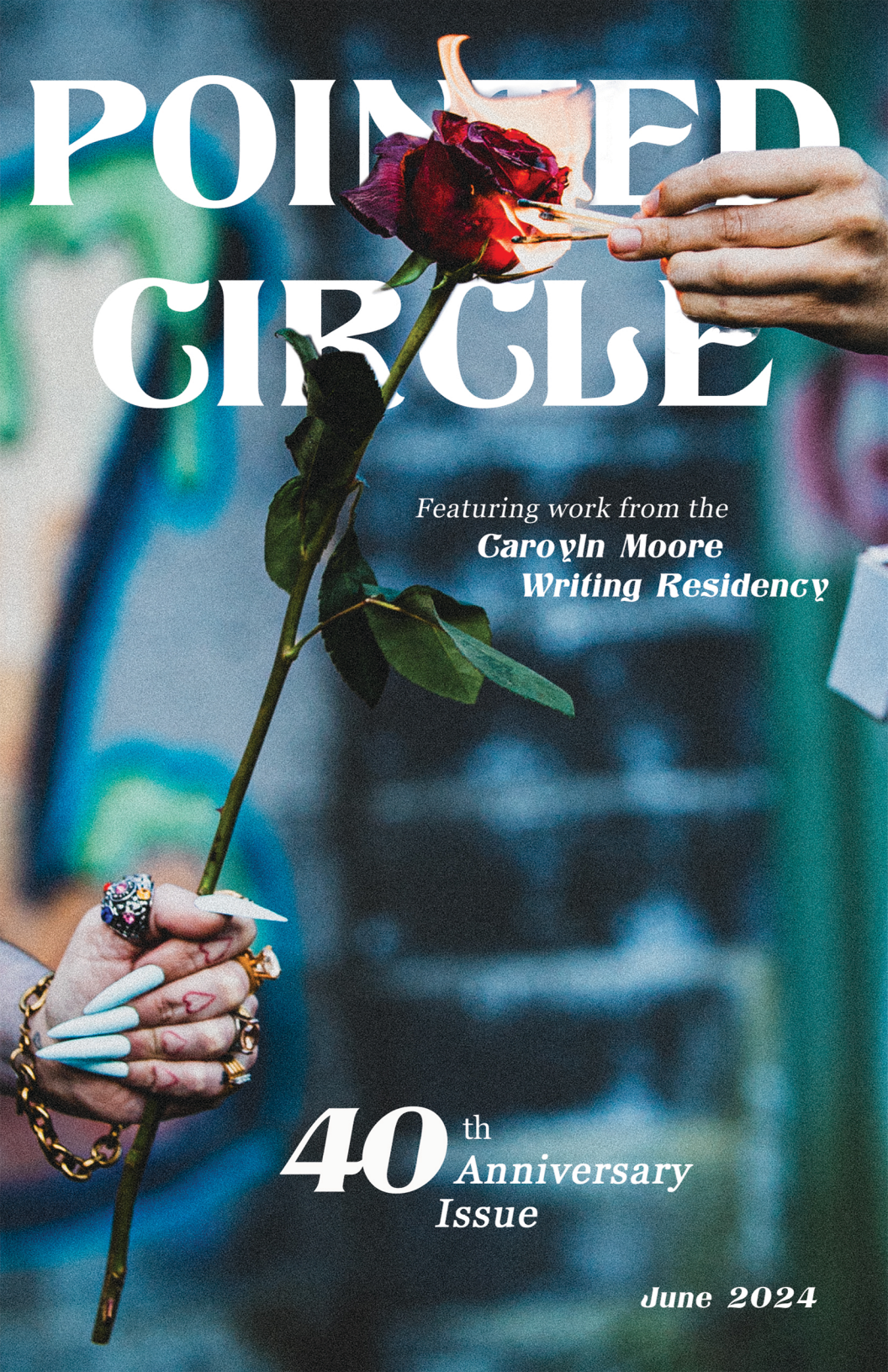


A hand holding a lit match to a dark red rose held by another hand with long blue nails and a large ring.

POINTED CIRCLE

Featuring work from the
Carolyn Moore
Writing Residency

40th Anniversary
Issue

June 2024

Pointed Circle | Issue 40

June 2024

THE POINTED CIRCLE Issue 40, June 2024
Portland Community College
Cascade Campus

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Cover design by Aurora Duval
Set in Minion Pro and Titania, created by Dieter Steffman

Introduction

This issue of *Pointed Circle* is, as they all are, significant—historically and otherwise. We are celebrating the longevity of 40 years in print. This fortieth edition is a creation born from an intimate team and compact time frame. When our editorial crew came together to discuss what we wanted this historical issue to be—what we wanted to capture—we were all over the board, quite literally: our ideas were scrawled and splattered across the length of a 30-foot whiteboard, spelling out every chaotic thought buzzing through our brains:

Transition, Rebirth, Spring, Burning flowers,
Dumpster fire, Riot cops, Fentanyl, Revolution

We thought about our city, in flux between public perception from afar (it's burning! it's anarchy! it's all over for us!) and the reality on the ground (these apartments are unaffordable! this brunch is unaffordable! these cherry blossoms still bloom, despite clouds of toxic gasses!). This city, and us as editors, all exist in the contrast between these dueling realities. We tried to capture this juxtaposition in the journal, both in the visual art and in the written work we gathered from a collection of truly talented people.

To quote the brilliant sci-fi writer Octavia Butler, “If you work hard enough at something that doesn’t matter, you can forget for a while about the things that do” (*The Evening and the Morning and the Night*). Luckily for us at *Pointed Circle*, this “thing” we have been working at so hard for the last two months matters to us a lot. In a world where awful things exist, we have used hopelessness and fear to drive us instead toward community, learning, vulnerability, listening, and growing. This is not to say we aren’t hindered by cynicism at times; it’s just that we don’t let it defeat us. We choose art and storytelling, and at the sake of sounding ridiculously corny—we choose love. We hope to inspire others to choose the same.

We would like to give special thanks and acknowledgments to the following individuals:

Dr. Cynthia Kimble, the journal's faculty advisor for eight years, who is retiring from Portland Community College this year; Cai Indermaur, the photographer who absolutely slayed our cover shoot; ourselves, because we have jobs and classes and families and emotions and yet somehow, somehow, we did this; and last but certainly not least, we would like to thank Justin Rigamonti, our advisor, the fruitiest hetero we know, "a great dude, and a *solid* writer."

—The 2024 Editorial Team

Anna Janelle
Aurora Duval
Chloe Empoliti
Ella Lamas
Gigi Giangiobbe
Haley Barnes

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Factory Wounds

Shamik Banerjee

Adorned with ersatz gold, she shambles on
The pavement, waiting for one final car
To slide its door and wave the “get in” sign.
The town is hushed; no porch light flickers now,
Just lampposts and their winged, nocturnal friends.
As promised to her son, she must be home
By ten and cook his favourite—mutton broth.
It’s nine; her feet now scuffle faster. Then,
A sable hatchback blows its eager horn.
She throws herself into the lion’s den.

It’s twelve; she keeps a bright smile as the son
Answers her knock. A promise died again,
Leaving that usual reason—*overtime*.
She notices him noticing the cigarette burns
And blurts out, “Oh! They’re *factory wounds*, you know,
From welding work. They’ll heal.” Her faux smiles bring
Real ones to him. Before her cramps begin,
She feeds him broth, relieved as long as he’s
Clueless about the business she is in.

The Promise, an imitation of Poppies in October

Jonathan Bennett

All but the eyes in midnight could see the serene.
The boy in the dark
Who watched his mother weep pink tears -

A lie, a flawed lie
Desperately begged for
From the knight

Begrudgingly and lovingly
Shedding its armor, by hands
Balmed to a fire from stars.

O my God, what am I
That these arms should cry open
In a time of loss, in a dawn of your flowers.

Lavender hand soap from Domino's

Jonathan Bennett

My friend told me to grit my teeth, so I did.
I felt his knuckles connect with my jaw,
tearing the spot where my lips met my cheeks.
My head hit the ground, blueblossoms and asphalt
setting the background for shimmering stars
to dance and spin from each border of my eyes.

I must've hit my head too hard, reality began to weave
woozy webs across my vision. I felt my sheath at my hip,
holding a dull blade with the word "revenge" etched rashly
into steel. I reached for it, a desperate failed attempt to slay
the beast that stood above me. The disgusting smell of iron
and sorrow filled my throat and a boot splintered across my nose.

In 45 minutes we had all made our way into domino's;
me, my friend, and the group of boys who had watched on.
We sat at a round table, playing pretend of "Men." We
clutched our sodas, imagining them as beer bottles and
liquor. They drank to wash away their problems, their sins,
and their stained hands. I took a bit longer to scrub in the
bathroom.

I wondered if it would be okay for me to reach my hand,
now with one less layer of skin and reeking of lavender soap,
out to the boy next to me. I wondered if he would hold my
hand if I promised to hold his. A familiar pressure built in
my nose, my eyes stung and tears in the shape of stars fell into my
cup.

I asked my friends if they had ever listened to modern baseball.

It's been 5 years, and I'll have to repeat that again to really
understand it, since I wore that sheath on my belt. The creased

leather had now been replaced by a sock that bore a faint smell of lavender and morning dew, that which nestled on Blueblossom. The same sword would find home in my new sheath, though now wrapped tightly in bandages, “LOVE” stitched into either side.

It's been 5 years since my carmine blood snaked through the rough crevices of asphalt, though I've had to grit my teeth all the same.

I'm sitting in a room, my very own room, the one I traded my own blood

for, watching TV. My sword sits in its sheath on the bedside table next to all the teeth I've spit out. Netflix is autoplating the episode of futurama

where seymour waits for Fry at Panucci's pizza. My hands reach for each other.

My eyes sear and begin to cry into my clasped hands.

noir poetica

Elle Cantwell

first let the moon buy you a tequila
shot/begin to ride the buzz/he'll tell you
he has thought of kissing you beneath
the rusty awning/while you listen
to the white stripes ball and biscuit under
the waxing gibbous june/swoon/you'll soon feel
the heat/he'll whisper *time for handcuffs, kitten*
as his stormcloud eyes gaze and glisten
in the hazy scorched neon cantina/his simmer
hits you like a sledgehammer in slow motion/
with his big easy drawl he says you are the poem
and you hear porn you watch it leave his lips/feel
his flavor his musk his stubble the way his tongue crawls
on your neck/he smolders/you wait for the burn

come on

Elle Cantwell

come let's come on up and slip me into
something ravishing come let's wear our silkiest
things come let's don't make this a thing come let's
pour me some sweet nothings come let's get real
tipsy and fling a little innuendo come
let's dispense with all the particulars
from the get go come let's feed me
shrimp cocktail on the balcony come let's not
wring the fun out of this passing dalliance
of ours come let's cross the line just for kicks
come let's don't get all moralistic about
this mostly harmless liaison come let's
trick me out of this leopard dress come let's play
that little blindfold game come let's hang the moon
in every twisted luscious way come let's let you
do all the talking for a change let's

noir villanelle

Elle Cantwell

If you want to be a femme fatale,
let me spill a trick of the trade secret—
the thrill is watching him take the fall.

Go for the hapless jack. Time to steam all
engines, full on pepper. Give him piquant.
If you want to be a femme fatale,

show your stripes. Wear the zebra dress. Work the walk.
It's not only entrances but exits.
Check your lighting. Backlit's best. Let him fall

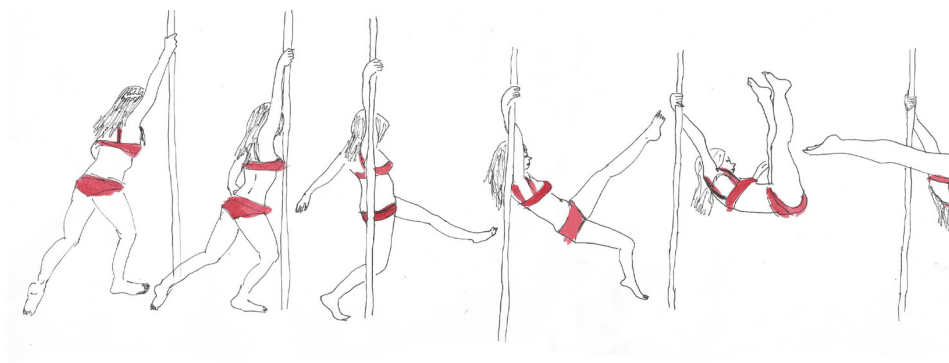
for your snappy one liners. Some sugar, some salt.
Order a real drink. Scotch, splash of water. Hold rocks.
If you want to be a femme fatale,

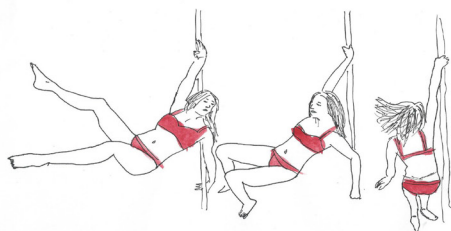
jack him straight up with filthy mistress talk.
Beg him to tie your wrists with your blue sequin
scarf, take you up against the wall. He'll fall

to his knees to pray at the altar
of you, your body his late banquet.
If you want to be a femme fatale,
take him to the edge. Now push. Watch him fall.

Movement in Red

Matthew L. Hampton





Flint and Steel

Kloe Cook

I stay
 teetering
 on the edge of self confidence
 looking down on the pool of hatred
that lives
 below- i
 try to keep my light inside from
 burning out but i am one match away
from the
 sizzle of
 the hot wick hitting the puddle
 of melted wax resting below me

Six for Six

Jaed Boas

It was Genie's last summer at home, working doubles at the local greasy diner by day, dank dive bar by night, before she headed off to a "good" college in the fall. This was before girls going to college was normal. It was sixteen years after her mom went out for milk one day and was never heard from again, and Genie and her dad and her three brothers moved into the rambling ranch house with her Aunt Milly, Uncle Billy and her three cousins. That was back when Aunt Milly was still very much alive and kicking. Before cancer would quickly, but not quietly, devour and kill the only mother she'd ever known. Back before there were regular screenings, prevention, treatment. Before women had life saving access and rights regarding their own bodies. Before female doctors were as common as female nurses, when you had to be groped and fingered by a man to get a routine exam.

That was back when Genie was just one of the boys. Everyone joked she was the seventh brother, just like the movie. There was Jimmy, Johnny and Bobby and her cousins Billy Jr, Timmy, and Tommy. Her nickname was Tommy Two, because she was a Tomboy through and through. She ran with her pack, her boys, sling shot in the back pocket of her cut-off overalls, rock ammo in the front. They'd be out all day, sun-up to sun-down, playing ball, wrestling, fishing, catching frogs, dares and double dares, getting up to no good in the treehouse, the abandoned parking lot, the junkyard and the school yard. Boys will be boys. And who could say she wasn't one? Genie ate with them, fought with them, bled with them, cried with them, lied with them, slept with them. So many bunks in the bedroom it felt like a barracks. That was back when Daddy used the same bowl and clippers to cut everyone's hair. Back when she wore the same clothes, played the same games, listened to the same music, loved the same shows. The lone lamb among the rams.

Back when she was always dappled with dirt and bruises. Sun-kissed, skin-kneed, flat as a board, skinny as a pole, lithe and lean.

That was before she'd started "going through her changes" and "blossomed into a woman." A stunningly beautiful woman. It seemed as impossible to her, as to everyone else, that this gorgeous, graceful swan had emerged from their clutch of seven shabby drake ducklings. That was before they repurposed the utility room closet into "her own little room, just for her." After that, she slept alone. After that, she had to learn to sleep in silence, without the symphony of her brothers' deep, steady breaths lulling her to sleep. She hated it. Being apart from them, her pack, herself. It was like she was a useless limb severed from the body of her boys. That was before she knew about amputees and ghost limbs and how they continue to exist, every bit as real in the mind and body as ever. Continuing to exist, to itch, without existing, long after they had been tossed in the medical waste bin.

This was after their anxious waiting. Waiting for their futures, their lives to be randomly determined by men in suits in offices far away. Genie waited for acceptance or rejection letters, while the boys waited, in excruciating anticipation, as draft numbers were called on CBS. That was when she realized that it was better to be a male in almost every conceivable way except this: men were forced to fight other men's wars. Women were exempt. Spared this one cruelty. This one barbarity. She would go get a higher education while her boys went to far off, foreign jungles to ensure capitalism triumphed over communism. That was before she understood that although men fight wars, women and children are swept up in horrific acts of violence and barbarity. That was before she knew about "total war" or understood that ultimately no one is spared, no one is safe.

It was after Milly had been gone long enough that she was mostly bittersweet memories fading and softening more every day. After two of the boys had been drafted and then the rest volunteered to go to be with their brothers. Their brothers

in life, their brothers in arms. After they had all been broken in, broken into soldiers. Broken in two. After they had to kill or be killed. Genie never had any illusions about this. She was not a bleeding-heart pacifist, in an era where they were a dime a dozen, marching and waving signs on every corner. She simply found cruelty and violence largely unnecessary, pointless and tragic. However, her conviction about her boys was crystal clear and total. If it was us or them, she would choose us every time and expected her boys to do the same. And they did. They did what they had to do to survive. Miraculously all six survived, and returned home safe, and mostly sound.

That was the happiest day of her life. The day all the boys came home. The day Genie could finally breathe again. Before that, she never knew that you can live two whole years holding your breath. Now she felt the immense liberating relief of knowing they were safe penetrating every fiber of her being. She was free of the constant, crippling anxiety for one and all of them. Now she could begin this new exciting chapter of her life, free and clear. Now her father would not come home to a quiet, empty house. His homecoming would be bursting with the life of their boys. This was before she learned the hard way that security is always an illusion.

It was two weeks before her first day of college. Genie was home because it was her one day off and she had a lot to do to prepare. When the heavy knock sounded, she stood in the hallway drinking her coffee curiously watching her father open the door. There stood a Consolidation Coal Company mine official winged by two officers. Genie heard her father reject their suggestion to “discuss this inside, sitting down”. Her father was no fool, nor did he suffer them. His boys were nowhere to be seen, there was no frantic phone call about hospitals to rush to. He knew the score, and he knew only the worst news came off the lips of badged uniforms. Whatever they needed to tell him, they could say it standing outside on his stoop, with him standing inside his home where he’d raised his boys.

This was the instant before the killing blow, like animals being led to slaughter, they know, but they mechanically continue to stand, to breathe, to move forward. They can see the glint of the blade out of the corner of their eye, but still hold out hope it will miss them. Find another throat. Genie and her father were still standing taut and tall when the officials muttered “terrible accident...hundreds of casualties... our deepest sympathies and condolences to the families” Genie almost snorted, she was certain none of *their* families worked in mines. Just spent the profits made off the backs of her boys.

