





**Spring 2024**

The *Kings River Review* is published each fall and spring semester by the students in English 15J, Literary Journal Publication. Our desire is to produce a journal that reflects the emerging voices and visions of community college students, designing a space for their creative expression. The journal is named for the Kings River which runs along the western boundary of Reedley College.

The *Kings River Review* is made possible by the support of Dean of Instruction, Dr. Todd Davis.

We welcome submissions from two-year college students from across the United States. Please visit our website ([kingsriverreview.com](http://kingsriverreview.com)) for submission guidelines:

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Number 6

Spring 2024

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## Letter From the Editors

Dear Readers,

We are thrilled to share Reedley College's spring 2024 edition of the *Kings River Review*. This semester, we were fortunate to receive 137 submissions and curate a collection spanning diverse genres, encompassing art, fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. From the voices of Reedley College students to contributions from out-of-state scholars, we're grateful for the various perspectives emerging within our community colleges.

Our gratitude goes out to all who entrusted us with their work for this issue. We hope our selections will give all our readers an opportunity to laugh, cry, and pause for deep reflections, just as they did for us. Among the themes to explore are hometowns, 90s music, transition, mythology, resilience, heritage, and the inane.

Our mission is to present a wide spectrum of emotions and topics, laying the foundation for future editions. The *Kings River Review* stands as a platform for your creativity. With that being said, we eagerly anticipate your future submissions and hope you find enjoyment within these pages.

Warm regards,

Gavin Garza

Hannah Kleinkramer

Paula Rawlings

KRR Editors



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# Creative Nonfiction

*Creative Nonfiction*



Reedley College Feature Writer

Katrina Riggs

Jeans

“Is it OK if your dad wears jeans tonight?”

I’m zipping up my black-and-white cocktail dress when I get the text from my mother. My wedding rehearsal is in less than an hour at Fig Garden Swim & Racquet Club, an institution of old money in Fresno. We aren’t members, but the club allows *anybody* to hold weddings there.

*Seriously, is it OK?* The thought of Dad in a pair of stonewash Levi’s, alongside bridesmaids in heels and future in-laws in tailored button-ups, flusters me. How could I be worried about a pair of relaxed-fit pants when he’s about to give me away?

Maybe he wants to be comfortable in a world that feels so unfamiliar. I’m marrying into a family of lawyers and skiers, of passports and Valley Public Radio. Dad is tape measures and drills, calloused hands and KRZR’s “The Wild Hare,” Fresno’s hard rock station.

He spent years as a machinist for Byron Jackson, a plant on the outskirts of Fresno that specialized in water pumps. He would leave for work when it was still dark out, but after his shift, there was plenty of time to take me to Manchester Park. We walked down Mariposa Street, past the modest 2-car garages and sprinklers that sprayed my cheeks, with a McDonald’s Halloween bucket full of metal Hot Wheels and Sesame Street cars. I’d push Big Bird and the glitter purple Viper along the aluminum bleachers until it was time for dinner.

In second grade, the company Dad was so loyal to announced it was moving to the Bay Area. He left it up to my mother and me to decide whether to stay or go. *If you want me to, I'll find a job here.* I didn't want to leave my friends at school or my grandparents who lived just 3 minutes away.

He eventually found another job at another manufacturing company, but it was the night shift.

"Don't wake your dad," my mother whispered, and I'd listen to him snore on our tired gray couch in the den, Nickelodeon on the lowest volume that wouldn't disturb him.

*Jeans*, I thought. But to him, it made sense. He always made it clear that appearances don't count for much, that things *don't have -tuh be pir-fick* for them to function. "You stress yourself out," he'd say while shaking his head and stretching out his tree-trunk leg which always cramps up anytime I got a B in school or when my curly hair didn't look glossy like the popular girls, even after using the flat iron over and over. He didn't understand how someone could be so anxious, so worried. I didn't understand how someone could be so unafraid.

This must be why Dad has so few wrinkles. Just a tan round face, blotchy from a recent shave, aged by sun rays but not by frown lines. His salt-and-pepper hair is the one thing that gives away his years, despite all the times I'd sit behind him on top of the couch, plucking out the gray hairs I found, one by one. "I got another one!" I'd exclaim while presenting the silver to him like a dandelion. He laughed, and I watched his brown eyes get small behind his big '80s eyeglass frames, his broad shoulders rising with every chuckle. "OK, that's enough," he'd say, still smiling

and audibly exhaling, “Ahhhhh.”

With my mother, he laughs at “Andy & Mayberry,” his name for *The Andy Griffith Show*. With me, he laughs at *Ren & Stimpy* and *Jackass*. “You’re just like your dad,” she tells me whenever I make a sarcastic joke. “I don’t know how that happened.” Her disappointment makes Dad and I laugh even harder. Years later, we try to remember the words to the “Log” song while sitting at the kitchen table. *She doesn’t get it*, we say.

*Jeans*. Dad wears them with extra-extra-large Nautica t-shirts, shirts he wears over his white undershirt that covers his generous belly, shirts with colorful graphics of sailboats. He likes to casually let people know that he once had a sailboat, but life and my private school education got expensive. *See, Trini, you work hard, and you can have nice things too*. He wears his shirts until they have holes in them.

Dad pays cash for everything, all the time. When I moved into my first apartment, he offered to buy me a couple of chairs from Fashion Furniture. “Ask them if they do a discount if you pay cash.” He sounded optimistic.

“They said no, Dad.” When I bought my first car 6 years later, he advised me to ask the salesman the same thing.

*Jeans and Cash*. “Quick, what’s the change?” he’d ask me, pointing to little green numbers glowing on a screen. It’s a race against the cash register to figure out how much the cashier owed Dad. We played this game in dozens of fluorescent check-out lanes. He needs to know that I can figure things out for myself, without a calculator or somebody telling me what the answer should be.

Dad doesn't have an email address and he refuses to send texts or use Google. He doesn't do *all that computer stuff*, leaving it to my mother to fill out any required forms online. He calls to talk to me about what she would like for her birthday or Christmas, and pays me back for her gifts in crisp hundred-dollar bills when she's not in the room. His wallet is tired; inside there's a photo of us when I was a little girl. He wishes things were how they used to be. Everything as it was.

I text back my mother. "Can he maybe wear some different pants?" OK, she will look for that one pair of Dockers to iron.

This family I'm about to marry into — a family tree of ex-wives and half-brothers and step-siblings — doesn't look like mine. My parents married at 20. There was no divorce, no every-other-weekends. Just broken-in jeans and faded t-shirts and worn-out sandals while he climbed the ladder to pick the fruit at the top of the orange tree in my parents' backyard. "That's plenty," I try to tell him, "I'm good." But he continues to pick even more, pulling down the branches and handing me fistfuls of citrus until his Foods Co plastic bag is full. "Here, take some to your friends or work."

The next day, my wedding day, Dad wears a black suit he rented from a local tux shop. I barely recognize him. "Your dad looks so handsome," my mother says.

We're about to walk down the aisle together, my arm linked around his jacket sleeve. The feeling of the sleek fabric against my skin, his skin, is so foreign. "I'm sorry your grandpa isn't around for this," he says, sadness in his eyes.

"It's OK," I assure him. "I'm happy you're here."

The 5-year-old ring bearer begins his march ahead of us. He

trips and tumbles down the stairs of the clubhouse. The ring bearer bounces right back up and keeps going. I laugh, and Dad smiles.

Isabel Fitzgerald

Dear Grief

Dear Grief,

Last time I saw you, I found you dressed in a shirt, free of wrinkles or creases. I suspected that you took a hot shower, of a similar temperature to your home in hell, and let the water do the work. You were probably too busy scooping out someone's eyes to actually iron your shirt. As you adjusted your suit, while my limp body was sobbing on the floor, you automatically won. Extending an arm that you'd used to stab me in the back countless times, I finally registered the balloons in your hand. It hit the ceiling and made a cartoonish, hollow noise. It's fitting because everyone you know thinks that you are a joke. I wish that you had been two dimensional, instead you were standing in my door frame during my darkest hour.

An hour passed and you stayed in my home. Hours turned to days, and days turned to weeks. You lived in all of my rooms and paused the clock.

I'm writing this because I have a plan to scoop your eyes out, when you least suspect it. This is a paper trail, telling whoever finds my body that this was an injustice.

Sincerely,

A small-minded girl who wants to be anyone else

James Francis Turano

## Fishing With Frankie

Frankie doesn't care if the fish aren't biting. He doesn't care if the sun isn't shining. He doesn't care where we go fishing, or when. He doesn't mind if we don't go freshwater from the banks of the American River, or deep sea fishing off the coast of Morro Bay. He's never been to the Sierra's, casting for salmon in the cold of Lake Tahoe. So, he doesn't miss what he doesn't know; but water he knows. And he loves to play in water, running under it as Dad sprinkles the parsley and basil in the container garden we planted this spring. He especially enjoys the ritual of his bath. But what Frankie loves best is fishing.

### Fishing with Dad.

Frankie doesn't care that Dad is a novice who just got his first rod and reel, or that Dad occasionally gets the line caught attempting the overhand cast, entangling above where an experience fisherman would not, or that Dad doesn't own a boat. And Frankie doesn't mind that he doesn't have his own pole. He's more than willing to share. For Frankie, it's not about what you know, or what you have. It's about spending time with someone you love. Two guys just hanging out, fishing, basking in the silence doing what Frankie loves best.

### Fishing with Dad.

Frankie doesn't care if we go fishing dark and early (five am or so), because Dad hates to burn daylight. Coffee first—a mug or two for Dad. Not Frankie. He's too young for that ritual just yet. Frankie doesn't mind if we go fishing at night when it's a little

dark and spooky, because he's with Dad after all. He doesn't care if we go fishing on a Saturday, or a Tuesday—Dad's usual day off—because Dad's got lots of time when it's his day off. Spring, summer, winter, fall—it's all the same to Frankie. Cooler, hotter, calmer, windier—it just doesn't matter to Frankie. All he wants to do is spend time with the most important man in his life, doing what he loves best.

