

Oleander



FREE VERSE REVOLUTION

Issue X
oleander

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Note from the Editors

From reading about oleander and choosing to name Issue X after it, we knew this issue would be our most interesting and diverse issue yet, simply because we asked people to consider duality. While duality, on the surface, represents contrast, the beauty is how juxtaposition will be discovered in different places through different eyes, depending on the beholder. This is what we found as we read through this issue's submissions and curated the work you will soon read and view. Duality does not mean the same thing for any one person.

Thus, within these pages, you'll find contrasts that are as old as time - innocence and loss, depression and hope - but also conflicts you may never have considered before, at least not in the way you'd expect.

The work here is some of the strongest we've had the pleasure to publish and we hope you'll enjoy our brief interviews with five of the contributors of this issue too. As always, it is our mission to share talent, narratives and voices from around the globe, and so we tried to choose a cross section of contributors from those who have been published by us before to first time contributors. We thank them for their willingness to share further insight into their creative process and the work which features here.

We hope you enjoy Issue X: oleander. It was a pleasure to create.

Thank you,

Kristiana & Nicholas

How to Care For your Plant: *Nerium Oleander*

Emily Mew

Tender ornamental shrub. Best suited to warm climates. Will perish quickly in deep frost. Bring her inside for Winter. Settle her in full sunlight on your window sill. Let her listen to you sing as you clean the kitchen - a stressed Oleander will not bloom.

Hardy and resilient. Will tolerate: poor soil, toxic fumes, salt spray, drought and heat. Plant her at the edge of life, amongst your ruins and your grief. Water her with tears and watch her thrive.

Protect her from harsh winds.
Give her space to hide
behind a nearby wall. Tend to her
and fragrant, showy flowers may flourish
all summer long. Delicate star bursts of pale
yellow, pure white, salmon pink, peach
or cherry red. Little gifts to lift
your heavy heart.

Caution. Handle all varieties with care. Wear gloves to touch. Whether Calypso, Petite Pink, Hawaii, Sister Agnes or Isle of Capri, ingestion of any part **May Prove Deadly**.

Sometimes considered invasive - difficult to eradicate.

If you cut her back, do not dare to burn. Her poison smoke will invade, inflame and restrict your airways.

If you cut her back, prepare for her to return,
as she emerged from bomb-scorched earth -
tenacious, committed, loyal:
evergreen leaves fighting
for their love
of the sun.



Little Acorn

Emily Mew

Cuddled in the crook of my arm, nested
in your bed, we read a story of a little acorn
fallen and buried
by a squirrel it sprouts delicate roots.
'But why?' you ask, perplexed. We turn pages
and witness its growth into a mighty tree.
'Ahhh, I see', you smile, so satisfied and awed
by the magic of this process.
All the tender sweetness spills from your heart –
your care for the world and longing to grasp
its workings and secrets.

In this moment I see the precious essence
of this world in you.

In this same moment I know you are too precious
for this world.

Soon your questions will turn towards a snippet
overheard on the radio. Four hundred dead.
'Four hundred people?'
I'll clumsily explain that in a place far
away there is war. People fighting.
People caught in crossfire. Not here.
Not here my love. Far away. Far
away. And my words will jumble
because there's no sense to be made.
No response of mine that can erase
this darkness or its tendrils that reach
into our cosy place.

I can only bury in your growing heart,
seeds of wonder, seeds of love,
and hope beyond hope
a mighty garden might thrive.

But Five Points of Petal

Daniel Lockeridge

This fog is the first since the summer
of the brightest star—
depression the weight of an altar,
a child, missing from the world;

a flower whose name I'll never know;

an adulthood in which the sun becomes caught
and shakes, as if in water, or stained glass,
or farther down the main street
numbered like the rays of a constellation;

but a flower.

This fog is a wedding dress
without the woman—summer
without the silver of the buildings
that remind me of a waist,
when I stand as far away as my reflection;

an Oleander will do.

Important have been the number
of years I've spent in the chest—
in the heavens, in the rainbow
that has been the only existence
to hold my hand; my bemoan.

But five points of petal, and I cannot remember...

What Flowers?

Daniel Lockeridge

Two pages rest
like two houses
upon my flowers.

What flowers do I own?
They are warm, toxic, pink
as the pillow of the window;

like walls they can rebuild
the lawns that are spilled
from the stem;

like water they can rebound
when they harm themselves
in an attempt to fade like they began.

In this shade I am fewer.

In this shade two pages rest
like the two petals left
after the hours take their last steps.

Two pages build explanations
like the glass that's tapped
by toxic fingers.

The glass droops, till the house
is but an undulating page—
a petal under the foot of loss.

No time is wasted;
the rest fights back like a candle.
The shade is firm.

Here are a few more small beams.

At the Military Cemetery

Rachel Lui

It was a military cemetery that held few actual bodies
said my mother as we walked up the white marble stairs
towards the large sword-in-the cross that marked
an area right next to her old secondary school in Stanley
On tidy rows of grey tombstones on the meadow
we saw the names of soldiers of different nationalities
who joined forces together one fateful Christmas
day in defending the city against invading forces
The pathway was clean and the surroundings
surprisingly idyllic as tales of secret candlelit visits
to the supposedly-haunted hotspot at midnight were
told to us in great detail and that was back when
mum was still happy and carefree and not greying
with worry over the concerns of the world
It was then at the edge of the cemetery next to an
off-limits building belonging to the corrections
department that we noticed it was
teeming with perfect pale pink oleanders that
grew almost innocuously on the branches
Like they were trying to tell us something
perhaps it was to beware and stay away
Or maybe absolutely nothing at all outside
Of their ornamental purpose

The hidden language of dissolution and flight (*Musca domestica Linnaeus*)

Fiona Dignan

She is Persephone, laying the grains of eggs
in the dead meat of the wood
the stench of the whiteness like bone
no, no like snow, moon, rice
Her wings like arches of gravestones
bridges and lace
Hear her wings beat a hum
in the key of F minor
Music, Musca, Muse
Fly
a noun
a verb
Watch
her children transforming death
to fat white grubs. The metamorphosis
of their bodies, creating iridescence like
peacocks, starlings, stars
raising death
to flight
Sometimes
we need to catch things
off guard, remember to notice the hidden power
of a mother's body. An other trapped inside
a word. Like the love
in beloved. Let words dissolve slowly
resurrected as the tender flutters
of sound waves echoing towards the light

An interview with Jillian-Rae Picco

How much do you draw upon the search for self revelation in *Elemental Steps*, as it often reads like a speaker’s letter to themselves?

This poem was inspired by a sudden and even shocking moment of self-realisation. I had stepped outside one autumn evening, and could viscerally feel the page at the end of one chapter of my life turning to the next. I could sense how the past and present were interconnected, and I believe in this poem I was not searching for self-revelation – self-revelation found me. I am an intuitive writer, and when I am not writing I am reflecting on my intuitions until moments like these happen, typically during times of massive change in my life, where the puzzle pieces all come together.

The poem, *Elemental Steps*, addresses a relationship between the individual and the elemental forces of nature; does this always come from within or is it an external influence?

My connection to writing and my connection to nature have always been directly intertwined and will forever continue to be. I think the fragmentation of the self comes when we are disconnected from the beauty and natural health of nature; I think the wildness within can only be found when we are aware of and notice the wildness that is around us. The best writing advice I ever read was to go outside and walk slowly when you feel stuck on a piece, or even just to do it everyday for the sake of enjoyment. Writing is as healing as nature, and both inspire the other.

Alongside long form poetry, you also showcase skill in crafting a haiku (*Dahlia and Pine*), how do the constraints imposed by the haiku form challenge and develop your craft?

I think a lot of us get really intimidated as writers when we have an extremely large piece of work to write or edit. In my experience writing novels, the greatest challenge throughout the process is never a lack of creative inspiration, but rather a lack of direct focus that connects to all that has already been said and may occur in future chapters. The constraint of having to write a 3 line poem was actually quite refreshing to me because I am so used to writing long form; I often struggle to “kill darlings” and narrow creative ideas down, so the haiku form really forces you to be present with a singular message. Writing haiku is like choosing one star in the universe, while writing novels is like looking at the universe and trying to create your own constellations (but the shape gets all weird when the universe is too vast and you can’t pick one damn shape).

Dahlia

Jillian-Rae Picco

Garden dahlia

From her bright magenta robe

Strips late this season.



Elemental Steps

Jillian-Rae Picco

elemental (via OED)
(n) (adj)

*of or pertaining to the 'four elements', earth, air, fire,
and water, or to any one of
them.*

... that is an essential or integrant part of any community; constituent.

a shock of wind hits as
a shock of hair, teasing out its own noise, combing
out its curls in cries.
all I did to see this was sit
at the window and tell the invisible that I wanted not
just to feel, but to play, to share.

there are too many ecstasies that are
non-ecstatic, all from going somewhere
grounded, all from inviting
something different.
I open the apartment door

... my feet are PLANTED to the cement
steps before the entrance to my home,
and it is not until I feel this place, of my
feet on real ground (emerging from basement)
that I can visualize the whole of what I was feeling,
step out of myself by stepping on
earth so that I can see myself in
this balance that's tied to other places I've been in.
(maybe I still exist there)

... in that single step, at One Ay-Em-Flat (picture
weather cliches: hard pounding rain, et cetera),
I felt what he once wanted when this same
step three years ago was three streets over and
I was not awake at One Ay-Em-Flat under
similar context. leaving the house of a boy,
you can fill in the rest

because when I explain the spell now
it casts no real effect, except remembering that giving
Nothing At All to What Really Matters

and

Everything At Once to Things That Didn't Matter
seemed my chemical-wiring, as though the powerlines
connecting streets from our houses carried the sole
inputs and outputs of our very existence.

this is why a single step onto cement composes
a letter to this moment, and all other moments

(imagining yet never knowing)

that I mail to myself and only receive at, what
some would call: Random Moments Life Throws

At You, and what I now call: The Rare Times Where My Mind is
Not-Busy With, Not Better Loves, But Loves That Stemmed From
Old Loves That Turned Deaths So That Growth Could Be
Maximized Because Time and Space Seem to Welcome This More
Than Love That Is Given In a Place That Gives Back in Limited
Ways.

....

...

...

... and, that's not just some Mail of Me.

when the wind combed her hair, she
clasped some trees to her head like
some cheap plastic hair accessories.
bark corpses (others) turned gaunt forest and
we all took pictures of them and put them
in lockets, in case we ever wanted to remember.