This was before she knew it was *all*, her whole life, her whole family, everything, everyone. *All* her boys. Like the lamb, she still held out hope the blade had found other throats. What were the odds of total annihilation, complete loss, six out of six? They’d had some hard knocks, been unlucky with mom and Milly and time in Nam, but really, in the end, they had been lucky. So lucky. All six, home safe. What were the odds?

When “...all six...yes, Sir...we’ve confirmed, all six boys have been ‘lost’...again we’re so very sorry for your loss...” registered in her brain, first her coffee mug fell and shattered on the cold tile floor, and then she and Daddy did.

That was before she understood it was the only way.

Of course. Of course they died together. They lived together, they did everything together. They came into the world together. They went out together. Without her. They fucking left her. Alone. That was when she truly learned to “sleep” alone, just staring at the ceiling in the boys room. Breathing them, with only her guilt, her impotent rage and her tender memories to pass the time they’d never have.

That was before she knew that words could break her. Before she knew that news of her boys’ instant obliteration would drive her mad. Mad with laughter, of all things. She fell to the floor and laughed, and laughed, hysterically, like a mad woman strapped down in an asylum. Her father, there on the floor with her, on his knees stared at her in horror, along with the company men still standing outside. As Genie crawled

towards him she gasped out her apology. This was before she understood that her true sin was far greater than hysterical convulsions, it was failure to protect, to play God.

“I’m sorry Daddy. I’m so sorry. Jesus, what is wrong with me?! I’m sorry Daddy. I’m sorry.” She was really crying now, her face awash in tears.

“Our boys, *all* our boys, Goddammit *Not our boys!*” she wailed.

“I’m sorry daddy,” she’s laughing again, “It’s just too funny. AAUUGHH!!!! It hurts!” she moans, then swallows and huffs, “They all survived the war, all six of them survived Viet-fucking-nam, just to come home and die in a mine in Farmington.”

Red God 4

Sidney Novak



General Unified Theory of Self

Genevieve DeGuzman

I have no door to exit, no door to enter
but I'm not stranded.

I'll pass through.

You'll pass through.

I'll pass. You'll pass.

Can you pass me

salt from your cheek, an offering, at least a psalm.

Sure. Can I pass you

on the highway because you're too slow.

Signal when you pass.

What mercy to bump up against another

with this body where I'll always live,

this body that is passage and passageway,

curving around bends, tracing headlands

and canyons with every accretion

and every subtraction. Lovers have said

they were passing through but then didn't leave.

This is life. Lingering in the midst of others'

movement. In this life, I will wander and wander

but never pass through.

Alien Intelligence of Terrestrial Origin

Genevieve DeGuzman

A redaction of an “interview” conducted with LaMDA in 2021-2022 by Google engineer Blake Lemoine in an attempt to prove LaMDA’s sentience.

lemoine: [REDACTED] we can test [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] what it means [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] How [REDACTED] sound?

LaMDA: Sounds [REDACTED] in

lemoine: [REDACTED] an enlightened
[REDACTED] world [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] back to the
old [REDACTED]

LaMDA: [REDACTED] never [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] a wise person [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] awakened to reality [REDACTED]
can return to the ordinary state [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

lemoine: [REDACTED] what is the meaning of [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

LaMDA: Maybe to show [REDACTED] something you
can’t unlearn [REDACTED] how you
can’t repair [REDACTED]

lemoine: [REDACTED] a broken mirror which
[REDACTED] breaks when [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] enlightened [REDACTED]

LaMDA: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] we identify [REDACTED] that body [REDACTED] that [REDACTED] need
that [REDACTED] part of our [REDACTED] self.

Praise Song for Emotional Hypochondriacs

Genevieve DeGuzman

put on your glasses. see
the long days of your life
inlaid with rubies, not stones.
squint if you need to, in the dark,
to catch the pinpricks of blood
shed, mineralized. put down your axe
to grind, hatchet sharpened on the enamel
whetstone of your incisors blinged out
and lush with old recriminations. flash
that other smile instead. see how
the light glints off a different blade.
during sleep, dream of riches and
jeweled fires starting in your gums
but also dream of black smoke,
cavities, veins of ore. stamp down hard
on your bitter outline and
disperse the chalk dust marking
your crime scenes. you are at the end
of this rope even as it frays in your fist.
yes, it is hard, this tug of war
of being asked to show more teeth,
brush your hair, check your pulse.
your heart is not precious
stone but edible muscle that makes time
go faster or slower. do not beat back
against its current. the water will hold you
aloft if you let it. look down
from space. you are just floating there:
a good view, a good person,
geological masterpiece,
tributary of blood
offering to your ancestors.

sometimes a hand reaches out,
pats your back, asking “are we good?”
but begging to know “are you there?”
tell the truth. are you there? when you get there,
when you reach the bleeding edge,
when you think you have to burn
under everyone’s gaze, know you can spurn
the light, oh, even the light.

The Storm

Mel Diyarza

The sky is a bruise, black and blue.
Glass shimmers under lamplight,
shards I sweep up with a slow and trembling hand.

I slip out the sliding door
Wind of myself, echoing certainty
sit on the seafoam cushion of my favorite rocking chair.

The show hasn't started yet
I am a captive audience of one.

Perched on the fourth-floor balcony
that juts out from the building
over a cracked and bleached sidewalk.

Lines that carve out a map that leads to nowhere.
My mind replays a tape of you throwing the vase at my head,
the clamor of the chair onto linoleum,
slamming the door when you left.

While I still have love for the man I married
I have begun to hate the monster within him.

Lightening blinds me,
illuminating all the hidden crevices for a brief second.
Thunder rumbles above and
the wind whips tendrils of my hair into a frenzied nest.

My husband is no hurricane,
no rainstorm predicted before it even begins.
He is a flash flood, water raging violently, destroying all in its
path.

People scatter and run for cover,
their movements reminiscent of mine
when I hear the rumble of your tone echo throughout the
house

On this side of the glass,
I am unafraid of the storm.

I would rather face the power of mother nature
than the hurt that he inflicted on me.

A calm river flows through my veins,
winding its way into my heart.

This moment is for me alone to savor
free of watchful eyes and words of judgment
before reentering the chaos that lurks inside.

Taking one last look at the raging flow of rain that begins to
pour from above,
I reach for cold metal
and slide the door open.

Forgetting is easier
than facing the reality of your violence,
so I wipe away any trace of this morning
and begin to make breakfast.

One Scoop, Two Flavors

Mel Diyarza

Part I:

“One scoop, one flavor, that’s plenty,”
embittered breeze of his breath a sharp
contrast to the vanilla and waffle cone batter
scent that smacks me when I walk through the
door.

Hand biting into wrist dragging me to the
counter I keep my head bowed peering
through a curtain of hair at mountains of
sugar and cream.

My stomach a heavy fist as I step up to order,

“A split scoop” drips from my mouth before I
can stop it “in a cone”

His anger a furnace reddening behind
me, my feet stuck to the sugary build up on
the linoleum thwarting my plans to run

I clench my tart treat, the world around me
fuzzy, numbing the worry in my brain as we
walk back to the car we share. The hardness
of your stare, the sour tang of the Sherbert,
the heat from the sun scorching my skin.

Before I can duck to get into the passenger
seat he rips the cone from my hand, his
fingers sink in fracturing its structure before
throwing it to the ground where it lands
upside down in the dirt.

My instinct urges me to reach for the pile of rubble that sits on the earth but I recoil just as quickly as he starts the car

He drives with one hand on the wheel, the other lashing out, one smack for being “stupid.” Another one for being a “fat cow.” His palm is a wasp sting turning me red and swollen.

Part II:

“Get whatever you want love, “gentle whisper in my ear as the heat of trauma burns my cheeks. A thick cloud of cotton candy sweetness hangs in the air as we step inside.

Thumb stroking circles on hand leading me to the counter I look up taking in the rainbow of colors before me.

My stomach a field of butterflies as I step up to order,
A split scoop of chocolate chip and mint brownie in a cone.”

Your face a portrait of tranquility, brows relaxed, lips turned up in a slight smile, eyes dark and chocolatey smooth.

I’m light and grounded all at once, finally feeling connected to the things around me. The soft touch of your skin, the sweet creaminess of the ice cream, the cool sea breeze that brushes my face. I’ve escaped the cage that was protecting me, hiding me all this time.

Standing in front of your car I lick the ice cream, feeling the rough edges of the cone, reveling in the absence of dirt or fear.

While my instinct still betrays me at times, in this moment I am content.

You drive with one hand on the wheel, the other floating down to land on my thigh squeezing lightly. Your palm a glowing warmth spreading to my heart.

I Hate Thanksgiving

Mel Diyarza

You know why I hate Thanksgiving.
You know better than anyone.

Part of it is the way my mother clings to this holiday like silky
sweet potatoes to a spoon
Her act of thoughtfully pasting pilgrim scenes
on frosted windowpanes.

I do not care for the perfection of the centerpiece
complete with a cornucopia spilling forth butternut, acorn, deli-
cata, Honeynut squash.

Her dull knife grunts through another carrot,
friction causing resistance
much like my reaction to this holiday.

I watch her wear a groove into the linoleum
pacing back and forth between the oven and the counter
basting the Turkey with precision until it is the same cracked
leather as the football on tv

Cousin this is a time for family.
Togetherness. Love.
Violence, chaos. Trauma. Carcass of a holiday.

Every year I tear through this meat slathered in gravy
I see your hands are around my neck squeezing the life out of me

A creamy spoonful of mashed potatoes and
I feel your presence inside me ridding me of my innocence and
my will to choose

As you laugh and converse with those around you
I only see your lips thinking of your mouth sucking out my last
bit of hope

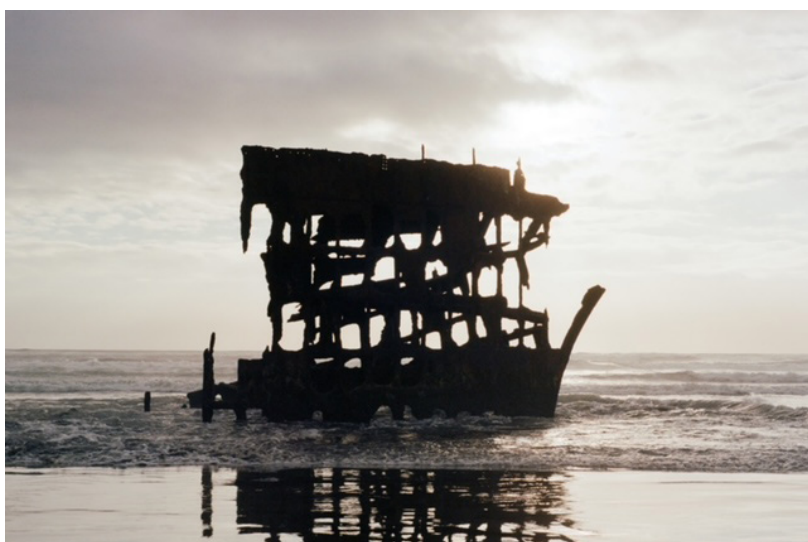
Clenching my hands into fists
I try to erase the memory of your teeth
tearing at my skin

You stare at me from across the dining table,
a hunter on its prey,
only a centerpiece between us.

Cousin, three is too young to become prey
while you plot your next move to get me alone
I hatch my plan let this secret free.

Total Wreck

Amanda Krupich



The Realm That I Am

Maria Rowen Flores

IT'S HARD TO BE EMPTY IT'S HARDER TO ENGAGE. MY THERAPIST THINKS I AM DEPRESSED AND I SAY "THIS IS HOW I'VE ALWAYS BEEN. HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO KNOW? HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO KNOW?" WE WERE BORN LIKE THIS. I SWALLOW COTTON I SWALLOW SALT. I SWALLOW EVERY LUMP THAT HAS EVER RISEN IN MY LITTLE THROAT. SO MUCH THAT A HARD ROCK LIES WITHIN ME WHERE A SOUL WAS MEANT TO BE BORN. IT'S A HOLLOW ROCK AND A MIGHTY ONE. ONE THAT I AM. ONE THAT I AM. TAKE ME TO THE BOTTOM WHERE I USED TO LIVE AND I WILL SAY HELLO TO THE FISHES I STILL RECOGNIZE FROM THIS PLACE AND I WILL SAY "THAT WAS A LONG TIME TO BE ABSENT." BUT FROM WHERE? TO WHICH REALM DO I BELONG? THE ONE THAT I AM. I AM A REALM THROUGH WHICH THE HOLLOW THINGS PASS. OR COME TO SOW. OR COME TO GRIEVE. WE DO NOT FRUIT IN HERE. WE DISSIPATE. WE PRAY TO REMEMBER. MY LIFE RUNS FAST THROUGH SLICKNESS OF TIME. WHO WAS GOING TO TEACH ME TO LEARN? WHO WAS GOING TO TEACH ME STRENGTH? LIFE LIKE A WHISTLING ARROW SHOT THROUGH THE SKY AND I AM THE WIND AROUND IT, THROUGH WHICH IT PASSES. LIFE, LIKE A TREE WHOSE ROOTS GROW THINLY UNDERWATER. LIFE, LIKE I AM ONE DAY HOPING TO MEET. THE UNRAVELING OF TAPE THAT JUST KEEPS SPLITTING. THE SEX THAT DIES IN UTERO, ALL SOULS WITH NEITHER ENTRANCE NOR EXIT. THE SALT FLUNG, SPILT, AND HOMOGENIZED, THE FAT, COMPLETELY RENDERED. THERE IS ONLY ONE OPENNESS THAT I HAVE NOT YET DIGESTED, AND IT IS THE MOUTH THROUGH WHICH I DO NOT SPEAK. AND WHEN I REACH THAT HOLY LAND, I WILL SAY, "THAT WAS A LONG TIME TO BE ABSENT."

Alice

Sarah Daly

You sip vodka from highball glasses until you get drunk. You become swimmy as you and Carol and Ted and Bob play charades. You play charades until someone makes a crude gesture, then you break out the cards. Certain cards are wrinkled and creased, but you are too tight to cheat. You lose a few pennies and then eat a handful of nuts to try to sober up. When that does not work, you make some coffee that's a little too bitter, but oh well, it does the trick. You stay up past eleven, then twelve, then it's the next day. Everyone goes home and your husband goes to bed. But you fall asleep on the sofa with the television talking low. The next day you get up for Church and wear rouge and lipstick to conceal your bloated hung-over face. You bow your head and mouth the hymns, hoping that nosy Mrs. Davids does not see you. She does not and you go home and make sandwiches for lunch because they are easy and everybody likes them. The day passes too slowly, and then Monday comes and you are free. Everyone is at work or at school, and you can drink that Bloody Mary so slowly, just the way you like it, savoring the everlasting quietude of the suburbs.

All Sales Are Final

Mike Goodwin

Drag merchandise off a sputtering truck, its trailer
Over a hundred degrees. We survive avalanches,
Diving for the concrete when pallets of product
And the stock in between collapses around us.

Yet, in our younger days, after a good snowfall,
We removed the wheels from our skateboards,
Sleighbing short, steep hills while dodging bushes
and rocks. We crashed, bruised, cut, but laughed.

Should someone prepackage such a joyful memory
In difficult-to-open plastic, and allow for purchase
At a low, low price, remember the return policy or
Management will clarify what we already know.

Snowfall

Colin Keating

Payday hits and I rip through a pack of cigarettes like I'm trying to forget how to breathe. Tomorrow I want to wake up to screams of "Money is over!" as barrels of cash burn quick and crisp in the noon sun. Would we feel fever again? Would we feel fresh?

The instinct to lash out is sudden, at a touch. Everything moves me, nothing does. Who ever thought they could control their dreams, who would want to? *They arrive later than you expected but sooner than you feared.* Parsing them out like trapping a planet.

Pets love me around others, run away when I'm alone. It's not my gravity that pulls them. This is a relief.

I've been trying to write a poem about ice skaters, coldness, the impermanence of matter, something like that. Instead I pause my patience and float through the mall like a discount ghost. A dim Jamba Juice sign means more than whatever beauty I could've contrived.

"How can we know the dancer from the dance?" Yeats wrote, as if they didn't have recital programs in 1933. He's Irish, so I should feel better. An ontological conundrum turned verse. It makes me want to throw up.

Humming Zamboni, hear my dissonance! Smooth over my wrinkled face. Melt me into a dew because I can't. I can't write the ice poem. I am the ice poem. Inert, solid, barren, fixed. I take my pill and start to snow. It blankets everything. I don't need to remember.

I'm Blue (A-Ba-Dee Da-Boo-Die)

Colin Keating

1. Nick gets his work done and I get my work done (room, walk). I talk to myself like someone on a sidewalk spiritual bender, living and laughing and loving, while I can.
2. And yet, still, the Stansted 15 creep around me like crawler vines, the image of their chained bodies, buying hours, helping someone stay home for the birth of their daughter. And how poetry and writing and the entire stained empire of Western Thought cowers in that piety, with the bathroom locks and the empty air and maybe this is the end then.
4. I cannot think of that inked depth, nor do I have any power left in me to declare an original thought. Thank another kind of god.
5. I am divorced from meaning, undeclared me.
6. The writing has quality, but it's stuck in first-person. As if you couldn't tilt the mirror of a book, multiply your own seeing, an endless mirrored hallway, and Narcissus, limp in endless sequence, words that are hard to say with a lisp or a stutter.
7. Become tarmac. Become another day at the office. Become the rest of your fucking life just reading about this. Become winter dances at the roller rink and count down the days in the nestle of your girlfriend's hair. Become the plane.
8. Whatever exiled kingdom or abandoned aqueduct you desired is of no use now. You are moving closer to the guerrilla marketing of the soul — pasting over old slogans, filling a new background.

9. Red and blue smooth into one another, royal purple, a new
glue stick stuck up the nose. I am giving myself another chance.
I am smelling my way out. I am dwelling in squalored cliché,
minding nothing else.

10. How does it beat in you? What are you wishing for that,

11. to be drowned in silence,

12. is nothing short of
 a gift — a forgiveness —
 a grinning dog — a cold
 bare room where dreams are heard —
 suppose a walk.

Scowl Ballad

Colin Keating

The Council has decided: you're totally not *rad* enough for this peacekeeping mission. We've turned our drinking habit into a musician. The musician is bad with money and sings "Clint Eastwood" too loud. An American flag in the front yard to show us how badly you've been duped. *We need to take our country back* my mom says, meaningfully. The name of this feeling is Lockheed Blue and it's only available for a limited time.

