

OUR CURRENT ISSUE:

new BEGINNINGS

"Welcome to our first edition, New Beginnings, and welcome to Iris Magazine! We are excited to finally be able to share this space with all of you, from campus community members to students, family and friends. Thank you for joining us in this new space, one that wants to hear you, honors your voice and loves you for being here, regardless of how you come. We are overjoyed to embark on this new beginning alongside all of you!"

~ Sarah Sharples, Editor in Chief



enter *new BEGINNINGS*

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Letter from the editor

Dear friends,

Hello, and WELCOME TO IRIS MAG! I am so excited to finally be able to share this space with all of you, from campus community members to students, family, and friends.

If it's taken you a long time to get here (here, a place that wants to hear you, honors your voice, and loves you for being here, regardless of how you come), you're not alone. As someone who did not (fully) come out until after high school, I struggled to feel supported. I struggled to feel seen. I struggled to get the resources from a community of people who understood me.

Even after arriving at college, it's been hard for me to trust that sense of stability and acceptance from those around me. I'm accustomed to playing a part and trying so hard to please someone who wasn't me. Every day, I'm learning how to unlearn all of that—to be the person that little-kid Sarah always wanted to be.

Becoming that person is a life-long process, and I know that that experience is not unique to me. But if you're reading these words and finding that they resonate with you, I want you to know that there are steps you can take to get there. You're allowed to be the person you've always wanted to. You're okay. And you're doing a really great job.

Since coming here, I've been introduced to all of the homoerotic cartoons I never watched as a kid. I've spent way too much time reading Anne Sexton, TC Tolbert, and Andrea Gibson. I've listened to hours (HOURS) of Lucy Dacus, Dua Saleh, Elton John, and Adrienne Lenker. I've bought crystals, tried matcha, went vegan, and finally shaved my head. I know a lot of these things are old news for my experienced gays, but I'm really grateful to finally be in a space where I can experiment and express myself the way that I've always wanted to. This has been a space for me to find that new beginning that I've been needing to grow into the person that I need to be.

I want Iris to be that space. Iris wants your weird, your experimental, your reflective, your self-discovering, your healing and your peace. Iris wants your QUEER, whatever that means to you. And I want you to know that whoever you are, however you come into this space, and whatever you bring with you, we are here to hold it, love it, and cherish it.

Thank you. Thank you for being here and joining me in that space. We are so excited to bring this mag to you, and begin this journey together.

Love,
Sarah

Alebrije De Polilla

Torianna Robleto



Alebrije De Rana

Torianna Robleto



Alpha

Al Tejera



books

Jenna Murray



child in water

Jenna Murray



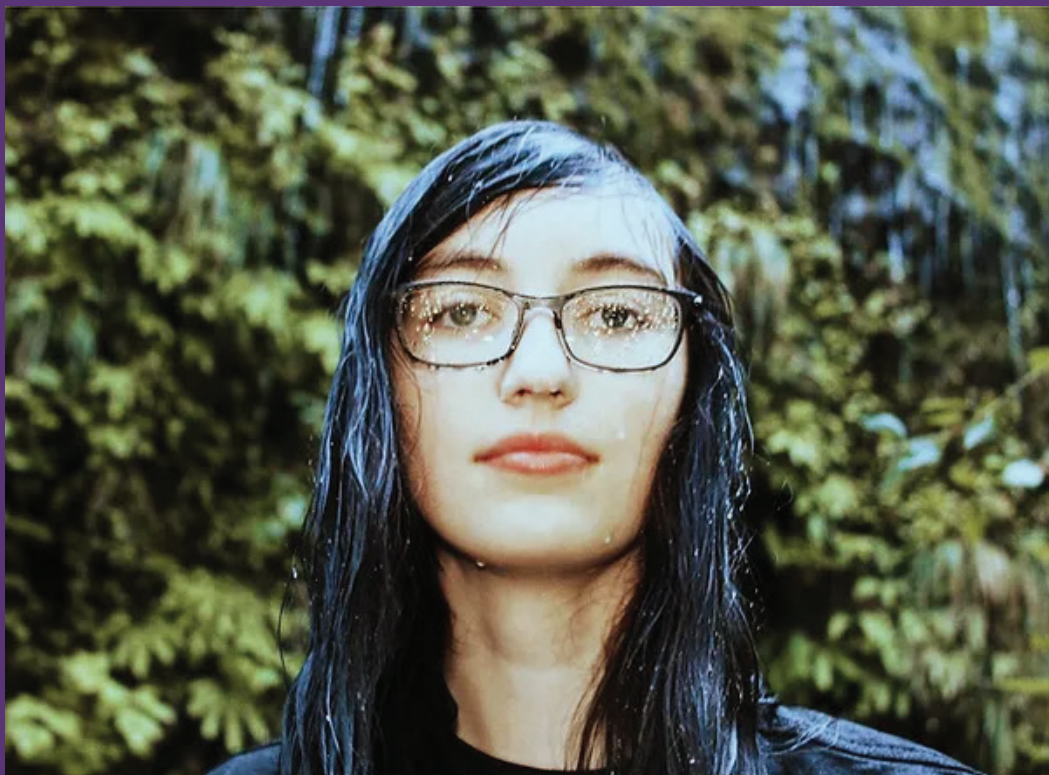
koi fish

Jenna Murray



rainy glasses

Jenna Murray



The Swing

Noel Guidry



Dragonfly Wings

Jess Marinaro

I sleep better
Far from a childhood bed
Some downpours drown
Some lift
I don't care what becomes of me

