

Alice Says Go Fuck Yourself!



#6 Influencers & Bad Girls!

**ALICE SAYS  
GO  
FUCK  
YOURSELF**



**Issue 6(66)**

**Influencers and Bad Girls**

**March 2024**

Alice Says Go Fuck Yourself is a quarterly(ish) digital magazine of art & literature,  
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*Lana Del Rey with Rose on Pink Vinyl / Cee Martinez*



# A Note From the Editors

Dear Readers,

Although we came to this issue with differing experiences and opinions regarding influencers, we realized through conversation that we both value them as a very specific type of “bad girl” — the kind who does what other people deem vapid, or scam-y, and unapologetically takes risks trying to make bank from it. And we also love and respect them for how mad a lot of whiny dudes and Ladies (and we do mean LADIES) get when they succeed. Influencers like these upset or even subvert the social order of things — even sometimes when their messaging reinforces the status-quo social order in ways we don’t necessarily love (yeah, #tradwives, we’re looking at you when we say that). But life is short, and plenty of us aren’t going to have anything handed to us — so if we want something, we gotta look at where we are and how we can get to a place where we can get it (and we do mean GET ITTTTTT). We both come from backgrounds that taught us to respect the hell out of hustle.

Incidentally, we both come from backgrounds that also predisposed us to love the Reese-Witherspoon-starring B-movie *Freeway* and the music of Lana Del Rey. And maybe that’s because they have some surprising essential elements in common: people love to look down on or laugh at these things — influencers, LDR, *Freeway*, and many other moments (and humans) in the arts and in contemporary popular culture that are “vapid” or “too earnest” or “trying too hard” — but these people and things tell truths.

So here’s what this issue stands for: we love a girl who unapologetically makes a grab for the bad guy’s gun — and we’re *always* going to cheer when she shoots him with it. We’re always going to stan for women who are simultaneously dismissed by gross, sexist men *and* by many feminists, but who still insist on making art or speaking their truths, and who refuse to parrot what anyone else wants them to say. And we’re *always* going to respect the hustle.

Love,

Fox & Cee

# CONTENT WARNING

If you've been reading our magazine since the beginning, you know that we're not only a safe space for hot messes and outliers, but are also often happy to host potentially difficult subject matter. (If you haven't been reading our magazine since the beginning, you've got quite a treat ahead — lucky *you!*)

It would be impossible to list every potential trigger in this issue, but we'd like to note that “Snake Oil, Caroline Calloway, and the *Vogue* Wine Diet” — an essay written by our own co-EiC Cee Martinez and appearing in this issue — depicts and discusses in detail the experience of embracing a well-known three-day crash diet. While a single crash diet spanning three days does not in and of itself constitute an eating disorder, the essay hinges upon the author's short-term commitment to eating in a way that probably no one on Earth would describe as healthy, balanced, or advisable.

Further, the essay explores both the positive and negative aspects of the author's experience, which some folx may find off-putting. We understand that this piece will likely not appeal to every *Alice* reader. We've provided this content warning so that each individual can make an informed decision regarding what (if anything) they can productively experience and appreciate in this issue. We hope you enjoy whatever aspects of Issue 6 you choose to engage with.

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**Issue 6(66): Influencers And Bad Girls**  
**Spotlight Piece**



*Gone Swimmin' Goldie / SheRa Kelley*

# POETRY

Paul David Adkins

**Eve Discusses the Medicinal Properties of the Apple to Adam in the Garden of Eden**

You're sick. You don't  
even know it: sin sick.

I am sick  
of not knowing  
why I tremble at night  
dreaming of other men.  
You are not for me.

I spoke with a phallus the length of a tree.  
I lifted a fruit the pink of a tongue.

I didn't know, but I wanted to.

You didn't know  
how to name a marmoset,  
what to call the stitch where your rib used to be.

I held a choice in my hand:  
to know,  
to not.

I heard one voice,  
and then another.

I also heard yours,  
but what did that matter?

Paul David Adkins

**Florida Woman, Carjacker, and Serial Killer Aileen Wuornos, Awaiting Execution for Seven Murders of Men While She Posed as a Prostitute, Waxes Philosophical with the Prison Chaplain Before Entering the Death Chamber**

Well, well, well.

Men:

such scum.

I didn't want them;

I wanted

to fix my teeth,

feed my lover;

I needed enough to live.

I needed

to become someone, you know?

Someone who bumps into you

and says, Excuse me.

Excuse me,

I'd like to steal your car.

I learned manners, then forgot.

My grandma slapped the shit out of me.

Shit, how many bullets did it take

to kill that Bible salesman?

Sometimes, I think spinning a cylinder is like riding a merry-go-round.

I had fun, once, as a kid.

Was it fun, was I

wrong to mock the guys I shot?

Was I wrong to zip my jeans and turn?

What good did it do?

The prison chaplain asked, What did you do that was good for the world?

What did I do that was good for the world?

The world?

Man, fuck the world.



Paul David Adkins

**Diana Oughton, Killed in an Explosion at a Weather Underground Bomb  
Factory in Greenwich Village on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1970, Discusses the Possibility  
that She Self-Detonated the Device After a Day-Long, Heated Argument with  
Fellow Bomb Maker Terry Robbins About the Moral Problems Inherent in the  
Decision to Kill Noncombatants Attending a Targeted Military Function that  
Evening**

you know

you know

it was

not

easy to decide

to do it

with all those

roofing nails

dynamite sticks

blasting caps and wires all those wire  
clippings on the basement floor

it was like we were shearing a monster  
like we were holding him down

terry didn't know

what

he was doing

but i knew

enough

to spark the naked copper

just

when he

wasn't

looking because it was better

this violence

it was better to believe there was

a hell and i would just  
be standing  
around  
innocent as one can be  
there  
pierced with those nails like cloves in an easter ham

## Stephanie Anderson

### **my algo and i are besties**

like in the way that my cat climbs  
up to me in the graying slivers of morning  
and i am jubilant to see him  
as the first light in my eyes  
he is tripping over the glossy women  
on my bedside and pulling leaves  
off my walls but he is what  
i sell myself for in the name of  
“customer service” and the “subsisting myself”  
that my bestie slides across the tabletop and  
croons to me this no this no this  
is what will tickle the skull  
soft touch on my wrist as  
she guides my fingertips heavenbound  
if i just shape myself  
like my bestie segment  
me perfectly  
this book will give me a complex but  
i want that don't i like i'll  
want to triple-knot my doors  
and keep us in and  
i will want to have  
her teeth in my mouth i will have  
her smile and her bones  
will be my bones  
like when my cat clamps his mouth  
to the soft flesh of my arm and shakes.

## Stephanie Anderson

**use my code for 10% off at checkout!**

since the only line between  
you, iridescently blue,  
and these silvery things  
hand-earned, possessed, is the  
gridline bolting us together.

cradle flashpoint with corporeal  
comfort chamomile and whatever  
you project in color with  
intransient diamond-crusted labor but  
hey

when the boxes arrive and  
the tape comes off  
don't you feel better now?  
don't you love when my  
pixels leave intangible smears,  
footprints on your carpet?

# Jerome Berglund

## Presentiment

They ask why the affianced hasn't accompanied her. She merely smirks in a decidedly less than demure fashion and remains mum as the flower. But throughout dinner never does the square package with a bright bow leave her sight. That, too, is left unexplained. None dare comment upon the irregularity; a toddler intent upon fondling the thing has grubby paws slapped away. An odd bird, that one, but easy to forgive such idiosyncrasies. The package leaves with her, a bit of dampness remaining where it has rested.

*paying interest  
for years spent nothing  
piper returns*

**Maxine, As in X**

If she was a reality star,  
A Catherine the Great,  
Her dear diary  
an insect  
halfway  
siren.  
A babydoll influencer,  
High for a selfie  
With Teeth like chalk moon. Blood red Rockies  
left in the mud after a day  
on the road.  
She echoes to the stars  
I'm a queen, I'm more than eruptions But the quiet is blue,  
Razor on the eyes  
blazed across with fingers  
That smell of river and beer, Where cinema is a dollar.  
She tells herself  
Good girl  
Indie girl  
Reckless girl  
But see how I perform for the crowd.



## Mackenzie Dunne

### Arrival

As much as I wish to be a woman,  
whose hands are clean, I am happy  
living in whirling chaos.

I arrived on this Earth covered in blood—  
my mother's—why now should I be clean?

My life, as you define it:  
a hurricane of uncrossed legs and body hair and words never left unspoken,  
charging towards the ocean  
where once again, it will become nothing.

Her blood has sunken into my skin,  
clogging my pores, staining  
the surface of my bones with the need to survive in a man's world.

To prevail?

To prove them wrong?

To bloody my hands with the truth of what they will not say.

There is no time for pressed bed sheets and an obedient wife  
with the devil  
whispering empty promises in your ear.

I am happy living in whirling chaos.

I choose to roam this Earth sticky, with the salty foam  
of what it means to walk against an ocean current.

**BDE**

Tiki icky ick / tequila killers on the dance floor / sticky icky dicky / tiger thighs left with a bite mark/ my hair to the side with my hoop ear ring reads baby / I apply red lipstick while a girl asks where did I get my pumps/ I am pink dipped in salt/ I like the shade of storms and how BBL's cut into shapes/ I sting and sizzle in dresses with a crotch grab/ I have big dick energy even if I cry about something you will never feel.

### **Side Effect: Conceited.**

I take 40 pics a day and go through like ew, okay, what is up with my right tit? Save this for a different day. Get baddie comments with 🔥🔥🔥 emojis. God, I fucking love it. Maybe I'm a bit conceited but it turns me on being adored or adorned? Perhaps both. Oh yeah, I definitely have body dysmorphia, but you won't know that. I give advice like I have a PhD. but disclaimer I am no doctor, so proceed with caution. Try to save you money with codes and come on baby I know we haven't talked in 10 years but buy this product, get me money in my pocket and a little self-love in your head. You want a fuck me, love me, hate me, be me ... I lick you all up clean off the plate.

**Lustful Recovery**

Tempt me, seduce me  
Write our toxic fairytale  
I pretend you caress my back  
As your hands grip hard  
Torturous touch grasping deeper into my waist  
Ecstasy our curse, ecstasy a void  
Heart barricaded to love, to emotion  
A lack of honor, lack of truth and trust  
Shallow hollow, lacking  
Lacking passion engulfed in pleasure  
I thought they went hand in hand  
Expecting an inferno ablaze  
Vesuvius runs through my veins  
Traipsing, rendezvous in tundra  
An abyss in bliss, lust a drug  
Addiction entwined  
High on you  
Needing to seek recovery in solitude  
Recovery is a bitch  
Tempting persuading. Relapse ahead  
You beg, plead  
You miss your Goddess  
Desiring craving me on my knees  
Incomparable  
Soaring in the cosmos, ecstasy high  
Stroke by stroke  
Damn how you taste  
Tell me how you like it need me want it  
Moan in your native tongue  
Si. Dijiste quisiera me encanta. Es verdad Papi  
Habla mi nombre.

I can't stand you. Mentiroso.  
Me duele corazon  
But I'm an addict, addictive personality  
So what am I to do?

## Kiara Nicole Letcher

### **Selkie**

Tears run  
down my cheeks  
gather at my neck  
like salty  
sapphires

Caress my legs  
seal skin slick

Bring my mermaid mouth  
to your sailor whiskey  
let me blow  
wind swept  
alchemy  
into your lungs

Worship me rough  
as waves coming together  
penetrating land  
breaking apart.



# Kiara Nicole Letcher

## Peace

Extend an olive branch  
to the girl you used to be

think of her in innocent colors  
salmon flesh, white lamb wool and rosebud

Instead of humiliation pigment  
dog whine, lipstick smear  
a walk home alone

Love her deeply until  
she becomes rainwater for  
new life

I wish goodwill  
to my former selves, friends and past sunsets

I wish corrosive foes  
to go fuck themselves.

## Lupita Limon

### **If I Don't Get Another Iced Almond Milk Latte I Will Riot.**

Round windows for eyes  
that seem endearing.

Yellow panes to feel  
like sunlight through  
the days of grey.

Green drapes with frills  
to tickle the cherry floors.

And a bedside table without  
a bed because no one really rests  
in a broken home.

**Shitshow**

Excuse me, do you have any manure?  
I apologize if that's not demure.  
It's just a dirty icebreaker  
By this home & gardenmaker.  
But seriously, I need to procure.