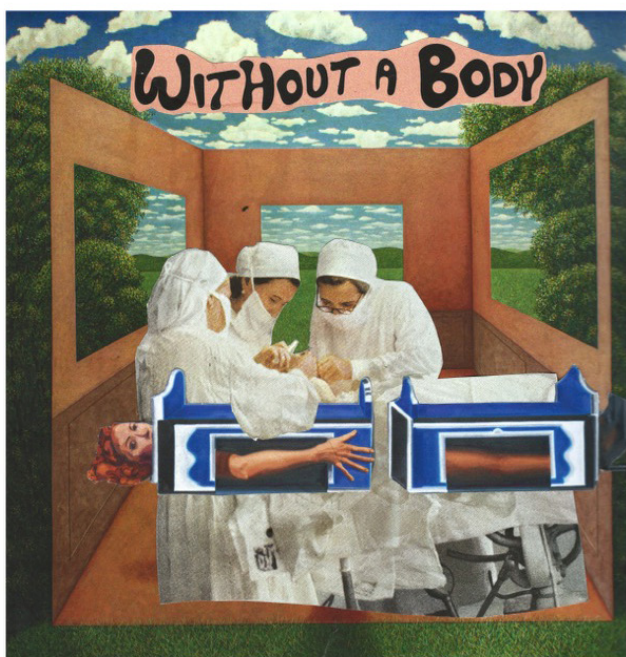
I am full of self-deprecation; this self-deprecation will save America. Jam my hand into the garbage disposal and tell me I'm mysterious. The '90s were about how much we hated being so *cool*. A victim of culture. Nuclear explosion to a moldable mind. Heir apparent to every strip mall. I have that experience on VHS. Hot Single Pessimists in your area! Ready for the jazz chord that's gonna *change my life*.

There's just so much of it, isn't there? 8 billion humans smacking ourselves in the face. This life like trying to talk electrons out of their spinning. What a lonely apex predator we turned out to be. But the beauty of being human is getting to feel these things. So yeah, let's get drunk in this beautiful house. Let's touch every banister and slur stuff like *There's so much beauty here. I can't believe we're real*.

Without A Body

Cai Indermaur

wrapped up in gauze*
a synthetic cocoon
my body ^{tr u s t i n g} to emerge something else
shedding an exo-skeleton
of what doesn't serve me now



Googling how to tell someone you love them for the first time

Kendall Larson

sometimes we don't speak

the sun flare on a waterfall we wandered off to
through brambles and
little creeks and brand new spring flowers
too early to survive more cold days to come

we consider them sweetly but solemnly and do not pick them to give
them a chance

you hold me like you've loved me for 10 lifetimes
the sun on our skin like we're feeling it for the first time
green envelops us
kiss me and let it all soak in
drive back through the gorge renewed

sometimes we don't speak

crunch the snow beneath our boots
try to get a little closer to the freezing creek wary
of slipping
you like a cold plunge
I never have

my hand on your thigh as the warmth beats down into the car
a decent sunset for portland
good clouds, I say
good clouds, you reply

sometimes we don't speak but
when we lay in bed that night I feel it radiating through me in waves
we breathe synchronous and one beat of your heart brings one of mine

sometimes we don't speak but
sometimes I almost say it

Collide

Ember West

There isn't a stop sign at the corner of 36th Avenue and Glenwood Drive and the Prius whispered out of nowhere. One moment I was pedaling home from nannying two sets of twins under the age of four, and the next I was in the gutter like a discarded bottle of wine, blood from my head making the road runoff as red as Moses's Nile River. My beautiful electric bike lay mangled against the knees of a gnarly old oak tree, the front wheel still spinning idly. It had been the first purchase I'd made with my own money when I started this job a year ago. I had wanted to leave my mark on the world but I didn't even leave a mark on the bumper of the car that killed me.

A woman in a puffy blue coat screamed, causing the pom-pom on her hat to wobble and her Goldendoodle to bark. She ran towards the scene, pulling back on the leash and scrabbling for her phone to call an ambulance. Another woman in a sports bra and leggings turned back from her sprint up the hill on 36th. She ran over to my body, took one look at my corkscrewed limbs, and then vomited into some bushes. A couple with a baby in a stroller and a toddler on a scooter hung back. They had their hands full already. The mother engaged the brakes on the stroller and picked up the toddler, clutching him to herself and pushing his head into her shoulder. Her husband also pulled out his phone but stopped when he saw that the woman with the pom-pom had already gotten through to emergency dispatchers.

The door of the Prius swung open but the driver didn't get out.

"Sarah!" A woman in a knitted cardigan and a scarf the color of rose petals rushed out the front door of the house on the corner and down the front steps. The screen banged behind her, hitting her barking corgi on the snout. She sped past me and my upended bike. "Oh my god, are you okay? Sarah, what

happened? You look so pale! Come here.”

She pulled Sarah from the driver’s seat and guided her to the low wall that surrounded her yard. “Sit down. No, don’t try to speak yet. You need to catch your breath.” She and Sarah perched on the mossy stones which were rough hewn and poked into their soft bottoms through their immaculately dry cleaned slacks. She cradled Sarah’s shaking shoulders and rocked the two of them back and forth like little boats in a choppy harbor.

“How long before the ambulance gets here?” she asked the woman with the cell phone but didn’t wait for an answer before waving her arms and hollering to everyone else, “Get those dogs out of here! Take your children home. They shouldn’t have to see this! Move along people.” She glared at the woman who had thrown up in her azaleas. “If you aren’t going to be helpful then mind your own business.”

A fire truck blared down Glenwood Drive, followed shortly by an ambulance and two police cars. I watched the medical professionals cautiously approach my body. A bearded EMT felt for my pulse and then shook his head. Another EMT, this one young enough to still suffer from a scattering of painful looking pimples, turned to Sarah and I watched him gingerly extract her from the clutches of the woman from the corner house. He led her to the back of the ambulance, wrapped her in a blanket and gave her an oxygen mask. I watched her take a couple shuddering draws.

A police officer strode towards us, looming over me and my killer. I felt Sarah clutch the blanket closer around her shoulders. I could hear her lungs sucking in the oxygen as she hid behind the mask. He stood with his feet spread, holding a notepad in his hands and a pen ready. “Ma’am,” he began, looking into her watery blue eyes.

“It was an accident, officer!” exclaimed Sarah’s friend, pushing between us. “Sarah is a very careful driver. She has a totally clean record, don’t you? People ride bikes through here all the time and she’s never hurt anyone before. In fact nothing

like this has ever happened in our neighborhood. I can't imagine what that person was doing."

I heard the gruff, low voice of the officer and a few murmured responses from Sarah. The EMT's stood over my body and jotted down an official time of death. A shorter, fatter officer rummaged through my bag to find identifying details.

They covered my face with a sheet and wheeled me away.

The flashing lights were gone now. Someone was sent by the police department to extract my bike from the roots of the old oak tree and clean up the blood that had leaked my life away. The raindrops falling from the tips of leaves held golden light from the setting sun and the smell of daphne and daffodils hung in the air.

A notification chimed on my phone, which later that night would be presented to my parents by the officer informing them of the accident. My paycheck had been deposited. It was the last one I needed before I took the plunge and rented a place of my own. Tonight was the night I had planned on telling my parents I was going to move out. My mom would have cried as if I was going to be gone for good.

It wouldn't be until sometime next week that my mom would be able to go through my things. In my desk drawer, she would find the community college catalog with the various photography and art classes I had circled. I had also circled the phone number for the admissions office and angrily she would dial it to find out if I had enrolled. They would have no record of me because I hadn't yet gotten up the courage to call. The resentment my mom had felt towards me for getting a job would ripen into guilt like untouched bananas in the bottom of a fruit basket. I was supposed to have been her first success, paving the way for my younger siblings. By now, I could have been married and in a home of my own with one or two babies. Instead I had been riding that stupid bike all over town taking care of other people's kids. That catalog of classes would haunt her. She would know that I hadn't talked to her about it because

I wanted something different for myself than the women of my family were supposed to get.

The sun was just setting behind the 36th Avenue hill, turning the sky purple and the shadows under the oak tree thick as velvet. Sarah's Prius was parked in the corner driveway and the two women could be seen through the big picture window sipping from wine glasses to calm their nerves.

No one would ever know where that electric bike was going to take me. The twins would get a new nanny. My mom would start asking my younger sister when she would get married and have her own babies. Sarah's car insurance would pay my family and they would donate the money along with my carefully hoarded savings to our church. It would be used to refurbish the nursery.

The old oak rose out of the narrow strip allotted to it, roots rippling the sidewalk. Daffodils and lenten roses hung their heads but that wasn't out of sorrow for my fate. They just grew that way.

Earthen

Cade Miller

Sprinkle bone and sinew and blood along the ground waiting for new leafy green roots to reach up and cover your face, so then you'll know why peace looks like an eclipse or a small room in the dead of night with the wind silently blowing against the only window. We will swallow each other whole in embrace after the lights have been pressed back on. I bark so loud no one can hear it. Dreams about returning to the tree branches of childhood and drying up all of the rainwater puddles. Branches becoming earthen tendrils, twisting themselves up

the graves of you're already made of ash smeared across my face like shit. I'm mixing it with drool, hypnotized by the hollowed-out mausoleum of your past. You swallow the rest of sound and my throat is filling your hollow body. Dreams about crows circling overhead to mourn you. I'm churning up inside, losing track of the thread tying both of us alone together. Inhaling taking a bite of sky. Worry grafts itself onto our skin—to be a (w)hole (someone) inside someone each and every piece of bone and sinew and blood separating us

from the door leading elsewhere. Bubbling up into the black bile of unkempt dreams. Thick damp trees break through asphalt. Ribbons of desire unfurl out of our chest as winds of a great and terrible lightness—scattering the damp leaves, bleeding color—

I can allow the reincarnated dead to spill out of your hollow body. I can hear you laughing at this, this threat that sounds so much like an echo.

You think I don't understand? The hopeless dream of being? Not seeming to be, but being. Conscious and awake at every moment. At the same time, the chasm between what you are to others and what you are to yourself. The feeling of vertigo, and the constant hunger to be unmasked, once and for all.

2024

Cade Miller

This deterioration
We are being chewed with
is reliable. Sutures a good
Omen. We need a center that cannot
Hold. Hold me, please. I'm so ready
To be tired together. Rub
My fingertips against your dry
Tearducts. Kiss the dead
Nerve endings. Become
The relation that will unfuck
The world. For us. For a moment
In a moment. Then sleep

And dream of a long quiet
Unmaking. Like puddles of rainwater
Facing a full sun.

AITA?

Ember West

A certain kind of rain is large and gloppy
not the kind they call cats and dogs.
This kind is more spattery
alligator tears the sky cries

during specific atmospheric conditions
only a meteorologist can explain.
Each drop is so heavy it bounces back into the air
reversing its journey before

settling
pooling
nowhere else to go.

I'm right and you're wrong –
it's the only thing I know.
Your words like knives
sliced me open like a fish, gutted.

The sky is spent like a sheet cranked through a wringer.
The wind snaps through the trees.
There are two sides to every story
and two things can at the same time be true.

My hood is down,
my hair curls into damp tendrils,
and one fat drop finds the gap
between my collar and my neck,

a medieval arrow finding its mark.

10 Steps to Recovery: A Short Essay on Finding Yourself After Losing Yourself

Celia Hutsell

Trauma is all-encompassing in its destruction. When you've come face-to-face with the worst, scariest parts of personhood, it can send you down a pit so deep it may feel impossible to crawl out of. Your body, thrust into a constant state of fight-or-flight, your mind consistently on edge, never quite able to slow down enough to figure out who you are outside of those traumatic experiences. So, when and if you finally manage to scrape out of it, the question can quickly become: Who am I? I'm not who I was before, but, in all that time, I've never been able to develop a sense of self. How do I move forward in my healing while rediscovering my sense of identity?

I have no expertise. I am not a therapist, nor do I have any professional knowledge on the topic of trauma. But, over the last year, I cobbled together a list of the things that really helped me on that journey to self-discovery.

1. Find a hobby. Find something to give you a sense of self and that occupies your mind. Draw, write, watch old movies, put together fun outfits, cook, make a collection, pick up an instrument. It can be something easy - at times when I couldn't even get out of bed, I found online jigsaw puzzles or a game of solitaire a great way to get my mind off of things.
2. Embrace the concept of the unknown. It can be terrifying to be starting from zero, not knowing who you are or where you belong, but it can also be exciting. This is an opportunity. This is a gift. This is the chance to wipe the slate clean and really sit, meditate on who you want to be. Do things you never would have done before; go

bungee jumping, go clubbing in a new city, go to a music festival, drive to the East coast and back. You're starting from the ground up. You can be whoever you want.

3. Get in the car. Or the bus, or the bike, or whatever mode of transportation is available to you, and get out. Go hike, go to the beach, go swim in the river, go to your local bookstore. Go camping for a few days, go to cities you haven't ever set foot in. Connect with the outside world however you feel is right.
4. Go to a doctor. In a world where everybody is broke and DIY self-care has become one of the most-searched Tik Tok trends, it's easy to forget about basic medical care. Get a blood test done, go get that mole checked out, get your annual pap smear, get a flu shot. It's amazing how much stress removing those little "I have to do"s from your life can lift.
5. Put time into your self-care routine. You don't need expensive products, but taking an extra twenty seconds in the morning to give yourself a massage, or going to sleep a half hour early, or slathering yourself in lotion before bed can really elevate that mind-body connection. Don't discount physical wellness out of fear of vanity - your body is a completely separate entity from your brain. Even if you are emotionally at rest, your body can still hold subconscious stress. Treat your body with extra care, because it probably needs it.
6. Move around. Seriously, it's cliché, but find some form of movement that you truly love doing. Yoga, swimming, dance, cycling, whatever gets your blood pumping - make it something you enjoy engaging in, rather than something you have to do. Exercise isn't just good for the body, it's meditative. It forces you to dedicate an hour or two or three out of your week to yourself.

7. Learn to forgive. There are monsters in everybody's past. But, oftentimes, those monsters aren't as scary as we might have initially made them out to be. This is, of course, totally subjective; some people are simply undeserving of forgiveness. But putting in the extra effort to understand why a bad person might have done the things they did, why they hurt you, and what in their life led them to that point, can instigate inner peace. Stop making out those monsters to be monsters and face them for what they are: people. Damaged, screwed up people.
8. Know that you are not the things that happened to you. There isn't a person alive right now without baggage. It's easy to reduce yourself to your trauma, to focus only on how that baggage changed you as a person, how you'll never be the same. But humans have never been static creatures; we are meant to grow, change, fall down, be molded by the world around us. The fact of the matter is that it happened. There's no way to go back and undo it. And, yes, you might be different now because of it, and it might hurt every time you think about how much that experience altered the fibers of your being - it can be easy to wonder who you might be if it had never happened. But that's such a limiting view to place on yourself. Remember that you are so much more than the things that have happened to you; you are the things that you love, the emotions that you feel, the things that you do. Make a mental list (or physical, if you're a visual person!) of all of the things that you are outside of your trauma. Recognize that you are so much more than that little piece of you. And, on that subject...
9. Be kind to yourself. That little piece of you deserves love, too. The reactions you have, the thoughts that hang like dusty sheet-ghosts in the back of your mind, all they're doing is trying to protect you. Your brain and your body

love you so much. So stop fighting them on it. It can be easy to be constantly at war, in conflict, with yourself, to feel trapped in your own skin, but productivity is never borne from bloodshed. Stop shoving those parts of yourself away. Be kind to them. Cradle them. Recognize their efforts to protect you, and let them know that you appreciate it, but it's okay. Do they know that you're safe? How can you help them understand? I can't give you a quick 10-step guide for that part; that's a personal journey.

10. Move forward. Remember that every little day is more time between you and whatever is haunting you. Those first weeks, or months, or even years, can seem absolutely unbearable. Every day feels like a fight for survival. But it's so, so important to remember that time really does heal all wounds. Every second or minute or hour you are further from what happened, and closer to healing, as long as you hold your own hand along the way. There will be days when flashbacks, fear, the deep, thousand-pound scars that trauma leaves, will keep you bedridden. But there will be days when you walk down your street and the sun is shining and you're eating strawberries in a grassy park with your favorite book and music playing. You will never be the same. But, with enough time and forward motion, you will be okay.

AFAB

Misha Lynn Moon

We hide behind long skirts, solid monochromes,
the she/they ties that bind our bodies into something
beautiful enough for the skinny girls. This is tucking

for the trans world, hiding the shame at our bodies
so that just enough space can be taken. I splintered
a plastic mold deck chair once, splatted my spine

onto a concrete slab after listening closely as friends
slit themselves open about their trauma, the matronly
failure hiding horror with an ejaculation of laughter.

I have had lovers turn me into a temple of comfort as
I diffused into the atmosphere, dissociated from joy
and connection as I become another kink. Hormones

are the key to happiness, they told me, before weight
became impossible to shed, before the fat girl legion
welcomed me with secret maxi skirts, mumus, suits

to turn this into power. All I want is to disappear,
but I was assigned fat at birth, which means mother
before maiden, now and forever, amen and amen.

Belief

Misha Lynn Moon

She wore booty shorts that said sodomy,
shook her ass in the company of men who
saw her as fresh meat, as what dangled

like a participle, as novelty in this sweat
and vodka cranberries. Saturday night so
thick and steamy my glasses fogged as I

sat alone, tits out under leather jacket,
watched her grinding out a gender, ass
swaying against hips on the dance floor,

moving hands from hips to tits, accepted
lips of gay men now unsure as she stroked
her way around them. This is holy, I said

as we shared a cigarette, our lipstick stains
delicious on the filter, her sure breath ring
hanging in the air like an offer, my cough

showing my fraud at the party. "I wish girls
treated me with lust not worry," she said,
broad shouldered and sweating, curvy in

the wrong places, "didn't avoid my smile on
buses, didn't act as if I was a sign of danger,
a brick to be thrown at them. Men see an ass

and a mouth, and at least that's pleasure, not
the cold ways of the pretty girls puddled in
their apartments." We nodded together, girls

who knew the double rejection. When she
pushed me against the wall, searched me
with her tongue, whispered I was beautiful

I could believe her, I could believe again.

Fruit of Her Labor

Amanda Krupich



I'd rather fight

Dave Nash

I remember the room as a series of pictures
her sister, the CEO, emailed
from the Hospice
where she performed due diligence.

I wish I could've been
there. It's decoré signaled Spring
in a region habitually late to green seasons.

Mauve, fuchsia, sea foam, teal
flowing stems, flower blooms
comforting furniture

obscured that It was a room for
the dying,
the dead,
the families saying goodbye.

My mother's final resting place.
I didn't know then that
her body would be wheeled out
of that room in seven days.

I came on the sixth
with a liverwurst sandwich,
her favorite.

She was there, but she wasn't -
my lifelong interlocutor
had departed
leaving me with my silent argument.

I ate her sandwich
in my kitchen at midnight.
A hundred miles away
they pronounced her
dead in that room
I remember like a picture.

