

**"Showcasing the beautiful power of written and visual art forms."**

**ISSUE #1, SUMMER 2023**



# **GABBY & MIN'S** *Literary Review*

**POETRY BY**

**JACOB  
REINA**

**FRIENDS WHO  
I BROKE KHLEB  
WITH**

**ART BY**

**RUBY  
WANG**

**BUTTERFLY  
EFFECT**

**FICTION BY**

**ELIZABETH  
WITTENBERG**

**UP, UP, UP**

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY**

**JAINA  
CIPRIANO**

**POWER  
PRAYER**



**GABBY & MIN'S**  
*Literary Review*

**ISSUE #1, SUMMER 2023**

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**COVER ART**

**FRONT:** *The Process Of Becoming* by Matthew Fertel

**BACK:** *The Process Of Unbecoming* by Matthew Fertel

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# **A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

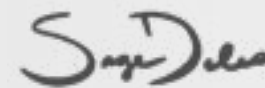
Dear Readers,

It is with immense joy and a heart brimming with excitement that I present to you the inaugural issue of *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*, Summer 2023 edition. As the Editor-In-Chief, I am beyond honored to have the privilege of curating this collection of creativity and expression from talented artists and writers hailing from every corner of the globe. From the very beginning, my vision for this magazine was to create a space that exudes beauty and meaning, a sanctuary where imagination takes flight, and emotions find their canvas.

Within the pages of this issue, you will discover a wondrous tapestry of artistic brilliance, featuring five captivating pieces of art, four spellbinding fictional stories, seven captivating photographs, and a diverse selection of nineteen eloquent poems and prose. Our aim has been to showcase the raw and unbridled talent that exists in the world, seeking to inspire and evoke a deep appreciation for the power of creativity. It has been an incredible journey to bring this vision to life, and I am immensely grateful to all the contributors who poured their hearts and souls into their works.

*Gabby & Min's Literary Review* is more than just a magazine; it is a celebration of the human spirit, an ode to the profound impact of art, and a reminder that creativity knows no boundaries. Our commitment to providing a meaningful creative outlet will remain steadfast as we continue to bring you future issues filled with even more brilliance. I encourage you, dear readers, to immerse yourselves in the captivating narratives and worlds painted by these extraordinary minds. Thank you for joining us on this journey, and I hope this collection ignites a spark of inspiration within each one of you.

With boundless gratitude and warmest regards,



Sage Delio, Editor-In-Chief, *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*

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# ELLIPSES QUARTET . . .

STEVE GERSON

1.

like ellipses . . . that hint at might . . . not will but could . . . despite our past . . .  
 promises fulfilled . . . and still . . . each day as new . . . I see in you . . .  
 why future sense . . .  
 beckons

2.

like ellipses . . . I await your next . . . words . . . actions . . . thought . . .  
 each a vibration . . . concentric circles . . . impacting our . . .  
 lives like thrumming . . .  
 melodies

3.

like ellipses . . . we understand . . . without each other . . . silence . . .  
 a gap as cementing . . . with air insubstantial . . . but trust that . . .  
 the other is there . . . here . . . always . . .  
 to fulfill

4.

like ellipses . . . what's unsaid . . . between us . . . is ever . . .  
 present . . . love . . . the sound of . . . two hearts . . .  
 wanting . . .  
 to touch



**SMASH THAT LIKE BUTTON**  
**HEATHER WHEATON**

# A NIGHT IN THE CRESCENT CITY

TAYLOR NECKO

The setting sun cast a warm glow onto the restaurant, giving the white tablecloths a golden hue and reflecting off the silverware. Plants spotted the brick walls, their vines drooping down like tentacles. Framed photographs of the southern city hung from beige twine. The restaurant was full of patrons, such as the man with dark brown skin wearing a navy, short-sleeve button up sitting across from a woman with long, strawberry blond hair in an off-white sundress.

With glossy fingernails tapping her soda glass, the woman said, “We came all the way to New Orleans for you to order the same burger you get everywhere else?”

“You can’t go wrong with the classics, Eileen. I’ll get seafood tomorrow after the tour of the French Quarter.”

“I’m so pumped to see the St. Louis Cathedral. Did you know that they used to do public hangings in the plaza and would stick the heads on the fence spikes?”

Dominic almost choked on his crème soda. “What an interesting fact to bring up at the dinner table.”

Eileen crossed her arms and pointed her nose up with pride. “I did some research. I didn’t only sleep during the car ride here, you know.”

“Your snoring would disagree,” he chuckled. “Anyway, what’s first on the agenda for tonight?”

“I was thinking we should walk along the riverfront before it gets too dark, then check in at the hotel before we go find a bar. I could really go for a strawberry daiquiri.”

“Sounds like a plan. Cheers to our first anniversary.” He raised his

soda glass, excited to spend another year with his college sweetheart.

Eileen did the same and giddily eyed her empty ring finger. “Cheers to the first of many.”

After finishing their dinners and watching the Mississippi River’s brownish water and taking many stops to admire the Creole architecture of heavy-braced timber frames, wraparound balconies, and Spanish moss on colorful siding, Dominic and Eileen made it to the parking lot and hopped in her red Elantra. When Dominic twisted the key, the car sputtered and its lights only momentarily lit up. He gave her a look. “Do you have jumper cables?”

Eileen got out of the car, told Dominic to pop the trunk, and checked it before returning to the passenger seat. “I must have left them out when I cleaned my car last time.”

The night was just getting started, and there was no telling when anyone would happen by the lot. “Let’s go ask at the restaurant,” he said.

The couple was met with a “Closed” sign. Eileen pressed her face up to the glass and could see someone mopping and their waiter removing the last plates off the tables. She knocked the window glass to get his attention.

“Did you leave something behind?”

“No. We were wondering if anyone here could help us jump our car. It died out of nowhere.”

“We’re the only ones left tonight, and we both take the bus home. I’m sorry. Would you like me to call someone?”

Dominic pulled his phone from his pocket and entered his passcode. “Let’s just take an Uber to the hotel,” he told Eileen. “Someone there has got to have cables.”

The waiter raised his bushy eyebrows. “You wouldn’t rather take a bus or streetcar?”

“This will be quickest.”

The waiter replied, “Oh, well, be careful. Some cab drivers won’t pick up passengers during the night in case they are spirits and won’t pay.”

Eileen clasped her hands together. “I’ve read the legends about that phenomenon. They say the signs are dropping temperatures, electrical glitches, transparency—lots of spooky things.”

“Lucky for the Uber drivers,” Dominic said, “we aren’t ghosts so they have nothing to worry about.”

“I suppose not.” The waiter gave him a slow shrug, then added, “but keep an eye out in case your driver is a spirit,” with a smug raise of his brows.

Dominic told Eileen and the waiter, “Ghosts aren’t real. It’s just a way they entertain tourists.” He looked towards the waiter, who didn’t disagree. Yet, it set Dominic on edge that he didn’t agree either. Instead, he gave Dominic the thin smile that he used while taking their orders. He wished them safe travels and returned to his job.

Their faces reflected long and dark in the glass. Dominic broke the silence to share that he booked a driver. Eileen passed the time while they waited by sharing more stories of the city that she learned from online articles. Her eyes wandered to investigate the surrounding buildings’ windows for any shadowy figures moving around. The only ghostly thing she saw were white curtains draped on the inside of a second-story window, and the most interesting scene she saw were drunk, young adult males spinning plastic beads around their necks like hula hoops. Dominic only half paid attention, distracted by his frustration over the car. Eileen held his hand and swung his arm as she spoke, which made him feel a little better. Five minutes, a black SUV pulled up to the curb. The light from the lamppost reflected onto the windows, blocking the view through the closed glass. After matching the car’s license with the one on the app, the couple entered the back seat.

“Fabien?” Dominic turned off his phone.

“Yes, you’re Dominic? You’re going to a Hilton hotel?”

“Yes sir.” Dominic helped Eileen find her seat belt buckle. She was observing the driver through the rearview mirror. He wore a cream Cu-bavera with subtle embroidery around the chest pockets. His dark, coarse hair was pulled back in a high bun that leaned against his headrest. They drove in silence until stopping at a red light, when the driver wondered what brought them to New Orleans.

“We’re celebrating our first anniversary,” Eileen answered.

“Congratulations.” Fabien grinned in the rear-view mirror at them. “We get a lot of newlyweds this time of year.”

“Oh, no.” Dominic interjected. “We’re just dating. We met during college and got together in senior year.”

“My mistake. Where did you go?”

While the men spoke about college as the car pattered down the streets of the city, Eileen shifted uncomfortably in her seat and picked at the skin on her palms. Dominic briefly paused the conversation to ask her if everything was all right. She gave him a firm, “Yes,” but even in the dark backseat of the car, he could see her smile fade.

The car came to a stop too soon, parking near Jackson Square, which housed the St. Louis Cathedral. It was an ivory, castle-like structure with two small towers flanking a large center spire. The surface was decorated with arched windows, pairs of columns, crosses, and a clock. The Square, surrounded by spiked fence posts, contained flowering trees, a path of brown pebbles, and a bronze statue of Andrew Jackson in the center. Lights colored the cathedral in a green hue against the backdrop of a night sky.

“Sir,” Dominic piped up, “our hotel is miles west of here.”

“Jackson Square is populated by mediums at this hour. I recommend you check it out.”

“No,” Eileen said, “we really need to be getting to the hotel.”

Fabien unlocked their doors from the driver’s seat. “There is a fuzzy line between a need and a want. You won’t find out what you need by

spending the whole night in a hotel room.”

Eileen slid off the leather seat and out the door before either man could speak. Dominic met her behind the SUV before it drove away. “That was weird.”

Eileen replied, “It could have been weirder if he was a ghost.”

“Not now with that. I’ll find us another driver.” Dominic pulled out his phone as he spoke, not watching Eileen step towards the Square. “How is there no internet connection here? It’s a landmark.”

Eileen saw tables set up in front of the cathedral, each covered with colorful fabric and miscellaneous items that were too hard to identify from a distance. There were small lines of people waiting at the tables to speak with the available mediums. Eileen told Dominic that she wanted to take Fabien’s advice and visit a medium. He said it was a scam, one they shouldn’t waste their time on. Dominic decided that he would walk up the street in attempt to get better cell service, and Eileen opted to wait for him near the well-lit Jackson Square.

Dominic held his phone in one hand and kept his other in his khakis pocket as he walked down the street towards a casino. He could tell that something he said or did made Eileen upset, judging by the pouting look on her face and more frequent fidgeting with her hands, but being stranded on their first night of vacation was a more pressing matter. Thankfully, Uber loaded and Dominic secured a driver. He made his way back towards the metal bench where he had left Eileen but spotted her in line for a medium instead.

“Leen, we have a new driver, let’s go.”

Like a crow drawn to shiny coins, Eileen looked at the row of decorated fold-out tables. There were lots of tarot cards and piles of crystals atop tablecloths spotted with either yellow stars or ornate patterns. Some of the tables housed crystal balls that reflected the streetlights near the cathedral. She stood in line for a woman with thick crimped hair and a satin, indigo robe. “I said I wanted to see a medium.”

“Since when do you believe in that type of thing?”

“It wouldn’t hurt for you to not be so closed-minded about everything.”

“Fine.” Dominic cancelled the Uber driver. He accepted that by the time they arrived at the hotel, it would be better to wait morning to deal with the car. The image of a warm, freshly made bed popped into his mind. He turned off his phone and said, “Why did you have to choose the medium with the longest line?”