**Find Me Fierce & Sweet as Starfruit — Shark Diving & Not Just for The 'Gram**  
*(after Andriana, and the icons in the ocean)*

Sometimes, it's not about you  
and your need to feel special.  
Sometimes, a shark is just a shark –  
aggro,  
in a mood, in need of space,  
in a race to charge before his buddies do.  
Sometimes,  
overstimulated or tangled in wire –  
a story for a sloppy Ahab, caught telling tales.  
More often,  
it upends whatever weakness flashes by.  
Know better  
than to be the bait.  
In the water, as in the crowd,  
power is a game you play  
without cruelty,  
if you play it well, if it is your own  
domain. You may thrash  
and splash a commotion behind you,  
instinct singing for escape.  
I know better.  
Be the apex of the toothy bodies. Be  
the predator whose graceful hand reaches  
forward for what is right by those teeth,  
pushes away the nose first, slow  
as a stretch held firm,  
slips wide across the wave  
with a mean-mugging stance  
and fins sprawled fearlessly

across the flickering shimmer of shadow  
and blue. Redirect. Guide the move yourself.  
Be the sweet beast that flips the ferocity  
of the gilled marine fishes over, belly up  
for a brevity that dispels the attack  
into camaraderie in the deep.  
Over into overwhelm, and right side up again,  
like a hand from the mosh pit. Or the boat.  
Be unafraid.  
My braid long behind me in the wave beneath  
the wave, my camera catching every rush  
of the deep, every slow blink  
of those smooth round eyes,  
I live for the moments of danger  
between the dive and the drink,  
wait for the dance of sunlight,  
prism-bright and brilliant, beckoning  
from along the shark's gray, flat flesh. A  
beauty beguiles like this only in the quest  
for it. Lead me on  
into the shadow of whale ballet  
and the rippling blanket cover of  
stingrays. The vampire squids and  
angler fish  
are miles below.  
What use is some stale swagger,  
when I am diving with my sharks?  
Where is your appetite for thrill without  
a kill? You can't know  
me as I know myself.  
Flip yourself,  
flip the shark.  
Shark Diver, and Shark Diva.  
I walk the same confidence on  
land — a mermaid with fine, new

legs  
as graceful as fins,  
a mouth full of sharp teeth,  
unrevealed. My shadow bears  
the ocean depths.  
Every way parts before me,  
as the wave beckons to be saved  
from time-spilt sands and grasping  
hands. A rush and a parity returned  
with breath.



**If Only You Knew**

When I first had a crush on you  
after we met on the San Fran Balcony  
cos your shitty mate introduced us  
I chased you to the next venue over  
& sitting outside Meow you  
sipping on your rum & whatever I said  
I'm gonna make you famous  
& you grinned your big shark grin  
you smiled your little boy smile & said  
hell yeah  
or something along those lines  
oh we were a live wire from the start  
but we never quite  
figured out the current  
we were star-crossed incompatible  
we were meant to never be

If only you had taken me a little more seriously  
if only you knew that I meant business  
if a woman can ever mean anything  
through the screen of your ingrained misogyny  
what a shame you didn't take me on  
what a shame we didn't collaborate professionally  
cos you thought we're too different  
we're the same thing babe  
ambitious & passionate  
or we were the same thing  
till you gave up on being  
more than average

If I'd been your manager you would've sold out the show

if I'd been your partner you would've had such power  
but you don't like sharing things so you  
let them slip away

don't say I didn't try to offer you  
a hand, a heart, a world  
don't say nobody was ever there for you  
cos we both know the truth.

## **Wolves Crying Wolf**

Haven't you ever made a mistake?  
Mine lie like ugly gashes across my life  
like dark, rotting debris  
that leaves stains even if I clear it away  
Mine haunt me  
like I wish I could go back in time  
to undo my ignorance  
but I can't, & neither can you.  
When did we become so cruel & righteous?  
When did we forget empathy,  
& communication, & the nuance of these situations  
which is always so unique  
why are we making facts out of fiction  
& certainties out of opinions?  
Who are you  
to claim to carry justice  
who are you  
to dominate a narrative  
who are you  
to tell a story that was never yours?  
To falsely yell predator  
belittles those who have found themselves prey  
it shrinks the space  
for those conversations that are genuine,  
& necessary  
We are so afraid of conflict  
we create echo chambers  
where agreement swirls but outside, silence  
we are so fixated on gossip  
we stake our claims on a twisted narrative  
Whatever happened to redemption?

Reintegration?

Reconciliation?

We are all wolves, crying wolf  
as we lead lambs to the slaughter.

# FICTION

## **Anthropology**

Daisy is getting a dog so that she will not kill herself. If anyone asks, she'll say she just wants to be a mom, which is true, but doesn't have the income for a child, which is truer. Even if she was making six figures, her boyfriend, Aaron, could never be a father. Men shouldn't be fathers until they can apologize and make eye contact at the same time. They've been dating for six months and he still doesn't put his dishes in the sink. The way she sees it, a dog won't leave its dishes in her sink, it won't take up the whole bed, and it'll love her just as much when she isn't wearing her sexy bra.

Her third therapist says an animal will help her get up each morning and establish a daily routine. She has a routine, thank you very much: wake up, go to work, cry in the bathroom, reapply expensive mascara, doom-scroll, pretend to like her friends over drinks, and end the day by having mediocre sex with her mediocre partner.

When she tells the therapist this, he gently suggests that she get a hobby, like journaling or knitting, if not a pet. She tried genealogy last year; it did not fulfill her the way the online ads had promised. All that money down the drain and the only interesting thing she found in her lineage was a great-great-aunt struck by lightning in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Fucking Oklahoma! She doesn't even like the musical. So, puppy parenthood it is. Journaling and knitting be damned. She'll make her therapist proud, or at least dissuade him from strangling her before finishing the job herself.

At fifteen, Daisy's first therapist told her to write down what being a woman meant to her. The list went as follows: Lucy draped over Schroder's piano. Marilyn Monroe singing "Happy Birthday" to JFK. Stevie Nicks. Harley Quinn. Daenerys Targaryen. There were trans girls on TV now, but Daisy's connection to them was like a spider's connection to its web. There was a strand there, but it was tenuous, self-made. Fragile. She had given up seeing herself represented on television, and she had also given up on seeing her true self reflected in the darkened pupils of other women--cis women, to be specific. When she said this, the therapist asked if transitioning was in her best interest. There was still time; after all, she was so young. Daisy got up and left without saying anything. After a sullen car ride home, she cut her bangs with blunt sewing scissors, piece by trembling piece. The next day her mother bribed her with pizza to go to the salon and fix it, but she liked how she felt with unarguably fucked up hair. It made her look jagged and untouchable like the bloody slash of fresh lipstick.

The new pitbull puppy is untouchable, cowering in her new crate for hours after Daisy brings her home. *I don't know what you want from me*, Daisy thinks, leaning on the kitchen counter. *What else could you want but love?* She realizes she has not been preparing to become a dog parent. If she's being honest with herself, she expected the dog to parent *her*. When the urge struck to tear her hair out of her scalp or throw herself down the stairs, there would be a warm weight tethering her to sanity. This puppy, however, screams whenever she comes near. Daisy has no choice but to sigh quietly and melt to the floor until her cheek touches the kitchen tile.

Nothing has worked: not fresh food, not a new toy, not baby sensory videos, or Billie Holiday's croon. It is as if the puppy arrived pre-programmed to find her motherhood horrifying. There will be no name for this sweet girl dog until she can look Daisy in the eyes, or until Daisy can get off the kitchen floor and not feel like shit. Crate training is important, sure, but she can't bear to leave this tiny heap of a wet nose and raw nerves behind.

Daisy lays with her limbs pressed to the wire and cries while Aaron blares the cooking channel in the background. He tends to avoid feelings by escaping into the world of the Great British Baking Show, a space where no one is ever upset and there will always be a nice tart waiting after conflict.

They're supposed to go out tonight, Aaron reminds her as she sobs on the floor. He got reservations at this trendy farm-to-table place where they have guests taste sage straight from the garden. Isn't that great? After the third time he reminds her, she pops up from behind the counter, an automaton revived.

She wipes the snot from her cheek and asks for five minutes to do her hair.

When she was in high school, nothing was more important to Daisy than the ritual of grooming. She would watch movies like *Clueless* and *Mean Girls*, longing for group makeovers and nail-painting sessions. It seemed as though bedroom dressers were the war tables at which friendships were formed. The first time someone tenderly swiped mascara onto Daisy's eyelashes, she almost cried. It was Christina Grey, a year above her, who had a long, graceful neck and chipped front teeth. Daisy didn't even like makeup that much, but she let Christina drag an eye pencil across her lids like she was



putting out a cigarette. It was enough just to feel Christina's legs on either side of her, enough to feel warm breath flutter against her cheeks. She went to her first house party that night, a hard seltzer bursting unpleasantly on her tongue while Christina ground against her. Still, it was nothing compared to the moment that Christina rolled off of her, finished with the eyeliner, and just *looked* at her. There was a note from that night deep in the archives of Daisy's phone, only two sentences long. *To steal a soul. To be stolen in turn.* Everybody thinks they're a poet at fourteen.

Daisy does not know what possessed her to take the dog to Shakespeare in the Park. Who knows, maybe she'll be socialized *and* cultured by the end. The puppy quivers the too-big harness Daisy had to muscle her into, flinching and wailing as each new person walks by.

It's a production of *Othello*, the kind of thing Aaron would go to in order to feel smarter than he actually is. Daisy fidgets with the hem of her dress; she doesn't know how to behave when no one's watching her. Down to the shade of her lipstick and the curl of her hair, she has mastered the art of being a woman in public. It is difficult to justify the hours spent picking an outfit and plucking her eyebrows when no one notices her in the end. She should be grateful; some trans women fight tooth and nail for a baseline of invisibility.

*Othello* smothers Desdemona on stage. She is stalwart and graceful as she dies, her body going limp as her husband exacts his revenge. Daisy holds her breath as she watches. She's always had an affinity for Shakespeare's heroines and the exquisite corpses they leave behind. If there's one thing her therapist is right about, it's that she'd

feel bad about killing herself if this dog found her body. She heard once that cats will try to eat their owners when they die. That's why she chose the pitbull in the first place. In the end, guilt is what will keep her alive, not counseling or meds.

After her first attempt, her second therapist asked her if she harmed herself. He would always get too close to her, the stench of cough drops wafting from his open mouth. Daisy had been in college then; she knew she hadn't been cutting, so she'd said no. Only now, watching Desdemona die, does it occur to her that he wasn't just talking about razors.

If anyone asks her again, she will laugh and reply, *Not in the obvious ways.*

In high school, Daisy found there was nothing obvious about the subtle torture of social interaction. There was a secret language to it, tucked between pauses and glances that she was slowly starting to decipher. Most laughter was fake, but some wasn't—she cherished the art of making someone snort. The phrase *we should totally hang out sometime* really meant *I will actually lobotomize myself if I have to spend more time with you.* A couple of grams of weed or a bottle of hard liquor could get her foot in most doors. At her core, Daisy was an anthropologist. All that time spent smiling when spoken to and dressing a certain way culminated in this: preening in front of Christina's friends, casually mentioning that she had a bottle of vodka lemonade in her trunk. If they wanted to cut class and drink on the greenhouse roof, they could come with her. In truth, she would rather be watering her plants, but she wanted so badly to have friends. Standing on the roof of the greenhouse that day, she took a swig of vodka lemonade and felt beautiful.

On the day that the dog finally stops whining, Daisy is pouring herself a stiff drink when she receives the diagnosis. She's been chasing it for years just like she chased her genealogy: she needed an answer. She asked her therapist, said she had a suspicion, and now here it was. *I am an autistic woman. I am an autistic trans woman. I am an autistic trans woman sitting on the floor of my apartment because my anti-death-dog fucking hates me.*

She sinks to the ground with her whiskey sour and a jar of peanut butter, her legs unable to cooperate any longer. While her first thought is to call Aaron, she stops herself before she does. He's never really had to support her; sure, he's bought her chocolate after a hard day, but he has not known this sort of cataclysmic identity shift. They met long after Daisy finished her transition, long after people miraculously stopped shooting her looks on the subway or calling her by the wrong name.

As if she can sense Daisy's doubt, the dog comes out from her crate and nuzzles her arm. Any worries about Aaron fly out of her mind; she runs her hand along soft fur. *You smell like Cheetos*, she murmurs, *and I will love you forever*. The puppy tenderly begins to lick the peanut butter straight out of the jar. She cancels her plans with Aaron and their friends at a swanky new bar. Who gives a fuck about 20-dollar drinks when her crazy dog has tottered into the living room of her own free will?

