



# wildscape.

LITERARY JOURNAL

equal parts whimsy & chaos



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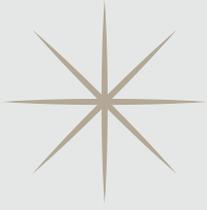
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**TRIGGER WARNING:** Some passages within this issue may contain difficult topics, which could be triggering for some people. These topics include but are not limited to mentions of genocide, religion, sexual assault, mentions of self-harm, mentions of suicide/suicidal ideation, abandonment, and abuse. Please read with caution, and take breaks as needed. Your mental health matters.



# editors' note

Dearest Readers,

We are grateful to once again have the opportunity to present you with powerful writing and breathtaking artwork. In this issue, you'll find twenty poems, two flash fiction pieces, one flash creative nonfiction piece, and sixteen works of art— all handpicked and organized to offer you a curated selection that will make you feel, make you think, and make you curious.

We hope that you take the time to soak in each and every page of this issue, and that you walk away at the end with a bit more light in your eyes, and a lot more fire in your heart, than when you started. It is our hope that you use *your* newfound hope to shed light on the truth, and share it with those around you.

Art is what will save this world— we truly believe that. But we must use this beautiful tool of creativity to speak up for the voiceless, and fight back in all ways necessary against genocide. Use your voice and your words and your art to speak truth into the world about what is happening in Palestine, Congo, Sudan, and in all other places where humanity is threatened.

Hang in there, friends. We're in this together, and we will forever continue to fight with you and alongside you.

With love,  
Ophelia & Oliver



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# Issue 2's Featured Poet:



## F i z z a F a t i m a

### ABOUT FIZZA:

Fizza Fatima is a writer wrestling with the worries of writing from within the Heart of Empire. It's not lost on her that while she frets over metaphors and similes, argues with herself about the correct placement of enjambments, Israel is setting fire to refugee encampments. Fizza would like to take this space to condemn the Genocide in Gaza and highlight the story of a young writer named Nour who at 16 years old writes with more resilience, courage, and heart than all the writers of Empire. Nour hopes to publish her own books, and mourns the loss of her collection at home. She speaks of the walls of her old room bearing witness to the destruction of her home, the same walls which witnessed her grow up. [Here is the link to her chuffed campaign.](#) Please donate whatever amount you can.

Substack: FizzyMusings

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

# Interview with Fizza Fatima

**Ophelia:** What would you like to share about your story? How did you become interested in poetry, and how long ago did you begin writing?

**Fizza:** I was fed poetry at a very young age, even before I knew language. My father, sat criss-cross on his prayer mat, would hold me in his lap reciting "poem after poem like a call to prayer." And I suppose I answered. The first poems I ever "wrote" I sang, they were poems in praise of the Prophet, because those praises and prayers are what made up the majority of my early schooling in poetry.

**Ophelia:** What feelings and/or messages do you hope to convey with your writing?

**Fizza:** I think what I hope to convey through my writing is some measure of attempting to language the ineffable, as poeming has always been a sacred practice for me. Or near enough. There are times when it's not, when it is simply a vehicle into which I pour my rage and frustration, but somehow in the crafting of a poem I think there is an ethos of care and patience that distills otherwise rushed emotions into their truest essences. It is a practice that when applied to our selves can---I think---in no small way make us better. Maybe that better means healthier? I don't know. I don't like the word healthier or healthy and equating it to better---that might be chronic illness talking. But maybe better as in healing. Healing is a word I can cope with, better than healthy. I think I have found that insofar as illness can be chronic so too is healing. I like to consider myself a chronically healing being. Healing from this ordeal of being. And I think I am able to do that through poetry. Because poems, unlike other literary forms, demand a stillness from you. They demand that you pause, and in a world that refuses to stop spinning, on an earth built on ever shifting tectonic plates, poetry allows you space to breathe between the earth's trembling resonances.

**Ophelia:** What hopes and goals do you have for yourself, as a writer and/or otherwise?

**Fizza:** I hope to be better. A writer, a person.

**Ophelia:** What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

**Fizza:** This is a hard question, because every good piece of advice I received was particular to the moment in which I received it, there is little that can serve as a catch all. But there is something my mom has always said to me growing up, and I think it's greatly shaped the person that I am today, which I struggle with translating---translating my mother is another theme in my writing. There is so much of her language that is rooted deep inside me, yet the world in which I move and craft and construct is made of an entirely separate alphabet. Many of my poems wrestle with being caught between two tongues, and funnily enough the ones that do often involve my mother. Because I think, in much the same way as I learned poetry from my father---the rhymes, the rhythms, the calls to prayer---I learned how to language from my mother. She is wonderful at untangling the knots I furiously weave into the fabric of my existence with very few words. And I spend poems upon poems trying to translate those easy words into the English of my poeming. But the advice I was going to poorly translate in answer to your question, essentially comes down to "before you find faults in others, find your own." And I think if more of us moved in the world from such a vantage point, we would be kinder to each other, and if we were kinder to each other, we would be able to be kinder to ourselves.

Footnotes:

- "poem after poem like a call to prayer" ~Martin Espada "The City of Glass" poem featured in his collection *The Republic of Poetry*
- "knots in the fabric of existence" is a Sufi concept first introduced in the writings of the great Sufi Saint Ibn al-'Arabi. The article "Insān-ity or "Knots in the Real": Ibn al-'Arabi's "Philosophy of Religion" by Professor Oludamini Ogunnaike presents helpful interpretation of the concept.

# Cityscape

## FIZZA FATIMA

buildings borne  
out of the ribs  
of other buildings  
grow new limbs  
to house ever-evolving  
organs  
and we carve new  
airways  
    construct valves  
    control traffic flow  
build atriums for trains  
in hopes that  
    if we get enough oxygen  
    into all ventricles  
the ballooning lungs  
of our metropolis  
will live to breathe another day.

the city is always  
out of breath  
always contracting  
and expanding  
in labor pains

what becomes of a body  
fighting to live between  
pains

what becomes of us  
trapped on the interstate  
stuck inside a held breath

*(poem continued on next page...)*

the image of me  
framed in the city's  
Wince

Perhaps it is in the  
nature of my chronically ill  
person to diagnose  
the surrounding infrastructure  
with pain

but on long  
commutes  
I swear I can hear the memorial bridge groan.



They are the  
world's oldest  
weaving spinsters.  
They guard.  
Like their ancestors  
before them.  
Watching over the caves  
of a much older  
God. But this is not a religion poem.

One is brown,  
kind of fat and stodgy.  
One is gray,  
small and silky.  
One is large and skinny,  
all legs—brown  
as well.  
There are three spiders  
in my window.  
Three.  
The number of fairytales.  
But this is not a story poem.

Although, the window  
has been known to frame  
many a narrative  
caught in a purgatory in-between

Filled with  
frantic wing-beats  
thrashing against glass  
and net  
and webbing.

buzzing anxiety  
persistent in its journey  
chasing the new sun.

