

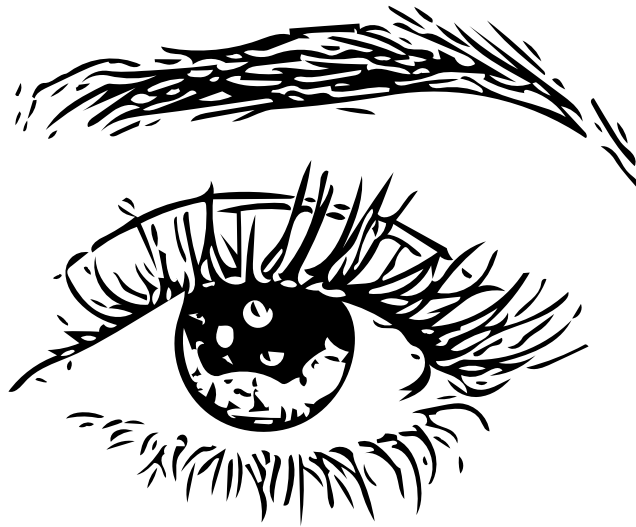
CASSANDRA

prophecy & deceit



FREE VERSE REVOLUTION

ISSUE V:
CASSANDRA
prophecy & deceit



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EDITOR'S NOTE

It feels as if every editor's note I write begins with what a pleasure it has been to create this issue for you. But, it truly has been a pleasure.

2021 saw the fruition and flourishing of Free Verse Revolution in its new guise as a literary and arts magazine. We finished the year feeling positively buoyant with our first print anthology around the corner.

As it stands, *Hebe to Hades* has been released to wonderful reviews from readers, and the support you have shown for Issue V as it becomes the first issue to be released in print and online, has been incredibly humbling.

I am lucky. I am grateful. The community Free Verse Revolution has fostered over the years, but particularly over the last 18 months, is one of care, talent and kindness. I am thankful for this, for you.

Without further ado, however, here is Issue V: Cassandra (prophecy & deceit). Within these pages are voices which demand to be heard and to be believed. Our contributors deal eloquently, beautifully and brutally with justice, the truth, womanhood, personhood and survival. The strength in this collection of works is palpable, as is the vulnerability which makes us so astoundingly gorgeous as human beings. Cassandra, and how she has been portrayed through the written word, photography and art, made me fall in love again with courage and what it means on a community and an individual level to be brave. I hope you finish reading this feeling brave too.

Please be mindful of the following content warnings as you read:

- pages 11 - 12: allusions to abortion
- page 28: depiction of Parkinson's Disease
- page 29 - 33: discussion of Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)
- pages 38 - 41: allusions to incest and sexual assault

Your humbled editor, always,
Kristiana

FREE VERSE REVOLUTION

Free Verse Revolution is an international literary and arts magazine publishing quarterly issues in print and digital format. Each issue is themed and shares poetry, prose, photography and artwork by creators from around the globe. Free Verse Revolution also publishes an annual print anthology sharing a selection of pieces from the four issues of that year. We pride ourselves as a home for new and established creators since we began publishing poetry as an online WordPress platform in 2018.

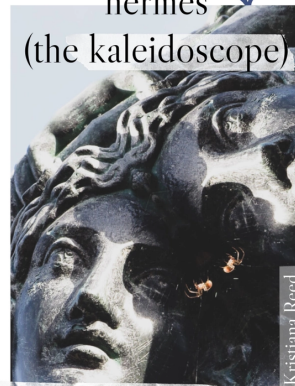
Read previous issues online at
www.freeverserevolution.com

Issue I:
hebe
(the fountain of youth)



Free Verse Revolution:
a literary magazine

Issue II:
hermes
(the kaleidoscope)



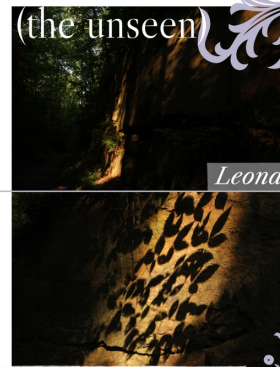
Free Verse Revolution:
a literary magazine

Issue III:
hestia
(hearth & home)



Free Verse Revolution:
a literary magazine

Issue IV: hades
(the unseen)



Free Verse Revolution:
a literary & arts magazine

WHEN SHE FINALLY CRIES
MOLLY FUREY

"Where is the woman with the moth for a mouth?"
All done up, a hundred feet search for the how.

Sunken with her cymbals and oddest daughter song
Bathtub blues on, the radio asks me
How long?

Where is the Woman and what does she do?
When the purple beasts fly in and the silent ghost refutes
He cannot sign the legal papers,
not with vanishing hands
Is she still grooving with doom in that three stanza band?

We go out all day and it's over like a song
Like those men of flight
I'm not a thought to be brought along

So where is the Woman?
Pink boots on swan feet

A dolly by the red floorboard, pink caskets of defeat

I find her dresses filled with iris
As Hell bakes in the oven
Is it now that I bear witness to
the death of her I called
"My Woman"



ALTAR

RACHEL THOMAS

I am all wet curls and
white knuckles and cold feet
Arriving at the destination and praying
that the door isn't locked.
I am a burnt down church,
where my hope is still knelt at the altar.

My body's like our old, godforsaken home.
Too much love and pain
Sitting across from each other at the kitchen table.
It is something I don't want to be buried in.
Rooms where each picture on the wall screams, each floorboard creaks
Every piece of furniture is broken
so I'm spending longer in bed.
My father died in that living room,
blue lips, shaky hands, set free.
The front porch is rotting away
under the chair my mother smokes in.
Too much love and pain,
sleeping back to back in the same bed.
At eight years old, with hands over my ears, I learn that pain is so loud.
Godforsaken home.
I am fourteen years old, and pain is so loud.
I am fourteen years old, and there are so many reasons
that I cannot breathe in this godforsaken home.

I dream of bruised knees
And swollen bellies
I dream of blood that pours from the corners of my mouth
I clutch my lips as it drips to the floor
This is some sort of open door
to my pain, can't you see
Can't you see it?

It's martyr pain. "God-bless-you" pain. Intravenous pain. Saline shivers. Surgical tape
pulling. "Like a bandaid" pain. "Little stick" pain.
"There's nothing we can do," pain.
"But I don't know how to handle this," pain.

THE AUGURIES, THE BROKEN BIRDS
ELIZABETH A. OATES

as I lie bleeding like the broken birds, stuck pig
with truth squealing in its veins, now drained,
I see a figure rising. The rest lies with him.

sweetened by a divine mother, hardened
in Love's candy shell on battlefields
Aeneas King and father of Kings, I see but never tell.

when we were small I thought I saw a dove over his shoulder
but I blinked and saw it bleed and never looked at him again.
a yellow spot appeared on the wall of my closed eye,

one lump still glows hot beneath a heap of smoking coal
a pencil man emerges from an inky sea
his knees move on hinges, hauling the best of me.

his bird soars overhead toward promised land.
a city rises to nest him, small bones of his descendants
feathers falling fast onto an earth already salted.

