

# memoryhouse magazine

spring 2023 || issue no. 28



*visitation*

# visitation

This issue brings us true stories about unexpected people in unexpected places, from hitchhikers on island roads to a trip (in every sense of the word) in a souvenir shop. A visitation can be welcome or unwelcome, earthly or spiritual, in the form of a childhood friend or the first breeze of fall. What unites all visitations is the difficulty of explaining them and their lingering impact. Here, our authors attempt to do just that. Step into *Memoryhouse* with us!

# memoryhouse magazine

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**memoryhouse** is a uchiago student-run publication that curates personal narratives from chicago and beyond through creative nonfiction and visual art.

learn more about us at *chicagomemoryhouse.wordpress.com*

founded 2012, alida miranda-wolff

# long sunday afternoon

sarah kim

	Kaitlin	The Cow
Technical information:	<p>Scientific name: <i>Homo sapiens</i>.            DOB: 10/4/2000.            Height: 159 cm.            Friends since 2015, fellow EMT since 2020.</p>	<p>Scientific name: <i>Bos taurus</i>.            As livestock: cattle.            Lifespan: 18-22 years.</p>
Surface anatomy:	<p>Buckwheat hair, limbs devoid of freckles. Grin with a peek of tongue. Skin like blue milk, prone to goosebumps.</p>	<p>I want to imagine not the visceral, but the velvet. Floppy tongue, chocolate brown hide. Wobbly legs, ready to run.</p>
Body habitus:	<p>Warm and floppy— not like a dead fish handshake, but like a sun-basking moppet. Low and steady center of balance. Hypermobility joints, and proud of it, too.</p>	<p>Fluid: its blood is the only feature involved in the lab. In a stubborn bid to endure, her essence evenly distributes.</p>
Summary of anatomic pathology:	<p>Bites the hand that doesn't feed her. Ate ten samosas by herself at Shreya's grad party. Would graze lawns on all fours if it were dill instead of grass.</p>	<p>Bright, ancient wound I follow home. Superior to the meadow, inferior to the sky. The tank gurgles and bubbles, as if sleep-chasing after dragonflies.</p>
Cause of death:	<p>Prediction based on medical history: Gastrointestinal trauma. Argument with local butcher. Evil palindromes. Go Hang a Salami! I'm A Lasagna Hog.</p>	<p>It's not so much that The Cow is dead, but that it serves little purpose to be blatantly alive.</p>

# cadaver lab

## The Cadaver

## The Kitchen

---

Provided on loan from the AGAI.  
ID: 4947322.  
Liked Herman Melville and the taste  
of olive oil.

Sweet nickname for *Rush University  
Advanced Trauma Training Lab*. This  
will be your first and last interaction  
with The Kitchen.

---

Degloved from its skin like Holbein's  
Dead Christ— iodine yellow where the  
dehydrated flesh clings.

Pine-scented walls, freshly scrubbed.  
Basement location. Windows too  
high up to see out of. Bloodless  
womb.

---

Low levels of adipose tissue. So mus-  
cular that I find it contemptible. The  
term *body habitus* is redundant.

Static mesh filled with airy quartz. Re-  
verse entropy. Swallower of swarms,  
salt, songs. Appropriate temperature.

---

Mild fever. Hot and hemoglobinous  
broth floods and courses through  
every vessel, propelled by a sous vide  
wand.

I joke about circulating beef stock  
through The Cadaver and slow-cook-  
ing it at 57°C from inside out.

*See also: The Cow  
Surface anatomy  
Body habitus*

---

REFUSED TO DISCLOSE

N/A  
Does not die:  
is only entered  
and exited.

# II

*cm clemente*

you fell at recess  
and after class i called your house to see how you were  
and you said fine and your parents went to go get pizza  
we ate it on your porch and played yugioh on the steps  
and you were wearing a green cast and it matched your eyes  
in the sun



*binod dawadi, the girl and a dog*



# unusual visitors

*robyn michaels*

*“When the Europeans came, we had the land, and they had the Bible. They taught us to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened our eyes, they had the land and we had the Bible.”*

*- Jomo Kenyatta, the first president of Kenya*

We volunteers were mostly college students. Volunteering is such an American thing. A few of us were older, with ‘careers.’ I was one of the older ones, and I volunteered to get a taste of what the Peace Corps might be like, and to improve my KiSwahili. It so happened that, of the eight of us, two others were also Jews.

What we learned on that trip was that virtually every educated Kenyan identified as Christian or Moslem. Only uneducated people were animist, or so we were told. We met a lot of Maasai on that trip. The Maasai believed in one God, and for the most part, were not easily converted. The European missionaries enticed the Africans not just with stuff, but with ‘education.’ That’s how they do it: get them while they’re young. Teach them songs. The Africans might or might not have believed in an afterlife, but they definitely did after being inculcated by Christians.

The District Commissioner (essentially a local mayor) brought us to the Girls Primary Boarding School. It was in Kajiado, south of Nairobi. The school was sponsored by the African Inland Church, a Protestant group from Scotland. Well-off African families of all religions sent their daughters because the quality

# unusual visitors

of education was considered better than most public primary schools. All the teachers were at least high school graduates. Some had more education. This school was nothing fancy, but you don't need fancy. Girls had to haul water in the morning before classes started. The headmistress was a well-educated Maasai woman, and it was decided that we'd make bricks for a new class building.

Sand, small stones, and frames were ordered, and a community development worker, a young African guy, showed us how to mix the materials and pour the goop into frames. We learned later that the bricks should have been 'cured' in a pool of water for several days, but none of us had ever done this and had no idea what we were doing.

Also, there was a drought, and the headmistress trucked water into the school from a well on her farm. I eventually realized that the quality of our bricks was so bad, we probably didn't have enough for a latrine. I expressed my dismay to the headmistress, but she told me, "That isn't so important. What's important is that the girls see you working."

We were told that if teachers asked us to teach, we should leave our brickmaking and teach the class. The headmistress thought it would be a good idea for the girls to get used to listening to our American accents.

*cntd.*

A teacher approached me with her lesson after we had been there about a week, and asked me to teach. Her lesson was: ‘How we know Jesus Christ is with us every day in our lives.’

I told the teacher, “I’m sorry. I can’t teach this. Jesus Christ is not with me every day in my life. I’m a Jew.” Looking very surprised, she asked me, “Don’t you believe in Jesus?”

“Well, we don’t doubt he existed, but we believe we’re all God’s children. And we don’t believe in virgin birth,” I replied. Now, the other teachers were listening to our conversation.

“What do you believe?” she then asked. “We don’t really have a concept of Hell,” I said. “We don’t have a concept of Heaven, either,” another volunteer, also Jewish, added. “So, what happens to you when you die?” She asked us. “You’re dead,” we told her, in unison. Rather funny.

She gasped, “So what causes you to be good?” “Your responsibility to your community and integrity,” I responded. My Jewish companion nodded.

