

SUNSPOT LITERARY JOURNAL

VOLUME 6 ISSUE #2 © 2024 SUN DOGS CREATIONS



**CHANGING THE WORLD
THROUGH WORDS AND ART**

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Devotee of the Bog Witch

Leah Skay

Editor's Prize

I'm learning to listen and it is never quiet.

Mushrooms are growing antlers from
the bones of frogs and the birds are
screaming for sacrifice.

Trees along the marshlands lean
towards the wind and flip their leaves;
there's a storm coming, atom bombs
and acid rain and the animals are
fleeing.

I talk to the huddled herd and they tell me where to hide.

Let me wait under raised roots, wade
to my knees in land too thick to
breathe.

Cicadas speak the name of a dead god
named Patience and crawl from the
mud starving; I hold my breath and
moss replaces my teeth. Hunger and
waiting make nature's greatest
behemoths.

I become home to dying things and ingest a thousand lives in
one.

Let me fossilize and keep my skin; I
crave to die useful.



Tremula / Robb Kunz

Jetzt reifen schon die roten Berberitzen

Rainer Maria Rilke

Translated from German by Wally Swist

From *Book of Hours: The Book of Pilgrimage*

II, 32

*Jetzt reifen schon die roten Berberitzen,
alternde A stern atmen schwach im Beet.
Wer jetzt nicht reich ist, da der Sommer geht,
wird immer warten und sich nie besitzen.*

*Wer jetzt nicht seine Augen schliessen kann,
gewiss, dass eine Fuelle von Gesichtern
in ihm nur wartet bis die Nacht begann,
um sich in seinem Dunkel aufzurichten: —
der ist vergangen wie ein alter Mann.*

*Dem kommt nichts mehr, dem stoest kein Tag mehr zu,
und alles luegt ihn an, was ihm geschieht;
auch du, mein Gott. Und wie ein Stein bist du,
welcher ihn taeglich in die Tiefe zieht.*

— Rainer Maria Rilke

II, 32

Jetzt reifen schon die roten Berberitzen

The red barberries are already ripening,
aging asters breathe feebly in their bed.
Those who are not rich now that summer is gone,
will always wait and never own themselves.

Those who can't close their eyes now,
certain that a wealth of visions in it
only waits until the night begins,
to rise up in its darkness—
passes on like an old man.

Nothing will come to him, no more days will be allotted,
and everything that occurs is a deception to him;
you, too, my God. And you are like a stone
that pulls him down every day.



Galaxy Room / Emily Dolanová

Subway Meditations

Aaron Carrot

Bleecker

Time was, I often sensed that something was about to happen. I was on the verge of something. I felt this when, for instance, I would ride into town on a Saturday night with my friends: a glowing dashboard, strawberry incense sticks, the Cure. The sense of my life unfolding; a sail hoisted to catch the wind. I have forgotten what came next; it was never exactly what I sought, but something always happened nonetheless. Now I seem to have undergone a subtle metamorphosis while looking the other way. I have unwittingly crossed a threshold. I can no longer recall the last time I sensed that something was about to happen. That feeling did not stop suddenly, like a road that leads to the edge of a cliff, but faded gradually, like the whistling of a train receding into the distance. In its former place I discover the feeling that something *has* happened. But what? That, also, I cannot recall. I was clearly not paying attention, as usual. But whatever it was, it left an irrefutable trace. There are crow's feet around my eyes.

Hunts Point

Sometimes I wonder if I have a parasite inside me. A writhing, blind, devouring worm that congests my sinuses, reddens my eyes, disrupts my bowels, and saps my energy. An horrific situation, no doubt about it, but one that still affords hope. Someday the masked avatars of science may find this worm and remove it, pulling it out of me like string cheese. Then I will be cured! There will once again be spring in my step, and my eyes will regain their blue. But what if this parasite cannot be removed? What if this worm is called *time*?

Whitlock

Let me tell you about that other me, the *romantic one*. He who stands entranced by clouds, yearns for women to fall in love with him, cries

over imaginary losses, listens to Chopin on rainy nights, pours over antiquated maps, dreams of becoming a bird, takes pictures of abandoned buildings, and aspires to live according to artistic possibility. The *romantic one* is an incorrigible idiot, a sentimental fool whose stunted brain quivers in a vat of hormonal fluid. I would just ignore him if I could, but I cannot. For all his fatuous sighing, he is surprisingly strong and incredibly persistent. Take your eyes off of him, even for a moment, and he *will* take control. Despite my vigilance, it happens all the time. I blink and then *boom*, there he is, a braying jackass behind the wheel, driving us pell-mell toward annihilation. You have no idea how much damage he causes, and how hard it is to restore any dignity, whenever that fucking clown acts up. And what infuriates me beyond all measure is the fact that, while the *romantic one* is clearly my arch nemesis, he does not even know that I exist.

East 96th

I could go on about what might have happened during my so-called *lost years*, waxing melancholic on the inexorable demise of possibility. But there is always another truth. Things *did* happen during the lost years, and they were just as numinous as what did not. I wrote about Chaucer as a blizzard raged outside my little window. I drove my dying grandmother down a winding country road in Autumn. I watched my beautiful girlfriend bathe in a waterfall in a redwood forest. I walked under a glimmering emerald dawn in Seattle after having danced all night. The fact that these things were *episodic* and did not constitute any meaningful arc cannot be held against them. These things actually happened, while meaningful arcs are the greatest illusion of all.

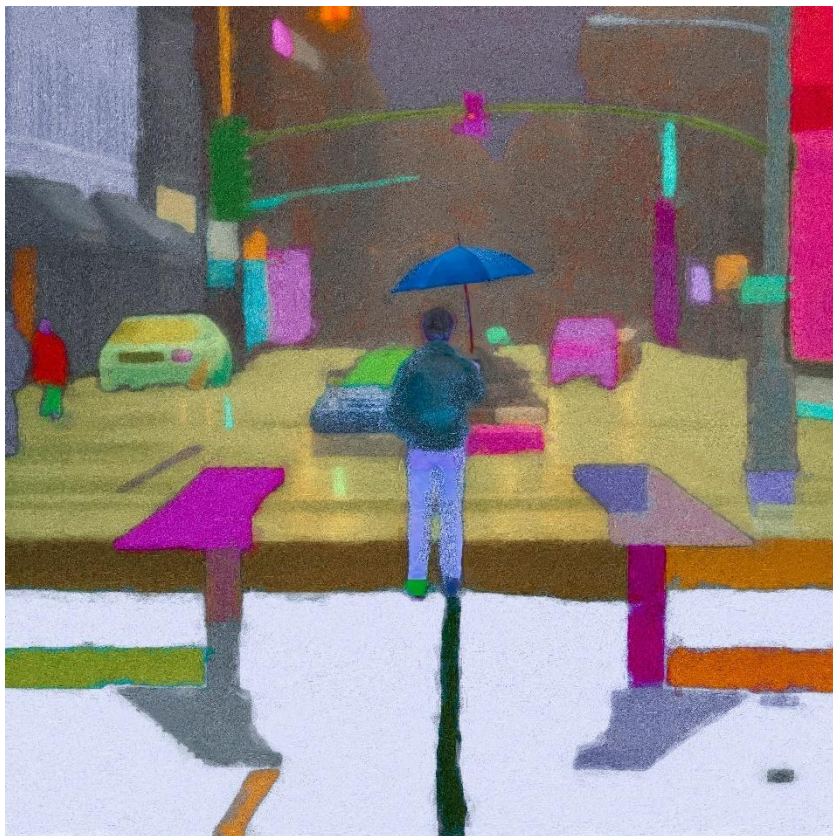
Zerega

Self-consciousness is my archenemy. Ours is a lifelong duel. Always lurking in the shadows, his loreal pits locked onto the heat of my heart, he has ruined many otherwise happy moments with his venomous *awareness*. Sometimes I manage to evade him and experience the incandescent rush of life without reflection, but he soon finds me again,

fangs dripping. Yet what would I be without him? Unrecognizable. His venom is inseparable from my blood. Vanity has its uses. It leads us to accept those parts of ourselves that we abhor but cannot banish. We cast out what we can; we grow to love what remains.

Middletown.

