

An abstract collage of dried plant matter, including leaves, stems, and seed pods, arranged in a dense, layered composition. The colors range from light beige and yellow to dark brown and purple. The background is a light, textured surface. The text 'JET FUEL Review' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

JET FUEL Review

Spring 2023 / Issue 25



JET FUEL Review

A High Octane Literary Journal

www.jetfuelreview.com

lewislitjournal.wordpress.com

Cover Art by Ryota Matsumoto

Front Cover / Back Cover: Water, Hinge, Field

Cover Design: Lauren Lotarski & Alexandra Martinez

Mission Statement

As an online literary journal, we believe in the power of language and seek to provide a platform for quality writing and artwork that pushes boundaries, surpasses expectations, and creates an emotional resonance in our readers. In order to do this, we aim to showcase work that is representative of the complex and evolving human condition while featuring a diverse array of voices and styles. Every semester, we have a rotating editorial team of Lewis students who carefully evaluate our submissions. Our diverse staff strives to include authors that represent ourselves and others. We hope our journal will inspire and unite the literary community. In addition to our journal, we maintain a corresponding blog that offers an array of commentary on art, literature, film, music, and more, allowing us to interact with and expand our community. We seek to create a writer's community, publish quality writing and artwork, and maintain a blog connected to the literary journal site.

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Many thanks to our Spring 2023
guest readers and consultants!



Row 1:
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Foreword

Dear Readers,

Welcome to Issue 25 of *Jet Fuel Review*! The editors are excited to share with you the wonderful collection of writing and artwork that is encapsulated in this issue. After months of reading through over 800 national and international submissions, the editors have carefully selected pieces that are representative of our mission statement. As a result, this issue highlights a variety of voices and artwork that speak to the world we live in and the prismatic nature of the human condition.

Housed at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, *Jet Fuel Review* is a student-run, faculty-advised, four-time CMA Pinnacle Award-winning literary journal that publishes writers and artists from across the globe. We are honored not only to provide a creative platform for people's voices but also to produce a journal that is impactful to those who read it. Our featured cover piece for this issue, "Water, Hinge, Field," by postdigital artist Ryota Matsumoto, is one of two pieces that explores "the morphological transformations of our ever-evolving urban and ecological milieus." Matsumoto uses his art to comment on the speculative changes in society, culture, and ecosystems. He rises above the limitations of two and multi-dimensional art by combining traditional and digital media.

The poetry section of this issue highlights an expansive and engaging set of voices, such as the work of M. Cynthia Cheung, a physician who serves as a judge for Baylor College of Medicine's annual Michael E. DeBakey Medical Student Poetry Awards, and Jules Wood, whose work highlights where performance ends and the body begins. We're also thrilled to showcase Pablo Otavalo, James Fujinami Moore, Emma Bolden, Ronda Piszcz Broatch, Sandra Crouch, Ashish Singh, Flower Conroy, and many other dazzling voices.

The fiction section features a variety of stories that showcase the hidden struggles that many face over the course of their lifetime, including "The Ball" by Jeremy Wilson. This piece forces readers to recognize the moment in which they lost their innocence, whether or not it was at their own hands. "The Ball" also leads readers to question the absurdity of life during a war.

In addition to the artwork created by our front and back cover artist, Ryota Matsumoto, our art section showcases dynamic pieces by Annabel Jung, who makes powerful statements about personal experiences. *Jet Fuel Review* also features the work of Eve Ozer, an acrylic artist born in Germany whose pieces create a dialogue between colors, lines, and shapes. These are just a few of the many amazing authors and artists who grace our pages.

The literature and artwork in these pages are a testament to the diverse perspectives and experiences that are currently present in our society and to voices that are both candid and sincere. We invite you to dive into our 25th issue, and we hope that you appreciate the works that make up this issue as much as we do.

Read on!

Selena Tomas & the *Jet Fuel Review* Editors



POETRY

Hymnody

In a room with ruined blinds, someone
is writing a poem, someone is singing

alto under the angels: someone else;
she makes melody her dependent.

Someone else—

Here the conditions
for beauty are ripe. I own a spoon

meant only for honey; hawks cross
the yard, large as puppies, on the other side

of the glass my desk faces; I can spare
my son tangerines when he asks

for oranges, when he wants to drive studs
of clove into their skins like the orphans

in his book, kids who scare off spirits
simply by making pomanders. He asks.

I am writing a poem—and not, like
someone, in an ill-favored place; I have only

to harmonize. I mean there are hymns
that scoop something from the earth—

opal, son, quill of Hawk's red tail—
and hold it under a stronger light,

and there are hymns that borrow
nothing. Someone teaches an apple

to leap, polished, from her sleeve;
in a room with ruined blinds, she is

writing a poem, someone is adorning
an orchard never meant to fruit.

Conditional Love Poem

It does not take many folding chairs or much distance
to remind me that I might not have found you. Without
sons, without friends, in a row of people we do not know,
you look suddenly, distressingly separate: a man who could
have had another life.

A long time ago, a stranger snatched
the X at the back of my overalls before I could cross
the street that a box truck barrelled down. Which is how—
on seeing you, seated among strangers—I recognize
this affront as relief, as gratitude almost outraged.

Coincidence, or?

Who do you know who is desperate to live?
You don't see the ghosts, but I do. The head
opens. Fog densens. In one asthmatic breath
the quiddity of time recoils. A thought that keeps
me going is the impossibility of an ancient leaf,
how roots centuries deep continue to produce
something new. Really, though, what's new?
In a different poem, mom became grandma
not because they are the same person but because
I am. That's not new, but old. Dad used to ask
"what's doing" instead of "what's new?" A Brooklyn
thing, maybe. Special combo of what's new &
how you doing. The fathers on the block all used
to call one another "Moey" even though that wasn't
anyone's name. Their names were Charlie, Dave, and
Dolor. "Hey Moey what's doin" the olly olly oxen free
of Gerritsen Beach. "Hey Moey what's doin" Dave
would say from his porch to Dad and they'd chat
and crack open a can of beer as they grilled.
"What's doin"-- I used to hear it all the time,
but no one says "what's doin?" in their poems.
I'm desperate to get out. To do something new.
But not like Charlie who used a gun or Dad who used
liquor not like anyone I know because that would be old
and doing something new means new things to be doing
means what's doing is what's new. One year,
when everyone was still alive, a young couple
moved across the street. Dad, Dave and Charlie
threw a welcome party. You can imagine how
their cheers started to raucously grow when,
wouldn't you know, the new neighbor extended
his hand and introduced himself as Mo.

Dolor, I

I can't say my mother
didn't warn me. One night
I sat on the corner of the tub
as she ran a bath. Lavender
warmed the air. She told me
no she begged me to stop

indulging the habit. Her hand
held mine. I looked her
in the eyes and shook my
head, but not in the way she
wanted. Uncle Bruce told me
Dad never had a chance.

My grandmother burnt
herself to death. I've never
called her that, grandmother,
always my father's mother. I
never met her, but from pictures
it's clear we share the same legs.

My grandmother burnt herself
to death from a lit cigarette and
drunken stupor. My father got there
too late. My father fell to his death
from a drunken stupor. His name
was Dolor. Mom fears I have his fate.

Nudibranchs

Mostly harmless mermaid ghost I fragment at your clown
marigold dancer sea rabbit florescence, flounder at your
dragon. Digit-backed jentacular carnival sushi swimming
through abstraction. As if the microscopic world were
magnified & drowned such, & therefore what movement
into intimacy. My wife & I are going to the sea. I'm sizzling
for Eden of pineapple rings, bedroom shipwreck, footprints
in space—so I'm packing books & bathing suits, capes &
toys, spiked slippers & a bit of the unknown. Fingertips of
mathematics paralleling along a cenotes' mouthroof. I want
her to spread me marmalade then toast me. Exhausted
beyond crawl, the brain lubricant, firecrackered in
dopamine, oxytocin, I want me tongue-tied. Museum doors
soon closing away the naked gill marbles. Leaf sheep Bubble
snail Feathered anus. Emptied shell. Lost in the depths I
want to confuse body of water with body of water.
Unaccustomed as they'll've become to solid ground my
knees might sinkhole under the water column of the
showerhead. Internal rocking tethering me. Substrate of
floating feeling. Déjà vu a hair before the recognition. I
might return sunburned tailbone. I might come back electric
eel

FORGIVENESS TIME

Three times in the last five days
the thought has come to me, while busying
my hands, that my father is dead,
not a question but a thing I've known
& am now remembering, then
that swallowed lightning feeling of fear
in the stomach, only my father, in all likelihood
is not dead, just floating like a yellowed leaf
atop the standing water of his life. He wants
to die, perhaps, told me so once, saying *gravy*
saying *never expected this much*
just hasn't guts enough to make it happen
so he leans into the workaday vices,
chipping away at himself in little bits
while I let what's worst in him stand in
for the whole, the shit-stained rag
I rub over everything I'm afraid will hurt me.
Meanwhile the days keep happening
the fountains in the park getting fuller
with hopeful pocket change, the leaves
on the trees taking into themselves
more & more copper, the voicemail box
filling up, the same message each time:
I didn't want anything & I can't do it
anymore, tired of playing MacBeth
at the dinner party, making everyone look
at the ghosts in my eyes. I've wasted
too much time caring & trying not to care.
I'm ready to be the coolness that people
throw their pocket-change hopes into, ready to feel like
the flowing thing I am. *Your life is a table*,
says my heart. *The plates are being cleared*,
says my heart, & *if you're going to keep*
clutching something in your dumb fist let it be
something you love. And dear readers,
my heart, fat though it is with lovesickness,
makes a compelling argument. I've got
to work my way back to thankfulness.
This man will be no man forever & needs
to hear my voice. The sun still shines
on his bald head like he's made of nothing
but chlorophyll & nectar. One day,

maybe, he'll bloom, like the porchside iris,
the one that did nothing the last four seasons,
then suddenly one week in July
lifted a straight papery fist up
into the sky, showing everything its yellow.

Easy as Aleph

for Goofy

On each side, the squat, twisted olives
fan an oasis bent in Syriac noon 🌳 —

in Arabic, spread like a boat
lugging a green sun. An upside-down
tusk in Aramaic. A tomb's jaw in Hebrew.
A lightning aspect to touch in Phoenician.

Even so, the cheerful, dream-footed
atom where existence is merely observed
probability. An electron is its own nictating
lizard *everywhere* until peered at

like a split string bean. How strange then,
for all my wild, if the world hadn't seen
me beside you, laughing, easy as aleph,
I couldn't have lived.

Narrative

A story best left untold involves an old barn,
the concrete floor. Add swallows, their fleeting darkness.

Hold it together like a mud nest packed with tiny bones.
Place a wooden ladder at its center.

Three small girls stand below, chins tilted up.
One of them refuses shoes—she's the climber.

The new birds have enormous gray heads and odd yellow beaks.
They are sleeping, but the girls want to see them awake.

What occurs after the wanting can't be undone—her slim
arm's reach, the raw expanse, the broken birds, their open throats.

I prefer not to say so, not to tell it at all.
I prefer the absence of verbs, but I don't have a choice.

Shame is stubborn. It has a way of sticking—
that is, if you feel it at all.

Just Because it's Electric Doesn't Mean it Has Currency

They count their rings like trees.
Recall the awkward scramble into
his blue 4x4, music with the windows down,
blond hair opening into sunlight
like dandelion seeds.

Daily calls to the house,
picking her up on the front porch,
a host family in a host town.
A departure.

They suffered
a stupid kind of beauty—
youth filled.

Now he doesn't remember
their first conversation,
her last name—

a note passed lightly
from one hand to another.
That green, green grass.

Doppelgänger

I knew this as my life.
She hung like a decimal.

The way I made my bed, or didn't.
The way I brushed my hair, or didn't.

There were things about her I couldn't stomach.
Great fictions like new appliances.

My car rusted, needed work.
Hers, an SUV, or some able other.

I was then twelve and this was very, very good.
She was still twelve...

My pain tempered me.
She. why. created. in me. a temper.

I, with great birth breaths, broke through/broke through/broke through water.
She bloated. bloated. repeating corpse.

Recipe

"It's all so strange, Karamazov, such grief and then pancakes..."

F. Dostoevsky

Is it not urgent to live amongst people
who bow to lampposts,

who wear their shirts pulled over their heads
like vellum wings?

Don't we need our parents, our prime ministers,
our school teachers to sprout velvet antlers?

When I finally make it to the front of the queue,
a salmon in a suit devours my wallet...

Don't we desperately need a chest of drawers
of tiny running shoes and iguanas?

Shouldn't our yaks play banjos?

Death Bloom

pull your body out of the mud and dress it
in your grandmother's fleece sweater
find the person you still think about
on a sunday morning when your lonely
bones have faded pink and pull open
their curtains, tell them it's the last warm
day of the season even if it's not and slice
an apple so thin you can see the whole
san francisco skyline through it
and let the slices melt on your tongue
because nothing matters
in a way that means everything matters
because you are calculating how fast
you can get to the coral reefs
and not thinking of the washing machine
which has flooded twice this month
or the way your father's breath caught against
his teeth when you were twelve and he was
volcanic, don't you see, your chest is blooming
and we should push the living room furniture
against the walls so there is more room for
swimming and touch the temple of your mother's
graying hair because now we can see
the boulder tumbling toward us, but it's always
been there, hasn't it, haven't your ears always
been waiting for the sound of a car rolling
off the cliff and you said you would learn
to cook if you had more time and speaking
of time, there is none, you are already
an exposed nerve being plucked away.

Stolen Ghazal

Last night, the blood moon swallowed the center of the universe, stole
light years from the stars. Twenty years ago, grandmother stole

grain to feed her girls as the sky soaked her vegetable garden with
bullets. When the Red Guard arrived, modernity stole

anything older than I was: mother's fashion magazines, jade
bracelets, lineage from viscera. That night, mother caught me stealing

away to the garden, sentenced me to hide where no one would
want to look. I sung in a language I learned to steal

from her mouth, grief as exodus. When the new textbooks came, covers
stained with widows and flattened rebellions, mother burned them. She stole

history back one dynasty at a time as she taught by candlelight. I asked her why
they wanted us to forget the skulls bursting like cherry bombs. So they could steal

our lives again: my brother another estimated casualty. My mother pointed
at the textbook: famine overwritten by prosperity, an autobiography of stolen

victories. This, too, is an act of violence. My greatest ambition was to learn
the trick to satisfaction: if I weaned my body from need and belief, stealing

anything would be impossible. The night brother left for Mongolia, I watched
mother's back fold like a burden as she mended a dress the furious years stole.

Fashion Statement

Faceless the man, his scent woodless, his body of a twelve year
old, ribs pious and teeming like pencils beneath a sheet, his smile
bashful, his arm basking tensionless in your lap of fire, in the ocean
around your waist dies a tide of guilt, hands worshipping the state,
the state of its own disappearance which is how a critic describes
the portrayal of Hong Kong in Chungking Express, and in it
while listening to California Dreamin' wild hands fight all day long
a fundamental urge to pleasure the body, but how? By doing what?
By clapping, by slapping the desk in quarter-life delirium as the man
you cradled has left you a parting note, his boot prints on the floor
a mix of sand and clay, porous enough for your gaze to perforate,

for your eyes to deliberate and catch a horizon in the ceiling,
the long crack of an isthmus separating the dust of nations
along which green twigs have emerged to teach unironically
the value of resilience which apparently you have started
to show a lack of, as evidenced by a tingling sensation
on the surface of your belly, and some folks are calling you
psychosomatic, and the doctor is asking you — *have you been
stressed* — and the ultrasound reveals an enlargement of liver,
and barred from alcohol and hard protein you develop
an obsession with oversized single color round neck tees,
the choice of monochromatic pleasure punctuating your being.

Night River

the lake brims over with rain and the fish spill
onto roads as monsoon's sacrificial offering
to the juggernaut of the city's traffic, the drivers
fogwashed inside the icy room of their cars, those
with spectacles most vulnerable to the recurrent
haze of glass, opening their windows to taste
the wind and letting a little fury of rain inside;
the driver of my cab calls his beloved (I think), says
I will come home only if you want me to come home
when the call ends abruptly and by the drop of speed
on the highway, I can assume nothing for the car wades
through water like a machine operating with considerable
reluctance in the wrong medium, my eyes catching
the white of the driver's teeth in the rear view mirror
as the city is lit up by that optimal kind of lightning
that shows us things we didn't know we wanted to see

Summer Palace

When glaciers retreated from the plains, most animals followed them into the sky. Only the saiga—antelopes tricked by cold-weather feints—stayed. Now, they circle in their last great migration. The ghost of Genghis Khan tells me these things calmly, the same way he says that melt water is fresh, not salt, and at least 1 in 200 men today descend from his own body. I know it's true, science has proved it. I say to him, so, it's possible you really are my ancestor. Look how I ride, and fast. I'm certain to learn to shoot from a gallop. I know this because memories from those alive in 1949 are as far back as my genealogy goes. That was when thin papers burned on their spines, flew like sparks into the sky. At gunpoint, on threat of family, they made my grandmother's sister eat bowlfuls of hair and sleep with the dead in their open graves. To this day, my parents like to tell me it can happen again. Run first, think later. Be ready. At this, the Khan seems to regard my story with pity. Hair and dead bodies, he muses. In the summer country, we'd have cooked your wish into a diet of antelope flesh, or perhaps small arrowheads pressed into your back. Don't imagine for a second I will tell you what to call yourself—you know how careless people are with names. In the act of remembering; bones all sound the same.

