



# RAW LIT

Let Your Scars Shine Through Your Words



Issue 2 - Summer 2023

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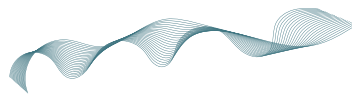
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# ABSTRACTION

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Artwork by Cyrus Carlson

# THE BONSAI TREE

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Poetry by **A. E. Thiel**

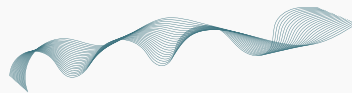
**CW: Death**

A Christmas gift to her parents,  
the bonsai tree had died  
after she did.

In an attempt to keep her memory alive,  
her mother spray-painted  
the dry, brown miniature branches  
an emerald green.

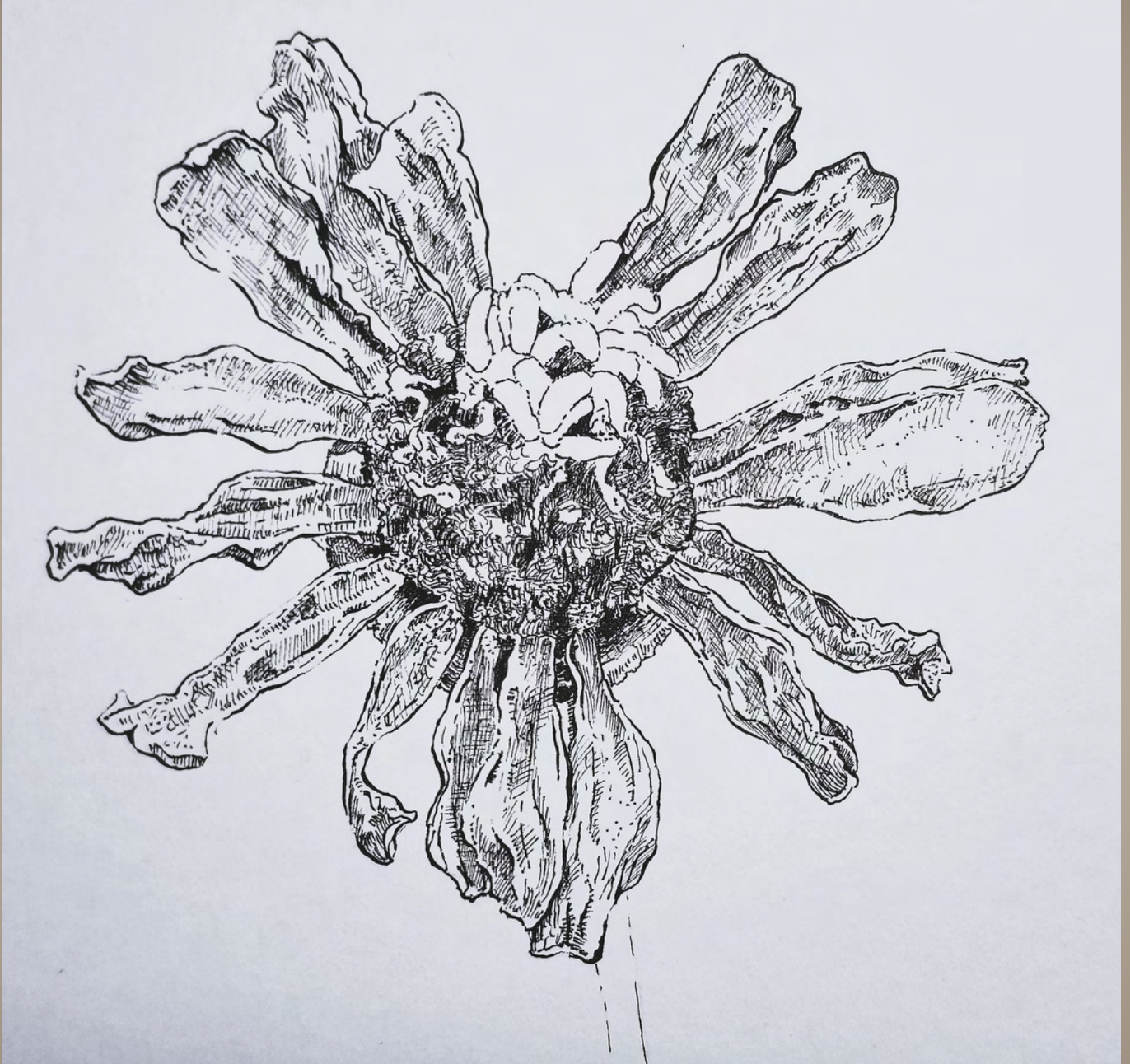
The color was more vibrant  
than ever before.

It was as if  
her mother's love  
shined that much brighter  
after her beautiful girl  
was gone  
forever.



# FLOWER

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Artwork by Juan Paez

“Looking is a narrow task between the eyes, the hands, and the observed. It is a vibration of the three, which manifests the continuity of the drawn line.”

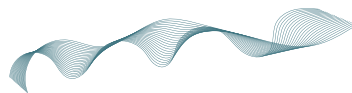
# THE CANCER PATIENT OBSERVES WEEDS

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Poetry by **Christian Ward**

**CW:** Mention of Illness

The wild nettles overrunning the patch  
of land behind the sports centre  
remind me of the unruliness of my disease.  
Their pale green, a spearmint tint  
in the early spring light, has colonised  
almost every patch, overtaking bluebells  
as big as my pinkie, silk dresses of cow  
parsley, and passion flowers opening  
like satellites. The scene invokes absurdity:  
Did one of my lymph nodes sneak out  
to take notes? Perhaps not. I remind myself  
everything is purposeful. The nettles  
harbour aphids to be consumed by ladybirds.  
Their young violet flowers, an offering for bees.  
Peacock butterfly caterpillars feed on nettles.  
The chrysalis of my body stirs in my sleep.  
Something twitches. Stings.



# SPRING

---



Photography by Melissa Flores Anderson

“After winter, summer toys abandoned in a corner of the garden are overgrown with weeds.”



# CHANGE

Non-fiction by **Janelle Sheetz**

**CW: Death**

A psychic once told me that to the dead, we forever remain the age we were when they died.

To my dad, I will always be 30.

To the rest of us, he will always be 54.

*Leave a quarter if you were with them when they died.*

I lingered in the doorway of my childhood bedroom—now occupied by my father’s hospital bed. I watched his chest rise and fall with each shallow breath. I wondered how much time he had.

*Leave a dime if you served together.*

Sometimes when we visit my father’s grave, we find coins already placed, shining in a neat row or arranged in a small cluster.

