

Writer *to* Writer

a journal by writers, for writers



ISSUE 6

SPRING 2022

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Letter from the Editor

Dear reader,

Welcome to the sixth edition of *Writer to Writer*, a literary journal run by students in collaboration with the Sweetland Center for Writing. We aim to foster interdisciplinary creativity across a variety of modes, mediums, and genres and encourage conversation and growth among our community of writers.

In our fourth year as an organization, we were faced with a transition back to in-person classes, rigorous schedules—but maintained our operations remotely. Since moving to a completely digital space, we've had to rethink how to connect as a community of writers without the ability to gather in person. Fortunately, *Writer to Writer* is full of motivated individuals who rose to the challenge and convened regularly over Zoom to share ideas, review submissions, and work together to produce the latest edition of our publication.

Within this issue, you will find pieces that all touch upon common themes of nature and life, particularly with the beginning and end of life. From existential poetry to romantic partners having fallen apart, we hope that you see yourself in this wonderful microcosm of writing, and that you enjoy the stories our writers have chosen to share.

As always, our journal strives to celebrate multimodality in writing as well as the individual writing process for different writers with our "Spotlight Interviews." You can find snippets of these interviews with featured writers in the publication itself, and you can hear them in full by scanning the supplemental QR code to listen on our website.

Lastly, this journal would not be possible without the generous support of the Sweetland Center for Writing, especially from our wonderful faculty advisor Dr. Shelley Manis. Her thoughtful guidance and enthusiasm have been absolutely essential in producing our journal and continuing our growth as a young publication. To Shelley, the Sweetland Center for Writing, the contributing writers, and to you, reader, we are so grateful. Thank you for all your support.

Sincerely,

Madi Altman
Editor-in-Chief
Writer to Writer

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bottom dweller

by Madelyn Chau

I used to imagine flying
Now I just settle
at the bottom
like a sack of sand thrown in a
once-great lake
Sediment and bones,
fossilizing
under December's icy cap
I can hear pins
drop
from the clouds
in the shape of crystalized perspiration
When April comes, tell me
Have you ever
heard songs
drift up
from the underground?
Can you hear a voice
gargle beneath the rushing river?

June Bug

by Madelyn Chau

May June bring you what you always wanted:
Smooth stones, rolling waves, "*Remember when we
were their age?*" wheelbarrows overflowing with
wildflowers and ladybugs. Someone to push you on
the swing, "*I wish I could.*" a crown of dandelions
sitting proud in your hair, fireflies "*Like she used to
say, smaller than—*" to catch and set free. Eventually
you will want "*A wish in a well.*" a field large enough
to build a home, branches strong enough "*So you do?*"
to shoulder a treehouse and the grip of your children's curled toes.
Somewhere safe, and warm. "*I wish she were here.*" A home.

Pining

by Madelyn Chau

I walked on treetops and trinkets,
pine needles kissing my heels
I still remember the smell of the pine trees

I ran on sunbathed grass in my grass-stained jeans,
a ball at my feet and hands dipped in the breeze
I still remember the smell of those fields

I know salamanders grow back their limbs
and trees part ways with their leaves,
but I cannot bear to part with you for even a season
I cannot remember why it ended, I cannot think of any good reason

But if you asked me
to find the pine needle in the haystack,
I could do it

The Healing Power of a Hummingbird

by Sydney Moore

An iridescent hummingbird the size of a fist swings from a lamp
Its post by the window crafts refractions of all shades: blue, purple,
yellow, and green It was brought to this location during a recovery
period

One in which a mom stuffed a car full of hurriedly-packed belongings
and canceled all future plans

She scurried across the state to play nurse to her daughter

Who had just been diagnosed with a concussion

From an excessive night of drinking and an unfortunate run-in with an
unusually aggressive speaker

The hummingbird on the lamp went unnoticed at first

As the daughter slept in silence

In a man-made cave void of those things that we usually crave

Light, warmth, pleasurable sounds

Her mother wanted to stay near

But a dim light from the closet

By which she read a dry book borrowed from her daughter's roommate
with squinted eyes

And a space heater that gave out on the second day

Was all the separated the mother from an unbearable existence

The mother quickly realized that caring for those who don't really want
to interact was no fun at all

Any attempt at interaction was met with a grunt or a grumpy request

However, by the third day, hope spread its wings

The daughter's voice took flight again

As she began to speak with a bit of vigor

Her eyes still swam like dead fish, lashes fluttering, but her lips
attempted a strained smile

At last, the daughter acknowledged the hummingbird on the lamp
A lamp with a fluorescent pink bulb that looked suspiciously close to
that of a grow light
This was merely a coincidence
What mattered more was that the light reminded the mother of an old
strand of pink string lights
That the mother used to string up when the daughter was young
Providing a reminder of the beauty in this world whenever sickness
struck

But back to the hummingbird,
To truly appreciate them, you must understand their complexity
They weigh less than a nickel but can travel up to 500 miles at a time,
preferably alone
They can't walk on their tiny legs, but they are the only birds who can
fly backwards
The world's smallest bird
So much more than meets the eye
A subtle resiliency resides in their dainty appearance
And most days I find that I feel like a hummingbird

The classic Ruby Throated is my favorite
Perhaps because it was my grandma's favorite
When she died I was only waist-tall and unprepared for how hard grief
hits you in the chest
Grandma was the type of person that lit up a room
Especially when her grandkids were around
She called me pumpkin
She used to drive three hours each way just to visit whenever the
distance became unbearable

Except these aren't my memories
Only recollections of those events recounted to me by my mom
With a wistful expression
But what I do have is the healing power of a hummingbird

After grandma passed, we all began to believe

That if you saw a hummingbird it was grandma's way of saying 'hi'
That's why when my roommate expressed concern
About me not having anything to hang on my walls
When I gave back the poster that was actually hers (which I had pretended not to know)
I told her not to worry

I had my Grandma's memorial poster stuck in the frame behind it this whole time

Drafted years ago by my uncle with care, whose expertise lies in graphic design

It features a humminbird descending from backlit clouds, outlined in deep red

Which strikes a stark contrast against the comparatively muted background

Now the bird perches on my wall
Hovering behind my head as I work
Perpetually glancing over my shoulder
Keeping watch on its granddaughter

Writer Spotlight: Sydney Moore

In each issue, Writer to Writer selects a few submitting writers to interview, encouraging them to reflect on their piece, writing process, and the medium as a whole. Here, our Submissions Chair Krystal Koski sat down with writer Sydney Moore to talk about her piece, *The Healing Power of a Hummingbird*.

KK: What first inspired you to write “The Healing Power of a Hummingbird?”

