

Issue III

January 2025



NINE MUSES REVIEW

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Edited By Katie Baughman,
Lily Baughman, and Abhinav Aitha

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Happy 2025! With the start of the New Year, I am beyond thrilled to introduce the third edition of the Nine Muses Review.

We received submissions from over three hundred individuals for this issue, and are overjoyed with the quality of each piece we were lucky enough to publish here. It has been such an honor to be able to share works created by a truly incredible group of artists, poets, and writers. I hope each of you readers will find joy and hope within this collection as we enter a new year. I know each of these pieces meant something special to all of us here at Nine Muses.

Thank you to everyone who has submitted work and helped us create this journal. We really appreciate everyone's hard work and support. Being able to produce this journal means the world to us, and we are excited to keep publishing pieces we love throughout 2025 and beyond. Thank you to Editor Abhi Aitha for everything he's contributed and a special shoutout to fantastic Senior Editor Lily Baughman for taking point on this issue! Most of all, thank you so much for reading. It is such a joy and an honor to welcome you to Issue III of Nine Muses Review!

Katie Baughman, EIC :)

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The Moon in my Father's Boat

—grind me colors with dragons: *into wine*[glass] till dawn. like i'm a dream
bird waxing in the center of Alabama sea. set me ablaze. with blooms, like my
breaths are dredging leaves with god's underneath cactus incisor: soulful bread &
ice. hallelujah to roses: in bullets jet planes here; without glory. oh! moon in my
father's boat: tell me how ruin makes swinging fires out of horses, how syllables
broken into dusty hands could be dreams, renaming a child's winter, into rotten
rainbows: into sinews, lovely ostriches —lights will come & go. the way
language becomes is a holy grail for hearts still fighting for survival. the way
doves holding bomb craters: with fingers, clapping on belly of thunderbirds pray
for new rain. young enough to hold our shadows drowning & laughing. dream
love: affirm yes. forage the wind paths with splendors & blessedness. the
dolphins are awake. insert hope with belligrant of liquid flowers. into graves
yearning for apocalypse: erase darkness with pastries of dawn. shame hate with
indigo trash cans. like our longing for a great god, our new home. isn't there a
miracle or river as night shifts us? oh, agbarakata boats, in this cathedral of form
and weightless oxygen, not only dead bats sing songs. in troops: climbing air,
knowing what distance says to a house designed by grief but also our glorious
nothingness. now swirls landscapes like a bleeding amen: night is a heavy weight
for a sky still forming in the octave of ashes. breath, vegetable house of
memories, upon these broken bones—afresh breath & see a season of new self
emerging in the darkest of oceans.

Onyishi Chukwuebuka Freedom (he/him) is of Igbo descent. A graduate of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He is a poet, essayist, *Publicity Secretary Muse* (no. 51), and music enthusiast. His works have been published/ are forthcoming in Port Harcourt Literary Review, Biochar Magazine, Poets in Nigeria initiative, the Muse journal, and recently the winner PIN's Best Poet for March, 2024.

There's Birds In Your Marriage!

On a sandy rock
outside your shoreline window,
a Blue-Footed Booby
mocks your sexual stumbling

as you try to caress
Sandy's right breast
but she pushes you out of your queen
bed like her bad
college boyfriend before you.

You need to know:
why does her shadow
still sleep in a sophomore dorm
while her body sleeps next to you
on queen comfort?

Driving with the window
squeaked open, you spot
two yellow Bushtits
perched on a stop sign

chirp chirping at you as if they hold
a superiority complex
over your domestic existence.
You should seek one out
as a marriage counselor.

Yet knowing you, you'd snap
a therapeutic neck
during the first session
to ready a relationship-repair dinner
with your only legal love.

Through a trio of green lights,
you're assaulted by a Hooters
screaming about their waitresses
who carry jugs
of beer and spicy wings.

You must drive back.