An ocean away  
a thousand windows shatter  
and three girls left standing  
frozen

like pressed flowers  
witness  
                  their father shot  
dead  
in the street below  
framed in broken glass

What kind  
of a poem is  
this?



TITLE: *A Present Pause*  
ARTIST: Jenn Joslin

# بارش (*baarish*)

FIZZA FATIMA

sounds like the rush of  
rainwater  
dripping in torrents

carries with it the  
long vowel of the ا (*alif*)  
an homage to the  
long distance the rain travels  
before hitting the earth with a  
rishhhhhh (ریش)  
a clattering of ل'jaam  
as though the dots on the ش (*sheen*)  
are emblematic of the beaded  
raindrops crashing  
against the ground

the curve of the ر (*re*)  
an upturned umbrella or  
the earth's bend  
rising  
to meet the raining heavens

This. Is how I come to  
understand my mother tongue.  
In the shape of letters as foreign  
to me as ancient hieroglyphics,

in the twang of accents mimicking  
the sounds of lived experience,

I trace the stories of my ancestors

try to understand the singing of  
songbirds in monsoon season  
in the sounds of a language born  
from my mother  
making it much more  
a sister-tongue than anything else

a language I can't help but search for  
in the sounds of rain  
falling in a land  
thousands and thousands  
of miles away from my mother's  
because surely  
the *rishhhhhhhhh* of water pouring  
from the heavens makes  
the same sound  
no matter where it hits the earth  
surely rain cannot be lost  
in translation



TITLE: *Veneration* // ARTIST: Luanne Castle

# *Waiting for Ladders*

STEPH JUNIPER

I want to be a playwright and move people  
across the stage like dolls, instead I play  
The Sims and remove the ladder to the pool,

This is the closest I'll get to God  
until I die - and still He might cast me away  
while deeming my sins too insurmountable,  
might determine that I should have clicked yes  
when the clerk-less grocery clerk asked me to  
"Round Up to donate to Child Cancer Research",

He might regard my sparse sprinkle of money  
with a single casual shrug - after all, He gave me  
this life and neglected to tell me how to live it-

So instead, I dry run strategies on generations  
of Sims who quickly become richer and cuter than me,  
who can write without a day job that drains instead of frees -  
That's why I know I am a prodigy at living,  
even when I'm swimming in a pool with no ladders in sight,

# *What You've Done with the Place*

ELIZABETH SHANAZ

Fox News calls it new growth and  
old problems in the neighborhood. But  
the brokers say the city has been resuscitated.  
None of our breath counting before,  
they mistook it for a quick death.

Acacia wood paneling kisses  
black stucco kisses  
numbers in Century Gothic font kisses  
a fiddle leaf fig in a soulless cement planter.  
No one bothered to check if that plant can even survive  
out here, but I guess they never checked on any of us  
either. Never checked which climates nurtured  
our seeds before we became a reluctant garden.

Walls of first-class grade material erected with  
union labor to obscure that all of the bones are still  
the same. That out here we still have squares of  
sidewalk with Jordan footprints, or the anniversary  
of a couple now married to other people.  
Out here they still burn their tongues on corn oils.  
Still chase vermin from rooms they could  
swear they cleaned.  
Spirits of Santeria still reclined over the corners on which  
they were conjured.  
Still fill your chest with bullets and say you were like that  
when they got there.  
Still drop your body in the bay and say  
you were just going for a swim.  
Still crying on the news, trying to convince the camera lens,  
"he was such a good kid."



TITLE: *Vorpal Rabbit* // ARTIST: Amy Powell

## *Film it next time*

SAMANTHA BACKLUND-CLAPP

The gun clicks, he turns away. Grabs a Tart Cherry from the bowl. Flicks the stem on the ground. The gun clicks, he doesn't notice. Looks out the window. Waits for me to pick up my shirt. The gun clicks, over and over again, metal caviar on the soft sponge of my tongue, over and over again, nothing happens, I'm trying at the doorknob, the gun is clicking, *saltier than the sea*, and it's more embarrassing for me than it is for him. He has not failed at anything. He brought indifference to a knife fight. I am drowning in bullets. He's like, *see you later*, and licks my teeth. He pulls back, mouth glowing like the fur stained red around a mountain lion's hanging jaw, heart beating for one thing, *to devour-*

Do you remember how I'd cower in front of you like I would a viper. Anticipating the strike. You can yearn for someone and still feel like prey.

There is the *holy second*, this rock and roll *drip drip* into the IV of dopamine centers lighting up the brain, this *holy second* in between the lash out and the contact, when the action has been taken and the outcome inevitable but nothing has *actually happened yet*, the ghost of a moment when his hand is atoms away, when every molecule in my body is screaming to run but I cannot, the *holy second* when, as prey, you have accepted your fate or what have you, accepted death as a friend, and his teeth are bared and there's such a fire in those eyes that it could only be murderous, you know his intent and the way your skin will soon become bleeding ribbons on the floor,

Do you wonder if in nature, prey is ever confused about its relation to predator? The worm to the hawk, the salmon to the bear? Is there an instance of dawning disappointment when the rabbit is met with the fox's eyes, staring up its snout like the barrel of a rifle, and its hackles are rising to pounce, and the rabbit has every opportunity to move but is cemented by hopelessness, black eyes seeing all, looking into the open mouth like it's a cracked door home, like it's a promise or a ring or the rising sun, wondering paradoxically what it will feel like when the jaw closes, when the bones crack, how it will feel to be consumed and digested, thinking *idiot, I thought it'd be different this time*,

He is done, wipes his mouth. Carnage.

# *i like it when the city tightens its grip on you*

FINCH GREENE

when our homes look alike for a season  
when the room pushes us closer together  
and we fall into our places  
like two good-natured dolls

i catch our breath in a jar  
call us two panting fireflies  
i call to a magic i haven't spoken to  
in decades and i come back to a glow

i believe again  
in all this wanting without touching,  
all this red light burning through my skin

