



# LESBIANS are MIRACLES

March 17h, 2022



The Issue of Growth

NO. 13

# **lesbians are miracles magazine**

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# The Issue of Growth

We often hear “growth” described as an ideal but rarely as a thing we must grapple with. The art and writing in this issue examine growth from myriad perspectives and points-of-view: as joy but also as struggle, discomfort, confusion, anger, doubt, resignation, chaos, and sorrow. As always, it is with the utmost gratitude, pride, and humility that we feature the work of these brilliant queer poets, essayists, painters, sculptors, illustrators, and creators. Thank you for the trust, the support, and the community. We love you and we’re rooting for you always.

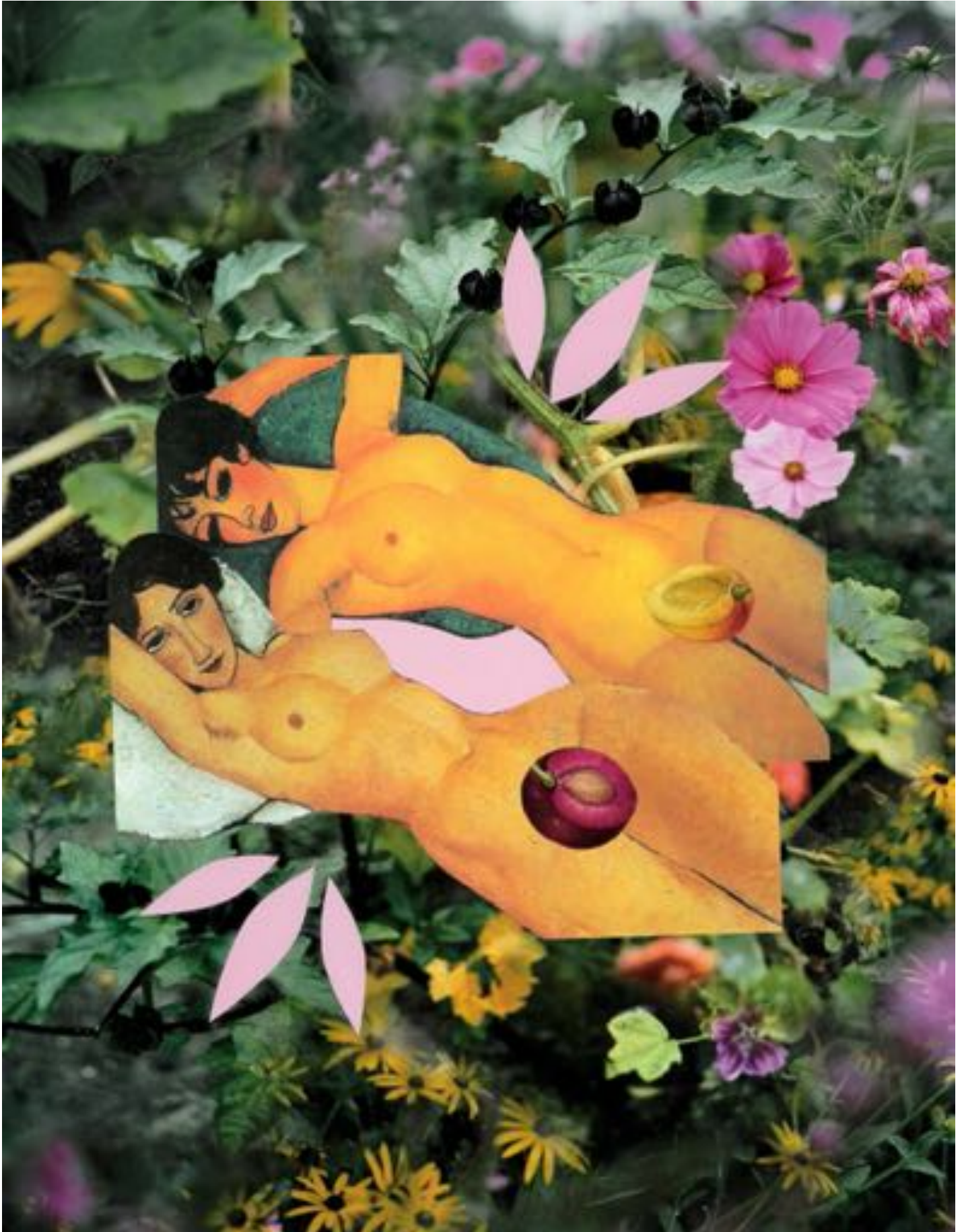
With admiration,  
Lia Ottaviano  
*Lesbians are Miracles*



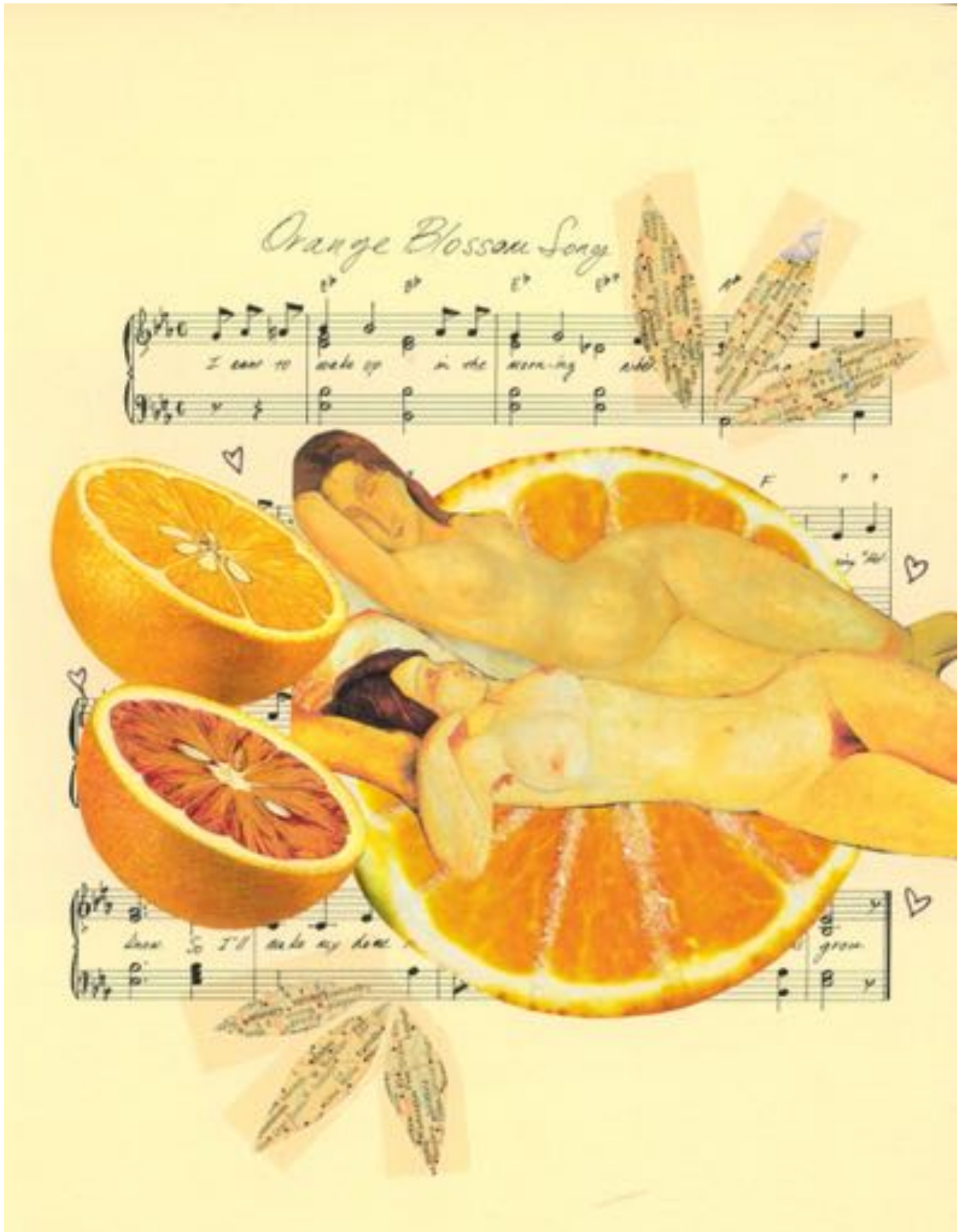




# Despy Boutris



# Despy Boutris





# Growth

by Jude Harris

The waiting room was, once again, full of diabetics. Cal noticed a scowl from a jowly older man in a gut-stretched golf shirt lopped over his permanent-pressed slacks. Caught staring, the old man muttered something to his wife, who was small and stooped beneath a cloud of spider-silk hair – curled into herself from decades of apologizing. For what? *For him*, Cal guessed. *Or to him?* Both, Cal decided.

And then, inevitably, Cal spotted a very specific smile from the other side of the room. So many teeth and bright eyes and slightest tilt of the head that Cal had come to recognize as the wordless face of ally-ship, the “check please” of acceptance. This time, it came from a young woman trying to distract a toddler from thinking about needles with a stack of board books pulled from a ragged embroidered diaper bag.

*She seems like a good mother.* Cal thought, and adjusted their hoodie, suddenly conscious of their chest and the sensations within it. *I should have mothered more... I should have mothered more... I should have mothered more.*

And off Cal’s mind went, down the tornado of memory that any emotional at all seemed to elicit lately. A memory of that other waiting room, and the lost expressions the boys and Rebecca carried into therapy. The thought was too much, too sad and unresolved and suddenly, Cal found themselves elsewhere: Their bachelor apartment. (*Bachelorette apartment? Would any pronoun redeem it?*) They saw the pine futon guest bed and the sad, small shelf of toys. They thought about the community theater version of Christmas before everyone else took a cross-country flight to the real celebration without them. They found themselves alone again. They’d been alone that Christmas once in life, but thousands of times in their memories.

Cal had learned tools to weather these shifting waves of pain. They rushed to find a better thought, took a deep breath, held onto it. They wrote their name on the sign in sheet with a chewed-on Bic pen bound with masking tape to a dirty length of twine.

“Just have a seat sir, and we’ll call your name when we’re ready.” *Sir? Seriously? Here? It’s been two years. But, fine. It’s fine. It’s fine.* Back in the tornado, Cal flailed, grasping for the better thought. They instead found a deep breath. They blinked five slow blinks, counting them.

