

Circles



A Letter From B

You might be asking yourself, why is this Anthology called Lyricist Lounge: Circles? Let me explain.

We end each Lyricist Lounge off by gathering in a circle and performing an Isang Bagsak, which is tagalog for *one fall we all fall*, (and by extension) *one rise we all rise*. Every single time we gather in this space, it is a show of revolutionary love, solidarity, and community empowerment. We come here not only to speak but to listen. We demonstrate the strength in togetherness and not individual power at another's expense. This is why the cover depicts a person being lifted up by many hands. As an individual artist, I would've never have gotten here if it weren't for so many of you. And it's because we're here together, we're able to reach others with our work.

Who are we without our own personal circles supporting us? Who are we as creatives, no- as people, without each other to rely on? This book is an extension of this intention. A declaration, in fact. That we shall be heard, and we will not be ignored if we are able to move forward together! When the works we create are extensions of our lived experiences, I invite you to think of the people that influenced you, who protect you, and who will call out your name against the gaping maw of any storm that seeks to harm you. We cannot survive alone in this world, and I think this is something to be celebrated. To know that we will always seek out each other. No one is alone in this world, artist! :)

Who makes your circle?

– *B*

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Cover Art by Megan Ponce

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Meet The Authors

Veronica Mireles (@oooveronica) is a Chicana writer pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in English with a concentration in Literature at the University of San Francisco. Having grown up in Los Angeles, she is interested in topics of gentrification, cultural activism, Chicana literature and exploring her identity. She enjoys baking, reading, and playing with her cat, Manchego.

Sofia Belen Criswell (@atrevidasofia) is a Latina artist originally from Miami, FL, based out of SF. They are the daughter of an immigrant mother and a father whose ethnicity was white-washed growing up in the U.S. Growing up in Miami, they always felt the influence of both Latin America and the U.S. on my identity and perspective. These places have created unity and misalignment within me. Her work touches on themes of family, capitalism, gender & sexuality, and time. They tries to play with unexpected subject matter, mediums, and composition to express the tension they feel around these themes.

Jordyn Chapman (@jordynjanai) is currently a senior at USF majoring in psychology with a minor in criminal justice studies. She hopes to pursue a doctorate in clinical psychology and work with disadvantaged youth. She was born in Jackson, Mississippi, and grew up in Dallas, Texas. Her southern roots heavily influence her work. Jordyn writes poems and short stories about love, life, identity, and spirituality. She finds that writing has been a source of healing for her and hopes others can find the same through her writing.

Lia Sina is a second-year English major with a concentration in creative writing. She is originally from the Los Angeles area. Much of her work centers around Chicana culture and identity, family, and womanhood. When not writing, she enjoys watching old films, listening to music, & exploring the city.

Hillary Nguyen (@hillaryttn) (she/her) was born and raised in the Bay Area, and is currently a kinesiology student at the University of San Francisco. In her downtime, she enjoys experimenting with creative mediums such as poetry, photography, and textiles, exploring the many neighborhoods in the city, and finding joy in the little things.

Hi guys! I'm **Madeline Liu (@notebeansstationery)**, founder and digital illustrator behind Notebeans Stationery! Notebeans Stationery is my creative entrepreneurial venture with a mission to bridge creative culture and humanitarian causes. I donate 50% of my sales profits to Global Giving's hundreds of cost effective charity projects, and I do so through my original characters Kato the cat, Kuma the Samoyed, and Paya the Penguin! Through storytelling of shared deep experiences, emotions, and my characters, I hope people can resonate with my work! See more at **Notebeansstationery.com**

Gus Berg (@gberg24601) is a fourth-year USF student and an aspiring Great American Novelist, whose work deals earnestly with themes of religion, melancholy, and his experiences growing up as a transgender man in rural Northern Minnesota. He currently lives in San Francisco's Tenderloin District with his three-legged cat, Trinity.

Malia Amani (@maliaacruz) is a poet who loves being creative through her writing and style. Poetry has become such a key part in her self-expression and has pushed her to explore her identity. It has become an outlet, one that allows me to understand her experiences on a deeper level. Although her poetry may be specific to her own experiences, she hopes that others can connect with it and find a piece of themselves within her words.

Egan Walker (he/she) (@eggtemperart) is an artist and writer studying English and Classics at USF. He creates work that examines the body and its physical localities, with a concentration in apocalyptic optimism.

Maxwell Ayiko (@the.drati) is a spoken word poet and activist from the Bay Area, he is a partner with Gold Beams Oakland and a member of the youth speaks street team. His work caters around themes of Joy, Black pride, comedy, satirical critiques of society, people and mental health. He is currently writing a Book titled Lenses, a collection of poems and writings for Black people by Black people. And a documentary, Brute, coming out soon.

Bailey Steadman (@baileysteadmanphotography) is a Communications major who took a poetry workshop at USF on a whim to fulfill a core credit. They didn't see the value in being thrown off their artistic axis, but now she appreciates poetry for forcing her to learn the writing process. It has made her a more intentional fiction writer and taught her how to appreciate words. It has also humbled her. Never has she felt so laughed at by an art form. Some of her best poems she used to consider failures, and now they are dear to her heart.

