

HYPE

NJCU LITERARY MAGAZINE



ISSUE NO. 1

FALL 2020

ISSUE NO. 1 – YOUTH

HYPE

NJCU LITERARY MAGAZINE

*Art and Literature by students and alumni at
New Jersey City University*

FALL 2020

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The student editorial board considers submissions from all currently registered NJCU students and alumni. Submissions must conform to Hype Magazine guidelines regarding behavior and speech, and the editorial board will not accept material that aims to denigrate based on race, sexuality, or other aspects of identity. Decisions by the editorial board are final. Hype asks for first North American publishing rights. Authors and artists retain use of their copyrights, own their work, and have the rights to future use of this work. Hype accepts submissions on a bi-annual basis. Submit to hypelitmag@gmail.com.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Hype was just an idea, a dream, a strand of hope that I thought to bring to life in the summer of 2020. I wanted to encourage creatives at NJCU to create and share their talents during a time where we all may feel like the walls are closing in. I cannot express enough thanks to all those who submitted to the inaugural issue of Hype. Your talent and dedication to your craft is inspiring.

Thank you to the student editorial board for your persistence and dedication to Hype; for following behind me even though I was only one step ahead. Thank you to our designer, Katherine Zambrano, for illustrating what Hype is; bold, elegant, and original.

Finally, thank you, Theta Pavis, Director of Student Media, for being a supportive and thoughtful advisor. Without your encouragement, I don't think this issue would have been possible. To Edvige Giunta, for picking up the phone and saying, "NJCU needs this."

We put this issue together without ever meeting in person, in the comfort/discomfort of our homes. Yet, we did it! In reference to Graffiti (front cover), we are all the artist in the black hoodie. We might have worked alone but we each contributed to the bigger picture.

Editor-in-Chief
Rebecca Richardson



Youth Editorial Note

Youth is the time of our beginning, our becoming, and unbecoming. Youth is condemning hate that oppresses and violence that regresses. It is the time we find our sound, become comfortable in our thoughts, uncomfortable in our skin. We watch as our body changes, morphs into a butterfly, takes flight, falls and flees. A time when we fall into and out of ourselves, sometimes all at once. It is a chance for us to build bridges of equality, relations of quality.

Youth is the transformative moments that make up our memory. The dreams we have to build up and upon. It is a wave of color that washes away ignorance, fills us with contemplations, creation, and dread. We see the world and all its phantasms, its plagues.

A time of youth is a time of rise and fall. A time when the world opens around us and we reach out our hands to touch moments, watch memories sink, fantasies expand beyond our mind, beyond our body.

The youthful can be young at heart or wise beyond their years. Youth can create, construct, reconstruct, even deconstruct. They are not bound to this Earth, they cannot be contained. They put their words on loudspeakers through art, art that hurts and heals, burdens and breaks, screams and wonders. They use their pens, brushes, mouses, eyes to understand and transform themselves and the world.

The Youth are art in the making, artists that cannot be silenced, the resilience the world needs. The Youth speak in this issue, give rise to love, color to canvas, and question what must be asked to shape the future. The Youth in this issue are an explosion of contemporary necessity, the means required to design a better, brighter world; a world worth living in at a time of learning. They have come with their art for you to leave with an impression, an inspired and enlightened mind.

Youth, this issue's for you.

Creative Writing Editor
Peggy Jackson

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Welcome

Welcome to America:

The land of the chained.

Where unjust acts are swept under rugs, where things that should, don't cause you pain.

Where a human being mistreated, beat, and killed isn't discussed. Where there's a hierarchy in being unaware.

When has this country been free? When has it been fair? I'll tell you exactly what is happening here.

You talk about change and you talk about evolution but you indulge in your fear and never find a solution.

Why is it that you expect us to sit around and let these things happen?

Why is it that you determine someone's character from the color of their skin?

Why is everything alright as long as you put on a grin?

How is it okay that children no longer live, but are taught how to survive? The oppressed cannot thrive without being looked down upon. The oppressed cannot drive without being pulled over, never believed to be sober.

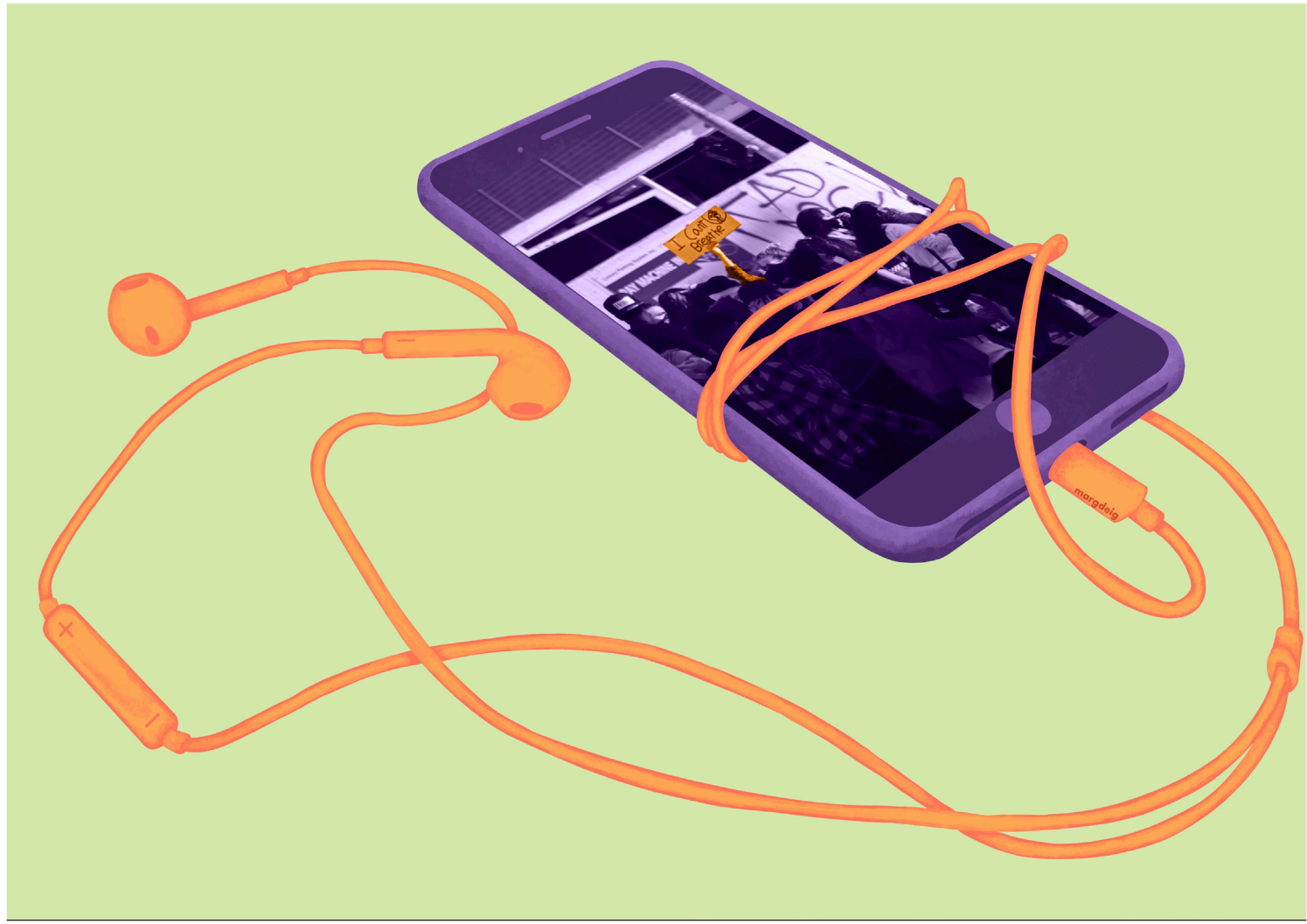
It's wrong, it's cruel, it's that R-A-C-I-S-M. So tell me when you're silent, what makes you better than them?

All of this because of mere ignorance that perpetuates in you. The looting, the protests - this isn't new. You people should know.

Save these lives.

Save these people. Your silence is loud. Speak up and let the world know that you are with us, with this movement. Make us proud.