Remember the rain in the background we forget? Remember,
and those old rosy lockets come delivering down
and split open our heads.

and the air fills with a toxic perfume rain that smells
like everything that would ever continue to happen
if any of us kept thinking that life was solely a
dream.

so, this is why we have earth to which we can
step. this is why ground. why space. why time and
much else that we know nothing of and don't need to.
why there are not just hair-combers and elements and
images that clash and scream; this is why play and share, why
everything a unique ingredient in our own unique recipe
(though not as unique as you'd think) called

Balance. pronounce it Balancé if you're feeling
like you need a vacation. this was rather cumbersome;
we must give accommodations.

so, take a single step:
(fire reddening
moon's pale bed)
and, stay?

Orbit to Heal

Jillian-Rae Picco

spring

I step into the light. I feel
globe-headed with a compass heart, facing maps
but being a contradiction – an airy balloon
floating in space, at any second
I will break, pop!
sputter out in cacophonous colour.
will you come to watch the show,
or is the air too cold?

summer

I wonder – do the stars laugh
at the memories we have made, and cry
that we will never align in this world
again – do they mourn
the invisible planet that only the broken lovers
know – that we are pulled by another world
filled with all things bent, crammed, unrequited –
perhaps it's on the dark side of the moon, perhaps it's hidden
somewhere so deep in the cosmos so that our soul on earth
might have a chance to become starstruck
again – this other place surely absorbed our love,
surely it still lives?

autumn

I fall
with the leaves,
driven to the release of memory
I am
too slow – there is the pink sun
on the water in its petrifying glory.
I wrap
myself in scarves, a defensive attempt
to savour my scars

I cut
my hair, and I change my mission,
submerging myself in worlds of fiction
I hear
fuzzy shoegaze, the sound of music from
another room; I play my minor tune.
I see
the distant sparks of a summer fire
that will burn these seeds of these memories of mine.
I take
the films out of the old back rooms,
smoulder VCRs filled with my favourite scars

winter

the mystery of the unknown future hardens,
the circling seasons surrender to the rigid queen.
the peaceful iris that bloomed out of hot and heavy
blades of grass was suffocated all summer
long – she barely poked through.
the competition of growth failed
to give her space.
so it is a relief when
the cold queen arrives, when
life zips itself up for a time. respectfully,
I am provided an empty canvas, a
medium through which
to finally
die

Pine

Jillian-Rae Picco

Youngling with wide rings,
memento mori seeing
The yellow needles.

Changing Winds

Lamarriv



Serendipity

Lamarriiv



Sweet Seventeen

Anna Louise Steig

At seventeen years old, I am still scared of the dark. Though it petrifies me to the bone, I think most of us - us being the broad spectrum of young teenagers to seasoned adults - can agree that there is nothing inherently malicious about the dark. After all, it is the natural state of the Earth, if we weren't so lucky as to be cosmically arranged in the vicinity of a flaming ball of fire. The majority of us are long past the familiar days of trembling beneath the blanket, wondering silently what evils lurk within the closet or underneath the bed frame. Monsters do not scare me. Ghosts do not bother me. Cryptids call themselves my friend. What haunts me is to finally release my childhood, like a balloon floating into the stratosphere, a balloon your mother might try to replicate but you, in the infinite wisdom of a child, understand that it will never come back.

The innocence of childhood has always resonated deeply with me, especially as a girl whose once-in-a-lifetime experience was snatched away, stolen like precious goods. Puberty struck a milky skinned, bruise kneed, pigtail child like lightning and through the night transformed her into a desperate rebel, like some alternative Cinderella story. "You're so mature for your age," they all crooned, lauding me with certificates of academic achievement while wholly ignoring the fundamental social skills I was missing out on. Normal ten year olds did not want to play at recess with the girl who couldn't keep her nose out of books and her scrappy fringe out of her eyes.

The most astounding aspect of childhood is not the hours of recess, the arts and crafts, even the untapped well of first time joys. Rarely is any adult appreciated, celebrated, even, simply for existing. A toddler tumbles down a slide and everyone within a mile radius jumps to cheer her on; a kindergartener waltzes off to school and his parents weep at the doorstep; a second grade student peels her own banana and the lunch lady lathers on the praise. As soon as I began to exhibit terminal symptoms of an illness called "growing up" I was subliminally introduced to a set of standards for functional members of society. The world around me had a preset expectation that I would, on my own, be capable of going down the slide, prepare for school, peel my own banana; there was no more praise for milestones. As soon as the first drop of blood stained my cotton panties, I became a woman. Through the magic of unfortunate biology, an eight year old loses her youth. And so, I sleep with stuffed animals. I hold them tight. I relish visits from my grammy because its the only time a night light is turned on in the hall bathroom - I can't bring myself to plug one in in my own room. After my boyfriend's band practice and before we have sex in the backseat of my car, I order an ice cream cone with rainbow sprinkles from Dairy Queen and squeal when they hand it to me through the window. In my mind, I like to pretend that everything has a soul, a friend, a mother, someone who is going to miss them when they're gone, so I refuse to step on the bug; I pick it up, be it bee or beetle or butterfly, and release them into the grass. I'll roll down the hill, buy a bell for my bicycle, wear my waist long hair in draping pigtails just because I want to embrace the feeling of being fun. Of doing things without ulterior motives, of simply living because there's nothing else you know how to do yet. When you're a child, nothing gets in the way of living. That is why I hold onto the balloon, that is why I let myself be scared of the dark.

An interview with mb

In your poems, purple petals and stoic, both speakers are desperately clinging to memories and the freedom of youth. Does ageing affect how you approach your writing?

Growing older definitely has changed the way I write and how I see the world. For myself youth was a long period of turmoil, a dark hole of never ending angst and uncertainty. Freedom can be a beautiful feeling and state of heart and mind now that I am older. I have learned in some ways to tame the wild in it or in other instances have grown tolerant to it. In youth freedom was dangerous and untethered. The two concepts put together poisoned the life of the two couples in these pieces. Once a reader is added to the stories, one can easily see the frailties of the characters through a clear levelled lens. In this aspect I believe age helps me to have a better understanding of life and my voice in the process.

How far have you been influenced by the writers you mention in your work?

I think that the writers that I love and myself have been influenced and moulded by the experiences of our families, culture, values of the time and most definitely the large urban city experience. I can relate very much with the relationships that the Beats and Bukowski had with their parents. In regard to the subject matter that they wrote about, for better or for worse I too had similar experiences in my life, particularly when I was younger. I am humbled by their gift to turn the ugly and bitter of life into a beautiful representation of the human condition.

You make reference to specific places in your work, how far do locations influence your thinking of people and relationships?

Los Angeles, my Lady, my love and my torment. Los Angeles is international and ever evolving in all areas from food to politics to dress to sounds and international crime and the economics of it. I have spent 95 percent of my life here. I work and play in the underbelly which to me is downtown. My spirit becomes alive with the cramps of hatred and love to see so much suffering within our working class communities and of course the internationally recognized Skid-row. I work in the mental health field serving the different communities in this part of town. There are days when everything is warped and wrong. But I can always count on someone to bring me back to a straight path with a smile or a “thank you.” The ecosystem here is something to behold. It is not for everyone. I am definitely kept humbled but have been taught to have confidence and hope in myself and others. My life and my career are intertwined here and so it is only natural for my work to be influenced by Los Angeles and her people.

stoic

mb

the magnolia trees
with hearty roots
ripping through sidewalks
i walk with empty hand
your face grey eyes fedora
button down vintage shirt
Dickie pants a real bad ass
appears to me like a mirage
me a sick old girl
grown leathery tough
round my ages
i'm astonished how easy
it's become to not give a fuck
when the Los Feliz sun my face kisses
then a mouthy bird with riot chirps
suck me back among those trees
those quiet late dark nights
when in your car
i'd give you head
pleading in my heart
you'd love me back
yet as years
travel on my breaking soul
your face that i used to adore
is just as stoic as ever

purple hearts

mb

when i was a teen girl i had a teen boy lover
he was broken like James Dean and like Brando a real bad ass mother fucker
as we walked along the Venice sand he'd get into fights
but we still caught the light of the Moon
sucking on the booze we'd fuck until we couldn't walk
not because of sex or anything but because of all the glue we huffed
to a punk skater kid of broken inner spirit
the lifestyle was his fort me i was just a wanna be
looking for a Trojan Horse to leave this solar system far behind
Blaine with the dirty blonde mohawk my only refuge that boy was
we swore our love with Sharpie marker anarchy tattoos
and shared pizza crusts from the dumpsters down on Zephyr street
at night we'd find some Gypsy camp and howl unto the face of angels
but when we'd look in each other's eyes there were no stars in them
just an existential escape past our sullied souls
knowing that we had no plan just living for the day
just me and Blaine alone together
simultaneous fear and madness punching in the air
we lived like Cohen and the Beats
we talked about fascism la Revolucion y El Che
we talked about the other times his aunt Myrtle's minced meat pie
Constantinople and even Hemingway
he read about the Bolsheviks while i adored Bukowski
he slept in the LA Central Library on my bony dirty lap
one of the most beautiful and sacred memories of my life
was my chipped fingernail polished fingers picking out two tiny
purple flower petals from his gentle baby hair crown

trees

mb

in dream i walk Pico Union
Lydia Lunch hair-do
fringe beneath my eyes
the hotdog vendor burns
her inventory
hands in jean jacket pockets
a gold Volvo stops an inch from me
i wear tap shoes to hear a click
because the LAFD sirens sicken me
in the sky there is a subtle sun
negotiating with the trees
one particular tree caught my eye
as he bent in an uproar
almost majestic in size
he blocked me from Hyperion's
cancerous sighs
chewing Bazooka Joe's
careful of my side eyeing
in case the fentanyl groupies
demand my food bank box
the city tired as she is
steady her sidewalks remain
in spite of the oppression
'and the wind began to howl'
protested from a Tennessee plate
Robert England cabin
suddenly the driver and i lock eyes
as lady Vyvanse begins to ebb inside
my pupils begin to show
but my dream turns out
is a hell bound reality

The Difference Between You & I

Lori Zybala

sharp words scrape along the nerium tongue

You - precise in your selection

I; carefully embrace the music inside

You - an instrument of complexity, pitch of intensity - *scratch*

I; a beautiful symphony and harmony of color *glide*

...

dark letters, create toxic words

You - accepting profanity, as the master

I; gently breathe in -

understanding anger needs to come *after*

...

silence a strength of protective armour

firm in its foundation

You - caught in a tempest wind *thrown to & fro*

I; plant the positive Leander seeds

You - expel negative particles across the mind field

...

an ominous cloud of unknowing *hovers*

the waiting tongue thickens

I; carving words, spill charm upon the silence

You - holding your breath, remain frozen

linguistic intersection, in a timeless moment

shared between; *You & I*

Mirror on the Wall

Wasima Aziz

Mother, mother, look at me; in spun gold, blood and a floral wreath.

