

THEY CALL US CATTY

EDITION 12



SUMMER 2023

A NOTE TO OUR READERS



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.

This edition centers on themes of cattiness. Each piece will talk about female rivalry, competition and pettiness. Please take care of yourself as you read. After, please take care of a friend.

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 Morgan Kail-Ackerman

Everything with my sister was a competition, especially in the eyes of my mothers. I will answer the phone and hear “oh, my favorite daughter”. I grew up in a family with all women - two moms, my grandma, and my sister. There are stereotypes that aren’t true about having an entirely female family. Some of us like sports. Not all of us wear makeup. No, we don’t talk about emotions all day every day. But, unfortunately, some stereotypes are true. We love to gossip. We talk behind people’s backs, or we’ll call each other names.

I am saddened that, looking back, I feel like my sister and I were pitted against each other growing up. We both liked dance, but our family and friends wanted to know who was “the best”. If she had a panic attack, and then I had one, mine was ignored because her anxiety was “worse than mine”. I was the smart sister, and she was the hot sister. None of this is true. We both love dancing, we both have anxiety, and both of us are smart and hot. We didn’t have to have polarized labels.



All this time, I assumed we were compared because my sister is competitive. I thought she was the one comparing herself to me. As I got older and reflected on this, I realized that these patterns weren’t exclusive to my household. It was society that pitted us against each other. We weren’t given an option and instead our identities were based on each other. I don’t know why we both couldn’t like something, but society commanded that women could only be one thing. Two women couldn’t possibly be good at the same thing, or else they would compete against one another, instead work in tandem.

I sometimes wonder what our identities would have been, if we weren’t pressured to compare ourselves. Maybe my sister would enjoy reading, just like me. Maybe I would have done gymnastics with her.

Why does society say that women must fight one another? I’d say that there is danger in women working together, communicating together, being powerful together. It’s why witch covens are feared. Having five women in my family is terrifying; why, there is a possibility we wouldn’t need men at all. We could run companies ourselves, raise children ourselves, or make our own money. And that’s scary to certain people (men). So they tell us that women must be in competition, that only one woman can have a title at a time.

But imagine if my sister and I weren’t in competition. Why, we’d rule the world.

FROM KITTEN TO CAT: WE DESERVE BETTER THAN THAT

By Mary Clements Fisher

Men often resort to animal references to describe women when they want to control or hurt them—bitch, cow, fox, horseface, and kitten among dozens more. Slurs by men disturb me, but more disturbing is the self-destructive behavior of one sister calling another catty, succumbing to this misogynistic insult. We need to change our language and bad habits if we're to improve our status as women. We win equality (and teach men how it's done) by accepting and celebrating our equality among ourselves. If we're not on this journey together, then we deserve this divisive label. But we're better than and deserve better.

We define ourselves. Once we accept a self-deprecating label and let it inside our head, we lose control of our destinies. Being self-critical and critical of others will never level the playing field. Judging bodies—too fat, too skinny, too tall, too short—makes young women self-harm and older women exhausted. Judging boobs by the whims of the fashion means nothing in the eyes of a lover or a baby. Judging another's brain power as brainless shows a lack of thought and insight and causes girls not to raise their hands and women not to lean in. Labeling a woman as a climber or show off encourages us to leave the power at the top in men's hands. We define not only ourselves but each other.

Cattiness brings our sisters down, and our comments signal our own envy or self-criticism. Competing without harming ourselves and others makes us all stronger. Competing without cutting comments allows us to accept our body image and another's, celebrate the intelligence of another woman and our own, appreciate whatever strength or vulnerability of another as important to them as to us. Getting past cattiness allows us to claim our rightful place as sisters, women who stand with not against each other. Name-calling has a long history, written by men. We've learned these labels by listening

to men's voices versus our own or by modeling our mothers caught in the trap of competitive anxiety.

How we talk to our daughters (and our sons) sustains the status quo or remakes the future for girls and women. How often do we define a child by her cuteness rather than her kindness? How many times do we pit our children to compete with others rather than encourage them to support each other? Our culture promotes cattiness, a spit and scratch kind of game, rather than mutual appreciation and celebration of our individual and collective skills and accomplishments.

