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STEPHENS LIFE



The  
Phoenix  
Issue



# *Table of Contents*

BURNIN' UP, BURNIN' OUT	<b>5</b>
YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN, KID	<b>11</b>
SIX POMEGRANATE SEEDS	<b>17</b>
AGAINST THE GRAIN	<b>23</b>
I SPY	<b>29</b>
MONSTER HOUSE	<b>31</b>
BARBIE, NOT BABY	<b>37</b>
I MIGHT KILL MY EX	<b>43</b>
I AM THE EAGLE...	<b>49</b>
ASH	<b>55</b>
STRIKE THIS PAGE	<b>58</b>

## *Letter From the Editor*

As I reflect on my college journey, I remember the people I've met along the way. I appreciate the countless professors who have pushed me and I take pride in the things I've accomplished and the places I've had the opportunity to visit.

This past spring semester, I studied abroad in London, England, at the London College of Fashion. Immediately upon landing at London Heathrow Airport, I was hit with a wave of emotions. Scared that I'd made the wrong decision yet excited for the journey to come.

The reality is, after making a big move like that, you will question yourself and whether or not you're capable of handling the situation you've put yourself in. You'll cry, miss your family and, believe it or not, miss grass. You'll get upset at yourself for being upset. And then, as if struck by a magical wand, you'll calm down. You'll settle in, find your people and places and you'll realize that you made the right choice.

At the end of my time in London, I saw a double rainbow. That day, I was burnt out from a photoshoot and over the class I'd had that day. I'd been lying in my bed, frustrated that I was wasting time being upset, when I noticed orange light slipping through my blinds. I peeked through my blinds and, to my surprise, it wasn't just the golden hour showing off; there was also a double rainbow awaiting me on the other side. So, I ran. I ran out of my flat and up the steps to take in what felt like a magical moment. While standing under the rainbow, I felt gratitude and something told me my journey was about to soar.

The sign I got from that rainbow is one similar to the connection people feel to birds; from Cardinal birds being beloved to Eagles symbolizing freedom. Ask someone to describe a Phoenix. They may begin by saying a bird that is orange, red, or orangish red. They'll then go on to tell you that this bird, which is a part of Greek mythology and often depicted in fictional books and TV shows, is immortal. The Phoenix is killed and rises again. The Phoenix is burned and rises again. The Phoenix faces a monster and probably gets knocked down, but it rises again. Time and time again, the Phoenix is getting beaten, and yet, inevitably, it rises.

So, here lies the Phoenix issue. It symbolizes and emphasizes change, transformation, rebirth and becoming. The Phoenix issue is fiery yet calm and, much like the bird, has a story to tell. In issue 23 of *Stephens Life*, we talk about being burnt out, the Mexican-American experience, being on your own and rising from your ashes.

Reader, welcome to the Phoenix issue, our reputation era. In the end, you figure it out, you get help, you find a way to finish and you rise once again. You'll lose faith in yourself, and then you'll learn to have faith in your journey.

I hope you find peace and comfort knowing that you are seen and understood. And if you find yourself struggling and needing release, flip to page 58 and remember, there will always be a rainbow on the other side.

Your Editor-in-Chief,

*Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore*

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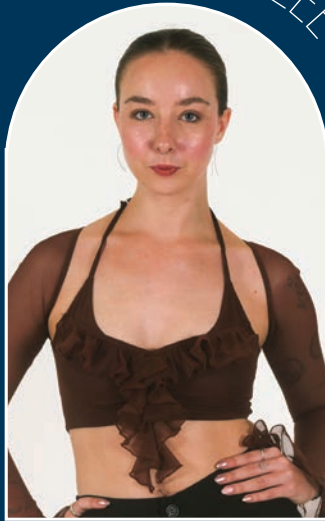
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Heaviness in my chest. Hands that won't stop trembling as I fidget with my keyboard, my planner, my third latte of the day. A fogginess behind my eyes, right where my brain should be. I get the urge to run away—from what? My to-do list? My life? I don't know anymore.

I'm burnt out.

**BURNIN' UP,**

**BURNI**



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black top, is looking upwards and to the right. A hand is resting on her head. The background is filled with vibrant, abstract light patterns in shades of red, orange, and yellow, creating a dramatic and artistic atmosphere.

*Story by Zoe London  
Photography by Mollie Davidson*

# NOUT

I've been burning myself out since before I could put a name to it. As a teenager, I would sing and dance in musicals nonstop. When I left Missouri to attend an out-of-state college for musical theatre, I kept up this routine. Finally, my burnout became something I could recognize. Performing was something I loved, but all it brought me was anxiety. At some point, I'd only kept doing it for the dopamine high. Even more, the pressures of turning my passion for theatre into a career had sapped all my love for the craft itself. I needed a break but didn't know how to take one. Then, two years into my degree, COVID-19 hit and I was forced to stop performing. After that? I never looked back. I don't plan to—at least not professionally. For me, the burnout I experienced from theatre was so intense that I needed to leave it behind for good. While that may strike you as a sad ending to a story, I don't view it like that. Burnout is never fun, but it isn't all bad, either.

## SO WHAT IS BURNOUT, EXACTLY?

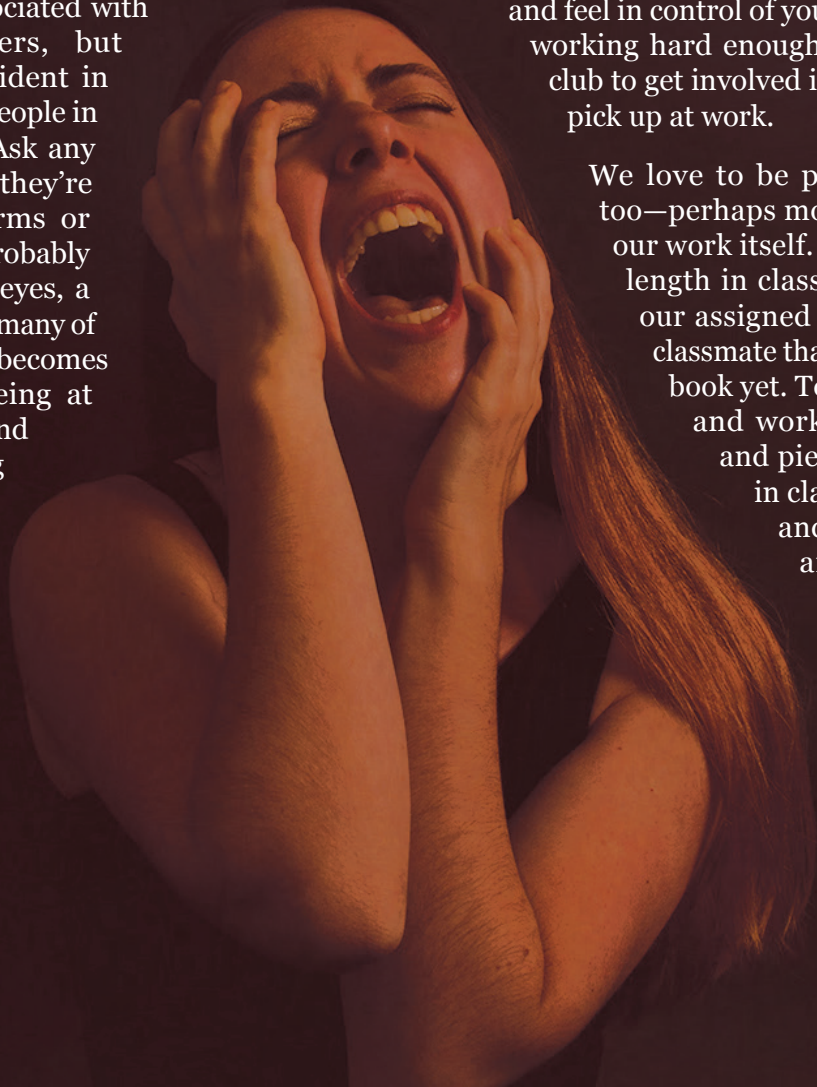
According to the National Library of Medicine, burnout is a term to describe a state of extreme exhaustion, listlessness and an inability to cope. Originally, it was associated with high-pressure careers, but its symptoms are evident in college students and people in the workforce alike. Ask any college student how they're doing during midterms or finals week. They've probably got bags under their eyes, a cold brew in hand. For many of us, the academic year becomes synonymous with being at our breaking point—and that isn't even taking into account the 70% of college students who work jobs outside of school, as was discovered in a study done by Georgetown University. We lose sight of the

ambitions that led us to college and focus on just getting by. We tell ourselves we can take a nap during winter break—and we end up trapped in a vicious cycle of go go go no time for rest before we realize it.

