

“Vegas Is His Bed” by Amber Edens '26

after Natalie Diaz's "Manhattan is a Lenape Word"

It is October and the separation is suffocating.

The extravagantly lit displays of the casinos
on the strip illuminate the awed masses,
but in a circle of light there
is only my hand in his. In that moment,
we are brighter than America's own city of lights.

Inside the Venetian we visit
Venice, Italy. Under a bright-blue fake sky
and string lights, we pretend to be
tourists. We take a photo in front of
the imitation canal; my smile says: *Please God
let this last.*

I am not naïve enough to think
that love lasts forever, that four days
in Vegas with a boy who was supposed to be
a summer fling equates to any measure of
forever. There is no such thing as forever.

But Vegas is not the Strip nor the
pumpkin cronut I said I could marry
nor the giant sunflowers that stand guard
in the Bellagio casino. Vegas is his bed in his tiny
apartment-like dorm where there is no such thing as distance.

Where does love go when it has
nowhere to go? Here, mere inches of
space between us, there is the gravitational
pull of two hearts in conversation. What happens
when once again we are three thousand miles apart?

What is distance but an endless darkness
created by insecurity and overthought, unable to be
smoothed over by vague attempts at reassurance?
In the thousands of lights attached to casinos who are
all trying to outdo one another, we see it spelled out clearly
on each other's faces: *I want you, but I don't want the pain.*

Three thousand miles away I am pulled
violently from a dream where it was
easy to pretend that in his bed time slowed
down, became thick and syrupy sweet.

He says, *I wish I could be with you
forever.* I ask, *Why can't you?* and suddenly

the fantasy dissipates—nothing invokes
reality quicker than a stupid question. The dream
becomes a casino, trapping me in
acid smoke and blinding light.

Bellagio, Venetian, Caesar's Palace,
New York New York, the Strat: this is
his life, casinos and business, and every
single light on the strip burns for him the way
that I do. But I am not a light; I am the darkness
created by distance.

Was Vegas real, I wonder? The safety net
created by his arms around me do not
exist here in this little town, where the cold seeps through my
jacket and shirtsleeves and into my bones.
Soon it will snow, and the snow will snuff out
all the light.