Karen Osorio



Black Lives Matters

Obsessed

I feel that piece of glass wink at me provocatively. One glance and the glass glows, the temptress makes a sound and my ears perk up. Fingers are numb at the tips, they are orphaned. It's only been thirty minutes, the glass is shining bright, my eyes are parched. The curiosity is unbearable, what could have happened in the last thirty minutes? I need to view the glass, teasing me with its flash. My pupils sting. My fingers grab the glass and play with its buttons. I drown, the refreshing whirlpool of fake news, anonymous faces, and artificial images.

Gaby Maya

Youth (As Experienced by a Queer Kid)

Yes, those were simpler days:
When my clothing size was the same as my age,
When the fire in my heart was still ablaze,
When I didn't question if I was straight or gay...
Then things changed.

No, ignorance is not always bliss,
When you're a mister but you're constantly called miss,
When you have to tell someone, "Yes, I'm in the right bathroom -- now please let me piss,"
When you're not sure if it's a girl or a boy you want to kiss...
You wonder why people can't understand this.

Yes, most of all, you're afraid.
When every day you wear your guise in this never-ending masquerade,
When after so much hiding your heart becomes frayed,
When confiding in family can get you displaced,
And all you get is, "This is not how you were raised."

Why shouldn't you be afraid?
How couldn't you be afraid?
Wouldn't you be afraid?

Percy Totten



Bubble

It Comes Back Eventually

Luis Pomales-Diaz

“Where the hell did you get that?”

Dinah gave an inelegant gasp of the cold, late November air and coughed as she was interrupted. Her expression gave off the terror of being busted smoking out on the porch, but quickly turned into a relaxed state as she recognized the voice wasn’t her mother’s. After a few dazed seconds, her posture turned to the older woman, eyes glancing over the garish fleece sweater and pleated pants on her cousin Laura. The woman’s hazel eyes stared expectantly down at her. She eventually answered.

“Uh. 7-11? A Circle K? Does it matter?”

“Of course it matters. What are you doing with that thing?”

The serious remark was met with a repressed snigger. “Is that a serious question? You want a hit?”

Laura pursed her lips, eyes narrowing at the brusqueness. “I think your mother would argue it is a pretty serious question,” was the only response Laura could manage.

As confident as Dinah wanted to be as she took another drag, she struggled to eke out a laugh that wasn’t half nervous. “Yeesh. Tough crowd.” She stowed away the pen in her clutch as she suddenly felt the cold wash over her hands. Her fingers slinked back into the pockets of her jacket.

“You know you could just be cool about it. Not overreact, not say anything?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll wait a few days and tell my mom. She’ll inevitably send your mom a text about it, with me safely behind the two of them.”

“Puh-lease. Laura, do you think just ‘cause your mom didn’t let you have any fun that the rest of us can’t?”

As sharp as the response was, it was par for the course between the two. Their snippiness had been attributed to a supposed cosmic mishap according to their great aunt. She claimed they were supposed to be twins.

Dinah and Laura were born on the same day in April in the same hospital, albeit 4 years apart making it slightly less impressive. They were supposed to be twins, she speculated, but as far as the star charts were concerned, there was a mix up with the paperwork. So what if Laura was taller, with black hair, and a sense of style like the fathers in K-Mart ads? And as for Dinah, what did it matter that she stood a little over five feet tall and sported short brown hair, donning outfits that marked her as a would-be Joan Jett groupie. Even if they weren’t siblings, they bickered like real sisters. So their non-sibling rivalry proceeded as expected.

“You know when I was your age—”

Dinah groaned, “Seriously, you don’t have a better line than that? And you’re only a few years

older than me!”

“When I was your age I wasn’t smoking out of choice. It’s not like I couldn’t, I was offered plenty. I just think it’s distasteful. Just ‘cause they make it smell like candy or mangos, or— “ Laura took a cautious sniff. “Mint. That doesn’t mean it’s any less gross, Dee.”

“I would beg to differ—” She had barely gotten the word out of her mouth before Laura went on.

“You know I heard a girl in Ellsworth had one of those...oil...refills—”

“It’s juice, not oil, and they’re called pods.”

“One of those pods blew up on her. Right in front of her face. Cut her lip up bad. Burnt her fingers.”

“One, that can’t even happen. Two, who do you know from Ellsworth? Isn’t that like, two counties over?”

“Roxanne.”

“The hairdresser?”

“Yes!”

“The one who thinks if you put allspice in a dehumidifier it cures cancer?”

Her posture shifted a bit as she scratched the back of her neck and looked at the ground. “...Well. Yeah. But that’s not the point.”

“She really the most reliable person for health advice?”

They stood quietly for a few seconds as Dinah’s eye got caught on the blinking green and red of an airplane’s underside overhead, moving across the night sky with a simultaneous hum and a roar to make itself known to the people below. She wondered how many people on it were leaving back home once the Thanksgiving festivities were over.

“Well, you don’t know. Maybe it works. You haven’t tried it.”

Laura struggled to keep a straight face before the snickering slipped through and opened the gateway for a string of snorting laughter from both of them. As quickly as the laughter came, it left courtesy of the sudden cold gust of air that blew through,

“Regardless, those things aren’t good for you.” Laura’s posture was less domineering now, relaxed as she continued speaking. If Laura was anything you couldn’t say she wasn’t persistent.

Dinah left a pregnant pause in the conversation before speaking. “Most fun things aren’t. Like,”

Dinah said before inhaling some fresh air, a contrast to the hit of vape she had taken. “We eat turkey and cranberry jelly in tube form, and cookies and pie until our stomachs hurt, and watch guys in football gear crash into each other, like, it’s totally cool yeah? Like there’s nothing harmful about that?”

“Yeah, but this is a celebration,” Laura said while gesturing to her sweater, and then the shine of the lights and noise from the inside bled from the living room onto the porch to illuminate their faces.

“This has got purpose behind it, all celebrations do. We do it for a reason.”

Dinah dozed off, staring down the street. “Do we though?”

Laura felt a tinge of insecurity at the question. She tried to figure out what was going on inside of Dinah's head, studying her face. "What do you mean?"

"It just feels different, y'know?"

"Different how?"

"I dunno, just different."

"Good different or bad different?"

"...Bad different I guess. If it's not good different it's bad different then..."

A few internal sirens went off inside Laura. "Something happen?"

"Not like a specific thing. Nothing happened. I just don't feel the, the..." Dinah's voice was jogging down the block now, feeling the distinct autumnal crispness of the leaves under her feet. She stared at the tiny glowing screen in her hand, hoping to conjure the word.

"The spirit?"

"...What, like Jesus and stuff?"

"No, you blockhead! The holiday spirit."

"Alright, god, chill out Santa. How would I even know that?"

"Well," Laura had never been asked to make a litmus test for this kind of situation, but she didn't take long to fabricate a few questions. "What's the first Christmas present you can remember?"

"Easy! That lopsided chunky blue camera, the one from Chinatown."

"How'd you feel?"

"Amazing," Dinah bit her lip and smiled, an almost childish expression as she let the wave of nostalgia hit her like a truck. Laura hadn't seen that expression on her face in what felt like years.

"I wanted a camera. Just like moms. It was just perfect. Nevermind they looked nothing alike, but I still ran around with it until, what, middle school? Then it died out on me. It's still on my desk."

"And what was last year's Christmas present?"

Dinah warily lifted her phone to gesture at it like a magician's assistant out of material to work with.

"Did you feel the same way?" Laura asked.

It was at that moment that Dinah was transported back to the porch all so suddenly, and the crunching of leaves on the corner of DeLancey and Hicks Street felt a million miles away. Her voice started back up with some clarity. "No."

"You remember getting ready for Thanksgiving dinner at our place when you were eight?"

"Yeah, I spilled chocolate milk on the both of us trying to open the bottle. Aunt Gina was fuming cause she had just bought you that—"

They finish the sentence in unison. "New white dress."

"Mhmm." Laura nodded and shuffled closer to her. She only had a little more tolerance of the cold left in her and tried to leech some warmth from D. "When you got dressed tonight were you excited?"

"I mean, I guess."

"Does the food taste different, like it was made by someone else? The lights feel different? Out here feels different?"

"So you've felt it too then?"

