

pointed circle





THE POINTED CIRCLE 2020 XXXVI
Portland Community College
Cascade Campus

Copyright 2020 Portland Community College
PO Box 19000, Portland, OR 97280-0990

Portland Community College reserves all rights to the material
contained herein for the contributor's protection; on publication,
all rights revert to the authors.

Cover artwork by Jai Milx



Editors:

Daniel Bloomfield
Niko Boskovic
Yao Cheng
Zachary Flye
Thomasina Fizdale
Rizzo Lasagna
Jai Milx
Bobby Mullan
Mylena Panelli
Rebecca Petchenik
Jasmine Pierce
Antonia Silva
Kira Smith
S.C. Taulbee
Camilo Velasco-Overson
Aaron Warnock
Ash Wilson

The editorial staff of The Pointed Circle would like to open this issue with an acknowledgement: the Portland metropolitan area, where this issue of The Pointed Circle was produced and where its editors all reside, rests on uncaded traditional village sites of the Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Bands of Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla, and many other tribes who were the original protectorates of the land before European colonization.

INTRODUCTION

This is the issue blindsided by coronavirus.

We'd already been planning on using a "monster/transformation" aesthetic. That turned out to be prescient. Because of the gothic little non-lifeform haunting the globe right now, but also because this time has warped us, changed us, both as an editorial team and as a species. We are, all of us, transforming—into what? Only the fullness of time will tell, but perhaps the work contained within this journal may give us clues to the new worlds about to emerge from the body of the old. The word "monster" comes from the Latin word *monere*, which means "to warn, advise, admonish." Monsters get a bad rap. Mostly because they're different—they don't look like us, think like us, or live as we do. Humans are great at hating what they don't understand, scapegoating and vilifying otherness. Unusual beings disrupt the complacency we love to keep. Monsters, and our reactions to them, tend to reveal things about humanity that cannot be rationally explained. In this way, the creator and the monster are perhaps not so very different.

This installment of *The Pointed Circle* aims to celebrate social equity and inclusivity by publishing works by people from myriad different countries, cultures, and identities. We seek to embrace and uplift otherness. We want to take our small stand against social erasure and demonization, against the homogenizing forces of white supremacy and nationalism and fear. The actions of our species have been at least "fifty percent terrible," as Maggie Smith says in her viral poem (pun intended) "Good Bones," and we're overdue for a transformation. It's coming whether we want it or not, and artists and writers will help show us the way.

CONTENTS

EXPECTATIONS

BIBHU PADHI 1

PRESSED

TBTISAM ABUJAD 2

PATTERNCHASER

RIZZO LASAGNA 4

SPRING COMES

MEREDITH ADAMS 8

MUD WASP

JUNIX SERAPHIM 10

TINY WHITE FLOWERS FALLING ALL AROUND YOU AND THE SUN MAKES YOU LOVELIER STILL

MONET SUTCH 12

THE BUDDHA OF MAIDEN LANE

IAN PETERKIN 13

CHUTNEY: APPLE AND AVOIDANCE

MADLINE KELSEY 17

DEUS EX MACHINA

REBECCA LONGENECKER 19

SHE WANTS TO TAKE A SHOWER

CASSIE PREMO STEELE 20

COMMUNION

JUNIX SERAPHIM 21

GAMBIT (FOR CHRIS SCHRIMSCHER)	
JASON B. CRAWFORD	24
THE WITCHING HOUR	
ZACHARY FLYE	25
EVERY ANGRY BLACK MAN COULD GIVE A FUCK ABOUT POST-RACIAL POLITICALLY CORRECT RHETORIC. THAT IS THE SAME LIE WILLIE LYNCH USED TO CHAIN THE MINDS OF SLAVES	
henry 7. reneau, jr.	30
CANYON	
CAITLIN COSTELLO	34
THE HIGHWAY, THE WALL	
JUDITH COMBS-REYES	35
WHISPERS HEARD WITHIN THE DRY GRASS	
JUDITH COMBS-REYES	37
OCEANS (FOR ROBERT TERRIO)	
KENDRA PRESTON LEONARD	39
BUTTER CREEK BLUEPRINTS	
JAMES VU	41
BEAST FILE NO. 225	
CHAD LUTZ	42
NEON IS LIGHTER THAN AIR	
MEREDITH ADAMS	44
LETTER TO A DREAMER	
STEPHANIE PARENT	45



QUIET MORNINGS

SOPHIE CARDIN 49

SCRAWNY TWIG

RAMON JIMENEZ 50

TENSE

KIRA SMITH 52

THEY ASK AMERICA

SHERRE VERNON 55

DISPATCHES FROM THE LAND OF ERASURE #2

henry 7. reneau, jr. 56

UNTITLED

S.C. TAULBEE 59

CORONAS AND THERAPY

JONG WON 60

TO TAMARA IN ROCK CREEK

TATIANA RETIVOV 62

BAILA MORENA

JESSICA MEHTA 63

SEVILLA, AND THE BLOOD THAT STAYED THERE

MONET SUTCH 64

BITTER BOTANY

ELIZABETH WING 65

LOST GRATITUDES

SHAWN ANTO 66



\THE MOON ALSO RISES\	
CHRIS NEILAN	68
SWAMP DRAGON	
ETHAN SLAYTON	74
FIRST PLAY	
JACOB KOBINA AYIAH MENSAH	75
ALBANY	
JAI MILX	76
BILLINGS, MT	
TRISTAN GUNVALDSON	78
UNTITLED	
QUILHERME BERGAMINI	80
HOME OWNERSHIP	
KIRA SMITH	81
A SHREK BLOCKS THE GRAVEL ROAD ON THE WAY TO WORK	
JONG WON	83
AND EVEN THE SUN IS SMILING THROUGH ALL THIS BRIGHT LONELINESS	
MONET SUTCH	84
THE MASON	
JOSEPH IEZZA	85
THE LITTLEST DIPPER	
ABIGAIL SWOBODA	86
TRANSUBSTANTIATION	
BOBBY MULLAN	87

PANTAGRUEL AND THE ONE EYED GOON

REBECCA PETCHENIK 89

THE RECRUITS

SUZANNE VERRALL 94



EXPECTATIONS

BIBHU PADHI

The three mango trees
in our backyard
wait for their fruits' arrival

Waiting is widespread.

The fruit market
is taking a longing shape.

The trees look
forward to Dhenkanal's
magnificent winter.

The markets rise;
future quietly emerges
in the skin's shimmer.

Waiting is widespread.

I go around the gardens
to see if I have a role

to play in October,
see if the fruits are losing
themselves to erratic hands.

Waiting is widespread.



PRESSED

IBTISAM ABUJAD

A chin tattooed, green, with the flower inks
The dangled gold coins on the forehead
Your grandfather gave those to me when we got married
I was still a babe then
Needlepoint on blankets sown and stored on cabinet tops
Ground henna, darkened red with steeped tea leaves
Henna shouldn't be orange like the midday sun
It should be the red earth of the valley
or the setting of the sun when prayer is called
We vend when the sun bends, and rise when the moon calls

Where are the olive trees that we would go and pick
with sisters and nieces up beyond the sanasil
from atop the highest hill in the town, where the lookout,
the razor-top fence, was built
They would watch us pick, but we would sing anyway
To the valley, beautiful and princely, your bridegroom is
To the Quds gate, we seek to travel today
Protected by god, protected by god

When the olive oil would come, the town men would sigh
and the families would drench torn bread in it,
hungry for the earth, as if we hadn't eaten for centuries
It tasted bitter like the thorns beneath the watch tower
pressed,
and then alive once more

on the glistening bodies of newborns
and in the braids of the Hajjat
and in the metal cubes sent westward
on the backs of the birds who have flown
away from the valley, from the gates of the Quds



PATTERNCHASER

RIZZO LASAGNA



i do not exist
but this experience is still happening

movement
is the only thing, waves in the liquid
black liquid ripples stars into spirals, dust collects into globes
of pulsing mineral
the spinning causes off-gassing, striation, upheaval, over slow
eons an illusion of homeostasis
clear liquid ripples cells together, the moon a magnet kissing
salty water
red liquid flows from the ocean floor, through the trees,
through mouths and pens and parchment
and into you,
this experience of it all having happened

movement
bouncing light particles sculpt terrain
rainbow flavors carve phenomena out of optic nerves
waves in guts and bones make tiny creatures within the super-
structure dance
the dance keeps electromagnetic pulses flowing into organs
keeps growing
the body is entropy
spreading out over thousands of miles and years, to die
leaving a blood trail, skin trail, tear snot spit cum trail

repetition
the first formless sounds crack ridges in squishy brains
the waves make the triumphant membrane move, the neurons
move, the tongue twists and dances into shapes
sounds bleed out through fingers into symbols
symbols bleed into sets and systems and syncretic simultane-
ity
the patterns that emerge are self perpetuating
thought is a virus
we cannot find the origin of these waves,
so we name the nameless center (which is absent from the
whole) and plot points, derive equations
the constructed center looks and talks as we do, because the
only origin we can pinpoint
is the one nestled within the squishy brains
but we know that something came from the outside, through
all the sensory experiences emanate outward, making it feel
like the opposite is true
we know there is an outside
but where?

repetition
tracing the line, men act as though everything is a test
men act as though the truth is complex
when it is self evident to the worms and the crows and the
moss
men arrange patterns, the rest of us try to codebreak
we know the patterns are flawed, the products of men's minds
but hidden in the complex test is a list of obvious answers
"this is not as it appears" and "try your best to nurture growth"
and "you are not one" and "everything is a contradiction,
absolved by its continued existence and our ability to perceive
it"

the orchid grows to look like the wasp and the wasp grows to
look like the orchid

the wasp will fuck the orchid for ten thousand years
and yet men dream that all of this comes out of their squishy
brains
they see the pattern in you and think that they created you
they can't understand that you, the other, are the one creating
them,
all the others are creating them, constantly

maybe consciousness is a substance
we absorb through our digestive tracts
or perhaps it is airborne, ambient
shining in through the skin
perhaps diffused inside the minerals of the planet
concentrated in the liver
or, most likely, it is a wave that moves through us

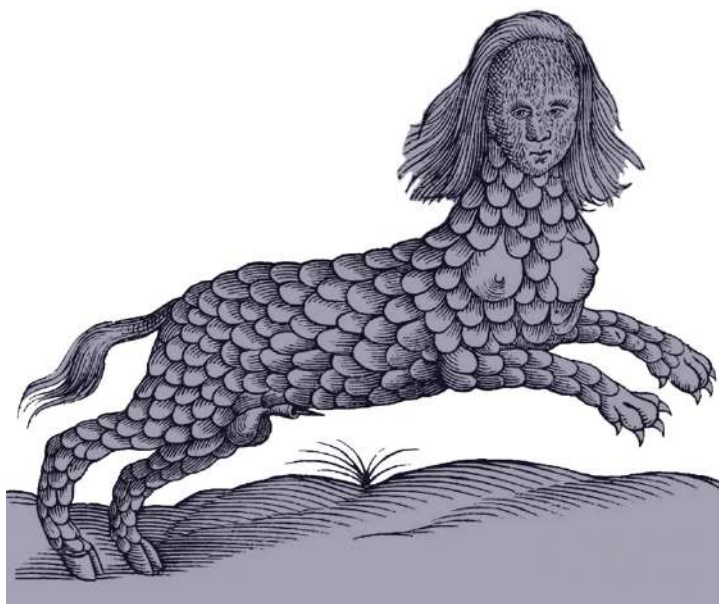
i do not exist, but i wish i could let the pattern go
but when a hand touches a hand
five points of energy to five contact points
when faces and turns of phrase and ideas
reveal themselves the same everywhere, everytime
when secret words from childhood spring up from the lips of
a strange mouth
when numbers add up
when mass culture shifts globally to accommodate a precise
line of flight
without anyone ever asking

it is hard to unsee the stitchlines on the firmament
it is hard not to see the stars in your own mouth

yet,
god is not the actor
but the subject

the only pattern exists in you

you read this
and in doing so
make this
you make me
by reading me
conjuring me out of the silent liquid
into divine sound and shape
thank you



SPRING COMES

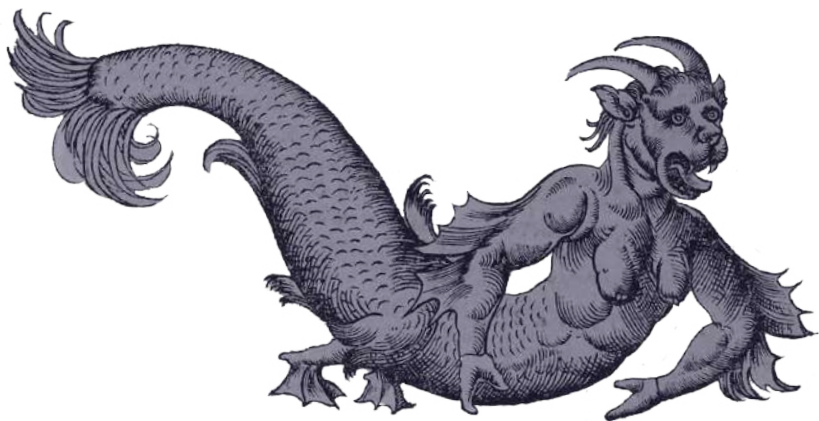
MEREDITH ADAMS

& you buzz plum trees ripe
take the first nectar
fitful season
for a fickle sleeper
claim you're the messenger
more like a Harold, I say
more like the precious familiar
breathless ordinary
miracle of a scent returning
to the earth

you don't hold me hard
in place
only enough
that I feel my own weight
beginnings & endings
body against sky
so many near misses
I pink at the thought of it

better a fence
than limitless this
better orchards
& orchards of you
loving me ripe into your arms
a time to keep light by
a beat to keep the night on

keep me urgent
keep me still
like how the bees work
shockingly quick
you take care
of me the way the blossoms do
fat apples under extra
minutes of sun.