#### **Fishing with Dad.**

And Dad? He loves fishing with Frankie. Why? Pure, unbridled joy. Nothing more, nothing less. Conversation? Seldom, usually one-sided, as Frankie doesn't say much. Except when you accidentally step on his paw, as the little guy is always underfoot.

Frankie's my pug, a cool little dude, my *baby boy*. I'm his *Dad* and I take him *fishing* in my office, a writer's attic loft, the *man cave* my daughter calls it. Frankie? I have no idea what he calls it. All I know is he loves our little ritual: me in my chair swiveled around, my back to the desk, taking a break from writing, him squiggling and squirming, bouncing in puppy excitations of endless figure eights upon figure eights—an eternity of pure love and abandon. He waits none too patiently for me to pick up the *fishing rod*, a whip antenna, one end of an old tennis shoelace knotted to the ball tip, a chew toy tied to the other, clinging on for dear life, as I do what I love best.

#### **Fishing with Frankie.**



Trinity Walsh

## The Glue

My father has always been the heart of my family. My parents would argue otherwise, but we all know he is the glue that ties all of our mismatched pieces together: loud, happy, angry, and stubborn alike. I couldn't count all the times he's been the call at 2 am for a safe ride home, the house with a room that is always open, the spare car for anyone to use, the place for food, the ear for quiet words, the tattered shirt shoulder for snot and tear stains. I was the lucky one, though. I was one of his daughters, and everyone knew how he was with his daughters. He loved us all, but as the youngest of the bunch, I wasn't just his daughter; I was his girl.

I was the one he spent his evenings going to the daddy-daughter dance with. I was the one to choose the radio station with all the songs he hated but listened to anyways because I liked them. I was the one he made pan fried carrots for every day. I know I wasn't always the only one, I'm still not, but at some point, as my siblings grew up, they became more and more their own people. They went to parties, they made mistakes, they sobbed and cried and pitched a fit when things went wrong. It turned out that I wasn't the only one to be his special kid, but I was the only one left of them.

The thing about parents having kids later in life is that they sometimes feel the urge to only prepare their kids for the worst. Suddenly, every car ride is a lesson on safe driving and crashes, and you're gripping your booster seat wondering why this is so

important. Suddenly your life is a roadmap of how many achievements and major moments they could witness before it's over. Suddenly, you have to be an adult in order for the kid you were supposed to be to grow up and be prepared for life to change. My siblings are all significantly older than me, ending major chapters of their lives as I was only learning how to say their names and not trip over the words in my mouth. I always wished I was older. I wanted to experience this amazing life they were all living while I was stuck, confused, and frustrated over long division and why it was different for me than it was for them. I wanted more than anything to be one of them. To be their sister, not just the *baby*.

At my seventh birthday party the concept of one day waking up and not having my father there hit me for the first time. I still remember sitting on his lap playing scrabble against my sister, fingers still sticky from cookies and cream cake and too much candy, when a wave of realization suddenly hit me like a hurricane. I had always known of death, I had from a young age. My father had always told me about his own parents, how they passed when he was younger, but the emotion was finally put to the story, and I was aware of what had actually happened. It was suddenly set somewhere deep in my mind that I was no longer a child at that moment, because one day my father would not be there to hold my hand. There was no imagination I could produce and see how to react; there were no warnings or lessons that could be taught on how to grieve, especially when the thing I needed to grieve was still sitting right next to me. My first instinct was to ask my father, and that's when it clicked that I

couldn't ever again. I cried so hard, in all my confusion and reality that I soaked my father's shirt through with tears. My birthday had suddenly become a day to remember how many were left.

My entire life after that moment had become about the end of it. My little seven-year-old brain was determined to plan every moment, every detail, every possible concept of how to spend the rest of my life as a daughter: when I would graduate, where from, who I would marry, all the places I would go with them. I was on a mission to be the perfect memory for them to leave behind, to make them proud of a future they so often talked of hoping to see. In my quest for perfection, I learned the hard way that sometimes things don't turn out how you plan. I never was good at being realistic.

My father and I were always close, but once he started working again, things were never the same as they had been before. He didn't get to drive me, he didn't get to cook with me, I wasn't in complete control of the radio anymore. He came home tired now, beaten and battered by the sun and shoes that never fit quite right. It was almost as if he was permanently tinted with the smell of sweat and sunscreen, his skin stained by the summer sun. Bit by bit, he was losing himself to the cost of the paycheck and the age he was cruelly reminded of: first his feet, then his back, his skin, and finally his organs. It was in 2020 that it came to a head, and surgery was once again required.

A hernia—when the expectations of youthful strength, and the reality of the things' true weight come crashing down onto your body. My father, our poor atlas, had finally been struck by the world and the gifts of time and needed to be cut into to be fixed. A simple procedure, we were told. “He should be out of the

hospital and back home in a couple hours,” they said. I called him that morning, the brisk air of January faint and fresh on my skin. I had a feeling I had to. I told him I loved him. We made plans for his time off. He cracked a joke and said he would be home when I got back from school.

He wasn't.

That day I walked into a house with cold tiles, and empty halls. There were no footsteps, no breaths, no sign of life or warmth other than my own. An almost eerie silence covering the house in a blanket of tension and questions of what was happening.

I check my phone.

No calls from mom.

I call her.

No answer.

No answer.

No answer.

I've memorized the sound of the phone ringing endlessly into the shade of the empty kitchen, her voice following in its usual monotone, mildly aggravating voicemail. It's not unlike her to not pick up the phone. It's not unlike her not to check till hours later. She will call me back.

She does, briefly, offer an explanation for the postponement but no reason as to why for me. She will be back tomorrow with dad, she tells me.

She is not back tomorrow, and neither is dad. She is not back for a number of days, and the only sound I know of her is her voicemail. Uncles and aunts I haven't seen in years are suddenly greeting me at home, but still no call.

It's 2am when I hear her keys jingle-jangle as they hit the kitchen counter, her shoes clacking on the hard floor, her sigh echoing through the empty room. The doors and carpet only hide so much from these thin walls, and tears are too heavy a burden for the rooms to block. I am only 14, but I am aware of when I am being told half-truths. I lay as still as I could, my back to the door, in hopes of feigning sleep if she were to check that night. She turns the knob, and I can't help but move towards the yellow-orange glow of the hallway light, jarring any hope of rest away from my tired eyes. She lies with her arms around me, her breath on my nape shuttered and held as if scared she might blow me away into the cold of the winter night. I grab her hand and she finally lets out the breath that she's been holding for 5 days.

"The doctor made a mistake," she tells me.

A mistake?

"Things didn't go to plan. They cut into a major artery, and dad almost bled out on the operating table."

Bleeding?

"Everyone has been visiting him, but he is so drugged up that he is knocked out still after days. They have cognitive therapists prepared for when he wakes up," she tells me.

Cognitive therapists?

"They are hoping for him to be out of it and ok in the next few days."

Hopefully?

I am lying here in my bed, my mother to my back, unable to look me in my eyes. She tells me that *hopefully*, my dad wakes up and there is no major damage to his brain from the lack of blood in his body for a period of time, that by some miracle, he is still

alive, can still walk, can still talk, can still *breathe* in a few days. It explains the missed calls, the relatives, the empty house, but it doesn't explain why no one told me that I was almost fatherless within 24 hours of it happening. Why was I suddenly everyone's least concern on the ranking of who should know first that the life of *my father* was almost ended by one swipe of a blade in a room that was supposed to help him heal.

Tears fell heavy and unrelenting after 5 days of dark, and there was no clear image of what was going to happen next.

I pray for the first time in years. It is the only time I will ever pray.

After my father returned home from the hospital, he wasn't the same. It was as if a ghost, a shell of someone I loved, had come and replaced him. His laughter was turned to wheezes and wordless pain. His smooth face, sunken and rusted over by unshaven facial hair. His eyes, once so similar a shade to mine, lighter and colder than they had looked before. It was clear that he was not the same; no man could be after death was so close, reaching out and mistaking him for a passenger.

The first time I saw my father cry was over the call that was never made. He wanted me to know what was happening. He wanted to know too. No one told him what was happening when his own parents died; he was just scooped up and told where to go next. He had spent so much of my life preparing me for the unexpected, but how could he have ever known that the unexpected would happen to him and that his preparations would be null and void in the face of panic and uncertainty? The world was silent for 5 days, waiting for the pin to drop, to see if things were over. They weren't, but the scar on his stomach and the stutter to

his words will always be evidence of what might have happened.

To this day, I still cry with my father over mistakes he didn't make, but can't help but apologize for anyway. He was gone, and then he wasn't, and in only a moment we were shown how quickly things could have never been the same. There is no place for me in a home with no heart, and my heart was almost stopped by the smallest cut.

My 2am call, my extra car, my warm meal, my tattered shirt shoulder—my father, the glue, had come apart, and we are still trying to collect pieces we didn't realize had fallen off in the wreckage.

# |Poetry



Brook Madison

## Sparrow in the Sea

—*After Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*

There was a flitting moment as Icarus eclipsed  
the sun, and the diaphanous shadow of a madman  
with wings sprawled across the cobblestone  
path and rock-prickled shore, imprinted itself  
on swelling cloth sails and the white coastal town,  
where we hushed our jobs to search the salt-  
sting air, wondering how tremendous the bird  
must have been to steal the hearty boast of the sun  
even for a second. When we saw no great phoenix  
or heaven-sent hawk, we returned our ruddy  
hands to the plow, to the helm. Miracles  
do not come to us. We are used to men thinking  
the rush of wind will help them flee their chains,  
fulfill a dream away from labor and submission,  
find freedom in the passage between sun and sea  
where the heart isn't fastened to the yoke. We know

this is a fruitless hope, we know to bow  
our heads back to the rake and sickle,  
for too many times we have heard the faint  
splash of a man slipped into turquoise sea,  
thrashing then devoured by gushes of water  
that inflate his lungs, the undercurrent plucking  
feathers from wax wings like a wolf tears  
into a flailing hen, blood, bones, and breath  
until he sinks into the bowels of black ripples.  
We do not care to look. There is nothing  
to be done; Icarus is a sparrow  
in the snare, and we have work to do.

