



wildscape.

LITERARY JOURNAL



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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, addiction, and abuse. Please read with caution, and take breaks as needed. Your mental health matters.



editors' note

Dearest Readers,

We are thrilled to present to you *wildscape.*'s third quarterly issue. We know that the world feels heavy right now, and that many of you are, like us, hanging on by a thread. The ground beneath our feet feels unstable, always moving, always shifting. Our hope is that this issue will provide you with a moment of stability. By the time you finish reading this issue, we hope that you feel a bit more grounded and lot more connected to the world around you.



This issue, like all of our issues, is equal parts whimsy and chaos. You'll find tranquility in the pages that carry whimsy, and rightful rage and grief aimed at genocide, oppression, and injustice in the pages that hold fast to chaos. I invite you to allow yourself to openly feel all of the emotions that surface while reading these pieces, and to give yourself grace as you do.



We are in this fight together, always.

With love,
Ophelia & Oliver

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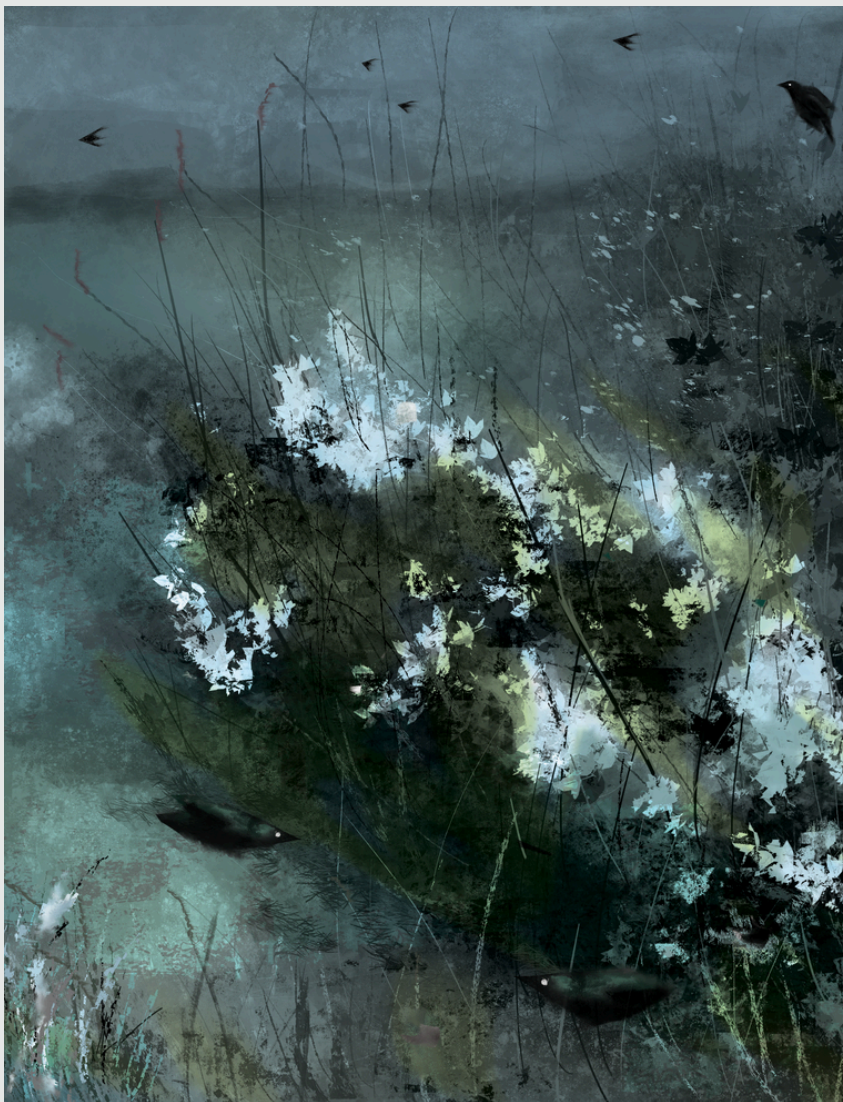
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spræna // creak

ROBERT FANNING

If you don't mind, I'll whisper. Being the first of what's to come. Spring. Overture. The end you hear even in the early strings. Let me sing to you what I know of silence, of chasm, of this world opening in you. Do you dream as I do? Of the sea? What unfloods you then. Better to know who you pray to—what old god you summon. The ocean may be just beyond this range. See those little stars—that constellation on my back? Small as I am, I carry pieces of the sun. Later: branches, ice floes, the night entire. First notes of a deeper truth. What you knew as home. I unmute the earth.



TITLE:

Passers-Through at Twilight

ARTIST: M.I. Lumsden

Small Theologies

VERONICA TUCKER

The maple leaves turned inside out before rain,
praying or surrendering, no way to tell.

At breakfast, my son asked
why people make mistakes
even when they know better.

I told him we are made of longing,
that our cells remember being starfish,
and sometimes we break things
just to feel how real they are.

He dropped his toast, picked it up,
brushed it off with small, reverent hands.

I didn't tell him how often I still pray
to the wrong gods
out of sheer habit,
how many wishes I've buried
in my own mouth.

Visioning

ANN MARIE GAMBLE

It's in every interview prep, but I was taken by surprise
"Where do you see yourself in five years?"
Mouth still gaping like a fish.
This is not a real question; or,
This is not the real question.
It needs modifiers, qualifiers
A work-life balance that allows
Your corporate strategy and my cottage in the woods
An herb garden and a pet crow
Now I don't see it so much as I feel
the foot-smoothed floorboards creak
Duck under the bundles of herbs hanging to dry
Hear them rustle as I breeze past, apple cake in hand, to
Pull the whistling kettle off the wood stove and steep a brew
Leaves hand-blended to tickle the palate and awaken the brain
cells
While I compile your annual sales data
Format sections for the stockholder report
The crow collects silver

Chicago Common Brick

GRANT ELLSWORTH

WINTER

last month, i got a new therapist. *emily*. we meet weekly, in a dinky brick building with creaky wood floors. she's been telling me to sit and feel stuff more. i am trying.

february 13th. you and i broke up on the phone today, because long distance is a slog. the connection was all spotty and we kept stumbling. stopping. starting. you bought me a tiny lego train set for valentine's day, and you wanted me to agree it would've been a perfect gift. i agreed, no doubt. luckily, you kept the receipt. we hung up, and i sat by the radiator. it went *ding-thunk*, churning thick steam.

tonight, i can't stop thinking about the week you visited chicago. i said i didn't like mark rothko, so you made me confront him in the art institute. you said, "*you can't understand him without seeing his work face-to-face.*" i didn't get it. we went home and i made *cacio e pepe*.

SPRING

my apartment's got one wall of flakey, old-as-hell chicago common brick. it's seen better days - specks dribble off it constantly, always spilling residue on wood floor, these cement cracks so wide i could stuff my whole pinky inside. still, the wall earns me loads of compliments.

exposed brick is an enviable feature.

i got drinks with a friend who said
chicago's common brick gets fished
from the city's river-guts, dredged

(story continued on next page...)

out of the bed's wet soil, flush-full
of lime, iron & silty particulate grit

which gives the brick a distinct orangeish-
khaki color, like stained newspapers draping
rusty gutters. the bricks are sturdy & cheap,
he says, but look downright, no-good *ugly*.

he speaks with pity, like the bricks are his dying pet fish.

architects use out-of-state brick on flashy
building facades, tucking chicago stuff to
back, side, and internal walls. milwaukee
brick looks tan like buttercream, st. louis's

looks red like raw steak; but chicago's flesh
looks like piss-poorly aged cheese. my friend
points out the embarrassing bricks all over
town on a late night stroll. we talked for miles
over sounds of jittery breeze rushing through oak leaves.

SUMMER

today's my last day with emily.
she told me weeks ago she'd be
moving (new job, out-of-state).
it's a sunday. it's a hangover.

