

Rejected Lit Mag Issue #2



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Despite How Much We Say We Hate Winter
Meghan Sterling

like mother's milk, the snow has scent
our bodies seek and hunger for,

while the black sky bright against the white
reveals the shape of things, our edges,

ghosts, the meanness of ice,
and winter's too-slow return to light.

Late at night, the sky threatens this sinking earth
as we walk along the coast,

my family and their dreams lost in the waves,
the shtetl that they fled across this water

and all in their graves.

I don't know how to explain to their memory

what has happened, what I have done
with my time here, how I have tried

to love this place, to save this place,
fed too as I've been by love and struggle

by loss. And all of this beautiful snow
the joy and cruelty of snow
the way that winter contains us
in its endless fields, its massive hands,

the way it brings us closer to our beginnings—
dark, light, and altar.

it's what We expect,
Ryan French

The pull of

Give, give
Take, take

The taste of her hair entering my mouth

Twisting and Knotting

My tongue into rows

of Poetry I do not understand

What Weaves

down and up her body
Is not allowed to be spoken of

A foot apart together

Having the most intimate of moments

With her own bone tissue,

She fingers

to recreate

the stitching of A God that no longer exists

Speaks of toiling away in bed with her new God

a Divine being herself

It's not blasphemous if

she Is the creator of The Creator

And I pull

Pull

and take and give

and take and give

from Her

A Brief History of Neoliberalism
AK Cola

Nocturnal dust hibernates behind the refrigerator

And taunts the compressor by remaining still,

Despite daylight's winded attempts

To achieve relevance

Through an accidental chore. Open the door.

See the light.

Capitalists patented canned-air to combat stillness.

Communists huff canned-air to escape oxygen.

Appropriate nomenclature for neo-liberal idolatries

Affiliates the evolution of morals

With advances in technology.

If food spoils

Blame the dust.

thoughts & prayers
for Ahmaud
Damieka Thomas

Ahmaud Arbery would have been 26 on Friday, May 8, 2020.

As you write this, that is tomorrow.

A day that you will get to see, but he won't.

A day that will be commemorated with

thoughts & prayers.

On February 23, 2020, Ahmaud was gunned down by two white men while a third filmed it. In the video that is now seared into your skull, they burst out of their pickup truck in a flurry, guns blazing; a struggle quickly ensues, during which Ahmaud tries to fight, sweat dripping from his white shirt, confused, disoriented, and attacked in broad daylight. The sound of a rifle shot rings through the otherwise blissful neighborhood, and Ahmaud falls onto the hot asphalt.

thoughts & prayers.

Now, that video has been viewed hundreds of thousands of times. You click, you watch, feel sick to your stomach, want to cry, want to scream. Feel that overpowering sense of déjà vu. You react. You click the angry emoji, the sad emoji. You like. You share. You send out

thoughts & prayers.

To his mom. To his body in the morgue. To his friends. You tell them that you are sorry. You tell them that you are angry. You actually get angry, feel it settle in your bones, in your chest, in your toes, in your shaking hands. You get angry. But not before you remember to send

thoughts & prayers.

We've been here before. We've seen this a million times. It is seared into our atoms. Still, each time feels different. Each time *is* different. A different family to send our

thoughts & prayers.

Our families prepared us for this from birth. Taught us to always be aware of our surroundings, always look out for the cops or white men who look at you in that way that makes your skin crawl. We always knew this was a possibility. Being black in America is the biggest gamble you will ever take with your life. And it's not even you who is placing the bets.

But still, you feel a shock run through you at the images you see on the screen. New and familiar all at once. Then you remember to like all the others posts that send

thoughts & prayers.

But, for you, the first shock, the first drop of your stomach to your knees, is in the brown and white image plastered across social media and the New York Time. The image you cannot unsee. He looks just like your stepdad. Wide smiling lips stretched over pristine ivory teeth, up tilted cap, he is black and beautiful and free.

thoughts & prayers.

You wonder what Ahmaud felt in those very last moments. The brilliance of the sunlight hitting his face one moment, sweating and panting and listening to music. Free and *alive*. Then the truck swerving beside him. That first initial shock that ran through his entire body at the sight of the gun. The struggle. The noise, perhaps heard as though through a tunnel, perhaps blaringly loud. The realization of the shot. The last racing thoughts as death comes to collect him too early. The hot Georgia sun on his face. The shade of the trees, and those white men standing over his body, admiring their handy work. Every black man's worst nightmare come true.

thoughts & prayers.