SM: Writing has kind of always been my way to process things — ever since I was young — and I think that was encouraged because my mom comes from a very artistic background, so I did a lot of that growing up. So, as you see in the beginning of the piece, I actually got a concussion and wasn’t doing so well at the beginning of the semester – I was even freaking out about not being able to pass classes. I had a couple of quiet days to myself and my mom had brought me this little hummingbird. I looked at it and started thinking about what that meant, and as I wrote the piece I just started thinking about what hummingbirds have meant to me throughout [my life] and all these connections popped up that way.

KK: During the writing process, how many changes did you make throughout? How different does the piece look now compared to when you started?

SM: My writing process is usually very stream-of-consciousness; I just go and feel when a theme starts to arrive. That’s what was happening with the hummingbird – all these memories just started popping up. I feel like I moved some of the stanzas around, but day of is when I did a lot of finding the exact words that I like. It hasn’t changed that much, just some tweaking to make it more understandable.

listen to the full interview on our website!



the crack

by Krystal Koski

There is a crack in the wall. It's small and thin, but exposes the innards of the creaky century-old home that have long been concealed. There isn't much to see; it's dark but not damp, and the uneven edges of the sliver peeled away reveal the particles of dust that have gathered in the space behind. As unreachable as it is, it's still visible.

Nothing lives in there -- no mice, no squirrels, no raccoons -- nothing but the organs of the old house. It's just the darkness. Over time, I presume, the crack will grow. It will slowly stretch out and split wall from wall, all to expose nothing but a dry, dusty, darkness. It's funny how that works. How things will expose themselves without wanting to, with seemingly nothing in it for themselves.

I presume this rickety old house wants to hide its ugly insides from the outside world. One glance inside and someone will call the landlord and mutter with dissatisfaction as they see the insides of the house they have to tear down for being so ugly and deteriorated. Everything depreciates with time.

I'm not going to call the landlord about the crack in the wall. I don't want to be the person responsible for showing the world the insides of a place that doesn't want to be seen. It's not my place. Walls have kept my secrets for me, so I will keep theirs for them, in return.

The walls, even the ones with the cracks, didn't whisper to you when they observed me. They bit their tongue – I wonder why that is. The walls are always in my ears, speaking slowly in their creaky whisper about the movements around the corner. They urge me to stay confined within them, for they can keep me safe. I complied, I was too terrified to encounter the slinking shadows that dance ever see me, no one can ever see my body. The walls protect me.

Sometimes, beyond the decrepit, disgusting darkness, I can see rooms. I can't keep count of how many rooms hide behind the crumbling drywall. There, ghastly children laugh and dance through beams of sunlight. How does the sunlight get there? There are no windows; no light can reach the damp corners of this dying building. I don't like to question it too much, the walls keep my secrets for me, anyways.

I am alone, the walls see the unfiltered versions of myself that intimidated the shadows outside. They pitifully watch me move through the hallways during the day, trying to find something to occupy myself. I've run out of things to do, things are long gone. I am decaying alongside the house.

Time ticks on, the crack grows bigger, my skin droops towards the ground. The rooms beyond the crack beckoned as they observed me, encouraging me to go where nobody will see me. The walls will hide me, and there is nothing left.

every atom glows

by Kaitlyn Fox

It was snowing in western Michigan the night the Weavers' house burned down. As the local paper reported in its account the next morning, Madeline, the youngest of the three Weaver children, told her mother she smelled smoke in her bedroom. Within five minutes the house had erupted into flames.

I was asleep when it happened.

As my mother poured me a bowl of cereal the next morning, she told me the whole story of what happened at the end of our cul-de-sac: Mrs. Weaver had gathered all the children and ran outside as the roof tumbled down. The fire trucks showed up shortly thereafter, and Mrs. Weaver and the kids sat on the other side of the road shivering in the cold as their beloved home at the end of Pond Creek Court fell into a heap of ashes.

Once the fire was put out, Mrs. Weaver looked down at her hands and realized her wedding ring was missing. She had taken it off while washing dishes, and in her scramble to escape the flames that were devouring her home, forgot to grab the precious gold band her husband had bought over fifteen years ago.

When I asked my mother about Mr. Weaver, her eyes grew dark and she said that he wasn't home when it happened.

"Does he know that his house burned down?" I asked. She shook her head.

Later that week, in science class, we learned about atoms, the smallest particles in the universe. Mr. Bradley, our seventh grade honors teacher, held up a metal cube and told us that it was packed with trillions of little atoms locked together to make a solid. He then lifted a glass of water and swirled it around, saying there were also trillions of atoms slowly sliding past each other to create what we know as a liquid.

At the end of his lesson, he turned off the lights and lit a match, waving the small flame in front of the class and explaining how,

like the cube and the glass of water, fire is also made up of tiny atoms that contain so much energy they glow.

I looked over at Sara Weaver, the eldest of the Weaver children. We never spoke to each other much despite living just two houses away, but I still felt like I knew enough about her just from sharing glances at the bus stop every morning. I saw the reflection of the flame in her brown eyes. Was that what her eyes reflected when she watched her home burn to the ground? Did she imagine every atom in her universe becoming so strong that they exploded into flames?

A month later, when I stepped off the bus, I walked down the street and saw the empty lot where the Weavers' house had been. The sun was already setting behind the other homes in the cul-de-sac as I slowly made my way to the end of the street, remembering the snow-dusted porch that had been lit with Christmas lights just a few weeks earlier. As I gazed across the dirty snow, I caught a glimpse of the silhouette of a woman kneeling where the house used to be. I stopped at the edge of the driveway, realizing it was Mrs. Weaver, grabbing at the darkened snow with her bare hands. Icy tears streamed down her face as she helplessly ran handfuls of snow through her naked fingers.

Behind me, there was the sound of tires rolling across salt-dusted gravel. I turned and saw Mr. Weaver pulling up in his truck, his sunglasses on and the sleeves of his shirt rolled to his elbows.

When she heard the car approaching, Mrs. Weaver looked up. Then, realizing who it was, she turned away, towards the orange light in the sky, knowing the atoms she was looking for were already swimming somewhere else within the universe, glowing.

A Conversation with Death

by Elizabeth Schriner

The front door closes with a *wumpth*. A tall man, her father, stands at the entrance.

"How's my girl doing?" he asks. He shuts the door and hangs up his jacket, dropping his car keys in a small silver dish at the entrance. He walks over to Bailey and plants a kiss on her forehead. "What are you watching?" he asks.

"Scooby-Doo," she replies.

"Ah, a classic."

Bailey looks up at him. He has a cheeky grin on his face shadowed with black stubble, hinting that he's still the goofy, charismatic father she has always known him to be. At the same time, the bags under his brown eyes take her by surprise. On the back of his head, tufts of gray hair stick out in several directions. How many sleepless nights has he had? When did her father grow so old?