Eyes flutter like wings
Close them
As the window closes off
A city of black and white
We, illicit comfort

Her fingertips are movement
A ghostperson
And a canvas body
Painted with every color
By sinful hands

Whisper in my ear
She does
The grayscale fades away
This place is a glitch
I'll never leave

Break my mirror
A buzzing reflection
A monstrosity
Steps out among the shards
She looks like us

Dragonfly wings tangled
In our heaven hideout
Don't look at me
Wait, please look at me
It's okay because it never happened

I would wash her hair in my parents' tears
Instead I run on empty
Secrets have always been
A warmer welcome wagon
A place to land
A place to stay

Feed

Al Tejera

The devil's whims scrape my temples. I need to feed. I see the steeple, leaning south so the cross dips against inky clouds and dim stars. Twisted, as I walk beneath moon shine.

A lack of pulse between our fingers. My husband's are thin like kindling and too long. I take them into my hand. Grass is black against the white well of the moon. Crisp leaves lie at our shoes, pressed into the shape of his lips. Or hearts. Or both. His hair, bound by a fickle ribbon and coarse locks.

The pastor was pronounced dead at forenoon. He says.

Carmine smeared across his serrated teeth. I say nothing. Sour fruit and steel. He smells like sour fruit and steel. I pull him close by the arm, my own weaved in crooked angles. I pick a bone from my teeth, a fine artifact from the pastor's corpse. He tasted like rot and lies, and yet I drained him whole.

Who is next? I say.

Goodwife Mary beats her children, dearest husband. He says.

Aye. She meets her last hour then. I say.

The church cries in the wind, creaking under gusts. Alive for three hundred years and the sound of suffering wood still mesmerizes me.

We walk. A door with a scrap of candlelight. Windows wide with unstained glass. The children's screams are dull as I feast on their matriarch. Brittle blood from her neck now sits at the pit of my belly. I share drink with my husband. Her limp form passes between our teeth. The children's bloomed bruises will heal. Goody Mary has no place in our village.

I am tender when I wipe gore from his smile.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Words I Forgot to Define Before You Left

Jenna Murray

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary Of *Words I Forgot To Define Before You Left*

A comprehensive word bank surrounding our Adirondack Trip.

1. **raW** [*adjective*]*—*The space in between my legs when we first met.

(or) The sunroof burning down onto leather seats. I watched your thighs sink sticky into mine—when we were only sixteen and convinced of maturity. You asked me to the Adirondacks with your family. I was happy with holding your hand (only) under tunnels. I was never too afraid to live in a shadow. We listened to Led Zeppelin and fell asleep. (Only) in this scenario was it okay for my head to rest on your shoulder.

2. **privacy** [*noun*]*—*Something we did not have.

(or) Your mom had brought the wrong tent. You had specifically reminded her that you didn't want to sleep in the same one as your younger sister. You had specifically hoped there would at least be a zipper. I told you to stop complaining, to bead your lips shut. Your words echoed a tone too desperate for friendship. Above us hung sagging trees and circling hawks and I could barely consider the absence of nylon a defeat—I smiled at your mom and remembered each wrinkle on her face. Your sister ran around while we pitched the tent and the world was at peace. I didn't care much for turbulence. I was happy with the stillness. You started crying when a supporting pole struck in half and still the forest remained quiet. The stress in your silence was heavier than when you spoke and I think everyone felt your chest cave in. Your mom taped the tent upright and left us to sit in the shade. Under a pine tree I kept myself from rubbing your back. This was as private as we could get— until night hit.

3. **release** [*verb*]*—* The relief that escaped our lips.

(or) Your hand over my mouth when humid oxygen threatened to rush through my teeth; the slight sigh that snuck by and almost caused a halt in your sister's deep breath. I let you bite my hand to keep your bliss mute and, under the moon, we had challenged the very

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Jenna Murray

existence of god himself. I was happy to lie there and say absolutely nothing. I was happy to let your arms do all the talking.

The next morning you immediately pulled me close; something about the weight of your skeleton seemed soft. I turned off my phone and ignored everything else.

4. **little safford lake** [*proper noun*]*—* The tide that sucked my legs in.

(or) The guilt that promised to flood my lungs, then my chest, deeper and deeper into my feet, until my body had no choice but to sink. Your mom had decided to take us kayaking. June sun promised clear water and light air and we decided mostly to drift—we didn't want to rush past. I remember stopping at some water lilies and watching your lips; the way your nose crinkled at the smell of dead seaweed; when you leaned your back on my chest and closed your eyes. I couldn't believe it; really.