Adriana Muré Parrino (AMP | @resisting.bitch.face) has been writing all their life and has been involved in activism since they were old enough to form their own opinions. The two arts naturally intertwined over the years, and poetry became a vehicle to explore her queerness, righteous rage, and deep pain. They were born and raised in Mesa, Arizona, a city and state which did not quite know what to do with people like them Jewish, queer, angry women(-ish) people like her. So, they wrote and they protested and they screamed their way here to San Francisco. And, now begins the unfolding;

Elsa Carpenter | Elsa Furay | @elsa.furay Remembrance is key to healing, to forward movement, to personal growth. Through their poetry, Elsa Carpenter aims to construct emotionally evocative, intimate, and often times fiercely untamed narratives which are intertwined with reminiscence of their own experiences and memories. These poems are a tenacious act of remembrance, each polished with a sense of bridled nostalgia, serving to provide decontextualized accounts of defeat, control, and triumph.

Elana Santos or e.l. (@manilafolderpoetry) is a Filipino-American writer. They've been writing for a little over a year now and are pretty new to writing and the world of spoken word. These works touch on what it feels like to fall in and out of, what feels like love, with someone in the wake of transitioning to a new city. They hope that you find something in this collection of poems to relate to.

Seth Timple (OG_Lumpiawrapper) is a Filipino-American kid born and raised in Seattle, WA. His art really focuses on identity, often their own, and the reclamation of history that may have been distorted or hidden. They don't want to represent anyone but themselves, but rather help in the preservation of other people's stories.

Janise "Jay" Powell (she/her) is a storyteller, racial justice advocate, education advocate, and social justice advocate. Utilizing skills in personal development, spoken word, and stories she creates events, workshops, and programs that allow people to share their stories through various platforms for personal and professional development, to learn from others, collectively heal, and to grow together. Currently, they are a doctoral student in University of San Francisco's International and Multicultural Education program with a concentration in Racial Justice Education.

Ally Hernandez is a second-year design major and advertising minor at USF. Besides design and making art, they also like singing, building Lego, watching cartoons, playing piano, playing video games, and exploring the city with friends. She hopes to design for the Filipinx-American community here in the Bay Area, as well as working with other non-profit organizations and museums.

Elijah Lizama comes from the small island of Guam in the middle of the Pacific. They are currently a first-year architecture major at the University of San Francisco who aspires to become a successful builder and designer for a future world.

Cayenne (she/her), Aria (she/her), and Nyles (he/they) are members of a **DID system named Autumn**, who has absolutely no published work, but has enjoyed reading and creating literature in all of its forms for over a decade. An aggressively pattern-identifying brain has made it difficult for them to expand beyond strict structures of rhyme and verse, but all the more rewarding when they finally manage to capture a feeling, be it whimsy, hopelessness, or defiant joy. In a world where even control over their own body is inconstant, they have found words to be the most reliable medium of expression.

Megan Ponce is currently a graphic designer studying at the University of San Francisco. As an artist, they never want to limit themselves to one medium and strive to experiment in different areas of design. Her main goal is to tell a story with her art whether that is her own idea or another's idea combined with her art style. While her design work can be seen around the USF campus her personal work can be seen on her artist Instagram: [@by.mimi.bella](https://www.instagram.com/by.mimi.bella)

Brandon Gagante (@bgagante_stories) is a Filipino American storyteller born and raised in San Jose. He is the **proud** host of Lyricist Lounge for the 2022-2023 school year, the student-centered open mic on campus. The stories he creates illustrate everything he carries with him, the lessons he learned, his people, his culture, his community, and more. He seeks to not only push the narrative but to break it, and writes in the way he wishes to live: without fear. He is the lucky collator of this Anthology and its many authors: *Lyricist Lounge: Circles*.

The MUNI & Me

By Veronica Mireles

6 a.m., the earth is blanketed by dark blue hues
and in the horizon, we are being invaded by a burning orange
telling us to get up and go to work.

the 44 is filled with strange construction workers with familiar
paint-stained hands and dirt tucked under their fingernails.
women are piling in, with hair cut short or gelled up buns.
they are styled in non-slip shoes. both have their eyes closed,
heads tilted down, back, to the side.

6:15 a.m., i think about my dad, his paint-stained jeans,
and his torn up hat that protects him from the scorching sun.
i think about my mom and her combed back curls, hauling
my sister and i through the bus routes of los angeles.

6:30 a.m., i wonder if i remind them of their daughter.

6:35 a.m., i should call them.

6:45 a.m., i am on 9th and irving. the overpriced restaurants
and modern vintage boutiques are closed, waiting for
the leisurely to come in. the muni has transported me
from the bayshore to the sunset.

7 a.m., i am in the richmond. minutes from the beach, the bridge,
beneath the marina. funny, i tell my mom later, when you go up the city
so does the tax bracket. pues allí es
donde debes de estar she says.

7:10 a.m., i am in a classroom with people i don't
recognize. strangers with strange lives. bayshore
is a dirty word here. they begin to wonder where it is:
south of market? sort of. oh, by the dogpatch, with the
nice new coffee shops? sure.