MUD WASP

JUNIX SERAPHIM

Slender mud dauber
tendrils legs, metallic skin
black & armored
head full up of mirror
eyes, glass gaze
mean wisp of a body
copper winged predator
thorax and abdomen stretched
apart the distance of a
waistline

Slender mud dauber, what could possibly pass
through that straw of a waist?

The same question I wonder of
the wasp-thin boy who haunts you
(hunted by food, he hungered &
fashioned himself in the predator's shape;
escape route from his body)

You are hunted still, yet now
your cheeks fill like the moon
in divine crescent increments
ripe for kissing

& when the wasp-thin boy asks:
how it is that anything
is supposed to survive without
looking a little mean?

Tell him with waxing cheeks:
the slender mud daubers do not look
their nature. they hardly ever
sting & frequent flower
nectar to drink

Tell him:
our wings were not
meant for coppery translucence
any soft on us is growth
towards looking our nature



TINY WHITE FLOWERS FALLING ALL
AROUND YOU & THE SUN MAKES YOU
LOVELIER STILL
MONET SUTCH

your skin
red earth
before the water table
dogwood branches
the canals are burning
thirsty flowers
and your mouth
corpulent as spring
breaks mortal thirst
and gives the clouds rain

THE BUDDHA OF MAIDEN LANE

IAN PETERKIN

Everyone had it. There were pieces on morning television shows. A segment with hawkers from the Street. There were more and more subscribers. Then, the first stories started to come out. A stay-at-home mom barricaded her children in their living room. A medical student leapt from his balcony.

Adedeji could not sleep, not even after selling his stake.

He sat in the restaurant, looking up every now and then to see if she was coming in. The place was not as full as it usually was, more than likely because of the event people were waiting for outside, some old pagan tradition made new. A group of teens at another table were fondling their smart phones, heads bowed in prayer, thumbs making the rotary. He wondered how many of them might be using it.

A friend had told Adedeji about ASMR, and he was willing to try anything after Atavan failed and Ambien gave him the sensation of being stabbed in the brain with an icepick. That's when it didn't give him lucid dreams. Those weren't bad, the lucid dreams. He once took it before having sex and hallucinated the whole time. Serotonin does wild things. Being in that netherworld between waking and dreaming wasn't enough to make him finish the scrip, though.

The videos that he found were silly at first. Young women ruffling empty bags of Doritos or slowly moving their nails across microphones. It had been better than those eight-hour ambient sound recordings, to be sure, especially the rain and surf ones, but he felt stupid, all the same. Then, he came across her channel. Her voice, barely a whisper, made his scalp

tingle and his heart slow down.

He slept.

They started by exchanging emails, then phone numbers. He met Noor for the first time two months after that. She later told him that she wanted to make sure that he wasn't a serial killer. They laughed about that.

He saw her sunhat through the window.

"You won't believe what I just saw."

"On the street or in the subway?"

"Subway."

"In that case, I'd believe anything."

She sat across from him, removing her hat and placing it on the ledge by the window.

"This woman with a tattoo on her stomach," she said, motioning her hand in a circle around her own.

"Really? Not on the back, like a tramp stamp?"

She narrowed her eyes.

"All right. So, what was special about it?"

"It was, what's that style called? Tromp-lo-eel?"

He laughed.

"You mean, like, it had that pop-out effect?"

She nodded and told him what it looked like. The woman looked like she had been vivisected.

Adedeji thought about when he had first come to New York, looking to get funding from a friend of a friend at a small firm on Maiden Lane, and how he had seen a man in the subway, right around the same time he left the office every day. That wasn't exactly right. He smelled him before he saw him. The man talked to himself and laughed at nothing in particular, like he was in on some joke that no one else knew. He smiled so much that Adedeji jokingly referred to him as the Laughing Buddha of Maiden Lane one night while having dinner with investors.

Adedeji and Noor were still trying to work things out as far as moving in together. He had no desire to move back to

the Bay, especially after all that had happened. She hated Cali, anyway. He was spending time between his parents' house and Noor's.

"Yeah, I don't know how you folks get used to this," he said, waving his hands in the air. "Big cities. Too much. People get weird."

"Small-town folks don't?"

"Not like this." He thought about growing up in Indiana, out in the suburbs. He thought about his father's university job. Adedeji became an engineer, too.

"No, not like this."

She looked at him like she wanted to say something but didn't. She reached out to the window and touched the glass.

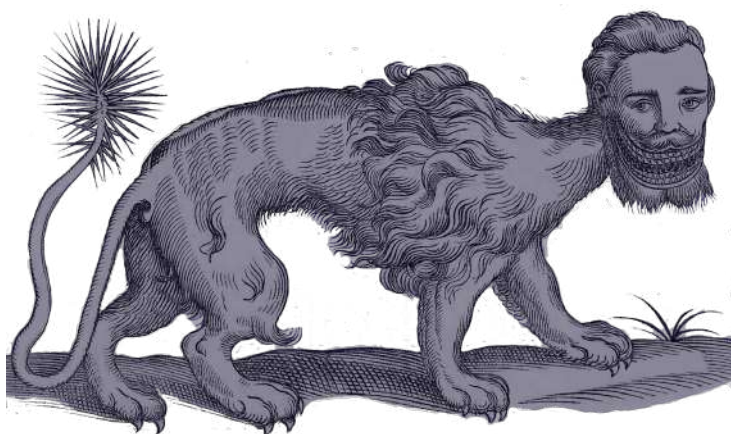
It was supposed to be funny or cute. Something like a Magic 8-Ball. He and his team called it RNDM. The app came along at the right time. Perhaps, in retrospect, the wrong time. People were already routinely scanning their faces. Voluntarily entering their genetic information into databases. Computers aggregating content. Online community hubs tracking every movement. It was hard to believe that AI was just in its infancy a decade ago.

Adedeji brought it all together.

RNDM took off almost right away. People were subscribing in numbers that were increasingly hard to believe, even after the subscription fee went up. The app could tell users whom they would end up dating, especially if the other users were subscribers. It told them the likelihood for marriage, for inheritable diseases, for children born with rare genetic mutations, for the usual stuff like Down and autism. But then it started giving statistical data for height, bone density, strabismus, hair loss, scoliosis, traffic accidents, eating disorders, peanut allergies, Lyme disease, cystic acne, plane crashes, school bullying, eczema, terrorist attacks, myopia, irritable bowel syndrome, and the list just kept going on. It could give

people the likelihood that they would grow old and alone. Whether they would have children who put them in retirement homes. Whether their spouses were likely to cheat. How likely they were to die within a 50-mile radius of the place they were born. How most probably they would almost definitely die very, very afraid in their last moments. It gave them the likelihood that their last descendant, two generations down the line or thirty, would perish on a fishing expedition or on the streets as an undiagnosed schizophrenic, thus ending their presence in the gene pool.

Adedeji led Noor by the hand and walked outside. People all along 14th street were holding their cameras up to record the setting sun for Manhattanhenge. Adedeji and Noor just looked, instead.



CHUTNEY: APPLE AND AVOIDANCE

MADÉLINE KELSEY

Harvesting the dread that grows on the underbelly of your thoughts.
Plucking each apple-shaped fear from the bones along your core
Ears make wonderful grounds for bundling terror, sticky and
Molding as the autumn shivers on its knees.

Mince them neatly, drown in vinegar, set stewing on the
Stovetop for the afternoon. Steam spirals, quivering droplets
Cling to the windowpane on the wall that faces homeward.

You say a prayer for the swans feeding beyond. Write a
Love song for the daughter you won't offer to
This dying place.

Warm the jars against the heat of forests burning,
The molten screams, aching, erupting from panic-stricken chests.
The silence smoking red hot, stalks through the crumbling
Trunks - lonely at last.

Pack them full, seal tight. On bright stickers inscribe the date, a time
Stamp for your sorrow, a maybe for sweeter tomorrows. Arrange in
Tidy Cellar-shelf rows. Let them sit packed in the dark.
Growing stronger as the swans flee the rising river, hungry.
Hope that it is before the water reaches the house, before
Uninhabitable slides from the shadows into plain sight,
That you find the courage to eat what belongs to your belly.

Smear it on crackers, on toast at breakfast. Lick it off your lips,

Share it at Sunday night potluck.
Let the crumbs drop onto the counter, glare back.



DEUS EX MACHINA

REBECCA LONGENECKER

I was less woman than machine. Then, nothing
stopped my getting through the repetition of children
and the wash and breakfastlunch&dinner
and other responsibilities called mother sister husbandsonsonson.

I was getting through the repetition
of one day after another—small steps toward death—
and other responsibilities called mother sister husbandsonsonson
by a sheer determination to move through time.

One day, after another small step toward death,
I woke up and found I had been obliterated
by my sheer determination to move through time.
I could not lift one minute of my heavy future.

I had been obliterated—
with marble eyes, I rolled across the pilling bed sheets
but could not lift one minute from my heavy future.
Instead, my hands took themselves apart.

Marble eyes rolling across the pilling bed sheets,
I left the wash and breakfast, lunch, and dinner
My hands had taken themselves apart.
I was less than woman, than machine, than nothing.

SHE WANTS TO TAKE A SHOWER

CASSIE PREMO STEELE

The first shower she had after her baby slithered from her was a circle of baptism for her body. Her skin, like pasta in the colander, hot and wet and new, rearranged in the water with the knowledge of what she could do. She was clean like a pink china cup. She brewed the tea of mothering success and drank it up. But dozens of years of teapots is a lot. Tannins collect on the bottom. The water goes cold. Each swallow has the ubiquitous taste of the other one. Be alarmed if you must, but mothering gets old. Her child hardly needs her now. She is broken-hearted and longs to be undone. She wants the lush water of that first shower, a scream in the library, the song of something new to come. Some women take a lover in times like this. It is not sex they are after, it is their own desire they want to open, wrapped in paper with a bow. Their own bodies surprising them under fresh lips, their skin a new field, seeds in hand, ready to sow. And when rain comes and waters the earth, those seeds will have their own first shower, a blessing and promise that something can grow.

COMMUNION

JUNIX SERAPHIM

He kisses his hand
through my stomach
I am a butterfly
mounted under a glass display
—pinned with a needle—
pleasure with an exit wound.
My stomach wound round the
puncture. Taxidermy angel, dying
a little death.
I know why it was
the seraphim circled
the throne, ejaculating,
“Holy! Holy! Holy!”

I want to rub my
filthy gay hands
on all that flesh-
colored bread. To sip wine,
queerly, from his bowed lips
pomegranate-stained.
I go blueberry picking
in his mouth
He holds my artichoke heart,
all soft supple sustenance,
in his canines
Fuck, those teeth *Holy Holy Holy*
Juice drips down his chin.

I'd beg him for more
if he'd leave me any
words to beg with
he is a watering hole allowing
only animal sounds.
Like the Ouroboros we feast
of each other
in the swallowing we become
a beast of one back.
He sinks teeth into my neck
with a vulpine jaw.
I want to weave
his name, daisy-chain
into a wreath
to collar me
tight as a halo.

I know, *I know*
there's disease in thinking
I am a portion of anything
other than myself
But, oh, oh god
Holy Holy Holy
When he fills me
to his wrist *Holy*
I can't help but think *Holy*
I must have been made for this *Holy*
What other explanation
for a sensation so
blasphemously perfect.
There must be something ineffable
in his knuckles
teasing my cervix
Holy Holy Holy

A crush is a thing with feathers.
I must look like
a baby bird
bending my neck back
to receive his tongue.
Birds speak to each other
and we call it song
We angels make altars
and thrones of each other
call it Communion

Holy Holy Holy



GAMBIT (FOR CHRIS SCHRIMSCHER)

JASON B. CRAWFORD

My friend asks me what superpower would I want and why /
Naturally, I go to the X-Men / I feel most at home when I'm
being told I am a mistake / My powers must be all this sick I
was born with / They think it must be witchcraft or from con-
tagious touch / Pray for me, murder me, hope I turn out well /
but I must be so sick / the way they keep looking at me / like
a dying vessel / or one they wish they'd kill / The shimmer is
still on my breath and I hold it in as much as I can

I say I wish to set everything on fire with the tap of my two
fingers / And wouldn't any good faggot do the same / Want
to watch everything that has condemned them / Burn down
at the stake by their own hands / I say Kinetic Energy Manip-
ulation would be my superpower/ meaning I want to set this
world ablaze / at the mere push of my palm / to the wretched
dry soil / and watch it explode into a new set of asteroids to
drift into the sun / what is wet and giving will remain ours /
will remain untouched by the solar heat / will remain burning
/ and bright / and alive

THE WITCHING HOUR

ZACHARY FLYE

I've never snuck out of the house before, images of prying open my bedroom window and scaling down the drainpipe dance through my mind. With no one guarding it however, I simply slip out the front door.

