



Read👁



hey.



SPRING 2023

THEY DON'T CALL US

EDITION 11



They Call Us is a literary magazine created by powerful women and gender minorities wanting to empower other women and gender minorities. Using media, art, and literature as a means to inspire, They Call Us wants to tell the everyday struggles of women and gender minorities from around the world.

The purpose of art is to create change, so They Call Us works to unite artists to tell the stories of those that are normally silenced. Our goal is to ignite conversation and encourage people of all ages, races, sexualities, genders, nationalities, abilities, and the like to share their stories. They Call Us wishes to diversify the messages we see online and change the dialogue to give credibility to all of us who have felt helpless and lacking a credible voice.

A NOTE TO OUR READERS

This magazine centers around themes of:

Sex

Domestic abuse

Sexual assault

If any of the above are sensitive topics for you, please pay close attention to the trigger warnings listed before relevant pieces.

They Call Us seeks to tell the stories of any and all who wish to share them. Sometimes these stories, while important to listen to, can be hard to hear. Above all else, please take care of yourself.

Thank you for reading.

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FOREWORD

By Kailah Peters

I just got out of a three year relationship and honestly, one of the worst parts of all of this is the thought of dating again. I have nightmares of me hunched over on the couch, drafting out the perfect dating app bio to summarize me as a person. Do I lead with the fact that I like to read? A cute selfie or a picture with friends? Should my profile say bi or queer? It feels like a never ending cycle of whittling myself down into three digestible prompts.

Then comes the swiping. You have to sort through countless men's rights activists, 20-something year olds who don't own a bed frame, women biting their lip like it'll end world hunger, and creeps waiting for new prey to stalk. The horrors of dating are endless. And yet, in my waking hours, I downloaded Hinge. No matter how awful the apps are, or how many bad first dates I go on - I am still a hopeless romantic. I still long to be known deeply and completely by another person, to share my life with a partner, to love and be loved. I dread the swiping, but wait patiently for cute coffee dates and inside jokes.

I am stuck between a rock and hard place: the desire for companionship and the will to survive. But things aren't all bad. For the most part, women and gender minorities are no longer dating as a means to an end. We don't need marriage for financial stability, or the stave off the shameful label of spinster. We date because we want to, because we are looking for a little extra light in our life.

This has been a paramount shift in the world of singles. The tasks of our partners have gone up. Mere company isn't enough; we ask that our partners make us happier than we can be alone. Studies are showing that this is a big ask. Recent research suggests that single hetero women are much happier than both single hetero males and coupled up straight women. (Of course, we lack research into our queer counterparts.)

But this makes sense. We can pay our own bills, we can care for ourselves both physically and emotionally, and we can turn to friends for communities of support. Dating is no longer necessary for our wellbeing, but an addition to the life we've built.

So men want to complain that our standards are too high. Honestly, they are right. Our standards are six feet high, and 5'11 effort simply isn't cutting it. In the words of Miley, "I can buy myself flowers." Now, I want a partner who can help with domestic work, engage in stimulating conversation, get along with my friends, make me laugh... the list goes on and on.

Personally, I think it's a good thing that the standards have been raised. I'm hoping this generation will see less resentment in marriage and more long term companionship based on genuine compatibility. We will see more equal partnership in relationships and more joy for both the single and the coupled. In the meantime, I'll keep swiping and who cares if they don't call?



Artwork by
Grace Juracka



Artwork titled "Lincoln's Getaway"
by Grace Juracka

DON'T TRUST DUNCAN

By Bret Serbin

I told my siblings I'd never try a dating app, but after Gregory went off on his "spiritual journey" and Billy explained that our "stars weren't aligned," I did what any non-self-respecting millennial in Montana would do. I downloaded the little red icon and started swiping.

The first few finds were predictable. Flannel-clad figures offering fish. Skiers and snowboarders with their faces fully obscured. Deceptive visages followed by wildly inappropriate bios. I started looking at profiles with one eye closed.

And that was how I found Duncan.

He billed himself as a Chris Pratt lookalike, which should've been my first red flag. He even had a genuine photo of the actor in his queue for comparison.

It took only a few messages for him to ask for my number, a request I deflected. But that didn't stop him from sending raunchier and raunchier messages full of provocative inquiries.

I agreed to meet him Thursday night.

I was nervous at the brewery ahead of time, tugging my crop-top sweater over my abdomen and fidgeting with the black choker tightly wound around my neck. When the time came to meet Duncan at a nearby bar, I reminded my friends of my location and set off into the cold.

He found me by the bathrooms and pulled me into an awkward hug, just as the Bingo announcer launched into the first of many alphanumeric combinations he would bellow throughout the night.

Duncan and I stood watching the avid Bingo players with their proprietary markers whizzing over their sheets before he said, "want to go to my hotel? We can pick up a six-pack on the way."

I nodded and followed him to his rental car. He managed to get us lost driving the few minutes out of downtown Missoula, then balked when I asked for a pack of White Claw instead of beer. He bought both.

His hotel was far from elegant, but I nonetheless told him I felt like a married woman having an affair. He scooped me up in his arms and carried me to the bedroom.

An impressively long while later, Duncan sat next to me on the couch, cozying up to the White Claw, while an old episode of *Friends* droned in the uncomfortable silence.

I couldn't help but giggle as Phoebe and Chandler duked it out to see who could pretend to be interested in the other the longest. When Phoebe's bra came into view, Duncan made a vulgar comment.