Classes, student organizations, an on-campus job, an off-campus job, an internship—as I planned out my fall schedule, all of this sounded perfectly manageable to me. Busy, sure, but nothing I couldn't handle. Who needs sleep, anyway?

About a week into this semester, I realized I'd already burnt myself out. I was gripped with an intense awareness that I was way in over my head. I had no way to stop it, either. You'd think that a senior in her last semester would be able to avoid this. But no. In fact, all I had was the ability to recognize the pattern I've trapped myself in since I started college. In the article burn burn burn, writer and burnout scholar Anne Helen Petersen says, "I think sometimes we use 'burnout' as a way of avoiding saying depression — and/or making sure to allude to just how hard we've been working, just how much we deserve to wallow in the burnout." A morbid badge of honor comes with being the most stressed, the most overworked, the most burnt out of the friend group. If you're comfortable and feel in control of your life, you're probably not working hard enough. There's always another club to get involved in, an extra shift you could pick up at work.

We love to be praised for our burnout, too—perhaps more than for the quality of our work itself. One time, after talking at length in class about the symbolism in our assigned reading, I confessed to a classmate that I hadn't actually read the book yet. Too overbooked with travel and work, I'd only skimmed bits and pieces so I could participate in class. My classmate laughed and told me, "I don't know anyone who can B.S. as gracefully as you can." Her compliment stuck with me—obviously, since I'm talking about it a year later.





## WHERE DOES BURNOUT COME FROM?

“Why am I burned out? Because I’ve internalized the idea that I should be working all the time,” Petersen explains in her article, *How Millennials Became The Burnout Generation*. “Why have I internalized that idea? Because everything and everyone in my life has reinforced it — explicitly and implicitly — since I was young.” While much of Petersen’s writing focuses on millennial burnout, many of the issues she raises can be seen in the struggles of Gen Z college students as well.

It’s not that I necessarily enjoy how overbooked I am. I chastise myself for every missed reading or half-assed assignment. But do I get some odd satisfaction from my peers thinking I have it all together? That I’m not crumbling under the superhuman weight I’ve put upon myself? Absolutely. And maybe that’s another piece of the puzzle, of why we get so addicted to the feeling of burnout. While we may detest the depression-like symptoms of burnout, what we truly love is winning at the game of it all. If I take too much onto my plate, then at the very least, I’d better keep all those plates spinning.

I mentioned my musical theatre burnout saga—well, when I transferred to Stephens in 2021, I thought changing my major to creative writing was the end of exhaustion and existential dread for good. And don’t get me wrong, a new major was a positive change. For the first time in ages, I felt excited about what I was studying. So vividly I remember telling my loved ones that I realized I only did theatre for external validation. That was how I’d gotten so burnt out. Never fear, though—writing was my true passion. While I hoped to turn that passion into a career, now that I’d found my true calling, I would never burn out again.

Oh, how wrong I was.

## WHEN ART BECOMES INCOME

I was naive in thinking I'd permanently evaded burnout, for sure. While my love for writing hasn't waned, now that I'm applying for jobs—and my literary passions are morphing into my source of income—it's hard to maintain the pure, uncomplicated love I once had for it. Under late capitalism (a society in which everything is commodified and subject to consumption, not just products), even our hobbies feel tainted by the pressure of monetary gain, and burnout becomes inevitable. I spoke with Rin Visaney Scholtens about this issue, particularly how it affects artists.

Scholtens graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where they earned their MFA in Fiber and Material Studies, and they've worked as a professional weaver and educator. When I asked how they knew they were burnt out, they responded, "Endless dissatisfaction. It's hard for me to feel connected to what I do, particularly in being able to hold onto positive feelings. Apathy becomes my new normal. There's a barrier, a distance, between me and the world. I might still be able to do the work, but it doesn't mean the momentum or meaning is there."

One of the hardest aspects of combating burnout is that we often don't recognize it until it's too late. Scholtens can sense burnout coming on when they're turning to mindless tasks, like scrolling and restless sleep, rather than engaging with their passions. "There's something slowing me down or obstructing my ability to engage," they said.

What's difficult is that, when we're burnt out, the first thing we want to do is get out of that slow period—especially when our job depends on it. "Being a creative is so difficult because sometimes it helps to work in your field and other times it's the worst decision in the world," Scholtens said. Even though we work in

different industries, their experiences are relatable to any professional artist: the pressure to brand yourself, the fact that you are your product.

## REIGNITING YOUR SPARK

Now that we better understand burnout—where it comes from, how to recognize it—the question we're left with is: what next? Despite the challenges of burnout, we don't often drop our jobs, our homework or our passions when faced with it. Perhaps it's because we realize it's an inevitable part of life, a storm we have to weather until we're back on track. Scholtens put it best when they said, "Burnout is part of a cycle, like the seasons or our emotions. We can't always be creative, just like we can't always be happy. Just as burnout is part of the cycle, so is rest and recovery."

I have a confession to make. As I write this, I'm burnt out beyond belief. I have a cold, and I should be resting—but the alternative is a missed deadline, a moment of failure. It feels silly, after all I've learned about burnout, to still not have a handle on it myself. The truth is that, if I don't cut back soon, I'm probably going to crash and burn.

Maybe that's okay.

That's the thing about burnout: while it's unpleasant, it also

forces us to slow down, reevaluate our priorities, cut back and ultimately make changes that will make our lives better. I know that I'll be carrying around Scholtens' words of wisdom: "I've been trying to think of my creativity as a garden: sometimes I need to tend to weeds whereas other times, it's just the entirely wrong season or soil."

So the next time you're burnt out, don't try to bounce back as fast as humanly possible. Instead, take a moment to sweep up the ashes, poke at the embers and breathe. Soon, you'll be ready to spark again. **SL**

**“WE CAN'T ALWAYS BE  
CREATIVE, JUST LIKE WE  
CAN'T ALWAYS BE HAPPY.  
JUST AS BURNOUT IS PART  
OF THE CYCLE, SO IS REST  
AND RECOVERY.”**

# TIPS FOR BEATING BURNOUT

RETAIN

CURIOSITY.

REDEFINE

SUCCESS.

REMEMBER

TO REST.

# You're on Your Own, Kid

*Story by Kya Nilges  
Photography by Mollie Davidson*



**Y**ou've made it—to college, that is. You've been waiting for this for what feels like your whole life. Finally, you will have freedom. A life entirely your own, away from your parents, where you can make up the rules as you go. It's horrifying, exhilarating and everything in between. But sometimes, we don't get what we want. Sometimes, our plans are slammed in our faces and it's up to us to open a new door—alone.

You've been cut off from your family. Standing outside alone, what do you do next? Navigating your new life just became exponentially harder. While so many of us yearn to be set free, forced independence comes with its own set of emotional and financial challenges. As we strive to make our own decisions and carve out unique paths, we find ourselves grappling with the weight of responsibilities once shouldered by others. The pursuit of education often comes with a hefty price tag and the financial burden can be overwhelming. It's a juggling act of managing academic demands, part-time jobs and our emotional well-being.

I spoke with an anonymous student who has experienced this firsthand. For this story, we'll call her Rebecca. As a freshman in 2020, COVID-19 shook up the world and her life. Many kids moved back home, but she didn't have that option. She had been kicked out and had nowhere to call home. She entered into a long depressive period where she was unsure if she would be able to continue her education. Adaptation is necessary, but how do you adapt to this?

Rebecca quickly learned how to live independently. Her understanding of the world and view of everything shifted. This change, she stressed, reshapes one's perspective on life. Change is not a series of events but a profound force you must move with. She learned to appreciate and value things in a new way.

One realization she faced was the value of money and how difficult it is to live without it. She worked three jobs totaling 80 hours per week, and almost all of her paycheck went to food







and rent, with any leftover money going into savings. “Learning self-reliance when I had no one to support me made me a new person,” she said. Her life was altered when the only person she could rely on was herself. She described this semester as the worst one she ever had. She sometimes worked 16 hours a day with no sympathy from her employers. Her mental health was at an all-time low.

One of the most important lessons she learned was prioritizing personal happiness over others’ opinions. It wasn’t easy, but it was crucial for her independence and self-acceptance. Rebecca believes that college is a time for self-discovery. As we age, we learn more about ourselves, our preferences and our values. It’s an ongoing journey of trial and error.

Rebecca found that what shaped her life the most in college was finding love. For her, it was romantic, but for you, it doesn’t have to be. Love can also be found in friendships and investing in ourselves.

While Rebecca faced a lot of hardships, she overcame them. She now works one job, has good grades and said she’s “living the life.” She felt it important to note that she is also in a good place mentally. Finding community helped her make a home here.

