

# Jet Fuel Review



LUIZA  
MAIA

Spring 2024 / Issue 27



# **JET FUEL** Review

*A High Octane Literary Journal*

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## Mission Statement

As an online literary journal, we believe in the power of language and seek to provide a platform for quality writing and artwork that pushes boundaries, surpasses expectations, and creates an emotional resonance in our readers. In order to do this, we aim to showcase work that is representative of the complex and evolving human condition while featuring a diverse array of voices and styles. Every semester, we have a rotating editorial team of Lewis students who carefully evaluate our submissions. Our diverse staff strives to include authors that represent ourselves and others. We hope our journal will inspire and unite the literary community. In addition to our journal, we maintain a corresponding blog that offers an array of commentary on art, literature, film, music, and more, allowing us to interact with and expand our community. We seek to create a writer's community, publish quality writing and artwork, and maintain a blog connected to the literary journal site.

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Many thanks to our Spring 2024  
guest readers and consultants!



Row 1:

Dr. Jackie K. White, Stephanie Karas, Selena Tomas

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Patricia Damocles, Andrea Y. Rodriguez

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## Foreword

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 27th Issue of *Jet Fuel Review*! The editors are excited to showcase the exquisite curated works featured within this issue. After months of reading more than 800 submissions, the editors have carefully chosen a collection of poetry, prose, and art that culminates to display a vast and enigmatic sampling of experiences highlighted through the human condition.

Housed at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois, *Jet Fuel Review* is a student-run, faculty-advised, five-time CMA Pinnacle Award-winning literary journal that publishes writers and artists from across the globe. We are honored not only to provide a creative platform for people's voices but also to produce a journal that is impactful to those who read it. Our featured cover piece for this issue, "Blue Telephone," by Luiza Maiacom comes from her Nostalgia series where she rediscovers and reimagines items from antique stores, places where "objects carry stories from the decades in which they were used." Maia urges her viewers to search for the uses, meaning, and beauty in everyday objects from a different time, all while in a landscape submerged in seemingly distant but familiar patterns and colors.

The poetry section of this issue highlights a fascinating set of topics and voices, such as the work of Reyzl Grace: a poet, translator, and short story writer from Alaska whose work engages with her experiences being a member of the LGBTQ+ community. You may also read the stylings of Mina Khan, a Korean-Pakistani American poet from New York who plunges into conversations pertaining to the role of the woman, cyclicity, violence, tenderness, and the everyday. We're also thrilled to showcase Anoushka Kumar, Grace Marie Liu, Charlie Coleman, Lynne Thompson, Mike Puican, and Donna Vorreyer along with many others.

The fiction section opens with "Owl" by Riley Manning, whose eloquent style buries meaning below the surface, inviting readers to recognize the non-viscous relationships between the bizarre, the absurd, and the sentimental. "Dirt" by Alina Polatsek continues similar themes by weaving through depictions of grief, motherhood, and exhaustion, letting her reader experience all the nuance of these processes. Bryan Betancur follows in "Boquisucio," stitching different languages, cultures, and the nuance of familial ties, trauma, and love. Our fiction section also features "Road to TayyIbah" by Raja'a Khalid, Beth Sherman's "We Pay Cash," and "Slipping Through the Cracks" by Karen George.

In addition to the artwork created by our front and back cover artist, Luiza Maia, our art section features the abstract, dynamic worlds of mythology and wonder crafted by Christy Lee Rogers, as well as the decaying, displaced, and magnificent world created by Erika Lynet Salvador in “Uprooted.” The work of Marsha Solomon, then, can best be described as the point where all of these converge, her collection depicting a new lens through which to see the beginning of the universe. Along with the abstract precision of Kristina Erny’s works, our art section features tales as old as time; reinvented, unafraid, and purely stunning.

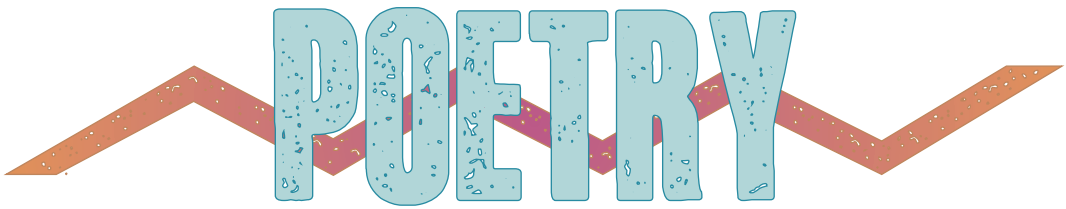
The literature and artwork in these pages are a testament to the diverse perspectives and experiences that are currently present in our society and to voices that are both candid and sincere. We invite you to dive into our 27th issue, and we hope that you appreciate the pieces that make up this issue as much as we do.

Read on!

Lauren Lotarski, Samuel McFerron, & the *Jet Fuel Review* Editors







# POETRY

## The Coldening

The leaving was such that each apple  
in the orchard glassed over into ghost-form

on a single night. Centers rotted, dropped out,  
only translucent orbs at the end of wooded knots remained.

A buck arrives, noses them to the ground.  
His only want: to hear the shatter. First my grandmother,

then my brother. A permanent Autumn settles across my face.  
Brinks become a fabric to dress in.

I practice sewing parts of my body shut:  
the mouth, an ear, the space between my fingers.

At the edge of the orchard I find an owl.  
Bring my hands around the middle of the algid body,

between my palms it moves as dead things move.  
Still, I'm gentle as I walk the owl out of the orchard

to the place of bramble and stumps. Lay the bird out like a boat,  
like a baby in the arms, like a dirge.

Slow gold light slips,  
the night freeze blackens fruit trees.

I continue to visit the owl. The spiders come.  
The flies, too. For a moment one of the owl's eyes opens.

I look through the eye into the back of his death,  
parts of flight and story leak out.

The collapse of the left lung: green.  
The collapse of the right lung: sky.

I've only ever had one good dream  
in 46 years of bad dreams and it was of sleeping

in a moon field with my daughter while friends  
placed inocybe between my teeth.



The eye of the owl closes.  
The buck says *it's peaceful here, to be with you like this.*

I don't say anything because I don't speak anymore.  
Within a streak of light, wasps fly out of the ground

as leaves fall in the orchard.  
I become a ghost apple at the nose of a buck.

## seasickness

*after Laurel Chen, after Gwendolyn Brooks*

what is grief for if not to dampen. not to grey or blur  
past recognition; more like a sponge dipped in paint thinner.  
what was there is still there, just changed.

there is a wound on the back of my head, spreading.  
an infection seeped in one of the days i left my body.  
this could be a metaphor, but isn't.

i haven't reread the scripts i left for my body to follow.  
somewhere, the memory is stored. let me tell you where

i am: a room bled gold, draped in light and shadow—  
one nothing without the other. here i am, waiting  
for truth to settle like a stone on water.

let us follow this metaphor down, past breath to the bottom  
of whatever body is encasing. the stone, like truth, doesn't settle  
but breaks. changes medium. air, then water, then damp silt lining

the end. here we are, the stone, the truth, and us, waiting.  
here, we can't hear the truth above the rush of movement,  
then stillness. what i believe should matter, but doesn't always.

often, it's cast to the wayside. tangled like so much netting,  
so much lining, fishhooks mangled into one harmful body  
of knots. trust is the line moving through it. trust is the skin

catching, the blood welling, then flowing. liquid meeting liquid  
and drawing near what needs it. can we blame anything for claiming its need?

what about grief, and its need to spread, and ease?  
can we feed it both? do we have room?  
do we have time enough to become unafraid?

## **Red-Tailed Hawk's Monologue**

I am more or less your spirit in strife.  
When I lift their small bodies in my clutch.  
When I see capital-B beings as ingestible facts.  
I am not the wolf you fear who'll fear you yet.  
I am a face you cannot unhood in full sun.  
From afar I make an indelible signature twitch  
    in red quill.  
Like you on your post I win or err and never tire  
    of hunger.  
But I am all that and a sack of rabbits.  
If nothing else I am this field of vision.

## Father

*After Safiya Sinclair*

Father I am waiting and time  
has turned from witchgrass to metal  
under my feet Father this metal  
feels cold like you I am alone  
remembering the orchard  
peaches fall and rot after the wind  
takes advantage of their ripeness  
Father how heavy the air was  
with bruises you cut  
the trees and told me to build  
Father you called me your  
self gave me your tongue your  
hands but Father these trees  
are not meant for building these  
trees are not meant for you Father  
I write *trees* because I cannot  
use the tongue you gave me  
Father your tongue chokes  
what I want to say Father I want  
to say Father I cannot build you  
forgiveness from this wood Father  
I prefer the tree Father the fruit  
Father there once  
was something beautiful

## Dustin Wants To Write A Poem With Caridad

*After “Nicole Wants to Write a Poem with Maureen”*

Dustin is writing this poem without his secret weapon—Kirkland brand Pinot Grigio from Costco. Dustin is writing this poem hungry since he’s on another diet, but he swears he won’t get hangry. Dustin wants to know what Caridad is having for dinner.

Caridad means to tell Dustin she is having grilled chicken and spring mix for dinner, but it comes out as spring chicken and grilled mix. Caridad laughs at the gaffe because it sums up her youth when all she ate was grilled chicken and spring mix—in public, that is. Caridad sighs with resignation when she says, *I got fat anyway.*

When Dustin hears/reads/thinks the word fat, he thinks of *Sordid Lives*— how Bonnie Bedelia’s character Latrelle removed the husky label from her son’s jeans, sewed on a slim label in its place. Dustin’s mother used to ask him, *Do you want to be fat like your father’s mother?* Then add, *Don’t tell your father I said that.*

*Don’t tell your father,* is what Caridad’s mother says when they slip into the Orange Julius at the mall for a midday pick-me-up teeming with all the sugar he doesn’t allow either of them to have. Caridad’s father monitors her mother’s weight and dress size which is why her mother bursts into tears when the maroon, size 8 slim-hipped polyester bell bottoms she’s been eyeing don’t fit her size 10, well hipped body. *Don’t tell your father,* she says later at home as Caridad watches her remove a size 8 tag from a Papi approved pair of pants and replace the size 10 tag on the new pair she brought home with it. It is painstaking work that requires tiny snips, a practiced stitch, a lie ever ready on the lips. Caridad never tells.

## Dustin Wants To Write A Poem With Diamond

*Inspired by "Nicole Wants to Write a Poem with Maureen"*

Dustin is moving from Florida to North Carolina  
in a month, asks Diamond if she has any tips  
about living in Asheville,

so Diamond tells Dustin about the hills,  
how she traces the horizon  
with the hills' green shoulders,

how the fog swaddles the mountain, heavenly  
bodies twisting into inseparable twine.  
She mentions the mulberry tree,

and the squirrels feasting on berries—full-bellied,  
dabbled with juice. There is, Diamond tells Dustin,  
so much sweetness here,

and Dustin wants to sit under the mulberry tree,  
confesses he Googled "mulberry tree"—  
don't judge, he couldn't remember

what they look like—it's palm  
trees for days in South Florida.  
Maybe they'll have lunch under the tree, read poems,

or finish this poem in real life—which Diamond loves—  
poetry in real life, or that a poem is breath  
wrestled between lyric, a child wobbling

into its first steps, and this is the closest  
Diamond ever wants to be to mothering,  
while Dustin is always the mother

of the friend group— packing snacks for road trips,  
making sure everyone drinks water, watching  
out for creepers (old cis white men, their wandering

eyes and hungry hands). When Dustin herniated  
a third disc, his other half helped him dress,  
all the way to putting on Dustin's socks and shoes—

Dustin wasn't as helpless as a baby  
but he felt like it—a hardcore type A,  
which Diamond wants to be—organized,

brain cubed into order. Instead, house-cat  
Diamond lounges in the sleepy bars of sunlight  
padding through the bay windows,

thinks about what she will miss  
about Florida: the seafood market,  
brine-stink slicked along the cases

then wonders what Dustin will miss.  
Men! Wilton Manors: where all the pretties play.  
Dustin's father's side of the family has a history

of diabetes, so he loves this sweet, sweet  
eye candy—harmless—at least in one way.  
And he will miss Apt 9F, baked goat

cheese, and the dirtiest martinis he's ever imbibed.  
He'll miss those Saturday mid-morning naps  
serenaded by the Atlantic. He'll miss his walks

with Gregg. His walks with Denise. He'll miss  
that in Wilton Manors straight people are the other,  
and this, Diamond realizes, is the most important thing

about Asheville: that we will be together,  
will escape, finally, from the bars of these lines,  
rub elbows at a table of tarnished wood, a million

togethernesses etched in its wear, and we'll sip  
lattes, nibble almond cakes, write poems—so sweet,  
our place in the world.

## For Certain

*-For my friend B.R., murdered by his wife and her lover while taking out the trash.*

I failed math in middle school  
because he showed me how Mentos  
could be spit through a straw

at the teacher—how algebra  
was really an excuse to carve lyrics  
into a desk.

+

Someone I was certain  
I would never leave gifted  
me a slip joint  
knife, but every time  
I opened it my hand bled  
and we split like skin  
on an operating table.

+

This isn't my story to tell,  
but it was skip day

in high school  
and everyone was high;

a teen girl told a teen boy  
she would fuck him if he swam  
across the river and back.

The cold crept into his quadriceps.  
Their stoned smiles were swept away.  
The divers snatched at the bottom.

+

The last time I spoke to him, we were ordering  
Chinese for our families near the town  
we grew up in. We talked about playing music



ten years ago, his rapping snare, double kick  
drums, my Telecaster plugged into a now-sold  
half-stack, both of us trying and failing to stay in time.

+

If my wife  
were to murder me,  
I think it'd be with poison.

Maybe. I don't know.

Cyanide in the soup  
a few nights in a row.

+

He didn't know. He fought with his wife  
about money or children the night before  
and maybe pictured a lover sealing her mouth

with his mouth. He bagged his trash and headed  
to the curb and knew, soon, he would sit at the table  
and have dinner with his son and daughter.

## **We Choose Our Own Miseries**

From our mouths emerge  
blasts of winter, its white fires

held within the savage  
eyes of owls in the hollowest

hours of piety. Distilled  
prayer. No one thirsty. Who

else speaks so brazenly  
of wilting crowns, the dead

of a city split in two and starved  
of memory? Carrying upon

its strained shoulders, the cure  
for remembering the gold

sighs of daylight, for a horse  
frozen in a field of ghost

flowers, for a summoned  
quiet descending. A child's song

says more about misery,  
about the thundering depravity

of these hymns trapped in bone  
than the locket slung across

a wonder-heavy heart.  
The shovel's head. A flaunt

of seedlings. An anchoring  
wish in each hush of saltwater.

The palace gates. The bright  
mirror into which we sink.

## Zaliv Vozvratseniya

The highest tidal bore in the United States  
occurs in the Turnagain Arm of Cook Inlet.

Reaching heights of twelve metres and more,  
it is a significant tourist attraction and water hazard.

As the student watches through a pair of coin-op binoculars  
at a Seward Highway pull-out, the latter is the focus.

The student is used to this—is taught to fear many things:  
the tide, the Russians, any angel from heaven

who would preach any other gospel than the one  
received at a mother's knee and a father's hand,

every drowning pull that draws away  
from the coast of this body to an unnamed shore.

Through binoculars, though, the bore tide appears  
as a silent and wondrous thing, turning over

and over itself until it is become wholly  
its own creation—a rustle of shifting feathers

that emerges into the grace of that first forward sweep  
of wing as a swan frees itself from the ice.

This is not what the student—a poor swimmer—is meant  
to take away, but as any folklorist or sex

educator knows, even the sternest warnings  
rarely survive contact with something beautiful.

## The Poet Drunkenly Remonstrates with High Tide

You have a way of holding everything in slender grace, like a line of Sappho.  
You touch my arm, my hair, but not my [ . . . ], trace me fractured like a line of Sappho.