*Leave a nickel if you went to bootcamp together.*

We wonder who else has been here.

*Leave a penny if you visited.*

We rummage through wallets and change purses for pennies—one for each of us—and place them in a neat row on top of my father’s headstone.

We leave a penny for my niece, who he adored for three months, and one for my son, who he never knew at all, never even knew to anticipate.

We cradle my son and shield him from the wind as we climb up the hill. My niece walks hand in hand with me and her mother. She places her own penny.

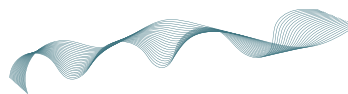
The land stands barren, primed for fresh graves. Grass springs up in the dirt, covering the newest ones. New, shiny marble headstones dot the hillside, the rows getting longer and deeper each time, eventually swallowing my father’s, making it harder to find. At Christmastime, wreaths pop against the snow—green with a red bow—and are removed in the spring, after the snow has melted and made the ground soft and muddy.

My son walks on his own, stumbling through the grass behind his cousin.

They get bigger, taller, looking dramatically different from one visit to the next, passing one early-childhood milestone after another.

Our row of pennies expands along with our families, more pennies as we welcome more children.

My father’s headstone is unchanged.



# SOOTHING WORDS

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Artwork by **Amanda Young**

“Heartbreak and sickness. When there is nothing to be offered but the familiar comforting voice and touch of a trusted parent.”

# THE SCAR

---

Poetry by **Holly Harrison Cline**

**CW:** Mention of Illness

Your dad knows not to kiss the left side of my neck  
 The twice opened scar there  
 At once too sensitive and too numb  
 The lightest touch sending off alarm bells of vulnerability  
 Fight and Flight and Freeze all at once

You don't know any of that, little love  
 You don't know the words

*Pleomorphic Adenoma*

*Surgery*

*Radiation*

*Recurrence*

You just know  
 When you are tired or scared or hurting  
 You want to cling on and not let go  
 So you dig your razor nails into my neck  
 Grab my ear that is too numb to feel anything but wrong  
 And you cry

And you don't know  
 Because you shouldn't know  
 That it triggers a panic that makes me afraid to hold you

You don't know why I put you in your crib  
 And walk away  
 To breathe

You don't know about scars

You will

The first time my neck was opened  
I was closer to your age than mine

The next time was just two years ago  
It was supposed to be the Once and For All  
So I could raise you in the peace of remission  
The radiation was supposed to make it stick

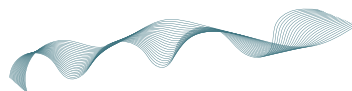
It didn't stick

Next time, you'll remember  
I'm not sure when

But I think of it every time I catch my breath  
And try not to tell you  
You can't cling to your mother  
Like every evolutionary instinct in your tiny body demands

Next time, your Mama's face will change forever  
No one is lucky three times over

So I clench my jaw  
Perpetually sore from radiation that didn't work  
Smile at you  
And hope this smile  
Is all you remember of these days



# HEALING WATERS

---



Photography by **Katharine Weinmann**

"My life as poem and prayer wherein making photos and writing poetry are holy alchemy for healing and social change."

Poetry by **Julia Jianski**

**CW:** Risky Behavior, Mental Health, Self Harm

I like to watch my cuts  
scab over  
to remind myself my body  
is a healing vessel  
I destroy  
And I don't know what I enjoy more  
the destruction  
or repair  
perhaps the cycle is what  
brings relief  
as the swollen red hot  
bumps of flesh  
dissolve into the faintest  
marks  
or brightest scars  
depending on their depth  
Perhaps I look at them and see  
forgiveness  
for despite the war  
I wage, on my own arms  
they still have grace enough  
to close the wounds  
I make

And why would my body do so?

After 10 years  
of the same old  
shit  
I'm surprised it hasn't just quit  
on me  
thrown in the towel  
and abandoned ship  
"How 'bout you close up your own holes,  
you bitch."

Is what I think it'd say  
at least

But,  
somehow  
it doesn't

Patiently  
it sends its lymphocytes  
to the site  
I have chosen  
to express my own  
resentment  
for the things I've felt or  
done

It doesn't ask me  
questions

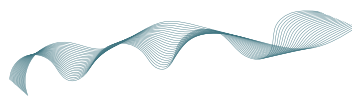


Like: “Why do you keep doing this  
to us?”

“Has the pain been  
not enough?”

“Who do you yearn  
to heal you  
now?”

Each time I’d have a  
different answer  
to the last one  
depending on the fantasies  
that trapped my mind  
whether it’d be from a  
one-night stand  
or from a man  
that drained my  
life-force  
through his love  
But the traces of the  
violence  
remind me  
that the healer’s been  
within  
all along



# SHE

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Artwork by Dr. Vass Geo

“Looking to the future.”

# THIS IS HOW I SEE HER

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Poetry by **Ivona Coghlan**

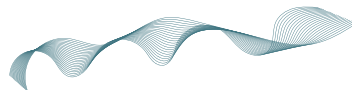
**CW:** Mental Health

My legs stride through jagged mountains like fields of dewy grass  
Sparks fly from my fingers and blitz the coal black clouds  
My tongue can spit acid or sprinkle hope  
My hands punch and caress with equal clout  
Through tornadoes of turmoil and circumstance, my feet are firmly planted

My brain plans, adapts, implements  
My heart swells, bursts, holds  
My tears rive, release, restore

