13  Letter from the Editor

14  Nestor and the Dolphin Andrew Ballard

16  Jerusalem Joji Baratelli

17  Jerusalem Daniel Dov Yadin

18  Homecoming Kat Corfman

20  Poem for A and B Aparna Nair-Kanneganti

24  I DISSOCIATE IN THE CHIPS AND PRETZELS AISLE OF OUR LOCAL SAINSBURYS Sasha Carney

25  Anxiety Schedule (The Beginning of Sumthing) Ronan Day-Lewis

26  Love Diagram One Ronan Day-Lewis

27  Love Diagram Two Ronan Day-Lewis

28  Prone E.C.

38  THE GHOST OF MAC MILLER SPEAKS AND I DIDN’T KNOW I LOVED HIM UNTIL THE GRIEF SET IN Kamau Walker
39  **Scream** Natasha Gaither

40  **Tanya** Natasha Gaither

41  **Coming to Los Angeles** Mariah Kreutter

45  **Xuyong** Baylina Pu

46  **Who Has Remained** Alex Taranto

47  **Something Missing** Alex Taranto

48  **40 Kilometers from Guatemala City**
    Kiran Damodaran

51  **A Man on the Bus Looks at Me** Ruoji Guo

52  **Interview with Alexander Chee**

56  **Self in a Box** Basak

57  **Things Unheard and Things Unsaid**
    Camden Smithtro

64  **The Center Cannot Hold** Bryce Morales

65  **Het Amsterdamse Bos** Patrick Shea
Alexander Chee, in his interview with us, describes loneliness as the definitive emotion behind his writing. His reflection is extremely specific. Our present moment, he says, depletes ideas and fills up politics yet not culture. He means the loneliness we feel when we yearn to see beyond what is in view.

New stakes are raised for the ancient question: can art still make us less lonely? In this issue, we’re thrilled to publish ten poems, three pieces of prose, and the works of six artists. They reveal a range of devastatingly familiar emotions: grief (Kamau Walker), nostalgia (Alex Taranto), moral decay (Bryce Morales). But they are also ambiguous miracles. Daniel Dov Yadin and Joji Baratelli, by sheer creative providence, both offer Jerusalem as a historical image. Aparna Nair-Kanneganti challenges the narrativization of love. Patrick Shea’s photograph of the goats of Amsterdam makes you unsure whether to giggle or to mourn.

Take these uncertainties, wrapped up in four layers of acetate, and peel them back one by one. They are yours to see, in every index of color.

— Elaine Wang, Editor-in-Chief
It was summer and I
was working for next to nothing
when in a gift store I saw him
kissing a dolphin.

I carried the picture
to my room, placed it on the sill
where I returned each night, feeling
nothing much at all
to see him again:

His head bowed
to the fish as in prayer, and the dolphin’s
lifted to him—

Of course, there are other
reasons to feel drawn: his arms
raise the glistening head as if to
make an offer; and his shoulders like
stones are rounded by shadows; and then
there are the gentle lines
of the jaw, the back, and the things that
move to compose attraction
in quiet gestures.

My room was never not
a mess, but I kept him, surprised at how little
I cared for the absence
of bed sheets, or a dresser, or a rug to cover the linoleum—

I know you
cannot love a postcard.
But sometimes, it is enough
to be stilled
between all the other things you feel
you must do.
Atop a roof in the Old City,
Hangs laundry lit in the day’s last light:
White sheet of an enemy woman,
Towel of an enemy man
With which to wipe the sweat of his brow.

And in the Old City skies,
A kite.
And at the thread’s end,
A boy
I didn’t see,
Because of the wall.

We raised many flags,
They raised many flags.
So we’d think they’re happy,
So they’d think we’re happy.
Sunday, Jun. 2  Cinnamon rolls, that’s what I don’t smell. Everyone sleeps. This room isn’t mine, doesn’t feel like rest. Pillow doesn’t remember my shoulder.

Sunday, Jun. 9  Too quiet since Dad moved into his office. Little brother hides headphones in every room, Mom has wine in the bathroom cabinet and Kurtis with a K.

Sunday, Jun. 16  Father’s Day. Brother and I make muffins: “close enough.” Dad is laughing in the pew with his arm around my fourth-grade counselor, who sings every Sunday.

Sunday, Jun. 23  I need to notice everything. Therapist will ask. In the margins of the bulletin my capital letters look like his; my cursive all her. Be still before the Lord and wait.

Sunday, Jun. 30  There is no stained glass. Gray carpet and a scarlet banner, with two white satin doves high-fiving. I overdress and sit too close to the front.
Sunday, Jul. 7  
“Who do you belong to?”
I’m supposed to smile. Tiled ceiling, water
damage, say my family name.
I’m getting braver, a long
lace to untangle.

Sunday, Jul. 14  
Some woman’s hand
on my head. I tell her, The Holy Ghost
might not remember me. My eyes don’t
know how to stay shut anymore
when God speaks.
let me tell you a story that i’m hearing for the first time, about a town on the very top of the known world. up where the thermosphere becomes projection space becomes just space. to give you a working idea of the topography: this town is right on the edge of a giant chasm that separates it from the rest of existence. out there, beyond the chasm, is a red sand desert that goes on endlessly in the daytime and twice as far in the night. the town would be quite remote if not for the set of parallel train tracks that runs out across a green viaduct, serving one inbound and one outbound train every day.

the town is an old-fashioned place. the children wash behind their ears, are seldom seen and never heard. each person knows their own place, and if they do not, they are reminded of it by the mayor, who wears suspenders and a coiffed mustache, and by the greasy warden of the jail. this story, then, must be about two people who refuse to know their place.

i’ll name them - person A and person B. and say that person A and person B are in love. and for some reason their love is forbidden. maybe person A and person B come from different social classes, and they are both women, and thus their union would be a source of displeasure to everyone around them. person A tips her head gently so as not to disturb her fascinator. person B rubs her sweaty hands on the breeches she stole from her brother’s grave. these are the surreptitious gestures by which they must establish their courtship. like romeo and juliet miles below and before them they plan to elope to a place where they can be together freely. they have heard that out in the hinterlands far past the chasm there is a monthly bacchanal where people of any station and gender and proclivity mingle nakedly and freely. perhaps even A and B of such disparate castes, A and B who on their seventh christmases wished, respectively, for

poem for A and B
Aparna Nair-Kanneganti

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- a pet pelican, an orange to share with brother.