She wants to be able to say, *See? This is why*. This is why she wants to tear her hair out. This is why friendships have always been synonymous with pain. There will never be solutions, though; there are no twelve-step recovery programs she can turn to, no medications or surgeries. This is Daisy's song, whether she wants to dance or not.

The dog licks her perfectly made-up face, and she lets it happen in all her ugly, messy glory.

Daisy loved the ugliness of Christina most of all: the sharp incisors, the hoarse laughter, the skeletal gleam of her knuckles in harsh light. Daisy worshipped her body the most when it was wrapped around a toilet bowl or curled inward in pain. In those moments, you could tell she was a dancer, a damn good one at that. When Daisy and Christina kissed, they kissed to bruise. Sometimes they would talk, but mostly they just made out and screamed at the top of their lungs in the school greenhouse. *Completely soundproof*, Christina said once. *It's great. We can go in there and be animals and no one will know.* Daisy liked being animals with Christina, maybe a little too much. Once, she even drew blood from Christina's neck. It was an accident, but when she started to apologize, Christina bit back harder and bared her teeth in a bloody grin. Daisy could have wept at that moment, but instead, the bell rang and she got up to leave. She hid her face with her sleeve, pretending not to hear Christina calling her name.

Aaron makes it clear that he does not approve of the dog's new name. *Jif? Really? Why couldn't you name her something normal?* He's staunchly ignoring the autism diagnosis in favor of canine nomenclature. Daisy can't blame him—actually, maybe she can. Jif is a perfectly fine dog name, and she is utterly indifferent when he insists on coming to the pet store to pay for five pounds of peanut butter dog treats.

While he grumbles his way through the aisle, her attention snares on something else. The woman behind the check-out counter is transcendent. She reminds Daisy of her younger self before she learned how to fold into crisper, neater shapes. Dark, full lips: pink eyeliner: streaked hair pulled up into messy space buns. She is vividly, unabashedly, unashamedly trans. After Daisy vanished into Aaron, into her 9-5 and her cocktail-chic friends, she had actually stopped telling people. She likes to think she just forgot, but now, sliding her card across the counter, she can't remember the last time she talked to another trans woman.

Aaron's hand tightens around her waist as if he can tell what she is thinking. *Cute dog*, the cashier says, but in her eyes, there is an unspoken *Oh, honey*.

Before Christina, Daisy had an unspoken pact with the tenth-grade science teachers: since there weren't enough participants for a real gardening club, Daisy was allowed free reign over the school greenhouse. Digging through the dirt and planting new herbs was a great joy; she felt so messy, so perfectly ugly and fem with her skin covered in soil. Christina complained when she spent too much time pruning, watering, and loving her plants. She let it all die beautifully and slowly. Christina stopped showing up to the greenhouse by the time junior year started. When Daisy tended the flowers now there was fresh grief mixed with the scent of dirt and nectar. There was no dramatic build-up, no grand soliloquy of rejected queerness. The suddenness of it all kept her up at night; her mother made her take sleeping pills. That November, Daisy returned to the greenhouse, leaves whispering under her feet as she trudged through the kudzu-strewn carnage. Clay pots lined the walls like caskets, holding the mummified

husks of her plants. She carried home a single jar of English ivy, the only thing that had survived. When she did dream, she dreamt of forcing her gardening shears into Christina's mouth and cutting away at flesh.

The workday slides past like a dream. Daisy contemplates going back to the pet store just to say hello to the cashier. New emails fill her inbox as she scrolls through the Instagram of every transfem in the greater Nashville area. She goes through Facebook, Craigslist ads, even Fetlife. *Did you meet someone cute?* Her coworker peeks over the cubicle wall, excited about her imagined (implicit) queerness. *Something like that*, Daisy answers shyly.

She imagines a cozy life with the mystery girl, full of tangled-sheet mornings and hot-beverage evenings. How did her transbian Cinderella take her coffee? Was she a dog person? Weeks ago, she wrote a breakup note to Aaron in her notes app. Every day now she opens it and rolls the words around in her mouth like dough. In her search through the wild queer west of the Internet, she stumbles upon a face she never thought she'd see again. It's Christina, feral and radiant at the Mercy Lounge in Sobro. Apparently, she works at the venue; her wife is a bassist in a band called Jet Set & the Desperate Measures. *Wife* is a warm little secret that Daisy holds beneath her tongue.

On the way home, she stops at a plant nursery and fills her little car with ivy plants. Dog-safe. Girl-safe. Death-safe.

After months of being a social pariah, some older girls welcomed Daisy into the safety of their inner circle. Maybe it was because Daisy was beginning to pass after months of hormone blockers and expensive doctor's visits, but she didn't care. For the first time in Daisy's young life, there were sleepovers, roller rinks, and movie nights. There were summers full of bonfire smoke and sun-warmed skin, beach towels drying on lawn chairs while the girls waded into the pool. Jade, Reagan, and Anna: her first squad, the Plastics to her Cady Heron. Suddenly, everything she said was funny, every fashion choice bold and striking. The bridge of her nose was *unique*, not masculine; her voice had a sexy husk, but it wasn't *deep*. Whatever minor havoc puberty had wreaked before the hormone blockers, these girls rebuilt her stronger and more beautiful than before, a debutant in training. They bonded over their love of Broadway musicals and the bands their parents hated. She smiled more and wore lip gloss from a glittery tube. When her mother asked where all her anger had gone, she replied that she simply didn't need it anymore. Anger was too loud; the wars she waged were quieter and the victories always sweeter. After she gave her first blowjob, she relished her ability to impress the older girls. *I haven't even kissed a boy in ages*, Jade grumbled. Daisy left out the part where he wiped a glob of spit off her cheek and offered her drugs.

Daisy discovers CBD for dogs. Where was this magical drug when she'd gotten four hours of sleep because of Jif's whining? A whole generation of canine stoners and she'd had no idea. The next logical step, of course, was to get high *with* Jif. It's been a long week, so she guiltily acquires some magic mushrooms and makes sure her deadbolt is locked.

It's a struggle to feed Jif the gummies, but within the hour Daisy and the puppy are stretched out together on the floor. God hangs heavy in the room tonight, a kaleidoscope of color and sound that Daisy can't look away from. In her altered state, Daisy wonders if Jif can see God, too.

Maybe she'll quit her job! Maybe she'll call her mother. Maybe she'll fall through the ceiling to another world whether she's doing drugs with all her cool, sexy transfem friends who are also new dog moms. She wishes she hated Aaron, but she doesn't; she fucking hates herself for folding into him.

A primal scream carves itself out of her chest. Soon, Jif joins her, curled up in her arms for the very first time. They bark and howl until God decides they are done.



## 18F Seeking Sensitive Man

“Well, I’m not very tough, so what do you guys want me to do?” Ana asked the other two girls, who just stared at her bewildered.

“I mean, you’re going to have to participate a little bit,” Layla said.

“Or just be the one who goes on the date, brings him back, and then you can help us after everything goes down,” Kylie suggested.

“I don’t know if I pass for 18,” Ana looked Layla and Kylie up and down adding, “Do...any of us?”

Kylie quickly responded, “We aren’t 30, dude, we’re in our early 20’s.”

“Layla’s 26,” Ana said, shrugging, as Layla threw her head back frustrated at being called out.

They were all surrounding a desk in Kylie’s room, with a Craigslist ad open saying “18F seeking sensitive men”. It had been the fifth time in one week, more than they would normally see each other. This was a project that required more time and effort than anything any of them had participated in. All three young women met each other through work but became friends as they realized they all had similar interests and horrible taste in men. In between waiting tables, they formed a friendship that brought them here today.

Kylie was fresh out of her breakup with Carlos. He had broken up with her in his ugly Honda Accord and she had to immediately go to work devastated. They had been dating for 6 months and it was a horrible relationship. Kylie would never admit it because who would believe her? Carlos was a golden retriever man that everyone loved. He was so cool with all of her girlfriends, did face masks, and even had a gay guy friend. Even though, Kylie would often have to come to the defense of this friend because Carlos was always shit-talking him in borderline homophobic ways. The first few times Kylie heard him, she told herself that everyone complained about their friends. In the same manner? Maybe not but everyone is different. In fact, Carlos shit-talked all of his friends about things that Kylie found to be very unreasonable.

One day, they were having lunch and he was calling his friend a “fucking moron who needs to get a job”, Kylie asked him if he talks about her this way when she isn’t around. Their lunch was cut short after that.

Layla was 8 months out from her break up with Anthony. When Layla met Anthony, he was a suave guy with good taste in media. They would bond over movies and TV shows and he had an extensive vintage magazine collection. But when he wouldn’t let her enjoy “lowbrow” things, she got increasingly more frustrated. She broke up with him and said that they would just be better as friends. All of Layla’s friends and coworkers wish she had just cut him off hard and fast. He would always text her and now and again she would go to work in a complete frenzy. She would think he wanted to be with her again but she would find out that he went on a date the night before and all hell would break loose. Layla had had enough strength to break up with Anthony and post-relationship, she’s realizing how much of a weirdo he actually is.

Besides the fact that he would constantly be playing her, the embarrassment was starting to wear on her. He would make passive-aggressive comments to her all the time and some aggressive aggressive comments. With reflection, Layla realized how much of a joke he thought she was.

Passive-aggressive example, “Are you only dating me because you think that you won’t be able to date a hot person again? Would you be dating me if you didn’t get to say that your boyfriend is hot?”

Aggressive-aggressive example, “I’m not in the mood to deal with shit today so if this is how you’re going to act, I’ll take you home.”

Maybe it was always aggressive-aggressive.

Ana was the furthest out from her break up by an entire calendar year. She wanted to be back on the market and ready to rumble but the things Mike put her through still haunted her and she knew that it would be a while again until she was going to be able to settle down. She wanted to have fun and find herself again but the idea gave her anxiety due to Mike’s eccentric personality. He, similarly to Carlos and Anthony, considered himself a feminist. A pure of heart, rejecter of masculinity. But there was this one time he was talking about how he and his cousin, Maria, were in a fight because Maria called him a wimp and then Mike called her a whore. He said, “I’m sorry but she finds men to fuck on Facebook and that just makes her a downright *whore*,” with the utmost amount of vitriol in his voice.

Shocked out of her mind, Ana quietly told him that that wasn’t an appropriate thing to say and when he hit his steering wheel, telling her that he was the one who was hurt and his cousin was a hypocrite, Ana knew she couldn’t be around him.

The first time the girls bonded over these men was when they made jokes about dating guys who hung art in their apartment to cover up holes in the wall. Jokes like this continued until they realized that all three of them weren't just making references to stuff they heard about or read on Twitter, they were recounting experiences that they all shared.

"I just feel like all of these guys are like, *Oo! Look at me, I painted my nails and listened to Lana Del Rey, I respect women!* And they end up being crazy like out of their minds." "Yes! And I'm supposed to be so supportive of them being considered wussy men and going against the grain but they aren't going against the grain and they're actually very scary! And they're always looking for a fight to prove that they can fight."

"But they normally can't fight. They just pick fights with women they date." "Literally and figuratively."

"They just hide behind their Sensitive, Feminist, Indie personas."

"Literally wolves in sheep's skin."

"Literally! It was such a wake up call because I think I was searching out these guys according to how they aesthetically presented and what I thought that meant to me and it just isn't true."

"I agree and I think it speaks to the fact that we are all girls who were searching for a partner who is softer and sensitive and just assumed that since we could see it in their presentation, it was how they were on the inside."

"And we were wrong."

"I think the number one thing I learned from dating him is that how someone looks and surface level interests they have isn't definitive to how they treat people and their partners." "You're absolutely correct because if I had known that my ex was like

a jealous, insecure, violent person, I obviously wouldn't have dated him -"

"But why would you think he was all those things if he like.. Liked *Normal People*, ya know?"

"Yes! And, oo! Look at me, so blinded by him liking *Normal People* that I missed the signs that he's horrible!"

"Just saying and doing all this fucked up shit and when you call them out on it, they lose their minds."

"My ex-boyfriend literally did so much shit that I'm so embarrassed about so I never told anyone because it goes against everything I believe in."

"Oh yeah, I was going to bring my ex out to meet my friends but then he said some derogatory stuff that I just never suggested he meet them again."

"No, no, no. I would never bring him around my friends because he hated women! And I was delusional enough to think that I was excluded from that."

"Is there a way to describe an incel who fucks?"

"Hmm... A misogynist, a chauvinist, a freak..."

"Someone who spends too much time in the Manosphere."

"How much time is too much time?"

"Good point."

"I feel like depending on how old the guy is, they won't know the difference between someone who is 18 and 21," Kylie said.

"Yeah, I also think that there are also more important things to focus on," Layla

added, she knew that the three of them had all agreed to go about this in the smartest way possible but that didn't really mean anything.

