
2019 Zine

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Journal of literary and visual arts

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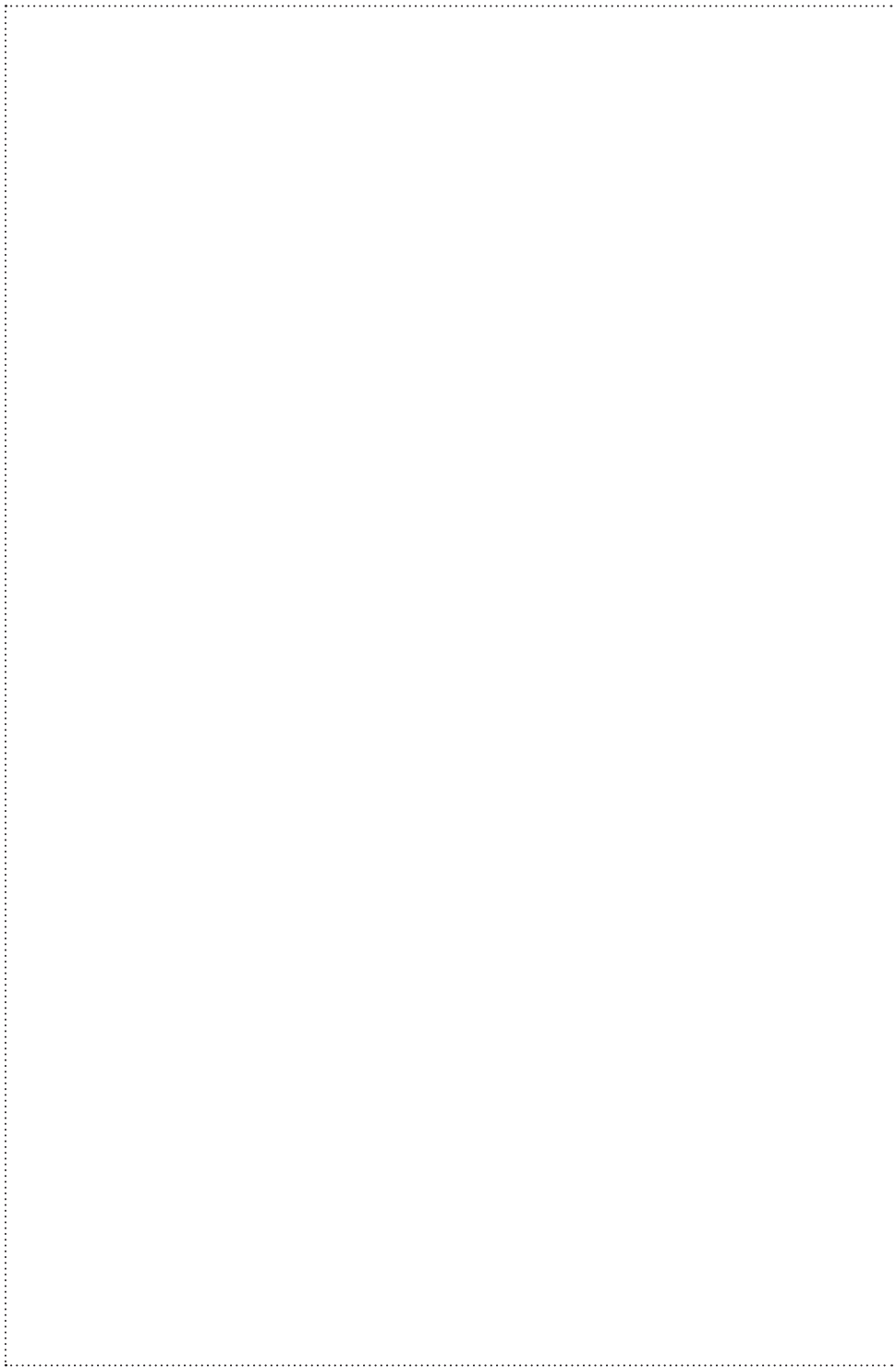
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Red Vinyl

by Alison Drozd

“Refill?”
Ellie, lost in her past, hadn’t noticed the waitress walk over, steaming pot of coffee perched precariously on a tray. She glanced down. The once scalding mug before her sat untouched, a refill seemed unnecessary.

“I’m set, thanks.”

The waitress smiled and headed back behind the counter, stealing a glance at the small notebook that sat next to the untouched coffee and barely eaten muffin. Ellie slipped her hand over the words scrawled out on it. Her fingers instinctively searching for the ends of her long sleeves, tugging them down ever so slightly.

Angel Rose Alvarez El-Rose Alvarez E-Rose Alvarez Ellie R. Alvarez?

Ellie.

Anything but Angel.

(Who looks at a tiny newborn and decides Angel is a fitting name?)

Ellie was still getting used to this name, her hands often practiced it, an attempt to convince herself it was who she was now, or who at least she would become. Picked the day she decided to call the birth mother that she didn’t know existed for the first twenty- three years of her life. The mother she sat waiting to meet, exactly one year from the day she found the birth certificate with her name on it.

She was early and had sat for nearly an hour watching the vehicles and pedestrians pass by outside the large window. She hoped the time taking in the atmosphere would steel her nerves and ready her for what was to come.

The last remnants of winter could be seen in dirty melting piles that dotted the edge of the sidewalk. Trees turned their branches upward to the warmth, the emerging new life sparkling in the sun. She was long removed from the age of counting cars or playing license plate bingo to pass the time. Instead her mind wandered as it had done so often in her life.

She watched as minivans filled with families spending quality time together rushed by. Moms and dads filling every daylight hour of each weekend with fun and memory making adventures for their small progeny, hoping to make up for all the hours during the week they aren’t around. She imagines their hushed conversations after the kids

are in bed at night. “Junior won’t touch drugs as long as when he is five we take him to the zoo, and natural history museums at age eight. Little Jilly won’t be a teen mom if we take her to ballet classes and gymnastics and don’t forget the art walk every fall. The right preschool leads to the right grammar school, leads to the Ivy League. Get it right and the kids will be fine.”

(Sorry guys, that’s not how it works.)

Outside the window she watches the weekend warriors with their trucks piled high, off to another battle in the never-ending war with their homes. Weapons supplied by Home Depot or the local hardware store, their inner fuel provided by Starbucks or Dunkin’ Donuts. America Runs on Dunkin’, after all. Keep that grass green. The yard neat. Organized. Shipshape. Gotta have that curb appeal. Don’t forget the Jones’, they aren’t going to keep up with themselves.

(Way to keep the HOA happy guys!)

Ellie had always been fascinated with other people’s lives, ones that seemed better than hers at least. She often wondered if other people faked happiness, joy, as much as she suspected. Were happy families really *happy*?

...

Her mother had died when she was just three years old. She has no memories of her mother, wondering at times if she ever existed. There is a picture of this person and a scarlet haired little girl standing next to her kept high on the mantel in the parlor, but it triggers nothing for Angel. As a young girl she would sit and stare at this picture, at the various pictures hidden of her mother, and try to feel love. It never worked. She felt no sadness either. Anger. Anger was what she felt. Was the monster born that day or had it been there all along, lurking, waiting? Would the stairs have thrown her heart-rate into turmoil her whole childhood if her mother had never died? Questions unanswerable haunted Angel, slithered along time and continued to dig deep into Ellie’s core.

To the outside eye she had a privileged childhood, as long as you only looked on the surface. She never went without a meal, was never cold and always had the best clothing. Art museums and cultural fairs dotted the landscape of her youth. Her education was top notch, one her eidetic memory made good use of. By fourteen she had finished prep school, years ahead of her peers. Before her eighteenth birthday she had a college

degree, her ability to remember everything she had ever read made school easy, at least the academic parts. Her peers had Quinceaneras, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs and Sweet Sixteen parties that rivaled the red carpets of Hollywood. Her Long Island upbringing was seemingly idyllic, yet the marks under her sleeves would tell a different story, if allowed.

Eight years old, her mother dead for nearly five years. Angel, because she was still trying to be Angel, spent her time outside of school becoming small. Staying out of the way. Hidden. Bad things happened when you were spotted. Quiet infiltrated every pore. On weekends she would almost forget what her own voice sounded like. There was a small room off the kitchen, filled with books she claimed from school, the library, the bookstore downtown. Some legally hers, others awaiting their return dates, a few were stolen keepsakes from play-dates gone wrong, all offering her an escape. When books were not at the ready, she would watch the world around her, wondering if they watched her. Stories played out in her mind, lives built for each person walking by her. Mothers, fathers, doting grandparents, loving families traversed her periphery. Silently she would wish someone, anyone, would spot her. Somehow see the pain, scoop her up and take her off into the sunset. Her own happily ever after. A hero in a cape that would take one look and know she needed saving. Heroes that never came.

She grew up in a picturesque American home. Stone walls and large windows greeted as you drove up the long driveway. Gardeners kept the grass an almost unnatural green. (Drought? What drought?) The flowers and bushes always trimmed to perfection. Garden parties, tea on the veranda, dresses of lace you dared not get dirty. From an early age she learned to slap on a smile and show everyone that was anyone, her family was perfect. On that veranda, everything was flawless.

Nighttime told another story. It was then the monster inside her begged to come out. Lying in the dimness of night, her blankets unable to shield her from the darkness that slinked into her mind. A sharp pocket knife, kept hidden between mattress and box spring, filled her hands. The slow, methodical slicing released just enough pain, drip by drip, to stave off the dam she had built around herself, from breaching. This release only helped for so long. The knife was replaced, pills chased with whiskey, any attempt to drown out the thoughts

that held her hostage. Those scars never fully faded, hidden under the long sleeves she still wears daily. Shame filled every crevice of her life; leaving a path of destruction in its wake.

Her eighteenth birthday and Angel had been warned beforehand, act up and you are cut off. The only threat that worked up to this point, removing the money that kept her a functioning addict. The house was filled with her father's friends and colleagues. At the very edge of the room she lingers, hoping to go unseen until she could satisfy her obligation of behaving *just long enough*. She spotted her father, the tramp of the week on his arm,

this one not much older than herself. She turns her head away from him, self-preservation. Blood pooling inside her mouth, biting her tongue to keep the words she wanted to say from spilling out.

The foyer resembled a middle school dance.

Bankers and stock traders talking shop on one side, wives huddle in cliques on the other. The mean girls, young and pretty, drinking their glasses of white wine spritzers and talking about how amazing their equally young husbands are at their jobs. The new houses they can afford and which preschools their infants have been accepted to. Not far from them are the Botox Bunch, frozen faces void of emotions. They were the ones that could almost taste the day that their husbands would retire, and they would no longer have to come to these types of events. They stay huddled together, watching no one, barely speaking to each other. In between were her favorite group of wives. No longer young, but not yet close to the age of escape. The soccer moms. The parents of the kids who would be her friends, if she had friends. They gripped their wine glasses with fierceness, drinking them empty just a little too quickly. They shot looks of longing and envy at the other women in the room.

Darkness closed in around her as she listened to the nonsense spilling out of their mouths. Out of all their mouths. They were all so preoccupied with their own perfection, their need to project perfection made her shake. Inside she was screaming, unable to keep the charade up any longer. The density of the words on her tongue, demanding release, became more than she could contain.