I was a bird on those coals
where do you fly? what lies ahead, little bird?
strangled into submissive silence, neck

broken like the spirits of my sisters and mothers
bodies bent backward for an answer, but left
unfinished and long before a word was uttered.

beseched and besieged, sizzling on those coals
when will the storm end, when will it end, little bird?
my mind was raped up against my own funeral pyre.

my dreams are filled with dying birds, throats cut
to prevent their passage, my dreams are filled with lies.
men will spit blood on their new gods to win contests.

sweet Aeneas survives, but his lonely heroism
means nothing; he never believed me either. Truth dies
in my throat, like fading lines of birdsong.

*I am sick of looking forward, backward,
and seeing nothing
but treacherous men.*

APOLLO'S CURSED CASSANDRA
ELIZABETH A. OATES

when will it come?
I have seen the future arrive
to reap what the present sows
the fire that for so long
attacked my mind arrives
to raze the forests to the ground
and men may see how they can be
reduced to ash,
but throw me to the flames instead
for I am used,
and I am of no use,
and I am not to be believed.
I have been slaughtered by time,
and the battering knowledge of
time,
as everyone soon shall be
but my sisters first, always,
first my sisters, always,
heads pushed down into a muddy
river of time
I saw it many times, but
I am like them, I am meant
to suffer,
and I am not to be believed.

*but I have seen
what has not yet come to pass,
what I believe to be,
if not for my burnt body,
then for the unburnt
bodies of my sisters
yet to come,*

a reckoning.

CASSANDRAS : NEVER TAMED

DEBARATI GHOSE

The newspaper burns at my finger's touch,
A fire stirs as my eyes smudge.
It propagates from a page to the next –
Consuming injustice that gasps for breath.
Thousand mouths shut, thousand grails bleed
They are scathed and ruined, as the gods sleep.

“The wrath of the gods”, the grandma says,
When I respond in cries and complaints.
I lamely lie to the moths that burn,
“Candles give light, they do not harm”.

“The wrath of the gods”, says the peasant bride,
When I balm her wounds and her pride.
Punished by her husband who drank and beat,
Many a day she can't stand on her feet.

“The wrath of the gods”, says the crowd.
“She shouldn't come out at night”, they shout.
“How does a deer dare to roam free?”
“When predators are on a hunting spree?”
Her breaths feeble, her limbs limp,
Shards and splinters bite, her muscles weep.

Little lies, she swallows every night
The wounds hurt but her mouth must be tight.
Nobody believes her; the truth now fears,
The faces mock, as she pools in tears –
“The fault lies in her beauty and her brain,
And all the sins that run through her veins”.

Like the priestess in the temple of god,
Who was desired, cursed, raped and murdered!
Cassandras, who are devoured and defamed,
Their eyes never lied; their spirits never tamed.
It's their wrath that Apollo should fear –
That grows and spreads now everywhere.

As impatient as I grow, the prophecy grows in endurance
Cassandras' chrysalides shimmer, like silk in silence.
Soon they'll break free, like origins to arcs –
Armoured with venom that'll morph
Their moths to monarchs.

A WOMAN'S VOICE

ENRICO BARIGAZZI

Tears are staining the myriad of faces
behind the curtains of oppression
their voices going unheard
by the poisoned passiveness which dwells
into the hollow Gods of nothing

Kings and Emperors wasted their time
following their stubborn deafness
they didn't want to listen to the sweet voice
of the Woman they neglected
without crossing the Wall of their arrogance.

SNAKES IN A CRADLE

The time's feeding the hours
meanwhile fake truths are whispering
into the ears of the blind sleepy throngs
whose bloody yearning wants to judge
a woman for her words they've never figured out
for the future they've never conceived
for her sympathy they've never had.

BLURRED VISIONS

Inside the sadness of being neglected
there's a small fire burning the time
its light has dazzled the eyes of a tortured sensitivity
ruins and disgrace have paved her walk through
the perilous battle against the human short-term vision
she tried to broaden it
the ashes of her foresight were smouldering
under the foolish wisdom of conformity.

WHISPERS

SANGEETHA

Whispers seeping out
from this wizened weary earth
colour my nails blue
clawing at secrets interred
long before yesterday died



HYPOCRISY

Her crimson clothes hung heavy
Yet Truth, Janus faced, decreed
That she must hide
Under the shade of shame
If only to protect herself
If only to save her name

IN CRACKS*

in cracks of shadows
at the swish of her silk skirts
his heart howls, secrets rustle
their history hisses
in wordless angst, sighing what if

**a Warya (a quechuan form of poetry) – 5/7/7/6/8 and to also include onomatopoeia*

SOOTHSAYER

VANESSA NAPOLITANO

Truth is a muzzle,

axe nuzzling too close to the bone,
where the sharp edge of a blade
reflects the colour of disaster.

Your dissident voice will sing its last song
alone and unmoored from the chorus.

You can't stop talking, can't stop seeing. Narrating is as core to you as feeling.

Fine mesh may cover your mouth. Sea foam.
Sand is mute and wears you down. Truth is a muzzle. At last to cry out is to give your
location to an enemy.

Your dissident voice
will sing its last song
alone.

PARTY TAROT

At the party Cassandra stays by the dip table
with the tarot cards in her pocket in case anyone asks.
Nobody asks. Everybody in the room is doubled,
one solid form, one future self in motion
heavier, older, better/worse across a spectrum
that infiltrates the beer and Malbec. Jostling for attention.

She feels like a dream-catcher for middle-aged shadows. So many of the prophecies
would be sad, or dull;
or if beautiful, not beauty recognizable from a distance.

Still,
she stays by the dips waiting with glossy cards clutched, reduced to a party trick
that is easily dismissed,

classic Rider-Waite cards, each as accurate as the mirror,
and just as distorted.



DREAM VECTOR
DIANA STORY



SALON OF WAITING
DIANA STORY



MY MOTHER'S VANITY

BARBARA LEONHARD

Mom's cedar beauty station,
 where I primp.
My desire to see her face.
 Her shimmer of hair.
The light splashing
 on her Bésame lips.

I dabble in dreams.
 Twist my hair and clamp it
in coils with her bobby pins.
 Fluff the curls to my shoulders
for a night out.

My face will light up at a stop
 to view the moon. I'll feel
the cool, surrounding darkness
 undrape my skin.

The long mirror swings on hinges.
 Faces their bed. The sun whispers
off the bed linens. I gingerly open
 the vanity drawer.

 Follow a thread of pearls
 winding deep into Mom's memories.
 Past Grandma Lilian's rings.
 A bottle of red polish.
 Black and white Kodak photos

of Mom at my age. A girl fumbling
 for freedom. Cooing for caresses.
Another of her as a college coed.
 Her head turns to the call of her name.

The light from her eyes slips
 onto a coy smile, her lips part
into a hush. Waves of desire
 crease folds into a sublime form.
A pearl earring reflects a new dream.

Shadows entwined on soiled sheets.
 Mistakes made, shame.
 Her father's scorn.
 Her mother's cold silence.

My hands retreat,
bitten by the snake.

I excavate more memories,
kicked under floorboards,
polished to cover gouges
in the wood panels.

Stomped on. Scuffed by flights
from hall mirrors.
Not for my eyes
to see
what remains.

Red nail clippings.
Stained hankies.
Broken clasps. An unthreaded
strand of pearls.

