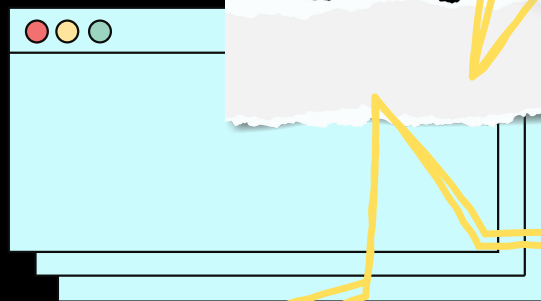


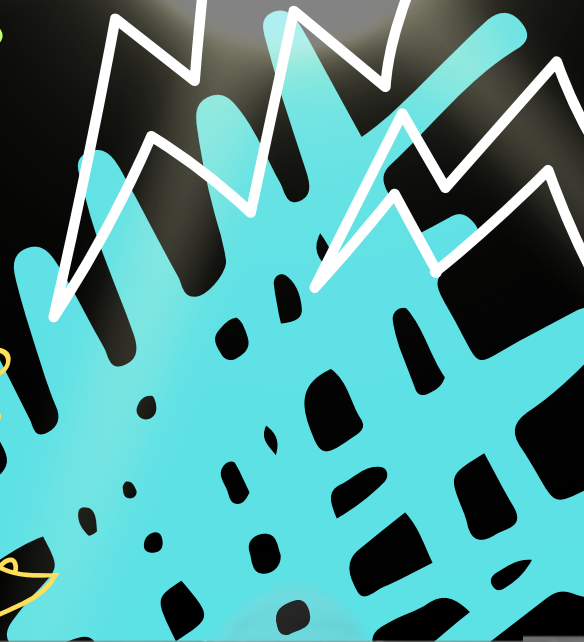
WANT TO GO TO HOT TOPIC AFTER
SCHOOL? MY MOM WILL DRIVE.



RAWR MEANS
ILY
IN DINOSAUR !!!
XP

IT WAS NEVER A PHASE

A POP PUNK ANTHOLOGY





IT WAS NEVER A PHASE; A POP PUNK ZINE
EDITED BY ADAM SHAW



ON TAP PUBLISHING, JUNE 2023



EDITOR'S NOTE

I bought New Found Glory's *Sticks and Stones* from my hometown Best Buy in 2002. I unwrapped it in the parking lot, stuffed the plastic into the cupholder of my 1995 Geo Metro and flipped open my Discman, popped it in. I'd hooked the Discman up to a cassette adapter, created a cradle from an old hoodie to keep it stable as I drove through mall parking lots, sped across backroads to make it from school to work on time. My friend Ben or my brother Isaac would hold the Discman when they rode with me. They saved us from missing a beat of "My Friends Over You" as we screamed out the window on the way to school, did it again on the way to the gas station for 44 oz. pops after. The album was one of a dozen or so I kept safe on the driver's side visor of my car.

In 2021, I saw New Found Glory at Riot Fest in Chicago. They played their hits and I jumped to them, threw my hands in the air even though my shoulder had started popping at some point over the last decade, my hip had started giving out if I moved the wrong way. My wife stayed home with our two-year-old daughter,

the girliest of girls who seemingly out of nowhere had become obsessed with Disney princesses, brushing her dolls' hair, wearing a braid of her own over her shoulder, acquiring a collection of shoes and dresses that filled her closet. So when Jordan Pundik came out for an encore in a blonde wig, sparkling blue dress, I recognized him more quickly as Elsa than I would have had I run into him at a coffee shop. I shouted along to every word of their rendition of "Let it Go," stopping only to capture a clip of the chorus on my phone to show my family. When I got home, we circled up on the couch like something out of a furniture catalog and watched the bouncing rendition on my screen. My kid pointed a finger at Jordan. "That's Elsa," she said.

That Discman on which I first listened to New Found Glory, blink-182, Yellowcard, Jimmy Eat World would be replaced by an in-dash CD player, which would be replaced by an iPod hooked up to an aux cable, which would be replaced by a Bluetooth connection between the car and my iPhone. The songs remained the same, though, fast beats even though I'd slowed down, crunching power cords even though I'd softened, longing lyrics even though I'd settled. More importantly, the feelings remained

the same. The desire to perfectly time the inhale at the start of "MakeDamnSure." The need to match of Tom's whine of "where are you?" in "I Miss You." Punk, pop punk, emo—this music has a staying power that resonates with that part of us that longs to know, embrace, and stay in touch with ourselves. It's a power that spoke to so many of us when we were trying to figure out who we were then and, at least for me, who we are now.

I no longer own *Sticks and Stones*. The black hair dye has long since grown out, the bracelets stuffed into drawers, the Chuck Taylors too weathered to wear. That might not be the case for you. Whether it is or isn't doesn't really matter. What matters is the flutter in our chests when we hear the opening chord at a show, the way we raise our fists in the air as the lights cascade over us, the way we jump jump jump for an hour, maybe two, maybe more. And that's what this anthology gets at, or at least what I hope it does. Whether it's in your dreams, in your memories, in reunion shows or even in your car on your commute into work, the pieces in this collection speak to that staying power of pop punk and the connectedness it gave so many of us in middle school, high school, whenever. I was as excited to read

and compile these pieces as I was when I saw Jordan Pundik come out in that Elsa dress, collide my past and present in a way that made me abandon my thoughts and anxieties and just enjoy the art, and I hope it does the same for you.

-Adam Shaw, editor

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THE WAY IT FELT TO GET THE TIMING RIGHT LISTENING TO BLINK-182 (I MISS YOU)

by L.M. Cole

To Preface: I miss you. (Where are you?)

A non-comprehensive list of other things I miss:

Skate park sunsets, sitting at the top of the quarter pipe, shoes dangling like hope, like any second the boom box would change over to the song that would make you look at me and change your mind.

Daylight drives with a burned CD of Blink-182 songs playing over tinny car speakers.

Soft grass under our backs, counting stars.

The way Mark Hoppus sang, “you know that it meant everything to me” and I never told you I was singing along to you, but I’m sure you knew.

Watching *Flavor of Love* re-runs in the background of a teenage existential meltdown.

Crawling out the bedroom window to sit on the roof of the kitchen and wonder if this is how it would always be, if this is how it could always be.

The time before I was bored to death and Blink wasn’t singing about California all the time.

Playing snake on my Nokia phone, face lit all green glow, no text messages.

That one last barefoot walk down the sidewalk on the East side of Main Street.
Midnights haven't been the same without you.

The freedom, the fear, the feeling.

Mostly you. (Where are you?)

SMILE AND WAVE GOODBYE

by Keith Powell

They decided to take a trip. To fix things, he said. To spice things up, she said. They compromised on a town along the river less than a day's drive away that proclaimed itself home to the world's largest outdoor flea market. They drove with the windows down, The Ramones on the stereo, the Ohio sun baking their pale arms and thighs.

At their motel, he took a shower to wash off the road grime. She joined him uninvited, pressing her small back against him to wet her hair beneath the spray. Kool-Aid dye from her short undercut puddled at their feet, staining the acrylic pink. She turned, reached between his legs, found him, and squeezed him in her soapy grip. He traced the tattoo on her bicep. She claimed it was a sleeping dragon, but he thought it looked like a mayfly fucking an iguana. Told her so. Leaned down and kissed the top of her forehead with an extravagant *smooch*.

The next morning, they ate sleeves of powdered gas station donuts before heading to the flea market. It was a bust – all bootleg DVDs and baby clothes. They stood between rows sweating, bickering about what to do next, when she suddenly squealed and flutter-patted his arm in urgent delight. At the end of the table beside them sat a large glass jar containing a human hand floating in amber liquid. She knelt in front of it and poked it like the glass of an aquarium.