She stared at the marble stairs at the center of the house, taking note as she often did of the spot that if the light shines *just right* she was sure she could make out the faint remnants of the last breath her mother took. She turns, her courage

.....
*To the outside eye she
had a privileged childhood,
as long as you only looked
on the surface.*
.....



fueled by a dinner of Vicodin and vodka and looked her father in the eye for the first time in nearly three years.

"You pushed her, didn't you?" Angel could barely be heard over the room.

"You pushed her, *didn't you?*" she demanded, finding her voice. Fear spread through her like a wildfire burning hot enough to turn the liquor in her veins into vapor.

Every eye turned towards her, surprised looks battered her paper-thin armor. Angel was known for lots of things; talking wasn't one of them.

"What are you talking about Angel?" her father asked impatiently.

She couldn't believe the words tumbling out of her mouth. This was not the way she had rehearsed this, this was not what she had planned for years to say. Instead, pure emotion controlled her tongue.

"How does a ballet teacher *fall* on the stairs? How does someone who spent her life being graceful, slip, fall, cracking her head open at the bottom," Angel said pointing to the near shadow at the base of the stairs.

"I've told you about that night, stop being difficult," he replied.

Difficult, that was what Angel was good at, a master at even. Difficult got her kicked out of three schools before she was fifteen. Difficult was why nannies and housekeepers never made it through a whole summer. For the last three years she had given up the ruse of being the "well behaved daughter", instead embracing the words others used to describe her. Trouble. Slut. Whore. Drunk.

She was the rich girl that the good girls only spoke to when they needed a "study aid" and were too good to go to the corner junkie. Her dyed jet-black hair and dark make-up gave everyone a fair warning. Stay away. Nothing good lives here.

A deep silence covered the room like a wet wool blanket as everyone waited to see what happened next.

Her father stared at her, his face getting redder, she waited for it to pop off like a firecracker. Instead of blowing up, he did what he always did, he went back to pretending she didn't exist, that nothing was wrong.

"Angel, I think it's time you go up to your room, you are obviously not feeling yourself," and he turned back to his friend like she had never uttered a sound.

She wanted to throw things, to throw them at him, at everyone, but a calm overcame her instead. Her eyes swept across the room, took in the looks coming her way, most of pity, she could hear the words being whispered.

"That poor distraught girl, I hope he gets her some help."

"She drinks like her mother, that's how she fell,

you know."

Without another word she walked up the very stairs that had taken her mother's life and had caused her heart-rate to skyrocket more times than even she could count. Calmly she grabbed the very few items of importance to her. Her journals, hidden under a loose floorboard along with her various bottles of pills, her favorite black Chucks and a bag full of clothes.

She walked down the stairs, making eye contact with no one, a new hush had fallen over the crowd. Angel walked over to the gift table, stuffed every card inside her bag. Many would be filled with cash, cash she would need. As she walked out the front door she took a full glass of wine out of one of the soccer mom's hand, drank it down, smashing the glass on the floor.

Angel would not step foot in that house again for five years.

...

The sound of plates slamming to the ground in an unseen back room jolted her. Ellie looked around the small diner with its black and white checkerboard flooring and vinyl seats. She took in every cliched sign nailed to the faded whitewashed pine-board that spanned the back wall of the diner.

Unclaimed Children Will Be Sold to The Gypsies (promise or threat?)

Don't Flip Out (complete with a spatula image)

Whip It, Whip It Good (Devo anyone?)

Ruby's Kitchen Seasoned With Love (the cook sure didn't look like a Ruby)

We Guarantee Fast Service – No Matter How Long It Takes (good to know)

The diner teemed with the monotony of everyday life. A mad dog cook barked out orders to a gangly zit infested teenager while customers sipped their coffee and ate their apple pie in purposeful oblivion. The waitresses danced from table to table, filling orders, chatting with patrons, laughing at unheard jokes. Ellie watched this dance she had never learned the steps to unfold around her, marveling at the ease with which people coexisted in this space.

Out of the corner of her eye she noticed a well-dressed brunette staring her down from across his coffee. He appeared to be a few years older than her, maybe twenty-six or twenty-eight. Shyly she averted her gaze, her reflection staring back at her from the window. Her shoulder length fiery curls still startling to her after years of living life in Cali as a blonde. In her past she would have walked over to the guy, said something, likely inviting him back to her hotel room. She had never had only one type she was attracted to, unless breathing was a type. The wild abandon that once controlled her life was

nowhere to be found. In this place, at this time, her inhibitions were in control. That was likely a very good thing.

A year ago she was a different person. A year ago her whole world changed. A year ago, people were merely background noise. Back then she was still walking that crooked road, where needles and bottles were her only friends. A functioning addict, a *barely* functioning addict.

That was 365 days ago. Today, she sat in this small-town diner, watching the world as she had so often as a child. She wonders if she is worthy to be seen, had she fixed herself enough? Panic hits her like a shovel to the head. Every dagger of doubt sliced into her icy exterior leaving a black hole so deep in her stomach that not even bile can find its way out. She absentmindedly began writing in her notebook again.

Mother Daughter Family Ready?

...

Brought back to this house after five years, by a simple phone call.

"Ms. Alvarez?"

"Yes."

"I regret to inform you that your father had a fatal cardiac arrest early this morning," a distant voice said.

The caller had caught Angel between fixes, in that sweet spot where she could actually follow what was being said to her.

With no hesitation in her voice, she simply replied, "Thank you" and hung up the phone.

The words *fatal cardiac arrest* settled deep into her mind. He was dead. The time since she walked out of his house flashed before her. Years spent on the opposite side of the country, working, attempting to break the shackles that bound her to her past. Two Thousand miles had only quieted the demons for a short time. Pills had lost their potency and the monster inside her now chased needles to release the pain, one hit at a time.

Somehow, she managed to get herself on a plane and to Long Island, played the good daughter at his funeral, and dealt with his will. She faced his work colleagues and their wives, many of whom had been there the day she accused him of murdering her mother. Pleasantries were swapped as they all passed by her telling her how sorry they were for her loss. Her ears rang with the whispers and murmurs being traded behind her back as they walked away.

"She looks so different." "She smells like vodka." "She didn't fall far from the tree."

Her father had left her the house and its contents, complete with all the dreadful memories. His

last "fuck you" to her.

She stares at the box at her feet. (Criss-cross applesauce). Instinctively she falls into position on the hardwood floor. Flashes of a long-buried exchange assaults her, forcing her to find the strength to stay sitting, to touch whatever is inside that box.

The box was hidden deep in the bottom of her father's closet. It was unearthed by the charity she called to claim his belongings. A Realtor would be here this afternoon and the house of horrors would be excised from her life forever. Angel would have preferred to torch the place, burn the whole house, but even fire doesn't destroy the past.

Must and age radiates from the box, her nose crinkling at the onslaught. Long forgotten whispers begin to fill her ears.

Funny how memory works. She could remember every detail of her life, with often painful accuracy, yet this moment had remained concealed for twenty years. Slowly an image joins the sounds in her head and she can see herself standing next to her first nanny. They were inside this very room, her nanny holding the box in her hands, looking at Angel.

"Find this box when you can Angel. Your truth is in there."

She then tucked the box in the very back corner of the closet where it would patiently wait for Angel.

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. Her heartbeat crammed the space between her and the box leaving no room for her to move.

She shakes her head, an effort to clear away the lingering effects of her liquid breakfast and gathers what's left of her strength. The lid, heavy as lead, filled her hands and then clattered to the ground. There was no turning back now.

Old pictures filled the box. Women she didn't know from a time before she existed. Her father, younger than she ever knew him, next to many of them. She methodically moves them, one by one from the box to the floor. The air leaves her lungs as she touches something different at the very bottom. Her fingers wrap around thick, expensive feeling paper.

Angel stares down at a birth certificate. Her birth-date emblazoned upon it: July 31, 1994. The names though, those were not right. Instead of Angel Rose Alvarez it read *Baby Girl Jones*. Her head swirled as she took in the rest of the words on the document. Mother *Elizabeth Ruby Jones*. Father *Unknown*. Location of live birth *Memorial Hospital Jacksonville Florida*. The information was coming into her head, but she was unable to process it fully. She sat and stared for what may have been hours. Shook from her haze by the sound of

the doorbell, Angel grabs the birth certificate, leaving the box and pictures scattered on the floor and heads down the stairs to meet the Realtor.

When the Realtor and the charity people had left, Angel locked up the house and drove back to her hotel. Sleeping in that house was not an option. She placed the paper in front of her on the bed. She was not *his*. She had been haunted for years by the biological link to that man and just like that the link broke. Adopted. Not his. One layer of pain gone.

For the first time in her life Angel was ready to face her pain. Pills and booze had been her medicine of choice for most of her teen and adult life, it was time to change that.

There was a person out there. A mother. Someone she could know-really know. Someone who could know her, *see* her.

Did she have red hair like herself? Green eyes? Did she come with a family?

Angel was no-one worth knowing, not yet, but she would be. She would put in the work and become someone.

...

The house sold, faster than she was ready for. Angel used the money to pay for twenty-eight days in. Mandatory therapy sessions fleshed out her inner demons. Inner demons don't fight fair though, they don't care about the rules of warfare. She was released raw and bloody, pain cascading off her.

She started her twelve steps. Spent eleven months on their path. Traded dirty, drug infested apartments for church basements filled with coffee, donuts, and other warriors in the same battle. They told each other tales of battles won and lost, of the war they shared. Lies and truths and everything in between. They craved the small medals that told them they were winning their wars.

She fell down those steps more than once, the irony not lost on her. Climbing steps to live, to be ready for the mother that waits at the top.

Her sponsor told her to set little goals, a day, a week, two weeks. She wanted a year. A year of sobriety before she made the call. She got to two months. Then Oliver happened. Oliver always happens. She hadn't hidden well enough from him. She allows herself to be seduced again by the sweet nothingness opiates bring with them. When the cold sweats and shakes had finally subsided, seven days lost never to be found again, Angel once again took her Chucks, her journals, clothing, and walked away.

She found a new apartment, in a new town,

told no one. She went back to the task of removing the layers of shame and pain that controlled her every decision. Changing the voices in her own head, the ones that had been telling her she was not good enough, would *never* be good enough, proved to be the hardest task. One she still hadn't accomplished, not really. Her new goal was three months. That would get her to almost exactly a year since she found the birth certificate. Three months that had once seemed so easy, had alluded her with such intensity. She used to fool herself and say she could stop whenever she wanted, she never knew how little she actually knew, until that was proven wrong.

As she got closer to that magical number, she found herself staring at the slip of paper she had gotten from the P.I., hired before she went into rehab. The slip that said: Elizabeth Ruby Jones. The one with the 315 area code phone number she would

need every fiber of inner strength to call.

Slowly, piece by piece she undresses herself from her history, becomes someone new. Someone better. Shedding the ghost of a girl she didn't want to be was the hardest thing she had ever done, the hardest thing she would continue to do. This person had a future, a purpose.

The new coin firmly in her hand, she picks up the phone and dials.

A voice answers on the other end, "Hello."

Angel's heart seized up for a nano-second, leaving her with the inability to speak. In that split-second every fear that she could not speak of clouded her thoughts. Want. Need. Love. Would any of these things be waiting for her at the end of this conversation? If she had not been wanted twenty-four years ago, has that changed? Is knowledge enough to force those feelings into being?