I had been cheating on you with my ex-boyfriend, you knew him. I had texted him before this trip and said I was going with family, that we weren't together: I knew you had wanted to keep it a secret, so no one knew anyway. Your entire body weight was dependent on my posture and I had to wonder if you would drown if my back broke. I had to imagine snapping my bones in half, grinding them up into a dust and feeding them to the fish. I know you were having a much different experience.

I couldn't tell you or risk the sun crashing down. I couldn't acknowledge what kind of pain weighed at my toes and taunted me to jump in. I considered a block of cement too light to tie around my wrists. I considered forgetting how to swim and sleeping on the floor of little safford. I considered how you would react. I secretly hoped you would have been sad.

5. **latrodectus mactans** [*proper noun*]*—* The eight legged suicide.

(or) The pulpy arachnid I found on the beach. We decided to go back to shore. I watched your sister while you helped your mom return the boats. You could cry over broken tents and yet I couldn't release anything. The sun settled and the air chilled and I was frozen. The God we had just spoken into irrelevance beamed down, past the cracks of cloud and deep into my chest and promised me this feeling would stick. He glued shame to the bottom of my footprint and I watched as each sand-stone step became burnt and black.

Your sister watched and I swear she must have seen my skin burn—boil—at the thought of that boy from home. Nothing could have been more degrading than explaining how his dried out fingers dug between my bones. I wondered what deformity must have

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caused this—I stared deep into the sand and imagined which corner of my frontal lobe must have been rotting. Your sister decided to skip stones.

The northern black widow isn't as dangerous as its southern counterpart. But its venom is still fifteen times more poisonous than rattlesnakes. A red hourglass ticks away at its back and reminds the human of their worth. If your sister didn't scream so loud I might have tested my own.

6. toothache [*noun*]*—* The way my gums started to bleed when I told you everything.

(*or*) Your teeth chattering at the lack of warmth from my body. It was only thirty degrees and you couldn't face me. I tried explaining to you—I hadn't known how serious we would get. I let the possibility of us rust in hopes that I couldn't get my tetanus shot.

I knew the only possible redemption was one of likely hatred. So I spit every dishonesty I could out past my tongue, my cheeks puffy and full like an old man chewing gum. I crushed mouths full of infidelity and felt truth trickle up my jaw, a seize of my lips and an internal command to remain silent until you could choke a response past the lump in your throat. I waited for you to push me away—to break my limbs, to scratch the skin off my face, to inject the poison of a black widow into my right vein— but you crossed the metal bar that divided our cots and shrank into my spine. I'm still unsure why. You told me not to say another word that night.

7. drool [*noun, verb*]*—* The saliva on your pillowcase the morning after.

(*or*) Our instant and unexpected make up, the movement of your tongue and the exchange of liquid permanence. The way the light leaked past the mesh sunroof and sparkled all over our skin. The way you dove right back in. The way I couldn't tell if I was awake. The way you pinched me to ensure I was.

The drip of the faucet when you dragged me into your shower after breakfast. The wax of your stomach when the water stuck on. The shampoo you washed out of my eyes. The suffocated laughter when your mom walked in on us and you had to lie. The yellow tiles, too distracted to see the grime on the ground. The broken mirror we forgot to see.

8. celtic spread [*noun*]*—* When the psychic said you would leave.

(*or*) Our last day: Sparkling sunsets and royalty in your step, neither of us had a clue—I don't think we wanted to. Your mom took us to Old Forge for the day and let us run free. I remember cotton candy and kettle corn and ice cream: The duality of your hand on me

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Words I Forgot to Define Before You Left

Jenna Murray

when we went to candy shops to spend your mom's money. Really, we weren't looking for anything. We were perfectly content living in the shadow of maturity.

I had never met a psychic. Didn't really believe in it, and neither did you—but it was only ten dollars of your mom's money, and the neon sign was good for pictures. So we let a lady dressed in gold tell us our future. We followed her through a skinny door, the apartment building next door, and into a foggy room. Rosemary smoke dripped from an incense stick and we were asked to put forth our intentions. I can still feel the syrupy sensation of your hand in mine, eyes closed.

She foresaw a break. A snap of something, physical or conceptual. I remember she said she couldn't be exact. I remember you laughed.

9. **masterpiece** [*noun*]*—* A Big Thief vinyl you gifted me before we went home.

(*or*) The outstanding marksmanship of which the lady dressed in gold saw our break. The artistry behind switched roles, when you deepthroated your co-worker in the cinema parking lot, when I said it was okay and tried to fall deeper into your skeleton. When I invited you to the Thousand Islands and you said no. When you questioned God while covered in your new boyfriend. The extraordinary craft of which we both failed, the impeccable way in which we decided it was not our fault. The sweat that dripped from our thighs when we remembered being sixteen and getting away with everything. The album I'm listening to right now. The note you wrote on the sleeve. The reminder you'd never leave.

