

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

ISSUE #12, SPRING 2026



GABBY & MIN'S *Literary Review*

POETRY BY
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BURNETT
BRIERS III

ART BY
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TURNEY
VESSEL

FICTION BY
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Literary Review

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Philadelphia by Christine Stoddard

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear Cherished Readers,

Spring arrives not as a sudden transformation, but as a quiet unfolding.

In this issue, you will find works that move through that unfolding—pieces rooted in memory, in growth, in rupture, and in return. There is a tension here between what persists and what changes, between what is held and what is released. The voices gathered in this issue explore those thresholds with remarkable honesty and range.

From intimate reflections to expansive visual compositions, each contributor brings a distinct perspective to the shared act of making meaning. Together, these works form a conversation about perception, connection, and the spaces we inhabit—both internal and external.

As always, Gabby & Min's Literary Review remains committed to showcasing the powerful interplay between written and visual art forms. We are grateful to the artists and writers who entrusted us with their work, and to you, our readers, for engaging with it.

May you find something here that lingers.

With gratitude and renewal,



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

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★ COVER FEATURE

BEETLE

MAKAYLA WALLENDER

Bug's in the blue rain

Iridescent stained wings

Grounded just for me



PRETTY IN PINK

MATTHEW MCCAIN

The image shows the cover of the book 'Waxing Moon' by Lawrence Bridges. The cover art depicts a bright, glowing yellow moon in a dark blue sky. The sky is filled with soft, wispy white clouds that are illuminated from below, creating a dreamy, ethereal atmosphere. The moon is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the cover. The title 'WAXING MOON' and the author's name 'LAWRENCE BRIDGES' are printed in a bold, white, sans-serif font in the lower right area of the cover.

WAXING MOON

LAWRENCE BRIDGES

BRIERS III

T. ALLEN BURNETT

In the hallowed earth of early spring,
 Where winter releases its tight grip
 On air and stone and season,
 Where we dig in mulch, deep and rich,
 And amend and protect,
 Our roots form and endure like bone.
 Generous with the garden fork,
 Liberal with moss and lime
 And greensand,
 The heart, the heritage, the home—
 Roots that grow among the briers.

In the harsh wind of early spring,
 The winter clings desperately
 To the evenings.
 The remaining snow grips the granite
 And becomes chiseled ice,
 Freezing and melting and freezing again.
 Birds return among the leaves—
 You, a house wren camouflaged and heard,
 I, a bluejay, unafraid and seen
 And returning—
 Leaves grow among the briers.

In the hard ground of early spring,

The winter, hopelessly attached
 To the soil, yields
 To warmth and light.
 Daffodils, bluebells, purple violets
 Spot the morning grass—
 A color burst
 Among the tan-green shoots.
 The brier canes, some dead or dying,
 Some in birth and blooming,
 Some eager to fruit,
 The berries green, then red, then black,
 Born from what flourishes in the dirt—
 Roots strong among the briers.

In the harsh digging of early spring,
 The winter yields slowly
 To the frost and thaw,
 The cold wet clay drying
 Then crumbling fertile,
 The skim of pond where peepers
 Come to life,
 Where their eggs are laid
 On lily pads and hatch,
 The tadpoles wiggling
 With gills and tails,
 Damselflies mate in mid-flight,
 The Green Darner cuts and zips
 Among the blades,
 Because of the slow-growing
 Enduring roots,
 The source that keeps the bush alive—
 Love rooted among the briers.

SOLEMN 1AB

EDWARD MICHAEL SUPRANOWICZ

LUCKY ONES

CARTER VANCE

We hashed out life over
quarter-beers in the Hamberg bars,
over the foosball din and
the tap of shoe soles on pavement.

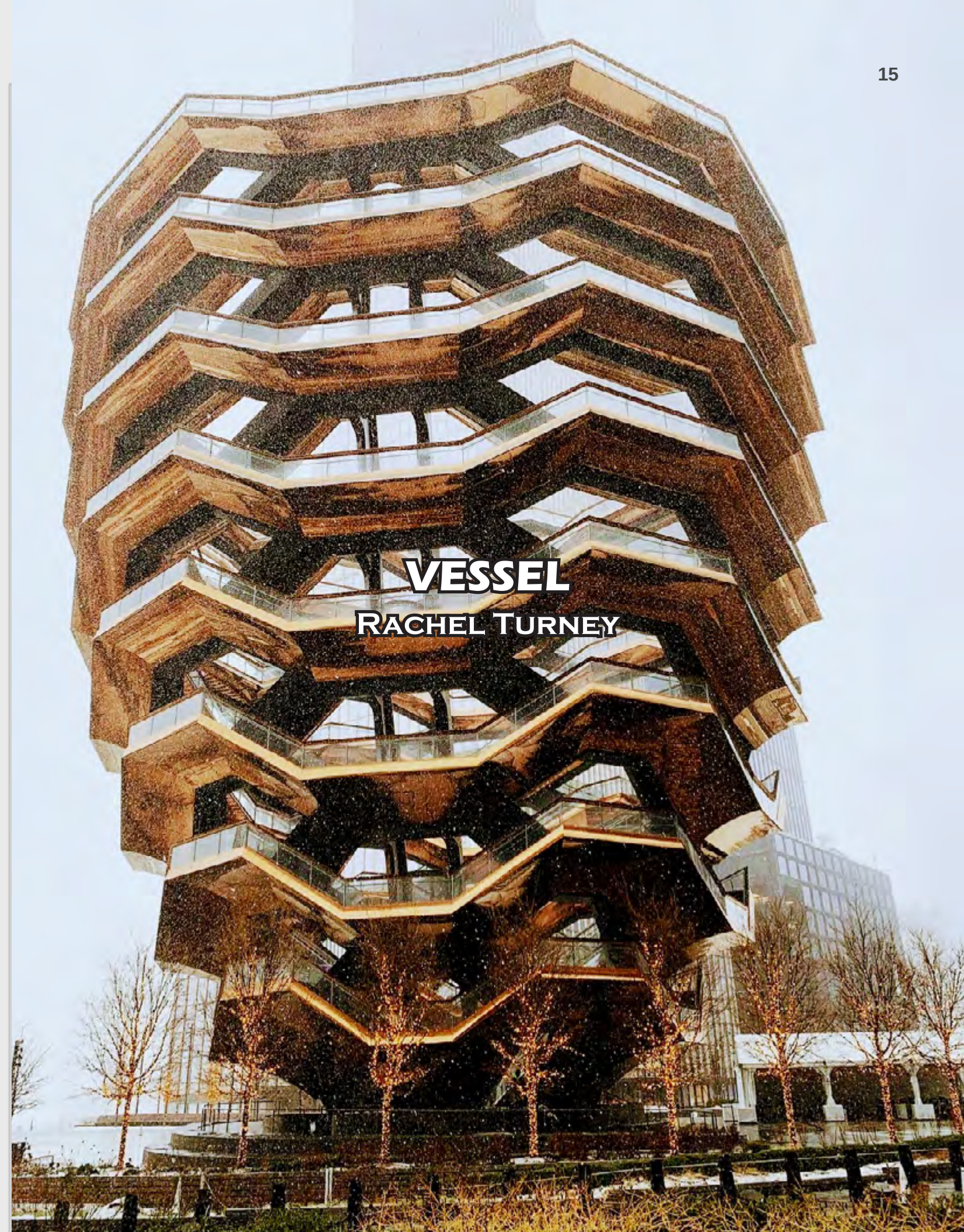
We knew how all things would go,
from the patterns of planets to
the flutter of sparrow winds,
how all of it was one circle,