PREMATURE

BITHIKA HALDER

The fears are coming at me again
with their forks and knives

I'm still raw, still premature
to be devoured, I plead though unheeded

The tree who bore me, they say,
is shedding its leaves, turning earthy

A season more would do, I say,
let me turn fruitful, till I become myself

But I hear the clinking at the tables
of shiny things to cut right through me

I'm still raw, still premature
My skin can take a cut and not bleed

I heard, they banged their empty plates
and left cussing on the dying tree

By the time they saw me next,
I had grown into an evergreen.

FRAGMENT

LAURA JAMESON

I want to feel light, yet not disappear
[Guilt] Grief has become too heavy for womankind
to keep. We break stonewalls only to emerge
the Great Unheard - is this
how we become afraid
to speak the truth? What do I
tell my daughter, muslin-soft and laid bare
to the lash of forked tongues, a viper's kiss-curse?
Her wisdom spit from a glass throat, every word
splintered and questioned. Her body condemned
to crumble, between the bully and the blame
Her savaged soul rests in shatters, consumed
by suffering and shame

I pray the earth delivers those luminous shards
to a sky, both melting and burning with rage
As reckoning rains down, the land yields
this time, this place - for the truth to take root
For [in]credible girls to sing their stories
of milk and honey; and be born of
light, equal to the sun

LIFE AS PROPHECY

SARAH BELLUM MENTAL

I live as prophecy
hold body like hope
fold into
origami that only
I can read the curves
of paper into what
my body is saying.

The kingdom keys
given to those who
broke through the doors
vandalized the floors
left a mess behind
for me to clean
until I decide
that I will rebuild
what they broke.



IN THE MIDDLE OF MYSELF

IULIANA PASCA

I dance around the sun
all night
with the legs of rays,
I break through the gates of hell
and slip my glow into its depths
to fill the void of non-existence

(Do you know how oppressive nothingness is?)

the light does not belong to me
I am the nothingness around it
the vacuum of darkness
and this luminescence
is a temporary reflection
of the fire burning under my feet

(Do you know how unbearable knowledge is?)

ALONE

she picked the flowers of the dead
then she made a garden
at the end of the world –
a temple of solitude
where she could be herself

angel among saints
demon among people
stepping solemnly
with eternity in her arms
and existence on her shoulders

alone
expelled by everyone
the lady with the scythe
wears the white dress
for the end of the world

OVER THE WINDS

JAI-MICHELLE

there is a black bloated sea in the bones of this house
a matted, rotten squall behind my palms
the noise is incessant, crushing

I lay a few collected smells
tobacco, secrets: glaucous and deathly
they gather claws in the bedroom
I vomit dead gardenias and family portraits
lose a tongue somewhere

mice drag my heart into dank corners
my spirit lies on the ceiling, restless
I draw crosses over her eyes - a ritual

in the roof thrashes the remains of holy smoke
I know they fight angels up there

I disappear into the dark hymn, white-eyed. drowned.

yet, from the back of my knee
grows a marigold like a small sun
dripping with eyes

I give her my mouth
but like burnt ships, her orange petalled swansong
lies forgotten to the fog.

unbelieved.

we tremble together, waiting for another Troy

their choir sings on, taut
hunched inside their skins clutching dead words and moldy facades
squeeze out one remaining storm

the rain hurts,
but I pulled myself away over the winds

CLOUDS OF FIRE

S. K. NICHOLAS

All along the strip, the bars shine with a sticky light that sticks to her skin like a kiss. There's a bottle of beer in her hand. Green. As green as the unseen trees and containing a thousand questions with no answers. The road—the road is a long one. It meanders and grows heavy like the night so often does when you're lonely, drunk, and in love with those who don't love you in return. If only they would listen. If only they would open their ears rather than live in fear of what they don't understand. The taste upon her tongue is ashy; like an autumn sunrise in the English countryside, or the sky above the swirling eye of a bonfire in a long-forgotten memory from childhood now nothing more than dust. In these giddy moments, minutes become hours, and hours slide into decades with the force akin to a sea of mud rolling down a hillside swallowing a crowd of fleeing children whose only crime was living. If only they would listen, if only they would learn. There's a shard of glass in her pocket she uses to scratch the flesh of her wrists. Not hard enough to draw blood, but enough so that the pain conjured is the only thing she's thinking of as the world does its best to drown out the words spilling from her mouth. As the words escape, everything is in its right place, and although it's true that you don't need an audience to reach a higher plateau, you can never quite shift the sense of unbecoming once it begins to sink in. Swigging the rest of her beer, she tosses the empty bottle into the river that wraps around the town but also her ankle like a bracelet adorned by a whore. Like a giant stalking the land, she peers into the windows belonging to the rows of houses and whispers into the ears of all the sleeping kids, guiding them the best she can. She'd do it to the adults too if she knew it would help, but they're as dead as the bones beneath the gravestones that appear like matchstick boxes far beneath her gaze. With each stride, she leaves behind the place she once called home. A place where she's not a woman, wife or lover, but merely a liar, which is why on nights like tonight, she retreats to sleep in clouds of fire.

ST. LAWRENCE RIVER, THOUSAND ISLANDS
WINTER DAWN FOG
CHARLES T. LOW



ctlow
Photography

FORETELLING

MAY HEM

I'm going to write
of what will be
When one and one
will equal three
And you'll be hanging
on the line
Between what's true
and what's denied
You'll blankly stare
at pictures made
Of choices forced
to cover shame
In smoke filled rooms
of solitude
You'll long for oneness
made of two
You'll gather dreams
into a pyre
And seek a match
to light the fire
You'll find me with
my hand stretched out
Each match you light
I will snuff out
A thousand times
if there need be
Until the day
you come to me
Without want,
or need or goal
To sit beside
the truth I hold

REGRET CONSUMES LIKE FIRE

RACHEL DICKENS

And you will
Crawl out of the embers with
singed fingernails and a
Fringed lace veil
That's been coveting your
True feelings
Your instinct is out of balance
You know me better than you allow
Bats flock to your heart cave
And cook in the flames

Lashed out like a cat claw
An ill considered offence
Calling it first
Does not make it true
Or right. A judgement in itself when
Waiting to take the unintended
Personally
To blow up
Press red, self implode
If that's what you need to do

And I am collateral
Debris but I am
Damaged all the same

WAX ORACLE

RACHEL DICKENS

I manifest abundance
Carve it into a candle and light it
The everyday ritual
After some joy
an inkling of success
It burns out
So suddenly
Before I can harvest what I desire
Never to be lit again



