



**pulp**  
MAG



# Masthead

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MARK ROBINSON  
MAKAYLA GOLDSMITH  
SHEILA VAN DELFT

## 555

The couple across the bus were utterly lost in one another. They fed each other bits of sandwiches and croissants, cuddling like they were the only two people on Earth. Kayla observed them, wondering what their life together was like.

They rode the 555 bus often, on the half-hour route home from Vancouver Community College. When she got off at her stop every day, she spent the ten-minute walk back to her cheap flat thinking about what would happen if she trusted someone in that way. Would she feel the same things this couple did, and do the same things as them with another person? Both of them looked about her age, too. Who else had they been with before they met each other? How had their individual lives led them up to this point?

She wished her commute to and from university wasn't so long. Even more, she wished she got her driver's license earlier. She shouldn't be looking at people and wondering about their private lives this much.

Suddenly the couple let out a loud cackle, making Kayla and a few other people on the half-full bus startle and turn to them. Oh, how she missed that sound. And that joy. She sorely missed doing this with her friends back in Toronto, whom she then realized she hadn't heard from in some time. She made a mental note to try to get in touch with them when she got home.

Even though the people had turned back to their own business, Kayla's eyes stayed trained on the couple. She tried to make it discreet; she wondered how long she could do this before they noticed her. They looked so happy; it felt like an eternity since the last time she felt so comfortable with someone else, even if the person was just a friend. Her focus had mainly been on friendships before moving

to Vancouver over the summer, but since then her wandering thoughts were inescapable. It would be nice to have a guy to be close with.

But, it seemed, this was not the case in her life.

Her stop arrived before the couple's, as per usual. They went right on cuddling, seemingly without a care in the world. She stepped off the bus and walked home alone, in the rain, without a warm hand to hold.

Then a new guy started frequenting Kayla's bus. At least, he was new to her. She didn't remember ever seeing him before that one November afternoon. He was awkwardly tall and lanky, with dirty blond hair and thick square glasses. His wardrobe looked like stuff the Weasley twins from *Harry Potter* would wear. Every day he boarded the bus, which was most days, he carried a book in his hand and, once he took his seat, buried his attention into it as the bus trudged along. He always sat across from her, beside the couple, and the book changed with almost every bus ride; Kayla didn't see the same one for longer than two or three days. He got off quite a few stops before hers, right outside of a rich-looking neighbourhood.

She was so interested in his book choices she almost forgot about the couple. The books ranged widely from classic novels by Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë, to biographies about influential artists like Picasso and da Vinci, to ethnographies of different lived experiences of spirituality. She lowkey wanted to read them, but she didn't mind watching him read them; she liked when people were engrossed in their books like this.

The rustles and giggles coming from the couple still distracted her sometimes, though.

Except for one day, when all the seats in their row were taken. At the book boy's stop, he boarded and took the free spot beside Kayla

without hesitation. She just looked at him for a second, before glancing down to his book for today. *Fahrenheit 451*.

*It's not a big deal*, she told herself. This guy was just super cool. And neither of them had said even one word yet.

The bus started back up immediately after the last person had paid for a bus ticket. They rode along for a few stops, and then Kayla noticed the guy had gotten to his reading. She'd heard this book was pretty good, and she didn't know why she never got around to checking it out. Maybe she should.

After several moments, the boy shifted in his seat a little. He paused, and then his gaze moved up to Kayla, who was still fixated on his book. It took another minute for her to realize he was looking at her. He gestured to it and said, "You like this book?"

She tried to come up with a good answer. "Well, actually, I've never read it. I've heard of it, but I haven't read it. But I do kind of want to."

He smiled, just slightly. "I do like a good reading partner. I just started it. It's good so far." He turned back to the book, but moved it the tiniest bit so Kayla could see better.

Her next words were out of her mouth before she caught them. "You finish books fast, don't you?"

A small laugh escaped him as he looked back up at her. "You could say that. Why?"

"Yeah, well, it's just..." *God, I sound so dumb*, she thought. *How to say this without sounding like a stalker?* "I've been looking at the books you're reading. They look interesting. But they're so long, too. You must have a lot of free time to be going through them this quickly."

"Sort of. I'm in university right now, so not too much. But it's still

enough, at least for me.” He shrugged nonchalantly, making her feel guilty for struggling a little to keep up with community college.

She nodded. “So, these books are for your classes, then?”

“Most of them, yes. But this one, I’m reading for fun,” he answered, holding up *Fahrenheit 451*.

“Most of them?” Kayla stared at him. “The hell kind of classes are you taking? You don’t go to Vancouver Community College, do you?”

“No, no. I’m an English major at UBC. But my electives this semester kind of explain my reading recently.”

*I think all your classes explain your reading, holy shit*, Kayla thought. “Yeah, um. I don’t go to UBC. I’m at VCC, I’m a culinary arts major there.” His eyes lit up at this, which made her heart warm in a way she didn’t expect. “And also, this might sound weird, but I don’t remember seeing you on this bus before a couple of weeks ago.”

