

In The Ords

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In The Ords

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IN THE ORDS ASKED CSUMB

to reflect...

Who are **you**?

What are your **identities**?

Where do you **belong**?

What **societal norms** and **expectations** do you
resist?

How do you show **persistence**?

Feeling Fake

PARKER JONES

I am
The dusty,
Sun-blached flowers
Made of cotton and wire,
To the blooms in my
Great grandmother's garden
That she tended to,
So carefully,
Until she died.

I am
A box of temporary
Hair dye from the corner store,
Named something bizarre like
Poison apple,
Compared to the rich locks
Of an Irish girl in the
Worn-out story books
I read when I was younger.

I am
A picture of the setting sun
Over the ocean,
Found in a chest in the attic,
Damaged from a leak in the beams your father
Never fixed,
To sinking in the sand,
Breathing the air,
And feeling the spray.

Tic-Talk

SIERRA FISHMAN

One. One hand in front of the other. Shuffling feet following right behind. The slippery leather of the sofa tries to impede his progress, but he perseveres. He reaches the edge of the sofa, and his hands slide over, sending him toppling down over the cliff of furniture. Giggling rises out of the laundry basket below. The conspiratorial, joyful, wholehearted victory call of a baby boy who has just crawled to freedom.

Four. He steps from the soft, safe comfort of the brown wood chips and onto the slippery metal bars of the play structure. He doesn't understand the word "fear." He launches himself from bar to bar, hands groping for purchase on the green metal as he grunts and pants and keeps going. One foot, two feet, one hand, two hands. He climbs all the way across the bowed ladder and reaches the gap between the landing of the play structure and the final ladder bar. It might as well be the Grand Canyon; it spans the little oceans puddled in the wood chips below. The distance should be terrifying, but this toddler knows no fear. He winds himself up, dipping his butt below the bar, as his knuckles turn white from his intense grip. He releases that frenetic energy and unwinds himself like a frog launching across a lilypond, all long legs and groping arms. He lands on the solid surface of the play structure and takes off running, a guttural battle cry ripping from his throat. A primal, insistent demand for the world to bend to his will.

Nine. He stares up from the blacktop, his hands bleeding onto the crisp white foursquare lines, painting them in a splotchy tie-dye. He balls his hands into fists and shoots up at the sixth-grader. He misses as the hulking mass of the boy steps easily to the side. He tries again and gets shoved to the side, falling onto the blacktop again and adding his knees to the growing list of bloody body parts. The schoolyard monitor is standing on the opposite side of the soccer field with her back to him, far enough away that she might not be able to hear him. She's talking to one of the pleasant children. He wails a screeching, frustrated cry as he launches himself again. His frustration and anger propel him ever-forward, his screeching becoming more frantic with each unsuccessful attempt.

Twelve. He sits in the corner of the classroom, stabbing a pencil through the centers of every zero he finds on the page, avoiding the

questions that he can't immediately answer. He's good at math, but this math is hard. He doesn't like things that are hard. Math isn't supposed to have words. Math is numbers. Numbers make sense. He continues to put holes in the paper, a steady ripping sound filling the air as his classmates sneak glances at his table. They're all working in groups, but his table is off to the side of the room, away from the walls and the shelves, but most importantly away from the other students. He keeps a steady, predictable cadence as he stabs into the paper over and over, his throat issuing a rasping, squeaky grunt with each hole. His noises sound unnatural, grating and strained vocal utterances.

Fifteen. He lays on his twin bed. His body perfectly still. Like a corpse forgotten in the darkness, unmoving. He doesn't dream. He doesn't snore. He doesn't move. He is still. *Still.* The only proof that he's alive is the steady rise and fall of his chest, the air softly escaping through his nostrils, and the almost imperceptible flutter of his eyelashes against his cheeks. The silence is deafening, an unnatural juxtaposition to his usual persistent squeals, murmurs, and screeching.

Sixteen. He stares at his video game, unresponsive to the news that his dog has died. The dog was ten and sickly. She'd lived a good life, full of walks and toys and nipping at little boy heels. He continues tapping on the screen and makes no effort to acknowledge anything out of the ordinary has happened. The next day he opens the door to let the dog out to use the bathroom before school, whistling for her over and over. He receives a gentle reminder that the dog died. He stops whistling but doesn't close the back door. He walks to the dog's little round bed and kicks it across the living room. His cheeks are streaked with tears and he's making a strangled choking sound in his throat. He is allowed to stay home from school. He is going to ask about his grandpa. And his grandma. And the dog we owned sixteen years ago that died the month before he was born. He might whistle for the dog again later, after he's gone back to playing his video games and the choking noises will come back louder than before.

Seventeen. He steps through the threshold, his car keys in hand. The car sits in the driveway behind him, packed too full with every memory he has ever made. He has a photograph of the Atlantic Ocean taped to his rearview mirror and a pair of noise-dampening headphones on his dash. A framed letter peeks out from under an oversized Sonic the Hedgehog plush toy on the front passenger seat.

Dear Mr.

I am delighted t

the class of 202

As he backs out of the driveway, I can hear him through the metal doors and glass windows, his trills echoing in the air. The joyful, wholehearted victory call of a young man driving to freedom.

Yours

ALANAH HUNSDORFER

I wish you'd stop frowning at me,
as I frown back at you

Your eyebrows furrowed in thought
lips pursed, nose scrunched
eyes welling up with tears

But they glitter in the light,
your red whites and long lashes
panning the gold in your irises

And once again I see your beauty
even when you're sad

I wish you'd crack a smile
because I can't help but smile too

The corners of your mouth turning up
face bright, dimples deep
a row of white teeth

And hinting your cheeks,
a light blush, the color of roses

and regret

I've seen it all
your worst and your best

I've seen you try and give up
only to try again and succeed

and here I am trying too

mimicking your beauty,
however unoriginal it may seem,

however artificial *I* am

But I hope you know
how captivating you can be

to steal my attention so wholly
so purely
so perfectly imperfect as you are

but then again, I am too
I am *you*

Sincerely yours,
the you in the mirror

Looking in all the Wrong Places

ELIJAH RAMOS



Toy

ELIJAH RAMOS



All In

ELIJAH RAMOS

The voices, their screams, the nosebleeds. It's all in my head.
The sirens and songs that they sing. It's all in my head.