“No,” he said.

"Yes," she said.

"How much?" she asked.

"Make me an offer," said the vendor.

"Is it real?" he asked.

"Oh yeah," said the vendor. "Got it at a doctor's estate sale. It's old. You can't get rid of it because of the preservatives they used back in the day. Health and safety regulations."

She hoisted the jar. Flakes of flesh shimmered in the brine.

"I can see it now," he said. "You'll ask me if I need a hand. I'll say yes, and you'll hold up that jar."

She smiled and nodded. "Yeah. That's right."

She insisted on securing the jar in the backseat with a seatbelt for the trip home. He kept an eye on it through the rearview mirror as he drove. Every time they hit a bump, the hand wobbled like it was waving goodbye.

TUESDAY NIGHT ON THE FAMILY COMPUTER, ELEVEN P.M.

by Lindsey Peters Berg

localscenequeen_:

ok since apparently we're not welcome in the ~official~ discussion thread i made a new one

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

HAHA theyre dumb we're awesome

localscenequeen_:

ikr

so as i was saying

his. Fucking. hair. HOLYSHITHOLYSHIT

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

I FUCKING KNOW

BLONDE

THEIR FIRST MUSIC VIDEO FOR THIS ALBUM AND HE FUCKING DYED HIS HAIR
PLATINUM BLONDE

localscenequeen_:

AND IT WAS SO GREASY

like he looked like someone doused him in oil

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

tysm for that mental image

brb going to obtain my friend the showerhead~

localscenequeen_:

ikr rofl

Also i was dying when they zoomed in on his face and you could see his adam's apple quivering

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

HAHA

my vagina was quivering too

his adam's apple is like weirdly bulbous but I want to lick it

localscenequeen_:

BULBOUS OMG I KNOW

god hes sexy

ngl the blonde looks good

i love that blonde greasy mop on his head

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

wait did you read that slash someone posted on lj with him and gerard where they were both janitors at a high school and brendon and ryan were students and like brendon was the new kid and a nerd and mormon and ryan was a burnout and they

met in detention where they had to help the janitors clean the school and they ended up falling in love?

localscenequeen_:

omfg no?? Link??

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

<https://slashypunkboys.livejournal.com/892563.html>

localscenequeen_:

ty bb

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

omg the mods will be pissed i posted that here lol oops

but ok sry back to bsnss

Did you see the part in the video where he's saying "baby" and he like shimmies

gemma22:

Omfg you American whores the video premiered for you tonight didn't it????

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

YES BITCH

wait do you not have Fuse in england

mate~

gemma22:

No we don't get anything here fml fml i need to see the hair

localscenequeen_:

dw bb it'll be uploaded to absolutepunk.net soon im sure

Even tho jason hates him rofl

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

I hate jason

localscenequeen_:

OT but do ppl at your school listen to music like this

Like i feel like everyone thinks im a freak

Like i write lyrics in my notebook during class instead of paying attention obv and yesterday this guy (who's so hot btw i sit behind him in geometry first period and watch him stretch erotically every morning and im like GET MORE SLEEP BB U SEEM SO TIRED BUT ALOS PLESE DONT JUST KEEP STRETCHING KEEP LETTIN THAT LIL SHIRT RIDE UP OK) he was like why are you always scribbling in your notebook about how much u hate the world

As i was in the middle of shading in my (ornate as fuq btw) block letter rendering of the 'okay i believe you...' chorus

And i was like its brand new

And he didn't even know that was a band

He thought i meant like a brand new illustration of mine HAHA it was embarrassing
he was like cool good 4 u

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

Ugh

my school listens to some stuff but only fueled by ramen bands

Like i love hayley but come on

they're all going to warped tour too

Even the ~preps~

gemma22:

o_o we don't even get warped tour here

localscenequeen_:

Everyone at my school is flipping a shit cause dave matthews band is playing this weekend

I dnt even think they listen to their music its just where they go to get drunk and give blowjobs

gemma22:

OMFG IT S UPLOADED OMG ASKLGJSAKLFJA WATCHING NOW

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

He's so fucking hot you're gonna shit a brick

the blonde actually looks so good

localscenequeen_:

And his pants are...unffff i just wanna

Nvm

my sister is gonna hear me start moaning and be like lolque

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

WAIT WTF YOU HAVE A SISTER>??!!>

localscenequeen_:

HAHAH OMG YES

Have i not told you that

but she's like 12

gemma22:

ok im halfway through and paused for thoughts

Mainly that im jw if anyone else gets turned on when he swings that mic cord around his neck

Like when i see him getting choked by that microphone im like...actually I, in fact, want to choke u

(sexy not murderous way)

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

YES MTE

I WANNA CHOKE HIM

dear_you:

im just popping in to say ive been reading yalls posts and yall are crazy

You're posting so fast your bumping every other thread down

localscenequeen_:

ummmm sorry? I didn't know there was a post-per-minute limit on this message board rofl

dear_you:

Obv there's not im just saying

we're discussing the actual music in the other thread

All you're talking about is how hot he is

Like do u even like the video?

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

um. of course we do.

dear_you:

Would u even like this band if he wasn't the lead singer?

localscenequeen_:

uh yes?? His lyrics are genius.

dear_you:

Like would u still like this band if the lead singer was deformed?

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

He is deformed bb. the adam's apple, remember?

localscenequeen_:

HAHAHA

OUR DEFORMED KING

gemma22:

We lay our naked bodies down in worship at his deformed feet

dear_you:

Ok whatever

p33n:

[petewentz.jpg]

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

NO

p33n:

[petewentz.jpg]

localscenequeen_:

THE GIANT PETE HEAD

p33n:

[petewentz.jpg]

gemma22:

Ah shit we're getting spammed eh

p33n:

[petewentz.jpg]

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

JFC WHO ARE YOU AND WHY DO YOU DO THIS

GET OFF YOUR BURNER ACCOUNT AND SHOW YOUR FACE

localscenequeen_:

it's prob just a lurker finally finding the courage to post

UR SO BRAVE BB CONGRATULATIONS

gemma22:

Why is it such a gigantic image

stretching the fuckin page all funny

localscenequeen_:

OH SHIT GUYS ITS ALMOST MIDNIGHT

AND I HAVE A HAMLET QUIZ TOMORROW

AND I NEED TO SPARKNOTES EVERY SCENE

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

omg go sparknotes!!!

gemma22:

yes go!! I have to watch this video again (while wearing less clothes) (jk) (am i?)

localscenequeen_:

roflllll ok bye bbs ill be back tomorrow

sweet dreams of u know who

Love u

XxFriends_Or_EnemiesxX:

Love you!!

gemma22:

LOVE YOU

p33n:

[petewentz.jpg]

CHICKEN SHOP LOVE STORY

by Oli Court

The lights come up in the final chorus of Mr Brightside. Last call for the pullers and the dance hall heroes. For the rest of us, when Brandon croons out his final 'I never', the pilgrimage towards chicken and chips begins. Phone screens flash across the night, all the way down the hill.

☺☺☺

I bought a companion book for an art exhibition from twenty years ago. JAM: Tokyo-London, it was called. It had a Chris Morris exhibit and I'm a disgusting comedy nerd and total completionist, so here it sits in front of me, on my bed that doubles as my writing desk. The book smells like old video game manuals after you open the box for the first time in a decade. It smells like the Blink-182 poster I bought to hang over my bed when I was seven, before I'd taken it out of the tube. It smells like 2001.

☺☺☺

Many of my peers preferred the high end, franchised brand names of Dixy Chicken or Favourite. But the true salt n' grease connoisseur knows that these outlets serve an off-the-shelf, generic box of deep-fried nonsense night in, night out, and provide not a single element of the genuine chicken shop experience. I mean, they couldn't even muster up an original colour scheme between them.