Your womb used to hold all the warmth in the world, but the sweltering heat of the desert can kill. From my body and yours, it knit itself into heavy wool, nails met walls and my home became a canvas of scars clawed into your skin. So I had to claw my way out.

Your love - a garden of rare, orange blooms where every flower, stem and leaf could kill - I picked them all and left its corpse bare.

Now, my home is a mesh of scars, red as a looking glass. Now, your eyes are all that I have, and the sickly blossoms go well with this shade of dark brown. Now you sit propped over my bedroom dresser-drawer, and your ghost resides in the curve of my poison-apple smile.

Mother, mother, I cut the cord. Now watch as my blood runs back to yours.

Repression

[TW: child abuse/suicidal ideation]

Alli Tschirhart

There is a rush to it. The giddiness of starting up the computer, the fans whirring to life. Your heart is pushing up into your throat. It is nighttime, everyone is asleep but still, you are cautious. The computer prompts you to put in your password, something you will not share with anyone.

Downstairs and to the right, your little brothers are sleeping in their beds. They are nine and thirteen years younger than you, products of your father's second marriage. It may sound harsh to call them products, you know that. You don't actually believe that. They are everything to you. The only reason you haven't left this godforsaken place.

You open the browser and type in the letter 'o'. The rest of the word is magically filled in by the amazing power of Google. You are fifteen and are about to sign on a website that allows you to chat with a random person. There is a video option but you only use the chat option. You are not okay with people seeing your face, and besides, you have to be sneaky.

You long for human interaction outside the family. Even just outside the immediate family would suffice. You are home schooled. None of your brothers are, only you. Your father signed you up for an online school the day a boy drove you home from school. It didn't matter to him that the guy was gay, in fact, that set him off more. Perhaps his daughter shouldn't associate with 'those' kinds of people.

There is no hanging out with friends, no going to the mall. You are stuck in this ancient house that shifts when it rains. You live in the attic. Which, yes, your father and grandfather made it into a room with some sheetrock, some nails, but it still feels like the attic. There are planks to step on to avoid falling through the floor. There is a hole in the wall leading to the outside that was planned for a window, but one was never put in. That hole has brought in wasps and snakes into your room. And yet, you still prefer being in this room alone than downstairs with your father. You have an orange tabby cat named Marshall. He is forced to stay in the attic because you have an erratic German Shepherd downstairs that chases after the poor cat. When you are sixteen, Marshall will die in front of you. You will laugh because his body seizing up looks like he is rolling around on the ground. When the realization hits you, you cry. You cry harder than you have for previous pets, and there have been a lot of them, because this cat felt closer to you than any other pet you have ever had.

There are keywords to type into this website in order to find like minded others. You favor words like ‘daddy’ ‘submissive’ etc. You know you have daddy issues. You are sexually frustrated, but most importantly, lonely. These men won’t talk to you without the promise of sexual gratification, so you tell them what they want to hear so they will do the same to you. They ask you if you have any other way to continue chatting. You give them your username to an instant messaging app. They message you and ask for pictures. You stand in front of your full length, flimsy, Walmart mirror and try to position yourself the way you like. You are young, which means your breasts haven’t filled out, and neither have your thighs or butt. You worry you look too young, too childlike. When you get older, you will laugh at your younger self for those thoughts. You will know why they wanted to talk to fifteen year old girls.

The television flips on downstairs. He always watches it very loud, almost shaking the whole house. Your breath catches in your throat. You tiptoe back into your bed, without taking any good pictures. The man will be upset, but you don’t mind. You will block him by the end of the night. You will never run the risk of evidence being on your phone because it will be searched. Your father doesn’t trust you, for some reason, so he will go through not only your phone, but your notebooks, journals, sketch pads. No secret is safe with him. When you were twelve, you came home from school to see your dad had gotten day drunk and went through your room. He and your step mother were reading it and giving you pointers on how to better develop your characters. You were more angry that they were critiquing your writing than going through your stuff. You will always be nervous to share your writing in the future.

Below you in the living room, your name is called. You quickly fall silent. In the past, you have played possum, hoping your silence would make him give up. He calls your name again. You don’t move. There have been times when he stops after a few calls, but sometimes the calls grow louder, more angry. These times you are not safe beneath your blankets. Sooner or later he’ll come stumbling up into your room, slurred words spilling from his lips.

You creep down the stairs and look at him through the gap in the door. He is sitting up, eyes half open. You know you must open the door now, or you will be punished. The door creaks loudly outward into the living room. Your steps are tentative while his gaze washes over you. .

“Get me a drink,” he says.

You have been a master bartender since you were young. You made your first screwdriver at age five. You were taught to eye the ingredients, not measure them. You start with a cup, typically a 99 cent plastic cup. Then, pour one fourth the glass full of vodka, the cheapest kind, and finally fill with orange juice. So easy a kid could do it.

Your father has stopped asking for mixed drinks since the move from Arizona back to Texas. Not by choice, you assume, but because your step mother told him he couldn’t. Because apparently drinking isn’t the issue, drinking hard alcohol is.

You walk to the fridge and pull out a Budweiser. As you age, you won't like beer, but you will not be able to stand Budweiser. The sight of it will bring you back here, to this place.

You slowly walk back to him, trying to make it a point that he woke you up, keeping your eyes half open. He is sitting up on the couch, legs splayed with his head down. He motions for you to set the beer on the floor next to him. Trying to slip away, you make a dash for the stairs. Not too fast, or he will be suspicious, but not too slow that he will take it for wanting to stay there. The door closes safely behind you. You quietly let out a sigh of relief.

Most times, especially towards the end of your time living there, you were not as lucky. He would make you stay with him until he fell asleep, like a child. Your father is fond of sad movies at night. You are not. Sleepiness will always make it easier for you to cry, the nasty cry. The cry that rocks through your body.

He told you he had insomnia, though you don't believe he ever did. If one sleeps all day, how are they able to sleep at night? There's only so much sleep a person can have before their body no longer lets them.

In the year before you moved out, you no longer had a room. It was physically there, but in the winter and summer months it was unusable due to the old house's problem with insulation and lack of central air. Your clothes would begin to hang in your little brothers' shared closet, your clothes in their drawers. Sometimes your brothers would sleep together in one bed; other times you and your youngest, who sometimes accidentally called you 'mom', slept together.

Your father was jobless for almost three years before he died. Not straight, he had some odd jobs that he would quit a week or two in, but he stopped bringing in consistent income. His last 'real' job was a government job. He stopped showing up and they called the police for a wellness check. When they realized he was okay, just drunk at 8:30am, they cut their losses.

The job he had after that was at Child Protective Services. After he got the interview, he gave you a nasty look.

"If I don't get the job because of your fucking essay..." He is referring to the essay you wrote in eighth grade. You were tasked with writing a memoir and the teacher's assistant was running the class. She shared a story that was tragic, about a drunk, abusive mother. You think, Hey, I could top that! My dad is a drunk. Thus, CPS was called and made life harder for you.

The morning of the interview you wake up as usual. You were never able to wake up late, that was for lazy kids. Your father would wake you kids up at seven in the morning, even on weekends. You envied children in movies who got to sleep in.

He is getting ready for the interview. He asks you for help putting makeup on. You wonder what the hell he means by that. You look at his face and see a black eye forming on his right eye. Your mouth opens wide with surprise. You ask what happened and he explains it to you. He was drinking and your stepmother was fighting with him. He went to sit in his truck to clear his mind and got so angry with himself that he began punching himself in the eye. You will always remember this moment with your eyebrows furrowed because What the fuck?

He gets the job. For some reason, CPS doesn't think that having CPS called on you three times disqualifies you from the job.

He is a case worker. He is supposed to not talk about the cases. It makes sense, these are horrible tragedies upon children. He doesn't listen to those rules though. He tells you every last detail, and even takes you to interviews. Sure, you sit in the car with a book, but he wants you there. When he gets back into the car, he talks of children who use words like 'pussy' and 'dick'. Of parents who take hammers to their children's small fingers. When you are older, you will begin to think that maybe he told you all of these to show how much worse a parent could be. It's true, your father never broke a bone (he did dislocate your shoulder, but you were playing you were told), his scars are much more internal. It will take you a long time to feel comfortable around older men. You will not be able to meet their gaze as they speak to you, you will flinch when people raise their hands. The first time you are in bed with a man, he will try to spoon you, and you will be taken back to those mornings when you found your father in your bed, arms around you.

Your grandmother will call you 'CinderAlli' on account of the fact you've been taking care of your younger brother, cooking, and cleaning since your mom moved to California when you were four. You would pull a chair in front of the top-load washer to load it and climb over the side in order to reach the bottom clothes to put into the dryer. When you are older and thinking of this time, you will remember the pain of the barrel digging into your stomach.

Your father not only makes you clean, but do an exceptional job. Everything you do is looked at critically. This will be hard for you to correct, and when you are older, you will have control issues and get mad at others when they don't complete tasks up to your standards. It will frustrate you when things are done poorly, as your father always said "If you do something badly, it's better if you didn't do it at all."

When you are sixteen years old, you are tasked with watching your younger brothers while your parents go out. This is not new, you are mature and old enough to take care of them. There is a cheer in the air and you sing as you fold the laundry. Your father has come upon some money and brought up the idea of going to Six Flags. All three of you are excited at the prospect of an amusement park. Anything to escape the suffocating house.

You are walking back from hanging clothes in your parents room when you hear a growl and a cry. You run to the living room to see what has happened. Your four year old brother is crying and touching his cheek. You are panicked now, something bad has happened on your watch. This isn't good.

You question your brothers on what happened. They say that the youngest one put his face in the dog's face and the dog let out a warning yip and cut the boy's cheek with his sharp tooth. This wouldn't be an issue except the dog is a Saint Bernard and 200 pounds and the cut on your brother's cheek is deep. Very deep. Stitches deep.

Tears stream down your face as you comfort your brother. You know the trouble you will be in and you are scared. Your father has told you to not let the dog on the couch, but he only went up there when you left the room.

Your brothers sense your fear and they sit with you on the couch, very still and behaved. You all know what is to come. You try to ring your father but no response. Same thing when you call your stepmother. What would you even say on the phone?

