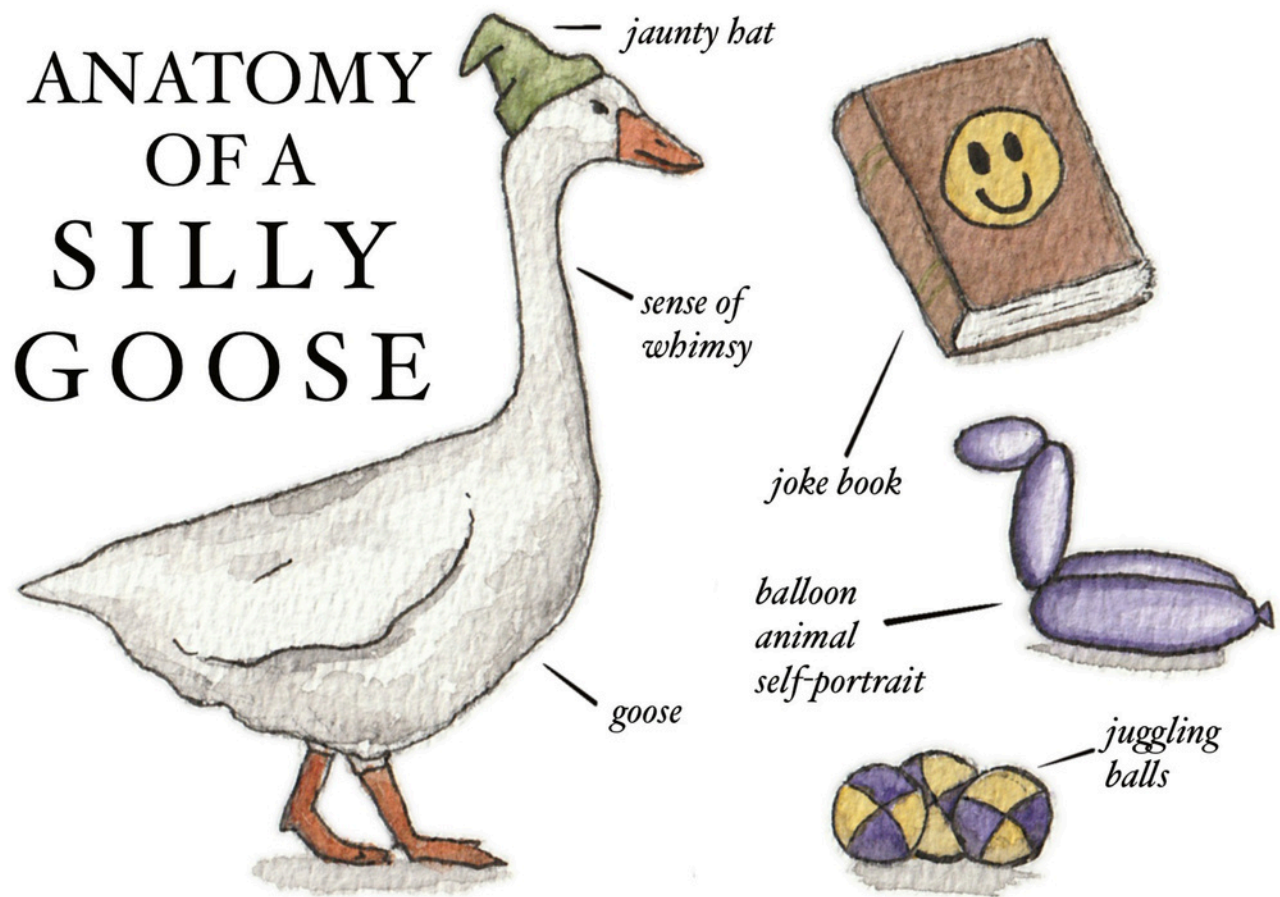


# SILLY GOOSE PRESS



## Issue Six

# Letter From the Editor

Honklo and welcome to Issue Six of Silly Goose Press!

We started dreaming of this magazine over two years ago, imagining gathering a small flock of literary geese and nestling them together between our warm (internet) pages – but we never could've dreamed up the wonderful and whimsical reality of running a lit mag.

Through SGP, we have stretched our wings and flown in ways that were only barely-hatched longings two years ago. We have honed our editing and marketing skills, learning how to run a website and business, been featured on a writing podcast and in CLMP, had our own table at AWP, and—most importantly—have made so many new literary friends!

Our absolute FAVORITE flockin' thing about running a lit mag is getting to interact with so many amazing writers, artists, presses, magazines, and editors from all over the world. We here at SGP believe that art connects us and that we are better together. Our goal is not only to publish incredible artists, but to celebrate their accomplishments, highlight their achievements, and create relationships that last. When we say we are adding our contributors to our flock, we honkin' mean it!

Though SGP will be hibernating over the Winter, we hope you'll stay connected with us and look out for all of the exciting things that are hatching in the Spring. Check out our socials or subscribe to our newsletter for information about SGP at AWP, future issues, and the new ways The Flock hopes to give back to our amazing community.

We hope our little whimsical corner of the internet has brought you, readers and contributors alike, just a little bit of joy. Thank you so much for being here—we couldn't do it without you— and Happy Flockin' Fall to you all.

Honk honk!

Rhiannon + The Flock



# About This Issue

Hello and Happy Honkin' Fall to you all! The Flock here at SGP cannot believe we are already publishing our SIXTH issue. It feels like just yesterday that we were hatching Issue One, still stretching our wings, itching to fly.

We made some changes to our issue-building process behind the scenes, so in some ways, Issue Six felt like Issue One: unexpected, glorious, and beautiful with a side of definite learning curve. For one thing, we started using Submittable to keep us organized and give our growing number of submitters a better experience. We also introduced our newest offering, Speedy McGeese: a way for you to hear back from us in just a shake of a tail feather (and help support our mag along the way!). AND we gained a new reader (a big HONK for Georgia Lowe!)

As this year begins to draw to a close and we enter The Long Dark, we wanted to bring you an issue that highlights the deep, the dreary, and the dramatic, as well as the stupendous, scenic, and silly. We know our pond could use all shades of whimsy to get through these months until the sun returns and we reopen for submissions in the Spring.

As always, we are eternally grateful for each of you reading our humble magazine, and we hope that you can find a piece to help light your way with whimsy. We are thankful for you, dear reader, and we hope you love Issue Six as much as we do.

Honk honk!

Rhiannon + The Flock

## Meet The Flock

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Fiction Reader

# About The Cover

“The first draft of this piece was a sketch on the back of a love letter to my spouse, sent three years ago when we had to spend a month apart during the holiday season. My partner is funny, like really funny. I wrote that I was a silly goose in training, learning from their expertise in the field. They were, and remain, a master at nurturing hope and whimsy despite the catastrophes of capitalism. No matter what, we bring our tools for silliness with us towards survival.

This fall I revisited the piece, and this is the final product. The original sketch, and the letter on the back of it, is framed in our bedroom.” - goth

**goth** [they/them] is an artist, writer, and an introvert's introvert. goth works full time as a public defender, hence the pen name. this isn't legal advice. it would be really weird legal advice anyways. @g0thlawyer on bluesky and instagram. g0thlawyer.com



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Honk honk  
honk honk  
honk? Honk!

Translation: What is a  
goose's favorite city?  
Honk Kong!



Honk honk! Honk honk! Honk honk! Honk honk!

# Through a small octagonal window

by Jeffrey Kingman

a little something.  
Tip of a bare branch,  
black-shingled roof,  
momentary starling,  
brief flutter.  
Invisible all the rest.  
Put your cheek on the glass.  
A tunnel  
is dark.  
Exit at either end,  
autumnal dusk.  
Up: floating parade,  
geese honking by,  
off north,  
slate sky,  
no trees or roofs.  
Down: open field,  
goose and goslings hunch,  
eating grass.  
Gander, the lookout,  
neck a periscope,  
looking for trouble.



## Early Birds

by Gaven Lover

The woman sits on her porch  
with a journal while looking to her front yard.  
She sees robins.

*They must be looking for worms,*  
she thinks.

The robins look back at her,

hopping intermittently as they wander.  
*She must be looking for worms,*  
they think.

# **Iridescence**

**by Sophie Sala**

Today I feed myself  
and the pigeons. Their oil-slick  
necks, how they trust and land  
gently onto my arms. The man  
working on the roads says,  
“You’ve got a lot of friends there.”  
Forgive me, poem, I believe  
this is one of those times  
when I have nothing more to say.

# Mountain Magic

by Susan Pollett



Pastel on paper

## **friendsgiving**

**by Chloe Ackerman**

*angel-faced girl invites you to  
take communion/she holds  
the mason jar/gestures to the  
full/forever away room/says  
we all drank from it/sloshes  
forward/holds your face/tips  
the jar into your mouth/the  
glass clicks on your teeth/her  
hand is on your neck/the  
blood runs down your  
cheeks/onto your white  
sweater/you laugh with  
her/wipe your face/wipe your  
sweater/someone says/what  
kind of wine do you think  
Jesus made anyway?*

# Saudade

by Leslie Cairns

*you used to nuzzle your dog / & I'd pretend / a mom could do that to me / I'd imagine  
us talking about owls / we never did / I never gave us the chance / in my dreams, we  
wouldn't stop talking / we'd hide nothing / you'd see me / Tawny, I'd whisper / I had a  
friend with that name/ you didn't know me then / you never knew her / we never  
asked each other about our names / & you'd tell me that owls tucked in their young  
& I'd walk with you under the country-lit stars & I'd keep naming feathers & burrow &  
wings / there's a barn owl & a pygmy & a great gray / when owls love you, they turn  
their heads all the way around / I thought / if I lost a home, I'd find a place where I  
could nestle & coo / like they do / alone but not alone / midnight love / under frayed  
stars & flight paths / nip my flight in half & look for shooting stars like ricochets /  
Tawny & I used to hold pinkies in the dark / we'd say goodnight to her spider plants &  
and pull the covers up over us*

# Neapolitan Ice Cream

by Fay L. Loomis

Ice cream was something our family rarely had. Only in the summer, and only when it was hot. Really hot. The idea that people ate it in the winter was beyond my childhood ken.

Dad was the holder of the purse and did all the grocery shopping. If he decided it was hot enough, he would drive his truck from the farm to the A&P and bring home a half gallon of Neapolitan.

Three divine colors divided the rectangular block into vanilla, strawberry, and chocolate stripes. It wasn't until years later that I discovered a carton could hold a single flavor.

With great drama, Dad laid the container on a cutting board on the dining room table. He would peel back the paper covering and expose the tantalizing frozen chunk. Like a maestro conducting an orchestra, he raised his butcher knife and divided the vision into equal swaths of deliciousness before placing each one on china dishes.

Each family member received a parcel, and almost prayer-like, we dug our spoons into the creamy treat. Pacing myself was tricky. If I ate too fast, my mouth turned numb and I got an instant headache. Too slowly, and the treat melted. While it still tasted okay, it wasn't quite as good as partly frozen bites.

I still love ice cream, mostly vanilla or black raspberry. None ever tastes as good as it did when I was a kid eating slices of color.



## **Prefer not to disclose**

**by Kelsey Edwards**

I always figured that girls kiss girls and I was as straight as my hair but then I decided to stop straightening my hair and it turns out my hair's wavy, not all-the-way curly, but maybe that's what I am too, at least that's what I've come to realize even though I'm married and mostly happy and I swear that sometimes girls just kiss girls, it's not like it's weird or different (right?) and it felt like freedom when I filled out a form online that asked for demographics and I realized that I could check off the box that maybe actually applied to me, but instead of being open or honest, I shut that door again, because all I could bring myself to choose was I

prefer not to disclose

# Lipstick Pink

by Melinda Giordano



Pencil on paper

## **First Crush**

**by Madi Corell**

It was my dark hair collecting heat. You know the way the pavement blurs in the afternoon? It was all so dizzying, our bikes whirring, whooshing, wrapped up together in the breeze. We took a trip to the cul-de-sac, haven of honeysuckles, to find some shade. It was the butter petals twirling, her forefinger and thumb, noses tickling, beads of nectar on our tongues. Have you ever seen something so beautiful and thought maybe God does love me after all? I mean she— well, I'm sure you know how it goes: how sweetness draws you in, how you press close when you get the chance, how hair gets tangled in the briars of summer's halo.