person A: call her the mayor's daughter, proud chatelaine of the house with the pink portico on the main square. and B: the daughter of a criminal in jail. she has begun padding her shoulders and wearing her brother's breeches when she goes to visit her father, to disguise her gamine form from the warden's trespassing hands. in the alley which opens up by the pink portico A leaves something for B. a missive. A leaves B a missive in her loopy, well-practiced handwriting. her wooing is exquisite and voluptuous: meet me at 6 tomorrow. we'll take the last train away from here and they won't know where we've gone and we'll be together till we perish. but the town gets wind of this plan. not through any indiscretion of A's; A has been taught by her governess that a lady must always be discreet. then how? suppose B cannot read, so she puts on her breeches and does not wash her hair for six days and goes to the warden: the only person she knows who can read. mistaking B for her dead brother he grins jovially, showing less skin than usual, and obliges her request to dictate back the missive.

alas, alack! cries the mayor the next evening as he bounds into the office of the warden, his most trusted of allies. his waistcoat is undone, his pants hanging loosely around his knees. my daughter has run away! the warden sees the truth of the situation instantly. he dashes from the office to fetch the constable and make the arrest before the mayor has even the chance to collect his mustache from the floor.

i've lost our two heroines - let me find them before we continue. ah, there is B, huddling on the train platform. would it not be poignant if she were to board the train before her beloved A arrives? a toot-toot to signal the impending departure, and here is A. for the first time she wheels her own luggage. she wastes valuable time, rummaging for a penny before realizing that there is no porter to tip. and now the moment of confusion! there are two trains leaving the station at 6 today, for all
the incoming trains have been rerouted. or maybe there was never an inbound track at all. maybe the only trains the town has ever known are those which are forever receding into the uncharted distance.

the police and the warden descend upon the train station, the mayor waddling behind. A jumps into a carriage and the two trains pull away along the green viaduct. below her, the dark mystery of the chasm. opposite her, the nose of B, pressed to the dirty window of the other train.

i do not know what happened to A or to B or to A’s father or to B’s father or to the lecherous warden for most of their lives, and i do not know what will happen to any of them either. but i imagine that the town is still there, unchanged. and as the trains cross the interminable chasm and the interminable desert beyond, i imagine that A and B realize that there is no hinterlands but this. the dreariness of separation. and yet i imagine too that they maintain a seed of hope that these tracks will meet again; that these worlds, borne away from one another under the night sky, will, say, collide again. for all parallel lines, it’s known, must converge at infinity. all together they vanish, an extinguishing as carnal in the far-out haze as a poem.

and so, sunrise after sunrise, A and B postpone their love for each other till the horizon.

and isn’t that just delightful to think of?
and wonder if I have been unbodied since birth, if I could ever shake myself back into my skull or if it’s a lost cause kinda deal,

if I could eat Kettle’s Salt and Vinegar till it corrodes a hole in my squirming tongue and still not feel a thing; poke my pinky tentatively through,

Doubting Thomas to my own troubled flesh. Saint Peter raises an eyebrow at this metaphor from over by the sour straws and I yell

Fuck you, you’re a fairy story
and can’t quite make myself believe it.

When something was here and now isn’t, it tends to leave a reminder of sorts (a 2000-year-old religion or an empty crisp packet in the landfill, or bloodstains in the bathtub, or the like) and maybe we’re only still here because we’re scared of being even bigger when we’re gone.

Your friend texts you:

*I didn’t ask to be born into this big world!!!!* and you think of your body, rattling around in your soul like Doritos in an underfilled packet and think:

Fuck it, it doesn’t matter what I welcome into this mouth, the self-checkout camera will flatten it, anyway.
Anxiety Schedule
(The Beginning of Sumthing)
Ronan Day-Lewis
Love Diagram One
Ronan Day-Lewis
Love Diagram Two
I have acquired a hammock. Don’t freak out. It’s just a normal hammock, except it’s gorgeous. It’s orange and shimmery. It wobbles in the wind. It looks like a mirage. It’s shimmery and a chimera. I only use it on hot days. Days so hot they’re asphyxiating. Days when the air has nothing better to do than curl around my neck like a belt.

So sorry. I know that’s violent. It’s just that I put a belt around my neck. I thought that feeling it would help me stop cerebralizing suicide and realize that I viscerally don’t want to kill myself. My mind can convince itself of anything, but my body is less gullible.

It had the opposite effect though, pushed all the thoughts up into my brain so that it bulged out of its socket, ribbed the cranium with little bulbs of pink tissue. Buffered the limestone castle with fleshy battlements. Crenellated cranium. Sounds nice, means nothing.

It’s like when you girdle a tree to stop the downward flow of sap so that the fruit at the top ripens quicker, except in my case, the fruit always just explodes. The garden is strewn with carcasses. Back to the hammock though. The cloth is cold against my neck and the backs of my legs. I don’t know what material it is, but it’s stunning in the sun. It sparkles like it’s lined with tiny diamonds. I think it might be bulletproof. I haven’t tested it. It’s a chimera, except it’s real, because I can feel it. I want to be naked in it, feel it against all my skin. I want it to be my skin. It’s like a womb.

Age doesn’t count until you’re out of the womb. Time passes but doesn’t count in the hammock, or at least it doesn’t count for me. It’s not a solipsistic enclave

Prone
E.C.
where I can stop time for everyone. Everyone’s waiting for me; I’m just not waiting for anyone. I’m not waiting for myself.