You wonder where Ahmaud is now. If the thoughts and prayers can reach him there. You hope they do. Hope that he is somewhere where the sun never sets, illuminating ebony skin, and the smiles are wide and big as a crescent moon. Where they drink sweet tea and eat soul food that never runs low. Where they dance and laugh and there are no white men with guns to take the laughter away and replace it with blood. Most importantly, you hope that there is lots of room to run there. You hope there is a track that never ends, and that Ahmaud is on it every single day. You will pray to whatever God there is in the hopes that this wish will come true. And then you will remember to send more *thoughts & prayers.*

White Girl

Damieka Thomas

White girl,

Black name.

White girl,

Black friends.

White girl,

Black sister.

White girl,

You a shell,

A sponge to soak up our culture,

An unwanted weed encroaching on our roots.

White girl,

You taste of nothing.

No,

You taste worse than nothing.

You taste of sugar

And watermelon

And cotton.

You taste of them—

The ones who taught us to hate our skin as much as they did.

You taste of minstrelsy.

You taste of thievery,

Of heritage exhumed and

Men taken from their homeland in ships too small to fit their bones.

White girl,

White men don't want you.

White girl,

Black men don't want you.

But you just keep claiming your half-life,

Treating your skin with cocoa butter

And talking in large platitudes of oppression unknown to you.

White girl,

You are a fraud.

White girl,

Why ain't you more proud?

Healthy Coping Mechanisms

Damieka Thomas

Fucking a man that I barely know.
Getting lost in the smell of weed and
beer and cheap cologne and sweat,
And then ghosting in the morning.
Feeling powerful as I bump Beyonce
on my way out of his parking lot.
Sunglasses on and hair in a messy
bun.
Can't nobody tell me nothing.

Driving the hour to my hometown,
Stopping at Trader Joe's on the way.
Chocolate and wine.
Locking myself in my room
And drinking an entire bottle of cheap champagne by myself

Then buying out half of my Amazon wish list while
humming to the tune of *I want it, I got it*. Going to sleep dizzy
and bubbling with giggles.

Waking up and throwing up into my nightstand drawer.
Avoiding calling my family,
Or texting my friends,
Or looking at my to-do list.
Laying in bed.
Masturbating until I fall asleep again.
Waking up,
Drinking vodka and orange juice.
Rewatching *Community*,
Only the ones with Donald Glover.
Realizing I find *Abed* weirdly hot.
Realizing that aloofness turns me on.
Wondering what that says about me.
Falling asleep with salt and vinegar chip dust on my chest
and my cat meowing at my door. She gets tired and leaves.

I wish I could do the same.

I fall asleep dreaming of the open road and no responsibilities.

Then I dream of my mom screaming at me,

My dad's fist pounding on the wall next to her head,

The door slamming as he leaves for more speed.

I go looking for him,

And find him under a bridge,

Copper skin pale and stiff to the touch.

Waking up.

Realizing I forgot to brush my teeth the last two days.

Looking into the bathroom mirror and not recognizing my own face.

Forget to brush my teeth.

Existential crisis until 4 pm.

Call the boy with green eyes and calloused hands.

The one who smells of weed and regret.

He ignores me.

I hide my phone.

I find my phone.

Boy has texted me.

U up?

Cliche enough that I roll my eyes.

But lonely enough that I still respond.

"Roommates gone again," he says.

Drive an hour south to meet him.

We spend three hours together,

And he never says my name.

Come home.

Stand in my room naked and take an air bath.

I saw that in a Betty Page documentary

once and always wanted to try it.

Realize it's too hot for this shit.

Put on a robe.

Ignore all my missed calls and texts.

Get drunk and read my entire astrological

chart for the fifth time this week. Cry.

After all, I'm a Cancer Moon and double Pisces.

Fall asleep reading about how I'm

attracted to people that are bad for me.

Get out of bed.

Brush teeth for the second time that day.

Feel accomplished.

Shower.

Rinse.

Repeat.

Rejected Lit Mag's Young Writer Spotlight

An Excerpt from "Chapter 1"

Esme Brown

It's been 3 days since I told her what happened, it's mostly silence between us. "Love you, see you when I get off", she yells from the door. "Love yo-" the door shuts, and she's off to work, that's our communication. I think she's taking this out on herself instead of me. Damn it! I knew this would do more hurt than good. I just needed to put dude in his place, I never meant for her to get hurt instead. Momma always says, "we're going to move out of this shit hole I promise you" I think she's promising herself more than us. She works 6/7 days out of the week, and no amount of hours is enough for us to pick up and move.