# Love Strode in on Chicken Legs

by Lyv Constance

As long as Mariya had lived in The Woods, she had been in love with the dreadful Baba Yaga.

Mariya herself had become a thing of twisted joints and loosening skin. She was of an age where age itself was no longer a thought. She had seen the day break open and the night fall down thousands of times. Most days, her life in The Woods was full of quiet whimsy. Mariya was a witch, but of all the magic at her disposal, she used only a pinch. A little magic in the morning to make her tea the perfect temperature. A little more to make her vegetables grow into the perfect shapes. Perhaps some to dust her vast collection of oddities and knick-knacks. For centuries, that had been her calm, peculiar life. She had lived and lived and lived, but she had never felt more alive than when she was around the gruesome Baba Yaga.

Everyone knew of Baba Yaga. It was true that she, too, was a witch, but she was far from Mariya's personal brand of magical woman. She was known as many things: a trickster, a krone, an ogress, a beast. Yes, Baba Yaga was all of these and none of these at the same time. She stood at an enormous height, looming over even the tallest knight. Many would describe her as ugly. She had countless wrinkles and spots with cataracts in her eyes and hatred in her heart. Some saw her as ugly, though Mariya vehemently disagreed.

Villages trembled at the sight of her approach, at the sound of her cackle, at the smell of her dreadful oven. Did she truly cook naughty children in it? Perhaps. Did she truly even exist? Some argued she did not. There were many who believed her to be only a folktale, one made up by parents to deter tantrums. This, of course, was not the case. There

was a truth Mariya carried like one of her treasured knick-knacks: she had been the first to know of the one named Baba Yaga.

Once, when Mariya was still a young witch, she found herself lost in The Woods. This was a pleasant thing for her. To be lost among the trees and woodland creatures was her biggest adventure. Though danger lurked in every nook and cranny, Mariya was not scared. It may have been her first day in there, but it had already felt like a home of sorts.

Mariya walked with no real destination in mind. She figured she would know where to stop once she got there. After hours or perhaps days, she arrived. In a clearing of grass and mushrooms, sat a girl with moonlight gray hair. Her skin was splattered in freckles and moles, giving her an aged look, though she could not have been any older than Mariya herself. Her nose stuck out beautifully from her face. Buried in her lap was a goose with feathers the color of tar. On the ground in front of her lay a whittled piece of wood. It seemed to be a roughly shaped house, only from its base grew bird legs. In the girl's crooked hands, she feverishly ground something in with a mortar and pestle.

"What is that in her hands?" Mariya wondered from her place behind a tree. Unfortunately, Mariya had always had the terrible habit of moving her mouth with her thoughts.

The girl did not startle. Her eyes never raised, but she held the mortar with her arm outstretched perfectly towards Mariya. Inside, a yellow mush was being made from what seemed like dandelions.

A rough, creaking voice far older than the girl slipped from her mouth.

"Paint. For the chicken's legs."

"Oh. What is it for? Is it a toy?" Mariya herself kept her dolls in the bag at her side, even though she pretended she was too old to love such things.



“No! Not a measly toy. One day,” the girl lifted her eyes, milky and faintly blue, to meet Mariya’s.

“One day, it will be my home. I will travel from land to land, the legs of the chicken carefully carrying me. Alone, I will live the rest of my life in it, so I have to take my time with this part.”

She began to grind her yellow paint again.

“How do you know all this? Why must you be alone?”

The girl thought for a moment, tilting her head with a crack. “Maybe not alone. Dymok will be with me, but he is just a stupid goose. But perhaps ...”

The girl’s face looked up to the stars, deep in thought, “What are you called?”

“Mariya. What is your name?”

“They will call me Baba Yaga! Fear will be left in my wake, and I will not care,” the girl exclaimed, crackling with laughter.

“I have never known fear. I am never afraid of anything. I will never fear you, the one who will be Baba Yaga.” Mariya said this in the way only a child could, with confidence and fierce determination.

“How interesting. Mariya the Unafraid. We shall see how true this is,” the girl said, her voice like tree branches cracking under feet.

Almost as if she were never there in the first place, the one who would be known as Baba Yaga vanished in a swirl of black feathers. All that remained was a smear of yellow paint in the dirt and the memory of the strange girl with milky eyes and moonlight hair.



Several years passed, and Mariya had never left The Woods. She built her small cabin by hand (a magical hand, albeit) in the very clearing she met Baba Yaga. She started her life, solitary, quiet. Every now and again, a traveler would stop by her cabin in need of food, potions, or other adventuring needs. Through it all, the girl with moonlight hair floated in the back of Mariya's mind.

Of course, she had encountered Baba Yaga a handful of times since that day. The next time would be in what would be their teenage years. The sound of giant footsteps grew closer and closer until Mariya realized what it was she was hearing. By that time, the whittled hut was only the size of a doghouse, but its chicken legs did carry Baba Yaga across the lands. She traveled and made her way back through The Woods, right past Mariya's own home. Mariya ran out and climbed to her own roof (she was still limber in those years).

“Baba Yaga!”

Baba Yaga draped herself upside down out the window of her moving home, her white hair swaying with each of the chicken leg steps. Dymok, the midnight goose, posed like a weathervane on the small chimney. Baba Yaga laughed heartily as she swung. She looked much the same, though she, too, had reached her teenage years.

“Mariya the Unafraid, you never left these woods! How quaint a life you must lead. Tell me, do you fear me now? Have you heard the horrors I leave in my wake?”

“Travelers tell the tales as gruesome as I am sure they seem. ‘Oh no! The terrible witch who eats our children like others eat chicken!’ Tell me, is that completely true?”

Mariya had indeed heard these stories. She believed them, too. Yet

she could not bring herself to feel anything negative towards Baba Yaga. If anything, she was entirely too delighted to see her again.

“The ones who deserve it, I do eat. They go nicely in a borscht. Quite filling. Does this make you afraid?”

“No, not even a bit. I think you are not as terrible as even you think.”

“There will be worse things that I do, my friend. You will come to fear me.”

Though she smiled, Mariya could see a hint of sadness in the milky blue of Baba Yaga’s eyes. Mariya wished she could ease that sadness. She wished she knew Baba Yaga well enough to know what helped her best.

“Maybe we could have tea and talk. You could attempt to convince me to fear you?”

At that, Dymok honked once from his place upon the chimney. If Mariya squinted, she could almost see a disappointment in the upside-down hunch of Baba Yaga’s shoulders.

“Not yet. The day for tea will come. Perhaps tomorrow. Or perhaps in several eras. Only the stars would know.”

“Well, tell the stars I look forward to that day.”

Baba Yaga swung herself back up into her hut, and the chicken’s legs continued through The Woods at a startling pace. Mariya watched until the hut, the goose, and the strange Baba Yaga were hidden completely by the trees. She felt a pain in her chest and hoped it would not be too long before chicken feet stamped across her lawn again.

# what scientists don't know

by Priya Saxena

scientists don't know why  
whiptail lizards

(an all-female species  
that reproduces via

immaculate conception  
or so i'm told)

simulate sexual intercourse  
with each other

but i think  
you and i

could give them  
some answers

because it feels good  
because it's comforting

to hold one  
like yourself but not

because you want to  
find out how she bites

to feel her teeth  
on your leathery skin

because the arizona desert  
is vast and lonely

and what a miracle it is  
to have found another

because your babies are  
given to you by god

and you're all virgins  
and you're all marys

and isn't that something  
worth celebrating

because the two of you  
are turning into your mothers

who turned into their mothers  
and it's unbelievably nice

to be with someone  
who gets it

and anyway  
she looks real pretty

when her tail's entwined  
with yours

## red-winged blackbird

by Sydney Brown

Perched with your hair fraying in my hands,  
I relearn the ways in which I can't weave a  
braid: hands frozen and cramping, silken strands  
left to whip in the wind. I listen to cognizant laughter  
spray against walls in the same arch a wave would  
make and I make it okay, make all my unforgivities  
disappear. I find myself dipping away all on my own,  
hands seizing as they fly behind, always seizing, even  
as they slip through your hair, loose and wanting.  
It is all I can think about: the lovely plume, the toss, the  
wave, slipping you berries, red and ripe, blue stains  
linking the tips of our fingers invisible in the sinking bloom.  
In the dark like this I can hear the bright dawn cooing where  
it dies in its cradle, hands reaching for soothing comfort,  
wispy blinks tucking into the crease of my thigh, unaware  
of the cacophony building in my stomach, the scorched lanes  
of my throat ferrying violins fiddling into frenzy mid-conversation,  
fans flourishing silken runs over which horns defend against the  
other; I'm too blissed, truly, to motion them to calm, instead basking  
in embroidered delusions, fermata trembling in my hands, faces ballooning,  
embouchures spluttering spit and condensation pooling in the bottom of  
bells tipping onto the mat — the noise is all in my head. I can tie a braid.  
Can undo it, too, very simply but well enough. I just want to be the branch  
you return to — look, I even wrapped it in ribbon.

# One Way It Could End

by Eirene Gentle

Four oysters on the table and three of us. We could slice the fourth in thirds but oyster essence relies on the whole briny mess, mignonette, horseradish, tipped back in one go, so Mel gets the fourth because we're at their place. Or Jak because he brought them, or me because we all know I like them best. Or Jak is disqualified for bringing four oysters to three people and the host gets it as a courtesy. Or the host gives it to me as a courtesy because Jak is disqualified. Or I give it up (though I love oysters) to people who only *like* them for murky reasons, like politeness, only it isn't oysters on the table, it's teeth. Four teeth and three of us. With oysters, teeth don't matter much; we could just leave them there leering, but what if the next course is steak or raw carrots? Do we gamble on what's coming? Mel knows the menu and takes a tooth so I take a tooth and Jak takes a tooth and we're back where we started, but worse because I can't claim to like teeth more than Mel or Jak and we can't break a tooth in three — that's more absurd than the oyster. So there's just one bonus tooth between the bread and water glasses and six eyes staring at it and each other. Jak's chair scrapes back like he's about to do something, only it isn't a tooth on the table but years. Four of them, fleshy and green as a sprout at one end, withered at the other, four years for three people and Mel leaps up as Jak hurls a year by Mel's ear. Mel kicks the year across the room, where it stamps the muzzle of a startled cat like frost, but before Mel can cry 'Muffin!' Jak hurls another year in Mel's lap, where it melts like hope, and I'm under the table engaged in a death glare with the third year, instructing it to fade into the floor because who cares how old the floor is in a situation like this? Amid the standoff, Mel uses a fork to fling the final year into Jak's eye and then there's nothing on the table but air. It's hard to describe the desperation when we realize air is not the same as emptiness, this air is required to breathe and there's four packs of it and three of us. In all the shouting, we see Mel with two gleaming, new teeth. So that's what happened there, but air is air and we're running out of it quickly. There's one bundle for all of us, but who knows how long it will last and if it runs out, two of us die while the third hangs on longer and by then — who knows? — something else might be on the table and Jak is mumbling about the sacrifice of one so two can live but Jak can't talk and do at the same time so Mel snatches the air packs from under his gusty justifications, but there's only two packs because I'm under the table again. This time with Muffin and we're sharing one pack, because how much air can a cat take and Muffin didn't ask to die like this, and another pack is tucked under my shirt and Mel and Jak are crashing all over the table fighting, a big waste of breath if you ask me and Muffin, but then it's not air on the table, it's a meat pie. Cut perfectly and precisely in three. "Ah, so that's the next course," we say and sit down to eat.