7:15 a.m., they navigate the city through yelp reviews
but like in my city of angels, i see lines. reds. blues. yellows.
where they see the top 10 brunch places in the bay area,
i see numbers. the 44. the 9. the 8. i see people. my moms. my dads,
mis abuelos. mis vecinos. mi gente.



dvsy
By Sofia Belen Criswell

This is for my Generation

By Jordyn Chapman

We are the forgotten. The blueprint, carrier of the eve gene we are creators, we build empires, empires they've tried to steal, burn, rebuild into something unrecognizable, and yet we remain these genes running through blood for tens of thousands of years

We are the forgotten. They stole our features, our clothes, our hair, our style, our music, our babies, and our bodies right in front of everyone and the world watched in awe, entranced by the way anything that came from a Black woman but isn't Black is beautiful

We are the forgotten. We were sold and exhibited in circuses, set on display in museums, sexualized and fetishized until nothing is left but out bodies, our bodies used cars at the auction waiting for the next bidder, we will never be looked at as the "girl next door"

We are the forgotten From a young age, everything is stacked against us, in schools, we are 4 times more likely to be arrested than our white counterparts, see they made villains out of us before we even know what the word meant, they told their children scary stories at night and we were the monsters to be afraid of in their eyes pushed out to make the perfect path to prison pipeline

We are the forgotten. The media refuses to acknowledge us unless it is obtaining profit when we are not ass-shaking and music-making they no longer believe we exist, won't cover our stories when we go missing when we are wrongfully killed, we are ghosts in the night tethered to this earth forever searching for our missing bodies but

We will not be forgotten. Change begins with us, and we will be silenced no longer, you will hear our voices loud and clear until the echoes of our pain ring in your ears for generations to come

We will not be forgotten. Throw out everything you got, and we will only evolve into something more locked hand in hand with sisters searching for the same goal

We will not be forgotten. We build empires, empires they've tried to steal, burn, and rebuild into something unrecognizable, but our daughters, will have an empire to remember, a foundation so strong left unbreakable by any disaster that may come

We will not be forgotten. They try to erase what they cannot handle, but Black ink doesn't fade easily.

We will not be forgotten.

You will remember.

Where I'm From
By Malia Cruz

My name is Malia Cruz and I am from Vallejo California
Or maybe I should say
My name is Malia Amani Duenas Cruz
And I am from bumpy roads and run-down neighborhoods
I am from home after hoome - never staying long enough for it to feel like home

I am from long car rides and even longer commutes
I am from traffic
From gas fumes and overheated cars
I am from late night dinners
From growling stomachs and dirty hands
I am from love between two strangers
and then from divorce when the love wasn't enough

I am from two Christmases and two Thanksgivings and two birthdays
I am from overcompensation
From I'm sorrys
Mother and father
Youngest sibling
Found out I had a younger sibling
One turned into three - I am no longer the youngest sibling

I am from wars and soldiers
I am from muffled cries and stinging wounds
I am from bare feet calloused from walking across a whole continent
I am from my grandfather's pride
I am from pancreatic cancer
Six months.
Terminal.
I am from the truth, cancer didn't kill him

I'm from the rhythmic pounding of feet to this foreign but all too
familiar beat
I am from sticks bound together to brush away century old grudges - we
call that a walis

I am from fear and hate
I am from love maybe even fate
I am from cigarette smoke
I am from "I'll give you something to cry about"
I am from the smacks of belts
The smack of gum
The smack of hands
I am from standing ovations
I am from congratulations
I am from *I wasn't supposed to make it this far*

I am from seven
From twelve and thirteen
From 19, now twenty
I am from when did I decide to live?

I am from bones and brittle and dust
I am from "stand up when things get rough"
I am from "hard work beats talent when talent don't work hard"
So work hard
Work harder
Work harder

I am from calloused hands but not my own
I am from they came here for you
So work hard
Work harder
Work harder

I am from writing until my hands hurt
Reading until my eyes hurt
Bent over backwards now my back hurts
I am from youth naivety
I am from learning my lesson the hard way

I am from friends - from people I didn't even know a year ago
I am from late nights

Drunk nights
Cold nights
I am from *please let the night end*
I am from the morning sun
I am from I made it through another day
I am from maybe I do want to stay.

I am from hugs
Side hugs, awkward hugs, where have you been hugs
I am from I love yous
I miss yous
I miss you
I'll miss you

I am from maybe I'll stay
Maybe I do want to stay.

4th of July
By *Lia Sina*

I remember Spooky sprinting across the front lawn
as my cousins and I cahsed him with our dollar-store water guns
I wondered if the little black spiderweb
tattooed at the corner of his left eye had hurt
When he fell forwords onto the ground
his laugh was deep and loud,
and he let us spray his face with lukewarm hose water.

I remember Aunt Lupe wheeling out a cooler
full of paletas and beer that Spooky raced us to.
Uncle Jonny mumbled that this was the first time in years
that Spooky had been on the outside for the 4th of July.
I wondered why Spooky would celebrate inside the house
when he had so much fun in the yard with us.

I remember the bouncy banda music that played so loudly
none of us heard the sirens
until they were blaring right in front of the house.
A pink strawberry paleta fell from Spooky's hand
and landed in the muddy grass.
Then he shouted,
I'm sorry!
to nobody in particular

I remember my cousins and I confusedly calling after him
while Uncle Jonny yelled for us to
get the fuck into the house.

But I gripped the bars of the fence so tightly my knuckles turned white
so the adults couldn't make me go inside where
I couldn't keep my eyes on Spooky.
I had a sour feeling in my stomach
like maybe wherever he was going
he wouldn't be back again for a long time.

I remember Spooky sprinting down the street
as the police sprang out of their cruiser.
His frantic footsteps echoed against the asphalt,
and when the dirty white laces of his left Cortez came untied
I bit my bottom lip so hard the taste of iron coated my tongue.
I didn't want him to fall.

And I remember Aunt Lupe shrieking,
God, don't shoot him
in front of the kids!