The feelings and fingernails crawling into my skin the reason I can't
Seem to flee or get out of my bedroom stings. It's all in my head.

The epiphany that everyone's sympathy is pitifully, maybe
They're secretly out to pull my strings. It's all in my head.

Stabbed in the back, I never did learn why fake friends
Keep crawling back; for flings. Betrayal is all in my head.

The teeth gnawing, spit growling, gory chewing
My brain, this migraine, it only rings all in my head.

Tickle in my spine, this body isn't mine, I'm walking on mines,
And trapped in my mind. The living thing all in my head.

"Listen You're okay, the solution is all in your meds."
"But doc, it feels too real. It can't be all in my head."

Hair-line Fractures

PARKER JONES

I never got sea sick,
Or felt ill
On the winding roads
That led to my home.

I was fine on rollercoasters,
Never scared of heights,
Spun around,
Neck-jerker.

I'm allergic to nothing.
Stuff me full, give me
Anything; I'll be ok.
Eateateat.

I've never failed,
Except my drivers test,
Twice before twenty.
My palms turned the steering wheel slick.
I forgot to put on the parking brake.

I think that's why my parents
Never saw that I was broken,
Shattered, chipped away in so many
Places that I will never be fixed, not
Completely.

See the places where the glue seeps through,
A porcelain vase with,
Hair-line fractures.
You might think I was perfect
From a mile away.
Hold me and I'll break.

No Country to Call my Own

JENISES GONZALEZ

I remember the first time I realized I did not belong in either of the countries I loved. I was in El Alvareño, Michoacan, home to my loving father, a place full of dirt roads, tiny brick houses, and where a child's dream is stolen by poverty. I was getting my haircut by Ana, a petite brown woman that lives a few houses down from my abuelita.

She asked confidently while she snipped away at my long brown hair, "¿Mija eres del Norte verdad?"

I answered, "¿Si como sabe?"

She said, "Pues no eres como la gente aquí, eres americana."

I said confidently, "No, yo soy mexicana."

She giggled and asked if I was born in Mexico.

I said no, I was born in America.

She said exactly, you are American, not Mexican.

I remember feeling so rejected, why did someone with the same skin color, same language, same culture not accept me? I attend church every Sunday; I celebrate El Día de Los Tres Reyes Magos; I had a Quinceanera. What is the difference between Ana and I? And when I was in the United States, those were the things that made me not American.

In The United States, I was convinced that beautiful meant blonde, white skin, and blue eyes *the total opposite of me*. I used to hate my brown skin, I hated wearing braids because I feared that I looked like *La India Maria*. America purposely tore down my confidence along with other little brown girls and now my own people were doing it too. Starting with my own family, *La Niña fresa* was always a harmless joke before this moment. Then everything clicked. *La Niña fresa* was a form to insult me for being "too white" for my family.

I sat in the chair confused as she continued to snip away at my hair. I couldn't wrap my head around the idea that she saw me as different. Without even knowing Ana took a part of me away that I miss. My sense of belonging, the idea that I knew who I was. Sadly, Ana was not the only person in my culture to reject me. But, Ana was different. She was the reason I realized that mi gente would never accept me.

She then asked, "¿Mija me puedes hablar en inglés?" I asked if she knew English, and she said, "No pero pienso que es un idioma muy bonita y me gusta oírlo."

At that moment while I was still sitting in the chair and she was finishing up, I realized how blessed I am to be from two different countries, to be Chicana. Even though I am not fully accepted by mi

gente, I am blessed to be able to live their dream. Their dream of the American dream, the idea of being able to come to the United States for a brighter future. Even though I am blessed, to live this dream I am forced to tone down my brownness. In certain places, I must hide my native tongue because I am in America and in America, we speak English. My brown skin is enough for people to set me aside from them, I am more than my brown skin. Most of the time I am instantly seen as an immigrant for the color of my skin and I take pride in that. I resemble my hardworking father simply through the color of my skin. My brownness is a symbol of hard work, resilience, determination, and oppression. I represent my ancestors who went through the unimaginable, who survived the conditions no human should ever face, who fought to not be forgotten to allow me to live the American dream. I used to think of my skin color as a threat, my biggest fear was to get discriminated against but, I have learned my skin is not a threat to me. It is a threat to those who do not share the darkness and oppression in their skin. For mi gente, I will prosper and succeed in a country that hates to see young brown women do so.

Where I am From

AUBREY AMILA

I am from the never-outgrown black and white superstar adidas shoes
my feet are accustomed to since middle school–
milage: thousand miles and millions more to go.

I am from the five peso mango popsicle,
from the Dumaluan beach families comes to,
picking up seashells and going into the sea
on my knees confessing,
caressing
a love or a sin.

I am from the Spotify playlists I made for myself.
There resides The Beatles, Billy Joel, Tame Impala,
Queen, Air Supply, Linkin Park, Mac DeMarco,
Coldplay, Taylor Swift, Frank Ocean, and more–
It's a core people adore more and more,
A solitary door.

I am from two hospitals too big for me.
One for dialysis–
watching the blood travel
from my grandpa's veins like midnight onboarding trains
going anywhere and everywhere with only one passenger.
One for chemotherapies–
Changing tubes from my mother's chest everyday after school
because she took care of me my whole life
and it was my turn to do so...to do so like a mother.
I am from two hospitals that taught me
to fight even if your own body is against you,
giving up on you.