## fever dream

inspired by Cameron Awkward-Rich's "Meditations in an Emergency"

by Shrishti Khanna

look! my childhood all around me,  
the childish grins of my kids, all of them mine,  
*my kids, my kids* i repeat under my breath,  
a prayer every midnight.  
my kids with their hearts  
whole, full of hope,  
& thorns near balloons break my heart.  
*my kids, my kids*  
how crushing, how blessed,  
it breaks my heart.  
there is so much water  
pooling in my chest, eyes pooling, pooling in my palms,  
it breaks my heart.  
i must take a ride to work, hate the people i hate  
sitting under tube lights, play-pretend grins,  
i must accept my mother's truth,  
at night, blinds open,  
it breaks my heart.  
i must get out of this knit, stop feeling cold all the time,  
i start wondering: how much weight chill has  
*my kids*, so tiny under a blanket of birds, growing seeds in the dark;  
didn't i teach them greens grow in the dark? what does it matter at the end of the  
world and is it the end of the world? my little boy laughs and says, *ask me in dark!*  
i start to wonder late into the morning:  
does the wind weigh on their shoulders?  
but i start counting dollars in my bank & it breaks my heart; i cry on a stranger's  
shoulder, fall asleep in the dark,  
i think about the laundry i shoved under the bed & it breaks my heart.  
i tell the kids, huddle closer for warmth, & the chill on their cheeks breaks my heart  
& there's a dream in which  
i return to the perpetrators of my childhood & let them break my heart  
but my kids, my kids are only seven & i see hope  
drying around the periphery of their mouths & it breaks my heart.  
i burst the bubble, say it in child-talk, hand on my stupid heart –  
*does the wind weigh too much?*  
how much?  
how much?  
here, a kiss on your heart.



## 25 Weeks: A Sonnet

by Beverley Sylvester

I thought I would be more scared of the breaking open.  
I thought the since-childhood maternal urge and the  
*birthing hips* and the deep wanting might mean the pregnancy  
would be one of those easier ones. *Meant to be*  
or something. Hah. I thought I'd feel powerful, goddesslike  
in my big-bellied Venushood. I thought, I thought.

I think now about inelegant miracles. I burn frankincense and the living  
room is still just the living room — unholy. I think about water, wonder  
if mine will break on its own. If I stood before the Red Sea, it would  
not have moved. The parting of my own legs, the rushing out between  
them, only that small exodus might be mine. I am small and without  
prophecy.

For me, no burning bushes. Lazarus stays dead at my touch.

My motherhood not Mary or Sarah, but dust. Beautiful dust.  
Full of love and sickness. And enough.

# Frick Museum Florals

by Susan Pollett



Pastel on paper

# The Art of Loving Impermanently

by Thais Jacomassi

The prefix “Eu-” in Ancient Greek means *good*. In Portuguese, it means *I*. I have not studied the history of language and the ways it has transformed over the years, but I have spent a lot of time contemplating whether I was ever good.

My high school best friend, Miriam, had an uncle who was a psychic. His hands would shake when he sensed someone’s energy. I met him for the first time as I walked my friend down the driveway to her mother’s car. He reached over the console to shake my hand and I hardly noticed the tremor against my palm. Weeks later, as we sat on Miriam’s bed trying to find a horror movie we hadn’t already watched, her gasp directed my attention away from the screen.

“Oh. My. God. I forgot to tell you what my uncle said after he met you.”

I motioned for her to continue.

“Well, you know about his psychic thing, right? Did you notice his hands shaking when he met you?”

“I mean a little, but I didn’t think anything of it,” I said casually.

“My mom and I asked him what he picked up on after we drove away and he said there was this black energy surrounding you.”

“Is that good or bad?”

“He said he couldn’t tell.”

I sat with her words for a minute before concluding, “Well, that’s just great, isn’t it?”

Miriam was my best friend from eighth grade through the end of high school. I first saw her on the school bus with a One Direction binder spread over her lap and Louis Tomlinson’s face on her phone’s lock screen. We hit it off almost instantly. We talked about our favorite members of One Direction and horror movies and makeup, and by the time I was dropped off, we had saved each other’s phone numbers with a flower emoji at the end of our names. For the next few years, we celebrated our birthdays together — her birthday being the day before mine — and I spent almost as much time at her house as I did my own. Her family became an extension of mine. But by senior year of high school, Miriam was homeschooled and had lost friends while I had made new ones. And slowly, but simultaneously, as I became one of her only friends, I became significantly closer to my new friends. In Miriam, there was familiarity and a slow comfort, whereas my new friends were reckless and fun and unguarded. Things I had never had the opportunity to be.

By the time graduation came around, we had our big “break up.” I hadn’t seen her in weeks leading up to that point, but I had seen my other friends almost every day. We lay on the floor of my bedroom looking up at the glow-in-the-dark stars on my ceiling as she cried over the loss of our friendship while I felt entirely numb to it. When she pointed out my lack of reaction, I couldn’t find the right words to comfort her. I thought to myself that maybe this was the black void her uncle had sensed in me years before. Her eyes were red and swollen by the time I hugged her goodbye and when my mother asked what had happened, I could tell she was disappointed in my answer. But any guilt or shame I might have felt seemingly faded into that dark smoke clouding my surroundings.

I saw Miriam a handful of times after that, but her mother no longer



hugged me when she saw me and she no longer kept apple juice stocked in the fridge for me. Our conversations were forced and uncomfortable and I knew it was all my own doing.

In my sophomore year of college, when I was a few tequila shots into a long night, I got an unexpected call from Miriam. I was quick to dismiss the call, telling myself I would reach back out to her when I had sobered up the next day. And when I did, I found out she had called me because her grandmother, who she and her mother had lived with and taken care of for a number of years, had passed away. She had called me for comfort because she didn't have anyone else to call, and once again, I had not delivered.

Miriam was one of the greatest friends I had in my life and someone who I probably would've had a lifetime friendship with had I not ruined any possibility of that.

I see my actions during this time as a stain on my character. The apology I owe to Miriam is so far overdue that I am no longer sure it would hold any weight. I tell this story to be transparent. Because I see myself — my morals, my values, my character — through the friends I keep and the way I treat them, and I did not start from a place of goodness, though I'd like to believe that I have since learned to give more credit and appreciation to my friendships.

I learned the most about friendship during college. College was a long and heavy battle through a cocktail of mental illnesses that nearly took my life in the spring semester of my junior year. It was a time of great loneliness. That particular semester, I lived alone in a dorm meant for five people. My school's COVID-19 policy did not allow students to visit each other's dorms and encouraged us to limit our social circle to our respective roommates. Given my situation, I spent a majority of my time alone during those four months. So I went on nightly walks through the North End, Seaport, Chinatown, Beacon Hill, and the Esplanade. I'd walk

until my feet cramped and my calves burned from the effort, and this pain became the catalyst that pushed me to reflect on the things I had done. I could've entirely blamed my isolation that semester on the pandemic and no one would have questioned it, but I knew that part of it was self-induced. The carelessness with which I had treated my relationships combined with crippling mental health made it difficult to give anyone any of myself. What Miriam's uncle had sensed in me that day was a black hole that knew how to take and keep taking, but had forgotten how to give back. Stripped of community and friendship, I learned its value through its absence. It was a difficult lesson to learn, but also the most rewarding.

My final semester of college was my saving grace. I found a best friend in someone I had vaguely known for years, and I lived with an incredible group of young women who brought out the best in me. It was because of them that I began an annual tradition to commemorate my friends. Each spring, I write a heartfelt letter to the people who made the biggest impact on my life during that year. Expressing love and appreciation for the platonic relationships in our lives can at times be forgotten, though no less important than the ways we do it in our familial and romantic relationships. This act must be intentional and conscientious. Love and appreciation are not things to be shown passively. I know that the end of my friendship with Miriam was not a result of my being a bad person, but it was careless and distracted and entitled. I can look back and realize the mistake I made. I write these letters as a way to avoid repeating myself.

When I left Boston for New York, there was an underlying fear that the loneliness I felt in college would claw its way back into my life. But I got lucky. A good friend of mine let me move into the empty room of her Chelsea apartment and my best friend got a job in the city around the same time. I'm not sure that New York would be the city I have come to love had it not been for these two people. They not only made the city welcoming, but they made it home.

I have called many places home during my time in New York: 222 in Chelsea, a brightly-colored apartment where the light sparkled over the walls in the summertime; Lincoln Place, with the yellow kitchen that overflowed with exotic plants; Ditmars Avenue, at the very end of the W line, where my friend and I would make baking trays out of tin foil; and Beaver Street, where I mourned the loss of my grandparents in the arms of my closest friends. All of these places — and these people — have played an integral part in my growth, but none have had as big an impact as the home I built on Beaver Street.

My downstairs neighbor once said that the company who manages our building thought of us as their charity case since we are the only property they had outside of the vastly more expensive brownstones of Park Slope.

But sometimes, when I have come home a little later than usual, I enter my building and I can smell the incense our first-floor neighbors like to burn on cleaning days; I can hear my second-floor neighbors watching TV (most likely “Survivor”); and above it all, all the way from the third floor, I hear my friends’ laughter overlapping and intertwining with each other and whatever is playing on the TV (most likely “Love is Blind”). And sometimes, I sit on the stairs and listen. Trying to absorb something I know I’ll never forget. Something I learned during that lonely semester of college is that silence rings loud. It suffocates. So in these moments, where I get to take in everything my senses have come to recognize as home, I feel the richest I have ever been.

I try to repay my roommates. I bake and I make soup on rainy days and I buy the chocolate Pocky at the store whenever I see it. I bring back magnets from the places I visit and I hang paintings in the kitchen so I might aid in making this as much of a home for them as it has been for me.

I have also lost friends who felt like home. I had a friend who used to pull my hands apart when I would nervously pick at my nails. She was

the dearest kind of friend. We wrote together at coffee shops and I listened to her talk about the poetry and screenplays she'd read that week while we sat by the water. We took cigarette breaks at parties to gossip and we took care of each other when we got too drunk. We gifted each other books and traded clothes and got boba after our night classes.

Some years ago, I found out through a confidant that this friend had been sharing things I had told her in confidence to someone I had set her up with. I felt entirely blindsided and betrayed, and I did not know how to mend the trust that was broken. A crack emerged in the foundation of our friendship and I could hardly stop it from growing until eventually, we sat down at a restaurant in Chinatown and I no longer knew how to speak to her. I left her birthday party early and she did not attend mine, but she recently sent me a book that her workplace had published because it was written by my favorite author.

She was a dear friend, and despite what has happened, she is still dear to me now.

It is easy to feel love and gratitude for the friendships we currently have, and it is easy to let the relationships that have grown distant turn bitter and rotten, but just as I have learned to value the friends that add to my life, I'd like to do the same for those chapters I've closed.

We are ultimately bound to the process of change. Relationships can feel eternal when we are in the midst of them, and I have found that this is the precise moment that we allow ourselves to become careless with them. This is not to say that we should ever attempt to stop change from occurring, but I do not think that change has to be synonymous to an ending. I have learned the most about love and care *through* the friendships I have maintained *through* change. To continuously relearn a person, to support them through the difficult moments, to be with them when they no longer know themselves, and to have the difficult



conversations when trust is broken. I could have mended many friendships had I known these things.

*Goodness* is relative. A term to be interpreted to the best of our ability. I can look back at the moments where I failed as a friend and feel guilt for them where I once felt shame. Shame is the black hole that takes and takes because it does not know how to learn from its actions. Guilt is the lesson we learn. And what I have learned about goodness is that it is not found in how long we can keep a friend in our lives, but the grace and the respect we can show to the friendships we outgrow and the ones who outgrow us.

# Avoidance

by Chris Kads

My house  
is an IKEA garden.  
Polyester palms  
in doorways.  
Synthetic succulents  
lining windowsills  
like guards.

In the apartment we shared,  
there were natural flowers.  
Birthday Tulips  
that whispered promise.  
Let-it-go lilies that latched  
onto flimsy heartstrings.

Life's easier now,  
I tell myself,  
with this artificialness of mine.

Better,  
with this plastic  
that keeps its promise  
to never wilt.

# At love, I am mad—

by Ayesha Owais

it is afternoon and i am compliant.  
i have teared up over nothing again. it is the nothing that keeps me.

in syntax, there are mistakes. i have left the window open.  
crows everywhere. can't they be tender?

like a mother  
in my small world

i stammered into birth  
body bones oblique

bleak January morning  
a raven carves my arms for dinner.

outside, people  
orbiting a scaffold

speak in verse. my love verbose.  
there are languages only he knows.

shame in wanting  
eversion

i have found ways  
to keep away—

there is so little to fight for.

grey mittens  
in both his palms

placed against my open wound—  
Rahman everywhere

is in the birds  
migrating this spring

floating in a fishbowl—  
light slitting us open

unforgiving.

white dust rising  
mid-winter afternoon

my hands still  
my hands,

eyes still  
a lamp.

i have attuned to the living  
darkness this world demands

my absence.  
i, a namesake—

Ayesha like my mother  
Aisha like

wife of the holy prophet,  
his most beloved,

in whose lap  
he took the last

of breaths.  
the language of love is sweet

good lord,

softness i must not seek  
swallows me.