Life Lessons
By Hillary Nguyen

I've been heart over head since young. The
Ocean can attest to my recklessness: as a child,
And not knowing much— much less the difference
Between a bathtub's giggles and

The tameless, and howling, head-thrown-back, full-bodied
Laughter of the sea— would beg to go further
Then the shallows, to feel the touch of a thing that existed
Long before my lips first touched water, to return

To this place of soul and singing, because there is no way
These waves— these waves of spume and seesaw sway,
These waves whose movements match the pulsing pattern
Of my beating heart— no way these waves aren't alive, this sea

Not breathing, and what is a child if not a magnet of life, what
Is water if not a bearer of life, what is youth
If not diving headfirst into something the heart feels
Must be palpable purpose, must be mortality manifested.

Alas, I would last thirty seconds before panicking;
Before I fall into reality; before someone drags me
Back onto course sand; before I cough out crushing

To join their kin; my lungs laugh at the sky to fill
Themselves with the alluring air of crisp ocean breeze.
I glare at the water. I hear the foam tinted wind sing like
Sirens. What to make of this mighty beast of betrayal

And beauty. What must it feel like to be immersed in, absorbed by
What can conquer all. I spit to the gritty sediment
Of heartbreak. Forget the pain of salt on raw skin and gasps
Of air. Walk towards an entity much more weathered in life

Than me, fill my empty headspaces with the cool lull of
Swept moonshine and tide, wade out further than I ever should--
I will swallow it whole.

And through all of this, it never once occurred to me,
Before I follow my heart's hunger and dive,

That I should first learn how to swim.

Sea of Possibilities

By Madeline Liu | Notebeans Stationery



The risk for people with DID
Aria | Skúlk | Autumn Brukketa

The risk for people with DID
is a whopping seventy percent
And if you can't solve your identity
then that's how the story went

But things are not as dark as they seem
to disorder is just to dismiss
And you never had any right to deem
my self invalid or cis

The things I feel and the things I see
are the treasured prizes of the past
And if it serves me in my memory
then I choose the shadow cast

But can't I help you who try to dream
to show all that's wrong with my psyche
And you will not find a broken-down team
behind my genuine glee

For I need to be loved,
but if that is illness
I suppose that makes
ev'ry one of us less

For I am just the same
as any one of you
I am one of more
but are not you all, too?

'Cause I'd presently like
to breathe in the air
I know I have sadness
just look for it there

'Cause I'd not be a person
to fail feeling so
I trust that you'll meet me
where emotions go

and maybe you'll see us
When you finally release
the people of should-be
You have locked up in fleece

and maybe you'll like us
When you meet each our members
 the people of would-be
You have set so it blurs

and maybe you'll like us
When you let these things take flight
 the aerie of will-be
You trapped thoughts from the light

and maybe you'll then see
When you rub eyes open free
 the true statement that we
Like the rest of the world, –
Are sometimes happy.

God is Female
Bailey Steadman

God = Hell
She is sin and sex,
we truly worship.
Tap dancing while unicycling watching
 vegans eating corn dogs as
 arachnophobes pet tarantulas—
 endless possibilities in Hell.

I don't have a favorite,
I have favorite words:
 aura,
 belligerence,
 pandemonium,
 mistress

I know God is female
just like I know
 eudimoniousness feels
 like being high
 in a museum,
discovering Richter's Lesende

“God is an American”
- Terrence Hayes

Eyes like mine
in the mirror
of childhood bedrooms
walls painted pink and yellow.

Pasteled innocence.
Most of what I feel
has a difficult name.

Hayes, you're not the first.

But sometimes
somberness is the hush
 falling over my soul
 when I had my first kiss

I am in-hate
with incompleteness.
I want resolutions and ends.
If She is God,
I am a sinner.

Three Days / Three Nights
By Gus Berg

I wonder if Jonah emerged knowing the secrets of the Whale—
How her knotted-baleen mouth spread open around him, pliant and
gossamer,
How she pushed him down and down
And down.
Three days is a long time to sink inside anyone.

Did he talk to her while sheathed in her body, stroke the supple folds of
her stomach lining
As it burned, gasping as he watched the creamy saliva dissolving the
prints from his fingers?
Did her belly rumble when she sang, groaning feverish in the current?
And could the good Prophet feel her powerful body rock against the
ocean waves over and over
And over again
As he prayed to be delivered from her, unable to hear himself through
the vast tomb of flesh
Wrapped around his head?

Did he know, when she was dribbling him out of her mouth,
How the succulent brine would salt his skin
And linger on his tongue, her wetness just a delectable memory in the
desert on the road to wicked Nineveh?

a good man's daughter
By e furay

they found chemical seatbelt
to put out the fire in her mouth
to bend her back and break her in
up on the altar, don't you remember?
flooding her wounds with bitter water
pressing down on the pedal, watching the birds
you thought you'd sent to slaughter

and no, i do not speak to tell you
that the lines do not crease at the folds of her palms
to kneel and tell you of her sins
whether his wave broke her or brought her
whether his hands woke her or robbed her
but hers were wrung and bow to tell you that
she was never a good man's daughter



Loneliness

By Bailey Steadman

I once made love in a sleepy house, but instead of moaning we giggled in mourning— a shelf knocked down with love, not passion. Now I lay on linen soaked with something sweet, sprawled beside the clock watching time plunge onward. Collared and chained, I can't even breathe for free. I can't fathom how someone who looks like me gets left behind by someone who wasn't supposed to matter. I survive in a cloud of weed and down Bacardi to drown the way death beacons like a lighthouse on a foggy night. I swayed with the trees until I became one of them. A true flower child, tracing visions across the sky shedding tears because the clouds are alive with me. I tried to make money off my art and it made me feel like a cheap hooker. I won't make it, cause I don't trust my fellow humans. You can take the spirit out of the girl, but you can't take the girl out of loneliness.

