



RAW LIT

Let Your Scars Shine Through Your Words



Issue 4 - Winter 2023-2024

*This issue is dedicated to the loving memory of
Fidel (2008-2024)*



Artwork by Georgia Spyratou

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STARRY MORNING



Artwork by Mirjana M.

“The work is a mixed media, digital collage of vintage photography juxtaposed with fractals. The art was inspired into creation by heading to my day job way too early and seeing the rays of the Sun illuminate the clouds so vividly, while all the stars were still watching.”

THE WARPED JIGSAW PIECE

Fiction by **Marie-Louise McGuinness**

At 9, you were a star-sprite called Starina, plucked from your celestial home to sit squashed on a life-drenched sofa in an Irish semi-detached.

You were aware that she was a figment of your imagination, but for weeks, you allowed the idea of her to inhabit your bones, to stretch her icy fog tendrils throughout your body, and you allowed her to use your voice which flowed much smoother through her than you.

Starina was authentic and you were not, she could speak the truth you couldn't - There was something wrong with you.

In the puzzle of your family, you were the warped jigsaw piece or the dog-chewed stickle brick, never quite fitting, no matter the pressure. As they gathered in the fire-warmed comfort of the living room, you felt pushed out by the cacophony of family life that clawed at your ears and burrowed a buzzing soundtrack deep into your brain. On the sofa, the encroaching bodies of your siblings ate painfully into your personal space, burning invisible bruises within your flesh and the stagnant air, scented with dusky coal and warm breath stifled your ability to breathe.

Although you needed space, you didn't want to be alone, you hated feeling lonely. On your own, dark shadows bore weight that spurred cold ripples of anxiety to clamber in waves up your spine and into the waxy skin of your scalp. So, you would spin, round and around, blurring the edges of the objects around you to make them softer, less angry. The ticking rhythm was calming, for as you turned, your body felt natural, fluid and for that moment, not feigned.

Outside, you would hover on the edges of friend groups, smiling, nodding and trying not to take offence when the other girls made jokes you didn't get, or when you'd find there had been a party you hadn't been invited to. When all the children played 'Kick the Can' or 'What Time is it, Mr Wolf?' in the dry summer evenings, you would take a spot on a squat wall nearby and read a book, hoping that they'd ask you to play, but also deathly afraid that they would.

You were the satellite, at a distance, but eager to be visible in your glowing dress, so sweet and creamy it tasted like Spelga peach yoghurt.

With time and expectation, Starina drifted back into the ether, and it was just you again, perpetually uncomfortable and with your voice choked dry within your throat.

Throughout your youth, you were an amalgamation of the characters from 'Breakfast Club'; The Basket Case, The Pushover, The Princess and The Brain.

Until, at 32, you were 'The Criminal' solely to blame for the strife of your children. You spilled your love into them but doubted love could flow freely from your imperfect jug, your cracks dark and visible beneath an insubstantial glaze of normal.

You were the 'Refrigerator Mother' with iced edges who could not depart enough warmth to soothe the cries of your children, to aid their sleep or use their voice. You focused on the unripe bananas, the uncooked eggs and the epidurals that didn't work, you blamed yourself for the fact that you had lost too much blood to produce milk and that you chose to give them vaccines to stop them getting sick.

But at 40, with the education available now, you finally know who you are.

You are the understanding Mother to children with alien passports, the guide who has navigated this world before. You listen when your son speaks of his new world, one littered with zeros and ones, and as your daughter spins around, her little hands flapping like wings fit for flight, you spin too, until you both fall giggling to the floor, relaxed. In your living room, the Neurotypical, the Star-sprite, the Alien and the little deaf Bird, fit together in a 4D puzzle that tastes pretty sweet.



THE BIKE RIDE



Artwork by **Amanda Young**

“Observing the joyful autonomy, freedom, fun and intimacy of my niece and her daughter, took me back to when I was the one riding and carrying my niece in the child seat as we sang.”

THINGS I CAN NEVER TEACH MY DAUGHTER

Poetry by **Audrey T. Carroll**

CW: Stigma, Strong Language



[REDACTED]
 Depends on what your disability is
 but some people should never be
 able to have kids if they can't teach
 their kids how to walk

how to walk without a cane / how to balance a bike / how to swim beyond bare necessities / how to paraglide / how to take shit from people who don't even know you / how to take shit from people who do know you, but apparently don't know you well enough / how to tell from first glance if someone is going to ruin your day / how to ignore people who stare when you have cane in one hand, baby in the other / how to find forgiveness in your heart when you've been pushed too far / how to do calculus / anything about physics / how to cure chronicity / how to perform like a circus clown to entertain those who would cast dispersions for anything less than a brightly painted smile / how to understand people who think they know it all / why some people don't think keeping quiet is an option / how to make major life choices based on a random internet man's opinion, typed in ten seconds or less / how to be abled / how to be neurotypical / how to be the perfect little soldier bodymind always / how to shrink / how to shut up / how to do the things that would be easier because some neurotypical chucklefuck declared it so / how to give up / how to give in / how to quit the world / how to ask for less / how to adjust to toxic air / how to be cruel for cruelty's sake / how to despair

What I can teach my daughter?

How to goddamn survive.



THE LITTLE SHRIMP



Artwork by Raw Lit

“The daughter that never was.”

FIVE WEEKS, SIX DAYS

Fiction by **Angie Brady**

CW: Mention of Miscarriage & Disturbing Imagery

Dedicated to our Biscuit

The white porcelain caresses my cheek like the cool side of a pillow on a warm summer's night. Except, of course, that it is hard, unyielding, and provides none of the comfort.

I keep my body still - I don't trust it. It's already betrayed me, and if I twitch I'm sure it will find yet another way to undercut me. But my eyes...they drift from the rim of the toilet and fall slowly to look at the still, pink pond below. It's impossible not to look. I'd just spent the last few weeks checking the water, checking toilet paper, and hoping for anything that wasn't red.

Now there is always a shade of red, from pastel pink to burnt umber, and I don't have to check anymore. I could claim the blissful ignorance of a little girl who doesn't even know she could bleed.

Except I very much cannot do that. Call it habit or compulsion or morbid curiosity, but today I turned and looked. And ended up here, knees kissing the floor, wishing I'd flushed it all away.

They warn you about the clots. They don't warn you about the tissue. Is that what this is? My brain stutters and won't label it "fetus" or "embryo" or worst of all "baby." It is thin, fleshy, and maybe the size of a quarter. No, a nickel. No, a cherry.

It, too, is hugging the porcelain, nestled against the white curves. Is it just as cold under water as it is up here?

It's the tail my eyes trace over and over again. Is it a tail? Maybe it's just a small mass of...something. Maybe I'm being dramatic. Maybe this is normal and nothing important at all. But goddamn it, the tail trails off into the depths of the bowl where I can't see it anymore and I want to move it, poke it, nudge it so I can see the end.

Bile roils in my stomach, but there's remarkably nothing in my stomach, so what does it matter? My hand moves of its own accord, going to cradle the still-flat span of skin that never had time to bulge.