When I’m outside the hammock, I’m always waiting for myself. I feel like the anchor of a relay race, waiting for the baton pass, except the penultimate sprinter has died, he’s just lying dead on the track and no one is even looking at him. I’m screaming at everyone to stop the race, to fucking look at the kid bleeding out on the track, did nobody else see the pistol guy misfire and shoot him through the stomach, absolutely gut him, blow out his intestines like a shredded flag unfurling in the wind? Even the blood is lazy, curdling in the heat, and I’m screaming at it to sprint to the finish line, to race like it had in the body when the kid had the strength to will it to, but I’m also screaming at all the spectators to care, to mourn, to go up to him one at a time like you do at a wake and hold him—I’ve never seen people hold the body at a wake but why not—hold him hard and quickly, sixty to a hundred times per minute like a communal heart that might revive him, but mostly I’m screaming at the dead kid to get up, just get up so we can finish the fucking race, the pistol shot a blank you fucking idiot, you’re not dead, you’re not even bleeding, it hasn’t been a tough race, you just need to get the fuck up, crawl to me if you have to so I can finish and get the glory for the both of us. Ah, fuck, they’re taking him out on a fucking gurney. He’s milking it. He’s making everybody wait.

Which brings me back to the hammock, which is a womb where I exist but don’t age even though everyone else is aging because I’m not in the world because I’ve decided not to be for the time being. Does that make sense? I’m doing the best that I can. The key takeaway is that I need someone to love me as if I were their child. But also, the hammock packs up small like an ultrasound fetus curled into itself. When it’s stowed like this, the carrying case is the womb and I am the mother. I cradle it in my arms. I love it as if it were my child.
The hammock suspends me low enough that it’s safe but high enough that I forget about the ground. We’re only a part of the world when we’re conscious of the ground. Think about it: we’re not in the world when we’re floating in the womb. We’re not in the world when we’re floating in the ocean. We are in the world when we’re floating in lakes because we can usually see where lakes end in every direction, so we’re reminded that we’re at least in a world, if not the world, that is, something circumscribed, and even then, we can usually see the bottom of a lake so that we know we’re in the world, that is, the one with a ground, the one that is three-dimensionally circumscribed.

In the hammock, though, there is an orange vacuum on either side, like when you close your eyes after looking at the sun and all you can see is a fathomless, pixelated orange. This is exceptional because there are only three things that are fathomless: the insides of your eyelids, the ocean, and the sky. These are the three places where the world ruptures at the seams. This is why we love closing our eyes. This is why we love the ocean. And this is why we love the hammock, with its burst-open view of the sky. Blue cupola. Sounds nice, but it’s not a cupola. It’s fathomless. It’s not an observatory, either, because that would be a tautology, though it is glass. Delicate, blue glass. Don’t shatter!

In the hammock, with the sky arcing past, you are the Earth’s axis of rotation. It’s nice to have the world spin around you instead of having to traverse a world rocking off its unidentifiable spindle.

It’s like when you were a kid and you were lying in the soft grass at the top of the hill behind your grandmother’s home in Quebec where her cows grazed—she was a butcher—except then, for some reason, you decided to roll down the hill. This was reckless, because then you and the world were spinning out of control and perpendicular to each other. You’re too big for that now. There’s too much inertia, not to mention too much room
in your head. What if your brain got sloshed around? The space between your brain and your skull is terrifying, like the space between the heart and the ribs, or the space between the mother and the fetus. I know I keep coming back to the mother and the fetus, but it’s a really important dialectic.

These evolutionary gaps leave room for self-destruction. Just think of the Death Star. It seemed like an external attack, but it wouldn’t have been destroyed if not for the exhaust port. I think that’s how the Death Star got destroyed. I’ve never seen *Star Wars*. Also, on the topic of aircraft, we *are* in the world when we’re in airplanes because we never actually lose contact with the ground; the ground just changes altitude. This is why everyone still dreams about flying, real flying, the type that takes you off the ground and out of this world.

Trees tether the sky to the ground. They are the bronchi between two lungs, which is fitting, because trees breathe. They breathe oxygen into us and we breathe carbon dioxide into them. You should know this. This is basic. The outside of us is just the inside of us turned inside out. Don’t quote me on that. Quote me on this: the world and I are like socks turned into each other so we don’t fall apart. This is gravity. It is also the attraction between people who love each other because they both love and hate themselves, and so need someone who is them turned inside out to cradle them so they don’t drift away. This is called “spooning.”

I’m saying all this because in the hammock, you can look at the tops of trees, in relief against the fathomless sky. It’s one of the few things that makes me happy. Flowering things have all the beauty of exploding things without any of the mess. Flowering things have all the beauty of exploding things except in slow motion. The tops of trees rocket through the air like skeet shooting targets before suddenly being shot through with life. Their petals blossom like shards. The pollen hits your face like shrapnel. Everything is violent because every-
thing is about rupture at the atomic level. The push and pull of electrons. Things breaking away from each other. I don’t have a source for this, but it sounds right.

Though the hammock’s not high enough to be dangerous, it feels dangerous. Something like sixty percent of people who hang themselves are found touching the ground. It’s amazing that in all the chaos of finding someone hanging, people remember whether the body was touching the ground, enough at least to get a statistic. My mother’s father found his father hanging. I don’t know whether the body was suspended or grounded. In my mind, it was suspended, because I’ve never visited my great-grandfather’s grave, but I’ve often imagined his body dangling above my life like an ornate chandelier. It’s not morbid. It’s very literary. His suicide is a family heirloom.

You can hang yourself on a doorknob. That’s why I couldn’t be in my room that night. I had a doorknob and a belt. Everything felt very far away. My window blinds are always shut because I live on the street. My room is cavernous. It is two hundred and thirty eight square feet. It is a massive space between me and the world. It is circumscribed and so it sometimes feels like the world. I pace around in circles to get it to spin but it won’t fucking move. Time stops for everyone. There is no one left but me. I haven’t seen the sky in days, years. It is a tumor where bad things fester, where everything inside ruptures but you can’t tell it’s bad from the outside because sometimes they’re benign, for most people they’re benign, calm down, you’re going to be okay, and then I’m out. I’m out and I’m walking. I feel like I’ve exploded all over New Haven. I’m just a shard hurtling towards the student health center. The city is littered with me. I am the payload, detached from the rocket, sailing through a fathomless night. No, my brain is the payload and I am the rocket. My brain is the precious cargo. Every other part of me is fragile and cold. All my other organs have given themselves up in service of my brain, and so my
brain feels loved and cared for.

