

THE POWER OF MOTHERHOOD & WOMANHOOD



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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 miscarriage, postpartum depression & anxiety, trying to conceive, sexual assault, difficult labor/birth, loss of a child, genocide, and similar topics. Please read with caution, and take breaks as needed. Your mental health matters.

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO:

the women and mothers of Palestine, Sudan, the Congo, Haiti, and all other oppressed, colonized, and war-torn nations, who fight constantly for their lives and the lives of their children

transwomen, who fight to exist in a world fueled by hatred, ignorance, and bigotry

all who dream of becoming mothers, and fight every day to make that dream a reality

women who have lost a child, a piece of their heart, either in-utero or otherwise.
you are still a mother.

those whose hearts ache with the loss of *their* mothers

women experiencing, healing, or running from domestic violence

women and mothers who do not feel good enough in a world that sets unachievable, unrelenting standards and expectations

step-mothers, mothers-in-law, foster mothers, and adoptive mothers

women who are victims and survivors of sexual violence - *it is not your fault.*
it has never been your fault.

women.

mothers.

all women & all mothers.



editor's note

Hello there friends,

This is probably the longest editor's note I'll ever write, because I am both a Woman and a Mother, and I am very passionate about all that Women and Mothers do. Buckle up.

What an honor it is to publish this collection of both written and visual work, all showcasing the strength, power, and fire of what it is to witness a world full of path-forging Women and Mothers.

Originally, my plan was for this to be a "mini" issue. I was blown away by the volume of submissions we received, but I was also taken aback by the wide variety of perspectives, tones, and quite the array of feelings. Reading these submissions made me realize that I didn't want this issue to only portray the soft, warm, gentle side of Motherhood and Womanhood, but to also encompass the challenging, bitter, fierce, and devastating sides. This issue is for all women and mothers - including cis and trans Women and Mothers, those who want to be Mothers, Mothers who have lost children, those who have lost their own Mothers, those who have difficult relationships with their Mothers, the list goes on and on.

As Women and Mothers, we constantly encounter unrelenting expectations and standards, placed on us by a society that simply does not value or acknowledge the invisible load we carry, and all that we do for ourselves, our families, and the world in which we live. All this to say - this issue certainly did not end up being "mini" by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, it is perhaps our biggest issue to-date, and it is chock-full of varied lenses, giving an array of different views of the immense strength Women and Mothers carry within.

It is not lost on me that in celebrating Women and Mothers, we must also acknowledge the strength of Palestinian Women and Mothers, of Sudanese Women and Mothers, of Haitian Women and Mothers, of Congolese Women and Mothers, of all Women and Mothers who are fighting for their lives and the lives of their children. Of all Women and Mothers who do not get the opportunity to tuck their babies in each night under quiet, peaceful skies. Of all Women and Mothers who have been forced to witness the near-constant terror behind their children's eyes. Of all Women and Mothers who cannot promise safety to their sons and daughters, and who lie awake each night begging a higher power to give them just one more day with their children. My heart bleeds for these Women and these Mothers. I think of them every second of every fucking day. If you are willing to and financially able to do so, I've included links below for organizations that are working to help these Women, Mothers, and children both here and abroad. Please consider helping, and if you are unable to do so, please share these links with those around you and on your socials, and please, do it loudly.

LINKS TO HELP WOMEN, MOTHERS, AND CHILDREN IN PALESTINE AND ABROAD:

[Palestine Children's Relief Fund \(PCRF\)](#)

[Women for Women International - Palestine Crisis Response](#)

[United Nations Population Fund \(helps pregnant women & newborns in Gaza\)](#)

[Médecins Sans Frontières \(MSF, Doctors Without Borders\)](#)

[Save the Children](#)

[Middle East Children's Alliance \(MECA\)](#)

[The Malala Fund](#)

[Women Deliver](#)

[Mayday Health \(supports women living in areas with strict reproductive rights laws\)](#)

With love,
Ophelia M.



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There are wildflowers waking from this same soil

EMILY PATTERSON

That spring I take the baby food
cookbook, used precisely twice—
small red lentil cakes frozen
in aqua trays—and the bottle rack,
its neon grass and white plastic tree
where I used to drape pink pacifiers—
to the thrift shop in two heaping
cardboard boxes. A collection
of small items, once deemed
essential for the birth of a child
and mother. Other relics persist
in corners and closets, retained
for various reasonings—pristine
cloth diapers, disassembled
crib for an imagined sibling,
and the clothes she wore most—
pastel patterns imprinted on our
earliest days. Every mother is told
time is a thief, movement a mourning
game—but there is beauty in release.
In the emptied car, I feel a secret
contentment as March sunlight
returns, christens my face.

Ode to Bryan

DRÉ PONTBRIAND

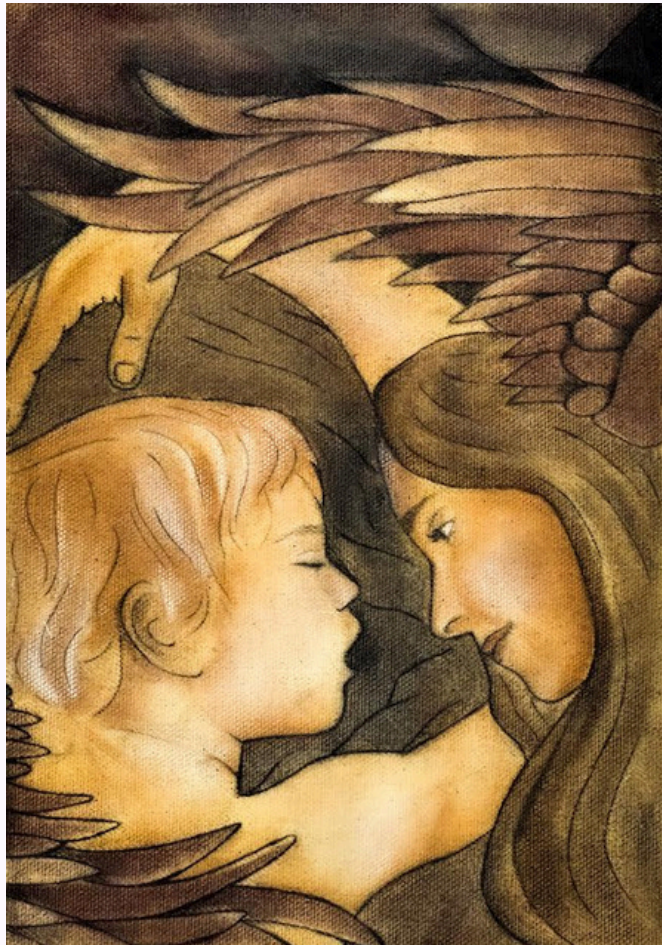
after Sarah Leidhold

Therapy isn't all armchairs and affirmations, EMDR
tapping away the void made by an absent father
who never left—sometimes it's a sledgehammer,
safety goggles, and \$64 at a strip mall across town.
It's a pallet I can't make a dent in. *Someone needs to
fuck it up before I lose my shit.* Vera makes an explosion
of it in two steady swings. I don't have to
slay all my dragons alone. Bryan hands me a baseball bat.
He smells like Newports and wears a No Fucks Given
backwards cap but he gives a lot of fucks. He wedges
his foot in the door. *Excuse me honey, you're not allowed
to close it.* *I need to make sure you're safe.*
My cheeks flush with the heat of muzzled screams: *No
and back up and are you fucking kidding me, Bryan?*
I'm a woman. I've never been safe. I crumble
under the weight of the words I can't say. Wouldn't wanna
scare old Bry with the flame in my veins. I knock out
a tail light, swing a chandelier into space,
send a platter back to 1952. It's not the same. He pops
his head in, *Having fun?* Classic fucking Bryan. I wonder
what it's like, breaking shit for fun. A few years ago
I said: *I don't really experience anger. Exasperation, perhaps.*
Then in Bali in a meditation, I rewind to scenes of
a pig-tailed me palms clenched into unswung fists, tongue
blistered by bitter words wishing themselves saccharine.
I know rage but good girls swallow it. Us granddaughters of
the gallows, flames licking at our feet we've been choking
on millennia of muffled shrieks. A family heirloom,
a Victorian corseted figurine I tee up on the stand,
swing with all my fight, make bone-ash of it. *Fuck you,
Bryan, on behalf of every woman who never spoke
her piece. Don't call me honey—I'm fresh out of sweet.*

The Night Is Dead, the Babies Are Alive, the Mothers Are Somewhere in Between

RACHEL BEACHY

In the middle of the night
when you are awake with the baby
and everyone else is asleep
it is not nothing to know
robins start singing
when it's still dark
so certain are they
the sun will rise.



TITLE: *My Baby*
ARTIST: Becky Krotts

Object Permanence

ERIN O'REGAN WHITE

My son and I have a running joke — human life
is a simulation and the fog that shrouds
our hill hides a master developer. It runs an update,
re-renders textures, tweaks features,
adds new quests. Does not fix bugs.

This morning, the fog seems alive,
a brumous body that slips between lampposts
and warps the wide street toward mystery.
What we knew is shaped into questions.
Does the driveway end

where we remember an ending? Will we
find the bus stop beyond the curb? We imagine
the thrill — a step from foggy sidewalk that lands
in candy colors, speaking trees, a Dalí-drawn
reality. Anyway

we play this game, my kid and I.
Beneath our play is longing, a wish
to shape a new reality into being or
at least answer some questions —
the big burners, the ones that creep

into night-dark minds, that drip
into the crags and pits of stone-cold fact.
Our play is a bond, a distraction
from the wound we share — the one
that's settled, the one we don't discuss,

the one that murks about like mist and splits
old truth from new.

The Day Before Your First Birthday

D.C. DUBS

Hundreds, thousands of times, I have set you down to sleep in the same way. Alone, on your back, and safe in your crib. You did not turtle in the corner the way you usually did, face mashed down in the mattress. Instead, you clambered to your feet and cried. A sharp cry. Not from a dirty diaper, not from a hungry belly. I touched your forehead. No fever. You reached for me, cried again.

A scared cry.

So I scooped you, my tomorrow toddler, up. I rocked you in your dark little nursery, the mechanical sound of ocean waves washing the walls. I sang the magic song, "Wheels on the Bus," and you settled, slowly, my shoulder wet with your snot and salty tears, one arm hooked around my neck. Humming, I nestled into you, your head tucked into the crook between my clavicle and shoulder.

Your knees bend like a frog, one on either side of my thigh. I have never been so grateful for the soft padding of my postpartum body, pillowing the tide of your belly, the tiny little crests of your muscles and curves. You are too tall to fit inside my torso the way you once did, but you'll never be too tall to not be mine.

A year ago, you were here, pressing against me, tucked in the dark cave of my body. Tomorrow, it will be a year since we split into two. For so long we used to dream like this, two halves of a whole. Until you didn't need to anymore. Tomorrow marks a year's worth of gifts: my love and my sleep and my body and my time and my job and tomorrow I will give you a green stuffed dragon, wrapped in shiny paper, strawberry shortcake with a yellow candle on top.

But here, now, sleeping with your heart against mine, it was you who gave me this birthday gift.

the first time

PETER CHIU

i am asking about all the moments
that coalesce into one -
like how sunlight passes

through a glass of water that
falls in the kitchen, and you clean
the broken shards

with reckless abandon,
scoffing at the bit of glass
embedded on the side of your hand as you sweep.

some months later, you are lying
on your back, hearing the first cry of
our daughter after the nuchal cord around her

neck is released when your belly is split by
the surgeon's blade and the curtain
covers your belly like a prayer

and you tell me that you want
to look over the other side where the light pools
together. limbs and hair in the nurse's arms

and already, you are beckoning her to come
and be held, to see sunlight pass
through the hospital window for the first time.