"I bet you never noticed that before," he laughed.

And that, despite all the other warnings, was the final straw.

Who was he, despite his endurance, to decide my anatomical interests? He was right, in this instance, but only because Lisa Kudrow was hardly my type. The women I had dated were far more masculine—more masculine than Duncan himself in all his self-assured manliness.

And beyond the offense of his presumptions lurked a deeper discomfort. Fear. What if I shot back in defiance that I had been with bigger-breasted women than the ones on the TV? Would he be surprised? Impressed? Scandalized? I didn't want to stick around to find out.

"You can stay the night," he said drowsily, crinkling the tall aluminum can in his large hand. "We can do this again in the morning."

But I made up an excuse, exited and immediately switched my dating profile to women—exclusively.

Artwork titled
"Not just a phase"
by Brianna Protesto



YOU THINK YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT YOU ONLY LIKE GIRLS

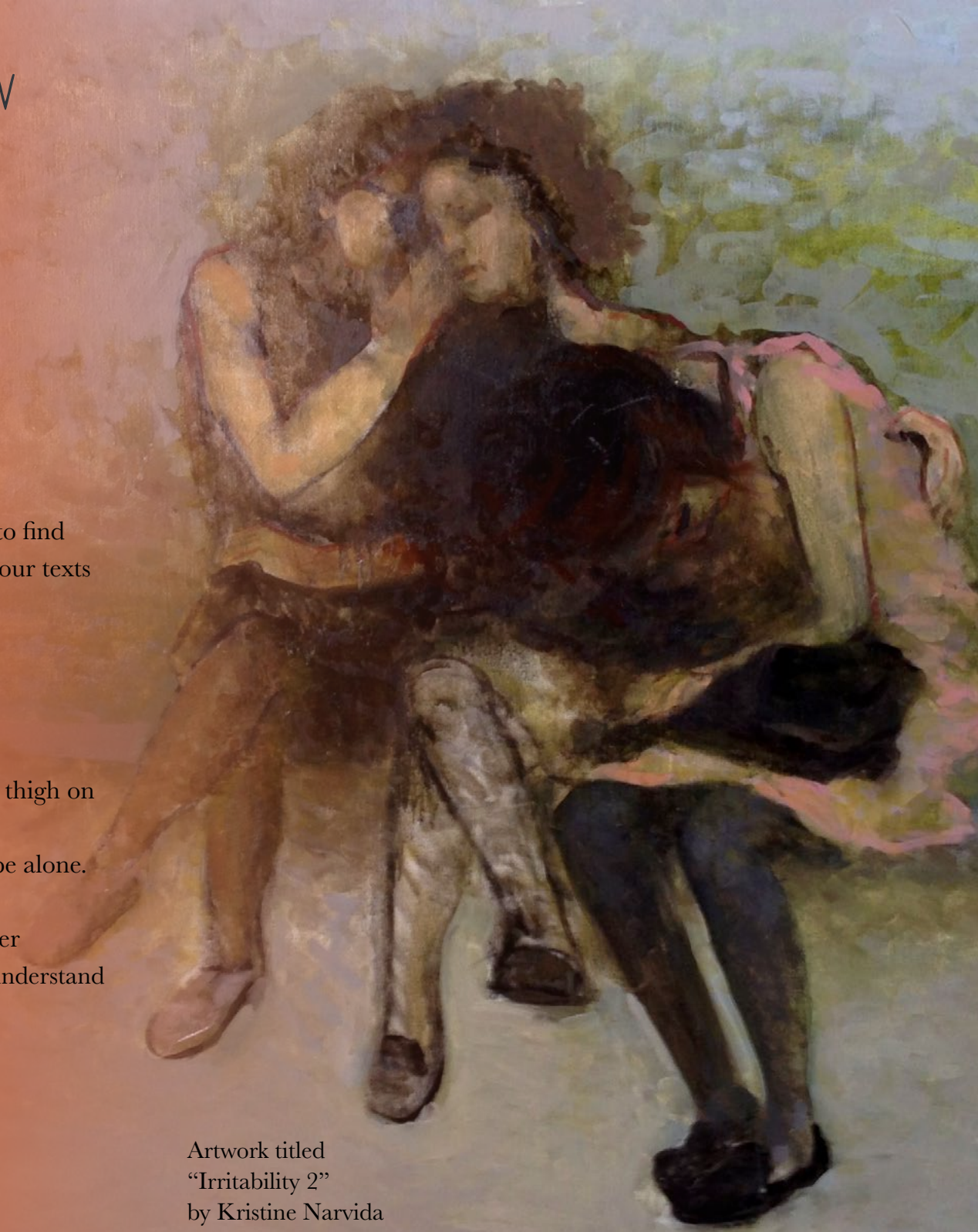
By Zoe London

but a compulsory lens makes it easy to flirt
with your starry eyes and a desire to be convinced;
boys are everywhere and they aren't so bad
better to be won over than to be alone.

girl one, girl two, no third—girls that like girls are hard to find
your friends have better luck with boyfriends and miss your texts
boys are everywhere, after all,
and they're implied unless you want to end up alone.

one boy is older than you, one boy has money
your compulsion becomes an impulse to self-wreck
one boy is everywhere so you move his hand off of your thigh on
his bed again and again
and again, you never said yes—you actually wanted to be alone.

your compulsory lens made boys easy to look at but never
to kiss—you accept your failure. it's only now that you understand
how boys could be everywhere and their beds so lonely
but only a girl's bed could make you a home.



