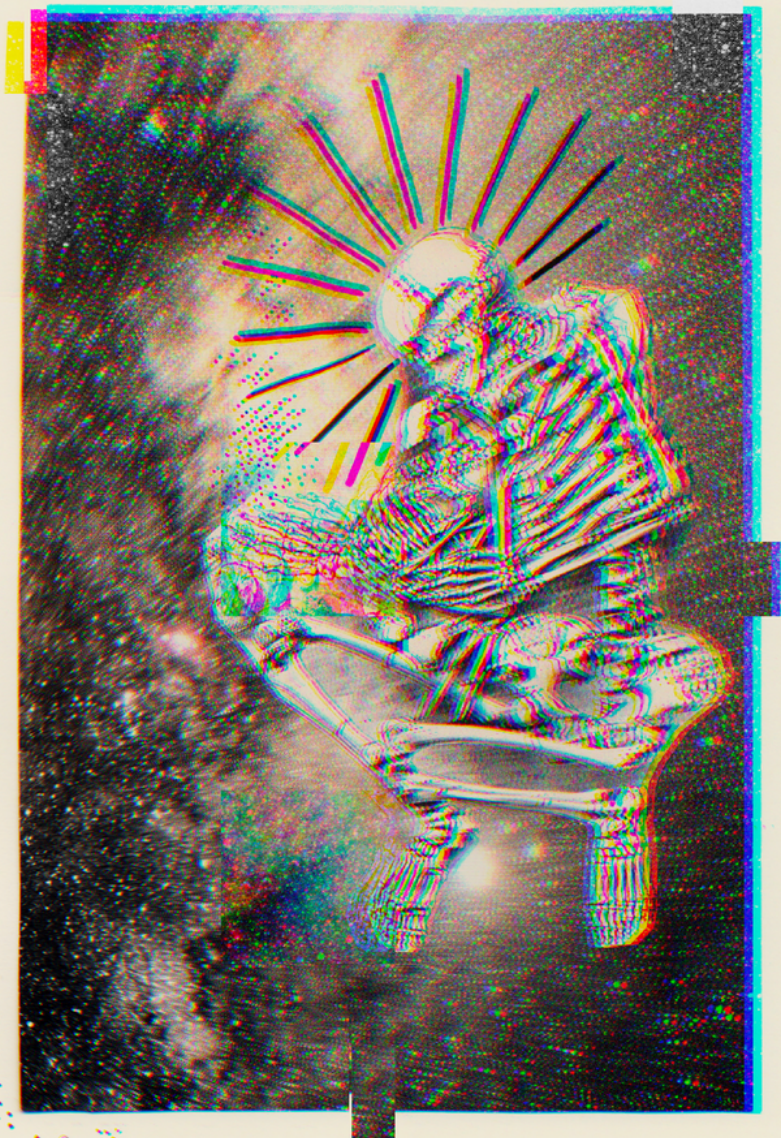


ISSUE 02

WINTER  
2021

# Hecate

LITERARY MAGAZINE



loneliness in perpetuity  
cradle clutch unborn forgotten  
triple sicked

## DECAY

THERE IS NO ROMANCE IN  
LYING SICK AND SLEEPLESS

Hecate Magazine  
Issue 2. DECAY - Winter 2021

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Front cover art by Xanthe E. Horner

# EDITOR'S NOTE

We are not all that we let go of. We are not what we hold onto either – but all things must come to an end. All things.

I have made no secret of the fact that this anthology is a bookend to BIRTH, and when I think of decay, the image really is antonymic for me. It's dust; it's rot; it's grief – embalming all that is buried.

Every birth is a death in part. In literal terms, new life changes us. We step into a different world; be us parents or the babe itself. And what is rebirth but casting old skin and bone to the ether?

I'm sure that I am not alone when I confess: I have lived many lives. Creation is constant innovation. Creators, then, are constantly reinventing themselves. And when the past year has seen the whole world let go of so much, by choice or force – we have been changed beyond compare.

Change is for the bold and the brave. Often, it is raw, messy and confronting. So the prose in this soul-shattering collection shows.

There is rage here, boiled over. An eco-feminist angst. A dying faith. Grief for our bodies, lost lovers, idealistic expectations. DECAY is mourning. And as a collective, we have mourned intensely.

In fear of this sounding fatalistic, I remind you all of Rumi's wise notion; that wounds exist to let the light in. As this anthology mercifully illustrates, that light is within us. We are that light.

We chose to release this issue on Halloween as a prompt to embrace the darkness. On a personal note, it is a part of myself I have rejected for too long. My pain was ugly; self-pitying; unjust. But Hecate serves as a guide between these worlds; these two personas that co-exist, often unceremoniously.

*We are not defined by what we have lost.*

And so, with this primal and pulsing gift to you, I encourage you to be all that you are.

Go gently. Be brave.

This is DECAY.



FOUNDING EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, HECATE MAGAZINE

IN THIS ISSUE...

ART

**06**

**red dress**  
by sarah hardy

**11**

**kiss**  
by luciana vasconcelos

**23**

**the reaper**  
by helen gwyn jones

**27**

**first, second, first**  
by hanna lee

**35**

**snake charmer**  
by josephine close

**39**

**the eternal threesome between  
me, you and the future**  
by veronica merlo

**51**

**temperance**  
by ayshe-mira yashin

**55**

**the birds**  
by helen gwyn jones

**67**

**ceaseless turmoil**  
by luciana vasconcelos

**71**

**the afterlife**  
by ayshe-mira yashin

**15**

**thunderstrike**  
by candace hunter

**19**

**shapes in darkness pt.2**  
by hanna lee

**30**

-

**31**

**decay**  
by luciana vasconcelos

**43**

**time to leave**  
by veronica merlo

**47**

**siren song**  
by josephine close

**59**

**21 two**  
by meagan viken

**63**

**mask'd ix**  
by candace hunter

**75**

**21**  
by meagan viken

**79**

**ghosts**  
sarah hardy

## POETRY

- 08 seedless pomegranate *by alana seena*  
09 pygmalion, necromancer *by s. alexandra singh*  
10 condemnation *by dee richards*  
manananggal *by erica hom*  
14 artemis and lost boy *by ellen huang*  
18 we see only the fanfare *by scarlett ward-bennett*  
20 finding poetry in maggots *by lucy holme*  
22 i quit match *by clem flowers*  
24 beneath the surface, rotting *by tatiana clark*  
25 last sense to leave *by ren gay*  
26 visions from the north *by lexi knott*  
the cavern *by louise mather*  
28 bury your dead *by laura bibby*  
29 moth mouths *by tahlia mckinnon*  
32 sew your death into my body *by emily m goldsmith*  
33 shipwrecked *by chella courington*  
34 how is there even less of you? *by a. n. dejesus*  
40 last night i cracked my bones *by lorelei bacht*  
41 a girl is a gun *by carrie elizabeth penrod*  
42 dying girls *by auzin*  
46 old woman & 16 journal entry 1 *by pearl button*  
54 dreams of blood and dressers *by lauren theresa*  
57 heart suture *by justina wiggins*  
60 the wife *by barbara genova*  
62 bound and gagged *by kate falvey*  
68 the ever-new tongue *by gerry stewart*  
70 i break the news to you in a dream *by alyssa may trifone*  
73 fly agaric *by sonia burns*  
74 heaven haven heathen *by camille ferguson*  
76 boxing day *by abigail mitchell*  
77 as above: so below *by eleonora luongo*  
78 an eve on an eve *by lauren anne cassidy*

## PROSE / PROSE POETRY

- 07 eve *by kinneson lalor*  
12 black annis *by romy wenzel*  
16 pestilence *by astrid vallet*  
22 cult classic *by palaces p.*  
44 photinus carolinus *by alycia calvert*  
52 dust to the ones we lose *by r. m. phyllis*  
56 persephone's descent *by katie kalyani ness*  
58 iconography 2 *by arden hunter*  
65 sunday lunch with ghosts *by vivian burnette*  
69 red bleeds to black *by wren donovan*  
72 celtic longevity spell (annotated for irish-americans) *by emily cotman*

## CREATIVE NON-FICTION

- 36 a girl walks home alone at night: notes and fantasies *by k horowitz*  
48 alchemical marriage *by danielle goshay*  
64 rotting paint *by bunny mcfadden*  
  
80 contributor bios  
83 acknowledgements



# *eve*

BY KINNESON LALOR

The garden is nothing but upturned mud. The thick pine forests of her new neighbours' yards cast shadow on her rectangle mire. The only colour is the sky above. Moon-blue. Bone-blue. The wind stops in clusters of needles.

She should be unpacking. If he was here, she would be. But he's in their old house, with the box hedging and steel sculptures. This ground is hers alone.

She pushes her sole against the spade. The clay swallows then divides. She pushes again. Something hums through her leg and into her groin. She recoils. The shovel slips to its side, a dark slit in the earth exposed.

The autumn before, he gave her a net for picking apples. She caught butterflies instead, holding their soft, velvet bodies on the fractured moon of her fingernail, felt their wings change every future, every half second.

Inside the clay gap is something pale the shade won't touch. She grips the concave side. Too warm for stone but too rough for chalk. Dirt climbs under her nails. She pulls. The clay sucks slick then opens.

It's bone. Human bone. One perfect, pitted, hooded vertebra. She leaves it. She washes her hands until the sky is dark. She leaves the lights off. The bone hums to the moon from the mud.

She used to leave teabags in his Le Creuset mugs, string wrapped around the handle. They left tannined lines perpendicular to the scum of his half-drunk coffees. She liked those mugs, but they weren't hers to take. He said she was chaos. And chaos can't own crockery.

She dreads dreams of uncovered bone. Instead, she dreams of butterflies. She tips them from the net on to his tight, clipped lawn. The sprinklers come on and gold wing-dust drowns like rust. Haw frost chases their light-touch feet. She cups her hands around them to keep them warm. She doesn't notice she's freezing. Frozen. He renames it the sculpture garden. When she wakes, her hand creaks as she makes a fist.

Her knuckles splinter on the peeling wood of the neighbours' door. When no one answers, she tries the other side. She glares at the shutters of silent lace. She wonders if the houses are also deceased estates, if it's the reason she could afford the place. It can hardly be a good neighbourhood if there are no neighbours. But it also can't be a bad one.

*Who else will love you?* His finger across her fleshy, bladeless shoulders as she packed. She ripped pages from his books. It wasn't spite. She only chose the words she loved. She left the rest.

Alone, she digs around the vertebra. She exposes a long, pale length of spine. She lays beside it, her curve against the prick of skeleton. She's so much more than clay and bone.

She scatters seed from her bedroom window. She waits for time. Time will bring wildflowers. Flowers will bring butterflies. Wings will grow from invertebrate bodies. Wings that change futures.

## *seedless pomegranate*

BY ALANA SEENA

I stuck a knife in the ground and twisted.  
What I pried away was raw, pulsing, and bleeding.  
I thought about what I could have done  
Crush it into wine, boil it into jam.

Instead I pared off the skin,  
Then delicately ate the whole organ,  
One half at a time,  
All while I played god and pretended  
That the world's heart was in my teeth.

Atlas was at a loss, aghast  
As I devoured his burden.  
I offered him a piece.  
Lips stained red, I murmur

"Before you say anything,  
Remember,  
I kiss you with this mouth."



# *pygmalion, necromancer*

BY S. ALEXANDRA SINGH

Projecting a beat up corpse  
onto a living body  
left you collapsed on a shipwreck  
moaning waterfalls  
with no tiger lilies fragrancng the waves.

This flood used to taste like poetry,  
but now it spits bitter with 'you should know better's

You've taped the cadaver's eyes open,  
propped it up,  
puppeteering it at the party  
like you don't know it's festered with infection.

The black rot spread,  
tearing through the soft flesh of your palms,  
and like a cancer, it took root.

Waist deep in graveyard dirt,  
drunk on formaldehyde,

you smelled like rotting flesh,  
and called it perfume.

Cherrywood and black calla lilies,  
notes of congealed blood  
with a hint of shattered glass,

musk.

It's always so hard, choosing a new fragrance.

# *condemnation*

BY DEE RICHARDS

Hunched shoulders protecting aches embedded in decades;  
A creature so buried that I can only see it when I smile.  
Its hooked fingers pull vertebrae in unnatural forms,  
And I rest only if I can keep my head above the clouds.

My stiffened arms shriek electric need of these  
Restless movements, pained tendons, gnawing joints.  
With weightless desperation in scrawled symbol, just  
Before my shoulders crack, ribs break, it awakens.  
My wings break free, and truth of me carries us away.

# *manananggal*

BY ERICA HOM

You've heard of me, the murderous morena with ebony maw,  
eyes like lunar eclipses, guardian of primordial palm trees,  
I commune with the multitudes of ancient mushrooms.

I spread my wings with the rising blood moon.  
I live in the threads of your hurried whispers,  
I find shelter in the mountain's ancient womb,

I am a bad daughter, I have never seen the light.  
Once, I broke down the glass window of a God's house  
rested my entrails on the moss covered altar,

gave a sermon for the ghost flowers in the pews,  
sang homilies for the mothers and babies in mass graves,  
weighing heavily in the crocodile's belly.

Meanwhile, neighbors hold seances, hold their children tight  
banish me with garlic, burn my eyes with salt. blame me  
for the rot in the harvest, for the drought in the soil.



Handwritten signature or mark.

# *black annis*

BY ROMY WENZEL

You could hear it in the pause of the night winds, in the space between the clouds drifting over the moon. The east wind carried the sound up the neck of the valley, through the throat of the hills, rolled it out over the land. Crick-creek, the sound of stones walking. Scritch-scratch, the sound of roots breaking the earth. The sound slipped under the doors and between the window-cracks of the cruck houses of Leicestershire, sneaked into the ears of sleeping children, rolled around the seashells of their ears.

*Crick-creek. Crick-creek.* Black Annis grinding her teeth.

*Scritch-scratch, scritch-scratch.* Black Annis scratching her nails at the door, at the window, trying to get in.

\*

*Who is Death, to me? Death is nothing,* I tell myself, as the child takes a last, sucking breath, and does not take another. Her skin is the colour of parchment, and hangs around her bones like cloth. I inhale her last exhalation down my throat, into my lungs and blood. It would be easy to sink under the loss, otherwise. Hugh brings me the bolt of wool that will be her shroud after we wash and sing over the body.

The Dominican sister delivered this child to me as she had delivered Hugh years before. This is the place my watch begins, the beginning of the end. I've nursed a hundred black-fingered, boil-ridden bodies to their transformation. This is my lot: to nurse people back to death. This is a child, but they are all children, in one way or another, from the time they first breathe the dark of my cave, by the glow of my fire, to the time they give themselves over to me, knowing themselves lost. Some rot from the outside inside, some from the inside outside. Some leave pieces of themselves around the place, like lost socks. More often they seem to shrivel up into themselves, like they have something inside them sucking the life from their borders. It does not matter what state their edges are in, I care for them all the same. When they turn from flesh to soil, you see how similar we all are, beneath health and illness, youth and age, virtue and sin.