We continued to make bricks. The word got out, and people from the community started visiting and asking questions. Not only were we the first white people they had ever met who weren’t missionaries, but we were the first white people they had ever seen do physical labor. They called us unusual visitors.

# the cat whisperer

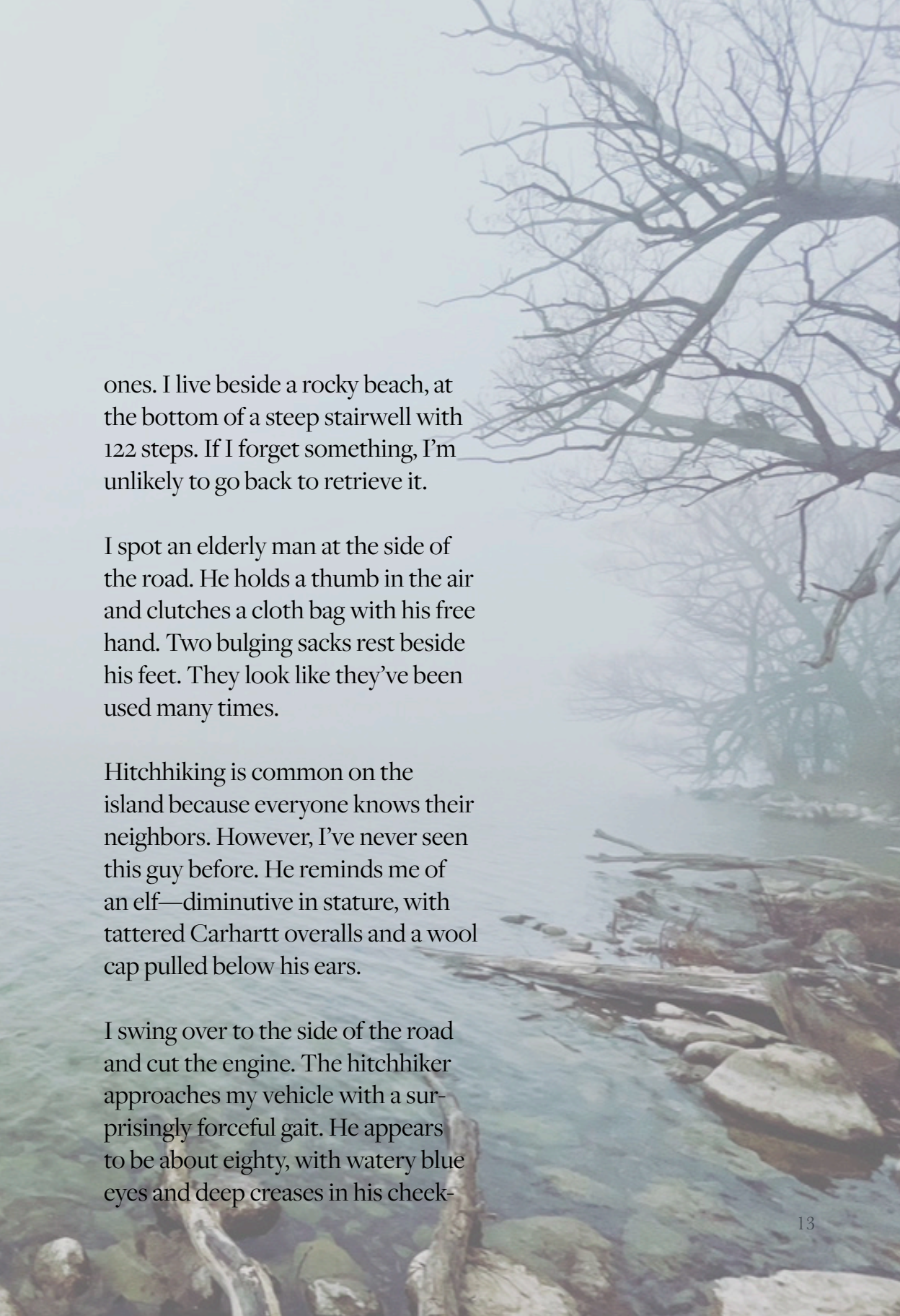
*Leah Mueller*

Vashon Island looks its best in early autumn—fading, yet still dark green, with crumbles of brown around the edges. Evergreens line both sides of the bumpy, curving main road, so dense that they block the clouds at higher elevations. The massive branches exert an invisible pressure that lowers my energy level. I'm often exhausted by mid-afternoon.

Another month remains until the wet season. I can feel precipitation straining at the end of an imaginary leash. The prodigious rain will start in mid-October and continue until early July. I savor the sun's bittersweet warmth, because I know it won't last much longer.

Vashon has a central, commercial hub, where everyone buys what they need to get through the week. Fertilizer bags, slug bait, and shiny, overturned wheelbarrows clutter the supermarket entryway. Neighbors stroll through the aisles, talking animatedly about compost and left-wing politics. An enormous rack offers a selection of wool socks and long underwear. Even hippies need to be practical in the rain.

I drive towards home, after completing my shopping ritual. The usual haul of yogurt, orange juice, bread, fresh seafood, coffee, sparkling water, and a few other essentials. Two half-full paper bags jiggle in the back of my car. I can never remember to bring reusable

The background of the page is a photograph of a misty, overcast landscape. In the foreground, there's a rocky shoreline with several pieces of driftwood. The water is calm and reflects the grey sky. In the background, there are several bare, gnarled trees, their branches reaching out against the fog. The overall mood is quiet and somewhat desolate.

ones. I live beside a rocky beach, at the bottom of a steep stairwell with 122 steps. If I forget something, I'm unlikely to go back to retrieve it.

I spot an elderly man at the side of the road. He holds a thumb in the air and clutches a cloth bag with his free hand. Two bulging sacks rest beside his feet. They look like they've been used many times.

Hitchhiking is common on the island because everyone knows their neighbors. However, I've never seen this guy before. He reminds me of an elf—diminutive in stature, with tattered Carhartt overalls and a wool cap pulled below his ears.

I swing over to the side of the road and cut the engine. The hitchhiker approaches my vehicle with a surprisingly forceful gait. He appears to be about eighty, with watery blue eyes and deep creases in his cheek-

# the cat whisperer

bones. “Thanks for stopping. I’m glad I didn’t need to wait long. It’s getting dark, and I missed the last bus.”

The man hurls his bag into the passenger seat. Then he snatches the sacks from the roadside and tosses them into the back. “Are you going to the south end? That’s where I live.”

My rented house rests at the southernmost tip of the island. Pohl Road flanks the waterfront and offers an unobstructed view of Mt Rainier. It’s almost worth risking my life on that stairwell.

I nod at the hitchhiker, and he settles into the passenger seat. At first, he stares at the highway, as if deep in thought. A couple of miles later, he becomes more animated. “My cats will be happy to see me. I’ve been gone for almost a week.”

“Are you sure they’re okay?” I somehow intuit that his pet situation is under control. Despite his advanced age, the hitchhiker exudes strength and competence. Still, a week is a long time for a brood of hungry cats.