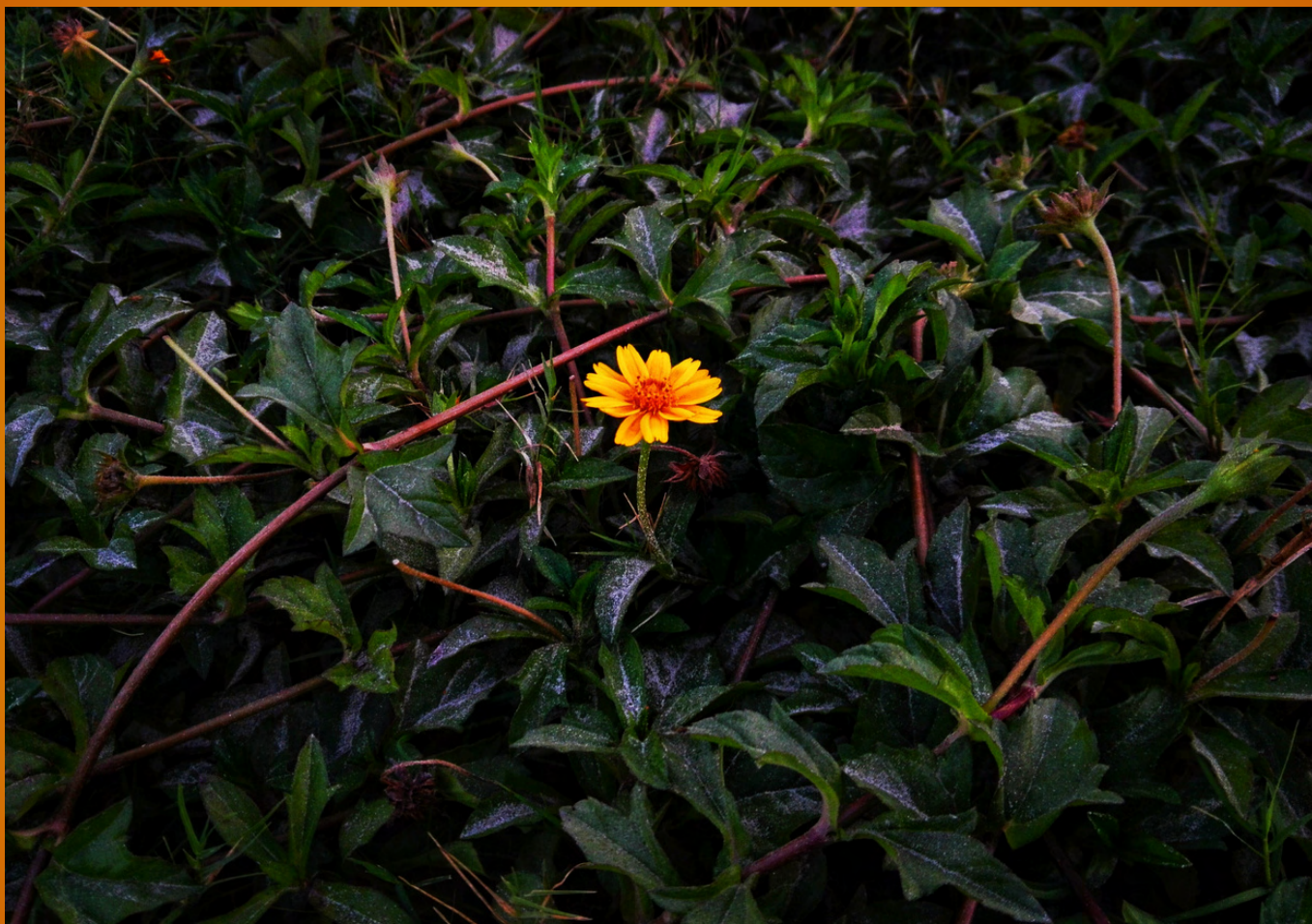
You call me weak?  
You call any of us weak?  
We breathe strength into being  
We survive when we should rightly smash and shatter to smithereens  
Instead, we dance in the ashes; we scream through the storm

In the empty, pitch-dark, soulless void, we are the single note of music



# THE SMILING YELLOW

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Photography by Soumik Srabony

“There will be garbage, there will be chaos, there will be pollution and also there will be a pair of eyes, they will find beauty and capture that.”

# TODAY I COUNTED

---

Fiction by **Emily Macdonald**

**CW:** Mental Health

Today I counted the number of times I spoke to you and had to repeat myself because you weren't listening the first time. Sometimes I counted extra because you weren't listening the second or third time either, though I didn't count the names I called you under my breath.

Today I counted the number of times I gave way on the pavement. To the entitled mothers who pushed their prams through, to the young men, striding while talking in those confident tones on their smart phones, and the children who scooted at me, aiming with painful accuracy for my shins or my knees.

One person acknowledged me and said thank you. An elderly woman, who I stood aside for but who insisted I pass as she paused with bags of too heavy shopping and looked at me, so grateful to be noticed that she smiled and nodded and smiled.

Today I counted my steps and my calories and the number of glasses of water I drank. I counted to find a shape of me in centimetres, inches, and ounces.

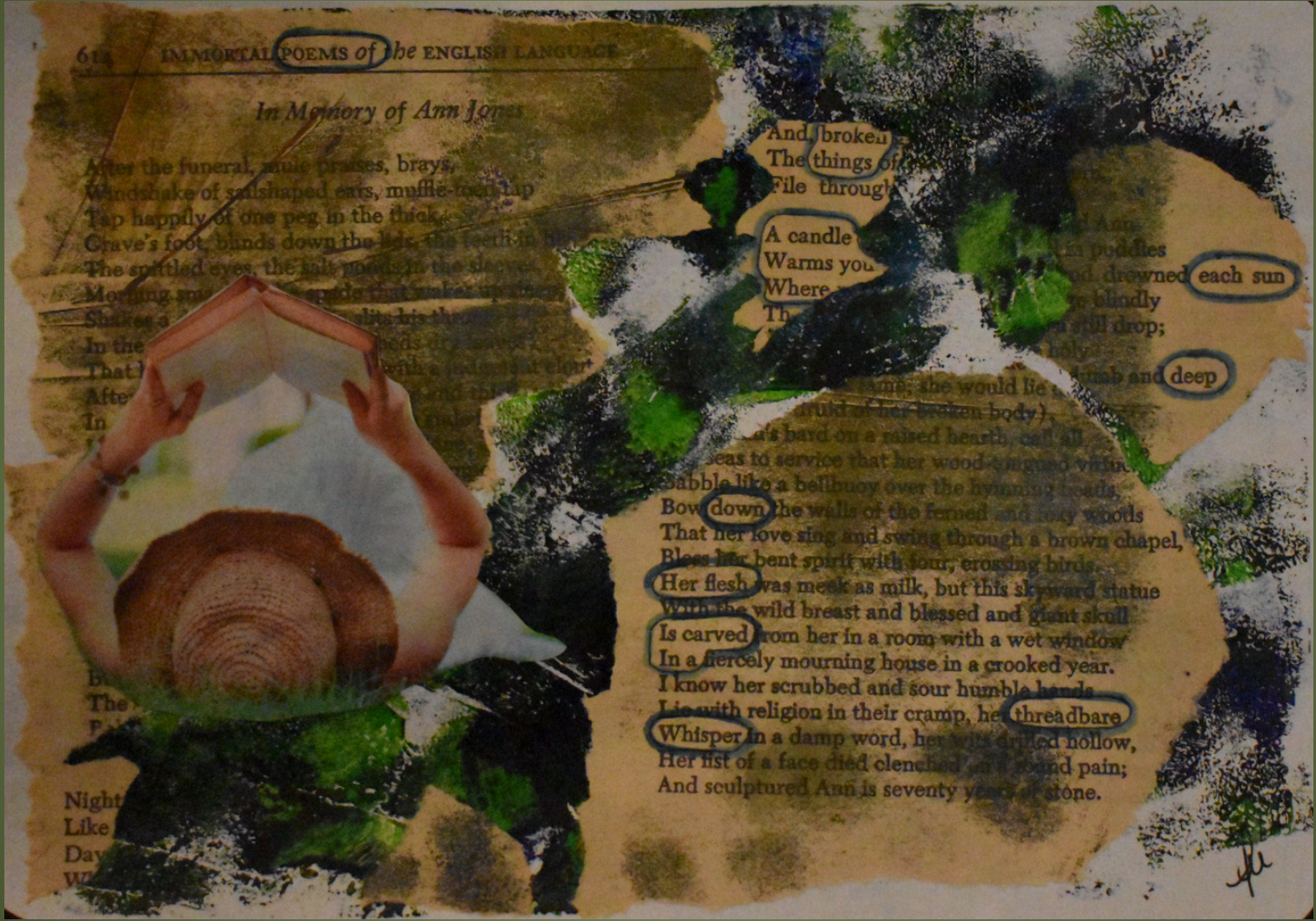
Today I counted the number of times I became distracted from the task I'd set myself. When my mind drifted, meandered on a path of its own finding. I'd tell you how many times if I could remember. If I could distinguish those moments from the rest of my day.