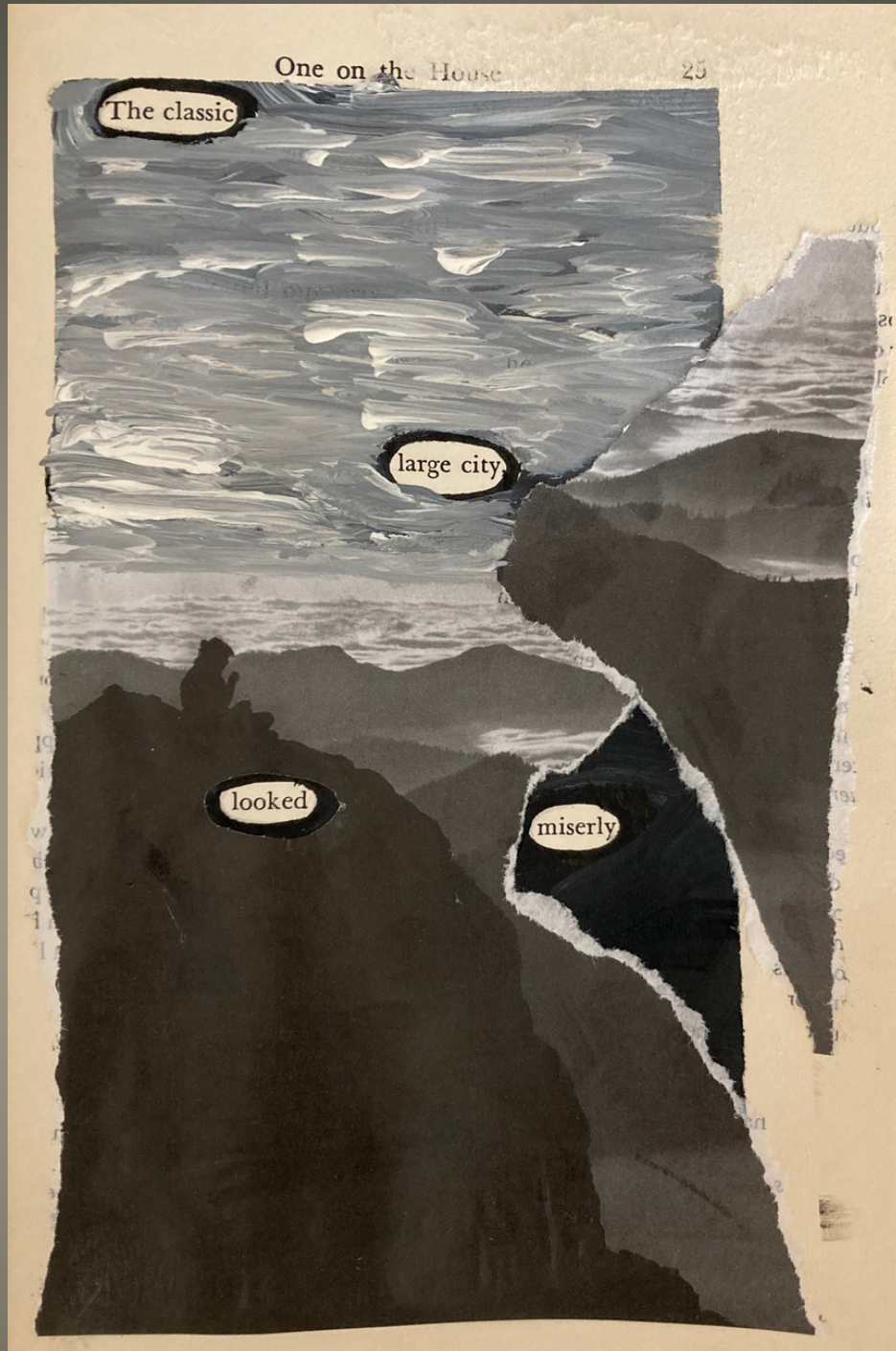
The movement reminds the rest of my body that it is very much alive - cold tile under knees and soft rug skimming toes. And a single warm trail on my cheek that doesn't match the cold from the porcelain.

All of me moves at once, and retching echoes around the bowl, escaping loudly past me into the bathroom and ricocheting off the pale green walls.

The gray-brown water doesn't show my tears or anything else that might have been.



MISERLY



Hybrid by Amy Marques

“This poem is from the “On the House” collection: This collection of erasure poems transformed an old copy of a 1949 novel by Mary Lasswell, “On the House”. It is a novel full of humor and, while each page is stand-alone, the tone is overall humorous and frequently leans into nonsense and whimsy. The work is done directly on the book and includes collage and painting, mostly with acrylics.”

TREVELYAN'S CORN

Fiction by **Seán McNicholl**

CW: Violence & Mention of Death

They turned us out of our home, coming with their bayonets and rifles, no heed being paid to the first flakes of snow that fell.

They turned us out of our home, tearing us apart like ravenous dogs setting upon a terrified hare.

They turned us out of our home, setting it alight, warming themselves from the winter chill.

And in the fire's glow, they beat him.

He was too weak to resist, we all were; our bodies emaciated and blighted like the potatoes that starved us.

My withered children watched, like snowdrops dying in early summer, barely strong enough to stand. They watched as the Red Coats beat him.

They watched as their father lost consciousness.

They watched two Red Coats drag him into the shadows and gathering snow.

His crime was breaching Trevelyan's decree.

He took a pocketful of corn, and the Red Coats took him. He took a pocketful of corn to feed our starving children, so that they might see the Spring.

But they didn't.

They caught a fever and died before the turn of the snow.

My husband never knew - given no trial, no chance to plea. Sentenced at the docks, not the dock.

They dragged his limp and lame body from our blazing home to the quay, shackled and fettered, and threw him on a coffin ship bound for Botany Bay - if he'll ever see it.

I doubt he will.

I watched as the white horses of the sea pulled him out beyond the horizon, to a land where the gun makes the law, to live a life of servitude.

The Red Coats and the white foam took him from me.

And now, here I lie, alone, in the gutters, begging other starving passersby for their scraps.

But they just look and pass by, fearful of meeting the same Trevelyian fate. If only I could feed off their pitiful looks and sip from their tears.

The priests tell us that we shall one day feast at the Supper of the Lamb, and I know that day is coming soon for me.

But I would gladly feast on the morsels that fall from the table.

But there is no table here in the mud, only death.



SUNRISE



Photography by François Bereaud

GIBBOUS GIRL

Non-fiction by Angela Townsend

Many strange little girls love the moon. Some rhapsodize about how she is shy, winking boneless in the night. But our friendship was born of her boldness. There she was, in the hot blue sky, disregarding all the storybooks that wrote her out of the day.

“It’s the moon!” I announced.

“Sometimes you can see it even in the day,” my mother confirmed. This was no simple atmospheric phenomenon, and no one knew that better than the woman who kept books with names like *The Moon is Always Female*.

I spent enough days searching the sky for my pearl that my mother found me an icon, a rubbery wall moon that formed a triptych with pink roses. I said prayers for all the aunts and uncles in her glow-worm light. She supervised the poster of the baby polar bear promising, “Nothin’ can happen today that God and me can’t handle together.”

But puberty makes us terrible and new. My overlong legs dangled off the crescent in ill-fitting jeans that earned me the nickname “The S.S. Highwater” from the boys I liked. A child valiant against chronic illness is everyone’s mascot and cherub, but a fourteen-year-old diabetic is just a downer. My effortless A-plus years vanished into the cloud of Earth Science.

I asked for grit. I experimented with encouraging people in all directions. I purchased a yellow notebook and passed it around class, asking everyone to file reports of what made them glad.

“The Happy Book” filled with secrets from hoodlums, tenth-graders, and the odd substitute teacher. There were paeans to the X-Files and doxologies for Doritos. There were unsolicited arguments – “cookies and cream,” “Strawberry, you fool!” – and bold propositions – “I love Rachel!” “Who wrote this????” There was flamboyant self-pity – “the days that are not total trash” – and latent Buddhism – “when I just feel like I’m all here.”

Mostly there were meditations on the small salvations breaking dawn across each day. “Soccer.” “My dog going silly for spray cheese.” “Ladybugs.” “Coffeeeeeee cake.” “Peace signs.” “Getting my little cousin to laugh.” “EVERYTHING PURPLE!” “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles forever.”

The powerful volume came back to me every night. I had become the Happy Book girl. I was auditioning for the role of sun, and directors were everywhere. I colored myself into the top corner of the page, praying my rays would warm the whole picture. It worked. Eleventh-graders I didn't know sought me out to confess their awful mothers and nascent novels. The substitute teacher threw comets of sadness while clearing the board. I listened.

The Earth Science teacher, a nasal reed in cargo pants, was my cloud of unknowing. "You and that Happy Book," he would chuckle, going on to lecture about condensation I could not comprehend. Then the day came when he brought messages from my home satellite.

