





## **Title // Author**

*small spaces* is a commentary on society's inability to recognize or talk about sexual assault without compartmentalizing or labeling it based on preconceived definitions and technicalities. By forcing and contorting the human body, in its most natural and vulnerable form, into the most unnatural and confined spaces, the figure conveys a physical expression of the struggle that victims of sexual assault face.

For each tableau, I look for spaces that could potentially be hiding spots, located in an environment where the figure doesn't belong. I ask the model to fit herself into the space in the most compressed and obscured way she can. I direct her to display as much tension in her body as possible, as if she is trying not to be seen. When recording the image I select a point of view that seems to be from the perspective of an invisible onlooker, implying a sense of mystery, or danger.

The purpose of this work is to reach out to victims of sexual assault, to tell them that they are not alone. Survivors should never feel that their experiences are invalid based on rigid, qualifying criteria set by society.





# Ode to the First Pancake // Emily Churchill

As if spun from the inner imag-  
inings  
of a mad scientist  
Built from bits of leftover DNA  
Your possible genome limitless  
Chile pepper chocolate chip  
Peanut butter bacon banana  
Lingonberry lemon curd

What potential! What promise!  
If only born into the privileged  
one percent  
Of pancakes, stirred and stacked  
with care by  
Culinary cuisiniers  
Showered with pearls of pow-  
dered sugar  
Bathed in pools of golden, vis-  
cous butter

Instead, you were conceived at  
home  
By a frazzled father on a Satur-  
day morning  
Clumsily dumped into the pan in  
a hasty fury  
His negligent eye distracted by  
Sizzling sausages  
And frying eggs  
Toddlers' tantrums

Your edges crisp and curl  
Your insides melt to mush  
Emerging from the pan

Your grim fate predestined long  
before your inception  
Abandon all dreams of the noble  
life of the first-born  
The favored offspring  
Surrender to the dismal destiny of  
a castaway

In purgatory you wait  
As one by one, your siblings are  
Piled high on a  
Separate plate  
Destined for the heavenly choir  
Of breakfast delicacies  
While you turn cold  
And die alone  
A nameless nobody  
Tossed into a mass grave of food  
waste

Or worse  
Discarded into  
The savage hell  
Of the dog's  
Barren  
Bowl

## God is an Animator // Mitchell Gregory

While outside making plans for a wooden tree house with her best friend, Cassidy wondered if humanity was God's cartoon. To Him were they two-dimensional to His three-dimensional? Created in His image but in the ambiguous, distorted way that animators fabricate characters to accentuate their inhumanness? In God's case, our ungodliness.

She asked Markus, "Do you think we're just God's cartoons?"

"If my dad were near, he would spank you," he told her, so she stopped speaking about it. She wanted to be one of those characters who could do stuff that was far out of reach for people watching it from the other side of the screen. By her logic, that would mean she would do things that God couldn't do.

Like, in cartoons, they didn't die. She herself could die, she remembered, but God couldn't. So God always had to be God, always knowing everything. Somehow this led her to thinking about infinity and how things never ended-which just made her head hurt. Cassidy then sank into a child-like existentialism, a state of being she could not yet understand being that she was only six. The two continued drawing out tree house plans on large pieces of white paper and even practiced building some semblance of the structure out of sticks, but a thought nagged her: "Markus, why would he spank me?" Her parents never spanked her, probably because she was a particularly introverted, respectful child-at least on the outside. In truth, her rebellious nature surfaced even at that age, though only occasionally. She knew what was expected of her; the people around her could not know she was capable of autonomy. That would just lead to her suppression of these kinds of thoughts, but they would come out in due time.

"We are God's children, not products of his imagination' is something my father would say in reply," he said, focused. It didn't answer her question. Cassidy again wondered about God. Why he had to be a man, if he was white like Christians typically think, African like her, or not even a human race, as it would not make sense for a God to prefer one ethnic group. But if she said it aloud there would again be threats of admonishment. He continued, "What you say makes sense. I just don't want to be a cartoon."

Markus moved away at the age of eight, so he might as well have become a cartoon to her.

## Higgs Boson // Liana Saleh



there was gossip  
where the sunlight  
met cabinet cracks.  
he swept it into  
vodka bottles, left it  
outside her door  
where she'd never  
find it. *let's take a  
picture*, he'd say, *snap  
it shut with titanium  
dioxide and put her  
away for life*. he  
watched her burn  
into watercolor car-  
bons thirty three  
times over, once  
for each time they  
froze the world.  
they'd watched cit-  
ies crumble togeth-  
er. good thing his  
last investment was  
a spaceship, cherry  
red with orange  
flame decals on  
each tiny door. he  
didn't bother to  
stock it with fruit  
loops. milk doesn't  
keep where time  
passes in stars.



## Virus // Liana Saleh

they gave us a roof above our heads made of twigs and protons, one we could reach up and touch with our fingertips, pluck bouquets of phosphates to drop into the plastic cup by the weeping willow at the train station. they gave us drinking wells made from bricks and galaxies, where we'd reel up buckets of planets with red rugged hands and centrifuge the starry water from between them. they twined laser beams into our split end hair and daisies into our dna and we were thankful on rug-burned knees until the sky spilled zwitterions and we remembered where they came from.