I am from the dim-lighted avenues and boulevards,
lying on the bench, sitting by the ledge, never intending to jump–
homeless.
Home is oceans away from me
so, I search for it in people
my peers, teachers, and strangers,
building a garden with a field of dandelions,
wishing that they would stay in my life forever.

But they are just wishes that come true
when the disney channel is on.

But the thing is... I don't have a TV.

I am from a household who does not listen,
from a school who does not listen,
from a community who does not listen.
Always hearing, but never listening.
Apparently, if you look like a kid,
scrawny and short, unfixed dark hair, just like me,
you are not worth the ears.
So, I decided to change my address.
I am not from those places anymore,
for I am from the notebook my English teacher gave me.
A place where my words, for once, were given importance.
Writing all of this at once,
for a poem like this does not have a period at all.
Even Calculus agrees.
The limit $f(x)$ does not exist...

Senior Portraits

TYSHELL JOHNSON-HILL



Bahama Mama

TYSHELL JOHNSON-HILL



The World Ends in Silence

ELIJAH RAMOS

The world ends in silence,
By a divide in which,
The fate will be defiance.
How would you identify us?
The US? Its Men and Women
Of color will be incriminated,
By the police criminating,
And walking then freely.
But, still society cannot deny
us,
For we shall not assimilate,
As to let diaspora then defy us.
We see past the
discriminating,
Of the color which defines us?
The US: land of the free;
Home of the brave
Until your pinned by a knee,
Reminded your ancestor was a
slave
To the White man's family
tree.
Tricked into thinking, our
silence
Serves to prove our
innocence.
But this generation needs to
pave
The way for significance,
In protest of the indifferent.
All I have learned from the
quiet fleet
Is but their ignorance.
But protest is a trap;
We're overshadowed by the
intrusion
Of malicious and violence.
And to call it a riot,

Frames our belligerence
As anything but the last resort.
How would you identify us?
Americans should be patriotic,
But this democracy is nothing
More than a hypocrisy of
hegemony,
Based on dominance.
We sit in a court,
Where by tone we are sorted,
Positioned by poverty or high
finance,
Finesse, fitness and all things
Social Economic Status.
One lead by a patriarchy; by
misogyny
And the legacy of supremacy.
So even though I'm a citizen,
I've been told we're all illegal
immigrants;
Wetbacks from another
planet;
My ancestors are aliens.
I already see the truth
Beyond their media spoof:
I am more than the color of
my skin,
But still I wear it proudly
To honor those akin.
So do not tell me that,
Because I am Mexican,
I am worthless.
Likewise, I will never
Declare another culture
Worth less

When Time Turns Gray

ALANAH HUNSDORFER

I stare at myself in the mirror, my eyes boring into the reflection in front of me, tears running down my splotchy cheeks. Somehow watching myself cry always makes me feel a little bit better, like the embarrassment of my red face is enough to scare the sadness away. I always was an ugly crier, the kind of ugly that makes you want to look away, not really in disgust but almost in laughter. I hear a whine at my feet and glance down to see my dog tilting his head at my discomfort. Giving him a small smile, I crouch down to scratch at the back of his ears. I don't know how to tell him that the tears are for nothing, that I had seen an old picture of him as a puppy and started thinking about how much he's aged. How much *I've* aged.

I rub at the little wispy hairs growing in around his eyes and think about how he still looks so much like a puppy, even when he's turning gray. I can still see the dog I brought home all those years ago, rambunctious and playful, how I smiled at him with bright pink braces, and he licked my face in response. Now I smile at him with straight white teeth, and he lays down in exhaustion, like checking on me suddenly took away what little energy he had left in his old tired body. I wonder what he thinks of me, what he sees when he looks at me, if he gets sad that I'm growing up too, that I don't look like the little girl I was when we first met.

Sometimes I still wish I wore the rose-colored glasses. You know the ones we wear when we're young, the ones that seem to blind us, leaving a pretty golden residue over the edges of our vision so that the sadness can't seep in. The rose tint, a symbolic lens for ignorance. And, sure, maybe ignorance isn't the best thing in the world, but they really weren't lying when they said it was bliss. Being in the dark can be scary and lonely, but being *kept* in the dark, well...*that* can be freeing, almost comfortable, like you don't really know you're in the dark until someone turns on the light. I wish I still wore the rose-colored glasses because at least they would hide the tears.

It's silly, honestly, to cry about something so inevitable as aging. When I was younger, my grandmother used to have this piece of paper hanging up in her kitchen with the quote, "*Do not resent growing old. Many are denied the privilege.*" It always stood out to me because it didn't quite fit in with the rest of the kitchen. My grandma's decor has always been artfully picked, strategically placed, thoughtfully designed. But here was this little worn scrap of paper, hung up by scotch tape at the very end of the kitchen. You could walk

right by it if you weren't paying attention. But I guess that's kind of the point, isn't it? Life tends to pass you by if you're not paying attention.

My grandma used to catch me reading it when I was younger, pondering its meaning. It stood out to me not because of its weathered nature in an otherwise expensive room but because of the message behind the words. I couldn't fathom why someone would resent growing old. All I ever wanted to do was grow up, to be taken seriously, to start experiencing the world without someone reminding me of how young I was.

"It's true," my grandma would say. "When you're older you'll understand."

I would nod in agreement, but I never did think I would ever understand, however much she was sure I would. But now as I look into my dog's old sleepy eyes, I suddenly realize why everyone is so fucking scared, so *displeased* at the thought of growing up. Why would anyone want to look at themselves and think that time got away from them? Why would anyone want to look at their dog and wonder if they're sad about the gray around their eyes, or the joints that don't quite work anymore, or their owners who don't seem to look the same either?