The moon was always full, but she told tales with light. Made of integrity, she did not mind that we misunderstood her most of the time. She had her own course to follow, needing no permission to become new. She gathered light and gave it with prodigal pleasure. She gathered herself and gave herself the grace of secrets.

This was not how Mr. Jursak explained it, but I orbited above his text. Only one of his words pierced my dreamscape: "gibbous."

"New," I knew. "Full," everyone wanted. "Crescent" had its magic. But I had never known the term for the plump moon, the clown who scrapes the icing off the cake. "Gibbous." The word delighted me absurdly. *Gibbous*. Now I had the answer for the nights we would squint and ask, "is it full, or just close?" *Gibbous*. Her imperfect circle claimed the name, playful as a monkey. *Gibbous*. She would take what the sun gave her and make her own meaning. *Gibbous*. Doughy and divine. Short of expectations and full of process.

I looked for the fat moon, calling her by her name. *Gibbous*. We laughed. I wrote "gibbous" in tiny script on the bottom of every page of the Happy Book, and everyone wondered who had done that.

Gibbous invited me to spend the summer gathering light, but I had already colored my corner, yellow as hay fever. There were torches to carry to the timid and tortured. There was love to lavish. There were eleventh-graders and uncles and the odd postman to warm like mice between my hands. There was so much in my hands.

If I could not be the full girl, I would be the loving girl, no one's beauty but everyone's old familiar. I rose with prayers like helium, "love through me, love through me, make me a light today." I discovered the power of my vocabulary to reupholster egos. I did battle with darkness on the landscapes of lives.

I graduated with the superlative, “Sweetest Girl in Rose-Colored Glasses.” I was terrified most of the time. I became molten comfort by day and complete collapse by night.

The moon always protects, and she remembered what I forgot. My crowd-pleasing exuberance fell flat in college, where no one seemed to need constant reminders of their splendor. I snuffled lonely across the quad, leaking lazy prayers that I might become better. I received no answer.

I received a red fox, feral starlight with no cover letter. She offered no explanation, a comet complete in herself. She was gone before I could gasp, and my gaze shot up. I had only seen the fire-tailed spirit because of the gibbous moon. I felt new. I imagined running.

It was a moment. I rose the next morning redoubling my efforts. I befriended the woman who cleaned the dorm bathroom. I got to know the dining hall director’s sorrows. I wrote letters to every elderly member of my childhood church. “Love on legs,” one weepy professor called me at graduation.

I loved enough to be loved. I squinted at the sun. I went from seminary to nonprofit, fullness to fullness, scribbling the storybook with waxy frenzy. I met flotillas of suitors who loved their reflection in my eyes. I felt powerful. I spilled light.

The moon is always full, but little girls learn to empty themselves. I met a hungry man and offered him my icing. He was every page of my Happy Book, the place where the universe could stop expanding. My process was complete, my fullness secure. I declared myself “incandescently happy” and proclaimed his glory at every turn.

He asked me to stop wearing bright orange and to start eating differently. He told me I was abnormal and recklessly naïve. He photographed my craters and gave lectures on my veiled selfishness. He crumpled my prayers in his pockets and cautioned against belief in a fairytale God.

He did not know what to make of my manic accolades, and in that regard he was the healthier of the two of us. “You call me golden,” he quivered with contempt. “You describe something that does not exist.”

Still, he grew green and gigantic, haughty in the hothouse of my striving. If I stayed full, he never needed to hunger for my affection. If night never came, he could always see his ornamental bird. I slimmed to a crescent and gave up my colored pens. I stopped writing and allowed him to proofread my greeting cards.

“Love him through me,” I prayed on my back in the night. “Love him. There’s nothing you and me can’t handle together.”

The moon is always holy, and she makes no effort at earning. When my prayers pierced a black hole I’d assumed would kill me, I woke to find that the sun had risen without my word. Riddles of light streaked my hours, but I was powerless to compel them. I watched them laugh across my fingers, and all I could do was wiggle.

If divorce had turned me into a black hazelnut in the sky, my constellations did not notice. No one ceased to love me. Neonatal and bewildered, I had no gush left to give. I kept my job. People sent peonies and hand-felted hummingbirds and superb vulgar cards and jellybeans. Friends conspired to gift me a telescope. Words hurtled out my fingers like primeval fire.

I felt new and feral, process on two legs. I lurched from darkness to swollen hope within an hour, phases and phrases crashing in and out of order. It was dangerous to be anything other than the light, my own happy heresy. I saw myself out of place at midday, then secure under fog of night.

I conducted experiments, gluing rocks into cairns and sketching satellites on my ankles. I wore violent orange and exhumed weekends for my own designs. I rested when I felt sick. I hogtied adverbs to keep from telling acquaintances they were godlike. I was astonished that they liked me anyway.

I noticed the sun and its distance. We did not overlap in any Venn diagram of power. He had things under control. I had a face that was a container for light. There was nothing that could happen tonight that we couldn’t handle together.



MILKY WAY



Photography by Michael Anthony

“Peering up into the night sky offers a unique and humbling perspective on everything. Its importance, its inconsequentialness, its connectivity.”

THE DAY I BELIEVED IN ALIENS

Non-Fiction by **Catherine Rossi**

CW: Mental Health

“I was abducted by aliens.”

The first time he said the line, it didn't register, my brain drained from the argument, my body weary from the late hour. Unlike him, I had to work the next day, had a full day of meetings to facilitate. Yet I'd spent the last two hours convincing him I loved him. Convincing him I didn't want to break up. Convincing him I didn't care that I made more money than him.

Or, I should say, trying to convince him, since he didn't believe me.

“I was abducted by aliens.”

I laughed this time, assuming it was a joke. Certainly a non sequitur, completely irrelevant to the debate at hand, which started when I declined his invitation to elope that weekend.

If a friend was recounting the evening to me, I would have nudged her towards the breakup. But I couldn't do it. Maybe it wasn't love, but I did care for him. And there was a spark, something I rarely encountered in my mid-40s after decades of bad dates. A physical spark. A verbal spark. An emotional connection. Maybe even a potential soulmate.

He was unattached, also highly unusual at this point in my life.

And he liked me too.

I could count on one hand the number of times all those elements combined in the past decade. I could count on one hand how often I'd worn that date outfit I'd bought years ago.

“They beamed me up to their spaceship and did experiments on me. That's why I get those bad headaches. I never did before.”

After dropping that bomb, he proclaimed the debate over and walked out, leaving me to wonder if we were even still dating. I fell into bed, unable to stop myself from calculating the hours until the alarm buzzed.

I woke not to the annoying drone after all, but to the phone's ring. It was him. “What's up?” I mumbled.

“Don't tell anyone,” he said. When I didn't answer, still barely awake, my synapses not registering what he could possibly mean, he continued. “About the aliens.”

“Oh, that.”

“I knew you’d forget. Everyone I’ve told mysteriously forgets. It’s part of their experiment.”

In the shower, my brain starting to come to life, I wished I had forgotten. I didn’t want to think about it.

But, I rationalized, this was merely another one of his weird things. Weird like his tendency to come over uninvited after midnight, pounding on my door until I scrambled to answer it before the neighbor dog barked. Weird like his sudden announcement when we were standing in the buffet line at a wedding reception that I should forever wear the hideous class ring he was handing me.

He’d been down on his luck, short-timing it through odd jobs, then through a bankruptcy to get out of debt, and was only off the streets due to the generosity of our church, where we met.

But didn’t we all have weird things? At our age? At least he admitted his, was working on his, unlike the other 40- and 50-year-olds I’d encountered on dating sites - guys who were full of themselves, unable to admit the smallest error in their life, and uninterested in anyone who wasn’t 20 years younger.

This was the dating pool, after all.

And, who knows, maybe it was possible. Even though I’d never believed in aliens. Ever.

I could picture the ET-like creatures with their unwieldy arms and oversized eyeballs. I could picture the spaceship, hovering, lit up like a Christmas tree. I could picture their spindly fingers poking and probing his unconscious body.

Maybe it was possible. If I could imagine it, I could believe it.

And if I believed in aliens, then I could believe in us.

I wanted so badly to believe in us.

