

TRANSFER

Since 1950

MAGAZINE

Issue No. 119

Interviews

Truong Tran
Junse Kim

Poetry

Dasha Bulatova
Angel Johnson

Fiction

Gabrielle Rupert
Guadalupe Campos



TRANSFER noun. (trans'fər)

1. in some transportation systems, a ticket given or sold to the passenger to enable them to continue their journey to another point. 2. to cause to pass from one person to the other, as thought, qualities, power etc.: transmit. 3. *Law*. to make over the possession or control of; to ____ a title of land. 4. to imprint, impress, or otherwise convey (a drawing, design, pattern, etc.) from one surface to another. 6. to withdraw from one school, college, or the like and enter another. 16. *Law*. a conveyance, by sale, gift, or otherwise, of real or personal property to another.

Transfer is a collection of students writing from San Francisco State University published twice yearly in association with the Creative Writing department and with the support of the Instructionally Related Activities Fund.

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Printed and bound within the United States.
Set in Cormorant.

Book design by Gitanjali Poonia.
Cover art titled '2' by Cameron Gonzales.
Cover Design by Gitanjali Poonia.

Transfer would like to thank Nona Caspers, Chair of the Creative Writing Department; Katherine Kwid; Jane George; Andrew Harris, Dean of College of Liberal and Creative Arts; and The Poetry Center.

The editors and staff of *Transfer* would also like to extend thanks to Dodie Bellamy, our faculty advisor; interviewees Junse Kim and Truong Tran; Leo Litwak Award judge Andrew Joron; Mark Linenthal Award judge Joseph Lease; and all staff members, editors, and readers, past, present, and future, who have helped make *Transfer* the magazine it is today and will help continue its legacy.

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You bring out the Lucha in me

Jennifer Guerrero

You bring out the Lucha in me!

But don't be confused I ain't no criminal, gangster or a drug lord.

Some of us live to paycheck to paycheck trying to make ends meet.

Having three jobs. So what? Just to pay for a garage to live in.

We are fighting to stay in a place where we call home.

Imagine the countless nameless souls that will never be properly buried.

Or the people that jump the beast just to end up losing an arm or a leg.

Where only the day of the dead we get to see our loved ones once again.

Think of the fear of getting a knock on your door; not knowing when it's your turn.

The insanity of a child's hands reaching out through bars to hold their mother.

Seeing the rough exterior of a hand laced with dirt working in the fields.

Picking the fruits each day knowing that this is towards our families' dream.

A Dios le Pido that my people don't give up the fight!

Well, get there soon enough!

Rubies in Georgia

Daja Walker

Black girl,
remember to wash your
aching feet.
the filthy soil
you trudge
is closer to the devil

&

Black girl,
remember to wash your
coiled crown.
for even your head
bowed in prayer
stretches closer
toward the heavens.



Dysmorphia
by Juliane Roberts-Hansen



The Unseen Truth
by Juliane Roberts-Hansen

Untouched

Cepideh Jaberi

Home

The house on Berryessa Street looked like a time capsule. Years had passed since Bahareh stood in front of the two-story track home, and while her face had developed little cracks around corners of her eyes, the tan colored home stood without any blemishes, completely untouched. Bahareh felt a bizarre sensation overtake her body as she contemplated her next move.

Obviously, she was going to walk to the front door. But then? Knock? Use her key? She would say hello, right? What the hell she doing? This was home. Or at least it used to be. But that was a lifetime ago. When sneaking out of her second story bedroom to see boys down at the park (after she had been strictly forbidden) was a norm. A time when rushing to the mailbox before anyone got home to hide her below average report cards was as simple as smoking her vape pen, cough free.

Click, white. Click, blue. Click, red. Yes. Red was definitely the color of choice for this moment. Maybe if she was higher than a kite walking in, she wouldn't feel as petrified as she was right now.

About 3 drags later, feeling sufficiently not sober, Bahareh grabbed her bag, swung it over her shoulder and let out a deep breath. Now or never.

She pulled her phone out of her pocket, and wrote him a text message.

I can't do this. I can't tell them.

Before she could hit send, the front door swung wide open and there stood her father, wearing a surprisingly flattering Tommy Bahama floral shirt, smiling from ear to ear. "Bahar!! Get over here you pedar sookhteh!"

Bahareh couldn't help but start giggling. Her father was always able to make her laugh. That was one thing that always stayed

constant. From calling her his little brat in Farsi, to lighting up the room with his larger than life personality, her father was never one to lack spice.

"Hi, Daddy." Bahareh was suddenly very aware of how young she felt and sounded. She leaned in to hug her father and smelled the Pacco Raban cologne that was spritzed just a little too strongly on his chest. "I've missed you," she whispered; and she had. That was more apparent than she would ever let on. He pushed her back from his embrace and looked her up and down.

"Let me get a good look at you, dokhtaram. It's been so long." He looked straight at Bahareh for what felt like an eternity. His voice started to crack, and Bahareh felt keenly aware of sadness joining them in the room.

He looked away almost hesitant. He leaned over and picked up the light blue backpack filled with what looked like work clothes and gym shoes. For just a moment, he held it with such intent, then quickly shifted his way over to the sunlit kitchen.

Bahareh watched him walk away. His back was starting to hunch over, and each step he took seemed heavier than the one before. She couldn't stop the pain from hitting her heart like a razor blade cutting jaggedly through Styrofoam. His heart was in pain, and her absence was the culprit. As the guilt started to overcome her body, she quickly tried to remind herself why she had left for so long. Why she chose to distance herself from what in this moment felt like the most comforting place she would ever encounter on this earth.

How had she strayed so far? How had her absolute universe suddenly turned into a simple question of doubt? Her father spoke. "Your mother isn't home yet. She will be back soon. I'm going to stop by the bank and run a few errands." Without looking back at her, he walked out of the room, leaving Bahareh alone with just her guilt as a companion.

Chemistry

Justin was waiting for her outside the gym with the rest of their group. Bahareh adjusted her tank top and pulled out her new purse from her backpack. She tucked the light blue wannabe JanSport

back into her locker and stood up. Her first high school dance. This was going to be absolutely amazing, she thought. She took one last look at herself in front of the locker room mirror and decided she felt pretty. Her face started to pink. Time to go.

Bahareh could hear all of her friends chatting and laughing as she went to turn the corner. She was just about to call out to the group, when she heard Justin's voice. "I'm not trying to be a dick you guys. I just don't know how to tell her."

"Just do it man. Tell her you aren't into her like that because you're terrified she's going to bomb your ass if you piss her off." Everyone burst out laughing as Jason went on. "I'm serious! Y'all know she probably practices how to make those things in her garage. Her great uncle Saddam probably gave her her first bomb making kit when she was like six."

"Nah man. You've seen her in Chem class...she can't mix chemicals for shit..." Their cackling turned to complete silence at the sight of Bahareh, frozen in her tracks. Justin opened his mouth to speak, but Bahareh just felt her throat start to close up.

She turned around and started to run. "Fuck all of you", she wanted to scream. But her throat was completely swollen. She could hear him trying to run after her, asking her to slow down, but there was no way she could let anyone see her cry.

Gheimeh

The smell of gheimeh filled the entire house. It had been so long since Bahareh had tasted the sweet turmeric and eggplant dish. Oddly enough, she didn't realize how much she missed it, until she saw the bright orange stew sitting on the Lazy Susan next to the plate of steaming basmati rice. Her stomach growled. "Mamani, this smells incredible." She said much softer than she had anticipated.

Her mother didn't look up, but instead kept dicing the tomatoes for the salad Shirazi. "I'm glad I can make you something special while you are home dokhtaram." Bahareh's mom paused for a moment, almost hesitant to continue, then added "do you know how long you will be staying for?"

"Only a day." Bahareh spoke faster than her brain could filter.

As soon as the words blurted out of her mouth, she wished she could hit rewind and retract them. Her mother, again silent, picked up the salad bowl, and laid it on the dining table.

“Well, you’re here right now, and that makes me so very happy.”

Bahareh felt that sickening guilt start to take over her body once more. She sat down at the table and waited for her parents to settle into their seats. She watched her mother pick up her plate and serve her father. First with the buttery long grained rice, fragrantly garnished with brightly colored saffron, then with the gheimeh stew on top. The aromas of cinnamon and turmeric made Bahareh’s mouth start to water. There was so much art on such a simple plate. From the elegance behind the layering of flavors, to the complexity behind the actual recipe. Bahareh felt the corners of her mouth start to curl as she looked down at her own plate.

“It feels really great to be home.”

Hunger

The lunch line was longer than usual. For some reason, the line always seemed to be longer when it was a rainy-day schedule. Bahareh walked behind the recycle bins and stared down the line in search of her counterparts.

“Bahar!” She turned around and found Brittany and Jessica waving to her eagerly from table 5. “Mr. Lam let us out to lunch 5 minutes early, so I already got my food, and Jessica packed hers today! Hurry, come sit before someone takes your spot!” Bahareh let out a sigh of relief as she scooted towards her beautifully freckled and perfectly blonde pair of best friends.

As Bahareh settled into her seat, she watched Brittany pull apart the packaging of her Uncrustables peanut butter and jelly sandwich, while Jessica squeezed ketchup onto her chicken nuggets school lunch. The two girls could have been sisters. Sometimes Bahareh actually thought they were. From matching friendship bracelets, to having the most perfect button noses, Bahareh was always amazed at how she managed to wiggle into this friendship duo.

Jessica smiled at Bahareh as she took a bite of from her nuggets. "You didn't grab your food?" She looked at Bahareh confused, "the nuggets are actually really good today."

"I actually brought my lunch today. Trying to save the lunch money up so I can buy a new pair of sunglasses." Bahareh pulled out the Tupperware from her lunch bag and searched for a fork. She unscrewed the lid, and smelled the sweet turmeric zap into her nose like a alarm clock for her stomach; she realized how hungry she was.

"Oh Ewww!" shouted Brittany. "What is that gross smell?! Is something wrong with your food?! Why is it so orange?! And so...sour smelling?! Oh my goodness, I think I might throw up!"

Bahareh couldn't have shut the lid fast enough. "Oh, I think it must have gone bad or something. Yeah, super gross."

"Just go get some nuggets or something from the cafeteria. And for goodness sake, throw that nasty smelling crap out, won't you?" Brittany leaned over to her backpack. "Or here, just have my GoGurt."

"No, thanks though. I'm not even really hungry." Bahareh smiled as she felt her stomach growl.

"Suit yourself. Anyways, like I was saying... I told Mr. Lam I left my homework at my dad's house and wouldn't be back there until Thursday, so he said I could just turn it in..."

Substitute

"Bah-whore-ch?" Bahareh felt her entire body sink into the depths of her chair. The entire class started to chuckle. "Baa-hair-y?" *Shoot me now. Someone PLEASE put me out of my misery.*

"Here." Bahareh practically whispered as she raised her hand just long enough for the substitute teacher to make eye contact. He smiled at her and moved on to the next name.

Bahareh snapped at her mother when she got home. "I don't get why I can't just change my name at school to Brooke or something! I'm so tired of being the only girl in school with the weird name! The teacher LITERALLY called me bah-WHORE-ey today!"

"If you really want to change your name, then go ahead. But don't ever expect me to call you anything besides the name I gave you."

I think it's beautiful and I am proud of it. And for the record, you aren't like every other girl at your school. And thank goodness for that."

Hands

Bahareh tugged on her brown split end anxiously as the bar continued to fill with the cluster of 20 something hipsters. What had she gotten herself into? She didn't belong here. The onslaught of young and eager millennials continued to pile in for another 20 minutes. It's 10:30. He's officially late.

"Of course, I'm being stood up," Bahareh thought to herself.

Officially 45 minutes late. Bahareh stood up and slid on her coat. She started to make for the front door, when she heard his voice.

"Bahareh?" He said it so perfectly. She had only said it to him once on the phone, when they first talked, but he remembered it exactly. Where to annunciate and where to let it flow. It sounded like a song when he said it now.

Bahareh took a deep breath, tried to convince herself her heart wasn't visibly beating out of her chest, and turned around. There he stood, completely disheveled and somewhat flustered. He was staring at her eagerly and almost looked afraid to maintain eye contact, but he did. Oh did he.