Slowly she pulled the words out of her throat. "Is this Elizabeth Ruby Jones?"

"Yes."

"The Elizabeth Ruby Jones who gave birth to a little girl at Memorial Hospital on July 31, 1994?" Angel asked.

Silence.

"Hello. Are you still there?"

"Yes." The voice was more hesitant than before.

"My name is," She paused for a moment, letting the realization she didn't have to say Angel sink in and then continued, "Ellie, and I found a birth certificate with your name on it, I think you are my birth mother".

...

.....
*She wanted a year.
A year of sobriety before
she made the call. She got
to two months.*
.....



The clock ticked closer and closer to 2pm, the time Elizabeth Ruby Jones was due to walk into the diner. Ellie's eyes wandered from the window, to the clock to her cold coffee and back to the clock. Her left hand continued to scribble with a mind of its own, in the notebook next to her.

1:40 came and went and still she sat.

1:45 inched by and she remained glued to the red vinyl seat. She could feel the icy cold surround her as the black hole in her gut grew.

When the minute hand reached 1:50pm her phone vibrated. Oliver. She stared at his name, stood up, put a twenty-dollar bill on the table, grabbed her notebook and left. ●

One More Walk of Freedom

by Irene Namer

I had to push myself to put 1 foot in front of the other as I made my way down the Freedom Trail. This was always a last-minute addition to my trips to the hospital. I would take one last walk down the Freedom Trail, and savor every moment of it.

In my life, living as a Bostonian for the entirety of my childhood and my adulthood after college, I had seen it all a thousand times, but none of it ever grew old. Only I did. In the distance, I saw the Bunker Hill Monument, which stretched high into the sky – what had once been a pillar anchoring into the earth where I would do my best work in my career in the city of Boston – now was an arrow pointing towards the sky, where I could end up next if I made some very important decisions.

...

I absolutely hated that cold metal plate feel against my skin. Then would come the doctors: one-by-one they'd trickle in with their closely guarded tablets and furrowed brows and muttering—very classy—and they'd tell me in their condescending tones how to eat, sleep and drink my way out of the slippery slope into bad health.

Then, as always, the last one would come in. She was a bit softer, but not by much. As the years had passed, she had crept closer and closer to having the same sterile demeanor as all the others. It hurt me to see it. "Irene, I raised you better than this."

"Dad..."—she looked away for a moment. She kept up a veneer at work—and I was secretly proud. Admittedly, it was a bit asinine of me to balk at her so carelessly. For as much as I disliked watching her spin like a robot in a lab coat, I'm sure it hurt her far more to see me like this. She solemnly spoke, "Can we talk after?" She left the room, and I sought solace the only way I knew how. I pulled out my mobile phone and opened the app...Triple Luck. As the colors swirled together, I felt a small rush come over me. No matter how tough things had gotten, no matter how hard it was to face my health, if I could just land it big on Triple Luck, that's all I'd need.

I pulled more money from my account and sent it to Triple Luck. A notification came back that I'd have to wait for the transaction to clear to play. This was the hardest part of my day. I could handle my mortality. It was battling the urge to win that completely pulled me under. I had always been competitive. It had never been about gambling.

I wasn't a well-off man. Triple Luck had come to me through an advertisement as I watched TV at home. Why not?—I thought.

It seemed harmless. But I had no idea how much it could change my life.

"Dad, I don't know why you're doing this." It's like she was a different animal—the girl I knew, the girl I watched grow up far away from the city—spunk, nerve, fire—the kind of attitude that jubilantly yelled her mother's spirit from deep in her heart. I sometimes egged her on after checkups just to see a glimpse of it.

"I just don't think this is for me—"

"For you? Dad, you have to take this medication...What would Mom say right now? What would she think?"

Now I shied away. Little twerp. If her mother were here, she'd...well, she's not here.

"Dad, I have to work late tonight. You need to think about this."

"Really? Maybe you need to think about me and what I want." Suddenly we were escalating.

I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket. The transaction had cleared. I turned my body away from her at the worst time.

"You can't just go chasing after Mom by not taking care of yourself."—I knew her well and could see she was about to tear up; I turned back around and my arms wrapped around her as fast as they could.

"It's okay. It's okay." I could feel her sob just the slightest bit into my shoulder.

"No, it's not," she said, muffled. She had to return to work, and I'd be a bad father if I let her break down like this.

"Your mother followed her heart. My heart may just not be in this...I'm as healthy as a horse, anyway."

I shook my arms a little bit, hoping to cheer her up.

"I just want you to be here with me. I can't lose you."

"I'm still here. Come home for dinner."

She smiled.

She parted away from me—back to work. I quickly pulled out my phone to try my luck at the slots. What I couldn't tell her was, even with her help at the hospital, there's no way I could afford that treatment anymore.

On the way home, I drove by a few places which perfectly encapsulated my relationship with my daughter, through and through. The first was Boston Common, where we had spent many afternoons lying in the grass and looking at the sky.

We would gaze upon the clouds and make sense of their shapes, as if we had all the time in the world. Then, we did. Now, we never have time for it, but I can live within the memories.

The second place was the Museum of Fine Art, where I have shown my daughter what some of the greatest artistic and creative lenses had created throughout the course of history. Watching her young eyes widened in wonder always inspired me to reach higher and higher in my career – so I could provide for her in every way I could. Little did I know, I was going to need it.

The last place I stopped drove by was the Museum of Science. If the Museum of Fine Art had given her a symbol of inspiration, the Museum of Science was like diving into a pool of water for her. It was here that she learned to spread her wings and truly fly as an intellectual, and it was this feverish admiration for the world of science that grew her medical career, and now was the one Teutonic force pushing to save my life.

This city, Boston, had shaped and cradled my delicate life and its warm and loving hands. I just couldn't shake the weight of this decision. It was heavy, and I'd have to give it just a little more time.

...

Dancing light filled the living room. These old, grainy videos flooded in memories I was genuinely scared of losing someday soon. The colors blurred and the images were soft, but my mind was crystal clear. I curled my arm around the grown-up version of that little girl who would run in and out of frame from time to time.

She stared back at me—clearly she was still reeling from my arguably ignorant indifference to her feelings. How could I ignore that little girl in the video?

“Dad...I don't want you to become some old friend I have to watch late at night just to remember. I can't go through this again.”

“I'm not. Not yet.”

“It's just one medication. That's all I ask. Just one.”

“Those doctors don't know—”

I pulled out my phone and started playing Triple Luck. The slots splashed their vibrant colors at me. It was a refuge from this conversation.

“Don't know? I'm one of those doctors. Are you

saying I don't know?” I knew how important this was to my daughter, but I couldn't face it. “Why are you...What are you doing?”

“It's a game...”

“You're playing a game right now?” She was flabbergasted.

I paused a long while before continuing—partly on purpose, to let the tension air-out, partly because, well, I didn't have an answer. Finally, I fell on an old excuse.

“Science says one thing one year, and another thing the next—” But my daughter, like her mother, was insistent.

“It's not science...I'm following my heart. Even if they're right, that's another year we have...together.”

It was then that I looked into her eyes and saw her mother, still alive and thriving, beaming full of true love—a perpetually positive spirit, bright enough to light up the sky

and courageous enough to paint the stars.

DING!

Then, I saw it. In one swipe, I had somehow landed the best max bet I could possibly win—with the highest payout rate. In an instant, my life had changed. I could do the treatment. I could look my daughter in the eye. I had more life ahead of me. I had prosperity and wealth I could share with her. Whoever out there in the universe that was watching over me—I was forever grateful. This had changed everything.

I looked up towards the ceiling and spoke to my wife, wherever she was. Maybe this was her pulling strings. Either way, Triple Luck on my phone had just saved my life.

Julia, I'm gonna keep you waiting just a little while longer. We still have a beautiful daughter who needs her father.

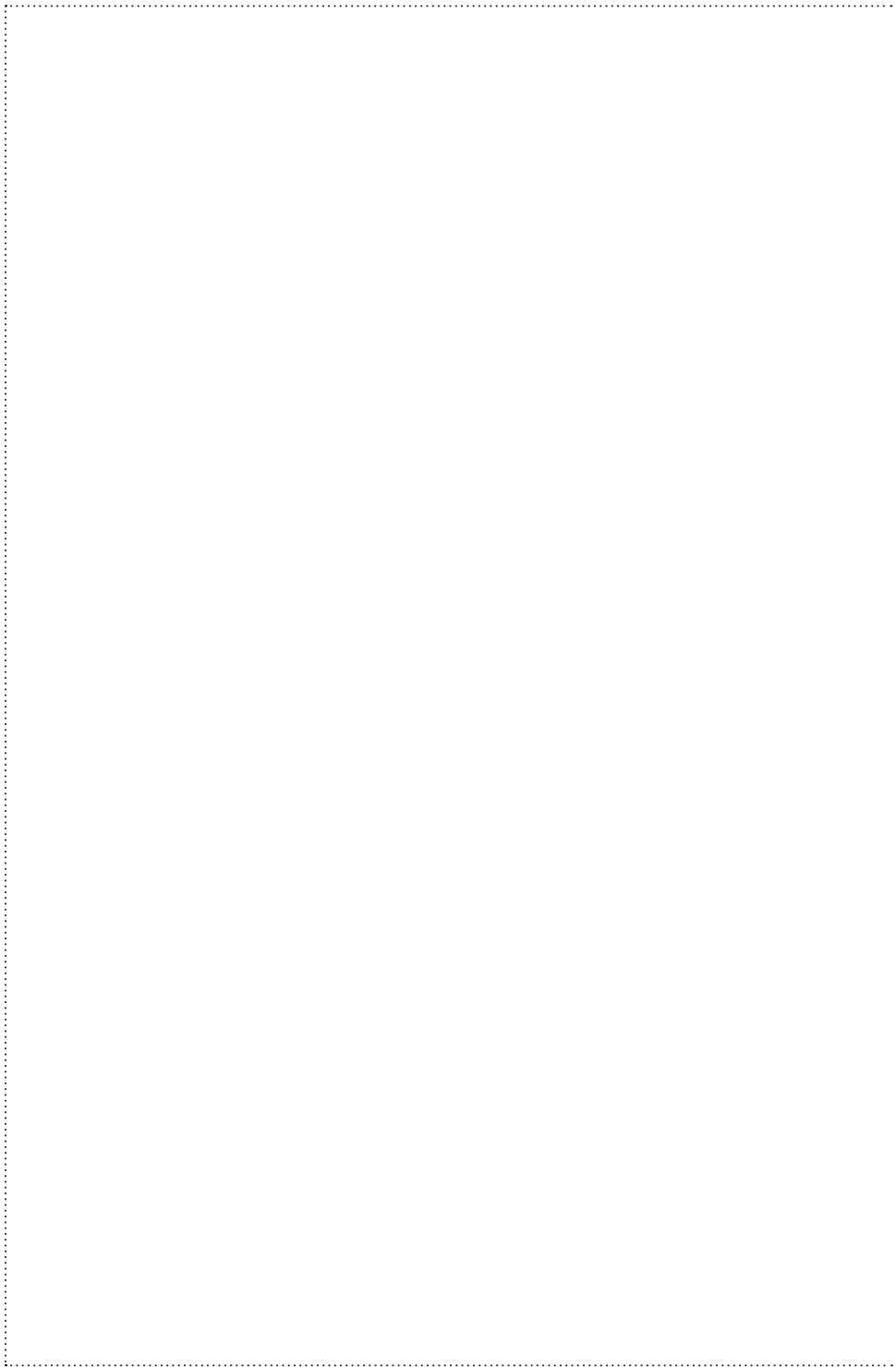
I held her close and kissed the top of her head.

