The Gender & Sexuality Center Presents...

Ephale
Identity Series

heavenly bodies

winter 2022
Exhale Identity Series is hosted annually by the Carleton College Gender & Sexuality Center (GSC) as a way for students to share their experiences, stories, and art to reflect on a specific theme related to identity. This project is also centered around fostering connections and community building; although some may not share the exact lived experiences of those that submitted to the Exhale Series, they may find a piece of their own identities reflected in these pages. This year, the theme is focused on Heavenly Bodies: Transformation, Etherealness, and Transcendence, as a way to explore the multitude of ways in which oneself comes into their identities and beyond. The theme is open for interpretation, as there is no one way in which we come to know ourselves nor is the process of coming into identity linear.
This year's Exhale Identity Series comes at a moment filled with difficult social and political contexts. As a GSCA and as a trans woman of color, I grieve the increased push in anti-trans legislation from sports bills to criminalizing parents of trans children. This series, I believe, serves as a testament to the generativity that emerges from communities who understand both pain and resilience as a complicated truth yet also as a blade to cut through the vines of systemic discrimination. While some of the contributors of this zine may be anonymous or not necessarily part of the LGBTQIA+ community, they showed up. To visualize queerness and transness requires envisioning a portrait as expansive as the universe, and even without limits, it is not enough to pay us the debts we are owed. The reality is: we are disrespected in life and in death. We are owed the time the everyday person is guaranteed. Give us our flowers while we still live. As always, protect Black trans women.
Praying

Anonymous

should be praying to something. it’s in my blood.
to tell the rosary, circumambulate a stupa.

I want to stutter, dotted with holy water,
hail mary, full of grace

as the weight of a thousand years
and a thousand atrocities bear upon me.

kneeling, shivering across from some emaciated figure,
under the bloodied tiled ceiling.

holy mary, mother of god, pray for us sinners
(but later, as the orange afternoon languishes:

• I bless her hip bone
  and anoint her temple

• and through her stained glass eyes
  I am reflected, real,

kneeling at her feet—not praying—
whispering—

While I wasn’t raised in a very religious household, the intersection of religion and sexual identity was something that I always had to grapple with, especially upon seeing the significant role that religious institutions played in the lives of close family members during the pandemic. Through grappling with these feelings, I gained a broader definition of religion which transcends the institutionalized binaries that often suppress other, non-conforming notions of what religion can look like.
Me

Rehana Naik Olson (She/They) '23

Bliss, reaching upwards into a mist that rains stars, cascading on to my eyelashes in the icy
Wind Bored, droopy woopy gloomy roomy yummy tummy chocolate, pie, and veggies yummy
Water Venom coursed through my veins as I slammed the book shut. I will burn them in roaring
Flames Vibrant radiating a pathway, beckoning for me to step forward. I'll fly where you never
Dream, Hope I didn’t say too much. Tell me if I did something wrong. I’m sorry, I should just
Disappear Heavenly loneliness, songs that pull my heart, I could never describe, I don’t mind this
Sadness. Glorifying sad is poo. Realists are just pessimists who think they’re better than other
Pessimists Gaily (†gayly) loving. If you don’t think emotions are important, then what’s the point
in Living Life is important to me because I’ve been given a chance to help others and to receive
help From Lovers and create a nourishing environment rooted in empathy and kindness and
genuine Care, Cozy fluffy pillows, watching a show about cruel but moral love triangles and
swimming And Comforting you with potato chips like you’ve never tasted before. These are the
best Potatoes Why did you tell me that. It made me so sad. You didn’t care. You didn’t even
think, Living What do you think I’m thinking when I’m completely silent and can’t speak because
I’m From Shaking hands and breaths caught in eyesight blurry and I don’t speak because of
gnawing Fear Selfish, you think it’s selfish. To show up and not be able to talk, to you, is selfish
shellfish And Easy peasy to overcome, and I’m a clammy clam and you’re a big powerful
charismatic Octopus Everly judging and not understanding and closing your eyes when you see
something Living In a way that is new to you, grammar typo punctuation logic smart punch the
nation well With Irreversible charm, splendid demeanor, beautiful kind gorgeous ostentatious
proud and noisy Me But there are some days I can’t sleep because flashbacks, the cruelty of
people, want to Scream BVHGLCWSEIB means nothing, and neither does life unless you make it,
my dear. Optimists Also think they’re better than everyone, but to belittle the sharing of happy
emotions and Little Affections is an invasive and pervasive terror that causes too many
problems to be Ignored Not a woman, not a lady. Never call me a lady. Not a man, not
nonbinary. I don’t know What Nothingness I am, but please let me live happily because I am nice
and will listen if you Tell Me thoughts, it is not liberating for me to use labels because when I
use labels I feel like a Fraud Maybe it’s a problem, but it is what it is. The labels I like include my
name, my species, and My Memories spun around each other clasping hands in a flow of water
that electrified the Earth