Out your window, down on the beach,
the cyclic high tide
washes away
(no break)
a child's sandcastle triumph.

In the oak tree that straddles
your property line,
an Acorn Woodpecker pecks away
a hole into a home.

In your bedroom, Sandy scrolls
through college snapshots. In one,
you're standing in the campus background
among a throb of freshmen. Up front,
her smile commands attention.

You protest: why won't her mouth
gestate to term that same smile anymore?
You haven't seen it

since the last Red Moon
dropped a sea of light
onto your anniversary night
three summers ago.

Sandy fires a declarative flight:
*for a pet, I want a rooster
to play pecking games
with our baby to-be.*

*Don't you know how happy we'll be?
Plus, a cock will look on
when we make our baby.*

Keith Gaboury earned a MFA in Creative Writing (poetry) from Emerson College. Kelsay Books published his full-length poetry collection *The Cosmos is Alive* in 2023, and *Still Human* is forthcoming from Falkenberg Press in March 2025. Keith lives in Oakland, California. Learn more at keithgaboury.me



Other People's Noise

Collage, 2024

Kathy Bruce (she/her) is a visual artist based in Upstate New York and Argyll & Bute Scotland. Her work explores archetypal female forms within the context of poetry, literature and the natural environment. Ms. Bruce is the recipient of numerous awards including a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Fellowship, 2 Fulbright-Hayes scholar grants and a Ford Foundation Grant. She has exhibited her work in the U.K., U.S. and internationally including Senegal, Taiwan, Denmark, Peru, France, and Canada.

Rovers Take Pictures on Mars

Five hundred years ago,
corporate white men
in ships grandly named —
Santa Maria, Ark Royal, Gift of God —
sailed to new worlds
and wrote glowing accounts
of wealth to be won.
These days
rovers looking cutely like humans
crawl in Mars dust,
and for the amazement of Earthlings
post photos of ore
on their first-person
Twitter accounts.
The names haven't changed all that much —
Sojourner, Spirit, Opportunity, Perseverance —
absent the presence of God
and red men to tame.
Now, move forward another five centuries:
anonymous near-human robots
sail from Billionaires' Bubble
to the asteroid belt,
mining it
out.

Jim Krosschell's poems and essays have appeared in some 75 journals, and he has published two essay collections: *One Man's Maine*, which won a Maine Literary Award, and *Owls Head Revisited*. He lives in Northport, ME and Newton, MA, and is Board President of the Maine Writers & Publishers Alliance.

Help Wanted: Rubbery Bio-Goo* & Otherwise

One problem--at least in adult humans
cartilage does not have an inherent ability
to heal, repair or naturally regenerate.

Despite our ability to crack the atom
+ manipulate DNA, oy FDA says injection
lipoid/ platelet rich plasma unproven**

so Medicare won't pay huge charges.
Stanford expert says latest, greatest synthetic
pipedream unrealizable in her lifetime.***

But unlike pobiz community where AI
/microplastics need not apply, catalytic muses
lubricate Ger's creekly mind're welcome.****



[*https://www.upi.com/Health_News/2024/08/06/new-biomaterial-replace-cartilage-arthritis-knees/5461722949287/](https://www.upi.com/Health_News/2024/08/06/new-biomaterial-replace-cartilage-arthritis-knees/5461722949287/)

****Platelet-rich plasma** — Due to the lack of solid evidence for the benefit of platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injection in patients with knee OA, we do not recommend its use. A meta-analysis of 40 trials, including 3035 patients with knee OA did not show that PRP improved pain or function compared with hyaluronic acid, intra-articular steroid, or saline [80]. In one randomized trial of 288 patients comparing PRP with saline placebo that was included in the meta-analysis, intra-articular PRP injection demonstrated no benefit in pain or structural changes [81]. Although initial studies had suggested benefit of PRP for knee OA symptoms, methodologic flaws, heterogeneity, and high risk of bias raised concerns that the effect could be related to confounding variables. Factors contributing to the variability between studies include differences in the number of injections (generally one to four), interval between injections, preparation of the PRP, and volume injected [80,82]. Additional information on the use of PRP for OA in general can be found elsewhere. (See "Investigational approaches to the management of osteoarthritis", section on 'Platelet-rich plasma'.)—*UpToDate*, 18September2024
https://www.uptodate.com/contents/investigational-approaches-to-the-management-of-osteoarthritis?sectionName=Platelet-richplasma&search=prpknee&topicRef=111177&anchor=H2196487319&source=see_link#H2196487319