Beneath their form-concealing Walmart hoodie, they were overdressed for the doctor’s office. Cal swept a swath of bright red viscose dress beneath them and sat so as to put the old couple in their periphery and to face the mother. Now it was Cal’s turn to telegraph support as the toddler indulged in an unrestrained tantrum and the mother’s attempts to sooth him became more desperate.

They gave the mother a kind smile wrapped in the intention: *You’re doing great. You’re doing great. You’re doing great.*

“Mr. Shaw? Come on back.”

The endocrinologist had perfected the acceptance smile. She was young and kind and her hair had the most impeccable part Cal had ever seen. She seemed to enjoy her days spent in support of people’s glands. “How are you?”

“Good. I think? Am I good?” Cal’s eyes drifted to their chart, looking for numbers, hoping for a glimpse at where theirs fell within the tolerances of normal.

“You’re good!”

“Good.”

“But you’re still...”

Cal nodded. The endocrinologist looked to Cal’s chest, patient, but also tensing her face with an awareness of passing time and the many glands the day still held in store for her.

Cal removed their hoodie and there it was: a warm ball of flesh on their sternum, soft and hot, rounder than the small breasts it sat between. The ball of flesh pulsed, subtly, with the rhythm of Cal’s heart beat - like the tiny twitch of an eye.

“And the oncologist...”

“He isn’t concerned, apparently.”

“Good. That’s a beautiful dress.”

“Thank you. I actually...” *That word. Actually.* They scrambled for the better thought again, inhaling. “I have a date tonight.”

The endocrinologist became a person for a moment, with a layperson’s curiosity. Her eyebrows briefly leapt up before returning to polite neutrality. “And you were going to...” She gestured tactfully at her own chest, invoking Cal’s, “let it show?”

“Well, it’s just sort of what’s going on with my body lately.” Cal noticed the endocrinologist smiling, her face giving away an emotion Cal couldn’t place. “What is it?”

“You’re amazing. I really admire you.” And then the doctor was a doctor again, the . “I hope it’s a wonderful date.”

At the bottom level of the hospital parking lot, their car wedged between golf carts and a maintenance truck, Cal again removed



their hoodie. They looked for the hundredth time at a Hinge profile, trying to combine four pictures, a few evocative one-liners and a week of messages into a vision of a person.

First, a serious portrait, defiant and sexy: wild lucite earrings framing a face from a Vermeer painting. Second, a laughing smile in a blurry low-resolution photograph of an all-night diner, delighting about something over a shared plate of fries. Third, black and white, at a bar with a bearded man: both smiling to the camera and somehow glamorous, ripped from the pages of *Interview* – shimmering, silver, metallic. And, finally standing at the front of a protest at the brink of boiling over, her lips snarling at a cop in riot gear.

She was all of these things in her messages. She was principled. She was direct and vulnerable, flirtatious, funny and wise.

*Who could you possibly be?* Cal wondered. *I cannot wait to meet you.* This was the better thought.

Cal noticed their chest. The growth was shining, just a bit, the faint light of the salt lamp on their cobbled-together bedroom shrine with the dimmer at its weakest. A witchy night-light.

*Lovely.* Cal thought. *It fucking glows now.*

Traffic was light and Cal found themselves at the bar twenty minutes early.

It was an old, oaky, once-fancy place that felt that night like someone's grandmother's den. Cal took comfort in the knick-knacks in need of dusting, red velvet seats in need of upholstering, and the dust-caked artificial ivy in need of being thrown away.

It was dim and Cal was aware that the growth was as bright as the chandelier bulbs. Was it larger, too? They inhaled deeply and tried to exhale the tightness in their chest. *This is just what's happening now.*

They ordered a club soda and over-tipped, apologetic for existing. The bartender was short, moon-faced and shaggy. As soon as she spotted Cal's chest her expression became an echo of the endocrinologist's. Overwhelmed, with wet eyes, she beamed at Cal in a way that made Cal feel a bit too much like a cult leader. Cal tried to smile this away, but it only intensified the moment. They retreated to a booth with the club soda and tried to ignore the bartender and the temptation to retreat into their phone.

For seventeen minutes, Cal delighted in the better thought, the unknown pleasures of conversation with the mysterious stranger from Hinge. Then came a text about a sick cat and an emergency trip to the vet. Then came a promise to reschedule.

*Of course.* Contemplating their half-finished club soda, Cal decided to believe in this cat, this emergency and this promise.

They prayed a silent prayer for the cat, for the mysterious stranger, and for their own always tight, always bruised heart.

And then came a text from Rebecca about a flakey babysitter. She had a date of her own. Could Cal help?

The boys climbed into Cal's car, yawning and lopsided from the weight of their sleepover bags. "That's a beautiful dress, Dad. You look amazing."

"Yeah, who were you going to see?"

"I had plans with a friend, but she had an emergency."

"What kind of emergency?"

"Her cat got sick, actually."

"What kind of cat?"

"A gray cat. With black stripes. Maybe that's a tabby? I don't really know kinds of cats."

Cal pulled pajamas onto the boys and brushed their teeth. The boys were punchy and tired, dragging their feet over the Cal's tacky mish-mash of carpet, linoleum, and tile as they petitioned Cal for a last glass of water, a favorite stuffy from their backpack, a story. All of it in fits of laughter over a fart or an inside joke.

"Grapes, grapes, eat them sour grapes!"

"Bananas, bananas, eat them sour bananas!" And then cackles, loud enough to bother the neighbors. To Cal's relief, no one pounded on the wall.

The boys could not make themselves comfortable on the futon and Cal was too tired to persuade them to sleep on it anyway. All three of them piled into a tangle of limbs in Cal's bed. The boys fell asleep asking for stories of Cal getting into trouble when they were a boy.

Cal smelled their heads and thought about retreating to the futon for a better night's rest, but didn't dare to risk waking them. The growth glowed through Cal's thin white t-shirt. The boys snored softly as the light grew brighter and brighter, eclipsing the salt lamp, eclipsing the light that leaked in from the street lamp outside.

Cal lay awake, their heart full and empty all at once. They felt the tornado of sadness gathering strength again, swirling in the shadows. The room brightened. The shadows grew smaller. ♦

# Mali Rezai



*The vessel is innately whole and perfect. Watered by spirit, the vessel expands to hold it all, allowing for infinite potential to bloom.*

***WE ARE THE VESSEL***







## Seed Coats

by Niko Swanson-Brownell

You are quiet  
I believe your silence to be  
the wind carrying seeds from childhood  
and whispering them to the soil here

I am not supposed to know  
the pain of birth,  
shedding the seed coat  
as the sun holds back

I am not supposed to know  
the sun holding back,  
my skin was formed with saltwater and sunlight  
choking back the waves

the sun never faltering I know

your silence is  
whispering to me  
please  
as roots take hold  
in the damp soil here  
your silence is  
louder than I ever could be  
but where do the ears live here

I shelter from the rain, falling into my mattress  
from the sky

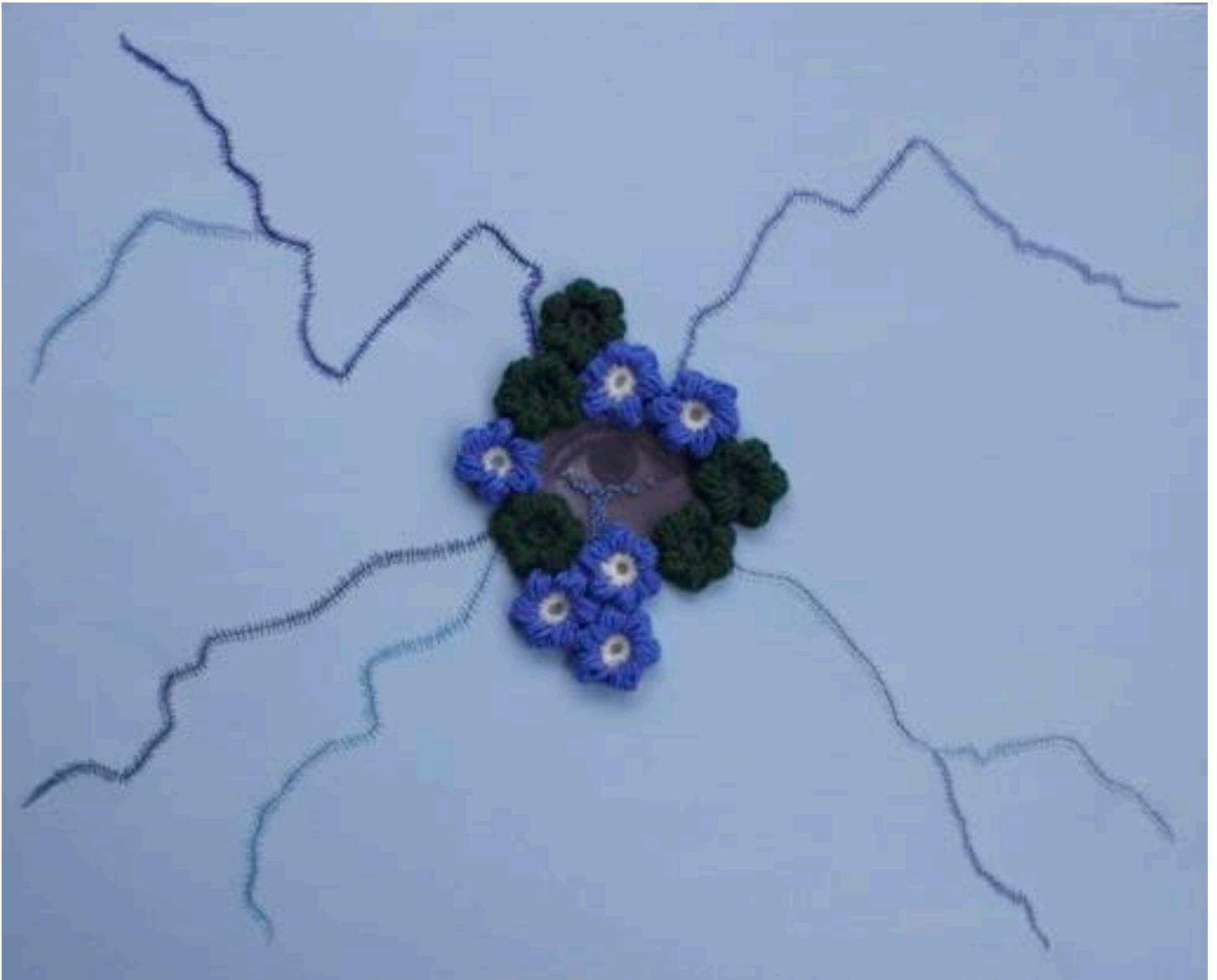
We were always so good  
at being quiet  
and never at shooting upwards