# Kaleidoscope

by Hayley Shucker

*Get some help, Marianne.*

Fiona's parting words knock me onto the couch. So much for sharing a dorm room next year. Underneath the blunt-burnt cushion is the neon pink kaleidoscope I redeemed before the bank foreclosed on the arcade. Fiona conned two tickets from a lonely teen in exchange for a dry peck on the cheek because the chip-toothed jackass behind the counter wouldn't let me slide. She's a reformed, born-again, bible thumper now. She's mad because I won't let her thump me. I preferred the way we used to thump before she straddled the good book.

I take a bite of my PB&J, letting its artificial grape blob slink down my chin, and affix the kaleidoscope over my right eye. The optic nerves in lefty are still recovering from the Fiona incident. The bendable rings from the quarter capsule machine are more durable when resting on a knuckle.

A green hexagon appears in the center. It splits into six pairs of crisscross lines like double helixes. X marks the spot. I search for gold.

Yellow speckles trickle to the center like rain, converging into a flower. It explodes, each petal rockets in six different directions, six shooting stars screaming across the sky. I make six wishes.

A red blob morphs into a heart ripe with lust, and it's gone. Like Fiona's lips. I twist the tube back the other way, searching for the heart, knowing that isn't how the toy works. It's not an electrocardiogram.

I toss the trinket across the room. A wad of white bread and peanut butter sticks in my throat. My frail pulse hums and dwindles to a stop. I spit out the glutinous gob and take a breath.

Goodbye, Fiona.

## low tide

by Christianna Soumakis

the creek is empty, drained of tide,  
and now the gods are exposed.  
the size of shoeboxes, or kittens, they sit  
at the feet of timber pylons in a soft  
oozing moonscape of round mud runes.

the absence of water gapes, a shared nakedness, a lost tooth.  
the gods lift platoons of arms, a trunk or two,  
keep their gazes level in the face of world-weary gulls  
and the bafflehead averting their oblong eyes.  
the pantheon's dignity is plastic and nonbiodegradable

and they are none the worse for wear, blinking  
out of the semi-depths, the filmy shivers of algae  
beneath them now, the guppies, like flies, no longer a nuisance.  
it's not so bad, is it? the reeds will only praise the sky, but  
the droplets on their crowns are just like diamonds.

# Even the Rain

by Christine Potter

Even the rain was beautiful then, so  
it did not matter if I was sad. Even the  
mottled zinc of the Hudson from my  
train window in a storm that sloshed

water almost to the tracks. Even the  
sunburn needling the back of my neck  
under my halter top — a kiss, a giggle.  
I'd had too much sun, was near fever

with sun. That didn't matter either. My  
commuter pass, my espadrilles soggy  
and doggy-smelling, too long in Central  
Park with college friends whose names

I've washed away since. The day had gone  
dim. Towering cumulus, someone said.  
I'd left someone. Someone had left me.  
Maybe this was the night I'd call the DJ

I'd been listening to all summer. We'd  
end up married. Too much sun, thunder,  
too much rain. I was so sad. The rain was  
moonstones set in silver, pretty, doomed.



# Isle of Skye Vista

by Susan Pollet



Pastel on paper



## **SEEKING: EXISTENTIAL-DATA WRANGLER (GRADE 4)**

**by Zoë Davis**

### **SEEKING: EXISTENTIAL-DATA WRANGLER (GRADE 4)**

Do you feel an inexplicable pull toward the impossible? Do you experience a tangible hint of dread every time you sit down for your morning coffee? Do you sometimes ... not? If so, we want you to join our rapidly expanding team in an undisclosed, non-Euclidean location.

#### **The Role:**

An Existential-Data Wrangler does not simply manage data. They wrestle with it. If you were to be lucky enough to obtain this position, through merit or the ability to complete a 4D Rubik's Cube in under seven seconds flat, you would be responsible for tracking, sorting, and interpreting data streams that may, or may not, originate in this bitter reality. Our primary client is the concept of Thursday, and we would need you to determine its fundamental frequency and whether statistics prove it has a marketable colour palette.

#### **Key Responsibilities:**

- Auditing the Inventory of Nothing and ensuring compliance with all key accreditation bodies that may or not be God or God-like entities.
- Catalogue all thoughts currently being thought by people named Gary between the hours of 3 a.m. and 3:04 a.m. This will then switch to Sue.
- Develop predictive models to forecast the exact moment all office printers will gain sentience and start weeping in the key of C minor.

- Interface with The Clandestine Archive (without making direct eye contact with The Archive). PPE will be provided at cost.
- Ensure the corporate coffee machine, created by Schrödinger's disembodied thoughts, maintains a perfect state of simultaneous emptiness and fullness.

### **Qualifications (Required):**

- A degree (of familiarity) in relation to the giant African land snail (minimum 2:1 hons, or equivalent accrued in mollusc time).
- Proficiency in at least one dead language that you must use exclusively to communicate with all colleagues and 49 percent of suppliers.
- A palpable sense of impending doom, coupled with irrepressible cheerfulness.
- Must be able to successfully distinguish a lie from a truth that is merely tired.
- Hold a Nietzsche™ approval rating of four or above. But we won't check.

### **Compensation & Benefits:**

- Competitive salary paid in a mixture of local currency, couch coins, and well-wishes (does not include thoughts and prayers; all business gifts/hospitality must be declared then burnt).
- Unlimited vacation days. You may take them, but you may not leave the state of reality as confirmed during your first week compulsory medical. Please bring a sample (of when you were last afraid of your own disfunction and inability to read social cues).

- Free supply of lukewarm water and Hobnobs shaped vaguely like your mother's tears.
- While lone working is encouraged, a permanent hot desk will be provided, positioned exactly where the office floor used to be.

**To Apply:** Please submit your most recent CV and a short essay (no more than three words) detailing your least favourite texture. If required, we will contact two of your character references to supply a small, unidentifiable object of absolutely no sentimental value or significance to yourself. You can expect to hear back from us sometime last week, so if you are reading this, we are sorry to inform you, you have not been successful. We do hope you find the courage to place yourself elsewhere. Do keep existing.

# Oxbow

by Brooke Hoppstock-Mattson

Some rivers die a death of convenience,  
leaving behind a body,

or a tomb shaped like a hook, the unfurling  
cast of a reel as it merges with sky. You and I

were not meant to make it past summer.  
Cradling dunes lined with marram held us

like mothers. If you've ever known thirst,  
you know the unmistakable smell of water close by.

Trapped, held by the land,  
some vernal poem forgotten by the channel.

## **retirement guide for the largemouth bass**

**by Ben Starr**

White River dons a thin coat  
of ice, water traveling beneath like a snake  
shedding its bubbled skin. Do you think fish,

with their overconfident scale-mail and rolling marble  
eyes, know that at the end of their slippery road  
there's just more water? Oceans of the stuff really.

Or do they think once they've flowed through  
their final rivulet, each tributary spread out like  
one of many lashing tentacles, there is an end to all this

liquid? A place where they can stand on their own  
two fins without fear of slashing bear paw or  
deceitful fly lure, and spend their remaining days

whittling roe figurines out of soft pine and  
saying remember when about their old swimmin'  
hole, big as some spiraling galaxy.

# O Time Thy Pyramids

by Phil W. Bayles

For one brief, shining moment, as I pulled my fingers away from my typewriter, I thought I had a whole soliloquy. Then I read the first two lines.

*To be or not to be, that is the question;  
Weather 'tis nobler in the mines to suffer*

“Shit.”

Once I spotted the first typo, others came thick and fast. By the time Hamlet reached the undiscovered *cuntry* (another unfortunate typo), the page had begun dissolving into a random sea of letters, numbers, and punctuation marks.

“What are you working on?” came a voice from above me. I turned to see Terry peering over the top of our shared cubicle wall and munching on a peanut bar. Before I could answer, the orangutan reached out a long arm and leafed through my outbox. After a moment he stopped and stared intently at one sheet.

“What’s this?”

I plucked it from his fingers and scanned it. Like most of what we typed, it was complete chaos. Four words in the middle of the page formed a sentence:

*O Time thy pyramids.*

“Just a fluke,” I muttered. “I got distracted, thinking about *Anthony and Cleopatra*.”

Terry mouthed the words a few more times, rolling them around in his mouth. “I like it,” he said. “Lovely turn of phrase.”

“But it’s wrong!” I said, unable to keep the frustration out of my voice. “I’m meant to be writing *Hamlet*, not this nonsense!”

I slammed the page back into my outbox and reached for a fresh sheet.

“Maybe you should take a break,” Terry said. “You must be tired.”

I shook my head. “I’m not going to get the work done by sitting around complaining how hard it is.”

Terry took a languid slurp of his coffee.

“*Joy’s soul lies in the doing*, my friend,” he said. “I always find that words come more easily when I stop trying to reach for them and let them come to me.”

“If I wait around for the words, I’ll be waiting forever,” I said. “Just got to keep putting one word in front of the other.”

Terry chuckled. “Bit hard to do that with the equipment we’ve got.”

“*Excusing of a fault doth make the fault th’ worse by the excuse*,” I said.

Terry had a point, of course. The typewriters we worked on were *far* from normal. If I tried to type the word HAMLET, there was almost no way of knowing what combination of characters would appear on the

page. Maybe the keys were entangled at the quantum level. Maybe the paper was just dodgy. Either way, it made writing our own names nearly impossible, never mind the works of Shakespeare.

“What about you?” I asked. “Blocked as well?”

“*Au contraire, my friend.*” Terry grabbed a page from his desk and presented it with a flourish. “I may not have any sonnets, but I *do* have a *very* suggestive limerick about a young woman from Phuket ...”

“We’re supposed to be finding the Word of the Bard, Terry, not writing dirty poems!”

Terry raised an eyebrow at me. “Why?”

“What do you mean, *why*?”

Terry swept his arm around the Writing Room. “Why are we all here?” he asked grandly. On all sides of us, stretching off into infinity, were clusters of cubicles at which apes of every size and shape — orangutans like Terry and chimps like me, Bonobos and gibbons and even gorillas — were bashing at typewriters. The air was filled with the sounds of rushing paper and clacking keys. “Why do we spend all day, every day, trying to write the works of Shakespeare with machines that barely work?”

I gawped at Terry. “Shakespeare is the greatest writer ever to have lived,” I told him. It was the first lesson we were ever taught, from the day we were old enough to sit at a desk unaided. I still remembered the first words I ever learned to read: *Two households, both alike in dignity.* My eye was drawn to a page that was pinned to my cubicle wall: a drawing of the Bard I’d painstakingly copied from the frontispiece of the Great Folio. Whenever I wavered in my work, those frowning eyes staring out at me from under that great shiny forehead reminded me why I was there. *What a piece of work is a man*, he wrote. And with hard work, we, too, could be the paragon of animals.



“Recreating his Great Folio is how we earn — ”

” — our place with the humans,” Terry finished, rolling his eyes.

I nodded. “Exactly. That’s *always* been our goal.”

Terry looked me in the eye, his face turning serious. “But *why*?”

I opened my mouth to answer, then stopped. They’d never bothered to give us an answer to that question before. I’d never needed one before today.

The evening gong reverberated around the open space. All around me, other apes were standing and stretching after a long day’s typing.

I used my foot to pull a canister from my desk drawer and unscrew the lid. I stuffed the stack of typed sheets inside and gingerly fed it into the pneumatic tube that hung down next to my desk. Air tugged at the fur on my arm as the canister went rocketing skywards.

“Where do they all go, do you think?”

I looked up to see Terry staring into the cavernous ceiling of the Writing Room. Above us was a sea of pipes, filled with hissing and clattering, which vanished into the ceiling above our heads.

“Bard knows,” I muttered. “Come on, it’s quitting time.”

I joined the crowd of apes heading for the nearest exit. When I reached the door, I realised Terry wasn’t next to me. He was still standing silently by his desk, staring up at the tangle of tubes disappearing into the darkness.