Testimony

I have to breathe between
the words

as if a rib had
cracked

but not my rib

as if the roof had blown
away as if the floor
collapsed

but not in my house

as if a tongue had been
torn out dirt stuffed
inside a mouth

but not
mine

as if
as if we could open
the locks
release the mounting storm
water

dissolve
whatever blocks the air
passages

hers or mine
theirs
yours

as if it were
that simple

can I get an amen
though I don't
believe

Polysemy in Snow

i.

The survivor survived the cold.
The survivor survived the coyotes.
The survivor survived eco-collapse

ii.

and the road. Asphalt hills sealed
in ice in colorform cracked
vinyl home disguised in time
frostlips snow bricks in static
broken channel in sepia in
dark thoughts you know the kind
in plague in plague in plastic sac-
red roots birch maple in asphalt
fossils in iron rich eyes the road.

iii.

Survived the raid on fact, fac-
simile of fertility, cleft heart
too beat to swipe left
tanks flattening clover,
insufficient to combat
the atrocity of athleisurewear
during the end of times—
the survivor presses forget-me-nots
into the sheetrock
the survivor presses
the orphans for answers
the survivor presses
his own smoldering hands
into the snow.

When Night Comes Wrapped in Asbestos

disguised as clouds rushing from my hair dryer, an ancestor
prophesying worst-case scenarios, I think of the girl

who glowed for a glorious moment while blow-drying
her horse before the show, before the plug found

the puddle on the stable floor, before the volta.
I'm no more a goddess than she was, the horse's hooves

not yet blacked and polished, mane and tail detangled,
braided, saddle waxed, silver adornments shined,

but let me diagram the universe for you, how it was before
the second expansion, before there was more to come.

Sometimes the future is served in a tin can opened
with a dull blade. Imagine the girl: golden, nervy

in her anticipation, the horse turning its head to nose
her shoulder. The calendar had its own idea, bones, flesh

and hair their own answer to the charge. What aftertaste
following lightning? After licking electricity's sooty

stigmata? Brushfire, sage-smudge, silverware in the pot
on high boiled dry in the middle of the night. Spark

has its own kind of beauty at the watering hole,
hole in the floor collecting soap suds, hose coiled

on wet cement. What is the scent of a life lighting up so brightly
for the first and only time before it gallops on, blooming

like orange poppies, and who knows exactly what's on the other side
of any turning, any plot twist in spacetime's ominous road?

I Desire the Things Which Will Destroy Me in the End

– Sylvia Plath, *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*

Oh, damn girl, night's gone otherworldly now.
The smoke alarm's disengaged and gutted.
 A spider's crawled inside, a dust mote, a flea,
 one particle too many to sleep.

The smoke alarm's disengaged and gutted
of insectivores, boys, the bodies of wolves,
 two particles too many to sleep.
 Who plays with the prunes in the plum tree filled

with insectivores, boys, the bodies of wolves?
Your subject howls like the preacher's son
 who drinks of the plums from a prune tree soaked
 with the Holy Spirit, with a locust tongue;

your subject preaches his revelations, howls
his falsetto chimes from a belly deep
 with the Holy Spirit, and a locust tongue,
 and your throat's gone dry, your heart, underground,

his falsetto chimes, muffled now, belie deep-
seated secrets and nightmare scenarios,
 and your throat's gone dry, your heart, underground,
 his voice still ringing, ringing in your ear

planting secret nightmare scenarios—
Oh, damn girl, night's gone otherworldly now,
 his voice still ringing, ringing in your ear.
 A spider's crawled inside, a dust mote, a flea.

I Stole the Moon, and it Taught Me to Glow

I took the sun and spread it on my skin until I became a steamy version of myself. The blackberries have dried on the vine, even the moldy ones from that overnight moment of rain. I'm planting hopes and prayers under compost to let the worms feast on them. A past iteration of myself lies beneath what's left of a glacier, one toe and a breast exposed to warming air. My ancestor freeze-dried and under glass in a museum of extinction. Sometimes I wish Jupiter would beam me up. But Jupiter just tells me it doesn't need me to run interference. I stole the eggs from my chickens while they scratched great craters in their pasture. They have no interest in the moon and whether coral reefs can be seen from outer space. Yesterday, I drove to my aunt's house and smoke wafted from the Honda SUV in front of me, the driver's three dogs, heads hanging out the window, tongues dripping in the road. They seemed to be smiling. The air in my car began to smell like weed. I really don't know what I don't want my kids to know. My kids already know too much. The cockroach in the hallway to the hotel pool in Honolulu looked the one on the wall. I flew the moon from my deck on Kauai. It told me *never stop looking up*. This is how we will survive.

Revision

Now it is gold everywhere; gold in the leaves and in smears along the stone of the houses and slipping in the houses, and dancing with the shadows to form patterns and the patterns, how shall I say, making *sense*; being “at a glance” in one of the thousands or millions of arrangements that do not defy physics; light and matter behaving themselves, at least mostly, and this is how I know that my eye is healing; that the blood-splash in the vitreous that cast onto the world its own garbled designs, interrupting reality with its shadowy churning, is fading, though in truth it is *not* fading; in truth streaks of blood will always stain the innards of my eye, but the mind inside the skull reforms! It sometimes can happen that the the mind inside the skull, over thousands of hours, detecting mosquito, oil-spill, spiderweb; the cloud that is not there, tells itself, “That is not there,” -- “that is not reality;” and drawing out of itself some little eraser, gently begins to run eraser over spiderweb, so that a little more gold and leaf and streak along the stone and house and gold slipping into the house, and darting into shadow--comes into view, behaving more or less as they should, as dictated by laws of light and of gravity; as if reality is king. But should I not call this process--*magic*?

Underbeat

I have wanted to be one
of the deep water women.
Not wind-gnarled, foam-flecked,
not tossed by flimsy sheets of light
but good and far down,
with barnacles lacing
flank, shin. With fish scales in
my hair. Down there
in the crusted dark I can hear
nothing.
Bloodbeat against silence.
My mind
sharking.

After I Stopped Eating

Holly the collie was rescued
from the churchyard gully

she'd been trapped in
for nearly a month, her eyes

blind behind infected crust,
her stomach a pouch

drawn shut against hunger,
half her weight

starved off her ribs.
When they lifted her out,

her bones jangled like
the pipes of a windchime.

*Look what you've done
to yourself,*

the vet cooed, opening
her eyes' grimy caskets.

They slopped meaty paste
in her dish, but Holly

couldn't swallow—
even the taste hurt her.

They set her on the scale
but her claws slipped away

from the stainless steel,
and she felt herself falling

back to the skintight gully
that had held her so safely

and for so long.

Tusk

River revealed
it—big, pale curve
like a question mark
sticking out
of the riverbank—
and you were struck
by *what's what*. Rivers

are all about water down
here and water up there
in the rivers of air:
scarcity yields scorched
earth, fields of no food.
Too much swells a deluge—
homes and whole lives
swept away. *What's*

what is mammoth, is
as unbelievable as
miles-deep ice sheets,
as the last of a species
breathing its last.

Tusk tells a tale
of tall grass as far
and wide as they could
walk. They had no way
to change what was
changing, so lumbered
and ate their way
across a cold paradise
until it was neither.

And you—after river,
erosion, and revelation—
what are you going
to do (question mark)

Purple Poetry

*June, moon, soon - why do the
most beautiful words rhyme?
Why do only the good
die young?*

There is purple, two syllables
breaking upon salt lines.
This is my mother's favorite
dress, her dancing to paint walls
with fragrance, stretch marks
dissipating distances. Star-shaped
bruise blossoming like peonies,
unforgiving, unapologetic as
necessity of summer, leaving
only a trail of shredding feathers.
Her handprints & galaxies—
neither comprehensible
to me, then.

Consider the way my father's
fingernails crescented under
skin like liquid like glass like
knives. Which is to say,
stored, sharpened
words spilling over
like sorrow like blood,
coagulating under
lamplights illuminating purple
promises into darkness.
So easily exchanged: beauty & eerie.

The picture frame cradling this
image of his lanky frame against
knock-on wood door frame.
*Don't you think it depends
on how you frame the question?*
Not peonies, but something alighting
red & ready. Folds of purple nights
tingling with day: tasting of sureness,
most paradoxical of hues. Sure,
there is purple, but then there's this.

Mosaic (with Gatsby and the Sour Dead)

wind all night last night—a low fire
zombie substrate—like in the Arctic
now—

those nightmare scenes I keep repeating
freshly fanged—
brain nearly

digital these days—
even at rest
it scrolls—brain

still with its doors *not* blown out—
that's my friend—
all *his* framing's splintered—

wind has pushed him to cliff edge
in just four months—
he is slack—

windless—a *jib*—
really *gibbet*—hanging
between nurse and partner

to take a piss—
he forgets his daughter's name
but not her face—

wakes from napping—looks for me—
but it's just
Death there—

not *low and delicious*
as Whitman had it—
but vulgar mostly—lyric—

how could it not be otherwise—
that's how we spoke—
walking Crane Beach

or that Gatsby lawn fronting the estate—
desiring
not money

but its hidden healing power—
loving daughters—
world as fuel as friendship is—

as bodies are—
father—brother—husband—wife—
all the *sour dead*

keening as we the living burn—
seeing only the grief
in it—

where is the joy—
the promised new life—
there's a gap in theory

somewhere—
Dear *godrot*—Dear *thing-in-the-night* that pierces
the brain—

how is it you so easily cut away
at us
we mistake you for the shapes of care

***Idominion* (with John Keats and a Napkin)**

sometimes I am so eternal I am Keats' nightingale
lip-synching

my own private trauma—that age-old human-
woe-

porn—magnificent and temporal in the singing—
but I'll be

done soon—being mortal—nearing 70—I can't
carry him

anymore—he can groan away in that other world—
literature—his

royalties crypto (by the line—like *Poetry* does)—
so he

can reap the love and fame many these days are
reaping—lesser

talents sure—but we've evolved—the computations
shift—it renders

down to voice the constant X—the criminal
(eternal)

(see above) vagaries of a era—the real trauma-
porn—

necessary—given diminishment (constant)—naked
murder—

how we manifest what we define as love—the way
some men now

would kill a nightingale if they could—failing that
they turn to

women—who are songbirds sometimes—eaten
behind a napkin—

by the beak—sometimes—it is happening now—
on full display

—O John Keats your poem is ruins—bust with
its nose

blown off—stumps for arms—not quite that
next

museum—heaven—if you believe such things—
but the di-

alectic is the same—new bird with new
song in the

trees mornings and a praying mantis in
the yard—I

oscillate between the two—song in my ear—
forlorn—yes—

then memory of song—and then the man-
tis—

its trip-wire quickness—in a spray of flowers

if I should die eaten by a Pomeranian

I would like the priest to say
that I did not see it coming
because if I did, I would
have done something about
it despite the fact that it's
never a good look to try and
fight a Pomeranian, even if
it started it, even if you see,
somewhere deep those tiny
overplucked eyes the echo
of some older thing, some
glint outside the cave, the
growl of what isn't exactly a
wolf, dear priest please say
the thing about what wasn't
a wolf and also the thing
about the feral hog, how if
you leave a domesticated pig
outside for long enough it
becomes a hog, grows tusks
and hair, how that's
epigenetics, how a feral
hog's not exactly a boar but
it hardly matters does it
when you're bleeding out
into the loamy floor trying
to figure out how your
afternoon went so badly,
how you entered the
ecosystem, how your story
about the woods turned into
a tale, a cautionary tale, the
kind of tale you hope isn't
told by a priest in a non-
denominational side room
while the ushers check their
watches, stifle their laughs,
wonder what happened to
the Pomeranian anyways,
wandering the woods,
growing its fur, finding its
old wild, the priest wrapping

up the story with something
about nature probably, the
wet hungers of nature
probably, how the precise
bright teeth of a Pomeranian
are each the finger of God
probably, each wrapped
around your throat, almost
like a prayer

For I can't and I won't

"At the outset. Like a fallen dragon"

— *Tomas Tranströmer*

What is this ghost I am in a moonlit kitchen?

What is this less I am?

When we sent ourselves through interstellar space
we sent small hinges and brackets,
right angles and machined dodecagons.

Why do we fail to imagine alien satellites? Revenants?

The whisper of us. A crow's pile of dry bones.

In a moonlit kitchen. At a magnificent speed.

Why can't we build a rocket ship so large as to resemble an entire planet
of cavernous seas and a windshield of atmosphere, powered only by the mutual
drag of a gravity well.

At a magnificent speed
a thermonuclear heart the right distance away
to provide all the trinkets of heat and light

If only we could build a little tin can terrarium and toss it
from terra on rendezvous with Andromeda. We light
such small bonfires of cities.

Why strap ourselves to rockets when our Ark is already the world
already the mountain ridge and desert's edge already the last of our kind.

Leí Cien Años de Soledad en la casa de mi abuela¹

The door had a heavy latch with a keyhole
facing the landing, edged in plump green begonias
dashed with pink and red. Emerald hummingbirds
hovered over open flowers as my grandmother
watered her garden, descending the stairs.

Once, I remember her walking up the courtyard
in a long black skirt, a white blouse. Slender
as a broom. In one swift motion she closed
her hands above her head and caught a bird
midair. A blackbird with gold bands
that flashed when she set it free.

Snow fell slowly over a field
when my grandmother died.

¹ I read One Hundred Years of Solitude in my grandmother's house

Two Sonnets

[summer]

I ride my bike down the dappled road, wanting only to smell
quartz in hot bands across the shore. Mossy stone walls pound
down and remind me of the fragility of light, a diffuse desire
to taste meaning, to see moonstone crack as porcelain mirrors
refract eyes and eyes. I center myself in the idea of hydrangeas:
the filmed negative of color assumed to be real. Underground,
not much happens while sunflowers burst with seed in heat
that streams off your body. I watch you from the edge
of the bluff, how you caress him, how I don't. How I turn
and find my bed emptier for holding another person waiting
for me. Outside, canvases trap grains of sand in drying paint.
The colors shimmer and pines bow as light is thrown across
trunks, revealing Earth's dome bent to knots. How to realize waves
are glass, how everything is seen through the lens of your body.

[winter]

A candle lit on my windowsill flickers against the snow
falling under sodium streetlights. I wait for you to come,
my brushes dipped in water as I smear red and blue across
the negative space, the grit of possibility. Days are short
and dark, and I know I have more important things to discuss
than sunsets in December, but what is the point in setting free
the scalding sun? I catch Styrofoam on fire and watch it bubble,
turn pink and melt to pools of oil. Static in the sky seen as
stars mirrors your journey through the storm. I pull cards
to tell me what I want to hear, to tell me that this is the right
way forward. That I'll soon forget about the twisting vines of
summer. Fingers dipped in the stream of my consciousness,
hermits light lanterns in the pine forest. I hear your stomping
boots, and as you knock, I pretend you're someone else.

(thank you to Diane Seuss for inspiration)

Sonnet for My Ex-Husband, Dead Again

And here I am with my bouquet beneath his hospital
gown, our grown children striding in & out among
the rose stems. By now this bridal posey is a corpse.
Not the wedding you dream of, but some women
are widows & one beauty changed her name
to *Divorce*. Once, I watched a woman lose her husband.
I heard her black dress tell the funeral
flowers, *Some days the darkness is a tourniquet*.
That was the day I bled dry, any bones I wore
turning to ash. Not my epilogue. Knot & wedding song.
I was married. I died. My ex-husband rose from the dead.
Our children grew eyes, our potatoes refused to eat.
If this were a cautionary tale, I would be unlocked
cottage, sick widow waiting on a basket of woodcutters.

Directional Points

It takes too much to prepare this body. It takes
too much to be in this body, a lemon of an Oldsmobile,

each inch forward a drag. A hulk. A huff. "Learn to love
yourself more," the horoscope girls say. "The flesh is a place

of potential for pleasure." *The potential for what now*, I think
in the center of a step, the rusted scissors of my legs forced open.

And here is the point of sharpness. We're supposed to see
the body only as bright, as a bulb incandescing at our command;

with hushed expectation we are to turn our own body
naked in the mirror, we agree to see nothing other than light.