Mckenzie Lambert

## Glorious Morning

My eyes as heavy as sandbags

My rousing consciousness pries my eyelids apart to reveal  
buttery morning sunlight shining through the chiffon cream  
curtains

Muscles stiff from the nights paralysis

I stretch feeling the tendons pull apart and scream a relieving  
sigh

My will is weak and the sheets know that, tangling my limbs like  
restraints singing my name softly in my ear;

Go back to sleep, the world isn't awake yet

I know it's a lie because

I can see the glorious morning

Coaxing me to follow it to the day that awaits me

Samantha Aguilar Villanueva

Barbed Wire

I'm always sitting on the barbed wire  
But as fate would have it, I'm a shrike

Christian Hernandez

## Home Town

I am from a place so small and uneventful people join gangs just to have something to do.

I am from a place where you'd better be careful wearing red or blue.

I am from a place that changed my cousin from a funny kid to a man serving 7 years in prison.

I am from a town where my only thoughts are *how do I get out?*

I am from a town whose wicked grasp has a stranglehold on me.

I am from a family who just want me to succeed.

I am from EBT and microwaved food and a mother who did her best to hide her struggling.

I am from a father who worked hard and loved his children even harder.

I am from summer's spent drinking out of water hoses.

I am from egging houses with cousins on the weekends.

I am from Huron.

**Antoinette Corral**

**There's a Place I Know**

The hills will run down the mountains and melt away  
Earth is now dark molasses, 'til then I wait to sink  
Remaining a whirlpool of yesterday and leftovers of tomorrow's  
Dead leaves, bitter, brittle, and washed away  
The world is now nothingness and still holds so much  
  
A lost city and a sunken dull space. . .  
Still so special. . .  
Because we both lived in it.

Antoinette Corral

Stone Necklace Gifted From Berkeley

The sage stone turtle within my palm

A chip on his ear and threaded vine through his core

A gifted necklace my mother knows best

This gentle creature against the warmth of my chest

Has it seen my wavery nights?

This endeared trinket I grasp onto so tight?

It's pattern shell cool to the touch

A reminder that time must pass and the present cannot last

My mother knows best

She's given me this gift

This gentle companion holds my hidden

tales And a gentle chip

## Cheyenne Sampson

### Human

You're a junkie, that's all you'll ever be.  
You're a junkie, that's all you'll ever be.  
You're a junkie, that's all you'll ever be.  
You're a junkie, that's all you'll ever be.

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Kylee Feist

More Room To Love

You came into my life and  
your steadfast presence  
c a r v e d in my marble exterior  
a b i g g e r s p a c e for my heart -  
so it could comfortably e x p a n d  
without bursting  
now that, for the first time,  
someone had come into my life  
and made me feel

Loved

On

Purpose.

So when you

went

my heart

shriveled

like all of my houseplants

the sunlight

doesn't reach  
this time of year.

And now that carving?  
That blessing you bestowed?  
It only means a bigger

empty tomb.

My anemic heart is mocked  
by all the space for it.  
Like a single woman who desperately craves children,  
in an empty 3-story mansion,  
with no furnishings  
because her ex-husband took them all in the divorce.

She walks around  
from room to room  
lost  
&  
confused.

Unable to imagine a way  
to fill the space on her own.

Too lost in memories  
to realize  
she could pull back the curtains  
and let more sunlight in on her own.

The knowledge of the size of the love  
I once swelled up with,  
further cracks the pieces  
of my already smashed soul.

But the truth dear,  
is that you are mainly a symbol  
of everything from the time of my life I miss  
that grief's waves are too vast, too strong, too fast  
to allow me to pick out and remember  
the details  
of the wealth of community  
I need to feel whole.

Kylee Feist

## Pleasant Young Lady

"You're not being very PLEASANT," my mom says,  
as if losing that label should be a threat.

But I don't want it.

Pleasant girls are the ones  
the predators,  
the groomers,  
the rapists  
target first.

See, pleasant girls are taught they must police their own skin  
and all other women's  
so as to not let any man stumble or fall.  
You better embody the ethos of  
"modest is hottest"  
unless you want it to be your fault.

Pleasant girls don't challenge,

don't raise their voice,  
and smile  
at every sexist, objectifying, and dehumanizing joke.  
They always swallow their words  
drowning them within themselves to keep the peace.

Pleasant girls don't cry out when touched.  
They apologize for the men's wandering hands.  
They must always be unassuming.

Pleasant girls  
never become fully women.  
Instead, they are forever stuck labeled "young ladies."  
Except that is,  
in the eyes of men,  
where they are sickly ripe  
far before they have a chance to even blossom.

My mom says I am not being very pleasant;  
I smile a Mona Lisa smile,  
with fire in my eyes at what I take as a compliment.

For I no longer am willing to be restrained in the cage of that  
word

I am empowered.

I am wiser

I know what red flags are.

I believe in consent.

I have reclaimed my voice

and I \*gasp\* have opinions!

And I won't let another man,

or still enchained woman,

shrink me with that word again!

Even if that means I have become,

what they tell all pleasant young ladies to fear,

a feminist "bitch."

## Giulianna Angula en está ciudad

En está ciudad, todavía siento el amor que senti cuando éramos niños.

Siento los abrazos de mis tíos, las manos de mis tías tocando mi pelo, y la sonrisa que cargue todo el tiempo cuando jugábamos los juegos en la tele hasta la madrugada.

Miravamos la misma película hasta que rallimos el disco, y no nos dormimos hasta que el otro se quedó dormido y dibujabamos en la cara del otro, mirándolo en la mañana y gritándonos solos en el espejo.

Nomas quiero hacer todo eso una vez más. Sin emociones feas y responsabilidades; nomas juegos y nadar hasta que caiga el sol.

Pero ya estás mayor, crecistes sin yo, y yo sin ti.

Te llamo cuando ya no tengo miedo,  
cuando es muy tarde.

- en cinco minutos

**en está cuidad**

**English Translation:**

In this city, I still feel the love I felt when we were children.

I feel my uncles' hugs, my aunts' hands touching my hair, and the smile I wore all the time when we played video games on the TV until dawn.

We watched the same movie until we scratched the CD, and we didn't fall asleep until the other one did and we drew on each other's faces, looking at them in the morning and yelling at each other by ourselves in the mirror.

I just want to do all that one more time. Without ugly emotions and responsibilities; just games and swimming until the sun goes down.

But you're older now, you grew up without me, and I without you.

I'll call you when I'm no longer afraid,

when it's too late.

- in five minutes



Isabel Fitzgerald

New Year's Eve

The champagne is dry and bitter, especially coming from his glass

It bubbles and froths against the walls of my throat

“I did not expect a wallflower like YOU to show up! Woah look

who's drinking, watch out America. This might actually  
make you a fun person to be around,”

he drunkenly spews out the words

Wobbling as he steps towards me, I can tell that his stomach is

warm with social oblivion His scratches and bruises cannot  
heal unless he tries to nurture them

I would be annoyed by the overbearing smell of sandalwood and

sage but the stench of liquid courage fills the air

I rarely have my own glass because drinking makes me spill my

guts in guest bathrooms or on other guests, not that it  
matters which

Both result in an apologetic, agoraphobic banter to unsuspecting

party guests I am devoid of personality in the end, having  
just hurling my charm up

I want to crawl out of my skin and replace my insides with

champagne

The foolish girl in my heart is bound to ruin my blouse or my

faulty social facade No one is sober enough to tell that both  
are soiled

Gripping my shoulder for support, you exclaim “This is going to  
be my year!”

as your lifeless eyes refuse to shine

The continuous absence you subscribe to becomes days of empty  
promises Cycles of “goodbye” and “I need you” bounce off my  
eardrums

and land on the ground I wish to inhabit

Feeling suffocated by his hand on my shoulder, I am forced to  
face the extremely drunk music I wish on shooting stars that  
liquidate across the sky

I wish on pennies in mall fountains

I wish that I could respect you

# |Fiction

Kylan Jynee Wilson

Case Number 116

I was a hologram that no one could see, and no one could hear: a low-class, low-rank hologram coded for only one use—to record.

The city was a frameless picture; it was a tangible cheap postcard of sorts. The snow stuck on the concrete in spite of muffling the sounds from the city.

The urban cities were jarring and jolting even farther from joyful. A melancholic presence thrummed through the streets. The day the snow finally set, the city had lost its life. It no longer filled with vigor. I doubt if its people would survive long enough to be taken by time or by the hands of one and another.

Their warnings of rough winters—uttered in satire—were proclaimed in bitter truth; they were untestable, impenetrable, and repetitive. I had little faith that it would yield for this scout.

As I documented the city, its inhabitants scurried to their intended destinations or crazily panicked when they lost their valuables. One man, with an uneasy pointed nose and balding head wrecked a food stall seating area in a blind rage. He flipped tables, breaking the legs off of stools. Mothers averted their children's eyes, and others focused on the unnecessary rampage.

I turned onto a road called Ginza: a vacant bus bay, plastered with an old advertisement in sooty blue lettering. *Get Tested for Your Sake and Mine*. I re-read it a total of three times. I became more puzzled the farther I tried to analyze that meaning. *Why do they need people to be tested?* A man threw himself on the bus bench,

practically shaking its foundation. He blocked the rest of the advisement. My focus fell to him.

He held a pristine cigarette between his fingernails and began to gaze at the brick building wall. He slipped exhausted into his own mind.