Once outside I walk toward the edge of town, but can't chase off the feeling I'm being watched, like an itch on the back of my head that I can't scratch away.

As I reach the end of the block, I hear a snap followed by a muffled curse. My heart leaps in my chest and I spin around. I make out a large shape in the dark.

"Lukas?" I ask.

Lukas steps out of the shadows. He embodies the "Golden Boy" trope: star athlete, gorgeous, popular, yet I managed to stumble my way into becoming his friend.

"What are you doing here?" I ask. I was supposed to meet up with him and the others, not be followed.

"Chill, Alek, I came by to make sure you didn't chicken out. When I saw you leave, I decided to follow, make sure you got there safe."

He says everything with his trademark smirk, the kind that makes me wonder if he's ever felt the cruelty of the world.

"You could have said something. You nearly gave me a heart attack." I stammer. Lukas just grins.

Lukas sidles up to me, matching his stride with mine. His knuckles graze against mine, instinctively I stuff my hands in my pockets. His proximity makes my face heat and when I try and put more room between us, like a magnet he follows.

We don't say anything as we walk. I hate silences, not the silence of solitude, but the silences that occur between people.

As if possessed, I ask the question I had been avoiding. "Did you really think I was going to bail?"

I sound pathetic, worse than pathetic; I sound like a child begging for reassurance from a parent. Of course they thought I'd bail, of course someone came to check up on me.

"No," he says, pulling me away from spiraling. "I saw your face today. I knew you'd come."

"Then why?" I ask.

For the first time, Lukas seems to be at a loss for words. Before he can say anything we spot Jason and Bethany waiting at the edge of the forest.

"Finally, more dudes," Jason sighs. He doesn't quite avoid Beth's fist as it grazes his arm, forcing him to mutter a quick

"Sorry".

"So," Lukas says once we've assembled, "who's ready to see The Witch."

The story of The Witch of the North Wood has been an urban legend in Azure Cove for "centuries." Since I'm new, I don't know much, other than the only time to supposedly see her is midnight on Halloween, and she can only be seen in an old cottage hidden in the woods.

"So, what's special about this 'witch' again?" I ask as we enter the woods.

"Well," starts Jason, "over two hundred years ago, she and her family had just escaped Salem, and sought shelter in Azure Cove. Her family stayed under the radar, but the Witch couldn't help herself. She snuck out in the middle of the night to play pranks on the townsfolk. Her victims caught her and drowned her and her entire family.

"But, on Halloween night she can be seen at her old cottage, using what remains of her power to trick the living."

I force myself not to roll my eyes. It's a neat story, if a little cliché.

"Who told you that pile of bullshit?" Beth interjects.

"That's what happened! That's how my brother told it to us." He looks over to Lukas for support. Lukas only shrugs his shoulders.

"Nope," Beth says. A cocky grin spreads across her face, "that's not what happened. The first part is true, I'll admit. She and her family did escape Salem to hide out in this cottage, but it wasn't for minor tricks she was killed.

"She fell in love with a boy from town and when she believed he truly loved her, revealed her secret to him. He betrayed her, giving her up to the town council that very night. She and her family were pressed to death. She reappears on the anniversary of her death, crying over her beloved's betrayal."

With urban legends this contradictory, I'm shocked they've survived multiple generations.

"You do know..." I say, as if passing on a secret, "that magic isn't real, right?" They have no hesitation rolling their eyes at me.

Soon enough a small stone cottage comes into view. Everyone quickly crouches behind a bush and I follow suit. They're just staring at this small abandoned cottage as if, any moment, something will happen. Nothing does. For a moment there's an odd green glow coming from the dwelling, but it's quickly revealed to just be a firefly.

Wanting a better look, I begin to move forward, but Jason holds me back.

"What are you doing?" he whispers.

"I'm going to check out the cottage, isn't that why we're here?"

"But what if she gets you?" Beth asks.

"It's just a bunch of Hocus Pocus." I quote.

Shaking Jason's hand off, I continue toward the cottage. Up close I see ivy growing up the sides and pushing its way into the abandoned structure.

It isn't until I get to the window hole that I realize I'm not alone, Lukas followed me, again. I try not to think if that

means anything and continue my investigation.

Inside there's a lot of clutter, I wonder if anyone's been this close to the building in the past two hundred years. Ivy's run amuck in the small dwelling, knocking over knick-knacks and winding its way around rotten furniture.

"No witch?" Lukas whispers, shoulder to shoulder with me.

"No witch." I parrot.

We continue around the building, looking for a door. If there is one, it's too ruined to see. With nothing to show for our efforts, we head back to the others.

After twenty more minutes with nothing to see and the chill in the air all but gone, Jason decides we should head out. A part of me feels guilty, as if my being here was the reason we didn't get to see something magical.

When I turn back to follow everyone, Lukas is standing right in front of me. When I step forward he places his hand on my chest, stopping me. Before I know it his lips are on mine. His kiss, light and hesitant against my mouth, is over before I can reciprocate.

"What was that for?" I blurt. It comes out more accusatory than I meant, and Lukas's grin falters.

My heart plummets, I didn't mean to hurt him and I quickly try to explain.

"No, it's not that- I didn't- You just caught- I-I didn't mean-."

"You're cute when you're flustered." Lukas says, having found his grin again.

"That, let's go with that." I say before pulling Lukas down for another kiss, a longer one this time.

Heading home in the middle of the night, my hand in Lukas's, I take one more look at the cottage. For a brief moment I think I see a woman in the window, smiling at me as if she'd seen everything. She gives me a fluttery wave, and I swear I see faint sparks dancing across her fingertips.

I turn to tell Lukas, but when we look back there's no one

there. I tell myself that I'm just seeing things, but part of me wonders; maybe, just maybe, something magical did happen tonight.

EVERY ANGRY BLACK MAN COULD
GIVE A FUCK ABOUT POST-RACIAL
POLITICALLY CORRECT RHETORIC.
THAT IS THE SAME LIE WILLIE LYNCH
USED TO CHAIN THE MINDS OF
SLAVES.

henry 7. reneau, jr.

The victim's predicament, like the imprint of a police boot upside a cuffed nigger's head, or the prayer circle of huddled Baptist faithful culled by the semi-automatic of a predatory ideology, doesn't get any more traumatic than being Black in Amerikkka. The latest police shooting statistic like the mugshot of a splayed black *thug*, seemingly de rigor mortis, who wouldn't make the fifteen minute news cycle. We's living while Black, the first one in, but last one out, that sounds like a Blues song/: *If it wasn't fuh' bad luck / I wouldn't have no luck at all.* But what goes around, comes around. So, it doesn't come as a tragic surprise, in point of fact, it is somewhat chickens come home to roost; because in this time & place, anyone else can be shot & killed in a movie theater, or a school just as quickly as #wetoo can be shot & killed in a church, or a traffic stop, is something that Black folks have always lived with, *in the wrong place, at the wrong time*, & are only sarcastically in awe of the obliviousness of white people who react so appalled, gaped-mouth surprised when their children are shot by the dozens, in the schoolhouse, the university campus, or a movie theater.

Is there any better way to say that gravity binds us to each other?

My six-year old self can hear the plantation lullaby of my mother's voice/: *If you shit in your own back yard, you'll carry*

your nasty ways next door, when the Twin Temples to greed are kamikaze-bombed by people who have been treated just as badly as Black folk have always been treated, like the waterlogged refugees of Katrina sweltering in the Superdome, or left for dead on flooding rooftops. Is because, the standard operating procedure of the USA is to take without asking, only from those who greet them in the guileless welcome of extended palms, or ignorant awe, like the Indians welcomed the white colonists, like the Africans did the European colonizers, like the Australian Aborigines, the New Zealand Maori, the Hawaiian islanders . . . the Japanese, the Korean, the Vietnamese

(Wait a minute! The Viet Cong actually did kick Amerikkkan ass, like the Koreans did, with Chinese assist . . . the Somalis, by attrition.)

& Amerikkka's ally the Saudi, who should have deported the greedy white carpet-baggers, who said they came to drill for water, until they struck crude oil, & the War on Terrorism began, is now ongoing, against the Iraqi & the Afghan, that continues the chain of retribution that has evolved to kamikaze-bombed the Twin Towers with Amerikkkan planes, embassy car bombs, I.E.Ds, & suicide vests on children denied the dreamers disease, but countered "patriotically" (USA! USA! USA!) by remote- controlled murder drones, extraordinary rendition & torture, Abu Ghraib, Gitmo, & Muslim bans.

(One element of white privilege today is oblivious-ness to privilege, including a blithe disregard of the way past subjugation shapes present dis-advantage),

like Haitians, sent back home to death at the hands of the Tonton Macoute, like Mexican children in "tender care facilities" & Somalis with white church sponsors/: the square pegs proselytized to fit Amerikkkan round holes, but white

Cubans, white Russians, & every other white European refugee, with money, or an exploitable talent, welcomed to Amerikkka, who can change their names from Baptiste, García, Kowalski, or Khrushchev to one of a million Smiths, or Sinatra, or Trump, & by the second generation, become the latest tits & ass, blond news anchor for FOXNews, the treasonous corporate puppet leader of the free world, or one of many, sex-bomb tabloid trash celluloid royalty, like Trump, or Clinton, or any Texan Bush, the white LAPD/NYPD/FB-eyes, or the Sandy Hook active shooter, with a legally purchased rifle, like the Texas tower sniper, & all the white serial killers with three first names, or Harvey Weinstein, or the executive chosen to be Supreme, Brett Kavanaugh, while Black is still second-class Nigger trash/: dumb & lazy, sexually depraved & downright dangerous.

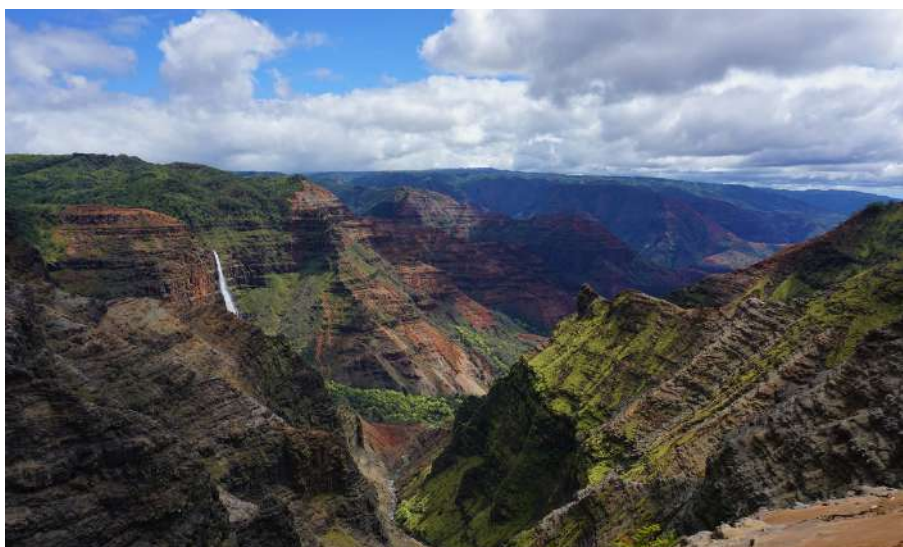
(But wait a minute! What about Bill Cosby & Clarence “Uncle” Thomas. They are Black, & look how far they made it... to African-hyphenated-Amerikkkan, to dangerous, & criminally depraved.)

Like all them who parrot a “token” up-by-your-bootstraps, means the onl’iest Negro to make it to the lily White House, despite the psychological, & physiological trauma of slavery to institutional racism, the “token” first African-American shot into space, OMG! a velocity faster than a racial profile, like the first African-American to swing a golf club, earn a Nobel Prize, or kick ass with a tennis racket . . . But isn’t it something, a kind of you-reap-what-you-sow +justment, that even white folks can be shot & killed in a movie theater, the Dallas police department, or any regional FB-eye. A San Bernardino social services center, or a country music festival, a social security office or the DMV, a political rally in the Show-Me-Your-Papers state, the Pentagon, or maybe even, if courageous, & God willing, with a good aim & a 50 cal. fully auto sniper rifle, could take the initiative, & post up in sight of the White House, just as easily as we can be shot & killed in a church, a traffic stop, our home, crossing the street . . .

