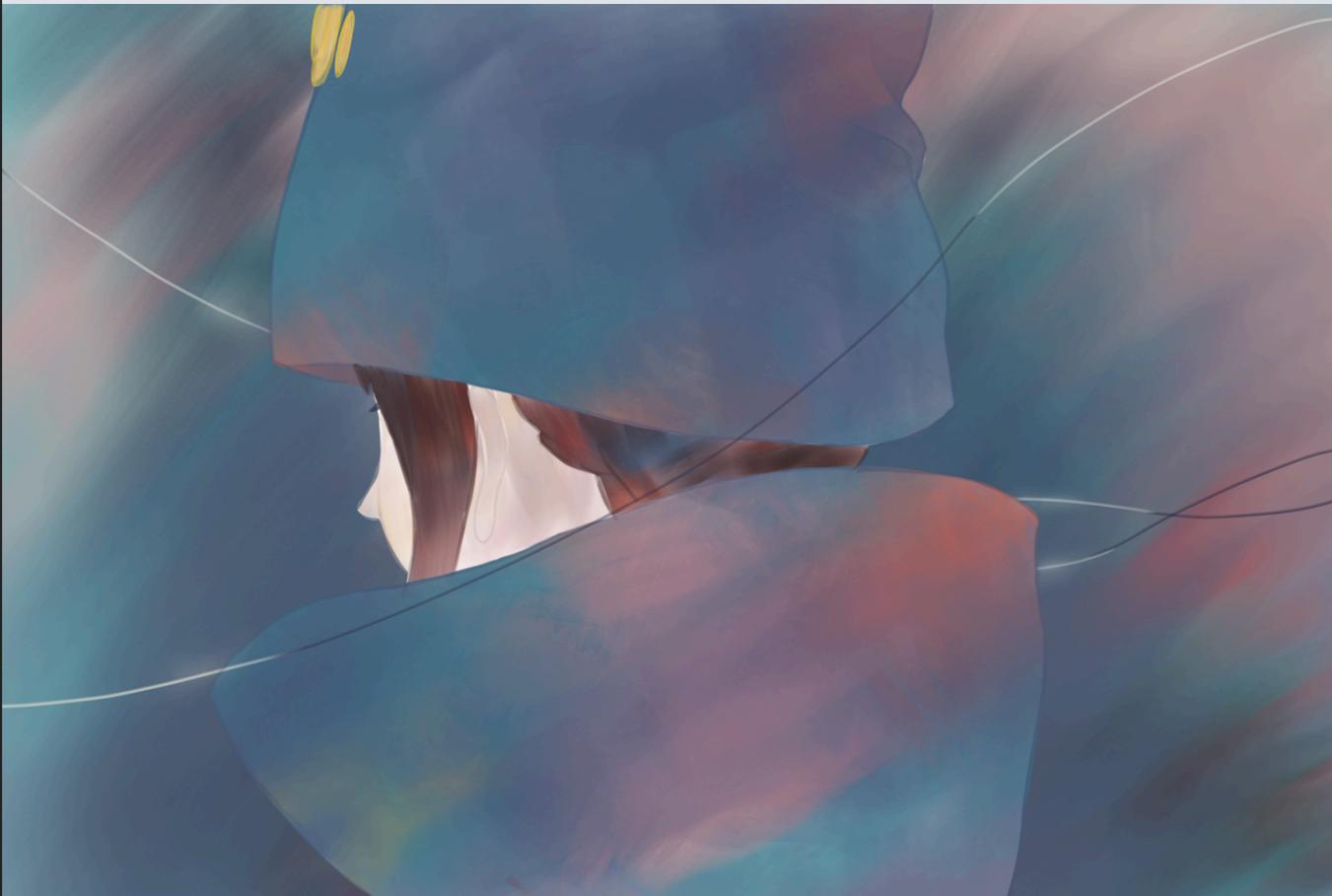




# wildscape.

LITERARY JOURNAL



ISSUE I

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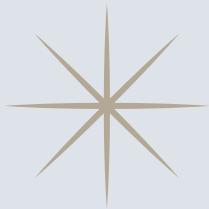
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# editors' note

Dearest Readers,

When we started *wildscape*, we were not sure what to expect. We certainly weren't expecting the outpouring of support and submissions that we received, and even more so, we weren't expecting the love and kindness of hundreds of people we'd never so much as met. We are blown away by you all, and we are grateful for all you have done to help get *wildscape* off the ground. Thank you. From the bottom of our hearts, *thank you*.



We are honored, elated, and proud to present to you the inaugural issue of *wildscape. literary journal*. We have spent countless hours creating this issue (on top of our full time jobs, parenting, and our part-time jobs - yes, we also have part-time jobs). Many sleepless nights, shots of espresso, and passion made this happen, in addition of course to the wonderful contributors of this issue. We are thrilled to showcase so many incredible writers and artists, and we hope you enjoy their work in the deep, unfiltered way in which we do.

With love,  
Ophelia & Oliver



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# Issue 1's Featured Poet:



## Elly Katz

### ABOUT ELLY:

At 27, verging towards a doctorate at Harvard, Elly Katz went for a mundane procedure to stabilize her neck. Somehow, she survived what doctors surmised was unsurvivable: a brainstem stroke secondary to a physician's needle misplacement. In the wake of the tragedy, she discovered the power of dictation and the bounty of metaphor. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in the Stardust Review, the Sacramento Literary Review, the Amsterdam Review, and many others. Her first collection of creative nonfiction, *From Scientist to Stroke Survivor: Life Redacted* is forthcoming from Lived Places Publishing in Disability Studies (2025). Her first collection of poetry, *Instructions for Selling-Off Grief*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books (2025).

next several pages: our interview with Elly & three of her poems

# Interview with Elly

**Ophelia:** What would you like to share about your story?

**Elly:** As an emerging scientist in love with literature, poetry was, from a young age, ingrained in my journal entries and academic writing. Spending time with words became an instinctive balustrade starting at age 10, when my connective tissue disease presented setback after setback that left me bedridden, sometimes for protracted periods of time. Language and quantum physics were spaces of wonder and safety in the midst of pain and uncertainty. I delved into and out of poetry, listening to Rilke, Baldwin and Morrison as I waited out my connective tissue disease's tolls on my body. But, before my brainstem stroke, words never claimed the transfixing and life-affirming space they do now.

**Ophelia:** How did you happen upon poetry?

**Elly:** Poetry happened to me, took me under its wings after I was discharged from the ICU, where the tide of my breath dangled in disequilibrium. I suffered from neck pain secondary to my lax connective tissue, was on my way towards the doctorate in science, and went in on an otherwise ordinary day for a supposedly routine repeat procedure to stabilize my neck. A doctor's needle accidentally made its way into my brainstem and surrounding tissue, resulting in a medullary stroke that erased sensation and awareness of the right half of my body. When I woke from anesthesia, my life as I knew it was gone, as was my right side's connection to my brain. I spent months in the silo of silence and disbelief, dispossessed of everything I took to be true. Without the use of my right arm, I was unsure how to spend time with words, but I began to break down the silence by auditioning the pen in my vocal cords. Beforehand, I didn't realize that poetry is drafted and revised in the ear and that I could delineate the line breaks using my left hand. Poetry is now not only a refuge, but a way to have experiences in a body foreclosed to experiencing the sensorium of the world. Poetry is not simply a mechanism to shift my lens on the world, but acts as a life-support system that compels me to craft something beautiful out of unimaginable loss and disability. It is a way to trouble time, to move between what is and what was, to preserve memory and to push back against the boundary of who I can become in the wake of tragedy. It permits me to take the raw ingredients of sorrow and grief and compose song after song. It is an abiding thread of connection between me and the outside world.

## Interview with Elly, cont'd

**Ophelia:** How has poetry eased your transition into your "new normal"?

**Elly:** I don't believe it is possible to acclimate to these circumstances, so abundant with pain and dependence on my parents now at age 30. But Poetry has taught me how to breathe again, how to feel again in a void a feeling, how to listen to a new music each day. It has also permitted me to grow because of other poets' root systems that compel me to test the limits of what it means to survive. I digest two to three volumes of poetry a day and am particularly taken by Nikky Finney, Jorie Graham, Chris Abani, Ada Limon, Dickinson, Bishop, Adrienne Rich, Dionne Brand, Ross Gay, Arthur Sze and numerous other voices that are havens, arms reaching towards me across the distance. Due to my lack of awareness of my right side and my connective tissue disease, I often awake to several dislocations on this part of my body; but poetry is bird song fluttering in my mind that presses me forward into each new dawn to ready my body to sit in the quiet and wait for words to crawl forth, to watch, without any agenda, what language wants to shape out of day and where it wants to take me.

**Ophelia:** What message/feeling do you hope to convey with these three poems?

**Elly:** If I come to poetry, to the white page, to the great silence, with any goal other than to locate a latch on the ineffable, to weave language around an absence, knowing only that I will fail to capture my experience, the poem is destined to fall on its face. I approach dictation with whatever serving of hope each dawn brings, but nothing more. I believe each of these pieces wades into a different slice of my existence with a distinct cadence and tone. I also believe each is a failure to absorb and to recreate my essence on the page. I love this aspect of poetry because failure begets unremitting trying to get at what I'll never get at. It means there is something new to make out of nothing each day. If a poem was a linguistic key that perfectly fit the totality of my yearning, there would be no need to keep returning to words.

**Ophelia:** What is your goal going forward?

**Elly:** My goal is to continue along the arc of my poetic evolution, to learn the formalities of poetry in the setting of a remote MFA program, which I am starting in 2025, and to continue to mold and remold who I can become in sound. I aim to explore how my voice can reach and speak to a wider audience and to hopefully even offer a measure of consolation to others.

*read ahead for three of Elly's poems*

# Above Your Plain, I'm Ablaze with Pain

ELLY KATZ

It's all still surreal—  
sur the level of reality,  
sur the processing prowess of the tongue.

It's metastatic, self-dissolution a line  
no matter

how often its broken—  
felled on its knees  
in wounds of white—  
can't get at.

Metaphor, simile: smite them most minutes as  
invaders of presence where there's

absolute absence

on its own in the dark.

I'm one with where language gets lost,  
loses its footing,  
loses its feet until it can't walk like me—

the word walk falls into vacuity,  
misplaces its very essence,

here where aphasia unclenches the word  
from the cheek,  
corners me into craters of speechlessness—

my primary residence,  
the kingdom of evacuated sound, sense, sensation  
from spine through my right, vision from center askew though my right field of view,  
the left left behind as viewfinder topples,  
populations lapsing balance over hours, pages, my world

where clarity evades,

mystery pervades, I—  
the person at the center un-selfed  
of me: an effervescent entity,

a stormed oak, a shock of geese smacking

glass  
into never.

How to select the right words in the right order to define erasures  
that delineate where I was, who I was, who I lost, how I got lost,  
whose outlines I seek but can no longer find, the girl I

pressured into a ruby in cell culture hoods—

someone  
slung far away into seas  
of severance, points of departure

never eyed arrival, never glimpsed what was  
only a moment behind me  
what I supposed

Eve in my Eden:  
my entity entire, my entire eternity.

# Conjunctions

ELLY KATZ

How to tease truth between these teeth?  
Does it visit these temples—  
dreamscapes weighed between lips,  
experimental keystrokes,  
evidence of the unexplained?  
I'm idiosyncratic—a body that's no road to follow, not anymore,  
but a halfway home,  
draft upon draft of interrogations, punctuation rescinded,  
bursting into verse.

I'm form scaffolded on contractions and expansions,  
a side-effect of what survives: memory hung on the line  
on a tired mind delivered by brainstem  
subtracted of its stem,  
a dandelion plucked before its bloom.

The strangled petals strangely reach  
their yellow arms out,  
symphonically striding towards sunlight.

I'm no metaphor, though I meter out  
a path to get at what I can yet explore  
outside the shade of science, where I executed tests in test tubes  
outside of poetry.

Now, I'm lugging myself into daybreak,  
heartbreak to write off cliffs of my cataclysm to  
the possible—  
my soul process now, as I destabilize who I was  
to articulate in hundreds of insufficient lines  
who I am.

I am not inert but activated in allies of hammering ordinary letters  
onto ordinary pages that are  
the kindest thoroughfares:  
convents of promise that don't promise  
anything apart  
from deliverance out of disability,  
out of definitions, into what now tastes,  
after my tastebuds' postmortem,  
like freedom's voice—  
clear air washing through the palate  
as a word negotiates up and out.

# Entries in Silence's Diary

ELLY KATZ

My mom's elbow in its third trimester—  
a magenta aerobics ball:  
territory  
between us.

We ventured into the stem cell lab,  
that incongruity  
impregnating our gap,

forestalling pain's hum  
across my sacrum  
as I formulated inferential codes  
in a once mother tongue—

lips smacking logic's cipher  
    where math nodded at letters,  
spitting out remedies

    remembered in blue fugues  
of dictation where I live  
a little life

in dialogue  
with nobody but  
spellcheck against

my non-English—  
words of urgent necessity  
unborn.

She still holds me there,  
in the space

I'm not—  
in the inflated air,  
signing her braille of devotion.

The physical therapist  
troubleshoots me, her face a  
funnel of focus  
like my body's a word she's  
rummaging to translate  
into

what elides  
explanation.  
I'm incomprehensible—  
steps

removed from language's  
piano—with dust  
after rain

pelts  
my window.

I'm across the street from

words, a poet of the periphery  
where home and abroad

don't know their relationship—  
here where time slides

forward by sliding  
backward, where memory

and present twine into  
a gate left

open onto unified fields  
unvanquished,  
where I'm slick  
with grief on the ocean floor,  
this oppressive loss—

the lone

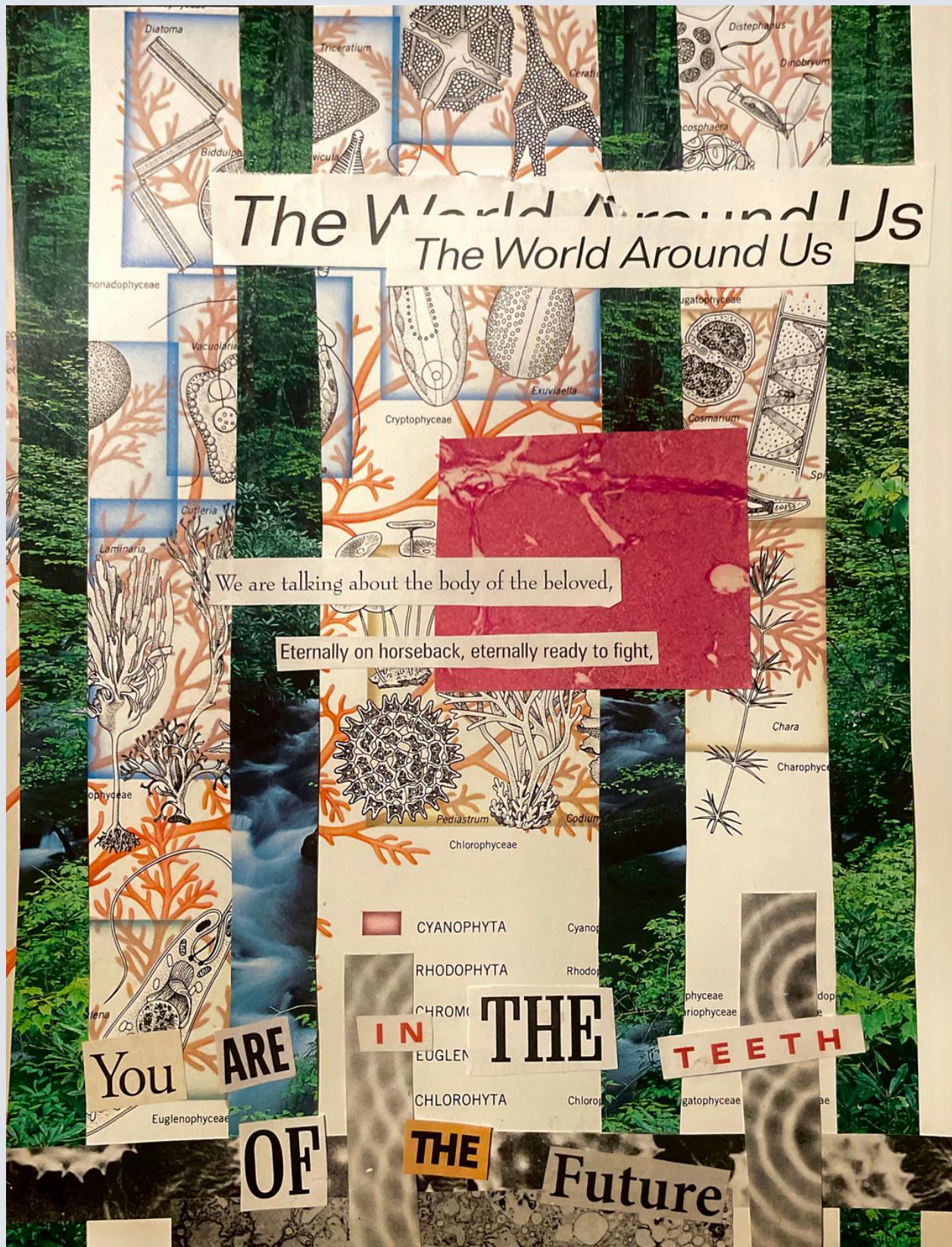
stable structure  
in my life.

It's in what's not said  
that an entire notebook is  
healed—  
testimonies of what doesn't survive  
reduction into ink,  
that only crosses

the channel  
above silence's head when  
I enter my mother's  
country of origin.

Here, I'm participating in  
what reaches up and  
out of my partitions  
into what tries to

tap the fingers  
of wholeness— the unfading stain of  
belonging.



**TITLE: THE WORLD AROUND US // ARTIST: KAYLA STARLING**

# Reflections

B. A. HUTCHISON

Of the many tribulations  
one will always be  
on a threadbare bath mat  
discolored under pale soles,  
pained balls of your feet  
and a heavy dislike for the signs  
of all the walking you've done.

This is where you start thinking  
of starting revolutions, of  
"doing something about it".  
You'll be thinking

but it is only a decayed brain cell  
inside a desolate land  
that hides ruin too well.  
It still could be worse.

You've felt a little worse. You've seen  
a lot. Worse - glimpsed hell in metal.  
Upside down and tireless.  
This is where you shed,  
sometimes with blood.

This is only shiny bathroom tiles  
and a yellowed bathtub  
that needs re-caulking. This is  
only a mirror room.