There was another person on the bench. A significant distance separated them. I didn't know when exactly she arrived, only that the faint scent of perfume followed her and that she wasn't there when I turned the corner. Her dark hair was sleek and glossy paired with the whitening snowfall. The bags under her eyes were stained, and her cheeks were lackluster, yet she still was the epitome of beauty.

I switched back to the objective. I scanned the whole street to document the full scope of life. The lights were dimmer, and the people huddled in one spot that led underground: the subway station. I glanced back at the bus bay and at that brick wall. The whole street had modern skyscrapers with basic holographic technology, except that one.

I returned and recorded for further research. Incidentally, I glanced at the bus bay. They were still there.

The woman had fallen into her mind. I went closer to them. In her eyes, I could tell her daze was different than his; it held hints of solace and familiarity in its darkness. In comparison, his daze seemed rather disordered. Specs of light would surface then be snuffed out, forever consumed in that same darkness.

They stared at the wall with their backs turned away from the crammed street, reeking of exhaust and shoddy tobacco—away from the copious messages plastered across the other buildings, and away from the blaring intersection lights at every cor-

ner.

It was hours before they spoke. The atmosphere that surrounded them mirrored the unwonted somberness of the weather. They simply sat, staring at the motionless, immobile brick wall in front of them. It was invaded by colorful posters in a war for the surface area: *Viagra*, *Maybelline*, *Vote-for-me Campaigns*, and others too ruined to read. None of it dawned their interest, as if it was another brick on top of the brick wall. It appears they are waiting to die at some old bus station on some forgotten avenue. Together, they were a quintessence of living decay.

“Take me,” The woman said. “You can try, you won’t get off on it.”

The earth fell to a hush. The man leaned, comfortably, with back against the bench. And while he lit his cigarette, strands of his hair escaped from his bun. He took a drag from the cigarette. Its ashy smoke began to waft in the air, disappearing among the slight winds.

“That takes effort. Not that I wouldn’t want to,” he said.

“My boss,” he repeated, emotionless. “He fired me.”

His words lingered, one by one. He sounded too drained to make the words stick. His eye bags coupled with hers in their printed appearance. His gaze wasn’t pointlessly blank, but void of what it should be, like a bitter aftertaste in the back of the throat.

The car horns and foul shouting flew over my head. I was defeated by curiosity. The noise quickly submersed into the background.

“What did you do?” she said.

Her voice held a certain somberness that clarified her words,

much like the graceful vacuum of winter.

“I didn’t show up for a few days,” he answered, dawdlingly.

“How many is a *few*?”

“A week. I kinda lose track.”

She reached over to gently pluck the cigarette from his blue lips. His hands were too stiff to protest their sharing. There was a gentleness in the way she removed it that I couldn’t decipher.

“No, you didn’t,” she said, plucking it.

She sat with her legs crossed and back straight. Before she took the cigarette, her hands were deep in her coat pockets as if she feared touching anything outside of them.

“My supervisor wants to fuck me...every.... single.... time I go into his office. Or....He’ll make sure I don’t get promoted,” she said, her voice growing smaller.

He turned to face her, and mouthed, “Ouch.”

She stole another long drag.

“You goin’ to do it?” he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders, still inhaling. Somehow, it seemed they grew more alert with each puff, preferring the euphoria of tobacco. The woman tapped out the ashes onto the sleet.

“I have bills,” she whispered. “There’s no point in anything.”

The man stretched his arms above her head and forgot all about the cigarette. He fixed his head at the blurry sky.

I looked back at her. She paused to breath. Her lungs slightly shuddering as if her body could only handle small amounts of oxygen at once. Between the two of them, they both displayed a struggling ability to breath compared to the others that walked along the city streets. Their lungs struggled, existing at a slower,

almost motionless pace that seemed far from voluntary. However, when they spoke, their words aligned such exhaustion. The snow wouldn't fall close to the bay, as if it already pitied them enough to freeze them more.

"They didn't tell us this part when we were kids," the women said, tiredly and unavailingly.

"The daily thought of wanting to die?" he said, solemnly. He still stared at the sky, while she glared at the downtrodden snow piles among the busy sidewalk crossings; lost.

"I don't think we would've listened. I 'd assume it was just a fallacy, or they were lying to scare us," he said.

A gust of wind snuffed out her murmur.

"Did you say something?" he said.

In her murmur, she partially agreed with what he said but didn't harbor the will to disagree with his opinion, so she simply pretended that the murmur itself never happened, an easier choice at this moment.

"To be a kid again..." she said.

The man leaned forward; his body began to tense.

"I'm not going to listen to how fuckin' good your childhood was. I've got my own shit to deal with it," he snarled. Immediately, he regretted it. He rubbed his temple and ignored the sole purpose for her silence. Time froze. They resumed their dazes until finally the woman responded.

"Want to be alone?"

"It doesn't matter."

She cut her eyes straight to his, savoring the first whiff of her newly lit cigarette.

"Asshat," she said to him.



The man grunted, amused at the boldness. He mocked her previous theft. Then, he took her remaining bud. His hand lingering near their coats. They still sat at a distance from each other, but together now, comfortably uncomfortable in their stillness. Interesting. Their point of view as humans is quite nebulous in clarity. It wasn't until this. I realized how slowed the rest of the world around them became. Night loomed, and the streetlights flickered.

"Oh, the train's coming," she said, and rose from the bench, hesitating before departing.

"I'm bad with names," he told her. A poor farewell. He watched as she walked away. She headed towards the endless sounds of descending commotion, the destination of the evening subway station. He could've asked her name, but from the way he said it meant he had no desire to know at all.

In a frenzy, another person crashed into him.

"Who's that, Kuro?" he said, huffing and regaining his balance. *Kuro*.

"No idea. I just met her," Kuro said, checking his pocket.

His friend blabbered about mundane human affairs as Kuro attempted to locate the woman in the fading distance. He gave up faster than he started. He gathered his friend and headed in the opposite direction from the evening station.

*Kuro. His name's Kuro.* I returned to the objective.

#

Disconcertingly, I recorded everything in the city's streets: the life, the living, and the behavior. Over the span of four weeks, I finally reached ninety percent capacity. My sole task was nearly complete. Ten percent of storage data remained. I learned I was

studying a place, its inhabitants called Tarkio or Toyoko. It was a melancholic city with melancholic people.

I recorded the buildings in the Shibuya area. *The inhabitants' dwellings would be vital for further research.* The street was lacking in foot traffic. People entered and existed through buildings constantly, then they slowed after dark. The middle structure was a plastic and steel design without the robotic convenience systems. I explored for further analysis. Interiorly, throughout the building, it was identical in design model, architect, and bland appearance. It housed few people.

A delicate knock echoed in the corridor. A moment later, I found myself observing a boyish bedroom. Kuro emerged, with the woman from the bus bay at Ginza. She was thinner, and her cheeks lacked any trace of fullness. She took a seat on the bed and tiredly dropped back onto the mattress.

“Sorry, for the mess,” he explained, lighting a fourth candle.

“Are you?” she said, listlessly. “Sorry, that is.”

“Nope, but you’ll be fine.”

“Wow, thanks. So thoughtful of you,” she chuckled.

She walked over, to what looked like, a mass display of vintage records that decorated an entire wall. She traced her fingers along the grooves of a brown Rochester record player that I believed had been lost to the vastness of time—things one would study.

As I peered at Kuro, sorrowfulness filled his expression. I knew those eyes. It was as if he was watching death hands. Soon she’d be an empty shell of who she used to be.

“Do you have any jazz records?” she asked.

He shook the feeling away. “Um yeah, they’re up here.”

Kuro reached into a closet and pulled out a shabby, green crate. She started to flip through them while he sat by the crate.

“Alright, so talk,” he said, trying to shroud his feeling. “Where do you work? My friend thinks you’re some kinda hot-shot.”

She snapped back softly, like a medic removing a bandage, “No one says that anymore. I work at James, Briar & Benson as their receptionist.... How much was your bet worth?”

His brows furrowed, forcing a bemused expression. Dramatically, he held a palm to his chest.

“I grew up with brothers. Gambling is in their nature,” she said, her attention never deviating from the crate. Kuro broke out in laughter. The tittering rocked the bed, almost tipping the crate on the floor. When he regained his composure, he steadied it. He probably was the victor in the wager.

“Like fifty bucks, but it also had other bets on top of it.”

She chuckled, low, not able to gather the energy for a laugh. She pulled a worn, white record from the crate. Flickers of sadness lingered in her eyes, as she grasped its edges.

“Engelbart Humperdinck,” she read.

“You know,” he said, laughing at himself, “I still can’t say his name for the life of me.”

“It isn’t that hard to pronounce. Just say it.”

Kuro took the record.

“A-Angelbart Humper...dick.”

She giggled. Kuro rolled his eyes and placed it strategically on the Rochester, and music saturated the bedroom. Engelbart’s baritone consumed every nook and cranny in the room. The effect of his melody seemed to allay their woes, suspending them as the

song lasted, imbuing them with a tranquility. Kuro began to sway.

The sadness in the woman's eyes was replaced with a brown blankness that somehow was relieving. It seemed he had no intention of changing the mood with perpetual talk of their reality. He retrieved a wrinkled piece of photo paper from his dresser and joined her on the bed.

"This you?" he asked.

She smoothed over the picture's corners with her thumbs.

"A 2-8-2 steam locomotive train, and that's my grandfather." She fell into a brief reverie.

As he let her undisturbedly revel, the music started to wane. He grabbed one by a lady called Billie H. and tinkered with the volume to a low pitch before playing.

"So," he said, "where is he now?"

The gloom returned over the room that the music didn't fix. She fell silent, lost in her own mind, but this wasn't like the bus bay. If I had a heart, a mere glimpse inside her mind behind that silence would have shattered it completely.

The singer's enchanting harmony infused with the silence, like it attempted to nudge her out of the reverie. The wind seeped in through the window, returning the forgotten tranquility. In its entirety, their world seemed to exist within these walls, in this untidy boy's bedroom.

"Get up." Kuro held his hand out for her.