I can see history reboot the armed Panthers in the Statehouse, &
Ronnie Reagan using a visiting schoolchild as a human shield.

CANYON

CAITLIN COSTELLO



THE HIGHWAY, THE WALL

JUDITH COMBS-REYES

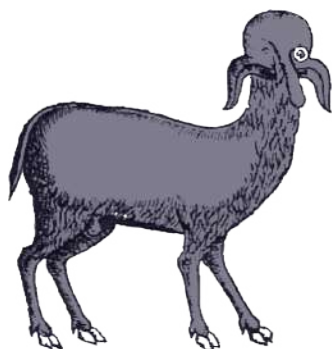
sailing wind of gasoline surfing blacktar river Styx we cross
we the dead river weeping under the impossible weight of our
rolling mausoleums fingers broken over the wheel spins the
tires slip squeal catch and Im driving the highway hit

oh the ocean my ghost horses with their blood full of rainbows
sprinting breakneck marathons through the flickering towers
the tunnels of brimstone the lights were all pointed down the
eyes of many horses solid moonlight the many horses falling
the sheerface cliff the stars captured in blackwater mirror I
keep fire at all times burning cigarettes and glass the opening
of the mouth I drink from cups full of ash the smoke trails my
procession I captain a funeral barge I am a shark I am sub-
mersible under waves of lead I ride Medusa chariot of stone
I ride noisemaker it sings tiger deathrattle I crest the wave of
plumbum and headsick

my enemy is before me! his ship lands narwhals it eats islands
the dread black the rolling cathedral the church of concussion
the rod of iron erect flying the crusaders flag the red cross
of Rome the canton of blue the field of white they lavish the
death of their king of mercy all blood for bloods sake to sweat
away their wailing and plunder a parade every day for their
miseries oh to be spared in heaven oh to hang long in the sky
and pray only for death oh to drink greedily from the cup oh
to be saved once always and forever all to ride to ruin all to
be the end itself oh they will see their fathers again there will

be pity without mercy there will be hate without fear I match
speed with the beast of lands I throw caltrops in all directions
the shriek and shred of rubber snap impact and gutshot the
smell of burning smell of iron oh mayhem and mirrors the
lights the horses running blind tumbling to the ground oh the
splintered pillars the wailing mechanical agony oh the plastic
fishbones in my neck the cruel flat cliff the damn the river
divided oh the boulders in my head

my sarcophagus washed ashore before the idol of death I leap
from the window up the steps of the looming temple the path
to their vile monument paved with great ribbons of slick flesh
my red carpet I feel my muscles unspooling for the last time I
grip their flag with tooth and nail I rip it from the bone I feel
my limbs arc rainbows of murder I taste mud and metal I carry
the moon on my shoulder I cannot open my jaws I cannot
unclench my fist I fall backwards into the river I see moon-
light bouncing from the knives edge I see it peeling the skin
of the river itself I see the horses return oh the ocean oh the
concrete stonemill spilling blood on concrete I am concrete
I am a wall I am a concrete wall running down a highway dug
out under highways every day gambling our lives on highways
always following highways all I see is highways always the
same Concrete plastered on concrete bloodslick concrete dark
stains on concrete draining into basins of concrete crushed
teeth on concrete bonemeal porcelain concrete gravel human
concrete highways



WHISPERS HEARD WITHIN THE DRY GRASS

JUDITH COMBS-REYES

I will not keep them in any
record

they will be felt in the seismographs at
the observatory as fluctuations the
gyroscopes will make all necessary
corrections there they may be read
the splendid and unexpected variation
of data that resulted in an adjustment
of micrometers by reading this you
may reconstruct them fully

They will be lost to mammal fur and freeway tremor but you will
hear it once more

like you did that starless night under
the mountain it cut through the
smoke and radio wildfire signal like
leaves of paper carried by heat
rolling over the fields of stone and
black ichor

like the owl pursued by the band of
falcons the owl falling on the hare
the call of the owl over the valley
of blood and water

begins the aria of
knives the talons of
sleep the beak and
feathers the white

face the black eyes
the wings and
many blue veins
the silver breath of
the sphinx who tells
the answer but not
the riddle



OCEANS (FOR ROBERT TERRIO)

KENDRA PRESTON LEONARD

I

When I looked back
from out on the sand
the windows were full of ghosts
made where the cold
hit the hot
and the sea called for them,
even if leaving their places
meant their ends.

II

The ocean has voices I haven't heard in years.
Voices that read lines, produced shows,
sang the viola line, made witty remarks—
voices from mouths that puckered and kissed
and drank and grinned and gave the voices
homes in cathedrals of city streets,
where Whitman, a god of the ocean,
was sounded and found fit to be worshipped.

The ocean brings those voices to me,
it brings them right to the shore,
in water turquoise and pink and a French blue sky
to the volleyball court with its young shining men,
to the sidewalk salt-covered and dazzled with sand,
to the shop with the tropical fish,
where I stand

and listen.

III

half of a house

a picture in a archive

schooners coming in

and a sea song not remembered

trail-sand wisps

a daughter's memory

the pier that was falling

sandpiper prints

aloe and salt

bright stripes



BUTTER CREEK BLUEPRINTS

JAMES VU

By the butter creek, the unbroken
 smoke of newborn bugs. Cells stir
 underneath the skin, as the backyard
crow caws.
There is something crawling
underneath this sickle moon shine.
 The American miles of fermented grass
 could be something else growing.
The scent of cocaine spikes,
 the skin, dry as nasal,
dry, always.
 The looming spire of black song, the skin
 feels rubbery, maybe, by the rotting organ.
He, who takes fat, a certain white man
 His iron sweat, and police speed
 Providence over fields, not hospitals
Powerviolence — something in the water
 Manila folders, and camera pillars
Where crows do not perch
 On crooked crosses,
The blood of gospel singers The lost organ donors
 The reborn bugs stay near the water
 where the grass grow up coughing
 A pale creepy-crawly visits butter creek
Flashlights searching for a foundation,
cementing the American mile.
If the crow could offer an omen,
 to wake the red heart in every tree

BEAST FILE NO. 225

CHAD LUTZ

Still not sure if that's the correct number.
Still not sure how I feel about leaving in a week.
Still not sure if I want to cut my hair.
Still unsure if I'm getting enough protein.
Still don't know what I'm going to do for a job.
Still don't know where I'm going to live.
Still wish I had some pot.
Still Vegan.
Still swat at flies.
Still not dating anyone.
Still ghosting people on Tinder.
Still cry when I'm happy.
Still don't know if I'm gay.
Still won't pick a side.
Still afraid of cheating on the next person.
Still sleep with a stuffed animal.
Still use blankets as pillows.
Still chasing dreams.
Still reading books.
Still prefer coffee over tea.
Still vibing to Frank Ocean.
Still hung up on California.
Still care about the environment.
Still use plastic straws.
Still use microwaves.
Still use plastic bags at the grocery store.
Still don't shower.

Still want the best for others.
Still don't believe in God.
Still miss Mikenna.
Still miss Maggie.
Still don't use napkins.
Still only text people my accomplishments.
Still taking medicine.
Still living in Indiana.
Still afraid of driving.
Still miss the open road.
Still love camping.
Still love sleeping on the ground.
Still sleeping on couches.
Still check myself in mirrors.
Still 145lbs.
Still eat like a bird.
Still live vicariously through Facebook.
Still use bowling to cope.
Still get sad when it rains.
Still dream of a place where the sun always shines.
Still hiding out in my stories.
Still writing in prose.
Still bending genres.
Still bending genders.
Still writing.
Still surviving.



NEON IS LIGHTER THAN AIR

MEREDITH ADAMS

I spend a cold summer searching

for my own hill to die on and find
a bowlful of sun, the lip

of a gulch paved over.
the shortest distance between two points is a broken grid.
You go quickly walking sideways

like the neon crab, sleepless
in next door's parking lot.

I wander the drugstore roof to watch the marquee sun rise.

There are no omens here only facts:
kiss the black cat every walk to the dumpster, hammer
a lawn chair
under a ladder to watch the parade children pass.
Here, we burn red without knowing
how and we
light up our dead with it.

Nostalgia highly volatile scarce on the inner planets

lights my every
tangled path home.

LETTER TO A DREAMER

STEPHANIE PARENT

My Dearest Stephanie,

You've spent so much time yearning to become a fairy, and all along, you've had invisible wings growing out of your back. All those hours poring over the Flower Fairies books, with their buttercup and snowdrop, lilac and lavender, willow and holly sprites that flit through every season. All those days gazing at the Arthur Rackham illustrations, ethereal etchings so beautiful they might dissolve before your eyes; nights spent watching Tinker Bell trail pixie dust across your TV screen. And you've never glimpsed the feathered miracles that rise from your shoulder blades, making you dream of other worlds and other yous.

Watch out, my dearest girl, because so many will try to clip those wings, to pluck those feathers. It will start when you switch schools in fifth grade, when your new classmates ask what you do for fun and you tell them you like to read. "How strange," they will say, and laugh. You won't care all that much. You'll keep reading your fairy tales. But though you won't realize it, a few fringes from the feathers of your invisible wings will whisk away into a breeze, gone forever.

In middle school, the trio of girls you thought were your friends will stand in a line and glare at you and tell you they're putting a spell on you, like in the movie *The Craft*. A few more fringes of feathers, these in hopeful, childish shades of yellow, gone to the rising wind.

You'll leave those girls behind, go to a performing arts high school for piano. You'll probably hold on to more of your

feathers there than you would have anywhere else, but still: you'll lose layers in shades of amethyst and moon silver and delphinium blue, the colors of the fairies you still love, but don't have time to read about anymore. You'll lose them when you watch your classmates in the dance department flit across the stage, floating as Giselle's willies and The Nutcracker's sugarplum fairies, and you decide that their talent is worth so much more than your own.

You'll lose them when you believe the world's message that grades mean everything, that those letters will fly you where you want in the world. You'll sink down to earth when you work so hard to get those perfect grades, yet your family still can't afford any of the universities you dreamed of.

In the small college where you end up, the world will begin to take larger chunks of your wings, plucking entire feathers at a time. Only a few weeks after you move out of your parents' house, two planes will collide with two towers, and the impact will echo for years to come. Who could imagine wings, in a world turned violent and ugly and unsafe?

But you'll keep going, and other feathers will be ripped out more quietly: by the male professors who are too friendly in the wrong ways, the frat boys with their laughter stinking of beer. Most of all, the disappointment of learning academics will never be the answer you thought they might. The pain of learning that books can be stripped of their souls as surely as the feathers can be plucked from the skin of a dead bird. Of learning that everyone wants to achieve, to display their intelligence like some taxidermied thing, but achievement alone will never allow you to soar.

And then, after college, living with your parents again, working in clothing stores, counting each lost minute. Wondering what you worked so hard for, wondering if there's anything beyond this earth-bound dust.

My dearest Stephanie, I've dwelled too long on these feather-pluckers, these vultures, mostly beyond your control. They're easier to talk about, these external things, but I can't hide the truth: there's a worse way you will lose those invisible feathers, and cripple those intangible wings.

It will start in high school, around the same time you're envying the ballet dancers. You'll notice a little extra jiggle around your belly, your hips. Dancers don't jiggle, and neither do fairies. They need to be light enough for those flower-petal wings to lift them to the stars. You want to be light as air, so you stop eating breakfast. Then lunch. Soon, the jiggle is gone, along with the blood that flowed between your legs every month. There's another weight missing, too, one you can't quite pinpoint.

(It's those invisible wings: not just feathers, now, but the bones supporting them are losing mass and marrow.)

You love that weightless feeling, so you eat less and less. No butter, no ice cream, no cheese. No nourishment your body needs. You stunt yourself. At night, instead of imagining flying like a fairy, you dream of inhaling cakes and pies. It's a simpler desire. A less painful one.

In college, the stress becomes too much. You give in. You eat. You despise the flesh that jiggles under your arms like chicken wings, the opposite of fairy wings. The disappointment in your growing earthly self melds with the disappointment in this earthly place of deadlines and evaluations and work work work. You have failed to find love and beauty and meaning, failed even to find enough hours to sleep and breathe, and so finally you take any sharp thing you can find to your flesh: pins, scissors, knives. Rip, rip, rip. Not deep enough to scar, just enough so you look like you fought your way through a thicket of thorns, a place you were too heavy and lost to fly out of.

The crimson blood reminds you that you are not a bird or butterfly or fairy. You are a human girl who bleeds, and all your invisible feathers have been stripped away.

My dearest Stephanie, I won't tell you not to pluck your own feathers. It would be useless, a waste of words. I won't even wonder whether the impetus to pluck comes from outside, from the world's messages absorbed and warped within you, or whether the drive to self-destruction was always buried in your heart. I will only tell you this, and hope that somehow, you can hear me across the years:

You have destruction and disappointment within you, but you have something else as well. A garden inside your ribcage, a place where new feathers can grow. Perhaps not so brightly colored as the first ones, not so fragile and beautiful and soft. Maybe some of them are hard as iron, sharp as steel, or as your determination. Feathers to protect you. Feathers that can pierce as well as fly.