Grandmothers

SHANNON MARZELLA

Once, I was a guest at a séance

or, I was a guest

in someone else's dream. Unclear. There was a table

and a candle on a brass throne melting wax

into ivory rivers. Nothing in this room

was made of glass, therefore

nothing in this room was easily

broken. Every word became an echo

of the one before. Every word became

a mother, their bodies

cupping each other like Russian dolls, faces

both known and unknown, shadowed like bats'

eyes peering through translucent wings. I wanted to touch

their cheeks, some sallow and creased

with navigable lines, others scarred like peeling tree

bark. One was alabaster white and

(poem continued on next page...)

eyeless, one could only squint as if it were all
too much. Another lay in a childbirth
bed, blood running in thirsty rivers,
her arms spread like wings, her voice
a whisper: was her daughter
playing in the forest, had she found
the wolf in the center of everything? One knelt
before me as if I were the God she had been praying
for, clasped my hands while another
language spilled from her split tongue-
all I could hear was a hiss.
I wanted to press
each of their faces against my own,
scream into their open mouths:
where have you been hiding and
can you take me with you?

A Letter to the 'Just Wait' Brigade

ALEXA BROCKAMP HOGGATT

In the summer, I grew leaves and blossomed.
August heat brought me, sun-stained and changing,
into my body again and again.

*Just wait
until she's here,
you'll never sleep again.*

*You think that now, but
just you wait*

*until she's moving
until she's screaming
until you lose yourself
to this.*

*Three days without a shower
do you really think
you're going to read a book next year?*

*Glowing, they said, hormones, they said, nesting.
So many words that mean you are not your own.
Just wait, they said,
but I won't.*

Wings and roots born the same day
This sweet softening broadened my hips
to carry new weight by ground,
stronger feathers for air.

(poem continued on next page...)

Why wait?
If we fall to the water
I'll teach our daughter to swim.
It was never a matter of ending where she begins.
They wanted me to be a tree but I am the bird who sleeps in its arms.

Just wait, they said,
but I won't.



TITLE: *Tales from Home*
ARTIST: Autumn Rozario Hall

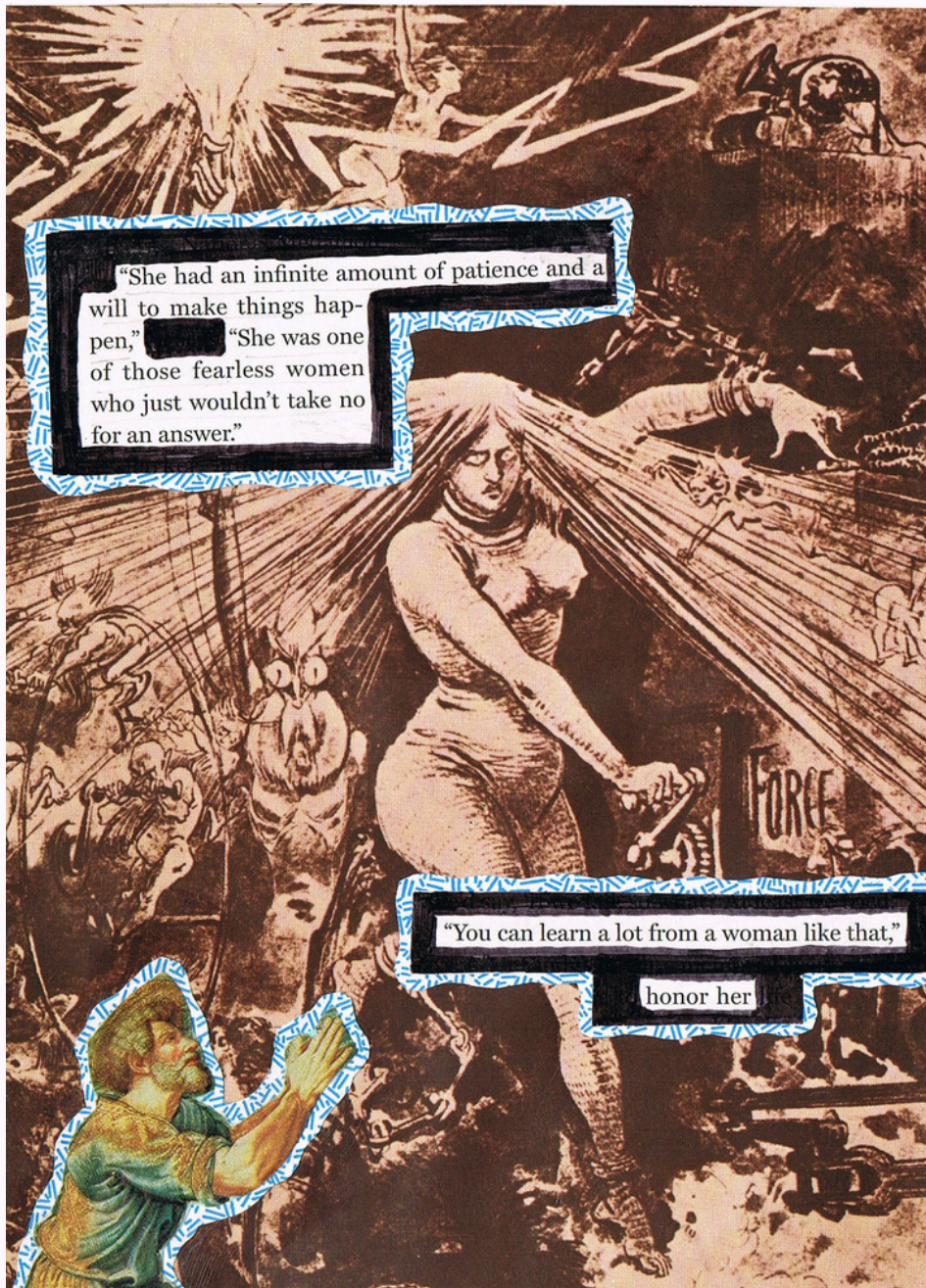
After the Slaughter

RACHEL HAPANOWICZ

I was cut out of my mother a month too soon,
the doctor's scalpel pressed against her stretched
stomach, pushing pushing down to open the skin
where thin green veins of marble patterning gave way,
splitting so blood could pool and the doctor could pull
me out from where I was cooking, growing, early,
not quite finished, blue in the middle, which is maybe why
I feel rawer than I should.
Or maybe this rawness is because of my father
and my father's family, who come from a long line
of butchers, owners of a Polish meat market
that has been passed from generation to generation,
where the feeling of being flayed has been set in my bones.
Perhaps my infant-self mistook the scalpel that opened my
mother up for a cleaver, as part of her intestines were
slopped onto a surgical plate,
similar to the sweet sausage links
hanging from racks in the back of my father's market,
making way to pull me out like the
innards of a Thanksgiving turkey, pink and juicy,
slimy and silent, not crying at first which made the
doctors worry something was wrong, more than wrong,
nurses gathering around my infant body, wondering if maybe I was
undone,
if they could return me or send me back to the chef
for a few more minutes but the chef was now unconscious
more than unconscious, slipping away, a burst blood clot and slippery
stitches
unable to mend my mother, the drugs sedating her
(did she still feel pain)
and the only thing they could do now
was rub, tenderize this meat, wait for the screaming to start,

(poem continued on next page...)

which it did, finally,
as I was handed to the expectant butcher,
cradled in calloused hands.
And there was a great sigh of relief
because I was fresh.



TITLE: *Honor Her*
ARTIST: Tristan Tuttle

A Girl Learns Geometry in Afghanistan

ERWIN ARROYO PÉREZ

The teacher holds the protractor like a gun,
measuring the angles of the girl's obedience.

She was born in the season where girls keep their heads down,
while the air remains thick with chalk dust.

But the girl refuses to be erased. She drags herself
back to the blackboard and writes her name.

At night, her mother doesn't chide her,
instead, she stitches algebra into her sleeves.

X is the closest thing to a map; X stands for exile,
for exit, for escape—for a door that won't open,
for a window too narrow to climb through.

She tells her daughter the story of a *caged bird*.
'They clipped its wings before the feathers grew full,

before flight became muscle memory, before
it could learn the weight of its own shadow.'

And once the doors of the cage were open?
Does the bird hesitate at the threshold?
Does it wonder which side of the door is home?

She asks: *If a girl steps into the dark,*
does she become its echo, or its light?

(poem continued on next page...)

What do you call a woman without a mouth?
A shadow? A lesson? A nation?

But she knows the answers to these questions—
inside her ribs she keeps a library, book spines
pressing against the doors, padlocked.

Tonight, she uses pencils as crutches,
to hold the fractures of language in place.

Tonight, she writes her dreams on the inside of her eyelids,
so even in sleep, she is rewriting herself.

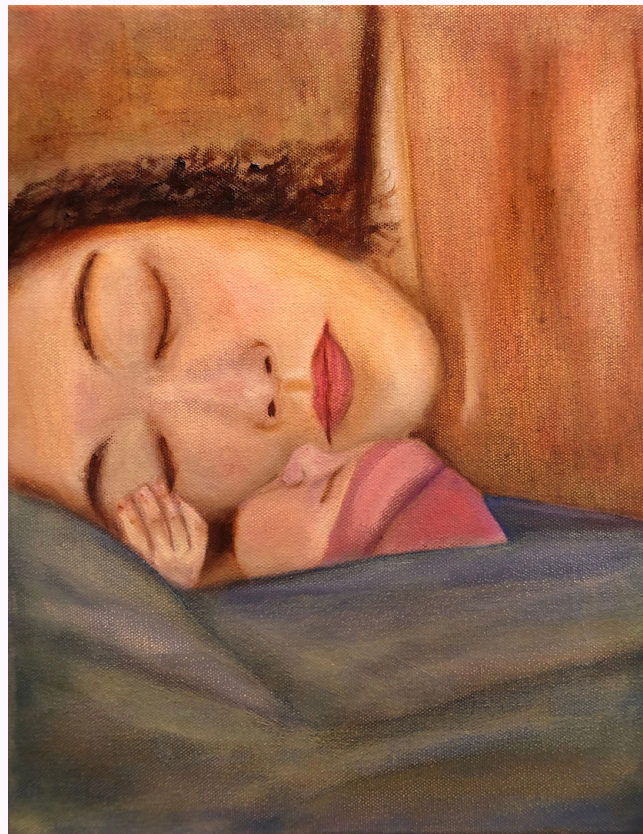
Tonight, she whispers a question into the dark,
sharp enough to slice a hole in it.

The stars do not answer.
She steps through anyway.

AI Will Not Wake Up in the Night and Hold My Baby

RACHEL BEACHY

Everything gets more modern but babies will always be babies
who don't know how to sleep through the night
yet do know the sound of their mother's heartbeat
There is no algorithm for the way that mother wakes
the moment before her baby cries
No formula for the rhythm of her sway
No predictive language for a love that does not depend on words
This is how we all begin
how we will keep beginning until the end
When I want to remember what is good I have only to think
of the things that are so human they cannot be outsourced
or made more efficient
AI could take over the world
but without mothers
there will be no one here to see it.



TITLE: *First Kiss*
ARTIST: Janet Cooke

Archipelago of the Two-Headed Hare

GABRIELLA EKMAN

We must resist, she says, but I must
buy gloves for my child, to protect
her hands against the cold, though
she resists, tearing them
off with a scowl. Swans
downy, grey, snap
at sand, hiss
this is
mine.