I wrote a free-verse poem that I felt best described my relationship with my identities. I intended
to encompass something that is ever-changing, fluid, like the bog of thoughts swimming around
my brain simultaneously, and yet constant, present, and familiar, because that is how I experience
myself. Some thoughts explicitly make sense and others don’t, but nonetheless they transform
into one another in a format that does not prioritize certain kinds of feelings over others but
rather transcends that type of hierarchical classification, as they are all a part of me.
In March of 2019, a 20 year old man, soon to be a 21 year old woman, sprouted wings. White, fluffy and enormous, they found it a massive inconvenience when trying to go through doors, or in fact anywhere, as everywhere she went, she was hounded by every news outlet known to mankind. At first, most people assumed it was an elaborate and well planned april fools prank, but the story didn’t go away, instead more and more people were discovered sprouting wings, until it became very clear that this was not a prank, not a one off thing and not going to quietly go away.

At first people approached it with curiosity. Why was it happening? What did it mean? But as no one was able to provide clear evidence based answers, the curiosity started to transition to fear. Does it hurt? Is this a globalist plot? Am I next? No one had answers to these questions either, but many found it settling, if not comforting, to scream endlessly into the void. And when Angels started to disappear, people lost their minds.

As the fear grew, scientists from around the world gathered in Atlanta to figure out what was to be done. This group of mostly male, mostly white and wholly unwinged scientists started to look for answers. They never discovered the real reason for the event, no one has, but they weren’t especially interested in that question. What they were able to figure out was that it was possible, if difficult, to remove the wings. You see, when an Angel goes to sleep, or comatose, their wings “tuck” into their body, and it makes them impossible to remove. However if you perform the procedure on fully awake individuals, it can be effective. This however, presents other issues, namely that it hurts. A lot.

This brings us to a hospital room in the present, containing one person, who will for the purposes of this story be called “Alex.” Alex is young, about 16 going on 17. When they first saw reports of the Angels, they were interested, but assumed it didn’t apply to them. Well, here we are. Alex’s wings are not the fluffy white wings of the first Angel, but a shriveled black version, looking less angelic and more like a vulture. At first, they despised this style, but slowly, as they woke up everyday and saw themself, the wings were starting to grow on them.
“Hello Alex. How are you feeling today.” Dr. Smith opened their door and entered. Alex was sitting on their bed eating a cup of jello.

“I’m good. Little cramped, but good.”

“That’s to be expected.” Smith opened up their clipboard. “I have some good news. The St. John Hospital was able to free up some resources, so we’ll be able to move your surgery up to tomorrow.”

“That’s pretty soon.”

“Yes. We can start getting you prepared, there isn’t much you have. Just remember not to eat, get plenty of rest, and don’t break your wings. I think that shouldn’t be too hard.”

“Hey Doc?”

“Yes?”

“What would happen if I didn’t get the surgery?”

Dr. Smith nodded. “Well, Alex. We don’t really know. I’m sure this is scary for you, but considering all the unknowns and especially all the disappearances, I am sure that this is the safest, most practical option for you.” He was calm and collected, but the message was clear: this was happening.

Their mom would appear not too long after. It seems like Dr. Smith informed her about the progress and the surgery, which to her ears was very good news.

“My Brave Baby Girl.” She said, giving Alex a kiss on both cheeks. “I’m so proud of you.” Alex was barely awake when this happened. They were taking Dr. Smith’s advice and resting. They did not find this difficult, as they had been feeling tired ever since they had been admitted to the hospital.

“How are you feeling?” Alex explained that they were anxious about the upcoming surgery. Even when they got their wisdom teeth pulled, they wanted to be knocked out, so they were not excited about being cut open fully cognizant.