No matter how much pain you feel, no matter how much you have lost, new feathers will rise out of your sadness, spread across the framework of your back, and lift you. You can pluck and pluck and pluck, over and over again—pluck with cruel words, poor choices in jobs and relationships, endless self-sabotage—but still more feathers will grow. Let them lift you. Let yourself believe.

You have invisible wings, my darling. The only thing you must learn is how to see.

QUIET MORNINGS

SOPHIE CARDIN

The morning is
Dripping its silence everywhere

Turning dark things sun spangled
Brazen in the winter light

I think of making a religion
Out of quiet mornings

Turning toast and tea to sacrament
Earl grey and sourdough waxing holy

Balancing the breakfast tray like prayerbook on my knees
Draped in red bed sheets

Extolling the quiet morning and its absent gods.

SCRAWNY TWIG

RAMON JIMENEZ

I was a scrawny twig that could be snapped with ease.
So I dressed in green army camouflage cargo pants and sneakers
riddled with holes.
I would hide under trees and hop over fences.
Wage guerrilla warfare on neighbors, siblings
and invisible opponents using imaginary guns and grenades.
Even crafting a rocket launcher from the deepest powers of my
mind.

I was told not to play down the block.
Born free, but limited in movements,
because real soldiers of the streets
with no imaginations
fired real bullets made of lead and hate
that easily strayed into young skin.

Saturday morning was our sanctuary.
A time to gulp down bowls of *confleis*
and imitation brands of lucky charms.
We owned one TV
and all morning long it played cartoons and music videos.
The power of cable provided by our neighbors
without their knowledge.

The TV would run all day and all night,
the images of cartoons would change to the *noticias*,
where fortune tellers and misfortunes dominated the screen.

Don Francisco and the madness of *Sabado Gigante*.
The beautiful dancers in their short skirts and long brown hair.
The *Chacal* in his black robe and inquisitor mask,
dragging away the souls of the losers from the weekly karaoke
contest.

But my father could not stand Don Francisco,
quickly calling him a *pinche viejo pendejo*.
As if Don Francisco could hear him from his studio in Miami
or his fat mansion in the suburbs of Dade County.

The nights would finish with Telemundo.
All of the greatest action hits of the 80's in the 90's.
Stallone, Seagal, Van Damme and Schwarzenegger
dubbed over in Spanish.



TENSE

KIRA SMITH

I found the tense of life in my college French 102 class that I took because everyone I knew was in Spanish and French is the language of Voltaire, West Africa, and pretension.

“le subjontif” my Russian French teacher would say, is not a tense but a mood. Other romantic languages carry this moodiness, and even though the Indo-European language of my mother’s is proto-Celtic, my dreams resonated in the romantic.

Sitting in the back of my mom’s white Chrysler minivan, rumbling on the way to Long Island to visit my emotionally and physically distant grandparents, I would clutch my limegreen CD player and stare out the window at flashing oak trees and open limestone quarries, wishing I could talk to animals. My best friend would be a dashing thoroughbred named Thunder or Star who would be happy to give me rides to visit my array of other animal friends in the Mid-Atlantic region of Appalachia. Disney propaganda in the 1990’s led me to believe that megafauna was not only thriving in Pennsylvania, but that jaguars were actively seeking friendships with 9-year-old girls. That it was ok if you smelled and wore third hand clothes every day because it would probably increase your chances of a rich social life in the forest.

Le subjontif is the tense of uncertainty and possibility, the

“I’m not so certain, but...”

The I wish...

As I age from CD players to iPods, to refurbished smart-phones, the subjunctive follows. Reminding me that if I was better at French, I would be able to express fully the uncertainty, desires, and dreams that comprise the un-lived reality.

But my somber Russian French teacher gave me a B-, and that's probably because I cried during the final oral examination, choking out my sobbing conjugations that were hardly decipherable to begin with.

Now, the subjunctive moods that haunt my adult discourses are increasingly pragmatic, less fancy, but more fanciful for their radical diversions from reality.

Instead of befriending big cats, I wish I could remember to stand up for myself.

I have memories of being told that I am responsible for abstinence. Sitting in a wooden chair in a line of desks with other attentive forming frontal lobes, my health teacher flipping through gruesome photographs of inflamed genitals leaking unsightly fluids. Reminders to say no or face being a gross sexual pariah for life. But not how to say "no" in a way that could not be ignored.

I would remember that my worth is outside of my capacity to produce capital and forget the type of future talk that excludes the possibilities of dying a penniless writer.

I would wish that precarity was not a lifestyle choice that all my friends had to face. Be a full person or have a home. Instead, we eek out space for the subjunctive in a world that toes the infinitive, with its bland certainty, and the imperative with its patronizing directness.

You are penniless. You will die penniless.

There's no room for conjugating into the unknown in this Proto-Germanic dialectic, which is the only language I can think in.

Je souhaiterais le vie libre.



THEY ASK AMERICA

SHERRE VERNON

and I sing you, Carlitos,
screaming bruised-fist
through the red smoke tunnel.
Oh, little cousin, I would give
you paper and an old comb,
a book of poems to tap out against
this brittle porcelain and piss-sheet.
What of yucca, what of Arizona
and that fast break – is it enough,
this life without sandy breast,
a chipped-bottle wall and the pull
of your father's fist?

DISPATCHES FROM THE LAND OF ERASURE #2

henry 7. reneau jr.

Repeated verbatim into the symmetry of sorrow, like an eye
unmoored from its socket, or the keloid mesh of scars

reaching out in beggared relief, or
cumulative agony, the way trauma tethers itself to our ancestry.

Something's always breathing down our neck, transmitting,
through lineage, like an inheritance of

genetic despair,
the chemical dirge of flesh once fettered by iron.

Pain has a reflective surface of want, a brooding
need as it penetrates the flesh,

vibrant as a spring
that retracts when touched, or an unending longing.

The pages of a bible, that hold between them
the last chlorophyll heartbeats

of a soon-to-be-reaved
dead flower, in reverence of a sort of prolonged suffering,

akin to momentary joy, or the scent of determination
given off by the corpses of martyrs.

We quibble trivial issues as if they had a life of their own,
even as gunshot splayed children

become the new meta-
phor Black mothers, left to moan immovable denial or cry

into condolence, an ocean too vast to swallow. Where the pugilism
of hurricanes wail & levees fail, & people quickly remember

the gospel of Jesus, as life jacket,
or condone the drowning in earthly violence, whole cities

submerged in flood,
but pain bobs to the surface again & again: the vocal inflections,

body language & facial expressions, like treetops
jutting from deluge.

A repetition of change is gonna come, like
Hope, digging a hole to China with a spoon, is a circular

rhetoric of diminishing returns, proven unreliable
by see-IA torturers in black sites, an enemy

who uses music as a weapon. The inhumanity of solitary
confinement, waterboarding & stress positioning. The

inescapable blackness as in-just-us rains down
onto its most vulnerable spectators, or the token-ized *Other*, the type

that feels a little safer to Amerikkans, because, more often than not, it has a narrative of Euro-educational ambition, can live with

chasing success like a quota. How strenuously they run from the past, & never expect it to catch up with them.

The rock-jawed face of intolerance, as ignorant as those who believe so zealous. The soup lined

regiment of voters, transfixed by the audacity of Hype, waiting for the other shoe to drop,

onto those who do not believe, who cannot be swayed by representation *in absentia*, or

the presidential Twitter-verse of idiot-autocracy—are rapists & criminals, or terrorists. Should be wiped

from the face of the earth, with bibles & bullets & Big-Head bucks. The begging braids of dispossession

hobbled in borderline detention camps, & the needle of hate spinning

to all points of the compass.

UNTITLED

S.C. TAULBEE

Stories I heard when I was young are playing out now in my life as I approach middle-aged. Long have I known that I was the Princess and the Pea: the slightest discomfort and I'm all noise and endtimes. Thorn in foot; shoe doesn't fit. I collect old adages and tailor them to fit my experience. Then I take to the pulpit and bully my way into hearts and minds, making sure always to offer my thoughts and prayers.

Maybe that's the value in a tradition of oral storytelling: an elder must first know the one in whose care they choose to pass the story along. Trust is central to the process: I trust you have a reason you want me to know the story; you trust me to hear, not just listen.

Cave in ears
Hallowed vessel
Please carry me along with you



CORONAS AND THERAPY

JONG WON

i step into a massage chair designated for patients
one man is distant enough
we stare into each other
as plastic balls knead my shoulders into tenderloin
i make that disgusting enjoyment face I sometimes make
trying not to laugh
our eyes roll inside our heads
I might feel a tad translucent
waiting room with plenty of room
to walk around
and chat
the chairs placed elbow to elbow like drumsticks
my roommate pressed the issue
and a brother quarantined himself for two weeks:
“I’m just waiting till the numbers rise, man”
beautiful sundering
the way roommates fly back from their Chinese wedding
as another roommate locks their bathroom door
i came here for therapy
it must have been the ovens we build inside of us
large steaks flew out of our mouths which is it? which

eyes fall and which ones bring us together

my back pounded by a chair and a stranger's eyes
I'll be ready soon I'm told

I'm waiting for all of this to go
a little longer, you where
them were



TO TAMARA IN ROCK CREEK

TATIANA RETIVOV

Tamara, you are more alive than before.
The cushions on your fingers are still
waiting for love. Aunt Emma questions
your whereabouts, the time of your return.
Patiently she reads the Holy Book
all day remembering your smile.

If you were back it would be
no different. The same tug of war
between mate and mate on an un-carved tomb
waiting for your surrender.
When you were found in the ruins
of their unyielding passion, it was too late.

Tamara, if you had never gone, I would be
the one you would pay homage to.
You too would wonder what,
for heaven's sake,
there is to do
when dying's done by others.

Still, you are gone. The marble dome
that shelters you is cold.
Sometimes the watchman hears me racing
for the moon at dawn. I come to weed.
The parsley has grown brown
around the corners of your bed.

BAILA MORENA

JESSICA MEHTA

It wasn't all bad. I remember
the good, and it wasn't in the big moments
(it never is). The year en Moravia whipped
me raw with the scaling Tico Spanish,
the dirty buses and whistles trailing
from scooter saddles. But that quiet day
the rain twisted my locks
into a frenzy and pressed the cotton closer
to your heart than I ever got—that

is our Costa Rica. Tucking into casadas
while the queso vendor across the street
shouted palmito specials to the downpour.
¡Aquí solo calidad le vendemos! The flies
hugged us close in the tiny soda
shop while Baila Morena lulled us all
into a stupor deeper than Imperial
could ever muster. We knew the palmito in the city
would never compare to the fresh wonder
balls sold in huts papered with banana leaves
along the winding rainforest back roads.
You knew I was already half gone
by the urgency of my swallows. And I knew
it would take years shrouded

in a different love,
a different life,
to ever listen to that song again.

SEVILLA, AND THE BLOOD THAT STAYED THERE

MONET SUTCH

the moon cuts itself
on the dark lip of night

dies in me

my plunging heart
a diving bird

red water
chipped bones

i take the limitless dark
and make it

A body: A lantern

when the pulp from the cherry rips
clean from the pit

leave the seed

i swallow it

rock tumbler
light house

until i am nothing but
god bones

glowing



BITTER BOTANY

ELIZABETH WING



I say
Pretty things
So you wouldn't find me
Ragged under the rhododendrons

Resentment
Bubbles from fermenting leaves,
throbbing from a till of fine silica

Rattles and rips grapel-tears
Into the linen hung to dry

Crying willow
Chewing bark stomach sick

A fat prowler crusted in mucus
Masturbating to the mating cries of vultures

Dragging my grandmother's wedding silver
In a hamper through the thistles
Vomiting into the waxy-leaf salal and watching bees dawdle

Lying here hidden by oat grass and feral cape ivy.
I could almost be fictional
I could almost forgive you for having my happiness

LOST GRATITUDES

SHAWN ANTO

I don't
remember when I
stopped tipping
the lord.

I float
from prayer
buoyancy
a cultural rebellion

if not dissuaded
then put
on ice.

suspended
motionless

here
an emptiness
stirs me
roots tangling
slowly

a wraith
claws out
of the earth wailing
gnashing its teeth.

blisters give me pause
what was once
a prison
becomes a person.

person becomes prison
weary in its churned
crackled foundation
trapped in a war
that was not meant
to be started
there are stirrings
offerings that only
remain apparition.



THE MOON ALSO RISES

CHRIS NEILAN

I AM JUST A BOY. I THROW MY NET. Sticklebacks slip through the holes. My town is dark, my mother cold—it's winter now. Here, have my blanket! But she grumps. She breaks a cup, smashes the plates. The shadows come at night.