Ourselves at the centre;

Two wet-soaking amateurs,
their backs bruised from
pressing against invisible walls

So tight for warmth we
never flew, beyond the hazed
windows, weeping for the fires

That burned across the alley corner.



A MILKWEED GARDEN FOR MONARCHS

CHRISTINA M. RAU

It grows wild and specific. Royal orange wings bordered in black alight in the thick brush behind the pond's edge.

They are in danger. Here, they thrive. They mingle with swallowtails yellow and blue. Eastern pondhawks buzz.

The monarchs arrive one at a time, decide on a leaf, hover to see if it will hold weight. Never staying long

they keep moving on the air— behind the pond, skipping lily pads, towards the mill, down to the garden

where a pebbled path unfolds half in sunlight and half in shade where heirloom roses grow. Then over

to the marigolds, the zinnia, the wild bergamot. Thin wings like blades— when they close, they become almost

invisible. When they open, they reveal

a masterpiece composed of fractals,
all symmetry. Appearing disappearing

reappearing disappearing reappearing
one and two and ten and four at a time
until invisible in a distant sky.

The harbor flows below. An egret, so
white, stretches out its long neck.

Christina M. Rau, Cedarmere Residency Day 3 August 3, 2022



CHANDELIER OF FLOWERS

SUSAN REAMS

NO HALO

MARCO ETHERIDGE

Marie stands on the patio, sipping coffee and surveying the backyard. It's another beautiful spring day in the valley. Rays of sunshine illuminate a trio of fruit trees. The oranges will need picking soon, and the lemons as well. That will make a nice treat for someone.

Maybe Opal would enjoy some fresh oranges. But not too many. The poor girl can't store a crate of fruit in her tent. Not that Marie is judging. Being homeless is not Opal's fault. The young woman has made some poor choices, true, but bad judgment bites everyone sooner or later. And Opal was dealt some very bad cards. An alcoholic mother and a parade of her mother's predatory boyfriends. It's no wonder the girl chose to run.

She stares into her coffee. At least Opal has the excuse of being young. Marie is a grandmother. She always thought wisdom would come with age. Maybe it has, but bad choices still bite her in the butt.

* * *

The young woman who calls herself Opal kills time outside the Tulare County library. Opal hates waiting for anything, but if you want to grab a computer, it pays to be at the door before the snooty librarians unlock the place. Another lesson learned the hard way. Show up late, and she might wait hours for her turn. Greedy bastards will hog a computer for hours, no matter how hard she gives them the evil eye.

Opal is not at the library to kill time with YouTube videos or an

air-conditioned nap. This is business. Opal believes in having a plan. Without a plan, you could be stuck on the streets forever.

Step one is get the fuck out of the Central Valley before the heat of summer transforms her makeshift tent into a living hell. Step two: get to Los Angeles. But she needs money, always the goddamn bottom line. Step three is Marie.

It's not that Opal dislikes Marie. The old woman is easy to like. Maybe too easy. Plus, Marie's got it all. Most people see their glass as half-empty or half-full, but Marie's glass is overflowing. Opal imagines what life might have been like with Marie as her mom, surrounded by a huge family of brothers and sisters. The fantasy lasts less than a heartbeat. Reality hits with the stark memory of Mom passed out on a filthy couch while the latest boyfriend leered with hungry eyes.

Opal shakes away the past and focuses on the now. A figure appears behind the glass doors. Locks click, and the doors open. A librarian steps into the sunlight. Opal flashes the woman a fake smile, ignoring the bitch's holier-than-thou look. Still smiling, she follows the librarian to the front desk. Time to play the game. Be nice, ask for a temporary password, get a computer, and work on the plan.

* * *

Marie gathers up the breakfast dishes. The house is quiet, but her mind is unsettled. She prides herself on not being a worrier. In her experience, life's little problems tend to work out given time and an open mind. At the moment, however, she has two thorny issues to deal with. The first is how to help Opal. The second and stickier problem is her husband.

Larry ignores what he calls Marie's do-good projects. If his wife wants to waste her time on lost causes, that's her business. He doesn't

care about people like Opal, but he certainly cares about money. Larry is quick to point out that he works hard. Homeless people could do the same if they'd get off their asses. He objects to seeing his hard-earned dollars handed over to some freeloader Marie hardly even knows. What if the girl is spending the money on drugs? Larry's questions come weighted with enough irony to sink a battleship. Marie can only bite her tongue.

Their life together wasn't always like this. Marie and Larry began their marriage as poor hippies living on dreams and love. They made candles and sold them at street fairs and craft markets. Tie-dyed entrepreneurs, lucky if they had two dimes to rub together, but life was simple and fun. Then things changed.

Their candles were good. Trial and error made them better. Word got around. They opened a second booth and hired other hippies to sell their goods. Demand increased. A rented warehouse replaced the garage workshop. In the space of three years, they owned a dedicated candle factory. Now, two decades later, their candles are sold around the world.

Marie sighs, sets the memories aside, and loads the dishwasher.

* * *

Opal stares at the computer screen, hunting for a hidden gateway into Hollywood. Forget acting. Too much competition. She's still cute, unlike the meth-ravaged tweakers camped all around her, but being cute is not enough. LA is full of gorgeous cocktail waitresses waiting for their big break. Opal never flatters herself. She's not gorgeous. But there are plenty of good jobs behind the camera.

