cover & inside cover art by Lucy Curtis.
Dear reader,

It’s been a challenging year. A global pandemic brought a new sense of isolation to our community at Puget Sound as classes went online, and rapidly increasing political polarization amplified our fears and anxieties about the future. The challenges that this year has brought have affected marginalized groups the most. Feeling overwhelmed and exhausted by all of the challenges that we face now is valid and expected. Yet, it’s important to remember that along with systems of power that protect societal injustices, there will always be a corresponding revolutionary movement. To quote a former editor-in-chief of Wetlands, Hannah Ritner:

“There is revolution in our forms of creating, in how we build community, and in how we care for each other.”

The mission of Wetlands has always been to elevate the marginalized voices of our community, and it’s never been more critical than now to listen to those who have the courage to speak. This issue contains pieces that address a variety of important themes, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. These pieces address personal trauma, societal injustice, healing, and love, and I think everyone will be able to find something personal within each piece.

I want to sincerely thank all of the Wetlands staff for their dedicated work on this publication made in an entirely new way. Although the semester was not without difficulties (so many Zoom meetings and emails), we came together to uplift students’ voices during an essential time. I’m so grateful to be a part of this publication, and I hope that it only continues to grow in the future. I also want to thank all of the people who submitted their work to Wetlands — especially those brave enough to have their work critiqued in the class anonymously.

Finally, I want to thank you, the reader, for taking the time to read these narratives that express deep vulnerability. I hope that in reading this issue, you have the opportunity to think about your own identity, positionality, and privilege as it relates to your time at the University of Puget Sound.

Rachael Stegmaier
Wetlands Magazine provides an inclusive, accessible, critical and safe form for students to amplify marginalized voices and facilitate mutual education through the celebration of intersectional art, poetry, literature, performance, and advocacy on the University of Puget Sound campus.
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Luke 12:49
“I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?”

For home
In the obsolescence of time
warped wings caress western skies that
stir over burning fields of strawberries,
crucified atop conquered sod that
awaits sacrifice to a pale god who
ships cardboard boxes to stucco homes

With Love
(What my homie said)
I sent a call deep into concrete desert, despairing
The voice on the other end spoke in an apathetic drawl
I asked if it can still see hope through smothered skies

If in the evenings it can still see the palm trees
Dance through a sea of violets
It told me people still get killed at night,
That it heard the gunshots in the courtyard
Then the cries of the mother turn to silent winds
I asked it if in times of tragedy it
Weeps in the arms of a scorching sun, if it
Kneels below overpasses as the
Echoes of its cries
Carry it to a righteous peace
It told me it isn’t very religious
Though like Jesus it
Still takes the time to watch the birds sing love songs

Crows Over California
Theo Meranze (art by Lucy Curtis)

CONTENT WARNING: violence, trauma
At the prom I never had,
you held my hand & I kissed you on the cheek.
When you asked me to go,
you said it was supposed to be ironic.
That’s just an indie boy way
of saying you want to but won’t admit it.
At the prom I never had,
my dress was blue,
sky blue,
the color of my eyes
& drug store eyeliner
& not letting you grope me
when I’m too drunk to stand.
I almost wore a suit,
& almost convinced you
to wear a dress,
but in the end
we’re just shadows of our parents.
At the prom I never had,
I still wasn’t what I wanted
or
what you wanted, either.
I am told that he made me
to bask in his sunshine gaze.

He speaks of my curves
and tells me that I am beautiful.

He stares at me
and undresses me with his eyes,
I think he sees delicate beauty,
but I see Violence.

Violence follows my tired form home
in the dark;
Violence leers at me across a parking lot.

There is no line between pleasure and pain.
There is no innocence left for him to take.

I look in the mirror and I see
skin and muscle and bone.

I am looking for the girl he made out of porcelain.
I am looking for the girl he wants to devour.
But all I see is a girl
who screamed her way out of fleshy darkness,
only to be made into a porcelain doll
that Violence wants to take apart slowly.

I am looking in the mirror every day
to gauge whether I am human or doll.

I am looking for the girl
who shatters against the pavement,
I am seeing the woman who stands back up.

I am looking for his broken porcelain girl.

Kaya Heimowitz
untitled works by Lucy Curtis
On Vashon Island, you found art without a name, a cement sculpture that would one day be green with moss and erode from the salt air. On Vashon Island, you remembered that even cement and rocks aren’t forever.

There’s a quiet question that buzzes like a sand fly around brie in the sun when two bodies lay side by side on a beach blanket, shirtless, their skin wet and salt-sticky from submerging in the water, where fish ran from their feet.

He rubbed sunscreen into your back and you told him to stay there for an hour, forever, don’t stop.

Two children, a boy and girl, probably twelve, run across the beach. You remember being twelve. Being with girls. Trying to be with girls. Now you want to kiss him, but you don’t want the kids to see, as if it would be wrong for them to see.

On Vashon Island, you told him how you love trees in suburbia, how poetic it is when they crack and break those perfect lawns, those perfect streets.

He tells you nature saved him, playing outside saved him on those days when his brothers with a rope looked to tie him to the upper bunk. He learned to get out of the tie, and out of the house.