Laura gave the smile of a wiseacre, some far-off oracle in a distant tower divining the teenager's exact feelings from a crystal ball. Dinah glared like she was out of the loop on a very funny joke. She nodded and dropped the upturned lip eventually, considerably less smug. "Happens as you get older. Your brain has less room for all the good stuff. You get perspective, see things you didn't see before. You get your mind cluttered with things you don't need, trivia, paperwork, responsibilities, emails to answer, people to text back.

And eventually—"

Dinah let out a quiet 'oh' as she said that, remembering her friend. "I should text her back."

"Focus." Laura flicked Dinah's hand and she sucked air through her teeth at the sting on her knuckle. "It gets harder to care about things. It takes effort, and work. My point is, it happens to everyone. But I wouldn't worry about it too much."

Dinah made a mental note about this as she paused. Later on in life, looking back at this conversation, and replaying it over and over in her head, she would find it to be one of the few times that a conversation between the two had had such a large amount of dead air.

"But I don't want to just not have it." There were equal parts of discomfort and annoyance in Dinah's voice, like a child leaving a toy store empty-handed.

"You pick it back up."

"What, you got it back when you had your kids or something? Cause I don't really want—"

"Oh, god no. Nope. I love my girls, but no, babies aren't necessary. You just...find it for yourself at some point, maybe in college, maybe after. It's not on-demand for what other people need, it's not like a sacrifice or something. No...ah-hah!' moment. It just happens. It comes back eventually."

"So, waiting? The answer is waiting?"

"Yep."

Dinah tucked the phone into her pocket and brushed a lock of hair behind her ear. "That's a bit boring."

"Yeah. It builds up to good things, genuinely good things, usually does."

The sound of another plane overhead interrupted the silence. Laura gave her a warm and powerful side hug and Dinah tensed up. "I'm dying out here. You wanna go inside?"

Dinah nodded. "I'll be there in a minute."

"Suit yourself."

Dinah nodded as she stood alone for a second. She turned for the front door but stopped short. She rifled around in her clutch and unfastened something with an unusual amount of conviction. With a light kick, the small glinting object she dropped was sent flying in a weak arc into the grass. The vape pen sat in the darkness onto a pile of leaves.

Brother Blues

My brother cuts his wrist,
gets them bandaged,
writes a letter, I get the gist.
He's damaged.

Gets them bandaged.
Zoloft and Xanax.
He's damaged.
He's looking blue crescent.

Zoloft and Xanax.
Sadness comes to rue.
He's looking blue crescent,
white walls block his view.

Sadness comes to rue.
Dopamine, have mine.
White walls block his view.
Always my brother, compromised.

Dopamine, have mine.
Writes a letter, I get the gist.
Always my brother, compromised.
My brother cuts his wrist.

Gaby Maya



Color

Love of My Lonesome

I see waves of her through the grating of my space heater
And suddenly, the dark clouds recede and she holds no hostility.
I'm on my knees in the citadel of night-and-day personalities
Sobbing through my sleeves
Because she wants to know if I have a loaf of bread to break.
Leave me alone, we spit into one another's soullessness.
But drowning under scalding street lights and losing hard
Leaves fall, but no one ever leaves.

A back full of geologic spikes and tragic wet chin. And you
sit on the curb with me still;
She's killer grace, she's the gravity of my garden, I mean
Look at her bloom through the sidewalks
with her frostbitten black nose, her pupils of infinity.
Full disclosure; I am sewage. I've littleness reeking from my pockets;
Hello, I am
Letting you know that when you blink, my world goes ant hole black.
My state of self will fall out of its handcuffs, fall for you
And leave a breadcrumb trail that crosses every passing puddle.
Soggy as we become, I cannot stop myself, I believe
This saga is a scimitar that will slice self-awareness through me.

She laughs like the whole earth has wronged her. I cup her weathered face,
My senses writhe in the suit of my skin.
She's a snowball, all of my dreams and disasters rolled into a singularity.
And creeping through your flavor
Are the soured bruises being the daylight for so long have left with you?
My sullied claws and I are hostiles in the solstice that is your character
And in that second, I realize that I could watch you
Catching shimmering snowflakes in my palm until time stops.

I mean
Look at you and the growling nebulosity that comes from all sides
From the forest, from deep in my throat
To bury your sense of humor alive in the overcast.
But little are the blurred expressions of the world aware
That the cold and caliginous thoughts that hole up in your head
Are mere seconds from going supernova instead
And I'll be left with a mason jar of your ashes as you
Transcend to a town less hated, turn over a new leaf
You'll haunt me
Slow dance through autumn groves as I clutch handfuls of you in grief.

I'm likely the worst sight you've ever seen
And you're the northern star tonight
But today, and for countless tomorrows
Be that as it may
I come in peace and I come in pieces
With the moxie to step out of my melancholy gutter
And onto a blacktop dancefloor of preposterous proportions
With you.

In this life of deep sleep and plastic perennials
A silly love within me dreams that we will trip the light fantastic
Under a blushing sky that siphons nightmare induced redness from our eyes.

Moyinoluwa Blessing Akeju

Oblivion

Why am I attracted to bad things?
Why do I believe in love but not wedding rings?
Every time you talk, my mind and heart sing.
I'm oblivious to all the baggage you bring.
I love too hard and forget who I am.
Fights and yells and doors slam;
I'll give you everything before you give a damn.
Long story short, you're the wolf and I'm the lamb.
I'll love all of you: your views, body, and hair.
But it's like it's never enough, you never care.
People tell me to leave. They say it's not fair.
But how can I do that if everything isn't everything when you're not there.
My heart is too big.
It's made of concrete, nothing like a twig.
I'll put you on to music from my soul, like other girls put on their wig.
I genuinely loved, that's what you digged.
I don't need anything from you, but this:
I need you to know that I'll love you for everything, not just lust.
I'll pay attention to little things, like you not liking bread crust.
I'll always love you even if you hurt me, that's something you can trust.

Karen Osorio



Jersey City Night Lights



Outside

Friendship Bracelet 2020

In the dream where we make friends,
my thoughts are your boxed faces
and they disconnect
into little screens as tangents, dis-
assemble, like the video game loser.
My thoughts are separate personalities,
graphically unfixed
chatter, colors, the anti-rubix. The un-puzzled
I. As an other—no more.

Let's weave then...

My speech is yours, a joystick
that takes tokens, devours
cherries, runs from ghost mouths.
(Y)our speech is acquisition:
our avatars cheat death in each sentence
a few seconds more, in multi-player view
as they, we, you
navigate the frames and boundaries
distance necessitates. We smell each other's
kitchens, taste living rooms, wipe each other's
breakfasts from cell walls stained
lucky charm. Red. As a good harm,
we wear our separate threaded lines
woven of these days always

August Catarella

West Side Park



Innocence

There are memories sewed into every part of this park. I have lived in Paterson my whole life; this park holds my childhood. I used to come here all the time with my older sister, mom, and grandma. As I've grown older, I still come here. Whether it's to keep my younger cousins' company or hanging out with my friends.

The park has a basketball court right next to it. Despite being tall, I never really did like playing basketball. I can't catch the ball. I was always scared of getting hit in the face with it. Still, the park is a place that is magical for any child. But for me, it's not as magical as it used to be since I have grown too tall for the slides and monkey bars.

At least I can still fit on the swings. Swinging makes me feel like a kid again. I feel like I am floating, carefree, and wanting to touch all the stars that litter the sky. If I reach out enough maybe I could catch one and bring it home with me. There are hardly any airplanes at this time at night. Anyways, no one is traveling as much these days.

I can feel the squishy and rough little pieces of wood beneath my feet. They always get stuck in my shoes. The wood would scatter around the entrance of my house leaving evidence of where I snuck off to. Why do parks have these pieces of wood scattered around? Wouldn't regular grass be softer to land on if a child fell from a swing? I remember having the wood stuck not only inside my shoe but on my clothes as well. When I used to play in this park, I would go down the slide and land on my butt when I reached the ground. I would stand and become a wood monster with the pieces all stuck to my clothes. Grass would not have treated me this way.

I'm on the adult swings— well not really adult swings. More like just swings, just not swings for babies. The chains are cold to the touch. Global warming at its best, a freezing night in the summer. Parks are eerie at night. It feels like I'm in a horror movie, where a ghost child could appear in the swing next to me. But, no ghost children are here to keep me company tonight.