Today I counted the number of cups, glasses, and dirty plates I collected from the rooms in the house. I counted the socks on the floor, the shoes discarded in the kitchen and left in the hall. I counted the wet towels left on beds, the tubes of toothpaste missing their caps and the bottles left beside the overflowing recycling bin.

Today I counted the cup of tea you gave me with a spoonful of sugar stirred in, though I've not taken sugar for over ten years. I counted this cup like a notch on a belt or a black mark in a book. A trigger reminder to add to the sum, taking shape in my secret account, accumulating to build a visible me, shiny, and hard with currency.



# UNTITLED



Artwork by Amy Marques

# SEEKING THE EDGES

---

Fiction by **Rachel Canwell**

**CW:** Risky Behaviour, Mental Health, Death, Strong Language

After her mother dies, Katie finds herself seeking out life's edges.

Day after day, she walks along kerbstones and negotiates the fringes of striped yellow platforms. She caresses creases of envelopes, obsessively folds pages of books and unread magazines.

Blades of knives, both blunt and razor sharp, taunt and tempt her fingertips as she strokes them, late at night by the light of a bright, frost-bitten moon.

The edges of tables, with sharp, inviting corners and the jagged edges of evergreen leaves. Slithers of glass, of patience and time. Slices of rich velvet cake, the blades of steel scissors and the far side of scenes.

She hoards and worships them all.

Katie lies on her side, at her edge of the bed, balancing and dreamless, waiting to fall.

She heats her small flat fast and hard, turning the thermostat up to the max. Then opens the windows wide and shivers, naked and alone, daring the winter in.

One day she will gorge and the next she will starve. Sees no one for weeks and then stays out for days intent on kissing and fucking the world.

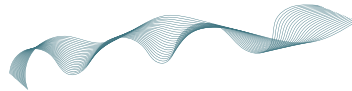
There is no in between.

Katie arrives at work just before late and leaves a second after early; always travels home in the last carriage on the latest possible train.

The beginnings and the comfortable middles are invisible and irrelevant. Stretching out, barren and endless, completely hidden from view.

For Katie can focus on nothing but the endings; on the magic of fragile and final things. Each one brittle, crumbling; slipping away, cracking into pieces beneath her feet.

And as the edges crowd in, Katie's boundaries retreat.





# TRUFFLE ISLAND



Artwork by Maddy Robinson

“During the new moon in Aries, I found this waterfall. I had been struggling with the past, and felt that a personal journey would be healing. I decided to jump into the water, and after reemerging, the water felt like a blessing.”

# EXTEMPORANEOUS EXTREMES

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Poetry by **SOUM**

**CW:** Risky Behaviour, Mental Health

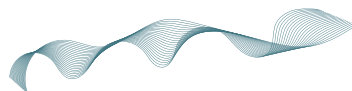
Braking to a grinding halt  
I want to drive full tilt into  
The granny-driven vehicle in my way  
Should I?

Daydreaming, happy in my head  
Impatient fingers click click click  
Close enough to take a bite  
Should I?

On the cliffs edge looking  
Down down down thinking  
What if I stepped off?  
Should I?

Cutting meat with a shiny blade  
Sharp like your cheeky tongue  
Imagine it slicing soft human flesh  
Should I?

Functioning in everyday pitter patter  
Suppressing those teasing impulsive notions  
I wonder, do I need to get help?  
Should I?



# PEONIES

---



Artwork by Rachel Coyne

# HEADS I WILL, TAILS I WON'T

---

Fiction by **Sumitra Singam**

**CW:** Abuse

*Dedicated to the many women who have had to compress themselves for others.*

The girl is pale, her skin like an undercooked biscuit. She is beautiful, but like a doll - her features unmarked by life. She could be fifteen instead of twenty-five. Deepak, my son, holds her to his side as if she might run away. His height crowds her so that she seems to be sinking into him.

There is a coin in my pocket, and I twist it over and over, feeling the markings on either side. Heads I will, tails I won't.

My husband invites our son and his new girlfriend to the table. "Sit," he says, "My wife has made food for us! Sit!" We sit at the family table, as we have done for almost thirty years. My husband makes a sweeping gesture over the food as if he has produced the briyani, the palak paneer, the chicken korma with his baby-soft hands. He invites the girl, Kareena, to eat. She looks to Deepak for guidance. His hand grips hers as she reaches for a second ladle of briyani. My breath catches in my throat. The harsh coin speaks in braille – heads I will, tails I won't.

They've been together six months, Deepak says. Already I can see the hunch in her shoulders, as if her thin body is a yellowing sheet of paper, curling at the edges, warping in Deepak's virile heat. Heads I will, tails I won't.

My husband asks the girl about her work. She starts to answer, but Deepak finishes her sentences. “She’s in PR at the company! Doing really well too! She won’t be junior associate for long, will you darling?” He grips her shoulders, and she jerks towards him. My shoulder aches like a memory. The coin is cold and heavy, like the stone in my gut. Heads I will, tails I won’t.