At the health center, I write on a little slip of paper that I’m suicidal and that I have a sore throat. They take my vitals to make sure I’m not already dead, and then they put me in a room while they figure out what to do with me. A nurse keeps offering me drinks. I can have any drink I want because I’m suicidal and have a sore throat. They tell me that the on-call psychiatrist is driving in from twenty minutes away, and I’m like, fuck, sorry to trouble him, but they tell me it’s his job, that he lives for this shit. They move me into a bigger room with two soft-looking beds I can’t sleep on even though I’m desperate to sleep, I only came here to sleep, I don’t want to talk to anyone, I just want to sleep in a place with no belts and no doorknobs. There’s a big-ass window with a pretty view of New Haven. Whenever I see glass, I imagine it shattering, except this time, instead of the shards falling dead to the street, I imagine them floating straight out and shrouding the view, refracting the light into thousands of pixels, like rain suspended, like low-hanging stars.

I talk to the on-call psychiatrist. He doesn’t want to make a decision about what’s best for me, because there’s only one person who can do that: a second on-call psychiatrist, from the Yale-New Haven hospital, who decides I need to go to the emergency room. She is soft-spoken and has short, purple hair. She straps me into the gurney like it’s a car seat. I text my friend and she catches me in the health center as I’m about to leave. She gives me chocolate-covered raisins and I grip them really tight as if they are the pills that are going to save me.

They send me in an ambulance with no sirens and no lights because it’s not a real emergency. Looking out the back window of a moving ambulance makes it seem like you’re vomiting out the street, or like the street’s being unspooled from you like an intestine, or like you’re going back in time to when you were better. The guy in
the back asks if I want to kill myself right now, and I don’t want to offend him, so I say no. But also, if I really wanted to kill myself, wouldn’t I be trying? After a week in the psych ward, I’m still confused about the space between wanting to kill yourself and just doing it.

This liminality is called suicidal ideation. Sounds pretty, I like all the long vowels, makes it sound floaty, I bet a lot of writers kill themselves because suicide is such a pretty word—except the ambulance guy tells the emergency room receptionist that I’m in for S.I., not giving me the satisfaction of hearing the pretty words in full, but it’s okay because the emergency room receptionist is beautiful, beautiful enough to make me happy for good, if only I could look at them forever, but they’re wheeling me away, goodbye, I’ll love you forever!

So I’m lying on a gurney in the hallway of the emergency room when I realize I’m not only prone to depression, I’m also prone for depression. It’s hilarious, but it’s also the title. I’m tugging at the nurses’ scrubs as they walk past. Can’t they see? It’s the fucking title. They think I’m crazy. The title of what? My memoir? And I’m like, no, my memoir is going to be Practicing Smiling because I was self-conscious about my smile as a kid and I was also depressed, but this piece isn’t about my childhood, it’s about my nostalgia for a time when I wasn’t depressed, which isn’t categorically my childhood, though it’s parts of my childhood, but also this piece is about my nostalgia for a time when I felt loved and cared for, when I didn’t have to worry about anything, when time didn’t count, a period so distant it feels even earlier than childhood, but also this piece is about caring for myself in the way that I feel like I was once cared for, so that the dialectic of caring and being cared for keeps me together, keeps the gaseous part of me from spinning away from the solid part—the solid part is just the gaseous part that has compressed onto my skeleton and fossilized over time—long enough so that it becomes solid and then all of me is solid, but also this piece is just the gaseous part of
me which has leaked away and petrified on the page, the part that is too late to recover.

I explain all of this perfectly but they still take me to the psychiatric observation unit. They take me in a gurney. They take me everywhere in a gurney because I'm a liability. My body is the precious cargo. They don't care about my brain as long as I can breathe.

The psychiatric observation unit is a gray hall in a basement. It’s like the movie *Us* where the people underground are tethered to those above, except I am both. I am above and below, real and imagined, fiction and non-fiction, controlling and controlled, happy and sad, mother and child. The only thing I am not is black and white. I am so white. There are no mirrors in the psychiatric observation unit because they don't want people shattering them and cutting themselves with the shards, but I see myself in every white, shiny surface. I see myself in every dead-eyed patient in scrubs. All the patients are white and all the nurses are black. All the space between us is an amorphous, depressing gray.

You can see the resonances between people. The vibrations make the air blurry like a mirage. It's hard to tell what’s imagined and what’s real. These spaces between people are sad, but not as sad as the spaces inside of people.

Eventually, I move to the psychiatric ward. My parents visit me every goddamn day. On the first night, a guy tells me he got admitted for threatening to kill his parents in their sleep. Some people haven't seen their parents in months. Some people haven't seen their parents in years because their parents killed themselves. We’re in a group therapy session about leisure activities, talking about whether we prefer summer or winter sports, when a woman named Grace says that her dad killed himself when she was two. Then, a veteran named Harry says he prefers summer sports because he’s a scuba diver. He has a thousand dives under his belt. Grace says that the only thing in the world that's
completely unpredictable is the ocean. She misses the ocean. She used to go with her niece and throw bottles filled with letters and plastic jewels into the tide. Then she’d come back early the next day and bury a bottled response in the sand so that her niece would believe in mermaids. Grace says she was enchanted by mermaids as a kid. From the way she talks about her niece and the ocean, I guess she still is.

All this is called Dialectical Behavioral Therapy, or DBT. The idea is that you can hold two truths at once: that you can accept who you are while also recognizing that you need to change. Grace is depressed but she can still remember things that bring her joy. The memory of joy is dialectic to depression. Grace is scared of the ocean but she also loves the ocean. A fear of the ocean is dialectic to a love of the ocean. This is what makes the ocean sublime. Another important part of Dialectical Behavioral Therapy is observing things objectively, without judgement. A girl named Lisa gets a call on the second day that her ex-boyfriend has killed himself. Everyone is killing themselves. The psych ward can’t save everyone. I can’t say whether we’re lucky to be here, because that would be rendering a judgement.