The sound of the river flowing behind me and the crickets chirping to make music together makes the night feel less eerie. It's so quiet, I can hear the wind blowing against my hair. So quiet, the creaks from the swing chain disturb the silence, like a baby crying in the middle of the night.

At least no one is around me since it is nighttime. But it's different during these troubling times. Having to come to the park and everywhere else with a mask on. Is that person smiling at me or just squinting their eyes to act like they are? But knowing these masks are for our safety makes it worth wearing. Parks both during the day and night are mostly empty these days. Parents must not want their children touching all the equipment in case they catch something. In front of me stands the swings for babies. Despite growing up in this place, I don't recall going on those swings. Maybe those are the memories in which my brain cannot remember because of how young I was. My growing up in this park will be different from the kids now growing up in this park because of COVID having to be cautious of touching the equipment.

Like the long yellow pole. It's one of those poles that firemen go down on when the alarm goes off. I can never slide down from it. To this day, I remember the feeling of being at the top, looking down, feeling lightheaded, and then turning back around to go on another thing. I still can't slide down on the poles even though I am way older now and should not be scared of it.

Then there's the green slide. It's two slides in one meaning two kids can slide down together next to each other. The image of my sister and I sliding down together pops up in my head. We would always go down the slide in crazy positions to make ourselves laugh. Sliding down backwards, on our knees, you name it. These positions made our mom and grandma anxious, but we never did get hurt.

There's also the red twirly slide (at least that's what I like to call it) that's my personal favorite. It's the longest and the fastest. It's shaped like a spiral and I used to reach the bottom of the slide feeling dizzy. To the right of the twirly slide, are the green monkey bars with the green spinny-stools. The bars are a new addition to the park. They couldn't be older than four years. I still like going on this even though I'm taller than the monkey bars. I like the act of the stools spinning to ruin your balance as you try to make it to the end.

Everything is surrounded by those darn pieces of wood. I long for the cooling grass lightly wet due to the rain from earlier in the day. Maybe that's why they use these wood chips. If the grass got wet around this equipment, you could slip. Maybe these pieces of wood have its perks. Breathing in and basking in the feeling of just existing in the park, I thought about the park. I thought about why I still come here. I guess the park is not just a place for kids, but it can be for anyone of all ages. This place is special. It has a special ability to bring different sensations and feelings to a person. There's nostalgia, happiness and freedom along with other varying emotions. Not everyone feels the same thing here and that is what is so great about a place like this.

Mabel Rivera

Caged

Far too many sleepless nights.

Reality is too hard to fight.

Escaping the world I feel I don't belong.

Everything here just feels so wrong.

Distractions now are starting to run low.

One day I will make it out.

Maybe for now I'll just close my eyes and
enjoy the breeze.

Ariana Perez



Caged

The Delinquents

Arnold and Jeff are best friends. They have been since they were kids. One always followed the other, in whatever they did. If Jeff greased back his hair, Arnold would do the same. When Arnold joined the Tunnel Snakes gang, Jeff joined him.

“The Tunnel Snakes look out for one another. They’re family. That’s what I want.” Arnold told Jeff the day before his gang initiation their freshman year. They were at Moe’s Diner, the place where everyone in town went to hang.

“But I’m your brother. My family is your family. My parents look out for you as if you were their own.” Jeff felt like Arnold was making a mistake joining that gang, but knew Arnold was going to do it no matter what he told him. So he joined too. They were initiated into the Tunnel Snakes the next night in the swamps of Greenville. They made them take the Tunnel Snake pledge and got the Tunnel Snake seal branded on their left arms.

Now they’re seniors, and they lead the pack of newly initiated Tunnel Snakes. The thing with Tunnel Snakes is they’re a group of humble and hardworking young guys who do whatever they can to not only support their families but to support each other. When they aren’t protecting the swamps of Greenville from the uptown gang of rich kids and star athletes, they’re all working multiple jobs to help out their families. Tunnel Snakes are typically from the “wrong side of town” as the rich kids would say. Among their crew was Ron, who Jeff and Arnold picked up after they saw the jocks bully him. He proved his toughness by punching Jeff across the face his sophomore year while Jeff was a Junior. Tunnel Snakes were feared across town. All the other students clear out for them, out of sheer respect and fear of them.

On the last week of school, Arnold, Jeff, and the gang went to Moe’s Diner. Where they met the star athletes of the school. The athletes saw them as inferior since they always got in trouble. They drew first blood by trying to take over their lunch table freshman year; thus their rivalry began. It didn’t help when those preppy students kept hounding at the Tunnel Snakes for being poor. The jocks also loved to flex in their new sedans that their daddies bought them. “Get out of the way, losers.” Daniel, the star quarterback of the football team, shoved Arnold out of the order line.

“What the hell man! What’s your problem?” Arnold replied, combing back his greased brown hair in a cowlick. He dropped his cigarette and crushed it under his boot. Ron and Jean both had their fists balled up. Their eyes look at one another with anger.

“Take it outside boys.” Yelled Moe, the owner of the Diner.

One of the football players spat out his gum to the side pavement. He took his stance along with the others. They can not reach an agreement on who can hang out in the diner. Moe’s is sacred to the Tunnel Snakes as that is where they hung out since freshman year. So they start

to fistfight. Jeff knocks out the football player with a punch to the temple. Jeff moves on to help his friends with their fight with the jocks. He grapples the quarterback from behind, locking his arms up and leaving him vulnerable. Arnold wails at him, throwing several punches to his abdomen. Jeff throws the quarterback to the floor.

Within minutes, the police came and everyone fled at the sound of sirens. Unfortunately, Jeff and Arnold got caught and apprehended. They see the police let go of the jocks as one of the athletes is the son of an officer.

Hours later, they're in their cell. "Bloody pigs. One of them's the father of that jock, so they let him go." Arnold points out.

"Blatant corruption, that's why I'm going to law school to be a lawyer," Jeff replies. "I'm done with all this; it was fun messing around with the teachers and fighting the meathead athletes. I'm done with all that though. I just got accepted into the school and I'm not going to throw that away. I'm done with the gang." Jeff responds, seeing as hanging with this crowd can jeopardize his future.

"Really Jeff? You're not joining the marine corps with me after we graduate?" Arnold asks.

"I was at first until I got the acceptance letter. I'm going through with it and then I'm going to law school when I finish college."

"They pay for college you know."

"I'm poor anyway so financial aid has me covered either way," Jeff responds.

"What about joining after college? You can be an officer." He questions.

"No, I want to be a lawyer and that's final."

"If you insist, you can leave, but why."

Jeff tries to explain to Arnold that he has more ambitions than just fighting. He wants to go to law school and become a lawyer. "It's school, Arnold. I want a good job so I don't have to work at a warehouse, like my dad. Plus, my dad has been good to me. I want to have a good career as a lawyer so I can treat him. He doesn't deserve to keep working his dead-end job."

"I guess that's understandable, Jeff. I want to be in the Marines and I can't risk any criminal charges." Arnold is convinced. The two talk about the old times in their early high school years. Like when Arnold put laxatives in the principal's coffee. Jeff's father picks him up from the police station, he's let off for his nonsense since his father is a good friend of the commissioner. He couldn't pick up Arnold because he's not his legal guardian. Arnold is left to his devices to contemplate his future actions. Arnold is let off later on a warning and ticket for disturbing the peace.

Years later, they meet again under bizarre circumstances. Arnold is a beggar on the street and Jeff is a successful lawyer. Jeff was getting off work and walking home.

"Spare change?" Arnold asked.

"Arnold? What happened to you?" Jeff is in shock to see his friend in this position.

"After my service, the politicians, the military...they screwed me over. Nothing."

"Didn't you save your money that you earned?"

"I wish I did. I was too foolish to do so, I wasted it all on liquor and gambling." Arnold regretted what he did. "You were right. College is the way." He had a clear frown on his face.

Jeff took a good long look at him. "I've practiced long enough to have my own office. Tell you what, I'll hire you. Just work as my assistant and clean around the office and I'll give you twelve per hour for it."