Dear Pheonix

By Adriana Parrino

Speaking Truth to Power
The hour is at hand
Let's fight the power
And stick it to the man

This is our protest moment
This is our movement's chant
Peter Tatchell said,
Ironic, isn't it, that if you want to demonstrate for peace, you also have to employ some of the traditional qualities of war.

So we'll go at them Guerilla style,
Popping out of the forgotten places
That they meant to forget,
We'll come out of the shadows they threw on us,
So we fight
Their war on our neighborhoods,
Their war on our people,
Their war on our planet
This war leaves us in pieces,
Leaves us crumbling and crying,
Leaves us sweating and freezing,
Leaves us farming and wheezing,

This war has destroyed our peace,
Left us in pieces,
Our pieces turned ashes,
Our ashes went flying,
Scattered through the wind,
Soaring soaring soaring,
We are geared up,
And we are warring,
2pac style we ride on our enemies,
Fighting with a pen,
Fists in the air,
Our ashes bore into the land,
Which bore us.
Nuestra bonita tierra nos llama para luchar.
Porque la tierra es donde nuestra ceniza empezó,
Empezar empezar empezar de nuevo,
Doy la Vuelta, y lo veo,
Our ashes rising into the sky,
Nosotros cielitos lindos tratando subir
Y solamente vemos ese cielito sucio llena de polución,
Our ashes rose and rose,
Our roses grew thorns like vines up our sides,
Begging to be let inside,
Begging to find a table that would take us,
Breaking through glass ceilings,
QUÉ ROMPEN LOS TECHOS CRISTALES.

They tell us over and over
Get out
Get down
Go away
Come back another day
But,
Lemme ask you, Phoenix?
Has it ever been in our nature to do anything but RISE?
When our Congress grinds us to ashes,
What does Phoenix do?
We RISE.
When our world screeches through the fire that our desert home is so
accustomed to,
What do we do to protect her?
We RISE.
Fire proves that gold is what it claims to be.
How far will we let this forest fire go until we see
The people who claim to be the people's representatives
Are breaking promises after promises?
It's time to get contemplative:
If we want progress
Offset
By the offense
Of the people's forces,
We must protest
And Object

To the abject
Oppression of this nation.
No More time to deflect.
Let's reflect
On the precepts
And the legislations.
Listen to me...
Bigotry is built-in
To the system.
The institution is blatant
With corruption
And forever will be as long as we
Put profit over planet.
We must realize
Capitalism only gets us so far.
The rest is in the heart,
So let's feel that burn in our chests
That goes so deep that we can do nothing but scream,
Our bodies so hot with the desire for change,
That despite our tries,
We can do nothing but RISEEEE
PHOENIX
LETS RISEEEE!!!

El Paletero
By *Lía Sina*

He ambles down the block / leather hands around the handle of his cart
/ which overflows with / mango and strawberry and chocolate paletas /
spicy and cheesy and salty chips / bubbly and tangy and sugarless sodas
/ hot and sweet and sour candies. / A blue and white flannel hangs over
his slender, arched body / a yellow straw hat rests on top of his thin, gray
hair. / His eyes / dark and framed by deep crow's feet / stare narrowly
ahead at his path / his papery lips tight and straight. / But when niños
with crumpled bills and high laughs swarm his cart / his mouth cracks
into a wide, gap-toothed grin. / Me and my brother spot him through
the fron twindow. / We glance at each other / and then reach around our
pockets for stray dollars / porque you're never too old for El Paletero.

All My Poems End in Kisses
By Hillary Nguyen

Tulle feels like gritty sandpaper
Against the grain of my skin
And so I pin and line my gown
With five yards of it— red silk
And black lattice into the color
Of veins, viscous and flowing.
By the end of the night my skin
Is raw, crying and unsexy. This
Is not how this is supposed to
End but my mother unzips it
For me, sees my spine and ribs
And its abrasions, says nothing
Except: you'll find a good man
Soon. In my room: dress falls like a glass
Of red wine. Frosted, handprints,
Shattering. My blood still hums,
From when your hand, press on nails
And perfumed wrists squeezed mine,
My heart thrumming the way no man
Can make it feel. Now, I am alone,
Afraid of my own heartbeat. I fall like gulps,
My gloss-stained lips pressing silky
Bruises against my knees.

My Mona Lisa
By Ally Hernandez

Everyone has a Mona Lisa in their life
Someone or something that they praise
And fall in love with
And find beautiful
What is my Mona Lisa?

7:30 AM car rides to school on 280,
Rice floating in my sinigang,
The Last Supper painting hanging over the dinner table,
Lolo eating mine and my brother's leftovers at lunch,
Kuya bribing me with \$5 to do a karaoke solo,
Hours of practicing Fur Elise for a piano recital,
Tita plopping more food on my paper plate,
Finding sewing materials in the cookie tin container,
Classmates covering their noses as I open my lunch,
Singing in choir with the itchy school cardigan,
Stressing over the B that ruined my straight A report card,
Scared of the poor, crispy lechon with an apple in its mouth,
Ate begging me to sleepover with the older cousins for the night,
People asking if I was going to be a dentist like my mom,
Taking an extra hour to say goodbye to relatives,
Hearing "Sigue, bahala ka sa buhay mo,"
Having a mental breakdown at Kumon

Using the walis to clean my Boy Bawang crumbs,
Parents chaperoning me at my “friends-only” hangout,
FilAm BBQ all warm and packed in aluminum foil,
Repeatedly asked “Do you have boyprend yet?”
96.5 KOIT being the only acceptable radio station,
Bundled up in a puffy jacket I hated with a passion,
Crying over math homework with my dad teaching,
Inhaling the fish scent of the supermarket,
My mom telling me I smell like the sun,
The tabo spilling water over my head,
Mano for every elder at the party,
TFC blasting from Lola’s TV,
Altar serving with sneakers on at Sunday mass,
Not knowing the English translation to certain words,
Being embraced by Daly City fog.