“I don’t know how long this is going to last, to be honest. My usual route is messed up right now ‘cause of construction, but I have to admit I like this route. More scenic, I find.” The boy looked out the window for a minute before he turned back to her. “You’re a regular on this bus, I take it?”

“Only on my way home. I take another one going to school. Just different routes.”

“Oh, okay. I’m taking this to UBC as well. One of two.” He took a minute to look at her. “You know, now that you mention it, I don’t recall ever seeing you, either.”

She shrugged sheepishly, as if to say, *You sure haven’t, boy who I don’t know the name of.*

“Well then, hello, stranger,” he said playfully. “It’s nice to meet you.” He stuck out his hand to her, and she couldn’t help laughing as she shook it. “My name’s Jacob.”

“Kayla.” In the silence that followed, her eyes wandered to the bus’ front windshield, and her eyebrows furrowed slightly. “Hey, isn’t this your stop?”

Jacob turned to look just as the bus started to slow. “Oh crap, that’s right! I gotta go.” He stood up as it came to a full stop, but faced her once more. “So, uh, I’ll see you around.” He strode off the steps into the light of the parting clouds, and Kayla watched him go. It wasn’t until after the bus rejoined the traffic that she realized this was the most comfortable she felt in a long time.

She barely paid mind to the couple, still in their usual seats.

Kayla didn’t see Jacob the next day on the 555 bus home. *Welp, just one of those days*, she thought, though her heart sank a bit.

The day after that, he came back. He was still reading *Fahrenheit 451*, apparently. When he sat down beside her – again, to her confusing surprise – she saw the bookmark at the book’s approximate halfway point.

As he opened it, he glanced over at her. “You still want to read this? ‘Cause I still want to.”

She nodded, borderline feverishly. She hoped he didn’t notice. He stuck the bookmark at the last page and placed the open book in between them, on their laps.

Kayla tried to fight back a small smile as they started to read together.



## Betel Leaf

My ancestors  
wrote poetry  
in their  
recipe books

spread messages  
like ghee on toast  
thin  
but present

tucked Rumi's  
books underneath  
sukrit plates  
in the mosque

drew geometric  
lines in the sky  
with mango  
chutney.

My ancestors  
ate their words  
bit their own  
tongues

swallowed  
their paint  
like it were  
chai

mistook their  
pain for paan  
chew it like a  
tough betel leaf.

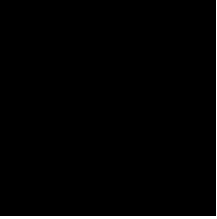
# Visual

Makayla  
Goldsmith  
2020  
Watercolour,  
Ink & Conte  
10x10"

## Too Long



## Little Black Box

Somewhere deep inside of me is this little black box.  
 Its glossy corners cut into my skin whenever I breathe  
 too deep, until you slid your soft hands inside my chest,  
 searching for my heart, finding this little black box  
 instead, cracked, a soul splintering break the second  
 you touched it. Innocent fingers unstoppable,  
 winding their way around my memories buried  
 deep. This little black box is leaking now, memories  
 of rust and fire and  blood. Morning air  
 and forget-me-nots, and secrets hitting the  
 back of a throat like whisky in a teacup.  
 Fragile like smoke but firm like glass -a pinky promise  
 type of trust. From blood on bitten lips these memories  
 escape me, in tears dusting the delicate insomniac purple under  
 my eyes, in panic attack fever dream sweats. I was haunted by that *thing*  
 I once was with sharp incisors concealed behind malevolent  
 lips. With hands that harmed, when I had to become my own  
 hero. That *thing* she forced me to be. That *thing* I left behind.  
 When I can't tell up from down, your hands hold me together,  
 filling this ever-spreading black hole inside my chest. It's easier to  
 focus on your hands than the person I used to be, even though  
 the thought of giving you my heart, is locked away in this  
 little  
 black  
 box.

## Las Vegas

Tonight, and if only for tonight, I was beautiful. I chose to be the reflection that had many sides, dressed in all glitter, from my vintage dress to my pedicured toes. I wasn't just a mere diamond; I was a star. A thing far out in an endless sky of nothing, often cast out by skyglow, but still so damn bright.

As I applied clear lacquer onto my lips, my boyfriend's reflection passed by the mirror, his campfire red hair seizing my attention. Leo leaned against the vanity, an eager smile on his face, giddy about the wealth of depravity he desired to partake in tonight. "Ready?"

I smiled so wide and broad, I probably looked like the waxing gibbous moon to him. "Definitely."

"You're going to outshine the birthday girl."

"Jessica knows I like to dress up on nights out."

"That may make it easier for her to forgive you, but it doesn't mean that she won't be just as mad." Leo sounded like my mother, dismissive yet critical. Was it my fault I wanted to feel beautiful for just one night?

I rolled my eyes at him, stealing a glance at the Victorian etchings on the mirror's metal frame. It was moulding around the edges. The top part of the reflective glass casing was chipped away, revealing an abysmal black beyond the structure. Once, it must've been a beautiful mirror, before time wore it down to nothing but decrepitude.

"They're here?"

He nodded. "Sam just texted me saying they're coming up right now."