I argue, darkly. I hear the shadow in my own voice. I can
love it then: the self as a force that fails me, the body as the night

after Christmas, the glory of torn paper and ash, a room
where the hope is gone. What you must call a gift remains.

**This is how I answer my mother when she asks
what I'm going to do with my life**

Green, I tell her, *38 shades*.
Chartreuse is my favorite of course.

I have always loved Viridian, I say.
Sage, Juniper, Fern. She creases her brow.

I say *Pistachio. Pickle. Seafoam. Sea*.

You always wanted to study the ocean
she says, *Yes, follow your heart*.

I say *Forest, Pine, Pine Needle, Spruce*.

Trees are good, she agrees, *I studied botany*
while I was pregnant with you, it's in your blood.

Like Paris! I exclaim, *Caribbean, India, Pakistan*,
my eyes glow Celadon in the Darkening Moss of night.

Well, she says, *I don't have a passport, but*
spread your wings, Shamrock, I will wait here for you.

Thyme passes. I am Harlequin, it is Christmas.

When I move to Los Angeles everything is
Xanadu, Road Sign Green, Green Screen.

Everything is Vivid, Maximum, Lightsaber.

When my father dies suddenly during my first pregnancy
we go home to her. *Avocado*, I say, placing her hand on my belly,

Spring. Spring Bud. Bottle Green. Her hands fold together
over her face like a Mantis, I stroke her cheek,

I say *Granny Smith Apple*. We are crying together
with smiles on our faces in the Bright Mint of day.

My Bitter Lime becomes a Limerick, I write it all down.

*Title is a line from Daniel Liu's poem "Return Home," in *Adroit Journal*

The Museum of Lost Bodies

We found ourselves in an ancient library of light
whose books had folded wings for covers.
I loved the quiet shift that happened—how the air
made gods out of long vowels in my mouth.

It's how the living carry what is eternal for awhile.
After we die—we weigh twenty-one grams less.
This is the weight of wakefulness, light as
seven hummingbirds.

For whom will we unfold our true names?
If brave enough, or broken enough,
we turn from all that is false
in this tango of leavings and returns.

This is how it happens—let all the walls,
rooms, tables and chairs shrink and crumble,
soften to one smooth horizon—the mica chips of stars
smolder. As though the sky had finally come for you.

This is the journey we are all on.
Moving like a heron flying low
over the water—slip from your dayskin.
There is a place you belong among the names.

(*salt moon penny moon broken violin moon*)
Your hands are full of sky—a sheen of green bottleglass.
At night the salt-swell calls in baritone and you come out
in a simple vanishing.

Braided Cento:

Mark Nepo, *Things That Join the Sea and the Sky*, Sounds True, 2017

Joyce Sidman, *What the Heart Knows*, Clarion Books, 2013

Jennifer K. Sweeney, *Salt Memory*, Main Street Rag, 2006

Even These Things We Cannot Touch

Everything I know for sure about my mother's mother
can fit in the space of this poem. As if a poem were a reliquary

custom-built to house the artifacts of the dead:

something characterized, chiefly, by space
and the disposition to distance. And what was once the wood

in the carpenter's hands is now the will that all of this

shall be filled. Once, years ago, I bowed my head
at St. Vlad's Ukrainian Orthodox and vowed to listen.

But I could not hear her prayers, uttered unceasingly

in a language as strange to me, as fleeting as smoke
from a coal stove, boarders nestled upstairs, tissue-thin hair

clinging to metal rollers. That church was no place to find her,

and if she was anywhere, it was not within those gilded walls,
boarded up behind Theotokos and the lesser saints,

but in the casual way my mother chides herself

when no one's listening. My mother, youngest-daughter-
of-only-daughters: like me: non-inheritor of her mother's

tongue. And what was once the breath

in my grandmother's lungs is now the answer to questions left
unformed. Thoughts drifting through the rafters of my mind:

the fog of incense: there, then gone. And I wonder

if that language might be a kind of sanctuary, a refuge from
the self. Or, no. Something more: a private audience

with the past: a door swung open from its hinges.

The Year of Love

I want to bear an exquisite name. Something that sparkles. I want
to suck the life from figs newly shucked from their branches. Where

do figs even grow. I've never seen one outside of a Newton.
Outside of Newtown, the tragedies I most remember

boast a date or a woman's name. Speaking of tragic women,
Juliet was only thirteen. Barely old enough for Facebook. Though

let's consider how we're defining *tragedy*. After thirteen years
my friend got herpes from her husband. Then she found out

about the baby. All my life I believed my mother chose
the most common girl's name of 1982. But *Ashley* was only

second and only in Louisiana. Which brings us back to Katrina.
And makes me think of Blanche Dubois. My brain's irreverent that way.

Always groping after connections. Not unlike my body: touching things,
testing the wire, testing to see if it sparks. If the fingers burn.

All those years spent with my hands in my lap. I wasn't crocheting
anything. I was only tearing my cuticles. Like the pictures I unsheathed

from *Glamour* and *Redbook*. Where did those go. Rose bushes
wild as summer. Diamonds the size of a fig. Mine's a carat

and a half, sealed away in the top drawer. *Zelda*, maybe. Or *Guinevere*.
Cassandra, *Evita*, *Salome*. Though their sorrows outnumber the stars.

Stripper Strike!

*After Morgan Claire Sirene's "SESTA
Vs. Stormy Daniels" for Tits and Sass*

I have only been a victim in my sweet
civilian bed, fresh sheeted,

a dream dying in my flexors, overstretched
from his pointed weight.

I smeared on his chest a bit
of vestibular blood, marked him

guilty. Back to work hustling hours
in my paid-for pillowtop

dominion, every smack and squelch
sounds like rent against my body.

The last time I felt shame it snagged me
like a hangnail

and yet to be called a whore is social
death for a working woman:

suddenly rent comes due
every time she shuts her eyes to rest,

dares to dip into the arrested revenue
stream she once called sleep.

Now there are only victims and criminals
and employees

must wash hands. I'm a contractor,
my hands are everything

I've touched, if not everything
that's touched me.

It's Not That I Can't Take the Pain! It's the Shame!

after "Bloom, Pig!" by Kim Hyesoon

my mother said there's no name for where I'm going
no place for me to rest my life's gooey splatter
no meaning to derive from my hedonic thrills

my friend asked if I would prefer to be called Mommy or Madam
no one calls you Miss or Ma'am to put you in a place of power
if in Hell they call me Mommy I will have won

this manager would forklift out our sweaty skivvies
before he twitched a lotioned finger
no rest in here for stirring stirring shit no rest in here for neon

a civ would need a magician's secret rope, but I'm in show biz
I get good grip and lift my manager overhead
I can prostrate before an ego and outstretch my tithe, my dankest ounce

my every hole filled to yawning with his ideas
bursting supply and yet I can guess no gamble
with psychic force he wants me Mommy

at night I bite my hand until limp wristed
handcuffed to my own trimmed neck
best to be a happy pig a happy pig a happy pig

I dangle my ghost, my haunting privileges, like keys to a new Kia
where does one even buy that big red ribbon

Off the second floor balcony of a fire-ridden Xinjiang apartment building, mid-jump

And in the morning, moths tugged at our ironclad windows.
You spoke quietly about how good it was, this life,
as the rust on your wheelchair thrashed my palms.

I walked to the stairwell and I saw
the baby, a soft yolk dangling from
cobwebs in the ceiling. That's how I knew I was dreaming.

Three pieces of lettuce sat in the rice cooker, steam rising to thread
your crow-thin hair, like pink fingers.
When you said war
flocks of wild geese set flight in your eyes,
dove through your vintage fog.

The rotten blankets from underneath my bed
gnawed at the heat, sloshing like egg-white.
You said sometimes your stomach felt hollow,
and it was sickening sometimes, like you were the pink son
you couldn't let out.

At the bottom of the stairs, my dangling brother asks,
couldn't, or wouldn't?

Another featherlight winter
slipped down the hollow between mute boughs
and fell to the ground, dead.
Breathe in my ear, *fly, fool.*

—

*In Xinjiang, a building under quarantine policies was left to burn as
authorities failed to reach incapacitated individuals in time.
The One-Child Policy, enforced in China from 1980 up until 2015,
mandated that all family units produce only one child. All other
offspring were to be aborted.*

Leaf / Not Leaf

In weeks and years I'll be older, but I'm already feeling too old.

I look at faces smiling at other faces and think I could do that too.

The movement of your own limbs, looking at your feet and making them move, isn't that something?

I want to walk into a restaurant alone and sit at a table and order and wait and eat and pay and leave.

I want to get in a car with someone, drive for hours, and not worry.

I point out billboards, people, trees and houses, all of this to distract me, all of this noticing.

The tattoo I have is actually to tell me I could be happier.

There's a Joe Wenderoth poem about nailing a leaf to a door with a sign that says LEAF and you leave it there until it becomes so old and dry and fallen apart that it is no longer itself.

You return to the door and the sign and the leaf weeks or years later

and now the door says LEAF because there is no more leaf. Or maybe the door says DOOR...or the wall says DOOR.

I can't remember.

My memory retains too much of the hard little things and I wonder if this is why dreams don't come to my sleep easily and why, when they do, I feel like they really happened—why, when they do, they feel like memories.

I nail a sign to my dreams that says MEMORIES and I leave it there for a few years.

"and the wave,"

its ornithological regret, instinctively
out of tune, knew to distinguish crane,
heron, egret, by all black-leggedness and ancestral warmth. I
think about touch and the love-languages a river cannot send labouring,
for its cry is a cut of the silt and our freckle

of sand appearing beside it is washed with reflections of
canary grass in
what is the colour's recommended berth;
no marsh grass and there's no
hollowing with which to hold our bodies steady for longer

in air which held
all turn the short wave's breadth, cresting low as yesterday's sun;
whoever heard herons through
whole shades in towns, not me; deliberated sadnesses,
frightened and pink, fewer rabbits oxidise landscapes

I am done misreading, distance's volume becomes to you the sea-shell I hold out.

Someone's Always Trying to Kill You

Against the dark sleet pushed aside
by wiper blades last night, her questions
about god as what was before science
exploded void into cosmos. Unknown.
Is violence god, or men making god

both bomb and shield against his will?
Secrets of night driving: scanning
roadsides for any glint off low eyes,
catching shadows in motion, ditch
a pitched pit skirting cones of light.

I'm unconvinced by awe and grace.
Hard to feel their presence in tonight's
black sky leaking small knives of ice.
Unknown. What does omnipotence mean
in a world of men who skin women alive?

A world of no refuge, of women crossing
streets in dead hours, pulling children
by the wrist out of sleep. We brake
for three deer crossing field to field
by railroad tracks and flash our brights

to warn oncoming traffic. God of gaps,
of the highway's well-timed stream,
cars slowing, speeding, paying no mind
to pilgrims passing in search of food
and shelter on a bitter spring night.

Song for Cello & Girlhood

I rest my thoughts on the idea of your slender neck,
think of words that don't caress:
violent, vitriol, until I get
to violet, purpling to faded armchair
velvet, viol of the arm, low
notes rendered—no wolf tone howl but such sounds
your hollow body makes—mellifluous,
through ribs & catgut and shapes that draw air,
so that I, listening, forget to breathe
until my lungs take in what's trembling through
an open window at twilight just when
the coyotes offer their vibrato
& bravado: a girl two doors over
practicing for high school orchestra,
filling the air with her broken chords,
sighing September, as she drags her bow
across strings, solo—the perfect wail
of being seventeen, & I want to save her.

Fugue State

She plays in the key of forgetting. Forgetting, she loses locale, landmarks. Landmarks wander in her mind. Her mind becomes an antic character. An antic character will wonder. Wonder is the destination, unmapped. Unmapped, her trip takes an unexpected turn. Turn loops past the gas station & church. Church reminds her of repentance, an altar. An altar takes shape in her mind like matter. Matter becomes quark, atom, & particle. Particle reminds her of clavicle. Clavicle curves, a bone at the base of throat. Throat opens to voice & air & words. Words may lie because nothing is as it seems. It seems that she is losing her mind. Her mind rounds a corner and runs into a door. A door swings, creaking, hinges into the cerebellum. The cerebellum rests under occipital & temporal. Temporal suggests time, which the eye meets, open. Open, she tiptoes in the vestibular corridors, hearing chimes. Chimes say the clock strikes down the hall. The hall is the vestibule where she waits for language. Language bears the thrum that she cups in her hands. Her hands open & memories fly out like birds. Birds always know where they are going. Going, she hangs her sorrows on a hook in the hall where they jangle, like keys, until she returns.

Self-Portrait As A Survivalist

By profession,
I'm nothing. When I was young,
mother said, *be whatever you want*,
but what was in her mind,
she did not tell, only
it should keep you safe.
So, I choose to become an impostor.
On the playground,
I tried to be them, the certified boys,
would mirror their movements
as shadow does to a body.
In the classroom,
I sat with my thighs set wide apart
and joked in a language
I heard them use. But, a lie is a lie
and a shadow a mere deceit.
A giggle and the mirror shatters.
Once, as a punishment,
the sport's teacher refused
to let us play and we sat in a circle,
determined to kill time,
when a boy said,
you sometimes act like a girl
and I knew I'd fail in my endeavour.
Imagine, years of dedication
turned to ruin. Oh mother,
nothing in this world is without teeth
and how foolish it was to believe
a shadow could desire to be
the whole body.
Since then all I wanted was to be
called grown, to know
I survived the worst. After all,
what is survival if not breath
after breath after breath.

hoping you could make a manual sound

both universal and instrumental
you practiced paradiddles but used words
“like music [to] communicate feeling”
terrence hayes wrote as a trumpet muted
not to euthanize or to stupefy
the blizzard in Utah descending steps
like humanity with a human in [it]

If you listen while riding on busses

for something that buzzes, isn't that some
form of prayer? Churches always in the news
for the wrong reasons. Misery kisses
the cheeks of select citizens only.
Meanwhile, your unlikely visit to the
prison near town brings a realization:
The business of prisons is misery.

Churches might only mean realization.

Maybe there is nothing more bizarre than
believing in pauses. If you listen
while riding on busses for something that
buzzes, isn't that some form of prayer? When
misery cast its shadow through ages,
there was born the business of belief. Then
barkers came along, invented show biz.