I stagger out of bed at eight a.m.,
wet my hair, flop in the alley.
I board a train, interior buzzy
with anxious pre-pride party

fervor--june thirtieth. last day
of pride; a neighborhood full of it.
three boys wear sheer crop-tops,
shivery, it's early, sixty degrees.

two stocky old guys don gaudy
kaleidoscopic button-ups--my
olive shirt and shorts feel oh-so-
drab in contrast.

i enter the therapy
room, plop in the big chair.
all these big, cold abstract paintings
dangle on walls, cheap knockoffs. modernist
rothko bullshit, they remind me
of the museum with you,
and interrogating his big
grand *stupid* full-of-air
silly walls of color.

i told emily i went on a walk this
week--took the L to lincoln square,
found the nature preserve in winne-
mac park, for the first time. haven't
heard bugs or seen honest shrubs like
that since i moved to the city. i love it here,
but all the surfaces are hard & imporous,
and now i never really tune my ears to
bug-buzzing below red line tracks
in the little brick room i'm living in.

today i'm crumbling and
sort of breaking down entirely.
emily's moving away right
as we found a real pace.
she sees a fervor building in
my tapping legs, she
tells me to breathe and
listen to my body.
i stop. i start to cry, *why am i crying*
then i talk more. *i don't know why i'm crying,*
i need to talk until i find it and
then she says:

(story continued on next page...)

you can't
psychoanalyze tears
while they're falling.

i stare at faux-rothkos on peeling walls
until my vision clears. they reveal nothing,
no matter how close I look.
i curse the monochrome,
ever-unanswered knocks.

the session ends. i say thanks. it was
an honor and a pleasure. the air's sticky
on my cheeks when i step outside.
i smoke a cigarette on craggly brick,
both of us hiding out in the alley.
ten a.m.--already starting to feel hot.

AUTUMN

Today, I've lived in Chicago for one year.
my friend and I puff lucky strikes in quick
succession, flicking nubby stumps into half
of a *bang!* energy can on the wooden patio.

Wind nips my ears. *should've worn a flannel.*
the trees are drying up now, burnt-brown leaves
cosplaying chameleons on coarse alley-brick,
I feel this strange, quiet, bustling energy like
the whole town's packing up its colors.

We don't say much, us two addicts who said
we were gonna quit last week. we savor the
dumb smokes. my friend's surprised it's only
been a year since I moved to town. I'm surprised
I haven't made a trek out to the aquarium yet.

Last week, my friend and I took some gummies at the art institute.
there's a rothko out right now--an old one, called *number 19*.
it's got a cluster of gray rectangles up top, and a yellow
square in the bottom right, with an orange backdrop.
I observe for a minute--
I see a gray man looking in a yellow mirror.
or maybe a yellow man looking in a gray mirror.
or maybe a dull gray man staring back at me, hell maybe
I'm the mirror. maybe I'm the orange! maybe I'm just stoned.
I stare at it for longer than
anything else that day
and walk away annoyed--

wait, oh god. is that the point?
epiphany. then:
man, I hope that's not the point.
I think I'm just stoned.

WINTER: AGAIN

february 15th. two a.m. now, by a field in logan square. i
am drunk, but not spinny-helpless drunk like my friends,
who i just nudged into the back of an uber because one of
them threw up in a club called 'slippery slope' and got us
all kicked out. eyes glazed, i'm leaned up on spattery city
brick, it's twenty degrees out but i'm cozy under orange
lamplight.

i hold a cigarette. got it from a pretty girl in the club. i'm
nicotine free, twenty days. my head pounds. something's
welling up and i wonder if i'm gonna hurl but all the
sudden it's in my throat, i'm gonna cry for who knows
why--it's the withdrawals, i think, or the drinks, or the two
am, or maybe still the emily, or the constant lack of *you*, or
the lack of any *You*, or it's city life, or probably the long
dumb chicago cold, or it's my brother leaving for two years
to serve a mormon mission in peru when i was a kid, when
i walked into his room the day he left, too young to get it,
when i saw his converse dangling off the side of his bed,
and i swear to *god* i felt his living ghost in there--

(story continued on next page...)

man, i want this cigarette. i squeeze my fists, let the
fingernails munch my frigid pale palm.

it comes out. spilling, deluge, like the moment moes
stopped parting the red sea and it all came torrentially
crashing in on itself. i cry big and i feel it--i walk into that
big room, the place we go when we cry, the one where you
see every cry you've ever had, all the ghosts and haunts of
every shit moment. it's always so much bigger than i think,
and in a way, it's a sweet room to enter, even if i never
want to be there, just like how it's nice to see old friends
even when you don't get along that well anymore, just to
know they've still got a pulse--

and then i let out a wail, audible, and get so self-aware about
it that the door *SLAMS!* shut and now i'm

recomposed. RECOMPOSED. i stand straight, put on my
beanie. i walk to the river, unclench fists, crescent marks in
my palm like little baby moons. i throw the cigarette on the
ground. i am sorry for littering but i feel like the universe
gets it. i put my hands on the
cold river bridge rails
and i watch the
blip blip blip of
the tip of the
Sears tower.

i tap my fingers to its pulse.

it's as pretty as the day i got here.
it's such a lovely city, not quite
mine, but almost there.
i let myself feel it.

Going Back

tc WIGGINS

The past takes no prisoners.
Buries each sentence with *when*.
Reminds us this year's harvest of plums
were not as sweet as last's. Then
leaves us defeated from delight.
When Orpheus returned, he sang
for no one. Just sat on a rock, and spoke
in plain words how he only thought
to turn because he had heard a sound,
or not enough of one. Then on about her hair.
We come back like geese to the banks
of memory. Like widows we return
to the village of abandoned homes to find
nothing besides dust, unfinished cans of food.
The portraits of happy people everywhere.



TITLE: *The Shirt Factory Windows*
ARTIST: Janet Cooke

How to Bulletproof a Mother's Prayer

SVETLANA LITVINCHUK

The news reports on children gunned down by other children. Bullets fall from the sky like tiny seeds, making punctures in the earth to grow the opposite of life. Look at us still learning how to make nothing out of something. Life is a gun chamber's lucky spin. The fruit of this planet is housed in the husk of one word: *senseless*. A world where an entire life can be erased like chalk marks on a blackboard, like an algebra equation that never results in wholeness. Is the Earth not one big mother weeping for her children? My pockets are filled with holes that spill seeds to cover the scars of loss. I call the flowers that trail behind me motherhood. I braid grasses, harvest tiny twigs with sprouting buds to weave a nest to house a prayer that can't be crushed. I surround it with my wings to deflect the rain, guard my precious egg, become a door at lockdown against the backdrop of the morning sun. Inside a backpack, I tuck a love note with instructions for how to play dead. I count how long I can keep the outside *outside*. Spring is almost here and already so many seeds are drowning.

Gardener

BENJAMIN GOODMAN

Not yet in my true leaves, I'd wake to
the only sun I'd ever know, dreamful,
precious to some, myself an urge to grow.

In the idea of a day, I'd wade down the road
unpainted, as the gale passed over, the shroud,
kicking up leaves in the rain.

Such long light to which I gave my boyhood.
I had to earn my way out of the dark.
I used to shout in the dark.

The human slumbers under nothing.
He sings and sometimes dreams
of an age turned over. The way I was

taught to tend the soil, those long lives
my soul shed. Striped shirt,
a boy in the rough with the stuff of life

in his hands so small. Watching
the worms touch. Wondering about carrots.
I shook a bag out on the lawn like a sandman.

Splashes of Monochrome

SUI WANG

After Bhanu Kapil's Wish (2)

It's a pupil but also a country: the way color spirals inward, a palimpsest blinking in this light. For you, it might be the glow of neon tattooing the alleyway, a white vow you once swallowed like a pill. Like you, I thread through dreams where blue glances off uneven surfaces. When I say blue, I mean the horse galloping through my sleep, vanishing into faint beats as it slips past this sentence. Improbable, yes—like the way your voice became a flock of starlings when you read to me, or how my mother's hands, once a spring of clouds, now linger behind the door. You are writing to me from the hush of our dreams. Left behind, you dip your murmurs in residues of blue, the memory of it, staining the retina. We circle around each other like two yodels. We don't stop until there's more blue, until it surrenders to a streetlamp's yawn, tucking itself back into the center of a pupil—*tell me again, how color begins.*



TITLE: *Gladiolus B&W*
ARTIST: Tinamarie Cox

No Place

ena ganguly

there is no place like home or so the saying goes it's bullshit but
you already know home is the circus i was born into
the performance i trained for my smile was the parlor
trick i learned to survive home my mother
reminded me at the end of every show
there is no place like home there is no place
like home there is no place like home
except my home did not land on an evil witch
and at the end of a harrowing dream no god
mother met me on a yellow road to point with
a manicured finger at what i had inside all along
no curling feet ever owed me
sparkling ruby red slippers
i alone tap tap tapped the nights
away to scrape out the sun
i earned it the loneliness
stayed with me even though
papa and mama and meemaw said
they left the entryways laden
with gold all i ever got was
the tornado all i ever got
was the tornado
all i ever got
was

Double Line

EVA ALTER

"You and I could see into the same eternity" - Adrienne Lenker, Sadness As A Gift

I.