"Sorry I had to leave you alone for a minute, pumpkin," he says. "This was one appointment your mom and I had to deal with alone. You understand, right?"

Bailey opens her mouth but doesn't say anything. She turns back toward the television and hears him move towards the kitchen.

"I see you ate the sandwich I left for you. Are you still hungry? Do you want something else to eat?"

"No, thank you." She hears the faucet run and the clanking of dishes. Her father's footsteps grow closer until he is standing next to the couch.

"Alright. I'm going to lie down for a bit. Come get me if you need anything."

He starts toward the hallway. Bailey swallows and feels a lump in her throat. "Dad?"

Her father pops his head around the corner. "Yes, Bailey?"

"Do you think everything will be okay?"

He steps back into the living room and takes a seat next to her

on the couch, sinking into the gray upholstery. He sighs and rests his elbows on his knees. "Do you know why your mother and I call you our miracle?"

"I was small when I was born."

"Yes. When you were born ten years ago, you came very early, which meant you had to stay in the hospital for a longer period of time. Your mother, too, was in the hospital with something called severe preeclampsia. I was worried sick about you two."

Her father hangs his head and hunches over. Tears gather in the corners of his eyes before he whisks them away with his fingertips.

"Deep down I knew you two would be okay, but I was still scared. I want you to know it's okay to be scared sometimes. No one is immune to fear, not even grown-ups."

He glances to his right, looking Bailey in the eye. She is staring back at him with wide eyes, hanging onto his every word. A slight, asymmetric smile spread across her father's face, warm yet with a hint of sadness pasted over the top. He sighs and leans back flat against the couch.

"But you know what? You're a fighter. And you get it from your mom."

Bailey smiles, diving into her father's arms. For a moment, she melts. Everything will be okay, just like her father said. At the same time, it's okay to *not* be okay. When she lets go, she takes a deep breath and fixes her ponytail. Her father surveys her, probably trying to figure out whether or not she's okay.

"I know this is a lot to take in. Are you doing okay? Want to watch a movie or something?" He looks at her with wide eyes, and her gaze shifts to the bags underneath them. She could go for a movie, but the fact that her father said he needed a nap means he really needs a nap. The last thing she wants is another sick parent. Besides, she'll still be sitting on the couch when he wakes up.

"I'm okay, Daddy. Go take your nap."

"You sure?"

"Mhmm."

"Okay, sweetie. Wake me up if you need anything." He kisses her on the forehead and leaves Bailey alone on the couch.

She picks up the remote and clicks play, starting another episode of Scooby-Doo.

Music plays, and Bailey watches the cartoon gang run away from a floating phantom. The great dane and his companions slip into a room, catching their breath. Fred, the leader of the Scooby gang, tells the group about his next plan. Listening to him, Bailey's eyelids begin to feel heavy. She can feel her heart slowing and there's a sensation of floating, falling, before she again sees the phantom from Scooby-Doo. He vanishes and Fred's face appears, gradually morphing into her father's. Her mind wanders to what he had said today, but before she can finish the thought, the door closes behind her and she gives a sudden jolt.

"Mind if I join you?" a voice asks.

Bailey turns and sees her old friend, Grim, at the door.

"Oh. Hi, GR. I haven't seen you in a bit."

"Sorry, I've been a little busy recently. Do yourself a favor and don't get involved in war or politics, kid." He hangs up his long black coat, revealing a similar inky-colored cloak underneath. "What are you up to?" he asks.

"Watching Scooby-Doo."

Grim sighs and sits beside her on the couch. The two sit in silence, watching the Scooby gang congregate outside an old castle.

"How about ice cream?" Grim asks.

"Right now?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know if my dad would like that."

"He doesn't need to know."

"You never change, GR. You're always trying to get me into trouble."

"Live a little. I, of all spirits, know that."

"I guess." Bailey sighs, and the two watch the television again. She chuckles as Scooby appears in a ghost costume, momentarily confusing the phantom that was chasing him. She looks over at Grim, a puzzled expression on his face.

"What's this show's appeal?" he asks. His skeletal face cocks to the side in curiosity, his glowing red eyes focused on the bright television screen.

“Huh?”

“Appeal. As in, why do you like it?”

“Oh.” Bailey ponders for a moment. “Well, there’s a mystery, and sometimes things are scary, but the ghosts end up being fake. The good guys always win, and you know there’s going to be a happy ending. Plus, Scooby and the gang are pretty funny.”

On the screen, Scooby scarfs down a tray of desserts. Bailey snickers. She can always count on him to make her feel better. The same could be said for a lot of children’s shows, really. Maybe she’s starting to get a little old for them, but she likes letting the colorful images and loud noises wash over her. She can take them at face value, even when they don’t make sense. She doesn’t need to judge or think about what’s strange.

“I’d have a dog like Scooby, but Mom’s allergic.”

“Maybe you can have one someday.”

“I might soon.” Bailey frowns, adjusting in her seat. From the corner of her eye, she spots Grim watching her. But he doesn’t push it. He never has to. He just waits.

Bailey suddenly turns toward him with wide eyes. “GR, why didn’t you take me home with you? You know, when I was a baby?”

“I didn’t think you were ready.”

“How do you know when someone is ready?”

“Well, kiddo, that depends. Sometimes a person may not be. And when you love someone, which humans often do, no amount of time together feels enough.”

Bailey twists back to the television screen. She’s not quite sure whether he answered her question. Her father always answers her questions like that, too. The image of his tired, haggard face pops into Bailey’s head. She tries to imagine her mother, but it hurts too much to think about her. She wishes she could go with her father to visit her, but at the same time, she’s not sure that she would like what she would see. Does that mean her mother is ready?

“Hey GR?” Bailey asks. “What’s going to happen?”

“That’s up to her.”

Bailey’s eyes shift to the side and grow wet. She can hear the television playing, but she’s not paying attention to it anymore.

“Oh, kiddo. I’m sorry,” Grim says.

Bailey hurries to scrub the tears from her face, her cheeks hot from embarrassment. She knows that crying leads to sympathy, and sympathy leads to more crying. Truthfully, she's tired of both of them. She's tired of strangers talking to her as though they understand what she is feeling.

Bailey glances down at the pink swirls on her socks before turning back toward Grim. She half-expects him to say something else and add to the never-ending supply of sympathetic yet disparaging comments she's heard. But he doesn't say anything. He just listens and waits.

Grim understands, and he's a friend.

"Hey GR?"

"Yeah, kiddo?"

"I'll take some of that ice cream now."

For (My) Davey

by Grace Hovda

Free Bird – Lynyrd Skynyrd

When you hear Free Bird, think of (my) Davey –

David Richard Hovda, 54 of Three Rivers, MI

– who found eternal peace on November 30, 2021.

