the final page, exploring the eerie, unique, and unsettling perspective. He is eager to share the strange and captivating worlds taking shape within his words.

Kayla Rene Texidor is a second-generation Puerto Rican writer from Spanish Harlem pursuing a degree in Creative Writing. Passionate about exploring identity and heritage, she draws inspiration from Taino cultural myths, aiming to publish a sci-fi/fantasy series one day. Kayla's work often reflects the complexities of being Latina, Queer, and from the inner city, weaving narratives of resilience, cultural pride, and self-discovery. She aspires to do work that amplifies Latinx voices and myths. Beyond writing, she enjoys creating art, cosplay, gaming, and spending time with her cat.

Born and raised in Medellín, Colombia, **Laura Tobón** carries the rhythm, resilience, and color of her roots in everything she writes. She currently lives in New York City, where she is building the life of her dreams: writing, studying, and shaping her voice as an emerging bilingual writer. For her, writing is a way of breathing; it's survival, healing, and purpose. Her work explores the emotion captured in her perception of life, where every word is born with the purpose of leaving beautiful scars on those who read it.

Born in Mexico City and raised in Astoria, Queens, **Alessandra Ventura** is a Latina creative who is making it her mission to reconnect with her roots and implement her culture into her work. She loves any form of writing, but her main favorites are prose and poetry. She works as an English tutor at the Writing Center at LaGuardia Community College, and recently won the Neal Feld Memorial Prize for Poetry. Alessandra will be pursuing a career as a professor of Creative Writing and is going back for her Master's.

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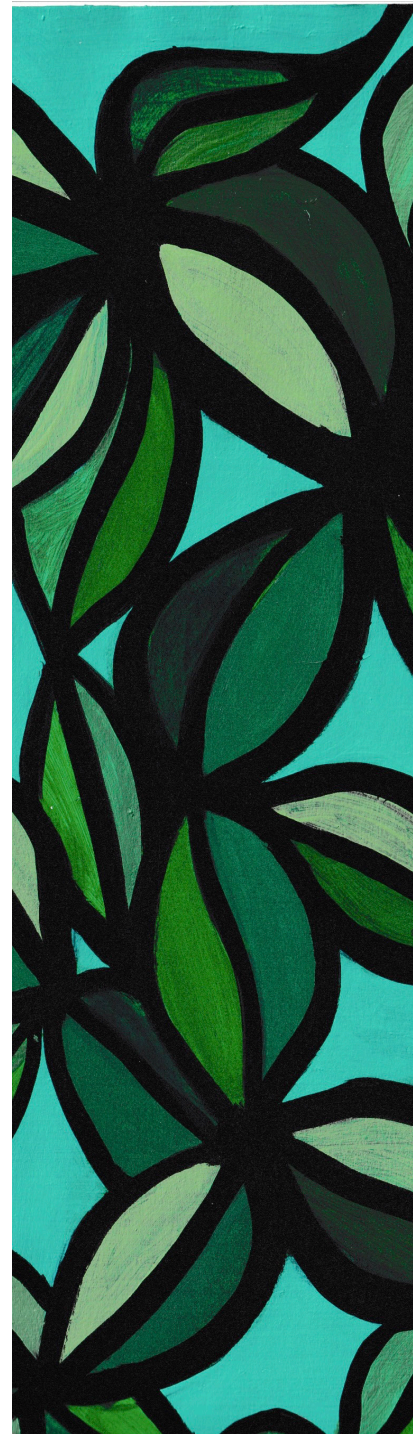
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“Nature’s Frame,” Nancy Bishwakarma



arma, 2025.

THE LITERARY AND ART MAGAZINE OF LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
SPRING 2025

EDITED BY THE STUDENTS IN ENGLISH 288—THE LIT

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