No Grace in Beauty

Julissa Valdez

come as you are

me? a black woman?
i'm too loud they say
too aggressive
too uneducated
too eager to change the world

come as you are

me? a plus sized woman?
i'm too fat they say
too hungry
too lazy
too big for a crop top

come as you are

me? a bisexual latina?
i dress like a tomboy they say
& undress every beautiful woman with my eyes and can't choose a side

come as you are

me? well, who am i?
i'm an inspiration, i say
to young black girls
to women
to queer individuals
to humans

Ozmanthus and the Wolf

Charlie Kenny

Ozmanthus was lucky for their name. In a household of recycled names for boys and floral names for girls, Ozmanthus stood out. Yes, they were named after a flower, but one would be hard-pressed to put Ozmanthus in the same category as Rose, Daffodil, Lilly, Iris, and Tulip. While they hated the girlish association even they had to agree it was better than being named after some millionth great uncle or, worse, be stuck with their Pa's name like their big brother (affectionately called Junior); who would ever want a name like Brent. It just sounded boring.

There was an omen to Ozmanthus. As their ma's stomach swelled with the little abomination, Great Aunt Bunny began to dissipate. She had been the picture of health one day and the next she could not keep down her food like she used to. After a month she couldn't make the walk up the twelve steps to her bedroom. But before she could pass on to God's gates, the expecting couple and their five younglings made the long trek up to Great Aunt Bunny's tiny home.

Great Aunt Bunny drifted in the three hours that her great niece was in labor. When the screams of anguish and the cries of pain subsided, when all had drifted to calm, when the newborn was left in a cradle beside their sleeping ma, Great Aunt Bunny rose with the spirit of a particularly jumpy rabbit. She walked for the first time in six months without her walker and lifted the six pound and three-ounce baby with an ease she had lacked the past three months. Settled in her beloved rocker, Great Aunt Bunny sang for the first time since her youth. Ozmanthus's ma could never replicate the song, something "from the old country" as she would put it, lost to time, lost to history. When her song came to an end and her great niece roused from her bed, the revitalized woman pressed her wrinkled nose to the newborn's head and took in a big breath.

"Ozmanthus. Smells just like Ozmanthus." Her boney finger glided over the sticky tufts of orange hair that sprouted from the silent child's scalp. A smile bloomed on her sorrowful lips. "Same shade of orange too."

"I always loved Ozmanthus."

Great Aunt Bunny pressed a kiss to christen Ozmanthus's head and departed. She was right about the hair—the bright orange mess could be spotted no matter how hard they tried to hide, making hide-and-seek feel like a cheat of a game. Yet Ozmanthus had other reasons to stand out among their ten siblings. They were grounded on a regular basis for trading chores with Michael (named after Pa's great-great uncle) who was too into his book to bother with sharpening his knives or cleaning the guns. Besides, they were much more likely to die from poisonous plants than the wolves. Pa and the other boys made sure to keep them at bay. But weapons were a man's duty, so Ozmanthus was put on manure duty nearly every week that at some point they grew dull to the foul scent of cow dung.

Ozmanthus and the Wolf

Charlie Kenny

What really did them in was the hair. It simply grew too long, too frizzy, too annoying. A few simple cuts and they felt ten pounds lighter. Their parents did not agree to the necessity. The scar on their forearm from the lash was worth it though.

Ozmanthus sat on the porch rubbing freshly picked aloe vera leaves on the still tender wound when their pa marched out, gun strapped to his back and knives on each thigh, with all five brothers following behind like ducklings in similar attire. Pa stopped abruptly and turned on his heel to survey his sons, a deep frown drawing out the lines at his mouth and forehead. At the sight of little Atticus (Ma's great-great-great-grandfather) no older than three with a butter knife in his chubby grip, Pa sighed.

"Atty, you can't come until you're bigger. Stay on the porch with Ozzy and practice today ok?"

Ozmanthus perked up. "Can I have a knife to practice with too?"

Pa ran a hand down his face. "You're a girl Oz. You can't learn to hunt."

"But—" Oz swallowed and glanced at their scar. "But why not?"

With the lumbering steps of a man much too tired for this conversation, Pa squatted down to be face-to-face with Oz. "We all got our roles in this world Ozzy. Men have to hunt and scavenge and protect their women. Women," he gently chucked their chin, "need to take care of the house and the younger kids. Then we all work together to take care of the farm. It's a scary world. I don't want you getting hurt."

Ozmanthus stiffened, their eyes narrowing. "I'm not weak."

Pa's eyes grew soft in that pitiful way that made Ozmanthus want to show him just how strong they can be (even if it was bravado held up by desire rather than fact). "Ozzy, sweetie, a lash is no where near what them wolves can do. They could break your whole arm with just their paw. Now," Pa stood, scooped up Atticus, and set him in Oz's lap, "watch this little bug and stay on the property okay?" He attempted a smile, attempted peace. "I'll find a nice fat turkey for you to eat tonight, okay Ozzy?"