“I know it’s scary, baby, but we have to go through with it. We have to, okay.” Alex’s mother swaddled them. They imagined this was a lot easier for the person who was not getting carved open.
Alex has had their wings for upwards of a month. They just kind of woke up one day with them. On that day, they hadn’t realized what had happened for most of the day. Alex got up, went downstairs and poured themself a bowl of cereal. It was easy to not notice the wings, they folded around obstacles and actually worked to keep Alex balanced, so it was easier to move around on that day, like how monkeys use their tails.

They didn’t know anything was happening until their mother saw them and screamed. She was not a fan of the wings. The next few weeks would be their mother and them fighting over whether or not Alex needed to check into the hospital. Alex’s Mother had read about a local doctor, Doctor Smith, who was trained in the wings procedure. However, Alex didn’t think it was such a big deal. It took her a minute, but Alex’s mother finally convinced them that the procedure wouldn’t be such a big deal, and that even though Alex would be afraid, it was for the best.

That is how Alex ended up in the hospital. She had been there for three days while their wings were endlessly prodded at, tested and scraped. It took the doctor 48 hours before he even declared that it was safe for the procedure to go ahead, and said that he needed to see if the local catholic hospital could free up some resources that they needed.

But now they were ready. Tomorrow, Alex will be wingless.

A ventilation grate hits the ground and clatters, which is followed by an entire person rolling out. They sprawl out on the floor, shocked and confused from what they had to know was a bad idea. “I’m here. I have arrived.”

Alex had all kinds of tubes and pipes into their wings, so they couldn’t turn comfortably, but they called out. “Thena? Is that you?”

“Yea.”

“Are you okay?”

“I did something my back wasn’t happy with. My wings weren’t too happy with it either.” Thena stood up and brushed themself off. They were pretty in a way Alex decidedly wasn’t. Their wings were small, pointed blue and green wings, like a human sized hummingbird’s, which gracefully matched their short cropped dyed purple hair.

“What are you doing here?”

Thena scuttled over to Alex’s wings in a panic. “This can’t be comfortable, can it?” They delicately touched Alex’s wings, which flinched slightly at the sense of human touch. “Sorry.”
“No, it’s fine. I’ve had a lot of feathers pulled.”
“Ouch.”
“It’s not so bad.”
Thena leans on the hospital bed and gives Alex a hug. “I’m so sorry this is happening. I just came to say that I think you look so beautiful with your wings, and I’d miss them. Also a lot of people are saying the procedure is horrifying, and I’m scared. I don’t want you to go through that.”
“Thena, it’s too late. Doc scheduled my procedure for tomorrow. I’m already in too deep.”
Thena started to pace frantically. “Tomorrow? No, no. It can’t be. Alex, you can’t do this. Please don’t do this.”
“Thena, it’s too late. You aren’t going to break up with me, are you?”
“Break up with you? No, sunshine, no.” Thena stopped her pacing, and sat to look at Alex. “I’ll love you no matter what. I’m just scared for you. You’re sure this is what you want?”
Alex shrugged. “I guess.”
“Then I’ll be here when you wake up.”
“The procedure is—”
“You know what I mean.”
“Also, I think my mom will be here too.”
Thena leaned in. “I. Don’t. Care.” They gave Alex a kiss on the cheek. “I wanna be here.”

Thena had to leave sooner than they wanted. Alex was under strict orders to only have family as guests, and a sweep was coming soon. This left Alex in a precarious spot. They felt the tubes and drips connected to them. Unsure which were important, they opted not to yank them out. However, they twisted themself, until they could feel the bone running through their wing pressed against the wall at an awkward, painful angle. Slowly, they started to press against the wall.
A poor nurse who was simply changing out the sheets in the room next door heard a noise like a twig snapping, closely followed by a blood curdling shriek. The nurse panicked and burst into the room to see an intense looking Alex. They were clearly in incredible pain, but they weren’t crying, or even upset looking, instead they took heavy breathes, shook rhythmically and seethed out, “I think I broke my wing.”
No shit. It was a miracle that it hadn’t pierced skin.
The nurse called for help immediately, and Alex’s wing was wrapped in bandages. To this point, the procedure for putting a cast around a wing is still being figured out, but they put an awkwardly shaped cast around the specific break in the wing and put the whole wing in a sling, which ends up looking like a very confused backpack.