I could already hear Jessica stomping her way down the hallway, banging on the door as if it was an accompanying instrument in her orchestra of madness.

I yanked it open. “Quit being so loud, there are people sleeping right now.”

Tossing her head back like some New York upper east side witch, Jessica cackled. “Who the hell sleeps in Vegas?”

“Just get inside,” Leo said, walking past the door and into the bathroom.

“Don’t mind if I do,” she said, sauntering into the hotel room and jumping onto my bed, her blonde hair like dandelion seeds floating into the sky. When the bed started to groan and dip into the floor, Jessica quickly got up back onto her feet.

“Y’know, you don’t need to sleep in this rinky dink ass motel, you guys can always stay with me at Sam’s house.”

“We’re fine,” I said. “Where’s Sam?”

“He’s in the car.” A devilish smile played on her lips. “I have a little birthday gift I want to share with you.”

With feigned interest, I raised an eyebrow. “What is it now?”

She pulled out a bottle of eye drops and threw it at me. I held the vial up to the brown-speckled, fly-littered fluorescent light. The ampoule was tinted magenta, yet the viscosity of the eye drops indicated that the liquid was translucent.

I threw the bottle back at her, sat on the cream chaise lounge and began putting on my boots. It was easier to say no to Jessica when I didn’t look her in the eye.

“Not tonight, Jessica.”

She slammed the glass bottle on the table next to me. “It’s my

birthday, you don't get to cop out on anything."

The girl became a hurricane when she wasn't getting her way. When she was possessed by her ego, she became the mirror image of my mother, and I couldn't help but fall into submission. I often wondered what sort of childhood trauma others re-lived when Jessica was disparaging them.

Thankfully, Leo's exit from the bathroom halted our impending argument. He picked up the vial, assessing the bottle as he fixed the collar of his plaid shirt. "What's this?"

"Jessica wants to do acid," I said, attempting to make the offer sound as unappealing as possible to a "thrill seeker" like Leo.

His eyes glazed over. He looked distant. Far from this ratty hotel, possibly this universe. "Why not, we're on vacation anyways."

"I told Georgia the same thing," Jessica said, her cheeky grin nearly splitting her face in half. "It's a unanimous vote. So, who wants to go first?"

Ironically, I ended up going first. Both of them were cowards. The idea of losing control was more alluring to Jessica and Leo rather than the actuality of it. Jessica put two drops in each of my eyes, did the same for Leo, then threw all caution to the wind and put four in her own.

—

The windows of the car were rolled down as we drove past the Las Vegas strip. The casino lights, the sound of bikers revving their engines as they drove by, the locals soliciting foreigners with "knock off" Rolexes and Louis Vuittons and the amalgamated scent of crepes and lobsters all filled the car to capacity. In Las Vegas, the wind carried spirits that left you feeling inebriated, and tonight was no different. I had just adopted a new high altogether.

Jessica wiggled her eyebrows at me with a smug smile. “Someone’s having a good high.”

“Not there yet.” I sat up and poked my head past the side of Sam’s headrest. “Where are we going?”

Sam glanced at me and then looked back at the road. “My friends are holding a party in the desert.”

I gave Jessica an apprehensive look, which she ignored and began toying around with a loose curl on the top of her forehead. “It’s like this massive party Sam and his friends hold every year. They do it in the desert, so the police can’t shut it down. Apparently it gets pretty crazy.”

Leo elbowed Sam in the ribs playfully. In annoyance, the Latino boy swivelled out of his jabs. “Sounds like it’s going to be fun.”

“That’s the prerogative,” Sam said.

I looked out the window, and conversely my heart dropped to my stomach. The buildings, the people, the desert floor and the sky had all merged into one. Skin and cacti were pooling into each other like a melting sundae. Clouds reached for skyscrapers and the monuments of modern civilization reached back, and as they coagulated together, it transformed into red. Not a soft rouge, or pastel pink, but a violent and unforgiving vermillion. Disgusting and beautiful all at once.

When Jessica shook me out of this trance, we’d already arrived at the location. Everybody was gone, except Jessica. She’d chosen to stay behind. Maybe out of obligation, but to this day, I liked to imagine it was out of concern.

“C’mon let’s go, we’re here,” she said.

I’d never been to the Nevada desert until tonight. Whenever I used to go on vacations with my mother, we’d always drive through route fifty straight into the city. And when I got old enough to travel on

my own, Jessica and I would do the same. The convenience of always sticking to what was familiar had kept me shackled to mundane living.

Today, I was especially regretting my hermit nature as I surveyed the heart of this state. I'd expected there to be no plants, no life, just dry, weathered soil; but the desert was very much alive. Even when it was nighttime, I could still feel the warmth of life emanating deep within the earth. There was nothing dead about this place. People danced about, throwing their limbs around like birds taking flight, music vibrated through my skin and caused my teeth to chatter, and the smell of *Larrea Tridentata* sweetened the dry summer air. The vastness of the Nevada desert felt much, much smaller. For tonight, it was full. Not an overwhelming fullness like in Las Vegas, but more complete and in oneness.