On a wintry Monday morning you ride your stationary bicycle and have a harrowing epiphany: *this is it*. Your destiny has come and gone. You watched for it all your life; yet you missed it completely because it did not rise in the east and set in the west. No, it came through some secret door, wove its inextricable web, and then stole away. Now you will never know your destiny's face, but you can plainly see what it left behind. Just look around you! *This is it!* It is not at all what you imagined, but then destiny and imagination never got along. To say they are archenemies is to vastly overestimate your imagination's might. While by far the more appealing of the two, your imagination doesn't stand a chance. Your destiny tramples it as a charging rhino tramples a mouse, without even noticing the squeal and crunch under hoof. But do not fear; your precious little imagination will survive. Its resilience is legendary. Even now, with a shattered spine and bloody mouth, it still sings its sweet, impossible song.



Big Apple Montenegro / Rex Wilder

AI Assisted Art

House of Cannibals

Anita Cabrera

This is the house in Messajanes where they assigned me the bedroom with no window or door that closed. This is the house where the Australian painter a breath older than thirty whose works are auctioned before brush touches canvas offered to switch rooms and gave me the one with a window and a door that closed. This is the house where the painter and I were instructed not to feed the feral cats that invaded the patio because the German actress and playwright who lasted only three days kept laying out saucers of milk and food scraps and now we had fleas and cat vomit and turds. This is the house where I felt all sixty-two years of myself on the second day when the rock-and-roll legend called to invite the painter to the concert in Lisbon with backstage VIP passes and the painter asked the five other resident artists in town, all under thirty, but not me, to join him. This is the room with a twin bed across from the street-level window. This is the window that the neighbor with the silent Brazilian wife blocked each night with a different car. This is the wall next to the window where I taped a piece of drawing paper. This is the paper on which I scribbled tasks and deadlines, and schedules of yoga, biking and dance so I wouldn't go crazy alone in the room all day writing what hurt. This is the house where the artist quoted the rockstar who said you've got to "cannibalize your pain." This is the desk where I sat and finally wrote about the night I started to kill my mother and did not let myself walk away until it was all out in one form or another, until my muscles twitched against the wooden chair at the flimsy desk and a first draft was born. This is the house where each day I passed the painter in the studio off the kitchen working seven hours straight making canvases and colors and drawing bases and painting for shadow and form and jerry-rigging a makeshift crutch to lean his arm against. This is the house where I sprang up from the chair to go out with the cats on the patio and sit on a splintered wooden stool and stare at the blue and white *Nossa Senhora do Remedios* cathedral up on the hill and bummed cigarettes from the painter and listened to how he learned more about light and depth from a copy of *How to Paint Like the Old Masters* he found at a garage sale than from all his university art classes. This is

the house with the patio where I crept each morning with a threadbare hand towel as a yoga mat and killed fleas and swatted flies and practiced breathing. This is where I did a forty-minute vinyasa yoga stretch with Adrian on YouTube on the warped slats of deck or practiced dated choreography memorized from years of dance classes. This is the house where the Brazilian wife of the unsmiling man with many cars peered over the wall while hanging laundry when I was dance stretching to Patti LaBelle's *When You Talk About Love*. This is the house where the young painter and I listened for truck horns, ran out to the street, and waved down vendors selling vegetables and fruit, bread and cheese. This is the house where the painter prepared dinner for us both each night because, according to his fiancé on speaker phone calling from Sydney, he really loved cooking for other people and I shouldn't feel bad about eating it. This is the house where I sat outside with the cats in the dark listening to the young painter who, as the evening wore on and the beer ran out, repeated over and over how he couldn't believe how "you" Americans were allowing mass shootings and the reversal of Roe vs. Wade. This is the house where each morning I woke to twenty emails asking for money to help stop mass shootings and the reversal of Roe vs. Wade. This is the room where I hit buttons to sign petitions and send \$5 or \$10 because I was too far away to make campaign calls or write postcards. This is the house where I submitted rough writing and counted scores of rejections and one acceptance for a piece I didn't love. This is the house where I parked the borrowed bike with loose brakes. This is the bike I rode at dusk down to the square then up to the top of the hill to sit in the shadow of the church and take in the village below me. This is the house where the young painter and I invited the artists from Belgium, France, Bulgaria and Utah to share dinner out on the patio. This is the kitchen where I tore wilted leaves of romaine and listened to the welder describe meeting her new beau on Tinder and sang with the photographer slicing tomatoes. This is the house where guests brought wine and homemade savory tarts and fruit tarts and vegan sushi without seaweed, where, perched on tiny stools and broken chairs beneath the clothesline, we drank tea after dinner and cracked open pistachio nuts dispensed in cans for one euro from a machine in the bar with the pool table. This is the town where people referred to me as *La Espanola* and I was not going to correct them. The town

where the painter ran up to the corner cafeteria for cigarettes after dinner and bought a round of beers for everyone and then consumed the multitude of beers paid back to him. This is the house where the artist wobbled home over cobblestones and recounted how the townspeople had thereby christened him *El Presidente*. This is the house where El Presidente showed me the Instagram clip of him proposing to his girlfriend who models for Vogue and described the engagement ring he designed that contained his little sister's ashes. This is the house where one night I smoked too many of the cigarettes I had bought for the artist while out on a bike ride and almost fainted the next morning after practicing choreography on the patio. This is the house where the artist knocked on my door and asked if I was okay and left me a plate of cut up fruit and toast and eggs covered with a napkin on the kitchen table. This is the house where I and the painter half my age who wore the trousers to a Gucci suit designed just for him with no shirt but a full apron watched a UFC tournament from across the world on a phone screen because he and one of my sons back in the States both trained. This is the house where before I left, the artist and I sat out on the patio later than usual, he this time cold sober. Where he wondered aloud if his drinking so much might have something to do with his sister's death. This is the house where I paused. Where I did not ask the question, but instead waited, the answer already wafting up in spirals strangling the stars. This is the house where I stayed anonymous because I did not want to seem to proselytize sobriety. This is the house where I thought about telling the young artist that I had finally written about trying to kill my mother. This is the house where we cannibalized pain and didn't speak of it. This is the house I left after hugs and kisses when the painter and the other young people gathered around to see me off. This the house I left far behind before I ever saw the YouTube video of the painter accepting an award and asking the audience to indulge him as he used the moment to give voice to his sister, his best friend, whom he lost to suicide. His sister, he said, who would have told us all to support one another by listening and asking hard questions. This is the house where I danced in the morning and sat with the cats and smoked with the painter and ate with young artists. This is what came out of the room with a door and window and piece of paper on the wall telling me to sit and listen. And write down what happened.



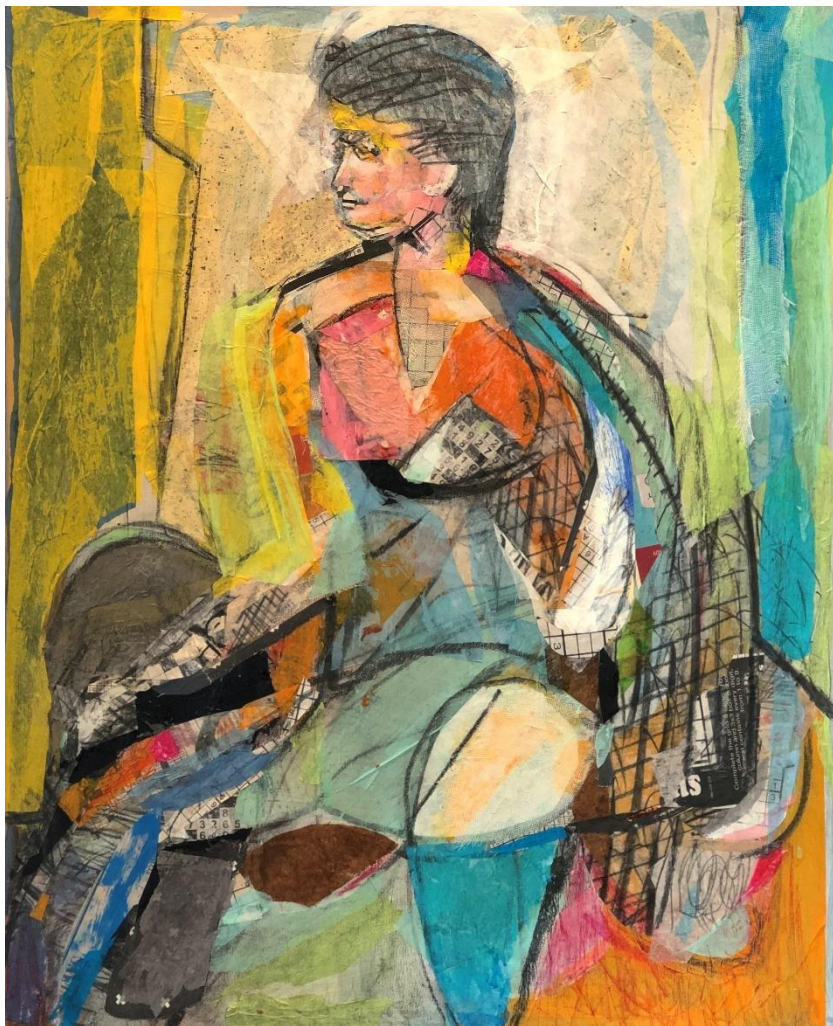
Augmentiquities, Ersatz Ecologies / Caleb Weintraub