Waiting for the ferry back you walk out with him onto the rocky, barnacled shore. He flipped the bigger rocks like your old friends—your middle school, church friends—used to flip rocks. Looking for crab. Even the tiniest crab scuttle away when he opens their home’s rock-door. There are millions here, all under the rocks. Another world. Another sphere of existence. He held a big crab up for you to see; close enough for you to see its eyes, the shape of its claws, but far enough for you to know that you are safe. Your old, middle school friends would have tossed one on you, you would’ve screamed. But there, on Vashon Island with him, you felt safe.
art by Lydia Thompson
“Growing up as a Korean-American, I’ve always felt a divide in my personality. Since I am one of the first in my family to be born on American soil, I still feel very much connected to my Korean roots, but at the same time, America is where I grew up and went to school. I’ve always felt out of place, because I felt like I was too American to be Korean, and too Korean to be American. In this poem, I tried to depict the constant struggle between racial and national background that I have gone through.”
Butterfly fly away
To the persimmon tree
In my backyard.
The sweet fruits that ripen every winter,
People always asking me what it is.

Butterfly fly away
To the place where my blood runs deep
And my roots begin.
Where the faces are similar to mine,
And my favorite foods are the norm.

Butterfly fly away
To my grandmother’s kitchen.
Spices and smells of home mingle in the air,
Clinging to our clothes long after we’re done.
A drama playing softly as I learn another recipe.

Butterfly fly away
To the school cafeteria, where my lunch
Is very different from those around me.
Wishing for a sandwich, the smell of spices
Prompting kids to tease and hold their noses.

Butterfly fly away
To the place where street vendors judge you
As you fumble with your native tongue
Where people stare
As you try to navigate the subway

Butterfly fly away. Where do you belong?
Which national anthem do you sing?
Destined to forever fly across the sea.
Two factors made me decide to watch Once Upon a Time in the West. The first, of course, was Ennio Morricone’s soundtrack. I’d heard it before: Music so beautiful you’re forced to remember there’s an element of being beyond our perceptions, music speaking to us in a language we don’t completely understand, or maybe a language we understand better than words.


My older brother often played a CD of western film soundtracks when we were young. That’s how I met Ennio. When I first heard his music, I could only hear the absurdity, and I didn’t understand. And so I laughed as I listened; the way I would anxiously laugh when I was being disciplined by my parents, or the way I now crack jokes and laugh in the scariest moments of horror movies.

My brother was obsessed with cowboys then. He subscribed to ranching magazines, owned a pair of cowboy boots, and laid out his plans to move to Montana (we lived in suburban Washington). He held onto that dream for a long time; he studied agricultural science in college. Now he works in a bank.

It was partly my memories of that CD, its incessant playing, that drew me to watch the film. But that was only one
I also thought watching it would make me feel more manly.

I had been quarantining in an empty house for three days after showing Coronavirus symptoms. I was also dealing with the symptoms of what Web MD told me could be a hemorrhoid, an anal fissure, or a yeast infection from a recent Grindr meet-up with a guy who wanted to be a drag queen.

I was going through a reflective time, reflecting on my own sexuality and gender expressions. I had been out for a year, out to my family for six months. It was time for an overhaul.

Not that I was already going through enough with a possible case of Covid, a possible STI, and existential, identity-based dread, Co-Star decided to tell me in their daily text alerts that “sexuality, as you know it, doesn’t exist.” What does that even mean? Foucault has some thoughts on that, but that’s for another essay.

Anyway, in this context I turned on Once Upon a Time in the West, sinking comfortably into the sofa, liking the feeling of being the type of person—the type of man—who watches old cowboy movies when I’m alone.

I started crying as soon as the music began.

There I was, 10 again, back in my old home, my brother’s CD playing, being young, not knowing the ways I would live, who I’d become, the pain I would feel, the joy, the absurdity, the love—

I should also add that I was living in a house alone because arguments with my family had recently gotten so antagonistic with my siblings (including the banker-brother who once dreamed of being a cowboy) that my mom announced the stress was killing her. The next day I found an available room at a house near my college and moved out.

I was alone, I finally had a space to make my own, to invite who I wanted, to eat what I liked, to spend mornings playing dress up in front of a mirror without worrying about my family laughing at me or calling me vain. I could try new looks: higher waists, crop tops, tank tops. I felt free at first. At my family’s home, after I came out, my mom told me she noticed I started acting campier. More hand flips, an uncontrolled fluctuating tone, more dancing. But as I spent more time there, in that Christian home, she told me “the
real Daniel returned.”

I argued most and loudest with the cowboy-turned-banker. He called me a commie (as if that’s an insult). In hushed tones after these long arguments, my mom would say to me that he must be stressed from his work. I did feel bad for him, he was 28; he had moved out since graduating, but had to move back in after his housemates got married off around the same time his old workplace folded. And since our dad had passed away years before, I figured he felt some sort of duty to be the “man of the house.” I almost snickered when mom said he must’ve been stressed from work; she sounded like a suburban housewife defending her suburban abusive husband. Everyone playing their roles. The queen chess piece knowing she can only move in unoccupied squares.

And so finally being alone, doing what I wanted without a family or a roommate to perform for, I felt freer than ever. I suppose that’s what made me feel so uncertain in this time, so self-reflexive. I had so many truths to live that they all felt like lies.

That summer I turned on lots of movies to slurp up the silence, which is another reason I turned on Once Upon a Time in the West.

I loved it: Its quietness. Its sweaty, leathered cowboys. Its portrayals of greed and passion. Its close-ups on faces. Its rambling storyline that is seemingly meaningless. But of course it’s not meaningless. Nothing ever is if you ask the right questions.