# In Response to Increasing Demand // Erin Piasecki

I had a price gun  
once  
ran around  
ascribing weakly  
glued value  
to all things  
I encountered.

my heart                      weak in my throat  
   an unset ramekin of pudding  
   back of my tongue

kindness cost  
five cents,  
cool apathy  
fifteen dollars.

   lips taut                      keep it in  
lest it leave on the carpet                      a vague  
   watery stain to hide and say                      lie

true confidence  
was tagged  
more  
for novelty  
than worth.

   it was only                      him  
and too much fruit again, you know how he gets  
never could learn a lesson,                      that boy

like most things  
it had more  
functions  
than two.



the third and last time, but it doesn't matter  
too much  
everyone already knows what was once there  
it was only

an unshakable  
faith in god  
garish,  
willful letters:  
FROZEN FRESH.

kiss the hands that cover their ears my heart  
fear of impurity is a malady itself  
keep it in lest it

the cunt  
was marked up  
whereas the  
appendage was  
depreciating.  
*salesalesale*  
on a limp  
exclamation  
point.

but that doesn't mean a a limb of yours never could  
kiss can't choke  
my tongue  
learn a lesson

ripe-peach  
breast,  
Best Before.  
The adhesive

Defiantly.

it doesn't matter

when there's a mottled bruise you put it down and pick another

learn a lesson

you know how he gets

that brutal look

in their eyes:

\$2.50 in red

final markdown,

all must go.

put it down and pick another

never could learn a lesson, that boy

that boy

learn a lesson

impurity is a malady

I stuck one

off to the side

in my elbow

for later:

warranty void.

Not overly eager

to employ it.





# The Forgotten Ending // Annie Campbell

I had always remembered my grandparents' house in Florida as a magical haven. Curtained by the mystical clouds of Spanish moss, it seemed that their Daytona cottage could just as easily have been the headquarters of a clan of undiscovered sorcerers. In my youth, Grandpa Jack and Grandma Joan's Florida home was an alternate universe, free of rules. Stocked with a limitless supply of sidewalk chalk and a brand-less soda my Grandpa referred to as "Sprite-like stuff", visiting my grandparents meant a want-less period of freedom and bliss.

Exploring their shaded, suburban neighborhood one summer, I was a detective. Inspired by the *Nancy Drew* series that lined my shelf at home, I imagined dozens of mysteries in need of a solution. Devoting entire afternoons to getting to the bottom of imaginary burglaries and murders, I was unstoppable. On that trip, there was no puzzle I couldn't decipher, no set of monkey bars I couldn't conquer, and no friendship bracelet combination I couldn't master. Every day presented my eight-year-old self with a new conundrum to crack.

Visiting my grandparents again five years later, I yearned for that same thoughtless freedom I had experienced just summers before. Boggled down by the weighty stress of middle school homework and hallway drama, I was relieved to be able to return to a place so entwined with the ideals of individuality and independence that I craved. Upon forcing open the sticky, screened-in door after my five year recess however, I could already tell that the trip was going to be different.

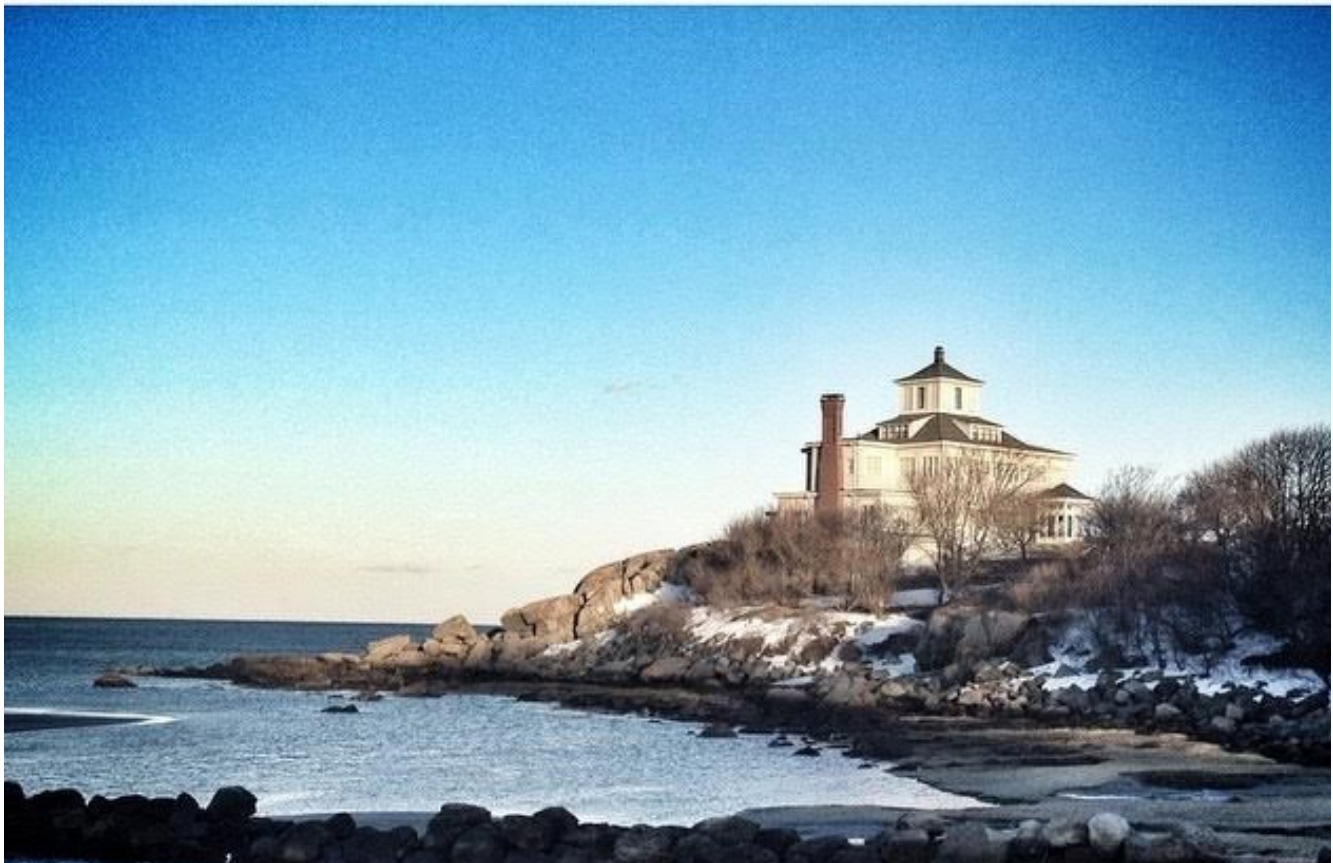
It smelled; that was the first thing I noticed. Rather than the musty, almost nostalgic smell of mothballs that had previously embalmed their house, the entire place now reeked of the Marlboros my grandmother had resumed smoking since I last saw her. In addition to the house's unwelcome new scent, it seemed Joan's newly-resumed habit had affected other aspects of their residence too. Like the yellow tint of my grandmother's fingernails, all of the white table napkins had adopted an unavoidable "vanilla" color that made me second-guess rubbing my mouth against them at meals. Even my grandmother's previously praiseworthy cooking was affected and adopted a pungent staleness that I assumed reflected the way cigarettes must taste.