The genuine article in Selly Oak was to be found over the road: the big spinning stick of some sort of meaty substance, the giant globs of pasty white gloop that plopped out of a translucent tub labelled 'mayonayse', all shoved towards you across counters cleaned to the standard of the two-out-of-five hygiene rating proudly displayed on the front door. There, on the corner of the high street stood our Mecca - the red n' gold of Rooster House UK.

☺☺☺

PRESENTER: HEY GUYS! WE'RE HERE AT THE GUILD FOR FAB, THE BIGGEST NIGHT OUT IN BIRMINGHAM IN 2001! WE WANTED TO GET IN AMONGST THE ACTION AND HEAR FROM YOU GUYS WHAT TRACKS YOU'RE LISTENING TO RIGHT NOW! WE'VE GOT A LOVELY LOOKING FELLA HERE, FIRST OFF, WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

JOE: IT'S JOE!

PRESENTER: HI JOE, MAY I SAY, YOU'RE LOOKING SEX-AY TONIGHT, HEY!

JOE: YOU'RE NOT SO BAD YOURSELF, LOVE.

PRESENTER: OOOOH WHOA THERE, JOE! WE'RE HERE ON IMPORTANT BUSINESS TONIGHT! EVERYONE OUT THERE WANTS TO KNOW, WHAT RECORD ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO MOST IN 2001?

JOE: WELL LOVE, I GOTTA REP MY FELLOW NEWPORT BOYS, AND SAY, FEEDER, ECHO PARK. G'WAN LADS! LADS!

PRESENTER: HMMMM, MAYBE NOT AS SEXY AS I FIRST THOUGHT, JOE. BUT LET'S KEEP GTV ROLLING NOW, MAYBE NOT WITH FEEDER, BUT J-LO, AND LOVE DON'T COST A THING!

JOE: LADS.

and then he puts his mouth around the baffle of the presenter girl's microphone. It's magic. They took the clip off the GTV youtube channel though, which is bullshit.

CCC

You never could take Amy or Hayley to Roosters. Vegans, the both of them. Proper missing out, I feel. Like, when you're off your nut and hearing the remnants of Darude - Sandstorm ringing in your ears as you shiver under your jacket, I don't know about you, but all I want is the warmth and the loving embrace of a chicken

wing cut off a spinning stick and bundled into a colourful cardboard box, just for my delectation.

I never understood those girls. That's why I wanted to explore the whole world with them. To share my life with them. Just in the hope that, one day, they could have let me in to what was really going on.

Prang out. Deal. Pose for the pics. It worked, for a time.

☺☺☺

After I left Selly for good, they knocked the place down to build student flats for international students, these eyesores with exorbitant rents, the end result of a higher education system distorted beyond recognition. The Vice-Chancellor never realised we were never much interested in the rolled-up piece of paper, or the weird hat and gown which for some reason cost a week's pay to rent for one day. We wanted chicken boxes, we wanted them hot as hell, and we wanted them at 3:30am.

☺☺☺

BASICALLY, SORRY I HAVE TO SAY IT NICK, BUT, VERY DISAPPOINTED IN YOURSELF. I NOT ONLY FEEL, I'M QUITE POSITIVE AND GOT EVIDENCE THAT YOU'RE PLOTTING A VERY DIRTY PLAN ON EVERYBODY IN HERE

☺☺☺

Roosters, just a Fall Out Boy track away from my front door. That's where I wish I could return to. I crave those sizzling chunks of processed something. I long to feel those weird sensations in my chest after devouring the whole box in front of late night Scuzz on the telly. I want to be back in that place and that time, hand in hand with the girls, fidgeting with my front door key, unable to open the lock fast enough. We'd all just freeze in the chill of a massive January night, and thank bossman for the memories. That's what I dream of. That's what will never come back.

LATELY I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT

by Susan Barry-Schulz

—a golden shovel after [Lately I've been feeling about poetry] from Diane Seuss' *frank: sonnets*

dimies at the dugout beer stick floors the haunt jump dancing to alt/punk i
knew he would be there and I knew too when his blue eyes flashed like that & he called
me over from behind the bar it was like it was already done down-
town Ithaca on friday nights with all
my beautiful friends the
ones I still talk to and the ones I don't—all angels—
we'd hitchhike up south hill back to campus from
the commons or sometimes take the
lit bus up the other hill ghost breaths all a jumble under cold upstate skies
in search of a slightly different vibe or something to
quench that unnamable longing hanging over our heads we'd get
off unsteady and hungry and pop into the nines for just a slice (& to get him
off my mind) we were neoned & swatch-watched half-shaved & whitewashed we were out
on the town with our suede boots & fake IDs & the
line at the door
was all part of the plan or so
we thought in those days everyone studio-gelled & gorgeous & talking kind of loud and even i
with my habitual not quite under the radar hovering shroud of sadness felt like i could
actually make it if things would just stay like this forever & if someone suddenly had to bolt
to the restroom to vomit even that seemed more like a minor inconvenience & it
wouldn't slow us down or sway us from our mission which was what exactly and
the next day after sleeping it off & half away we'd wash

our sickly faces taking inventory of the parts we could remember but the vague him
bits—fumbling keys/the flash of a bathrobe/clean sheets—these a little harder to shake off—
even now— from the loofahed &lavender soaped-up best of
me.

STILL NOT DEAD YET

by Ly Faulk

I

The Ataris put on a Don Henly costume and said that the boys of summer would be gone. Avril flipped her long blonde hair and said he was a skater boi. Billy Joel snarled and said she's the salt of the earth and she's dangerous.

II

I put the safety pin through my jean vest. Like the latest fashion. My Doc Marten's are too heavy but well worn. Nobody likes you when you're twenty three. Underemployed and overeducated. I'm stopping and stalling. The music is my obituary. But I'm still not dead yet.

III

The noise vibrates the speakers and seems to touch the very heart of me. As The Ataris play, I comment to my roommate that this is the greatest song of our generation. She sneers at me, not getting it. No one seems to get it. I close my eyes, tune her out, and focus on the music.

IV

It's about a boy. I'm boring and predictable that way. I know I'm not the first person to have their heart broken. All the symptoms are there. No sleeping, no eating . He cheated. My chest feels caved in. Unless I have the music. Clangy guitars and scrawny vocalists. Only then does it go away. Three note chords are my salvation. I'll live through this. I'm still not dead yet.

TRUST ME, WEAR SOCKS

by r.s.brandriff

when i was 12–13

maybe, i got my first Doc Martens

black/leather/10-eyelet-high, two sizes too big,

with steel in the toes,

weighed almost as much as i did, tiny skinny blonde girl

high on green day and paramore on a first gen ipod and

that one +44 song

i didn't really understand but i knew it said–Fuck,

had a fast beat, a pace i liked

wore them right out of the store in low socks because

no one told me to break them in first

no one told me the leather would take a price in blood when i didn't

that i gleefully paid over and over because i didn't care;

i went to middle school with hair dyed blue

and ankles shredded and bloody/the biggest grin

and a pink and black plaid miniskirt and tie with avril lavigne's name on the label

there's a photo somewhere of an eighth grade graduate in

a white and black lace dress and Docs still two sizes too big

wore them into high school even after i outgrew the skirt

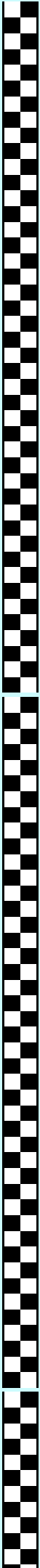
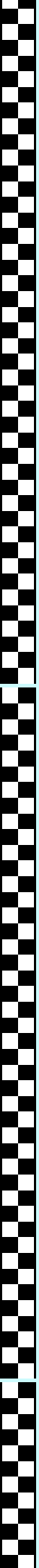
and the friends, and watched hot topic stop selling skulls/faux leather, and start in on shows and movies;
the blue hair became cherry red/green day became all time low and linkin park,
i became queer and
queer became “fuck you”, and i pierced my nose
when i was 16, and my nose bled instead of my ankles, and
they were still one size too big