Some land somewhere still bears
twin footsteps. Eleven months ago
we stopped a quarter mile down
from the trailhead to witness

pine-moss illuminated in brilliance.
You were silent then, too,
your hushed breath bearing only awe.

II.

Just a nod to substantiate the mutation.
What other persuasions of death
did you consider?

Was the short drop a kindness?
You spent all rounds but one.
Left the last as caustic bargain.

III.

My ears are ringing to fill the dead air.

Perishable

CHRISTY HARTMAN

Metaphors are failing me. The ups and downs of a rollercoaster, the chaos and resettling of a snow globe, the horror of finding a worm in your apple. My mother-in-law calls it my cancer journey; like I'm a grizzled pioneer regaling their friends with fireside tall tales. It's the friends we made along the way, valuable life lessons learned through hardship and trials, and strength of character gained through adversity. I despise the word journey.

No one wants to hear about the journey of the scope through my cervix without anesthesia because women are tough and I can handle it; *just concentrate on the crooked print of The Lady of Shalott pinned to the ceiling and squeeze the pillow if you really need to.*

Or the week I stayed up all night rabbit-hole researching until the anxiety made me throw up, but always in the guest bathroom so I wouldn't wake my husband, and his soft words of consolation couldn't spark hope.

Or the notification ding when a friend of a friend, using my trauma as watercooler chatter, reached out to reassure me *God doesn't give us more than we can handle*; I told her to fuck off, blocked them both, then cried myself to sleep and dreamt of apples and serpents and pulsating black tumors.

I can't settle on a metaphor for when I was deemed healthy and cancer-free, but my brain hadn't even processed the diagnosis. *New lease on life* was exhausting when I discovered that the world had gone on without me. *A weight off my shoulders* buried me in the expectation I should slip back into life as though everything I thought I knew about the universe and myself was still true, and constant anxiety, deep fear of being alone and out-of-the-blue panic attacks were only a phase.

I should be grateful. I want to be grateful. I *am* grateful.

But.

My therapist talks about how an existential crisis can shift one's core beliefs. My core whispers interchangeable truths and lies to my soul. My couch confession today is that I'm not sure I still believe in souls.

An apple may be the perfect metaphor; irony being another solid writer's

tool. The flesh is still sweet and crisp despite the shiny skin being tarnished with scrapes and bruises from being plucked and passed around. But the core, where life's essence begins and ends, has transformed to swirling liquid, changing colour from glittery pink to squid ink black-uncontrolled and volatile. Perishable.



TITLE: *Poppies*
ARTIST: Emma Rich

Lately Though

STEVEN FORTUNE

More than once I've piled up
at the window of this medium
with nothing but a knock
and a prayer.
My left palm,
yawning out the usual laments,
would collect a few words
and a concept,
and the medium was ever
charitable.
Lately though,
I'm shackled by a numbness,
leaving no decipherable language
with which to verify an honest effort
on my part.
All that I can offer
is a mute unraveling of incongruent
breaths,
and the mock histrionics of a beggar,
whose next exhale is dependent
on donation.
My mind and body punch a mutiny
into whatever's left of me to write this.
Whatever this is.
The medium has left the conversation.

Things I'd Still Do

DRÉ PONTBRIAND

Get in vans with strangers: a Palo-Santo heavy Chevy G20 with a sonnet-spilling prophet; a red 70's Volkswagen shaggin' wagon with three long-haired surfers headed South; a fuzzy pink and purple pimped out festival-goer's fantasy stocked with the best candy—one taste and I make-out with God. Talk myself out of a felony on one side of the border, have my first lucid dream on the other. Skinny dip a bioluminescent shoreline with a nowhere-bound time-traveller, his touch the lightning that strikes me sober, makes me want to remember. Take LSD blessed by a Mayan shaman on a Panamanian beach. Find out the only love I've ever known isn't free—my softened gaze on strangers spinning around me, I love them not because they're mine but because they never will be. Get all my shit stolen and backpack for three months without a backpack. Dance callouses onto the bottoms of my feet. When strangers barge into the van, I learn that boundaries don't need to be barbed wire fences, a purple velvet rope is all you need. The prophet heads North and Tara asks *Are you sure he's not the one who stole all your shit?* Nope. Hand what's left of me to a golden-haired dreamer who hymns any instrument he holds. Change my mind about building a home in the gap between his front teeth. Leave him carving our initials in the rearview like the one before him left me. Fall in love during a solar eclipse. Let a wizard undress my notions of pleasure in the stolen darkness at mid-day, melt into the world of tantra without knowing what it means. Yes, a nameless rose does smell as sweet. I'd forego the forever

my college sweetheart promised when he said he'd ask
my dad, like I was an 18th century commodity. I'd handpick
the same bouquet of brief eternities, still slam on the gas
pedal—my rose-coloured windshield shattered to pieces
when I travel to the final frontier to find the lights
in his Northern eyes out of order those nights. *Kintsugi*:
the Japanese art of repairing broken items with gold lacquer;
freesias swooning over the fallen vase—her slow dance of
shimmering scars. Given the chance, I'd still fling myself
off the shelf, bless the falls that broke me golden.



TITLE: *Malkinson's Iceberg* (2025)

ARTIST: Sean Bw Parker

Kitchen Table Prose

CATHERINE DEAN

I stumbled across an ad for the perfect job in the classified section of the local newspaper. I was lucky to see it. The classifieds were never really my thing. It was always the obituaries and then the comics. I hadn't yet quit the comics. I still couldn't give up on Al Capp and Hal Foster. The obits still comprised some of the best and worst of newspaper writing.

Neither my husband Gary nor I thought anything of my 8 p.m. job interview at an apartment building. Back then, kitchen table magazines were seen as a valid introduction to the publishing world. He dropped me by the dim yellow light of the main entranceway. I pulled a clipping out of my pocket. It was a dream ad for any writer, soliciting non-fiction, genre and literary fiction.

I had learned to adapt to the strictures of newspaper writing. I had been busted several times for my inability to write ledes and for my infamous run-on sentences. Over the years, practice improved my ability to hit one thousand, then, 750 words. Word count never increases no matter who you are, but editing can wrench the heart right out of a story. A correct or more accurately incorrect turn of phrase could literally hinge on one letter. My work was constantly subjected to the whims of a revolving door of junior reporters. Hence, my review describing a book steeped in *bathos* was now infused with *pathos*. A *claque* of obsequious admirers had become members of a select *clique*.

I wrote questions down in one of the spiral shorthand notebooks I always carried with me. My pens were within easy reach of the inside of my purse. I had worn a suit jacket over a dress and tied my hair back. There was just enough time beforehand to blot a coat of lipstick and run a dusting of blush over my cheeks. I arrived at the door drenched in rain and sweat.

It was an ordinary, small apartment stuffed with old, not antique furniture. I noticed the grooves from the vacuum cleaner in the low-pile carpet. The living room was painted in an extreme beige.

The editor introduced himself as Edward and asked me to tell him a little about myself. I started with my usual joke about having worked for Conrad Black's fiefdom.

"You can write anything you want," he interrupted.

"Really? I don't do genre writing, but I do fiction and non-fiction."

"I really don't care what you write. You can write anything you want, like anything. What we really need is for you to sell magazine subscriptions."

"Magazine subscriptions?"

"This is how it works. People sign contracts to pay for our magazines. These agreements are legal and binding, also unbreakable. Best case scenario is our premium package."

He was just some guy in a sweater and a pair of slacks, of average height and weight, freckle-faced and wholesome in an Alfred E. Neuman sort of way. You'd be hard pressed to pick him out of a line-up. How could such an ordinary looking guy be capable of this kind of casual cruelty? The worst thing is that he figured I was desperate enough for the job. He sized me up as just another writer willing to get the job done. It was necessary to thank him and get out, but I hesitated. I spent another few minutes imagining this was some small independent, community magazine. I would not be struggling with Gary's directions for interviews at art studios, churches and farmer's fields. There would be no opportunity to be an off-the-beaten-track stringer for a story that would blow up nationally. There were no more small-town fall fairs to add to my oeuvre.

The guy hadn't even noticed that I had stopped listening. I got up from the hardback chair I'd been sitting in.

"Thank you very much," I said, extending a hand.

"Thank you," he said, shaking my hand briefly, not too long, taking care not to squish my fingers together, like the kind of guy you hope to share a pew with when it comes to the *sign of peace* portion of the liturgy.

I ran down the long flight of poorly-lit stairs and out on to the street to wait for Gary. It was still raining hard when he pulled up. I was crying when he opened the door.

"Don't worry," he told me, "I have a friend on the force. We can talk to him."