i pick the locks to old love songs  
i swallow wide oceans until i am sunk

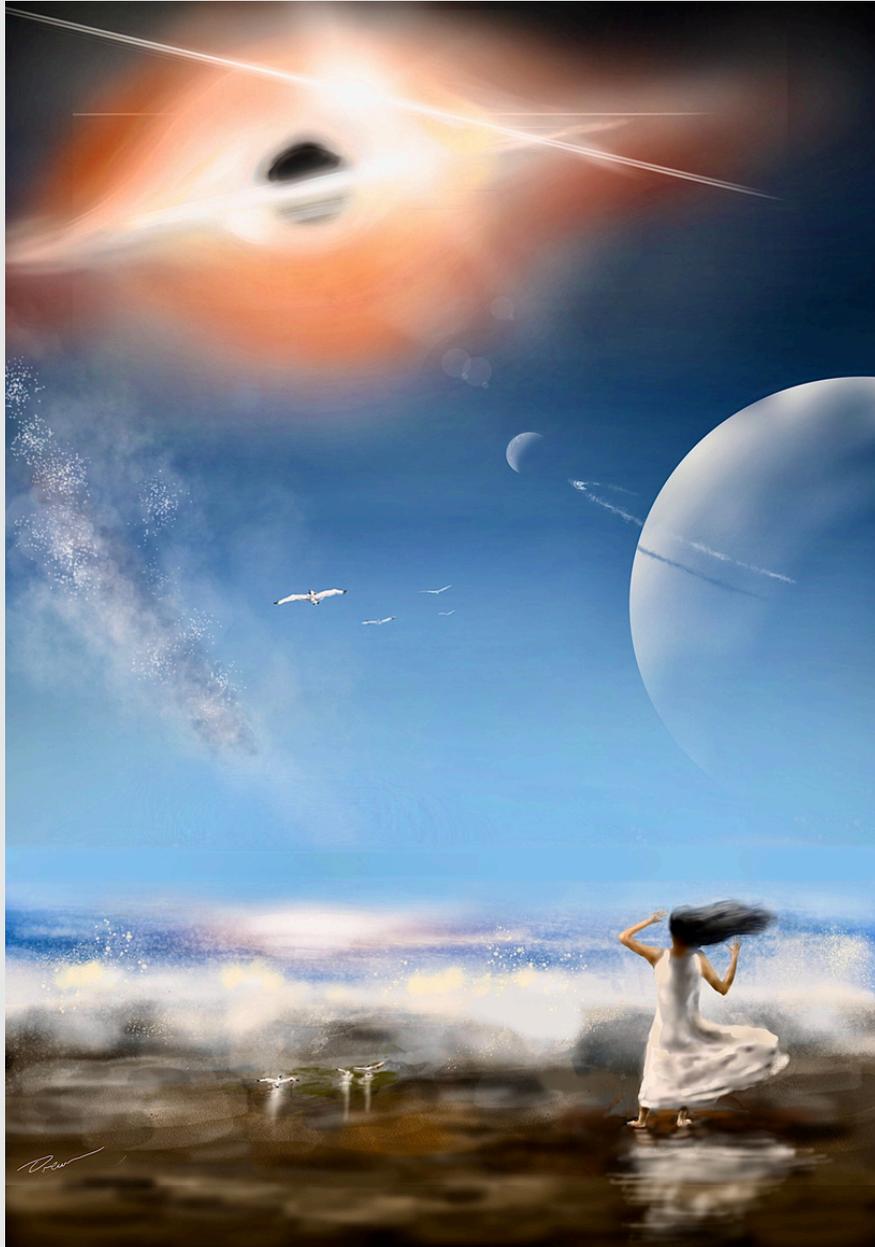
i dream us on opposite sides  
of an underwater street:  
you, holding hands with your son—  
it is never not your son—  
and i, alone

alone and thinking of a blue deeper than blue  
thinking of every sacred place  
i've held your voice in my hands

a scavenger hunt  
leading everywhere i've misplaced  
my gasping,  
tender,  
reaching heart—

*(poem continued on next page...)*

a piece of me forgotten  
on purpose at your feet  
i don't think i'll ever want  
to take it  
home



TITLE: *The Shore of Eternity*  
ARTIST: Drew Golden

# *fisterra*

REBECCA HERRERA ALEGRIA

here]

we are

gathered at the end of the earth to offer our clothes, our  
language, and our tired feet over to the atlantic. the  
july sun releases itself like a flood and time gives up.

here] *we are ancient beings, gold-soaked in a thousand  
eyes.*

a few thousand years ago this was where the trail ended  
and where catholic saints burned incense over the rocks,  
where they blurred the edges of the horizon line and the  
pilgrims cracked themselves open.

[your journey ends here. you've anointed yourself in oil,  
you've carved spirits from pine trees, you've recited every  
hymn over fire. listen close enough for the harp strings and  
the trumpets. come down on the cliffside and taste the  
galician saltwater. try not to fall over.]

*(poem continued on next page...)*

| here]

on these european coastlines black-sail ships embarked  
over the edge of the earth less than a few thousand years  
ago.

[my grandmothers were burying jade and carving  
basalt into prayers.]

[my grandmothers were rocking their babies below  
deck and sung hymns in gold.]

across this wide atlantic lays centroamérica in contradictions.  
across this wide atlantic we've cast nothing but moons and dreams. |

here] is where the druids built the earth from stone  
and spirits.



TITLE: *Primrose*  
ARTIST: BobaBee

# *Multitudes*

JULIA TRAVERS

*With reverence to Whitman*

The hard white corner of the kitchen cabinet  
juts into the air.  
Unapologetic right angles  
say:  
just this.

While the morning sun  
says:  
multitudes,  
in polyphonic tongues of light on unmowed grass,  
the morning  
says, multitudes, says, all,  
says nothing of dividing.

The morning light knows me  
and meets me as itself.  
The morning light says nothing of dividing,  
says,  
you don't even have to

# *Meeting the Bush Doctor*

DEANNA ALTOMARA

*Rondevlei Nature Preserve, Cape Town, South Africa*

We begin with a shell,  
as we all do,  
small as pearls, sheltered in a fleshy womb,  
growing by millimeters and heartbeats.

We begin with a shell,  
the shell as a hearthstone,  
its soft mouth thick with ashy smoke,  
the crackling blades of rhinobush, snakebush, and pepper  
rising in the air like incense,

rising through the veins of a sparse-leaved tree,  
rising towards a clear blue sky,  
where the Milky Way, invisible, alive,  
guides spirits along its path.  
Spirits who once held this shell, breathed this smoke,  
inhaled this sky.  
Smell is a memory,  
and memories don't die.  
Memories listen, memories speak,  
memories rise.

The bushman passes along his artifacts,  
one by one, sharing  
stories he will not let die.

*(poem continued on next page...)*

Sweet bark for sweet speech,  
mountain garlic, camphor, ginger, buchu,  
an ostrich egg, brimming with water and sprinkled with herb.

Taste, feel, breathe, he says.  
Listen, speak, rise.



TITLE: *Red Fox*  
ARTIST: Drew Golden

# *Strange Fruit*

ALINA MOORE

It feels like we are designed  
to know the look of these moldy fruits.  
It is the only thing that seems to grow  
when we holler for something more  
on bended knees beneath our willow trees.

They've tasted this strange fruit  
and savaged it right down to the seed.  
They share it in celebration for the wins of having it in their hands,  
but spit it out onto the ground right before  
they are seen, trying to bury it deep.  
It still grows repeatedly, roots sticking out freely  
rotting the soil and sickening the land.

And when it is ready to be plucked once more  
by those desperately yearning for its taste again,  
we are made to stare at this strange fruit,  
infested with fleas beneath our willow trees.  
and told to be proud we were able to harvest  
on this land they call home.



TITLE: *Lavender Mouse* // ARTIST: Amy Powell

# *Sweet Rememberings*

OLU AYO

Many times a year, my mind returns to the Mango tree,  
the squat figure with roots that bulged the earth.

It's the Nigerian sun I remember most,  
the way it honeyed the leaves.