She searches through film credits. So many people needed to make a movie, and most of them not actors. The big stars top the list, but way down at the bottom are other credits that catch her eye. Assistant to

Mister So-and-so. Assistant to Miss Big-Boobs.

An idea sparks Opal's imagination. What does a personal assistant do? Actors are spoiled brats. Their assistant is there to spoil them. All you need is the ability to anticipate. Know what the star wants and have it in their hand before they ask. She can do that. Reading people's desires is one of her well-honed talents. You don't survive on the streets unless you know how to read people.

Opal closes her eyes and sees her name appear on a movie screen. Her real name. No more of this Opal bullshit. Anna Mason, assistant to Mister Bale. Anna Mason, assistant to Miss Hathaway. She nods her head as the credits scroll. Yes, this is it, step four, the final piece of the plan.

Her eyes snap open. It's time to make things happen. Step four doesn't happen without step three. So far, Marie's been good for two hundred bucks, most of it still hidden in Opal's bra.

Marie says she will help Opal sign up for general assistance. It's a risk putting your real name down on a government form, but the payoff is sweet. Four hundred bucks a month! Cash the first check and buy a bus ticket out of this shithole. And in the meantime, Marie will keep helping. Opal is sure of that.

* * *

Marie is busy baking cookies for the grandkids for yet another bake sale at one of the schools. Larry grouses about money spent on flour and chocolate, claims it's an extra tax on top of the huge property taxes he's already paying. It's a monologue Marie has heard many times before. *Taxes, schools, government waste... blah—blah—blah.* Fortunately, Larry has locked himself in his office, probably shouting into the telephone between cutting lines of cocaine.

The sunlit kitchen is her sanctuary from the outside world. Not that the world is a bad place, but everyone needs a quiet space all their own. Marie pulls another batch of cookies from the oven, happy with her work. The grandkids will be tickled pink.

Family is the cornerstone of Marie's life. Her two girls have grown into successful married women. So what if they don't have time to bake cookies? That's what grandmothers are for, and she loves being a grandma. She's only fifty-five, but she is blessed with four beautiful grandkids. They're all still in elementary school, and each one of them precious.

Marie surveys the racks of cookies cooling on the granite countertops. A quick mental tally tells her there will be extras beyond what she promised her daughter.

Opal would probably love a dozen homemade cookies. They're meeting tomorrow to fill out the forms for the welfare office. It took some convincing before the girl agreed to apply for assistance. Marie thinks part of Opal's reluctance stems from suspicion, which is understandable. Authority has never been on the girl's side. But Opal is also fiercely independent, even though she's living in a tent camp. Larry would scoff at the idea of a homeless person being independent, but Marie respects Opal for the very same reason.

This is a chance for the poor girl to get back on her feet. Marie believes in second chances. Everyone needs a helping hand now and then. With the money from the welfare office, Opal can find a cute little apartment. A permanent address means she can look for a real job. And then no more tent camps for Opal, that's for sure.

The smell of fresh-baked cookies brings her back to the here and now. Yes, cookies will make a thoughtful gift. Marie smiles and turns to check the oven.

* * *

Opal crouches in the tiny patch of shade beside her tent. It's way too hot to sit inside, even with the flaps open. Sweat trickles down her spine. She needs a shower, but the mission isn't open for hours yet, so showering will have to wait. She squints up at the merciless sun.

Being homeless means waiting for everything. Wait to eat, wait to wash, wait for someone to show a little kindness. Normal people take it for granted, all the stuff they don't have to wait for.

Opal reaches into a paper bag and pulls out a cookie. The chocolate chips have gone gooey in the heat. Marie can bake, that's for sure, but the cookies aren't sweet enough to push away her bitter emotions.

Marie had been edgy this morning. The old lady tried to hide it, but Opal saw right through that act. Marie gave her the bag of cookies and a check. A lousy check for a measly sixty bucks! What's she supposed to do with that? Marie went on about helping Opal get a bank account. Like that was going to happen. No way, bad idea.

Opal figures it's the husband. She only met the guy once but once was enough. Opal had seen enough jittery eyes to recognize a user. Mister Suburban was ripped on something. Anyone could see it.

The check had pissed her off, but Opal had kept a smile plastered across her face. The check-cashing joint would take a big cut for a personal check, the bastards. But now was not the time to make waves. Tomorrow was the appointment with the welfare people.

Eyes on the prize. That's what she kept telling herself. And Marie had dropped another kernel of hope. If Opal qualified for immediate need, the welfare would shorten the waiting period. She's living in a damn tent, for Chrissakes. Can't get more immediate than that.

Opal reaches for another cookie. They really were good. Marie was a good person in her clueless way. She might even miss the old girl in a way, but not enough to stick around after that first big check. Los

Angeles, that was the prize, and a new life that didn't include sleeping in a damn tent.

* * *

Jumbled thoughts crash through Marie's brain. How could things go so wrong so quickly? The appointment with the welfare office had gone so well. The welfare woman was polite and very professional. Opal was on her best behavior. It was a shock to find out that Opal wasn't her real name, but that was understandable. No, all the trouble came afterward. Now things were complicated, and everyone was angry.

Larry found out about the check, which brought on one of his meltdowns. She loved her husband, but the man could be so close-minded. She explained that the check was to help tide the girl over until the first assistance check. Surely he remembered how they had struggled as a young couple. Everyone needed a helping hand now and then. Instead of cooling Larry down, her words only made things worse.

You've helped enough. Not one penny more, Marie. You got her signed up for welfare. She's the state's problem now, not mine. We're not made of money, you know. You get that check back or stop payment. I don't care which.

Then Larry had stomped off to his office, leaving Marie to agonize over what to do next. There was no reason for his harsh words, but Larry did have a point. Marie wanted to help Opal. No, not Opal, Anna Mason. The whole thing was so confusing. Yes, she wanted to help the girl, but not at the risk of her marriage.

That was yesterday. Just an hour ago, she'd met Anna and explained about the check. If anything, it was worse than trying to explain things to Larry. Why did everyone have to be so angry?

What do you mean, give it back? You gave it to me. I need that

money. No way, Marie! This isn't fair. I mean, sixty measly dollars. Why don't you stand up to your husband instead of picking on me? He's just going to spend the money on drugs.

The girl shouted those last words, then turned her back on Marie and stomped off, just like Larry. Marie drove home, parked the car, and walked into her silent house. She made herself a cup of tea, sat at the counter, reached for the phone, and called her bank.

* * *

The asshole standing behind finger-smearred bulletproof glass shakes his head. His voice is distorted by a crappy speaker.

