



VAGABOND

# CITY

**FEAT.**

INARA LALANI  
ELIZABETH TOBIN  
MEGGIE ROYER  
NEOBIE GONZALEZ  
SARAH FRANCOIS  
MICHAEL PRIHODA  
NICOLE LOURETTE  
ALEX LENKEI  
KAITLYN CROW  
MAIA IRWIN  
JEMMA HOOLAHAN  
AYAH ELBEYALI  
SHANNING WAN  
NEGESTI KAUDO  
OLIVIA LADUN  
NAOMI LANGER  
BECKY YEKER  
YSIDRO XYLANDER  
AMIRA SIMON



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LITERARY JOURNAL EDITED BY RACHEL  
CHARLENE LEWIS, CHELSEA ARDLE,  
ELENA SENECHAL-BECKER



**COVER ART**

"SCREAM" BY SHANNING WAN  
PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROSS HARDY



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# EDITORS NOTES

The writers in this issue are overwhelmingly not straight, not white, not male, not established; the writers in this issue are women, they are queer, they are young, they are of color; this, in itself, to me, is magic.

**This is the meaning of grit:** pregnancy scares and trying your best and changing the water in the fish tank and swimming or drowning and fucking and being fucked.

Our writers exposed themselves on the page. **Come and see them.** You have their permission.

There is nothing sexy about brutality. There is nothing sexy about vulnerability. There is something real about brutality, about telling of the times you've been brutalized, about telling about the times you've been brutal. There is something real about vulnerability. You know this.

We promise our writers we will love their work the way they want to be loved. We tell our writers to tell us about how they've been failed. In this issue, our writers tell us the ways that they've failed. The ways that they've kept going, or given up, via carnival food, the gaps between fingers, books closed. They are the tug of impulse when manic becomes the new normal.

Soak in their screams. Learn, or re-learn, your own. Be silent alongside them. Hold your laptop in solidarity. They'll be waiting.

**RACHEL CHARLENE LEWIS**

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Vagabond City Literary Journal was established in 2013. Submissions are open now for our winter issue until midnight on November 1st. Email submissions to [vagabondcityliterary@gmail.com](mailto:vagabondcityliterary@gmail.com).

**Let's talk about spaces.** Between us. Inside you. Empty. Too full. The intangible spaces without walls, without volume. How do we measure these gaps?

Do we use the standard ruler? Do we assign it a monetary value? We are all still figuring out how to fill the spaces in our lives—the absences or overwhelming presences. What our writers know is that these gaps can be filled with words, and perhaps, for now, that is enough.

As a new part of Vagabond City, I'm honored to be a part of this issue—to join our hard-working editor, Rachel, and Elena, the enthusiastic and careful reader. As an online publication, connecting with this staff is mostly done through keyboards and shared spaces on the cloud. These, we measure in megabytes. But they are more than megabytes, right? This is art. It is priceless, unitless. Right?

So I ask you, while you read, to think about how you measure these spaces between here and there, him and her, us and them, Oz and Kansas, the moon and the earth, the Russian philosophe and his love, sanity and that gray space surrounding it, petals and the fluttering wings of a bee, the metaphor and its subject.

In the past, I've thought of relationships in miles—how many can we put between us before we break; in rhythms—I always want to waltz, but you're stuck in common time; in motions—brushing teeth, drinking coffee, walking out the door one after the other. But what if our unit is a word, a word that does not measure but is more accurate than those that do?

Like **depth, & love, & negative, & happy, & scream, & silence, & breath.**

Welcome to Vagabond city Summer 2015. Breathe it in; let it fill you; breathe it out.

**CHELSEA ARDLE**

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Vagabond City Literary Journal accepts submissions of art, poetry, and prose. We've been described as "funky." Send us your weirdest, your most brutal, your most raw.

# AN AQUARIUM FOR THE DEAD

>>>>> *INARA LALANI*

I have this theory,

That for six days, I could maybe keep a goldfish alive long enough so that I could see you again.

On day one, I would watch the salesman pull it out from its home, and tuck it into a bag filled with more air than water.

On day two, I would search up a name to give it.

A name that would trap the energy of the way I used to say your name on my lips,

And the way my tongue tapped the backs of my teeth so gently.

On day three, I would pretend that it is its birthday

Just so I wouldn't have to feel like I missed out on so much of your life already.

On day four, I would swish my fingers around the tank,

Watching the water bounce off the walls like the way I did when you put me on your lap,

And balanced me like I was on a seesaw.

On day five, I would feed it too much because I liked seeing the way it formed little "O"s with its mouth,

Because to me it seemed like you were trying to speak after days of being silent.

On day six, I would change the water in my fish tank,

Hoping that this time a drop in there somewhere once rolled down your cheek because

God I feel like I might kill this fish soon

And I just really want to see you again.

# FOR THE AVERAGE MELIPHONA BEE

>>>>> **INARA LALANI**

I speak the language of a vanilla-flavoured day.

Just beige pastels, and an ordinary tint of a café au lait.

I have spent a lifetime crawling over a blanket of shells,

Just to coat my bones in the achromatic pain of synonymy

So that my crescendo of affliction remains unheard,

Against the symphony of living in a world that only breathes in *forte*.

I write in flavours of muted saffron and unripe pomegranate seeds,

Only to make myself believe that I'm trying;

Trying to live in-between the colours of royal threads and the sweetness of red wine.

But threads will start to unravel and meet new stitches,

And wine will continue to age and begin to taste of something entirely different.

And so here I remain in the comfort of simple perpetuity,

Speaking in vanilla just to stay classic;

Even though "staying classic"

Just means that my words can only be pollinated by a *meliphona* bee.