NOBODY LISTENS ANYWAY

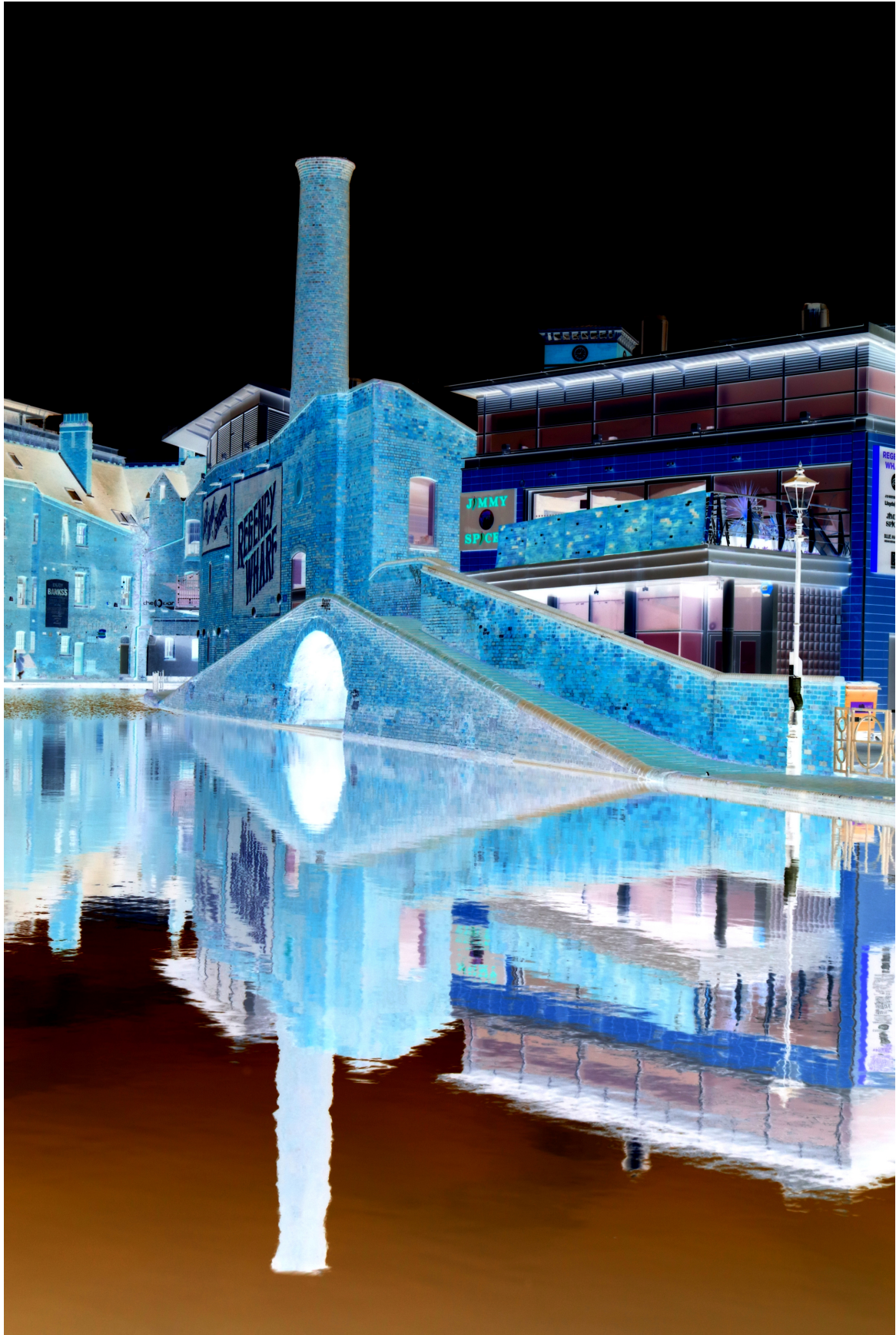
DEVEREAUX FRAZIER

the pain was not ours to take
or yours to hide
you say we are loved
“our favorite explosion”
but really, you love to believe
the lie in the middle
the excuse of never having time
or not garnering real interest
when I know the truth
better than your lie
the interests of profiteers
profit only those
with hands too small to grasp
eyes dimmed by corporate luminesce
and hearts that churn mighty engines
that billow hate, anger, and pain
in a deafening roar of arrogance
black smoke that reduces hope
to another political slogan
prophecies unread are still
prophecies fulfilled
the world is churning, shaking
as I kneel for balance
for fallen brothers and sisters
in a war we are never meant to win
for they that were born
but have no home
a name but called anything but
you can call them Cassandra

or Ahmaud, Breonna, or Eric

Nobody Listens Anyway

RIPPLES DEFLECT REALITY
SARAH LEAVESLEY



SECRET CITY
SARAH LEAVESLEY



HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

EMILY MEW

They focus on deterrents,
offshore processing,
detention

They proudly report plans
to keep the boats at bay
to drive the hoards away
with whatever it takes –
water cannons, gunships,
blaring unbearable noise into the sea

towards
the makeshift dinghies
overloaded with people
clinging to each other,
clinging to a sinking ship
in a frozen sea, babies,
children holding their mothers
clutching the hope that
this next place might offer safety
this next place might offer rest, in
this next place the terror
and the horror might end

They talk of Migrants, Illegals –
smile at their achievements
in prolonging misery
keeping that safety
out of reach,
letting hundreds of humans drown
in the deep

and, in all of this, who are we?
the ones sitting in our homes
watching telly
witnessing it all through a screen

They want us to fear
those frightened people in the sea,
but I fear the hostile environment
They are making of our country,
the hostile environment they're creating
in you and me.

WORLD WITHIN WORLDS
BRITTNY LEE



THE BARE TRUTH

SNEHAL

I stand by the sink, snack packet in hand but my fingers refuse to move
I can feel your impatience rising as you all of 20 months old begin tugging harder and faster on my pyjamas
Something as simple as opening a packet shouldn't be so difficult I helplessly tell myself
And my hands begin to shake. The tremors raiding my body like merciless tyrants.
You are now screaming I want, I want it give me give me
I panic, trying to locate a pair of scissors
I pick it up with shaking hands and somehow manage to pry open the packet
I whisper words of reassurance to you as I get hold of a baby bowl
The snacks rain down, like confetti on the kitchen counter
I finally collect some into your bowl, hand it to you and you finally calm down

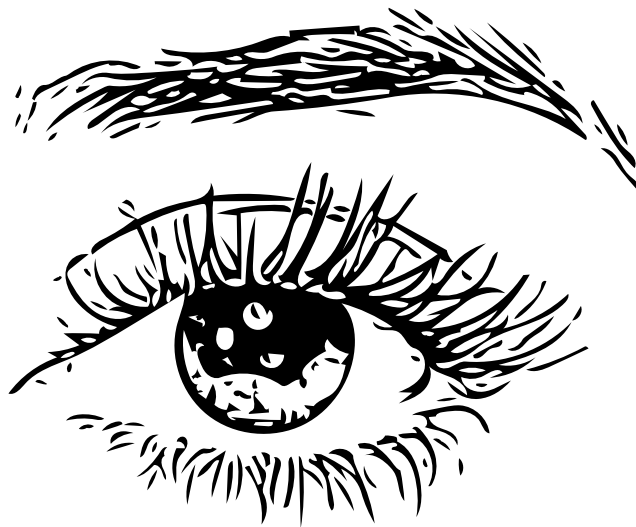
We settle on the rug to read your favourite book
I read the first page and slowly reach out to turn to the next
My fingers don't listen to what I am asking of them and they turn pages at random
Skipping the very next page that has your favourite scene etched onto it
You immediately realise this and begin showing your displeasure
Slapping my thigh, folding your arms and saying No this no this
I feel embarrassed, my cheeks burn in shame
I am unable to even read to you without becoming acutely aware of the disease that's slowly ravishing my body
Then suddenly something magical happens
You deftly turn to the correct page, look up at me and smile
I resume reading the book from where we left off

It's time for our evening stroll now , a time of day that you look forward to but I don't
Dressing you up is hard, so hard
The buttons, the zips, the laces; they all snigger at me
The belt in your pram adding to the insult
Yet everyday I persevere to take you out
In the hope that the fresh air will replenish this emptiness that seems to have possessed my soul
My steps are small, my gait a tad unsteady, the lack of swing in my right arm masked by your pram
To the outside world I appear to be a regular mum
Out for a walk with her toddler
Little do they know the minutiae of our day
And seeking solace in their ignorance I walk towards the sunset
In the hope that tomorrow will be a better day.