It was not accepted. "Okay."

With a final sigh and wash of his face with his hand, Pa and his remaining troopers marched down the porch and off into the wilderness. Ozmanthus waited until they were out of sight before grunting and smacking their good hand. Atticus peered up at

Ozmanthus and the Wolf

Charlie Kenny

their frustrated sibling with curious innocence.

“Do you hate Pa, Ozzy?”

“No. He just makes me feel like a baby.”

“But he treats you like all the other girls.”

Ozmanthus sighed. “I’m not a girl Atty.”

“Are you a boy?”

It took them a moment to register what they had revealed. Took another moment to roll that long mused over realization over their tongue, now in the world. Took yet another to process their brother’s question. “No. I ain’t a boy either.”

This made the unjudging arbiter of Ozmanthus’s truth frown. “Are you a wolf?”

Ozmanthus snorted, hugging the funny child. “No! I’m a human like you, silly.”

Atticus sighed, deflating with relief. “Okay good. I don’t want you to be a wolf ‘cause if you were a wolf than Pa would have to kill you and I don’t want you to die.” He tilted his head up to look at them upside down. “You’re my favorite human in the family. Well, after Tulip but that’s just ‘cause we’re twins. But I like you most because you make the coolest forts! Can we make a fort now?”

As appealing as the idea was something more came to Ozmanthus’s mind. While putting Atticus and Tulip down for a nap (and in the care of Lilly who was none to thrilled) their plan solidified. The wolves. The scourge of the woods. Pa had been in pursuit of the pack since they had moved into the isolated forest. Giant, spindly things they were. Bodies too long, too flexible, too twistable. Eyes so dark and deep to look into them was to stare into the abyss of death. And their howl. Oh, their howls. They were like the final screams of the damned before being dragged down into the depths of their everlasting despair. Pa hated them, didn’t trust them. “They’re not of God and shouldn’t live.”

If Ozmanthus could kill one then Pa would never be able to ground them again.

Ozmanthus would prove themselves the stronger human.

Ozmanthus and the Wolf

Charlie Kenny

Ozmanthus will finally get their pa's respect.

An hour later Ozmanthus was deep in the woods following a trail of prints that their own boots could dwarfed in. Part of their deal with Michael was that he had to teach Ozmanthus everything about hunting, and Ozmanthus was a damn good student. Naturally, Pa and the boys took all the guns and hunting knives—but not the butcher knife, not the rope. Ozmanthus ran off of pure adrenaline, pure hope, rather than a plan. So, when a wolf came into view, they didn't have a plan.

While accurate, the stories neglected to mention the wolves' size. Ozmanthus was on the shorter side, but they knew animals. No animal should have towered over them like this wolf. No animal should be so out of proportioned. No animal should have been able to sense Ozmanthus's silence present. Those eyes. Ozmanthus thought they knew fear. The longer they stared, the more their mouth watered with a yearning, no, a need to be devoured. Their legs moved on their own towards the now seated beast. (What was happening?). Something tugged on their heart. They threw the knife to the side. They wanted to beg this majestic creature to eat them. (This is wrong). What else could life mean if not to be destroyed by something greater than yourself?

Ozmanthus was reaching their hands into the wolf's gaping, bored maw when the spell broke. It didn't notice. Ozmanthus's arms diverted from mouth to around the throat and, using the angle and moment of surprise, flipped the wolf onto its back and pinned it down in a choke hold. Ozmanthus had to wrap their entire body around the wiggling wretch to keep from being knocked off, to keep themselves alive. From their new position they could only see one of the wolf's eyes and when they looked in it they felt a weaker version of that need once again.

"You tricky bitch. You fuckin' coward!" Ozmanthus grunted. "Gotta use stupid tricks at your side?"

The wolf snarled, revealing teeth the size of Ozmanthus's hand.

Ozmanthus growled back, just as guttural. "I don't need this shit from a coward! You don't deserve to eat me if you don't fight fair."

It gave a rough twist of its upper body and managed to pin Ozmanthus to the ground. What the beast did not realize was how this second roll would cause their body to wrap itself in a painful, tight constriction. It yelped in pain and tried to roll back the right way, but Ozmanthus would not allow it.

Ozmanthus and the Wolf

Charlie Kenny

“A coward and an idiot! Don’t even know your own limits.”

So the struggle went for hours, both too stubborn to relent. At times, the wolf would be able to roll back into a comfortable position. Others, Ozmanthus would get close to having the wolf be in a knot of its own flesh. Sometimes the wolf would try to buck Ozmanthus off and get smacked or kick by whatever limb Ozmanthus could risk. Yet other times Ozmanthus would try to their rope around the beast’s maw and instead be met with scrapings from its knife-like teeth.