# LOSING TEETH

>>>>> **ELIZABETH TOBIN**

Swimming in between stubborn kindergarten gums,  
my mouth is full of blood.

We pull up to that blue house  
while the kitchen curtain is on fire.

Cake icing fingerprints the wooden table  
from where the knife must have slipped.

I am standing in it's place watching my mother drink from the sink.

On linoleum sun,  
kids sit licking fingers in the flames.

Her hands are clean.

There are alarms that don't go off  
in homes that don't say I love you.

We put our teeth under the pillow anyway.

# ALMOST HEAVEN

>>>>> **ELIZABETH TOBIN**

The asphalt of summer stood still.

Swam the deep end of mother's disease  
and dreamed of dangling from telephone wires,  
calling the world to watch from under the table.

Swam in the deep end of mother's disease  
in panic like a kitchen curtain fire.  
Calling the world to watch from under the table,  
the sun laid down its bones on Grammy's porch.

In panic like a kitchen curtain fire,  
secrets shimmy down skin like sweat.  
The day surrenders to streetlight and  
chipped teeth play football in the street.

Secrets shimmy down skin like sweat.  
Fire hydrant calls home from hollow.  
Chipped teeth play football in the street.  
June bug skeletons break their graves.

Fire hydrant calls home from hollow in  
the morning sounds of father gone.  
June bug skeletons break their graves  
and the asphalt of summer stands.

# LYING NEXT TO SOMEONE YOU DON'T LOVE.

>>>>> **ELIZABETH TOBIN**

The water is next to the bed.

I am having those dreams where I am awake again.

Whispering *take*

*your fingers away* in sleepy protest moans.

Lost in someone

pouring wind into the corner of my neck.

And hands there.

And the dreaming awake again

where the boy jumps into the swamp

And jumps out.

# DOROTHY FACES THE TORNADO

>>>>> **MEGGIE ROYER**

He called her bruja so she prayed day in and day out  
over hemlock and wart of toad  
that he would let her leave. Braided ribbons of thorn  
into her hair in lieu of satin. At night it purred and crawled  
over the pillows and through his bownecked legs,  
but never strangled him in sleep  
as she hoped it would.

The yellow road could be seen from the door.

He built it brick by brick, muscles straining with sweat  
as he laid & laid & laid each piece into earth,  
eyeing her like coins as she longed through the window.

He used to hold her against the sink, nails into skin,  
making her watch. Polishing her down to the bone.

Would open the latch but catch her by the throat  
when she tried to escape.

He called her rubble & she wondered  
if it felt just like gold, soft beneath her red heels.

One day the house swept itself into smithereens;  
it threw the bathtub into the sky and every Budweiser can  
into the orchards.

That cyclone of ravish & tremble, that tornado of dust  
and spit, its thrashing claws, its spiral of bomb & wind.

It took him in its arms, that cyclone did,  
it uprooted him from the remains of their home.

Catching his ankle at first, she thought better,  
and let him go.

# BITS

>>>>> **NEOBIE GONZALEZ**

In my dream I carry a mason jar filled with bits of Einstein's brain (stolen before the rest of him was ashes), pieces they still haven't found. I run up the stony steps of Gaudi's basilica in Barcelona (built 1882 and finished never). Spires high, bricks laid, most of it a skeleton of becoming. Some fugue (Bach's maybe) plays through a room, and it's then I wake up, losing its last notes. One time in French class, my teacher told us "I miss you" was said as *Tu me manques*. Switch that back to English and it's "You are missing from me." or, simply put: "I lack you." (or is it the other way around?) Everyone sighed at exactly the same second, while I thought of a hole growing right in the middle of a man, just above his navel, swelling by the size of what had long been gone from him. Soon it was stretched into the silhouette of his mother, pleased at return. But sensing want of her son, another hole bloomed within her until she formed him, a cycle of coming and going and coming, because nothing will ever be

enough for either of them (nothing would  
be the same). I wondered then  
how long it would take me to grow  
into the shape of you, if we would even fit  
each other. You, being tall and me, tiny,  
in tiptoed sneakers (too often). There  
isn't enough space here for absence. I think  
of things I used to have – pins (dropped), nails  
(trimmed off), marbles (given away), and the bell  
starts ringing. I stay behind to wear this  
buttonless sweater around me (yours),  
while the class stands up and shuffles, leaving  
(all our half-open books gently shut.

# SEA SHELLS

>>>>> *SARAH FRANCOIS*

Ze sold seashells by the sea shore  
No not really Ze sold sex by the pier  
It was amusing the look on people's faces  
The deadpan expression to the  
Straightforward question  
Of would you like to top or bottom  
And the price tag  
It was almost as if it hung from Ze's waist beads  
There were always cops  
Everywhere  
Guarding the pier  
From us undesirables  
But somehow no one ever  
Remembered to lock the restrooms  
The park curfew bent as easily  
As ripped tutu fabric  
And dusty knee patches  
It was pride and we would enjoy it  
Orally  
Simultaneously

# UNTITLED

>>>>> *SARAH FRANCOIS*

white powder

runs

down his

nose

his laugh

is

ragged

lonely

and deranged

his fist is

bloody

i wonder

if

the blood

is mine

if his

fingers

are broken

from contact

with

soft flesh

if there will

be

a scar

or if

this is

just another

Tuesday

Wednesday

i nursuay

Friday

Never a

Monday

he works too

early

doesn't have time

to beat

his woman

on Mondays

tries

to fuck

me

while

I'm asleep

instead

# ARTIST FEATURE

# SCREAM & SCREAM II

>>>>> SHANNING WAN





# ABOUT THE ARTIST

Shanning Wan, a compulsive documentarist, social media Tourette, humorous pessimist, introverted drama queen, reserved social butterfly, skeptical exhibitionist, reverse-engineering learner, sapiosexual bilinguist, Muslim-area-born Chinese, international vagabond, lover of authenticity, cosmopolitanism, and minimalism.