INTERVIEW

WITH

Ingrid Wilson



Introduce yourself; when did you begin writing? When and why did you decide you wanted to share your work with others?

I began writing at primary school: I loved nursery rhymes and the poetry of Lewis Carroll. I started to write my own rhymes, inspired by what I had read. I sometimes read my poetry out in school assembly, but after that I didn't do much sharing until I started my blog in March 2020.

Where do your inspirations come from? Are they musical, literary, ekphrastic or all three?

A tough question! All three, to some extent. I often think I'm more of a 'lyrical' than an 'imagistic' poet, but there is plenty of room for crossover between the two. The beauty of the natural world always inspires me, if writing nature poetry can be considered 'ekphrastic' in any way. My reading also informs my writing. I will often weave lines of well-loved poems into my own (giving the proper credit, of course!)

With regards to this issue, what drew you to Cassandra and the themes of prophecy and deceit?

I was immediately attracted to the theme, as I often think of myself as a bit of 'a Cassandra,' particularly as I'm so concerned about the climate crisis, while so many people seem blind to it. However, for this issue, I chose to write on another subject for which I feel so many people's suffering remains unseen and unheard.

Your poem in this issue, 'To Hilary, Elizabeth, the 1-in-20', shares your experience and the experience of other women with Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD). Could you share with us more about this and your advocacy work?

PMDD is a condition that affects up to 1 in 20 women of reproductive age. It is often mistaken for other conditions, such as Bipolar Disorder or Borderline Personality Disorder. It is caused by an abnormal reaction in the brain to the normal fluctuation of hormones during the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle. Symptoms include extreme physical discomfort, agitation, rage, irritability, depression, suicidal ideation and social withdrawal. PMDD was not recognised as a condition when my mum was alive, but looking back, I believe she displayed many of the symptoms of the condition, which is believed to be hereditary. My mum killed herself, and now I can't help but wonder whether PMDD was to blame. I believe it is a condition which can kill if misdiagnosed and not appropriately treated, which is why I advocate for better understanding, awareness and treatment of the condition via my blog and other social media platforms.

Do you have advice for others regarding PMDD? Are there any resources/support networks you would recommend?

Firstly, you are not alone. While there is not a great level of understanding in the medical profession at large, there are other sufferers and also experts who understand what you are going through, and want to help. My first port of call for advice and information would be the [IAPMD website](#). There are also support groups such as [Luna Hub](#), which I have found invaluable, and there is a very supportive PMDD community on Instagram (follow #PMDD). My Instagram account for PMDD is @pmdding: feel free to message me on there for advice and support!

Alongside your advocacy work, you have also launched your own publishing press, Experiments in Fiction, can you share with us your vision for this exciting endeavour?

Certainly! Experiments in Fiction (EIF) started as a blog which I have been growing since the beginning of the pandemic, and mainly serves as a platform for me to share my poetry and promote the work of others. My first publication via EIF was *The Anthropocene Hymnal*, in July 2020, and since then I have transformed the blog into a publishing platform where I promote and publish both my own work, and that of other talented writers. Upcoming projects include a poetry collection from Jeff Flesch, and an Anthology compiled and edited by Gabriela Marie Milton. I am very excited to be launching my own publishing house in this way!

You recently published a poetry collection titled '40 Poems At 40', how would you describe this collection to anyone yet to read it?

I have subtitled this collection 'A voyage of self-discovery,' and, although not wholly autobiographical, these 40 poems do explore many aspects of my life which have shaped me as a writer and artist, from experience of life abroad, to various personal relationships (not least with myself) via loss and bereavement. I also deal with my experience of PMDD in this collection, which is published via EIF and is available from Amazon.

Finally, in all of the work you do, from advocate to writer and publisher, how do you stay motivated and what do you find most rewarding?

I would say I am certainly a driven person, which includes being driven almost to distraction at times! What I find hardest is slowing down, and pausing for breath. But I have come to realise in recent years that this is just as important as racing ahead, so I strive for balance in all that I do. It is a natural part of my life in dealing with PMDD, which means in effect I get two 'good weeks' and two 'bad weeks' every month. When times are darkest, I have two favourite mottos: 'Keep on keeping on' (thank you, Bob Dylan) and 'Suit up and show up' (thank you, AA.) What I find most rewarding is being able to live with an authenticity that comes from creating art on a regular basis: it's a special kind of freedom, and I hope I never have to return to a regular office job!

FOR HILARY, ELIZABETH, THE 1-IN-20 INGRID WILSON

My great aunt Hilary
was 15
when they locked her up
in an asylum
and she lived there until she died, young
pumped with drugs and ECT,
a stranger to her own mind

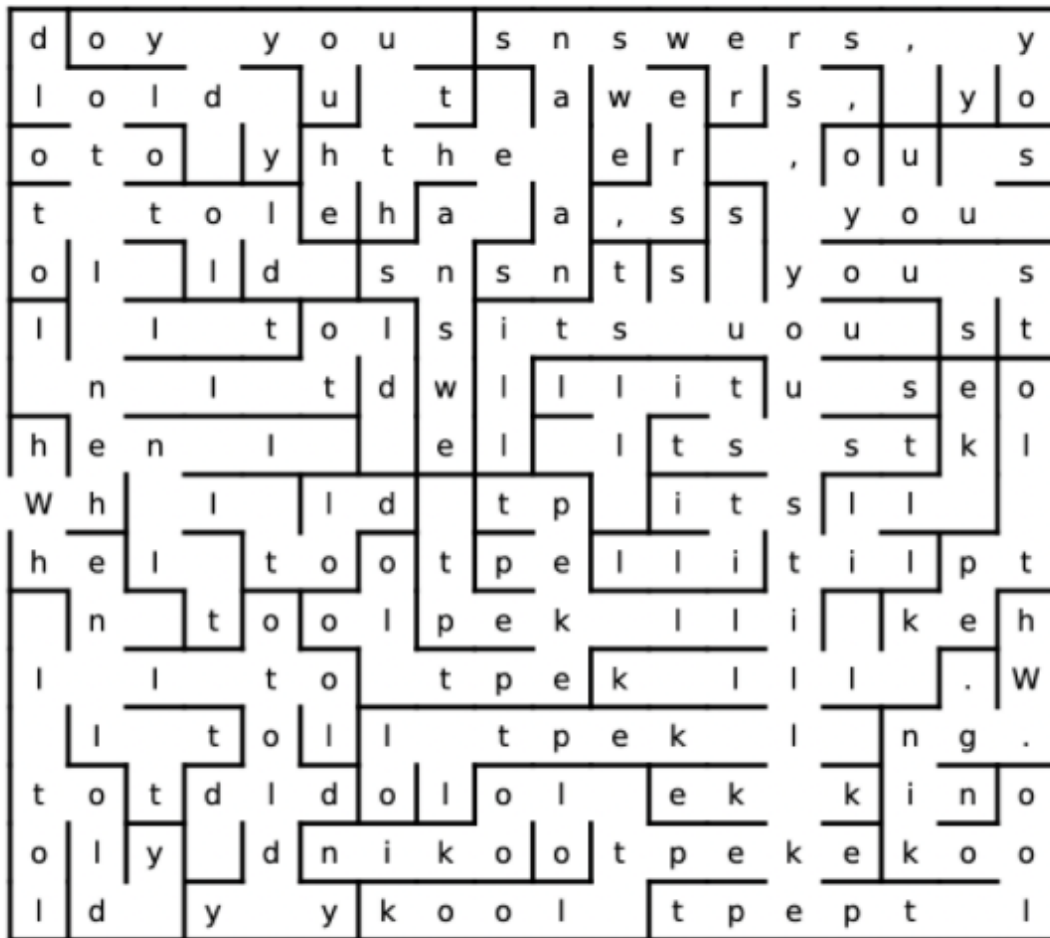
My mother Elizabeth
was 15 when her troubles began
Anorexia, Bulimia, Schizophrenia
in and out of hospital
overdose after overdose
of ineffective medicine
until she took the plunge and died, aged 33