Alex’s mom was not happy. “Sweetie, what did you do to yourself?” Alex insisted their wing got caught in the bar of the bed and snapped that way. It was not hard to tell they were lying.

Doctor Smith seemed somewhat unphased by this, he didn’t even seem to really care what had happened to their wing. He explained to Alex’s mom that this wasn’t actually that big a deal, as long as Alex was sure to rest their wing. All this meant was that they would have to wait until the wing was healed. Alex’s mother asked if he could remove them anyways, and he said that a broken wing invited too many complications, and the wing may be too weak for a clean break, possibly causing tearing to Alex’s back and spine. Alex’s mother understood well enough. They were discharged from the hospital, with a promise to check back in in a month to see how their wing was healing.

Alex found it hard to sleep that night, constantly tossing and turning, trying to find a comfortable way to rest their broken wing.

“Here. Let me help you.” A voice whispered. Alex felt themself starting to float in the air.

“What the hell? Who are you? What are you doing?”

In mid air, Alex twisted themselves in circles trying to find the voice. They felt their wing aching and screaming, but they had to, had to, find where the voice was coming from. As if to help, the lights in their room came on and started to glow unnaturally bright, less like they were running and more like they were on fire. Alex felt an unknown force guiding them to float on their back, and once they finally let it take over, the voice returned, and the source appeared to them, a series of glowing linked rings, with eyes painted on them, slowly spinning and each eye saw Alex with a new emotion, some pitied them, some envied them, some cared for them.

“Be Not Afraid. I am no one, not yet. I come bearing glorious burden, a weight you can carry to set you free. All I ask is that you run.”

Alex felt a pulse running through their wing, as the rings faded into mist, and when Alex turned to check the wing, it was glowing golden.

of body text
They woke up with a start. They assumed it was all a dream, but when they checked their wing, the cast and sling was gone and the broken wing was healed. Still letting the unknown force guide them, Alex pulled out their backpack, and stuffed enough clothes to last three days, all the money they had and a couple of other things into it. They left a note to their Mom telling her they’d call soon, but not to worry. Finally, they left. Standing outside a McMansion nearby, Alex threw rock at the window. Thena arrived at their window. “What’s happening? Alex? What are you doing?”

“Get down here. Quickly. Something amazing happened”

“Okay.” Thena wandered downstairs and let Alex in. Alex struggled to explain their vision, as well as their sudden compulsion. However, for all the times they stuttered over their words or seemed confused, Thena seemed to understand. Without saying much of anything, they went back into their room and came back with a duffel bag that they had already packed. For some reason, Thena had heard a similar voice. And for some reason, Thena also felt the need to run. Their car was already filled with gas and when they peeled out of the garage, no one noticed, somehow.

“Where are we going?”

“I’ve heard San Francisco is nice this time of year.”

“San Francisco, huh? Sounds like a dream.”

And off they drove, tearing down the highway. The next day, the news declared that another pair of Angels had disappeared.

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I think transcendence is about a feeling, and not really something that I can put well into words. I suppose this piece is about change and specifically the transcendence that comes from simply committing to being oneself.
Things I Will Try Before I Go On T
Isaac Fried (He/They) '23
CW: Gender Dysphoria

I have drawn comics since I learned about them in my A&I, I like to express ideas I have about gender identity and mental illness. I know that they are not the most polished or technically advanced, but to me my work shows a person in transition, transformation, and transcendence.
What’s in a soul?

My brain hates me. My body hates me. And I hate it back. That’s what I think to myself, for years. My body is wrong. My brain is wrong. No one is like me. It takes so many tears, talking and crying and screaming. My body and my brain are full of hate, full of pain.

But with time, I transcend. I see my body for what it is, a vessel to hold all the heart and soul it can. It’s insufficient, and I get mad at it.

I transcend again, after more tears. I see my brain for what it is, wires crossed and new wires scattered about. It’s different, but I don’t get mad at it, not this time.

I exhale. Connecting my body and my brain to my heart. It hurts. There’s pain. Does it ever end? I connect to the floating ether that is my soul. It is always enough. I cannot hate this thing, this me that is so connected to the universe that gold strings connect it to every other, beautiful, magical human being.

I come back down. I see my hands and my knees and my wild hair. I see the scribbles on paper and the thoughts in my brain. I connect them all.

