



Literary
Journal



Volume 3



Literary Journal

VOLUME THREE

Editors

Crystal Bonano

Isabelle Cavazos

Laura Flores

Interns

Raquel Mueller

Natalia A. Pagán Serrano

Kristin Dawn Urban

Ellianie Vega

Publication

Copyright © 2021 iō Literary Journal, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of quotations in a book review.

First edition August 2021

Front cover art “indigo” by Jiesha Stephens

Back cover art “elision” by Jiesha Stephens

Book design by Crystal Bonano

Vision

iō believes that art is derived from one’s experiences and exploration of life. Therefore, anyone is capable of creation. However, not everyone has access to the traditional means for publication. This book aims to provide a platform for these underrepresented voices of our time.

Disclaimers

Fiction: The pieces of prose labeled fiction are just that. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Nonfiction: The pieces of prose labeled nonfiction are just that. Some parts may have been fictionalized in varying degrees, for various purposes.

Content Warning

The stories in this volume touch on many sensitive topics such as, but not limited to, abuse, violence, childhood trauma, self-harm, suffocation, sexual assault/rape, homophobia, transphobia, drug use, thoughts of suicide, and death.

Previous Volumes



Volume 1



Volume 2



Tales E-book

EDITORS' NOTE

Dear Readers,

The past two years have created a unique landscape in the literary world, to say the least. With a global pandemic that catapulted everyone's lives into utter unpredictability and unrest, being in position to capture this transitional period in human history has been quite the experience. With all that 2020 had to shell out, we were a bit apprehensive as to whether writers and artists would be creating like they used to, but we ultimately decided to post a call for submissions for Volume 3, and intentionally decided not to designate a theme for our third print volume (unlike our open-access e-book *Tales from Six Feet Apart*, which singularly focused on people's experiences of resilience amidst COVID-19). Nonetheless, we have found that although writers and artists were not in the same position they used to be when it came to creating, as true creatives, they found their footing in a new world, influenced by COVID-19, to create in a distinct way than what we have seen previously. These pieces reflect the new state of vulnerability, authenticity, and transparency the past two years have pushed us to deeply think about, and ultimately to create about. As a result, Volume 3 houses pointed and nuanced perspectives on race and ethnicity, identity, spirituality, relationships, and sexuality, to name a few.

In exploring these themes, these pieces showcase the individuality embedded in issues that have become largely generalized. This volume features characters confronting normalcy and conformity in their self-expression, while others highlight what it feels like to see oneself through another person's lens. Nature is portrayed both as a consistent stronghold, reliable in the face of human limitations, and as a restrictive force

that traps us. Migration is both an understanding of power and endurance and an emotional and physical gap. As a collective, these pieces teach us that the human experience cannot be concentrated into a single theme, a single word. We, as editors, acknowledge the effect of curation and our individual preferences, but we are simultaneously grateful to have the opportunity to receive work that speaks to issues that intersect with first-generation experiences, family dynamics, and identity, which intimately intrigue us. The contributors in this volume have characterized these themes, and more, for us and have illustrated their plurality. We consider Volume 3 a special and defining collection for iō.

Thus, we are proud at how far iō has come as both an organization and a print journal, and we are grateful for the outpour of support over the years as we learned along the way what worked and what didn't. Going forward, we will be shifting our focus to building iō as a brand by expanding into new ventures. During the last three years, the editors have visualized in-depth fun and challenging creative projects we hope to branch into. The literary world is always evolving, and, to sustain the journal for years to come, iō must, too. The third volume signals a change in path as well as a start to a temporary hiatus. When we return with our next print volume, it will be with a renewed energy and direction in our book reflective of upcoming literary trends as well as emerging mediums of storytelling. We hope you, our readers and contributors, are as excited as we are about this next adventure!

Crystal, Isabelle, Laura

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 07 El Chan**
Danielle Potter
- 08 Dulcet Tones'
Recurring Dream**
Kenneth Pobo
- 09 Gender-Bending
Creatures**
Shantha J. Bunyan
- 11 Cosmic Serpents**
Sarah Stone
- 12 Everything's
Connected**
Sarah Stone
- 13 The Sheet**
Charlie J. Stephens
- 15 Pillow Talk**
Sam Nelson
- 16 Girl Voice**
Kiran JS Bonner
- 17 Hemoptysis**
Lisa Olsen
- 19 Unholy**
Divya Vetticaden
- 21 Burned Burgers
and Lazy Flies**
D.S. Maolalai
- 22 Upbark**
Megan Mizanty
- 23 Never Nothing**
Jen Schneider
- 24 The Great Divide**
Danielle Broadway
- 28 Self Love**
Jiesha Stephens
- 29 Blue Madonna**
Jiesha Stephens
- 30 The Isthmus**
Iliana Cuellar
- 32 Work Ethic**
Naazneen Diwan
- 35 Identity**
Esin Nizamoglu
- 36 Lifecycle**
Mickie Kennedy
- 38 Deep in Skin**
Vimla Sriram