We go to music therapy, where we listen to four songs and draw what we feel. Someone requests “Young Love” by Chris Brown, which would never fly at Yale. Then, we listen to something I don’t remember. Then, we listen to “20 Something” by SZA which I’ve never heard before but I love. Then, we listen to “Make You Feel My Love” by Adele and I want to cry. I draw a circle in the center like a nucleus, and then a space, and then the valence electrons. I connect the electrons to each other in a complex network. The nucleus is completely untethered, even though it’s at the center of everything. Sometimes the space between people is sadder than the space inside of people. This is how I tell sadness from depression.
I could say a lot more about the psych ward. I took a lot of notes, but then I lost them, which is probably for the best, because it was voyeuristic and made me feel like a sociologist. I put a page between me and them so that I could feel like I was at an outer valence, always on the cusp of breaking back out into normal society.

The key takeaway is that we played a lot of foosball. There was a shitty table in the cafeteria, set against a big window where we could see the outside. The table didn’t look like much, but when we were playing, it was gorgeous: spinning little red and blue people, all on different axes, pitted against each other, but not really, just for fun, all in perspective, we could see all of them at once, see how they worked together, a ball, the shared nucleus, rocketing around, lodging itself in lots of hearts, so fast it was blurry, this was the resonance between the foosball people, this was how we would stay connected forever. It was a spectacle. We loved the whirring colors and whirring shouts like sirens. We loved each other. The staff yelled at us if we got too rowdy. We didn’t hold it against them: if we were happy, they were out of work. They yelled at us that it was time to go back up to the unit and so I turned my players parallel to the tabletop and the sky, hoping they would get some rest before the next bout.
THE GHOST OF MAC MILLER SPEAKS AND I DIDN'T KNOW I LOVED HIM UNTIL THE GRIEF SET IN
Kamau Walker

The world is so small / until it ain’t / spinning to the tempo / you imagined it would / stay like this / for a while / you forgot / how often you’ve been left / with the responsibility / to escort a wooden box into the mud / of an earth that denies you / time / no matter how much you need / to pause

I know / all that I am / to you / is a bleeding door / to a flooded house / I no longer possess / language / to erect a glistening city / from this mud / I sculpted / a watch / so take a second / look at the skyline / you inherited / what I borrowed / time / don’t give a fuck about clocks / until they stop

I / never dreamed / of growing old / of dying young / either / my hands turn / into time’s own wood carvings / or / they are to be swallowed / into the light of an abstract / city / living is difficult / balancing act / between the ashes / and the flame / always roars / there is no shelter / so you might as well stay / outside / there is a god / calling my name / I don’t know / where to

I apologize / all I have built for you is a ribcage / cold iron / surrounding a pulsating clock / I apologize / you now have to learn / what is grief / if not the acknowledgement that / love intends to stay
Scream
Natasha Gaither
You land at LAX and the sky is gray. You feel cheated: it was sunny in Newark. The palm trees are skinnier than you imagined. They look kind of silly, swaying in the wind against a backdrop of so much concrete, like overgrown teenagers out of place at a school dance.

You take a Lyft to your short-term lease. “Welcome home,” the driver says, and you don’t correct him because you like the idea of being from here. You look out the window for a city. Everything together almost adds up to one: there are the billboards, yes, and too many cars, but even so, there’s an abundance of empty space.

The buildings are stucco, adobe, cement: no wood, no stone. They come in pastels and jewel tones. They look like they might wear caftans. Might daydrink gin fizz and call everyone darling. Might have acrylic nails and feathered turbans, might stick pink flamingos into the cracks on their patios, might buy cigarette holders and canned orange juice. (The driver points out the Hollywood sign, so maybe he’s realized you’re not a local after all.)

Your new roommate believes in crystals and astrology and collagen supplements and her lord and savior Jesus Christ. She believes in everything, really, everything at all, and it makes sense: with the city low to the ground, the sky takes up more space. Of course there’s a heaven. Of course there must be something to put in all that sky.

To get to the nearest drug store, you pass L. Ron Hubbard’s literary agency. You buy soap and pick up a cold prescription and the cashier seems faintly surprised, like they don’t do a whole lot of business like that here on Hollywood Boulevard. You get used to it. It’s
glamorous in its own weird way, the theater where the Oscars are across the street from a Hooters, touched indelibly (and yet, you have to imagine, somewhat reluctantly) by celebrity. Hawkers sell mixtapes and mango in tajin. Poverty lives here, hugs to the shade. You get to know the rhythm of the street: which blocks are crowded with bodies, when to cross and when to stay the course.

One night in the middle of a heat wave, your air conditioner breaks. You walk down Hollywood towards the nearest movie theater, the TCL Chinese, seeking darkness and cool air, then keep walking. You end up at Grauman’s Egyptian. You watch a double feature in this grand and obscure movie palace, letting the black air cool the sweat from your skin, while a bushfire rages in Burbank. You walk home at midnight along the boulevard which is aglow in neon, somehow both sharpened and softened by the dark, and you understand how people can love it here.

To the south is Sunset. Every billboard announces something for your consideration. Men and women sleep fitfully in the shadows of bus stops. There’s a smoke shop at every intersection, a Starbucks on every corner. A strip club with the slogan LIVE GIRLS in glittering electric lights. It always makes you think of dead girls. The boulevard is so broad and cracked you can’t quite believe it was ever something beautiful, but maybe that’s the point, maybe you should finally watch Sunset Boulevard, maybe that’s the myth that makes everything make sense.

You meet a boy at a Fourth of July party and go home with him. You get on the back of his motorcycle and ride east on Sunset towards Little Armenia and fuck in a brightly painted room that holds a bed and a bare bulb and almost nothing else. You stay the night even though there’s no air conditioning. You’ve started evaluating a lot of your choices based on whether or not they involve air conditioning. The temperature hits

It makes sense to live an aesthetic life here. Everyone you’ve met seems to. You think about the motorcycle and the sunset and how you can see the Hollywood sign from your rooftop, and it makes sense to imagine how all these things add up to a Lana Del Rey music video or a David Lynch film. The line between the image of the city and the reality of the city always seems blurred.

The boy with the motorcycle works part time at a gay bar. He’s very beautiful. He makes a lot of money. He tells you about his sugar daddy over In-N-Out one night and you’re not sure if he’s joking or not, and you’re also not sure which possibility is more appealing. You want him so badly. You understand how an old man in a bar would want him badly too, badly enough to offer money and iPhones and badly enough to beg, to take scraps, to take whatever he can get. It’s nice, isn’t it, that you didn’t have to beg.