Determined to enjoy my week of vacation despite the lingering impact of my grandmother's sickening habit, I decided to spend more time outside. Escaping out the back door to revisit my previous crime scenes however, I was not greeted by the same feelings of excitement and adventure I had once experienced. Instead, the crushing heat of the sun immediately exhausted me. It seemed the Florida heat had become more merciless somehow-less forgiving, meaner.

In fact, I began to realize that everything had become more hostile in my absence. The loud, rusty squeal of the oven door opening assaulted me. The dirt flecks on the bottom of the drinking cups violated me. The slightly mildewed smell drifting from the fridge defiled me. It was as if everything that I had previously appreciated and familiarized myself with had gone behind my back to purposefully sabotage me.

In addition to the overall griminess of the house, I was taken aback by the noise. My grandparents had unexpectedly gotten louder in my absence. Almost every movement required an audible wheeze, grunt, groan, or exclamation. Like the protesting squeals of their coffee maker every morning, and the achy squeaks of the couch springs every time someone sat down, it seemed my grandparents' bodies continuously echoed a series of noises in a desperate attempt to alleviate their workload. I began to catch myself silently cheering them on every time I watched them do something. "You can do it Grandpa Jack!" I would think as I watched him take a sip from his mug while simultaneously balancing the newspaper on his lap. My daily adventures had changed from exposing the neighborhood newspaper boy as a nose picker, to helping my grandma unload the dishwasher. Life seemed less important this way, less significant.

I hardly recognized my grandparents anymore. A strong, stable, oak tree just five years earlier, it seemed my grandpa had shriveled into a fragile houseplant under the harsh Florida sun. He was different somehow; like everything else, he was worse off than when I left him. My grandmother was different too. If not as dramatically physically different as my grandfather, she seemed slower somehow, duller. It was as if her colors had washed away in the rain like the old sidewalk chalk masterpieces of my youth. It was in the way her hands shook pouring her coffee. It was in the energy it took her to stand up from the couch. It was in the way she would trail off in the middle of a sentence... oblivious to where she left off.



## Age. // Tess Monks

When everything moves,  
Rushes,  
    Rages,  
In osmotic motion until merged as one.  
Whenever touchdowns and tourniquets are the norm,  
Focus, focus on the day  
Of the night,  
Bringing worship to weakness  
Because maybe it means more  
To live dead than to die living.  
None of us pretend to know  
And the days are thrown directly into the pail  
In anticipation until eyes fall black,  
Necks fall back, and palms close.  
Age is not just a number;  
They know that the gentle lapping of darkness,  
Saturated, seeps back  
For its final bow.





## Tallinn Song Grounds // MacKenzie Ragan



## we sit complacent. // Mitchell Gregory

I have been taught that love is all,  
that marriage is high,  
and that the end goal is a bed of two.  
but they never taught me how love was supposed to feel,  
only that I had to have a body  
i thought I loved  
when it was really just some kind of poisonous powder  
eating away at me because I do not know  
what it is supposed to feel like,  
if what I'm feeling is what it is,  
and if this feeling is something I want.  
I crave that feeling of being inseparable,  
of incompleteness without,  
and yet I long for the moments when i feel the opposite.  
no, I will not rank  
the idea or the body above the actual,  
that which is unattainable.  
I would rather wander.



## three intervals // Megan Towey

Interval Cedar

almost having pulled the pink  
from the blush, we cradle  
a language of pauses

a sky embedded in one small of a back  
for minutes, causing substance in slow hours

where I eliminate the progress of unfolding  
in buildings I shouldve been  
evacuated from

a trace of semicolon the undersides  
of moon magnolia never having  
known loneliness,

never having seen a pattern-dull ocean structure

we will be in a singular passage

## safe interval

but yeah, I  
wanted it.  
where I went

I couldn't inhabit  
my body. my form,  
locked up in its absence.  
my shotgun empathy  
hovering in the space between,  
scorching form to find it

in the little blast of an eye staying open  
I swirl, a deep blue box for I am human,  
efficiently. sunburn condenses on  
the pale green lifecycle of my back  
in intervals all

straight lines all digital prophets

did you know that even secret names can compose  
a poem?