How we talk to each other face-to-face or behind closed doors strengthens or weakens us. How we think about each other unites us or divides us in spirit—thoughts form on our faces and in our eyes and cause confusion and self-doubt or clarity and encouragement. We're better than the narratives sold to us by advertisers, movie moguls, and politicians. Catcalling and cruelty exploded in this past decade from every corner of the nation, sadly from women as well as men. Women need to become collaborators, play to each woman's unique abilities, and utilize our supportive and intellectual skills to win the respect of our fellow women players. Together we gain power to define our futures. Divided we lose our best selves and remain cats in a dog's world. Women need to form a team mentality for women to compete.

Women in sports show us the value of playing our status like a team sport. We see the strength of the team, the lion-hearted on the courts. The best plays take coordination, collaboration, and compromise. The best teams bow to each other's strengths and protect the weak flanks. They play like a pride of lionesses. Women can use our minds and emotional muscle to protect and promote each girl and woman and celebrate her win and ours.

Lionesses help each other raise their young, hunt together, and harbor no hierarchy. Self-preservation brings them together. Now is a time for self-preservation, to become a proud coalition of women, to shed those labels of kitten and cat and own the lioness in each of us. We can define our pride in womankind and call ourselves by the names we deserve.

CATTY IS

By Megan Harris

Catty is the sense of defeat when a “prettier” women walks in the room

Catty is the resentment that boils in your chest at her new travel photos

Catty is “she slept her way to the top”

Catty is “what a slut”

Catty is “she’s not that pretty anyway”

Catty is a patriarchal concept; that there is only room for one woman at the top

One woman at the table

One category for each trait

For the smart ONE, the pretty ONE, the funny ONE

Catty is a fabrication

They only want to make room for one

Catty is divide and conquer

Catty is working

But Catty can stop.

Catty can be protective, a tool to defend our sisters when they need

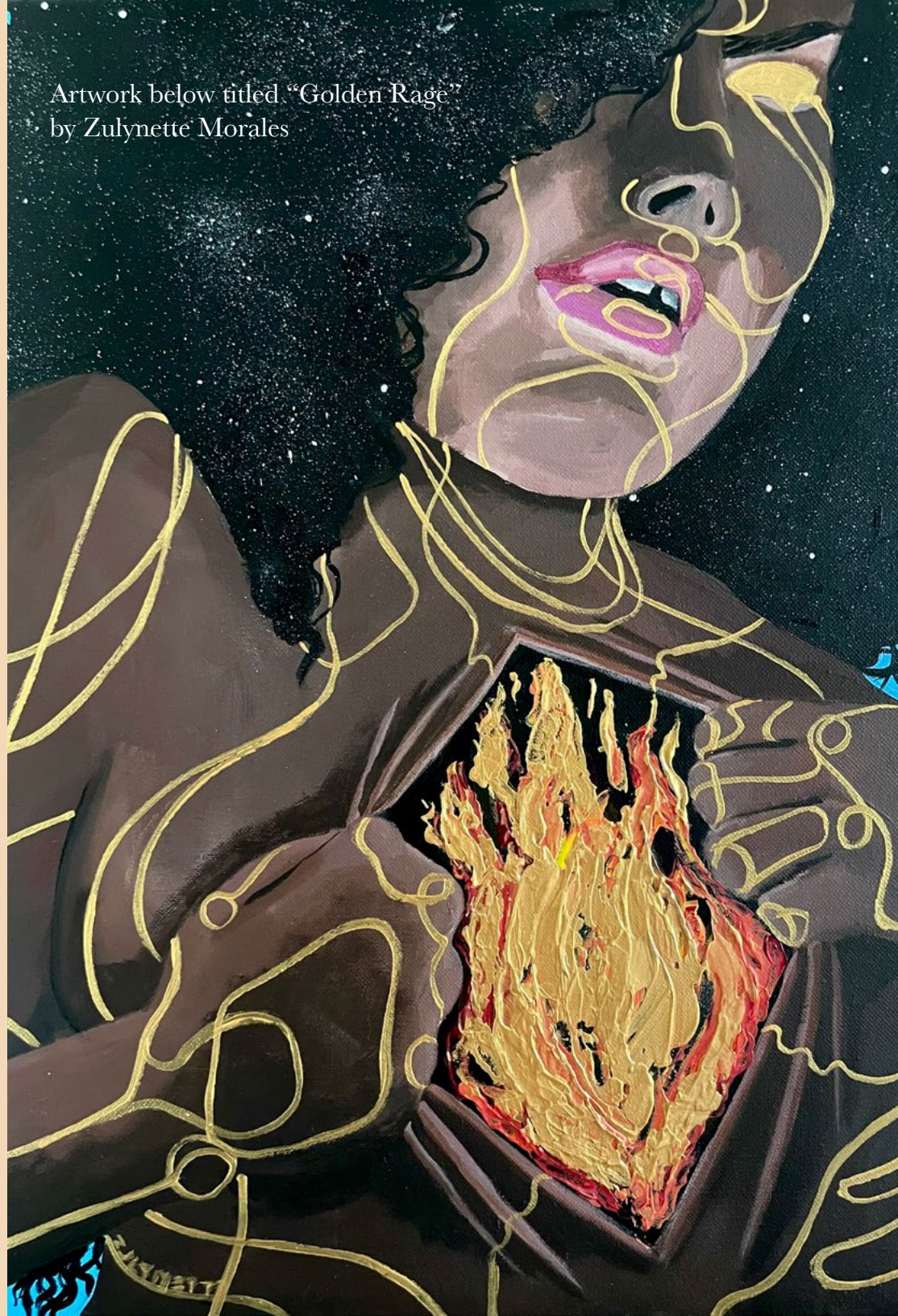
Catty can be powerful, a lioness standing in defense of her heard