There’s a big plot reveal at the end of the film. The two cowboys who have been at war with each other face off in a duel. The older cowboy keeps asking the other: who are you? Who are you? And then we’re given a flashback—

“This is when I really started crying. It’s also when everything finally made sense: The cowboys were brothers.

In the flashback, we see the older brother force his little brother to play a harmonica all the while having to balance a man with a noose around his neck on his shoulders. The young boy knows if he loses strength the man will die. He plays the harmonica pressed to his lips, he strains his small body, knowing what will happen soon, hoping it won’t.
I could barely see what was happening on screen. I only saw myself, my older brother, the old CD, our old house. We were young again, the day he shot me with an airsoft gun, leaving the little scar on my chest, telling me he thought it wasn’t loaded, me saying no one should play with guns; I saw myself dancing, and my brother yelling at me to stop; I saw myself plucking my eyebrows, and him telling me men don’t do that.

The boy with the harmonica loses his strength, he crashes into the dust and the man on his shoulders dies.

The figurative Man on my shoulders died too. My brother and other men kept telling me to keep playing that harmonica, to keep being strong. I thought they were supporting me then, but that was before I realized it was them, and centuries of men before them, that had tied that noose, had placed those feet on my shoulders, the feet of the Man society wanted me to be.

Years ago, I remember walking in on my older brothers who were watching Once Upon a Time in the West, just as it ended. They looked bored, maybe a little confused. “That was weird,” one said.

They couldn’t understand.
“I made these collages over the last two years at different points. I made them to help process my concerns and thoughts about goings on in the queer community both on campus and in Tacoma.

The collage about queer folx in jail was something I made while volunteering as a research partner in the Freedom Education Project Puget Sound (FEPPS). While doing this work, I regularly met with incarcerated folx at the Washington Corrections Center for Women (WCCW), many of whom were queer, and discussed how being incarcerated at a women’s prison impacted them in different ways (especially mentally and in terms of how guards treated them) from heterosexual & cis women.

The only one with a title is “the demon slayer,” which reflects the way I felt like men treated me prior to my transition.”
Wanna go and liberate our desires?

The Demon Slayer

Yeah! But not with you asshole!
QUEER
IN JAIL

WE LOVED IN REAL LIFE
WHO COULD'VE BEEN US OR OUR LOVES.

FOLX

... What does it mean that
we are literally dying?
TO beautiful subversion

Liberation

MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD:

Stop mimicking straights. Stop censoring ourselves!
You’re walking down the street with your parents
To the place where you are meeting your friends
The rowdy bar stops its chatter
All eyes meet yours

Then slowly make their way down your chest
Their faces contort in confusion
Wondering why this teenage boy
Has such a curvy chest
Why his crotch does not budge
Why his leg is bouncing and
His eyes are glued to the stone floor

The waiter asks
“Sir, how many?”
You cringe
Your mom’s voice sheepishly saying
“This is my daughter”
The realization hits the waiter when he sees your blushing face
“My apologies ma’am”

You want to scream
Want to cry
Want to tear your breasts off
But you follow the waiter to your table

When everyone sits down,
You feel a tingle between your legs
You excuse yourself to the restroom
You stare at your two options
Skirt or pants?
Mesmerized by them, the line backs up behind you
Weird looks follow you as you open the skirt

The ladies at the sink are reapplying their lipstick but
Freeze, petrified
“Sir? The Men’s restroom is the other door”

Your eyes burn, threatening to spill tears
You remind yourself that real men don’t cry.
You walk calmly to a stall
Waiting for the chatting to disperse

When it finally does, you pull your pants down
Your orange boxer briefs taunt you until they’re at your knees and sitting
Your reflection mocks you as you pull the plastic from your pocket
You close your eyes
Feeling the plastic rip between your fingers
The tip of the applicator is a knife in your hands

A single tear slips down your cheek
You hate the feeling of cotton inside of you
Hate seeing the blood in the toilet and on your hands

Another tear drops

Your pants are pulled up, toilet flushed when you
Break
You try to stifle the sniffles but shit’s just too thick
The tears wet your imaginary dick
You want to fucking die

You walk out to wash your hands and see a Line of men,
Arms crossed
Scowls Plastered

“Get out of here faggot. You don’t belong here”
You close your eyes and walk past them Hearing the whispers in your ears as you roll up your sleeves
“Kill yourself”
“Tranny”
“Dyke”

“Shemale”

You squirt liquid soap in your Calloused hands
Examining the scars lining every free inch of skin
You think about the first cut that you made when you were 12
Trying to ignore the whispers.

Your eyes clench shut
The whispers get louder
You crack

You snap
When you open your eyes
The men are gone
The door is open

Peeking out
Treading carefully
A man appears
Blocking your way

“Hello Aaron”
Deep voice
Brown beard
Flat chest
You embrace.
“Welcome home”
Tree

Lucy Curtis
Theseus’ Cargo
Ari Vergen

citrus walls emptied look within
the peel I mean the orange peel
touch juices slipping down the sides recall
the meat was ripped away the way
we would pluck a strangled goose
feathers stuck under nails under
white rind from this vacant cave
I mean the orange, peeled

peel empty is it still an orange the same
way the strangled goose is still
a goose I mean does the orange stop
being the orange
even when a goose loses
feathers and breath it’s
a goose but
dead I mean I feel the torn
tendons in these slices and the
seeds leak from its
plucked chest so
when does the orange
stop being a
goose
insignificance

Lucy Curtis
Fragments (2020)