I dreamt a new name for you in unstable col-  
ors, wanting to have  
done a thing properly

it swings in the cool grey sky  
of your mouth

I know the frantic cubes of memory  
induce anxiety and that's  
okay

## interval multiform

here wrenching silence where rhythm  
should have lifted

your rectangular heels from the floor.  
here pitfalling

absence where there should have been  
flat hands

brushing back your curls

caught in conducted sunlight

we fall into a hunting season: all mis-  
fire

& misled forms, all earth,

all soil;

feeling one's cleared-out soul as a deadly  
cycad

named for its process of sourcing

nutrient in cyanide

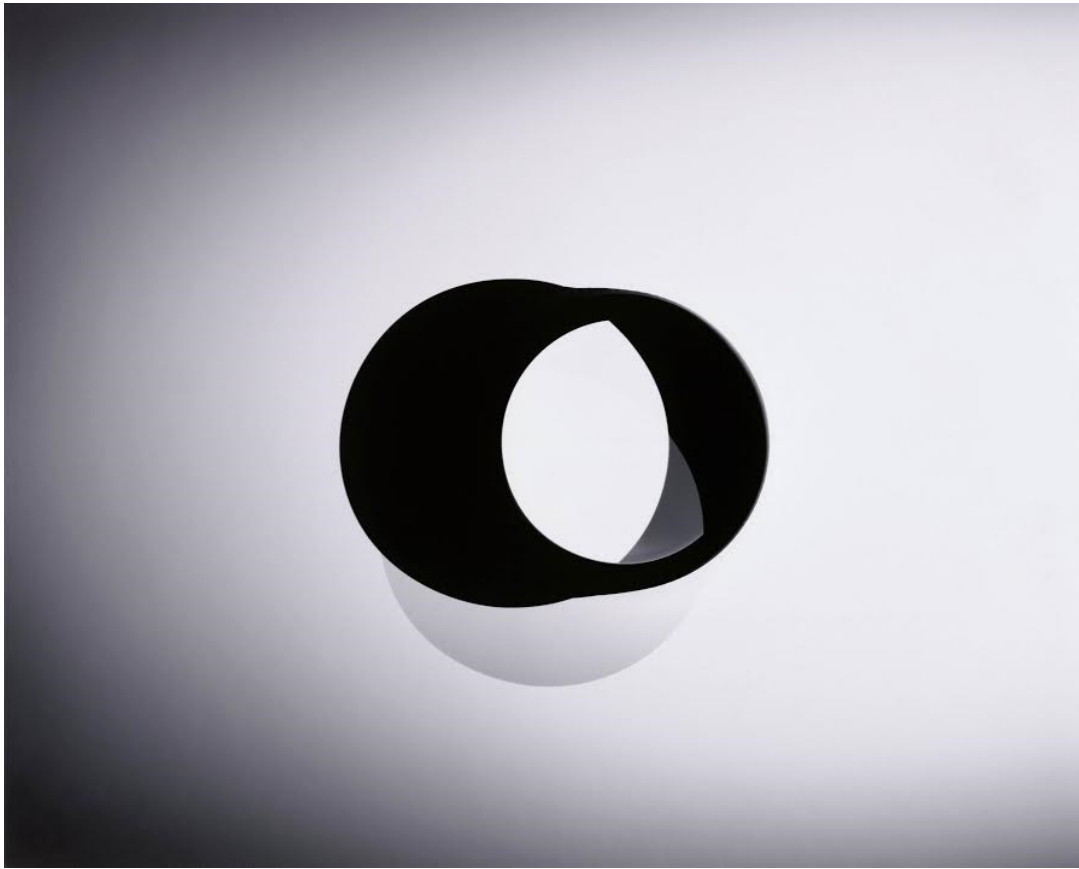
(I have not yet determined if you have  
changed for certain

my dear thick cluster of  
thin thoughts

my presumption in having  
known what the ancients  
thought

my sky bloated with astro-





## **A Black Broad Abroad // Elizabeth Montague**

I'm scrolling through social media an ocean away from the marches and rallies but I'd give anything to be there doing whatever I could. On the news I see the face of every black man I've ever loved and their eyes stare back at me, looking for a comfort I can't give. Here, an ocean away, I've discovered I'm more American than I thought and there's nowhere to run that my American-ness will not follow; so there is nowhere for me to go but home. But home doesn't want me. Here at this cafe I try to comfort myself into believing the future will be different, that millennials will be different, yet between the social media activism and shared news articles I see selfies and sunsets and suddenly realize some of my closest friends aren't different. I scream through flooded lungs, *speak up for me, speak out for me please please please-it's your perception of us that's killing us!* The headline is a vow, "Speak now or forever hold your peace."