*****Explains to me a “hypothetical” anti-inflammatory effect on tendons.** However, MD colleagues who used PRP extensively in clinical trials have discontinued.

********https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2024/09/avoiding-microplastics-luxury/79939/?utm_campaign=weekly-planet&utm_content=20240919&utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email

Poet, aphorist, humorist or sometimes meanderist; **Gerard Sarnat's** a multiple Pushcart/Best of Net Award nominee. His work's been widely published; including four collections; by Brooklyn Review, Tokyo Poetry Journal, Gargoyle, New Delta Review, Buddhist Review, New York Times, Oberlin, Northwestern, Yale, Pomona, Harvard, Stanford, Dartmouth, Penn, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, NYU, Brown, North Dakota, McMaster, Maine, British Columbia/Toronto/Chicago and Virginia university presses. He's a Harvard Medical School-trained physician, Stanford professor, healthcare CEO. Currently, he's devoting energy and resources to dealing with climate justice, serving on Climate Action Now's board. Gerry's been married since 1969 and has three kids, six grandsons — and looks forward to future granddaughters. gerardsarnat.com

House of Seasons and Landscapes

Imagination is more important than knowledge. —Albert Einstein

I sit on the cushioned window seat,
behind the heavy drapes to my living room,
small world of pillows where I dive into
a novel with a big dog, can surface to raise
my gaze to the west woods in winter. Today
snow falls in fat flakes, lights up skeletal
trees of brown and gray. Downstairs,
the French doors open onto the pond

in mid-spring, bullfrogs and chorus frogs
calling for mates. The air, full of pollen,
smells green. Daffodils bloom along
the pathways, irises next along the shore.
Phoebes nest on the porch spotlight. From
my bedroom windows, I gawk at the Atlantic,
turbulent or calm, a few walkers on the sand
collecting shells, building sand castles

or muscles with each stride. Closer
to my house, palms surround a patio,
blue pool where I can swim all year.
My art studio faces mountains misted
in the mornings, cattle grazing in foreground,
a patchwork of plots for vegetables sowed
by a farmer who will explain companion
planting if you stop to nod hello. Always

autumn in this view, a warm palette outside
my window to inspire me at my artist's table.
Climb the stairs to my summer penthouse
and it's lush Central Park—New York City,
where you can buy anything and have it
delivered hot to your door. My dog
walker returns with Ivy, my happy tired mutt,
who died in 1984. We're young again.

Joan Mazza has worked as a medical microbiologist, psychotherapist, seminar leader, and is the author of six self-help psychology books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self* (Penguin/Putnam). Her work has appeared in *Atlanta Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The MacGuffin*, *Poet Lore*, *Slant*, and *The Nation*. She lives in rural central Virginia.

Available: One Improved Husband

She'd thought she'd hit the jackpot, marrying a sewing machine salesman. After the wedding it came out that he couldn't repair a machine or even sew a straight line! One thing was for sure - it was necessary to find someone else for him. If she got her husband a new woman, she'd be free to acquire a better man. Locating someone who wanted a sewing machine salesman who couldn't sew or repair his machines would be a chore, but Lucille was undaunted.