"Really? Thanks, Jeff. I'm sorry for calling you a coward so long ago. You were right about your path."

"Don't worry about that, Arnold. You work for me now and I'll pay well." The two firmly shook hands. From then on, Arnold worked for Jeff for years as his assistant.

Alberto Rios Perez

Expectations

Constantly staring at a screen, aching fingers typing away. Every late-night bombarded with work, assignments that may or may not help me, nothing I'll remember years later. Those first two sips of Dunkin' every morning fuel my mind. Every day I have to wake up early to take the bus to that one-hour English lecture. A lecture of just talking and responding to how we feel. I never understood the purpose of a back and forth conversation. Will this conversation help me get a full-time job, a part-time job, an internship? Or even an opportunity to get me noticed when I walk into that office and look that man or woman in the eye? Or how to exploit myself and show my potential in just a few words. I could not handle it. Yet I'm expected to have everything together by the age of 21. I am supposed to get involved in clubs, put my work out there, and receive achievements. But what if it's not possible to accomplish all three in the course of four years. It's difficult to put my writing out there to be judged by people who are in the same predicament as me but managed to accomplish their three goals.

To achieve the American Dream after years of studying is either by luck or pure fantasy. If I land a job (that I may or may not even want) I will have to put on a work facade. I will become the pleasant employee that follows rules and does what they're told. Whatever they tell me to write, I will write. The skills they teach me I will absorb and keep close. I want stability, to stay alive and make ends meet. But I also want to thrive. We can't all thrive and be successful. Not as successful as others who were born lucky or worked even harder than us. The urge to take a risk, to be at the top, is strong. I need to build myself up again for the money; do it for the money.

I need to have all my ducks in a row to have a future career, a committed spouse, a house, and children. How will I raise my children? Do I even want children? What is the right way when there is no right way to raise them? The world keeps corrupting, changing, coercing you to be somebody you did not want to be. The world tells you different stories. How do you know which is truly the best for the next generation? New generations keep opening up new ideas, legacies, rules, evils. It never stops. The desire to provide all the right answers for them so they can live the same life cycle as me, but bigger and better. Will I love my children, or secretly use them to compensate for the setbacks or failures I could not achieve? I don't want to tell my child "yes, you can make it," or change my answer to "the real world might not let you."

Right now, I am typing on my keyboard, wondering if all these worries of growing up will prepare me for the unknowns that will hit me. Will it all be forgotten once I reach the end? When I lay in bed at the age of eighty or ninety, god forbid one hundred, was it all worth it? The laughing, crying, anger, lies, truths, happiness, will the whole world know? I want them to know this is my writing. The contributions I made through my thoughts, I want that to be known. Does it even matter if anyone else knows? All of these worries inside our minds and hearts soon turn to dust and we become the soil. At the end of the journey, it seems the last lesson we learn is to not give a fuck about anything and just live.

Gabrielle Maya



Inside



Old & Young

Hold my Drink with Massive Hands

Massive hands have you to raise cardboard fortresses from trash
A warm-blooded sun you are today, yesterday, will be tomorrow
Tell me what I have to do to stop you, the indestructible you
From running tracks through the fathomless pit of my stomach
Where friends, fiends of stress and stop lights burn cavities into me;
When I wake up in the dead of night the thought of life crushes me.

Raging against the dying of the fright.

I have to worry what the world's boogeymen will think
If I stroll past them and pour a lonely glass by the kitchen sink
As the clock strikes twelve and my worst dreams hush the wind.
Will every angry drop which hits the floorboards be held against me
Will I drown in a frothy pool of monster drool and midnight mystery?

Bedtimes were demolished as I felt the world within my bones,
 somehow I turned out to be an exhausted pacifist
 Good in the sense that I didn't use my fists of fury on childhood comrades
 Bad in the sense that I feel like I haven't slept since the eon before the last.

In my somnambulist blues, I strike untrue in the running rains
 The one medicine would be to stay awake till we reach good rapport.
 I've been preoccupied with untraceable voices, echoes of unimagined pain
 But I'll slam these eyelids shut if you do so alongside me.

When I wake up it is not from sleep but from this bewildering world
The big blue caterpillar of nothingness, the ghosts of hate on my front doorstep
Long-legged beetles of bravado and black bleeding butterflies.
Everyone tiptoes down the corridors lest they wake the sleeping beast of sorrow
Who has never stopped wishing upon our friendship, the last supernova, to suffer
Not with a whimper but with an incandescent pulse ceasing.

Moyinoluwa Blessing Akeju

Aqua

Lasted longer than our own
Your cycle, repeated through the billions
You've staked your claim on our home
Let's speak on your contributions

The blue from the skies is reflected through your eyes
The shade around the world is different
The life you hold beneath, we are mesmerized
Many look at you in awe
And see "His" holy existence

Your rage can be seen at any moment
In this stage, you claim lives with a quickness
Some days we become your opponent
A mystery how you mix beauty
and turmoil in your existence

Flames

Do we dare come close?
Knowledgeable on your chaos
Trying to tame, as you rise
Then act surprised when you turn against us

We forget sometimes the kindness you show
Giving warmth to lost hands in the cold
How your embers perfect our dishes
And blow you out for our wishes

Your danger out shadows your purpose
When you tear away at our structures
Feel betrayed when you made no promise
And saddened because you resisted capture

Marcel Jones



BookShop

Suffocation

Thoughts, loud.
Silent, me.
Another day, gone.
Another night, scream.

Morning, smile.
Night, cry.
Suffocating emotions.
Keep them inside.

Mouth, shut.
All I could do was hide.
World falls apart outside.
I fall apart inside.

Ariana Perez



Winter Wonderland in the City

Pencil Pouch

Whoosh— the pencil pouch sliced through the stale air and smacked its target with everything it had.

Pencils of all colors, green, red, purple, yellow, pink, orange... of all sizes, from brand-new to barely-any-wood-left-to-sharpen, and erasers bigger than my fingers, rough and smooth, dirty and clean,

were all tightly packed in a prussian blue polyester pouch thicker than the wrists our teachers used to chalk up the black board. Heavier than the little wittle weight balls we messed around with in the gym when it rained during recess.

It smacked Dyllen right across his frightened face,forced him to turn the other way.

It smacked Dyllen’s broad shoulder, made him recoil.

It smacked the floor by Dyllen’s desk. A loud thud followed behind.

Perhaps the gasps of teachers and students erased the sound, but it must’ve not mattered. It must’ve not existed. It must’ve been easy to breathe in. My eyes were glued to the pouch. My ears traced each impossible sound it made. My nose followed its pungent scent of grime, led, burned-out

erasers and ink. My hands stood in place, mid-air, extended, throwing daggers and declaring war, alert and ready for a fire that never ignited.

Against the stained ceramic floor of the classroom, the pouch screamed for attention. Any attention. Mine. Its worn yellow zipper line was a stark contrast to the dark surrounding it, but not as much

as the faded tiles forever bound to the floor. The floor, however, didn’t matter. Nothing mattered to the young Yomalis, nothing but the pouch, and yet, I remember his face. Stunned. Pained. Confused.

Against the pale wall of the far end of the classroom, the bright-red glow of his cheek popped out as if it were, at any moment, going to come for me. But it didn’t swell, it didn’t twitch, it didn’t breathe for a

single moment. Neither did it glare. It only shook in horror. Salmon-pink lips followed suit, and clear, almond eyes threatened to fall out of their sockets along with the tear they formed. Dyllen’s.

My face shriveled up in ways my current self will never understand. It must’ve. It could’ve. It should’ve. Attracted as a moth is to light, in ways she had yet to comprehend or control, impulse may have taken over at the mere sight of his smile on my best friend. My best friend, not his. It must’ve. It could’ve. It should’ve.

Perhaps a squeak escaped him. Who knows. I wish I did. I wish she knew. But she’ll never know, and neither will I. No teacher nor student saw it. Just me and him, the pencil pouch and the floor, in the classroom.

Yomalis Perozo Sanchez



Indifferent

I Can't Retrace Your Steps for You

“Do you think we orbit one another?”

“What?”

“Can you light this for me? I think it went out.”