AI Assisted Art



Souvenirs from the Uncanny Valley / Caleb Weintraub

AI Assisted Art



She's Undone / GJ Gillespie
Inception 2024 Finalist



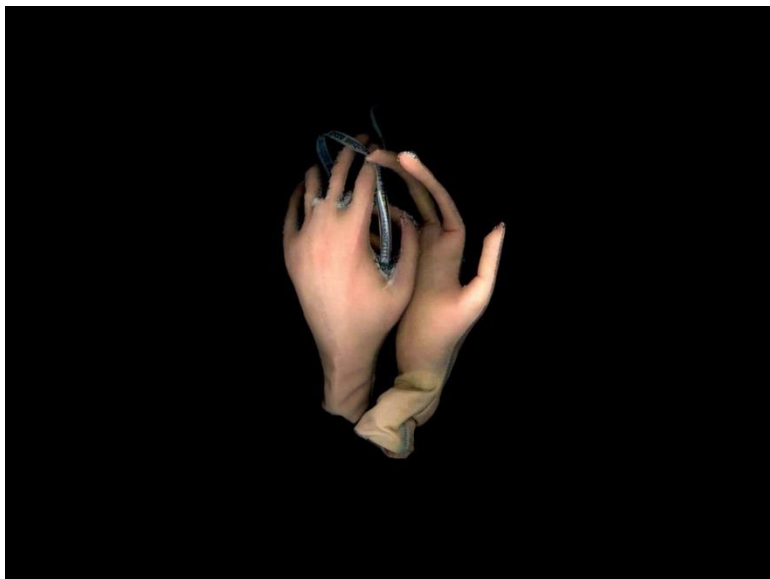
Reflection in Orange / Robin Young

Inception 2024 Finalist



My Glittering City / Heather P. Shreve

Inception 2024 Finalist



Your Body is Real / Anna Troxell

Inception 2024 Finalist

Ginger Cake

Indyana Horobin

Inception 2024 Best of Creative Nonfiction

I watch my grandfather hold his mug of coffee. He inhales through his nose before he sips. I do too. Smelling the roast before tasting. I'm recording us. My phone set down on the table, a microphone plugged in. I'm recording because I'm writing this. These words, this book. I've planned time in the week with him and my grandmother. I'm going to take their stories. I'm going to make them live in text. I'm going to keep them alive with words.

Rodney's first positive memory of life is being handed a slice of ginger cake with lemon icing. He's seven years old. His ribs protrude, skin wrapping thin over the bones, eyes deep set in a face missing baby fat. Malnourishment makes him seem younger. Rod lives on the Wombarra coastline. He doesn't know it yet but when he gets home, his father will beat him. Jack Horobin, doesn't want Rodney to have anything nice. Rod was born into a family of ten, he was the sixth, and when he arrived things were already ... pretty fucking bad. His father—drinking and bashing his mother every night; his mother—a couple years into a full-blown psychotic episode. They both do things to Rodney that stick in his memory, hot tar on gravel, napalm, boiling; angry and permanently there. His parents scream at him to stop crying, to stop talking, to not be seen or heard, to have not existed in the first place.

Eulogistic Texts to My Dead Girlfriend as a Timeline of Grief

Kyo Lee

Inception 2024 Best of Fiction

April 15 11:43 PM

hey

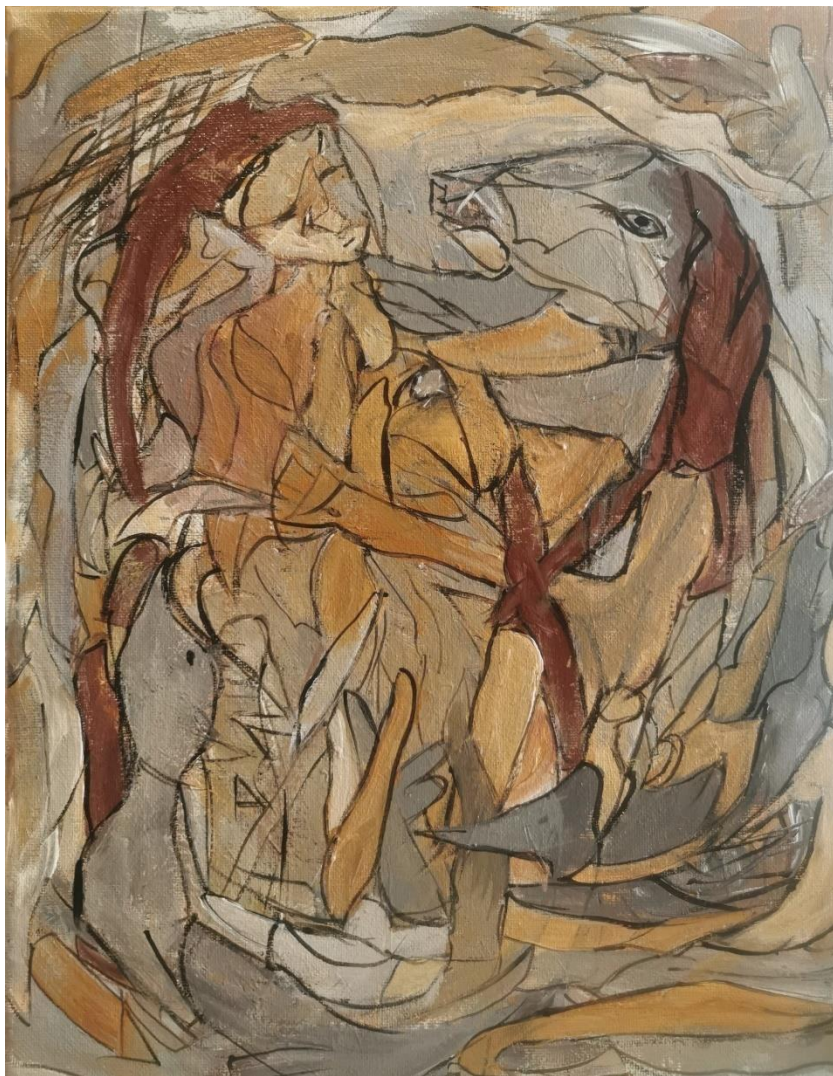
how're u

me? thanks for asking.

the past three months have swallowed me and severed me into pieces. winter was beautiful this year. one day I woke up to a world blanketed with snow, sky and ground holding each other so tight they appeared to merge under the violet dawn air, and when I fell back asleep, I dreamt that your blood was staining the snow a terrible red.

I woke up to the clattering of my teeth. it was as if my skull was shaking from the cold, as if I could feel your blood sticking to me. I turned on the shower and sat on the bathtub shivering but this reminded me of the nights, when we were children, how we'd paint each other's nails in the same tub. bare skin of my shin sliding against yours under the blanket, our legs shifting around so more of ourselves could touch each other, our naive bodies seeking what they wanted as we, above the blanket, said nothing. I would've continued to say nothing if you were alive.

anyway. the reason i'm messaging you is that you've returned to life. there's this rat who i met in the apartment dumpster & everyday he convinces me that he is you. he has narrow black eyes bulging out of him, like flowers ready to bloom, and he has this charm and charisma. i sometimes mistake him for you. resurrection is not a glorious matter. you would know.



Comfort / JJ Chen Henderson

Inception 2024 Best of Art

The Buddha Train

Stephen Policoff

Inception 2024 Best of Novel

The damn phone would not stop ringing.

After the first call I knew there would be more. Journalists have some universal hook-up; it's like when one monkey learns a new skill and suddenly the whole clan can slit a gourd in half with a sharpened stone. I couldn't answer most of their questions. And those I could answer I did not answer.

Even now, I do not know how he came to be where he was when it happened and certainly I do not know—do not care, *do not care*—why his once-bright star fell so precipitously.

Here is what I do know: Gabriel Bish, famous/infamous creator of theater epics, prince of the avant-garde, appears to have died in the first days of the year 2000, under circumstances far removed from the bohemian splendor in which he had once lived. The cause? *A crude explosive device*, according to Connecticut State Troopers; *a highly sophisticated detonation*, according to the **Hartford Courant**.