Sewing was the obvious place to start. Lucille bought a bolt of fabric and handed it to her husband. He looked at the orange stripes and then at his wife, tilting his head to one side. She steered him to the table and pushed him into the seat. Up. Down. Up. Down. The needle slowly punched through the fabric, speed increasing as her husband gained confidence. He went through the bolt, stitching pillows, vests, curtains, and tablecloths, and then the needle snapped. She handed him a new one. It took him ten tries to replace it. He spent the next six months fixing every part of the machine that she could find to break.

He was proud to have mastered the sewing machine. Lucille pursed her lips, and when he bragged about the curtains, she sent him to the kitchen. He scrubbed the stickiest pots she could conjure: toffee, jelly, cheese, grease. His sleeves sogged, but potatoes needed peeling, cheese shredding, and onions chopping. He wept. She handed him a cookbook and he muddled his way from applesauce to zeppole.

He was proud to have mastered the kitchen. Lucille pursed her lips, and when he bragged about his croquembouche, she marched him into the laundry room. Running the machines wasn't hard, but fixing them took longer.

He was proud to have mastered the laundry. Lucille pursed her lips, and when he bragged about the glowing whites, she grabbed him by the tie and pulled him into the bedroom. Within a week he could tuck corners neatly, so they turned to more pressing matters.

He was proud to have mastered the bedroom. Lucille pursed her lips, and when he bragged about his skills, she agreed. He looked at his wife, tilting his head to one side.

It was time to find him a new woman; that was the whole plan. Luckily, she knew plenty of women married to disappointing husbands who would be glad to get their hands on hers. It was just a matter of time before she could get herself someone new. As predicted, it only took one after-dinner party. While the others played cards around the table, he took Christine down the hall to show her his mastery of the bedroom. By morning he was gone, taking the sewing machine with him.

Katie Thorn, currently studying creative writing online through Falmouth University, divides her time between writing, baking, and listening to odd musicals. Her stories have been published in Livina Press, Prompt Press, The Writer's Workout, Magnolia Magazine, and Lobster Salad and Champagne.



Andri's Münster

Acrylic on Canvas

I am living in Münster, Germany, at present. Münster was bombed heavily in WW2 and rebuilt quickly afterwards. It is an enchanting city, steeped in golden hues, and I often wonder what it looked like before the war. This picture is created from my imagination and from old pre-war images I have seen of the city. It represents what I imagine a pre-war Münster looked like.

Nuala McEvoy is of English/Irish origin but has lived abroad for many years. She started writing and taught herself to paint approximately five years ago, at the age of around fifty. Her writing has since been published in several literary magazines and she has read her poems on podcasts. She started submitting her artwork this year, and her paintings have been accepted for publication in over thirty five reviews. Her art has been accepted as cover art for over five of these reviews. She was recently interviewed by The Madrid Review and was the featured artist in Does it Have Pockets. She has had two art exhibitions in Münster, Germany and is currently preparing an exhibition in London.

A Stingray, Two Pussycats, No Owl

In an emergency, I would save the stingray
captured mid-undulation. When my husband said
A rocking chair is coming, I pictured
a prim pencil-straight back. What arrived
was a student's dissertation in design,
white fiberglass molded into fins
wingspan as wide as the sofa
suspended over silver rockers.

Maybe this isn't the most practical item to grab in a hurry? We have
practice tipping it sideways and out the door, down to the basement
before parties. Like John Denver's featherbed, it can hold the cats,
Una's modern mug, the flowered photo album, passports,
prescription glasses, and grandma's gold necklace.

Like the poem about the pea-green boat, we could float
to safety with two pussycats, no owl. (Although
if a screech owl offered a serenade, I wouldn't say no.)
The Cayman Islands protects stingrays. We could drift
to the shores of curly-tailed lizards.
We could rock in wave rhythm,
stretch toes to the tips of pectoral fins,
breathe salty air through spiracles,
dream by the light of the moon.

Jean Janicke lives in Washington, DC with her husband and two cats. She works as an economist and finds her creative outlet through poetry and dance. Her work has appeared in *Yellow Arrow Journal*, *Instant Noodles*, and *Last Stanza*.