It hurts to be missed by one whose eyes [ . . . ] every sister of the Pleiades.  
In your study, every book lies open to you; one is me, and nine are Sappho.

I stagger around this island like the deck of a ship; I know how it must look.  
But I am not drunk. I do not slosh [ . . . ]. I'm just pouring out some wine for Sappho.

For all you've taught me, my hair is still weighed down with scorching stars—the charcoal halo  
of a student who cannot [ . . . ] your likeness, nor turn a verse as fine as Sappho.

Another pupil lies upon your couch, whose forms are more pleasing. What can I say?  
What gift of tongue could light on me while all the [ . . . ] muses sit and pine for Sappho?

One day, time will lap away the long, sighing  $\acute{\alpha}$  of our moon, and you will leave me  
incomplete [ . . . ] a salt-drenched rose that, in some old dialect, once rhymed with Sappho.

## She, Reborn

Daughter rose from sparrow  
from deer bloodied  
and seeked  
because man placed his hands  
                    on her stomach  
and tore  
the wolf from  
her chest

When her eyes first met  
                    the earth  
It told her to run.

So she listened.

She crossed valleys  
that               swallowed her  
And rivers that  
spat her  
                    back out  
Calves swollen  
and breath     catching  
on the shifting light

She ran until  
she was born of deer horns  
and sparrow teeth

Until she could take a  
wolf by the ear and watch it  
                    shake.

## Dorinda Medley Monologue

*pop*—goes the cork of mouthiness I'm not the one  
 for shit-talk but my tablescape wouldn't be caught dead  
 in paper napkins like last season's balenciaga  
 & no donatella-wannabe in a canal-street-mink-coat  
 better dare come to my turf saying what's what  
 because sweetie I was dragging racks of cashmere  
 around the garment district before you  
 were a flint in limestone *spark*—  
 goes every wick left in the candlestick drawer  
 because I don't care if the clinton's are here  
 I'll scream to every pool boy about your routine  
 vaginal rejuvenations your needing  
 an ez pass for that holland tunnel because I racket  
 every slight with a sharp-tongued return  
 because I dizzy  
 as the motorized tie rack spins like tree rings  
 & I vertigo imagining baucis & philemon entwined  
 —gone are the days I partied with alexis from *dynasty*  
 the one who married & remarried  
 oilmen & shipping tycoons the one who said  
 “death is always a simpler solution than divorce”  
 —gone are the days of MRS. of london socialite  
 yet luann counts each manhattan I drink  
     *ohhh she's startin'* she says & I go off the rails  
 because how dare you compare your husband's affair  
 to being widowed  
 every six years the devil begs for a waltz & I go around  
 I go around this empty house talking to myself  
 to the cat: horatio  
     what is the geography of tragedy?

five manhattans in & I turn  
 Slurrinda Medley *hostess with the mostess*  
 undraping white sheets from the antiques  
 as if it's an opera's opening night at Bluestone Manor  
 —Berkshires fun fact: these mountains  
 formed half a billion years ago when one continent  
 collided into another kinda like that time  
 luann d.w.i-crashed into a guardrail remember ladies?  
 those moments will haunt you isn't this home  
 built for a baroness? gargoyles schmaltz  
 along the drive vestal virgins guarding the entryway?

still—luann’s pissed I assigned her to sleep  
with a taxidermied swordfish over the bed  
& it’s just ridiculous how they always smell blood  
in the water how every guestroom’s worth half a million  
so I fucking lose it wielding a wine bottle like yorick’s skull  
reciting “I cooked I decorated I made it nice!”  
which is to say *I’m more than a fellow of infinite jest*  
& I inscribe “memento mori” onto the party favors  
as they limousine back to their lives cameras gone  
I drift to the property’s hundred-year-old tree  
& call out *Richard? Richard!*

## **Fugue Bourgeois**

*after Untitled #8 by Louise Bourgeois*

Meltwater patterns in Antarctica, ground exposed which should be white. The ground in a garden full of anthills. Many small guitars that children have fashioned from tennis rackets. Cellulite constrained by athleisurewear. Spots on a zoo giraffe, puddles on asphalt, the path of the wind as it passes through slats of a plank fence. A plate of half-eaten hash browns in a cafeteria. Cellular structures beneath a high school microscope. The aggravation of razor burn. What burns here other than streetlights and anger? Daffodils or dandelions, aquamarine pools chlorinated free of algae. Whole neighborhoods free of trees, only the lines of streets that dally with cul-de-sac ovals. At night in the windows, dialogue bubbles bursting with blood and rust.



## **Something about Jason Momoa's Orange Scale Bodysuit Makes Me Relive My Mother's Decline (or All That Glitters is Not Gold And Sometimes Just False Hope)**

I watch the end of Aquaman:  
The Lost Kingdom and wonder  
what the rest of the Justice League  
thinks about the king of Atlantis  
negotiating with the United Nations  
to address climate change through  
science while most of them run  
around in codpieces, capes and masks  
battling supervillains with mutant  
powers or evil borne from trauma.  
Aquaman sparkles behind his podium.  
[Cue swelling soundtrack instrumental.]

Later in my dreams I watch the end  
of my mother's life on a loop and  
wonder how the doctors missed  
the signs of cancer, prescribed  
laxatives, failed to pinpoint other  
symptoms while we yearned for  
answers, made more appointments,  
haunted hospital hallways, dutiful  
to those we believed knew better.  
We ended up praying for miracles,  
for a superhero to save her.  
All the stars have gone dull now.  
[Cue closing montage. Cue Credits.]

## **I am Told to Look for the Beauty in Everything**

the nurse pulls  
an upswirl of garnet, bright  
as a pomegranate seed,  
into a vial, my arm  
one of a porcelain echelon  
of arms waiting for  
this sumptuous coupling  
of needle and flesh,  
such a lavish carcass,  
the exquisite portal  
of the veins opening,  
then closing with one  
last gasp of red

## Through Another Looking Glass

Because I am *slithy* and *mimsy*, I reign as  
the Almost-Upright Queen of Portmanteau:  
*infomercial*  
*influenza*  
*smog* and  
a *sharktopus*, and you  
shouldn't scoff at the mixing of the breeds:  
*cama*      *coywolf*      *Zonkey*  
or do you think—*Miss-not-so-innocent*—you should?

If so, Miss Zebra make way for Mr. Donkey.  
Come sit by this bank of listless waters. Come  
share your hay and silage, bark and saplings,  
because there won't be another generation like yours.

So what? We are all a ghostly hybrid residue and  
this world has seen worse. What happened when  
one Belgian<sup>1</sup> came to more than admire a woman  
born of the Twa or of the Babongo people? They laid  
down together and there made an increase although,  
perhaps, they left no credible record of their daughter,  
nor she of hers, nor they of theirs. So what if someone  
writes a blasphemy about the *listicles* of each of them;  
they have been liberated from death, yes? Because they

are the next generations' *guesstimate*, its *hazmat* not to be  
*mansplained*. They are a *metaverse*. They are a *romcom*,  
a *spife* and *spork* and most definitely sacrilege wedded to  
deliciousness—so *sacrilicious*, 2075. If they live that long.

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<sup>1</sup> I wrote this poem in the midst of reading Adam Hochschild's "King Leopold's Ghost"

## The year of voting dangerously

The ayes may have it.  
The nays may have it.  
The most important question:  
whether or not to support  
the kale lobby or  
ignore & go for pumpernickel?  
Should we few unschooled debate?  
On the one hand, kale  
threatens to split the country—  
but what of spinach, cabbage,  
lettuce? Because, on the other  
hand, who can trust in bread? White  
today, a darkening rye tomorrow—

## Being Unhappy Shortens Your Life

When I was 13, I thought the isosceles  
triangle a magnificent thing—a shape

with two sides of equal length  
reassured me of a certain reliability

sewn into the world; something solid  
and clean lined, unlike my mother

bouncing \$3 checks at the grocery store.  
But I want to live a long life, so I'm going

to look up words, like *pericardium*  
and learn the heart is enclosed

in “a fibrous sac” that keeps it separate  
from the lungs. Is it correct to assume

that *happy* is the opposite  
of *unhappy*? Sarah Vaughan's voice

filling up the radio on my drive home  
the opposite of my mother sitting alone

unable to boil an egg  
until her caregiver arrives.

How do we set up our equations  
in this life? A red cardinal =

summer or winter  
depending on the hemisphere.

I'm told if I exercise three times a week—  
a brisk walk with the sidewalk purring

beneath me—my life will extend,  
rolling out before me like a feisty ribbon.

Does the heart really know  
what it needs?

My father collapsed  
over his keyboard one evening.

He had eaten a sandwich for dinner,  
worked out at the gym. My stepmother

found him slumped in his pajamas  
because she wanted to ask him a question.

He was already bluing  
in the face. Is *to blue* a verb?

After typing those earlier words,  
it makes me a touch happier

to consider this. The first known  
mention of *blue*--from the Proto-Germanic

and Old French--described "fair blu cloth"  
in a collection of saints' lives

circa 1300. We are always  
onto the next thing, our minds

tick ticking. Right now,  
I'm considering marmalade,

and how I used to hate it  
until I was living in Madrid,

when my roommate, Maria,  
brought back jars

from her hometown in Valencia.  
And, one morning, its sweet,

buttery texture,  
made my mouth gleam.

## **Restless Coyote Pilfers the Night and She Does Not Need Your Judgment**

A howl and a yip shiver the air. Tonight the moon, orange and black, is a coyote's back rolled into sleep. Coyote sees her mimic in the sky, a kind of god. She yips in a thousand voices, a gloating illusion of abundance. There is sadness in the wolf when she howls, confesses to the moon that she's utterly without. Wolves don't like to be alone, but a coyote can pilfer Detroit. A coyote doesn't need the woods, her mate, her own kill on her muzzle. She'll just go on. The coyote fills her gut, feels the good feeling of running her legs, and tells her memories to sit quietly back on their haunches. Haunted is for dead and she'll get there when she gets there. Rabbits taste so sweet, and so does she. She sends out the yips and waits for the howl. Wolf, what did you leave her? She'll clean the bones. Don't ask her to remember that once there was more.

## **The Improvisational Jazz of an Idle Life is a Heaven So Fine They Told You It's Kept in the Devil's Hand**

Sometimes-I think- you have to rattle the rattlesnake. Take the threat and shake it, fearless as a baby. Thrust the weight of your fat innocence on its throat. Have you been bitten? Bite back. Teethe your wretched gums on the body-warmed body, scales shimmering like a mirage. If you hate your job, quit. Even if it's January. Smear your shit on the way out and crawl into the milk sour world. Make music with the keratin clap-clap of the snapped tail. Your life too, seeps out day by day. Drool wickedly. Quit. You're going to need more space and you will need to demand it. Cackle! Look at your breath caught in a huff between snowflakes. If nobody told you, a forked tongue can be ripped like a seam. Do that. Unlike your corporate mission statement, you are not a lie. You, my dear sweet baby, deserve the rhythm of your days-dazzling, ripe, and warm as your own pulse, kicking out power. Pow-er. Pow-er. Pow-er. Until the end.



## The Familiar

Watch it wither  
                  under  
          worms  
and seeped-in rain

where *story* is a myth,  
                  as is  
          *property*  
and *sequence*.

O Liberator,  
                  in this  
          now with  
its own color

and sufficiency.  
                  Even  
          your absence  
shows us

the world. Beware,  
                  little speck,  
          the familiar  
is enormous.

## Fire in the Butterfly Sanctuary

The wasteland piles sand in an unfurnished waiting room,  
clinic ceiling torn off. The sick cat falters in the winter  
garden, paw curled around the corner of an iron armchair.

I've seen a lot of smoke where nothing is burning,  
found feathers in places where birds won't go.  
The dead cat stiffens in the icy garden.

I realize I'm saying *I'm sorry. I'm sorry.* You say  
*This is a bad idea.* I think my life would be different  
if I could make me forget you. When you slap me

I think there's a lot I could lecture you about. I scoop  
the dead hard cat in the garden into a white garbage bag  
and I scoop the garden into a white garbage bag

and I say *I'm sorry. I'm sorry.* I'm sorry  
you were a sick cat and you lived outside.  
I'm sorry for the white gunk in your sick eyes.

I want to climb Mount Julep and cry all over it.  
I want to never have sex again. You say *Look  
honey, the sky is full of smokejumpers.*

You tilt my chin toward the window.  
You put me up on the counter and ask me  
if I feel like my life is just beginning.

I turn to look at you through several hundred panes of glass  
and see a several-hundred-handed thing. The planet  
has trillions of eyes all blinking at once.

I see a little devil making horns in the waiting room.  
I ask him if he will grow up to be a big devil.  
He says *Unless someone stops me!*

**the women**

that day you died.  
that day lasted twelve years.  
there is nothing  
more than this. cut  
flowers. still yellow  
waters. ripe  
scent of rot. what is left  
to mourn the living? the daughter  
cheek slumped to  
the lover's breast. the seabird  
twisted at  
the neck. the ocean  
reaching toward  
itself. the nautilus  
living.

## How I learned to kill mosquitoes

I have gotten very good at killing  
with a hard-bottom slipper or  
Raid designed to spatter pool drown  
roaches and ants.

I never kill  
between my skin or with a napkin  
never crunched lungs  
clapped splat in thin white tissue  
too close to its needle mouth  
so I never will

wear skirts  
except from age five to  
seventeen, a little plaid hunter green  
too long to be sexy, too short to be modest  
so as soon as I got down the hallway  
out of Umma's sight,  
I rolled the waist exactly three times so  
the hem would hit  
above my fingertips. under that I wore  
scratchy things, tights that always smelled  
like pussy. my hole was out and this  
was not sexy. maroon heeled oxfords and bright green tights I was  
fourteen on a subway platform  
at what could have been 4pm at 77th street  
waiting, everyday, for the 6 train  
when a suit dropped his briefcase,  
I didn't help. I watched his papers puddle and  
his nails scrape the muck  
off the platform and he  
on his knees and bits of blackened gum  
from the charcoaled floor and I  
watched him fail, over and  
over again to lift the edge of the document.  
I stood there, knees hip-width apart and thought,  
I should help him.  
he is Asian  
and I am Asian  
and I should but  
anyway, it turns out this was all on purpose  
that he tipped his bag and struggled too long  
on purpose

while his phone faced upwards to film my

on Pornhub I type “school-girl up-  
skirt subway” and I watch  
so many do not notice the  
camera none of them  
are wearing hot pink undies  
bought on sale for \$5 which is, in retrospect,  
too expensive, but also  
if I found the video  
what could I even do but

kill it.

because it was buzzing and it was summer and it landed on my wall.  
sprayed it, hoping its body would limp and slip off.  
it stayed stuck up there and it did not disintegrate  
until December until I purchased  
a very long stick from the Dollar Tree  
attached to it a napkin and smacked  
its body fell so easily it  
didn't leave a mark

## That Time

I was apologizing before I learned  
to whistle. Then, I was a chronic hummer.  
I was starfished in March with nothing  
to lose but my head. I was theorizing  
the direction of the wind—perpendicular to my mother.  
Mitski said *There's nothing left for you* so I skipped  
stones in Lake Michigan and lived  
off birdseed and hummus. So what if I couldn't  
swim? I was constructing boneyards  
between campgrounds. I was writing  
ghosts like skeletons like contrails like lacunas  
between my thighs, then rewriting myself in  
-to something tiny, something tapered. The tally  
marks corroded, the days slow and whittling.  
No one looked for me. I know, I know, I know.

## Taxidermy

Between a grass blade of snowfall and birdsong, my mother  
 teaches me to lick white  
 cream across my legs. It ends with my thighs  
 snapped shut and her shriek  
 skittering across the tiles like wildfire.  
 I am always the watchdog, or witch, or heart  
 -less daughter.  
 Still, my mother knows apology  
 as in hunger, takes me to dinner only to run  
 over a greyhound. I do not  
 cry, only watch its yellow tongue spill  
 from its jaw— how its paws  
 plant themselves into cement  
 like wildflowers. She leaves her ribs in Texas  
 Roadhouse. That night, I witness  
 my mother stab each baby's  
 breath into a freckled jar, splintering  
 sunflower seeds between her canines. My self-help books  
 advised me to think *fresh* -water and grow  
 fat on fried eggs and raw milk.  
 Naturally, I forgot  
 about dead animals, the lot of them.  
 But spring came early  
 and I bailed, again. I didn't want to burn.