Hugh turns his still-beautiful eyes on me as I release the child's breath from my lungs. His eyes are set into a face that look ten times his age. Hugh has stayed alive longer than any of the others, long enough that I'm beginning to think he might outlive me too. But he looks weak today, grey as the ashes in my hearth. *A few fat yolks would give him strength. Time to break those vows again, and steal a hen.*

\*

I settle down into the folds of my black skirt, and my knees grumble as I go down. I toss a handful of dried garlic cloves in the impression on the mortar, worn down through decades of use. My ankles creak as I try to find my balance, and my toes curl into the earth like claws. Soon I'll have to grind up comfrey and calendula for my curved joints and bent sockets, as

well as the medicines for all the others. Old age is turning me into the names they call me in the village: cold-blooded, iron-boned, mottled and cracked as verdigris. A hag, a crone, a bat. Witch.

*Crick-creeak*, goes the stone against stone. My wrists echo the sound as I push against the mortar, and the aroma of garlic fills my nose. Crushing it between stones makes it mild and sweet, a paste that can be stirred into sops or tea. Better than the blood of virgins, or popish urine. I cackle to think of the Antonites I've known who believe in such cures.

Hugh's eyes follow me from the bed, the new duck by his foot that will give my patients eggs and much-needed fat. His mouth-sores pain him, I know, but he speaks her name again and the duck is mollified by his caresses. I draw a circle with the pestle, around and around.

*Crick-creeak. Crick-creeak.* My knuckles struggle with the rotation, and at last I give up and etch the cross with the round of the pestle into the rock instead. I close my eyes and continue the motion the cloves crush further into the pores of the granite. *Scratch-scratch, scratch-scratch.*

I scrape down the mortar, and feed Hugh the paste with a knife. He opens his mouth, revealing the sores inside, and closes his lips around the steel. The blade comes out clean. He does not require his medicine to be disguised, like the others. He's the youngest and strongest of my guests, with the most fingers and toes. He will be the one to bury me, out of all these crippled folks. He will look after them, when I am gone.

\*

The fireplace in the cave is cut directly into the rock. The fireplace is so deep you cannot see the back of it, and so high a small man could stand upright inside. It is not an easy fire to light; the stone steals warmth from the fire until it is roaring, but then the stones keep us warm all night long and into the next day, too. It is a fireplace made for season-long fires, for a winter that is blue with cold. I have always been comforted by fireplaces, ever since my mother read me the Old Testament by the hearth. I have a different family now, gathered from sick and wretched folks orphaned by ill-luck and disease. *She comes in the night, to pluck them from their beds. Scratch-scratch, scratch-scratch.*

Hugh holds his hands up to his eyes, as if the fire is too bright. The shadows are dancing in the coals again. I let the edges of my mind soften, and the coals cake to block in a silhouette. It's like reading the myths in cloud, I tell myself, as the silhouette steps from the fireplace, swathed in grey wool layers. His ribcage glows red and embers escape his mouth as he says to me, "Step back with me into the fire, Annis. Do not be afraid. 'Twill only burn the roots and worms from ye."

I stand up and step into the fire. Hugh cries out, but I was ready a long time ago. I've had a death-wish for a long time. Who would not, nursing friends to the other side, one after another? *She brings darkness and she brings death. Scratch-scratch, scratch-scratch. She comes in the night, to eat them.*

*May it burn me to a cinder, may it purify my soul,* I swear as I commit myself to the flame, but the smoke turns blue and cold, and though my boots smoulder like frost steaming in sunlight, my toes are comfortable and warm as cats by a winter fire. The flames lick at my skirt and my shawl, but my clothes do not burn. There is, however, a delicious fizz in my mind, like fermented *sowens* on the tongue.

"That's the untruths burning away," the man with the fire in his beard says, sagely. "The roots and the worms. Step through the stones with me now."

I touch the tips of his fingers and step through the thin crack between the rocks easily as a spider. The air around me shivers, and I grapple for the man's knuckles. His left hand is a cool breeze in summer and his right hand is warm water in winter. My creaking bones quiet with his touch. "Come through, Annis, and see what is waiting for you."

I step through the opening, and on the other side of the rock is a soft forest floor, warm with composting leaves. The walls are green with moss, lined like a nest. This place smells like life. There are people. So many! Faces I know and have loved. Easy faces, faces wiped clean of pain, released of suffering. Each one I've buried myself. *To think, all this time, they were only on the other side of my fireplace! I just had to walk through the smoke to find them.*

My old-body has followed me with questions. *What about those you left behind? What about Hugh?* I find it is easy to turn from the worries of that old-body. They will all be okay, when the smiling faces of all those thought lost are waiting for them, after. *If I had known they would be waiting for me, I would have left before my work was done.*

Never mind all that, the faces say, without moving their smiling lips. Never mind the past. We'll talk about the past later. Just step into what's already here.

**Black Annis is an urban legend based on Agnes Scott, a fifteenth century anchoress who lived a life devoted to prayer in the Dane Hills and may have cared for a local leper colony. Over time she evolved into the local bogeyman as a means to bully children into good behaviour and express anti-Catholic sentiment during the Protestant reformation.**

## *artemis and lost boy*

BY ELLEN HUANG

I grew antlers from my skull last evening, to see how they felt. / I shook my entangled hair from them, musing at the leaves in my branches, / when I heard the snapping of twigs. Quick as an arrow / I turned and saw him, not quite a man but a human fawn. In his eyes was a different kind of love, a humble / awe on his freckled face and perked ears. He asked for antlers, too, to make him full grown out of his smallness, / for the stirrings and shortcomings of Eros never visited him. I cursed him with a rare blessing, instead—to see me, *know* me, and live. To share in the moon's sole fullness / and be led to return. Only wanting the boy to remain as he was, / I did not account for an agony worse than childbirth, / how humans hunt down the blessed.



# *pestilence*

BY ASTRID VALLET

She pulled the thorn out of her foot and watched the cherished red stain the snow. The roses thrived, unscathed in the winter, demanding care. Perhaps she had struck too good a deal, and now they wouldn't let her die. She picked the thorns off of them and sold them like this, naked and domesticated, absolutely pristine. This was the way of things, this had been the way of things through autumn.

She licked the blood off of a finger, and continued picking. She would have to choose, tonight. She had wool and leather, not enough of either to cover and care for both her hands and feet. She picked, tore the thorns from the stems, like scabs and fibrin off of wounds. She had sold too well, she had survived too well. And in winter, roses and white fell out of favor. She kept picking. Thorns for the midwife or apothecary, surely, or to feed someone's hens. Or to protect a home. She looked up and squinted at the square of white sky. She would have to cut the bushes soon, or the garden would vomit its unwanted white roses into the world. She sighed, and resumed picking. She thought of burning them, for warmth, and shuddered. Her children.

Footsteps in the snow, someone with shoes. She laid eyes on her, a young woman with some red to her cheeks, who covered her nose and mouth, and contemplated the bushes. The warmth of a visitor. She sat staring in the snow, like a beggar who couldn't possibly beg, surrounded by her livelihood. Another soul within the walls, apart from her own and that of the place. She sat staring, swearing the snow was melting under the woman's feet and fingers. A familiar pair of eyes, familiar clothes mostly, all blue, and the lips, too, blue like her own frostbites. She didn't recognize faces, not even her own, but she knew that if there was color and life distilled, then she wasn't looking at herself. The blue woman walked up close, so close she could've rested her forehead against her thigh. What did she smell like? With the cold, she couldn't tell. She chose to believe she smelled like sugar, that the little crystals on her fingertips and lashes were sugar. The blue woman stayed standing and brought a rose to her lips, and bit. It crunched like an apple.

She sat by the fireplace dreaming of sugar, and of plunging her hands in the pot. She sat hugging her knees, listening to the purring of the pot, while the scent of roses saturated the air of her home. An abundance of sugar, with which to make jam. Stew would have to do. She closed her eyes. And alcohol, if she could figure out how to make it. To drink and to wash, to burn the stench and the scent off of her. To breathe something else again.

She scrubbed the dirt and the dried blood from under her nails with a thorn, between her teeth with another. The stool was high and she could people-watch. A familiar pair of eyes, familiar clothes mostly, all blue. A woman, a woman who sold violets. She remembered. Her dirty feet dangled out of sight, by the fire under the copper vat. Wrinkled noses and sorry eyes. But food didn't fall out of favor, so the stewed roses sold, by the bowl or the jar, and this was enough to carry her through winter.



Winter died, and the roses didn't. Neither did she. Roses as white as milk, bland food and ornaments, more than she knew what to make of. She spread her only spare bedsheets on the ground, along the bushes. She beheaded the young flowers, they rolled at her feet. These days she ate little, shivered even by the fire, and strained her shoulders trying to breathe. She had spared herself the effort of stripping the roses of their thorns. Small buds like these, she could sew them on dresses, or weave them into crowns. She cut and moved along the hedge. She winced when a thorn pierced her skin and lodged itself into her foot. She finished her work, walking on it, considered leaving it to rot and fester. Or perhaps another rose bush would grow inside, stretch through her veins, burgeon, the way young women were supposed to. She sighed and sat among the heads and the blood stains to pull it out. The skin was swallowing the thorn, and she had to pinch at it, to pick at it. A clinical extraction. She remembered buying soap she couldn't afford to wash these sheets, she remembered the numbing bite of cold water on her hands. There was still a slight brownness about them that maybe only she could see, an emptiness in her belly. Blood wasted on pristine sheets, blood and membranes that failed to bring anything forth, drag anything out, anything alive, anything breathing, anything screaming, anything of color, blood that seeped into the ground, membranes buried, and now the roses. She tossed the bloody thorn into the bushes.

The blue woman came, carrying a jug, with pink on her cheeks and a violet in her hair. She wondered whether she had children, mouths to feed, and what fed her. These young, small flowers wouldn't do. She bent down and gathered it all into one bundle, the blue woman watched, and she hoped she hadn't seen the brownness, or the bloodstains. She hugged that bundle to her chest, fruitless swaddling clothes. Nothing to eat, nothing to eat at all. The blue woman handed her the metal milk jug, though not to drink. Water, violet blue. They sat by the bushes, caressing leaves, crystals on the fingertips, dipping roses in violet water.

The blue roses sold, the blue woman came. The blue roses kept selling, the blue woman kept coming. Never stayed for dinner. She survived well. She bought a small bag of sugar, didn't even know what to make of it. She still ate so little, shivered and heaved. She licked a finger and dipped it in, then sucked on it. The taste of iron. She pulled a thorn out of the inside of her cheek. They found their way in. She tried the sugar again, dreaming of a day she would share it.

The blue woman brought violet water and kisses with every visit. She watched her lips bless every bud, wondering whether she tasted like sugar, wondering when her turn would come. She watched her fingers caress the petals and the leaves, rake the earth, inspecting, feeling.

She woke, certain that she was drowning, certain her throat and her chest were on fire. She had eaten so little and there was nothing to vomit. She got up and walked out to suffocate by the roses. She lay on her side, coughing, unable to tell whether she was trying to let the air in or to spit something out. Fingers dug in the dirt, fingers dug in her mouth. She sputtered petals the color of which she couldn't tell, and extracted the thorns out of her lips, her tongue, her cheeks. She wouldn't live long enough to taste her turn, would she? Fingers dug in the dirt, lips on a bud. And it all tasted like salt.

Morning came. Salt in the ground and worms in the roses. And blood, cherished red. She lay there. A woman who sold violets, the visitor in the rose garden. Her turn wouldn't come. Thorns in the lungs. She sat up, and her eyes looked within the walls. This was her chance. She could let it all wither, she could choke and die. She had fed and been fed on, the roses had fed in return. All of it, colorless and poisoned. She sat and dreamed of sugar, and jam, of sewing dresses and weaving crowns. She would breathe this air a little longer.

The blue woman came and stayed for dinner, and stayed much longer.

Sheets stained again, blood and flesh, breathing and screaming, cherished red, browning, rotting, feeding.

The earth within the walls smelled like iron, and the roses grew red and prickly.

## *we see only the fanfare*

BY SCARLETT WARD-BENNETT

a decaying log ruptured into gills,  
the splintered spine of a trunk told to: be alive!  
a damp smell of rot is the huddled clutch of new breath,  
sutures of umbrella domes line up in rows,  
ridges reach out like melted wax,  
crowning felled Oak, Birch, Ash  
with a tiara of growth—  
as a Lord washing the feet of disciples,  
mycelium anoint each tree root,  
then an exhale of shiro knits itself away,  
frenzied invisible lace.  
you would recognise Him if you saw them,  
for what is a watering if not a Christening,  
and what is a giving if not a taking away from one's self.



# *finding poetry in maggots*

BY LUCY HOLME

There is no poetry to be found in maggots, I'm sure.  
No verse spare to waste on dull hoarfrost coats,  
mucilaginous pouches bereft of all emotion.

Rancid jelly sacks, puffs of rotten cream—*stay back!*  
I shout, and slam the lid on the spectacle,  
try to compute what it is I have seen.  
Bosch's garden of earthly delights  
but more graphic, less serene.

Their blind blunder has no grace, no style.  
What can they teach us? These eyeless custard molds.  
Not nobility, not how to hold our heads up high.  
They only just exist. Born to feed and creep and writhe.

What could be sublime about the rising fug  
that erupts from wheelie-bin depths?  
While I sit inside, in darkness,  
head in shaking hands.

I curse their mini nervous systems,  
no match for my own,  
now queasy at the ensuing larva waves

as they writhe and crest atop three-day-old  
uncooked beef mince  
in sweaty unsealed zip-lock bags.

There is no romance in lying sick and sleepless.  
In strategic dawn raids, afraid of reanimation.  
Of a new moveable feast grown bulky overnight  
like fat white rice steeped in wine.

I twitch the curtain, check the offending receptacle  
placed a safe distance from my front door.

Don battle Marigolds, protective eyewear and march,  
armed with boiled kettle, Clorox-bleach trigger finger flexed.  
Throw open the cover, watch them crushing each other  
like deranged children in a plastic ball pit.

No one ever wrote a sonnet on a soft-bodied bag of genes  
waxed lyrical about their perfumed essence,  
the prehistoric raw stench.

Who could take comfort from an infected canvas which  
billows like the least favourite sheet on the washing line?

So dismal a sight, yet so fragile.  
Susceptible to a swift death by bicarbonate of soda,  
sea salt or apple cider vinegar.

What's worse is what they represent, their sensitivity and drive.  
They press forward, dorsal organs sniffing out the twenty-seven  
separate odours of a single onion.

They don't care about me, my healthy flesh and neat concerns  
but do what is natural for five to eight days.  
Cells ungrasped, pudgy flies inchoate.

My intimate antagonists, putrid bodies gluttonous.  
Fit to burst with protein. And I have to learn to face them.

Even though they signify the seams coming undone.  
Even though I can barely whisper the shameful words  
*I have maggots in my bin.*

It's as if the gossamer thread which binds a tidy life  
has frayed, loosened, then disintegrated.  
Finally showing what lurks within.

# *cult classic*

BY PALACES P.

*after The Wicker Man (1973)*

I've never been in a cult, but I've been in an improv troupe, and those are the same. Once you are in, you cannot say no. You stand flammable before your crowd, and you must go along. As they watch us, spectators one by one become foxes and fish, squirming in their seats. You are still above me and inside of me, hence a God— hence, you make everything possible for them.

One cannot rewrite the Bible, but there is nothing written about improv.