"I want you to meet Oscar," Jessica said as she dragged me through a crowd of people dancing, towards a man that was standing by two huge speakers.

He handed me a cup.

"Oh, I don't want this," I said.

He then gave me a smile, thinking that the additional offer would make me comply. "Just try it."

Jessica whispered into my ear: "This is Oscar, Sam's friend, the one who invited us to the party."

Oscar raised an impatient eyebrow at me. I looked at the cup and then back at him, he nodded in approval of my observation. I sighed and then took a sip. It tasted like the earth. Forest floor, bark, and mud are all mixed in a blender and put into a cup.

"This is disgusting," I said. "What is this?"

Jessica and Oscar both laughed as if I'd just said the funniest thing on earth. I furrowed my brows and directed a searing glare them both.



A hand reached for my cup, took it out of my grip and emptied the drink out into the tired desert floor. “You shouldn’t really be drinking any of this,” Leo said.

“Why?”

That far off look eclipsed Leo once again. “It’s ayahuasca.”

Oscar rolled his eyes at Leo dismissively. “There’s no harm in trying it. It’s all-natural.”

“Right. If it wasn’t so bad, you would’ve told me what it was in the first place.”

“That’s just Oscar’s way of joking around, don’t take it personally,” Sam said, throwing his arm around my shoulders like we were old pals. “How about I show you around the place? Jessica’s told me you’re really into nachos, we’ve got some in the trailer if you want some.”

I shook my head and detangled myself from Sam’s grip. I’d had enough of him and Oscar for today, maybe even a lifetime.

“Forget them, let’s dance,” Leo said and began tugging me to the pit of dancers.

Running into the crowd felt like falling towards the ocean from a hundred feet above into a current of bodies commanding me to sway in synchronization to the beat of the music. Leo spun me around, stirring up the contents within my stomach. The stir-fry I’d eaten that evening was beginning to rise up my throat in rebellion, and like a dictator, I didn’t know how long I could delay its revolution.

“You alright?” Leo said.

“Yeah.”

I tried to catch up to the rhythm of the group once again. The faster I danced, the more my feet began to burn. The beats emitting

from the speakers moved in front of me like coloured mist, causing my head to spin like a tornado. Something wasn't right, I'd never felt like this before.

"I need to use the bathroom," I said. "Where's the bathroom?"

Leo was saying something, but I couldn't hear him speaking. I gave up trying to understand him and began walking aimlessly through the group of people in hopes I'd magically find a bathroom.

The people around me looked like leery shadows made of hues of black, their swirling wisps of smoke whipping at my cheeks and lips. I wanted them gone, out of my way. I ran from them until they were out of my sight, until they could no longer torment me.

My surroundings began to dim into darkness. Something skittered past my leg, toppling me over onto the desert floor. I remained on the ground, maintaining a crouching position as I attempted to skuttle back to the party. After a couple cacti stings to the palm and a few dozen pebbles embedded themselves into my knees, I gave up crawling and laid on my back.

A teal iridescent butterfly floated above my head and rested on my nose. "Georgia, you need to get up," the butterfly said.

"I will in a bit."

"Young lady, your laziness will be the death of you."

I sat up and swung at the butterfly. The thing sounded like my mother, and she was the last person I wanted to hear from right now.

"Up to absolutely nothing as usual. No wonder your life is so meaningless."

"It's not!"

I slapped my hand onto my forehead, squishing the cursed butterfly into oblivion. My mother was a harp, always putting me down for

being everything she was not. I had come out of her womb too fat, not light enough, ugly even. And for my entire existence, she'd been punishing me for it. I recalled a time at the age of seven when she signed me up to join a youth girls' soccer club. My position was center back, a position which required bravery, something I severely lacked. In the tournament, a striker on the opposite team kicked my mouth in, causing me to consequently lose half a front row of baby teeth. I decided from that day onward no amount of validation from my mother could surmount that kind of pain.

It was also the same day I met Jessica. As Jessica walked me to the rec center infirmary, I remember my mouth tasted like copper pennies and the only thing that kept me from bursting into tears was the smell of her jersey. She smelled like tangerines and Victoria Secret perfume, and I should've known then and there the girl was trouble. But I was a lonely child and often grasped onto anyone who took the slightest interest in me. Fifteen years later, I had dropped out of college, moved halfway across the state from home and took up odd jobs to keep afloat, all for Jessica. It was her dream to live in California and she was too afraid to tough it out on the Los Angeles streets on her own. I had stopped being my mother's mule to become hers, and it had worn me down. Now, I was going to die in this desert, my body to waste away in this barren land.

There was a growling sound in the distance that grew louder every second. I screamed, blinded by the night and without a cover to hide behind, I was certifiable dead meat. Two beams of light rooted me to the ground. They were like two flying saucers, circling around me, ready to steal me away from earth.

A man emerged from behind the lights, obstructing them with his stature. "Georgia, are you alright?" Leo said.

"Are you real?"

He chuckled at me. "Yes, I'm real."

“How did you find me?”

“You didn’t walk off that far from the camp. You ended up a couple hundred meters away.”