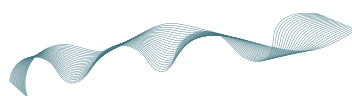
My husband asks about her family, and she drops her gaze, “They live in Canberra.” Deepak laughs, “You get really homesick, darling, don’t you?” She has two spots of colour on her cheeks, high and hot. I try to remember the last time I heard my sister’s voice, her laugh like a waterfall. Heads I will, tails I won’t.

I clear the dishes away and bring the dessert out. Golden gulab jamun balls like little suns swimming in syrup – Deepak’s favourite. He serves himself three, four, five. “You can share with me, darling,” Deepak says. My husband guffaws, “Yes Deepak, that’s right, you have to be careful with these women! No self control! Right, Sonu?”

I invite Kareena to help me with the dishes in the kitchen. “What can I do?” she asks.

Heads I will, tails I won’t.

I grasp her hands. They are fragile, like holding a quivering sparrow. “I have something to say.”



# THE BECKONING FIGURE

---



Artwork by Aislinn Feldberg

# DON'T BELIEVE ANYTHING THEY SAY

---

Poetry by **Sonja Berry**

## CW: Death

I see you.  
You are teaching me how to skip rocks  
in the glassy alpine  
face of Lake Dillion,  
your boyish eyes  
beaming from the lake's surface.  
"It's all in the wrist."

But they say  
you are not  
there.

I see you  
sitting on our favorite park bench,  
bronze and statuesque  
like a solar deity.  
I'm painting your fingernails  
while you are not looking  
and you turn and say,  
"hot pink suits me."

But they say,  
the North Winds  
carried  
you  
away.

I see you  
in a restless September evening,  
your cherubic cheeks glowing.  
I'm wearing your flannel  
and we are burning  
lighter smileys  
into our flesh  
so that we will have  
matching scars.

But they say,  
you  
are  
in the dark,  
cold ground,  
alone.

But,  
I  
see  
you.  
You are lying next to me,  
warm,  
supple,  
your fingers gliding over my skin,  
like a dove-drawn chariot  
grazing the tops of clouds,  
carrying the sun.

But they say.  
But they say.  
But they say.

I  
don't  
believe  
anything,  
they say.



# CHASING WILDFLOWERS

---



Artwork by S. Kavi

# TENTH SUMMER

---

Fiction by **Sally Simon**

**CW:** Child Abuse & Disturbing Imagery

Dear Carrie,

I hope you get this letter. I sent it to the address I found online for Camp Merrywood, but it has been six years and you probably don't work there anymore because you'd be like what, twenty-five or something. I mean, you could be married and living in another state for all I know, but I hope they found you because my therapist thinks I need to write this and send it to you, although I think writing it is enough, but what do I know?

I do know I want to thank you for the kindness you showed me during my last year at camp. When I said goodbye and the buses rolled out, throwing up clouds of dirt, I didn't know I'd never go back. I mean, I should have suspected, but I was only ten and didn't realize stuff like I do now. If I'd have known, maybe I would have told you this then. Maybe.

This is so hard. I thought it would be easier, but I don't know how to begin, so I guess I'll just start on the day near the end of camp, the day I was chosen to raise the flag, the night we had our end-of-camp sleepover. You probably don't remember.

I'd waited all summer to raise and lower the flag and for Mike (you remember Mike the director, I'm sure you do, everyone loved him) to teach me how to fold it. I practically danced off the bus that morning knowing it was my turn. Finally. You gave me a high five and told me Mike saved the best for last.

At arts and crafts that day, you made me a friendship bracelet, wrapped it around my wrist and said: *Forever friends*. I still have that bracelet in an old box under my bed. It's ragged and dirty, but I couldn't throw it away. Not ever.

At the lake that day, I swam across the deep end for the first time and all the counselors cheered.

And at the flagpole, when everyone sang "Day is Done," you held my hand before Mike took me aside to fold the flag. It was bigger than I thought, and I had trouble with the first two folds, but I looked over at you and you gave me a thumbs up and I knew I could do it.

That had been the best day of my life up until then. I was looking forward to the campfire and s'mores and sleeping in the cabin on old cots, knowing you'd be there to keep me safe from the animals that came around at night, the ones the older campers teased us about.

Do you remember at the campfire, you told me Mike wanted to see me in his office, something about the flag? You were busy readying the graham crackers and chocolate bars, but shooed me along, telling me it would just be a minute.

Well, Mike didn't want to see me about the flag.

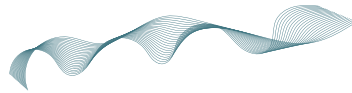
When I went into the office, he told me to close the door. The room smelled of the whiskey my grandpa drank. Mike was sitting behind his desk and told me to come around, that he had something to show me. He told me what to do to be a good girl, to make him like me best. My heart pounded out of my chest and I didn't know what to do, and you weren't there, and I heard laughing at the campfire, and wanted to get back for s'mores, and Mike put his hands on the top of my head and pushed down.

Before I left, he told me I was special and to hurry along so I wasn't missed, and we didn't want anyone to come and look for me, did we, and now we had a secret. The word "we" cut into me, but I wasn't sure why. Not yet.

Did you notice how I was so quiet after I came back, how I didn't even take one bite of my s'more, how during the ghost stories I stared off into the darkness? Later that night, back in the cabin, when all the other girls had fallen asleep, you noticed I was tossing and turning. You asked me if everything was OK. I almost told you then. I wish I had. I blamed the cot and the older campers who told stories of animals that wanted to eat little girls like me, and you laughed and told me there was nothing to be afraid of.

I'm writing now because I want you to know. You were wrong.

Sincerely,  
Melissa (from Camp  
Merrywood, summer of 2012)



# UNTITLED



Artwork by Amy Marques

# TURNING THE PAGE

---

Fiction by **Hilary Ayshford**

**CW:** Mental Health & Abuse

The photograph, faded and discoloured, has resisted the efforts of the heavy books to iron out its creases, flatten its crumpled corners. She cannot recall how it felt to be that laughing ten-year-old, eyes squinting in the sunlight, hair lifted by the breeze from her shoulders into a golden halo. That was in the Before. The pull of the picture brings her here, into the shadowed alcoves of her mind to probe the memory of the day when the Before became the After, to examine it, to test whether its potency has diminished over the years.

She hurries past the familiar archives of adulthood, feeling drawn to the happy images of recent times but not allowing herself to be waylaid by the alluring brightness of love, marriage, motherhood.

Trepidation slows her haste. The aisles in this part of the repository are dark and grimy. Dread creatures with swollen black bodies and distorted limbs lurk in corners and skitter away at her approach, leaving pinprick tracks in the debris of her lonely childhood. She makes for the furthest recess, where light never reaches. Fingertips skim names and dates, summoning images of people and events long since banished to the oubliette of her mind.