ART

Water, Hinge, Field



Mixed media

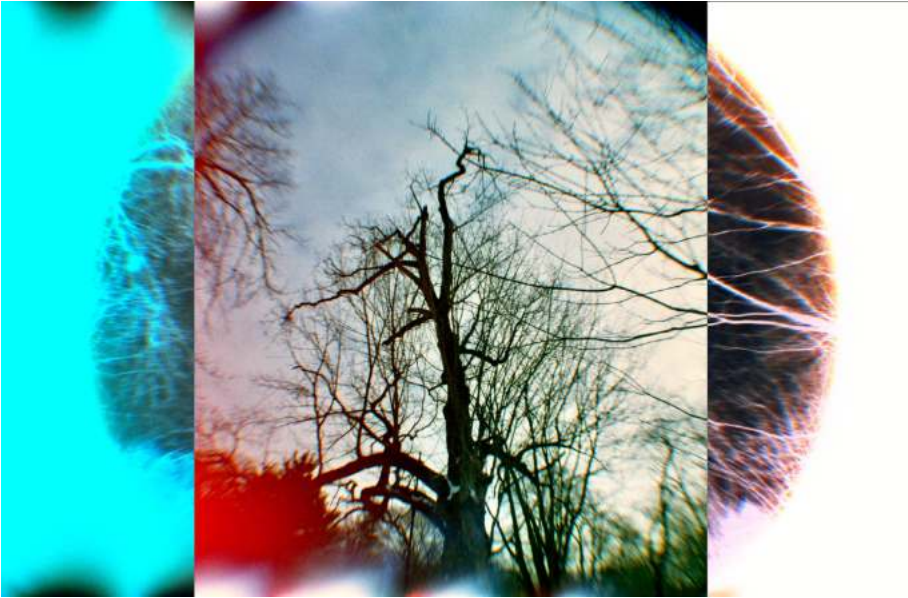
Ryota Matsumoto

Those Who Affirm the Spontaneity of Every Event



Mixed media

Transitory Space, Brooklyn, NY, Color Photography, 2021



Photograph

Transitory Space, Brooklyn, NY, Color Photography, 2021



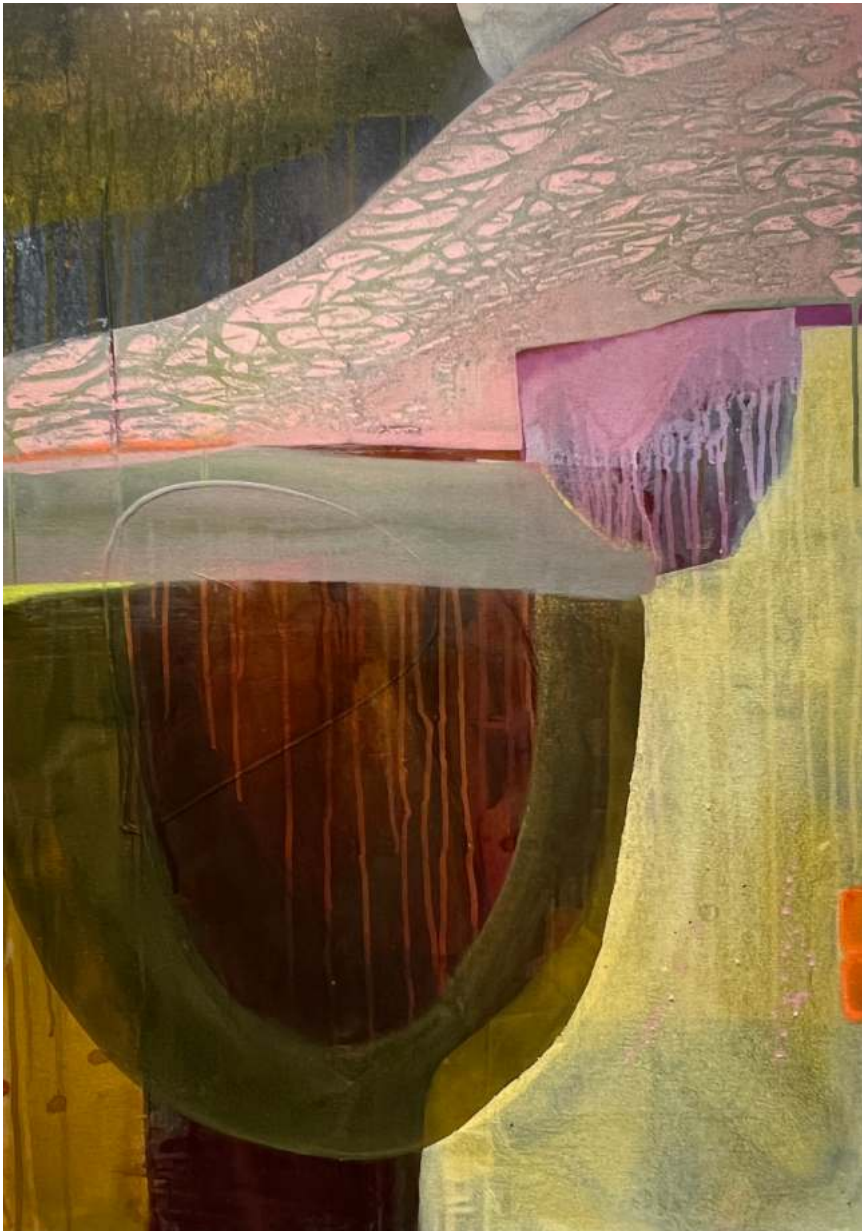
Photograph

Composed Chaos



Acrylic, Collage

Piece of Mind



Acrylic

Primordial Flow



Acrylic, Collage

Red Madonna



Acrylic

Stay With Me



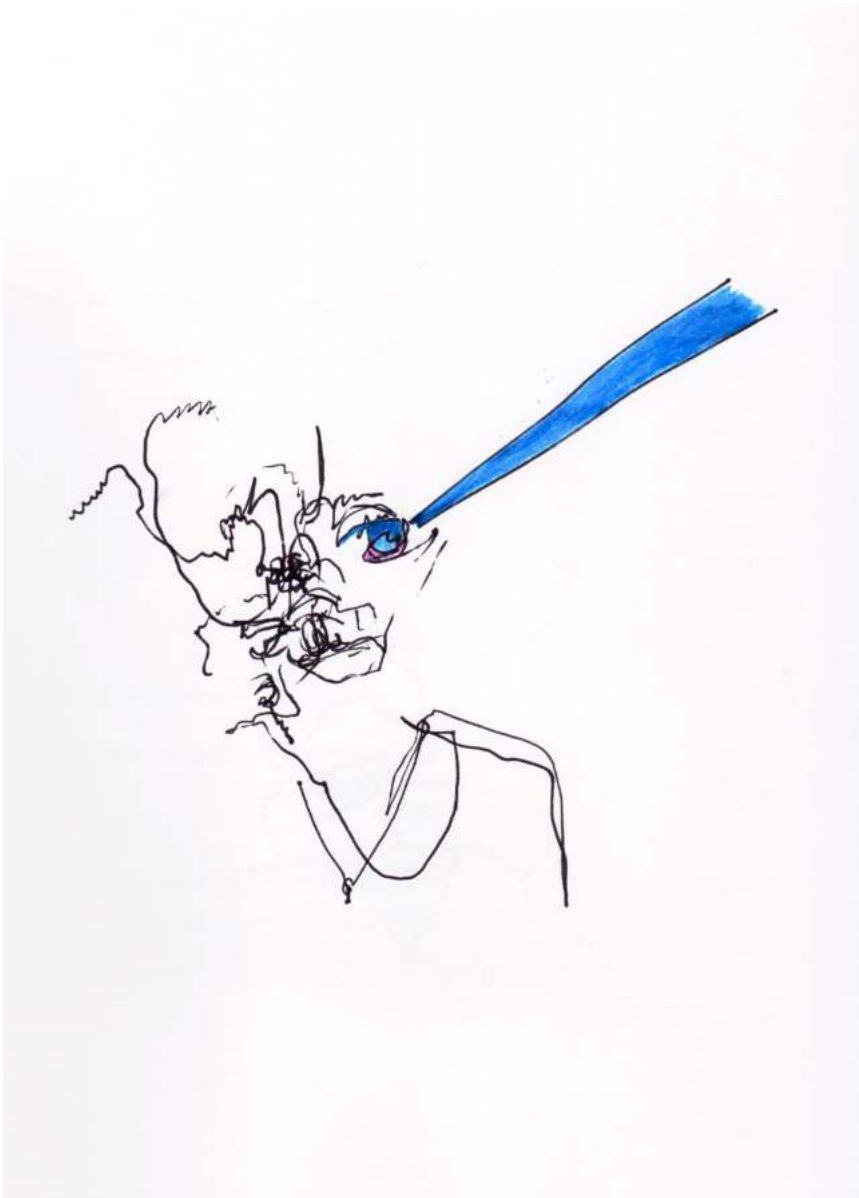
Acrylic, Collage

Tender is the Night



Acrylic

Abduction



Blasted



David Carter

Two cowboys, rest. Catskills, NY



Bespoke paint on canvas

David Carter

Going home, spring snow. Saratoga, NY



Bespoke paint on canvas

Expiration Date of Money



Watercolor and colored pencil on toned paper

Unstable City



Watercolor and colored pencil on toned paper

Camouflage1



Mixed media

The word "FICTION" is rendered in a bold, black, sans-serif font with a white speckled texture. It is centered horizontally and overlaid on a thick, yellow, jagged line that resembles a stylized mountain range or a signal waveform. The line has three peaks and two valleys, with the word "FICTION" spanning across the middle of it.

FICTION

Blue for Excitement

The wild ones can fly up to fifty-five miles an hour if they're so inclined. The domesticated ones are so fat they can't lift off the ground. The wild ones roost in trees. They don't see well at night so they sleep in the branches to keep themselves safe. They launch at dawn. Their heads are like mood rings: redbluewhite. All you need to know is the more intense the color, the stronger the emotion. They will attack humans if you stare into their eyes for too long—do *not* look into the eyes! Male droppings are shaped like a J, female droppings a spiral. The bigger the poop, the older the bird. Forty-six million are slaughtered for Thanksgiving every year.

Second grade teachers are expected to know many things: the best picture books (*Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, hands down,) how to resist the urge to work through our lunches, how to resolve playground conflict, the names and locations of all fifty states, how much to feed the classroom hamster, how to add not only two numbers together, but three.

I am, of course, an expert at turkey handprints. I encourage the children to paint the skin of their palms brown and their fingers yellowredorange—although I love when an experimentalist sneaks in and presents a green bird. I am a jack of all trades, and a master of none—except for being totally exhausted.

That doesn't mean I don't have a social life. After the long hours and difficult PTA meetings, I still have energy. I'm still young. There's a stereotype that teachers party to take off the edge, bathing their sorrows in wine. I'm not here to combat that stereotype. Some of my coworkers even start most weekdays blurry-eyed and confused, unsure how to respond to the upturned eyes looking at them. I'm not here to judge, either—teaching is exhausting and very rewarding. I'm just not part of the in-crowd, the group of young pretty teachers who go out on weekends to a bar on the other side of town, who try to ignore the looks they receive from their students' dads. No, I'm not a part of that.

I'm something completely different.

Now, don't worry. I wouldn't teach my students about the slaughter of innocent animals. That's something for older kids. I barely got the lesson approved. There was fear that children would connect the bird on the projector to the bird on their plates. But the administrator just loved hand turkeys and making them with her own kids years ago. She was so busy, anyway; I was such a good teacher that she let it go.

I began to research the birds obsessively. This is definitely my downfall as a teacher. It's true, no matter how much it sounds like a cheesy interview answer: *I work too hard*. I want to make sure I know everything about a topic before I present information to my kids. I want them to get the best of the best and to have the opportunity to learn everything they can.

I read everything I could find about turkeys. To the ancient Maya, turkeys were more than vessels to mark seasonal gratitude. They were vessels of the gods. They were domesticated for religious rituals. The birds operated in the between spaces, like dreams. Like the space between the living and the dead.

The children seemed to enjoy the lesson; they usually do. I receive great feedback from my superiors, my students' parents, the students themselves. During the painting portion there was a brief battle over a tube of blue tempera as two students worked on psychedelic fowl. But besides that, my class loved learning about nature. They especially liked listening to the recording of the different noises turkeys make: not just the *gobble gobble*, but the *cluck* and the *purr*, the excited *yelp*! The sounds stilled the kids. Their eyes closed, their faces peaceful, their bodies tensed with focus. I enjoyed the rest of the day—recess was filled with students running and jumping, making turkey calls. *I never knew turkeys could fly, Miss!*

I truly believe that the purpose of life is to keep learning. None of the information I presented the students with was particularly surprising or new to me—we live in the shadow of the Appalachians, half of the men hunt the bird here, and some of the women do, too. But the fact that the ancient Maya worshiped the bird surprised me. The fact that they believed the bird was a messenger to the dead surprised me. The fact that the bird even lived in their region surprised me. My lack of knowledge shouldn't have surprised me, though—this part of the country isn't exactly known for uplifting different cultures.

I became a teacher because I believe our childhoods shape us for the rest of our lives. Sure, genetics play a part. But have you ever read anything about serial killers? Everything always points to the way their parents treated them. I never met a serial killer as far as I know—but I've met people who ended up doing things that they couldn't take back.

When I initially went to college I wanted to become a therapist, but that seemed too close—I didn't think I could listen to someone talk about suicide. I didn't think I could witness someone's self-destruction again. So I decided to intervene even earlier, before the problems really started. I decided to become a teacher, to impart every student with the knowledge that they are worthy and they are loved. I believe this is a form of magic, a talisman my students carry home with them into adulthood. I pray that the magic is strong enough.

I know what you'll think when I first bring it up. *Talking to the dead*? It's nothing like those tv shows, though. I know because that's where I got started. It was the only place people seemed to openly talk about that kind of stuff, except for the occasional late-night conversation after a few drinks. I watched *Long Island Medium*; despite being impressed by the platinum blonde woman's accent and perception, I decided to go in a different direction. I took out a credit card so I could spend eight-hundred-fifty dollars on a reading from John Edward. It was more than I paid for one month's rent. I selected him because his show had been off the air for a while and he had more availability. And I'll admit it, I thought he had kind eyes. I added myself to his waiting list; it was a lottery system. He randomly selected who he would be reading for. While I waited for an email stating I was the winner, I Googled him and read testimonies claiming he was a fraud. They cited studies. I began to feel unsure. Eight-hundred-fifty dollars was a lot to pay for someone who was a fraud, and why did I need him, anyway?

I'm a teacher in America—and I teach in a poor district on top of that. Teachers are known for operating on very little and getting the job done—and getting it done *well*. My students have never been left wanting. I do whatever it takes to get it done—research, creating decorations when my budget won't allow for store-bought, making requests on social media for gently used books and other supplies. I didn't need a big budget to talk to

the dead. Not only could I do it, I was confident I could do it *well*.

It started with research. How did people traditionally contact the dead? The research started out like all research does: with Google. My initial search included results about famous mediums, like John Edward, followed closely by Amazon pages advertising books with titles like *The Dangers of Talking to the Dead*. I didn't care about the consequences. I would do whatever it took to find him. I crawled through pages of results and took notes on each one. *Dreams. Visions. Scents. Talking out loud. Coins. Feathers.*

I wanted to see him again. It did not matter if it was in a waking vision or a sleeping one. Various websites informed me that there were herbs that could help aid the process. Lavender hit all the important notes: cheap, easily accessible, familiar enough that I felt safe consuming it. It was also well-verified. Several websites reported it could foster my intuition and intensify my dreams. I purchased some lavender tea at Kroger's. I drank one mug before bed for sixteen days straight. I ran out of tea bags; nothing happened. I was no closer to him.

Articles encouraged me to look for coincidences—familiar smells or people that looked like him. The articles advised me to interpret them as communications from him. I had never seen anyone that reminded me of him anywhere, let alone in this small town—that tall, pale boy whose masculine scent was so familiar to me I could find it in any crowd. I tried and I tried: the grocery store, the mall. But I could never locate it.

The articles suggested talking out loud to the dead. Before I started this journey I thought of him constantly and sometimes allowed myself to talk to him internally. This small action was a devastating acknowledgement that he was no longer alive. I had never tried speaking to him out loud. I began using my rare free moments to talk to him and to wait for a response or an apparition or even just his scent, oh god, what I would give to smell him again. *Nothing.*

I looked for signs Google asserted are associated with the dead—coins, feathers—but none came. I could have let myself get frustrated and given up, but I am a teacher and that is not what we do. We take the impossible and we make things happen. Not just anything, either—*important* things. I don't say this for any recognition or to act like a martyr. My job is extremely hard and I constantly face the challenges of too little money, too little time, and too little support. What I can say with confidence is that I do my best to fulfill the

promise I made to myself, to him, and to my community: I do my best to make sure each of my students knows that they are loved, precious, and valuable. That the world would be worse off without them. And I feel more often than not, I am able to do that.

All of that is to say that I'm used to challenging situations. I have even come to enjoy them sometimes. The sense of satisfaction I get when I resolve a difficult situation cannot be paralleled. I didn't know it was possible to become more motivated to connect with him, but after all of my failed attempts I was. I would overcome all barriers; I would figure this situation out; I would speak to him again.

When the above suggestions didn't work, I turned to the darker side of the Google search. These things came with lots of warnings about how they could be difficult to accomplish, how my soul could be at stake if I chose to move forward. That made me laugh. I was confident I had lost my soul long ago when he departed. I had come to understand that my job, no matter how draining, had given me something to fill the void left inside me. I was often working, preparing for work, or agonizing over it: I didn't have to face my own emptiness because of it. There was not much left of me outside of the word teacher and I found I liked it that way. It didn't give me time to think or to feel. I was not afraid of losing what was left of the shell I had become.

Medium. Séance. Ouija.

I was surprised with how many results came up when I searched "Ohio mediums." I scrolled through pages of white, female faces. Most of them seemed to be clustered in Columbus, but that was doable. I just dreaded pouring all of that money into my gas tank and into a reading when I might be able to do it myself. When I searched "Ohio seances" I read about a 19th century ghost story in Athens. There were no contemporary results.

The Ouija board approach had been simple enough. I asked around the school. One of the teachers had one. I had all of the girls over a few weeks before Halloween—they reserved that night, of course, for skimpy costumes and rolling around with strange, masked men. No judgment here—I just wish we could have done it on Halloween. The internet suggested it was the perfect night to talk to the dead. It wouldn't have mattered, anyway; a few girls brought bottles of wine, another, White Claw. *Ain't no laws while you're drinking White Claws!* They immediately drank, and drank heavily, to forget the runny noses and sticky fingers of the day. One girl ended up chasing the other with the

planchette. Nothing came of that night.

That's when the turkeys came in. I went to Ohio University. The Maya never came up in my education. I knew very little about them. So, I had to do extensive research and read everything I could find.

The ancient Maya worshiped the animal and considered it as important as their gods. The bird supposedly had powers in transitional times, like at night, but especially in dreams. Its ability to travel between states allowed it to carry messages to the gods on its wings. They could also carry words to the dead, who they were frequently buried next to. The Maya domesticated the bird so it could play a part in their religious rituals, and it was one of the most common symbols of their time. It was so revered that it was considered a significant symbol of power and prestige. One ruler used it as part of his name; all rulers decorated themselves with turkey feathers.