Things My Mother Was Told

You can be whatever you want, Kathleen.

*Are you on birth control?
We can't employ you if you become pregnant.*

You'll be the first in our family to attend college.

*We'd have to insure you as a high-risk driver;
you're no longer married.*

*Come back to Penn and finish;
you belong here as much as anyone.*

*We had to cancel your library card;
you're no longer Mrs. Fletcher*

*Who says a single mom can't do both?
Prove them wrong again.*

*But you're thirty and a woman;
we have plenty of male college grads.*

*On behalf of our committee,
congratulations, Dr. Fletcher.*

Jonathan Fletcher holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Columbia University School of the Arts. His work has been featured in numerous literary journals and magazines, and he has won or placed in various literary contests. A Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, he won Northwestern University Press's Drinking Gourd Chapbook Poetry Prize contest in 2023, for which he will have his debut chapbook, *This is My Body*, published in 2025. Currently, he serves as a Zoeglossia Fellow and lives in San Antonio, Texas.

Jamie

With an exhale of blue-grey, metal-colored smoke,
Jamie's dreams snake away in cool night ether.
I spend hours unstuck in time,
inhaling Vonnegut's Ice-Nine science.

Downtown on Christopher Street,
all the boys are stardust pretty.
Poets bleed their words into the wind,
while Fourth Street winos search their souls.

Cordon Bleu will never be served down here.

The boys at the bar marvel at Jamie's ass,
sip warm beer and knock back bourbon-bacon shots.
Mary dunks her Rice Krispie wafers in Sangria,
and Jamie tells Joseph not to drink too much again.
Jamie doesn't really care, she's there to make tips,
edit my book with her MFA from Manhattanville.
Talk with proletariats who play pinball in empty bowling alleys
before they jackboot through NYU students' placards
that proclaim everyone needs to be loved.

I don't know what good any of it does.

Jamie calls me at 1:30am about how her husband is bored
and hates her and the kids.

Where's Baby Jesus and lost art from the Renaissance?

Where's my handle of Jameson and late-night eight ball?

Where the fuck is that dude, St. Anthony?

Thunder booms outside.

I'm left wondering if Jamie's early-morning call

is about loneliness or love.

William Teets, born in Peekskill, New York, has recently relocated to Southeast Michigan. He misses New York pizza, the Hudson River, and Fran, Remember the Good Times '68. Mr. Teets' work has been published in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Ariel Chart*, *Drunk Monkeys*, *Shot Glass Journal*, and *Impspired*. A collection of his poetry, *After the Fall*, was published by *Cajun Mutt Press* in February 2023.

Chance Your Own Adventure

Dislodged sequins from my red shoes littered the pavement slabs under the dwarf wall where Kaylee & I sat, clicking our heels & plotting far away futures. Hoods pulled up, we passed one fag back & forth; Safeway bags blew across the road, bloated as tumbleweed — freezing little dots of rain pelting ankle space between sock & trouser leg. Earlier, some boy had typed his number into Kaylee's phone; we watched his fingertips turn blue as he pressed hard on each button; one-ring to check he'd typed it right. We didn't know, as we composed text messages, cackled, blowing smoke rings, how one thing spiralled into another & if he had a bad friend & which one of us would lose her virginity in that squat with the cracked ceiling & he won't ask if she wants to or use a condom & all the time fireballs will swell behind her eyes & who will...(flip a coin)...