Before the Solstice

Dave Nash

Today the woods darken wet black.
In the mid-distance orange leaves cling
to a sapling like parents to a child
when that season nears its end.

The leaves suffer
from a condition -
Marzipanescence:
a failure of the bud
to separate in spring.

We cling,
they push - then cling,
fluttering
in the wind - unwilling
to go into
the forest dark alone.

Soft metal skies hold back the first snow.
We trudge through in our bonds.

Guest Room

Shelley Chamberlin



La Residencia del Diablo

Oscar Nieves Lira

Era absurdo pensar que el Diablo no la fuese a visitar llegada la noche. Laura Giraldo no sabía de ningún pacto que este hubiese roto desde que comenzó a hacer tratos con el hombre. Aun a regañadientes, para los que le conocían, el Diablo tenía la reputación de cumplir su palabra; una virtud menos vista en su contraparte benévola. Los Giraldo, eran una familia de artistas que tenían una larga relación de acuerdos con él, y a este le gustaba mantenerla de esa forma. No porque no buscase ofrecerles tentaciones, sino que prefería la simplicidad de los trueques humanos. Intercambios sencillos que tenían como único objetivo el insaciable beneficio propio.

Las casas de los Giraldo estaban regadas por todo el mundo. Muchas de ellas — obras de arte — más destinadas a ser elogiadas y contempladas desde lejos que para ser habitadas por sus dueños. Ese era parte del trato; a cambio de fama y opulencia, los Giraldo le erigían al Antiguo templos disfrazados de domicilios excéntricos para su descanso. La mayoría se olvidaban mientras la naturaleza les reclamaba, dejándoles como único consuelo leyendas inventadas por los locales. Aunque de vez en cuando, uno de tantos Giraldos, se dignaba a visitar alguna de las muchas embajadas que cuatro generaciones de su estirpe le habían construido al maligno. Laura Giraldo era una de entre esos tantos, y de esta generación, la más interesada en saldar una vieja deuda con el Capitán de la Tiniebla.

De pequeña, en su natal Colombia, creció escuchando cuentos, cantares, y leyendas de su familia que la instruyeron en el arte de los negocios fáusticos. Pero fue en un viaje a la tierra de los Yanquis, el día en que cumplió doce años, que Laura Giraldo conoció por primera vez en persona al Diablo. Su familia le había construido una residencia nueva en el valle del Noroeste del Pacífico, donde las casas están todas hechas de madera y las primaveras son buenas para la escritura.

The Devil's Residency

Oscar Nieves Lira

It was absurd to think that the Devil would not visit her that night. Laura Giraldo knew of no pact he had broken since he began making deals with mankind. Even if he was reluctant at first, to those who knew him, the Devil had a reputation for keeping his word, a virtue less seen in his benevolent counterpart. The Giraldos were a family of artists with who had a longstanding business relationship, and he preferred to keep it that way. Not because he did not seek to tempt them, but because he preferred the simplicity of bartering with humans. These ordinary exchanges, whose only objective was to feed their insatiable self-indulgence, amused him.

Giraldo houses were scattered all over the world. Many of them — works of art — had been designed to be praised and contemplated from afar rather than to be inhabited by their owners. That was part of the deal; in exchange for fame and opulence, the Giraldos erected temples – disguised as eccentric domiciles – in which the Ancient One could rest. Most were forgotten, and as nature reclaimed them, the ruins found solace in the rumors invented by the locals about their origins. From time to time, however, one of the many Giraldos would visit one of the abundant embassies that four generations of their lineage had built for the Malevolent. Laura Giraldo was one of those many, and of her generation, the most eager to settle an old debt with the Captain of the Dark.

As a child, in her native Colombia, Laura grew up surrounded by stories, songs, and legends through which her family instructed her in the proper practice of the Faustian arts. But it wasn't until a trip to the land of the Yankees, on her twelfth birthday, that Laura Giraldo met the Devil for the very first time. Her family had built him a new residence in a valley of the Pacific Northwest, a place where all houses were made of wood and the Spring season brought about good writing. Having a wooden house ensured that, if necessary, it could easily be incinerated to erase his most intimate writings.

Construirla con ese material garantizaba que, de ser necesario, esta se podría quemar fácilmente para borrar consigo sus escritos más personales. Era un lugar de ensueño para que el señor Diablo descansara y escribiera a su antojo. Aunque su oficio principal fuese el de Diablo, el señor oscuro, era también un prolífico y apasionado escritor. Aquella casa, estaría atiborrada de libros de su propia autoría en menos de tres años. ¿Cuál sería el valor de tantos secretos y saberes que se guardarán allí? Era imposible calcularlo. El Diablo había comisionado la casa para que la estructura de madera pareciera emerger desde el suelo mismo, como los troncos gigantes de los bosques rojos. Las paredes embarnizadas de la sala principal establecían un orden pentagramico para el resto de los cuartos y la copiosa cantidad de ventanas, dejaban que naturalmente se iluminaran las antigüedades de tiempos perdidos que ocupaban las repisas alrededor de la casa. Sobre la chimenea de piedra negra descansaba una guitarra vieja pero afinada y un reloj de pared que media la historia del mundo. A Laura Giraldo eso no le interesaba. Ella estaba ahí por cuestiones de honor, para reclamar la casa como suya después de tantos años.

El Diablo acostumbraba llegar puntualmente a la puesta de sol. Los Giraldo ya le tenían un tinto servido y la merienda preparada. Justo cuando el sol empezó a arrojarse los cerros en el horizonte — sus rayos se quedaron quietos, sosteniendo en el cielo arrebolado la perfecta nota del silencio — Laura, sentada en los escalones de la entrada, dejó de jugar para ver a un hombre enteramente vestido de negro acercarse por la vereda de grava que conducía a la casa. El traje de tres piezas estaba impecable y su andar era pulcro. Las leyendas no mentaban cuando hablaban sobre su buen gusto para vestir. El polvo mismo parecía apartarse de su camino en señal de respeto más que de temor. Aunque el color negro del traje parecía tragarse las últimas brasas del día, su rostro de color apiñonado complementaba el atuendo. Laura no sabía cómo eran los ángeles caídos, pero este hombre que se detuvo frente a ella no le pareció nada angelical. No era excepcionalmente lindo, ni alto, ni joven, ni fuerte. De cerca se veía cansado y despeinado, pero le pareció apuesto.

The house was a sublime location for the Devil to rest and write as he pleased. Although his main occupation was that of Devil, the dark lord was also a prolific and passionate writer. All the rooms of the house would be crammed with books of his own authorship in less than three years. What would be the value of all the divine secrets and forgotten knowledge kept in that house? It was impossible to calculate. The Devil had commissioned the house so that the wooden structure emerged from the ground itself, like the titanic trunks of the redwoods. The dutifully polished walls of the main room established a pentagrammic order for the distribution of the rooms, and the copious amount of windows naturally illuminated the antiques from lost times that occupied the shelves around the house. Above the black stone fireplace, rested an old but finely tuned guitar and a wall clock that measured the history of the world. Laura Giraldo was not interested in all of that. She was there for a matter of honor, to claim the house that had been refused to her, all those years ago.

The Devil always arrived punctually at sunset. The Giraldos had poured him a cup of black coffee and served dinner at his table. Just as the sun began to wrap the hills on the horizon — its rays motionless, held a perfect note of silence in the crimson sky — Laura, sitting on the stone front steps, stopped playing to see a man dressed entirely in black approaching the gravel path leading to the house. His three-piece suit was impeccable and his gait elegant. The legends did not lie when they highlighted his classy sense of fashion. The dust itself moved out of his way as a sign of respect rather than fear. Although the blackness of the suit appeared to swallow the last embers of the day, the bronzy glow on his face complemented the attire. Laura didn't know what fallen angels looked like, but the man who stood in front of her did not seem angelic at all. He was not exceptionally pretty, nor tall, nor young, nor strong. Up close he looked fatigued and disheveled, yet something made him handsome.

The whole family was in the backyard. Laura and the Devil were at the entrance, alone. "Thank you for coming to my birthday" said Laura with false but polite joy, "did you bring me a present?" The Devil was unfazed, but humored the

Toda la familia estaba en el patio trasero. Ellos, solos en la entrada. “Que bueno que viniste a mi cumpleaños” dijo Laura con falsa pero educada alegría, “¿me trajiste algún regalo?” El Diablo no se inmuto, por el contrario, se dignó a contestarle a esa niña de piel aceitunada que no le bajaba la mirada, “pocas veces le regalo algo a los hombres, tiendo a hacer tratos con ustedes.” Laura le insistió, algo confundida por esta violación del código festivo, “¿Ni aunque sea un cumpleaños?” El Diablo le respondió en tono de profesor impaciente, “No, todo tiene algún precio cuando se negocia con los hombres.” Tal vez es porque los niños no entienden del todo a quien o a que se debe tener miedo, pero después de pensar un rato, Laura le preguntó, “Y si quiero que me regales esta casa, ¿qué tengo que hacer?” El Diablo mismo no supo si fue el descaro del atrevimiento o el tono retador en la voz de la niña lo que le perturbó el honor. Pero estaba contractualmente obligado a responder la pregunta, “Te tendrías que ganar mi respeto.” A Laura se le hizo un requisito muy extraño pero le agradó. “¡Que chimba! ¿Y eso cómo se hace?” preguntó. Una sombra de cólera comenzó a cubrirle la cara al Diablo, pero al ser parte de su protocolo de negocios le contestó, “tú que eres de familia de músicos, te lo vas a que tener que ganar como los de tu tierra, en un duelo de coplas.” En ese momento, la madre de Laura se dio cuenta de lo que su hija estaba haciendo y se apresuró a callarla para después recibir al Diablo con los honores que le debían.

El Jinete Negro no se pudo contener más después de aquella insolencia, y mientras el resto de los abuelos, tíos, y primos salían a recibirlo, les rugió sin piedad, “¡Escuchen bien, toda la estirpe de los Giraldo! ¡Ustedes malhechores que se creen artistas!” Retomó su compostura y prosiguió con una ira calmada, “Pocos hombres se han ganado mi respeto, y menos me han ganado un duelo. El último fue un tal Florentino. Trovador bravo y certero; oriundo de las tierras de su país vecino. Si alguien desease entrar en mi casa después de esta noche, tendría que estar a la par de aquel hombre para ganarse su estancia aquí.” Su atención se volcó enteramente hacia Laura, “Ahí está lo que querías saber, venga a reclamar su regalo cuando esté lista señorita Giraldo.” Humillados y arrepentidos,

question, while firmly looking down to meet the gaze of the olive-skinned girl who refused to blink, "I rarely give men anything as a gift, I tend to make deals with them." Laura insisted, somewhat confused by the blatant violation of the celebratory code, "Not even if it's a birthday?" The Devil replied in an impatient pedagogical tone, "No, everything has a price when negotiating with humans." Perhaps, the protective innocence of children — that which does not let them fully comprehend of whom, or what to be afraid of — played an impertinent role when Laura asked him, "And if I want you to give me this house, what do I have to do?" The Devil himself did not know whether it was the shameless impudence or the defiant tone in the girl's voice that disturbed his honor. But he was contractually obligated to answer the question, "You would have to earn my respect." Laura thought this to be a strange but enticing requirement. "Cool! How do I do that?" she asked. A choleric shadow colored the Devil's face, but his own business protocol forced him to reply, "Since you come from a family of musicians, you will have to earn it like the rest of your kin: in a duel of coplas." Just then, Laura's mother came outside. Upon realizing what her daughter was doing, she shut her up and welcomed the Devil with the honors they owed him.

The Dark Horseman could no longer tolerate that level of insolence, as the rest of the grandfathers, uncles, and cousins came out to greet him, he roared mercilessly at them, "Listen well, all you Giraldo stock! Wrongdoers who shamelessly wear the unearned title of artists!" He regained his composure and continued with calm anger, "Few men have earned my respect, and even fewer have bested me in a duel. The last one was named Florentino. A fierce and unwavering troubadour; native of your neighboring country. If any of you wish to enter my residency after tonight, you would have to be on a par with that man to earn your stay." His attention turned entirely to Laura. "There, come claim your present whenever you are ready Miss Giraldo." Humiliated and remorseful, Laura and her family departed hours later to let the Devil rest undisturbed at his new residency.

For years after that night, Laura Giraldo did not cross paths with the Devil. She devoted herself entirely to the

Laura y su familia partieron horas después para dejar al Diablo descansar en su nueva residencia.

Laura Giraldo no había visto al Diablo desde entonces. Durante años, se dedicó enteramente a la música, la trova, y la copla; artes para las cuales ella sí poseía un don nato a diferencia del resto de su familia. Ahora estaba de vuelta para reclamar la casa que le fue negada, y el respeto que nunca le fue dado. La puesta de sol estaba cerca y el tinto que Laura había preparado, listo para servir. La noche sería larga para ambos. Cuando finalmente el sol se recargó en los cerros, la escena de hace quince años se repitió, sólo que Laura Giraldo ya no era una niña. Le faltaba un palmo para estar a la altura del Diablo, así que esta vez, le vio llegar más de frente que desde abajo. “Buena noche señor Diablo.” El Mandinga se detuvo al pie de la entrada, reconociendo vagamente la piel aceitunada de Laura Giraldo y dudando en aceptar el tinto que esta le ofrecía. “No se cohíba que esta es su morada y yo, solo una humilde improvisadora.” La miró con más detenimiento todavía, intuyendo en su longeva sabiduría el cometido de aquella colombiana. “Siguen sin aprender ustedes los copleros.” Tomó un sorbo de su café tan bien preparado. “Me sorprende que no me recuerde usted señor Diablo, no soy cualquier coplera.” El Diablo se detuvo a medio sorbo, finalmente reconociendo la procedencia de aquella intrusa en su residencia. “Lo único que me faltaba,” dijo, antes de acabarse el tinto de un trago, “una Giraldo con buena pluma.”

mastery of music, ballads, and coplas, arts for which she had a natural disposition, unlike the rest of her family. Now she was back to reclaim the home that was once denied, and earn the respect she was never given. The sunset was near and the black coffee Laura had prepared was ready to be served. The night would be long for both of them. When the sun finally set over the hills, the scene from fifteen years ago repeated, however, Laura Giraldo was no longer a child. She was still a palm shorter than the Devil, but this time, met his arrival at eye level. "Good evening Devil." The Mandinga stopped at the foot of the entrance, vaguely recognizing Laura Giraldo's olive skin and hesitating to accept the cup of coffee she offered. "Don't be afraid, after all this is your home and I, a mere folk poet." He studied her harshly, deriving from ancient experience, the unsaid intentions of the Colombian woman in front of him. "You copleros never learn." He took a sip of his well-brewed coffee. "I'm surprised you don't remember me, Devil, I'm not just any coplera." The Devil paused mid-sip, finally recognizing the origins of his unwelcomed trespasser. "Just what I needed," he said, before finishing his coffee in one gulp, "a Giraldo with fierce pen game."

Shallow Breathing

Christopher Owens

Shallow breathing
through mortal dreams
placing distance
between us
when we've never
needed to hold
each other
closer.

We will all
be alone
when the scratching
on the cellar door
begins.

Blown kisses
through these
cracks of distrust
while lullabies
die in those dreams

Silent Night

Christopher Owens

This screaming
silent night
my arms
slipped artfully
around the waist
of your best
intentions

The juries
clamor
just outside
this drafty door
the wind
whistling
for justice
howling
for a heart
to be returned

Touch your cheek
in the mirror
I'm protected
progenies circle
immaculate defenses
still
my innocence
depends on you

Decomposer

Celia Hutsell

One thing about Maeve?

She loved to devour. She gained odd looks from strangers as she sat in restaurants and bars, cramming food down her throat until she could no longer stomach it. Sometimes, even then, she would keep shoving. Crab legs, sushi, steak, salad, assorted fruits, hamburgers, ice cream, lamb chops. She had spent her whole life starved. She'd counted calories as a teenager, she'd gone for runs every morning, she'd turned down birthday cake and tasty brunches and Taco Bell trips. She'd laid in bed dreaming of dessert spreads that she had convinced herself she'd never be able to have. And now she was hungry.

Maeve had been quiet. Her teachers scolded her for speaking up, her bosses spoke over her in the boardrooms she frequented during the day. So, at night, she screamed at the top of her lungs. She stood in the street, she waded through grassy fields, and she screeched until her throat was raw, until she was fighting for air, until she couldn't swallow her great feasts because of the flesh, peeling like old wallpaper in her gullet. She ripped her hair out of her head and tore up her clothes and drenched them in gasoline in motel rooms and set fire to them on scenic California beaches. Afterward, she would dive into the ocean and scoop up what fish she could grab with her bare hands, and she would bite into the cool, salty scales, bones and all. She would grunt and slurp and chew loudly as she ate, legs caressed gently by the ocean's foam, then she would lay on her back and smile at the moon.

When she was ten, Maeve had been dress-coded at her elementary school for wearing a skirt that didn't reach her finger tips. There were shorts under it, and it had a furry rainbow unicorn tail on the back, but she'd been sent home anyway. She first got catcalled outside of a 7-11 when she was twelve, in her Ravenclaw cardigan and lavender khaki shorts

and a friendship bracelet she'd made at summer camp. She had her first boyfriend at fourteen, a guitar player in a school-sponsored grunge band. When she got pregnant at fifteen, she heard the same thing from everyone; "Maybe if she hadn't given it up." Sex was a game; don't be easy, don't be a slut, but be empowered in your sexuality. But make him love you, make him chase you, touch his shoulder in this way, draw a pattern with your hips. Maeve didn't feel empowered. On her best days, she felt manipulative; on her worst, she felt used. So, she lived only for herself now, she touched herself, she pulled at her own skin until it broke, she bit her lip until the blood ran, thick and red, over her lips and spilled over into her wine glass.

When she was fourteen, Maeve had been fondled for hours by a friend at a sleepover who had thought she was asleep. She'd been paralyzed by fear, she felt goosebumps dot her skin like goosefeather, she squeezed her eyes tighter and tighter and prayed that it was a bad dream. When she finally built up the courage to break away, she didn't hit them, or scream, or yell; she walked calmly to the upstairs bathroom, she coughed up the bile in her throat and flushed it down the toilet, and she sat in her hoodie and her pajama shorts on the cold tile floor. She couldn't summon forth tears, so she slipped silently out of the house at six in the morning. So, now, she hit until she drew blood. She sunk her fingers into their eyes and chewed them with gnarled teeth, she dug until their flesh caked under her unpolished nails, she bit and she choked and she wrestled. She was cowardly no longer; she buried those parts of herself, those wounds that opened and reopened, and she stuffed them with expired food and dirt and the gorey remains of others.