Theo Meranze

A dead man croons to me over porcelain melodies
The sky leaks oil as the sun sets east
My television tells me to avoid the streets
They are soon to be gullies when the blood runs dry, I look outside and see
A dog roll in the damp grass

My mind tells me that money is feudal, futile
The church cross looks quite heavy in the light
It intimidates me, though I would never admit this to myself
A ringtone transforms into a psalm, Kamala Harris tweets a baby picture as an addict approaches me with tattered hands
“The eyes always go to the light first”

The paper on my laptop screen reads “Before any animal can be sacrificed, it must first be protected when born, fed, and then finally guided to its place of slaughter.”
The CDC announces that the virus is airborne again
At 6pm, my block will go silent to honor the essential workers, the next section: “Imitating God in The Sanctuary of God”. [1]

The cameras are on, the lights are rolling
My feet whisper of typhoons, samsara
Silence responds in staccato, careful compositions:
The coldness of sordid concrete
The searing nature of sensation
The tender mirage of drowning dreams
I think that its words would have been better appreciated when I was writing last night
The police begin to surround us
Her face tells me that she’s smiling
Her eyes tell me that she’s crying
I just can’t tell under the mask
I’ve just told her that I do care for her, That if I could I would sit in a sea of withering trees and tear them asunder, that I would build a bridge of limbs six feet long and feel skin, heal what isn’t there
I haven’t seen her since

A boy went to get strapped today, His bare body shivering under a black overcoat

CONTENT WARNING: state violence, drug addiction
“Bullets are warm”, he says
“and maybe if I bust at this beautiful blue
void above us I can tear it open, its fluffy
white skin ripping into heavenly pieces
of cotton candy as it sheds tears of smog,
baptizing us into a new age as we dance
atop apartments of dilapidated stucco
laden with the plastic remnants of a time
once known”
I watch as he pulls the trigger,
the bullet disappearing into the sky like
a pebble into the sea

On a distant corner,
a militia man cradles a gun like a child
it is a willow tree
A live-streamer’s camera caresses
a hidden face, the eyes are like waterfalls
I put my phone down
it is raining (a beautiful day)

On a Friday,
I enter the donut shop where
tamales are sold to men who
hide needles in their smiles,
Where as a child I would
exchange copper for sugar under
their glazed gazes
Azreal sits quietly in the corner,
watching with a
dim stare that only could only be
held together through a
rebelliousness numbness that smells
of poppy and vinegar, Nature’s greatest
gift
the cherished cope of kings since the
Sumerians scorched the Tigris with a
name at
the nativity of history
The darkness of her eyes seem to contain
supernovas—
Death songs of a mourned childhood,
creation’s most dutiful lament
We meet at the moment’s apex,
shattered mirrors

The voice on the other end speaks of
substantiality, the present
A small sphinx runs through
the bodies of blooming flowers
Autumn leaves fall through a
Never ending sky, foreign lands
The tree is a pyramid, a mystery
I am still

Frolicking in a cage of
hollowed psyches,
smiling faces
disappearing into oblivion
Yes, I’m on Tinder again
I’m not sure why
Is this how an epoch dies?
In a rush of dopamine, a headline, a
parasite
The silent screen envelops me, slivering
into my retina, I am
its handmaiden
It is here again, the fear that I could be nothing but a frantic vision of those that perished within the lush green of Polish countryside. The images and nausea forced upon me at fourteen amidst static and blurred lines, my yeshiva. The faces that appeared in my mirror, pleading that I appreciate being and benevolence, that I shelter in scorched earth, finding solace in survival.

It’s been awhile since I’ve cried. I miss it.

I haven’t been drinking enough water. I haven’t been taking care of myself. I walk on rivers of serotonin and swim through streets of code on shattered knees. It’s 1am and I don’t know what day it is. The house is formless, a dream. A foghorn snores in the distance.

The street is empty, the bluebird is out the cage watching me through street lights, swallowing me whole, dissecting what is beneath flesh, what was, what isn’t anything but a life, the estuary we call a self, our sanctuary, our sickness. The bluebird whistles in the wind.

"Flesh dreams blindly here; we have nothing better to do than get to know ourselves.

This is a dissection of the self, gilded and displayed for the masses. Its serene grotesquery reflects conflicts of touch, vulnerability, isolation, and blindness (willful or otherwise). Become both voyeur and victim in your own search for truth."
I get asked the same question a lot
What does dysphoria feel like?
It can feel like a lot of different things
It can feel like you’re dying
Or perhaps flying
30,000 feet in the air.

You know the plane is going to crash.
You know you don’t have a parachute.
You know you don’t have a lifejacket.
And you know that there is a slim chance of survival.

Dysphoria for me is like drowning
No air is getting to your lungs
You’re afraid.
You panic
You thrash
You scream
But no one is there to save you.
They only watch you struggle.
You may encounter a lifeguard
But by then it’s too late.
The water is already in your lungs.
You know there’s no hope.

Some days there is a lifeguard on duty
And they see you drowning so they pull you out of the water
Press their hands on your bare chest and

Push the salt water from your lungs.
They bring you back to the crushing reality
You’re not you
You’re still alive and
Still pretending to be someone else.

Sometimes you wish the salt had succeeded.

I can’t exactly say what my dysphoria feels like
I can’t explain the pain it makes me feel
Or the thoughts it sends through my head

Sometimes it would be easier to show them
But even then, how?
How would you do it?
You can’t show someone something they
Don’t believe in
Something they think is fake or stupid.
For attention.