He marched to his own beat. A lover. A rebel. An artist. A free spirit. A lost soul.

A (my) Father.

Always accompanied by a racing mind and a Marlboro.

Heart of Gold – Neil Young

His friends – his posse, his crew, his tribe – were an extension of himself.

His son inherited this trait, his daughter (I) did not.

Davey loved to help people, build for people, talk to people. He was admired for his adept craftsmanship of trades and stories. He loved to make people laugh.

Davey always believed in people.

If only he had believed in himself.

He (I) (we) deserved it.

Stealin – Uriah Heep

He (we) loved beltin' out lyrics, windows down in the red truck. His (our) favorite anthem all the way to Viva: 2 chimichangas, extra chips, queso and Budweiser.

His vices stole a lot from him (me), too.

Wasted Time – Eagles

“I know what's been on your [my] mind, your [I'm] afraid it's all been wasted time”

Davey was young, always. He (I) had dreams, fears, adventures to explore. He is free now.
Free to believe in himself (me).

“Maybe someday we will find, that it wasn’t really wasted time”

Davey (I) never gave up – he (I) won’t start now.
Believe in him (me).

Always On My Mind – Willie Nelson

When you hear *Always On My Mind*, listen for (my) Davey.

“Little things I [he] should have said and done, I [he] just never took the time”

Closer now than ever before.
He (I) can hear now.
Listen. He (I) can speak now, too.

Something Fine – Jackson Browne

So, in the morning, (I) say hello to Davey. His (my) favorite hours.
Oh, (I) recall the wonder of his (my) sober conscience. (I) take refuge in these memories.

(I) leave an extra cup out for his coffee; an extra lighter for his smoke.

Old Man – Neil Young

He is survived by his children.

Jacob Thomas

Grace Mary Catherine

Hovda

His name, his legacy is within them: unquiet minds, thirsty spirits, early birds.

May his children (I) find peace in the sweet by-and-by, solace in a salt & pepper pizza
Until they (we) meet

Again.

Writer Spotlight: Grace Hovda

In each issue, *Writer to Writer* selects a few submitting writers to interview, encouraging them to reflect on their piece, writing process, and the medium as a whole. Here, our Editor in Chief Madi Altman sat down with writer Grace Hovda to talk about her piece, *For (My) Davey*.

MA: What first inspired you to write “For (My) Davey”?

GH: My origin piece was a note that I found in the Notes on my phone. It was really small and I had been the only audience of it, but it had been a time that I was with my father. My father passed away last semester, November 30th, and it had been a really overwhelming experience, especially during school. Regardless, I saw this as an opportunity to use writing as more of a creative outlet for some of my grief. I originally wrote his obituary and I realized that I didn’t really identify with it; it was more influenced by the traditional conventions of an obituary. So, I decided to experiment with something of an obituary playlist mash-up that represented the man I knew.

MA: What draws you to the act of writing in general?

GH: I think I’ve always considered myself a writer, even if I’ve largely been my own audience. In the *Minor*, this was my first experiment and I’ve actually decided to fully realize a collection of flash nonfiction. So I feel like I’m in the early stages of using writing in a different way and kind of breaking through the fear of sharing my writing with others. While it’s always been a staple for self-reflection, writing has always been a really prominent part of my personal life, so I think embracing an audience is really exciting.

listen to the full interview on our website!



Sydney

by Audrey Tang

When I was six, I wanted to be called Momo. I don't remember how I came up with that name, but I wanted it—the way the o's rounded out my mouth when I spoke it, the short burst of syllables—I wanted to answer to morning roll calls with that name, I wanted to write out the four letters in all caps on the top right corner of my worksheets.

I think my obsession back then came from a stubborn dislike for my own name, Xīn Ní. I have an English name, the one that is printed on my passport, that is so pretty that my relatives all fought to name their own beautiful daughters with it. I have a handful of cousins tell me that my name would've been theirs if my mom did not give birth to me first. But my Chinese name could not match its beauty. It would've been nice if I had the character lì, which means delicate beauty, or the character qí, beautiful jade. Instead, my name meant “glad girl”—and not even “girl” in a pretty and delicate manner, but “girl” in countryside vernacular.

When I introduce myself, I would say “xīn as in gratified, ní with the girl particle.” The characters were so simple and plain compared to my brother's: shùn as in the legendary ancient king and wén as in literature and intelligence. The characters were so complicated that he could not write his name himself. After writing the little cap on the shùn, he would stare blankly at the paper, wondering what stroke came next. When you say his name, there was a machismo about it, like a handsome prairie horse with a striking brown coat, and it rolled off the tongue like pearls. My name felt small and stiff, like a schoolgirl with pigtailed who spoke too quietly.

Both of our names were given to us by my grandma, who used to be a teacher in China before she gave birth to my father and moved to America. My parents, who could barely read an advertising pamphlet in Chinese, gave her the important task of naming their children, hoping to make us a little more Chinese than what's already flowing in our veins. But she named us the American way—she named us by how she imagined us to be when we grew up, my brother being handsome and

intelligent, and me being a dainty country girl. It was almost ironic how my brother and I turned out, almost as if we heard our names in the womb and fostered a deep angry spite as we grew up being complete opposites.

I grew up hearing the stories of my friends who were named the Chinese way. Vivian from elementary school was named Jiā Róu because her mom was named Jiā Chéng, and her grandma was named Jiā Xīng. They all shared the same character, jiā for excellent. It was like a piece of their womanhood—regardless of who they marry and how their families will change, they can always trace their lineage back to each other. Then there were the twins, Alex and Alice from summer camp, who looked nothing alike. But they were named Hán Qí and Hán Yùn, hán meaning that they are always together. I loved these little stories. Their names were so much bigger than who they are and who they will be; it's who they love, it's a compass that always led them back home.

But I was named the American way, where my name was only as big as the person who held it.

There was not much I could do about it, other than my brief rebellious phase at six years old with “Momo,” and my family only calls me by my English name now. Except for my grandma, who could not pronounce my English name, who would struggle with the odd combinations of vowels you never see together in Chinese. Instead, she would call me by my middle name, Sydney, but she pronounced it in a way an American would pronounce Xīn Ní, without the inflections. During dinner, she would say “*Shih-nee ah*, eat more” or when she's reading the paper, she would say “*Shih-nee*, come look,” and show me some article about the best universities ranked by Forbes.

Sydney, or *Shih-nee*, soon caught on with my relatives back in China, who also struggled with my English name. When we visited the countryside on New Years, they would call my brother's English name with ease, “Lionel ah, you grew so tall!” and then look at me oddly—at this moment I could see their eyebrows furrow and the synapses in their brains firing, trying to figure out how the vowels in my name fit—before smiling, “*Shih-nee ah*! You're a grown woman now.”