No, that's not true.  
I remember you most, as we sat in our Mango tree.

Our pure imaginings, undiluted by any racial reality, what was racism to us?  
For a short time longer we were the default,  
the main audience,  
the primary demographic.

Our pure imaginings were of an America worlds away.

In our, as of yet, unstrained minds, we modeled and maintained American streets of  
gold,  
brilliant in the ever-shining sun.

Actual streets of gold, we were too new to the world to have grasped metaphors or  
hyperboles.  
Too nascent, to distrust hope and optimism.

Everything was literal.

Now I know, I know too much.

In our limited way, we were saying goodbye to these red-dirt lands that shaped us  
and our ancestors,  
to the red clay soil that nurtured us.

*(poem continued on next page...)*

Maybe we knew we would carry the dusky red of *life* in our veins, the oily crimson of *obe ata* on our tongues.

Maybe the grit of this place would stay in our bones, work its way into our marrow, and home could be nearer.

I remember it was days later, after that last time balancing on the bark of our mango tree,  
that I was away in a red-eye plane.  
And I awoke in America,  
a stranger,  
a curiosity,  
an amusement.

Could we have known, those two days before I left my birthplace for all and good, the true spirit of loneliness, its dark, liquid center?  
Was there even a hint of knowledge in our jokes, in our attempts to get the other to snort up a bit of mango flesh?

Could we have known in '95, before Eric Gardner, before  
Walter Scott,  
Freddie Gray,  
Philando Castile,  
Botham Jean,  
George Floyd,  
Robert Forbes,  
Barry Perkins,  
Trayvon Martin,  
Breonna Taylor,  
that this was the most human we would ever be in the eyes of any society?

Could we have known then, at age six and seven, that our lives would go on to matter in varying degrees, conditionally, conditional to the economy, to misinformation, to employment, to the preservation of power, to pleasure, to entertainment, to music, to fashion, to income, to housing?

Could we have known then that the mango tree with its sucrose flesh, its juice like liquid sun down smiling lips, its fibers catching in our teeth, would grow for decades beneath our collarbones reaching up and out for home, a home we may not recognize anymore?

Is our mango tree still there, down the street from Obafemi Awolowo University, past the cement walls?

Does our tree remember us? Because I barely do.

At thirty-five, I see us in flashes, a swiveling smile, a yellowish orange mango tossed in the air, us, squeezing each mango reflexively to check for ripeness, our over-ambitious bites, our laughter, crackling, high, not yet buried by puberty.

Then, that sweet, sweet remembering.

# *Neighbor, how can we have a home like yours?*

PRANNOY NAMBIAR

Your fences stand straight, neatly white.  
One might forget they keep the scavengers away.  
So uniform and green is the garden you keep.  
Every flower and plant has its own tune yet  
they sing in unison.

Your interior spaces exude quiet peace.  
Even late after sundown when  
night terrors may fool us in the darkness,  
your windows glow warm light  
in serene meditation.

Now see our lawn!  
Brown. Scorched. Haggard.  
The screen door is torn,  
cracking off its hinges.  
Windows dusty, smudged,  
our chests sink in shame.

Our rage has lost its container:  
Your land is a siren  
So painful in its beauty that we must agree  
to sever our shared boundary.

# *Fire Downstream*

SARA FITZPATRICK

I dreamed I was sleeping, so I know  
I was. Next to me you breathed, so I know  
you were. The one I left, he seethes, his gift  
to us, the reason. What atrocity now attends  
the world that I should have stayed? An Olympian  
drama in such small lives. His seething big  
as any sea—what village for his tidal wave?

My fault small and not tectonic, but next to me  
you breathe, my new religion. Alms in a jar  
unearned peace. For now it soothes the world.  
It feeds, and we build a house around it, grow  
flowers for an altar we haven't made, make gods  
out of mud as soon as it rains, dress our bodies  
in earth the way it's always belonged to us, how  
it's waited to be slapped naked into an oven  
for tomorrow's bread. Call it *horno*, a destiny  
of desert. We cultivate what we can out of what  
we find, furnace to stave off tsunami, seeds  
of a wind called Elsewhere.



TITLE: *Regrowth* // ARTIST: Harper Hanson

# *Landscape With Exit Wound*

JEFFERY ALLEN TOBIN

The sky is low again,  
pressing its wet hand against the hills.  
Someone left a truck in the field last winter,  
and now the grass grows around its carcass.

A crow hops along the rusted hood,  
considering the wreckage.  
It must think—  
what is the use of this thing,  
with its hollowed-out bones,  
its absence of flight?

Somewhere, a man stands in his doorway,  
looking at his hands.  
The day is half-spent,  
and still, he cannot decide  
whether to make something or undo something.

The street smells of burned coffee,  
the last hiss of rain against pavement.  
Everything insists:  
now is the only hour.  
Now, before the engine gives out,  
before the light spills itself into dusk.

In the distance, the crow lifts.  
A wingbeat,  
a dark stroke against the sky's pale canvas.  
The truck stays put.  
The grass leans deeper into its forgetting.

# *I Have Spoiled This Body We Once Shared*

*after Helen Dunmore\**

KAIT QUINN

Stained the blue floral porcelain  
with the blooded berry of unchristened

holly. Filled its oyster boughs buoyed,  
then broken. I have gathered a sorrow

of ravens in the peach orchard  
of my valley—I have forgotten

sting of steel through flesh; grenades  
tossed to ankles, nail bed detonated;

your guitar-scarred thumb running  
the length of my collarbone like a fret-

board. I am not the homeland you  
remember. High desert bled you

vermillion from my nose.  
Mariposa sand storms carved

my bones of every atom  
that once brushed yours.

All the spine-bruised,  
plum-lipped, August-viscid

agony I once saved for you—'til we bent  
under the tension against laundry room

*(poem continued on next page...)*

doors and your parents' seven-thousand-dollar couch—now sacrificed

for the poem. Even if I could gap black tea seas I spilled between us, I'd have nothing

to offer save a leaky aorta, wet matchstick ribs, a poem

I didn't even write for you. Every line is another organ failure. Every letter a brain cell

sputtering to recount the broken-winged mockingbird I traced across your bister-

dappled back before it flickers out.  
Can you hear the bells?

Their death knell tolling?  
These slices of carved strawberry

and buttercream are never what you think.  
I am constantly writing my own eulogy.

\*Title is a line from the poem "To my nine-year-old self" by Helen Dunmore.



TITLE: *Mountain Goat Rave*  
ARTIST: Karen Parker

# *Visualization Exercise*

KATE KADLECK

Lightning scissors through  
the construction paper sky.