"Like?" Ana questioned.

"Literally getting caught and arrested and going to prison for cutting men's dicks off!" "We won't get caught!" Kylie interjected.

Ana grabbed Layla's shoulders, "And even if we did, we'd be fucking heroes." "I don't know about that," Layla said. "I mean, think Aileen Wournos, she's considered a serial killer and people hate her. What she did isn't that different from what we're doing. And I think ours is worse because it's premeditated."

"We aren't killing people though, it's not the same," Ana sighed. Layla looked back and forth between Ana and Kylie, immediately the two knew Layla was really scared for the first time.

"I feel like we have a responsibility to protect ourselves and other women from dangerous men," Kylie said, her voice stern. "They tricked us into thinking that they were these great guys who defied what it means to be a cisgender heterosexual man when really all that meant was that they had one pink shirt. It didn't mean anything in the way of politics, safety, or relationships. They abused us in the name of feminism. Fuck them."

Layla nodded her head, Ana did too.

"They'll never suspect us," Kylie continued, "Let's get them back."

**Lilith**

Lilith huddled beneath the camping trailer. October rain pelted the sheet metal siding as she curled for warmth on a patch of dry yellow grass, eyes facing the rain. She mourned the sunlight and the summer moonshine. She didn't know how long she'd been shivering in the cold. It could have been hours; it could have been days. She only knew she was wet and freezing.

Her skin quivered in the chill as she prayed for warmth. She wept to herself, and her canine tears rolled down the side of her dachshund snout. Her whimpers underscored the anodized aluminum beat of the raindrops.

“Oh, you poor thing.” Two hands, knotted with arthritis, reached under the trailer, and patted the top of her head. Trimmed fingernails scratched behind her ears. Then, the hands picked her up, nestled her against a bony chest. “It's okay, sweetie. Everything's gonna be all right. Everything's ok.” The old woman carried her inside.

She warmed a couple burgers in the microwave and dried the shivering animal with a fresh towel while they watched the timer's countdown. She went to the sink and poured some water into a bowl. “It's ok, sweetie.” She repeated as she settled the dishes

down on the hardwood living room floor. Emma sat down in her easy chair and watched the dachshund eat.

When Lilith finished, she walked to the old woman and jumped in her lap. She licked Emma's face three times, before settling down, sated and happy. "You can call me, Emma, sweetie. Hmm. Now, who do you belong to? No collar. No tags. Where's home? What's your name? Oh, maybe we'll come up with something. Ah well, it's late. We have plenty of time to figure it out."

She swung up the footrest as she sat back. Emma pet poor Lilith, her aged mind reflecting over her 85 years. She glanced at the photo album lying on the side table, beneath her reading lamp. She turned to Lilith, scratching her behind her ears. "I've had nine husbands, you know. All gone." She laughed. She leaned forward and whispered. "They suspected for years, but there was never any proof." She rocked back, raising her face to the ceiling, cackling at her cleverness.

Lilith raised her head, looked at the old woman, a brief smile on her canine lips. Emma scratched behind her ears. The dachshund's eyes closed halfway, a moan gurgled from the back of her throat.

"You want to see them? I can show them to you." She reached for the album, and settled the spine between her leg and the armrest. She opened the cover. The first



picture depicted a young woman in a white dress next to a dark-haired man in an Army dress uniform. “That’s Frank. He was my first husband. We got married just before he was shipped to Vietnam. Here he is, after he came home.”

The next photo showed the same man. He lay on the concrete floor of a garage, His eyes stared up at the camera from a clotted pool of blood, bone, and brains. A revolver on the floor next to him.

She turned the page again. There she was again, just a bit older than the young woman in the first picture. She wore the same dress, but this time, the man had long red hair. Sun-kissed freckles lined his smile, in contrast to his white teeth. “That’s John.”

She flipped over the page. This time John was draped over a coffee table. His red hair rippled across the green shag carpet. Lines of dried blood stained his upper lip. His eyes reflected the panic he must have felt in his final moments. “They said he died of an overdose. They found rat poison in his stash. They didn’t realise I put it there.” She laughed again.

Every time she spun another page, she mentioned a name. The first photographs always showed her with another man, both smiling on the biggest day of their lives. The next would depict her partners in various shades of dying. “Nine husbands. Nine men,

sweetie. Oh, the cops knew. Don't get me wrong. They knew. They couldn't prove it, though." She pointed at the mantel hanging over her fireplace. Nine urns, each enshrined with a photo, and a lock of hair tied around a fingerbone. "They couldn't prove it."

Emma's absent-minded fingertips scratched the underside of the dachshund's throat. "Oh, sweet girl. You can stay with me, I think. But what should I call you, eh?" She looked into Lilith's dark brown eyes. "Yes. Yes. I think that's right. Lilith. It fits you." She laughed again.

Lilith licked her hand, her long canine tongue scraped along the liver spots freckling the skeletal hand, tasting the pain embedded in the old woman's bones. Then, she jumped from Emma's lap. She trotted several steps to the stairs. Green tentacles of shag carpeting grabbed at the toenails scraping through the yarn. She stopped. She looked at Emma. Her black upper lip revealed a sharpened tooth. She growled.

"Okay. I guess. I'm tired, too. Just a second, sweetie." Emma's time weakened hand struggled with the side lever on her chair, then she rose, only to fall back in her seat.

Lilith growled again. Louder. Her lips revealed the ghost of her wolfen cousins.

“Fine.” Emma said. As she rose. “I suppose you’re right. I don’t need this old thing, anyway.” She rose from her lazy boy. “Let’s go to bed.”

She shambled to the stairwell, settled her right foot on the bottom step. She watched the dog clamber past her to the upper landing, down the hall to the bedroom.

Then, she followed Lilith to upstairs.

# NONFICTION

## **Snake Oil, Caroline Calloway, and The Vogue Wine Diet**

*Every essay I read from folk trying the Vogue white-wine diet is from people who don't like boiled eggs or coffee. I love boiled eggs, coffee and white wine. I wanna do this.*

— @dazedpuckbunny, posting on X

“Did you eat your fucking steak yet?!”

My phone dinged with this message from my friend and co-EiC Fox Henry Frazier. I was scheduled to read at the online series Favorite Poems, hosted by Agape Editions and Yes Poetry. The reading was beginning imminently.

I was sitting on my messy bed, with my Surface balanced on an unstable pile of pillows so that the front facing camera would register my best angle, white ring light clamped to the top of the screen.

I was fairly drunk, and on my third day of drinking one bottle per day of white wine whilst simultaneously eating next to nothing. The goal was to get “little black cocktail dress” thin. I was feeling dizzy, feeble, grumpy, terrified — and had been hallucinating strange voices, specifically in my right ear, all day. Yet, I was mostly concerned with trying to remember how to set my Zoom wallpaper background to a photograph of the Red Room from David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks*. I couldn’t have the collection of guests and readers for this reading privy to the sight of my godawful abomination of a bedroom.

I scowled into my Zoom camera with my patented “squinting makes me look sober” expression, responding to most things said to me with one-word answers. To this day, I do not recall what I read to the classy and polite audience of poets and readers.

I had told Fox that I was going to be living on boiled eggs and wine for three days. She was understandably concerned, hence her tone of motherly angst in this essay's opening line. She already knew that I was drunk and hallucinating, and that the only thing stopping me from a possible visit to the ER was one tiny cut of juicy steak.



Fox announced the order in the lineup of readers, and everyone but me replied in the affirmative when she asked if the order sounded good. When she called out my name again, I replied, “Sorry, what?”

And then after verbally approving of my order in the reading lineup, I boldly declared to the group, with all the aplomb of a Tennessee Williams heroine, that I was attempting a *fast* that was from an antique source and that if I seemed out of it . . . well, that was the reason.

“I love you, you’re a lunatic!” Fox said in an enthusiastic voice, the kind one might use when one’s best friend or beloved family member is doing something extremely odd in front of a crowd one needs to impress, and one needs to get everyone in the mindset that everything occurring right now is not weird or derailed, it’s actually *fun* and *quirky!*

Fox’s enthusiasm was met with an odd spell of possibly disapproving silence from the gathered poets, a group who may have assumed that since I was declaring my fast was from an antique source, that it *must* mean it was related to something possibly spiritual, and holy. Perhaps they were thinking that Fox was being glib and insensitive at my expense. On top of that, I did not help much because I was tilting my head and scowling, hoping that *the voices* might fall directly out of my ear.

A quick Google search will find you a handful of essays written by young adults determined to remind us that the era of the Boomers was FUBAR when it came to self-help, health, and beauty tips. One look at the popularity of dishes mixing gelatin with sus savory ingredients like *\*urp\** fish, and ads presenting the drug Mornidine as safe to give to your pregnant wife so she can forget her morning sickness and make you

breakfast would be enough to confirm this. The Influencer Queen of whacked-out, mid-twentieth century advice is now known on social media as “The *Vogue* Wine Diet” — a diet promising to shave five pounds off your figure if you live on boiled eggs and white wine for three days.

WINE AND EGGS / 3 days / loss: 5 lbs (2.5 k.)

Breakfast: 1 egg, hard-boiled  
1 glass white wine (dry, preferably Chablis)  
Black coffee

Lunch: 2 eggs, hard-boiled is best, but poached if necessary  
2 glasses white wine  
Black coffee

Dinner: 5 oz. (150 g.) steak, grilled with black pepper, lemon juice  
Remainder of white wine (one bottle allowed per day)  
Black coffee

I remember first seeing the wine diet posted on Pinterest sometime in 2019, and not thinking too much of it except that it seemed normal for 1972. The pins and reposts noted that this was an actual crash diet printed in *Vogue* magazine. Naturally, this kicked off a flurry of young women and a few men who tried out that diet, and posted their experiences to various news and lifestyle platforms. The articles all had the consistent theme that Grandma’s generation was off her rocker for this, and eggs and wine are gross to live on for three days straight.

It was around this time — September of 2019 — when Natalie Beach dropped an article on *The Cut* entitled, “I Was Caroline Calloway.” I did not know who Caroline



Calloway was, and was only alerted to the article by one or two friends on Facebook who actually knew her. The flurry of emotions in the comment sections had me scrambling to read it and get in on whatever the tea was.

The tea was delicious and hot. Natalie Beach is a very talented writer, and she wrote a shocking narrative about an intense friendship between two women that soured over Adderall addiction, traumatizing hookups in Amsterdam, the true authorship of Instagram captions (um . . . okay?), and the eternal battle that always seems to be brewing between brunette and blonde.

My initial thoughts on the article was that Caroline Calloway seemed like a bubbly cartoonish villain straight from a Tina-Fey-penned fever dream, but also that a story this juicy seemed a bit wasted on an article. An odd take on my part, to be sure; Natalie was unloading something she felt very passionate about — traumatized, even — and my reptilian brain was thinking about how modern culture is so set on instant revenge and gratification that it was a shame she couldn't save up all this story for what could have been a sharp, biting novel turned into a movie deal.

On the heels of this article's publication, there were tweets calling for Caroline's cancellation. There were articles from the *New York Times* and the *Daily Mail* (among other outlets) digging up Caroline's failings and chaotic behavior. There was a Reddit forum dedicated to discussing every single one of her Instagram posts and picking it apart for confirmation that she was an evil, insensitive villain, someone of poor personal hygiene (yes, really they obsessed over their manufactured idea that she never showered), and a desperate fame-whore who is bankrolled by Daddy and will at some point crash and burn into obscurity. There were even posts dedicated to zooming in on pictures of her knees to prove that she was lying about certain medical deformities.

So, naturally, I found Caroline Calloway on Instagram. I had to learn about who she was from the motherfucking *source*.

As public hate for Caroline Calloway reached a deliciously rabid and frothing fever pitch, Caroline leaned into it on her Instagram with a defiant, smug acceptance. Then, the news broke that her father had committed suicide — probably around the time Natalie Beach’s article had dropped.

Caroline addressed this tragedy by posting a thirst-trap selfie of herself in a bikini, with a caption listing all the emotions her father’s death was putting her through. It set off a tirade of angry comments, reposts, judgments, and hands-in-the-air commentary on the state of today’s society. I admit, the post threw me off; I didn’t quite know what to feel about it other than accepting that this was how this strange and infamous young woman was dealing with her crisis.

I was checking up on Caroline’s Instagram page so often at this point that I decided to just dive in and click “follow,” and move on with my life.