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 39 38th & Chicago**
[May 25, 2020]
David Harrison Horton
- 40 Roots of Genocide**
Raquel Morris
- 42 Lucky Dreamer**
Vicky Pinpin-Feinstein
- 50 Sacred Threads**
Vijay R. Nathan
- 52 For Everything Behind
Her Has Lost Its Place**
Joan Caska
- 53 A Woman Tangled**
Xenia Sylvia Dylag
- 54 Hatched**
Sasha Torchinsky
- 55 Horned Goddesses
Come to Life 1**
Amalia Galdona Broche
- 56 Horned Goddesses
Come to Life 2**
Amalia Galdona Broche
- 57 syncope**
Emily Perkovich
- 58 Drop It**
Lisa Bellamy
- 59 Digging Beneath
the Surface**
Mari-Carmen Marin
- 61 Out Black**
Marie G. Coleman
- 73 As Is**
Stephanie Lamb
- 75 External Factors**
Jason Tobin
- 76 Blood Barriers**
Mateo Perez Lara
- 78 God Poem**
Joanna Acevedo
- 79 A Shared Moment**
Sid Gopinath
- 80 Subway Bench**
Sid Gopinath
- 81 All Eyes on Him**
Sid Gopinath
- 82 Danced**
Ramon Jimenez

Danielle Potter

El Chan

When I had gone to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, and ventured from its cobblestone streets to climb the ladder hugging the cliff three hundred feet down to El Charco del Ingenio, I did it barefoot. Once below, I relished the feel of my toes curling around the edges of the granite, splaying where flat, a pair of extra hands that kept me from slipping into the Charco, the water carpeted green with algae in some parts, unpleasantly clear in others. I imagined some long-ago girl with waist-long, black hair and a deep brown tan like mine doing the same. My soles are worn thick from years of running barefoot; grass-between-toes-no-goathead-can-pierce-this-skin calloused. I had only paused and stretched on a slab of granite in the sun when El Chan—demon of the Charco, of these bottomless waters—poked his head from the depths, blemishing the surface, his oil-drop eyes daring me, his shell curving into the dark abyss of his home. And then we talked of the stories surrounding the Charco. Yes, he said, the bandit Chuchuy did disappear into the caves within the cliffs when the hounds were nipping at his tail, but he could hardly attest to whether any of the tunnels led to a home in the heart of San Miguel, such as the stories went. And he talked of Don Baltazar Sautto's headless ghost, and we wondered what urged this factory owner known for his cruelty to mount his steed and take to San Miguel's cobblestone streets until the sun pierced him through at daybreak, overpowering his subtle luminance to only those paying attention. Muerto. Again and again. Muerto. Every sunrise, whether you bore witness or not. Muerto. I laughed, and when he asked why, I told him it was because he was not as terrifying as the stories said.

Kenneth Pobo

Dulcet Tones' Recurring Dream

In my house I'm watching an *I Love Lucy*
rerun that I've seen at least 50 times.
The wash *slurps* in the basement.
I washed the breakfast bowl. Everything's
ready for lunch. I've done this
for half a century, not knowing that

I was dreaming. I had not lived a real life.
What's a real life? One day
I'm seven years old at a Memorial Day
parade, scouts walking past.
The next day the army

breaks in, searches my house.
They don't care which Lucy episode
I'm watching. I'm to be questioned.
Downtown. I wonder if
my fingerprints can quickly learn
how to lie. I must have done something.

They won't say.
Maybe they never will.

Shantha J. Bunyan

Gender-Bending Creatures

There are many creatures of the earth, sea, and sky who blur the lines of gender and sexuality as a rule.

A green sea turtle's gender is determined by the temperature of the sand surrounding its egg during development.

A mature male clownfish becomes a female only after the female is lost from their anemone family.

Ribbon eel juveniles mature into males, and later convert to females, should they live that long.

Hawkfish can change back and forth if necessary to maintain the gender balance of their tribe on the reef.

Hermaphroditic flatworms will duel during mating, fighting over who impregnates and who must bear the burden of carrying offspring.

African reed frogs can change gender in captivity when a group of females needs a male to reproduce.