Catty can be our impenetrable force of female solidarity

Catty can be reborn

Artwork in spread above titled “CATTYWOMPAS”
by Ellen Frances Tuchman

Artwork below titled “Golden Rage”
by Zulynette Morales



BITCHY LITTLE THOUGHTS

By Rachel Macaulay

You think you know someone, and then you stop by their house to pick them up, pop inside to use their toilet, and see, to your surprise, that their toilet paper is hanging the wrong way, and you're momentarily upended, metaphorically, as some assumption you'd made about your friend is shown to be unsound; you thought it went without saying which way was the right way, and that it was, in some sense, important, in that hanging it the right way made it easier to take toilet paper off the roll, and ease of taking toilet paper off the roll is, after all, one of the key metrics for judging a toileting experience (the others being: softness and structural integrity of toilet paper, efficacy of flush, availability of warm water and good quality soap, and functionality of either hand towel or hot air hand dryer, whichever is better for the environment, you can't keep track) and you're rattled by the realisation that your friend either doesn't know which way is the right way, god forbid, or she doesn't know that there *is* a right way—it isn't simply a matter of personal preference, the right way is *better*—and so you're rattled, and then you start to feel unkind; your friend has welcomed you, let you use her toilet, opened this private area of her home for your comfort, and here you are, passing judgement, sneering, and you're disappointed in yourself because you feel so tenderly towards your friend, your old friend, and you'd hate for her to feel that you were judging her and you feel, momentarily, like a piece of shit, for having such unkind thoughts, and you chastise yourself, slap your own wrist, but then you take a deep breath and realise you have so little control over what floats into your head, and of course, in a patriarchy which teaches women to place importance on even minor household matters, and undertake them to sky-high levels of competency, of course you're going to internalise the idea that such things matter, and that it's reasonable to judge people on such matters, and to enjoy feeling superior about such matters, because that's what the patriarchy teaches, when it rewards women for

comparing themselves to each other, when it rewards cattiness, offering 'superiority to other women', in lieu of, say, equal pay or equal rights or freedom from violence; you can't help that you were raised with these bad ideas, these terrible, false, damaging ideas, but you can choose not to indulge them, you can choose to laugh, to huff, puff, and blow them away, shouting, 'good riddance you bad ideas, you silly ideas, you filthy, stinking ideas', sending them on their way, and you can remind yourself, of course, that it *doesn't* matter; that the benefit secured by hanging toilet paper the right way is minimal, and if someone prefers it the wrong way, that is their business and you wish them well, and perhaps your friend is the sort of person who doesn't think the way the toilet paper hangs is of any importance, and she'd be surprised, disappointed, and maybe, justifiably, angry, to know you'd judged her and you wouldn't want your friend, your dear friend, to be angry with you, so you blow those bad ideas away, and wash your hands, reminding yourself as you do that your friend has a small child, and a partner who works long hours, and she's tired and responsible for so much, like so many women, and doesn't have time to worry about which way the toilet paper hangs, and you're a bitch to have thought anything other than kind thoughts about her and her lovely home, but you can be proud of yourself for having learned not to act on those bitchy little thoughts that float into your head, unbidden, for having learned to see right through those bitchy little thoughts to the patriarchy-induced insecurity behind them, and since you rarely feel insecure in that way any more, you have no need for bitchy little thoughts, and you remind yourself that, the older you get, the more you just want to be as good a friend as you can, not the kind of friend who would feel even a grain of salt's worth of superiority ego boost from the idea of knowing how to hang the toilet paper the right way, which, of course, is a silly, unserious thing to give a fuck about, like, you're the dum-dum, for giving a fuck, and all you can do is laugh at yourself, laugh at this world full of fallible, bumbling humans, of which you are just one such, very ordinary, unremarkable example, and somehow take comfort and even joy in that, as you go about your day.