I no longer buy pinot noir
she says, from the US, she says
I guess you must start somewhere
but where, this resistance
is confused, where
are my glasses,
keys, where my
wobbling
fist?

Too tired to fall asleep, my daughter
cries. It sounds like pain. I leave
the house; my dog howls. In plenty,
in peace, we still grieve the loss
of what will return to us.
What sound, then, children
of war, when from your
mouths, your tongues
burning
speak

My grandfather, self-taught, painted horses
sometimes a cow, during the last world
war. My grandmother scrubbed, shot
the pigs he'd named. At night
no lights, so planes could
fly, screaming, clear
across the
seal-rich
sea

To
whom can
coral coiled
drift from a warmer
sea, whom bite of fog
or seals rocked luminous
brown-flecked, by curls of bracken
wet, when porcupine woman, small
jaws fanned round her hands and four scorched toes
where the axe-cracked skulls of sea-long
merchants, where the boats, weary
home scratched like a name into
their sodden hulls
so we know
we're where
who?

My grandmother fought every hour
and apologized for it every day
her language (*kieli*) whacked
out of air with birch whips
the teacher's blonde braid
swinging. When cancer
ate her, she sipped
wine, for hours
after
screamed

In Stockholm, I turn forty-five, dream
I married him. Took many buses.
Things did not work out. I wake
to my daughter, saying
where is mamma?
Where is mine?
Gone, long
since

First, she ate swedish (*havet, himlen, barnet*), though the shining Rocks,
they said, and fat swift Fish were estonian (*kivi, räim*).
Then soviets burnt her Boat (*лодка*), but she
could Swim. Then germans freed her
from her Limbs (*beine, waffen*).
When soviets rained in, again
she could not Swim.
She ate her Skin.
Ate the Sea
the Sky
Him.

How many eggs to flour? I ask,
baking, your grandmother baked the
best pancakes, my mother's voice
says, but I don't remember
pine seeds crouched too
far from the wind that
carried us, sleeping,
tucked into elbows
of cloud, all
the way
home

Once
ships, sleek
minnows, they say (*ros, ruotsi, rus*)
spilled down rivers
others, later, demur.
By missile. Listen. But if
you aren't heard? Roar. In cold, plant bulbs
papery skins rustling, thin, this wind will whittle
the seas of the world, if (*якщо*) or (*або*), now (*nyt*) now
crawl quick. Keep watch for bears, unspelled from winter.
Green shines the two-headed hare beside the blooming linden tree.

Alchemy of Her

WAVERLY VERNON

The first god I knew was my mother:
blood-warm hands, milk-soft prayers.

She called the sun to rise, stretched time in lullabies,
planted my name into the earth.

Then they came, men with stone-thick tongues,
wrote new laws in the dust, said no, child, that was not god.

That was a vessel, a rib bone's echo,
a footnote in the book of man.

They feared the alchemy of hips wide enough to carry nations,
wrists that twisted herbs into medicine.

Voices that hummed the universe awake,
so they burned the wise women.

Cloaked them in hex and horror,
called their knowledge poison, their power a curse.

Tell me what god ever bled once a month,
and still walked the earth unbowed?

What man ever split himself open, birthed another heartbeat,
and called it love instead of war?

You built your temples on the backs of the ones you tried to bury,
called us witches because we made miracles without you.

You called us wicked because we did not kneel,
but we are still here.

(poem continued on next page...)

Still spinning life from nothing,
still singing the old songs to children who will learn
the first god they know is not the one you gave them.



TITLE: *Interconnected*
ARTIST: Harper Hanson

Pietà

ELIZABETH C. GARCIA

At bedtime my son hesitates, asks,
will you lie down with me?

He's swaddled in his blue robe,
nestled in his pets, not yet ready

to say goodbye. Tomorrow, I leave
on a short trip. He reaches out to me,

and I lie down, hold my only boy.
I hate it when you go

he says, and I watch his lip tremble,
his face give way like marble beneath

the hammer, like rock
tumbling down a shaft.

What do I call this need to be away, this
sometimes-I-must-unmother-myself,

peel away this self like birch bark,
like a sweaty sock?

If grief is another name for love,
I'm close to believing what he says

every night like a mantra: *I love you*
more than you love me.

(poem continued on next page...)

(Oh, I do not deserve this!)— maybe
a mother's love does

have edges. Last night, I keeled at the edge
of thought: my mother,

gone. What will it mean
to be motherless? No—

what will it feel? Like this:
little prophet, grieving what is not yet.

He lies down before it like a martyr,
welcoming its fist, its stony kiss.

Three days without my body is an abyss.
He holds me, comfortless

in his loss of me, strokes his memory
of every other time I've died,

that a return lessens not the untethering,
the floating loose into cold space, the vault

of abandonment, that I, once gone,
am always gone. That though I kiss him,

I am never coming back.

Girlhood and Fluid Dynamics

CANDACE KRONEN

Fluid dynamics: the principles that govern the movement of liquids and gases.

My daughter is half joy, half liquid. She fills any space she enters. My husband and I joke that no matter the occasion, she's always the most enthusiastic person in a group.

Making butter at a historical site? Let's get churning! Looking for rocks along the creek? They're all treasures, even that one that looks suspiciously like rabbit poop! There is no task too small, no activity too dull, for her to approach with whimsy and gusto.

In some ways, this makes life with her easy. When she works on her spelling words, she wears a necklace around her head, a long silk scarf trailing behind her as she practices "magical incantations." She turns cleaning the house into a Broadway show.

But there are also challenges - how do you parent a braided river?

Entropy: a measure of disorder; indicates the amount of chaos in a system. When a solid becomes a liquid, it has a higher degree of entropy.

With so much passion for life, it can be hard to wrangle my daughter at times. She dances her way through a room, twirling and leaping with reckless abandon. Leaving the house takes three times longer than anticipated when we fail to account for all the side quests still remaining.

This is not, however, my biggest concern.

Superfluids: liquids with zero viscosity that can flow indefinitely.

The world is not safe for girls who can melt into anything. Girls who will pour themselves out over and over. Girls who are frictionless.

During play dates, I see her transform. The day after proclaiming a lack of interest in vehicles, she watches a boy admire a passing car and offers Hot Wheels on her open palms. When play fighting gets too rough, she turns a wince into a supplicating smile.

We practice self-advocacy in role play. We practice speaking the words out loud - "What about..." "Actually I'd really like to ..." and maybe the hardest one for her to use with her peers, simply "No."

But still I worry.

Shear stress: forces that act on opposite sides of a body. Fluids cannot sustain shear stress.

In the back of my mind, I fear she might one day chameleon her way out of herself and not find her way back. That in being too open to the suggestions of others, she may lose an essential part of herself. How far can a liquid spread before it becomes unrecognizable?

I seek reassurance in facts. I strengthen myself with science.

Law of indestructibility: although a fluid may be rearranged in space, the mass of the system remains constant.

My daughter practices resistance with me. Tests out holding her shape. She negotiates bedtime, stubbornly moving slower than a congressperson. She declares in a firm voice that Santa isn't real, but she wants to believe so she will. She insists that a tutu is an essential part of any outfit, using the one argument that always makes me cave: "my body, my choice." A liquid keeps its mass.

Property of an ideal fluid: incompressible.

Property of an ideal daughter: incompressible.

Post-Partum

CAT SPERANZINI

If I could lose another three pounds
maybe I wouldn't look so round, but
it's my loose muscles that stretch and sag
and come unwound and I am but a rope unbound,
a rubber band pulled off shape, a bone that bends
until it breaks.

a closet full of useless clothes, a scale
that changes by the hour, a scar
that mocks me in the shower, water gleaming
on the surface of tissue ripped and sewn
together.

I am not a woman, but a wound
where life bloomed and left me ragged
and I'm so grateful to be a vessel,
but I do not stand on my own,
I am a mother paramount
and a person after.

TITLE: *Postpartum*
ARTIST: Kendra Sanchez



Un-mothered

CASEY JO GRAHAM WELMERS

I

In high school you turn into a fragile porcelain doll. Your mother can't watch the transmogrification, so she places you at the tippy-top of a high shelf and shoves you back toward the wall where you won't be visible to her or anyone, really. You do not hold this against her. You are starving yourself and she cannot conceive of a girl actively seeking to become dust and bones. She decides to disappear on you before you can vanish on her. It is all just too much. One day you are coming home from school and feel your soul or possibly your failing heart as a hummingbird in your sternum. You lie on your bed and hold your splintered piano key fingers over your ribcage and decide you don't want the hummingbird to escape the sanctuary of your chest. You eat a monstrous plate of spaghetti that night and pray for the noodles and tomatoes to please keep you alive and strong and the hummingbird safe. Two years later your mom's left carotid artery spontaneously dissects and she passes away unexpectedly. She leaves behind pie crust, two large balls of dough not yet rolled and floured and pressed into tins. You grab one from the refrigerator and sit on the tacky faux-brick linoleum with your back to the door and consume the whole thing, the last thing she ever made in this life, made with love and butter and a dash of nutmeg and no clue that she would disappear before she could savor the fruits of her labor.

II

Your favorite yoga nidra narrator speaks of a *cosmic mama that loves you no matter what*. You long to crawl into the nebulous womb of this celestial Eve and ride along as she busies herself creating the universe. You have mothered yourself for so long. *There there, it will be okay*. You pat your own back, smooth your own hair, hug your knees to your chest so very tight. You pack up your CD's and drive yourself to college and arrange your own wedding dress with self whispered reassurances that everything will be fine, *just perfect*. You hold your own hand and answer your own questions about breast size discrepancy

and mascara removal and shuddersome men in all shapes and forms. *I do not want children*, you tell your college boyfriend before breaking up with him and fighting over who owns the vacuum cleaner. *I do not want children*, you tell your fiancé, terrified he will collapse like an unmastered puppet. He pulls you into the crook of his arm and holds you like his own child and tells you that you are all he ever wants, anyways. Wet atmosphere bursts from your eyes. *I do not want children*, you tell your dead mom as you paw through her hope chest of musty old baby clothes and crocheted receiving blankets and jaunty plastic toys frozen in time. To this there is only ever silence, and a sad knowing that all of those items were carefully folded and packed and saved for the future babies of her own precious babes.

III.

You are the un-mother. You sit on the scorched desert floor, red desert floor, rock dust and sand in your hands and your hair and the tiny bubble pockets of your lungs. Perhaps the ground is red here because you bleed, every month, until you don't. You are not the mother. The mother sits in fertile soil amidst the sleek grasses and frilled flowers and small tiny seeds, tangles rangy vines in her fingers and collects translucent insects in her braids. You, the un-mother, once put your toes in the mothers' beautiful soft earth and said I don't feel anything here speaking to me, or hear it or see it. You were escorted to the town square where they questioned your choices and the fact of your breasts. You decided it looked awfully beautiful out there in the desert with the cacti and mesas and wild desert blooms, so you went and now here you are. You and the mother visit each other in turns. You are eternally grateful for the mothers and all they bring forth and hold up and cradle in arms so Earth-building strong. You have given birth to other fine things here in the arid terrain, courageous words and unpolished music and laughter like rogue ocean swells. You eventually *will* turn to dust and bones in this place where the stars never go out, every night a spray of phosphorescent pins flung into the firmament, all the cosmic mothers and un-mothers dead and gone, emitting their love from far burning suns.