“She’s probably the best. You can check out any one you like, or none at all.”

“No, no, I can do it with you.”

While waiting for a turn with the medium, each of them moved their eyes away from one another, pretending to stare at something on the sidewalk, like a busted beer bottle or a bobby pin, as if the litter was of more interest.

“Please take a seat.” The medium held out her arms, showing off the robe’s flared sleeves. As the couple took a seat on the folding chairs topped with velvet cushions, leaving a couple of feet between them, she said, “You can call me Madame Ruby. The two of you tonight?”

“Yes, my name is Eileen, and this is Dominic.”

“Splendid. What may I offer you? I specialize in tarot cards, tea leaves, and palm readings.”

Dominic peered at his palms, so Eileen asked for the two of them to receive a palm reading. She was to go first, so Madame Ruby took Eileen’s hand and traced over the present wrinkles and lines with a pointed, red, acrylic nail. She spent a moment touching Eileen’s ring finger before speaking.

“Starting with your head and life lines, so curvy and sloped, I see you have a knack for creativity and adventure. Perhaps that spontaneity is what led you to me tonight. As for your heart line, which appears to begin below your middle finger, I notice a certain egocentricity when it comes to



love. You always know what you want.”

Eileen looked at her palm and copied the medium’s tracing, lingering on her ringless ring finger. Madame Ruby turned towards Dominic and asked for his hand.

“You have a deep and long head line. You think realistically, guided by logic.”

“My head line?”

“It determines your intellect. The life line reflects your general well-being, the heart line your emotional state, and the fate line reveals your destiny.”

“Wait, you didn’t tell me my fate line,” Eileen said.

“That is because it is not present,” she answered. “Neither is his. This signifies an uncertainty in your futures, meaning you either lack a plan or it is bound to change.”

Eileen raised her eyebrows with pretend disbelief, not wanting to support the idea that Madame Ruby may be right about their fate. Although she had started to think the same thing when Dominic missed proposal opportunities at the nice restaurant and while watching the Mississippi River under the stars.

At the same moment, Dominic stood up too fast, knocking his cushion onto the sidewalk. “Thank you for your time, but I think we need to get going before it’s too late.”

“There’s never a ‘too late’ in New Orleans,” Madame Ruby replied in a smooth, almost sing-song manner.

Dominic pulled some cash from his wallet and set it on her table. Eileen argued, “She hasn’t finished your palm reading.”

“I don’t want to hear a stranger tell me that there’s no future for us.”

“If you insist that she’s wrong about us, then what is our future, Dominic?”

He responded, “I scheduled a new driver and they’re on the way.

Let’s go. Please.”

They left the Square and stood on the sidewalk of a nearby alleyway. Music and shouts of the nightlife rang in the distance. Headlights pointed down the alleyway and into their eyes as they were approached by a familiar SUV. Its automatic doors opened, and Dominic called, “Scram, we don’t want another ride from you.”

Fabien replied, “How else do you plan to get to the hotel?”

Dominic tried opening the app to find another available driver, but it froze again. “We went to see a medium,” Eileen blurted, uncomfortable, “like you suggested.”

“Fantastic, what did you learn?”

Dominic looked up from his phone right as Eileen gave him a frown and crossed her arms in the chilly, nighttime air. “Apparently things aren’t looking too good right now.”

“That’s not all bad,” he said. “To go down the right path, you have to first realize what path you’re on.”

Dominic muttered under his breath. “Stop humoring him. He’s nuts.”

Fabien shrugged and put the car back in drive. “If you insist. Even if I’m nuts, I’m your only ride.”

“Will you actually take us to the hotel?” Eileen asked.

“I give you my word. Take a seat.”

The couple sat on opposite sides, neither wanting to be the first to look at the other. Fabien played blues music and was telling them all about notable buildings and graveyards they passed, yet neither passenger was listening. They were headed through the French quarter, where they would be going on a tour tomorrow. Eileen looked at the houses, painted in bright colors like salmon and yellow, and imagined the couples living in those houses as happy, considering they lived within the famous southern city and had lots to explore with one another. On the other side of the car, Dominic studied the passing shops and pondered how much better the night would have gone had he purchased an engagement ring prior to this vacation.

Fabien announced that they had arrived at the hotel, which the couple was relieved to find out was true. They climbed out of the backseat as he said, “Have a great night, my friends, and good luck,” before driving down a narrow alleyway and becoming one with the shadows of the night.

Under the crescent moon and in the summer humidity, the couple faced the revolving door of their hotel. Each of them was replaying their interaction in front of the medium and felt embarrassed over what they said before storming off. Still not speaking out loud, Eileen decided to sit down on the short curb of the sidewalk of the loading zone adjacent to the entrance and faced outwards towards the city block. Feet planted on the asphalt, she rested her elbows on her knees and held her chin up. After a moment, Dominic joined her.

“Will you trust me if I give you my word?” he asked. When she didn’t respond, he continued, “Listen, I’m not a mind reader or even a fake mind reader. I’m just a guy who wants to be with you, whatever you want that to be.”

Eileen barely turned her head to face him. “What do you mean?”

“I should have made this trip into what you want it to be. I’m sorry that it took being stranded on the streets of New Orleans for me to realize that.”

“It shouldn’t be what I hoped it would be. It should be what we both want.” She flicked an ant off her leg. “I guess I didn’t realize that we weren’t on the same page.”

“Leen, if I didn’t see a future with you, I wouldn’t be here celebrating an anniversary—celebrating us—with you.”

She gave him a half smile, so he continued. “There will be more anniversaries, and I’ll learn how to read palms or tarot or whatever to prove it.”

“It’s ok, Dominic,” Eileen said. “I took the hint that you’re tired of those jokes.”

“They’re starting to grow on me.”

The following morning, the couple stepped out of the revolving doors. Having left their luggage in the trunk, they wore the same clothes they had on the day prior. Dominic carried jumper cables from the front desk in one hand and held Eileen’s hand in the other.

They came to a stop when they noticed their red Elantra parked in the hotel parking lot, no longer in the restaurant parking lot many blocks south of the hotel. After passing the cables to Eileen, Dominic unlocked the car and opened its doors and trunk. After not finding anything suspicious inside, he climbed into the front seat and turned the key in the ignition. The gas dial pointed at “FULL.” Perplexed, Dominic stood back up and looked at Eileen across the top of the car. It was hot under his arms. “Do you think the waiter called someone and got it towed for us?”

“He knew it was dead but didn’t know where we were going.”

Dominic struggled to keep a serious expression as he said, “But Fabien knew. And taxi drivers are ghosts, remember?”

“Ok, well what do you think Fabien would want us to do now?” she played along.

“I think he would strand us someplace else we should go,” he said. “And I’d say we need to go get breakfast. What was that café you mentioned during the drive here? Du Monde?”

Eileen flashed a grin, glad that he remembered. “Yeah, that’s it. It’s near the Square.”

They got inside the car and turned on the air conditioner, attempting to combat the humidity, and drove back into the French Quarter with their hands intertwined.



**BLOOMING COLORS**  
NATALIIA BURMAKA



**CAT'S DREAMS**  
NATALIIA BURMAKA

## THE HOUR OF LITTLE JITTERS

AMANDA TUMMINARO

One foot wrong and I shall fall into the arms of a straitjacket.  
It is waiting for me like a spider in his web;  
If I had a wand over my destiny, this gold dust would glitter.  
As it is though, the conjuring cricket has other plans for me,  
for in this hour of jitters all the doors creak shut,  
and leave me only the choice of flying out the window.

In such a restraint, I'd look like a struggling, mad, mad ghoul.  
One false move and so it progresses there.  
Is there a small, paddled auction to buy all these misplaced souls?  
Never mind. There are small houses awaiting our arrival,  
and for all the toil I've tried to keep it from approaching,  
that spider keeps ruminating in its devious-like prayer.

I shall find many in such a place, this premature grave waiting.  
Aren't we all among the worm in the end?  
One misstep and the art of gravity and I depart with no qualms.  
Suspend me to the sun's tentacles for I believe in the light,  
or, at least, I know I will see it in again in the final hour,  
whether by nature or by way of gun and sweaty palms.

The grip is loosening like a tree from its well-planted root.  
There will only be air where I once stood.  
That spider sees eight of me: Eight persons and none to return.  
It seems, after all, that I've split to that of a spiteful fate,  
and I will no longer know the hour of the little jitters,  
the cuckoo clock marking when I've stiffened to wood.

## LETTERS OF TRANSIT

JONATHAN JONES

I've words I want to say in front of God  
to you. No other. These are not vows.  
I've seen these words somewhere before.  
You do not end is what I mean

to say, the way a film like Casablanca  
ends. Predictable as Van Gogh's Ear.  
And God knows little else that Bogart  
couldn't quip a hill of beans.

How art exposes us like God to naked truth.  
It's déjà vu, and a damp misty night  
somewhere out in the desert.  
One courier I'd gladly crucify.

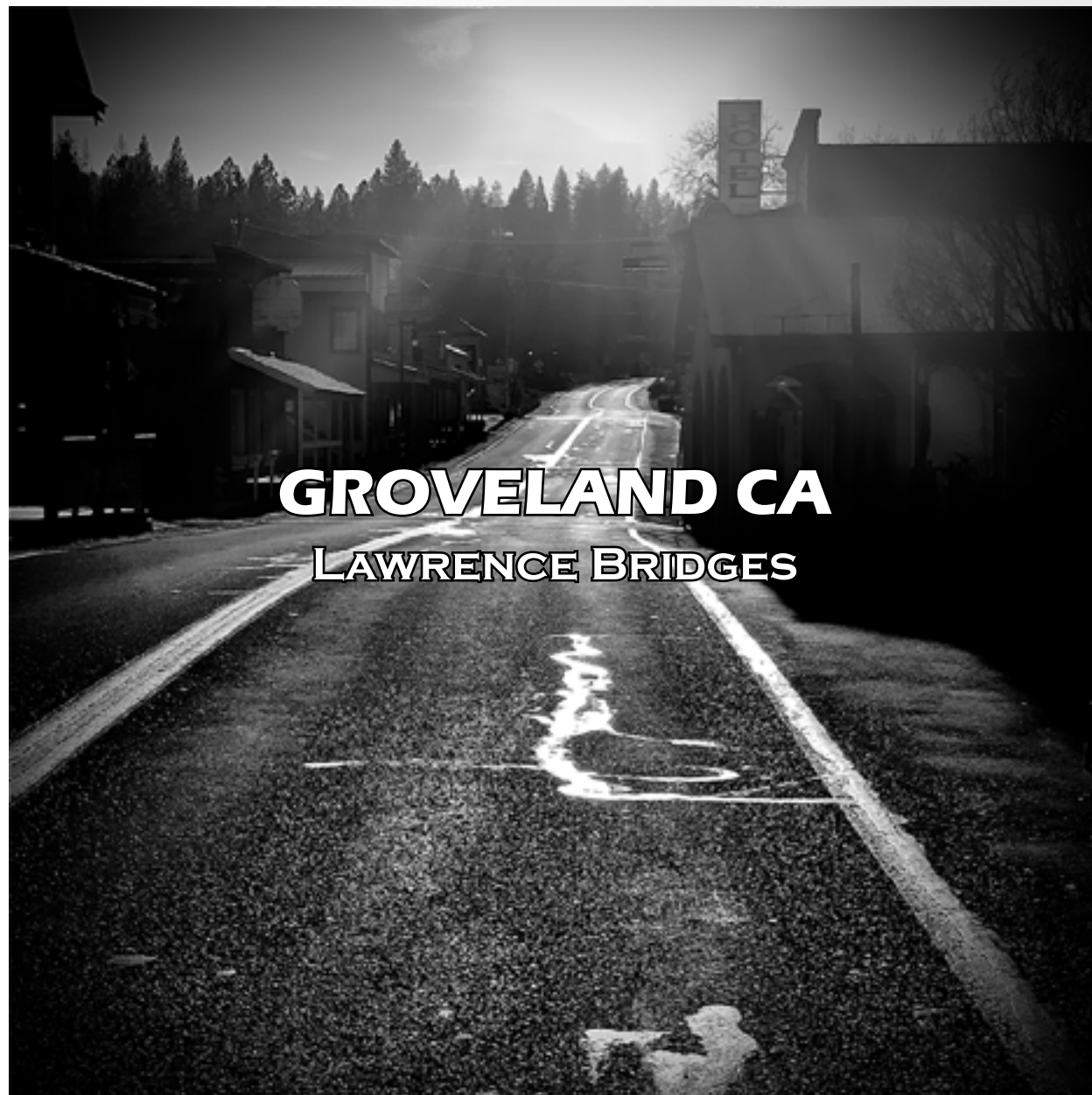
Long buried in Sam's piano  
those quiet little letters of transit  
that never quite make it  
to America.