# Where Did the Eyes Go?

NICHOLAS GROOMS

Impulsions like a trident to heart  
jagged tears in the fabric of yesteryear  
coded language never understood  
just shapes and symbols draped  
in a mystery's veil  
they agitate within  
skirting the brain wrinkles  
touring the temples  
to pound upon the door  
the knock, knock, knocking  
of the brass knocker  
those skeletons, hanging for so long  
they have disassembled themselves  
crates of dry bones in the closet  
fractured femurs and cuffs  
xylophone rib cages  
lost little piggy toes  
as chatty as Yorick's skull  
upon Hamlet's palm  
orbital holes with nothing inside  
emulating fresh graves  
his and hers, side by side  
laying dead-  
    where the eyes they  
    formerly had for one other  
        -used to go

# Velvet Masonry

ELLIS EDEN

I

We are born in darkness, our honeyed cells soft and warm. The hum of movement around us hints at a world beyond. From the first moment, we know each other, share the ravenous pain of growth. She is not me, though we are one.

-When I have wings, I'll go higher than everyone, she says. What do you think it's like, flying?

I turn away, pretend to be asleep. In my dreams, we never leave home.

II

Between feedings, the workers prepare us for life outside. Our favorite lesson is the story of how our kind began. We ask for it over and over: *In the beginning was the Sun.*

- But what is the Sun? she asks. How can it burn and not die? Does it move?

- You'll see soon enough, they respond.

When it is time, we are separated into cells, the combs mortared over with wax.

- Will you find me? she asks, her voice trembling.

- I will find you.

- But how will you know me, after the change?

- I've always known you.

We fall into a deep sleep. I don't smell the smoke when it curls through the hive. I don't hear the cries.

### III

When I emerge into the next life, she is gone. Wind passes through the empty space where her frame should be.

I move with the others toward the bright sky. Dizzy, dazed, we spring from the lip of the world. Home is a box among many. Our sisters call for me to join in the hunt, but I can't leave until I've found her.

A broken frame rests under the shadow of a maple tree, the combs shattered. The velvet masonry is mute under my feet, but I dig in the wax, searching through the dead until I pull her cold body from a cell. The weight of her silence, her stillness is more than I can bear. I lay beside her.

Shadows move for the Sun until light falls on us. One at a time, antennae unfurl from her head.

- Am I dreaming? Are you really here? she says.

We look at each other with new eyes. No softness. Now we are armored. Strong. We spread our wings to discover she is missing one.

### IV

The yard next to our hive is barren, except for a patch of thistle beside a rotted fence. She hides there, away from the others. As long as I collect my quota, we are ignored.

At the end of each day, I bring her food. Honeybread, strawberries, tiny brown mushrooms, lilac flowers, and the pulp of a wild orange. She tells me of clouds and hummingbirds, and the silver procession of snails in the rain. At night, we rest among the thistles, listening to the bubbling call of frogs.

When the last star fades on the dawn-pink horizon, it's time to work, to join our sisters in the hunt. As I wash my face, her wing droops and she turns away.

- I wish I didn't have to leave, I say.

She slashes at a thistle gone to seed, the ghostly tufts taking flight.

- And I wish I weren't broken, she says. See? Even a flower can fly.

- You're not broken. I'll show you.

We climb into the maple tree. Its tan seeds are long and slender, tucked between the layers of leaves. I leap from the tree limb, my wings pressed together as one. She laughs as I turn dizzy pirouettes to the ground.

- Now it's your turn.

She floats, her wing flashing in the light, maple seeds spinning along beside her. When she lands her eyes are clear, luminous.

- Let's go again.

## V

The days are shorter, and the sunflowers in the field turn brown. Our sisters from the hive have disappeared over time, fallen in battle or lost in the forest. I think of the winter children who have yet to be born, and hope we have stored enough for them.

A fire catches in the pine hammock where I hunt, heavy and sudden, veiling the forest in grey. I'm trapped inside a charred log, thinking of the thousand ways she could die. She'd climb the post, legs clinging to the wood, her cries drowned in smoke as the flames crested the fence.

The fire subsides. I am a streak of gold among the black, smoldering grass.

Thistles cast long shadows in the afternoon Sun. She's there, watching clouds, waiting for stars. My heart is a sparrow full of song.

## VI

Night is coming. We rest on the sun-warmed fencepost.

- I can't climb down tonight, she says. My legs won't move.

- Then we'll stay. You'll feel better tomorrow.

We ignore my lie, watching crows gather in a hemlock, shadows in an amber sky.

- In the beginning was the Sun.

- And from the Sun's golden tears rose our kind, I reply. And the Earth was ever fruitful, and the flowers sang for joy.

She curls her antennae one at a time, and rests her velvet head against mine. We twine our limbs together, watching for the first star. Her eyes fade from black to grey as night descends, and even after she's gone, I never let go.



# Sometimes the sun is hot, and colourless

VICTORIA SPIRES

And green ideas sleep, but only  
furiously. I am fond of asking, where

is Chomsky, when you need him? But  
I'm a lover, not a linguist. At the end

of the world, I'll still be singing paeans  
to the effects of thermonuclear hydrogen

efficiency. And if that is not an argument  
to occasionally lift up the bonnet

of meaning, then consider, if all we build  
is not a secret architecture of leaving?



TITLE: DESERT MONSOON // ARTIST: JO ROHRBACKER

# red tentacles

O.P. JHA

red tentacles are scratching  
the heart of the sky  
deadening the frozen drops in clouds  
bruising the bosom of the Earth  
turning it into a barren ball

scared clouds don't assure  
for a pleasant rain  
for a rainbow drawing an album  
of calm light, filled with the color  
of unspoiled smile

some eyes are measuring  
the abrasions of time  
in the sky  
on the Earth  
and between them

paws of red tentacles have grabbed  
all the three tenses

red tentacles, the whims  
of war-mongers are killing  
the voice of the Earth  
and the silence of the sky

no one dares to decipher a tearful river  
flowing between the Earth and the Sky.

# Wither on the Vine

MICHELLE LI

I have never wanted anything to end: highways on 183, smoke rings, the summer. When I was in the fifth grade, my brother and I caught a house gecko. It was just before school, and as I swung my backpack over my shoulder, hand gentle against the doorknob, the crystal light from the door window playing on the floor, a scampering movement caught my peripheral vision. The gecko was on the wall next to our upright Yamaha; it was tiny, centimeters shorter than my little finger, smaller than any of the green and dirt-brown, tough-skinned lizards that I had tried to catch in the backyard.

We captured the lizard in a tiny dessert container that once contained small samples of Costco tiramisu, and upon returning from school, I found it relocated to a larger plastic fish bowl (the fish had long died).

I looked at the gecko closely when I came home that afternoon. The world passes through you as a child, the only way it ever really seems to move, but there are things you don't forget about childhood, and this was one of them. I suppose this may well be one of the things I will carry for the rest of my life. The gecko's thin layer of skin looked almost tightly stretched, spots like black paint, its eyes were watery and pleading, but its body had curled into a semi-oval shape, joints pushing its abdomen perpendicular to the floor, lethally wild. In the late spring light, it looked almost livid.

But I had wanted to keep such a beautiful thing. We fed it crickets we had begged our father to buy at the local pet store, dropped beads of water in the plastic cap of a water bottle, put the fish bowl under the sunlight, then under the shade, asking God to keep it alive.

The first time, I felt sorry for the crickets we would put in the fish tank, how they were to die because of their birth, devoured limbs like stiff hairs in a red animal mouth. I asked my brother to pick which ones went into the tank because I was not worthy enough to play the hand of God.

The next day, when I woke up early to check, the crickets were still there, launching themselves at the glass walls of the tiny fish tank, wanting out. Ricochet, ricochet.

Nine days later, our beloved house gecko turned its white belly up. That light blue morning, those starved crickets were still jumping.

We have gotten a larger, seventy-five-gallon fish tank, from a family friend who died in a way my parents refuse to speak about. A while ago, we had five fish; two tropical, two goldfish, and a tiger barb. I loved the tiger barb most and found it floating on the mirror surface of the water, eyes cloudy.

I don't think I'll ever marry, and I don't think I'll ever again own another pet. Own even sounds too possessive of a word: to exhibit dominion over a tender animal soul. Why do we always assume less of our animal counterparts? When my first bird died, and I had cried so hard I almost couldn't breathe, my mother said something along the lines of birds being unaware of death to console me. *It spent its entire life in a cage anyway, darling. What would it know?*

On weekends, I pace around trying to think of what to write, but really, all I think of is sorrow. I ask what I love and what I leave to forgive me. I tell of this to God most often; it is the only reason why I have not become a religious dissenter.

I don't know how it happened, but it must have happened this year. I woke one night, sat up, reached for the water on the nightstand, and the thought of dying entered my mind, uninvited.

I have thought about death many times before, starting when I was eight; I sat down, bony knees, on steps of the backyard deck that my father painted in fine scarlet red, looked up at the sky bleeding between blue and bruise purple, and quietly told my mother I was scared of rotting away into the soil and being eaten away by rollie pollies. It was just the two of us under the awning of summer. I don't

recall her response precisely, but she said something about time and chocolate cookies in the pantry.

That night, I thought of my grandparents. The red and angry bug bites on my grandmother's blemished knees when she stowed away in her backyard garden for hours. My grandfather was the same age as the average life expectancy in the US.

I sat in the night, the crickets sounding their first calls in the wild, and felt alone, as if time had already collected my family off one by one, like token animals.

In June, my mother said she was tired. She wanted to go back to China for vacation. Six months.

I told her, what about my schooling? *I wouldn't leave if I didn't believe in you, honey.*

She had been slaving away at work since she arrived in America. Two decades. *I'm tired. Sweetheart, every one of your friends' parents has the luxury of leaving just when they want to.*

I sat at the dinner table and cried because where was my childhood now? The leaves were throwing their oily, oily leaves up in applause. The baby blue sky through the slant of the window looked like a shade that felt soft, like it was sorry for me too.

I never got another bird after my last one. One day, in the spring, my brother came back from the pet store, clutching a small cardboard box. Inside, a yellow and lime green feathered parakeet flapped its wings.

July. We spend our evenings under a sky that never seems to be aware of its color, our necks burning or the evening kind enough to braid our hair. Although

our family is not one for gossiping, my mother and grandmother spill whatever they want to when we walk around the block.

Today, there are cicadas everywhere. Some of them sound their nightly calls; there are some on the pavement, worshiped by halos of starving ants.

They are talking about the friend who gave us the fish tank. At home, the tank filter runs, the fish grow fat and blind. But my grandmother is talking about her friend before she took too many pills one night.

*Her mother died when she was younger than your brother, maybe about eleven. Sad as it is, I don't think her father put too much effort into raising her. Don't know if she loved him.*

I did not know this, her past, unbridled. I feel rather guilty because I know I will remember, and write it down. Is a writer to use others for tragedy?

*She married and didn't know what she was getting into.* And the rest of her life goes on like a cliche. Haughty husband with a stretching smile. A son born, with a name like water, wailing. Years of soccer practice and he left for college. Her body, like a handkerchief, folded away, until the surgery. She sat at the park bench every day, then she met grandmother because old ladies love congregating in public parks for reasons unknown to outsiders. The cicadas sigh, even the dead ones.

I tell my grandmother: *you know, you might have been the kindest person to her.* And to think, that is her whole life too. We don't realize a lifetime, even though we all have it, and are hurtling our bodies toward more, more of it. Several decades compounded together, and an aging, short woman—a stranger—was the best thing that happened to her.

And to think: I am fortunate. To write so terribly about tragedy. I cannot tell you the color of the last scarf she wore, how many years it has been, her favorite chocolates, the last song and person she loved. Perhaps someday I will be better. There are things so powerful that they must hurt if you know them.

*Maybe all we ever are is alone,* Grandmother says. The streetlights light up and a breeze passes by.

And to think: grandma—grandma, how much time do I have now?

The flash of movement was the same. In the bathroom, the night was cool, the years fanned out. The gecko had lost its tail, left with a nub pink like lamb fat. It was even smaller than the last one, with the same watering eyes. I looked at it for the longest time, then cupped it into my hands.

I went downstairs and opened the garage door. Outside, the teetering bottom edge of summer, the leaves in motion. I set the gecko into the night and prayed for its survival.



**TITLE: WINDOW VINES, BOSTON // ARTIST: CHRISTOPHER WOODS**

# Frontarrears

L. WARD ABEL

Dark blue bottomless sinkhole  
crosses skies to the west  
deep, above  
as if we've grown used to  
living upside down  
on this green dangle  
full of leaves  
and moving.

Empty air the victim  
of its dark other  
the current sways  
branches, spired  
heads of hair breathe along  
with everything nailed  
to the ceiling-blue floor  
its cobalt soul  
raining up.

# Small Fires

ACE BOGESS

Stranger meets stranger in the morning.  
One lives for moments between stories  
in which a story told is told again.  
The other, desperate for the slightest touch  
after years of neglect, doesn't last  
long enough to boil a pot of instant oats.  
Both consider this success,  
desire not spelled out in hours,  
more a connection passing like an unexpected shock,  
what so many want: to feel & know we are felt,  
priest & penitent sharing last rites,  
foolhardy hero rushing into a burning house  
to save himself in the flesh he carries out.

# If I Had My Own

ALLISON MEI-LI

He keeps a nature shelf in his room  
of rocks and shells and pine cones,  
dried dandelions and twigs.

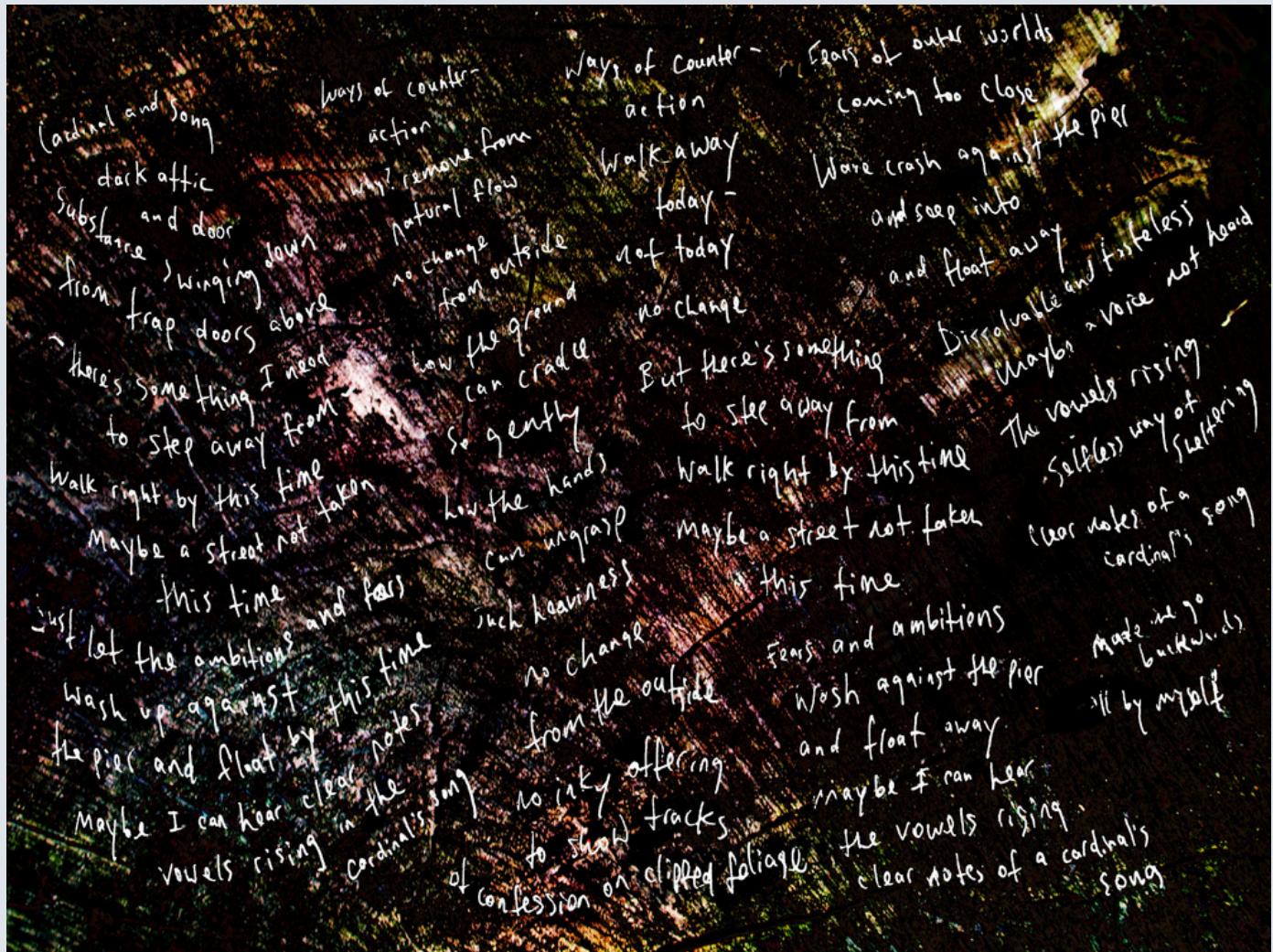
A time capsule of his treasures.

If I had my own,  
I'd keep the freckle under his right eye,  
the drops of ice cream from his chin,  
his insistence on wearing jeans and socks,  
even at the beach.

I'd keep his voice from the backseat  
cheering, "skinny moon!"  
when a crescent hangs in the sky,  
and "the bright went away!"  
when the sun dips behind a cloud.

I'd keep the blanket  
we lay on our bodies each morning,  
the hooded towel  
with the puppy ears after bath.

I'd keep his hand in mine,  
his head in the crook of my neck,  
his weight in the curve of my lap.



TITLE: CARDINAL SONG // ARTIST: AARON LELITO

# portrait of my father in his grave

AMMARA YOUNAS

it's a soliloquy—  
if I close my mouth there's a foetus throat growing there  
where water pipes burst but nothing comes out  
I feel the need to bawl & ask for food & warmth  
& water but my tongue has circled the roundness of earth  
like a pilgrim  
it knows too much it knows too much it knows  
too much  
once on earth it moved with venom & speed like that of a cottonmouth  
& now when I set it free it comes back again  
it's the elastic strap of a catapult it's the up-dive mid-air against  
gravity  
I wish to set it free just enough to taste  
the terrible earth beneath me  
but when I open my mouth there's a myth writing itself  
with its gods all dead & pitted or turned into sallow fossils  
I'd like to be a fossil  
they for once will remember me

# “What Do You Say to Strangers That Hold Your Fate?”

ACE BOGESS

*question asked by Savannah Dudley*

I never expected to experience happiness  
in a box. Will you forgive me?