A Ghost Story

BRI GEARHART STATON

The second you walked out
the door, the kids started fighting. They wrestled,
laughing at first, until the crack of a slap
stilled them, just for a beat, before the righteous
scream. I try to search
online for that article about how children
are three times or thirty times or three hundred times
worse for their mothers than anyone else. Something
to do with safety. I want to send it to you
at the airport. I want you to feel my martyrdom
in the pulp of your teeth. But before I can find
it, there's a cat food monsoon on the linoleum.
The kitten is climbing the blinds. There's a ghost
hunt going on with crumpled
Post-It note clues clinging to the walls, the backs
of chairs. In nine-year-old
handwriting: *Ghosts, are you here?*
Circle yes or no. What do you miss
about your life? Write it below.
Isn't motherhood a ghost story? Invisible
hands, poltergeisting
away the wreckage of a long
day. Apparating over small, sleeping
bodies, searching for the rhythm of breath.
What do you miss
about your life? Write it below.
You send me a picture of your window
seat. Someone, down
the hall, is singing. A wilted sock grips the arm
of the couch. I think I see
the curtains
move.
I wonder if I could push
the pen
from across the room.

My Mother, Peeling Carrots

PAT DANEMAN

She scrapes another, hones it
to a sharp point, adds it to the pile
on the counter, an arsenal.
Curls and patches in the sink,

heap of limp, wounded skin.
Her face is brown from afternoons
in the garden, her eyes wet.
My feet are bare, my hair a tangle

from a long walk home. Her hair
turns gold as light fills the window.
I do not know her recipe,
only that she puts water on to boil,

cuts onions, carrots, potatoes, cabbage
into pieces small enough to swallow,
cooks everything until it has lost
the taste of earth. Halfway through

the second bunch she feels my presence
behind her. She turns.
I imagine she is about to tell me
something I've needed to know

since before I could talk.
Instead, she chisels the spear
in her hand, a woman's spear.
Her skin is stained. There is blood

on her finger. She does not need to say
you are like me. She does not need
to say come, stand beside me,
here is your knife.

one

RORY MEYER

i had waited
so long

for a
single
positive test,

that the clocks
had begun
 dripping
 numbers
from their faces,

while i dripped
 drops
of urine
onto test cartridges,

pleading aloud,
 "please, hurry up."

but as the lines faded in
 and out,

i couldn't be sure whether
time was coming
 or going,

as it all
blurred into

one.

Picking Raspberries in the Rain

SARAH CUMMINS SMALL

My mother bends over a bush,
white hair cobwebbed, blue eyes
dimmed, thin skin of cataract
on the one that does not see.

In her hands: a dozen
sparkling rubies, juice droplets
spreading red on her palms—
an offering—or a sacrifice.

She is ancient oracle,
hunter-gatherer, keeper
of the hearth. She is healer,
nurturer, nourisher.

Rain droplets nest
in her crevices, face wrinkled
and creased as an apple-head doll—
She is full of all knowledge
and none. What is forgotten?
What is new each day?

This, though, she knows:
how to choose what's ripe,
how to hold what will nourish
in one small cupped hand.

Day in the Life of Mind Bunnies

VICTORIA JAMES

When Miss Rachel songs are a little too applicable

I tug my wetsuit on,
keep my thoughts
together, focused, in one spot.
Squeeze my insides in place,
do a little hop — fit form.

Hop little bunnies hop hop hop hop

I pick up toys, fuzzy snacks,
torn books (*cry for them*), dog hair
covered socks, old sippy cups (*chunky milk*),
and straighten the rug — again.

Sticky, icky, bubble gum, bubble gum

I instruct a room of young humans
with their own bunnies jumping
around their heads. They're just faster,
bouncier, unprioritized, quick-witted,
and over my rules and "numerous assignments"

This ring leader no longer entertains her beloved circus — it's April.

Along comes Mr. Sharky and snapped that fishy right outta the sea

A to-do list sticks to a laptop,
travels to backpack, sticks to cup —
soggy — slides to a crumby black hole.
#1 read: don't lose (*forget*) this list.

(poem continued on next page...)

Ants go marching in a line, one veers off, uh-oh that's a mistake

Mid sentence a thought escapes:
runs up my teeth, gets sidetracked,
turns around and jumps down my throat.
Blank confused stare, meet another
blank confused stare — shakes hands.

If you see a crocodile don't forget to scream



TITLE: *she's even more than you imagined*

ARTIST: Caitlin Peck

Hysterectomy

ALLISON CAROL SCHMOCKER

*From Greek hystera 'womb' + English -ectomy
A surgical operation to remove all or part of the uterus*

When a baby is born, it is often after hours of laboring.
Always the mother is breathless and emptied.
Always there is blood.

Somewhere there is a baby crying.
I can hear it echo in the vents.

When the doctor told me the news, it was
after months of bleeding, a never-ending tide.

Somewhere there is a baby crying.
I can hear it down the hallway.

When they removed the broken thing, it was
after hours of cutting away tissue growing
in the wrong place.

Somewhere there is a baby crying.
I can hear it through the walls.

When my body had recovered, it didn't feel
whole. Maybe it was missing the damaged thing
or something I'll never make.

Somewhere the baby I'll never have is crying
in a room without doors or windows.

(poem continued on next page...)

When my lover calls me *baby*, I learn words
have different meanings.

Somewhere the baby I'll never have is crying
for me.

When I sleep, I am the one round and heavy.
I can't tell if I am complete or just no longer hungry.
It feels too real. This time I am the one crying.

Somewhere my baby is crying,
and when I reach for it, it is taken
away with the wind, like a whisper.

When I say *hysterectomy*, it is after a story
of my failing body. *I don't want kids anyway*, I say
And it's true. Most of the time.

Shared Language

JAQI HOLLAND

Are you that grizzly
the ranger warned me about miles back,
stiff chestnut brushes bristling
when you hear me draw near?

Unable to wrest my eyes from yours,
dark amber, deep as dens,
your feet novelty slippers,
I wave my useless arms.

Two cubs, walnut brown,
tumble out from behind whitebark
pine, are quick-stilled by my scent,
the grizzly willing me not to see them,

willing them not to be seen.
But they're furry magnets.
I look to them, then to her.
Mother, I try to convey.

I used to be one of those.
Would have killed for mine too.
Maybe we could sit awhile
and you can tell me about fear.

The Lost Elephant

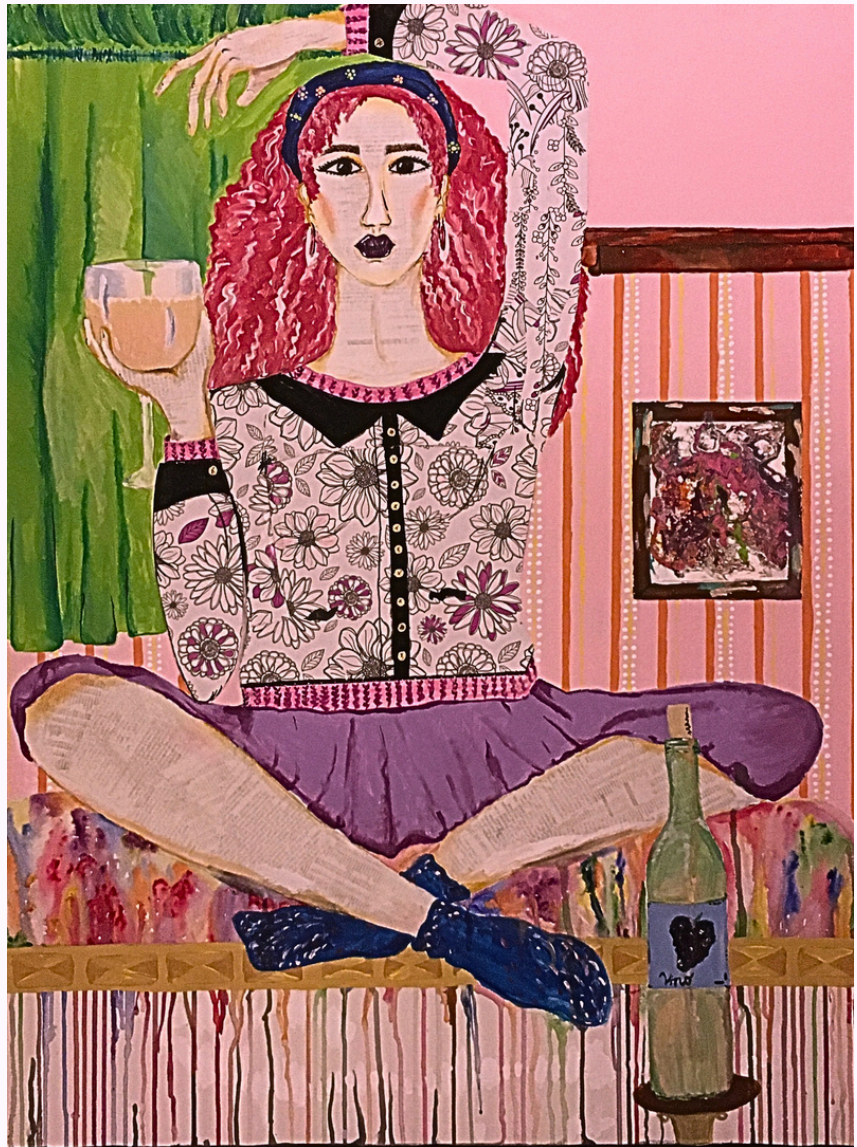
SARAH T. JEWELL

Even elephants grieve when a mother
dies. It is hardest to forgive myself.
Where inside me is the perfect daughter?
When I found her, I screamed my grief to deaf
walls. The perfect daughter was dead. I had
rehearsed this moment, to be more prepared,
but one is never ready for death's sad
entrance. I woke then in the bardo scared.
A gravestone stood and mother's name in place
of my own. I lifted my wet head off
a pillow, a Rorschach blot where my face
had been— my tears in the shape of a lost
elephant. *Are you my mother?* she asks
each passing animal, studying tracks.

Do Not Disturb

TRISTAN TUTTLE

"Mama, can you..."
Sorry baby, Mama can't.
She's in the middle of a primal scream;
check back later.



TITLE: *Sparkling Wine*
ARTIST: Ashlee Scott

Oh Inaya...

NEHA M. SAMPAT

I remember what it was to be 12 and starting to bite your tongue only to realize your blood tastes like righteous rage, all steely and sweet, all mineral and meat.

Bite me instead. Bite the beating rhythm of pain right out of my head until there is only a quiet that keeps no time. Until my breath in must not sing out but only drain from me, aspiration to atmosphere.

Only you know the sounds I am still too stiff with grief to form into words that, untamed, untangle themselves from letters into lines, telling me where I end and you begin.

My darling daughter, you are a wilding witch, alchemizing the iron in your blood - once and still mine - always for you - into armaments. You who spits spark into flame to forge from our ferritin a shield. You who screams, "Stop it!" to me because you know that love lives in palms opened, not fists clenched. You.

You.

Sometimes, I want to scream at you and your daughters - all shooting branches and blossoms budding - to stop saying stop it! To behave! To respect your elders. But instead, I tilt my head towards my roots and silently wish I could send the message back in time.

And then, I bite my tongue.

Interruption

JESSICA AURE PRATT

Conversation is grabbed and shaken,
slammed to the wall - it gasps a last breath,
is cut to pieces by small teeth,
scatters across the table, falls on the floor,
an odd bit gets sucked up the air purifier,
comes back out as abstract art.

What I was trying to say?
It's turning to dust by now.
I look at your tired face,
you reach your hand across the table.
I answer the question "why is it yellow"
for the third time.

Honey and Cocoa

SHOSHANNA CORTES

I hated my Cupid's Bow.
I thought it was too deep. Too
Pronounced. Too masculine.