Next spring, when you hoe the garden

you discover curled coils of roots

that never made it to the sun and you know

I believe your silence  
because it is my own



# Anja Bartlog







# Kendra Barker



## **What If I Had Known**

by Natahna Bargen-Lema

It's hard to picture it

Like everything  
would have to be  
different

13 year old me  
recognizing that my feelings  
for Chad Michael Murray  
and the pastor's daughter  
were the same shade of

Oh

My

God

I would have still  
bit my tongue  
until it bled

choosing to be tongue-tied  
than say something  
stupid

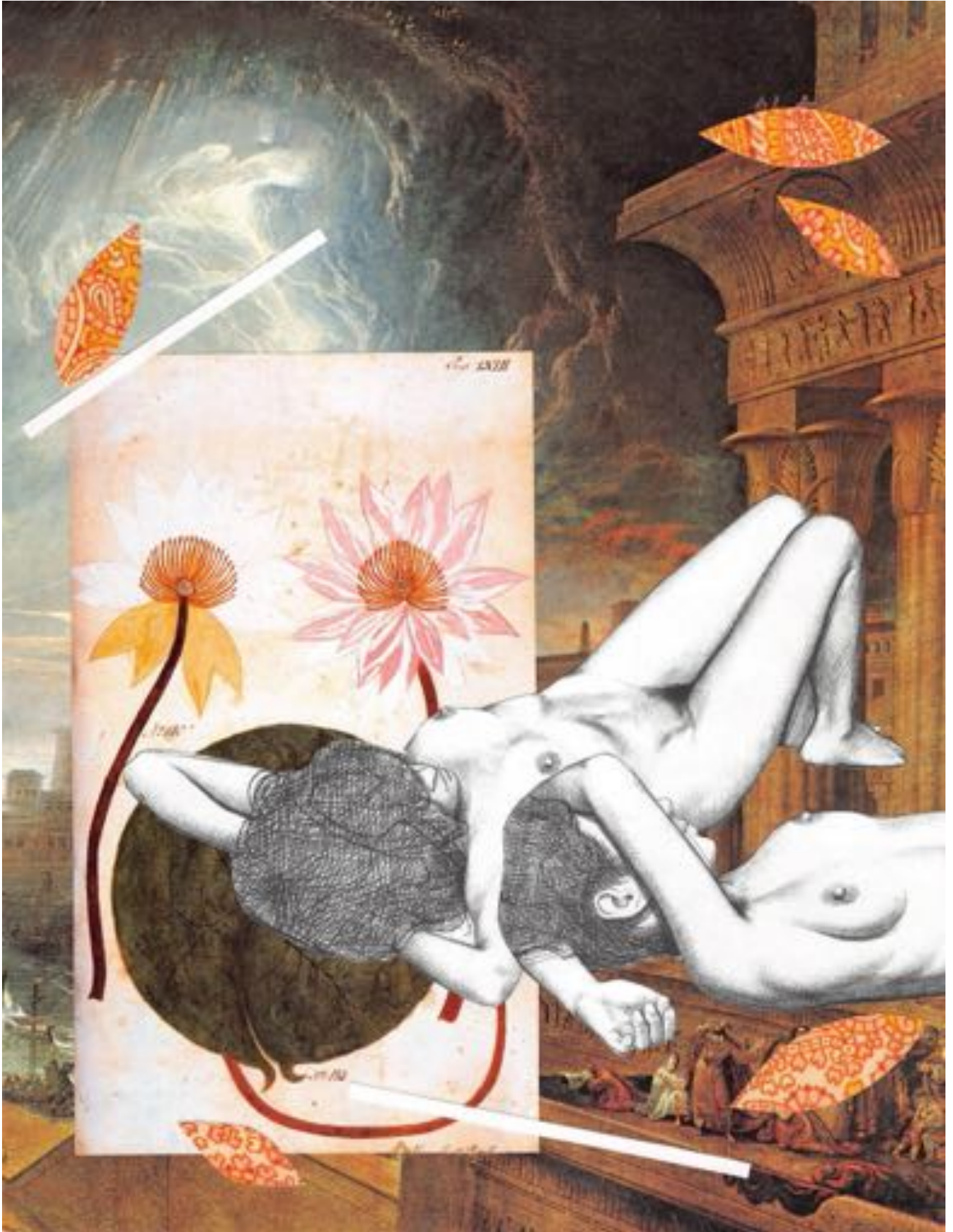
So what if highschool  
best friend  
had loved me  
back then

I would have still  
sat on my hands

because no one knows  
the word bisexual  
in small towns  
set in prairie wasteland