Shadows I wore like a jacket of knives  
left scars I should be ashamed to show.

Now other shadows embrace me.  
I welcome their touch bringing ecstasy.

I have been wrong so many times  
that to count my mistakes

would take a lifetime of mistakes  
to stand on, wasted sadnesses,

shards of glass. Will you forgive me?  
Recovery is an assembly line where

not all machines perform their functions.  
Look. I've crafted a new human being

with flaws. It has never known  
the warm Spring air of choosing.

# In the Other World

SANDY FEINSTEIN

I see you there. Still but wakeful. Unaware of how you got to that place, but unsurprised. Imp tree, asp, vehicle. In the evening, not the undertide, late summer Florida heat weighing night down. It could be Hades or hell, the fires burning, unslaked, despite seeming pools there to tantalize. Poetic justice meted by the gods whose words are cryptic, riddling rhymes.

Now, green light, red light, deadly game. You who loved cars, on foot, and struck—snakebit or demon tree, regardless of pedigree, all indifferent. From the field to the street, dangers lurk.

Never a fan of blood and gore. My own gashes I leave unattended, ignored. So what I wonder pushed me to where you'd be, fallen, bloodied, broken. I knew too well what I might see were I to find an opening, traverse the miles of caves and tunnels, get past the natural and unnatural guardians, the dark and dogs.

The seekers have been lovers or sons, all grown men, kings and princes, poets, heroes. There are no stories of women excavating Hades. Abducted goddesses and queens have no say, no magic words that entrance their captors, switch their fates. There are no stories of sisters tracking brothers, though Cassandra could see hers in defeat, her father's fate, her mother's loss. It's not as if anyone listened. Words, just words, however true.

How much easier to slip in, as if by mistake, an absentmindedness. Excuses make a story, too.

I got lost, but now I'm here. I didn't see the yellow tape. Monsters? Really? Three heads—you're not serious. Can I pet him? Does he bite?

Is that all you have to say for yourself?

I could try to sing my thoughts or put them plain, jumbled as they are. But I don't want to offend you more than I have. And I don't know what you'd hear. Greek logos, poesis. Latin lingua, poeta.

What do you see? What would you say to you if you were me? Would your curiosity get the better of you to presume to ask for one little peek? Now that I'm here somehow, I'd like to see what there's to see.

What if you see what you don't want to see, want to save what can't be saved, to know what can't be known.

I'll weep. Isn't that what women do? Then I'll turn around and close this door.

You can never close the door, no matter what you see, do not see.



**TITLE: IN THE ALYSSUM**  
**ARTIST: TINAMARIE COX**

# In the Wind, I Think I Hear Your Voice

AMY G. SMITH

it seems a thousand years since the air rang  
with the sound of your words pulsing

through the tiny bones in my ears  
you stood naked that day haloed

by the yellow aura from a single  
light bulb your head angled back

toward our bed where the residue  
of our humming bodies still hovered

the dawning light was singing the birds  
awake at breakfast you spread strawberry

jam on your toast your temporary laugh  
already a language of loss time froze

into a shape that would be called  
yesterday our fated late meeting

sweeping dust from the sky  
leaving just a brilliant

blue sheen a faint echo  
across a desert sky

# A NONET FOR DESIRE

ANDREA ALDRETE

we stretch our desert limbs to the sky,  
hungry for rain—for anything  
that will mend the gaping sun,  
and soothe the endless drought.

Distance grows a mouth;

devouring

all the things

we reach

for.



TITLE: OVERREACH #2 // ARTIST: DAVID A. GOODRUM

# Ode to Blessing

AMY G. SMITH

You arrive in your coattails; the long stem roses you carry  
still have thorns. You are a cool cloth on a hot forehead, cold

breeze crossing a waiting heart. You are the sun slipping  
through streaks on soiled windows, years of dirt wiped

thin with a wet rag. A stone slipping smoothly into place;  
a hand on the back of a tired shoulder; the final puzzle piece.

You are not a promise. You are a momentary pause, a breath  
between songs. Fingers caressing a jawline. A fluke. A favor.

Sometimes you arrive disguised as agony, wearing the colors  
of trickster, bringing the grace of cataclysmic understanding.

Sometimes your arrival goes unnoticed. The laughter after  
the loss; the heart keening toward the ground in grief.

To bless is to mark with blood, to consecrate, make holy.  
Invocation for the doubters. A benediction; not penance, not  
punishment, but a jagged crack, a wound stitched loosely  
by the blight of a blessed life.

# Totally Non-Hypothetical Reasons Why I Either Set Fire to My Phone or Swipe Right on Dating Apps

MEREDITH HUGHES

On Bumble:

Left	Right
Liking to hike is not a personality trait.	You have a grammatical error in your bio, and I want to correct you.
Your name is Benjamin—you're the 500th one I've seen this hour.	There is not an offer to put me in a coma from "Daddy Dick."
You describe yourself as "a bit of a goofball," "down to earth," "weird," or D) All of the Above.	You don't speak in code like: "For the love of God, please have a sense of humor," aka "I'm a racist, sexist homophobe."
That's a really great bathroom mirror selfie with the toilet seat up in the background, says everyone ever.	You're willing to share the burden of existential dread that comes with living in late-stage capitalism and/or order me DoorDash.
You don't live above ground. I may live with my mother, but I am no gopher.	You live at least ten miles away from your parents' basement.

Too good-looking.	The American Flag is not worn in any sort of way: bowties, shirts, hats, onesies.
Not handsome enough to tempt me.	Conversely, and I shouldn't have to say this, the confederate flag is not pictured hanging in the rear window of your truck.
That is a really impressive picture of a fish.	Speaking of flags, there's something remotely resembling a Progress Flag in one of your pictures.
You work for a pet cremation service. What if you pull a Dwight Schrute and decide it's time to euthanize one of my cats?	None of your pictures show you wearing a shirt that says, "My beard is the only hair that should be between your legs."
That's an even better selfie of you in a car. Well, look at that. You're obsessed with your 1995 Honda Civic.	You don't say things like, "Your personality should comprise more than your political beliefs." Patrick, my political beliefs are 97% of my identity. I just can't think of how to be a person without them.
You're a Nice Guy™	You admit that you're a sinner and sloth was ruining your life.
You use the phrase "looking for someone who takes care of themselves" as code for "not fat."	You're less than handsome but sound remotely interesting in that you've read one book in the last fifteen years other than The Lord of the Rings.

<p>Your political leanings are “apolitical” and your religious beliefs are “agnostic.” Believe in something, will ya?</p>	<p>Liberal to communist political beliefs with a sprinkle of Christianity—the love and kindness parts, not the smite to hell part.</p>
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### On Hinge:

Left	Right
<p>I am not “in search of a pickleball partner.” I’m in search of a “fall of late-stage capitalism partner.”</p>	<p>Having a therapist and knowing your self-destructive tendencies. Mine is over-thinking. Or is it?</p>
<p>I do not want to start the conversation if you pick the topic of “my favorite place in the world.”</p>	<p>There aren’t pictures of you petting your dog while sitting on the toilet with your pants down and your shirt nowhere to be found. I did not need to find out you wear tighty-whities that way, Dave.</p>
<p>Your religion is listed as “other.” Other what? Otherworldly? You might as well say “N/A.”</p>	<p>You don’t have a basic bro name like Josh, Chad, or Jake.</p>
<p>I do not, in fact, want to debate Chipotle vs. Currito.</p>	<p>You have a beard or are a beard. Beards get me.</p>

Your simple pleasure is humor. I get it; you think you're funny.	Your voice prompt shows you have good comedic timing but that you're not funnier than me.
I don't care that you geek out on <i>Harry Potter</i> .	Your profession is something I find useful, like lawncare so I won't have to mulch, or a hitman to smite my enemies, or your employee discount is useful to me, like the at fish store so I can buy discount worms for my axolotls.
You say the first round is on you if I can sing the lyrics to most of Morgan Wallen's songs.	You've already liked me.
You're convinced that you sound cultured because you watch a foreign sitcom by saying, "Pitter patter, let's get at 'er." America is Canada's trashy neighbor, Blake.	The phrase "active and ambitious" is not something you're looking for. I'm a sedentary procrastinator.
The one thing you'd like to know about me is my favorite movie.	You don't use the phrase "ideal father figure" to describe having a dad bod.
You're looking for someone who is "positive and a joy to be around."	Your irrational fears are totally rational. Of course, every elevator you ride in is potentially going to fall, plummeting you to your death.

<p>"Together we could . . . travel the world like the virus did." Thankfully, sir, I've been vaccinated against your stupidity.</p>	<p>You ask me to give you travel tips for Europe. Sure, it's basic, but I'll basically be in Europe on your dime, and at least it's not traveling to Florida with your mom. I already do that with my mom.</p>
<p>I don't give a shit that you take pride in your Costco membership, Cody. I still share one with my mom.</p>	<p>Unlike Jonathon, you do not have a tattoo of a UFO flying over an astronaut planting an American flag on your nipple, though that is inventive.</p>
<p>You ask what I bring to the table besides boobs.</p>	<p>You don't say that dating you is like dating a horny little Care Bear (looking at you, Micah.)</p>
<p>Your life goal is something other than huddling together and watching the fall of our society in this late-stage capitalistic era.</p>	<p>You know that the phrase "late-stage capitalism" exists, and you use it correctly in a sentence.</p>

On Tinder:

Left	Right
<p>You're a white, cisgender, heterosexual man.</p>	

# Becoming Inclined

BARBARA E. HUNT

(After John O'Donoghue)

*to watch the way of rain*  
at first the merest hint of spit

tumbling from clear skies all  
slow and free. Then clambering

calmness in cahoots with drop-  
on-drop in perfect pattering

tattle of a twilit realm. Take  
note the shifting light and lilt;

small miracles of slanting senses.  
For you, who travel too far, too

fast must grasp that soothing  
rhythm of the natural habit

of downpours. The silence and  
the rushing-hush that's come

to take your soul back  
to its nesting-creche.



**TITLE: SELF PORTRAIT // ARTIST: KAYLA STARLING**

# The Power of the Divine Woman

CAT SPERANZINI

Isn't womanhood, by definition, divine? Am I not  
a god of my own making? Forming life from the void  
between my legs and in the marrow  
of my mind, destroying it  
whenever I like?

I am flawed  
like a grape plucked and mashed from the vine  
pressured into Spirits, both holy and horrible,  
peeling the wallpaper until it crumbles  
under my feminine gaze or screeching  
louder than a newborn babe—unfazed  
by chaos, I am a conduit

and a confessional. Unburden yourself in my breast,  
my thighs, the nape of my neck. I am a woman,  
so, I'm somebody's muse. Meant to be used  
as a vessel—

meant to be feared, revered, seen.  
The duality of mother and sexual being,  
a woman as a hurricane of feeling.

# Why My Love Handles Heavy

JESSICA BELL

I. The man I love is sitting less than six feet away. Six is an important number because it's the number of years we never made and the number of feet we were once expected to keep between us. In public, when the world stopped and shut down and everyone thought it might end and somewhere along the way we did but the world kept moving, kept dragging us through its mud and maybe I don't entirely understand the significance of the number yet. The man I love(d?) is sitting three hours and thirty-nine minutes away from me and maybe he's asleep but maybe he's pacing except I don't know if he ever loved me enough to do the pacing.

II. The man I grew to resent and who resented me is texting me, over and over in my mind but really only once, *Would you like for me to leave you alone?* Because even when I am no longer his I am expected to do the work. The work of anger and of caring and of thinking and of dog walking and of cleaning up ferret shit and of cooking and of meal planning and of aborting babies and of folding laundry and of dusting and of abandoning homes and family because we want different things but the man I love can't stop staring

open-mouthed at me in a Lowes parking lot when I try to spill over my edges. When I try to tell him that I spent a year working and cooking and cleaning and crying in the place he wanted me to live, with and for him, wanting only

to die.

III. The man I am afraid of looks at me with fear in his eyes when I laugh an exhausted woman's laugh instead of the melodic girlish one he's spent almost six years laughing alongside. He plugs his ears with invisible fingers he isn't hearing me I am suffocating I am dying I am  
splitting open.

I cannot abort a baby and not need to cling to the father and I cannot hold that father close to me without remembering how it felt to read text messages between him and his ex-girlfriend, telling her things like *you're the one I think of when I fall asleep at night* knowing that same night I was asleep next to you  
and restless

and pregnant with your child. There is more than six years' worth of hurt and social distance braced behind a dam I reinforced over and over and over with empty promises.

Of dog walks and flowers and dinners and interlocked fingers not dropped within the aisles of another Lowes I once spent months trying to write a poem about because the relationship between us could not hold my words.

IV. The man I love is a ghost haunting the halls of my brain that look exactly like the upstairs hall of our first house and I am ruined between the boards and nails and faulty wiring of that same house he wanted both of us to abandon. The heat didn't work our first January and the heat burnt itself out

between us when I could not help him pay our bills and shame sits inside every dollar sign I see and still

I could not afford to be his wife. I could not stay in a little blue house in a little blue-gray mountain town and pretend I was not suffocating. I could not bear the thought that one day he would expect a baby boy to share his name despite the way he pushed for me to just *go to the doctor and get some pills you'll just take some pills but don't tell anyone you'll just take some pills don't tell anyone just take some pills don't tell anyone take the pills*

*don't tell take pills don't tell don't tell don't tell*

I think he might hate me for those things. The man I loved was dissolved inside the weight of a life I couldn't pay for but don't know that I wanted and I will spend years digging all of his pieces out.

The man I loved disappeared inside the heaviness of my poverty; bowed under the weight of my hands when I tried only to hold him closer; grew to screaming at me two days before Christmas when he was sick with Covid and loving me and all six of those feet.

The man I loathed yelled at me from the staircase that I was going to get a job by February first and if I did not then I would get the fuck out of his house.

The man I loved slept soundly on nights I laid awake, nights I cried myself to sleep because the dishes were not done or laundry was not folded or because we had not had sex or because we had and somehow at the end of it I was even emptier

than before.

V. The man I hate grabbed my hips in the kitchen and once held a trash bag over my head because he thought

I'd find it funny. When I didn't, the man I came to fear tried to make a joke and looked at me as if I were crazy for not laughing.

The man I once loved died, not physically, not where I could see it anywhere but in his eyes, when I was poor and depressed and needy. When I took and took and took but never gave him anything he wanted or valued back. The man's eyes are burned into my own when I look in the bathroom mirror of a lowes I never went in with him and we made it nearly five and a half years and six has never felt like a dirtier number.

I have never felt freer. Never felt more frightened of the kind of love that lies behind those green-gray eyes sitting in my head—for five and a half years that love has been anxious and scared and painful as it poured itself out into a man I am not sure I know.

I am not sure of the woman who spent nearly six years too poor, too sad and sick and scared to say *Yes, I would like you to leave me alone*, to scream and fight back for herself—

VI. Here six becomes mine and the woman becomes an I and I become an overdrawn bank account; an inflated currency; a shameful dollar sign as a dirty, crumpled up bill panting into its own skin.

I become inside out. Six becomes green; ink stained into an old carpet; a kitten's lost claw.

The love inside me sits heavy on that dollar sign heart—thick and marred and worthless. It cannot make a house payment. It cannot take a man on vacation or pay a vet bill or do anything outside of beat like a begging fist against a wall.

*I love you* is a crack in marshmallow white paint.

*I wish we'd never met* a gouged out hole in cheap sheetrock.

*I hope I never see you again* is a crater in an upstairs bedroom where a man once threw his video game controllers when loving me and losing became synonymous. *I wish it hadn't come to this* almost like a handwritten anniversary

## VII.

on a calendar that was never written,  
because here is the only place that six will come to exist  
for us  
and we no longer do.

# encomium of the canary

K. MCNEIL

my captor keeps me close and clipped  
like song.

i am that yellow bird-like thing,  
fluent in suffering-speak.

a ruffled sunny hue  
i sing sounds of soot and coal  
here in these hollow mines.

tell me,  
watcher of the home and holder of the  
key,

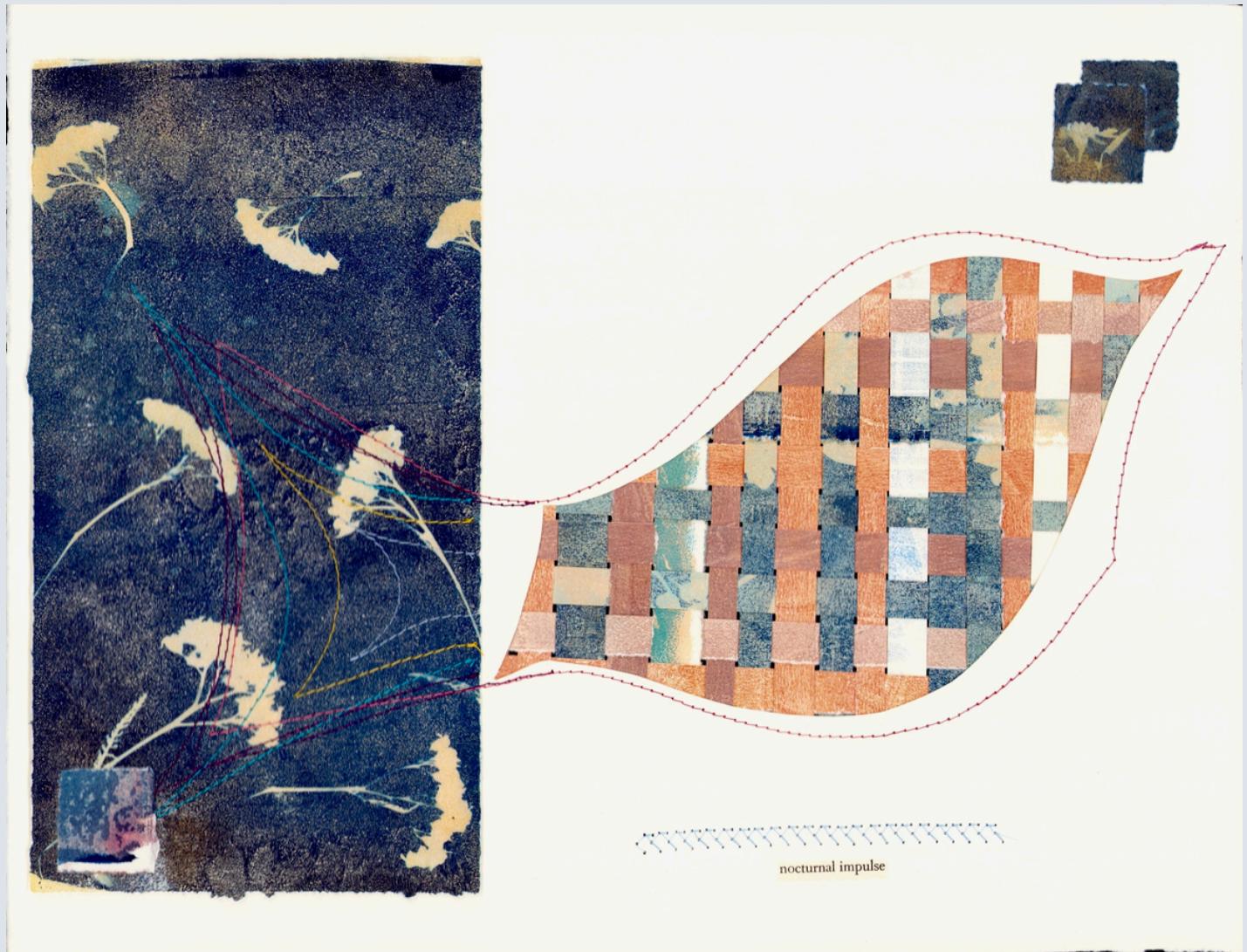
do you know the taste of iron bars,  
the feel of smoke in wings?

stroke my body softly  
and call me a good bird.

i see that you are nothing.

i am queen of this cage, you know,  
of stolen southern skies.

false idol on a dusty shelf  
there is no church for a songbird.  
fold me in a cloth and put me in  
the garden  
for i would rather see me dead  
than live life a warning.



