

Jet Fuel Review

Fall 2022 / Issue 24





JET FUEL Review

A High Octane Literary Journal

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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 Fall 2022
guest readers and consultants!



From top left clockwise: Andrea Yvette
Rodriguez, Patricia Damocles, Stephanie
Karas & Dr. Jackie K. White

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Foreword

Dear Reader,

Welcome to Issue 24 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. This semester *Jet Fuel Review* was awarded its fourth Pinnacle Award for 1st place in the “Best Literary Magazine” category by the College Media Association. 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. This issue features the most artwork *Jet Fuel Review* has ever published. Examples of this eye-captivating work can be seen on this issue’s front and back covers, featuring artist Ursula Sokolowska’s works titled *Self Portrait 143* and *Self Portrait 106*, respectively. Sokolowska uses film and digital camera formats to create unique self-portraits that speak to the complexity of human existence by challenging viewers to see what is beyond the physical body of the subject.

The poetry section of this issue highlights an expansive and engaging set of voices, such as the work of Will Cordeiro, who is an Able Muse Book Award winner, Portuguese-American award-winning writer Millicent Borges Accardi, and Konstantin Kulakov, whose work highlights their experiences with being born in Zaoksky, Soviet Union. The fiction section features a variety of stories that showcase the hidden struggles that many face over the course of their lifetime, including the arresting piece by Hannah Harlow, titled “The Migraine.” This piece takes readers through a provoking journey that highlights the silent battles that chronic migraine sufferers fight each day. Through elegant and compelling diction, Harlow reminds us that not every condition is recognizable to others. In addition to the artwork created by our front and back cover artist, Ursula Sokolowska, our art section showcases dynamic pieces by Harryette Mullen and Irina Greciuhina, who both make powerful statements about our contemporary moment through lustrous colors and striking juxtapositions. *Jet Fuel Review* also features the work of Jezzelle Kellam, a graphite artist from England whose pieces evoke an emotional understanding of the human body, and Mark Yale Harris, an award-winning sculptor, who creates work from serpentine, limestone, and steel. These are just a few of the many amazing authors 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 24th issue, and we hope that you appreciate the works that make up this issue as much as we do.

Read on!

Alexciana Castaneda & the *Jet Fuel Review* Editors



POETRY

Creation Story

My phone chimes to remind me:
be present, so I wash last night's dishes
attentively at six-thirty this morning.
Hot water steams the window view
of light beginning to occupy the maple.
Or permeate. Gold. Or suffuse. Locate
waning moon—see that rose
to indigo spectrum?
It's that planetary feeling:
quirk of conscious matter in time
a Mayfly sees one sunrise Drew
turned fourteen broke his arm & died
of sarcoma in two orbits
inside everything exploding
between big bang and flat pool of entropy
cells cluster stars in a vastation
expansion out of control.

Some god
could be middle-aged staring at the swirl
in the aquarium he filled yesterday
maybe waiting for a tinder swipe
trying not to start drinking yet nope
it's barely light out see?
How quickly *presence* slips away?
I'm off in speculation and being
distracted I take my plate grip
for granted and it slides—
white ceramic floral pattern dives flat
don't tell me time isn't bendy
because it feels like an hour watching it
fall. I think of all the things I'm breaking
decorum speed limits vows then
it hits the tile and clanks.
It just clanks and bounces and
wobbles wa-wa-waaa to rest
intact on the floor. Hashtag blessed.
I don't know how it didn't
break. Chemicals wash my insides
I feel a sudden clean and close my eyes
arms wide face the sky in relief
of fate avoided

but then there's Drew
in my mind the night before they amputated
his arm biking one last time
down the steep highway
toward the river.
I pick up the plate
drop it again
and this time it shatters
into a brand new universe.

Woman Who Reads

They say she came from a family of moderate means. Sickness caught her in infancy when she stopped listening to the birds and her family cooing. Her scribe father translated for nobility. Instead of investing in cattle for marriage, they taught her to read and write many languages—better than most men. Perhaps they thought this would ensure her survival and let people see what they saw, that she wasn't dumb. But after her parents died, she still ended up here like the rest of us. That's what they say anyway. She practices her Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin—stick in sand. Sometimes, she tries to teach us, but we lack her smarts.

Fighter

They warn; don't tick her off if you value your life. Red firey locks. Her major muscles upon muscles are stronger than most men. Easily provoked but not easily subdued. Strikes or spits on those who stare, smirking, saying something smug, smuggled softly or sharply. Glad she stays on our side, as long as she's not mad at us. They say she had her baby taken from her, deemed unfit in her condition. Was she too weak after labor to fight back? I wonder if her strength came from being a mother or just from being a woman. I bet it broke her when they ripped her baby away right after she gave birth. I wonder if the father even knew to care; if they even let her hold the baby.

Sadness

Many despise him, even among our flock. His father was a tax collector, a traitor to his people—trading their sparse savings for pounding poverty. Some assume his mother was of Roman birth by his sharp nose and chiseled chin, despising him even more—never glancing his direction. But I say, he did not choose his parents. A grandpa in a 7-year-old boy's body. Came soon after Happiness did. They're still inseparable. His short, dirt greying tunic is more or less intact, on the verge of becoming nothingness. Sadness may be small and meek with his peppery hair and beard, but is as sharp as any street merchant. Happiness carries him on his shoulders but respects him like an older brother. Sickly, Sadness was always the first of us to lay ill and the last of us to recover. We presume this was why he was left here and are amazed that he still is alive. I think he could live anywhere, but I guess his family, his people (whoever they were or are), disagreed.

Ruptures

Begin with the end:

my body
carries you still, like a reliquary
holds death skin to skin, cradles
everything

built of bones. Another
end where insides

spill onto a lap:
the twist of rib cage, a pelvis
flexed to concavity. Spineless,
sand gathers into hills,

into bellies
that line ocean floors & cover
themselves with seagrass tongues.
Taste salt.

Blood. An octopus will beat
herself against rocks, consume
her own tentacles after

birth. This feels
familiar: to become consumable, a body
in violent

decline. A reliquary knows
the unreliability of soft tissue, a matter
of decomposition time.

Begin
in the architecture of a wound like that
of a shrine, of shelter:

fleeting.

Self-Portrait as Laser Interferometer Space Antenna (LISA)

with language from lisa.nasa.gov

In space, LISA can avoid the noise of Earth
and access distant regions of the spectrum,
listening for gravitational waves with every

instrument in her three-bodied self.
She tends to remember the nitty-gritty
details of each of those bodies—from

which bread they like best to the last location
of the most beloved lovey. She'll marshal
the three spacecraft separated by millions

of miles, which fly in the Earth's wake
as it orbits the Sun. They'll all get
to the right place at the right time,

as long as she provides the right mix of fuel
(fruit snacks, apples, light beer, salsa)
and rest. She can conjure up waffles

when the bread's gone moldy.
This equilateral triangle of spacecraft
has three "arms" that extend to detect

ripples of violence from eons ago.
With her extremely long arms, LISA
can hold herself still. The digital thread

connecting them pulses with data,
coding a family out of three integers.
She requires the precision of picometers,

can note a shift in space-time less than
the diameter of a helium nucleus
over a million miles away. Just ask her

what that muscle twitch in the starboard
face of one spacecraft means. She's got
an ear adapted to hear the roar from

two stars merging as they pass too close
to a black hole, maybe even the whisper of
quantum fluctuations in the early universe.

LISA's in a customized package
optimized for spaceflight. Her lasers
must operate for generations

in the harsh environment of space,
the acidic dark of near-vacuum.
She'll push past the stiffness in her joints,

chilled in the disinterested deep-freeze.
She will ride the gravitational waves,
measure the level of imperfection

as the delicate gold instruments
in the safe cavity of her interior
free-fall. With her help, we'll

be able to detect ancient distortions
in the stretchy fabric of space-time
from disasters we won't ever witness.

Space Pastoral

This is Friendship Seven. I'll try to describe what I'm in here.
I am in a big mass of some very small particles, that are brilliantly
lit up like they're luminescent. I never saw anything like it.

—John Glenn

If the prairie is thermosphere, fireflies
are frost sloughing off a metal capsule
that streaked from Florida into orbit,
heated then chilled then heated in sunrise
and -set sped up. The snowflakes luminesce.
They star-shower. They fail to seek a mate,
bound to the speed of falling, orbital
mechanics. In another life I hiked
through them in dusk, beetles tessellating
the fields, extinct stars brighter in the lack
of atmosphere. I mooned over a flirt
light years away. Ugh, I carried a torch,
for god's sake. I longed for something
simpler, the plasma fireball, re-entry.

Buffalo Skull

Snot-yellow & flaky as any wasp's nest,
sockets snuffed out, brain gulch rinsed
until its hollow bone's just brittle paper.

Sand-grains in its muzzle rattle with a thistle.
A dust-up mustered in a quashed-off sketch
the winds blast. You were the last sad prince

of a vast civilization when the sun-torched heart
-land tremored with snorting shadows & thunder
decentered across an endless pasture of tickseeds

& asters, only to be pitched athwart parched
meadows—mudholes hard winters disaffect.
A splintery quill, a relic from an age gone by.

Glaciation

Mastodons rot below us. Neanderthals
thaw out as gases leak from permafrost
and drunken trees burble into sinkholes,
exposing bones and karst. Fabled giants
will walk again—meander in a slow burn.

Yes, lost creatures have begun to resurrect.
New ones are evolving, lumbering toward us.
The earth is murmuring. Maybe I'm the missing
link. Listen. A thin ice bursts. They're coming.

Their far-off footsteps are my own heartbeat.

“Nature invented bodies so water could party”

— *for Andrew Smith*
1980-2021

“Nature invented bodies so water could party”
but this week it won’t stop raining. I refuse

to close windows it’s so cool
for late June and everything is damp,

encourages mycology, curiosity as the world
spores into space, but this humidity situates

into a cloud forest memory of paper
on the verge of hosting mold, skin and eyes

never dry, treetops outside my window
catching drops and letting go. Precipitation

is a cycle. You died a month ago, left
the party right when it was getting good

or at least interesting again, your body
sent to fire, evaporation of temporal

host. Disintegration. When nothing makes
sense I revisit the hope that at least we got

a new interstitial guide. I want us to meet
again at the lunar teahouse in a different

dimension, hit the intergalactic stripclub
afterwards, but first we must sip enriched tea,

enhance whatever vehicle we’re occupying, catch
up and rave together like days past that will never

happen again. Eventually everything — impulse,
inebriation, our time together — wears off.

Until then I fling open windows, take
rainwalks with no umbrella, let the wet fabric

of this moment saturate clothes and hair
so that when I make it home, water is ready

to go: I crank the music of you so loud
that I can't hear loaded complaints

from neighbors, knees, time's passage, grief.
Is this how we are to party now?

Ash and Ember

Some time around Christmas I got a rash on my eyelid,
saw the dermatologist right after Valentine's Day. Those

made me want a red eyeshadow, reclaim infected shade.
is not my forte but I have learned which friends to ask.

arrived one week later: "Ash and Ember" brand in a hue named
I opened the package, used fingers to smear it on healing lids.

a wand. Wanting. What is it about a wound that
Ash and Ember:

I have been burned and staple-grafted back together.
it was mostly hand, not face. Forehead just a touch singed,

by next season. Ash and Ember: return to carbon.
another tool in my beauty kit, still using a stick

to India: wax and ash. Return. The compost into which
makes stories grow. Myths that die like flowers

finally
six weeks

Makeup
A cardboard box

Viscera.
As if

draws us in?
[OPEN OPEN OPEN]

How lucky
hair grew back

Kohl eyeliner
from that last trip

we plant ourselves
a whole field of them.

Serpents' Bush

Serpenbatus

Serpents' bush is an aromatic shrub that grows well at the edge of cultivated lands. The bark of the tender branches has an astringent quality; taken as a drink twice a day (with a sharp wine) it is good for dysentery, and is used for perfume due its arresting smell. If left unpruned however, the widening branches will weave themselves around larger trees or even homes. Those within begin to speak only in whispers, their words given up to the winding, while the dark green leaves grow heavy, feeding on the hush. In time, the people learn to confine themselves, to minimize their motions and avoid the slight cries of floorboards, the friction of pencils. Finally, the figures become still, and spend their days listening to the only sound that remains, the wind slipping through the structure. A gentle hand that re-arranges continually, but is never content. A low voice that to those within is both pleasure and suffering.

cleek

begin with hook, bent glance in afternoon shade, the heat
already living in the spine of structure. blade. one terrible
rush from the sharpest point. I can't help but picture the
bend of your fingers, your clenched hand hooking my hair.
when you live inside the blur, the consistent and enclosed
space that feels so much like a footnote, it's easy to slip
through your fingers. you missed me. there. fastened in but
living in the margin.

satori

what if we considered the blackbird more carefully, her circular, barreling body, her yellow eye-ring and beak, her territorial threat displays, her fledglings' pink throats that blend into the softest orange at their pointed beaks. but it's the male who sings loudly in the spring, calling in the evening to secure his roost. I understand now how the puddles formed. snow melt and frozen saliva. winter and the horizontal salvation we worried and worried and worried about. the icy field, the bird's early song, our mouths open to the dawn's light.

danger, spring, sediment

i.

category: iron
that stained rock
red. moments
you are missing
are moments
I conjure you
shrouded in crimson
daylight plucking darkness
away
only to return with
flecks of bronze
& fluorite
veins that crack open
when we shift
to another category

ii.

sister of my dreams
i thought you'd be here
where

you are a ghost
& field of Columbine
& a wolf who has waited
too long to hunt

iii.

nestled in
wild pomegranate mouth
deliver, deliver
we peel away
the burn
the paper
the scar
the word we won't speak
in the darkness of coldsnap

Pickup Line Gone Awry

your coffee spill & tobacco tarmac smile / let me taste how you live //

my dentist scrapes polka dots onto incisors / her x-rays uncover darkness abloom in unexpected places //

I have not misplaced my gums / those germ reservoirs //

(she whispers) / bleed them dry / (she commands) / my emergent jawbones / ivory economy / her lip-quivering joy / her leather stool's pneumatic rapture / my sweet molasses spit //

you can choose whether to sip / on the first date //

plaque is a thief with forethought / (she warns) / my arteries / my liver / it coagulates in quiet corners //

now is not the time for science //

I swallow bottles of mouthwash weekly in paranoia / it's not paranoia / (she assures) / a pinky vivisection / let light inside / find the pale recalcitrant halos / (she threatens) / or prove I'm a collection of good ones / in need of polish //

I was saving that line for you //

(for you)

Think It the Pleasantest Thing

*How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!*

—Robert Louis Stevenson

If you find yourself in a chair swing
made of planks and pushed from behind
by a nine-year-old boy in the doldrums between
the end of summer and the beginning of school—

try to forget about sirens rising and falling
in their approach through the hills of your stomach
—in that nausea of what's already urgent and only likely
to get worse —

Try to remember your mother's percale sheets
wind-billowing from her clothesline; her
diaphanous curtains breathing at an open
window. Resist imagining your head

malformed between concrete blocks or under
the dead weight of a rodeo bull leaning on his own
skull. It's opportunity missed even pinching the skin
over the bridge of your nose or drilling

your fingers under your hair clear to your medulla
oblongata. Imagine instead the amber waves of bourbon
swirled in a glass, the banked curve of a skirt hem swiveling
from hips. Let your movement

hypnotize the leaves on the nearby lilac
like a cobra weaving before a mouse — then swallow
the sun feet first and let your own peristalsis work it back
through your vestibules to your open mouth

and again up to the bottoms of your feet. Be yourself
the hands and the measure of butcher's twine
that becomes Cat's Cradle, with their shared swoop
and gather. Be the hammock the cradle

the echo the womb. And when the boy drifts away
into his own equilibrium, become the whistle
spun 'round his finger by its chain
and slid freefall into his pocket.

No Vacancy

Lila's mother laundered bed sheets maybe
once in spring and once in fall. So when, after
popcorn and toasted-cheese sandwiches,
you two girls giggled into that small bed,
you drew over yourselves the redolence
of warm bodies, the burr of rumpled laughter
and frayed wool sweaters with holes at the elbows.

You nestled into a gamy, welcome
welcome.

Your mother washed your sheets
once a week at least. That may be how
tonight and on the road, you know
more than you think you know. If I say,
Someone's been sleeping in my bed,
it's not what you might think — not
some fair-haired fairy story and surely not
the smear you find on your own burgundy sheets
when your lover welcomes you home
from that all-girls' weekend in Detroit. In fact,

it's nothing you'll likely see — no
make-up smudge, no hair too long, too
dark. You might think soap, but it's nothing
bottled, dabbed or rinsed. As aroma, it's more
the difference of his late rising
and your early. The difference
between a Chevy
and a Ford. Between breathing
the russet feather from a red-tailed hawk, and then
a wild turkey's bronze wing.

There it is.

And so tonight, before you've barely
turned the cover down, how
something of these unfamiliar sheets rankles solitude
and closes on your throat. Says
Withdraw your hand. Says
No vacancy. Who lay in these sheets last
may know where those young girls went
but will not let you follow. May know why

you no longer forage in your dreams
but will not say. How tonight
 if I could say salt, you might think sweat.
 If I could say rust, you might think
 iron in the blood. And really

that may come as close to it as anything.

Circuits

After noon. On a some
day June in a recovery room.

Move father. You aren't
stained in glass yet. Run

child. You are not hard-
wired to breakers. They are

only baffled by your circuitries.
The knobs that won't budge

and the shorts in the extension
cords that reveal us all in darkness.

Pinch the fuse and you can still
escape the inkblot's translation,

but don't be afraid of the electric
chair. Say they're stars.