## WEBSITES & SOCIAL LINKS

[www.makewan.com](http://www.makewan.com)

<https://instagram.com/shanningw/>

Photos taken by Ross Hardy.

# I AM EXACTLY LIKE A WIND STORM

>>>>> **MAIA IRWIN**

I. The night is alive and so am I.

II. Maybe instead of the wildfire I long to be I should be a rolling storm.

III. Or maybe just the shadows. Maybe the night is harsher than the day.

IV. Maybe I should be the creature that stalks alleyways and lonely roads, it snaps trees and throws boys to the dirt and makes girls with ill-fitting skin shiver. (I'll tell you a secret: I don't know many girls who haven't felt like they were something stuffed into a body that's only going to cause them grief.)

V. Maybe I am more suited to being a burning star, something pretty and theoretically dangerous. (I'll tell you another secret: there is only one star that we know of that's ever hurt anyone.)

VI. I am only an earthbound girl wanting to have claws sharp enough to kill the lurking men in the night. Maybe I can only ever hope to be standing in the storm and hoping that I am never the moon. (This is the last secret I'll tell you: the moon is old and strong, but she has a flag planted on her.)

# LOVECHILD

>>>>> **NEGESTI KAUDO**

Pregnancy was everywhere. That's what happens after having really good unprotected sex. I bragged about it to my best friend: about how my lover and I had been spontaneous and placed our bets on the pull-out method, how I'd broken my rule of saying his name. Hundreds of miles away and with her face bright and close to the camera, she said, *but what if you get pregnant?* And I hadn't thought about it, but she spoke it into existence, forcing the thought of pregnancy to travel to the forefront of my mind. I was terrified and it was all I noticed.

In one season of America's Next Top Model, three contestants stated they got pregnant the first time they had sex. As they laughed about it with Tyra Banks, photos of the women with their babies popped up on screen. I remembered the first time I'd had sex, less than a month before, and the relief that washed over me afterwards, the excitement with which I embraced my period and blood. Stories of my best friends circulated in my memory: how one had taken multiple pregnancy tests after simply lying naked with her ex-boyfriend because "fluids" and how her mother had found the discarded tests with their distorted negative symbols. With another friend, I laughed about "the scare," the creeping fear of being pregnant that always comes after sex. Pregnancy was always a running joke between my friends, all of us graduating as motherless teenagers and heading to college. Waving around celery sticks in our hands during lunch, we would talk about the possible as the impossible: *what if you got pregnant? What would you do?* I'd brag to my friends about how I would never get married and never have children in an attempt to embrace my youth and smother any secret longings for a family of my own, and they'd point to me: *You'll be the first to get pregnant, and have a boatload of children.* They had been betting on it for years and there I was: walking around, feeling like I was drowning in the now blurred vision of my future.

I never bought a pregnancy test. That would admit defeat. That I was conceding to have the baby of a boy I wasn't sure I loved. We said "I love you,"

but what did it mean? As friends, we do anything for each other and were calling it love. There was no dating, afraid it might lead to more, and I was left wondering if he really meant what he said or if his lips were just forming words. I hovered in the condom aisle of CVS, sidestepping past the condom boxes and lubricants, to casually glance at the pink and purple boxes of pregnancy tests before slipping out of the aisle. Lying in bed, I would catch my hands pressing on my belly, as if they had a mind of their own, trying to figure out fat from baby, if I was gaining weight from stress or pregnancy. I wasn't ready, I wasn't married. I was afraid I'd end up like your stereotypical black teenager from a Lifetime movie, having made one mistake after years of climbing up only to spiral all the way back down. Worst-case scenario: I saw myself homeless, begging for pennies in too-tight clothes with skin stretched tightly over an exposed belly. I replayed the conception, how such a brief moment of pleasure could become an abandoned future. I was supposed to go to college and do college things: go to parties, get an education, and indulge in reckless behaviors before being rebirthed into the adult world. I wanted that life, those experiences, untainted by a child.

My parents never married. I've spent years romanticizing my arrival into their lives as their first child and daughter, the first concrete object to tie them together for life, later followed by my sister. Their relationship is shrouded in mystery. My one available source for answers, my mother, has plagued her memory with single mother bitterness; I can't ask her. Depression trapped each of us in a haze when he died, keeping me in its grasp for years, smothering the thoughts and questions I had of my dad, and forcing me to answer them myself. My mom loved my dad. She would never admit it, but it's there in the way she's smiling in the yellowing Polaroid photos he took, in the way she laughs at her memories with my aunt and cousins, and in the way she looks at me: the undisputed child, the replica of my fire-born, Sagittarian dad.

I had an astrology book that my mom had given to me at the point in our relationship when she still allowed me to believe in something other than God. I devoured the information, lapping up everything I was told about how to love

certain zodiac men. The first time I flipped through the book, ready to find out the secrets of my lover, I found the section already heavily underlined. My mother had taken her pencil through *The Sagittarius Man* chapter—years before I flipped to the same series of pages with a pen in hand—and underlined things about my dad. I added to her pencil lines with black ink, memorizing how to make the third fire sign fall in love with me. Astrologically, I had the perfect parents, though they might not have been the perfect match. My mom, a watery Pisces, and my dad, a fiery Sagittarius, had me: their feisty Leo lovechild.