**TITLE: NOCTURNAL IMPULSE // ARTIST: BETH KEPHART**

# GRIEF IS SUCH A WILD LANDSCAPE

CAROLINE WIYGUL

They should sell it as a 12 month illustrated calendar / or a series of Windows screensavers: a fist full of red beetles / with the yellow organs oozing out / a sun-warmed strawberry / the gold flash of a birthmark in a lover's eye / how their face goes swimmy and blue when looking up at you from seated / your best friend at the dinner table, still visiting in dreams / mouthing from out of the big nothing / *love you* / which means in this case / *take heart: I can still love you* the lavender drying / the awful hot of concrete / a thousand men who hate you at the helm of the law / breakfast / bombs / the world the world the world / a girl floating face up practicing her breathing / learning the same lesson on loop / you must let your life become very simple even though this is impossible / you must sink to the bottom of the lake where nothing lives / except bacteria and crabs / and another vision of her / leaning in through that ever-present cloud of hair / flash of gorgeous teeth / snap peas / kitchen / a colander of silky sage / and for the calendar's finale / a grainy low-lit memory / the swallows that flutter in the underpass the ones you keep thinking have got to be her

# On Fatherhood - Year One

CAMDEN MICHAEL JONES

- i. when that first squeeze took you, I was asleep & you bowed before the toilet & it wasn't until a quarter past *this is happening* you pulled me from our pillows between quakings & the hospital said because she is your first *wait* & we did & you were eight centimeters when we walked through those double security doors & you swam through endless
- ii. mid-labor we showered & I held you & our daughter crept downward & the water mixed with blood & mucus to wash at our ankles & we hummed together with voices wet & the bathroom echoed with us
- iii. I cried & it was *release* it was the snap of *too taut* it was that first *hello* it was that *I'm proud of both of you*
- iv. & you have so many words now & your feet sound like those of geckos on the hardwood all gummy and sweet-smelling & you love music more than I loved anything until your mama & you & you dance with hips swaying & knees bending & there in the soft space below my sternum tiny feet beat out new rhythms in the flesh
- v. we shared the hammock today, a Thursday home from work & daycare & the playlist was right for the afternoon under the sun & we rocked, you with your book of textures & my library of poems & you babbled against the breeze & peeled your socks off to better feel the grass between pigs far too small for market
- vi. *and thank you*

# Room Enough

PHEBE JEWELL

Ellie's hands reach for jars of paint before she remembers. Colors are dangerous. Red and orange stretch her legs, purple lifts her chest and shoulders toward the sky. She swaps her paint brush for a graphite pencil and presses hard on paper. Better to stay behind parallel gray bars, keep herself tiny. A slap from her mother, a glare from her father, and she shrinks to half her size.

Some days Ellie forgets, and ambles into the sunless kitchen, fingers stained turquoise and tangerine, hands and arms stretched by colors the dark house cannot contain. Those days her mother exiles Ellie to the dank room in the back, a hint of day escaping from a dirty window above her head. *Stay here 'til you're fit to be seen*, her mother commands.

Ellie's teachers urge her parents to let their daughter take risks. But Ellie knows the drill: curl up into a ball on the edge of the hard plastic chair, avoid eye contact. Eyes down, she counts to one hundred and back while other kids hurl themselves down slides, conquer monkey bars. When Ellie's teacher leads her to an easel, draping a smock over her tiny frame, Ellie shakes her head. Returning to her desk, she fills the paper with straight lines and arcs, birds flying low over a field, pressed under heavy dark clouds.

When summer arrives and blue skies erase the dull of winter, Ellie is kept indoors, *in case you get any big ideas*, her father says as he shuts her door. Trapped, she lies down on the bed, eyes closed. But even in darkness the colors warm her, washing the slate walls marigold and cinnamon, vermillion and topaz. Chest rising, her legs lengthen and shoulders broaden. Lifting her arms, she traces blue green veins under skin. Ellie is so long now her feet dangle at the foot of the bed, her head pushes against the frame.

It's the biggest she's ever grown. Standing up, she crouches so she won't bump her head against the ceiling. On the other side of her window the fields stretch, shaded by deep forest. Ellie crashes through the stone wall toward the blaze of yellow and green.

In the gloom of the kitchen, Ellie's parents look up, startled by glass and brick shattering. They stare at each other, listening for clues. Nothing. They return to their bowls, spooning gray porridge into their mouths in silence. It must have been a sudden wind, shaking the walls of the house.



**TITLE: BIHTER WITH COFFEE**  
**ARTIST: SEAN BW PARKER**

# Consider

CATARINA DELGADO

I tried to analyze my life through the lens of science fiction and realized there's more meaning in feeding a void than in asking for solutions.

*Consider:*

The wasted potential of sunny afternoons. The infinite certainty of abandoned miracles. Immortality attained through memory.

The eternal enemy we call time.

The flowers in your garden have wrinkles and there's one that looks like your grandmother when she asked you for a cup of tea at the end of November.

Light touches a yellow petal.  
You see the moment differently.

Incessantly looking for interpretations annihilates the essence of an answer. The feeling should be enough.

# Midnight Punctuation

CHRISTIANA DOUCETTE

A squawk with eyes closed.

The distress call.

Bedsheets rustle  
root right left.

A second squawk as I enter—the midnight morse code for mama.

I lift you from the crib  
and you curl into me soft and warm;  
a comma  
where all day you were a dash.

Pudgy fingers push, pull, push again.

Certain I'll be there  
certain of sweet milk  
and a steady heartbeat to drum away the dark.

And then you're latched  
drawing safety, security, sustenance  
from breast to body  
filling the empty places  
grown with absence.

As I brush cornsilk curls from your forehead,  
the nightlight blinks blue on double crescent lashes.

A content head rolls from breast to just below my chin  
the scent of sleeping baby  
perfumes the air as  
your ear catches my heart's cipher.

You're safe.

You're safe.

You're safe.

# Raw Talent Acquisition

CHRIS CLEMENS

The buyer leaned over the fence, waving his flabby arms to catch Coltetta's attention. "Seems more like a pup, if y'ask me. A joyous mutt! Sure it's a horse?"

"Again, our miniature horses are not dogs. They are horses. Small horses, yes, but horses nonetheless." I caught his gaze with purpose. "Not dogs."

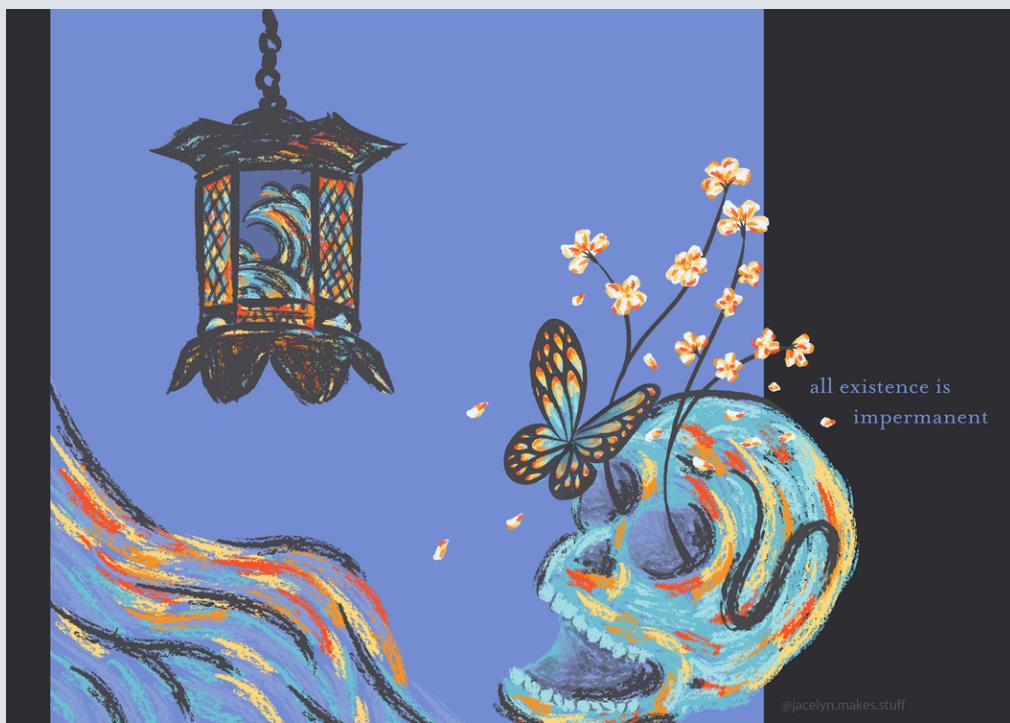
"Is there a manager? Someone who could check again?"

I sighed as Coltetta frolicked around the paddock. "She's the manager."

"That yapper?"

"That *miniature* horse. MBA. She has a degree from Wharton."

The buyer was impressed. Soon Coltetta was operating his kennels, running the business into the ground.



**TITLE: IMPERMANENT**  
(previously published by  
*FERAL: A Journal of  
Poetry and Art*)  
**ARTIST: JACELYN YAP**

# Flower Haiku

JOSHUA ST. CLAIRE

lily of the valley  
a Roman candle shooting  
into darkness

when will I wild pear blossoms

slowly dying  
the dandelions  
her grandsons picked

the old spaniel panting June wilted pansies

a hackberry emperor  
settling into phloxcent  
afternoon deepens

blue lotus  
a common sanddragon lands  
in deep time

ephemeral pools  
the shadows of dame's rocket  
swaying in the meadow

first lightning  
through the oak grove  
wild violets

heat lightning  
white gladiolus  
bend under the weight

the drought sky  
shifting from lapis to slate  
chicory

# Rosemary, Lavender and Thyme

LINEA JANTZ

Rosemary, Lavender and Thyme sat at an oaken table, each with a secret cupped in the palm of her hand. They had known each other for so long that they had forgotten when and how they met.

Each year when the snow fell, the three would gather together and go into the wilderness.

The first year that the women traveled into the white forest, Rosemary wanted some berries from a holly plant growing high in a towering spruce. Lavender was afraid of heights, but for Rosemary she climbed to collect them, heartbeat flickering at the side of her throat.

The second year the three walked with rounded bellies and dreamt of their babes playing together. What good friends they would be. The women were tired and did not walk far. They leaned on each other and shared hot cocoa in the dark. They watched the stars through a break in the branches, and Thyme doubled them over with laughter.

The third year, they held babies on their backs. Thyme's birth had been the hardest. A shadow darkened her bright eyes. She was a nervous mother and had lost her lightness. Her humor turned sharp.

Rosemary's body refused to return to her previous shape. She denied herself the holly berries and other foods she loved to eat. Her brain seemed soaked in fog. She mourned.

Lavender was softer and battered, but the happiest she had ever been. For the first time, the women were not united. A hairline crack began to form.

As the years passed, the children scattered, laughter echoing amongst the branches like flitting birds. Yet each winter, the three would gather together. No

matter how long it had been since they last spoke, when the earth grew cold, Lavender, Rosemary and Thyme would walk into the deep snow that snapped into powder beneath their feet. The fir and spruce would stand at attention along their path until they returned. Each year their secrets grew heavier.

Lavender began to realize that Rosemary did not always speak kindly of her when she was not there. Rosemary and Thyme were often together without her.

Lavender climbed into the trees to bring Rosemary holly berries, but Rosemary would not eat them. Lavender's conversations with Thyme grew stiff. The women were growing apart.

The winter came when Lavender stood at the edge of the white forest with her children and spotted Rosemary and Thyme returning from the deep snow that snapped into powder beneath their feet. They had gone without her.

Lavender saw the two women freeze, huddling back a bit into the shade of the forest. There was still time for them to pretend that they were happy to see her, that they were surprised. But the three were not women to falsify a smile. One of the things they loved about each other.

Lavender's children ran to greet their friends. She realized that she would have to follow.

She walked carefully through the snow with an iron fist slowly tightening on her throat. She realized that the two were not going to greet her. Her chin raised.

To their credit, as she stopped a couple steps away, Rosemary and Thyme did look uncomfortable. Typically, this was her cue to soothe and comfort. But not today.

"I always think this is going to be more fun than it is," Thyme offered. "The snow is too deep for the children."

Lavender let her gaze travel to her children gamboling down the trail, captivated by polygons of frozen snow crust they had broken free and held like treasures in their mitten hands.

"I should go," Lavender said.

She hated the wobble in her voice. She was not easy to wound and her friends could tell they had done so. She ducked her head away from the apology in their eyes. The women were not monsters. The three had all changed.

Lavender lifted her face to the winter sky and drew a deep breath. Then she let it go.

Lavender followed her children into the trees. This time when she climbed the tall spruce, cradled by fragrant branches, rocked by a chill wind...Lavender plucked a holly berry for herself.



**TITLE: SLEEPWALKING**  
**ARTIST: KIM ARTHURS**

# Tell Me Again

NAOMI MILLS

The following is known as a 'burning haibun'. It begins with a prose-poem (1), the second part is created by the erasing or blacking out of certain parts of the first poem, thus creating an erasure/blackout poem (2). This is then reduced even further to create the final part: the haiku (3).

(1)

I am a witness to what I wish did not exist. A world unfurls in my cupped hand. Its petals turn to dust and scatter. The tongues of a thousand languages roll back in throats slit into silence. Tell me that earth is a light-filled place. Let me recall that face of hope, like pompous clouds, lolling in celeste skies, or my father's eyes, as he lifts me up. I'll be a child again, I won't know what it cost us just to live, or what we lost so that we could love. Let me believe that earth is as light as a butterfly kiss; that gentle tickle of absurd intimacy, as our faces press together for a moment and our mouths pull into smiles, enamoured by our proximity. Will it cost you too much to tell me again, tell me that the actions of men cannot weigh down this bubbling joy I feel when the sun holds my skin in its command? Or when the land dazzles, swelling in viridian and sage - will you repeat it then? I am a river that scorches a trench in a future I might not be part of. I am holding my hand up to the light, again.

(2)

A world unfurls

The tongues of a thousand languages

Let me

believe that earth is as light as a butterfly kiss

this joy I feel

when the land dazzles, in viridian and sage

scorches a trench in a future I might not be part of.

(3)

A world unfurls

light

this joy I feel

dazzles, in viridian and sage

# IFENI vesper vesper

KATE MACALISTER

the sound  
petrichoral:  
we begin

with the old call to prayer:  
calm your heart, place a hag stone  
a snail shell, beneath your tongue.

taste the body of the water, swallow  
the blood of the goddess here  
frondescence sweeter than the calcareous

altarwine. the women never stopped  
worshipping what cries deep inside  
the night rasping; glory be to the dirt

& the wolf's-bane, the holy bog moss.  
as in the beginning, so now and always  
and until the bones are gilded with guilt

# The Score

L. WARD ABEL

I.

As I get older, clearer, the glint means more.  
Here the old bell beside my Quaker barn  
won't ring. They call red cedars boundary trees  
but mine scatter in the open. Times are restive  
wired, taut. A loud family of geese lives  
at my pond now. Where will they go?  
Where will we go?  
Still, things almost sparkle.  
Not in a good way.

II.

Words can thwart. Morning never breaks.  
The seconds lose by gradation. History  
can never progress, always guilty  
of having been. Flight-path roars  
turn silent with altitude.  
A hideout life of night grinds away  
and changes your name. Colors  
lose meaning in the absence of  
light, sound. Still,  
there are only  
absolutes.

III.

Preferring Chopin's nocturnes to chaos, I  
pour a drink. Cool for late Spring, burdened.  
Eastern flyway contrails form crosses  
eight, nine miles up. Still, a blue belies

turbulence. The green belies a lack of  
planting. A wound shows no promise  
but the flailing drama. And no glint.  
Drinking behind battle lines  
you're forgiven  
if you don't know  
the score.



**TITLE: DANCE, CHILD**  
**ARTIST: KATIE HUGHBANKS**

# Need Considered at the Shore

KEITH MOUL

I'm speculating now. I rushed  
through a lit mag relying on art:  
abstracts mostly, artifacts of our  
time, you know, postmodern angst  
because everything means nothing.

Well I'm on a bench at a peaceful  
shore, straining to remember when  
nothing meant everything, and more.  
But damn those memories die.

Even a name here on a bronze plaque  
that shone a long time stands alone  
as in a reliquary, synapses themselves  
corroded with oxidation, pre-synaptic  
irreconcilable with the post-synaptic.

Young people jog right by, laughing  
maybe at the latest joke, at an old man  
frozen-faced in thought at the tide,  
along the path of countless bronze  
memories disdained, although inscribed.  
Energy should be fueled by legacy  
to be enough to join the wind,  
feel its buffeting, rippling all about,  
the future after all.

I suffer with my need to remember,  
not to fade, not to die.

# Believe You Me

LANA HECHTMAN AYERS

the candidate says again.  
I am certain whatever it indicates  
is not a truth  
anyone should have to face.  
Probably not even truth at all.

Overhead clouds are gathering  
gray taffeta veils and dark  
woolen shawls  
as if already mourning  
for what is to befall us.