Men arrive, with hunting bags. So you're the little man, one says, the one with the teeth, the big stone ones, with the hairs on his neck and up his cheeks. They make themselves at home, and mother isn't cold so much no more. Go play somewhere else! Stone Teeth takes me out to shoot. Hold it to your shoulder, there, like this. It's going to kick. But guns don't have legs. I'm flying through the air. He's looking down at me. I heard your dad's due back tomorrow.

Dad looks familiar. He gets the watery eyes. The men are watching as he hugs me. Whad're you doing here? You know that don't you. You can tell an argument's coming, so I throw my ball as high as I can, Look at me! Look! I throw it up so it rolls down the roof and drops. Look! Throw it up so it drops, but it gets stuck in the guttering and the rifles make a sound like a mountain giant trying to scream. Mother says I'll be better off at fake aunt Ginette's. I'm not your mother no more, got it? I wave to her as she rides off on the back of Stone Teeth's motorbike, but she doesn't wave back.

I'm a boy in man's clothing. I kick the kid's teeth in. They lock me up again. When are you gonna learn? Old fake aunt Ginette shows up. I don't know what to do anymore, she says. How about get me out of here? No, I don't think so. Not anymore. I think you're on your own now.

The job pays shit, but it comes with a room—a windowless box above the repair shop. Slop the floors, clean the shitter and spitshine every car that comes in, and if you turn out not to be a blithering moron maybe I'll let you change the odd transmission. Big if! There's a girl, behind the counter in the lunchroom across the way, by the reservoir. She looks like she has a smile for everyone, but how it disappears when no-one's looking. You come in here a lot, she says. You work at the repair shop? In the dream, she's a seahorse, bobbing in the current, and behind a moon-sized shadow becoming a shark.

A voice makes the hairs stand on end, so I wash the toilet water from my hands and go take a look. There's a black sedan up on the rack, Phil half under it and yelling something about the transmission, and the boss nodding and listening to a man with hair down his neck and mouth full of giant stone teeth.

Should I kill him now? I ask the moon. Or wait? The moon's answers can't be heard, but that doesn't mean they're not there. I sit on the floor, next to Phil, as he fiddles around. Who is this guy anyway, he says, some big cheese? Got me. Hey! You two! If you scratch that sedan I'll cut your balls off and stuff them in your mouths—each other's mouths, got that? Who is this guy Boss? He looks at me, and retreats back to his office.

I wait for him to come again—he comes alone, checks the car. Seems okay, he says, with a voice that makes my stomach shake.

It's going to kick

I'm there with Phil, hanging back. Nice car, I say. Boss shoots me the ball-cutting-mouth-stuffing look. Stone Teeth sucks the last life from his Pall Mall. Wanna try it?

You can't believe how the air screams by, soundless, like the car's a fish through water, knife through butter. It's pretty smooth huh, he says. Sure, I say. Ha! Driven smoother have you? He eyes me. How much's Torven paying you? Room and board, I say. Room and board! That stingy old shit! So

how you like being a slave? I eye him for a moment. The road is spooling out in front of us. The cliff is right there. A spasm of the elbow and over we'd shunt, off we'd tumble, down to a watery. That's my place up ahead. Bring it in, you can see how the other half live. An isolated remodelled farmhouse. A henchman sitting on the bonnet of an off-roader, eyeing me. How would you like to come and work for me?

Mister Pedersen offered me a job, I say. *What?* I let you go off on a joyride with a customer and you stab me in the back! Relax, I don't want it. Don't *want* it?! You're planning to turn down Søren Pedersen? Are you *trying* to get me killed? I let the day take me to the reservoir, the lunch room. Her hair is up in a bun, a net. Little strands slip through the holes. Hey—what's your name anyway? She tells me, and I wonder why I waited this long to ask. We walk by the water. It's so huge, she says. You know how deep it is? Deep enough you could stack two skyscrapers top to bottom and still not touch the bed. Can you even imagine? In the water, the moon is split into ripples. I'm leaving town tomorrow, I say. Come with me?

I can't find the key for Phil's moped, but it isn't hard to get started—a tug and a splicing of wires. The cliffside road is empty as a dream, the moon approaching full, and hanging fat over the water like it thinks it's a sun. The two ball peen hammers, strapped to my sides, bump and jolt. I pull up a hundred yards away, walk the last. The house is cast in darkness, a couple of dimly glowing windows. The back door leads into the kitchen—I can see the henchman at the table. I grip hammer #1, turn door handle, squeeze hammer-grip—but henchman's passed out, drooling on hand, next to a half-empty bottle of Zubrowka.

I softfoot through the ground-floor, carpets you'd happily roll around on. He's up there, Stone Teeth, I can feel him. I hear a voice, feet. This is it. Squeeze grips #1 and #2, ready to pull—

Hey. You're nyuh— new. You're new. Right?

A moon-eyed, red-ringed spectre, forty looking fifty, swaying in the gloom, tumbler of vodka. She sways too far to one side, almost falls. Mother.

Hey. Kid. What the hell? Stone Teeth at the head of the stairs. I'll need a place to stay. If I take the job. Mm, he grunts. Stig'll get you set up. You can start in the morning.

When morning comes, she's still swaying. Eyes of the moon. You remind me of someone, she says, looking far beyond me. I have one of those faces, I say. She scuffs around the house, nagging the henchman. I'd get rid of her, Stone Teeth tells me, but fuck it, I guess I love the old bird. Plus she still knows how to keep a man happy, if you know what I mean, and he digs an elbow into my ribs. I clean out his cellar, I weed the weeds. I rake the path and spitshine the henchman's off-roader. Try not to pull a muscle, she calls from the porch hammock and chuckles a familiar throaty chuckle that I remember from somewhere in my bones. I'm a child, just a child. All I want is for her to love me. Precious baby, precious thing, and she holds me to her bosom. Little baby, hey I just cleaned that you little shit, don't look at me like that—get away from me, why are you crying? Ha! Tears? Ha! Throaty chuckle. Stone Teeth has a meeting, two Albanians. I hear import-export talk, shipments, dockets. Hey, kid. C'mere. He offers me a drink, the house empty, my mother spectre passed out on the couch. You know who they were? I shake my head. Good. Stick with me kid, and you won't be raking leaves all your life, you get me? There are big things afoot.

I get a message to the lunchroom girl. Things got delayed—give me a week—I'll take you anywhere you wanna go. I give her no way to respond.

The moon is so huge it doesn't seem real. It's a perigree something something, Stone Teeth says. Biggest it'll ever be, they said on the news. Fuckin beautiful you ask me. I look at him: giant nostrils, broad face, hair up his cheeks, down his

neck. Makes sense anyway cause tonight's a big fuckin night. A ghostly white car approaches on the cliff road. They're here. Go get Stig.

I stay on the fringes as the deal is done. Several bags full of mysterious product. Bag after bag. The Albanian brothers fill their car—opening hidden panels, secret spaces, filling them up, every nook and cranny. Mother Spectre appears next to me. She's staring, moon-eyed. Don't think I don't know, she hisses. Know what? I know who you are. My blood turns to water. My veins turn to paper. I know why you're here. You're nothing but a God-- damned— spy! and she whips my jacket open, exposing the hammers. I clamp a hand over her mouth, her breath hot and wet on my palm, yank her arm behind her back. Ggmhelmp! GgmHELMP! I don't have time for this. I hurl her into the old coop, tie a rag around her mouth. You know who I am? Do you? Look at me. Look. Go on. Her moons seem to clear. Look at me! Her brow contorts. She says my name into the rag, at least I think she does, but the rag eats it up. The ghost car is halfway up the drive. Stig and Stone Teeth are counting the stacks of money, feeding them through an electric counter, *tttthhhrap*, *tttthhhrap*. Hey kid. Get a load of this. Ever see anything like this? I haven't, it's true. I have two hammers strapped to my back, a hundred grand in front of me, and my mother's spectre gagged in a hen coop. I smash Stig's teeth in, but the heart has already gone out of me. Wha— what— My name is Aksel. You killed my father, and you stole my mother. A cloud crosses over his face. I know who you are kid. And I didn't steal your mother—he stole her from me. And I didn't force her to come back. And— he takes a step forward, deep into hammer range— your pop ain't dead. Get my drift?

The road back to town is 2am dead. The cliff is on the other side now. A spasm of the other elbow, and down I'd go to my watery. So that's what I do—I shunt to my right, tumble tumble, smash the scooter on the rocks, disappear into the

night. At least, that's how it seems. Or maybe I go back to the reservoir, and go scuba diving with the girl, build a home in the deep. Or maybe I go back to Phil and the Boss, share a crate of Carlsberg and laugh laugh laugh. Or maybe I age, wake up in Stockholm with a Swedish wife. Who is this woman? Round chinned and dark, huffing in her sleep, she asks me to check on the boy. The apartment is chilly, dim—a siren passing somewhere nearby. This moon-headed boy is twisted in his crib, head all the way over and body limp as if he's been broken, but his little chest HUFFS as a diver pulled to the surface and re-engaging his lungs. His miniscule fingernails, so small it's like a joke. I'm old—can feel it—but a boy—that too—I take him in my arms, just to try. Warm squirming thing. I see a ghost in the mirror, a moon-eyed spectre, holding his child. The wife's voice is calling to me. Morning should arrive soon, but dark it will be—it's still winter. I hold onto him, for a little longer.



SWAMP DRAGON

ETHAN SLAYTON



FIRST PLAY

JACOB KOBINA AYIAH MENSAH

The first night after spending
five days without a night. The rain comes

bit by bit without having anything
to eat or a place to hide from fatigue,

we huddle together in one corner

we struggle
with our body parts
turning

into termite hills.

But being safety

eases the pain in our other parts

which are not soil yet. I stop
at anything you have built as my memory

and that has questions beyond
the broken bottle in a stairwell.

I crawl 100 yards before bleeding

ALBANY

JAI MILX

Burning gas around the traffic circle
won't get you far. Anyway the old mall
is a hole in the ground now, I guess.

Sometimes in summer the sickly trees they'd planted
actually managed to grow toward skylights thick with dust.

Last I heard, you charmed the throat out,
and I find myself wondering what happened
to all those other tight-shoulder punk boys
where we grew up. Probably not much.

The fountain was marked with hard water and algae.
Pennies won't get you much of anything.
My mom took it all on layaway. The floor tiles cracked.

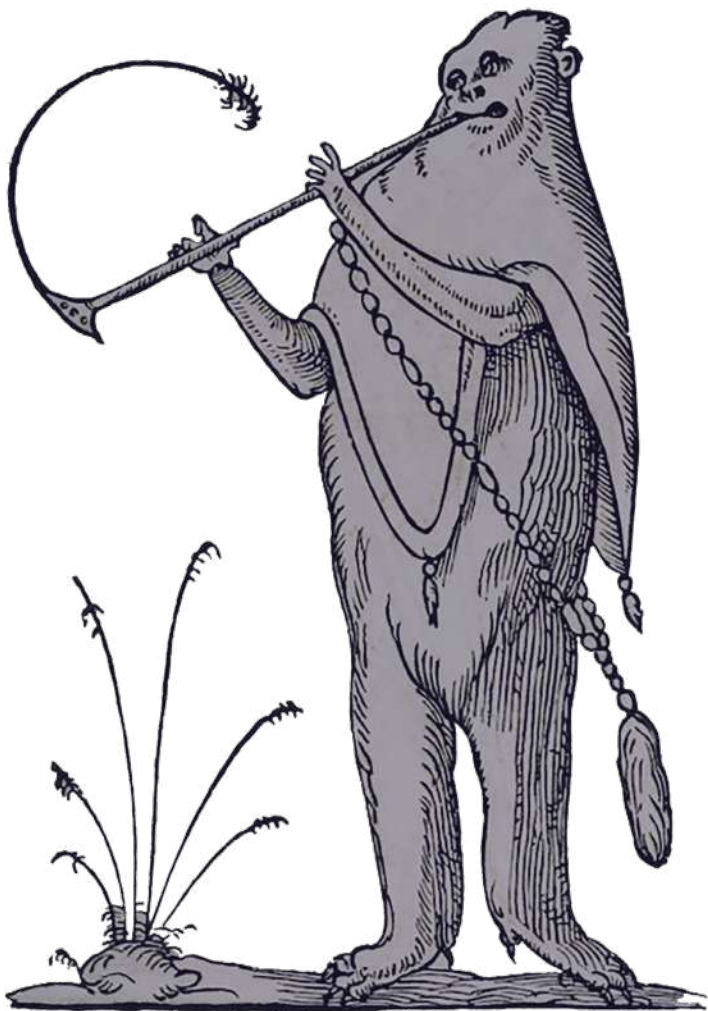
What was it you always asked me? I'm full of
fucking answers, but I never catch the question. You
probably read about what happened in the paper -
no, no one reads the paper anymore.

Last I was there, they demolished that
big skyscraper housing project that
hung over the freeway one half at a time
so from up on the highway stilts you
could look out the passenger side and
see the rooms bisected, laid open:

some cheerful curtains, a child's chair.

Freeway: the word holds a promise it can't keep.
I picture you in a suit, in some late-model car,
weird, gangly limbs tensed, hitting the offramp hard.

