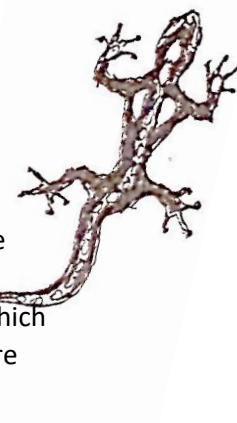
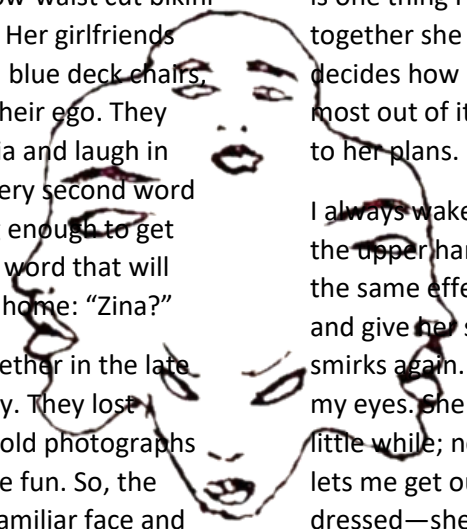




SPUT



She is doing push-ups in the corner of the swimming pool when I walk into the backyard of Georgina's father's building. A long-legged skinny girl with a green bandana in her long wavy brown hair, her 2000's low-waist cut bikini only adds to her careless look. Her girlfriends are sunbathing in long, plastic, blue deck chairs, swimming suits as high up as their ego. They drink their freshly made sangria and laugh in their high-pitched voices at every second word they say. I squint my eyes long enough to get the courage to mouth the one word that will soon become my definition of home: "Zina?"



Our mothers used to work together in the late 80's, early 90's fashion industry. They lost contact at a certain point, but old photographs suggest they knew how to have fun. So, the name Zina was attached to a familiar face and accompanied by good words, but nothing could have ever really prepared me for what comes after she affirms my question mark with a high-push, eyes up, mouth open, "Shanty?"



Zina and I spend our nights awake, because "sleeping is waste of time." We talk about everything and nothing at the same time. I am curious and so is she to know everything about one another. Curiosity has me pull up a bright flashlight in her face to observe her eyes.

There's dark green in there for sure and it's spreading like a spider web into yellows and browns... But she has safe eyes. Perhaps, that's the best way to describe them. They look at me in awe, and I feel them see much more than perhaps I, or anyone else for that matter, do. The flashlight is blinding her, but she does not say one word. I see her slight smirk gradually growing from getting this much attention. That night we come up with a theory. This our sixteenth time hanging out. We have only been out fifteen times, and the sixteenth is undefinable.

I remember her inviting me to her house in Tinos perhaps the third time we went out. Her

eyes glowing in excitement, longing for the plans she had already made for us, since the second time, in her mastermind brain. One thing about this girl is she loves planning, which is one thing I hate doing. So as long as we are together she asks me to lay out my day and decides how it will go down for us to get the most out of it. I sometimes add slight changes to her plans.

I always wake up before her, so that gives me the upper hand. Her sleeping vibrations have the same effect as a cat purr. I stroke her hair and give her soft kisses on her forehead. She smirks again. I am weak. I tell her I love her with my eyes. She says it back. We stay there for a little while; nothing compares to this. She never lets me get out of bed. I never want to. We get dressed—she's wearing my clothes—and head downstairs to Jeepinha, my beloved red Wrangler. She thinks we're going to that meeting I have. I know we have a stop to make first. When I take a right turn at the corner of the street she looks at me indicating that now she knows too. I smirk. We go down to the beach for a half an hour of water-gazing. Not much is said, but our silence means the world to me.



Zina, an only child, grew up in various homes and locations. Her mother travelled to photograph and her father for business. Zina followed them around the world or stayed with family friends and acquaintances. She is special because she absorbed the most out of every person she met along the way. She sees it as relating to everything and nothing at the same time. Rules don't quite apply to her, and if you tell her she's right she will probably contradict you there too. I might be biased, but I think she does it in the most innocent way possible.



She starts talking fast and cutting her sentences short. She questions every little word but also uses words that don't quite mean what she is trying to say. She tries to figure out new ways to



see things, and she is restless. You can debate for hours and at the end of it you're both just looking at each other wondering, "Where did this get us?" It always gets us closer. Closer to something at least.

When she gets confused, bored, lonely or inspired she sketches her thoughts. Anything from an idea to a memory she will draw on any surface available. One moment she's talking, and the next she is searching for her 0.05 pen, because it is "better for details." All of a sudden, she's fading away into this other dimension. She's speaking, but she's not thinking of what she's saying. Sometimes you might even catch her slipping. Her hand, left or right because it doesn't really matter, draws lines as naturally as breathing. As if she's not commanding it, it knows where it's going. Everything belongs. Imperfections are welcome. The odder the better. She sometimes takes a quick look around to see if anything grasps her attention, but she won't stare too long. She doesn't want to copy, just be inspired. Ideas are temporary, so she has to work fast. Her art betrays her inability to stick to one thought. It gives away her state of mind. She urged me to draw with her, but it's hard to concentrate when you are witnessing art being created in front of you.

I don't think she realizes how unique she is to see the world the way she does. Every image is a picture, every sound is music. Every stroke she draws is art, and every move she makes is dance. I have never observed someone so closely, adoring her very existence. Her beauty is contagious, and it makes you want to do more. More for yourself, more for her. More. It's that she cares so much about others that makes her so beautiful to me. That she sees my beauty, that she shows me how special I am with every opportunity she gets. She isn't just beautiful, she makes the space around her beautiful, too. She affects others and brings out

their best selves, and she does it effortlessly. She brings out naked truth.

"Naked." When it comes to nudity, Zina covers her body as little as she covers her thoughts. She has made nudity so comfortable by relating it to nature and not sexuality. That type of confidence is not easy to find and yet she has managed to bring it down to earth. When bodies are just bodies, nudity is natural and that's how she presents it, to build a different type of intimacy. But bodies are not just bodies, and she knows that. She has a passion for figures, both male and female, and what they tell about each person. She observes the anatomy. The movement of each body. She falls in love with it. She talks about it. Studies it. Draws it. Mimics it. She fell in love with mine and I with hers. She allowed me to love the person and not the gender, allowed me to see past skin.

The day a friend left, our drama-loving personalities rushed to the kitchen to grab the neatly folded washing cloths—I taught her how to fold—and then waved at his car while he got lost behind the hills of Tinos. "You make my life a movie," I whispered to her, and I felt tears formulating in my eyes. Knowing how dedicated she is in pretending to hate crying, I started running the opposite way the Subaru Forester had driven. It didn't take her a second to follow me. I ran down the hill and tripped. But when I looked back, she was rolling down with me.