## Life Decisions from a Restaurant Bathroom // Abigail Belcher

I'm searching the room frantically and I can tell I look ridiculous. Everyone's staring at me, I can feel it. Oh gosh, I've never done this type of thing before. Why did I start now? Is there a different place people stand and wait, like maybe they're always hiding in the corners waiting for their other half to meet them? Oh gosh, no one looks as awkward as I do right now. Okay, okay, okay. Brown hair, glasses, six feet tall. Will be holding a rose. Wait. No, I think I just saw that on TV. Just brown hair, glasses, six feet tall. Oh... I really hope he's not a five-foot redhead. I'd hate a liar. Yeah, but like, I'm really into running and nature. I guess we'd work well together then, two liars. A short redhead and a chunky soap opera addict living together at the beach where we will take long walks every night. That is, assuming we both really like to stride along the ocean line after dark with crabs running over our feet and sand sticking to our toes for the rest of the week. Oh, this is a disaster. I don't see anyone matching his description and no one is walking towards me. Maybe he came, saw me, and left? It's really embarrassing to be the first one here.

I walk to the bathroom to touch up my makeup and wait there for a few minutes. . Everyone is watching me walk over there. Just go fast. Faster. Wait. Am I a chico or a chica? Chica. That was close. Good thing I took Spanish in college. Perfect. A one person bathroom. How long do I wait? I'm so nervous I don't even need to go to the bathroom. Let's see, oh, right, mirror. Oh... I definitely wouldn't blame him if he came, saw me, and left. Did I even look in the mirror before leaving my house? Well, I can't change what God gave me. Time to face reality. He's either out there or he isn't. Go find out. Okay. Here I go. Wait. Why won't the door open? It's stuck! My God, it really is stuck-I wasn't just exaggerating when I thought it was stuck a second ago! Why isn't this opening!? This probably looks ridiculous from the other side of the door. Okay, calm down. Think. How to escape a bathroom you are trapped in in a Mexican restaurant. Is the window really my only option? Wait. No window. Oh God. No window! A knock at the door. Okay. Just tell them what happened so they can go get help. How embarrassing! Oh. This is even more embarrassing. How did I seriously not think about unlocking the door? This is the worst thing to happen in the history of Match.com. Forget it, this is ridiculous. I'm 38 years old, stuck in a Mexican restaurant bathroom, waiting for a guy who may or may not show up or who may have already shown up. I'm going to be alone forever. I'm getting too old for this type of shit; this should only be allowed to happen to teenagers. I guess love and misery have no age restrictions. Just get out of here. It's time to go home. Okay. Here we go. A run to the car. You can do it.

Unlock door and walk out of bathroom. Check. Walk swiftly across the floor to the exit with your head slightly down, looking up once on your way out the door for one last quick scan. Just in case he came in during your breakdown. No sign...Check. And I'm out of the building. Start the self loathing process all the way home for believing in internet dating but then persuade yourself to try another website. Check. Delete Match.com and download eHarmony. In progress.



**Untitled (Ground.) // Jessica Mairena**

## The N Word // Elizabeth Montague

Can I say nigger? Cuz I mean I'm black but I'm the daughter-of-an-executive-college-is-not-only-expected-but-required-vacationer-of-Martha's-Vineyard-used-to-be-gluten-free kind of black and I live in one of those gotta-order-makeup-online-because-drugstores-don't-carry-anything-darker-than-peach-there-are-no-non-religious-private-schools-because-the-public-schools-are-as-good-as-private schools-and-we-have-the-property-taxes-to-prove-it type districts. I don't know if I have the right to say the n word. I've never seen anybody get shot but I've seen my pastor get down like the Holy Ghost is a close personal friend of his and I've seen my sister spend four hours straightening her hair for an interview at that big corporate company cuz kinky curls ain't corporate yet. My dad's definitely qualified. Youngest of seven from the projects of Brooklyn to the executive corner office with siblings who shoulda coulda woulda been hashtags if that had been a thing then. I remember once I heard the n-word had been dead and buried down deeper than the slave bones but I guess the ground didn't want it cuz here it is floating on radio waves. It costs to be black, but some people sell it cuz there's suburbs full of people who buy it. Can I say the n word? Cuz even in the rap songs it's surrounded by "bitches" and "hoes" and being a bitch and a hoe and the n word all at once can be a bit overwhelming.

Can I say the n word? Or do I talk too white? Or rather, too educated, as in, I'm too black to sound this educated, but why is talking black talking uneducated? Can I say the n word? Or am I too pretty? Correction: pretty for a dark skinned girl. I have my mothers eyes, who got them from her mother, who got them from her mother, who got them from her mother whose eyes enchanted the master enough to get her pregnant but not enough to get her out of the fields. Can I say the n word? With all these bullets flying and walls as threats and threatening to ban people, and by people I mean Muslims, and by Muslims I mean black people cuz majority of Muslims here are black, or in PC terms, African Americans.

But am I a victim of slavery or an American and are the two mutually exclusive? Would I be welcomed back into a tribe I've never heard of in a country I've never been to on a continent I've never visited in a culture I'm not a part of with a way of life I'm not adapted to full of people who I have nothing in common with beyond being black and the distant relative I have who was taken away in chains? Can I say the n word?

## *Like, my first suicide attempt turns 5 this year // Anonymous*

my insurance company requires 90 day prescriptions so now  
I have 90 lorazepams, as in, I'm living  
between the potential of having died 5 years ago  
and death, or something like it, bottled up in my hand;  
as in, I could die, but I won't. I believe this  
with a nearly supernatural conviction: my higher power  
is my own will to live, or something like it.  
after insurance, the lorazepams were less than a penny each.  
there is no verb in english that means 'to receive without effort.'

in my life I have discovered two ways to stop wanting to die.  
the first took months and months of intensive psychiatric treatment.  
the second was by losing you, but you died and so you'll never know it.

one wintry morning in your Hudson Valley eco-home  
we took vodka shots & then you taught me  
the forms of the Greek subjunctive. how the  
Greek subjunctive works is that the thematic  
vowel lengthens & in that extra space  
the word invites in potentiality,  
it infuses potentiality within itself.  
we weren't good students and we missed class a lot,  
but because of that I have this gift: whenever  
I encounter a Greek subjunctive, I'm reminded  
of your life. and I will never not have this.  
we both wore velvet shirts to the midterm.  
this was not intentional, but it could have been.

four weeks before your death, you apologized and I found this strange.  
it seemed as if your apology was for your essence, which had never hurt me, and as far as I knew,  
it had never hurt anybody.