By the Second Act—there were no Acts on the playbill when everyone came in—I am but your Old Testament, and it is time that I give birth to the New. Feeling our cue, the crowd mocks and mocks me. It mocks me until the fetus is degraded cleanly out.

I die of laughter, though not my own, and there is another long intermission.

# *i quit match*

BY CLEM FLOWERS

Sleeping agony long ago  
went beyond the pale &  
yet I still hang to the mercurial bed

I slow my breaths  
to the rhythm of the  
low light song

before

all the lawns and  
all the stucco and  
all the pepper trees  
just went to shit



# *beneath the surface, rotting*

BY TATIANA CLARK

somewhere between  
the three o'clock moon &  
silk-numb collarbones

a distant grandmother  
performs witch-talk on effigies

coveted prayers  
flesh to ashes  
waiting graves

& it unfolds this groundhog's altar—a memory, or a dream, or a memory  
of a dream crooned  
in the witching hour:

*deities at my feet with their gaping mouths  
pit of blackened sea slow &  
bottomless drowning...*

at every end of it  
half-suns hemorrhaging  
mortal wounds

open my eyes  
to the darkest dawn  
in a fury water purged  
in the form of air  
from my lips & it lurks

just the same beneath  
the surface of man:

somewhere between  
macrophage &  
possession

an aptitude for rotting.



# *last sense to leave*

BY REN GAY

the bittersweet tinge  
of Sunday

*(this isn't enough. can you not be gentler? do your hands not soften? the muscles  
weakening to allow sand to drip out?)*

grapefruit peel  
of a pink clouded sunset

*(Is this the calm or is it the storm?)*

taxidermied glass eyes with the sheen  
of unshed tears

*(I couldn't feel anything for half a year and when I did I couldn't stop crying)*

sugaring to prevent the setting  
of concrete

*(language is always the first thing to leave me and the last to return)*

the silent scream  
of the fly as the spider bites into its too-slowly numbing thorax

*(if I had to guess I would say - )*

# *visions from the north*

BY LEXI KNOTT

the forest rises  
a greening celestial fire,  
earth as ziggurat of old

time bowered the dark night  
heavier, even at exhale  
a haunted air speaks from the canopy,

sounds of microcosm,  
& beyond a black ocean reflected  
breathing to the eternal flames below

# *the cavern*

BY LOUISE MATHER

Blue earth howling,  
you don't remember –  
the shattering of dusk,  
if you cocooned the ground  
of viscous thorns, chords  
edgeless – if the throbbing  
was the sound of your own  
blood trawling echoes  
of black holes –  
if you locked the cavern,  
if they found you.



# *bury your dead*

BY LAURA BIBBY

Tradition is a corpse  
washed and laid out in a house of stone

Before closing the curtains  
I catch a glimpse of the ivy that clings

Twisting like the embroidery on the cloth with twin heads  
Two names

My fingertips still smell like rosemary and forgetting  
Forgetful

I've already forgotten that there is white heather and nettle  
still to be gathered

It would be easier if I didn't recall difficult things and caustic people  
Needling thoughts of failing

I'm going to perform a ritual tonight  
A sacrifice of hurt. A purge

Ceremony is pressed palms and sour words  
whispered against homemade charms

Wooden beads and every mirror in the house covered out of fear  
Fearful of ghosts and the past returning

With revenge; the poison in its chalice  
spiced wine long drunken along with the funeral cake

Escape to the bedroom for the quiet and lack of faces  
with mouths turned down in resignation

The body in the other room is decaying but even in its demise  
It will become nourishment for another

Watch the candle burn the darkness away  
put on the black gloves and turn down the bed

This is how to bury your dead.

# *moth mouths*

BY TAHLIA MCKINNON

i don't even know where we got this idea  
that eating into each other  
was the only way to stay alive

but now you're stuck in my throat  
turning my lying tongue into a lungworm  
and my body a grave

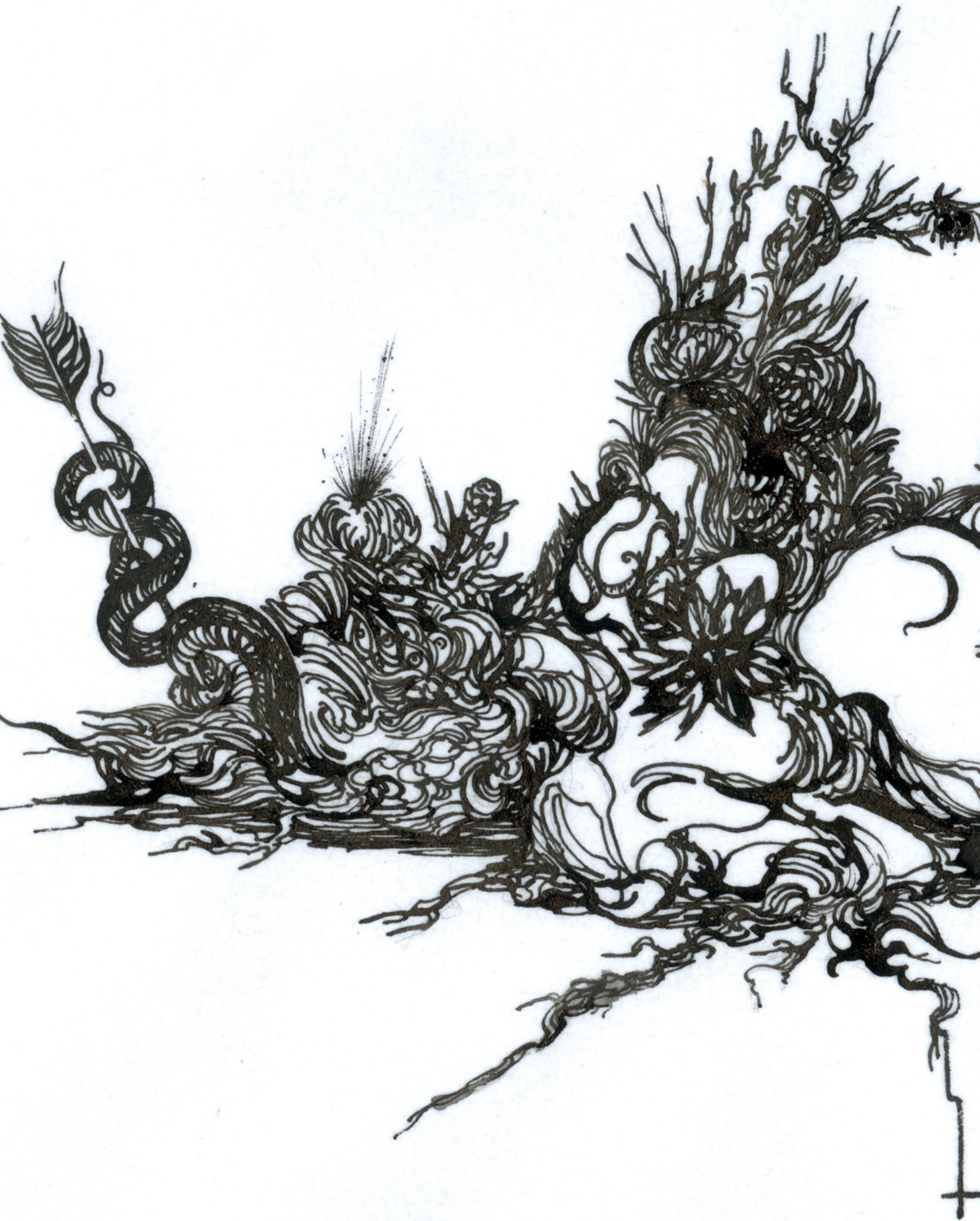
with the work of your widow hands

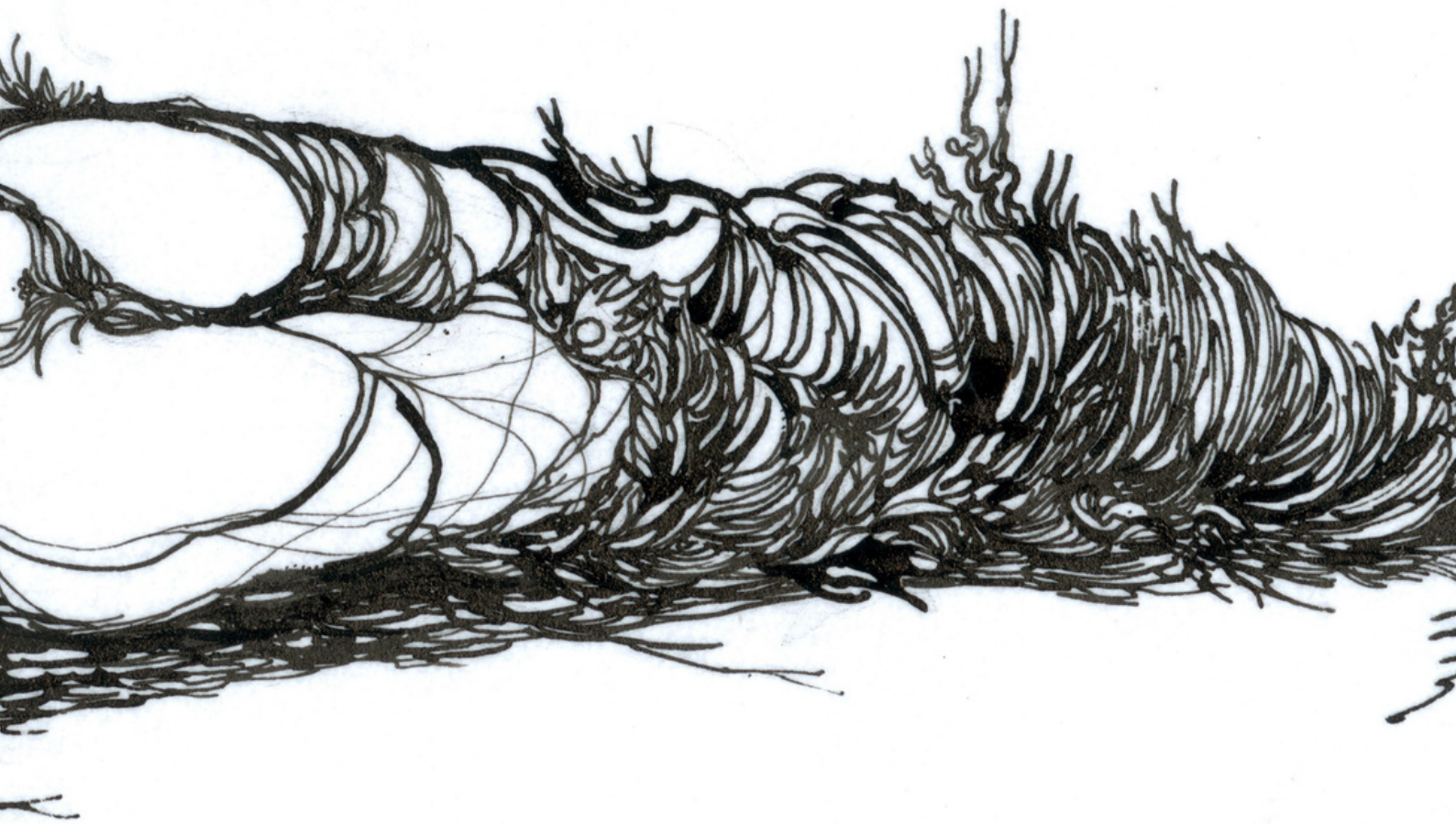
and it's all i can taste; the dirty pain  
of your roots through my uterus  
flowers in my mouth

*now neither can live  
while the other thrives*

and i can't help but think we fucked it up  
because it could have been so nice  
you used to be so nice

but now my body  
becomes your body  
becomes anybody's body  
of lies





# *sew your death into my body*

BY EMILY M GOLDSMITH

I carry your death in my ulna  
I feel it when my arms bend  
when I hold my morning coffee  
when I balance it between knee and thumb  
to sip slowly burning

My heart is not in the center of my chest  
Is it to the left? Pumping left and right  
pulmonary pumping superior vena cava  
to the center of my chest feels tight

The center of my chest is not my heart  
but it grips like nails digging into shoulder  
into the space under my ribs  
which is not my heart but strains like it is  
or it could be

I wonder how much more death I can know  
before it seeps into my body  
into my bones  
and hardens anchors me into the ground  
to sinking

My nightmare was drowning  
until I tried to drown myself  
fingernails digging into concrete  
clawing to hold under  
left gasping burning lungs  
bleeding fingertips  
I didn't know it at the time  
I was surviving  
my own hands I was  
conquering my nightmare

My nightmare now  
is being buried alive  
shoveled earth by shoveled earth  
I feel it all in my chest  
If I am buried alive  
it will not be by my own hands.



# *shipwrecked*

BY CHELLA COURINGTON

I tell my lover I want to die soon  
She pulls me to her  
Our breastbones side by side  
    She becomes a field of lavender  
    crushed blooms  
    a diamond in the crocus  
    I long to unwrap

\*

*I'm afraid I can't love afraid  
if I open myself you'll hear the  
Siren I am*

\*

My lover says she knew we were at risk  
I called myself too worn  
She looked at me like a mother at her newborn  
    Whispering  
    between  
    no past no singing

\*

*I'm hurting my body a violated vow  
words riddled shards of what  
I desire*

\*

My lover hears my song no less sad  
than sweet crawls into the dark  
closet with me

# *how is there even less of you?*

BY A. N. DEJESUS

There is danger in seeking something to sanctify. For a decade I desecrate myself, splitting cleanly at the knees & neck. Separate girl from body from brain from desire. I dream of molars wrought out of bloody gums & wonder what use I have for a tongue except to conjure acid. Incantation chafes out of my raw throat, twin crescent moons scarred into the back, *I will do better today*. I build steeples in bathrooms & invoke versions of myself that are better at waning. Lunar light drips in through the window as I stand at the sink concocting potions: pink pills & white powder. I keep this apothecary in a tiny golden tin along with the stones in my pockets & carve sigils on the softest parts of me. I, alone, know their meaning – protection, power. I am 19 & alone, charmed by the idea that I am in control. I haunt an empty apartment, spectral & seething. *Something*, I say to my mother, *locks the doors while I sleep*. Exhaling ghosts of breath, I pretend that someone witnesses me careen from deathly to dead. Being seen would have been enough. I summon demons whose names I do not know, force stars to my vision midafternoon, impatient for the shroud of night. Mouth hexed wordless for days at a time until I call my mother, breathless, & beg her to tell me that nothing is locking the doors while I sleep in the tub. I measure things in absence, not presence. I circle like broad-winged hawks on the stretch of Route 50 where I watch a deer decay for months. Crawl into its rotted ribcage & resew it shut. A womb is a womb even crawling with a mass of fat black flies.

I mistake an incubus for a man. Perform nightly necromancy with moths in unquiet fluorescents. Wings at grotesque angles, the tiny Icaruses preach submission, sage advice: *Just lay back & pretend to like it*. I am a Kafkian metamorphosis, my amateur attempt at transmogrification. Exoskeletoned & in denial, I astral project out of a body I am sure is not mine. Return to the husk at dawn, dress in the dark. Ready the sacrament, blood & more blood. No body for me, please. Regret the sin of consumption only to find a mouse, lifeless in her watery ceramic tomb. She sinks slow: a sacrifice.

