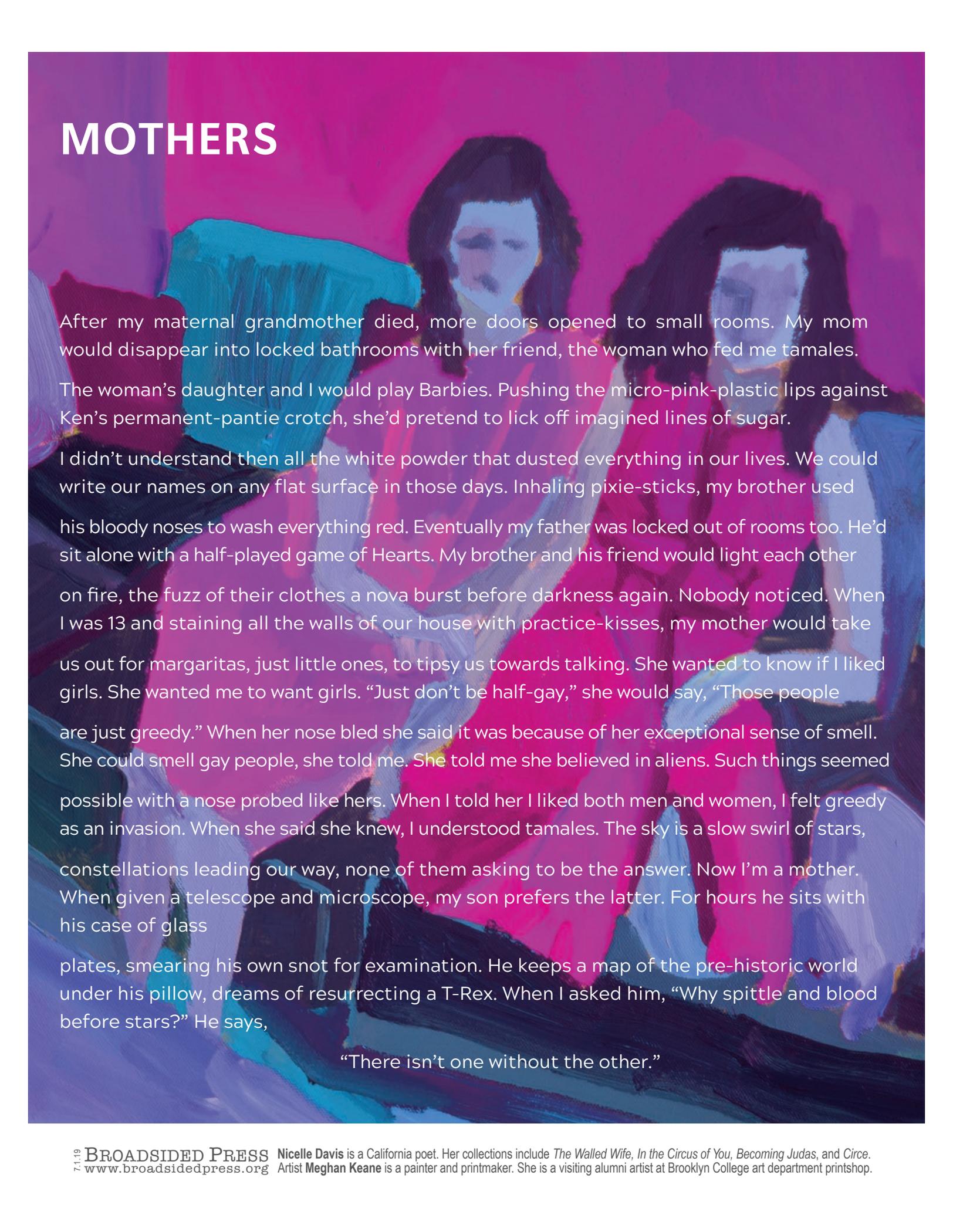


MOTHERS



After my maternal grandmother died, more doors opened to small rooms. My mom would disappear into locked bathrooms with her friend, the woman who fed me tamales. The woman's daughter and I would play Barbies. Pushing the micro-pink-plastic lips against Ken's permanent-pantie crotch, she'd pretend to lick off imagined lines of sugar. I didn't understand then all the white powder that dusted everything in our lives. We could write our names on any flat surface in those days. Inhaling pixie-sticks, my brother used his bloody noses to wash everything red. Eventually my father was locked out of rooms too. He'd sit alone with a half-played game of Hearts. My brother and his friend would light each other on fire, the fuzz of their clothes a nova burst before darkness again. Nobody noticed. When I was 13 and staining all the walls of our house with practice-kisses, my mother would take us out for margaritas, just little ones, to tipsy us towards talking. She wanted to know if I liked girls. She wanted me to want girls. "Just don't be half-gay," she would say, "Those people are just greedy." When her nose bled she said it was because of her exceptional sense of smell. She could smell gay people, she told me. She told me she believed in aliens. Such things seemed possible with a nose probed like hers. When I told her I liked both men and women, I felt greedy as an invasion. When she said she knew, I understood tamales. The sky is a slow swirl of stars, constellations leading our way, none of them asking to be the answer. Now I'm a mother. When given a telescope and microscope, my son prefers the latter. For hours he sits with his case of glass plates, smearing his own snot for examination. He keeps a map of the pre-historic world under his pillow, dreams of resurrecting a T-Rex. When I asked him, "Why spittle and blood before stars?" He says,

"There isn't one without the other."