Me, I'm never going back.



BILLINGS MT

TRISTAN GUNVLADSON

The smell of the I-94 is Budweiser
and rest stop floor piss
spilled by lonely
long haul
truck drivers

The sound of oil refineries
illuminating the night in Billings,
warming the sky,
cradling her in a blanket
of carcinogens
as you speed by at 70 miles per hour

A golden retriever, mangled and bloody is captured by the
headlights,
while the wind and road
converse about your destination
in hushed tones

Pulling into a rest area
94 miles from the last
Both of the drinking fountains are broken

A faded sign reads
Don't get plowed on Montana's Highways
Enter cautiously and clean your teeth

The mirror in front of you is etched
by numerous scribes,
letters arching and swooping
across the marred surface of glass
The names begin to feel familiar

A stall with a circular hole hewn through it,
at roughly dick height
the small patch of light that shines through
stale, from the fluorescent bulb overhead,
illuminates tiny specks of dust
Worshiping your aloneness



UNTITLED
GUILHERME BERGAMINI



HOME OWNERSHIP

KIRA SMITH

My first apartment, well, Nadia, Rob, Ranger, Mark, Romy, and I's first apartment, had three 10x15 foot bedrooms that we shared with one another. We moved with a lot of optimism into that ground floor apartment, and through school classrooms, crowded house parties, and minimum wage. We paid \$300 for rent each, well some of us did, some of us stopped paying rent after a while but kept moving anyway.

The first thing to break in our new home were the pool sticks. I had seen Rob break a slew of tennis rackets during high school, but it was surprising that his frustration also extended to less competitive activities like pool. He would drunkenly swing the sticks onto the edge of our pool table until they cracked and then he would cackle like he had won the French Open. His baby face pinched into a wide grin and his blue eyes twinkling somewhere between derangement and charisma.

Mark rushed into the house through the back door one night, ripping the lock out of the wall with his metaphysical strength. I can't remember what instigated the panic, but it might have been because I had pepper sprayed everyone by accident while we were smoking pot in the living room and watching Beavis and Butthead DVDs like it wasn't 2012. I was in a state of calm, fumbling with a friends' robust purple keychain. The button that stuck out was sexy, it fit so well into the palm and I was enticed to push it. The opening of the bottle turned towards my face, so curious was I about this hefty gadget.

Most things get easier over time, but no one develops an immunity to pepper spray.

Other things in the house would shortly follow the pool sticks and the chain lock. The carpet was squalid, the top portion of one of our bar chairs became dislodged when a friend pushed another off of it. One of the mirrored doors was smashed in an erroneous incident and the carpet of glass shards that bejeweled the floor for months became an object of my devotion- a thousand shattered little reflections.

In all, we received \$300 of our \$2000 security deposit back.

I then moved to a meticulously managed complex out of town. Even though there was a bus line, I walked two miles through Penn State's experimental farm fields each day to get to class, filling my pockets with baby corn and genetically modified apples along the way. Then I moved into a boarding house above a Korean restaurant downtown where my landlord guarded her residents fiercely from census takers. I made the mistake of moving back into my parents briefly, and then into my Chevy Cavalier. A geriatric colonial with no heating; the suburbs of Portland; a one bedroom in the fancy part of town with an employed boyfriend; a co-op with a prolific garden; a blue house with 25 year old men who had never cleaned a bathroom, a punk- venue with cheap rent and a broken everything.

Through habit, I've made my life portable. Lingering is dangerous because you might find that you want a real dresser instead of an old filing cabinet but know you are never going to stop driving sedans. You're getting a little old for illegally dumping furniture into construction sites in the middle of the night.

But moving is not like being pepper sprayed in the face, even if it's a terrorism.

A SHREK BLOCKS THE GRAVEL ROAD ON THE WAY TO WORK

JONG WON

bus ride doors clatter phones glare up the way skies open
wide

a car ad about the time we have left

ribs cared for in foil broiled till the juices run mad

an ad about healthy frozen foods portions just less than a
compact amazon

a shrek blocks the gravel road on the way to work you
stand stunned god do you laugh?

an ad for a travelling circus new iPhone cures for
diseases please call now

covered in underwear licking yourself to sleep repeating

you can't be. You are a child again

AND EVEN THE SUN IS SMILING THROUGH ALL THIS BRIGHT LONELI- NESS

MONET SUTCH

summer hours pass in sweat eu te quiero closer than a
sunburn shimmer and moan in the tender pulp
& delicate rind of a tangerine i saw you kissed the
seeds hoping they would become you when they did
not i kept them harbored in my palm for a thousand years
through cricket song and silver dawn i carried you like
a hummingbird corpse the pink moon lifted herself
over the stone teeth of the castle the scent of your hair
the skin of your sun drunk neck roiling through
the wind the cooling llano wide as all that soars red
dust kicked toward saturn the earth and all the fire she
makes if i could pull this heart out and put
it in your hands it would be a plum dark
and full and maybe were i able to fit in the palm
of your hand you would hold me so gently i
would burst

THE MASON

JOSEPH LEZZA

I watch from my yard as you lay me out, brick by brick, until I am fully formed. Each afternoon, feigning artistry and grinding chalk into the pavement, I wait for high school to return you to me, wiser and just a bit taller than the day before.

You were Clark Gable and I was quick-dry cement. Freshly poured and sloppily pliable, I spread myself underneath as the weight of you sunk in, burying footprints too deep to ever be smoothed away.

And, like a gust of wind, you blow open the gate and fly across the grass, sneakers rolling in your wake as you land and call your shoeless court to order. All floppy raven hair and chestnut skin, you pull the orange sun from its perch and spin it around on your finger, at once the center of my universe, before lifting it back to the sky. And, I am there to catch you on your return.

Like every great artist, you scratched your name onto your work, as if cement could ever forget who stepped in it.

Skin to stone, I long for you to run me over. Back and forth, to trample my rigid flesh while I press against and kiss you in darkened archways.

Solemates, you and I.

THE LITTLEST DIPPER

ABIGAIL SWOBODA

In that haunted half-space between consciousnesses,
I feel your arm wrap around my middle—so tangibly.
I want it to fasten there like a belt,
to hold me like quick-set mortar
so that I don't slide down the kitchen wall
with the rest of the blue tile backsplash.

Moments like these drip with the poignancy of funeral home
traffic cones;
here, there's no hearse, just a silver minivan
with triangular orange flags flapping off the back
and the sticker stars above my bed.
In dreams, I find myself searching up there for compact con-
stellations
next to the smoke-detector-sun;
my mouth tastes like cough syrup and someone else's saliva;
I am becoming the tiny pile of ashes dissolving on the second
step of my concrete stoop.
I really think they're up there somewhere, around the ankles.

Our bodies lay like damp confetti on the bed,
teeth gleaming in the golden light of the hallway.

This is the home of paint-stained forearms under second-hand
shirts and
the ugliest hands that have ever held me.
I want to love like I thought I could when I was eleven;
swing-kissing, bug-swallowing, knee-scraping love.
I'll bury my heart in the mulch for you, next to the entropy
and the earthworms,
ready to resurface in the rain.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION

BOBBY MULLAN

obligated Conception,
ofs & ifs:

concerned vessels
per pre-condition;
form fucking functions.

Love (*in forms*) all.

often,
idea is
before humanity.

in difference,
in deference
revered spectacle.

masturbating adjectives,
pointedly pointless
shortcoming language.

All (*forms in*) love.

stroked long and slow
wrist cutting ego,
artistic bloodletting.

blood tears and cum,

poetic in justice
oozing sticky off page.

given daily
bread & wine,
line by
line.



PANTAGRUEL AND THE ONE EYED GOON

REBECCA PETCHENIK

Once upon a time, there was a great and beautiful giant named Pantagruel. He was cloaked in silver and fish scales. His robes were made of the skin of the river, and weaved in his hair was the starlight itself.

Pantagruel was not a happy creature. His heart moaned with a bitter ache of nameless source. Within him here or there, a stray finger must have poked through the fine muslin of his being. All joy that could be and would be was let out as a chilled smoke settling across the ground.

No earthly thing of metal or wire could plug the hole. No god shaped clay or cock shaped stone could sit with precision in that part of him where something must fit. But he was not without hope.

Across the world, beneath every familiar bridge and in all the alleys and sewers of all the great cities of wonder and history, The One Eyed Goon stalked and slogged through the beer vomit rain and cigarette smog. Though his flock of homebums and train kids were pious and pitiful, The One Eyed Goon was as fractured as the Giant. No amount of sniped cigarette butts from the pavement or pus-filled sores lining his lips could fit into the hole left in his head where the other eye, the eye that looks back ought to have been.

Out of all creeping things in the slimes and sludges of this world, only The One Eyed Goon knew how to cure Pantagruel's cruel disease. They would build a living golem together from their momentous and shared grief and from clumping earth and twigs broken from the shabby trees dying by the highway. A perfect and simple thing as lovely and chirping as the cracked concrete and clodded dirt median whence it came.

They toiled and they labored. They broke knuckle and split nail. And with the acid rain that came from heaven and wet their creation, its heart beat and it was alive. The critters in the sparse grasses and the sliming slugs and rats and rodents running in and out of the moss and peat tickled its nerves and drank its sewage blood, driving it on alive, cruel and violent as a bitter winter. And in their work, now living and being and wailing into the weeping sky, Pantagruel and The Goon's holes were filled with an echo of silence.

But as do all living things, the golem held within it a hole where desire should have been, seated deep and entrenched for good. The rain and the storms of summer leached into the golem's dirty, rocky flesh, and the golem died of a sorrow that only a few real things would ever know.

As Pantagruel held the crying thing in his lap, the rivers and streams and the runoff and downpour tore apart the golem, carrying its dissected corpse into a nearby gutter. Soon the golem's face and smile were all that was left, a few clods and pebbles in the giant's slim palms. He clutched the golem's sullen eyes to his chest and wept.

The One Eyed Goon would do no such thing. With no eye to look back, the Goon pushed on.

They would try again. They would use better ingredients.

They would use heartier parts made of steel and iron and oil. They would rob shipyards and burgle refineries. They would rip pipe from walls with their bare hands. No crane, no press, no machine within miles would be safe from their claws. Their new golem would be a monster of fire and sharp corners.

And so again they toiled. From a knot of pipes and cables and the engine of a school bus, a creature grew. The hands of the giant and the Goon were as stained with the oil of their new child as the mud of the old. And when the great mechanical automaton, a golem unlike any other, crackled and sparked alive, Pantagruel and The One Eyed Goon once again found themselves struck silent in the greatness they'd achieved. Gasoline and diesel pumped through its veins. Exhaust erupted from its lungs as it reared up out of the shipping harbor, spread open and roared.

But even things of metal and axle grease, things that live in flame and smoke, have a hole in them. A hole where some great nameless thing fits earnestly and elegantly. And so in a flash and a burst of sinister fire, the golem died of an anger that would burn the whole world to cinders.

In the light of the burning golem sinking into the harbor like the Colossus of a new Rhodes, the One Eyed Goon watched his greatest work burn and drown and decay into scrap. All Pantagruel could do was turn away into the shadows, taking solace in his starlight and his other beautiful trinkets. But The Goon knew what must be done. They would need real parts.

So they took up shovels and picks and held flashlights in their teeth and broke into cemeteries and snuck into morgues and tore and broke away and severed and ripped out every limb and every organ and every tangled nerve and hair they could carry in their weary arms and stole away into the night to do their fearful work.

Beneath a darkened moon, a moon too frightened to look at the horrors that would be done in its light, the One Eyed Goon and Pantagruel the Giant sewed these pilfered chunks of mismatched human viscera together with dental floss and stapled them with a rusty staple gun from a nearby construction site. They substituted engine parts for organs and piping for veins when their meatier supplies ran thin. They extended a leg with a block of wood nailed to a backwards foot and filled in the ribs with some broken pvc pipes and chickenwire.

Though their creation had all the makings of a living thing, within its chest, in a deep and hidden place where only a secret might be kept, a hole let in the air and the golem would not live.

Again and again, Pantagruel beat upon its chest to make its cast-iron heart beat. But there was only dead flesh and stalled out motors. He wailed in the dark and tore through his hole, ripping his gossamer-thin essence apart, letting all that was sick and diseased out to splash upon the ground. His starlights were washed away and his cloak of scales torn from his gnarled and cruel shoulders.

He took the One Eyed Goon around his neck, strangling the life from him, and with two monstrous fingers plucked the Goon's last good eye, the one for looking forward, from its rotten socket and let the Goon die at his feet.

With the pilfered eyeball, he plugged the golem's hole and at last, with agony, it lived.

The golem sat up and saw what the giant had done. The goon's bleeding and deflating corpse was already beckoning flies and worms. The golem howled like a wild thing and stood up tall over the giant.

Pantagruel, now only blistered skin hanging slack from tarred bones and nothing more, cowered from his creation. The golem took his head in its mighty hand and lifted him high above it. He cried and begged the creature to stay its rage and vengeance, but to no avail. With a horrible cracking of bones and ripping of nerves, the golem tore Pantagruel's head from his body and dropped them both into the dust at its gruesome feet.