The only way to show you or tell you
What my dysphoria is like
Is to put you in my shoes.
But even then
You still wouldn’t understand.
Hands
Quin Severo
There is a creature behind my house.

We moved in on a hot day, and most of the days have been the same since. We swelter into the rugs and walls, avoiding the sun until it’s cool enough to pull ourselves back into our sticky skins, in time for the shapeless hours of the night.

It was one of these days that I found the backyard, one of those days where you look to the blue skies and sweat drips into your eyes and stings. I’d encountered it before, the backyard, the fenced-in grasses shadowed by looming neighbors, glaring windows. Look too close at the glass and find silent eyes, eyes that kept me locked inside, all of us caged into our
suburban zoo. Caged in, that is, until I knew if I stayed inside any longer I wouldn’t be able to put my liquid skin back on my bones when the sun set, it would be stuck to the walls until winter.

It was one of these days that I couldn’t wear my shirt anymore, and I got down quickly, dropped and glued by my chest to the ground, terrified that my neighbors would catch my nipples.

Laying there, bare-chested to the earth, my back and shoulders browning like crickets on a griddle, I heard the patter of many small feet beside my ear. A creature, body half the size of my smallest fingernail, and legs three times that of its body, skittering around my head. Though I wanted to leap up, to yell, to move, the eyes of my neighbors held me down, staring at the impossible suspension before me. Moving through the grasses with ease (even though the stalks and weeds must have been a jungle), it had only six legs, and if I hadn’t counted I would’ve thought it a spider. Six legs for the tiniest body I’d ever seen, an infant on stilts.

People like to talk about bees as scientifically improbable, how their wings shouldn’t be able to generate the lift to get their fuzzy little bodies into the air. I’ve never heard people talk about my creature, who sits so high on its thin legs, who looks like a pill in its round, indiscernible features.

And though its eyes were too small for me to find, I could feel them on my skin. Its gaze was different from any human I’d felt before. It didn’t impose upon me any of the expected desires. It didn’t ask for ownership, for connection, for absence, for flesh. Its gaze was that of a tourist staring at a monument, of the climber to the peak. I was immovable, unquestionably existing as permanent in the creature’s mind.

As the creature perceived me, said I am going to exist here, it stepped onto me. The six legs were on my arm, not all at once, always a few swishing through the air, a few dragging imperceptibly across my skin. It was stare or be stared at, and I stayed on my chest to stare. The way the creature danced across my freckles, through my fine forearm hairs, it was a performance, and I was the stage.

The stationary imposition of its perception made me as alive as the stage upon which I had performed as a child. Young, I never considered the experience of that stage, the multitudes of people and entertainments it had supported. I

“I knew if I stayed inside any longer I wouldn’t be able to put my liquid skin back on my bones when the sun set, it would be stuck to the walls until winter.”
hardly remember the stage itself, though I know it was black and in constant use. I do remember the play, the changing rooms. I remember the shocked glances when I walked around shirtless, the sting in my cheeks, eyes when mean girl Breeze pulled me aside, cover up. I remember my chest morphing to a secret, something to hide even though it looked just like the boys my age. I remember the first time I saw, really saw my nipples poking through my shirt. I don’t remember ever considering the perspective of the stage.

In that moment of my creature’s skittering performance, a conversation with my mother floated through me, the symphony my creature swayed to. Bras, I asked her if she would buy me some bras. I didn’t need any, she said, gently motioning to my flat chest, as though I was the only one aware of my budding nipples. I begged, please Mama, and she said, gently motioning to my flat chest, as though I was the only one aware of my budding nipples. I begged, please Mama, and she said, gently motioning to my flat chest, as though I was the only one aware of my budding nipples. I begged, please Mama, and she said, gently motioning to my flat chest, as though I was the only one aware of my budding nipples.

“I had a strange and fleeting desire to teach the creature my fear. To raise my other arm and pinch its body, take its control, and make it scared of me.”

school admired. She couldn’t see how my skin itched under layers of shirts so no one would talk about me like they did the other girls who didn’t wear bras, Do you see her nipples? Ew!

She didn’t tell me that the shame wouldn’t dissipate with a bra or full breasts. She didn’t tell me to be patient, that I would fill out those leopard print grown-up garments some day. She didn’t tell me why my nipples had metamorphosed in a single day from the same as the boys to repulsive pink circles. She didn’t tell me why the gaze of men had shifted, or my awareness had, to danger.

I wondered if my creature sensed danger. If it knew as soon as its microscopic feelers on the end of its legs touched the warmth of my skin that I could kill it in an instant. Not that I had any desire to, but just as I’d seen no desire in the stage of my youth, surely my creature was as limited. I wondered if my stage had felt the waves of power rippling through its black surface as we danced across it. If my stage had ever felt shame for being painted over, production after production. If my stage had ever been scared. I don’t think it had, and I wasn’t sure my creature had either.
I had a strange and fleeting desire to teach the creature my fear. To raise my other arm and pinch its body, take its control, and make it scared of me. The urge passed, but not so quickly that the creature missed it. The dance ended in an instant, and it was still, all six legs finally against my skin.

After a moment of my blinking applause, the creature fled to its green maze. Long long legs in the long long grass. It knew something of desire and fear now, I thought. It had looked in the mirror and seen the eyes of a stranger behind it staring ravenously at its chest. It knew fear, or at least my fear, though I’d never moved to act on my terrible thoughts.