“Nothing I can do, lady. It's a stop payment. The check's no good.”

Opal is one thin thread away from screaming. She tries one more time.

“But listen...”

“Take your check and go.”

She starts to speak, but he waves her away, leans to look past her shoulder.

“Next.”

Opal snatches the check from the sliding tray and stomps toward the door, avoiding eye contact with any of the other losers. Then she's outside, staring across a shitty strip mall parking lot. Anger boils through her guts.

She stares at the check dangling from her fingers. Without a thought, her free hand moves like a snake, grabs the stupid check, and rips it in half. Another tear into quarters, and another, cursing and ripping until the offending check is reduced to confetti.

Opal stalks across the sun-baked parking lot, muttering as she

goes. She's way too pissed to care what anyone thinks.

Goddamn bitch! Who the hell does she think she is? Wants her stupid check back. That's shitty, but stopping payment? No way I can let that go. Fuck Marie. No one shits on me and gets away with it. Those are the rules. Time for some payback.

Walking gives her time to think, and thinking cools her anger from red-hot rage to plans for icy revenge. None of this is worth going to jail for, not when she's so close to the payoff. It's no good running around like a crazy bag lady. Revenge comes in its own good time.

She's got to stick to the plan. A good plan is flexible; only now, there's another step. Steps one and two are the same. Get out of here and get to LA. Step three is wait for the welfare check. The money is on its way. She doesn't need any do-gooder old ladies.

Opal remembers daydreaming about having a mom like Marie. Stupid! That's what happens when you start trusting people. They always shit on you in the end. Lesson learned. Again.

She pushes the negative thoughts out of her head. There's a lot to do. First, she's got to move her camp to avoid unwanted visitors. After that, plenty of time to plan the perfect parting gift for good old Marie.

* * *

Marie signals before steering the SUV into the turn lane and easing to a full stop. Cars zoom past in the opposite direction. People drive so fast these days. She waits for a safe gap, then turns into River Park Estate.

Her foot barely touching the gas, Marie coasts past landscaped yards and split-level houses. She keeps the SUV well under the twenty-mile speed limit. You never know when a child might dart into the street.

On any normal day, Marie would enjoy this suburban tableau.

This is her home. Most of her kids live in the same subdivision. Her grandkids are within walking distance, not that anyone walks around here.

Today, however, Marie is troubled. Opal, or rather Anna, has disappeared. Two weeks now, and no sign of the girl. Just yesterday, Marie had driven to the homeless camp, but Opal's tent had vanished. A ragged man approached her while she stared at the vacant space where Opal's camp should have been. When she asked about Opal, the man pointed at the sky. *Probably aliens done it.* Marie gave the man two dollars and left.

She turns into a cul-de-sac. She'd only tried to help. Now, everything had turned ugly over a simple misunderstanding. That darn check! She should never have listened to Larry. What could have happened to that poor girl?

Marie pulls into her driveway and immediately senses that something is wrong. What's happened to the front door? She sets the brake, turns off the ignition, and steps from the SUV.

As she walks up to the house, Marie tries to make sense of what she's seeing. Someone has piled garbage in the entryway. A thick layer of plastic bags blocks the front door, some split open and leaking. The stench of rot hits her as she draws near. Her stomach lurches.

She raises her eyes and stares at the front door. An aluminum foil ring dangles above a handwritten sign. A pair of what look like droopy wings hang on either side of the scrawled message. The sign reads:

You Lost your Halo

Tears spring into Marie's eyes. She turns away and walks around the side of the house to where the garbage bins are lined up in a neat row.