I wonder if I wasted my childhood wanting to be the person I am today. All those minutes wasted on wondering what I would look like in the future, who I would turn out to be. So much time wasted wanting to grow up, to be someone I wasn't. I could have been riding my bike until sunset. Or reading books with a flashlight at midnight. Or running through sprinklers on those hot summer days. And how ironic is it that I'm wasting the present trying to go back? Trying to make sense of everything I missed. Trying to meet my dog for the first time again, crooked teeth and all. When my wardrobe was dazzled in color and patterns, and my eyes were bright with curiosity.

"You're perfect," I spit out through giggles, as my new puppy kissed my cheeks on our way back home all those years ago. I'd like to think he was thinking the same thing about me at the time, excited at the prospect of finding a family.

I wipe at the stray tears rolling down my face with a tissue and sit down next to him on the floor. Here I am resenting myself for growing older, wasting my time again. It almost makes me want to laugh, how ridiculous it all sounds. How childish that I was told this would happen, and I still didn't heed the warning. I scratch behind my dog's jet black ears again, listening to his calm steady breathing.

"You're perfect," I whisper to him, my voice getting drowned out by the silence in the room. I can't see myself through his eyes, can't see how much I've changed over the years, but I hope he's thinking the same about me.

The Name I Was Given

PARKER JONES

My mother named me
After my great-grandmother.
It was her maiden name,
And my family
Still tells me
How much they miss her.
I don't know them anymore,
Not since she died.
They never got the chance to know
Anything more than what to
Call me when they'd wave me
Away.

My parents chose my name before they knew my gender, but I guess
They still don't.
A few years ago I talked about a fact I
Learned in my honors statistics class:
Names create biases for those reviewing job applications.
My mother said she named me so they'd hire me
Anyways,
So they'd think I was strong and
Manly.

During roll call, my teachers would call out in their shrill voices,
"Mr. Jones?"
They'd apologize when they saw my
Long hair and round cheeks.
They'd turn red.
I'd turn red.
Looking back, I relish the confusion and
I pity the past version of me that was so ashamed
Not to be a girl.

My name comes from a woman who lived until she was 96,
And parents afraid for the child they thought would grow to be
A woman.
I wonder if someone will be named after me,
The child of an old classmate or a stranger,
Glimpsing the six letters that form who I'll always be

On some form or old newspaper clipping.
I used to want to be the only me,

Back before I knew I was more than just
A name.

Little

ZITLALLI MACIAS

there are little lies I tell to myself to get by
like I'm fine with the rain, it does not
make me want to stay home,
where my body does not
sink into the couch like a child
trapped in a deflating bouncy house
I can breathe just fine inside the caving walls

there's one small door where
the sun peeks through, inside
it smells like grass and fruit and small, sticky hands
and I hear her voice that sounds like
dawn and it carries me closer to the rolling
fields of flowers, my favorite, forget me nots

the dew that sits on blue petals
falls into my hands— wet diamonds
melt like tears that fall in the spring,
warm showers and trees
remind me of her eyes, wide and green

I can breathe inside this world of hers, that once was mine,
behind the door, behind my eyes, I sink so deeply that I rise
and find I've bloomed into solitude
and again, pitter patter

I'm fine with the rain,
it does not make me want to stay home.

why can't I go?

CRISTIAN JESUS VEGA

I remember the day i looked straight into my mom's caring sunkissed eyes
as knives slid down my throat making my tongue wince with pain. I
wanted to leave

or disappear, but I stood—frozen—with claw marks underneath my
sleeves,
with burgundy eyes, and tears trails down my cheeks, i whispered *I
want to leave*

*earth's grasp. every friday, I lay on warm coarse beach sand near shore,
staring
at heaven's angels flying to god disappearing behind clouds, wishing I can
leave*

*with them, but I lay amongst couples' hand in hand strolling, alongshore with
their dogs,
running through navy-blue ocean waves headfirst, I lay, staring, wishing I
can leap*

*in the ocean, and let large waves drag me down to depths where sunlight is
scared
to shine its brightest, but I sit at the beach watching others smiling, laughing,
leaving*

*to their cars in groups. I drive in my car blasting music to drown my thoughts
in anything
other than my voice, but I stare at traffic passing by, one by one, gaining speed,
leaving*

*me behind, if I had guts I would swerve my car to oncoming traffic, or to the
concrete wall,
or off the bridge's rail, to stop the music, but the cross dangling on my
rearview mirror*

*tests my christianity, I walk the earth bearing's jesus name on my DL, but I
don't feel worthy.
My shoulders slouch from running thoughts, hoping this day will be my last so
I can leave.*

My Small Corner of the Room

ELIZABETH LIPPA

“Doesn’t her back hurt from laying in bed for so long?” she turned from side to side, sighing in frustration. I’m not sure how many hours it’s been since she left that spot, but from the looks of it, she wasn’t leaving anytime soon. In the meantime, here I sit, in my small corner of the room propped up on a wooden chair, watching the days pass. Suddenly, her phone rings, a muffled marimba ringtone startles her. She looks around, picking up blankets, pushing her open textbooks off her bed forcing them to hit the floor with a loud thud. Finding the phone buried under the unfolded laundry at the end of her bed, she picks up the old cracked device and stares at it, debating if she should answer this time. If it was anything like the past 10 calls she received, it would be one of her friends checking in on her.

“Hello?” Her voice is groggy and tired, seeming to know exactly why they called.

“Hey, how are you doing?” A soft but concerned voice asks. She rolls to her side, giving the same answer she always does.

“I’m fine, I feel a little better today.” She and I both know this wasn’t the complete truth yet she understands that the answer would prevent them from asking any further questions.

“That’s really good. Do you need anything? I can bring you food?”

“No, that’s okay. I think I just need rest” I can see the tears forming in her eyes. She should have said yes.

“Alright well, please call me if you want to talk, okay? You know I’m always here for you.”