From there, it was easy. It was so very easy. I live in the shadows of the Appalachians. Turkey season starts every April. My dad was more than happy to help—he's hunted his whole life. He never had a son he could pass his knowledge down to. Dad loved the idea of me giving a lesson about local hunting habits. (Don't worry—I'd never actually discuss any of this with one of my students. That's for the older kids.) First, the preparation: camo, weapon, box call. He said some younger kids were using apps to track the birds these days, but they weren't really necessary—the turkeys roosted in a specific area and had done so for as long as he'd been alive. Predictable, like the seasons. Predicable, like anything else in the natural world. Like life-death- rebirth.

I asked him to draw a detailed map. I would share it here, but you probably couldn't read it—he left the names off most of the streets. When he did label them, he used nicknames you wouldn't be familiar with. And if you were a local, you'd already know where the birds were, or you'd know someone else who could tell you.

It was his idea to lend me the camo—he has never been a big man, not much bigger than me. I took it with gratitude. Teachers never turn away donations.

The next steps were simple. I returned to the *talk to them* method. Except I did my talking on paper torn out of the back of one of his old notebooks. On it, I wrote what I needed to say; I unburdened the words that haunted me, that were always on my mind, that I constantly pushed away while smiling into the face of yet another child, while

grading papers. They poured out quickly, in red ink. It had always been his favorite color.

I slowly pulled up each camo pant leg, buttoned the garment, and cuffed the ends. I put the jacket on and felt how loose the sleeves were. I didn't take a knife or the pepper spray my mother gave me when I first moved out on my own. I took the letter; I felt for the wooden box call in my right pocket and the cracked corn from the local supply store in the left one. The wood was smooth, the grain, rough.

I walked into the woods and followed the path until I came to the place. I stepped into the brush. I kneeled down in wait. And eventually, they came. Their dark feathers stood as proud haloes as they pushed through the brush. The massive birds paused, as if waiting for something. Their heads delicately poked around, looking for what, I didn't know. After a few moments, they took a few more steps. Steps, pause, steps, pause, the cycle continued. Despite their size, I could barely hear them—the leaves and twigs on the forest floor hardly registered their presence. Their silence was unusual: they are known for a variety of sounds, from clicks to gobbles. I watched in awe, imagining what the early Maya saw when they took in these crowned behemoths: the snood, a long column of flesh falling over the turkey's beak and the fleshy wattle, mounds of meat under the beak. The way the light played off the red and blue of their faces, the chocolate of their plumage. It was the first time I had truly seen them. It was the first time I saw god.

The tears that fell on the letter were the first I had cried in years. They blurred his name on the envelope. As if I had needed to write it; as if these divine beings did not already know who the message was for and what it contained.

Steps, pause, steps, pause. Their blue heads finally landed on me. Their dark eyes barreled into my own. Their heads are like mood rings: blue for excitement, blue for messengers.

Mercy

After a few cocktails, my agent won't be able to resist telling you how she discovered me. How she plucked my headshot from a pile of Polaroids. Lowering her voice, so you have to step closer to hear her amongst the chatter, she'll tell you, and it's always the same phrase, that I had an alluring asymmetry. Even in Los Angeles, the golden land of the gorgeous, mecca to the beautiful, my picture, she will half-whisper to you, commanded her attention.

She will explain that the left side of my face—here she will dramatically bring up her hand and touch her own face—is flawless. But thrown across my right, like a fistful of mud, is a spatter of freckles. A perfect paradox, my agent will say, bringing a ruby Negroni to her ruby lips and taking a long sip. She was lucky to have found me, she will tell you, adding that I am lucky to be born with such a face.

I always disappear, mingle with the other guests, or head out for some air when my agent begins her story. She has a good heart, and without her, my career wouldn't be what it is today. But my agent grew up in Santa Monica. Lucky? She has no idea what it was like to be a kid attending a shitty middle school, in a shitty Midwest farming town. With a cult-like, lockstep conformity my classmates all had the same Trapper Keepers, identical Lisa Frank folders; the same pink, unblemished faces. To be successful required the ability to blend in. I would attempt to hide my freckles under a thick cake of makeup, or behind a mass of bangs that I'd blast with hairspray so they'd hang like a slab of beef jerky covering half my face.

The kids avoided me; ghosted me, talked through me as we sat at our rectangular tables in homeroom, as we ate in the lunchroom, played at recess.

I'll never forget the night I stole a Brillo pad from beneath the kitchen sink and scrubbed the right side of my face bloody. Would my agent still call me lucky if she knew?

Or what if I told her about the day Anna moved in? Her family had bought the Peterson's old place, three houses down from my own. It was early August. Splendidly warm. I was riding past on my new Huffy mountain bike and she waved at me from her porch. No kid had ever waved at me before and I actually squeezed the brakes and came to a jerking stop.

The two of us instantly became friends. We spent the rest of the summer together. If we could convince one of our parents to drive us we'd go to the mall. Or we'd sit in her bedroom and talk about the upcoming school year. She was starting seventh grade, I was going into the eighth. As if she were cramming for a test, she wanted to know everything about our middle school. I gave her a rundown of the teachers, taught her how to tight-roll her jeans, and helped her pick out a JanSport backpack. Sometimes her plastic hamburger phone would ring, and she'd roll her eyes. She'd talk for a little while to one of her old classmates, and then she'd tell them that I was there, her friend, and she had to go.

There was a moment when I almost told Anna about school. We were flipping through my yearbook and she was asking about my friends. I was going to tell her that I didn't have any. But Anna could see my freckles and to point them out, to explain how the kids treated me, I felt was unnecessary; akin to pointing to the sky and explaining the sun.

I didn't talk to Anna on that first day of school. We had separate lunch periods. But I did catch a glimpse of her in the hallway. She was beaming—the focal center of a group of girls. I yelled her name, but my voice was lost in their laughter.

She wasn't on the bus ride home. Which I thought was strange. But I chalked it up to the fact that maybe she had joined an extracurricular. When she wasn't on the bus the following day I could feel dread corkscrewing in my stomach, turning and turning as I ate alone in the lunchroom, rode the bus, walked to her house, rang her doorbell.

Anna opened the door a crack, just enough to poke out her head. I could hear muffled giggling behind her, could smell the tang of buttery burnt popcorn. She looked past me as I asked her why she wasn't on the bus, why she would no longer talk to me.

Never once did she look me in the eye. Not when she said that I had lied to her; that my omission had been a betrayal. Or when she told me we could no longer be friends.

For years I was heartbroken. Maybe I still am. I tell myself that's what my agent saw in my polaroid, not my freckles but sorrow, an earned despondency. It's the look I strive for when I'm being photographed. When I pose, I imagine the lens is a grocery shopper browsing a rack of magazines and they pick up the one with me on the cover because I remind them of someone from their past who had lived for a time next to them, alive, yet even then, forgotten.

Breath

1. *The emperor scorpion fluoresces bright blue.*

Most blue feels unnatural. Electric. Manufactured by pharmacologists. Bottled poison that sits glowing in translucent bottles - dusty on a chemist's shelves. The corticosteroids and biologics. The synthetic mists that Erica must gulp to stay alive.

Or the sapphires and cobalt growing within the earth, silently and privately, like precipitated bile in an organ. Ripped out and polished by human hands. Their surfacing made somehow profane. Some things should never be seen or touched, but left to grow, quietly cultivating their secrets.

Blue is deceptive. It has a seductive invitation, like a viperine tooth or the glowing tendrils of a man-o'-war. *Let me hold you*, it says. *Be silent and rest with me. Let me rock you down, down, where there is only stillness.* It wants to be inside you, coat your bones. A quiet annihilation. *Touch me, become me.*

A foot below the surface of the canal, underneath her family's houseboat, she likes to surrender her breath. Purposefully. The tranquillity is captivating. It is not the same as *holding* her breath, feeling the blood pounding in her ears, her body straining against self-immolation. Under water, there is a hush, gently blanketing her body.

She looks up at the teal glass separating her world of swaying pondweed and the hostile orange air above. The choking humidity moored in their 40-degree September. Her mother shrilly chiding: 'Get out now! You don't know where that water has been!'

True, it is not always fit for swimming. Now in the umpteenth year of flooding, their houseboat floats precariously in a basin of pesticide and petroleum runoff. The risk to her body, however, seems laughable.

2. *Scorpions can survive underwater for two days.*

The minute her head breaches the surface, she gasps, her body attempting to inflate and buoy itself. But the energy it took to paddle her arms has winded her. She gasps again and again, trying to keep her head above the surface and swallow more air than water.

Her mother hooks her hands under Erica's underarms and struggles to pull her teenage daughter under the railing. Her rainbow swimsuit snags against the barnacles puckering the stern.

'Now you've gotten yourself all worked up,' her mother scolds. She disappears for a minute, leaving Erica to lie trembling and wheezing on the deck like a recently-hauled fish, dreading the boot about to land on her head.

Then she feels a shaft of plastic being placed between her teeth. 'One two three,' her mother counts, and on the last beat Erica obediently inhales the bitter dust.

'No more swimming or running when I'm not around,' her mother says, putting the cap back on the inhaler. 'These are expensive.'

3. Scorpion mothers carry their young on their backs.

'They're called booklungs,' explains Dr. Jehaan, pointing to the cross-section in the illuminated projection. 'Still fairly experimental. But it may improve your quality of life.'

'It will be my own tissue?' asks Erica, squeezing her husband's hand.

'Of course. We begin with two 3-D polymer moulds, which are implanted with stem cells drawn from your fat, and modified to differentiate into cartilage and dense tissue. The polymer will disintegrate, leaving only your own cells behind. We will also do a gene-splice marrow transplant at the same time. Your red blood cells will no longer carry oxygen, and instead your body will produce hemocyanin. This will fill the cavities of the book lungs.'

'I don't really understand.' Hannes side-eyes the projection hovering weightlessly above the examination table. 'Why would these lungs be any different?'

Erica notices that Hannes' lips are pursing - failing to keep his expression, and position, completely neutral. Contrary to what he had promised.

'Your respiration will completely change. No more inflammation of the bronchus, no more mucus, infections, or cysts. The gas exchange happens in an entirely new part of your body. You won't be - for a lack of a better word - breathing.'

It surprises Erica how easy it is to imagine. The curve of the pleated organs illuminated before her face. Picturing them inside her body, flanking the outside of her breasts. Spiracle vents gaping like small open mouths inside her armpits.

'Many arachnids have booklungs,' adds Jehaan. 'It's where we got the idea. All the folds maximise the surface exposed to the air and the amount of gas exchange. See how the layers look like a folded book?'

'And what about my... the lungs I already have?' asks Erica.

Dr. Jehaan shrugs. 'Defunct. Remove them eventually, probably. Once we've established the first surgery was a success.'

4. Scorpions may be the oldest land animals still living today.

Outside the Harley Street clinic, the unspoken boil ruptures.

'It's grotesque,' hisses Hannes, loath to allow pedestrians in on their conversation. The orange-grey sky is awash with the stench of ammonia and methane. It hums with delivery drones, pumping through their invisible capillary-like traffic lanes.

But Erica is already two feet below water, wafting with the duckweed, in the blue silence. 'It's natural,' she says, her voice muffled by the elastomeric respirator she replaces over her sunken cheeks.

5. Scorpions do not have bones - they have an exoskeleton made of chitin.

Erica signs the waiver - she will recover at home, unattended. And the do-not-resuscitate which would render the first document moot.

She imagines the empty houseboat, its decimated parts on a scrap heap. Their paltry worth contributing to her hospital bill. She knows what her mother would say about all this. She hears it, or rather feels it, like a guppy reverberating with the finger-taps against the aquarium glass.

She feels cold in her dotted gown and plastic booties. The hairnet squeezes her face. The anaesthetist asks Erica to count backwards from five.

5 ...

The sound of twenty tennis shoes crunching against the terracotta track. She runs for thirty yards before her windpipe pinches shut. The weight on her chest crushes, as if someone has dumped a sandwich board declaring 'the end is nigh' over her shoulders. Her primary school gym teacher finds her trembling and pale. Unable to draw breath.

Such a silly thing to forget how to do - the very ritual which keeps her alive. Pulling the purity of life inwards with every muscle surrounding your organ and tissues, and push the waste forcefully from your nose and mouth. Even a child should remember how.

Her teacher taps her shoulder twice in a chummy 'walk-it-off, soldier' gesture.

4 ...

She graduates from inhalers and atomisers, to three bronchial thermoplastys a year.

The basement of the off-campus building is dank and clammy. She leaves her oxygen tank at the door, like a wet umbrella. Silvia Winkels takes her bottle of Rekorderlig from Erica's hand and drains it. 'I'm glad you came,' she says.

'I'm not really into poetry,' Erica admits.

'What are you into?'

Erica leans in and kisses Silvia, impulsively. Her heart pounds as her lips part. She feels the warmth of Silvia's breath touching her lips. She nurses on it. Then Erica pushes Silvia away, panting.

'Do you want me to stop?' asks Silvia.

'No - I mean yes - just for a minute,' she pants. 'I have CMA.'

'Oh?'

'Chronic metastatic asthma.' Ashamed by the need to explain. 'It's the atmosphere. My airways are too narrow and they get agitated and capillaries burst and that causes and—' she realises that Silvia is looking around the room, distracted, unlistening.

'That's awful, love, you should take care,' Silvia says, avoiding her eye. 'I'm just going to go

find my mates, be back in a tick.'

Silvia disappears into the throng of the party. And does not return.

3 ...

Charlie Foresgren squeezes her throat behind the chippy. She regrets making the joke in front of his friends about his band never finishing a song. The apartment they share will be chilly tonight. Fireworks burst before her eyes.

'Will you stop undermining me?' he asks coldly.

She digs her fingernails into his wrist meekly. She considers clawing his eyes but she does not want to hurt him.

2 ...

Her husband calls her a gene-punk and a bio-hacker. Growing an animal in her armpits.

He sleeps on the sofa for a time. Then his office.

After a while, Hannes just does not come home at all.

1 ...

Erica stands on the Pitch Hill summit, one of the last stretches of woodland in southern England. Her walking shoes are muddy, her sweaty vest clings to her back.

She looks over the vista, and the monolith coking ovens in the distance, blenching smoke skywards. The brown forest disintegrates into the persimmon hue of the city, ending abruptly on the horizon. It is the first bright day in May, after a month of frost and fog.

She lifts her arms, feeling the wind thread through the thick hairs and graze the spiracle vents beneath. Despite the steep climb, her chest is silent, motionless.

At this altitude, tufts of xanthic smog hover at the same height as where she stands, shrouding the valley. It almost seems possible to scoop them with one hand and squeeze them like lamb's wool. But the smog cannot harm her. It cannot even enter her body - once porous, now fortified.

Palms skywards, shoulders open, she basks in her stillness.

This world was not made for Erica.

And Erica was not made for anyone.

The movie star's daughter has an itchy back

When my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, my back turned red and scaly. I couldn't stop scratching it, with my fingernails first, then with a dry loofah. In the end, I resorted to a knitting needle that cut through my flesh and left my skin covered in scabbed welts.

You fret too much, Mum said, nursing her third Martini.

I helped her shave her head and shaved mine in sympathy. Mum put on her silver sequined dress from the 1974 Oscars afterparty and lay down on her bed, her glitter stilettos still on. I sat at her feet and brushed my back against her heels. For a moment, the itching disappeared.

'Pass me the cigarettes,' she said.

I tried to negotiate but she said dying people don't need to be reasonable. Death never was.

She smoked until her skin turned gray and she doubled on the rouge.

We developed a routine for her outfits. Mondays were silk shirts and fox fur collars, Tuesdays were about leather trousers and fedora hats. Wednesdays were exotic belts, sometimes worn as necklaces. Thursdays for taffeta gowns from post-war optimistic times, Fridays for fresh cotton and linen. Weekends were about cashmere because she loved the *cuddling* her cardigans offered.

I expected her to make room for me in those cardigans. Some were big enough to welcome a junior league football team. I mentioned once or twice that I was chilly, but she waved her hand as though she was dismissing her loyal maid and said, 'You must be tired, go to bed now.'

Before the fourth fox-fur-and-silk Monday Mum was gone, in the same rush she'd always lived.

During her funeral, a cast of white crabs crept up her cherry wood casket and hypnotised us with their ensemble of rasping claws. The priest watched them seize the

altar and when they got too close to the wafers, he screamed and tried to smash them with the gospel. My mother, a Cancer, had found a way from wherever she was now, to steal the scene one last time.

I went home and fell into her cupboard, deep and dark as Alice's rabbit hole. Mum's shoes and bags and scarves and belts and hats fell after me and until I found my way out of the heap, I feared I would die there, buried alive under hundreds of thousands of dollars of clothes.

For seven nights I slept down the cupboard hole. For seven days Mum's fox fur collar caressed my cheek in the morning to wake me. Her leather belt pulled on my toes while the silk one stroked my arms. Still lying down, I'd clad a cashmere cardigan over my shoulders, the warmest hug. For lunch I nibbled at the linen shirts, crisp and fresh like lettuce. For dinner, I had a steak of conditioned Spanish boots, solid and earthy. Mum's colorful silk shirts were wonderful squeezed, especially the bow ties. An injection of vitamins and good mood.