A secret fortune no-one thinks  
to look for there, at Bogart's  
signal plays La Marseilles  
as though to better pray

for what is only passing

weather. A sudden  
memory of travelling  
to Liverpool one winter.

But here it is only July.



## WRITE ABOUT TELEPHONES

ELLEN ZHANG

*For Reuben*

G chords harden into callouses. You are  
self-taught. Melodies rooted from memories.

Some things you did precisely,  
school notebooks metamorphosing into  
lines, five after practiced curlicues.

Who would have thought that Manipuri dust  
would rise with notes, juxtapose afternoon  
sunlight, settle onto unwavering traffic,  
drag jaggedly through still air, scape against  
the slow pace of life & heat. Yet here,

there are no constraints of expression. Only  
stripping you know of are of telephone wires.  
What insulation is needed in this heat? What  
protection can your evolving mind envisage?  
What do you know of being tied down?  
Of rootage? Yet, you know exactly

how music lines history. Soil from  
nine mountain ranges gather beneath  
fingernails. Fingers nimble. Ready the wire. Sharp  
tightening against body. A kind of stretching  
done right before

breakage.

Say decade, a word not unsavory but foreign.  
 Ten years feels longer than it should.  
 Wrinkles gather upon forehead, dimples  
 light as rising of warm puris in winter mornings,  
 hands well acquainted with texture of curry &  
 rice. Isn't it amazing how we perceive time?

Ten years. Only. Ten years. Mere. Ten years.  
 Decade since you have sat strumming a guitar  
 in your second home. Although you wonder,  
 sometimes, if you came from the womb with  
 chords etched in the curves of your fingers,  
 solidifying. It's been a while. To say the least.  
 Still you turn over the image of ecdysis. Ironic.

Snapped. Broken strings easily fixed. Music notes  
 hastily repaired. Larynx cartilage tightening.  
 Invisible lines connecting time zone.  
 Easy. Compasses as sure as timepieces,  
 melodies manifesting. Still in making.

## **PALM TREES**

### **CLAIRE MARIE ANDERSON**

I walk the lines  
 of your palms:  
 hardhanded, tired  
 crooked daddy issues  
 a problem with distinguishing  
 positive and negative emotional stimuli

(am I right so far? you  
 can tell me if I'm not  
 I don't have much of an  
 ego, if you can trust my  
 mount of venus)

your apollo finger tells me you're passionate  
 and also that you broke it once in third grade  
 the callus around your mount of mercury  
 breaks into your attachment lines  
 which worries me  
 but only a little, since mine look like  
 wasted potential  
 and a lifetime of self-effacing support of a significant other

unfortunately,  
 I might get sick before you  
 (but it'll be your fault)

but you can take me to a temple  
 dance with me in the ruins for long enough  
 to cure us both of fate

only if you want to though.

(argue all you  
 want I know nothing and  
 that I'm just following  
 google and what you  
 whisper into my ear while asleep  
 sucking up only childhoodisms  
 painful allegory just enough to  
 tell you what you and I both  
 know is true  
 a heretic but not bc I can  
 see the future but bc I  
 am lying to you  
 I can neither argue back nor  
 defend myself since  
 either way the only truth  
 is palms change and I  
 won't see yours again even  
 if I really want to)

I'm a palm reader  
 not your therapist  
 I'll confess I stopped reading when the book  
 got to the island chain health line stuff  
 convincing me of my own brother's mortality  
 conscientious attempts to drink himself to death

upward-inclining head line  
 broken girdle of venus

disappointing heart line  
 inconsistency

your fingernail half moons are  
 nice but you'll  
 die young



## IF YOU GET SICK, I LOVE YOU

MAGGIE BOWYER

I will hold your hand on the car ride to a new doctor's office, explain as much or as little as you desire, reassure or pressure, a gentle squeeze of my palm, a patient advocate if that's what you want.

I will cook you chicken noodle soup, keep a kettle constantly boiling in case you require more tea, and run you a cool bath when the fever leaves a sweaty trail across your skin.

I will stay up until 3 AM listening to you wheeze and breathe, watching your chest rise when it gets a little too quiet, refill the humidifier, and remind myself you're still there behind eyelids fluttering with dreams.

I will help you change pajama pants in the morning, lend you my shower stool, take your blood-oxygen saturation and keep you satiated with the softest skim of my lips.

I will be there in the days that drag on with you in bed, the extended weeks where exhaustion eclipses emotions, the months you wonder if you'll ever get better, and the years you learn to cope with one at a time.

When you get sick, I will love you.

## CALENDAR GIRL

TOM MISURACA

On January 1st, she springs out of bed at sunrise. She's filled with eager anticipation for what the new year will bring.

She takes a long, hot shower, as if to wash off the dust of the previous year. It's her tradition to have a nice, healthy breakfast of fruit, scrambled egg whites and orange juice.

While she eats, she turns on the television. The news relays the atrocities from the previous night: shootings, stabbings, fires, deadly car crashes. And the horrors of wars and terrorists attacks from around the world.

Her heart sinks.

Today is no different than yesterday.

She goes back to bed, leaving half her feast uneaten.

By February, Christmas feels like a lifetime ago. Winter's ire grips her and the world around her. She is at the mercy of its snow, ice and wind. Both inside and out are dark and cold.

Now that she can work at home when the weather is slightly inclement, it feels like she never leaves the house. Everyday is a repeat of a lonely routine.

Friends and family have given up calling or visiting. Why should they? She never reaches out to them. Why should she? She has nothing to tell them. Her life is like a blank page. As white as the snow covered world. Just as cold and barren.

The shortest month feels like the longest.



March gives her hope. The name itself is about moving forward.  
March!

She greets each day with a lion's breath. Repeats an energizing mantra to herself: "I'll be nicer to my co-workers. I'll accept social invitations from my friends. I'll reach out to my family."

But no matter how nice she is to her co-workers, they barely pay attention to her. Unless they need help with a task. While they disappear to lunch for more than an hour, she sits and eats at her desk. Alone.

Her friends invite her to their children's birthday parties. Knowing they expect gifts, she struggles to figure out what's both a good and inexpensive present for a kid that they'll end up ignoring anyhow. All her friends talk about is how their kids keep them busy. They have no time for anything anymore. They don't ask her how she's been, only when she's finally going to settle down and have kids of her own. While they brag about their children's accomplishments, she sits and eats a piece of over-frosted cake in the corner. Alone.

She regrets reaching out to her family. They invite her to Easter dinner. This year it falls in March. That always feels wrong. The days are still dark and cold. Not a time for bunnies and candy baskets. But perfect atmosphere to celebrate the brutal death of a man of peace.

On these holiest of holy days, she's inspired to return to Sunday mass. But whenever she sits in church, her eyes focus on the nails driven into Jesus' palms and feet.

At Easter dinner, she's crucified by questions. Why isn't she married? Did she at least have a steady boyfriend? Why isn't she looking for a better job? Or saving for retirement? Or doing anything with her life?

All she can do is surrender to them, like a lamb to the slaughter.

April brings spring. She survived the darkness of winter.

In the spirit of the season, she attempts to spring into action in her life. When her family, friends and co-workers suggest they "get

together sometime" she takes the initiative and invites them out to dinners, museums, plays, walks in the parks and more. But they ignore her requests or come up with lame excuses why they can't get together. Their "rainchecks" are never cashed.

She recoils back into her shell.

Turns out she was the true April Fool.

May Day. The name once evoked images of people dancing merrily around a pole. Now it evokes a distress call. Mayday. This ship is sinking.

Every day in May she wonders if this will be the day she goes down for the count. It's a struggle to do even what was once the simplest of tasks. Nobody notices.

Mother's Day is a double whammy.

She misses her mother, even though she was cold and emotionless. Still, she'd do anything to have one more Sunday dinner with her.

She doubts she'll ever be a mother herself. She'll never know the joy of having a child grown inside her. Nobody to take care of her as she grows old and helpless.

Memorial Day overrides these thoughts. While people at work talk about barbecues and movie openings, she focuses on the fact that this is another day of celebrating death. The death of heroes.

She wants to be the hero in her story. But her brain makes her the antagonist.

June is all about endings and beginnings. Commencement.

Some of her family have children who are graduating. How excited they are. How innocent.

She remembers how she and her friends felt the same way about the end of school. Little did they realize the real world would crush them. They'd never get their dream job, and end up being a cog in the corporate machine. They'd never make enough money, and spend their lives trying

to survive financially. They'd spend too much time looking for love; kissing frog after frog, but never finding a prince. And worse, they'd drift apart after graduation.

She'd warn these kids that school will be the best times of their lives. But doesn't want to be a downer.

In July, summer celebrations abound. She's surprised that people are still inviting her to BBQ and pool parties. This year she accepts them all.

When the day of these events arrives, anxiety grips her. The idea of socializing with other people twists her stomach into knots. She tells herself she must do this. She gets dressed in a fun summer outfit and packs a bag with sunscreen, mosquito repellent and cute sunglasses.

The feelings of fear amplify as she tries to leave the house. She can't do it. She can't go out there and face other people. She needs to be alone. Nobody will notice that she's not there anyhow.

She sits home alone, frightened by the explosions in the sky.

August is too hot to move. Too hot to do anything.

September arrives with Labor Day. Fittingly, since every task this year has been a labor. Getting out of bed, washing up, making food. Going out into that world is the most laborious task of all.

The heat still oppresses her. But the knowledge that autumn will soon arrive is no relief. All it means is that the leaves that are so green and vibrant now are under a death sentence.

She knows how they feel.

October is all about death. It's supposed to be fun and silly, taking the power away from these dark and scary images. But all she can think about are those who died before her: her parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and a few friends from school taken well-before their time.

She feels guilty for outliving them. Their lives had purpose. While hers...

Luckily it's the perfect month to disguise herself as somebody else. To mask all her feelings.

In November, the clocks turn back. It gets dark so early now. All she wants to do is go to sleep. Instead, she turns on every light in the house in an attempt to cast out the darkness.

As the month progresses, she tries to think of things she's thankful for, but cannot. Just being here and being (fairly) healthy should be enough. But her stupid brain won't let her appreciate that.

The coming of winter and the holidays feels like shackles on her hands and feet. The year is terminal.