Though the rain when it falls  
is clear as the beauty of  
the monarch caterpillars  
emerging full winged,  
glistening as moonglow across grass.  
It's everything after the election I fear.

Too many children  
like crushed acorns  
will never grow into trees.  
Swollen rivers of hate  
overflowing all our shores  
and melting glacier risen oceans  
of famine swallowing the masses.

In another version of the world,  
there must be leaders  
who attend the kindness of sunrise  
with tongues held and  
palms up to receive  
the words of their people  
like water in the desert.

# Faithless

PAUL HOSTOVSKY

I don't like the way you read  
and I don't mean  
aloud. I mean you read too fast,  
too facilely, too faithlessly.  
I mean we both read that book  
and loved it—you said you loved it—  
but then you moved on to another book,  
another voice, while I still had the voice  
of that book in my head  
and I couldn't move on. I went back  
and lingered in the copyright history,  
the blurbs, the epigraph and dedication,  
then I reread the first sentence, the first  
paragraph, the first page,  
and it was like love at first sight a second time  
as I dove back into the book we loved,  
and I'm loving it still  
and reading it again. Don't talk to me  
about the book you're reading now.  
Don't tell me you're loving that book.  
You don't know what love is.

# Along the Ice Age Trail

DARRELL PETSKA

storm blown through—  
skeins of sunlight  
cascade from clouds

sight unfettered  
scudding like spindrift  
toward old Michi-gami

step-wise, finespun  
transubstantiation  
forgetting feet

the ways of flesh  
by tailing winds  
laid bare

thought scattering  
on ancestral dust  
green-grown



**TITLE: FOX DANCE**  
**ARTIST: MANDY ROBERTSON**

# A wish that we could make the same mistakes

ELA KUMCUOGLU

// All summer I wait for summer to end / all winter I wait for summer to come /  
And seamlessness / was something I wanted to show you  
In the sunlight stretched over the sky like a pyrophanous skin / draping itself  
Over my neck like a mother's hand /

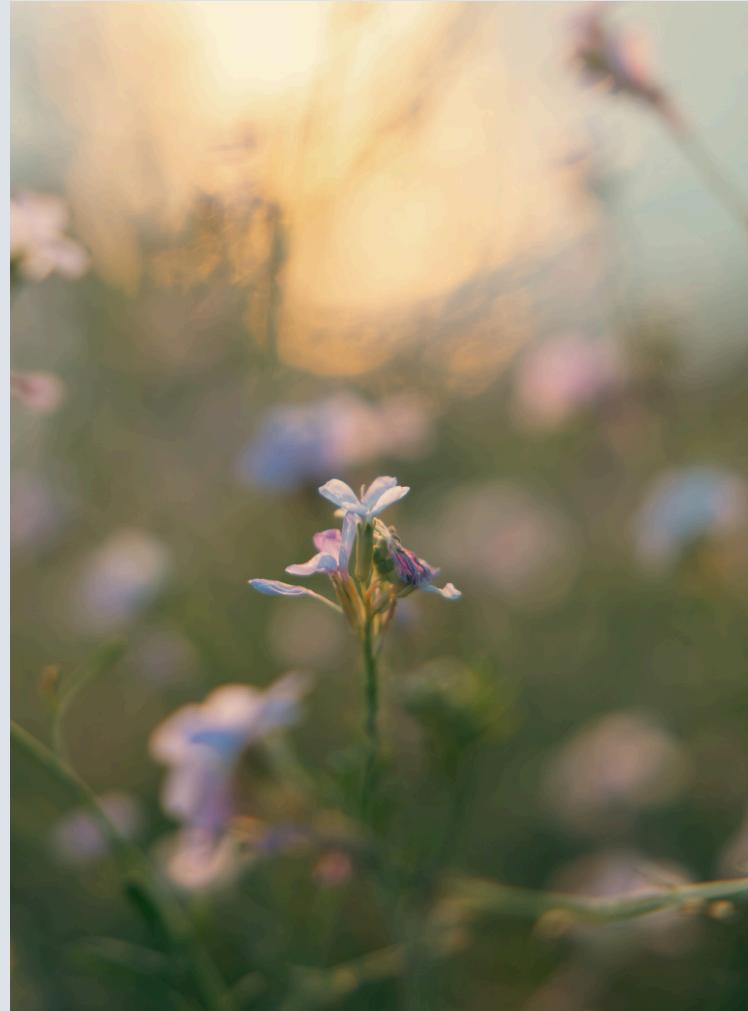
I wanted to show you the intimacy of the sun blooming out of kilter through the river bed / the vestiges of old trees effervesing on the surface /  
Sirens dancing / your heart /  
/ making dreams out of clouds /  
the yolk of life sticky in between your fingerprints /  
Would you want to be the bird balancing the sky on the back of its wings? /  
Put roots in the dreams they buried with their dead  
And wait them to spring out in red poppies on a field of wet, winter dreams ? /  
Would you chase the tail of summer like he does?

/ For him, summer is the changing  
Winds tapping on his hands / with the same tenderness as a poem /  
For him, summer is exodus / the flight of hands from heart to mouth  
For me, summer is the stirring of an old battle / when close is not enough  
The bitter taste of a not-quite resolution / tender epithets, nothing much to do or to be done  
For you / winter is when you crave the touch of someone else / when you ask yourself  
*If loving someone is just liking someone a lot, or is it something else, something that can't be defined?*  
For you, winter is hastily stripping the driveways of fresh memories that fell overnight  
For me, it is the footsteps that tread behind you / and the doubt trailing through your fingers trailing through my fingers /  
Wishing we could make the same mistakes //

# Awestruck

LAUREN MERRYFIELD

A tingling chill  
running through me.  
Pleasant shudder,  
reactive flesh; the nerve,  
arousing limbic,  
reminiscent connection.  
This rush of dopamine;  
a temporary hit.  
Stimulating melody like  
Frisson meets Florence  
and her machine.  
Sympathetic extremes  
overcome, intertwine.  
Taken aback, to a moment,  
defying the illusion of time.  
Hijacking the senses,  
triggering; emoting.  
Struck by awe.



**TITLE: MORNING GLORY**  
**ARTIST: LARENA NELLIES-ORTIZ**

# Or

MIKE CHRISMAN

*for Siena, age 3 months*

I carried my baby down the dark  
road between the moon and pond.

She cried, as if she wanted some  
better balance of light and water.

I tried to sing her what quiet I could  
take from those places. But she cried,  
as if she needed calm  
from far below me, below  
the search for balance,

deep into rock,  
down where centers meet, where I  
could no more extract it  
than she would know if she saw it . . .  
as if she knew I could grasp  
at the loss as ballast against  
falling or floating any sudden  
way . . .

or

that I could hold her close  
against both our uncertain places  
and sway and sway and sway and sway.

# For Sale: The Complete Works of William Shakespeare

JENNIFER ANNE GORDON

Hardcover, in low grade condition.

This copy of The Complete Works of William Shakespeare features a gold embossed cover that the original owner always wished were silver instead. Gold always reminded her of her mother's fake gold pinkie nail with a diamond chip. Her mother never realized this was supposedly a "cocaine nail" and throughout high school it was awkward when her mother would *tap tap tap* her long cigarettes into the ashtray when picking her up from school.

This copy of the complete works of William Shakespeare also features ephemeral paper that feels as if it will turn to dust with every movement of the page.

Special care should be taken with the Othello section. All of Desdemona's lines are highlighted, and in the margins, there are notes written in pencil that have almost faded away. Book will need to be brought into the light to see said notes.

Portions of Desdemona's *Song of Willow* are worn almost through due to water damage.

Are tears considered water? Are they considered something more, something less?

Pages were damaged in the family waiting room on floor C of Catholic Medical Center. The original owner would spend hours in that room memorizing said

passage. What normally would have just taken her an hour took close to the full thirteen hours that it took for her father to pass away after his feeding tube was removed.

What is invisible is the melody of the Song of Willow, as it was sung quietly to herself. She tried not to disturb her mother, who was fighting the nurses and trying to get them to change her husband into the new pajamas she had purchased for him that day. That's where she was, that's why she wasn't here, that's why she missed the call about him signing the DNR.

The original owner of this book was in bed with someone she should not have been when her father's decision was made.

So yeah, tear damage, but it should be expected. Tragedies are sad, especially Othello.

The section of Macbeth is in pristine condition. Original owner never got the chance to highlight any of those lines, another wrong person she would go to bed with went on to direct that play, and he thought it would be best for both of them if she didn't even audition.

She did go see it though, on opening night, fighting back bitter tears that tasted like the pages of a book.

His Lady Macbeth fucking sucked.

That is not apparent in this what we now realize is a vintage copy of the Complete Works of William Shakespeare.

Around this time the original owner started to slice the tops of her hands open in thin little cuts like slivers. She would blame this on her landlady's miniature dachshund, Lucy with her tiny sharp claws.

Please note that red brown stains that seeped from Richard II to Henry V's Saint Crispin Day Speech are due to this.

Damage.

The book comes with a very creased spine, and if the book were to fall open it would almost come apart in two distinct pieces, a before and after.

The book, when closed, is all she has left of the "during" time of her life.

Book has taken residence in New Hampshire, Ohio, and New Hampshire again. It has resided in the small shelves of the libraries of her childhood home, first apartment, second apartment, a hotel where sex workers turned tricks on the third floor that she lived for 6 months, the house where she almost died, the house where her husband was arrested for trying to kill her, and then eventually back to NH again, where it lived in her mother's shed, and eventually in a haunted house.

Warning. This book is damaged and has ghosts.

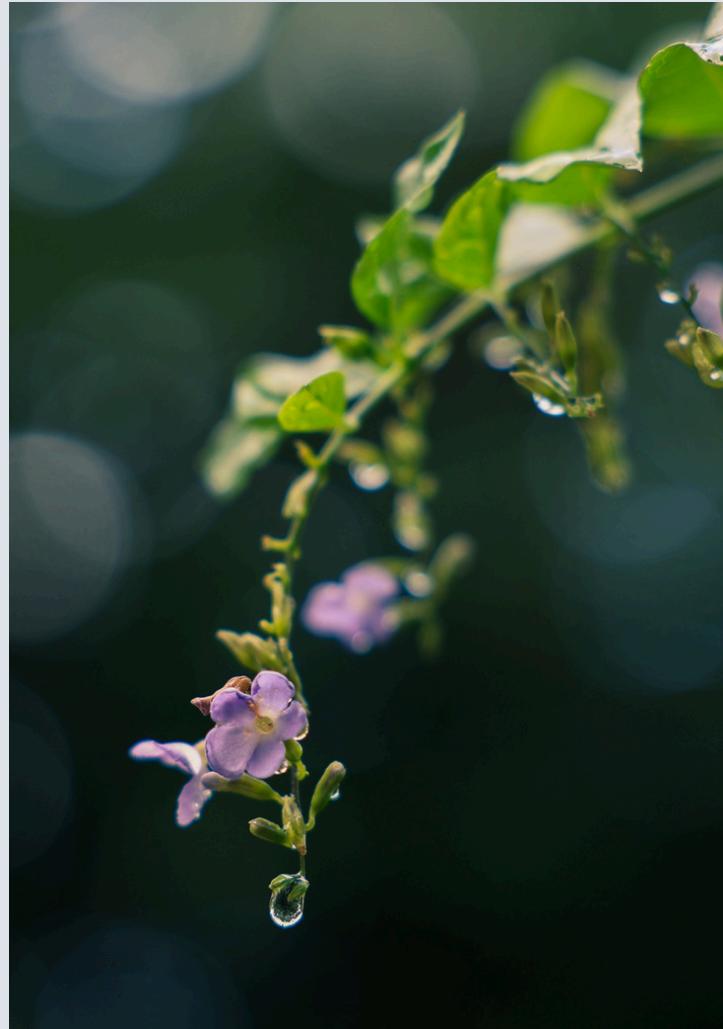
# Sing to me

EMILY R. PAGET

Sing to me.  
Breath sunk to  
staved bone,  
porcelain cracked  
wide like thunder.  
These hymns sung  
in sheets painted violet;  
the scent of mourning.

Laced wings beat  
to the drum of moving earth.  
Her music set at dusk  
to bury secret longing.  
So sing to me.  
Let me sleep.

**TITLE: AFTER THE RAIN**  
**ARTIST: LARENA NELLIES-ORTIZ**



# Directions for Finding Home

KY L. GERBUSH

Go.

Go back.

Arrive. As the plane lands, remove an itchy sweatshirt from a time smoothed canvas backpack. Note that a plane can not take you home, only *back*. The sweatshirt is a shield, it should communicate that you are “from” here, but no longer “of” here. Bonus points if it lets people know that you are very smart. It should be red. Red, like the crimson blood of pilgrims. It should not be yellow. Yellow like corn. Yellow like your hair.

Walk. Into the cool air of the airport’s two terminals. Hear the echoing of your voice, “Yes, it’s a good place to be *from*.”

Argue with the woman at the rental car counter. Do not accept the SUV she offers. Tap manicured nails on the counter. “All that matters is the gas mileage.”

Speed.

Swerve around Ford F-150s and minivans. Marvel at how uncomfortable it feels to be the tiniest thing on the road. Think, *I really don’t fit here anymore.*

Slip into auto-pilot. Head north on large highways that melt into smaller roads. When you see the first cornfield, slow down. Hands wandering mindlessly towards the buttons on your left.

Pretend.

Pretend not to notice that, as you breathe in corn pollen, an ache inside your chest eases. Feel the sunshine on your arms. Know precisely when they will start to burn. You possess a body that is tuned to this latitude.

When you pass the football scoreboard next to the highway, next to the Taco Bell that used to be a Dairy Queen, next to the gas station that used to be a McDonalds, next to the new gas station that has "Tap to Pay." Know you have come too far to go back. You must turn right.

Do not turn right.

Look at the houses. Take inventory:

They are new-ish.

They are nice-ish.

Judge them.

Houses with brick on the front and baby-vomit-beige vinyl siding everywhere else. Houses with large back porches and cheap man-made lake views.

Drive past:

A blonde woman with a dog.

A blonde woman with a dog.

A blonde woman with two dogs.

Try to think of a blonde joke with a dog. Think only that these women's bodies are yours. See their faces as you glance at yours in the rear view mirror.

Stop at a grocery store that looks like a farm stand. Go inside. Expect to feel lost. Feel disappointed when everything is in the exact place you knew it would be.

Remember.

Hear your mother. "If you ever step into a fairy ring you must not eat anything because then you'll never be able to come home."

Remember.

You found a patch of wild strawberries. You could smell them before you saw their little red faces winking up at you out of a ring of deep green grass. Smell sugar in the air. Bees buzz around your mosquito-bitten ankles. How many types of bees could you name as a six year old?

*Rusty-Patched Bumble Bee. Ligated Furrow Bee. Sweat Bee. Carpenter Bee.*

Don't remember. Stare at the glistening strawberries in plastic containers in the store.

Remember. You pressed an unwashed berry to your lips.

Don't remember. Feel the chill store air on the nape of your neck prickling your skin into goosebumps.

Remember, crunching grass, gone brown, a summer with no rain. Withering corn stalks. Someone moved towards you. The coolness of a shadow fell over you. Darkness pressed down, breath stolen from lungs, innocence taken from your child body. Don't let your mind remember everything your body knows about loss. Mindlessly run your fingers over bruises that are long turned back to flesh, thumb prints faded from your wrist, throat, and thighs.

Scream.

Do not scream.

Do not buy the strawberries.

Flee to the parking lot. Sky pink like a freshly scraped knee. Pull your phone from your pocket and look at your lock screen. You in the maroon sweater. You stand on the shore of a far away coast. You, laughing with people who don't have corn pollen in their DNA.

Think of the women with the dogs.

Breathe.

Allow yourself to imagine being one of them.

Breathe.

Imagine watching this sunset from the porch of a brick-and-vinyl house. Put a wine glass in your hand. Put a sign on the wall that says, "*The secret ingredient is love...and butter.*" Put a man beside you. Give him kind eyes. Listen to your matching accents. Feel no twinge of shame when he says, "Whatcha looking acrost at?"

Rub your sweaty palms on the crimson sweatshirt.

Drive.

Pretend. That there are plural reasons you don't belong here, not a singular reason. Look at your not-SUV-rental and think, *I really don't fit in here.*

Go back.

Don't go back.



**TITLE: ARBOREAL RIPPLE // ARTIST: RUTHENIUM**

# Marshmallow Test

JOSEPH GESKEY

He lived his childhood  
believing everything  
within a container  
must be rationed.

He was obedient.

Carafe of water  
beckoning thirst  
while playing taught

temperance, foregoing  
the indulgence of those  
with a non-scarcity mindset,  
water greedily guzzled

until quenched, then poured  
over faces and bodies  
before evaporating  
without a second thought.

Imagination as big  
as a canvas, learning  
to thin his brushstrokes,  
one-time allocation

of a few primary colors  
that still settled below  
the top of plastic palette  
wells with so many unfilled.

Decades later he learned  
about the marshmallow  
experiment. If preschool  
children could wait

fifteen minutes without  
eating a marshmallow  
placed in front of them  
they could have two.

Unrealistic he thinks,  
only in research labs  
could a promise like this  
be made and kept.



**TITLE: HOPE BUBBLE**  
**ARTIST: KATIE HUGHBANKS**

# Ordinary Time

ELIZABETH ANNE SCHWARTZ

Those days when the sunlight  
streams through the stained glass,  
a prism of color  
on green altar cloth.  
And it's a comfort,  
the rustle of  
Sister Abigail  
in her garden, weeding and pruning  
in the morning dew;  
the smell of old wood  
and candle smoke;  
the way footsteps echo  
and whispers ring  
like prophecy.  
I tell her I love her, here,  
so it's both quiet and profound,  
sitting shoulder to shoulder  
in the final pew—  
hand in hand  
in the softness of  
unremarkable days.

# Stains

ERIN JAMIESON

you  
wait  
to feel  
anything  
but  
numbness

sticky residue  
in your chest

sometimes  
you smell  
peppermints

he used  
to eat

you scrub  
dishes only  
to have

stains  
remain

# Buried

EMILY R. PAGET

When the Earth sleeps  
I hear her ancient mourning.  
Divine sorrow drawn in the  
ashes of oak.  
A brumal mist that drifts barefoot  
through the hourglass,  
swollen in her crown of  
grief.

These wings of darkness  
beat in syncopation  
against the silence.  
Soul for soul and  
buried in scarlet.  
The sound of drumming  
an invitation  
to the wild-eyed moon.