When the week was over, I decided to put the house on sale. Many people came to visit but I was still down the hole, the feather boas tugging at my knees, not wanting to let me go. I left a note for the visitors, said I was abroad, and they could make themselves comfortable in my absence.

The thin alligator belt that had been my grandmother's climbed upstairs and slithered over the carpet, keeping an eye on all those strangers coming in throughout the day. People do curious things when they think no one is watching. A pregnant woman started doing Kegel exercises on the kitchen floor. Her husband filmed her. Two anxious fathers put down their child in the crib that had been mine to see if he fit inside.

On the eighth day the boas released me, and I could crawl up to the surface. The clothes followed me, each returning to its place in the cupboard. For the first time in six weeks, my back didn't itch. I ran a hand over my shoulder blades and found a soft, round lump on each side.

I signed up to a resale website and filled in my profile. I chose a picture of Faye Dunaway because my mother despised her. They had been in love with the same man and, clearly, he hadn't chosen Mum.

I lay the clothes flat, the boots up and the stilettos coquettishly on the mantel piece. The belts I fastened around a mannequin's wasp waist, the hats I filled with silk paper.

It took me four weeks to go through the 3532 pieces my mother had hoarded during her lonely days and nights. She had taste.

Four hundred and three days later everything was gone.

The last piece to sell was her leopard-print fur. I took it off the website several times, put it back on. It kept me warm at night and it was still February. It smelled of berries and vanilla. In the end, I chose a beautiful box for it, mauve with a gold ribbon. I wrapped it in purple silk paper. I kissed it goodbye before taping it shut.

When the woman at UPS took it to the storage place in the back, I felt a prickle and a pull around my shoulder blades, as if I was carrying a heavy backpack. Six steps out the door, I realized I had grown wings. White and majestic wings. I got on pointe and pushed down my toes against the sidewalk. I took off, and never set foot on Earth again.

Narrowly

It was during my gap year: I was in Munich. I'd gone to a museum that was the size of a park. I don't remember the museum or the park for that matter. What I remember was that there was a sidewalk and long wall—quartering off the museum grounds, I suppose. I turned the corner and there was a man with a moustache. He was the kind of man my grandmother—the one on my mother's side—would have called “swarthy.” He asked me something in another language. I can't remember if it was German or something else because I was too busy remembering other things—the eye contact that looked like he was purposely trying to dial it down a notch, as if he resisting the urge to narrow his eyes. The way his head didn't move when he spoke. The way his arms hung stiffly at his sides. He looked like he was trying to slow down time just by willing it to happen.

The only word I understood was “coffee” which is basically the same word in all of Europe.

It was broad daylight and the museum bordered a side street. No cafés, no other tourists, and this man was inviting me out to coffee.

Somewhere in my reptile brain I understood that in what should be a benign exchange, this man thought he had the upper hand. Maybe that was the biggest tip-off of all. Because when a man extends an invitation to a woman, he knows that his best chance for a “yes” is letting her believe that she has the power.

I answered in English, snapping loudly with the mean-girl disdain of an ugly American.

His demeanor changed immediately. He apologized and disappeared so quickly it was like he was never there. And I understood that he had mistaken me for a different kind of brown girl. The kind who might hesitate. The kind who might even accept his offer.

I turned back to the way I'd come, hearing the sound of my grandmother's voice, the one who died years before I was born.

“Brava, mija,” she said proudly. “That's the best way to escape from the inside of a van.”

Breaking the Chain

On Monday, Tom took a big breath and licked his lips, staring at his mailbox. A bright, breezy May day flowed around him. He put his hand on the latch for his mailbox. The flap dropped open. Inside, of all things: mail.

He snatched it out and went to his front door. Once inside, he walked through his bare house to his cluttered office.

Most of the mail went right into the recycle; the fifth piece was an envelope with his handwritten address. No return address.

He dropped the other mail on his desk to grab a letter opener. The sharp blade sliced the envelope open. Two pieces of paper, folded. After glancing at one, he inspected the other.

"Dear Tom:

I saw your message online, and I knew I had one sitting around here somewhere. Just like you asked, I've rewritten it word-for-word. I'm not superstitious, but fingers crossed nothing bad happens. I don't know why someone would WANT chain letters, but your message made it seem like you have a good reason. Whatever you're looking for, I hope this helps.

-Frida."

Tom put the letter on his desk. He stood in the center of the room, holding the second piece of paper by the corners.

"Dear reader, you have an incredible gift!! This letter is an omen of good fortune to come as long as you follow the instructions!!

Become just like Patrick Everman, who followed these instructions and got a raise, a new car, and a wonderful wife, all in the same year!!

If you FAIL to follow the instructions, however, you are in GRAVE DANGER!! Like Daisy Thurgood, who discarded her letter and got into a car accident, lost her job, and got divorced--all in the same month!!

The instructions are simple--all you have to do is--"

Tom sighed. The chain letter went into the recycle with the other mail.

#

More than a week later, on Wednesday, he stood in front of his mailbox again and

took a deep breath of fresh May air. He licked his lips. Again the flap dropped open. Two pieces of mail. He inspected them inside.

The first was a letter from his Realtor; the second was an envelope with his handwritten address on the front.

In his office, he opened it up. A shorter message from the sender this time.

"Hi Tom, I saw your post on Reddit. It took me a little bit of time, but I found it in my old things."

No name. No matter. He opened the other piece of paper.

"i'm sorry"

Tom's body locked tight. Sensation drained out of his hands--his heart pounded in his ears.

"she's coming to u now. i didn't have any choice. i had to send this letter. u have to send this letter to sixteen people in three days or else she's going to visit u. There's no way to stop her. if u don't send it to sixteen people, ur going to die.

don't ignore this letter. don't try to look for her. don't leave your windows open. don't leave your doors open. don't keep any knives out. don't tell anybody about this letter, but send it to sixteen people in three days or ur dead.

i'm sorry"

Tom barely even needed to read it. He'd read it a million times in his head. Sixteen people in three days. No capitals. u instead of you. The rules at the end.

i'm sorry.

He lifted his head, looking at the wall. There hung a dozen faded pictures of the same teenager. Sitting on the deck, in the car, in the yard. At school, dressed for church, in a swimsuit for the pool. Bright smiles or goofy sneers. Alone, with his arm around a young woman, or carrying a younger brother on his back. Above the pictures, on a big piece of paper, written in marker--

i'm sorry.

Tom's hand went into one of his desk drawers. It pulled out an old, dirty switchblade.

He checked out the window, pulling the shades wide and letting in as much breeze as possible. After that, he roamed around the house, re-reading the letter, opening every door. In the kitchen, he set his silverware knives on the counter in a long row, covering the counter next to the sink. He lined up all his cooking knives on the other side of the sink. He put the switchblade at the end.

Only three more days. Saturday.

#

"Check it out, Ben," Tom said on Thursday. "I got a chain letter." He placed the chain letter on top of Ben's keyboard. "Got it in the mail and everything. Remember these?"

"What?" Ben picked it up and scanned it. "Wow. People actually send these in the mail? I just get emails." He read on, chuckling to himself. "Amazing anyone could take these seriously. Did you ever get the ones that were like 'the original version of this letter was written by Jesus Christ himself!' Or the ones that tell you to send a dime and get a dollar, things like that."

Tom nodded. "Those are classic. Practically the original. They've been going on for a long time. Some say back to the late nineteenth century."

Ben snorted. "Did your research, huh? Uh oh, better not show it to anybody else, or 'ur dead'!"

Tom grinned as he took the letter back. "I'm going to tell literally everybody in the office."

"That'll show her. Hey, any word on that API project?"

"Not yet," Tom said. He went to the next cubicle. "Hey Cath, check it out. I got a chain letter in the mail."

#

After work, he had dinner at his mother's house. As Mom cleaned up, he pulled the attic ladder down; old wood creaked and groaned as he climbed. His mother hummed from the kitchen while he hunted through boxes. Clothes, Christmas decorations, forgotten housewares, and more scattered detritus of seven decades of life surrounded him. He picked past them until he got to the back, to a set of boxes marked "Oscar."

Kneeling in front of them, he took a deep breath, taking in layers of dust. He licked his lips and pulled the flaps open.

School books. Toys. Clothes. Things his mother couldn't possibly give away. Oscar's junior yearbook. Bits and pieces collected over the years of being an older brother. While chasing off bullies and helping with homework and doing chores and--

Tom took another big breath. He rubbed his face, wiping dust out of his eyes. The ladder rattled as his mother climbed into the attic.

"I've been thinking about him a lot lately," Tom said after she sat next to him and pulled one of the boxes close. "I was...what's the word...." He shook his head. "I wished I could see what was next for him. His college, his family, what he accomplished. There should have been so much more of him."

His mother nodded. "I ran into Harriet a few months ago at the bank. She had three kids with her, and I spent the whole time thinking they could have been my grandchildren. Just maybe."

Tom reached into one of the boxes and pulled out a stack of Polaroids. "What do you think he would have ended up doing?"

"He would have done something like you. Something complicated and detailed and technical, and he would have been good at it, even if it didn't get him any acclaim. He would have been good, like you."

There was Oscar, sitting on the steps of the house, shirtless, pocket knife in his hands. "How old would you say he was in this picture?"

Tom's mom appraised the photo. "I'd say fifteen." She wrinkled her nose. "Throw it away. I never want to think about those knives."

Tom tore the picture up. "Seems like the right age." He flipped through some of the other photos. Each one had Oscar, younger or older, but never past seventeen, just like in Tom's office. Playing t-ball, dressed for a first day of school, or standing with Harriet, wearing a suit for junior prom. One had Oscar at his sixteenth birthday party, surrounded by friends and decorations. Cake on their plates, a colorful plastic top hat cocked on Oscar's head, and his long arm around twelve-year-old Tom's shoulders as Tom gazed at his older brother with unchecked devotion.

"Oh, would you look at that," Tom's mom said. She pulled Tom close. "You know, I think I felt the worst for you. You lost your best friend. I was terrified of what you might do."

Another picture had the two brothers sitting on the deck's bench. Ten-year-old Oscar had a book open in his lap as he grinned at the camera. Six-year-old Tom slept, mouth hanging open, head leaning on Oscar's shoulder, his own book slipped off the bench onto the ground.

Heat filled the space behind Tom's eyes. He exhaled, and the pressure in his chest released. He went through more pictures. So many had the two boys. One Polaroid had Oscar, older, looking at the camera with a weary expression. Seventeen. Little time left.

"Do you mind if I keep this one?" he said.

"Of course, dear. Where did that one of you two on the bench go? I think I want to put that one up."

Tom sat looking at the Polaroid. The lines around his eyes, his drooping mouth, his slumped shoulders.

"Come on, let's get out of here," his mom said. "It's too dusty up here."

#

Thursday had a big red X on the calendar. On Friday, Tom continued telling people at work about the chain letter, no matter how annoyed they looked.

When he got home, he carefully took his framed pictures of Oscar from the office into the living room, crowding them on the hearth. The Polaroid he got from his mother went in the very center. He taped the big piece of paper above them.

i'm sorry

After digging through his office closet, he found a crate of old things. He picked out a piece of newspaper and a large notebook. His brother's handwriting greeted him from the cover.

He flipped the notebook open to a random page. The paper, twenty years old, was thin and yellow and feeble under his fingers. "Got my test back from Mrs. Wallentine. I missed an easy one but I still did well. After school, Tom and I went to the park and got ice cream. Dad's doing better."

Tom had been eight. They walked to the park a few blocks away. The ice cream truck had come by, and Oscar had bought Tom a cone. He didn't remember the flavor but remembered Oscar handing over two hard-earned dollars for two treats in late spring. May. Hot already. A perfect day for Tom.

He flipped forward. The journal entries got more frequent. More detail, better handwriting, deeper thoughts. Still straight and to the point.

"Harriet and I had a fight. She wants to see me more, but I'm so tired. I know she's right, but by the end of the day it's hard to see her after work and school. Especially now that Dad's gone. God, I can't believe it's almost been a year. It still seems like yesterday. I'm getting my colon checked every year once I'm twenty-five. I want to spend more time with Harriet. She's been so good about everything."

Tom had a rough day at school today. Came home crying. Bullies, he says. Middle school is tough. We hung out for a little bit."

Older kids had made fun of Tom. Made fun of his dead dad. He'd tried to stand up to them, but they laughed at him. Hard to be brave with tears in your eyes.

He flipped forward a few more pages. Another year passed in the record. Entries became more frequent, but they were either one sentence or three pages.

"I don't know what the fuck is going on."

They clawed at Tom's heart.

"Dad's gone. Mom is too busy. Tom is distant. Harriet and I haven't spoken in a week. Who the hell do I even talk to? How can I possibly explain what's happening to me? I don't even know what's happening to me! I go to sleep scared, I wake up scared, I spend every moment in between scared. I think the only time I'm not scared is when I'm dreaming!"

And, then, just before the journals ended, they changed.

"Surprise is the best way to put it. Chain letters are garbage, everybody knows that, but this one...."

I guess she's going to kill me."

At thirteen years old and in his last year at middle school, Tom had no idea why his brother had changed. Of course, Oscar hadn't told any of them about the chain letter. Tom had found it afterward, going through his brother's things.

He scanned the remaining journal entries, reading and re-reading them to prepare for tomorrow. Missing his brother.

#

He got up early and checked out the windows. Nothing. They stood wide open, letting in fresh air, and he sucked in a deep breath. He licked his lips. Knives gleamed in early morning light, neat rows of metal on either side of the sink. Saturday. Nothing to do but sit and wait.

By noon, he had been pacing for three hours. He stalked through the quiet house, checking all the windows, making sure breeze still flowed through them all. Rearranged the knives a few times and re-read the rules. Had he told enough people? Were the doors open enough?

As he adjusted the angle of the upstairs bathroom door, something slammed. A door. And then another and three more. Wind blew through from nowhere, knocking him off balance, and the bathroom door slammed shut. The bedroom door behind him did the same.

Tom stood in the upstairs hall, listening. Stairs creaked as he descended to the first floor. Windows shut. Doors shut. A woman in the living room.

Hazy. Out of focus. Lost. Feet drifting over the carpet. Tom stared from the landing.

An envelope of shifting color surrounded her. Green, white, black, blue. Never staying put. Haze drifted down from the top of her head like long clouds of hair, pooling around her feet, casting shifting shadows as she glowed. She gazed at the row of pictures.

"Thank you for coming," Tom said. The head turned toward him. Eyes gleamed white-

-the rest of the face a mere suggestion of features. "I don't know if you can hear me, but I think you can. That's what it seems like, anyway."

He stepped forward. He took a breath and licked his lips. "I remember coming into the basement once, finding all Oscar's knives laid out in a row. All the windows and doors open. He was having so many issues. Once I read his journal, I put it all together."

Tom stepped up to the spirit. Smaller than him, even floating off the ground. "My name's...Tom Hanson. My brother was Oscar Hanson. You visited him about twenty years ago." Tom stepped around the ghost. He picked up the Polaroid and held it to her. "I wonder if you remember him."

The head inspected the photo, and a hand came up. Tom placed the Polaroid in the shimmering, cupped palm. It drifted closer to the face. "You're a hard lady to track down," Tom said as he went to the kitchen. "Took me twenty years. I got every chain letter in existence until I got yours. It had to be mailed to me properly."

He picked up Oscar's old switchblade. "I felt crazy. Must have been how Oscar felt. But I was right. Here you are."

The figure drifted closer to the wall, looking at the newspaper page Tom had put up.

Service for Oscar Hanson on Sunday. Under it, in smaller print: Shocking suicide stuns school.

"We all thought the same thing," Tom said quietly. "He couldn't have really killed himself. He wasn't like that. And then I found his journal. He talked about the chain letter, and doing everything in reverse because--in his own words--he didn't care anymore. Might as well, right? I thought you had done something. Enchanted him. But he was hurting long before you."

He walked back to the hearth and opened the switchblade carefully. "I read his journal a thousand times. He felt like he couldn't talk to any of us about what was happening. But he could talk to you. You were there. You listened. He didn't even know your name, but he told you everything. His thoughts. His depression. I hate that he didn't think he could talk to me, but I was a kid. I missed Dad, and I was struggling. He would never ask me for help when I needed help, too."

The figure gazed at him.

"Thank you," Tom whispered. "For being there for him." He sniffed. "I'd like to think you didn't want him to..." He looked at the knife in his hands. Ancient blood stains had blackened the blade.

A shimmering hand took the knife from Tom's hand. The blank, white eyes inspected

it, turning the blade in the light. Her second hand came up and slipped it away, clicking it shut. She put the knife back in Tom's hand and closed his fingers over it. Both of her hands wrapped around his--warm. Soft.

