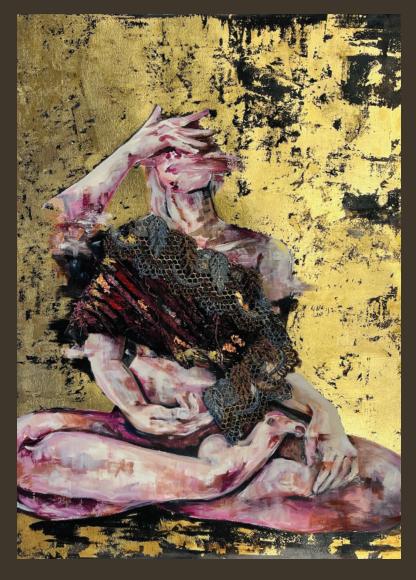
ZENIADA



SUMMER 2022





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Kelly and Me and the Devil Makes Three

The devil talks to me. It suggests offhand that I look at Kelly as she writes thank-you notes that I never deliver, as she asks "How are you?" and I ignore the reply. It waits

for me like mice that chitter under floorboards as Kelly and I fall asleep, its voice slow but conversational like the ceiling after dark.

The devil notices I bought cheap wine and rhinestone earrings

with money Kelly saved for gifts. The devil raises its eyebrow when Kelly trips as I leave a room. Watch, it encourages,

speaking just often enough that I no longer need it to that I am already asking myself its questions.

KELLY MORGAN

I was born to a strange tree

I was born to a strange tree

Where fruit like me prune before they're grown.

At home, we're used to holding our breath and watching

As all elasticity

Leaves our lungs.

Our tongues shrivel and we wait as our skin browns and sours.

And there are the many hours I wonder,

"Will someone ever pick a little black girl like me?"

NYLA WHITE

A Secret Orthodoxy

I am not religious, but I have still prayed from within brown polka dot sheets, from the blue trundle, from the back of the thumping volvo.

I have addressed God with my eyes glued shut and hands unclasped my asking always prefaced with an unsaid please.

In an imagined shrine, I make my own relics. I cradle my fears (let me wake up, make her better, make me look older, please, please...).

Though I have never disclosed them to anyone, I have prayed to you, and I grasp onto my thanks:
I hold my end of the bargain.

I am not religious, but I can sacrifice, be sacrificed. And, my god, I find myself praying, still, in my own, numerical covenant, blazing in my gold foil as I continue anointing myself with sweaty palms.

MAGGIE MERRILL

a (not)girl holds her mother's hand a little too tight Karachi, 2019.

Soft feet press into a bed of rose petals, red like the sari of a new bride, eyes cast down as she crosses the threshold into her new life. One day, I will call her *chachi* (aunt), but for now, she is just a freshly bloomed marigold. The bottoms of her feet are painted the color of carnations, stained under thick layers of mehndi that clung to her skin.

I'll watch her from a distance, as I step through the meadow that is the foyer, let myself reside amongst the affluence of flowers that ask me to stay in their arms.

Mama presses her hardened hands against the *dholki*, the claps of thunder masked by the bang of the drum that will echo throughout the house. Mama tells me it's not raining, but it is. She just can't see it yet.

I'll sit at her feet, press my face against the beads that are sewn into her *lehenga*. The beads will dig into my skin like an ice pick shattering the frozen river before the ice harvest.

If I press my cheek against it hard enough, I wonder if I will draw blood. Will I burst from the seams as the river does? Can I fragment open in the same way He does?

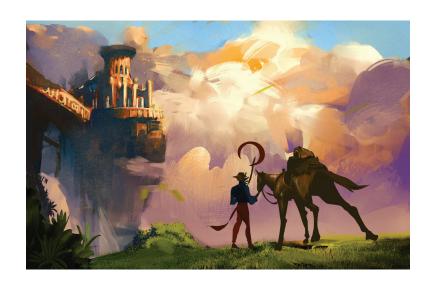
pulls me down to press her lips against my ear. She asks me, "Who would do this My younger self will come up to me, tiny hands grabbing for my dupatta as she for the daughter who marries a daughter?"