I fell in love with these things
Both the good and the bad,
They are all beautiful
My culture, my home, and my family:
They are my Mona Lisa



*how the desert betrays
e furay*

parts of her longs to be ten again
fingertips combing through sunlit sage
golden hair knotted in two feverish braids
she thinks of bare feet skimming dusty desert ground
chasing a horizon with no end, a little red thread
with no tie, loose, slipping free,
she thinks of ruddy calloused hands grazing freckled skin
the wind tasting of smoke from fires unseen
and in the bare mountains, rattlesnake hunting by moonlight
old men spitting words like tobacco bullets, too young, too keen,
listening for their grating ch-ch-ch, just before they spring
she thinks of little fingers sorting through tiny glass chevron beads
and hiding a bone-handled knife, sharp edges
glinting between stretching shoulder blade

in this city, walking the line of twenty-three,
she finds herself running only in her dreams
with no thread to chase, buried in the sand, lost at sea
because the doctors told her she can't anymore, they whisper,
heads bowed neat, saying that she had grown too weak
still, she defies them, a girl raised by the desert's heat
they don't know that there, the land teaches you never to cede.
in her dreams, she runs through rain, down grid-patterned roads

ahead, a desert highway forever incomplete, in memory
dry air clinging to cracked lips and tar-lined teeth,
she has to remind herself, again, to breathe.

at night, when sleep won't come to settle
over her conscious mind, with its paws thick and sleek
like coyote in the brush, his eyes winking knowingly,
she lies back against cool hardwood floor
stretching one hand overhead, reaching for memories of thread
the other tracing the geography of her neck
and her chest, gliding over smooth white ridges and valleys
crescent ribs bare to the sky, her mind drifting, imagining
that they have grown into naked mountaintops
dusted with white sage and golden lupine seed,
the organs beneath shot and burnt and bloody
with man's trace, and his ruddy sheath
across her body, scars from father's dusty cowboy boots
how they are scattered now, distanced,
like they are meant to be run in-between,
like the sunless cities that come only in her dreams

she imagines herself stretching, growing so thin
that keyhole spaces between the victorian row homes
threaten to suck her in as she passes them
silently cursing her mother's broad way, her legs,
like the metallic taste of the under-ripe cherries they had

thigh deep in the creek, for her birthday in may,
tongues fighting against nature, hair flowing
like tangles of genetically engineered fire
feasting eyes and sharp-angled faces worn just the same

in her free time, she pens the lines by sylvia plath from memory,

out of the ash

i rise with my red hair

and i eat men like air

from the sky, she shields her eyes, thinking of how
she clawed her way out of her mother's crematorium cage,
her broad beautiful bones stained with soot,
fingertips smelling of stone and sun and sage,
tasting of tart cherry seeds, still rotting in the river clay.
she looks back, out over her path of destruction,
not knowing whether she filled or emptied the garden of its snakes
wiping her tears away, remembering how she was raised
because he was not deserving of the heat which graced her face.

she thinks of their admissions, how they fell like icarus from grace
the sins of men like anchors to sea, screams lost in dust and space
she thinks of baby brother's blue eyes watching
when the mountain snake came back to strike, his screams
she thinks of how she lit a cigarette, and dangled it
between the tips of her fingers, pointer and thumb
knowing what it takes to take, to steal, to erase, to cheat

she thinks of watching coyote duck his head and turn away,
knowing how the desert tricks and betrays.

she remembers baby brother's watchful gaze, coaxing it away.
she remembers when the sirens came, flooding their house
with blue and red light framing the dark, inky gray.
she remembers father's dusty boots burning, bloodstained,
and watching the men take him away in silver chains.
she remembers listening as he screamed.

a new age

By Elana Santos

all at once, her roots were withdrawn from the soil, after being
stood in her place for years and years
out of the old soil and into new, she is now
reborn

all at once, she's now stood in new soil, with the room to truly grow.
living in a rich and vibrant light, she prospers.
even when it feels like the winds of chaos may break her, she still
draws on her resilience to keep her up.

you can see her now, a tree so fruitful and ripe with beauty, she
defies the eyes that undermine her.

now, like all living things, she needs validation and encouragement to
yield her flowers.

long have i waited for her to grow in such a way. expanding up
towards the light and away from the dark that once consumed her.
if you're fortunate enough to experience her nurturing spirit,
appreciate it. it's what has
kept me going

What do the Ancestors Think?

By Seth Timple

When did it start? Where do we begin?
How did it come to foreign invader turned local subjugator?

Why is it that pain is perpetual, I thought we broke from that model
when we read Jose Rizal's notes?

But look at recent records, we've had two nasty regimes.

Written down in paper,
casualties and numbers,
the truth in red ink.

Blood of Filipinos spilled by Filipinos.
Not too long ago we fought foreign entities,
but now society is greased by the corpses of titas and titos.

So when did it happen? Where did it begin?

Did colonization really fuck that much with our brains?

What is this new wave amnesia that lets tyrants dictate las Islas Filipinas.

And its funny, tho I'm an outside perspective,
barely recognized as Filipino. More so they see Americano,
who happens to share a few features.

