

*Meditation*  
by Sarosh Nandwani

my mother, a mediator, always introduces herself to her clients

second—after her male partner, who always says, “hello, I am a lawyer” first, after which

the people being counseled think, “oh, he must be in charge here,”

and my mother, who has endured countless men commandeering her space

gracefully backs away.

my mother, a kind woman, tells her partner he is good at mediating

to which he replies, “you are so good too—I am so bad at being organized,” and my mother’s heart says

“I am not your secretary,” but she takes the notes, makes the calls, and organizes anyway even though

she was the lead on this client’s case and perhaps she could have introduced herself first, and he

could back off.

my mother, a feminist, tells her boss the men must make more space for us

and her boss counters by telling her, “tell him you aren’t available and he can do the calling and texting.”

and my mother considers this and agrees that yes, perhaps she should make an excuse because

it would be audacious to imagine a man that could take direct criticism for taking

up too much space.

my mother, responsible now for demanding space when her partner is unaware

he must make some for her, concedes and continues to hope her boss will mention space at the next meeting, but of course

not directly, because you can tell a crowd to make space for each other, but you cannot tell a man

he is taking up too much, and again the cause is ignored in favor of

abating the symptoms.

*Blood Scriptures*  
by Matthew Gilbert

What does it mean to toughen up?  
To a young boy leaped over  
the steps of empty bleachers –  
blood running down his leg –  
it means softness will not be tolerated.  
It means offering your body  
as dodgeball target practice.  
It means tripping over your own  
shoelaces onto cedar blocks.  
It necessitates waiting out recess  
because five stitches can wait.  
Why would you rain it for everyone else?  
You must learn to fortify your emotions.  
You must learn that teasing tests your willingness to live.  
Your body is fragile because you sit gym out  
and prefer to work on pronunciation of sounds.  
You don’t have to speak. Remember that sacrifice  
means giving up. Strength means knowing  
the words to recite and when to bite your tongue,  
like when they say -oh in- that doesn’t belong,  
that wasn’t my fault, thh-asks.

Matthew Gilbert is a recent graduate from the M.A. program in English Literature at East Tennessee State University. He has served as the 2018-2019 editor of the student-based literary journal *The Mockingbird*.

He currently serves as a reader for fiction at *Orison Books*.

He loves the music of written word and the movement and transformation of ideas through the poetic experience. His work has previously appeared in *Echoes and Images*, *The Mockingbird*, *Red Mud Review*, *Delta Poetry Review*, and *Eunoia Review*.

*Antebellum*  
by Eunice Kim

August, and the summer widows  
itself.

I press a knife against my  
chest in self-supplication. August  
finds me listless—  
unraveling on the  
blacktop, soft-edged. My lips  
are forgetful narrators.

Before I learned to float, I opened  
up my veins, the practical cartography  
of me. My mother  
unbears a daughter, asking: How much  
force does it take  
to dissemble the human body? How  
human do I have to  
be for this weakness?

Eunice Kim is a Korean-American writer living in Seoul. Her work has been recognized by or is forthcoming in *The Hellbore Press*, *Vagabond City Lit*, and *Polyphony*. She currently works as a poetry reader for *The Adroit Journal*.

*Sinner*  
by Efrén Castro

i’ve shared my safe space with too many men

and though i continue

i know it’ll never be enough

i’m already messaging the next one

i can’t imagine what these men think

but i know we’re all feeling the same things

society has left us for dead

and we’re finding comfort in each other

the next morning, another stranger’s scent lingers on my bed

a small souvenir that i hold dear

my mom called me again to tell me to take care of my body

its become a hobby of mine to disobey authority

she asks if otherwise i’m fine, i say yes

i don’t talk about how her anxieties for eternal life started leaking into mine

and how time only makes them worse

The heaven i’m living is stuck on Earth

i keep it inside

we both know the way i go about things isn’t right

she says goodbye for the night but the silence frightens me

it gives me too much time to think

and i think

that in her eyes

i am the sacrilegious

an afterlife defying anti-christ

in her eyes, i am still

just a sinner

Efrén Castro (ig: @namchere360) is a queer Latinx writer whose poetry can be described as “nostalgia porn”. They write a lot about how growing up as a closeted person in a conservative environment has affected their platonic, romantic, and family relationships. They also discuss the ugly and dark side of gay hookup culture through their unique storytelling. They also write and design their own poetry zines, which he sells digitally and physically on his website!