“Thank you,” I said. “For coming to look for me.”

Leo crouched down and lifted me up onto my feet. He hugged me, and I didn’t realize how much I needed one until then. My mother had never hugged me, or Jessica. The lights behind him surrounded his ginger head like a halo, and for once, I felt saved. Maybe, maybe he was who I needed all along.

“I don’t want to go back,” I said.

“Then where would you like to go?”

“Home, take me back home.”



215



## oh, ivy

what part of this apish evolution  
gave me these emotions  
to work with?  
i don't want to deal  
in love that feels desperate,  
excitement that feels guarded,  
sadness that feels deserved,  
anger that catches fire  
and burns down my house.

i'd rather feel nothing  
and take the experience at face value,  
nothing more from happiness  
or less from despair,  
observing affection  
unaffected,  
watching a sunset  
for the time to pass by,

nostalgic carbon monoxide  
flowing up my nostrils,  
squeezing the air  
out of my lungs.

love is tragic  
with exposed nerves  
with sticky tendrils  
clutching onto the branches

because without the sweet syrup  
that i suck from your tree  
my gut will fill  
with the vinegar  
i make on my own.

## Until Every Birdcage is Empty

The streets were chaos. I tried to find the faces of my friends—impossible to distinguish when everyone wore all black, faces covered with masks. The rain and wind were unrelenting, muffling the yells from our friends and from the police. I was split up from my friends and that was the worst thing that could happen. Our police liaison, distinctive with her spiked pink hair that peeked through her toque, ran between us trying to pass on legal information and words of encouragement.

One of the cops found a megaphone. “This is not a game! If you do not clear out of the port immediately, we will enforce the injunction.” The cop held the papers over his head as if it meant anything to us.

I tried to find my friends but everyone was lost in the sea of people running to the sidelines to act as legal witnesses or from the sidelines to the frontline in a rush of anger to defend a friend from arrest. I thought I heard someone yell “Heather,” and twisted around to see who was calling me, but the word fell into the mass of other screams. The cops stood in front of what remained of our blockade with handcuffs ready. Two of them had police dogs by their side, held on tight leashes. The dogs glared at us with a hatred that could only be trained.

We held the line hand-in-hand, chanting. “Water is life! Water is sacred! Stop the pipelines! Stop the hatred!” Our words echoed in the swirling wind. The cops tried to drown out our voices with their megaphones and car sirens. Behind us all, behind the port access we were blocking, the ocean waves lapped up against every passing tanker in the harbour.

Natalie sang a few lines here and there throughout the song, barely heard over her guitar and the accompanying static. Later on in our jam session, when we switched from Bikini Kill covers to PJ Harvey, she suggested we play “Yuri G.” “Do you know the lyrics, Anna?” She asked me again and again. I stared at Natalie, resting my bass on my leg and taking a sip of ginger beer, wondering why she didn’t sing it herself. Assuming she didn’t have a good voice or had stage fright, I didn’t ask as not to embarrass her.

The drummer Sara and I walked home at 10 PM. We had the energy to keep going but wanted to be respectful of Natalie’s roommates, some of whose bedrooms were clustered around the jam space in her basement. She lived in a long-established punk house on Cambie St called the Pretty Party with seven other musicians, students, and activists. Every wall was covered in either current or past occupants’ paintings or sketches, large mandala sheets, tour posters, and passive aggressive household chore reminders.

Her house must be the fullest on the block, I thought, as Sara and I walked the empty neighbourhood street. There was no one walking home, no one out for their last smoke of the day, no dogs taken out for their last piss. We walked past a bus stop with an advertisement from the city about paying your empty-home tax. “Clearly doing a lot of good,” I said.

I took out some ‘Refugees Welcome’ stickers from my backpack and pasted them all over the glass walls of the bus-stop. Sara looked around for anyone driving by and then took out a giant black sharpie and wrote “Fill the empty homes with refugees, motherfuckers!” on the glass. We couldn’t just pass by empty houses without being angry. In fact, we couldn’t move through the city silently at all. Grinning, we continued walking down to Broadway for our bus.

“So, how did you find that?” Sara asked.

“That was a lot of fun! I mean, I’ve wanted to be in a band since I moved here. And that was five years ago.”

“Do you think you wanna stick with vocals?”

“Yeah, and bass. I don’t know how to play or anything, but hey, what punk band needs to know how to play their instruments?”

Sara laughed in agreement. “You’ll learn, it took me a long time to get used to the drums. Natalie used to sing for us, y’know. Before Chrissy joined and left.”

Sara gestured her hand to me when she said, “Chrissy” I suppose because Chrissy must have told her we started dating. “Yeah, Natalie used to be really good too. But she ruined her voice with too much screaming.”

I swallowed and felt the soreness in my own throat. Rubbing my hands together for warmth, I felt a small bump on my right thumb and stuck it out in front of Sara’s face. “Look, my first blister!”

“The first of many.”

**C**hrissy and I lay in my bed running our hands over one another. It was one of those quiet moments after sex where we were content just touching instead of talking. Well, we should have been content with the quiet. We had only been hooking up for a couple of weeks and I had the urge to fill the silence with anything I could think of. Apparently, Chrissy did too.