I think of Ophelia drowning & witch trials by water, sisters eternally waterlogged. The filling & voiding, the lungs & belly. I have forgotten how not to obliterate myself, ritualizing demolition.

Lying on the ground, a shovel in my hands, I am trying to get home.



# *a girl walks home alone at night: notes and fantasies*

BY K HOROWITZ

You find yourself drawn to moody movies about small, girl-shaped vampires. You find yourself soothed by the sight of something that looks like a girl destroying something that looks like a man.

---

You buy a set of adhesive fangs online. There are a million options to choose from, but one brand has the best reviews. The tiniest fangs—the size you need, the fangs designed to fit the smaller mouths of women and children—are called Sexy Bites.

---

If you were a vampire but still looked like a girl, would you be safe?

---

You are walking down the street when a man drives past and hollers something out the window. The car is already halfway down the block by the time you parse the rough words he shouted. It's nothing groundbreaking. Something about your body. Something he would do to you.

Without hurrying, you catch up with his car as he waits at a red light. You reach one hand through the open window, seize him by the lapels, and drag him out of his vehicle. Your voice is low and cold, the question mark unnecessary. *Why*. Your grip is iron around his neck: his jugular vein trembles against your palm. You look him dead in his terrified eyes and quietly ask again. *Why*. He whimpers and pisses himself but cannot answer, mostly because he himself does not know why he does it. When you shake him and hiss, *What is the point? Did you think I'd leap into your car and suck your dick?*, he can't tell you. He can only cry, in confusion and fear and anger at being held accountable. You look off into the distance and close your fist and crush his windpipe and snap his spine and let his limp body fall with a thud to the pavement. Immediately another man sprouts from the ground and springs up to take his place.

---

Even in your fantasies there is no escape.

---

Research supports the stereotype that boys and men are better than girls and women at wayfinding and navigating. The research also indicates that this disparity is acquired, not innate. That is: because it is not safe for girls to go out and explore, they do not learn how to safely find their way home.

---

Adding the word “girl” to any internet search is a surefire way to find pornography.

---

Please take another moment to sit with that.

---

In 1821 a Scottish painter named Patrick Syme compiled what he called a “nomenclature of colors”—a book of 110 color swatches, each painstakingly named and matched to the precise animal, vegetable, and mineral sites in nature in which it appears. For example: #78, Flax-Flower Blue, can of course be found in the flax flower, but also in blue copper ore and, most winningly, the “Light Parts of the Margin of the Wings of Devil’s Butterfly.”

With surgical precision Syme transcribed not one, but two colors of human blood: Veinous Blood Red (found in “Musk Flower, or dark Purple Scabious,” “Pyrope,” and “Veinous Blood,”) and Arterial Blood Red (“Head of the Cock Gold-finch” and “Corn Poppy Cherry”).

---

Sometimes when things are very bad you feel a powerful need to see it. You take matters into your own hands (fingernails or sharp scissors). The sting comes, followed by the color, and suddenly you can breathe again.

It’s been a while since you felt that craving. Longer still since you gave in to it.

But not that long.

---

After the meal during which you tell your mother what her father did to you, after she explains to you that that’s how life is, that we all know he’s like that, that there’s really nothing to be done, and, well, he *was* offering you a lot of money - after all that, on the drive home, she says, *I’m a terrible person*. Her voice is almost a whisper, as though she is afraid that someone, even you, will hear her. *I’m a bad daughter*. You ask her what she means. She sighs. *I wish he was dead*.

---

You are currently deriving profound pleasure from imagining ripping your grandfather’s throat out with your teeth. Not even drinking his blood. Just letting him drain.

---

According to Syme’s palette, the spurting liquid in your fantasy is #87, Veinous Blood Red: “a carmine red mixed with brownish black.”

---

You record these thoughts and events with complete and clear-eyed awareness that you cannot share them with anyone until, and possibly even after, he is dead, and with equal awareness that he is somehow immortal, that he will outlive you all, that you will have to

keep all these violent acts (his) and daydreams (yours) secrets forever.

---

Everything you read about the science of memory makes you doubt your own recollections.

Everything you read about the science of trauma makes you certain again.

The reality of these disciplines is that we know almost nothing about either.

You try to remember this.

---

You want to go out at night and feel the wind in your hair and ride your skateboard down the dark street unmolested and unafraid. You want to personally dispatch all of the men who have ever preyed on you. If you make it through that list, you might start on the men who've harmed other vulnerable people. You could do so much good for this world. And you'd never want for a meal.

---

You don't know what kind of monster your grandfather is. The immortality and thrall and wealth all point to old-school vampirism, but vampire is your house, and you refuse to let him in.

You are not alone in this line of thinking; the man has a reputation. Some people half-jokingly speculate that your grandfather is the devil himself. One doctor addressing your family delivers the grim prognosis: *That son of a bitch is too evil to die.*

---

You don't feel safe spending the holidays with family anymore. You don't feel safe talking to your own mother because so often when you do, she tries to get you to call your grandfather, tries to feed you to him again. It would make him so happy. You wonder how your life and the world would change if he was dead. How many girls and women, including your mother, would be freed by his demise. But there is no way of knowing, because he is never going to die. And so you are finding more and more comfort in a vision of him lying on his back on the floor, choking. Gushing. Gurgling. Finally laying still.

---

Watching a wide-eyed, girl-shaped monster take down a large, menacing man is more than entertainment to you. You are wide-eyed, studious, drinking the whole scene in. The points of your new fangs prick your tongue.

The man onscreen thrashes, thrashes, thrashes, stops thrashing.

Your nostrils flare: you can almost smell it. The ferric richness of spilled blood, yes, but so much more. The dark street steaming after a summer storm. Damp earth. Perfume floating from the trumpets of night-blooming flowers. Fresh air moving sweetly, freely, gladly into your lungs.



# *last night i cracked my bones*

BY LORELEI BACHT

open and rid my skeleton of him.  
I milked the spittle out. I pinched  
the red thread trapped and unravelled

the whole damn thing: stitch after  
stitch after stitch, a ball of crooked white  
roots that dried up in an hour. I set it

on fire and watched the Phantom  
Blot rise up, murmur, cajole, threaten –  
every familiar step of the fire ladder.

But I did not listen to his blue shriek.  
But I did not extinguish him. I sat  
and let him burn his last ambers, to an

irrevocable, charred zero. Then,  
I opened the window. I would like  
you to know that it is possible –

to leave not just the man, but his  
shadow behind.



# *a girl is a gun*

BY CARRIE ELIZABETH PENROD

Mother of pearl encrusted handguns with silver shined accents of filigree and slicked back hammer and trigger

or sometimes she is the bullet

the entrance wound  
you never saw approaching

the blood  
visceral with metaphor

the stitch  
pulling at your skin

or sometimes she is the frayed flesh

the exit wound  
you never thought would come

the reverberation  
of her leaving

the thought of violence  
against silence

or sometimes she is the finger that pulls

the trigger  
eased back to rest

the spatter  
you created

the lodged remnant  
causing phantom pains

or sometimes she is just a girl  
with a cocked back hair trigger  
rage, fingers itching to rip  
out those who hold her  
like a thing to be used.

# *dying girls*

BY AUZIN

in the treatment center my friend says “why do men love girls who are dying”  
and I think about:

my partner staunching the flow from his ex’s bleeding wrists

my father downloading iTunes to buy Amy Winehouse songs

Taylor Momsen stripping slowly while walking into a burning graveyard

(her skeletal frame on every thinspo blog)

dove-white and bird-boned

dying in ways we all understand

~~~

Hiding my deaths hasn’t been easy,

or worth it.

I paid off many con-artists and

many people (all of them with the same name)

had to suffer, trust me.

~~~

& so you only love girls who are dying

& so my absence must feel like home

& so because you made me feel alive I was punished

& so you are twin flames with an ash heap

& so there are infinite ways to not measure up



# *photinus carolinus*

BY ALYCIA CALVERT

Moonbugs hover over the dark lake, merging into moonlight. Three blink and unblink synchronously in her jar. She counts the pattern. Seven bright pulses the color of mama's key limes just before picking, four seconds dark. Her pupils dilate. Five juicy bursts, four black seconds. The glass is cold against her nose. Yellow-green light ripples. Four times. Seven. Seven. Six. Eight. Five. She closes one eye. Points into space. Predicts where they'll appear next. The loose plank on the dock creaks.

What's that in your bottle, he asks. Photinus Carolinus, she says. Captive moon bugs burst synchronously with the uncaptured. With the stars. With the mirror of their jarred watery reflection. What's that? Just a moonbug. A special one. Now, what makes it so special? Just that they only live here. Also they flash synchronously. See. On together. Off together. Crazy, I don't think I knew that. Synchronously, that's a big word. It's like a dance. They move together. Come over here, sit down next to me. I don't want to. Her legs dangle, hanging off the dock. I just want you to show me those bugs.

You're a nice girl aren't you, smart? I'm alright at school. I thought so. I play golf with your Daddy, you call me Uncle D. She holds the jar to her face, looks at the tiny tan backs with black stripes running the center. He slides his body, closing the gap. Pulse, pulse, pulse, pulse. His crossed legs by her dangling ones. Four flashes, she says. Dark. Nice girls listen. He reaches for the hanging strands of her hair, and braids them. Give me a hair-band. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. I see one on your wrist. Dark.

She snaps the band against her skin. I seen you at the house. He pulls a ribbon from his pocket, rubs his thumb across the velvet, ties it into a bow. Oh, it's upside down. She pulls the braid. I do my own hair. She reties it. Tries to straighten the ribbon. Her fingers fumble. One bit won't straighten, that bit closest the knot. I want you to catch me a moon bug for that bottle. There's one, see, hovering over the water. Strands of loose hair brush her cheek. I already have three. Moonlight ripples around her small ankles. My rule is three.

Climb down, it's not deep. He lifts under her arms, lowering her in. The water rises, licks the top of her legs. Her feet sink in silty mud. Her dress floats on the surface. *Pulse*. She shivers. *Pulse*. Unscrew the lid. *Pulse*. Open to let it in. *Pulse*. Don't let the other out. *Pulse*. Tap it down there. *Pulse*. Use your nail. *Pulse*. Silver scaled fish tickle her legs. *Pulse*. Behind her knees. *Pulse*. The soft place above her ankle. *Pulse*. The edge of her big toenail. *Pulse*. She takes a step. The moon follows. *Pulse*. She snaps the lid. *Dark*.

She hands him the jar, now with four captive bodies.

He pulls her out, squeezes and straightens his dripping, rumpled slacks. Now hurry. Drips run down her legs. Nice girls aren't late. The moon bobs against the dock. Insistently. *Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse.* Fine, I'll show you. He wraps her soft fingers around the jar and holds the other. *Dark.* The moon disappears into lily pads, mud and grass, stops at the wooded trailhead. Her black roof punctuated by small bright windows bounces closer with his steps. TV laugh tracks echo, drift over their sloshy steps.

\*

"I've been so worried" Mama holds her. "How'd you get wet?"  
"Silly thing, got distracted by the moonbugs and wandered into the marsh."  
"Go get jammies on, hungry?"  
She nods her head, wanders toward her room.  
"... sure she's tired...wandered a good way when I..."  
"Thank you, Mr... lucky you did. Can I get you... before you go"  
"Nope, tell Tom ... for me."

\*

Mama hovers in the hall. Two sisters sit together on the floor of their room. Her pink fingers glisten purple at the knuckles, holding tight. Wetness seeps through her to the worn carpet, she pokes a finger through a long twisted loop. Sister plays dolls. You're not playing. Here, hold 'em like this. Like you showed me, see? Sister drapes the dancers arms over the soldiers golden epaulettes, tutu creating space. Sister pushes the dolls into her chest.  
I don't remember the game.  
Yea you do, play. Play! ... I'm telling mama. She drops the dolls,  
"Shush Sis, sister is... go brush teeth?"

\*

She turns out the light. Climbs into bed pushes herself up against the wall. She nudges the glass close to brush against her eyelashes. Her shoulders, elbows, hands, hips, knees, ankles stack. Punctuated light drifts through her vision. Twenty-four legs tap against the surface. Two wings buzz an occupant to the top, gasping for breath through tiny nailed air holes. Two dance the perimeter, pirouette, assemblé, grande jeté, glow in time. *Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse.* *Dark.* One *Photinus Carolinus* lay huddled against the round bottom, possibly fatigued from the nights involved synchrony, maybe attracted by the patterned bedsheet, perhaps not getting enough of the trickled air flow, maybe not realizing it.

\*

She will hunch under flickering florescent lights, long bony spine protruding in bumps through a thin, holey Mudhoney t-shirt. The desks circa 1960's honey-colored laminate will be warped; stained with coffee rings; speckled with sandwich crumbs, foamed plastic, curved forceps, and minuten pins. Her lips and nostrils glow as she works. *Pulse. Pulse. Pulse.* *Dark.* Magnifying goggles distort everything outside the slim scope of her centered focus. Forceps place the fluttering insect, guide the pin just beneath the scutellum. The green beat will slow. *Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse. Pulse.* *Dark.* Reposition the twitching forewings. Apply glue to the mounting styrofoam with a clear horsehair brush. She found she couldn't stop. She will paste this dimming *Carolinus* next to the last.

# *old woman & 16 journal entry 1*

BY PEARL BUTTON

After I drowned, my ghost swam to the island.  
My body climbed out, became part of the world's rumble.

Go on.

I am a sign.  
I am still there. I am still here.  
I am in this | stone |

in the basement, mother's life  
lived mutely on metal shelves  
in closed cardboard boxes her nature  
her charms against the dead, broken  
piano strings, one shorn red | braid |

she remains as a sign made on the hand

at best, my compassion a thin flicker  
their apocalypse, my pale remains  
these harriers: old words that have lost their meaning

our talisman: black locust  
hangs its seeds  
between thorns clustered.  
Dark pods sag all winter  
burnt umber skin  
dries finally cracks  
in the spring  
rains down leaving  
thorns still vigilant.

meaningless things: my face in this dark mirror  
stones at the root of a mountain

seeds once they have become the tree  
sign to those who don't read hands



# *alchemical marriage*

BY DANIELLE GOSHAY

1.

## **You and I on Higher Frequencies**

**Raw dream data 2012-2021**

we encircle the ditch  
the earth is wet with mud and branches  
I slide in  
a metal machine  
red maple tree cut down, folded, carried home  
it grew inside my room but soon felt crowded

a sweet face I couldn't trust  
he lied in the street and yelled out to me, "cars can easily get out of control" and was hit

steps lead to a shallow pond  
red hue  
hazy, thick air  
deep yellowed moon like a scythe

cavern 3  
mossy stone walls  
copper  
gunmetal  
psychically yoked  
two scrolls, giant sundial in clouds  
whirlpool  
holding sword to doorway

wedding  
family tension  
stopped the car to look at the map, a lake nearby  
I walk into the woods alone  
the earth a stretched sheet of fabric  
a sketched black horse  
pastoral  
hill



fence  
snake sleeps  
conch  
the others come after me  
eggs stuck in the dirt, digging up  
snake awakens

trespassing  
"I know you're here"  
my hair ablaze, you gently pat it out

constructed  
we surfaced  
onto wood floors of white lit rooms  
steady and solid foundation  
high floor  
facing the water

constructed  
future recalls past  
light bathes your skin  
smoke swirls above  
I trace you  
hand to your chest  
legs intertwined  
kiss your earthquake hands  
window  
stories like cubes, hollowed, the same room  
13

botched fairy  
at the foot of the bed watching me  
pretend to sleep and grasping your letter  
"I see a light right there"

incubus visit

2.