No one knew I was counting nine months from May to find out when I'd be exposed, when I would no longer just be getting fat, but instead develop that glow and that bump, when rumors would swirl and my mom would disown me. I waited for the blood. As weeks passed, I thought about if I could get rid of it, or even extinguish myself along with it. I considered it, knowing I had only so much time to make it look like nothing was ever growing inside of me. I wondered if I had the courage to lie back and have my problem pulled out of me one appendage at a time. Could I live with myself, if I did? If I showed up to my high school reunion with a toddler or a child would people try to do the math, would my friends and peers be able to count back to the time I lay naked and naïve, feeling invincible. Could I come back?

Looking at my mom, I could do it. Be a single mother. I'd go somewhere, pick up my things and travel from Columbus to somewhere in northern Ohio, working until my ankles swelled. Give birth to a beautiful baby boy and give him all the love I searched for in my lover and wanted from my mother. We deserved it, someone to love us wholly. I deserved it. The idea was romantic, irrational, but I believed I could do it. I was smarter than average and I had an array of talents, ready for any job. Women did it in the movies, embraced their children and their independent lives as they charged into motherhood.

I lay in bed and imagined my future baby boy. I could feel the fragile softness of his milk chocolate brown skin tone, a swirl between his parents' shades of brown. Espresso brown eyes, or maybe tar black, like his father's, but I wouldn't be able to read him as he carefully watched everything and everyone

through low lids and thick eyelashes like blinds to his thoughts. My pink lips to slobber on my shirtsleeves, sitting underneath a miniature version of the wide-set nose his parents have. He'd be chubby, but small. And very quickly I'd learn to forgive him for the pain that comes with being split open and be grateful for the gift of a new beginning. I knew his name: Aaron Edward Joseph. But I never tacked on a last name, building his identity of recycled names: his father's middle name, followed by my father's first and middle names. A tribute to new life, a tribute to the two men I loved. The name rolled off of my tongue and bled into my notebooks, filling my head with a picture of happiness I'd never known. I imagined Aaron's face, the sound of his babbling, and wondered if he'd laugh even while looking at the years of sadness etched into my face. The longer I waited, the more I wanted those feelings, the more I fell in love with my unborn child.

Twenty-three days I waited before the fantasy was over. I hadn't been pregnant, just irrational. The sex hadn't been careful; we'd just been lucky. I told my lover the "good news" on National Sex Day—June 9th. He hadn't considered the possibility of me being pregnant, of us having a baby, when he'd pulled out of me, semen dripping onto the carpet. The next day, I walked across the stage to receive my diploma in a navy blue cap and gown, praying that I wouldn't bleed onto my white dress. I smiled in the photos. I had a summer job. I was going to college. I was seventeen and my entire life was laid out in front of me: a book of blank pages for stories to be written. My son didn't exist. He never had. He'd merely been a microscopic fragment of a glob saturated into the carpet, vacuumed up and possibly covered with carpet fresh. I hadn't realized how badly I needed him. A child to run away with and start over, creating a new legacy for ourselves. I was stuck in my plan, my bland layout of a future trying to be good enough and prove myself to the world. It hurt. I felt like I'd lost something, a glimmer of hope of a permanent connection I'd been desperate for and was never going to have.

# THIS IS THE CLOSEST I'LL GET TO PAINTING YOU

>>>>> **AYAH ELBEYALI**

the beat of your heart- one. two. three. four. the gleam of your sweat- heat.  
shimmer. hips. quiver. the almond of your eyes- green. kind. honey. mine. the  
space behind your ribs- ache. flood. furnace. blood. the palm of your hand- red.  
flower. touch. devour. the bend of your thumb- square. raw. hook. trace. the  
soft of your mouth- wet. smother. sweet. lover. the clasp of your fist- open.  
close. grab. own. the line of your back- straight. bow. bend. flow. the curve of  
your throat- long. pulse. bruised. sink. the points of your teeth- beast. bite.  
bite. *bite.*

# COUNTING CROWS

>>>>> **OLIVIA LADUN**

I like to call this counting crows.

A boy told me he liked me while I was high and crying listening to some indie bullshit.

My ex girlfriend smoked everyday, 3:11 pm, after school in her backyard, and I guess that is sort of cringeworthy.

Tell me you like me.

I like to call this counting crows.

And I wish I was pretty without make up, but I sold my soul and became demoralized.

My ex boyfriend split his wrist one day and blamed me, and I guess that is sort of cringeworthy.

Tell me you're okay.

I like to call this counting crows.

And you really can't call me pretty because once, I loved someone and they called me pretty, but now they say I'm not the same-

They said I'm glass, but I always thought I was marrow.

I like to call this counting crows.

And I keep throwing up water and candy and syllables, but you won't like me once you reach the smell,

And I've been empty for a long time,  
but eating and eating and eating has only made me nauseated.

There is a pit in my stomach filled with sand.

I like to call this counting crows.

And I didn't expect to meet you here, but there you are smiling at me with top and bottom marbles that I'd love to play with someday.

And here I am rubbing my knees trying to stand up without looking as feeble as I feel-

I remember little things.

Princess Diana died on my birthday.

It takes one man to change a light bulb and a woman to light it.

What the fuck was the punch line?