## Ghazal for Things That Disappear

After your funeral, in my bedroom mirror, I saw a ghost  
wearing your lipstick, your black pearls—I begged: stay, ghost.

I skipped school and lay in the snow to absolve myself.  
What I left in the field was no angel, but a stray ghost.

My lover, a mathematician (which I mistook for *magician*)—  
calculate the ways he makes me disappear, a display ghost.

Remember when the setting changed from country to city,  
the sky a palimpsest of dying stars, a Milky Way ghost?

I longed to fade, so I cut two holes in a pillowcase—  
they called me *imposter*; they called me *cliché ghost*.

That midnight dream where I'm shoeless in the street.  
Every road in this life leads to grief, a highway ghost.

A woman at the flower market with your amaryllis hair  
pulls peonies by a leash. She vanishes—a bouquet ghost.

The blue hour. Oh sapphire oh electric oh azulejos.  
Watch as the dial slowly turns up, up, up, night-to-day ghost.

Would the sky become invisible if I could erase the stars?  
He calls me trash, garbage, nothing—yesterday's ghost.

I disassembled myself like a toy and played hide and seek,  
but I didn't want to be found—only to play ghost.

All the ways I have molded myself to make you fit.  
How I have lengthened the arms of this clay ghost.

Another funeral, another bedroom, another mirror.  
I miss her hair, that dissipating cloud of hairspray ghost.

Say *phantom* say *spirit* say *child of an alcoholic* say *empty*  
*bottle* say *shell* say *Sarah*: how many ways can you say *ghost*?



## Irene, My OCD Brain, Goes to the Post Office

The postal clerk asks if there's anything in my package that's liquid fragile perishable flammable potentially hazardous. It's the word *hazardous* that Irene doesn't like. It's the word *potentially* that I don't like. Everything has the *potential* to be dangerous. Nail clippers. Sand art. That yellow sign in my neighbor's yard that reads *Slow Down, Children*—the words *At Play* buried in snow. I'm sending a Valentine's gift to my niece. A pink teddy bear holding a small bag of Hershey's Kisses. *I guess that's technically perishable*, I tell the clerk. *That's not really what they mean by perishable*, she says. *They mean things like tomatoes*. I want her to know that my package isn't inherently dangerous but that it *could* be. That anything *could* be. And isn't everything fragile? Aren't we all just walking around like rattling boxes of glassware that someone didn't wrap tightly enough? Her face is red like a warning label, the kind I want her to put on the box. *Handle with Care, Just in Case*, I want it to say. *Handle me with care*, I am asking of her. Irene knows that I will spend the next few days worrying I made the wrong choice. That I will think about going back to the post office and begging them to find my package so I can change my answer. That I will wake up in the middle of the night with intrusive thoughts about my package hurting someone, somehow. But there are things Irene doesn't know—like that I have spent hours estimating her dimensions. That one day I am going to mail her off in one of those prepaid shipping boxes to an unknown destination. That the clerk will ask if I'm sending anything liquid fragile perishable flammable potentially hazardous. That I will say *no* as she takes the box from my shaking hands.

## **Natural Selection For The Lonely Individual**

*Cento with lines from Hanif Abdurraqib, Solmaz Sharif, and Cameron Awkward-Rich*

I keep dry when the rain comes.

I have infinite skin. I know what it is to walk into the mouth of an unfamiliar morning and feel everything.

There was an inlet I pulled over once to watch the sunset, which was still another hour or so away, the light just low enough there to begin to change.

I have a dream in which I love the world. The flight of doves, the city of tents beneath the underpass, the huddled mass, old women hawking roses, & children, all of them.

I should've stayed.

I suppose this is survival. There are no borders, only wind.

Maybe we both long for an era when there were less things to record death.

I will love those who no one else thinks to remember.

## Sestina for Lawrence v. Texas

So it goes like this: when the police entered the apartment  
and saw, their reports differed on the kind of sex  
the men were having. A bow with arrow taut and a hand  
fisted in a cream sheet. In a downtown office, a lawyer in a purple tie  
filed *certiorari* and goes back to bed for his lunch hour.  
Everywhere in the country there are orifices waiting to emit light.

After a month of birth and twenty years, I wake to your body flayed by light.  
You were my gilded morning, crashing in our friend's tiny apartment.  
Today, it's the mark where your legs meet your hips and the long hour  
we spent over coffee and yogurt. You suggested we have sex  
in that furnace of an estranged room, our friend at work, boxers and ties  
sizzling on the floor, my fervent yes and your miraculous cold hands.

The Attorney General of Texas refused and the DA blew their hand,  
but it was just electioneering, the firm press of a tailor, steps taken light.  
On the marble and the concrete, this was the culture war, and it ended in a tie.  
While I wailed in Maryland innocence, there were Dupont Circle apartments  
drooping full of other lives in expat cities, weeping for sex  
with ghosts, a cowboy from a dream, a man meeting you in the park on the hour.

When I decide to go missing and celebrate the hour,  
I think of that little mesh number and thighs and a hand,  
slowly caressing, opening up a thunderstorm. We had sex  
just once, after the club. My whole life is spent under this piercing light—  
no one older or younger. Later, when I share a one-bedroom apartment,  
I remember in a flash: when your song came on you pulled me to the floor by my tie.

The scorned lover from the original story had stepped outside to loosen his tie  
and buy a soda. He called the police, and two years later the hour  
turned sharp—when he died they never solved the case. Furniture into the apartment  
and gold into silver, another margarita into his hairy hand,  
and that was it. He damned them to fines and misdemeanors, how light  
a sentence for courtly love, to forget the number but never the sex.

In the grain of my basement we talked about Foucault and all the sex  
we still need to have. Back then it was still the matter of how to tie  
yourself up and find new ways to escape. When we saw the light  
and the angry texts from your mom, the nausea of the hour  
left you to walk home alone. I set to forgetting the canal of your hand  
opening to the sea of my chest, salt under the floorboards corroding the apartment.

On the first day of the first year we had sex in our first apartment.  
The green velvet couch was heaving through its ties and you offered me a hand.  
It is the birthday of our bodies in the light: the fleshy slap of the clock striking the hour.





The word "ART" is rendered in a light blue, bubbly, hand-drawn font. It is centered and overlaid on a thick, multi-colored zigzag line that spans the width of the page. The zigzag line features a color gradient from orange to red and is speckled with small white dots, resembling a textured or marbled effect.

# ART





**Aphrodite and Ishtar**



Photography

**Blue Avian**



Photography

**Euphoria**



Photography

**Identity**



Photography

**Sea of Tranquility**



Photography

**The Seduction**



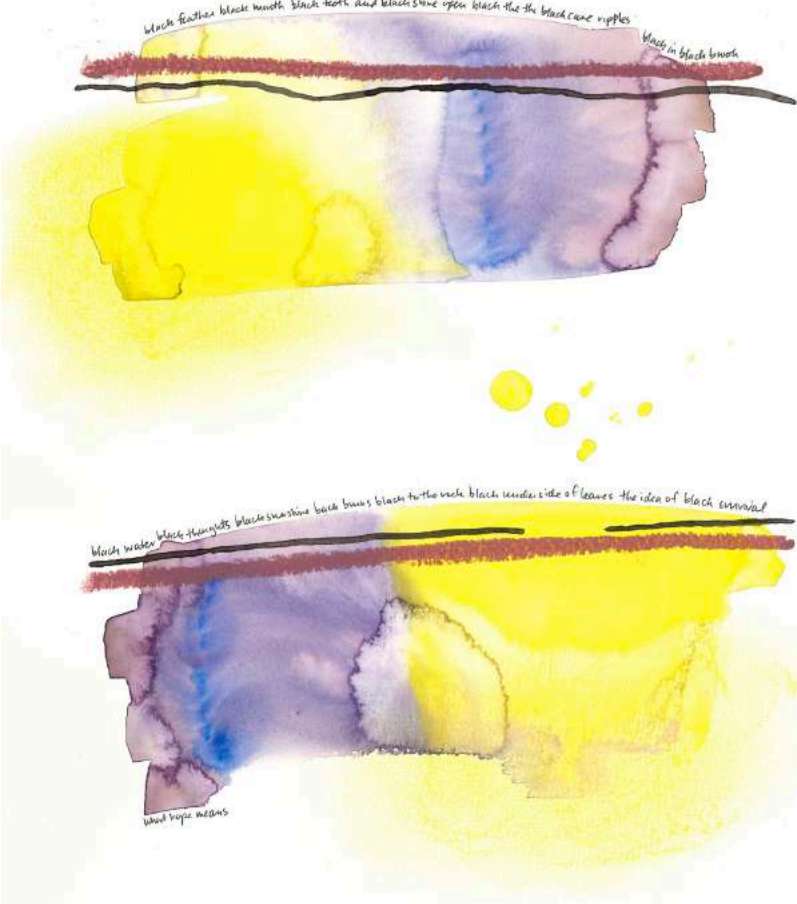
Photography

**Uprooted**



Digital, Oil

**Black Feather**



Mixed Media



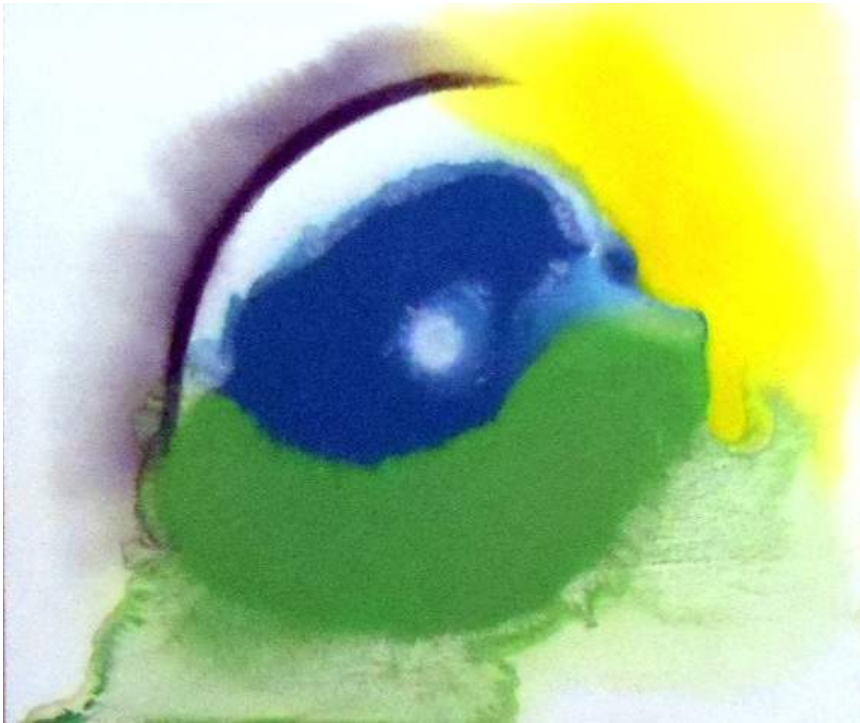
## Overhead the Sky



overhead the cloud / split like a melon / bright, and of course, etc shine / You can color created / just to please;  
perfect, and just in a vapor / well - time / what is can get / overhead the cloud / split like a melon

Mixed Media

**Prelude In Yellow And Green**



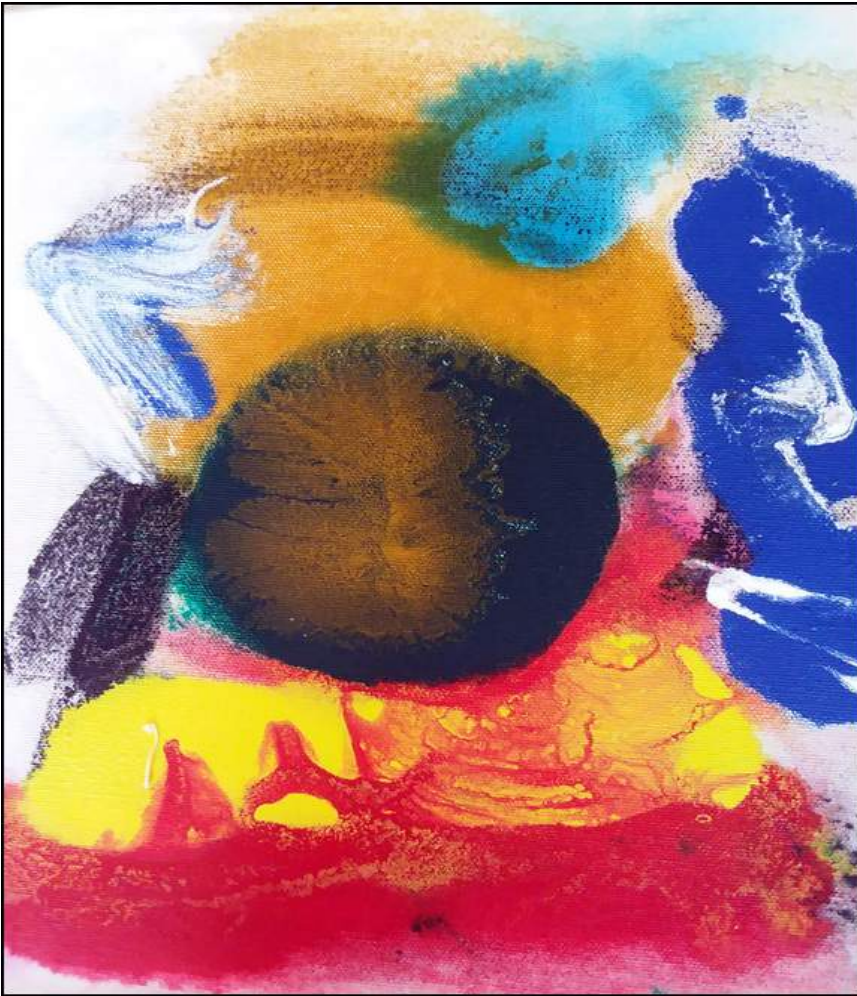
Acrylic on canvas

**Star Formation**



Acrylic on canvas

**Echoes**



Acrylic on canvas

**Singer**



Oil on canvas, 30x24

**Saudade**



Oil on canvas, 20x16

**Guilt**



Oil on canvas, 20x16

## Blue Telephone



Oil on canvas, 20x20

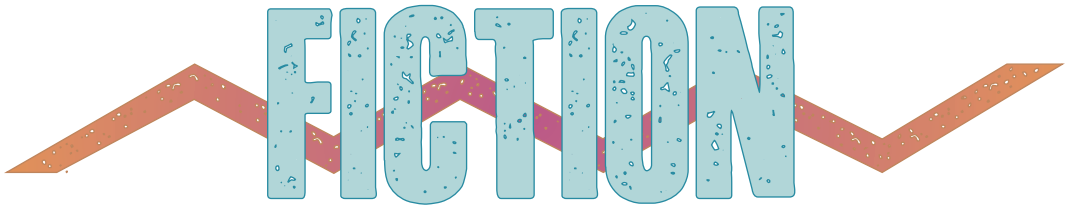


**Left Hanging**



Oil on canvas, 16x12



The word "FICTION" is written in a light blue, bubbly, hand-drawn font. It is centered horizontally and overlaid on a thick, red zigzag line that spans the width of the word. The red line has a slightly textured, speckled appearance. The background is plain white.

# FICTION



## Owl

The Trace at night is as dark as the inside of your body, an endless corridor of trees, the occasional orange marbles of deer eyes crowding the embankments. Alarming for a split second, but by the time you register this alarm, the danger has passed. Conversation between you and your husband has died, drowned in the soft heartbreak of a good marriage.