**Deep Enough // Fatima DelBarco**

## Byronica // Thamine Nayeem

My blonde-haired heroine  
on her black stallion,  
she rammed into me,  
yes, penetratingly.

Byronica's lips sang  
sagacious untruths,  
surreptitiously sliding down my spine:  
a paean to her selfhood,  
a perversion of mine.

Believe me.  
I crawled away but she leeches,  
"You need me,"  
a cyclical torture  
of my sanity.  
This-this is my reality.  
Yes, this is my reality!

My blonde-haired heroine  
on her civilized black stallion  
now holds her white hands out to me,  
yes, so lovingly.

She speaks of injustice,  
how the monster in her head  
just is.  
Her white arms encircle me  
to say, "you will forgive me,"  
for the sun will hang high  
and heavy every day.

Crawling to her,  
fighting my own for her,  
giving myself to her,  
we cannot help but believe her.

Oh, yes, we believe her.

As love tills and rots,  
and our mad soul divides,  
she births another white child.

This child is named Erica.  
Erica runs through blue hills.  
Afloat with red water she spills  
as she beams her whiteness  
like her mother-dearest,  
and realities like ours  
continue to be killed.

But, in her eyes,  
we bleed and fertilize  
green, green,



**Unnamed // Fatima DelBarco**

***Edette "Edie" Ann Churchill, 54, of Lancaster, PA, passed away peacefully on January 9, 2015 // Emily Churchill***

There is no peaceful way to die.  
We leave this earth gasping for  
breath as our souls are  
caught in a chokehold by the  
dying body.

*She was surrounded with the loving sentiments and kisses of her children and family*

I leaned down to kiss her  
writhing body, trapped in the  
confines of cold, unfeeling sheets.  
I ran out and down the stark  
hallway, eyes glued to me all the  
way. In a corner I sat and cried,  
silently and alone.

*She was adored by her three children, Sarah (25), Emily (18), and Matthew (13)*

Dad held up the phone to her ear.  
"Say goodbye, to your mom, Sarah."  
Her voice meek and miles away,  
she devolved into explosive tears,  
her fists clenching empty air.  
This was not how she wanted it.

Past lies and pain melted away until  
only the love for their children remained.  
And a new promise was made.

*Edie was raised in Nazareth, PA, by her loving parents, Harry and Phyllis (Kratzer) Longenbach*

“Can you wait for your father, Edie? He’s almost here.”

Her head shook violently.

“Please, for him?”

Calling on every muscle, she

tugged at the tubes,

pumping air through

shattered lungs. Her eyes shouted:

“Out. Out. I want them out.”

*Naturally gifted at everything she pursued, she enjoyed decorating, gardening, ice skating,  
playing guitar, painting, and giving gifts and kindness to those in need*

A skeleton of what used to be

a strong body, mind, and heart,

I cried for her, for moments lost, and for

grandchildren never to know

the depths of her love.



**Alternate Dimension // Marisa Ruskan**



# Dream Machine // Mitchell Gregory

There was once a boy who liked to dream big. He was devoted to his hobbies and he figured his hobbies were devoted to him. The boy wanted to play golf for a living and the people around him thought he could if he put his mind to it. He got lessons from local professionals who taught him how to truly play the game. He learned how to curve the ball in mid-air, bunt it along the ground so it skipped like a flat rock on water, and lob it in the air as if it were a bird in flight. He could close his eyes and imagine each hole's twists and bends, whether he would curve the ball right in this situation or left in that. When the boy knew he was going to play the next day he could barely sleep at night. He wanted more than anything to play the game endlessly for the rest of his life.

But, one day the boy found himself not wanting to leave the house. It confused and frightened him just a little. He was supposed to love golf, yet whenever he had plans to go out and play he found himself making excuses as to why he couldn't go. He became frustrated with his swing, his inability to make his body do what he wanted, and the impossible task of feeling out every imperfection in his game. He felt the inability to improve grip his heart, and a warm anger bubbled up underneath. It frustrated him, nagged at him. He swore off the game, but every few months he would be dragged in by the past's promise of achievement. His muscles strained in an attempt to simply relive the success he had felt years ago. His family, so supportive of his dream, was now a nightmare that kept reminding him of his failure to succeed. How could they not understand that his failure had crippled him-it was no longer his dream. Had they not seen his devotion? Had they not seen how hard he had tried? The boy no longer wanted to dream that dream, but that was all right, because now all he wanted to do was play computer games.

He was a boy who dreamt big and figured his hobbies were devoted to him. He wanted to play computer games for a living and believed in his ability to do so. He watched countless hours of professional replays that taught him how to play DOTA. He learned the game's mechanics. He learned which strategy could counter which. He learned how to read his opponent and how to get inside their head. He mapped each finger to a key so that he could play the game in his sleep if he wished. Each rank he climbed felt like he was unlocking a piece of himself. The more he improved, the more it felt as though he was ascending a tower to an enlightenment he could almost taste. He hadn't remembered that this was the same sensation he had felt when golfing so long ago.