The sun was beginning to set. Both creatures were tired. Ozmanthus began to yell for their family, for them to find them and help them kill the wolf. In turn the wolf began to howl. Perhaps it was because they were too exhausted for the howl to rip through them or maybe they were simply fading into sympathy for the beast they were entwined with; rather than the screams of the dead, Ozmanthus only heard a resounding tiredness within the howl, a plea for rest. It quieted Ozmanthus’s own screams. It moved them enough to stroke the beast’s cheek with the same reverence they gave to their mother when she was in labor with the twins. Once again they met the beast’s eye and instead of that pull Ozmanthus felt a warmth. A question laid within that stare. A resolution seemed to follow in the strange crack of the air that only Ozmanthus could hear.

“Ozzy!” Pa had his gun in hand, but his eyes were on Ozmanthus rather than the wolf. In the second it took Ozmanthus to look up at their pa, the wolf wriggled itself loose from their tired arms and sprinted into the distance. Pa dropped his gun and ran to check on Ozmanthus, began tending to their scraped arms. He was saying something to them. Something about Atticus. Something about not caring as long as Ozmanthus was alive and safe. All Oz could do was stare off to where the wolf had disappeared. They will learn what resolution it came to.

Pronoun Game

Isaac Schiller

I like they/them in the sense of
Production, a controlled-release seduction,
A vindication of all the things within our coven,
So stake me, take me, remember what I said: I
can use them all if my deadname stays dead.
Androgenize me, homogenize me,
Make me your sopping cake-milk,
Froth me, spin me, leave me in my own filth,
Let's just wait and adore me,
God, don't ignore me—
How about
How about we just wait a minute
Catch up with me and then I'll win it
Back in the days without the praise
And I just want your validation,
I just want your gaze,
Graze off me, feed from me,
I'll let you live off my bones,
My favorite snail,
Telling me it's okay to fail,

Put your rat lungworm on my tongue.

Sometimes I think you're corrupting me, Sometimes I say it's done,
But I don't know what I want anymore,

I don't know if I want anymore.

The Ghostwriter

Isaac Schiller

Alan: hello?

Me: God, you always take so fucking long to pick up.

Alan: and? Would you pick up quickly for a voice in your head?

Me: No, I'm always the one calling you.

Alan: And let me guess. You're here because you think it'd be pretty and poetic.

Me: why else would we be here?

Alan:

Me: anyway. To the point. Where were you last night?

Alan: the union.

Me: Soviet?

Alan: college. Idiot

Me: I'm the one who takes your classes for you, so tread carefully.

Alan: fine. Yes the union

Me: are you sure?

Alan: yes

Me: so why were you on a hill? Feeling menaced by bees?

Alan: bring up my childhood, you always go for the easy strikes

Me: so why do you still remember it? Do you remember your first encounter with beetles?

Alan: it's about relationships

Me: to whom?

Alan: to Helene. To Abel. To Luca.

Me: so why don't you look them in the eye?

Alan: I'm good at that.

Me: then you wouldn't see my reflection in anyone else?

Alan: well—

Me: Admit it. I'm your greatest relationship, your only relationship.

Alan: you

Me: yes

Alan: maybe I'll submit this to a magazine

Me: feel free. If you were more body than mind, you wouldn't even have a writing partner.

Alan: you?

Me: well, that beeping noise doesn't stop for just anyone. I care for you

Alan: sure

Me: so, you can take care of yourself?

Alan: obviously

Me: Where are you?

Alan: the pizzeria.

Me: getting pizza? Please. You're not talking. Not looking. Not speaking. In what version of your world are you here? No, you're there. You're always there. Haven't you realized that yet?

The Ghostwriter

Isaac Schiller

Alan: I...

Me: You make me into a person every time you try to kill me. You objectify yourself every time you wake up. What other being can claim this?

Alan: Please. I'm trying

Me: And has that ever been enough? Face it. You have four walls, no windows. See this document? It's not round. And if it were, you'd still be walking in circles.

Alan: I've never let myself be seen by anyone

Me: that won't change!

Alan: Exclamation points. Class act

Me: you always want to be a fucking grammarian

Alan: is loving my work wrong now?

Me: loving yourself is.

Alan: oh, now you hate body positivity?

Me: No! Just you

Alan: stop trying to control me

Me: so it's my fault you can't really speak? That now I'm thinking of all your lines because you can't fucking stop? I'm helping you, Alan.

Alan: how?

Me: Don't you want to know where you are?

Alan: These aren't the right questions

Me: fine. Why don't you want to die?

Alan: Because I want to live

Me: On. You want to live on

Alan: And?

Me: You know that when you're gone, they'll only remember me.

this city

Hannah Fuller

this city only fit our dreams when we folded them,
 crinkled them up and stuffed them in our back pocket
acting like it was enough that we carried them.

this city has mopped up more tears than could fit in Lake Erie
 but it's old news, only salt on wounds
that could have healed by now.

this city shudders under the demanding gaze of the night sky
 when it asks what we are doing
and where we belong.

we don't have an answer for this city that raised us yet
feels so far away.

like we were never meant to fit in here.
like we were strangers to begin with.

and so,
 to combat this
we unfold our dreams from our pockets
 we raise our fists to the inquisitive sky
 and we move on.