You watch as stiff, awkward fingers pinch at the blunt. Taylor, despite being at the wheel of the car, is keeping a close eye on it, mindful of whether you're all canoeing it. Her boyfriend, John, is seated next to her in the front seat, the Boyfriend Seat. Or the Girlfriend Seat when he drives. You used to sit in the girlfriend seat before Taylor was around. Now you sit in the ex-seat, behind it, next to your own boyfriend as he fumbles to light your blunt. You're visiting your mother's house in the Poconos with them. It felt like you were introducing them like an amalgamation of a partner; love them, love me for loving them. You all finally caught a moment where you can stop pretending like you were still in high school like you're still those kids who were afraid of being put under at the dentist. Instead, you're the twenty-something-year-old who smokes weed in John's basement after driving around the twisting streets of Hudson County, looking through Targets, through Michaels, through Walgreens before plopping down to pass a bong.

The blunt is handed back to you and you smile your thanks. Inhaling, you look out the window at the backcountry roads. You normally don't hotbox like this; you normally don't need to. But you can't smoke in your mother's house. That would be like spitting in her kitchen. So instead, Taylor takes the wheel of the car and gets you lost. Lost in a tangle of highways that are almost familiar to you. Ones that shouldn't be nostalgic but are. You think you like her best out of everyone in the car, in a way that's so different from your boyfriend or your ex-boyfriend. She grew up in a completely different world than you, sat under a completely different sun. And yet when you stare at her, you see yourself. Or what could have been yourself. John met her in college; he was the only one to truly go away for school. You tried but you came right back, pulled in by some force that choked you. You knew her the least amount of time, and yet your mouth opened for her like you were childhood friends, speaking secrets that no one else knew, almost like school girls comparing homework to see if you both had the same answers.

You passed the blunt up to her. John took it and held it for her as she inhaled.

You sat back in your seat and watched the sea of autumn leaves melded together with the speed of the car. Peak leaf season, that's what your mom said. You guys came up during peak leaf season. Your boyfriend, James, was looking out his window too. He was a quiet stoner. He was a quiet boy. You had a crush on him freshman year of high school because you were convinced he would never like you back. That your loud, shrill voice scared him off. By senior year of high school, he had given you his virginity. By the time you were graduating from college, you had moved in together, sharing family plates and Tupperware and furniture from childhood homes.

Only James and John shared a childhood in the literal sense. They had gone to grammar school together for some years before James transferred schools. They remet in high school, where you met John senior year. But it was almost like you knew them better than they knew each other. You knew their childhood antics like you were there with them. There was the time before John, before sex with boys, and that felt like a different lifetime, a different world. There was a time before James too, before the heated pining of adolescence, before scrambling to find a check to pay rent. Between sheets, he revealed whole lifetimes to you, entire family histories, lost stories that weren't supposed to slip past his tongue. You gobbled them all up, gobbled him up, that boy who was always so quiet. That boy who was too scared to give you even his email address when you first met him.

“I recognize this road,” he said, not looking at anyone. “We're near a tourist spot my parents would take me to.”

“Country Kettle, right?” you say, eager. He nods, smiling.

“So much candy.”

“Dude, you guys will love it. Like it's just rows and rows of it.”

“That's where I got you that jam, John.”

“They have hot sauces too! Homemade and shit.”

You and James both have histories in Pennsylvania. As a child, your family vacations were split between here and Wildwood, NJ. You preferred the woods because you could bring your dogs because your mom rented out entire houses because you got to step into a whole new life for a week. That's why your mother moved here after retiring and divorcing your dad; it was an almost-home. A shoe that fits if you wore an extra thick sock with it. James had family up here too; you remembered an entire summer in high school he had to spend with his aunt here, away from you. He wrote you emails, long emails that frightened you. You were too young. It was too big. Now you both spoke of the same stores, the same ground, the same roads as if you walked hand in hand through them. As if you shared the memory. As if you had known each other your whole lives.

“Do you think we orbit each other?”

“What was that?”

“I really like this flea market around here. I got that antique-looking chair here. My mom's whole house is basically furnished from there.”

Laughter filled up the space, mixing with the wisps of smoke. The blunt was being passed to you again. How did it get back so fast? You never knew. Inhaling, you looked at the houses lining the roads, at the families, you would never know. Did you walk the same steps as them? Did they get chocolates from Country Kettle too? Were they sad when your mother bought the vintage lamp they were pining for?

Stiff, awkward fingers plucked the blunt from you again. You watched those thin lips curl around that waxy paper. Lips you were sure you had known all your life, were sure you had been

born to kiss. Taylor’s ever mindful eyes were on you both still. Protective. John was looking at her, at the way she held the wheel. The Boyfriend Seat came with many responsibilities; helping with directions, ditching burnt out blunts, writing down fast-food orders, fixing hair that had fallen into the driver’s face. They listened to the two of you ramble on about where you were all driving. They seemed to soak up the words, like bread in oil. So much shared. Shared boyfriends. Shared secrets. Shared blunts.

You looked at your boyfriend and felt sad. Sad because you would never see his face the first time he went to Country Kettle. Sad because you would never sit with him in his depressed aunt’s living room as he typed out emails to you. Sad because you would never not have his email again. Sad because he wouldn’t have the you before he met you.

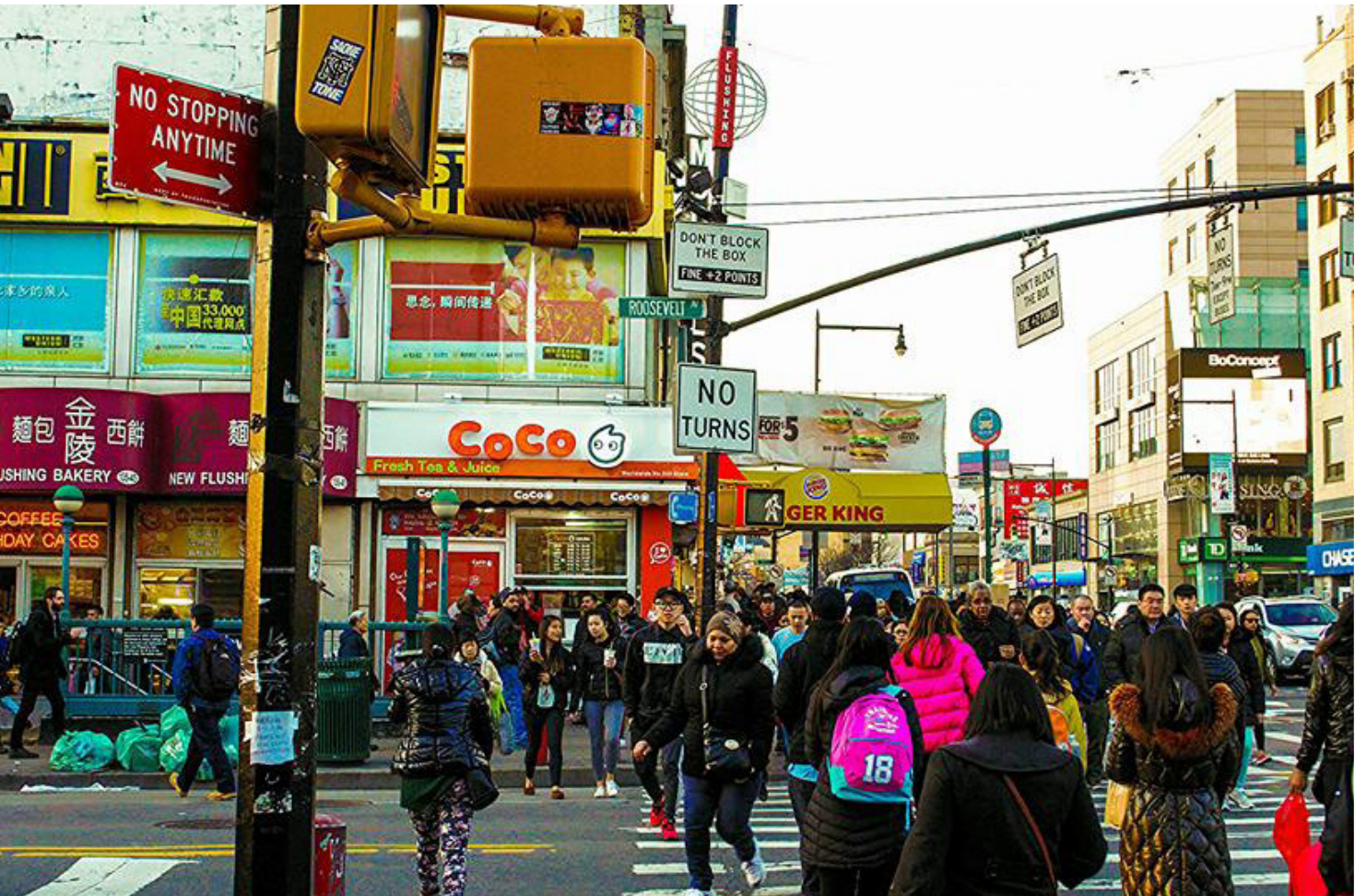
“Do you think we orbit one another?”