Today my two year old traced it with his
finger and called it
Waterfall.

I've never loved it more.

My legs are muscled and thick
Thank God
they can bear the weight
of two weeping children
asking
Carry me, mama.

The boys in middle school always wanted to arm wrestle.
And now these arms can wrestle any thrashing toddler into any diaper.

I once wondered if
my eyes are too brown
to be beautiful.

My children have eyes the color of
honey &
cocoa
two ingredients most
ancient &
coveted.

Portrait of Grief as a Medical Procedure

SUKRITI PATNY

I am nestled in the red eyes
a mottled wood owl
a pack of doctors
work on my body
emptying
my
enormous guilt
these compound eyes
see everything, see
between my ribs
this broken heart
beat s

*please see the following page for a note
& the full version of this erasure poem*

A Note On This Poem:

This poem is born out of one of the most painful experiences I have been through. I've used erasure as a tool on this poem to depict the effect of time on grief. With time, I have learnt that grief remains - there is no way to escape or eradicate it. But if we give it time, we learn to live around it, to live inside it, and to live in spite of it.

I am nestled in the red eyelids
of a mottled wood owl perched
on a ghost tree as a pack of doctors
work on my body. They scrape
away mechanically, emptying
my uterus, products of conception
evacuated safely, thoroughly.
But what of this enormous guilt?
What of these compound eyes
that see everything, that can see
me burying it between my ribs?
What of this broken heart
that has never beaten the same since?

Lasterday

ALLISON MEI-LI

My son likes to say *lasterday*,
which could mean last night,
or yesterday, or a year ago.
Tomorrow, on the other hand,
means any time that isn't right now
and hasn't happened yet.

He can't read a clock,
floats untethered to a calendar
or day of the week. Wakes up
from a nap at four p.m. and asks,
"Is it morning?" I tell him it's not,
but he argues that the sun is out
and the joke's on me.

He measures time in the space between
two hands. Pulls his palms close together,
showing me six inches of air, and says,
"Only be gone this long, Mama."

The closest he gets to a real unit of time
is holding five fingers in the air: *five minutes*.
When I ask how long he napped at school,
I already know the answer. Five minutes.
If I offer a half hour of playtime at the park,
he negotiates for five minutes instead,
which to him, seems much longer—
a whole hand of fingers.

(poem continued on next page...)

I like the way time works for him.

I want our days together to span
10,000 inches, to live in this love
for as tall as a tree. I want five minutes,
and five minutes, and five minutes more
of the pure bliss of his childhood.

I hope he will love me tomorrow
as much as he loves me today.
As much as he loved me lasterday
and the lasterday before that.



TITLE: *All My Boys*

ARTIST: Jessica McNamee

Muscle Memory

LAUREN MERRYFIELD

She hums in the hum of the engine,
sways in the wheel's slow turn.
Her breath is static between radio stations,
a whisper when tires kiss the curb.

Given away
before I could cry for her.
Gone
before I could know her name.
Seventeen when I found her again—
in the passenger seat, in the rearview blur,
in the way my hands flinch before impact.

The light turned green—
but my foot stayed frozen.
A blur of metal tore through the intersection,
horns screaming where I should have been.
Not luck.
Not hesitation.
Her.

She keeps me between the white lines,
pulls at the brake when I don't.
A mother in muscle memory,
a ghost with a grip on my bones.

I never knew her voice,
but she sings when I drive,
low and cracked in the quiet.

Not yet, not yet.

More Information on "Muscle Memory":

I felt this poem had context that was deep and fragile, so we reached out to Lauren to ask about the backstory for this piece. We highly recommend reading "Muscle Memory", reading the following explanation, and then reading the poem again.

"Muscle Memory—is one of the most personal pieces I've written, and it's incredibly meaningful to know it stood out. I was adopted as an infant and didn't know much about my birthmother, only that she was sixteen when she had me. When I started driving, I would sometimes feel a presence beside me—especially in close calls or bad weather. It was subtle, but constant enough to notice.

Years later, when I was 24 and adoption records were opened, I was contacted by my maternal birth family. That's when I learned my birthmother had passed away in a car accident at just 21—on a stretch of road I'd unknowingly travelled countless times. The presence I had felt all those years suddenly made sense. Writing this poem was a way to honour that quiet connection. It felt like her." -Lauren Merryfield

A Lovely Crash

ALLISON CAROL SCHMOCKER

when i was a kid, my mother
would pull us onto the front
porch for every storm. we
would sit in bundles of
tangled limbs and baby blankets
just out of reach
of the rain and watch our small
world light up with a camera flash
as thunder would clap around us
like a lovely crash. windows shaking,
rain-soaked screen doors, our small
world came alive.

my tiny fists wrapped around paper
doll limbs, knees on the living room rug
when the tree fell across the window
just missing the front porch swing on
which we spent every humid, muggy
moment. i remember crying when we
counted seconds between thunder cracks
and crying when the tree cracked in two.
it was the first storm i remember not being
pulled out into by my mother. it was the
first time i remember my parents fighting.

clouds bleach the sky for an entire day
while the air hangs thick with
anticipation and longing. my
mother is on the other end of a cell
phone predicting the weather by the
way the leaves turn.

(poem continued on next page...)

i am a child again sitting on
my couch looking out the open window
at a storm approaching
from the west, dampening the wind
and blanketing the sky in darkness.

when the weight becomes too much,
there is flooding and scared pets and
leaves just begging to stay
on the trees, and winds taking Chicago
building apart. i watch it come down and
feel at home in its cacophony.
i know this chaos and am at peace within it.
my mother has taught me peace when the
world has come undone.

i lie on my bed, washed in the
crisp post-storm air, the pavement like
wet cheeks in the aftermath, and
feel myself wrapped in baby blankets,
skinny legs dangling off the porch swing,
and hear my mother counting. *one, two,*
three, four. and i am home.

Stem Mother

AMELIA L. WILLIAMS

Trumpet honeysuckle bugles forth,
hummingbirds arrive with blender sounds
to feed at the coral blooms. We have moved

to this neighborhood also; leaves begin
to curl. We are the stem mothers, clustered
at leaf nodes to suck sap. We have carried

our daughters within our bodies; they too
carry their daughters. We birth them all
alive & ready. Some observers call this

telescoping generations. This is not
about your human psychology, how
your mother told you to keep your legs

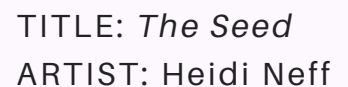
together. It's not an antique set
of painted tea dolls. I'm here to tell you
the nicknames do not sit well with us:

ant cow or plant lice. We aphids, legion,
develop wings when vine, bark, root, or fruit
get crowded, hatch a late summer squadron

of males so there will be eggs. Exalted
family. Our cousins spin waxy coats
fuzzed like wool; be awed by their rhythmic

(poem continued on next page...)

waxy threads that ward against your hose
& soap. Baltic amber proves we made it
through the Triassic. We carry our daughters.



Vernal Equinox: Cincinnati Nature Center / Approaching the Last Day of Nature Preschool

ASHLEY KIRKLAND

For Calvin

First: hepatica, lesser celandine, and marsh marigolds
or cowslips, piping up among the spotted green of spring.

The flowers are rich in my mouth and I want
to say their names again: hepatica. Cowslip. Lesser

celandine. Marsh marigold. These paths are rare, to be
in the presence of old-growth trees: birch, maple, oak. Calvin

drank sap from the maples this winter in his class, and I think
there is nothing more pure than a child discovering

nature over and over again. I want to be that curious,
to look at the world with my eyes wide, to drink it all in.

Anymore I'm all bad news and a fire burning,
unfathomable, into the sky, making it hard to see.

I like the stone steps that lead to the old pool, like
to imagine the original owners in their old-timey

bathing suits swimming in the circular, concrete
tank. Do you know the way sunlight marbles rippling

water? What about the sunlight breaking through
the canopy, only to land on the surface of the water

(poem continued on next page...)

and break again? If light had an action it would be to break,
the way we say dawn breaks, the way I break. The children

are allowed to pick only certain yellow flowers, although
I wonder if they can really tell the difference. At the end of the day,

Calvin bounds to me with a fist of yellow petals and I lose
them in the car, but for months I'll remember his small hand

opening above mine, the petals, crinkled and sweaty,
dropping softly, without feeling, into my palm.



TITLE: *Sanctuary*
ARTIST: Autumn Rozario Hall

Motherhood

MARY SIMMONS

I want to grow a baby
like a turnip: pat moisture-

retentive soil into a mound,
three cups of water

from the measuring cup daily.
I'll pick the sunniest spot, hold

my hand above my eyes and squint
if that will bring you to me.

A turnip the size of a baby. A baby
the size of a turnip. I can crochet

a sweater for anything. Green thumbs know
when to turn the soil for the birds

to get at the wireworms, when to sow,
when to sit in the dark and time

your breaths to the clock until lightheaded.
A time for spreadsheet, a time for faith.

So many trowels. So many things
I never imagined doing alone.

I will feel guilty when I weed,
as though I am robbing some mother-weed

of daughter-weed hair against her neck,
a daughter-weed face in her shoulder,

(poem continued on next page...)

plump daughter-weed fingers, an afterthought.
I know myself as blessing and curse.

I will fit the nursery with twine
and twigs, a rocking chair, soil

on the windowsill, a mobile of helicopter seeds,
strewn with string-of-pearls to tickle

the top of your head. When the rain comes,
I'll hold you close. I'll promise you

nothing can wash you away now, no bird
peck at your hair, no one take you from me,

and I'll swear it, though it's colder out here,
though you're so small, I'll swear it.

“Failure to Thrive”

AMELIA NAPIORKOWSKI

Small scraps of paper stacked
in a tent-like upside-down “V” ...
am I rapid cycling?
The diagnosis, that’s right,
the constant nightmares -I can’t get to my husband I can’t get to the hospital-
The baby - he’s lost too much weight, he’s tired, something’s wrong, someone do
something...
Tell me - have you ever ridden in an ambulance with your newborn?
Only you can’t see him.
You are in the passenger’s seat and the smell of gas station coffee fills the cab.
He’s in the spaceship incubator, in the back of the ICU-ed up medic,
and he doesn’t cry
not during the blood draws, catheters, feeding tubes, IVs,
not even the spinal tap.
Small scraps of paper neatly stacked
now scattered on the floor.

Mom Brain

LAUREN MERRYFIELD

They call it Mom Brain—
like it's scrambled, cracked,
but it's quantum.

Multiverse multitasking,
nipple out, dinner on,
solving crises with a glance
and a fruit pouch.

She forgets her keys
but remembers
who likes crusts cut off,
which scream is real,
and how to silence
a tantrum with three syllables.

This isn't fog—
it's neural fire.
A beast reborn,
feral in love,
funny as hell,
and twice as sharp.

delivery was smooth

BROOKE GROSS

I'm told that's all that matters
when they wheel me to the door
with a car seat in my lap
and a bloody diaper on my ass

the days are molasses
the hours crawl
and the miracle I made
makes me cry

sipping sleep like soup in sickness
skipping through daydreams
siphoning consciousness
through a rusty gas funnel



TITLE: *Walk Through My Garden of Abundance*
ARTIST: Indigo R. Williams

Modern Eve

LORRIE NESS

Wasn't the snake's idea—
grabbing a Jonathan by the stem

& stripping him with my peeler.
He just flicked his forked tongue & coiled

as I cleaved a Pink Lady—left her
two lobes wobbling on rocker bottoms.

I got no use for commercial swill, bottled
with yellow #5. Don't even

get me started on McIntosh coated in wax.
Chop & snap is where it's at.