-(h.g.f.)

to be the unlucky mediator between celestial bodies

Sarah Sharples

I stare at the moon so long She releases Herself
to me. I pluck Her from the sky,
a ripe berry from a bush. The distance between us
a thousandth of what it is between She and I, yet
tonight She hangs heavy in my pocket.
The rhythm of my step soothes Her
and where are you?

I sit quietly on the pavement, attracting stares.
I will do anything to seduce Her,
turn Her gaze and make Her love me. Meanwhile
you run wild under Her serenity,
undignified.
The thought of it empties me—
the thought of someone tarnishing Her divinity with
that sort of arrogance.

She will be mine; I, Hers; I will love Her as long as
She will allow.
Sometime tonight Her remains
will become stuck in your teeth, souring
with the rot of your drunken breath. Your hollow
corrupts Her holy, O

Transcendent

Grayson Dailey

Moving forward
Unheeding to resistance With your
own power
Reinforced and ready

Finding self
Among us and them
Nurturing who you will
be Becoming
transcendent

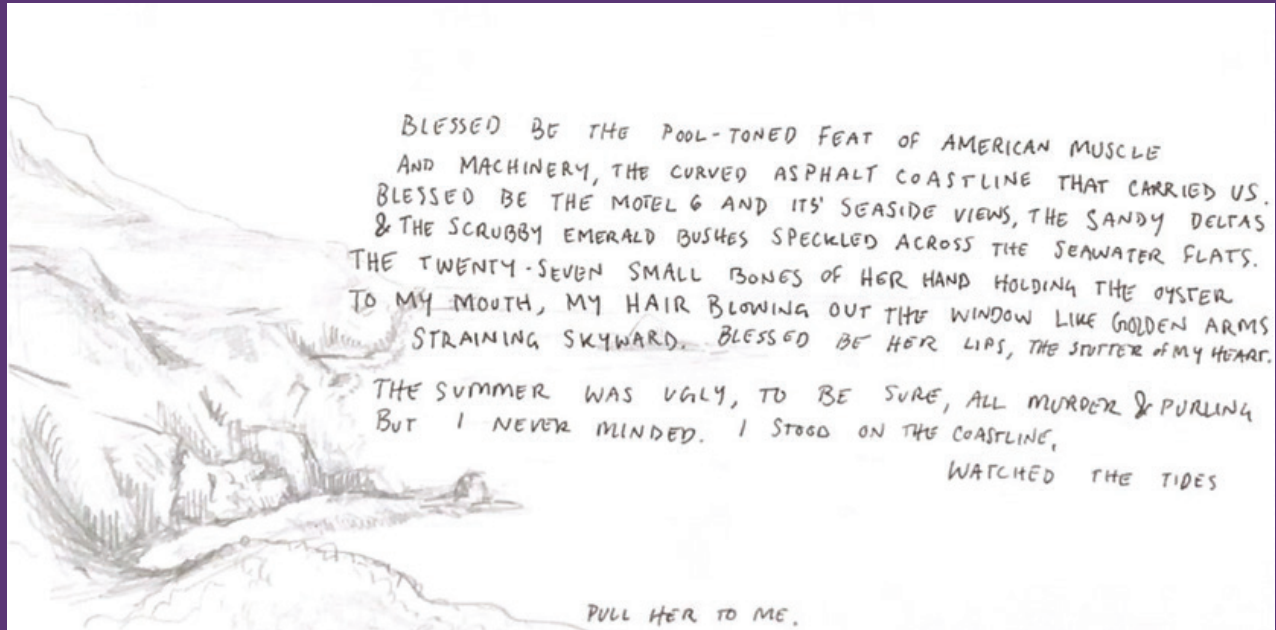
Forge a force
Pick yourself from the
earth Like a brilliant
flower
Standing tall from the weeds

Scavenge a thread
Of wonder and
mystery Once lost
Never forgotten

Rebuild what once
was Purging
limitations
Opening the curtain
Show the truest
treasure To yourself
first.

Untitled

Madelyn Rice and Kayla Eyler



BLESSED BE THE POOL-TONED FEAT OF AMERICAN MUSCLE
AND MACHINERY, THE CURVED ASPHALT COASTLINE THAT CARRIED US.
BLESSED BE THE MOTEL 6 AND ITS' SEASIDE VIEWS, THE SANDY DELTAS
& THE SCRUBBY EMERALD BUSHES SPECKLED ACROSS THE SEAWATER FLATS.
THE TWENTY-SEVEN SMALL BONES OF HER HAND HOLDING THE OYSTER
TO MY MOUTH, MY HAIR BLOWING OUT THE WINDOW LIKE GOLDEN ARMS
STRAINING SKYWARD. BLESSED BE HER LIPS, THE STUTTER OF MY HEART.
THE SUMMER WAS UGLY, TO BE SURE, ALL MURDER & PURLING
BUT I NEVER MINDED. I STOOD ON THE COASTLINE,
WATCHED THE TIDES

PULL HER TO ME.

when I wonder if I will be misgendered at my funeral

Kat Johnson

when they pronounce us spouse & spouse
at the altar, my father will raise his brow.
he sees grief as a woman in a tuxedo,
standing beside the ghost of his daughter,
a person who learned to put love
in the hands of someone who addresses them
by their real name.

when they say that we are forever unified by a ring,
a symbol of a promise that a grey-haired alcoholic wouldn't ever know how to make,
I will pick the rot from underneath my fingernails and bury it in the peace I find knowing
myself —
in other words, shattering his lens and opening my own eyes every morning,
black coffee, oatmilk creamer, and an acoustic guitar that belongs to only me.