# Despy Boutris



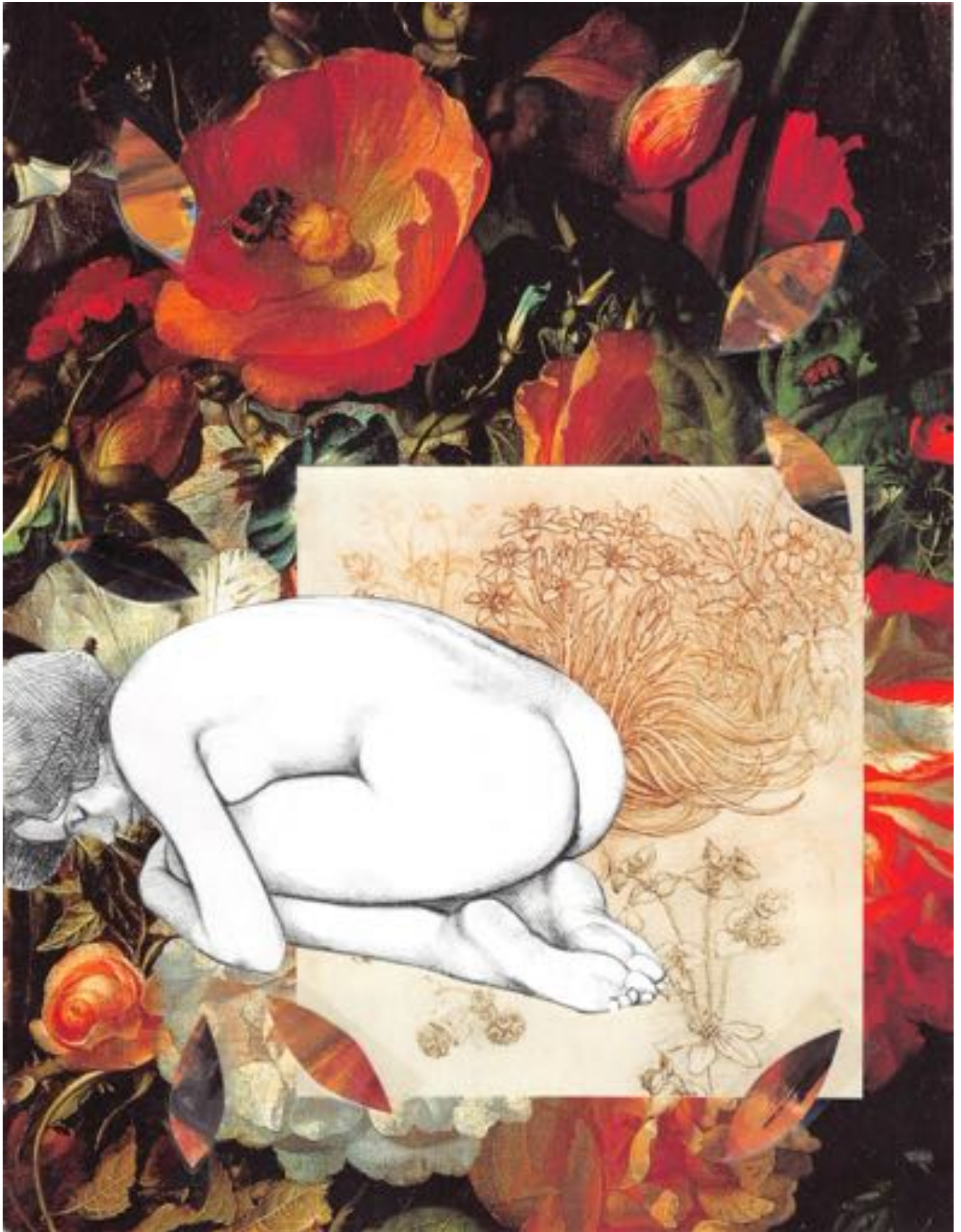




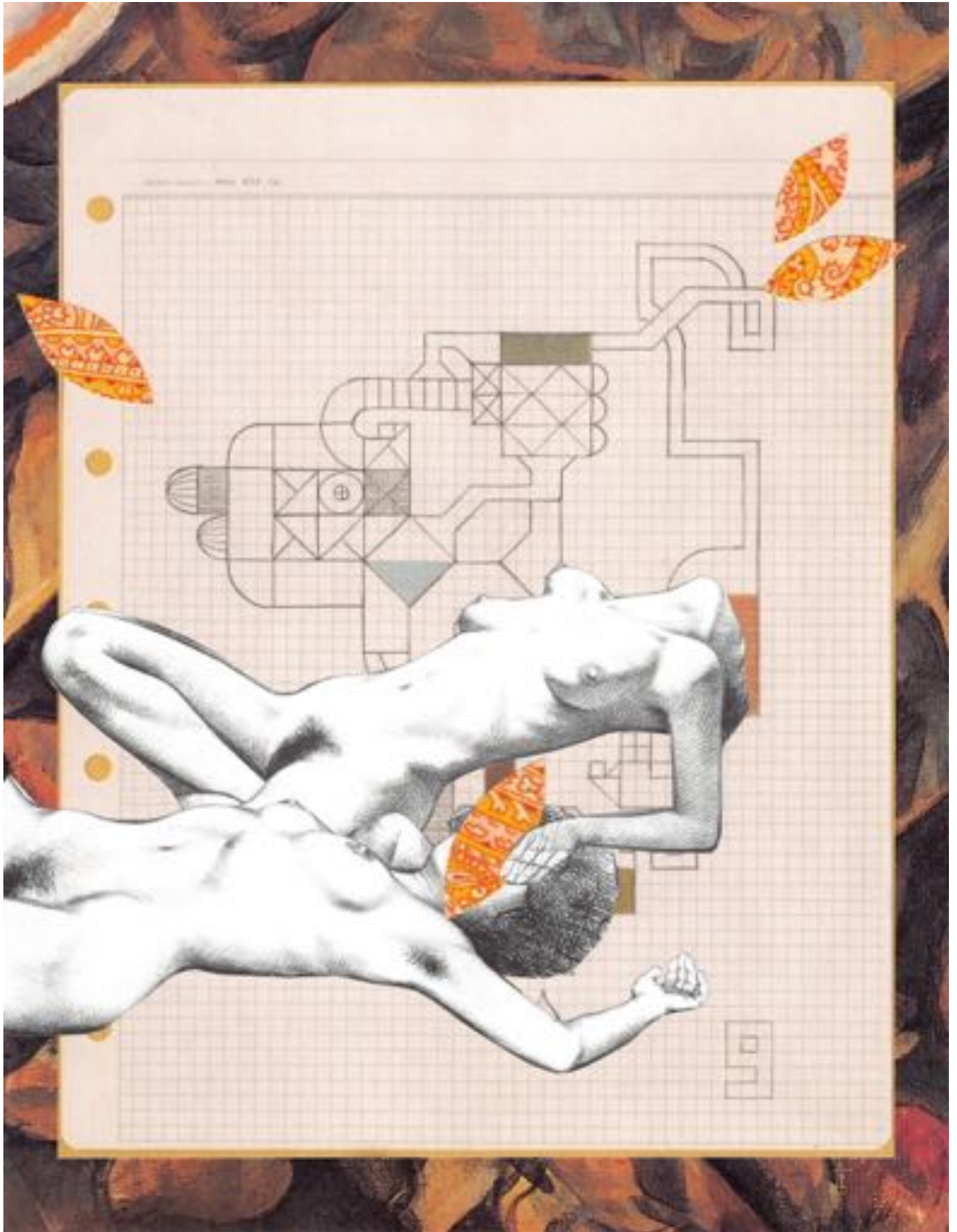
# Despy Boutris







# Despy Boutris







# Conscious Unscissoring

by Victoria Rey

*CW: mention of sexual assault (no details!)*

*July 2018*

“How haunted do you think that building is?” I asked as she laid palms-up in the sun. It was the hottest day of the summer and we had made the pilgrimage to Riis Beach, the summer epicenter of queer New Yorkers.

“Oh, very haunted,” she answered. I loved that she entertained my questions. It felt like a deeper level of seeing me.

Overlooking the queer section of the beach was the abandoned Neposit Beach Hospital, which originally served as a children’s tuberculosis ward and then had a brief stint as a veteran’s hospital before being returned to the city as Neposit Home, the first municipally-operated geriatric home in New York City. She listened intently as I rattled off facts, sweat wiggling its way down the creases of our bodies.

We traded slices of watermelon over knowing looks, swimming in sexual tension before we stepped foot in the water. Our relationship was sustained on bated breath and the fear of saying the thing that felt taboo when it didn’t have to be.

We swam and sat under the sun until we could no longer take the heat. We went back to her apartment where we ate, bathed, fucked, and napped. It was the first of many days where our relationship would feel like more than just casual sex. It’d take months of uncomfortable moments and hard conversations for us to admit the truth of what we were.

*February 2020*

“You’re non-negotiable if I get into a new relationship,” she said through tears. We were checking in, as we were doing often lately, asking each other:

*Does this still work for you?*

*Am I getting in your way?*

*How do we end things when they’re over?*

We’d sit in the discomfort of these questions, knowing so much wasn’t being said.

I couldn’t help but think, “Why?” every time she said I was non-negotiable. I’d never befriended an ex and knew being friends with a former lover usually led to the new person in the relationship feeling some type of way. She would oscillate between saying our relationship was just about sex to demanding a more permanent place in my life.

I’d spend my Valentine’s Day recounting this to AJ over lunch and Kiki over drinks, and watch their jaws drop and eyes grow larger. Kiki, forever a therapist, took a breath and said, “Well...it kind of sounds like it’s time to call it, don’t you think?”

“Ugh...you’re probably right,” I responded. Of all my friends, Kiki was one of the few who knew how transformative this relationship had been for me, but I could tell she was seeing from a mile away what I was choosing to ignore.

*September 2020*

“Did you unmatched us on Tinder?” she asked as we made our way through the park. It was the eighth month of the pandemic and the fifth month of what I’d coined our *Conscious Unscissoring*. Of all the queer terminology listicles I’d devoured in my early coming out, I couldn’t find the term for the end of the sexual part of your relationship with a woman you meet as a casual hookup who ends up becoming one of your closest friends. So, I made one up. She hated it.

A few weeks before, we were sitting on her couch when I noticed a Tinder notification light up her phone. I knew she was dating again, but she’d set a firm boundary that she couldn’t talk about it with me.

“It’s too heartbreaking,” she said every time I’d tell her that, as *her friend*, I wanted to hype her up as she jumped back into dating post-quarantine.

It was at that moment that I realized *heartbreaking* was the right descriptor. Our ending suddenly felt more real than ever. I had not thought about how it’d feel to no longer be the object of her care and desire. I felt gutted. In a wave of emotions, I walked home, opened Tinder, and revisited our



first conversations, made up of polite, get-to-know-you banter. We talked about what we did for work, what TV shows we watched, and how owning a cat was queer canon.

I know that revisiting old photos and texts can sometimes cause me to spiral. Though the spiral is chaotic, it gives me a certain feeling of control—of stability—when things feel unsteady. This was one of those times. I looked at my calendar to find the day of our first date and made my way through the evolution of our relationship over the days, weeks, and months.

I could see how excited and insatiable we were for each other in the beginning by how frequently we met up. Setting aside a few hours after work to see each other evolved into spending an entire day of the weekend together. Her initials as the title of an all-day appointment indicated how I had been using my time. It was only us and the attraction we shared. In those days, our relationship felt especially confined to her sleigh bed—we'd have to force ourselves to leave the house for dinner. At the end of each encounter, we engaged in a waiting game of who would text the other to ask, "Would you like to do this again?" with a mix of bated breath and excitement. I tried never to assume she'd say yes, but after a while, I asked more out of ritual and less out of not knowing how she'd respond.

I remembered the first time we had sex. I hadn't realized when she invited me over for a beer that the evening was going to go that way. As I followed her down Flatbush Avenue towards her apartment, she whipped around and matter-of-factly said,

"I'm on my period."

Nerves ran up and down my body as I said, "That's ok! Me too!" I faked as much chill as I could.

"Ok. Great," she said. She turned around and kept walking.

She was the second woman I'd ever slept with, and knowing she'd been out since her teens daunted me. I was 29, newly non-monogamous, and had only slept with one other woman a few months before meeting her. As we fumbled through our first time, she looked at me and said, "I'm really nervous." I felt a wave of ease. "That's ok," I answered, smiling.

Between the first and second time we had sex, we texted back and forth about boundaries, likes, and dislikes. We shared one sexual thing we liked and disliked each day. It was the perfect marriage of sexting and building consent, and I was smitten with excitement.

I began to cry as I clicked through my calendar, a visual representation of our mastering each other's bodies. "We" were supposed to be temporary, but somehow, we got caught up in the safe, healing space we'd created and never quite jumped out of. I searched my memory of our time together to try to find when it went wrong, but all I could think of was the walk we took the week before she said we had to stop sleeping together. "You're my sex partner," she told me as we discussed the logistics of touching each other again. When I thought about that time, I beat myself up for having gotten too comfortable.

There wasn't one single moment when things went wrong. The pandemic had proven that, at the end of the day, she wanted more than what we had, and I couldn't give her that. Our relationship had confirmed her want of monogamy—to be my one and only partner—while for me, it validated that I thrived when I had multiple partners.

We were a conflict of interest.

"Yeah, I unmatched us a few weeks ago. I should have given you the heads up, but I wasn't sure if you were still using Tinder. I'm sorry," I said, looking down as I stepped through the fallen leaves.

### **August 2021**

"Then she said, *I told my mother you could never be the one*," I recounted as I merged onto Flatbush Avenue, "and I said to her, *I don't believe in having 'the one,' but I'm not afraid to admit you were certainly one of my great loves in life.*"

"...she has no idea how big that is for you to be open about that," AJ said sympathetically.

I broke into a sob as I choked out, "You're right. It is."

A week before, she and I had sat on the steps of the

library, having one of our summer's signature clear the air sessions. The latest issue between us involved her calling me condescending over something benign, then pretending nothing happened. If she had a signature move, it'd be pretending nothing happened. We'd finish clearing the air when she said, "I also...have some news," with a nervousness I didn't understand.

"What's up. Why are you being weird?" I asked flatly.

"I met someone and we...slept together last night"

Hearing her news made me want to vomit. She had spent so much of the spring and summer trying to take ownership of me instead of the damage she had done.

June: *"You can be with someone new, but they can't be better than me."*

Also June: *"My friends said you look so gay for someone with a male partner."*

May: *"The thought of you talking to someone at Cubbyhole makes me jealous."*

And the pièce de résistance--

February: *"I can't believe you're comparing me to your rapist right now,"* as she centered herself in my ask for her to own the harm in not acknowledging our months of post-breakup sex.

"Wow, that's great! What's her name?" I asked, knowing she'd be weird about me knowing anything about her dating life. In the last 14 months, she'd shifted from me not being allowed to know anything to giving me very vague information like, "It was good"—unless she wanted to process something with me because it had ended.

They'd met two weeks before. "It feels like it could really be something," she said. I was genuinely happy for her, but also felt the resentment I'd felt the whole time we were together. She left me with my own triggers to work through while she project-planned me out of her heart.

Within a week of our reconciliation on the library steps, she went from making plans with me to claiming going to Riis together "Felt like a date" when I proposed we spend a summer Friday there.

"It just doesn't feel fair to this new person," she said over the phone, "for me to go out with you for her to later discover you're my ex. It just feels too much like a date"

I didn't understand. I wasn't in love with her anymore. This outing felt like an exercise of the friendship she'd claimed as a non-negotiable.

AJ swiftly stepped in and came with me to Riis, feeding me donuts and listening to me process as I drove. I played tour guide as we made our way to the queer section of the beach, laying out our blankets to lounge and eat and talk through our feels.

The water raged. A hurricane was moving in that weekend, which felt appropriate for the moment.

