

This week, the *Nass* dives into the uncanny valley and drags some of you down with us.

The Nassau Weekly



god, i love my happy family

September 25, 2025

In Print since 1979 | Online at nassauweekly.com

Volume 49, Number 12



GOD I LOVE MY HAPPY FAMILY

4

The House Behind Gladewood Street

By Annie Wang
Art by Eden Reinfurt

6

Nass Recommends: *Masquerade*

By Charlie Milberg
Art by Phoebe Pinder

7

A Mother's Mission of Unconditional Love

By Vaishnavi Murthy
Art by Alise Chung

10

The Scorpion

By Mary Grace Walker
Art by Raven Reid

12

An Athiest Guide to Grief

By Camila Villavizar Gomez
Art by Gina Cocuzzi

14

Nass Recommends: *Officeparks*

By Sofia Shapovalova
Art by Noam Hessler

16

"When I come down off this mountain": concealment in popular queer film

By Roya Reese
Art by Ollie Braden

18

I Only Want to Go Camping With People Who Hate Camping

By Mia Mann-Shafir
Art by Benjamin Martin

19

Do Men Even Use The Bathroom?

By Naomi Gage
Art by Nina Obidairo-Danielsen

20

Crossword

By Simon Marotte

Trustees

Alexander Wolff 1979
Katie Duggan 2019
Leif Haase 1987
Marc Fisher 1980
Robert Faggen 1982
Sharon Lowe 1985

Dear reader,

There is a pressing discomfort in the knowledge that no image is necessarily real. Generative AI first dissolved trust in mundane photos, then spread to images of personal and collective value. We reflect on this with some hesitation—the discourse surrounding AI has become cliché, boring, and uninspired. Technology made it so that we can no longer look at a photo of two public figures and be certain they met. But how soon will it be until we will see photos of ourselves and are unable to confirm whether they are real?

Still, there is value to unsettling imagery. Photos have been altered since the Daguerreotype, but we've always treated them as reflections of the real (or real enough). There are genuine ecological and ethical critiques to make against AI images, but we should recognize their value: they force the viewer to reflect on the symbols they usually casually accept.

This week, as our eyes betray us, the *Nass* returns to lived experiences, all sappy and glad—writers reflect on their own changing families, the desire to be around haters, queer cowboys, and more. They take apart images with preestablished meanings. And in our discomfort, they make something new.

xoxo,

Frankie Solinsky Duryea and Alex Norbrook, co-EICs

Masthead

Editors-in-Chief
Alex Norbrook
Frankie Solinsky Duryea

Publisher
Ellie Diamond

Managing Editors
Jonathan Dolce
Sasha Rotko

Design Editor
Sophia Macklin

Art Director
Chas Brown

Head Copy Editors
Charlie Milberg
Danny Flaherty

Senior Editors
Mia Mann-Shafir
Aiko Offner

Cecile McWilliams
Ivy Chen

Junior Editors
Claire Beeli
Nell Marcus
Livia Shneider
Narges Anzali
Annie Wang
Laila Hartman Sigall
Gavin Stroud

Senior Second Look Editor
Sofia Cipriano

Junior Second Look Editor
Aina Marzia

Business Managers
Nora Choi
Vivian Clayton

Communications Manager
Naomi Segel

Social Chair
Wendy Wang

Historian
Oliver Berke

Web Editors
Leah Shefferman
Sarah Park

Audiovisual Editors
Mannix Beale-O'Brien
Juna Brothers

Staff Creator Director
Harper Vance

Events Editor
Amy Başkurt

This Week:

By Amy Başkurt

September's coming to an end—and fall is soon to be upon us! This week's campus lineup runs from shiny tin stars to literal horse-men of the apocalypse.

Join Veronica Olivares-Weber's **Mexican Embossed Metal Workshop**, where you'll experiment with hojalata—a folk art technique that transforms flat tin into shimmering, textured designs. The event will take place in Louis A. Simpson's Room B60. Lunch is included. (Sept. 25, 12-1:30 p.m.).

Contemplating the end of days seems an appropriate part of the spooky season—Orion Lopez-Ramirez '26

presents *How to Live at the End of the World*. Picture a late-night talk show, except the guests are none other than the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse — and, it's a play! What follows is a mix of dark humor and philosophical questions. Stick around after opening night for a conversation with Lopez-Ramirez, playwright Virginia Grise, and director Elena Araoz. The event is in Drapkin Studio at the LCA. (Sept. 26-27, 7 p.m. or Sept. 28, 2 p.m.).

If you'd rather discuss beginnings than endings, this next event is for you! Join leading Nigerian authors, in McCosh Hall 50, at **The Canon 65 Years**

Later: Nigerian Literature and the Postcolonial Perspective. As Nigeria marks 65 years of independence, writers Lola Shoneyin, Helon Habila, and Nnedi Okorafor dig into the legacy of the nation's literary canon. (Oct. 1, 6-7:30 p.m.).

With Crafternoon at the Commons's **creating Blackout Poetry**, take some time to reflect. What a perfect way to balance the week's bigger questions about survival, art, and identity. This event is at the Commons Library Curiosity Studio. (Sept. 26, 12:15 p.m.).

Whether you're em-

bossing stars, laughing through the end times, reimagining a literary canon, or letting sound waves crash over you, there's no shortage of ways to spend the next couple weeks. Be sure to engage *Nassau*-fully, Princeton!

Email Amy Başkurt at ab7955@princeton.edu with your event!

For advertisements, contact Ellie Diamond at ed7627@princeton.edu

Verbatims:

Overheard at Labyrinth
55-year-old man: "I think Miranda July is the greatest writer of our generation."

Overheard outside Whitman
Jewish girlfriend: "Like, what is your deal, big G? God's children don't really have a great track record. Besides Jesus, but he's like the Sean Lennon to Lucifer's Julian."
Protestant-raised Princetonian: "We are all Julian Lennon in the eyes of God..."

Overheard in SPI298 lecture
Professor with a pixie cut: "So what does GDP stand for?"
Backwards-hat-wearing econ major: "Can I phone a friend?"

Overheard in the aftermath of Charlie Kirk's no-good, very-bad day
Middle-aged Japanese Princeton parent: "The shooter's dad turned him in? You know, I would hve just found you some dude like Jesse had in El Camino. That is some white people stuff to turn your own kid in."

Overheard before first-year course selection
Christian, balking at the idea of an 8:30a.m. lecture: "Literally the only thing I would wake up for at 7:30a.m. is Second Coming of Christ."

Overheard in C-Floor Firestone
Student with an undiscovered Oedipus complex: "ChatGPT is like a god and a mother, and my lover."

Overheard on Nassau Street
First-year: "Sam was watching an Albanian version of *Jersey Shore*, like with Albanian people."

Overheard in the Terrace Tap Room
Guy (talking about the Performative Male Contest): "I just don't see why women find that kind of man attractive."
Straight girl with heteronormative tendencies: "Well, makes sense, because if *you* found that attractive, you'd be gay."
Guy: "I AM GAY."

Submit to Verbatims
Email thenassauweekly@gmail.com

The *Nassau Weekly* is Princeton University's weekly news magazine and features news, op-eds, reviews, fiction, poetry and art submitted by students. There is no formal membership of the *Nassau Weekly* and all are encouraged to attend meetings and submit writing and art. To submit, email your work to thenassauweekly@gmail.com by 10 p.m. on Thursday. Include your name, netid, word count, and title. We hope to see you soon!

Read us: nassauweekly.com

Contact thenassauweekly@gmail.com
us: Instagram: @nassauweekly
Twitter: @nassau_weekly

Join us: We meet on Mondays and Thursdays at 5 p.m. in Bloomberg 044!

About us:

The House Behind

"I thought about how I used to sleep on Gladewood Street with the passing trains at night. It reminded me of the boy who lived even closer to the tracks than I did, whose name I couldn't remember."

BY ANNIE WANG

Our neighborhood had several streets, and each sounded like the names of trees. Some streets were named Thistlewood Drive and Woodard Road and Glenn Oak Lane. I lived on Gladewood Street, and none of these were names of real wood.

My friend lived in a different neighborhood from me, which had a neighborhood security guard and a gate. Dad said the houses there were too big for a family like ours. Another friend lived in a neighborhood more like mine, where anyone could drive in and out but only the people that lived there actually did. The other friend had a twin sister, two cats, and two dogs. Things in her house came in pairs, but their house was about the same size as mine. The houses in their neighborhood all looked identical: blue and grey color schemes, stout frames, and two stories tall.

If you drove

down one street, it would be like every other.

The houses in my neighborhood looked different. Some houses had white vinyl siding, others had red brick. One house had a blue door, and another was green. There was a steep hill that led down to Gladewood Street, and on the way down the hill, one of the houses on the hill had a tree with crab apples. The apples were the size of my thumb and green, with flexible stems like ones attached to cherries.

Gladewood Street was at the edge of my neighborhood, so we lived closest to the tracks. The trains that ran on these tracks carried cargo, not people. During the day, the horn blared, and wheels squeaked and clacked against metal rails. At night, the trains were just as loud, but I always slept through noise.

A long, wooden fence separated Gladewood—and most of the

neighborhood—from the train tracks. But behind the fence by the tracks, there was a house so small that it looked like a tool shed. A boy around my age lived there, and from the deck in my backyard, I often saw him playing with his dog. The boy and dog were both skinny and had short brown hair. Perched from the deck, I could see him swinging a tree branch from his hand. His dog would run after it, and the boy would chase after his dog.