Ending the phone call, this seemed to be the routine for now. Wake up at noon, forced by the midday sunshine peering through her windows, followed by her staring at the ceiling for a few hours, deciding whether she should get up today, or fall back asleep. Somedays she’ll look around at the objects surrounding her in her room. Her backpack with weeks of homework she’s been avoiding, the stack of unfinished paintings leaning against the wall. Her piles of books she swears that she’ll read one day on her shelf. After a short spring of motivation, she soon seeps back into her covers, finding safety huddled in blankets and phone calls from friends.

As I sit here, collecting dust, I knew that if she just gave me a moment of her time, maybe she would feel better. She always felt happier when she sat with me. I think back to that one summer, she would sit with her back slouched over me for hours at a time, feeding

me cloth and pins. Shirts, dresses, skirts, you name it, we made it. We were a team. I would see her face glow with excitement as she gently guided fabric under my needle, uncertain if her idea would turn out, or even look decent, she never seemed to care. The ability to focus on nothing but a straight stitch provided ease to her days. A time when she wouldn't have to think about her grades, what college she wanted to go to, or what she wanted to do after high school. The two of us together gave her a moment of freedom from the pressures of her world. I hoped she would sit down with me soon, I could tell now more than ever she needed it.

"Stella! What are you doing?" Her mom yelled from the other room. "You can't keep doing this to yourself, it's been three days of you just laying here."

"I know mom, I'm sorry. I'll get up I promise. Just one more hour, I feel so tired." While she desperately pleads her mom thrust open the door, staring at her with an expression of disappointment. Noticing that her presence made no difference in Stella's willingness to get up, she rolls her eyes and stomps her way back to the living room.

Eventually, I see Stella slowly rise from her bed, after wiping her sleepy eyes she begins to gaze around the room, glimpsing right over to me. For a brief second, I think this will be the day she notices me, a link to possible happiness that she's aware she's ignoring. Instead, she resides to plunging her head into her hands while curling her knees upwards to her stomach.

Come on, I think. You can do this, Stella. I wish she could hear me, but my voice stays stuck in my encased plastic box.

Taking one deep breath Stella raises her head to face forward, she closes her eyes as tears stream down her face. Followed by a few shaky breaths, she makes her way out of her soft mattress, leaning down to find the closest pair of previously worn sweatpants and sweaters piled on her floor beside her. Getting ready, her mouth droops downwards, a sight not often seen from those closest to her. At her best, you wouldn't catch a Stella that's not laughing in high pitched tones and moving in what she calls her "dance moves". These were the pieces of her she missed greatly, and I hoped would return soon.

Making her way to her closet filled with piles of dirty clothes. It looks as if she's reaching for some shoes, but to my surprise, I see her stand all the way up on her tippy toes reaching for a bag long forgotten in the left-hand corner of the tallest shelf. As I see her attempt to grab a floral plastic recyclable bag my heart leaps in excitement. Almost out of reach she yanks down the bag causing a pile of fabric to fall to the ground. She stares at the colorful mess of torn and salvaged fabric. Prints of rainbows to tie-dye to patterns of

bumblebees and poppies scattered the floor. Letting out a large exhale, Stella crouches down to sift through the pile pulling out an old skirt we began making months ago. Holding it up, arms extended, she scans the fabric, knowing she'll have to move the pins in a few more inches to fit her now smaller waist. She lays it down on the ground slowly readjusting each pin, eyes focused and determined to keep her hands from shaking. She groans in frustration through her struggles but continues nonetheless.

Afterward, she grabs the nearest stool, placing it right beside me, turning on my light switch, my bulb brightly glows to show her darkened and baggy eyes. Taking another deep breath she lifts my plastic lever to clear the space on my metal surface. Just enough room for her to slide her fabric inwards, fastening it in place.

“Okay, here we go.” She says.

From there we went. We sewed for hours that day. From sunup to sundown and project to project, we were an unstoppable force. Over the course of that month, I saw her change. Her smile seemed to reappear as if it never left. Her anxious shakes subsided as she pinned fabrics. Her phone calls were filled with more laughter. I knew that the happier she became, the less she would sit with me, but I didn't mind. I knew she would always return when she needed me again. Until then, here I'll sit collecting dust in this small corner of the room.

Descent

MOLLY COOPER

To set our scene
It was 14 years after the turn of the millennium
The town was small but verging on a city feel
It was a time when we were too young to keep our eyes from going
star crossed
But too old to be hopeless romantics
It was me and my three best friends
Walking in formation
Our chins held high
Boys whistled as we walked by
And we grinned, as the narrator said “Let the games begin”

Our parents classified us young and dumb
But we knew better than that
And... we knew nothing at all
You see, the excitement was the paradox
That back and forth between morality and impulse
Between logic and desire
I was plagued by the idea that love was the only reason to exist
I was so wrapped up in this idea of love that I never learned what it
really is

My friends and I snuck out of the Eden when God wasn't looking
Cause I heard that the bad boys only roam around night
One friend crosstown heard they like pretty young things
Another heard that they like to clip a girl's angel wings
We were pretty little girls dressed up with sex appeal
Flashing our baby toothed smiles hoping they might look our way

We pretended to be all grown up
Stuck out our thumbs and hitched a ride
In an attempt to live our lives on the high line
We used to be graceful angels but down we fell
Hearts skipping
Skinny dipping
Sipping on our Shirley Temples
Pretending they were mixed drinks
We could care less about who we are or who we should be
Only ever cared about what other people think

And I never had more fun
Then watching all my friends fall in and out of love
And we always came back together when it all went wrong
And it all went wrong

We were pretty little girls dressed up with sex appeal
Used to be graceful angels but down we fell
I followed my best friend into the bathroom stall
And wiped a tear from her mascara streaked cheek
And she told me that once he got her between the sheets
That his eyes changed from green to mean
And she didn't need to continue
We all know what she means
And I tried pick up the pieces of her that he left behind
But putting her back together was like trying to finish a puzzle while
only looking at the pieces
blank sides
I promised her that everything would be just fine
But I had a bad feeling in the back of my mind