On December 31st, she prepares to go to bed early. She wants to wake up tomorrow to find the world has changed. That all her problems, fears and sadness have washed away.

She hears the church bells chime at midnight. She's never heard those before. There are noises and celebrations in the distance. The new year is here. And she knows things will only get worse. How much more of this will she be able to handle? If any.

She gets out of bed...

This is the year she'll ask for help.

# TO THE BOY SITTING ALONE ON THAT FOREST BRIDGE

JADEN FONG

I saw you there, lovingly gazing  
at the rust that was wrapping  
the tin can in its speckled blanket—  
the one that has been sleeping

for years in the creek below you.  
You were breezily swinging  
your legs beneath you, and  
they were dangling in the air

like unweighted fishing lines  
being tossed about in the wind.  
I saw your jade knit cardigan  
on the dusty wood next to you,

folded neatly like you were  
doing laundry. As I approached  
you, you looked at me with  
your mouth stuffed with salt

crackers and your eyes drowned  
in peculiar curiosity. You muttered  
out an apology for blocking the path

and gestured to a snake hole

to my right as if to make up  
for it. I said nothing in response  
as I walked past you, and for that  
I am sorry. I hope you looked

at the back of my head through  
a crosshair the way a young  
hunter might watch a fawn—  
with gentleness, understanding,

and a twinge of pity. I hope  
that you unbuttoned your shirt  
and jumped in that creek,  
but not before you dusted

the white crumbs off of  
your black pants. I hope  
that someone held your heart  
for you while it was still dry,

and that they laid it on top  
of your shirt in the sun  
until it every inch of its shape  
was preserved in sugar and light

like dehydrated mango. I hope  
that when you leapt into that creek,  
your fervorous laughter was cascading  
all the way down like the tears on your cheek.



## **UP, UP, UP**

### **ELIZABETH WITTENBERG**

I'm starting to go a little blind. I try not to be alarmed, but the last time I had this many gray sparkles dance across my vision was when I fainted in the sixth grade, altar serving a stranger's funeral. I do not want to recreate the third most mortifying moment of my life right now. It's far too risky. The narrow gravel path at my feet switches back and forth along a rocky cliff face. If I were to pass out, I'd fall off the side and die. Liliana would turn around and not know where I went. Wouldn't be the first time somebody's done that this week.

I pull my hydration pack straw from its magnetized spot on my backpack strap and find my mouth with it. I bite down. The rubber is stiff. My water tastes like plastic. It has already gone warm from my body heat, radiating through from my back. The warm water makes me miss my collection of double-walled insulated straw cups. But I left all my double-walled insulated straw cups in Peoria.

I grip the chest strap buckle of the backpack, holding on like it will pull me up the mountain. I rub my thumb on the little plastic whistle, imagining blowing it for help. The back of the pack is gel-lined and covered in mesh and drenched in my sweat. I felt a drip fall to my ankle about an hour into the hike. I thought it might be raining. Still clear skies nearly three hours later. The tag on the pack, ripped off at 5:45 this morning read, "contoured for a woman's comfort." I've never been less comfortable.

It is beautiful, I'll give her that. We passed through a lush forest and are now surrounded by rock formations and wildflowers. So many wildflowers, in so many colors. I have trouble believing that this is all real, it has always existed, and that I've spent none of my time in it. I think of

my old commute past strip malls and boxy buildings in varying shades of brick.

I'm thankful for how narrow the path is - we can't walk side by side and Liliana can't see how much I'm struggling. She can probably hear my ragged breathing. We've been alternating between talking and silence, with more talking early on and more silence the higher we get. We traded our favorites: color, animal, food, smell, tree, and shared a few stories from when we were younger. She taught me the names of a few trees and how to tell a spruce from a pine from a fir. All surface level, easy, sweet. I'm glad she hasn't asked me any big questions; I wouldn't know how to answer.

She glances back again. She's a good twenty-five feet in front of me. She stops until I catch up, then immediately starts walking again. I need a real break, but I don't want to ask for one. I keep stopping myself from looking at her butt as she walks. A year ago, I would have convinced myself I was just jealous of how fit she is. I still am jealous of how fit she is, but I smile to myself as I let my eyes linger for a second. It shocks me how much I feel when I let myself feel something.

I try to think of more questions to ask. I'm so intrigued by her life, but I don't even know where to begin. When we met at the trailhead parking lot, she was leaning against a maroon van, painted with a peeling 1970's groovy flower pattern in an array of yellows and pinks. The first thing I asked was if she'd painted them herself. She shook her head and said she wished she had, but the van had come pre-painted.

"And with a whole lot of problems," she added, "but it's livable." She'd had a picture of herself with the van on her profile, but I hadn't put two and two together.

"How long have you been a van-lifer?" I asked.

She stuck her tongue out and rolled her eyes, then apologized for doing so. She told me, "I hate that term. I just kind of saw the opportunity when I saw someone selling ole Marsha on a Facebook group for people

who'd hiked the AT."

I nodded. I didn't want to ask what AT stood for. She hadn't answered my question. She busied herself splitting her thick black hair in two and twisting it into tight French braids. I was awed by how quick she did it and how even the braids were.

"Oh, shit," she said, "I totally didn't answer your question. I've had Marsha for six months, lived in her full-time for four."

"Cool, I'm kinda on a break from real life myself." A point of connection, I figured.

She balked at that, pulling her head back toward her neck, giving herself a double chin. She shook her head and said, half-sarcastically, "every second of every day is real life, dude!"

I didn't like being called dude.

"You wanna hit the trail?" she asked, an awkward crack in her voice.

I nodded. Maybe, I thought, if we were moving, I'd stop being so nervous. My daily incline walks on the treadmill had dulled my feelings of impending doom for years. Doing the same thing in nature had to be at least as good.

On her next turn back, Liliana asks if I need a break. I might be on the verge of a breakdown if we don't stop, but I don't want her to know. I think crying might somehow top the fact that we're hiking a fourteen-er together as the most absurd thing about this moment as a first date. Nevermind that I'm on a first date at all; nevernevermind that it's with a woman.

I nod. I need to get over my embarrassment. I'm an out of shape midwesterner and that's okay. I slump against a rock and drop my bag.

Liliana rushes to pick it up, saying, "I'm sorry, those flowers are just so fragile - it will take years for them to grow back."

"Shit," I say. The curse word is unnatural in my mouth, like I'm a kid trying to impress her older brother's friends. It tastes like pennies. I wonder if that's just exhaustion. My heartbeat presses against the roots of my

teeth.

Liliana shakes her head and says, "It's ok, you didn't know! I'm assuming this is your first fourteen-er?"

I nod. We hadn't talked about our respective hiking experience when planning the date. She simply sent I'm gonna hike Mt. Elbert on Sunday - you in? I said yes before even looking up exactly what hiking Mt. Elbert entailed.

She gets up from her ledge and holds out a hand for me to grab. I take it, catching her eyes and accidentally staring too long into their dark depth. I pull myself up, bracing against her. She doesn't even begin to waver. Hot chunks of apple cinnamon oatmeal curdle up through my throat and meet my mouth. I can not puke on this girl. I swallow them back down.

"You gonna make it?"

"How much further?"

We step off trail up onto a flat boulder as a pair of passing middle aged men give us a courteous smile. "You're almost there, ladies!" the one says, all cheer across his weathered, sunkissed face. His friend runs his hand across the white prickles of hair jutting out from his scalp as he nods. As they pass, the smell of sweat trapped in dri-fit smacks my nose.

"Don't listen to them," Liliana says as we mosey on. I don't think we're out of earshot. She continues, "we're barely even above treeline."

I don't answer. I hadn't noticed that there were no longer trees around, just rocks and patches of grass with teeny tiny flowers. I miss the shade of the forest below. I ask how much longer she thinks we'll be hiking.

"It's gonna be awhile," she says. I sigh. She laughs, then says, "I'm not laughing at you! I promise! It's really hard!"

"I'm gonna sit." I'm defeated and I hear how obvious it is in my voice. She turns back to me as I slump against a boulder. I tell her to go on without me.

“Really?” she asks. I nod. “Really, really?”

“Really, really, really” I say. I can barely breathe. I can’t keep up with her.

“I’ll wait for you at the top.”

I shake my head and say, “I’ll wait for you right here.”

She smiles, mischief flicking across her eyes, and says, “If... when you make it to the top, I’ll kiss you!” She turns on her heel and scampers up the path before I have time to answer. I look down at my hands and let my head drop into them. I pull the thin air into my lungs and remind myself that this will not be the only opportunity I’ll ever have to kiss a girl. I look up. She’s already rounded the curve of the next switchback, disappearing. I push myself off the rock and follow, a slow slow shuffle. I don’t know how she’s moving so quickly. I feel like I’m swimming through stew, despite the air’s thinness and dryness. I remind myself that I can always take one more step. I remind myself to turn around and look back at how far I have come. I remind myself to enjoy the rock formations and the flowers and the view from so high up. I remind myself that I can do anything. I think.

And I can sit down as often as I want to. So I do. I sit every time I can’t breathe and I can’t breathe about every five minutes, so I sit a lot. It’s less of a sit as often as I want to and more of a sit as often as I need to. I try to distract myself from the pain by finally thinking about the things I thought I’d distract myself from with the one way ticket to Colorado.

I am about to be a twenty-four-year-old divorcee. I remember doling out dating advice to my best friend as we planned my wedding at nineteen, telling her that she had to show boys that she was wife material, otherwise they wouldn’t commit to her. I would laugh now, if I had the oxygen. My favorite memories of wedding planning were with my best friend, not my husband. My favorite memories of the wedding were with her. My favorite memories of my time being married were with her.

Thinking is hard, right now. It isn’t proving to be the distraction I

want it to be. I count wildflowers instead, keeping a tally of how many of each I’ve seen poking their way out from the rocky earth. I’m moving slow enough that I can take in a panoramic view. My favorites are the pale purple ones, with the skinny petals and yellow center. Those are outnumbered by the white ones, q-tips stretching up from the ground. I spy a few red ones, petals splaying up and out. I try to make up names for each flower, but my creative well is dry.

People keep passing, telling me to keep it up, or that I’m almost there. All I hear when they do is ‘You look dead!’ I don’t let it get to me. I wipe sweat out of my eyes and trudge along. I sit again and lift the ponytail from my neck, the breeze tickling my drenched baby hairs. I push myself up again and keep moving. I move, I sit, I think, I don’t.

And I can see the top of the mountain. My first thought upon registering that that indeed is what I’m seeing is that it must be a mirage. My vision is blurry enough to give the scene the effect as a desert oasis in an old cartoon, wobbling in the distance. I can almost hear a doodle-oodle-oo sound effect underneath the blood rushing in my ears. But it’s real. The top is less of a point than I thought it would be - there’s a whole flat space full of people. I’m still too far to pick out Liliana from the crowd taking pictures and celebrating the idiotically difficult thing they just did. But I can see it.

I keep walking and I keep stopping and people keep telling me I’m almost there. I want to tell them I know, but all I can muster is a smile. I am encouraged that none of them are Liliana. She hasn’t given up on me yet. I feel like my fourteen-year-old self on my first date with my soon-to-be ex-husband. I didn’t have to climb a mountain for him to kiss me, I just had to pretend I liked baseball.

By the time I finally make it, my femurs feel like they might slice through my knee caps. I stumble up the last bit of crumbling rock and land hands first on the ground. I want to kiss the dirt. A woman offers a hand but I shake my head. I push myself up and look around for Liliana. I

scan until I see her braids. She's looking out over the opposite side, standing with her hands on her hips. I bite the straw of my hydration pack and gulp water, preparing to approach her. I dust myself off and take a deep breath before calling her name.