When asked what advice she would give someone in her position, Rebecca said, “Don’t let it take over your life. You will adapt, and you will make it through this. You will find people who will love and support you through everything.”

In college, creating a sense of community can be overwhelming. Start this era by looking into the various clubs and organizations on campus. If you live on campus, don’t underestimate the power of your dorm or residential hall community — organize late-night study sessions or join in on dorm-wide events like pizza parties. Pay attention to campus events — many of them are organized by students and are a lot of fun. There are many ways to build community and make your campus feel like home.



Being a college student in that transitional phase feels like a roller coaster ride without a seatbelt. You've got newfound freedom to make your own choices, like staying out late or deciding what to eat for every meal. You've also got assignments, jobs, and looming student loans reminding you that you're growing up fast.

Amidst the chaos, there's a sense of adventure and growth. College is a time of exploration, self-discovery and personal development. You're exposed to diverse ideas, cultures and experiences, which can expand your horizons in ways you never imagined.

Throughout this journey, we'll undoubtedly face adversity. Whether it's a challenging class, a personal setback or a daunting life decision, these moments test our resilience. When I first moved away from home, I remember feeling isolated. My whole life, I struggled with expressing emotion. I internally struggled with everything that was thrown at me. I pretended to be okay while the perfectly plastered walls in my mind cracked with the weight of what I was bearing. I had to work hard on my relationships and go through so much to be able to communicate. Overcoming these obstacles became a testament to my inner strength and determination.

Through these trials, we develop the resilience needed to navigate life's unpredictable waters. We will look back on our college years and find that it wasn't just about acquiring a degree. We may find the most valuable lesson we received was the one that was never explained in words but through experience and resilience.

Surviving college is one thing, but thriving is another. Students need to find their groove. That means balancing studies, jobs, self-care and a social life. Change is the essence of the college journey and resilience is our constant companion. We celebrate the beauty of both within our community. It's in the stories of students who overcome obstacles. It's in the bonds we form with people who support us through triumphs and setbacks. Our success is a testament to the human capacity for change and resilience and a celebration of the collective strength that emerges from our shared experiences. The community we find is the secret to managing our challenges.

College encompasses more than academics; it's about embracing ourselves as we are. It is a time for nurturing our dreams and persisting through challenging times. In life, you'll find people who will love and support you. You just have to let them. **SL**



# Six Pomegranate Seeds

*Story by Maggie Lowery  
Photography by Amanda Coppeti*

While there are variations in this story, there are mentions of sexual assault and kidnapping.

When most people think of timeless love stories, they usually think of “The Notebook” or “When Harry Met Sally.” They don’t typically think of being kidnapped, taken to a place they’ve never been and told that’s their home now. In this case, we’re talking about the story that the Greeks and Romans believed was the start of the change of the farming season, or what we typically refer to now as the seasons.

This story was passed down through oral tradition for generations before someone wrote it down. Along with this fact, this story has many different variations depending on what version you are looking at or reading, including both modern-day iterations and old variations. Regardless of what version you are looking at, there are always these four big names in every iteration:

*Zeus:* King of the Gods and Goddesses, ruler of Mount Olympus

*Hades:* God/King of the Underworld and death

*Demeter:* Goddess of harvest and agriculture

*Persephone:* Goddess of fertility and Queen of the Underworld

# The Beginning

Persephone, daughter of Zeus and Demeter, only grew up with her mother. Zeus was what most would consider an "absent father" and left all of the parenting to be done by Demeter. Some would say that Demeter was perceived as an "overprotective mother." But wouldn't you be considering how women are treated in these stories by the other male Gods?

Our story starts with Persephone and her mother, Demeter, on our plane of existence, i.e., not the underworld and not Mount Olympus.

While they are on Earth together, Demeter maintains the Earth's harvest and overall nature for humans to enjoy. On the other hand,

Persephone is frolicking in the beauty of the Earth that her mother has created. It is debated whether she is enjoying the

beauty alone or if she's playing with nymphs that are nearby. Not too far away, Hades spots the young woman having a wonderful time and is entranced by her beauty and behavior. At that moment, Hades knew that he needed to have her.



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nit goods it is exe



## HADES FORMS A PLAN WITH ZEUS.

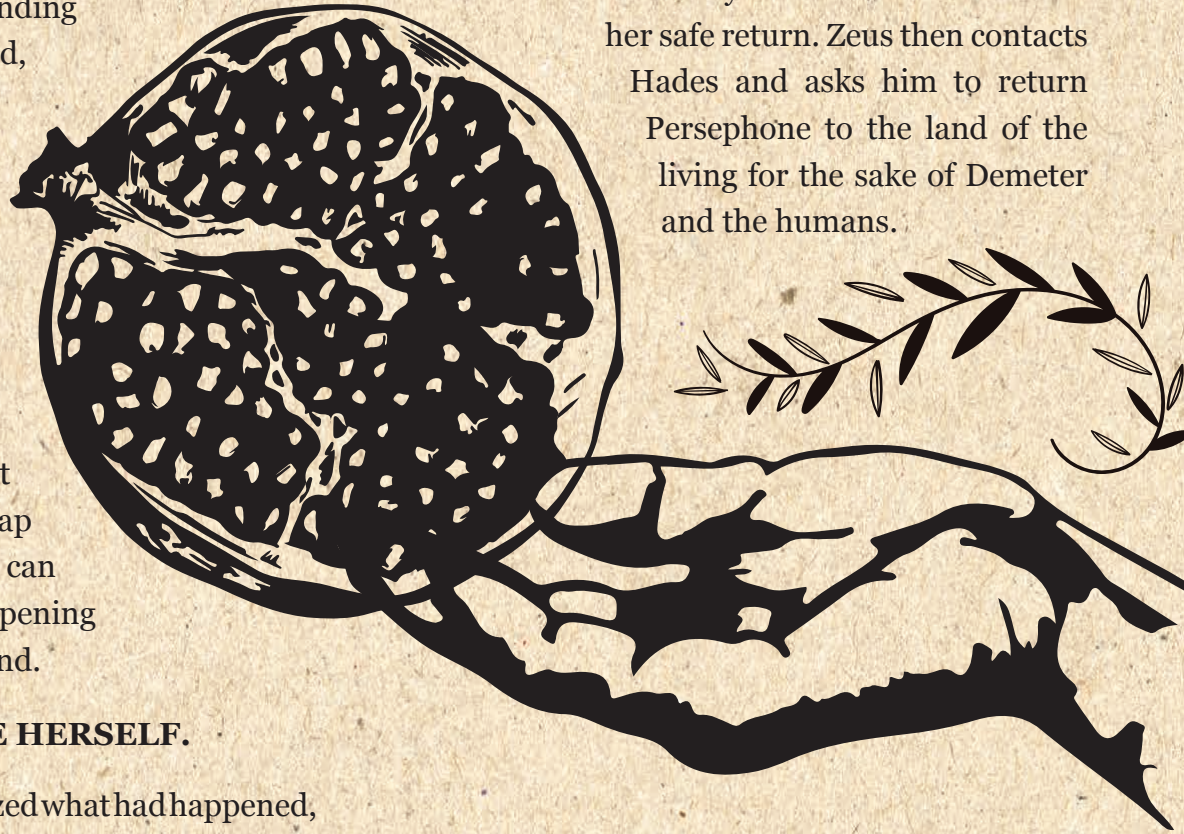
With Hades having this new “love interest,” he devised a plan to have her. Hades goes to his brother Zeus to see what he can do. Unsure if Hades knew that Zeus was the father of Persephone, he went to solely ask if he could have her or if he was simply going to Zeus to seek some “brotherly advice” on the situation. Depending on the version you read, Zeus essentially gives Persephone’s hand in marriage without consulting either Persephone or her mother, Demeter. In other arrangements, Zeus essentially gives Hades the green light to go ahead and kidnap Persephone before she can even realize what’s happening while Demeter isn’t around.

## DEMETER IS BESIDE HERSELF.

By the time Demeter realized what had happened, it was far too late, and Persephone was already gone. Stricken by grief and agony, Demeter roams the lands in a long, endless search for her daughter. She completely abandons the idea of nurturing the crops and life on the Earth’s surface. Because she abandons everything else besides looking for Persephone, all of the crops on Earth start to wither away and die, leaving no food for the humans living there. When the humans turned to the Gods asking if they had done something wrong, Zeus took note of the situation and sought out Demeter.

When Zeus found Demeter, she was utterly

beside herself and unwilling to talk to Zeus. Zeus had made countless attempts to talk to Demeter. She refused almost every single one but eventually conceded and told him why she was neglecting everything. Demeter told him when she was upset about her daughter being missing, to which Zeus responded that he knew where her daughter was, in the Underworld, and he would try to contact Hades about her safe return. Zeus then contacts Hades and asks him to return Persephone to the land of the living for the sake of Demeter and the humans.