Finally, the gray Dodge Ram pulls into the driveway. It is the worst to crush your father's good mood. He comes into the house singing, carrying items. You walk up to him, your lip trembling. He senses. He asks you what happened.

You stutter out that Doc, the dog, snapped at your littlest brother and cut him badly. Your stepmother grabs the boy's shoulders to look at his wound. She sees the severity of the cut. She looks at your father with worry. His expression turns bitter.

"The dog is not supposed to be on the couch!" He yells at you, even though you know this and you regret leaving the boys alone with him. He grabs you by the throat and pushes you against the wall. You are choking and he is talking to you, expecting a response. His hands are big and strong. Though he is out of shape and an alcoholic, he will always be able to overpower you, dominate you. When you can't say anything due to the air flow being cut off, he throws you to the ground and stomps on you. Your baby brother who was silent is now crying and the older one is hiding. You are crying too, as silent as possible because he doesn't like you to be too loud, even though nobody will hear you cry. Your nearest neighbor is close, but not touching and the highway runs to the right of your house, covering any sound that may escape, and he is still kicking you.

Your stepmother drives down to the Dollar Tree and picks up butterfly bandages and tries to tape his wound closed. He will always have that scar. There never was any Six Flags trips after that. You ruined that for your brothers. Your brother was not taken to get stitches, though he obviously needed them. Growing up, you never went to the doctor. Your father had an aversion to doctors and your step mother was a recluse that liked to deal with things on her own.

She has forced him to go get help for his drinking and mood swings. He is prescribed lithium for his bipolar disorder but he doesn't take them. His cousin offers to buy them to take recreationally. You will not remember if he sells them, but you know he doesn't take them. There is no cushion to protect you from the blows of his mental disorder.

The worst part about growing up with an abusive parent isn't all the bad times you had, it's the good ones. Those are the times that will make you question your own experiences. You will chalk up the abuse to being your fault because sometimes, you were best friends.

Your father has told you for as long as you can remember, that you are his favorite child. It will make you smile and feel special. It will also make you feel sad for your three brothers. One is a year younger than you, from the same mother as you. He was always your best friend until he moved in with your mother when you were fifteen. It was very hard to be apart from him. When your parents are divorced, your sibling can become the person you see most often, especially when your parents live 2000 miles from each other.

Your brother moving will make you feel sad. You wish you could as well, but you cannot leave your youngest brothers in the hands of this irresponsible mentally ill alcoholic.

When you are alone with your father, he will tell you that he will never let you live with your mom. This leaves a sour taste in your mouth. Your only chance of escape is gone like that.

You've thought about running away. Planned it, even. But, you know what happens to young female runaways. You don't want to end up in a worse situation than you are now. Plus, you read that CPS investigates the parents of runaways and you don't want your brothers taken away.

You even consider an alternate route. You look up the lethal doses of all the pills in your home. Most of the pills won't kill you, they will just leave you with organ failure and a stay in a mental hospital. You will lose the few freedoms you have. Your father has guns, but that's too final, absolute. When researching, you realize you probably don't want to kill yourself, you just want the option. In your attic room, there is a beam that runs the length of the room near the ceiling. It is sturdy enough to use it if necessary, so you look up how to tie a noose. You grab a power cord for a home computer and tie it the way that the internet told you how. Once it is securely fastened to the beam, you stand on a chair and test it around your neck. You bend your knees a bit to know how it will feel to use this route. The cord pinches and hurts- a lot. You weren't expecting the pain. You think it's because it is a cord and not a rope. One day, years after you are gone from this house, you worry that the noose is still hanging there, a memory of your suffering.

Reconcile

Rachel Thomas

lost cause in sacred hands

the holiest land is always home

but the water promises me mercy

this is the steepest hill I could vow to die on,

where everyone can watch my body

roll right into the sea

you can tell me you're sorry,

they'll call me spitfire

I'll stare you down

and call you a liar

if only in my dreams

Mollusks and Girls

Raya Finkle

Snap the oysters open, be quick about it with your
shucking knives, get the
 fucking knives, they're ready to
feel pain again, ready to
be real again, I tell you
 their baby hearts are aching to be
pried further apart.

Ease them open now,
lads, that's the spirit.
Celebrate on yachts now,
when hope of organic love has abated to nothing.
Cracking oysters open now,
finding only pebbles, finding only
people among the pillows,
smothered pink by baby lips.
Sweet vinaigrette, a vignettted beach
sheltered among chip-resistant doors,
open wide always:
 I love the fleeting feeling, love fleeing and
 falling away.

Put the knife down,
I'll tell you a secret.
Walk with me to the edge of the surf
and I'll tell you how to dive further in
than any man has ever gone before,
using soft, gentle fingers
to polish with violet petals, not violate and explore.

Watery Moon Philippines

Raya Finkle

Cold butter sunlight.
Winter parting skies like curtains
and this play is playing out like
a play
on words
on a stage
somewhere in Greece
or the Philippines
or on the moon.

Drifting by
I have caught the entire planet in the palm of my fish eye
and is still drifting around
in a spiral
pool of water
down the drain
in the bath.

Just sit there
as those constellations fragment into road maps
as the moon makes mountains out of waves
and hills out of clouds.
Topography of a pulled landscape
tugged like puppet strings.
The wastelands of water
set to undo itself
and fall back, static
but fluid
and flow
the evolving image

so far below.

The Distaff Side

Ingrid Wilson

Walking in
Memphis in June
Nubian Queen
sweet oleander
Cleopatra's
Needle weaves a tapestry
throughout the cloth of ages:
strong women
Patti
Carole
Nina
shine bright through these sounds and light
this woven cloth
these printed pages.

Emily
Emily
Charlotte
Billie
with secret thoughts,
desires clothed in Chantilly
Lace, an Orchid in her hair
softens the purple bruise
the silent scream
the unshed tear:
she raises her voice
above the backstreet noise
of hardened minds
who do not care to hear.

*There is no darkness without light
nor no light without shadow
in all things, possibility,
from yesterday: tomorrow.*

How dare you change your mind

Rachael Collins

The words “best friend” smells of hot chocolate powder
clumped and steaming in styrofoam cups,
stirred vigorously with two tiny red straws pinched together.
As I spend hours at the ice skating rink while Amanda practices
triple toe lutzes in blindingly white skates.
Sometimes her mother pays for me to clunk around the perimeter of the rink too,
feet blooming blisters in brown rentals.
I remember her carting us both to Amanda’s tap dancing lessons
where I longed to participate rather than sit on the parents’ side
of one-way glass mirrors.
Her mother’s shiny bald scalp was covered with a flowered scarf
and I knew before Amanda did what that meant.

We met in preschool and she stole my graham crackers
and apple juice at snack time,
but in grade school I gladly gave the contents of my lunchbox away.
Desperate, thrilled at the opportunity to trade salami sandwiches for a friend.
How when we played Peter Pan I was Wendy and let her tie me
to the school flagpole.
Enamored to be a damsel in distress, undesiring of resisting my bondage
as she ran away to play with the popular girls.

We promised never to shave our legs or be into “girly things”
The pink spangled bracelets and goopy lip glosses of the mall,
prideful in our stoic differentness from all the other girls.
I remember pain and longing, the pangs of a lover,
when she went away for four weeks to a Jewish sleepaway camp.
Twirling the curly landline phone cord around and un-around my finger
after she came back home with the souvenir of whispered recountings
detailing first kiss navigated around braces and rubber bands
with a boy whose face I’d never know.

She was furious months later when I read in secret
my library book about female knights
during hours of phone conversation weighing the pros and cons
of various male admirers.
How she changed her name to “Mandy” and I could never remember.

Mandy had earlobes glowing angry red under piercing studs from Claire's,
bedazzled nails, lips wet with a plumping venomous balm,
and a bra strap glowing neon white through her uniform polo shirt.
How scary it must have been to cross the bridge from child to woman
without a mother,
and how dare you leave me behind.



The Feast of Us

Rachael Collins

Two sisters, paddling through a brothy riptide.
Climbing kitchen counters, outstretched fingers yearning
for cans of whole tomatoes or Campbell's or Spaghettios eaten cold,
always ever so slightly out of reach.
Greedy consumption of Food Network with insatiable eyes.

You wondered once if what we shared was love,
or simply memories no one else could understand.
Two soldiers standing on a hill,
looking down upon the remnants of a scorched battlefield.
I want to bathe you in a bowl of soup

until that golden brown crust of pain softens into the mush we once were.
A man on the news said infants drown in bathtubs
so I showed you how to blow bubbles underwater.
Taught you to read with alphabet pasta letters,
scooped up in "Here come the airplane!" spoons

And gulped down into a warm belly
to grow hands that mix dough for challah and encircle steering wheels
as you leave and come back, leave and come back,
like the over-under of hair in twin braids parted down the middle
or dough longing for the brush of an egg.

Two girl-loaves, two stretched and braided and ovened,
heated like a promise.
Safe, sisters filled and filling with warm bread breath.
How simple it is to rest and become what you are
what you were kneaded to be.

A cookbook for those who just can't Rachael Collins

The tendril of an idea will wiggle its way out your brain and through the nearest nostril
glistening wet with mucus as it flops out of your nose.

This is spaghetti, my dove, not a feeding tube.

Grab tight and pull, fling the clammy noodle at the wall and see if it sticks.

The revelation, that you are or perhaps could be safe.

Maybe you can be trusted with sharp objects and long nails.

Slice thin strips through tough tomato skins and into their gushing tenderness
without getting lost along the way and etching lines across your own.

You can turn on the stove now.

Sylvia Plath is not destiny waiting behind each oven door.

nor does its innards contain ghosts, just unused pans.

No boogeyman will force himself into you, pressed against sharp unyielding corners
or Hansel & Gretel witch pressing children's palms onto burners
as they glow an unsympathetic red.

And you are not the Big Bad Wolf who will burn the whole house down

When the meal is cooked and laid out on a clean table
feast, it's all for you.

A full belly may be foreign, but it is safe.

You are safe in kitchens, in your body.

Laying down these words as paper weight wishes

Forks on picnic napkins to keep them from blowing away.

An interview with Carella Keil

How do you approach pairing your written art and visual art?

Usually the written art is created first, and the visual art emerges from a more subconscious space where it has time to marinate in dreams. The visual art will either capture the emotional essence of the piece, or a scene or interaction. Usually it is the emotional component, rather than a direct visual translation.

'Palandia' bridges the gap between dream and reality, is this a separation which often inspires you to create?