In the first week of June, families in the neighborhood went on vacation, and Gladewood Street was empty. In the summer, it was hot, and I always wore these flip-flops studded with silver squares. From the inside of my house, I listened to the trains as they passed. When the trains were gone, I listened to the low humming that came from the air ducts and could hear the boy yelling at his dog from outside. Bored and alone with the other neighborhood kids gone, I decided to venture behind the fence to actually meet the boy and his dog in the first week of June.

When I went behind the fence, the boy was quiet; he wore a blue T-shirt rimmed with sweat along the neckline. His dog jumped on me and the legs pawed at my shoulders. The boy snapped at the dog to get down. He was shorter than I thought. But still, his chin lined up with my forehead. Though the boy didn't say much to me, I was more entertained by his quietness than I was with the emptiness on Gladewood Street during the first week of June.

A few days later, the second time I went behind the fence, the boy showed me his backyard, which didn't have a deck or fence like mine. We were right by the train tracks, which felt strange, because adults always lectured us to stay away from the dangerous train tracks. There were no other neighbors, and the grass in the lawn was long. There was, however, a tire swing tied to a tree.

We took turns trying to guess each



Gladewood Street

other's age. He said he was going into third grade. I asked him if it was hard and who was his teacher. I asked if he liked the fourth graders, since they had recess and lunch times together. The boy's face altered, and he retracted his first claim. He was actually going into second grade, like me. Not understanding why he had lied, I knew he still wasn't telling the whole truth because I had never seen him at school before, let alone in my grade. He didn't say much more after that, so neither did I.

One day later in the week, the sun stood directly above us. The dog lay in the tire swing tree's shade, and I sat beside it in the grass. The boy said he wanted orange juice and asked if I wanted anything. I would take the same. We went inside the house as the dog slowly stood up to follow. He offered me the juice in a glass jar. It was my first time inside his house, and my first time drinking out of a jar instead of a cup. The inside was bigger than I imagined, but the house was still much smaller than those on Gladewood. We sat at a small, circular table in the kitchen that felt more like a nightstand than a place for a family to eat meals together. From there, I could see a staircase but never saw what the second floor was like.

The glass of orange juice was cool against my palms, and the orange juice tasted sweet. The dog drank water from a metal bowl as the boy and I sipped on juice. Aside from the dog's panting, the house was silent. That was the third time I went behind the fence in the first week of June.

When I got home that evening, Mom said she saw me go behind the fence from our backyard. She scolded me and told me *it's not safe to be near the tracks*. When I argued that there was a boy who lived by the tracks, she sternly said she didn't want me going near the boy either.

When everyone returned during the second week of June, I went back to playing with the kids that lived along Gladewood Street. We always stayed

where our parents could see us from the front yard. During the day, my hands felt soft from chalk dust while my knees were red from the driveway pavement I drew on with the other neighborhood kids. The girls liked to play hopscotch in the road and draw on driveways when the guys wouldn't let us run races up and down the street with them. When the trains passed through, we covered our ears with our hands, looking at each other and laughing. We played outside until the sun disappeared.

I didn't go behind the fence again, and the boy spent less time in his front yard. I figured he stayed indoors more as the summer heat grew. It wasn't until July when a silver truck showed up in his front yard—the first time I saw a car there. All the houses on Gladewood had a driveway leading up to a garage, but the boy's house didn't have a garage, and it only had a dirt road leading to it. The truck stayed for about a week and then disappeared.

On Gladewood Street, we spent our last week of summer doing the same things. During the school year, we would have more time indoors doing homework at our dining tables with only weekends to play. Not long after the truck disappeared from the boy's house that summer, I heard our neighbor tell Mom the *crack shack* was finally gone while she was checking the mail. A few days later, on the first day of second grade, my friends pointed out that my face had freckles. I looked around but never saw the boy at school.

I thought about him very little over the years. When I was older and experienced my first summer away from home, I lived with a roommate in an apartment that was smaller but more expensive than my childhood home. We were working different jobs in the same city, one in a different time zone from Gladewood Street. Sometimes my roommate would come back so late at night that it was early morning. She would slowly enter the unit, trying to move quietly and not wake me. With one step on the creaking

floorboards and the soft click from the closing door, my eyes would open to the dark room. I had become a light sleeper and missed how easily I used to rest on Gladewood Street, even with trains passing by at night.

Thinking about the loud trains reminded me of the boy who lived even closer to the tracks than I did. I couldn't remember the boy's name, but I turned over the words *crack shack* in my mind. I was surprised that an adult said that in front of me then, and even now, I can't tell if it's the truth. I tried to recall if the dirt road leading up to his house connected to roads that led to my neighborhood streets. I thought about how loud the trains must have been from the boy's house and his room upstairs that I never saw. I wondered if he could drown out the trains as he slept in his empty house, and if he ever found himself in a home quieter than the one behind Gladewood Street.

Nass Recommends: *Masquerade*



BY CHARLIE MILBERG

6:50 p.m. Thursday night. July 31. The sun slowly emerges after a day of sultry rainfall.

Sixty or so people, all draped in formal and cocktail attire—tuxedos, white tie and tails, ball gowns—all matching a strict dress code of black, white, or silver only. With silk and lace masks covering their bedazzled eyes, they line up against the plush velvet ropes lining the crowded, cigarette-stained sidewalk. Black and white newspapers obscure the glass walls of the building behind.

Photographers flash their cameras, as groups of people smile behind their made-up faces and forgotten identities.

“What is this?” ask puzzled onlookers, sporting t-shirts and shorts, as they walk past the line, the ropes juxtaposing the two groups. Crowds form and subside, the flow of traffic pulling onlookers and tourists away from the happenings and onto 7th Avenue.

As the photographers’ flashes diminish, figures in black appear, checking IDs, glancing at covertly placed tablets, timely tapping the screens. Navy blue stamps with an imprint of a mask are placed atop the trembling left hands of guests, and carmine stickers with cursive text are placed over phone cameras. Sneakers, oddly contrasting the formal-wear above, clap the ground as the line stumbles forward.

Two front doors, padlocked, stand parallel behind the line of people making their way to another door—the door—on the side to the right, covered in crimson and white skeletal-inspired graffiti. In front stands a man of six feet and four inches, gently smiling as the line of people inches closer.

“What is tonight’s password?” he asks each guest as they approach.

Some guests proudly exclaim the phrases sent to them 24 hours prior in a discreet, cryptic email, while others struggle to remember the instructions delivered to them. Those who have forgotten the password stand to the side, as more prepared guests make their way

inside. After a few moments of revisiting their inbox, guests recall the entry words and find their way indoors.

The door shuts.

Another group of guests comes to the ropes. The sounds of the iPad, the stamps, the stickers, the clatter of shoes, the brief moments of fear, the recital of passwords. The door opening. The door shutting.

Four more times the cycle repeats.

8:15 p.m. The sun has set. All guests have entered the building. The door is shut for good—until the first of the guests exits.

Set at 218 West 57th Street in Midtown Manhattan, between Broadway and 7th Avenue, in the four-story gothic building built in 1897 and formerly home to Lee’s Art Shop, *Masquerade* began previews to adoring fans, “Phans,” with plans on officially opening at the end of September.

Masquerade is the off-Broadway immersive theatrical revival of *The Phantom of the Opera*, formerly the longest-running musical in the history of Broadway, running for 35 years, from 1988 to 2023. *Masquerade*, re-inspired by director Diane Paulus, the artistic director of the American Repertory Theater at Harvard University, combines the story, music, and lyrics of *The Phantom of the Opera* with the immersive environment of *Sleep No More*. The latter, an immersive theater production retelling Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* at the McKittrick Hotel in Chelsea, New York, ran for 13 years and nine months, opening on April 13, 2011, and closing on January 5, 2025.

Masquerade has redesigned the four-story building on 57th Street to become Paris’s Palais Garnier, or “Opera Populaire,” with the old art shop transformed into an opera house. Having spent weeks working on the production, watching the transformation from inside, I still catch myself stunned by the detail. Guests are prohibited from removing the stickers from their phone cameras and taking photos inside the building. There are no public

photos available of what the interior of the building looks like or what the experience entails.

9:15 p.m. The first set of audience members has just finished their experience.

The sounds of sneakers clapping the ground near.

As the people emerge, the sight of black clumps of faded mascara cascading down the cheeks of faces becomes visible. The wail of sniffles resonating; tears forming and falling.

Eyes scatter around, dropped jaws and incredulous glances fill the space.

“What the hell did I just watch?” a man of about 40 asks himself, his furrowed head shaking in disbelief.

The question reverberates in the evaporating mist, the final remains of a stormy day.

Sighs erupt, charged with a tenacity ready to revolutionize New York.

“Undoubtedly, the best theatrical experience of my life,” cries a blonde-haired guest to her husband, gripping his waist so tightly, the seams of his jacket nearly rend.

The sunken cheeks of hers turn as pale as the porcelain hue of the guest’s mask, now clutched in her free, quavering hand.

“Theater is ruined for me. I can’t go back to watching anything else.”

masqueradenyc.com

Through November 30 only

Your obedient servant,

O.G.

A Mother's Mission

Of Unconditional Love

She lived on the beach off the west coast of Oahu for almost seven years. After a rough childhood and broken home, Kanani made it her life's purpose to treat the world as her family. And she uses her cultural values to guide the way.