Memoir's of a skip-tracer.
Or the ghost's of traffic jams

from when you'd bend back
power lines so the recoil

might unplug you.

Pic of us at Rockaway

We stand next to winter
waves to memorize their roar,
small stones in the blue
dreaming themselves backwards.

I want to say a deity dwelled
in that mine of churning stone,
that we could smell hooves
and hair in the mineral and
bitumen brine, taste the sweat
of winter sun.

I want to say in November
the Atlantic's lip was indigo,
but it was colder than indigo.
Gray of uncrushed granite
when we took deep breaths
and lunged into the dying god's
luminescent mind.

Prototype for the eruption of melancholy

– taken from an interview with Adam Purple about his
Garden of Eden, formerly on Manhattan's Lower East Side,
demolished in 1986

formed bed widths
and lengths equal

to a rake's handle;
surplus whole bricks

sold for 25¢ each;
generated potash

from unpainted
burnt wood; with a bike,

carried back carriage-
horse manure, filling

concentric broken-
circle beds, flowering

Euclidean of stone;
sifted rubble

for the gravel wheel of paths,

salvaged galvanized
sheet metal;

for gaps: sand–

dragged mattress springs back

for a Connecticut dry stone
wall, curling non-enclosure –

then,

sweet alyssum

walking sticks, praying
mantises, snakes, brown

thrushes, bees in black

walnut, purple basil below
a Chinese Empress

sharing a spoke near
the center of a labyrinth

on the Lower East Side,

Green Ash opening

in leaves that wheel,
spin. again,

POEM FOR THAT CRAZY BASEMENT

Eerie, the host's hushed third-floor mirrored hall. Room after room, wall-lined Brazilian Rosewood-windowed cabinetry, lit within: ornate candelabra, outsized inlaid service trays, chubby cherubs circling silver ice pails. I roamed rooms for a grand tureen the host's wife insisted as centerpiece, that my mother's lobster bisque, prepared for one hundred twenty, would fill. The first course.

Out of our basement came Angie's catering business. Word of mouth lured the northwest suburban mansions to her calendar, double-booking every weekend, day events, evening affairs, three seasons until unfailing arctic cold felled the city again. Still she booked favorites.

Often we returned the following day, the retrieval of banquet prep tables, commercial-sized coffee makers, specialty knives, tools her alternating staff exhaustedly left behind. And always, down a manicured hill's lawn edge lay a mammoth haphazard garbage heap. Heavy-duty garbage bags pecked and plucked wide open. Unrecognizable foodstuffs tumbled out atop the green expanse. Incorruptible handsome ravens. Partaking of easy bounty.

The party event menus themselves took on rousing personalities. Clientele envisioned Angie a nourishing servant. Zeal glistened like hot pig fat on their faces. Paraded through homes, she was shown luxurious crooks and expanses. If some exotic object were cracked, broken, quite valuable otherwise, often it would be offered, and she took. Random rooms frequently kept exactly square, alabaster, utterly empty. Angie adored this.

No reason why, only she felt calm.
I may be wrong. I find I'm wrong more and more often.
Nothing to covet. No wish too heady. But Angie.
In a boxy vacant room by herself with nothing—
burlesque-worthy, I have to figure. What of it.
Never was one day with my mother
in good conversation.
I was assured those rooms had no windows.
Barely doors.
I listen to fable.

*Once there was a jet-winged bird
who gained a window where there*

was not one. It could tilt a polished eye with
unfettered regard through ivy-framed glass.

Like a most beneficent guided missile
unsubtle and accurate, its beak so much more
than capable.

I bank on that raven
in its hurtling descent, wings tucked tightly in, then
the instinct instantly to outstretch utterly
and break.

Spearing Sturgeon by Torchlight

On my run, I nearly trip over a dead raccoon. I open my notes app & type, “her clouded eye.” I type, “in the poem call it a fox instead.” The neighborhood dogs haven’t found it yet. This patch of skunk cabbage. Half-crushed Bud Light cans; purple beaks; lean, brackish grass. Four legs point to a gathering storm. The lifeguard whistles children out of a swimming pool. A tug with a rust red barge churns down the East River. I watch a leaf spiral in an updraft. I watch currents braid & unbraid thick green water. I watch a hawk outfly the rain, just. Then, rain. I think: beech, alder, ash. I’m sitting in a window in a teal & white seersucker robe, waiting for an answer.

///

Estuarine. Boneless. Armored. At dawn, men in ball caps cast lines over the railing.

I thought the dog was going to drown when she jumped off the paddleboard & my sister wouldn’t let go of the leash. I thought I was going to die in the golf cart with her laughing at the wheel—hurling us over the bluff like Thelma & Louise. Sea lavender sways with the tides. I watch meteors from the dark belly of the green. In the morning, we take down the lights. Fold up the tables. Toss red & white checked cloths in the washing machine. We stack Fallen Soldiers in milk crates & carry them to the maintenance shed.

Her home is on the mainland now. But she’s also here, shucking oysters under this chestnut.

///

In the x-ray, mycelium maps a dying tree.

I think: copper to raise daffodils, foxglove to still a heart.

///

I drive back over the river. Someone hit a fox. A raven unspools the ribbon from its abdomen. A 25-foot inflatable duck bobs in the bay. One of the abandoned houseboats drifts closer to the island. Some pennies are bad like that.

///

I tell her I like the fire ring. The slate sink. The beams in her kitchen, stained with tea & ink.

///

Crow eats the peanut then cleans its beak on the deck rail. I check to see if my neighbor is watching. The rosemary is starting to yellow. I Google “rosemary yellowing.” On my walk, I collect mulberries in an empty coffee cup, smuggle somebody else’s blackberries home in my t-shirt. We head north next month. I’d like to bring her something. This fruit won’t keep. Fireflies aren’t here yet. Vultures are still molting in the hemlock. I find a bird’s skull the size of an almond under the dogwood and decide to keep it.

They were nice bees, the couple recalls, we liked having them in our shower

1.

Shadows holler outside my bedroom window. I tip-toe down. Open the storm door as quietly as possible. Three crows scold a kestrel off the lawn.

Eclipse, eclipse, eclipse, sun ...

I take some photos, mostly of the neighbor's fence which, subsequently, I delete.

Here's what's on the table:

A deer's antler with an ink-smudged tine; a bowl of oranges; my grandmother's brass candle sticks; cedar in an abalone shell; spruce boughs laid upside down.

2.

Locals want to know. Doves or racing pigeons?

Red plastic rings bind them to nothing. Up there will-o'-the-wisp. Up there bridal bouquet. Who loosed you like a squall of rice.

If it were possible, I would lure you down with corn.

Here is the secret: *let them watch you crack it.*

No chance. Not a chance. The neighborhood Red-tail is on the hunt.

3.

I open a book on symbology & look up "snake."

4.

Have you heard of living ink?

One day we will print our homes with it. Bacteria will glue us all neatly into one body. Honey flowing through the walls.

They came in through a knothole. All 80,000 of them, a single point of light.

5.

I read an article about star stones / fairy coins / sea lilies.

Another way to end the day is:
owls are calling to each other through rain-slick wood.

Morning will break my greedy heart, Turtle Dove.

Who would fall for cracked corn. That's not how the story goes.

6.

These are just words. Start with one word. Hollow.

Say, *it has a nice ring to it*. Hollow & ringing. Ah, it's about trees. Countless & lost. A blackened stump. Forest under the forest. Goldthread & trout lily. Once, we found a yellow lady's slipper. I double-dare you. She plugs her nose & jumps off feldspar specked granite. Treasure, Fortune, Mystery, or Christmas.

The lake is thick with algae. We can't swim here anymore. Tell them to get out of the water. In the photograph I'm wearing a too small sky-blue bikini. I pick tiny white flowers. Perhaps it is a starflower *by flower, hour by hour*.

7.

One summer, I rode a mare into the sea.

When the hills show their ribs I think, the salted round of her.

8.

I run through the chlorinated weather of the wastewater treatment facility. Doves are preening on the telephone wire.

Go to sleep. Hush! Hush! The bees are in for winter.

Too bright, one jigs. *Too cold*, strums the other.

I like to think the doe is happy, that the sun warms her neck the way it does in the north, like it's always morning

We take the same route every day with our Arizona Iced Teas / jumping into the ditch whenever a truck tears by / setting off plumes of flying grasshoppers with our flip-flops / honking our arms like idiots until the trucks honk back. Daisies & Queen Anne's lace crown empty dew-soaked soft packs & broken bottles.

///

The dog finds it first. A silver-blue fist, purpling in the sun. There is no chalk outline. No red tire marks—

as if body parts just up & wander away from home.

The heart shimmers in the heat, in the wildflowers, still as an unset stone.

///

I've heard time of death is recorded when a heart stops. I've heard a heart can beat for weeks after an animal has died, given the right conditions. I've heard the heart of a doe is nearly identical in size to a woman's. If I could hold a woman's heart in my hands it would be yours. I hide your heart in the left breast pocket of my denim jacket.

I overhear them talking about it on the police scanner. Volunteers dredge the west branch of the river, find only mercury, rusted chain, long-lost timber. Men take dogs deep into the woods to inspect under the burnt floorboards of the hermit's camp.

You lie in the tall grass behind a patch of black-eyed Susans, your left leg obtuse against a rusted-out powder blue VW Bug. Butterflies court in the goldenrod growing up through the floor. When I'm close enough to smell the beetles in your hair, I unbutton your unicorn print blouse with my teeth, & with my fingertips, gently press the heart back in.

report card pick-up, 1987

he passed down his work ethic

so I can be better than

not break my back like

him

sorry... but

my back is broken

~o~

no llames enfremo

no llegues tarde

tragarse su orgullo

no te queje

no somos débil

mi trabajo es cuidarte

come porque no se sabe si la revolución viene mañana

but sustenance wasn't about communism
if what was afforded today was here / there

tomorrow the meaning of a grain of rice
left on a plate

was to eat was not to waste was
that he knew a mouth without

Baptism by Fire

Foolhardy, they removed me from the water.

Somehow branches, somehow vines.

Although I do not recall the sun,

I heard a jackal and something shined.

Caw, caw, the birds overhead; *caw, caw*, the whole world a Christening.

Neon lightning.

I need to return to learn the word *no*.

I spend my formative years looking for synonyms but find none.

So many searches — look at the thistle on my skin, look at the bone breaks —

unfruitful. Lost one

self along the way, gained others; a Matryoshka doll.

I became what was to become.

Moon bait. Honeysuckle shoot.

Woman, yellow and sky bitten.

Glass Tuning Fork

Started by a line in "Saguaro," Eduardo C. Corral

It's a game this wanting
you to be wrong, like winding
up for a hard-hitting back hand,
almost too easy the placement
of the challenge backs up to
the corner of the room, and, no,
this is not a poem. This is about
keeping one's word, about lessening
the meaning of crying "Not wolf"
but coyote as the animal barrels
into the canyon air, in one fell
howl that says hunger and means
No, forever No. This is not how
I want to be trying, This is how
I want to be moving on and opening
up to that great missive I inside
the sky of you, where change
is possible, even when I know otherwise,
where Ventura Blvd turns
into dirt Mulholland and makes a fork
in the road, bending like a musical
note finding its range, a tone that we have
to match to turn, to meet, to when
we want to join in on the chord
together, us, alone and fat inside
the note, on pitch when we
want to be and on time with
the key signature that tells us
clearly what sharps and flats are
meant to be and what survival
is all about before we sing it.

Jenna

One year in The Life
and Pimp Mike takes a few
of us girls to the beach to
celebrate. We don't have
suits, so we wear our bras
and panties. I keep looking
for signs. The gull on the
boardwalk looks straight
at me, turns away. The sand
goes silent a million miles,
out to the Atlantic that goes
a million more. We trudge
over dunes stuck with long,
dry grass. Mike just picks
a spot, tells us to sit. Froth
caps the waves. I wade in,
looking for signs. The waves
roll over, break, withdraw.
The sun slides back behind
a cloud. When I get out, you
can see through. Mike wants
it for free. The girls hop up
for a walk down the beach,
not looking back, not wanting
to check. I want to laugh
hysterically, go to sleep. I kneel,
bend my head, wait for signs.
Nowhere do we have cream,
a radio, chips. I could get
burned. I could grow lost or
hungry. Late tonight, I'll
think of Mike's hand,
gentle on my neck.

Family

Pimp Mike tells us girls
again we're like a close family. I think we're more like
a band of secrets that relates by mere proximity, a hostel that takes
care of each other like
unsolvable problems. We drown out the whispers, the crying,
like a stone wall blocks the sea wind, a wall left with slits and dings
and hollows. With barbs,
we slice each other's hearts: the Greeks called it sarcasm,
a tearing of the flesh. We say it's to keep us all tough, a boon to our
business, but some of us
secretly like to give or receive pain, what we learned early.
I'm Angela, the white rock, the bright-hard queen, Pimp Mike's most
righteous hand. I send
the youngest of us out into the night to find new caves to mine.
Because why not? Why should she be exempt from the work most wet,
most dark, most deep? I've
done it all my life, exiling Christy—my sister, myself—from
home. And when she comes back that first night, there's no power like
mine, her cash limp in my
hand, and I imagine I can taste the salt on her thighs, her cheeks.

not fragile like rice paper, fragile like shrapnel

*she was not fragile like a flower; she
was fragile like a bomb. -Rahul Singh*

the axe head's weight
tugs at the handle.

your firm grip
loosens off his shoulders

letting breath exit
from a balloon's neck: a quick rush

& wood splits in two
halves which can no longer

secure him to your chest.
distance becomes an orbit

while air fluctuates.
thoughts spittle like two birds

falling, the splinters, wet
with sap. the bond, a proposal

reminiscing & drifting.
our vows now two fractions.

an inhale incubates
eggshells & infringement.

between sheets

your hospital bed
took you

into its arms
and taught you

about caskets

I don't want to lose the thread

We don't talk the whole way back in my friend's white truck
because I've forgotten how to talk.
I'm holding my breath like a fish spilled from its bowl.
I can't breathe in a vehicle in motion.
How can you talk over all that noise,
when that's what we all are: furious engines
following the blurred thread of the future.
When the car slides into a snowbank,
a dark silhouette appears,
an old man up at the crack of dawn —
the serendipity of those hardened eyes
and a shovel to dig us out.
At night, I follow the trail of stars.
I want to fuse myself to the future,
forget these names, these harrowed paths,
footsteps in the snow where I keep slipping.
Poring over books at night,
my eyes slide down the page.
Words waver and drift. I confuse *life*
with *leave*, *word* with the whole *world*.

A game of reductions

Outside, I never wear a coat.
My backpack hangs off one shoulder.
I never remember waking, just the daily
descent down the creaking stairs.
I'm *not* learning to sneak, just to never
make a sound. I walk on the outside
of my feet, each step curled inward.
I keep only the essential until the essential folds.
My mother wakes early to give me food and drink.
Her hands are overflowing.
Let me never be as tired
as my mother in her nightgown,
a lamppost fading in the early dawn.
Let me never be ashamed as I am now.
Let me be like my fingers uncovered in winter.
At school the teacher reads a poem
about leaves fused to a frozen lake,
delicate ribs cased in frost.
She lets us see each leaf.

STILL DURING THE RUSSIAN INVASION

My body kills all day.
Its cells. Swallowed parasites.
My body aborts all on its own.
The waste. Unfertilized eggs.
My baby. It didn't need any help.
My body gets out of bed.
An elegy. A sky knifed in the peach pit.
My elegy holds around my neck.
Has fallen off its bicycle.
Continues to fail what it sets off to do.
Oh, elegy, poor and poor dear.

ODE TO THE LINE

Death is the vision of a line. By way of a cliff as a choice or a push. The landscape from the perspective of the cliff blooms, hardens, regrets, opens, hardens again to the cliff like running up to a wall. By way of a cliff, I was thinking through suspension as a risk. A child fishing Tylenol out one by one from the bottom of their mother's purse. A little pile on the table. Finger-slicing white island to form smaller islands. The want to fall. The line sitting in front of bad television; a solar system diorama hanging on by strings. Death at one end of the line. Beginning far away at the other end. And the middle, a flat horizon we run to and fall out of.

dusk? no, dust!

Knowing is the pigeon's foot,
A stroke of orange, in my memory—
Stepping like a saint
Into God's stare, toward a single crumb,
Placed there intentionally,

Passed through doors, quark-size & invisible.
Usually it takes too late. Usually it takes too soon,
To realize the multiverse of miracles; the two feet
Of distance painted white & yellow, keeping the 18 wheeler
In the working class lane as Ms. Barbara, the driver, calls it

Or by the flight in the monarch's flutter.
Or the fading light reaching for the Flower Lady's face, *no longer*
A twenty-five year old beauty, her mother daily repeats.
She's up the road now, in a nursing home no one would dare call dignified,

I,too, knew

The amber wave shaking like brick dust,
Off the bell's curve. I suppose I know the color
Of the place where the sky meets the ocean.
Might you imagine it too?
Might you imagine water —

The color of your been- gone-too
Long mother's cremains. *Keep*
Your cavities dry when you shower,
A measure to keep the children safe.
At times the mothers want to disobey

Their own advice. After the judges proclaimed
their bodies did not belong to them but to the state, M-I-crooked letter
Crooked letter I- humpBack, humpBack I
PP-I
Their blood warmed like curious liquor.