An Asian sheepshead wrasse female can become male and challenge the dominant male for his harem.

Many types of snails have both male and female parts and, while mating, each impregnates the other, doubling chances to continue their species.

All these biological examples of fluidity can be seen across the planet,
to say nothing of behavioral examples that don't fit human "gender norms".

Emu fathers parent, while mothers seek more mates, gay penguins adopt eggs,
male seahorses gestate, female lions grow manes and lead prides.

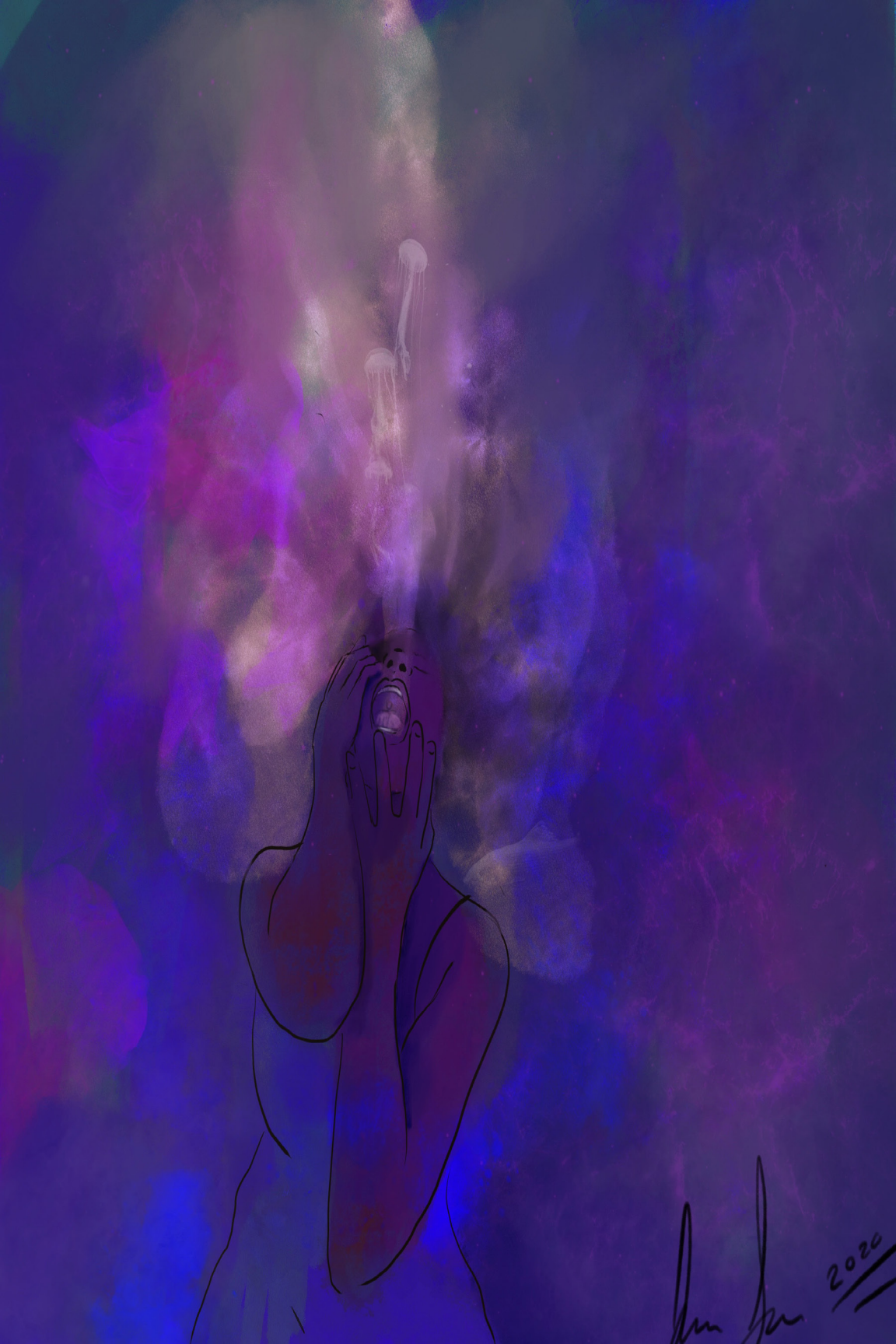
All these wonders exist around the world, easy to see if we would look,
yet, it's only recently that humanity has begun to realize there might be more
to us

than straight male or female.

Sarah Stone

Cosmic Serpents





Am Am 2020