“I'll come back in tomorrow—and we'll see.” I tried to mask my acceptance but I'm sure her wit saw right through it. She's just like her mother.

I looked back at my phone one last time. Triple Luck was twinkling my winnings across the screen. With my next breath, I would share the news with my daughter. Now I'd have all the time in the world to spend with her. ●

I pulled out my phone and started playing Triple Luck. The slots splashed their vibrant colors at me.





pt 1. Short Fiction



pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. Poetry



pt 4. Lyrics



pt 5. Visual Art



pt 6. Scholarship



Larynx Lamentations

by Jahaira DeAlto

"We realize the importance of our voices only when we are silenced."

– Malala Yousafzai

We live in a world that seemingly commands that one espouses their own praises in the hopes of attaining any kind of validation or upward mobility. With that in mind,

I must confess – I cannot whistle. I cannot fish, I am deplorable at folding laundry and the only thing I've ever built with any degree of success is tension. I am not a work in progress. I am progressing towards being a work in progress. I say all of this not to elicit

sympathy; there are far more pitiable things in this world than a non-whistler who will never enjoy a career as a laundress. Rather, I begin with my more pathetic attributes with the hope that my one redeeming quality might seem exponentially more significant. I, am a speaker.

It is a curious truth that the very thing for which you were chastised in your youth might thrust you right into your calling as an adult. I was born with an opinion about everything and an acute inability to shut the hell up. I was never thin and never conventionally pretty, so I forged my words into a rapier and called comedy my weapon. Let's face it – nobody wants fat and angry hanging around. It was my voice which quashed the rage in bullies and brought levity to stressed-out teachers. As an adult, this voice, when married to life experiences brings hope and inspiration to the masses through my work as a social media influencer and intersectional advocate. At my job (the one that pays the bills), I work counseling survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault. Mine might be the first voice that they hear assuring them that they will live beyond their traumatic experience. Imagine then, if you will, the distress that accompanied my realization that I had contracted laryngitis.

For many people, a key component of one's identity is contingent upon their ability to perform a physical task which validates their assertion as to who they are. When the body betrays them, as bodies sometimes do, can one still lay claim to the identity that they profess? Who would Michelangelo be without hands? Who would Isadora Duncan be without feet? I understand that there are people

all over the world with disabilities who find alternative means of accessing their needs and desires. I don't know that a greater example of this exists than the late, great Stephen Hawking. Lest there be any confusion, I am no Stephen Hawking. And while I'm clearing up misconceptions here, I fully recognize that I am writing about laryngitis and not smallpox. I realize that on its face, this affliction is somewhat benign. I will regain my voice eventually,

and all shall be well with the world. In the absence of those glamorous diseases that make for truly great reading, however, I would ask you to consider two things. Seneca wrote about asthma and nobody gave him a hard time and (it bears repeating) I

am incapable of shutting the hell up.

There has been something humbling about this experience, to be sure. In a healthy state I am lauded and commended for my vernacular, my cadence, my delivery. For the past two weeks, the same voice possessing the same qualities has been pitied, advised, plied with offers of tea and home remedies; even prayed for. My rallying cry for solidarity has become a rallying cry for sympathy. My pride and joy have become my shame and chagrin. Up to now I have enjoyed a long-standing love affair with my voice, narcissism be damned. I can code-switch seamlessly. The tone I reserve for friends, family and the occasional object of my rage was forged from good Nuyorican stock in the heart of Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. I can successfully find a restroom in five languages, and I can quote Maya Angelou poems from memory. With all that in mind, I know one thing for certain and two things for sure. Nobody wants to hear that crap when you're sick. Stanzas and sarcasm are hopelessly rejected when you sound like the love child of Bea Arthur and Harvey Fierstein. I've been scared half to death by my own voice. I said hello to my dog one morning and wondered who the hell let Barry White into my house.

Older, well-intentioned folks would say that you have to have a sense of humor about these things. I believe that you have to have a sense of humor about all things. We are living in precarious times. I watch as the groups I stand at the intersection of - Black and Brown, Bi and Straight, Trans and Cis, naturalized and undocumented, Baptist and Bruja – struggle to get their voices heard, too. Clamoring

*I was born with an
opinion about everything
and an acute inability to
shut the hell up.*



over supremacy and rhetoric is no easy feat. The old adage states that closed mouths don't get fed. What I know to be true is that open mouths don't always get heard, either. It's easy to get drowned out in the tumult, get discouraged and give up. It is significantly harder to get and keep the attention of those people who are committed to misunder-

standing your every word, and to force them to truly hear what you have to say. In life I have learned that doing the right thing and doing the easy thing are often two very different decisions. I choose to be someone who makes you laugh, makes you think, and makes you reconsider. And whether it comes by way of a whisper or a shout – I will be heard. ●

What is Chronic Pain Like?

by Liza Citron

You really want to know what chronic pain is like? It's like a prison, keeping you trapped, able to see the outside, the freedom that lies beyond, and even perhaps, on the rarest of occasions, venture out and be part of it. But not for too long, no. It's only just long enough that you think you might be free. That you might be able to live this way, and be like other people, before it pulls you back into a cell.

It's the façade we're forced to put on day after day, just to blend in with the rest of the world, because if we get asked one more personal question we've answered a million times before, we'll snap. Or because it's easier to say, "I'm tired," or, "I'm fine," than to sarcastically jab for the hundredth time, "I can't feel my legs and yet they feel like they're on fire, but that's my norm – how about you?"

You only see us on the good days. The days when you think, "Oh, you're not so sick, are you?" or, "Hey, you're looking well." The days when we put in incredible amounts of effort. The days when we can walk, when we can talk, when we can do everything we need to so we can pass for normal – and even then, we do a sh*t job of it. You want to know what you don't see?

You don't see the days we're curled up in bed, barely able to move a few feet to get our water and straw before hiding from the light again under the covers. The days when we can't keep our eyes open for the life of us. The days when we have to make decisions between things as simple as a "run" to the bathroom or a "run" to the fridge.

You see when we're made up and put together, not when we've lived in the same clothes for five consecutive days because we couldn't move, much less do laundry. You see when we're speaking eloquently and coherently, not when we've sat up and stared at something for five minutes because our mind is too foggy to remember how to turn on a lightswitch, or change our shirt. You see the days we want you to see, and not those

we don't.

Because we're tired. We're tired of being "inspiration porn" for just being alive, as though just going through life was this incredible strength to inspire abled people – yes, we're strong, but we're strong despite our condition, not because of it. We're tired of being told, "You're too young/pretty/smart to be disabled!" as if awareness of our inner youth, beauty, or intelligence could cure the pain we've been suffering from for so long. We're tired of trying to educate people who, for the most part, really couldn't give a damn about disabled people and their needs.

Because we're lonely. We're lonely; have had people leave us for being disabled, because we were too much work for them to deal with or to be friends with. We're lonely because we live in a world where people really don't tend to think twice about disabled people, aside from being their "inspiration" or the friend they say they have, to suddenly make ableist statements perfectly okay (they're not, by the way). We're lonely because in a world with all this under-the-radar ableist culture, we're told we're not worth getting to know.

And because we're scared. We're scared of people's value judgements on us, just because of our limitations. We're scared of feeling like less than or a burden, just because of what limbs we happen to have use of that day. We're scared even of ourselves, of the negative attitudes towards chronically ill people we're exposed to, and prone to absorbing.

We're people, we're here, and we're not going away. If you want to know what chronic illness is like? If you really want to see through our eyes? Maybe start by accepting us first. Treating us like people. Maybe start by being friends with us. Not pushing us away. Showing us decency when no one else has. Respect our struggles, like we respect yours.

And, maybe, someday, you'll begin to understand what life is like for us. ●

Life in the Rear-View Mirror

by Alison Drozd

“Why do you hate me?” I cringe just a little as I head down the walkway. Is this really how my day is going to begin? Does he actually think that I hate him simply because I am “making” him go to public school, for the first time ever? I guess he must.

With a sigh I climb into the shiny, brand new, Kia Sedona mini-van (we aren't exactly Honda or Toyota people.. at least that's what my bank account says), the three children reluctantly follow and we take that first thirteen mile commute into our new normal.

That first drive, with only the music from my Iphone via bluetooth to distract me

from the three grumpy faces avoiding eye contact every time I glance in my rear-view mirror, seems to take forever. Drop off, park and wait. Sit. Sit and take in that new car smell, that clean dashboard, the odometer that reads 250 miles.

Sitting in the driver's seat, waiting, it is only a half day, and the front seat is about to become my desk. Newly “back to college”, I spend the time working on essays and readings while I wait.

Days turn into weeks and more and more time is spent watching, sitting, waiting. Dust starts to accumulate on that once clean dashboard, and the odometer seems to mock me as it slowly ticks higher and higher and I calculate how soon we will be over the mileage on the lease my husband insisted upon. Too soon.

The trunk is now filled with football pads, soccer cleats, fall baseball equipment, and the occasional child who needs to change before a game. Yes, my mini-van doubles as a changing room, this is what happens when you decide to send your kids to school thirteen miles from where you live.

“Mom, mommmm, MOM can I play my music?”

Sure kid, go ahead, I'm sick to death of my music anyway. Never thought I would grow to loathe so much “alone” time, watching the world through laminated safety glass.

Drop off, at least no one hates me for sending them to school now, well most of the time anyway. Race back to Pittsfield only to find that my son's earbuds have been half hanging out the slider, bouncing off the pavement like Mexican Jumping Beans. Amazingly even with road burn and filled with the now melted snow they still work, they are

much more resilient than I am.

Ugh, how much crap can they leave in this van? Do they even notice the piles of food wrappers and clothes anymore? I know I barely notice the salt and sand covering the floor, the mess of life during the winters in New England. Go to classes, race back to Lee, sit, wait, almost basketball season. The trunk is empty save the lone orange cushion with the paw print in the middle. The exterior of the van matches

with its own orange paw print on the back window, Go Wildcats!

They all made their teams, travel, JV and Varsity. Three kids, six basketball teams, time to fill up the trunk with gear bags, cases of water, and don't forget the snacks

because the time sitting, waiting, watching just grew exponentially.

Wow, the amount of crumbs on the floor, does anyone notice when I open the doors? Does it matter? Blankets too, because winter is cold and gas is expensive, no way the van is running while we wait. Homework, that is what happens in here now. Off we go, heading out into the latest storm, battling what life is throwing at us with as much luck as the wipers are having with the snow.

Discarded clothing scattered around in piles so high I often wonder if my children have any left in their rooms. At least spring clothes are smaller than winter clothes. Gather up the piles, complete with lollipop sticks stuck to several half-dried muddy socks. Spring, mud season.