When we returned to the garden we realized that no one had even
noticed that we were gone
But we had eaten from the tree of knowledge
My smile tasted sour, my world view was coming undone
And I didn't know why but I knew things would never be the same
again

Campfires warmed up our hearts up by the lake
There were 16 candles glowing on my birthday cake
I had a bad feeling that things were going to change
And I couldn't stop crying because I didn't want to turn the page
My intuition said that we had fallen out of grace

A few nights later my friends wanted to venture out again
And when I asked them why
They answered me with another question
They said "why would we want to stay safe
When we know the passionate kind of darkness that lies outside of
heaven's gates?"
They didn't care about the risks or the stakes
And I looked to my best friend
Who was still missing most of her self from being maimed by the
twisted love game
But she just wiped her tears away

She wanted to have a second chance at being the missing rib in some
man's rib cage

They were the best friends I ever had
So I stayed
I played
Until all our bridges went up in flames
Till I couldn't recognize who I'd become
And I thought that they would always stay
But sadly that's where the beginning of the end began

The field of serenity

LIBERTY SORDIA



Sunset escape

LIBERTY SORDIA



She

PARKER JONES

She is my childhood bedroom. The light catches the dust when I walk in for the first time in a while. It seems smaller, more faded. The vibrancy of youth lost to time, I guess.

She is a small fish in a big pond, an expression my parents used to describe the jocks and cheerleaders of my gold-rush town. She wished she could be a cheerleader, date a jock.

She wished she could run in long, summer dresses through the dry grass. Dresses made of sun-bleached cloth covered in painted blue baby's breath. She wouldn't worry about tics. She wouldn't be sucked dry.

She is the corn-flower blond. She reads Jane Austen. She liked *The Notebook*. She hunts for crawdads in the river and doesn't get dirt under her nails.

She she she she she.

THEY.

They look over bluffs on a stormy day, let the wind tangle their hair. Brown hair. They are more afraid of drowning but less afraid of death. She's in there somewhere.

They have floated in the middle of the ocean when it rains. They've let their mind wander with the waves and the white caps and the birds, racing the wind.

They like green grass and longhorns, thunder and lightning. They clawed their way out of the small pond. Ran into the forest to meet gray wolves in caves. Climbed redwoods to see the hawks that nest over the canyon.

Their river has rapids. Frigid. Bears stab at trout, knee deep, soaked fur. The scales flash. It's evening and the crickets pierce the navy haze.

They know who they are. They're *real*. They look like her and love her, but

THEY

THEY

THEY

THEY

leave her in the weeds.

Ode to my Nightlight

ALANAH HUNSDORFER

The sun sets outside my bedroom window,
tugging on the last glimpses of light.

I find myself scrambling
to make the darkness go away.

Desperately struggling to brighten up the shadows,
the thoughts that lurk in the corners of my brain.

how silly
unease still settles on my skin

how stupid
I'm still plugging my nightlight in

As childhood fears become
adulthood nightmares.

And the monsters under my bed become
the demons in my head.

When do I stop running?
When do I stop running?

Imagination breeds disaster,
a magnet to all terror.

Caught in the confines of conception,
yet still worse than reality.

The mind seems to like it.
The dark seems to welcome it.

And the child in me
doesn't really know what to do,

except scramble for my nightlight
when darkness falls over the room.

I'm a writer

RYAN ANDERSON

I point out the thorn in every rose and sing praise of the gloomy rain.
If curfew is midnight, I stay out 'til one just to see if the
moon's got something behind its back.
I have no off switch—working overtime in my dreams.
Although I sit silently amongst the scattered chatter of a busy room,
I can recall any detail lost in the chaos.
When I don't write I lose the fleeting wisdom flying by
in the breeze like dandelions towards the horizon.

Forgotten flowers of wisdoms that whisper truths such as:
Style is humanity's best addition to the world.

When emotions pour over me, dousing me in sudsy water,
I soak up the feelings like a sponge, putting them to use
cleaning humanity's dirty dishes.

Who says my words can't have the same embrace?
Narrating and navigating journeys
through kids like Huckleberry Finn,
or playing out Rodion's mistake of ascent
in Crime and Punishment.

Success is how many hearts I touch and smiles I catalyze,
not power or profits.
Any other vocation is voluntary incarceration,
willingly locking myself in a cell,
spending my days thinking about life on the outside.

I'm a writer because
I understand the new world isn't bigger than me.
It's man-made like a movie;
now's the time to flip the script, cut the take
and take hold of the director, shaking him until
he sees the beautiful piece of art he's destroying.

I'm a writer because
if I don't spread out my feelings on the page
they harden inside me like
cement.

If any of these reasons ring true for you,
Maybe you're a writer too.

Honey

MOLLY COOPER

Honey dew under my eyes
I may sting like a bee
But I can turn every sting sweet
Gold drips from my pen
The paper never refuses my ink
Sticky metaphors
And saccharin similes
The stars in your eyes may have grown dark
But mine are lit with by the honeymoon
Working through the night
Hindsight
I rewrite
Until I can make the bitter goodbye thick and cloying
Till I can make “never again” deliciously destroying
What I’ve learned from bloodletting poetry
Is that the nectar of the gods isn’t made from falling in love
It’s made from making the poisoned fruit look good enough to eat
I’m a necromancer
Cause no matter how dead you are to me
You’re still alive
In my mind
Between the lines
Did you know bees die after they sting?
So maybe...
I’m more dead to you than you are to me

Sí, yo puedo decir

LUCAS BUGARIN

Yo leo sus palabras reflejando en sus pensamientos.
Sus sueños,
Su dolor.
Yo siento exactamente lo que sentiste.

A veces no puedo encontrar las palabras.
Soy diferente,
Un arco iris que perdió sus colores.
¿Qué expectas cuando el hombre no puede decir?