But I think that's why. I've lived a similar experience.

This pandemic that sweeps through the current periods.
This cultural amnesia is exactly the feeling of
second gen diaspora,
fact of the matter
we need to reach back to the latter
half of the history
we took back from the spanish
Or repeat those disastrous
Punitive practices
That plague current society.

Jose Rizal, what did you fight for in the first place?

Born Again
By Jordyn Chapman

The water surrounding him was still. From the stinging heat, it grew cold over time, bright lights blinded him from seeing people watching. He imagined those beady eyes staring through the dim light of the room. He didn't know what they could be thinking. Was it acceptance or judgement? He was scared. He couldn't discern the shivering of his body from being cold or being in fear. He found himself overwhelmed until the pastor touched his back gently. The warmth of his hand coursed through his entire body. He felt a sense of comfort as the pastor spoke. His hand cradling the boy's head, he slowly submerged him under the water, silencing the noise, silencing his wandering thoughts, he was finally at peace. That is until he saw her again. Images of her flashed into his head. He saw the way she smiled, small wrinkles forming at the crevices of her eyes. The way he could never let go every time she would drop him off at school. His arms damp clothes hanging onto a coat rack. Her laugh would ring through his ears as she whispered "When you blink, I'll be gone. And before you know it, you'll blink again and I'll be back." He clung to her words just the same way he clung to her. That is until she lied. Until the day she never came back. That day, he stood in the doorway seeing her body limp in the tub filled with water. He ran to shake her away, her lifeless body icy to touch. She had always promised to come back and today he felt he saw a glimpse of her again. Her presence was with him in the water. The blinding lights became her figure, and he saw once more, for what felt like the last time, the radiant smile that kept him going. All the memories of her that made him believe.

Breathe

By Janise Powell

1,2,3,4 walls

That make a school but not an education

Make a box that I won't be checking

Make a square that cannot confine the knowledge my ancestors whisper
in my ear

Make a Diamond, maybe, wait no, never, try again

1,2,3,4 girls

My sisters and I were taught that education is the key to liberation

But I felt more assimilation

More contemplation as I walked the hallowed halls of what was suppose
to be my unshackling

Why do we talk more pipeline than pathway?

Why is there always only one pathway?

1,2,3,4 roads

We are at a crossroads in education

An intersection of past, present, future

And the road unpaved

But is Education ready for the cycle of death and rebirth

To commune with spirits beyond its understanding

What happens then? What happens now? What happens here?

Here, we stand

Here, we ask questions

Here, we challenge tradition

Here, Education Met justice and double dated with co-conspirators and I

Here, we begin to pave but it takes time

1,2,3,4 semesters

Well technically 6 but for 2 I felt more imposter than student

More "why am I here" than "I'm here"

Until my freedom dreamed it's way into reality

So in 4 semesters

1,2,3,4 things happened

1 - I learned outside the confinement of 4 walls

Did virtual teleportations allow me to be present in this moment but be
home but be me

Questioning what is education to a lifelong learner

2 - I healed Black girl from educational trauma

It can't harm, I mean it can't catch a fugitive if they are always masked

But their eyes see clearly across multiple dimensions and timelines

3 - I paved my own path of knowledge and creativity

How surprised I was to locate myself and find support

Find those who don't just watch pavers but hand them instruments as
they work

And Those Who pave along side them

4 - I breathed

To remind myself that I am alive

To remind myself of those who could not breathe
To remind myself of those still struggling to breathe
To remind myself that it is not easy in the midst of multiple pandemics
It is not easy to be fugitive
It is hard-work to pave roads
But breathing, just 4 seconds, allows me to sit in a moment and be
present
To be here
In community with you

Deafening Silence

By Malia Cruz

Don't judge me because of the color of my skin
My complexion is fair but don't mistake me for your kin
I am born from the dirt my ancestors rubbed against their skin
I am born from the prejudice my ancestors endured, when?

Years ago before I was even a thought.
They lived off the land to protect the Mother Earth who was so grand
They fought for what was right but see the invaders believed that they
had seen the light
They pillaged and crusaded and truly believed that because their skin
was white
they were always in the right

So indict me
Charge me with the crime of having insight
Charge me with the crime of believing this isn't right
You know nothing of what it's like to lie awake at night hoping and
praying that you won't have to fight

Every day is a struggle
I'm trying to organize the pieces of the puzzle
Our efforts fall short, we in trouble
Our efforts are too subtle

¿Qué vamos hacer? Mi gente está tratando a comprender.
To understand what we've done so wrong to be treated like we don't
belong

See ICE is banging on our doors
They're breaking them down and stomping on our floors
They separate our families by force and somehow they look in our eyes
and feel no remorse

So in truth, your crimes have begun to weigh on me heavily
Your lack of empathy has made you my enemy

What happened to treating people as equals?
What happened to everyone treating each other as people?

Much to my dismay
We got lost somewhere along the way
And maybe it's because of the things we never got to say.