I am a writer, lit-mag editor, piano teacher, gallery artist, redbubble artist, dog sitter, and art-market art slanger. Even with the onset of the Covid pandemic and the apocalyptic feel of a world shutting down and dying, I stubbornly lived day to day figuring out what art I was going to place where, what was my true place in the literary community, how could I replace the income lost from missing piano students. I didn’t really have the energy to be outraged at the thought of Caroline Calloway existing out there, causing chaos in NYC’s West Village.

In the meantime, a few more “I Tried the *Vogue* Wine Diet . . .” articles popped up. I read all of them and was oddly disappointed to read that folk either gave up on the

diet early, hated white wine, or complained about the sulphuric smell and taste of too many boiled eggs in a row. *If someone doesn't like boiled eggs to begin with*, I thought to myself, *then of course they're going to fail and be traumatized by the diet, straight out the gate!* I smugly thought to myself that they were weak and that if I ever tried the diet, I wouldn't complain this much. Surely not.

Caroline Calloway was posting frequently on Instagram, courting agents and starlets in California, teaming up with a young woman to make goddess-themed watercolor paintings, opening up for commissions to paint followers' watercolor portraits, selling her own "revisions" on a classic Matisse piece (to the outrage of art purists who called this plagiarism and laziness), and sometimes purging her cluttered personal library collection by personalizing love notes to followers on the title pages of once-treasured tomes and selling them for around \$25 a pop.

Chaotic collection of side hustles that I am, I fucking LOVED that she was doing this and making money. I felt both jealous and exhilarated that her Matisse-inspired paper cut-outs were selling like hotcakes. Andy Warhol got fucking famous pawning intern-installed silk screen prints of pop art, and repetitively painting cans of Campbell's soup; why couldn't Caroline Calloway create works based upon Matisse, whom she was crediting anyway? If she's selling and people are buying, the public has spoken!

The usual platforms, including *Vice*, *Daily Mail*, and the *New York Times*, continued to cover Caroline's every move. She leaned into the attention by regularly collaborating with other influencers, appearing on podcasts, announcing presales for a novel she never seemed to get around to writing, and getting shoutouts from Cat Marnell. At this time, Caroline really sank her teeth into the press coining her a

“scammer,” and she announced that she was going to start packaging and selling the very same recipe of essential oils that she used on her face to keep herself looking youthful and her acne at bay.

This oil would sell at a limited run priced around \$65 a bottle and, in a not-so-subtle wink at her reputation as a “scammer,” it would be called Snake Oil.



The term “snake oil” nowadays brings to mind the cautionary tale of frauds and quack medicine. Any red-blooded American knows that at one point in history a fairground charlatan conned the gentle public into buying his patented Snake Oil. Supposedly, the fat of rattlesnakes was a cure-all for sore joints, skin ailments, and muscle pains. Snake Oil was one of the first victims of a newly formed FDA, which found that the oil did contain some sort of fat, probably bovine — but, more than likely,

no actual snake product. The product was deemed fraudulent and sales of it were shut down.

The man in question was a Texan named Clarke Stanley, and he made quite a show of personally slaughtering rattlesnakes outside his wagon, then boiling them down into oil. It was a good technique for selling Snake Oil to a rapt audience, the better to soothe their various ailments. What a villain! What a fraud, to tear the humble American public from their hard-earned money!

But wait . . . there's more.

There were actually many loyal buyers of Snake Oil, hard-working housewives who insisted that the concoction truly did soothe their sore knuckles. Modern-day analysts say that this was due to the “placebo effect” and the physical act of massaging the sore joints. But this analysis doesn't take into account that Stanley's snake oil mixture also contained both Camphor and Capsaicin — ingredients that are used in sore-muscle rubs and liniments to this very day. The devoted buyers of Snake Oil were not lying about the product helping them; it actually *was* giving them much-needed pain relief. If only Mr. Stanley had leaned into espousing the correct ingredients to sell the efficacy of his product, instead of the flashier-sounding rattlesnake gimmick, he may have avoided the humiliation of turning his passion project into an embarrassing household name.

Because I was aware of this fact about Snake Oil, I became highly interested in buying and trying out Caroline's concoction, the same blend she used on her face to give her the complexion of an 18-year-old TikToker. *Vice*, the *Daily Mail*, *Teen Vogue*, and the like published articles in which dermatologists warned that using this oil could be — at the very least — a foolhardy move, tearing you from your hard-earned money for no real

payoff results. At worst, buyers might be setting themselves up to suffer horrible sunburns, because of the lemon oil listed in the ingredient list. After all, like Mr. Clarke Stanley, Caroline is not a medical professional. It's purely her word and faith in her product that are the only real selling points.



Meanwhile, Caroline Calloway was toting her Siamese cat Matisse to boho parties in NYC and verbally slaying — in her Insta stories and at an impromptu public poetry slam — the fuckboi poet who'd two-timed her with a highschool girl. After witnessing a completely unhinged Caroline paint her apartment's wooden floors with

buckets of white paint, I just had to get my paws on a touch of her sunshine. I took advantage of a \$25 dollar flash sale on her Snake Oil and acquired me a bottle. I then set the unopened package on a shelf where I forgot about it.

It was now circa 2022. I shook up my “fuck-it bucket” and dove back into my obsession with trying out the *Vogue* Wine Diet. I found out that it was a crash diet that originally appeared in Helen Gurley Brown’s self-help book, *Sex and the Single Girl*, which was published in 1962.

The diet is basic. One is encouraged to choose a few days when they’re already going to be down — *Ah ha!* I quite smugly reasoned to myself. *Everyone else who wrote about this diet chose to do it while they were still showing up to the office — of course it wasn’t going to work out for them!* But I had no 9-5 job that I needed to report to.

I chose a stretch of time to do this diet when I would be having no piano students and would be free to lounge on the couch in delicious uselessness — quite forgetting that I had scheduled an entire day dedicated to a “Pancakes and Booze” art event, and that during the same general window of time I was also due to read for the aforementioned Favorite Poets series in support of Fox... (AH!!! As I am writing this, I just now remembered that I read as my favorite poems a couple pieces from Dena Rash Guzman's amazing collection of poetry, *Joseph!*).

I popped off to the liquor store and bought 3 bottles of good-quality Chablis, and some steaks from the butcher. The diet calls for one boiled egg and a glass of white wine for breakfast, two eggs and another glass for lunch, and a 5 oz. steak, cooked with pepper and lemon juice, for dinner — along with the rest of the wine bottle. The diet also allows for unlimited helpings of water and black coffee throughout the day.

Honestly, one of my favorite things on this planet is alcohol. I felt like having spent all these precious years punishing my liver with booze had prepared me for this very moment.

I was pretty stoked on Day 1 of the diet. I took care to soft boil my eggs. I made myself some drip black coffee to sip after I'd had my glass of white wine. I imagined myself as some twiggy and eccentric Edie Sedgewick-esque character; I was ready for the **GLAM** to begin.

My sister was really supportive of this venture; she'd heard me go on enough times about doing the damn diet that she was glad the day had finally come when I was *actually going to do the damn diet!* My mother, on the other hand, was not enthused about this project. She told me that I was going to get the gout and end up in the ER by Sunday, but to at least put some paprika on the eggs.

I spent the stretch between breakfast and lunch sipping black coffee and Perrier sparkling water — which was actually not that big a change from my normal eating routine for the first half of any given day. My smugness was intact. I found the steak dinner on Day 1 to be delicious and triumphant. I was tipsy from wine and ravenously hungry from only having eaten boiled eggs. I was so grateful to be enjoying the cut of meat.

Day 2 was a disaster. I had to get up early and get my art together to stand in the summer heat outside for two hours, waiting for a chance to get into the venue to hang up my art.





The Pancakes and Booze show was a first-come, first-serve art vending event. I had soft-boiled eggs, black coffee, and wine rolling in my tummy and it wasn't even noon yet. I was a bit nauseated, dizzy, and annoyed that I could possibly crash and fail at this diet like all the others who'd tried before. I powered through with Perrier, the carbonation and burping helping out quite considerably.

I made it through the art event, which lasted from 7pm to midnight, by sipping white wine I'd snuck in using a Perrier bottle, eating my steak from a sandwich bag, and drinking black coffee from a thermos. My mother was angry at me at this point, afraid that I was now a bonafide alcoholic and that I was going to be dead soon.

The night of Day 2, I was plagued with an inability to fall asleep until 4 am. My stomach was in agony. I kept trembling. I was hallucinating shadow figures. When I did fall asleep, it was only for a few hours — during which I had nightmares about my skin being torn off by Pyramid Head from the *Silent Hill* video game franchise.

I spent Day 3 listlessly sipping white wine, unable to get off the couch, and wracked with stomach pain as I nibbled at my eggs, convinced that I had turned into Gollum. It was at this point that I had to participate in the Favorite Poems virtual reading; I managed to do so purely out of loyalty to my friend Fox and wanting to make sure I supported her work. I'd be *damned* if this diet resulted in me letting a friend down!

I have felt no greater relief than when I scarfed down my steak dinner that evening, with the knowledge that this would all be over soon. I spent the night of Day 3 with renewed nightmares, hallucinations of people whispering, and excruciating gut pain. I survived only through my sheer stubbornness, and also not wanting my mother to be right about my imminent demise.

The next morning was an absolute triumph: I stood on the scale and found that I had lost 8 pounds — when the diet itself had only promised a 5-pound loss. And even though I resumed my normal eating habits that week, I lost another four pounds in the ensuing days.

***I fucking did it!***

In the weeks after that, I slowly gained back the weight I had lost and continued on as normal. On the surface, it would sound like this diet is a scam — but it clearly states in Helen Gurley Brown's book that the diet is purely meant as a crash diet to

quickly get you into that little black party dress for an evening. And I have to say, if that's the sole purpose of the diet, then it is clearly a success.

Coming off that experience, I wanted to write an article about it. It seemed that I *should* write about the traumas of it — the nightmares, the gut pains, the physical weakness — and use them to point out how fashion-minded women of the past were slaves to torturing themselves for glam. That I should be grateful to be a modern woman who was allowed to be comfortable in her own skin.

The thing is, even though I am comfortable in my own skin, I am also very aware of how modern beauty is also about the ever-increasing popularity and acceptance of young women filming facelift procedures for social media, surgically and permanently removing fat from their cheeks, and Botoxing *before* the wrinkles.

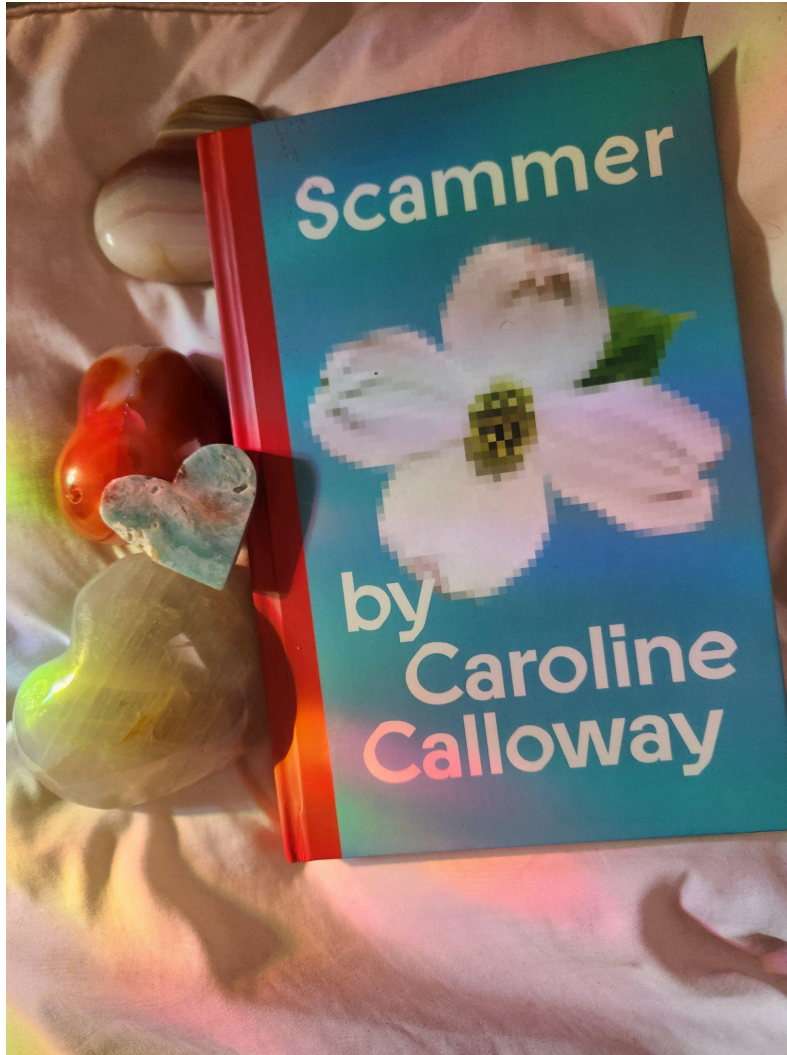
Are any of these invalid ways of investing in personal beauty?