For some reason, I thought that the business card I had taken from the guy would be the kicker, the ultimate evidence. I figured the fraud squad would see the classified ad as proof of the guy's shamelessness and immediately despatch their best people. Because Edward's scam was so transparently fraudulent, it was considered local and trivial.

So the story ends, right? A writer walks away from a bad thing and learns a lesson. I would be remiss were I to end the story there. Of course, I still remember how literally exposed I felt standing in the dark waiting for a ride home.

But this is a lie of omission. It leaves out what my oldest daughter calls the Mary Sue-itude of my own writing.

Years ago, I received a call from a guy asking if I would like to join a new writer's group. Two men named James (my father was also a James) met up with me at one of two local coffee shops. The group worked out very well (also I only had one name to remember). We met regularly, sharing stories, poems and ideas. Original Jim entrusted his newly-written novel with me. The men were respectful and fair, also honest.

As our family prepared to move to a new city, our group meetings had come to an end. The two Jims revealed that they had been puzzled by an expression I used in a story. It's technically correct (for someone living at the turn of the century, at any rate). I do admit to having a bunch of words in my word hoard that I like simply for the sound they make. Giving any of them up has not been easy.

Uxorious is one I still love, despite it being an offensive anachronism (less offensive than *womanizer*, or even *feminine* or *masculine*). I still find ways to shoehorn the word *scatological* into text. It's such a nice way of talking shit, literally. And for that, I love it. One of my writing group friends insisted I retire *recidivism* from the files. It just doesn't work with everything. *Onanism* always makes the word list, being such a mellifluous term for *masturbation*. It sounds more like a philosophical movement than a physical one.

I can't deny being a hypocrite. I called out the guy in an undergraduate poetry course who used the word *ontology* or *ontological* several times a class (never to his face, so the outrage festered the entire course). *Onanism* is a far more functional concept than ontology, the most oxymoronic of all oxymorons, the scientific proof of God.

Original Jim explained that the group was baffled by a description I foisted on them. They could barely contain themselves as I described a character's *farded cheeks*. Neither Jim called me on it at the time. I regret that I must have missed some serious side-eye. Sometimes, we only see what we must. What they in fact *heard* were the words *farted cheeks*. I admit to having been partial to words like interlarded and larder and bard. At the time, they seemed somehow traditional to me. The next had that same ring. The arcane term *farded*

refers to applying make-up to one's face. Now, it feels a lot like invoking the fourth dictionary definition of the word *labia* to describe a character's facial lips. One might be technically correct in doing so, but risk the red-faced laughter of the most generous of audiences, and not of the *farded* cheek variety. And I'm as guilty as the next person for mocking a fellow parishioner (clearly a Nancy Drew stan) who favoured the word *ejaculated* as a synonym for "yelled out". At 12 years old I had figured out that Carolyn Keene had led a sheltered life.

I could torment myself over the malapropisms attributed to my byline, or pity myself for nearly being used, or underused. In order to protect myself, I knew Mary Sue to be a grifter. It was time to cut ties with her. I waved gently at the Carolyns huddling in the rain by the wan light of an apartment building waiting for a car to take them to the sanctity of their homes.

Rotation

SARP SOZDINLER

In the photograph,
my father stands beside a missile.
No one is smiling,
but it isn't political.

They have just eaten lunch.
There is lamb in their teeth.
One man is holding
an empty wine bottle like a baton.

*

In Ankara, the fountains run
even in winter.
I say "run"
as if they're fleeing.

My aunt writes that it's peach season
but the trees are stalling.
She suspects a conspiracy
among the roots.

*

I dream in Turkish.
But the subtitles are in English.
They rarely match.

Someone is always knocking
from the inside.

TITLE:

something almost said

ARTIST: Emma Rich



Not There There, but Here

VIDYA PREMKUMAR

I wanted oil paints.
Got chalk dust.
A beret swapped
for attendance sheets.
Term-paper confessions
written in broken ink.
I alphabetised futures
that weren't mine.

I wanted doctor-before-missus.
Got honeymoon rice in my bra instead.
Wrote my thesis
in the margins of grocery lists.

No kids, I swore
then his fingers curled around mine
like a punctuation.
I stayed. Became a semicolon.
Not a full stop.
Not yet.

Gave up on giving up—
(what a job does to bones
should be a museum exhibit).
But I stayed,
fossilised in fluorescent light.

Home: flooded and ghosted.
Rebuilt with terracotta and spite.
Named the cracks after planets.

Love left,
returned as a drag,
told better jokes.
Now, refills the gaps.

(poem continued on next page...)

My body:
rented out to grief and chemo.
Evicted the womb.
Locked the breasts in a memory drawer.
Ovaries? Gone.
Like the missed call from a future
that didn't leave a voicemail.

Forgiveness tastes like turmeric
stirred into old arguments.
My mother and I
share silence like secondhand sweaters.
Too warm. Still itchy.
But mine.

I moved
to a place where rain forgets to stop
and names grow in Malayalam.
I came late—
to joy,
to colour,
to thread-and-ink identities.

Now:
I'm a painting smudged on purpose.
I'm a book spine that refuses to crack.
I'm poem, protest, patchwork.
(also: potholder, poet, publisher of soft chaos)

And I
have finally
arrived
mid-sentence.

Baby Talk

DIANA FENVES

The baby was born speaking. Not just “no,” “mine,” “yours,” but also, “post-industrial decay,” and “carbon footprint, traces of which are present in the changing azaleas.” He talks with his little baby fist in his mouth. He talks even with my nipple clamped between his gums. “Gulp, gulp, gulp, why do you disappear in my closed-eye darkness?” And, “when will color arrive?” “Tired, tired, tired, rage of never being held again;” “Are you worried about my pain?”

He is cutest when he’s sound asleep. His nose is full of heavy, mucousy breaths. Little soft coos. I like it when he is sweet like other babies.

He screams obscenities when I place him on his belly. I don’t know where he learned these words. He must have picked them up in the womb. He has eavesdropped on all my worst days.

“I miss your heartbeat, gulp, gulp, scream.” he tells me. “Why is daddy afraid of being kind?” he asks. He rambles. He’s very concerned about his body. “My legs are cold jelly. My ear fur shivers. Please, take me flying.” He is full of nonsense. I swaddle him, but nothing quiets him. He grabs my hair with his hands. He thinks the dog will eat him.

When I can’t take it anymore, I pick the baby up in my arms and stick a boob in his mouth. It’s the only trick I have. I imagine our heartbeats are syncing up; he’s afraid, but so am I. He cries, but so do I. He’s picking up words, and I’m losing them. Everyday my vocabulary shrinks. My mouth hangs open as I try to think of it, the word I’m missing. I drool puddles in my short sleeps. I feed him tiny bits of my secret self. I am reminded of all the animals who nurse their young right before they die. Are they also this tired? He wakes me up in the small hours. “Don’t forget me in the night; there is only *you*,” the baby says.

Everyone says babies who talk like this at birth need therapy. Intervene early, they say. He’s at risk of living too fast. He might become an adolescent toddler, a middle-aged high schooler, a jaded ancient at only twenty-three. He could turn out like one of those ferals— radicalized and bearded, out there living with the monkeys. Would the baby be happy, in the woods? Should we start a college fund for him or spend everything we have now on better schools, schools that specialize in babies who talk?

"Not to worry," says the pediatrician when I break down crying at his check-up. *Everything* worries me. I cry even harder. The baby doesn't care that I'm crying. He glares at his doctor; the baby doesn't like anyone but me.

"There there, ma'am," says the pediatrician, "it's going to be fine. Growing up is forgetting. Many of these things: reflux, gas, teething, fear of reef deterioration...he'll grow out of it. He won't remember any of it."

"But I will, doctor, I *will*."

The baby asks the pediatrician how come all the dinosaurs in the waiting room are dead. The doctor finds it so easy to ignore him. I think he must see too many patients. All the doctor ever does is weigh him. "At this stage," the pediatrician says, "they are like house plants. Keep watering him and take him outside. They like outside. But don't let the sun touch him. And keep giving him vitamin D drops."

The baby looks up at me with my dark eyes and says, "Outside, yes, take me. Why is no one helping my tall trees? Who gives pacifiers to the oaks?" He's right, I have failed the oaks in some unnameable way. Motherhood, the mommy blogs tell me, involves a great deal of failure.