Leaving me
battling depression since my teenage years
toying with eating disorders, until
saved from alcoholism, with a clear head
I began to track my cycle, realising
all of my problems fell
in the two weeks prior to my period,
the other two spent on top of the world:
not Bipolar
not BPD
not Bulimia
PMDD:
one of the 1 in 20*

A day of reckoning is coming
one day, doctors will listen to the many women
whose voices have not been heard
if we join in chorus,
shouting loud.
A day of reckoning is coming
but it isn't now
'It's only womens' problems' now
we listen to the patriarchal doctors,
as we nod, with cowed heads bowed.

**An estimated 1 in 20 women of reproductive age suffer from Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, or PMDD. Most are undiagnosed, misdiagnosed, and certainly not listened to by the medical profession.*

WHEN I TOLD YOU THE ANSWER
SOPHIA MURRAY



When I told you the answers, you still kept looking.

THE LITTLE BOOK OF LIES

SOPHIA MURRAY

1. I love you
2. I'm only doing this because I love you
3. I don't remember saying that
4. I don't recall
5. I don't think I would ever say that to you
6. Do you know I love you?
7. I love you more than you could ever love me
8. I can't do this without you
9. I would never lie to you
10. Have I told you before that I love you?



YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL

LEONA

When waking up in the morning,
I hear you toss and turn in your sleep
The dreams from the night before
Have given you reason to worry.

On average, 60,000 women are killed violently around the world.

“Darling” I say quietly. “Isn’t it time to wake?”
Stretching arms and soft sighs
To escape as you waken to the day
In this space, we are safe. All in love.

On average, 60,000 women are killed violently around the world.

Your body is lovely. In every shape.
Many don’t understand my love.
Sometimes you exist apart from yourself
But all of you are beautiful.
Heart. Tongue. Waist. Breast.
Soul. Song. Fire.

On average, 60,000 women are killed violently around the world.

In every way, it is easy to give you love
Your bleary eyes meet mine
And you lean up to meet
My lips. Softer than fairy wings.
We become a part of the space between
Realities and dreams.

On average, 60,000 women are killed violently around the world.

BORN OF TROY

LEONA

Maker maker
Display your hands
Brittle rose quarts
And diamond backed rings

Your lips foretold of the
Coming and going
Of the evils and perils
That could have been
Will yet to be

Oracle Oracle
Display your hands
Bound to carved stone
That sinks slowly into
The dying sun

Your lips foretold of the
Leaving and seizing
Bodies and souls
Violated
Underneath the ancient sun



IM LEARNING SO MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO BE QUIET (LAURA'S VERSION)

KAIT QUINN

after Ada Limón

There's how I write the shit down, journal my secrets into the wall behind the dresser, that's one way. There's also how I press white-powdered opisthenar to nostril, wait for the whamp whamp whamp to muffle the memory of dingy hair sticking to collar bone, guttural throat to ear lobe. There's how I've scraped the red pulp from my heart and sucked the light from my joints. There's dumb silent and whiskey silent, dead stiff silent and strobe silent, and pupil silent is not at all the same as blind silent, and then there's the silence that scratches at the window, bears down on top of me, grunts and cackles and howls my name through the lips of a father until I cannot bear the silence any longer, swallow silence in red curtains, and whisper my incestuous truth to a black-suited stranger who cannot save me in this timeline or the next. This is how my quiet unrests.

GLENSHIRE PARK

I told him no but pulled his naked hips into mine. I mouthed
yes, but no ocean swelled between my thighs. I lied
when I said I was fine. I lied when I said this hurts. I begged
him fuck me fuck me fuck me as my skull slammed the armrest, cracked
leather cleaved to thighs. I told him to turn on the A/C and came
home pink, wet, like I'd been filled with so much poetry, I cried ink.
I housed stars, not as pop rocks between teeth but as tacks pinning
his spindly arms to my pupils. I held my breath so close to my heart, I forgot
to exhale. Air became a stone etched with his name. And when I said no
I meant I can't breathe. When I said yes I meant I can't catch
my breath and the night sky is a knife slicing my irises and you kept
shooting me up to the heavens, swallowed each slate sliver like clementine
wedges, licked every shade of blue off your brine-slicked fingers,
laid me at my doorstep a peony corpse, flooded before I even bloomed.

THE CHRYSALIS: A LIFE IN THREE PARTS
KAREN E. FRASER

1. NINETEEN: ravenous

she loved the heat rising off sweat
invented wheels to take her
straight to the furnace, to the edge,
burning her brazen enough to ask for
what she wanted - five nights a week
laughing off those who didn't measure up.
she wasn't cruel, just casual, chalking it up
convinced feminism was armour, right?
a fragile, keep-sake girl, airtight deity
let out to dance on tables, drinking
mixed messages atop bars of abandonment
the bourbon of freedom by the shot-glass
growing the loss of connection in a spine
reinforced by independence, rebellion
and less than no idea about the real world,
gravitating toward smooth-talkers and potential,
clumsy, eager boys with soot-filled mouths
where pearls and petals should have been laid
a collection of troubling secrets slowly nailing her
to the cross of hard-truths - a weapon purpose made
for her massive destruction - a pile of ash
from which to filter every future, bullshit lie.

2. (TW) Burned without a flame: eaten alive

I was aware and yet he managed
with absolute confidence
to claim, to take, to use
the territory of my body.
big hands pointing from lechery o'clock
to hours of promised torment
hiding my purse, keys, the exit sign,
just to prove who's in control
hours of misery, praying to be rescued
by one true Atlas or Hercules - the safe
haven of their downy wings to lift me
higher than ground zero, carry me
toward the full moon of my choosing,
away from common flies with faceted eyes
unravelling the skein of me, their filth
locking me in fear's cages; accepting blame for
my wingless battery, relegated to cease
flailing, my every-woman's-voice unheard,
not believed, banished - strangled silent
throat wrung till scorched, weeping on my knees
the sound of value made inaudible
by malicious intent and wilful neglect,
every dancing molecule forced to swallow fire
till I froze and faith, in any city of love, burned.