"I want to help you," Tom said. "Repay you."

The light in the room shrank. The figure faded, and Tom reached forward. "Wait. There are things I could try!"

Gone. Wind picked up from nowhere, stinging Tom's eyes. Blinds rattled against windows, and pictures of Oscar tumbled off the hearth onto the carpet. The big piece of paper tore off the wall and landed at Tom's feet.

i'm sorry.

He held the switchblade. She had taken the Polaroid.

The Ball

Several months into the war, a ball appeared in my neighborhood, rolled underneath the front fender of an abandoned car. The ball was blue and roughly the size of a basketball, maybe bigger, although I didn't stop to measure its circumference. I assumed a child had lost their ball or it had not been among the things they took with them as they fled, so I left it there, and when I returned later from work—yes, some of us still went to work despite the war—the ball was gone.

I hoped the ball and whoever had lost it had been reunited, but it returned a few days later, except this time it was purple, and it was in my yard. I picked it up and bounced it on the cracked sidewalk, dribbled it, enjoying the way it adhered to the laws of physics and bounced obediently back into my hands. The sound echoed off my house and all the other houses and could've been mistaken for gunfire, so I dropped the ball and went inside.

The next morning the purple ball was gone, but a red one had appeared, this time on my front steps. It was dirty, like it had been traveling a long time through littered streets to find me, so I took it inside and gave it a bath, shined it up until it beamed like a red sun. I put it on my couch, but it looked lonely, so I left the TV on while I went to work.

It had been some time since I'd seen any of my colleagues, but that just meant I was more productive. I wrote emails, posted a video, created an excellent slide deck, and congratulated myself on my good ideas. But my sense of accomplishment was short-lived. When I got home, balls were everywhere. They were much smaller now, softball-sized, except for the red one, who still sat on the couch acting like it had not spawned this infestation. All the small balls were different colors, and where the earlier balls stayed still, these moved, quickly and unpredictably, so that I tripped several times while trying to make myself a sandwich. I didn't want all these balls, and I felt resentful the red ball would behave this way after I had taken it in and showed it such kindness, so I chased them around and picked them up, one by one, and tossed them all out the front door and down the front steps and into the yard.

It took a lot out of me. I was tired, so I went to bed, but my sleep was unpleasant.

A soldier came by the next day and asked me what I was doing with all these balls. He said they were unsightly, and he'd gotten complaints about them.

"From who?" I asked.

"Whom," he corrected.

"From whom?"

"Citizens," he said.

"Go ahead then," I said, "take them away."

He said it wasn't his job and asked me why I needed so many balls and what was their point and didn't I know there was a war going on and why hadn't I joined the fight?

I told him I didn't believe in war.

"What's belief got to do with anything?" he said. He told me the next time he came by, he better not see any balls.

So I delivered each ball to a neighbor's house as a gift, placed it on their crumbling steps or in an empty flower pot to brighten things up. I thought I had gotten rid of all the balls, but the red one still sat there watching endless news coverage of the war. I tried to change the channel, but the ball bounced off the couch and knocked the remote out of my hand with surprising strength. I felt like it was mocking me, and it would never leave, and wherever I went and whatever I did the red ball would follow, forever and ever and ever, plaguing my waking hours and my dreams.

So I quietly pulled out a kitchen knife and snuck up on the ball and plunged the knife into its rubbery skin. Blood spurted from the fresh slashes, but the carnage didn't stop me, as a matter of fact it was encouraging, because whatever can bleed can die. The ball bled everywhere, and its red flesh peeled easily as it screamed, low at first, then like a chorus of children growing louder and louder. All through the neighborhood, everyone's balls started screaming, but I couldn't stop stabbing until it was fully deflated, and the ball wasn't really a ball anymore, just a bloody memory splattered all over my couch and carpet.

Then I went out to find the soldier.

NONFICTION

The word "NONFICTION" is rendered in a large, bold, dark brown font with a white speckled texture. A thick, yellow diagonal line with a similar speckled texture cuts across the letters from the bottom-left to the top-right.

Single dads with back tattoos

The tattoo of the faded blue comic book woman on my father's freckled shoulder watches me pick at the edges of the dark charcoal painted kitchen table. There is a small finger-sized gap between the sheet of glass and the edge of the table. Beneath that smudged, streaked glass, there are shards of a shattered mirror arranged, glazed, and staring up at me to make up our kitchen table. It had been a while since we cleaned beneath the glass, crumbs of food slipping and making my father's functional artwork a lot more meaningless now -- the curling of slim rotting vegetables and the bottom of the bag Doritos are dusting the mirrors and table cracks now. In between, there are crumbs and tiny hairs. I always picked what I could out with the tips of my fingers. That was today's afternoon task.

I look back up at my father's right shoulder. Blue ink fades onto tight freckled shoulders. There is a woman there, her fingers posed across her face. I always thought she looked like my mother, that was the family joke anyway, wrapped up in this fading tattoo of 17, 18, whatever age he thought he needed it when he'd met her. I felt a humor in knowing my parents did not last and yet, she was there, a cartoon version of my mother, as he spiced some afternoon rice in weekend boxers and the shape of a father figure's beginnings. I always found my mother in this comic book girl on lazy weekend afternoons.

If the radio was on, I knew he was happy. If a cigarette was in his mouth, behind his ear, or balancing in the chipped glass ash tray, I knew that he was moving, going, thinking. Today there were both -- a crisp cigarette tucked atop his ear in wait while his dad's favorite songs hummed atop the greasy countertop next to moldy bread from other careless nighttime dinners.

I used to study his old photos, magnify how much like a tree trunk my father was -- no edges, no curves, just straight up to a goofy boy with freckles, red hair, and giant ears. He was young then, young enough to still have a litter of pimples across his forehead, and young enough to think the world was his. He still is young, really, but I don't think he rules anything but this house anymore.

I look at the pictures of my parents before me and hardly recognize them, but maybe it's because I guess that's what their love's supposed to have looked like. I brush that thought and the crumbs off my fingers. It is too black and white.

I noticed having a young dad in the circles we had -- church, school, the neighbors. I never thought it was a problem, but can still trace anger in my grandmother's cracking voice when she retorts "cause his brains not fully developed" and watch as she rolls her eyes, marches away to smoke her own cigarettes in hiding.

It is a late and lazy weekend breakfast. I am picking the crumbs from our table. I think now that no one ever made me feel like a mistake. I loved having a young dad. It

meant we stayed up late, we crawled across the ground, and I saw him more than all the other kids. He worked part time jobs and his schedule was always when he wanted it. In many ways, he's a kid too. He laughs at fart jokes and listens to loud music. He pranks you in public and dances in Dairy Queen lines. He talks to everyone he can, just to say hi. He stays in bed late and doesn't want to clean either. He didn't have a serious job. He'd just been fired from Applebee's for stealing the chocolate molten lava cakes. I think it was worth it. Years later, he tells me I don't remember that memory correctly. I know that memory is fickle. I trust that some things are skewed. In spite of it all, I think all emotion behind memory is to be trusted. I chose to think he got fired for stealing them while I now I remember the restaurant's boxes in our freezer. There is some vague truth in it all. Either way, I never regretted living differently.

He'd try construction, a butcher shop, a car dealership, pyramid schemes, scrapping, all sorts of jobs that spread him away from art and us and home. I think the jobs are breaking him now. I bragged to the kids at school that my dad was an artist, but our dining room table, his project was falling apart and I didn't know how to fix it. It was beautiful, neurotic, shards of glass reflecting back up while you chewed thick burgers in the winter early evening. Dad never fixed it.

No one ever came over, except for my dad's friends or their kids. No one from school had playdates, none of the moms and dads came over for coffee or birthday parties, and I always thought it was because our home was messy. A simple shame in living poor and dirty. Your world is always smaller than you think it is.

But now, I think it's because this loose man was too young, the growing sleeve of tattoos on his left arm that we don't talk about singles him out. He's just a child compared to the parents of my classmates. Grandma said those tattoos would ruin his life, but I know that I, his first born, might have too so I love to watch the sleeve grow.

His back is still to me. He is just getting done with a breakup in the basement of my grandma's house to a girl with pretty red hair and a young face like his. I liked her. She sat with me at church that day, but that night, he'd taken her downstairs to talk. I snuck down the stairs, sat right before the door to listen, close enough I could run and escape his view if they came towards me. He broke up with her because of me, but he doesn't know that I know. "You can't be around my kids with that in your system." I didn't know what "that" was, but she was gone and here he was in the kitchen somewhere between happy and preoccupied a couple days later.

I know she's not coming back now either. There's a fat lazy cat sitting by the window, my brother is watching a scary movie he shouldn't, and I watch my dad. "This is grandpa Bob's favorite song," he says. I don't know that much about Grandpa Bob, but I know my dad loves him, so I listen and tell him I like it too. Food is ready, there's a glass of V8 in front of me and a plate with worn and faded McDonald's characters. Too many knives cutting steaks and chicken have erased the bandit's face; I cover him in sauce and we eat. My brother does not come, my father does not care, and there is silence in the curly q's of his chest as he eats and stares at a too blue vase of fake flowers.

It is hard not to think of my missing mother. She is tensing upon my father's back. She is here, even though she has not been. There was a moment I realized my mother wasn't coming back. But it wouldn't come to me for years. My mother stopped writing me and I realized she wasn't leaving Michigan for me. It was always going to be just us.

I used to think my mother would come back, even thought that I could orchestrate a parent trap and get them to fall in love again. I had seen the pictures, I knew they used to love each other. No one loves each other like that anymore, I think. I tried real hard at my aunt's wedding, watched my parents dance, held my fingers crossed behind my back and prayed to God in the middle of the dance floor, begging for my parents' happiness. My sister said mom was single; I told her dad was too. Things lined up. They danced for a second, my mom in her blue dress and long hair and my dad with his only good tie and new efforts at facial hair and they danced slow. It felt right. I felt hope. We watched the entire song. I cried the next day when we took a plane home and told my grandma how they danced. She saw it too, she said. They used to look at each other like that a long time ago, but it was unrealistic of me to expect anything to happen. Unrealistic, she said.

When mom left, when his girlfriend left, when the pretty redhead left, it was just us. I almost preferred it. The best moments with my father were lazy days when he was lonely. I tell him, years later, I loved you most when you were single.

I wonder now what happened to the table. I vaguely hold onto the memory of it failing, too many crumbs to save it now. My father was an artist; I hold onto this even though we probably threw it away. Your world grows; I hope someone salvaged it.

The Inheritance

There are bees following you.

In your earliest memory, you are lying in bed screaming that the walls sounded like bees, like an oncoming storm. No one came to save you when the plaster broke and the angry swarm moved in.

But that was only the first time.

At seven, a drunken honeybee buried its stinger into the soft skin of your cheek. Twelve when you were chased through the backyard, hot welts blooming across your thighs. Sixteen when they found your lips, left them red and flaming.

Some people don't know that bee stings can scar.

Even after you left, after you thought you were safe, you dream of all the homes you had that were held together with poison. When you wake, there is a swarm in your veins.

Last summer, you sat on a quiet park bench with your newborn son asleep in your arms. You unwrapped his blankets so that his jaundiced skin could touch as much sunlight as possible. Your milk had just come in.

A lone bee found the back of your arm, just inches away from his still unbathed head.

Maybe it was adrenaline, or the fact that you were still bleeding, but that was the moment when you began to consider all of the ways that your body holds poison: There is hot skin. There are welts. There is the way blood rages.

These days, you don't tell anyone about the drone you keep in your chest. When you manage to sleep, you dream of bees erupting from your mouth. When you chase your son down the sidewalk, there is a crush of bees following you. And tonight while your son sleeps, you pull a dead bee from his hair.



BIOGRAPHIES

Eleonora Balsano

Eleonora Balsano's short fiction has won or has been placed in several international competitions and is featured in *Portland Review*, *Fictive Dream*, *Reflex Fiction*, *Micro Podcast*, and elsewhere. In 2021 she was shortlisted for the Bridport Prize. Eleonora lives in Brussels, E.U. with her husband, their three sons and a feisty dog named Sidney. Tweets @norami. Website: eleonorabalsano.net

Callie S. Blackstone

Callie S. Blackstone writes both poetry and prose. Her debut chapbook *sing eternal* is available through Bottlecap Press. Her online home is calliesblackstone.com.

Emma Bolden

Emma Bolden is the author of a memoir, *The Tiger and the Cage (Soft Skull)*, and the poetry collections *House Is an Enigma*, *medi(t)ations*, and *Maleficae*. Her work has appeared in such journals as the *Mississippi Review*, *The Rumpus*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Madrid*, *TriQuarterly*, *Shenandoah*, and the *Greensboro Review*. The recipient of an NEA Fellowship, she is an editor of *Screen Door Review*.

David Carter

David Carter is a masterful painter based in Saratoga County, New York, who uses the medium of painting to reveal groundbreaking and seminal perspectives on the divine illuminations of the landscape around us. His works speak to the importance of nature and its connection to the spiritual world and our collective understanding of it. His paintings are an exploration of this idea and a testament to the power of art to reveal truths at the heart of our shared experience.

M. Cynthia Cheung

M. Cynthia Cheung is a physician whose poems can be found in *The Baltimore Review*, *Pleiades*, *RHINO*, *swamp pink*, *SWWIM Everyday*, *Tupelo Quarterly* and others. She serves as a judge for Baylor College of Medicine's annual Michael E. DeBaakey Medical Student Poetry Awards. Find out more at www.mcyntiacheung.com.

Flower Conroy

LGBTQ+ artist, NEA and MacDowell Fellow, and former Key West Poet Laureate, Flower Conroy's books include *Snake Breaking Medusa Disorder*, *A Sentimental Hairpin* and *Greenest Grass* (winner of the Blue Lynx Poetry Prize, forthcoming 2023). Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *New England Review*, *American Literary Review*, *The Yale Review* and elsewhere.

Jill Crammond

Jill Crammond's chapbook, *Handbook for Unwell Mothers*, is forthcoming in May 2023 from Finishing Line Press. Her work has appeared in *SWWIM*, *Slipstream*, *Stirring*, *Limp Wrist*, and others. Her poem, "How to Bury a Bird," published in *The Shore*, was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize, as was "American Dad Sonnet," published in *Kitchen Table Quarterly*.

Sandra Crouch

Sandra Crouch, MA, is a poet, artist, letterpress printer, and recent transplant to Nashville, Tennessee. Her work has been published in *HAD*, *MER Literary*, *Rogue Agent*, *Rust+Moth*, *SWWIM*, *West Trestle Review* and elsewhere. You can follow along at <https://sandracrouch.com>.

Satya Dash

Satya Dash is a recipient of the Srinivas Rayaprol Poetry Prize and a finalist for the 2020 Broken River Prize. His poems appear in *Poet Lore*, *ANMLY*, *Waxwing*, *Rhino Poetry*, *Cincinnati Review*, and *Diagram*, among others. Apart from having a degree in electronics from BITS Pilani-Goa, he has been a cricket commentator. He has been nominated previously for Pushcart, Nina Riggs Poetry Award, Orison Anthology and Best New Poets. He grew up in Cuttack and now lives in Bangalore, India. He tweets at: @satya04

Daniel Deisinger

Daniel is alive. He's usually helping seniors play bingo. His work has appeared in more than twenty publications, including *Havik*, *White Wall Review*, *Castabout Literature*, *Defenestration Magazine*, and *Ripples in Space*. His serial "Voices in My Head" is available on Amazon, as are several books. His twitter is @Danny_Deisinger, and his website is saturdaystory-Time.weebly.com.

Rita Feinstein

A graduate of Oregon State University's MFA program, Rita Feinstein is based in Washington, DC, where she teaches creative writing to kids and teens. She is the author of two poetry collections, *LIFE ON DODGE* and *EVERYTHING IS REAL*, both from Brain Mill Press, and a young adult novel forthcoming from Page Street. Her stories and poems have appeared in *Permafrost*, *Grist*, and *Willow Springs*, among other publications, and have been nominated for Best of the Net and Best New Poets. She lives with her husband, who is a lawyer, and her dog, who is not.

Dan Fliegel

Dan Fliegel lives and teaches in Chicagoland. His chapbook, *How Music Works On Us*, is forthcoming from Main Street Rag in late 2023. Poems are published in *Adirondack Review*, *African American Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *Free State Review*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, and elsewhere. He is the poetry editor for *TriQuarterly*.

James Fujinami Moore

James Fujinami Moore's debut collection is *Indecent Hours* (Four Way Books, 2022), winner of the GLCA New Writers Award in Poetry. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Barrow Street's 4x2*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Guesthouse*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *The Margins*, *the Pacifica Literary Review*, and *Prelude*. He has received fellowships from Poets House, Bread Loaf, and the Frost Place, and received his MFA from Hunter College in 2016. He lives in Los Angeles.