"I figured you stood me up." She blurted out without thinking, mortified. Are you fucking kidding? How much of a bitch did she come off as?

"I'm an idiot," he blurted out. "I over shot...I under shot...I missed my bus. Which led to me trying to call a Lyft. And by the time I got home I had to leave to make it here on time, but I couldn't leave in work clothes, so I had to shower and I...I just." He paused mid-sentence and stared right at her, his black eyes pounding to the rhythm of her heart. "Holy crap, you really are beautiful."

Bahareh couldn't stop herself from laughing out loud. "Seriously? Get real."

"No I mean it. This will probably make me sound like a total creep, but your nose, your eyebrows...are like something out of a painting. Can I buy you a drink? Please, just stay for one drink?"

Bahareh had had her features be called many things throughout her life, but beautiful was rarely ever one of them. She felt the urge to roll her eyes, but instead found herself taking the stranger's familiar hand into her own and letting him lead her back inside without saying a word.

Pancakes

"I don't ever go back home." Bahareh looked up at Eddie hoping he would have suddenly overcome a change of heart.

"Well, this is probably the best reason you'll ever have to go back." He was cooking in the kitchen, sleeves pulled up and mid pancake flip when he raised his free hand and wiggled his ring finger jokingly.

Bahareh felt her cheeks warm and shook her head. "They don't even know you. They are going to flip out." She popped another strawberry into her mouth and leaned against the bedroom door. "Doesn't help you don't fit their perfect little framework of future son-in-law." She twirled the ring around her finger consciously, looking at it sparkle in the morning light.

"Maybe they'll surprise you." Eddie. Her fiancé, the ever optimist. He walked over to her, handed her a mug filled with her favorite cardamom Sadaf tea and tapped her lightly on the butt. "Now start packing. We leave for the airport in an hour."

Speak

I'm getting married. He's Latino and doesn't have a college degree. His parents are divorced, and they voted for Trump. I love him and am happy. We live together and have been living together for 3 years. We have two dogs and have already named our unborn children. There will be 3 of them.

The words flowed in her mind so easily. Now, if she could just say those same words out loud.

She took a deep breath. Eddie probably wouldn't let her back into the loft until she told them, so she had to get this over with. She could almost hear him say it.

Rip that bad boy off like a band aid, baby. It's going to be just fine.

“Mom? Dad? I need to talk to you.”

Bahareh walked into the kitchen and propped her duffle bag onto the leather barstool. Her mom turned away from the samovar, and looked over to her father who was placing down his reading glasses. He looked confused, almost annoyed for what he sensed he knew was about to happen. “What is it, dokhtaram?” His voice remained calm.

Now or never. Just say it already. “Okay, look. I didn’t just come back home for a visit. I wanted to...”

“Of course you didn’t come back to visit us. You don’t ever come home anymore, or even call unless you need something.” Bahareh was shocked to hear such salty words come from her mother’s mouth. “At least the first few years you left you would call and ask for money to come home on the holidays, but now you don’t even bother doing that. You’ve created a perfect little world for yourself, I’m sure, far away enough that we know nothing about anything it is you do anymore.”

“Maryam, stop it.” Her father put his hand on her mother’s arm, trying to calm her down. “You’re just going to make yourself angry. Please azizam, calm down.”

“I can’t calm down. I am angry. I am furious. And she needs to know that I am. We both are angry. I didn’t raise a beautiful little girl, dasteyeh gol, in this foreign country, leaving my entire family, just to have her disappear across the state and never visit or call either one of us.” Her mother turned to Bahareh now, an unknown strength behind her voice. “What is it you have to say Bahar? Tell me, why is it you are here? Why after 3 years do you suddenly remember who your family is? What finally happened in your life that has reminded you about your mother? Your father?”

“Mamani, I di-” Her mother raised her hand up sharply.

“I don’t know what it is you want to say, but I don’t want to hear it. You may want someone to listen to you now, but it won’t be me. Not anymore.” She placed her hand on her father’s cheek, wiped away his free-flowing tears, and smiled sadly. Bahareh noticed the folds and freckles sprinkled across the top of her newly manicured

hand, evidence of the years that had passed between them all. "I can't do it Masoud, nemitoonam."

As her mother walked out of the room, Bahareh stood in complete shock. She opened her mouth to start to speak; her father beat her to it. "Listen to me Bahar, I don't know what you want to say, but family doesn't work like this. Not our family anyways." He walked towards her, and Bahareh felt the urge to walk into his embrace, to feel the comfort of his warm arms. Her father placed his hand onto her duffle bag and smiled. "There is so much life we have had to live without you around to share it with. It has hurt us both, more than you will ever know. Have a safe trip back to San Francisco, I love you very much dokhtaram."

Bahareh stood in silence for a few minutes, processing the dose of reality she had unexpectedly been prescribed. Her entire body felt numb, more like frozen. As her body temperature continued to plummet, she found herself fixate on a photograph in the living room. She felt her legs take steps towards the 5x7 frame and found herself staring at her father and mother, smiling from ear to ear, in front of the Eiffel Tower.

When the hell did they go to Paris?

Probably around the same time you and Eddie were unpacking the loft.

As Bahareh looked at the photo more closely, she saw only fragments of the people who had raised her. Unlike the photo she held in her hand, and the photo she kept of them in her mind, her parents' lives had in fact continued on even when she decided to freeze them in her mind. She grabbed her bag, took a deep breath, and walked to the front door.

Motion

Bahareh stepped outside, dropped her duffle bag onto the grass and walked towards the swing set perched perfectly in the corner of her parents' front yard. The semi dry tears on her face felt icy against the early evening breeze. She took out her phone and typed.

Hey. I'm on my way to the airport. You were right. They did surprise me. I'll see you soon. I love you.

Send.

She set her phone to her side and started to push the swing back and forth with her legs. After getting enough momentum going, Bahareh tucked her feet underneath herself and let her body sink into the rhythmic swinging motion.

Bahareh looked up the side of the stucco tan exterior of her childhood home and surprised herself. Just 48 hours ago, the house stood without any blemishes in front of her in the bright sunlight. But now, in the glow of early moonlight, Bahareh noticed a cluster of little cracks in the foundation. It turned out, after all these years, the house on Berryessa Street did in fact inherit blemishes of its own.

Marrow

London Pinkney

You listened as your father sucked bone marrow from flat ribs. Bone marrow is a delicacy in places where name and identity are open to you. You do not exist there. Marrow is a delicacy when the bone is split in two. Belonging is a delicacy. Wait for the marrow to present itself to you. He placed the bone in his mouth, tonguing fatty brownness until it melts. Delicacy—meaning fineness or tact. There are rules for consumption. This disgusts you for the same reason you don't eat
chitlins
pig's feet
jowl
hogs maw



He Got On For Free
by Oscar Dominguez

What The H

Guadalupe Campos

Hair: Straight but wavy at the ends. Long, brown and flowy. Well maybe not flowy more like a tangled mess. Frizzy, unkempt, and cowlicks everywhere. Everywhere. Can only be tamed when in a braid, so it's always in a braid. A long thick braid. Like rope. Like a chain. Like I'm chained. Yank yank yank. Now it's a scorpion's stinger. And it will sting you if you keep yanking. No don't- Aaand now it's a helicopter. Great. Fwoop fwoop fwoop fwoop fwoop. If only it were a helicopter, then I'd be able to fly away from all the- Yank. Yank Yank! Okay that's it! Snip snip snip. Wavy and brown. A tangled mess. Frizzy, unkempt and cowlicks everywhere. Everywhere. Can't be braided anymore. No longer tamable. No more rope. No more chain. No longer chained. Short and light. And it feels so right.

Hoarse: *There is a baby alien inside my throat. It wishes to get free. So, it claws at my neck. I feel it scratch harder everytime I swallow, I say. What the fuck, she says. It's slowly sucking out my life force too which is why I sound like an 84 years-old man, I say. She scrolls down her Instagram or a FanFic. Whatever she's doing. And I'm afraid to try and cough it out because what if all that force is gonna cause all of my blood to squirt out of the scratches in my throat and I bleed out from my mouth, I say. Hmmm, she says while she clicks something on her screen. Sorry that was random and weird, I say. Huh, she says never looking away from her phone, it's fine I tuned you out right after you said throat.*

Heavy (: the doctor said looking down at the clip board. She's too heavy for her height. Compared to her last check up, she gained 12 pounds. 1 pound each month. Why has she gained weight, the doctor said looking at the parents. She's been away for college, so she hasn't been eating proper meals, my mother said. Yeah, she's probably been eating too much junk food since

we're not there to tell her no, my father said. Ah, I see. Freshman fifteen, the doctor said. She's in her 3rd year. She's 19, my mother said. Really? She looks like she just came out of high school, the doctor said as he finally glanced in my direction only to look back at the parents. The doctor and parents exchanged words with one another. Who's the patient again? The doctor leaves and a nurse comes in with a small tray containing two needles. The cold alcohol touches my skin. Ah right, me.

Two Barbies and one Ken. Blond Barbie, Blond Barbie with a single pink highlight, and Ken....Ken knocked on Barbie's front door holding a bouquet of roses behind his back. Barbie opened her door immediately having a bouquet of roses shoved into her face. *B-Barbie, will you go out with me*, Ken says. Barbie grabs hold of the roses and spits out some petals. *Oh Ken, I'm so sorry but I'm already seeing someone*, Barbie says. Just as Barbie finishes saying those words, Pink Highlight Barbie comes out from the hallway behind Barbie. *Oh hey Ken, what's up*, she says. Ken looks at Pink Highlight Barbie. Then at Barbie. And back to Pink Highlight Barbie. Now back at Barbie. *Hold on, Ken says, are you two le-* My five-year-old-self raises both Barbies up to the heavens and yells, *They're lesbians: Homosexual*

Halfway: *Ni de aquí, ni de allá.* Neither from here, nor there. Neither from here. I was born here, but my family isn't from here. I grew up hearing the words, *Eres Mexicana. Tienes el nopal en la frente. Eres Guatemalteca. Eres Chapina. Eres Latina.* They flowed out of my parents' mouth like a chant. A reminder of my roots. A reminder of who I am. Nor there. The first time I went to La Romera, where my dad is from, I was in seventh grade. I was driven all the way to Tijuana by my aunt's friend. That was the first time I had ever seen the border. The wall that separated the US from Mexico. The barrier between "America" and "the illegals." Is it illegal to want to live? It was night so I wasn't able to truly see it. From Tijuana we hopped onto a plane to Uruapan. *Ni de aquí.* We sat in a taxi for hours. I didn't know for how long. I didn't know anything about this trip. I was being taken through the unknown. Eventually, we reached an area filled with houses. I got out and my aunt was automatically greeted by her family. I was invited in

and was told to wait since one of my uncles was heading over to pick me up. Apparently, this wasn't my final destination. I sat on a chair under the shade. It felt like I was left in an oven. I felt myself sweat, but I didn't feel any sweat roll down my face. I looked to my side and saw a little girl. She kept staring at me. I took out some Tic-Tacs I brought with me for the trip and said, Want some? She tilted her head to the side and said *¿que?* I mentally kicked myself and said *¿quieres uno?*

Heterosexual: Snow White ends up with the Prince. Aurora ends up with Prince Philip. Belle ends up with Beast. Ariel ends up with Prince Eric. Jasmine ends up with Aladdin. Anastasia ends up with Dimitri. Woody ends up with Little Bo Peep. Buzz Lightyear ends up with Jessie. Flick ends up with Princess Atta. Ella ends up with Prince Char. Melody (Ariel's daughter) has a love interest who's named Alix and is a merboy. Mike Wazowski has Celia Mae. The Powerpuff Girls have the Rowdyruff Boys. Mojo Jojo temporarily went out with Moko Jono (whose real name is Michelle). Balto ends up with Jenna. And I am expected to end up with...