Mountain View Arkansas, the town where my mom grew up. Not the town she wanted to raise her kids in. My older sister Kylee was born when she was 18, nothing went planned after that. I can't count the times she has wished she never brought us here because of how close minded, and racist it is. I pretend not to notice but she beats herself up about it all the time.

I always knew our skin wasn't the same as everyone else, but I was never "different" until I hit High School. The slang, the name calling, and even some people's actions made me realize real quick I was the definition of different. At first I just ignored

it and moved on, but the closer my siblings got to High School I realized I had to make a stand for not only me, but for them too.

I began writing, using my voice until I realized it wasn't being heard. That's when my emotions became actions, and my silence became violence. It was that day I realized this was OUR year, the year black people have a voice, and fight back using it.

~

It's the same every week, everything on tv, people is dying at the hands of police. They blame us, so who do we trust? Nothing is changing, this shit old like rust! You don't agree? Well educate, because this our society. If we join in all 50 states, as Tupac estimates, we will be stronger than police brutality. So tonight rest your head with the truth instead, and know the point of view, maybe then we will all pull through.

I'm finishing the last line, when I realize it's 4:00, momma gets off at 5, and not a single load of laundry is done. Clearing my head always takes the time away from me, especially when the words just flow. I've always had a good grade in english, and the teachers always said my tone of writing was "different". It was only then I realized I had just changed the meaning of "different". Unique, bold, strong, outspoken, all these words describe a different/black woman living in america.

Grounded, no phone, or friends describe the exact look on momma's face when she comes home early only to notice I haven't moved from this couch since she left.

"I was just finna start a load, I swear", I told her.

"And I was finna get off work 4 HOURS AGO", screaming tha last part.

"I know, I'm sorry"

"Me too", she says as she walks away to her room.

Seeing the exhausting look on her face I realize she only left work because of the terrible headaches she sometimes gets. Instantly feeling regret I run to start a load of towels so she can shower later. It's not easy working a 9-5 then coming home to cook and clean. I try to help her out as much as I can, but I don't think all the help in the world would touch the problems we got.



Meghan Sterling's work has been published or is forthcoming in Rattle, Rust & Moth, SWIMM, The Night Heron Barks, Cider Press Review, Inflectionist Review, The West Review, UCity Review, Sky Island Journal, Valparaiso Poetry Review Westchester Review, Pine Hills Review, Menacing Hedge and many others. She is Associate Poetry Editor of the Maine Review, a Finalist in River Heron Review's 2021 annual poetry contest, and winner of Sweet Literary's 2021 annual poetry contest. Her collection *These Few Seeds* is out now from Terrapin Books. Sterling is Program Director for the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance and lives in Portland, Maine. Read her work at meghansterling.com.



Ryan French is a poet who is from Colorado originally. Currently they are attending University of Montana for Creative Writing and Elementary Education. They attended Idyllwild Arts Academy from 2017-2020, focusing on creative writing.



AK Cola is a pop-culture-war-veteran and they're here to exploit American consumerism for profit, starting off by selling their book *New World Hubris* through Amazon, find their current material at AKCola.com.



Damieka Thomas is a mixed-race writer and poet. She holds a degree in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing and a minor in Education from UC Davis. She currently works as a Librarian Assistant and bookseller. Additionally, she is the co-founder and Public Relations Officer of *Mad Mouth Poetry*, which is a collective of poets dedicated to creating equitable spaces in poetry. She has been published in *Open Ceilings Magazine* and *Poets.org*. She is the recipient of the Celeste Turner Wright Prize for Poetry from The Academy of American Poets and The Diana Lynn Bogart Prize for Fiction from UC Davis. She is applying for MFA programs this Fall and hopes to attend a program next year. In her spare time, Damieka enjoys reading, writing, hiking, yoga, traveling, and indulging in the frequent Netflix binge with her cat by her side. You can find Damieka @damiekat on all social media platforms.



Esme Brown grew up in Mountain View, Arkansas, where she learned to embrace and stand up for her racial identity. Writing was always her escape, but it was the two teachers Mrs. Knapp, and Mrs. Reading who allowed her to find her voice. Having life on her shoulders, she realized everything you do comes with experience. Learning to live with good intentions, she uses her past to yield her future.