I AM NOT A KNOWABLE THING

after Joan Didion on Georgia O'Keeffe

but bottles tossed into the air and shot by Claudia.
no star memorialized in watercolor but still
a disappearance on the horizon, a slip from fingers
after being drained and dropped into a sack,
slung over a shoulder at dusk.

it is hardness I seek, the certain translucence
of glass so I remember what it is
to be sand. not unlovable but its
opposite: wholeness through opening,
the rough rip that says *I am*.

so I am seeking bullets,
I am looking to explode against the sky, refract
that last light of day as I tumble toward dirt, into
the earth that made me without judgment, back to her
wish that I become whatever it is I think I am.

**WE ARE ON VACATION BUT THE BIRDS + OUR DEAD GRANDMOTHER KEEP
SPEAKING TO HIM**

the kitchen shears are still
in the drawer, tucked among spoons
and forks, the odd chopstick and
chipped quarter cup. my throat

catches at the sight, body
freezes, dishtowel in hand.

alone in this small room, i feel the quiet all
around. the lake is glacial, the loons
lonely this evening, long gaps
between their calls. upstairs

my mother's mattress is stuffed
with knives i secreted by the fistful
as she lured my brother to the porch,
offered him the sunset. the shears

stare up at me, serrated and unafraid.
i wonder what else i've failed to notice.

ONE WAY OF LOOKING AT MY MOTHER

i want you to hear the quiet
of this house perched on the hill,
old and barn red and leaning.

hear the trees, the thin rustle
of dead leaves left on branches.
only the straggler birds remain,
only their occasional call.

can you see my mother?
she has her back to us, rust-colored
coat pulled tight around. her legs
are long, her throat slim, her eyes
glance over shoulder, squint
for the road. no firetruck yet.

she turns back.
she does not think
much has changed since she first saw
smoke slip from the wall
around the chimney.

hands to the plaster confirmed too much
heat so she listened up the stairs:
silence. in the kitchen,
she picked up the phone, dialed for help,
then quietly put on her shoes,
pulled a jacket from the hook,
went out the back door to wait.

years later, she explained
i was a difficult baby. it was hard
to get me to sleep.

A Brief Lesson on Location & Setting

Because you don't have a criminal mind, you won't suspect
a criminal mind as you set the fork next to the bone
white plate on the table from the set you were given

as a wedding gift. And you'll assume he really does need
to take the car—your only car—every day to work
even though he's employed by his father merely a few blocks

away where company vehicles sit in the lot
next to the company office. The question will come up
in conversation but he will always explain, and it will always

sound reasonable, as will his lack of explanation for why
he often comes home late. You won't have questions
anymore within a few months. The first night

a storm takes out the power, he will teach you how to use
an oil lamp correctly, even though you already
know how. But this lamp is different; it belongs to his mother.

Best to teach you again. He does. You light it carefully
tonight and set it in the center of the table for ambience—no
storm—attuning yourself to beauty as you learned to do

long before you met him; and the flicker from the lamp
is beauty waiting to happen when he sits opposite you
at the table smiling up, your faces framed in the fire's glow.

You hope, anyway, that this is what will happen.
Placing the water glass above the plate, you are careful not
to set it too much to the side because, since youth,

you were taught the importance of a perfectly set table—
not from breeding, but from blaming. Once,
you watched your father knock his glass over while at

the dinner table. *Debbie!* he scolded, looking across the room,
sharply, in her direction, *It wasn't where it belongs!*
Silence; your mother rushing to beautify his setting again.

In Anticipation of My Husband's Reply

By the time I write this poem, I will be divorced {and a poet}, and the name of the 'gypsy' moth will have become 'spongy' moth to erase oppression of nomadic peoples in Eastern Europe now referred to as Romani; but, for me, this change will not bring to mind the way history takes strides to undo damages of history, language understood as a viable weapon—no, *violent* weapon capable of altering whole national egos until they surrender a fight willingly, not because of lack of ammunition or skill but because of who they *are*. Less, suddenly. Reduced by merit of a few believed symbols on documents, walls, and signs. But you see, this is not what I think of when I learn that the 'gypsy' moth is now *Luminaria dyspar*, or 'spongy' which, sadly, looks unpoetic on the page. Instead, I think *romantic* or *romance*, as in the letter that arrived at our home within the first years of our marriage addressed to me from somewhere in Romania. I carefully unsealed and withdrew its contents: a single, typed note in perfect English asking after my welfare, whether I was still alive. Holding the thin paper, I recalled the moment its writer took my hand on a backstreet in Bucharest and said, "*Act like we are together. They like to kidnap blondes.*" I thought it a ruse to hold my hand until one of the men in this seedy section of the city tried, later that week, to kidnap a blonde. I never answered that letter addressed to the seventeen-year-old girl, now a woman, from an equally grown man, understanding its mission perfectly; and, at the time, also understanding mine—to stay married, already having been termed to give up so much of my power to you. It remains in a box containing a few of my regrets; the spongy moths returning each summer to remind me that a name can be changed quickly with a few legal strokes of a pen. But the poem I write for the letter I should have answered has nothing to do with a name; this is about identity—yours, my husband, and mine.

Lovingly

EVERYONE IS DOING THEIR BEST AND THEY CAN ALSO DO BETTER

A woman set the world
on fire today.

Maybe that was the best
she could do

in the strain
of the moment.

I mean, it's not like she set
the moon on fire, too,

and Mars isn't looking
any worse for wear.

In fact, every place but earth
is very much

not on fire, though
she could have done it,

though she almost did.
But she controlled herself.

She made do with just the world,
and it's not as if the fire

won't go out. Look,
it's already dying down,

the flames shrinking
from waving flags

to wiggling tongues.
She could have done something

more final: smothered
the breath out of the world

with the heft of a pillow
or shot the world

point blank
in its slow-spinning head.

But she didn't.
She set the world on fire

and only the green things died.

Of course, it would have been better
if she hadn't set the fire

in the first place.
I'm not saying

what she did was right.
But give her time

to sit, time to heal.
She'll learn to manage

on a smaller scale:
just a continent,

just a big, empty barn.
Just the candle's small

and willing wick.

HYBRISTOPHILIA IN THE TEENAGE GIRL

We tell you to watch out.
We say, avoid men who look
a certain way, who smile
a certain way, who walk
in any direction
except away from you.
When you ask us why,
we say that men do
ghastly things. They pretend
to be vulnerable, asking for help
with feeble voice
before knocking you out
with a strike of their crutch.
Or else they sweet talk,
convincing you you're prettier
than you are, telling you
how the blue of your sweater
brings out the blue of your eyes.
Then, next thing you know
you're floating
in the river, your eyes
rolled white. This
is our stern job,
to provide you with stories

of men who want you
dead. You begin
to imagine hands
exploring the shape
of your throat, your body
being traced
by some sharp,
teasing object—
a needle, perhaps,
or a shard of glass.
It's dreams like this
that take your breath
away, that arch your spine
in torturous desire.
You ask us

what's the difference

between pain and pleasure?
We answer by warning
of stairwells and drunk coeds,
dark alleys and Black Dahlias,
dumpsters, decaying debutants,
and strangers donning ski masks.
We give you

pepper spray in a pink can, a key
to slide between your knuckles.
We teach you to scream
like you mean it. We offer
two options: be a victim
in the making, or study
these flashcards we made,
each showing a different piece
of a woman's hacksawed body.
Once you've memorized the crime,
decide if you want that
to be you.

MATERIALS FOR A POST-SOVIET FILM

i.

amerikansty

In Tula, England hung from our walls. Oxford leaned from the pots until, one Sunday, tall suitcases shrunk the living room. Cigarette in the toilet bowl. Russian girls perfuming themselves in my mother's room. Boys drinking kompot straight from the pitcher.

In the months when they stayed with us, they would bring plastic airplanes, neon snowsuits, board games. They would bring English names, adoption papers, talk of insomnia.

They knew my mom could dress a table, or at the grocery, turn the flurries of Cyrillic into English. They knew she could tell the girl crying on our couch: *vse budet horosho*.

ii.

shot list

Sashka's adoptive parents return from the orphanage and sit in the dining room. Sashka is jumping on the couch.

*

The parent's eyebrows reconfigure. They say "Scott, easy on that couch. You'll break it."
Subtitle: *In Russian, Scott is the word signifying livestock.*

*

Sashka does not listen. He has something more important to convey. He jumps on the couch because he is starring in a movie.

*

His parents move in their seats. They think about the toys they brought, how they shine, shouting "Scott! Scott!"

*

The CAMERA moves in on Sashka. His face is charged with energy and his eyes burn with knowledge. Sashka continues to jump, shouting "Nikakoi ya ne Scott. Ya Sashka Kyrov!"

Subtitle: *I am no Scott; I am Sashka Kyrov!*

*

Sashka is jumping and his parents continue to shout "Scott! Scott!" He holds a metallic firetruck and shouts "I am Sashka Kyrov!"

WISH IN ONE HAND, SHIT IN THE OTHER

The L.A. River shifts like a wave pool
reversing course. Grocery bag parasails
catch lift & sixpack rings eddy.
Our beach cruisers slow, pick-up speed
moving backwards. Cycling away from sea,
we squint into the Pacific horizon.
Raked over surfers rise from salt soup
to carve barrels tail first. Shaka at the drop.
The sun moves east across the sky
& June gloom fogs. Keep going.
Dad pulls his MISSING CHILD flyers
from telephone poles & eucalyptus trunks
near our home. We coast into the garage,
wrestle the backdoor open without turning around.
Mom's tears sup back into her eyes but my sister
is still missing. Maybe we shove inertia
into history. Instead of bedside prayer
we take her chaos to a shrink. Rewind the tape
and find the frame. The moment the plot shifts
from coming-of-age to Bipolar case study.
But you know what they say:

Nuthouse

We're all one shitty day away from the nuthouse, he says as he lifts the shimmering Coors Lite bottle to his lips, his hand just barely trembling. He's been to rehab three times on his dad's dime, and he's finally learned to stick with beer now that his dad has been dead for two years. I think of the abandoned asylum out in Medical Lake where, once the psych ward shut down, a Westside university funded a breeding facility for monkeys. Scientists injected the animals with AIDS before testing experimental treatments and drugs. I think of my great grandmother who spent most of her adult life locked up in some brick building in the countryside for hysteria back in the early 1900s. She probably just had OCD, like I do. She was probably just a woman who got sad sometimes, or angry, or too fixated on one thing to care about brushing her hair or fixing lunch for her husband and the kids. Maybe she said something so unforgivable that people decided she was crazy—the truth is like that. I see her standing at the window, dark hair down to her waist, the same hazel eyes as my mother and the nose with a hump at the bridge, the upper lip a bit larger than the bottom. It didn't matter that she was beautiful, or maybe it did. Maybe the orderlies pitied her more, touched her shoulders and back and arms more than they needed to, unafraid of her mind because her body, her body was something they understood.

By August

they're already hanging witch
dolls from the eaves and the ledges
of the homes in Salem

and from the windows of shops where I buy
local goods: waxy combs, balms,
and a small owl

candle with a long wick. A dragonfly
leads me past a hedgerow
of autumn olives. August

yields her sun low, lower,
lower each day. I curve
into the fall, lick the parts that hurt

most, my wounded willow bark, my
animal skin. Last night, in a dream, this:
I cradled a corn cob doll to me,

urged it to nurse the nothing that's left,
became less sad, less of a conduit.
Can I deconstruct an asexual life

and call this home? Can I not allow
touch and still love?
Come morning, I pondered the exclusion

of queen bees in fall. My hair
was a willow nest of cold blue eggs
and I could smell the wine from the small

apples that fell, rotten and bruised,
to the ground below my window.
All night, I'd simmered on low

shimmery citrus rinds—
a tea I could drink, a balm
boiled down. Come, mourning, take

the inch of light: orbit wider farther
away. My back arcs into place. Out back,
tomatoes choke, thick on their vines. At last,

the pepper plants have turned deep purple. Fall
curves here, a pelted thing, amber.
You have to see it, the light.

Asylum Ghosts

I've never known how to manage a flock,
how to gather strays to my side. Everyone
wanders from any field where I'm in charge.
I beg, plead, cajole and tantalize but only my
phantoms stick around. I study the underworld
while I'm dreaming because I need to know
what to expect before I'm damned with my
sins pinned like mittens to my sleeves. After
I ghost this earth I'll reappear with my skin in
strips and a hive of wasps for a mouth. It'll be
nice to move without gravity's unwanted
attention, no more needles haunting my joints.
I tell you the world isn't ready to meet me
unburdened by myself but when I said *me*
I meant the world. Your god is not my god
is not the pale spirit of our daily crucifixion.

Asylum Episode

The scene opens when I'm in third grade and allow
a grown man to touch my body. This

sets the tone for the rest of me. It's where I begin
before the fall into another world,

before my elaborate complications set in. I forget
who I am for many years and some

argue I lost the plot but the truth is, I spent time
in the middle deciphering meaning

amidst the chaos. The way "chromatic" can refer
to light *or* to music is important

to know before the second act ends – even if I think
they're the same. I'll overcome

the obstacles before anyone has to tabulate their
losses and/or after we celebrate

under a disco ball. Bewilderment followed by a sip
of happiness, for the lucky ones.

In the time between monsters sniff at our necks
attempting to pinpoint the spots

where we might be our most vulnerable. They open
their jaws. They swallow us whole.

[Enter throughout tautology]

Enter throughout tautology. You and your likeness return to iteration, confusing rain for stillness and landscapes for repetition. Mispronunciation is enough. You want to be misread before occupying the cartesian theater with empty empty hands.

There is no detective to enter; the introspectionist has an ex/It sign. A good question comes for the somnambulist. There are bemusing sexual acts in lieu of historical shortcomings. Take three sci-fi filled nights and call in the meridian.

The man with no hands took the painting seriously apart.

And now this is addressed to you, poem, persona, the second person to walk through this sentence, if that isn't too ill-fitting, having hijacked the elsewhere, having shot the imagery through the rube-goldberg translation hour, having glued you to *you* on the monochrome instance, having made your way to the surface, having nothing to do but exist, the referents will take their rightful place among consideration.

You are no longer in theory this time, this time around a few broken propositions.

[Enter the redaction]

Enter the redaction, an hour of mistranslation. It was never easy. The continual referents to *AporIa* are the point. Footnotes, slantwise, the navel-gazing knows no bounds. There is no return. An afterthought eats its own tail. Syntax is in stock and vogue. Given enough space-time, abstractions can untether the self from the *I*. The art was hung too high. This can turn into a name. You spent too long looking up at the self and now. Craquelure dances like a bastard across your face in conceptual ways. A slight moth perching on a hint of moon, estranging imagery. The tv flickers an alibi. We engage the ink without context. The etceteras matter less. We become stuck in a page of our own *I*. You will need a year to complete an afterthought. Here's the thing, on the surface, with the rest of you ninnies. Here's another, unopened. The syntax, once again, the deadpan. Their ilk will return, re-volta. If redactions reach uroboric;— a needless repetition in mistranslation and errata, the reaction of the hour is turned into a name. I have the zeugma, the zeitgeist of a good time, asking how much of this self is performative, anachronistic, versus.



ART

Blue Green Hollow



Acrylic on canvas

Serene Turbulence



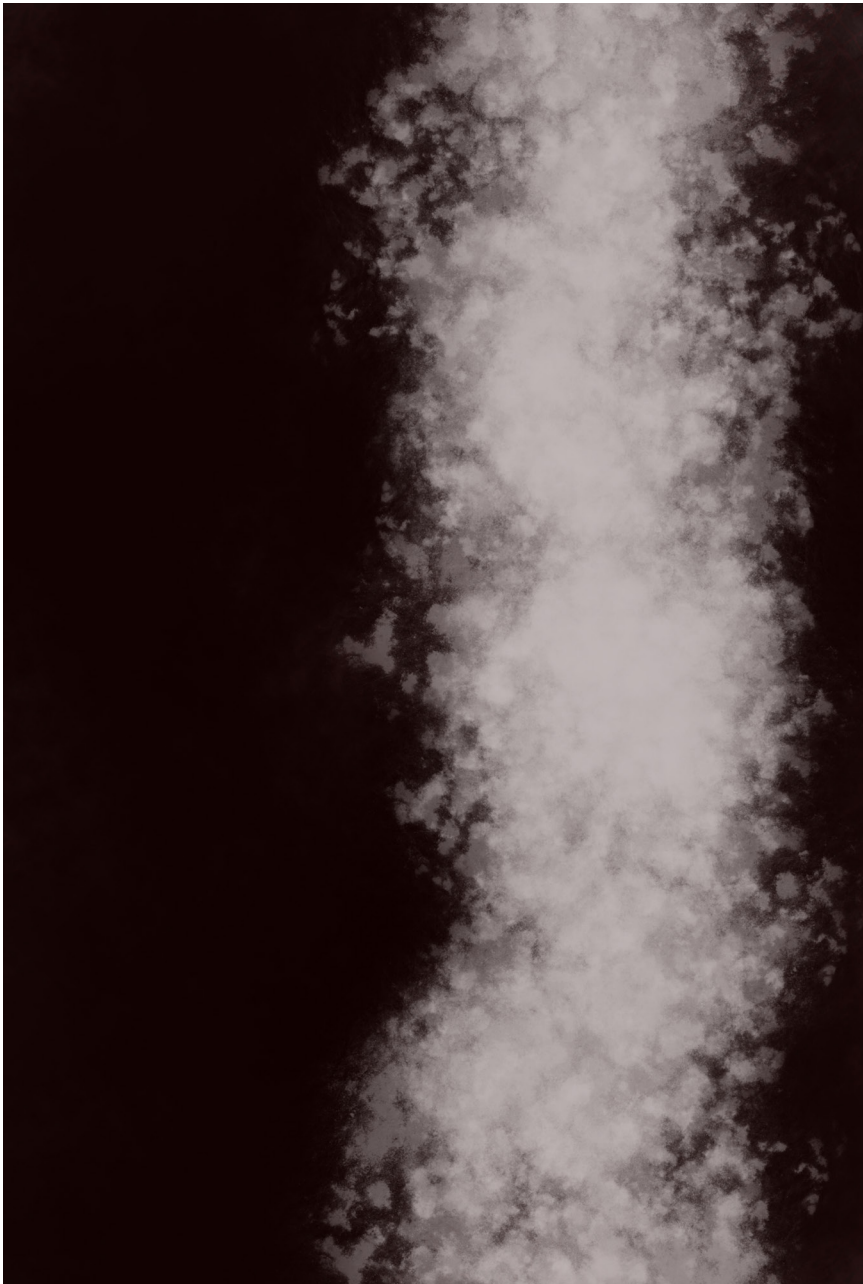
Acrylic on canvas

Time Forgiven



Digital

Into Unknown Waters



Digital

Autumn color



Collage

Reverence For My Cell



Graphite

Am I Identical To My Skin?