BY VAISHNAVI MURTHY

IF YOU WALK INTO THE office of the Hawai'i Civil Rights Commission at 3:30 a.m. you can find Kanani typing away in her cubicle, hard at work before the sun has even risen. She's likely donning a grey or dark purple sweater, braving the blasting AC. Kanani exudes gentleness and maternal energy; she wears a calm smile that lifts playfully at the corners. The crinkled skin around her eyes sits under thick glasses frames. I still remember the first time she gave me a hug; it was the first day of my internship, and my hand reflexively shot out each time I met a new staff member, offering the customary formal handshake. Before I could reach for Kanani's hand, however, she gently pushed it away, wrapping her arms around me instead. "In Hawai'i, we hug," she said, looking at me earnestly. There is something about her that deeply legitimizes the unquestioned reverence for elders I was once taught but seem to have dismissed as I grew up. She felt familial; and as I learned more about her story, this feeling only made more sense.

The *hānai* system—the philosophy of chosen family in Hawaiian tradition—is central to Kanani's ethos. In English, *hānai* loosely translates to "informal adoption," but the term fails to capture the intention and history of the system. Its use as a noun and verb encapsulates the versatility of *hānai* to different situations that may require someone to take in someone else's child. "There was no such thing as homelessness back then because whenever someone needed help, there was always a Hawaiian family that would come and *hānai*."

For centuries in Hawai'i, grandparents, uncles, aunts, friends or even strangers would take children into their care. It was not uncommon for

Hawaiian children to have multiple mothers and fathers. The system is based on the belief that a child can be raised with intention by non-blood relatives, and that these non-blood relatives will provide care and love even without the oversight of a legal process. *Hānai* was not viewed as giving one's child away. The lack of legal documentation of the relationship between a *hānai* child and their family, though, leads to complications in legal areas such as housing policy. The system is starting to gain some legitimacy at the state level; the Hawai'i Administrative Rules, 12-46-302, defines familial status as including *hānai* relationships. Kanani has five *hānai* children. Kanani explains that there are two ways to take in a *hānai*. One can either sever the relationship with the birth family and simply rely on one's relationship with the *hānai*, or one can maintain relationships with their birth family while living with their *hānai* family. The second situation would likely occur in cases of extended family acting as *hānai*.

MY FIRST LONG conversation with Kanani stands out. I can't remember how it began, but I remember Kanani's eyes glazed over slightly as she narrated a distant memory: her father packing up their belongings in a chenille spread, her childhood cat sitting next to her dolls and other things of innocence that would be left behind, a worn-down car and four bewildered children driving off into the night. She was five years old when her mother left, shortly after Pearl Harbor was bombed.

When she narrated this part of her story, Kanani didn't dwell on the pain. "My mother left us," she said matter-of-factly. She focused on her father. "He just tried to think of how he was going to save his family." Due to Martial

law post-Pearl Harbor, Kanani's father had to be vigilant of the increased surveillance amongst law enforcement who had their eyes peeled for opportunities to institutionalize Native Hawaiians. Children with single fathers, especially of minority backgrounds, were targets for foster care.

So they left everything behind, escaping to the west side of the island to Waianae and Makaha along the coast. This area is known for two things: beautiful beaches and high poverty rates. They lived on the beach until Kanani was in the seventh grade. She picked up maternal duties quickly, caring for her 9-month-old baby sister and her 2-year-old little brother, washing diapers in the ocean. She learned how to cook rice in the sand. "I watched my dad, and I watched how he cared for us, and I tried to copy him, because I wanted to help," she says. Her father would build a small fire in a deep sand pit during the nights, cover it with sand and place the pallets over it so his children could sleep warm through the night. This was survival. Kanani chuckles as she leans forward to say, "I tell my children, you know, if it ever comes to survival, you're all gonna come home, okay? Because you don't know how to survive like I do."

Kanani kept a low profile, doing her best to maintain it even as she began school. She attended Kamehameha School for Girls. "It was like going to another planet, okay?" she says. "People judge you." I think it had only been two days since I arrived in Hawai'i when I first heard someone say "Kamehameha high school." The first Kamehameha school opened in 1887, with the purpose of educating Native Hawaiian children, so that they might reach socioeconomic equality with other peoples over generations. Kanani and her sister were accepted into Kamehameha along with children from a variety of economic



classes. The dominating influence was still largely Christian. Kanani recalls all the Kamehameha school faculty were white through the 1950s. Hawaiian history was never taught—only American history was in the curriculum. Olelo Hawai'i, the native language, was neither taught nor spoken.

After attending her 65th high school reunion, Kanani excitedly told me someone had remembered her as the girl who sewed her graduation dress. Sewing was just one of the ways Kanani earned money for personal items. Along with cleaning the teacher's cottage and ironing clothes for five cents each, Kanani worked multiple jobs—at the school library, office, book bindery shop—for approximately 300 hours a year—to pay for her tuition.

My favorite stories were the ones where Kanani would bring up her husband. After several stories it is almost impossible to miss the subtle upturn at the corners of her mouth when she speaks about him. Kanani married a part Hawaiian man who served in the U.S. Air Force and then the U.S. Army Reserve. They were married for 52 years.

Her husband was a sheet metal worker and the love of her life. She teared up slightly when she talked about him, but the look on her face reveals that it is abundant joy, not sorrow, that has spilled from her eyes.

Shortly after the birth of Kanani's first child, one of her classmates approached her saying she was pregnant. The classmate came from what was considered a good family, well off financially and of higher social status. Heavy Christian morality meant having an illegitimate child, one out of wedlock, was unthinkable. To Kanani, someone who picks up family wherever she goes, this woman was like her sister, her chosen family. Now, so was the unborn baby. The child became her first *hānai* before it was even born. At 18 years old, she took her husband to the hospital with their three-month old baby wrapped in a blanket. At Kapiolani hospital they stood outside the window looking at all the recently born babies. "Isn't he cute?" Kanani gushed, pointing to her friend's baby, her *hānai*, her child. She put the baby boy in her husband's arms, cradling the head with extra care.

"See when you have love, you trust one another."

Growing up in a missionary-dominated Hawai'i, Kanani's father had been forbidden from speaking his native language. After the last Hawaiian monarch, Queen Lili'uokalani, was overthrown in 1893, a provisional government of American businessmen passed a law in 1896 banning the teaching of the Hawaiian language from public and private schools. From then on, English was the sole medium of instruction. Kanani herself could only learn Olelo in her congregational church when the sermons were done in both Olelo and English. She shares a lesson that many colonized peoples and immigrants learn painfully in one way or another: "we were taught that you have to learn their way and only speak English in order to get ahead, you have to be like them." But *hānai* was an element of Hawaiian culture that constitutes a worldview of what it means to be a family. It could not be taken away.

When the whole world is your family, to take someone in is not a chore. When she was approached by a struggling family asking her to take one of their three

children in, she responded, “I can’t separate a family. And so that’s my choice.” She took in all three children. “In Hawai’i, you know, *hānai* means that I choose you. You don’t choose me. And so basically, it’s a way of always living harmoniously and helping others. In the meantime, you know if they wanted them back, I would have graciously given them back, but they were struggling. And so, it wasn’t temporary, it was real and it was forever.”

Kanani’s philosophy of family applies to her work too. Before becoming the Administrative Assistant of the Hawai’i Civil Rights Commission, she had the most impressive list of jobs I’ve heard of. Ranging from positions at Honolulu Iron Works and State Tile Manufacturing, to Executive Director of the Hospital Association of Hawai’i, I could only imagine what her resume looked like.

Kanani’s philosophy of care extends to engagement in the civic sphere as well. She served on various Hawaiian groups including the Waianae Hawaiian Civic Club. As vice chair of Papa Ola Lōkahi, she supported the organization that was the catalyst for the development of a Native Hawaiian Health Care System that can be sustained no matter the form of government. And she’s done all this without a college degree, because when the time came, she sacrificed her college scholarship to take care of her father after his heart attack.

She loves to tell the story of how she was appointed as the Administrator of the Molokai General Hospital: “One day, my boss comes and says, Kanani, don’t come to work tomorrow. And I’m looking at him, I said are you firing me? And he says, no, you’re going to run the hospital. And I looked at him, I said, “I don’t even understand my medical insurance.” She ends this story with a laugh each time, as if the memory shocks her all over again. She says she realized however, that she could do the job because all she had to do was treat the patients as family. According to Kanani, you run a hospital like a home. She learned to collaborate with other hospital administrators, learning how to read financial spreadsheets for the first time. When she found out the hospital’s electricity supplier was an energy guzzler, she applied for a grant with

the U.S. DOE. She was able to cover the entire hospital roof with energy savings panels that lowered the utility cost by almost half the amount.

Greeting patients every morning was invigorating. “I would invite their church or families to come sing for them. I would feed them.” She was fired from her job at the hospital because of an irksome bureaucratic conflict of interest, she was devastated. I wasn’t surprised she bounced back from bumps in the road like this, but I wanted to know how.

“Everything that we experience in our life begins in our home. My home was broken. And I constantly get asked, why aren’t you angry? And you know why? Because going through my journey was a lesson for me.” Today, Kanani lives in a big six-bedroom home. She’s divided the entire second floor into three units, and whenever people are in need of a place to stay, her doors are open.

This is how she keeps the *hānai* system alive, the spirit of unconditional love and chosen family. *Come home*, she assures her guests, her words welcoming like open arms. “They need to feel that there’s someone out there that cares, you know? That they need now to take responsibility for their life too.” In one story she loves to tell, a new Civil Rights Commission employee couldn’t find affordable housing due to exorbitant Hawai’i real estate prices. Kanani let the employee stay in her home until they were back on her feet, going so far as to leave her guest in charge of the house while she traveled. Her chosen family receives her care and unconditional love, and with it they are bestowed with the responsibility to carry it forward.