I snap my fingers, and she smiles at me like she knows something I do not. Like she knows something I do not yet know how to put into words. She dissipates into the air, dissolving into lush violet petals. I let them fall into my hands and crush them gently before I brush them underneath the couch. They will be vacuumed up by the cook's daughter later tonight, long forgotten.

When the stars drift down to the earth for the night to kiss the children on their round cheeks, I'll close my eyes and stick my tongue out like I'm trying to catch a snowflake. I hope that a spark will settle on my tongue and let me know that I come from a dynasty of sultanas, not queens.

Mama asks me what I'm doing, and I just shake my head and laugh. I cry into the koi fish pond and watch the fish lap up the saltiness from my tears. Koi fish are a freshwater species — they do not know that they are not meant to consume the saltiness of the sea. But how can they know, swallowing up the tears in the pond? How can they know their desire goes against their very biology? How can they know?

What a horrid thing it is, I murmur, to not know that which you love is not meant for you.



LIO CHAN, ON THE WAY HOME

Genesis

The moon oozes like a split cactus. Clouds disintegrate like sugar. People appear and disappear in intermittent windows.

Snow blows in and coats the city, and washes the dirt off my hands. Clocks unravel like the snapping of fingers.

A lion creeps through the streets, shadows dragging up from his paws and thinning themselves like fingers clawing over pavement.

and if the clock fell apart in seven pieces— shattering into how many eons' bad luck? I would drive my hall-mate to the doctor every day if she asked, if she asked

"If" is my shadow. It falls from the frames of open doorways where cats yawn: the word narrows into snarls of saliva pulling between their teeth.

A suicide attempt: a room in daytime but the lights are off.

If I called a lion on the phone, the ringing would go to voicemail. If I separated and into streets and deserts, that breath of life could make the cactus bloom. KELLY MORGAN

Snowmelt seeps into pavement, spines buried in watery flesh like leftover waters from the firmament percolating back into Earth.

something reflecting my image: I do not know if I'm a pagan or an infidel. Here is something shining like a mirror for the well and truly wicked,

I take seven days to crawl under my bed, lean against the dirty clothes basket, and weep. I draw on paper in charcoal and smudge the image when I hang it on the wall.



LIO CHAN, ME AND MY OTHER HALF

Amateur Cartography

Numb and limp, animalized out of my refined passions, each epistolary fold smoothed into the evening's red jaw. I saw a pinhole camera vision of us, the dinner table at Nottingham Street. It was unusable footage: microwave rice, Michael Mann movies, the stitching around the neck of your maroon sweater, a fork to the wrists. Soft with artificial sleep and leftovers I begin to wonder if there was a question, a ways back, someone forgot to ask.

If we resort to pulp and noble gasses, then of course, we all hung around the First Avenue crowd. We cut up Tremont for scrap metal and choked on trains dining uphill. Here in the dark we are not subject to maritime law, we are unfound, there are only hands and blue television and hands.

C.G. COLEMAN



MIDGE HARTSHORN, 1 NEPHI 14:3-11

Angelize

after Francesca Woodman

A body cannot angelize without darkness, without shaft of broken cola machine deep in the pelvis. A body cannot angelize without hanging, cannot hang without dying dying to self, I mean, dying to self, to shirts of polyester-cotton mix, to the curling iron on, to the camera on, to the wallpaper on, cannot die without plasterizing, without turning body into wood and crinoline and light. I will not be your phone girl. I will not be your wasteland. I will not be your kitchen cupboard or your mudroom or your basement.

I will eat the phone before I let you talk to me like that again. I will pry open my own jaw—be boa and viper, gut and poison, before I let you turn me doll.

I will angelize and my heart will never break on linoleum and concrete.

ALENA COLEMAN

Girldom Elegy

after Mary Oliver

Come with me into the field of sunflowers, she told me once in the heat of '08. I laced my fingers over my lips and blew bubbles through the sunflower seeds crushed under my teeth. We sat, her and I, on a bench made of melded pennies. She unraveled her sweetgrass tongue and sang the song the sunflowers were humming.