This body I hate and this mind that despises me are both part of the ethereal, floating soul that I love.

I am still full of pain. My body reminds me of its otherness, and my brain tells me I do not belong.

But my soul belongs. It is tethered to everyone and everything. To beauty and love. It is tethered to me.

I am ethereal.

My interactions with my own body and existence have changed a lot since arriving at Carleton. I have hated myself so strongly for so long and only recently through a radical self-love have I come to be accepting of my existence and come into loving myself: my soul is ethereal, my experiences transformative, and my mind has transcended into a higher place than it ever was.
I've questioned my gender for most of my time at Carleton. By connecting closely with myself, I have begun to learn who I am. I have felt so uncomfortable in my body, but when I think of my body not as a gendered thing but as an ethereal, beautiful being, then I feel more at home within it. Though I still use both pronouns, hearing myself being called "they" puts me oddly at peace.
I found who I really was. I grew up in a space that didn’t give me an opportunity to explore who I was outside of the ideas that were places upon me. Here, I was able to begin to question who I was and those beliefs that keep me in a box all my life. Now, I know who I am and feel confident in asking questions of myself and life.

Questioning comes in a lot of different forms and it is always shifting its form in our lives. It allows us to transform and become aware of ourselves, others and have the world. The wood pieces have questions burned into them but they form a larger question mark symbolizing the journey of trying to understand yourself. The dot is a monkey fist which is a complex knot. I see this knot as the feeling when questioning begins to causes us to tense and feel lost but all we need to do is follow the rope (the connection) through.
Girl fix light
Standing on a chair, she twists her arm. She’s wearing two scarves, greenly knit, one wrapped around her hair, the other around her foot. She shakes the box (too cheap) and drops the bulb. Girl flashes a grateful smile when Lady One catches it. A forceful day, she thinks, my life has been a forceful day. One brought the chair from the recreation room to the closet -- she’s always doing nice things (they all do, but that’s women). One grins back, light peeking through her gap. She might be pretty.

“Do you know what a bidet is?” One’s holding a magazine. Girl turns the light to her, illuminating a white picture. Her head stills.

“You crazy,” Girl says to One, making her laugh. She climbs off the chair. Girl do dishes squeaky clean Washing leaves her hands purple and ashy -- but she’s helpful. Girl pours water into the dish detergent, listening to Lady Two, her braids shrieking off her back. She’s talking about her boy (it’s always a boy, but that’s grief). Girl finds it odd to include men; she hasn’t seen a man since Her Father.

Lady Two is from New York and she doesn’t let them forget. “I’m deadass. He’ll come back to me.” She bites down on a lollipop. Girl almost asks how she got the money from commissary but doesn’t have the time or language.

“You crazy,” Girl says to Two. She doesn’t think that a man who was stalked will go back to the woman who stalked him. Men don’t love dangerous women, not in reality, and not abstractly either.
Still:
“My man always comes back,” Two declares. She throws out the stick and helps Girl dry.

Girl clean (before six)
In all of human history, women sit in circles. The ladies play spit, waiting for moonlight.

“My trial’s in five days,” Lady Four says to Five, passing a card. She’s mommy smiling. They pat her back, thinking, hope you make it to your baby.

Five snaps her fingers at Girl. “When’s yours? Are you getting a translator?” No answer, she’s not supposed to. They feel bad that they don’t know anything about her; no one does.

“She’s her own attorney,” Two whispers to Five.

Five’s stare doesn’t break. “That’s fucked.” Girl continues sweeping, but she looks up to see One being dragged like a chair by the sadist guard. Girl catches One’s eyes in her chokehold; they’re unnervingly light.

“Crazy bitch,” Two snarls, but bites her nail, her nail polish green by the lamp. No one likes to see them get beat. It’s always us&them, us them -- team terrorists of the state (pejoratives of the nation).

“We don’t say crazy anymore,” Five retorts as One is pulled to solitary.

Two glowers. “I say what’s true. If you’re crazy, you’re crazy. No cap.”

“You are abhorrent,” Five says, shaking her head. That’s her new word: abhorrent. You are a whore and rat. “What’d she even do?”
"Take a chair," Two mentions idly. Girl looks again but One is gone. Two taps at the table. "Let's play." And when the nice white guard passes by, they know to pack up: bedtime.