She speaks of her children with so much pride. They’ve all settled down and work all over. One works as a schoolmaster in Taichung, Taiwan, and another as an air traffic controller in Honolulu airport. No matter where they go, they always come back to visit, bringing their children and now grandchildren too.

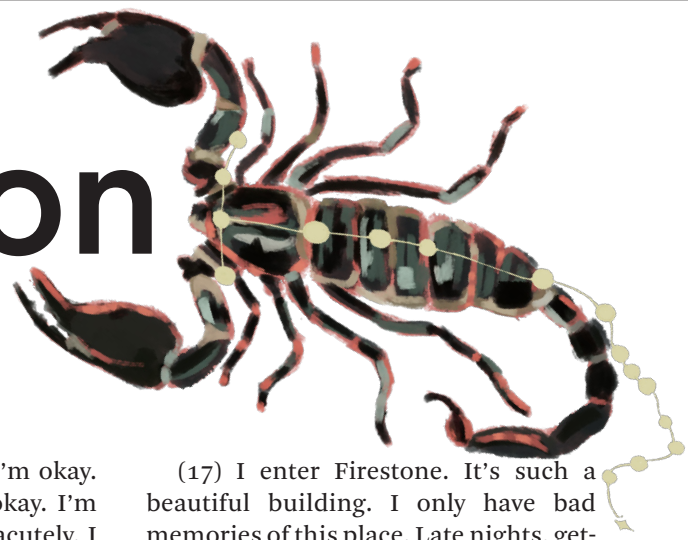
At this stage in her life, Kanani is learning to slow down, taking time off of work to see her son Kalani, who was diagnosed with cancer. She wanted to bring him home to take care of him. “My *hānai* son Sam and his wife

and my grandchildren said no.” They wanted to take care of him themselves, Kanani remembers with pride. “That. That’s my report card.” After listening to Kanani’s story, I still can’t fully wrap my head around how she survived. But the one thing I gathered for certain is that the centralization of *hānai* in her life screams unconditional love. It’s the lesson of every story she tells and a lesson I have to learn.

This article was edited and fact-checked as part of the Nassau Weekly’s journalism section, Second Look. Please submit corrections to thenassauweekly@gmail.com



The Scorpion



By MARY GRACE WALKER

(1) My roommate stirs. Her alarm rings at 9 a.m., and she hastily turns it off to avoid waking me. My half-waking dreams are all the possible ways the email I sent last night could be answered. They range from “We’re sorry to hear you felt that way” to “Well, it wouldn’t have ended this way if you weren’t as worthless as you are.”

(2) I don’t want to wake up. Sleep offers nothing better.

(3) The snooze button should have broken by now.

(4) It’s 10:30. I have somewhere to be at 11. My alarm goes off again.

(5) Snooze.

(6) Snooze.

(7) What if I just disappeared? Fell off the face of the planet, faded into oblivion. Rotted in my sheets. What an inconvenience I would be, even then, decomposing under Blair Arch or on the steps to Murray-Dodge cafe. How concerning that I would serve a better purpose, nourishing life in death.

(8) Last night I biked to—

(9) Where was I biking?

(10) The air is cold. February is cold. Each breath is cold. I am burning. I let my bike fall. I lay down on the pavement, stare at the sky. Orion’s Belt. It’s the only one I recognize. Pride was his downfall, but he became those beautiful stars. Did you know stars burn? Surrounded by the vacuum of cold space, they burn. I burn. It’s cold.

(11) A passerby asks me if I’m okay. It’s 2 a.m., and I don’t look okay. I’m dying. We all are, but I feel it acutely. I wish the world would stop spinning. I wish the planet would pause, give me a break. I pray daily for another pandemic. How selfish of me. People died. So many people died. I survived then, but I’m dying now. Just one moment to breathe, please.

(12) My alarm goes off again. If I don’t get up now, I never will. I say a prayer. It’s not my own strength by which I leave my coffin.

(13) I bike to Dillon. I’ve gotten in a bad habit of talking to myself aloud in Spanish or Korean. *La gente va a pensar que estoy loca. 죽고 싶어. 살고 있어.*

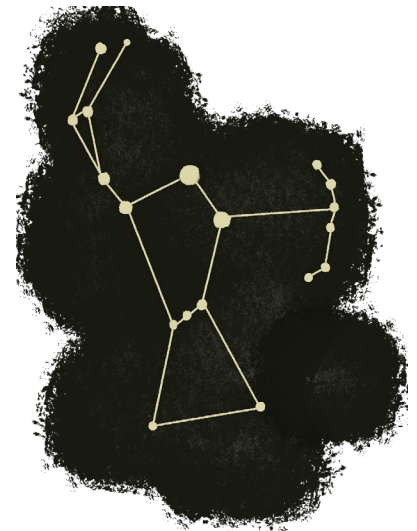
(14) Me convertí loca. I don’t remember when; I didn’t write it down in my GCa. I was doing so well, too. How quickly it all fell apart.

(15) I rehearse for a play. I am not myself. It’s easier this way. The person on stage is a puppet, a marionette I manipulate, a mouse in a cage I taught tricks to survive. The play is written, the lines unchangeable. The conflict will be resolved, so long as you stay long enough to see the end. How unsatisfying it would be if the principal actor left the stage, if the character constructed by my actions died and the story never was complete. The character is the prey, and I the infallible hunter.

(16) I leave my bike. I walk, how novel. I walk to Small World. I need coffee like I breathe. It’s already 2 p.m. Everyone else orders a medium chai latte with almond milk, or an oat milk latte with lavender syrup please. I order a black coffee and leave.

(17) I enter Firestone. It’s such a beautiful building. I only have bad memories of this place. Late nights, getting kicked out, crying in a C Floor cubicle. If I wanted to, I could disappear here. I stick to the collaboration zone, keep the temptation at bay.

(18) By the time I leave it’s dark again. My eyes scan the sky. I have to find Orion. I have to. I can’t look away until I do. I search and search and search.



Where is that arrogant man? I find him. I find myself. The thought has never crossed my mind that I should look for the scorpion instead.

(19) It took me months, but I found the scorpion. I see her everyday, as I wake and brush my teeth and wash my face. The scorpion watches me, waiting until my back is turned, until I’m so self-assured that I lower my guard. She watches me as I walk to class—my bike is still broken from when I crashed it—caught in every window and mirror and puddle of water.

(20) The scorpion nearly got me that



rainy night. My bike slipped out from under me, and I hit the ground hard. It was an accident. That's the line I rehearsed. I was scared.

But I survived the scorpion. I'm not like the stars, dead and beautiful and haunting. 살고 싶어. I refuse to be Orion. I don't know what I am, but I'm still here to find out.

An Atheist Guide to Grief

“Life had been returned to her—the one she squeezed every drop of, the one she did and redid in her stories when it was just the two of us in the living room of our first house.”

By CAMILA VILLAVIZAR GOMEZ

Not long ago I had a nightmare about greatgrandma. She was sitting in her plastic chair, bright red, curved backrest, in the living room of the house I grew up in: Avenida Alameda del Corregidor 2857. When alive she had been confined to her room, dumping her wardrobe on the floor and blaming us for the chaos, losing the threads of our conversations and braiding them with those in her head. I had come out of my room when I found her, sagging and silent, under the San Damiano cross.

Was my mind not letting me escape the truth or was the truth so deeply buried in my heart? Because with one glance I knew she was dead: her head sinking deeper into her shoulders, her eyes unblinking, her body reeking of formaldehyde. Dead. Deceased. Passed away. Though there, with her brown knitted socks and her lilac pajama set with fuzzy wool inside. Dead. Deceased. Passed away. Formaldehyde or not, I wanted nothing else but to hold her.

So she woke up.

Her eyes were yellowish-green, the color of sulfur, and she babbled “Good morning, child.” She emerged from her seat as if emerging from the soil: reaching, grasping. I felt the tears soaking my neck before I felt them soaking my cheeks. She tripped. This time I caught her.

Right after inhaling the formaldehyde off her skin I started breathing.

I linked my arm with hers as we entered the hallway and headed to my room. Her every step was doubtful but heavy. When I saw the shape of her patella I had to look away. Even then I wished it would take us long enough that we could forget why we were walking at all.

My prayers were heard—sort of. After every step, the hallway grew in size. At one point I could barely glimpse the end. Greatgrandma never stopped walking. My shaky hands hovered over her arms as she wobbled between my fingertips, humming and creaking.

In the middle of my room was one of my coworkers. They handed me a piece of paper. “Don’t forget to send a postcard.”

It read LATAM airlines. I blinked once. Twice. Thrice. Everything remained the same except greatgrandma who was trying to talk but her tongue kept getting stuck to the roof of her mouth. There was no emotion in her eyes as she struggled. Her gurgle and empty eyes didn’t let me think.

“Why?” I asked.

My coworker smiled, “Your family realized it was time.”

“How?”

Their chin pointed at the door.

“Thank her.”

When I looked beside me I met my greatgrandma’s glimmer, yellow gaze.

Once we entered the hallway I flutered around her, stepping on her footsteps. The excitement of coming back to her clouded my need for an explanation. Was greatgrandma alive or could this be a last bodily reaction, the last effort her body had managed to pump? But this was not a sudden jerk or a soothing death ho-hum neither was it some unconscious tossing and turning, the body becoming stiff only to sag. She was alive. Still cold. Still stiff. Still dragging her feet on the ground and still reeking of formaldehyde but when I hugged her, she was the greatgrandma who could not resist putting her hand over mine when it was close. And she was still holding onto it now. Though the smell and the feel of her skeletal fingers made me recoil, I was grateful. Of course I was.

For a second I thought about calling a hospital, but even in my dreams I was selfish. If death hadn’t robbed me of her, nobody would.