She turns. Her eyes and mouth open wide with excitement and she jogs over. Without saying anything, she wraps her arms around me, sliding her hands into the sweaty space between my back and pack. I meet her eyes and a zing hits the center of my body. She leans in. I expect a peck, but she kisses me deeply. I let my body react. And then I hear myself laughing.

"Are you okay?" she asks, pulling away.

I shake my head, then realize I'm telling her that I'm not okay by doing that and I start nodding. I'm moving my head too rapidly. I'm still laughing. I cough. I apologize.

She laughs. The air I've been holding in my chest leaves my body, a full balloon released. I remember how to breathe. I apologize again. She apologizes back. I laugh again. She does too. She grabs my hand and bumps my hip with hers. She gestures to the scene ahead, straight off of a postcard: layers of mountains patched with snow, clouds drifting over peaks, sky bright and blue.

"Worth it?" she asks.

"Absolutely," I say.

## MELPOMENE

EMMA WELLS

Faustus' doom dresses skin  
dappling in frigid fear  
of rippling river waves:  
a fermented chill  
as a raven's perch  
filtrates, icing veins  
with devilish zeal.

Malevolence creeps  
below wooden stage boards:  
wispy willow branches,  
vapour thin;  
actress' heels vine  
with obsidian cords,  
pulling tightly;  
invisible webs  
entomb lead actresses,  
actress after actress  
falling as asphyxiated flies.

Melpomene,  
sorely missing the stage  
yearns for limelight,  
jealous of all whom bathe in it:  
protecting its spectral beauty



in theatrical hands  
as newborn light.

Malevolent stardom:  
a fierce liquid fame is reborn.  
All Melpomene's.

Coursing brim full -  
of gothic venom,  
Melpomene regally rises,  
possessing actress-by-actress;  
manifesting her own lines  
by twisting mouths:  
using actresses as puppets  
whilst she stalks the stage,  
adrenaline-high,  
beaming bright in stage lights.

Blood-red roses arrive,  
falling in droves at her feet;  
clapping hands applaud;  
people stand in ovation  
praising each actress  
whom has lost her soul.

It is clasped tightly  
in Melpomene's evil hands.

She marvels at stolen stardom.

A muse reborn.

## TRAIN TO MUNICH

CLS SANDOVAL

At seven years old  
I was completely oblivious  
to the deeply rooted histories  
surrounding trains in Germany

I was just on vacation with my family  
exploring the beautiful city of Vienna  
taking a train for 3 1/2 hours to Salzburg  
to toboggan down the mountain  
near where The Sound of Music was filmed

Though I had seen the film  
everything about the Nazis  
just seem like the typical bad guy to me

I hadn't quite made the connection  
to my class reading of The Diary of Anne Frank

Another hour and a half  
from Salzburg, we were in Munich

My most vivid memory of the place  
consists of the hard rolls and cheese  
that were served for breakfast  
in stark contrast

to my American expectations of soft sweets

After a night or two in the German city  
 our train left the station  
 4 1/2 hours back to Vienna  
 then a plane bound for the United States  
 our American passports  
 I was a little girl oblivious  
 as to how many would have wanted those passports  
 that allowed us to easily board  
 I lived in blissful ignorance  
 as we rode then flew to the New World

me not knowing that going home was a privilege

## **THE GRASS IS NOT JUST GREENER, IT IS NEON BRIGHT.**

VAISHNAVI PUSAPATI (DR.)

My neighbour's garden, the tomatoes are bigger, redder, real.  
 While mine shrivel, die and silently I buy new ones,  
 as vampire worms feed as they die green,  
 punching holes in the drying leaves. I kill them and they still come,  
 worms and bugs alone grow here.  
 In my neighbour's garden my hope is wilting,  
 gnomes and flamingos guard against my evil eyes,  
 the flowers actually bloom with outstretched arms like asking hugs, and buds already queue  
 My own tree, escapes into it, roots, then twigs and now, branches, dropping seeds there  
 And the bird nest has turned its back on this old place, always looking at the new garden.  
 The trunk already bending the two-faced fence, whiter on the other side.  
 The emerald grass is greener, the sapphire pool bluer, and something ethereal  
 in the golden air under the fair rain of light. I remain, Chernobyl,  
 In my shallow pool, basic as basic can be, the angry rainbow frowns,  
 and my own paleness, adds to their colour, in that Eden  
 of bees and butterflies and sparrows competing, communicating, laughing,  
 where everything is in its best dress and the best foot shot forward.  
 On casual Sundays there, whiter linen unstained by life, the one that got away,  
 the superior car is bathed there, and mine shall simply wait for the rain.  
 All this would be fine if not for the construction music, eternally playing,  
 adding kitchenettes, islands, half rooms and rooms, up and down  
 while I haven't added a rusting nail to the wall.  
 And I can smell the dinner in the chimney scope, carried by the wind like rumours  
 The snail began weeks ago, perhaps already half-life past,  
 steadfast goes towards that meadow, that greener pasture  
 where the sky is mysteriously bluer, the stars like diamonds, brighter and brighter.



# MANGO SELLING IN MANHATTAN IS DANGEROUS

LINDAANN LOSCHIAVO

Six mangoes swayed, supported by the green  
Hammock of her worn homespun skirt. Free fruit  
Offered for stolen kisses. She was twelve,  
The vendor old and married. Mom won't ask.

Alicia can't explain her happy face,  
Her realization that beauty's prized,  
How secrets feed a hungry family.

No snake of conscience hibernating then,  
She watched her brothers lick their fingers, lips,  
Aware contentment crooned a lullaby,  
Aware adults preferred what's left unsaid.

Soon she'll embrace the kin of Sisyphus,  
Who heft the weight they bear eternally  
Instead of facing darkness just ahead.

Today's transactions on a Queens' train tapped  
That memory, unpeeling older fruit,  
Sweet satisfying inner core explored.

Then roughly she is grabbed, her mango cart|  
Possessed by men in blue who handcuff her.

Much worse, Alicia's strip searched, ticketed,  
Detained, her merchandise confiscated.  
She's unlicensed to sell on the subway.

New York's Mayor will say they're stopping crime.

Hate crimes continue to rise (and assaults)  
While officers are tackling temptation -  
Aware forbidden fruit in callous hands,  
Cut, scored, cored, juiced can lead to perdition.

Preventing public sinning requires more  
Than shame - pursuing like a trail of ants.

# WHAT THE BOYS ORDER

SIMON A. SMITH

They come as a trio  
pack.  
The tallest one has  
bulging calves,  
fibrous, and flour white,  
wrapped  
like a burrito supreme.

The shortest, my son,  
is an unforeseen  
weightlifter with  
no business toting  
around two forearms  
veined and shredded  
as the chicken they  
outlawed at  
Taco Bell.

They speak first with their  
long strides, putting distance  
between me and their  
pumped up posse.

When the chatter starts,  
it unfurls like extended limbs

posted straight as stiff-arms.  
Loaded language like  
Joe Rogan,  
then Joey Diaz,  
Deathsquad,  
and hardcore history.

Like the one I thought we had,  
my son and I,  
some shared  
understanding of the world  
that now includes tacked-on  
words like Resveratrol,  
and Quercetin

And then Cantina.  
Where we stand staring at  
a screen that is supposed  
to be our waiter  
but is more like a chasm,  
Gordita Gorge,  
separating us the way  
things like Nirvana  
and Jordache jeans  
used to act as offensive  
lineman blocking  
me from my dad.

But stone washing  
and heavy rocking  
do not transmogrify,

if that's even  
 the right terminology,  
 these days,  
 are not ingredients that  
 threaten  
 to mush the brain's  
 chemistry in such  
 molecular,  
 modified ways.

And under those  
 conditions,  
 they purchase the most distressing  
 thing;  
 the wrongest, most chilling  
 thing  
 on the entire menu.  
 Mega Blast  
 Macheese-mo.

## FRIENDS WHO I BROKE KHLEB WITH

JACOB REINA

In Batumi, we let our glasses clink,  
 Filled with Georgian cha-cha that  
 Burned our throats; *Zdorovye!*<sup>1</sup>  
 A spoonful of hot meaty borsch,  
 Beetroots blood-red like grounds  
 Of war; their little Ukrainian son  
 Learned geography from the flags  
 That scaled along the rafter beams  
 As gifts from tourists of the past.

Where are they now  
 In this season of false blaming?

In Svaneti, I photographed you  
 With the Caucasus behind; and  
 The sun shone down, so Irina's  
 Brown eyes gleamed; I snapped  
 Chamomile and said *Tsvetok!*  
 (For her orange hair) and *Sergei,*  
*Drug moi, moi Ray Bans dlay*  
*tebya.*<sup>2</sup> With Andrei and Polina,

---

1 Cheers!

2 A flower! ... Sergei, my friend, my Ray Bans, for you.

You looked—a California tribe.

Where are you now  
In this season of escaping?

In Tbilisi, Rudi bickered with the  
Customs agent on the line, and his  
Armenian hoarseness slurring curses  
Like bricks or mortars aimed for  
Troops. Sveta always told me *Tak,*  
*Dzheikob, don't worry—vsyo kharasho!*  
Then *Davai,<sup>3</sup> eat please, before you go!*  
But I'd worry about border doubts,  
And invasions of our recent past.

Where are they now  
In this season of invading?

---

3 So...everything is good! ...Let's go



**LOST IN THOUGHT**  
ROBIN YOUNG

# A BOOK AND ITS COVER

SUSAN CORNFORD

**CONTENT WARNING:** This story depicts scenes that may cause distress to readers.

It started as a simple case of mistaken identity. John tapped Sally on the shoulder in his local supermarket, thinking she was an old friend he hadn't seen for years. When she turned around, he realised that the woman he had known had never been as beautiful as the one in front of him, mumbled an apology but kept on staring at her face. She seemed unsurprised by this rudeness, smiled and said, 'I used to be a model. People have been telling me I'm beautiful since I was two years old.' Then she held out her hand and said, 'I'm Sally Martin, what's your name?'

This snapped John out of his trance enough to reply in kind, apologise again and ask if he could buy her coffee at the cafe next door when she'd finished her shopping. Not having anything frozen or perishable on her list, she agreed. A few minutes later they were face to face over steaming, fragrant cappuccinos, as John's weekly supply of frozen dinners defrosted beside him.

Then, and over the next few days, he learned that her home was on the other side of the country and she was visiting her aunt who lived nearby. She had saved enough from her high-fashion days to put her Art History degree to good use; she had bought a gallery which she ran with modest success. In her spare time, she loved early morning ocean sailing, so her one luxury was a powerful motor launch. Apart from this, she lived quite frugally, except for the times when her work required high-end clients to be entertained. This she chose to do in restaurants

rather than in her cottage on the shore.

'I have lots of friends,' she said, smiling, 'all kinds of people, from the rich and powerful to the poor and struggling. And, needless to say,' she looked down, 'lots of boyfriends. But,' in a blushing Niagara torrent, 'no one special.' John mentally shook his head every time this facial change happened, his eyes following the rise of colour up to her brow and then its subsidence. Heaven was an eternity spent watching Sally's face.

All too soon she returned home, but they managed to begin and maintain a long-distance relationship with Skyping, visits and the occasional, short meet-in-the-middle trip. Otherwise, they both continued their usual, separate lives. John worked at his job, played one or two sports and watched others. His social life was mostly with people he had met through these activities plus a few old friends from school.