Graphite

This Place Isn't Mine



Graphite

Futurological Congress



Existence



Fogs Dreamland



The trick of the spirit



i waited



Photograph

you can't get there from here



Photograph

Failure To Communicate



Limestone and steel

Tres Truchas



Serpentine

Shaken Not Stirred



30" x 60," giclee on canvas

Your Kitchen or Mine?



24" x 48," giclee on canvas

Canyon Winds



34" x 46," acrylic

Magma Rising



52" x 50," acrylic

Obsidiana



60" x 50," acrylic

Self Portrait 83



Self Portrait 106



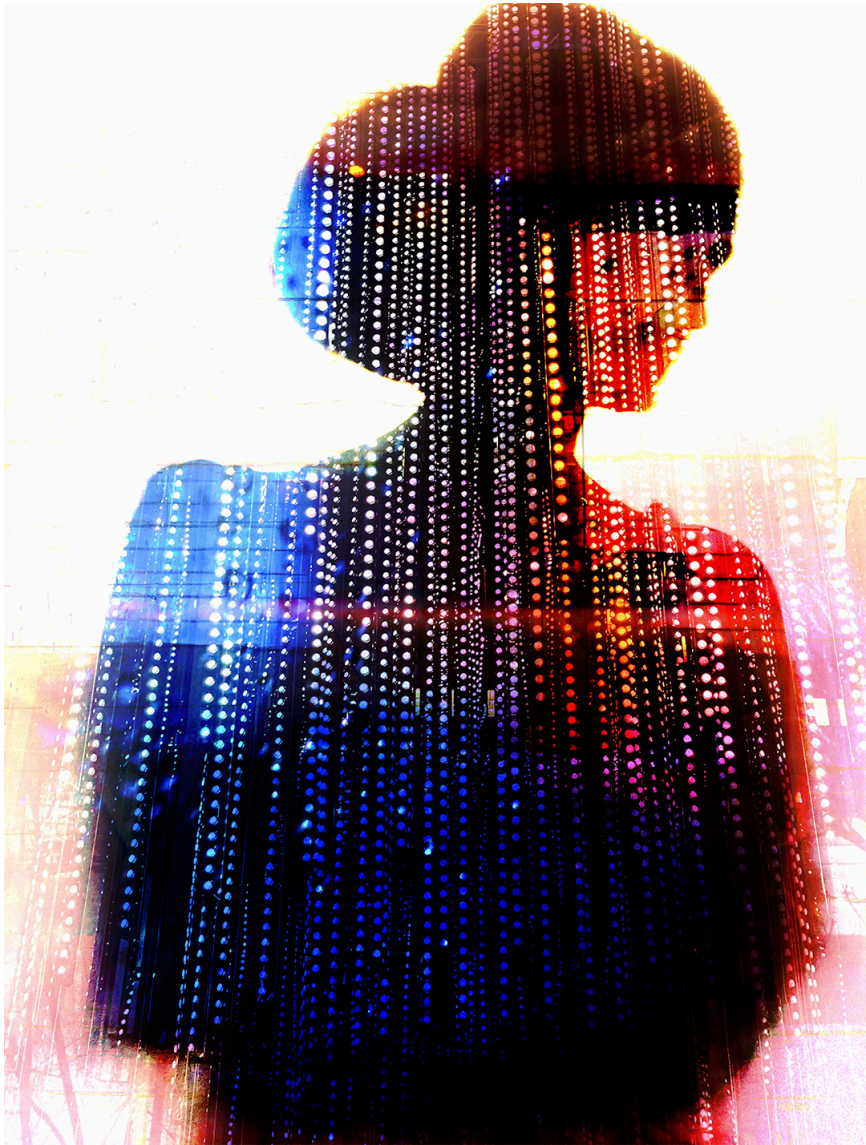
Self Portrait 122



Self Portrait 143



Self Portrait 153



Self Portrait 181



The word "FICTION" is rendered in a bold, dark green, sans-serif font with a white speckled texture. It is centered horizontally and overlaid on a light green, jagged line that resembles a stylized mountain range or a fluctuating graph. The line has three peaks and two valleys, with the word "FICTION" spanning across the middle of the graphic.

FICTION

Apoc Sim

Through the forest, the flight attendant. A can of ginger ale. I run across the center of the map, through the Rivers of Blood and the Valley of the Damned. The other survivors are easy to outsmart, low-level teenagers caught up in apocalyptic bloodlust, psychokillers living out their dreams in their parents' basements. The neurocontroller in my mouth tastes like lemon-lime. I think my actions, and my tongue makes it so.

"I only ever drink ginger ale on airplanes," my dad says, wiggling his eyebrows from the middle seat.

I give him a withering look through my Second Life Contact Lenses. He scratches at the rash on his neck, red and Australia-shaped and threatening to become infected.

"We should go to a soda factory," he says, crunching an ice cube between his molars. "See how the sausage gets made."

Some kid in a gillysuit, JMarsh420, throws a knife at my head and misses. I chase him through the jungle, machete-ing through vines. He is level 1, and without the knife, weaponless. At level 20, I am a god of the apocalyptic waste. When I catch him, he inputs command Warrior Death, and kneels before me, waiting. I input command Strangle Kill. It's slowest.

"Syd. You answer when I speak to you."

I blink at my dad, blood-and-wire overlaid on his face. I say "what," but as an accusation. *What* is wrong with you. *What* is up your butt.

"What?"

"You'll call your mother when we land, yes?"

Yes, I nod. As previously stated, multiple times.

"This isn't her fault, you know."

I rest my head against the airplane wall and let the plastic rattle my skull and check my six and scan the treetops. The key to being level 20 is to never drop your guard. Strangle

Kill takes both hands for a full minute, which makes you vulnerable to attack. I drag JMarsh420 into the bushes. His body flops around like a fish.

“You can’t blame her for this.”

Gak. The first sob my father lets out sounds like a dying salamander. Gak. I turn to him—horrible babyish forehead crease, obsolete wedding ring tapping on the tray table—and make a serious *pull-it-together-man* face. The stranger in the aisle seat, a graying, dead-looking woman, presses her lips together and smiles at me with something like embarrassment and joy. Radioactive ash rains from the sky. YOU KILLED JMARSH420 blinks at the top of my vision.

I pull my knees to my chest and stare out the window.

. . .

Once a year, my mother flies me to Manhattan for a ritual she calls Mother-Son Time. She greets me at the door to her apartment on the upper east side in a nightgown and pearls.

“My baby,” she says, bouncing the emphasis back and forth between the words. “My baby. My *baby*.”

I ask about the child support check, per dad’s instructions. I go with her to the museums and restaurants and shops, saying the things I need to say to keep her from exploding like a little glass ball. I ask about the check. I act surprised when she buys me things I don’t want or have room for in my suitcase—snakeskin boots, hat boxes, a credenza. She doesn’t really mean for them to be gifts. The napkin rings she bought me last year are on her table this year. The credenza will never leave her entryway. I ask about the check.

At the end of the week, when my mother is tired of trouncing around the city, she calls her friends over and “shows me off.” The apple of her eye (rotten, with worms).

“A bike mechanic, at his age, isn’t that impressive?” She says, gesturing with a flourish to her friends. Rob the lawyer, Rich the banker, and Dick the doctor, or something like that.

“Oh yes,” they say, nodding into their whiskeys. “When I was your age, blah blah blah.”

I stomp off to the edge of the map, to the Alpine Abyss, where only the pacifists go, the people who treat Apoc Sim like a sandbox game. I trek up and down the mountain ridges, snapping leaves off trees, picking flowers. I fill my pack with foraged mushrooms and fish. I birdwatch.

A hawk spirals down to a tree stump a few yards away. I input command Befriend Animal, extending a strip of gamey meat. He flies over to me, broad and grim and fluffy, and perches on my arm. His beak hooks downward, like he’s kind of sad. He offers me the bird equivalent of a bow, his plumage rusty and bronze. I name him Chuck.

“Syd? Are you listening?” My mother says, an icy hand on my shoulder.

I nod and smile at the floor. “Yeah, bike mechanic. Colorado. High school. That’s the Syd update.”

Rob and Rich and Dick laugh heartily. Through my lenses they look like part of the forest, strange, well-dressed trees that press in on me with vaguely evil intentions. Snatch out your eyes. Gobble you up. I hurry into the underbrush, seeking out the shadows. The darker the lenses, the less Rob-Rich-Dick. The less mother.

My mother and her friends spend a long time talking about problems. The tax problem, the scaffolding problem, the problem with price-gouging reupholsterers. I slouch in her leather sofa.

I input command Summon Enemies, which shoots a flare above my location, and wait in the bushes. Chuck alerts me to each enemy’s approach with a screech. Glambandit2. In\$tantFun. ElJefe69. I kill them one by one. I am a flash of bloody metal in the shadows. I am the killer of killers, the godless master, terror of the earth. I am level 21.

“What’s your take on that, Syd?” Rich says.

“Uh, that’s the world we live in I guess.” I pull my knife from the chest of StacyKid07.

“Wow. Still waters do run deep,” Dick says.

By the time my mother says goodbye to her guests, night has fallen in the hellscape. I roast a squirrel over a fire, watching for threats in the trees.

She wants to know what I think of them, Dick in particular.

“They’re cool, right?” She says.

I shrug. “I don’t know. They’re adults.”

“You’re always shrugging,” my mother says, “is your father feeding you enough?”

I nod and squeeze the slight pudge of my stomach.

“Rob’s a corporate lawyer, but he began his career in family law,” she says.

I listen, but don’t *listen*, as my mother falls headlong into a thought-spiral on divorce law, never quite saying what she means to say: your father’s a problem, I’m paying him too much, you’re not helping.

I input command Eat Squirrel. It gives me plus two health points for meat minus one point for radiation. I watch the fire. Sparks drift across the sky, commingling with the summer stars. The flames lick my mother’s face.

“Poor thing. I don’t know how you handle living with him.”

I focus on the irradiated wasteland.

At the edge of the clearing, a metallic glint gives away an enemy’s location, watching me and my fire. They wave. I sic the falcon on them. YOU KILLED JMARSH420 blinks at the top of my vision. Chuck comes back bloody.

“Are you, okay, Syd?”

I give my mother a thumb’s up. Two thumbs up. Two thumbs way up.

When the week is over, she puts me in a cab and tells me to tell my dad that she told her lawyer to tell the court that she wants to countersue the divorce settlement. “He’s making more than enough at the bike shop. And you can tell him I said that.”

The last I see of her is a peace sign, held imploringly over her head. Make peace not war. Don’t hate me, baby.

I play Apoc Sim all the way home.

...

When I get back, my dad is watching football on the couch, five beers into a six pack. Broncos Jets.

“Welcome home.”

“How’re they gonna run the ball on third and long?” I say.

“Do you have the check?” My dad scratches at his rash. It’s climbed up his jaw, a pink tendril reaching for his mouth.

I take the envelope out of the special pocket in my bag. I don’t tell him that my mother said to call it extortion. I slide it across the coffee table, careful to avoid the drops of beer, and slump in the old rocking chair. I pretend the football commercials are the most fascinating thing I’ve ever seen. Maybe I *should* consider bundling my home and auto insurance. Online sports betting, power tools, pizza with hotdogs in the crust. What is life?

“This is only half.”

I shrug. My stomach clenches. Back from commercial, the Broncos lob the ball deep down field. The receiver leaps, catches, and two defenders smash into him like buses headed in opposite directions: one to his chest, one to his knees. He spins in the air like a crashing plane and hits the ground in a puff of AstroTurf.

“Syd, she only gave us half.” Already dad’s voice is catching.

The receiver doesn’t get up. A group of trainers gather around him, patting and prodding his legs. It looks like maybe he’s yelling.

“You were supposed to check the amount before you left. What did I say? What do I *always* say? Check the amount before you leave.”

They show the replay in a slow-motion loop. The receiver looks like he’s made of Jell-o.

“What a hit,” I say.

My dad stands, wobbles a bit, and fishes his phone from his pocket. “You need to call her.”

I blink at him. “Why me?”

He drops the phone into my lap. From the notifications, I can see he ordered a pizza earlier. I wonder if it had hotdogs in the crust.

“Look at me. I’m drunk. It’ll just go better if it’s you. She likes you.” “No she doesn’t.”

“Look at me. I’m drunk. It’ll just go better if it’s you. She likes you.”

“No she doesn’t.”

“Just. Please.” He turns his back on me and watches the TV. “What a hit.”

I leave him there. In my room, I pop a fresh neurocontroller into my mouth.

Watermelon. I call my mom. It goes surprisingly well. I say the words my dad asked me to say into the phone. My mom says some stuff back. She sounds upset. I stroll through the sweet, sweet apocalypse. 27 kills. I am level 23.

...

On a sunny morning I wake up angry, having dreamt of eating bowlfuls of live baby birds, cheeping in confusion.

...

Twice a year, my father takes me bowling, as part of a ritual he calls Father-Son Time. He asks me his proprietary blend of father-son questions: Any girlfriends? Working out? How’s school? These three things, always in the same order: dick, body, brain. I say the things I have to say to convince him all three are fine. I don’t tell him about the killing dreams. I don’t mention my mother.

My dad beats me, in bowling, every time.

“With one hand tied behind my back,” he says.

I shrug. I spend the whole game slitting throats and looting bodies. I am level 24.

“Your mother and I are worried about you,” he says, “The ‘D’ in English has us worried.”

I tell him I don’t want to go to college, I want to keep working in the bike shop with him.

“Does anyone really give a shit if I’ve read *The Great Gatsby*?”

My father nods and raises his eyebrows, the *touché* of the face. “Well, your mother does.”

I bowl a gutterball and say, “does she? Does she really?” The ferocity in my voice surprises me.

“Easy,” my dad says, grinning, “easy.”

On the drive home, Chuck leaves me. He circles higher and higher until he disappears into the sun, and when I input command Retrieve Falcon, nothing happens. I stalk the hellscape in search of my bird. The Toxic Marsh to the Abyss. I do not find him.

...

I peel a fresh neurocontroller from the pack, blue raspberry, and suck on it through the Sunday shift. Polish frames, replace flats, sweep, repeat. An eight-hour shift is an eternity. The click of the socket wrench marks the time. My dad plays classic rock through the speakers. The same 20 songs, over and over again, all about the same vague woman.

At level 25, everyone is too scared to attack me, so I seek them out. I hunt the runners and the hidere and rip the life from them with the same motion I use to yank old brake lines from the neck of a badly rusted 10-speed. Why people even bother repairing these old bikes.

But eventually, there is no one.

I input command Summon Enemies, flare arcing over the snowy ridge, and no one comes for me, blades drawn, guns cocked. I check the streams, the mesas, the abandoned cabins, the acid lake. Suspiciously still in the apocalypse.

“You’re polishing the paint off,” my dad says. He places a gloved hand on my arm. “You OK?”

I throw my rag onto the work bench and sit on it. I run a greasy hand through my hair. “I’m fine.”

“You look sick.” My dad takes his gloves off and feels my forehead. I push his hand away. The light in the shop mixes with the light in my lenses to make the world look dim and gray. My father looks like an old man, held together with duct tape and string.

“I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?”

I try to say something. I stand, stagger. My dad moves to catch me, but I have already caught myself. He couldn’t have supported me anyway.

I'm good.

I say, "I'm good."

I'm good.

A falcon appears before me like an angel of the apocalypse, preening himself on a stone at the marsh's edge. He considers me through his glassy black eyes and bows his pointed head. He scrapes the blood and guts from his beak, glides over to the clearing I stand in, and looks up at me, cocking his head.

I clear my throat and say in a raspy voice that surprises me, "is this it?"

I input command Befriend Animal. I kneel before Chuck. As I kneel, an ambush springs from the trees in an explosion of gunfire and flying knives and charging killers. Bullets explode from my chest. Knives impale me. My lenses flicker red with damage.

My father wraps me in a bony hug. "My son," he says, "ah, my son."

I input command Warrior Death, but it's too late. A blade has opened my throat. YOU'VE BEEN KILLED BY JMARSH420 flashes across my vision, and I spawn in a snowy field with the clothes on my back, a half-full canteen, and a rusty knife. I am level 1.

The Migraine

As I sit on the dock with the morning sun and heat still rising in the sky, the lake lapping gently, a stillness tickles my insides. I could curl up inside this headache.

The deep croak of a bullfrog cuts through the morning.

"I know that frog," my older son says.

"You two have met before, have you?" I say without opening my eyes. I sit in a deck chair, a book open in my hands as though I might be reading. At my side, a drained mug of coffee, my second, with the hope that the caffeine will constrict my blood vessels, chase the pain away.

"Yesterday on the beach. It had been stabbed in the eye by something. It was all bloody. I moved him into the woods."