wore them into college, 300 miles away, when i got my first tattoos
when my name changed and my voice dropped and
i shaved my head and pierced my lip when i was 20, and ipods became streaming, all
time low became halestorm and the offspring,
and at last the Docs weren't too big;
they carried me up and down campus all year round,
in rain and the summer and in knee high snow instead
of the expensive new boots my parents bought,
until finally, the holes in the leather wore through on the ankles,
right after graduation

i'm 26 now, with a job and rent and a normal hair color,
and the jeans became slacks and the t-shirts became
button-downs, i drive a crappy old VW bug, and
now it's the clash/ramones/the struts/death cab for cutie
on the playlists instead but my
face is still pierced, and my hair is still half-shaved,
and at least the car's red

there's still green day and all time low and halestorm and the offspring,
and that one +44 song,
and my old broken/scuffed/worn/loved-to-death Docs are
in my closet with my blood in the leather

and yesterday, i ordered new ones.



WARPED TOUR 2009

by Josh Shepard

in the years after it was good, too late to be cool, too young not to try, we pile into the car and drive five hours into kansas to feel something different. when we get to the hotel the night before the show someone breaks out a giant bottle of something cheap and clear, a stack of solo cups hollywood-red. I say that we should wait until after the show tomorrow so no one's too dehydrated to have a good time. I have a good point but what I'm not saying is that I'm scared. a summer ago they were boys eating white bread sandwiches and Doritos in my backyard, wrapped in towels poolside; now they're mixing their sacrament with Hawaiian Punch. holy water turns one boy into an angel that sprouts fists instead of wings. his eyes are beautiful. one boy abstains, but he's not a chicken like me—he's straight edge. I watch a third throw one back like it's almost nothing, until his face puckers into itself and he tells me that it's good. too much turns another into flames. we try to put him out in the cold water of the hotel bathtub, heartthrob curls hanging in his bleary eyes. we feed him water but he throws everything up, the water, the vodka, his parents, the summer, the Hawaiian Punch, and the bathwater stains his underwear pink. we bring him to bed, put earbuds in his ears and play Attack Attack on his Zune until he sleeps. we decide to stay awake with him in shifts. I stay up all night anyway.

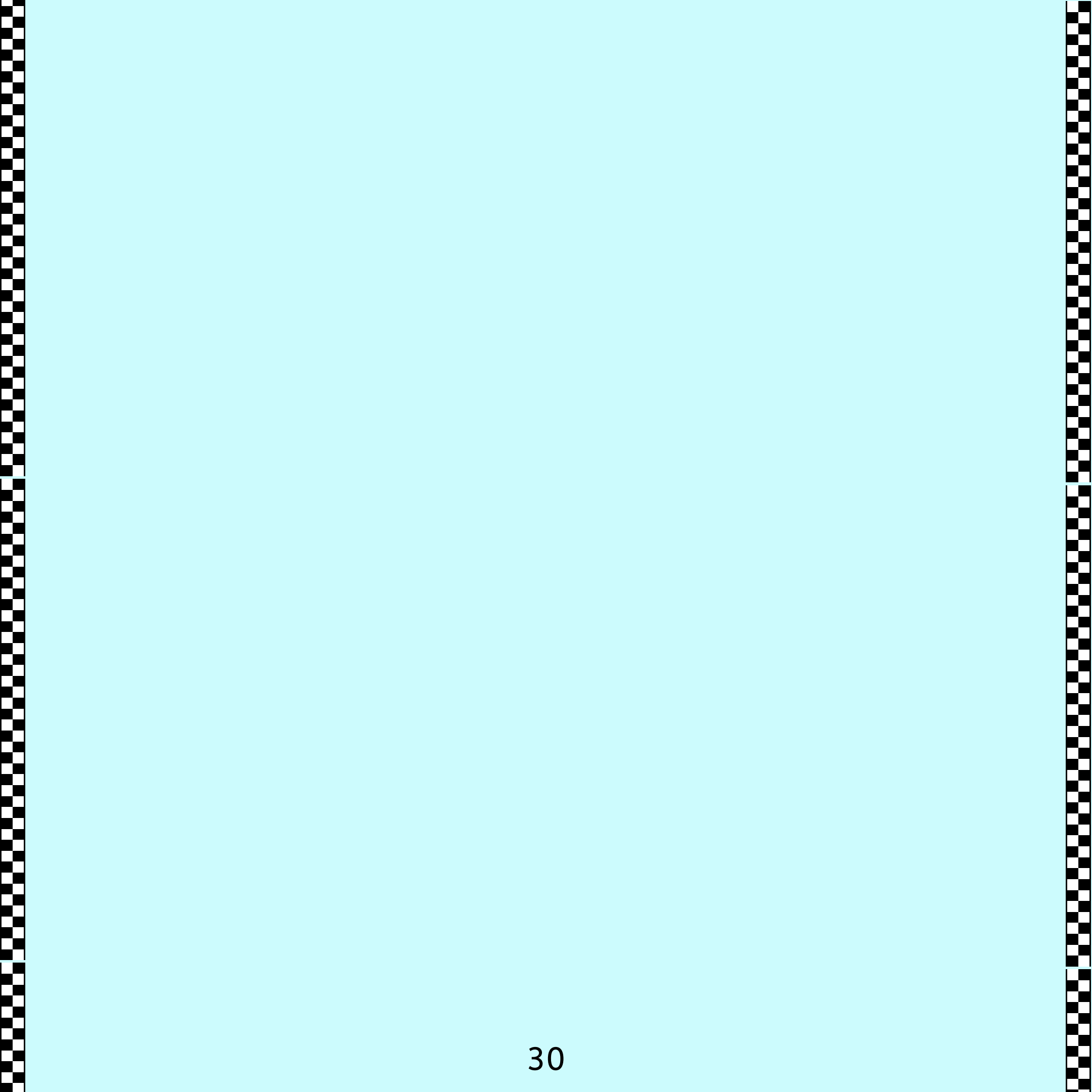
who are you here to
see this weekend? scoff those guys
are fucking clown shoes

last night is a puzzle we work on together. *why does my face hurt?* lucky to be alive. *I said if you spit your water back out at me again I was gonna hit ya.* punched by an angel. we show up just late enough to have missed more than a few favorites. if the morning's hangovers aren't punishment enough for the night before, the walk from parking to the venue had ought to be. my ass is a trickle of sweat, I stick to myself, my pits, my tits. they suffer like men after a bender; I suffer like a fat kid in august. but we are here, where we've been dreaming of. it is an animal we become part of, moving with the current of kids to one stage, fighting against them on the way to another. together we are alive, and together we die—circle pit! circle pit! wall of death! fuck it up!—and together we do it again and again. we drink water from a Monster can. we visit the stages with the smallest crowds: alt-bluegrass, midwest hip-hop, the lousy locals & more. we buy t-shirts, posters, a record that will melt in the sun. the artists sign them with sharpies and sweat. but the day spirals down. good times turn to bad times. the liquor took its toll and the sun takes what's left. from throwing down to throwing in the towel. dehydrated & exhausted from the heat, we miss the headliners. *you wouldn't last a minute on the creek.*