“Sure. They’re used to my absences. I rent a room in Seattle and have another place here on the island. Each time I come home, I bring food for them. They never run out.”

Relieved, I return my attention to the highway. I pass familiar landmarks—the Minglement, site of the original Seattle’s Best Coffee roasting plant, The Country Store, with its hilarious signage offering

*cntd.*

classes in chicken maintenance to transplanted urbanites, the little town of Burton, with its overpriced grocery store and sweeping views of Puget Sound.

I glance sideways at my companion and try to figure out his story. What possible reason could he have for renting a room in Seattle? The guy's much too old to hold any sort of job. Perhaps he just enjoys the change of pace. He might even have a girlfriend in the city. Hopefully he doesn't spend all his time alone.

The man notices my side-eye and smiles. "I taught martial arts for forty years. Retired a few years back. Now it's just me and the cats. How about you?"

I'm not sure how to answer his question. My life seems permanently stalled, like the abandoned cars I see along the I-5 corridor. Despite my bucolic surroundings, I'm often depressed and anxious. My husband Russ makes the long ferry commute every morning from Vashon to his desk job in downtown Seattle. He doesn't get home until 7:30. Meanwhile, I'm glued to my recliner, staring at the gorgeous view, trying to get up the energy to climb those steps.

"My husband and I recently moved back to Washington after living in the Midwest for a few years," I explain. "I'm not sure why. Probably just a midlife thing."

The hitchhiker laughs. "Yeah. I remember that well." Declining to elaborate, he goes back to staring out the window. The trees tower overhead like sentinels. It won't be long until we reach the end of

# the cat whisperer

the island.

A couple of miles later, he points to a spot at the side of the road. “That’s where the bus lets me off.” I glide to the shoulder and turn on my flashers. The hitchhiker hesitates, and then asks, “Could you take me all the way home? These bags are heavy.”

I can feel the gravitational pull of my house, inexorably sucking me towards my living room. The idea of spending a few more minutes in my car is almost more than I can bear. Still, I can’t say no to the poor man. I imagine him trudging down the road with his heavy cargo, while I recline in my comfortable armchair with a slab of carrot cake. I wouldn’t be able to stand myself if I did something so selfish.

“Of course I will. Just let me know where to turn.” My voice sounds exhausted, resigned. I inch back into the highway and accelerate. The sun has almost disappeared behind the grove of trees, and long shadows stretch across the asphalt. I don’t like to descend the steps to my house after sunset, even though the stairwell has sensors that turn on a series of lights. I’m always afraid something bad will happen and the lights will fail to illuminate.

The hitchhiker points at an opening on the left-hand side of the highway. It’s barely visible, surrounded by dense hemlocks and blackberry bushes. “Just a bit further,” he assures me.

The new road is narrow, covered with ruts that are half-full of murky rainwater. It appears to be flat, at least. Many of the island’s



*cntd.*

thoroughfares are steep and terrifying. They lead to shadowy destinations you can't escape unless you're fortunate enough to own a four-wheel drive. The road ends abruptly behind a massive clump of weeds. A shack sits on the right hand side, cobbled together from an odd assortment of weathered boards. Its moss-smearred windows look as though they haven't been cleaned in years. Two bent metal stovepipes protrude from the roof, one on each side. Beside the door, a pile of firewood molders into the damp ground.

The hitchhiker turns towards me. "I can't tell you how grateful I am." He peers through the car window with a hint of anxiety. "I don't know where those damn cats are, though. They must be out foraging."

As if on cue, a gray tabby pokes its nose around the edge of the porch. A second cat appears from behind a bush. The creatures move warily at first, but when they spot their owner, they break into a giddy run. Both cats look muscular and healthy, like they're used to spending a lot of time outside. They've probably become experts at hunting for prey. After all, the feline species has only been domesticated for 10,000 years.

The man grabs his bags and descends from the car. Turning to face me, he extends a grubby hand for me to shake. His grip is firm and confident. I can feel his strength seeping into me like juice from a battery. "I'm Sean O'Toole. It's been a pleasure meeting you. I hope we see each other again."

# the cat whisperer

I am taken aback by the mention of his name. In fourth grade, I was tormented by a bully named Sean O'Toole. He used to beat me up every day, while his cabal of friends stood around, jeering. Sean continued his ritual of abuse until I hit him in the face with a book during math class. He chased me home after school, but his friends were nowhere in sight, and I was able to outrun him. Sean never bothered me again.

The hitchhiker is much too old to be the same person who caused me so much pain. Still, the coincidence feels fortuitous, like I'm closing a wide circle that began decades ago. If I had driven down the highway only a few minutes beforehand, I would've missed Sean entirely. Someone else might have picked him up, a person with no connection to his name. Instead, I had spotted him at the side of the road and pulled over on a whim. What could it possibly mean? I grasp Sean's hand and smile. He takes a couple of strides towards his house. Several more cats emerge from behind the trees and greet him with a chorus of yowls. Sean shakes one of his sacks at the group. His pets go into a frenzy, jumping and spinning in mid-air. Finally, all of them break into a gallop and charge towards the house, stumbling over each other in their haste.

My services are no longer needed. I turn my car around and head down the dirt road, away from the ecstatic reunion. Russ won't be home for an hour, and my steep stairwell is already dark. But Sean has given me a surge of energy, so I know I can make it to the bottom without falling.