One evening after work, the bus doesn’t come. You’re left waiting on Santa Monica just outside the bland height of Century City, the street so wide and flat it’s almost a landscape unto itself. It seems to extend forever in both directions. It seems like you could step out into its center and the universe would radiate around you. You think about the hills pushing the city towards the sea. You think about the name itself, Los Angeles, “the angels” in Spanish but in English los becomes loss and the angels become gibberish. Dusk falls around you as you wait and wait and descend into language, becoming gibberish yourself. Then the bus comes and you ride through the neat even squares of Beverly Hills towards the shock and glamour of West Hollywood. The bus comes, and you locate yourself once more.

When the smell of hot concrete gets to be too much, you take a bus up the Pacific Coast Highway and sink your feet into the ocean. Seaweed wraps around
your feet and cliffs rise up behind you. This ocean carries less weight than the Atlantic, you decide. Less baggage. You buy french fries and ice cream at the beachside cafe and eat them looking out towards the water. You feel yourself at the edge of a continent. You feel yourself in the middle of something you can imagine but do not yet understand.

Later that night, salt and sand still in your hair, you get a text from the boy with the motorcycle. He wants to take you out dancing. He knows a place where the bouncer will palm you a fake for twenty dollars. Gia Carangi was once spotted there, he says, but that was almost forty years ago.
Xuyong
_village in Sichuan, China_
Baylina Pu

1. 
My grandfather's grave is carpeted with snails. They leave weeping trails of purple, ink prints against the hard clay. Earlier, in a Daoist temple,

I saw a bat for the first time in the jubilance of day, swooping from rafter to roof tile chewing the mug of insects engulfed in sky.

2. 
In the late mountain air, red candle wax collected and hardened into beads as I knelt, immersed in incense.

3. 
I was thinking, I will invite all the bats, lizards, snails, spiders, tiny birds and caterpillars to my grave, where they will shed their skins and build nests with my hair and lay eggs in the humid soil right against my cheek.

We traipse back down the mountain and drink tea happy and thinking of death.

4. 
On the boat, I drop bamboo leaves in the green river where they float like a child on the surface of becoming.
La Plaga resumes, white children shudder.
Houdini mother has broken chickens’ neck.
Snapping branches, breaking bread:
husbands cry out. Silhouettes straining backpacks’ stands up straight.
Magician mother takes pollo from boy, leaves sandwich in hand.

chiera en pollo.

Husband breaks silence with joke:
quiets crescendos, save chicken whimpering.
Bose speaker falers, white children gasp.
dashing son has broken chicken’s leg.

Dashing son silhouettes of childhood slips down dirt slide.

dodging concrete piles and under armour backpacks.
Husband hums duet of La Plaga with Bose speaker,
too full of baby and Barbie to offer refuge.

Magician mother balances generations on her head.

40 Kilometers from Guatemala City
a man on the bus looks at me
Ruoji Guo

A man on the bus inspects the details of my coat,
I suspect he sees a ketchup stain from my lunch at Shake Shack.

We learn not to cry when our parents put our toys behind us.
Today is hide-and-seek anyways.

To wipe the stain from our face in the mirror.
To throw away the umbrella when our shoes are wet.

The glass window is dirty: the sand is showing.
I clean the dirty water by flushing it away and getting new water.

The girl in the bath is blowing bubbles. She lets them lean against her forearms.
She never sees my face when she smiles into the soapy water.

Be careful where you cry, Ruoji. You don’t want to stain the shirt.
You always have to leave the window at the stop.
Interview with Alexander Chee

Yale Literary Magazine Your most recent book, How to Write An Autobiographical Novel, talks a great deal about your relationship with fiction as a genre. I was particularly moved by your description of fiction as a way to elicit the same emotions that realities create. I was wondering if you could talk a little more about what incentivized you, given the power of fiction, to put out a book of nonfiction? What is the power of nonfiction to you in this moment?

Alexander Chee I have been writing essays for thirty years. So really, I just felt it was time. I’d been invited to speak at Columbia’s nonfiction program and was shy about accepting as I didn’t have a nonfiction book. My host, Lis Harris, urged me to pay no mind and just send her some favorites. So I made my list of favorites, noticed it resembled a table of contents, and my agent and I began talking about it.

When I did begin looking over what was eligible, I saw there were about 70 essays. I was shocked. And that’s ignoring much of what I published in print magazines in the 90s and 00s, before almost everything went online.

The essays in the resulting collection are drawn from across that period of time. 10 had been previously published, 6 had not.

I had the sense the essay was growing in popularity, yes. But I really was on a different schedule. As to the power now? A good question. I remember hearing Mary Gaitskill asked this about the memoir, about 9 years ago, and just said, “Loneliness.” I would give an answer like that: I think people are lonely, but for ideas.

YLM Hmmm. I like that. I wonder -- what is it about writing in particular that you think makes people less
lonely for ideas? And how does your writing situate itself with regards to this loneliness given that it has been a favorite of those who are interested in the craft of writing? Is the fact that it is a favorite of writers the result of intention? Or is it, as with the collection of the book itself, a kind of coincidence?

AC Well, if I were to say write an essay about what I imagine is behind the loneliness for ideas, I would begin with what I see as Americans feeling choked alive by the minoritarian right wing takeover of our country. There's a massive mismatch between our culture and the politics of the country.