open up the pit
kid way in over his head
vomits on my chucks

we sweat. we swear. we stop. we sleep. we sleep. we wake. we are bummed. we are so sorry, bro. we told you so. we are so fucking hungry. we want to know what's open this late. we wander into Hooters. we were so fucked up last night. we wings & things. we had a good time. we could have had a better one. we take what's left in a styrofoam box. we watch as they throw out a drunk. we bum him a smoke. we listen to him howl. we laugh because he's funny or we laugh because we're nervous. we watch him tumble into the night. we see familiar faces. we *aren't you the guys from?* we tell them the bar just closed. we don't have any seats left in the car, but you can sit on our laps. we drive them to a bar we can't get into. we *what* a trip. we so *crazy*. we admit *that I'm not perfect*. we admit *that I'm a fool*. we take it easier tonight. we sleep. we wake. we drive. we drive. we stop to piss & drive some more. we see two cars behind us, speeding and weaving. we watch one fly by us. we watch the other. we stay the fuck back. we watch one car squeeze a gap between two semis. we watch the other try. we *holy shit* as semi wiggles across the lane in front of us. we *fuck oh shit* as the car smashes into the median guardrail. we don't even realize the car is stopped until it's parked on the shoulder. we are twenty sneakers across blacktop racing toward a machine bound in the grasp of cables. we *thank fucking christ* when everyone is okay, alive, uninjured, a mother in the front seat, her three-year-old in the back. the mother cries & cries but the child doesn't make a sound.

when I get back home
mom asks why my bag smells like
cigarettes I sleep



DON'T PANIC

by Alejandra Medina

Bodies imitating ocean;
limbs moving to the beat
of a drum. I can feel a heart
pulsing through the soles
of my boots, calling out
to join—electricity

floods through the room.
The rush of a million bodies
push and pull, howl
with reckless abandon.
They tug at me.

Skin on skin,
high on the heat
and the scents, humans
swishing, humming. I learn to
swim as the rest of the world
is drowned out. Nowhere else
can I come close to death, give in
to the waves raging against
each other and emerge

singing, feeling
alive alive alive.

HAYLEY WILLIAMS WAS THE BACKDROP TO MY ZUNE

by Aaron G. H.

Pardon my Secondhand Confession –

the riffs run together as

the Green Sundays Fall into a Panic!

My Paramore was a black rectangle in my hand.

A rebellion against the iPod

never held so much power,

the black box parading the melodies of a thousand ripped tunes

playing on the heartstrings

like the violin of a Yellowcard song.

A piano chord reminds me

of Something...

Corporate Americana buying into the emo entitlement,

young men – boys – feeling like they were experiencing enlightenment,

the Simple fact that nothing was fair –

life was a nightmare.

You grew hair over your eyes so no one could see you cry...
because the best love was unrequited,
a best friend was unresponsive.

To show devotion was obsessive
and romance was just chemicals
in search of serotonin.

A chemical imbalance killed my Zune
The batteries hit an all time low ending the love affair with-
A rebellious product that never quite found
new glory.

A PORTRAIT OF 2002 AS 2008

by Elia Karra

Everyone says that going back in time is no easy feat, even with the right equipment and a skilled traveler, but no one ever thinks that maybe all you need is a reunion tour, and 2022 had plenty of those. All I had to do to be a teenager once more was fly all the way to the other side of the continent, to Sweden, where Green Day and My Chemical Romance performed in the same week.

There is a certain artistry in shoving yourself back in your teenage skin. My favorite jeans—complete with detachable suspenders that always hung by my legs—were ruined a decade ago, when a doctor had to cut them to get to my broken ankle, but I had my trusted Dickies. My go-to eyeliner now makes my eyes red and teary, and though I can appreciate the look, I don't appreciate the three days of stinging that come with it. My Converse, though I wear them daily, are somehow almost pristine.

Maybe a reunion tour isn't enough to travel back in time, after all. Fuck getting old.

So, I had to compromise. I wasn't a teenager anymore. So what? My friend Sarah and I still caught the bus, and then the train, and then the tram, and we went to Gröna Lund at something to nine in the morning to stand in line along with a bunch of 30-year-olds and a bunch of 16-year-olds, because it turns out there is a My Chemical Romance renaissance no one warned us about. It rained all day. Half the crowd bled pink dye from their hair, but nothing swayed us. We buzzed like neon lights, thousands of us together.

When the gates opened, we spilled inside the amusement park like the lyrics that rushed out of our lips all those years ago in unbridled off-key cries. And when they finally stepped on stage, the clouds parted and the rain stopped.

I like to think it was magic. Our magic, our collective hope for a night when we could be the person we buried in the closet and in boxes under the bed along with those tattered skinny jeans and the cheap eyeliner and the scribbled Converse. Perhaps the chorus of Welcome to the Black Parade was our prayer and Gerard, face painted like a holy skull, our preacher. Perhaps it was enough to bend the sky to our will.

There was no time travel that night. By the end of the concert, my back hurt, my feet hurt, and I knew I would need a day or two to recover. So unlike my teenage self, who went to see The Prodigy right after taking off my leg cast. But I am just as much 13 as I am 17 as I am 27, all of us in one body, singing under a goldenrod sun, na na na (na na na na na na na na na).

THE END

CLOSED, SO CLOSE CAN ERASURE POEM OF MOTION CITY SOUNDTRACK'S "L.G. FUAD")

by Lauren Kardos

figuratively,
I committed

my memories and photographs
to love,
to awkward common sense.

I want to
get addicted to every lie,

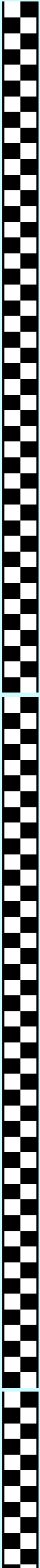
to explode, wreck
all my problems.

I want to forget things get old.
know I express myself afraid, alone, and
fucked up

last try: smile,
drink heavily, believe,
choose to win,
soldier on,

repay my memory in liquor 'til it kills,

tired, totally useless.



GROWING UP (EKPHRASTIC POEM AFTER "GROWING UP" BY THE LINDA LINDAS)