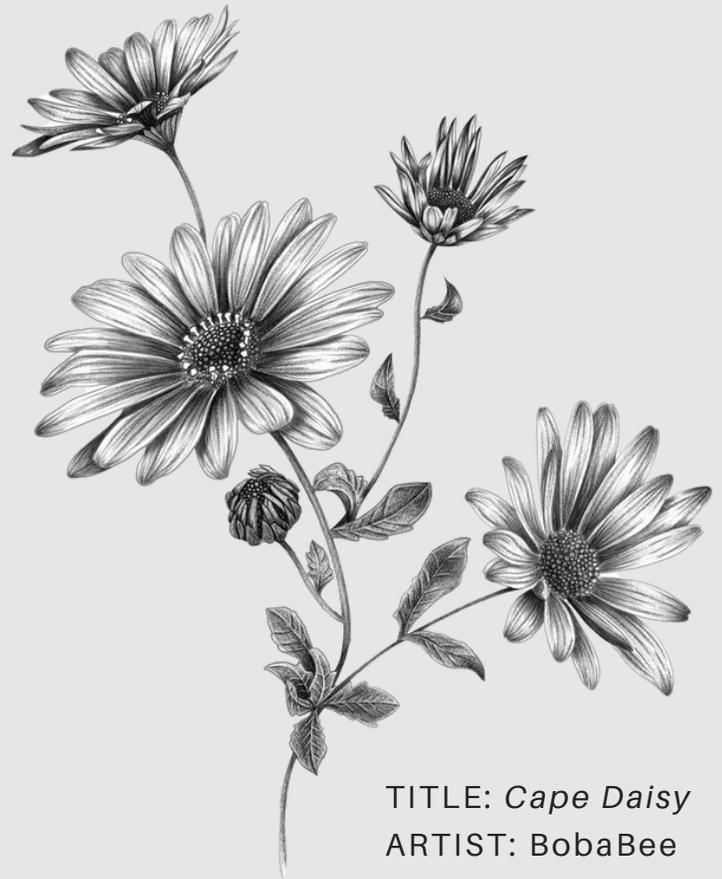
All I see are jagged edges.  
Do you remember how it felt

when the world was soft? I know,  
I know, trick question—it never was:

crooning birds, a thumbprint  
moon, pastel flowers stretching

their lithe torsos out of the dark,  
damp earth. Joy leaks

from a mother's mouth,  
and she doesn't apologize.



TITLE: *Cape Daisy*  
ARTIST: BobaBee

# *Unsexed*

C. SHOW

1.

I wish to duel Hamlet with more than my tongue.

I wish to penetrate him as I know my brother has (on the grounds by the brook).

After, Hamlet tried to kiss me with the same mouth that enveloped my brother.

After, Laertes lectured me against Hamlet's advances.

Hamlet says, 'I see the shape of something in you that tricks the eye.' The name he whispers between my thighs is not mine, but how I wish it was.

2.

I grow what I can with what's afforded to me.

Rosemary—such fragrant hair from forgotten graves—for remembrance.

Pansies—their purple faces fixed unblinking towards the sky—for thoughts.

The bodies each worm has turned into flowers are eaten up until their bones tell no sign of their sex. Bare faces picked beyond recognition, and I think in some future they might bring my skull from beneath the ground and take me for my brother.

(Or perhaps in some farce they take me for Hamlet).

I know not what they would say of my body—if that could be mistaken. I hear they call a skeleton's sex by the angle of the hips, so I pray nightly in death my pelvis does not betray who I was in life.

*(story continued on next page...)*

3.

Hamlet and his madness stalks Elsinore in a way I understand because something akin paces within me. Unceremoniously, he plucked my future when his madness stole from me my father.

That supposed marriage wherein I could play wife with the only man who would have me (myself the only one who would accept a mouth that fed from other springs) shriveled, a seedling dead from want of water. Now dust beneath my feet. Without, I cannot fulfill what passes woman. I am protected by no father (what names daughter), bound to hand myself to God in some form or fashion.

Thus, I dress myself in my father's, my brother's clothes and cut my hair with the dagger that took my father into the ground.

I sit in the willow, heavy with grief, working my fingers at a chain of buttery crowflowers, orchids, and nettles to drape when they call for father's funeral rites. That grief snaps the branch beneath me, plunging my body into water, swelling the fibres of my unfamiliar clothing, bare feet slipping o'er algae'd stones, grasping towards a light above, a life I cannot lead.

And they will bury a stranger.



TITLE: *plants and sunshine*  
ARTIST: Mande Nicole

# *Everyday Nothings*

CRYSTAL TAYLOR

Footprints on the rug grow brown under my dog's paw pads. I wash it, but a thread pulls the hem until the seams come loose. I can't out-think the worry-weeds tumbling under my head when I sleep while the caulk peels and cleaves around the quarter rounds. Bags of things sleep in the guest bedroom: now it's inhospitable. The cat leaves his sweater rolled up beside the curtains, while the laundry breeds a mound of sleeves down the hallway, miles-long. If there were any music left in my head, maybe I could inch along.



TITLE: *Shroom Lover*  
ARTIST: BobaBee

# *I Didn't Want This*

LAURA MARRE

Take me to the highest point you can, on a day when the wind blows your hair over your face and the birds circle frantically in the sky. Early in the morning would be best, so that each breath will fizz and tingle in your nose, and the scent of freedom, of what is still to come, will hit the tip of your tongue and linger there like the heat from the chilli flakes I like sprinkled on my pasta. Make it a day when you can't wait to get back inside and clasp a cup of hot something between your hands until the cold dissipates from the tips of your fingers and the liquid burns away the cold in your throat.

Once you are there, please don't rush. Hold me close to your heart for a while, warm my cold shell with the heat from your body and let each beat of your heart tell us a story. Pick your favourite and wrap it in a soft woollen blanket, care for it as you would a new born baby. Take its scents, its sounds, every tiny detail, and let them meander over your skin and lay down roots in the most ethereal realm of your body. That untouchable place that holds immunity against the ravages of time; your eternal flame, the magic that created you and will never disappear. Do that, and I will never truly be gone.

Be sure to wear gloves, so that your hands will not struggle to turn the lid. Not the fancy ones at the bottom of your drawer, but ones with a good grip. You won't want your fingers to slip and fumble, to spill me all over your shoes. And take a picnic blanket with you, one of those ones with a waterproof lining. Lay it on the grass, sit down on it, and get comfortable. You should probably do that first. You could even take along a bottle of my favourite prosecco, the rosé in the pretty bottle that you always admired, pour us both a glass and let its bubbles slip over your tongue and down your throat, let it soothe and blunt the sharp edges.

You will know when it is time. Do not be afraid. Perhaps take a deep breath first, allow it to give you a glimpse of the freedom you will be gifting me, and the burden you will be freeing yourself from. Then, when you are ready, do not hesitate

*(story continued on next page...)*

like you did that time when you jumped off the waterfall at the lakes. Remember the exhilaration of the fall when you eventually leapt, the satisfaction of the plunge into the cold water, the intensity of your pride.

Do it sitting, or do it standing. Do it whilst leaping into the air or spinning around, arms outstretched and coat flaring like the princess dress you used to wear, even when you grew too big for it.