Heads)

Tails)

...think of this, years later, on a broiling day in Central Park. She's taking a break from writing her next novel to breathe & drink iced coffee & watch owners walking fat overheated dogs who tug at short leashes the way loneliness tugs her sometimes deep from the cold pit of nowhere when she's watching a mother wipe a toddler's face on the subway; or a boyfriend turn to carry his lover's heavy case. She eats soup dumplings with her artist friend at this really good Chinese restaurant. Coming home she is hit by a speeding white car at the crossing outside Bushwick Av. They take her to an Uptown emergency room where three black guys with gunshot wounds to the neck writhe on trollies, slicks of blood pooling on the lino floor. She keeps telling the nurse she doesn't have health insurance until he leans across her & whispers, *Honey, look around, do you think anyone here is giving us their real name?*

...cringe remembering, as she touches the place where they scooped out her unwanted baby. She's waiting for the kettle to boil; staring out the window of her maisonette to the stairwell where some neighbour has strung lights in all the primary colours. Then she's calling over her shoulder to her teenage son, who's playing Call of Duty, *That's enough killing people now!* The sun's come out & she's waiting for her mum, who's just rung to say there's meringues on discount at the Big Tesco & she'll bring some with her when she drops the washing round in a bit. They'll sit & eat them on the south-facing communal balcony, worrying about whether those black dots her dad sees everywhere are signs of rising damp they should ring the council about, or if he's developing dementia, like his own father did. The tea melts meringue on their tongues & they lean back, enjoying the sweetness. Feeling the sun's burn.

Katie Beswick is a writer from south east London. Her recent poems have appeared in Dust Poetry Magazine, Hog River Press, The Lit, Roi Fainéant Press and Ballast - among others. Her debut chapbook is Plumstead Pram Pushers (Red Ogre 2024). She is currently longlisted for Canterbury Festival's Poet of the Year prize.

November

Each November, I think *Don't squander November*.
The gloom I adore. Slick oak leaves on asphalt.
Obscure biographies, medieval history, street maps
of old New York. Once we get the OK to turn
back the clocks, cold rain says it's time to roast
the season's first chicken, russets nestled in the fat,

Brussels sprouts yielding burnt leaves sweetened
by the heat that burnt them. I call *schnibbles*
the succulent bits roasting leaves behind. *Loony bin*.
Daylight savings. *Extraordinary rendition*. *They have*
a lot of issues. I'd say absurd idioms cram English

full to bursting, but that's a tautology—well, maybe
not strictly speaking, but contemplating even one
idiomatic phrase will conjure vertigo. Each time I read
what my bosses write, I write “English is screaming!”

to my close friends—a redundancy, given my experience
of friendship. The grandmother dead on Halloween
passed *schnibbles* down four generations. The Texas

cousins say “the burnt,” my brother-in-law “crust,”
my wife “crow food” as she tosses out the front door

the schnibbles I failed to scarf & the stale bunko to boot.

John Repp is a poet, fiction writer, folk photographer, and digital collagist living in Erie, Pennsylvania. Seven Kitchens Press has just published his twelfth chapbook of poetry, *Star Shine in the Pines*.



Ou Ja Vais Aller

Dr. Ernest Williamson III has published creative work in over 600 journals. Williamson has published poetry in over 200 journals, including *The Oklahoma Review*, *Poetry Life and Times*, *The Roanoke Review*, *Pamphlet*, formerly known as *The Gihon River Review*, *The Copperfield Review*, *Pinyon Review*, *I-70 Review*, and *Wilderness House Literary Review*. His artwork has appeared in hundreds of journals including *New England Review*, *Kestrel*, and *Columbia Review*. Ernest has an M.A. from the University of Memphis and a Ph.D. from Seton Hall University. Williamson has taught composition and literature courses at numerous institutions including Fairleigh Dickinson University, Nyack College, Essex County College, and Allen University. He lives in Tennessee.

Undesirable Visitors

They always came uninvited.

Talking boisterously while approaching the property. Stomping on the front porch. Opening the rusty door as if they owned the place. Then venturing inside, like a herd of Mongolian yaks.

None of us wanted them here. They smelled of freshness we'd grown unaccustomed to, and often interrupted our slumber, moving about as if we weren't even there.

Stay away from windows, the elders said. *And doorways. And don't you dare hide in any of the closets - especially not under the bed!* What could we do? Protesting verbally was forbidden, to say nothing of any physical dissent.