Artwork titled
“Irritability 2”
by Kristine Narvida



WE ARE NOT HERE,



FOR YOU.



TO THE TWITTER RANDO WHO ASSUMED I WAS SINGLE

By Francesca Leader

I get it—I do.

The fact that my profile pic
is less than dowdy.

The fact that my bio
mentions neither partner nor kids.

The fact that I publish, and tweet about,
erotic poetry sometimes.

The fact that my DMs
are not, explicitly, closed.

The fact that when you comment,
I usually at least drop a like.

Who, in your position, wouldn't think
I was ripe for the picking?

And by in your position, I mean
alone, in your mom's basement,
jacking off to thumbnails of women
who provoked you,
just by existing.

Artwork titled
“We Are Not Here, For You”
by Tali Rose Krupkin

JUST FRIENDS

By Margaret Schnekenburger

His arms are wrapped around me
Holding me close, keeping me warm
He's fast asleep but my mind is spinning
I want to turn and kiss him
And tell him I love him
Even though I know it is not true
He is nothing but a fantasy to me
And I am just a warm body to him
I yearn to love and be loved
But he longs to feel and be felt
I wonder if he even sees me
He knows I see him
Oh well, I sigh as I grab his hand
And intertwine it with mine
I will deny what I feel to take what I can get.

ARTIST STATEMENT

This painting shows an unfortunate reality of young women in many countries, who decide that their only option for a decent life is to find a husband online from a more prosperous country. Sometimes these unions work out and there is genuine affection involved. Often, international online dating can be a survival tactic, especially for women in war-torn and impoverished settings. There is an asymmetry in this kind of a relationship, which can render the immigrant spouse powerless.

Artwork titled
"Mail Order Bride"
by Tanya Levina



DANS LE LIT

content warning: sexual assault

By Zoe London

You stop time to look at your lover. She sleeps across from you, the sunset having long since retreated outside the brothel, the red lantern swaying outside her second story window. The lamp-light in her room intersects with her rogue and makes a dappled pattern of her high forehead and curved cheekbones. You aren't able to stop time often, not in the city streets, not while you work, but you try to stick this moment to the wall like you're mounting a painting. You want her to keep her eyes closed for a bit longer.

Elise's work is the same as yours, but this isn't a professional liaison. When she asked you to come up to her room, you did it without regrets. It's not everyday that you get to sleep with someone without seeking payment. She tried to pay you when you came inside. You pushed her hand away. Her loose change fell to the ground; you helped her pick it up, and she asked you why you wouldn't accept the money, her fingers like spindles, her nails dull against your waist. What sort of contract between two women means anything? You keep this time off the books.

One day, money will destroy both of you. Elise sends her money back to her family; you work to say that you could fend for yourself. To sleep together, not for work but for pleasure, is your quietest act of rebellion.

You stop time to watch her sleep. Sex relaxes you, which is no surprise, but laying next to Elise is a sort of ease you haven't felt since you were a child. You pull the duvet up to your chin, raising your arm so she is covered, too. Even though an evening spent entangled with a woman has made you feel weightless, you sink into the down of the mattress. You burrow under the embroidered red quilt, blue-gray beneath its surface. You think it's an abstract underwater scene scrawled out on the fabric—the most delicate design, and you find yourself feeling delicate the longer you remain in bed with Elise.

Her pillows are soft under your neck. You wonder how much harder she has worked than you to be able to afford nicer pillows, and a luxury quilt, and a room on the second floor. Maybe she

is just luckier than you, but you have a feeling that luck isn't weighty. You lift your hand, still underneath the covers, and you slide it across her pillow. Her hair is shaggy, cropped close to her head, softer than you expect it to be when you brush your fingers over her temples. You count her freckles. In the lamplight, you have all the time in the world to do this. In reality, you only have until she wakes up.

You stopped time to watch her sleep, but then Elise wakes up. She must know that you've been studying her—like you're a painter and she is your muse, like you aren't two women in a brothel. She awakens with a drowsy yawn, lazy false eyelashes fanning green eyes. There's a sheen of sweat across her forehead, dampening her bangs. She smiles at you. You wonder if this gap-toothed grin is something she offers any customer, or if you're the only one who has ever seen it. You marvel over what it means to receive a gift like that for free.

“Jo,” she says. “I dozed right off.”

“I noticed,” you say.

“I was too exhausted for pillow talk. Sorry.”

“I don't care.”

You already pulled your hand away before her eyelids ever lifted. There's more that you could say to her, but there's little time. You cannot stop time, after all, as much as the warm light and the composition of Elise's face makes you believe otherwise. The red lights flicker to life outside. You both will need to get dressed soon, so that you can work, and Elise can care for her family, and you can care for yourself.

“I might sleep a bit longer,” Elise murmurs. You wish that you slept as easily as her, that your breathing could deepen so freely. You're accustomed to shallowness. She asks, “What are you thinking about?”

“Very little nowadays.” You don't say the more honest answer—you, *only you*—since it would strike your lover as sentimental, not to mention unfounded. You hardly know her intimately. Then again, does anyone know you intimately? You've shared a bed once, an intimacy of soft pillows and aquatic bed dressings, of body but never of soul.

You can't stop time, but you watch your lover sleep again. Even if you never share a bed after this, you're happy that you could count her freckles. Your little death must count for something.