She recoils when she finds the volume, reluctant to touch it, unwilling to disturb the muffling layers of dust that have settled over its cold covers like a protective blanket. She turns it over in her hands, finds it unchanged but no longer as heavy as she thought. The scalpel is sharp that she uses to excise the final folios. She tears them into tiny, impotent pieces and scatters them among the musty detritus on the floor.

Bypassing the awkward period of adolescence, she carries the mutilated memory back into the light and warmth of sunny beaches, birthday parties, board games and bedtime stories. She places the tome on the middle shelf, between recollections of her wedding day and the birth of her first child, where happiness can permeate its faded covers and rework the remaining chapters.



# VIEW OF THE FUTURE

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Artwork by Amanda Young

“The dark window frame is a metaphor. Fear and pain can hold us back from stepping into the sunshine and moving forward with our lives.”

# IN HINDSIGHT THE WORLD IS A DIFFERENT PLACE

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Fiction by **Joyce Bingham**

**CW:** Violence, Miscarriage

In hindsight I should have stayed at home, nursed my stomach cramps, watched daytime television, and sobbed.

In hindsight I should have seated them at a table in the back, not at the front, the one we have to advertise our clientele and food in full view of the street.

In hindsight I should have been making their drinks behind the counter, preparing their cutlery and napkins, but I was chatting to them, entranced by the cuteness of their baby girl.

In hindsight I should have been in the staff toilet mourning the loss of my pregnancy, but I was standing in the direct line of fire at the window.

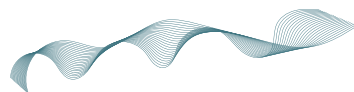
In hindsight I should have known that the metal tray I carried was light aluminium and was not going to stop a bullet.

In hindsight I should have known that shielding the baby from gunfire was going to destroy any chance I had in the future of bearing children.

In hindsight I should have understood the silence after the gunfire was simply my eardrums reacting to the violent noise.

In hindsight I should have realised the baby girl I saved would light up my life in ways I never expected.

In hindsight I would do it again.





# UNTITLED



Artwork by Rachel Coyne



# THE RIVER WILL CARRY HER HOME

---

Fiction by **Maria Thomas**

## CW: Death of a Child

The optician is sharp-nosed, with thick lensed glasses that magnify her eyes like an anime character. Alba sees flecks of silver in the pallid ring encircling large, inky pupils. The room smells fungal, as if it isn't cleaned very often, and there's an evil eye pendant hanging over a monitor in the corner. Alba is cocooned within a leather chair and staring at a box of light until a ghost glow appears at the edge of her vision; it feels warm, like a halo, like halogen. The optician uses a machine that looks right inside Alba's eyes, and she shows Alba and her mum a photograph. There is a thick line within each eyeball which curves and loops like the River Thames at the end of Eastenders. The optician's face looks serious, and Alba is sent to wait outside. She sits and waits gazing at a picture of three witches spinning a golden thread that binds people to the earth.

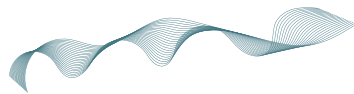
In the months that follow, Alba's world narrows to a metal framed bed in a small bright room, hair moulting onto the pillow, mouth parched and cracked like she's suffering her own personal drought. Her parents wear falsely optimistic faces, but the slightest lenticular shift shows sadness and fear beneath. When they think she's asleep their eyes glaze with pools of tears, dammed behind their need to shore each other up.

In bed Alba pictures the optician's chair, the warmth of leather and the bulbous glare of her eyes in the photograph. She closes her lids and follows the course of the river past weeping willows and island churches, bustling docks and fish-markets, towers of stone and glass, apartment buildings with flowered balconies; she flows beneath bridges, past places with names like Eel Pie, Canary and the Isle of Dogs.

She follows flotillas of boats, shoals of salmon, swarms of eels; sees mudlarkers gathering bone and coin and driftglass, knowing instinctively however far they dig they'll never uncover all of this river's secrets, never find all the blood and all the love that sit beneath the silt and sand.

The Thames carries her beyond a white dome, spiked and pointing to heaven, past spur-shaped headlands to the ocean, and she smells salt and feels the sting of brine on her skin. She hears the whirs and screams of birds and the susurrations of waves, and she untethers.

In a small bright room, her parents snip the thread and let her go.



# SAILING

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Photography by Sreelekha Chatterjee

“Life thrives in the midst of boundless, sea-like difficulties, scorched by the sweltering heat of pain, agonies—sailing on with indomitable spirit, perseverance, and gaining strength along the way to endure all.”

# BOYS ON THE BEACH

---

Poetry by **DLC Hanson**

**CW: Death & Vivid Imagery**

Boy on the beach.	<i>Boy on the beach.</i>
He's travelled here	<i>He's travelled here</i>
with his parents	<i>without his parents</i>
in their spacious saloon	<i>in an oven-like truck</i>
(then a novelty train)	<i>(then a heaving dinghy)</i>
from his high-spec home	<i>from his bombed-out home</i>
in his safe little town	<i>in his war-torn town</i>
a few miles north.	<i>four thousand miles south.</i>

He frolics in the waves,	<i>He floats face down,</i>
edging deeper and deeper,	<i>drifting closer and closer,</i>
he shudders, feels the chill	<i>observers shudder, chilled</i>
as the breakers lap	<i>as the breakers turn him,</i>
gooseflesh thighs.	<i>showing his eyes.</i>
He rises and dips	<i>He rises and dips,</i>
with the swell, arms swishing.	<i>belly swollen, arms sagging.</i>
He takes the plunge:	<i>No one takes the plunge:</i>
the boy dives in.	<i>the body glides in.</i>



# STORMY SEAS

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Artwork by **Birte Hosken**

“Stormy Seas was one of my first oil paintings in recent years. This is a piece of decking and the painting was done with a nail.”

# ALL STORMS

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Non-fiction by **Chris Morris**

**CW:** Mental Health, Abuse

I came to suspect that she hated me from the very moment I was born. Mother Nature is considered beautiful, divine, an entity which envelops the world in light and love and spectacle. But I have seen her true face. I have felt her furious, red winds and seen her angry skies. I have heard her deathly roars and tasted her bitter hostilities.

I have witnessed raw hatred in the dark heart of her raging storm.