I wanted to believe that our months together were leading to something. That the twice-a-day arguments, that the tears, that the yelling louder than I ever had in my life, that the constant weariness, that the requisite consoling of his ego were leading to something.

I wanted to believe that a husband and kids could happen to me too. Would happen to me too.

All I had to do was believe in this one thing.

I could do it.

It was no different from changing my wardrobe or hairstyle or taking up new hobbies to please a date. Right?

He called again, this time at the office, to ask about getting together that night. I was heading to the first meeting of the day, aliens long forgotten, my mind now focused on convincing the programmers to rewrite the software as the customers requested instead of the “better way” they’d dreamed up over the weekend.

I explained I was going to yoga after work and hung up as quickly as he would let me. Then despite running late, I took a moment to google: *how many people believe in aliens.*

A surprising answer came back - almost 50 percent.

A few moments later, as the mix of techies and Trekkies straggled into the conference room, I suddenly blurted, "Do you guys think aliens exist?"

Three immediately said yes. *They're out there. I've seen strange lights. Unexplained things.*

"But I mean, like aliens abducting humans and doing experiments on them?" I asked.

My friend Anne, just walking into the room, choked out a laugh before looking at me sharply. I ignored her, focusing my attention on the black clothed, black booted, black capped 23-year-old genius. "The technology doesn't exist for that. It's been proven. Besides, we would have heard about people disappearing."

"But people do disappear," I said.

He shrugged.

Certainly aliens would be a more palatable explanation for why my last 3 blind dates all ghosted me.

"What's going on?" Anne whispered as we left the conference room an hour later. "Is it Peter?"

I hurried down the hall, waving her off.

Back in my office after more meetings and a yogurt for lunch, I googled again: *causes for headaches.*

Migraines, stress, medication, dehydration.

Nothing about alien experiments, not even in the fine print.

Come to think of it, I got headaches too. And I had those matching weird birthmarks on my thigh that looked like a pair of lips. Dad always said an angel kissed me at birth, but it could have been alien forceps. Whatever those looked like.

I was typing *tools used by aliens* when the phone rang. "What about tonight?"

"I haven't had time to think about it," I said while stifling a mid-afternoon yawn.

"You think I'm boring."

I exhaled. "No, of course not."

Though, I thought to myself, sometimes I wish you were. Boring meant I'd get 8 hours.

After two more meetings and a drive to the yoga studio, I stretched out on my mat, exhausted from the day. I took a deep breath and began to relax. The yoga teacher instructed us to forget about our cares, be in the moment. *All that matters is the present.*

But the aliens were there. Hovering over me. Making my mind race.

Isn't the instructor asking me to believe in a higher power, a natural power, something beyond myself? Couldn't that be aliens?

And could that be why some of these poses feel so unnatural?

At home, while scarfing down takeout, I googled again: *alien experiments*.

Apparently, they were common. There were studies. Research. From Harvard, even. A Wikipedia page. Tens of thousands of people claimed to have been abducted, their descriptions eerily similar to Peter's details.

I slammed the laptop shut before I could read more. *This is ridiculous. No amount of googling is going to make me believe. I don't believe what I don't believe. I can't believe what I can't believe. I'm not that desperate.*

But.

Am I desperate enough to let it slide? Am I desperate enough to be okay with him believing it?

Is that enough for me? Is that enough for us?

I was just getting out of the bath, ready to fall asleep with a book, when he called again.

"I think we should break up," he said.

I hesitated, considering which reasoning would work that day. Then I thought of how many hours I'd spent making excuses for him. I thought of the scared-for-me look from Anne. I thought of visiting Roswell, going to alien conventions, joining an Aliens Anonymous support group, maybe even taking a course on mental health.

I could hear him breathing, waiting for an answer, ready to unleash the rest of his speech when I inevitably disagreed.

Instead, I merely said, "Okay."

I hung up and put my head in my hands, waiting for tears, waiting for the urge to call him back, waiting for regret, waiting for the loneliness to return.

Instead, relief washed over me.

Are humans the only life in the universe?

I don't know. But I'll take my chances on being alone.



SUN WINTER FIELD



Photography by **Ann Kaye**

“Light pierces cold and storms, reaches beyond human discomfort.”

FIFTEEN

Poetry by Alice Hatcher

CW: Violence, Mention of Racism

When her older brother pulls the knife,
the same one he uses to cut himself,
she traces the bruise on her arm, a pink sunrise
—just like the ones on postcards from California—
and thinks of calling 9-1-1, but if she does nothing,
It will end, so she won't try to stop anything,
she tells herself,
this time,
or ever.

As her brother presses the knife,
the same one he uses to cut himself,
against her father's throat,
she laughs, as though its blade is tickling her skin, and
measures her deliverance in centimeters.
He should do it, she thinks, and
feels weightless,
almost free,
looking at her father
slumped
against
the wall.

Maybe her brother is as crazy
 as she suspects,
 as crazy as the ragged swastikas carved into his arms,
 but he has resolve, now,
 and should hurry, she thinks, because
 their mother is in the kitchen, dialing 9-1-1,
 not to protect herself or anyone else except
 the trembling man
 slumped
 against
 the wall.

She wonders which member of
 this Unholy Trinity,
 She Hates the most.
 This could end, she thinks.
 Her father could be buried, her brother in prison,
 her mother gone somewhere.
 It would all depend on what she said
 to the cops or the woman from social services.

She's covered in bruises, her brother screams, and
 she wonders at his hypocrisy;
 her brother has his own violent streak
 —one she knows so well—and
 could be screaming about her,
 as well as their mother.
 (He has learned from their father so well.)

We Are Not,
 She Hopes,
 The Same.

She dreams of living in friends' basements,
 finishing high school, maybe
 moving to California and sleeping on a beach.
She's never seen the ocean, but San Diego is warm,
 she imagines, and California seems so close, now,
 as her brother leans into the blade and talks about
 Race Traitors and Cowards,
 What This Country Used to be,
 the Black People next door,
 and The Growing Conspiracy, and
then she hears the Pause,
 the silence of anger exhausted.

Her brother drops the knife,
 the same one he uses to cut himself.
His rage and resolve, she knows, have been replaced by
 contempt for a man not worth killing.
Nothing has changed, except that
 she's more ashamed than ever of what
 she imagined and wished (only seconds ago),
 and, in her shame,
 alone.

California's fading, now, and she knows the cold
 will always be inside her, and
knows, too that she will testify against her brother,
 talk about the swastikas and his hunting knife,
 the same one he uses to cut himself,
 even though he's her brother and
Family Should Stick Together,
 Always.

She slips out of the house, unnoticed,
 stands barefoot in the snow until numb,
 and, when the police arrive,
sits in the back of their car and studies
 the salt crusted on the windshield,
talks about her brother and his hunting knife,
 the same one he uses to cut himself,
her mother's prescription drugs,
 the ones she uses to numb herself, and
her father, the old man
 slumped
 against
 the wall.

First published in 2016 in *S/tick* (defunct).



THE ATTIC



smells, sounds, words
all rise
to the cerebellum
of houses
where they remain
long after we
have departed.

Hybrid by Christopher Woods

“I like to combine words and images in picture poems.”

ONE SENTENCE

Non-fiction by Megan Hanlon

He said it at the lunch table. Even small earthquakes send wide ripples.

His words floated through the heavy air, were tossed back and forth among a student body that was already writhing in pain. By the final bell, the whole high school had heard it. Unconnected groups, united by a shared enemy, waited for him in the common area near where he had said it.

Her fellow cheerleaders and friends, still raw in their grief and shock, stared at him with derision. Meaty football jocks threatened to punch his face bloody. The "kickers" - FFA and 4H devotees who wore cowboy boots to class - offered to launch heavy ropers into his ribs.

The principal pulled my brother away from the trembling crowd, stuck him in an office, and called the police. The police delivered him home.

After he said it, maybe his friends cringed and chuckled and hurried to change the subject. Maybe they thought it was a harmless joke and guffawed with disgusting amusement. I don't know. I only lived through the aftershocks.