IT WAS QUITE HORRIFYING TBH

By Cara Morgan

The first penis I ever saw was sent to me by someone who said he was *35M USA*

PenisMan202: *asl?*

A private chat window now obscuring the webpage *Chatroom for Depressed Teens*

Me: *18F USA*

Two of those answers were a lie, but only one was purposeful at the time

PenisMan202: Do you want to see something fun?

Me: **silence**

PenisMan202: [hyperlink](#)

click

Some cam boy in his bedroom. Nude from the waist down. Clothed from the waist up. Stroking himself. I pondered it for a moment. I did not think it would have so many veins. He was talking then he closed the chat. He didn't want to be watched by a silent viewer. He needed something from me. The penis having eclipsed the day that sent me to *Chatroom for Depressed Teens*, I closed the lid of the laptop and went to sleep.

Artwork titled
"Self/Take, this is my body"
by Caterina Leone

YOU CAME TO ME IN A DREAM LAST NIGHT AND PROPOSED THAT WE
FUCK. SO I LOOKED YOU UP ON FACEBOOK THIS MORNING.

By Abigail Kirby Conklin

You were naked so quickly.

*Would you, you murmured, just
touch me?*

Small, uncut, you bobbed
soft against a thigh.
The air hung rich
with sex uneaten.
Room full of white
morning light spilled
across a gray comforter,
ridged beneath you
in a first-thing rumple.
White sheets.
The stately anonymity
of a decent hotel room,
pales and blacks
and some lost palette

in between.

I have never wakenly
touched you, but
in this daybreak bedroom
deep in my dream place,
you are looking at me
as though I have been
your answer since before
the Earth rounded its edges.
A look that sits
on my chest
and exhales still
against the nape
of my neck, hours
past my alarm.
I am, somewhere
far beneath my skin,
craved.



UNTITLED

By Avery Knaub

I. MET

I change my clothes on the floor.
for him. When he says I'm quiet I speak up. For
Him. There are days I imagine him.
my tongue rolls his name between my gums.
his
stupid name I only just learned.
for him.
For Him Wouldn't I Do Just About Anything.
scream like a monkey
run around campus over and over and
again
again because
He asked me.
I never saw you, motherfucker.
I never even looked in your direction.

II. COCOA

When you start running after romance
the same way you catch lightning bugs.
And it is dazzling. With
The fullness nostalgia has stuffed with stars
Because peeking into his glimmering windows
Brown secular pieces of holy cocoa
I would harvest every piece, not without
dipping a greedy finger into the bitter cacao;
put it to my tongue. Just to taste. Just to feel it.
The warmth of my spit against my finger embracing
his splendor, tangible, against my unhidden muscle

We dive miles into words in
my bitty broom closet room.
He sits in it and I know he belongs
just like my pillows do. My records. My baby blanket.
Not even an urge to try and subtract space with words,
the silence isn't even loud from the way my heart beats in my chest
into my ears. I know he can't hear it
but if he could I would still hold his head and put it to my chest
So that I could look at the angle of his nose from somewhere
new, also intimate, also just because he fascinates
my spirit like light refracting onto water,
ever-changing, always curious, always new
ever the same

III. PITY GREEN

I was kind of praying last night
The same way a baby sort of spits up on its bib
Like, please God fit this phase somewhere nice, leave
Me without too much pain because I've had too much
Yuck, blah, etc. etc., go, go, go!
Deliver my dumbass because I feel love again and it's not
gonna work out, it's gonna hurt like shit and I can't undo
what I feel

Pick me, someone, choose me over her
Yes, he is so good hearted, to see me, but stop
telling me all the ways she and I are similar
or how hurt you are when she cries
Like, here I am too, thinking of you, a sizeable pain like a fist
No embraces to be had
trite in my room on my floor below the ceiling
between the air behind the door
sucking atoms into my lungs, no kisses for me
only my downturned little sad eyes
For—seemingly—ever



Artwork titled "NO"
by Constanza Aravena

PLAYING HOUSE

By Emma Yahr

originally published by The Whorticulturalist on 01/16/2023

He's the daddy.
Boy's boy with a briefcase.
I visit him every day at work, imaginary
casserole dish resting in the dip
of my feminine hip.
It's 1952 with iPhones
and craft coffee and don't
we make a handsome couple?
He's God
and I'm Tour Guide Barbie! Leading
every conversation back to him:
his long day, his stressful meeting,
his big dick. I'm smart,
but still fuckable. Prude
in public, slut in his sheets,
mirroring the mothers before me.
I've learned how to stare up at him
through my eyelashes and moan.
He's learned to expect dinner, pretend
like he isn't obsessed with me. But he is?
Isn't he? You are? Obsessed with me, aren't you?
His lips, infinitely more gentle
than his hands, remind me
that this is a non-speaking role.
I never did learn how to keep my legs open
and my mouth shut.