Terrorism? Perhaps. He enraged many political partisans who sought his attention. An act of revenge by someone whose life he damaged? Possibly. But there are so many candidates. Where would one even start?

Everyone else is astonished. I may be too tired of refusing to think about him to be in the least surprised by his horrible death.

I suppose I shouldn't blame them for tracking me down. But I do. In the years since Gabriel Bish ruined my life, I've felt vaguely safe up here in Ulster County.

Sea Horse: An Ode

G.R. Kramer

Inception 2024 Winner

I arose with the squat rouge heart
of the newbirthed sun and saw
on the shore the filly, pale,
riderless, feral horse
in shoaling waves,

His T-shirt and Mine

Milo Harvey

Goldilocks Zone 2024 Finalist

There's a certain weight that grows within your chest when your cousin appears wearing the image of an AR-15 within the silhouette of Texas on his heather gray T-Shirt and for months all you can think of is dying and you slowly become hardened by it and a fear and a pain cements there like a grit in the joints between your bones and you clench your teeth and you've noticed your gums bleeding and you taste it in your mouth like iron and you turn cold and sad and just oh so exhausted from watching the threads grow longer and the bottom feeders killing each other and the blood fills the tank and your other cousin tells you what your great-aunt said about you last summer and how she argued and said she'd never try to understand and didn't care to anyway and after a while you just stopped even fighting it and when you float through the store like a specter you feel a small, welcome sense of relief because the employee who helped you had a layer beneath his voice that you recognize and as you trudge out into the baking, humid parking lot you think of hot, hot red, a beautiful flower you will only see once, deep red petals blooming through the thin white cotton of your T-Shirt, expanding slowly, steadily outwards and all you can do is watch and think oh how beautiful it is, the color red, and you think about the man in the parking lot killing you, or the man at the concert in the square, and you think about your cousin killing you and on the cusp of every thought, in every breath of consciousness, you glimpse into the cool glass of fear and stare into the scared eyes of your own mortality, the gentle breaths you take, so easily halted and you wonder how a heart can keep beating when such a tiredness overwhelms you, but not the kind of tiredness that dissipates into sleep, but the kind that aches your bones and curses you and brings you to your knees to cry "Oh God, why, why must I watch this all happen, how am I supposed to eat something that never goes down, swallow when it's impossible to chew" but you sleep as much as you can and you hope that the countless nights will make it waver and every morning you eat your instant oatmeal, stirring in the boiling water

but leaving it runny and you forget about it, but never for very long.
No, never for very long.

Maybe Both

Jordan Nishkian

Goldilocks Zone 2024 Finalist

The equipment in this room looks different than the one from last month, even though Dr. Lin made the procedures sound similar.

This one is different. This one comes with a cauterizer, a vacuum, a waiver, and Nurse Daisy telling me it could make it harder to carry a pregnancy to term.

Until I heal from this, that makes sense.

“Forever,” she corrects.

The wax paper crinkles under my shifting hips. Apparently, you can only get almost-cancer so many times before your cervix stops letting you have babies.

Do I even want babies?

I start to cry.

I guess so.

Nurse Daisy says the doctor will explain everything to me before the procedure, which seems out of order to me. She says I don't have to sign yet.

I wasn't thinking of ending things when I got curious about the little locked box under my ex's side of the bed. I knew about it for years, but the morning he left for a week-long trip, I felt the urge to look at it. Crisp, finger-sized streaks disrupted the lid's thick layer of dust the way knowing this disrupted my day. A combination lock from a suitcase was all that stood between me and what I already knew.

I glide my name over the waiver's empty line. This is where I let the universe decide, hoping it'll intervene via dead pen, or maybe something more dramatic like a fire alarm or a not-so-serious earthquake. Despite the clinic's location between two fault lines (I checked), divine intervention kept to herself. The ink flowed smoothly onto the paper.

I relinquish the clipboard, the documents, and my cervical cells to Nurse Daisy, who looks a little bad for seeing me crack — I'm not as good at not-crying in a doctor's office as I am at not-crying at a

funeral—but takes what I offer and tells me to relax till she comes back.

There are a lot of things to like about Nurse Daisy: that she doesn't treat me precious, that her nails are always pink, but what I like most right now is that she doesn't ask me if I'm sure.

Of course I'm not sure, but I made the appointment, searched for parking for fifteen minutes, put on the single-ply gown, and tucked my underwear into a stack of performatively folded clothes on a chair. What am I supposed to do? Let myself get worse?

I fail at not-looking at the equipment the way I fail at not-crying. What awaited me on the metal tray looked anything but delicate. These were the things I wanted preciousness from—for the silver nitrate to be stored in crystal, for the speculum to be wrapped in pastel silicon, for the stirrups to be heated and cushioned while the rustling sanitary paper whispers encouragement. I try lying down in case it has anything to tell me, but all it gives is an untranslatable crackle.

Seven days before he realized I left him (AKA: "Lockbox Day"), I called out of work and spent the morning trying different lock combinations and searching for the key. I spent the daylight combing through hoarded, miscellaneous papers spread over his desk, shoved into drawers, and tucked between old DVDs and magazines. I checked my phone every twenty minutes—when he texted me in the late afternoon, I didn't respond. (My therapist says I avoid anger by seeking power.

She also says I restrict myself from my emotions. I tell her I cry all the time.

"But what do you feel?"

Nothing.)

I ease myself off the examination table and onto the linoleum, trying to decipher the paper's static response. The woo-woo part of me says it's radio static, but I'm not tuned into the right station to receive the message (the woo-woo part of me often makes the situation my fault), while the mm-hmm part of me says to stop making something out of nothing (it also makes the situation my fault). I help myself to a tissue to clean my teary face and blow my nose, glad I didn't have time for makeup this morning.

I wipe my eyes greedily and move to the wall of posters and brochures. There's a year-old printout about insurance updates, and beneath it, a flier with the new esthetician sticking a needle into Nurse Daisy's forehead. Something about a women's health clinic offering Botox felt like it could either be sexist or empowering. (I'm tempted to throw my tissue into the red biohazard disposal.) Maybe neither, maybe both.

I didn't find the key on Lockbox Day, but I found a hotel parking pass. I called the Sonata Inn at 4 p.m., but Mike at the front desk said he couldn't share protected information. I called the Sonata Inn again at 2 a.m. This time, a bored Bernice was more than happy to help (I think about her sometimes) and reported that his license plate was connected to a string of one-night reservations made under a name that frequented his phone screen.

I'm straightening a stack of pamphlets when Dr. Lin knocks and walks into the room with Nurse Daisy. There's a lot to like about her—Dr. Lin—the way her fuchsia pants and floral blouse billow out of her white coat, the way she sits with me and draws a bunch of circles and lines on the back of my chart to explain the procedure, the way she (later) narrates what she's doing from between my knees, even though she uses words I don't like: "cough," "cut," "cauterize."

The four Cs of diamonds come to mind (which I only know about because of my close relationship with delusion). I try to think of the fourth C of gynecology.

I wince at the astringent smell of vinegar and burning flesh (my burning flesh).

Cry could work.

After the breakup, I drove to the beach in the middle of the night, parked across from my college apartment, and walked down the ramp next to the pier, sliding out of my shoes before stepping off the concrete (I tend to go there when things end—books, relationships, lives). The sky was black with the new moon, smattered with faint stars, the sand chilled the tender skin between my toes, the waves and the wind were louder than my thoughts. After walking along the shoreline to the highest dune, I unclenched my jacket from my body and dropped it, along with my shoes, my shirt, and my jeans, beside my cold feet.

"Are you doing okay?"

No, but I nod. Chills unfurl over my skin; I stare at the pocked ceiling tiles. The pain-seeking part of me is piqued when Dr. Lin says, “Good job.” (It doesn’t react to praise the way it normally does when my legs are open. I want to lose that part of me.)

“Almost done,” Dr. Lin says. “You still have plenty of cervix left.”

The fourth C: “congratulations/condolences.” My eyes travel to the bulletin board full of baby photos on the wall. Dozens of baby eyes watch me get slashed and burned.

My feet flew across the beach faster than my thoughts could keep up. I had the urge to do this for almost a decade (to plunge into the black, bitter water, piercing the sea foam and wetting my head, blending into the abyssal horizon). I ran against the push of the waves and followed their ebbing, arms cradled, eyes happy and burning. It was frigid. It was brief. It was mine—it was my favorite thing I’d ever done.