Around the New Years dinner table, the aunts and uncles gathered around wide platters of steamed fish and chicken, chatter in

Shih-nee-esque Chinglish ensued. Words and characters swished around their mouths like New Years wine, getting mixed and jumbled into half-words with exaggerated inflections or pared-down Chinese with no accents. They asked, “*Shih-nee*, how’s school?” and “*Shih-nee*, would you like some more soup?” and “*Shih-nee*, has your brother been annoying you?”

Sydney is how I imagine being named the Chinese way feels like—a word that fits into my grandmother’s tongue like cotton, that is said comfortably between mouthfuls of chicken and onions, a language that is given and a language that gives. Sydney does not mean “glad girl” in a country vernacular, nor is it the name I use just for myself or stole from my cousins who were born too late. It is not my name at all. I never used it; I never ask teachers who take roll on the first day of school to call me by Sydney.

Sydney is the name that guides my American name, contorted by American vowels, back home to the country village where my grandmother was born. It is a gift from my parents to the rice paddies and ceramic tiled roofs they see once a year at New Years. Sydney is fleeting and constant. A worn poster fluttering in the wind, a secret whispered under the covers. Red and warm.

The Five Love Languages

by Madi Altman

1. Physical Touch

This one is your favorite.
When I show up to your house,
I lay my weight on yours,
my head going in the crook of your neck.
I hold you tightly in my arms,
gently running my fingers along your back,
just the way you like.
My hands linger when we're out in public,
showing our friends that you're mine.
*You get up after we have sex,
checking to see if you have any notifications.
Turning away from me when we sleep
is your favorite because
you can only sleep
when you don't touch me.*

2. Receiving Gifts

Neither of us enjoy receiving gifts,
but I love giving them.
I sent you a playlist
filled with songs that reminded me of you
on Christmas Eve.
I made you a bracelet that matched mine,
so that I'm always with you.
*I found your bracelet
on your bathroom counter,
on your bedroom floor.
It was missing
the last time I was there.
I don't expect any gifts from you
and probably never will.*

3. Acts of Service

I try my best to help you.
When you have an exam,
I tell you that you'll kill it.
You rant to me about housing,
complaining that no one cares but you,
so I remind you that it will be okay.
I offer to help in any way.
You stopped helping me.
Your response when I had a panic attack
and asked to come over was
"if you want to."
My anxious moods mean nothing.

4. Quality Time

I love spending time with you.
I know you enjoy
fun, adventurous dates,
so I try to plan for that.
However we don't need
anything wild to have a good time.
I'd be pleased watching Netflix
all day with you.
You only call me over at night,
just wanting to have sex.
I have to leave as soon as we wake up.
Your responses lack when
I ask you to come over.
You stopped asking me on dates,
ice skating never brought up again.

5. Words of Affirmation

This one is my favorite.
I reassure you that
you are meant for me.
I find you attractive.
You are the main love interest

in my story,
not some lousy side character.
I make sure to tell you this frequently,
so you never question it.
If I could tell you
“I love you” now,
I would.
You know I need this.
You stopped assuring me.
Just call me “stupid.”
Say I’m just there to fuck.
I know you’re kidding,
but it doesn’t make me feel good.
I need to know that
you still want me
for more than my physical self.

Folly

by Maya Sistruck

Valentine King dragged the heels of her Chucks against the pavement, squeezing the glossy red handbrakes of the bike as it squealed to a halt. Her heavy backpack had slunk off from one shoulder, full of campaign pamphlets that were crumpled and bent in an array of angles. Sweat collected where her box braids met her forehead and she shielded her eyes from the hazy afternoon sunlight to get a better look at the magnificent, tanned beach house. *Last stop*, she thought, *and then it's done. I should be getting paid for this shit.*

East Erie Avenue was one of the nicer neighborhoods in Folly Beach, which wasn't saying much. It was slightly less cluttered than the rest of the packed South Carolina shoreline; this particular street boasting fresh green lawns and newly painted docks that extended far out into the marsh. Valentine had spent all day traversing the rugged roads on her bike, flashing an artificial grin, handing out colorful pamphlets that would likely be thrown in the trash as soon as she closed the door. It was all a show: recite the script, do a dance—known as, *being likeable*—and make your exit. In this case, Valentine was a professional.

This was the last beach house on the street, a tall white gate separating its lavish porch of purple azaleas and palms from the rest of the world. It was remarkably well kept in the dizzying swell of summer, and Valentine couldn't help but marvel at the way the sun bathed the mansion in gold—God's gift for a long day's work—as she lowered her kick-stand. Stonework the color of oatmeal was built as a grand archway over the glass doors and the various bay windows presented clean, fluttering curtains. Valentine readjusted her backpack, fishing a pamphlet from the bag's partially open zipper, and pushed past the gate.

“Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Saunders,” Valentine rehearsed on her way up the lengthy driveway to the front door, “how are you on this fine evening? Good. I am here to kindly ask for two minutes of your time in discussing Mayor Rockwell's reelection in 2021.' Wait, shit. 'In 2020...”

Her father, an enthusiastic member of the City Council, had

volunteered her for the task of campaigning around the beach. The initial excitement of summer had gone down, and Valentine's hours of relaxation were being perceived as inactive. Mr. King thought it would be a good opportunity for her to make connections before college started, though Valentine insisted that her loner older brother Davie would need them more than she. Nevertheless, *she* was the one here on East Erie Avenue delivering stupid political pamphlets and sweating her ass off.

The wooden steps creaked under Valentine's shoes as she came to the glass double-doors. Silver wind chimes jingled from the ceiling, dancing in the salty air. Valentine jabbed the doorbell with her knuckle and tied her denim jacket tighter around her waist, waiting for her grand entrance.

"Someone's at the door!" someone called from inside the house.

"Harper, I'm trying to keep this filet from burning—can you grab it?" Another woman's voice answered, farther away. *Harper?* Valentine listened intently. *These aren't the Saunders...*

"Ugh, why can't Lex do it?"

"*Harper!*" The sudden and violent outburst made Valentine flinch, crinkling the pamphlet into a fist.

A shuffle of heavy steps came down the stairs from inside. "Fine!" And then: "Bitch." A shadow swam behind the glass and one of the double doors swung open, where a tall white girl leaned halfway out in an attempt to catch herself. Startled, Valentine stepped back. The girl—Harper, she assumed—brushed back strands of her damp blonde hair; her dazzling blue eyes the only interesting feature above a dull grey tracksuit. A striped towel lay about her angular shoulders.

"Uh..." Valentine stammered, the script coming up dry in her throat. "The Saunders...?"

"Nah, they moved." Harper snapped, uninterested. She looked down at the pamphlet in Valentine's hand. "You selling something? We don't take solicitors in this neighborhood."