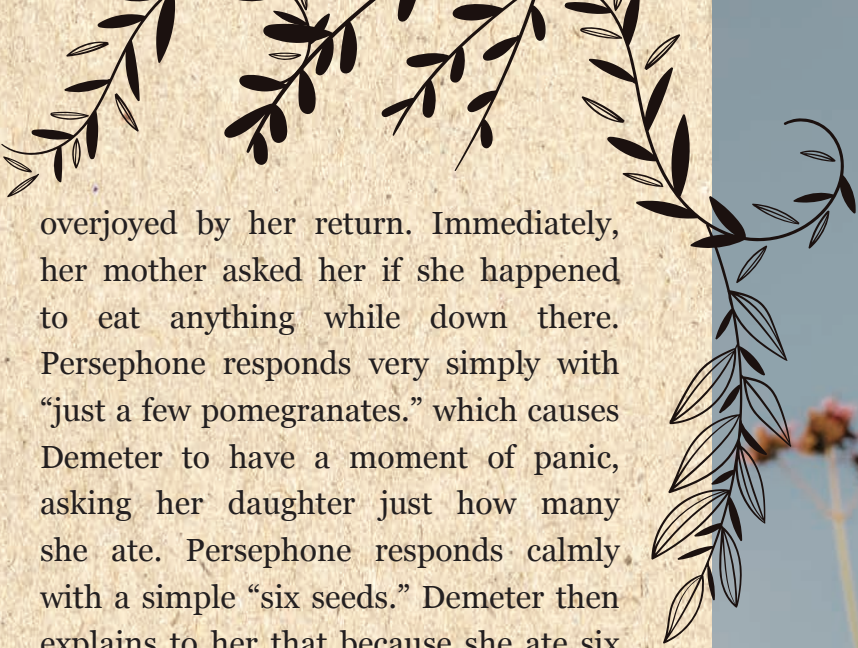


## HADES LETS HER GO, BUT NOT WITHOUT A CATCH.

After Zeus talks to Hades, he realizes that he has to give back Persephone but he doesn’t want to lose her forever. With this being the case, Hades starts thinking of ways around this situation. Hades finally comes to a solution. Before he lets Persephone leave and return home, he tells her to eat six pomegranate seeds before she goes home.

When Persephone returns to the surface, she is welcomed by her mother, Demeter, who is





overjoyed by her return. Immediately, her mother asked her if she happened to eat anything while down there. Persephone responds very simply with “just a few pomegranates.” which causes Demeter to have a moment of panic, asking her daughter just how many she ate. Persephone responds calmly with a simple “six seeds.” Demeter then explains to her that because she ate six seeds, then that means she’ll have to spend six months out of the year down in the Underworld because for every seed it translates to one month.

After realizing this, the two of them immediately go to see Zeus. Upon their arrival, they fill Zeus in on the situation and see if he can summon his brother from the Underworld. Zeus declares there is nothing he can do, considering that Persephone took the seeds willingly. When Hades arrives, Demeter starts trying to find the best of what would be called a bad situation. They agreed that Persephone would spend the end of the year down in the Underworld with Hades and the beginning of the year with her mother. This was the birth of what we now refer to as the seasons, when Persephone, with her mother’s life and light, fills the Earth, which is what we refer to as spring and summer, and when she’s in the Underworld with Hades. At the same time, her mother is alone and there is little life growing and things are darker on Earth, which is what we refer to as autumn and winter.



***This is not a love story that we should romanticize. We can reflect on this story as one of grief, loss, rebirth and change. We can take lessons from this story to see how far we have progressed from portrayals of women in the past. Instead of being the ones kidnapped, we are becoming the heroes of our own stories. SL***



# Against the Grain

By Alex Jockisch

Photography by Jadyn Graves + Alex Jockisch

*Today I wore a dress over pants.  
I wore my icy blue 1980s slip dress  
with my boyfriend's baggy Levi's  
jeans under them.*

*I looked at myself in the mirror, a person  
in a sea of fabric, and smiled.*

*I was wearing a truly unflattering outfit,  
in all senses of the word.*

*And I never felt better.*

When I was five years old, nothing made me happier than dressing myself. Once I was old enough to put a shirt over my baby face with its cherub, chubby cheeks, nothing could stop me from my frequent wardrobe changes. One sunny day during a Virginia heatwave, I stepped out from the front door in a one-piece swimsuit, a thin ballet cover skirt and some strapped sandals. My accessory of choice was an umbrella to stay cool from the heat. Any onlooker would notice that not one article of clothing matched another, in the traditional sense. At five, I hadn't learned what "matching" or "flattering" meant. I didn't filter out my thoughts through a societal lens. I picked my Cinderella swimsuit purely for myself—and for the weather.

When I was twelve years old, I noticed one day that my stomach pushed out a little farther than my friends. I noticed how my stomach looked in a fitted shirt. I looked through my mother's People and US magazines. Britney Spears and Jessica Simpson had stomachs. The article made it clear it was a negative. Madonna had back rolls in one photo—what was she thinking? Skimming through, I thought I was ignoring their headlines. I wasn't interested. Underneath it all, I felt a disruption to my system, an acknowledgment that I had a body that others would look at and judge like the magazines judged these women.

When I was thirteen years old, I had to see a therapist. She spoke at me, rather than to me. She was trying to fix me through her tangentially related stories, like telling me how her son's truck flaps indicating he only wanted small women to ride "his truck." She assured me she thought it was wrong. She turned to me, stating, "Eating disorders are serious, you know." I never listened to her. All I could think about was how my friends' clothes were from the mall and mine were from the military base general store. No matter how hard I tried to conform and shrink, it never felt like enough.

When I was fourteen, after a particularly bad case of high school bullying drama, I threw out all of my "ugly" clothes, the thrifted items I had slowly started collecting, the hand-me-downs from family members, anything that didn't "fit" in. I didn't "fit" in. I cried when a "friend" said that no one liked me. I believed him. Why would anyone like me?

I declared to my empty room that I would be normal. For once in my life, I was going to be normal.

When I was sixteen, I bought a pair of Mary Janes and a pair of fake teashade glasses to wear with my contacts. I spent a week dressed up as the different decades, purely for myself, while taking AP Literature in a Midwest farm town. I wore denim on denim, clothes from the boys' section and cut off all my hair into a twee-bang look. I brought a ukulele to school for heaven's sake.

When I was eighteen, I went to school for four hours in a pair of knee-high Demonias and a lacy choker from Spirit Halloween. I ignored the girls who snickered at me, whispering in the

back. I was stopped in the halls, asking if I spent an hour buckling my shoes. I wasn't there long enough to care, changing out of my ten-piece ensemble in the dimly lit school bathrooms into my Dairy Queen uniform.

The day before my 20th birthday, I shaved my head. A guy from high school sent me a message. He asked why I cut off all my hair. I replied, "Because I'm gay, Colby." I was over it. I didn't have the patience to explain why I wore the clothing I do, why I kept my hair short or why I have tattoos and piercings to people who only saw me as deviant. Shaving my head was cathartic, something I always wanted to do but was told I couldn't. My scalp was as free as I felt.

Now, at 21, I acknowledge that I have more to grow in deconstructing my style. While I wore my weird shoes, trinket earrings and 80s sweaters in high school, I wanted to look "flattering." I still do. But I'm here, trying to let go of the obsession of being "snatched" and enhancing my body in the right ways. I'm letting go of the silly pride of punching a hole in a belt, making it smaller than the manufacturer planned. I'm letting go of the rules:

- *Low rise only looks good on models. Your stomach should be flat.*
- *Spandex must be worn with bodycon.*
- *Baggy clothes are homely.*
- *Circle skirts are sooooo not in right now.*
- *Professionals can't have tattoos + piercings.*
- *Body hair is gross.*
- *Every outfit should look like you have the perfect hourglass figure.*
- *You always have to look "good."*

These systemic ideals of what I "should" look like were holding back my self-expression.

## WITH THE NAP

I turned to the internet to see if others felt the same way and fell in love with dopamine dressing, a term for rejecting fashion norms and focusing on what brings you joy. This was what I was looking for. I talked to a fashion



influencer I have been following along their journey, wanting to know how they came to where they are today.

Kelley Heller (she/they) is a style influencer on Instagram and TikTok, known for their clown core and "Southern Hell" styled looks. Through an online correspondence, Kelley delved into her style journey. "I think my [style] motivation is just the word joy. I have a really strong visceral reaction to stuff I like," Kelley said. "When I see a pattern or a textile or shape that I enjoy, it immediately jumps out to me. I want to be wearing it [or] experiencing it in some way."