The night of the procedure, the rain convinces me to get the lockbox from the garage. It has a thin layer of dust on top, which started collecting a few months ago when I moved into my friend’s house. Leah’s house has an attic for storage, two bathrooms, and a backyard that we’ve become extra-enamored with (a ring of mushrooms appeared one day on the lawn). The glass door fogs as I look at it from the living room.

When Dr. Lin finished up and my knees fell together, she flipped a series of switches to turn off the machine. “You did great. I’ll see you in four weeks to make sure you’ve healed completely,” she said, discarding her gloves. I tried to ignore the black smears on the fingers before they disappeared into the trash. “Until then, no sex, no tampons, no baths, no swimming.”

To punctuate this, Nurse Daisy pulled a printed list of restrictions from a folder and placed it on the counter next to a bulky pad. The burning smell lingered.

“Expect some cramping, and you’ll want to use pads for the next few weeks; it’ll be normal to see black stains. It’s from the medicine.”

I want nothing more than to fall into the midnight Pacific and get tumbled and scrubbed over jagged beds of broken rocks and shells

(coquina—that’s what that’s called), then let the water salt each new wound. Again with the pain-seeking.

“Are you ok?”

No. I nodded, betrayed by welled-up eyes. Dr. Lin rubbed my knee. Nurse Daisy set down an extra pad. “Take your time,” the doctor said before leaving.

I choked out a thank you, competing with the sound of the closing door.

A chill seeps through my shirt as I close the sliding glass door behind me, place the lockbox onto Leah’s patio chair, and leave my slippers and jeans next to the legs.

Rain pelts my head and clings to my body while I cross over the field mushrooms to sit in the center of the fairy ring, imagining that my body could sink into the ground, the nape of my neck held by the soft edge of earth and bluegrass, bathing in its round, muddy mouth until the elves and pixies find me. (I want so badly to be swallowed—for my limbs and phalanges to root and branch and join the ring’s mycelium network—sentience without a body.)

When Leah enters the yard, I’m curled in a fetal position, facing the light pouring out from the living room.

Can you see me?

“What are you doing?” she asks, lowering a trash bag and shutting the sliding door behind her.

This is supposed to make me invisible.

“That’s a good way to upset the fairies,” she says, waiting for my reaction (I have none). I pick dirt out from under my fingernails.

She watches me like I’m a maybe-dead possum on the side of the road. A halo of breath swells around her face before she pulls up her hood and moves the chair onto the lawn to join me, placing the lockbox on her lap as she takes a seat with crisscrossed legs.

“So, whatcha doing?”

I think this is as close as I can get to a bath for a while.

Maybe I’m not white enough for the fairy circle to work (the DNA test said I was 20%), but Leah’s Irish. I’m tempted to ask her to try it.

“If you want a bath, we can just stick you in it upside-down.” A dry smile crosses Leah’s face while she fishes her favorite necklace out of her jacket pocket. “Can you get this?”

I sit up to catch the tangled chain, which ripples over the heart-shaped pendant in my muddy, concave palm. My nails set to work, trying to release the knot.

I'm about to consider that upside-down bath, then I remember that grief is stored in the hips, and as a woman, my hips are bowl-shaped—who knows how much is in there? Where would it go if I tip over? Maybe it'd put less pressure on my wounded cervix.

Leah leans an elbow on a rusted armrest. The rain drums on the lid of the box.

I worry sometimes I'm a fixer when I want to be a healer.

"Explains your relationship."

With my ex.

"With yourself."

Ow.

The rain falls in fat drops but only a few hit my face. The woo-woo part of me thinks I should be collecting it.

"I'm more of a fixer, it's not a bad thing," Leah says. "All those doctors and surgeons I had to see were more like fixers too."

I think about Dr. Lin.

"Do you think she's a healer?"

She has a bunch of awards in the hallway, so maybe both.

Does cutting out flesh count as healing? (My busy hands react to another wave of cramps.) Maybe neither.

"How many healers do you know?" she asks.

My mom is a chronic fixer. The rest—my grandmothers, my aunts—were neither. They were helpers, caregivers, young souls. The only person who claimed to be a healer was my ex's mother, although I'm not sure it's healing if she deals the damage in the first place. She was desperate to be one though, which might count for something.

"I think you're a healer in survival mode. There's nothing wrong with it."

I spent so much time trying to fix him.

"You were just trying to help."

The chain's knot starts to give. I push away the memories of asking what I could do to fix things. A worm wriggles out of the soil beneath my knee.

“You gave him the space, means, and time to do it; he just wouldn’t get better. That’s not on you. People don’t get better all the time.”

I pull the last of the tangled links apart and hand back the necklace, which she puts on in a practiced movement.

“K.” The chair creaks when she stands, lockbox in hand. “Time to return the favor.”

Leah examines the small box as she steps onto the patio, tosses it onto the concrete, and (in an equally practiced movement) drives the heel of her boot onto the hinges.

The raindrops sound different when they hit the bent metal as Leah walks the broken box back to me. Holding it over my lap, I curl my fingers under the new spaces of the lid and pull, revealing a scatter of fortune cookie slips, a blue poker chip, a Baskin Robbins gift card, and a corroded AA battery. I cover it all with a wail my chest thought it would die holding. The box drops onto the grass under the weight of my screams and curses and sobs, and now I know where the grief goes when I’m put upside-down.

My fingers loosen their grips from the dirt. The tears mix with rainwater, and—despite the cold—my shaking subsides. I look over to Leah, who’s smiling.

“How do you feel?”

I let out a tired breath. “Better.”

We sit in rain-fallen silence, holding the moment.

“Want me to throw that away for you?” she motions her head toward the garbage bag by the door. “I’m taking the trash out anyway.”

I nod, reaching to pick up the box and its spilled contents.

“I got it,” she waves me away. “Go get some coffee started.”

I look skyward as I push myself up—face welcoming the warm patter, toes sinking into the lawn.

At the Edge of Things

William Lewis Winston

Goldilocks Zone 2024 Finalist

And here, in my skin, standing
at the sink and easing into the mirror,
and feeling the warmth of the day still in
the half-note wedge of fall that plays
through the blinds and spreads itself
on every surface waiting in its path,
I think, again, I have begun to lose my sight,
at least the focus it once held around the edges.

For as I move in close and just
tilt my head a guess or so to inspect
the sparse white stubble that needs
bordering along my jaw and below
the shifting sandy banks of my cheeks,
it is all a blur, a cautious breathing of
the light there — not too alarming, mind you,
for I have noticed it before in other untold stories.

But this autumn evening
I am out of comfort with aloneness,
and wonder how it might feel to
descend the back stairway to
the basement and from there to
reach for the short door and duck, as always,
so as not to hurt my head, into the garage,
and which tool I might finally choose.

Lucky Stones

Christy O'Callaghan

Goldilocks Zone 2024 Best of Fiction

Year, 1955

(Found materials in bold from "The Good Wife's Guide" from *Housekeeping Monthly* May 1955)

Have dinner ready.

She stripped off the soaked navy-blue canvas sneakers, cigarette pants and blouse, the Kelly green windbreaker, white socks, panties, and bra, dumping them in a pile on the steps by the kitchen door. Her shivering body naked in the spring air made brisk and foggy by the ocean. Scandalous thoughts had, on occasion, run through her head about walking around disrobed, letting the summer sun caress her stomach and breasts. The neighbors were too far away to see her. But this wasn't how she imagined it. The sodden pile of clothes waited as she wrung each article as best she could over the grass. Clapping the sneakers together, breaking loose the sand, tiny rocks, and mud. Debris sticking to her pale, damp skin.

The pile tucked in her arms, she made her way through the kitchen, relieved she'd already cleaned up her lunch of cucumber slices and onion soup. No one else was in the big, empty house, but she walked as quietly as possible so as not to raise awareness about what she'd done. Some things need to be kept secret. Once inside the bathroom with the door closed, she filled the sink with water and Woolite and soaked the clothes. She then turned on the hot tap in the shower. Each drop stung while it washed away the salt and the scent of seaweed.

Still shivering, she took a long swallow of her husband's Scotch. Dry, unblinking eyes barely registered the well-rehearsed movements of preparing his favorite meal until her heel pressed down onto something hard. She picked up the small gray stone with a perfect

white ring around it. The lucky stone she'd clutched while walking into the drink.

Prepare yourself.