She and I had spent over a year breaking up and trying to find a rhythm in a friendship. Whenever she couldn't handle the thought of me thriving, she'd throw her hands up and claim we hadn't even begun to figure our friendship, as if it was my fault. A friendship she insisted we maintain. A friendship she said was non-negotiable.

After the beach, I drove home as AJ coached me on what to say. She gave me a big hug. "You can do this," she reassured me.

I woke up the next morning and carefully crafted my message:

*Hi, I don't think we can be in each other's lives right now. I don't have an answer for the right time to reassess and check-in, but I think time and space is what is best at this juncture.*

I put my phone away to give myself space from the situation. A few hours later I returned to a response:

*Okay. I'm sorry I hurt you. ♦*





## Kendra Barker







## **My Riparian Sex Poem**

by Helena Rae

*You're such a beautiful woman,  
so why don't you dress like one?*  
Not sorry at all to disappoint, deer heart,  
but at most, I am a charlatan of a woman -  
a crook, a trickle, charade.

And of my manhood?  
Well, let's not forget  
the predictable act of mine  
to send my lovers out to gather  
wood for the flames  
as I can hardly impose it upon myself  
to rise from my languid throne  
for tender kindling to bring in to light!

My sex is riparian in its fragile inability to thrive  
without a stream running through it.  
I crisp and leather like a California bay's leaves in drought  
flail like the last tadpole stranded in an evaporating pool of mud  
when my riverbed cracks with torrid dryness  
when the arid season comes...

So babe, pour your sloppy lucid love  
down the mycelium webbed bank  
of this wicked wetland heart!  
Mirror, reflect each loose leaf curl  
of this rose tinted salted flower  
fill these redwood irises with  
wide eyed wonder  
at the slick expanse  
of something so  
ungendered-

prosecuted  
forevermore  
for its gentle resilience  
its country comfort  
furry forested fierceness  
urban gritty charm

this juicy wet  
thing  
of mine







## Esther Renehan



## Afternoon in the Woods

by Despy Boutris

What I love about the woods  
is that you can scream  
and no one will come. Some days  
sound's the only way pain can flee  
the body. I want to be grown  
of wildflowers, but I'm all thorn. Years ago,  
my father came home alone from a bike ride,  
his face a broken window strangled  
by vines. He held out his arms and I ran  
into forest, headed for the tree  
I'd made a home of. At the hospital,  
my mother's body plum-colored, her face  
all stitches and bruise. My father  
thumbing the blood on her brow. *I'm so sorry.*  
*I didn't see you.* How do we bear  
even the tenderest touch, knowing  
what we know: the potential for disaster.  
Wind, rustling leaves. Fading footsteps.  
Mangled bicycles. Flutter of wings,  
then birdcall. I lark. I longing. I clench  
handfuls of dirt. There's no name for the scent  
of these fallen leaves, hot under the sun.  
And how dare my body want  
another body, heat, a hand in mine. This town  
of black ice, half-burned trees, cracked  
lips and nosebleeds. Once, I let tears fall  
and someone hovered over me, her lips  
on my cheek, mouth blurred  
with my salt. I was wanted, then—touched  
like a plucked plum. Now, I clutch  
handfuls of dirt, and a thorn pricks my pinky.  
How easily the body breaks,  
blood such a striking color.



# Esther Renehan





## **The Devil**

by Karina Portuondo

I wanna fuck the Devil inside me.  
I want her to make me come so hard that I can see God.  
And then I want God to look me in the eyes  
while the Devil punishes me  
for each and every sin.

God thinks penance is hot and that's just as well,  
Because I want God to get in on it, too.

I wanna fuck my inner demons  
so thoroughly that they sleep  
for a thousand years.

I wanna fuck my guardian angel and every other heavenly body  
so energetically that their lights can reach  
the deepest depths of the darkest pit.

But it's the Devil inside me who I'll go back to again and again.  
She's the only one who can make me pray in earnest,  
Bargaining, begging for what I deserve.

Night by night, I'll learn her tricks.  
Find out where her power lies, how to steal it.  
How to make her come, succumb, submit.

# Aurora Powell







# Elizabeth Schafer





## **Together**

by Dakota Seabourne

she crept towards the sunlight  
with unseen movement through the night  
with silent whispers of life and love

she brought promises of beauty  
and songs of power  
and expectations of joy

i hope she blooms them for me

we sit together basking in time  
and trust in the breath of the other  
secrets are exchanged with our exhales

you in your life and me in my mine  
we stretch and grow until the end of our time  
as long as i care for your flourishing

and you care for my own





## **The Cave Waters Its Shadows**

by Eva Lewis

i.

Growth too has a curfew, for example a dark  
room descending on its stem, spine bending towards rock  
-bottom. You do not need to say it

ii.

more than once for a cave to remember. I do not need my mother  
to repeat I am a disappointment. I wore a hole  
in my shoe. And because nothing truly disappears  
I wore the inverse of that hole on my heel for two

iii.

weeks. A blister saturated into a dome. It leaked  
when I popped it. Sobbing or drooling. The body after all  
is mostly water. The difference between a tsunami and a beach  
is the earth beneath it. What year 7 lesson isn't Sisyphus  
-bound? The mouth spoons each word round as

iv.

hunger; a boulder. My mother shoulders her  
way up in my thoughts. Again. Ghosts are the same as  
the boulder. The absence in a cave is what  
echoes. The wind with a snakes tail in it  
rattling through this exposed house. Does the sun identify as

v.

a rock, a planet or somewhere in between light  
and ash? I identify as Neptune, all those rings  
around my eyes. Ice and rock that could not be contracted  
into a planet. I am orbiting the bad

vi.

decisions I made twenty years ago. Insomnia identifies as  
purple. The sun a welt raised  
into a boulder. It is hunger. My mother pushes up

vii.

to the precipice of my lungs and dangles  
her legs thrashing: a child's swing set. I seesaw on  
the verge of tilted earth. I well

viii.

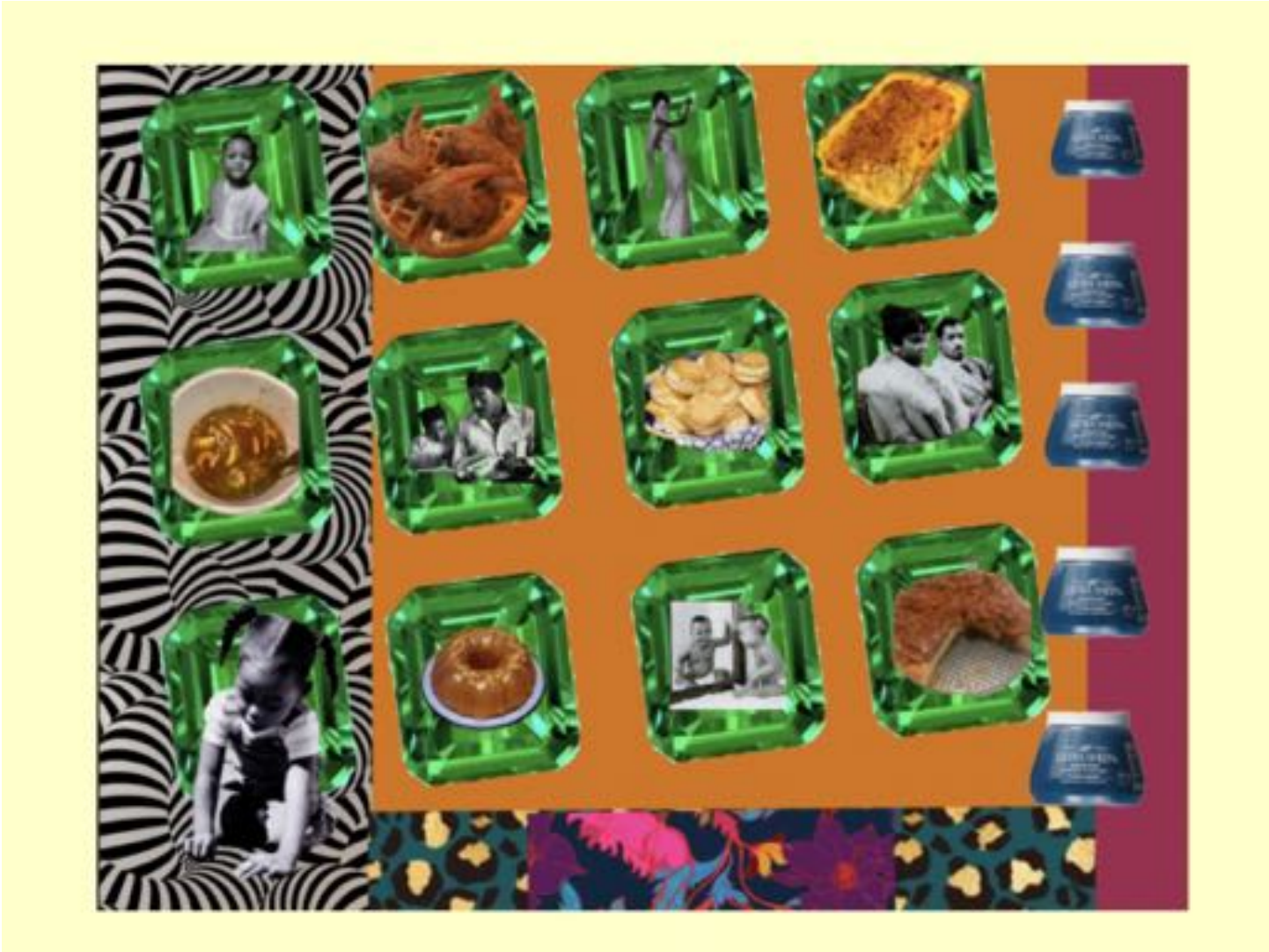
up. My mother shouts down to me, the water, my whole  
body rings with her words, a stream circling a dropped penny.





# Destiny Crockett





## To Point C

by Umika Kumar

*CW: description of physical pain/graphic imagery re: bodies, mention of death, suicide, therapy*

You are standing alone in your darkened apartment, lit by the fireflies posing as lights outside on the street. The ground is steady, then suddenly, remembering the evening's latest upset, it flips, inverts: you are upside down. In fact, you are no longer in your apartment. You are alone, surrounded for miles by nothing but clear, smoke-grey darkness. There's an abandoned swingset that you're magnetically pulled to - not by your legs, by the magnets - and then, all you can feel in every nerve, every crevice, under your fingernails, behind your ears, inside your rib bones themselves: electricity. You are being flesh-fried from the inside out, and these magnets won't let you leave. If this is a bad dream, you can't seem to wake up.