**brian michael barbeito**

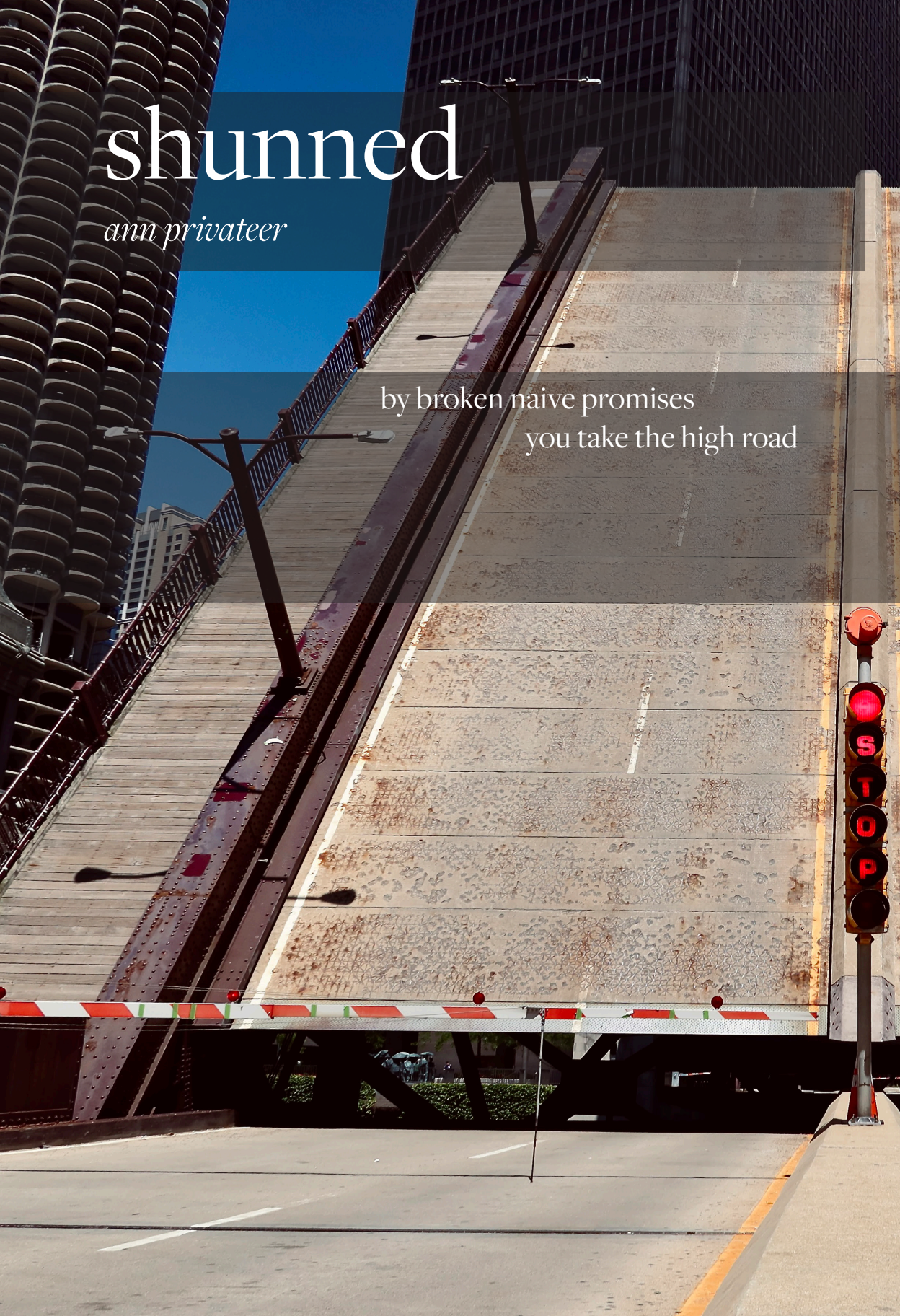
*cntd.*

For the first time in weeks, I look forward to an evening of isolation. The strange encounter has lifted my spirits. I don't even mind the prospect of another rain-drenched winter. If Sean can get through the gloom and the chill with his spirits intact, then I have no reason for complaint. I've finally figured out how to overcome gravity's pull. Just don't think about the descent.

# shunned

*ann privateer*

by broken naive promises  
you take the high road





leave early and I  
punch the hollow  
wooden door

*ami watanabe, be you*

# the curio shop

*eric vanderwall*

And then we came to the curio shop.

It was a squat little building with a deep trench all the way around. A walkway connected the store to the sidewalk. The place had been under construction for years, longer than anyone remembered. Castoff things were at the bottom of the trench. The sign over the doors read “America the Beautiful.” People in clashing color combinations streamed in and out of the store. They were all either young or young-looking as they entered the shop or exited into the bright garish sunlight, their whole lives ahead of them like one long spool of meaningless film images.

We went inside America the Beautiful. Old beer posters hung over the counter. Gibson Girls in faded pastel colors cavorted suggestively with pool cues, gasoline pumps, and automatic weapons. In one poster, four women of differing hair colors and styles rode a bomb toward an outline of Vietnam circa 1972. The text said, “Nuke the ‘Cong.” The women were sweaty, and they held their heads back.

I checked my bag with the woman behind the counter. She was wearing a faded t-shirt advertising a heavy metal band, some of whose members were still alive. She handed me a plastic dog tag on a keyring. On one side was the number ØØ in black text on a pink background. On the other side, a cartoon Richard Nixon face with eyes bugged out smoked a fat marijuana joint.

*cntd.*

I put the tag in my pocket and followed my friend past the counter toward the curios.

We walked over a patchwork of carpet, concrete, and threadbare rugs. The floor looked as if it had been stitched together after the store's assembly to cover the gaping chasm underneath. A musty smell, a scent of the detritus of a dead century, filled our nostrils.

My friend said something about the smell. I didn't know what he said, so I agreed. Agreement was good for uncertain times like these.

We turned a corner, went down a hallway, and navigated a crowded anteroom to enter a large room with tarnished white walls and a ceiling thirty feet high. The flickering fluorescent lights, humming while suspended from flimsy wire, made me forget what the sky looked like. Concrete aisles separated clustered racks of jackets, pants, leather purses; islands of shelves sagged under VHS cassettes, audio tapes, and old bins of decrepit combat boots. Yellow arrows on the concrete aisles directed consumers, but the arrows contradicted one another; people followed arrows, their heads bowed to read the wordless commands of silent yellow symbols, collided with each other wherever two concrete aisles merged. This happened again and again to obedient consumers. It seemed inevitable.

A rap recording, about fifteen years old, came on over the sound system. It described bodies; it described methods of accruing and disbursing money; it described various substances. It had been very popular at the time. My friend bobbed his head and grinned. When it ended, the radio announcer came on: "Thank you for listening to

# the curio shop

Jazz Archive. Tune in next week for more forgotten jazz classics.”

We looked at each other in confusion. Had rap and jazz exchanged labels? If they had, how would we know? Words buoyed by sounds continued to come over the sound system, but I didn't know their meaning. The people drifting along the paths demarcated by yellow arrows seemed not to notice the radio, the fluorescent lights, or the security cameras sweeping back and forth. The footage would make for a very entertaining program. I wondered when we would be able to view it, and on which channel.

Following the directions of the arrows as best we could, we came to an unstable wooden shelf displaying an odd assortment of books. My friend picked up one that said it was the diary of a drug fiend. The cover depicted a man and a woman doing something I didn't want to think about. It seemed unsafe, what they were doing.

I picked up another book and started reading it. The narrator, using ordinary words in a way that made my head feel screwed on backwards, talked about flashing lights, multinational corporations, shopping malls, nuclear war, and eating disorders. That was the first page. Light reflected off the spots of ink, which are called words. Words got inside me, where they started to have worrisome effects. These words, I thought, might be affecting my ability to later operate a vehicle in a safe and legal manner.

A cloudy feeling filled my head, which hummed like the fluorescent lights. I turned to the second page. It had even more words on it than the first.



*cntd.*

My friend looked at the wigs on the adjacent shelf and felt one, then another. Some of the wigs included a beard. None of them seemed to fit his or any other face. I wondered why they were manufactured and how many wigs without faces were in bins and on racks around the world. It seemed unthinkable that market forces would permit such an outcome for all those wigs.

I returned to the book. The narrator described a world like our own, but suffused with the happy glow of advertisements and electrical appliances. Somehow it made me notice the price tags on everything in sight. Everything had a price, could be bought, and then taken out of America the Beautiful. Who was this narrator? What right did he have to talk about our country that way? I put the book down and set some other books on top of it. I didn't want to think about it. All of this thinking was getting really out of hand.