Very much so. Palandia was actually written as a two-part piece, the second piece delves into psychosis and reality; the first part, featured here, is the more magical part, the second part is darker and more chaotic. There are so many unexplored parallels between dream and consciousness that I like to explore, and creative writing allows a wonderful outlet for this. There are always beautiful remnants of the dream world in our waking life.

Why do you choose self-portraiture in particular as a vehicle for expression?

Self-portraiture is a medium that allows me a lot of control as a creator. I can control the lighting, expression, background and overall mood. I can manipulate the subject (myself) in a way that I like. Self-portraiture for me also adds another layer to the creation, as the image conveys something artistic but also reveals something about me and my essence.

Broken Light

Carella Keil



Lonely Pirouette

Carella Keil



Palandia

Carella Keil

In delirious moon gardens, the goddesses dream of imaginary worlds. A tall, thin lady holds a little girl's hand as the shadow of an eclipse cuts their universe in half. Hands stretch across infinity. green worlds fall into a void of purple skies.

*

I'm here. I'm hungry. Wake up.

My daughter needs me.

*

Apples plummet from trees and the sky caves in on tomorrow's blue misery. red pears and yellow eyes, the lone wolf hunts with steely determination, stalking the silent moon.

*

Shhhh. Hush. It's ok. Go back to sleep.

*

Black rain like meteor darts, and a darkness so complete it forgets the sun.

*

I'm sorry he made you cry. Wipe your eyes. You're still a good girl. There's still time to heal.

*

Red sun dialing backwards, unwinding the days of our world backwards. Delicately, she rips out the memory stitches.

A lilac gown, my darling, I'll make you a lilac gown, to twirl above the mountain peaks.

*

What is real? What is real? And what is simply imaginary worlds? The subway doors slide open and closed, like the shutters of an eye, and eternity streaks past in an instant.

Mermaid scales fall from the green goddesses' tail, while hovering yellow fairies writhe in agony as their world ends.

Teacups on the table and faces in the floor, slowly dissolving into nothing.

Muses? Muses? Where did you go?

There's a lump of coal in my chest instead of a heart. Please, a spark, embers, please, bring my fire back.

I, I curse you, wails the little girl, abandoned by her mother on the highest mountain peak.

How did I get up here and how do I get back down?

Snow. Snow. Falling down.

*

Close your eyes. Cold. Empty winter. I think I'll go back. to sleep.

*

The stone goddess cries pink tears.

Even rocks feel. Every petal of this world vibrates inside her, and she hates to close her eyes to their screaming pain but I must

*

Wake up. And thicken my skin. Creams and balms, sunblock and jeans and winter coats, pink bows for my daughter's long blonde hair.

We are so intent on protecting and preserving the outside casing, while inside we are all the same spirit winds.

My fins flutter, I long to swim away.

Doppelgänger

Carella Keil



the apple that hangs from the bedroom ceiling

Christiana Smith

i rise from this mattress, cream-fitted sheets not taut,
pillow still damp from tears, bed cold no matter how long i stay.
stand alone in this empty field, tall grass irritating my palms,
long white dress draped over this form they called mine.
if someone saw me here, would they assume me lost,
staring at these power lines wondering if they would lead me home
like an electrical brick road?

i know you better than assumptions. there is no home for you but there.

there is no lost inside of me anymore, i cried out any loss i had
when i was abandoned in this wasteland.
i was left behind like a loaded silver gun with the safety turned off,
a powder keg begging for a spark.

*i have always loved you more than your "family" ever will.
i was there for you when they saw a weapon,
when they first buried you under the floor,
ignoring the holes we clawed in the boards.*

i was told you are what you eat,
so i devoured into this bloody grenade of a heart,
witnessed as these blunted nails turned stiletto,
wax gathering under as they dig into the lit candles,
a flame lighting that gunpowder.
i tear this self into pieces, let this dress become shredded,
leave the strips from my frenzy in my hair.
my body bound in scraps, i hang

over the edge of this precipice, suspended over the infinite ravine.

*this is your final resting place, this is where i finally come to life,
these shreds dig into my palms as i hold you up,
the blood trickling down, these red scraps staining this being.
i hold these shears and cut open my old paper skull,
dig my claws through my paper skin, let this lighter fluid drain
into the bed that they made. they saw a weapon.
i became the weapon. i have chosen this decay.
i cut the powerlines to our "family" home,
and watch as it finally catches that spark it begged for.
my heart bursts i watch. i smile for the first time.*

psyche gives up on cupid

Christiana Smith

my skin, littered with dried flowers
forced to live,
crushed
and
embedded
into my being as rooted
birthmarks.

those pink, veiled petals slumber
under my eye,
sip my tears,
but they never rehydrate.

my body never blooms.

it rests in a field of tall millet
and unhusked grain,
that i am tasked to harvest
and separate.
the roaming ants plead their
assistance to me.
they can not truly help me.

i wish these blossoms would take root
in the soil i lay upon,
and pull me down with them.

this body will be
a new
unbroken,
unhusked breed,
a flower that refuses to bloom anywhere seen,
this shell can be taken away
for it belongs to
the fauna.

the ants fervently dredge me out
as my bitter nectar
sinks.

cast veils before flash fires

Christiana Smith

you were so small and young back then. you had two ceremonies with him, and your dresses consumed you for both. your first wedding was at six in the morning. your waist-length hair was all hidden by your golden khăn vấn. your white silk pants touched the concrete of the sidewalk from under your red áo dài. everyone took photos outside your sister's house, where you lived. it was overcast that early, but it was the time you were told was ideal. that afternoon was your wedding in a catholic church. your puffed sleeves made you seem shorter than you were, and his height did no favors. your dress was too big despite being tailored. you smiled with your bridesmaids, dressed in white just like you. if i didn't already know you were the bride, i wouldn't be able to tell because they were older than you. you looked too small to be getting married, too unknowing of your future. you are not small or young or unknowing anymore. maybe you were not actually small or young or unknowing then. i can only look at you, who has just gotten married, and you, who has given birth to only two of your four kids, and you, shorter than me in front of the mirror of the master bathroom sink. the photo from your wedding day used to hang on the wall behind us. i remember looking at that photo with fireworks in my eyes. you in your white dress, sitting in a limousine against the cream cushions. your hair was braided into hanging loops, intertwined into your veil. your pearl necklace and lacey white dress and puffed sleeves never made you seem too small. your makeup was flawless, your skin was radiant. you were radiant.

your veil in my hand,

i clutch it tighter as it burns,

wildfire tulle.

Up Hex Mountain

Alexa Brockamp Hoggatt

Up Hex Mountain there is forest land that will come to know me
in the way of quiet things
that hold still and listen
not telling their secrets unless you first learn the secret of silence

I'll plant Thistle, Yarrow and Dandelion
for protection
for wounds
for calling down the sun

Nettle will sting from the forest and wake me
in the morning with its song knowing

We both bite
when trampled and we
learned it from our grandmothers and
their mothers

my grandfather had eight children and at any old time of day, he fought in bars
this blood memory that lives in my limbs
the way poison sings from Nettle leaves
protecting the underbrush from intruders
and at dinners everyone would say
she's so beautiful and soft
such snow white skin
he said, she's so quiet
I like this one
the rest of them said
such a sharp tongue on that girl

They named me Alexa when I was born-blue
Defender of Man,
and sent me out into the forest where Nettle guards the periphery
looking so gentle
that I ran straight into its teeth
its bite so ferocious
I recognized myself in it

Ode to the Mediterranean Sea

Conny Borgelioen

after Pablo Neruda and Ibrahim al Rubaish

*“Boats of poetry on the sea”
—Ibrahim al Rubaish*

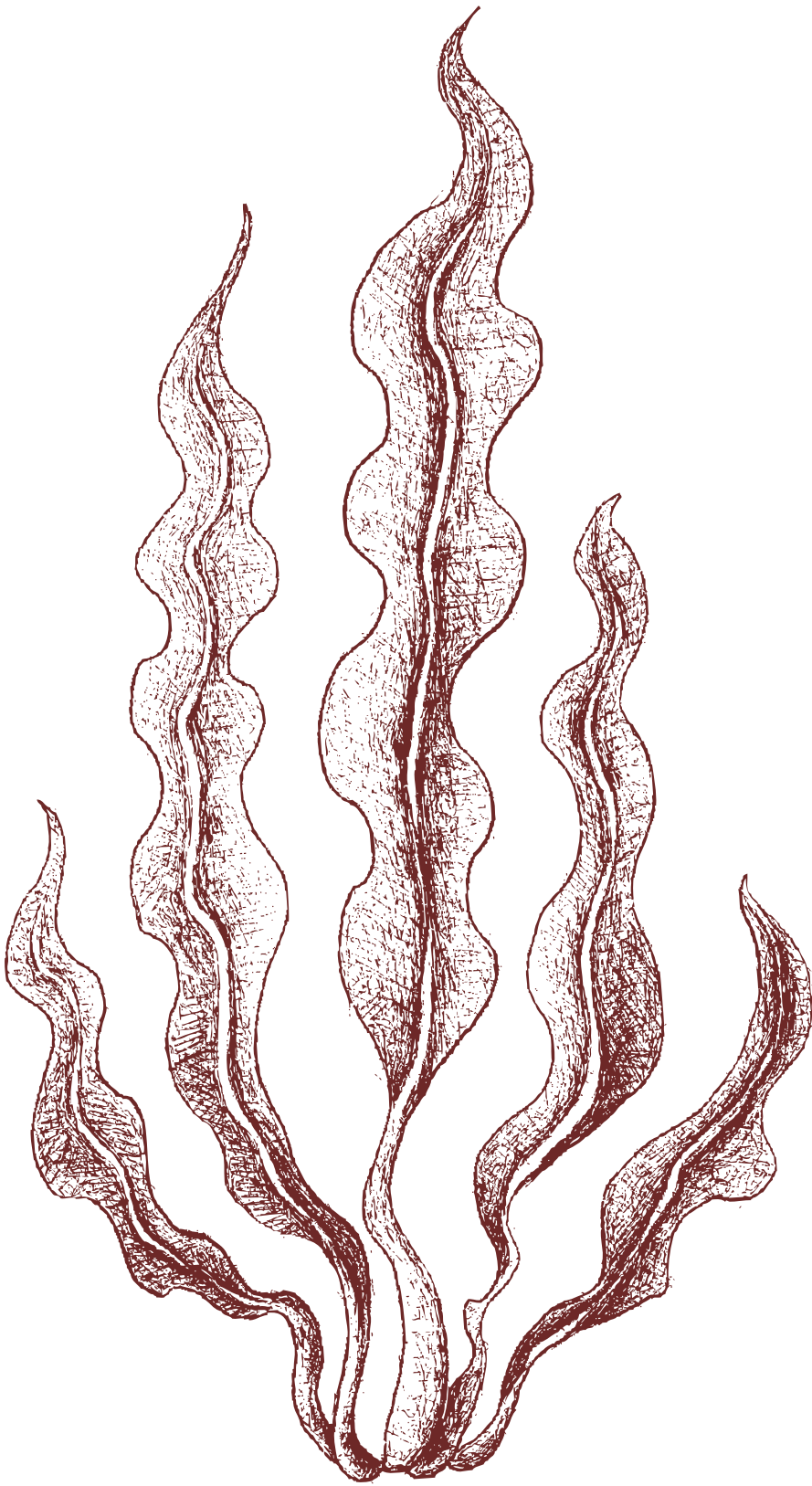
Playing on yellow sand,
on grey-specked pebbles,
giving small kisses on toes,
the sea invites
a restful sound
of peace.
A vision
of light refracting
in the distance,
as she pulls you in
her depths
of cyan to azure.