MEZZANINE
By Egan Walker

i kneel at my mother's feet, head bowed in a picket beach town in
california where everything is good/and warm/and slowly bleeding out.
i read somewhere that after we die it is a shepherd that comes for us.
fields full of sheep, resting among the green. i don't want a meadow if
it is not for running in, breathless and windblown, sweaters discarded in
the long dry wheat. i stood in the meadow next to my dad's office before
they bit/scored/gouged dirt (deer bedding down between caterpillar
tractor wheels instead of carrara marble) and tore it all up. gored. there's
a hospital there now. a parking lot. concrete. my dad wove us through
the rubble and we pressed fingers to the green plastic tarp over the chain
links and pulled; i see. i kneel at my mother's feet skirt around my knees
in a white picket town in california and think with my head bent, about
all the girls who have come before me. who were their mothers? did
they hold their laundry baskets on their hips, wicker whispering crinkled
paper promises don't you want more? weren't you meant for something
bigger than this creaky wooden door your fathers hardened gaze your
mothers cheerful silence?

i want more than the mezzanine floor i was born in, mom. i want* to fly.
it will be easy. i have never knely a day in my life.

*this: the heart of it



Conundrum

By Maxwell Ayiko

What does it mean to be vulnerable? What is vulnerability? I don't know how to receive the news that I did a good job. Because The first time my step father told me I love you I was 15 years old. The first time anyone ever told me they'd be sad if they lost me I was 19 years old. I don't understand the weight of the words "good job" cuz I've never quite held it in my hands. I'm not even quite sure what a good job means to me. I'll tell you what though, it feels like I don't deserve it when I hear it. I'll tell you what though, it feels like I rarely ever heard it. I wonder if the white man feels this way, if the white woman feels this way, if any other human feels this way. Or is it just me? Is it just me?

Have y'all ever noticed you only ever hear Black men we see you when we die. Black men, we love you, when we're suddenly worth the cry. Black people you're great when we "do" something worth the pride, The pride heard nationwide, well brotha these white people ain't on your side.

I came into this world crying just like all of you so why am I only seen as human if you see me dying from a cellular phone shaped point of view. Why do I have to DIE in order to be considered human?

Why do you have to see me cry in order for me to be considered humane? "Well y'all never wanna cry" don't you know the reason why?

Because we were told the same thing. Do you know what it does to the human psyche to be called gay after you cry when you watch someone you love die? What it does to the human psyche to be called weak, when you cry cause cuz ya partner died? To be called white when you pick up a book instead of a gun? To be called a real nigga when you contribute to the destruction of the very street you came from? To be called gay when you finally open up about the fact that you, a man, a Black man, was sexually assaulted? Do you know the strength it takes to turn away the gun when the entire world looks at you and sees you as a thug, my nigga do you know what that does to the human psyche? Have you ever even been put in that position? When you look in the mirror and you don't even think you're worth a hug, not that you even think you'd want one cuz the world told you you're supposed to be tough? Do you know what that does to the human psyche?

Why am I only seen as human if I DIE. We seen as a lot of things, wakin' good dick, a d1 scholarship, gangsters, thugs, niggas who came straight out the mud. But we're never really seen as human beings who deserve love are we? Didn't you know? That hate is the absence of love? So why are you so surprised we are the way we are? You did this to us. And you helped us do it to ourselves.

Why am I only seen as human if I die?

If you haven't heard it today Black man, I love you.

translations to english
By Brandon Gagante

First Word: Sigue

Translation: Go ahead, then.

Example Sentence: You want to go out late? ai, sigue.

Actual Meaning: Do not go far from me. I will not follow you. Smoke will trail in both of our shadows and my lungs only hold enough breath for 2 vowels. This is not enough to call you back. To name you and all the light you carry before I am filled with the silence. With the shards of past promises, it's made me spiteful. So maybe, maybe I will just anchor you here with this. with me. Sigue.

Final Word: Anak

Translation: My child.

Actual Meaning: My glory. Anak. My damaged pride. Anak. My purpose. How these 4 letters are my tether. Anak. You're a reminder of each way I've failed and haven't yet. Anak. My fear. Anak. I see so much of myself in you that it scares me.

I've taught you to swim, but I don't know how else to protect you from
how this world, it swallows you whole and there is no bottom.
Anak. Where do I start? I will not be with you forever.

There is much I keep from you, Anak.
We have made it here but I've given up more than you know.
The absence of what I've lost, weighs heavier than the presence of what
I have.

There are no pictures about what I've been through in any country I
have called home.

No polaroids of the raked feet in the mud. The soil displaced.

The faces cased in dirt.

The Faces Dirt colored, soil smothered, scrappy jawed, crooked tooth,
smile with a gap, jaw Knocked loose,

Our portraits aren't shown here.

I've forgotten more than I've forgiven.

It's made me sharp, but I didn't mean to sever us like this.

People are not born to cut. To split,

To be broken from each other and cast out to sea.

And I see everyone I've lost in you.

Myself too.

And I don't know if telling you will pull you further away or not.

But maybe, maybe this is not important.

Because, My awesome Bran.

The reason silence plagues us,

Is because there is no proper translation for what bursts for you inside
my chest.

So the next best thing I can do is call you in the same way Nanay called
me.

Anak.

Forgive me.

Despite what I bury under my tongue,

I urge you to go forward Anak.

Despite what I cannot twist into English,

Go forward, Anak,

Despite this American-coated accent,

That brings forth more silence from our people than sound,

Know that with every word I say in my mother's native tongue,

No matter what it is,

Know that I am telling you to go forward Anak,

Reach as far as you can.

I want you to fly not swim, but all I've known is water.

I worry about you, Anak.

But you are greater than me.

So,
It's okay if I can't come with you.

Sigue.
Just visit Anak, just promise you'll visit.

Now then, you've been reading the stories of all the amazing artists and creatives who made this book what it is. But don't forget, you are a part of the circle! YOUR story is needed in this world too. I encourage you artist, take this page, and mark it as your own, whatever form that may take. Thank you for reading, and thank you for being a part of this book.

By _____