On the back window, a fresh Millsaps College sticker. You are childless and alone for the first time in a long time. Motherhood is a song that fades out. You can't tell when exactly you quit hearing it, and maybe it's still going on somewhere else — "Start Me Up" keeping its dim promise, your only daughter bedding down in her dorm.

It's not a deer that gets you but an owl, swooping low and out of nowhere, swallowed by the Escalade's face, the brutal crunch-cry cracking the night like a dropped porcelain plate. Hustle out, though he tries to make you stay in. It takes a minute for you to see it, the alien eyes peeping from the wedge between the grille and the crooked bumper. The disc head ticks and squints and chirps with animal pain, shrinks away from your husband's hand as he reaches for it. Impossible to get a sense of the shape of it, or the size, or where it might be broken.

Your husband is bald and curious for the first time in a long time, polo shirt tucked into khaki cargo shorts. Leather sandals. He spades his hands into the cracks. Hold your velvet breath, clutch your sweat-damp collar, imagine the feathering bulk on your own palms, its tender beating.

A commotion, a caterwaul, wings thumping against Cadillac polymer like a mad heart. Husband falling back, raking his arms crying, "Ants, ants, it's covered in fucking ants."

You peer in yourself and hear "Jesus" jump out of you.

He tugs at the bumper, but nothing doing. Hands on his forehead in the blue light of the Escalade made sepulcher.

"I can't," he stammers like a boy. The lump in his throat in yours, too. The night is a knot of wet rope.

The horse doctor is the only doctor awake, waiting for you in your driveway — "Lemme see what we got here," like it's not three in the morning. Tan leather gloves up to his elbow, heat fogging up his glasses. He clamps the owl, turns it, frees it like an abortion. Flings the mangled creature onto the concrete. It looks nothing like a cartoon owl or a stuffed animal

owl. More like a tangle of wire coat hangers. A failed architecture. That story about the witch who lives in a house stood up on chicken legs. Your husband sprays it with the hose to banish the ants.

“We can’t taxidermy it. It’s illegal,” he says. “I don’t know how I know that, but I do.” He closes the owl in an empty printer paper box, then that into a black trash bag, then that into the city garbage can.

“It was dead no matter what,” the horse doctor says. He packs a plug of RedSeal into his lip and points to the Escalade.

“My brother does cars. Take a look at that bumper, if you want.”

From the owl, your husband steals a silky feather, no bigger than a thumbnail. He closes it in an almost empty box of matches beside the bed. You catch him looking at it from time to time, until the cleaning woman throws it away.

## Road to Tayyibah

Hind looked in the rearview mirror and caught sight not of Salman's eyes in his counterfeit Police sunglasses but his smile, his two front teeth in gold. So, he knew. But how? Joebelle wouldn't tell. She wasn't the type to talk about things like this. Maybe he'd pressed his ear to a door and listened like Hafiz and found out. That this was no holiday.

Tayyibah was not a holiday. It was a punishment. Two months at Umm Al Ghaith's farm. Time enough—Umm Hadeyah and Baba felt—for Hind to realize the wrong she'd done. Lying to Joebelle, telling her she was going to try on shoes at Mango and slipping out to the car park instead, getting into Rashid's Armada. Even as she was doing it, stepping on the escalator, going through the sliding doors, her heart had beat violently in her chest, two fast beats at a time. Dum dum, dum dum, dum dum. The first beat for the boy's touch. The second beat for Baba's slap. Twin thrills. Forever entwined.

Deep, deep, deep inside she was sure Baba would not actually ever hit her. He couldn't. She was his favorite after all. He'd stroke her hair and run his thick finger down her small upturned nose, call her his little pussycat. Meow. On account of her green eyes. She'd got them from her mother she suspected who he'd left behind in Balochistan, their short lived marriage, the unanticipated event on the itinerary of a houbara hunting party. He'd raised Hind with too much love, spoiled her with frocks and dolls but she still felt the gap, the endless void of a mother-shaped hole in her universe. It was on her sixteenth birthday that she asked Baba her mother's name for the last time. He'd held a forkful of white forest cake in front of her lips. Don't ask me, he'd said. Open your mouth pussycat, eat this.

Tell me her name Baba.

I don't remember. Eat the cake.

She took the bite then ran to her room, bit her pink silk pillow, cried thick salty tears which rested for a while on her long lashes then cascaded down her cheeks. Baba had come into the room, raised her chin with a thumb. Aren't I enough for you? he'd asked.

Rashid with the Armada had caught her eye at Starbucks in Mercato. He was in a big group and she felt his gaze hit her cheek like Dubai's white hot sun. They chatted on bluetooth for an hour. When she went back the following weekend he was there. He had figured out the routine she had with Joebelle and Meitha. When he made the offer of a drive she didn't hesitate.

His car was new. The smell of leather mixed with his heavy oud and *Commes des Garçons* excited her and scared her in equal measure as did the D'Angelo track on the player. Up close he looked older than the twenty one he said he was. He drove them to an

abandoned villa in Umm Suqeim, parked in the dark driveway. When she told him she was seventeen, he laughed. That's my favorite number, he said, putting a hand on her knee.

What happened in that car? Baba had asked.

We just talked, was her reply.

He didn't believe her, this much was clear but his rage broke silently, hidden inside, confined, like the rumblings at the center of the earth. There was even a tear in his eye from the effort of keeping it all within him. This is going to hurt me more than it's going to hurt you, he'd said, as he'd picked up the phone and called Umm Al Ghaith telling her that he was sending Hind over to Tayyibah for eight weeks. Why? For the fresh air, change of scenery. And Meitha would come too, to give the girl some company.

Meitha's rage hadn't been silent or confined, she'd screamed and screamed at Baba. Shave her head, Meitha had said pointing at Hind. If you want to keep her from trouble.

But Baba said eight weeks in Tayyibah was enough for now. Next time it would be longer, six months if Hind even looked at a boy. She guessed that he knew what she had come to terms with years ago. Boys would find her no matter what. They always did, their phone numbers scribbled on slips of paper left under the windshield wiper of Mouza's G Wagon. *For your sister with the green eyes.* Yes, Hind was different from her sisters, stood out in that line up of seven. Her raven colored hair glistened blue under the midday sun, her skin the color of cream, the shape of her lips a little rosebud. Just looking into your eyes will send me to hell, a boy had said from the window of his Brabus. She hadn't caught his name but the slip of paper he flicked at her landed on her lap like a butterfly. Mouza had ripped it up and thrown it like confetti in Hind's face. You're more trouble than you're worth, she'd said.

Look, said Salman pointing.

Camels, half a dozen of them, some sitting under the shade of a Ghaf.

More mandi, said Salman and laughed.

Bas bai bas, said Meitha.

It's bhai not bai. Safina didn't teach you anything.

How much further Salman?

We've only been in the car an hour so another hour at least.

Hind tapped her baby pink nails on the window. Bubble Trouble the color was. What funny names the nail colors had. *Call My Agent, Casting Couch, Topless.* She wondered if there would be a parlor in Tayyibah, if she'd be able to change the color. Perhaps a peachy neon orange next. Umm Hadeyah had taken Hind's hand into hers that morning and whispered in her ear. You'll do anything to get attention, maybe we should just chop these fingers off. Her stepmother's wizened face flashed before Hind's eyes. She stood behind



Baba as he closed the door to the Patrol, arms crossed, squinting in the sun, doing little to hide her smile. The woman was ecstatic inside Hind knew, euphoric at the prospect of having Hind sent away for she had never made a secret of the fact that Hind was another woman's child. In front of Baba Umm Hadeyah had taken Hind into her arms, braided her black hair, put her in pretty dresses but behind his back she'd pinched Hind on her legs, threatened her with hot spoons, called her the devil's princess. Your mother was a whore, she'd said to Hind once. And you'll be just like her. The woman was convinced that Hind's mother had been a witch too and that witchy blood now ran in Hind's veins, convinced that Baba's devotion to Hind could be credited to some serious hocus pocus. But Hind never minded the taunting, the twisting of her arm, the whispered insults, she even called the woman Ummi for Baba's sake for in return he gave her gifts he gave none of the other girls. She could see the flames of jealousy that licked at Umm Hadeyah, could see that all the old woman was trying to do was hold onto Baba, Baba who had slipped away from her fingers like sand from a fist years ago. Umm Hadeyah's hysteria was the stuff of tragedies for she would never have the power over him that Hind had. Even now, even with this banishment to Tayyibah, Hind knew Baba did not love her less, that he was not really angry, only afraid, afraid of accepting the event that was just round the corner. She would belong to another man soon and the fear of this made Baba tighten his grip. Even in a crowded room his eyes sought only her and when they'd meet her gaze they'd offer up a wordless story, a private joke as if the two of them were alone. He'd lose himself when he would lose her of this she was certain. She'd come back after the eight weeks with even more power than before. As they'd said goodbye in his study he'd pulled her close. Promise me we won't have to do this again, he'd said.

Am I still getting the Lumina for my birthday? she asked him and left the room smiling because he did not say no.

By the way, guess who's getting married? said Meitha.

Who?

Abdullah and Omar.

The twins! To who?

To two sisters from Sharjah.

A prickly electricity pulsed on the surface of Hind's skin as she recalled the twins faces, or face rather for they were witchingly identical. She hadn't seen her cousins for, she counted on her fingers, eleven years. Eleven years ago they'd stayed over, come to her playroom when she was alone and locked the door behind them. One grabbed Hind's Japanese princess coloring book and colored the princess's face, arms and legs with black ink while the Other undressed her Barbies and sheared off the hair with a pair of scissors. They offered to leave if she would take off her frock. And so she did. Stripped till the only

things left on her were the socks and plimsolls on her feet. They had looked at her body officiously, like doctors, then quietly they'd left. They went to boarding school in England after the summer so Hind never saw them again. They became pilots she heard.

When's the wedding?

March.

I'm going to stop here for petrol, said Salman. Want anything, chips, Pepsi?

Red Bull.

Red Bull for me too.

There's a palm grove if you want to take a walk.

Hind and Meitha got out into the crisp December air. They crossed the road and walked through the gate to the oasis where tall date palms with dusty fronds stood in formation beyond an empty car park laid with gravel.

Ew! Meitha shrieked and turned to leave.

What is it? said Hind.

Nothing, let's go. Meitha tugged at Hind's sleeve.

Tell me.

It's nothing!

And then Hind saw them. On the gravel, not just one or two but dozens of used condoms, scattered like washed up jellyfish. She rushed to the Patrol. Salman was already inside, his fingertips orange with the dust of twisty cheese chips.

You don't want to take a walk?

No, no, said Meitha. Let's go.

Hind opened her can of Red Bull and sipped. Salman overtook a horse truck and Hind saw for a moment the horse's eyes in the window. She'd miss her Buraq, Buraq who'd been with her from the start, from whom she had no secrets because she would whisper them into his ear. Black bodied with a white star on his head, she'd been afraid of him once, briefly when she was fifteen, after a fall and Farah had gotten her back up. Farah who wore her long black hair in French braids, who was as tall as a man and just as strong, who'd said to Hind once that at night she turned into a horse herself. They'd been alone sugar cubes in palms, storm clouds gathering outside when Farah had slipped her fingers through Hind's and led her into an empty stable. She told Hind her heart ached with the burden of a forbidden secret, that she had a wild horse inside her that was tearing to break free, that he took control of her at night, that the truth of herself felt like a boot on the chest. She pressed Hind's hand on her left breast and there was the dum dum, dum dum, dum dum. Please let me, Farah had said as she'd placed her lips on Hind's parted them with her tongue, leaned her tall body into hers. Hind understood then what Farah had meant by the wild horse, for she could feel it take over her. Her arms and legs no

longer her own yielded to the steed, letting him charge through her veins, her hips, her back. As thunder clapped outside Hind had felt a jolt, a gush of energy, like waves leaving her center, coursing slowly to her edges where they crashed into one another then ebbed away. That night she had a dream and in it there was Baba illuminating light as he smiled and placed a hand on her shoulder, telling her that try as she might, he would always have the grand total of her secrets, that he alone was her keeper, that it was he who would steward her from planet to planet, sun to sun, moon to moon, to wherever it was that she needed to go. She woke with a start and Baba's face hung there in front of her, the afterimage burned into her eyes, refusing to fade until she stared for a minute into the morning sun which was bright and clean because the rain had cleared away the smog and settled the dust.

Farah wasn't at the center for Hind's next lesson and all Hind ever learned from the office was that she'd gone to train in Abu Dhabi and wasn't ever coming back.

You see those mountains, used to be leopards in there, said Salman. But they're finished.

Hind recalled seeing the cats at the zoo. Sleeping, bored, forlorn. There had been an info board outside the enclosure about how they'd been hunted to near extinction. Mostly by villagers who were protecting their goats. Hind looked into the distance at the mountains and imagined herself on four legs, on the edge of a rocky cliff, at once the hunter and the hunted. Is this what Baba saw in her? Was he even now watching her prowl on the edges of the world he'd made for her, a world of ponies, Parisian apartments, Hermes handbags, Miu Miu shoes. In the action of sending her away he was actually pulling her in close. He'd be there in Tayyibah, in the rocky hills, in the clouds, in the green watching her, his big hand blocking the sun, his loud laugh creating a deafening silence.

She would play his wordless game, she'd go to Tayyibah and sit still for eight weeks on musty cushions, take walks with Meitha to the parameter of the farm, pet the baby goats, eat the rice and lamb every day for lunch and dinner. She would watch Umm Al Ghaith make luqaimat, khabeesa, balaleet, open her mouth for these and the dates stuffed with nuts. At night she would step out to see the stars that were impossible to find back home because orange city lights clouded the view and turned the sky into a purple haze. No, the night sky in Tayyibah would be clear, deep and black and she would gaze into it as Umm Al Ghaith would tell her and Meitha stories of girls who cavorted with djinns and woke up to find their hair turned to snakes.

She'd come back as the leopard Baba wanted her to be and the two of them would continue their stalking. He'd get her the Lumina SS she asked for—what the racing boys called the death driver—and she would throw her arms around his neck, kiss his cheek,

let the roughness of his beard scratch the skin of her lips. She'd ask for painting school in London and to this too he would say yes and ask why she was always finding a way to stab him in the heart. Hind closed her eyes and recalled not a vision but a scent instead. Leathery oud, tobacco smoke, black pepper, burnt roses. Baba's scent. Then his voice. If only I wasn't your Baba. He'd said that to her when they had been alone in the majlis one evening.

Whatever he was trying to save her from, she'd known its truth already. She'd heard it from him after all.

## We Pay Cash

Because the guy is 45 minutes early, Leah has to throw on her clothes still dripping wet from the shower. His name is Dimitri and he's younger than she expected. Mid-40s with a droopy mustache, and a pregnant looking stomach. *A sharpie*, she hears her mother say. *Someone who'll fleece you with no regrets*. He walks through the apartment quickly, taking in the broken-down furniture and stained carpeting. Leah has had two other dealers come already. She knows what might be valuable: 29 pieces of majolica, some costume jewelry from the 1950s, a Pyrex set, a stamp collection. Everything else is either broken or falling apart. *Mom had a lot of stuff*, Dimitri says, pausing to examine the bottom of a majolica teapot. Unsigned. Her mother used to wander through the apartment touching the majolica as if it might disappear when no one was looking, stroking a vase's hidden curves, the green and blue ceramic pieces precious as gemstones that were too big to wear. Leah shows him the one Wedgwood plate in the collection, tells him her mother was a shopaholic. He laughs. The others did too. But her mother kept spending as if it were Monopoly money. This condo, with its two mortgages and small terrace, the leaky toilet and original kitchen, is Leah's inheritance.