Outside the pediatrician's office are landslides, wild fires and mass shootings. I try to keep the smoke out of the baby's lungs as I carry him to the car. All the other adults in the parking lot are screaming. I want to throw things and yell, too, but I can't do that in front of the baby. Me, I have to model emotional regulation and democracy, no matter how I really feel. Everything is burning; the asphalt in the parking lot is melting under my feet. It's lucky that I parked so close. I strain my back, strapping the baby into the carseat. The baby has so many questions. I can't answer his questions. He wants—he needs—he cries. I can't even speak any more. All I can do is give him kisses.

Sprig

ALICIA WRIGHT

Snagged in the thicket of a joyless summer: chill
of creek water, feathery bloom of scum widening
around my adolescent waist. The stinking mud,

the sandy bank—mossed stones burrow deep
into the valleys of my spine, rivulet of crimson
threads its slow way knee-ward. This is the truth;

it is also the well, and all of it a void in the back-
woods of a public-school youth until it stumbles,
halting, from the barrens of a smoke-fogged night

and I am pinned again to the table. There is violence
in it: needle-sting probing for yield, twilight a lead
quilt and I am split cold

and cleaved wide open. *Here you are webbed.*
Here you are woven taut. Here the delicate
pink of you uncoils for the sun.

The topography of the wound maps the pale ridge
of a hip: the ruptured grape and its sagging vine,
the empty bowl of a softly cupped palm.

My Dad's Recipe for Dark Chocolate Pudding

ELLIE ROSE MATTOON

Perfect for friends at a Galentine's Day party. Best prepared the night before.

1. Lay everything out on the laminate countertop of your cheap college apartment in a neighborhood close to the police station. At this age it's easy to ignore that the fridge smells like must and the drawers fall off their hinges and the overhead light looks like it's from a school cafeteria. But this place is what you can afford, and for the first time in your life a place is *yours*. You're twenty years old, and you don't need anybody.

2. Call your dad and ask if he can resend the recipe.

3. Dad says that pudding comes together like "Bohemian Rhapsody." It's a song that escalates at every step even when you think it can't possibly get better. Mix the cream, milk, eggs, sugar, cocoa, cornstarch, and salt together. When you were younger, you would have impatiently asked your dad to stop here and grab two spoons. It already looked delicious. It already smelled like hot cocoa. But tonight, just place it over heat for a few minutes and feel resistance grow against the whisk as it thickens.

4. Bring the mixture to a light simmer on the stove for thirty seconds. Whatever you do, do not let that milk boil goddammit. Do not ruin this for everyone (no one else knows you're making this).

5. Your dad always liked to make food for other people. Remember that one time, he got invited to a friend of a friend's graduation party and decided to make a Paris-Brest pastry with the idea that everyone would be blindingly impressed. In a single morning, you heard the car leave the garage three times, saw your dad return with an armful of ingredients three times, felt the trash bag stretch with the weight of fresh "not good enough" three times. Three failed attempts at a "good enough" Paris-Brest, then one successful attempt telling him to stop. He brought chocolate chip cookies (still homemade, of course) to the party instead. Back then, you couldn't understand it. Why was he so desperate to make something that was both intricate *and* perfect? Ponder the question while you stand over a pot of milk that you can't let boil even as it sends sweat across your forehead in February.

6. Remove from heat, then add the butter and chopped chocolate. Now the mixture should make glossy dark ribbons that drip against the side of the saucepan. If pudding comes together like “Bohemian Rhapsody,” this part is the electric guitar solo. Add vanilla and espresso powder until your tiny kitchen smells like the Ghirardelli factory. Aren’t you glad you didn’t trust an Instacart driver who might have gotten you 59% cacao instead?

7. Call your dad because the recipe says to strain the ingredients over a colander and you don’t own a colander but you own a cheese grater with small holes. Does that work?

8. It does.

9. For how selfless it should feel to make dessert for your friends, as you lean down to smell the mixture you feel like the witch from Hansel and Gretl, baking gingerbread to funnel company into her hovel. In a way, you’ve always seen good food as the way to earn company. The better this pudding turns out, the longer your friends will linger after dinner tomorrow. The more likely they’ll want to come back. Of course you love your friends, but plenty of people love their friends through Jell-O mix just fine.

10. Cover the pudding with plastic wrap so it doesn’t make that weird skin on the top. It’ll taste fine, but it just won’t look as good.

11. Look around for a moment at the mess you’ve made of the kitchen. Your botched attempt at *mise en place* left the sink so full that your Brita can’t fit under the spout. Quality high-cacao chocolate streaks across the vinyl wood floors. Your dad is going to come home to this. Cry.

12. Stop. Your dad doesn’t live here. This is your kitchen. For some reason that doesn’t make you feel any better. Clean to the sound of “Hotel California” blasting from your Spotify.

13. Chill for at least four hours and up to overnight. Making chocolate pudding for your closest friends is an emotionally exhausting experience. Maybe take a shower or wash your face before the steamy milk sweat gets into your pores. Put your chocolate-stained sweater in the laundry. Go to sleep and pour a cup of coffee the next morning.

14. Also, make sure the pudding is in the fridge while you do all this.

15. Remember how sad Dad was after his best friend moved to Minnesota. That was around the time he bought a subscription to *Cook’s Illustrated* and found a KitchenAid from Goodwill. And before you knew it he was making souffles no one in his bible study asked for. Bringing a well-researched espresso machine

to the dog park, plugging it into his car, and passing cups of Lavazza across the parking lot. Maybe the order of events is off in your head, but was this really all because his best friend moved away? Maybe he cooks for the same reason you do. A combination of love for others and want of company that no one can really disentangle.

16. When ready, serve with fresh whipped cream in paper bowls. If they love it, congratulations. You've fed your friends into loving you for another day. If they only *liked* the pudding, turn to the Appendix for advice on finding new friends after your old ones leave you.

17. Once everyone has said goodbye (because they always, inevitably, do) text a picture to Dad. Of everyone crowded around your tiny, scuffed table with smiling faces.

my friends loved it

i'm just like you now

of course i still love you

If this nonfiction piece made you crave dark chocolate pudding, Ellie Rose was kind enough to share the recipe with us! You can find it as a PDF at the bottom of Ellie Rose's page [here](#), and [here is the direct link](#) to America's Test Kitchen's recipe on their website.

There Is

ROBIN TURNER

a wilderness. A sliver
of moon. A thrum. That book

you've been meaning
to read. Blue window

you've been meaning
to mend. All its raingleam

& cloudbloom. Every rough chip
& fissure. Your own searching fingertips

feeling for light. There is light. A quiet
listening held & holding

deep in the soft moss
of any of us.

TITLE: *Winter Stems
Before Snow*
ARTIST: Jenny Brown



Plasticity

ALINA KALONTAROV

I saran wrap my steaks the way
I preserve my dreams: loosely
and with a healthy suspicion
that they might spoil
before they ever see a skillet.
Still, I keep a shake of salt in every drawer.
Isn't it funny how much slip
we can hold, our insides without casing.
How many different ways
we can fit a ghost with bones.
The old lady across the street
came out every afternoon,
as the children walked home
from school, to watch for speeding
cars from her stoop.
She knew they would come—
the children, the cars.
Isn't it funny
how we carry our young in our teeth
but the world still bites.

There Are Too Many Fascists To Stay In The Forest

JESSICA AURE PRATT

I've started writing poetry and now the dishes
are languishing. The laundry is a pile of
soot and the weeds are becoming a
metaphor about capitalism. My brain is
turning to compost and growing
fields of flowers and brambles and moss.
I start dreaming in another language
where everything becomes animate,
becomes intertwined, becomes an
abstraction. Have you ever felt the
construct of your perception of reality
start bridging gaps at the rate you hear
people do when they eat mushrooms -
and begin to understand why art
is necessary for revolution, for empathy,
for democracy, for processing life and love
and grief and despair and why we want
to become a redwood tree rooted in
an ancient forest on an aging planet
in a shining and archaic spinning void?
It's tempting to stay in the forest.
If only it hadn't been ordered to
be chopped down - there is so much
work to be done.

This Midsummer Momentary Pause

MERCEDES LAWRY

Rain as mockery, as descent,
drought as sublimation.
This late July, swallowed exhaustion.

This midsummer momentary pause.
Birds with no time to waste,
towhees, finches, ubiquitous crows.

Wisdom evaporates to water spots,
to shadows stuck in trees,
to nothing less than wanting, disturbance
of dreams, perplexing as weather.

Even a small wind has echoes.
Even a parched rose has grace.