## **Coupler/courser**

### **The Alchemical Marriage**

*I pinpointed back to Summer 2012 when I became conscious of a sort of complex. For the first time since my teenage years, I started to articulate my ideal man — certain energies and personality types that I was attracted to and the kind of intimacy I wanted — and I was projecting that fantasy onto lovers and always ended up disappointed when they couldn't satisfy the lust, passion, and intensity that I desired. That daimon manifested and transferred from man to man, sabotaging my relationships, until I accepted that my ideals were qualities that I should be looking for and striving toward in myself. I had to embrace, cleanse, and heal my own masculine side and reintegrate it properly in order to strengthen my relationship with the divine, myself, and others.*

Caitlín Matthews's book *In Search of Woman's Passionate Soul: Revealing the Daimon Lover Within* was published in 1997 on the subject of women's sexuality and gender studies. Matthews uses the term daimon to describe a masculine figure within a woman's psyche that serves as a true companion and counterpart, and is central to evolving her sexuality, creativity, and spirituality.

The daimon is not an incarnate man, but often an idealized partner and fantasy. "Mr. Right", "Prince Charming", a type, the man of our dreams and meditations. He is sometimes created from collections of male archetypes and characters in literature and film, and then projected onto real life lovers who can never live up to him. Positive experiences with the daimon describe him as a guide, healer, friend, lover, protector, spirit, and visitor — a muse transmuted into abundant and creative energy and enforces healthy relationships. A negative relationship with the daimon manifests as an incubus, trickster, rogue, and abuser leading to toxic relationship patterns and attachments.

Alternatively, the daimon can represent the "animus" which Jung described as the unconscious masculine side of a woman, while the "anima" represents the unconscious feminine side of a man. Jung's "Alchemical Marriage" understands this duality as a conjunction of the sun and moon, king and queen, day and night, light and dark, yin and yang, the table of opposites. Once we embrace and merge with the contrasexual Other — uniting our male and female qualities to complete the androgynous self — we attain a sense of harmony and wholeness within.



**TEMPERANCE**

# *dust to the ones we lose*

BY R. M. PHYLLIS

Sophie had drunkenly suggested that it's easier for me to lose people and I downed the vodka we were sharing and launched the bottle at her head. It missed by a long shot and she was too drunk to even notice. Thirty seconds later she looked over her shoulder, asked me where the broken glass had come from, and promptly fell asleep. She drooled all over my cashmere pillow, lipstick melting in thin red lines.

I'd fallen asleep not long after her, anger dissipating the last of my energy. I woke up with a pinch in my neck, a fiery smell and taste in my mouth. Sophie had still been snoring away, lithe limbs knotted around each other, box braids falling over her face, her comfy cardigan hanging open to show tattoos of hearts with lover's signatures, some looking almost new, some faded to pastels over the centuries.

The house, a cottage Jack Bowen built back in the early 1700s and built upon and built upon by necessity, snakes back at almost random. Not all of my husbands (and sometimes their boyfriends) were as adept at building as they claimed to be. Later husbands (and sometimes their boyfriends) even laughed at some of the work, calling it whatever the hip new insult was at the time.

I sit on the rug in my back room, cradling my favourite coffee mug, double strength with extra sugar and paracetamol. 3000 years (give or take) on this rock and I still can't handle a hangover. Boxes and books leer over me and the smell of old dust wraps around me like a duvet. Windowless, the door sealing tight, the room is thick with age, suspended in a time warp penetrated as rarely as my old heart can bear it. With every entry something else crumbles to dust.

I take a book at random and open it. I keep hoping to find something I've forgotten but there never is. I remember every line of their faces, every laugh, every lock of hair. Every relief of being understood. Every frustration our show of love could never last any longer than ten years as they aged and I didn't. Every fond smile as I went from spouse to distant relative to grandchild and never loved them any less.

Rodger Fagerbank had spent his mornings at sea, his afternoons manning his fishmongers, and his evenings sat on the sand with his sketchbooks. The Cleethorpes pier grew over the pages between drawings of cod and cockles and the crash of the waves that was almost audible in his squiggles of foam. We'd sit together for hours until each of my seaside dresses had stains on the rear and yet I still never remember to take a towel to the beach. I sometimes wonder if that's on purpose. Rodger never did so I never shall.

My profile peers out from many a page, with my low-set eyes and wide smile and hair tucked tight under a bonnet. Rodger would sign my name with loopy flourishes, Mrs. Melissa Fagerbank, as if any stranger would ever be graced with the sight of his pages.

Halfway through, as the pier has most of its foundations set, Craig made his first appearance in his flat cap, smiling toothily with his laugh lines bunched up over his cheeks.

He wrote in tidy cursive: "If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved." Rodger decorated it with swirls and sunflowers.

I can hear Sophie in the kitchen, popping her own paracetamols to down with the last of the orange juice.

The final pages of this sketchbook also features Craig's pretty wife, Patty, and the violets the maid from the estate had embroidered into her apron. She'd blushed beetroot red when Craig talked so fondly of her girlfriend Rita and almost combusted when he joked that she was Patty's mistress. She scolded him in one of the most honed, vicious tongue-lashings I'd ever witnessed, and I understood how Rita could give Patty's sharp wit her whole heart.

It had taken half an hour and three fingers of whiskey to calm Patty down. She was still blushing, a mix of booze and embarrassment ripening her cheeks. Craig sat and laughed through the whole thing, his fingers laced idly with Rodger's, and my heart had been warm to see them so relaxed and happy together. We drank all night, singing to love we didn't feel and friendships that would never die.

It was centuries before I felt that relaxed myself, though I'd always sworn I was happy. The Internet floated into existence, together with its forums and medias and new words bringing together a million people searching for a term for their existence. Asexual. I was curled up in a blanket (Helga Regan, the 1890s, she was a seamstress with a curl in the middle of her forehead that refused to stay under her bonnet) and said the word aloud a few times. The walls glowed like they'd agreed the word was right.

Sophie plods in. She's made a half-hearted attempt to wipe her face, only succeeding in smearing lipstick and concealer up her cheeks. Her grip is tight on the orange juice carton, and her nail varnish is chipped already.

"You good?" I said, still too hungover for long sentences.

"Nah. You?"

"Nah."

She plonks herself down on an armchair and I wince; Paul Merry built the frame for back in 1650-something, and when the upholstery finally decayed beyond denial three centuries later Charlotte Wrigley, who reminded me so much of Paul with her dimples and her growly snores, re-upholstered it in the latest repurposed parachute fabric.

We sit in silence for several minutes, Sophie clinging to her head, me flicking idly through Kasiel Till's pressed flowers. I barely dare to breathe on the five-century old paper, and I swear I can see pieces of leaves and blossoms flaking away.

"What is all this?" Sophie finally asks.

I drum my fingers just once on the cover of Kasiel's book as I decide how to answer, and I feel the leather peel under my skin. I sigh, and Kasiel's sweet face, his pinched features and straw hair, sighs back in my mind's eye.

"Everyone it's so much easier for me to miss," I say, and I don't manage to sound as bitter as I feel.

Sophie's eyes scan the room. Boxes upon boxes, books upon books, pictures upon sketches upon photographs.

"I'm sorry," she says.

"It's not your fault," I say, "You didn't kill them."

"No. But you loved them, didn't you? And they loved you."

Kasiel's book falls into my lap on top of Rodger's and the spine splits in silence. The pages and the flowers crumble as I rub at my face.

Sophie is next to me, still smelling of the last of the perfumed oil her lover from the 1910's gave her and cheap vodka, and she's putting her arm around my shoulders. The dust duvets us, the decay of thousands of friends loved and lost.

# *dreams of blood and dressers*

BY LAUREN THERESA

*I killed a guy* I used to hiss  
seven drinks in when I still knew how to swim  
away from the unwelcome advances  
toward the chances I had to bare my teeth and prove my weight.  
I hate to admit it but I spoke it with conviction,  
the diction flowing like the wine and beat,  
the heat and adrenaline pushing these words out  
so often, so effortless, like they were etched into my being.  
I've dried out now,  
burned all conviction to embers.  
Still, those dreams of blood and dressers—  
wondering  
what  
don't  
I remember.



# *persephone's descent*

BY KATIE KALYANI NESS

A doorway groans open like a smoker's lung. Stairs echo with the sound of tapping, like hawkmoths battering against a lightbulb or teeth chattering over tea cups. Spiders lounging on dusty drain pipes like geisha. In a room, a woman with hair curled like rope speaks in a language that cascades from her mouth like incense and old buildings. An urban fox rests on a garage island like a pioneer for wild things, and a black cat murders mice by the gutter, its poised body pouncing with fallen arguments. Hands in back pockets. A window screams open, horrified at something that could be singing, struggles in the spaces between concrete and monologues. While a girl in denim and pigtails recites *Christina Rossetti's Goblin Market* on the way home from school. Pausing to photograph a dead pigeon with its heart missing for her journal. In a crooked kitchen filled with smiles, a couple slow dance to Americana, looking at each other ardently, he's telling her sweet nothings to soothe her. And the haunted child ties itself to the woman's waist, floating like a death kite, growing in the quantum realm. The quiet beauty of a muted TV and house plants orbit the pain in her stomach. But she'll fix him a cup of coffee. Outside, the fox with oil slick eyes stalks along peeling fence palings, shouting fragments to grey skies about poetry and oracles, bedroom silhouettes and the sadness of a lost fallopian tube. Hearts breaking for a little love. She made the rain, that brutal baby, steeped in silver and blood. A voice chokes, ripples like a floodlight. *"You could never be a mother, who could ever love you."* The seaside town grief followed her to the city in a bitter salt breeze, it said she was destined to fail at raising flowers. The terrible edge of the tongue-sword in the soft living room glow punctures the womb. Tidy plump cushions stack like dolls, to hide the wretched shadow. One day she looked out into the clouds and her body rose up, out through the yawning window, taking the orchid and bedsheets with her. Even in sadness she displayed a regal bearing. The fox watched on, sitting on the roof of a red car. Staring into the stratospheric cool. The man walks the streets, heart hardened like coal, searching for dove feathers to build a flying contraption. He's trying to bring her back. He says; *Darling, I'll love you forever, let's go back to bed, I'll make you a chai, the darker the better, I'll kiss you gently, make your skin tingle, the softer the better. Come back to me in our summer brooding blue beach forever. Come back to me in our sugar kissed memory. Come back to me. Come back.*



# *heart suture*

BY JUSTINA WIGGINS

*The Mütter Medical Museum*

The miscarriages and stillborns are kept in jars.  
Porcelain white and refusing to pink, flesh  
folding and sinking low around their hollow bones.  
Some are crowned with a halo of shed skin.

It all comes down to flesh: porcelain and refusing to pink.  
Suspended behind glass conjoined twins are sinking  
beneath a halo of shared skin. Pigeon breasted  
rib cages and a single heart strung between them.

Behind glass conjoined twins embrace—  
in three days a urine soaked strip will read pregnant—  
and you tell yourself pigeon breasted rib cages are just  
a matter of one heart tightroped between chests.

In three days a urine soaked strip will read pregnant  
but now gap toothed skulls are lined against the wall  
with a shared heart tightroped between them.  
Each is marked by violence, an entry and an exit.

Gap toothed skulls are lined against the wall  
and across the room books are bound in human skin,  
each marked by violence, an entry and an exit.  
In three days you'll be dreaming of a nursery.

life bound inside human skin, books  
on every shelf and here and there a feathered skull.  
In three days you'll be dreaming of a nursery  
paper lanterns ribbed with light; casting shadows

on every shelf and here and there a feathered skull  
sinking low and folding around its hollow bones.  
The paper lanterns are ribbed with light,  
and the miscarriages are kept in jars.

# *iconography 2*

BY ARDEN HUNTER

She couldn't blush now, so she would pinch her cheeks; roll the meat between bones just to look alive. They told her the blush made beauty, and pain wouldn't stop her; she would be beautiful on film.

Rest the skull just so, atop a curled hand, itself supported by glass pins in a wrist. She used to be stronger, before the cameras and lights and strangers out in the garden. They loved the house; loved the gilded edges and vast silver mirrors, loved the grand arching staircase and walls of ancient unopened books. Flashbulbs met sharp fates over balustrades, sconces and rosewood.

She had blazed, once. The star in the celluloid, eclipsing all others. People would pay to faint in her orbit, just to smell her perfume or to dance in her door. These days, she lurked in lifestyle magazines, still shining on, dimly.

I'd told her, long ago, when her blood still rushed and the diamonds still shone: I'd told her— the cameras. They take part of you if you let them. Hold something back; don't give it all up, not for flat inky pages of fake adoration. But the cameras clicked on, she gave all that she could and the pieces of her flaked away caught on film. Flammable icons for strangers to worship: she sacrificed looks, yearning and life to the lens.

When I went to shoot her the gilding had faded, the mirrors were speckled, the wallpaper damp; the soul of the house lay now panting and gasping, reaching for freedom, for blessed obscurity. I met her where I'd met her before; her velvet couch mottled, her fan frayed and grey. She looked just the same: smooth skin, full hair; but the eyes and the blood now fell flat. There was less life in her then than the mould on the walls, and she looked like she knew I was coming.

'You think I regret it,' she said as a challenge, raised that proud chin people had died just to glimpse. 'I don't — I'll live on in my art and in pages of journals and magazines; hearts and in minds.'

I raised my camera to take the last set.

'It's all dust,' I said, shrugging; then shot.