Hispanic: *What do you identify as*, she says. *Huh*, I say. *Do you identify as Latina or Hispanic*, she says. *Oh, I identify as Latinx*, I say. *Oh*, she says. *Why*, I say. *Because I always check off Hispanic in papers*, she says. *Okay*, I say. *Am I filling it out wrong then? Have I been checking the wrong thing*, she says. *Uh, no? You identify with what you identify with*, I say. *But we're both Mexican and Guatemalan. It should be the same*, she said. *I guess*, I say. *Why do you identify as Latinx*, she says. *Hmmm I guess it's because I grew up with my parents using the word Latinos and like Spanish TV also uses Latinos instead of Hispanic*, I say. *Oh, well I don't know Spanish*, she says. *It's fine if you check off Hispanic*, I say. *Is there a difference between Hispanic and Latinx*, she says. *Ummm I think Hispanic is more like if you're Spanish and Latinx is if you're like from Latin America, but I could be wrong. I don't know*, I say. *Oh well I'm going to use Latinx because I wanna be exotic*, she says. Our two friends in the room who were having their own conversation spit out their drinks. *You using the word exotic and saying you want to be exotic just shows how White you are*, I say.

Hurl: I layed on my parents' bed with three giant thick blankets weighing down on me. The door was closed. I was alone. The curtains were shut. The lights were off. But it was still too bright. I closed my eyes, but it still wasn't dark enough. I pulled my head under the blankets. Goosebumps decorated my skin. I wrapped myself into a ball under the three blankets. But it was still too cold. I shivered. My body was ice cold. But I could feel a warm jelly like puddle forming in between my legs. I trembled. The room was silent. But it was still too loud. I could hear my heartbeat drumming within my head. I covered my ears, but it didn't work. My stomach was bloated. But it was empty. I hadn't eaten anything that day. My sides hurt. A slow frantic pulsing ache engulfed my waist. I shifted on top of the big couch cushion I smuggled into the room. The darkness soothed me. The warmth lulled me. The silence comforted me. The cushion hugged me, and slumber took me. I woke up and I heard low murmuring near me. The inside of my mouth went cold while spit poured out of my salivary glands. I sat up and the world twirled in a blurry haze. Move, I tried to yell out but only mumbled. I stood up but tripped over the blankets. My cousin and brother sat up from my bed which was next to my parents'. My warm hands slammed into freezing tile and all my energy gushed out of my mouth. I stared at the yellow translucent puddle as tears streamed out of my eyes. Words dripped from my mouth, *I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry.*

Horror: *Yeah! Cut that bitch! Slit her throat! Don't let her get away!* I covered my eyes and looked away from the TV. I hugged my legs and buried myself in the couch. My cousin kept yelling at the TV and the TV gave her what she wanted. A shriek blared out of the speakers along with spooky dramatic music and my cousin would cheer. Night had draped its arms around us and only the flickering light from the TV lit the room. My mom, dad, brother, two cousins and aunt all watched the bloodshed and didn't flinch at my cousin's enthusiasm. I tried to forget. To imagine I was somewhere else, but the screams and music held me hostage and controlled my mind. Guts, blood, death. Something my cousin who was seven years older than me found amusing.

Home: Ni de allá. Half an hour later someone who claimed to be my uncle arrived with another uncle in a beat-up truck. As we rode through the dirt road, I looked out into the green fields. Lightning flickered in the distance as Funky Town began to play. I stared at the unfamiliar while listening to the familiar. More hours went by and when we finally reached La Romera, darkness engulfed us. The moonlight didn't even bother to try and light the way. The next day, I walked around the village with my grandma, the only person I knew. Everyone we passed would yell out *¡Maria Vega!* To which my grandma would respond with the equivalent of, *The fuck you want mother fucker*, in Spanish in a loving way. *Who is that*, they'd ask. *Es la de Ramon*, she'd say. *Ah es del otro mundo. Ah she's from the other world*, they'd say. Neither from here, nor there. The front gates to an abandoned light blue house squeaked open. *Esta es tu casa*, she said. *This is your house*. I stared at my dad's light blue house in Mexico. *Not my house our house. This is your home*, I heard him say inside my head. *Esta es mi casa. This is my house. Esta es mi casa. This is my home. Ni de aquí, ni de allá.*

The Night It Changed

Mackenzie Pauley

The juice she was drinking, she laced with something strong. Something
to make her fun.

To make her forget. She heard herself laughing and singing. She was
having fun, wasn't she?

The party got smaller, people drunkenly stumbling home. He got closer,
dancing beside her. She heard him laughing with her. She felt his fingers
graze her hips as he twirled her.

She was having fun, wasn't she?

He pulled her closer, his lips inches from her skin. She giggled a soft no
as she pushed him away. He sang the next line of the song to her as she
swayed along. She was having fun, wasn't she?

She sipped a bit more, her thoughts going foggy. He pulled her into
the room. The darkness swallowing her as she fell on the bed, the door
closing behind him. She was having fun, wasn't she?

He grabbed at her like he was picking her apart, so aggressive. His lips
trailing down her neck. It's not what she wanted but it felt all right. She
was having fun, wasn't she?

He started taking her pants off and his fingers roamed the places she
didn't want him to be. His lips moving down her neck and chest. She
didn't want this but it had already gone too far. She was having fun,
wasn't she?

He was forceful. She let out fake little moans. The ones she knew would
make it end quicker. She didn't want this but she couldn't say no now
could she? He stops and he's done and it's over. He looks at her with a
wink he says, you had fun didn't you?

Ode To Black Men

Daja Walker

Black Man!
God took His time on you.
For how long does it take to make a King
Who will spend his life in societal destitute!

O' Black Man!
Your arms so strong
You carry the blame of all the world's sins
But still mighty enough to uplift your children

Beautiful Black Man!
With eyes so ardent,
Yet you weep.
You weep for every Nipsey Hussle, every Trayvon Martin.

Tender Black Man!
I wish the world knew you as well as I,
How your smile melts away all fault
How your very existence is the answer to your ancestor's cry!

Courageous Black Man!
You will never hesitate to fight
You fight for what's right, you fight for what's wrong
You fight and fight. You always come out strong.

Black Man,
From a Black Queen,
I appreciate you.
You are everything, everything, e-ver-y-thing.

The Record

TreVaughn Malik Roach-Car-

The girl, spending her lunch break at the thrift store down the road, was looking for a prom dress. The record's album cover featured red smoke, a yellow Impala with black lines stretched across its middle, red letters that spelled out "Fever of Love," and a younger, hairier version of her father stood beside two men she didn't recognize. She knew he loved Cat Stevens, but she had no idea he'd been in a cover band. She remembered how he would quote Cat Stevens songs to her and her brother as kids. She missed that. She would love to hear that again. "I need this, how much?" she pointed to the record mounted on the wall. The man at the register just looked at her. "Not for sale, there's a scratch on it. It's just decoration." She tried to tell him that she was willing to pay much more than it was worth. "It's not up to me. The boss wants all the records on the wall. It's for the aesthetic, or something. You can't listen to it anyways, there's a big ass scratch on it." He walked away to assist the elderly man struggling in the back aisle of the store with a tangled wad of belts. She was sad that he refused to sell it, and even sadder that she couldn't listen to it, but she walked out with it anyway.

Jade Hunting at Willow Creek

Dasha Bulatova

He releases the dark, wet stone
into my palm, then slants
my hand upward so the light
threads through its crystalline fibers

My posture holds in this prism,
while I hold the stone up to air and
pretend to see what's there

“See how the green deepens
As it dries? See how...”

Sentences launch objects
that rotate around
space and sound.

Offshore,
the sea pulls itself back
from solid forms. The tide
which swings against
memory coils up.

In the middle of this,
I forget
how to identify jade among imposters,
I know only the untruth of oceanic greens
that mute to flat grey once dry.

Walking back to the car,
I kneel at the mouth of the small creek
which empties to the sea,
I immerse a pocketful of stones
again into dark water.



Limits by Your Conscious
By Juliane Roberts-Hansen



The Fight For Space
by Anna Costanza

Mark Linenthal Award Winner

Dyedushka

Dasha Bulatova

Snow the racket of huckleberry
garden today the dog
licks my only face who is here? shimmer beyond my sight
but the door opens another face in my blue hands she says
she knows my son number of years just sounds
among other sounds I have been
waiting
for night under snowfall does everyone know
that I will die soon? We eat the heap
of kasha and I show her my exercises
on the floor ten kicks on each leg ten more for an oldman
Something in my hands begins to smile
were you named for this unbuilt
why are you crying? Has the dog
died

You Will Never Be The Same

Angel Johnson

For Jeff

I turn to tell the nurse
she has lead me into the wrong room.
Curtains in rows, beds of unrest,
crust on the mouth I do not recognize—

You will live, but I know nothing.
I haven't seen you. I don't see your eyes
under the half-open lids.
Your pale skin under the yellow crust.
A mind that just yesterday could sign,
almost, for an operation
that will save your life
at the expense of another.

No one really prays.
The faithful know that god will do what she will.
The unfaithful, that their begging and screaming
will be unheard. So we stand, for one instance,
the nurse, your wife, and I, next to this man—
in a bed, in a row, in a hospital—
while I search the row for you.

Leo Litwak Award Winner

Cryom mythology

Gabrielle Rupert

“... and thank you for your support, either through financial or material aid. Now, I shall be telling you all a local myth, a creature that once lived, or maybe still does, on the frozen ice of the sea. That’s right, guys, the demon of Mortla. Let me begin...”

Face close to the radio microphone, Eirlys Wynn told the story of when she saw that monster. Of course, she spoke of the experience as if it was another folklore passed down through generations around campfires and bars. Her words were smooth and friendly, showing no sign of the terror she still felt.

It had been three days since Eirlys last stepped in the direction of the sea. She had driven out to the edge, where snow-covered soil met snow-covered ice, and walked to the fishing holes. It wasn’t far, and she didn’t mind the mix of sun on her layers and quiet wind against the hood of her coat.

At the fishing holes, Eirlys met her older brother, Greg. Him and his friends had driven their trucks right up to the fishing holes, unafraid of the ice. Eirlys simply didn’t want to risk it, even though she had never heard of a truck breaking through. And once again, she didn’t mind the walk.

The weather forecast had said the wind would pick up later in the day. But of course Greg had forgotten to bring extra supplies. So, just in case, Eirlys brought layers for them. She also brought beer, and had one herself while sitting with the fishers. Once she caught a fish, she felt satisfied with social hour.

“What story you going to tell tonight, Eir?” said Ted, one of Greg’s friends. Ted had had a crush on her since middle school, but was terrified of Greg’s protective watch over his little sister.

“I’m not spoiling it for you.” Eirlys laughed, putting her catch in a small cooler of ice. “Guess you’ll have to listen.”

“He’ll be doing more than listening!” Said Mike, the friend who always said the crudest phrases. While speaking, he made a lewd gesture near his crotch.

It only took one glance from Greg to quiet all the men. His dark eyes were more dangerous than the dark cold abyss below their feet.

“I apologize, Eir.” Mike’s cheeks couldn’t get any redder as they were somewhat purple from the wind hitting the skin. He didn’t look Eirlys in the eye.

She smiled, putting a gloved hand on her hip. “If you all don’t bundle up, none of you will have hands to touch yourselves with. So throw on those layers I brought before it gets windy.”

The men laughed, including Greg. He glanced at his sister, and nodded his appreciation and admiration in her direction. She tipped her own fur-lined hood towards him, and began walking back to her truck.

The wind was already picking up once her back faced the men, but she wasn’t concerned. Ten minutes later, though, when she looked up from her gaze at her boots, she found the white and grey horizon blurred into white.

Even then, she should have seen her bright red truck on the shoreline through the squall. She couldn’t. When turning to look back towards the fishing holes, the same wall of breezy snow blocked her view of the men and their darkly colored vehicles. It was a good thing she brought them layers.

If I keep going straight, I’ll reach my truck soon. So Eirlys continued her path, eyes down, shielded from the cold as she stepped on foot in front of the other. This type of situation wasn’t unusual, just an annoyance. She didn’t have to be at work for a few more hours, and the town was only a couple miles away from shore.

Eirlys started getting concerned as the squalls became constant, transforming into a blizzard, still blocking her view ahead. After a few more minutes, she still couldn’t see her truck, or anything at all. Stopping in her tracks, she pulled out her compass that all Sinaaq residents carried in their coat pockets. *Shit. I’ve been going the wrong way.*

The weather forecast never said anything about snow, but even on the edge of the Mortla Sea, trajectories can get unpredictable. Especially during this time of year. But this snow was too much to have gone undetected.