Grito por la pena de descubrir el tesoro tan hermoso,
Y todo lo que puedo hacer es trazar la forma de su brillo.

Grito por la cascada que aprendió la tragedia del muerto.
Cien años de soledad en la vida del segundo.

Y grito por el niño que no podía volar,
Cuyas alas congeló del peso de la expectativa.

Yo grito sin sonido.

Pero a veces me equivoco el patrón,
Rompiendo las reglas y quemando la ira silenciosa.

Tengo los árboles en mi alrededor,
Enseñándome el alfabeto.
Abrazando mi vergüenza,
Y iluminando el camino hacia la realidad.

Yes, I Can Speak

LUCAS BUGARIN

I read your words reflecting in your thoughts.
Your dreams,
Your pain.
I feel exactly what you felt.

Sometimes I can't find the words.
I'm different,
A rainbow that lost his colors.
What do you expect when a man can't say anything?

I yell for the pain of discovering a treasure so beautiful,
And all I can do is trace the shape of its glow.

I yell for the waterfall that learned the tragedy of death.
A hundred years of solitude in the lifetime of a second.

I yell for the boy who could not fly,
Whose wings froze from the weight of expectation.

I yell without sound.

But sometimes, I get the pattern wrong,
Breaking the rules and burning the silent rage.

I have the trees around me,
Teaching me the alphabet,
Hugging my shame,
And illuminating the path towards reality.

Mine

JOHANNAH WOODHAMS

*"Diamonds can bring riches. But mostly they bring poverty."
Antoine Rolland, 2020*

The only constant in life is death.
Claws wrapping around the necks of
unsuspecting victims.
With bloated bellies, lifeless, bloodshot eyes begging for relief,
filling the bellies of those draped in gold,
laying on piles of glittering stones.

Uncut gems, grasped in their tiny hands.
Stolen.
Stolen by uncalled palms to award to cold-blooded reptiles
whose teeth smile in their reflection,
then turn away to snap their jaws on ebony skin.

Possessive.

Possessive of the children crawling through the dust.
Finding the priceless pieces possessing their attention,
only to get stuck in the dust.
Then returning to the dust,
while the jeweler swipes them off
with a clean cloth.

Anastasia

TYSHELL JOHNSON-HILL



the crows and the bees

PARKER JONES

Somedays, there are crows in my veins,
Inky black and frantic.
I feel the feathers on the ends of
Their wings, razors beneath the surface
Of my skin:
Their talons scratch and claw.
There are crows in my veins that
Screech and scream;
They are stuck,
Batting against each other,
Trying to fly in a cage too small.
Somedays, the crows are swarming bees,
Fire,
A river of energy under my flesh,
A bright yellow-orange.
They burn my skin and can't escape,
Just bubble and scream and wish
To be set free.
I peel the charred flesh from my arms
And my face,
Scratching with hands, filled with hornets:
My nails are torn off in the struggle.
The muscle underneath where my skin was
Pulses and glows, like a fertilized egg, held to a flame.
Somedays, the crows are swarming bees.

to all the girls i've ever loved

JOJO COOK

i wish i were a ladybug in your hair, drinking in your perfume
& drowning in the warm sea of your curls; paradise for a ladybug.

stained glass eyes would hold your beauty in ten thousand panes,
hippodamia admiring homo sapien, gargantuan goddess to a ladybug.

You could hold me in the throne of your palm, or with gentle fingers
tuck me in your pocket. i'd promise not to fly away; not this little lady.

bugs of other sorts may buzz & scurry & bite & sting, but i'd be
content
to sit, paper-thin wings beating time with your heart; hymn for a
ladybug.

they say i would come with luck, but to land on your hallowed skin
& trail kisses on your hand would make me luckiest of all ladybugs.

spring would paint the days in watercolors, the gentle breeze
whispering in amazement at what sleeps on your cheek: *ladybug!*

summer would come with debonair dragonflies and cicadas' serenade;
stay true, dear, i would pray, for autumn is always dressed in ladybugs.

& still in winter i would cling near your garden, waiting to hear
my name part your lips before frost ends the hour of ladybugs.

Impulse

ELIJAH RAMOS

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1. User | Daydreams persist; persuade the user's mind.
Behave distinctively; form images
Between reality we seek and find
Displacement. We are our own witnesses |
| 2. Addict | Toward madness inside our heads. Just breathe.
Adopt fiction: pretend cartoons, adjust
Cliches; embark what is hidden beneath...
False surface. Clamber floods; allow combust |
| 3. Abuse | Creative juice explodes opaque rainbow.
Now colors flow so violent cutthroat:
Expectations limitlessly aglow.
Invade, divine, commute, appear, afloat. |
| 4. Cycle | The light exists to help escape regimes.
Provoke, advance, then utilize — daydreams. |

Two Years Since The End

ANGEL SCOTT

It's been two years since the world ended
Where are we as these days zoom
by
Needles
Screens
Lessons long forgotten
But here we are
Those who kept on
Living
Revolutions come and gone
Replaced with silence heard across the world
The enemy still flies
And innocents still die
But days go on everyone one sees
No one hears
No one cares
Tears are shed from dry eyes
Hollow is the hearts
Of the American
Child
We scream
We cry
But the only response is
Ignorant

Blissful joy

circular isolation

ELIZABETH WILES

i said i made up my mind

i'm leaving you
and i'm never coming back

i said i meant it
walked out our
creaking door

when suddenly
i was back in my childhood bedroom

writing poems i knew
would destroy me

between fresh
white walls
indigo sheets
my mother bought me
after she left

maybe i'm more lonely
than i can be
with you

black furniture
sleek like i wanted
modern as a mirror
I stopped worrying
about colors or reflections
after years of
watching them fade

my shoe rack by
the closet they carved
to fruition, to space
i could never force
myself into

i've always been lonely
i'm stitched with it
just like
i'm stitched with you

but loneliness
knows me better
without you

like i know
the creak of our door
as i step back
close it and

tighten those stitches

AUTHORS

AUBREY AMILA

Aubrey Amila is a 1st year Biology major at CSUMB who immigrated to Salinas, CA from Bohol, Philippines. She is passionate about writing poems, reading novels, observing wildlife, taking pictures, and hiking on any terrain. She is currently working on her first book: *The Grief of Growing Up* (a collection of poems).