THRESHOLD OF LUMINOUS MEMORY

MAHMOUD ELMARDI

ORIGINAL ARABIC TITLE: عتبة الذاكرة المضيئة

ENGLISH TITLE: Threshold of Luminous Memory

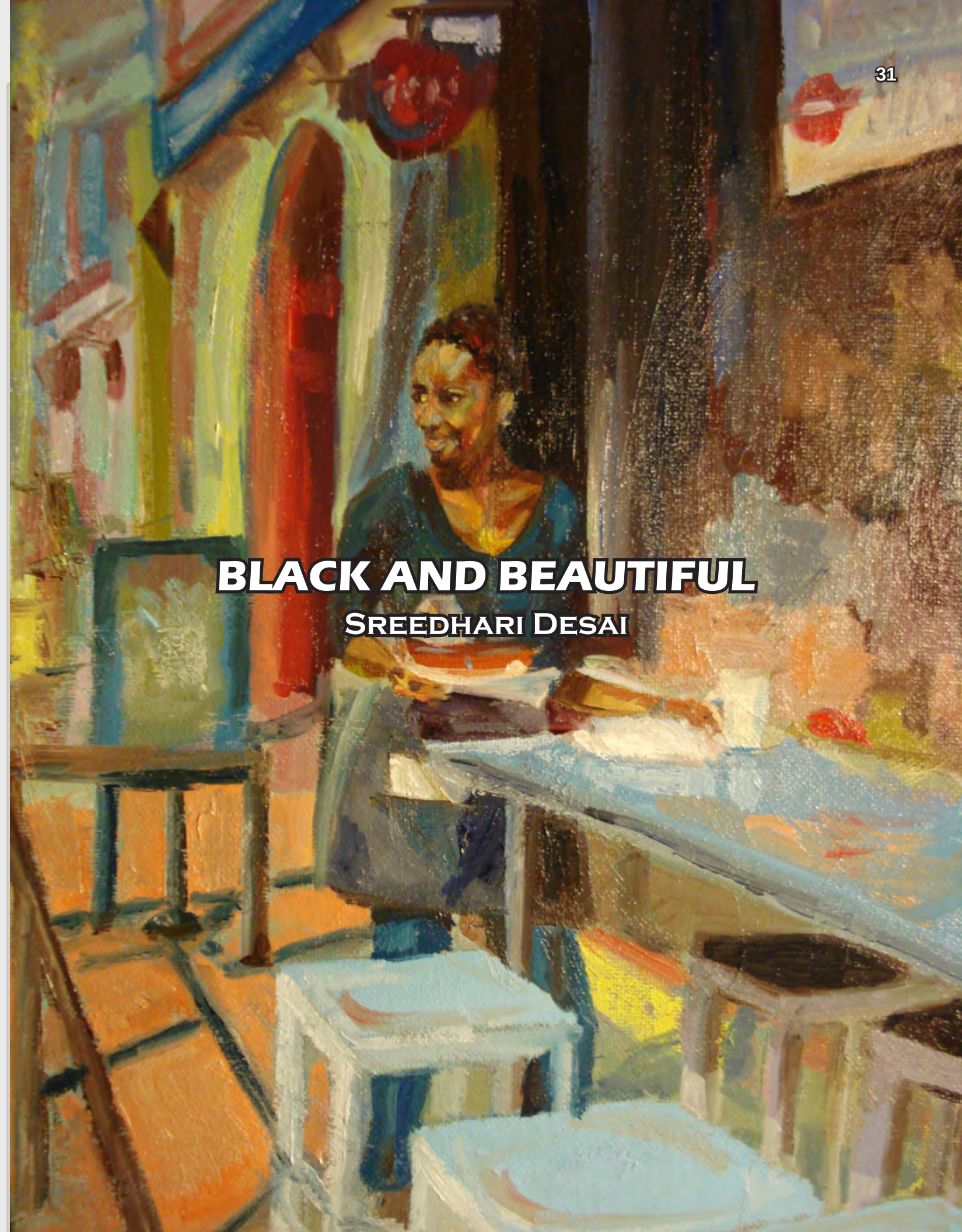
2018, Acrylic on Canvas

ARTIST STATEMENT: *Threshold of Luminous Memory* explores the intersection between architectural symbolism and emotional nostalgia. Through the central motif of the archway, the work acts as a portal between the tangible present and a vibrant, illuminated past. The deep blues at the base ground the composition in history, while the emergence of yellow and pink light within the arch suggests a sanctuary of hope and clarity. By blending abstract expressionism with symbolic figuration, the piece invites the viewer to move through this threshold and rediscover the light that resides within shared human memory.

THE LONELY CITY

ROHAN BUETTEL

There's nothing more romantic than a cruise on the *Canauxrama*, the barge on the Canal Saint-Martin in the city of light and love one Sunday afternoon in spring. Departing below the Bastille, couples on the deck entwine in the dark of an underground tunnel during a sound and light show, a sickening display for the sightseer whose partner lies a world away. He feels the good humour of the crowd, the passengers on the vessel waiting in a shady arbour of chestnut trees, while locks behind decrepit gates fill lifting the boat to a level where the journey will continue. It ends at the Bassin de la Villette and he wanders around the exhibits of the City of Sciences and Industry. In darkening twilight, he leaves on an elevated Metro from a station called Stalingrad to return to his lonely room and prepare for tomorrow's meetings.



BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL

SREEDHARI DESAI

WHEN GATSBY FELL IN LOVE

JENNIFER HANDY

it was forever,
Daisy being not to him a girl,
much less a woman,
only the focus and the emblem of his romantic dreams.

The fact that she was herself,
a person,
made of flesh and feeling,
must have struck him as something
altogether foreign.

The problem, he determined, was not
that Daisy didn't love him,
that she had married someone else.
No, the problem was only money,
a challenge practical in nature
like a quest
to climb the highest mountain,
and he took up the task with zeal.

When he returned victorious,
rich beyond most people's comprehension,
he bought a house out in West Egg
with a pool he never used
and a view across Long Island Sound

where he could see at night
not her
and not her house
just a green light shining
dimly
far off in the distance.

His love for her was manifest
in all the things that he collected,
caring nothing for them at all,
not the things themselves.
His love for her materialized in mirth,
in the throwing of endless parties,
each one more glamorous than the last.

He wandered through the parties,
lost in private vigil,
waiting for the day he knew would come,
the day when she would put in an appearance,
he, the absent host, waiting for his absent love.

The day he saw her again at last,
he pulled out all the stops,
and pulled out all his shirts,
one by one,
silk and linen,
stripes and plaids,
and Daisy buried her face in them,
and sobbed for them,
for all their beauty
so many shirts,
and all so beautiful, it made her sad, she said.

The two had their affair,
 a torrid, dreamy passion,
 which all came to a head
 one hot, hot day
 on a trip to New York City
 when the truth—
 it all came out.

The problem was not
 that Daisy didn't love him
 but that she didn't love him alone
 the way that he loved only her.

The accident followed naturally
 from the sweat and tears
 the disillusion
 the Plaza Hotel
 too much mint julep.

The car didn't swerve at all
 under the watchful eyes upon the billboard,
 and T. J. Eckleburg looked on
 as Daisy ran over her husband's mistress
 in Gatsby's fancy car.

The blame would fall on Gatsby,
 and like a knight of yore,
 he was quick to take it upon his shoulders.

He was ready to die for her,
 and though she might not be willing to do the same for him,

it hardly mattered, really,
 he was so ready to refute it,
 so ready to disbelieve.

Better he was shot,
 his blood flowing out into the pool,
 than for him to have discovered
 that Daisy might have depths or shallows
 still unplumbed,
 pieces of herself
 he had never guessed or known.

Had he only loved her for who she was
 that might have made all the difference.



EYES

DONALD L. PATTEN

HENRIETTA/RITA

RYAN J. ELDER

A rainbow splashed against the wall. Shining off of the reflectors on the turning spokes of the bike wheel spinning in the sunlight. Oscar sat beside the upside down bike and watched the wheel spin. His arms resting on his knees, elbows on a piece of mail. He ignored it for the rainbow on his living room wall.

He spun the wheel again.

Behind him, on the bookshelf beside the window letting the sunlight in, a picture of him and his wife loomed over the room. The two of them against a forest backdrop. He was clean shaven, unlike his current stubble, and smiling. She laughed at a joke he had said moments before the shutter. Her long brown hair flowing in the breeze.

He spun the wheel again.

The mail was addressed to his wife. Henrietta Blake. Sent from a doctor's office from the next state over. The one she insisted on getting the second opinion from for months. Work schedules, insurance, and her condition were all obstacles that kept them from going sooner. Moving savings around, selling one of their cars, and prepping a travel kit helped them finally get to Bedford Clinic. Tests were done. Blood drawn. X-rays and examinations were had only for the results to arrive far too late.

He spun the wheel again.

Oscar kept the tie on that he wore to the funeral. It was black with a white sphere at the bottom. He remembered the first time he put it on for a job interview. Standing upstairs in their bedroom he fumbled trying to get it around his neck. Henrietta emerged from behind him and fixed it for him. She teased him with every step. Seeing himself in the suit in their closet mirror made him feel accomplished in a way few else did. Her hand slid down the tie and rested over the sphere.

"It suits you," Henrietta said. "Get it?"