“How was playing with Sara and Natalie?”

“Really fun. I love screaming and now I finally have a place for it... You know, when I was a teenager and lived with my best friend and her family, I would play lots of riot grrrl music. In the shower and whenever I did chores. One time my friend’s mom commented about how I ‘really loved angry girl music, didn’t I?’”



Chrissy laughed and rested their head under my chin. Maybe I could appreciate being quiet with them.

“Yeah, screaming is fun. I really liked jamming with the two of them, but I just couldn’t do that kind of screaming to my voice anymore. I have to keep it safe for my own projects...”

The first time I heard Chrissy sing was at a jam session with a bunch of mutual friends. They let their voice flow like a river undammed and pulled it back for quieter moments in the song. Even when they were quiet, their voice was still strong and distinguishable from their guitar, like a bird you could hear over the wind. Rain began to tap on the windows as if asking to come inside. I wrapped my arms tighter around Chrissy’s small frame.

The bookstore we all called home was on Commercial Drive. The walls were covered with protest flyers and revolutionary posters—there was even a poster from the Seattle WTO protests and I always told my friends about how I attended the Women’s and Children’s march in a stroller with my mom. In one corner of the bookstore, there were couches, a kettle and countless jars of loose-leaf tea, and guitars lying around for anyone to pick up. Someone was always playing.

Sara read some of her zines aloud and Natalie played her guitar alongside it. I sat behind the counter checking on the till. It was pretty common for those of us who needed it to take a bit of money here and there, as the majority of people volunteering were students or artists. Either way we were anti-work. *\$5 laundry. \$15 life, man. \$35 gonna roll around in this big pile of money then throw it away after. \$10 smokes. \$20 going to bet it all on a slow horse...*

Sara came by the counter. “Is Chrissy coming to the reading tonight?”

“No, they’re pretty worn out.”

Sara scrunched up her face. “Their back again?”

“Yeah, their pain is pretty chronic now. But they also had work today and apparently the amount of physical labour was worse than ever. They just needed to rest.”

“Capitalism’s coming for us all.”

“It’s already here, man.”

A few hours later, the normally quiet bookstore was filled with people. The portable bookshelves were pushed into the sides of the room to make space for a circle of chairs. Our volunteers had organized a book launch for a local anarchist who had just been released from prison after thirty years. The author, Alejs, explained at the beginning of her reading that she had to get approval for all her readings from her parole officer, otherwise she could go back to prison for breaking her parole conditions by organizing with activists.

From my seat beside Natalie at the till, I could tell Alejs was uncomfortable with the discussion portion. She put in great care into every sentence, pausing to choose the right word, and tapping her foot on the chair. Alejs seemed nervous, understandable when being around a group of strangers that could have been infiltrated by a cop, like her own group of friends had been. Her discomfort didn’t stop the onslaught of questions.

“How do you not get burnt out?”

“Some of us are really sick. We’re tired and can barely make it to our own events.”

“Our own community and commitment is strong, but it’s so hard to feel like we’re succeeding in anything when the movement only sur-

faces publicly every five or so years.”

“I don’t even believe in a One Big Movement anyways.”

“What about the One Big Union?”

Everyone laughed.

Natalie suddenly grabbed her jacket and walked outside for a smoke. The bell on the door rang behind her. Needing a moment of quiet too, I followed her.

The sky was clear and as full of stars as a city sky at night could be. When I exhaled, my breath came out in soft clouds. I slipped my hand into my pockets.

“Heavy stuff.”

“Yeah.”

Natalie leaned against the wall and tried to light her smoke. The wind blew it out again and again, so I lent a hand to block it from the other side. It lighted swiftly and she offered me one from the pack. I shook my head.

“Since I lost the ability to sing, I figured ‘fuck it.’ Might as well start smoking since it can’t take away the one thing I loved most. It’s already gone.”

I stood beside her and stared at her fingers, chipped black nail polish moving back and forth from her mouth. “Sara told me about that. That’s awful.”

Natalie shook her head. “I wasn’t being careful. I wasn’t taking good enough care of my voice.”

“Not enough honey-lemon tea?”

“Not enough rest. We did a lot of gigs last summer even when my throat was inflamed, sore, and begging for me to stop.”

“Rest can be hard to take. It’s not your fault you didn’t take it. All the world does is enforce these ideas that we need to work non-stop to be valuable members of quote unquote society.”

Natalie laughed. “I’m aware, but it wasn’t about that. I don’t know... It’s like my voice was asking me to stop and I was like, no! Fuck you, I won’t stop! I won’t ever stop!”

**G**ravel dug into my chest as I was shoved down by the police officer who tackled me. He had his knee over the small of my back and held me down as he tried to watch the scene around us. I could feel warmth spreading from my underwear as I lost control of my bladder. All control over my body was taken from me the moment I hit the cement.

From the ground, with my head twisted, all I could see were the feet of people running. I couldn’t tell who was a cop and who was a friend until they too were pushed onto the ground and handcuffed. I could hear the dogs barking, growling. I heard friends begin to chant from the sidelines. “No justice, no peace! Fuck the police!” It all sounded so far away.