“Child,” she said. I dropped everything to lean into her. “Seeing you happy

makes me happy.”

Life had been returned to her—the one she squeezed every drop of, the one she did and redid in her stories when it was just the two of us in the living room of our first house. That life (where she fed me, clothed me, held me) suddenly remembered it belonged to her. I hugged her tighter.

On our way back, the hallway had returned to its original size. She had almost slipped twice before entering the kitchen so each time I pressed her against me, linking my arms against her stomach to stop her from falling on her face. As I held her, I pressed my ear against her back—partly out of old times’ sake and partly out of morbid curiosity. Her heart did not beat. It whirled.

“I’m fine,” she panted each time she did not hit the floor. “Don’t worry about me.”

How could she ever ask me that?

Everything was white in the kitchen—white tiles with white marble, a white roof with white cabinets. I took a step back. It was the kitchen of our second apartment.

“Mama,” I said, and I did not know why I said it. On our last video call she was sinking in her wheelchair as she hovered over a spoon of bland oatmeal she kept missing. Before that she would see me through a screen, 3,465 miles and 7 countries between us, and at least waved. Three months after I moved to America and she stared at me as if I were another pill, another syrup, another bandage, another prescription forcing her to stay alive, “Mama, why do I feel like nobody loves me?”

She let go of my grasp and I hovered around her. I did. I really did.

She smiled. Fondly. “If only everyone could like us—”

Then, she slipped.

She blinked, confused by her own weakness. Bright, yellowish-green eyes opened and closed. Opened and closed. Even before she landed I knew she had cracked her head.

And the scene, oh, it was horrible—no blood because corpses cannot bleed, no

resistance because corpses have accepted they are losers, no coherent sentences because corpses are not supposed to do anything with their mouth except give a final exhale.

I woke up crying.

Music played from my phone. *Bad Girls - Donna Summer*. My room was pitch dark. I had made a mess of my sheets tossing and turning. Behind my windows the tree and all its creatures were fast asleep. I heard a lonely creak from outside my door.

Ever since great-grandma died I had kept dreaming of her: disappearing, withering, evaporating from my hands. And ever since great-grandma died we had been reduced to roles: she, the object, I, the observer, and like the object and observer we knew our parts; she would stand there and disappear and I would watch her leave.

And suddenly I was not on that bed that squeaked every time I moved and I was not under those 100% polyester covers that always made me itch. Memory flew me 3,465 miles away from my bed, 7 countries to the south of America, to the small church by the side of a major avenue where her body rotted in that coffin. And I was humbled. In the face of death there were no winners, just future losers, and as the loser I was, I cried

over my defeat. Even when I joked with my coworkers or wrote long essays or dissected everything anyone would say, I cried. I cried even when I raged for having no tears left—and maybe because I cried all the time, I was dry.

That night, however, my tears returned, carving an unfolding emptiness in my chest. At the thought of her cracked head and the loud thud I cried harder, but I also seethed at myself. Had I only been able to believe in what everyone around me was saying, maybe I would have had some comfort. *She is in God's glory; she is in heaven; she is watching over you now*. But how could she, if glory had been her laying on her anti-bed sore mattress, draped under her purple blanket with fuzzy wool inside? How could there be another heaven than the moments she sang about

hummingbirds and a longing that lasted a century? How could she be watching over me now when she always had?

In the weeks following her death, my family attended masses every day. Once she was cremated, a loved one and I sat on a bench, staring at the smoke from the crematorium's chimney—and whatever consumed her was gone in that white plume going almost in a straight line as if in one-way to heaven. I just watched it go.

At that moment he claimed we were different: he had the tales of eternal glory to hold onto, but I had nothing. No tales. No eternal glory. Nothing to bury my truth under.

Why? Why couldn't I believe in a God and convince myself she was fine, out there, wherever she was? Why? Why? Why?



Why did she die? When could I hold her again? Her face, the one I filmed as I said goodbye. Her impossible soft onion skin. Her cheekbone I used to leave kisses against. Her complaints when we carried her out of the shower and cured her bedsores. Even irritating things like sitting on the bathroom floor and hearing her pee, or brushing her fake teeth, or hearing mom say *God, we'll have her until you want her back*. We would sit with great-grandma and watch her suffering and watch her watching herself suffering. Sometimes we all dreaded the waiting, sometimes we all waited with patience but more often than not, we were eager for death to come. In the beginning I felt ashamed until it became another uncomfortable but bearable truth.

I called mom.

She picked up after the second ring, and was startled by my sobs. I found more comfort in her tone than in her words (*I know you don't believe in a God, but she is somewhere else. If you are worried, go pray to the universe for her well-being*).

But the comfort quickly turned into despair. What if my mom died and I did not get to hold her hand? What if the loved one with the cruel words died and nothing between us changed? But I also fixed on other things, like the dream and the pitiful babble that robbed my great-grandma of her words or the fact that everyone she loved had died. She had missed them daily in front of my eyes so how could I dream of wanting her alive when death fulfilled her wishes?

But was that what I dreamt?

In her prime, great-grandma had sat in our living room and recalled her childhood in a 1930 Latin American port. She had taught me how to read and she had taught me how to use a fork and a knife. In less than a decade she turned into vestiges—sweet, caring, motherly but also confused, angry and often resentful. At some point in my life she became the object I took care of rather than a member of my family, and at some point in my life, I sat on the front row of her suffering, watching

her die little by little, day by day, breath by breath.

So maybe I dreamed about why she died.

That morning I fell asleep at four and I woke up around eight. I went to the bathroom. I got dressed. I took the bus. I attended class. I went to work. I went back to my house. Life without great-grandma was house arrest and at any time, grief could knock on my door to check my attendance. On November 29th I was present. And so was all my unexpressed sorrow. All my unexpressed love.

Nass Recommends: Officeparks

By SOFIIA SHAPOVALOVA

This review started as an obligation. It was the least I could do, really, to thank my friend and congratulate them on their poetic debut. Then, when I finally opened my personal copy of the book, sent to my home address after I'd emailed a certain publisher by the name of Will Ballard with a request (on behalf of the *Nassau Weekly*, naturally), and saw the note of gratitude inscribed in blue marker on the inside cover, I knew there was no way out of the task at hand. Admittedly, all I had wanted was a free copy of the bound poems to peruse at will (It's not everyday, afterall, you recognise the familiar name of someone you once sampled Jaegerbombs and Guinnesses with printed on the title page. Items such as these, I figure, are necessary keepsakes...). Seeing the chipper 'Thanks!' though, inevitably meant I'd now have to determine the best way to actually *talk* about the poetry, too.

A whole collection of poems, I marveled with a shudder as I flipped through its pages. I thought back to the hours I'd spent last May and June, repeatedly counting out—clapping, even!—sonnet syllables in frustration (such are the exercises any student eager to study creative writing is prey to, no matter whether their interests lie firmly in the department of prose or not). I'd share these tedious sonnets with my tutor, then scrunch my nose in suspicion whenever she'd thoughtfully announce that I had the real *makings* of a poet. The *potential*. Noam, I reckon, has a great deal more than what our shared tutor diagnosed in me as 'potential.'

I suspected this prior to getting my hands on *Officeparks*. I've read some of Noam's poetry before—even attempted to offer careful editorial advice at Noam's behest. I came to this specific collection a bit late, however, though I'd heard of its making since mid-January. I must have heard it once or twice. "I'm publishing a book of poems," Noam casually declared to their audience one

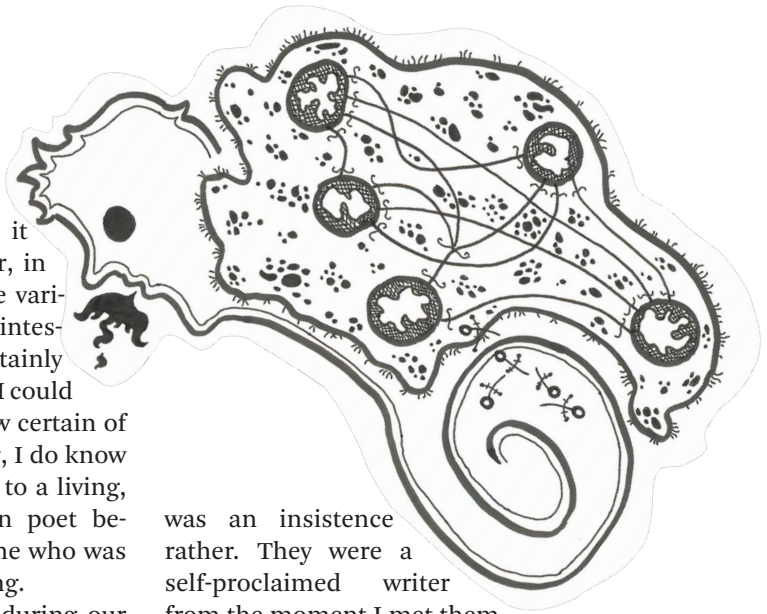
day—and another (perhaps, it was over lunch...over dinner, in the dining hall, where some variant of potatoes and other quintessentially-English fare was certainly on the menu). And although I could not say when precisely I grew certain of this commendable endeavor, I do know Noam was the closest I had to a living, breathing, post-post-modern poet before me at the time. Someone who was presently *generating*. Creating.

In their spare moments during our time as visiting students at St. Edmund Hall, I can envision Noam walking around—a bit over here and a bit further over there—until they'd find themselves at the point where the poem had been written before them. Not that Noam was ever an especially avid walker, though I reckon they walked just enough for the poems to find them. I was walking too. And watching.