In swift surprise, she took it. As the song echoed throughout the room, they danced slowly and presently to the rhythm of the music. I noticed the purposeful length of her coat sleeves and how they reached past her knuckles, and she struggled to main-

tain her balance as he led her around. Kuro noticed too, but he focused more on the way she melted a little into the music and to him.

“Would you believe me if I told you I took ballroom waltz classes?” he said, a boyish grin illuminating his cheeks.

“Did you?”

The grin widened. “I could’ve.”

“Like you’d be seen in dance lessons,” she chuckled. “It’s your turn.”

He dipped her to the ground, then quickly brought her up again. The reseeding chuckle broke out into lightening laughter. The peal of it became a competing melody in the room. She smiled from ear to ear, effortlessly. I know now that it is the most authentic gesture a human could ever render. I felt the sting from a glitch. Kuro continued to guide her into music. I witnessed them dance, like two lit candles nearing their end. In a few days, they talked every night until the sun arose high in the sky, laughing and conversing about medial things and mundane events of the city. The glitches frequented. Their dialogue muffled at times. From the fragile tone he spoke in, they were still dancing together, hand in hand, nearing their end.

One morning, as something sizzled and brewed, there was a crisp knock at his front door. He untied his apron. Another woman stood in the threshold; her wardrobe quite similar that of the woman’s. The burnt orange and dusky wool coat was not common geographical appearances from this section.

“Um, can I help you?” he said to her.

“Kuro Tanaka?” Her voice was uncomfortably grave. “We spoke on the phone.”

He nodded and showed her into the apartment.

“Would you like coffee. I just made it?” he offered.

She waved to decline. As they sat, she elaborated the need for her to meet Kuro in person, conveying her condolences regarding the matter of a Viviana. And at 4:34, the day before, she had thrown herself from a station platform and collided with an ongoing train.

“What was the train, if you don’t mind me asking?”

She scrambled inside her small purse. Then, pulled out a crinkled piece of glossy paper and pointed at the image. Viviana. Kuro pondered over it, and a wave of relief overcame him.

“This was all that was on her. Her phone was locked in her desk at wo—”

“Can I keep this?”

She strangely nodded, letting her confusion drive her to aggressively ask, “How aren’t you sad? You two talked practically every day.”

“Exactly. We talked,” Kuro said, almost inaudible. “She was waiting for that day. She was.... she was so exhausted. We both were.”

Tears of frustration and anger soaked the woman’s cheeks. I felt the glitches again. Kuro stared at the ceiling, honing in on the cracks into the dry wall. All his muscles relaxed. I witnessed something fundamental disconnect from inside him. His anguish was almost identical but would never match the depth of hers. No. Kuro’s arm limped at his sides. The woman called out his name, then again. No. Glitches erupted into the matrix, my code forcibly overridden. The apartment blackened.

Storage full. Maximum capacity.

Log marked: Toyoko  
Case number: 116  
Year: 2083

## Jay Hill

### A Classic Title

*The Good Times Are Killing Me* would have been the perfect name for the album. Unfortunately, it's already the name of one of my favorite records by a band I'm not in. We covered it in Portland about a month prior to the events that inspired the album's final title. During the naming process, all the titles that entered my brain seemed referential to some other band or artist. I conceived the title *Where Is My Mind* while nodding off one night. It wasn't until the next sober morning that I realized it too was taken. Bowie, when talking about Lennon, mentioned how dependent he found his own writing to be on his inspirations. He seemed to believe there were two types of creativity. There was the type like him, and, I was realizing, a type like me, which breeds by bending established concepts. Then, there's art originating from an expression completely original from an insular individual's mind. As further proof, that's how my mind worked. I only gained that view after reading his explanation of it. Sometimes I need help realizing things about myself.

I've always had an issue with being inspired by others. I felt it cheapened my work. I had a variety of reasons to feel my work could ultimately be discredited. This persisted no matter how much recognition I received. Imposter syndrome, I've come to know it's called. Imposter Syndrome would've been a good album title. Maybe I'll save it for my autobiography. Showing outer inspiration is why I hated covering records. Nonetheless, I have an ingrained urge to start singing someone else's song whenever I



hold a mic. Obsessions on if I'm being wholly original kept me up plenty back then. To some extent, it still does. Can I really call anything I do original? Every riff we play reminds me of another I've heard. Every word I write has been inspired by one I've read. Short of creating a new language, I'll always feel this way. Then there's the vices I have which I chalk up to preternatural predilections. If I can't blame myself for what's wrong with me, how can I try to take credit for what I like about myself? I blame nature for my faults, but then I say, free of nature, I created my talents. To call it even, I'd have to blame nature for every sin I've committed and also credit it with any beauty I've brought into the world. Originality is overrated, anyway.

I did come up with one original title for the album. It was the first name turned down by Gene, our intermediary for the record label. Gene was viewed as a legend to those who knew who to view as the real legends of the music industry. He'd broke some of my favorite bands and had been doing it before I was born. His input hadn't been too oppressive on the creation and curation of the final cut of the album. However, I thought he was being a pedantic prick about the album title. He had only reassuring words about our outlook as a band and felt our debut album was going to be a classic. Therefore, it needed a classic title. The one I chose wasn't classical enough for him. ON:WE was the name he declined. I explained it had a myriad of meanings. With it being our debut, it seemed to imply the phrase "we are on." I liked the brash confidence of that statement, as if we suddenly ran on stage and told them to turn on the bright lights because we had something to say—the energy of naming a debut album *The Big Come Up* or *Enter the Wu-Tang* and a final album *The Score* or *Closer*. If people

bought and played the album, as Gene believed they would, “we are on” would take on a literal meaning. And, more importantly, it was a play on the French *ennui*, the feeling of our generation. In addition, *on* in French is a form of *we*. “You’d have to explain that to everyone who bought the album,” Gene said.

The search for a superior album title was on. With the number of lyrics on the record that had years of tragedy and experience behind them, I felt choosing a simple motto to wrap it all up with was trivial. But, like I said, Gene was a legend, and who was I to tell the guy who could make or break our little group that he was wrong? At this point, I owed him that much. The exposure we were getting from a single I wrote in a dingy basement and recorded on cheap mics was ridiculous. Now, in an excessively large hotel room, I had only to write a few more words, and we could release an album destined to debut number one, as Gene kept informing us when he received updated projections. He had too much faith in us. I was constantly suspicious of his optimism. All he’s done, and he still treated us like we had some sway on his career trajectory when it was clearly the other way around. His cosign was why we’d essentially been able to skip the underground scene and the tedious grind to music stardom for immediate mainstream success. We “sold out” before selling a single album. All I had to do now was hold up my end and deliver the record with a name that made Gene happy.

It ceased being an entertaining bout with writer’s block when Gene started phoning daily to say we’d need a title before our television debut. Around the third day of daily calls, I gave up and told him to just name it after the band. He said he knew someone as creative as me would come up with the name eventu-

ally, so we didn't have to resort to that. The Doors already had the perfect self-titled debut, he said, and The Beatles refused to do it until it was an ironically iconic decision. All his references to other bands seemed to start at The Beatles releasing *Please Please Me* and end before The Smiths formed and dropped the real greatest self-titled album; he did mention Jay-Z once and I couldn't believe it. *Self-Titled*, I then suggested. Not a self-titled album, but an album called *Self-Titled*. Gene wouldn't take that or *Eponymous*. *E Pony Mouse* was my next, increasingly frivolous, suggestion. A no-go for Gene, though. He hung up on me at *Fly Fishing in Tacoma Washington* or *Lotus Flower Limbs*, as he should have. The album went unnamed that evening. With his daily phone call out of the way, I was able to truly start my day. I had tried to stay coherent enough every day that week until after Gene's routine call. When it was clear he was through with me for the day, I'd start the stronger stuff. Uppers until the call, then downers for the rest of the day.

Benzos were my uppers then, although still considered a downer. Xanax and her cousins got me high enough to listen to people talk at me and for me to talk back, with the side effect of making me feel everything I said was much smarter than it was. OxyContin for when I knew I didn't have to move my mouth anymore. When the Oxy hit, my mouth stopped being in synch with my thoughts. I called it Contin mouth. Like trying to walk in a swamp, the intentions are there but all effort became slowed by the opposing force. The air feels thick like a constant hug or a perpetual chokehold. I remember when Oxy first hit my town. It was like the beginning of the punk scene. I was already shooting

up when the shift started. Now, I could get a nice nod without the needles, curated by scientists. A brave new world. The nod is what I craved. It's what directed me to the needle. I tried it all, short of a perfect combo of many drugs and drink, or a lucky instance of the hospital stuff like Morphine coming to town. Nothing but heroin was sure to cause it. And, smoking it didn't do it the same way. Me and my gf at the time used to have these post-come up conversations about how great it would be to find someone to supply you glass vials of the hospital stuff on a regular. Like an angel answering our prayers, the gold prescription bottles started to flood the town, and I never turned back. To someone who used H it was mystifying that they had synthesized the experience in a pill. It couldn't last, could it? I was far from that town, that girl, yet the ripped sticker scarred gilded bottles were still there. The modern age was the golden age for an addict.

Like sobering up from a bender and looking at the clock display the same time on a different day, we were already playing the talk show. Still, no name for the album. I should have stayed more sober than I was, but hindsight... If I knew while shooting my last bit of H, dreading the withdrawal to come, that one day I'd be complaining about having too much of a good thing because I was about to play national television, I probably would've slapped my ungrateful future self. The production guy in charge kept telling me not to cover the mic so the audience could see I was singing live. To appease him, I held my right wrist with my left hand, both behind my back, while doing the rest of the rehearsal. Although, I felt it made me look ironically bashful while performing our single about sex, drugs, sins, and tragedies. I was

so high. In the green room me and Mike had a spat about something. It wasn't the lack of me being able to title the album, although that shadow was hanging over the room. It might have been about the drugs, covertly. All I remember is I threatened to shoot myself if he didn't shut up. "Shoot yourself full of what," he said. I told him to leave the wordplay to me. I was on edge to begin with. Gene called, more stern than usual. He let me have it for not coming up with the name in time, although he ended the conversation with a paternal confidence boost. I couldn't help detecting the genuine disappointment, at me, in him. It stung. That might've been why I was trying to take the edge off excessively and chemically. We played Conan. He held up the prop vinyl and called it our "yet to be titled debut album." The performance was mediocre, no matter what anyone else said or says. Gene thought it was a revelation. He said there was a growth in buzz, but that buzz was secondary to the one I was chasing now.