With dinner in the oven, she lay down on top of the bed, covering her numb body with a creamy white knit blanket. The freezing May ocean left her skin stinging, red, and itchy. Curled into a ball, she inhaled the scent of the wool afghan her Gran knitted as a wedding gift, each stitch filled with her hopes for a happy life full of love and babies. The small lucky stone pressed between her icy hand and the space below her belly button. Images of mossy green, apple blossoms bursting open, nests full of eggs, and bees with legs covered in yellow pollen played behind her closed lids. The doctor told her she must banish all negative thoughts and only make room for Life in order to grow a baby. If there was no baby, it was her fault for not wanting it enough, not wishing it enough.

She wouldn't tell the doctor about this afternoon and how the waves had beckoned her to join them. Calling as they hissed against the beach, shifting the stones with each lap. They seemed to understand how exhausted she was. They promised rest and peace.

The second alarm clock, closed away in her bedside drawer for her afternoon naps, went off. She pulled on a sunny yellow dress with blue trim—one of his favorites.

Be a little gay and a little more interesting for him.

She pinched her cheeks to add color and removed the scarf and curlers. Her hair hadn't gotten wet in the ocean or the shower. The shock from the winter-chilled water sucked the air from her lungs when it hit her chest, turning a switch back on in her brain, forcing her legs and arms to turn her around and march her back to shore. She almost looked pretty after brushing and setting her hair. The lack of flush to her face made her green eyes glow.

She broke her gaze to review the magazine that had arrived for him, readying herself for conversation.

Clear away the clutter.

She tiptoed by the closed bedroom door and the unused bathroom where her clothes hung to drip dry. Her eyes focused on the

plush carpet of the hallway, then made her way to prepare for the evening. The magazine placed just so next to his chair. The coaster set perfectly out of range of his elbow or gesturing hand.

Gather up schoolbooks, toys, papers, etc., and then run a dustcloth over the tables.

The library book on plumbing, with a letter from a certain friend sharing news of her latest pregnancy tucked between the pages, shut up inside a drawer. The wrench and bucket hidden under the sink in case her repair didn't hold. A fresh sweep of the kitchen and a run of the carpet sweeper around the living room erased every speck of the day.

Over the cooler months of the year, you should prepare a fire for him to unwind by.

Her mother always referred to May as her biggest disappointment in moving to Wilda Point from New York City. Often damp and socked with fog. The mud-coated landscape grabbed at shoes and flecked the bottoms of skirts and pants' legs. Spring hadn't yet burst forth to offer hope. But her father was tired of the city and wanted to discover his inner wild man. He loved every minute. Her mother never stopped complaining.

She never minded the mud and the fog all that much. And readied the logs and kindling in the fireplace, touching the long-lit match to the newspaper under the logs. Her fingers held her hair back as she blew life into the embers.

Prepare the children.

She sat back on her heels, pulled the small stone from the dress pocket, and held it to her emptiness. She tried to envision Life as instructed, but all she saw were the flames.

Be happy to see him.

His tires crunched along the gravel road to the big house with the empty bedrooms—so many unopened doors. She greeted him as he walked into the kitchen. He kissed her soft cheek.

Greet him with a warm smile and show sincerity in your desire to please him.

She smiled.

Listen to him.

And tilted her head.

Make the evening his.

He sniffed the fragrance from her neck. The one that shop girl suggested on the trip they took years ago, hurrying to drink in life before they settled into their dream.

Your goal: Try to make sure your home is a place of peace, order, and tranquility where your husband can renew himself in body and spirit.

She turned on the radio.

Don't greet him with complaints or problems.

He settled into his chair, then leaned back to review the mail. She excused herself to check on dinner and snuck a peak under the sink.

Don't complain if he's late for dinner or even if he stays out all night.

He called from the other room to say how good the dinner smelled and that he was starving. He was always home on time. Reliable. Eager.

Make him comfortable.

She poured Scotch into a glass and placed it on his coaster. Then removed his muddy shoes that rested on the ottoman and clapped them outside the kitchen door in the sharp evening air.

Don't ask him questions about his actions or question his judgment or integrity.

They relaxed into dinner. He made a big show out of every bite. The stone sat heavy in her pocket. With his mouth stuffed, he

scanned the baren chairs around the table, his posture bent. The smile dropped from his face. He swallowed, lifted his shoulders, and recounted the office gossip over the new secretary's skirt.

A good wife knows her place.

After dinner, she lifted the stopper to one of the jars on the bookshelf and dropped her stone in. Altogether, the jars held a thousand small lucky stones gathered each day since they started trying for a family. Each a wish to fill the growing void.

He flopped the magazine over his leg, sighed, and reached for her hand. He told her how cute she was and how lucky they were to have everything they wanted.

How We Learned to Fly

Anita Hunt

Goldilocks Zone 2024 Winner

As storms move branches,
as a river pushes past fish in spawn,
we dance an eddy, a tight corner,
a swing of sky,
feet stepping across streams
on the backs of stones singing ancient melodies
only our bodies can hear.

We sit cross-legged on the ground until our spines are stone,
and rise as green stalks.
If bones were wood we'd stand for years, bending,
shedding a branch, a ragged twig,
to come into balance, stronger at the break,
roots tangling with older bones
hardened in the frost.

We vine through branches, roof-lines;
fledgling coils reach higher each year, pursuing flight
above abandoned nests
and the shelter of walls.

The last elm has died.
Its skeleton turns silver,
magnificent and smooth as stones buried at sea.
Limbs feed our fires, which feed us, sending
smoke, invasive as knapweed, into the still air.

Argestes, In Heat

Paloma Maria Freitas

Solar Flare 2024 Finalist

The wind kept Maya from leaving the bed.

It was the fear of the wind which interfered with her leaving the arms of her lover and flying home to her own bed, where she'd much rather be.

It wasn't exactly a fear of the wind that plagued her, but a fear of the sound it made. Not every sound it made. Not whistling through pressed-layer canyons or fluttering through the silvery leaves of bay trees. Even the gales of a hurricane side streaked with rain. These were fine sounds, beautiful sounds, calming, peaceful sounds that meant the world was turning as it should. It was only the winds which sparked change that terrified Maya, the winds that signaled a shift in the weather, the ones which ignited disaster.

Maya had been 19 years old when the winds pounded against her bedroom window and the thin wooden walls and the metal roof of the house where she lived. But the sleepless night she endured as branches collapsed from their limbs and limbs from their trees beyond the walls of her home that shook when the thunder came each May would not be the origin of her terror.

There was yard work to be done the next morning, hours of cleaning up the wooded area surrounding her home. Branches as long as she was and twice as heavy required strategizing; they could not be so easily taken care of with a rake or a weed-whacker in the ways of normal chores which were always tedious, but thankfully, also thoughtless.

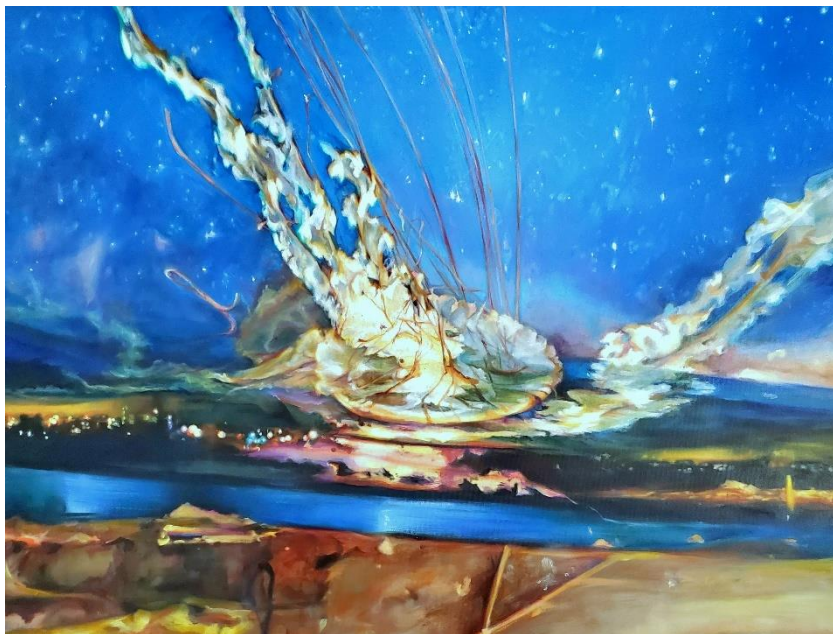
Alexander's naked body pushed up against her from behind—in what Maya hoped was an act entranced in a deep sleep. If there was a chance of leaving, she knew it must be now. That would mean facing the wind. The wind, like Alexander, had never hurt Maya directly. And like the wind, Alexander rarely caused Maya any sort of distress. But then the wind would whip in such a way, and he would blow by, having missed her, needing to hold her.