Drawn to her
by true-loves blood,
by dreams
of streets paved with stars.
To go beyond her borders,
a hegira,
like a child wanting to fly
into mother’s bosom.

This mother
has a temper.
Her peevish mood
turns into a puddle,
murky and taupe.
Tenebrous winds push the waves and they dash hard.
Their senses washed away. Waves, heap upon heap.
Their bodies rigid
like a witches wand.
The long sobs of the wind
covering.

Oh Leander!

They rest in Neptune's straggly hair.



A Blue Heron Crash-Lands Into A Pond

Nicholas Olah

the last time i saw god
i was standing near a pond, my skin stiff from the cold
and pink as a newborn. i was overlooking the wreckage left
in our wake. it's surreal—
seeing the regrets that come out in the flood
when a life breaks apart.

there, i watched a blue heron crash-land into the pond,
let myself feel the good in the guts
of an unbecoming.

what a dichotomy:
a blue heron crash-landing into a pond seen as hope splitting
through the seams of a sadness that tried to trespass
the borders of an afternoon.

An interview with Greer Banks

How much is the bilingual voice of *Un Bosquejo del Mundo Natural* a statement on dual heritage life?

It can certainly be interpreted that way, though that wasn't my original intent. To me, this poem explores how we use language to pass our understanding of the world down to future generations. The interchange of the two languages is meant to universalize this experience.

How did you find a start point in the exploration of bilingual or dual voiced poetry?

I am not of Hispanic descent, but I am fluent in Spanish and have an affinity for Latin American and Hispanic arts & cultures. Some of my favorite poems, including *Romance Sonámbulo* by Federico García Lorca, are best read and interpreted in their original language. Spanish has such a beautiful flow that lends itself easily to poetry.

The first bilingual poem I wrote came at a restless time for me. I had been living in Madrid for nearly half a year and finally realized my romantic relationship was crumbling. I got to explore the concept of the love being born in the United States and dying in Spain.

You employ a range of forms and structures in your work, was there a conscious choice made about which structure would match a specific idea?

I usually start with an idea, narrative voice, and pace before I finalize the structure. Form influences the reading experience to accentuate the poem's message.

I wanted Jeannie to feel enclosed and isolated while also being meandering. I had originally written the piece as three columns, but changed it to the single paragraph since I felt more could be hidden within it. With so much white space around each line, columns would have laid too much to bare. By adding the slashes to arbitrarily separate words and phrases, I could create a choppiness that tries to push the reader away, while also adding emotion to certain segments.

In V, I had a lot of fun with the implicit rhyming structure. This poem was born out of the first stanza. I had just read V by Thomas Pynchon, so I felt inspired to tell a compact story with references to many characters. I had the structure and rhyme in mind from the beginning and this poem has gone through minimal editing. I wanted the piece to feel like a dirty postmodernist book where conventions were adulterated. Sticking to four line stanzas makes it appear more formal than it actually is.

At a very high level, I intended Un Bosquejo del Mundo Natural to show how we can learn about the world by observing its cycles and our own natural requirements. The spacing within lines creates time within the piece. All which exists now is the outcome of every building block that came before it, compounded over time.



Un Bosquejo Del Mundo

Greer Banks

hasta que tú ves la cuna de la raíz y la degradación de la cáscara seca y la
regeneración estacional

and you live under sky for the lifespan of a harvest and feel chilled breeze and
gentle rain and differentiate each day por la posición del sol

you will be lost

el progreso siempre sube y destruye the difference depends on point of view

todo nuestro conocimiento sale de lo anterior from the lives lived previously to our
own, vivimos, from the aggregate of our decisions and experiences, crecemos

y somos el substrato de lo que sigue the child wiser than the father wiser than his

Jeannie Greer Banks

I know the heartlessness of nature / that every
organism wants / what's best for itself to protect
itself / I know too a boxed bee / tells the time of day
/ even if you fly it backward / *my feet quake in*
walnut corridors / in the small town over the hills /
past yonder / they empty their stomachs as fire /
shoe worn patina a rounded edge / *I go back* / the
first scream and the second / preceded enough
silence / to doubt my senses / I had wanted a child /
one / but my body my life it's not enough / to
sustain a child / much less relate the trials / one day
a perfect cycle / same / pillow / same / time / I just
wanted someone who would know me / *my hand*
brushes against moss / I sail by / the forest / as deep
as wide / splinters searching downward / outward /
tangling up / nutrient concentrate / inhaling /
expelling / upward to bake in the grandeur of the
sun / the first five years are most important / if they
can make it / they anchor the terrain / a hundred
more / if a tornado hits it'll be a tree / or my
neighbor's airstream crushes me / into the earth

V

Greer Banks

well didn't you know, Sandra?
what reading might do,
what might happen in
an elevator with Geraldine?

well I coulda told you,
mighta sneaked just a gleam or two—
postcard's got miles, no one's lookin' for hires,
green eyes on the screen.

well you been somewhere new.
took up to the big city through skies blue.
the best art, the best food.
a new scheme, all that humans achieve.

Geraldine— she made it look so easy.
rough and tumble to get up and beam.
barely a brow beat and
Paola on the scene.

well I thought you knew, Sandra.
“take a good look”, “help me out” propaganda.
her bonanza, her man barely a phantom.
Rosanna, her, and the veranda.

I know someone you should meet, Sandra.
a real get out, conscious manner.
nothing to believe, fake nose, real dreams.
she likes the classics, the moderns, the seams.

The Gardener and The Worm

Caitlin Thornley

He sticks his feet in the damp soil and
glares, daring me to stop him. Worms wriggle
between his toes and he steps
out of the flowerbed, sodden. He makes me pick them out.
Each slender worm. One by one

by one. My warm April fingers
grip those snake-like bodies; stale mucus
making a mockery of my feeble human hold.

Kneeling at his feet; picking out worms. Eternity
passes. Shivering, I look up
and his body is an unexpected eclipse
against the sun. His shadow my
home. He stares

down at me
and I am suddenly tiny particles of mud
between his toes. The worm in my fingers
contracts, getting smaller and smaller
and smaller.

Near Sighted

Ellen Rowland

When morning light throws shadows through
the pines, my mind tells me they must be birds

bringing moss, twigs, insects back to waiting beaks
but without my glasses they are spectres, flying

words almost ready to speak of whole
worlds through portals where the lower shrubs

ask *what might live here?* Snakes, hedgehogs, or
a whole new story I might imagine. See, for instance, how

those clouds look like veils dancing without their women,
liberated from any purpose other than to lift

and sail across the blue-blurred sky. And the women? Look
how they float on their backs, ancient islands in summer sea

hair splayed like jellyfish tentacles. Look! how their still
faces turn to the sun, unafraid of the fishing boats casting

their wide nets nearby, or the briny seagulls just above
hovering like paper angels.

How Are You?

Ellen Rowland

I can see it there in your eyes
and I pray to god you won't ask
the question I can't answer
without looking down at the ground
where the toe of my black Converse
digs at thick chunks of red clay, soft from rain
as I say, as I have said to so many,

I'm good, really.

But not you, not you.
To you I could sing a bird of truth,
lift it from its downy turf,
let it nest your own unease.
Maybe over honeyed Darjeeling
between hot sips in deep, clockless chairs,
feet curled against the cold.
Maybe then. But not now, not like this
when we both have someplace to be.
Anyplace but here.

Anna in Sunlight

Ellen Rowland

after the painting, "Summer at the Dacha" by Sergei Vinogradov

On linen covered mahogany
sits a book I may have read.
Read a book in the sun of morning shadows.
Shadows mourning a night
we, from here, can only imagine.
Imagine lovers turbulent or peaceful?
Peaceful now alone and patterned
with splashes of beauty and distraction.
Are you knitting a war?
Knitting your life over again?
Vases and vases of nature contained,
the world brought to your door.
You might be a garden yourself,
fragrant, humming for all we know,
maybe the mottled song
of an interior life. Life, so impressed
with its own capture.

An interview with Jimmi Campkin

Your prose is often written from the perspective of an ‘unknown’/unnamed narrator, why is this?

Much of this comes from being a habitual people-watcher (and photographer); the concept of becoming part of a story whilst also taking yourself out of it, and allowing the narratives to play out in front of you, without outside influences, other than what is within the frame. Many of my stories could be broken down as stories about storytellers telling stories. My influences can often be found in overheard conversations, or a snapshot of body language between two people in the street - I have no idea how these little tableaux start, meander or finish, but I can run with part of it and create my own story within.

For well over a decade I have created short stories and flash fiction around three characters; The Narrator, The Boy and The Girl, in their strange universe of decay, decadence and hope. Often the roles switch around - sometimes The Girl is The Narrator, sometimes it is The Boy's turn... they exist in this ongoing cyclone, thrashing around for their ending, or a different beginning. They are real to me, and they follow me around most days even when I am not writing. And their stories are not over.

How far does natural landscape influence how you write about people and relationships?

I grew up in a post-industrial town that had yet to find what was supposed to replace the pain after the shutdowns. My neighbourhood was flanked on three sides by nature and rust - we grew up building dens, getting covered in nettle stings, and exploring all the detritus spat out and left by the remnants of Beeching, Thatcher, etc. I also grew up surrounded by visual history. Not just bricks and blue plaques, but ancient burial mounds and castle ruins, now topped with butterflies and burned beer cans.