# *the wife*

BY BARBARA GENOVA

forty-six married to a venture capitalist separate bedrooms  
the view from the sundial will punch you in the throat leave you begging  
the woman saunters in when the mood calls for a cameo appearance, she drapes herself on  
the whitest couch, takes a picture of the ceiling, she goes, fellas, is it trans-humanism if you  
don't think of them as people  
to the flock of climate barons deferential to her man

*my wife*

they entertain

committed to the silver snake bracelet life, the *you must tell us more* life  
a wife

conventional wisdom states: he wanted a piece of sophisticated pop lore to spark his whole  
deal up, make it shine glitter and gold  
name the child model on the cover of *all's fair*:  
*it's colby rail!*

she comes from a full century of deviant artists and male socialites, first official photograph  
she's two, curly hooded lippy babe, the portrait of fortune and glory  
gets her picture taken one hundred and sixty three times, is cast as the reincarnation of nero,  
and she's the girl in that milk commercial

but then:

eight years old she wakes in fright, blown apart, shadows eating her pretty face black bags  
under eyes swollen shut, screams mom

diagnosis: *she got hit with the ugly*

the rail family curse

treatment: none

she's yanked out of grade school sent to live in the dust quarter no more glamour shots, it's  
permanent curtains county and a revolving door of minders  
shallow the pool of activities they can choose, there's sewing painting and manipulation –  
that would be making play-doh ashtrays for the poor  
(why do the poor need ashtrays? don't talk smack dear, it's a law)  
babe peers out the shades at a gravel road, no one's howling  
eventual verdict: find yourself a vocation, be useful to the disadvantaged

at sixteen colby is granted permission to return – child, nobody can see who you used to be,  
you had time to adjust to wretchedness

gets enlisted in the youth delegation of clean cut former idols, swaying in place under a  
giant say no to the occult banner, they sadly comply – yeah sure uhh demons – but she loves  
this, a warm red flower blooms in her belly, she keeps it up, she gives it her all

(also it means she's out you know, ix-nay on the onfinement-cay)

this mint green duchess she visits women's correctional facilities, she soaks up the pain  
dripping off the halls, bonds with inmates over smoke breaks by the window, buys snacks in

the commissary  
misspells snacks in her journal, snakes, leaves it in  
she takes pictures in border war zones, an ambassador  
world on fire she builds a wall she digs a trench narrowly avoids kidnapping twice dang it  
listens to coldplay as she pounds a treadmill in the green zone  
jump to: manila, candy booth, i've got soul but i'm not a soldier  
raises money for good to great causes  
water hunger malaria charity auction  
gets her period anywhere she wanders, from the open-plan windswept lobbies of colombian  
five star hotels to the smoking cages in continental airports, standing room only

the rail curse, eh  
talk about a curse if all the women in the bloodline turn monster  
beautiful children doomed to live in darkness once their number is up  
but then:  
she's ordinary, brisk, effective, quick to smile, a healer  
not really though  
she pays money to bind torture and kill perfect strangers

she is very well acquainted with the rules and regulations of the establishments with a drain  
on the goddamn floor thank you  
first rule is, don't clog the drain! battery acid meets you halfway at best and the cleaning  
crews must maintain some illusion of mental dignity, for the team!  
(she will one hundred percent giggle whenever the word *drain* comes up in civilian  
conversation, what's so funny?, and her choppy hair will shake, apologetic, nothing nothing,  
have i told you i met perry farrell once, he was a gentleman)

total collapse is always on the table, *but then*, once in a rust moon, you take a devil out  
feels sharp  
feels righteous  
she doesn't join the betting racket becomes a buyer gets a seller – direct line to her *skin guy*  
– pays in time she's got manners

at thirty-nine, colby rail adds a middle name back, jane  
dream child rebranded as wife  
airtight prenup she's eager to sign in cardinal red and, done  
gets a monthly allowance, no demands for emotional labor  
as a gesture of wanting this to work, she throws in a free [don't fuck the kids, they're never on  
the house] to an appreciative business partner  
her shopping expenses justified by  
my wife collects outsider art

and, she does! – the rail genes do carry some excellent dedication to the facade: her attic  
lounge is home to crippled ashtrays (there it is), scarecrow puppets, matchbox paintings by  
double amputees; the fine bone americana polite society craves  
tattooed in white dots on her ring finger lie two words seven letters  
wild guess what they say

she's a woman of but then; cause and effect links to be dismantled  
this makes her, as per label, vulnerable to magical thinking  
this once made women diagnosed, certified, real life crazy people  
the prime domain for a god of confidence: leave the odd survivor confused about the how it  
happened, leave them babbling on --- all of a sudden --- it was fast ---

how would you like to be eternally successful and kissed by luck open mouth in every endeavor of yours  
or would you rather know the blessing of boundless anxiety latching on to your daily bread, sliced in half, beast arms clamping on your waist dragging you down into the black earth tunnels awash with real estate agents trying to be cute like we're all in this together thought so

you've met my patron, our lady of bountiful mercy  
we should check in with colby jane right about - now  
she loves a good game  
invitation's in the mail

# *bound and gagged*

BY KATE FALVEY

Mass. Inertia. Friction.

Movement was never a prayer  
but always a shambling lamentation.

Air is an impediment, will,  
its own remorseful friction.

Ghosts weigh tons. The hands  
of a thready child gasping, grappling.

It is now customary to be vociferous  
and outspoken about such things.

In my day – I had a day – we  
clammed, cracked, went belly up.

Then were force-fed down  
that fuggy rabbit hole

where all our piteous clamor played  
awful jiggery pokery chess

with a dodo, a duck and a maddening dread  
in the tortuous dark inside of the head.



# *rotting paint*

BY BUNNY MCFADDEN

Once, I opened a paint can we'd purchased for the nursery. We bought it when the summer heat was building in Albuquerque. We even pried it back open on a particularly hopeful weekend. Then it sat in the garage for a year or so. When I opened it again, it was covered in mold. I had no idea paint could rot like that. The smell was unbearable.

In the 1990s, my mother was a night janitor at Arapahoe Community College. She dragged our sleeping bodies with her as she swept and mopped each classroom. She had a knack for finding the corners where milk had been spilled three semesters ago, the spots where gum and grime married to hang in odious clumps under desks. I'd stretch out on a couch in the teachers' lounge and shut my eyes, imagining I was in another world while my mother scrubbed. She had a talent for making an art out of cleaning. When I'd peek through half closed eyes, I could see her swishing a mop the way Artemisia Gentileschi probably painted: with masterful revenge for a life unlived.

After some time, my mother found a day job painting eyes. She worked at the My Twin Doll factory. Jealousy beat in my unformed breast when I saw her methodically painting the eyelashes on a doll who looked just like me. Despite that childish resentment I held, I knew it was revolutionary; I'd seen white dolls and black dolls, but never a doll painted with skin the same terracotta shade as mine. Still, my mother cleaned and painted, making art out of one and work out of the other.

I learned her signature from those few paintings she did in stolen night hours. I copied it on field trip permission slips, report cards, and the application for free and reduced price lunch. I never learned to paint, but mimicry was easy for me.

When at last we witnessed our miracle, they painted my urgent belly with povidone-iodine. It colored my skin an unnatural orange. Birth is the ultimate mix of natural life and sanitation, of capitalism tinting motherhood until it is unrecognizable. In Albuquerque, I was billed before my baby's umbilical stump fell off.

I took care of other people's children; I fed hungry teens the sour green apples that I couldn't feed my daughter because the first bell rang at dawn. I read them Steinbeck in the voice I reserved for bedtime stories. I carried home stacks of ungraded papers that weighed exactly as much as my baby did when I took her home from the hospital. It was a bitter lesson to learn that I could not hold both at once.

To be a mother is to be a tin of paint rotting in the corner. Full of promise, eager to begin. We trade our brushes for brooms, and our lives go unpainted.



# *sunday lunch with ghosts*

BY VIVIAN BURNETTE

Your father remarks that you and your older sister always seem ready to leave. As if you can't bear to sit too long in this place. Why do you even ask, you think, then remember that it isn't a question. You're not wrong, you say. A sigh. I guess you won't want the house when we're gone. No, I don't suppose we will.

The aluminum broom your mother once whipped against your thighs leans in the pantry closet. You can see it from the kitchen island as you set out a stack of mismatched plates. Teal with fraying canary-yellow bristles, a few dents now in its slim frame. Your mother uses it to sweep dust from the sticky floors onto folded up printer paper.

After, she plays the piano, thumbing through Bach's, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring." Her knuckles are inflamed, metacarpals swelling, splintering outwards. It's arthritis, she says, but I still like to play and you remember years ago when she made a fist and rapped on your forehead like a doorway, shuddered those knuckles—smaller then, sharper—into flesh that was still clay.

\*

When you're nine, you finally tell your father and he says, It's just cultural. He doesn't add please, but you hear it in his voice anyway. Besides, you've always known what to do. Two years before, when a girl at school asked how you got those bruises on your legs, you said you'd fallen down the stairs. Laughed until she grinned. A year later, your mother stops hitting you. You think it's because you've grown an inch taller than her. Now, she just makes you kneel on concrete. She won't let you stand until you add please.

\*

How did she feel, you wonder, raising a child who looked nothing like her. Your sister got all the Korean and you were just left with your father's double eyelids, his thin White lips and thin White hair, so did it make it easier for her, you wonder, dragging a comically large fallen branch from the yard, shaking it in your face, bits of bark flecking your skin, shrieking that if you didn't apologize, this is what she'd use next—or was she thinking of another little girl cowering in a closet: you could light a match to her father's breath and the entire house would turn to ash.

When you were younger, you thought it was something outside of you, enacted upon you. Fear and shame are easier to forgive than anger. It was always your-mother's-your-sister's-not-yours and it took three decades to finally come into your inheritance. Your-mother's-your

-sister's-yours-now. Words take up residence in the gut, the seat of the soul, curdling and blooming long after blue-green-purple-brown-black fade and that's why you choose them instead of hands and feet. When you tongue at the piked phrases crowding behind your teeth, you draw blood and retch. It tastes like power, not decay. This, you don't say, even when you apologize. Especially then. You're trying: therapy and meds and journaling and impulse control. But in the secret dark of your body, there's also a spiteful satisfaction, great triumphed howl of wholeness each time you spit up thorns rather than petals. Why doesn't it feel like giving up control, you wonder, then wait longer than you should to rinse out your mouth, wipe the red from your chin.

\*

(Grief stutters, pauses, asks you to crouch and ponder the wet, mottled leaves at your feet, the way bone-colored mushrooms have made a cliffside path up the trunk of a dying tree. In that quiet rests an almost-holy pain, the kind of cold that burns.

I didn't mean to and promise I'll be better and why are you hurting me and don't you believe me and you stole from me and plundered me, so either love me or give me back.) You'd rather be angry. Always, angry.

\*

Why do you see them every week, he asks, you don't have to visit them that often. Because they're my parents. As if that's all the explanation you-and-anyone-else has ever needed. (I won't abandon you like you abandoned me.) Of course he asks this because he knows it's your-mother's-your-sister's-yours-now and so the temptation is always there: to slaver over scars like milk and honey until the wounds split back open. Sometimes all it takes is a certain inflection, dehydration or a half-full belly. Lunch is ruined. What did you expect, you snarl. Better, your mother says, I expected better and there's an evil in you. You think, But I've never looked more like you than I do now. Your father asks if you'll be coming by next Sunday.



1977

# *the ever-new tongue*

BY GERRY STEWART

*inspired by (and with lines from) the Book of Lismore*

Born a child in a dark house  
where the walls blocked  
the trance and sleep of light,  
I prayed to hear  
the language of angels,  
some utterance of sweetness.

A patient thing,  
ringing clear from stone,  
it calms the roaring landscape,  
gentles our fall from grace.

My heart hunts the air like a bodhran  
to the cathedral of hills  
and an ocean god,  
green and luminous.

They shudder, empty and silent,  
poisoned by my presence.  
I speed on stolen wings,  
hearing only echoes and taunts.

We float days on end  
in a galley built of half a broken egg,  
ready to tip into the deep  
and drown.

The world fills with dread  
of a plague foretold,  
particles of fear infecting us all.  
Its longing encloses me again  
in this cold, dark place  
where no sweet voice is heard.

# *red bleeds to black*

BY WREN DONOVAN

I have no real experience with wolves or wild dogs devouring dead among slender tree trunks in moonlight. I have never actually seen those slinking black forms move against blue snow. Only one wolf once, blue-eyed and familiar, and now this weird half-dream. Thick writhing tails curled like oil tracks in water, they scattered like rats into cracks in the moonlight when I clapped my hands. Leaving the bodies still and charcoal-black against blue snow in moonlight. Why would I have this dream. Because I watched a war movie in black and white. Because those old photographs, bodies dropped or tossed like toys, limbs akimbo asunder in ditches and fields, wool uniforms blackened eyes open or closed demanding dignity denied to them by the lens. We call those photographs old but no photographs are old. Just yesterday I saw a sepia face smiling on a beach, a face soon after famous for hiding and dying and hoping. I turn my body over on the bed.

It's not any of those things, the reason for this dream. I don't know those lives, only look at them, read the books. It's not the dead bodies, it's the monsters, right? Those canine shadow-silhouettes are anxiety personified. My inner demons come to feast on memory lying face-down in the snow. Or perhaps they are the ones Out There, the rapacious and the ravenous. A red shirt turned to shadow, circling carnivores, omnivorous narcissists, my own blood. Is it the monsters that repel me or their meal, the mothers' children now haphazard and inert, the horror of namelessness of abandonment of limbs bent and twisted with disregard. What would they have dreamed, these children now reduced to meat, in blue moonlight? Red bleeds to black against blue. Blue snow. Black blood. I'm afraid to see red. Red reads as black with the removal of sunlight, or the addition of time.

This liminal space between sleep and morning, between beauty and horror, between blue and black or red, between life and death, feeding and bleeding, this space where detritus bumps into itself to form pictures on this screen in the back of my head. That place should have fences and moats. A big sign that says Why go here Why go there Why? Leave well enough alone. Let the dead sleep without dreams and Let the dogs feed Let the flesh be devoured in secret, leaving tossed bones to find later, licked clean.

In the dry garish sunlight of Utah I found such remains, of deer and unfortunate antelopes, turtles and unlucky rabbits. Only the rocky parts left, the yellow-white-grey curves of calcium, last lingering memorial of a short life. Scattered vertebrae were spiny beads of bone. Skull no longer home for eyes or tongue is now collectible to grace a shelf among other texts. Sometimes tufts of fur still clung to a tail or to a femur. That would be the only movement in these skeletal dioramas, tawny scraps of hair touched by a stray breeze.

I dreamt monsters in moonlight. I dreamt full-sized ragdolls still wrapped in their woolens, combat boots crusty with blood that bleeds black against snow. Bare-headed. Winter's hand brushes through hair. Spirits blink and hesitate then rise to dance and feast upon their own former bodies, dance for a night in the form of shadow scavengers before not plotting revenge in the morning. No retribution, no vengeance. Only still shapes in blue snow in blue moonlight, senseless. I go back to sleep, this will fade.

# *i break the news to you in a dream*

BY ALYSSA MAY TRIFONE

*after Ai Ogawa*

We are sitting on the front porch  
cushioned in nebulous pillows. My back  
is narrowed and abrupt. Your eyes  
are two full moons.

*What was it like to die?* I ask. The twin  
moons open wide, lids compressed into dust.  
You part your lips to answer, stunned.  
You didn't know you were gone.