#

I woke to the feeling of someone roughly shaking my shoulder. My eyes snapped open. Terry was standing above me.

“What time is it?” I asked blearily.

“I’ve got something to show you,” he said.

Without waiting for me to follow him, he turned on his palms and sped out of the dormitory. I clambered out of my hammock and swung after him. He was waiting for me in the Writing Room, leaning casually on his desk. The lights were turned low at this time of night, and unfamiliar shadows spread over every surface.

“Well?” I asked. “What did you want to show me?”

“This.”

Terry clambered onto his desk and leapt for the pneumatic tube that hung off the side. “I got tired of wondering where these went,” he said.

He started to climb, the tube swaying slightly under his weight. When he was about 20 feet up, he shouted down: “You coming?”

I looked around nervously. Terry was still climbing.

*“Returning would be as tedious as go o’er.”* I muttered.

I clambered onto my desk and jumped for the tube. It was cold against my hands, and though it juddered for a moment with the force of my impact, it held firm. Terry’s ginger arse swayed high above me. I set off after it.

We quickly climbed further than the office lights could shine. Terry ignored my repeated attempts to ask where we were going; eventually I gave up. For a while the only sounds were my breathing, and the slap of

our paws against the tube.

After what could have been an eternity or three quarters of an hour, Terry's voice drifted down.

"Nearly there," he panted. He sounded as tired as I felt.

I looked up, and was surprised to find that I could see him. He was being lit from above by a soft, orange glow. The pipes eventually reached a hexagonal balcony and disappeared. Terry climbed over the latticework and extended a hand. My arm ached as he hauled me onto solid ground. I looked around. Unlike the endless concrete and office furniture of the Writing Floor, this room looked almost cosy: the stone walls and wooden floor lit by softly flickering torches.

Terry coughed behind me. I turned and saw him standing in front of a pair of large wooden doors, covered in beautiful, intricate carvings. It took me a moment to realise that they were designed to look like pages of a book.

I looked up at Terry. "What now?"

He reached up a hand and rapped gently on the hard wood. For a long moment, nothing happened. Then we heard footsteps approaching. The door creaked open. A tall figure in a hooded robe stepped forward into the light. I stepped back as the figure raised its small, hairless hands and removed its hood. I found myself staring at a thin brown face with bright eyes, framed by hair that stood at attention like black wires.

The human looked down at us and smiled.

"You're back!" she said brightly to Terry, before turning to me. "And you brought a friend!"

I looked nervously at Terry, who was smiling up at the human, and coughed nervously.

“Erm ... hello,” I said. “Sorry, but ... who are you, exactly?”

The human laughed. “My, he’s chatty!”

I looked to Terry, who shook his head. “She can’t understand us,” he said.

“I tried talking to her but she just laughed and said *ook* a lot.”

“*Ook?*”

Terry shrugged. “Must be what we sound like to them.”

“*Them?*”

Terry smiled broadly at me, then looked up expectantly at the human.

“He wants the tour as well, does he?” she smiled, opening the door further. “Come on!” And with that, she turned and walked up the staircase behind her, the hem of her robe swishing against the stone. Terry went after her, leaving me to follow dumbly behind in their wake. A few twists later, we emerged into another hexagonal room.

Four of the walls were taken up by bookshelves, each shelf packed to bursting with slim books identically bound in smart black leather. The last wall contained an archway, beyond which I could see another room with more bookshelves. Beyond that hole were more identical rooms, stretching on and on into the distance. There was a hole in the ceiling encircled by a balcony, beyond which even more rooms towered above our heads.

“Welcome to the Library,” said the human.

“How far does it go?” I whispered to Terry.

“No idea,” he whispered back. “I saw dozens of rooms. Maybe hundreds. It might go on forever ...”

“The Library provides us with new works every day,” said the human. She pulled a book off the shelf at random and opened it. “We read the pages, bind them, and place them on these shelves so that new generations might one day uncover their meaning.”

She held the book out to me. I gently took it from her and opened it. Every page was covered in a jumble of random letters, numbers, and spaces — all typed in a font that I recognised.

“It’s our work,” I said.

Terry nodded.

But *why*? Why go to the trouble to turn all of this nonsense into a book? It was bad enough seeing pages like this come out of my typewriter every day, but seeing them *here*? Dressed up for all the world to see as if they could be compared with Shakespeare?

“One more stop,” said Terry. Then he turned and clambered up a shelf, nimbly catching the underside of the balcony above before leaping up through the ceiling. I made my way up and through the hole, following Terry’s form as he swung through room after room. On the way we met dozens of other humans, all wearing the same simple robes. Some pointed and laughed as we passed by; others barely looked up, so engrossed they were in the various books they were reading.

Finally, we arrived at a room that seemed identical to the dozens we’d

passed through. As I caught my breath, Terry reached out and plucked a single volume from the shelves, found a particular page, and handed me the book.

“Look,” he said.

I took the book from him, and stared at the typed words on the page. Nestled there in the middle of the chaos were four words, arranged in an incoherent sentence:

*O Time thy pyramids.*

Surrounding those four words were a kaleidoscope of new sentences, written in a dozen different pens by a dozen different hands:

***Whose time, I wonder? The pyramids?***

*WERE PYRAMIDS USED FOR TELLING TIME?*

***Pyramids are used for holding dead people (see X: 857, Y:10106, Z:42, shelf 3.8, book 7).***

*BUT ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA WEREN'T KINGS ...*

***Well, Cleopatra was a queen, wasn't she?***

*FOR THE LAST TIME, THIS ISN'T ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA!*

The sound of heavy breathing behind me drew my attention from the page. The first human was standing against the archway, holding her side.

“We got that one just today,” said the human, panting slightly. “They’ve spent *hours* arguing over what it means.” She smiled down at the book in

my hands. “The only thing we can all agree on is that it’s beautiful.”

I looked down at the four words on the page.

“They don’t mean anything ...” I said. “They’re just ... words.”

“You’re not the only one who decides what the words mean,” Terry said.

“Even if you wrote them.”

“But I didn’t write them!” I protested. Terry turned and looked at me in mock puzzlement.

“Really? I thought it was your typewriter that it came from?”

“Well, yes, but —”

“Your fingers. Your typewriter. Your words.”

I looked down at my hands. “But I wasn’t even trying to ... I was trying to write *Hamlet* and — ”

“But why?” cried Terry, making me jump. “Why do we have to spend our lives trying to recreate the words of some old sod who’s been dead for centuries? Why is *his* work the benchmark, when *this* — ” he jabbed a finger at the words on my page, “ — is proof enough that we are capable of greatness!” He spread his arms and gestured at the universe of shelves around us. “Look at this place! It goes on for miles, just like our Writing Floor — maybe *forever*! Somewhere on these shelves, every one of the Bard’s works has probably been written already. Maybe twice.”

“Then what’s the point?” I cried. “Why are we even here?”

Disgusted, I hurled the book at the wall. The human gasped, but Terry

reached out a long arm and caught it easily. He flicked through the book slowly, checking the pages for damage, then handed it to the human. She clutched it tightly – almost reverently – to her chest. Then Terry turned to me, his expression grave. For a moment I thought he was going to thump me. Instead, he put his knuckle on my chin and dragged it up until I was looking him in the face again.

“So that we can write something *new*.”

I scoffed. “You mean I should just spend every day typing random nonsense in the hope that a tiny fraction of it turns out to be something profound?”

Terry gave me an inscrutable smile.

“Isn’t that what *all* writers do?”

For the second time that day I found myself lost for words.

“C’mon,” he said gently. “It’ll be morning soon.”

Then Terry sauntered off without a backwards glance. I gave the Librarian what I hoped was an apologetic look and set off after him.

#

I awoke with a start in my hammock as the morning klaxon sounded. I was exhausted after all of last night’s climbing, and my dreams had been filled with hexagons and random lines of text. As I rushed into the Writing Room, I heard a voice call my name.

Terry was sitting at his desk, coffee and peanut bar in hand, looking perfectly refreshed.

“Morning!” he called brightly as I approached. “Peanut bar?”



I shook my head. “Where do you get those, anyway? It’s like you have your own private stash or something.”

Terry winked and gave the same response he always gave: “Well, it’s like they say: ‘If you pay in infinite peanuts, you get infinite monkeys!’”

He turned back to his desk, still chuckling. I waited for him to say something about last night, but he just carried on getting ready for the day. As I shifted closer to my typewriter, a crumpled wad of paper landed in front of me. I unfurled it. One edge of the sheet was jagged and ripped. The typed words in the middle were surrounded by a sea of gibberish that was obscured by a riot of handwritten annotations:

*O Time thy pyramids.*

I looked up. Terry was smiling at me over the cubicle wall.

“Thought you might like a souvenir.”

“Won’t they miss it?”

Terry shrugged. “They’ve got millions of words up there. These ones are yours.”

I felt my eyes prickly with tears. I looked up to say thank you to Terry, but he just held up a hand.

“I look forward to seeing what you come up with today,” he said as he sat back down.

I fished around in my desk drawer for a pin and stuck the page onto the wall of my cubicle, next to my drawing of the Bard, whose eyes seemed somehow kinder today.

I fed a clean sheet into my machine, shifted in my chair and cracked all twenty of my knuckles. My fingers hovered over the keys.

“Me too.”

**THE END**

# Rock Nest

by Lauren McGovern



Collage

# My MasterClass on How to Take a MasterClass

by Jesse Kubanet

Step 1: On January first, download and pay full price for MasterClass. This is a year of learning new things. Soon you'll be cooking, sewing, and persuading — after you learn the ropes from a former FBI Negotiator. Wow! You are going to learn so much!

Step 2: In Mid-May, open the MasterClass app for the first time since January second. Select “Forgot Password” and reset your login information via email.

Step 3: On June first, take your first class.

Step 4: It is very important to take two-three classes in a row. Show your pre-recorded professor that you mean business.

Step 5: Go out and buy a notebook. The more expensive, the better. Ideally, buy two notebooks and get the third free. That's a great deal. You are going to be learning so much and jotting so many things down, only one \$29.99 notebook simply isn't going to cut it.

Step 6: Leave your new notebooks in the car for a good four-six weeks. Tell any passenger to, “Go ahead and move all that stuff to the back. Sorry it's such a mess in here.”

Step 7: Let MasterClass recharge you for the next year's billing cycle. Let this credit card notification serve as a reminder that it is time to take this seriously.

Step 8: Head out and buy a few notebooks.

Step 9: Start with a class from NBA champion Stephen Curry on how to shoot three-pointers.

Step 10: Bookmark a class on financial literacy. You'll get to that eventually.



# Green World

by Lucy Nelson

If you knock on my chest,  
you'll hear the hollow,  
where I lay to rest on garden dreams.

You'll hear grassy knolls like timpanies  
& shimmering ponds like triangles.

You'll hear that I am daily discovering  
treasures beneath my branches —  
that dog and wolf surprise me still,  
as do buttercup and swallow.

On a sunshine glimmer day,  
she flew in patterned descent  
to the meadow of my hollow,  
on wings of wind chime chorus.

Her eyes are green flecked-gold,  
like a star got stuck in the forest

& it's winking at me  
'cause it likes to hide  
under thrumming  
heartshade groves,  
where it burrows in shadow  
& flickers like fireflies.

The day her green-forest eye turned from mine —  
the day her finger-torch left my cheek —  
the day her burnished-star banished —

Pompeii grew from the ground  
& erupted in my hollow.  
It cast my knolls in igneous rock while  
ash fell like confetti at my funeral.