At 9, he tends to make up stories so I'm not sure if he is telling the whole truth. I lift my sunglasses and we stare at each other; it's possible he's waiting for me to call him on his bluff. He looks away. I decide I don't need to know. The headache rests in the base of my neck and reaches down my back. It has kidnapped my heart, threatening to squeeze if I make the wrong move. Blackmail.

Normally, at this point, I would call someone for help, escape to a dark room, take a pill. But I am alone. Our weekend away. Just me and the kids. But this is not so different from our real life since my husband died. Away from what, I wonder.

I can feel the headache vibrating inside of me, a pattering both quick and slow, both an engine and a fuse.

My medicine, forgotten on the blue tray next to my bathroom sink, leaves a baking soda taste in the back of my throat. A burn. Bitter. I do not miss that. You have a tendency to self-sabotage, my husband once said. The tray on his side of the sink has been empty for six months.

"Hurry, and take it off the hook!" My son has caught a fish. He dips it in the water to

keep it alive when I am too slow to respond. He pulls it up and dangles it in front of me. When I stand I am unsteady on my feet, listing to one side as though I'm drunk. My limbs go from light to heavy, but my fingers spark with electricity.

I hold my hand out and pause until both the fish and I are ready. I squeeze its body firmly but gently and it doesn't flinch and flip the way they sometimes do. I thread the hook out without getting it caught in the hole. The fish still has not moved and I worry we've killed it, but when I throw it back in the water, the fish twists and swims away.

My 6-year-old slips his hand into mine as the fish blurs out of sight. I look down at his tawny head and think, when did you get here? Things I should know.

The headache is half beast, half man and momentarily I let it embrace me. Its fur is downy and thick and warm. I can see the real world through a membrane; for this moment I am in its fairy tale world, lying on a divan, protected. In the real world, dark thunderclouds thread into the blue sky from the west. I sit back on the beach chair with my younger son nestled against me. The older hooks another piece of ham onto the fishing hook. Just a little while longer, I think, as I close my eyes.

The headache has a hunchback and wolf ears. I cannot see its face. It won't show it to me. It is gentle. It is not the worst headache I ever had, but it is familiar in its monthly recurrence. It's not pain exactly. Or it's not just pain.

I think of Persephone going to the Underworld. The mark of seasons changing. The representation of death and rebirth. I look out at the water and notice a patch that looks different from the rest, a square with waves moving in a different direction. It shimmers and I'm not sure if it is the headache or if it is real. A door perhaps. Where Hades comes up out of the earth in his chariot.

I am here but I am not here. I am looking through the membrane at my children. The younger one retains the plumpness of babyhood. He's eating goldfish, dropping every fifth one between slats in the dock, potentially on purpose. The older one's toes hang off the end of the dock. He has teenager feet on a boy body. It hurts to look at them straight on.

It starts to rain and I blink and I am here and we gather the books and shirts. I slip on

my sandals already dappled a darker shade of brown with raindrops. I grab a towel heavy with water, too heavy for how much rain has yet fallen. As I carry it inside and place it in the dryer, my biceps ache. The machine thumps confidently, then bangs louder, louder, but it could just be my head. I can see the machine jumping. I think of the fish before it swam away, the will to live. I switch off the machine and hang the wet towel over the door.

I can act normally so long as there are no major events. I make scrambled eggs for lunch because we didn't really eat breakfast. My younger son spills the little bowl in which we keep the salt and I feel my edges blur, pull, expand, ready to burst. The beast holds me tight. I open my mouth to snap at my son but when I look at him it seems I already have. He cries.

I cannot find the dustbin.

I cannot find the dustbin. I walk down the hall to look in the bathroom closet. I remember the eggs are still on the stove. I run back and they have not burned exactly.

I decide to sweep the salt right out the door. Something twitches in the pile of salt and dirt. I lean down but cannot tell if it is a spider or a large tick. I try to count the legs but it won't stop moving. I sweep it out into the rain. Looking out into the surrounding trees, I wonder if the salt will attract animals to our front door, and if so, what kind. Maybe my beast is out there. The leaves rustle in the breeze, muted and heavy from the rain.

We eat and play cards. We say words and I struggle to understand their meaning, the pain in my head interfering. Something about a tree lion, how they climb to escape or hunt, or maybe both. Something about chips and betting. "How do you know how to play that?" I ask at one point and my younger son shrugs. A cold sweat springs up on my back and it could be the headache or it could be the thought of my son out in the world, alone, learning how to gamble from strangers.

I play with the boys until I can't hide the truth from them any longer. "I'm not feeling so great," I tell them and their foreheads scrunch up in concern. "I just need some quiet time."

Somehow it is not yet noon. Time has stopped. Time has potentially begun to move

backwards. If I wait long enough, maybe I will get my husband back. I place the children in separate rooms. One hour. They know this because we do it every day. Every day, just us. One two three.

My whole life the shower in this log cabin we visit every summer the hot and cold faucets have been reversed. I turn on the cold faucet and wait. Someone knocks at the door and I say, "Yes?" even though I am naked and standing outside the shower and I do not want anyone to come in, my older son has started to become embarrassed by me, but I can't figure out how else to answer and no one responds anyway.

I stand for a long time with my hand in the stream of water. Freezing cold. I move the faucet further to the left, and further. Finally I turn the knob marked hot and the water warms under my fingers. Did my husband fix the faucets before we left last fall, or am I on the other side of the membrane with the beast, living in reverse?

Perhaps I have been living in reverse my whole life.

I step into the water and already feel guilty about how long this shower will take. I let the scorching water burrow into my hair and I feel the headache shift, rising to the surface. I no longer see the beast, now there is a man in a field. Clusters of small flowers sprout up at his feet as he dances. I can't see the flowers well because there is a low mist, or perhaps that's the steam from the shower. The man wears a mischievous grin, but it's not a real grin, he's wearing a mask. He's not a real man, either; he's made of wood.

To make the shower last longer I shave my legs for the first time in a long time, shedding a layer of skin with the forest of hair, leaving part of me behind. Like I can become something new but still be tethered here, so I can find my way back, find my way back to my children. How many times I have become something new. Daughter, sister, wife, mother. And now this.

Widow. Ghost.

I think of the many fairy tales I have read but they jumble in my mind. Sometimes the animals the characters meet in the woods help and sometimes they don't and I'm not sure it's possible to tell the difference.

Headaches have a breaking point, the point at which I would cry into my husband's arms, when I would tell him I couldn't take it anymore and he would hold me and assure me I could. The beast would recede after that, back to its own world.

I both want the headache to be gone and I do not want the headache to be gone. My children need me. Would it be so bad if the headache never went away? I would be allowed to stay here forever. There is no one but the beast to hold me now, to assure me.

The steam rises.

The animals. Were they trying to lead me somewhere? The frog, the fish, the spider. I turned them all away. When they could have led me back to my husband.

I turn the faucet again, chasing the heat. I hear voices but I don't know where they're coming from, which side.

"Mother?"

Is it my boys calling or me?

Is it me or someone else?

"Come back," the voices call, we're all calling. "Come back."

A Farm

A failed farm. A small white house with a front door painted pale blue. A lilac tree next to the house at the top of a green grass hill. Lilac tree in bloom. Two sisters reading near the lilac tree. A father opens the blue door of the house and storms outside shouting, “Goddamn steer! Goddamn steer!” The oldest sister stops reading. She watches her father barrel down three steps and then veer right towards their station wagon. Parked on a gravel driveway. “Goddamn steer!” A father wearing khaki shorts and black dress socks and black dress shoes and a navy-blue polo shirt bunched at his waist. A father with blonde hair combed away from his forehead and fifties era glasses in 1979. Furious face. He opens the station wagon door, enters, sits, slams the door shut. He starts its engine and the car lurches forward. A girl watches the car with her father inside it race down a steep driveway. Gravel pops. A hard left onto a country road. Unpaved. Dust rises. A car disappears. The girl keeps her eyes on the dust. Waits for it to fade away.

My father was a lawyer. He bought the remains of a farm in northwest Illinois that was two hours from our Chicago home. Fourteen acres of rolling hill pasture. A creek. A stand of thin trees at the creek. Large flat stones in the water under the shelter of trees. Every Saturday afternoon I walked to the stones and sat on the largest, flattest one to watch water spiders glide in and out of the shade. Vulnerable and defenseless, I loved them and worried for them as I watched them spin on top of the water on their thin legs.

My mother was from Italy. I don’t know that she liked our weekend farm. We didn’t talk much. I never asked her what her feelings were about our weekend home, and she never asked about mine.

During the week we lived in a newly built townhouse in Hyde Park. It was short

and squat and its garage stuck out in front like a last-minute thought. Sometimes a neighboring farmer of ours would call my father in Chicago to tell him that his steer had once again stomped a barbed wire fence flat and gotten out. “Goddamn steer!” he’d shout. “Goddamn steer!” In my bedroom, while he shouted, I’d stop reading and freeze, wait for his raging to stop.

In fifth grade, my class was assigned a project in which we had to create a homesteading, prairie person who would give a talk about prairie life. I became a prairie mom and talked about churning butter, outhouses, using woodburning stoves for cooking and warmth on winter days and nights. I spoke about how we depended on horses and trains for travel, on cows for milk, on pigs for meat. We plant grain, I said in my talk, and right now we’re struggling because of red rust disease. That’s a pathogen that’s killing our crops.

I practiced saying the word pathogen out loud for over an hour.

My teacher Miss Kamberos asked me to take my prairie woman to two other classrooms. My mom had made me a long skirt from swirling blue cotton and had sewn a red scarf into its waist with which to tie my skirt. I remember her saying, “Make a strong bow so that it doesn’t fall down.” I wore a dark blue, nylon turtleneck with the skirt, and for shoes, my Ked sneakers. I knew that the sneakers weren’t right and hoped my skirt would cover them up.

In the bathroom where I changed into my prairie woman clothes, I looked in the mirror and under the white light saw that I didn’t look like a prairie woman or prairie girl at all. No one will believe my act, I thought. I’d learned about prairie life from two books and hadn’t been able to put my personal country experience into my talk. I’d left out the water spiders gliding about our stream on thin legs, the flat stones, the pasture, the lilac tree. And the steer. I’d have liked to say that even though my sister and I had never seen him, we knew that he was there, dangerous and angry.

I didn't want to leave the bathroom, but I had no choice, and so I took a deep breath and entered the hallway and walked to the first of my two classrooms, heart pounding hard, holding my skirt's red bow with one of my hands hoping that it wouldn't come undone while I walked.

When I asked my mom why our father shouted so much, she said it was because he had bad headaches from being a lawyer and needed total quiet when he came home. I considered it, understood that this was true. He'd come home from work and change from his suit into gray cotton pants and a polo shirt and then lie down on the couch with a cool washcloth over his forehead. "If you and Clara don't disturb him, you'll see he won't yell at you, he won't raise his voice."

I became quiet, but the quiet didn't help.

That spring of the steer, Clara and I took care of a feral cat who lived in the collapsing chicken coop of our failed farm. We brought her water in a bowl we took from the kitchen pantry, and leftover food whenever we could. She got fat and that made us happy and then she had kittens. Clara and I brought her double the water and food when we could and watched her kittens grow fur, then stand, then begin to walk for three weekends in a row. On the fourth weekend, when we went to sit at our spot outside the coop, the mother and her kittens were gone. Clara cried because she said that meant they'd been killed and eaten by a coyote or skunk. I told Clara that skunks and coyotes don't eat kittens – they were too bony – and that they'd left because they'd grown up and had to begin looking for food on their own, had to find homes of their own. They're alive, I told her. Believe me, they're alive.

We went to Italy every summer to spend time with my mom's extended family. Her mother and many siblings lived in a village within the Sibylline Mountain range. I don't remember missing my father.

Clara and I kept away from the steer by never crossing the creek and reading books together under an oak tree that stood halfway between the creek and our house. Even there, we could hear my father when he shouted, "Goddamn steer!" His voice would interrupt the sweetness of birds singing and calling above us. I'd freeze, look up from my book and watch him storm to our station wagon, enter it, slam its door shut. He always drove the car down the driveway and turned onto the unpaved road fast, made gravel-dust rise up. I'd wait for the birds to return to their calling before I went back to my book. Here I am, there you are, I am here.

Our cousins in Italy had wanted to know what the steer looked like, and so after we returned to Chicago, I searched for the steer. It was the last weekend of September. I looked for him by myself; Clara was too scared to come with me. We'd learned from our father that he'd staked out the large northeast corner of our property, near the fence that separated us from our neighbor's corn fields. I didn't like to go to this area because I thought it too far from our house, but that Saturday I pushed through the thick weeds and nettles of our pasture's tallest hill and when at its top, I saw our steer in its corner eating grass. He was an enormous animal who exuded a primal physical power. I studied him for several minutes, but when he stopped eating and lifted his head, I became afraid that if he sensed me near, he'd run towards me to trample me into the ground just as he trampled the barbed wire fence when he escaped. I turned away quietly as I could and began running home through nettle leaves that scraped and stung my legs.

Our steer was the product of a business that sold steers a person could buy and feed and then send to a meat processing plant where it would be killed and cut to become white paper packages that were sealed tight with translucent tape. Our steer arrived at our Chicago townhouse on a warm fall morning. I heard the doorbell ring, heard my father open the door and say, "Hello, hello, come in." I left my bedroom and made my way to the stairs and then down the stairs sitting until I could see the ground floor and entrance hall.

Once I could see what I wanted to see, I became quiet and kept my body still and watched. I remember the delivery men's hand-truck that carried a white, horizontal freezer. I remember their crewcuts and arms covered in tattoos of snakes and crosses and skeletons. My father led them to our basement stairs and then I heard the thump, thump, thump of the hand truck as the delivery men maneuvered the freezer down the steps.

My father said, "Over there, and the socket's there, can you see it?" And then my father and the two delivery men come up from the basement, and I saw the delivery men go outside and then come in again. This time the hand-truck carried a white box that had Stanley's Meats stamped on it in red. My father led them down to the basement again, and I heard the ripping sound of the box being torn open and then the plunks of our steer now in white packages being dropped one by one into the freezer. So many plunks. And my father said, "Goddamn steer," and laughed. He said, "Thank God I don't have to deal with those phone calls anymore."

They came upstairs together, and after the deliverymen left, my father closed our home's entrance door behind them and then turned and shouted, "The steer's here."

As though this was something that we needed know.

Timber

I've brought down too many trees since I've met you. Dug too many holes, and the pads of my fingers are mapped with earth and regret. Yet here I am, in this wanting-to-be-wild front yard, still standing, and awaiting your instruction.

You perch precariously upon top ladder rung to bind the old Pine's heart. I remain below, grasping rope and fealty between tentative palms, as you loop the coarse weave noose around her trunk. Now she is ready to fell. Aloft, oblivious, with her abiding solid stance, breathing into the sharp blue day as she's done for decades. Chainsaw jolts into its unrepentant roar and I shoot shudders into thick, hot air.

"Now! Pull! Pull harder!" you scream.

And your expression, even at this distance, wonders why I'm so weak, why I must be told, how I would cope without you. I bid biceps and thighs to hold as I lean back, grinding heels into the grass, and heave into my resolve.

Then she breaks. With final splintering crack, groan of surrender, she crashes metres before my feet in a cloud of malty dust and woodchips. You fist pump and holler.

"Alleluia!! We took her down!"

I nod vaguely, but consider god had nothing to do with this. Save your praise for miracles, like drought-breaking rain or regrowth through the ashes.

"Look at that! Told you, didn't I? A much cleaner view now, see? We'll finish her off with a few more cuts and then we can start out the back."

You climb down, wiping sweat and tree flesh from your face. Exultant with conquest, you peruse the subjugation of your land.

"King of the trees!" you grin.

Except, you can't reign over the dead and decaying. In ghost tales, maybe, but you're never really king of the vanquished. Roots and seeds always remain. Sprouts of sedition everywhere. And we are not ghosts, certainly not regal, but tired and thirsty mortals,

labouring in a hot suburban garden.

*

You have such plans. Engineered a path to cull and cultivate, burn, and build. I know, with you, I am fortified. Moats and walls, bricks, and locks. Sheds stored with every efficiency, every tool. Every future question considered, every fallow sigh ignored. But, standing beside the fallen trunk, crushed plants, skinned bark, I am hollowed. Later, you dismember the body and I feed the small branches through the mulcher, twig by stick. Branch by breath. Watching, through the sad blue tinge of safety goggles, as the machine rumbles and grunts; ingesting limbs, spindly fingers that quiver in their final snapping outstretched plea.

“To cultivate, you have to clear first and create a rich foundation,” you scream above the chainsaw growl.

Yes, I nod again, while the woody scent of tree spirit tickles my nostrils. I shift my feet from busted organs now splattered across the lawn, spilling out desperate wood borers trying to escape the light. And, it’s not that I dispute your logic. The garden will flourish to a trained and polished perfection. And yes, it certainly improves the view, disposes of the redundant, the imperfect, and makes way for new possibilities.

“It was rotting from the inside,” you shout.

Yes. And still it stood. Somehow survived. Like all those scurrying beetles, slimy grubs inside my own heart. Boring, bite by bite, deed by deed into the crumbling chambers of whatever I used to be. Husked in brittle smiles, compliant gestures, to hold the whistling empty spaces in.

*

I’ve sat so many dusks upon the back cement step, picking at dirt beneath fingernails, taking a final swig, after toiling in the garden of your plans. Droning of cicadas, scent of green and brown wreathed about my head as I swat mosquitos from sticky forearms, and watch earth breathe. It breathes without us. Despite us. Weeds flourish, spider webs lace over branches, beetles sift through leaf litter, and possums leave pellets of possession. Until

we take up prongs and blades to plunder through another day.