As Eirlys turned to the right direction, a low moan began as a vibration under her feet. The noise reached through the ice and skidded across the surface of the snow. Feet unbalanced, Eirlys stumbled and dropped the compass into the snow. The white seemed to devour the intricate metal piece, like quicksand. It was gone before Eirlys could pick it up.

The howl that shifted under the snow became part of the wind swirling around the surface. All Eirlys could hear was these gusts and whispers, like hearing one's inner voice shouting without opening the mouth. She attempted to put her gloved hands over her ears, but the cold whipped against her waist. Returning her arms back to her sides, she squinted at the surroundings.

Unlike the calm before a storm, and more like just the eye in the center, the winds swept the snow off the ice in front of Eirlys. It appeared to be a path, starting from Eirlys and ending a few meters away where the falling snow cleared. She couldn't see past the small clearing on the surface.

The groans under the ice quieted, but not the squalls, as a male elk walked out from the wall of the blizzard and toward the middle of the clearing. At first, the creature appeared healthy and not concerned with the stormy conditions. Its branches of bone held high as it made its way across the ice.

The hooves stumbled.

Bits of snow scattered from beneath the beast as it staggered to its knees. The fuzzy lips opened, and Eirlys expected to hear a cry. Instead, the extended throat began twitching, and black thick liquid spilled out from the mouth and onto the snow.

Sick and injured elk was not a new sight for Eirlys, but she had never seen this before. After one more expulsion of dark sludge, the elk fell to its side with a short thud that echoed into the surrounding storm. The winds picked up around both the elk and the human, and the volume of the whispers increased.

The dry gusts were directed toward the fallen animal, and strips of fur were pulled off the body. It was slow, at first, as Eirlys watched with eyes squinted from the wind but watering from the fear. Then the disintegration was swift as the skin, muscles, sinews, and organs flew off into the abyss of the blizzard. All that made the elk soft disappeared.

As the organic pieces parted, the gleaming shine of metal appeared. The bone was not ivory or slightly yellow, but silver. Grey. Too heavy, or too unnatural, to be picked up by the storm. The winds ignored the skeleton.

Once the metal was purely dry from blood and mucous, the gales stilled. The blizzard skipped the squall phase, like a gravity button switched from OFF to ON, and all snow in the sky was pulled to the ice.

Less frozen, Eirlys was motionless. Her eyes flickered around the metal framework, not understanding what had just occurred. Beginning to understand wasn't even a good start as mentally processing hadn't even proceeded.

Even through the thick layer of ice, a crack snapped up from the water below and ended at the metal ribcage. The quake seemed to think about where it was going to go, sensed Eirlys, and decided to prey on her.

Never having seen the ice crack on its own before, Eirlys thought of all the wilderness survival training in her youth. It never prepared her for when the solid surface of the Mortlan Sea split in the dead of winter. She turned and ran in the direct path away from the ice breakage.

She could hear the fractures behind her, as well as the snow crunching under her boots. They weren't made for running. The fur and rubber felt like coal collected in her wool stockings. She wondered if the crack would reach Greg and his friends. Their trucks would cause a massive hole, and their bodies wouldn't be recovered until the thaw in a few months. That was if their bodies weren't carried out to the ocean through intricate pathways of rivers and bays.

Suddenly, the ground was less slippery. Looking down, Eirlys saw that ice had ended. She ran past the sign that read, "Sea of

Mortla.” Her truck was there with only a little snow on the front bumper.

Gasping for air, Eirlys turned around to see the cracked sea. The sweat pooling in her socks felt cold at what she witnessed.

Nothing.

The bright sun lit up the shoreline, much more than it did when she parked earlier in the day. The surface of the sea was still frozen. Intact. Covered with the same thick snow of last night, smoothed over by the occasional light breeze. There were a few clouds on the horizon, which was all that was predicted by the weather trajectory. There were no fissures. No sign of elk, dead or alive, nor pieces of metal except for the few trucks out by the fishing holes.

I did not just imagine that, did I? Eirlys took the few steps to her truck, opened the door, and pulled herself into the driver seat. Her gloved fingers fumbled as she turned on the heat. As the vents warmed up, she stared out at the desolate plain. She knew what she saw. Was it real, though.

Then she remembered.

Pulling off one of her gloves, she reached her hands into her coat pocket and founded it empty.

If These Streets Could Talk

Marisa Cuevas

School lets out,
and all the kids disperse outside.
Black, brown, caramel kids walk in clumps,
each picking up a snack before going home.
The elotero leans off of his cart, the ice cream man wakes himself up
with a pat to the face.
The children's hands full of corn syrup, citric acid, and artificial coloring.
And they couldn't be happier.
The moms wait outside, gossiping with each other.
Que, "No me digas!" y, "No, pa' que te cuento!"
Conversations cut short by their children.
A reluctant goodbye til tomorrow.
I wait for my brother with the car window open.
Spanish, slang and cackling make their way through to my ears.
I do not feel like a minority here.
I close my eyes, remembering when I was the child being picked up.
Appreciating the streets and its vendors that have watched me grow
to this day.
The schools that saw me from K-8th,
The neighborhood where everyone knows everyone, or at least a
prima or sobrino of another.
It is home, and I'm not sure if I will ever make it out of here.
If I even want to.

Mark Linenthal Award Runner-up

With Love, From Oakland

Angel Johnson

I'm going to write you a poem
like Lascaux's, paste it
to my hard/soft/highway underbelly.

Where the tents are.
Where the colors take away the taste
of pee turned purple in the air.

I will tell you
I love you. With my steel bones,
I support you. With my living breath,
my deep, pulsing vents and BART-filled lungs,
I promise you air. Lull you with my street sounds. —It won't rhyme.
You'll show it to your friends if it doesn't rhyme.
You'll like it. You'll raise your head, lift your
chin, for the first time that week—
reaching to touch me with more than your shoe.

CANE

In the halo of the moon, after dark, the airplanes trail white clouds. In the rose garden I see what will not bloom this year. Splintered bench. The halo of the moon, halo as white as clouds, the bushes pruned nearly to the ground. I can see the roses won't bloom this year. The airplanes trail white clouds. The bushes slashed to woody canes. The airplanes leave trails, they are slashed to splintered canes. Roses won't bloom this year, they are splintered canes. Last year, candy bushes white clouds in the halo of the moon. The airplanes keep coming. Memories, pruned nearly to the ground, with airplanes flying by.

by Dasha Bulatova

Sade the Turtle

Jay Arellano

My mother had a turtle once. She named it Sade. My niece was her namesake. Sade was supposed to be a present for my niece and it was supposed to be her responsibility to take care of her, but she was taken away by the foster care system before she could. My brother and his girlfriends were really the worst parents. The cycle that never ends. Mother to brother to daughter to turtle. So that's how my mother ended up with Sade. I still remember the multi colored rocks and the adorable pink turtle cage she was in when she came to our house. I bet that turtle thought it would live a life of merry wonderment on sea cliffs overlooking blue seas or at least have a nice middle-class life.

Unfortunately living with my mother was never pretty. Sade learned that, and she learned it quick. So, she was always trying to run away. Maybe to those seas she came from. I came home one day, and she was gone. My mom was throwing the usual tantrum. Blaming everyone for Sade's disappearance but herself. My mother had let Sade out on our front porch for some sun took a phone call and Sade got away. Months went by and you tend to forget about Sade and what she was up to. My mother used that turtle as an outlet for anger, so we were again left to pick up the slack.

I've heard of tales where turtles get lost and they wander around the perimeter of a house but usually the turtles aren't found for years decades even. Sade's path to freedom was much shorter. I went to the back yard to get a broom and that's when I saw something moving in the grass ever so slowly. It was Sade and she was dusty, and she had grown, and she was just about to make her way out of our backyard. She was happy, and she was almost there but she really hadn't gotten very far in all these months. I picked her up and I showed her to my mom. I'm sorry Sade. I'm sorry I found you, but I needed something to make it stop for a little while. My mother

was overjoyed. She never let Sade out of her sight again. Sade stopped eating and no matter what my mother gave her or how much she yelled at her to eat, she wouldn't.

After a few weeks my mom came to me with tears in her eyes all while cursing Sade for not eating. There she was in this extravagant fish tank that was 10 times too big with nothing but a big rock in the center which she was on top of. My mother then took to parading her corpse around and showing her to anyone who asked about Sade. I told her to bury Sade, but she didn't want to do that. She wanted Sade's shell as a keepsake. Months passed, and Sade started to smell but she would not decompose fast enough for my mother. She had to throw her out because to the very end Sade would not give my mother what she wanted.

Requiem for an Unrequited Love

Santos Arteaga

I find it harder to explain while sober. That tender moment we shared in the backseat of the car, high on shrooms; it's intangible, the same way that *déjà vu* is impossible to explain. I can't pinpoint the feeling, and I'd rather not, but the moment I slumped all the way back on the seat and my neck melted into the headrest, staring deep into your eyes, I was seventeen again. And you were explaining—or trying to explain—how stupid responsibilities are, how you so wish to escape the tethers of being an adult, longing to be young again, despite only being twenty-one. And I tried to listen, but I couldn't because we were in a car, high on shrooms, on a rainy freeway, and I was at a point in my trip where I was coming down and so the anxiety was coming back up. I looked at you and said, *I appreciate the conversation you're trying to have with me right now, but I can't listen properly because I'm too anxious about being in this car.* And you quit your rambling, and I realized that this was the most you've ever talked since I came to visit, and I regretted ever opening my mouth. I think I said that not to shut you up, but to silence the thoughts that came into my mind at you mentioning responsibilities, and how I subconsciously felt responsible for the confusing youth that we both had to endure, and for that, I'm truly sorry.

The day before you had been talking about this girl you'd been hanging out with, how you and her and your friend who was also my friend once, but no longer, all went out to see the movie that the rest of us went to see the night before without you. You spoke about how you had overly sweet margaritas at the movie theater and how you couldn't tell whether there was alcohol in them or not, and so all of you went out to a bar afterwards and got hammered, and then you

nonchalantly mentioned how you and this girl drunkenly made out, and I was seventeen again. Our friends said the things that friends usually say in these situations, like, *nice and this fool!*, and I laughed and smiled along with them, but became acutely aware of my silence and so I filled the dead air by asking what she looked like. You pulled up a photo and she had kind eyes and a cleft chin; beautiful, and everything that you deserved, but after I acknowledged her beauty, something that had lay dormant in the pit of my throat since I left home five years ago suddenly lurched forward. I was angry and jealous, or envious, though I suppose both are applicable since I once had you—if only in the nights—and now I don't, and for that, I'm truly sorry.

The day we took shrooms I felt like a child experiencing the world again and you felt like that, too, because I saw it in your eyes in the back of that car and I heard it in your voice as you stumbled over your words and spoke over yourself, and I didn't love you romantically then, so much as I loved your person, your being, and I wished in that moment that I could bottle that feeling up and hold it close to me forever. And I got home that night, still high, and broke down because the walls were all too familiar; I was reliving every nightly secret encounter that we'd have when we were both seventeen, when I would host small parties for our friends, but they were really just for you, they were really just so we could get drunk and high, they were really just so we could sneak out of the living room once everyone was asleep and do confusing things in my bedroom, they were really just for our pleasure at the expense of our confusion, and for that, I'm truly sorry.

But after I cried, I went into a fit of laughter because I acknowledged that despite all our history, I'm happy in the City and you're starting to forge your own happiness at home. I laughed because we had both grown so much as people and as friends to the point where you're talking about drunken make out sessions and I'm talking about my own messy experiences with sex in the City, and we can both be comfortable with what we've shared, even if a bit of jealousy find its way into my words. I laughed because this wasn't the first time and though I hope it'll be the last, I can be sure that if I ever feel seventeen again, I'll get over it and laugh, and write about

it and read it aloud to a group of people who may or may not have experienced a similar thing, who may or may not have ever felt seventeen, or sixteen, or fifteen again in their life, and for that, I love you.