**TITLE: DREAMING OF CROWS ON  
A SUPER BLUE MOON**  
**ARTIST: KIM ARTHURS**



# SYNTAX

IAN PARKER

*hush / like drifting snow or susurous waves  
she explains her recent diagnosis*

and she punctuates it with a lingering so  
trailing off / air dying / uncertain soothsayer

an ellipsis meant to mean  
*you talk now so I can take a breath*

I make a rash joke, joshing her about  
moving her things into the hospital

where will her clothing hang in a shared room?  
what photos will she bring and does she  
need help in finding a mover? will an ambulance  
double? when are visiting hours?

but really, I'm afraid I'll lose her syntax  
the synecdoche of her vocabulary  
the weight of her nouns and verbs  
and remember I failed music theory  
and linguistics the same semester  
that tone is indistinguishable from voice  
and that's the real punchline

# Dopamine Fast

JOSHUA LILLIE

I hear *why* so serious, but we don't carry  
that flavor ice cream.

Some cultures don't even have words  
for our brand of cognitive dissonance.  
A cigar is a cigar is a cigar is

obscuring the view of the mountains with smoke.

Some people are born never having seen  
the veins lit red between their eyelids and  
everything else.

Can you envision a ball you've never seen?  
Only ever held? What's the nature  
of the orb in your mind if the real thing was  
never there?

The story I'm telling is the one about the man  
who had a daughter and whose wife died in  
child birth.

He sailed her to an island where he raised her  
all alone,  
and taught her that they were the only

two people on earth, that the island was the only patch  
of land for miles and miles. When he died

she was all that was left, and when she closed  
her eyes all she saw was the widemouthed sprawl  
of an empty plate.

# Nothing Biting

RICHARD JORDAN

First cool breeze off Cobb Pond & already  
I'm bracing for frosted windows & clanking pipes  
as I stand here with my father's Shakespeare Wonder

Rod, so old it's made of fiberglass. *The best  
for soft presentations, for imparting subtlety  
to a Hula Popper's chug.* That's what

my father used to say & like he taught  
I'm on the watch for fevered boils at the edge  
of lily pads where lunker bass gulp golden

shiners & fatten up for winter. But I see nothing.  
*Scan the sky,* I can almost hear him say.  
*Osprey circle when fish are near the surface.*

The sky is spotless. On the shore a mere  
few feet away, curled like an ampersand,  
a small, black snake flicks its tongue to taste the air.

I can't recall fatherly wisdom pertinent  
to snaky ampersands. Here's what I think:  
not even vintage fishing gear will lure

largemouths from the depths today. It's just  
me & this snake sunning at summer's end,  
an occasional sparkle dancing across the water.

# helium

ROWAN TATE

when i was in summer still, i  
climbed a plum tree and made up a song that  
went on singing itself, i put my eyes  
on sturdy branches so that they would stay open  
long after i climbed down. that was the summer i  
wobbled onto roofs that weren't mine and dangled from telephone wires  
as if a blouse hung on a washing line. i wanted god  
to catch me and he did. god said get in the car  
and he drove me down to california at midnight so i could see  
the moon dip  
like a tea bag into the pacific.  
you might have seen us  
or you might see us again, hair and hands,  
he drives like a maniac, i am  
screaming, we are flying,  
laughing and won't stop.



TITLE: OF ELSEWHERES  
ARTIST: JONATHAN KUSNEREK

# summer dies in the mouth of my aunt

SIMONE PARKER

summer dies in the mouth of my aunt  
who says she prays for israel every night.

she sits across the table from my sister  
and the cake my sister baked for her

chewing cheney praise with the cream cheese  
icing "he's voting for kamala you know"

at this point in the afternoon that looks  
like evening, my sister texts me for an ally.

another stomach churning back the milk & honey,  
vomiting that bleached blood onto the worn

persian carpet from the soukh (we should've  
checked the provenance), our guilty heels bent back

against the wool, red-soled from walks through tel aviv.  
"or," says our aunt, "anointed. elevated, an aliyah".

"or, dusted with birthright" says our aunt and our aunt  
and our father and our uncle and our aunt. they mourn

the parks they used to walk through in the golan.  
we claw at our hair. a child's lungs crush in the rubble.

an arm waves from a burning tent. another aid truck  
turns back down apartheid avenue, concrete and wire.

we cannot forget what we have seen. my aunt takes  
another bite of cake. chews with her mouth open.

# Science

THOMAS RIONS-MAEHREN

*Protons*

*Electrons*

*Always*

*Cause*

*Explosions.*

-RZA

I.

furtive electrons, nebulous,  
probabilistic ballistics  
buzz and hum  
to the call of universal laws,  
their actions and flow  
the thrust we feel. it  
permeates the cell walls,  
pierces the weightless mind,  
causes the dread that kicks  
the pit of our stomach in the silence,  
triggers the dexterous, intuitive  
movement of the toes  
with every step.

II.

disheveled galaxies appear at our moment of despair and cluelessness like  
professors - absent-minded, blithe, wise - late for class, their glasses cracked,  
their smiles genuine.

III.

let me ask, do you  
    know yourself better  
    from your flipped reflection

in the mirror, the same, old eyes staring back  
at you, a new freckle or scar maybe, or from living, from feeling  
    the subzero wind cut through your jacket,  
    the pain of  
        stagnation, the elation  
    of a blue sky?

IV.  
science is the looking glass.

V.  
everything there is to know about the universe  
is rattling around somewhere between  
the dainty, little hairs on your skin  
and the black hole of fear in your soul. the mysteries  
of the cosmos  
    i am.

VI.  
we are sacks of goop held  
    together      by the surface  
tension of water. our minds  
    evolved to avoid  
the sharp end of a tiger, not  
to nestle cognizance of all existence  
    in the pre-made, pre-fitted boxes of our psyche.

VII.  
when the chalkboards have been wiped, the pages  
of our textbooks stamped by muddy boot prints,  
our computers neutralized by the deluge of a new spring,  
AI babbling endless strings of probable next words  
into the void of space, what will we say  
that it is that we lost? a lot, certainly,  
but will it be who we are?

### VIII.

#### CONCLUSION.

in this poem, the dichotomy of human understanding and human experience was explored. a discussion probed whether or not knowledge is learned or lived, wisdom true or illusory. despite the lack of a satisfactory answer - or even question - being found, somewhere, moisture in the air was condensed on a microscopic particle, which was augmented by its ascending and descending, before being splattered upon a fallen maple leaf. additionally, blood vessels were dilated and heart rates elevated by the hormonal indicators exchanged in a tender kiss between a young couple caught in the storm. areas for further research include the strained conformations of twisted molecules in the eye being liberated by photons reflected from waterfalls and forests and the movements of neurons being stimulated via compression waves created by the babble of crystalline creeks, the cry of fertile toads, and the compositions ethereal songbirds.



**TITLE: DON'T HOLD YOUR TEARS**  
**ARTIST:**

# icarus ghosted the birds

WILL DAVIS

only the birds are landing today  
at the airport terminals.

no passengers  
they exclaim  
we remember a story

Icarus, was high  
on a horse—  
of his own supply—  
to drown on a journey,  
sealed in wax and  
the unkindness of feathers.

they will not bear  
text messages  
to our opposites above.

the solitary hoverings  
above us are ghosts—  
and only ghosts  
understand the birds.

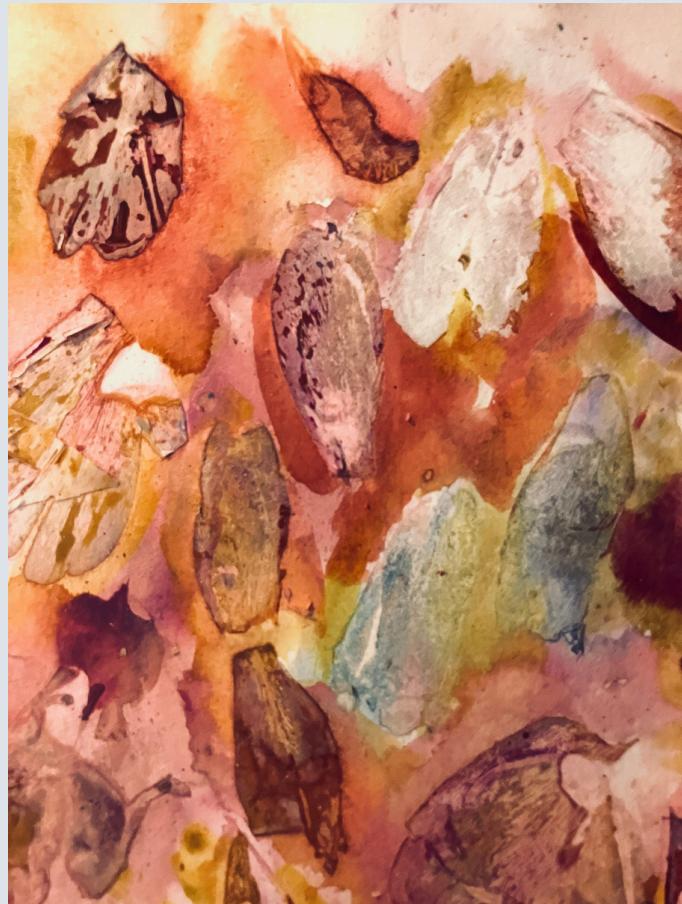
# Last Leaf

YUAN CHANGMING

Still hanging up there alone  
You're the most popular  
Reviewer of parading swirls

Smaller than a palm, you're  
Actually big enough to hold  
The entire season

Withered like a weathered wish  
You seal, for a new spring, every drop  
Of freshness in the twig



TITLE: PETALS  
ARTIST: RACHEL COYNE

# Syzygy

SHELLEY K. DAVENPORT

Amid these rocks, these round wooded hills, these outposts of the most ancient of mountains, approach the pillar. Hidden in the ten thousand inscribed, trace the one and only name. Lay flowers. Back away. The sky is adamant blue, enamel to tap fingernails against. Seven hawks, ambassadors of war, circle and cry as the three-day blood-struggle ebbs down the slopes. The ridge curves like the spine of a man reposed on his side. Crawl through the earth and bramble, find bits of tortured metal —bullets and buckles that bear witness like the oldest trees. Pause. The shadow approaches, and time laps back on itself. The hawks have gone and with them heat; the glare of the sun is quenched. A blink, a farewell twinkle, and noon-hard blue melts to twilight. Songbirds hush, allowing tree frogs and crickets to take up the strain. False sunsets flame sweetly on the horizons, while ten thousand unnamed stars hang in violet above. An iridescent circlet of silver rules the sky, a crown exchanged for all the weariness in the world. Kneeling by the tall stone, hear the long-desired sigh, feel the brush of cool knuckles. Reckon the loss. In a faraway home, a clock clicks the moments away. There, a tune is remembered. There, a name is written. Someone plucks strings beneath the light that never goes out.



**TITLE: DON'T FEED THE SOLACE**

**ARTIST: JONATHAN KUSNEREK**

# deep shade

STACY MARIE MILLER

No one recalls where the good canopies are, whether  
it's more or less humid near the river, whether  
it's even running any more.

It seems we lost all the paperwork  
on how to run this place. Whether  
May was a myth, like heaven.

*Let's get back in the car, sweetie -- this  
this is not the one I thought it was.*

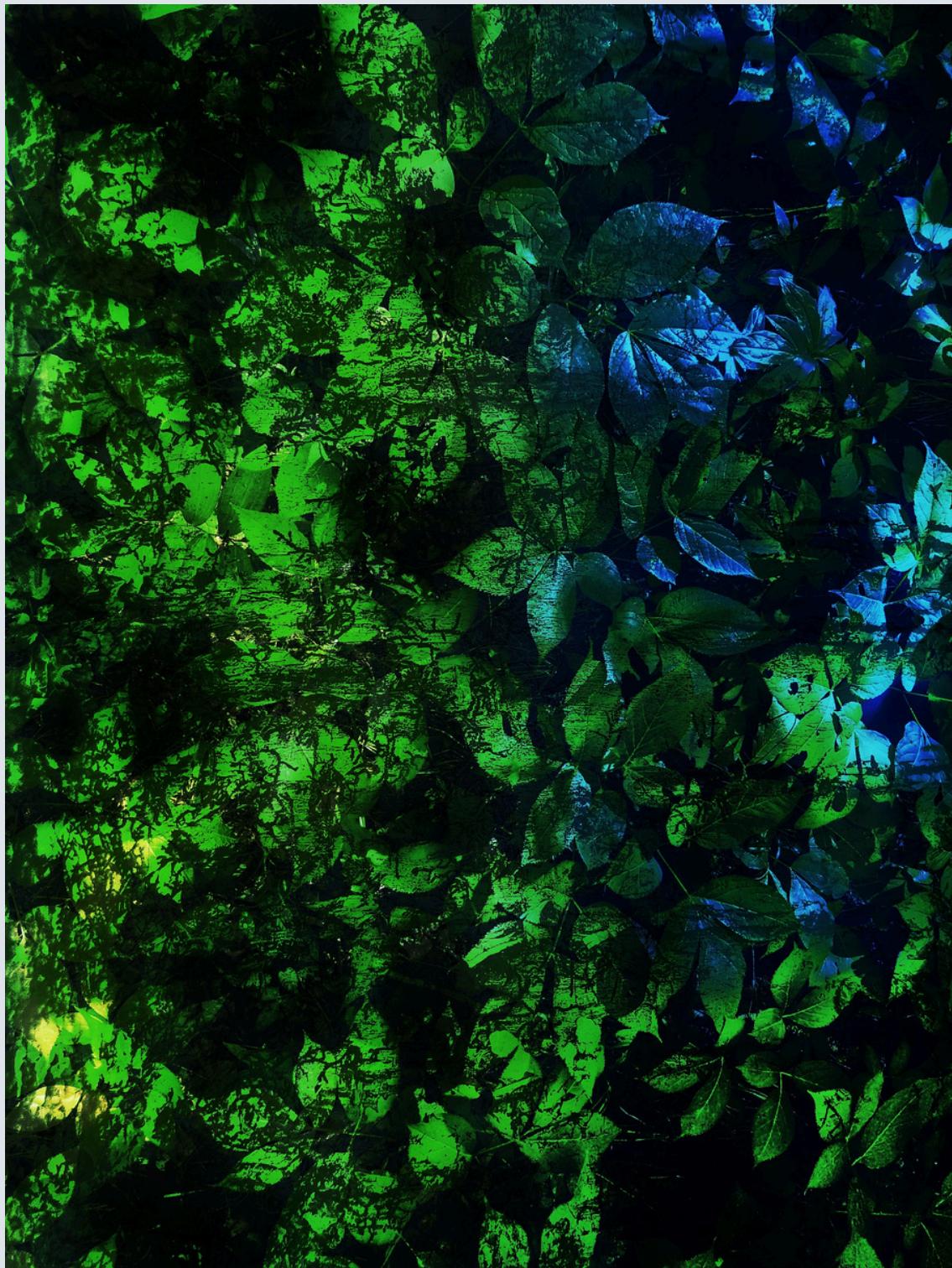
Son, I should have known. Or I knew, but  
it was a knowing I had no place to keep.  
All the things I promised were not

a lie, just truths no longer possible.  
We are so far from the deep  
shade I remember. Whether

we even saved the seeds.  
Hairs glisten on your legs, the parking  
lot melting beneath your shuffle, shoes

on the wrong feet, in the toddler style.  
Everything about and in and of  
you is still and always perfectly

impossible, a feather  
made of birds, a leaf  
made of trees.



**TITLE: SHADES OF SHADE // ARTIST: RUTHENIUM**

# By Any Other Name

STEPHEN K. KIM

On my first day of college,  
at a varnished oaken table,  
in sturdy slatback chairs,  
we went around listing  
name, hometown, some fun fact.

When my turn came,  
I gave the name Clive,  
unmooring myself  
from the name my parents gave me.  
I imagined gliding  
through first dates, interviews  
doctor's visits without  
the wrong kind of attention.  
Frustration from thwarted desires  
to "get it right." A well-meaning  
"I love ethnic names, what's yours mean?"

Years later, sitting on a windowsill,  
greeting the dawn of graduation day  
in last night's clothes,  
I recalled that scene from Spirited Away,  
when Chihiro is trapped  
in that fantastic bathhouse  
because a witch  
tears her name asunder,  
rending 千 from 尋,  
so she forgets who she is.

I thought back to my brash decision,  
sitting straight-backed at that oaken table,  
and I wondered if like Chihiro  
I had forgotten myself,  
so I could never remember  
who and what I lost.

# Confessional

SIMONE PARKER

*Cut up after Tumblr posts*

when i was little i  
pretended to be a statue  
of an astronaut, but not  
the astronaut himself.

all the things I wanted  
to be (an angel, a ruse)  
shifted inside me like  
seasons of girlself.

the secret changes  
my best friend and I felt  
together, the supernatural  
want I held in my diary.

how confusing it is  
to want to be loved  
knowing girls don't  
fall in love with girls

# Apology

TERRY TIERNEY

You ask me why I comb my hair  
now that it's fallen out  
as if the seconds I waste could add up  
to something.

I don't need a reason.

I have no apology  
for the frayed hem of my jeans,  
the worn hole in my crotch,  
the years I tried to escape my clothes  
like a god on a binge,  
my weak knees and broken arm  
from pointing the wrong way  
through traffic.

Too late to admit  
my thoughts were impure,  
not all, just the puckered  
scars on my back  
from making love to myself  
when I thought I could avoid  
the darting rabbit  
beneath my tires.

# IFENI dawn history

KATE MACALISTER

my dark mother covered the land  
in salt, a flood  
then came the decay, a sinking,  
then the fern seeds, the stories and ancient unsettling  
fog a thick shroud for a living,  
seething burial site. I sleep  
with a mouth full of moss, and I wake  
with a mouth full of rain; thirst.  
something in this water catches the ghosts  
they are drawn to the lichenlight  
& the old songs begin to walk  
here wordless, gorseful hymns  
& every crossroad within me is a haunting choice

# Aberration

HUNTER BLACKWELL

Underneath the crinkle is the spiral-spill  
paired with a smile and irises mutating  
into the search bar's blinking cursor.

The black text on blue screen float  
in green, blink at you in security code of your credit card  
and melts into a sideways triangle ready to play.

Underneath the singing bowl is a thumping heart  
and two nostrils inhaling cedar to press into ribs-  
hold it there.

The ribs bar away the floating star, the vessel  
bubbling with its own acid and flame. It only demands:  
*feed me well*  
and to follow the scratched down notes and printed ink.  
Take the shrug as: *it's well worth the try.*

Underneath, the last ray sits, converging onto itself,  
blurred in its own refraction, underneath  
a cold stethoscope biting at your chest  
to hear the whisper of bronchi and trachea.