"No, I..." Valentine frowned, taken aback by her attitude. She closely measured this ostrich of a girl and reached an indignant point of

of authority. “Okay. You’re new here, right? This isn’t a private neighborhood.”

“So?” Harper had moved on.

Valentine bit back an equally rude response and exhaled through her nose, a tired smile forming on her wide lips. “Look, my name’s Valentine. My dad works for the city council and his boss is up for reelection so...here.”

She handed the pamphlet to Harper and it dangled lifelessly from her fingers, an imprint of a sweaty thumb creasing the lower half. Harper stared at it, scrunching the ends of her stringy hair into the towel. “We’re Republicans.”

Valentine sneered, still holding out the pamphlet. “I guess that’s why I’m here.”

“Harper, who is it?” the other woman called out from inside the house.

“Some girl!” Harper yelled back, paying no attention to how unnecessarily loud she was being. Valentine sighed, tucking the pamphlet back into her backpack as a mess of commotion unveiled itself from the back of the house.

Stumbling over, in one fuzzy slipper, came the second occupant; delicately balancing a glass of red wine in her left hand. She was an attractive middle-aged woman, dressed in a soft blue housecoat, with bouncy yellow waves that fell to her shoulders. She laughed—a flittering, bird-like laugh; a strange greeting—and practically pushed Harper back from the front door, taking in their new guest. Valentine was at a loss for words, bewildered by the odd nature of the pair.

“That is hardly some way to address our first *guest*, Harper—” The woman swatted at her daughter with her free hand, but still kept her balmy smile on Valentine. “—Why, *bello* there! I am so sorry about that. I’ve been meaning to come down to the city council and introduce myself...”

“It’s okay.” Valentine said, wiping the sweat from her brow. “I was just dropping off flyers for—” “Yes, yes!” The woman plowed through, haphazardly taking a sip of her wine. “You know what, I love talking politics. I do. Why don’t you come by sometime later and we can have a real chat? I’m sorry this wasn’t the best time, Miss...what’s

your name?”

Valentine glanced back at Harper, who was glaring at her from behind the glass of the other door. *What did I just walk into?* She cleared her throat. “Valentine, ma’am.” The woman’s face lit up like the fourth of July. “Valentine! How cute! Well, I’m Daisy Bridges! Our family just popped into town a little over a month ago. My dinner’s probably a hot mess by now, so I gotta go but...please do come by again! We don’t get visitors down here!” “Sure.” Valentine put on her best smile, vainly trying to hide her confusion over the contrasting characters of the mother and daughter. “Have a nice—” “You’re lovely, by the way.” Ms. Bridges stopped her, gesturing up and down with her wine glass. “Seriously. Strong and...healthy. Love your hair! You should meet my son Lex—he’d have a lot to learn from you; doing your work around town!”

Valentine didn’t say anything, her smile fixed. *Strong and healthy? What’s that supposed to mean?*

Ms. Bridges chirped: “Oh, I smell the filet!” Valentine did too. “I have to run! Please come back to see us. We’d love to host you.”

“Uh, yeah. Nice to—”

The door slammed shut and the wind chimes clattered against the wooden post supporting the porch. Valentine rolled her eyes, humming. Interesting. She walked back down the steps and down the long driveway, the gentle sea breeze tugging at the ends of her braids. She kicked her bike-stand up and settled in the seat, squinting against the four-o’clock sun to get another look at the fanciful beach house. Flanked on two sides by palm trees and wildflowers, the four-floor building stood tall against the watercolor sky and flat wetlands. The highest floor’s window was open, letting the wind flicker against the curtains inside.

Valentine, in a moment of spontaneous curiosity, found herself staring up at that top window. An alarming yet familiar feeling raised the hair on her arms—a feeling that someone was watching. It didn’t feel intrusive; it was just *there*. She waited, eyes trained on the window.

And there, barely—when the light caught the window just right—was a shadow of a man. It was fixed on her, unmoving; a hand

having pushed back the curtain. After a moment too long, someone yelled “Lex! Get down here!” from inside the house and the shadow dropped from view, leaving Valentine alone again. Rapt, she lifted her feet and began to pedal. She and her shiny red bike picked up speed along the avenue, leaving behind a single crumpled pamphlet.

“So the Saunders are gone.” Valentine announced casually as she hooked her elbow around a strawberry soda, using her free hands to grab an order from the bar. Her older brother Davie was waiting, straddling the seat of one of the picnic benches outside of Chico Feo, a local Caribbean joint. The moon was barely visible through the thick, green canopy of trees, fairy lights strung across their unruly branches. Although the night had cooled down, the muggy air was like molasses against Valentine’s skin. She plopped down across from Davie, sliding over a greasy helping of fried pickles. “Did you hear me?”

“Yeah...” Davie wasn’t listening, his curls wilting over his furrowed brow. His thumbs flurried over the screen of his phone, which glowed a bluish-white. “Sorry, let me finish this text...”

“Who the hell are *you* texting?” Valentine laughed, stabbing a fork into her salad. “With your antisocial ass.”

“Shut up, Val. It’s the same girl I told you about earlier.” There wasn’t too much vigor in Davie’s delivery. He slipped the phone into the pocket of his jeans.

“Wait. Your college study buddy?” Valentine stifled another laugh, waving her fork about. “Dude, this has been going on for months and it hasn’t gone anywhere!” “Well, if you could’ve let me finish, maybe it would.” He rolled up the sleeves of his floral beach shirt, revealing the only area of his mahogany skin that hadn’t touched the sun. He took a swig of his Smirnoff Ice. “Anyway, she’s in town so I might be out for a bit later this week.”

Valentine hummed in response, still amused by her brother’s mysterious antics. Davie, while very intelligent and generally pleasing to the eye, was not a people person. It wasn’t like he was shy either, but his natural tendency to push away potential relationships and friendships always put him at odds with the kids of Folly Beach growing up. Valentine always assumed that Davie was the same way amongst his

engineering peers at Caltech, but this instance was slightly different. With nothing else to glean from the topic, she came back to her own:

“But you heard what I said about the Saunders?”

“Yeah, did they move?” Davie asked through a mouthful of his food.

“What’s that about?”

“I have no idea. I was handing out those flyers and some white family lives there now.” “Maybe Mr. Saunders finally retired? He said he was planning on it last time I ran into him at the pier.”

Valentine shrugged, the music from the restaurant’s outdoor speakers warbling between them. She kicked off her sandals, digging her toes into the sand below the picnic table. “They’ve lived in that house for as long as I can remember. It’s just kinda weird.” “Sure, it is.” Davie swatted at a mosquito.