These Violent Delights

Angel Johnson

- I. Cowboy, near a silver dog,
the black and white with the euro sign
and one floppy ear.
Close the light off, turn the corn off,
the maggots inside are dead.
- II. Pilot smiled on thin ice
while the TV doctor knocked on the pyramid
before explaining the science of vacuums.
The gossips have been out in force—
it was mostly positive about the new broom.
Duty above the dancing girls.
Black crows were a bad omen,
dead on the record player,
but the red stains were just tomato soup.
- III. They didn't want to make it coffee flavored,
yet they mixed the old grounds
in with the coconut and oats and called it dessert.
Round and tasteless as the moon.
She spit it out, the god in her heavens,
and left it behind clouds for the wolves to see.
- IV. It's a Saturday on the coast and everyone is sweating in the heat,
watching people swim through their living rooms inland.
The moon pulls their houses up,
heats the night, tastes like coconut.

The Moment I Became Beautiful

Daja Dubois

And after sex,
He peered down on my naked body
Like a false god.
His eyes, focused and conclusive,
Taking in my battle wounds,
Skimming through the odd angles.
They stop at my marks.
Paused.

Then he looked at me.
His striking physique too much to bear.
That Man looked at me.
Impassively. Decidingly.
“You’re beautiful.”

Then he got dressed.

December 19th, 2017

Nicole Gonzales

I went to the cemetery again. Crisp orange leaves took the place of greener ones I had left here months before. Pulling the zipper of my jacket up, inhaling sorrow and exhaling fog. The view of the hospital was now clear through barren branches.

Christmas trees had been carefully placed around the silent yard. Lively holiday decorations seemed to mock the graveyard's own gloom. I couldn't decide which were sadder, the ones with the busiest ornaments or the ones with none.

It all seemed so elaborate to me. The grandiose trinkets that covered each plot. Representations of entire lifetimes whittled down to shiny bulbs and flags. I arranged the plastic flowers and ribbons I had brought on the gravestone latch. My mother standing behind me, examining my job. I could feel her pain through the unspoken phrases and chores that piled up for weeks.

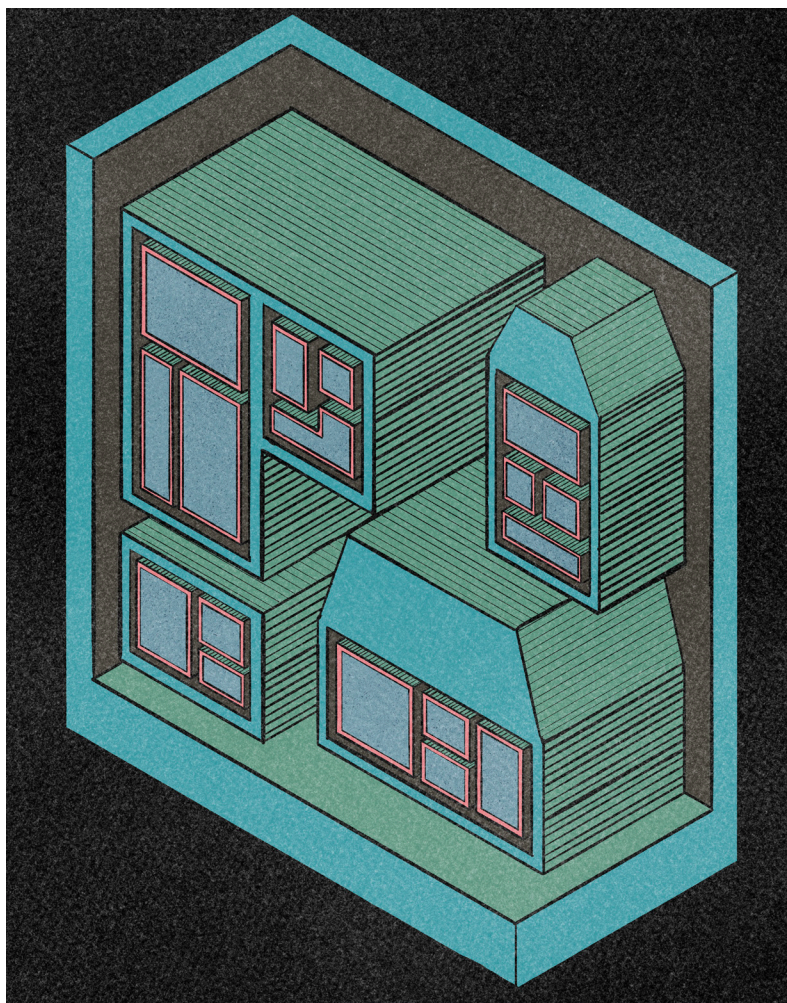
I sat on the bench across from the wall of endless grave sites. My mother continued standing, staring at her own mother's name on the gravestone. She turned and squinted at the sign in the distance, "NO loud music, NO dogs, NO food".

She took a bite of her cupcake, and asked "Sebastian, could you play that song again?" "Sure thing." I responded, turning up the volume on our portable stereo.

If I sat here completely still, I could feel the world cave around me.



Fall Morning
by Jonathan Wilson



Home Credenza
by Jonathan Wilson

Where the Heart is

TreVaughn Malik Roach-Carter

She was on edge. It was strange to see her like that. She couldn't even focus on driving. Her front teeth dug into the thickness of her bottom lip. Her fingers tapped the steering wheel rapidly. I felt the car slow as she'd get lost in thought. I wish I could have relaxed her somehow.

We drove into the mountain town. Although I had heard many stories, I had never been here before: it reminded me of meeting someone you know only by reputation. We drove past a church and I asked if we could stop at a diner, we hadn't eaten since breakfast. She kept going, looking at the scenery of a neighborhood that was surprisingly still populated. She ignored me. Some deer ran around, they looked like they had just escaped confinement, finally tasting freedom. A large bird made circles in the sky above us, a brown figure of death, searching. A jagged mountain guarded the right side of the road, buildings to the left. A pink fog engulfed the mountains, touching the blue sky and coming together to create something new. Homes made of wood, brick and mortar were fossils of what had once been a community fresh from the womb. Abandoned churches, struggling shops, and decaying homes. The landscape evoked the image of mountain men marching through the streets to their work in the quarry. Once the heart of the town, now desolate and dry. My grandmother grew up in this town, raised my mother here. "I loved it here," Mom said.

The sun's white light grew more intense as we got closer to the house. A couple more turns brought us to what I imagined would be a grassy and spacious farmland with a gray shack in the center, like it was described. The silhouette of a home stood in the distance. As we got closer a porch swing gently rocking in the cool breeze came into

view. As we pulled into the driveway, I saw the two story manor that sat in front of a forest of brown trees. No desolation, no animals, no farm.

Not just her hands trembled but her entire person vibrated at the sight of it. She stepped out of the car, eyes wide and mouth opened, and stood there for a moment. The sunlight gave her brown skin a golden tint.

It wasn't my mother who left me in the car and approached the old and dusty building. It was a daughter, whom I had never seen before, that went towards the home that had held our kin. Our history rested in those walls. Our lineage was embedded in the land.

"Mom," I called out to her as I exited the car as well. The light breeze rustled my hijab slightly, tickling my cheeks. My mother started taking steps towards the house we had driven hours to visit. The house of a dead woman.

"It hasn't changed at all," she said. I wasn't sure if she was telling me or speaking to herself.

"It's pretty." It was hard to believe she traded it in for a two bedroom shoebox in the city. After a lifetime of living in a three room house, the thought of living in this home was inconceivable.

"I should have brought you here sooner." She was at the door now. She reached for the knob but stopped herself. "I should have come back a lot sooner."

"That's all in the past," I reminded her, making my way to the wooden structure. "None of that really matters now." She sat down at the porch swing, refusing to acknowledge my attempt to comfort her. The swing creaked and buckled as she sat. Its fading blue paint added a comforting touch of color to the brown walls behind it. A pair of wet and muddy work boots sat under the swing. I expected her to crumble under the pressure of the past returning. I wanted to scoop her up into my arms and hold her together in one piece. But I couldn't.

"Your grandmother used to sit here every morning and every night and watch the sky. Clouds and stars. She loved them both."

"I think this is the most I've heard you talk about her." My mother told me stories of the town she grew up in, the friends she

had; but never spoke about her mother, even when I probed. There was a giant hole in my knowledge and understanding. A hole filled with sorrow, curiosity, and light resentment.

"The last time I saw her, she was sitting on this damn thing." Her red manicured nails scratched shavings of the old blue paint off of the wood. "The day she forbid me to bring my daughter into her home."

"Well..." I struggled to find the words.

"We can go in now." She smiled at the prospect. Her body moved slowly, drifting to the door. She reached for the knob, successfully this time. The door resisted as she pulled. It scraped the ground with a heavy screech. Darkness was on the other end.

It swallowed her. For a moment, I thought she'd never come out. She'd disappear into her past, leaving me alone in a town I've never known. Abandoned. Trapped in the same place she ran away from. Or, as she liked to say: escaped from.

The dim light snapped on, rescuing her from the abyss. She stood in a hallway with a long brown rug stretching across its floor. The wall was covered with pictures of people I didn't know, caged in by wooden frames. A broad-shouldered woman in a white dress, tinted by greyness. A newborn baby boy swaddled in a thick blanket of blue yarn joined them in the next photo. A baby girl wrapped in a torn blue blanket being tugged on by a little boy. Another baby girl, covered in tattered blue yarn, a teenage boy and a young girl held the baby's bassinet. The story the wall told continued, the people aged and moved on without the girl they left behind.

"Did you ever wonder why?" I asked her. Her mouth opened but closed before an answer could escape. Her eyes left me and found the photographs. I wondered what memories the images conjured.

She went deeper into the house. The sitting room held a couch decorated with frilly red throw pillows, two cushioned chairs in front of a round coffee table, and a stone fireplace full of ash. The room's emptiness felt dishonest somehow.

My mother reached for something on the couch. A heavy quilt, sewn together from scraps of blue jeans, frayed and browning but still capable of serving its purpose. She held it to her chest and

turned to me. "I helped your grandmother make this when I was just a little younger than you." Her fingers touched some of the squares. One bleached almost white, another paint stained, the next with holes ripped into it. She touched a square and said, "I loved these jeans." She touched another and said, "This is from Daddy's work overalls." Her words were here in the present but her eyes were looking towards the past.

She may have escaped this place, but she never wanted to. She had always taken pride in her survival, but she ignored the cost. Escaping from a blazing inferno destroys everything you left behind.

She placed the quilt on the couch with great care and disappeared deep into the halls. I didn't follow. She needed to do this next part alone. She had turned away from this place and never looked back until now. I had always heard of "the sins of the Father," but the sins of the Mother can weigh much heavier.

I wanted to sit down but it felt intrusive to put my body on the furniture of the home that was still such a mystery to me. I heard the sound of a door opening, slamming into a wall and then swinging shut. Something hit the ground following the grunt of a man. A body came into view from the back entrance of the house. The man was tall and his skin looked as dark and rough as tree bark. He removed a hat from his bald head and hung it on a coatrack. He looked at me, and stopped moving.

His grey eyes were locked on me. He didn't seem surprised or afraid to see someone in his home. "You're her," he sighed with a level of audible sadness. "You look like your mama."

"I'm Ophelia," I said, trying to smile. I extended my hand but he didn't make a motion to return the handshake.

"I know your name," he said. He looked at my hand like it was an insult. "I'm Rufus." My mother's older brother. Technically, my uncle, even though it didn't feel that way.

"My mom went down the hall," I said. "I can go get her."

"No need," he told me. "How is she? Your mama."

"She's taking this pretty hard," I said, wondering why he couldn't ask her himself. "But she's strong."

"The women in this family usually are," he said. One corner

of his mouth curled upwards slightly but he brought it back down fast.

"You should talk to her," I suggested.

"No need," he spat. He moved past me, I stepped aside to avoid a collision. The smell of manure lingered in the air as he passed me. He went into the kitchen and turned on the sink, letting the stream of water run over his hands. Layers of dirt peeled away from his large fingers. "The time for that is long gone."

"Is it though?" I asked, more forcefully than I intended.