TITLE: *Fenceboard*
ARTIST: Benjamin Green



Unsent postcards from London

NAOMI RONNER

Cornucopia

A pen in the colour gold. A Sunday "toast" (he's not an English man). A bus ride to perhaps. My name, attached to a city; I like the sound of that. The scaffolding on Pembridge. All of the sudden, I want to wear heels; is that trad, anti-feminist? Support comes before the collapse. "Run girl run" — it echoes. Today, I asked a stranger if I'm addicted to drama. "Accidents will happen" (that's Elvis Costello by the way). The sour white wine was accidental, just like the boquerones were accidental. Maybe the discrepant world views are also accidental; the matter oscillates between "sidenote" & "keynote". *Maybe* somewhere in between, love can grow. I tossed a coin, prepared for the worst; being bailed on, *again*. *A stray thought of me, how many times?* I want to be scooped up from the wade in that hotel bed like..ice cream. Sex, the colour green sage. Lonely and glorious. Longing and beautiful. I'll take a deep dive in the Thames; underwater touch. Baby come and get me. I'll be at the Dickens museum.

Sidewalk-ballet

A beheaded streetlight. A woman in a pocket park; strawberries in her lap, never in flux. West Hampstead wrapped in the sound of reverb guitar. A house with everything blue; blue doors, blue elevators, blue lighting; all the blue embodied by humanity. A girl crouches on the sidewalk, camera trained on a ladybug. Two Roman pillars; the face of a river in between, life exquisitely static. A menu of quicksilver interactions, laid out like dishes. A keepsake upon re-entering the fast world.

City girlies

On the Bakerloo line with my extra-matured cheddar and my skimmed milk. Those Armani vintage trousers fit me like a glove. That's such a brat-thing—taking an Uber to your morning shift. A bench for sitting—for the bullies, this time. Watch her. Them. The one with the broken heart, the hollow one. Watch all of these girls. Get familiar with the term “slay”. I dare you to impress us. Ditch the five year plan. Have a cigarette, bitch.

Field notes for you

There's the boy biting into the gingerbread, the mother, capturing this scene on her Iphone. Leonard Cohen hums in the corner of deduction games. There's coffee and tea; old readers and young writers. Elevators and stairs. The dichotomy of “wow”. Spill, then mop what you've spilled, only to spill again; I left my secrets around Prudent Passage and Saffron Hill. Hannah and Lisa (I think that's what they're called) are talking about boys and babies. Everywhere, people's belongings.

“Sprezzatura”, losing sprezza

Thinking about how to ‘unthink’ things, people. Avoid places with fake candles, the gods said. Apologies—just another kind of defense. The next stop is only ever just a stop. Another word for embroidery? *Love*. Prediction for 2025: a sheer dress will save the world from falling apart. Every woman has one in her closet. My life, remembered and archived on a laptop. *Amor fati*: wise, or spiritual demise? The fog swallows the London eye outside my window. Is that all there is to the fog? Men as mere souvenirs; dictatorial reminders of home. For now, I suspend judgement.

A copycat with a baby

I went to a church, then lit my first cigarette on this godforsaken island. Ate a donut to fill the hole in my stomach. Tried on a slip dress and imagined myself as a mother. I had run into her before—me as a mother. She acted like a close friend, a closest kind of self. But something about her unsettled me; like she was trying to emulate me. We both had ovaries and an ass. The difference? She—a baby in her arms. Aka “completed woman”. Competing with her would be an act of vanity. But for love, as weak as I am, maybe I would.

Soft crashes

Sometimes I dream of falling off my bike, just so someone can kneel beside me, press ice to my bruised knees, stitch the wounds open to the world. The harsh white lighting, illuminating absences I never named. If I had time to ‘unbecome’, I’d hang a chandelier in my 7m² room.
I’d eat from someone’s fig tree.....somewhere
.....a garden in Kensington (where all the rich people live),
pluck their flowers and hand them to the poor.

Call it an ego-trip.

I call it charity.

“Every sinner has a future”.

Before core-memories

Out of all feelings, feeling beautiful is the most volatile. I could be on top of the world, strutting on my hot-girl-walk, replaying our dynamic, the way I replay Caroline Polacheck songs: *rock-paper-scissors, rock-paper-scissors*. At some point I'd break—snap and then I'd arch my back, when you...you know and then I'd press my hips into the matras and say "that was so real".

I
feel
beautiful.

But then there are other times, when I'm chilled in bed, like an iced-coffee, reading about sinkholes and microplastics. On a cake diet; making Wholefoods even richer. In those moments I could convince myself to fly across the sea, just to have a chamomile tea with someone's sister; mother; lover. Sometimes, I need intimacy. To know I exist. I

can
be beautiful.

Lying darlings

It's a Friday night. I'm staying in and making myself tteokbokki. I ran past Brunswick, nostalgically spied on the youth at *Slim Chickens*: braces, TikTok and too much foundation. *What exactly makes us feel like adults?* Meta clusterfucks usually do the trick. A whiff of sweet alyssum runs up my nose before I disappear into rush hour; into the bloodstreams of London. Wouldn't it be nice to have a map; a key to all these lines and symbols? Secrets colonize these park benches and phone booths. What lying darlings they are. Who are "they"? You decide.

Vibe shift

I gladly ate his breadcrumbs. Shrieked for nauseating romance. Read a book about hate, that was actually about love. In a dodgy corner around Peckham I said a prayer. Arguing with fate, while it had told me to fuck off, a long time ago. After the pangs of intimacy came the pangs of remorse. After that, the slut pop.

His style was always choppy. Girl could've known.

You must be somewhere in London.

You must be loving your life in the rain.

...

I don't even think to make corrections.

Goodbye.



TITLE: *Sunset on the San Juan*

ARTIST: Jo Rohrbacker



TITLE: *Barefoot Kid*
ARTIST: Julia Kossack

Entropy Loop

JEFFREY HEATH

This poem is another woman

I read your face, swept in lines you believe will be meant for you:

*The girl was an ocean of jellies,
a spiral of stars left in her wake;
galaxies bloom her hidden currents*

The moment hangs weightless, tip-toed off cilia and leviathan bones,
storms that split the afternoon sky, rains that once were oceans
that once were rains
that once were

A tetra radial stare soothes the world to sleep, each of us medusa,
coiled around our sting— taste our salted hands, our bitter mouth,
the lingering ache of our shared belly

another sustenance

Wasps nesting in my paper throat, a swarm of whispers, yellow, black;
they drown in the thirsty earth of my chest, swallow and sacrifice
to the green fig of my heart, labyrinth the cold echoes of my veins

I don't look to leave, but everywhere lies evidence of not being here;
oil coats the page— a residue on the corners folded into memory,
smudge of ink on fingertips, dark nebulae brushed across the heavens

another universe

(poem continued on next page...)

Light you once traced across our history, the long red decay
shifting, accelerating against this constant expanse, the horizon
a death that is only realized generations after the burial

You long for a movement in your nearest star, a transit, a lensing,
a rocky place I could rest my head, and in some other orbit,
look back across the years to you: a sixth star of Cassiopeia

But ours are worlds stretched thin, lungs collapsing
against the weight of gravity, until, for a time, we breathe:
a low lamps' susurrations after the cadence flickers,

into / out of / into
f a d e s f a l t e r s ,
a w a y ,
another

Beautiful

CHILA WOYCHIK

Mornings, squirrels gather old hazelnuts or walnuts I toss away, and a Spring westerly sings along a swath of Midwestern acres of cornfields being seeded.

"Are you done being mad at me?" I ask my aging self. "Maybe it's time to put it all on the table."

We forget what it's like to feel the warm earth beneath our feet. We forget what it's like to see a hawk on the wing, a jay on the wire. We get used to the sun and the brash blue sky; we get used to living.

When my clothes were smaller and my hair was longer, when my face shone brighter than the morning's sun, I skipped along the beaten paths, a child in wonder, Wonderland, the beauty of the day. But the years slid sliding toward a crack called Time, and somewhere Age grew teeth. It's no secret that the truth changes things, and what is gone, is gone. But we're all just boys and girls in wearing-out bodies, so make liars out of dream-snatchers, because everything is just plain beautiful beautiful beautiful.

Oh for fleetings of hush in days banging heavy with planets and stardust noising the world – for tickings clock-soundless and light-splinter quiet, a blackness bone silent to love in.

There are memories in photo albums, left behind. "See this one? Remember that one?" Time has vanished, and recollection is our daily companion. Oh my, don't we have a date with Father Time, an unscripted tryst, a falling over feet in a dark room, the music loud, the partner strangely silent. About this date with Father Time ... isn't the sun this morning uncommonly beautiful?

Please laugh, sweet sun; I dance this time with you. Old luck makes the best luck, and ancient stars are the most reliable.