# **Talisman**

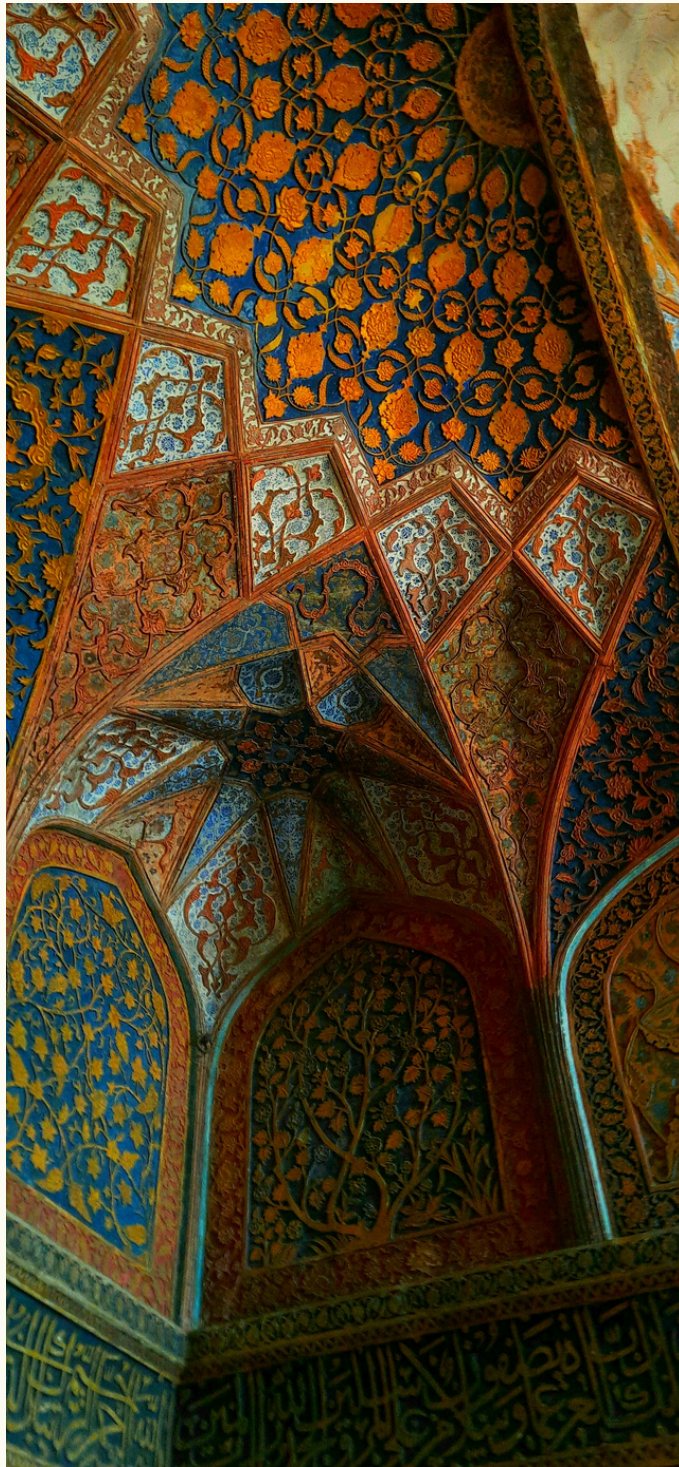
**by Colette Maxfield**

When we stepped off the boat  
To watch the glass blower  
Your single-bead bracelet  
Broke.

That was the day the giant blue crab  
Danced for us in the canal way.  
Now I see him adorned with that  
Perfect pink pearl  
Cresting  
Like a balloon  
Through the air,  
Jetting off across the Atlantic,  
Belonging anywhere.

# Cerulean Reverie

by Moumita Bhattacharjee



Digital photography



# The Flamingo

by Ben Shahon

As someone who's always wanted to be a writer, the rise of ChatGPT and software like it that mimics the very real work that I've been pouring my life into is downright depressing, and to begin, I want to address the matter of voice, that thing which ties all writing you're compelled to keep reading together, whether it's something you recognize or not, because even those prose stylists who opt for an invisible voice have made a conscious effort to do so, to obscure themselves as an author to maximize your enjoyment of a particular aspect of their work like character or plot, a choice that cannot be made by a machine, because as much as the charlatans who wish to peddle their meager wares would want you to believe it to be capable of sentience and decision-making, the way these machines work is not through a process of pure expression or invention, but instead as a jukebox with poor selection by which the work of actual brilliant thinkers is devalued into a widget and mass-produced for you, and by intaking such writing you're essentially eating gas-station food for thought, when the world's best chefs are waiting to prepare meals for you, the writing of the machine so boring and rote and purely functional as to strip any spark of joy or wonder or interest from it, and a part of me wonders whether none of you enjoy humor or joy or whimsy, especially as I sit by a creek in rural Pennsylvania, surrounded by writers I've admired as friends, peers, and aspirational figures, where the whole experience has the vibe of the dying days of summer, worrying about the way the tides have turned against us in many ways, because I cannot say that I've ever seen writing from one of these mere machines that made me laugh, or smile, or given me pause to reconsider the ways in which I think about the world, and that's by design, because you and I are building a relationship on the page as you read this, dear reader, we're performing magic, like Stephen King talked about in *On Writing*, and you can't really ever build that kind

of relationship with a machine, because it serves and serves alone, rather than demanding anything of you, in the way I wish to demand your attention here, dear reader,

but maybe that's not enough for you, and you do not care about us writers so directly as individuals, which is fair to an extent, we are a whiny bunch, even if I would argue that we've more than earned that write to complain about the state of the world, a world which might not physically last much longer at the rate of environmental degradation that software like GPT accelerate every day, and you like living on the planet, I'd hazard a guess, dear reader, you like having summers or winters that are navigable outside of your home, and consistent food supplies, and fresh waters, and the possibility of existing in an eco-sphere that supports life as we know it, not that everyone does, but that the algorithms certainly know nothing of, can know nothing of, because it isn't in their programming to be able to feel or understand the things you feel or understand when I gesture at them, and I know you're waiting for what this has to do with flamingos, and I promise there is an answer, but I'm holding the suspense to keep you reading, but besides all that, maybe you're the time-is-money type, and you're starting to protest that the ease and the time and cheap monetary value of the work historically has to mean that it should never be worthwhile, whereas someone like me, who builds their life around the arts, feels quite the opposite, that there is almost no other reason to live other than to appreciate that which is beautiful, whether that be the relationships we build with real people or the art we build for them, but I would remind you as well of the recent cryptocurrency bubble, and the day-trading bubble before that, and the subprime-mortgage crisis before that, and the dot-com bubble before that, many of which were meant to tie some grand technology to the idea that said technology is going to make everyone a lot of money, but just as often ended in catastrophic ruin for many involved, and that by devaluing the labor of those in an intellectual class, you only serve to make the average person weak and stupid, only we don't have to be if we refuse to play the game, but I have one more big point that should

hopefully convince you,

and furthermore, let's assume for a moment, dear reader, that you are not one of the moneymen trying to bring about the technological apocalypse, but a regular person, working an ordinary job, just using that little bit of tech to make your day less stressful, I ask if you really believe, deep in your heart, that the world would be better off if freaks like Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg were even more obscenely wealthy than they already are, that the world would be better under the benevolent rule of neo-industrial monarchs who would gladly suck the marrow from your very bones if they thought it would bring them one more pretty penny, because I, for one, would like those anti-social nuts as far away from me as possible, thank you very much, even as many of us are stuck using their platforms, even as they've grown a real chance for fascism to become the dominant ideology of my country, eighty years after we fought the largest war in history to push it back but now our reliance on the machine has led to us not reading, not thinking critically, not funding our schools beyond mere mathematics and sciences, such that we have become a nation of the functionally illiterate, willing to go along with whatever our reality-TV leader wishes us to do, but that is not the world I wish to live in, because, believe me, I understand how thinking is hard, and have often wished I didn't have to think quite so hard, especially in my days as a student, or in the office writing the same email a thousand times over with little variation, but this is not an essay meant to depress, but instead a sentence to serve as a kind of micro-manifesto against the mildly apocalyptic threat that faces all of us, one that I hope, dear reader, might somewhat convince you to rethink your desire to rely on LLM's as tools to offload your thinking from the muscle of your brain, no, I do not wish to have my head in the sand, like a programmer friend of mine recently accused of me, but instead wish to keep myself balanced on one foot as you see here, screaming out for us all to wake up, and see what it is we are becoming, because I'm not so sure I can keep myself balanced in this way much longer.

# **Feral Girl Winter**

**by Lucie Pereira**

I'm going feral these days, by which I mean I'm growing  
out my body hair, thicketing the expanse of my skin  
with swathes of dark bramble. I'm going feral,  
which is to say I'm devouring three servings of buttered pasta  
straight from the pot, leaving the dishes to languish in the sink  
like road-weary travelers soaking in a seedy motel jacuzzi.  
I'm letting my scalp get slick with grease and then I'm taking  
long showers so luxuriously scalding I can't tell if I'm blushing or burning,  
so suffocating with steam I might choke. I'm going feral, or in other words:  
watch your fucking tone with me. I'm going feral, so no,  
I will not be answering your email. I'm disconnecting my phone  
and burying it in the backyard. I'm making a bonfire of my W9s.  
I'm absconding into the woods and I'm howling at the moon and lately  
I swear I can hear her wolf-whistle back.

# Ghazal for Lost Girls

by Mary Simmons

In the last gasp of twilight, I can remember a time before I was a girl,  
or something like a girl, because a girl can be a swan and a swan a girl

and the only real difference is the feathers you cough up in your sleep,  
the gray that braids into hair and anoints you girl-

child, firstborn, beloved above all beloveds, until you traipse off  
the path, into a forest more choked than dark, no place for a girl

who has heard the whispers; of course, she's heard them all, and she knows  
fear as a thin, red thread needled through a maze of girl

after girl in a cradle of bark and wet grass and earthflesh good enough  
to take in her jaw, and become something a little more teeth than girl,

a little more bone than ribbon, a little more every swallow dies  
midair than anything her mother would ever call a girl,

and yes, this is the difference between restless and hopeless, a little crack  
in the wall to peer through, and there: something never-really girl.

## Tuesday Night Concert

by George Marshall

I spent today table hopping. Orders filled my pad, but I tried to not look when putting them in the computer. *Yes, sir. Thank you, miss.* Ran out food trays and carried back bare plates. *Need a refill?* Brought out three cups in one hand, two in the other. Trays slowed the pace. After my lunch shift, I went home, showered and changed. I looked around my apartment for a moment.

Unease sat in the stillness.

I did my dishes, took out the trash, and started learning a new song on bass while practicing an old one. The curly-haired woman I'm dating, affectionately nicknamed Hushpuppy because she's a cornball, invited me to a punk concert. I changed into a rattier pair of shoes and left.

The first band was stuck in Minnesota with car issues. Their van broke down due to a hatred of fans. Or some mechanical issue, but how could it not be about us?

The second band played one long song of noise rock with vocals too soft to be heard over the feedback. They all wore wide, torn jeans in various hues of black. Every member but the drummer had hair long enough to get caught in their armpits while they jumped around. They stopped playing and packed up after one song.

Everyone in the crowd looked at each other, shrugged and went to the parking lot with disappointed murmurs. The crowd waited outside between acts because no one wanted to stand in a packed room without air conditioning in the dead of summer.

Hushpuppy's friends left right after the second show. They had lost any rowdy energy brought with them. Red wine and the smooth jazz vibes of Mr. Toad's Pub lured them away.

Now we're alone. She sits on a curb lining the outside of the building. We pass a cigarette back and forth and talk about the disappointment that was the second act. Suddenly, the crowd floods back inside through the steel door taped with a red "x" for the final act.

I help her up and she skips to the door. I release her hand to let her frolic. She stops and looks at me as if I took her plate before she finished eating. In a few months we won't be speaking, but it's best not to think about that now.

Inside, the sweat on my back grips my white t-shirt. We stand in the crowd's front row, in the middle of a plywood-paneled room.

The industrial fan in the back corner can't reach us through the mass of black-shirt bodies. I am an ice sculpture dripping from my nose into a puddle on the cement floor. The air wiggles between the crowd and the band who stands on a persian rug.

The room fills with amp feedback. A woman in a faded green dress screams into the mic. Her words are lost in the fuzz. She jumps, twirls and pinballs into the musicians beside her. The drummer's hair whips around like an angry janitor's mop. He beats the drums like a boy bashes the sternum of his abuser. The guitarist swings his leg. He loses balance, extends to look like a capital "T." The ground waits for his arrival. He regains stability and keeps kicking like Chun-Li. The bass player stole his head shape and fuzz length from a tennis ball. One foot on the ground and his other on a speaker. He looks like George Washington ready to mosh across the Delaware.