This went well until the accident. Sally was driving home late from work in bad weather conditions. Nobody did anything wrong; it was just a misalignment of tires, water and bitumen for just long enough to end in crumpled metal, broken glass, sliced flesh and crushed bone. John arrived as soon as airplanes and taxis could move him from A to B, his heart leaving no room in his mouth for even in-flight drink service. His prayers bounced, like a tennis ball, between her life and her beauty. Neither side won.

Slowly, Sally healed but not completely. When they'd made the last visit to the last plastic surgeon, John knew it was time to speak. He took Sally gently into his arms and said, 'I know your beauty has always been important to me but it's only now, when you don't have it any more, that I can see it's you, the wonderful, beautiful person underneath that I really love. If you will marry me, I'll be the happiest man on earth.' Then he held his breath. Long before he suffocated, she smiled, said, 'Yes', cried, then hugged and kissed him.

When he woke up in the morning and found both she and the



keys for the motor launch were missing, he knew she had gone for one of her usual jaunts. Not till later did the Water Police phone to say her boat had been located with no one on board and a note addressed to him as her fiancé.

‘I know you can live with my being ugly and I love you for that and many other reasons. But I can’t live with not being what I’ve always been, without the only good and worthwhile part of me, the thing that is, really, the only reason for anyone to love me. So, goodbye.’

At Sally’s memorial service, John released a boat-candle into the waves with his farewell message to her: ‘I wish you had been born deformed.’

## **INCLUSIVITY**

### **KEN KAKAREKA**

My rap name  
would be  
Quick Wit It  
(quick witted)  
or Min ‘mum Wage -  
something corny  
like that  
and I’d be  
a damn good  
lyricist -  
not that  
it matters much  
anymore  
but rap pays  
better  
than poetry  
does.  
And they let  
white boys  
get away  
with it  
more than  
they used to.  
What’s strange  
is

they aren't  
 letting  
 white boys  
 get away with  
 literature  
 anymore -  
 you have to  
 identify as  
 anything but  
 white  
 to have  
 something  
 read.  
 Quality  
 doesn't matter  
 as much as  
 inclusivity  
 does  
 and  
 that's not  
 a bad thing  
 normally,  
 but it  
 can be  
 for an  
 art form  
 that's  
 supposed to  
 thrive on  
 exclusivity.

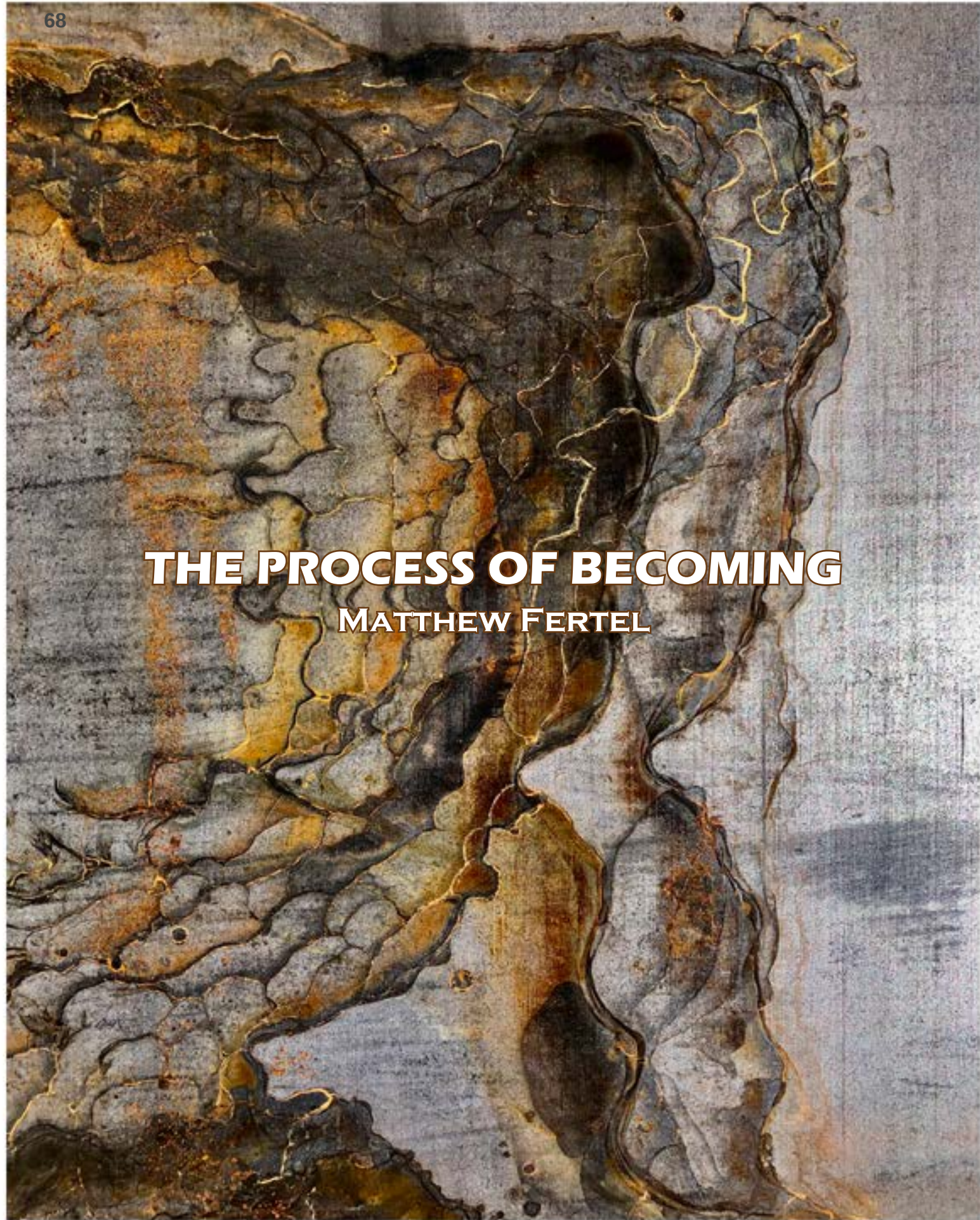
## LABOR OF LOVE

NICOLE K. BRADEN-JOHNSON

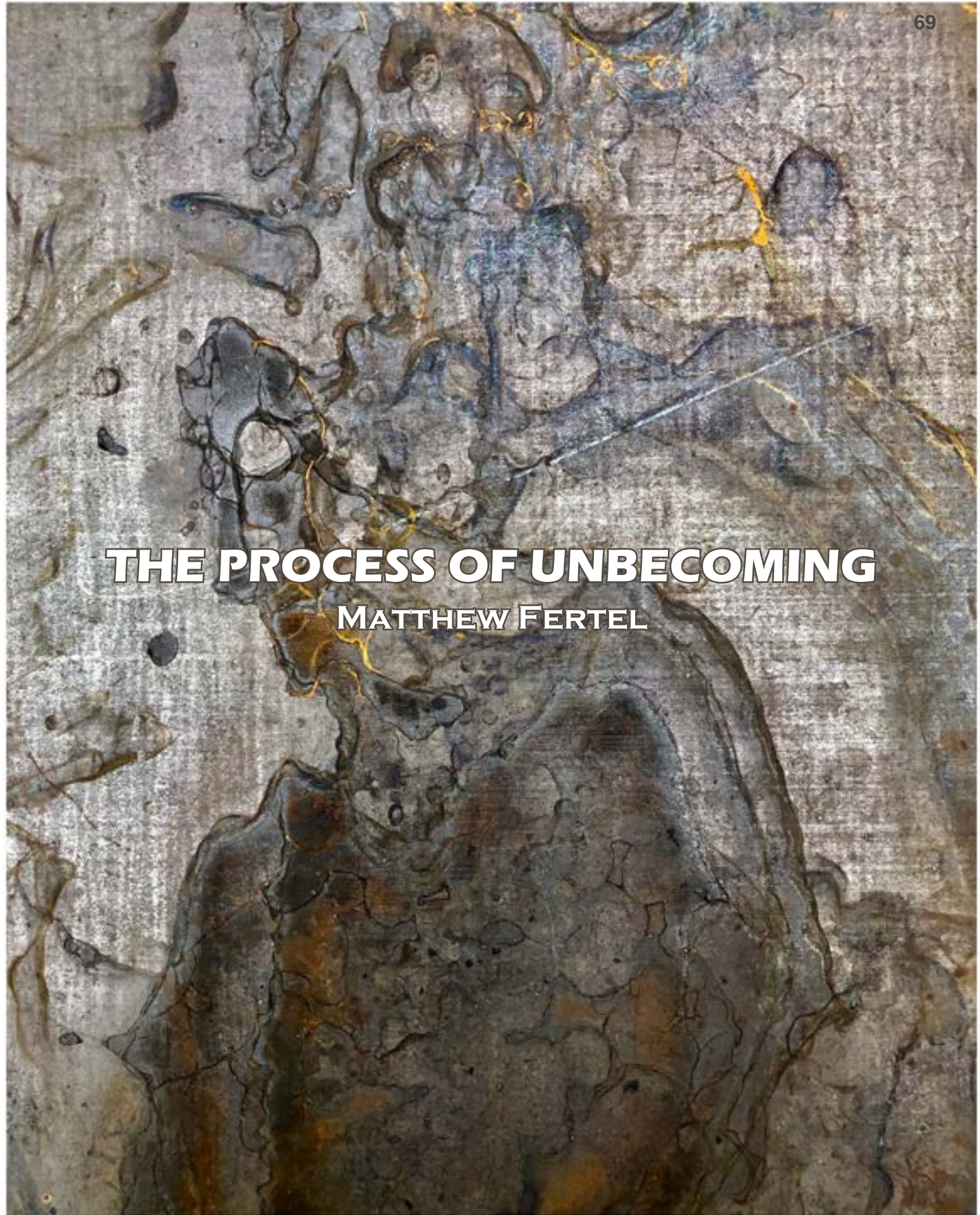
With a high-pitched roar the sweet acidic smell  
 Of friction-heated metal melting through cedar wood  
 Blooms in the air and stings his nose.  
 His supple limbs carry the angled lumber;  
 Through his hands it glides like water  
 Into place on the rising structure.

Now and then into the skin of a palm or finger a splinter sneaks  
 Which he seeks and pulls out with tongue and teeth—  
 The intermittent instant of pain less jarring  
 Than gloves that slip and dull the feeling.  
 His creation wrought from earth and wood,  
 Thus imbued with his very blood.

Under his scrutinizing eye he finds the exact position  
 Of each piece of steel and cellulose growing  
 Into the image he holds in his mind:  
 Here a perch for his love to sit;  
 There some beams for his little loves to play;  
 A spot to drink, a seat to think, a place to spend some time each day:  
 He crafts and sets the stage for all life's moments  
 With just his hands and some bits of trees and ore.



**THE PROCESS OF BECOMING**  
MATTHEW FERTEL



**THE PROCESS OF UNBECOMING**  
MATTHEW FERTEL

## NOSTALGIA

TAYLOR FRANSON THIEL

The obsession with space began  
 when we lived with my grandparents.  
 Grandpa had these  
 stick-on glow in the dark stars  
 that he put up on my ceiling  
 into actual constellations.  
 The big and little dipper.  
 The north star.  
 My first love was Orion and his belt.  
 I'd stare at them for hours.  
 Falling asleep beneath the cosmos  
 made me feel safe.  
 I longed to be among them,  
 to touch them.  
 I think that's when the height came,  
 spending so much time on my tippy toes  
 reaching, pulling, longing for  
 the heavens.  
 I sprouted up,  
 like my biology knew  
 I had meant to be a star  
 and somehow ended up on earth instead.