Throw me to the wind and let it carry me away. Let it take me to all the places I never got to see and all the places I would wish to return to. Let it whisk me in spiralling circles and take me to dizzying heights. Throw me to the wind and give me the greatest gift I can imagine when I can no longer have you. Toss the dust of my dreams into the air so that I may dance all over the world, lighter and even more magical than a dandelion's whispery seeds.

See my virtuoso turns and jumps. Marvel at them. They will be the best I have ever done.

I cannot say how you will feel afterwards. I cannot know. I will not be able to hold you and make your pain vanish with a kiss. But anyway, it has been an awfully long time since I could work that magic with any kind of ease. What I do know is that while I will be flying through the clouds and treetops, I will also be in you, as I have always been. And you will be with me. After all, we are made from each other. No goodbyes then, and I'll come and visit you in the spaces between dreams.

\*

That is the letter I wrote for you. I wrote it on beautiful, pale pink paper with fine silver patterns traced at its edges. It lies crisp and neat and safe within its matching envelope, within a folder, in a drawer, in an office somewhere. I remember it word for word because I toiled over it for weeks in search of perfection. With my eyes closed, I can see the words running across the sheets of paper. Neat and controlled to begin with, then gradually sloppier, as my handwriting slid into its usual scrawl.

As I lie here, on the cold, hard floor, I wish that I had never written it. Because now, when you read it, it will only make things worse. Now, you will never be able to send me whirling into the sky. I will never be able to dance forever under the sun and among the stars.

He asked me what I preferred, this elegant man still wearing his tuxedo. An impossible decision, so he made it for me. He has begun with my extremities. First, the little finger of my left hand, next, the smallest toe of my right foot. I don't know what he injected into my neck, but it has rendered me motionless. I wish it had also taken away my ability to feel. Not only the sharp knife that he held before my eyes and tilted to and fro beneath the harsh fluorescent strip lighting until it shone; the one that he is using to slice me to pieces. Not only that, but the sandy grit beneath the back of my body, the freezing air on my skin, the one jagged stone digging into the small of my back. The utter terror running through my veins. The regret. The pain. All of it. All of the agonies, real and imagined, past and present.

I am crying, and he thinks it funny. How much joy he is getting from this. Look how he smiles.

He is telling me that the pieces of me will be so small, and he will scatter them so far and wide that no one will ever be able to find enough of them to put me back together again.

He is laughing, basking in his own ingenuity like the neighbour's cat basks in the heat of the sun outside my back door. An intrusion, both of them.

You will never take me to the highest point you can, on a day when the wind blows your hair over your face and the birds circle frantically in the sky. I am so sorry.



TITLE: *Foliage and Bird Series No. 2- Gray Jays*  
ARTIST: Chris Marquez

# *biblicism*

JONATHAN CHAN

*while reading Genesis*

*after Noor Hindi and Natalie Wee*

colonisers read the bible.  
it is a seduction, the promise  
of a dispensation of land. it  
excuses violence of even the most  
sadistic form. does the Lord will  
the bombing of schools and the  
judicial approval of rape? i read  
how the dove returns with a  
single plucked olive. a theology  
of empire is untethered. logics  
froth at the mouths of politicians.  
table for the agenda a declaration  
of all that is unhinged. how covenantal,  
when the lines fall in pleasant places,  
bisecting the bodies of Palestinian  
Christians. Zionists marvel that they  
even exist. it is the weakest politics  
of identification. when the blood cries  
out from the soil, those in denial  
cover their ears. noise suppression  
is a coping mechanism. a flag of Israel  
hangs outside a steakhouse in Texas.  
an airshow proceeds in the hangars  
of Singapore. there is a single spring  
of water in the wilderness. it shall be  
lapped by no Palestinian tongue. their  
descendants are the dust of the earth.

*(poem continued on next page...)*

say occupation. say dispossession. say complicity. say liberation. say that shame is too awful to be deliberate, encountered again and again. say the lightness that needs to be carried into every future. say the love that ends an apartheid and restores exiles to a home. say the prayer that resists the whine and begs torrents of justice to roll.



TITLE: *European Starling*  
ARTIST: Alexandra Mikel

# *Hija de Mi Madre*

MIYIN DELGADO KARL

"Let me go"  
whimpers the heart as it reaches forward,  
crocodile jaw piercing skin  
too old and hard to eat.

"It's you and me against the world"  
said the mouth as it clung to the earlobe,  
spiderweb silk-soft embrace  
sliding between the actors and the stage.

"Congratulations, it's a girl!  
What is her name?" Not yours, hers.  
umbilical-ribbon-cutting ceremony  
marking the beginning of the end.

"Are you close to your mom?"  
As close as it gets  
when you launch two satellites  
from the same base into space.

Not a propagated stem,  
or a phone update,  
or an adaptation of a play.

A New Thing  
with blue-print eyelids  
and a sourdough chest,  
but also with feathers  
and shadows that crack  
Dawn's shell,  
with honey and pebbles  
to guide her own way.

# *Obituary*

## ZACHARIAH CLAYPOLE WHITE

Death died unexpectedly on  
Tuesday morning. He too  
was heartbroken: exhausted  
from laughing gas  
and oxygen tanks; the guns,  
the guns, always the guns.  
Vigils will be held in schools  
and synagogues, by the blind  
corners of NC-86, and across  
the 5's third rail. Death is  
survived by my grandmother  
's wheelchair and  
a westerly breeze. He is  
remembered as a son,  
hoping for a cigarette;  
a father ill-prepared  
for rest. He is remembered  
as a red balloon rising  
to a cloudless sky.

\*This poem draws inspiration from *Obit* by Victoria Chang.



TITLE: *Honey in my Tea* // ARTIST: Amy Powell

# [contributors]

## Alexandra Mikel (they/she) // Genre: Art



Alexandra is a mixed media artist based out of Portland, Oregon, inspired by nature and their mother's work as a scientific illustrator. Using watercolor, gouache, ink, and recycled paint, they create layered works that combine high-focus figure drawing with expressive textures. Through their work, Alexandra emphasizes the value of coexisting with nature, reminding us of the interconnectedness of all life and the need to nurture this relationship. Instagram: @Alexyasha / Gopherpop on Etsy & online

## Alina Moore (she/her) // Genre: Poetry



Alina Moore is from Chicago, Illinois. Alina is a first generation Black and Cuban American. She is a lover of storytelling and crafting in many forms. As an emerging poet, her work and passion centers the BIPOC LGBT+ community and feminist thought. She unapologetically lives as a black, lesbian poet. Alina is a public librarian and enjoys movie watching with her wife and pets.

Instagram: @alinareadsandwrites

## Amy Powell (she/her) // Genre: Art



Amy Powell is a watercolor illustrator inspired by the delicate wild. Originally from Michigan and transplanted in Colorado, her love for both landscapes colors her paintings. She graduated with a completely worthless art degree from a college that doesn't deserve to be named. Yet, mostly out of spite, she has become a full-time artist and a member of the most incredible group studio: Good Bones.