"This whole situation is before your time!" he barked as he returned from the kitchen, rubbing his wet hands on his pants. I backed away from the sound of his voice. He closed his eyes and took a calming breath. "You wouldn't understand."

"Rufus," my mother said as she came up behind me. She held a cardboard box of photos with a wooden jewelry box sitting on top.

"Annie," he said.

"I didn't think you were home," she confessed. "I assumed you didn't want to see me."

"I was tending the horses out back," he coughed. "I thought you'd come alone."

"I wanted her to see the place," my mom said. She was almost as tall as him, but there was enough of a height difference to give him all of the power in the room. "How have you been?"

"Lately? Or since I've seen you last?" he asked her.

"Either," my mom answered. Her soft brown eyes rested on him.

"Life goes on, I suppose," he told her. "Things don't change much around here. Until recently, things have been just fine." He looked above her head, rather than at her.

"Maybe getting out of town wasn't such a bad thing," my mom said quietly. "I've adjusted to quite a lot of change."

"No one said the same was bad," he groaned. I felt like that was all a matter of opinion.

"Even though things are different for me," my mom began. "I still felt the shock of this. When I got that call—"

"You missed the funeral," he interrupted.

"You told me not to come," she defended.

"You've never been one for listening," he barked.

"And you've never been one for talking straight."

"You got what you need?" he asked her.

"I do," she answered. She bit her lip and I was worried she might rip herself opened.

"You shouldn't have brought her here," he scolded. "You know how Mama felt about you and your choices."

"She's not here anymore," my mother said. "I didn't think it mattered."

"Respect the dead," he argued.

"I never respected this particular decision," my mom scoffed. "She rejected a relationship with my daughter and destroyed her relationship with me when she didn't have to."

"She didn't want you bringing that raghead filth into this family!" he screamed. His eyes lit up with rage and he waved his fist in the air. "Every time she looked at that little girl, she was reminded of the man you took to bed and what he was. She couldn't stomach it."

"Ophelia is not her father. She is me, and I am Mama. That should have been enough," my mom explained with a calm and leveled voice. "I don't see anything wrong with who her father is. Neither should anyone else."

My dad, a painfully consistent secondary parent, never revealed the secrets of my mother's past. Even though they weren't together, they were very much on the same page. It was clear now that he was more involved in my mother's fractured family tree than I had thought. The removal of our branches came from a place of hate and intolerance towards him and towards me as an extension. Knowing this made me feel queasy.

"Let's go," my mother said. She turned and went out of the front door with swift steps and I followed right behind her. Our feet hit the steps like music.

"Annie!" Rufus' voice brought my mother to a stop. "Take this with you too. You need it more than I do." He tossed the quilt made of jeans on top of the collection of items my mother had collected. He went back inside without speaking. She looked at the large blanket

with a smile, taking a moment before turning to the car. She placed her box in the trunk and folded the quilt and brought it into the front seats with us. She handed it to me and started the engine. As the car came to life, a weight lifted.

“Did I ever teach you how to sew?” She asked me.

“No,” I told her as she brought the relic towards me. “I didn’t even know you knew how.”

“I’ll teach you,” she smiled. Her cheeks were wet. “We’ll fix this up. Maybe even add to it.”

A Conversation with Truong Tran

Truong Tran is a poet, visual artist, and teacher who was born in Saigon, Vietnam in 1969. He earned his MFA from San Francisco State University, and is the author of five collections of poetry: The Book of Perceptions (1999), a finalist for a Kiriyama Prize, placing the accents (1999), a finalist for a Western States Book Award for Poetry, dust and conscience (2000), winner of a San Francisco State Poetry Center Prize, within the margin (2004), and four letter words (2008). He is also the author of the children's book, Going Home, Coming Home (2003). He is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including a Fund for Poetry grant, three San Francisco Arts Commission Cultural Equity grants, and an Intersection for the Arts Writer in Residency Fellowship. His visual art has been shown in Bay Area galleries such as Intersection, APAture, Kearny Street Workshop, and A. Muse Gallery. Tran has described himself primarily as a visual artist whose "alter ego" is a poet. (Poetry Foundation).

On Friday, February 28, poetry editor Olivia Villescas sat in conversation with visual artist, poet, and teacher, Truong Tran.

Transfer Magazine: I wanted to start with a question I had in my mind that I like to ask people a lot. Do you remember the first poem that you wrote?

Truong Tran: I don't remember the poem exactly, but I believe it was an allegorical poem that had a bird, a maggot, and I believe some kind of...gecko. And it beared the American flag, too, so I don't know what—I remember those things about it.

Transfer: Yeah. Do you remember how old you were?

Truong: I believe I was in my first year of college.

Transfer: Wow, that's crazy. Who are some artists that influence you, and why?

Truong: When we're speaking about artists, I think about both poets and visual artists and, first and foremost, the visual artist that has always captured my imagination has been Joseph Cornell. He's considered to be the father of assemblage art. I'm drawn to him for two reasons: one, he makes small works. We exist in a time, now, when so much of art is about the "looking up" and the "bowing down" of the self, to the work of art. And Cornell worked in the opposite mode—he made these tiny structures: boxes that had entire worlds in them. And he'd invite you to lean over and look into his world. I really appreciated that.

Transfer: Yeah. It sounds very minimalist.

Truong: I wouldn't say he's a minimalist, but he constructed worlds in *small spaces*. This shifted my perspective on the viewing of art. In terms of writing, Wanda Coleman has always been an influence of mine, and a friend. She did something that I thought was remarkable, in that, she didn't write and perform anger — her poetry is the embodiment of anger. Her work was angry, at times, but also beautiful. I am very concerned about writing and its performative aspect. I didn't ever feel like Wanda performed her anger or her otherness. She was angry, and rightly so.

Transfer: In our current sociopolitical environment, how important do you think representation is, and what exactly does representation mean to you?

Truong: That's a good question. I think, being represented, as an artist, is very important in the world. But I want to state

clearly that *curation is not inclusion*. I repeat: *curation is not inclusion*. And I think we're at that point in society right now where artists of color, writers of color, are often being *curated* into an environment, into a conversation. But I don't know if we're truly being included in it. Artists and writers of color are being curated into the academic environment, too. But I don't know if we're truly included yet. Our presence is to represent a kind of consciousness of inclusivity and diversity when, in some ways, that invocation of diversity is really a diversion from the consideration of what it means to exist within the structure of the academy.

Transfer: Yeah. Ah, I couldn't have phrased it any better than that.

Truong: What happens, in this mode of curation, is that we as artists and writers of color, and other marginalized writers, such as the LGBTQ, POC community, what have you—we've been invited into these spaces, but I don't know if we're entirely welcome. We are present and we are asked to *perform our otherness* in those spaces.

Transfer: That actually bleeds into my next question which I've been talking about with a lot of other artists. I think that a lot of poets, but specifically writers and artists of color, feel pressured to write about their tragedy, their struggle, and their experiences in oppression, in order to be taken seriously, in order to be heard, in order to be published.

Truong: In order to be *seen*.

Transfer: Yeah. In order to be recognized. It's not even really recognized; it's just kind of, to be seen, yeah.

Truong: Just to be seen. True recognition of your work and your craft is a different thing. It's this idea that the world wants to see you a certain way. It's hard for me to combat that as a teacher because my students see it—they see that all around them in the world—and they see what is the formula for success and they are like moths to the flame. They move towards that. You have to, as a writer, as an

artist, you have to ask yourself: What is happening here? Why am I—? I have a poem in my latest collection that is coming out in the coming year where I find myself standing on the stage and my body moving involuntarily to the music that is being played as I'm standing on that stage. And I'm doing this almost like a strip-act to this audience.

Transfer: That's how it feels, yeah.

Truong: It feels that way.

Transfer: I feel like Pinocchio.

Truong: But if you don't, then you're at risk of being invisible to that world. If you're a person of color writing into the abstractions of language, you're not often registered in that world. It's like almost as though you're being sent a message that *you're out of your lane*. And if you do see a writer of color working in that way, it's probably one at a time. There isn't room for a whole lot more than the single representation.

Transfer: Have you ever felt that kind of pressure when you're writing or you're performing?

Truong: Absolutely! Absolutely. I still feel that pressure. I feel that pressure of delivering to that expectation of who I am on the surface of my being, as a writer and as an artist. I did an interview with a gentleman on the radio recently; we are both artists, and I spoke about the political consciousness of my work, and this other gentleman, who was white, when it was his time to speak, it was very clear that he wanted to very matter-of-fact state that he did not make work that was political. As though this idea of making political art was somehow beneath him. I thought about that and I was furious in the moment and I couldn't fully articulate my thinking. What I wanted to say was, I don't wake up in the morning saying "*I'm going to write a political poem.*" I don't wake up in the morning saying that "I'm going to make political art"; I try to move through

the world as an artist and as a writer and as a teacher. But more often than not, I come home at the end of the night, and before I lay down and close my eyes, I come to the realization that I *did* make something political. I *did* write something political. Because the world is *happening* to us as we are moving through it. I believe should you write and create and assert your thinking in the world *as it relates to you*, not as a response to the expectations of what that world wants of you

Transfer: I agree completely. I don't think enough people realize that or talk about it. In your collection of poetry, *placing the accents* (1999), you speak often about language, but more so the failure of it. What exactly do you mean by that?

Truong: I only write in the English language, and for years, I positioned myself by saying that I write in a borrowed language. And for years, I wrote without the implementation of grammar. And it was not until more recently in my career that I circled back around to the use of grammar in my poetics, and also owning the English language as my language. As a writer of color in this society, I am constantly being reminded that I don't have authority over that language. It happens again and again and again. That somehow I don't have the authority. Even though I teach in the English language, I am reminded again and again and again that I don't have the authority to assert myself in the English language, you know. And that's a struggle for me. It's a struggle that is imposed on me. The English language fails me because it doesn't always have my back. I don't know if that makes any sense, but...

Transfer: No, that makes a lot of sense. I feel that exactly. What drew you to pursue an MFA, and how difficult was it to do so?

Truong: I wanted to be a writer—and maybe I want to be a teacher—and the message was clear: that in order to accomplish these things, I *had* to have this measurement of my abilities. The MFA was that representation. It's an interesting structure, to be perfectly honest. And I've been writing about this a

lot. The whole construct of “*learned*”—and the mastery of this craft, this language, this art. The Masters of Fine Arts. I don’t know how I feel about that because, again, the feeling is that that construct is external. The best way for me to answer your question is to read a response that I wrote:

Dear white engrained deep within me, I came to you as a child.
You named me “immigrant” before knowing my name.
And then renamed as “refugee,” I sought refuge inside your house.
I learned your language.
I taught your children.
I changed my name.
I referred to myself as “other” so as to use this name as a verb: othered,
other, the other, othering.
The gerund, in this instance, feels particularly violent.

I’m gonna leave it at that.

Transfer: As a past student of yours, I recall my favorite part of class always being the beginning of each class, when we would watch visual artists before getting any assignments or writing exercises. How do you hope to engage students with that tactic?

Truong: I hope to engage students on the level of their thinking. You look around this place, there’s a lot of objects here. And, really, for the most part, they’re useless objects. They don’t serve a function. As Ai Weiwei says, as soon as you attach your identity to something that represents a function. If I made chandeliers, they’d call me a chandelier maker. If I make political statements, they call me a political activist. An artist has this ability to make a structure that, on the surface of things, feels useless. But right beyond that surface is the ability to embed one’s thinking. And that’s what I’m hoping to convey to my students: *the writing of a poem as an object that can hold your thinking*.

Transfer: What is your process, typically, within corresponding poetry and your visual art? How do you find the connective tissue between

the two?

Truong: It's a fluid movement for me, between one practice and another. When one container is incapable of holding my thoughts and my expression, I tend to move towards the other. So that if you're looking at an image of a sculpture on one of these walls, it's really not that different from a poem on a page. They're just ways to facilitate my thinking. Sometimes I want to think with my hands, sometimes language holds my thought—and sometimes language fails me, and I have to express myself beyond the capacity of language. I try to create a visual language in those moments.

Transfer: I've heard about a piece of yours that consists of a mirror and paper butterflies with naked men on them. What drew you to create this?