3. Untethered: fertile ground

I exist -

Something final about this realisation
Though I am no different from the mad woman
wandering the mall, disconcertingly muttering
a looping mind with every thought lit strange
covenants spun darkly; my name announced loudly -
proud, fair warning of the brazen song of me
shifting into tones lifting every molecule of air,
my mettle pressed upon the totality of memory
the work to undo what is cursed upon
our lush and ripe anatomy
watch me now as I take whole trees to hand and
write till fingers bleed the precious ink
of life that burns me vintage-bold and known
I breathe to stoke the fire of our fierce womanity
to rage strong with soft and holy righteousness
until I'm sure you've received every noise from me
tattooed in place where I belong to me
a wilful, earth's-own girl-child, grown-ass free

so you can never question my autonomy.

"GIVE US A TWIRL!"

EMMA CONALLY-BARKLEM

Like the Swan Lake ballerina in her indigo box
That sings silvered notes and aloneness,
I pirouette on beige lino, which is meat-spattered & curling

A space demarcated, spotlight down
for the male gaze
Those of the father-protector
So the message is confused

She, with eyes ice flecked, turns a slow infinity to tinkled bells in tulle tutu
Swan Lake theme that turns me to tears even now, a gift from the absent mother.
Did she turn like this, in secret photographs to titillate?
Did she dream her way out of an indigo box to escape this tinselled Sisyphean fate?

Now, in the kitchen that smells of bacon fat and stale cigarettes—shall I prance?

Each time I enter, is she thinner or fatter?
Feistiness dissolves in the cattle handler's appraisal, where my hide is never quite smooth

"Give us a twirl!"

So I can observe the areas which fill you with shame
Battle lines drawn on the abdomen

"Turn around so I can see you!"

Pronounce judgement in the complacent air of a man for whom every woman is fair game.
Stranger at a bar, wife, Miss World, daughter

"Let's watch; we'll watch together"
With notepad, the Daily Mirror & pen
To score these women as they parade, gloss angular & jutting

But don't we all seek world peace?
Freed from this scene of overhead lighting & stifled desire

A hurried freshen up in the car
Lipstick & eyeshadow, a bra back on at the turn of a key
Perfume sprayed, until the pieces line up, a centrifuge in reverse

And I can spin like Lynda Carter, your pin up, ready for the greeting:

"Right, let's have a look at you!"

Now

Hair free from chemicals, face free from cosmetics, body free from turning, mind free from misogynistic influence, now, see, spy the truths housed inside me where your gaze cannot reach.

VESPERTINE

EMMA CONALLY-BARKLEM

Delicate pinion of rose gold gathers warmth towards the centre
A gilded bloom which can only be divined by the sun

Veined appellation, forewings, hindwings,
powders ash to the touch,

So, keep your distance, my essence is sunk in the deep whorls of the juniper berry tree
Where cypsela catch the light in me.

A plaintive waltz 'twixt shrub and bee,
A lonely dance in the vespertine



MOTHER LILITH

FRANCESCA DEWART

mother Lilith taught me
that to seduce a man
- only men can be seduced -
you need to seduce yourself first.

stand in front of a mirror
and feel sexy, powerful, independent.
caress your sweet curves and tender lips
until you want to make love to yourself.

make the whole world
fall on its knees for you.
feel their passion and adoration
grow under your skin
and look at yourself through their eyes,
so that all that desire and pleasure
goes back to its source.

you were made to be entertained by men
and to love and be loved by women.

-do not forget your power



MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Molly Furey is 19 from a small town near Manchester in the UK. She started her writing journey back in 2018, using poetry as a creative outlet throughout high school and onwards. She has previously featured in issues from Free Verse Revolution and hopes to continue creating new work. You can find all of her pieces on Instagram @fureysfreeversee.

Rachel Thomas (she/her) is a 25-year-old disabled artist and poet from Charleston, South Carolina. She is an animal lover, an audiobook/podcast listener, and a small wonders enthusiast. You can follow her on Instagram @Oblivesce.

Elizabeth A. Oates (she/her) is a poet and aspiring author from Gloucestershire, UK. She graduated with a bachelor's in English Literature in 2021, having spent the last several months of her degree writing on portrayals of feminist icons from the Greek classics. Her poetry is a love letter to her illustrious female predecessors, steeped in respect and admiration for the greatest figures in literary history, both real and fictional. An ardent environmentalist, Elizabeth's work often draws on themes of nature and climate change. In 2021, Elizabeth was longlisted for the New Voices pamphlet award run by the Cheltenham Poetry Festival and has since begun work on her first full-length collection on the theme of womanhood.

Debarati Ghose lives in Bengaluru, India. Her passion lies in weaving stories, crafting poems and writing random stuff that feeds her soul. Debarati regularly shares her drafts and compositions on Instagram (@penpoetrytale), Wattpad (@DebaratiGhose) and her writing space www.penpointsandpaperboats.wordpress.com.

Enrico Barigazzi was born in Venice, Italy. He has always had a deep interest for literature since he was a child and this spurred him to pursue classical studies, graduating in political science from the University of Padua in 2005. He began writing when he was 34 years old, relatively late. He usually writes in both Italian and English. He has published two poetry books in Italian: *Il colore delle parole* published in 2017 for Irda Edizioni, and *Parole scomparse* issued in 2019 for Irda Edizioni. Some of his poems have been published by different anthologies –Alidicarta.it, Clubpoetico.it and Scrivere.info-. As far as his work in English is concerned it can be found on the English poetry site Allpoetry.com. His contribution for the magazine Free Verse Revolution is his first publication in an English literary magazine.

Sangeetha writes on her blog mindfills.wordpress.com. She's at the moment, fascinated by how wandering words tessellate to encase moments...moments she likes to revisit.

Vanessa Napolitano lives in Yorkshire with her husband and daughter and works with international students. She loves to write both about her own world, and through adopting and exploring different personas. You can find some of her work on her instagram page @nessanapswrites, and her most recent publications in the anthology 'Songs of Love & Strength', the exhibit Maternochronics, and in New Normal zine.

Diana Story is an emerging heritage and museology researcher, artist and poet.

After growing up in Australia, she moved to Europe in 2018 and has worked across the United Kingdom, The Netherlands and Poland. Meaning-making, multiplicity and the role of memory upon identity are central themes in Diana's practice. Her published works can be found in *Lucent Dreaming*, *North West Words* and *Voices of Youth*.

Barbara Leonhard's work is published in *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Free Verse Revolution*, *October Hill Magazine*, *Vita Brevis*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Amethyst Review*, *PhoebemD: Medicine & Poetry*, among others. Barbara won prizes and awards for her poetry in the anthology *Well Versed 2021* and *Spillwords*, where she was voted Author of the Month of October 2021, nominated Author of the Year for 2021, and recognized as a *Spillwords Socialite of the Year* in 2021. You can follow Barbara on her blog site, <https://www.extraordinarysunshineweaver.com>

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Bithika Halder (she/her) is a writer/dreamer from the suburbs of Kolkata, India. To be able to imitate the beauty, enormity and absurdity in nuances of the everyday lived experiences is what she wishes for in her creations. Currently she is pursuing Masters in Economics from Jadavpur University, India. Her works have been featured in Catharsis Magazine and Free Verse Revolution–Issue IV. She shares her words via Instagram @pathbetweenpoetry and Substack newsletter [Path Between Trees](#).