A wild storm does not accept the decisions of the ships upon her waters, and neither does she tolerate the will of those who defy her. As a child, I tried to paddle my own way through her treacherous waters only to be met with disapproval and scorn. A child made from the salt of her own ocean, I should have been nurtured and made to feel safe. Instead, I was afraid and made to feel pain.

There be beasts in them dark waters. Monsters that will reach their deadly tendrils towards any passing ship that looks as though it is a little too comfortable on its journey towards a horizon that remains mysterious and enthralling. Those things will attempt to damage and even sink the ships that appear too settled. And in my youth, she appeared to protect me from them. Her storm formed around the essence of those terrible beasts and soon sent them on their way. But in the process, some of her own lightning burned me and left holes in my ship that were hurriedly repaired by my own criticised hands.

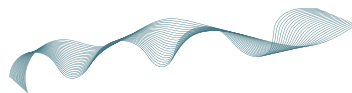
As I grew older, the skies surrounding the waters around me lost much of their fog, but the waves still leapt threateningly at my ship's bow, and Mother Nature's lightning still burned me, especially when I turned my vessel in a direction that she deemed unwise. I was assured that I was her pearl of the sea, and that sometimes a mother's love seemed painful, but that it was what was best for me.

And then I had a pearl of my own, and *everything* changed.

My pearl was different to how I'd imagined. Her light was so bright and wholesome that it lit the paths before me in ways I had never previously fathomed. Her radiance gave me courage, her smile, joy. But all the while, mother's vicious storm circled above us, threatening to come down hard upon the first sign of disobedience. And when it finally did, it burned my pearl much more harshly than it burned me. I knew then that if I stayed, there was nothing I could do to prevent my pearl from being wounded by the malevolent frenzy around us. The storm was too venomously intent on destroying me, uncaring for the pain that was suffered by the children of the ocean.

In the end, leaving the realm of her storm was easy. My pearl, young enough to have forgotten the tribulations of these miserable days, shone the way for me, even helped me to steer. And Mother Nature could only watch on with baneful aversion as we sailed away. Now she's only a faint echo of a nightmare. Her raging storm is disappearing on the distant horizon behind us.

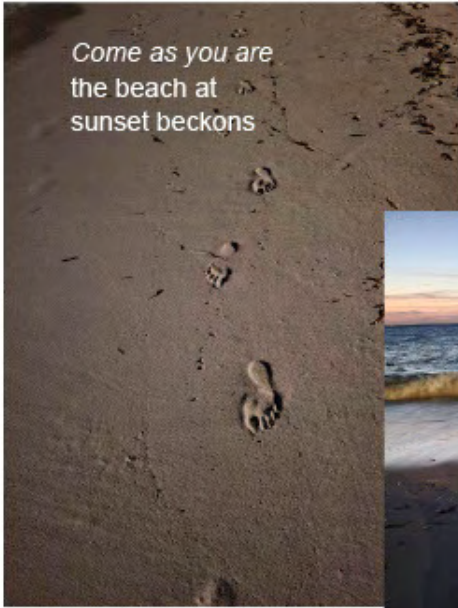
And all storms eventually die.





# UNRAVELING TIDES

## Unraveling Tides



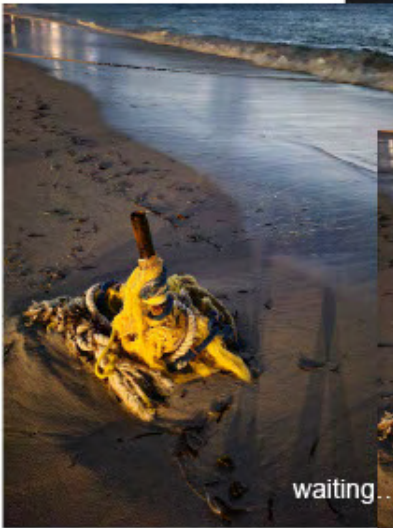
Come as you are  
the beach at  
sunset beckons



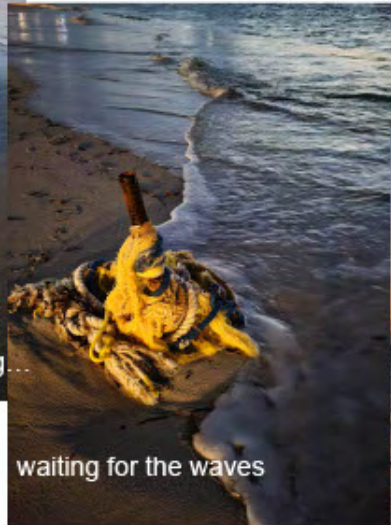
So I sit by the shore  
ends frightfully frayed



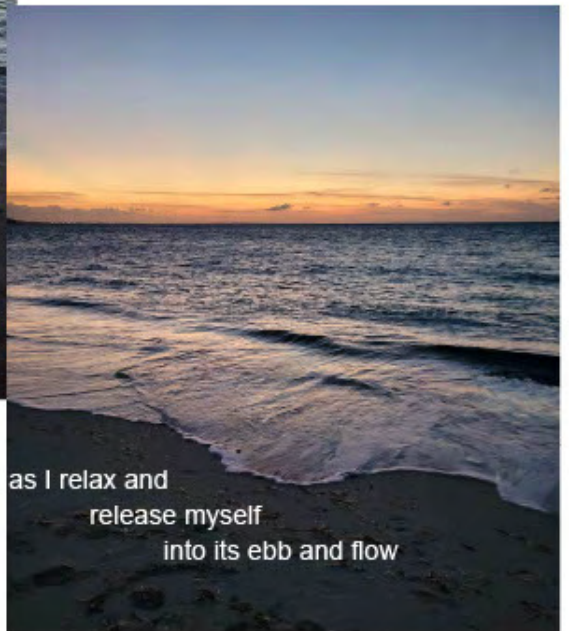
a tangle of twisted knots  
a rusted rigid core



waiting...



waiting for the waves



to unwind, unwrap and  
unwound as I relax and  
release myself  
into its ebb and flow

## Hybrid by Nina Miller

"This tangled mass of rope embodies a person's stress, tension, and everyday anxieties. They can unravel and wash away their burden on a beach bathed by healing waves."

## CONTRIBUTORS

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**Cyrus Carlson** is an abstract painter from the Midwest.

**A. E. Thiel** is working on publishing her first poetry book. She writes about topics including, but not limited to: love, self-discovery, mental health, and inner-peace.  
@a.e.thielpoetry (Instagram), @a.e.thielpoetry (TikTok)

**Juan Paez** (1973) is a Colombian artist who lives in New York.  
@tallercaudapodo (Instagram)

**Christian Ward** is a UK-based writer who has recently appeared in *The Hemlock*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *The Dewdrop*, *Dodging the Rain*, *The Seventh Quarry*, *Bluepepper*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *The Amazine* and *Rye Whiskey Review*. His first poetry collection, *Intermission*, is out now on Amazon.