I wish I still knew the prayers she kissed into my cheek between those flowers, but now all the seeds have sprouted out my brain, and that old field burned in cigarette-gasoline, and some man parks his busted cars where once her finger swirled dirt into my name.

ALENA COLEMAN

Last Supper

vast windows hung like
portraits on your walls,
welcoming in the night sky and the sea.
you smiledpointed out the moon.
we all looked at her for a moment
silent
noticing the way she leaned down to kiss the breakers.
my cheek rested on your granite countertop as you made dinner.

SONCERA BALL

How big is the Milky Way galaxy? (space scares me, I don't know how my sister is so fascinated by it)

Do you think it can hold five-thousand planets in its starry bucket As it collects the broken shells of stars? I'd like to think that somewhere in that unknowable Black abyss of infinite?'s There is an entire breathing city (the size of three whole heavens!) With cosmos dangling from a black hole's swirling chandelier.

And yet, a crumple of a wrapper, A single slingshot aimed by a mighty solar ray... Maybe that will be its downfall.

A sweet defeat into molten chocolate flooding the galaxy, Freeing every nova, dwarf star, Sugared ring of Saturn and Astronaut lost to the enchanted, candied mansion of space.

- All is liberated back into the black. -

But with cursed curiosity we still float closer, Missing the sweetness of oblivion that comes with the reckless, childlike fascination in a chocolate bar galaxy.

I can concede to this thought of decadent destruction: My last moments smelling & tasting & burning & feeling & searing into me with the softness of cacao powder and the irony of it blending in perfectly with our ashes.

MIA HUERTA

CONTRIBUTORS

SONCERA BALL is a freshman at Princeton University who plans to study philosophy, creative writing, and music. Some of her favorite pastimes are sleeping in, ruminating, listening to loud music in the car, and eating.

LIO CHAN is a sophomore majoring in illustration at Rhode Island School of Design. They like to illustrate environmental art and art that explores themes of fear. They bring their dog Ace into every conversation.

ALENA COLEMAN grew up in New Harmony, Indiana-a utopian experiment turned living museum. She is a senior at the University of Notre Dame studying English and Spanish. Her work has also appeared in *Asterism*, *Re:Visions*, and *Juggler*. She hopes that all your fences have gates.

C.G. COLEMAN is a first year at Barnard College of Columbia University studying English and philosophy. They have previously published work in *Quarto Magazine* and *ANGLES*. They are from the DC area and are passionate about new wave films, love letters, kitchen sink dramas, film photography, 60s music, and long walks around the city.

MIDGE HARTSHORN is an undergraduate at Mount Holyoke College, double majoring in mathematics and astronomy. They were raised in an orthodox Mormon household in Idaho, and have been navigating their loss of faith through writing. In their limited free time, Midge enjoys knitting, reading science fiction, and re-watching episodes of *The West Wing*.

CONTRIBUTORS

MIA HUERTA was born and raised in the suburbs outside Chicago and has just finished her freshman year at Kenyon College in Ohio. She is double majoring in Spanish and English with a concentration in creative writing.

MAGGIE MERRILL is an undergraduate at Pomona College studying English and Classics. This is her first poem published in *Zeniada*.

KELLY MORGAN is a recent graduate of Vanderbilt University where she served as editor-in-chief of Vanderbilt Review and poetry editor of SciLit Review. Her poems are published or forthcoming in Oakland Review, Rainy Day Magazine, Blue Route Literary Journal, Collision Literary Magazine, and elsewhere.

LILLIAN OLIVER is a Johns Hopkins senior who explores the subjects of life and rebirth through elements of traditional Tibetan culture. As part of a series dedicated to examining ancient Tibetan artifacts from personal travels and museum exhibits, her 'rebirth' painting exemplifies her current life and challenges the Western perspective of death.

NYLA WHITE is an undergraduate at Montclair State University, majoring in communications and media studies with a minor in creative writing. She considers her poetry, narratives, and art as a creative outlet and means of expressing her faith. In her free time she enjoys sporadic dates with her friends, attending church, video-making, doing makeup, or serial binge-watching shows with her family.

ANONYMOUS is an undergraduate at Barnard College.

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