You, in your mind-numbed hellscape, try to remember how you got there. How did you end up melting, being purged? What did you do to deserve such a curious kind of torture? You thought of that evening's upset, the friend who said the snarky thing / the job that you didn't yet hear back from / the lost earring / the stepping in gum / the slipping on ice / the forgotten email sent too late / the funeral / the burned chai. How, immediately after that memory (point A), you were in your mind, on a completely empty six-lane highway, paved freshly, magnetically pulled into a self-driving jet, which took you to the playground that provides nothing remotely akin to play (point B).

*This is an automatic negative thought*, The Therapist soberly explains, nodding, wide-eyed, hands clasped. *You can rewire your brain to get rid of these.*

You dream of this so-called oasis, this metaphorical point C. A pink-orange-yellow-purple wildflower-filled, velveteen wonderland. It probably smells like cardamom and pistachio, or dew slipping off roses, or sandalwood and your grandmother's shampoo. It probably makes you feel whole, and held, instead of burned alive. It probably feels like the home you dream of but have never known.

You've never wanted to be anywhere else more. Would drinking bleach help? Maybe wafting into the San

Francisco Bay with bricks for pocket warmers. *Just because your brain is wired this way, doesn't mean it has to be this way forever*, is the takeaway message you're supposed to do something about. Like it's easy.

You've never been to point C before.

So the next time you're in your apartment and the chai burns / she didn't text you back / you're sore from the falling on the ice earlier that day, and you start to feel the floor turn, you reach wildly into the ether and grab a machete, and before the magnets can catapult you into the self-driving jet, you hack off the first magnet. It's too late, it's still too strong. Burning, seeping, smoked.

The time after, you manage a few magnets off, and the burning is excruciating, but there's more space between you, and the jet, and the cursed swingset.

Later still - I mean, months after excruciating months of grabbing different tools before the ground shifts - you have a knapsack, and a machete, and you're in this other world, hacking your way through the forest. There's no path, there's nothing good. A bead of sweat rolls behind your left ear and down your shoulder, an uncanny path, a shiver down your spine. The cicadas hiss. You can feel the muscles of your abdomen cramp and seize: you've been trekking for forty hours. It doesn't smell like burning flesh, but you've never used your muscles so completely.

It has now been a year since you first grabbed that machete on the way down. Each moment heavy. You're back at point B all the fucking time, still, but less often than before. You're leaner, more alert, accustomed to fighting off the human-sized bumble-bees and chainsaw-branched trees that line the unmarked, unpaved, untravelled path you are trying to pave. The magnets are dulled, but if you stop clenching your fists for even a moment, you're back.

*I've never wanted to give up more*, I told The Therapist, slouched on her couch, *doesn't it ever get easier?*

*I don't normally share this with my patients, but we've been working together for a long time, and I think knowing this will help you. I've struggled with [oh, reader, wouldn't you*



*like to know?]* in the past, and it's a constant vigilance. You can't stop looking out for red flags for a moment, because it's always going to be there, waiting for you to relapse. But it does get easier, she nods solemnly, glimmering warmth and a hope for me that I only ever see when I look in the mirror.

It is three years later. You are lean. Sinewed. You remember the burned chai / the broken promise / the cheating boyfriend / your high school best friend unfriended you on Facebook unannounced / his suicide, and worse, the note / the funeral / the lies / the job you were too scared to try for / the broken ankle / the 2020 election / the white supremacists / the nice white people / the way your mother looked when she said, wait, what do you mean, queer? / the next lost gold earring in a parade of lost gold earrings. The ground twists ten degrees: you lift your arms overhead and roll your neck, left, back, right, down. It cracks. The ground twists ten degrees more: your shoulders roll back, the spaces where there were once magnets, black ink California poppies blooming like a wildfire on your body, a willing canvas. The ground has moved thirty degrees now: your fitted knapsack has gadgets smarter than the latest Apple product, like SpyKids, only less zany, more lethal. Forty degrees, and you levitate into the jungle terrain. The bumblebees bow to the side, and the chainsaw trees respect the mist you spray as you jump onto the mountain bike, bubble basket loaded with snacks, a miniature crochet bunny, fresh sunflowers. Moving your sweet thunder thighs, you arrive at your destination, exerted, but not nearly exhausted, or even tired. More just: alert. Alive.

You are at point C. There, you pull out the election results / the look in your mother's eyes / the love you had for him / the dress you wore to the "celebration of life." You let each little roly poly unfurl itself onto the gingham blanket. Watch them scurry away. Breathe.

You look over at the field that is home to the roly polys, each another loss, another mistake, another hurt, squinting: the wildflowers are too many to see all the rolies scurrying around. The sun too soft. The air too salty for the rolies to grow sharp.

You pick a poppy, the time she told you she loved you too. Then, determined to gather a true bouquet, you lean for a daffodil, the squeeze of your arm that your brother gave you at the wake - he didn't have the words, but he would never let you do it alone. A sky lupine, standing tall in the wind, your Upper West Side

apartment, found alone, remotely, without a broker's fee, sunkissed and with laundry and three minutes from the train that takes you to your lover and thirteen - walking - from Trader Joe's. Yarrow, your coworker's ebullient praise for your redo of the powerpoint deck. Another poppy, a bud, the peanut butter hot cocoa mix from London.

The only burning in your life is when you light the candles scented by your wildflower cocktail back in your apartment, when your world hasn't turned. Though it turns often, the magnets for point B only work once or twice a year. Bad things happen every day. You let them. Your garden is more vast than any electric fire hurt. ♦

# Elias Rosas









## **Burial Crown**

by Valerie, darling

i slip the match from under my tongue  
and strike it across my lips.  
it's a trick: to die a little  
and taste the fresh, thrown earth  
at the back of your  
throat without pause.  
and it's not easy becoming a god -  
setting fire to your skin,  
melting your hair  
until the cuticles coil  
up against your skull  
and break down into gold.  
i've been told this is  
the only way to grow.  
so i've crawled through soil,  
again and again.  
to appear reborn,  
suck the dirt from my fingertips  
and tell you baby,  
i've been to hell and kissed  
Persephone on the lips.





# Elias Rosas





## Hannah Youngblood



# Holding My Ear: On a Haircut Shaping Up My Gender

by Elle Roberts

*November 2021*

I chew on the decision for months before I casually ask B over dinner at my house. I know their response is an enthusiastic yes ahead of the question leaving my mouth. The weather is warmer than should be mid-November and the day ends in y. The details are lost to me now, a hallmark of cyclical time in a global health crisis. B gushes over the *experience* they have in store for me. We plan for Monday night before my 33rd birthday.

*March 2020*

My hair grows past my ass by time I finally book a March 16th appointment with a local black lesbian stylist to cut my locs short. This particular femininity project runs a near eight-year course, ending abruptly as the first few U.S. residents contract COVID-19 abroad and stateside. The governor of Indiana mandates a lockdown along with most states. I begrudgingly cancel my appointment.

The world quickly descends into mass disabling and death-dealing chaos. I cannot tell if my tightening chest and neck aches are symptoms of illness, gender dysphoria, or grief on grief. I turn to YouTube to learn how to cut my hair at home. I sit in front of our cheap floor length mirror propped against our coffee table, loosely measure and tie my hair into small sections, and direct my nervous partner handling the kitchen shears in this trust exercise.

*Are you sure?*

Yes.

*Promise?*

*I promise. Please cut it.*

They steady their breath and I hear metal slice through each strand. A moment later, I am holding a foot-long bundle of my hair in my hands.

*Okay. Let's keep going.*

With two dozen bundles gathered in my lap, I am slowly combing my fingers through my ear-length locs. My head is a million times lighter. I am staring at a new configuration of my face in the mirror. Hair cut away, I cannot hide behind it anymore.

*May 2012*

Two years of intense research on loc styles and methods lead to one too many pro/con lists detailing the hair care ease I want and the level of commitment I am afraid of. I commit and find K on the official Sisterlocks website. I use my entire tax return check to pay for one of the most expensive natural hairstyles. The adapted interlocking technique works for locs of most sizes, but the founder and her loudest followers insist the specificity is superior. Several YouTubers tell me the pattern is less harsh on the hair than palm rolling. This assertion may actually be true but the highly secretive exclusivity, costly installs and retightening appointments and trainings, and specialized product lines beg a deeper connection between black wealth and the promises of femininity.

K installs my locs in my parents' living room over 21 hours in three days. She brings a custom cushioned seat helping her maintain posture and I sit in my dad's home office chair he carries up from the basement. First, K constructs my grid, parting my hair into near-symmetrical sections before weaving each loc tip to root from back to front. While she works, we watch episodes of OG CSI back to back on A&E. I am not yet a police and prison abolitionist, questioning my dying love for copaganda as a dressed up and popular crime drama. Every hour on the hour:

*Who are you? Who, who? Who, who?*

I am a wayward daughter of black middle class upbringing, of which image is everything and the goalposts of what is acceptable as a black woman move in lockstep with anti-blackness. The last cishet man I date praises my hair as both cultural call back and political power play. Complicated and cruel as he can be, he is also very candid about our class differences. He is wrong about a handful of things, but not this:

I choose Sisterlocks with purpose, to manipulate my hair into growing long rather than big. Same reason why my mother brings little me to N's salon around the corner from our church every few weeks — I remember the Vaseline she lathers on to prepare my tender scalp for relaxers. Same reason why I follow my high school girlfriends straight into the Dominican blowout trend. Same reason why in undergrad, I grow out my relaxer in pursuit of healthier hair, riding the natural hair wave of the last decade.

The girl, the teenager, the young adult I am grows up to make my own hair choices, choices that hold living history I fail to understand. I *want* to look like the woman I think I am and

the people I come from and I *want* a Seat at the Table for what I think are righteous reasons at the time. I will untie the knots I uncover somewhere down the line. For now, these diametrically opposed conditions catch me in their crosshairs.

### March 2021

The year from hell, as Zora Neale Hurston might say, is one of questions and a good chunk of them are about my gender. I am swimming through emerging and evolving answers that inevitably unearth more questions. Somewhere up the line, the woman I think I am outgrows *woman* as category. I lose interest and investment in the project of femininity, refusing arbitrary rules reinforcing what makes a woman. Hair is one of many visible manifestations.