Dimitri can tell the daughter is overwhelmed. In his line of work, he's seen it all. Valuable paintings decaying in attics, hoarders and hagglers, relatives fighting over sterling teaspoons. He marks everything up 70 percent, sells it at the Antiques and Design Center in Miami. He pays cash. Sometimes people ask about his accent. He lies, claims he's Ukranian. Which is only half a lie because his mother's from Odessa. It's bad to be Russian right now. Hospitals bombed, grain silos bombed, apartment buildings sheared in half, an entire country reduced to rubble. Just this morning, he read about a woman found half naked in a storm cellar. She'd been kept there for months before the soldiers finally strangled her.

Dimitri is talking about how young people don't collect majolica anymore. Or Pyrex. Or stamps. *I can give you maybe \$400 for all of it*. Leah knows it's too little. Her mother spent \$8,000 on majolica in the 80s. Leah has the receipts. But her mother's stuff is practically worthless now, the way a new car depreciates in value the moment you drive it off the lot. With the funeral expenses, taxes, the mortgage balance, the money she has to pay Hunks Hauling Junk to cart everything away, she owes \$157,000 she doesn't have. *Fuck you, Mom*. Instantly, she hears her mother counter, *is that a nice way to talk?*

*Is this her*, Dimitri asks, picking up a photo. The woman in the picture has old world glamor: bobbed hair, Kewpie doll lips, an impish smile. *Yeah*, says the daughter. *About fifty years ago*. There's something about the eyes that Dimitri recognizes. Not fear exactly, but foreboding, as if the woman in the photo knows none of it ends well. Dimitri offers ten

bucks. *You can keep the picture*, he says. *I just want the frame.* *Sure*, says the daughter. *Why the hell not?* Her voice sounds muffled, like she's choking back tears as she heads to the basement for a carton and some shopping bags he can pack everything in.

When it comes down to it, Leah thinks, watching him wrap the majolica in newspaper, her mother liked stuff better than people. *Stuff doesn't talk back*, her mother announces. Her mother's voice is faint but audible. *Stuff doesn't hurt you.* Leah says, *When did I ever hurt you?*

Dimitri pauses, brandishing a teacup in one hand. *What?* The daughter looks as nervous as a runaway cat.

*Nothing. Could you hurry up? I have another appointment at eleven.*

These Americans, always in a rush. They have too many possessions. You could fit what he owns in a duffel bag. A news alert pings on his phone. *Russian Missiles Bomb Maternity Ward* and below it, a woman on a stretcher clutching a baby that looks like a broken doll. He blinks, stares at the baby, the way its neck tilts. The baby will never grow up, never own a dish, or get married, never have a daughter of her own. There are worse things in this world, he thinks, staring hard at Leah, than not being able to sell a stamp collection. There's suffering and violence. Random violence that hits when you least expect it – when you're washing a glass, sitting on the toilet, feeding your newborn baby.

After Dimitri leaves, Leah fixes herself a peanut butter sandwich, washes it down with flat seltzer. She wanders from room to room. Then it hits her. He'd taken the picture along with the frame. That picture of her mother on the beach at Coney Island. When her mother was young and gorgeous and her life was gift-wrapped with hopeful ribbons. Leah feels worse than when they'd lowered the coffin into the ground, worse than when she realized she never got to say goodbye or undo all the hurtful things they'd said to each other. The word *bereft* comes to mind and she spits it out. *See*, says her mother, more gently this time. *Now you know.*

## Dirt

A couple hours after her son's death, Fraidy Adler found herself in the bathroom, standing before the mirror and remarking at how normal her expression was. Then she raised her fist and hit her stomach as hard as she could. She was pregnant. Almost three months—not yet showing all that much, but with a distinct roundness and a belly button that showed through her shirt. With the aching of the blow, she bent over and vomited in the toilet, clutching herself around the middle, thinking of the not-yet baby living inside her, and feeling the most intense disgust she had ever felt. She wanted to rip herself out. But by the time she flushed and stood up, washing out her mouth in the sink, the disgust dissipated, and all she could feel was pity and love, rubbing her stomach as gently as she could, whispering sorry to the fetus she had just tried to kill.

*Had I tried to kill it?* she thought, extraordinarily calm and reasonable in the moments walking out into the living room, where her daughters were waiting. She supposed she did, at least a little, in that moment—but now, the idea of death made her feel as though she'd turned into a sheet of metal. *Do I want this baby dead?* Each of her pregnancies—this was her fourth—had been difficult, yes, but there was something incredible about the feeling of life growing inside of her, as if she were some kind of minor god. Now, her stomach just felt like a stomach, the fetus like any organ in her body, and her mouth was sour with nausea.

He drowned—her son. His name was Akiva, and he was six years old, and had drowned after a seizure in the bath. He was six; she started letting him bathe on his own a few months back. He had a seizure, lost consciousness, and slipped underwater. Fraidy hadn't realized anything was wrong until an hour later. He always took long baths. He'd refuse to get out until the water went cold. He liked to pretend he was a fish, or a mermaid, and sometimes she would come in to find him with his head lying back on the rim, his eyes closed, his hands waving slowly through the water.

She lost patience at 8:30, wanting to bathe Rivky and put her to bed. The bathroom was locked, which wasn't unusual: he was six and liked his privacy. She knocked. And knocked, and then kicked the door because her knuckles started to hurt. She said, "If you don't answer me right now, I'll make you shower with the door open." She said, "Akiva, I'm serious, answer me." At some point Shoshana came running. At some point Fraidy started throwing her shoulder against the door. When the wood splintered and the knob gave way, she felt silly, thinking of how they'd have to pay to get it fixed, call up a repairman. And then she saw something underwater.

The paramedics had come and gone, and the bath was empty now. The girls were waiting in the living room. Rivky was four, Shoshana eight. They were sitting on the floor, a fifty-piece puzzle spread out in front of them. Someone had already thrown a towel over

the closest mirror. "You can put that piece here," Shoshana said calmly, guiding Rivky's hand. She glanced at the wall, and Fraidy knew instantly that Shoshana had understood everything that transpired, while Rivky had no idea that anything had gone wrong.

"I'm hungry, Mommy," said Rivky as soon as she saw her mother.

"I..." Fraidy's voice trailed away. The window shade was open and it was starting to rain. She could feel water in her throat.

"I'll make you food," Shoshana said. "Mommy's busy, okay?"

"I want Mommy to make me food," said Rivky.

"Well, she can't," Shoshana repeated, a slight note of frustration creeping into her voice. She was only eight, Fraidy realized. "If you come to the kitchen, I'll make you waffles, and I'll even give you extra whipped cream." She looked at her mother. "That's fine, right? For her to have extra whipped cream?"

"She can have extra whipped cream," said Fraidy. As soon as they left the room, she started laughing. She couldn't help it. Whipped cream? Who the hell cared about whipped cream? Her child was dead. She fell, laughing, into the sofa.

She was morning sick at the funeral. She was sat in the front row, so she had to stand up in front of everyone and half-run, half-walk to the bushes so that she could throw up. When she stood and wiped her mouth, she found Shoshana, holding to her elbow. She had Rivky's sippy cup (grape juice and water) in her hand and handed it to her mother, who drank.

When she was back in her seat, she looked over the service, the crowd, the grave. The body was on a board and clothed with a kittel. She imagined the Chevra Kadisha wiping the last of the shampoo out of Akiva's hair, combing it out, and dressing him, tucking the white linen gently under his back, pulling his arms through the sleeves. There was to be no casket. He would go directly into the ground. The rabbi she had known all her life was leading the tefilos. In the rows were everyone she saw around the Monsey community, pushing their kids in strollers, walking back from shul, waiting in the carpool line. Next to her was her friend, Chanalah, patting her every so often on the thigh. Not her husband. Yochanan refused to sit. He stood, wavering, between his mother and the rabbi, his face screwed up and badly covered with one hand. He had rent his shirt at the collar. He hadn't stopped crying since the morning, when he told her he was moving back to his parents' house for the time being. "I just can't," he said, and started sobbing. "I can't, I can't, I can't." She hadn't responded; all she did was look at the wall, waiting for him to calm down.

Since the funeral started, he had his mother clutching to his arm. Every so often he would turn back, crumple into her. Fraidy watched her mother-in-law pat his head gently. Yochanan wiped his eyes with a dirty tissue. The whole thing disgusted Fraidy. Not once had he touched her since he pulled her away from the bath, the front of her shirt soaked through with shampoo bubbles and water. And here he was blubbing away, hanging to his mom. He couldn't control himself at all. She was revolted by him. By the contortion of his face, the weakness, the way he took up all the space with his insistence on acting like a



child.

A hand squeezed her arm. “Let me take you home once this is over,” Chanalah said, following her eyes.

“He’s leaving me,” said Fraidy. She looked at Chanalah. “It’s about time.”

“Oy, mameleh,” said Chanalah, stroking her hand. “Let’s just get through today.”

The men took the board on their shoulders and carried the body, singing, to the grave. Yochanan was the first to shovel in soil, and then everyone was helping, covering and covering. Fraidy knelt. She lifted a handful of earth and, turning her head away from the crowd, stuffed it in her mouth. She gagged, spat it out, and washed her mouth clean with Rivky’s diluted grape juice. When she looked up, Chanalah was watching her, standing still next to the grave. Watching her. She didn’t turn when Fraidy caught her eyes, and she didn’t smile. Fraidy stood and took her place at Chanalah’s side. It was then that Chanalah resumed her consolations, cooing and rubbing Fraidy’s arms. Fraidy blinked hard and came back. But when the service ended and the grave was filled, she could still feel the dirt between her teeth.

“It’s okay to cry,” said Chanalah to Shoshana, who stared at her blankly. “You know, when I was your age, my father passed away. It was very hard, and very sad, and it’s okay to cry.”

“Okay,” said Shoshana.

“Death isn’t easy for kids to understand,” she continued in that high-pitched voice. Fraidy winced.

“I need the bathroom,” said Shoshana, looking at her mother, as if she needed permission. Of all things, Fraidy thought she looked bewildered—not at the prospect of death, but at Chanalah.

“What happened to your brother was tragic,” said Chanalah, “so, so tragic, but he’s with Hashem now.”

Shoshana looked down at the floor they were all sitting on. “I’m going to the bathroom,” she said quietly, and slipped out of the room.

“How are you doing, Fraidy?” said Chanalah, her voice now heavy, hard to swallow.

“What do you think?” She ran a hand over her face.

“Your girls are strong,” said Chanalah. “I don’t know if that’s any comfort right now, but they are. They’ll get through this.”

“Yeah,” said Fraidy, but she was distracted. She thought of Shoshana handing her the water. Rivky whining for food. They’d be fine. It was tough, but they’d be fine. They hadn’t lost a child.

She saw the years come—a fast winding of time, jumping through the scenes. Shoshana and Rivky growing up. The baby in her stomach getting old. She was tired. She couldn’t do it. She was tired. “Do you want them?” she asked Chanalah.

“Want what?”

“The kids.” She watched Chanalah flinch, something awful crossing her face. “Wait a minute. Hear me out. I don’t know if I can do it, and you and Moshe have been trying for

a baby for years—”

“What are you talking about, Fraidy?” said Chanalah.

“I always wanted to be a mother,” she said. “I used to imagine growing old with a million kids running around the house, happy and loud and making the most annoying messes, and I saw the years pass, not smoothly of course, but relatively well. And now I keep looking for that picture but instead I see—something else, and it’s not good. It’s not going to work out for me, Chanalah. It’s not going to be good for me to keep them.”

“You need to rest, Fraidy. You’ve been through a trauma—”

“I know,” she said. She was frustrated; Chanalah wasn’t understanding her at all. “That’s what I’m telling you. Now that there’s been this—this trauma, I can’t have them anymore. I *know* it. I know if I keep them, it’ll go bad, for all of us, and they’re still young, and don’t you want them?”

At the last sentence, she started crying, breathing panickily, but she didn’t feel caught in it. She was somewhere deep inside her head, remarking at how strange it was that she was not breathing, wondering when she had lost control.

“You need to shower and sleep,” said Chanalah gently. She no longer looked afraid, just absolutely sick with pity. “You’ll feel better once you shower and sleep. Let me help you.”

Chanalah walked Fraidy to her bathroom and turned on the bath. “I don’t want to,” mumbled Fraidy, but Chanalah soothed her, whispering *shh, shh*. She helped her undress and guided her into the water. Fraidy barely noticed she was naked. She sat in the warmth as Chanalah washed her hair, wiped her eyes with a towel. The only thing strange was the protrusion of her belly. That she was still a mother, and there was another on the way.

“You have to give a little bit of it away,” said Chanalah as the shampoo dripped down Fraidy’s shoulders. “That’s what I learned after my father passed. You don’t need to hold it all. You just have to give a bit of the pain and the grief to someone and you’ll feel better. I’d go to the grocery store by myself, and the cashier would ask, ‘Where are your parents, sweetheart?’ when I went up to pay, and I’d say, ‘My father’s dead.’ It meant nothing to them, of course. I was a stranger. They winced, and said sorry, and forgot about it the next day, but I’d given a bit of the grief over, and suddenly, I had a little less.”

When her water broke, two weeks early, she called Chanalah. Yochanan had been gone for months. As far as she knew, he was in Lakewood with his parents. They didn’t talk anymore. She didn’t think about it much. It was the morning—the girls were off to school before Fraidy even woke up. Her contractions started quickly after, and she was soon in the hospital, lying in bed, her friend holding tight to her hand. “Just breathe,” said Chanalah. “Just breathe.” And although she was screaming, she was thankful for the pain. It left no room for anything else, any understanding of the process happening to her. All she could feel was the stretching of her vagina, the aching of her stomach, detached from the idea that there was a baby coming out of her. When the doctors placed her wet, crying child in her arms, she was confused. Dazed that it had happened at all, and baffled that it

was a girl. She had been so certain it was going to be a boy. Certain that she was owed one now.

She uncovered her breast and nursed it, Chanalah cooing at her side: “Oh, how adorable,” “What a sweet baby,” “Baruch Hashem she’s a healthy, beautiful girl.” Fraidy watched the child suck and thought it must be retarded. She knew it was her fault: she had hit her stomach, surely messed up its brain. She told herself that she’d love this baby no matter what, but she wasn’t sure that was true.

The baby fell asleep. Fraidy handed her over to the nurse, and let her head drop back against the bed. “You did so well,” said Chanalah.

“I’m tired,” she whimpered.

“I know,” said Chanalah soothingly. “I know.”

“I thought it would be a boy.”

“What will you name her?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’d kill for a baby,” said Chanalah.

Fraidy looked away. She wanted to throw up. Chanalah’s face was tight, watching hers.

“Tova,” she said. Her voice was hoarse. “I’ll name her Tova.”

“Tova is a beautiful name.”

Fraidy slept and woke. The night passed between nursing and drifting off with her head tucked into her shoulder. When the sun came through the window, Chanalah was ready with a wheelchair. “The doctors are discharging you,” she told her. “It’s time to go home.”

The nurse helped her into the wheelchair and placed Tova in her arms. Her body was heavy and tired. Once they got in the car, Tova started crying, and didn’t stop. Fraidy sang to her, rocked her, fed her. It made no difference. And it was irritating. Her ears hurt from the noise.

“Something’s wrong with her,” she said, as Chanalah pulled up to the house.

“Don’t worry,” said her friend, raising her voice so that Fraidy could hear her. “The doctors said she was a healthy baby.”

“She won’t stop.”

“Babies cry, Fraidy.”

“No.” She shook her head. “Something’s wrong with her.”

“You’re just anxious. You need to sleep.”

She relented.

“Mommy!” Rivky rushed at her as soon as she opened the door. “Me and Shoshie cleaned the house!”

“It was supposed to be a surprise,” said Shoshana. “How are you feeling, Ma?”

“Baruch Hashem,” Fraidy said.

“Do you guys want to meet your new sister?” asked Chanalah.

They walked together to the sofa, where Fraidy sat, the baby still crying.

“Hello,” said Shoshana, putting her face close to Tova’s and giving her a kiss. “I’m your

sister.”

“I don’t want a sister,” burst out Rivky.

“She’s jealous that she won’t be the baby anymore,” whispered Chanalah in a loud voice.