# Good Mammals

ANGELA TOWNSEND

I would like to commission a statistical analysis. Is there an Ivy League post-doc seeking to contribute something novel to the field? I do not know to which field I am referring, but people with velvet stripes on their robes can sort that out. All I need is a scientist.

The object under study: declarations directed at cats.

**Hypothesis:** Upwards of ninety percent of catward statements translate to, "you are good." Cats do not need to hear it, but we need to say it.

I am a child, not a scientist. I scarcely passed Geology. Still, I come into this project with a high measure of confidence. I laugh the roof off my laboratory daily. Laughter is the unsung sibyl of science. Laughter is the healthiest and holiest response to that which we cannot control, such as the moon, the trajectory of aerosol cheese, or ourselves.

I cannot control myself. I can only hear myself. Every time the nutmeg nugget swaggers into the room, I slobber like a sycophant. *You are a good baby! You are beautiful! You are in the ninety-ninth percentile of verbal reasoning!*

Cosette's accomplishment is her arrival. This is sufficient. She may pursue her own tail like a felon, claim my lap for France, or consume beef nuggets shaped like stars. It does not matter. Her goodness is under her ribs and out of her hands. This is why her empty bag of worries blows in the wind like a flag. This is why I would like to be Cosette when I grow up.

My mother has been campaigning for me to grow up since I was smaller and wiser than I am now. When I tell her I feel precarious, her hair stands on end, as though a wombat ran into the room. I tell her this so often, her hair should not still get surprised.

I tell her I am afraid I will lose my job because our income was down. It was down three percent, but all three were obese and uncouth. I tell her I am afraid my friends have

impeached me because no one responded to my text about elves. I tell her I saw God fold God's head in God's hands because I spent profane sums on ice cream.

I tell her I want someone to tell me that I am so excellent, I have outrun the boogey man. I would like this notarized in triplicate. I would also like a Pulitzer Prize.

My mother is a psychologist, so she uses words like "internal locus of control." My mother is a theologian, so she uses words like "mercy." My mother is in her fourth decade of hearing me ask if I am lovable, so she uses words like "dammit."

I am a child, not a scientist, so I follow impulses like the ice cream man. I code "you are good" into emails to the Board of Directors and texts to my nutritionist. I am an aggressive awardee, pinning blue ribbons on lapels and Led Zeppelin T-shirts. I inform many mammals of the news I need to hear. I see God fold God's head in God's hands because I am yelping too fast to hear God.

Our post-doc may need backup from the divinity school. It has been conclusively proven that cats believe they are the Pope, but their theological agenda remains unexplored. If ever they espoused insecurity, they have gone apostate. They are evangelists of the unconditional. They are not going to tell us what to believe. They are not going to wait for us to tell them that they are good. They are going to laugh. They have velvet stripes on their arms.



TITLE: GUARDIAN // ARTIST: JONATHAN KUSNEREK

# Without Shadows

CHRISTINE POTTER

A week of rain, a week without shadows, with  
shadows lost in the velvety grass and the  
earth spongy underfoot. With daylight soft as

an old white sheet. With no one taking a star  
turn in the long rays of sunset or dawn. With no  
stars. With night showing up like your mother

in her old green car, rolling down the window to  
lean out and call you: *Want a ride up the hill?*  
*I just ran out for a few groceries.* With her

headlights double moons in the gathering dusk,  
under the plum-black, cloudy sky. Of course  
you'd get in, even though she's four years gone.

Even though you're halfway dreaming it, half  
remembering. Even though tomorrow you'll  
wake to an overflow of morning, horizon zipped

into its blue and brass uniform, and ruthlessly in  
love with the new. Its bright world begins at  
the tip of a shadow. And likely includes even you.



TITLE: THE LONG GOODBYE // ARTIST: KAYLA STARLING

# [contributors]



## Aaron Lelito (he/him)

Aaron Lelito is a visual artist and writer from Buffalo, NY. His poetry chapbook, *The Half Turn*, was published in 2023, and he released a collaborative notebook/art collection titled *If We: Connections Through Creative Process* in 2024. His work has also appeared in *Stonecoast Review*, *Barzakh Magazine*, *Novus Literary Arts Journal*, *SPECTRA Poets*, *Peach Mag*, and *Santa Fe Review*. He is Editor in Chief of *Wild Roof Journal*.

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## Ace Boggess (he/him)

Ace Boggess is author of six books of poetry, including *Escape Envy* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2021), and two novels. His poems have appeared in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Harvard Review*, *River Styx*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where writes and tries to stay out of trouble. His seventh collection, *Tell Us How to Live*, is forthcoming in 2024 from Fernwood Press.

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## Allison Mei-Li (she/her)

Allison Mei-Li (she/her) lives in Southern California, where she is a speech-language pathologist, writer, and mother. Her writing has been published in *MER Literary*, *Coffee + Crumbs*, *the VC Reporter*, *Ink + Marrow*, *Wildscape*, and elsewhere. She loves connecting with writers and readers on Instagram and Substack.

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## Ammara Younas (she/her)

Ammara Younas, a poet from Pakistan, has work published & forthcoming in *Rattle*, *ONLY POEMS*, *Glass*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *The Shore*, *Subtext Literary Magazine*, *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*, *The Imagist*, *Small World City*, *Lakeer*, and *Resonance*. She is currently serving as a guest editor at *Subtext Literary Magazine*.

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### Amy G. Smith (she/her)

Amy G. Smith is a poet living and writing in Northern Nevada. Her poems have appeared in several places, including: *Humana Obscura*, *Gyroscope Review*, *contemporary haibun online*, and the *Wee Sparrow Water Anthology*. Amy is currently pursuing her MFA degree in poetry through the low-residency program at the University of Nevada, Reno at Lake Tahoe.

Instagram @amysgj / FB: @amy.sgj / [Website](#)



### Andrea Aldrete (she/her)

Andrea Aldrete is a published author from a small Texas border town where she savors every bit of her rich Hispanic culture. She is a mother of two small children, and a wife to an amazing husband. She lives a sober life that allows her to enjoy her loved ones creating long, meaningful memories.

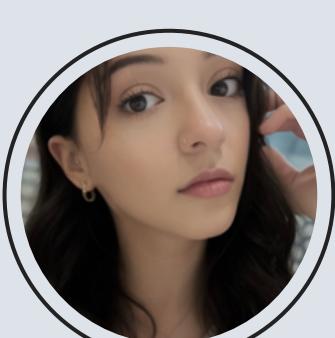
Instagram: @dre.writesnow



### Angela Townsend (she/her)

Angela Townsend is the development director at a cat sanctuary. She graduated from Princeton Seminary and Vassar College. She is a Best of the Net nominee and the 2024 winner of West Trade Review's 704 Prize for Flash Fiction. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Arts & Letters*, *Paris Lit Up*, *Pleiades*, *SmokeLong*, and *Terrain*, among others. Angela has lived with Type 1 diabetes for 34 years.

IG: @fullyalivebythegrace / X: @TheWakingTulip



### B. A. Hutchison (she/her)

B. A. Hutchison is a Dayton, Ohio resident who found her love of poetry fifteen years prior thanks to an eighth grade English teacher showing a great interest in her writing. She is a hospital pharmacy technician, chess enthusiast, and amateur vegan cook living out a beautifully creative life with her pottery-obsessed husband. Her work is mostly found on Instagram under the handle @fromtheastralplane and has been published in several anthologies including Jack Wild Publishing's Spring Anthology and First Lines Poets Anthology.

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## **Barbara E. Hunt (she/her)**



Barbara E. Hunt has publications across North America, U.K., Netherlands, Scandinavia, Australia, Germany and has recently garnered a Pushcart Prize nomination for publication in Sweden. Work is accessible (free) on WATTPAD. Her climate-change collection is Rowing Across the North Atlantic (available at [writersplayground.ca](http://writersplayground.ca)).

Instagram: [@barbaraehunt](https://www.instagram.com/barbaraehunt) // [Website](http://writersplayground.ca) // [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/@barbaraehunt)



## **Beth Kephart (she/her)**

Beth Kephart is a writer, teacher, and book artist whose paper arts have been shown in galleries and featured in magazines such as PRINT (online) and WHAT WOMEN CREATE. Her new books are My Life in Paper: Adventures in Ephemera and You Are Not Vanished Here: Essays. More at [bethkephartbooks.com](http://bethkephartbooks.com) and [bind-arts.com](http://bind-arts.com)  
Instagram: [@bethkephartnow](https://www.instagram.com/bethkephartnow) / [substack](https://www.substack.com/@bethkephartnow)



## **Camden Michael Jones (he/him)**

Jones published his debut collection of poetry - "There is a Corner of Someplace Else" - in Sept. 2023 with Cornerstone Press. Individual poems have appeared in a variety of anthologies and a few CNF stories have appeared in various magazines. Jones is an MFA Candidate at OSU Cascades Low-Residency MFA program studying poetry, and is a high school teacher in Condon, OR.  
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## **Caroline Wiygul (she/her)**

Caroline Wiygul is a poet originally from the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. She now lives in Tennessee, where she helps design community gardens, orchards, and parks. Her work has appeared in Outcrop, Interpret, Propel, and Gutter magazines.

## **Cat Speranzini (she/her)**



Cat is a New England native and Emerson College alumna. She works as the editor of Grey Coven Publishing and is also a reader for Querencia Press.

She has two full length poetry collections: "Watercolor Souls" and "Calm in the Dark." Her work has been published by numerous literary magazines, including: the Eunoia Review, Clever Fox Lit Mag, Glass Gates Publishing, and Moss Puppy Magazine.

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## **Catarina Delgado (she/her)**



Catarina Delgado is a writer from Setúbal, Portugal. Her work appears in Eufeme Literary Magazine, NOVA em folha journal, Pigeon Review and Impostor Literary Journal. She self-published her first Portuguese poetry collection, Fragmentos.

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## **Chris Clemens (he/him)**

Chris Clemens lives and teaches in Toronto, surrounded by raccoons. Nominated for Best Microfiction, his writing appears in Invisible City, JAKE, The Dribble Drabble Review, Apex Magazine, and elsewhere.

## **Christiana Doucette (she/her)**



Christiana Doucette spends mornings in her garden weeding, because just like her poetry, flowers grow best with space to breathe. She has judged poetry for San Diego Writer's Festival for the past three years. Her poetry has appeared in anthologies, been set to music by opera composers, and performed on NPR. She is the 2024 Kay Yoder Scholarship for American History recipient. Her full-length verse novel works are represented by Leslie Zampetti of Open Book Literary. You can find her recent/forthcoming poetry in Full Mood Magazine, The Zinnia Journal, Boats Against the Current, The Creekside Magazine, and Frazzled Lit.

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## Christine Potter (she/her)



Christine Potter is the poetry editor of Eclectica Magazine. She has had work lately in Rattle, ONE ART, Grain, The McNeese Review, The Red Eft Review, and Autumn Sky Poetry Daily. She lives with her chonky cat Bella and her husband in a very old house in the lower Hudson Valley. Her last poetry collection, *Unforgetting*, is published by Kelsay Press and her young adult novels, The Bean Books, are on *Evernight Teen*.

Instagram: @chrispygal / [Facebook](#)

## Christopher Woods (he/him)



Christopher Woods is a writer and photographer who lives in Texas. His monologue show, *Twelve from Texas*, was performed recently in NYC by Equity Library Theatre. His poetry collection, *Maybe Birds Would Carry It Away*, is published by Kelsay Books.

Instagram/Threads: @riverbedsky2229 / [Gallery](#)

## Darrell Petska (he/him)



Darrell Petska is a retired university engineering editor and two-time Pushcart Prize nominee. His work appears in Verse-Virtual, 3rd Wednesday Magazine, The Orchards Poetry Journal, Amethyst Review, and widely elsewhere ([conservancies.wordpress.com](http://conservancies.wordpress.com)). Father of five and grandfather of seven, he lives near Madison, Wisconsin, with his wife of more than 50 years.

[conservancies.wordpress.com](http://conservancies.wordpress.com)

## David A. Goodrum (he/him)



David A. Goodrum, photographer/writer, lives in Corvallis, Oregon. His photography has graced the covers of several art and literature magazines, most recently *Cirque Journal*, *Willows Wept Review*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Ilanot Review*, *Red Rock Review*, *The Moving Force Journal*, *Snapdragon Journal*, *Vita Poetica*, *Full House Literary*, and appeared in many others. His artistic vision has always been to create a visual field that momentarily transports you away from hectic daily events and into a place that delights in an intimate view of the world.

Instagram: @goodrum / [Website](#)



### **Ela Kumcuoglu (she/her)**

Ela Kumcuoglu is a previously unpublished poet and student living in London. She is originally from Türkiye and enjoys writing poetry in her free time. Her other interests include ballet, theatre and astronomy. She is a member of National Youth Theatre.

Instagram: @elab.egum



### **Elizabeth Anne Schwartz (she/her)**

Elizabeth Anne Schwartz writes sapphic fiction and poetry, and loves all things dark, lyrical, and confessional. She earned her BA in Creative Writing at Purchase College, and has work featured or forthcoming in Clever Fox Literary Magazine, Grey Coven Publishing, and Bitter Melon Review, among others. Her poetry chapbook, Nine Stages of Coming Out, was published by tiny wren lit. Visit her website at [elizabethanneschwartz.carrd.co/](http://elizabethanneschwartz.carrd.co/)  
Insta: @elizanneschwa



### **Ellis Eden (she/her)**

Ellis Eden is a writer, artist, and book advocate. Her written work has appeared in Periphery Literary Journal and Andromeda Magazine. Her intersectionality is bisexual, neurodivergent, and DhBΘΩ (Cherokee) and Chahta Okla (Choctaw). She's a Midwest transplant to Florida, and loves mythology, foreign film, and surfing.

Instagram: @ellisedenauthor / [Blog](#)

## Elly Katz (she/her)



At 27, verging towards a doctorate at Harvard, Elly Katz went for a mundane procedure to stabilize her neck. Somehow, she survived what doctors surmised was unsurvivable: a brainstem stroke secondary to a physician's needle misplacement. In the wake of the tragedy, she discovered the power of dictation and the bounty of metaphor. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in the *Stardust Review*, the *Sacramento Literary Review*, the *Amsterdam Review*, and many others. Her first collection of creative nonfiction, *From Scientist to Stroke Survivor: Life Redacted* is forthcoming from *Lived Places Publishing in Disability Studies* (2025). Her first collection of poetry, *Instructions for Selling-Off Grief*, is forthcoming from *Kelsay Books* (2025).

## Emily R. Paget (she/her)



Emily R. Paget lives and works in Dumfries and Galloway, Scotland. The landscape and coast around her home inspire both her writing and photography. She is passionate about her natural surroundings, history and the balance of light and dark. Emily was shortlisted for the Yeovil Poetry Prize 2022. Her debut poetry collection, *The Weight of Missing*, was published in March 2023 by The Choir Press.

[Instagram](#) // [Facebook](#) // [TikTok](#) // [Website](#)

## Erin Jamieson (she/her)



Erin Jamieson holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University. Her writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, including two Pushcart Prize nominations. Her poetry chapbook, *Fairytales*, was published by Bottlecap Press and her most recent chapbook, *Remnants*, came out in 2024. Her debut novel (*Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams*) came out November 2023. She resides in Loveland, Ohio.

Twitter: @erin\_simmer

## **Hunter Blackwell (they/them)**



Hunter Blackwell is a Black and Native queer poet and author. They received their MFA in Creative Writing from Northern Arizona University. They are the recipient of the 2020 Diana Gabaldon Award and the 2018 Gorowny-Owen Prize for Group of Poems. Their previous works have appeared in Parentheses Journal, Kissing Dynamite, Barren Magazine, and others. When not writing, they are attempting box mix bakes and cosplays. Find them on twitter @hun\_blackwell and Instagram @hun.t.blackwell. [Website](#)



## **Ian Parker (he/him)**

Ian Parker is a poet and musician living in Portland, OR. His work has been previously published by orangepeel literary magazine and infinite scroll. Instagram: @gloomsayer\_



## **Jacelyn Yap (she/her)**

Jacelyn is a self-taught visual artist who ditched engineering to make art because of a comic she read. Her artworks and photography have been published by the Commonwealth Foundation's adda, Chestnut Review, The Lumiere Review, and more. She can be found at <https://jacelyn.myportfolio.com/> and on Instagram at @jacelyn.makes.stuff.

## Jenha Paulino (she/her)



Jenha Paulino is a mixed media artist focusing on drawing and wearable art. Her work explores repressed emotions from good and bad memories, past and present, and transforming these experiences into expressive, colorful, and vibrant art. Using an intuitive approach, she embraces imperfections, valuing the creative journey over the outcome. Her pieces explore happiness and melancholic themes, leaning towards abstract expressionism. This artistic expression is a form of healing for her. Through her work, she aims to connect with others by giving voice to often unspoken emotions.

Instagram/Tiktok: @stamped.petals / [Linktree](#)

## Jennifer Anne Gordon (she/they)



Jennifer Anne Gordon is an award-winning author and podcast host. Her debut novel *Beautiful, Frightening and Silent* won the Kindle Book Award for Best Horror/Suspense for 2020, as well as the Best Horror Novel of the Year from Authors on The Air. Her novel *Pretty/Ugly* won the Helicon Award for Best Horror for 2022, and the Kindle Book Award for Best Novel of the Year (Reader's Choice). Her collection *The Japanese Box: And Other Stories* was an instant Amazon Bestseller and her story *The Japanese Box* won the Lit Nastie Award for 2023 for Best Short Story.

[Website](#) / [Facebook](#) / [Instagram](#)

Literary Rep: Paula Munier of Talcott Notch Literary

Publicity Rep: Mickey Mikkelsen of Creative Edge  
Publicity

## Jessica Bell (she/her)



Jessica Bell is an emerging writer living in Southwest Virginia with her dog and two ferrets. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Hollins University and is currently mostly interested in hybrid writing that explores the inherited grief of women. Her work can be found in *The Journal*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Midsummer Magazine*, *Nightshade Lit*, *Londemere Lit*, and *Discretionary Love*. In her free time, she can often be found outside, drawing and covered in oil pastel, or reading fantasy novels.