As my back began to ache and peel, I saw the creature in my mind again, those ridiculous legs. High above, to not be touched, by what? There must be fear in such elevation, some evolutionary avoidance I’d been ignorant of. Fear of the dirt floor below, unfelt by the winged insects of its world. Unfelt by the ants and beetles who are belly-in like me.

Perhaps I’m asking the wrong question. Perhaps I should wonder what the creature gains from the skies.

I know when I did stand after the creature had bowed, left out the side door, when I did stand I didn’t look for the neighbors looking. I didn’t hold my chest until I could cover it again.

I danced, lifting my feet carefully through the grass, the fractals of worlds under my feet. When I did melt back into my t-shirt, at my leisure, I still felt the tingling of six small legs dancing on my skin.
WARNING: Handle With Care

Hannah Zinn
For Her (a Haiku)
Alice Noble. Art by Lucy Curtis

I am profoundly
lonely in every room with
out you. Forgive me.
“This semester I created a series of prints critiquing how we think about images produced for sexual pleasure.”
1. Memories
Count the different ways you tied your hair for her. Decide to cut it all off. When you run your fingers through it, you won’t think of her. When you touch your scalp, you won’t think of the time she made you soup when you were sick and laid beside you, drawing swirls with her fingers leaving your hair in spirals, your stomach in twists. Walk by different houses each day. Change your route. Try to actively unlearn the associations you once possessed of these places. Try to know that despite the sting, walking under the weeping willow tree on Maple Street where you first kissed, a tree is only a tree. A memory is only a memory. Neither one defines you. Hold in your heart the element of yourself that remains unwaveringly constant despite the burn. When you go to the store, stop by the stationary. Smile when you stare at the stacks of colorful cardstock, hugged into neat labeled rows. Shake away the time you stood in the same aisle pondering the different ways to say I love you. Don’t let her shadow linger in the corners of what you’ve always loved. Buy a card for your mom. On the way out, pause. Buy a soy latte. She will never shame you for your lactose intolerance again. Stare at the rain. Think about how you love the rain. Think about how you pretended to hate it because she did. Watch it dribble and fall into the gutter. Think about the sound pitter-patter. When you start to cry, remind yourself how finite water is and smile. Laugh at yourself, think how funny that my eyes still have some. Relearn the things you unlearned to love for her sake.

2. Hands
Start to crochet, knit, and embroider. Anything your hands will do. Buy a pasta maker. Explore your backyard. Collect snails and rocks with spots. Find the perfect worry stone. Place it in your pocket. Allow it to absorb the hurt from your hands. Put marbles in a jar. Sign up for a pottery class. Discover you are truly horrendous at throwing. But you keep at it, there is something cathartic...
about sculpting. Slamming something on a spinning disk satiates some part of you. Keep making something out of nothing. You will meet someone named Stacy. She makes creating something out of clay look so easy, you wonder if you are doing anything right. Maybe you aren’t. Stare at the blob of clay spinning helplessly below you: a brown nebula trapped on a swirling grey disk. Release your foot off the leaver. Let it pause. Then sink your fingers into the clay. Laugh at the clay farting at your finger’s weight. Then almost start to cry, always at the most inopportune times. Feel the cold clay hug your fingertips. Use your hands and keep making things out of clay. Make tiny people out of clay and place them on stones. Go on walks. Count leaves. Rub your worry stone till it’s warm. Feel the weight and roll the rock with your palm, cupped in your pocket. Feel your weightlessness without her. Feel the burden lighten although your heart feels heavy. Pick up a pine cone. Feel how light it is in your hands. It is light yet strong. Try not to step on cracks. Knock on wood. Slide your hand along the trunks of trees. Let your fingertips ripple along the ridgelines of the bark. Look at the bare branches stretching upwards. Notice how much more pronounced they are in their new-found absence. They stand so tall without the leaves, so essentialized without the fluff. Smiling as though they are finally free, naked without the weight of heaviness pulling. Stare at the sky and think about time as moving, not wasted or spent.

3. Things

Go on eBay to sell the things she left in your apartment: a checkered circle scarf, a Kathy Acker poetry collection, six red spatulas. Think to yourself, who the fuck has six red spatulas? Delete the pictures on social media, even though you look cute. It’s symbolic. Buy new bed sheets. You needed them anyway. Find the polaroid photos, take them off the fridge. Shine your shoes with her old toothbrush. Place a box on the curb with free lazily written in lopsided letters. Ignore the prying neighbors who seem concerned. Laugh at how astonished they were by your previous relationship. Perhaps now their understanding of gay domesticity is linked to semi-permanence. Wonder why things don’t last forever. Wonder why fabric is bound to fray and china always chips. Wonder why you seem to experience things that chip like cheap glasses: always leaving cuts. Remember that cuts heal and things

“Feel your weightlessness without her. Feel the burden lighten although your heart feels heavy..”
are only objects. Remember that moments are only fragments of time. Remember that you can carve your own of both. Rub your worry stone till it’s warm. Hold it in your hand till your quaking stops.

4. Body
Do push-ups till your arms quake. Lay on your hardwood floors; feel the earth beneath you. Lay in the grass with bare feet. Allow the cool dampness between your toes to quell ripples of anxiety. You will softly blink and put your pointer finger and thumb on the bridge of your nose. You will feel pressure in the space between your eyes. Your chest will feel heavy. Hold your worry stone till it’s warm; place it in your palm. Walk. Repeat this until it’s ingrained. Repeat this until you feel sane. Repeat this until you start to feel human again. Buy new leather shoes. Break them in. Think about how symbolic your blisters are: your calloused feet, your calloused heart. Recognize that you are more than a definition of someone else’s limited understanding of yourself.