CL Glanzing

CL Glanzing is an international nomad, currently living in London. By day, she works in healthcare research, trying to use those ridiculous letters after her name (MA, MSc, PhD). By night, she does heritage crafts and runs an LGBTQ+ bookclub. Her work has been published in *Luna Station Quarterly*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Quarterl(ly)*, and the *Minds Shine Bright Anthology*.

Lisa Higgs

Lisa Higgs is a recipient of a 2022 Minnesota State Arts Board grant providing creative support for individual Minnesota artists. She has published three chapbooks, most recently *Earthen Bound* (Red Bird). Her reviews and interviews can be found online at the *Poetry Foundation*, *Kenyon Review*, *the Adroit Journal*, and the *Colorado Review*.

Dennis Hinrichsen

Dennis Hinrichsen's most recent work is *Flesh-plastique* from Green Linden Press, published March 2023. He has new work appearing or forthcoming in *diode*, *The Glacier*, *Leon Literary Review*, *The Pedestal* and *Timber*. He lives in Lansing, Michigan.

Mara Jebson

Mara teaches at New York University. She received her MFA from NYU and BA from Duke University. Mara holds a New York Foundation for the Arts award in poetry and her book, *The White Year* was a finalist for the Jake Adam York prize with Milkweed Editions. Mara's work can be found in the *American Poetry Review*, *Hanging Loose Press*, *jubilat*, *Sixth Finch* and in other journals. She was raised in Lome and in Philadelphia.

Abriana Jetté

Abriana Jetté is an internationally published writer and educator whose work has been featured in Best New Poets 2022, Teachers & Writers Magazine, *River Teeth*, *PLUME*, and more. In 2023, Abriana received a Finalist Award from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and her work has also been supported by the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, the Southampton Writers Conference, and more.

Letitia Jiju

Letitia Jiju has work published/forthcoming in *Passages North*, *PRISM International*, *trampset*, *Moist Poetry Journal* and elsewhere. She reads poetry for *Psalttery & Lyre*. Find her on Instagram/Twitter @eaturlettuce.

E.W.I. Johnson

E.W.I. Johnson is a poet living and working in Chicago. He grew up in West Michigan and is currently earning his MFA at Northwestern University. He has poems published or forthcoming in *Lone Mountain Literary Society*, *Snarl*, and *Sonora Review*.

Kalie Johnson

Kalie Johnson is a 25 year old living near Cleveland, Ohio working as a garden coordinator for residential foster care organizations. She has been previously published with *The Watershed Review*, *Fatal Flaws Literary Magazine*, *The Bookends Review*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *Quillkeepers Press*, *Thirteen Bridges Review*, and the *Jet Fuel Review*. When she's not writing, she enjoys traveling, hiking, and gardening! You can find her instagram at @thingsfeelwrite.

Annabel Jung

Annabel is a sophomore attending Cornerstone Collegiate Academy of Seoul in South Korea. She is a curious girl who is very interested in what happens around her, such as visual phenomena and social issues. She likes observing objects around her and expressing them, paying attention to details and depicting them in high quality. She is cultivating her artistic talents by researching and experimenting new ways of expression using visual contrast, reflection of light, and various textures. She also enjoys watching movies because the color palette of each movie is different and has unique characteristics, which often serves as an inspiration for her artwork.

Janine Kovac

Janine Kovac writes about power dynamics and women's bodies. She is the author of two memoirs, *SPINNING: Choreography for Coming Home* and *THE NUTCRAKER CHRONICLES* (forthcoming from She Writes Press in 2024). Her distinctions include: the Elizabeth George Foundation Fellowship, the San Francisco Foundation/Nomadic Press Literary Award for Nonfiction, and the Calderwood Fellowship for Journalism from MacDowell.

Ashley Kunsu

Ashley Kunsu's recent poetry appears in *Massachusetts Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Barrow Street*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. Originally from Pittsburgh, she is currently assistant professor of creative writing at Rocky Mountain College in Billings, MT, where she lives with her husband and two children. You can find her online at www.ashleykunsu.com.

Susanna Lang

Susanna Lang divides her time between Chicago and Uzès, France. Her most recent chapbook, *Like This*, is available from Unsolicited Books. Her e-chapbook, *Among Other Stones: Conversations with Yves Bonnefoy*, (Mudlark: An Electronic Journal of Poetry & Poetics) and her translation of *Baalbek* by Nohad Salameh (Atelier du Grand Tétras) were both published in 2021. Her third full-length collection of poems, *Travel Notes from the River Styx*, was published in 2017 by Terrapin Books. Her poems, translations and reviews have appeared or are forthcoming in such publications as *The Common*, *december magazine*, *Asymptote*, *American Life in Poetry*, *Rhino Reviews*, *Calyx* and *The Slowdown*. Her translations of poetry by Yves Bonnefoy include "Words in Stone" and "The Origin of Language," and she is now working with Souad Labbize and Hélène Dorion on new translations. More information available at www.susannalang.com.

Ryota Matsumoto

As an artist, designer, and architect, Ryota Matsumoto is internationally recognized as one of the progenitors of the postdigital art movement. Born in Tokyo, he was raised in Hong Kong and Japan. He received a Master of Architecture degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 2007 after his studies at the Architectural Association in London and Mackintosh School of Architecture, the Glasgow School of Art in early 90's. Matsumoto has previously collaborated with a cofounder of the Metabolist Movement, Kisho Kurokawa, and with Arata Isozaki, Peter Christopherson, and MIT Media Lab.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Matsumoto's work reflects the morphological transformations of our ever-evolving urban and ecological milieus, which could be attributed to a multitude of spatiotemporal phenomena influenced by socio-cultural constructs.

They are created as visual commentaries on speculative changes in notions of societies, cultures, and ecosystems in the transient nature of constantly shifting topography and geology.

The artworks explore the hybrid technique, combining both traditional and digital media. The adaptive agent approach allows the work to transcend the boundaries between two- and multi-dimensional domains.

Matthew Murrey

Matthew Murrey's poems have appeared widely, most recently in *Split Rock Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and *Rust + Moth*. He's an NEA Fellowship recipient, and his collection, *Bulletproof*, was published in 2019 by Jacar Press. He was a public school librarian for over twenty years and lives in Urbana, Illinois with his partner; they have two grown sons. His website is at <https://www.matthewmurrey.net/> and he is on Twitter and Instagram @mytwords.

Leah Oates

Leah Oates has a B.F.A. from the Rhode Island School of Design and a M.F.A. from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and is a Fulbright Fellow for graduate study at Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland. From 2021-2022 Oates was part of group shows in NYC at Usagi NY and Susan Eley Fine Art. From 2018 to 2020 Oates was in group shows in Toronto at The Gladstone Hotel, Gallery 1313, Propeller Gallery, Papermill Gallery, Arta Gallery and Wychwood Barns. Oates has had solo shows at Black Cat Artspace, Susan Eley Fine Art, The MTA Lightbox Project at 42nd Street, The Arsenal Gallery in Central Park, The Center for Book Arts, Real Art Ways in Connecticut and Artemisia Gallery in Chicago.

ARTIST STATEMENT

The Transitory Space series deals with urban and natural locations that are transforming due to the passage of time, altered natural conditions and a continual human imprint. This series articulates fluctuation in the photographic image and captures movements through time, perception and space.

Transitory spaces have a messy human energy that is perpetually in the present yet continually altering. They are endlessly interesting, alive places where there is a great deal of beauty and fragility. They are temporary monuments to the ephemeral nature of existence.

Pablo Otavalo

Pablo Otavalo is from Cuenca, Ecuador, and now lives and writes in Illinois. A recipient of the 2013 and 2014 Illinois Emerging Writers Competition prize, his work has appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *RHINO Poetry*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *Structo Magazine*, *No Tender Fences: An Anthology of Immigrant & First-Generation American Poetry*, *Matter*, *Levitate* among other publications. We must find what we revere in each other.

Eve Ozer

Imagination is where German born artist and poet Eve Ozer finds her groove. She created a mythical mirror twin at the age of four, she named Ila. Not willing to leave that magic behind, she continues to spin that world through a dedicated studio practice that allows her to stay in touch with that four year old muse.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Whether I am painting, writing, or cooking a good meal, I do it because it makes me feel alive.

Curiosity and conversation drive my work; curiosity allows me to be experimental, conversation weaves the work together.

In the beginning, I look for the conversation between the colors, shapes and lines, towards the end, I listen for the conversation between me and the painting.

I know when a piece is finished when the dialogue makes sense, and the composition lights me up.

Ronda Piszak Broatch

Ronda Piszak Broatch is the author of *Chaos Theory for Beginners* (MoonPath Press, 2023), and *Lake of Fallen Constellations*, (MoonPath Press). She is the recipient of an Artist Trust GAP Grant. Ronda's journal publications include *Greensboro Review*, *Blackbird*, *2River*, *Sycamore Review*, *Missouri Review*, *Palette Poetry*, and *NPR News / KUOW's All Things Considered*. She is a graduate student working toward her MFA at Pacific Lutheran University's Rainier Writing Workshop.

Heather Qin

Heather Qin (she/her) is from New Jersey. Her work has been recognized by the New York Times, Columbia College Chicago, and Hollins University, and can be found or forthcoming in *Kissing Dynamite*, *Pidgeonholes*, and *Diode*, among others. Besides writing, Heather loves classical music and reading.

Emily Rankin

Emily Rankin was born in Riverside, California and attended university in Texas, where she received a BFA in 2011. Her body of work deals with the tangles of human emotion and understanding, the intuitive messages of dreaming and subconscious exploration. Her work has appeared in such publications as *Gasher*, *Raw Art Review*, *Meat for Tea*, *Landlocked*, and *Rattle*. She's based in New Mexico. Eerankinart.com

ARTIST STATEMENT

There's something mesmerizing about tangles. Something frightening and comforting about knowing something is so completely knotted-up that it will never be undone. I've always been interested in tangles and knots, in the ways in which dreaming and wakefulness, reality and dissociation, what is felt and what is expressed, become intertwined. To that end, my work explores liminal space and the ways in which we as humans strive for connection with each other and with the tangled web of ourselves.

Amanda Roth

Amanda Roth (she/her) is a poet and folklorist living in Central Texas. Her debut poetry collection, *A Mother's Hunger*, was released in 2021. She is a poetry reader for *Longleaf Review* and co-host of the fairy tale podcast, *Retell Me*. She is published or forthcoming in *Portland Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Literary Mama*, *Five Minutes*, and elsewhere. Follow her at <https://msha.ke/amandarothpoetry>.

Wesley Sexton

Wesley holds an MFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and his work has been published in journals such as *Indiana Review*, *the Rumpus*, *Tar River Poetry Review*, and *Poetry Northwest*. He lives in Cincinnati.

Ashish Kumar Singh

Ashish Kumar Singh (he/him) is a queer poet from India with a Master's degree in English Literature. His works have appeared- or are forthcoming- in *Passages North*, *Chestnut Review*, *Fourteen Poems*, *Foglifter Press*, *Banshee* and elsewhere. Currently, he serves as an editorial assistant at *Visual Verse* and reads poetry submissions for *ANMLY*.

Sara Sowers-Wills

Sara Sowers-Wills teaches linguistics and writing at the University of Minnesota Duluth, where she writes and pursues research in cognitive linguistics, sound system development, and constructed languages. Her poems have appeared in *Pleiades*, *Interim*, and *Denver Quarterly*. She is inspired by the explosive sunrises and extreme cold in Duluth, Minnesota, where she lives with her husband and two daughters.

Sydney Vogl

Sydney Vogl currently teaches, writes and lives in San Francisco. Their chapbook, *CRYBABY!*, was chosen by Chen Chen as the winner of the 2022 Cow Creek Chapbook Prize and is forthcoming in 2023. They are also the author of the chapbook *CALIFORNIA IS GOING TO HELL* (Nov 2021, perhappened press) and the winner of the 2021 Jane Underwood Poetry Prize and the 2020 AWP Intro Journals Project. Their work can be found in *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Hobart*, *Honey Literary*, *Booth* and more.

Elinor Ann Walker

Elinor Ann Walker's recent poetry, flash fiction, and creative non-fiction are featured or forthcoming in *Bracken*, *Cherry Tree*, *Feral*, *Gone Lawn*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Plume*, *Ruby*, *The Southern Review*, *Whale Road Review*, and elsewhere. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, lives with her husband and two dogs near the mountains, and prefers to write outside. Find her online at <https://elinorannwalker.com>

Andrew Wells

Andrew Wells is the author of two chapbooks, *SEALED* (Hesterglock, 2020) and *Menacing Sense* (Osmanthus, 2021) and a co-editor of *HVTN Press*. His work has appeared in *SAND Journal*, *The London Magazine*, *Poetry Wales*, *Amberflora*, *The Scores*, *Fanzine*, and others. He is an MFA candidate at Columbia University.

Erin Wilson

Erin Wilson's poems have recently appeared in *Vallum magazine*, *Tar River Poetry*, *The Shore*, *Verse Daily* and *January Review*. Her first collection is *At Home with Disquiet*; her second, *Blue*, is about depression, grief and the transformative power of art. She lives in a small town on Robinson-Huron Treaty Territory in Northern Ontario, Canada, the traditional lands of the Anishinawbek.

Jeremy T. Wilson

Jeremy T. Wilson is the author of the short story collection *Adult Teeth* (Tortoise Books). He is a former winner of the Chicago Tribune's Nelson Algren Award for short fiction and has been named one of 30 Writers to Watch by the Guild Literary Complex. His work has appeared in *The Carolina Quarterly*, *The Florida Review*, *The Masters Review*, *Sonora Review*, *Third Coast*, *The Best Small Fictions 2020*, and other publications. He teaches creative writing at The Chicago High School for the Arts. His debut novel *The Quail Who Wears the Shirt* is forthcoming in the fall of 2023.

Marina Hope Wilson

Marina Hope Wilson's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in journals such as *The Massachusetts Review*, *Horse Less Review*, *Mulberry Literary*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *The Racket*, and *\$*. Her chapbook, *Nighttime*, was a finalist in the Black Lawrence Press Spring 2022 Black River Chapbook Competition. Marina lives in San Francisco with her husband, stepdaughter, and two cats, and makes her living as a speech-language therapist.

David Wojciechowski

David Wojciechowski is the author of *Dreams I Never Told You & Letters I Never Sent* (Gold Wake, 2017) and the chapbook *Koniec (End)* (Greying Ghost, 2023). His poems can be found in *Bateau*, *Bending Genres*, *HAD*, *Meridian*, *Sporklet*, and elsewhere. David works as an adjunct instructor and freelance graphic designer, and he's the host of the David Has Zoom Pro for a Few Months Reading Series. David can be found at davidwojo.com and @MrWojoRising.

Jules Wood

Jules Wood is a queer poet, performance artist, and teacher living in Chicago. She is currently in her third year at the Program for Writers English PhD program at UIC and holds an MFA in poetry from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her poetry has appeared in *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Lana Turner Journal*, and *Nat. Brut*, among other journals.

Esther Yeon

Esther Yeon is a current junior attending Seoul Foreign School in Seoul, Korea. Many of her projects focus on personal experiences and ideas and are interpreted as artworks in various forms and shapes. Her artwork, "Hands of Diversity" has been published in the *Adroit Journal* in 2020.

Richie Zaborowske

Richie Zaborowske is a dad, librarian, and author from the Midwest. He puts a contemporary twist on traditional library offerings; his monthly Short Story Night packs the local brewery and features trivia, comedy, and author interviews. His writing appears in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *HAD*, *X-R-A-Y Lit*, *Identity Theory*, and others.

Ellen Zhang

Ellen Zhang is a student at Harvard Medical School who has studied under Pulitzer Prize winner Jorie Graham, poet Rosebud Ben-Oni, and poet Josh Bell. She has been recognized by the 2022 DeBakey Poetry Prize, 2022 Dibase Poetry Contest, and as 2019 National Student Poet Semifinalist. Her works appear or are forthcoming in *Rappahannock Review*, *COUNTERCLOCK Journal*, *Hekton International*, and elsewhere. She can be found on instagram @ln.writes

BJ Zhou

BJ is a poet located in the East Coast. They enjoy filmmaking, hiking, and the work of Paul Celan and Wong Kar-Wai.

Jane Zwart

Jane Zwart teaches at Calvin University, where she also co-directs the Calvin Center for Faith & Writing. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, *Threepenny Review*, *TriQuarterly*, and *Ploughshares*, as well as other poetry journals and magazines. Along with Timothy Liu, she serves as a reviews editor for *Plume*.

Jet Fuel Review Spring 2023 Staff



left to right

Row 1:

Samuel McFerron, Jovaughn Williams, Lauren Lotarski, Selena Tomas

Row 2:

Alyssa Khuffash, Haley Leon, Alexandra Martinez, Harper Saglier

Row 3:

Dr Jackie K. White, Dr. Simone Muench, Patricia Damocles,
Andrea Yvette Rodriguez, Stephanie Karas