It's the fresh flesh that gets me juicy—
fruit that flows aquifer clear.

Until the serpent strikes
& crimson capillaries the cutting board.

I press my thumb
to a thin sliver of Jonathan,

mingling our wounds. The apple is stained
glass, held to the window's light.

I taste it—Eden's forbidden fruit. A wet communion
of sugar & salt

dribbling
down my chin.

Daughter to Mother

ALEXA BROCKAMP HOGGATT

Mother, I've found worlds in my own body.

Do you remember when we knocked on trees to speak to faeries?
Mycelium beneath us speaking
the language of everything.
Redwoods and I, growing together.

Mother, it was easy, then, to love you.
Youth is bright with truths that fade.

When hills sprang from flat earth
on the first day of all days,
rivers ran down them and I was one of them,
pooling in the valley,
and the banks of the pool grew wild and green
and even then, my daughter was growing toward the sun.
I have been so many stories in so many lifetimes,
created and creating, in the same day.

All days are happening on top of each other;
Time is a book of pages stacked neatly
and we are Becoming in every day
and lifetime, something new.

What strange mischief, Mother,
that I spent my childhood
looking for doors to other worlds,
not knowing I am one.

How to Love Your Season of Motherhood

CAM MCGLYNN

One person's pleasure is another's prison.
Weighted blankets and sheets tucked in
make my legs fight off nightmares. Listen,
when not granting wishes, I know other djinn

must love the snug feel of their tiny lamp
walls, like weighted blankets and sheets tucked in.
They curl up in spirals, and don't mind the damp.
When not granting wishes, I know some djinn

think of showers and chores as me-time.
Must we love the feel of shining our lamps?
Aren't we allowed to miss sleeping sprawled out? I'm
curled up in a spiral. Don't mind the damp

towels left on the floor. I have no reason
to think of showers and chores as me-time.
No, this is the time of the smothering season.
I'm allowed to miss sleeping sprawled out. I'm

begging the towels on the floor: Give me a reason
to make my legs fight off these nightmares. Listen,
this is the time of the smothering season.
One person's pleasure is another's prison.

While I was getting married my Grandma lay dying

ANGHARAD WILLIAMS

or dead, the phone rang off, the save the date lay lying, and we should have guessed
when the hawthorn bloomed, turned up lavish and overflowing, rotting on the day
the mother of the groom in a white dress shedding wedding night scent
and decay

Grandma said a marriage announcement is an obituary anyway, a little death ushering bees
and flies in, and of course veil and shroud are synonyms, that cheek prettily blushed
is guilt, confetti, posted bills, the ash of your life
I found

my tongue once and removed it something borrowed from the family pickling jar
and told you I loved you, made promises that expired like
everyone does.

Nine Perfect Days I Hope You Remember Too

TRACIE ADAMS

Grandma forgot your dad's birthday this year. She has forgotten everyone's birthday, including her own, so it's not personal but somehow it cut him deeper than any loss he has ever suffered. There is profound sorrow in the moment when a mother forgets.

Children, listen to me. "Burn me, scatter me, plant me in clay soil, and still, I will remember you."

Four children, five grandchildren, nine days I remember, looking into your eyes for the first time, seeing the whole world reflected back to me in your baby blue gaze. Those days were perfect then, and they will be perfect for eternity. I held you, I saw you, I knew you.

Burn me, scatter me, plant me beneath a tree that blooms in spring. Even my ashes will not forget how I rocked you through cold nights and long days we thought would never end.

Keep these words, hold tight to yesterday, when I made you sandwiches the way you liked it without crust, when I bandaged your skinned knees and broken hearts with my arms around you, when I sat in the audience never taking my eyes off you because you were my shining star. You were the light I awakened to, you were the song whose lyrics I sang in my sleep, you were the fruit that nourished me.

Burn me, scatter me, visit me under the weeping cherry tree, and know that you were not forgotten.

smooth legs.

AMANDA ANDREWS

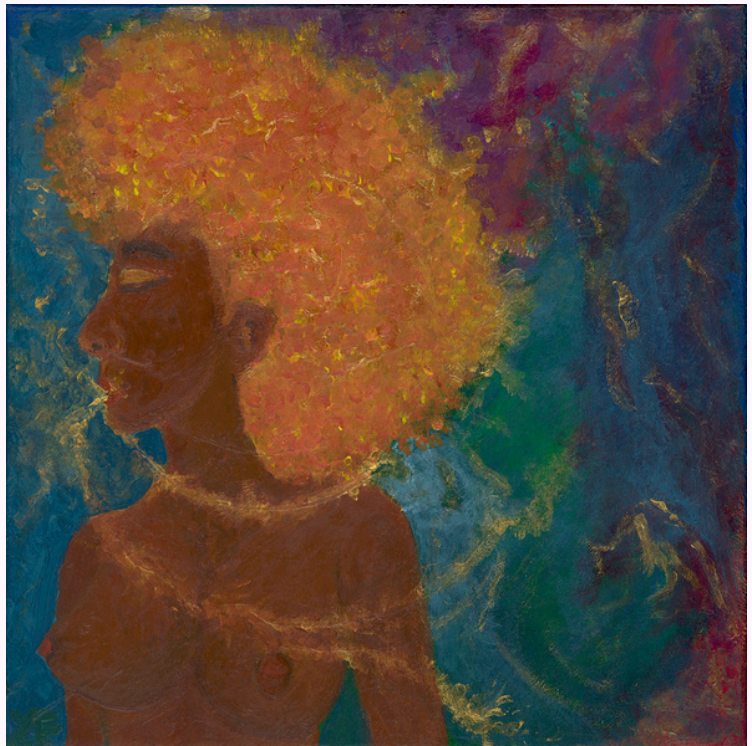
my sister and I used to paint
your legs with shaving cream
and draw a razor through the foam
in uneven patches of hair and
crooked lines dabbled with
little bits of toilet paper pressed
to scraped flesh.

we thought this was being helpful
and you let us
because this was kinder
than explaining the helplessness
of knowing your daughters
will soon grow up without
a mother.

Vestige

PREETI TALWAI

I briefly held
two sets of intestines inside me,
as the ultrasound wand skated
across my jelly-glazed womb.
The tech click-clacked crosshairs,
bold white text blinked:
BLADDER. BOWEL. STOMACH.
Letters swallowing
the organs they named.
When the doctor said *all good*,
I briefly held a thick, bright faith —
this body might yet be wired for health,
the way bloodhounds nose
where a body once fell,
the way a blind man
still knows green.



TITLE: *Wisdom*
ARTIST: Yazz Fawaz

Everything, Even a Shadow

ALLISON MEI-LI

My son laces his fingers through mine
and says, "Your hands are smaller than Daddy's,
so your hands must still be growing."

I turn my palms up, all lifelines and crossroads,
a history of everything I've held.

"No, love," I say, "my hands are all done.
This is how they will always be."

He peers up at me sideways, doubtful,
as if he knows that nothing ever stays
the same.

After all, he is growing out of his favorite
clothes and into the next classroom,
hair falling over his eyes every six weeks,

and the roses in our yard keep
pressing toward the sky,
the lima beans still sprouting
on the window sill.

Everything, even a shadow,
stretches as the sun falls,
spilling silently across the ground.

Maybe I shouldn't tell him
that my hands will never change
when every day, they learn
the shape of letting go.

(grief)

LYDIA FORD

sometimes its a live wire
and I'm pressing my tongue
to the fibers.
sometimes a soft cloud of nostalgia
to stick my head in.
it somehow always welcomes me home
no matter the weather.
sometimes a friend, but never a lover.
it is equal parts poetry
and equal parts blue,
a beauty mark, a scar.
a mother's love.

Now, Now

ASHLEY KIRKLAND

First published by Gnashing Teeth Press on November 8, 2024

This many years and you'd think I could do something other than press myself up against tomorrow with my eyes closed. I never used to be this way: laughing as I stare my problems in the face, all *I'll figure it out later*. But then again, no one ever said this would happen. I was a kid on a kickball field,

celebrating a homerun, yelling into the woods, fists raised above my head & now, now I'm pressing my eyelids together, peaking just a bit at what morning might bring. When I go downstairs, I am able to watch my son eat strawberries, watch as they take up the entirety

of his small hand like little, red grenades. I am able to watch my older son, the look of terror on his face, as he slowly grasps what our short future might hold. I've made a habit of lying to him lately: *It will be okay*, I say, maybe more for myself than him. He cries into the couch

pillows. I slide into the kitchen and brew coffee, feed the dog, take my morning pills. Pain doesn't hurt until it does. Things aren't bad until they are.

Cauldron of Change

MACKENZIE SAINS

Holy stone beneath our feet, you are the bedrock of this valley.
We are the mountains— ancient women, metamorphic and formed by fire.

We are the new women; we are answered ancestral prayers
formed as flickering aspens, lupines in the amethyst, flowing waters

of eternal time: the headwater's invariable truth as tributaries to the river.
Before this winter's returned reign, the harvest will bear her brambled fruit

stronger than before the frost, glucose-sweetened at the roots.
It is a choice to change, an agency to surrender, letting light melt you

in the cauldron of the valley, while the fire hums of change. Glaciation is just a phase—
now, you rest your bones, trusting how this snow is blossom food

with wildflowers for eyes and a body that will become blossoms of bones.
Turn me into a meadow and I shall seed for eternity.

We embrace the arc of eternity at this hallowed equinoctial hour, the great turning
that wheels around a hole in the stone that births this river humming.

[contributors]

Alexa Brockamp Hoggatt // Genre: Poetry



Alexa Brockamp Hoggatt (she/her) is a poet and programmer from Tacoma, Washington. Although there is endless machine to rage against, Alexa writes poetry as a sort of running list of reasons humans deserve to go on existing: The tenderness, the shared experience, the soft parts. Her dad woke up every morning after coughing through the night from breathing sand and dust at work and said "It's another perfect day" and that is what she wants her poems to say: Even if you have sand in your lungs, it's another perfect day.

Substack - A Case for Continued Existence
Instagram - @alexa.hoggatt / TikTok - @alexahoggatt
Facebook - Alexa Brockamp Hoggatt
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Allison Carol Schmocker // Genre: Poetry



Allison Carol Schmocker (she/her) is a Wisconsin-raised, Chicago-based artist and writer. She is queer, a creative, and a researcher (in that order). She utilizes poetry, acrylic, watercolor, and embroidery to weave the universal stories we share to the unique experience of womanhood. She is a recent recipient of the 3Arts Make A Wave award and is a graduate of Columbia College Chicago.

Instagram: @allisoncarol_artist
allisoncarolschmocker.com

Allison Mei-Li // Genre: Poetry



This poem is from Allison Mei-Li's (she/her) debut collection on motherhood, set to release later this year. Allison is a poet from California with published work in journals such as Rust and Moth, Voicemail Poems, and MER literary, among others.

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Amanda Andrews // Genre: Poetry

Amanda (she/her) is an author, poet and artist, graduating from Brock with a degree in writing. You can be sure to find her scribbling poems down in her notebook. She enjoys writing either "a little too close to home" poetry or poetry that mingles fun and experimental.