He said it on a Thursday or a Friday, but the rumbling didn't quiet for months. Seeking vengeance and power where they had none, teenagers (and a few adults) drove up and down our street to glare at our dirty living room windows.

Some stopped before our gravel driveway then gunned the gas, tires screaming their disdain. A few parked defiantly and waited in menacing silence.

I was 12, and hadn't known terror until then.

For weeks we only slipped out of the house when necessary, and kept our heads down. All of us save my dad were afraid of being stalked through the grocery store, run off the country roads, even shot at by guns that usually came out only during deer season. I swam alone in the thick disgrace of being from *that* family, the one with the kid with the smart mouth in a small town.

I doubt anyone was surprised he said it. My dad, never particularly respectful toward the opposite sex, had said things like that - though not as vile, and rarely in public. I remember his elbowing a fellow grease monkey at the service station when either of them saw a woman, and their back-and-forth stage whisper of "creamy juicy thighs!" He and my brother shared a running joke: "The best part of you ran down your mother's leg." "It's not my fault you missed."

My mother would say nothing. I turned crimson.

After he said it, I had to fake normalcy and perform jolly Christmas tunes for my seventh-grade band concert in the high school gym. My brother couldn't come - school officials said don't bring him back any time soon, we can't guarantee his safety - and he couldn't be left unprotected. As my parents and I loaded into our sputtering car, he crawled up the folding stairs into the attic space of our shabby rental. There he hid between the splitting rafters, alone, armed with nothing but a 13-inch black and white TV to watch while he waited for our return.

On the short drive home, fear painted pictures of the smoking remains of our house burned to the ground, or broken glass and blood on the termite-bitten floors. Whether the police and firefighters would have turned a blind eye in her name, I don't know.

After he said it, I don't remember, but there must have been a funeral, because she was buried in Palms Memorial Cemetery south of town. There was a trial, too, where her father said he was not guilty of violating his daughter. The court sentenced him to 20 years.

After he said it, my brother never went back to that high school. He enrolled in the next town over and showed up for one more year before dropping out. Rusty trucks hung with gun racks still rolled by the house, still tailed him around town occasionally. I had to share a school with her younger sister, a grade above me, for three more years.

After he said it, her sister confronted me in the middle of the junior high, where pre-teens tumbled down the halls like rocks in a landslide.

"By the way, I don't like your brother very much," she sneered at me. What could I say? We can't choose the families we come from.

After he said it, the fear faded out, but the shame remembers.



WINTER DAWN



Artwork by Amanda Young

“Viewing hope in a winter sunrise from cosy hibernation. Drawing me out into the crisp new morning.”

Fiction by Emily Macdonald

Mary is barefoot and cold in her nightdress. She stands with her hands on her hips, assessing the mess. The upturned chair, the splattered table, shattered glass, the direction of travel from his furious flung fist.

Outside, the morning shines pink. A landscape of sweet early love. An oyster shell sky spins off pristine snow and the scant ice-tipped trees and bracken reflect a soft pinkness too. Tender and fragile. So easily broken.

Mary turns from the window, shrugs off the view though she longs to run outside, to feel the coconut ice crunch under her feet, to lie in the flushed snow and let its soft marshmallow blanket her in.

Sunlight glints in sharp shards on the floor and she marvels at the red of it, though knows it's blood spilling from a cut on her foot.

The kitchen clock ticks over the hour. Mary calculates the minutes left before he will wake, how long she has to right the mess, to stem the blood from the cut, wash, dress and prepare for him, to make his next meal.

She looks out of the window again, considers the pink fading to grey. The icy landscape is bleaching colour, becoming weary, half-hearted, a day done before it's begun.

She sighs, aligning herself with the view, then ties up her unwashed hair and tackles the tasks that need to be done.

When she hears the first cry from his cot, Mary thanks the sky for hiding its iridescent display. When he wails louder in the shock of wakening, stirred by hunger and the damp in his pants, she curses the sky—praises it too—for hiding its sweet temptation, allowing her to tackle another long day of loving him.



MURAL ART IN BIKING TOWN



Photography by François Bereaud

"I'm a big fan of public art, especially murals. I was struck by this one but had to take while driving, which is perhaps appropriate given the motion inherent in the image."

THE HIGHWAY

Fiction by **Rachel Laverdiere**

CW: Mention of violence & Abuse

I stuff the Nancy Drews and Holly Hobby diary I got for my seventh birthday into my Smurfette backpack. Squeeze in my binky, zip the backpack shut and prop it against the stained mattress—stripped so it can dry—so I can lace my arms through the straps. I am heading to the highway I'm not supposed to cross, and this time I'm not coming back. I'll never have to sleep with my sister, Cookie, again.

She peed the bed again, but Father spanked me because I cried. Cookie didn't get into trouble. She never does. Father just pretended to steal her nose and told Mother to give his *stinky-winky girl* a bath. I stood outside the bathroom door in pee-soaked pjs until Cookie was clean. Finally, it was my turn, but the bathwater was cold, and all the bubbles had popped.

I tiptoe towards the front door. Pause at the kitchen doorway to watch Mother kneading bread dough. Blue and purple blooms trail down her arm. I wish Father could love us like he loves Cookie. After Father left for the fields this morning, she looked at me with sad eyes and said, *Sometimes, it's best to stay unnoticed.*

I want Mother to turn and take me into her arms—tell me not to run away—but she punches down the dough and coos at Baby Brother who is smiling and eating Fruit Loops in his highchair. I want to press my nose into his fuzzy hair.

Cookie screeches, “Mine!” and steals his breakfast. He begins to cry.

Mother senses me behind her and asks me to get Baby Brother another bowl of cereal. I wish she would notice my backpack, but she is busy greasing loaf pans.

Outside, I blink away tears. Clamp my teeth together as I step into the waist-high wheat behind our house. My heart grows heavier with each step I take toward the sliver of road ahead. The sun melts my mousy hair, and too-dry air scratches my throat.

Last time I ran away, I headed towards the chokecherry trees. When I got there, I set out my notebooks and pencil crayons and opened *Super Fudge*. Soon after, I was dying of thirst and my stomach growled louder than the words in my head, but the chokecherries were too bitter to eat.

This time, I thought ahead. I stop and slip off the backpack, pull out the blue thermos I refill with water every night before bed, just in case. I take an apple tucked into the side pocket Mother never checks and bite into the biggest bruise. As I spit it out, I promise God or whoever is listening to my thoughts that I will be brave enough to step out of the ditch and stick out my thumb when I get to the highway. Cross my fingers that He'll make sure a new family stops to take me far from the one that doesn't love me. I toss the apple core into the field for the ants, struggle to lace my arms through the backpack, and set off. Imagine my new family—a mom and dad and a little brother. They will see I am kind and smart and helpful and let me stay with until I'm all grown up.

When I get to the edge of the field, my heart bumps against my throat like a cow butting against the rails when Father loads it for the slaughterhouse. I step into the ditch and take a deep breath. Watch the heatwaves dance along the asphalt and peer towards the hill that takes us to swimming lessons in Green Lake. My heart stops and drops into my belly—a burgundy Ford like Father's is racing towards me! I dive into the tall weeds and flatten myself. Pray that if it is Father, he doesn't see Smurfette in the dandelions. If he were to spot me... My heart clogs my throat and my mind goes black. Maybe I am dying.

After the truck passes, I scramble to my feet, turn and run and run and run all the way home.

I pause at the kitchen doorway. I want Mother to see that I am sweaty and streaked with dirt. Want her to notice that I am wearing my backpack even though it is the weekend. Want her to swoop me into her arms and wipe away my tears. But she doesn't. She pushes loaf after loaf of bread into the oven. I wait and wait while she gathers Cookie's curls into pigtails, while Cookie and her pretty hair and frilly dress run around the kitchen. My baby brother bounces in his jolly jumper. When Mother turns to the dishes, I give up and put my books and binky away, swearing that next time I'll be brave enough to leave for good.