LET'S STAY HERE LIKE THIS

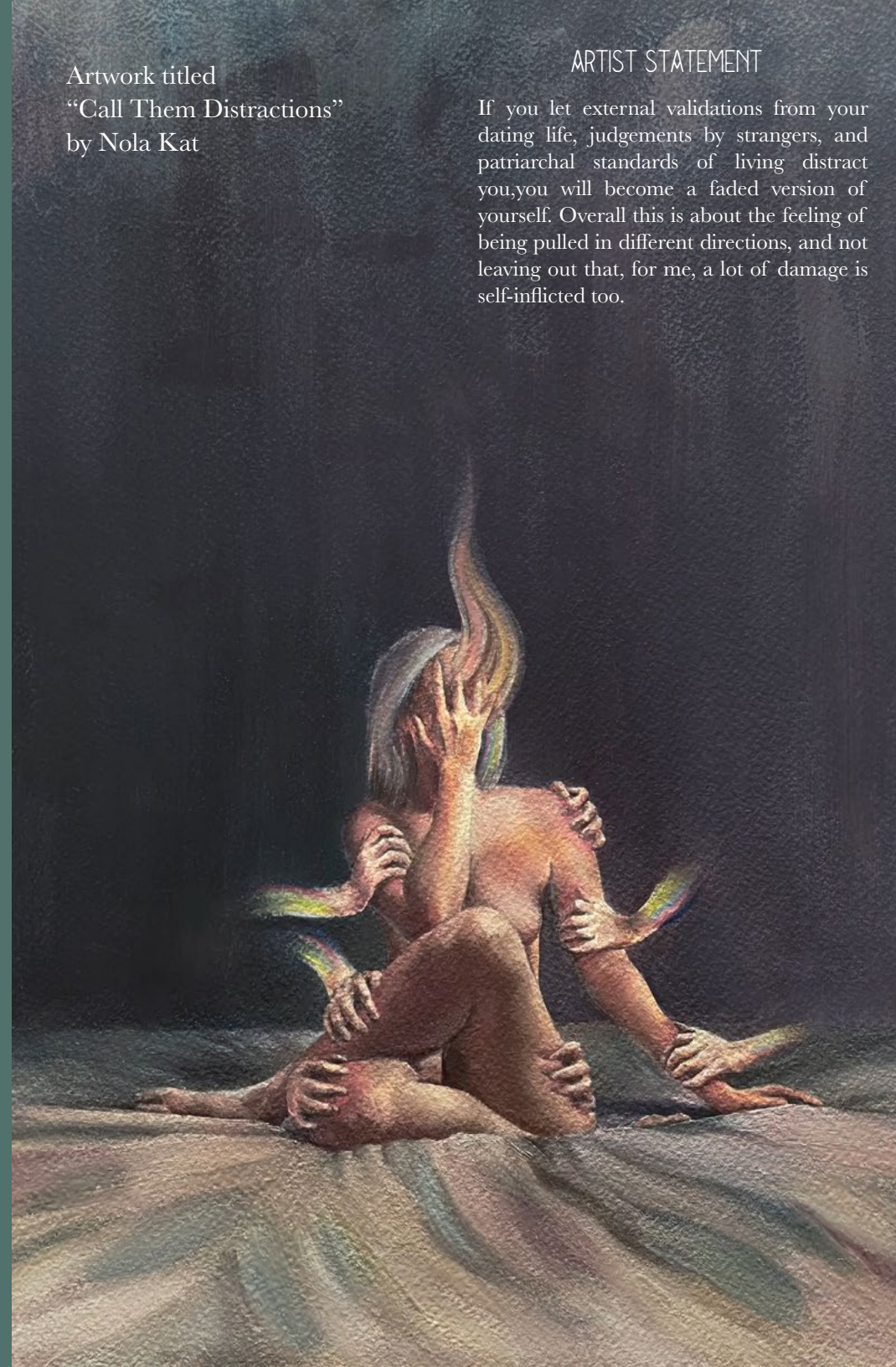
By Mary McCall

Last night, I gave you all of me.
Our breathing intertwined,
As two became one.
Our hands clasped together,
As a puzzle finally united,
Our hearts beat on cue,
As the notes of our perfect song,
Our names left each other's lips,
As we caressed each other's thoughts.
But now it's the morning after,
And you disposed of me again.
Your heart is my cure as I am yours.
Now, I beg you as your body leaves my reach.
I watch you go to cleanse yourself,
As you wipe every inch of me off.
I see you're thoroughly purged,
As the water turns off and you emerge.
I note the materials that plague your body,
As they cover all that I'd ever seen of you.
I grab your hand trying to stop you,
As you pull away from me without a word.
The door shuts, you go with it,
And dispose of me again.
My body is your escape as you'll never be mine.
Then, You will return tomorrow, like always.
You'll wake me with a kiss on my head,
As my eyes open to meet yours.
You'll brush my hair from my face,
As I try to memorize your touch.
You'll bring my face close to yours,
As I melt into your arms.
You'll relive our last night,
As I wish for us to be forever.
Then it will be the morning after,
And you'll dispose of me again.

Artwork titled
"Call Them Distractions"
by Nola Kat

ARTIST STATEMENT

If you let external validations from your dating life, judgements by strangers, and patriarchal standards of living distract you, you will become a faded version of yourself. Overall this is about the feeling of being pulled in different directions, and not leaving out that, for me, a lot of damage is self-inflicted too.



VALLEY FORGE

By E. Veronica Noechel

When you asked me if I wanted to road trip to Philadelphia and gave me 15 minutes to gather my clothes, my wallet with the \$26 inside that was supposed to last the month, and any food I had stashed in my dorm room, I never expected tonight would find me huddled inside a 200 year old wooden hut holding onto your muddied frisbee, guessing it's near 4 am, smooshed between you and some other guy you just met and invited along on the trip in the time it took me to gather my stuff, arms wound around ourselves against the cold while you go on and on about George Washington.

The cold is a clarion that can't be ignored, and you are beautiful in your exhaustion, broken only by your wide-eyed enthusiasm for something we read about in elementary school. A moment riveted into our brains and shined up like your own reflection rendered golden in polished brass. Here we are crouched in a glorified doghouse and I can't help imagining, if I could see through the dark, I'd find "Washington wuz here" written Kilroy-style on the wall of logs before me.