Last Will and Testament

ALICIA HOFFMAN

Never in my life have I thought of the end
as anything other than a gray slab of granite

over Lake Ontario. Sisyphus said he pushed
until the stone fell back to its beginning and

I think beginnings are a good way to start.
Never in my life have I climbed Machu Picchu

but I've given the ghost to the grave. A child,
I traced the lichen and remembered the name.

I've pushed my own child into the pit, pronounced
and sacrificial. I've known the many tongues

of god. I've heard them whispering in the back
yard of late spring after a long year is gone.

Squirrel. Cardinal. Pill bug. Earthworm. Here,
the ants say, as they carry the load of the heavy leaf

into their underground castle, is the secret of all hearts.
Here is the grain of sand. The brittle twig. Each

blade of grass, an offering. Books and papers, tunnel
and nest. To the great gaseous overheads, a second

(poem continued on next page...)

of light and then the end. I want to give you the day
I woke up early and the clouds were my own anxiety

dissipating. What a gift. To know the synonyms
of this gorgeous hallowing, this open vein of living.



TITLE: *Eclipse*
ARTIST: Jenny Brown

[contributors]

Alicia Hoffman // Genre: Poetry



Originally from Pennsylvania, Alicia Hoffman (she/her) now lives, writes, and teaches in Rochester, New York. Her poems have appeared in a variety of publications, including Thrush, Radar Poetry, The Penn Review, Glass: A Poetry Journal, The Night Heron Barks, SWWIM, Atticus Review, and elsewhere. Her book *_Browsing as a Guest_* is due out next year from Gnashing Teeth Publishing. Find her at: www.aliciamariehoffman.com.

Alicia Wright // Genre: Poetry



Alicia Wright (she/her) is a writer from Appalachia. She holds an MFA from Bowling Green State University and her work has appeared or is forthcoming in The Inflectionist Review, River and South Review, Eunoia Review, The Crawfish, Thimble, Kestrel, and elsewhere. She currently resides in West Virginia, where she runs an adult literacy program and leads the occasional community workshop.

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Website: www.aliciawright.ink

Alina Kalontarov // Genre: Poetry



Alina Kalontarov (she/her) is a teacher of English literature and Humanities in New York City. Her work has been featured in various literary journals and anthologies including Sky Island Journal, Thimble Literary Magazine, Scribeworthy, Overgrowth Press, Sand Hills, Prosetrics, Last Leaves, Wild Roof, Boats Against the Current, Gather Poets, Querencia Press and Words Apart: A Globe of Poetry.

Instagram: @alinakay66

Ann Marie Gamble // Genre: Poetry



Ann Marie Gamble (she/any) is an editor and writer who enjoys telling stories, experimenting with language, and discovering connections between family, places, and ideas. Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and you can find her work in Nixes Mate Review, star 82, and the Heartland Review. In her free time, she organizes volunteers for the Unbound Book Festival and checks out as many audiobooks as the library allows.

Instagram/Threads: @annmariegamble

Bluesky: @amgamble

Benjamin Goodman // Genre: Poetry



Benjamin Goodman (he/him) is a poet, counselor, and educator residing in the Hudson Valley. He regularly offers poetry classes in the Hudson Valley, at Princeton University, and online. His work currently appears or is forthcoming in various publications such as Strange Matters Magazine, North of Oxford, Midway Journal, Vassar Review, and Berkeley Poetry Review.

Instagram: @bennygoods1

Benjamin Green // Genre: Art



Benjamin Green (he/him) is the author of eleven books including *The Sound of Fish Dreaming* (Bellowing Ark Press, 1996) and the upcoming *Old Man Looking through a Window at Night* (Main Street Rag) and *His Only Merit* (Finishing Line Press). He is also a visual artist, exploring landscape through many media. At the age of sixty-eight, he hopes his new work articulates a mature vision of the world and does so with some integrity. He resides in Jemez Springs, New Mexico.

Catherine Dean // Genre: Fiction



Catherine Dean (she/her) lives and writes in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. She has had a variety of short stories published in literary magazines and has had fiction and non-fiction featured on Canadian radio.

Recently, her story "Althea" was a runner-up in a fiction contest run by "Story" magazine. She is a longtime member of an online writer's group known as WWW out of North Bay.

Chila Woychik // Genre: Nonfiction



Chila Woychik (she/her) is originally from the beautiful land of Bavaria but has lived in the American Midwest most of her life. She is widely published, and has an essay collection, *Singing the Land: A Rural Chronology* (Shanti Arts, 2020). Her impressive barn is currently home to an old cat named Sweet Pea and four young strays, Shadow, Skitter, Suzy, and Scamp. Chila is the founding editor at *Eastern Iowa Review*, and also reads for *Birdcoat Quarterly* and *The Upper New Review*.
www.chilawoychik.com

Christy Hartman // Genre: Nonfiction



Christy Hartman (she/her) pens short fiction from her home between the ocean and mountains of Vancouver Island Canada. She writes about the chasm between love and loss and picking out the morsels of magic in life's quiet moments. Christy has been shortlisted for Bath and Bridport Flash Fiction prizes and is a New York City Midnight winner. She has been published by *Elegant Literature*, *Sci-Fi Shorts*, *Fairfield Scribes*, and others.
Instagram: @christy_hartman_writer
www.christyhartmanwriter.wordpress.com

Cristina Sanchez // Genre: Art



Cristina Sanchez (she/they) is a speech language pathologist, mixed media artist, avid gardener, and cat & rabbit parent based in New York City. Through mediums including watercolor, ink, and pencil, Cristina explores the breadth of emotions inherent in domesticated and wild natural forms.
Instagram: @artbymecristina

Diana Fenves // Genre: Fiction



Diana Fenves (she/her) is a speculative fiction writer and artist. She works a couple of jobs and lives in NC with her husband, toddler, and baby. Her work has appeared in *Lilith Magazine*, *Planet Scumm* and *Walter Magazine*. Her fiction is represented by John Silbersack at the Bent Agency. More at:
www.dianafenves.com
Instagram: diana_fenves
Facebook: Diana Fenves
Twitter/X: @oscarsunibrow



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 or is forthcoming in Gnashing Teeth, wildscape., SWWIM, and Arte y Literatura Hispanocanadiense Anthology. She is currently working on her debut poetry collection.
Instagram: @the.dre.verse



Ellie Rose Mattoon // Genre: Nonfiction

Ellie Rose Mattoon (she/her) is a graduate of the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars and a medical student at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Her work has been published in The Xylom, Summerset Review, and JSTOR Daily.
Instagram: @ellierosemattoon



Emma Rich // Genre: Art

Emma Rich (she/her) is an abstract painter based in Savannah, GA. Her work is a visual response to movement, shape, and space translated into still images. She is inspired by fractal self-replication and the patterns that make up the smallest and largest aspects of our world and are echoed over and over in between.

Instagram: @emmabirdie.art
Website: www.emmabirdie.com



ena ganguly // Genre: Poetry

ena ganguly (she/they) is a soft-spirited Bengali femme, born in Bihar and raised in Texas. Their work focuses on collective memory, grief, surveillance, and sensuality and has been featured in Palette Poetry, BBC, Buzzfeed, KUT Austin Radio, The Austin Chronicle, COURIER Newsroom, exhibited in Austin, TX at Prizer Arts and Letters and allgo, and won Breakwater Review's 2024 Peseroff Poetry Prize.

Instagram: @enaganguly

Website: <https://enaganguly.com/>



Eva Alter // Genre: Poetry

Eva Alter (she/her) is an emerging poet from the Southeast. Her work focuses on nature, memory, decay, and rebirth.

Instagram: @eva.alter.poet

Twitter/X: @eva_alter00



Grant Ellsworth // Genre: Nonfiction

Grant Ellsworth (he/him) is a Chicago-based writer. He writes essays about buses and poetry about space, trees, and existential angst. His work has appeared in Maudlin House, WREATH LC, and The Urbanist, among others. Years ago, he co-founded the underground literary collective Prodigal Press

(@prodigalpressprovo). He can be reached on Twitter @gantisdant, Instagram @gant.fr, and via his website at gant.foo.

Janet Cooke // Genre: Art



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 the beauty, tranquility, and serenity surrounding her home in upstate NY, Janet's expressively realistic canvases are a testament to her love for evoking emotion. She is a member of the American Impressionist Society, Oil Painters of America, and the Lower Adirondack Regional Arts Council.

Instagram: @janet_cooke_art

Website: www.janetcookefineart.com

Jeffrey Heath // Genre: Poetry



Jeffrey Heath (he/him) formerly lived as a cat stalking the shores of South Florida. He currently lives in Memphis, TN, where he works for a non-profit. His work has appeared online and in print in Poetry Super Highway, Eunoia Review, Synesthesia Literary Journal, The Syzygy Poetry Journal, Amaryllis, and as a Goodreads monthly feature, among others.