"Let them do their thing," Edwin Mort said. "They seldom take more than a few hours. Stay cool, and they'll be gone before you know it."

Stay cool. As if we had another setting to resort to. Well, ice cold, maybe. But that was about it. Most of us had gotten used to the repetitiousness. Lately, however, it had started to get to me. It's one thing for the mundanity to last a year, or even several. But we were coming upon ... well, so many decades had passed since my arrival that I'd lost count. And there was little - if any - evidence of the future offering newfound excitement. One could only be imperceptible for so long, before succumbing to dementia, paranoia, even a full on psychosis. That's what happened to the Worchester Widow. She was never the same, and now endures infinitude by her lonesome. Tough luck.

The worst of our visitors was the old woman. She lit several candles, each smelling like thick, abhorrent incense from a common house of worship. Her eyes were freaky (yes, even for *us!*) - and in the absence of noticeable pupils - consisted mostly of sclera. She always seemed to see that which her friends couldn't. She spoke in strange tongues, her intonation rising and falling throughout the hypnotic chant. Her words made my skin crawl. At their repeated regularity, I shook, shivered, and found myself venturing towards her. I tried resisting, yet it evaded me. Soon, I could not externally comply with my own wishes. I found myself approaching their table, where the four of them sat, their hands linked. I was tempted to respond to the old woman's alluring calls - and I would have - if not for Jonas Halott leaping at me across the room. He held me

down, until the urge passed. The foursome at the table looked at one another - especially after the muffled thump our fall produced.

“Don’t you understand?” Jonas whispered, his frigid breath as rancid as a grave. “If you respond - if you say *anything* - they’ll never leave! In fact, they’ll return tomorrow, and bring more of their friends. Is that what you want?”

Last year, last month, last week - I would’ve said, *Of course not!* But today? Right now? I was no longer sure. Still, such foreboding thoughts I kept to myself, choosing to merely nod in the affirmative to his worried face.

The bearded man with glasses rose from the table. He set up cameras on every floor, and in each room. Six in all. I couldn’t understand what they’d capture in complete darkness, until Natalia Shoeleng enlightened me about the advancement of modern lens optics.

“They’re night vision apparatuses,” she said. “Light is no longer needed to capture an image, be it a photo or video.” Natalia was a photographer for a well known magazine, until a dangerous assignment put an end to her pictorial endeavors.

“They can capture us with those things?” I asked.

She merely shook her head. “For the most part, no. Just resist the urge, and you should be fine.”

Right. Resist the urge. Easy as pie. But what if ... what if I didn’t want to? What if... what if I ... failed to resist the call, and willed myself to appear - my housemates be damned?! Well, they already *were*, in a way; I merely meant it in a figurative sense.

So, assuring them I was “okay,” I waited until they retreated into their respective hideouts, and proceeded to venture into the forbidden areas. Window. Doorstep. Closet. Under the bed. Even in front of the table, where the visitors engaged in another seance.

I walked this way and that, in front of the cameras - several times - no longer caring. Jonas, Edwin and Natalia wanted nothing of the outsiders’ company, but I also dreaded another eternity as a translucent entity, belonging neither here nor there, existing for no one but the darkness of the night. This time, I willed myself into a visible wisp of mist. Consequently, the cameras

sensed my presence, and worked their magic. Finally, the visitors had what they wanted. Their jubilant screams were initially misunderstood as frightened shrieks by my housemates; by the time they realized that I had assisted the visitors in their objective, it was too late.

Today, our house is a high profile commune for clairvoyants, mediums, psychics, mystics, occultists, hard-core ouija board aficionados, and anyone mustering enough cojones to venture into the liminal zone. Myself, I'd become a minor celebrity. My image went viral on social media the world over. Billions shared and retweeted and posted my picture, arguing about its authenticity, origin, but particularly the identity of the presence in question. A new argument - spanning continents and countries on opposite ends of the world - was spawned: Do they really exist? Or is this just another hoax, among countless others?