We continued to wander, sometimes disobeying the yellow arrows on the floor. I wondered if a man or a machine was tallying our acts of insubordination against the signs. There might be consequences for people like us, people who didn't follow directions. The paths seemed to have no method, no ultimate destination; they folded in on themselves, a vortex of commands on the floor. The same display rack passed us by again and again, but it may have been another rack. I couldn't tell.

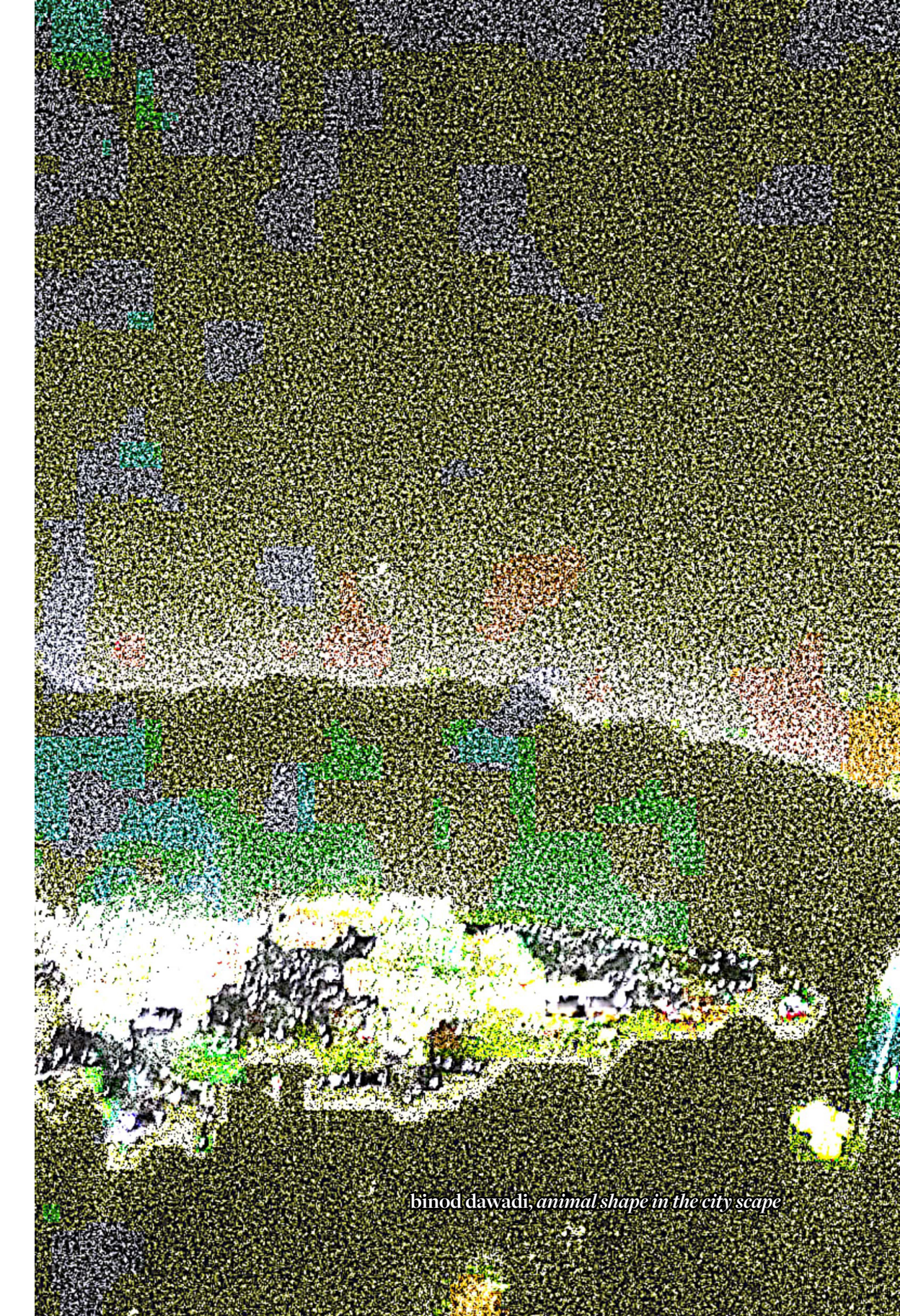
The radio played something else entirely now, something with no announcer. Without a voice naming the style and what the recording meant, how were we supposed to know what to do and think?

# the curio shop

Was it music or something else? I was concerned that the earlier business with the words and the book might have lasting effects on me.

After some time, I realized I no longer wanted to be in the curio shop. The arrows pointed everywhere but the exit. My friend had thoughts in his head, but I couldn't hear them.





binod dawadi. *animal shape in the city scape*



meghane saidenberg, *silver lining on a cloudy day*



*summer haze*

# on guatemala, la tierra de evelyn

*natalia serrano-chavez*

I have always hated my hair. Throughout my childhood, Los Angeles air made it unruly, frizzy, and uncontrollable. My mom said it was my best feature, that my indigenous roots made my hair run lusciously thick and that I should be in love with it. Scenes of me fighting with my hair in the bathroom made her summon a youthful time when her hair resembled mine; she misses tugging at her own. I stopped trying to do hairstyles in the morning, arriving to AP Spanish however my purple comb would leave me.

“I love your hair, Nat. It’s so thick,” Evelyn would comment in fascination. “Can I braid it?”

Evelyn loved braiding my hair identically to hers. She came to school in two braids, a hand-embroidered headband, and her huipil, a shirt made by the hands of her tribe in the mountains of Guatemala. She wore long beaded earrings and light brown flats. Most mornings, she smelled like lavender incense because she lit an altar before the sun could rise. My mom said she dressed and lived like she was from el pueblo; una niña directamente del barrio.

I let her braid my hair every time and she’d shower me in compliments and sing the songs of her land. Where the mountains graze her bare feet and the air whistles a hidden, dulcet melody that she wishes she could transcribe; a tribal language that she’s still trying to

*cntd.*

comprehend. Where she curses the Spaniards for wiping out most of her tribe and traumatizing her elders. Where she asks the Sun and Moon and Earth and Wind for forgiveness. Her hands were delicate and felt like a southern cattail on the lake; a feeling I could revel in forever. Evelyn made me look in the mirror of morals multiple times and every time, I'd question the reflection. She basked in her indigenous tribe along with the ancient leaders on and under Earth. Looking back, I question: What about me? I basked on the surface of my culture.

El Salvador had not been kind to my Mother. It had not been kind to my sisters. Some memories of it bring immense pain; I cannot bear to listen to atrocities from the motherland.

I did not wear traditional clothing or earrings. I did not pray to tribal deities, nor could I name the indigenous tribes near my Mother's village. I did not flaunt El Salvador the way Evelyn did Guatemala, and it never bothered me. My home was predominantly in Los Angeles' Central American community. But here, in Chicago, I find myself struggling to find that community. I find myself questioning my Latinidad in a sea of people who look nothing like me.