Baseball and Lacrosse season as well. When I glance out the back window my view is impeded by bats and lacrosse sticks, never in the bags purchased to contain them. Rattle, rattle, sure hope that bat doesn't go through the window if I have to stop fast. The lone cushion has been replaced with folding “camp” chairs that never see camping because I have athletes, not vacations of any sort. At least with these chairs I don't get bleacher ass, like in winter and basketball season. My butt likes spring sports the best.

“Hi Mom” “Hi Declan's mom.”

In crams half the varsity baseball team, good thing we got the eight passenger van.

“No guys, the doors still aren't power doors.”

Why is that so hard for them to remember? How do boys smell that bad and not even seem to notice or care? Windows open, *oops there goes a few*

Days turn into weeks
and more and more time
is spent watching,
sitting, waiting.



candy wrappers, guess I'm a litter bug now. Off to the baseball field, "Still not a power door, guys."

"Okay, who drew the penis in the dirt on the back window?"

I can hear them laughing as they saunter out for practice, no one will ever claim responsibility. Clean it off or drive around proudly with the evidence that the van was defiled by a rowdy group of teenage boys, easy choice, off I drive.

Go, wait for lacrosse practice to end, the girl is hungry. More food wrappers to fill the few empty voids on the floor. The younger son's practice is almost over, grab him food and off to the next field. Early, just enough time to read for Lit class. This one is in a mood, smash goes his bag into the trunk, *lets not worry about the \$165 purple lacrosse stick you almost just broke on your sister. Have your feelings, son.* The kid takes his seat and it's finally time to head home.

Ready to be released from my front seat confinement, hours of sitting, waiting leave me more exhausted than it should.

Summer, freedom, or at least the idea of freedom. Bicycle helmets, roller blades, flip flops and sunscreen. Baseball bags and lacrosse sticks mingled in. It's Sunday, clean out the van day. I am always amazed by the amount of garbage I pull out, I shouldn't be by now. I return the van

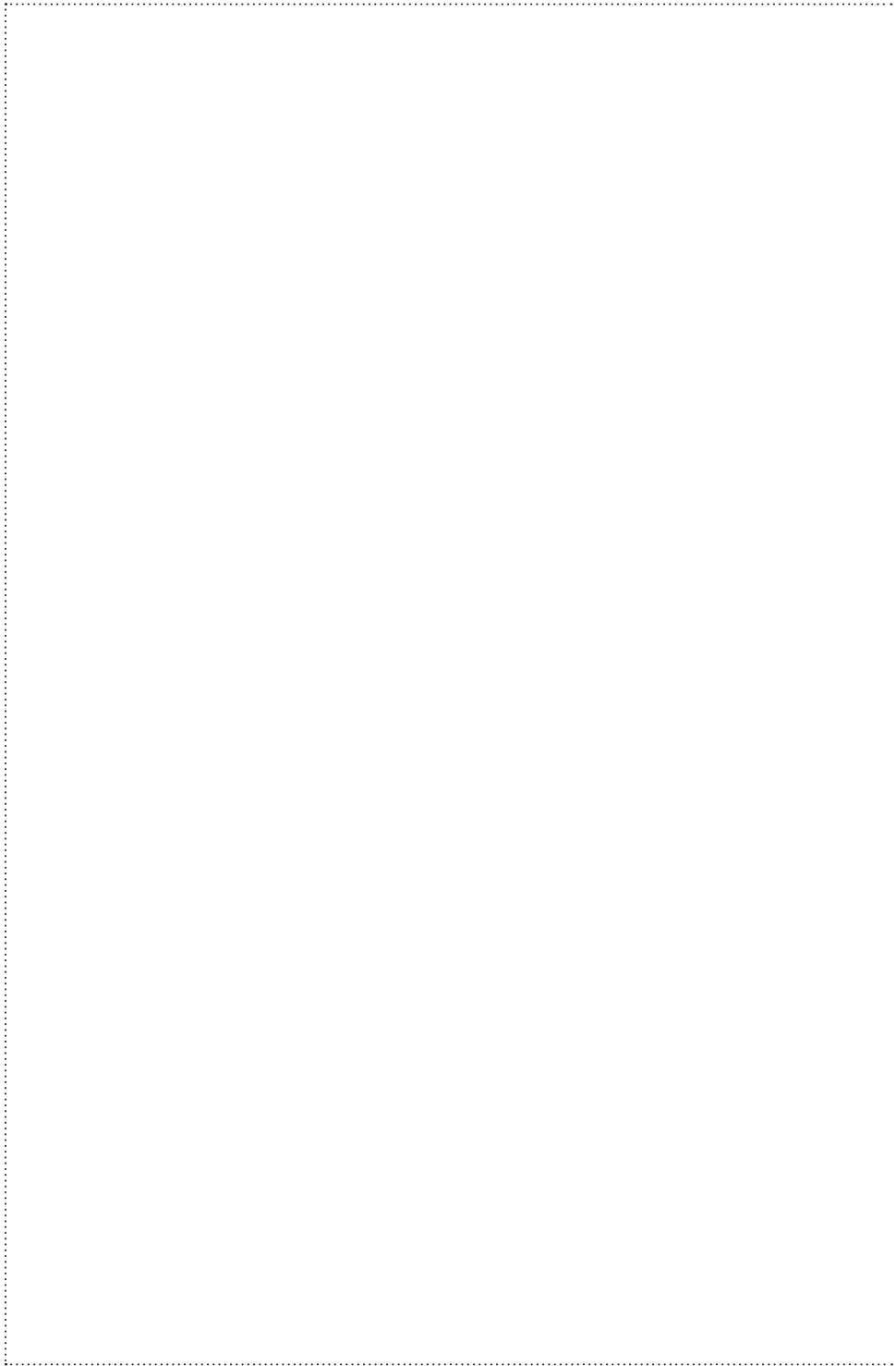
to her orderly state. No more baseballs or water bottles rolling around, heading for that sweat spot under my brake pedal, just waiting for the moment to take ten years off my life. This never lasts, by Wednesday it shall return to it's lived in normalcy, that level of "yes this is where we live" that no vehicle should reach as quickly and often as this van does.

25,576 miles. In a year. *How over my lease am I now?* I can't even begin to allow myself to think about it. Just for fun let's sign the girl up for summer travel lacrosse and hey why not, All Star baseball here we come. States? Oh we will win that! 11U State Champions! Off to Maine, pack it up kids!

"Mom can we go fishing before my game?"

Sure kid, lets just drive around Maine looking for places to fish, this week is all about you. More miles, more life, and now tears. Still State Champions, but returning home Regionals wash outs. No, 4th place in the whole of New England isn't the end of the world, but the tears from a certain eleven year old will permanently resides in the cloth of his seat belt, right next to the remains of the last nosebleed. 310 miles until home. Four days until football begins again.

Two weeks until school starts back up. We better enjoy the next three days because a new year is almost upon us. ●



pt 1. Short Fiction



pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. **Poetry**



pt 4. Lyrics



pt 5. Visual Art



pt 6. Scholarship



Mythos

by Christian deManbey

I.

You are born and the Moirai set about to weave your tapestry
They set into place everything that will happen to you
Everything you will be in this mortal world

When you look in the mirror you see the face they made
When you try and speak you hear the voice they gave you
On the stage you feel your body twist unnaturally to move by their puppet strings

With every path and person in the labyrinth of life they split you
To think you are simply Janus is foolish for you are the unending hydra
You aren't two-sided with the real you simply hiding in the dark

You have a face and a you for every person you smile upon
And the Moirai laugh as you readily submit to them shaping you
Amongst the million shadowy faces you wear no one knows where the one true you is

If there is even one to be found at all

II.

The old gods and the new come together as Apophis snickers in the corner
Osiris and Set must be still with each other if only for Geb
And it's supposed to be a joyous time and so everyone smiles

The snarls hide in quiet moments

Anubis finds more joy in death than being together with them
Eyes always watching prevent them from simply killing one another
Ears are always listening to prevent truth from ever being spoken

Angered whispers in the dark when alone

Lips are sealed tight with mechanical motions and scripts the norm
Sometimes on off occasion Thoth might hear shadowed truths
He hears of violence and blood from one thought kind and bright

Each cries silently of the pain they cannot release

If they're lucky Bes will shut their minds off until it's done
If they're not lucky then Sekhmet starts a fire in their hearts
It spreads to each until everyone hates everyone else ad infinitum

Back at home you shake your head wondering why you're the only sane one

III.

Valhalla at last
You suffered to have this moment
But when you open the banquet halls
Silence

There is no laughter anywhere
At the endless table each stares down at their plate
It's almost maddening to hear all the knives screeching

Loki no longer has joyous tricks or jokes
Just hides Jörmungandr inside a fishbowl away from it all
And everyone shivers at the sound of Odin's thundering voice

You are at this table and don't know what you see
How all the stories got it so wrong of looking at a trembling Thor
Forced to sit by his father's side and first to feel that sharp strike of lightning

You eat
You say nothing
You just look away

IV.

Barking hounds
Perhaps screaming monkeys
The roof is shaking on the Ark
It's a thousand voices trying to get over one another
It's four walls holding individual creatures that don't mix
Order and structure crumbling away

The Serpent from the Garden slithers across the floor
No one wants to eat the apple anymore
No one wants to hold the Truth
They all just lie to themselves
Lie about the place where they are
Who they are

You've never had a home
This place is just a container of nightmares
The place where Hell opened up
Hell changed its face but the memories stay forever
The bones do not set
The wounds never stop bleeding

Lucifer weeps for you and your pain
He lost his home and you lost yours
Both of you betrayed by your creators
He whispers in the corner sometimes, "God is dead."
And you know yours is dead too but it doesn't work
This cage this box this prison will never be home

V.

Crosses are for doorstops Buddhas for incense
Even all the atheists come running in to join the family
The new gods live on earth and with their love our empty souls fill

They will dry up those endless tears in their loving spells
No longer will you suffer the struggle of existence the agony of finding Truth
Just look into their lights and let it burn in your heart and mind and soul and self

The new gods are kind
The new gods are merciful
The new gods love us all equally

Out of the darkness Lord Television flickers on to light your way
Holy Computer buzzes to life in the corner to whisper softly to you
In your pocket the Great God awakens to kill all time so you don't have to suffer through it

The dreams are real now
The dreams are at your fingertips
The dreams are better than your reality

They are the family that finally sees and understands you
The rules are gone and you get to write the story how you like
So why should you ever wake up

The Red Garden

by MacKenzie Soto

He promised these lands would be theirs,
As two boys grew under their father's care.
Their fields would grow tall,
And each would have a share.

Preparing his plans,
One brother's intentions would show.
He knew his father's lands,
he would soon outgrow.

Then one day their father died,
Ambitions unwilling to subside.
The land grew too small
For both men to reside.

So, the brother left to build his own life,
With his child, his wife,
His will, his strength,
And his scythe and seeds at his side.

Hacking down trees,
And briars as he went.
For his ambitions
Were not yet spent.

With foliage and match
He let the flame take form.
Kept it well fed.
So, his family stayed warm.

He stood unafraid.
When came the strife,
He carved a path
With his hungry scythe.

Through valleys, and forests,
Towns young and old.
Actions that would make
Even humble men feel bold.

Then they found it,
Land straight from a dream.
All might have been perfect,
If it weren't for the weeds.