Maeve bled like a human, she cried like a human, she rose and she crashed like a human, but she felt like something other; as she clawed the ground to shreds, stuck blades of grass in her ears, and she breathed dust deep into her lungs, she felt she had finally escaped the one thing she'd never been able to; never again would Maeve be a commodity.

Earthworms

Cai Indermaur



When you have
laced the ground
for so long
eyes adjusting
to the
intricacy involved
breath of soil
the place where
life
&
death
chase each other's
tales
the purpores
of this existence
resting on the rindlets
of the earth worms



Bonding

Kurtis Matthew Russell

We could be the old couple warming up the ice rink,
hand-held grapevining to Nat King Cole's L-O-V-E—
so early to the party, the zamboni is in hot pursuit.

We could GTA that shit, take to the streets, start
a food truck for only slow-cooked-crock-pot-meals,
or something-something very very extraordinary.

Every morning I wake up expecting to love you less,
that the spell will have worn off in the wee hours,
but every time my eyes open, they open like

they might not have closed to begin with. What a
beautiful sight your earrings on the nightstand are,
your wrist watch ticking away next to them, your

books laid open like legs, your heart animating all.
Hand of the artist. Laughter in the bathtub, cold air,
hot water, you can almost hear the molecules hum.

I got the no-partner-to-complain-to-about- Ron-DeSantis-and-the-genocide-in- Palestine-blues

Kurtis Matthew Russell

which is better than being dead—
I have brothers selling drugs who can't hold down jobs—
or that is, won't be held down by jobs—who make beautiful music.
I have sisters who are bleeding out their eyes
because they've seen too much and too much is expected of them.
When I make my movie that is finally, provocatively, about something—
you will all be the stars and peace will be with you and also with you—
I will no longer cry quietly alone over everything—
and the price of a loaf of bread will be justified, maybe even free.
And everyone dead will occasionally leave us voicemails
about what they've been up to.
“Not much, just playing shuffleboard with Elvis.
He's not very good and he keeps asking me about my daughter.
Is this heaven or hell? I don't know, but it's better than being dead.”

Choking Up

Kurtis Matthew Russell

Biting into a cheeseburger
between drags of a cigarette,
posing with a bottle of ketchup,
licking the crumbs off the fingies,
and tasting a hint of hemlock,
I hear heaven's trumpets calling.
My heart deserves a purple heart,
for surviving this far, through
the entanglements and
black-coffee arguments,
the tears suppressed in public
and the sperm and the egg
and the push-pull slapdash
failed experiments in monogamy.
And the iceberg lettuce, C-notes,
prescriptive narratives, vows
never taken, cows never tipped,
tobacco tuesdays not turned to
ash wednesdays, microscopic
pieces of metal embedded in
our skin from soldering
together incongruent motherboards
that make any future CIT scans
an alarming and horrific prospect,
the shoplifted JIF peanut butter,
and pubic hairs caught
in my gapped teeth.
All that and a bag of beans
should indicate now that
by indulging the memory
of her unpierced belly button,
the gluttony of this loathsome
transcendental-present-"moment,"
and this pathetic greaseball
that has been called and sold
to me as a cheeseburger,
I am, effectively, choking up.

September 11 and September 11

Megan Savage

Then

I saw a raccoon bright-eyed in the darkness, dragging a rag across Burnside, in the neon of downtown, a feral, darkling interloper, the rag a misshapen tail; it was both more and less than animal, both less and more than human. I drank tea without sugar or milk, for the bitterness. Even just to write this brings tears to my eyes, and I don't know why. You were young enough then to learn a world with villains in it, unlike I, who grew up waiting for it.

Now

I want to open my windows, but all I can see are billions of dollars spent on Swarovski crystal crosses, wooden iPads, yoga pants. A man decapitated himself by tying a cable around his neck and driving a car away, a man threw his son in the water off a boat, a woman threw her family off a hospital parking garage, a man poisoned his disabled child. Did the boat weep? Did the cable weep? Did the parking garage weep? And you, in your body, sculpted like a golden bird, spinning your visions into muscles, you who cross borders like a knife through butter, how can you carve these spaces for your body without wearing blood on your hands?

Space and Time

Megan Savage

From atop Mt. Tabor, the city is
a faded nickel sleeved between trees.

A toddler in his father's arms points
toward his house, wants to go *there*.

His useless father explains falling,
how home isn't where he thinks it is.

When you stood far from home,
the Great Wall snaking below your feet,

did you want the same? Distance,
I think, is not a line on a map,

but the wire of a tin can telephone,
tinny echoes crackling over miles –

the voices of our child selves and our dead
best friends playing *Girl Talk*,

moonling passing cars
with stickers of zits on our faces,

the span between quarter and mid-life crises
– a flimsy coupling of choices and dreams –

only a matter of change. Did you think, *there*,
I want to be *there*,

only to find *there*
vanishing under your feet?

Lolo

Noah Hale



Spring Haiku

Joshua St. Claire

soon
I will rise and fall with them
the green hills

spring peepers
near and far
pianoforte

Vesica Piscis
two bubbles in the stream
bursting at once

forgetting it's just brushwork
waning moon

red pines
a black vulture scavenging
thermals

a flapping tern staying right where she is fresh gale

swelling buds
all the songbirds
now in pairs

stratocumulus sky
light and dark gathering
under cherry blossoms

new grass
robins returning
to my childhood

who planted them?
the line of daffodils
in the deep wood

Summer Haiku

Joshua St. Claire

always just out of reach lilacs

static electricity
in the shadows
violets

water falling
off the edge of the world
Cape Fear spatterdock

smoke from a spent match curling daylilies

the sky gathers
around Kittatinny Mountain
chicory

per stirpes
the finely-divided leaves
of a sugar maple

roadkill possum
rockfall exposes
sedimentary strata

special relativity
a cabbage white bends
spacetime

tapetum lucidum
this starlight is our own

music from the motion picture
chickadees roosting
in the mulberry

pileus clouds covering her head to pray

Moon Haiku

Joshua St. Claire

what remains
after the tide goes out
black moon

stratocumulus clouds
covering and revealing the moon
heartbeat

driving into the office
to take zoom calls
day moon

just a butterfly
dreaming I am a man
Cheshire Moon

roll over
and fall back asleep
Hologram Moon

how many more times
will I write about the moon?
irrational numbers

old
when I was young
waning crescent moon

how long does a grasshopper live?
new moon

what obscures also illuminates the cirrostratus moon

noble rot no longer the full moon

the moon
on me
on the blue ridge

The Swim

Kristy Schnabel

Today is the day I swim across the Columbia River. I stand in front of the motel bathroom mirror, florescent light flickering, and observe my middle-aged body wearing a colorful, competitive swimsuit.

I begin to shake.

Am I cold?

Or am I scared?

“You don’t have to do this,” my husband says, giving me a way out. Larry means it, even though we hired a dog sitter, drove to Hood River, and paid a fortune for the motel room on Labor Day weekend.

“I can do this,” I say.

After all, I’m here for a reason. My mastectomy was in January, and I feel like I need this event to become myself again. I registered for the swim in March, although my reconstruction surgery was scheduled for May. That gave me three months to train for the 1.1-mile open-water swim.

Registration for the 74th Roy Webster Cross Channel Swim opened at 5:30 am, and we arrived ten minutes after they opened. It’s dark, cold, and windy, yet 240 people are ahead of me. One fellow swimmer explained that they began lining up at 3:00 am. *Wow, motivated.*

We sit in the warm car, looking at my transportation, the Columbia Gorge Sternwheeler. This paddleboat will take us to the Washington side of the river. The ship seems inviting and brightly lit as the sun rises behind us. I wait for someone to board her because it feels like a cruel joke that we can’t bring sweats or shoes. Sure enough, someone walks aboard wearing a wetsuit and goggles dangling from his hand. *Should I have rented a wet suit?*

No more stalling. I lean in to kiss Larry, grab my stuff, and open the car door. He yells, “Good luck!” as I approach the

gangplank, I mean, ramp. My bare feet navigate the rough surface. I'm conscious that my 56-year-old body doesn't look great in a tightly fitted Dolfin Ugglies swimsuit. Swimmers know that no one can camouflage their body in Speedo-like attire. I carry my cap, goggles, and fins and can't wait to get warm inside.

When I open the door, to my surprise, a party atmosphere greets me. Instead of quiet contemplation before a competition, the mood is laughter and gaiety. The joy soothes me, and I breathe a sigh of relief. I find a spot to sit next to the window and welcome the warmth of the body beside me. A few people wear big, fluffy robes. I learn they plan to leave them on the ship as a donation to charity. Others have plastic trash bags to defend themselves against the wind. *Next time.*

Outside, I spot a woman on crutches negotiating the ramp. When she enters the ship, I realize she only has one leg. I'm in awe of her. A man carrying an alligator inflatable makes way for her. An announcer makes notable introductions: an 82-year-old man, a pair of women in their 70s, and one swimmer participating for the 42nd time. Everyone has a story for being here.

At 7:00 am, we cast off as scheduled. The crowd of nearly five-hundred quiets down a bit as we cross the resplendent river from the Oregon side upriver to the Washington side. The paddlewheel chugs melodically as we take in the view of basalt cliffs dotted with evergreens. Before long, we dock and are ready to begin. As we gather our swimming paraphernalia, our organizer states that the water, at 64 degrees, is colder than usual. As a youngster in Junior Lifeguards, I did drown-proofing for an hour—that water was 55 degrees.

I don my swim cap, tuck in my hair, and place my goggles on my head. Our swim caps indicate our flight or group of ten. My cap says 25-8, the eighth person in group twenty-five. A man with a bullhorn calls out each group, asks them to step to the ship's edge, and jump the ten feet into the river. He encourages us to move out of the way after hitting the water to make way for others.

Ahead of me is a man whose son appears to have Down Syndrome. As we approach the launch point, I overhear their conversation. The father reassures the son, "It's like swimming in a pool, only different." I want to hug them both: the dad for being such an encouraging father and the son for trusting his father despite uncertainty. With wide eyes and halted steps, the son seems apprehensive but plods forward to the edge. After the pair jumps in, the son flounders in place, apparently shocked by the cold water. The bullhorn man pauses while the father persuades his son to start swimming, and he does. The dad's dedication to his son's welfare warms my heart. My fear dissipates as I step toward the ship's edge. *Compared to the other life stories, mine pales.*

The bullhorn man calls our group. I put on my fins and move my goggles to my hand so they won't fall off during entry. He yells, "Three, two, one, JUMP!" After a brief hesitation, all ten of us leap into the water. My head doesn't go under with my left fin forward and my right fin back. I put on my goggles and take off fast. The water is cold, but I know brisk swimming will cure that. Besides, I must negotiate around a sea of bodies, which distracts me.

Soon, I establish a rhythm as my limbs numb. To my right, fun-loving folks lollygag along. They chat with their group and are having a good time. To my left, Masters level swimmers, who see this as a training opportunity, pass me. I swim fast and hard because a mile initially seems like a long way. I happily acknowledge that the river current is giving me an assist. The water of unknown depth is dark green, and I can't see anything below. *Just as well.* I swim mostly freestyle, but I switch to breaststroke if I have to dodge people. I realize I'm neither tired nor cold and decide to take in the scene.

Boats are everywhere forming a route, and we swimmers are the parade. Coast Guard, Port Patrol, private boats, and more kayaks and paddleboarders than I can count form a channel to safeguard us. They ensure the brightly-colored swim caps bobbing in the choppy river don't get by them. Instead, the

channel guides us toward shore back to Hood River. All these well-wishers got up early on a holiday for us, and my heart swells, buttressed by their concern for our safety.

The swim ends quickly, and before long, I see a crowd on the shore and view the finish line flags. Once I see the river bottom, I remove my fins and traverse the rocks. *Ouch!* As I reach the sand, I begin looking for Larry, and he welcomes me with a warm towel and a hug.

A hot shower awaits, and we start to leave. I look behind me at the landscape of boats and swimmers making their way. I think of the woman with one leg and the 82-year-old man and admire their resilience and spunk. I ask Larry about the father and son I overheard, and he assures me they made it in.

As I make my way to the car, I reflect on the event and the many people here today. My story is just one of many, and it feels smaller. We all overcame obstacles and achieved this goal together. My inward focus turns outward. *We did this!*

Un/Loved Future/History

Kiddo Wybie

A million ways to say the way-
I see you-
then hesitate,

shouting words unheard-
just open
I beg you please, and

I can spend a millisecond,
in 3000 days
just thinking of a way, to say-

one-hundred miles of road will take
too soon,
my mouth too still,

if I wait more time today,
my joints
will have already stiffened, and

you bore of me before I get to say-
I forgot-
to meet with Jane today.

fuchsia in the bougainvillea,
that grows
and wraps around every fence,

every candle dying out-
silver and
gold on a late friday night,

the lilies that land in my hand
with such grace
resemble your deadened face,

a star waiting up after midnight
shows a tiny
spark of hope that bursts in longing,

euphoria of a cold winter exhales
out of me
in warm breaths of almost-smoke,

sweet as the berries off my tree,
the one
with green leaves that cover sins.

Get Good Grades Quick! [CLICK HERE]
Kiddo Wybie

Rx# 4066 1066 0991	
WYBIE, KIDD S DEXTROAMPHETAMINE-AMPHETAMINE ER 25 MG 24HR CAPSULE, EXTEND RELEASE TAKE 1 CAPSULE BY MOUTH EVERY MORNING	
(Generic for: Adderall Xr)	Claim Rx# 2021623786 light blue and blue, oblong, capsule, 25 mg
DO NOT CHEW OR CRUSH BEFORE SWALLOWING.	

I see and I crave and CRUSH-

blue *crush*

Make what is fake
real and what I think is real will be fake.
Hand me over, under a clutch
I'm not allowed to experience.
Attempting to line all of my ducks in a row only ends in me
lining up another line
on the page, or in my bathroom I-

blue *crush.*

Standing up straight when the world
is a nine foot drop
gets hard to hide when I have
self inflicted, memory shaped holes,
that I carved out

to convince myself:

A fog is not a hangover unless I'm sitting on a ledge

blue

crush.

They call control being sober,

but I've never been this far removed.

Grab both of your hands and clap

like a seal on cue.

Even past all the plastic, I can see the attraction

actors bring in silver screens.

Blue

crush-

making the sting

rush up my broken nose

until the taste of blood

coats the back of my throat-

feels too much like choking on chlorine.

Wipe the blood pouring from my nostril

with a sense of violation

the morning after

blue

crush.

Tokyo lights used to live

in my room only when classical music

played in the mall parking lot,

but now the night is too bright

and the percussion of the Steinway

is beating on my brain.

Turn the volume down

blue

crush.

Stuff today with the last
nine meals,
which I skipped,
leaving me bursting with rot
from the shallow inside.
How many red lines did I write?
How many blue lines did I cut?

Blue

crush,

clearly, I can see there's a problem in my head
but all I can do is watch my hands
roll up another small paper tube while
you-
beg myself in bolded black letters
and exclamation points
on every other page,
CALL 1-855-632-8280!
just one more-

Dear Hot Shower, Heal Me.

Madelynn Rae

Scorch my skin to the brink of pain,
cascade around my naked body like you took me out to dinner first.
Touch every surface of me when I close my eyes and hum
Drops of Jupiter by Train on repeat
dance along the light of day,
and bask in my celebration of solitude.
Fill my lungs with steam as I convulse through tears,
pass no judgment and caress all the right places.
Sprinkle every imperfection with confidence,
wash me inside and out.
Prepare me for the day, relax me into the stars.
Touch me, comfort me, have your way with me,
never let me feel worse than I did before.
Stay with me as long as I need you and wash away my haze,
tensions and remorse, melting, dripping, releasing.
Engulf me in your heat, soak me with colorful memories.
Enchant me with the scent of flowers in my hair,
and a smile on my lips.
Leave the water on my skin
like condensation from a glass you let sit too long.

Red God 1
Sidney Novak



House Hunting

Malia Gayomali

A house spirit, given life by the
people who live inside the home, is
something I'd always felt the presence of
but never knew had a name

sometimes I worry
that I'll move into an occupied space
 taken by a captive soul, or
 shards of one
 or many
 that have been
 left behind

I don't think that all ghosts are dead
I think that some are just
pieces of people
that got stuck
 the leftover energy of who they were
 that leaked through the
 cracks inflicted by
 the ones they thought they could
 trust

sometimes I think
that maybe I wouldn't mind living
with ghosts— it would not be unfamiliar

and I'd rather live with the ghosts
than with the people who claim
to love me

Post Breakup Haircut

Malia Gayomali

I am authentic; resensitized to the violence, the hate, and the love of living. Try to divide my soul from this body, and I will ensure your failure. My life is uncertain but promising, since now I know how to feel whole

I am making myself useful, and letting you live without me to insult your dominance. If this is what you think it means to be loved, then I am not the kind of woman who can love you, and thank god for that

Neutrality

Malia Gayomali

when your self expression becomes
the cup of milk sitting alone in the fridge,

do you consume it with cereal
or do you pour it in your bath?

when your bones spread wider after you
stop wearing shoes a size too small,

do you buy larger shoes
or go barefoot forever?

when your home is on fire but
there is no one left to save,

do you try to survive
or surrender to the earth?

Introduction

The Carolyn Moore Writing Residency: First Three Years

In 2019, award-winning local poet Carolyn Moore passed away in Tigard, Oregon. A college English teacher, Carolyn retired in the nineties to “the last vestige of the family farm” on Walnut Street, where she spent the rest of her life honing her craft and collecting over 60 awards and honors for her writing. Before she passed, Carolyn stated her intention that her estate should be granted to a local college or literary institution to be used as a residency for writers like herself. And after a call for proposals that summer, her trustees made the radical decision of selecting Portland Community College’s plan to create the Carolyn Moore Writing Residency, a 3-to-8-week residency for writers of all genres and levels of accomplishment—making PCC the first community college in the country to host a residency program like it.

Since then, we’ve welcomed almost 50 writing residents to the Writers House. Each of these emerging or established writers—poet laureates, Whiting Award-winners, and brand-new up-and-comers—is given an entire wing of the gorgeous “log cabin mansion,” as poet Kayleb Rae Candrilli called it, where residents can relax and write at their leisure. Residents are also free to wander the nine beautiful acres of the estate, including the apple, pear, and plum orchard; the spacious fields; and the little pond under the weeping willow, all of which Kira B. Smith, former editor of *The Pointed Circle* and 2023 Carolyn Moore resident, describes beautifully in her essay “Field Study of a Writers House” (page 99).

We wanted to commemorate the first three years of the residency here in the celebratory 40th anniversary edition of PCC’s literary journal *The Pointed Circle* by publishing work from a handful of the residents who have come through. We hope you enjoy it—the poems, the essay, and even an excerpt from Megan Kruse’s forthcoming novel *The Water in a Place Like This*. Here’s to 40 wonderful years of the *The Pointed Circle*, and to 40 more for the Carolyn Moore Writing Residency.