And all that was left of the great giant Pantagruel was a pile of putrid organs, grayed and dry skin, and what ooze was left now all carried slowly toward a ditch by a coming rain



THE RECRUITS

SUZANNE VERRALL

we all came
down
in the last shower

each one riding a raindrop
like our own
mighty steed

which smithereened
on
impact

whereupon we leapt
to our feet and immediately
went about our business

trying for all the world
not to look
like tourists



CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

IBTISAM M. ABUJAD is a doctoral student and instructor of English at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI. She is also a poet, with creative works published in a number of literary journals, including Cream City Review, Blue Minaret Literary Journal, Rigorous, The Nasiona, and Entropy.

MEREDITH ADAMS teaches preschool and writes poems in Portland, OR. In both disciplines, she explores concepts of DIY as ritual and process over product. Her work has appeared in *Wyvern Lit* and *CARE*. Find her on the apps @murmurdith.

SHAWN ANTO is from Delano, California. He was originally from Kerala, India. His writing has been featured or are forthcoming in Reed Magazine, El Portal, Sierra Nevada Review, and elsewhere.

Reporter photographic and visual artist, GUILHERME BERGAMINI is Brazilian and graduated in Journalism. For more than two decades, he has developed projects with photography and the various narrative possibilities that art offers.

CV: <http://guilhermebergamini.com/autor/>

SOPHIE CARDIN is a second-year student studying political philosophy and nonviolent theory at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Sophie fell in love with poetry during her early struggles with dyslexia.

JUDITH COMBS-REYES is a technologist, music lover, and free verse writer born in rural West Texas. She can be found performing at weeknight open mics in Southeast Portland.

CaitRider Photography was founded in early 2019 by CAITLIN COSTELLO. She had been an avid photographer for many years with a keen eye for the little things, and often an abstract interpretation of natural occurrences. As a student of Environmental Science and Anthropology, Caitlin is drawn to nature, landscapes, and historical landmarks. She has also recently been accepted for a study abroad opportunity starting Summer of 2020. Caitlin will be a class photojournalist in Costa Rica.

Email: caitriderphotography@gmail.com

Instagram: [@caitriderphotography](https://www.instagram.com/caitriderphotography)

JASON B. CRAWFORD [He/They] is a black, non-binary male, bi-poly-queer writer born in Washington DC, raised in Lansing, MI. In addition to being published in online literary magazines, such as Wellington Street Review, Barren Magazine, The Amistad, and Kissing Dynamite, he is also the Editor in Charge for The Knight's Library Magazine. His chapbook collection Summertime Fine was a Short List selection for Nightingale & Gale.

Website: JasonBCrawford.com

Instagram: [jasonbcrawford](https://www.instagram.com/jasonbcrawford)

Twitter handle: [@jasonbcrawford](https://twitter.com/jasonbcrawford)

Facebook page: [By Jason B. Crawford](https://www.facebook.com/ByJasonB.Crawford)

ZACHARY FLYE was born and raised in Portland, OR. Having spent most of his childhood entangled in the fantastical landscapes of books, he quickly discovered his love for writing. He currently attends Portland Community College which is just the first step in his master plan to become a New York Times best-selling author and professional editor for a major publishing house.

TRISTAN GUNVALDSON is a student at PCC and works as a dishwasher.

RAMON JIMENEZ is an educator and writer from Seattle, Washington. Originally from Los Angeles, Ramon works as a high school social studies and language arts teacher. Along with teaching, he runs a writing program for youth called, "The Boot," where young people can develop their voice through poetry, spoken word, rap and storytelling. Ramon enjoys writing poetry and short stories that focus on immigrant communities, geopolitics, culture and travel. Ramon's poems are featured in Rigorous Magazine and The Anti-Languorous Project.

MADELINE KELSEY is a poet, climate activist, and co-founder of Just Write Creative (www.justwritecreative.org). She lives in Richmond, Virginia where she runs, writes, and works to change the world. Her previously published work can be read in *pacificREVIEW*.

RIZZO LASAGNA is a pcc student and pseudoscientist, living in Portland Oregon. She prays this reality is not only a prison, and she hopes to write a lot of fantastical bible fanfiction someday.

JOSEPH LEZZA is a writer in New York, NY. Holding an MFA in creative writing from The University of Texas at El Paso, his work has been featured in The Hopper, Stoneboat Literary Journal, Still: The Journal, Fearsome Critters, Rio Grande Review, Cleaning Up Glitter as well as on Thought Catalog. When he's not writing, he spends his time worrying about why he's not writing. His website is www.josephlezza.com and you can find him on the socials @lezzdoothis.

REBECCA LONGENECKER is a born-and-raised Mennonite: the descendant of farmers, missionaries, conscientious objectors, and an unwavering commitment to non-violence. She is a graduate of Eastern Mennonite University where she studied English Language and Literature and dedicated herself to the craft of writing. She currently lives in Seattle, Washington.

CHAD LUTZ is a 2018 graduate of the MFA program in Creative Writing at Mills College. He was named the 2019 prize winner in Fiction by Haunted Waters Press, the 2017 prize winner in Fiction by Bacopa Literary Review, and was a 2017 nominee for the Pushcart in Poetry by KYSO Flash. He is a three-time Tupelo Press 30/30 project participant and currently serves as an assistant editor for Pretty Owl Poetry. Examples of his work appears in recent or forthcoming issues of KYSO Flash, Glass: A Journal of Poetry, Loud Coffee Press, The Hungry Chimera, and Bending Genres.

JESSICA MEHTA is a citizen of the Cherokee Nation, multi-award-winning poet, and author of over one dozen books. She's currently a poetry editor at Bending Genres Literary Review and Airlie Press.

Learn more about Jessica's creative work at www.jessicamehta.com.

JACOB KOBINA AYIAH MENSAH, who is an algebraist and artist, works in mixed media. His poetry, songs, prose, art and hybrid have appeared in numerous journals. He lives in the southern part of Ghana, in Spain, and the Turtle Mountains, North Dakota.

Social media, twitter: @byiypublisher

JAI MILX lives in Portland, Oregon with their partner, a number of roommates, and their elderly toy poodle, Jean-Pierre. They are

currently a student of creative writing at PCC as well as an editor of the Pointed Circle, and will transfer to PSU's Creative Writing BFA program in the fall. jai.milx@gmail.com

BOBBY FUCKING MULLAN is a writer, improviser, noise-maker, bread baker, (alleged) cynic, and bastard currently residing in Portland, Oregon. He has so far been published in Cathexis Northwest Press and is currently working on two typewritten chapbooks. Additionally his first chapbook/zine "Messthetic" was self-published in March 2020.

Bobby appreciates friendship and money, give him both at:

IG: [@bobbyfuckingmullan](https://www.instagram.com/bobbyfuckingmullan)

Venmo: [@bobbyfuckingmullan](https://www.venmo.com/bobbyfuckingmullan)

CHRIS NEILAN is an award-winning author, screenwriter and filmmaker. He was shortlisted for the 2016 Sundance Screenwriters Lab, and was awarded 2nd place for Short Fiction in the 2017 Bridport Prize. His prose has been published in the Bridport Prize anthology, One For The Road and Fur-Lined Ghettos. He is currently working on his first collection of short fiction, his second novel, and several narrative and documentary film projects. He also created and co-hosts the podcast Two Minute Stories, and is the founder of Gor Gai Films.

A Pushcart nominee, BIBHU PADHI has published fourteen books of poetry. My poems have appeared in distinguished magazines throughout the English-speaking world, such as Acumen, Contemporary Review, The Poetry Review, Poetry Wales, The Rialto, Stand, America, The American Scholar, Commonwealth, The New Criterion, Poetry (Chicago), Southwest Review, TriQuarterly, New Contrast, The Antigonish Review, Queen's Quarterly and The Toronto Review. They have been included in numerous anthologies and textbooks. Five of the most recent are The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets, Language for a New Century (Norton) Journeys (HarperCollins), 60 Indian Poets (Penguin) and The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry.

STEPHANIE PARENT is a graduate of the Master of Professional Writing program at USC. She lives and writes in Los Angeles.

REBECCA PETCHENIK is a writer, actor and organizer originally from North Carolina. She currently resides in Portland, Oregon. Her most recent play, KAIT, premiered in Portland as part of the Fertile Ground Festival in 2019. She has a forthcoming collection of fiction and does regular short story readings in the PDX area.

IAN PETERKIN teaches creative writing at Rochester Institute of Technology. Their stories have been featured in Río Grande Review, Helix, Wagner Lit, and Flare: The Flagler Review.

KENDRA PRESTON LEONARD is a poet and librettist based in Texas, where she writes about the local, historic, and mythopoetic.

henry 7. reneau, jr. writes words of conflagration to awaken the world ablaze, an inferno of free verse illuminated by his affinity for disobedience, like a discharged bullet that commits a felony every day, the spontaneous combustion that blazes from his heart, phoenix-fluxed red & gold, exploding through change is gonna come to implement the fire next time. His work has also been nominated multiple times for the Pushcart Prize and the Best of the Net.

TATIANA RETIVOV was born in New York to Russian émigré parents. She studied English and French literature at the University of Montana, where she received her B.A. She received an M.A. in Slavic Languages and Literature from the University of Michigan. Tatiana has lived in Ukraine for over 25 years. Since

arriving here, she has also engaged in literary translation and creative writing.

JUNIX SERAPHIM is an artist, drag king, and student at Lewis & Clark college. They are interested in rebranding fruit from the feminine and using it to elaborate their nonbinary and trans masculine experience. He also encourages you to be kind to crows.

My name is ETHAN SLAYTON. I'm a student at PCC Sylvania. I moved to Portland from Vermont in '08 , years after attending the Maine College of Art and the Joe Kubert School of Illustration and Design in '98. I've self-published my own comics, taught youth programs for comics at day camps and I've had spot illustrations published in a number of gaming supplements. I continue to write & draw my own comics and short stories as well as working freelance doing spot illustrations for role-playing games.

KIRA SMITH is a writer from Boalsburg, Pennsylvania. She primarily writes about and researches environmental issues in Oregon, with occasional forays into feminism and politics.

CASSIE PREMO STEELE is an ecofeminist poet and novelist. The author of 16 books and audio programs, her poetry has been nominated 6 times for the Pushcart Prize. Her most recent book is *The ReSisters*, a #1 bestselling LGBT YA novel. She lives with her wife and (now home) college-aged daughter in South Carolina. Her website is www.cassiepremosteele.com

MONET SUTCH is a whole lot of things, all of which are changing all the time, as minds within their bodies often do, but the relevant information is this: Writing, whether it be through words, through an instrument, or through song, have always been

their primary means of living beyond survival. Monet sings and composes in two bands; Over and DNA Minifridge, and is an editor for Cathexis Northwest Press.

ABIGAIL SWOBODA is a writer based in Philadelphia, PA where they are currently pursuing their M.A. in English at Temple University. There, they also teach French, eat too much oatmeal, and conduct paranormal investigations.

S.C. TAULBEE is a polymath, PCC student, and ne'er-do-well born, raised, and residing in the Great Pacific Northwest. Don't Google them.

SHERRE VERNON is an educator, a seeker of a mystical grammar, and was a Parent-Writer Fellow at MVICW. She has two chapbooks: *Green Ink Wings* (fiction) and *The Name is Perilous* (poetry). Readers describe Sherre's work as heartbreaking, layered, and lyrical. To read more, visit www.sherrevernon.com/publications

SUZANNE VERRALL lives in Adelaide, Australia. Her flash fiction, essays and poetry appear in *Atlas and Alice*, *Flash Frontier*, *Archer Magazine*, *Lip Magazine*, *Poetry NZ Yearbook*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, and others.

JAMES VU is a languid Vietnamese Californian keeping Portland weird. He is a comic book author and pays the bill with a McJob. James Vu loves you and loves basketball, but doesn't love drugs anymore. He is taller than you and can cook.

ELIZABETH WING is a rising sophomore at the Pratt Institute. Her work has appeared in venues including Hanging Loose Magazine, Up North Lit, The Defiant Scribe, Jet Fuel Review, and Euphony. In 2018 Gordon Square Review nominated her short story 'Leda's Daughters' for a Pushcart Prize. When not at school, she lives in California where she works in a popsicle truck and teaches animal tracking.

JONG WON is a Korean/Canadian aspiring writer currently situated on the unceded lands of the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. Jong is currently in their fourth year at UBC majoring in Creative Writing.





XXXVI

To any who claimeth unrightful ownership or would seek to
deface, abuse or otherwise mistreat this book:
Be blinded by botflies and bitten by pilliewinks
a blight upon thy days,
may thy digits fall from thy feet,
may thy coffee always be decaf,
and may thy cat eat thee and may thy devil eat thy cat

Fonts:

Cinzel Decorative is used for headers

Albertan Pro is used for everything else