Jenny Brown // Genre: Art



Jenny Brown (she/her) is a visual artist living and working in Providence, Rhode Island. Her primary mediums are drawing and collage, which she uses to challenge long held understandings of time, space, and matter.

Jenny is a 1996 graduate of Bennington College and received her MFA in 2005 from The School of Visual Arts. She just completed a solo exhibition titled "Efflorescence" at the Dryden Gallery in Providence.

Instagram: @jennybrownart

Website: www.jennybrownart.com

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

Jo Rohrbacker // Genre: Art



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

jorohrbacker.wixsite.com/mysite

Instagram: @jo.paints

Julia Kossack // Genre: Art



Julia (she/her) is an analogue photographer based in Berlin, with a habit of disappearing to Glasgow to romanticize the wonders of long distance love.

With more questions than answers to most things, she is drawn to themes of transition and nostalgia as they unfold in everyday moments. Her work has been featured in Seedlings: IV Winter, the upcoming anthology Demeter's Garden and will be shown at the :unmittelbar 2025 exhibition (Deutsche Sofortbild Kunst e.V.) in June.

Instagram: @julia_madlen_

M.I. Lumsden // Genre: Art



M.I. Lumsden (she/her) is a multimedia artist and illustrator who currently lives and works on Cape Cod, MA. Her studio practice ranges widely in media and genre and she enjoys the process of discovery and freedom that this brings. She is inspired by the eerie beauty of nature and stories hidden in shadows.

Her art reflects calm melancholy and uneasy dreaminess that all at once can seem emotional and yet withdrawn. When she is not in her studio she is out with her dog, Nimbo, walking around taking way too many reference photos.

Instagram: @m.i.lumsden

Mercedes Lawry // Genre: Poetry



Mercedes Lawry's (she/her) most recent book is *Small Measures* from ELJ Editions. She's also published *Vestiges* from Kelsay Books, three chapbooks and poems in journals such as *Nimrod* and *Alaska Quarterly Review*. Additionally, she's published short fiction and stories and poems for children.

BlueSky: @mercwrites.bsky.social

Naomi Ronner // Genre: Fiction



Naomi Ronner (she/her) is a bilingual writer and fiction author based in Amsterdam and London. Her work has appeared in *Capsule* and *Akimbo Magazine* and focuses on identity, love and late-capitalism lifestyles, explored through short stories and flash fiction. She is passionate about stories defined and told by women, using experimental fiction and her own experiences.

Instagram: @naomironner

Robert Fanning // Genre: Poetry



Robert Fanning (he/him) is the author of five full-length collections of poetry: *All We Are Given We Cannot Hold*, *Severance*, *Our Sudden Museum*, *American Prophet*, and *The Seed Thieves*, as well as three chapbooks: *Prince of the Air*, *Sheet Music*, and *Old Bright Wheel*. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Atlanta Review*, *Waxwing*, *THRUSH*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Common*, and many other journals. He is a Professor of English at Central Michigan University, as well as the Founder/Facilitator of the Wellspring Literary Series in Mt. Pleasant, MI., www.robertfanning.wordpress.com

IG: robertfanning_poet / FB: robertfanningpoet
Bluesky: @robertfanning.poet.bsky.social

Robin Turner // Genre: Poetry



Robin Turner's (she/her) poems, prose poems, and flash fiction have appeared in *DMQ Review*, *Rattle*, *Rust + Moth*, *The Texas Observer*, *One*, *Bracken Magazine*, and elsewhere. Her chapbooks are *bindweed & crow poison* (Porkbelly Press) and *Elegy with Clouds &* (Kelsay Books). She is a community teaching artist in Dallas, Texas, where she lives and daydreams near White Rock Lake.

Facebook/Instagram: @robinsmithturner

Sarp Sozdinler // Genre: Poetry



A Turkish writer & poet, Sarp Sozdinler (they/them) has been published in *Electric Literature*, *Kenyon Review*, *Masters Review*, *Trampset*, *JMWW*, and *Normal School*, among other journals. Their work has been selected or nominated for anthologies including the *Pushcart Prize*, *Best Small Fictions*, and *Wigleaf Top 50*. They are currently working on their first novel in Philadelphia and Amsterdam.
Instagram (& all platforms): @sarpsozdinler
Website: www.sarpsozdinler.com



Sean Bw Parker // Genre: Art

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

<https://uk.linkedin.com/in/seanparker100>

Twitter: @seanbwparker

Instagram: @seanbwparker7



Steven Fortune // Genre: Poetry

Steven Fortune (he/him) is a poet, playwright, and collage artist from Sydney, Nova Scotia (Canada) and a graduate of Acadia University. He has released five poetry collections to date, edited several works for others, and has also appeared on CBC Radio, while his work has been featured and read on several online programs.

Instagram: @kublakhan27



Sui Wang // Genre: Poetry

Sui Wang (she/her) is a writer of poetry and prose, and a PhD researcher living bicoastally. Sui has studied with Sackett Street Writers Workshop and The Non-School in New York. Her poems and short stories have appeared or are forthcoming in HAD, Yalobusha Review, Pile Press, Contemporary Verse 2, and The Inflectionist Review. Her work is a finalist for 2025 Yellowwood Poetry Prize. She's a 2025 Brooklyn Poets Summer Fellow. Instagram:

@fluffycacti5

Svetlana Litvinchuk // Genre: Poetry



Svetlana Litvinchuk (she/her) is the author of a poetry chapbook, *Only a Season* (Bottlecap Features, 2024) and a forthcoming full-length poetry collection (spring 2026). Nominated for Pushcart, Best of the Net, and a finalist for the Slippery Elm Poetry Prize, her poetry appears in *ANMLY*, *swamp pink*, *About Place*, *Flyway*, *Inflectionist Review*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Arkana*, and elsewhere. She is the Managing Editor of *ONLY POEMS*.

Instagram: @s.litvinchuk

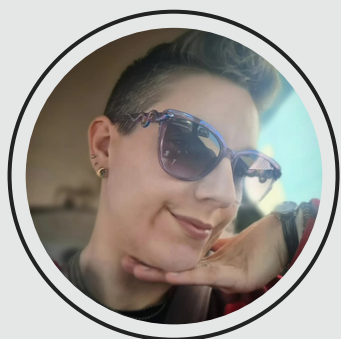
Website: www.svetlanalitvinchuk.com

tc Wiggins // Genre: Poetry



tc Wiggins (he/him) is an African American poet residing in Cincinnati, Ohio who has been writing since the August of 2022. Their favorite writers and inspirations are Jack Gilbert, Linda Gregg, Mary Oliver, Maggie Smith, Victoria Chang and Wendy Cope. tc suffers from chronic (if not terminal) boredom. You should send them poems to read, preferably your own. Their Instagram handle is @scaringthemuse.

Tinamarie Cox // Genre: Art



Tinamarie Cox (she/her) lives in Arizona with her husband, two children, and rescue felines. Her written and visual work has appeared in a number of publications under various genres. She has two chapbooks with Bottlecap Press, *Self-Destruction in Small Doses* (2023), and *A Collection of Morning Hours* (2024). Her debut full-length poetry collection, *Through A Sea Laced With Midnight Hues*, arrived with Nymeria Press in 2025.

Instagram: @tinamariethinkstoomuch

Website: tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com

Veronica Tucker // Genre: Poetry



Veronica Tucker (she/her) is a physician and writer based in New Hampshire. Her poetry explores the quiet intersections of medicine, motherhood, memory, and resilience. She finds inspiration in early mornings, winding trails, and the spaces where grief and joy coexist. Her work appears in Red Eft Review, Medmic, and redrosethorns, among others. When not writing, she loves running, traveling, and sharing finely crafted matcha lattes with family and friends.

Instagram: @veronicatuckerwrites

Website: www.veronicatuckerwrites.com

Vidya Premkumar // Genre: Poetry



Vidya Premkumar (she/her) is a poet, educator, and collage artist based in Wayanad, India. Her work often explores the intersections of memory, ecology, and womanhood through Japanese short forms, found poetry and free verse. She is the author of *Living in an Indian Laputa*, *Musing While Living*, and *frame story*. Her poems have appeared in *Pan Haiku Review*, *Failed Haiku*, *#FemkuMag*, *Scarlet Dragonfly*, and other journals. She curates literary content at www.litlens.in and shares her art and writing on

Instagram @i_sing_peace.

Website: www.litlens.in