After that show, we had a break from gigs and the press circus. We went our separate ways even though three of the four of us had residences in the same town. I wanted to patch it up with Matt before we had to hit the road again, but the chase took priority. I linked up with an ex who also used. We melted like molasses for days. Soft moans and rattling pill bottles were our soundtrack. The dealers in town must have rejoiced as the prodigal son returned. Matt called me. I thought he was being the bigger man which would have been no surprise. He might as well have been a choirboy around the rest of the band. Perhaps he popped a pill once. I wouldn't be able to remember because if he had popped one, I would have been on my tenth. Lincoln, our drummer at the time, was a major pot head. Not the worst vice,

but he'd also take whatever was around. With Carlos and I in the band anything could have been around. We were the true degenerates of the band. Matt drank whenever we were together. That was about the most habitual intoxicant he ingested. He was one drink from a narc in my mind. We weren't that close at the time. We had just formed the band, for the better part of a year, when Gene discovered us playing shows on the coast. I think, on the cusp of success, we both felt we'd either become the best of friends or creative differences was close to claiming another casualty. He had a reason beyond reconciliation to call.

When we were more grassroots, free of a label, Matt managed us essentially. For the above explained sobriety he was the most responsible. He received a request for us to play a show while we were in town. Returning to our old stomping grounds, we both regressed to our past contacts. He talked to our label overlords and got an okay. We would be playing a secret show. A reputable rumor of us dropping by the venue we'd now outgrown spread the following day. It's crazy that we'd have killed to get a spot at that club before Gene. Now, we didn't have to be on the marquee to pack the house. I stayed more sober for that show like indirect repentance to Matt. Humbly, I must say, we blew the roof off that night. This was a revelation. It was like Neo in *The Matrix* when he realized his world was just ones and zeroes. I was bulletproof. It reminded me what it was all for. Doubt had been quietly growing when I couldn't come up with the album title. That night, as I sung those lyrics written far in the past, it was like they had been lies until then. Every song we performed, no covers that night, felt like reality. The quieter moments when I spoke to the crowd, and they reacted to what I said, felt more

real than anything. I knew what it felt like to listen to a band and think they understood you. I knew what it felt like to have a group respond like they respected you. It made me feel useful. If I could put that feeling into a pill...

That set would have been a good epitaph. Matt and I made up through that performance. We hugged backstage. Back at my place, the girl I had been shacking up with was shooting up in the bathroom. I had been buying her H and after we were done with our mattress activities she'd use and be out of it. I was so ecstatic that night. I popped some pills, but decided I deserved a heavier dessert. I took out my kit. The retired hitman's buried gun. I kept my tools in a lunchbox in my closet. I drew up my dose, and inserted the needle. Fresh blood. I pushed the plunger. Like riding a bike. A long-missed family member's embrace. My lungs were chilly. I was in the bathroom like I didn't want to subject my bedroom to this brand of filth. I planned to walk to bed. The nod came on too fast for that. I craved this feeling. The dreamless sleep, like a dog's sleep in a ray of sunshine. I always felt like a dog when I nodded. Dogs look asleep, though their ears are constantly alert to the outside world. The nod felt like having one foot submerged in the dream void and one in the disappointing waking world. Something was wrong. My lungs were too cold, my breathing too shallow. My mind was still turning gears, although slowly. I wanted to open my eyes with a jolt, but my body was on break, self-induced sleep paralysis. For days and weeks, it felt, I repeated the thought of getting up and splashing my face in the sink. But I was still jailed behind my eyelids. Then a sharp breath like a shock awakening. But I wasn't awakening. I was falling deeper than I ever had. I was overdosing. No way I

mis dosed my first shot back like an amateur. This was embarrassing. Is this it? Still no name for the album. The press was going to publish this too now that we'd found fame. Man was this embarrassing. Luckily, it wasn't a case of mistaking my tolerance after a break. The pills had Fentanyl in them. It wasn't that embarrassing then.

You can die from taking drugs. Why didn't anyone tell me? What kind of sick joke was God pulling when they made the best things the worst things in disguise. My girl knew something was off with me and phoned 911. Despite her own accountability, or the contraband throughout the house, she saved my life. I'd have to marry her after this. I hadn't taken off my hospital band. It'd been few days since I was released. I insisted on the show we were about to play. Gene and the guys tried to talk me out of it but relented. I was now like a grieving kid, no one wanted to deny me anything. I was still on the pills. I was given plenty of time alone with my thoughts since my surprise sabbatical. I had a new thought to entertain. Should I stop taking drugs? I had never thought of this. The reasons that seemed the strongest were dying (top of the list); embarrassment (a shocking second); the idea that the drugs were tied to my creativity; and that discrediting everything I've accomplished was also embarrassingly high on the list. The most compelling reasons were all self-absorbed, if you were wondering.

I tried to think of others, but that seemed an even more distant reason to change myself. I thought how selfish it would be to ruin the rest of the band's big break because their lead singer and songwriter self-destructed. Then I thought how New Order did just fine for themselves. I knew Matt would do well for himself, if



anything. I thought about how I'd make our audience my enablers. I'd force them to finance my bad habits, putting the blame on them as they danced to tunes of my descent. If I was going to kick the habit, it was going to come from within. I heard what happened when they tried to make Amy rehabilitate for others. No, no, no, was her reply. All these reasons, like the album names given to Gene, got rejected in my still ill mind. When we walked on stage the applause felt disingenuous. I thought they were congratulating me for not dying. Then we played. It happened again, although I didn't deserve it. The revelation. Not a revelation, The Revelation. We performed like every other show was us tuning our instruments. The set was put together by a hand not of this world. Written by a writer much better than me. We were under divine direction. If the first was a fluke, this proved there was magic somewhere. If I couldn't save myself for this and these people, not just the band members, not just the audience, not just the world at large, for all reality, past and future, I didn't deserve to have lived.

I didn't sleep, I just thought. The next morning, I called Gene. I hope you have that album title if you're calling at this hour, he said. He had a smile on his face, I could hear it. No, I answered, but I think I need to go to rehab. It was hard. Simply committing to entering was a step I almost turned back on. I felt lucky for the option. Sometimes, it seems, there's no way to halt your life to better it. Before I was admitted, Gene told me face-to-face not to worry. God willing, he said, the audience would still be there when I returned it. Gene called himself a professional or a businessman whenever I said he was an artist. Truthfully, he was an angel. It got worse before it got better. But when it got

better, it made the worst times feel meaningless. Fighting off your demons doesn't seem like a fair fight. They play dirty even when you're not allowed to. They attack from behind and ambush you while you're alone. Then, when you try to strike back, you only hit air. They're terrible at adapting, though. If you can survive long enough, and that's the part that claims the best of us, trying to survive, they'll show their hand and you can retaliate. Although they adapt slowly, familiarity can be deadly too. The return to the same battlefield doesn't make it easier, it only makes you feel like you should have known better when you trip up. The familiarity goes both ways. If you can find the method to kill one demon, you can kill them all. When it's finished, you can laugh at their funerals and relieve yourself on their graves. We named the album *Ode to Joy*. "Classic," Gene said.