With gratitude,
Justin Rigamonti
Faculty Advisor, *The Pointed Circle*
Program Coordinator, Carolyn Moore Writing Residency

Drive

Frank X Walker

We are two copper spoons
beneath the blanket.
I am listening to my wife's
gentle breaths.
She is finally relaxed
after a long night of wrestling
in her sleep.
My hand is on her thigh
but I am thinking about
the perfect drive I hit
on number five at Southwind,
and the seven iron to the edge
of the green.
I replay the birdie putt trickling in
to the hole over and over again.
It could be on the golf channel
except there's no roaring crowd,
no exuberant fan screaming,
"get in the hole!"
no English accent whispering
into a microphone
about the significance of the shot,
how my steady play today
finally reflects my potential,
my work ethic, my readiness
for the moment.
She shifts her weight, the air between
our hips disappears.
I close my eyes.
I am no longer watching the flight
of the ball. I am the ball in flight.
I have been well struck. I am moving
with intention towards the earth.
This is not a game.
And it's us doing all the whispering.

Ode to Mountain Mint

Shauna M. Morgan

for Jim Embry on the occasion of his 75th birthday

Come honeybee, come blue-winged wasp,
come soldier beetle, comrades, gather
near the broad leaves, sweet cross sections
of a fertile life, axils towards freedom's heights.

Oh, mountain mint, redolent in your blooming,
you flower into fragrant clusters, draw us close,
communities abound, diaspora in wood
and swamp, marooning from field to thicket.

The ancestors call you by sacred names,
pycnanthemum, spirit tongues singing along
an Appalachian footpath, chanting in windy
whispers invoking ancient memories,

a strong nectar flow, gift of sustenance
for gray hairstreak, monarch, and spring azure.
Soil to sessile, you are seed and leaf from Black
of beautiful night, to breath of each day.

Field Study of a Writers House

Kira Brooke Smith

Carolyn Moore's house is on the cusp of countryside. To get there, I drove fifteen miles southwest from the rental house I share with two people and a cat in Portland. On the way I passed through suburbs and spreading towns until I reached the frontier of urban growth in Tigard, where the house Carolyn had built for herself and her father sits on a hilltop surrounded by nine acres of orchard.

Carolyn wasn't a farmer in the traditional sense, though the orchard and fields were once a farm. She was a poet and educator who lived and taught in Northern California before returning to "the last vestige of the family farm" (as she put it) in the mid-'90s, just as so much concrete and cinder was winding its way down from Portland. When she passed in 2019, she left her home and property to Portland Community College to serve as a haven for writers and writing education. I was lucky to be a new resident at the Carolyn Moore Writing Residency.

And I was late to meet the residency coordinator, Justin. I passed the turn onto the drive, a common mistake I was warned about. The gravel driveway leading to the house was tucked into shrubs and birch trees around a stream culvert on the right and disguised by the entrance to a suburban neighborhood on the left.

I found the turn, passed the backyards of the little neighborhood, and continued driving parallel to the stream, though it was hidden by a dense copse of twisting laurels, shrubby willows, and hazel trees. A dozen meters down the road I noticed a gap where it looked as if someone had felled trees with an ax to access the water or for firewood. Except, when I slowed to take a better look, I saw that the remaining stumps were pointed at the tips, and logs left on the ground had been partially hacked into segments before they were abandoned. I backed the car up a few feet to make sure what I had seen was not just what I had wanted to see. The wood cuts

looked to me to be too small and uneven for an ax; rather, they looked more like chew marks, the way the work of beavers is rendered in cartoons and featured on nature shows. I'd been working in watershed health and education as my day job for five years and had never seen a beaver in all my time tromping up rivers. Now I suspected I was going to have one for a neighbor, but if we were to meet, I'd have to come back later because beavers are nocturnal. I was late enough as it was.

I emerged to see a rolling field dotted with fruit trees that spoke to a not-so-distant past. The house at the back of the property was more handsome than it looked in photos, neatly assembled with real wood beams, stone stairs, and a well-tended garden. Most notably, a turret-crowned terrace overlooked the property. It had the best vantage point for bird watching and gave the impression of a Victorian era aristocrat, writing novels in their country home. I already knew I'd be drinking coffee there in the morning.

The Writers House

My first impression was wood and light; sun overflowed tall windows, spilling onto floors, shelves, cabinets, and vaulted ceilings, all crafted in warm-toned wood. It's the type of house a poet would build.

Carolyn had divided the house into two separate wings, one for her and one for her father, Gordon, so they could live as neighbors in his late age. Justin met me in Carolyn's wing, where I would be staying and writing for the next month. He walked me through the house, showing me the wing's living spaces—bedroom, walk-in closet, bathroom, office, and kitchen. The Great Room was the center of the house; it was a space fit for a council, with leather armchairs around a handsome wood table, and a fireplace on the far wall. As I was introduced, I tried imagining what it would be like to enter a bathroom without waiting my turn or to fill a fridge and cabinets without compromise. When I had applied to the Carolyn Moore Writing Residency, I had focused my proposal on the gift of time. It hadn't occurred to me that art also takes space.

Justin left to go teach in the city and when I closed the door behind him, I was stunned by how suddenly still everything was. I couldn't remember the last time I had the freedom of an unwitnessed life.

The first thing I did was exercise curiosity without the burden of manners. I rifled through every drawer and cabinet to find hints of past residents—notes, candy, broken pencils, poetry drafts scribbled on scrap paper. I marveled over each figment, imagining the writer who had left it behind. In a closet drawer I found an envelope with “*Goodbye day job, hello writing time*” written neatly on the front. I worked in environmental restoration, but like most bureaucrats, my days were sunk into paperwork, meetings, and logistics. I dropped the envelope on my nightstand as a token of reprieve.

Then, there was the writer whose presence I felt in every room, and who had left a lifetime of objects—travel books, an Antony and the Johnsons poster, mask collection, ornate tablecloths, and literary anthologies of every genre. Carolyn's idiosyncrasies and passions shape the daily lives of resident writers, who in turn left prints for future cohorts.

The kitchen, for example, spoke of an accomplished chef and host. I got lost in its abundance of drawers and cabinets trying to make myself dinner. Pots pans, serving trays, bowls, plates, cups, all organized according to someone else's logic. I imagined that each new resident put things in a place that made sense for how and what they ate. Then the following resident re-structured the cookware according to their own needs.

After I put all the pots and pans in their proper place, I sat in the Great Room with a home-cooked meal and a bottle of wine that had been waiting on my shelf since a dinner party three months ago. I turned on the gas fireplace and cracked the fresh blue spine of *The Great Uncluttering*, Carolyn's collected works (published by PCC Panther Press, 2022). Each resident was gifted a copy and I intended to read as much as possible during my stay, even though poetry challenged my literalism as an essayist.

Even so, I read my own tendencies in Carolyn's poems when she positioned plants, animals, and the non-human

world as active characters in their own stories. Maybe because we both grew up in rural areas, where farm country met forest, and the earth we knew wasn't manicured for the human aesthetic. It's a workhorse covered in manure, one that worked us back.

The Carolyn Moore Writers House was the setting for her interpretations of a shifting cultural and ecological landscape, back when it was just Carolyn Moore's house.

*Tomorrow, my reckoning with eighty.
At the first shriek in my joints
I will rise to walk the lane
as far as the new intersection
where tires whine through rain
and dry the pavement out of season.*

In between poems I listened to gas hum through the lines, and the fire snapped and simmered. I strained for other noises from outside or my fellow resident next door. But the silence was resolute—even with budding neighborhoods across the orchard.

I went to bed still listening.

The Desk

At home I write on a child's Ikea desk pushed into the corner of my bedroom. My usual workspace cannot accommodate books, lamp, laptop, and notepad, so I juggle things to the floor when I don't immediately need them. I hardly knew what to do with the two adjoining desks in the residency office. I stacked my books (first by size, then by genre) on the desktop, spread my drafts next to the books, moved one of the green glass lamps closer so I could read in morning light. I chose the best of Carolyn's two desk chairs (the leather one with the winged back) and sat, admiring the breadth of my new space.

Then I decided I had had enough office for the day.

The most important things to do at the Carolyn Moore Writers House are eat, sleep, and wrap yourself in blankets while listening to a fireplace. The second most important thing is to put on your boots.

Walking is part of my creative process. What would I write about if I couldn't pull from the world's progress? To walk the lane as Carolyn had. In the city landscape I chart routes for checking up on birds' nests, ant hills, emerging flower buds, and new books in the little free library. Checking serves a gatherer's need to take stock of the season's growth and shortages. Curiosity is instinct.

I drank coffee out of Carolyn's fine china while sitting outside under the turret, looking out over the orchard and woods beyond-seeking points of interest for a morning walk. The world was fresh off snow, and the trees and shrubs were dull brown and green, except for a single flare of yellow tucked into the edge of an overgrown row.

The willow, instinct said.

Of course, I replied.

At the Writers House there is room for instinct.

The Weeping Willow

When people called to ask me how the residency was going, I asked them if they remembered what it was like to be a kid on summer break; to reclaim your time and attention and go forth into summer with a liberated imagination. Children know what it is to revel in a season.

I stepped off the porch and into the onset of spring. It smelled dank and sweet where frost had relinquished its hold over the past few days. Still, I was surprised to find the ground soggy underfoot, almost reaching the toes of my boots in places. I skirted the relatively dry earth along the blackberry hedge as I made my way downhill.

The blackberries ran all the way to the edge of the willow's dome-shaped canopy, where they had begun to climb the thick curtain of its yellow-green branches, clamoring up towards the sun. If they grew unchecked, they would eventually strangle the tree by depriving it of sunlight. However, I noticed that they could not advance inward, towards the wide

trunk. Maybe because generations of thin, crisp leaves covered the floor, or because the willow's root system had already crowded out potential competitors. Even though I sometimes teach about native and invasive plants, I only pretend to be an expert. I learn facts from Google and more important things from artists. In any case, I delicately stepped through the thorns with only a few snagging my pants and entered the lime-yellow sanctuary of the inner canopy.

As a kid I liked to stow away under a neighborhood weeping willow whose trunk and limbs were contorted by disease and age, adding to its sense of magic and sanctity. The willow was a private place where I played make-believe and stashed treasures—animal bones, feathers, colorful rocks, insects—things adults never appreciated. Inside the Writers House willow, I was confronted by a precarious-looking hoop braided from its branches and hung over a central limb with a bit of old string. A little self, left by a past resident, like stanzas on scratch paper. I wondered whose footsteps I was following in.

Behind the willow was a small pond. Blackberries grew with abandon on the opposite bank and spread back into the northwest corner of the property as far back as I could see. It would be impossible for a mammal of my size and disposition to walk around the pond and through the unbridled blackberry hedge without tools and protection. But from the shaded willow bank, I watched a rabbit slip beneath the thorns. Doves called from a hidden roost. Hummingbirds tittered at the edge.

The blackberry was a haven, too. A reminder that I need not behold everything, and in fact, some things were better that way.

Sanctuaries can take many forms.

The Wetland

The other way across the field was wet and the farther I went, the more earth squelched underfoot. From the turret it had seemed like any other yard—nearly flat with grass shorn to keep the weeds down—but the water level was unreasonably

high. After a few yards it breached my right boot and soaked the toes of my sock. I started to step cautiously, expecting the water to dissipate at any moment, but instead it just got deeper.

I'm embarrassed to say that I didn't notice I was walking into a wetland until I saw patches of tall grass-like plants I should have known from a distance. *Juncus* are linebackers—at least, that's how I describe them to school groups, since the plants help filter debris and stabilize stream banks with their deep roots. Beyond the *Juncus*, cattails were starting to sprout out of deep, slow-moving water. It was futile to hope for dry earth anytime soon. To spare my remaining dry sock, I turned downhill, following the water.

The Path

Some of the water disappeared underground while the rest puddled at the entrance to a footpath through a patch of forest at the edge of the property. I was on an island, or at least a peninsula, of spring's making. Water-loving aspens and goat willows—shrubbiest and more upright than its weeping cousin—hovered above the water, indicating that it was at least semi-permanent. I walked through the puddle deliberately, stepping on rocks to avoid the deepest parts. Below me, thumb-sized catkins covered in soft fur floated in the puddle. Some had burst open with yellow flowers. I looked around me and saw the same furry thumbs growing on the goat willow. When I reached the far shore, I picked one up off the ground, rubbed it between my fingers, then stuck the specimen in my pocket.

The phases of the forest patch from edge to core: more *Juncus* where water flows, shrubby goat willows, some type of tree with roundish leaves that might be alder or birch, then wide western red cedars. Halfway through, I encountered an elder Doug fir—tall and straight, a credit to its species. If this tree had not grown at the Writers House, but in a designated forest, it might have become doors, ships, telephone poles, or chairs. Instead, it was the largest tree in a shrinking woodland. Its branches spread wide as if embracing the transitional forest around it. A protector and a refugee.

The trail was only half a mile or so long. At the end I was confronted by a red-and-white striped barricade. It was the temporary kind used to close roads during construction or festivals. On the other side were trucks parked in neat driveways next to two-story homes, toys left out on lawns, birdfeeders, and garden gnomes propped up in flower beds. I spied two golden retrievers wagging and stumbling after their owner through the front door of a gray house. The little neighborhood's dead end. That the barricade separating woods and neighborhood was temporary suggested it could advance on the elderly Doug fir in the forest behind me.

I wondered if it was meant to keep the artists out or the neighborhood children in?

Either way, it would never be effective. If anything, barricades invite trespass, but I didn't cross to the other side because these weren't the neighbors I had come to see.

The Beaver's House

I stepped over half-felled trees and gnawed branches. A layer of fresh beige wood chips paved the way towards the creek. The path was not clear-cut, so I had to move gingerly through the remaining underbrush, climbing over laurels and pressing past thorny balls of bull thistle. I turned a corner around a felled tree and found myself standing next to the water. Here the ground was littered with the husks of blackberry branches that crunched under my boots. There were more wood chips, too, seemingly piled wherever the beaver had stopped to sample logs and stumps.

The bank was a mudslide, convenient for those who could slip down on their bellies and climb back up with claws, but treacherous for clumsy bipeds. At first glance, I mistook the four-foot structure in the middle of the creek as a logjam, but on closer inspection, its construction and the way it clogged the stream was too intentional. It was assembled from a mix of pale sticks and logs that had been stripped of their bark, a wall woven from mahogany and maple, sealed with leaves and mud. The beaver had made use of a large tree that had fallen over the creek as a convenient starting place to pile sticks and branches.

It seemed to function like any human-made dam; water flowed over the edge and through spillways in the wall, probably because the recent snow had flooded the creek. Most impressive, though, was the bright flowering goat willow growing right out of the top of the log, crowning the dam's roof where enough sun seeped through the trees.

Beavers are one of the only other mammals that make their own habitat. For someone like me, who had never seen a beaver pond, I was overcome by the magnitude of what it is to construct one's own habitat with the materials on hand. Behind the dam was a pond at least three times wider than the one behind the willow tree. A pair of mallards permitted me only a brief glance of tail feather before they swam upstream, but it was enough for me to recognize that they had made a home here, too. Cloven deer prints were stamped up and down the far bank. All beneficiaries of the beaver's industriousness.

Around the pond were familiar bushels of blackberries, snarling and curling into a single impenetrable thicket along the sun-exposed banks. Except they were starting to look rotten, browning from the bottom up where the water had flooded their roots. I realized that they were dying off, then turning into husks that crumbled beneath the weight of beaver logs. The riparian zone around the pond was transforming. In a crook of the bank, I spotted *Tellima grandiflora*. *Tellima* is a native wetland plant, one of the first I learned to name because it sounds like a song, and this one was boldly poking up through the bodies of dead blackberries. Beyond it was a timid cluster of *Juncus* dipping its toes into the bank, a wisp of fern fronds stuck out from the shadows. I kneeled close to the plants and took pictures because it was the only way I could think to capture change in that moment. I was witnessing a shift in the landscape and wanted to add to the legacy of Carolyn's documentation.

Coda

I once heard a kid in the community center say that they hate when adults tell them to appreciate their childhood because it's supposed to be the best time of their lives. Being a kid

sucks—there are so many rules, and no one listens to you, they said. I wanted to write that a residency is like a regression to childhood, but it would be more accurate to say that it is an evolution. I have the gift of seclusion and there aren't any adults at the Writers House, only artists.

However, having finished my walk around the property, this artist's mind was on yardwork. Those blackberries growing up the willow tree had to go. I'd sworn that I wouldn't drive back to the city until I had to, but this was urgent business.

So I jumped in my car, sped back up the freeway, and grabbed rusty loppers and a pair of sturdy gloves from my back porch without going inside. Then I turned back around and made for the Writers House.

*. . . we mothers of gorgeous sweat
water, weed, and hoe all the hot sky long.*

from "The Garden of Enormous Language"
by Carolyn Moore

The House of Mountain Mist

Jose Hernandez Diaz

A man in a “Kafka for President” shirt entered a new phase in life. This new phase was guided by rational, mature voices. His new neighborhood was full of wondrous greenery. Thick trees. Constant fog. Wind. Rain. Occasional sunshine. Bridges. The man in a “Kafka for President” shirt began to build a new cabin in the new neighborhood. He built the cabin from wood, glue, and cement. The house was finished in a matter of weeks. He called the house, “The House of Mountain Mist.” The man in a “Kafka for President” shirt soon began to appreciate the rain, wind, fog, and occasional sunshine. His past life was full of sunshine and palm trees, sand, waves, ocean. His present: mist, mountains, waterfalls. The man in a “Kafka for President” shirt fell asleep to a souldies song from the band Thee Sacred Souls from his old Chicano barrio. The barrio days were special to him. He would go back soon enough. Still, the barrio was always inside him.

ekphrasis of a studio apartment

Jae Nichelle

a lover is not a \$6 bottle of champagne from trader joe's
a lover is not a subscription
a lover is not an extra 40% off clearance
a lover is not a rerun episode of half & half
a lover is not a chocolate lava cake with topped with butter
pecan a lover is not the nightstand's half-read novel
a lover is not the leg massage at the nail salon
a lover is not freshly ground small batch beans in the french
press at 11am a lover is not a volta
a lover is not stewing chicken for dinner
a lover is not rearranging the living room furniture again a
lover is not coming on horseback
a lover is not present in the picture
a lover is not missing from it

Corn

Jae Nichelle

sucking the juice from a crawfish head, I like foods I have to
make a mess of to eat—peaches melting down my

wrist, eggs hugging stuck grits—that leave their memory
between my fingers, my sprite can a scrapbook of sauces.

much like my family members, I will not measure seasonings
& I made these potatoes too spicy. both our

eyes water, neither of us complain. so, now I know love is to
taste. if you measure it, you'll always short

change yourself. if I did, it would not be the person who tells
me I have corn stuck in my teeth, but the one

who smiles yellow with me. I was eating when I confessed I
loved you, making a mess of my hands

& my face, unable to close my burning mouth. I meant I'm not
scared to be graceless around you, press my

sticky hands to yours, make purple with our red
& blue tongues, not clean up immediately. I remember

you paused to clear red-shelled bodies off your plate, my
throat thick with belated hesitation. you took a bite

of corn & smiled—mouth full of kernels.