## POWER PRAYER

JAINA CIPRIANO



## THE LOUIS P. THURSBY HOUSE

KRISTA RUFFO

The Louis P. Thursby House is a historic home in Orange City, Florida, nestled within Blue Spring State Park. You know, Blue Spring? The area that became a park after Jacques Costeau filmed *The Forgotten Mermaids*, a movie about the great, grey, hulking sea creatures known as manatees?

Anyway, the old-fashioned white home sits just beside the vivid blue spring that became the park's namesake in 1972. When I see the house, I think of my birthday. My birthday is in January, and the best time to see the yearly Blue Spring manatee migration is in January because that's when the water is the coldest. I try to come every year, preferably right on my actual birthday. I suppose I've agreed to age with the house.

The establishment stands strong like a 150-year-old undefeated giant. The bright white sides catch too much light in the Florida sun, reflecting savage rays back at my eyes. Windows riddle all sides of the house like a many-eyes creature. Two stories of railings line both the porches, with the third story standing like a hat on top. It's raised on stilts on the entire thing is white. Old, looming pines sagging with grey moss encircle the house in a loving embrace.

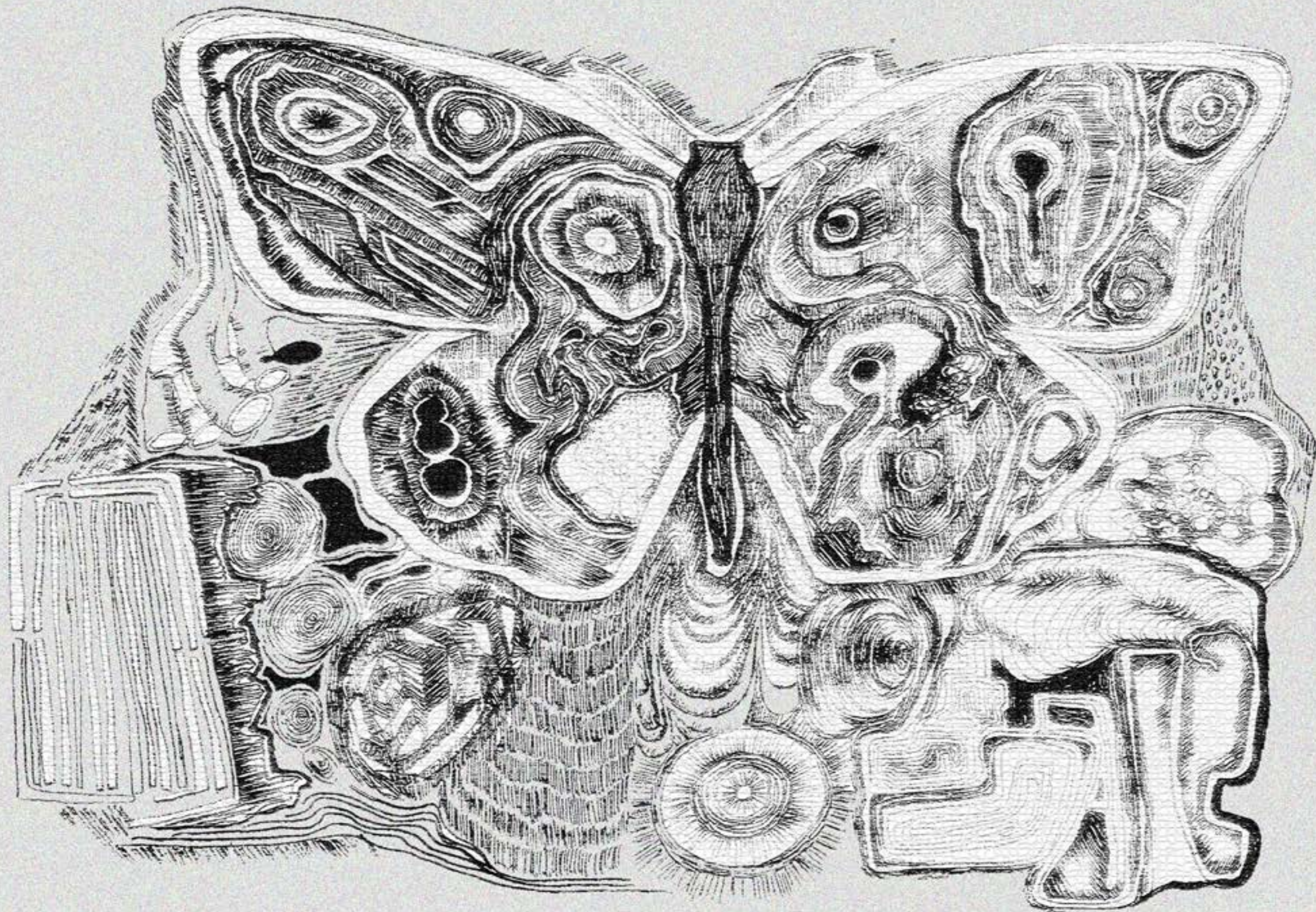
When I walk inside, I hear nothing. There is a dead silence as if walking through the front door took me inside a different world, one that blocked all the outside commotion. The Thursby house is a miracle because even the tourists are quiet.

Why is everyone so quiet? It's not like anyone lives here anymore. But there's something about a century-and-a-half-year-old house that commands respect. I turn a corner and see an ancient woodburning stove, smell the pine, and wonder what life was like for the former residents of

the Thursby house.

What was Louis P. Thursby's family like? Did they cool off under the shade of the great swinging clumps of Spanish moss or take a dip in the unusually blue water of the springs? What kind of words were shared in that house? Surely birthdays were held inside those walls, just as I celebrate my birthday by sitting on a bench and eating some cake right outside of it.

And when I tread across the floors, I tread softly, as if the house were a real thing I was disturbing. As if some family was still there, still living, still witnessing the manatee migrations from their front doorstep.



## THE FACADE

a.SOUL

**the facade.**

under the floorboards they *swore*  
there would be a *mystical treasure* -  
for they themselves *had done* the 'work' of  
**detonating** every single *love bomb crater*

every hopeful depth of our adolescent souls -  
"for as long as we **act**, and **do** as we are *told*,"  
public praise reward for being watered down to  
their entire expectation..

had grown to show we were *not necessary*,  
a *pawn* in their *game* -  
a **set** of *dolls only* to be *displayed* -  
played with, dressed up and touched..  
"and *girls*, **damn you** - if you ever **speak up!**"

## THE TOOL CART

LAWRENCE BRIDGES

Heft the glowing pumpkins from underground  
to patch. Mine throbs like a kopfschmerz as it  
glows, another sleeping head in the longest night  
of the year. It arrives, my chrome tool cart,  
with a month of understanding our lives in all contexts  
that is, before new new technology descends upon us.  
Everything's not better, but niftier. Write letters.  
Hold off. Get to know a horse. Someone polished  
my cart for its debut. I lift an ancient instrument,  
a needle with great beads of insulation, and I point it  
toward the patch. We all rise and it is summer  
and there would be mud and darkness if all this  
were not a sci-fi prop. There is no life without imagination.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Nataliia Burmaka** is a Seattle based artist and art instructor. She shows extensively in the Northwest. graduated from the National Studio of Fine Arts of Boris Danchenko (Sumy, Ukraine) in 1999 and worked as a designer from 1999 to 2005. Later, she earned a master's degree in philology and had a postgraduate course in accounting. Although she worked as an accountant, she didn't stop drawing and painting. Together with her husband she makes illustrations for books and murals (private commissions). In 2022, she moved to Finland to escape the war in Ukraine. Her works were shown in exhibitions in Finland and were featured in American magazines such as *Welter*, *Phoebe*, *Quibble.lit*, *Red-noisecollective*, *Flare*, *Santa Clara Review*, etc. Besides being a painter, Nataliia is also a writer and co-organizer of the Ukrainian short story contest "Open World".

**Cynthia Yatchman** is a Seattle based artist and art instructor. She shows extensively in the Northwest.

**Robin Young** works in mixed media focusing mostly on collage and contemporary art making. Her focus on collage art using magazine clippings, masking tape, wallpaper, jewelry, feathers, foil etc. allows her to develop deep into the whimsical and intuitive.

From large, life-sized pieces and 3D sculptures to small postcard-sized arrangements, Robin's keen eye and gripping esthetic guide her viewers into her own semi-readymade world. Repurposing these nostalgic images for lighthearted and sometimes disquieting messages; Robin's artistic universe is strange, funky, sometimes perverse and always alluring.

When creating her work, She will rely on paper and fabrics instead of paint or pencil. Rummaging through hundreds of scraps of fabric, wallpaper, magazines, print works, art papers and hand pressed papers; "painting" with these discarded remnants much like painters work with paints, twisting and binding the scraps into lines and marks. She is attracted to the humor of the everyday bizarre, seeking to make herself laugh through the imagery in the pieces. During the pandemic she quarantine fairly extensively in the Southern California desert seeking refuge from the ongoing loneliness through her own humor and art. She is based in Borrego Springs, California.

**Ruby Wang** (she/they) is a multimedia artist currently pursuing BA degrees in English and Visual Arts at Duke University. Her pieces attempt to evoke a meditative and peaceful internal experience, intended to juxtapose the deeply tumultuous aspects of the world's political and social circumstances. They are inspired by their intelligent friends and the insights offered by them during conversations, but they are also easily influenced: even how a leaf looks during a leisurely walk or listening to a song lyric can be enough to inspire Ruby. Introspection in her pieces drive a motivation to change, that refiguring the world can be achieved through imagination and action.

**Taylor Necko** is a senior at Bowling Green State University majoring in Creative Writing. Much of her poetic and prose work is focused on human relationships and how they transform. Along with her major, she is double-minoring in Art and Word-Image. The latter minor focuses on hybrid words, such as comic creation and visual poetry. She is the editor in chief of *Prairie Margins*, her college's undergraduate literary journal, and a writer for *Her Campus*.



**Tom Misuraca** studied Writing at Emerson College in his home town of Boston before moving to Los Angeles. Over 120 of his short stories and two novels have been published. His story, *Giving Up The Ghosts*, was published in *Constellations Journal*, and nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2021. His work has recently appeared in *Literature Today*, *The Unconventional Courier* and *Beyond Queer Words*. He is also a multi-award winning playwright with over 150 short plays and 13 full-lengths produced globally. His musical, *Geeks!*, was produced Off-Broadway in May 2019.

**Elizabeth Wittenberg** is a New Orleans-based writer who prefers moving over sitting still.

**Susan Cornford** is a retired public servant, living in Perth, Western Australia. She/her has most recently had pieces published or forthcoming in *Ab Terra Flash Fiction 2022*, *Arzono Publishing Presents the 2023 Annual*, *BigCityLit*, *Flash Frontier*, *HalfHourToKill.Com*, *Roi Fainéant*, *WELL READ Magazine*, *Written Tales* and *Wyldblood Magazine*.

**Heather Wheaton** is a writer, photographer, actress and tour guide. You'll find her work in *Curbside Splendor*, *Slipstream*, *The Morning News*, *PIM*, *Press Pause Press* and *Shooter Literary Magazine*. She lives in Manhattan and will never leave.