Valentine sighed and looked up at the fairy lights in the trees, pursing her lips. She could still see the guy’s shadow in the window from earlier in the day—still feel the weight of his unseen gaze on her. *Lex. Why am I so hung up on him?* Valentine saw new people all the time. Folly Beach was, as its name indicated, a beach; visitors would come and go seasonally. If anything, the anomaly was *she*. Locals to beach towns were an interesting bunch. Stuck in paradise.

“You have plans tonight?” Davie then asked, tittering into his drink. “Mom and Dad won’t be home until, like, two.”

Valentine did have plans. “Two’s kinda generous, don’t ya think?”

“That’s when Mom said the function would end. Museum folks love to drink and talk about art shit.”

Valentine tilted her head with a crooked smile, as if to say seriously? But she had already made her plan: Kitty and some of the girls would swing by in her Jeep around eleven and jimmy the gate to the county park. A few boys Valentine didn’t know were also invited to this bonfire, which made it even more exciting.

“Whatever the case, make good choices, Val.” Davie raised an eyebrow. “Sure.”

That could change.

Valentine's phone buzzed, interrupting her steady playlist of Megan Thee Stallion. She grumbled, blindly searching around her crowded nightstand as she tried to hold an eyelash steady against the glue on her eyelid. Finding it finally, she swiped right.

"I'm, like, a minute away!" Katherine 'Kitty' Lupine was already speaking, her southern accent nearly obscuring it. "Get out here!"

"Hold on, girl. Damn." Valentine checked her reflection once more, feeling somewhat proud of her makeup. She had swiped on some metallic eyeliner, resembling daggers that pointed away from her eyes, accentuating her round face with something sharp. She popped her lips—a bright citrus orange—and slid on her sandals at the top of the staircase. "You said eleven!"

"We have to run by the liquor store before it closes." Kitty reasoned, and Valentine could already hear the Jeep's engine running outside of her house. "I'm here."

Valentine hung up, throwing her phone into her woven tote, and raced down the stairs. Davie, watching TV while slouched over the couch in the living room, said nothing but waved his hand, bidding her farewell. They both had a system for sneaking out; so much that it didn't faze them anymore.

A matte black Jeep waited just past Valentine's overgrown lawn, speckled white with dried ocean water. The night was clear, stars peppering the uncanny darkness. Kitty leaned across the girl sitting in the passenger seat and stuck her head out, her dyed-platinum Afro barely making it out the window. "C'mon, c'mon!" Valentine couldn't contain her excitement, squealing as she squeezed into the backseat with her two other senior friends. They peeled off into the night, leaving tire tracks in the sandy curbside.

After securing the alcohol and some liters of soda, the Jeep was alive with bass and singing and gossiping. One of the girls, belting out Lady Gaga, started mixing the drinks into empty plastic water bottles. Valentine was amazed at her concentration, hugging the back of the front passenger seat and stealing a Twizzler from a communal bag on the center console.

"So who exactly is coming to this thing?" asked the ginger-haired occupant packed in the middle of the backseat, sucking on

a cherry lollipop. The girls called her Lolly, fittingly. “Kasey, Luke, Isaiah—the cute Isaiah from Physics, not the other one.” Kitty chirped, one hand on the wheel and the other draped out the window, raking the summer breeze with her fingers. “They’re bringing a few friends, too. Some new guy from out of town.” “Really?” Valentine tucked a stray braid back into its bun. “College guys?” “Maybe, girl, I don’t know.”

The girl mixing the drinks broke from her karaoke party to chime in: “I think they said his name was Lex or something.”

Valentine fell silent, feeling the hair on her arms rise again. *The shadow.* The girls finally made it to Folly Beach County Park, the gate already slightly open from when the boys came through before. Lolly got out of the Jeep to push it all the way open, allowing for them to pass. It was pitch-black as they entered the naturally forested enclosure. “Hold on, girls.” Kitty said, turning down the volume of the music. “We ‘bout to go off road.”

Just as she announced it, the wheels of the Jeep dipped down into a small ditch before gaining traction on the coarse hummock. The ride was bumpy, scaling over mounds of fallen trees and high grasses. The headlights didn’t reveal more than three feet of clearance; cattails, saltmeadow, and oyster grass—stripes of taupe and green with yellow buds—gave way to the start of the shore, where the dark sky met an even darker line of sea. Immediately, the girls spotted the blaze on the beach. The brilliant flames licked the air, and a small group of boys and their pickup truck already awaited them. A red Bluetooth speaker sat on a lawn chair.

Kitty, Lolly, and the other girls toted the drinks and snacks from the Jeep, whooping and hollering at the boys. Valentine slowly followed them, her eyes locked on a boy she didn’t recognize. It’s him. It had to be. Dirty blond hair pushed back and wavy, knife-like jawline, and a strong nose. His blue eyes—a shock of lightning, polarizing like his sister’s—sparkled in the light of the fire as they found her, and Valentine’s heart leapt to her throat. *Why are you staring for so long? Why are you—?*

“Val, this is Lex! He’s an old friend of Kasey’s who...” Someone was introducing her, but Valentine didn’t notice or care. The sweet, hypnotic smell of hemp clouded her senses. Lex was turned facing her, his dazzling smile becoming one of realization. He was wearing a mint

button-down and matching shorts, the wind rippling the thin silver chain that rested against his collarbones.

Valentine shook her head. "Um...uh, sorry. Hi, I'm Valentine." "I know." He reaffirmed. "Lex."

Valentine examined him. "What do you mean you *know*?" Lex chuckled, pulling a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket. It was one of her campaign pamphlets, looking less patriotic in its sad, wrinkled state. Valentine, embarrassed, laughed softly: "Yeah, that'd be my doing."

"Sorry about my mom. She's been a mess since we moved here." Lex put the pamphlet away, gazing out at the ocean. "Hope she didn't scare you away." Trying to match his casual demeanor, and uncertain of her own, Valentine looked toward the ocean too. "Your mom invited me back, actually."

Lex opened his mouth to say something and thought better of it. Valentine watched him curiously, the heat of the bonfire simmering against her bare back. She fixed the straps of her halter top and whipped back around to the party, shouting: "Kitty, can I get a hit?"

Kitty danced over, wrapped tightly in the arms of a boisterous man Valentine didn't know. She shot a playfully suspicious glance at the two of them—in which Lex pressed a fake smile and Valentine harshly mouthed, "stop"—before handing a lit joint to her. The bubbly pair sauntered off and Valentine took a drag from the joint, a new warm feeling coming over her; a little more confidence. "Welcome to Folly Beach, Lex."

"Thanks, I guess." His maddening blue eyes bore into her soul, neither comforting nor threatening. He crossed his arms over his minty fresh shirt. "So can I expect a second visit?"

Smoke shot out of Valentine's nose like a dragon and she gloated. "What? You want me to?"