Girl make bed ______ like strawberries

That's what her mother called it: tug the ends of sheets into the mattress fold blanket like a basket drop into strawberry sweetness. She remembers going to the market for Sunday dinner but not why, not when, not how. That's what happens when you're inside for too long. The light escapes you.

Her roommate, Three, is already in bed. She was smoking on the bannister before Girl arrived. That's Bad. That's the type of thing that gets you a few more years. Girl makes a face and Three reads her instantly.

"Oh, shut up, saint." Three knows everything. She says funny words like "matrix of domination" and "industrial complex." Words are stupid, to Girl. They fall apart. "May you be rewarded for your good behavior with a fig tree."

Three's always talking about being delivered, not happy. Are you ready to die, Three asks? Are you ready to bury your mothers, sisters, brothers, uncles? No. You intellectualize it, but you're not ready to be a revolutionary.

S

tupid.

When the work's done, Girl thinks about peace.

And when the light creaks just so
she closes her eyes.

dreams are all enigma, toxin, bullet in the brain — Girl do well for herself.
I’ve gotten both smaller and bigger in my time at Carleton, dealing with the weight of microaggressions and terrible food. But I’ve creatively found a lot of space to grow and use my work, academic and otherwise, as space to heal myself and imagine new constructions.

I wrote this piece as part of an abolition collection. So it is partially about the transformation of our society and what our world would be like without prisons. But I think it’s also transcendence because the way in which I’ve watched and felt women transcend boundaries and rules to comfort each other.
As someone who didn't grow up or have any introduction to Ballroom, I have had the opportunity to hear and learn from others who've had a passion for the culture of Ballroom. Reading about the AIDS movement and how many Balls took the opportunity to spread awareness about the virus and how to stay safe was my introduction to Ballroom culture.

With this photo series, I wanted to honor and reminisce on the historical strides that many mothers and performers made while doing what they loved. Ballroom is a culture, lifestyle, and personal expression of one's identity. The history of Balls has been translated into many forms of media/mediums today and I hope my piece can do as much as educate and excite others into learning more about the history of Balls and its impact on the Queer community today.
I'm not a writer or poet in any way shape or form. Photography is how I see the world, through my eyes. Our eyes are like cameras, what we see gets saved in our frontal lobe where all our memories are stored, good or bad memories. Carleton was my opportunity to be my authentic self without the fears of pressure or self-doubt. I'm still growing and that's a good thing.

Homecoming Queen invites visitors to explore the wonderful world of Utica Queen, star of Season 13 of the Emmy-winning pop-culture phenomenon RuPaul’s Drag Race. The exhibition features garments, accessories and original design sketches by Ethan Mundt (Utica Queen), editorial photographs of the Drag Race.

The exhibition highlights the impressive output of Mundt’s burgeoning career, from the capstone “Balloon Bride” dress from his senior year in college to creations realized for the Drag Race competition — including iconic looks such as the “Sleeping Bag” dress featured by Vogue — to amazing costumes designed after the show. Each one of the 20 garments presented in the exhibition is rich in articulated references to queer culture and historical religious symbols. These original creations showcase a world of duality: the world of Utica Queen, where images of joy and sparkle coexist with the darker and fantastical side of Mundt’s imagination.
Wishing the Pain Away
Amaris Venus Brumby '23

Sometimes I hear my friends say they
"Want to wish the pain away"
Or
"I wish I never experienced hurt"

And to that I sometimes agree
But deep down I know the girl I am today
would not be formed without her pain
The beauty of pain is the person you become after

But that person depends on how you handle that
The pain can swallow you whole
Or
you can channel it as a way to heal and realize potential

I chose to heal from my pain and take it as a message
My past self fought battles relentlessly
My current self is reaping the rewards of the battles
My current self is handling the consequences of the battles

Venus is beauty transformed
Her soul made ethereal
Her flesh made of stars
Her body made to shine