@fighting\_cancer\_with\_poetry (Instagram)

**Melissa Flores Anderson** is a Latinx writer from California who tries to tame the backyard garden with her husband and young son.

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**Janelle Sheetz** lives with her husband and son and their two cats in the Pittsburgh area. Most recently, her work has been featured in *The Everymom* and *Literary Mama*. Her writing can also be found in *Paste*, *HerStry*, *Ms. Magazine*, and more, and she is a regular contributor to *Collider*.

@LittleJanelle

**Amanda Young** is currently studying MA Illustration, her visual language aims to make a visceral connection with the viewer via mental health themes in her own life.

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**Holly Harrison Cline** is a part-time writer, full-time parent living in PA. In addition to a poetry collection, she is also working on her first novel.

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Introspective and contemplative, **Katharine Weinmann** is a seeker whose reading of poets and philosophers shapes the container from which her words and images emerge, revealing beauty in her imperfect, sometimes broken, mostly well-lived and much loved life.

[www.awabisabilife.ca](http://www.awabisabilife.ca)

A young poet based in Europe, **Julia Jianski**'s goal is to make beauty out of horror.

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**Dr. Vass Geo** is an untroubled, non-traumatised artist who loves colours.

**Ivona Coghlan** studied Creative Writing with The Open University. She has had stories published by *The Blue Nib* and *Books Beyond Boundaries*. Her poem *And They Called Them Souls* was published in *The Bangor Literary Journal*.

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**Soumik Srabony**, a human who still exists, lives and breathes on this earth and loves literature. She is passionate about creating artworks.

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**Emily Macdonald** was born in England but grew up in New Zealand. She has been placed in several writing competitions and has work published with journals including *Fictive Dream*, *Reflex Fiction* and *Ellipsis Zine*.

<https://www.macdonaldek11.com>

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**Amy Marques** grew up between languages and places and learned, from an early age, the multiplicity of narratives. Her work has been published in journals including *Streetcake Magazine*, *Bending Genres*, and *Chicago Quarterly Review*.

<https://amybookwhisperer.wordpress.com/>

**Rachel Canwell** is a writer living in Cumbria. Her flash collection 'Oh I do like to be' was published by *Alien Buddha* in 2022. She writes short fiction and is currently working on her first novel.

@bookbound2019 (Twitter)

**Maddy Fay Robinson** is a writer based out of the Rocky Mountains. Her work has been featured by *CBC Books*, *Ember Chasm Review*, and *Viewless Wings*, and her artwork is forthcoming in *Moss Puppy Magazine*.

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**SOUM (Screams of Unfettered Minds)** is a newly-formed New Zealand based female trio whose poetry leans towards the darker aspects of life. They champion bringing awareness to mental health and social issues.

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@SOUMpoets (Twitter)

**Rachel Coyne** is a writer and painter.

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**Sumitra Singam** writes in Naarm/Melbourne. She travelled through many spaces to get there and writes to make sense of her experiences. You can find her and her other publication credits on Twitter: @pleomorphic2

**Aislinn Feldberg** is a writer and visual artist from Queens, New York. She enjoys experimenting and creating art with a dark, bizarre flair in order to develop awareness of social issues, including reproductive and women's rights.

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**Sonja Berry** is enrolled in a UCLA writing certification program, aspiring to pursue a writing career upon completion of 26 years of military service.

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**S. Kavi** is a South Indian American poet, writer, and artist from Texas. She was a finalist for *Best of the Net 2023* and her work appears in *antonym*, *Culinary Origami*, and elsewhere.

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**Sally Simon** (ze/hir) lives in upstate New York. Hir writing has appeared in various journals. When not writing, ze's either traveling the world or stabbing people with hir epee. Ze dreams of the day we no longer have to worry about child abuse.

[www.sallysimonwriter.com](http://www.sallysimonwriter.com)

@ReiserSimon (Twitter)

**Hilary Ayshford** is a former science writer and editor based in rural Kent in the UK. She writes mainly flash fiction and short stories, and is working on a novella-in-flash.

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**Joyce Bingham** is a Scottish writer who enjoys writing short fiction with pieces published by *Ellipsis Zine*, *FlashBack Fiction*, *VirtualZine*, *Funny Pearls* and *Free Flash Fiction*. She lives in the North of England where she makes up stories and tells tall tales.

@JoyceBingham10 (Twitter)

**Maria Thomas**, middle-aged, apple-shaped mum, has won *Oxford Flash*, *Free Flash Fiction* and *Retreat West Micro*. In 2022 she was a runner-up in *Retreat West* themed comp, a finalist in *London Independent Story Prize* & took second place in *Propelling Pencil*.

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**Sreelekha Chatterjee** is a writer and an amateur photographer living in New Delhi, India. Her short stories have been published in several magazines, journals, and print anthologies.

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**DLC Hanson** grew up in Grimsby and Leeds before travelling the world, falling in love and moving to London. After finding neither fame nor fortune, he moved to rural Essex to start a family, a business, a covers band and to become a writer. He is currently working on his first novel.

@DLCTheWriter (Twitter)

After writing two romantic novels set in Cornwall, **Birte Hosken** came back to art during lockdown. She now works with materials found on local beaches, some driftwood but also reclaimed wood. She produces wall hangings, paintings and small-scale sculptures.

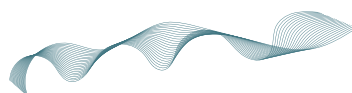
[www.birtehosken.wixsite.com/author](http://www.birtehosken.wixsite.com/author)

**Chris Morris** is a writer from Dundee in Scotland who has self-published three books and is currently working on a novel he hopes to have traditionally published. He is a writer, musician, teacher, and father.

[www.chrisamorris.com](http://www.chrisamorris.com)

**Nina Miller** is an Indian-American physician, epee fencer, and creative. Her work can be found in *Cutbow Quarterly*, *Bright Flash Literary Review*, *Five South*, *Roi Fainéant*, *Five Minutes* and more. Find her stories and art at [www.ninamillerwrites.com](http://www.ninamillerwrites.com)

@NinaMD1 (Twitter)



# THANK YOU

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Without our contributors, this issue of *Raw Lit* would not have been possible.

If you enjoyed the magazine, please, support the creators featured by sharing their work on social media.

**THANK YOU FOR TRUSTING US WITH YOUR RAW.**



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