In their essay *My Gender is Black*, Hari Ziyad says, *Blackness ruptures the laws of gender*. Hortense Spillers' seminal text, *Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe*, offers necessary context: U.S. slavery effectively ungended captive African females. Property does not have a claim to gender and we are living in the shadow of this history today. Ziyad continues, citing Saidiya Hartman, *Blackness is that which is denied access to humanity, and thus Blackness is denied access to human gender/sexual identities*. Our subjugation, our ungending, provides the foundation for our current mis/understanding of gender and violence against anyone moving beyond and breaking down the binary.

The gender marker on our birth certificates and driver's licenses and medical charts will never have the same currency or benefits as whiteness demands and affords. It is a fool's errand to believe otherwise. I do not blame us. I am gratefully not the first or the last Black woman to interrogate my allegiance and attachment to the gender assigned to me when I was born. We are not women in the same way others are because we are not *people* in the same way others are. We are the reason others can be. We are a world apart.

### November 2021

I stand in front of my bathroom vanity as my fingers trace the outline of my impending undercut. I toss my hair into a messy top bun and take out the locs that will soon no longer be attached to me. I pull the locs left hanging into a fist and pull them taut, down and back, and stare at my face at this angle, and that angle, and back again. My eyes meet my forehead, my jawline, the traces of my father's face more clearly than ever.

My partner double checks my guess work. We move a loc up and take a loc down until my lines are in agreement. Then, my partner takes a newer pair of kitchen shears to my locs and cuts with confidence. I carefully brush out the remaining hair, feeling the bristles on my scalp for the first time in ten years.

B learns how to cut their own hair during the ongoing pandemic, after combing out and chopping off their locs into a cropped style a few years ago. They collect their kit of proper tools over time. As a teenager, they would occasionally give their dad and younger brother line-ups in between haircuts. Tonight, I join their ranks.

We set the stage in their living room. I grab a dining chair and set up a ring light for better visibility for B and of course, for my partner documenting the affair. They drape me in a matte black cape, buttoning the snap just behind my left ear. I want a low fade so they start with an eighth inch guard. My body tingles head to toe as B deftly maneuvers the clippers through the first pass. I relax into the feeling as B moves from the right side to the left, talking me through every step. With B's advice, I decide on a rounded hairline. The more *feminine* option feels good on my body as I put down the femininity put on me. They warn of the edger's stinging sharpness.

*Hey, would you hold your ear down?*

*I think I can manage that.*

I still myself best I can. The buzz tickles anyway, sending a jolt up the back of my neck. As they finish cutting, I can feel remnants of hair collecting in crevices only a hot shower can clear out.

*Oh, you weren't kidding. This is an experience!*

B somehow tracks down the scent of black barbershop in a plastic green bottle for less than \$5.00. They tap a little Pinaud's onto a brush and sweep the powder along my hairline, brushing away excess hair in the process. My partner and my friend hype me up as I ugly cry when B places a heavy handheld mirror in my lap.

I lift the mirror to my gaze and I meet myself again. ♦



# Juli Jaworski





## **Tiny Saints**

by Spencer Wollan

Saint of the internal rebellion /  
Witch of the southern state.  
I scratched at the exit  
of my mothers womb until she bled out  
and they had to start digging.  
Oh god, and now?  
I've been such a burden on my heart.  
Been vibrating since the moment  
I noticed that she somehow survived it.  
Found her floating above the blasphemy  
begging to be fed by hand  
or given a tiny bag of sweets  
or granted asylum into the country  
of whatever never shatters /  
into the landscape of whatever  
is the opposite of having to try  
and instead i just said,  
Call me tomorrow morning.  
Today is tomorrow's slave  
and we can't live here forever.  
The heart is never wrong  
but a muscle always fails  
at some point.  
A long time ago, I was very small.  
And the smallness still lives here.







# Róisín Nolan

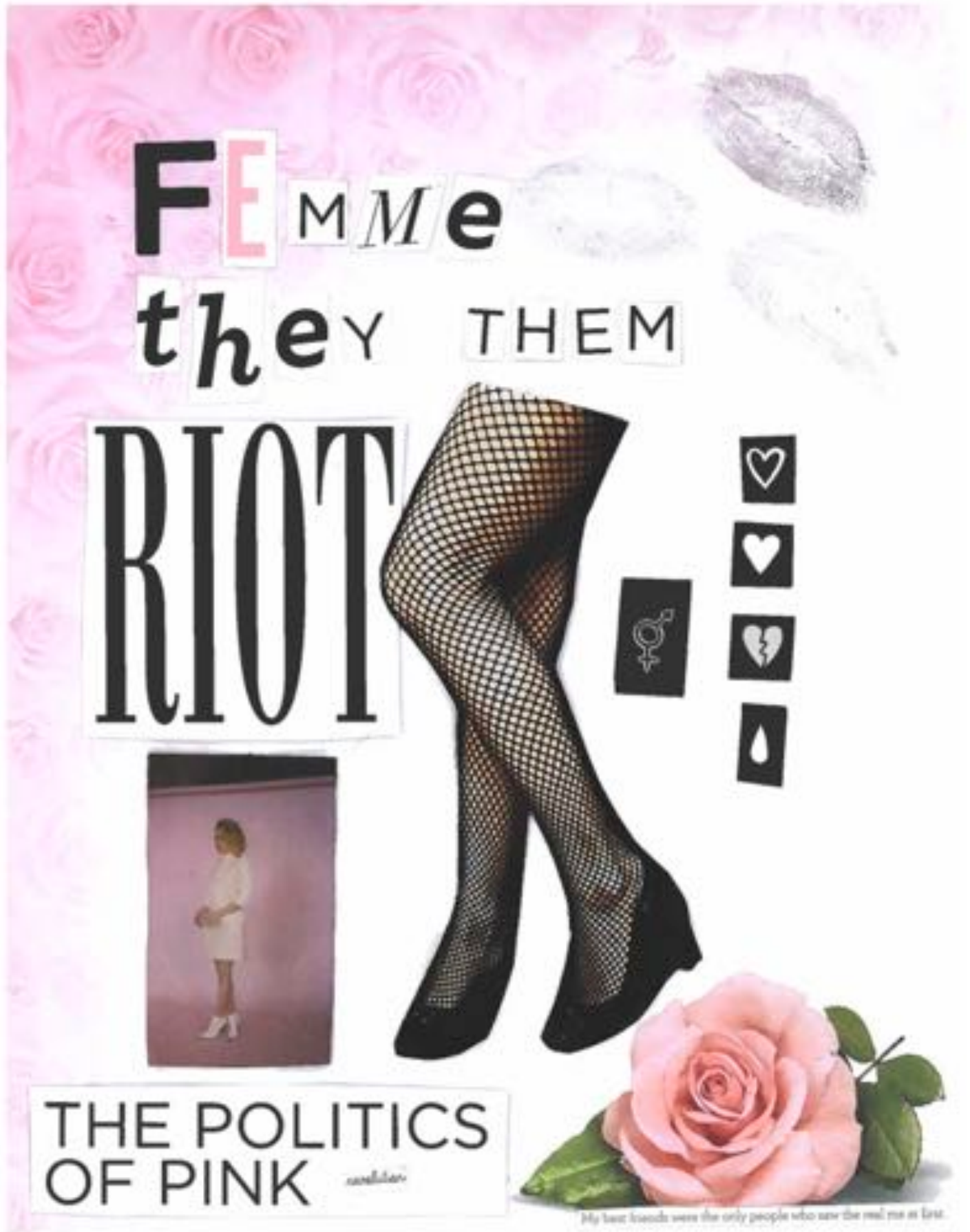








Leela Shamash





# We Love Our Contributors!

**Natahna Barga-Lema** (she/her) is a queer writer, graphic designer, and publisher living in Edmonton (Amiskwaciy Waskahikan), AB. Natahna has been published by *The Financial Diet*, *Metatron*, *Soft Magazine*, *Hello America Stereo Cassette*, and *Alberta Views*, among others. She is the author and co-author of the poetry collections *Modern Madonna* and *Prairie Girl Collective*, respectively. She also writes a semi-regular newsletter documenting “big feels” called *The Madonna Notes*. Natahna is co-founder of the women-run, digitally focused publishing house, Party Trick Press where she is passionate about revolutionizing the eLiterature experience by centering unique perspectives in fresh and surprising ways. You can follow Natahna on Instagram at [@natahnamadonna](https://www.instagram.com/natahnamadonna).

**Kendra Barker's** (she/her) art is inspired by the pain and isolation she's felt after having lost someone she's loved, the ways that childhood trauma can impact growth and development, and how liberating it can feel to leave behind a toxic person, or multiple people, in order to be free and discover more about yourself. Follow her on Instagram [@kendraspaintings](https://www.instagram.com/kendraspaintings) and [@kendram19](https://www.instagram.com/kendram19).

**Anja Bartlog** (she/her) is a genderqueer lesbian artist whose focuses on combining aesthetics from her childhood with queer subject matter, in defiance with the removal of our existence from the stories we grew up with. You can find her work at [@bogbabes\\_art](https://www.instagram.com/bogbabes_art) on Instagram.

**Despy Boutris's** (she/her) work has been published or is forthcoming in *Guernica*, *Copper Nickel*, *Ploughshares*, *Crazyhorse*, *AGNI*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Colorado Review*, and elsewhere. Currently, she lives in California and serves as Editor-in-Chief of *The West Review*. Follow her on Instagram [@dbouts](https://www.instagram.com/dbouts).

**Niko Swanson-Brownell** (they/them) is a queer individual born in the Bay area. They grew up in various areas of California before joining the Midwest for a brief and continuing sojourn. They wrote their first poem, titled “No more binning,” at age five. Since then, they have published poems in two anthologies. In their free time they enjoy spending time with goats and wise trees, tending to their numerous houseplants, and kissing large bodies of water right on the mouth.

**Eliane Castelar** (she/her) is a Catalan and English bisexual queer artist. She is exploring drawing and oil painting, and she is currently teaching herself how to tattoo. In painting she especially likes bodies and ways of depicting fleshiness. She also dabbles in design and printmaking. She loves queer communities and hopes to live in a queer commune when she gets old. Follow her on Instagram [@eliane.kz](https://www.instagram.com/eliane.kz).

**Corbin** (they/them) is an artist based in DC, who works with digital, ink, and acrylic mediums. After losing their winemaking job at the start of the pandemic, they went running back to their first love - art. Corbin's return to sketching, paralleled with their process of coming out as non-binary, has served as both a means of healing and livelihood. Their work is an extension of their own journey exploring the pure queer joy that transpires from choosing to live in authenticity. Currently, Corbin does commission-based work which includes everything from portraiture to greeting cards to freelance graphic design. Follow them on Instagram [@cscrbn](https://www.instagram.com/cscrbn) and visit them at [cscorbin.com](https://www.cscorbin.com).