He could still feel her touch in the fabric. Any time he put it on it was like a piece of her essence came along for moral support. Though faint, Oscar knew it was there as he spun the bike wheel. Being in the living room gathered the remaining pieces of her essence through the pictures on the walls and shelves. Through the furniture she picked out. Through her movie collection. Through the chess board coffee table and the bicycle beside him.

The wheel stopped.

Clouds rolled in to block the sun. No rain accompanied them, but they brought a needed return to the present. Oscar wiped his face and stood up. He adjusted the sleeves of his shirt to not bunch up at the elbow then headed for the window.

Outside his home was a park filled with trees and signs about not littering. There was a bike path that cut through the park and headed down the street to the apartments on the other side. The starting point lined up perfectly with the garage. Something Henrietta took advantage of nearly every day.

For a moment, Oscar swore he saw her peddling for that starting point. Dressed in her lime green track suit she would take off with a wave and a smile. Instead, it was an elderly woman in pink sweats and a toy poodle in a basket on the handlebars. He pinched some skin from his wrist and twisted it as both a reminder to stay in the present. She was gone. There was no chance of anything changing that even for just one last good-bye. He slapped himself to make sure the lesson stuck.

A knock on the front door paused his mourning. It was strange. It had been days since the funeral and even longer since he got a check up from one of their friends. Oscar left the living room into the hall with wooden floors and walls. Another, louder, knock moved his steps faster.

Opening the door revealed a woman with red hair and loose fitting clothing holding her hands together. She made eye contact to say, "hello" but dropped it the moment the word left her mouth. Like she had no energy left. She lowered her head and took a breath.

“Can I help you?” Oscar asked.

She tapped her foot before saying, “are you Oscar Blake?”

He nodded. She looked up for confirmation then took another breath.

“I need to talk to you about your wife, Henrietta—about Rita.”

Whatever sympathy he had for the woman had diluted when she said that nickname. In the time he knew her, Henrietta never asked to be called anything else. They had pet names for each other, but no “Rita.” Not even her parents and closest friends called her by that name.

“Do you have a minute?” The woman asked. “Or several really.” She took a glance inside at the wooden finishing of the hallway. “Just like a being on a mountain.”

When it came time to renovate their home, Henrietta decided that she wanted it to feel like a ski lodge on the inside. Something cozy that let her feel like she was locked away on a mountain.

“I know this is a tough time for you,” the woman said. Tears rolled down her cheek. “But I—you deserve to know.”

“Know what?” Oscar said. “Who even are you?”

“My name’s Gina.” Her lips curled inward. She exhaled and found the remaining energy to look him in the eye. “Your wife and I were having an affair.”

The claim short circuited Oscar. His head tilted and mouth moved to say “excuse me,” but no sound came out. Despite the small amount of evidence, the nickname and comment about the decor, there was nothing he could see tying his wife to Gina. The insinuation that Henrietta would be unfaithful, with someone who had no connection to them, made him blurt out his inner dialogue.

“How dare you?” He said. “Get off my property right now.”

“I’m not lying,” Gina said. She took a step back as Oscar’s eyes grew wider. She didn’t leave the patio, however, and kept talking. “I’ve been losing sleep over this. Please—I’m not trying to cause a scene. I

knew it was wrong, but I—but she was so...”

Her words trailed off and knees buckled along with the sobbing that followed. Gina crashed down and wiped her eyes. The anger bubbling up inside Oscar stopped for a moment.

“I didn’t go to the funeral,” Gina said. “I wanted to give you space to grieve, but my stomach was in knots. I—I didn’t know what to do.” She covered the right side of her face with her hand. “I didn’t get to say good-bye to her.”

Neither did Oscar. On the final day, the insurance department at the hospital pulled Oscar away to discuss payments and sign paperwork. It took roughly fifteen minutes. The issues with coverage hadn’t been solved. Fifteen minutes and Henrietta had passed away.

“Could you come back tomorrow?” Oscar asked.

Gina stood to her feet. Her eyes were still swollen from crying, but focused on him.

“I can’t process what you’re suggesting right now. The funeral was just the other day. I can’t even make oatmeal right now.” Tears fell from his eyes. A mixture from the memory of his and Henrietta’s last day together and the possibility that she might have been seeing someone else. “Let’s try again tomorrow.”

Gina nodded. “Okay, sure.” She took one last look at him. “Tomorrow.”

Oscar closed the door and found himself crashing to the floor the same as Gina. He turned over and pressed his back against the door. The entirety of the hallway felt like it could swallow him at any moment. Part of him wanted it to and he wouldn’t protest. Being devoured by the memory of Henrietta working on it and planning. Talking about how great the rest of the house will look. It didn’t feel like a bad thing.

It was better than teetering on the edge of believing a stranger’s admission.

The next morning, Gina woke up to the sight of an empty space beside her. It had been weeks but the memory of Rita beside her was too vivid to let slip away. Her hair shaped against the pillow, strands dangling off the edge. Rita's smile when she saw Gina was awake. It felt cruel for it to be just a moment in time.

Reality crashed back into her life. Gina pulled herself out of bed and dressed herself in slacks and a shirt. She went into the bathroom and practiced saying "I had an affair with your wife" so it wouldn't sound like she was taking directions from a soap opera director. Another memory hit her.

The day she was set for a job interview, Rita had been over for a weekend. Gina was also practicing being interviewed in the same mirror. Rita watched from the living room, hovering over a chess board on the coffee table, doing her best not to giggle. Gina deepened her voice to play the hiring manager and it was too cute to ignore.

"I think I bring a lot to this company," Gina said.

Hiring Manager Gina followed up with, "Your resume does have some gaps that are a bit concerning."

"Well, that I can explain." She crossed her hands. "See, I was hospitalized for a mental break. I'm fine now, but I felt it important to prioritize my health so I could be a better employee."

Rita entered the bathroom. "They don't need to know why. Leaving it "medical leave" is perfectly fine."

"But I don't want to lie."

Rita stood behind her and wrapped her arms around Gina. "You sweet little thing."

"Is that not lying?"

"Worry more about yourself and not if a suit feels hurt that they were lied to."

When she returned to the present, Gina put her hands where Rita's had been. The warmth and reassurance was gone. Her essence was gone.

She wished she could have it back one last time.

Leaving her apartment building, the park between her and Oscar's house took up the entirety of her view. The trees swayed under the morning sun, glistening. Dogs were barking from the pathways that lead in and out of the area. It was a cyclist, however, that caught Gina's attention. An older woman wearing shorts and a shirt, peddling an orange bicycle that had reflectors on the spokes. She entered the same pathway that Rita would exit from. It was as if Rita would materialize from there fully formed.