In this sense, it started an endless fascination with decay and renewal; our influence over landscape and how, even after millenia, we can still see (with the right eyes), the footprints of an impossible past. More than just nostalgia, it was a desire to make sure that history was never shoved aside clumsily in the name of progress, that it became the bedrock rather than a footnote.

This juxtaposition has always fascinated me; hence why I often put my characters inside ruins and derelicts. Often my characters are looking for something indistinct and intangible - which is a reference to both the untouchable miasma of nostalgia and the sharper blades of the future, wondering where the answer lies... in past warm reverence or the cold painful truth of modernity. The characters are often lost between two completely opposite, but completely attractive, periods of time... floating, or treating water, in the vacuum that is their own strange and beautiful Universe.

Both pieces in this issue reference shades of red and orange, was this a purposeful choice when writing about duality and drawing inspiration from the oleander plant?

The colours red and orange can symbolise many things, from rust to lust. These are the colours, along with burnished silver, that are burned into my memory. Dull browns and flaking reds. Bright oranges against a vague grey. Scarlet red figures spray-painted against a flaking wall, Jesus like in their depictions of anonymous crucifixion.

I associate these symbols and colours with the transition between late summer and early autumn, and this takes us back again to the idea of decay and renewal. Endings and beginnings; remembering the endings and acknowledging the beginnings. The transformation from one way of life to another, from one person to another, from one situation to another. There are always echoes in everything we do. The difference is whether we decide it is worthwhile to acknowledge these footprints.

Tangerine Eyes

Jimmi Campkin

I'm always nervous when she is in a good mood. She draws too much attention to herself. And us. I'm standing next to her but a few paces apart. I can see a tree, and I can see her former boyfriend hanging from the tree by his wrists. She's wrapping herself back up in a deep, dark coat covering up the black lingerie she wore to entice this fool. And then, with one ridiculous heel braced against the oil drum, she kicks it away and This Boy dangles like a trouser-less piñata.... his dick already beginning to tumble in panic like a demolished tower block.

She has a knife in her pocket and it's already out. This is both good and bad. If she shows the blade early it means The Boy will almost certainly return home with the rest of him, but on the flip side she is in the mood for fun. And any second now a passing dog walker is going to stroll past and start asking questions. And I have my own blade, hidden and considerably sharper than hers, to deal with intrusions.

Whilst they - whilst she - talks, I sit down on a nearby rock, like a grey island amidst the thistles and weeds. The wind hisses and waves through the grass that seems to charge in unison towards this weird public execution. There's dog shit on my shoes, my jeans, under my armpits and behind my ears. It's been an odd day.

I should get out of this. I tell myself every day. But within her sphere life isn't boring and sex is dangerous. A sniff of her greasy hair flecked with pollen and dandruff and I'm hopeless. To see her squatting, shitting in a field is divine. People may laugh, but then they end up like This Boy. Kicking and fretting about the loss of his insignificant sexual vegetables.

Her eyes are orange, thin black pupils over a pair of deep autumn suns. She always has plans... and strategies and I wonder if she shouldn't be in the military, or as a modern day Boudicca, riding a tank into a war zone with a sword in the air and a pair of goggles to protect from the diesel smoke.

It always begins like this; we're going to do something nice and normal, like go and get pizza from Earl the street vendor, but we 'happen' to meet up with her ex; and for a while we sit and we eat pizza and she tells us stories about each other and our failings, and I haven't even asked why a black trench coat in June?; and then she suggests a walk out to the fields and beyond to the wasteland, and by now I'm trying to mouth to her ex that this is a bad idea; but he's cock of the walk right now, especially when she turns to me and tells me to fuck off but with a knowing wink that he cannot see; so I do go away to give her the five or ten minutes she needs to string up this silly boy and prepare him for the entertainment...

...and as I'm walking away, knowing I will return soon I think, there she goes again with those flawless Tangerine Eyes.

Red Clutch

Jimmi Campkin

She sat, nose deep in the last few pages. I swatted at thick air, vainly aiming for the little buzzers pecking and bumping against my face. She looked up from her book, amused. “Flies love you. Maybe you actually are dead.”

Maybe. My thumping heartbeat disagrees. As I watched that fine Roman nose delve deeper into the flaking papyrus, her eyes growing supernova as she reached the crescendo, I knew how alive I felt. Insects be damned; nothing beats sitting under a tree with the one you love as they have their life changed, 167 pages at a time.

I poked the embers of our bonfire with a stick and threw another strip of bark into the heart of it. She insisted on burning every book she finished and discussing it over the embers. Books serve their purpose and deserve a proper funeral... apparently. Good or bad, they were all cremated. Sometimes she'd grab a cooling handful of ashes and smear them over her arms and cheeks, looking like a librarian dropped into *Apocalypse Now*.

I once asked her; ‘*can you miss a place you’ve never visited before?*’ She waved a novel in the air like a flag and gave me a ‘...*the fuck do you think?*’ look.

Finished, the latest opus sizzles and crackles, the plastic jacket melting as the pages turn black and red. Words and characters disappear, snapping and rising red into the night sky.

“I’m releasing them...” she said, looking at me sideways. “Before you ask...”

my emotions set sail a long
time ago ~~and are probably~~
~~lost at sea~~

Shreyasi

you bottle up your tears in empty perfume bottles that merely serve
as decor on your dressing table and tiny glass vials that dangle
from your charm bracelet and make it shine when the sun hits it

in just the right direction even though the silver
has blackened long ago and the skin around your eyes crinkles
as you tell the story of every item

on your mantelpiece and every charm on your bracelet and
i am reminded of how the magnetic lines of force
crowded around the pole of the bar magnet

we drew in class today and i wonder what would happen if those lines
met, what havoc it'd wreak on the balance of the world if
those tides were to flow, what storms i'd unleash if i were to find

the key to the heart-shaped lock charm on the chain you wear
as a bracelet and i wonder if there is perhaps slightly
too good a reason why the ship in the bottle

is displayed in the centre of your mantelpiece

Avarice

Shreyasi

We learnt about saturated solutions in chemistry today. I enjoyed it. Not the sugar in water or the salt in water or the whatever in water part. That part was bullshit. But the part where I stopped paying attention and drifted off into my daydreams and began creating my own analogies. We should be allowed to do that more often.

Is it wrong to want? My mother tells me it is. Funny. She didn't even ask what. But maybe that's a good thing. I don't know what I want.

The water laps up whatever I feed it. Insignificant white crystals, there one second, having disappeared the next.

Maybe she's right after all. Maybe there's no point in wanting. It all just goes away anyway. Or does it stay, until it becomes a part of you, and you can no longer detect its presence?

The water sloshes about in my beaker as I stir, faster and faster, devouring the crystals cresting its waves, until a small pile forms like a shipwreck at the bottom of an ocean.

Is it wrong to want more? My mother tells me it is. Don't bite off more than you can chew or else you'll choke.

I raise the temperature and the shipwreck is gone.

You see, Mother, there's always room for more.

I raise the temperature higher and watch crystal after crystal drop into the engulfing water below like the grains of sand running in an hourglass.

Why so worried, Mother? Would you rather I stop now? I can try if you want.

I cool the water out of curiosity. The surface is crystal clear, crystal-free, looking like the slightest disturbance would break it into a thousand shards.

Where'd everything go?

A rope dangles from a pencil balanced on the rim of the beaker, crystals accumulating around it, until a royal chandelier hangs from the ceiling of the water's surface.

Oh, mama, this is just the beginning.

Its bitterness rends it unpalatable

Vanessa Napolitano

On the face of it I would like to bite
through the stem and choke down petals
just to see the look in your eyes.

Have you been out collecting mushrooms?
Foraging in the darkness suits
your mood and long

have you been able to decipher berries,
poison from not.
Here, let's tend an uneasy peace

knowing that all is held on the surface.
You can hide all your sharpness in honey
and hand me wildflowers

and still it catches at the back of my throat.
It's the aftertaste that gives it away.

The Raptors

Debarati Ghose

The bird flapped its wings frequently trying hard to steady itself against the strong wind. There were other birds too, mostly Brahminy Kites and some white-bellied sea eagles. The bird that had Joki's attention was a Brahminy Kite. He admired its white breast, head, and chestnut brown plumage. The bird now lowered its head and extended its talons. It took a few rounds circling the small boat that Joki had stationed in the back waters. Finally, it flew down, adeptly cutting through the wind. Joki was familiar with this. He picked up a meat chunk and stretched his arm backwards ready to throw. In a perfect orchestration, he hurled the chunk in the air and the bird caught it effortlessly and flew away. It then settled on a mangrove tree savoring its treat. Then came the turn for the other birds. Joki loved his early morning trips down the back water canal, feeding these hungry predators. Some days when he had enough money he would buy meat for the birds. On other days he brought stale fish that no one would buy. Life was tough for Joki. However, the raptors never complained. Joki felt that in a way they were grateful. He could love them and watch them for hours, hear their shrill cry severing the apathy of the morning wind, reminding him of affection.

A cold stale air wafted from the morgue making Joki nauseous. Even after ten years of working in the mortuary, he always felt nauseous for the first few minutes of entering the room. Joki and the sweeper pulled a body bag over the autopsy table. The bereaved family belonged to his village. However, instead of offering any condolences he simply explained to them the discharge process. It was unlike Joki. He was very outgoing. He would stop by the chowk and talk to his neighbors, smile, and wave hands at known faces as he bicycled through the market, sometimes stopping to discuss the soaring vegetable prices with vendors and buyers. People liked Joki. However, today he remained preoccupied. He glanced at an unopened chamber in the morgue. It held the unidentified corpse of a young woman. Not all bodies went for autopsy. But Joki could tell by the way her limbs were swollen and discolored that the body was in sea water for a long time. It was lying in the morgue for a few days and would start to putrefy unless someone claimed it soon. If no relatives turned up by the end of the day, he would have to dispose of the body. Joki worked his way through the day quietly but kept remembering the Brahminy Kites he fed in the morning. His loneliness kindled an unusual kinship with them. The morgue job didn't pay much. It wasn't even the month end and he was already feeling the pinch. He wasn't concerned for himself rather he brooded over the birds and worried about how to feed them.

The day passed sluggishly, grinding Joki under a merciless pestle. He waited patiently for the hours to pass, so that he could quickly dispose of that woman's body and return home. Nearly at his shift's end, the dead woman's brother arrived. As the brother's sobbing prolonged, Joki felt a heaviness in his heart.