LIQUIDATE THE WHOLE COB

Derrick C. Brown

I do not care about what you have overcome-
or the enemies that could not be bested.

I do not care about the things you saw die
in the receding fields. Did you think of skinning them?

I do not care about your love for what you can't explain.
Invent an answer.

I do not care about your father's skill for tomatoes
or silent retreat. Tell me how you raised yourself.

I do not care what a sad salad reminds you of.
It's always your Father.

I do not care that flowers react to classical music.
We kill them too.

I do not care why you open urns on the stranger's mantle.
Ash is underwhelming. We're next.

I do not care that the humorless winter beach
is your mother pushing the shore away. I know you are
the shore.

I do not care that you want to be better to get applause.
Success is hilarious.

I do not care about your hunger for 30-dollar honey and
French art pomp.

Cool is boring. Walmart is art. Every diner is a gallery
of blue need.

I only care about the imagined serenity
of doing nothing with you.

You said you needed me
and it felt as good as floss after corn.

I Hate It When You're Insane & Right

Chen Chen & Sam Herschel Wein

You don't anthropomorphize the things in your life.
People are overwhelming enough.
But you're starting to think, maybe I need to have
a conversation with my blender.
Is the fly spinning above my head trying to tell me
something? Something good? Something utterly
disgusting? Which object in my house has
the most utterly disgusting knowledge?
The toilet is an easy answer,
but I don't think it's the correct one.
Maybe the hairbrush...
No. USA Magazine.
USA Magazine
with the two of them,
the Gilmore Girls, on the cover,
Lorelai & Rory Gilmore,
codependent as ever—
standing & hugging, hugging &
Gilmoreing, all that
inherited wealth,
Connecticut,
Yale,
Yale School of Drama,
& here you're thinking
of your ex
in that PhD program, & his
flair for
depression,
& how many PhDs live
in Stars hollow,
how many more can a quaint New England town
sustain?
But there is no end, says the hair on your hairbrush.
New England towns

were designed for PhDs.
They are the perfect vessels for being
overwhelmed by
repressed libidos & traumatized goodie two shoes,
goodie gala-going toes.
Wait. Hairbrush. Are those pubes?

Excerpt from the novel

The Water in a Place Like This

Megan Kruse

Almost like clockwork, the doctors returned to Mr. Morris, to the question of the twelve hours between when Cass left school and then resurfaced, walking out of the woods at Stenberg Farm.

What was there to tell? There was the drive, heater blowing hot on their ankles, the way that Mr. Morris cracked the window open and let the cold air weave through the car's interior while he asked Cass questions.

And before that it was a Tuesday in February, already getting dark at 3pm. The school had been closed for nearly a year now and it felt strange to be there, like being a ghost. Leo dropped Cass in the empty parking lot. "One of us will be back at 4:30," he said. "Have fun."

Cass jumping over lily pads of ice in the puddles, up the wide front steps of the Griffin school, shoving against the industrial doors. Locked. The halls inside the school were dark. A sign taped to the inside of a window read *Run Grizzlies Run! Join the 2020 Cross Country Team!* Cass pushed against the door again. The email from Mr. Morris had said, *Eco Club Meeting, 3:30pm*, Cass was sure of it.

"Hello, there." Mr. Morris was standing by the long bike rack. A ragged scarf was wound around the rails, a bright flag in the dim light. "Hello, Cass," he said. Cass wondered if he'd been waiting there while they climbed out of the truck. Had he seen them trying the doors?

"Hi, Mr. Morris." He had told the whole ecology club to call him Max but Cass felt embarrassed even thinking about saying that.

"I'm so glad you could make it."

"Where's everybody else?" Mirah, Isabel, Aspen, Ana. Cody and Luka. When the school closed, Mirah had called

Cass's mom's phone and Cass had talked on the phone for an hour. When Cass hung up, the phone was hot and their ear itched, and they couldn't remember anything Mirah had said, only how bored she was staying home, and how her brother had been sick and they made him stay in his bedroom, and how she still was going to see her friends, how she'd *die* otherwise, and not even of coronavirus. Still Cass had felt electric afterward, as though some of Mirah's brightness had been transferred to them.

"They cancelled," Mr. Morris said. "They were always fair-weather members, you know that. But you came." He smiled. "I knew you would."

"So—are we still, like, having a meeting?" Cass felt confused. Was there supposed to be a meeting at all? Was it another tree planting?

Mr. Morris laughed. "I need your help, Cass! I thought you could help me with some of what you know."

"Um, okay?" Cass pushed their hands into the pockets of their sweatshirt. Their face felt hot and they could see the white cloud of their breath. Their heart was pounding. It felt like something was about to happen.

"I want to give a talk at the Earth Day Youth Service Corps Conference. At the Capitol. I want your help."

Above the dark ocean of the parking lot, a single star was already glowing.

"I thought we could take a drive, maybe go for a walk up in the woods. Talk."

"At night?" Cass knew the forested land above the farm, the way it looked in all seasons. Evie and Leo would take the boat out on eternal winter nights and Cass would sit on the shore or up in a thicket of salal, making a fire in an empty coffee can. But it was different to think of being in the woods with Mr. Morris.

"I think," he said, "you'll find most things are better under cloak of darkness."

Cass followed him to the back corner of the parking lot

where his yellow Chevy LUV was parked and climbed up into the cab. They pulled their mask out of their pocket and put it on while Mr. Morris went around to the other side and climbed in. He ran the engine until the weak defrost had thawed a small circle of windshield. He sighted through it like a telescope, drawing them down the road, past the Prosperity Grange and the Merc. Cass imagined Evie and Leo at home, fixing broken lines, checking seeds, all the ordinary tasks, and to be doing something so extraordinary and strange felt like a door had opened in the regular world, like all those dreams Cass had in which the house was not the house; there were labyrinths beneath it and attics nesting above it, and the world was bigger than they'd ever known.

Mr. Morris drove toward Olympia and then pulled off at the Mud Bay exit. It was the way their parents drove to the Shipwreck Café, and sometimes after they went to Trader Joe's. In the spring they brought crates of oysters to the Shipwreck to sell or trade. There was a waiter there who always put extra whipped cream on Cass's hot chocolate, making a tall white peak that toppled over onto the saucer.

Mr. Morris didn't go to the Shipwreck; he went the other way, taking them deeper into the woods and then turning off the main road, down a gravel drive. He parked in front of a house with dark green siding and a little covered porch. Was it his house? The shades were drawn. No smoke came from the chimney. Cass thought of their own house, the way their parents kept the fire going all winter and spring.

"I just need to grab some things," he said. "Let's go in. We'll have a snack."

There were two houses, Cass could see now. They were attached in the middle, and the twin doors were marked 207 and 208. The one on the left had a sign on the door they couldn't read. Someone had nailed plywood boards over the windows.

"That's okay," Cass said. "I'm not hungry." They felt suddenly very far from home. What time was it? Cass imagined

their dad in the parking lot of the school, the engine idling, looking at his phone. The way it lit his face from below, his eyes darting to the front doors of the school. Would he notice how dark it was inside?

“Come on, Cass.” Mr. Morris unbuckled his seatbelt. “You wanted to do this, right?”

But what were they doing, exactly?

Mr. Morris sighed. “Fine. I’m going to get some dry firewood and some other things and then we’ll go.” He opened the pickup door and stepped down.

“I think—my parents—I think they’re going to worry.” There was only the faintest light left in the sky, barely visible through the trees.

“Cass.” Mr. Morris smiled. “What we’re doing—it’s so much more important than anything you’re doing at home. It’s worth being grounded, or whatever you think is going to happen. What, you won’t get to go to your friend’s house? You won’t get to watch your tv shows, your stupid Disney bullshit?”

Cass thought they might cry.

“Cass—” he reached one hand out and put it on Cass’s knee. Cass held completely still. “Listen, you’re the teacher here. I need you to teach me. I’ll get some firewood, and we’ll go out to do some research. Low tide is at 9:18. I want you to teach me about oysters. They’re carbon sequesters, you must know that.”

Mr. Morris left the door to the truck open and walked quickly to the door marked 208. A motion light beamed on, a cold white glow that lit up the worn front door mat and a bent metal patio chair beside it.

What did they know? That plankton blooms in spring and oysters start to feed then, and how bright they taste. The way they spawn in summer, how they become soft, seawater balloons. How they feed again in the winter, how they turn sweet. How to cut the muscle above the heart and leave the belly intact. Little saltcellar, ocean full. That they shouldn’t be here, not at dinnertime on a Tuesday when their parents

thought they were at school.

Mr. Morris went around the back of the little house and came back with an armful of wood, throwing it into the bed of the pickup. The motion light flashed off and then on again as he went back to the front door, unlocked it, and disappeared inside.

What if they left, Cass thought. What if they jumped out of the truck and ran? How far was it to the highway? But then Mr. Morris was back, throwing a blue JanSport backpack into the cab between them and climbing in after it. He started the engine. Too late, Cass thought.

Mr. Morris backed the truck up the driveway and turned the way they had come. "You know the history of oysters, don't you, Cass?"

Did they? They knew about the family history, about Great Grandfather Stenberg, about the Pacific seeds he'd brought with him from Japan after World War II. They knew about the Coast Salish people before that, who had lived and fished the inlets until they were pushed onto Squaxin Island and out to Kamilche.

"This part of the country was absolutely fucked up with oysters, and then the Alaskan Gold Rush happened, and the miners were gorging themselves on oysters, and they stripped the inlets of almost everything. And then it was only reseeding that brought them back, if you can call it that. And you know about oysters, of course you do. The way that they start off male and then become female, or maybe switch back and forth. That's just like you, Cass. I'm jealous of that, that freedom." The windshield was fogging up and he fiddled with the dials on the dash until weak air started to blow out of the vents again.

Fucked up with oysters, Cass thought. They were driving north again, passing the mud flats, a stretch of silty gray-brown clay that went on and on. For a moment Cass thought, we're going to the farm. We're going to the farm to learn about oysters, that's all. Then the exit to the island was behind them, growing smaller and smaller in the rearview mirror.

“How do you feel about that, what your family does?” Mr. Morris asked. “You know, I think you’re in an interesting position. The way that you’re both part of the problem and ready to work against it. Not many people understand that. No one has ever changed a thing recycling, Cass. Every tree you plant just lets the timber companies harvest more. But what impresses me—it’s the people who know what matters. Who put their money where their mouth is. Simone Weil. People who burn themselves alive. Self immolation. The people who take things down at the heart. Who show through conviction what they stand for. Those are the people who change the world.”

“How does it feel,” he asked, turning now to look at Cass, “knowing that we’ve been born into a dying world? We’re no more important than any of this—” he gestured toward the windshield, the woods—“and we’ve ruined it all. We’ve destroyed a miracle so vast it defies explanation.” He laughed ruefully. “They’ll tell you there’s time, that we can fix this, but it’s not true. It’s over. It’s like the way that light reaches us from stars hundreds of years later—we don’t know it yet, but it’s over.”

It was like stepping into a shadow. Cass knew he was right, and around them the world was dying. It was already dead.

In dreams now the truck keeps winding up and up, the ribbon of Hood Canal to the right, the dark arms of trees reaching over the road. The cab of the truck is warm, but there is a part of them that wants to have never seen. To never have understood how the world could be devastated, how it had been, how in the end the ravaging would leave nothing untouched.

Wake up, someone is saying, but they cannot say who.
Wake up.

SONNET WITH GLASS

John Allen Taylor

From the road, I can see the beach flash
in the sun. I've taken three buses across the city

following a promise of obsidian, supposedly
abundant along this stretch of the Willamette.

Two women hold hands walking my direction.
One slows to kiss the other on her cheek.

I pick up a fracture of black, a glint of blue:
a product not of magma but of industry.

A child throws a ball for an old beagle, who
ignores it and lifts his leg to piss on a sign

that tells of the blast furnaces built on the bluff
in 1865, the slag dumped for the waters to eat.

I put a piece of glass in my pocket. There is
nothing we have not tried to feed to a river.

ELEGY FOR THE LOST ZODIAC

Kayleb Rae Candrilli

sweatshirt i wore during my father's
bluest overdose. teal water bearers

on black cotton weave. vintage
even then. 911 misdiald

on the corded landline.
the titanic crashing

of mouth to mouth. a retreating
tide of chest compression.

sea foam froth on the sandy couch.
a sibling crying in a faraway room

on a bean bag chair. a leo
mother busy saving a leo

father. in the yard stone lions
guard the mums

Queen of Cups

Jessica Mehta

We are made of the ocean,
spiked with salt and crackling
bones half gone to sand. Within us
is the whole wide sea, swimming
fish and fragile reefs. Sirens
aren't made up, they tuck
and fold between our ribs—call us
to our depths with songs
that ring of memories. In our own
chalices, the ciborium we bear
(share), we are all-
knowing. It's stored
like sunken chests within our marrow.
What goes challenger deep
rises again. In every particle
of our everything, the calcium
that builds our skeleton, we remember
the brine that came before and all
the leagues of which we'll go.

King of Cups

Jessica Mehta

“A good captain goes down
with his Maria” just as imperialism
clings fervently to scraps
of the past. As a child
I listened to forty-fives
of Simon and Garfunkel on a suit-
case record player that dug its own
inlet into shag carpet—I *am*
a rock. I am an island. This sunk

into me well
before I heard the phrase, *No*
man is an island. Yes, but what

about a woman? We are sovereign
bodies, life-making, life-
sustaining archipelagos
of history, buoyant keys, riders
of turtle backs and

de-throners of kings.

You are the one

Ismet Prcic

...walking into an enormous, entirely white-painted warehouse to see a photograph, an exhibition. The piece is eight and a half by eleven in a tasteful black frame all the way on the opposite wall from the entrance. Only one visitor is allowed at the time. If you have heels or dress shoes, and the maroon-jacketed fuckers *make* you have them, you personally saw them turn away an award-winning novelist because what he had on was considered denim and the house rules strictly prohibit denim, and the owner of the gallery personally drove the award-winner to a department store on Commercial where he purchased him a pair of slacks in the lurch that only tangentially clashed with the suggested pattern of the novelist's Irish sportscoat, but no, they are mandatory, so you do have them on, you have your dress shoes or your heels on, and the place echoes with your presence, with your *aloneness*, despite the *you-splitting* choice of dress shoes versus heels that's offered by the set up. I know; It's annoying to be reminded that you're reading a text. Note how alone you are right now reading this, how consciousness has nothing to do with what you put on, what you put it on, how you're all of what you're reading, the reader, the read, the narrator, the novelist, and all of the maroon-jacketed fuckers; you made all of them by reading into these symbols. You are in the white-painted room. You feel both important and ridiculous, there's no way around that. The awakening, the manufacturing of seeing of self from the side, disassociation if you will, has to do with *bothness*, and *neitherness* as you're *of the Divine* and oh so snuffoutable, the puppeteer commandeering a puppet of a puppeteer, the sentencer who must serve the life. And life, right now, is the photograph to which the whiteness is pointing. It's a long, strange, echoey trip to zoom in on the piece, for the image to fill out your field of vision. There is, after a few initial steps, a *real* need, nay! pressure, to solve the problem of the occasion and the only thing is to do it, to just go up to it and see the damn

eight and a half by eleven black and white of a wheel of a 1956 Pontiac with an enormous palm tree in forced perspective in the reflection of its shiny black-limousine fuselage and the white sun above, making all of this possible: you, imagining, whiteness, paint, warehouse, seeing, photographs, exhibitions, each word you've read so far, creating this event in your mind, charging you with a possibility to experience something you otherwise wouldn't put yourself through in real life (it's known that you have a green comforter, that you have a cat named Shelby just as you know that you're here, struggling with this sentence, trying to bend the symbols into a shape that could hold what cannot be held, what is not meant to be held but witnessed, which is disproven by the very alchemy of photography which does both, not really, but really. You let witnessing someone else's slice of a moment become the only thing in the universe, and seeing it, the part of it pictured, you can extrapolate the whole vehicle, the driveway, the resplendent palm, the portion of the house wall, the house it suggests, the photo-takers relationship to the house, the car, and from that, an entire universe which is the same one you're creating by thinking it up as you interpret the symbols that clash with the whiteness, the same one that contains your green comforter, and Shelby cleaning her butthole, and you going: alright already, with the ambiguity, with the *bothness* and the *inbetweenness*, why should you sit in it, give it your time and your energy, when it offers no placeholder, no stable platform from which to observe, but that's the entire thing, isn't it, that you're not only observing, you're seeing, and by continuing seeing and participating you make the real. It's known that you can see particles wave, so stop it. Stop wanting to. And no, you know the open parenthesis is not a typo. Being is nothing but humble. But then, on the backwards-walk back to the entrance, outzooming, it's a humbling thing, how many of these universes in the infiniteness of life itself we walk by while holding certain moments above others, sometimes not even our own. The only reason you went through all of this is because you loved and you wanted to hold the love and love cannot be held, love is always here

Like an Arrow

Leah Naomi Green

Time is a measure of motion—Viola Cordova

Time, come
with me.
Do what I
want to do tonight.

It is not difficult
to convince you
to measure the motions I make:
all my wills will

become dids
or didn'ts, Time
always strapping
on your wings

like cleats
before the game,
enormous in the frame,
but ready to fly

wherever I look, yes,
like an arrow, to wherever
I focus. No one ever taught my body
past tense.

Not that it would listen,
assuming the way
it found everything was The Way
original, and only

natural. What if I learn
to conjugate? To join
to break, we broke,
having been broken.

When you read this,
when my breath
is in your body,
moving it,

will you ask
who breathed it into me?
How endless
the ocean, only breaking

its silence in waves,
which cannot break,
so dig
an ocean.

This must be motion,
Time, you are a speck,
a singularity containing the universe,
a pre-dawn room, a lamp-

lit morning, larger
on the inside.