HOPEWARD



Hybrid by Amy Marques

“This poem is from the “Mimics the Moon” collection: The words for the poems in this collection were sourced from my personal correspondence. The handwritten words are from old letters and the typed words are torn from loose pages of an old poetry book sent by a friend. Most of the words are from the book *Immortal Poems of the English Language*, 1983 edition, pages around 610-20.”

GOING NOWHERE

Fiction by **Amy Marques**

Father said her place was near family. Father said if she wanted more schooling, he'd build her a school next to the farmhouse. Father said she could be a schoolmistress, teach the neighboring children, inspire young minds. But she shouldn't aspire to leave the farm, to live in the city, to be on her own. Father said he was going to the city for further medical tests. She could come, someone had to come. Mother had too many little ones to tend to and another on the way. Father said the city was big. Father said it was difficult to navigate and too much for a single young woman, even if it was 1940. Father said she shouldn't go anywhere without him, might get lost without him, shouldn't leave his side. At the hospital, Father slept. The doctor said they needed to keep father over several nights and was she able to find her way back to the boarding house? She said she would be fine. She rode the buses: looping routes, memorizing street names, mapping the city in her mind. She studied the women who walked purposefully down sidewalks, into offices, clinics, and schools. She found the boarding house, her stride, her daydreams, her soul. She tried to tell Father when he woke up, when he sat up, when he was discharged. Tried to explain that she needed to be here, in this city that felt like home. Father said she didn't know what she was saying. Father said it was time to go home. Her place was near family, Father said.



CLASSROOM



Photography by JD Clapp

“Walking through the empty school, you could imagine children from times long gone, their lives ahead them, not yet realizing the toll the hard landscape they inhabited would cost.”

WHEN JEN ATTENDS HER CLASS REUNION

Fiction by **Alison Wassell**

CW: Mention of Bullying

When Jen attends her class reunion with a figure Beverley Rose will say is ‘to die for’ and a dress to match, she won’t mention that when she was fifteen she memorized every piece of graffiti in the end toilet cubicle while she ate her lunch, nor that every day she would take her coat to the last lesson so she could make a swift getaway at home time, nor that not once does she recall waking up, in those days, without that sick feeling you get before a hospital appointment or a driving test, nor that even now, when her boss announces in staff meetings that they’re going to break into pairs to discuss something, she starts to hyperventilate and waits for her partner to shout “Oh Miss, do I have to?”, nor that when her mum and dad thought she was doing homework she was, in fact, knitting effigies of Beverley Rose, Paula Cotton and Samantha Scott and submitting them to horrific torture, nor that when she lifted her desk lid that time in the fifth year to find a can of deodorant she really, really wishes that, instead of acting as though nothing had happened, she had taken it out, shaken it, and sprayed it right into the stupid, sniggering faces of her tormentors.

When Jen attends her class reunion with a figure Beverley Rose will say is ‘to die for’ and a dress to match, she will accept the compliment gracefully and stand around sipping Prosecco for a while, commenting on how the years have flown by, and how it seems like only yesterday they were all conjugating Latin verbs, solving quadratic equations and lusting over Mr Thompson, the geography teacher. She will listen politely as Beverley Rose, Paula Cotton and Samantha Scott boast about their careers, their children, their grandchildren. She may even boast, just a little, about hers. Then, probably before the buffet, she will sniff the air dramatically, declare that there’s a dreadful smell around here that’s turning her stomach, but that it’s been wonderful to see everyone, swivel on her Jimmy Choos and leave, and unless you notice how white her knuckles are on the strap of her Louis Vuitton handbag, you might be forgiven for thinking that her schooldays were the best of her life.



PINING FOR ANOTHER DRINK



Photography by Paul Lewthwaite

JUST ANOTHER NIGHT

Poetry by **G. Lynn Brown**

CW: Risky Behaviour

The sunset burned the sky
and her eyes
until the river of doubt
that flowed through her soul
poured from them
putting out the fire

As the moon rose
so did her spirits
they flowed from a bottle
as shapely as she
and cracked the ice cubes
shaped like her heart
hard and cold and fragile

The sunrise burned the sky
and her eyes
bloodshot and blurry
from another night
she didn't remember
spent forgetting a love
she never knew

Oh, what a beautiful morning



ANCIENT PATHS



Artwork by Amanda Young

“Many Celtic Christian places of prayer and worship are ‘thin places’ of deep peace and angelic protection, where the veil between heaven and earth is thin. I search for those places in the footsteps of ancient saints and listen to the spirit of God.”

IN DEATH AS IN LIFE

Fiction by **Fiona McKay**

CW: Mental Health & Death

I picture my younger self grazing along this wall, lurching, as though grief had broken my knees. A white coffin tucked under my arm. Alone. I run the image over and over. This place; that day.

The thud of a spade slicing dirt brings me back to myself.

* * *

I am still lagging from the journey that brought me here. We have been standing for a long time, wearing black in this dull heat. My feet expanded on the plane, filling out my pumps, flesh overflowing leather, leather biting flesh. My mother making me uncomfortable, even after death.

* * *

Our last conversation was months ago.

‘You were a mistake,’ she told me, fingers clutching at the thin blue hospital blanket. ‘We didn’t have the options back then though.’

My brother gaped across the hospital bed.

‘Make sure you don’t let yourself get pregnant again, I don’t need any grand-mistakes.’

After, the meds kicked in; her head sliding to one side on the pillow, mouth spilling thin, sour drool but no words.

After, my brother held my elbow gently in his hand as we sucked down terrible coffee in the bleak family room.

‘You never told me she was like this to you,’ he said.

I had, but he hadn’t believed in her private bile.

‘You shouldn’t let her speak to you like that.’ But he had said nothing to her.

After, I transform into grey rock: obsidian-smooth, though shattering easily.

* * *

I missed the end, my brother a lonely proxy. He says he understands. I try to match my face to the occasion as we fill out forms and phone the funeral directors. But freedom keeps bursting through. And happiness. I don’t interrogate my feelings.