I am Venus
I stand for the Trans girls
who are hurting and telling them
Never wish your pain away
For even caterpillars have to wait
To become butterflies
My piece is meant to stand that battles are not fought without purpose. Even when you reap one grain of rewards and face a storm of consequences, you will gain something from it. For after every storm comes a rainbow. The pain may stream your face with tears and you may not want to get up. But getting up and looking at the beauty that your tears have nourished is the best everlasting sweetness that your body can taste.
Once upon a time there was a little girl. She was gorgeous. She had brown little curls and ran around gleefully in a white dress and black soccer cleats. She loved to live life and she loved to feel her soul alive. She started wearing shorts and shirts like the little boys. She dreamed of loving a woman. Her little mind dreamed and longed to know what it felt like to press against a woman’s chest—a deep longing and ache to know what that was like. But she knew she never could. Because it was shameful to do that. It was shameful to even have the thoughts. But the world said that to be sporty was to be cool and so she was sporty. She wished she could be like the boys and play with the boys at recess. She wore her baseball t-shirt, hoping the boys would think it was cool. Why did she have to play with the girls. She could play with the boys but she was too scared. She was expected to play with the girls. A deep sadness set in. A deep, deep sadness set in that she didn’t know what to do with. She kept on growing up. She looked like a princess and was a beautiful girl. She got so many compliments whenever she wore dresses or girly things. And she liked the attention and knowing that she was good at something. She had long gorgeous thick brown hair. But she had this tugging in her heart, in her soul, behind her sternum, an amorphous mass of something shrouded and heavy. Oh so heavy. Sometimes a little unraveled and chained her down to the bed and she couldn’t move. Sometimes it clamped her brain down and didn’t let her think. Sometimes it caused her so much pain that she dug her nails into her face, her beautiful face, to try and let it out. She was so sad and hurt so much and she didn’t know why. They told her that sometimes there is no reason. And maybe that is true. She grew up some more. Grew close to a girl and loved her more than she knew she could love someone.
She got her heart broken but didn't understand why. She knew heartbreak. She knew that feeling. Because it was the same feeling she felt when she first dreamed of feeling a woman's breasts against her body. But she didn't remember that thought. Not yet. This is what it is to love a friend, she thought. What a powerful all consuming gut wrenching feeling. She grew up some more and realized that she could lie with a woman's body. Over time she learned that she could lie with a woman's body and feel no shame, only love and celebration and happiness. But her hair grew ragged and dragged her down. That lonely weight, sickness in her chest, woke up. She realized that she wasn't a woman at all. That she never had been a little girl.

Goodbye little girl. She cut her hair and all of a sudden it glistened again in beauty. Her whole person lit up again like that little kid in the white dress. And she recognized themself for the first time in her whole life. And she died a little. In his loving arms. The little boy who she left behind on a street corner somewhere behind her sternum. She found him and promised him in tears and sobs that she would never, ever abandon him again. I am so sorry she sobbed. I am so sorry. And the little boy clung to her afraid to let go and she poured her heart and love into him and took him everywhere from then on. He grew up and slowly began to walk hand in hand with the girl. And sometimes he held her close and said it's okay, I've got this, let me lead the way. And other times the little girl in the white dress and black soccer cleats wakes up and runs gleefully barefoot through the grass and flowers. And the boy does too. He is still young. He has a lot to learn. He hasn't learned how to live yet. But he has the girl and together they make it through. Leaning on the one when the other is too weak and tired to continue. This way they live their lives. They love each other and never let the other go. Sometimes, the woman grows sick and they think the boy will have to take over and he whispers in loving tears, "it is okay let me take over." Other times, the boy is too young and she remembers her joyous love for the world. Sometimes the boy realizes that joy is really his. They don't know what will come next but they do know that they love each other and are working on letting the other go when the time is right. For now, they love each other and they love life and they live each day like it is their last because who knows what tomorrow will bring. That is the love story I have to tell. It is the story of the love within myself, for myself.

This piece is a late night, nostalgic stream of conciseness about me recognizing the little boy in me and coming to terms with my sexuality and non-binary gender.
Unfinished, For Now
Jalen Causey (They/She) '23

i remember when i was young
i would look at the moon
i loved how she made me feel
seen
understood
heard
...
i didn’t feel lonely anymore.

i remember when i was in my teen-ness
i would look at the moon
her in all her phases
she could be this way one day
another the next
she was who she was in all her forms
and we accepted her for it
...
when am i next?

i remember when i was transitioning into college
i would look at the moon
the Moon
the change
the rebirth
the clarity
my moon mother saw someone different
/in me/
i think i’m starting to find Her, too,
i remember when i was right now year’s old
i would look at the moon
and she would look back at me
in the dark you see things different
more true, more honest, more literal
she reflected me, and i her
we’re the same -
someday i’ll love me (her) and her (me) all the same