# DARKEST HOURS (FOX AND THE BIRD)

>>>>> *MICHAEL PRIHODA*

when i was young  
and heading east  
these ashes  
weren't counterfeit.  
we avoided  
the bend toward  
Dallas  
in No Man's Land  
by force  
of habit,  
we two dreamers,  
nothing  
but a wreck  
of the fallible  
through  
a valley  
of saints

# AND ALL OF A SUDDEN I MISS EVERYONE (EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY)

>>>>> **MICHAEL PRIHODA**

it's natural to be afraid,

watching

the birth and death of the day.

this is your

catastrophe

and the cure,

saying so long, lonesome,

and welcome, ghosts.

will you ever not

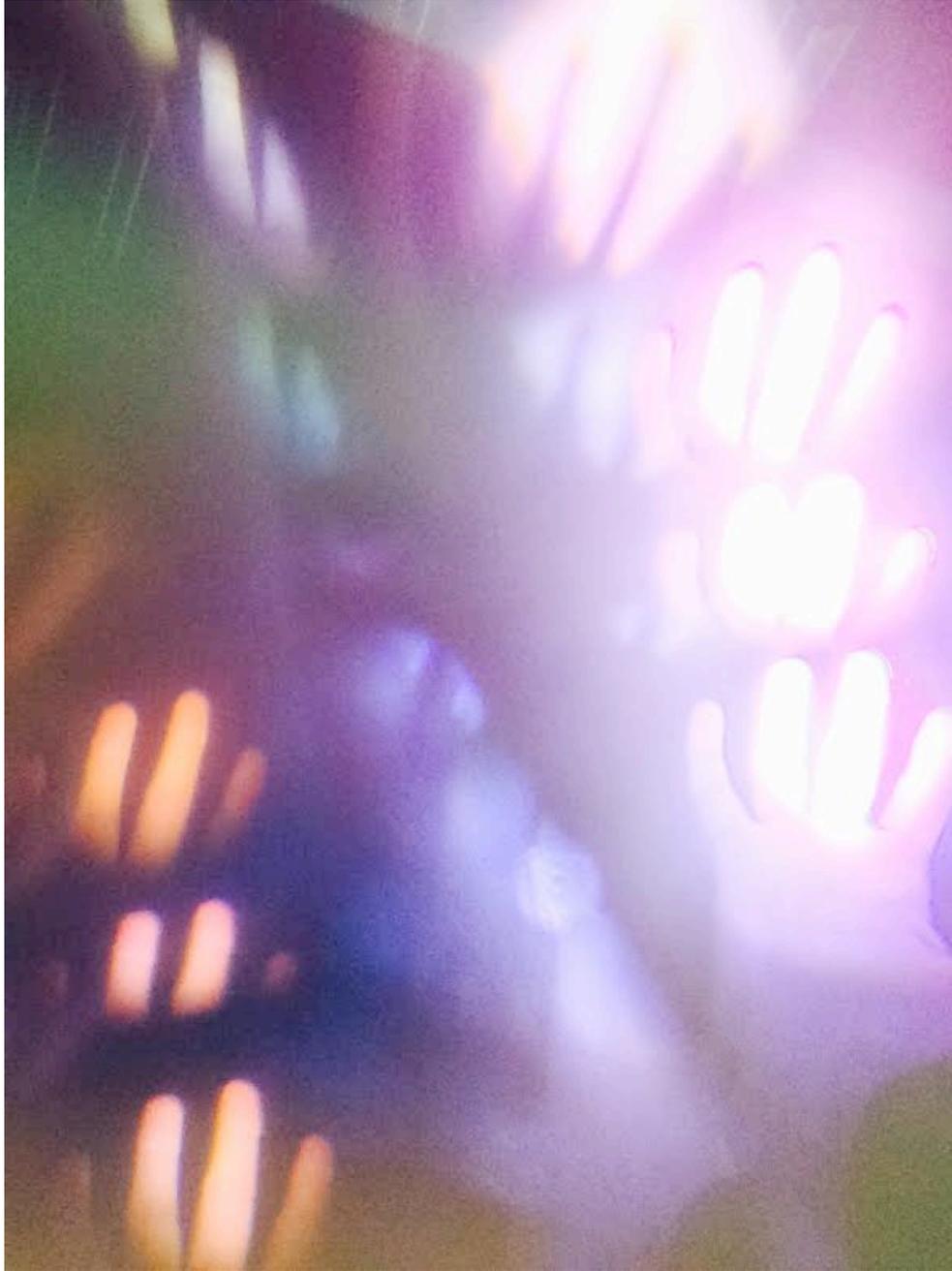
be haunted, asking

"what do you go home to?"

*Note: these poems entirely constructed from the song titles of music albums, said album becoming the poem's title. The genre is experimental found poetry.*

# PHOTOGRAPHY

>>>>> *YSIDRO XYLANDER*







# A CONVERSATION WITH AN IMAGINARY FRIEND

>>>>> **BECKY YEKER**

What does it feel like to feel?

It feels like the thoughts of every living person are inside of you, like they are thumping against the side of your head and they are reflecting off of your eyeballs like they are mirror images of yourself, even when they are not you.

Does it feel like the earth is shaking?

It feels like the universe is desperately trying to crawl into your skin, like some kind of small insect that leeches onto skin and snacks on your blood. It feels like thousands of those tiny insects are taking every bit of you until you are close to nothing, but they are everything.

What does that mean?

The world loves someone who listens.

But what do you mean?

No one listens.

But why do you feel like you are nothing?

Because every inch of me has been sucked into some kind of insect, some kind of tiny insect that has stolen every bit of something, because I have given it, I have allowed for these insects to dissect me, because I choose to listen.

What happens when you choose to listen?

You end up alone.

# UNTITLED #1

>>>>>> **KAITLYN CROW**

i.

I am the mood swings striking in the middle of the night,  
keeping you nocturnal past three in the morning.  
They call me mania, bipolar.

I am your misdiagnosis,  
the ADHD pills that made you go  
insane,  
the tug of impulse when manic  
becomes the new normal.