“I want Akiva back.” Rivky crossed her arms and threw herself down onto the floor. “I don’t want him to be with Hashem. And I don’t want another sister! I want Akiva to come back.”

Fraidy blinked hard.

“Oh, sheyfele,” said Chanalah. “I don’t know what to say.”

“It’s okay, Rivky,” said Shoshana. She made no move to touch her but instead sat directly across from her and looked her in the eyes. “I get sad, too.”

Fraidy’s arms ached. Her stomach was saggy and sore. Her head pounded. Her boobs hurt so much she thought they might explode. Her fingers wound into her palms, digging in. She held Tova as though she didn’t want her too close. She regretted not hitting her stomach harder that day in the bathroom, bleeding out on the floor, being found the same way she found her son. *You have to give a little bit of it away*, she heard Chanalah say, but she wanted all of it gone.

“Mommy,” said Shoshana. Rivky’s anger had dissipated, and she was now examining Tova’s feet. Shoshana stood before Fraidy, looking at her with her childish, open face. There was something of understanding there. *Children can be old*, thought Fraidy. *And mothers can be young*. It was the only thing she could hold to.

“Let me have her,” said Shoshana. She sat on the couch, smoothed out her skirt, and opened her arms.

Fraidy lifted her and placed her in Shoshana’s hands. Shoshana’s entire body seemed to wrap around her. She was reminded of a kangaroo and a joey. Her hair brushed against Tova’s scalp. She leaned her chin on Tova’s forehead. She kissed her nose, and then looked up at her mother and nodded. She had it. She’d asked for it, and now she had it. Now Fraidy’s teeth were clean.

Tova stopped crying. Fraidy let go, closed her eyes, and sank back, away.

## Slipping Through the Cracks

I pushed open the front door, wondering whether I'd smell spearmint or chamomile tea. My psychiatrist Dr. Linwood alternated between the two. My mind reeled when the only scent I detected was musty couches and a metallic hint of disinfectant.

"Dr. Linwood?" No answer.

I was forty-five minutes early. I'd dawdled, tried on several sets of clothes and matching jewelry before I left my apartment, drove as slowly as I could without pissing off too many motorists, pulled over twice to check Facebook and my voice mail. There's nothing wrong with allowing plenty of time to get somewhere. I could be delayed by a chemical spill, mudslide, bridge collapse, or an Elvis sighting.

It took me a year to get Dr. Linwood's 9:00 AM appointment slot every two weeks. I hated waiting with other patients, lowering their eyes, glancing at people peripherally, or nonchalantly sweeping the room.

Three large aquariums burbled in the room's center. I sat close to one of the motors because I liked the low humming sound, how the vibration calmed me. I envied fish—suspended their entire life in water, to glide or just hang there, buoyed up, assimilating fluid through their gills. Even before I began seeing Dr. Linwood, I studied fish—breathtakingly lovely ones, odd ones, to downright ugly ones. Dr. Linwood had a fair representation of each.

I touched the glass close to a species I hadn't seen before, pale pink body with a red protrusion on top of its head like an exposed brain. A paper-thin silver hatchet fish whizzed by with its drop belly and fins pooched out like ears. Their translucent bodies intrigued and disgusted me. Internal organs right there for the seeing.

When I thought I heard movement in one of the rooms, I approached the hallway leading to what I called the inner sanctum. Was the doctor spying on me?

"Dr. Linwood, are you here?" No answer. *Did she forget to lock up last night?*

She owned her own small practice. Employed no nurse, no office manager. She'd converted an old house to her needs: a series of consult rooms, a bathroom, and waiting room.

Back at the aquariums, I watched two black and white marbled gouramis glide side-by-side, one the shadow of the other. When their long whiskers brushed the shell of a hermit crab, making it skitter alongside a stone gargoye, my stomach lurched. Crabs I did not like.

Dr. Linwood reminded me of the sexy amber-haired older woman played by Cate Blanchett in the Woody Allen movie, *Carol*. I often imagined myself as the young woman Mara Rooney played, who falls in love with Carol.

As I watched a neon tetra, half blue, half yellow, I envisioned three scenarios involving

Dr. Linwood: a male patient mounting her; her pleasuring herself; her spanking a female patient.

Again, I walked to the hallway leading to the consult rooms, listened for sounds of pleasure. "Dr. Linwood?" My heart raced; my lungs kicked into overdrive. I wanted to turn and run out the front door, drive away and never come back. Every first Friday I want to slip through the cracks and not look back. But an equal feeling pulled me down the hall, a similar adrenaline rush as when I contemplated, or was in the middle of, a theft.

I followed the path of worn carpet the color of oatmeal. I asked myself the same question every time I entered Dr. Linwood's hallway. *Who would want carpet the color and lumpiness of oatmeal?* The doors to the two consult rooms were open. With no lights, I could only see a few feet in front of me. Such a gloomy place. Why didn't the doctor brighten it up, paint the walls a cheery tint like tangerine or sea-green, replace the carpets with a warm walnut or whitewashed luxury vinyl plank flooring?

I walked into the room on my right like a cat, all ears and nose. While my eyes adjusted to the semi-darkness, I pulled a wad of tissues from my pocket, peeled one off. It helped me to hold something soft. During my visits, I hold a plush taupe pillow, soft and soothing as rabbit's fur, stroke it as if petting my dog Codger. He's a mix between a Pekingese and a pug. Ugly as a dirty old man, always in my face with his terrible breath. I give him milk bones, take him for regular teeth cleanings. Nothing helps. I guess dogs contract halitosis the same as humans.

Breathing deeply, I scanned the room. Someone could be wedged between the couch and wall, behind the chair, or wrapped in the folds of the heavy mud-brown drapes.

Were my breaths echoed by another fainter rhythm in the far corner behind the tall chest? I picked up a stuffed teddy bear from the couch, smacked it hard against the chest. A small vintage Chinese glass snuff bottle teetered and fell against the chest's marble top, breaking into three chunks.

From my oversized purse I snatched a plastic bag, filled it with the broken pieces, with my tissue gathered any remaining glass slivers, and tied the bag securely closed. Maybe I'd attempt the Japanese practice called *kintsugi*, of gluing the fragments together, seaming them with gold to highlight the broken parts.

I'd wanted to steal the bottle since I spotted it on my first visit. It's three inches tall, painted with an intricate scene of exotic white birds perched in a blooming cherry tree. I'd adored similar snuff bottles at the art museum where I worked until I lost my job after my arrest for shoplifting. I'd never stolen anything from the museum. I loved working there—all that beauty free for the viewing.

Twenty minutes had passed since I entered the building. Again, I thought I heard someone breathing nearby. Was Dr. Linwood in a hidden room, watching me on a surveillance camera? Feverish, I removed my sweater, folded it over the arm of the couch. Still a half hour before my appointment.

I pulled the center drawer of Dr. Linwood's desk half-open, heart racing. Gold and silver pens gleamed side by side in the front compartment. I touched the gold pen Dr.

Linwood wrote with during our sessions. Slim barrel etched with lengthwise stripes which caught the light as she moved her hand, like the facets of her diamond ring. I hope she's happy. I've never asked about her marital status or sexual preference. She knows I've never married, rarely even dated.

I ran my fingernail along the stripe of the pen's barrel and picked it up. It fit my hand. Mm, the pleasure of a good pen. I clicked the ballpoint down, swirled a few blue loops on the note pad. The flow of the nib across the paper reminded me of the way fish glide after one flip of their tail—luxuriously, effortlessly.

I retracted the gold pen's tip and slid it inside the front pocket of my purse. I considered stealing the silver pen as well, but decided against it. Dr. Linwood might believe she had misplaced one pen, but not two from the same drawer. She knew my propensity for stealing. That's how I wound up as her patient, court-ordered to get help as part of my probation for successive shoplifting charges.

Mostly I steal reproductions of vintage Chinese snuff bottles, only the ones I believe I can't live without owning. They're between one-and-a-half and three inches tall, made to fit in the palm of your hand. Some of my favorites are an underwater scene of fish on a coral reef; intricate, gorgeous, terraced gardens; two fire-breathing dragons battling each other; and the Great Wall of China with mountains in the background. When I hold one of my snuff bottles in my palm, I'm taken back to the antique store of my thievery, and I relive the adrenaline rush that mirrors an orgasm.

A scraping sound came from somewhere in the office. Was she videotaping me? Would she refuse to treat me anymore? Report me to the police?

I held my breath. Heard nothing more. My body hummed, vibrating with the irresistible lust to snoop. I creaked open the desk's top side drawer, catalogued the contents: ruler, staple gun, tape dispenser, stack of note pads. In the back I found a jar of Vaseline, a red silk scarf, and a paddle hairbrush. I tied the scarf over my eyes, fantasized how she might use the three objects.

Dr. Linwood wears solid-colored slacks and tops—black, navy, deep burgundy, camel—along with exotic silk scarves, loosely knotted around her neck or tied around her long golden ponytail, puddling on her shoulders. One favorite of mine had a blood-red background gluttoned with lounging big cats: lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars, panthers. Another was van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, sumptuous midnight-blue and gold. I was most intrigued by her opulent purple scarf with two snakes striped iridescent blue, green, silver, and bronze, entwined in an orgasm. That scarf featured in many of my reveries about her.

In the very bottom desk drawer, I found an oblong trinket box. Inside was a small diamond ring, an engagement ring I decided, two ticket stubs from a performance of *Madame Butterfly*, and a man's watch, the face badly scratched. When I held it up to my ear, it still ticked, strong and steady. Had Dr. Linwood's husband or lover worn it? Between my fingers I squeezed a tiny purple velvet drawstring pouch. The sifting sound told me it contained a thick lock of hair. I didn't open the pouch. Saving hair freaks me out.

When I returned the trinket box to its original place, I saw a fat envelope pressed

against the back of the drawer. To dislodge it, I had to pull hard. It felt as if the paper had begun to merge with the wood. It was addressed to Sophia Linwood, postmarked fifteen years ago.

I took a few deep breaths, glanced around the room, before opening it. Twelve handwritten pages on lined loose-leaf. The letter began, "Dear Sophia, I don't expect you to ever forgive me, but I want you to understand why I did what I did."

Goosebumps rose on my arms. I scanned the closing, "Love, Gerald," carefully replaced the letter in the envelope, and buried it in my purse. Sliding the drawer shut, I heard a howling noise outside.

I ran to the window facing the woods. Trees dense enough to hide a body. Dr. Linwood's building stood alone at the end of a long driveway that dead-ended at the bottom of a hill. I strained my eyes to see into the tangle of trees—emerging green of leaves interspersed with purple balls of redbud blooms. No sign of Dr. Linwood's spaniel, Cocky. Her chain remained attached to the clothesline by a ring, so she had free run of the grass edging the woods. I worried about ticks.

Dr. Linwood brought Cocky to work in every season but winter. Sometimes she got tangled up and barked, and the doctor's shoulders tensed higher and higher, until she went to untangle Cocky. After my sessions, I played with Cocky. Her name fit. She had a strut, tail held high, that taunted, *Look at me, bitch*.

A murder of crows swooped past the window, cawing. I ran from the office. The last time crows crossed my path, my ferret died.

Sitting behind the steering wheel, I decided to wait until ten minutes before my appointment to re-enter the office. I used the stolen pen to draw a zebra fish on my palm. The ballpoint skimmed across my skin, ink a rich purplish-blue. I twirled the shaft in my hand. Sunlight glinted off the etched lines, swirled diamond patterns on the windshield, dashboard, my arms. I closed my eyes, imagined myself a blue tang whisking to the ocean's surface, sunlight glittering off my scales.

When I put Dr. Linwood's pen back in my purse, I removed the envelope. The return address read "Gerald Kaeseler, 2021 Hobart Ln, Jacinta, Alaska." I quickly slid it back inside my purse, zipped it closed. I could wait to read the letter. I'm a patient person.

The crows flew past the windshield of my car. What if I never went back inside, never saw Dr. Linwood again? I could wait and see if the courts got hold of me. My probation wasn't up yet, but you never know. Sometimes people fall through the cracks. I might get lucky.

I re-entered the waiting room. Still no aroma of brewing tea. The only sound was the low hum of the aquarium motors, the faint gurgle of water. I sat at the center aquarium, watched the cherry barb wiggle in and out of a skull's eyes and mouth, flipping its filmy tail.

I had lists of my favorite fish categorized by size, color, species I wanted to own, ones that gave me the creeps like Dr. Linwood's lionfish—six inches long, all dangling whiskers and tentacles. Or her dwarf spotted frog, her albino frog, and the pink anemone that



resembled disemboweled intestines.

Dr. Linwood said I should get some fish; pets are therapeutic. But I already had Codger and his bad breath. Would I be satisfied with a few goldfish in a tank? I did not have Dr. Linwood's money. I could barely afford Codger.

A noise sounded below, creaking followed by huffing. A rattle, as of chains. Hair on my arms rose. I forgot there was a basement to the office. I heard footsteps coming up the stairs toward me. "Cocky, you stay down there for a while. Chase bugs and mice."

Sophia peeked into the waiting room. "Olivia, have you been here long?"

"No, I just got here."

"Sorry. Cocky insisted on a long walk. Come on back."

I followed her down the hall. She wore caramel-colored slacks, a fluid V-neck blouse, and a sheer scarf of red, yellow, orange, pink, and violet dahlia flowers. I'd longed to steal one of her scarves. This one made my mouth water. Observing the way her slacks cupped her firm bottom, I pictured her body veiled with only the translucent dahlia scarf, imagined speaking aloud her beautiful, fluid first name.

We entered the room where I broke the painted snuff bottle. My eyes traveled to the chest's marble top. Along the way I saw the sweater I'd laid across the couch arm. My heart raced. I quickly lowered myself onto the couch, snatched the sweater, folded it across my lap. As I watched Dr. Linwood open the center drawer, roll the pens back and forth, a puzzled look on her face, I fingered the seed pearls around my sweater's neckline.

Her hand surfaced with a pen I hadn't seen, one with a cloisonné barrel. Her eyes moved to the window, hesitated on the chest's marble top, before examining my face. Had it all been a setup, a test to see if I'd steal? How long would it be before she missed the letter from Gerald? Did she read it daily, weekly, monthly, only on holidays, anniversaries?

If she demanded to search my purse, I could run for the door. Maybe she'd prosecute me, maybe not. There's always the chance I'd slip through the cracks.

I'd been in tight spots before. I'd wiggle out of this one too. Like Sophia's black-velvet molly, wriggling in and out of the skull, barely fitting through the eyes, I would emerge into clear cool water that buoyed me up and carried me away.

## Boquisucio

Breakfast tasted like soap. Every bite of egg and sip of coffee coated my tongue in a lathery aftertaste. The mug and plate I used had just come out of the dishwasher, so I emptied the appliance and dumped everything in the sink. The dark olive dishware was cracked and chipped, unsuitable for anyone but a single man in his late thirties who never had company. When I left home fifteen years ago, my mom gave me the dishes we had owned since I was a kid. I assumed the gift was a show of support for my venture into what she called gringo adulthood (living alone while unmarried), but now I wondered if the gesture was a ploy to unburden herself of outdated, deteriorating plates and cups.

The thought of having to wash the dishes by hand irked me, but I was more annoyed at having to endure my landlord's overblown sense of mechanical acumen. Like most Colombian men of my father's generation, his intractable macho ego would force him to fiddle with the dishwasher himself and refuse to call a repair company until I stopped paying rent or threatened to kick in his teeth. My stepfather put on similar airs whenever the car broke down. *No es nada*, he like to proclaim with matador bravado before lumbering his melting-snowman physique to the driveway. My mom always stood nearby, phone at the ready, waiting for the moment he held out his greased-up hands as proof the issue was, inexplicably, beyond his expertise. She'd then feign awe at the complexities of automotive repair while dialing the mechanic.