Looking through Heller's online catalog of garments, you can quickly see how true this statement is. Kelley has a collection of to-die-for vintage garments, each one sparking a dopamine rush in any fashion lover's heart. From intricate lace details to perfectly aged quilted jackets, their wardrobe is intensely joyful. "I am an actor, and so every dress is its own character and its own personality. When I get to put it on, I get to become a slightly different or more exaggerated version of myself" Heller stated.

Lana Saint Clair (she/her), a TikTok fashion girly, brings her audience along her journey of finding joy in fashion. Lana became popular for her series on recovering from a shopping addiction and hyperconsumption. Her videos show her going through her wardrobe and only keeping things that she will wear and she's excited to own. Through this, Lana says that emotions play a part in her style inspiration.

"My inspiration has a lot to do with where I am and how I'm feeling," she said. "I tend to dress in a way that compliments the scene—maybe an artsy maxi dress for a museum, a plaid skirt for a bookstore, a beret for a cafe—it's a little hokey, I know, but I think it's fun! At the end of the day, I want to feel good in my clothes."

Being able to identify what clothing makes you feel good versus what makes you look good to others is tricky.

On her journey, Lana states, "Finding your personal style is a bit like digging up a skeleton. It's retrieved piece by piece and becomes more cohesive with time. I haven't found my personal style yet, but every time I try a new combination using items I already own, I can tell that my taste for fashion is developing into something I'm able to identify more and more."

After the first two interviews, I met up with a friend and fellow designer, Jess Kittle (she/they). With a million and one thoughts roaming around my head, hearing how Jess views clothing perfectly encapsulated how I was feeling. "I look at articles of clothes as individual pieces, as individual purveyors of joy," she said. "I collect pieces that bring joy and confidence."

Jess' favorite pair of jeans makes them feel on top of the world, like everyone "needs







to lower their voice when they speak to her.” This is how garments should feel. Why would I wear something that makes me feel miserable, when I could roll up my sleeves and dig for a joyous wardrobe?

## ON THE BIAS

Writing this piece has been very cathartic. I looked around at my peers in this highly creative space and wanted to highlight their style and my own. Seeing everyone bring something different to the table was so inspiring. When talking to my models, I thought it was important to mention how hard it is to be experimental.

I have the privilege of being white, skinny and mostly femme presenting. The idea of the “mythical norm,” of fitting inside this box holds back our creativity. I can fit inside the box. I can easily fold myself up and slide under the radar. My peers may have a harder time.

Personal style means something radically different from one person to another. It can be a journey of letting go of expectations, of reclaiming what it means to be flattering, and it can be a reason you smile in the mirror—**because you look damn good in those jeans.** SL









*Story + Photography  
by Jady Graves*

# Monster Use

## SHHH! DO YOU HEAR IT?

*That shy creak of a door,  
the stir of something,  
someone. Whispers of a  
familiar voice dancing  
along tattered walls,  
etching words and phrases  
onto pages of a notebook.*

## CAN YOU FEEL IT?

*The peculiar aura  
emanates from the large  
manor. There she sits  
beside the wondrous ninth  
and the romantic seven.  
The eighth house slowly  
opens its door, anticipating  
your arrival.*

## WILL YOU ENTER?

## A FATEFUL KNOCK

**A**strology is fun, right? Learning more about your personality, getting insight into why you click with certain people and even romantic compatibility. However, once you get deeper into the study of astrology, uncomfortable parts of our life begin to surface.

With the rise of astrology, many people have delved deep into the different houses within the zodiac. Each house has specific signs, planets and themes that it rules. The eighth house is one that many beginner astrologers are not too keen on. This house ruled by Mars and Pluto, is associated with taboo, power and transformation, so the initial fear is understandable. Furthermore, the zodiac Scorpio, a sign that has developed a reputation in the community for being very “toxic” and “secretive,” rules the eighth house. When asked about words they associate with the eighth house, many use words such as death, intensity and rebirth. In short, the eighth house doesn’t have too much allure going for it. Don’t be fooled though, there is a silver lining; to get there you’ll first need to take an intimate look within yourself.

How does one know when the eighth house begins to take form? We’ve all had the week or month where it feels like the world is crashing in on us and we’ve been suffering repeatedly through the same problems. “Blame the stars,” some say. “It’s shark week” or the recently adopted “Mercury must be in retrograde!” Yet, The eighth house challenges us to examine if there are any patterns to these exhaustive cycles. Why do I keep attracting people with a certain toxicity to them? Why do my relationships always feel out of control? It’s time to say hello to your first karmic cycle. Karmic relationships are interactions with

people. There is an intense feeling that you are supposed to be together. Don’t be fooled though. Usually, these relationships become unpleasant. However, the magnetism in the beginning stages makes it easy to succumb to the pull. The aspects of these relationships can also seep into other parts of your life, such as familial or financial issues. The eighth house’s job is to point out the cyclical nature of these interactions and give us pause. Think. Take a step back and examine what inner desires or events from our past led to such a strong attraction to these people and/or acts.

### IT’S TIME TO DIG UP YOUR PAST!

Confronting how past experiences affect us in the present and our choices can be frightening. People often don’t like thinking about their past selves. It feels easier to stay in the present or reach for the future. However, our past “shadow” selves have the potential to be very insightful and prevent future usage of destructive coping mechanisms.

I spoke with sisters (and twins!) Vivienne and Cheyenne Lea, concerning their relationship with the darker parts of life. They spoke about how they feel more comfortable than average people with the darker aspects of life. The two theorized that it’s because their eighth house sits on the planet of Jupiter under the sign Leo. Jupiter is associated with faith, and Leo with confidence. Therefore, the two share an “it is what it is” approach to life. Cheyenne shared an experience where this approach led to a positive outcome: “[A] mutual of mine got wasted and needed help putting on a menstrual pad— I was the only one who could do the job. It was gross but it didn’t bother me.”

In terms of more taboo and existential aspects of life, Vivienne and Cheyenne enjoy discussing different philosophies with each other and, in turn, find comfort in the meaninglessness of life. This

isn't to say the two don't experience feelings of discomfort. Vivienne shared how growing up with a mom struggling with body and facial dysmorphia caused her to feel out of place as a POC in a predominately white school. She states, "I used to genuinely believe that I was one of the ugliest people ever, and I absolutely detested being in photos—I recoiled looking at myself in photos."

When talking about her relationship with her past self, Cheyenne said she felt anxious and resentful. She expanded on this by quoting, "I didn't grow up with the best role models for self-esteem, and as a result I didn't really learn how to like myself, muchless love. I didn't feel like I belonged in my own skin, or anywhere for that matter. I often found myself hating everything that set me apart from others and wanting to conform to those around me." When past feelings like these arise, they can be difficult to process, leading many to search for healthy coping mechanisms.

## TENDING TO YOUR SHADOW

Once people acknowledge the toxic patterns within their lives, it becomes a question of how they work towards breaking the cycle. A practice that has made its way into the mainstream is shadow work. Origins of shadow work originated from Hoodoo, a set of practices created by African Americans to preserve their ancestry. Those outside of this practice might associate the term shadow work with the philosopher Carl Jung and his theory on the repressed parts of our psyche.

There are many methods of how people approach healing their "shadow" self, but the most widely used form is journaling. People generally utilize prompts about their past to start and gradually begin to let their subconscious thoughts flow onto the page. It's recommended to find a quiet spot that feels safe to process repressed feelings alone in. Below is a list of starter prompts to utilize, but please remember to be open, honest and kind to yourself always.

WHO AM I AFRAID IS GOING TO  
LEAVE ME IF I START LIVING THE  
WAY I DEEPLY WANT?

WHAT WAS I LIKE AS A CHILD?  
WHAT ASPECTS OF CHILDHOOD DO  
I FEEL LIKE I LOST TOUCH WITH?

WHAT IS AN EMOTION I TRY  
TO AVOID FEELING AND WHY?

WHAT IS THE WORST TRAIT  
ABOUT YOURSELF AND WHY IS  
IT SO BAD?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FORGIVE THE  
PEOPLE WHO HURT YOU? WHAT DOES  
THAT LOOK LIKE?