**Lawrence Bridges** is best known for work in the film and literary world. His photographs have recently appeared in the *Las Laguna Art Gallery 2023*, *Humana Obscura*, *Wanderlust a Travel Journal*, the *London Photo Festival*, *Light Space & Time Art Gallery*, and the *ENSO*

*Art Gallery* in Malibu, California. His poetry has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The Tampa Review*, and *Ambit*. He has published three volumes of poetry: *Horses on Drums* (Red Hen Press, 2006), *Flip Days* (Red Hen Press, 2009) and *Brownwood* (Tupelo Press, 2016). He created a series of literary documentaries for the National Endowment for the Arts "Big Read" initiative, which includes profiles of Ray Bradbury, Amy Tan, Tobias Wolff, and Cynthia Ozick. He lives in Los Angeles.

**N.T. Chambers**, a former Chicagoan, has led an interesting life on the way to becoming a writer. Among many jobs held were: cab driver, bus mechanic, sales drone, pizza deliverer, wine merchant, improv actor, editor, educator, professional counselor, and, of course, every writer's "go to" job – bartender. Every position helped to stockpile a wealth of experiences from which to cull ideas and characters for poems, stories and photography.

**Matthew Fertel** is a Sacramento-based photographer who has worked at Sierra College since 2004. Before that, he was a fine art auction house catalog photographer in San Francisco for over 10 years. His work focuses on capturing the usually unnoticed minutiae we all encounter in our daily lives. He seeks to expose the unseen beauty in the everyday objects that make up the landscape of our existence. Going to the same locations over days, months and years allows him to capture images under different lighting and weather conditions, and to see objects change over long or short periods of time. There is art hidden everywhere if we can learn to see it.

**Jaina Cipriano**, a self-taught experiential designer, photographer, and filmmaker, delves into the emotional impact of religious and romantic entrapment. Her vibrant worlds connect with our neglected inner child, employing explosive colors, elevated play, and the interplay of light and dark. Jaina's award-winning short films tackle the complex journey of healing. 'You Don't Have to Take Orders from the Moon' (2020) is a surreal horror film confronting deep codependency, while 'Trauma Bond' presents a dreamy, coming-of-age thriller exploring the consequences of seeking quick fixes for deep wounds.

**Steve Gerson** writes poetry and flash about life's dissonance. He has published in CafeLit, Panoplyzine, Crack the Spine, Decadent Review Vermilion, In Parentheses, and more, plus his chapbooks *Once Planed Straight*; *Viral*; and *The 13th Floor: Step into Anxiety* from Spartan Press.

**Amanda Tumminaro** currently lives in the U.S. with her family (and cat!). Her poetry has appeared in *Mercury Retrograde*, *Plainsongs*, and *Barzakh Magazine*, among others. Her first chapbook, "The Flying Onion," was published in 2018 by *The Paragon Press*. For fun, she enjoys reading, watching movies, and pondering the universe.

**Jonathan Jones** lives and works in Rome where he teaches at John Cabot University. He has a PhD in literature from the University of Sapienza, and a novella 'My Lovely Carthage' published in the spring of 2020 from J. New Books.

**Ellen Zhang** is a student at Harvard Medical School who has studied under Pulitzer Prize winner Jorie Graham, poet Rosebud Ben-Oni, and poet Josh Bell. She has been recognized by the 2022 DeBakey Poetry Prize, 2022 Dibase Poetry Contest, and as a 2019 National Student Poet Semifinalist.

**Claire Marie Anderson** is a writer and art historian from Houston, TX. Her work has appeared in *Unfortunately*, *Literary Magazine* (Best of the Net nomination), *Alchemy*, *The Decadent Review*, *BarBar Literary Magazine*, and *Sheepshead Review*, among other publications. She serves as Managing Editor for *Landing Zone Magazine*, and is currently at work on her debut poetry collection.

**Maggie Bowyer** (they/he) is a poet, cat parent, and the author of various poetry collections including *Allergies* (2023) and *When I Bleed* (2021). They are a co-host of the podcast *Baked and Bookish*. They have been featured in *The Abbey Review*, *Chapter House Journal*, *The Elevation Review*, *The South Dakota Review*, *Wishbone Words*, and more. They were the Editor-in-Chief of *The Lariat Newspaper*, a quarter-finalist in *Brave New Voices* 2016, and a Marilyn Miller Poet Laureate.

**Jaden Fong** is a writer with a sweet tooth and a soft spot for the whimsical and the peculiar. A two time nominee for the Alike Perroti and Seth Frank Most Promising Young Poet Award, he has won awards in fiction, poetry, and other forms of writing. His writing is most often inspired by the natural world, and in his free time, he likes to spend time in nature, where he frequently and confidently misidentifies every flower he comes across. You can find his work on the Academy of American Poets website at [poets.org](https://poets.org), *Flora Fiction*, *The Owl*, *The Santa Clara Review*, and *Transcendence*, among other places.

**CLS Sandoval** PhD (she/her), is a pushcart nominated writer and communication professor with accolades in film, academia, and creative writing who speaks, signs, acts, publishes, sings, performs, writes, paints, teaches and rarely relaxes. She's a flash fiction and poetry editor for Dark Onus Lit. She has presented over 50 times at communication conferences, published 15 academic articles, two academic books, three full-length literary collections, three chapbooks, as well as flash and poetry pieces in several literary journals, recently including *Opiate Magazine*, *The Journal of Magical Wonder*, and *A Moon of One's Own*. She is raising her daughter and dog with her husband in Alhambra, CA.

**Vaishnavi Pusapati** (Dr.), is a physician and poet, previously published in eighteen journals including Drabble, 50 word stories, 50 give or take, Five Minutes, Molecule, Micro fiction Monday, Flash Fiction Friday, Dreich magazine, Havik, Shot Glass Journal, Plum Tree Tavern, Paragraph Planet among others.

**LindaAnn LoSchiavo**, a Native New Yorker, and a four time nominee for The Pushcart Prize, has also been nominated for Best of the Net, the Rhysling Award, and Dwarf Stars. She is a member of SFPA, The British Fantasy Society, and The Dramatists Guild. Elgin Award winner "A Route Obscure and Lonely" (Wapshott Press, 2019), "Women Who Were Warned" (Cerasus Poetry, 2022), Elgin Award, Firecracker Award, Balcones Poetry Prize, Quill and Ink, Paterson Poetry Prize, and IPPY Award nominee "Messengers of the Macabre: Hallowe'en Poems," co-written with David Davies (Audience Askew, 2022), "Apprenticed to the Night" (UniVerse Press, 2023), and "Felones de Se: Poems about Suicide" (Ukiyoto Publishing, 2023) are her latest poetry titles. In 2023, her poetry placed as a finalist in Thirty West Publishing's "Fresh Start Contest" and in the 8th annual Stephen DiBiase contest.

**Simon A. Smith** teaches English to high schoolers. His stories have appeared in many journals and media outlets, including Hobart, PANK, Whiskey Island, and Chicago Public Radio. He is the author of two novels, *Son of Soothsayer*, and *Wellton County Hunters*. He lives in Chicago with his wife and son.

**Jacob Reina** is an undergraduate English student at Fresno State. He was the undergraduate winner of the Fresno Fiction Prize in 2023. Much of his work is deeply influenced by Russian and Persian literature and has been or will be featured by The Banyan Review, New York Quarterly, Clackamas Review, Rougarou, Poets Choice, Cathexis Northwest Press, and Watershed Review.

**Ken Kakareka** is a poet, novelist, short story writer, essayist, and editor who lives in Fullerton, California with his lovely wife. He is the author of *Late to Bed, Late to Rise* (Black Rose Writing, 2013). Ken's words have appeared or are on their way in a number of rags including Gargoyle Magazine, Route 7 Review, Horror Sleaze Trash, New Pop Lit, and so on. His novella *Summer of Irresponsibility* is forthcoming with Alien Buddha Press (2023).

**Nicole K. Braden-Johnson** has previously published poems in The Write Launch, Spires, The Mind's Eye, SPLASH! (Haunted Waters Press) as well as in her monthly poetry column "Unheard Melodies," featured in the local publication Conway Currents (previously known as The Visitor). She is a freelance journalist with regular publications (mainly arts related content) in the Greenfield Recorder and is always on the look out for new stories. Additionally, she is a founding member of the Connecticut River Flute Choir and participates in the Montague Community Band. Currently she is working on her PhD in American

Studies at Universität Konstanz and is writing about agrarian, modernist novels from the US and ecocriticism. She is a Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts alumna with a B.A. in English and Philosophy and in 2016 she received her M.A. in English from Westfield State University. Nicole lives in Conway, MA with her husband, David, their sons, Kenneth and Nicholas, and numerous companion animals.

**Taylor Franson Thiel** is a writer from Utah, now based in Fairfax, Virginia. She received her Master's in creative writing from Utah State University and is pursuing an MFA at George Mason University. Her writing frequently centers on her experience as a Division One basketball player, the female body, abusive relationships and mental health. Along with writing, she enjoys lifting heavy weights and reading fantastic books.

**Krista Ruffo** is a junior at the University of Central Florida. She is pursuing a BA in English alongside an Editing and Publishing Certificate. Her top two publications are a poem in Appelley Publishing Company's "2020 Rising Stars Collection" and a poem featured on the blog for the Ilyse Kusnetz Writing Festival of Valencia College. She has also had two poems published in two editions of Valencia College's art and literary magazine "Phoenix."

**'a.Soul'**, unraveling is a lighthouse of vivacity for survivors of multiple forms of abuse, women, and minorities. you are beautiful, you are necessary, you are love.

## STAFF

**Sage Delio** might be considered a modern day renaissance woman, with her diverse interests and talents spanning across the fields of creative writing, computer science, music, and the arts. In May 2022, she published her debut poetry collection, *Blue Confessional: Poetry and Prose*. A second edition of the collection is being adapted with Sage's own art and illustrations. For *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*, Sage holds the roles of Editor-In-Chief and Poetry & Prose Editor.

**Sharon Fremont** is a multifaceted artist and avid book enthusiast. Her artistic journey spans across various mediums, with a particular fondness for the captivating realms of watercolor painting and sketching. Her passion for the written word is equally profound, evident in her dual roles as Managing Editor and Fiction Editor for *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*.

**Karen Porterfield** has spent over 24 years working in design. She has established herself as a talented artisan jewelry designer, crafting one-of-a-kind pieces that are highly sought after. Karen's passion for creating beautiful and innovative designs has led her to achieve a great deal of success in the field. She serves as the Art & Illustrations Editor for *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*.

**Matthew Evan** is an accomplished photographer and passionate car enthusiast. He has developed a sharp eye for capturing the beauty and essence of his subjects through his lens. He leads *Gabby & Min's Literary Review* as the publication's Photography Editor.

## **THE UNBREAKABLE BOND: WRITING AND ART**

As *Gabby & Min's Literary Review* celebrates the success of its inaugural issue, we would like to highlight the inseparable connection between writing and art. Within the realm of creative expression, these two mediums converge, transcending time and culture. Writing weaves tapestries of emotions and stories, while art communicates directly to the heart through strokes and hues. Together, they form a harmonious union, igniting inspiration and leaving an indelible mark on the human experience.

As this first issue comes to a close, our staff would like to reinforce the profound impact of writing and art on our lives. Their unbreakable bond enriches our understanding of the world, providing a creative sanctuary where ideas flourish and emotions thrive. *Gabby & Min's Literary Review* embarks on this artistic journey, acknowledging the timeless force of the fusion between writing and art, one that will continue to captivate readers, writers, and artists in the many issues yet to come.

**END**