But I'll answer another way: I'm not really sure what you mean by my being a favorite with those interested in writing. I do have those fans for sure. But most of the people I hear from are not writers. They are queer Asian/Asian American readers, or queer and biracial Asian readers internationally. Or they are abuse survivors or they lived through the beginning of the AIDS crisis, or they found truth in my essay on the tarot, or on roses, one of the most popular essays in the collection. If you browse my Instagram tag, you can see a little of what I see. They're people who have been looking to read something that they haven't found anywhere else, and to the extent my writing is focused on that loneliness, it is because I have read and thought about what I didn't see. My whole career began with an aesthetic act that was about me writing the first novel from the POV of a Queer Korean American man. That was the loneliness for an idea I felt then. An idea of myself in literature. Now I've done the first book of essays from a Queer Korean American man, 16 years later. There's more of us than there used to be: Willyce Kim, Samuel Park, James Han Mattson, R. O. Kwon, Franny Choi. There's more coming even next year. May it be a tide.
Queer people, and specifically queer Asian/Asian American readers, look for ourselves in the holes of history. Maybe that’s just me; I have been thinking a lot about this recently. I’m studying abroad in India and am looking for the empty spaces in history where queer lives must have been lived, the biographies of loneliness that in truth were homes of tenderness. I wonder if you can talk a little about how living and writing about queer Asian/Asian American lives today exists in reference to those empty spaces, to the voids where our stories are missing. How can we use world-building to understand what we don’t have?

This has me in mind of some of the most consequential graffiti of my life, found in a restroom in Seoul at the Navy Club. My grandfather had taken me to lunch there and soon I found myself in a stall there. The painting was new and pristine. And someone had just written in fresh ballpoint pen ink, in block print just like my dad used to use, “Korean Gay Sex Is Superior.”

I laughed. That whole trip, my grandfather and all of [the] relatives had been expounding on Korean superiority to me: the alphabet was superior, the culture, the design, the art, the way of life, all were superior. My grandfather offered to arrange a marriage for me. Years later I would do my first Korean language press and an interviewer would ask, “How do you think Korean American fiction is superior to other kinds of Asian American fiction?” I declined to answer it, but it reminded me that this was not just my family’s obsession, but a nationalist competitive drive. And so I was laughing because it was as if a gay uncle of mine had just addressed me. Tut-tutting me on how while being gay I still had to be the best because I was Korean, even as he also mocked even the idea of it. But there also, in the club, I wondered what it took to write that. Who did they imagine it was for? Also, it was just a plain brag, nothing humble about it. As I went back to my table, I first imagined a Korean man
most likely had written it, and then imagined the possibility of an American Navy man, then either of them, in the Korea of the late 1980s.

The message stayed with me, either way. Let me hold my head up a little higher at that lunch and for the rest of the trip, and after, the rest of my life, to keep laughing. But also that is how you can begin to do that kind of fiction work. How did we always find each other? Cruising, bathrooms, graffiti. Jokes with at least two meanings. You let yourself begin there, where you might if you also were looking not just for history, but for sex, connection, community.

YLM A few of your essays talk specifically about organizing. You mention one above, about the AIDS epidemic. I wonder if you could speak a little bit about writing as a kind of organizing – less so in the sense of being a balm to loneliness or separation, which both organizing and writing provide, but as an active contribution to the struggle. Do you think writing is necessary for effective organizing, or vice versa? Or do you think writers and organizers just happen to coalesce in the same spaces?

AC ACT UP was and is a kind of art school, with life and death stakes. Can you make a poster that will save someone’s life? Can you make a slogan, a t-shirt, a press release, a chant, a sticker, an action? Most art schools and MFA programs are reluctant to ask you to matter. It’s considered egotistical. Some do. But in 1989, I learned that lives were on the line with things I wrote or said. And that was a lesson I needed and have never forgotten. My favorite writers have always been politically involved. I haven’t met as many organizers as writers such that I think the connection is natural but I hope it will be.
Self in a Box
Basak
While Rene had no need to avoid the sun, ever since his return to Wethersfield rare was the person who saw him by day. His grandmother did the shopping for the both of them, answering the how-do-you-do’s from the grocer in the center of town, and mail was delivered through the slot in the door. He didn’t work, not since he had returned with that degree in his pocket, and if he had made any sort of appointment with the barber or the dentist, he probably would have cancelled it. Instead, he walked at night, more frequently than his grandmother would have ever cared to admit.

He would wait until the children had been called inside by their mothers, and the warmth of the sun had faded from the gray pavement. Once squash leaves had unfurled to catch the moisture of falling temperatures, and baby possums had crept from their trees to sample what the day had left behind, he too would slip from his grandmother’s house into town. Softly exploring, asking of the town the how-do-you-do’s lodged in his throat. Some nights, when his bare feet curved onto front lawn grass, long blades tickled the balls of his ankles, whispering a hello. On others, flecks of green and the smell of fresh-mowed clover would stick to the soles of his bare feet for two, three, blocks after, not letting him say goodbye.

Some people in town liked to ask if Rene had started walking at night before or after Marisa lost her voice. ‘Some people,’ however, are only comfortable asking their same ‘some-people’ questions when the answer is one they won’t try to understand. Few of the gossips, for example, remembered that Marisa and Samantha started dating only a month after Rene left Wethersfield. Everyone knew that Samantha and Rene had been best friends since second grade, but nobody except the town
itself noticed she hadn’t mentioned his name since he drove away. Thus the same doubtful questioning trickled without ceasing, but also without answers, through the porches and screen-doors of Wethersfield.

These days, Samantha wore her hair in a bob and her heart locked in a chest back home. She lived on Providence Street, just past the intersection of Providence and Maple, in the type of small Victorian two-story that leaned in so many different directions it should have been knocked down for scrap and land value, but in Wethersfield was passed from twenty-something to twenty-something for cheap. She and Marisa shared a bedroom but separate beds, as Samantha would kick when she had nightmares and Marisa woke if a breeze blew in wrong.

Five days a week Samantha took the morning shift at Coffee, and Marisa drove twenty minutes away to work at a different town’s library. In the evenings they made dinner, then played Scrabble with Rene’s grandmother. While the sun set, children began a last, illicit round of baseball in the field knowing their mothers’ voices would call them home soon, and the lights in the shops and homes in the center of town began to dim. Once, long ago, doors would lock sharp at the first brush of twilight and children would be washing up after supper long before the sun had begun to sink to keep them out of danger, even in the summer months. But Wethersfield had not had a problem with vampires, or anything else of the sort, since nearly 1853, so today’s children played, the women walked the three blocks to Grandmother’s house without fear, and vampires were only a thing of bedtime stories.