I sit on a throne of isolation,  
friendships jumping ship,  
chronic fatigue, dark thoughts:  
depression.

I am anything you can do to feel good.

I let strangers in,  
trust whoever possessed  
the upper.

I am your freshest scars  
and your furthest away.  
Cigarette burns on your  
forearms, knees.  
Smoke in your lungs,  
a rope  
in the back  
of your closet.

ii.

I am the second and third draft  
of your suicide note,  
methodically saved  
to your family's desktop.

I am a cry for help, answered

iii.

I am the white walls,  
the one window.

I am the charge nurse  
who let you vomit into a trashcan  
and rubbed your shoulders  
after you cried for hours.

I taught you everything  
you wanted to know about survival.  
Everything you needed to know,  
you taught yourself.

iv.

I am a gentle reminder of life  
when you walk through those doors:  
the air will blow in your face  
and everything will smell of carnival food.

# GABY, HAVE YOU DONE YOUR BEST?

>>>>> *KAITLYN CROW*

My first roommate in the adolescent unit  
had moss growing on her arms and spots of mold between her toes.  
I didn't realize until months later  
that there is nothing beautiful  
about that.

We'd walk around with plastic bags around our faces,  
slowly suffocating, and supporting each other  
while we did.

Sometimes we'd eat  
each other's sadness with dinner,  
and share a dessert.  
She'd eat the bread,  
and I'd get the icing.  
But it didn't occur to me until much later  
how unhealthy it is  
to ingest someone's sadness  
like it's your own.

# BITS ON SOUR BOYS

>>>>> NAOMI LANGER

## *i. Sonic*

We eat in his car, parked, light off, radio on, watching the sunset over the edge of suburbia. Romantic-like. If we wanted, the identical tops of a hundred gable roofs in the distance could almost look like mountains, the heat waves off of the hot summer pavement the surface of a cool lake. I squint and try to see but don't suggest it out loud in case he thinks I'm unsatisfied with the view. Perhaps he really did see something sexy in a drive-in date, cheeseburgers and slushies and a large fries split between the two of us, our fingers and lips slick with grease because the roller-skating waitress forgot to bring napkins. I put my bare feet up on the dashboard as he smokes a Marlboro Black, *I'm sorry I just have to*, until he notices and asks me to please not put my feet there. He ashes his cigarette on the gearshift and tosses the butt out the window. I reach for the bag of cold fries between us to keep from rolling my eyes; as far as first dates go, this one isn't too bad. At least he talks. I shove the last bite and a half of my burger into my mouth and am almost done swallowing when he asks to touch my chest. I shrug and turn up the radio. My footprints were on his windshield already anyway.

## *ii. The Best Gift*

For my birthday: a delicate string of freshwater pearls, ivory to light pink. A lovely luxury cool against my neck, a gift for a young duchess, almost.

"My mom picked it out."

## *iii. Months After*

Months after it is over I realize it doesn't always feel like nothing. Not that it didn't feel like anything when it happened. There was the boredom and the curiosity and the half-gentle hands and the soreness, but it was much more nothing than I expected it to be. There was the *I love you*, though that was more of a formality, and the *I'll see you tomorrow*, and the unspoken *so that's it then*.

We did it a few more times and then broke up, for reasons mostly related to the *I love you*.

Months after it is over he texts me: *were you a virgin when we met?*

## *iv. Dreams from Last Night*

chasing a boy through a sunny vineyard  
drying vines drawing blood from my  
weak legs and he will not turn towards  
me no matter how loud I am  
screaming his name oh what was his  
name it escapes me he escapes my

reach my scrapes are scabbing over and  
I hear let him go

now in a small room with a heavy  
ceiling weak walls and a foundation  
that is crumbling I can smell it breaking  
down with black mold and I must  
remember how to leave I am pacing  
the rotting floor asking for out oh  
begging to recall the spell I was taught  
that I have always known

I am trapped in bed though it is not my  
bed is it am I dreaming am I dreaming I  
am wrapped in these silk sheets with  
unfamiliar stains dreaming strange  
bruises in places that are quiet in  
places that used to be quiet oh but  
now pulse so strange

the boy in the vineyard turns around  
now that my throat is sufficiently raw  
and I see his face I remember his name  
but he does not have his face or his  
name his eyes are my eyes his mouth is  
my mouth his name that I scream is  
very much my own and both our knees  
are bleeding oh suddenly I recall the  
incantation I was taught

and I say let him go

*v. Nice*

He is by far the most beautiful boy I have ever convinced to take me out for coffee. He is tall, tan, half Chinese. He is lean and fit, but not too fit, not intimidating. His voice is deep and raspy, and I wonder if he smokes, but he seems above that. He is too close to his mother to harm himself that way. He is well traveled, has been to Paris and Rio and Shanghai, but remains charmingly American in his mannerisms. His last girlfriend broke his heart but the experience matured him. He knows more about how to treat a girl now, though I paid for my own coffee this afternoon. He is funny, quite funny, and we laugh together over our lattes. I wonder if he thinks I'm funny too. I certainly hope so, because he is so nice to look at, and listen to, and smell. He's made an excellent choice of cologne, or maybe it's just his deodorant. When our mugs are empty and our conversation dulls we walk to the metro. He holds my hand, his long legs make me work to keep up. His hands are just rough enough, nice to hold.