I'm starting to doubt my native tongue.

My skin resembles Abuelita's hot chocolate and I am growing disdain for it. I wear my huge silver hoop earrings and feel the weight of a thousand, bitter eyes on my shoulder. I decorate my fingers in gold jewelry when I want to command a room, and take them off when the Virgin Mary ring becomes too apparent because it dictates

# on guatemala

my Latinidad. I change my name - in my Spanish tongue, Natalia - to please those who refuse to say it, and feel disgusted when it comes out their mouth.

“Just call me Natalie or Nat.”

I coat my lips in South Central LA’s glossiest lip gloss but wipe it off when I feel too Latina.

Too brown.

“¿Y que? And what about it?” My mom said, when I told her that I stopped wearing my hoops after a woman stared at them distastefully on my second day in Chicago, at orientation. Clouds of identity loss consumed and consume me.

I wondered what Evelyn would say.

So I told her.

“Girl, wear what you want! I wear my huipiles everyday here and people look at me weird. Who gives a fuck.”

Me.

Sometimes I feel too brown, too Latina, too ghetto or not enough of all of these, when I go back home. Code switching in lecture halls, dining halls, residential halls, therapy, coffee shops, and even in my writing. I bite my tongue when I’m angry, afraid of being taxono-



*cntd.*

mized into the crazy Hispanic woman stereotype, instead giving into complacency. A complacency that drives me insane. I want to peel back my skin when I'm reminded of it - an internal battle that I am consistently raising a white flag to.

I pray to Evelyn's tribal gods and ask for serenity, love, and tenderness and reminisce about my braided hair days, when Evelyn's hands wove a story through my hair. When my hoops didn't alter my presence - I miss their weight. When I adored the sun because my skin glowed underneath it - I miss its warmth. How do I conjure my self-portrait when I'm not in the picture? I'm becoming an ephemera.

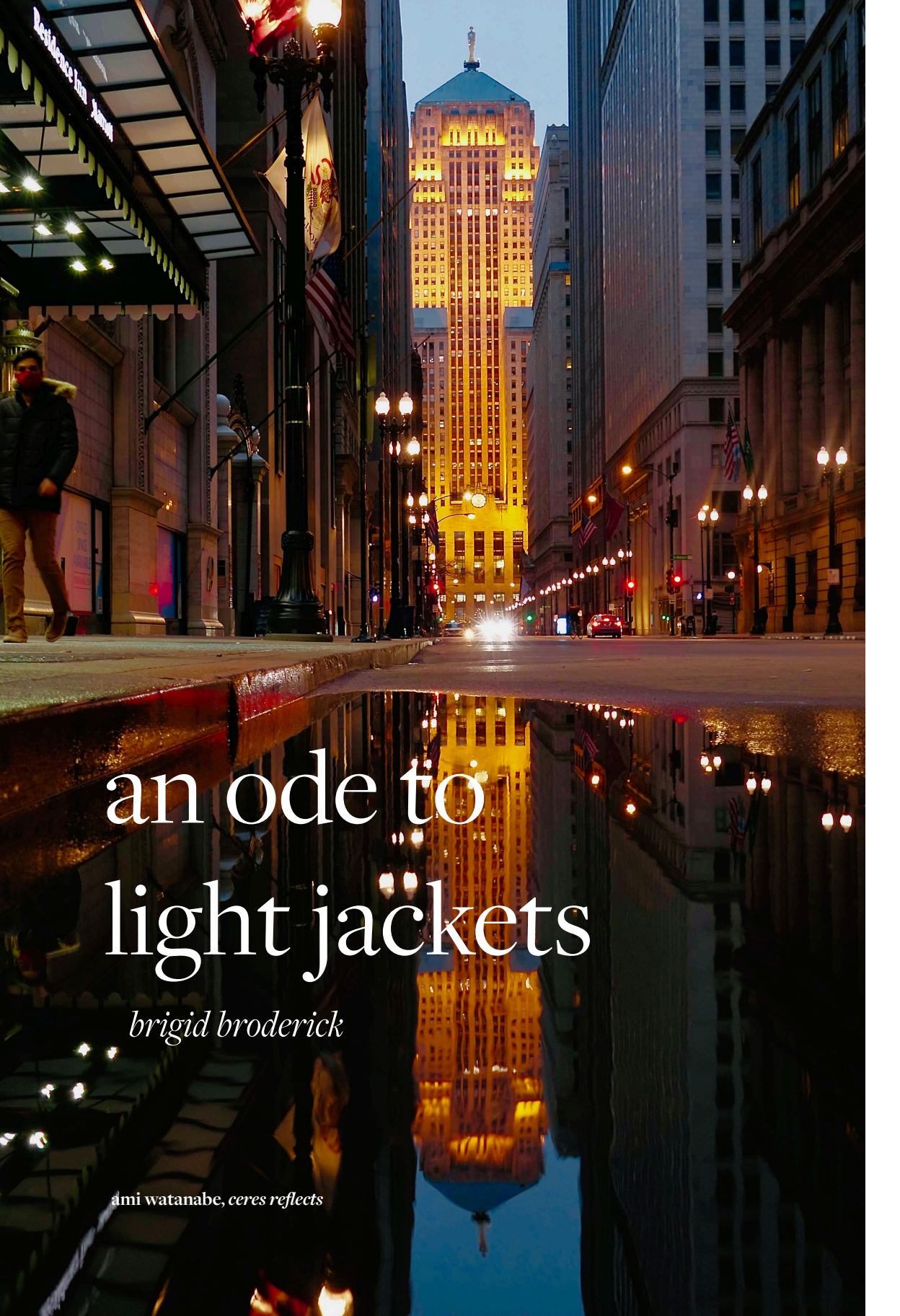
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After two years of Chicago air, my hair has softened and flattened; I find myself missing its past frizziness and volume. I earnestly style it and wear Salvadoran jewelry to compliment the hair my Mother gave me, the hair that my Mamita gave to her, and all the Salvadoran women who came before me. To feel community, I have learned to embrace identity as much as I can; predominantly white institutions be damned.



ami watanabe





# an ode to light jackets

*brigid broderick*

*ami watanabe, ceres reflects*

It's pumpkin spice bitch! In Oreo form a perfect fucked up little treat and I'm holding myself up with my forearms I don't think it's a good idea but people who I see all the time are running the Chicago marathon like it's no big deal how badly it will hurt more than cat teeth in your calf more than a text from notes app draft maybe. When everything is wet judgment is absent and you can't recycle pizza boxes because they have grease on them slippery shiny like my forehead at the end of my shift. I want to touch in a slow motion way because the end of summer is like a death striking in a painful way how do you mourn a lifestyle in a graceful way that's not really me I prefer a scene. Licking the outside of my coffee cup I don't want to waste a single drop scarcity is only real in your head there will be a million more hours even if you forget to bring your water bottle you might find tampons in the glove compartment. Adrienne on the radio let's kiss the sun—I'm going to miss her so hard.