by Rachel Alarcio

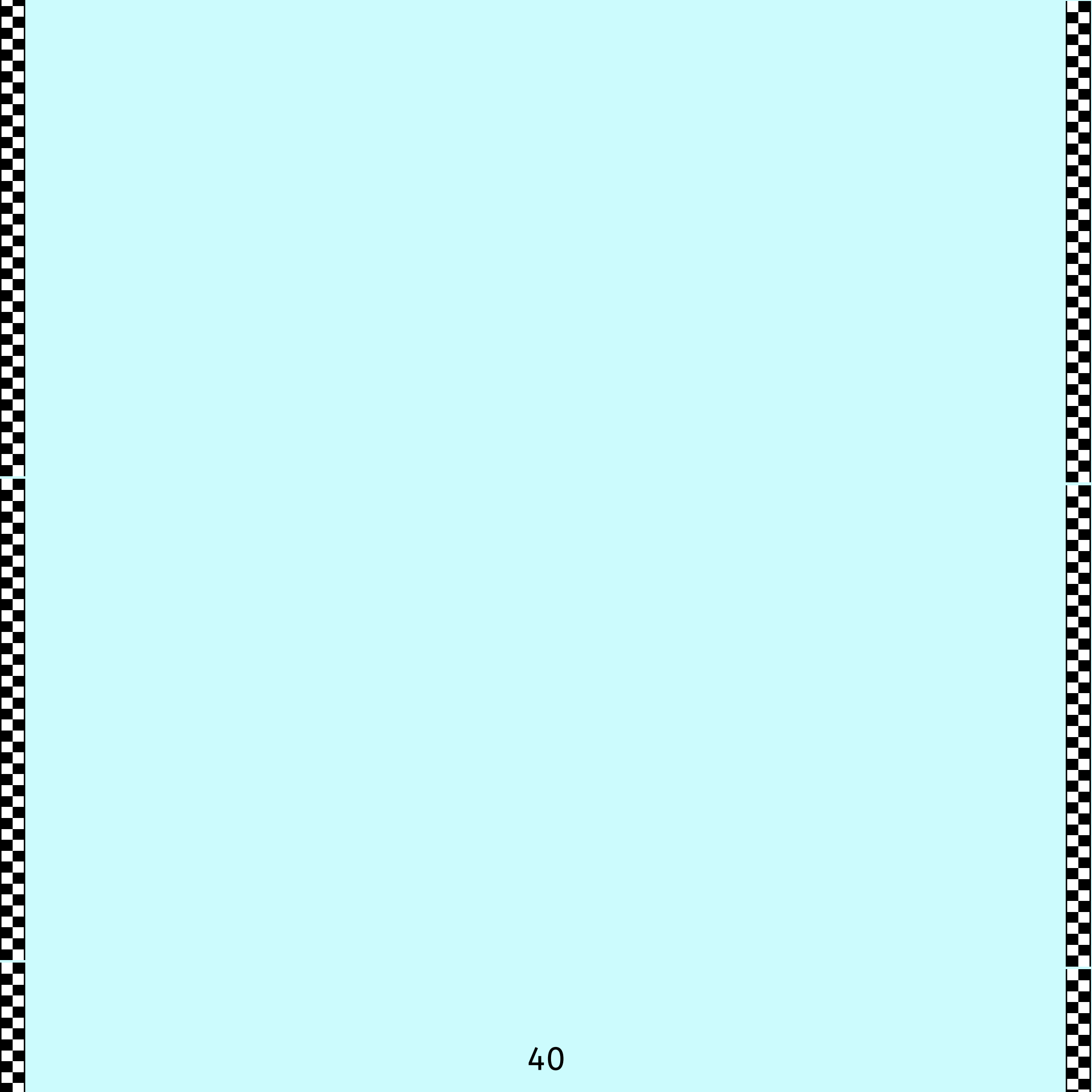
We'll make zines about politics, religion,
and smutty fanfic in your bedroom bunk, photocopy
a stack of three hundred in the teacher's lounge.

We'll write about French-kissing in the back
of the school bus, even though neither of us
have gotten with anyone.

We'll do drag, with painted on Adam's apples
and contoured jawlines in your older brother's faded
band tees and jean jackets, lip-syncing, me

to "I Don't Care" by Fall Out Boy and you
to Måneskin's "MAMMAMIA" both
of us sweating like swine through our sports bras

occasionally stealing glances at the doorknob. Neither
of us is sure what this means, but luckily we
don't have to know. Just grow up with me.



SCENE FROM THE SCENE

by Andrew Walker

FADE IN:

INT. HERE - NIGHT:

ALL OF US crammed in a tiny venue during Denver's massive winter, dark & crowded, crawling with clusters of the same type of CIS WHITE DUDE in their 20s who think that the world has wronged them more than it ever will //

ENTER:

LEAD FUCKING SINGER, hulking in from outside, sweaty & snowy & smelling like cigarettes & sadness, ALL OF US watching him push his way through the crowd of young & broken youth bumping his wet body up against their arms just reaching for his attention //

FLASH TO:

LEAD FUCKING SINGER, again, onstage now & twisting his bruiseless hand around a guitar, bellowing ballads about the women he believes have hurt him & ALL OF US ignorantly believing they have hurt him //

SMASH TO:

ALL OF US, overtaken by the sound of the songs we swore we'd always cherish. We dance & scream & fall into the other bodies falling into ours, liquifying our limbs against this infinite light //

CUT TO:

LEAD FUCKING SINGER vacuuming the last glimmer of air from our lungs before
bumbling off-stage to find tomorrow morning //

CUT TO:

CIS WHITE DUDE gawking at the green room pining for one last gasp of his guilt //

EXIT:

EVERYONE, gulped up and spat out.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HERE - NIGHT:

ALL OF US breaching the cold city, shivering down the street in shirts sweat-stuck to
our stomachs. We buy tallboys & Takis to wobble home with, the quiet violence of the
night still boxing in our ears //

FADE OUT

BLINK

by Emily Costa

I'm listening to "Mutt" on my Discman as we drive to the Christmas tree farm. Mom is only taking us because my sisters were begging, even though it's easier buying a tree at Home Depot. No one helps her with the saw. I thumb up the volume as she gets on her knees, as the dull teeth meet bark.

At Alex's, we memorize "The Party Song." We unfurl the CD jacket and move in close, hover over tiny half-nude bodies. I tell Alex about the poster I convinced Mom to buy me—the three boys in boxers, hung above my bed. Mark's nipple ring. My door always closed so Dad won't see.

I talk to Andrew every night but Thursday, because that's when Dad stays home and makes us all watch Must See TV. But sometimes, when ER starts, Andrew calls anyway, or Dad decides to go out anyway, and the whole thing falls apart.

When I answer, I have to pretend Andrew isn't the only thing I think about. He says he scored tickets, but only two. My palm slips on the cordless. *I would do anything*, I say, too eager. *Uh*, he says. *Do you think Lauren would go with me?*

Lauren is my other best friend. Socially malleable. Eternally likable. She's with me some days, cheerleaders others. She's somehow immune to the loserdom plaguing me and Alex. She hates Andrew.

I three-way call her and ask her to explain just how much she hates him, in detail, with examples. He's silent on the line until he can't be anymore.

At Alex's, we get ready for another seventh grade Catholic school dance. No uniforms. Tiny cartoon t-shirts from PacSun, glitter everywhere. We go so we can complain later, so we can talk shit. We go because we are dying to be touched.

We don't talk about it, but Alex tried out for cheerleading last year. She only told me the story once, but the hurt still pulses between us. It reminds me to never try.

At Alex's, we discuss Scott vs. Travis. At Alex's, we do Tom's fast part in "Degenerate" until we fuck up and collapse in laughter. We fall asleep, me on the top bunk.

*

When Danny breaks up with me over AIM, I don't cry. He wears big Nautica shirts and doesn't like any good bands. He goes crazy when they play Nelly at the eighth grade dance.

Lauren was just doing me a favor by pairing us off, anyway. Helping me get the first boyfriend thing out of the way.

I don't even cry when I find out he dumped me because Alex cybered with him. Instead, I get real calm, stare at her as she says she's sorry. I smile. Start laughing. I think Alex cries. Everyone calls me psycho, but I think they mean it in a good way.

At home, I lie on the couch and watch the video for "The Rock Show" over and over. I'm not sure I care about the new album, but I do care about the moment Tom spits straight at the camera. A spray covering everything. The lens blurry before they cut away.

*

A month before high school, Alex and I are in the city with our moms. I'm happy mine agrees because I never see her with friends. But when I start thinking she might be as lonely as I am, I almost say I have diarrhea and can't go.

But instead, we are running around St. Mark's Place, trying on bondage pants, filling our bags

with free postcards and photocopied band flyers. I feel as close to being a real punk as I ever will. On the bus ride home, we sing low about how we fucked your mom, or your dad, or a dog. How it would be nice to have a blowjob. We plan our life together: a triangle-shaped house with a Dr. Pepper soda fountain.

High school starts and it's 9/11, right away. The gym teacher weeps. We all think we're going to get drafted or die, or get drafted then die.

Alex gets a boyfriend. I stand at the lockers while they make out. After a week or two they break up. Turns out he likes me, I guess. And that decides that.

When she confronts me, she's wearing my shirt, Mom's old shirt, a red long-sleeved Izod that I cut thumbholes in. She's crying and yelling, but I'm just looking at her wiping her eyes with my sleeves. The red deepening.