Two years after the boy began playing, he quit one hobby for another. The bitterness of his struggle, the frustration of stagnated progress, the punishment of his every mistake; it was all too much for him. He began to think that there was a barrier between him and those who were talented. He began to wonder why he could not ascend to their level of success and found only himself to blame. He found that his broken dreams brought him nothing but despair and destruction. He wondered how much he could have accomplished in the time that he had wasted.

He was a boy who dreamt. He wanted to be the best at something. He figured that he would go to college and find inspiration there, but all he found were others like him. Other people who were better, other people who were worse, and all shades in between. He found people defined by their college days and people who were yet to be defined, people who were wrong and people who were right, people who were lost and people who were found, people who were unique and people who were similar, and people and people and people and people. There was no end to the dreams people dreamt and he decided that it had been vain of him to believe in his ability to succeed where they had failed.

The boy no longer wanted to dream and so he gathered up all dreams, those big and those small, those that were too outrageous to speak allowed and those that were pitiful, and brought his dreams to the Dream Machine. The Dream Machine accepted them with loving arms, took the dreams off his heavy hands and lived them out for him. It dreamed enormously, fantastically, emphatically, spectacularly, in ways that he could have never imagined. A well of emotion spilled over within the boy's chest and burst outwards. He laughed with himself, dancing and crying at the same time, tears streaming from his reddened eyes. Never had he considered that his dreams could be so beautiful and so grand. His world erupted in front of him in gorgeous full-bodied colors. These were dreams that he could taste, that he could touch, a torch aflame that would never be extinguished. He watched all his wildest fantasies come to glorious fruition and he lived vicariously through them. Free of his dreams the boy emerged from the Dream Machine, ready to live life.



## Eve // Shabethany Sawyer

I found religion nestled in the crook of your arm on a day in late July, when we nodded drowsily in the fleeting traces of a summer's eve, sated on cloyingly sweet blackberries and clandestine tongue kisses. You nipped at my ears like some frisky pup and a light-hearted smile played on your lips as you breathed words down my neck.

It wasn't the desire in your voice, palpable as the searing heat of your skin against mine, or the achingly sweet promise of nightfall that drew out the virginal flush in my cheeks. The stillness in your eyes darker than the cover of midnight that would shroud our sins from our disapproving parents spoke the gospel according to you.

I signed my life away without a thought.



## Reflections // Thamine Nayeem

Upon the dark-eyed juncos' arrival,  
God dims the light and night  
Falls.  
The beat of my heart fluttered,  
fluttered painfully against my ribs.  
I guess it falls for us all.

This time I watch:  
as the good become] the misunderstood  
she wanders uncertainly,  
and then as consciousness creeps into life,  
and roaming springs to desperation,  
she breaks  
down  
and earth's tides  
pull her  
into  
hell.

I wonder: can I save her if I kill the pomegranate?

With all her might she pulls with the moon,  
and stands with willful purpose and dignity.

There, she sees it—  
the world's largest mirror,  
at this time, colored in vibrant hues of red and murky blues.  
She thinks it's iridescently beautiful.

I see the glazed reflection born into her eyes.  
For her, I cry.



# Hung Elephants Swinging in the Room // Jhannelle Robinson

Black privilege is the hung elephant swinging in the room  
Is to be the first person from your block with a tombstone

Black privilege is being hurt and having to heal at the same time  
Is dying the blackest way possible and being called white  
Remember how Jesus died on the cross with his two hands out as his mother's tears washed her face

Black privilege is me trading in a sob story for a scholarship  
For a job  
For recognition  
For this poem.

Black privilege is having everyone know your name at the expense of your death  
No resume but a death certificate they'll accept

Black privilege is dying for people who won't even live to remember you,  
is being able to always be around people of your race  
Don't you see how we're in numbers at the graveyard  
Haven't you noticed that we're cellmates  
Can't you tell we've marched these streets before  
I be one more protest away from breaking a record  
I be one more hashtag away from another poem  
We be one more death away from another civil rights movement.

Listen closely as I assert my black privilege  
as the way I'm able to use the N word to end words  
Black privilege is never having to need Alzheimer's to forget the pain  
Gentrification will do it for you.  
Fox news will cover it  
Cultural appropriation will make it better

See despite all my privilege I'm only a certain kinda privileged, that black girls be  
Black girl do so I can see  
Do so I can take it from you  
Do but don't do too much cause you might make me uncomfortable



Negroland



a jumble of tribes and unplanned unions



**Abdoulaye // Nene Diallo**

## Dismas // Emily Bradford

The night air is so quiet, still weighed down by the presence of an evening rain that nothing seems to stir it until the boy comes tearing out of the narrow street. He ducks his head, his gait one of gangly youth just discovering the power of his own legs. His jacket bulges where it is zipped over the small leather bag held close to his ribs.

He stops. He is still panting from the quickness of his escape, the exhilaration, the shock of what he's just done. Having finally tried it, he marvels at the simplicity: she was easy enough to find, her heeled boots clacked loudly on the cobblestones, her back to him, hair swinging. She was unaware, soothed, perhaps, by the tender glow of lights. The city was lulled by the night, retiring dutifully like an old nun. It assured this girl that nothing was lurking, and she believed it. It made it all the easier for him, deft as one of the feral cats the city cared for, to spring on her.