# *celtic longevity spell (annotated for irish-americans)*

BY EMILY COTMAN

1. Gather an armful of fresh yew branches.

*Just hack your neighbor's yew flush with the ground - it's spreading.*

2. Carry the branches to a moonlit green.

*Pay your respects to the Moon with a loving glance  
as you drag the sprawling shrub through the streetlamps' migraine glow.*

3. Arrange the branches in a circle around ~~yourself~~ that Eastern White Pine

*in the city park - the one your cousin nicked up last week with a riding mower.*

4. Sing a prayer in your ancestral tongue.

*"Trasna na dTonnta" is fine if it's all you know.*

5. Dig a hollow in the soil with ~~a silver spade~~, your bare hands

*so you don't do any more damage to the soft surface-roots  
hunting for medicine. This will take a while.*

6. Lay the branches in the hollow and cover over with soil.

*Remove the seeds. Pluck the yew branches clean of every last seed.  
Burn the seeds. Now bury the branches.*

7. Repeat your song of prayer.

*"Muintir an Iarthair 'siad cairde mo chroí...  
Ar fhágaint an tsaoil seo, sé ghuidhim ar an Rí  
Gur leosan a shinfear i gcill mé"*

8. Sprinkle a little water over the soil.

*Some sources invite you to use your own tears for greater effect.  
Do not do this - White Pines are susceptible to salt damage.*

9. Leave and sleep ~~well~~.

10. Return at the next full moon to ~~renew your prayer~~. plunge your fingers  
*into the loam beneath the Pine and grip the probably-still-prickly  
matted yew and beg her to rot, beg "please mhamó please..."  
and if two Moons pass with no sign of decay, return to Step 5.  
Dig up the yew, burn the branches as well, and proceed.  
Ash is a fair-enough fertilizer in its own right.*

*Trasna na dTonnta*  
Across the Waves

*Muintir an Iarthair 'siad cairde mo chroí... / Ar fhágaint an tsaoil seo, sé ghuidhim ar an Rí  
/ Gur leosan a shinfear i gcill mé*  
People of the West are the friends of my heart... / On leaving this world, I pray to the King  
/ That with them I will be buried in a grave.

*mhamó*  
granny



# *fly agaric*

BY SONIA BURNS

Change the weather in your head  
mulch of shadows makes magic  
gift of wise and ancient gods.

Freyja, her cat-pulled chariot  
golden-bristled boar snout deep  
in forest floor, finding truffles.

Pale gleam of psilocybin  
cartoon sleek spotted mushroom  
red and white vanadium.

Divide your prime number  
hoping for truth and beauty  
or run berserk from yourself

in a crimson trance, breathing  
the woods; your mind is lightning  
splitting the future in two.

# *heaven haven heathen*

BY CAMILLE FERGUSON

I feel god—  
awful. Badly I want  
to be back in a church — back in my pure  
body, a small  
child, peering into rooms with golden  
trumpets, or the place that fills  
with water above the congregation,  
where bodies are drowned & saved in the name.  
I remember the lukewarm bath, the crowd  
clapping, my small breasts slicked under  
my soaked shirt, the man in the suit allowing me  
again to breathe.

//

In dreams I build myself  
a cathedral — no god,  
no funeral — just me & vaulted ceilings,  
stained glass glassing my skin. I crown  
myself in folded psalms. I step kindly  
around the weeping ghosts. I leave them gifts,  
origami flowers from chorus hymns.  
Their bodies bend into alters.

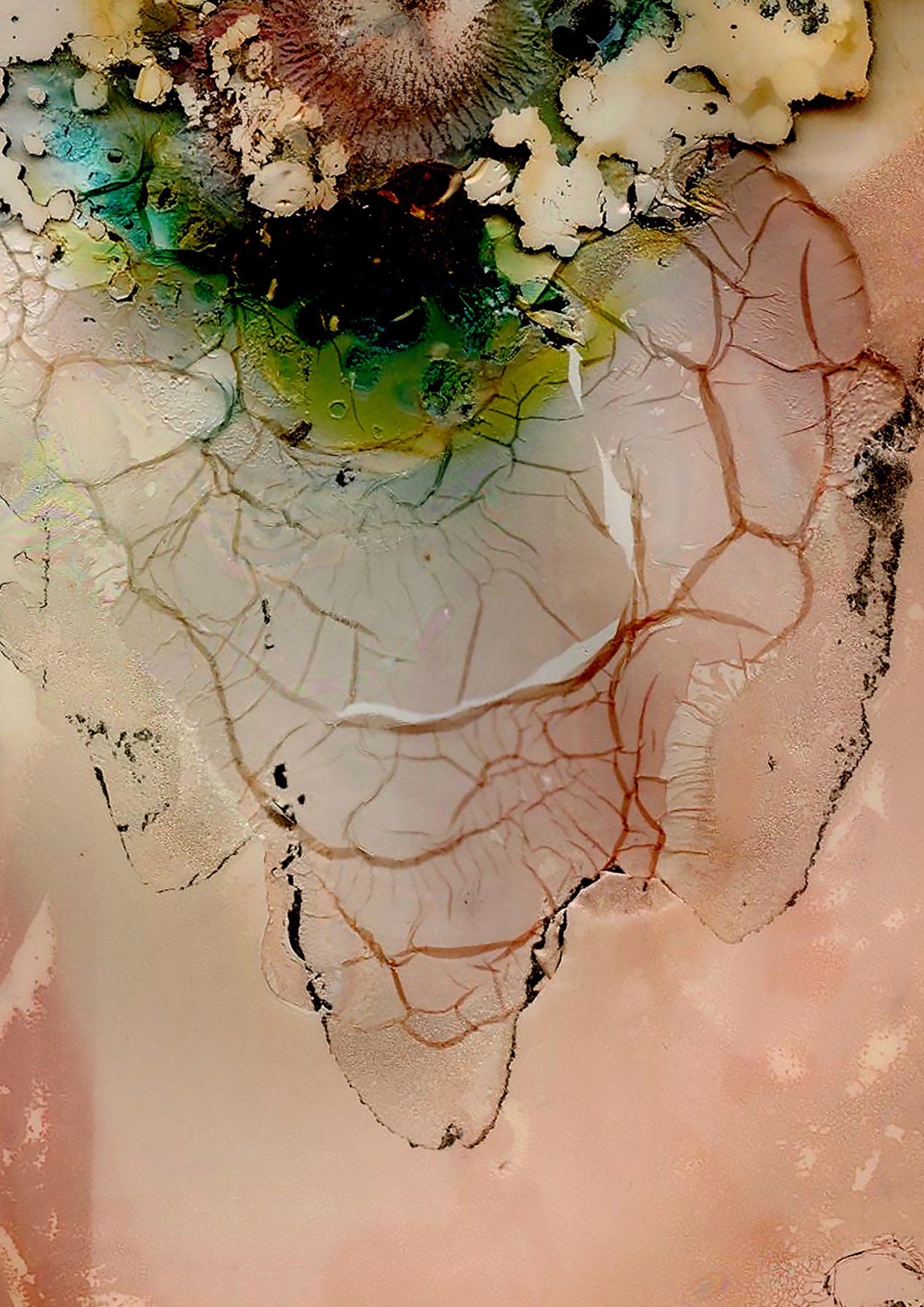
They say “come as you are” & I’ve always been paper.  
Ignitable. I douse myself in oil.

//

I’m afraid of what I’d give to feel safe: a life,  
a rib. To belong in a place  
in which I could shake & all would assume it  
from grace, a holy spirit, not this rage  
which burns in the temple of me.

What I wouldn’t do to believe in something.

I could sing glory, glory.  
I could be saved. Or I could be  
my own damned god.



# *boxing day*

BY ABIGAIL MITCHELL

we tested the god of the year and two hands reached back  
to snap the wishbone;  
two cars peeled apart at the intersection in the dead of night;  
wild eyes met through windows;  
our family, at the crossroads, splintering ghosts in the back seat without music playing.

that dark night we were  
wounded little creatures, we stared into the headlights, said *fuck*.  
i didn't know there were so few quiet places to grieve in.

that night we saw the shroud of what cannot be unseen, the hours turning over  
like flipping sand in sturdy glass;  
the traffic light turned green and so we must pass go, collect ourselves, the pieces on the  
board still all in play;  
i wore her lucky penny around my neck, the sick crack of severance still echoing in my  
ribcage,  
it was building, building –

we left her memory on the beige carpet, parted ways,  
drove home for christmas cursing, and  
by twinkling lights we sat wrapped up in grief;

and that night, in a small house,  
he bent at the waist, a final time,  
to kiss her papery cheek.

# *as above: so below*

BY ELEONORA LUONGO

I am Mother	Death
my womb grows heavy	in its emptiness,
A crowded hothouse	heavy with the thick scent of jasmine.
My body is	Deep and sacrilegious,
soft and silently	subversive.
Tremulous.	
	Tremble with me.
It's a wonder we exist	In this spreading Rorschach dark you can't see
at all. A miracle, you breathe.	And yet: we're not alone in our loneliness.
But you don't believe in magic.	Our vast interior galaxies hold everything. Or
Only wine and blood.	Reach further, grab hold of flesh.
Place your hand into my side.	Press my hand; feel my wounded palms?
Dig deeper,	Under the skin
the body is drumming a hushed beat.	Pulsing with blood like yours.

# *an eve on an eve*

BY LAUREN ANNE CASSIDY

Holy palmer's kiss lingers  
as the taste of sweet somethings leak  
down lips the shape of a moon mid-eclipse

Night slips and I in the orchard still when silence gazes only  
let's undulations dance on flesh  
under the silver crescent of chaos and desire - ubiquitous

sunk low in moss and petrichor  
a tongue becomes a snake

*Are gardens not born of seasons?  
Do seasons not shed like a serpent's flesh?  
Are bodies not gardens, and our very own Edens compressed?*

she turns a new shade like an apple with an open wound  
weaves a shroud of gossamer and effervescence  
and rising then, leaves like it is the simplest thing in the world  
and once left, lets the past lapse into its past tense  
to forgive and never forget

and so, I ask you good pilgrim  
I ask you this  
*is paradise not regained  
in some deaths?*



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Auzin** (she/her) is a writer from the Pacific Northwest who strings words together because there are creations inside her which clamor to get out. She has recently been appointed Managing Editor at Hecate Magazine. Auzin has been published in Hecate Magazine, Fahmidan Journal, and Rogue Agent Journal. Find her work at [byauzin.com](http://byauzin.com).

**Lorelei Bacht** (she/they) is a person, a poet, queer, multi-, living in Asia. Her work has appeared / is forthcoming in Anti-Heroic Chic, Visitant, Abridged, Odd Magazine, Postscript, PROEM, SWWIM, Strukturiss, The Inflectionist Review, and others. She is also on Instagram @lorelei.bacht.writer and Twitter @bachtlorelei

**Laura Bibby** (she/her) loves to write poetry and fiction that weaves her past life as a florist with the strange and ominous. When not scribbling in her notebook, she can be found wandering the botanical gardens or among the stacks of her local second-hand bookstore. She lives in Brisbane, Australia. You can find her online @bloomurder

**Vivian Burnette** (she/her) is a queer, mixed-race writer based in the U.S. Midwest. A former educator, she now writes personal essays, short fiction, and poetry about all the things you're not supposed to discuss at the dinner table.

**Sonia Burns** (she/her) is a Derbyshire based poet. Her work explores mental health and female identity and has been published in anthologies and magazines. Sonia's debut chapbook, *Umbra:philia*, will be published by the Bearded Badger Publishing Company in October 2021. Find her at Sonia Poetry on Facebook.

**Pearl Button** (she/her/they) lives in the Salishan Territories of western North America. The image is of a medallion made for her by a niece. Pearl wears it at stick game and other traditional events. She is published or forthcoming in a variety of journals including Literary Cauldron, Posit and SurVision.

**Alycia Calvert** (she/her) is a Fiction MFA candidate at UNLV, reader for Witness Magazine, and is applying to PhD's because she seeks the comfort of assigned thought. A long time resident of the desert Southwest, Alycia looks forward to her artists residency in France this summer, where she plans to eat her weight in sourdough.

**Lauren Anne Cassidy** (she/her) is currently pursuing a PhD at UCD, analysing mythological motifs and queer representation in contemporary Irish feminist novels. Although she spends the majority of her time analysing texts in an academic context, Lauren is also deeply passionate about her own creative writing. Twitter @Laure\_Cassidy

**Tatiana Clark** (she/her) is a writer and moon enthusiast. She is an undergraduate at the University of South Florida studying English/Creative Writing, and has work published in Trouville Review and Orange Blush Zine. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram @tatiianaclark.

**Josephine Close** is a visual artist whose primary focus is works on paper. A self taught mixed-media painter with a true love of the natural world, poetry, magic, myths and fairy tales, Josephine was born in the woods of New Hampshire, but now lives in a haunted cottage in Los Angeles. Find more work via: [www.josephineclose.com](http://www.josephineclose.com)

**Emily Cotman** (she/her) doesn't believe in any gods, unless you count Luna moths, overheard laughter, and all the tomato seeds no one's ever seen. Those she believes in. TW/IG @emilycotman

**Chella Courington** (she/they) is a writer and teacher whose poetry and fiction appear in numerous anthologies and journals including X-R-A-Y Magazine, New World Writing, and The Lavender Review. A Pushcart and Best Small Fictions Nominee, Courington was raised in the Appalachian south and now lives in California. Find her online @chellacouringto

**A. N. DeJesus** (she/her) is a second-generation Dominican American with a Master's in English and Rhetoric. Her work is forthcoming in Permafrost and Luna Luna Magazine and has been recently featured in The Log Angeles Review, Bear Review, and Cider Press, among others. She has been included in the Best of the Net Anthology in 2010 and was the recipient of the Helen and Emily Nguyen Creative Writing Award as well as the David Baker Poetry Award.

**Wren Donovan's** (she/her) writing appears or is upcoming in Anti-Heroic Chic, Harpy Hybrid Review, The Dillydoun Review, Cauldron Anthology, InkDrinkers, and elsewhere. She studied at UNC-Chapel Hill and University of Southern Mississippi. Wren reads Tarot, talks to cats, and lives in Tennessee. She lurks on twitter @WrenDonovan

**Kate Falvey's** (she/her) work has been published in an eclectic array of journals and anthologies; in a full-length collection, *The Language of Little Girls* (David Robert Books); and in two chapbooks. She edits the 2 Bridges Review, published through City Tech/CUNY, where she teaches, and is an associate editor for the Bellevue Literary Review.

**Camille Ferguson** (she/they) is a poet from Ohio. Their work has been featured or is forthcoming in Okay Donkey, Lumiere Review, Zone 3, Flypaper Lit, and Passages North, among others. You can follow her on Twitter @camferg1.



## CONTRIBUTORS

**Clem Flowers** (they/them) is a soft spoken southern transplant living in a mountain's shadow in Utah. In an eternal search for the perfect salmon roll. Nb, bi, and queer as the day is long, they live in a cozy apartment with their wonderful wife & sweet calico kitty. Their debut chapbook, *Stoked & Thrashing*, is available thru Alien Buddha Press on Amazon. Find Clem on Twitter at @clem\_flowers

**Ren Gay** (she/they) is a lesbian, autistic poet and artist from Fargo, North Dakota. Her work has appeared in journals such as *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *The Laurel Review*, *Qu Literary*, *Ghost City Review*, *Gamma Poetry*, *FreezeRay Poetry*, *Persephone's Daughters*, and others as well as the anthology *What Keeps Us Here*. Twitter: @RenKGay

**Barbara Genova** (she/they) is the pen name of a public woman who went private. Poetry and stories written as Barbara have been published / are forthcoming at *The Daily Drunk*, *surfaces.cx*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Sledgehammer Lit*, *Scissors and Spackle*, *The Final Girl Bulletin Board*, *Fahmidan Journal*, *Misery Tourism*, *Hallowzine* (2021), *ExpatPress*, *The Bear Creek Gazette*, *A Thin Slice of Anxiety*, *Discretionary Love*. She can be found on Twitter @CallGenova and on Instagram @thebarbaragenova

**Emily M. Goldsmith** (she/they) is a queer Cajun poet originally from S. Louisiana. They received their MFA in Poetry from the University of Kentucky. Emily is currently the managing editor of *Giving Room Mag* and their work can be found in *Fine Print Press*, *Witch Craft Mag*, *Entropy Mag*, *Vagabond City Lit*, and elsewhere.