X handle: @jbbell\_

## Jo Rohrbacker (she/her)



Jo Rohrbacker has lived in Flagstaff, Arizona for over 30 years and attended college at NAU. When she earned her degree in fine arts, her goal was to teach knowing she could be an artist without a college education. It was important for her to create safe environments for other creatives to discover their own passions knowing an artist's process can be so humbling and empowering in equal measure. Although her comfort zone lies within the medium of painting, she has always loved telling stories. She hopes to create children's books in the near future accompanied by her watercolor illustrations.

Instagram: [@jo.paints](https://www.instagram.com/jo.paints) / [Website](https://www.jorohrbacker.com)



## Jonathan Kusnerek (he/they/she)

Jonathan Kusnerek is a queer, interdisciplinary artist and educator based in Chicago, IL. Their work is inspired by nature and folklore to create wild, strange, and magical things.

Instagram: [@jkusnerek](https://www.instagram.com/jkusnerek) / [Website](https://jkusnerek.com)



## Joseph Geskey (he/him)

Joseph Geskey's first book of poetry, "Alms for the Ravens," was released by Main Street Rag Publishing Company in September. Individual poems have appeared in Tar River Poetry, Poetry East, Cloudbank, and many others. More information can be found at [josephgeskey.com](http://josephgeskey.com)



## Joshua Lillie (he/him)

Joshua Lillie is a bartender in Tucson, Arizona. He is the author of the chapbook *Small Talk Symphony*, to be published by Finishing Line Press in 2025, and was a finalist for the 2024 Jack McCarthy Book Prize Contest from Write Bloody Publishing. In his free time, he enjoys searching for lizards with his wife and cat.

Instagram: [@joshaaronlillie](https://www.instagram.com/joshaaronlillie)

## **Joshua St. Claire (he/him)**



Joshua St. Claire is an accountant from a small town in Pennsylvania works as a financial director for a large non-profit. His haiku and related poetry have been published broadly including in Frogpond, Modern Haiku, The Heron's Nest, and Mayfly. He has received recognition in the following international contests/awards for his work in these forms: the Gerald Brady Memorial Senryu Award, the Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Haiku Invitational, the San Francisco International Award for Senryu, the Robert Speiss Memorial Award, the Touchstone Award for Individual Haiku, the British Haiku Society Award for Haiku, and the Trailblazer Award.



## **K. McNeil (she/her)**

K. McNeil grew up in Los Angeles and is currently studying creative writing at Chapman University. She has been writing fiction and poetry from before she can remember and loves all things fantasy. Her hot take is that fairies are probably real, but that's something she keeps to herself for the most part.

Instagram: @kmcneilpoetry



## **Kate MacAlister (she/her)**

Kate MacAlister is a poet and feminist activist. She studied Creative Writing and Poetry at the Manchester School of Art. Kate has published two collections of poetry ('songs of the blood', Querencia Press 2022 & 'burn it all down then kiss me', Sunday Mornings at the River, 2023) and countless poems in magazines worldwide. She is currently working towards a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Nottingham.

Instagram: @kissed.by\_fire

## **Katie Hughbanks (she/her)**



Katie Hughbanks is a writer, photographer, and teacher whose photography has been recognized nationally and internationally. Her photos appear in more than 40 publications, including Molecule, Dulcet, Cool Beans Lit, Peatsmoke Journal, In Parentheses, L'Esprit Literary Review, New Feathers Anthology, Glassworks Magazine, Azahares, Paper Dragon, Sage-ing, and Black Fork Review. She is the author of two chapbooks, Blackbird Songs (Prolific Press, 2019) and It's Time (Finishing Line Press, 2024). She teaches English and Creative Writing in Louisville, Kentucky.

Instagram: @katiehughbankspics

## **Kayla Starling (they/them)**



Kayla Starling is a queer mixed-media artist from Central Florida whose abstract collage works explore grief, hope and existential thought. Combining surrealism and maximalism through 2D analog collage, they urge the viewer to grapple with their own despair – and challenge them to find a way through it. When Kayla is not making collages, they are perfecting their stained glass technique, studying the Spanish language, and working toward food justice in their local community of Tallahassee, Florida. They believe we will see a free, liberated Palestine in our lifetime.

Instagram: @decaf.collage  
(author photo credit: Van Lane)



## **Keith Moul (he/him)**

Keith Moul is a poet of place, a photographer of the distinction light adds to place. Both his poems and photos are published widely. His photos are digital, striving for high contrast and saturation, which makes his vision colorful (or weak, requiring enhancement).



### **Kim Arthurs (they/them)**

Kim Arthurs is a queer artist, writer, and double Pisces from Providence, RI. They have had their artwork installed in various locations across New England, they like to write by moonlight, and you can find them in the garden with their cat, or submerged in saltwater.

Instagram/X: [@moonersmakes](#) / [Portfolio](#)



### **Ky L. Gerbush (she/her)**

Ky Gerbush is a nonfiction writer based in the Berkshires, where she crafts deeply personal narratives that explore social issues and the power of storytelling. Her work often focuses on the interplay between individual experience and societal norms, with a passion for examining the transformative power of truth. An alum of GrubStreet's "Writing to Heal" program, a selective writing incubator that emphasizes craft and reflective practice, Ky holds a Master's in Education from Harvard. She teaches writing as a pathway to self-discovery, guiding others to uncover new perspectives through a unique, therapeutic approach to storytelling.

Instagram: [@donuttrashpanda](#) / [Website](#)



### **L. Ward Abel (he/him)**

L. Ward Abel's work has appeared in hundreds of journals (Rattle, Versal, The Reader, Worcester Review, Riverbed Review, Honest Ulsterman, others), including a nomination for a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net, and he is the author of four full collections and ten chapbooks of poetry, including his latest collection, *Green Shoulders: New and Selected Poems 2003-2023* (Silver Bow, 2023). He is a reformed lawyer, he writes and plays music, and he teaches literature. Abel resides in rural Georgia.



### Lana Hechtman Ayers (she/her)

Lana Hechtman Ayers makes her home in an Oregon coastal town famous for its barking sea lions. As managing editor at three small presses, she has shepherded over a hundred poetry collections into print. She holds MFAs in Poetry and in Writing Popular Fiction, as well as degrees in Mathematics and Psychology. Her work appears in print and online journals such as Rattle, The MacGuffin, The London Reader, and Peregrine, as well as in her nine poetry collections. Visit her online at [LanaAyers.com](http://LanaAyers.com).

Instagram/X: [@LanaAyers23](https://www.instagram.com/@LanaAyers23) / [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/LanaAyers23)



### Larena Nellies-Ortiz (she/her)

Larena Nellies-Ortiz is a photographer and poet from Oakland, California. Her work explores themes of belonging, identity, everyday wonder and the relationship we have with our environments. Her work has been featured in various publications such as The Sun Magazine, Stonecoast Review, Sunlight Press, The Ilanot Review, Indianapolis Review, and others. She loves to color, texture and shadow hunt in golden hour.

Instagram: [@lalifish](https://www.instagram.com/@lalifish)



### Lauren Merryfield (she/her)

Lauren Merryfield is a Canadian poet from Calgary, Alberta. Passionate about the power of words, she writes to express the depth of her emotions. Her poetry often explores themes of relationships—both real and imagined, past and present—capturing the complexities of human connections. Lauren draws inspiration from nature, particularly water and mountains, which deeply resonate with her spirit and creativity. She aims to connect with readers on an emotional level, using her unique voice to convey the beauty and intricacies of life's experiences.

Instagram: [@laur\\_enough](https://www.instagram.com/@laur_enough)

## **Linea Jantz (she/her)**



Linea Jantz has worked in roles including waste management, medical records, social services, and teacher. Among other adventures, she taught Business English in Ukraine (pre-invasion), worked as a bike law paralegal, and helped film a documentary about women entrepreneurs in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. Her writing is featured in publications including Palette Poetry, Heavy Feather Review, Beaver Magazine, and EcoTheo Review. She has been a presenter for the Poetry Moment for Spokane Public Radio and volunteers in her community supporting youth writers.

Instagram: @lineajantz / [Website](#)



## **Mandy Robertson (she/her)**

Mandy Robertson is a writer, musician, and visual artist located in Eastern Pennsylvania. She's fond of fairies, foxes, and fiddling.

Instagram: @mightyrmeller / [Website](#)



## **Meredith Hughes (she/her)**

Meredith is an educator, writer, and mother of many plants and animals. Not that she is like Taylor Swift, but she, too, enjoys putting the men she dates on blast when they wrong her.

Instagram: @missmeredithk



## **Michelle Li (she/her)**

Michelle Li has been nationally recognized by Scholastic Art and Writing, The Waltham Forest Poetry Contest, and the Rising Voices Awards, and is published in Blue Marble, Masque and Spectacle, and Lumina Journal. She is an alumnus of the 92Y Young Writer's Workshop, and Kenyon Review's Workshop, and is on the board of the Incandescent Review and Pen and Quill magazine. She plays violin and piano and loves Rachmaninoff and Sylvia Plath.

Instagram: kitkat.7731

## **Mike Chrisman (he/him)**



Mike Chrisman lived for decades in rural Western Massachusetts, working thirty-five years in the mental health field. MFA in Creative Writing from UMass, Amherst. Three daughters, five grandkids. He published/edited "The Valley Comic News". Was stringer/humorist for "The Shelburne Falls & West County News". He's been published in small mags, most of which are extinct by now. "Little Stories: New Poems by Michael Chrisman" has an ISBN ([dyslexiabookspublishing.com](http://dyslexiabookspublishing.com)). His "The Bible: Warts and All" appears on Amazon Kindle. Audio of his CD "Walking the Windy High Wire" can be heard on YouTube. He's retired now, in Antigua, Guatemala.  
Instagram: @mike.chrisman



## **Naomi Mills (she/her)**

Naomi Mills is a poet from Co. Kildare in Ireland. She earned a bachelor's degree in English and Philosophy at Maynooth University in 2023 and has recently completed a master's degree in Creative Writing at the same university, under the tutelage of writer Belinda McKeon. Her poetry has been published in Dark Poets Club.  
Instagram: @naomiy mills



## **Nicholas Grooms (he/him)**

Nicholas Grooms is a poet, writer and musician hailing from Garden City, Kansas. He has appeared in such periodicals as Verse Libre Quarterly, Roi Faineant, Skyline Magazine and Midsummer Dream House, though he is best known for his work creating music for the Kansas City Chiefs organization. Grooms is also a revered sports and entertainment journalist and is author of the book "Me, Myself and I Hate You". He currently resides in Austin, TX, forever learning and growing in his favorite role of "proud father".  
Instagram: @nicholasgroomsraps

## O.P. Jha (he/him)



O.P. Jha's works appeared in Rigorous, Mantis, You Might Need To Hear This, Punt Volat, Zoetic Press, Discretionary Love, In Parentheses, Shot Glass Journal, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, ANTHRA Zine, The Interwoven Journal, The Cry Lounge, The Odessa Collective Magazine, Backchannels Journal, Homer's Odyssey, The Indian Literature, The Broken Teacup, Poetry Pacific, Five Fleas-Itchy Poetry, All Poetry, By the Beach, miniMag, Iceblink Literary Magazine, Infinite Scroll, The Rome Review, The Tiger Leaping Review, Aloka and other journals. He is the author of an inspiring book Management Guru Lord Krishna. He has translated more than two dozen books including the works of Turkish writers - Ahmet Hamadi Tanpinar and Yekta Kopan. He has Doctoral degree in "Translation Studies".  
twitter (X) : @OPJha17



## Paul Hostovsky (he/him)

Paul Hostovsky's poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net Awards, the FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize, and have been featured on Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, The Writer's Almanac, and the Best American Poetry blog. Website: paulhostovsky.com



## Phebe Jewell (she/her)

Phebe Jewell's work appears in numerous journals, most recently "The Disappointed Housewife," "Reckon Review," "JAKE," "Does It Have Pockets?", "Bright Flash Literary Review," "Across the Margin," "Gooseberry Pie," and elsewhere. A teacher at Seattle Central College, she also volunteers for the Freedom Education Project Puget Sound, a nonprofit providing college courses for incarcerated women, trans-identified, and gender nonconforming people in Washington State. Read her at <http://phebejewellwrites.com>.



### **Rachel Coyne (she/her)**

Rachel Coyne is a writer and painter from Lindstrom, MN.

Instagram/Twitter: [@imrachelcoyne](https://www.instagram.com/imrachelcoyne)



### **Richard Jordan (he/him)**

Richard Jordan's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Terrain, Cider Press Review, Connecticut River Review, Rattle, Valparaiso Poetry Review, New York Quarterly, Sugar House Review, Tar River Poetry, South Florida Poetry Journal and elsewhere. His debut chapbook, The Squannacook at Dawn, won first place in the 2023 Poetry Box Chapbook Contest. He serves as an Associate Editor for Thimble Literary Magazine.

Instagram: [@richardjordanpoetry](https://www.instagram.com/richardjordanpoetry) / [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/richardjordanpoetry)



### **Rowan Tate (she/her)**

Rowan Tate is a Romanian creative and curator of beauty. She reads nonfiction nature books, the backs of shampoo bottles, and sometimes minds.



### **Ruthenium (they/them)**

Ruthenium is an artist currently living in the state of uncertainty. They believe creativity is real-life magic, and are obsessed with texture, context, light, and the question "what if?..." Their art has been published in Rabble Review, Celestite Poetry, Vulnerary Magazine, Messy Misfits Magazine, and Warning Lines Literary, among other wonderful places. Their various presences and publications can be found at <https://linktr.ee/Ruthenium>



## Sandy Feinstein (she/her)

Sandy Feinstein's most recent autofiction appears this year in *Manifest Station*. Her creative nonfiction appeared in *Impost* earlier this year and in *Michigan Quarterly Review* five years ago, among others in between. Her fiction has appeared this year and last in *WayWords* and *Flash Frontier*. In creative writing classes, she tries to teach students how to use what they feel and experience to write in any genre, including hybrids. Sandy also teaches early literature and assigns both Ovid's *Orpheus* and the medieval *Orfeo* in her creative writing classes.



## Sean Bw Parker

Sean Bw Parker (MA) is a writer, artist and musician based in Worthing, West Sussex. He lived in Istanbul for ten years, has written or contributed to a number of books and albums, and given a TED talk. He was born in Exeter in 1975.

Twitter: @seanbwarker / [Gallery](#) / [Amazon](#)



## Shelley K. Davenport (she/her)

Shelley K. Davenport is a published fiction writer and poet. She lives and writes in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania –the Paris of Appalachia, a most uncanny city. You can find her at [www.shelleykdavenport.com](http://www.shelleykdavenport.com).



## Simone Parker (she/her)

Simone Parker is a poet and collage artist. She is Jewish, bisexual, and unapologetically midwestern. Her poems have been published in the *winnow*, *Ghost Girls Zine*, *The Talking Stick*, and *bitter melon* review. She has showcased her poetry at Brooklyn Poets and The Poetry Foundation and exhibited her collage work at the Minnesota Center for Book Arts. She lives in Minneapolis with her husband, her cat, and at least 82 house plants. Find her on Instagram @singedfingers or online at [simoneparkeroft.com](http://simoneparkeroft.com)



### **Stacy Marie Miller (she/her)**

Stacy Marie Miller (she/her) lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. She has a B.A in English and Environmental Studies from Saint Mary's College of Maryland, where she was Editor in Chief of the Avatar Literary Magazine.

Instagram: [@sloppy.minutiae](https://www.instagram.com/sloppy.minutiae)



### **Stephen K. Kim (he/him)**

Stephen K. Kim is a queer Korean American writer and college educator in upstate New York. He enjoys spending time with his husband and his cat. His poems appear or are forthcoming in Ghost City Review, Fifth Wheel Press, Thimble, and elsewhere.

He can be found online [@skimperil.](https://www.instagram.com/skimperil)

Instagram/X: [@skimperil](https://www.instagram.com/skimperil)



### **Terry Tierney (he/him)**

Terry Tierney is the author of The Poet's Garage and the novels Lucky Ride and The Bridge on Beer River.

His poems appear in The Bellevue Literary Review, Remington Review, Reed Magazine, and Rust + Moth. His poetry book, Why Trees Stay Outside, is coming from Unsolicited Press. Website:

<http://terrytierney.com>.

[Instagram](#) / [Threads](#) / [Twitter/X](#) / [Facebook](#) / [LinkedIn](#)

### **Thomas Rions-Maehren (he/him)**



Thomas Rions-Maehren, along with being an editor at Open Expression Journal, is a bilingual poet, novelist, and chemist. His scientific research has been published in ACS Nano, and examples of his Spanish-language prose can be found in his published short stories and in his novel *En las Manos de Satanás* (Ápeiron Ediciones, 2022). More of his poetry in both languages can be found in a number of journals, such as The Elevation and Welter, at his blog ([tommaehrenpoetry.blogspot.com](http://tommaehrenpoetry.blogspot.com)), and at his website ([thomasrionsmaehren.com](http://thomasrionsmaehren.com)). He is on X and Instagram @MaehrenTom.

## Tinamarie Cox (she/her)



Tinamarie Cox lives in Arizona with her husband, two children, and rescue felines. Her written and visual work has appeared in a number of publications under various genres. She has two chapbooks with Bottlecap Press, *Self-Destruction in Small Doses* (2023), and *A Collection of Morning Hours* (2024). Her debut full-length poetry collection, *Through A Sea Laced With Midnight Hues*, is forthcoming with Nymeria Press in 2025. You can find more of her work at: [tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com](http://tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com)

Instagram/FB/Threads/TikTok:  
@tinamariethinkstoomuch

## Victoria Spires (she/her)



Victoria Spires' (she/her) poems scribble in the margins of remembered philosophies, overheard ideas, nature, motherhood and desire. Her work has been featured or is forthcoming in various publications including *The Winged Moon*, *Berlin Lit*, *Suburban Witchcraft*, *Ghost City Review*, and *Dust*.

She was commended in the *Ledbury Poetry Competition 2024* and shortlisted for the *Aesthetica Arts Creative Writing Award*. She is also a contributing editor at *The Winged Moon*.

Instagram: @jitterbug\_writes / X: @jitterbugwrites

## Will Davis (he/they)



Will Davis is a nurse, poem scribbler, and singular immutable fire escape. Words found @ByThisWillAlone.

Instagram: @ByThisWillAlone

## yuan changming (he/him)



Yuan Changming edits *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Yuan. Credits include 15 chapbooks, 12 Pushcart nominations for poetry and 2 for fiction besides appearances in *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry (2008-17)*, *BestNewPoemsOnline* and 2089 other publications across 51 countries. Yuan began writing and publishing fiction in 2022, with his first (hybrid) novel *Detaching* due out in September.

[poetrypacific.blogspot.ca](http://poetrypacific.blogspot.ca)