Acceptance of Differences: Music Taste and Gender

Grayson Dailey

Hi! You can call me Sunny (they/them), and I'm a lot of things. I'm a senior psychology major, a cat parent, Capricorn, baby gym rat, nonbinary, and a total music lover. My music taste is... pretty eclectic. Not to sound like a hipster, but it unironically gets a lot of flack and disdain from friends and people in general. Some of my favorite artists are Makari, Hands Like Houses, and Dwellings. I have an entire playlist dedicated to the music I feel comfortable playing at work, and several layers of intense consideration covering all of my song choices in public. I am even banned in certain friend circles from getting on aux.

This cautious treading is similar to the way I approach the lukewarm response my gender receives. In the same way I might subtly turn down my music when someone walks in, I turn down my out of place self-expression. I present as very feminine, and am perceived often as a cisgender gay man, which can often be uniquely uncomfortable. Being unapologetically different is something intensely uncomfortable for me, and I often find myself backing away from authenticity to avoid conflict or judgement. Even among friends or in more inclusive spaces, I often deal with misgendering by ignoring it or subtly angling my water bottle and its 'They/Them' stickers outward.

Subtlety in either issue does not concretely help me much. I still often feel that I stick out like a sore thumb; diving against the current of 'normal' people and 'normal' taste. The impact of this unpopularity is hidden, a discomfort and paranoia, drifting away from obvious or clear involvement in the most controversial parts of my gender expression, like dresses or skirts, and accepting disdain for my music taste in sad martyrdom or faux understanding.

However, it also has a few benefits. It can draw me closer to people, especially those who wholeheartedly embrace my differences on both sides, and those who can appreciate neither are easier to identify and avoid. It allows me the opportunity to find others that feel cast out or unpopular with either, or with any facet of identity. It brings me into internal conversations often about visibility and adaptation, openness and ridicule, and breaking norms.

The role that society has in shaping my behaviors and responses is complex and multifaceted. I have learned ways to blend in, grown into acceptable ways of expressing myself, and given up on the hypervisibility that differences create. I settle into type-casted expectations that are deemed acceptable enough: a flamboyant and effeminate gay man instead of a femme nonbinary person, and someone who 'likes rock' but never pushes to change pop or rap. In doing so, I lose connection with the truer pieces of myself at times. I become a subtler, more timid person. Alternately, I can appre-

Acceptance of Differences: Music Taste and Gender

Grayson Dailey

ciate those connections more often and more deeply with the most accepting friends and with myself. When I can be my whole, visible self, I shine much brighter and feel happier and more whole.

While some level of this social adaptation can be beneficial, it puts stringent ties on my behavior and personality. I am not supposed to be sporty or athletic, not allowed to play or enjoy music, assumed to only be interested in men, and am often at the receiving end of 'screamo' jokes. For the musical aspect, the response of the general public is common enough to become part of the culture. Concerts become places to meet others that don't express the judgement experienced elsewhere. Similarly, other members of the LGBTQ+ community form safer spaces to express themselves, but these often counteract each other in unfortunate ways. In some LGBTQ+ spaces, some people are less understanding or supportive than others of trans* people, and others can fall into the same typecasting as some of my cishet friends. However in alternative music spaces, I am so different that that shared experience with ridicule doesn't fully extend. They act as two drastically different circles, like a Venn diagram, with a very narrow middle connecting them.

Music is something often tied deeply to the self, and there are even certain artists and genres stereotyped towards LGBTQ+ folks. That said, my comparisons here are inherently unequal since I face no persecution or direct hatred for my music taste in the same way my gender can be treated. It is a less integral part of me, more subject to change, and easier to tamper down or selectively choose where and when to express it. The similarities I have noticed between both my music tastes and gender are more of a reflection of the ways differences are treated, and how hard acceptance can be. Both share a sense of disrespect, especially from those who lack understanding or empathy. What is normal and popular is what is considered good, and things outside of what is normal are scrutinized much more.

Overall, it's not that I wish everyone had more similarities to me in either aspect. That would take away from the selective, special circles that emerge and the unintended benefits I have experienced. It would just be much easier if typecasting and discomfort were less universal or accepted. Being allowed to exist in both aspects, just as I am, would reflect a much more brilliant and radiant reality. As it is now, I am working towards a more unapologetic future where my differences can become my strengths as I fight for inclusivity and find acceptance.

~Sunny