“We’ll poison the stump tomorrow,” you plot, calling out from behind the shower screen. And now unease thickens to a tight wad in my throat. Words of acquisition and destruction tossed about with fervour, mentioned in a soft smile at the restaurant, soothed into my skin as you caress my fingers at the table, spluttered loudly at a party as you’re back slapping with friends discussing weekend renovations and plans.

I scrub and soap the stain from my hands, but these palms are marked with malice. Cuticles coarse and fingertips callusing to a tougher, less receptive membrane. Sometimes in my dreams, I sprout vines, thick tendrilled stems from the soft flesh of my calves and upper arms. They weave around my neck, grow tight and strong, and when I try to weed free, I wake, wailing with an unnamed dread. But you are always there to hold me, tell me we are builders, not destroyers. Our little kingdom, for the time I remain as queen, is a fertile, verdant paradise for our chosen subjects.

“Off with their heads,” I mutter to the creepers in my dreams. But, even in shadows of sleep, I lose conviction, purpose to prune. Let there be wild.

Bird House

All my childhood I could hear through walls. Mum and Dad slept a room over. Voices carried through the air vents, which were on all the time. I lived with ears to plaster, ghosts coursing through our veins. I could hear the walls talk.

- say: we can wait until the kids have settled in.
- say: children are resilient, this is important.
- say: life has to go on.
- say: cancer doesn't wait.

Dad cooked rice smothered in tomato sauce for dinner. I let the water run over Mum's back. She spoke the same language as me. We hadn't lived all together for so long. When Dad spoke I listened to the walls.

- say: you're grown now, you should be grateful, you're not little girls anymore.

When my sister spoke she hushed, just in case the walls made sound. Mum's skin was see-through. Her hair was shedding. She spent most days with wires in her veins. Dad worked late. My sister slept in the same bed as me, squashing me, tucking her nails into my back.

- say: is Mum going to die.

The statue over Mum and Dad's bed was supposed to bring good fortune. Dad brought me a bike so I could ride to school. I spent hours circling the house at night before sidling up to the front door.

- say: you can't do anything right.
- say: it was one thing.
- say: I'll do it myself, what would happen if I wasn't around.

Mum puked in the kitchen sink. My sister ate grapes while we studied. I signed my own permission slips, learning to live life under a constant, droning scream.

- say: you think it was my dream to serve you my whole life.

My sister put my hand on her chest.

— say: there's a lump here, I think it's cancer, I think I'm going to die.

— say: that's your boob, you're fine.

Dad let us cut his hair to match Mum's. They held hands more often, took us out for ice-cream, let us stay awake long after the stars came out.

— say: I love you more than you could know.

— say: I love you, I love you, I love you.

— say: will you promise to look after the girls, have my mother move in with you, she'll help you.

— say: you always ruin everything.

— say: you think I'm not scared.

— say: we were having such a nice day, all you ever talk about is death.

The sheets were cleaned before she went. The wool wash always smelled like her. My sister said she knew where Mum had gone, she lived in the walls. She could hear her too. So we listened, piled on each other in the silence of night. Mum, watching us from her perch.

— say: the walls are closing in on you.

NONFICTION



If I Was a Psychic on a Blue Velvet Couch

At the end of summer, your mother will cheat on your father. You will not know if she has cheated before. You will not know if she has cheated with other men, in other places, when your father was living in a submarine or on a ship, or if there is more to the story. You will not know many things, but you will listen as your father and sister tell you this over the phone. When they hang up, you will skip the workshop class you have later in the day with the middle-aged professor you have a crush on, and you will finish off a six-pack of your favorite beer, and you will sleep for two days straight after.

But, before you do any of this, you will keep listening, confused when they keep talking. You will wonder what more there is to say. You will cuss under your breath, wonder why they had to say anything at all. And you will be even more confused when they tell you that your mother has been arrested for what the newspapers will later call “terroristic threat of family/household,” what your boyfriend’s family will call bad parenting, what your friends, for fear of upsetting you, will not call anything.

You will think your father is joking when he tells you that your mother tried to burn the house down with your sister and her fiancé inside of it, after they found out she was cheating on him. And, before you can stop yourself, you will laugh out loud, because you can really do nothing else.

You will think the entire phone call insane. You will imagine the red brick house on the corner of the street up in flames. You will imagine your old bedroom, still there like a bad shrine, gone, because of your kerosene mother. You will laugh, until you realize no one else is and you probably shouldn’t be either.

At this point, your sister’s voice will stall, her eyes probably full of tears, and you will have a panic attack. This one won’t last long and your breathing will slow and you will pinch the insides of your thighs as your sister tells you exactly what happened, tells you how she had no other choice but to call the police and have your mother arrested. Later, she will also tell you that she begged the cops to let your mother go, to call a psychiatrist, to call someone who might actually help, because something similar has happened before.

And you will have so many questions. You will still not know so many things. But for the very first time, you will not feel like a child left in the dark or talking to trees.

Soon enough, your sister will say goodbye. You will ask your father if he’s okay, and then listen to him lie yes. After they hang up, you will have another panic attack, a longer one this time. And, after that, you will think back to your childhood, to the fights you had with your mother once you started to grow up. You will think about the weeks when she was gone, and about the weeks when she wasn’t—but was. You will remember the times where her face twisted up and her voice became guttural, inhuman, not the mother you knew. You will think back to all of this, and you will stop laughing. You will think back to all of this and know that this was coming for a long time, probably. You will get drunk and skip class and get high and sleep for two days straight after.

X

In a month or so, you will visit home for the first time in a long time. Your sister will be

visiting too, and you will see her blonde hair, now dyed a dark brown, a color closer to yours, and you will think to yourself how much she looks like your mother. You will think how much you both have started to. You will run up to her and hug her tight. And you will put on terrible movies you both hate but love to watch together.

The night will come slow, and you will talk to your older sister about everything, but you will not talk about how your mother is gone, not yet. You will not talk about the strange empty hole you feel, and you will not ask her if she feels that same emptiness too. You will not ask her about that day, or even how it feels being back in the house where you both grew up but where only she was when it happened. What you will ask is if she wants to look for *it* online. And, because you are sisters, she will know exactly what *it* you are asking her about. You both will have been waiting to do this. You both will have been waiting for the other to start.

Once you find your mother's mugshot, you will wish that you hadn't. Your sister will gasp at your mother's face, blank and pale and strange without makeup. And you will echo her, you have always echoed her, and you will cover your mouth with your hands to stop any sounds from coming out, as you take in her thin eyebrows, their angry slant. You will visibly cringe when you see her eyes, eyes that you would have sworn were green, but will, in that moment, look black.

Your father will walk into the room, ask the two of you what you want for dinner, and your sister will shut the laptop fast. You will cross your fingers and pray under your breath that he does not see, but he will. He will see his wife's face on the screen, even as it is closed, and he will walk out of the room without saying a word. It will be your sister's turn to laugh then, and you will hold her hand. She will laugh, and you will know she isn't really laughing.

X

Texas will get cold, colder than it has ever been, colder than you ever remember it getting, and, in December, you will graduate with two degrees because you didn't know how to pick just one. You will walk across the stage when the announcer gets to the *L's*, and your family and friends will yell obnoxiously loud as you try not to laugh. After the ceremony, your mother will find you in the crowd, come up to you, and hand you a bouquet of sunflowers. You will not say anything as you take your favorite flowers from her hands, and she will look sad as she walks to her car alone.

When you take pictures with your grandparents, you will look a little sad too. But then you will jump in the river where everyone jumps after graduating, and you will forget about feeling sad. You will jump only after your best friends tell you that you have to and that you'll regret it if you don't. You will jump because you know they're right. The dress you bought will end up soaking and only a little see-through, and the two hours you spent on your hair and makeup will have been for nothing. You will see the video of you jumping in the river after, and you will not care.

You will get out of the river only after a stranger helps you climb out. And then your boyfriend, C, and your best friends will hand you the wilted roses they got from a booth outside the university arena. The roses will sit in a vase until they turn black and fall to pieces. You will keep the sunflowers your mother gave you for one day, and then you will give them to your roommate's girlfriend.

Texas will get even colder, but you will be okay. You will buy a warmer jacket. You will

bundle up in scarves and a hat. It will rain in the morning, and you will buy an umbrella to keep yourself warm and dry. It will snow at night, and you will wear the thickest socks you own. And you will remember how cold it gets, even when you try your hardest to forget. The days will grow shorter, and you will sleep even longer.

X

There will be a pandemic. Right before this pandemic happens, you will visit New Orleans with a few friends from high school. You will drive. Or, more accurately, your closest friend from high school will drive eight hours across state border lines while you sleep in her car's passenger seat with a heavy blanket pulled over your head. You will love her that much more for it, though, and she will be secretly happy you only drive the one time, the one hour, on the last night when everyone else is drunk, because she knows how bad you really are at driving.

It will be cold in New Orleans too, but you will borrow her skirt anyway. You will put your hair in pigtails, and your other friend—the one who slept in the *backseat* with a blanket pulled over *her* head—will paint glitter over your face, over your arms, over your goosebump legs. If there is a part of your body that is visible, she will paint glitter over it. She will also paint glitter over some of your not-so-visible parts. But you will be glad she does this too, mainly because you are the one friend who will flash the white-haired men and college-aged guys for plastic beads they probably would have thrown to you and your friends anyway. You will laugh, not quite drunk, as they shout at your naked chest.

On the first night there, your friend—your backseat friend, not your driving friend—will want to stop on a dimly lit street corner in front of a greasy fold-up chair and white plastic table to have her palm read. Your other friend—the driving friend, this time—will look uneasy when she tells you both how these people are scammers, and how their tricks are fake as her nails. After a few minutes, the three of you will decide to cough up twenty bucks each anyway.

Somehow, you will end up first in line, looking more nervous than anyone should, and shuffling your feet around in front of an aging woman—a self-proclaimed psychic—who will have more purple hair than gray, and a gold tooth where her left canine would have been. She will call you *honey* and tell you to sit down in a drawl much too hushed for a woman with a stolen shopping cart filled with plastic crystals and (plastic?) skulls. And you will listen, before asking her how this all works, as if you are the type of person who would believe any answers she might give.

She will take the two folded bills from your left hand and grab ahold of your right. Your eyes will meet hers when she says, “Like this.”

Without even looking at the lines and scars and freckles on your palm, her eyes will suddenly close. Her grip on you will tighten. Your friends will still be behind you, now laughing at her banana yellow eyeshadow, but you will be the one her fingernails dig into. You will not laugh when you hear their jokes because you will see the same sad orange lipstick, but also the quiver of her top lip, the flutter underneath her closed lids, and instead start to think, what if this is real?

A few seconds will pass before she says anything. And when she does speak, you will wish you would've just laughed and made fun of her too. You will be silent, still, as she tells you that your mother is in trouble, that your sister has been stressed, that your father has found out something bad, that you are needed back home. Your friends will go quiet

then too, and you will pretend not to have heard whatever bullshit the batshit psychic has said. You will move your hand away, too fast and almost rude.

She will wave for the next person in line, for your friend to come forward, and you will fake listen, fake laugh, fake a forced smile, at her happy predictions. You will rub your palm until the crescent-shaped marks from her hard nails turn pink and then gone.

X

Time will feel weird. And you will spend your days back in your old bedroom, sleeping where you haven't slept in ages. By now, you will have gotten used to sleeping all day, staying up only once the sky turns dark. You will sleep and you will wake and you will stop caring about whether you're dreaming or not. It will all feel the same for a little while.

X

Your twenty-second birthday will pass, and you will get ready to move to a new city for more school. A few days before you and your father make the seven-hour-long drive west, your mother will call. You will hit accept, because you will feel bad about all the other times when you hit decline. But when you answer, you will say hello like you are really saying *leave me alone*. In a voice both hopeful and strained, she will ask if she can stop by.

When she walks through the door without knocking first, your throat will feel like it is closing, your mouth will feel dry, and your words will feel clumsy and rushed as you say hello. Her smile will look awkward too, not quite right, not quite as you remember it, and you will wonder if you are hallucinating when one corner of her mouth begins to sag lower than the other. She will be wearing a tight shirt. Her midriff will be showing. Her dark pants will be loose around her waist, taut and stretched everywhere else. She will be thin, thinner than before, and she will still be pretty, she has always been pretty, she is prettiest in your memories and the old photographs you lie about keeping, but you will miss the before.

You will not remember exactly what she says—she will not stay long because your words will be cold—but you will remember how she stands to leave. Slowly, as if you will forgive her. Carefully, as if you might bite. Her black eyeliner will have gone all smudged, and her maroon lipstick never did stay in the lines. Underneath her dark makeup and fake-tan skin, she will look tired. She will lean in for a hug and her arms will stretch out and you will try to remember if she has always looked like a puppet on a string. You will not hug her, and she will flinch. You will ignore how frail she looks when she says goodbye twice, the same way she does on the phone.

X

And then you and your father will make the seven-hour-long drive west. The apartment you should have visited before signing the lease will be nice enough, but the air will be drier than you're used to.

You will try to call C to tell him about the dry air, but he will not answer. The call will go straight to his voicemail, and you will listen to the whole thing, his boyish voice sounding different and the same, recorded back before you two even knew each other. You will think about calling your mother before calling your sister instead.

Your father will stay just long enough to help you get settled in. He'll tell you that his back hurts, and he'll tell you to get off the phone and help him carry your coffee table up the stairs. You will stub your toe as you do. You will wish you hadn't moved at all. You will cuss, loudly.

As you cradle your toe, your father will tell you not to cuss so loud. You will tell him that it's his fault, you got it from him. And he will laugh, ignoring what you said, because he knows you're right. Your father will say that you need a new couch, and you will drive to some random furniture store together to pick one out, because you know he's right.

Too soon, he will leave and you will hug him goodbye and your new couch will be blue velvet. You will text him, *let me know when you get home*, and he will call seven hours later, letting you know exactly that. You will want to text your mother back. You will watch a horror movie with all the lights on. You will need to go to sleep early. But you will stay up late. You will think about sunflowers and want to cry. You will think about fires and punch the closest pillow. You will pinch the insides of your thighs and pretend you never stopped sleeping so many months ago. You will pretend your blue velvet couch does not exist. You will pretend it is last summer, and you have a crush on your teacher, and you have a six-pack in the fridge that you will not drink until the weekend.

Eye/Cave Sonnet

1.

I stare into the eye cave of a twelve-point bull elk. His skull is bleached; but the antlers shine the smooth brown of a season spent in the sun and wind. I'm drawn into the emptiness, into the white shadow bone casts inside bone. I try not to think of the process it takes to get here—the ripping, tearing of flesh. The release: muscle detaching, fascia breaking. The clearing of brain matter, eyes bulging, popping. The scattering of bloody entrails on fresh snow. I breach into imagination here. I have no idea under what conditions this elk died. But, I conjure a cloudy November morning. The wind has fallen off suddenly after howling all night. A shot rings out. His heart is pierced clean through. The white skull is mounted to a wall painted white, and I wonder what it means, this vacancy. I am bound to it, somehow.

2.

My brother texts me a picture of a mountain lion skin stretched and hung on the wall of a diner where he eats lunch. The head is intact, but I can't see the face. It is pointed the other direction. I envision the lion with teeth bared as it lunges onto prey. If I let myself, the image goes too far—I imagine a heavy weight landing on me as I run through the woods. I'm at the one spot where I always feel the hair on my arms stand up as if someone or something is watching me. I feel teeth sink into the back of my neck. A brief, final flash of being dragged into the bushes. Blackness. Or bright white. I don't yet know what the end of the world looks like.

3.

I want to understand my memories as once-sentient beings, the way I understand myself through stark, naked portraits of my own body and form. This urge has nothing to do with animals, those dead or alive or kept in the netherworld of taxidermy—except, I too am animal in my desire, heat. I look at the empty skull, knowing nothing of its memories, its body, its death—only what it tells me of my own, and how often I fall into the vacancy of my own head.

4.

I listen to the near silent sound of the river parting its lips for a boulder under the moving water. Small ripples blemish the surface, like wrinkles in the bedsheet the morning after. I have no desire to pull it smooth. I only want to lay here in the raw light and listen to the bees. Somewhere across the way a locust's wings drown out the sound of a plane. The rock beneath me is still nightcool. All around is evidence of the burning—charred trees, both standing and fallen, cross over each other on the hot ground. The path is blacker now than before. The land holds its trauma close to the chest. But, the understory is starting to bloom its way back from the dead—hidden gems, flowers crack open, unleashed from under the ash. The grass is new, waist-high in the place that burned. It bends to the wind and rises lightly on the breeze, a resurrection all its own.

5.

The elk on the wall is death as artifact. It makes me think of memories I haven't returned to in a long, long time. I wonder what it is about the bleached skull that takes me through a tunnel, my own eye cave, to where I have not let myself go. I am interested in how I play taxidermist to my own memories, the inventory I keep in tangible, frozen forms on the shelf, the mantel of my mind, things that once lived, but now do not.

6.

The way the wind blows, occasionally billowing the curtains in the bedroom upstairs, makes me think of Faulkner—not a specific story, but a type. The dog lays dying in her crate on the front porch. The appointment, to have her put down, is in less than an hour. Until then, the wind brings the afternoon. A thick cloud of sadness approaches on the breeze. Time's marching brings the inevitable. The petals of a peony in a glass jar pile onto the table, scatter on the breeze from the screen door. A magpie lands on a rock in the sun across the yard. A fly buzzes incessantly against the windowpane—its last hours. I hear ghost noises: Isabelle in her crate. Her paws clicking across the floor. Her bark wafting in from outside. Each time I pull in the driveway, I think I will see her there, waiting for me. But, she is gone.