# what to tell my children about this home

*mubarak said*

and today, color is not what an eye sees,  
what the skin feels or what lives longest on our faces,  
feeding the malnourished night.

they raised a boy  
by peeling his flesh with a dream of a bitch  
and called an old man indolent when they saw what  
nature nurtured his farm with.  
still, with all the homelessness,  
boys seek love on the streets,  
dying and rising again with hands kissing the sands.

let me tell you a story of Kushewa  
where breakfasts are eaten with burial shrouds  
and mothers sing not to be heard,  
but to find a living companion for their grief.  
this isn't all; young girls too know how to sing  
for boys: a funeral song, a song with a bitter taste.





ami watanabe



# spanish river

*david hall*

*SETTING: Boca Raton, Florida, during the summer after my senior year of high school. A1A runs along the coastline, on top of a series of barrier islands from Key West to Jacksonville Beach, but the part we care about is only a few minutes away from my house. There is a drawbridge that connects Spanish River Boulevard to A1A, and at the intersection of the two roads is an old wooden pavilion that has been there for as long as I can remember. On car rides with my family, I would see it and wonder why nobody ever used it for free beach access; it seemed nonsensical to me that we would always drive up to a front gate and pay an attendant to let us through, even though the beach had existed there for many millennia before Floridians.*

*It was always my fantasy to, at dusk, walk from my house to the old pavilion and sit on the shore, my bare skin on the cool midnight sand. I would be with my friends, PRIMROSE and ANTONIO, and we would freely set our beach towels on a what-should-be-public sunlounger that private high-rise owners along the beach decided that they would hoard and rent out for profit. In the morning, a rich person would unsuspectingly use the same chair that we used for an exorbitant hourly rate.*

*I am wearing a graphic t-shirt and swim trunks patterned with sea turtles. There is no need for sunscreen or sunglasses because it is late at night. In my hand is a large dandelion-yellow towel and on my back is a drawstring bag with a flashlight and a pack of gum inside.*

*PRIMROSE is wearing a cream sundress over her bathing suit, hoisting a light pink bag over her left shoulder. Even though it's nighttime, she*

*wears a pair of white sunglasses on her forehead to keep her hair out of her face—beachy, sure, but impractical. In her bag is a Polaroid camera and a book of poetry, but no flashlight to light the words she plans to read.*

*ANTONIO is wearing the same thing that I am, except his t-shirt is solid-colored and his trunks are patterned with alligators. He was burdened with the task of carrying our snacks because he did not bring anything of his own. He holds an insulated bag with three water bottles—one for each of us—and a family-sized bag of salt and vinegar chips inside of it. The three of us are walking from my house because I am the only one of us who lives on the east side of Boca Raton.*

ME: We've been talking about doing this for so long—and now we're, like, finally doing it. That's wild. It's been a while since I've been here at night. We turn the corner from my street onto another in my neighborhood.

PRIMROSE: Yeah, I'm excited! It's kind of like we're those high schoolers that you always see in movies or something, going off on their own adventures. She looks down at her feet, almost longingly. We should have done more dicey things like this when we still could have. You guys know that trespassing is always worth the risk, right? *ANTONIO and I nod begrudgingly to feign agreement. We both had a taste for the idea of teenage delinquency, but we found its legal consequences rather unpalatable.*

*But PRIMROSE was right, as she usually was, and neither of us wanted to admit it. ANTONIO was still in his period of lovelorn yearning and could only focus on one part of the high school canon that he missed out on at a time—that summer's worry was love and heartbreak. Why he would actively want to experience heartbreak, I don't know, but it was valid, I guess. As for me, I was too tired to try and fight back. I had accepted that the combination of my soft demeanor and strict boundaries would keep my high school experience from being too unruly, but not yet that my contentment was an unpopular sentiment.*

*During the pandemic, PRIMROSE got a job at Dunkin' Donuts until she stopped getting called in for work. She wasn't fired or anything, they just never put her on the schedule. It was weird, but it gave her more time to come into her own and live her life to the fullest, so she accepted it. ANTONIO stayed sedentary and spent a lot of time at home, except for when his friends called, and in that case he was eager to leave his house. He spent much of time in the company of just a few people, to mixed results—his heart had become a garden with two distinct sides fighting for control, one blossoming with the flowers of friendship and the other sprouting into an ever-growing ivy of silent resentment.*

*We near the intersection. We turn onto Federal and cross the highway, silently. We find ourselves in another, richer neighborhood that is a little closer to the Intracoastal. There is some time before someone speaks again.*

ANTONIO: How long does it take to get there again? He knows where I live, but apparently not in relation to the beach.

ME, *trying to find new words because I was going to break the silence by pointing out the bench on the Intracoastal on the next street over, but now that plan has been ruined:* Um, we just have to keep going down this street, and then we have to turn and cross the bridge on Spanish River. It shouldn't be too far. *That last part was kind of a lie.*

ANTONIO, *unconvinced:* Fine, as long as I can put this bag down sometime soon.

PRIMROSE: I dunno, I really like going this way. She's a bit of an optimist. It's peaceful, right? Plus, we can see all of these nice houses—I especially love the roof on this one. It's really picturesque. *She turns her head to the right and slightly upward to take in the scenery. She then gestures her hand for us to look at a house that has pretty shingles.*

*Many of the buildings in Boca Raton were designed by Addison Mizner, who is best known for his distinct style that blends the stuccoed walls and*

*red-tiled roofs of Spanish colonial architecture with some indescribable 1920s-ness. He became the city's first planner in 1924 and swiftly began work on a gigantic oceanside resort called the Castillo del Rey. Mizner's plans changed when the Ritz-Carlton expressed interest in the resort, demanding exacting changes and redesigns, delaying the start of construction. To buy himself time, Mizner began work on a smaller hotel called the Cloister Inn, which opened in early 1926 under the Ritz-Carlton brand. The original resort was never built.*

*In development, the Cloister proved to be problematic. The Mizner Development Company, which had been set up with a board full of celebrities to increase initial sales, was short on cash. Fearing liability, the lawyers of the board's celebrities recommended that they step down and so they did, the board officially splitting in October of 1925.*

*Nevertheless, the Cloister opened, to an onslaught of even more problems. Mizner informally opened the hotel to friends and investors on Christmas Eve of 1925, hosting an elegant dinner for over five hundred guests—why it was deemed “informal” is beyond me—for which he was forced to order over nine hundred dozen plates, cups, pieces of silverware, and other items. In an effort to cut costs, much of the furniture was made hastily in-house, and the furniture in common areas was sourced from Mizner's own personal collection. By spring, the hotel was making no revenue and investors could not keep making payments. Unpaid contractors filed suits against Mizner, who lost control of the company in July, and there were rumors of embezzlement overshadowing the former board members. The Mizner Development Company would go bankrupt in September of 1926.*

*In that same month, the Great Miami Hurricane ravaged South Florida. Newcomers to the area did not know how to prepare for the disaster; they left their windows unboarded, smashed by the winds and whatever debris it carried. They watched as railroad cars were thrown from their lines and telegraph poles splintered and fell. Waves surged to the height of the protective barrier islands, destroyed a newly-built casino, and razed to the ground an entire planned community (also spearheaded by Mizner) called*

*Villa Rica. Boca Raton, Addison Mizner's "entirely new world resort," returned to how it had been before he arrived—sandy, sparse, and dotted with a few palmetto trees. His vision had been rejected by nature.*

ME: Ooh, now that's a cool roof. I did like those shingles.