“Yes.”

“What?”

“It’s getting dark. We should head back, guys.”

Emily Seirra



Flushing, Queens is Home

Incendiary Smile

Why do I let the lava secreting spaces between your smile
Warm me to thawing and beyond from the inside out
Until I am laughing so hard that I am coughing
Until I am coughing so much I stop breathing

From oversized gaps between my teeth streaming
Impassioned plumes of smoke that originate
From a wasted bonfire fifty planes of time ago
And if I were to close my mouth and let it scorch me
Make me into a lava cake of burnt sienna from the inside out
A hot caramel comet topped with golden sparkles
Rearrange my quarks into bittersweet melting symphony
Would I be sorry that I turned to reformation
And morphed into something that could crumble so easily
And sticks to the creases in other people's hands without effort

I am trying, softening right now
As embers tumble down my brows
I yawn flames and roll on my side, fully aware that you've set me on fire
Inhaling exhaust, existing in tones of expansion, and exhausted
I am still right here
I'm left burning and I couldn't care less.

What makes your arsonist eyes do the things that they do
What keeps me chemically and gravitationally tied to you

That stellar glare,
that stomach-turning shift,
that flammable stare
That emanates more and more as I hold your gaze
Even as the axis of the earth forgets its own trajectory

Like that is what keeps the works of astero-seismology from killing me
Because I guess that I am still so shaken by you
That I won't be able to refrain from chasing down everyone I know
Just to show them the radius of my sparkler and
Wave you back and forth in the chilled spaces between days and
Refuse to let go until your fuse runs out
and I lose you.

Why do human starbursts and inhuman infinity run so deep
Why does your body unfailingly heat up when you sleep
Why are you the one thing that cremation can't keep
At least now I understand what it really means
To be captivated, cornered, captured,
To rewrite my own oscillation to match someone else's
To stumble into and end up entirely forgotten
In the aura of someone else's incendiary smile

I lay my heavy head down on your arm
And wait patiently for the thoughts in my mind's eye
To tire themselves out and curl up in the corners of my mouth
My headache will sputter away and my eyelids will slam
My lips will part and drool a puddle of nothingness onto the pillow
And they too will smile for the world like everything is the same
tomorrow morning.

Moyinoluwa Blessing Akeju



Disguise

[I] Buried My Father

Her face was crimson, her smile was now fake.
The papers are signed. Not two but one hand.
They pack their things and took it to the lake

She has a frown, her mom a clown, pure hate.
The wound gone, the mirror she cannot stand.
Her face was crimson, her smile was now fake.

New friends, new town, she has no sound. It aches.
His yells would blow, eyes bulged. His skin was tan.
They packed their things and took it to the lake.

Mom braids her locks, each remembers its fate
Her scalp burnt like toast after he pulled each strand.
Her face was crimson, her smile was now fake.

Now, she writes in class about a boy named Blake.
With each stroke her heart flutters, sinks like sand.
They packed their things and took it to the lake.

Mom sees the sun over hill, no need for escape.
The two of us hold hands, no fear or plan.
Her face still crimson, her smile is not fake,
they packed their things and took it to the lake.

Gabrielle Maya

Clovers

when we were kids
we had so much energy
but all we wanted to do was sleep.
as we grew older
we realized
that life doesn't last forever.
and by the time we wanted
to run and jump and scream
our bodies were too weak.
and by the time we wanted
to laugh throughout the night
it would hurt our chests
and we'd fall asleep.
but in my dreams
we'd be young again
we'd smoke in secret in your old den
we'd run off into forests
to sing in beds
of clovers
always wishing we were older

Percy Totten



A Commuter's Encounter

Morts Jaune

It was a Tuesday morning in April of 2009. I had a useless flip phone. I remember staring at my tan walls. Vibrations interrupted my routine of not wanting to get out of bed, contemplating if school was worth it, and whether breakfast was THE important meal of the day. A number I didn't recognize popped up on my tiny screen.

"Hello? Yes, this is she. I see." I felt okay. I knew I wasn't.

It took 52 seconds to find out my best friend was dead.

It took 66 minutes to react.

It took a year to accept it, or at least attempt to.

It took three years to talk about it.

I didn't know how long it would take for things to be normal even though nothing was— or would be again.

I met Cecil when I was in second grade. I don't remember much about our first encounter. I know that Angela had something to do with it. Angela was one of the first people I became close friends with in middle school, and she happened to live on the same block as me. We both loved ladybugs and snow. She was a pale blonde girl with blue eyes. I was the short brown curly-haired girl with brown eyes. Complete opposites. My self-esteem was nonexistent.

There was this tall girl. She had white skin, green eyes, and long wavy hair. She looked like a porcelain doll. Cliché I know, but she was way too pretty. Her hair looked auburn. She walked up to me and said, "Hi. My name is Cecil Auburn Abett. I'm in fifth grade. What's your name?" Cecil Auburn Abett with auburn hair. Her image was my dream. I wanted to look like that. I told her my name and she called it pretty. I never thought my name was pretty. It wasn't an original name considering my name was commonly used in Latin American countries. She smiled and grabbed the blue and white tie-dye ball from the floor and threw it at Angela. Angela giggled and threw at me. The snow never sparkled as much as it did that day.

Now, I color this antistress coloring book. I keep avoiding the color yellow. I still hate the color. It's so bright and happy. I avoid it because it reminds me of her. But I avoid it so I can miss it and go back to it. I keep thinking I could have stopped her from accidentally overdosing. Maybe if I knew she was taking different kinds of pills or something. I can't remember her face. I can't remember the shape of her eyes, the curve of her mouth. Did she have freckles? Was her voice deep, soft, loud, or rough? I know she spoke like the stereotypical girly girl in those teen movies. What was the apartment like? I know rooms connected but how, where? Where were they connected? I don't remember the last day I saw her. I don't remember the street she lived on. I don't remember what New York City looked like in 2009. I don't remember her mom. I don't remember her ex-boyfriend. I don't remember how we celebrated birthdays. I don't remember if she was skinny or chubby or curvy or whatever. I remember colors. The color of the rooms, her hair, her eyes, and her favorite color. I remember scents. I

remember the daisies. And then I remember the black couch. Green and white tiled floor. White sheer curtains. No sunlight. It was night. It was dark. Cecil had just turned eighteen a few months before. She was an adult, but just barely. She just found out she was pregnant. Her boyfriend left her. He was a jerk. He was abusive. He was selfish. He didn't want anything but the accomplishment of fucking a virgin. She did lose her virginity to him. They had sex probably four times, and the fourth was the one to knock her up.

"Don't yell at me. Please," she begged repeatedly.

"Cecil, you are fucking stupid. You dated an asshole knowing he was an asshole. He got you pregnant which was a big mistake. You are only eighteen. You should be the responsible one. A child is a blessing, but that dick doesn't deserve you nor your child. He fucking walked out on you the moment he found out. So, stop being an idiot."

"He left because of me. It's my fault. I need to find a way to get him back." She was crying. She was crying so heavily that snot was coming out of her nose.

"Don't. Are you serious right now? You're fucking pathetic if you think you should chase after him."