Noam found the poems, or the poems found Noam, or maybe it was a mutual finding. No matter how exactly it was that the poems came to be, my wonder came from witnessing this creative act—from simply *knowing* a close peer of mine was putting pen to page. This is not to say I lacked writer friends prior to my encounter with Noam. One such friend, for instance, wrote the *Nass'* first non-English drama. Another aptly named a new Dante. A third beautifully described the 'dog-eat-dog world of the Balkans.' Most of my writer friends treat this production as something akin to a secret though—a passing *hobby* or a sheepish indulgence. Perhaps, I take greater pride in their words than they do themselves. Few are so brave as to admit to the profession, especially at this young and tender of an age. For Noam though, this was never the case. For Noam, it

was an insistence rather. They were a self-proclaimed writer from the moment I met them, confidently ascribing the title to themselves until I came to truly believe it. Embarrassed is something Noam could never be.

I've been thinking about what exactly makes Noam's poetry different from other contemporary works I've encountered. What makes the poems approachable? Less off-putting, and clunky, and ridden with the dreaded clichés that most writers are taught to fear? There are, of course, the illustrations which draw one in. I'm distinctly fond of the alluring fish that appears early on following "Deepsea Lizardfish." This image, I am sure, I saw come alive before my very eyes one morning during a Gogol lecture. Noam would never take notes, nor would they simply sit through our beloved professor explaining the 1830s surge among many Russian writers for a 'usable' national identity and their (arguably futile) quest to identify what Russianness *is*. Instead, Noam's pen would be moving, producing pleasant curves and lines in their notebook, which provided for marvelous distraction during that one hour of lecture. Wednesdays. 10:00 am. Whilst my fingers struck the keyboard with a furious clacking in an attempt to transcribe the professor's every word, Noam pursued



the finer arts. The black bled onto the page. I swear I remember it catching the professor's eye—more than once. I hope Noam sent him a copy.

I recognise, too, the drawing found on page fifty-two—the “Exhale,” as I've personally deemed it. Much to my delight, I found it paired with one of my favourite poems from the collection, “Five Snapshots of the Spy.” Noam leaves the reader missing this boy of theories described. *It looks as though he's young...he isn't in / Our files.* I still miss the boy myself, *at those parties in Moscow.*

This is not to say, certainly, that the only appeal of *Officeparks* is all the illustrations drawn by Noam themselves (and I concede, too, that such an appeal only highlights my personal bias). Rather, Noam has a knack for conjuring images—of both the quotidian mundane and the viscerally uncomfortable—with the very words they colour their poems with. If anything, Noam knows best how to pick a word that is charmingly fun to say out loud. I'm especially a fan of the à-la-Mayakovsky:

— *Mushroomclatter.*

Robberstamp.

Coffinrumble.

Vulgartramp. —

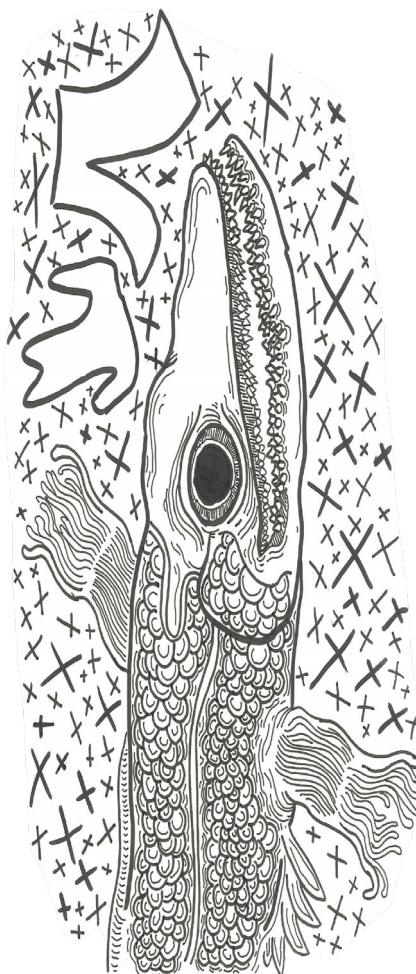
One might describe Noam's poems as *noisy*. You can hear the images, and this renders the poems in another dimension—that of sound—which gives them life beyond the physical page. Noam is further unafraid of pushing the constraints of form. Although I cannot pretend to understand metre and rhythm as any good poet would (and, here, is why I only have the aforementioned poetic *potential* but not the skill), *I can* pick up on visual cues.

The titular “Officeparks” is one such example, where brackets and bold and slashes are introduced to give us the story of David and the fiefdom. Or there is “Barnbuyin,” which nearly screams at you in all its caps-lock power. I do not think I have ever been screamed at by a poem before. Noam is, too, the poet who will unabashedly admit to falling under influence. Page forty-one presents the reader with “The Tumbleweed” inspired by Bryusov, of the Russian Symbolist Movement. I wonder if

Noam is not *laying Marxism's seeds* in the West as well (when asked whether they'd describe themselves as a Marxist in any sense of the word, they affirmed with a simple “yes”). And then, there are all the musical compositions. Only Noam would think to signal for the steel drum to start—to include a guitar and a bass in their poems (*the tempo of the vocals quickens*). The poems grow louder.

Noam does not always insist on big, bold letters and the addition of the drum's beating though. In fact, perhaps I like best what I consider to be the quieter poems in the collection. Take, for instance, the last poem, “The Burning of Windham County Parish, 1960.” Only at the end are the readers at long last introduced to the:

*Wanderer of wanders,
Strummer, guitar picker
Oh so dextrous,
Snub-nosed troubadour.*



The wannabe poet king whose voice we hear in these lines arrests the reader with their questions, and we're left wondering in tandem with

the speaker. There is a palpable sense of urgency to this final, ten-piece movement. This may very well be due to the fact that God is now a key player, and he seems cruel. This God *needs no poet*, the speaker reveals. Such a statement comes as quite the blow at the end of a debut poetry collection otherwise filled with much cheek and promise. *What to do?* Here, it almost feels that Noam concedes—in a Wildean fashion: *All art is quite useless.*

Noam does not, however, leave their readers stranded. *The flowers bloom in Montreal this time of year*, the poem concludes. We're invited to *move north* with the poet king. And so we beat on.

Just as Noam believes, I'm sure that *one day scientists will...uncover that there are certain places that hold poems and jam them into a poet's head. These poems will be carbon dated and shown to have originated within the poet years, weeks and even hours before the poet received them, before being catapulted to another time, as is their way.* It's my belief that all the poems that the town of Oxford held from January to June of the year two-thousand-and-twenty-five were jammed into Noam's head—and how glad am I that they were, despite any so-called God's lack of need for them. When the carbon dating results are finally available, I like to imagine science will prove that some of the poems were received during the time Noam and I spent there together in particular, walking to and from tutorials or fighting over who gets to check out the sole Vonnegut copy from the library. I'm still afraid of poetry, and I don't know how to talk about it. Like Wilde, I reckon it all *is* quite useless.

I could tell you about my friend though. *They've published a book of poems.*

“When I come down off this mountain”: Concealment in popular

By ROYA REESE

When I was four years old, I scattered rose petals during the lesbian commitment ceremony of my babysitter. It was 2008; same-sex marriage wasn't yet legal, but they did everything traditionally associated with a wedding. Including having baby me as their flower girl.

My babysitter was an early-adopter dyke (pixie cut) and somewhat scandalized my traditional Iranian grandparents. My grandfather pulled my mother aside: “Don't you think Roya needs some more...straight...role models?”

In my opinion, my siblings and I were fairly well-rounded kids—our parents' liberalism was always accompanied by a healthy dose of understanding what the other side thinks. For example, my father dragged us to church each Sunday so we would know the stories of the Bible, both to better understand pop culture and literature references, but also to better understand the role of organized religion in many people's lives.

But he was also the officiant of a gay wedding—in 2015, when same-sex marriage was legalized, our good friends David and Daniel quickly tied the knot. My dad cried throughout the entire ceremony, so moved that two of his favorite people were getting to celebrate their love via government acknowledgement. I remember being confused; they shared a house and dogs, what difference did it make?

Daniel, David, my parents, my brothers, and I sit around the dinner table. David is talking—for the first time I've ever heard—about growing up with an extremely conservative family in rural Oklahoma. It is, I think, hard for him to discuss, and I've never been brave enough to ask.

“So then, how old were you when you knew you were gay?” my brother prompts.

“Like, eight,” says David.

He and Daniel have been together for 25 years. They met in medical school, and shortly after he came out to his parents, David's family stopped speaking to him.

“We weren't ‘out,’ in the sense you're thinking of, at the very beginning,” Daniel tells us. “It was 1995. We were forging a new path.”

“So what about Bible camp?” my brother asks. “In bed by 8 p.m. and all that stuff.”

“Oh,” says David, “It was the best sex of my life.”

My best friend Clara and I are home at the same time this summer. It's too hot to do anything, so we decide on a movie marathon. I propose *Brokeback Mountain* and the marathon takes on a queer twist. *Call Me By Your Name*, *God's Own Country*, *Stranger by the Lake*.

Both *Brokeback Mountain* and *God's Own Country* feature two gay men herding sheep in an extremely rugged, isolated setting. Within montages of longing gazes and grass blowing in the wind, their queerness starts to feel almost locational—it's like, the only reason they're sleeping together is because they're bored. It's a thought experiment, the movies asking: what is there to do when two men are alone in a tent?

I wonder aloud about this, and Clara explains to me: it's about the isolation of these environments. Their repression runs so deep that only when they're so far removed from society can they express their feelings.