He took his scythe
To purge his new ground.
And the weeds, they bled
When he brought the blade down.

Then, with unflinching gaze
He set the remains ablaze.
All of it gone, in one foul slash.
Then he planted his seeds within the ash.

His land he fed,
With the blood of new dead.
Spread it wide,
So, his garden would survive.

But Every Night When the Curtain Falls, Truth Comes in With Darkness

by Hunter Fox

On sunny,
warm days, my joy travels farthest.

But every
night the curtain falls and truth comes in with darkness.

For most
it's therapeutic, solitude with their thoughts.

But for
me it's as bitter, as winter's first frost.

I, of
course was born on the darkest night of the year.

How can
one fear the very day they were put here?

When darkness
overflows the room, strangling your stimulus

This may
make you feel afraid, I know, for I'm not new to this.

Some people
fear the dark because they fear what they can't see.

But I am
fearful of the dark since nothing will distract me.

Morning
is my only hope, distraction comes with rays of light.

I beg for
mercy, plea for sun, for darkness is my kryptonite.

Every day,
I proceed with calming lightheartedness.

But then
comes night, the curtain falls and truth comes in with darkness.

For Women

by Samm Lescarbeau

I may rise
For, I stand on the backs
Of Powerful Women

I may rise
For, the Women behind me
Showed Me the Way

I may rise
For, they taught me to believe
My Soul is Mine

I may rise
For, I was shown no other way
Than Greatness and Unity

I may rise
For, my Fathers stood aside
And Protected Women, Like Mine

I will rise
To continue their legacies
And Guide the Next Wave

I will rise
For the insurance of a better society
Made of Love and Greens

I will rise
For Women to find and keep
Their Voices and Their Places

I'm Just Like You, Gramma June

by Samm Lescarbeau

I.

I'm just like you, Gramma
And Heather is, too
We're gonna make you proud, Gramma
And show the world what we can do

Look I picked some blueb'ries, Gramma
I know you like them, too
I know I ate a lot, Gramma
But I left some just for you

You love to play Scrabble, Gramma
I like to play it, too
You're smart and kind and love to rhyme
I wanna be just like you

II.

I'm just like you, Gramma
And Heather is, too
We're gonna make you proud, Gramma
And show the world what we can do

I let you take my pic, Gramma
I'll learn to love it, too
You cherish all our mem'ries, Gramma
I'll cherish them, just like you

I'm growing up so fast, Gramma
But I'm sure I'll make it through
I'm tired and I'm hurt, Gramma
But there's so much more to do

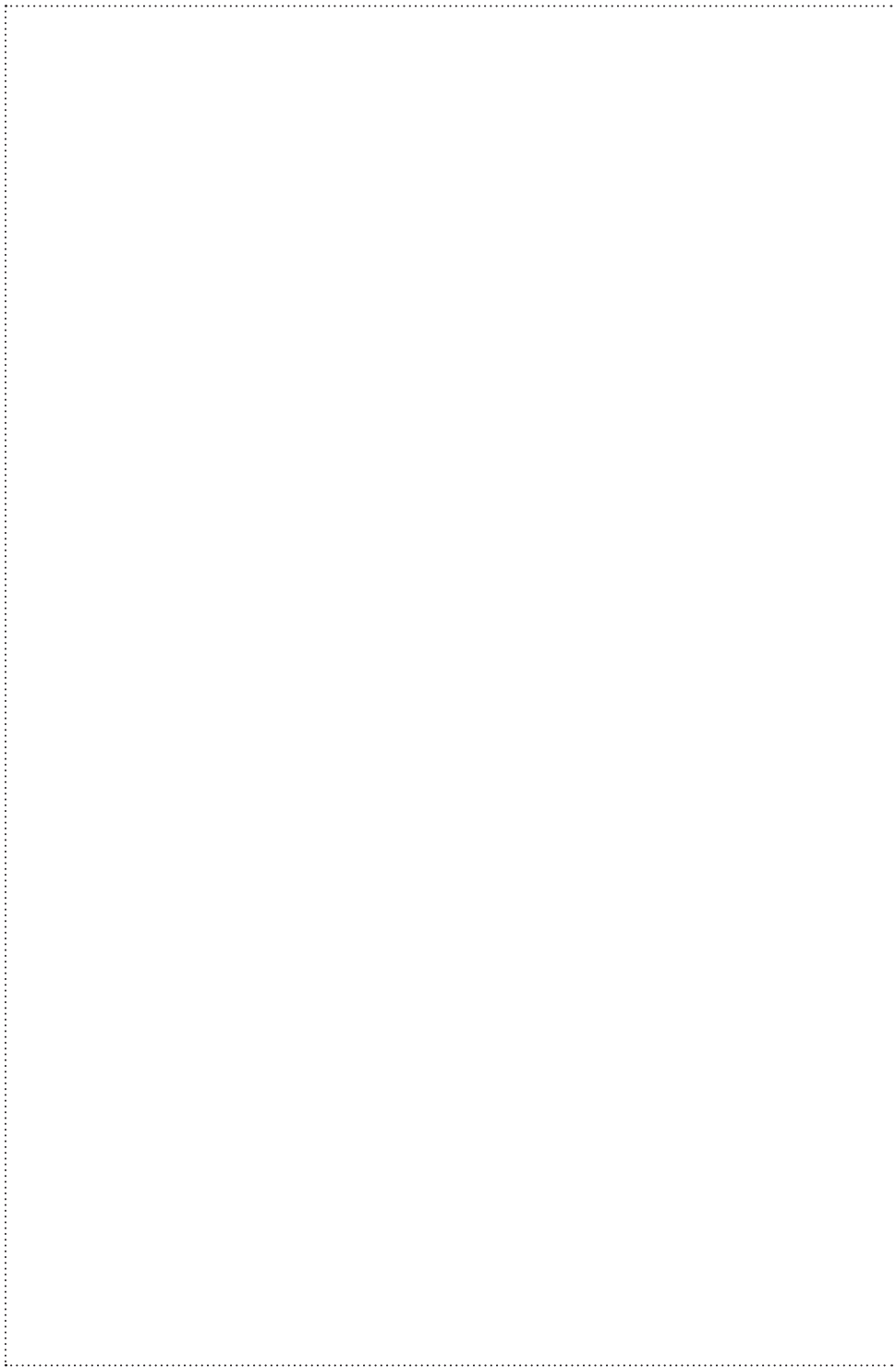
III.

I'm just like you, Gramma
And Heather is, too
We're gonna make you proud, Gramma
And show the world what we can do

I got my first degree, Gramma
I'll get my next one soon
The whole world's gonna know you, Gramma
Through everything we do

I wanna save the world, Gramma
It's long past its due
I know it can be done, Gramma
I know what I'm to do

We're gonna make you proud, Gramma
We'll show the world what we can do
We'll change its heart for sure, Gramma
Because we are just like you



pt 1. Short Fiction



pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. Poetry



pt 4. **Lyrics**



pt 5. Visual Art



pt 6. Scholarship



Black Bodies Swinging (A Tribute to Lady Day)

by Tyra Nurmi

Statement

I wrote this song as a tribute to Billie Holiday's life. She was a very strong woman. Not only was she a talented artist but was a survivor of hardship and horrific abuse. This song is meant to highlight her resilience and strength while also showing the challenges she and others close to her had to overcome due to being black. Billie experienced abuse since a young age, and discrimination due to the color of her skin. In the lyrics to her song "Strange Fruit" she refers to the horror of what black people had to go through being lynched. I decided to use some of her lyrics in my own song "Black Bodies Swinging" to evoke the same emotion and power.

They say where there's sadness
That's where the Gold is
So I guess that I am Gold . . . I feel a darkness in my soul
A young girl, raped, abused, and left all alone

Verse 1

I keep singing to heal the pain
Hoping God will save me one day
And the angels will sing (and take me away)
Oh, how I crave the escape

I keep getting high with this guy, to pass the time
I don't even know his name
It makes me feel more alive
I ask myself, Why do I keep trying?
Well, at least I'll die trying
I'm slowly dying . . . dying

Verse 2

Buried the pain like they buried black bodies
Hung by a rope; imprisoned and chained (sobbing)
As far as that man who robbed my sanity
I'm a victim, not to be blamed
Moms and Pops used to beat me for saying these things

I was raped by the game at an early age
And all I have left is this heroin to take away the pain
It's the sweetest escape
Prayin' to God I will see another day

Bridge/Chorus

Black bodies swinging
I keep having these visions
Black bodies swinging
But I'm still singing

God won't you save me (save me)
Angels just take me (take me)

Verse 3

They all want something from me
Don't they know I want more than the fame?
Now they won't let me get high
I have to abide by these rules like a little child

Don't you know that's why I left home in the first place?
To run free and run wild
Now I'm riled, riled, riled

Bridge/Chorus

Black bodies swinging
I keep having these visions
Black bodies swinging
But I'm still singing

God won't you save me (save me)
Angels just take me (take me)

Verse 4

I am ready to die
Maybe when I sing in heaven I'll feel more alive
Yeah ... the irony of my life
I put up a fight
Don't tell me wrong from right
I got my own way of dealing with the devil when he tucks me in at night

I've been losing patience for a while
I just want my lost innocence back from when I was a child
Before they took me away
Chained me, and lied to me; I buried the pain
Now I'm falling victim to the things I have seen
The stranger the fruit, the more I escape
But why the hell would I want to feel safe anyway?
The stranger the fruit means I don't have to change

I want someone to hold me (hold me)
And feel my soul
So I am not lonely (lonely)
Nevermind
I'll stay here crying on the floor
Lost and vulnerable

Verse 5

Thanks God for this heroin keeping me alive
Just when I thought my soul had died
I felt the devil there that night
I looked into his eyes (I looked into his eyes)
The angels keepin' me alive