As someone with an eighth house stellium—3 or more planets falling in my eighth house— shadow work plays a large role in my private life. Venus is the planet that governs romance, ruled by Libra and Taurus; therefore, since my Venus is in Taurus and falls in my eighth house, I struggle with intense, intimate relationships. In my first relationship, we were both addicted to each other. There was an allure I hadn't felt with anyone I'd ever been with. I viewed our relationship with rose-colored glasses even after the breakup. When I finally decided to go no contact, I began utilizing shadow work to voice grievances toward him or conversations I regret not having when we were together. It was hard at first, admitting to myself that our relationship wasn't perfect and that a lot of hurt came from it, but after, it felt like a fog was lifted. Since I'm a visual person I also used different mediums, like painting when I didn't have the words to describe my feeling in the moment. After working through the good and bad parts of the relationship, I felt content in letting him go. I did an unbinding spell to break the emotional ties we both were holding onto.

I spoke with Hannah Vannover, whose eighth house falls in the fiery sign of Aries, and she touched on how this placement can make her desire control a lot in life. She describes her personality as passionate but sometimes quick

to anger, making it hard to let up. This behavior is common for those with Aries in the 8th house because they're prone to be assertive in matters of money and relationships. Since they crave emotional authenticity it's easy for them to struggle with vulnerability by guarding their emotions. However, once embraced, vulnerability is a powerful tool for growth in this placement. Hannah talked about problems surrounding relationships stating, "It's important to be aware of what's not suitable for you anymore. Even if you're still wanting to make things work...and learning how to walk away from that even when there's still a lot of love in the relationship." Working through past experiences, she utilizes journaling, saying her journal is where she is the most honest, something she finds difficult in her day-to-day life. She also loves to do tarot readings for herself because it's very grounding and provides guidance. When asked what she would tell her past self Hannah has this message:

**“ LEARN THE WORD TEMPERANCE  
WHEN YOU ARE YOUNGER. IT  
MEANS, IN TAROT, TO FIND YOUR  
CENTER AND OPERATE FROM THAT.  
I FEEL LIKE THROUGHOUT MY LIFE  
I'VE NEVER REALLY BEEN ABLE  
TO EXPERIENCE THAT PEACE OF  
KNOWING THAT CENTER...SO I AM  
WORKING ON THAT. ”**



## A VEIL IS LIFTED

The eighth house is one of many paths for different people, ranging from navigating self-image to addictive relationships. Once the cycle begins, it can feel like it will never end, but once you have the tools to meet your past halfway, it can become a fruitful experience. Creating that thread to your past can lead to a deeper connection and overall awareness of yourself. We as humans are always learning and growing, but the eighth house urges us to be comfortable with the fact that as the seasons change, so do we.

THUS, ONCE AGAIN, THE EIGHTH HOUSE  
CLOSES HER DOORS AND THE SANDS OF  
TIME WHIRL. THE HOUSE IS FOREVER  
CHANGING THROUGH THE SEASONS. YET,  
THE CORE REMAINS THE SAME. YARDS OF  
SATIN FLOW NOW, WRAPPING YOU IN A  
WARM EMBRACE, LEADING YOU BACK TO  
HER, BACK TO YOU. SL



# Barbie, Not Baby

*Story by Madison Marlow*

*Photography by Mollie Davidson*







In the realm of childhood toys, few names have held as strong a presence as Barbie. She is not just a doll, but a cultural icon, a symbol of creativity and a companion held true through generations of play. Before Barbie's emergence, children's toys primarily revolved around baby dolls—symbols of motherhood and caregiving. The introduction of Barbie completely changed the game and the meaning of play for little girls everywhere.

Before Barbie entered the scene in the late 1950s, the world of toys for young girls revolved primarily around one figure: the baby doll. These dolls, made from fabric and porcelain, were designed to simulate the care of a child. The narrative was centered on nurturing and caregiving, encouraging girls to embrace the roles of mothers and homemakers from an early age. These dolls were dressed in frilly outfits and swaddled in blankets, leaving playtime to change diapers, feed and coo words of comfort to these “babies.”

While playing with baby dolls had some merits, it was a world categorized by its limitations on

imaginative play. These constraints reinforced the rigid gender stereotypes and societal expectations of the time. Girls were encouraged to prepare for future roles as mothers with no room for the possibility of more. These dolls marked only the beginning of a more expansive and imaginative journey that would soon be ushered in by the arrival of Barbie. Her entrance would manifest a significant shift in how children played, inspiring them to dream, explore and embrace a world of endless possibilities.

The seismic shift came in 1959 with the grand entrance of a remarkable and stylish new doll: Barbie. Conceived by the visionary Ruth Handler, Barbie was not just another toy. She was a groundbreaking concept that would forever alter the landscape. Handler, co-founder of Mattel Inc., envisioned a doll that transcended the confines of traditional play. Inspired by her daughter's imaginative play with paper dolls, Ruth recognized an untapped market. She saw an opportunity to create a three-dimensional doll, embodying a world without limits to dreams and aspirations.





Barbie debuted at the American International Toy Fair in New York City. While she wasn't received well by the people then, her appearance marked a departure from tradition and a movement toward the future. Barbie was introduced as a teenage fashion model with a keen sense of style and sophistication, yet to be seen in the children's toy market. She was different and here to change it all. She wasn't confined to a single role or identity. Barbie was a canvas for children's imagination. She could be a fashionista, an astronaut, a doctor or even a pilot. "You can be anything you want to be." This message resonated deeply with children, instilling in their young, hopeful minds the belief that their dreams and ambitions were limitless, the possibilities endless.

### **More Than Just a Doll**

What sets Barbie apart from other dolls is her incredible versatility. She isn't just a doll, but a chameleon capable of adapting to any role, career or fantasy. This has been a stylish factor in her timeless appeal, capturing hearts and minds for generations. Made possible with a wardrobe built from dreams, her closet includes

everything from evening gowns fit for royalty to running shorts and sneakers. With many ensembles within reach, Barbie can transform into a model, a stylist and even a designer, allowing children to experiment and find their personal style alongside Barbie.

### **Changing Times**

Like any cultural icon, Barbie has undergone a fascinating evolution over the decades. She's not the same doll she was in 1959, a testament to her enduring relevance and adaptability. She has the ability to reflect the cultural, societal and fashion shifts of the times. From her early days as a teen fashion model, Barbie has transformed to change as the world changes around her.

In recent years, Barbie has embraced the importance of diversity and inclusivity. Recognizing the need for representation, she has been redesigned to include dolls of various ethnicities, body types and abilities. This inclusive approach ensures that children from all backgrounds can see themselves in their beloved companions. Having witnessed the impact of representation, Bradley Justice



Yarbrough, Barbie expert and collector, stated, “It was an affirmation of how representation is important. It helps with understanding and it can create a conversation that reinforces that even though we may differ, we are still beautiful”.

Barbie has not been immune to criticism over the years, particularly regarding her proportions. Critics argued that her original measurements were unrealistic and could impact body image ideals. Though it did take a few decades, Barbie underwent a significant transformation. The move to add dolls with varying body types, including curvy and petite, was progress towards promoting body positivity.

Her body wasn't the only change; her career choices have expanded. She has ventured into traditionally male-dominated fields, breaking gender stereotypes and inspiring girls to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

Barbie's evolution reflects the changing times and is an inspiration for future generations. She continues to evolve, adapt, and empower, reminding people that even icons can grow and change with the world around them.

## **Barbie and Us**

For those who grew up with Barbie, she wasn't just a toy. She was a lasting companion, a source of inspiration and a partner in adventures. Her connection transcends the realm of playthings and holds a special place in the memories and hearts of countless individuals. When asked what comes to mind, Yarbrough states, “Fun. It brings back all the excitement of my youth and the anticipation of holidays, playtime and friendships.”

From tea parties to grand adventures, Barbie was there. She was a fearless leader of make-believe excursions, the star of bedtime stories and a friend who brought people together. Asked how Barbie made him feel, Yarbrough, a member of a vast community of Barbie collectors and lovers, shared, “It is such fulfillment. I found my tribe early and it is simply amazing, you know. I am part of such a fabulous community.” Through Barbie, people of all ages are able to explore a world of possibilities where they can be anything they imagined.

Her versatility empowered many children to imagine a dream without limits. Whether they envisioned her as an astronaut exploring the cosmos or a daring explorer, Barbie encouraged them to reach for the stars and chase our dreams. She instilled the idea that they could be anything they wanted while still being stylish.

However, it's essential to acknowledge that she has faced criticism. Her unrealistic slender figure and fashionable attire have led to conversations about unrealistic beauty standards. While recognizing these critiques, it's also essential to celebrate the connection shared with Barbie and the positive influences she's had on countless lives. The conversation surrounding Barbie's role in a child's upbringing encourages a balanced perspective, acknowledging her strengths and flaws.

Barbie's connection with people is a testament to her enduring legacy. She was more than a doll; she was and still is a source of empowerment, creativity and imagination. The shared history with Barbie is a reminder of the lasting connection between a simple toy and the dreams it has inspired through generations. She remains a cherished childhood memory. A muse for imaginations, and a symbol of the power that play can have on children, no matter their story or background.