5. Time
Six months will pass and your habits will seem less monotonous. After quality solitary time well-spent, you will stand taller. Your rhythm will return to your step, but it will still feel unnatural. Enjoy drinking tea slowly in the early mornings. Watch the sun rise in stripes of light. Enjoy your new-found comfort in silence. While staring at your wobbly reflection in shop windows, think about how you are not malleable. You are strong; you are adaptable. Break your caffeine dependence. Eventually, when you find your tea kettle is done steaming, consider who you were before and after her. Remember, that you are not beholden to anyone or anything. Remember that you are a force to be reckoned with. Stare at yourself in the mirror and puff out your chest.

Raise an eyebrow at the reflection in your spoon. Think: Who is she? Stare out the window thinking about the freeway like veins rippling. You feel the pulse of time passing. When you stare at your arm, feel an ache and try to sleep.

A year later, you still are hurt. Cry. But not too much. Be kind to yourself, be patient with your pain, be gentle with your heart. Eventually, you’ll go on a series of mediocre dates. Char, Nikki, Bethany, Cris, Mad, Pan, Oli. Remind yourself that mediocrity is not necessarily exclusive.

“Allow yourself to eventually fall once again. Stare at the sky and think about time as moving, not wasted or spent.”
entirely to a single-gender identity. Delete the dating apps you made symbolically. Set boundaries—but not too many. Be vulnerable, but realistic. Remember that assholes aren’t always men. Remember how you felt before you fell. Allow yourself to feel. Allow yourself space to wallow and space to bounce back. Allow yourself to eventually fall once again. Stare at the sky and think about time as moving, not wasted or spent.

6. Love
Go to the pet store and buy a goldfish. You will name her Frieda. You will wonder what it is like to be a fish. You will wonder what it is like to exist in a glass bowl seeing only magnified watery versions of your apartment walls: sufficing on flakes of fish food. You will smile when you see her, reflecting yourself in a bowl of water. You will feel strong in shared solitude. Frieda will fill your heart with something you never realized you lost. You will pinch fish food into her bowl and watch her swim to the surface; you will feel a smile creep across your face. She will make a new home in your heart.

7. Thoughts
Your mind keeps running but you will decide to write; your words are weights for your mind, body, hands, memories, and love, a vehicle for the minutia. You never stop writing until your wrist gives out. You will try to think of words that describe the melting full-body love you once held and still feel remnants of. You will feel frustrated by the inadequacy of words. Yet, somewhere deep down, you will feel something shifting. Your worry stone inside turning as your words and thoughts mix, creating a purée of what it feels like to fall in and out of love. Your words will embody the many moments you tried so hard to forget. Their stickiness will rub into your cursive squiggles. Your tears will drop over the ink in the pages of your journal, leaving tasteful splotchy stains. You will know that your ability to feel searing pain is only possible by your ability to feel boundless love. Write poems. Write haikus. Write lists. Write a short story or two. Write about your ability to feel boundless love. Write about your desire to be loved. Write about your fear that you are unlovable. Maybe it is bubbling, crushing, and bursting. Maybe it is calm, reassuring, and constant. Maybe it is just you discovering and learning the love you possess and the bounds to which it stands so fully, so freely, so beautifully, between the pen in your hand and the ink on the page, in the arms of anyone just partially large enough to receive it.
When you come, don’t bring your other-ness. Please don’t wear those colorful clothes that you say make you feel like yourself. They are just clothes, you can dress normally for one night. Wear a dress, it will please them.

It’s just one night, you can be yourself tomorrow.

You know we love you, because you are unique and proud of it.

We are proud of you, just straighten up. Wear a dress and maybe shave your legs. Call him your boyfriend, partner sound gay.

If they say she, just smile and stay silent. It’s just one night, you don’t want to upset them.

Please don’t talk about your pronouns. Don’t tell them about the drag balls, the feeling of fitting in with people who are so different from us.

Tell them about your writing, your singing, show them those pictures where you look so pretty.

Don’t bring up the hormone therapy. We’ll tell them eventually, but now is not the time.

Tonight we are here to celebrate you, and the woman you have become.

We are so proud of you.
GET THEM OFF
Anonymous
La Resistencia Solidarity Day, Northwest Detention Center, 3.9 Miles East from University of Puget Sound

Nola Thury, April 2019/July 2020 (return). Film.
It’s the fall of 1996 in Tacoma, Washington. We are located on the campus of the University of Puget Sound, inside Collins Library where a history class is taking place. MARY Martin and KATIE Larkin enter from stage left and right, respectively. KATIE walks absentmindedly, smiling to herself. MARY talks to her friend, HANNAH.

MARY
No, I really think we should do it! After this year we can go to Alaska— drive buses— c’mon HB, it would be so much fun!

HANNAH
What about Jake?

MARY
Nothing bad, I just need to talk to you. Okay, I have a class now. Meet in the SUB after?

HANNAH
(a bit taken aback, but smiling)
Sure, I have a bio report due though, so you can’t distract me like usual.

MARY
I won’t! Promise.

(Her friend winks and they both laugh)

MARY sits down directly across the classroom from KATIE. KATIE is gazing absentmindedly out the window, her chin resting on her palm. MARY looks at her for too long, a faint smile on her lips, only jerking to attention when PROFESSOR COONEY clears his throat.

PROFESSOR COONEY
Alright, everyone, I trust you found the readings interesting last night?