The cold slaps us awake every time I even think about sleeping and you offer me your pink jacket though you've got short sleeves underneath. "You're a hothouse flower", you tell me, "I don't get cold." You lie. Sort-of. You are the warmest human I've met so far, you wear shorts at 40 degrees, exposing muscled, dark-haired legs to the elements. We talk about revolutionary war soldiers. I am reminded of the Marine inside you and it frightens me in the way it always does. I can tell you've been taught to kill, albeit in peacetime. I despise guns.


You would nearly kill a mutual friend just 2 years later, fucking around with an automatic weapon, showing off your latest expensive toy in the apartment he would abandon you forever in the very same day. You found

a roommate, I heard, and moved on. You do that. Find people like sociopaths find umbrellas, just take one, there's always one by the door if you need it. I learned this story second hand, but it's so very you I could hear the recoil and see the burned hole glaring out of the doorjamb and the powder burn on the tip of his ear, mouth hanging open like a sucking chestwound. But this would happen long after you shouted me out of your life like a wild animal you'd found injured, made strong, then thrown back to the woods with words so cruel I'd never return or really even recover from hearing them. Though there's no way I'd ever tell you so.

But for now we are falling asleep in Valley Forge flying toward Philadelphia in a stolen car I thought was borrowed, but then it kind of was since you returned it. There was a thing you whispered to me then, something you said more than once in the time I knew you. It was something super awkward. "You are the person who brings the best feelings. Only my mom has ever been able to do that." I'm not sure what you mean or how to take it but it feels nice in the sleepy dark, deep within the folds of your slowly warming coat tented around me. I was small then, all dozing vulnerability draped in a veil of punk rock, sleeping in the shadow of an epic fight between white men over something that wasn't theirs to begin with.

I'm glad I never let myself fall in love with you, but I think it might have been fun for a while, and sometimes I am sorry I never collapsed into your handsome safety even once, even knowing it ends at the mouth of a dark woods. You, ungodly furious that I'd called you mean because you put Beta-Carotene Bunny in the blender and turned it on. It was just a stuffed toy, but his lolling black eye broke deep inside and couldn't be repaired and it suddenly made me so sad. So. Infinitely. Sad. And you laughed. I was 19 and you were 30. I was a grownup crying about a plush bunny and you were the man you always were. And you start screaming "Go! Go away!" as I see you through tears, wavy and cruel.

"Get out of here!" You don't understand. I wasn't standing there out of obstinance, but marveling at the way reality glimmers at the edges when it rips in half. I was staring, shocked but not really, just a stunned adolescent animal, feeling the strength of her restored limbs, lifting her tattered velvet antlers high toward the moon, before running away like we all do, eventually.



Artwork titled "Alone"
by Ashley Gomez

SALVAGED

By E. Veronica Noechel

My love for you was a MRSA-ous wound,
a black tar addiction disguised as an epiphany,
the way a urinal turned upside down becomes a fountain.
Like my slowly twisting spine, somehow disgust
took a hard turn in the wrong direction
and instead of cold distance, I gave you everything.
We were the repeated collision of drivers too busy fixing their makeup
in the rear view mirror to see the oncoming guard rails.
I was totaled. You hit and ran.

It may have been my fault. I was operating
under the influence of undiagnosed ocd
and a substance that arises from heating
ego and a dank, ugly fear of everything
to a rolling boil, then simmer until
the mixture has turned blue
black and reduced by half.

It's not an excuse, but a reason. You were
the darkened corner I ran to, the stifling space
under the bed where a grey mattress and an acrid smell like cat pee
trapped and concealed me, safe from dirty socks, the unintelligible
low voices grumbling on a non-existent radio, and the nightmares
that bled into the waking world, even as the most dreaded
flat, red citrine-scented bugs crawled under my clothing.

There they collected my blood inside
their tiny, sac-like bodies and turned it
into rusty streaks like the dark iron-y
rainwater tear stains that collect
in dark puddles under totaled cars
in junkyards, where cheap, sweaty
men pry the last serviceable parts
from the chests of their broken bodies.

I FINALLY REMEMBERED THE GOOD THING AND IT HURTS

By Abigail Kirby Conklin

The Fourth of July,
a Michigan suburb,
impossible heat
and your relatives'
half-feral dog.
Bouncing from curb
to sidewalk
to concrete-slabbed road,
shade pooling
beneath adolescent trees,
I looked at you,
laughter filling
my throat thought

*okay. Okay, maybe.
Maybe this is it.
The last story
I have to risk
writing into the meat
of my heart.*

And I was wrong,
of course. Two nights
later, under you
frozen
as the humid dusk purpled
the walls of your relatives'
spare room. Wrong.
But for a moment,
I hadn't been.

You hadn't flung
a molotov cocktail
into the whole shit.
You were just there

burning up
beneath a July sun
with me laughing

while I believed
you.