### **A Lasting Legacy**

Looking back on over seven decades of Barbie's presence, it becomes evident that her impact goes far beyond being a popular toy. Barbie has left an indelible legacy that continues to influence how children play and the messages they carry into adulthood.

Barbie's most significant impact is her role in empowering generations of children to dream and imagine without boundaries. Through her vast array of careers and versatile roles, Barbie

has consistently conveyed the message that there are no limits to dreams. She's been an astronaut, a doctor, a pilot and a CEO, serving as a reminder for all that anyone can aspire to be whatever they choose. Barbie has evolved to reflect these values in a world that is finding the importance of diversity and inclusivity. Her representation now spans various ethnicities, body types and abilities, fostering a sense of belonging and representation for children from all backgrounds. Barbie has contributed to a broader conversation about self-acceptance and self-worth by expanding the definition of beauty and challenging traditional beauty standards.

Barbie's lasting legacy is a testament to her enduring influence on play and childhood development. She's not just a doll. She's a symbol of imagination and creativity. Barbie inspires people to dream big, break boundaries and embrace the beauty of individuality. Her legacy serves as a reminder that even a simple toy can profoundly impact generations, shaping how people view themselves and the world around them. **SL**



# Barbie

**Available  
wherever toys  
are sold.**

**MAGIC AND  
LIMITLESS  
POSSIBILITIES  
INCLUDED!**

I M I g h t

K I L L

M Y

E X

Story by Jordan Davis

Photography by Emilee Frasier



*A blissful whistle  
Left for dead, soon she will  
awake  
Her calling is to kill*



*A jaded lover  
Adorned with the Tuscan Sun  
She arises at dawn*





*Blood splatters white snow  
A fatal battle between former lovers  
Hatred breeds longing*

*A lover betrayed  
She wants him to die  
But she looked him in the eyes*



*Grief cloaks the guilty  
The black widow cries at night  
Prayers to revive a life*





*Love, the first phase to hate  
Hate is the last phase to love  
A monster you've become SL*

I Am the  
Eagle...



Story by Daniela Saenz-Quintana  
Photography by Zoe London

Everything my parents have ever done is filled with love and hope. Every morning, before school, my mom braided hope into my long brown hair, she slicked it back and never left a hair out of place. My dad loaded me into the brown '85 Chevy and took me to school playing "Don Cheto" on the radio. I sat in the single seat, surrounded by every tool imaginable—a representation of his hardwork and dedication. Though I didn't realize it at the time, those mornings filled me with great responsibility. It was their job to take care of our family. It was my job to:

- Go to school*
- Be a good girl*
- Learn a lot*
- Get good grades*
- Go to college*
- Get a good job*
- Make my parent's sacrifices worth it*

Their actions instilled in me that intentional sacrifices would never go without reward. I was the fruit of their sacrifices. They walked so that I could fly. I was the eagle who flew out of the desert that my father quite literally crossed.

I consider hope to be one of the most beautiful things to exist in this world. Without hope, life is meaningless. Don't we all live for the hope of it all? At least that's what I've been taught. I live for the hope my family instills in me knowing that hope without sacrifice is just delusion. I've lived my entire life watching my community sacrifice everything, from their mental health to their safety, for the hope of a better life. Maybe it's a Latino thing or a Mexican thing. Maybe it's just an immigrant thing? I don't know.

I can't speak for all of us. What I do know is that the road I walk so easily was built by the pain, the joy,

the tears and the sacrifices of my ancestors. I'm hyper-aware that the privileges I enjoy cannot be solely attributed to me. The credit goes to the houses my mother has cleaned and my father has built. The credit goes to the dishes my grandfather has washed and the flowers he has planted. The credit goes to all the Latinos\* carving out a place at the table for me to sit. Being hyper-aware of all those sacrifices makes me wonder how much of it I truly deserve.

There is an unexplainable pressure I feel to prove that my family's sacrifices are worth it. That pressure definitely hasn't come from my parents, they cheer me on for everything I do. My parents validate my feelings and see the challenges I face as their own. They never throw their sacrifices in my face. Instead, they share their stories to remind me that I have incredible strength coursing through my blood. The pressure comes from my own heart. I know that I cannot afford to fail.

Many Latinos\* born and raised in the United States express similar sentiments. Aleidys Oliva-Olmos, an Early-Childhood Education student at Johnson County Community College,

is the daughter of Mexican immigrants. When asked about her relationship with pressure, Aleidys says, "I come from a family that didn't finish school in general. I feel the pressure of having to get this done. I have to make something out of my life. My family is very



hardworking so I feel like I need to be as hard of a worker as them because they set that good example for me.”

Carrying pressure like that can feel like carrying the weight of the world. So many of us have learned to carry that weight with honor because our options are to thrive and succeed or be crushed by the world.

As a community, we are resourceful. We have learned to make do with the cards we are dealt. I am lucky because, in my hand of cards, I hold those nine magical numbers printed in black ink that make everything possible. Having a social security number allows me to do things such as legally hold jobs, get a driver’s license, receive scholarships, qualify for medical insurance and travel. It removes the fear of knowing I could leave my house one day and never come back. The only reason I have these privileges is because I was born on American soil. It’s unfair. If I had been born 900 miles south, my life would have been very different. There are people who arrived in the United States more than 20 years ago not yet able to become “legal” American citizens. I also know people who arrived in the United States at nine months old. This is the only country they’ve known as home, yet it refuses to claim them. Dania Romero-Arellano is a paralegal in the United States who was a childhood arrival from Mexico, she has experienced first-hand what it is like to fear that your life will change in a matter of seconds. Dania shares the fear she faced when she was pulled over for the first time, something that the average American would view as an unfortunate occurrence, not a life-altering mistake:

“The first time I was pulled over and got a traffic ticket, I was in high school and was still undocumented. I thought my life was over because of this one ticket, which was just a simple one, but I felt so scared because I had done something to showcase my name and information to the police. Compared to someone who has documentation, that ticket is nothing. To me, it was major, and I was fearful for weeks.”

For most high schoolers, the worst part about getting a ticket is breaking the news to disappointed parents. Dania feared that her life would fall apart.

This fear is shared by so many undocumented people in the United States and their families since one person “revealing their secret” could hurt the whole family. Many Latino\* families are mixed-status families. This means that the children will be American citizens and their parents are undocumented, or that some of the children will be undocumented while their siblings hold citizenship status. Being in a mixed-status family means living in constant fear of your family being torn apart.

I’ll never forget being in elementary school and coming home one day to find out that my father had been detained at work. I remember the years of lawyer visits, my family praying every single night to be allowed to stay in our home. I remember being in second grade, preparing to testify in court. I remember the outfit I wore, a pink shirt and matching skirt with a black bolero tied in the front.

*How could the prosecutor look at an eight-year-old girl, dressed head-to-toe in pink, and tell her she was going to be forced out of the only home she’s known?*

The prosecutor couldn’t.

My family won the lottery. We were one of the lucky ones. My parents were granted permanent residency and became American citizens ten years later. So many families aren’t as lucky. How many Latino\* kids born in the United States count the days until their 21st birthday? Not to drink, not to buy cigarettes, not any other reason the average young adult is excited for. They count down to the day when they can sponsor their families for a green card, granting them the mental peace and safety you’ve always known they deserved.

Knowing that you hold so many advantages over so many members of your community can cause debilitating pressure and guilt. Why should you face any struggles if you have everything at your fingertips? When you grow up hearing stories of people walking through deserts and being pulled out of school in second grade, none of your ordinary problems seem to compare.

You should be easily able to find a job. You have a social and you speak English. Your parents didn’t have a social or speak English and managed to find a job and provide for their family. Why should you

struggle in school? You qualify for scholarships and have a K-12 education.

Being aware that the world was different for everyone at such a young age made me mature quickly. I was the perfect student, “a pleasure to have in class.” I looked forward to the parent-teacher conferences because nothing feels better than watching your parents swell with pride at your perfect grades and outstanding student awards. I was the perfect little Mexican daughter. I’ve always worn my Mexican-ness like a badge of honor. I never wished I was white. I was never embarrassed to speak Spanish. For years I believed that I was one of the few Latino\* children that escaped the American school system unscathed from internalized self-hate. I thought I was much too mature for that, but if I really felt no shame in my culture, why did I stop letting my mom braid my hair? If I was truly never embarrassed of my Mexican features then I wouldn’t have stopped wearing shorts and skirts until the age of fifteen when that girl in my fourth-grade class laughed at my hairy Mexican legs. If I wasn’t even just a little bit embarrassed of our traditions why did I pretend I hated Mexican music for so many years, even though the sound of the accordion has always made my body move with joy.