I stared at the dishware piled high in the sink, a crumbling ceramic monument to my childhood. The sight reminded me of the time my mom lost her shit because I let dirty dishes accumulate on the kitchen counter. I must have been eleven or twelve, and we had just moved into a new apartment, the first place we lived that had a dishwasher. She refused to use it, claiming she didn't have one in Colombia and that washing dishes was meditative, a chance to scrub away the day's stress. I promised to transfer everything to the dishwasher after I played videogames, but she yanked the console plug from the outlet and demanded I wash the dishes by hand immediately. *Déjate de lujos y obedéceme*. I don't know what angered me more, the interruption to my game or hearing her call a dishwasher a luxury and my proposal to run the appliance an act of disobedience. *Don't be so fucking Third World!* It was the first time I yelled at her in English, the first time I used my second language in her presence for a purpose other than interpreting. I doubt either of us knew what Third World meant, but there was no mistaking my intention to wield bilingualism as a weapon of intimidation. She leaned her long, wiry torso over me, fists clenched, lips pursed. *Boquisucio!* Foulmouthed. She flashed me the same look of heartache and defiance she gave my father and all the other abusive, alcoholic assholes who followed. She had never looked at me like that before.

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The food I ordered tasted like soap. The resurgence of the foul sensation made me want to jab my fork in the waiter's throat. I hadn't finished breakfast, and now some goddamn dishwasher's incompetence would force me to skip lunch. I raised the cutlery to my eyes, then the glass, then the plate, scrutinizing each object for signs of spummy residue and to determine which one I'd hurl at the manager before demanding a free meal.

"I don't know what's bothering you, but don't you dare embarrass me." My sister glared at me with bright owl eyes. Our mom's eyes.

I wanted to point out I couldn't embarrass her more than I did at her wedding but was too focused on smothering an impulse to gag as the taste of soap spread down the back of my throat. Between tedious anecdotes about her husband and toddler, my sister reminded me that mom wasn't getting any younger and that, as the oldest, I had a moral obligation to call and check up on her. I didn't respond. I was too busy thinking about her wedding. Our father's mortifying toast, the gall of a man who never paid a penny in child support whimpering about how much he sacrificed for his kids. Every rum-soaked word conjured more suppressed trauma: the nights my sister and I huddled under the blanket to drown out the sounds of smashed dishes and overturned furniture, the afternoons we cried on the front stoop because our father broke his promise to visit.

I don't remember tackling my father or breaking his jaw. A dissociative fugue, a know-it-all girlfriend once told me. Whatever it was, I can only recall the sight of my mom and sister scrambling to the dais, their bodies wrapped in dresses so grossly pink they could have only been chosen by a bride denied a happy childhood. My mom grabbed the mic and tried to restore order, pacing around like a flamingo. It was the first time I saw her not as my mom but as a woman, a woman who gave the men in her life more kindness than she ever received in return.

"Hey, Flamenca." I knew I'd ruin our lunch date, but I couldn't bear thinking about the wedding anymore. "Does this food taste like soap to you?"

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I didn't make dinner when I got home from work despite my stomach's angry demands that I stop ignoring it. Instead, I ran to the bathroom and brushed my teeth over and over and over. The revolting taste intensified. I slammed down the brush and gargled mouthwash until the alcohol burned my throat. I might as well have emptied the soap dispenser in my mouth. I clenched my fists and looked in the mirror. Wan, pursed lips. An unsettling look in my eyes. A look of desperation and fury.

My cell phone rang. It was my sister, no doubt calling to further berate me for saying lunch was disgusting. I declined the call. The ringing immediately started again. The irritating sound exacerbated the feeling of gnawing on a wet bar of soap. I considered searching for a scouring pad to scrape against my tongue. The coppery taste of blood would have been a welcome relief.

The phone rang a third time. I pressed my hands over my ears until the noise stopped. Silence, thick and acrid like the vomit gurgling in my esophagus, permeated the room,

punctuated by the *ding* of a new voicemail. I glared at the screen. In all the years my stepfather had been in my life, he had never called me. Not once.

*Hola, soy ... it's me ... Tu mamá ... umm ... slipped in the shower ... her bad hip, sabes? ... maybe you didn't know ... anyway ... she hit her head ... I tried to help, pero ... He struggled to maintain the façade of impenetrable toughness I abhorred. Yet though his voice never broke, he was clearly broken. When I found her ... ella ya ... muerta ... I'll take care of the funeral.*

I dropped the phone and walked to the kitchen, worried the taste of soap would never go away, worried it would. The dishware was still piled high in the sink, a crumbling ceramic monument to family love. I ran the hot water until it singed my skin. And I washed the dishes.





# NONFICTION

The word "NONFICTION" is rendered in a light blue, textured, sans-serif font. The letters have a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance with small white speckles and faint blue outlines. A diagonal band, composed of a red upper half and an orange lower half, passes through the center of the text from the bottom-left to the top-right.





## Phantom Body Syndrome

It starts to hit around the time you get regularly, effortlessly she/her-ed without even trying. When the laser's done its job and the shadow isn't visible and you can go a few days without shaving and you no longer feel the need to put on concealer every time you step outside. When you get ma'am-ed over the phone when you're sure the voice is a dead giveaway, remembering all the time you spent reading the Dune series out loud in your brand new femme voice, trying on voice while reading about Voice, imagining yourself as some Bene Gesserit picture of grace, remembering that Paul Atreides was supposed to be a girl but his mother had other plans, decided on his AGAB in utero, she had that power, but that's just mothers, isn't it?

It'll make all the other moments stand out in your recollection: talking with your mom over the phone, through text, in person, and her somehow finding a way to misgender you or, failing that, say or ask something wildly inappropriate, put you on the spot, make you explain yourself, make her feel comfortable with your existence. The moments will add up like secondhand cigarettes out of windows on drives, a third of a Coke can spilled out the window before she'd turn the engine over, light up. That one funny time, as a kid, when you told her you know you're a "boy" but that you feel more like a girl most of the time. The fact that she still enrolled you in an all-boys Catholic school after that.

You won't want to be so bitter, so angry, so resigned. The hypochondriac had cried wolf so many times over the years, especially when called out on her shit, threatening cryptic diagnoses after blow-up fights, cancer as a comeback, that it was only a matter of time before something finally caught up with her. Everyone's gotta die of something eventually.

You read of face dancers in Herbert's sci-fi mythos, how easy it is for them to completely change every part of their body, assume a new form, become someone new entirely. But someone inevitably finds them out, traps them in a corner, cuts them down. A shapeshifting time bomb is what they are.

Even your fucked-up fiction was overly optimistic, you realize when you're in gallows-mode. Your first novel's protagonist came back to his hometown to make peace with his estranged mother before she died of the cancer she'd always wanted, and it wasn't perfect, hardly a feel-good ending, but there was something, anything that wasn't this self-directed told-you-so, realizing that after all those years, all she changed about herself was her restraint in saying what she really thought, that maybe the fuck-yous and the shouted insults stopped, maybe she learned how to sprinkle some sugar over her interactions, but there was nothing underneath. There was just nothing.

You can't remember the term when it hits you, so you Google "ghost limb" and hope the internet will throw you a bone. It does, and so you transplant the word, find the exact

feeling: phantom body syndrome. When you look at photos from before your transition, you cannot recognize the person you see. You don't look like a femme version of your past self, you look like an entirely new woman. So why these phantom feelings and thoughts, these glimmer-whispers of who you were, what you looked and felt like? Self-loathing like a cough you can't kick, taste of iron in the back of your throat. You're done. You did the thing. You reached the other side. So why these ghosts of a you that never really was?

You find out about the heart attack through your little brothers, the clogged arteries too, the impending bypass surgery. When you hear these things, you cannot process them, or you won't, so you go back to work, you write copy and you do a good job and you finish one assignment, start another. You want to cry later, you think you should cry, but the person you'd be preemptively grieving, you realize, isn't an actual person at all. Not your mother but the concept of a mother, the mother you could've had, should've had, and even the novel you're writing right now is an attempt to keep reality at bay, look at the alternate paths a life can take, all the ways the here and now can be made to be not here, not now. You want to cry. Maybe this is the way you cry.

In the universe of *Dune*, cycles occur and recur, history repeats again and again, even when humanity is hardly recognizable anymore, off and into an unfathomable future, a great Scattering. You want to forgive her. You want to give her another chance. You've hurt people, you tell yourself. You remember that she was hurt by her mother, a deep, unclosing wound she never got treatment for, so she cut you open instead, gave you a matching hole so she wouldn't feel so alone.

You don't know if this is the end or just another end. You don't know when the pain will stop, the phantom rememberings, the dysphoria and feeling like you need to prove something, to make something out of your existence, to be exceptional. But maybe that's just another trap. Maybe it's enough to be a person, to suture your wounds, not give any more to anyone else: to do no harm. Maybe it's okay to not be okay and to sit with that. Accept it. To breathe and watch as the ghost passes you by, goes out and through the far wall.





# BIOGRAPHIES

The word "BIOGRAPHIES" is written in a bold, light blue, textured font. The letters have a speckled, organic appearance. A diagonal ribbon, colored in shades of red and orange, passes behind the text, creating a sense of depth and movement.



## **Terry Belew**

Terry Belew lives in rural Missouri and is a Poetry Editor for *The Good Life Review*. He received his MFA from the University of Nebraska. His work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in journals such as *Meridian*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Storm Cellar*, and *Tar River Poetry*, among many others.

## **Bryan Betancur**

Bryan Betancur is a Spanish professor in the Bronx. His fiction appears in *Acentos Review*, *Five South*, *Litro*, *Hispanic Culture Review*, *The Rush*, and elsewhere. Connect with him on X @BetancurBryan.

## **Dustin Brookshire**

Dustin Brookshire's chapbooks include *Never Picked First For Playtime* (Harbor Editions, 2023), *Love Most Of You Too* (Harbor Editions, 2021), and *To The One Who Raped Me* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2012). He is the co-editor of *Let Me Say This: A Dolly Parton Poetry Anthology* (Madville Publishing, 2023), which was named to the 2024 "Books All Georgians Should Read" list by the Georgia Center for the Book. Find him online at [dustinbrookshire.com](http://dustinbrookshire.com).

## **Charlie Coleman**

Charlie Coleman is a writer based in New York City studying English at Columbia University. His work has previously been published in *Quarto Magazine*, *ANGLES*, and *ZENIADA*. His writing is often inspired by his interest in philosophy, theatre, literary theory, and his dedicated love of people-watching.

## **Isabelle Doyle**

Isabelle Doyle is a Graduate Council Fellow and Truman Capote Literary Scholar at the University of Alabama. Her poems, stories, and chapbooks have been published by *Poets.org*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Typo Magazine*, *Jersey Devil Press*, *Bending Genres*, *The West Review*, *Ghost Parachute*, *The Chiron Review*, *DIALOGIST*, *Jacar Press*, and elsewhere. She received the 2023 Academy of American Poets University & College Poetry Prize at the University of Alabama, first place in the 2023 Elizabeth Meese Prize in Creative Nonfiction, third place in the 2023 Jerome K. Phipps Prize in poetry, three Pushcart Prize nominations, a Best of the Net nomination, a Best Microfiction nomination, and a Best Small Fictions nomination.

## **Kristina Erny**

Kristina Erny (she/her) is a third-culture poet and visual artist who grew up in South Korea. She is the author of *Elijah Fed by Ravens* (Solum Literary Press, 2023) and holds an MFA from the University of Arizona. Her poems and art have appeared in *Southern Humanities Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Yemassee*, *Blackbird*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Rattle*, and elsewhere. A lifelong expatriate, she currently teaches high schoolers literature, creative writing, and drama in Shanghai, China.

### ARTIST STATEMENT

These broadsides are an obsession of mine. These two were created using an accumulative method starting with watercolor, then adding forms to complete the composition in oil pastel, India ink, and then text. The text on each of them comes from two poems in my debut collection of poetry, *Elijah Fed by Ravens* (Solum Literary Press). "Black Feather" features lines from the title poem. Both works explore the tension of living in the body and of having a spirit and a soul. As Richard Rohr writes in his work *Everything Belongs*, "the biblical human is clearly tripartite." Lucille Clifton says that poems (artmaking) are her "way of living in the world" - it is the same for this artist. There are delineations in both works which hint at separation and distance and longing, but there is softness too, a calling out, and a reaching from self to spirit, spirit to soul, soul to God. Body, spirit, and soul are experienced simultaneously, brought to clarity in moments of great suffering and moments of great love. "We bear the mystery of God" (Rohr).

## **Diamond Forde**

Diamond Forde is the author of *Mother Body*, a 2022 Kate Tufts Discovery award finalist. Her work has appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *Ninth Letter*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, and more. You can find out more at her website: [www.diamondforde.com](http://www.diamondforde.com).

## **Karen George**

Karen George is author of the poetry collections *Swim Your Way Back* (2014), *A Map and One Year* (2018), *Where Wind Tastes Like Pears* (2021), and forthcoming *Caught in the Trembling Net* (2024). She won Slippery Elm's 2022 Poetry Contest, and her short story collection, *How We Fracture*, which won the Rosemary Daniell Fiction Prize, was released by Minerva Rising Press January 2024. Her prose appears in *Adirondack Review*, *Valparaiso Fiction Review*, *Atticus Review*, *Louisville Review*, and *NonBinary Review*. Her website is: <https://karenlgeorge.blogspot.com/>.

## **Reyzi Grace**

Reyzi Grace is a poet, translator, short story writer, and post-Soviet lesbian Jew from Alaska. Her work has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, named a finalist for the Jewish Women's Poetry Prize and Best Literary Translations, and featured in *Room*, *Rust & Moth*, *the Times of Israel*, and elsewhere. By day, she is a public librarian in Minneapolis—by night, a poetry editor for *Psaltery & Lyre* and *Cordella*. You can find more of her at [reyzigrace.com](http://reyzigrace.com) and on Twitter/Bluesky @reyzigrace.



## **Kelly Gray**

Kelly Gray is a writer and educator living with her family in a small cabin nine miles and seven fence posts away from the ocean, deep. Gray's recent work can be found in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Storm Cellar*, *Witness Magazine*, *Rust & Moth*, and *Action, Spectacle*, among other places, and her collections include *Instructions for an Animal Body* (Moon Tide Press) and *Tiger Paw, Tiger Paw, Knife, Knife* (Quarter Press, Gold Medal winner from IPPY). She was a recent participant in the Kenyon Review Poetry Workshop, the recipient of the Tusculum Review Chapbook Prize for her manuscript "The Mating Calls // of a// Specter", and the Neutrino Prize from Passages North. When she's not writing, she teaches rural youth while they speculate a just+poetic world.

## **Meredith Herndon**

Meredith Herndon is a writer and editor currently living in Virginia. She has an MFA from the University of California Davis, where she won the Celeste Turner Wright Poetry Award sponsored by the Academy of American Poets. Her poems have been published in *The Seventh Wave*, *Faultline*, *Sundog Lit*, *Copper Nickel*, *poets.org*, and elsewhere. She is currently a Guest Editor for *Palette Poetry*. You can find her on instagram @mertleher

## **Raja'a Khalid**

Raja'a Khalid is a Saudi-born, Dubai-based (and raised) artist and writer. She has an MFA in Art from Cornell University and has exhibited in London, New York, Basel, Vienna, Paris, Rotterdam, Madrid, Dubai and Athens. Her short fiction has previously appeared in *Vestoj*.

## **Mina Khan**

Mina Khan is a Korean-Pakistani America poet from New York, currently based in Chicago. Her work spans across nations, generations, to discuss the role of the woman, cyclical violence, tenderness, and the everyday. She was awarded an honorary mention by the American Academy of Poets and authored the chapbook, *MON-monuments, monarchs & monsters* (Sputnik & Fizzle, 2020.) She holds an MFA from Columbia University, and has been featured or is forthcoming in *Epiphany Magazine*, *Passengers Journal*, *Pigeon Pages*, *the Margins*, and more.