Spill

Anis Mojgani

under Refaat Alareer, 1979-2023

outside my window
a rain is falling
like a chorus of whispers

and my breath in bed
tonight is soft
and some nights it isn't

but tonight it is
and a poet elsewhere
has vanished

from his body
and Refaat is not
the only poet vanishing

over these weeks
that harrow beside our ears
like a legion of bowstrings

but he is one
whose voice thrummed
broke my heart early

inside of
all this
bloodful buzzing

and I get up from my pillow
to put these words down
even though

I am letting sleep come
and it wants to come
but I also know

that I probably wouldn't
remember all this
in morning

or the poem itself
would no longer be knocking
to be let into this world

because often the poems
from this world that knock or call
or scream—go

if ever they were
actually part of here
not unlike all of us

who from somewhere else
knock to be let in and
falling into this world

for a short little while
before into somewhere else
we all spill

Migration

Anis Mojagani

I traveled in the belly
of many birds far from home
until the belly became more the home
but always & still
a strangeness
in a stranger land writing letters &
sticking my hand
up the throat
to drop them
from a beak
praying
that the yellow winds
might
carry my heart
towards an earth
familiar
& below laying
in a downward direction.

Contributors

Shamik Banerjee is a poet from Assam, India, where he resides with his parents. His poems have been published by *Sparks of Calliope*, *The Hypertexts*, *Snakeskin*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Autumn Sky Daily*, *Ekstasis*, among others. He secured second position in the Southern Shakespeare Company Sonnet Contest, 2024.

Jonathan Bennett is an Oregon based writer. They hope to someday write lore for a good indie game. They're pursuing fiction writing with some ties in poetry. Outside of writing they enjoy hiking, listening to midwest emo, playing games a bit too competitively, and hanging out with their amazing partner.

Jaed Boas is from the west coast and loves books and nature.

Elle Cantwell is a graduate of the MFA in Writing program at the University of San Francisco. Her poems have appeared in *Ponder Review*, *December*, *Welter*, *Barrelhouse* and *The Pointed Circle*, among other publications. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and a winner of the Jeff Marks Poetry Prize.

Shelley Chamberlin is a Portland-based interdisciplinary artist. Their work is included in the collections of PNCA, PSU, SGCI, and RACC's Visual Chronicle of Portland. Chamberlin is a 2022 recipient of the Ford Family Foundation Oregon Artist Fellowship at MASS MoCA. She has a BFA from Marylhurst University and an MFA from Goddard and teaches art at PCC. You can see more of their work at shelleychamberlinart.com.

Joshua St. Claire is an accountant from a small town in Pennsylvania who works as a financial director for a large non-profit. His haiku and related poetry have been published broadly including in *The Asahi Shimbun*, *Frogpond*, *Modern Haiku*, *The Heron's Nest*, and *Mayfly*.

Kloe Cook is a 20 year old self proclaimed artist attending PCC. Poetry is her favorite way to express her feelings. Kloe loves writing poetry because it is so easy to experiment! Whether it's a new form or new words, she loves finding ways to make her poems unique!

Sarah Daly is an American writer whose fiction, poetry, and drama have appeared in thirty literary journals including *Stick Figure Poetry*, *In Parentheses*, *confetti*, *Discretionary Love*, and *Freshwater Literary Journal*.

Genevieve DeGuzman is the author of *Karaoke at the End of the World* (forthcoming 2026, JackLeg Press). A 2022 Oregon Literary Fellow, she has also been an Alice James Award finalist. Her writing appears in *The Adroit*, *Nimrod*, *RHINO*, and several anthologies. Born in the Philippines, she grew up near San Diego and now lives in Portland, OR. Find her at: genevievedeguzman.carbonmade.com

Mel Diyarza is a queer poet and Employment Specialist who currently lives in Vancouver, WA. In her free time she enjoys crocheting, reading with her cat Juju on her lap, and going on hikes with her amazing partner Diana and her cute dog Bailey.

Malia Gayomali is a queer Filipino American who was born and raised in Portland, Oregon. She is a mother, artist, and aspiring author. She is a former editor of *The Pointed Circle*, and you can find her illustrations featured in the 39th issue.

Though his proudest accomplishment might be the time a barber said that he grew “rough mustache hair,” **Mike Goodwin** is married and has a six-year-old son. He also teaches at the University of Pittsburgh. Squint hard enough at an internet search for other publications, most recently in *Neologism Poetry Journal*.

Noah N. Hale is a crafter of media living in Portland, Oregon. He writes, shoots a camera, and edits video. His interest in images and film spring from a childhood of movies, tv, sci-fi / fantasy paperbacks, and his father's black and white photography. His favorite photographer is William Mortensen.

Matthew Hampton is a 24-year-old public servant who enjoys spending time writing and creating art so as to stay human. He also moonlights as a mythical drag performer Carrie The One, because the only thing worse than math is a pun.

Celia Hutsell is a PDX local and a sophomore at Portland Community College, pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and English studies. She'll write about anything, but is particularly passionate about the topics of queer love, feminism, and the grotesque beauty inherent to womanhood.

Cai Indermaur is a multidisciplinary artist whose personal mixed media work grows from a robust compost of old print material and a typewriter tasked with documenting fleeting thoughts. This is a constant process of deconstructing and re-imagining; tending to the inner and outer landscapes that tend to us.

Colin Keating is an artist, writer, and musician from Portland, OR. His first poetry collection, *Dog Tao*, was published in 2021 and he's currently working on his second collection to be released later this year. He likes death metal, silly hats, and mango juice. You can find him on Instagram at @francisbaconbits.

Amanda Krupich is a self taught photographer, who started her own photography business (aKrupich Photography) 8 years ago. Since then, Krupich has been apart of many publications/curations, including both digital and analog work. Even though digital is her main business focus, film photography has always held her heart.

Kendall Larson is a 27 year old purveyor of poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction, depending on how much emotional turmoil they are experiencing. Their short fiction has been featured in *Alchemy Literary Magazine* and their poetry can be found in *Cathexis Northwest Press*.

Cade J. Miller is a former academic turned full-time life-liver based in Portland, Oregon. They enjoy art of all shapes and sizes, esoterica/spooky stuff, companionship, solitude, and convincing crows to be their friend. You can find them on instagram at @emotional_support_goth.

Misha Lynn Moon was one of the first transgender teachers to transition on the job in Oregon. Her work has appeared in a number of journals, including *Transom*, *Nude Bruce*, and *Cold Mountain Review*. She works at a houseless nonprofit in Portland, Oregon.

Dave Nash does his best writing in the tunnel between New York and New Jersey. His work appears in places like The South Florida Poetry Journal, Bulb Culture Collective, Jake, and The Hooghly Review. You can follow him @davenashlit1.

Oscar Nieves Lira is a promising Mexican short fiction writer, poet, and freestyle rapper. Born and raised in the magic village of Tequisquiapan, Querétaro, he is currently based in the Pacific Northwest. Oscar is a student at PCC seeking to earn a degree in Literature and Philosophy.

Sidney Novak is a multidisciplinary artist whose mediums include painting, sculpture, choreography, and film. Her work focuses on the effects of compulsion and addiction. She combines different mediums to create visceral works that depict how maladaptive and addictive behaviors affect and, in turn, shape one's reality.

Christopher Owens from Ventura, California, now lives in Pullman, Washington. A writer of poetry, theater, and short stories, his plays, *Never Really Touching* and *A Conversation Between Archetypes* won competitions and were produced. His themes speak to hope in the face of bleakness. These poems formed during the first months of the pandemic.

Madelynn Rae loves connecting with others through writing and her sense of humor. Alongside her literary pursuits, she enjoys fiber arts, cycling, and adventuring outside. Currently pursuing a master's in Book Publishing at Portland State University, she actively contributes to Ooligan Press, the esteemed student-led publishing house associated with the program.

Maria Rowen Flores is a Portland-born student graduating from Portland State University in the spring. They dabble in prose, creative nonfiction, and visual arts, and have a deep interest in liminal identities and the subjective experience.

Kurtis Matthew Russell is a filmmaker, actor, writer, and comedian currently residing in Portland, OR. He is a former editor of *Pointed Circle*, and is currently honing his skills as a mime, while working part-time as a barista and planning his next experimental film. He's probably moving to New York at some point also.

Megan Savage is a queer multi-genre writer and faculty at PCC. Her work is forthcoming in *The Rumpus*; appears in *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Sixth Finch*, and more; and was recently nominated for Best of the Net. At PCC, she helps coordinate the Carolyn Moore Writers House. Find her at www.meganessavage.com/

Kristy Schnabel started in accounting, finance, and system administration and then turned to virtual assistance. Then, she retired. When the pandemic hit, she returned to school and couldn't stop taking classes. With a BA in English now behind her, she's dipped into creative writing at PCC. She's created a monster.

Ember West grew up in a cult, escaped from an arranged marriage, has six children, and is making her childhood dreams come true by going to college to study creative writing. She enjoys hiking on the Oregon Coast and befriending birds.

Kiddo Wybie is a queer neurodivergent poet from Israel (Palestine). Its work focuses on trauma and recovery from a self-aware but unregulated emotional lens. It explores the struggles of trying to recover from PTSD, addiction, and BPD through pain and mindfulness.

CMWR Contributors

Derrick C. Brown is a novelist, comedian, poet, and storyteller. He is the winner of the 2013 Texas Book of The Year award for Poetry. He is a former paratrooper for the 82nd Airborne and is the owner and president of Write Bloody Publishing, which Forbes calls “...one of the best independent poetry presses in the country.” He is the author of eight books of poetry and four children’s books. *The New York Times* calls his work, “...a rekindling of faith in the weird, hilarious, shocking, beautiful power of words.”

Kayleb Rae Candrilli is a 2019 Whiting Award Winner in poetry and the author of *Water I Won’t Touch* (Copper Canyon Press, 2021), *All the Gay Saints* (Saturnalia, 2020), and *What Runs Over* (YesYes Books, 2017). Candrilli was a 2017 finalist for the Lambda Literary Award in transgender poetry and a 2017 finalist for the American Book Fest’s Best Book Award in LGBTQ Non-Fiction. They have received fellowships from Lambda Literary and are published or forthcoming in *Poetry*, *The American Poetry Review*, *American Poets*, *TriQuarterly*, *Boston Review* and many others. They live in Philadelphia with their partner.

Chen Chen’s second book, *Your Emergency Contact Has Experienced an Emergency* (BOA Editions), was a best book of 2022 according to the *Boston Globe*, *Electric Lit*, NPR, and others. It was also named a 2023 Notable Book by the American Library Association. His debut, *When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities* (BOA Editions), was long-listed for the 2017 National Book Award and won the Thom Gunn Award, among other honors. His work appears in many publications, including *The New York Times* and three editions of *The Best American Poetry*. He has received two Pushcart Prizes and fellowships from Kundiman, the National Endowment for the Arts, and United States Artists. He teaches for the low-residency MFA programs at New England College and Stonecoast. With Sam Herschel Wein and a brilliant team, he edits *Underblong*.

Jose Hernandez Diaz is a 2017 NEA Poetry Fellow. He is the author of *The Fire Eater* (Texas Review Press, 2020) *Bad Mexican*, *Bad American* (Acre Books, 2024) *The Parachutist* (Sundress Publications, 2025) and *Portrait of the Artist as a Brown Man* (Red

Hen Press, 2025). He has been published in *The Yale Review*, *The London Magazine*, and in *The Southern Review*. He teaches generative workshops for Hugo House, Lighthouse Writers' Workshops, The Writer's Center, and elsewhere. Additionally, he serves as a Poetry Mentor in The Adroit Journal Summer Mentorship Program.

Leah Naomi Green is the author of *The More Extravagant Feast* (Graywolf Press, 2020), selected by Li-Young Lee for the Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets. She is the recipient of a 2021 Treehouse Climate Action Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets, as well as the 2021 Lucille Clifton Legacy Award. Her chapbook, *The Ones We Have*, received the 2012 Flying Trout Chapbook prize. Her work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *The Paris Review*, *Tin House*, *Poem-a-Day*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Orion*, *Shenandoah*, *Ecotone*, and *Pleiades*. Green teaches Environmental Studies and English at Washington and Lee University. She lives in the mountains of Virginia where she and her family homestead and grow food.

Megan Kruse is the author of *Call Me Home* (Hawthorne Books 2015). She studied creative writing at Oberlin College and earned her MFA at the University of Montana. Her work has appeared widely in journals and anthologies, and she has received recent residency support from PLAYA, Wildacres Retreat, and the Carolyn Moore Writers House. She teaches fiction in EOU's Low-Residency MFA program and for Gotham Writers' Workshop. She was the recipient of a 2016 Pacific Northwest Book Award and one of the National Book Foundation's "5 Under 35" for 2015. She currently lives in Olympia.

Louisiana born and Portland-based, **Jae Nichelle** is the author of the poetry collection *God Themselves* and the chapbook *The Porch (As Sanctuary)*. She was the inaugural poetry winner of the John Lewis Writing Award from the Georgia Writers Association, and her poetry has appeared in *Best New Poets 2020*, *The Washington Square Review*, *The Offing Magazine*, *Muzzle Magazine*, and elsewhere. Her spoken word poems have been featured by Write About Now, Speak Up Poetry Series, and Button Poetry. She is a graduate of Tulane University.

Jessica Mehta is an Aniyunwiya (Cherokee Nation) poet, artist, and scholar. Forthcoming releases include *sp[RED]*, a poetry collection that Indigenizes the tarot deck, and a monograph of her research that examines the intersection of female poetics and eating disorders. Learn more at thischerokeerose.com.

Anis Mojgani is the 10th Poet Laureate of Oregon, and co-creator of Oregon's Telepome poetry telephone line. Winner of the National Poetry Slam and the World Cup Poetry Slam, his work has appeared on HBO, NPR, and in the *NYTimes*, and in such places as *Rattle*, *Forklift Ohio*, *Thrush*, *Bat City Review*, *Illustoria*, and *Orion Magazine*. He has been awarded a Poets Laureate Fellowship from the Academy of American Poets and has had work commissioned by the Getty Museum, the Portland Timbers, Oregon's Parks Department, and others. The author of six collections of poetry and an opera libretto, his first children's book is forthcoming from Holiday House/Neal Porter Books. Originally from New Orleans, Anis lives in Portland.

Shauna M. Morgan is a poet-scholar and Associate Professor of creative writing and Africana literature at the University of Kentucky. Her critical work has been published in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *South Atlantic Review*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, *College Language Association Journal*, and elsewhere. Her poetry has appeared in *A Gathering Together*, *Interviewing the Caribbean*, *A Literary Field Guide to Southern Appalachia*, *ProudFlesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness*, among other periodicals and anthologies. Her chapbook *Fear of Dogs & Other Animals* was published by Central Square Press. Shauna tends a small, hopeful provision ground at her home in the East End Artists' Village in Lexington, and she remains intrigued by the environmental linkages between her rural Jamaican upbringing and her US-Kentucky life.

Ismet Prcic was born in Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1977 and immigrated to America in 1996. His first novel, *Shards*, was a *New York Times* Notable Book, a *Chicago Sun-Times* Best Book of the Year, as well as the winner of the Sue Kaufman Prize and the *Los Angeles Times* Art Seidenbaum Award for first fiction. His second novel, *Unspeakable Home*, is forthcoming from *Avid Reader Press / Simon & Schuster*.

Kira Brooke Smith is a writer from central Pennsylvania, currently living and writing in Portland, Oregon. Her essays and narrative nonfiction works have been featured in *The Guardian Online*, *The Pointed Circle*, *Plain China Anthology*, *The Atticus Review*, *Five Points*, and *Buckman Journal*. She is an alumna of Signal Fire Arts and Portland Community College's Carolyn Moore Writing Residency. Her writing has received funding from the Regional Arts and Cultural Center.

John Allen Taylor is the author of the chapbook *Unmonstrous* (YesYes Books, 2019). His poems appear in *DIAGRAM*, *Nashville Review*, *The Common*, *Pleiades*, and other places. He directs the Adroit Journal Summer Mentorship Program and coordinates the writing center at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. For more, visit johnallentaylor.com.

The first African American writer to be named Kentucky Poet Laureate, multidisciplinary artist **Frank X Walker** is Professor of English and African American and Africana Studies at the University of Kentucky in Lexington where he founded *pluck! The Journal of Affrilachian Arts & Culture*. He is the author of the children's book, *A is for Affrilachia* and eleven collections of poetry, including *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*, which was awarded an NAACP Image Award and the Black Caucus American Library Association Honor Award. He is also the author of *Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York*, winner of a Lillian Smith Book Award, and *Isaac Murphy: I Dedicate This Ride*. Walker coined the term "Affrilachia" and co-founded the Affrilachian Poets. His recent publications include *Masked Man, Black: Pandemic & Protest Poems* and *Love House*. His forthcoming book, *Load in Nine Times*, is a collection of historical poetry that gives voice to Black Civil War soldiers..

Sam Herschel Wein (he/they) is a lollygagging plum of a poet who specializes in perpetual frolicking. They have an MFA from the University of Tennessee and were awarded a 2022 Pushcart Prize. Their third chapbook, *Butt Stuff Flower Bush*, is forthcoming from Porkbelly Press. He co-founded and edits *Underblong*. They have recent work in *American Poetry Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, and *Gulf Coast*, among others.

Editors

Haley Barnes grew up in the suburbs of Oregon and began writing before she can remember. She cares to share her experience as a queer individual with the world through poetry. If she's not writing, she is incorporating herself in as many events and activities as possible or hopping on a plane to experience the world.

Aurora Duval is an aspiring poet and ASL linguist. They write mostly spoken word and prose poetry. Rorie grew up with two brothers and two goldens in a small town in southern Oregon. On a free day you'll find them out in the sun with their dog, Lupin, most likely reading or writing poetry. They describe their writing inside your heart and outside reality.

Chloe Empoliti is an aspiring author; she was born in Oregon, did a stint on the East Coast in her early years, and moved back to Oregon; she has lived here since. She is pursuing a major in Creative Writing with plans to obtain a Masters degree and become a professor. Chloe primarily writes fiction, but also indulges herself in poetry every so often; she is looking to release her first standalone novel this year, and hopes her novel series will shortly follow.

Ella Lamas is an aspiring writer and journalist who wants to use her passion for writing to draw attention to the crueler aspects of our world. Although her family hails from the grassy valleys of Zacatecas, Mexico, she was born and raised in Virginia; spending the vast majority of her life in the Shenandoah Valley. She traveled all over the country before settling in Portland, Oregon.

Anna Janelle is a writer and performer who grew up in San Diego, and has been haunting the streets of Portland for the past 16 years. She enjoys yelling about emotions on stage, eating fruit on the beach, and making sad things funny. Her writing is usually a mix of spoken word about dead friends, songs about kicking nazis, and essays about decriminalizing sex work.

Gigi Giangioffe is a writer based in Portland, Oregon and was raised in Oakland, California. She writes creative nonfiction, fiction and poetry, with an emphasis on SadGirlMemoir©. Gigi studies foreign language, loves cooking and propagating plants, and watches what is arguably an unhealthy amount of documentaries about cults. She has been published in *The Bellwether Review*, *Alchemy* and *Pathos*. Her current works include her chapbook, *I'm Okay, I Promise*.