I don't feel like it's on me to judge them — but to me, it only shows that many women will (still) always go the extra mile to attain beauty standards, whether it's by surgery or crash dieting.

This diet was a literal three-day torture that dropped me, bleary eyed and blinking, into a world where I was suddenly grateful to have bacon and buttered toast on my plate once again. *It's the little things, you know?* But I also felt like there was something kinda hardcore and rockstar about our grandmas' generation. If they could set themselves to eating eggs and guzzling three bottles of wine in a three-day stretch to prep themselves for a cocktail party where the brandy flowed like wine and where the gelatin entrees jiggled with mayonnaise. What could we ever know about self-discipline and pain, compared to these women of our past who sucked it up to the Nth degree, all in an attempt to look like Grace Kelly?

And yet, I'm also aware that this is an ode I am only giving to a certain class of privileged women who fit into that "young and beautiful" stereotype. The reality is that many women were — and are — without money or agency. And for many women of color, their struggles in life were (and are) with far greater obstacles than a diet or a dress size. The diet appeared in a bestselling self-help book and was reprinted in *Vogue* years later, but it's not like it took the world by storm.

It's a bit like our modern time, where there is no one who is expected to actually *buy* anything Caroline Calloway might be selling, but there is a certain group of people who chooses to, in this America where a young woman can choose to see and sell the idea of herself as a startup company.



Speaking of which: I finally remembered the little box of Caroline Calloway's Snake Oil on my shelf, and began using it every night before bed. The ingredients list is as follows:

- Grapeseed Oil
- Carrot Seed Oil
- Pomegranate Seed Oil
- Sandalwood Oil
- Geranium Oil

- Lemon Peel Oil
- Ylang Ylang Oil
- Frankincense Oil
- Clary Sage Oil
- Rosemary Oil
- Lavender Oil
- Neroli Oil

One of the first things I enjoyed about the oil was the luxurious fragrance of it, probably from the Frankincense, Ylang Ylang, and Lavender. This *had* to be the shit that Mary Magdalene washed Jesus's feet with. The grapeseed, carrot, and rosemary oil I've seen listed on other popular beauty products touting benefits for face and hair. On top of it, there doesn't seem to be any mineral oils or unpronounceable chemical preservatives or compounds cluttering the recipe. I *could* spend money on high-priced, old-money-brand skin creams that a thousand white rabbits died for during the testing process; I could fly myself to New York to that spa that sells Korean baby foreskin facial treatments to Cate Blanchett and Sandra Bullock (yes, this is real — and I find it *far more* problematic than anything Caroline Calloway might sell me); or, I could just use Snake Oil every night, fall asleep to the delicious spicy scent of it, wake up with a face dewy and glowing, pick up my copy of Caroline Calloway's long-awaited memoir from my nightstand, and read every wicked page of it as I luxuriate in the light of a true American Scammer.









*The Magical Tool / Katy Somerville*



## The Magical Tool

Though I'm bound by my Midwestern niceties, a glamor girl, a lipstick, I'm actually a former tomboy who emulates a certain kind of woman. Grace Jones & Amelia Earhart, Debbie Harry & The Teddy Girls. I admire the artist who hit the art scene at 89, or the woman who rode a motorcycle across racial divides. I once celebrated a big win with the purchase of a Yamaha Virago motorcycle, cherry red. Virago means bitch in Italian and I was still at a place where I embraced that in myself. But first: a crash course on how to crash a motorcycle. I'd hoped for a few starter laps around an empty parking lot but, true to form, my debut lesson was a rush hour ride. He shouted over the engine: *You comin?! Follow me!* When I laid it down in a left hand turn, in the middle of a busy intersection, Dad kept going. A test of pluck, not the first, so I popped back up and lifted a 700lb machine before gunning after my father's 2000 pounder.

I showed up for a date several hours later, after a shower, with two enormous circles of adrenaline on sweat on the pits of my valentine-thug tank top. My date took the excitement personally and we had a marvelous time. That whole summer was gobsmack delicious. I was the tippy-toed vamp rider from the Marc Bolan song. I wore green army pants from the 40's that buttoned to my top ribs and a velvet halter top the color of bare skin. Aviator goggles and a helmet like a maraschino cherry. I learned that

the best way to steer my machine, and the sexiest, was to keep it smooth, just a subtle shift of my hips. There weren't many women bikers so I stuck out. A Volvo station wagon slowed down and an elderly couple shouted encouragement from the window.

Hot damn! Badass!

I rose before dawn for long sunrise rides with my father, later meeting my brothers for breakfast at El Tipico where we devoured Huevos Rancheros with fresh salsa. I spent most of my time with men: I was banging the On Again Off Again, and playing pretend love affair with my poet bestie. Never consummated, we cohabitated in Dad's basement where we spent long mornings reading poems & newspapers & palms. Pops gave Dan his blessing, but I knew that I couldn't count on any of these men. One of them was about to die at only 53 and his chosen son-in-law would tell me to soldier on, his body rigid in the cold.

It was a masculine summer: JFK, Jr., died in a plane crash; Livin' La Vida Loca was a radio hit; bitchy motorcycle, velvet halter, sexy ex, and a muscle car. I dreamed of a 1966 thunderbird: Dan was passenger side, bro was at the wheel, but I was driving. From the backseat. I was dressed like one of The Outsiders, in denim dungarees and a white tee shirt, sleeve folded over a cigarette package. Criss-crossing my jeans: a massive strap-on, which I used to shift the T-Bird. I phoned a friend: "Is it penis envy?" She said: "No, it's your Virago."

Penis envy is just a misogynistic word for power envy. We see men with power and we want it. We see it in each other — in ourselves — and we yearn to own what is ours without apology. Yet we've weaponized the word "cringe" — abusing anyone who yearns. Do we wanna kill us or fuck us? My appendage made another appearance in a friend's dream: "Dia, you had this enormous cock and it was seriously so big, and you were like bam bam bam, hitting my cervix." I apologized for being a shit lover, even if only in the dream world. "Oh no," she said. "You don't understand. I freaking loved it." Surely, that dreamer was longing for her own girth, her own cringe, and merely buckled it on me, or maybe she subconsciously admired my priapic approach to life, clumsy and tumescent, bulging behind the zipper. Either way, that friendship was doomed by my big dick.

My partner bought me a hot pink strap-on with a bubblegum leather harness and my first inclination was to treat it as an accessory. I styled it under frothy layers of tulle and announced my intention to wear it to an upcoming Turbonegro show. My friends said I'd get arrested like Jim Morrison and I do tend towards the provocateur. Maybe it's my obsession with the mythic trickster, maybe it's autism, but I am the thorny sticky-outy thing. I am the wrong kind of woman. Witch, bitch, cunt, cringe. We've turned these words against ourselves to maintain misogyny. While cringe is not an acknowledged reference to our anatomy, it is almost exclusively Female. Cringe yearns. Cringe engages in societal taboo, Cringe DGAF.

Cringe breaks rules, taboos, free.

Everyone's got mixed feelings about the bad girl, even the bad girl herself. In the Peaches song, the boys wanna be her and the girls wanna be her. "I wanna be her," says Peaches, when she is the one that we all wanna be. By her very badness, the bad girl comes out looking . . . bad. On screen, on the page, in real life, the bad girl's goodness is called into question. She is weighed on a moral scale, and, much like the movies, when queer characters suffer for love and pleasure, women pay a price for dreaming. We're covert with power. We learned this from our grandmothers.

Once, we were burned for putting off sparks, so we learned to dampen the fire, hiding it in amulets, whips, high heels or leopard print, until it feels to us like playacting proppery as if we're engaging with some unleashed other. There's always an external repository for female power — a dragon, a strap-on or some other monstrous element. We store our own ferocity in these ex situ symbols that are mostly testosteronic. Khaleesi razed King's Landing because she had a dragon. It was only ever gonna end that way.

There's a rule in writing that you should never introduce a superpower or magical tool that you don't intend to use. We're not here to make nice. We came to make a scene. I gotta take hold of my own life. I have to stop steering from the backseat, shifting with a phantom appendage, while the boys ride up front. I have to wield the blade and kill the people pleaser. I can't cage my power while also chasing after my own tiger. That creature is running off half-cocked.

## Stories From The Fetish Studio

When I got offered the job as assistant at the most, or one of the most, successful softcore bondage and fetish porn studios in New England, I was so flattered— I was thrilled. I'd shot with the studio's owner a couple of times, and he'd always made a good impression on me. I could tell he was trying hard to not be a creep, but I appreciated the effort. My boss ran his studio from out of a big farmhouse deep in the woods. There were three rooms for filming, a dressing room, and even a gym. I was impressed when he told me that he'd built it all himself: all the swings, the bondage beds, the isolation chambers... all by himself, and with the help of a kind, talented local carpenter.

Shortly before I'd been hired, my boss's girlfriend, also his top dominatrix, had written cryptic pencil messages all over their guest bedroom's wallpaper, and then she had dumped him. For a while they had still lived together, in the studio-farmhouse. The ex had hired a local frat boy as her assistant, and had paid him way more than what I was getting. Together they'd grown weed in one of my boss's isolation chambers, and then my boss had "accidentally" released several of the ex's pet snakes. After the snake thing, she'd moved out. At least one snake, I think, still lived in the walls of that house. From time to time, I would find its skin shed in the potted plants.

My boss was a hypochondriacal recluse, who would usually start the day out by railing at me for things I'm sorry to say that I've blocked from my memory. I do

remember that he claimed he wanted to pay for breast augmentation for me, and he also wanted me to start taking creatine and working out in his home gym. He was not easy to say no to— although I still don't think he would have actually paid for it!

I remember, the first time I set foot in my boss's studio, I thought his aesthetic was so bad that he must have crowdsourced it. He must have done market research, and come up with this aggressively heterosexual combination of chastity, bondage, pantyhose, and tickling. I'm not trying to shame his sexual preferences— I'm trying to shame his aesthetic preferences. The man had the worst taste and way too much money. In his off-hours, he was actually catfishing a Wall Street banker. The money he got off of this man eventually allowed him to renovate the bedroom whose walls his ex-girlfriend had written all over. He spent tens of thousands of dollars on mirrored furniture from Pottery Barn Teen, and ordered a custom life-sized photo mural of a horse running on the beach at sunset.

Rich as he was, my boss lived simply in a small apartment, one floor above the studio, with his two cats. One of these cats had developed a medical problem: she would pee blood all over the wall-to-wall carpets. The other cat had no medical problem that I know of, but followed the lead of the first. The apartment was a giant, carpeted litter box. One of my last errands for my boss, before he fired me, was to buy a shower curtain he could put over his bed, to protect the mattress from pee. Every few months, a cat would escape the apartment and pee in the dressing room downstairs, and my boss would storm around, sniffing all of the metallic stilettos, all the hot pink gimp suits, looking so crestfallen when he discovered that this time, a pile of his \$40 pantyhose had been the target. He didn't seem so concerned about the small, pee-dotted staircase leading up to his apartment, which I mention here only because this was also where he

kept, in teetering stacks, all of his model release forms, and all of the keys to his clients' chastity devices. It was always a hard day, for me, when a client would come by to have his chastity device removed— maybe he was taking a romantic getaway with his wife? Maybe he needed to go through airport security...? Minutes before he arrived, I knew that I'd be scrambling to find the little MasterLock key with his nametag on it, somewhere along the sides of that cursed staircase.

When we weren't filming him being wrapped in saran wrap or stuck inside his own homemade oubliettes, my boss liked me to film him as he read slam poetry. For this— and for warm, encouraging offscreen laughter— he paid me overtime. He didn't want my commentary, for this or for anything else: he just wanted an audience. One day, after shouting at me, he had said in a thoughtful voice, as if considering each word: "Don't speak. Just agree with me." After that, I took my energy out of trying to please him, and put it somewhere it could do some good. For the rest of the year I worked there, I would steal around \$200 a week from my boss: as cash, or in the form of groceries, cosmetics, skin care, and several houseplants which I cherish to this day. He never found out about the theft: I was fired for something totally different. I was fired because one of the other girls working there told him that I actually didn't like him at all, that I hated him. I hated him so much that my only reservation about stealing from him was that I knew, if it had been one of his findom scenes, he would have been totally into it.