His grasp was strong. There would be storms of purple and pea-soup-green clouds of bruising across her curves when Maya looked down at herself in the shower. But she wasn't in danger. Unlike the wind, he could protect her. He had strong arms he would wrap around Maya. He would pull her to his chest to let her know what he wanted. Those arms could keep the wind away. If he was holding her, if he was touching her, if he was inside her, she wasn't alone with the sounds of air moving.

That was all it was. Maya knew that's all it was. And now, far away and free from the crackling summers where she'd grown up, she could remind and reassure herself that wind frequently brought rain as well. Cool, extinguishing rain to keep grass from browning and tree bark from brittling.

As a child she had loved the crunching sound and soft pricking pain of the dead grass beneath her bare feet as she picked bark off the trees in large puzzle pieces with the lightest of touches. She'd create beautiful patterns of deep browns and tans and ashen grays at the height of a seven-year-old across every elm in her yard. As she grew older, the game became a habit. One that caught light and spread into her neighborhood as she was allowed to venture out further on her own. And it was always alone.

Maya did not mind being alone then, and she now preferred it. At least most of the time. When the wind was gone, there was no reason to want anyone over, even Alexander. Though, she did like him. She liked him much more than anyone else who might come over. And if he was there, Maya could curl up inside him, safety hidden from the wind. He would serve as her protector. There would still be the noise, but that was easily drowned out with the rest of her thoughts, washed away, extinguished by louder sounds and fiercer touches.



Impact / Katie Wilde
Solar Flare 2024 Finalist

The Banger

Rebecca Winterer

Solar Flare 2024 Finalist

It started when George hit her hand. Pickleballs sting. And surprise when they strike you hard from across the net. A drive aimed perfectly. She pretended it didn't sting, though she did shake and wriggle her fingers some. "Good shot," she said. But, was it? Good if he'd meant to throw her into a netherworld of smarting defense. George was tall with long muscular arms. Good too to remind her to wear her protective eyewear forgotten on the kitchen counter. He'd shown Mandy that she hadn't been prepared: her shot high, her paddle slow and low. Now a face hit was not only possible, but probable. She'd practically encouraged him by saying "good shot" like that, like do more of those. Effective strategy, George.

She and her partner, Tim, lost two points while she deliberated on the hit. Tim cleared his throat and although he didn't say "Hello, Mandy, it's lonely playing alone here," she knew the throat thing said as much. "And bangers bang," he added, under his breath, which was kind and a little funny since Tim's game could be equally strident.

Their point and it was now Tim's serve. George returned it with a forehand drive to Mandy, which she drove back to him and he to her, each moving incrementally forward. She didn't want to acknowledge she was wary moving forward. The closer to the net, the more extreme the impact, yet the further and longer she stayed back the more she disadvantaged she and Tim. Tim and George's partner June had already moved up to the non-volley-zone yet Mandy and George ignored them, locked into a peculiar one-sided volley hands battle from midcourt. This isn't how to play pickleball well. George had to be thinking the same.

Mostly Mandy, it's not a good idea to reflect on non-pickleball moments in the heat of a point or anytime during a match.

It was a great party. It was a wake, Mandy. Jimmy, her brother, was always judgy. They'd hauled their mother's Lenox dishes into her back yard, a weedy lot overlaid with cement. It was the

Butterfly Meadow Monarch dinnerware set and they'd hated the flowers, bugs, scalloped edges, the "every meal is springtime" comment when their mother dumped takeout over those coy blossoms and wings. They stood on foldable chairs and smashed one dish after another onto the concrete: a bang, bang, bang cacophony of broken colored pottery. Wasted as their mother on a sober day.

George's volleys came harder. Her returns more reactive now. She'd never ducked at home. It infuriated Jimmy. "Pure idiocy to be punched by a blind-drunk, Mandy, but the eldest knows best, right!" George's face red and shining. It's weird what you miss. How a child will, no matter what, long for their mother. George's returns were creeping higher, head level. She knew that she could easily duck and let the pickleball fly out.



Midday Living / Drie Chapek

Solar Flare 2024 Finalist

Goddess Musings #1

Micaela Foreman

Solar Flare 2024 Finalist

I've begun to see strange faces look back up at me when I kneel down at the riverbed to pray. Faces that aren't quite mine. Faces that are very mine. Faces that I own but cannot wear. Water rippling across features that I had only seen in forgotten dreams. Sometimes it makes my skin itch. Makes me question whether this skin can be shed like a tarantula molts. I wonder if there is anything underneath. Or if all this body can be is blood and meat and memory.

The sun is setting. I've lost track of time again. It feels like counting grains of sand. Moving one grain from a pile sitting on my right to a pile sitting on my left. And just when the pile on my left grows to be as tall as I am, I forget what number I was on and I am cursed to start over. And another year of my human life has passed. I am sure *God* could hold all my grains of rice in the palm of *Her* heavy, wrinkled hand. Did you know there are metric tons of water tucked away into dainty clouds? I imagine there are trillions of raindrops wrapped into hurricanes, I bet *God* has had to count those too. I wonder if an eternal life can be wasted.

I don't have to worry about a wasted life. The water living in the sky has known centuries more than my body ever will. The clouds so much more expansive than my flesh can ever willingly allow me to feel. I wonder if the clouds ever felt the need to be smaller. To be controlled by some sky wizard who gets fed cattle and choir boys. I wonder if *God* has ever wanted to bathe in the blood of sacrifice and have raw sex on the altar. I wonder if *She* ever wished *She* had another all-knowing being that controlled *Her*. Something to dissolve into, to relinquish the heavy agency of a body that was never meant to be. A body that could not maintain its tenuous constitution, constantly tempted by the need to be all but doomed by the call to be one.

My grandmother once said that eons ago, *She* watched herself explode into the heat of the expanding universe. Ever since *She* has traveled through space and time trying to find *Her* missing pieces. I can taste *Her* longing in the raindrops I keep mistaking for my own

tears when they trace the outline of my face. Perhaps, these are *Her* faces I see here, reflected back to me. I imagine the rain hears her plea to be reunited, so it collects the found faces before returning to the river and emptying back out from the delta into the ocean. I hope one day, *She* finds me too.



A Lost Coastline / Dylan James Seeman

Solar Flare 2024 Best of Art

The Happy Son

JR Fenn

Solar Flare 2024 Winner

I stood in the rain. My father came and looked at me, there in the front yard. Your eyes are bright, he said. Thank you, I said. You may have them. He put them in his jewel box, locked the box with the key he wore at his neck, tucked the key back under his shirt. After this he'd hum and chop the onions and laugh at the tears that sprang into his eyes. I could see it all clearly with the sight of the spirit. I ran and jumped over the line where the kitchen became the pantry, my hair a blaze down my back. In the silence, I turned. Your hair, he said. You may have it, I said. Please, it is yours. And he took my hair as I bent my head, the sting of water where my eyes had been as the knife sawed, soft as could be. After this he put on his work shorts and tended the vines and gathered the peaches from the tree. Look, he said, what bounty is before us. And the land stretched as far as the eye could see in all its goodness, the two of us resting after the harvest, our legs bare and warming in the heat. They are beautiful, my father said. And they were — my legs, brown and long as a boychild's legs become when he has grown taller. And there in the sun on the red picnic blanket, all the world rising in its splendid orchestra of cicadas and birds and streams and cirrus clouds that flitted high above in the celestial orb, I paused, and said, You may have them. Though my heart leapt in my throat. You may have them, I said, for you are the one who gave me life. And my father took them as gently as the grapes from the vines, and put them in the box, and we made pegs for me to stand and walk with my sheared head, and to marvel at penumbras with my spiritual sight. That night I heard a noise in the room with the box. I went to the door. I saw, on the far side of the room, my father wrapped in a glorious light. He was small as a child, with eyes of emerald and a cloud of boy hair and long legs that led down as if all the way back to childhood. On the floor I saw something dark, and a glint: my father's shirt, and the key. I picked them up. My father turned. I couldn't see his face, the window silhouetting him from behind. But I could see him move toward me with a round, tripping gait, in the manner of all those who

are newly born, and trying to live, and to walk and be free. And when he came closer, when I saw his joyful, weeping face, I wondered at what I had given — for he was the son, and I was the father.

Contributors

Aimee Bungard is an artist living and working in the hills of Appalachia just outside Pittsburgh with her guitar player husband, three free-range children, two Suessian mutts and one perfect Torti kitty. She considers Giacometti, Vincent, Frida, Hilma Af Klint, Tascha Tudor, Bukowski, Dylan, Townes Van Zandt and RamDass to be of the highest inspiration.