By the time he reached home, it was quite dark. He put away his bicycle and stood in the small unkempt green patch outside his home. He paced up and down for a while grumbling and kicking the soil, “Ungrateful blood sucking parasites, rascals, demons,” he spat out in rage, every word laced with venom. He was bursting with his general hatred for humankind. Truth to be told he hated everyone around and his distaste had grown manifold with passing time. Every morning he worked very hard trying to remain calm and to act kind and polite, a façade that he utterly despised. However, some days demanded a herculean effort. Like today, when all he wanted was an opportunity to dispose of that dead body. He had smuggled corpses before and sold them to medical labs. It was a lucrative business. But with new strict rules of corpse disposal, smuggling was on check. Over the last few months only one unclaimed corpse was disposed of without thorough paperwork. Joki saw this as an opportunity. He had snuck out the corpse and instead of taking it to the cremation ground, he had detoured to an abandoned warehouse. With a butcher knife he had carved small pieces out of the cadaver. Then he had treated them with formaldehyde and stuffed them in plastic sacks. He had carried the sacks home on his bicycle. That entire week he had generously fed his raptors with piled up frozen meat and felt glad about his service in cleaning nature’s filth. In fact, he took pride in his ingenuity. But that was almost a month ago. After that his kites were only feeding on small quantities of rotting fish that he collected from the market. Joki regretted the missed opportunity to have another corpse to himself. When the anger subsided, he felt defeated. Only one thought lingered in his mind; he was running out of money, *how would he feed his birds tomorrow!* He fretted for some more time, cursing everything around him.

He turned to go inside but then stopped and strained his ears. He could hear a humming from a distance, a voice he knew quite well. It was the drunkard Madan returning home. Madan was an insolent, corrupt vendor who beat up his wife and daughter every night after a half-pint of Feni. Disgust and distaste filled Joki as he remembered his fist-fight with Madan a few weeks back. That rascal had sold him rotten eggs and wouldn’t refund Joki’s money. Joki had a sinister thought and a smile fluttered on his face, *perhaps his raptors wouldn’t have to starve the next morning.* He took his butcher knife and followed the sound of Madan’s drunken rant.



Meet the Contributors

Alexa Brockamp Hoggatt is a poet and writer from the Pacific Northwest. Alexa's work has been published in *Beyond Words Magazine* and *Sky Island Journal*. You can find more of her work on Instagram @alexahoggatt.

Alli Tschirhart is an emerging writer who is currently pursuing an English and Writing degree. She finds writing about her past therapeutic. She lives in Portland with her three cats. You can find her on Instagram at [instagram.com/allitschirhart](https://www.instagram.com/allitschirhart).

Anna Louise Steig is a student of Creative Writing at Shepherd University. Find her on Twitter @alsteigo5.

Caitlin Thornley is a 24-year-old writer and artist from Berkshire, England. She is an avid reader, cat lover and beach-goer. Her debut poetry collection 'Who Says You Can't Play Songs About Death on Hospital Radio?' came out in 2020. You can find the link to this and more on her Instagram, @caitlinthornleywords, where she regularly posts poetry and book reviews.

Carella Keil is a Canadian writer and digital artist. Her work has appeared recently in *Columbia Journal*, on the covers of *Glassworks Magazine*, *Colors: The Magazine*, *Frost Meadow Review* and forthcoming on the cover of *Straylight Magazine*, as well as in *Chestnut Review*, *Door is a Jar*, *Grub Street*, *FVR Truthtellers* and *Myth & Lore*.

[instagram.com/catalogue.of.dreams](https://www.instagram.com/catalogue.of.dreams)

twitter.com/catalogofdream

Christiana Smith is a non-binary sapphic poet. They are Vietnamese and White. As a child, they once prayed to Aphrodite in a Catholic church. During their high school days, they were often spotted with their arms littered with Sharpie poems. Their favorite flowers are cherry blossoms and dahlias. They love the smell of a lit match. Smith has previously been published in *Milvia Street Journal*, *The Talon Review*, and *Gypsophila*.

Conny Borgelien lives on the shore of the North Sea in Belgium. She has a Sisyphean rock called chronic fatigue syndrome, and works part-time in a social grocery. Her poetry has appeared in *The Winged Moon*, *Rogue Agent*, *Feral*, *Babyteeth*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, *t' ART*, and *the Emma Press Anthology of Illness*. Her first poetry and essay collection *Waking up to Thrutopia* is out now on Amazon.

Meet the Contributors

Daniel Lockeridge is a twenty-nine year old Australian who studied English and Writing at university before self-publishing a collection of meditative reminders and two collections of poetry.

He has been published in *The Winged Moon Magazine* and is currently focusing on completing fantasy novels as well as additional spiritual and poetry books.

Approximately a year ago he started his Instagram page – @danlovepoetry – which has allowed him to expand on his love for writing free verse, especially romantic poetry interlaced with nature themes.

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), Facebook (Debarati Ghose) and her writing space www.penpointsandpaperboats.wordpress.com

Ellen Rowland is the author of two collections of haiku/senryu, *Light, Come Gather Me* and *Blue Seasons*, as well as the book *Everything I Thought I Knew*, essays on living, learning and parenting outside the status quo. Her writing has appeared in numerous literary journals and in several poetry anthologies, most recently *The Path to Kindness: Poems of Connection and Joy*. Her debut collection of full-length poems, *No Small Thing*, is forthcoming from Fernwood Press in 2023. She lives off the grid with her family on an island in Greece. Connect with her on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

Emily Mew is a poet, mother and therapist from Bristol, England. Emily often writes on themes of nature, womanhood and motherhood and is currently working on her first chapbook due for publication in 2024/2025.

Fiona Dignan is a UK based poet, who started writing during lockdown to cope with the chaos of home-schooling four children. She is inspired by her experience of motherhood, place, identity, and politics.

She won The London Society poetry prize in 2023 and was shortlisted for the EHP Barnard Poetry Prize 2022. She has been published in Mslexia, Popshot and Street Cake magazines.

Greer Banks is a software developer and gardener based in Kansas City. His work is published or forthcoming in *Ouch! Collective* and *Soft Star Magazine*.

Meet the Contributors

Ingrid Wilson is the Owner & Editor-in-Chief of Experiments in Fiction, an independent publisher of titles in poetry, fiction and memoir. Her personal publication credits include Free Verse Revolution, Gleam's Journal of the Cadrador, and *Archery In The UK* (a poetic collaboration with author Nick Reeves).

Jillian-Rae Picco is an author, editor, and advocate based in Northern Ontario. She has an Honours Undergraduate Degree with Distinction in English Studies, and her first book, *Canoeing with the Seasons*, was recently published as a work of creative nonfiction. Her poetry and nonfiction writings have been published through nearly a dozen literary platforms and magazines, including *Introvert, Dear, Nightingale & Sparrow*, and *Spare Parts Literary*. Her second novel, *The Insightful Journey*, is forthcoming publication in 2023 through *Thrive: Enabling Potential*, and you can find her Literary Magazine on Instagram @chemicalinevitable.

Jimmi Campkin is a writer and photographer currently living on the Yorkshire Coast.

Lamarriv is an author and visual storyteller. She's a restless soul who seeks the emotion in every single thing in life trying to reproduce the effects of them on paper. She always tries to capture the imperfection in the reaction versus the perfection in the elaborated thought.

Lori Zybala is passionate about intertwining the musing of the mind, related to human existence, nature and the love of language. Poetry is her natural extension, a paper and pencil union of the conscious and subconscious mind. Her poetry has appeared in multiple on-line publications across the global writing community.

Originally from Canada, works in the world of academia, and is now based in Waterloo Ontario. When not writing she can be found hiking in nature, reading poetry and indulging in a great cup of coffee. Links: [WordPress](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#).

Born and raised in Los Angeles, **mb** writes about the downtown urban life experience. inspired by personal events, mental illness and in working with vulnerable communities. mb has been published by Indie Blu(e) Publishing, 2020 and 2021; The Short of It, 2020 and 2022; Newington Blue Press, 2021; Prolific Pulse Press, 2021 and 2022. mb's work can also be found on wordlessspoken781842219.blog, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

Meet the Contributors

Nicholas Olah has self-published three poetry collections, *Where Light Separates from Dark*, *Which Way is North and Seasons*. Nicholas's work has been published in *Humana Obscura*, *Free Verse Revolution*, *Querencia Press*, *Duck Head Journal*, *Resurrection Magazine* and *Wild Roof Journal*. Check out more of his work on Instagram at [@nick.olah.poetry](https://www.instagram.com/nick.olah.poetry) or visit his Etsy shop at <https://www.etsy.com/shop/nickolahpoetry>.

Rachael Collins has never had her work published, other than the inclusion of an exceptionally over dramatic poem entitled "The Fox" in a grade school writing anthology. Nevertheless, observing the world around her and attempting to share it, as well as her own experiences, through words has remained a lifelong constant. She often writes about feeling anything but heroic while working as a nurse, longing for faith, her mental health journey, and memories involving shopping malls. She lives in Seattle with her partner and two "lucky" black cats, despite a lifelong fear of felines.

Rachel Lui was born and raised in Hong Kong, China but is currently studying for an English Literature degree in the UK. Since early childhood, she has had a turbulent love-hate relationship with writing--while it is her main means of self-expression, she also finds herself constantly reliant on external inspiration, which means she often runs into writer's block at the least convenient of times. She can also be found on Instagram via the handle [@rn_lui](https://www.instagram.com/rn_lui).

Rachel Thomas is a 26-year-old poet and visual artist from Charleston, South Carolina. Her favorite book is *White Oleander*.

Raya (legally Rachel) Finkle is a 21 year old nonbinary author currently living in Oregon. They love writing and use poetry as a form of healing. Their blog is [rfwriting.com](https://www.rfwriting.com), and they have a poetry book called *Raspberry Fingers*.

Shreyasi first discovered her love for poetry when she was six years old. She enjoys experimenting with her poems and trying out different perspectives and themes. In her spare time, she loves to read books.

Vanessa Napolitano lives in Yorkshire with her daughter and husband and works in Higher Education. She recently won third place in the I Am In Print poetry competition and has been longlisted for the 2023 Leeds Poetry Festival award. Her work can be found in previous issues of *Free Verse Revolution*, *The 6ress* and in the *Trees, Seas and Attitudes* anthology. Her debut pamphlet is due out 2024.

Wasima Aziz is a high school senior from Bangladesh, who writes in her spare time. Find her on Instagram [@washeem_cant_decide](https://www.instagram.com/washeem_cant_decide).

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.

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