“Rene is coming back,” his grandmother, Suzane, dropped casually one evening. She counted her pieces as she said so, eyes and soft fingertips trained on the blocks. New leaves on the trees outside whistled as the wind rushed through them, and across town groundhogs dove back into their holes. “After graduation.”
Samantha nodded, said nothing, but Marisa exclaimed and said all the things that needed to be said to a grandmother whose grandchild is graduating college. She squeezed Samantha’s hand tighter under the kitchen table that night. It is hard to break habits.

So when Rene drove in weeks later and she felt the town shiver, she was not surprised. And later that night, when they had settled in to Scrabble and he came down the stairs with hair so much longer than she remembered it being—four full years’ worth of growth—it did not startle her.

Ten full seconds of silence did, her hands full of Scrabble pieces, his eyes pulling at her under hair strewn across his forehead. He had a sweater on, even with the windows closed. Cold? He had always been skinny.

Suzane, plump and healthy in all the places Rene stretched and withered away, smiled up at him. “Coming to play, dear?”

Rene kept standing in the doorway, opening his mouth like there was something for him to say. Silence built up in the room, a thick fog steeped until it was all you could taste, all you could smell.

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

He nodded and left, not upstairs but out the front door. Suzane sighed, eyes flickering out the window before her attention settled on the Scrabble pieces. “He hasn’t been himself lately.”

On their walk home that night, Samantha thought back to playing pretend with him when they were small, the detentions they had snickered through in high school, the long drives in her car where he would stick his hand out the window and tell her about his dreams. She felt him thinking about her too, and took Marisa’s hand until the remembrance went away.

A week passed, then two. New summer iced teas arrived to be sold at Coffee, and Marisa started coaching the Wethersfield girl’s summer soccer team (ages 7-8). They would go to Scrabble, and Rene would walk down
the stairs, always just as the sky had swallowed the sun, stare, and walk away. The women chatted lightly in the warm, copper clad kitchen, and did not talk about Rene. By the beginning of June his circles had taken him out past the baseball fields, almost to the high school, where the woods held beer cans from teenagers and lost Frisbees from families. As they drank tea he touched mailboxes, trees, worms underfoot, turning his grandmother, Samantha, and Marisa over and over in his head. They did not mention the queasiness, the turning.

In early June Samantha skipped Scrabble to watch Marisa’s girls lose a soccer game. Only when falling asleep that night did she realize that missing Scrabble meant missing Rene. She slept easy.

But the next morning, Marisa woke to an empty throat and thoughts that could not be spoken. She prodded Samantha awake, frantic in her silence. Across town fell a hush, birds calming and quieting so as to allow Marisa to be heard, if she could.

Samantha and Marisa discovered together, after drinking tea drowning in honey and trying to force even a whisper, that Marisa could, in fact, still weep. She could also text. A half voice, communication without intonation. Wethersfield hummed with the emotion she could not express.

*I love you. I’m sorry*

“Don’t be sorry.” There was nothing to be sorry for.

*Everything feels louder when I can’t talk*

“Everything is quieter when you can’t.”

*Good thing I work in a library*

What she would have texted, she wrote with her finger on her arm. I love you. I miss you. Coming home soon?

What she would have sung—she always loved to sing—she could not remember.

That night, while Rene’s grandmother slept in her green house with a wraparound porch and loosely
tied trash bags, Rene slunk between the trees lining the baseball field. He liked the cool on his feet, from grass that had slept in shadow all afternoon into the evening, and tolerated the memory that gathered here more than in other places.

On this night, Rene was not alone at the forest edge. Samantha, in her pajamas, sat at the base of the right field fence. The field lights were off, so only the moon lit them.

“Why did you take my girlfriend’s voice?” He fumbled for his phone, tucked in his front right jean pocket.

*I didn’t steal her voice.*

“Well she lost it, we can’t find it, and she says it’s your fault.”

sry.

“Where is it?”

*can I sit down w u.*

“Can you talk to me?” Samantha looked at him, in his dark jeans and his sweater, and her heart, still locked back home, stretched to be there for him. Her memories stretch too, and the town leapt to fill in the gaps she had worn away. “Please talk to me.”

“Well where did it go?”

*idk.*

“Can you give it back?”

*idk.*

“Rene, please.”

*ur the one who stopped talking first.*

“When?”

*here.*

And she remembered. The town remembered too, but it had never forgotten.

“This is about my girlfriend.”

*u walked away from me.*

“I wasn’t trying to hurt you.” He sat down, finally, cross legged in front of her. His eyes flitted between fence, phone, hands, and face. “I mean, obviously, I guess.
I missed you. I miss you.”

“Ik

“Why didn’t you call?”

*this is the first time i have anything.*

“A half voice.”

“And whose is it?” But she knew. They both knew.

Samantha leaned closer, and touched his knee. He flinched, but didn’t lean away.

“I want to talk to you. Actually talk. I’m worried about you. But I need you to give her her voice back.” He said nothing, but looked at her, nodded.

*it came to me. I didn’t take it.*

She sighed. “Okay. Can we go home now?”

They walked together in silence. The town of Wethersfield watched them and, because the memory of a town is so much longer than any of its people, thought instead of them of all the friendships that had been born and died in those woods. Of how many children learned to speak on its streets, how many people breathed their last words and were buried there. Of who Samantha and Rene were as children, and who they would be when they grew old.
overton overton since you moved out east
we’ve all been dissolving our history
can’t you feel the fissures from your home
among the bread and circuses the question still
between right and left we crave the thrill
of each trap you set the culture wars
the breaking news we forget that Rome
didn’t fall in a day such fables so often inaccurately told
our eyes cloud over our spines start to warp
all our outrage rusts into worship

America when you were young your hull and keel
swayed gently through each tack and jibe I trailed your wake
I’d hoped to float along a steadier current ride
the gulf stream the southbound Mississippi immovable skiff
how much of the ballot did you leave
unmarked everyone went silent
binge-watching a creeping new normal
narrated by chorus
the chorus smoldered to rage
someone struck the opening bell and all
the rage rang out

62
The Center Cannot Hold
Bryce Morales
after Kaveh Akbar

overton overton since you moved out east
we've all been dissolving our history
can't you feel the fissures from your home
among the bread and circuses       the question still
between right and left       we crave the thrill
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Het Amsterdamse Bos          Patrick Shea