Anita Cabrera's poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction have appeared in *The New Guard*, *Acentos Review*, *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Litro*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *The Best Women's Travel Writing, Volume 12*, *Deronda*, and other journals. Her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Award and adapted for stage by the Bay Area Word for Word Theater Company.

Aaron Carrot leads a double life; by day a city project manager, by night a household member. He writes on the subway, shuttling between these disparate worlds. Fortunately his commute is a long one and affords ample opportunity to dream.

Drie Chapek constructs her painted environments with personal reminders of complexity, pain, pleasure and delight as a visual reminder to embrace emotional health and live in the present. Composing collisions of energies gives Chapek a visual field in which to explore and connect her life's joy and grief.

Emily Dolanová has enjoyed writing and drawing through her many adventures, including being a professional horseback rider, living in a van, and running a homestead. An English teacher by trade, she is currently located in the Czech Republic with her dog and parrots.

JR Fenn's work has appeared in *Boston Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *DIAGRAM*, *Versal*, and *PANK*, among other places. Fenn holds an MFA in Fiction from Syracuse University, where she won the Joyce Carol Oates Prize in Fiction. She lives with her family in western New York.

Micaela Foreman is an astrophysicist who tries to find time to contemplate the vastness of the universe between her grad school classes.

Paloma Maria Freitas is an American writer and theatre-maker currently based in the UK. She received a BFA in creative writing from Southern Oregon University. Her short fiction and poetry have been published by *Midway Journal* and *Messy Misfits Club*. Additionally, her short play *Delights* was performed in North London in 2023.

GJ Gillespie is a collage artist living in a 1928 farmhouse overlooking Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island, WA. A prolific artist with 20 awards to his name,

his work has been exhibited in 64 shows and appeared in more than 140 publications.

Milo Harvey is a visual artist based in Los Angeles with concentrations in photography, sculpture and poetry. Harvey's work explores transgender and queer identity, sexual trauma, childhood trauma, transitioning and gender norms through a heavy focus on the body and self.

JC Chen Henderson publishes fiction, poetry, and visual art in literary reviews and poetry magazines. Her work appears in journals such as *Fourteen Hills*, *Poetry East*, *Sunspot*, *Freshwater Review*, *The Pointed Circle*, *The Clackamas Review*, and *SLANT*, to name a few. Henderson strives to express spirituality and sexuality in her work. She has sold hundreds of her paintings.

Indyana Horobin is a PhD candidate studying at Griffith, with major focusses in modern history and creative writing. He has had a publication in Drunken Boat's 2020 anthology *Meridian*, and a short story published in APWT's *Pratik: Fire and Rain*. His current PhD project focuses on familial oral histories told in memoir.

Anita Hunt is a poet and retired adjunct professor from Cadillac, Michigan, who writes about her experiences living in rural northern Michigan and southwestern Montana. She holds an MA in Humanities and a BA in Writing. Anita is the recipient of the 2023 ArtFest 55 first place award for poetry. Her work has appeared in the *Montana Poet*, *The Feast* (Episcopal,) and the *Oprelle/Matter* anthology.

G.R. Kramer grew up in Canada, Kenya, and the US, the child of refugees from fascism and communism. His first poetry chapbook was published by Finish Line Press in 2023. Other places where his poems appear include the *Atlanta Review*, *Mudfish*, *The New York Times*, and *The Winter Anthology*.

Robb Kunz currently teaches writing at Utah State University and is the Art and Design Faculty Advisor of *Sink Hollow*. His art has been published in *Peatsmoke*, *Red Ogre Review*, *Fatal Flaw*, and *New Delta Review*. His art is upcoming in *Ponder Review*, *Glassworks*, and *Anodyne*.

Kyo Lee is a Korean-Canadian high school student. She is the youngest winner of the CBC Poetry Prize and finalist for the RBC Bronwen Wallace Award. You can find her in *PRISM*, *Nimrod*, *Synergy*, *This Magazine* and others. Her debut poetry collection will be published in 2025. She loves summer storms.

Jordan Nishkian is an Armenian-Portuguese writer. Her prose and poetry explore themes of duality and have been featured in national and international

publications. She has been awarded the Rollick Fiction Prize and has been nominated for the Pushcart and Best American Short Stories. Jordan is the author of *Kindred*, a novella.

Christy O'Callaghan is a dyslexic writer and developmental editor in Upstate, NY. Christy loves strange stories, plants, and lore. Her work has appeared in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Great Weather for Media*, *Trolley*, *Under the Gumtree*, *Chestnut Review*, and more. christyflutterby.com

Stephen Policoff's first novel, *Beautiful Somewhere Else*, won the James Jones Award, and was published by Carroll & Graf in 2004. His second novel, *Come Aways*, won the Dzanc Award, and was published by Dzanc in 2014. His third novel, *Dangerous Blues*, was published by Flexible Press in 2022.

René Karl Wilhelm Johann Josef Maria Rilke (4 December 1875 — 29 December 1926), better known as **Rainer Maria Rilke**, was an Austrian poet and novelist. Rilke is appreciated as one of the most lyrical German-language poets. He wrote one novel in lyrical prose, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*), but mostly wrote verse, although he is also known for several collections of his voluminous correspondence.

Dylan James Seeman, twenty-nine, born and raised in Phoenix, AZ. Self-taught, he began painting four years ago with extreme passion. Dylan's work centers around methodically heightening life's nostalgic moments to their limits.

Almost entirely self-taught, **Heather P. Shreve** has been painting and selling her art since age eleven. Her first inspirations were wildlife and the simplicity of Sumi-e Japanese ink paintings. She is also an award-winning screenwriter, historian, author of six books, lives in Maryland, and has two children.

Leah Skay received her BA in Writing from Ithaca College. She is a proud alumna of the Japanese Exchange and Teaching Program and has returned stateside with a renewed vigor for creating her award-winning fiction, nonfiction, and poetry (a new adventure).

Wally Swist's books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), selected by Yusef Komunyakaa for the 2011 Crab Orchard Open Poetry Competition, and *A Bird Who Seems to Know Me*, winner of the 2018 Ex Ophidia Poetry Prize. Recent essays, poems, and translations have appeared in *Asymptote* (Taiwan), *Chicago Quarterly*, *Commonweal*, *The Comstock Review*, *La Picciolletta Barca* (U.K.), *Pensive*, *Tipton Poetry*, *Today's American Catholic*, *Poetry London*, and *Your Impossible Voice*.

Finishing Line Press will be publishing his book, *If You're the Dreamer, I'm the Dream: Selected Translations from The Book of Hours*, in 2025.

Austin-based artist **Anna Troxell** cannot decide on a medium. Constantly torn, she embraces a mixed media approach. However, the study of the female body and how it is both adored and disposed of remains the focus. At times, the body is printed on fabric, sculpted, sewn and stuffed. Other explorations result in edible images consumed in performance.

Caleb Weintraub has exhibited nationally and internationally. Two of his paintings are featured in *Signs of the Apocalypse/Rapture*. He has been an artist-in-residence at Redux Art Center and the Santa Fe Art Institute. Significant group shows include exhibitions at the Chicago Cultural Center, the Hyde Park Art Center, and Scion Art Space in Los Angeles.

Katie Wilde is a Canadian visual artist with an affinity for nature, oddness and interactivity. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Ottawa, and has exhibited in a variety of contexts, including galleries, a biochemistry lab, a crosswalk, and the surface of a public square.

Rex Wilder is an award-winning photographer and poet. He is the author of four books of poetry. His fifth, *Rare Fuel*, winners of the prestigious Donna Wolf-Palacio Poetry Prize, will appear soon. His latest volume is called *A Quiet Place to Land*.

William Lewis Winston lives in Oakland, California, where he taught English and history for four decades. His poems appear in *Margie*, *Ink Pot*, *Comstock Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Underground Writers*, *Orchard Lea*, *Vita Brevis*, *Sunspot*, and *Consequence*. His story *The Sound of Snow Not Falling* was published in *Litro* in 2023.

Rebecca Winterer is the author of *The Singing Ship*, awarded the Del Sol Press 2016 First Novel Prize and selected as a finalist for the Black Lawrence Press 2016 Big Moose Prize. Her stories have been published by *Puerto del Sol* and *Identity Theory*, and nominated for Best Small Fictions 2024.

Based in Borrego Springs California, artist **Robin Young** currently works in mixed media focusing mostly on collage and contemporary art making. Her focus on collage art using magazine clippings, masking tape, wallpaper, jewelry, feathers, foil etc. allows her to develop deep into the whimsical and intuitive.

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