He gives me a kiss at the turnstile and my heart stops. I don't think he brushed his teeth this morning. He is not very nice to taste.

vi. "Please Don't Show Up High to My Recital, My Family Will Be There"  
He shows up high to my recital. Seven minutes late, small-eyed, clutching a bright bouquet with two stickers on the crinkled plastic: \$6.99, Safeway.

vii. Closure

5/7, 8:59pm

remember when i used to ask you if you'd want to hang out or go on a date like weekly and you would avoid seeing me and then when you did see me and i tried to seduce you you wouldn't even do that because there was so much more to relationships than just sex and you didn't love me anymore? what was up with that? you're so funny sometimes

9:05pm

i don't know  
sometimes feelings just fade out  
and you can't control that

9:06pm

do you want to just mindlessly fuck then?

9:10pm

um  
no

9:10pm

i meant cuddle

10:16pm

<3

12:03am

how can i convince you?

3:46pm

<3 <3

8:15pm

please leave me alone

# GIRLS WHO LIKE BOYS AND GIRLS

>>>>> *JEMMA HOOLAHAN*

girl liking boys and girls

girl hating labels; hating boxes,

but girl loving; always loving.

girl falling for crooked smiles;

the quiver of eye lashes like

leaves in the wind, protecting

cobalt irises full of love;

full of empathy.

girl kissing girls in darkened

alleyways as the sun comes over

the horizon, bathing them in gold.

girl pressing boys against sticky

walls of clubs,

smoky breath shared in a drunken haze.

girl finding the crescent moon

outline of where waist becomes hip.

girl running tentative fingertips

down rigid torsos'.

chapped lips against those painted red:

girl kissing boys.

red lips pressed against blue;

turning purple, navy; kaleidoscopic:

girl kissing girls.

girl loving boys;

girl loving girls.

girl hating labels; hating boxes

but girl loving; always loving.

girl kissing girls; kissing boys

lips against lips

tongue rolling over tongue

heart against beating heart

skin on skin

hand on neck,

on cheek,

on lower back.

girl kissing. just kissing.

# THE CRITERIA BY WHICH MY MOTHER SELECTS A FATHER FOR HER CHILD

>>>>> *NICOLE LOURETTE*

He has to be a white man,  
under six feet  
mid-forties  
intelligent  
a George Clooney chin  
no food allergies  
a taste for jazz music  
double-jointed  
the right kind of white,  
not too pasty  
or easily burned by the sun.  
An Italian would be nice.

The child is to be made  
in a plastic tube,  
or is it a Petri dish?

She enjoys checking the boxes,  
choosing the right ingredients.

Tells herself  
he will grow to love it.

# ST. ANTHONY'S RELIQUARY

>>>>> **NICOLE LOURETTE**

There are yellow roses at Mary's feet  
and two fingers missing from her right hand.  
She looks fragile, but the other at the pulpit  
looks more like a harlot. Jimi Hendrix would enjoy  
her company as he sings *Mary,*  
*Mary, Mary.* Would he be allowed  
in this place? The secret cast of his penis  
on full display at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.  
The tooth of a saint is tagged with my name.  
I place pink roses at Mary's feet, consider lighting  
a candle with the suggested three dollar donation.  
I have only two in my pocket. My period  
should begin today, but I haven't kept track.  
All these crying women make me want to pray.

# LITTER ON THE STREETS OF LAS VEGAS

>>>>> *NICOLE LOURETTE*

The bare-breasted nun prays  
in front of children  
as their parents snap photos of anything but her body.  
She is not the memory they want of this place.  
Her habit hangs far below  
her puckered lips,  
and for \$45, she'll show you what spring is like on Jupiter.

The moon over the Bellagio  
is Frank Sinatra's ghost,  
still a source of entertainment,  
his voice in the feathered hips  
of showgirls on the strip.

Another business card flicks,  
ladies with diamond nipples  
and apathy in their eyes  
hang from chandeliers,  
their paper portraits  
trampled and nameless  
on the streets of Las Vegas.  
How quick is a quick fuck?

\$35 special from Mindy  
\$50 off Candy

ΣΙΟΥ ΟΤΙ ΝΑΤΑΛΙΕ.

In other words,  
a kiss for a dollar,  
a hand job for 35,  
a trip to the moon and back, complete  
with an all you can eat buffet.

In Caesar's Palace  
they have clouds made of marble,  
and dragons in the ballrooms  
where dead celebrities play the piano all night.

# GAPS

>>>>> **ALEX LENKEI**

To be a construction of signs  
of sighs,  
remembering memories of encounters  
that were dreams—  
meeting-places in the dark.

The world's fog is my fog.  
Its limits are my limits.

How do we love the gaps between us,  
the daring—radical—difficult—  
infinite distance apart?

To a dusty shelf we aspire,  
to orbit each other's solitude,  
as satellites bound by gravity.

Not *togetherness*  
but *becoming together*,  
side-by-side,  
spinning and loving the gaps  
the same way we love  
the space between our fingers.

# FROM KIERKEGAARD TO REGINE

>>>>> *ALEX LENKEI*

Darling, dearest, dead,  
Sovereign queen of my heart:

You're the sunset in a cup,  
you're the ink bleeding into my marginalia  
of Aristotle, Kant, and Luther,  
and in the candlelight alone  
your face shines ever new  
across the gradient of my half-worn pages.

Your grace concentrates on your mouth,  
pooling into the upper curve of your upper lip,  
and my lips, spilling at the want of you,  
hands cupped, brimming with the thought of you,  
fumbling at the skin of you.

O Regina, I forget my god in the sight of you.  
I worship your hips and knees.

But the essence-thought of you is touched and tainted  
by the queerness of my heart,  
by a strange and brooding melancholy  
or despair of doubt.

O Regina, sovereign queen of my heart,  
I brought you out into a raging sea

with hands shaking and lips spurt open  
and swallowed you whole into me.