ANTONIO, *uninterested*: Well, yeah, but the rest of the house is kind of bleh. *Addison Mizner died in 1933. Most developments in Boca Raton postdate his death, although their architects and planners often chose to emulate his style.* I like this one, though. *He points with two fingers to a house with bougainvilleas growing up its side. Stepping stones lead from the driveway to the porch, slightly obscured by plumbagos and crotons. A bird-of-paradise aptly sits next to a bird bath, which has noticeably taken on algae along its rim.*

PRIMROSE, *equally uninterested in ANTONIO's judgment*: Sure, I can see where you're coming from. That's a beautiful garden. I wonder if they'd mind if I take a flower.

*We near the end of the road, turn onto Spanish River, and begin walking up the side of the drawbridge. I run up ahead so that I can see the view of the Intracoastal at night.*

PRIMROSE: Hey, wait up! *She begins to run after me. I accept her challenge and speed up, my shoes clanging against the metal of the bridge. ANTONIO keeps his own pace.*

ME, *panting*: Okay, okay. *I slow down and pause at the top of the bridge. Wasn't this view worth it? And we're still not even at the beach yet! I peer out over the railing of the bridge. PRIMROSE quickly appears behind me and widens her eyes as she looks. ANTONIO takes a little longer to join us, but he does the same.*

*From where we stand, we can see both sides of the Intracoastal. On one are the luxurious houses of people who thrive on hosting al fresco dinner*

*parties in their backyards, so their inland friends can gawk with polite jealousy at the waterfront view. On the other is the inland shoreline of a public park, where mangrove trees and limestone boulders converge, white sugar sand turning goopy and brown where it meets the water.*

*Over the summer it's sea turtle season, so the rich and not-so-rich alike must turn off their lights and shut their blinds at sunset. Three species of sea turtles nest on Boca Raton beaches—greens and leatherbacks, which are endangered, and loggerheads, which are not—and they all come at night. Female turtles instinctually seek out dark places to lay their eggs, and bright, artificial lights discourage them from doing so. Only about one turtle survives until adulthood for every thousand that hatch, so it is of utmost importance that both they and their nesting grounds are kept safe. Sea turtle preservation is the only thing all Floridians agree on.*

*The view from the drawbridge is breathtaking. It normally is—on nights where the lights are on, they reflect on the surface of the water and the natural ripples turn them into stunning light shows—but tonight is different. The stars own the sky and fill it with constellations; Cygnus, Pegasus, Aquarius, all draped over the faint puddle of the Milky Way. Instead of artificial light, starlight becomes reflected in the water and illuminates the silhouettes of lavish houses on one side and the sprawling figures of mangroves on the other.*

*We all seem to pause and think about what our next words are going to be. We hold this silence, our shared stasis in this moment, and keep moving forward.*





brian michael barbeito

# *contributor bios*

**Brigid Broderick** is a writer and comedian from Chicago. She grew up on the Northwest Side and now lives in Wicker Park.

**Brian Michael Barbeito** is a Canadian poet and photographer. His recent work can be found in *The Notre Dame Review*.

**CM Clemente** is a visual artist living and working in Chicago. At night, he watches professional wrestling in bed. It helps him sleep.

**Binod Dawadi**, author of *The Power of Words*, holds a master's degree in English. He has worked on more than 1,000 anthologies published in various renowned magazines.

**David Hall** is a first-year student at the University of Chicago. He is interested in storytelling and toying with mediality in writing. He grew up in South Florida, which has had a substantial impact on the themes and perspectives he explores. He also has a cat, who lives back home.

**Sarah Kim** is a fourth-year undergraduate at the University of Chicago majoring in Biological Sciences originally from Oak Brook, Illinois. Her work has been recognized by Skidmore College and Millikin University, and she has performed at various cultural institutions across Chicago such as Harold Washington Library and the Richard H. Driehaus Museum. She is the 2020 recipient of the Offen Poetry Prize.



**Robyn Michaels** is a retired dog groomer who has been publishing non-fiction, mostly about pet industry issues, for decades, but has recently started writing fiction too. She has lived in Rogers Park for over 30 years and has two whippets. She is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, and served as an urban planner in Blantyre, Malawi in 1992.

**Leah Mueller** lives in Bisbee, Arizona. She is the author of ten prose and poetry books. Her new book, *The Destruction of Angels* (Anxiety Press) was published in October 2022. Leah's work appears in *Rattle*, *NonBinary Review*, *Citron Review*, *The Spectacle*, *Miracle Monocle*, *New Flash Fiction Review*, *Atticus Review*, *Your Impossible Voice*, etc. She is a 2023 nominee for both Pushcart and Best of the Net. Her flash piece, "Land of Eternal Thirst" appears in the 2022 edition of *Best Small Fictions*. Website: [www.leahmueller.org](http://www.leahmueller.org).

**Ami Watanabe** is a poet, blogger, and visual artist from Chicago. Her poems and articles have appeared in the *Spindrift*, *Scribblearean*, *The Pond*, *The Calumet Press*, and the *Southeast Observer*. Her photography has appeared in the *Chicago Star* and *Performance Response Journal*. Check out her blog at [www.diamondlifeadventures.com](http://www.diamondlifeadventures.com)

**Ann Privateer** is a poet, artist, and photographer who grew up in Cleveland.

**Mubarak Said** is a Nigerian poet and essayist. He is a curious and enthusiastic student of the sciences and arts.

**Meghane Saidenberg** is a second-year undergraduate at the University of Chicago studying Data Science. She thoroughly enjoys exploring the opportunities fractal photography presents to capture the feeling of a moment and is excited to continue to learn and create. She is also passionate about combining her technical and analytical academic background with her other creative endeavors, which include writing, fashion design, music-making and calligraphy.

**Natalia Serrano-Chavez** is a second-year undergraduate at the University of Chicago studying Psychology and Creative Writing. She likes to integrate the Spanish language into her writing as an ode to her Salvadorean roots. Most of her writing depicts a personal narrative based on different lived experiences in cities, food, and the people around her.

**Eric Vanderwall** is a writer, editor, and musician. His work has appeared in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, the *Chicago Review of Books*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Open Letters Review*, and elsewhere. Visit [www.ericvanderwall.com](http://www.ericvanderwall.com) to learn more about his music.