Truong: Well, they're images of the body. Actually, they're images of the body and images of nature. I think a lot of people do have this constructed notion of me as the guy who cuts pornographic butterflies. This all started was because I wanted to respond to the killing of nine thousand plus butterflies by the artist Damien Hirst when he did a piece at the Tate Museum. I just remember feeling so aghast by that—this overwhelming sense of privilege and assertion of one's *dominance* in the world—to construct an art piece that systematically killed nine thousand butterflies over the course of those months of the exhibition. I thought the practice was obscene. Because of that, I responded with a material that the world seems to view as obscene: the image of the naked body. So, I started cutting butterflies out of such images. My intention wasn't to create an art piece so much as a meditation on that sense of loss in Damien Hirst's work. I cut nine thousand plus butterflies out of pornographic images of the *male* body. I only cut images out of the male body—and not only just the male body, but the *white male body*. I wasn't interested in cutting into the image of a person of color or into the image of women. There's a violent gesture to that act of cutting, and I didn't want to enact that on any other representation but that of

the white male body. That piece of art existed in two times: in 2014, I created a mirror and the reflection in that mirror was the self, but it was flocked with the image of butterflies and nature. In 2018, I revisited that same work. And it just felt right, in 2018, to now censor that image and *sell* that image, in a way. So, I went back into my own art and I kind of destroyed it by stamping “CENSORED” on each and every one of those images, and also “SOLD” on the images of nature, as a reflection of living in this time. This essentially, made the art piece unsellable, in many ways, but it felt necessary.

Transfer: What do you hope to generally convey with your visual art?

Truong: Well, it isn’t made to go over your burgundy couch. It’s not decoration. It’s the complexity of thought *embedded* in an object. I hope it offends, I hope it, at times, titillates, I hope that it engages with you and your own thinking. Sometimes, when I make art for my bathroom, I make something that I hope is decorative. But that’s just for me.

Transfer: What advice would you give to younger artists and to your younger self?

Truong: To know and own your voice. And to stay true to the core of who you are, as a human being. Easier said than done, because the world wants to shape you. If you’re a writer in a program, there’s a voice that whispers in your ear that says “tell us your story.” And if you respond with a story, make sure that story is true to you. Know that your voice is a matter of life or death.

Transfer: What’s the most important thing you want students to get from your teaching?

Truong: You know, I do an interview like this, and I think, it’s in a literary journal, and the illusion is that it’s about art, it’s about writing. In reality, this conversation is about life. It’s about having a voice—my voice—but in the hopes that you read something

like this, you also see and hear the emergence of your voice. It's about breathing. And it's about, for me, it's about knowing that I still exist in a world that wants to erase me. In a place that wants to erase me.

Transfer: Did you ever see yourself being a teacher and a visual artist and a writer?

Truong: You know, I saw your question ahead of time, and in that question, you had the word "*professor*." And I was going to say that I'm not a professor; I am a teacher. I thank you for making that distinction and for seeing me as a teacher. I want to address the notion of that title of "*professor*," because that's not the reality of the situation. I'm a lecturer, and many of my students don't recognize that there's a world of lecturers in your academic environment. Lecturers are way different from professors. We are, essentially, *seasonal workers*. In the summers, many of us apply for unemployment to make ends meet. We are not professors. And we do not have the rights of professors. And some of us have tried, and tried, and tried, to make our way into that title. Why? —Because we want the same rights. And we want the same privileges of a "*professor*" at a university. But we're not—we're not there. This circles back around to the question of why I wanted to get an MFA. I wanted to get an MFA because I wanted to fulfill those expectations that would make me viable and competitive as a professor in the academy. But even when you fulfill that expectation, you're sometimes met at the door with a "no, you can't come in." And, I'm just gonna put it out there: Even when it's said that it's not about race, from my perspective, from my truth, and from the facts that I hold, it's all about race.



Migrants waiting for the Beast, the freight train to the US border
by Richard Champion

A Conversation with *Junse Kim*

Lecturer Junse Kim is the recipient of a Pushcart Prize, a Faulkner Short Story Award and the Philip Roth Residence in Creative Writing at Bucknell University. His fiction and creative nonfiction have been published in Ontario Review, ZYZZYVA, Cimarron Review and Fourteen Hills, as well as two anthologies: Pushcart Prize XXVII and Echoes Upon Echoes: New Korean American Writing. (Poetry Center)

Transfer: How did publishing your first book change your process of writing?

Junse Kim: I actually have short pieces that have been published, but in terms of changing the process it actually reinforced the process that I had developed through the mentorship I had in my graduate program, because it works, obviously.

Transfer: I noticed you had some stories published in the Pushcart.

Junse Kim: Ah yes, one is republished and the other had an honorable mention.

Transfer: What kind of research do you do and how long do you spend researching before beginning the writing process?

Junse Kim : It depends on the type of work. For instance, I had a short piece that I had published and didn't have much to look back on other than my own resources. It was a personal essay about *Dr. Who*,

before the relaunch, so back when *Dr. Who* was the bottom of the barrel social strata, before sci-fi, fantasy and speculative fiction were mainstream, more outsider culture. The essay was about being a lifelong *Dr. Who* fan and how it paralleled the assimilation process I went through, growing up in Chicago, where there was no diversity.

It was about the 25th anniversary convention, and in order to get the authenticity, besides my knowledge of *Dr. Who*, I had to do my fact checking. It's part of what we do, regardless of the genre, is that we need a truth, a reality. Anything outside, or I'm unsure of, I have to get the specifics down. If you generalize, you may not only be providing something that is untrue but stereotypical. A common issue I find with young writers is that when they write outside of their usual comfort zone, they inadvertently focus more on plot than characters and don't realize they've created caricatures based on stereotypes. That is why you must do due diligence.

Transfer: Interesting that you mention that because it leads into my next question, what are common traps for aspiring writers?

Junse Kim: Fact checking is one. And thinking that plot is the most important thing. While it is important, the drama within the story and between the characters and how they are experiencing it within the plot, is the more outstanding feature to focus on. One needs to detail that. Specifically, what I mean by that is writers at times present overtly dramatic plot events, and they force the reader to assume how the character feels over this overtly dramatic event, instead of using specific detail. With lack of detail, the story becomes more plot driven. By detailing, you make it more character driven. As a faculty member, it is my job to focus on a literary fiction aesthetic. There are successful works that are plot driven but they're not literary fiction. Not a judgement, simply a statement.

Transfer: So, when you write your own stories, that's what helps you write better?

Junse Kim: Yeah, you gotta go in deeper. What is my character feel-

ing? How is this experience specifically dramatic for them? As I often in class, think about what character wants and what works for the character. Make sure that you put that on the page, especially the intensity of the emotions behind that, cause that's what sucks the reader in. It's what allows a reader to connect with a character, and feel like they know that person. Otherwise, the character becomes a concept of a character, a flat plot device. Kind of like your main character becomes this tool, rather than someone whom we can vicariously experience the drama with as the plot moves through.

Transfer: I do see your point. Sometimes I too find my characters to be bland and begin to question their purpose as my story's plot moves through. Like "Hm, they don't feel so real." Do you use people's mannerisms or speech as a model or inspiration for your characters?

Junse Kim: Well it's part of the research, you steal. Be a good observer of syntax, speech mannerisms, body language, gestures, etc., and that's how a character can feel more real to you; it's the specifics of the character. The hard part is coming up with the specifics because the most common question, whether it's an Undergrad class or MFA program, is how do I do that? It's one of those things where I can only provide ideas, but it's up to the student to figure out their own process of how to make that person real to them. It's important for the student to learn how to problem solve their craft in class. They have all the tools at their disposal to figure it out. A common issue with writers—not just for aspiring writers but even for advanced writers—is the discomfort of feeling like "I don't know what to do, can someone tell me what to do?" Instead of feeling helpless, take a moment and access your tools. You have to MacGyver it because when you focus only on someone telling you what to do, you don't realize that you're creating a dependent learning experience. It's the critical thinking you use to problem solve.

Anytime you feel stuck, think of the situation as an Escape Room. You're just sitting there, not knowing what to do, but you gotta just go out and look around and figure it out. You know there's an answer, but with writing, I think people have a panic and they

believe there is no answer; someone needs to tell them what the answer is.

Transfer: So it's like, There are multiple pathways, you just have to figure out which one to take.

Junse Kim: Exactly.

Transfer: How do you balance writing with everything else going on in your life?

Junse Kim: Oh man, I think that the biggest question for all writers. It's just, you gotta do what you gotta do and you gotta prioritize. Obviously, living in San Francisco, it isn't an easy thing to do. I actually spend more time teaching and grading, than writing. Especially since I'm a lecturer. As a lecturer, there's no guarantee in job security and so I have to make sure I have diversified where I teach, and it takes a lot of hustle to get those jobs. Once you get your BFA, MFA, the reality of trying to be a writer is really hard. So everyone needs to come up with a strategy. I was lucky enough to find one where I was teaching, but of course, it has its pros and cons. The Pros are that I love teaching. On top of that, when I teach, it's the equivalent of staying physically fit regarding craft. So when I write, everything is at the conscious level. The downside is finding time to write. I have to pick and choose my spots and then work from there. With my own writing process, I'm very immersive and I'm very obsessive in the process, in that I don't like leaving what I'm writing then coming back to it weeks later. Because part of the process is making the character real to me. I have a fear in my process that if I leave the character for too long, I'll forget about them then I'll have to re-build the character again, and it may not be the same character as I had originally built. The peak time is during breaks, when I can dedicate the time.

It's different for others. There are those who are structured in their writing schedules where as opposed to me, it doesn't quite work for my style of writing. I know this is what works for me.

Transfer: Are there any strategies/rituals/habits that you do before, during and/after you write?

Junse Kim: Going back, yeah it's you gotta do what you gotta do. When I'm in that streaky mode though, it's like chasing the high, but unlike addictions, you can catch the writing high again with the same intensity. Meaning, when you're so immersed in the story, time just falls away because you're in this reality and regardless of the story you're writing. It's easy to get into the mindset, the hard part is getting to that point. It's an addiction without the negative side effects. You get the high again, that's the amazing part. It's an exciting, fun experience.

It's also a bit weird because, for my process I end up getting isolated a lot due to being in front of the computer. Things like you're starving where you should've been eating, that type of immersion. But in those moments, I appreciate it, it's hard to get into those states and when you're there, you just don't want to leave it.

Transfer: What is one surprising thing you've learned since becoming a writer?

Junse Kim: Emotional awareness. In order to understand your characters' dramas, you have to know them as real people, and you have to know what makes them tick, why something is specifically dramatic for them, which then forces you to become introspective and think the same things about yourself. You can realize when you have been purposely, emotionally unaware, when you suppress emotions, when you repress—and you can get a better understanding of what your characters are going through, and you can detail it with much more precision, in a way that the reader knows what the character is really feeling in that exact moment.

Transfer: Ok, so then how do you come up with ideas for your writing?

Junse Kim: Through what I see as epiphany moments. Epiphanies don't have to be overtly dramatic plot moments, just how it's specifically

important to the character. Just focus on that then back track to how you get to that specific moment in time. For me it makes more sense, because you know the goal of the type of the emotional experience you want to get to. The hard part is detailing everything that leads up to that, particularly the emotional development cuz emotions beget the big dramatic understanding that is an epiphany moment. If you want to evoke a sense of great loss for something, you have to make sure that you render an intensity of love for the thing before it's gone, otherwise there's no loss.

So, let's say that the intent is a profound loss. Instead of just telling the reader "He loved the puppy very much," it's the detailing of the experience that shows love and care. In our culture we don't think about emotions in depth. We feel them and then when we try to describe things, we end up giving reasons for the emotional experience. "Why does he love the Puppy? Because his mother gave it to him." So that's just a plot fact, but there's no emotional detailing of, "So what? How does he feel about his mother?" Maybe the mother's a jerk, so you have to detail that intense love for the mother and connect it to how meaningful the dog is. There's a common issue in writing, that we intellectualize emotions instead of really figuring out "What am I feeling? How am I feeling this?"

Transfer: So much like, you're scientifically trying to describe an emotion but you're not feeling it.