Instagram/Facebook: @watchamypaint



**BobaBee (she/her) // Genre: Art**

BobaBee is from Taiwan and moved to the US with her husband in 2023. Now she lives in Cincinnati. She's working hard to get into the tattoo field. Fun fact about her: She can eat Blazin' wings from Buffalo Wild Wings without sweating.  
Instagram: @bobabee\_sketch



**C. Show (they/them) // Genre: Fiction**

C. Show is a Central Arkansan author whose hybrid work has been published with Fruitslice and The Q&A Queerzine. Their chapbook GESTAMP has been published by new words {press}.  
Instagram: @\_cshow\_



**Chris Marquez (he/him) // Genre: Art**

Chris Marquez is a painter, avid home cook, leaf collector, brother and son. He attended the University of New Mexico and has Bachelor's Degrees in Creative Writing and Painting & Drawing. Flowers, birds, and wildlife are a life-long love and appear in most of his works.  
Instagram: @chris\_marquez\_04  
Facebook: @chrismarquez04



**Crystal Taylor (she/her) // Genre: Poetry**

Crystal Taylor is a poet, writer, and birdwatcher from Texas. She writes before eight and after five. Her poetry lives in *Maudlin House*, *One Art*, *Rust & Moth*, *Ghost City Review*, and other sacred spaces. She was nominated for BotN, 2025 for her poem, "Pearls".  
Twitter/X/BlueSky: @CrystalTaylorSA  
Instagram: @cj\_taylor\_writes

**Deanna Altomara (she/her) // Genre: Poetry**



Deanna is a graduate of the Creative Writing Program at Emory University. Her poetry chapbook, "The Happening: Reflections on the Amish Schoolhouse Shooting," received the Edna Meudt Memorial Award from the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. She has also been recognized by the *Outdoor Writers Association of America* and *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*.

Instagram: @d.scribing.stories  
[www.deannaaltomara.com](http://www.deannaaltomara.com)

**Drew Golden (he/him) // Genre: Art**



Drew Golden is an author and artist from Pennsylvania. His short stories have appeared in speculative fiction magazines and his novel, *Nightingale*, is available from Dorrance Publishing (under his author name D.K. Golden). He is an attendee of Temple University's Tyler School of Art.

Instagram: @d.k.golden  
Portfolio: [deviantart.com/flatcapart](http://deviantart.com/flatcapart)

**Elizabeth Shanaz (she/her) // Genre: Poetry**



Elizabeth Shanaz is a New York based writer and lawyer. Her writing has appeared in *Playboy*, *PREE Lit*, *Sorjo*, *Human/Kind*, and the *Blue Minaret*. She is the proud child of Guyanese immigrants.

Instagram: @lizzieshanaz

**finch greene (they/she) // Genre: Poetry**



finch greene is a pushcart-nominated poet from the new york city area. they are a cat mom, a virgo, and very, very tired. their work has been featured in *BULLSHIT lit*, *last leaves*, and *scavengers*. you can probably find them reading smutty fanfic or painting their nails.

**Fizza Fatima (she/her) // Genre: Poetry**



Fizza Fatima is a writer wrestling with the worries of writing from within the Heart of Empire. It's not lost on her that while she frets over metaphors and similes, argues with herself about the correct placement of enjambments, Israel is setting fire to refugee encampments. Fizza would like to take this space to condemn the Genocide in Gaza and highlight the story of a young writer named Nour who at 16 years old writes with more resilience, courage, and heart than all the writers of Empire. Nour hopes to publish her own books, and mourns the loss of her collection at home. She speaks of the walls of her old room bearing witness to the destruction of her home, the same walls which witnessed her grow up. [Here is the link to her chuffed campaign. Please donate whatever amount you can](#)

**Harper Hanson (she/her) // Genre: Art**



Born in 2000, Harper Hanson is a Colorado native, living and creating in the Denver area. Her art focuses on lived experience with chronic and mental illness through a variety of mediums. Much of Harper's recent work is needle and textile work that explores topics of illness and how that impacts one's way of life. Harper's work helps people feel less alone in their own battles and teaches those without disability that being disabled does not make you worth less.

Instagram: [@art.by.harper](#)

Website: [harpershopepage.com](http://harpershopepage.com)



**Jeffery Allen Tobin (he/him) // Genre: Poetry**

Jeffery Allen Tobin is a political scientist and researcher based in South Florida. He has been writing for more than 30 years. His latest poetry collection *Scars & Fresh Paint* was published in 2024, and his poetry, prose, and essays have been featured in dozens of journals, magazines, and websites.

Instagram: [@jefftobin11](#)

**Jenn Joslin (she/her) // Genre: Art**



Jenn Joslin is a Portland-based naturalist and illustrator who uses her background in the fields of conservation biology & visual art to reflect on contemporary ecological issues. Through dynamic and emotive designs crafted using graphite, watercolor, and gouache, Jenn focuses our attention to the interconnectedness and resilience of life on earth, carefully honoring these creatures' ever-shifting stories with skill, reverence, and awe.

Instagram: @jennjoslinart  
<http://www.jennjoslin.com/>

**Jonathan Chan (he/him) // Genre: Poetry**



Jonathan Chan is a writer, editor, and translator of poems and essays. His first collection of poems, *going home* (Landmark, 2022), was a finalist for the Singapore Literature Prize in 2024. He serves as Managing Editor of the poetry archive poetry.sg and Poetry and Creative Nonfiction Editor at PR&TA. He was raised in Singapore, where he currently lives. He has recently been moved by the work of Kaveh Akbar, Han Kang, and Omar Musa. More of his writing can be found at [jonbcy.wordpress.com](http://jonbcy.wordpress.com).

Instagram: @fivefoundings  
<http://jonbcy.wordpress.com/>

**Julia Travers (she/they) // Genre: Poetry**



Julia Travers is a nonbinary writer, artist and teacher in Virginia, U.S.A. Find Julia's work with *Fish Publishing*, *Bowery Poetry*, *Rattapallax*, *On Being/American Public Media*, *Rough Cut Press*, *Ecological Citizen*, *The Poetry Society of Virginia* (which awarded her two first place prizes) and others.

Instagram/Threads: @jtravers\_wordspics /  
<https://juliatravers.journoportfolio.com/>

### **Kait Quinn (she/her) // Genre: Poetry**



Kait Quinn was born with salt in her wounds. She flushes the sting of living by writing poetry. She is the author of five poetry collections, and her work appears in *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Exposition Review*, *Reed Magazine*, *Watershed Review*, and elsewhere. She received first place in the 2022 John Calvin Rezmerski Memorial Grand Prize. Kait is an Editorial Associate at Yellow Arrow Publishing. She enjoys cats, repetition, coffee shops, tattoos, and vegan breakfast. Kait lives in Minneapolis with her partner and their very polite Aussie mix. Find her at [kaitquinn.com](http://kaitquinn.com).