## **Anoushka Kumar**

Anoushka Kumar (she/her) is a student and writer from India, with work forthcoming or published in *Poetry Northwest*, *DIALOGIST*, *Rogue Agent Journal*, and elsewhere. She likes wood-panelled flooring and Phoebe Bridgers. Find more of her at [anoushkakumar.carrd.co](http://anoushkakumar.carrd.co).

## **Cate Latimer**

Cate Latimer is a poet from Portland, Oregon, and an undergraduate student at Brown University. She is the founder and publisher at Stepping Stone Publishing, a student-focused publishing company. In her free time, she writes for her college newspaper and leads trips outdoors.

## **BEE LB**

BEE LB is an array of letters, bound to impulse; a writer creating delicate connections. they have called any number of places home; currently, a single yellow wall in Michigan. they have been published in *FOLIO*, *Figure 1*, *The Offing*, and *Harpur Palate*, among others. their portfolio can be found at [twinbrights.carrd.co](http://twinbrights.carrd.co)

## **Grace Marie Liu**

Grace Marie Liu is a Chinese-American poet from Michigan. A 2024 YoungArts National Winner with Distinction in Poetry and an alumna of the Adroit Journal Summer Mentorship Program and the Iowa Young Writers' Studio, her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Minnesota Review*, *Sundog Lit*, and *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, among others. She serves as an Editor-in-Chief for *Polyphony Lit*.

## **Luiza Maia**

Luiza Maia is a Brazilian artist currently based in San Francisco, where she received an MFA degree from the Academy of Art University. Prior to moving to California, Luiza worked as a fashion and costume designer in Rio de Janeiro before discovering her passion for fine arts at the School of Visual Arts and The Art Students League of New York.

### ARTIST STATEMENT

My interest in past cultures led me to create the Nostalgia series, with the intent to showcase antique objects that bring back memories and invite the viewer to think about times when things were done in a different manner.

Antique stores have been a familiar place to me ever since I was a costume designer in Brazil and used to dive in the hidden stories of dust covered garments. Now, as an artist, these stores are still where my creative process begins. My eyes look for objects that are meaningful to me, objects that I grew up around at my family's home, or that are aesthetically pleasing.

These objects carry stories from the decades in which they were used. In order to represent the mood of those time periods in my paintings, I develop a background design for each of them inspired by patterns and colors that were popular in clothes and interiors during those times.

## Riley Manning

Riley Manning is a Mississippi writer living in Tupelo. A graduate of Millsaps College and the University of Tampa, his work has appeared in *Hobart*, *Archetype*, *Rejection Letters*, *Bridge Eight*, and elsewhere. When he isn't writing, he is boxing.

## Sarah Mills

Sarah Mills is a Pushcart-nominated poet whose poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *HAD*, *Rust & Moth*, *The Shore*, *Gone Lawn*, *Unbroken*, *Up the Staircase*, *SoFloPoJo*, *Beaver Mag*, *MoonPark Review*, *Miniskirt Mag*, and elsewhere. You can visit her at [sarahmillswrites.com](http://sarahmillswrites.com), and on Bluesky-@sarahmillswrites.

## Faisal Mohyuddin

Faisal Mohyuddin is the author of *Elsewhere: An Elegy* (Next Page Press, 2024), *The Displaced Children of Displaced Children*, and *The Riddle of Longing*. He teaches English at Highland Park High School in suburban Chicago and creative writing at Northwestern University's School of Professional Studies; he also serves as a Master Practitioner with the global not-for-profit Narrative 4 and is a visual artist.

## Caridad Moro-Gronlier

Caridad Moro-Gronlier is the author of *Tortillera* (TRP 2021), winner of The TRP Southern Poetry Breakthrough Series and the chapbook *Visionware* (FLP 2009). She is a Contributing Editor for *Grabbed: Poets and Writers Respond to Sexual Assault* (Beacon Press, 2020) and Associate Editor for *SWWIM Every Day* an online daily poetry journal. Find her online at [caridadmoro.com](http://caridadmoro.com).

## Marcus Myers

Marcus Myers lives in Kansas City, MO, where he teaches and serves as a co-founding and managing editor of *Bear Review*. Author of *Cloud Sanctum* (Bottle Cap Press, 2022), his poems have appeared in or are forthcoming from *The Common*, *The Cortland Review*, *The Florida Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *The Laurel Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Poetry South*, *RHINO*, *Salt Hill*, *South Florida Poetry Review*, *Sink Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Windfall Room* and elsewhere.

## Liza Olson

Liza Olson is the author of the novels *Here's Waldo*, *The Brother We Share*, and *Afterglow*. A Best of the Net nominee, Best Small Fictions nominee, finalist for Glimmer Train's Very Short Fiction Award, and 2021 Wigleaf longlister in and from Chicagoland, she's been published in *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Cleaver*, *Pithead Chapel*, and other fine places. One of her proudest achievements was getting to run *(mac)ro(mic)* for four incredible years. Find her online at [lizaolsonbooks.com](http://lizaolsonbooks.com) or on social @lizaolsonbooks.

## **Adina Polatsek**

Adina Polatsek is a writer from Houston, Texas. She is currently studying at the University of Texas at Austin and was the runner-up for the 2023 James F. Parker Prize in Fiction. She has poetry and fiction published or forthcoming with *Apricity Magazine*, *Verklemt!*, *Soundings East Magazine*, *Welter*, *Barzakh Magazine*, *Hothouse*, *The Oakland Review*, *Ligeia Magazine*, *The Orchards Poetry Journal*, *Figure 1*, *The Talon Review*, *MSU Roadrunner Review*, *Wayne Literary Review*, *Avalon Literary Review*, *Last Leaves Magazine*, and *Moot Point Magazine*.

## **Mike Puican**

Mike Puican's debut book of poetry, *Central Air* (Northwestern Press) was released in 2020. He's had poems and reviews in *Poetry*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and *New England Review* among many others. He won the 2004 Tia Chucha Press Chapbook Contest for 30 Seconds. He was a member of the Chicago Slam Team and is president emeritus of the Guild Literary Complex. He teaches poetry to incarcerated individuals at the Federal Metropolitan Correctional Center in Chicago.

## **Christy Lee Rogers**

Christy Lee Rogers was most recently commissioned by James Cameron and Disney to shoot the stars of *Avatar* - Zoe Saldña, Sigourney Weaver and Kate Winslet to raise money for The Nature Conservancy. She is a visual artist from Kailua, Hawaii. Her obsession with water as a medium for breaking the conventions of contemporary photography has led to her work being compared to Baroque painting masters like Caravaggio. Boisterous in color and complexity, Rogers applies her cunning technique to a barrage of bodies submerged in water during the night, and creates her effects using the refraction of light.

### ARTIST STATEMENT

"What I want more than ever is to express and inspire hope and freedom, a sense of wonder and tranquility, to create a safe place to dream wildly, and most importantly to inspire the idea that there are still mysterious, impossibly beautiful things on Earth—not solely in our imaginations.

It can be dangerous at times because the water is unforgiving; it seeps in the nostrils, it's cold and has a life of it's own. You move where it wants you to move, and the fabrics dance at their own pace. For the models, being under water shuts off the excessive thought process that we all have going on in our heads, which is wonderful because it allows them to really be themselves completely."

## **Erika Lynet Salvador**

Erika Lynet Salvador, born and raised a Filipina, is an incoming first-year at Amherst College. Her visual art, usually using oil, watercolor, and ink, are featured or will soon be featured in the *\*82Review*, the *3Elements Literary Review*, and the *Madison Literary Journal for Literary Criticism*. Additionally, she is the cover artist for select issues of the *Remington Review* and the *Haunted Words Press Journal*. She also explores film and phone photography from time to time and is an avid reader of free-verse poetry. See her art at @bodeganierika or <https://linktr.ee/salvadorerika>.

### ARTIST STATEMENT

Relocation is an experience many can relate to, whether for education, employment or simply seeking a new beginning. This piece is my interpretation of such a transition, inspired by my experience of being an international student setting out to study abroad. 'Uprooted,' in itself, typically refers to removing something from its native environment, which inherently carries the weight of initial stress. However, it's often overlooked that the uprooted must find a new place to thrive—perhaps richer soil or refreshing waters—where it can flourish more than ever before, which I wanted to portray in my painting.

## **Beth Sherman**

Beth Sherman has an MFA in creative writing from Queens College, where she teaches in the English department. Her stories have been published in *Portland Review*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Tangled Locks Journal*, *100 Word Story*, *Fictive Dream*, *Flash Boulevard*, *Sou'wester* and elsewhere. Her work will be featured in *The Best Microfictions 2024 Anthology* and she's also a Pushcart and a multiple Best of the Net nominee. She can be reached at @bsherm36.

## **Marsha Solomon**

Marsha Solomon has exhibited nationally and internationally in galleries and museums for many years and has been the subject of dozens of solo and group exhibitions in the U.S., England, France, Singapore, South Korea, Italy, and Japan. Her work has been published as book covers, in journals, and has received extensive critical attention in publications like *Newsday*, *Long Island Pulse Magazine*, *Guardian UK*, *Chelsea News*, *Art Week*, *Suffolk News*, *Art Slant*, and the *Daily Record*.

### ARTIST STATEMENT

My series of abstract paintings titled began when I started to use thinned acrylic paint as color stains to form a central atmospheric shape. These "Centers," existing at first as fields of pure color emerging from an undefined ground, would then be shaped by semi-opaque passages of paint where the texture and dramatic gesture of the surrounding strokes would contrast with the smooth effect of the stain. In relating these circular motifs to the rectangular format, I am involved in how the spatial effect of colors, their placement and sequence, lets the painting breathe and transforms it into an imaginary space where the power of suggestion resides in the expressive capacity of color and form.

## **Sarah Sorensen**

Sarah Sorensen (she/her), MA, MLIS is a queer writer based in the Metro Detroit area. Sarah's most recent work can be found in *Allegheny* and *The Closed Eye Open*. She day-dreams about rescuing every shelter dog in Metro Detroit, but she just has one tiny fireball of barks. Her work is forthcoming from *The Bryant Literary Review* and *Soundings East*, so stay tuned!

## **Lynne Thompson**

Lynne Thompson was the 4th Poet Laureate of the City of Los Angeles and received a Laureate Fellowship from the Academy of American Poets. The author of three collections of poetry--*Beg No Pardon*, *Start With A Small Guitar*, and *Fretwork*--her fourth, *Blue on a Blue Palette*, will be published by BOA in April 2024.

## **Natalie Tombasco**

Natalie Louise Tombasco is a poet from Staten Island, NY. Currently, she is a PhD candidate at Florida State University and serves as Editor-in-Chief of the *Southeast Review*. Recent work can be found in *Best New Poets*, *Verse Daily*, *Gulf Coast*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Diode Poetry Journal*, *Copper Nickel*, and *The Cincinnati Review*, among others. Her debut collection *MILK FOR GALL* has been selected as the winner of the 2023 Michael Waters Poetry Prize and will be published in Fall 2024 by *Southern Indiana Review*. Find out more at [www.natalielouisetombasco.com](http://www.natalielouisetombasco.com).

## **Alexandra van de Kamp**

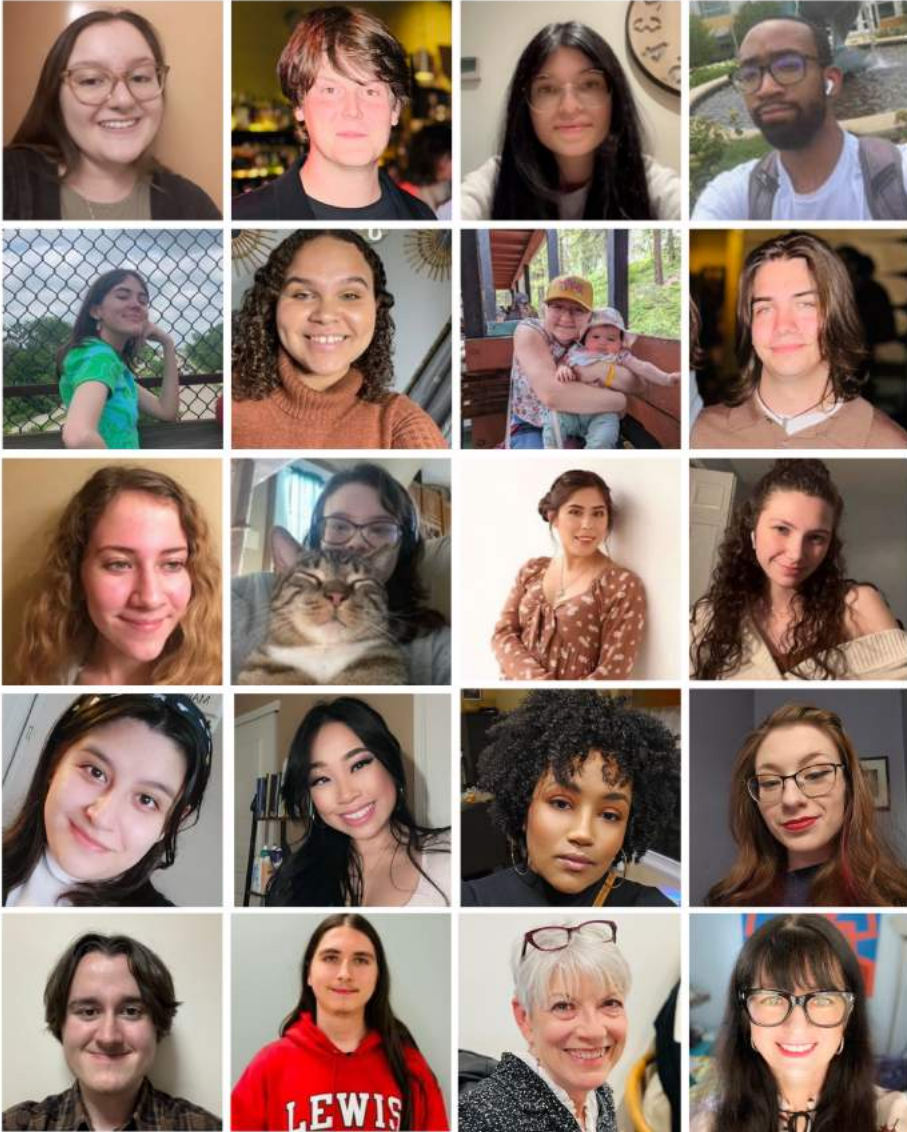
Alexandra van de Kamp is the Executive Director for Gemini Ink, San Antonio's Writing Arts Center ([www.geminiink.org](http://www.geminiink.org)). Her three books of poems are *Ricochet Script* (Next Page Press 2022), *Kiss/Hierarchy* (Rain Mountain Press 2016) and *The Park of Upside-Down Chairs* (CW Books 2010). She has also published several chapbooks, including *A Liquid Bird Inside the Night* (Red Glass Books 2015) and *Dear Jean Seberg* (2011), which won the 2010 Burnside Review Chapbook Contest. Her poems have been published in journals nationwide, including *The Cincinnati Review*, *The Texas Observer*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Sweet: A Literary Confection*, and elsewhere. Find out more about her poetry here: [alexandravandekamppoet.com](http://alexandravandekamppoet.com).

## **Donna Vorreyer**

Donna Vorreyer is the author of *To Everything There Is* (2020), *Every Love Story is an Apocalypse Story* (2016) and *A House of Many Windows* (2013), all from Sundress Publications. She hosts the online reading series *A Hundred Pitchers of Honey*.



# *Jet Fuel Review* Spring 2024 Staff



left to right

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Row 2: Kate Goranson, Kandace Garcia, Lauren Raimbault, Harper Saglier

Row 3: Katharine Svehla, Hannah Tubacki, Nicole Kaminski, Catherine Fatigato

Row 4: Selena Tomas, Patricia Damocles, Andrea Y. Rodriguez, Stephanie Karas

Row 5: Nicholas DeBello (blogger), Dennis Vargas (blogger), Dr Jackie K. White, Dr. Simone Muench





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**Mina Khan**  
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**Cate Latimer**  
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**Donna Vorreyer**  
**Luiza Maia**