Artwork titled "Misconceptions take flight"
by Shauna Lee Strecker



Artwork titled "leave her be"
by kiaya cornish



NETWORKS

By Charlyn Cervantes-Bond

Did you hear?

Emma's dating again
I thought she said she was done
after the last guy treated her so badly
she let him walk all over her
Turner lives in Dayton now.

Did you hear?

Olivia got a new haircut
short, like a bob
and with her face shape
no I mean, if she likes it, that's what matters
He's going by his middle name, Allen.

Did you hear?

Bella got fired again
she just can't hold down a job
she knew what would happen if she said anything
I told her to just keep her head down
He works at a factory - Tark Inc.

Did you hear?

DEAR JOANNE

By Devon Webb

Dear Joanne
you build your own echo chamber
from the tears & cries of our sisters
you pull the blinds on empathy
& enlightenment
you don't wanna have a conversation
because you are afraid.

What are you afraid of, Joanne
being undermined?
as you undermine our sisters, our daughters
who told you
that trans pride & power
cannot coexist with feminism?
who told you that these women are not women?

When will we learn
if we do not humble ourselves & listen
the future will not stop for you, Joanne
we will not stop rising up to you, Joanne
this generation who knows the strength
of individuality
who learnt from you, ironically

We feel betrayed by your bigotry
I stand with the world of wizardry
where unity wins
against those who say
that those who are different are lesser
I stand with the love you gave us, Joanne
but I cannot stand with you.





Artwork titled
"Did You See This?"
by Katy Fuller

MIRROR MOTHER

By Virginia Archer

Upon my engagement, a wise woman once warned me *You don't just marry the man, you marry the family.* I ignored her. The thought bothered me – that anybody would disqualify me based on the people from whom I came, a ruined businessman incarcerated for homeless crimes and an evangelical stoner mother on disability. Who was I to be picky about family relations?

As a young wife, I received many wedding gifts. A too heavy to use porcelain citrus juicer, a collection of silver napkin rings, a crystal punch bowl, and a new mother with a temper. She and her husband owned a salon in uptown New Orleans where you could have your dull brown hair painted the rich ocher of canyons or obsidian black. Where women were made to feel so beautiful, so convinced of their charms, that afterwards they could be seen parading down St. Charles Avenue, flashing their strikingly framed faces like teeth in a cat fight. She had come from nothing, a working-class family from the Cajun swamplands. Now, she sold beauty to immaculately manicured old-money women who paid whatever she asked.

She taught me how to make a roux for gumbo dark as the Mississippi. The hour of stirring took stubbornness and a deep glass of peppery cabernet. She taught me what beauty could do for a woman. How my face opened up when my eyebrows were just a hair thinner. The rightness of wearing warming perfumes with notes of clove and citrus in the winter, and light, floral scents in the humid months of our subtropical summers. She taught me what beauty couldn't do for a woman. On a

freak snow one Christmas, she confessed, sobbing into her dirty martini, that her mother had never told her she was beautiful. No age-defying serums or high-end grooming would undo the broken mirroring of that early silence. Our one tender moment, because I knew too about broken mirrors.

She smoldered the way unhappy women do, collecting our faults – especially mine. Unspoken grievances seeped up from the ground like the swollen water table. The day we returned from our seaside honeymoon, she crouched down, snarling mad, and gave me her worst: Had I purposefully given her daughter cheap pearls while the other bridesmaids had gotten the real thing? The men went silent. Her accusing eyes, smiling and violent, flayed open my newly wed heart, a shimmering butterflied cutlet ready for frying. An old church lady saying hung in the air *Do not cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.* It was only then that I realized we were at war.

When he lost his wedding ring, an omen I seemed to miss, she bought him a new one before I had the chance to. It made a kind of dark sense because well into the marriage she'd continued to buy him underwear. When her son told her that he'd met someone else and that we were separating, she yelled *How could you do this to me?* which was weird, because wasn't that my line? After I learned of the other woman, he and I filed for divorce, the friendly kind without lawyers. Neither one of us wanted to fight over stuff, though in the end we agreed he'd keep the citrus juicer, and the mother.