Since then, I've regressed into the incognito mode once again. The fame and celebrity became too much to bear. My housemates, for one, can no longer stand me. They suggested I leave, and find another dwelling to possess. I may just do that - in due time.

But first, I'm gonna enjoy my moment in the sun a little longer; for I hear that even the horned Lord of the underworld has become envious of my eminence.

And that's no small feat.

Barlow Crassmont has lived in the USA, Eastern Europe, Middle East and China. When not teaching or writing, he dabbles in juggling, solving the Rubik's Cube, and learning other languages. He has been published by British Science Fiction Association, Sudo Journal, and in the upcoming 41st anthology of Writers of the Future.

Three Voices

One calls me in despair.
One calls me in outrage.
One calls me in a fog
of burbling discontent
leaning toward depression
that billows & sags
like cushions of an old couch.
Three voices. One day.
All know I'd rescue them,
want to, but I'm
nowhere, left to my own
cold fists against the sky.
All I offer is laughter,
but distant voices
are having none of that
today. Nor am I,
trapped in blue twine,
a cat that went from
playful to panicked
in the moment after fun.
I can't move, so listen
as the voices offer me
oceans of plastic,
forest fires, & grief.
I never speak
my sorcerer's words in jest.

Ace Boggess is author of six books of poetry, most recently *Escape Envy*. His writing has appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Hanging Loose*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes and tries to stay out of trouble. His seventh collection, *Tell Us How to Live*, is forthcoming in 2024 from Fernwood Press.



The Fire Thieves

Collage, 2024

When I create, one of the central questions I ask myself is: how many different versions of ourselves and events exist, depending on the context? A context that is never truly objective, as it is shaped by personal experiences and biases. Knowing that each viewer will interpret my work through their own lens, I like to let them craft their own narrative—like choosing the ending of a novel. Will the hero triumph, or the villain? And which is which?

In this particular piece, the protagonist initially appears to be a prey, surrounded by a swarm of predators. Yet, the so-called predators are inanimate objects, raising the question: who—or what—truly holds agency here? With the fallen chandelier lying forgotten, are we witnessing the beginning of a story, or its conclusion? And as events unfold, will they turn into a warming blessing, or a burning curse?

What I especially enjoy about this piece is the contrast in the background combining the vintage, Victorian illustration with surreal elements of fragmented, floating pieces of the world. On this confusing, disorienting stage, even a delicate ballerina evokes an uncanny, unsettling presence.

Elzbieta Zdunek is a collage artist specializing in predominantly grayscale compositions. She aspires to create a confusing, immersive experience by exploring themes such as resentment about one's own identity and the subjectivity of perspective. Her favorite sources of inspiration are silent films and historical theater. She has exhibited in Omnibus Gallery and Chromart Art Space and was published in *The Adroit Journal*, *Maintenant Dada*, *Door is a Jar* and others. She collaborated on an illustrated edition of *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley recently published by Kolaj Institute.

There were no signs

There were no signs
in the grocery store today.

No aisles,
no shelves,
no baskets.

The food was just piled
on the floor.

I had to dig through, in search
of a loaf of bread not yet wet
with melted ice cream.

That's why the groceries took
so long.

Kiki Adams is fascinated with the structure and patterns of language. She explores these patterns in her professional life as a linguist, but has also been writing poetry since she was a child. She studied linguistics, psychology, and poetry in her hometown at the University of Texas at Austin, and now lives in Montreal, Canada. Over the past year, her work has been published in *Aureation Zine*, *the engine(idling)*, *The Dionysian Public Library*, *Paddler Press*, and *Lit Shark*. When not spending time with words, she can be found out in nature or practicing aerial circus gymnastics.

The End

Thank you, dear readers, for your continued support.

See you soon!

- Nine Muses Review