**Destiny Crockett** (she/her) is a queer collage artist. As a Black feminist scholar and artist, Destiny's collages (mixed media on canvas as well as digital) reflect the importance of food and fashion for Black people and for her in particular. Specifically, she is inspired by African American sartorial practices of the mid-20th century through today as well

as African American culinary traditions. She is originally from St. Louis, and currently lives in Philadelphia. Follow her on Instagram [@destinycrockett](https://www.instagram.com/destinycrockett) and visit her at <https://www.etsy.com/shop/DestinyCrockettArt>.

**Betsy Falco** (she/they) is a queer artist and craft goblin. Follow Betsy on Instagram [@arose.garden](https://www.instagram.com/arose.garden), on Twitter [@arosegardenart](https://twitter.com/arosegardenart), and visit them at [www.arosegarden.co.uk](https://www.arosegarden.co.uk).

**Jude Harris** (she/they) is a trans femme writer and filmmaker living in Los Angeles, CA. When she's not writing, she produces documentaries, directs comedies, cooks for friends, laughs at her partner's jokes and hugs her kids. Jude's Instagram is [@judehopeharris](https://www.instagram.com/judehopeharris).

**Juli Jaworski** (they/them) is a Rotterdam and Berlin based non-binary artist. Their artwork is based around topics such as queerness, their experiences, and the experiences of those in their community. Other focus points in their work include political and environmental activism and critical psychology as well as what it means to be a care leaver/being in the youth care system. They are part of a small zine collective (Instagram: [@oben.ohne.zines](https://www.instagram.com/oben.ohne.zines)). Their zine focuses around youth care to build a community and create a safer space for those affected to express their experiences. They publish in English and German. Follow Juli on Instagram [@julingwer](https://www.instagram.com/julingwer).

**AMK** (she/her) is a French illustrator and activist with a south-Asian background. She is from Paris and currently living in Grenoble. Nature is a strong inspiration for her, as is feminism, queer culture, and drugs, but also hate of state and cops.

**Emily Knudson** (they/them) is a queer social justice activist with an obsession for multi-media documentation of people, ideas, and moments. This drawing was inspired by activists Emily met on Mississippi riverbanks during their 2019 Canoe Expedition, and is part of a longer zine titled *Idle No More*. Their academic infatuations include critical race theory, environmental justice, latin american/global south decolonial thought, ecofeminism, intersectional futurisms, and queer theory, which is often reflected in their art. They are working towards a future that is brighter for all groups facing oppression, through a mixture of art, activism, anti-capitalist praxis, conversations, and neurodivergent existence as resistance. They are seasonally rotationally based in Minneapolis, NYC, Spain, and the beaches of the Mississippi River, and can be followed on Instagram [@eknudie](https://www.instagram.com/eknudie).

**Umika Kumar** (she/her) is a researcher, writer, and editor living in New York and dreaming of London. She writes prose that explores mental health, identity of all sorts (hello to the complexity of settling on a label! just say queer for now), relationships (familial and otherwise), and that nearly always mentions flowers. You can find her yammering about astrology, vegan food, bunnies, her writing, and the most simple and profound of life's delights at [@astronotpoet](https://www.instagram.com/astronotpoet) on Instagram and Twitter.

**Lizzy Lehman** (she/they) is a queer singer-songwriter and digital illustrator living in Austin, Texas. She has always enjoyed drawing but was mainly focused on playing and writing music before the pandemic. The closing of music venues left her free to explore digital art and it has been a great source of joy and calm for her—a momentary relief from the weight of the world. Through her art, Lizzy aims to erase mental health stigma, spread love, and simply make someone's day a little bit better. Follow Lizzy on Instagram [@lizzy.lehman](https://www.instagram.com/lizzy.lehman).



**Eva Lewis** is an emerging poet and writer from the North-West. They are a self-taught poet, exploring mental illness, emotional inheritance, historical symmetries and neuro and gender divergence. Their work has been published among literary journals and anthologies including *Y Gog: Surreal North Anthology*; *SINK Magazine*; *Cape Magazine*; *Young Identity: Ecosystems of Fury Anthology*; their work is forth-coming in *Ice Flo Press*, *Homecoming Zine* and others. They have performed with Amnesty International and as part of the Young Identity collective.

**Ashlee Morris** (she/her) is a [redacted] living in [redacted]. Follow her on Instagram [@wordsthatstartwithx](#).

**Róisín Nolan** (she/her/hers) is an Irish analog collagist based in Dublin, Ireland. Specialising in collage on paper, a satirical Dada influence is evidenced throughout her work. Detached from digital with a sole focus on analog, Róisín sources physical imagery to visually narrate stories through an intersectional feminist lens. Through an active approach, Róisín seeks out local imagery for her work. This involves trips to second hand bookstores, charity shops, thrift stores, etc. As part of her practice, she uses the time searching for imagery to research symbolism and meaning to employ in her work. Follow her on Instagram [@rooshmulan](#).

**Abby Nowakowski** (she/her) is a queer interdisciplinary artist using labor and story-telling to explore what shame and confidence look like. Abby's practice taps into the human tendencies of failure and awkwardness, with one foot in the realm of happy-go-lucky cartoons and another facing her own experience with tough subject matters such as sexual violence and anxiety. Her work aims to spread advocacy for consent, share stories, and make space for weirdos. Co-founder of [Otherwise Studios](#) with Ahmri Vandeborne, her artistic practice extends into art facilitation with a range of collaborations including workshops, performances, and community weaving opportunities that put an emphasis on skill development and creating safe-brave space. Follow her on Instagram [@poorthingdesigns](#) and visit her at [abbynnowakowski.com](#) and [poorthingdesigns.com](#).

**Karina Portuondo** is a queer Brooklyn bruja aspiring to consider herself a poet. You can find her smushing cheeks with her doggo [@karinaeliseportu](#) on Instagram.

**Aurora Powell** (she/they) is a trans/queer artist living in Albany, NY. Their recent work focuses on transitory spaces of the mind and how one comes to conclusions about inner and outer perspectives they are synthesizing. A mental step-back and consideration of where one has been and where they seem to be going. Follow Aurora on Instagram [@skater\\_dyke](#) and on Twitter [@queer\\_cosmos](#).

**Helena Rae** (they/them) is a visual artist, poet, and tree-hugging farmers market slut living in Santa Cruz, CA. Follow them [@helenaraeclay](#).

**Esther Renehan** (she/her/they/them) is an artist, illustrator, and dog walker living in Clerkenwell, London. An art school dropout, she honed her skills through many different media, including sculpture, felting, crochet, and painting. They are currently focusing on digital illustration. Their art is influenced by nature, fat bodies, the occult, old movie musicals, and abundance. Follow her on Instagram [@clouds.and.cakes.art](#).

**Victoria Rey** (she/her) is a queer storyteller and artist raised in Atlanta and Appalachia currently living in Brooklyn, NY. A composer by training, Victoria has spent the last 10 years teaching musicology and arts activism to middle schoolers, bringing arts integration to cities throughout the US, and curating arts programming and events for NYC's young professionals in the arts. Victoria is currently working

on [Queer Money Project](#), a community mapping project of queer-owned businesses in New York City (and soon, someday beyond NYC.) You can also find her hosting freeform radio on Radio Free Brooklyn or through her newsletter [my glass house](#). Follow her on Instagram [@sting\\_rey](#) and [@queermoneyproject](#).

**Mali Rezai** (she/her) is a multi-disciplinary artist and designer from Houston, TX. Mali is interested in creating art that touches on esoteric themes, feminine archetypes, and cosmic spirituality. Follow her on Instagram [@mali\\_rez](#) and visit her at [malirezai.com](#).

**Elizabeth Schafer** (she/her) is from Washington NJ, where she graduated with an associate degree in fine arts from Warren County Community College, in 2018. She is furthered her education in studio arts at Drew University in Madison NJ, and graduated this past December. Elizabeth is currently building up her body of work in her studio in Washington NJ, while looking into jobs in the NYC area. Her artworks consist of assembling an array of mixed media to build a dramatic pop of colored abstract textures. In order to convey these textures, she uses wood, yarn, plaster, clay, and paint. Elizabeth's assembled pieces give the impression of very neat and meticulously placed as well as, much time consumed in order for the finished product to come to life. Follow her on Instagram [@liveseyartem](#) and visit her at [www.liveseyartem.com](#).

**Dakota Sebourn** (she/her) is a writer/photographer from Seattle, Washington. She graduated from California Maritime Academy in 2019 studying international business and logistics. Dakota's writing focuses on science fiction, sapphic fantasy, and poetry. Her photography concentrates on landscape, portraits, wildlife, and anything else that catches her eye. The piece featured in this publication was inspired by the beauty she finds in all the small moments in life. Visit her on Instagram [@dakotasebourn](#).

**Leela Shamash** (she/they) is a nonbinary femme lesbian from Tio'Tia: Ke/Montreal. Follow Leela on Instagram [@leelasmash](#).

**Grace Thorpe** (they/them) is a trans nonbinary artist currently based in North Carolina. They create art both as a means of processing and as a method of escapism. The concept of identity and their observations of the world inspire much of their work. Grace is a painter, a mixed media and fiber artist, and a dabbler in furniture refinishing. Grace's work can be seen on Instagram [@gracethorpeart](#).

**Valerie, darling** (she/her) is an author living in Los Angeles. You can find her via [@softcorekitsch](#) on Instagram.

**Spencer Wollan** (she/her) is a lesbian with two cats and a hot wife (read: fiancée). She is a fan of Ocean Vuong, good tequila, and you. Follow her on Instagram [@therapyluvr666](#).

**Hannah Youngblood** aka HotandSexy Dyke makes art to reject conservatism and sexual repression while promoting fat liberation, sexual expression, and queerness. Hannah is an Appalachian transplant in San Francisco where they teach art and show work (sometimes).

**Jesi Zinn** (she/her) is a hyper-saturated realistic painter based in Brooklyn, NY and born in Harrisburg, PA. Zinn studied Fine Arts at Messiah University (Pennsylvania) where she received her BFA (2015). In 2018, Zinn received her MS in Special Education at Brooklyn College (New York). As an artist and educator, Zinn continues to practice and teach painting and drawing. Follow her on Instagram [@jesizinn](#). ☺