The gap between the band and me fills with guys two stepping with destructive intent at the end of their limbs. I was unaware of the punk show choreography. I love a sardine mosh pit, where the crowd throws each other around like a circle of elementary school bullies until somebody falls or passes out. This mosh pit is a violent game of sharks and minnows. Those not engaging in the dance routine form a semicircle in the middle of the room, stretching from speaker to speaker. I stand at the front of the crowd and Hushpuppy is to my right.

Bodies bound wall to wall. Whatever fuels them is left splattered on the plywood. A man in a yellow t-shirt gets up to speed and jumps onto one hand, flinging himself upside down into the right wall. He scrambles to his feet. He bolts to the other side. He plants his hand and jumps back-first into a woman on the wall. Her seltzer erupts. Alcohol drips from her giggling face. A short man runs through the crowd in proper football form. My stomach catches his shoulder. I push down on his scapula. He loses balance and meets the floor cheek to concrete. He rejoins the dance, grin dripping with blood.

A behemoth of a man spins himself through the semicircle of headbangers like a car wash rocker. He starts left and rotates right. Hushpuppy tucks behind me. I push the spiraling behemoth along his path. Sweat from his hair flung off like a dog fresh in from the rain. He smashes into the girl whose seltzer splashed in her face and turns back. The guy to my right and I shove the behemoth in unison. He gets off course, but only for a moment.

The music ends. We leave to join her friends at Mr. Toad's for wine and Go-Fish.

## **projection**

**by Julietta Bekker**

my image of us old:  
lady gardens holding hands  
threading memories through petals  
puffs of dandelion seed  
slipping into wind.

we tell how yellow the sun once was  
that grew the radiant weeds.

# Speciosa

by Elliott Schwebach

I've known love  
three days fasted  
like autumn charcoaling  
cold in Baltimore

brownstones, young  
like fawn like ash  
but how should I define  
disaster? I've known

love in hospitals  
fighting, over posole  
over Wyoming  
and Spain, like mesas, como  
cuerpos en cueros; I've known

care in half  
empty lots, care  
in covidian frames  
care like carbonate

I've known care  
often in its  
wanting, she held her hair  
between my fingers

but you are something  
else, familiar, a rolling  
stop, a sunkissed neck  
you are, like me, hand-to-mouth  
plural, partial agonist

like wide, green  
lakes, like starlings  
or sunshowers inside  
cathedrals and malls

and I'm not  
one to refuse  
malachite wings, lost homes  
for those who lost homes

# Winter bee

by Gillian R. Lionberger

Winter bee, your flomoutious back is speckled  
with paper lace snow and stale pollen as you challenge  
the beauty of defying landscapes you  
Winter bee, long to define “gratification”  
and “futile” Hills mourn  
their lush flicks of grass throunce you with their  
despair Winter Bee, your asceticism leads you  
through preserved rotwood in search  
of what the deadoak bark along riverbeds  
Consotorts  
that revered fixation sears your spindlelegs  
more than the frostbite you run a marathon with  
Winter bee, I admire how your name  
defies expectation you go against decreed complexions  
while your hive is cocooned  
in expected warmth  
Winter bee, please be real  
Winter bee, I love you  
Winter bee, guide me to that rot-wood log and  
teach me the spuruzal of quonarity  
I don’t know if you are real, Winter bee,  
or some random word concoction I slam together  
in the name of coping

# Passages

by Melinda Giordano



Pencil on paper

# Gone from Google Earth

by Michael Roberts

Grandma Myrtle's house in southwest Oklahoma is gone from Google Earth.

The house was there when I showed my mother street-level views on the computer just before mom died at 93. The white clapboard house with a covered porch was where my grandma raised five children after her husband died when the youngest was a baby. Mom's memories of the house still resonated with her Dustbowl experiences of sleeping with wet handkerchiefs over her mouth and reading books in the outhouse where nobody would bother her.

The house was where, during summer visits, my brother and I slept in the same beds from my mother's childhood, the mattresses bowed when rain had blown through the window and curled after they dried. The house was where Christmas was celebrated in the living room with energetic unwrapping of presents and loud thank-yous called across the living room while my grandmother rocked in her creaking chair warmed by the gas heater. Cousins played house under the heavy oak table in the dining room. They told ghost stories while the adults talked quietly in the living room about who had what ailments.

The house was where the older cousins gathered in the north bedroom, in which my mother and her siblings were born. There, we escaped from our parents and read poems aloud out of books once owned by a grandfather we never knew. Aunts played the rarely tuned piano, whose discord a raucous choir of cousins could overcome. The house was there for over a century. I haven't been back to that small town in decades, but I visited it often on Google Earth, and seeing that the house was there gave me a foundation.

Today, it's gone from Google Earth. I can see where it had been, now a parking lot for the Baptist Church next door. Gone from Google Earth means its absence is permanent. The house had been alive; it was where hearts came together, where memories were created, now warmed by age, but even a house, memories, and people are not impervious to the vagaries of time.

# Dear Obituary

by Nancy Smiler-Levinson

On my latest octogenarian birthday,  
stymied at penning a new poem,  
it occurred to me that I might  
write my own obituary

My cousin Mort had just written his obit,  
published (sans photo)  
in the Minneapolis Star and Tribune,  
although he was unable to read the final print

Written, of course in the third person,  
his lede struck me as a good prompt  
Mort ----- died on -----  
He was 92 and overweight.  
He was given plenty of advance notice  
of his imminent death, but his lifelong  
habit of procrastination meant he didn't  
write his obituary until pretty much  
the last minute, thereby sacrificing  
fact-checking, proofreading, and style.

So, how to follow my basic demise data,  
I mused, and how much background,  
how many of my lifelong stories to share,  
in short, how long ought I write

A quick graph on a winter birth during a  
Minnesota blizzard, born, of course, to  
her named parents, along with the names of  
two baby sisters who appeared out of nowhere

She would likely begin her life story  
in the downtown library, where her mother  
took her on the streetcar and where she fell in love  
with books and eventually became a writer

Then she would probably list every childhood book  
she remembered and continue listing  
title after favorite title from that time forward  
(a tad obsessively) throughout the years to follow

She would include study in the School of Journalism,  
exhilarating days on the university newspaper staff,  
and be compelled to include a true tale of her small coup  
'interviewing' Soviet Premier Khrushchev (one question!)



Of course, the obit would cover her first paid job,  
reporter for the Port Chester (NY) Daily Item and writing  
small town news then finally a real-life story:  
a raging fire on Main Street on a freezing winter night

Young and invincible, she ventured by freighter  
to Europe, finding herself in Berlin just at completion  
of the wall dividing Communist and free Berlin, where she  
snagged a short stint reporting for the UPI news service

Back in Manhattan, she edited school-aimed paperbacks  
at Bantam Books on Madison Avenue (cost 50 cents each)  
Then, one night, being at the right place and the right time,  
she met her prince who was to become the love of her life

Dear Obituary Reader, they eloped! Living, then,  
in Los Angeles, where small publishers and magazines  
frowned at hiring women on staff, she turned to teaching  
in a newly government-funded program, Head Start

She birthed two dear sons, and she adored  
reading to them beginning in infancy now  
she would probably list titles, there existing so many  
more wonderful books since her young days

While reading — the voice, the rhythm, the style  
of children's literature sang to her, stuck in her ears,  
and she went on to author some thirty books for  
young readers, focusing on history and biography  
(yes, several award winners to be noted here)

Her husband preceded her in death and, in time,  
she reinvented herself as a poet . . .

Stop! At this point I realize:  
rambling autobiography, not obituary

And I know that newspapers charge by the inch  
Cousin Mort's obit, which highlighted only  
essentials, ran only six graphs, likely keeping the cost  
under five hundred dollars.

So, I'll leave my survivors to write short about  
the beloved wife, mother, grandmother, sister, friend  
who became a writer and how she favored  
music, theater, and volunteering with children

If they include a photo, she has a nice one  
of herself at age twenty-five  
It's in a lavender envelope  
in the top right drawer of her desk

## Contributors and Artist Statements: Art & Photography

### goth

goth [they/them] is an artist, writer, and an introvert's introvert. goth works full time as a public defender, hence the pen name. this isn't legal advice. it would be really weird legal advice anyways. @g0thlawyer on bluesky and instagram.

### Lauren McGovern

Lauren McGovern lives, creates, and teaches in the Adirondacks of northern New York State. Her essays and artwork have appeared in WOW! Women on Writing, The Sunlight Press, What's Your Grief, The Razor, Gordon Square Review, MUTHA Magazine, and elsewhere.

### Melinda Giordano

Melinda Giordano is from Los Angeles, California. Her artwork has appeared in publications such as Amelia, new renaissance, The Bellowing Ark, Written River, and Third Wednesday. She values the creative worthiness of minutiae: architectural properties of the small things: subjects as vast and complex as any cityscape or countryside. Whether they be flowers, plants, shells, discarded nests, roots or more – they are all nature's wonderful detritus.

“These drawings express the loveliness and fascination I come across just by walking through my neighborhood. Whether it is a swath of color, an explosion of pattern, texture or shadow that beg pen and ink or pencil, they all grab my attention and insist that I submit to memory and drawing paper proof of nature's wit and cleverness.”

### Moumita Bhattacharjee

Moumita Bhattacharjee is an overthinking bibliophile who takes refuge in films, poetry and photography. She takes special interest in capturing life in its everyday motion and unappreciated elements of heritage. Photography for her is a quest for candid truth, because eyes may betray, but photographs capture the soul of authenticity.

“This collection, titled “The Heart of the Heritage”, celebrates the vibrant beauty of Indian architecture and culture. The heritage of India is scattered across streets, strewn across every corner, and woven into people's mundane lives. Not even an ounce of it is properly celebrated, yet it's the warmth, the uncouth essence of the mundane, often the broken, that brings an extra pinch of colour to life. The photographs aim to explore the symmetry in simplicity, the awe of the ancient.”

## Susan Pollet

Susan L. Pollet is a visual artist whose works have appeared in multiple art shows and literary publications. She studied at the New York Art Students League, has been a member since 2018, and resides in NYC. She is also a published author in multiple genres, including three children's books, which she both wrote and illustrated.

“Drawing inspiration from a combination of her interest in color, composition, dreams, and personal emotions, Susan Pollet’s work is a reflection of her search for beauty and meaning. Through the use of pastels, ink, collage or acrylics, she strives to communicate with viewers in a positive and optimistic way. Susan is a New York City-based artist whose eclectic style arises out of a desire to explore a diversity of vehicles. Drawn to haunting landscapes, warm interiors, and dream-like human forms, her works include both impressionistic and abstract themes. She has been a member of the Arts Students League of New York since 2018, and her work has appeared in many group shows and publications.”

Honk honk honk  
honk honk honk  
honk honk honk?  
Honk honk honk!

**Translation: How is a flock of geese  
like an airplane full of encyclopedias?  
They’re flying in-formation!**



## Contributors: Creative Non-Fiction

### Ben Shahon

Ben Shahon is the author of the fiction collections *Short Relief* (.406 Presss, 2025) and *A Collection for No One to Read* (Bottlecap Features, 2024). His nonfiction work has appeared in a number of journals, including *Flight: A Literary Magazine*, *The Daily Drunk*, and others. He was the founding EIC of *JAKE*, holds an MFA in Fiction, and received BA's in Philosophy and Creative Writing from Arizona State. He writes from his home in Greater LA.

### Fay L. Loomis

Fay L. Loomis leads a quiet life in the woods in Kerhonkson, New York, and is a member of the Stone Ridge Library Writers and Rat's Ass Review workshop. Her writing appears in numerous publications, including five poetry anthologies. Fay, author of three chapbooks: *Sunlit Wildness* (Origami Poems Project, 2024) and forthcoming *Living the Verb* ([Cyberwit.net](http://Cyberwit.net)) and *Fragments of Myself* (Porkbelly Press), is a Pushcart Prize nominee.

### George Marshall

George Marshall is a Philly based writer by way of Omaha, Nebraska. He's worked for publications such as *Daily Record*, *Omaha Magazine* and *PhillyVoice*. His short story "Nation of Flies" appears in *Magpie*. He won second Editor's Choice Award in 13th Floor for his poem "My Neighbor Died on Halloween And."

### Michael C. Roberts

Michael C. Roberts (he/him/his) is a retired pediatric psychologist. After publishing scientific and professional writings, he now seeks to produce creative writing and art photography for literary magazines and on journal covers. Although more successful at placing photographs, he has published essays in *Harmony*, *The Human Touch*, and *Invisible City*.