Alex becomes a hippie. Dreadlocks, no shaving, the whole thing.

I give in and let my boyfriend fuck me. I get dumped. I get suicidal. Not because of that, but it's not like it helps.

*

Jesse and I sublet my dad's condo while he's off trying to make a new family. It's our first place out of college, but most of my dad's stuff is still there. I open the nightstand drawer and find a cock ring.

Jesse is working at a bank and I'm working at Carvel. All the money we make goes to rent but I keep my tips.

We drive to my new brother's baptism. I dig through cracked jewel cases in the backseat, find

the live CD, cartoon boys playing to a sea of people. We each have a copy, which I take to mean something romantic.

Mark's Satan voice pleads for little kids and I'm laughing because you can tell the bit is dying. Jesse turns it down as we pull into the church lot.

I start needing something. My best guess is the something is a dog. While I'm home alone tumble-drying my ice cream uniform and worrying Jesse's getting robbed, I search Petfinder. But it's too sad. I want them all.

Every day I feel dumb and irresponsible. I eventually panic and sign up for a program to teach middle school. But then I start thinking about how I'd have to get up so early, how I have no professional clothes. How I hate public speaking. How I hate middle school.

Alex is off work early. She says she can pick me up no problem. We rarely see each other, even though we've been in the same city this whole time.

The piercing place at the mall is deserted. I sign the papers, lie in the chair, lift my Carvel t-shirt. I have work in two hours. The guy is calm and gentle. Marks me up. I look straight ahead at the piercing map, the black light posters of wizards and pot leaves. Alex holds my hand as the needle pops through. We both squeeze, interlocked, palm-to-palm.

The sun is coming through the mall skylights as we walk out, adrenaline-high.

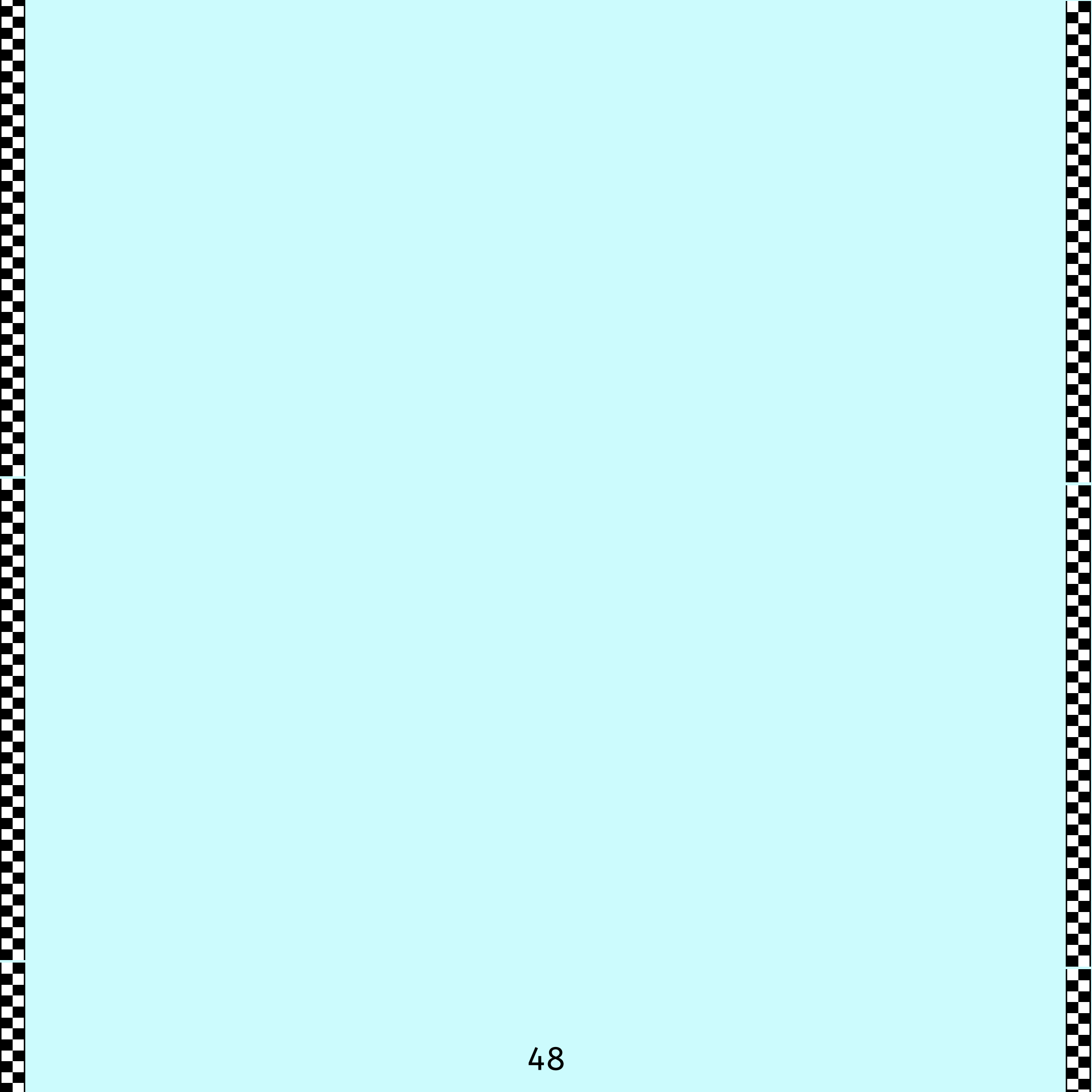
I need to listen to Dude Ranch, she says.

Of course, I say. Duh.

We sit in her car to kill the rest of the time, roof of the parking garage empty, windows open, late

summer just cooling down but the sun so fucking bright. We are non-stop talking. We are in a very particular kind of love.

I call Jesse to check in, and I tell him. Alex is saying *hi Jesse hi Jesse* in the background and then the music kicks in so loud I can barely hear him asking why, asking about the guy who did it, how he touched me. Asking what's wrong with me. Not in a mean way, really. But it doesn't matter. I just fucking hang up.



GREEN DAY IN L.A.

by Brian Harman

I was there, Rose Bowl,
2000 something,
rocked the green hair—
tailgate-partied Popeyes
and beer in the trunk,
some gummies when
we got in, stadium
was fucking packed,
crowd having a blast,
a bunch of American
idiots, Billie Joe
whined, asked us if
we had the time, we
did, our dreams were
broken boulevards,
our brains were stew,
so we sang and shouted,
welcomed the paradise
of a pop punk night,
loud ass music with
long-time friends
was all that mattered,
and an encore of good
riddance like it was

prom circa early 90s,
then it was time to hit
the freeway, get fork-
stuck in traffic, hungry
as fuck for fries and
something unpredictable
for when I come around
again, when September—
or any month—ends.

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Adam Shaw lives with his wife and daughter in Louisville, Kentucky. He is the author of the novel *The Jackals* and the memoir *Sportsman's Paradise*, and his work can be found in *Pithead Chapel*, *HAD*, *Rejection Letters*, and elsewhere. He can be found on Twitter @adamshaw502.

L.M. Cole is a poet and artist from North Dakota who now resides in North Carolina. Her work has been featured or is upcoming with *Roi Fainéant*, *Mid-level Management*, *Corporeal*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch* and others. She can still be found wearing her DC skate shoes, but mostly she's on Twitter @_scoops__

Keith J. Powell is co-founder of Your Impossible Voice and remembers attending at least two Warped Tours. Find more at www.keithjpowell.com.

Lindsey Peters Berg lives in Los Angeles. She has fiction about emo in *Rejection Letters* and fiction about other stuff in *Okay Donkey*, *HAD*, and *Moot Point*. Currently, she's at work on her first novel. Follow her @lindspetersberg and tell her your message board username (hers was rejects_are_sexy).