If at all possible, that's probably what Rita would have wanted. "Talking about the past" was a forbidden topic whenever Gina tried to get a deeper conversation going. It should have been a red flag, but Gina was blinded by what Rita gave her every time they were together. Peace. Love. Understanding. Things she was barely able to hold onto, if at all, without her secret love. The only things they could talk about outside their relationship were their passions or hobbies. Rita's interior design work was a common one.

That park felt like a dividing line in ways she only recently came to understand. Henrietta, the wife and interior designer lived on one end. Rita, the elusive cyclist, lived on the other. There was something in between the two that Gina never knew. That she assumed Oscar didn't know either.

She skirted around the park and headed up to Oscar's home. The porch had two seats on them that weren't there yesterday. When Gina knocked on the door, she gave one last practice read of her line of admittance.

Oscar opened the door, looking somehow more disheveled than the day prior. In his hands was a bowl of oatmeal flakes floating in milk, with a glow in the dark spoon. The kind that had eggs made of sugar that would hatch into bird pieces once heated to the right temperature.

"Hi, Oscar," Gina said.

He stepped out and gestured to the chairs. He acted like she wasn't there until she sat down next to him. Stirring the oatmeal and sugar eggs

absentmindedly with his spoon. Gina tried to speak her prepared line, but Oscar shook his head.

“Are you sure you have the right woman?” Oscar asked.

Gina nodded. “She told me everything when she broke things off.”

“When was that?”

Silence. Gina curled her bottom lip inward and kept herself together. “Just before she went into the hospital.”

Ignoring the time frame implications, Oscar decided to test if she was telling the truth one final time.

“Henrietta had a birth mark,” Oscar said, “where was it and what did it look like?”

The crass way he asked snapped Gina out of her somber state and into an agitated one. Oscar didn’t seem to care. He drank from his bowl.

“It was under her left breast,” Gina said. “She said it looked like a lion but it was just a circle to me.”

Oscar chuckled. “Can’t say I saw it either.” He put the bowl down at his feet and looked out to the park. Confirmation of his wife’s infidelity should have made him some mixture of angry and sad, but his mind just replayed memories of Henrietta leaving on her bike into the park. Once she went into that place, it was like she disappeared from reality, instead of just his sight.

Every time she came home it was like a piece of her had changed. The way her smile changed, the curl of her lips, they shifted in ways he didn’t notice until later. He never pressed her on the length of her rides. Never asked why she would have so many “girls nights” with her friends. In retrospect, he should have, but if events were to play out the same exact way he was certain he would act the same way. He thought freedom was important to her. That space was essential to their marriage.

He didn’t pry when she wanted to change the interior of their home. Answers would come in time from her, he felt. He didn’t want to overbear and intrude. When she would return from cycling, he wouldn’t

even ask about her routes or what animals she might have seen. It felt like an invasion of her privacy to ask such questions.

“Was it my fault?” Oscar asked.

Gina didn’t know how to respond. Her mouth opened, hoping something would come out.

“Did I—was she—did I make her unhappy?” He brought his hands together like he was trying to wring out the unpleasant feelings pumping in his veins. “I tried to be good. I gave her whatever she wanted.”

Gina’s hand raised instinctually, ready to offer a reassuring touch of the shoulder. She couldn’t go through with it when tears trickled down his cheek. The two sat there. Oscar’s faint sobbing being the only sound between them. Gina felt it was a just punishment for her transgressions. Having to sit and listen to the widow’s tears. She never knew the life he and Rita had together. She was never allowed to ask.

Oscar broke the semi-silence with, “did you love her?”

Gina nodded.

“I loved her too.” Oscar saw his pain and anguish reflected back at him on Gina’s face. He tried to be mad again at the revelation, but right there, in those tearing eyes of the young woman, he could only find a kindred soul. “Did she ever take you out cycling with her?”

“No.”

“Me either. I mean, I never tried to go, but I bought this bike for myself. Put it together in front of her thinking she’d want to make it a couple’s activity.”

“She never wanted to talk about things too personally. I just assumed cycling fit into that category.”

“So she disappeared for you too, huh?”

They both stared at the park. For them, the trees and people were gone. What they saw was a black box of sorts. A collection of information that housed the secrets they were either denied or too timid to seek.

Oscar pointed to the driveway and directed Gina's attention from it to the bike path directly across from there. "That's where she'd always start."

"I remember where she'd come out," Gina said.

"You think we can retrace her route?"

"Right now?"

"What else do you and I have to talk about when we don't know as much about her? I know you're sorry. I know you're not lying." He stood up. "Right now, all I want is to know who my wife was when she left here." He took a breath. "I should have tried harder."

Oscar went back inside, instructing Gina to stay on the porch for a minute or two. When he returned, he was wheeling out a blue bicycle. Henrietta's bicycle. He took the left handle bar and motioned to Gina to take the right. They wheeled it off the porch and onto the driveway, following the path straight to the Henrietta's entrance to the park.

Both felt different emotions as they stood on the same pavement of the bike path. Oscar was curious about what he would find. Gina was worried she would feel more guilt. They could hear dogs barking and children playing from within the walls of trees. Neither of them moved until a breeze gave them the gentle nudge they needed. Its way of saying, "it's time."

Holding onto a handlebar each, Oscar and Gina entered the park.

The bike route was paved with cement and outlined with pink paint to keep riders within the boundary. After crossing the sign that read, "Path starts here," the pair noticed how quickly the tree branches blocked the sunlight. Patches still came through, like light off a disco ball, but no one spot had anything bigger than the width of a medium sized dog. Illustrated by the sight of a Shiba Inu watching them in the grass while its owners tried to get it to play fetch.

On either side of the boundary line were patches of grass where people were free to gather. Some were there for picnics. Some played

with their animals. Some played with frisbees. The rest just sat in solitude. It wasn't too dissimilar to any park either Oscar or Gina had been to in their lives. The only difference was the bike path. How it weaved through every activity like it was a theme park ride showing off the animatronics.

The bike between them took to the track as if it were alive, adjusting without their input. The wheel turned without any resistance in the corners of the path. Gina felt like they could release it and it would roam the park like it was returning to its rightful home.

Picturing Henrietta using the route was simple enough, but what she saw or interacted with was a different story. There was a bed of flowers they passed. Filled with hues of purple, red, and yellow, it was kaleidoscopic. Gina liked to imagine Rita stopping to admire them, maybe even picking one or two to adorn her bicycle.