RYAN ANDERSON

Ryan Anderson is a Junior at CSUMB, majoring in Humanities and Communication with a concentration in Creative Writing and Social Action. He has a passion for reading and writing, music, basketball, MadLibs, and ice cream. Ryan loves to watch weird movies or go to the beach in his free time. He is an editor for *In The Ords* and a member of the Chess Club.

LUCAS BUGARIN

Lucas Bugarin is in his fourth and final year at CSUMB studying Spanish Language & Hispanic Cultures. He is a Spanish tutor at the Cooperative Learning Center and an undergraduate researcher with UROC. He likes to read Latinx/Chicanx or queer literature in his free time, which explains intersectional aspects of his own identity. Lucas aims to start his graduate studies at CSUMB and become a Spanish teacher upon graduation this spring.

JOJO COOK

Jojo is a current 3rd-year transfer student at CSUMB, pursuing a major in Creative Writing and Social Action and a minor in Biology. Much of the inspiration from her writing comes from her love of the natural world as well as her lived experiences as a proudly out lesbian.

MOLLY COOPER

As a California native, Molly Cooper graduated from Gavilan College With an Associate of Arts in English Language and Literature and an Associate of Science in Film, Television, and Electronic Media. Molly is now continuing her studies of both subjects at CSUMB. She is a single college student who in her spare time enjoys writing short stories, songs and film scripts, and playing at the park with her little brothers.

SIERRA FISHMAN

Sierra Fishman is a 3rd-year first-generation student at CSUMB studying Journalism. She is the acting Co-President of Otter Pride at CSUMB and places great importance on community and campus engagement. Sierra is a transfer student from Oxnard college, where she was the secretary of the ASL Club and dual-majored in Communications and Deaf Studies. She is originally from Idaho, but has lived all over the United States, including Hawaii for four years.

JENISES GONZALEZ

Jenises Gonzalez is a 3rd year student at CSUMB, and she is studying Creative Writing and Social Action. She enjoys reading and writing because it allows her to create something of her own.

ALANAH HUNSDORFER

Alanah Hunsdorfer is a third year student at CSUMB and is majoring in Humanities and Communication with a concentration in both English Studies and Creative Writing and Social Action. She loves reading and writing, primarily with a focus on poetry and fiction pieces, but she also enjoys the behind-the-scenes processes of editing and publishing. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her dogs and drinking tea.

TYSHELL JOHNSON-HILL

Tyshell Johnson-Hill is a 4th-year student at CSUMB, currently majoring in Visual and Public Arts. Primarily a digital artist, she still enjoys working with other mediums such as photography and traditional pen and paper. She continues to broaden the subject of her work through life experiences, family and friends, and her identity. As a woman of color, she hopes to one day use her skill to become a voice that can reflect the true beauty within her communities.

PARKER JONES

Parker Jones is a junior at CSUMB. They are majoring in Humanities and Communication with a concentration in English Studies. They mainly write about their experience as a non-binary person, as well as their struggles with family and mental illness. The ocean is also often featured and is their favorite part of Monterey.

ELIZABETH LIPPA

Elizabeth Lippa is in her Senior year at CSUMB. She is an HCOM major with a minor in Spanish Language and Cultures. Outside of her studies, Elizabeth enjoys participating in community theatre productions at various theatres in the Monterey County area.

ZITLALLI MACIAS

Zitlalli Macias is a third year student at California State University, Monterey Bay, majoring in Human Communications with a concentration in creative writing and social action. Zitlalli is twenty one years old and uses she/they pronouns.

ELIJAH RAMOS

Elijah (Eli) Gabriel Ramos is a 3rd year student at CSUMB, majoring in HCOM with a Concentration in CWSA and minoring in VPA. Many of his artistic works (written, visual, and spoken) are a reflection of his passions for social artistry and call for change. Furthermore, he lives by the motto/artistic alias, "Rebel the Flow" which promotes the concept of individualism including separation from social expectations, normalities, and labeling. Additional sub-themes present in his works include political injustices, mental health awareness, and philosophical abstractions.

ANGEL SCOTT

Angel Scott is a second-year transfer in their last year at CSUMB. They are an HCOM major with an emphasis in Creative Writing and Social Action. They hope to bring joy and hope to all those who read their stories and poems.

LIBERTY SORDIA

Liberty Sordia is a 4th-year student at CSUMB, and they are studying Psychology with a minor in HDFS.

CRISTIAN JESUS VEGA

Cristian Jesus Vega is a twenty-year-old Mexican American student at CSUMB majoring in Cinematic Arts & Technology. He has directed and edited the short film "Paralysis," has had one of his poems, "Food Factory" published in the 2021 Edition of the Calaveras Station Arts & Literary Journal. Also, two of his photographs, "Afternoon Road" and "Darkest Sunflower," were published in the 2021 Edition of the Calaveras Station Arts & Literary Journal. Cristian is doing freelance jobs as a cinematographer for local businesses around his area to direct and produce one-minute commercials.

ELIZABETH WILES

Elizabeth Wiles (she/her/hers) is a lifelong poet and current senior at CSUMB. She will be graduating with a bachelor's degree in Humanities and Communication and a concentration in Creative Writing & Social Action. Writing has always been her avenue for contemplation, solace, and growth.

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Johannah is a Senior at CSUMB, she is an HCOM major with a concentration in Legal Studies.

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