Oli Court lives in Brighton, UK. His fiction and essays have been featured in 3:AM, The Cabinet of Heed, and Misery Tourism, among other publications. He has written pro wrestling reviews and columns for Voices of Wrestling. Find him on Twitter [@AnotherOli](#)

Susan Barry-Schulz grew up just outside of Buffalo, New York. She is a licensed physical therapist living with chronic illness. Her poetry has appeared in *SWWIM*, *Barrelhouse online*, *Shooter Literary Magazine*, *Bending Genres*, *B O D Y*, *Gyroscope Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *West Trestle Review*, *Stone Canoe*, *Many Nice Donkeys*, *Okay Donkey*, (she likes donkeys), *One Art*, *Quartet* and in many other print and online journals and anthologies.

Ly Faulk has loved reading and writing for as long as they could read and write. They still believe in the power of the written word to change lives.

R.S. Brandriff (he/they) is a poet and writer living in the Southwestern US. He's had pieces featured in a few lit mags and has a poem in *Bullshit Lit's* first anthology. You can find them on Twitter trying to summon a demon to write their book for them [@hedgebones](#)

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Alejandra Medina is a Latina poet. Her work has appeared in WriteGirl's *Lines & Breaks*, *Unpublished Magazine*, *Capsule Stories Anthology*, and the *Exposition Review*, among other places. When she isn't staring off into space, you can find her at a local art museum, attempting to capture the ekphrastic.

Aaron G. H. (he/him) is an ELCA pastor living in Minnesota. When he is not working, singing in a choir, or chasing a rambunctious toddler, he is the co-host and producer of the weekly podcast *My Bad Poetry*. Aaron's poems have also been published in *Rio Fainéant Press*.

Elia Karra (she/they) is an author, filmmaker, and former teenage, now adult dirtbag from Athens, Greece, with an MFA in Creative Writing from Lindenwood University. Their work has appeared in *HAD*, *Cease, Cows*, the first *Bullshit Lit* anthology, and others. Say hi on Twitter at @eliakarra or visit eliakarra.com.

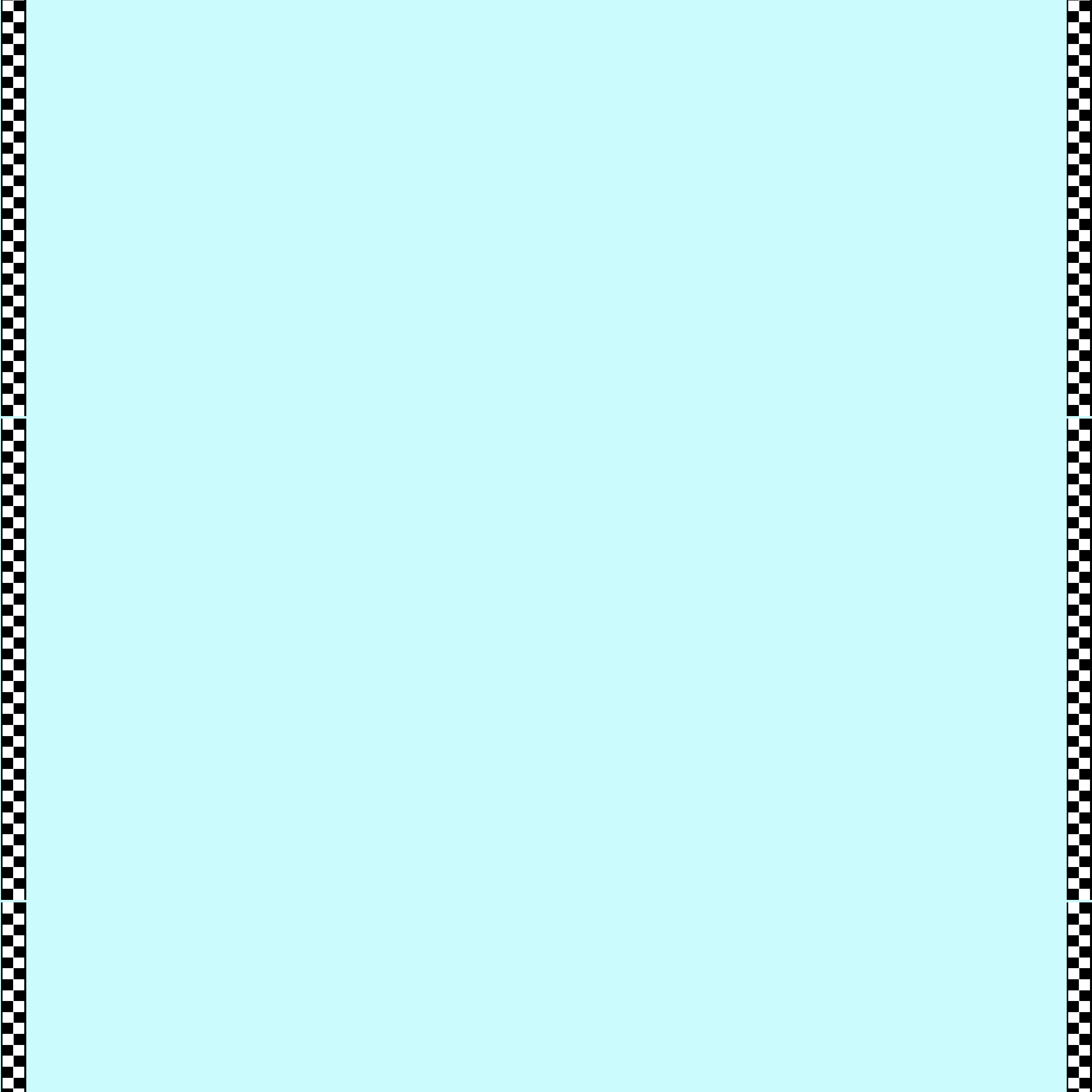
Lauren Kardos (she/her) writes from Washington, DC, but she's still breaking up with her hometown in Western Pennsylvania. *The Molotov Cocktail*, *Rejection Letters*, *HAD*, *(mac)ro(mic)*, *Best Microfiction 2022*, and *The Lumiere Review* are just a few of the fine publications where her work lives. You can find her on Twitter @lkardos.

Rachel Alarcio's work has been published or is forthcoming in *The Lumiere Review*, *Rogue Agent*, *West Trestle Review*, *Exposition Review*, at *LAX's Terminal 7-8*, and elsewhere. They are a Scholastic Art & Writing Awards Silver Medalist in Short Story. She attends Kalamazoo College. They tweet @rachelalarcio. Their Instagram is @raechillout. Her website is rachelalarcio.com.

Andrew Walker is a poet from Colorado living in Michigan's Upper Peninsula where he is working toward his MFA. He reads poetry for *No Contact* and has work published in *Kissing Dynamite*, *Pidgeonholes*, *HAD*, *Eckleburg* and elsewhere. You can find more of his work on his website, druwalker.com, and you can find most of him on Twitter, @druwalker94.

Emily Costa is the author of *Until it Feels Right* (Autofocus Books). Her work can be found in *X-R-A-Y*, *Hobart*, *Barrelhouse*, *Wigleaf*, and elsewhere. She is currently working on a novel sort of about her father's video store, as well as a book of short stories. You can follow her on Twitter @emilylauracosta.

Brian Harman lives in Southern California. He is the author of *Suddenly, All Hell Broke Loose!!!* (Picture Show Press). His work has appeared in *Misfit Magazine*, *Bardball*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and elsewhere. He loves craft beer, themed music playlists, and writing poetry into the night.



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• ALEJANDRA MEDINA • EMILY COSTA •
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