Linktree to socials (instagram: @asmandrews)



Amelia L. Williams // Genre: Poetry

Amelia L. Williams, PhD, medical writer, hiker, amateur naturalist, foodie, & fracked-gas pipeline fighter, lives in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Her poetry collections Species of Concern (Shanti Arts Publishing, 2025) and Walking Wildwood Trail: Poems and Photographs (Wild Ink Press, 2016) explore environmental and personal loss, and the "wild wood" of relationship. Pushcart nominee, finalist for the 2023 Wandering Aengus Press Book Award, and the Word Works Washington Prize, her work has appeared in ArLiJo, The Healing Muse, The Hopper, TAB: The Journal of Poetry & Poetics, Nimrod International Journal, Poetry South, and elsewhere. Instagram: @wildinkpoet / @wildinkpoet.bsky.social
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Amelia Napiorkowski // Genre: Poetry

Amelia (she/her) lives outside of Washington, DC on the Chesapeake Bay with her husband, son, and step-daughters. She recently quit her government job in intelligence to stay at home with her baby and pursue her passion for creative writing.

(Author photo credit: James Salmon)



Angharad Williams // Genre: Poetry

Angharad Williams (she/her) is a poet, living in Stockport, Greater Manchester, UK. Her poems have previously been featured in The Wild Umbrella, Black Bough Poetry, JAKE Mag, and Petrichor Mag, amongst others.

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Ashlee Scott // Genre: Art

Ashlee Scott (she/her) works with acrylic paint and canvas to create still life paintings that feature whimsical expression through interesting patterns, textures, and vibrant colors. Based in East Tennessee, she is a self-taught artist interested in chasing artistic growth and cultivating her creative landscape.

Instagram/Twitter(X): @ashfscottart



Ashley Kirkland // Genre: Poetry

Ashley Kirkland (she/her) writes in Ohio where she lives with her husband and sons. Her work can be found in Cordella Press, Boats Against the Current, The Citron Review, Naugatuck River Review, HAD, Major7thMagazine, among others. Her chapbook, BRUISED MOTHER, is available from Boats Against the Current. She is a poetry editor for 3Elements Literary Review.

Bluesky: lashleykirkland // Instagram:
@lashleykirklandwriter

Autumn Rozario Hall // Genre: Art



Autumn Rozario Hall (she/her, ella/ellas) is a Latina painter, dreamer, mother, and sharer of stories. She lives and works in Des Moines, Iowa. She is a recipient of two Community Art Grants from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and is working within the rewilding movement, blending art with environmental outreach in the form of gallery shows, native plant workshops, and writing. Through her work she seeks to share a sense of wonder and create art that inspires and uplifts. Her acrylic and mixed media paintings explore story and human connectivity to nature.

Instagram: @autumnrozariorhall.art

Becky Krotts // Genre: Art



Becky (she/her) is a visual artist and writer who specializes in pigments homemade from the earth. Each piece she makes reveals the depth and the hues, and also holds deep meaning and stories from where the pigment originated from. Her writing and artwork have been featured in multiple issues of RHIZO magazine. Becky lives with her husband, three children, and two cats in the outskirts of Cincinnati - often dreaming of living in the middle of a forest in a faraway land.

Instagram: @beckyjaneKrotts

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Bri Gearhart Staton // Genre: Poetry



Bri Gearhart Staton (she/her) is a poet living in southeastern South Dakota. A graduate of Augustana University's psychology, theatre, and gender studies programs, Bri's writing explores womanhood, intersections of identity, and experiences that exist in the periphery, including living with persistent Post-Concussion Syndrome following a life-altering motor vehicle accident in 2023. Bri's poetry has been published by Button Poetry, Livina Press, and has been workshopped at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. A mother of two, Bri's objectively hilarious children are the joys of her heart. You can find her on Instagram

@bristaton.writes



Brooke Gross // Genre: Poetry

Brooke Gross (she/her) is an MFA student at Western Kentucky University, having previously received a Master of Science in Information Sciences from the University of Tennessee. Though Brooke is studying creative nonfiction, she also has a passion for fiction and poetry. Her debut poetry collection, *Traitorous Muse*, is available on Amazon. When she's not reading or writing, Brooke can be found baking ugly but delicious desserts or planning unrealistic vacations.



Caitlin Peck // Genre: Art

Caitlin Peck (she/her) is an artist, illustrator, maker, and mother in the Philadelphia area. Her use of delicate lines and surreal themes communicate the fragility, compulsion, and nuances of the relationships we carry with others, ourselves, and the universe we build around us. She received her BFA in Drawing and Painting from Pennsylvania State University and her MFA in Studio Arts from Moore College of Art and Design. Her work has been featured in several publications in the United States and abroad - mostly recenting an interview and feature with *Visual Art Journal* (Issue #20). You can see more of her work and visit her online shop at www.iamcaitlinpeck.com or see in-progress works and upcoming events on her Instagram @iamcaitlinpeck.



Cam McGlynn // Genre: Poetry

Cam McGlynn (she/her) is a writer and scientific researcher living outside of Frederick, Maryland. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Orca*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *The Shore*, and *ONE ART*, among others. When not knee-deep in a swamp, you can find her at pinkpossumclub.bsky.social.



Candace Kronen // Genre: Prose

Candace (she/her) is a poet, activist, and speech-language pathologist living in Ontario. She is the co-editor of the upcoming anthology "If You Ever," a collection of poems based on Kim Addonizio's "To the Woman Crying Uncontrollably in the Next Stall." Her work has been featured in previous/upcoming issues of The Rebis, Free the Verse, and Last Leaves. Additional writing can be found on instagram @candacekronenpoetry and on Substack at "Stories I'll Tell My Daughter."



Casey Jo Graham Welmers // Genre: Prose

Casey Jo Graham Welmers (she/her) grew up in rural northern Michigan near the lake of the same name. She holds a BA in English Language and Literature from the University of Michigan and a BSN from Oakland University. She practices written and healing arts from the Great Lakes state while dreaming of many happy returns to the Sonoran desert. Instagram/X: @ca5eyj0 Website: caseyjo.carrd.co



Cat Speranzini // Genre: Poetry

Cat Speranzini (she/her) is an Emerson college alumni, a mother, a reader for Querencia Press, and the editor-in-chief of Grey Coven Publishing. Her third poetry collection, Of Verbena and Vitriol, is pending publication with Octave Eight Publishing. So far, her work has appeared in ten publications including The Eunoia Review, Moss Puppy Magazine, Clever Fox Lit, and Glass Gates Publishing. She was recently long-listed for the Black Fox Lit contest "Portraits of Failure." Instagram @thepoeticfeline Website: www.catsperanzini.com



D.C. Dubs // Genre: Prose

Growing up, D.C. Dubs (she/her) always wanted to become a princess, but when that didn't work out, she became a middle school English teacher instead.

Her writing has been published by Publish Her, PaperBound, Icebreakers Lit, HerStry, and other anthologies. She lives wherever the military life takes her, her husband, and their darling baby girl, enjoying the adventure along the way.

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Dré Pontbriand // Genre: Poetry

Dré (she/her) is a queer Mexican-French Canadian poet, cantadora, and alchemy enthusiast. She also writes in her mother tongues, Spanish and French. Her work has been published in Gnashing Teeth and Arte y Literatura Hispanocanadiense Anthology. She is currently working on her debut poetry collection.

Instagram: @the.dre.verse



Elizabeth C. Garcia // Genre: Poetry

Elizabeth Cranford Garcia's (she/her) debut collection, *Resurrected Body*, received Cider Press Review's 2023 Editor's Prize. Her work has appeared in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Image*, *RHINO*, *Chautauqua*, *Rappahannock Review*, *Portland Review*, *CALYX*, and *Mom Egg Review*, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. She is an MFA student at Georgia State and mother of three.

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Emily Patterson // Genre: Poetry

Emily Patterson (she/her) is the author of three chapbooks, and her debut full-length collection, *The Birth of Undoing*, is forthcoming with Sheila-Na-Gig Editions in 2025. Nominated for Best Spiritual Literature, Emily's work is published or forthcoming in *SWWIM*, *North American Review*, *Christian Century*, *Cordella Magazine*, *Wild Roof Journal*, and elsewhere. She lives with her family in Columbus, Ohio. Read more at emilypattersonpoet.com.
Instagram: @emilypattersonpoet



Erin O'Regan White // Genre: Poetry

Erin O'Regan White (she/her) is a writer and printmaker from Missoula, Montana. Her writing appears in *Ragaire Literary Magazine* and *Deep Wild Journal*, amongst others, and is forthcoming in *A Literary Field Guide to the Rocky Mountains*. Her nonfiction has received a Pushcart Prize nomination and a 2021 Best American Essays notable mention. A selection of her poems won the 2024 Merriam-Frontier Award. Erin holds an MFA in poetry from the University of Montana, where she was editor-in-chief of *CutBank*. Ever at the mercy of a 1935 Hacker Test Press, she turns writing and visual art into broadsides with her tinkerer comrades at Bear Scratch Press.

Instagram: @wildmontanaflovers
Substack: @erinoreganwhite



Erwin Arroyo Pérez // Genre: Poetry

Erwin Arroyo Pérez (he/him) is the founder and Editor-in-Chief at The Poetry Lighthouse. He also teaches literature and works as a translator in Paris. He holds a Master's degree in English Literature and Linguistics from Université Paris Nanterre and King's College London, specialising in Victorian literature and poetry. He has studied under poet Sarah Howe and novelist Benjamin Wood, shaping his approach to creative writing. Erwin's poetry has been published in *Paloma Press*, *The Nature of Our Times*, *Respublica Politics*, *Nanterre University Press*, and other American and British literary magazines.

Website: thepoetrylighthouse.com

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Gabriella Ekman // Genre: Poetry

Gabriella Ekman (she/her) is a writer and teacher currently living in Stockholm, Sweden, with her daughter and the ghost of a dog who likes to recite from Macbeth. Her poems have recently appeared in Orange and Bee and Amphibian.
Instagram: gsekmanwrites



Harper Hanson // Genre: Art

Born in 2000, Harper Hanson (she/her) 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



Heidi Neff // Genre: Art

Heidi Neff (she/her) is a therapist, artist, yoga teacher, and mother of twins. Originally from Paradise, Pennsylvania, she has lived in the high desert of Albuquerque, New Mexico since 2010. Her work has appeared in Bending Genres and Sala Writer's Group Zine, and is forthcoming in About Place Journal. She finds great delight in nature, and walks barefoot whenever possible.
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Indigo R. Williams // Genre: Art

Indigo R. Williams (she/her) is an Atlanta-based analog collage artist whose work explores Afrofuturism and the deep, often overlooked connections between Black people and nature. A self-taught artist, she began creating at a young age through drawing, painting, and pottery. Inspired by everyday moments and personal history, Indigo builds layered compositions that reflect both the past and imagined futures.

Instagram: @artistirw



Janet Cooke // Genre: Art

Born in the North Fork of Long Island, NY, Janet Cooke (she/her) worked at a major book publisher in sales and strategic planning for many years, before retiring to pursue her dream of becoming an oil painter. Inspired by beauty, tranquility, and serenity,

Janet's expressively realistic canvases are a testament to her love for evoking emotion. Janet has a BA in English Literature from Brooklyn College, and studied painting at the Arts Center of the Capital Region and the Ilium Atelier in Troy, NY. Her art has been shown at various venues in the Albany area, including the Paul Nigra Center for Creative Arts, the JRM Artists' Space at the National Bottle Museum, Albany Center Gallery, and the Lapham Gallery. Janet is a member of the American Impressionist Society, Oil Painters of America, the National Oil and Acrylic Painters' Society, and the Lower Adirondack Regional Arts Council.

Instagram: @janet_cooke_art

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Jaqi Holland // Genre: Poetry

Jaqi Holland (she/her) is a poet and essayist from the North Shore of Massachusetts with work in Milk Press; Little by Little, the Bird Builds its Nest; The Christian Science Monitor, The Ekphrastic Review, and Humana Obscura. She holds an MA in Writing & Publishing from Emerson College.