I called her a bitch that night. She cried profusely. I never apologized and I don't think I ever would have because she never went back to him. Months after her discovery of her pregnancy, Cecil asked me to be the godmother of her twins even though she didn't know they were twins until about four months in. She also asked me to name them. I was to announce the names in the living room of Cecil's apartment. The green tiles were glossy. The light from the window hit my face and I felt my eyes light up like caramel brown in the aura. Cecil's mom sat directly in front of me. Cecil was right next to her holding her two-month bump. It was round and sweet. She was glowing, the way people say a pregnant woman will. The black couch outlined her slim figure, making her belly just that much more apparent. I took a deep breath.

"You ready?" They nod.

"Aimee if it's a girl. Eric if it's a boy," I said. Cecil's mom smiled with elegance. I guess she read my mind. Cecil looked at her with confusion. She shrugged at me but said she liked the names. She never found out why I picked those names. Aimee because it means love in French. Eric because she loved The Little Mermaid. Love for the love she would have for these children. Eric because she finally found her prince.

Dead yellow. Morts Jaune. The worst but most beautiful color. It was the color of my feelings for the first two years after her death. I saw yellow everywhere. I hated it. It was dead.

She was dead. Stupid yellow. I wonder why she never talked about being French. Morts Jaune sounds pretty. I read The Year of Magical Thinking while sitting on a yellow patterned, two-seated couch on a carpet that has browns and hints of teal. I turn the pages back and reread the lines that made me dwell on my anxiety: "Grief is different. Grief has no distance. Grief comes in waves, paroxysms, sudden apprehensions that weaken the knees and blind the eyes and obliterate the dailiness of life." Damn. Joan Didion kind of hurt me. When does someone stop grieving? When does it actually end? My chest feels

tight. Tight like when I attempted to wear a dress six years after I bought it, my ribs being squeezed in the fabric. My breaths are short. Short like the distance between the carpet with hints of brown and teal and the piss-yellow couch. My tears stung as they fall. You're grieving. It's like I can hear her say that to me. Tell me, Cecil, what I am doing? But she is dead. She's been dead for six years.

Cotton candy. Pink and blue. Soft and sweet. I saw these colors in my head but that was the scent of her skin and her home. This scent is one I loved.

The dark wooden door was slightly open. I walked in and stared at her. She didn't notice me, but I notice her pouting. From the direction Cecil was facing, I can tell her mom was in the kitchen.

"I want sugar cookies!" Cecil frowned.

"No 'Hello'? No hug? No 'Welcome back'?" Cecil ignored me. This was my first day back in the city. I tried to come to the city every other day to visit her since she didn't live in New Jersey. I went to school and she didn't. She was so busy with doctor's appointments and shopping for baby clothes that she banned me from her apartment for a while. It had been a week or two since I had spoken to or seen my best friend. The cotton candy aroma in the room was home to me.

"No, Cecil Auburn!" I can hear her mom shout from the kitchen. I laughed. Cecil whined for about half an hour. She didn't acknowledge me until after then, she hugged me tightly. Her five-month pregnant belly poked my chest more than it had before. She looked at me with her eyebrows knitting together and tears sparkling in her eyes. Pregnancy cravings are a bitch to deal with but more annoying to deal with when you're not pregnant. She had a shitload of sugar cookies that month. I never understood pregnancy. I was only fourteen when Cecil got pregnant. I leave for the kitchen. It was like the light at the end of a tunnel, bright yellow and white. I called the long, narrow hallway the "art tunnel." Cecil always asked for my help in the decoration of her apartment. The cotton candy scent was gone and a buttery, sugary, heavy scent tickled my nose.

"Mum, you gave in."

"I can't have her crying all night over stupid cookies. This is the third night!" Cecil's mom was never the kind of mother to neglect her daughter. She was always there for Cecil.

"O-M-G is that sugar cookies?!"

Cecil smelled the sugar cookies. She wobbled her way into the kitchen. Cecil's face lit up. Her smile was flawless. The daisies on the white table reflected off of her. The white walls and yellow curtains with daisy hooks keeping them together made her glow.

From what I can remember she looked perfect.

Cecil was alive.

But now, she isn't.

She is dead yellow.

Rosa Garcia



The Elephant Matriarch

Final Steps

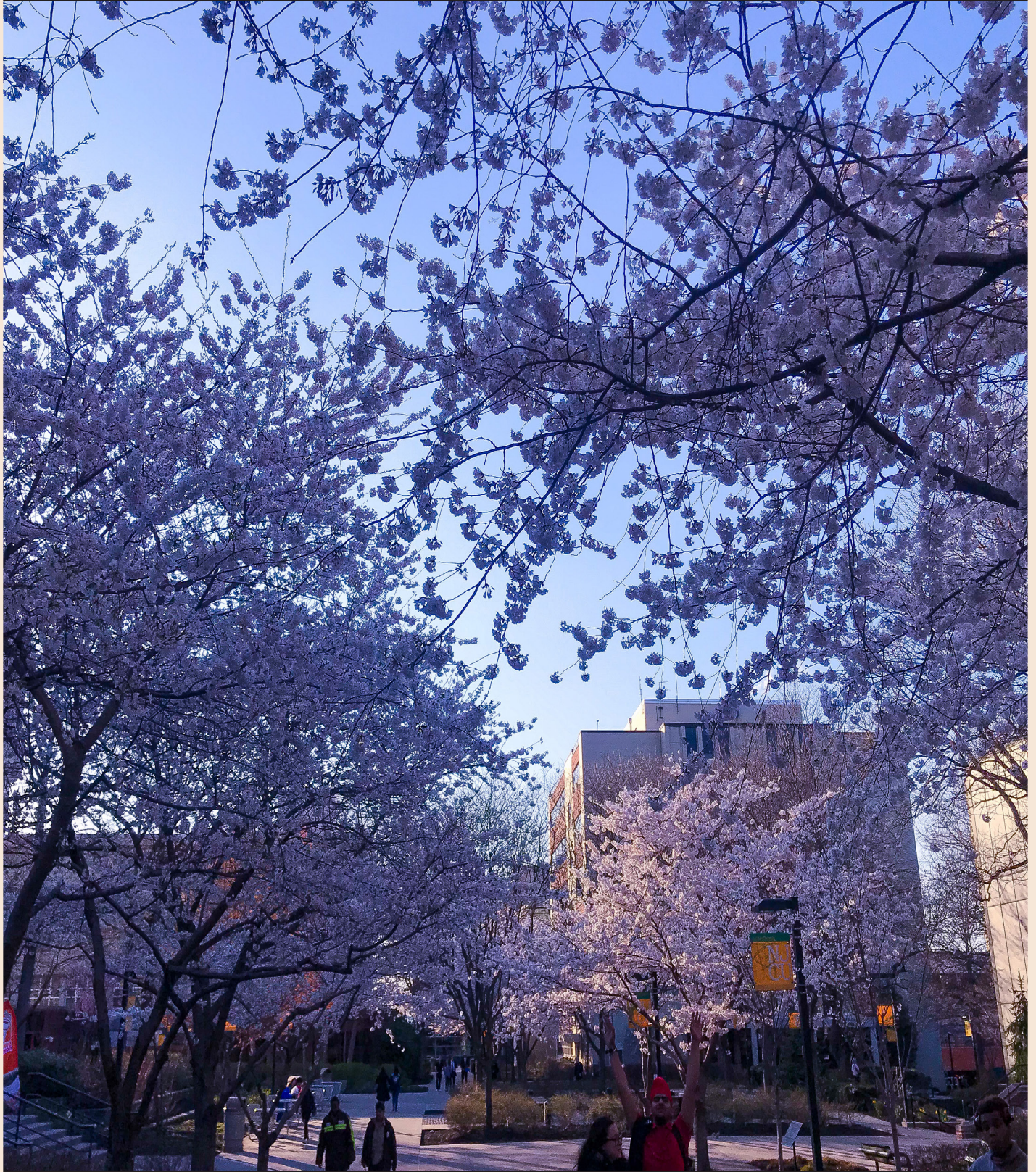
I kissed the pavement, the way the sun does in the late afternoon. Your footsteps felt warm, though colder than yesterday. Pebbles clung to my lips, the way yours did. I let the debris settle till the pink skin cracked. It brought me comfort to be touched. I swore I could smell the pine suds of your body wash. I felt the sticky lather between my fingers, then, came your body. My fingers trailed the bumps on your back; my fingers trailed the dirt on my lips. It stung. It reminded me of you.

Peggy Jackson



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