Laura Jameson is a mum to two working in healthcare science, she lives in Cambridge (UK) with her three year old son, one year old daughter and husband. Drawing endless inspiration from her personal experiences in pregnancy, childbirth and beyond, she began writing during recent UK lockdowns due to covid-19 pandemic. She shares poetry and prose on Instagram @laura.is.writing.

Sarah Bellum Mental is a Write About Now virtual poet and originally from Chicago, Illinois. Now living in Houston she continues being a part of spoken word poetry. She performs poetry live to try to give a home for those who don't have a voice. Her first and second books are taking pre-orders now: <https://sarahbellumental.com/pre-order-swallow-my-sparrow/> She is a 2021 WOWPS and Southern Fried Poetry Indie slam contender.

Jai-Michelle is Scottish born poet, now living via London in The Netherlands. Originally an editorial journalist, she evolved into her own compositions as a singer songwriter, recording artist and performer. As a poet she is inspired by mytho-poetic inner landscapes, surrealism and healing through complex PTSD and has been described as otherworldly, ethereal and confessional. She has been published in several magazines including Hecate Magazine, The Mythos Poetry Society Journal and Calliope's Eyelash. In 2022, her first chapbook will be published by Sunday Mornings At The River. You can follow her on Instagram @bornonadarkmoon.

S. K. Nicholas is a student of Fine Art, but over the past several years has become a disciple of literature. The author of A Journal for Damned Lovers Volumes 1-3, he published his first work of fiction in 2019 titled X and I: A Novel. His books are available to purchase on Amazon.

Charles T. Low has been photographing since the age of about ten. Some years later, someone put an adjustable camera in his hand, and something kindled in him then which persists to this day. The goal is art. Whether photographing families or dawn vistas, whether creating light in the studio or recognizing it in the wild, it has always been all about art. Of course many factors then surface, such as choice of subject, and composition, among numerous others. Charles agrees with the many artists who know that, in order to harmonize, all of those considerations demand an exceptional light. It has always been all about the many moods of light. He chooses no other theme, at least not consciously, than art and light.

This is **may hem's** first submitted, reviewed and published poem, though she's amassed over 500 pieces in the last 8 years on her blog jotnrot as a way to express intentions that missed their mark or couldn't find another outlet, where you can also find another attempt at an honest bio. Other ways include photography and printmaking in her basement. may hem earns a living under a given name, teaching and researching design processes in the uses of technology for pedagogical purposes.

Rachel Dickens is a mother, poet, graphic designer, and illustrator who operates under the guise of @lollysnow on Instagram. She has been published in two poetry anthologies: Dispatches from New Motherhood by Mothership writers and Songs of Love and Strength by the Mum Poem Press. She also features in zines: Dear 2021 project, The6press and Gypsophilia.

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Devereaux Frazier curates his own poetry blog - Musings of An Autistic Mind, is a regular contributor to Blood Into Ink, and is a Guest Barista for Go Dog Go Cafe. He also posts poems daily on Instagram, @d.frazier.writes.

Sarah Leavesley is a prize-winning photographer, journalist, poet and writer, who particularly enjoys playing with the shape-shifting of light, shadow, reflections and digital effects. Her website: www.sarah-james.co.uk. Her social media tags are @Sarah_James on Twitter and @s.a.leavesley on Instagram.

Emily Mew is a poet, mother, therapist and academic publisher living in Bristol, UK. Emily loves experimenting with a range of poetry styles and forms, and often returns to themes of motherhood, nature and healing. She can be found on Instagram as @emewpoetry.

Brittney Woss has been obsessed with taking photos since she picked up a camera. Writing is also a huge passion of hers. Both hobbies have gotten her through many rough patches and brought her closer to others. She was diagnosed with ADHD as a child and in recent years was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia. Everyday is a challenge but she mostly has a positive outlook. She enjoys connecting with other artists on WordPress.com. They are a community and inspire each other. She posts her photos and poetry in hopes to reach people who feel misunderstood or lonely. She wants everyone who comes to her blog to feel they are not alone and that they will always be supported. You can visit her blog anytime: <https://fieryphotos.wordpress.com/>.

Snéhal is a freelance writer, poet and blogger based in London with her husband and two toddlers. Her writing primarily reflects her motherhood journey, memories of her own childhood and the essence of everyday moments. Her debut collection Pause, inspired by the covid 19 pandemic has been recently published. She also reviews books authored by writers of South Asian heritage on her blog Desi Lekh. Snéhal has an infectious laugh and a very loud mind. She believes that observation might just be her superpower. You can find her on Instagram: @momtherhustler.

Ingrid Wilson is a poet, author and publisher via her own publishing house, Experiments in Fiction, which began as a blog (<https://experimentsinfiction.com/>) in March 2020. Her most recent publication is her first solo poetry collection, 40 Poems at 40, which is available from Amazon. She has also published an anthology, The Anthropocene Hymnal, in July 2021. Her poetry has been widely published both online and in print, and she was nominated for Spillwords Author of the Year 2022. At present she is working on poetry projects with several talented authors, and is always on the lookout for new proposals. She combines her writing and publishing with advocacy work for sufferers of PMDD, a poorly-understood but common and devastating premenstrual health condition.

Sophia Murray is a mum, poet, and voracious reader with a dark mind and a good heart. She has been published at Hecate Magazine Birth Anthology, Blood Moon Press Faces of Womanhood Anthology and has upcoming work in the Mum Poem Press Zine. Online work can be found at Goats Milk Magazine and The Cabinet of Heed. She tries and often fails to post daily poems on Instagram @sim_poetry or you can find her on Twitter @sophiaisamurray.

Leona is a short story and poetry writer with a background in anthropology and marketing. For this issue, she has been able to share her love for photography and creating otherworldly scenes through photos. Currently, she resides on the East Coast of the United States just north of the country's capital. You can follow Leona's writing journey @CiconeLeona.

Kait Quinn (she/her) is a law admin by day and a prolific poet/professional shower singer by night. She has self published four poetry collections and her work has appeared in Blood Moon Journal, Polemical Zine, Chestnut Review, VERSES, and others. Kait lives in Minneapolis with her partner, their regal cat Spart, and their Aussie mix Jesse Pinkman, Jr. You can find Kait's work at kaitquinn.com.

MEET THE CONTRIBUTORS

Karen E Fraser is a Melbourne-based, published writer and poet. With degrees in Professional and Creative Writing, and Anthropology, she marries a love of quiet observation and collecting with necessary storytelling. Karen has held various roles as writer and editor (including Verandah 25 Literary Journal). Her work embraces the natural world, social justice, and connection illuminated through the lenses of liberation, equality, dignity and belonging. www.instagram.com/be_nourished.

Emma Conally-Barklem is a yogi, freelance writer and poet based in North Yorkshire. She writes on nature, mental health, grief and wellbeing. Her work has been featured in national magazines and various publications which can be found on her website www.emmaliveyoga.com and on her IG page [@emmaliveyoga](https://www.instagram.com/emmaliveyoga).

Francesca Dewart is a passionate freelance journalist, poet, and owner of Unapologetically WOMAN, a safe space for minorities to find their voice and be themselves fully. She's also a Media and Communication student based in Glasgow, Scotland. You can connect with Francesca's work via her Instagram accounts [@aobast](https://www.instagram.com/aobast) and [@unapologetically.woman_](https://www.instagram.com/unapologetically.woman) or on her website www.unapologeticallywoman.com.