Instagram: @kaitquinnpoetry  
Bluesky: @kaitquinn.com

### **Karen Parker (she/her) // Genre: Art**



Karen's affinity for the natural world inspires her work; however, it was mid-life when she picked up a paintbrush. She has led a mobile life, living in five western states, which has broadened her horizons and sense of place. She currently lives in Sequim, Washington. Karen studied Park Management; however, she sought out mentorship programs, videos, and books to develop her painting skills. Karen's work has been shown in juried exhibitions, art festivals, and galleries throughout the country. Using watercolor as her medium, she carefully balances bold color with simple design to create a sense of calm for the viewer.

Instagram/FB: @karen.park.art  
<http://www.karensartbynature.com/>

### **Kate Kadleck (she/her) // Genre: Poetry**



Kate Kadleck is a marriage and family therapist and lifelong nesting doll collector. She spent her girlhood in a northern suburb of Chicago and her college years in Gambier, Ohio. Kate currently resides in a midcentury modern house in Dubuque with her fiancé, two dogs, four hens, and presumably a ghost or two. Her poetry can be found in *The Indianapolis Review*, *The Garlic Press*, *Tenth Muse*, and elsewhere.

Instagram: @kathrynkadleck

### **Kendra Sanchez (she/her) // Genre: Art**



Kendra Sanchez (b. 1992) is a multidisciplinary artist and designer based in Cincinnati, OH. Her work explores themes of self-expression, empowerment, and the balance between vulnerability and strength. Passionate about bold, unconventional art, she merges striking compositions with a deep appreciation for symbolism and identity.  
Instagram: @kendrasanchez.art / kendrasanchez.com

### **Laura Marre (she/her) // Genre: Fiction**



Laura grew up in England devouring books and dancing her heart out. Her dancing career took her all over the world until she settled in Italy, where she began writing her own books and short stories. When she's not doing that, she moonlights as an English teacher in local schools. Two of her horror drabbles have recently won Snake Bite Books' monthly competition.  
Instagram: @marre.laura

### **Luanne Castle (she/her) // Genre: Art**



Luanne Castle's poetry, stories, and art have appeared in *Your Impossible Voice*, *Gooseberry Pie*, *Bending Genres*, *Bull*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Cleaver*, *Disappointed Housewife*, *South 85*, *Roi Fainéant*, *River Teeth*, *The Dribble Drabble Review*, *Flash Boulevard*, and many other journals and anthologies. Her stories, poetry, and art have been nominated for Pushcart, Best of the Net, Best Microfictions, and Best Small Fictions. She has published four award-winning poetry collections. Her hybrid memoir-in-flash will be published by ELJ Editions in December 2026.  
[Twitter/X](#) / [Instagram](#) / [Facebook](#) / [Website](#)

### **Mandee Nicole (she/her) // Genre: Art**



Mandee Nicole is the founder of *Inner Light Botanicals*, *Just Earthly Podcast* host, creative rituals facilitator, writer and process artist that paints with nature's cycles. She shares her writing through gentle mornings, a weekly Sunday morning newsletter with essays on feels, reflections and writings for a slower, simple and cozy life inspired by the teachings of nature. She is an advocate for self and world healing through nature and aims to do this through her work.

Instagram: @innerlightbotanicals  
[www.innerlightbotanicals.com](http://www.innerlightbotanicals.com)

### **Miyin Delgado Karl (she/her) // Genre: Poetry**



Miyin Delgado Karl is a Colombian writer and poet currently based in Southern California. She was born and raised in Bogotá to a mixed Asian-Latino family that nourished her with stories. Her work centers around themes of immigration, identity, queerness, family dynamics, and Latin American folklore. Miyin currently works in film production and writes with equal measures of silliness and trauma.

Instagram: @miyinsdk / Instagram for Podcast: The Gifted Child Symposium Podcast, @giftedcs.pod

### **Olu Ayo (he/him) // Genre: Poetry**



Olu Ayo is a Nigerian-American educator in Boston and an aspiring debut author. He comes from the Yoruba tradition of thinking, dreaming, and remembering through storytelling. He has worked out what his last meal on this Earth will be, *Iyán* and *Egusi*. His short story "SMOKE" was ranked in the top twenty-five percent of all stories submitted to the 2024 International Fiction Festival. His other short story "FALLING" will be published in February 2025 by *Free Spirit Publishing* in the short story collection *TRAVEL STORIES*. He is a Boston Writers of Color and Black Writers Collective member.

Instagram/X: @olu\_writesagain  
Substack @writingunderthepalmtree.



**Prannoy Nambiar (he/him) // Genre: Poetry**

Prannoy is a writer based in Brooklyn, NYC. He wrote his first poem at the age of ten, inspired by the full moon. He writes poetry everywhere, especially on receipts.

Instagram: @prannoyn



**Rebecca Herrera Alegria (she/her) // Genre: Poetry**

Rebecca Herrera Alegria is a New York born and raised creative girlie. She is currently the managing editor of *Fifth Wheel Press*, and you can find her publications listed on her website, [allirherrera.wixsite/site](http://allirherrera.wixsite/site). You can also find her on twitter/x @strawburrymoon and on IG as strawberry.img



**Samantha Backlund-Clapp (she/her) // Genre: Nonfiction**

Samantha Backlund-Clapp is a student at the University of Amsterdam, writing on napkin scraps in her spare time. The lead on her chain is planted in rural middle America, where she learned the love language of desolate wastelands and dried corn husks. She has been printed in *Pinky* magazine, *Pacific Review*, and Dakota Warren's *Nowhere Girl*, among others.

Instagram: @sbacklundclapp



**Sara Fitzpatrick (she/her) // Genre: Poetry**

Sara Fitzpatrick works in animal welfare in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her poetry and fiction have been published in places like *The Shore*, *Feral Poetry*, *Tampa Review*, and *X-R-A-Y*. A collection, *Bury me in the Sky*, was published in 2020 by Nixes Mate Books.

Find her at [sarafitzauthor.com](http://sarafitzauthor.com).

## Steph Juniper (she/her) // Genre: Poetry



Steph Juniper is an imagery enthusiast from Louisville, KY, USA. Though her first love is poetry, she has been known to work in both fiction and creative nonfiction. Her work frequents themes of expectation, stereotype, and the weight that comes with existence. When she isn't writing, she's convincing her two cats not to claw her couch. She holds an MA in Creative Writing and Publishing from Bournemouth University.

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## Zachariah Claypole White (he/him) // Genre: Poetry



Zachariah Claypole White is a Philadelphia-based writer and educator, originally from North Carolina. He holds a BA from Oberlin College and an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College, where he was a Jane Cooper Poetry Fellow. His poetry and prose have appeared in *Southeast Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, and *The Rumpus*, amongst others. Zachariah has received support from the *Kenyon Review Writers Workshop* and *Writer's Digest*. His awards include *Flying South's* prize for poetry as well as two nominations for the Best of the Net and one for a Pushcart Prize. Zachariah teaches at the Community College of Philadelphia, Saint Joseph's University, Manor College, and the Writing Institute at Sarah Lawrence College. You can find more of his work at [www.zachariahclaypolewhite.com](http://www.zachariahclaypolewhite.com).

Instagram: @zachariahcw / Facebook:  
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