And then, when they return home, the feelings get shoved back into the physical and metaphorical closet.

Early in the film, *Brokeback's* Ennis establishes his heterosexuality clearly

after a few too-long glances from Jack. Of his girlfriend, he says, “we'll be getting married when I come down off this mountain.” As if the mountain maintains his queerness, as if the queerness is contained on the mountain.

Clara reminds me that in the case of *Brokeback* or *Call Me By Your Name*, these men might literally never have met another gay person. The final time Elio and Oliver kiss, she says—that might be the last time they see a gay man for years.

I've swam in very accepting waters—gay weddings, gay babysitters, gay preschool. At Princeton, Terrace. The experience of concealment is not one I'm quite familiar with; I'm not “out” (in a traditional sense) to either set of my grandparents, but they're homophobic mostly culturally, my mom's family having lived in Iran most of their lives.

It's hard to fault them for this, really, when they come from a country where being gay is illegal and punishable by death. Recently, my grandmother sat me down and asked how she could “spot a gay person” on the street. “Like, what am I looking for, in terms of...clues.”

I wasn't sure how to answer: there's one sitting on the couch in front of you.

Clara sees a theme of bodily fluids in the movies; at one point it seems that Elio is so lovesick he gets a nosebleed, and Oliver asks, “is this because of me?” There's also, notably, a puking scene in all four of these movies. Elio vomits upon seeing Oliver dance joyfully with a woman. Ennis doubles over in an alleyway when Jack leaves for the first time—“took me about a year to figure out it was that I shouldn't let you out a my sights.” In these moments, the repression of their queerness manifests as physical illness: it's too much to hold inside.

queer film

Even if I hadn't gone to church as a child, I would recognize the dead lambs in both *Brokeback Mountain* and *God's Own Country* as a Biblical allusion: the Lamb of God is a religious title for Jesus, with the lamb representing the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

In *Brokeback*, the morning after Jack and Ennis' first time sleeping together, Ennis rides back to his herd of sheep to find one dead—gutted by a coyote, flies already buzzing around its corpse. He's disgusted, and guilty; the sheep died because he wasn't there to guard it, he was busy fucking Jack.

An almost identical moment happens in *God's Own Country*. Johnny, in charge of the sheep on his family's farm, stays out too late having quick and dirty sex with a faceless man at an equipment auction. He returns to find a dead lamb, the result of a breech birth he wasn't there to catch. His father is furious. His queerness is punished.

Reaching back to my days of Sunday school, these lambs confused me. They aren't killed as sacrifices in atonement for sins; Ennis and Johnny have no agency in the death of the lambs, no moment where they decide to repent. The sin is so great that the dead lambs become their punishment, and the atonement is forced upon both young men. As a symbol, or perhaps a warning.

Parce que c'était lui, parce que c'était moi. A Michel de Montaigne quote that Elio's shockingly progressive father repeats to him when talking about, or skirting around, his relationship with Oliver.

There's no reason for it. It just is.

"Why are you telling me this?" asks Oliver. Elio: "Because there is no one else I can say this to but you."

Before I joined Terrace, most of my

close friends at Princeton were straight. This didn't strike me as a problem particularly, but then entering Terrace felt like a kaleidoscope of color and cool shoes.

It's not that I felt any shame or strangeness about my sexuality, but I couldn't name more than two out queer couples on campus. It wasn't concealment, or shame, but then what is the name for this feeling? My queerness became a marginal part of me, something unimportant.

When I joined Terrace, it was as if things shifted a half-inch to the right, and suddenly everything was in focus. I didn't notice that I didn't have a space for my queerness until I suddenly had one. Without Terrace, that part of me felt shoved to the side.

I'm "lucky" in that my queerness is something I can hide, if I choose to. But then, where does it *go*?

This summer I thought often about the history of queerness and concealment, queerness and repression. After, when you strip away this layer of shame, what is different? What is left?

It feels simplistic to say that in a perfect, non-bigoted, non-homophobic world, every queer person would be out and living joyfully with their partner. For Daniel and David, though I gather that they are very happy, it took some time. At the beginning, David says, "We were just figuring it out as we went along. Figuring out how this would work."

I understand this sentiment most clearly in my queer friendships—that is, friendships with other queer women—of which I have many. These have been some of the most profound and intense relationships in my life,

often straddling the line between platonic and romantic, switching back and forth with any given day or interaction. We almost want to pretend that we relate to each other in a "normal" way, but we don't. It's a constant game of chess, of—*are we talking about us?*

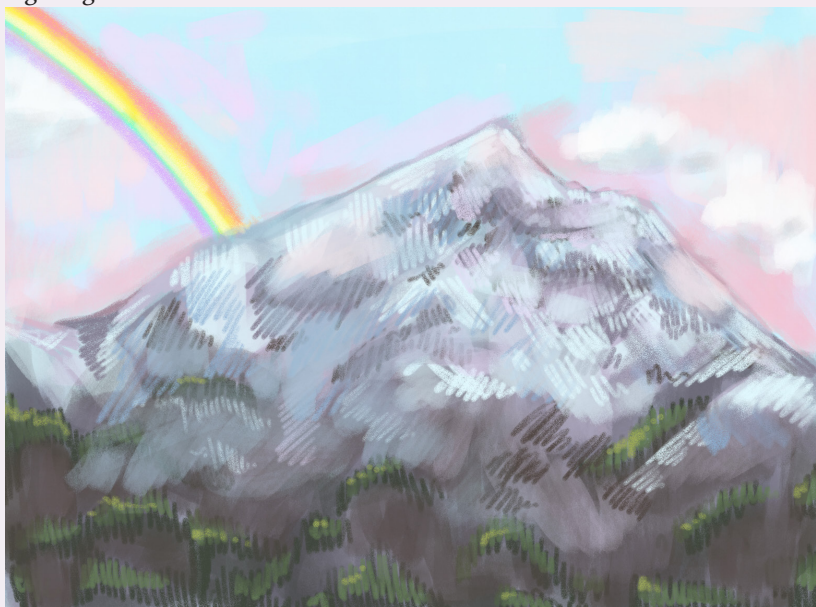
Is some amount of concealment inherent in queer relationships; if not from each other, then from ourselves?

Andre Aciman, the author of *Call Me By Your Name*, has another novel called *Enigma Variations*, which I personally prefer. It tracks the protagonist, Paolo, through the five great loves of his life; while each of them, and himself, truly remain enigmas. I flipped back through my copy this summer and saw this quote, which I'd underlined in blue pen:

I've been trying to disown what I wanted for so long that still today I can't recognize it without first going through motions of disowning it (p.225).

"I'm not no queer," says Ennis. Jack replies, too quickly: "me, neither."

As Roya Reese treks through layers of concealment, the Nassau Weekly is with her every step of the way.



I Only Want to Go Camping with People Who Hate Camping

The difficulty of being into things when your mother is, too.

BY MIA MANN-SHAFIR

Today, I went on what should have been, but was not in fact, a very fun hike.

I say it ought to have been fun, given that the weather was good and so was the company (my mother). My mother—I like her. Love her even, loads. Also, I pretty much like hiking.

But this hike, it sucked, and in all honesty, my mother is to blame. Every five minutes, she exclaimed: “isn’t this *glorious*?!” With such effusions, she turned what would’ve been perfect weather into too-hot. August sun started to feel like: I want to be in the shade, or at the mall, or at the dentist—literally anywhere but this, Please God.

And then she said, (my mother), as we were nearing the end of this hike—“I want to go camping!”, which made me think, Wow, camping is the last thing on earth I’d ever like to do.

But this is only half true—I do not want to go camping with my mother. But to my friends, I have definitely said, “Guys, we should go camping!”—said it a couple of times, if not many, many times. On this hike with my mother, that anyone would ever sleep in the woods of their own volition strikes me as insane. But when I pitch camping to my friends—who are mostly indoorphiles—the whole thing sounds quite fun.

See: I only want to go camping with people who like camping less than I do. With them, I am no longer the priss—Now, *they* are *me*, and I am *my mom*; they are repulsed, and I get to be like, “Guys, isn’t this *glorious*!”

Enthused, ecstatic, eager, and other positive E-words (ebullient!)—are ways I like to feel. I like to like things; I am a

person who is into being into things. Conversely, like-a-debbie-downer is a way I do not like to feel. Nor do I like to feel like a drag, or despondent, or dejected, or any other of a series of D-adjectives that mean some version of: Whiny.

Camping and hiking are not the only times I become whiny or turn some D-adjective in the presence of my mother. Take the family dog, for instance. When one of my parents is around, or worse, both, I experience a *moderate* to *very low* awareness of this dog’s existence. My parents dote on our pet: they scratch her belly, pick up her shit with a smile on their faces, and wonder where she is whenever she is absent. They call her name from the next room, which prompts her to scurry in, which prompts them to greet her like she’s just come back from a tour around the globe. They tell her she’s the cutest thing that ever graced the planet, and buy her toys. All I manage to do is tell them that in human years, Frankie is nearing thirty-five—shouldn’t she have moved on from squeaky rubber chickens by now? My parents’ abundant affection and attention for this dog called Frankie leads me to feel and exhibit an utter lack thereof.

And then my parents go away—to work, or vacation, or wherever—and suddenly, I am obsessed with this dog called Frankie. I walk her (even take her on hikes!), I feed her, filling her bowl more than I should just because all of a sudden I feel so much love for this animal and want to bring her maximum joy, so yes, after she’s finished the bowl, she may absolutely have a dried cow penis (bully stick) and some peanut butter (right off my spoon).

The minute my parents are back, my time being into the dog is over. Frankie may as well set out on an actual tour around the globe for all I care.