**Danielle Goshay** (she/her) is a Canadian/American visual artist based in Toronto whose practice includes digital and film photography and experimental/alternative process. Goshay studied at Pittsburgh Filmmakers media arts center in Pennsylvania. She has exhibited work in Pittsburgh and Toronto and has been published internationally. Find her online at [daniellegoshayphotography.com](http://daniellegoshayphotography.com) and on Instagram @daniellegoshay

**Sarah Hardy** is a painter based in Leeds, UK. Predominantly an abstract painter for many years, recent personal events along with the social isolation of the pandemic led her back to figurative work that explores fluctuating themes and narratives around the human experience. Find Sarah on Instagram @sarahhardyartist

**Lucy Holme** (she/her) lives in Ireland. She is currently studying for an MA in Creative Writing at University College Cork and her debut chapbook, *Temporary Stasis*, which was shortlisted for The Patrick Kavanagh Award, will be published by Broken Sleep Books in August 2022.

**Erica Hom** (she/her) is a writer, educator and artist based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her poetry has been featured in *Line Rider press*, *Rhodora Magazine* and *Bloom Magazine*. She has poems forthcoming in *Voices from the Attic*, *orangepeel mag* and *Swim Press*. She is a poetry reader for *Sepia Journal* and *Sledgehammer Lit*. In between writing poetry, she is probably painting, mixing homemade tea blends or whispering to her houseplants. You can find more of her writing on instagram at @e.h.writing

**Xanthe E. Horner** (she/her) is an eclectic artist, witch and poet residing in East London. Her visual practice explores and articulates an inner symbolic language, synthesising multimedia collage and illustration through both analogue and digital processes. Xanthe clusters symbols, objects and ideas in dialogue, seeking to articulate the arcane within the mundane, drawing on her knowledge of tarot archetypes and interest in alchemy.

**K Horowitz** (she/they) is an essayist, poet, science writer, and sea hag in Maine. Her work on monsters, movies, gender, and trauma has previously appeared in *Luna Luna*, *Rogue Agent*, *Bright Wall/Dark Room*, *bitch magazine*, and many more. You can find K online at [thingswrittendown.com](http://thingswrittendown.com).

**Ellen Huang** (she/her) is an aro/ace writer of fantasy. She reads for *Whale Road Review* is published/forthcoming in *From the Farther Trees*, *The Rising Phoenix Review*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, *They Call Us, K'in*, *Wrongdoing Magazine*, *celestite poetry*, and elsewhere. Follow her on Twitter @nocturnalxlight or her movie fanatic blog at [worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com](http://worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com).

**Arden Hunter** (they/them) is an aroace agender writer, artist and performer. With an eclectic range of interests from the horrific to the whimsical, the theme tying all of their work together is an inexplicable and unconditional love for the ridiculous beast that is called 'human'. Find them on Twitter @hunterarden and at [ardenhunter.com](http://ardenhunter.com)

**Candace Hunter/chlee** is a Chicago-based artist and storyteller. During the beginning of the Coronavirus pandemic, she began to do two things: offer free art classes on Instagram and to create what she now calls her "Brown Limbed Girls" – a growing series of whimsical brown girls enjoying their lives. She is extremely happy to share the girls with a new audience in New Orleans. A highly respected artist in the Midwest, chlee has most recently received the Tim and Helen Meier Family Foundation Award, the 3 Arts Award and her work has been honored by the Diasporal Rhythms Collective.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Helen Gwyn Jones** (she/her) started recording her world at the age of 8 when she bought a Brownie camera from her sister, something which has become a lifelong passion. A collector of the past (hers and other people's) she likes nothing better than muted images of imperfection. May be found poring over Welsh grammar books when not photographing drains or going into raptures over rust. Find her online @helengwynjones

**Lexi Knott** (she/her) is a poet, silversmith & witch living in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her latest poem appeared in Black Bough Poetry's 'Freedom/Rapture'. Follow along on Instagram & Twitter: @naiadpoet

**Kinneson Lalor's** (she/her) work has appeared in places like Tiny Molecules, Reflex Press, and Ellipsis Zine, and on many shortlists. She won the 2021 1000 Word Herd competition. She's currently querying for her novel about time-travelling botanists and beasts in Swedish castles. Find her on Twitter (@KinnesonLalor), Instagram (@kinneson.lalor), or via [www.kinnesonlalor.com](http://www.kinnesonlalor.com).

**Hanna Lee** (she/her) is a self-taught photographer from the US. She began taking photos when she was young, inspired to both create ethereal visual worlds and to document her life. Her work ranges from the dark and magical to the light and mystical. Find her on Instagram @enchanted.forests.photo

**Eleonora Luongo** (she/her) has an MFA in Creative Writing from Rutgers University-Newark. Her work has appeared in Bellevue Literary Review, Re-Side Magazine, Black Telephone Magazine, No Tender Fences: An Anthology of Immigrant & First-Generation American Poetry, and Divine Feminist: An Anthology of Poetry & Art by Womxn & Non-Binary Folx.

**Louise Mather** (she/her) is a poet from Northern England and editor of Acropolis Journal. Nominated Best of the Net 2021, her work is published in magazines such as Fly on the Wall Press, Crow & Cross Keys and Dust Poetry Magazine. She writes about endometriosis, fatigue and mental health. Twitter @lm2020uk

**Dr. Bunny McFadden** (she/they) is a Chicana mother who tinkers with words for a living. They are the winner of the 2021 Golden Ox and have been published in horror & scifi anthologies. They're also the assistant editor of a magazine for incarcerated folks. Their website is [DocBunny.com](http://DocBunny.com).

**Tahlia McKinnon** (she/her) is an esoteric storyteller and the Editor-In-Chief of Hecate Magazine. Her prose often centres on sex, death and the sacrilegious. Such work has been published by The Daily Drunk Mag, Wrongdoing Magazine, Anti-Heroine Chic, Epoch Press and others. Turn the page via [www.tahliamariamckinnon.co.uk](http://www.tahliamariamckinnon.co.uk)

**Veronica Merlo** is an Italian creative based in Edinburgh, Scotland. Her work has always been related to nature, dreams, subconscious and the many aspects of beauty and decay. She's currently working as a tattoo artist at The Kave studio.

**Abigail Mitchell** (she/her) is a PhD researcher at the University of Southampton, working on speculative and queer histories of the English witch trials. She also holds an MA from the University of Cambridge and an MPW from the University of Southern California. Her work can be found at pigeonholes, Paper Nautilus, The Nervous Breakdown and more. Find her tweeting about life and lit as @\_abbimitchell or about her PhD work at @hextorian.

**Katie Kalyaani Ness** (she/her) is a Yoga teacher, Women's Circle Keeper, Cacao ceremonialist, artist and ectopic pregnancy survivor. She has poetry published in Poetry Undressed, Pressure Cooker Literary and Hecate's BIRTH Anthology. She has articles and essays published with Yogi Approved, We for Women Stories, Rebelle Society, Kindred Spirit Magazine and more. Katie is of Romani ancestry, lives in London and teaches well-being and creative workshops across the UK and beyond.

**Pascale/Palaces** (she/her) is Editor-in-Chief of Wrongdoing Magazine. She was recently a finalist in The Conium Review's 2021 Innovative Short Fiction Contest. She is the author of EROTECAY (LUPERCALIA Press, 2021) and Folktales for the Diseased Individual (2021) and has placed work in Juked Magazine, Eclectica Magazine, Gingerbread House Magazine, and many others. She has a BAH from Queen's University. Find her at [pascalopotvin.com](http://pascalopotvin.com) or @pascalpalaces (Twitter).

**Carrie Elizabeth Penrod** (she/her) received her MFA from Mississippi University for Women. She currently lives in Indiana with her cats. Her work can be found at Anti-Heroine Chic, Sad Girls Club Lit, Prometheus Dreaming, Button Poetry's Instagram, and cornstalks.

**R. M. Phyllis** (she/her) is a reading glut who procrastinates reading by writing and writing by reading. No book finds the "did not finish pile" on her shelf, much to her own frustration.

**Dee Richards** (she/they) is a writer, parent, and LGBTQ+ feminist. Dee's work is published with Cape Magazine, Epoch Press, Cardigan Press, and more.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Alana Seena** (she/her) is a grad student who likes to write. Her work has been featured in Harness Magazine and Little Death Lit. She has recently authored a microchap called Talismen, which is available for free. Alana likes lemon cakes, pink roses, and the music she listened to in high school. Track her down on twitter @alanaseenah.

**Samantha Singh** (she/her) is a Belizean American writer currently based in Placencia, Belize, where she shares her home with her long-term partner and menagerie of house pets. In her free time between desperately scribbling her mad rantings and ravings, she runs a small cafe on the beach. You can find more of her work at salexandrasingh.com and @theseaitself on Instagram.

**Gerry Stewart** (she/her) is a poet, creative writing tutor and editor based in Finland. Her poetry collection Post-Holiday Blues was published by Flambard Press, UK. Totems is to be published by Hedgehog Poetry Press in 2021. Her writing blog can be found at <http://thistlewren.blogspot.fi/> and @grimalkingerry on Twitter.

**Lauren Theresa** (she/her) is a writer, botanical sorceress, and depth psychotherapist living outside NYC with her two daughters, husband, and myriad of plants. Her musings can be found on IG & Twitter @imlaurentheresa, and her words are living at laurentheresa.com.

**Alyssa May Trifone** (she/her) is a queer poet living in Connecticut. She currently works managing a local coffee shop. Her work has previously appeared in Germ Magazine and Anti Heroin Chic. She can be found on Instagram @good.line.graveyard, where she posts snippets of new poems, pictures of all her animals, and things she's found in the woods.

**Luciana Lupe Vasconcelos** is a Brazilian artist whose work explores the realms of the magic, the mythic and the mystical through the use of automatism in water based media. She has illustrated numerous books, including a Brazilian edition of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*. Her work has been exhibited internationally and was featured across online and printed media alike. She works and lives in Teresópolis, Brazil.

**Astrid Vallet** (she/they) is an English graduate from France, currently pursuing a Master's degree in Cultural Studies. Their work is featured in Sonder Magazine and The Shoutflower among others, and is forthcoming in Crow & Cross Keys; it usually revolves around queer, neurodivergent women like her, and she's decided that that's okay. They tweet at @astriddoeswrite.

**Meagan Viken** is a film photographer whose work focuses primarily on the connections that she has built with her surroundings. Themes of nostalgia, memory, and the juxtaposition of life and death are all foundational building blocks that lie beneath Meagan's work and processes. Much of her work draws on the relationship between man and nature, exploring the energetic and spiritual kinship that develops by immersing oneself in that relationship. Find her online @mvikenexperimental

**Scarlett Ward-Bennett** (she/her) is a queer writer from the Midlands, UK. Her debut collection Ache was published with Verve in 2019, and she went on to establish her own poetry publisher Fawn Press in 2021. Her work has featured in Nine Arches' Under The Radar Mag, Eyeflash Poetry & Mookychick.

**Justina Wiggins** (she/her) is a graduate of the Bennington College MFA Writing Seminars and is a multigenerational caregiver living in Baltimore. She shares a home with her rambling family, where they pack the house with as many fairy tales, and as much laughter, as they can fit beneath the eaves. She writes from the intersection of motherhood and womanhood— both have sharpened her teeth, called to her with green throats, and have asked her to recast the myths of her mothers.

**Ayshe-Mira Yashin** (she/her) is an 18-year-old lesbian artist from Istanbul and Nicosia, studying art at Camberwell College of Arts in London. She makes political and spiritual art, exploring themes such as witchcraft and sapphic love and intimacy. She runs a small business where she sells her tarot deck, as well as handmade notebooks, art prints, stickers and more.

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**shipwrecked** by Chella Courington was first published in *Lavender Review*

# FRANKENZINE

submissions open 31 october

CURATED AND COMPILED BY  
TAHLIA MCKINNON AND XANTHE E. HORNER

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PASCALE 'PALACES' POTVIN

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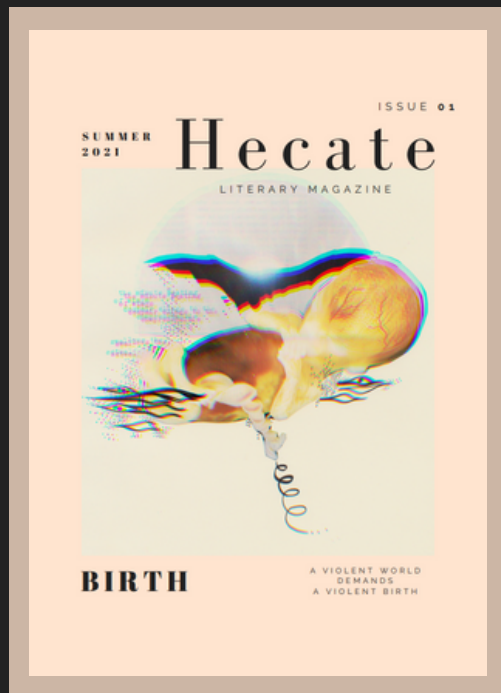


## BIRTH

A body of work that houses the inhospitable and all that makes us human in an increasingly inhumane world. Truths and fictions that cycle through beginnings, ends and rebirths in a phoenix fashion.

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DESIRE'S FIRE. TO MOULD  
THE EARTH. TO MOVE  
AND BE MOVED. ANIMATE THE  
INERT. YOU GALVANISE  
THE WILL. MAKE IT ELECTRIC.  
MEET YOUR MAKER.  
THRILL-SEEK YOUR LIMITS. PUT IT TO PAPER.  
WHAT GODS HAVE COME BACK TO  
TORMENT YOU, MADE IN THEIR IMAGE?  
WHAT HANDS MADE THEIR  
GROOVES IN YOU, WRESTED YOU FROM  
THE DIRT? CREATOR AND  
CREATED. A WAR WAGES.  
CAN THERE ONLY BE ONE?  
WE WANT YOUR MUSE, DISAFFECTED AND  
RE-EMBODIED. SUBLIMATED  
ONLY TO BE DEGRADED.  
THE INABILITY TO ESCAPE  
THE VIOLENCE OF FLESH. FLIGHT & THE  
COMEDOWN. DEATH DEFIED TO  
APPEAR IN A NEW GUISE. DO YOU REALLY  
KNOW YOU'RE ALIVE?

## ABOUT HECATE MAGAZINE

Hecate Magazine is an online literary journal with a bi-annual print anthology, celebrating the vision and voices of wild women, witches and underrepresented writers worldwide.

The magazine was founded and launched by Tahlia McKinnon in January 2021.

The publication is an ode to the goddess Hecate. Master of light and shadow, woman of innate wisdom, celebrator of sorcery and the celestial - we showcase words rich in myth, magic and mystique in Hecate's name.

Hecate hungers to be so much more than a magazine. We want to create a community. We strive to be a safe space for new writing and marginalised voices. We want to expand, offering a roster of events, spiritual services and publishing contracts.

Find out more about our mission and how you can support us:  
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