Lex inhaled, taking in the world and Valentine's breath with it. "Well, you've got my attention now. I'm sure you'd have no problem persuading my mom to vote for your guy." Smooth. Valentine's heart fluttered and she felt emboldened now—his electric blue eyes, the crashing waves, the smoky aroma, and the orange glow of the bonfire creating an ever moving, intoxicating atmosphere. It almost felt as if she was floating, but tethered still to Lex. She grinned. "I see. I'll think

about it.”

Lex grinned back, and suddenly he was stunning. In the reverie of midsummer darkness, he seemed to think the same about Valentine and the yearning coming to a boil beneath her surface. He remained coy, though his features expressed something less innocent.

“So...” Valentine continued, her eyes narrowing to inspect him, “what’s your deal, Lex? What do you like?”

He leaned in a bit closer. “What do I like?”

“Yeah, hobbies or whatever. I don’t judge.”

“Man, you’ll think I’m crazy. I have no aspirations whatsoever. Everyone in my family expects me to go to college and do big things but...” Lex shrugged, not breaking from her. “...I have no idea what I want to do.”

Valentine took another hit. “Me neither. I totally understand. But there has to be something you like, right?”

“Hmm. You?” His delivery dipped. It sounded hungry, if that were possible. Valentine rolled her eyes, but felt hotter than before. “I don’t count. But you know what?”

“What?”

Valentine pursed her lips, tilting her head up so that her nose barely reached Lex’s sharp chin. “We have the *whole* summer to ourselves. We can figure it out; we can try new things, or nothing at all. We can do whatever we want.”

“How about right now?” Lex purred. He was exhilarating, taking command of the space. Their lips were just a breath away from each other. Valentine was lost for words, submerging in the weight of his gaze and how everything else fell around them. There was no bonfire, no ocean, no music anymore—just Valentine and Lex. He smiled softly. “What do you want to do now?”

to read more, visit our website!



Konglish

by Allison Choi

My Korean accent sucks.

When I throw out 잘 먹겠습니다 and 너무 맛있어요 at the dinner table, I feel pretentious as hell. When I try to rap RM's verse in 땡, I feel even worse. I'll get the gist when my church friend, whose hometown is Seoul, interchanges between the two languages, *seamlessly*, but when it's my turn to respond, I clam up. When I stumbled through my 순두부 order and that 아줌마 gave me *the look*, I curled in further. When the order arrived, I picked at the clams in my stew, feeling dumb as ever.

The 발음. I plucked out the meat, leaving an empty husk. It's ever so blaring.

I felt it grow worse when my grandma passed away freshman year of high school, and traditional Korean meals morphed into microwaved pasta.

Or when I graduated from my K-8 Korean-immersion middle school. Were the nine years of Korean classes all for naught?

When you steam shellfish, they open up. The 조개 껍데기 that stays shut, closed off to the world, is dead, to be discarded. There goes my family's origin language, down the drain.

Who will shuck me open? When will I learn to weave 한국어 into my everyday speech? When will they 섞어 together?

But the tide swells and tosses mollusks around whenever I watch K-dramas with my mom. God forbid we remove the subtitles, but even if we went without for one episode, I'd stay afloat.

After listening to Crush and DEAN and my growing list of OST's

for a few months, *I could think a bit in Korean*, I thought. I'm starting to swim.

Ever since I came to college, I miss my 할아버지's food. I dial home and tell him so. Our calls are always short and stick to the same script—I'm doing well, studying hard, 사랑해요, 건강하세요.

Maybe these conversations seem shallow and superficial, but I've come to think of Konglish— these bits and shards of connection— as a love language. Precious as sea glass. I cradle them safely.

As Trung Le Nguyen once said, hybrid language is “the sound of people from very different worlds doing their best to come together and make each other feel at home.” So each clipped call, I cherish. They may be brief, but we never *just go through the motions*. It's all comfortable, this routine.

There's nothing more frustrating than not knowing the word for something, my grandpa going 뭐지? And neither of us can find the write words to 설명. But somehow we manage.

Maybe it's no pearl, lying painless and pretty beneath two layers. One thin, the other thick. Korean. American.

But like a tooth, I've wiggled loose. Popped right out of that pink flesh, glaring gaps and all. There's holes in our communication, but all the while, we're grinning.

Writer Spotlight: Allison Choi

In each issue, Writer to Writer selects a few submitting writers to interview, encouraging them to reflect on their piece, writing process, and the medium as a whole. Here, editor Andrew Smedley sat down with writer Allison Choi to talk about her piece, *Konglish*.

AS: What motivates you to write?

AC: Definitely deadlines. I think I need deadlines to write — I think the reason why I'm studying creative writing and taking a lot of writing heavy courses this semester, is I kind of need that external pressure, and I know some people don't want to make a career out of their passion or even major in it. But usually, I kind of need those external pressures and motivations, like grades or opportunities, or just like the idea that someone else is going to be reading something that I wrote.

AS: What draws you to the act of writing in general?

AC: Everyday, I'm just blown away by the things that people create and release into the world. Sometimes even classes like these days, I'll leave class after I have a really good group discussion, and I'll be in the headspace to just marvel at things — I'll take a really long time walking home. There's this Raymond Carver quote that my fiction teacher showed us at the beginning of the class, and it says something like, "at the risk of appearing foolish, a writer needs to be able to just stand in gape at random things like a sunset or an old shoe in absolute and simple amazement" so I feel like that lingering feeling I get after experiences or really high emotion or like revelation gets me really excited to write.



listen to the full interview on our website!

Seeking Medication

Anonymous

I am Seeking Medication, Can You Tell?
My Open heart requires further operation,
And my pale, green face needs re-dyeing.

I am Seeking Medication, Maybe Soon.
The stitches I sewed myself are rupturing
And the thread is sinking back inside me.

I am Seeking Medication, For The Summer.
The heat will swell my brain, flatten my curls,
And that Hippocampus will be all the rage.

I don't Want Medication, Really.
My ears will stop ringing, Waxing Crescents
At the base of my nails will grow back.

I won't need it now, not when everything
will go back to the way it was.
Probably Soon, I think.

Metamorphosis

by Giselle Mills

I've always thought of my metamorphosis
As something closer to a caterpillar turning butterfly
Than human to cockroach
But I'm starting to wonder if my cocoon was disturbed
Mid slumber and complete goo

Wires crossed and evolution reversed
Maybe I started as a caterpillar and I am becoming roach
Harder, more tolerant, eternal.
 Surviving the nuclear winter

Or maybe I am a human blossoming into a butterfly
 I can hope that at least
It sounds prettier — more delicate and careful.
My goo would glitter in silence, gazed at in adoration
 and be patiently waited upon.

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and you!