# SHARPIE ARTWORK

>>>> AMIRA SIMON



# WHO WE ARE

**INARA LALANI** is a sixteen y/o that is buried beneath her words that are scattered across the world with the turbulence of airplane flights. She writes on Tumblr here ([unlavishly.tumblr.com](http://unlavishly.tumblr.com)) and here ([inksoldiers.tumblr.com](http://inksoldiers.tumblr.com)).

**ELIZABETH TOBIN** lives in Medford, Massachusetts. She is a firm believer that experience is content and writes with her voice. She enjoys blogging about street style and the importance of language as a matter of character. She hopes to move any direction but northeast.  
[www.thestyleunderdog.com](http://www.thestyleunderdog.com)

**MEGGIE ROYER** is a writer and photographer from the Midwest who is currently majoring in Psychology at Macalester College. Her poems have previously appeared in Words Dance Magazine, The Harpoon Review, Melancholy Hyperbole, and more. She has won national medals for her poetry and a writing portfolio in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, and was the Macalester Honorable Mention recipient of the 2015 Academy of American Poets Student Poetry Prize. [www.writingsforwinter.tumblr.com](http://www.writingsforwinter.tumblr.com)

**NEOBIE GONZALEZ** is uncomfortable. She lives in Manila, Philippines, co-edits PLURAL Journal ([pluralprosejournal.com](http://pluralprosejournal.com)), and blogs at [neobiegonzalez.wordpress.com](http://neobiegonzalez.wordpress.com).

**SARAH FRANCOIS** is an MFA candidate at LIU Brooklyn. She resides in Brooklyn. She has poetry published in Poetic Diversity, Downtown Brooklyn, Brooklyn Paramount and Visceral Brooklyn. She waxes poetic at [fahimapoetry.wordpress.com](http://fahimapoetry.wordpress.com) and on Twitter @fahimapoetry

**MAIA IRWIN** is a bisexual 16-year-old girl in Hilo, Hawaii who currently wants to study sociology.

**NEGESTI KAUDO** is a born and raised midwesterner who writes (almost) too honest nonfiction to wrap her head around life. As a twenty-one year old and recent college graduate, she finds "adulthood" essentially means finding a good balance of frozen margaritas and stress. Currently, she's all about getting it wrong while trying to get it "right" because either way, she's got a story.

**AYAH ELBEYALI** is a young weaver of words living on the East Coast of the United States. She is a student studying political science, philosophy, and creative writing, with a fondness for Russian novels. She is a feminist, woman of color, woman of steel. She enjoys good coffee, good books, and better company. You can read her work at: <http://steelstories.tumblr.com/> and find her on twitter: <https://twitter.com/ayahbeyali>.

**OLIVIA LADUN** lives in Georgia, USA. She is queer, biracial, and seventeen years old, and she spends her time acting profounder than she really is.

**MICHAEL PRIHODA** was born in the Midwest. He is still there. He is the founding editor of *After the Pause* literary magazine and he spends a lot of time watching *Modern Family* when he should be writing. He tweets @michaelprihoda and blogs at [michaelprihoda.wordpress.com](http://michaelprihoda.wordpress.com).

**YSIDRO XYLANDER** is a queer 23-year-old living in the shadow of the Great Smoky Mountains. They love drawing, writing, taking art photos, making notebooks and filling them up, and humming tunes while cooking. Prefers no pronoun in particular. Art and poetry at [ysidroxx.tumblr.com](http://ysidroxx.tumblr.com), [twitter.com/YsidroXX](https://twitter.com/YsidroXX), and [medium.com/@YsidroXX](http://medium.com/@YsidroXX)

**BECKY YEKER** is a college student at DePaul University in Chicago. She's double majoring in Media & Cinema Studies and Public Relations with a minor in Creative Writing. She runs an art-based online magazine called *Hooligan Mag* and gets way too excited about graphic novels, records, and shows. You can find her at <http://beckyyeker.blogspot.com/> ; <http://www.hooligansurvival.com/> ; and <https://twitter.com/hiiimbecky> .

**KAITLYN CROW** is a seventeen-year-old queer poet from Northern Virginia. She is a survivor of bipolar disorder and has been writing ever since she realized that the words flowed better if she picked up a pen and put them on paper first.

**NAOMI LANGER** (she/her/hers) is an 18 year old who hails from MD right outside of DC and currently attends OC (Oberlin College). She likes talking and writing about sex and teenagerhood, and consuming mass amounts of chocolate. She is working on many things, including herself.

**JEMMA HOOLAHAN**, living in London. She likes feminism, Tumblr, poetry and English literature in general, identifies as bisexual. Occasionally found on [heartsexplode.tumblr.com](http://heartsexplode.tumblr.com)

**NICOLE LOURETTE** is a recent graduate of Chatham University's MFA program and lives in Pittsburgh, PA. She is a 24-year-old biracial woman of color. She is on Twitter, @nlourette

**ALEX LENKEI** is a Literature major at American University in Washington, D.C. His work has appeared in *Vine Leaves Literary Journal* and *Sun & Sandstone*. As a writer, he is interested in the intersection between literature and science, including themes of gravity, astronomy, chaos theory, and biology into his writing. He aims to examine the gaps in the human condition and whether we can genuinely contact each other. He writes at [typewriterdaily.tumblr.com](http://typewriterdaily.tumblr.com).

**AMIRA SIMON** is a seventeen-year-old girl trying to understand how life works. She suffers from Chronic Lyme Disease and is in Recovery. Amira loves rock music and reminiscing the 1980's. She loves to write and hopes to spread awareness about the struggles of being a teenager and dealing with a chronic illness. Amira Simon was born on April, 13, 1998 in Philadelphia, PA. Her art is a jumble of patterns done by sharpies.