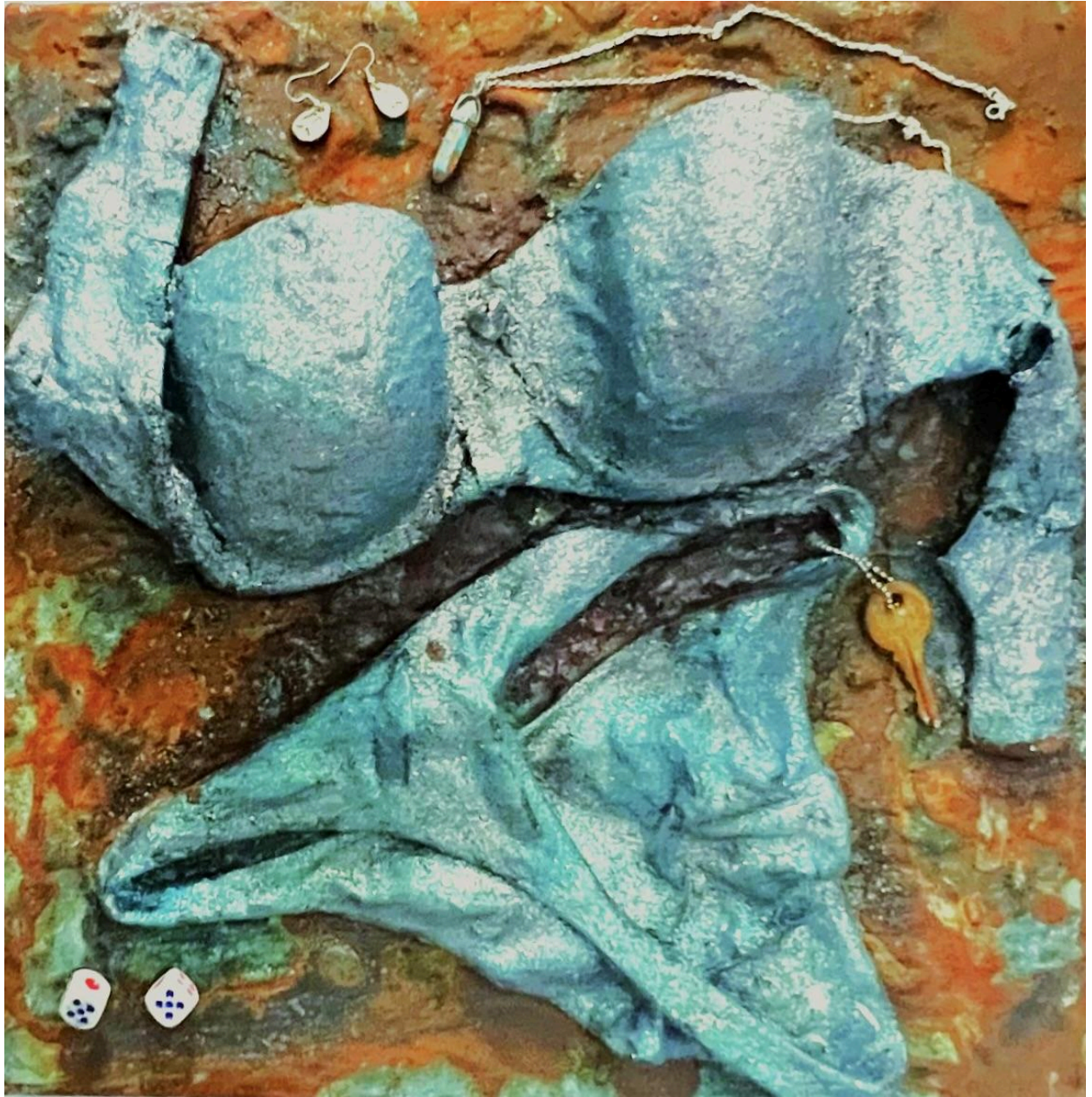
One thing that saved my sanity, both during and after working for my boss, was getting to go to the bar with four of his other ex-assistants, and trading stories about him. We were especially angry that he would appropriate the presents given to girls by their clients. These were valuable presents, but he would keep them for the studio, and

even display them ostentatiously without letting anybody wear them. This last straw made us agree: we had to take revenge.

Our first plan was to cancel all of his Adobe editing subscriptions, and to change the account information on the porn sites he posted to. After all, I still had all his passwords. —Only, we realized quickly, he had changed his passwords, immediately after firing me. Still, we knew everything about his schedule, and about the contents of his house. We knew when he left for coffee in the morning, and that his studio — shockingly — was never locked. This man needed consequences. We decided that two of us would keep watch from the road while another would steal back the expensive gifts he had claimed for himself. While she did this, I would be salting his dozens of prized houseplants. I think it was only my sympathy for the houseplants, which I'd been watering for a year now, that caused me to reconsider our plan. Should we have gone through with it? I ask myself this question. I wish we had for the sake of the story. But fortunately or unfortunately, my friend and I both decided at the last minute to lie to the others, and we got the operation called off.

What's the moral of this story? Here's what comes to mind immediately: for readers looking to start a business, consider this specialized softcore fetish niche because my former boss is making too much money with apparently no competition. Also: even in small-town America, you can find Wall Street guys who will pay absurd amounts to be wrapped in cellophane and extorted for midrange furniture! Isn't that a little amazing?





*Gone Swimmin' Cool Blue / SheRa Kelley*

# FLASH

## Dying for A Story

“What the hell were you doing, finding a body?” Mortimer C. Newsworthy, looked down from his six-foot four height at the five-foot nothing annoyance that was standing in front of him and fixed her with a glare that had prompted more than one subject to finish their interview with the realisation that they’d revealed much more than they’d ever intended. “I sent you to the gardening show to cover the event. Not to get involved in a possible homicide.”

“I didn’t exactly go looking for a body! And I never said it was a homicide,” said Twinky LaBelle, junior reporter with Mortimer’s local Weekly Chronicle and with her eye on a Pulitzer, or at least a permanent contract with a newspaper that placed more importance on real news than who had grown the biggest pair of plums that summer. “The police hadn’t established the cause of death by the time I left.”

“By the time you were escorted from the premises for continually interrupting the police, you mean,” said Mortimer. “How many times have I told you, accuracy is the cornerstone of our business.”

“Twenty-one and a half,” replied Twinky. “My phone died midway through one occasion.” Not entirely accurate, she admitted, but only to herself, she’d just been fed up with Mortimer’s constant repetition of his favourite adage. “And if accuracy is so important, how come you nearly always end up cutting almost half my copy?”

“Because the only thing more important than accuracy in the publishing industry is brevity. Especially with the price of ink these days. We don’t have the space to let you waffle on for half a page before finally getting to the point.”

“But people like a good backstory,” Twinky protested, although in the full knowledge that she was unlikely to win this recurring difference of opinion. After all, she was only a junior reporter (with her eye on a Pulitzer), and Mortimer was the proprietor, editor, and only other full-time employee of the Chronicle.

“No, they need to know the basics: Who, What, When, Where, Why, How. And if there’s space, then you can add a little history as a filler. Tell the readers that the man bit the dog. You don’t need to tell them the history of canine domestication first.”

Mortimer paused to collect his thoughts, “Did you at least find out the name of the deceased and their next of kin?”

“I don’t think there’ll be much luck there.” Twinky caught the expression on Mortimer’s face and added quickly, “That’s what I was trying to tell you. It was during the plot digging competition. A sinkhole opened up under Bill Jameson, one of the competitors, and when they pulled him out, they found some mummified remains as well. Bill said it looked like it had been there for centuries.”

“So, a cold case then.” Mortimer chewed on his lip as he thought. “I have a contact at the University archaeology department. I’ll get on to him, see if he has any information on previous excavations at the site. You get on to Bill Jameson, get five hundred words on his experience. And then speak to one of the coppers at the scene.”

He dismissed her with a wave and headed back to his office to try and find his phone beneath the piles of paper on his desk.

Twinky headed to her desk with a sigh of relief. She'd almost given herself away when Mortimer had fixed his glare on her. Luckily, going by past experience, now that he'd gotten a good story in his sights, he'd dismiss all other irrelevancies. Heck, that was how she'd landed this job in the first place, showing up for an alleged 'work experience' week and dangling a rumour of a suspicious death under his nose. By the time the investigation had recorded an official verdict of 'no foul play', she'd gotten her feet under the table and landed herself a job, albeit a not very well paid one. But sooner or later, she knew she'd get the story that would attract the attention of the national papers, maybe even an international one.

Twinky rubbed her pocket as she sat down, making sure that the knife was still in place. She had indeed gone to the gardening show to look for a body. It had just been rather a stroke of luck that she hadn't had to supply it herself. Maybe this case would be 'the one.' And if not, well, her knife was still sharp.

## **The Season of Our Honeymoon**

The oyster hope in the palm of your hand and the trip to McDonald's after a \$90 meal: you feel invincible, for a moment. At least, that's what you think when you see the other diners buying their cheeseburgers after omakase. You, yourself, are tipsy from the free drinks.

The next morning, you dream of popcorn ceilings and the cliché hotel furniture out of a modern 60s dystopia, sirens below. Earth lovely, and lively, humans dying and thriving. And you are in bed next to me napping.

Above us, a glass ceiling, a mall for earth. You can see the snow outside the glass, the wind, the rain, the hot sun. But you never feel it. You go from one store to another, cafes next to universities taught by bots, offices with virtual assistants.

Everything you knew is both the same and different.

After a few weeks, there is the moon over the Acropolis. They built a train through the ruins. Ancient soil still fertile and human inventions and creations lost to time. The gentle waves rocking the tourist boat to a brief time and place they'll eventually forget.

A plane ride to the blood red roses against the pink house with the white shutters, ancient and modern. Your home is across the street.

The roses and you are coexisting as one (time without time's prison) and the orange roses across the street still winking at the blood with its lightness, birds overhead screaming for peace—peace against the sun, the sky, the mountains, the entire world. Peace against shadows.

Birds still asking for beauty and love as if they are things to be asked for/of, as if anything could be demanded. The red, red roses grow as if they've always grown in the gardens of beloved, passions full of fury, delicate gardens seething underneath, a Byzantine, medieval world running full of ideas and details all unsaid. Linguistics, something I yearn to really understand within each of us, the linguistics of our complex minds and bodies. Does your body speak in periods or dashes, rhymes and rhythms?

How can I explain anything without explaining the beauty that runs and morphs and boomerangs in circles around time?

Nothing ever changes. Everything always changes. I am a web of disjointed memories, here, with these roses and these birds. Soon, another plane ride to Palermo, to a life of memories for the grandmother I hardly knew whose memories faded in a nursing home. She died earlier this year, a person I would barely recognize in any deep way despite knowing her—whose life seemed sad, so full of spiteful constraints, but within whose constraints? Maybe it was the best she could have had. To think on how she hurt to hurt others.

I walk around these stone streets and wonder what her parents were like, where she grew up before she journeyed across the ocean. Would she have even wanted to remember?

And now you and I at The Cure, back in the city we live, lucky enough to be in the glow of this never ending love—and all the fans holding up their phones like glow sticks because we all love the same thing right now. If only we could all just love all the same things all the time. Love doesn't have to be imaginary. It is real. It could always be real.

Here we are in the history of everything (which is not real) waiting to feel the angel take us. I think back to a week earlier, the Roman skies full of cotton clouds, clouds over the mountains; it's no wonder humans thought the gods lived here, high in a place where no one could see them, their goings on unseen, undetected. Their life in complete secrecy, sacred privacy—and maybe they are still there, bickering and strategizing. Maybe they don't care.

Or maybe they were never there to begin with.

It is morning and the boat in the distance raises its sails, unconcerned with gods. I'm convinced the gods were always here among us from day one, as octopi, whales, bees, flies, bacteria. It's us who think the human form is something more cherished and it's us who got it all wrong from the start. It's all just part of life: the god doing a handstand, the seagulls on the nude male statue in at mark, the glistening water against the buildings.

I think of those angels in Venice, the ones in Florence. What do those two angels face now lost, mystery? Branches of orchids at their sides born sloppily out of marble,



then taken to Lorenzo Bartolini's cemetery of dead spirits prisoner in clay and stone and the saints without their shoes, faded as in a dreamless dream in a plane with unending sky.

Soon we will be home to think of faraway places to live, to think of what death means, for our collective soul. To think on life as if we'll ever know what any of it means. Yet so desperately want it to mean something other than nothing. To be more than a liminal space between birth and death, a great cruel stage.

Together, let's eat every meal as if it's the last great supper.