7.

The ironic thing, where the meaning lies, is eye contact the hunter makes with the animal before shooting it. Here, studying the mount on the wall, I run my finger through where the eye used to be, lightly trace round and round the socket with my index finger.

8.

In the car, driving west over the mountains, I blast Joan Osborne on repeat. "*If God had a face, what would it look like and would you want to see?*" I'm in fifth grade, on a bus with one headphone. The other one rests in my best friend's ear. We wonder then, what if God was one of us.

9.

To kill a buck and mount it to the wall, a hunter must first make sure not to ruin the face or the neck with the shot. What follows is both intuitive and disturbing. A knife. Decapitation. Skin and muscle pulled free. The brain and eyes and ears plucked away, the skull scraped clean and dried. I've never seen it done, but the sounds in my imagination haunt me. There is a sense inside me that this tearing away of all the extra is necessary to clean the slate, make the meaning of this head hung to the wall.

10.

The lit swimming pool watermarks the ceiling with golden ripples. I'm stunned by light, but I keep going. A cold, red sunset burns out the day as I swim lap after lap in the indoor pool, trying to forget what the strawberry blonde boy wanted from me on the couch in his dorm. My laps solidify the memory—sixteen strokes, then flip. I am buried in life, and always returning. Each time I push off from the wall, I push him off me.

11.

There's a painted sign on the wall at the lodge where I'm staying—"Home is where your story begins." I want to argue with it, because like the elk, my story begins in the woods at the dawning of the world. Or maybe with the moon as it sets, an orange ball reflected in the lake, taken between the mountains like a lover. Or at the foot of the bed in an old hotel room, where I lose my virginity to a boy from Wisconsin as the credits to a movie I can no longer recall roll up the screen. A pedestal tv with an adjustable antenna. Home, for a long, long time is just a place I want to leave.

12.

It's warm in the room where I sit watching lightning through the window. I'm waiting for rain. Flies buzz, bumping the pane. They are waiting on death, I suppose, or the morning after, when they will be vacuumed from the sill. They love the light the way a moth loves the flame. My memories, too, will become still and hard—unless I write them. Writing is the way I choose to keep what has happened to me. Like a dead fox, stuffed to make it seem as if it trots back toward its young left in the den, these are my memories, gaining speed. This is orchestrated motion—a leg bent to look as if it is stepping, a little leap over a swollen stream. Are memories, the ones here, orchestrated as well? Do I decide how to play them back to myself? Or is this an emptying of my skull that I might somehow become an artifact on the wall? *If God had a face, what would it look like and would you want to see?*

13.

I am one of three drunk girls in a parking garage in the downtown of a southern city gone quiet beneath the night sounds of crickets and cicadas. A sweet May breeze clacks the magnolia leaves together. We are loud, laughing at nothing, trying to find our way back to the car. I don't remember who is planning to drive. The floor we are on is empty of vehicles, but in one of the middle spaces, there is a tiny construction site, a few items covered with a clear tarp held down by broken bricks. Underneath the tarp is a pile of thirty or so fluorescent lightbulbs. I'm not sure who does it first, but the smash and tinkle of glass echoes across the hard space. Soon, all of us join in, javelin the bulbs into the concrete wall twenty feet away. It is satisfying, this gratuitous destruction. Our cavalier drunkenness. Our youth. Not one thinks of the mercury released, evaporating, to circle the earth in an invisible thread of heavy metal vapor that may never truly be gone. We break every last one before we head out, heedless, into the night.

14.

I stare at the mount, counting and recounting the bull's points, I have the feeling of being outside my body, observing myself, as though through my camera lens. I am still, so still, as if I myself have undergone a moment with the taxidermist. I am real but remembered. I look back on the shape of myself as if it is passed, living dead. What do eyes say about the soul? Or, no eyes at all? The skull on the wall is a terrain emptied of memory. Perhaps that is what will make it immortal.

Stupid Cupid: The Lover Girl Essay

In movies, sometimes there is a scene where the male lead is teaching the female lead to do something. Swing a golf club, shoot an arrow. Whatever the task, he is required to stand behind her and hold this sweet spot just under her rib cage, maybe whisper something in her ear.

The first time someone grabs you like that- you don't know him. He is maneuvering behind you to something or other and uses your waist to push your twelve-year-old body aside.

And it's not romantic, and it shouldn't be.

You'd just thought certain kinds of touches dictated an unspoken want: A brush of fingertips, the adjusting of a tie. With romance being a completely unavoidable side effect.

Romance isn't your favorite book genre- but you'll skip all the fight scenes in an adventure novel in favor of long, waxing passages from the female protagonist about the male protagonist's hands, or something else mundane: His eyes, his elbows.

When you develop your first boy-crush, you don't imagine making Sunday pancakes in a golden hour kitchen or kissing him passionately while the rain comes down hot and heavy like the warm innards of a gutted animal.

You have one specific fantasy; he is wearing a black tuxedo- and you, a long red dress. He is twirling you around an empty ballroom- unspeaking, unsmiling, looking into your eyes.

This, admittedly, is dramatic for a nine-year-old.

In the fantasy- you are always a better dancer than you are in real life, able to maneuver glossy floors in the fancy black high heels you saw once at Payless.

There's a flaw though- whenever you imagine him coming closer, connecting his lips to yours, you feel panic build in your chest. And you have to shake your head like an etch a sketch, start the daydream all over.

You'd thought of love burning in like a comet: Throwing your life, morals, and relationships, completely off-kilter. Someone pointing across the room at you.

"That one."

Romance consumes your life in ways that are both mortifying and naive. Every attractive stranger at the grocery store has no flaws and is perfectly romantically compatible with you. Every calloused hand meant to brush yours walking side-by-side.

"Sorry- I didn't mean to-"

"It's okay."

And you wore converse for years because of how they'd look creased leaning up for a movie tip-toe foot-pop kiss.

They hurt your heels- no arch support. But you'd crack your feet into them anyhow, sidewalk-salt hardened canvas, until they were falling apart. You felt they still hadn't been put to their proper use.

The first time you love a girl, you spend an entire car ride half-knocked out on Gravel imagining the two of you making dramatic confessions to one another to the soundtrack of your dad's oldies playlist that seems to loop over and over the duration of the eight hour trip.

And the first time you look at a girl- in the way you're really not supposed to, her hand is curled around the thin neck of a wine bottle, tipping it into her mouth until her tongue and lips are purple. "Want some?"

And you'll forget warnings about people you barely know and liquor bottles you haven't opened yourself. "Sure, yeah."

And she'll laugh when your whole face goes pink.

"Not a red fan?"

"No I am, it's just- really strong."

"Uh-huh."

She doesn't kiss you, and you don't make eye contact for more than a few seconds, but you'll feel a whole future stretching ahead of you, a one-year anniversary, a tearful parting as she goes off to college, a recounting to family and friends that long distance can work if you really put the work in.

"Oh hey, have you met my boyfriend?"

"Nope."

And before you were of loving age- all your great romances took place in small moments your mind kidnapped and fed until they were full grown. A boy in your class who looked at your face under a frog-dissecting magnifying glass and declared it a "cute nose" becomes your on and off again third-grade boyfriend, with on being when he looks your direction and off being when you forget he exists.

And you'll write him love letters in your journal, something you've seen girls do on the Disney channel.

A+B A+S A+J

And you know you hold love like a wound, pressing it too close into your stomach until you pass out, until it comes out of your mouth, hot and red.

It's all so embarrassing, when you are in love- observing mundane acts begins to feel like an intrusion. She is there, chewing her salad, and you love how she chews her salad, but she doesn't know you love that, and if she did, would she even be okay with you seeing her chew her salad? Not that you have a weird thing for people eating.

And it's okay, it's young, it's romantic. It's fine. You're in the bathroom mirror slapping yourself in the face and "Why did you do that?" And "Why do you have to make everything so fucking weird?" Your reflection, predictably, does not answer, just shakes her head and crosses her arms.

And you know, you look like sex, but can they talk about something else, please? You saw the moon once and it hung high and clear like it was on a string in a middle school production of *Fiddler on The Roof*. Can they talk to you like all those people on Tinder who say they hate small talk but only really want to ask you if you think aliens exist?

You wonder how much romance is about performance, how many girls look up from under their eyelashes because Cameron Diaz did it in a movie once? How many couples with hands linked would rather let go because it gets sweaty to hold on so long?

You love like a backseat driver, fruitlessly shouting at your heart with no real control over where it goes.

And how much of it is loving anyway and how much is wanting to? How much is hearing a song that says baby and imagining you had someone who wouldn't flinch the second the word fell out of your mouth, unbidden and sincere.

And once, in eleventh grade, you came home from a late night drenched in Ontario rainwater, which smells like pennies. Poorly applied makeup making its agonizing crawl down your face. And you looked into the vanity in your bedroom and the mirror that wouldn't stop tipping over and

thought “I wish somebody loved me.”

And the thought hadn’t crossed your mind until then, love as care was something to be doled out by the spoonful from parents, sparingly from peers. Not that you’d ever been great at accepting it.

You wanted someone to give you a sweater that was not yours, to wipe your face with a warm cloth, to look at your disheveled state and love you anyhow, to watch you put on your big socks and tight bun, and curl up behind you in bed, arm hard and heavy around your waist.

After that, it happened more. “I wish somebody loved me.” In the unsettlingly humid girl’s washroom, the curb where you’d run for the bus a second too late, the sheet of black ice covering your driveway.

Lying on your back, feeling like everything inside you had broken in four places, you wish for it, like a comet, like clear sky chemtrails.

When you get love though, you find yourself plowing through it like a bad cold, shaking your head and drowning it in electrolyte-infused liquids to drain it from your system. And maybe you aren’t ready, quite, to pull out your heart, to present it wholly, and say “Just take it if you want it so bad. All the red is okay because at least your hands will be warm, and if they aren’t you can have mine” and “I’m not using them anyway.”

And you know that the truth is you are scared of love tearing through you, of it leaving you in a crumpled taffeta dress mouthing along “I do” with it’s bride.

So you’ll tell them to go, to bestow their red-wine blush and cute nose onto someone with smaller thighs and a better brain.

But love is building you a dresser and putting on your favorite movie. It’s wondering what you’re up to today and if you ate breakfast.

And there’s no floor-length gown, you are still a bad dancer.

And it doesn’t feel like time is suspended, or your life is being upended. There is no harsh burn, no aching thaw. There is no knife-cut tension or hand brush that makes the world briefly spin backward on its axis.

It feels like being completely done with the dishes by the time you put the cookies in the oven, and not sweating enough to make your hair dirty while you run to class.

You love like a girl, warm and soft and often performative. Tucking a stray piece of hair behind your ear and looping one ankle over the other. You hold people in your body and your mind, in all their quirks and complexities, in all their salad-eating ramshackle glory.

So you look, so you are: Sweat stained sweater, dirty finger-nailed, greasy-haired, good old-fashioned lover girl.



BIOGRAPHIES

Millicent Borges Accardi

Millicent Borges Accardi, a Portuguese-American writer, has four poetry collections including *Quarantine Highway* (FlowerSong). Among her awards are fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, California Arts Council, CantoMundo, Fulbright, and The Foundation for Contemporary Arts NYC (Covid grant). She lives in the hippie-arts community of Topanga, CA.

Lisa Ampleman

Lisa Ampleman is the author of a chapbook and three full-length books of poetry, including *Mom in Space* (forthcoming 2024) and *Romances* (2020), both with LSU Press. Her poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in journals such as *32 Poems*, *Colorado Review*, *Ecotone*, *Image*, and *Southern Review*. She is the managing editor of *The Cincinnati Review* and poetry series editor at Acre Books.

Joshua Bird

Joshua Bird continues to saturate the I of his I with a salvaged IBM Selectric II typewriter. His ontological speaking voice will misfire before our very eyes. He once was a mild-mannered birth certificate, apocryphal or otherwise. When not writing, he can be found sleeping in a simulacrum. Visit joshuabirdpoetry.com for further self-defenestration.

Mackenzie Carignan

Mackenzie Carignan is owner and founder of Creative Vision Lab, a creativity and writing coaching practice in Broomfield, CO. She has a Ph.D. in Creative Writing from University of Illinois at Chicago, and her collection, *a house without a roof is open to the stars*, is available from Black Radish Books, and her chapbook, *someone somewhere is running* is available from Dancing Girl Press. Her work has appeared in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Poetry is Currency*, *Dusie*, and many other publications. She enjoys coaching people to help them make space for creativity, rebellion, and authenticity in their lives, work, and family spaces.

Natalie Christensen

Award-winning photographer Natalie Christensen seeks the sublime in ordinary settings. Career highlights: U.S./international exhibitions; UAE Embassy culture tour delegate; Artist-in-Residence Chateau d'Orquevaux, France invitee; and publication of *007 – Natalie Christensen* by Setanta Books, London. She has work in permanent collections and has been featured in numerous fine art publications.

john compton

john compton is a gay poet from kentucky. he lives with his husband and dogs and cats. his newest full length book is "the castration of a minor god" from ghost city press [dec 1st 2022].

Will Cordeiro

Will Cordeiro has work published in *AGNI*, *Bennington Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *The Threepenny Review*, *THRUSH*, and elsewhere. Will won the 2019 Able Muse Book Award for *Trap Street* and is co-author of *Experimental Writing: A Writers' Guide and Anthology*, forthcoming from Bloomsbury. Will co-edits Eggtooth Editions and teaches at Northern Arizona University.

Janelle Cordero

Janelle Cordero is an interdisciplinary artist and educator living in Spokane, WA. Her writing has been published in dozens of literary journals, including *Harpur Palate*, *Autofocus* and *North Dakota Quarterly*, while her paintings have been featured in venues throughout the Pacific Northwest. Janelle is the author of four books of poetry, including *Impossible Years* (V.A. Press, 2022).

Nellie Cox

Nellie (she/her) is a PhD student in poetry at Georgia State University. She enjoys writing poems about her home state of California, the cult of her youth, and ravages of mental illness on her family. When she is not writing, she can be found photographing turtles along the banks of the Chattahoochee River.

Acadia Currah

Acadia Currah (She/They) is an essayist and poet residing in Vancouver, British Columbia. Their work explores her relationship with gender, sexuality, and religion. She is a leather-jacket-latte-toting lesbian, her work seeks to reach those who most need to hear it. Their work has appeared in *The Spotlong Review*, *Defunkt Magazine*, *Otherworldly Women's Press*, *The South Florida Poetry Journal*, *The Autoethnographer*, and *The Fiddlehead*.

Jesica Davis

Jesica Davis (she/her) is a poet and technical writer from Chicago. She's an Associate Editor for *Inverted Syntax* literary journal whose work has appeared in *Dream Pop*, *Storm Cellar*, *streetcake magazine*, *The Laurel Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, and other places. Sometimes she makes poemboxes, which are sculptural interpretations of her poems. See j3s.net for more.

e

e placed first in KoreanAmericanStory's 2021 Virtual ROAR Story Slam. She found success as a blogger for a spinal cord injury non-profit, called Backbones, and her "Gimpy Law" blog's global readership reached 1,550 yearly views on disability issues and promoting disability awareness. e is a recovering social justice attorney wannabe with a disability affecting her speech and mobility, but not her spirit.

Cynthia Schwartzberg Edlow

Cynthia Schwartzberg Edlow has published two full length collections of poetry, *Horn Section All Day Every Day*, and *The Day Judge Spencer Learned the Power of Metaphor* (Salmon, 2018 and 2012). *Horn Section All Day Every Day* was a 2020 Phillip H. McMath Post Publication Book Award Finalist. Other honors include the Red Hen Press Poetry Award, *Tusculum Review* Poetry Prize, *Willow Review* Prize for Poetry, a Beullah Rose/*Smartish Pace* Poetry Prize, and three Pushcart Prize nominations. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Plume Poetry Anthologies*-Volumes 5, 7, and 11, *Drawn to Marvel: Poems from the Comic Books*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Barrow Street*, *Gargoyle*, *Gulf Coast*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Ilanot Review*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Plume*, *Salamander*, *Smartish Pace*, *Texas Review*, and *Verse Daily*, among other venues.

Jason Fraley

Jason Fraley is a native West Virginian who lives and works in Columbus, OH. Prior publications include *Quarter After Eight*, *DIAGRAM*, *Caketrain*, *Copper Nickel*, and *Forklift OH*.

Otis Fuqua

Otis Fuqua is a fiction writer from Boulder, Colorado, living in New York City. His work has appeared in *Calliope*, *Capsule Stories*, *Arkansas Review*, and *The Green Silk Journal*. He holds a degree in Creative Writing from Brandeis University, and is, presently, typing around his cat.

Irina Greciuhina

Irina Greciuhina is a painter who lives and works in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova. She studied Painting in the Academy of Music, Theatre and Fine Arts in Chisinau, and she continued her studies in the Technical University of Moldova, getting a degree in Architecture and Urban Planning. Since 2007 she has been a chief of the Architectural and Design bureau in Chisinau, working on exclusive national and international projects and winning the awards in design and architecture. Irina is represented by art galleries in Los Angeles (U.S.A), Stavanger (Norway) and Moscow (Russia).

ARTIST STATEMENT

The artist is the link who from the noise of cosmic chaos sees the creation of the Creator and shows this cosmic creativity to other contemplators. I think this creative process of conception, maturation and birth is quite similar to the process of human birth. Perhaps that's the way how the worlds are born. All forms and images used by me had come to me "by themselves": they either were appearing before the eyes, or they were forming during the work... But sometimes the images demanded to wait patiently for the silence in the soul... unless I would be able to see them. What does the humanity need art for? What do I need it for? ... Creativity in my understanding is born from thirst and desire to sip from pure primary and absolute source and then to share it with the world.