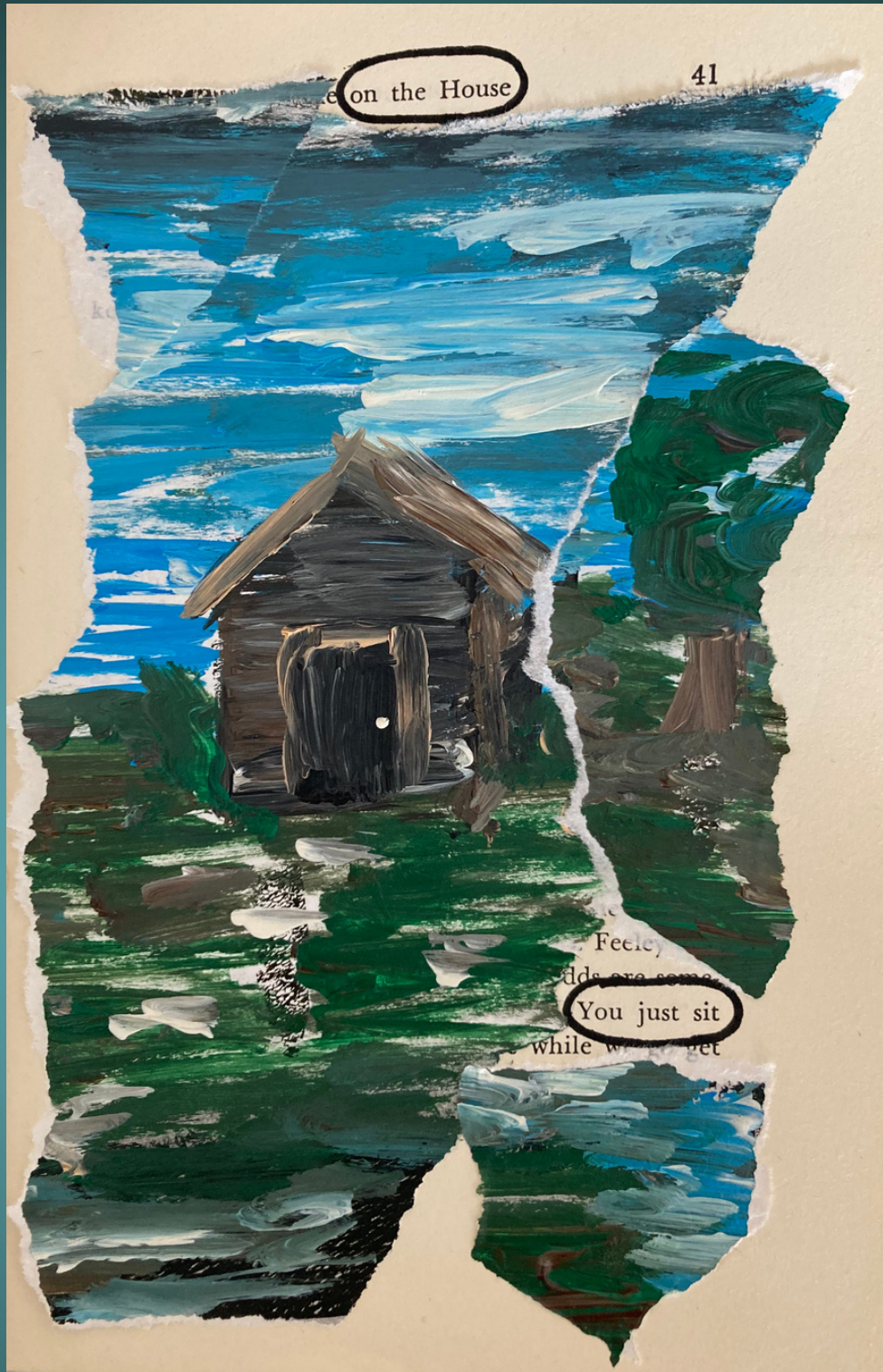
* * *

The last spadefuls of dirt hit the wooden lid and I take off my mourning mask.

I think back to the shattered girl I had been. The sun had cracked open the sky, poured a transfusion of light onto my young, ruined face as I paused at the graveside, the small box cradled in my arms, unwilling to let go. For her, I grieve. But I clutch my swollen belly and breathe in peace.



ON THE HOUSE



Hybrid by Amy Marques

“This poem is from the “On the House” collection: This collection of erasure poems transformed an old copy of a 1949 novel by Mary Lasswell, “On the House”. It is a novel full of humor and, while each page is stand-alone, the tone is overall humorous and frequently leans into nonsense and whimsy. The work is done directly on the book and includes collage and painting, mostly with acrylics.”

TAKE ME HOME

Fiction by **Caroline Ashley**

CW: Mention of Death

Stop.

Take me home.

Take me back to the Bridge Street flat. Drinking shots with Emma; arguing over dishes with Tom; and sharing slouched, hungover silences every Sunday morning. The family I made at university; the people I found to call my own. But the real world stretched the miles between us and we haven't spoken in years.

Take me home to the magnolia living room and green leather sofa, exposed skin adhering to its surface. Dad smoking by the window, dram gliding over ice. As darkness wraps around the house, he'll offer a smug, puffed-chest challenge to a round of chess. I'll play again and maybe win, just once.

Take me back to the holiday park where I broke my arm racing bikes with my brother. My mum standing over us, raging like the seas, but the salt water turns to frightened, panicked tears. The park shut down years ago and I can't remember the path we cycled, but Mum would know it.

Take me back to the long school walk, scuffing shoes along the ground, my fingers interlinked with Mum's. The rain soaking my tights and trailing icy fingers up my arms, till Mum lights the fire and melts them away.

Take me home.

These wreaths, these gravestones, these stone-carved platitudes – they make me feel sick.

Take me to where I can call and listen to boring stories about the next-door neighbours mixed in with concerns for my future. I would treasure every syllable, as if it were a fresh-cut diamond.



P.S.: PAIN, SNAPSHOTS



Hybrid by Audrey T. Carroll

“This is inspired by my own experience with chronic pain.”

BEATRICE'S PURGATORY

Poetry by **Katrina Moinet**

[how] very dangerous to live even one day
—Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*

My ovaries won't let me sleep
they have something to say
about the company I keep
in this bright noon of day.

My ovaries shake me awake
cause me to wander halls
searching silent empty-nest aches
as no bright damned spot calls.

My ovaries, rash bedfellows
can't stand the heat. Snatch back
lost nights, tossed in aged-soaked bedclothes
lucid pearl-warm patches.

My ovaries abandon ship
slack deserter ball-sacks
can't pull my hormones together
reality unwraps.

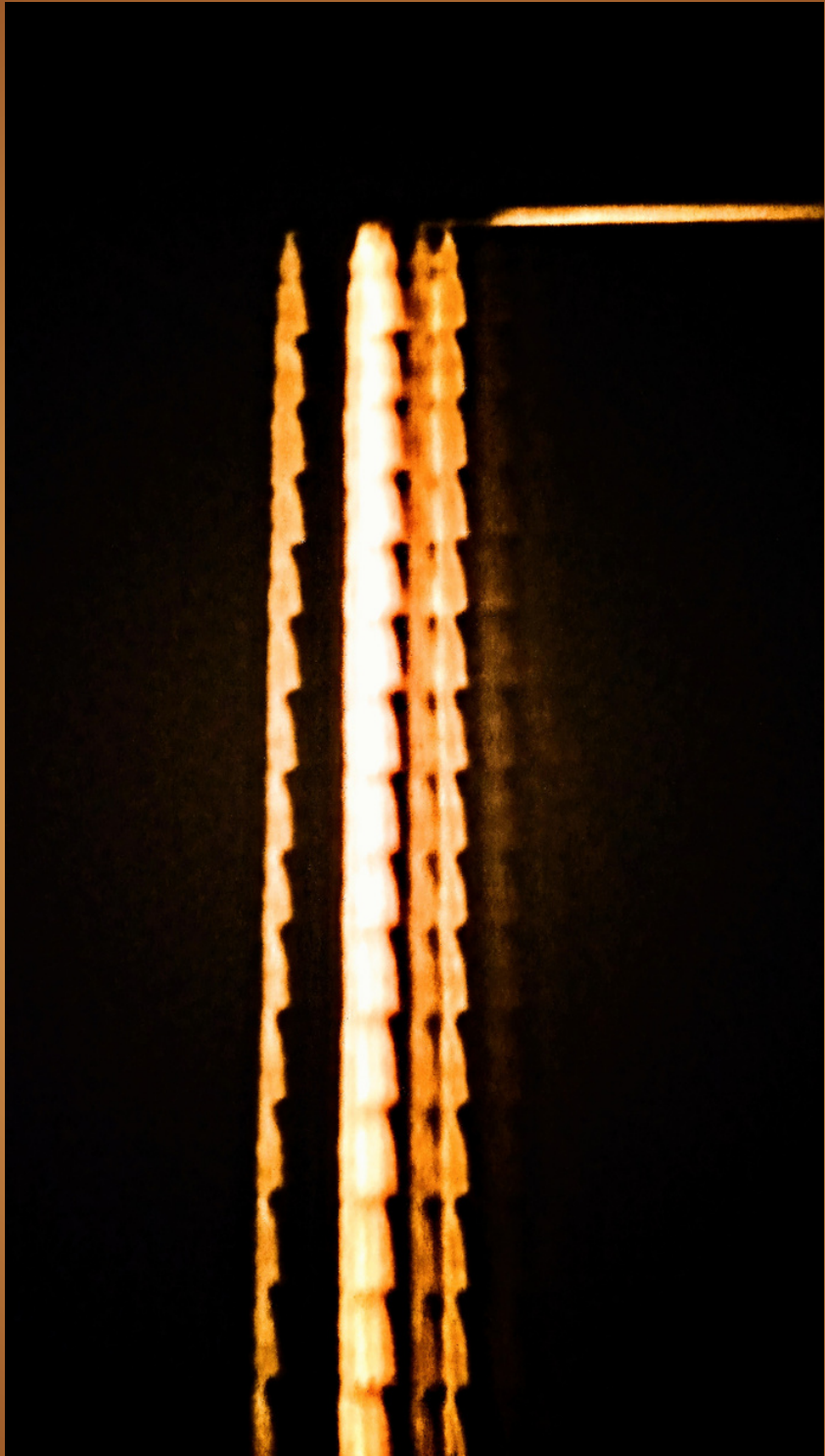
Such vagaries hush my insides—
shopping-trolley artful
mind downgraded to survival:
more brain-dead than heartless.