I can’t pretend I was too mature to fall into the woes of adolescence that make you want to crawl into your skin the second someone points out a difference in you. I genuinely didn’t understand that those insecurities we are taught manifest differently for everyone. I didn’t attend primarily white schools. There were children in my classes who looked like me and children whose culture was very different from mine. I understood that being different was okay, to a certain extent. Older generations of Latinos\* raised in the United States spoke of being punished for speaking Spanish or of people calling them by a different name to sound more American. I believed that we were past that and this was an action of an older generation. Call it hopeful or naive, but the environment I was raised in formed that understanding of the world. When I arrived at college and met Latino\* students who had grown up in an environment where they were one of

the few People of Color in their class, I realized that several insecurities I considered to be a thing of the past were still very much alive in my peers. It took me understanding that the diaspora was much more complex than I could ever imagine to understand how we all internalized our experiences differently.

As for myself, I grew out of some of the insecurities I developed in primary school and grew into publicly embracing my culture much more. I credit that to Mexican and Latino\* friends I made in high school. We clung to each other, attending soccer games and Quinceañeras every weekend. We shared our Hot Cheetos and introduced each other to artists like T3R Elemento and Bad Bunny. We unapologetically embraced our culture and shared it with our non-Latino\* friends, whom we convinced to buy cowboy boots and taught how to dance bachata.



Our loud Spanglish and strict parents bonded us. These relationships made me realize how important community really was.

Social media also played an important role in how I developed my relationship with my culture. This was the era of Latina Beauty Gurus on YouTube. These beautiful women taught me how to perfectly apply my giant fake lashes but they also served as older sister figures for me. They were fluent in Spanglish and made references I understood.

It was much easier to aspire to be a “Latina Baddie” than to aspire to be Emma Chamberlain. While some of them played into harmful stereotypes and perpetuated unrealistic beauty standards, I was taking representation where I could find it. I’m grateful to have found that side of the internet when I did. These videos allowed me to explore my femininity in relation to my culture, teaching me the confidence I needed to overcome some insecurities I had carried since childhood.

I outgrew my child-like insecurities, but I wasn’t home safe. As I aged, I found those insecurities had transformed and manifested as guilt. I wince each time Spanish doesn’t sit in my mouth like it used to. I wonder if I am forgetting my culture. I question if I will be able to teach my children Spanish, or if the traditions that have run in my family for centuries will get lost with me. My head spins with questions about my past, present and future. I am presented with opportunities my parents and I have dreamed of my whole life, and I wonder why I deserve it. My mother has a soul that calls her to help people. She

is creative and dedicates her free time to others. She won Volunteer of the Year at Children’s Mercy Hospital for her selflessness. My father can make anything you show him. He built everything in our home, from the furniture in my bedroom to our beautiful kitchen. Without formal training, he has learned everything from observing others. My parents have accomplished so much with the morsels life has given them. I imagine what more they could have done if they had the opportunities

and support I do. What has made me worthy of the privilege I possess?

I’m aware of the blessings that come from the love and hope my family has dedicated to me. I know that my parents made their sacrifices. It is now my turn to make my own. I moved two hours away, to a town where I knew nobody. I had an internal battle, I knew I needed to do it but a voice in my head told me I was abandoning the people I love. I know now that I wasn’t abandoning anyone. Instead, I am carrying them with me. I carry all of the love, strength and sacrifice to lead the way for the future of my community.



I wouldn’t trade this responsibility for the world. My heart has the power to love in two languages. I have wings that can fly over any desert. I am a 200 percenter. I love being complex. I love that my playlists consist of Los Tigres Del Norte, Summer Walker, Peso Pluma, Trippie Redd and Bad Bunny. I love that I’ve been covered in gold since I was born. I feel sorry for people who haven’t experienced December in Mexico. I smile with pride when someone can tell I’m from Chihuahua



by the way I pronounce “ocho.” I find it hilarious that I’m oddly proud of Kansas City Barbecue and put more ranch on food than I do salsa. My memories of the summer of 2019 consist of my friends and I going to someone’s cousin’s sister’s neighbor’s Quinceañera every weekend. I love that my community is known for working just as hard as we party.

My experience is unique, but I’m not alone. Hispanics and Latinos\* make up the largest ethnic minority group in the United States. My community understands me. I have the honor of watching my community build generational privilege. I am grateful to have been born into a Mexican family. Navigating the world as the child of immigrants has taught me about hard work, kindness and hope.

I spent my whole life thinking I was split in two, missing something I never had. Homesick for a home that I didn’t know well. Wondering who I would be if I was born somewhere else. I know now that I’ve always been whole. I am the eagle perched on a cactus leading the way to greatness. I am the eagle that represents freedom. I am the eagle who flies in between. **SL**



# ash

*Story + Photography by Elyse Clayton*

**T**he fire blazes. It surrounds me. The heat is almost unbearable. Flames flicker across my skin, but I am not burned.

I could leave. I could walk out of the flames. My heart is beating out of my chest. Every inch of me screams that this isn't right, that I should be burning, crying, melting. But I'm still standing.

Something keeps me in the fire. A deep desire, a curiosity for what comes next. A stirring in my very soul.

It doesn't hurt so bad now. I let out a deep sigh and the flames grow a little stronger, like they're feeding off every little thing I have to give, even the air in my lungs. Closing my eyes, I focus on my breathing, and the fire starts to die.

I stay there, counting my breaths, until my skin grows cold again.

When I open my eyes, everything around me is in ashes. Everything I once held dear, unrecognizable. I feel something vaguely like sadness, but really I'm just full of hope. It's a clean slate. Every impure part of me burnt away.

I can't ignore a flicker of fear, though. I look around at all the wreckage. How could anything grow here?

A light reflects off of something on the ground. Going slowly to not disrupt the ash, I move over to pick it up. It's smudged, but in the glass I can see my reflection. My eyes are somehow brighter than I remember. My entire face has a bit of a glow to it, really. I smile and let the glass fall back to the ground.

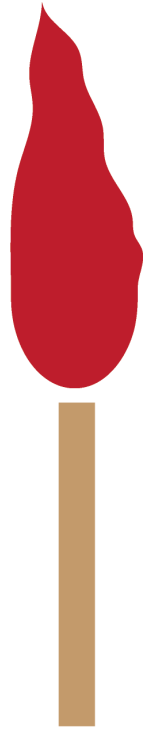
I can grow here. **Sl**



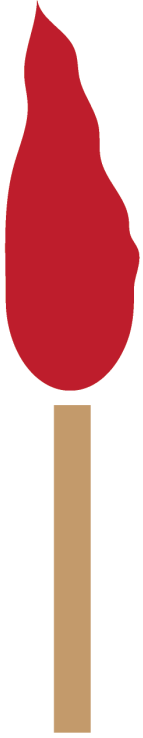


TEAR ME OUT

**WRITE DOWN THINGS YOU  
WANT TO LET GO OF AND  
STRIKE THIS PAGE.**



TEAR ME OUT



# issue credits

## Cover

Photography: Elyse Clayton  
Photo editing: Mollie Davidson  
Models: Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore  
Styling: Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore  
Clothing: Maude Vintage  
Assistant: Kya Nilges

## Color Pages

Illustrations: Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore  
Layout: Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore

## Letter from the Editor + Table of Contents

Copy: Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore  
Layout: Ryann Jenkins-LeFlore

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Editing: Mollie Davidson  
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Layout: Zoe London  
Models: Zoe London  
Styling: Zoe London

## You're On Your Own, Kid

Photography: Mollie Davidson  
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Photography Assistants: Alex Jockisch and Claire Johnson  
Layout: Alex Jockisch  
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## I Spy

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## Monster House

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## Barbie, Not Baby

Photography: Mollie Davidson  
Photo editing: Mollie Davidson  
Layout: Madison Marlow  
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Styling: Emilee Frasier, Clothes provided by Maude Vintage

## I Might Kill My Ex

Photography: Emilee Frasier  
Photo editing: Emilee Frasier  
Layout: Emilee Frasier  
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Styling: Emilee Frasier

## I Am the Eagle

Photography: Zoe London  
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Layout: Daniela Saenz-Quintana  
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Styling: Daniela Saenz-Quintana  
Hair: Brenda V. Saenz and Sylvia "La China" Rodriguez  
Makeup: Fernanda Fregozo Torres  
Outfit: (provided by) Tzintzun Clothing  
Assistant: Madison Marlow

## Ash

Photography: Elyse Clayton  
Layout: Elyse Clayton

Wayfarer

[wey-fair-er]

(n.)

A wanderer, especially one  
who travels on foot.