# | Artwork

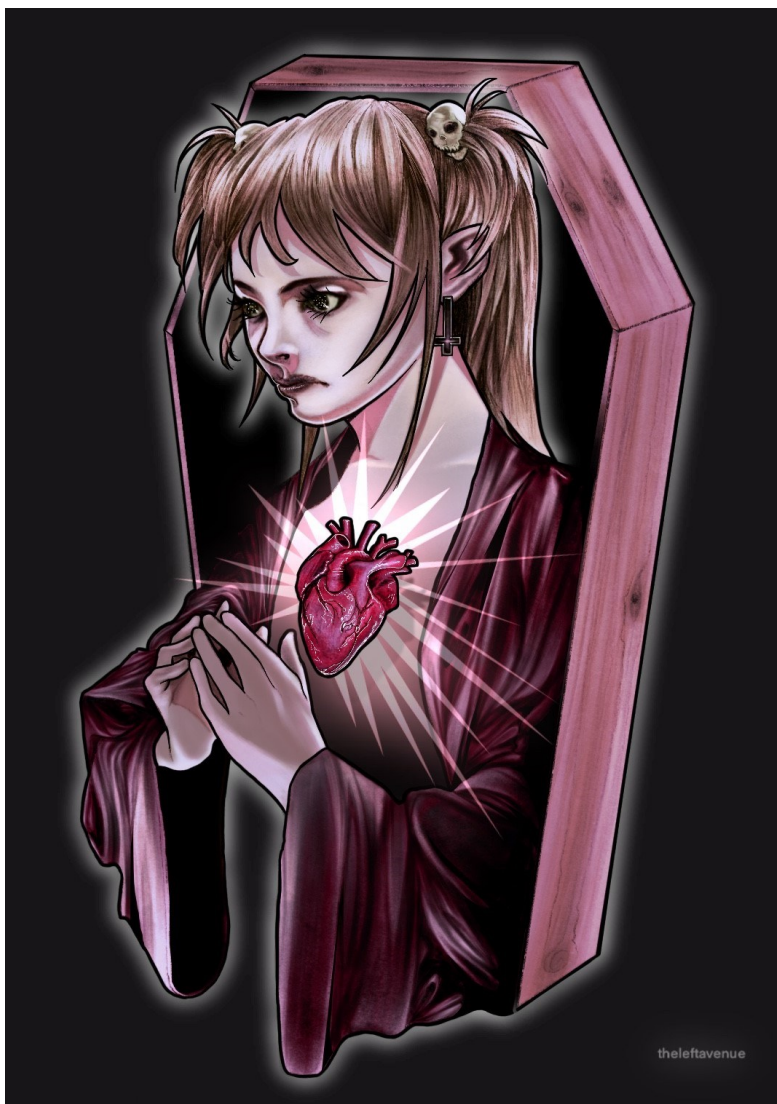


Giulianna Angulo

Lain

*Artwork*

61



Giulianna Angulo

MisaMisa



Giulianna Angulo

Nirvana

Artwork

63





**Giulianna Angulo**  
en cinco minutos



Alejandra Lara-Salas

Raven

Artwork

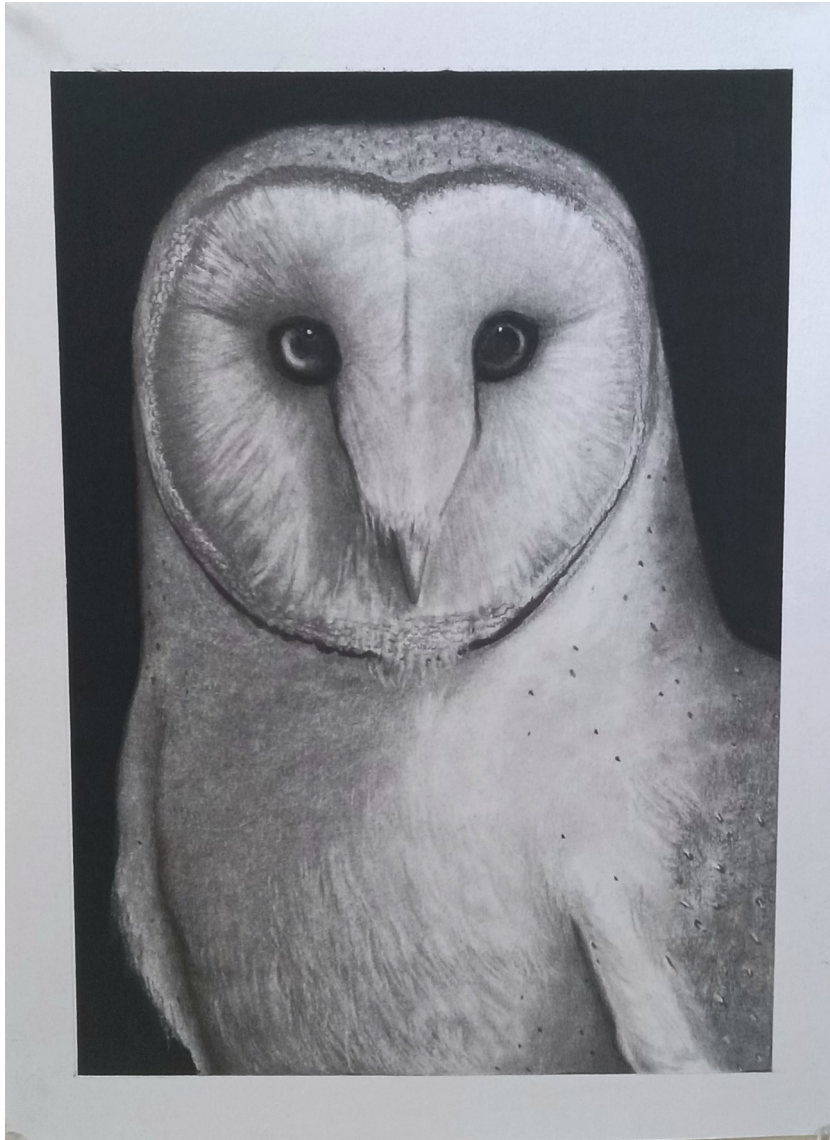
65





Alejandra Lara Salas

Sphynx Cat



Gracie Arciga

Barn Owl (Front View)



Gracie Arciga

Linocut Piece of La Catrina





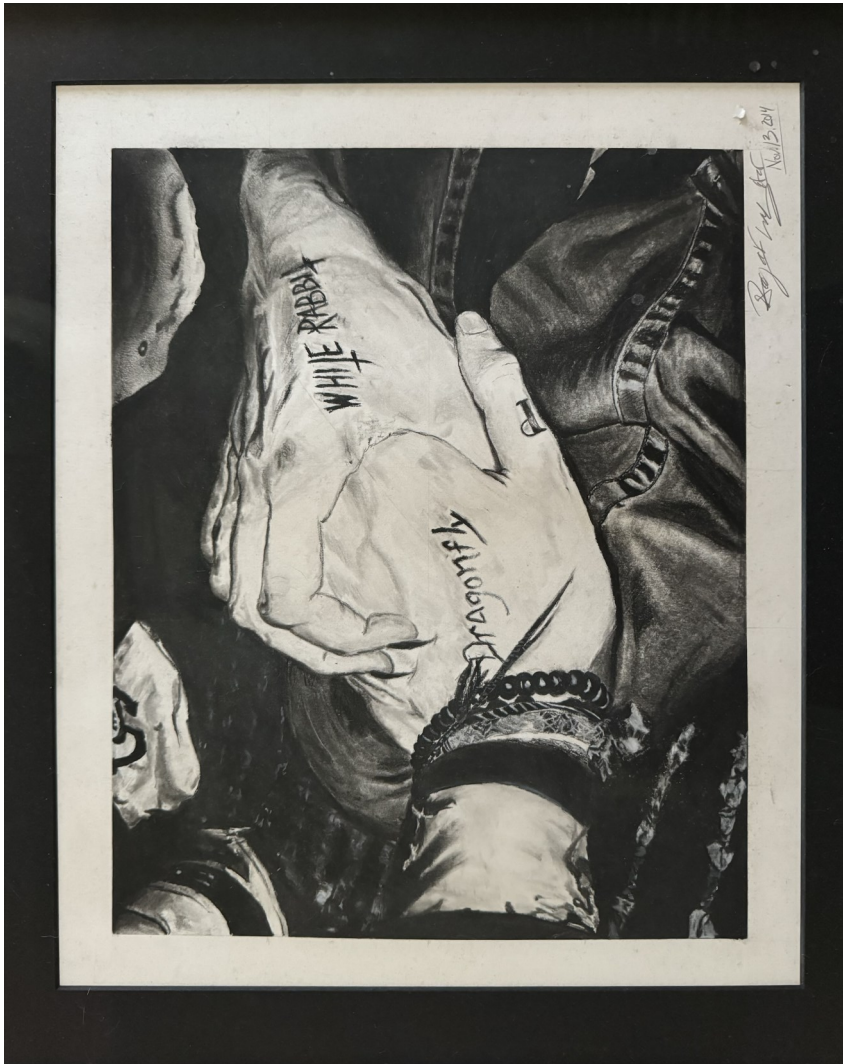
Sky Basherian  
Cold and Rotten

*Artwork*



Roger Lasater

forgiveness



Roger Lasater

love

Artwork

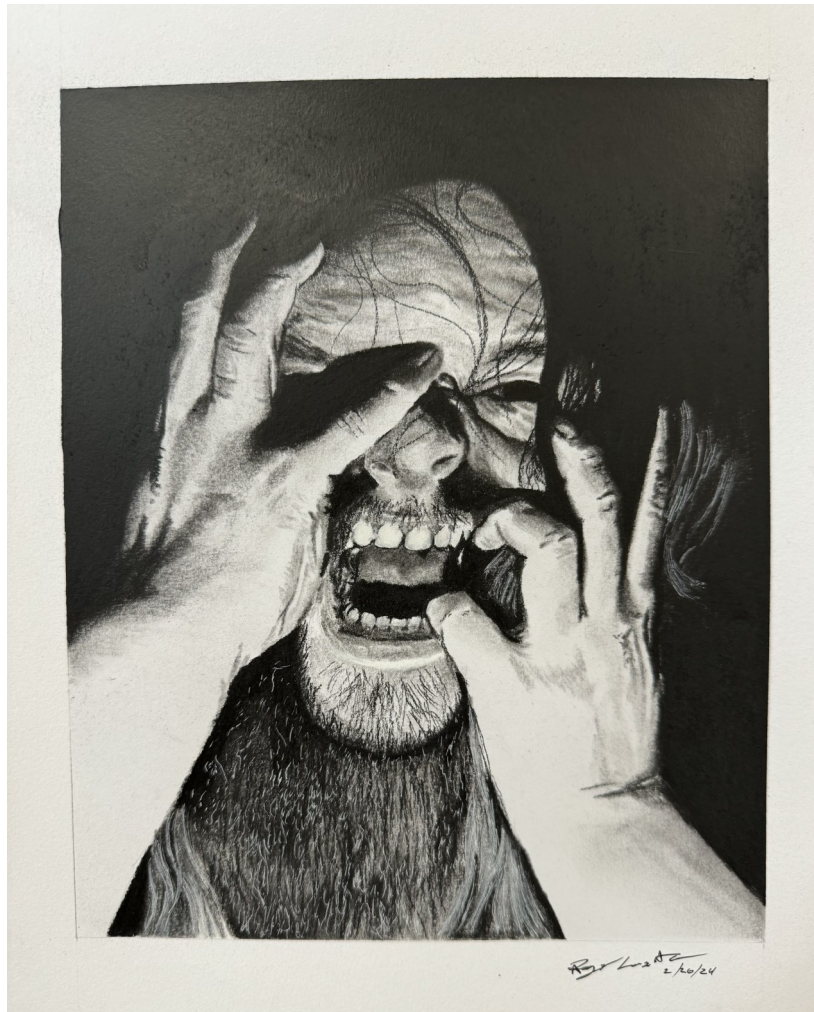
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Roger Lasater