Complementarity, apparently, is the name for this phenomenon.

When the seat of Person who loves doing this activity more, or, Person who is primarily responsible for and primarily loves Frankie, is taken, you take the other seat: the seat called Whiner or Uninterested. When the Whiner or the Uninterested seat is taken, on the other hand, *you* get to be the one spewing positivity, seeing the glass-half-full, remarking “isn’t this glorious?!” or congratulating the dog for her feat of lying on the floor all day.

It is fun to be a person who likes things, but more than that, enthusiasm that we cannot relate to feels like shit. Being in the Not into this seat sucks a lot, beyond just our inability to derive satisfaction from whatever the thing we’re not into is. Doing something with people who like it more than we do is unpleasant in that it emphasizes our own fear, restraint, or lack of energy by placing it next to the positive spirit of another. Their joy feels oppressive when we feel none of it ourselves.

So, in conclusion, I resolve to only go camping with people who hate camping. I land on this resolution with full knowledge that it’s probably much more fun to play the role of: Person who likes this thing, alongside another person who likes said thing. A negative and a positive balance each other out, sure, but two positives make a *positive*. Maybe one day, when I’m old and wise and my psychological landscape is immaculate, I’ll be like, “Yes, mom, this hike *is* glorious, and by the way, let’s go camping,” and “Oh, you love Frankie?, well I *too* think Frankie is a canine savant superdog precious pea.”

Until then, if you hate camping, come find me—I’d love to take you camping.

The Nassau Weekly always loves to hear from Mia Mann-Shafir. Unless she loves it too, then we couldn’t care less.

Do Men Even Use The Bathroom?

BY NAOMI GAGE

Not the way we do. As a refuge, as a moment of silence, as an interlude through mirrors, through cold. As a breathless moment with which to blot on two coats of lipstick and splash cold water on the cheekbones. As an enclosure—as four walls, however flimsy, between which one can perform a range of sensible rituals. Anything, or almost anything, can be produced from a woman's purse. Miniature scissors, blades as narrow as a sparrow's beak, a Tide pen, a compact mirror. Rarer: medical gauze, a Phillips-head screwdriver, a small well-thumbed statue of the Norse god Odin, a folding knife. Yes, a woman could be doing anything inside those four walls: lopping off loose threads, lifting stains from fabric, dressing a wound, lifting her palms in supplication to pagan deities.

In moments of profound suspension we gather and swirl like a maelstrom, at once generous and cruel. If there exists a lipstick in my bag that complements, precisely, the shade of your skin, you may have it now but not forever; you may have a folded stick of spearmint Extra gum, an unnerving shade of neon green; you may have the Advil I was saving for six hours from now because I recognize that crying out look in your eyes. I'll sew your ripped seam closed and promise you that whoever exists on the outside is not worthy of you; I'll spritz perfume on your wrists until this shithole smells like a Victoria's Secret on Mount Sinai. In this moment it's exquisite: the tenderness I feel for you, how I would peel for you a small mountain of tangerines, the pith disintegrating to white under my nails. I'll never see you again, in this life or the next, but of course this does not need to be explained. The brief sweetness of these encounters has in its roots the kind of grace that angels do not touch; humans melt together and detach, leaving never so much as a scar. Do men use bathrooms? Have they ever crouched on a

dirty bathroom floor to read a friend's message on a cracked phone screen: *it's possible im overestimating my role in all this but everything feels so desperately important these days*, have they ever sucked in panicked breath, pressed an ice cube to a bloodstain, prayed for a miracle? The truth is that girlhood exists as a thousand crisis scenarios, as a thousand delicate humiliations held close. As a stricken smile, as a wineglass slipping out of trembling hands. Every head in the room turns at the sound of it breaking.

Cut to another face in the glass. A vast slapdash night, made brutal and glittering by drink, slows for an instant inside a dingy club bathroom. A sea of legs and noise, a girl retching in a stall, a purse spilling meds and makeup, the tampon dispenser empty, always empty when most needed. She could be

anyone; she could be you, bending to wash her hands in the stream of water. Her mind a thready haze of aftershocks, echoes, pulsing bass. She recognizes herself in the smudged mirror. Pauses to clear, with a firm gentle tissue, the mascara, which runs blackly past her eyes. Yes there is grace too between these bathroom walls, for she emerges fresh, vulnerable, brave-faced. Into a world that dissolves rapidly between her fingers like sugar, melting. I do not think they know that texture, that sweetness and dissolution. No, forgive me, I do not think they do.

The Nassau Weekly is grateful to Naomi Gage for showing us what the bathroom can be, what it has to be, what it really is—and what it really isn't for some.

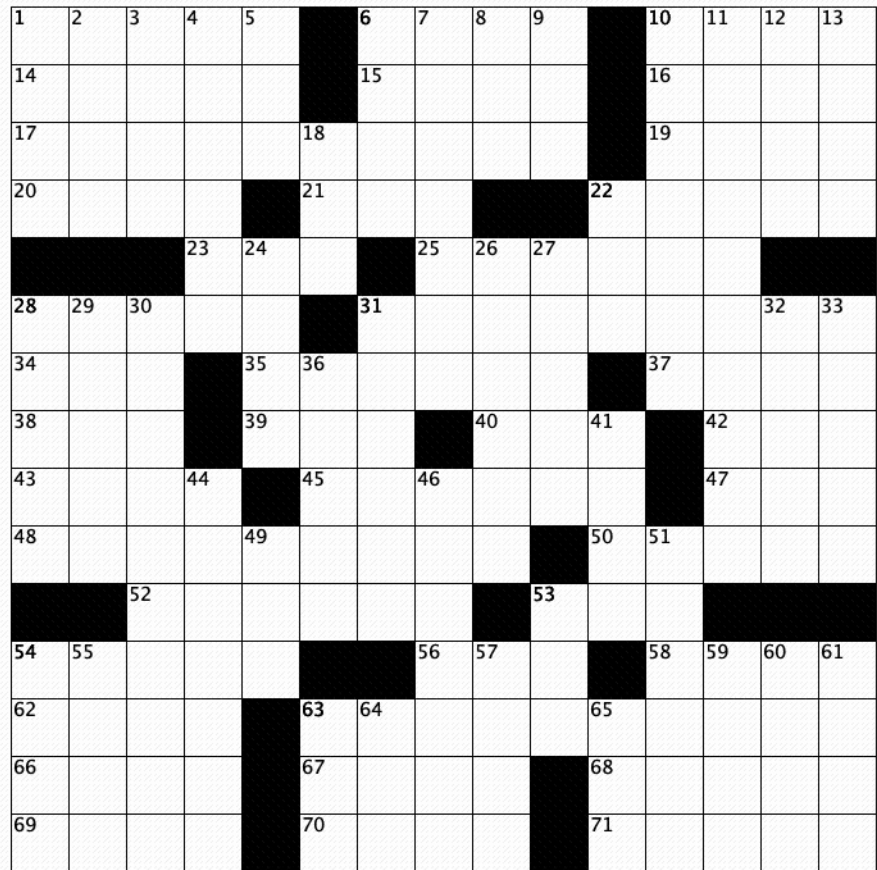


Tickling the Ivories

Simon Marotte

ACROSS

1. Place for a six-pack
6. Shakespearean "you"
10. Closest of pals, informally
14. Extent
15. Had on
16. Smurf-colored
17. Jazz pianist with the seminal 1958 album "At the Pershing: But Not for Me"
19. Showed up
20. Shoulder's place
21. Purpose
22. Word before circle or city
23. Planks help strengthen them
25. Investigate anew, as a case
28. Country where Lupita Nyong'o grew up
31. Jazz pianist of the bebop era
34. Green prefix
35. 2022 biopic about Marilyn Monroe
37. Plum type
38. Anna Wintour's hairstyle
39. Fair-hiring abbr.
40. Oath taker's words
42. Place
43. Some pub brews
45. Take stock of
47. Lively Irish dance
48. Jazz pianist on "Kind of Blue"
50. Roundup rope
52. ___ efficiency (concept in welfare economics)
53. Old Yahoo! rival
54. Hair care
56. Is no more
58. Muscle stretched in downward-facing dog
62. Clip closely
63. Jazz pianist that pioneered jazz fusion
66. Tall or venti, e.g.
67. Volunteer baby sitter, maybe
68. Pizzeria fixtures
69. A couple of bucks?



© 2025

70. Classifies (as)
71. Rising need?

DOWN

1. Bygone Russian ruler
2. Cinco + tres
3. Oblong tomato variety
4. Relaxing outing
5. Multi-vol. reference
6. Start of a classic Christmas poem
7. "Dinger," "round-tripper," or "four-bagger," in baseball
8. Chapter in history
9. Serpentine swimmer
10. Channel that a telly may be tuned to
11. Part of a slumber-party outfit, perhaps
12. Simmer in anger
13. Medium
18. Dip for a French dip
22. Wall St. letters
24. Exemplar of innocence
26. Whirlpools

27. Pundit's pieces
28. Meal on a stick
29. Cause of some produce recalls
30. Award for Malala Yousafzai or Marie Curie
31. Berates, at a ballgame
32. Armstrong of jazz
33. Turn loose
36. Take off
41. City where many a 30-Down is awarded
44. Jail, slangily
46. Making a white Christmas
49. Where some MDs work
51. Nook
53. Call upon
54. Common V.A. malady
55. Great Lakes city
57. Makes a scene?
59. Floor plan measure
60. Microscope part
61. Observe Ramadan
63. Fez, e.g.
64. Jet black or Barbie pink
65. Affectedly shy