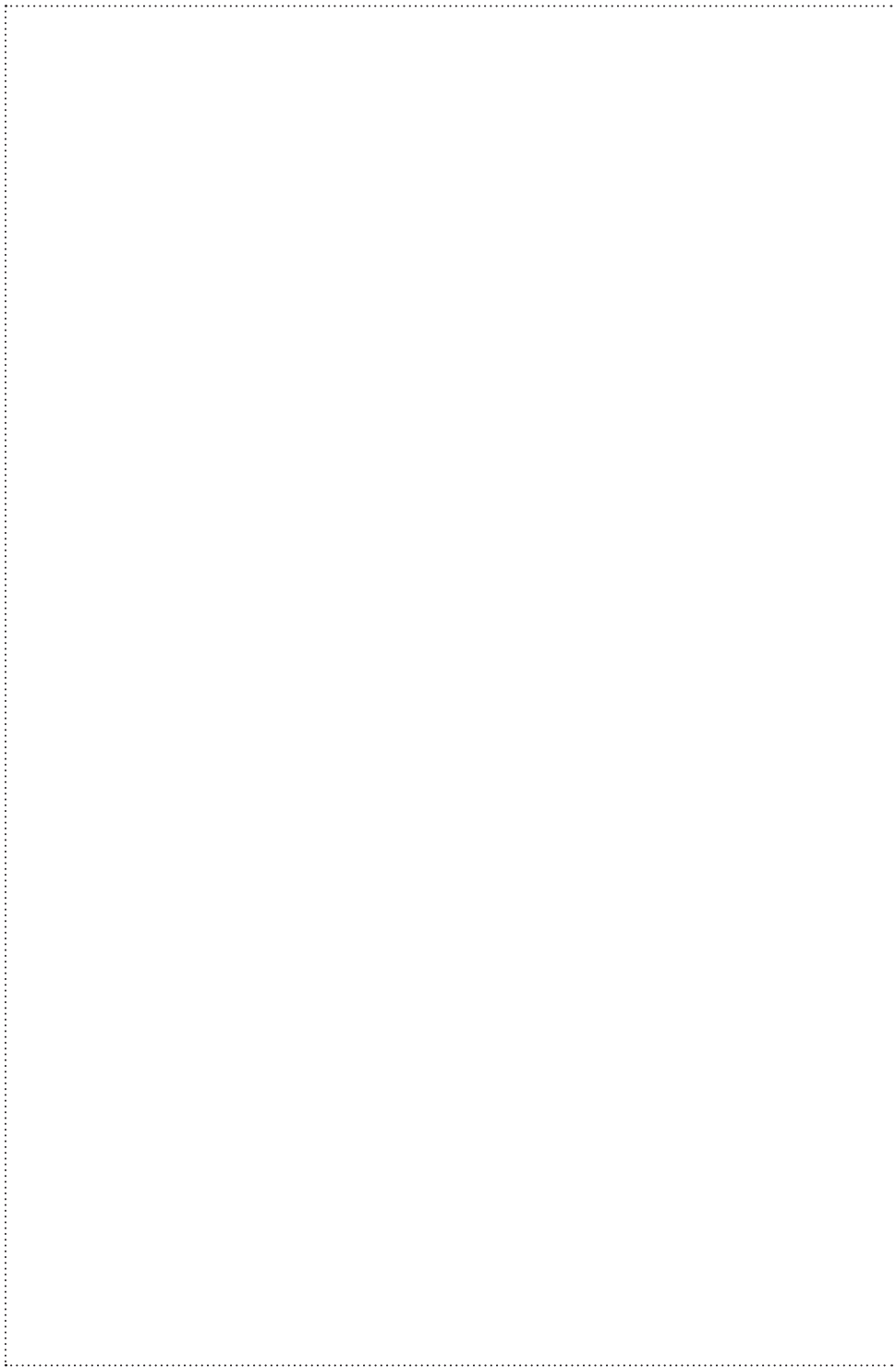
Thank God for this heroin keeping me alive
So I don't have to feel the darkness in my soul

I don't have to feel anything ... anything at all

Bridge/End

Black bodies swinging
I keep having these visions

Black bodies swinging
But I'm still singing



pt 1. Short Fiction



pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. Poetry



pt 4. Lyrics



pt 5. **Visual Art**



pt 6. Scholarship





Matilda Root
Untitled 1



Matilda Root
Untitled 2

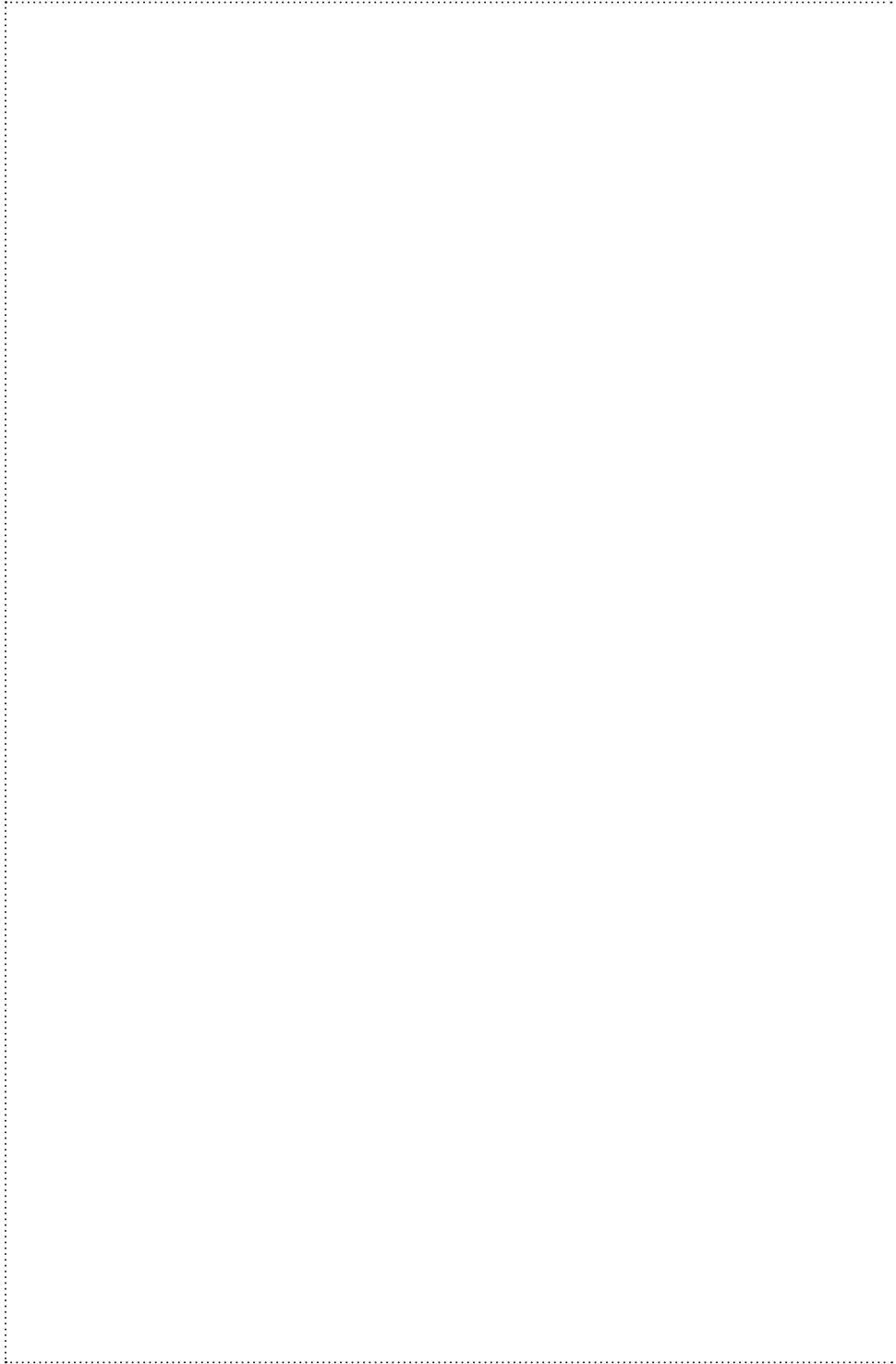


Matilda Root
Untitled 3



ببعضی‌ها حوه حسامی
ای گوه‌ران نامهاتان خفته
ای محو گشته پادهاتان،
یادهای آبی روشن
به ذهن موج گل آلود
زلال جاری اندیش
کدامین دست غم
تندیس طلای
درین طوفان
کجا شد زور
پس از این ز
تربا اگر آرا
بر اگر خالی
سخنر مهتاب
بخند بخشد
عوه اگر دل نر
ارور گردد
کی از نامهاتان
نورشید خواهد شد
طلوع پادهاتان
ادهای آبی روشن
چشم ماهیان خسته
باران ظلمت ها هر
طلوه امید خواهد شد؟
ای بر صبح من خانا
آران دردی کنم احساس
بدام چشم تو صیاد! چند
که حاجت نیست بهر
کجا این نایقه عشق
که بار دنیگ
همه گ
سگر ک
چه میشد
سب تمام
لب من میند سر
قل پتکی بروی سندان
اعت از حجم درد لبریز است
نب به پایان رسیده تا آخر
وزه های سگی لگد خورده راه من راه رو
سیر راه تو چاه می

Amy Gates
Inspired by Afghan Literature



pt 1. Short Fiction



pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction



pt 3. Poetry



pt 4. Lyrics



pt 5. Visual Art



pt 6. **Scholarship**



How Literature Gives Women of Color a Voice in Feminism

by Colleen Moran

Reading is of the fundamental ways of exposing oneself to other cultures and lifestyles, and a way of learning things one may never experience. That's why works like *Lady Sings the Blues* by Billie Holiday and William Dufty, and *Load Poems like Guns* edited by Farzana Marie are so important, especially now. *Lady Sings the Blues* is an autobiography of Billie Holiday penned by William Dufty from a series of interviews and meetings, showing the trials and tribulations of an African-American singer. *Load Poems like Guns* is a collection of poetry from multiple Afghani women, revealing their daily struggles under the Taliban's rule. Along with experiencing other cultures, white women readers get a chance to view other forms of feminism, and the different types of issues women deal with in other parts of the world.

The autobiography of Billie Holiday's life is an important story, despite getting much criticism for inaccuracy, such as her most popular song *Strange Fruit* being written by a white Jewish school teacher, Abel Meeropol (Gomez). The reason this autobiography should be read today is because many of the issues Holiday experienced in her life are still present in today's society. Some of Holiday's issues are those of a woman, and others are of a black woman. One of Holiday's rude awakenings to her life was being sexually assaulted as a child. Holiday was taken to the police, thrown in a jail cell and then "sentenced to [time at] a Catholic Institution" (Holiday 17). This act had repercussions on her life due to the things she had to see there, such as being locked in a room with a dead body. This behaviour, blaming or punishing women for the activities and actions of men, is still something that happens today. A notable recent incident is Ariana Grande being blamed for an ex-boyfriend Mac Miller's death from a drug overdose. After Miller's death, Grande's social media was bombarded with comments blaming her for his death, one comment on Twitter reading "you did this to him... you should feel absolutely sickened!" (Competitive). Misplacement of blame is an issue that spans across all women, something that any given woman can and probably will experience.

Billie Holiday struggled with drug addiction most of her life, primarily with heroin. She was caught with possession many times (some of which she wasn't actually "guilty" of). She also made

many attempts to go through rehab and could never do it in private, peacefully. After one of her stays at a "private" sanatorium, she noticed a man as she was leaving that "was from the law and [she] knew he was trailing [her]" (Holiday 134). As well, even up to a year after her stay she was trailed from "New York to Hollywood and back" (Holiday 141). Black men and women are both convicted more often than white people are for drug related crimes. Statistics in 2011 state that "Blacks were incarcerated at a dramatically higher rate than Whites (5-7 times) and accounted for almost half of all prisoners incarcerated with a sentence of more than one year for a drug-related offense" (Rosenberg et al.). This behaviour is seen when Holiday was tailed after her sanatorium stay. Her friend who was not a drug or alcohol user was charged with possession from "evidence [the cops found] under the bed" (Holiday 143). Though he did not end up going to jail, it can still be seen that black men and women are charged with drug crimes that they never actually committed.