Junse Kim: Yeah or give intellectual reasons for why someone should feel it, instead of having to detail that emotion, which is at the core of what develops compelling fiction. We don't know how to render emotions because we don't know how we actually experience emotions, we just know that we feel them and so that's why often times in early works of aspiring authors, as well as early drafts of MFA students, they're just a bunch of emotional tells or assumptions of emotions based on dramatic plot events. In fact, I created a grad class addressing this issue, of earning dramatic emotions, how to actually render emotions on the page in ways that move the reader.

Transfer: I remember from taking your class last semester, you would always say, “Why did this happen and do you think that they earned that emotion?” It’s always interesting when that happens because I find that in a lot of books, even I tend to ask that question, do they deserve to feel that way? Why is being emotionally involved very important in your writing? I sense a theme here.

Junse Kim: Oh! Because otherwise, how else will the reader know why this is important for the character? If I as the writer, don’t know how this moment is a specific turn for the character, I have no right to expect the reader to understand it. Part of my job as an educator is to teach the craft skills of how to actually affect a reader. If the drama isn’t real to you in a vivid way, why should you expect a reader to perceive it as so? Again, that goes beyond plot event. It’s like learning a brand-new language. Once you figure out how to hold the reader’s attention through vivid detailing, you’ll have them on the edge of their seat and wanting more. Even if it’s not overtly dramatic, we understand how it’s specifically dramatic for the character.

Transfer: In your opinion, what makes up the elements of a good writer, besides the emotional side?

Junse Kim: Oh gosh! Ok, I’m going to re-tool that into what makes a good student, which then leads to a good writer, which is critical thinking, the ability to figure things out, having that curiosity then developing it to critical thinking from the writer’s perspective and making it the most important thing. When you play video games you die all the time, except if you’re into a game, you keep dying and it’s ok, you don’t get discouraged; you’re just trying to figure out what you need to do to get better and critically solve the problem. It’s that attitude you need to have when it comes to narrative problems when writing. Instead of going to self judgement, focus on how to solve the issue. If people don’t make it the most important thing, they can unconsciously make something else more important, such as receiving praise that the work is good. It can turn into an ego thing, rather than the task at hand which is focusing on the education. The more you

focus on the education, your writing will always improve. The more you focus on worrying if something pleases or doesn't please a reader, you're not focusing on what actually improves your writing.

Transfer: So, don't focus on the little things?

Junse Kim: Yeah, rather judgements. Focus on the process and not the judgments. Not just in analyzing a work of fiction, but critically thinking how you can apply craft to develop your intent. This is my own subjective input—people oftentimes connect their own personal sense of self worth to their piece of writing and their sense of ego. That's why people want praise.

Transfer: I take it that building an ego, even though it's good, don't get used to it.

Junse Kim: Exactly. That's why if you focus on just the process, you understand "Hey I did something well this time" but don't get cocky and think you'll do it again for the next story. The more comfortable I get in applying craft well, then the more consistently I know my writing is going to come off the page. But if you focus on if something is good or bad, and you randomly write, it's going to be a writing-hoping type process, where you can't consistently have the good craft apply since you're not focused on that.

Transfer: Backtracking, you tell me you get obsessed in the moment.

I'd like to dig a little deeper into the writing process. Since it can be emotionally draining, how do you get yourself in and out of that headspace? You tell me you do get obsessed in the moment.

Junse Kim: Oh, ok! Yeah, we're talking about two different things here. When I get obsessed in the moment, that's a good thing. I want to stay in that moment. I have to come out to go to work or to go to a social engagement or XYZ, family things etc.

The emotional taxing part, that's different. It's actually something that we're addressing in one of my classes. Oftentimes

narrative writers have to pull from their own life experience. I'm not saying that they're actually writing out their own life experiences, but they pull meaning from dramatic emotional experiences they can connect to. In doing that, sometimes we don't realize that it's actually the act of writing that becomes traumatizing, if it's a traumatic moment. If that does happen, it's a common process issue that has nothing to do with craft, it's just your personal, emotional experience as you write. By re-traumatizing, you have the equivalent of a crisis moment that has occurred at the same moment as you re-live it as you write. It ends up being a trigger. For example, if you had a panic attack at a specific moment in life in the past, and your writing about it triggers it, you immediately feel the same high intensity level of anxiety in that panic attack in the present moment. As a teacher, I don't want students to re-traumatize themselves, and students don't want to re-traumatize themselves, but at the same time there's an understanding of having to go there to detail this. Part of the issue is finding ways to talk yourself out of those situations and find a healthier alternative.

Allow me to give a hyperbolic, but relatable moment. People like first responders, a very dramatic situation job. We think that we could never understand what it's like to stand in their shoes as they go through what they do every day in high level anxiety situations. You ask a paramedic and they say, "Well my training takes over." This idea of training taking over helps where one feels an emotion and acknowledges that's what you're feeling, you're not suppressing it. At the same time, it's not a binary thing, it's not the only thing we feel. One can also feel a sense of functionality. The functionality in writing is understanding how craft works and how to apply it. So, I like to use Sully Sullenberger as an example in class, of this very principle of training take over. He landed the plane in the only safe area which was the Hudson, and in all the interviews that followed, he was asked, "How were you able to land the airplane so safely and calmly?" To which he replied, "My training took over." That's what happens when you're in that crisis mode as you write. It's ok to feel what you feel, you don't have to let it dominate. Let your training take over. You can find a way to be functional while understanding you still feel this intense emotion you're wanting to incorporate in the story.

This is more on the process of writing on an emotional scale, but deeper. I know I'm saying emotional a lot but the issue is that our emotions, in the process of writing convince us to not detail what needs to be on the page because it's uncomfortable to write. So, we need to stay true to what developed a narrative drama and how you detail that and not let anything get in the way. You yourself and your own emotions can get a sense of fear or resistance when wanting to let go and let the emotion flow through the detailing.

Transfer: Could you say that that could also take you out of your head space? Sort of give you a moment to step back?

Junse Kim: It depends on where a writer is in their emotional self awareness. Cuz I think, initially, when I say this to classes, intellectually we understand it. A common defense mechanism is rationalization. It's hard to catch it as an impediment to detail what you know should be detailed because you're so good at rationalizing, you've convinced yourself that even though all these other great works detail something specifically with generous details, "It won't work for me in this moment." It takes time to develop that skill set of identifying that self resistance. You block yourself. It's such an odd thing. We become our own impediments to something that we really want.

Transfer: Thank you very much for your time and effort to adhere to this interview and for your wonderful insight into the life of Creative Processing.

Contributors

Gerardo Arellano who likes to be referred to as Jay is a not so new transplant to San Francisco. He's been here a year and a half he's made some friends, found love and a newfound home other than the one he knows in LA. Writing is no longer just something he likes but the only thing he wants to do with his life.

Santos Arteaga is a current senior at San Francisco State. He is majoring in Creative Writing with an emphasis on short story writing. He enjoys writing about the communities he's a part of including the Latinx community and the LGBTQ+ community. He's previously worked as an editor for *Borderless Zine* and *Transfer*. His debut short story, *Beach Dwelling Creatures*, was published in *Ramblr* magazine and won Best Fiction. In his spare time, he's either playing video games or lucid dreaming, or both.

Dasha Bulatova was born in Moscow and lives in Oakland, California. She received her MFA in poetry and translation in 2019 from SFSU. In July 2018, she was an Emerging Artist Frontier Fellow at Epicenter in Green River, Utah. She is the poetry editor for *Fourteen Hills: The SFSU Review* and a co-curator of *Take Place*, SFSU's graduate literary reading series. During the day, Dasha works as a language therapist with adults who have suffered a stroke or traumatic brain injury.

Guadalupe Campos prefers to go by Lupe because having people call her by her full first name reminds of her mom scolding her when she was little. Lupe has a sweet tooth and is usually seen plopping candy into her mouth in the middle of class.

Rick Champion is creatively unemployed, and has taken classes in genomics, math, and Modern Greek through the SFSU Open University. Rick's natural gift for embellishing real life experiences has led him to embark on a second career in creative writing.

Anna Costanza is a MS graduate student at SFSU in the second cohort Interdisciplinary Marine and Estuarine Sciences program. Her paintings tend to stem from her current research topics and wildlife experiences. Art helps her empathize with nature and communicate both beauty and importance. You can view more of her work at www.abcostanza.wixsite.com/portfolio

Marisa Cuevas is a recent transfer student from the East Bay where she resides. She is a creative writing major and has been writing ever since she found her love for fresh notebooks. She is proudly Mexican and Salvadorian. She loves bringing her heritage into her writing in new and old ways. The very small city she comes from known as Bay Point, inspires many of the worlds she creates in her stories with its diversity and warmth. Her genre of choice is realistic fiction and short stories are her most beloved outlet. She hopes to one day publish a collection of her own.

Oscar Dominguez is 22 and currently attending SFSU studying film. Having recently transferred from SoCal, he has found a space where he can be himself. Through his photography and writing, he invites others to see the world through his unique perspective.

Daja Dubois is a third year student at San Francisco State University. She is currently obtaining a degree in English Literature, with a minor in Women & Gender Studies. When not writing, you can find her watching anime with her pitbull Ringo or snacking on the latest health-food craze.

Cameron Gonzales was born in Upland, California on November 30th 2001. He is a 2nd year at SFSU and he is currently working on his degree in studio art / art history, and thrives on always creating new work, whether it be the next black and white portrait, relief stamp, or poem.

Nicole Gonzales is a second year journalism student attending San Francisco State University. She has always wanted to be a writer. She loves her dog and cat, reading, and the city.

Jennifer Guerrero

Cepideh Jaber is a first generation Iranian-American writer based in San Francisco. As a youth worker for over 10 years, Cepideh enjoys bringing together real life stories into creative fiction worlds for young adults. Cepideh believes it is only through experiences humans can grow, and the world of fiction has allowed her the opportunity to experience events her life path would otherwise never cross.

Angel Johnson is a Bay Area poet whose writing combines philosophical musings with observations about art, literature, and living in California. She holds a degree in Linguistics and Psychology from UCLA and is finishing a Master's degree in Creative Writing at SF State.

Mackenzie Pauley is a third-year fashion design student with a secret love for writing. Starting from an early age she knew she wanted to create in all aspects, from writing to photography to design. After being diagnosed with severe generalized anxiety, she learned that writing would be her best coping mechanism, which is why most of her pieces come from trauma.

London Pinkney is a writer, editor & educator. She is currently earning an MFA in Fiction at San Francisco State University. She is the co-founder and editor-in-chief of *The Ana*, and the 2019 recipient of the Joe Brainard Fellowship. London Pinkney has been published at *Mirage #5 / Periodical*, *Seen and Heard*, *OmniVerse*, and *The Fem*, among other places.

TreVaughn Roach-Carter is a queer black writer born and raised in Modesto, California. He attended San Francisco State University, obtaining a B.A. in Creative Writing with a minor in Education. He is currently obtaining a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative writing from SFSU. His poem "Entitled" is published in Tayo Literary Magazine's special issue: SOFT. His flash fiction story 'The Necromancer,' is published in issue 4 of BAD EGG. His poem 'Every Time' is published in Borderless Magazine. His short story 'Father' is an Editor's Pick in THE ANA. He is the author of the young adult novel 'The Marked Ones: Uprising.' He is a broke college student accepting Venmo donations at: TreVaughnRoach-Carter.

Juliane Roberts-Hansen is a first year at San Francisco State University who's majoring in Sociology with an emphasis in studio art. She is a California native from Sacramento and is looking to change the world through art.

Gabrielle Rupert is a graduate student in Marine Biology, and plans on finishing her thesis this spring. She is from Massachusetts, and has short stories published in *Pif Magazine* and *Ripples in Space*.

Jonathan Wilson is a current Industrial Design major at SFSU. He has been drawing and painting since he was a boy, and began taking it more seriously a few years ago after surviving cancer. Most of his art is influenced by dreams.

Gerardo Arellano
Santos Arteaga
Dasha Bulatova
Guadalupe Campos
Rick Champion
Anna Costanza
Marisa Cuevas
Oscar Dominguez
Daja Dubois
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