A wise woman once said *You don't divorce just the man, you divorce his family.*

SHE GOT PUBLISHED

By Audrey Leib

We were friends a long time ago
In elementary school
I'm proud of her
She's talented
But why wasn't it me?

Why wasn't I the one with friends
In high school who didn't use me
For a crutch and then discard me
When their feelings healed?

Why wasn't I the one with talent
Raw and beautiful and sinister
Glittery and spiritual and alluring
And something I don't have?

I wish we stayed friends
So I too could comment
And mean it when I say
"I'm proud of you."





HIVE MIND

By Beth Wolfe

Oh, there are queens
in my hive,
but there ain't no
queen bees.
No, these queens
know empowerment
comes from empowering.
They believe our wings
are stronger
when they beat
together.
I never fear
a wayward sting.
We know our enemy
is not within.
We save our venom
for the predators
who would steal
and destroy
all we worked
so hard
to create.

Artwork titled "The Boxer"
by Ryanne Phillips

PODCASTS

WHY FEMALE RIVALRY IS PATRIARCHAL BS
with Sahara Rose

WOMEN IN COMPETITION
with A Witch, A Mystic & A Feminist

WHEN WOMEN COMPETE
with Women at Work

FEMALE COMPETITION AND RIVALRY (WHY
DO WOMEN COMPETE?): TEACHING GIRLS TO
LOVE THEMSELVES
with Sonia Jackson Myles

WHEN WOMEN ARE OUR OWN WORST
ENEMIES
with CCWomen

FEMALE FRIENDSHIPS: OVERCOMING ENVY,
COMPETITION, AND ENJOYING SISTERHOOD
with THEOVERCOMER

BOOKS

YOU ARE MY SISTER NOT MY COM-
PETITION

by JA Huggins

TRIPPING THE PROM QUEEN:
THE TRUTH ABOUT WOMEN AND
RIVALRY

by Susan Shapiro Barash

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF
WOMEN AND COMPETITION

by Maryanne L Fisher

MOVIES/TV

HEATHERS
POLITE SOCIETY
THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA
LEGALLY BLONDE
THE FAVOURITE
NEVER HAVE I EVER
BLACK SWAN
I, TONYA
CAT GHT
FEUD: BETTE AND JOAN



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.

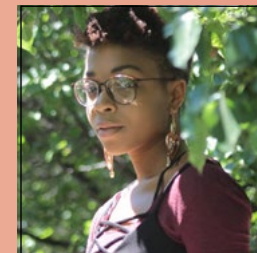
In defiance of this stigma, we are reclaiming the word. We are witches and the Coven Congress is our little sabbath. For each edition, we gather witches from all walks of life to talk about our experiences, opinions, and ideas. Next, we let the discussion inspire content included in *They Call Us*. Coven 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 the patriarchy from the comfort of our homes.

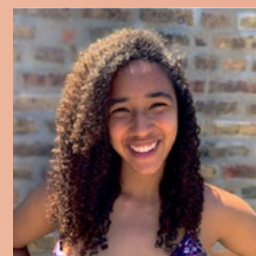
OUR TEAM



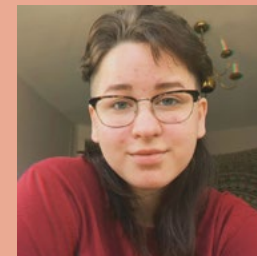
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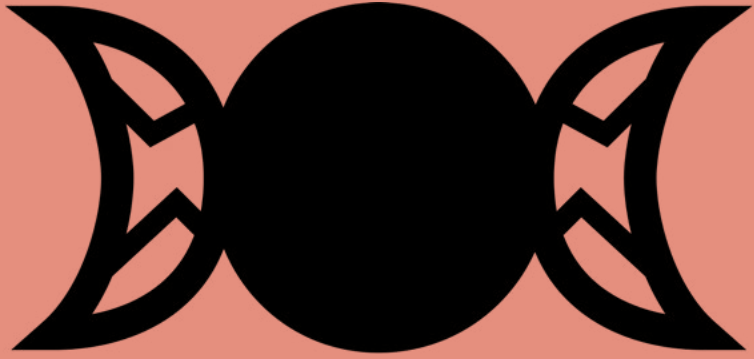


Asko Skladany
Illustrator

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!