I saw Chrissy’s small body be thrown against the pavement. They spat dirt and blood out of their mouth and looked directly at me. It was a look of fear I don’t know I will ever see again. We tried to say anything we could just by looking at one another, we knew it would be a long time until we saw one another again with the no-contact order that would likely be issued among everyone arrested. Whatever we were trying to express didn’t need words. It flashed between our eyes and disappeared when we were pulled to our feet. We both went limp and had to be dragged into separate cages of the police wagon.

Everything in my prison cell was grey. The walls, the floor, the bunks. The cement walls were carved to look like brick. There were 130 “bricks” in total—I had counted many times. Both of my cellmates were watching TV in the common area. In an odd way, the prison wardens were like neglectful parents, not giving us what we need but always leaving the TV on. I lay on my bunk and took advantage of the relative quiet to write.

*Dear Editors, I signed up to your free prisoner's subscription. I saw in your last issue that you publish letters from prisoners and want to submit the following to your newspaper.*

I knew that the letter might not get past anyone reading it when it left the building, but hopefully the guards would not find it and dispose of it before then. Other letters from supporters often got “lost” in the mail, as well as a few from Sara, who had been sent to another province.

*Three weeks ago, I was sentenced to a year in prison with possibility of parole after four months for taking part in an act of political sabotage. My friends and I were arrested after allegedly blockading the port of so-called vancouver as part of an anti-pipeline rally. We were there to blockade the port with the intention of disrupting of the economic infrastructure of the state. There are many voices out there, outside of prison, who are still loudly disrupting the colonial violence against indigenous folks and the earth. But I know after this series of sentencings that the state and its police forces will likely succeed in their tactics of fear and intimidation that causes our constant repression.*

On the wall of my cell facing north, I taped up photos of a forest and birds and other wildlife that I ripped out of a magazine my parents sent me. The photos hung limply where a window to the small, fenced yard should have been.



*It's hard for strength to grow roots in this concrete all around me, but it tries. It still wants to encourage people to resist. Because even though I'm here, I'm still connected to a great force—to the revolution and resistance across the world. I'm connected to every prisoner in the world who are victims of poverty and oppression, who needed to steal to eat or pay rent or get their fix. I'm connected to all the other imprisoned people who were punished for living authentically and true to themselves, who had to stand for what they know is right.*

Our shared toilet was underneath my photos, made “private” with a metal divider to hide the toilet from the camera surveillance. We were out of toilet paper, but I know asking was no use. The guards provided us with what we needed only when on the verge of becoming a human rights violation.

I did what I allegedly did because I dream of a world without prisons—both literal prisons and the prisons of colonialism, capitalism, and cis-hetero- patriarchy that everyone lives in. I am here because I lived my life the only way I could—loudly and against the rhythm. And I hope you do too.

If I squinted my eyes, the florescent lights on the ceiling looked like a ray of sun shining on my collaged forest scene. The cut-out of a robin flew peacefully between a photo of a tree branch and a photo of the sun. Laying on my bunk, I started to sing, softly at first, then louder as time went on.

*Until every cage is empty.*

## Bone Tree



## Home Quilt



## You never saw the stranger who dived into the dark sea

The stars are like tiny light bulbs across a black canvas.  
The night is humid, hot, loud.  
The beat of the congas moves your hips side to side.  
You can almost taste the sweetness of the beats  
and you feel them dance down your throat.  
Maracas make your shoulders  
shake, shake, shake  
while your body moves like a snake.

You notice them glancing from across the dance room.  
They gulp rum like it is water.  
Their face glitters with the full moon  
as you glimpse at them walking towards you.  
The music takes a break.  
“I am Amador,” they say.  
The notes go back on replay.  
Amador touches your gentle hand. They kiss it  
and leave behind the mark of their lips,  
a glossy red tint that shines like a ruby on your pale skin.  
They take you out of the party  
to the beach where you can’t dance, luring you out of your habitat.  
Your black strappy sandals crunch in the delicate grains of dead seashells.

The beach transforms into an empty desert at night.

Amador looks at you;  
your sweat shimmers in the night.  
Their stare -it feels  
as if waves are crashing down on you.

“Don’t be afraid,” they whisper.  
Their Cuba Gold cologne lingers through your nostrils.

You and them walk and walk along the coast,  
where the sand meets the shore.  
The cool breeze slowly touches every inch of your body.  
The Caribbean Sea is quiet.  
The music fades into the moist air.

Amador stops, places their hands on your neck,  
asks to kiss your lips, you agree.  
Closing your eyes, you feel their soft, meaty lips  
against yours, dry and chapped.

Then, you push them away.  
There is a small, bitter sphere on the tip of your tongue.  
It tastes like a rotten berry.  
Wrinkles form on your forehead, puzzled by their intentions  
you see them smiling.

Their grin is wide. Their teeth are sharp and white.  
Their face is now grey and dull.  
Your weak legs anchor your knees to sand.  
Your head drops, the seashells dig into your cheek  
as the warm water runs to your feet.