<https://www.jaqiholland.com>

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Jessica McNamee // Genre: Art

Jessica McNamee (she/her) is a Realtor, Artist, and Mother of three living in Ontario. McNamee endeavours to enrich the lives of everyone around her, and expresses her creativity through art and design.

Instagram: @jessica.creative.endeavours
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Jessica Aure Pratt // Genre: Poetry

Jessica Aure Pratt (she/her) is an occupational therapist and nature enthusiast. She lives in Utah with her husband, two children, and cat, where she enjoys hiking and camping with her friends and family. Her poetry largely reflects her experiences around parenting, nature, and many facets of spirituality. She has recently had a poem accepted into an anthology.

Instagram: @jessaure.poetry



Kendra Sanchez // Genre: Art

Kendra Sanchez (she/her) is a multidisciplinary painter whose work explores the tension between vulnerability and agency, body and object, seen and unseen. Working primarily in acrylic, pastel, and mixed media, she pushes beyond traditional canvas by incorporating sewn textiles, silicone skin, and even tattooing techniques into her practice. Her paintings often center the body — not as passive subject, but as an active, dynamic presence — blurring the line between representation and embodiment. Deeply informed by questions of consent, intimacy, and autonomy, Kendra's work invites the viewer into a quiet yet charged space of decision: to look, to touch, to question. Her materials and methods are chosen as much for their symbolic weight as their aesthetic quality, merging softness with resilience, familiarity with disruption. Based in Cincinnati, Ohio, Kendra is steadily building a body of work that reflects her belief that art should not just be viewed but felt — an encounter rather than an observation. Her practice is fueled by a reverence for craft, a curiosity about the unspoken, and a commitment to making space for complex, embodied experiences.

Instagram: @kendrasanchez.art
Website: kendrasanchez.com



Lauren Merryfield // Genre: Poetry

Lauren Merryfield (she/her) is a Canadian poet and mother of three living in Alberta. Her work explores longing, memory, and the quiet spaces between connection and silence.
Instagram: @laur_enough



Lorrie Ness // Genre: Poetry

Lorrie Ness (she/her) writes from a rural corner of Virginia. Her work has appeared in Palette Poetry, TRHUSH, The Inflectionist Review, Trampset, Sky Island Journal and many others. She has published two collections at Flowstone Press: Heritage & Other Pseudonyms and Anatomy of a Wound. Her work has been nominated for Puschart and Best of the Net Awards. More about her writing can be found at www.lorrieness.com
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Lydia Ford // Genre: Poetry

Lydia Ford (she/her) is a poet based in Colorado, where she lives with her boyfriend and two cats, Melon and Zuko. Her work has been published in Words Dance Magazine, Ink & Marrow, boats against the current, and Beyond Words Magazine. You can often find her in her local coffee shop, probably telling someone about the music playing overhead or her love of nostalgia. More of her work lives on Instagram @lydfordwrites



Mackenzie Sains // Genre: Poetry

Mackenzie Sains (she/her) is a poet, writer, and dreamer in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western North Carolina where she loves to farm and camp. She will be graduating in July with her MFA in Creative Writing with an emphasis in Poetry from Western Colorado University.
Instagram: @_mackenziesains

Mary Simmons // Genre: Poetry



Mary Simmons (she/they) is a queer poet from Cleveland, Ohio. She earned her MFA from Bowling Green State University, where she also served as the managing editor for Mid-American Review. Her work has appeared in The Baltimore Review, ONE ART, trampset, Moon City Review, Variant Lit, The Shore, and elsewhere. She lives with her brown tiger tabby Suki in her childhood home with woods in the backyard.

Instagram: @marysimmonspoet

Neha M. Sampat // Genre: Poetry



As a besharam (shameless) brown, queer, disabled (daily chronic migraine) woman, Neha M. Sampat (she/they) centers life on multiple margins through her speaking, writing, creating, advocating, and acting up. They are a mama, box-breaker, recovered people-pleaser, and founder of BelongLab. She works to make community cool again, and you can find her online at @nehainprint on Instagram.

Instagram: @nehainprint

Bluesky: @nehas

Pat Daneman // Genre: Poetry



Pat Daneman's--she/her--poetry is widely published, recently in Mid-American Review, Naugatuck River Review, Potomac Review, and Touchstone. Her full-length collection, After All, was first runner up for the 2019 Thorpe-Menn Award and a finalist for the Hefner Heitz Kansas Book Award. She is author of a chapbook, Where the World Begins and co-librettist of the oratorio, We, the Unknown, premiered by the Heartland Men's Chorus. She is from NYC and has a creative writing degree from Binghamton University. She has lived in Kansas and Indiana, is currently a recovering Midwesterner in Exeter, NH.

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Peter Chiu // Genre: Poetry

Peter Chiu's recent work has appeared in Crab Creek Review, the Indianapolis Review, orangepeel mag, and elsewhere. He lives in the San Gabriel Valley with his family.

Instagram: @peeterchiu



Preeti Talwai // Genre: Poetry

Preeti Talwai (she/her) writes from the California coast, where she is also a research executive in the technology industry. Her poetry has appeared in Typehouse, The Dillydoun Review, and Unbroken, among others, and her fiction has been acquired by the Rare Book Collection at U.C. Berkeley. She was trained as a designer and researcher at Yale and UC Berkeley.



Rachel Beachy // Genre: Poetry

Rachel Beachy (she/her) lives in Kentucky with her husband and children. Her poems have appeared in Ephemera, Freshwater, The Orchards Poetry Journal, The Rising Phoenix Review, Sky Island Journal, Steam Ticket and others. Her debut collection Tiny Universe will be published by Kelsay Books.

Instagram: @rachelbeachywrites



Rachel Hapanowicz // Genre: Poetry

Rachel Hapanowicz (she/her) is a recent graduate of the University of Virginia. She is currently a public school science teacher. A few of her micros can be found at 50-Word Stories. She'd like to apologize to her mom for being an early, C-section baby.



Rory Meyer // Genre: Poetry

Rory Meyer (they/them) is an Illinois native writer. They earned their BA in writing from Carroll University. Some of their published and forthcoming poetry and fiction appear in places including Vine Leaves Press, Nat 1 Publishing, and Wingless Dreamer, among others. In their free time, Rory enjoys tabletop roleplay games, building fantasy worlds, and bringing characters to life with paint. Instagram: @rorymeyerwriter



Sarah Cummins Small // Genre: Poetry

Sarah Cummins Small (she/her) lives outside Knoxville, TN. Her poetry has appeared in Appalachia Bare, Cider Press Review, Tiny Wren Lit, Yalobusha Review, and Willawaw Journal, among others. Her chapbook, Stitches, is forthcoming in July 2025 with Finishing Line Press. She holds an MA in English/creative writing from Iowa State University. Instagram, Facebook, Bluesky: @sarahcumminssmall

Sarah T. Jewell // Genre: Poetry



Sarah T. Jewell (she/her) won The Writer's Hotel Sara Patton Poetry Prize in June 2018; her poetry chapbook *How to Break Your Own Heart* was published by dancing girl press in April 2017. You can find other works of hers in *Rattle*, *Mudfish*, and other journals. Poetry prompts and links to her work can be found at www.stjewell.com
Instagram: @sarahtjewell
Website: www.stjewell.com

Shannon Marzella // Genre: Poetry



Shannon Marzella (she/her) holds an MFA in Poetry from Western Connecticut State University. Her young adult novel, *Girl in Shadows*, was published by Nymeria Publishing in 2021, and her poetry has been published in several journals including *Sky Island Journal*, *Stonecoast Review*, *Ghost City Review*, *White Stag Publishing's Spirit* anthology, *Coffin Bell*, and *Mulberry Literary*. Her first poetry collection, *The Uterus is an Impossible Forest*, is forthcoming from Raw Dog Screaming Press in August 2025. You can connect with her on Instagram @shannon_marzella_writer.

Shoshanna Cortes // Genre: Poetry



Shoshanna Cortes (she/her) is a mother of two young boys (4) and (2) living in Phoenix, Arizona. She has a Biology degree and Master's in Education, but her passion has always been writing. Her poems are dedications to mothering through grief and the incredible love her children inspire.
Instagram: @withlovefromshosh

Sukriti Patny // Genre: Poetry



Sukriti Patny (she/her) turns to the words in a flailing attempt to stay sane. (It's not working.) Her work has appeared in Dogwood Alchemy, Molecule - a tiny lit mag, Rogue Agent and others. When she's not making lists or staring at the moon or over-caffeinating, she can be found sharing her poetry and personal essays in her newsletter - Soul Gazing at Substack. She currently lives in Hyderabad, India with her husband and her anxiety.

Instagram: @wordsbysu

Website: sukritipatny.substack.com

Tracie Adams // Genre: Prose



Tracie Adams (she/her) writes flash memoir and fiction from her farm in rural Virginia. A retired educator and playwright, she now spends her time with five short people who call her Glemma. Her book, *Our Lives in Pieces*, debuts this spring. Her work was nominated for the Pushcart Prize and appears in over fifty literary journals and anthologies including Cleaver, BULL, Frazzled Lit, Trash Cat, Brevity Blog, Raw Lit, and more. Visit tracieadamswrites.com and follow her on X @1funnyfarmAdams.

Tristan Tuttle // Genre: Poetry & Art



Tristan Tuttle (she/her) is a writer, poet, and mixed media artist. She is the founder of the Southern Scribe Society and loves to encourage other writers on their journey. When she's not sweeping up the thousands of paper scraps from her collages, Tristan is doing the work of noticing the magic in the mundane. Her debut poetry collection *A Kudzu Vine of Blood and Bone* was a #1 New Release on Amazon. Connect with her at www.tristantuttlettle.com as well as on Instagram @tristantuttlettle, and on TikTok @tristantuttlettlewrites. Sign up for her Love Letters on Substack at www.tristantuttlettlewrites.substack.com.



Victoria James // Genre: Poetry

Victoria James (she/her) is a high school English and Creative Writing teacher. She grew up in Van Buren, Arkansas, but now lives in southern Kansas with her husband, son, and dog. Her fiction appears in Choeofpleirn's Spring Magazine and Cow Creek Review. Her poetry appears in Cow Creek Review, Empyrean Literary Magazine, Mindful Phoenix Review, 1134's Archivist, Written Tales, and Choeofpleirn's Glacial Hills Review.
Instagram: @vjames00



Waverly Vernon // Genre: Poetry

Waverly's (she/they) journey with writing began at eleven through therapeutic letter-writing, later evolving into poetry as a means of documentation and connection. Their work, spanning poetry and interdisciplinary art, explores femininity, resilience, religious deprogramming, heritage, and trauma. What started as a personal refuge now bridges shared and disparate experiences, fostering dialogue and deeper engagement with the world.
Instagram: @anthologyofeleos
Website: anthologyofeleos.com



Yazz Fawaz // Genre: Art

Yazz Fawaz (she/her) is an emerging abstract artist located in Austin, TX. She enjoys bold color palettes and textured brushstrokes. Her art is influenced by her perspective and experiences as a multicultural woman of color, an immigrant and her time as an academic in african francophone literature and postcolonial ecocriticism. Her primary medium is acrylic on canvas but she experiments with mixed media including oil pastels on wood.
Instagram: @artistic_dilemma

*Bryan, on behalf of every woman
her piece. Don't call me honey—*

*Fuck you,
who never spoke
I'm fresh out of sweet.*

an excerpt from "Ode to Bryan" by Dré Pontbriand - page 7