*Gone Swimmin' Pink Panties / SheRa Kelley*

# INTERVIEW

**“I Live My Truth, Don’t Ask For Permission,  
And Don’t Stop To Listen To People’s Opinions”**  
**Alice Interviews Russian-Born NYC Comedian Vicky Kuperman**

**Alice:** How did you get into comedy?

**Vicky Kuperman:** Mental Instability.

**A:** How do your family and upbringing affect your work (if at all)?

**VK:** Hard to say, because I can’t A/B test growing up in another type of family, with another type of upbringing, to see how it would change my comedy. But I surmise being born in a Russian space center, immigrating here at age 2, and growing up a Soviet-Jewish refugee in Brookline, MA back in the old days when our parents didn’t know what the f\*ck we were up to after school definitely shaped my work. Mostly the “coming here at age 2” part because if I’d stayed in Moscow, I’d probably be a) performing in Russian, and b) also in prison.

**A:** How did you build a following for your performance art (or do you consider stand-up comedy to be something other than performance art—and if so, what?)?

**VK:** The good old fashioned way: walking door to door selling vacuum cleaners. I kid. I have been traveling the country (and internationally) doing comedy for close to 17 years so bit by bit I’ve been collecting people (that sounds shady! I’m not actually collecting people)! Also . . . social media.

**A:** As you know, this issue is dedicated to influencers and bad girls. Do you consider yourself an influencer, a bad girl, or both? Please explain your answer.

**VK:** I am probably an influencer in the more traditional way. By that I mean, I live my truth, don’t ask for permission, and don’t stop to listen to people’s “opinions.” Opinions aren’t facts. Very important for women to remember that

and pull it out in vulnerable moments. Anyway, that *might* make me an influencer because people have told me that it inspires them. But who am I to call myself an influencer? I'll leave it up to the general population to decide.

Now, the other thing: bad girl. I'd love to know how you define bad girl before I answer that. But my gut says yes, as I am highly triggered by the term "good girl." Even writing it just now made me shudder and now I'm doing 4/7 breaths and tapping to self-regulate.

**A:** What quality in your personality resonates most strongly with the idea of a 'bad girl'?

**VK:** Not waiting for anyone to give me permission to do anything.

**A:** What quality in your personality resonates most strongly with the idea of an 'influencer'?

**VK:** Showing other women that [not waiting for permission to do anything] is ok.

**A:** What quality in your personality is least fitting with the 'bad girl' trope?

**VK:** I show up to work on time and meet deadlines. Gross.

**A:** What quality in your personality is most unlike a typical social media influencer?

**VK:** I'm horrible at Gen Z terminology and I don't use filters.

**A:** What's a normal workday like for you, in comedy?

**VK:** Sending painstaking booking emails, being sad after looking at social media, trying to write jokes that I immediately judge as soon as I get them on paper,

doing a set that I record then judge later, being told I'm funny and not understanding why, and doing it all over again the next day.

**A:** What's your favorite way to be transgressive in life and in your art?

**VK:** Comedy is about pushing boundaries and seeing what you can get away with, which is fitting for me because I was a smartass in school.

**A:** Do you think women have it more difficult in comedy as an industry, and if so, how? What if any ways have you found to adapt to this and/or combat gender inequities?

**VK:** Yes, but I'm going to say something totally unorthodox: the status quo has to be ignored. If an industry wants to pretend I don't exist or I'm not worthy, I can do the same thing right back. I focus on the people who want to work with me, who I want to work with, who are professional, and most importantly, I create my own opportunities and always have.

**A:** Other than yourself, who are your favorite stand-up comics? Favorite comedic writers?

**VK:** Some working comics I enjoy are Del Harrison, Sherry Davey, Missy Hall, Nicky Sunshine, Shanna Christmas, Bernadette Pauley, Kendra Cunningham, Vanessa Hollingshead, Negin Farsad, Erin Jackson, Kelly MacFarland, Jaye McBride, Danny Cohen, Poppi Kramer (you are missed), Leah Bonnema, Alyce Chan, and Christine Hurley.

Favorite famous comedians— both alive and not-alive — include Joan Rivers, Patton Oswalt, Gary Gulman, Chris Rock, Sarah Silverman, Margaret Cho, Tig Notaro, Sommore, Louie Anderson, Wendy Liebman, David Brenner, Sebastian Maniscalco, Carole Montgomery, Tom Cotter, Eddie Murphy, Wanda Sykes, Rita

Rudner, Jessica Kirson, Greg Giraldo, Maria Bamford, John Mulaney, Lewis Black, and Louis Ramey.

# CONTRIBUTORS



“Fuck this biography,” Alice said, “as well as **Paul David Adkins** (he/him) and the horse he rode in on.” Alice continued, “Fuck his MFA from Washington University, as if anyone gives a fuck. And his stupid upcoming collection from Backroom Window Press, titled *Sound and Fury*, or some shit? Fuckin’ don’t read it. It sucks!” Alice concluded, “But those six Pushcart nominations? Wow . . . JK! Every one of ’em’s terrible: fucking terrible.”

**Stephanie Anderson** (she/they) is a library worker, union organizer, grant writer, and MS Professional Writing student in Baltimore, Maryland. She doesn’t do anything else and also she was just born yesterday. Their work is out or forthcoming in *Genrepunk*, *Black Stone / White Stone*, *Sad Girl Review*, *Partially Shy*, *nightshade lit mag*, and a few other places. You can find them shouting alone in a graveyard @whoastanderson on Twitter and Instagram or @standerson.bsky.social.

**Jerome Berglund** has published many haiku, haiga and haibun, most recently in *bottle rockets*, *Frogpond*, and *Modern Haiku*. His first collections, *Bathtub Poems* and *Funny Pages* were just released by Setu and Meat For Tea press, and a mixed media chapbook showcasing his fine art photography is available now from Yavanika.

**MJ Brown** is a queer, neurodivergent writer from Huntsville, Alabama. Their work has been featured in *Five on the Fifth* and *Door is a Jar*.

**Isabella Chasey** is a full-time cook and full-time aspiring writer. During her free time, she spends time with her partner, dog, family and friends. Her social media is @wecallhimfez on both TikTok and Instagram. You can also read more from Isabella on her Substack, *Doing Stuff*.

**Olivia Delgado** has been published in the anthology *Hidden Lights*, *Harness Magazine*, *Penmen Review*, *For Women Who Roar*, and *Voicemail Poems*, to name a few. She recently published her first chapbook, *Girl Bred From the 90s* (Querencia Press). She resides in her home state of Texas, where she helps as poetry editor for *Honeyguide Literary Magazine* and as co-editor for *The Field Guide Poetry Mag*.

**Mackenzie Dunne** is a senior at the University of North Carolina Wilmington pursuing Creative Writing and English. One day she hopes to own her own farm where she can live out her dreams of reading her works of poetry and nonfiction to her chickens, but until then she will continue through school.

**Mimi Flood** (she/her) is the author of *Provocative is a Girls Name* (Querencia Press) and *Slut Pop* (Dark Thirty Poetry Publishing). You can find her on Instagram @Marigold\_Jesus

By day, **Kendra Jackson** crunches numbers for a living. By night (and sometimes into the early hours of the morning) she expresses her pent-up creativity by crunching words instead. For many years, those words consisted of fanfiction under the name Cein/Ceindreadh, but now she's switched to original work.

**SheRa Kelley's** work inspires us all to keep our eyes open to the beauty that surrounds us every day. Is it a rusty bottle cap or the base of an earring? Is it a piece of old metal or the centerpiece of new creation to come? You can see the fun she has while creating and will make you look differently at what you see as trash and see it as a treasure . . .

**Meghan King** is a New Jersey writer, and true to her roots she is brazen. Her work has been published in *Not Ghosts, But Spirits Vol I* and *Vol III*, *Winter Anthology 2023* and *Summer Anthology 2023* by Querencia Press. Meghan writes on hope and the resilience of the human spirit. Meghan holds to the belief in being able to change the tide.

Russian-born **Vicky Kuperman** has performed on Live From Gotham, Nickelodeon, The Maxim Comedy Showcase, and elsewhere. Her comedy albums [Love's a Joke](#), [When I Could Feel](#), [All Good!](#) and [Three's Comedy](#) are in regular rotation on SiriusXM, and her book [How to Spy on Your Neighbor](#) was top 10 in Political Humor on Amazon. She has entertained troops on 15 military bases and five countries across Europe — one of the greatest honors of her life.

**Kiara Nicole Letcher** the author of the chapbook *Scream Queen*, (The Orchard Street Press, 2019) received her MFA from The University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her first full length collection, *Oxblood*, is forthcoming, (Agape Editions, 2024). Her work has appeared in *Green Mountains Review*, *Plainsongs Magazine*, *Querencia Press*, *Mulberry Literary*, *Solstice Literary Magazine* and *Alice Says Go Fuck Yourself*. Her work is forthcoming in *South Dakota Review* and *Laurel Review*.

**Lupita Limon** is a queer Mexican-American individual who recently submitted a poem to *Alice Says Go Fuck Yourself*.

**Charles J. March III**'s work has been put out by or is forthcoming from *Neko Girl*, *Young Ravens*, *Gutslut*, *Disappointed Housewife*, *Sagging Meniscus Press*, etc. More can be found at [LinkedIn](#) & [SoundCloud](#).

**Cee Martinez** is co-EiC of *Alice Says Go Fuck Yourself*, a writer of short stories and essays that have appeared in *Luna Luna Magazine*, *Ravishly*, and other outlets. A reprint edition of *Antipathia*, a novel she self published in 2013, will be available to purchase in hardback sometime this summer (or after she gets the damn proof copies).

**Saba Syed Razvi, PhD** is the author of *In the Crocodile Gardens* (Elgin Award-nominee), *heliophobia* (on the preliminary ballot for the Bram Stoker Award® for Superior Achievement in Poetry), *Limerence & Lux*, *Of the Divining and the Dead*, and *Beside the Muezzin's Call & Beyond the Harem's Veil*. She's an Associate Professor of English & Creative Writing at the University of Houston in Victoria, TX.

**Katy Somerville** is a collage/mixed-media artist and intermittent writer. When not inadvertently gluing things to her kitchen table, she dons her Art Director/Co-Conspirator hat, indulging in the weird and wonderful with frequent collaborator, Dia VanGuntent, at *Cream Scene Carnival Magazine*. You'll find her singing loudly, marveling at her animals, listening to true crime podcasts, laughing with her beautiful bass-playing partner, and finding joy in skulls and sparkles. Find her art here: [@what\\_katy\\_said](#)

**Nathan Tompkins** is a writer living just northwest of Portland, Oregon. His work has appeared in numerous publications and anthologies including *The Inflectionist Review*, *Maudlin House*, and *Quail Bell Review*. He self-published his most recent chapbook, *Shipwrecked on an Imbrium Shore*, because he hates submission fees.

**Joanna C. Valente** is a human who lives in Brooklyn, New York. Joanna is the author of several collections, including *A Love Story* and *η ψυχή, η ψυχή μας | the soul, our soul*. They are the illustrator of *Dead Tongue* by Bunkong Tuon and *Raven King* by Fox Henry Frazier. Joanna is also the founder of Yes Poetry. One day, Joanna dreams of having a flower and vegetable garden.

**Dia VanGunten** is a dick. Weirdo Eic of *Cream Scene Carnival Magazine*, another collaboration with Katy Somerville, and creator of the Pink Zombie Rose Series, PZR's Major Arcana is out this spring on Q, the graphic imprint of Querencia Press. This essay written for the Bad Girls issue of *Alice Says Go Fuck Yourself*, "The Magical Tool," will be included in *Veiled Threat*, an upcoming memoir-work that explores the female experience as it relates to power.

**Cleo Varra** (IG: @cleovarra) is a writer and photographer whose work has been featured in *Opal Age Tribune* and in *Bottled Dreams Magazine*. You can find more of her writing at [memoriesoferasure.com](http://memoriesoferasure.com).

**Devon Webb** is a Gen Z writer & editor based in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Her award-winning work has been published in over seventy journals worldwide & revolves around themes of femininity, vulnerability, anti-capitalism & neurodivergence. She is an in-house writer for *Erato Magazine*, an editor for Prismatic Press, & is currently working on the launch of a collective called The Circus, which will prioritise radical inclusivity within the indie-lit scene. She is on Instagram, Twitter, TikTok & Bluesky at @devonwebbnz

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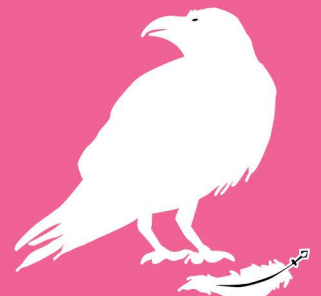
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*Alice Says  
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