Their tall figure covers the moon.  
Unable to move, you try to make a sound,  
but your body is numb.

They get close to your face,  
and confusion rushes through your veins.  
You can't break free from their malicious gaze.  
You need to escape.

A voice calls you from the dim yellow party lights.  
Amador caresses your face;  
their cold hands burn like ice on your skin.  
The voice rushes towards you, splashing grains of sand with each step.



But just before Amador gets caught,  
they dive into the restful ocean and disappear into the blackness of the water.  
Your limp body is surrounded  
by grains of sand and glittering stars.

The distant voice arrives at your rescue.  
They don't ask why you smell like Cuba Gold cologne.  
They just carry you away from the desolate beach.

## *In order of Appearance*

### **Mark Robinson**

Mark Robinson is a third-year student at Kwantlen Polytechnic University studying in the Bachelors of Fine Arts program. Mark's practice focuses on investigating the human psyche, working with abstract, figurative, and surreal imagery. The work's, *Self Portrait Study (All My Faces) 2019*, focus is the discarding and changing of future aspirations throughout people's lives. The process of this work consisted of creating several self-portraits, in private, of dreams and aspirations the artist had over their life, and covering the portraits making them momentary. Mark questions which are the artwork; the conceptual investigation or the art object.

### **Julia Ralph**

I am a fourth-year student at KPU, hoping to have a career in writing. I have been making up stories for as long as I can remember, so I find creative writing to be a very fulfilling thing to study. So far, I have had one piece of prose published in PULP Mag, in the Fall 2021 issue. I am hoping to graduate with an English major and a Creative Writing minor by the spring 2022 semester.

### **Sabrina Vellani**

Sabrina Vellani is an Indo-Canadian writer. She studied Theatre Acting & Creative Writing at UBC. Her essays & poetry have been published in various magazines across the US, Canada and the UK. Her latest work can be found in *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Filling Station Magazine*, *EVENT Magazine*, and *The Malahat Review* under her pen name, Rozina Jessa. She also works as an actor in both the film and theatre industries. Her personal mandate in her creative work is to tell stories of brown women and to navigate the complexities of cultural identity and heritage.

### **Makayla Goldsmith**

Makayla Goldsmith completed a certificate in Fine Arts at KPU. Pre-pandemic she loved to travel, her art has also been featured in Issue 22 and 24 of pulpMAG. She has been teaching people how to do the Métis red river jig since she was 15 and is hoping to start teaching some art classes for kids as well. She is now considering returning to university to become an Aboriginal Support worker.

### **Jayna Clarke**

Jayna Clarke is a first-year KPU English major who primarily enjoys reading and writing poetry, as well as other various texts. She's generally scared to show anyone her writing, and just hopes that the right people will read it. Also, when not bogged down with never-ending piles of homework, she likes to skateboard, play guitar, and spin some vinyl.

### **Catherine Mwitwa**

Catherine Mwitwa is a part-time Journalist and Creative Writing Major at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. While she isn't studying for finals, she's constantly posting on her blog [theaquilla.com](http://theaquilla.com) and volunteers at local Vancouver literary magazines. She has short stories published in *Quarantine Reviews*, *Random Photo Journal*, and *Otis Nebula*. She likewise has bylines at *Stir Vancouver*, *Royal-Tee Magazine*, *SAD Mag* and *Malahat Review*.

### **Emma Lindsey Smith**

I'm studying Creative Writing at KPU, and poetry is the thing that excites me most. I like to be real about the way I feel deeply about things, and also the way I criticize this aspect of myself.

### **firebrat**

firebrat is a writer and poet living on unceded Coast Salish territories. firebrat's writing explores freedom and the lack thereof, and all the resilient ways people can reclaim their identities and autonomy in the face of oppression and depression. "Until Every Birdcage is Empty" is a fictional piece written during the #Shut-DownCanada movement of February 2020, where Wet'suwet'en land defenders were attacked by the RCMP for defending their territory from the Coastal Gaslink Pipeline which threatens their sovereignty, traditional ways of life, ecological destruction, increased carbon emissions, and violence against Indigenous women and 2 spirit folks due to man-camps

### **Sheila Van Delft**

Visual artist Sheila Van Delft received a Diploma in Graphic and Visual Design from Kwantlen Polytechnic University in 1987 and has just received Kwantlen's Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Visual Arts. Her art practice includes murals, portraits, illustrations, and commissioned artwork. Sheila works primarily with acrylics on canvas and has recently been creating environmental work and work to express her feelings of Home.

### **Nicole Gonzales Filos**

Nicole Gonzalez Filos is a Panamanian, Venezuelan, and Canadian multimedia journalist and creative writer. She is in year four of her Bachelor of Journalism and Creative Writing Minor at Kwantlen Polytechnic University. Nicole is the Editor-in-Chief of *The Runner*, KPU's student newspaper. She enjoys writing long-form journalism with themes surrounding social issues and climate change. In her free time, Nicole creates videos for her YouTube channel, *Nicole Media* and enjoys going for nature walks through British Columbia's parks with her family and pug Booboo.





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