Artwork titled "The chair"
by Nicole Di Fabio



Artwork titled "Self Myself"
by Carmen Ciobanu

#FOE130

By Avery Knaub

Out of everything, it was dandelions he ruined for me
after giving them my name;
I remember the first time;
and suddenly,
I was three years old in the garden,
fishy-lipped blowing the seeds into the wind.
That was in the good years
there's no bad flower that'll make a weed like this
I think of you shutting the door in my face
gone forever like I'd dreamed up a loser.
If only I had preferred roses or
lavender or anything predictable
my love will not fix me, it will rot out my teeth
I'd eat the flowers just to get them away from you
stem, root and bud untouchable.
slam the door and see
how I disintegrate into the afternoon sky

BETWEEN THE BOUNDARIES

By Airam Sandoval

content warning: domestic abuse

How do I describe this? How can I explain through an app with too many sensual ads and colors that what I want is nothing sexual and nothing romantic? I want the intimacies that lay in the romance boundaries and yet I want nothing to do with the title “lover, girlfriend, mistress,” and such other things. I want the physical closure of hands holding my face and down my back but I don’t want my clothes to fly off and lay on the ground for me to pick up later.

One really shouldn’t have these kinds of spiraling thoughts when you’re leaning down on a counter, wearing nothing but shorts and no bra to be found. I’m sending all kinds of mixed messages but I’m at home and such things should not matter.

“Can you pull up your shirt a bit?” Yeah, pull up your shirt, expose your stomach and show off the undersides of your breasts so I can remember it later!

“Nope,” I popped out and ended the video call just as my interest slammed into the uneven floorboards of my kitchen. What was his name? Jason? Ah, I don’t really care. I blocked him anyway. I’m not dealing with anyone that ignores the “not interested in anything sexual,” headline like it’s an option. You can’t needle your way into a strip tease just because I’m willing to be comfortable.

He wasn’t even a friend and by all means he does not meet any of my internal standards, but I at least wanted to give a chance. He’s Emily’s brother and I wanted to see if he was anything like her: intimate, open to affection, and just a good overall friend that doesn’t ask more than what I can give. I even thought that this was

fate that I found him on this dating app.

I can’t blame her for giving the recommendation at all. Laying by each other for hours, just holding one another under pink sheets was something that friends don’t do. They don’t hold hands while walking down the street on a crisp October, whispering to each others ears about their day after a weekend, nor do they press foreheads and go out in dates that are not quite dates in a quiet café.

We were close. More than best friends but we were not lovers. What kind of label did we put it? “Discount lovers?” Hated that, but it’s better than “friends with benefits.” Especially when we didn’t do any of those usual benefits that come with it.

Either way, didn’t stop her boyfriend from slapping her face and calling her a lying whore.

Get your phone, use this app, I’m sure you’ll find someone. It’s how I found David.

Emily. Dear dear Emily, you know that’s not what I want. I’m not looking for a “David” or a “Jose” or a “Yolanda.” Romance was never my end goal.

Why did I even bother when her brother is on the other side of the world? It was never going to work. And now I can’t even look at my cheap ramen packet without my gut churning in discomfort. I don’t want a quick meal. I don’t want a quick anything.

I laid my phone flat next to the pot I just washed. I put everything away in their proper places. And, since I have no reason to be here, I went back to bed to sleep the day away.

SHOEGAZE

By Grace Tschlis

I decided to wear a short sleeve, blue and white checkered dress to your concert because it was the only dress I had that went above my knee. It wasn't a concert, anyway. It was a gig. You corrected me several times. Before you, I didn't realize there was a difference.

You and my roommate, Robin, waited patiently in the living room while I changed in my room. I emerged and paraded around in my outfit, eager for approval. Robin said I looked less like an uptight, elderly librarian than usual, but you said "Irene, you look adorable." We made a joke about you having a thing for older women, even though I'm two years younger than you. All your exes were older than you, but I didn't bring it up as Robin continued to laugh. My romantic history pales in comparison to yours. Robin says that that should worry me, but it doesn't, which means I can still call myself a feminist.

We met three months ago at a poetry reading in a local coffee shop, which sounds so cliché that I tell my friends we met on Tinder. "I never really thought you were a Tinder person," they'd reply. "What a fucking weird thing to say," you'd whisper in my ear, and we'd quickly excuse ourselves from the conversation and laugh ourselves to death in the corner of the room. I like you because you give me a reason to go to parties. I enjoy socializing, but I get easily overwhelmed with the pressure to interact. With your hand on my back, you can guide me towards or away from any situation.

On the night we met, you confessed to me that you stopped listening to the poets ten minutes ago. "Why are you still here?" I asked.

"I like the music that's playing. It's shoegaze."

Artwork titled
"Munich Hofgarten Stories"
by COdVT



“Oh, yeah.”

“You know it?”

“I’m familiar.” I was not, but I couldn’t bring myself to wipe the grin off your face with the truth. When I got home, I told Robin I met a cute guy. “But I already lied to him,” I confessed.

“Irene, you need help,” she said.

“Do you know what shoegaze is?”

“Fuck if I know,” Robin shrugged and pulled a bag of popcorn out of the microwave.

“It’s a music genre, I think,” I said.

“You know I only listen to BROCKHAMPTON and the Mamma Mia soundtrack,” Robin mumbled with a mouthful of popcorn.

“I told this guy I listen to it.”

“Okay, did you at least get his number?”

“Yeah, I did.”

“Well, it’s not too late to start listening now!”

After a quick Google search, I discovered that shoegaze is “a subgenre of indie and alternative rock characterized by its ethereal mixture of obscured vocals, guitar distortion and effects, feedback, and overwhelming volume.”

“Do you think The Strokes count?” I asked. Robin replied quickly, “For some reason I don’t think so.”