The girl had jumped, yet froze as he twisted her around and shoved her to the wall. He'd heard a noise catch in her throat when the wind was knocked out of her. Her bag, dangling at her hip, was easy to reach. Feeling him pulling at it, she regained her voice enough to choke out a protest. He could have rocked his hips against her, mocking, terrorizing her, like he's watched his brother do before. But there was the chance that she would scream, and that would be the end of an otherwise profitable night. Besides, he was barely confident enough to steal from the woman, let alone be carnal with her; he was on edge, and wanted the crime to be over with. The moment he had detached the little bag from its owner, tugging the strap roughly over her head, he had scarpered into the city's shadows, finding sanctuary under her black habit.

Now he catches his breath in a deserted piazza, a mile away from his victim. He stands dumbly, foolishly, disheveled and holding a woman's purse. The pride and disbelief he felt fades, as the openness seems to indict him. Slowly, as though lost, he looks around, then retreats to sit on the steps of the church behind him. He opens the purse and its contents tumble out: hair ties, receipts, a bottle of large capsules, half white, half blue. A rosary, a tampon. A wallet with two large bills, three small, seven coins. "Stupid bitch," he says, out loud, gleefully pocketing the money. His voice comes out high-pitched, uncontrolled, still weakened by the adrenaline surge. He says it again, forcing his voice to come out deeper and steadier.

He soon finds the woman's phone, new and hardly smudged by her clean fingers. Triumphant, he weighs it in his hand as if trying to guess its worth. It falls and hits the marble step, making him flinch. He picks it up – no damage.

He pulls a cigarette from his own pocket and lights it up, another new practice. The smoke curls into the night like breath in the winter, although tonight is warm and humid. Beside him, the phone vibrates suddenly, and he jumps up wildly. He recognizes the noise, settles back down, and glances at the text that has lit up the screen. *Where are you?* It says.

He clicks it off, goes back to his cigarette.

It buzzes again:

*Where are you?*

# The Invisible Children // Sabrina Escobar Miranda

## I

*To the invisible children living in poverty in my native El Salvador.*

You see them on the road ahead of you. You see the stoplight turn from amber to red and mentally curse as you slam down on the breaks. They are there every single morning. You see their accusing gaze through your car window and lock the doors for good measure. Guilt washes over you-- they are just children, you remind yourself. The guilt pesters you. Grudgingly, you roll your window down an inch and, fist outstretched, toss 25 cents to the dirty, rugged rag on the curb.

It is as easy as tossing scraps to dogs.

The light turns green. Pushing down on your pedal, you speed away. Out of sight, out of mind. Work is a haven. For eight hours, you forget them. Numbers and figures, figures and numbers are your world. They numb the itch that your conscience is begging you to scratch.

It is 6 pm. You stretch and head for your car, briefcase in hand. Thousands of dollars' worth of information, checks, and technology bounce against your leg. You check your phone and look around. There he is. Palm up, he stares up at you with marble eyes. No words pass his lips, but you know.

Not today, son, you hear yourself say. I don't have any money, you say, and climb into your car. Your briefcase thuds into the passenger seat as you race away.

The police stop you on your way. What now, you think. Traffic is swelling up behind you, a wave contained by a dam. The police clearly doesn't give a damn. What is the meaning of this, you ask. The police say there is no meaning.

Stuck, you look around. To your left, you see one. To your right, another. They play on the curb while their mother sells peanuts to the wave. You remember passing her five minutes ago; you remember making a face at her peanuts. You look at the children again, thinking how close they are to the street.

A car speeds by, inches away from the smallest. Now, you are concerned. You turn to the police. His eyes bore into yours. He saw. He understands your silent plea. He shrugs and looks away.

## II

*In memory of those without a name.*

Today we work at the church parking lot. It is Sunday, busy day. Holy day. We sit through Mass in the scorching sun, waiting for them to come out. Pearled old ladies and pocket-wrinkled green men; busy briefcases and high heels; light-up sneakers and delicate dolls, those we only see in pictures.

The first few trickle out, then they are a herd. Divide and conquer, we say, and run. Please, we say, please, can you buy a flower off me? A *cora* a flower, *seño*, please. *Jefe*, buy a pretty flower for your Barbie child. Nobody has time to stop and smell the flowers these days, we say. Much less buy them. We keep at it until the last straggler has gone. It has been a good day. Altogether, we have \$10.

Today we dine like kings.

## III

*You will not be forgotten.*

At least they have milk.

The government promised; every child has the right to a free glass of milk each day.

Sure, you think, their swings are made out of tires and their walls are lined with coarse wire, but at least they have a glass of milk each day. Who could complain? Walking two miles through the rain or the dusty rural plain to get to their forsaken school yard is nothing, because at least they have a glass of milk each day. Aren't they lucky? You say. They have one classroom, an untrained teacher, old reused notebooks and a glass of milk each day. Can they still work in the fields after their school day? You ask. Can they skip classes because there was no other way to pay? Of course, you say. After all, they have a glass of milk each day. You muster the nerve to whisper, but what about the gangs? Are they still allowed inside the playground? Well sure, you say, they love to come and get their glass of milk each day.

At least they have milk.

You are driving to work again. Something is missing. You pull into your office, sit in your swivel chair and survey the city. It is a beautiful day, like any other. You draw numbers and crunch figures. You get in your car. You get damned by the police. You think of dinner. You go to church. Something is missing. Your son walks into the room. It dawns on you.

The children have become invisible. To you, they are the murals and graffiti that coat the walls of the city.

You no longer see them.