My ovaries, feminine stock
strange legacies; what's left
flows, as slowed heart murmurs rock
bereft extremities.

My dark-web matter crystalized
reminds me change is good:
rage blooms at defeat, roses burn
brightest the day they die.



UNTITLED



Photography by Andrew Graber

“My photo relates to the “Fire” theme. It can be interpreted in many ways.”

UNREQUITED DANCING

Poetry by **William Ross**

CW: Mention of Death

Will you dance with me
when the houses drown in the river

and the forests are burned alive
far from the river,

the elk are trapped in quicksand,
their antlers piercing the sky

and the earth shifting on its axis
while continents grind their edges,

the sky raining lava,
will you dance with me then?

Or only later when we lie
perfectly still in death,

and the music has stopped, will
you dance with me then?



SUNRISE



Artwork by Dr. Vass Geo

WE'LL ALL DIE

Poetry by Shahryar Eskandari Zanjani

CW: Mention of Death

November 28, 2023

I woke up today a day closer
to the day I die
and everyone I hold dear similarly neared
their certain demise
so I put a little more *love* into all my hi's, love you (too)s, and goodbyes
a little more *humility* into all my handshakes
and a little more *kindness* into all my interactions
in case, alas, they may be my last.

* * *

November 29, 2023

I woke up today another day closer
to the day I die
and everyone I hold dear similarly neared
their certain demise
so I put even more *love* into all my hi's, love you (too)s, and goodbyes
more *humility* into all my handshakes
and more *kindness* into all my interactions
in case, alas, they may be their last.

* * *

November 30, 2023

I woke today yet another day closer
to the day I die
and everyone I hold dear similarly neared
their certain demise
so I put yet more *love* into all my hi's, love you (too)s, and goodbyes
much more *humility* into all my handshakes
and a lot more *kindness* into all my interactions
in case, alas, they may be our last...



ERASURE POETRY

We invited the artists and writers whose work we did not accept to transform their Raw Lit emails into Erasure Poetry (by posting & tagging us on X-Facebook-Instagram). We will publish one per issue henceforth.

For issue 4, we picked the erasure by DLC Hanson who turned the unpleasantness of a rejection for his artwork *Bushfire* into something fun, and although Raw Lit deals with harsh topics, we will always welcome humour.

Hi Dave,
Thank you for sending me your beautiful artwork. I had no idea you were so multi-talented. I loved your work, but could not find any written piece to pair either with *Bushfire* is brilliant but way too political for Raw Lit. I'm afraid I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news.
Delphine

Erasure by **DLC Hanson**

Mirjana M. is a digital artist and writer from Belgrade, Serbia. Their work focuses on exploring the digital juxtaposition of various elements through mixed media of photography, double exposure, textures and light. Instagram: @cyanide_cherries & X: @selena_oloriel

<http://Olorielmoonshadow.wordpress.com>

Georgia Spyratou is a promising young artist and animal lover from Athens, Greece.

Instagram: @ge0rgiasp

Marie-Louise McGuinness comes from a wonderfully neurodiverse household in rural Northern Ireland. She has work published or forthcoming in numerous literary magazines including *Flash Frog*, *Milk Candy Review*, *Gone Lawn*, *Bending Genres* and *Splonk*. She enjoys writing from a sensory perspective.

X: @mlmcguinness

Amanda Young BA Art and Design Practise, currently studying MA Illustration. Her work aims to make an emotional connection with the viewer, giving them a sense of time and a place.

Instagram: @amandayoungart

Audrey T. Carroll is the author of *What Blooms in the Dark* (ELJ Editions, 2024), *Parts of Speech: A Disabled Dictionary* (Alien Buddha, 2023), and *In My Next Queer Life, I Want to Be* (kith books, 2023).

Instagram: @AudreyTCarroll & X: @AudreyTCarroll

<http://AudreyTCarrollWrites.weebly.com>

Angie Brady works, loves, and lives in NEPA with her son and husband. She writes primarily short/flash fiction and nonfiction pieces that show a glimpse of our inner dialogues.

X: @AngieMBrady

Amy Marques is on a first name basis with many fictional characters. She has visual art, poetry, and prose published in many journals. She is editor and visual artist for the Duets Anthology and has an erasure poetry book coming out in 2024 with Full Mood Publishing.

X: @amybookwhisper1

<https://amybookwhisperer.wordpress.com>

Seán McNicholl is an Irish GP who enjoys writing short stories in a variety of genres. He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and for the Best of the Net (BOTN) award 2024.

He has been published in *Beyond Words*, *Raw Lit*, *34th Parallel*, *Bindweed* and *Intrepidus Ink*, among others.

François Bereaud is a husband, dad, full time math professor, mentor in the San Diego Congolese refugee community, and mediocre hockey player. His stories and essays have been published online and in print and have earned Pushcart and Best of the Net nominations. He serves as an editor at *Roi Fainéant Press* and *Porcupine Literary*. *The Counter Pharma-Terrorist* & *The Rebound Queen* is his published chapbook. In 2024, *Cowboy Jamboree Press* will publish his first full manuscript, *San Diego Stories*, which is the realization of a dream.

X: @FBereaud

francoisbereaud.com

Angela Townsend is the Development Director at Tabby's Place: a Cat Sanctuary. She graduated from Princeton Seminary and Vassar College. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Arts & Letters*, *Chautauqua*, *Paris Lit Up*, *The Penn Review*, *The Razor*, and *Terrain.org* among others. Angie has lived with Type 1 diabetes for 33 years, laughs with her poet mother every morning, and loves life affectionately.

X: @TheWakingTulip & Instagram: @fullyalivebythegrace

Michael Anthony is an American writer and artist. He has published fiction, poetry, illustrations, and photographs in literary journals and commercial magazines.

www.MichaelAnthony.MyPortfolio.com

Given that her parents met in a library, it is no surprise that **Catherine Rossi** owned a library card at age 4. Inspired by decades of bad dates, she frequently writes about strong single women. Her work has been published in *Midstory Magazine*.

X: @catrossauth

<https://catherinerossi.com>

Ann Kaye will travel for wildlife events. She is a place based writer with work in *Unbroken Journal* and *Riverteeth's Beautiful Things*.

X: @AuthorAnn

Alice Hatcher is the author of the novel *The Wonder That Was Ours* (Dzanc, 2018). Her poetry and fiction have appeared in *Water~Stone Review*, *Pleiades*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *The Masters Review*, among other journals. Hatcher is a teacher at the NYC-based school The Writers Studio.

www.alice-hatcher.com

Christopher Woods is a writer and photographer who lives in Texas. His monologue show, *Twelve from Texas*, was performed recently in NYC by Equity Library Theatre. His poetry collection, *Maybe Birds Would Carry It Away*, is forthcoming from Kelsay Books.

<https://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com/f861509283>

Megan Hanlon is a podcast producer who sometimes writes. Her words have appeared in *Write or Die Magazine*, *Variant Literature*, *Gordon Square Review*, and other publications both online and print. Her blog, *Sugar Pig*, is known for relentlessly honest essays that are equal parts tragedy and comedy.

X: @sugarpigblog, FB: @sugarpigblog & Bluesky: @sugarpigblog

<http://sugar-pig.blogspot.com>

Emily Macdonald has won and been placed in several competitions, including a shortlisting in the Bath Short Story Award 2023. She has work published by *Fictive Dream*, *Reflex Fiction*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Crow & Cross Keys*, *Ellipsis Zine*, *Free Flash Fiction* and *The Phare* amongst others. Her flash fiction collection of driving related stories *Wheel Spin and Traction* is out now with the independent Alien Buddah Press.

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