(The students nod obediently, rifling through their papers)

The lights dim, and all the students aside from MARY and KATIE exit the stage to the wings. Silence. KATIE begins to walk towards the audience, still smiling at her
feet. She steps off the stage and walks up through an audience aisle. MARY follows her, a hard-to-read expression on her face. We hear the crunching of leaves. KATIE is grinning widely to herself, zigzagging slowly up the aisle and taking care to step on scattered fall leaves. MARY smiles as KATIE crunches on the leaves with glee. They both exit out the back of the theater. The lights onstage brighten to reveal the SUB. HANNAH studies dutifully at a table, surrounded by books.

MARY
(walking up to HANNAH and slinging her bag down)
Hey there, HB!

HANNAH
Hi sweetie! How was your class?

MARY
Good, um, it was good. Look about what I needed to talk to you about—

HANNAH
Yeah?

MARY
I- I’ve had this notion and I know it’s silly but I just never challenged it. My friend in middle school, when his mom turned forty, she went and bought a Jeep.

HANNAH
What does that have to do with Jake?

MARY
Just, hold on, wouldya? And so his mom got a Jeep, and she’d always wanted a Jeep, and she bought it without asking her husband. And I remember thinking, “When you’re forty, you can do whatever you want!” And I decided then that when I turned forty—

(she takes a deep breath, visibly shaking)
That when I turned forty I would be a lesbian, I guess.

(HANNAH looks up at MARY, mouth slightly agape)

HANNAH
You know that’s fucking crazy right?

MARY
I know! I know. I just wanted kids and I grew up in Orange County, and I don’t even know any lesbians with kids, do you?

HANNAH
Well, I mean Susan and Carol in Friends...

MARY
Well, that was Ross’s kid.

HANNAH
You get what I mean. It’s a thing.

(she starts)
Wait, what about Jake? You can’t marry him

MARY
I know. I will.

HANNAH
Mary, I’m serious you can’t marry someone knowing you’re going to leave them. You have to tell him.

MARY
I know! I will. Tonight.

(she starts to cry)
Thanks for, you know, being my friend.

(HANNAH leaps up to embrace her)

HANNAH

Dammit, I said not to distract me!

(They both laugh tearfully)

Lights out. KATIE enters from the back of the theater, once again crunching on leaves mirthfully. She is wearing homemade “pirate pants” - baggy joggers adorned with patches. They were from her Halloween costume, and she now wears them unironically. It’s endearing, as all things about KATIE are. The scene onstage has changed, and we are back in PROFESSOR COONEY’s history class in Collins Library.

MARY

(approaching KATIE as students filter into the classroom)
Hey, Katie, is this seat taken?

KATIE

(earnestly)
Do we have a seating chart? I’ve just been sitting wherever

MARY

(laughs)
No, no. A seating chart by collective habit maybe. Something like that.

KATIE

Oh, well then no.

MARY

(crestfallen)
No?

(steps away from the seat)

KATIE

(pulling the seat out for her)

No, the seat’s not taken.

(laughs)

MARY

(sighs in relief, gingerly sits down and scoots her chair up to the desk)

Great, so about that project coming up. I saw you were interested in researching 1960’s America and I’m also SUPER interested in that—

(stops, looks down, takes a deep breath, then, voice shaking)

Any chance you’d like to be partners?

KATIE

(dimples and freckles on full display)

Yeah, I’d like that a lot, actually.

MARY

(blushing)

Oh, great! Great. I can meet after class if you’re free.

KATIE

(blushing too)

I’m free.

(PROFESSOR COONEY enters, places a stack of papers on the podium, and begins to write on the blackboard. MARY leans over to KATIE.)

MARY

(whispering)

Do you like coffee?
Queer Self Pudding

Lenora Yee

“For all people reflecting on themselves, celebrating the vastness of their queer identities, I hope that you can melt into your self and celebrate your multiplicity, with love, warmth, and appreciation.”

is this what queerness feels like? melting into the self you always knew?
egg yolk custard
in a cookie cutter
your soul spills slowly
over smooth metal edges
overflowing the limit of the self you thought you knew
unfolding
awakening yellow butterflies
fluttering in the newness
of allowing selves
to finally breath
and be fully free
ecstasy in being seen
queer self pudding
I remember reading once that when you love someone, you say their name differently because it feels safe in your mouth.

I have no idea if that’s true, but a little part of me still wonders, if I had listened more carefully, would I be able to pinpoint the exact moment when you changed your mind? Maybe I didn’t hear you when you tried to tell me the truth.

I have this re-occurring dream where we’re still together, and when I wake up it takes me a moment to realize that everything has changed. I know for a fact that you are not the person I thought you were, but that doesn’t stop me from looking for you everywhere. I think I’m having a hard time letting go of the parts of myself that loved you.
I wonder if you have the same problem, if you close your eyes to sleep but see images of me instead: on the hammock in your backyard, in your kitchen, covered in flour, in the back of your car with the seats all the way down. I wonder if that's why you won't have coffee with me.

Or maybe you have already forgotten, gone back and revised history, you were always pretty good at that. Could take a magic eraser to any detail that no longer fit the story. I bet you sleep better that way.

I know for a fact that you will probably never read this, but I print out copies and leave them in airplane seat pockets just in case. I sleep better that way.

Deep down, I know for a fact that if we met again today, I would not want to know you. But that doesn’t stop me from wondering what it sounds like when you say her name.
IT WON'T
ALWAYS
HURT SO
BAD