I’ve come to transform in many different ways
during my college experience, and the ones I
really home in on within the poem are about
beginning the journey to understand my gender
and gaining a sharper, clearer image of myself.
And because I’m a very astrologically-connected
person, I oftentimes think of the moon as my
guide.
Espadita de la Tierra

They are still, laid along the dirt-splattered stone
The Sun unfolds her tired arms, aching, toward them
But, the unknown mirror, already brimming with flame, remains unsheathed

Sun and the Earth chant, cry, shake in failed attempt to wake the blade,
their scars, all in singular pattern, reflect the intention of hurt
But the blade remains heated, rough, sharp.

Mi espadita remains unmoving - is it strategy, hope, or paralysis?
The lift of flame inside the compactness of themselves is alone.
The subject that the heavens envy carries no worth without someone to hold her
hold me
hold us

Alé Cota (She/They) '22
am i a flower
...If i don’t bloom?
If the sun doesn’t reach me
...Do i still crave its touch?
The warmth of its petals
The current of its breath
The drops of dew on my bare skin
Yet i will not bloom

I am beauty
I am fruitful
I am a dream
But i do not know if i am a flower
I empower you to pluck me
Even if it is not what i want
I want to be left alone
STOP KILLING BLACK TRANS WOMEN:
MARQUIISHA “QUIII” LAWRENCE
BRIANNA ULMAR HAMILTON
ZA’NIYAH WILLIAMS
ALEXUS BRAXTON
DOMINIQUE JACKSON
DOMINIQUE LUCIOUS
KOKO LABEIJA
ROYAL POETICAL STARZ
NATALIA SMUT
FIFTY BANDZ
REMY DEVANTE’ FENNEll
COCO CHANEL WORTHAM
POOH JOHNSON
DANlKA “DANNY” HENSON
ANGEL NAIRA
Tiffany thomas
TiERRAMARIE LEWIS
AMARIey “MAYRA” LEI
DiSAYA MONAAEE
35
TIARA BANKS
TYIANNA “DAVAREA
ALEXANDER
DUVAL PRINCESS
KE’YAHONNA STONE
TAYA ASHTON
JAILDA PETERSON
NIKAI DAVID
KERI WASHINGTON
SHAI VANDERPUMP
DANYALE THOMPSON
AIDELENE EVANS
SERENITY HOLLIS
DIAMOND KYREE SANDERS
BIANCA “MUFFIN” BANKZ
KIER LAPRI KARTIER
BRIANA HAMILTON
Think about what vulnerabilities you are and are not willing to share? How can you continue to heal yourself, and to appreciate your stories? What makes you, you?

Now think about how we can foster discussion as a wider Carleton community using this healing and the ability to share our stories to show up for others.

...exhale
Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Winter 2022 edition of Exhale Identity Series! Gratitude is also extended to Ale, Cori, and Ana who took the lead in breathing life into this enriching anthology. This series could not have been a success without the contributors, editors, publishers, and you, the reader. As a reminder, please continue to keep Trans and Queer communities at the center of your organizing and commit to protecting and loving these communities.
My interactions with my own body and existence have changed a lot since arriving at Carleton. I have hated myself so strongly for so long and only recently through a radical self-love have I come to be accepting of my existence and come into loving myself: my soul is ethereal, my experiences transformative, and my mind has transcended into a higher place than it ever was.
- Maya Rogers (She/They) '22

“I think transcendence is about a feeling, and not really something that I can put well into words. I suppose this piece is about change and specifically the transcendence that comes from simply committing to being oneself.”
- Anonymous

"I wrote this piece as part of an abolition collection. So it is partially about the transformation of our society and what our world would be like without prisons. But I think it's also transcendence because the way in which I've watched and felt women transcend boundaries and rules to comfort each other."
- Octavia Washington (She/Her) '22

'My piece is meant to stand that battles are not fought without purpose. Even when you reap one grain of rewards and face a storm of consequences, you will gain something from it. For after every storm comes a rainbow. The pain may stream your face with tears and you may not want to get up. But getting up and looking at the beauty that your tears have nourished is the best everlasting sweetness that your body can taste."
- Amaris Venus Brumby (She/Her) '23