owl



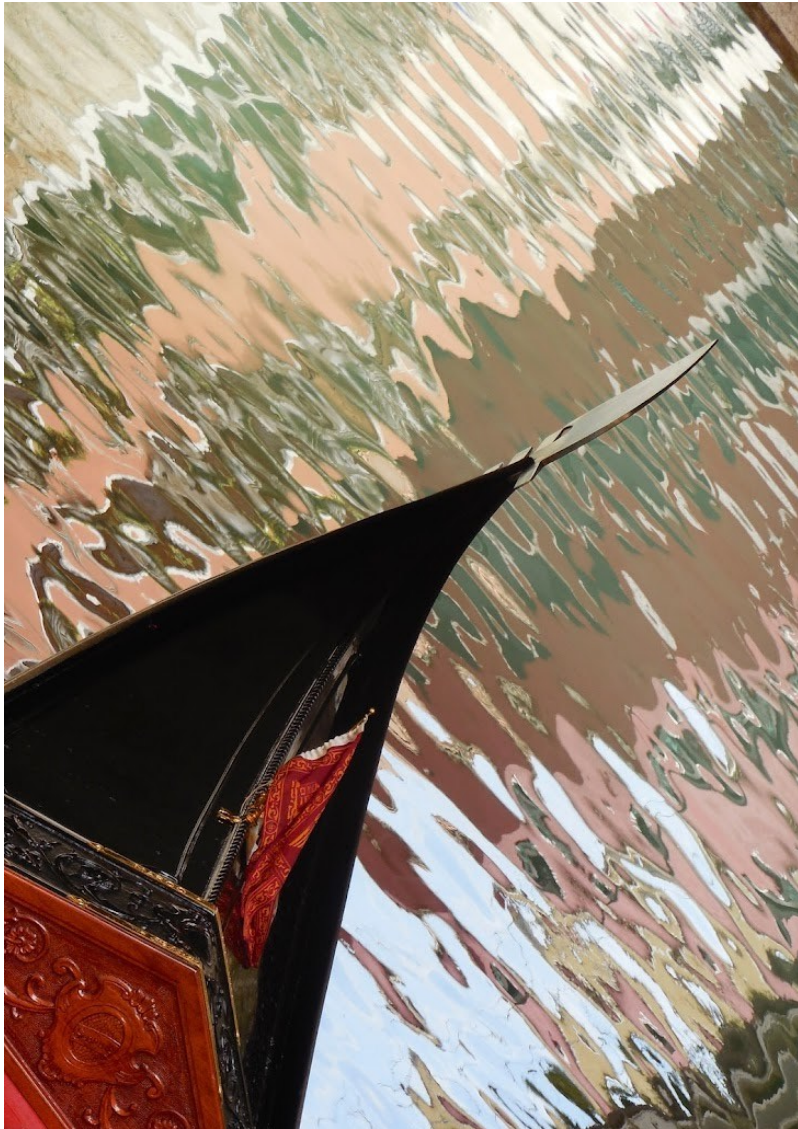
Roger Lasater

shadow self

Artwork

73





Kylee Feist

## Hypnotizing Waters of Venice

## Spring 2024 Contributors

**Giulianna Angulo** is a studio arts major at Madera Community College in California.

**Gracie Arciga** is an art student at Reedley College. Her current mediums are traditional and digital art, but she also loves to dabble in acrylic painting, and ink. Her career goals are to transfer to CSU Long Beach and obtain an MFA in Illustration. Gracie has been selected as the spring 2024 Reedley College featured artist.

**Sky Basherian** is a second-year student at Fresno City College. Art has been her lifelong passion. She is working at an adult day center centered around art and it has shown her its transformative impact. This fuels her desire to share art and make a difference with it.

**Antoniette Corral** is an English major at Los Medanos Community College in California. She hopes to transfer to a 4-year university to receive her Bachelors Degree in English. She wants to pursue her goal of being a Technical Writer and expanding her love and passion for Classic and Modern Literature.

**Kylee Feist** is a psychology major graduating from Fresno City College who dabbles in painting, poetry, and photography. She believes in taking time to create, giving life meaning even in despair. It also is a tool that keeps her from dancing over the edge of insanity by providing an outlet to express her internal conflicting multitudes.

**Isabel Fitzgerald** is a student and English tutor at Fresno City College. She plans to work in the healthcare industry in pharmaceutical research.

**Christian Hernandez** prefers to go by Chris and is from Huron, California. He is currently enrolled in West Hills Community College in Lemoore as an English Major. This is his first time submitting his work and he is happy to finally break that wall down and hopes to continue to do so in the future.

**Jay Hill** is an English Major at Fresno City College and is gearing up to transfer to a UC or CSU in the fall Semester. He also works as a tutor at FCC.

**Mckenzie Lambert** goes to Golden West College in Huntington Beach, California.

**Alejandra Lara-Salas** is a studio art major at Reedley College. At Reedley College she was able to work with an assortment of mediums that she has grown to love. Most of her art consists of watercolor and graphite.

**Roger Lasater** is a studio arts major at Reedley College. He is currently in college to further his education and improve his artwork. He hopes that after enough practice he could get a tattoo apprenticeship.

**Brooke Madison** is currently pursuing a major in Creative Writing from Chandler-Gilbert Community College (AZ). She plans to continue her education at Arizona State University. Brooke's dream job is to become a children's book author and illustra-

tor. She enjoys digital art and writing fiction.

**Katrina Riggs** is enrolled in Creative Nonfiction at Reedley College. Born and raised in Fresno, Katrina has spent the past 16 years working as an advertising copywriter, telling other people's stories. She's thrilled to begin her journey of telling her own. Katrina has been selected as the spring 2024 Reedley College featured writer.

**Cheyenne Sampson** is a student at Mid-State Technical College in Wisconsin. She is a part of the Liberal Arts program there. She has always used writing, drawing, and music as an outlet for emotions and situations she is unable to express out loud.

**James Francis Turano**, born and raised in Fresno, is back at Fresno City College to perfect his writing. Although he's written more than 70 poems, 10 memoir vignettes, and several essays over the years, he is previously unpublished. He's currently in the throes of revising his novella, "One Night in Fresno."

**Samantha Aguilar Villanueva** is in her final semester at Fresno City College and Reedley College before she graduates. She will be earning her associates degree in English through Fresno, and her Creative Writing Certificate through Reedley. She hopes that you find her work enjoyable.

**Trinity Walsh** is a student at Grossmont College in El Cajon, California and is hoping to pursue a degree in creative writing and literature. She is aspiring to become a writer or book editor in the future, and hopes to have many opportunities to create and

read beautiful and relatable pieces.

**Kylan Jynee Wilson** is a full-time pre-law student, majoring in English Literature at Chandler-Gilbert Community College in Arizona. They are experimenting in creative writing to convey their views within the boundaries of imaginative writing as to find their own voice and originality.

## Spring 2024 *Kings River Review* Editors

**Gavin Garza** is a poet and memoirist from Sanger, California. He is of Anglo-Chicano descent. Raised in the Institute of Basic Life Principles, a non-denominational Christian cult, Garza is currently reclaiming his Chicanismo through tutorship and social justice. In 2024, he became a California Youth Leadership Corp Fellow and was awarded the Dean's Medallion by Fresno City College's Humanities Division for his academic achievements. His work has been featured in *MudRoom*, *Eucalyptus Lit*, *Flies*, *Cockroaches*, and *Poets*, *Bullshit*, *Airplane Reading*, the *Los Angeles Poet Society*, and elsewhere. Garza can be found sharing his Spotify rotation on Instagram and Twitter @anoldsoulsong.

**Hannah Kleinkramer** graduated from Reedley College in 2021, and Arizona State University in 2023 with her bachelor's degree in English Literature. She has been published in Reedley College's Literary journal *Symmetry* and *The Blue Marble Review*. In her free time, she enjoys playing the ukulele and singing with her dad, skeet shooting with her shotgun, laughing with her friends, and repairing vintage typewriters.

**Paula Rawlings** enjoys writing fiction and creative nonfiction. Her work has been published in Reedley College's 2023 *Symmetry*. She is a spring 2024 graduate of Fresno City College and plans to pursue her MFA in creative writing through Southern New Hampshire University. In her free time, she likes to hold her dogs' massive heads to her chest, kiss horses' noses, watch movies with her daughters, take non-winding car rides with her husband, ponder, cogitate, dream, ruminate, speculate—yeah, she likes to think. If she thinks productively, she writes.



The *Kings River Review* publishes artwork, creative nonfiction, short fiction, and poetry of community college students from across the country and features a Reedley College writer and artist in each edition.

**Submission Deadlines:**

**March 15 for the spring and October 15 for the fall edition**

**Submission Requirements:**

- ◆ Artwork & Photography: Up to 5 pieces sent as .JPEG files
- ◆ Creative Nonfiction: Up to 3,000 words
- ◆ Fiction: Up to 3,000 words
- ◆ Poetry: Up to 5 poems

**All submissions must be:**

- ◆ titled.
- ◆ formatted in Microsoft Word (.doc, .docx, or .rtf).
- ◆ formatted in 12 point, Times New Roman font.
- ◆ double spaced.
- ◆ free of mechanical and grammatical errors. The *Kings River Review* reserves the right to make any editing changes deemed necessary.
- ◆ original, previously unpublished work. Non-English submissions must include English translations.

**In the body of your email:**

- ◆ Indicate the genre and title of each submission (Artwork, Creative Nonfiction, Fiction, or Poetry).
- ◆ Include a biography, including the name of your college (fewer than 50 words).
- ◆ Include your email address, mailing address, and phone number.

How to Submit: Email your submissions following the above requirements to [kingsriverreview@reedleycollege.edu](mailto:kingsriverreview@reedleycollege.edu). You will be notified via email regarding acceptance and/or work we cannot accept.

Questions? E-mail us: [kingsriverreview@reedleycollege.edu](mailto:kingsriverreview@reedleycollege.edu)

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