It is important for white women to read these texts and reflect on their own feminism in their life. Feminism is growing, but is still thought of as "Western", and there is an ever present "White feminism". White feminism is the pockets of white women that don't understand, or empathize with, issues that affect women of other ethnicities and races. A recent issue of white feminism ignoring women of color is an issue with the costume website Yandy. The website sold a sexualized "Handmaid's Tale" costume for \$64.95. Some Twitter users claimed the costume was sexualizing rape victims, and was insensitive. Subsequently, the costume was taken down quickly and the link redirects to a statement that apologizes for the costume (Henderson). The issue with this is the website is still rampant with other costumes that shouldn't be sexualized, like Egyptian and Native American women. If someone goes to Yandy's website, and types in "native american costume" they get a result of 41 products, only 4 of which are male costumes and 2 couple's costumes, leaving 35 costumes for women (Yandy). These costumes are equally, if not more, offensive, and yet there are still 41 products. There is seemingly no petitions or outrage to take them down -- at least none have made front page of the news like the Handmaid's Tale costume.

The Feminist movement has also had a history

in generally excluding black women from their community. The faces of the feminist movement have been white for so long that “many women of color steered clear of it” (Bates). Black women created the term Womanist so that they could “identify themselves as feminists without connecting themselves to the racism within some feminist movements” (Marbley). The term was coined during the 1980s by Alice Walker, and was used well into the Third-Wave of feminism, which happened from the 90’s until around 2012 (Marbley). The women’s march in 2017, the day after Donald Trump’s inauguration, was one of controversy. A few black women spoke out, asking white women to “[listen] more, [talk] less” (Bates). As usual, there was some obvious backlash to this sentiment. Many white women reported feeling unwelcome and cancelled their trips to the march because of this (Stockman). This is a tough issue because many white women felt that they were being told to step down and not talk about their issues, but they also ignore the fact that women of other minorities feel excluded and are often silenced themselves. Feminism needs to be a space where every woman can voice their issues. It needs to be accepted and understood that each group of women experiences the same base issues, but there will always be problems faced exclusively by other groups. It is equally important for white women to give women of color the platform and publicity to highlight their specific issues.

Another group that needs to be considered is Muslim women. Muslim women have been one of the biggest targets of criticism and hate crimes during the past years. Some Western women try to push their idea of feminism onto Muslim women, and try to tell them that their hijab is a symbol of oppression. For many years, from the 1960s well into recent history, women were encouraging Muslim women to to “cast off the veil to reclaim their sexuality” (Al Wazni). This is happening because in the Western world, in Western feminism, feeling free to show as much of yourself and not be ridiculed, and therefore embracing your sexuality, is what is seen as a major issue. The issue comes from the misunderstanding of the hijab and other head coverings, due to lack of education about the Muslim culture and religion. There is also the matter of societal differences. In the Middle East some women may see taking off their hijab as an act of rebellion and feminism, and some may not. This is an issue that will hopefully be learned more about over time.

Everything talked about in the previous paragraph is the experience of Muslim-American wom-

en. The case of feminism in Afghanistan is very different from the experience that Muslim-American women get. We see this in selections of poetry from *Load Poems like Guns*, a collection of poems written during the occupation of the Taliban. One of the poems by Elaha Sahel gives a little bit of insight into Afghani women and protest. The opening lines of her poem “Protest”, “My fingers tap the table/ seven thousand seven hundred and seventy-seven times--/my sign of protest” (Marie 138), can give the reader insight to how women are restricted in terms of their ability to protest. These women don’t get the chance to protest and participate in feminism as much as women in Western cultures do, especially when under control of the Taliban. The main author present in *Load Poems*, Nadia Anjuman, frequented literary meetings disguised as a sewing club, because that was an approved activity for women under the Taliban (Marie). As well, the feminist movements in Afghanistan are very different from the ones Western women get to take part in.

Most feminist movements in Afghanistan are done in secrecy, for the safety of the people involved. A woman, whose true identity is never revealed, is referred to as “Parween” and is the head of a secret feminist organization in Kabul, Afghanistan. The membership of the group averages to about 2,000 women, and Parween doesn’t personally know every single member, because the group operates in a cell structure model, again for safety. They keep their secrecy by not revealing their names, so that no one gets tracked by the National Directorate of Security, or NDS, which is Afghanistan’s intelligence service. Some of the things that Parween’s organization has done are run schools for girls to attend, and filmed the beatings and killings of women by hiding cameras under their burqas. Parween runs various orphanages and literacy centers, all under different names. Parween risks her life every day by being involved in this organization. She takes this risk to her life to better the future for women in Afghanistan (Boone).

In the end, most women come together as women and are respectful towards each other. Most women understand that a Muslim woman can feel safe and empowered in her hijab, and that women of color are subject to face issues that a white woman will never experience in her lifetime. The issue of the few that don’t understand this can not go unchecked though. There are women who are uneducated about a non-white woman’s life, and this is why books like Holiday’s and Marie’s collection of poetry are so significant. You can’t

*Feminism needs to
be a space where
every woman can
voice their issues.*



learn someone else's experience if you never are exposed to it. Making these types of books consumable for young girls as well is an important task for the future. Letting young girls see powerful women like Holiday, and other stories like hers (minus the details that a young girl doesn't need to know (yet)) is how a diversified and inclusive feminism will continue to grow. A wide range of women have been showing up in the fourth-wave of feminism, and have become the role models for younger girls, and will continue to be the role models for the generations to come. ●

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On Anita, a Documentary by Freida L. Mock

by Tom Gwinnell

Brilliant, courageous, and defiant in the face of her adversaries are only a few characteristics that define Anita Hill. In the documentary film "Anita", director Freida Lee Mock interprets many events along the course of Hill's life that epitomize her core beliefs and exhibit her cultural significance. The film leads viewers through an enduring 1991 hearing where Hill accuses Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment in conjunction with the benefits and implications that followed. The film was created to advocate against the social injustices that accosted Hill's life and career while also displaying societal changes that

have occurred because of her bravery (Mock). Mock constructed the film to completely sympathize with Hill's perspective of the inequality received from Senate and population alike. Anita does have a few blemishes as a documentary, however it does fulfill its purpose to raise awareness to gender, racial, and power inequalities, and to empower those afflicted to speak out.

What exactly is a documentary? This conundrum has plagued documentaries since the beginning of their existence. Movies -- documentaries included -- always fall in a continuum between complete objectivity and subjectivity. The problem lies within the fact that all documentaries have some level of human influence and all fiction movies have some empirical facts. The moment when a man or woman tries to describe their opinion on any subject matter, they fall victim to their own beliefs. There is no such thing as a completely truthful documentary. However, it is widely accepted to have a documentary that is believed to be true. When an individual asks another to tell the truth, they are really asking what they believe to be true. It is the job of the documentary's director to use as much empirical evidence in combination with as little subjectivity as possible. Directors are forced to embellish a documentary to make them captivating, which in turn makes it more subjective. Paradoxically, there is no authority on how much factual data a documentary must have because that also would be subjective.

Despite the controversy of what a documentary entails, Mock is very successful at staying within its perimeters. She utilizes raw footage from the hear-

ing and incorporates witness testimonies to add validity to the message she hopes to convey. This information is undoubtedly edited and contoured to preserve the sanctity of its purpose, which is to persuade viewers to side with Hill. The act of presenting certain facts in refined way is common among all films in this genre. "Anita" unfortunately falters when it comes to fallacies in logic. The film only features evidence and testimonies that aid the

director's agenda. At no point during the film were any of Thomas' supporters interviewed or details given that would make viewers even partially sympathize with him. This replacement of deductive reasoning with inductive reasoning damages the credibility of the film. If Mock had wished to make the film more nonpartisan, she would have to incorporate aspects that oppose her beliefs. This information would be vital if the only goal of the film was to unquestionably determine what conspired between Hill and Thomas. Since the film encompasses so much more than the subject of who was victimized, contrasting data is not required, thus leaving the audience with only one side of the story.

Mock masterfully progresses the film in stylized manner that is not traditional in Hollywood blockbusters. Typically speaking, movies tend to present a conflict, develop characters that viewers can sympathize with, and then sends them on an arduous journey that climaxes and resolves in the final moments. In "Anita", the journey and climax end just after the first half of the movie is over. The remainder of the movie displays the resolution that occurs even after the tragic loss of the court hearing. This progression is ingenious because by placing the conflict in the beginning to middle of the movie, viewers can witness the birth of Hill's identity as a cultural icon for equality. Then, just as a cameraman changes lenses, Mock replaces the spotlight directed at Hill's hearing with a lantern that encompasses the entirety of Hill's life. The audience, for the first time, is given details about Hill's childhood throughout early adulthood. Mock utilizes this part of the film to indicate how Hill became a strong, intelligent, and independent woman. The film then seamlessly transitions into Hill's later years, previewing her advocating for women's rights and receiving prestigious awards for her contributions.

Anyone who has ever been on the inside of a

Mock successfully recreates the events of Anita Hill's past in a compelling documentary of inequality.



courtroom during a hearing knows it is a dreadful experience. Mock successfully recreates the notion of apprehension and austerity that filled the courtroom during Hill's extensive hearing. Solemn violins or the absence of music all together, emphasize severity and the connotation of looming defeat. Mock makes it very apparent as Hill commences her hearing that she will face multifaceted inequality. "The Democrats really didn't rescue Anita Hill as they could have, and the Republicans were basically disemboweling her," states Jane Mayor as she describes the power struggle that would leave Hill without political support throughout the hearing (Mock). Many Republicans on the Senate repeatedly forced Hill to repeat her experience of sexual harassment to make her responses lose meaning in combination with making her seem more absurd. The only time the entirely white and male Senate backs off is during Thomas' inquisition. Mock carefully selects the most prominent racial statements made by Thomas on how the hearing is a "high-tech lynching" even though Hill herself is an African American (Mock). The lack of response from the Senate shows the racial inconsistencies that were prevalent during that time. The last inequality Mock stresses is of gender inequality when the Senate condescendingly humiliates her by asking if she is a "scorned woman" or a martyr for the civil rights movement. Overall, Mock skillfully cherry-picks critical statements and sharpens them to a point to slash through any belief of a fair hearing.

Unfortunately, the onslaught against Hill did not stop when she left the courtroom. Threats of physical and sexual violence toward Hill and her family persisted long after the hearing. Mock lays down

this information as a bed of ashes that a phoenix will later rise from. Hill is given the opportunity to let the oppression from the public beat her to her knees and keep her there. Fortunately for women everywhere, she decides to stand. From that point in the movie, Mock hastily moves through defining moments that solidify Hill's role as a voice for gender equality. By previewing events such as writing a book and giving seminars, viewers can see an abundance of Hill's personal development and altruism. Nearing the end of the movie, Mock decides to display the teenage youth impacted from Hill's trials and tribulations of sexual harassment. The reason that this portion is imperative is because it is a perfect segue into Hill's closing statements. Accompanied by soft, inspiring music that alludes to a happy ending, Hill recounts the societal changes that occurred since her hearing and her aspiration for later generations to carry on her message.

Mock successfully recreates the events of Anita Hill's past in a compelling documentary of inequality with sexual harassment as the focal point. The creation of the film has undeniably raised awareness and galvanized some individuals to vocalize their experiences with social injustice. Even if the film was more evenly divided in support, it would still be extremely hard to believe Hill was not a victim at the hands of Clarence Thomas. Mock's inverted style of progression allows ample time during the film to portray the message that sexual harassment is not acceptable and should be culturally disbanded. Through Mock's platform as a director, Hill's voice inevitably was reinvigorated and amplified to reach untapped audiences that would have never known of her legacy. ●