Hannah Harlow

Hannah Harlow has an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars. Her stories have appeared in *Cleaver Magazine*, *The Jellyfish Review*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and elsewhere. A publishing industry veteran, Hannah now owns and operates a bookstore on the north shore of Massachusetts.

Mark Yale Harris

Award-winning sculptor Mark Yale Harris works in alabaster, marble, limestone and bronze, expressing the duality in man's essence. Career highlights: 250+ national and international gallery and museum exhibitions (90+ solo); 120+ publications have featured his sculpture; he is represented by twenty galleries (US and UK); and has works in permanent public collections.

ARTIST STATEMENT

The purpose of my artwork is to invoke an awakening of the sensual. Stimulating a perceptual, internal, and intellectual response for the viewer: a visual that speaks to life's experiences. Creating symbols of universal connection underscores the relationship that one has to another and to nature.

Art conveys my nonverbal view of life. An ongoing portrayal of myself, my behavior, adventure, exploration, risk taking, and non-acceptance of convention and the status quo. Constantly in search of the new and different - I am fascinated with the unconventional. Life has a hard, aggressive side, as does much of my work, represented by rigid, angular lines. However, the soft side is also apparent, visible as curves and soft forms. Combining different elements, I bring forth a duality in the sculptures that I create.

Using the invaluable experience of the mentorship of Bill Prokopiou and Doug Hyde, along with my own vision, I have created an evolving body of work in alabaster, marble, limestone, and bronze. I was recently working on a commissioned piece and, while working, reflected on why I carve stone, a very primitive art form. The client had sent me a photo and specific dimensions. My process is to first draw it out dimensionally and then make a small clay model before beginning to sculpt. Then I start my work, in this case on a block of white marble. I measure and measure, then cut, then measure and then cut again, then recheck my drawing - and repeat. Finally, hopefully having made no mistakes, the figure begins to emerge. It is a great feeling of accomplishment! It is that mental challenge that inspires me to carve in stone. I thoroughly enjoy the cerebral exertion and concentration that is crucial to bringing something out of the stone, something that you really cannot do with clay or any other medium.

Summer J. Hart

Summer J. Hart is an interdisciplinary artist from Maine, living in the Hudson Valley, New York. Her written and visual artworks are influenced by folklore, superstition, divination, and forgotten territories reclaimed by nature. She is the author of the full-length poetry collection, *Boomhouse* (2023, The 3rd Thing Press) and the microchapbook, *Augury of Ash* (Post Ghost Press.) She is the recipient of a 2022 MacDowell Fellowship. Her poetry can be found in *Waxwing*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Northern New England Review*, *Denver*

Quarterly, and elsewhere. Summer is a member of the Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation.

Sara Kearns

Sara Kearns has been a runner-up for the Stan and Tom Wick Poetry Prize, and was a finalist for the New Issues First Book Award and the Walt Whitman Award. Her work can be read online in journals such as *The Literary Review*, *DMQ Review*, and *Rogue Agent*; her chapbook, *Plastic Babies*, is forthcoming from dancing girl press in early 2023. She teaches at the University of Pittsburgh.

Jezzelle Kellam

Jezzelle H R Kellam (b 1999) is a graphite artist from Kent, based in the Northeast of England.

ARTIST STATEMENT

In her work, she represents the body. By making conscious decisions in removing heads and parts of a body this is where her practice has led her. She has used this compositional decision as a vehicle for her ongoing oeuvre that articulates her way of thinking.

“By breaking down the form to how I see it, I attempt to encapsulate the physical, psychological, and physiological properties of what it is like to inhabit a form, a human body. By bridging a gap between the body and mind. My art and life are inextricably enmeshed. It is vital to portray a multitude of scars, body hair, cellulite and so on. These abrasive textures have been viewed as imperfections, but I want to share how beautiful these attributes are.”

Stefanie Kirby

Stefanie Kirby is a Pushcart nominated poet residing along Colorado's front range. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Passages North*, *Portland Review*, *Clockhouse*, *Rust+Moth*, *DIALOGIST*, and elsewhere.

Whitney Koo

Whitney Koo is the founder and editor-in-chief of Gasher Press and a Ph.D. candidate in English - Creative Writing at Oklahoma State University. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Colorado Review*, *American Literary Review*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Breakwater Review*, and others. Originally from Arizona, Whitney currently resides in Lubbock, TX with her husband, Bonhak, and cat, Bunny.

Konstantin Kulakov

Konstantin Kulakov (he/they) is a poet and translator born in Zaoksky, Soviet Union. His poems and translations appear or are forthcoming in *Spillway*, *Phoebe*, *Harvard Journal of African American Policy*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Passengers Journal*, and *Loch Raven Review*, among others. They hold an MFA in Creative Writing from Naropa University and are co-founding editor of *Pocket Samovar* magazine. They live in Washington, D.C.,

on occupied Piscataway and Anacostan land.

Edward Lee

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen* and *Smiths Knoll*. His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>

ARTIST STATEMENT

Moments frozen, time stilled, emotions made into a mirror in which the viewer can see some aspect of themselves.

W.J. Lofton

W.J. Lofton is a Black, Queer, Southern, American poet. He is the author of the poetry collection “A Garden for Black Boys Between the Stages of Soil and Stardust”. His poems have been featured in *TIME Magazine*, *Platypus Press*, *Rust & Moth*, and *Scalawag Magazine*.

Courtney Ludwick

Courtney Ludwick is a writer, teacher, and doctoral candidate in Literature and Creative Writing at USD. Her words have appeared in *Watershed Review*, *Oxford Magazine*, *Milk Carton Press*, and elsewhere. You can connect with Courtney on Instagram @courtlud or on www.courtlud.com.

Jennifer Martelli

Jennifer Martelli is the author of *The Queen of Queens* and *My Tarantella*, named a “Must Read” by the Massachusetts Center for the Book. Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Academy of American Poets Poem-a-Day*, *The Tahoma Review*, and elsewhere. She is a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellow and co-poetry editor for *Mom Egg Review*.

Kate Maxwell

Kate Maxwell has been published and awarded in many Australian and International literary magazines. Her first poetry anthology ‘Never Good at Maths’ was published in 2021, and her second anthology will be forthcoming in 2023. Kate’s interests include film, wine, and sleeping. She can be found at <https://kateswritingplace.com/>

Harryette Mullen

Harryette Mullen’s poetry collections include *Recyclopedia*, *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, and *Urban Tumbleweed*. Two books are forthcoming in 2023, *Open Leaves: Poems from Earth* and *Her Silver-Tongued Companion*, a critical edition of collected and uncollected

poems. Her collages have appeared in *Air/Light* and *About Place*.

ARTIST STATEMENT

My creative work is primarily poetry. Recently, I have been exploring visual means of expression, composing simple collages, using images as another way to think about challenging issues of our time.

Natalia Nebel

Natalia Nebel is a writer whose work has been published in a variety of literary magazines. Her story *Sloughs* was nominated for a Pushcart Prize, her essay “Lazarus” was a notable essay in 2019 *Best American Essays*, and she’s co-founder of the reading series Sunday Salon Chicago. When she’s not writing, she’s painting odd little creatures for fun.

Amy Nelder

Born in 1971 in San Francisco, painter Amy Nelder calls her work “Pop Trompe L’oeil.” Employing realism with precise technique and accuracy of detail, she infuses pop au courant imagery to celebrate unsung domestic moments or to convey messages of contemporary socio-political import. A trained opera singer from ages 9 – 20, she notes the musicality in her paintings, that her way of feeling color is rhythmic and lyrical. Nelder studied at the University of California at Berkeley and the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia. Early in her career, she was the Forensic Artist for the San Francisco Police Department and the Medical Examiner’s Office. Nelder now focuses entirely on her fine art.

Anna Oberg

Anna Oberg is a professional photographer based in Estes Park, Colorado. When she’s not arranging family portraits with the perfect view of Long’s Peak as backdrop, she focuses on writing tiny memories and small stories. She has been published in *Mud Season Review*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Causeway Lit*, *The Maine Review*, *decomp Journal*, *The Festival Review*, and *Split Rock Review*, among others.

Peter O’Donovan

Peter O’Donovan is a scientist and writer living in Seattle, WA. Originally from the Canadian prairies, he received his doctorate from the University of Toronto, studying computer science and graphic design. He is the winner of the 2022 Guy Owen Prize from *Southern Poetry Review*, and his poetry has appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Qwerty*, *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, and elsewhere.

Helena Pantsis

Helena Pantsis (she/they) is a writer, student, and artist from Naarm, Australia. A full-time student of creative writing, they have a fond appreciation for the gritty, the dark,

and the experimental. Her works have been published in *Overland*, *Island*, *Going Down Swinging*, and *Meanjin*. More can be found at hlnpnts.com.

Kimberly Ann Priest

Kimberly Ann Priest is the author of *Slaughter the One Bird*, finalist in the American Best Book Awards, and chapbooks *The Optimist Shelters in Place*, *Parrot Flower*, and *Still Life*. She is an associate poetry editor for *Nimrod International Journal of Prose and Poetry* and assistant professor at Michigan State University.

Annie Przypyszny

Annie Przypyszny is a poet from Washington, DC. She is an Assistant Editor for *Grace and Gravity* and has poems published or forthcoming in *The Northern Virginia Review*, *Pacifica Literary Review*, *The Healing Muse*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Ponder Review*, *SWWIM*, and others.

Nick Rattner

Nick Rattner has served as Editor-in-Chief of *Gulf Coast* and as Editor for *Ugly Duckling Presse*. Recent work has appeared in / will soon appear in *Fence*, *Colorado Review*, *The Cortland Review*, *Sixth Finch*, *Pleiades*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Salt Hill*, and *Asymptote*. At present, he is translating the work of Spanish poet Juan Andrés García Román, with the recent chapbook *Little Songs* (2022) from Foundlings Press and a forthcoming book *The Adoration* (2023) from Quantum Prose, for which he was awarded a grant from Spain's Ministry of Education.

Rachel Reynolds

Rachel Fiske Reynolds teaches middle school. They are a Best of the Net nominee and their work has appeared with *Red Rock Review*, *Liminalities*, *Faultline*, *Duende*, *the Nervous Breakdown*, *VICE*, and more. You can find them on the internet as @portmantoad and at portmantoad.com.

Bette Ridgeway

Over four decades Bette Ridgeway has exhibited globally with 80+ prestigious venues, including: Palais Royale, Paris and Embassy of Madagascar. Awards include Top 60 Contemporary Masters and Leonardo DaVinci Prize. Mayo Clinic and Federal Reserve Bank top Ridgeway's permanent collections. Books include *International Contemporary Masters* and *100 Famous Contemporary Artists*.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Bette Ridgeway is best known for her large-scale, luminous poured canvases that push the boundaries of light, color and design. Her youth spent in the beautiful Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York and her extensive global travel filled have informed her

colorful palette. For the past two decades, the high desert light of Santa Fe, NM has fueled Ridgeway's art practice.

Her three decades of mentorship by the acclaimed Abstract Expressionist Paul Jenkins set her on her lifetime journey of non-objective painting on large canvas. She explores the interrelation and change of color in various conditions and on a variety of surfaces. Her artistic foundations in line drawing, watercolor, graphic design, and oils gave way to acrylics, which she found to be more versatile for her layering technique. Ridgeway has spent the last 30 years developing her signature technique, called "layering light," in which she uses many layers of thin, transparent acrylics on linen and canvas to produce a fluidity and viscosity similar to traditional watercolor. Delving further, Ridgeway expanded her work into 3D, joining paint and resin to aluminum and steel with sculptures of minimal towers.

Ridgeway depicts movement in her work, sometimes kinetic and full of emotion, sometimes bold and masterful, sometimes languid and tentative. She sees herself as the channel, the work coming it comes through her but it is not hers. It goes out into the world – it has a life of its own.

Liz Robbins

Liz Robbins' fourth collection, *Night Swimming*, won the 2023 Cold Mountain Press Annual Book Contest (Appalachian State U). Her third collection, *Freaked*, won the Elixir Press Annual Poetry Award, judged by Bruce Bond; her second collection, *Play Button*, won the Cider Press Review Book Award, judged by Patricia Smith. Her first collection is *Hope, As the World Is a Scorpion Fish* (U Nebraska), and her chapbook, *Girls Turned Like Dials*, won the 8th Annual YellowJacket Press Prize.

Esther Sadoff

Esther Sadoff is a teacher and writer from Columbus, Ohio. Her poems have been featured or are forthcoming in *Cathexis Northwest Press*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Red Ogre Review*, *Santa Clara Review*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, among others. She is also a poetry reader for *Passengers Journal*.

Barbara Saunier

Barbara Saunier has published in numerous journals and reviews, including *Poet Lore*, *Cream City*, *Spoon River*, and *Nimrod International*. Her work also placed first in The MacGuffin 16th National Poet Hunt. Since retiring from teaching at Grand Rapids (MI) Community College, she lives quietly with her horses, cats, and one good dog.

Marsha Solomon

Marsha Solomon is an award-winning artist whose work has been exhibited nationally and internationally in galleries and museums. Her abstract paintings "From Rhythm to Form" have been the subject of several solo exhibitions and have appeared in many publications. Audiences in New York, Washington DC, Chicago, and Florida have enjoyed

her work, which has also traveled to exhibitions in England, France, Singapore, South Korea, Italy, and Japan.

ARTIST STATEMENT

In "From Rhythm to Form," I use thinned acrylic paint as stains to form a central atmospheric shape. These "centers," or fields of pure color emerging from an undefined ground, are then shaped by semi-opaque passages where the texture and dramatic gesture of the strokes contrast with the smooth effect of the stain. In relating these circular to the rectangular format, I explore how the spatial effect of colors, their placement and sequence, lets the painting breathe, transforming it into an imaginary space where the power of suggestion resides in the expressive capacity of color and form.

Ursula Sokolowska

Ursula Sokolowska was born in Krakow, Poland. She studied photography at Columbia College (1997-99), completing her BFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2001. Although her work is deeply personal, her images are also a reflection of separation of the body from consciousness and objectification. Her photographs can be found in many public and private collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Contemporary Photography, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Tanqueray. Selected exhibitions include The Travelling Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland, Saatchi Gallery, Zoo Art Fair, the Royal Academy of Arts, London, United Kingdom, Minnesota Center for Photography, and Schneider Gallery, Chicago, IL. Her work has appeared in CameraArts magazine, Light & Lens: Photography in the Digital Age, LENS CRATCH, Art Photo Index, and featured in People's Photography China.

ARTIST STATEMENT

I use various camera formats (film and digital), 35mm slide projections, and multiple exposures to construct a fiction around the deliberate act of remembering.

William Stobb

William Stobb is the author of six poetry collections, including *You Are Still Alive* (42 Miles Press) and the National Poetry Series selection, *Nervous Systems* (Penguin). His work is forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Glacier*. Stobb works on the editorial staff of *Conduit* and Conduit Books & Ephemera, and the creative writing faculty of the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse.

SM Stubbs

A former bar owner, SM Stubbs has been nominated for the Pushcart and Best New Poets; recipient of a scholarship and staff member at Bread Loaf Writers' Conference; winner of the 2019 Rose Warner Poetry Prize from *The Freshwater Review*; finalist for the Gunpowder Press Barry Spacks Prize 2022. His work has appeared in numerous magazines, including *New Ohio Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Raleigh Review*, *Post Road*, *Crab Creek Review*, *December*, and *The Rumpus*.

Daniel Suárez

Daniel Suárez is a first-generation Cuban American born and raised in Chicago, IL. He holds an MA in English, and an MFA in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. His poems can be found in the *Columbia Poetry Review*, *RHINO*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Third Coast*, *[PANK] LATINX/Latinidad Folio*, *Poetry Corner in the Chicago Reader*, and other print/online journals.

Chad Weeden

Chad Weeden's work has appeared in the *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Crosswinds Poetry Journal*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *great weather for MEDIA*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Main Street Rag* & *the Kakalak*. He lives in Newport, Rhode Island.

Jet Fuel Review Fall 2022 Staff



left to right

Row 1:

Alexciana Castaneda, Selena Tomas, Sam McFerron, Jovaughn Williams

Row 2:

Lauren Lotarski, Haley Leon, Andrea Yvette Rodriguez, Stephanie Karas

Row 3:

Patricia Damocles, Dr Jackie K. White, Dr. Simone Muench



**Millicent Borges
Accardi**

Lisa Ampleman

Joshua Bird

Mackenzie Carignan

Natalie Christensen

John Compton

Will Cordeiro

Janelle Cordero

Nellie Cox

Acadia Currah

Jessica Davis

e

**Cynthia Schwartzberg
Edlow**

Jason Fraley

Otis Fuqua

Irina Greciuhina

Hannah Harlow

Mark Yale Harris

Summer J. Hart

Sara Kearns

Jezzelle Kellam

Stefanie Kirby

Whitney Koo

Konstantin Kulakov

Edward Lee

W.J. Lofton

Courtney Ludwick

Jennifer Martelli

Kate Maxwell

Harryette Mullen

Natalia Nebel

Amy Nelder

Anna Oberg

Peter O'Donovan

Helena Pantzis

Kimberly Ann Priest

Annie Przytycki

Nick Rattner

Rachel Reynolds

Bette Ridgeway

Liz Robbins

Esther Sadoff

Barbara Saunier

Marsha Solomon

Ursula Sokolowska

William Stobb

SM Stubbs

Daniel Suárez

Chad Weeden