### Thais Jacomassi

Thais Jacomassi (she/her) is a New York-based author who has been published in various literary magazines across the country, including *Oxford Magazine*, *The Emerson Review*, *Concrete Literary Magazine*, *Blue Marble Review*, and *The Echo Literary Magazine*.



Honk honk honk  
honk? Honk!

**Translation: Which  
side of a goose has  
the most feathers?  
The outside!**

## Contributors: Fiction

### Eirene Gentle

Eirene Gentle writes lit, mostly little, usually from Toronto, Canada. Happy to be published in some very cool journals. Someone once told her to pound salt and she finally agreed.

### Hayley Shucker

Hayley Shucker (she/her) loves musical theater, cats, and baking. Read her work on [hayleyshucker.com](http://hayleyshucker.com), subscribe to [hayleyshucker.substack.com](http://hayleyshucker.substack.com) for craft analysis of first chapters, and find her on Instagram @superhayleykaystuff.

### Lyv Constance

Lyv Constance is a West Virginia-based writer with a bachelor's and master's degree in English. They spend most of their time spinning fairytales into something darker, stranger, and a little bit bloody, though every so often a cute queer romance sneaks its way in. Lyv writes with the invaluable help of their three cat sons: Mochi, Furb, and Bloop.

### Phil W. Bayles

Phil W. Bayles has lived in Paris and London, where he's written everything from movie reviews to mattress adverts. These days he lives in Derbyshire with his wife, his daughter and his cat. He writes very silly stories about very serious ideas, with the occasional poem to mix things up. His work has been published in 50-Word Stories and Twisted Ink, and he is currently working on his first novel.

Honk honk: honk  
honk honk honk?  
Honk: honk honk?!

Translation:

Other animals: Winter is almost  
here, what do we do?

Geese: Wanna hear migrate idea?



## Contributors: Hybrid

### Jesse Kubanet


Jesse Kubanet lives in Dallas, Texas. He is a fan of movie theater popcorn and the Buffalo Bills. His work has previously appeared on Conan and Jimmy Kimmel Live!

### Leslie Cairns

Leslie Cairns is a writer in Denver, CO. She grew up in Buffalo, NY and graduated from SUNY Fredonia. Her favorite publications have been in Ice Queen Mag, Exposition Review, among others.

### Zoe Davis

Zoë Davis is an emerging writer from Sheffield, England. She's a stubborn FND sufferer and fights what her body says she can't do by playing wheelchair rugby league. In her free time she writes poetry and prose, and especially enjoys exploring the interaction between the fantastical and the mundane, with a deeply personal edge to her work. You can find her words in publications such as: Ink Sweat & Tears, Strix, Roi Fainéant, Dust and Red Ogre Review. You can also follow her on X @MeanerHarker where she's always happy to have a virtual coffee and a chat.



Honk honk honk  
honk honk honk  
honk. Honk honk  
honk honk!

**Translation: I'm taking the goose  
farmer to the dance. I heard she  
knows how to get down!**

## Contributors: Poetry

### Ayesha Owais

Ayesha Owais is a writer from Karachi, Pakistan. A finalist for the inaugural Pakistan Youth Poet Laureate award in English, her work appears in the YPL Anthology (Jashn) with poems published/forthcoming in The mudroom mag, Lakeer Magazine, and the Whale Road Review. In Medschool she is mostly behind. Directionless, she is learning to drive.

### Ben Starr

Ben (he/him) lives in Los Angeles with his wife, a high school teacher, and three extremely powerful little girls. Ben studied poetry in college and as part of the UCLA Extension Writers' Program. His work has been published or is forthcoming in Maudlin House, Eclectica, Club Plum and other journals.

### Beverley Sylvester

Beverley Sylvester is a writer, composer, dramaturg, and musician. Her work is often rooted in the Southern Gothic genre where she interrogates the sticky, uncomfortable, and lovely relationships we have to death and dying, sexuality, spirituality, race, love, earth, politics, gender, and embodiment in the American Deep South. Her writing has received the Artistine Mann Award in Playwriting and the New South Young Playwrights Award, among other recognitions. Her poetry has been published in Yellow Arrow Journal and ONE ART. You can find her on Instagram at @bsylvester\_arts or at [bfsylvester.com](http://bfsylvester.com).

### Brooke Hoppstock-Mattson

Brooke is a graduate student of environmental geochemistry living in so-called Vancouver, Canada. Her poetry appears in Deep Overstock, Willows Wept Review, and elsewhere, with new work forthcoming in Tiger Moth Review and Scapegoat Review. She writes alongside the faithful devotion of her ginger cat and the ardent avoidance of her black cat.

### Chloe Ackerman

Chloe Ackerman lives in Madison, Wisconsin. She has previously been published in issue four of Silly Goose Press, FERAL: A Journal of Poetry and Art, and Barstow & Grand. She is very proud to be a Silly Goose.

### Chris Kads

Chris Kads (she/her) is a queer, Arizonan writer who enjoys creating coming-of-age works with feminist and LGBTQ+ themes. When she is not writing, Chris loves hosting the poetry challenge "Gut Punch Prompts" on her instagram @chris\_kads and playing board games with her loved ones. Her poem "Missing the Tide" was runner-up in the 63rd Glendon and Kathryn Swarthout Awards for Undergraduate Poetry, and she has had other works featured in Blood+Honey Literary Magazine, SHINE International Poetry Series, Pillow Talk Magazine, Canyon Voices Literary Magazine, and the anthology If You Ever: Poems Inspired by Kim Addonizio.



## **Christianna Soumakis**

Christianna Soumakis is an artist, writer, art instructor, and pilgrim. She has an MFA in Fine Art, has walked the Camino de Santiago three times (so like 1,400 miles, but who's counting?), is a Pushcart Nominee, and drinks a stupid amount of matcha.

## **Christine Potter**

Christine Potter is the poetry editor of Eclectica Magazine. Her poems have been curated by Rattle, The McNeese Review, Midwest Quarterly, Does It Have Pockets, and Autumn Sky Poetry Daily among a good handful of other magazines. Her young adult time travel novels, The Bean Books, are on Evernight Teen, and her fourth full-length poetry collection, Why I Don't Take Xanax, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books. She lives in the Hudson Valley with her patient husband Ken and Bella, her spoiled kittycat. Their house is haunted.

## **Colette Maxfield**

Colette Maxfield lives in the U.K. near the point where the Thames river meets the Kennet canal. Currently working in a University/union setting. Writing free verse poetry and has poems published via The Broken Spine, DarkWinter Literary Magazine and Silly Goose Press.

## **Elliott Schwebach**

Elliott Schwebach is a writer, educator and friend. From Baltimore to Albuquerque to Tacoma to Fort Collins to Wenzhou, he has moved around a lot these last few years. He adores good espresso, kava and 12/8 ballads, and his friends call him “crocodile.”

## **Gaven Lover**

Gaven Lover’s poems have been published in the Iowa Review, the Sonora Review, Eunoia Review, and Lyrical Iowa. She also dreams of one day holding a goose.

## **Gillian Lionberger**

Gillian Lionberger is a multi-genre writer studying at Hollins MFA program in Virginia. Her work explores the human condition through fantastical and often crittery narratives. When she isn't writing, she can be found roaming, with coffee in hand, looking for any and all creatures.

## **Jeffrey Kingman**

Jeffrey Kingman lives by the Napa River in Vallejo, California. His poetry collection, BEYOND THAT HILL I GATHER, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2021. His poetry chapbook, ON A ROAD, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2019. He is the winner of the 2018 Eyelands Book Award (Greece) for an unpublished poetry book, a finalist in the 2018 Hillary Gravendyk poetry book competition, and was long listed for the 2025 ONLY POEMS Poet of the Year Prize. He has poems published in BlazeVOX, PANK, Clackamas Literary Review, Action Spectacle, and others. Jeffrey is a copy editor at Omnidawn Publishing. He has a master’s degree in music composition.

## **Julietta Bekker**

Julietta Bekker (she/they) is a writer, educator and illustrator who lives with their family in Portland, Oregon. Their poetry incorporates elements of the natural world to explore political and social themes through the lens of a queer, antifascist parent. Their poems have been published by Pile Press, Oyster River Pages, Querencia Press, Flat Ink Magazine, The Inflectionist Review, Bitter Melon Review and The Dread Literary among others; more pieces are forthcoming from Gather and Free Verse Revolution. They are currently working on a poetry collection.

## **Kelsey Edwards**

Kelsey Edwards is a Rhode Island based licensed clinical therapist and the editor-in-chief of "Waffle Fried (a lit mag)". She is a passionate collector of partially filled notebooks and might write a book one day. Her work has appeared in "Hawai'i Pacific Review", "Prosetrics", "Frazzled Lit", and "Two Hawks Quarterly", among others.

## **Lucie Pereira**

Lucie Pereira (she/her) is a poet, educator, and author of the chapbook *From Here to the Ocean* (Finishing Line Press 2025). She is the food & beverage editor for Honey Literary and a poetry reader for Split Lip Magazine. Winner of the 2025 Ó Bhéal Five Words International Poetry Competition, Lucie recently completed an MA in Creative Writing at University College Cork. She lives in San Francisco, where she teaches second grade and co-hosts the reading and food pop-up series Kitchen Table.

## **Lucy Nelson**

Lucy Nelson (she/they) is a lifelong soul poet and a fledgling public poet who is deeply concerned with studying the rhythms of nature, extending compassion to all creatures, and fostering tenderness in community. She is a grad student at Smith College and is in training to become a therapist. She lives on the coast of Maine, and she spends her time talking to the waves and seeking little truths.

## **Madi Corell**

Madi Corell is a poet and educator from Virginia. Their work explores nature, identity, grief, and memory. They are a current MFA candidate at N.C. State University in Raleigh, North Carolina. You may find their poetry in the Screen Door Review.

## **Mary Simmons**

Mary Simmons (she/they) is a queer poet from Cleveland, Ohio. She is the author of *Mother, Daughter, Augur* (June Road Press, October 2025). She earned her MFA from Bowling Green State University, where she also served as the managing editor for *Mid-American Review*. Her work has appeared in *The Baltimore Review*, *ONE ART*, *trampset*, *Moon City Review*, *Variant Lit*, *The Shore*, and elsewhere. She lives with her cat, Suki, at the edge of the woods.

## **Nancy Smiler-Levinson**

Nancy is author of a poetic memoir, *Moments of Dawn*; a chapbook, *The Diagnosis Changes Everything*; and some thirty books for young readers. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee for an anthologized lyric essay and a runner-up in the 2025 October Poetry Project. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including Dorothy Parker's *Ashes*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Ink in Thirds*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Fleas on the Dog*, *Hamilton Stone Review*, and *Jewish Literary Journal*.

## **Shrishti Khanna**

Shrishti Khanna (she/her) is a poet and artist from India. She believes, as Audre Lorde wrote, that poetry is not a luxury but a necessity. Her work orbits childhood, trauma, grief, womanhood, and the small rituals of daily survival. Her poems appear in *MoonLit Getaway* and are forthcoming in *Suburban Witchcraft*, *Passionfruit Review*, and *1445 Literary Magazine*.

## **Sophie Sala**

Sophie Sala (she/her) writes poetry that comes in on little cat feet. She currently resides in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she studies English. She has been published in several literary magazines, including Cornell University's *Rainy Day Review* and Carnegie Mellon University's *The Oakland Review*.

## **Priya Saxena**

Priya Saxena (they/them) is an emerging poet and zine-maker based in Manhattan. They enjoy working on creative projects inspired by pop culture and their silly little lesbo life. Their poetry has previously appeared in *Londemere Lit*, *Querencia Press*, and *Impossible Archetype*.

## **Sydney Brown**

Sydney Brown (she/her) is a poet from North Carolina existing everywhere but home. She studies World Literature, and has a special interest in museums and archives. She's often scrolling through Pinterest for her next craft or dreaming of matcha. She is an editor for the NC-based zine, *First In*.

Honk at them:

IG: firstin919

Honk honk honk honk honk?  
Honk honk!

**Translation: What does an ancient  
Egyptian goose say? Ankh ankh!**



**SILLY  
GOOSE  
PRESS**