But now we’ve been together for three months and enough of your music has sunk into my subconscious, and my Spotify. Now I know bands like My Bloody Valentine and Gleeamer are shoegaze. Tonight, you and your friends are playing at a poorly lit, desolate bar but the drinks are cheap so Robin is more than happy to join me. I run my hands down the side of my checkered dress, unusually pleased with my outfit. I decide

I look good tonight, and Robin agrees with me. She grants me a sincere compliment about twice a month. Sometimes you’re put off by her blunt mouth, but I appreciate her truthfulness.

The show begins, and I wave to you from the crowd. You smile in my direction but I’m unsure if I’m the recipient of your gaze. It occurs to me that I’ve been to every single one of your gigs in the past three weeks, but you’ve yet to make it to my pottery classes. I teach a free pottery class twice a week through our community center. Robin attends almost once a week, and her closet is full of lopsided sculptures and bowls. As I sink into your music, your taste, your gigs, I wonder if it’s possible to drown. I turn to Robin and whisper in her ear as the speakers blast.

“Do you think it’s weird that my boyfriend never comes to pottery?”

“Oh, yeah. Weird as hell,” she replies. “Who doesn’t want to make a free bowl?”

I wonder if I should mention it to you, but I worry about coming off as clingy. Although, I’m usually the one to text first, so I suppose it’s too late for that. Your band continues to play through the speakers, louder than usual. The bar fills up with people I don’t know, all listening to you and your music.



Artwork titled
"Joys of Maintenance"
by Liz Darrell

RECOMMENDATIONS

PODCASTS

SAD IN THE CITY
with Taylor Tomlinson

LOVE LETTERS

WE'RE HAVING GAY SEX
with Ashley Gavin

DATEABLE, YOUR
INSIDER'S LOOK INTO
MODERN DATING

WHERE SHOULD WE
BEGIN?
with Esther Perel

CALL HER DADDY

MOVIES/SHOWS

THE SEX LIVES OF
COLLEGE GIRLS

MY YEAR OF DICKS

SEX AND THE CITY

SEX EDUCATION

ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF
THE SPOTLESS MIND

THIS IS 40

MINX

NEVER HAVE I EVER

BOOKS

ASK A QUEER CHICK
By Lindsay King-Miller

CULT CLASSIC
By Sloane Crosley

QUEENIE
By Candice Cary-Williams

SINGLE WOMAN
By Acamea Deadwiler

ALL ABOUT LOVE
By bell hooks

OVER THINKING ABOUT YOU
By Allison Raskin

SEX FROM SCRATCH
By Sarah Mirk

HOW TO DATE MEN
WHEN YOU HATE MEN
By Blythe Roberson



COVEN CONGRESS

The concept of a witch originated from a societal fear and hatred of independent women. Any woman who dared to challenge societal order, to not have children, to take up work outside the home, to think for herself was tortured and burned. Though the punishment is less explicit, the hatred of the witch remains.

In defiance of this stigma, we are reclaiming the word. We are witches and the Coven Congress is our little sabbath. For each edition, we gather witches from all walks of life to talk about our experiences, opinions, and ideas. Next, we let the discussion inspire content included in *They Call Us*. Coven Congress allows us to amplify the voices of a variety of women and gender minorities so the world can hear and learn from our tales.

Special thanks to our Coven Congress participants, for bravely sharing their stories and allowing us to use them as inspiration, and for pretending to put pants on after a long Zoom work day so we could safely debunk domestic violence from the comfort of our homes.

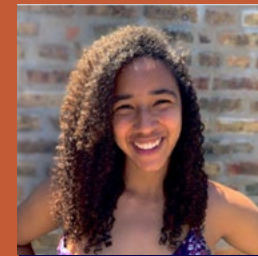
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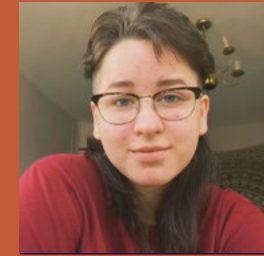
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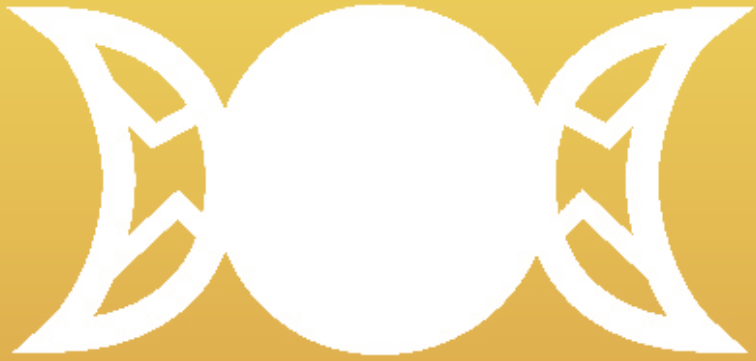


Asko Skladany
Illustrator

OUR PATREON

They Call Us is a not-for-profit organization. To fund our magazine, we've created a Patreon page and a merch shop. By donating through Patreon you will receive exclusive invites to Coven Congress, Patreon only merch, sneak peeks into upcoming editions, and access to a feminist only discord group. Please consider donating on our [Patreon](#), purchasing merch [online](#), or just sharing this magazine with friends.

They Call Us is a passion project for our team members and, although we do not make any money through the zine, it helps our organization to host events, donate to other feminist causes, and support our contributing writers and artists.



THEY CALL US

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If you're interested in submitting work for our next edition, please email us at theycalluszine@gmail.com or visit our website at theycallus.com.

Thank you for reading!