On Oscar's side was a rest station made out of wood. The panel work reminded him of seeing ski lodges in movies and travel guides. Tree branches swayed over it like they were protecting the tiny shack from the sun. It reminded him of their home hallway.

Tugging the bike that way, Oscar led Gina toward the shack. The pair parked the bike outside and looked inside through the window. A table and bench were just below their view with an incomplete chess game on top. In the back was a bookcase with some novels, but mostly other board games. They could see the edge of what looked to be a changing station for babies peaking into their line of sight.

Oscar went in first. Gina cautiously followed behind. The smell of coffee and pine hit their noses. No one else was there. It was still and quiet. Like it was an abandoned home. While Oscar examined the bookshelf, Gina sat down at the table. The placement of the pieces on the board was similar to the board she had at home. The only difference was a pawn present on the lower right side that was absent on hers.

A curious spine caught Oscar's eye on the shelf. Amidst the other titles, most things he was instructed to read in high school, was a black

label without a title. He plucked it out and discovered it was a notebook. He sat down beside Gina and flipped through the pages. The handwriting within was familiar. The way the Ys curled into a spiral at the end, the odd shape of Gs, and the lack of dotting on the top of lower case Is.

It was Henrietta.

He turned to the first page and started reading. It was a declaration of intent to defeat a chess gambit by a player named Rodrigo Huerta. She wrote, “who better to learn from than the top rated guy, right? I think this will help me get back into chess. I used to love it but I fell off when I got married. Oscar never seemed to want to play.”

That last line felt like a bullet to Oscar’s heart. He remembered her playing chess online on their computer from time to time. He never bothered to ask her about it because of his timid nature. He bought a bike to lure her into including him, when all he needed to do was ask, “whatcha doin’?” After a few pages of notes on technique for the game, he found a passage that started, “I met this woman today.”

He closed the book. All at once he could put together the picture of where he had gone wrong. It didn’t require someone with first hand knowledge of the couple to figure it out, but one sentence was all he needed. He slid the notebook to Gina.

“It really was my fault,” Oscar said.

Gina looked confused. She saw him deflating and wondered how a notebook could cause that reaction.

“She had to come here to be herself. That’s what it is gonna say, right?”

Gina uncovered the same information Oscar did about the chess game in the shack and the distance Rita felt from her husband. When she got to the page, “I met this woman today,” she exhaled. The page went on to detail her first meeting with Rita at a coffee shop down the block from her apartment. She described Gina as “cute, but wistful.” When they finally got to talking Rita realized how, “engaged this woman

was with everything she said.” Unlike Oscar who always felt at an arms length away.

The next few pages had her weighing the need to keep seeing Gina, but reminding herself of her vows to Oscar. How she felt like her home was with her husband, but her heart was drifting to Gina’s apartment. The pages went on to discuss the relationship blossoming between them, and the guilt that was on Rita’s soul.

The final batch of entries detailed the final days of when she got sick and needed treatment. Rita felt warmth coming from Oscar as she underwent treatment. He was no longer out of reach, but beside her the entire time. Feeling frustrated over his lack of interest in her hobbies had become such a childish thing to her. Rita broke things off with Gina because she, “was finally seeing who Oscar was” and that he, “was becoming who she needed.”

Gina closed the notebook and put it between her and Oscar. She urged him to “read the last passage.” His eyes scanned the pages while hers studied his reaction. Tears slid onto his cheek. He covered his face to hide the messy contortions underneath. Some of his guilt dissolved into the air as he let his arms drop to his side.

Both of them sat in silence, staring at the chess board. Neither knew exactly how to feel, if there even was an appropriate one. Whether it be Henrietta or Rita, there was someone else in those pages. Someone who didn’t feel warmth at home, but didn’t find care at the apartment. Neither had the full picture. Looking at each other, however, they could see themselves reflected back at each other. No matter what they could learn about their missing half they didn’t have to learn it alone.

“I’m sorry you couldn’t make it to the funeral,” Oscar said. “You should have been there.” He pulled out his phone from his pocket and opened the picture album app. “May I show you the arrangement I picked out? If it’s not upsetting.”

Outside, the breeze spread deeper into the park until it faded away.



PHILADELPHIA
CHRISTINE STODDARD

THE STORM

DEVYN RIDDICK

I settled into the thunder of his heartbeat against my ear. A contrast to the fresh flurries of white silently falling outside the window. As if God dropped powdered sugar from heaven. It danced down, dusted the rooftops and streets of us mere mortals.

I traced the center of his chest with my fingertips. Found a line of skin raised like a brand. In the dusk of the early morning, using my fingers as my eyes, I asked, *Is this a scar?* His groggy voice answered, *Yeah, back in our country my stepmom was wildin'*. I thought to ask what happened. Thought to ask if it had hurt. But words wouldn't suffice and I didn't intend to go robbing graves of buried pain. I kissed his scar. Resumed listening to the relaxing sound of the thunder in his chest, knowing that once I was alone my rain would follow.

My rain would follow. When I realized that I always kiss everyone's scars. No one kisses mine. No one cares if I have any. My rain would follow. When I realized that my romanticization of others keeps me chained to the same individuals who produce scars but disappear during the healing process. My rain would follow. When I realized that I'm tired of being tolerated. I deserve to be yearned for. The way that my heart yearns. My rain would follow. When I realized that the scars I have aren't external. They live deep within. And no one's willing to kiss those. No one will search deep enough to find them.

My weeping endures for tonight. Tomorrow my Lord will wipe every tear. His rain will follow. And wash these scars away.

AMBER-EYED
M. L. TUCKER



CONVERSATIONAL COMPOST

M. L. TUCKER

Misty wind blown by breeze,
 dampening grass and bugs beneath.
 Open sky; cloudless and carefully
 sewn against shaded structures.
 Vineyards strung, wrapped,
 tied tightly to the safety of home.
 Draped and falling, leaves and legs.

Back to the dirt from which we were born.
 Back to the earth, essence of kinship.
 Calla lily covered community.
 Croaks of anecdotes coming to sunlight.
 Photosynthesis breathed in just right.
 Alive with larva and laughter.
 The soil of someone I could love.



**A CONCH HAS NO SOUND
 TILL IT'S BLOWN**
 ARA DEINDE

CONTRIBUTORS

M. L. Tucker is a 19-year-old multi-medium artist from British Columbia, Canada. Currently attending post-secondary for a bachelor's degree in psychology, they spend their free time expressing themselves through writing and creative projects. They hope to share their personal experiences and find community in the literary world. Their work was first published in issue #12 of *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*.

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Susan Reams creates artwork inspired by time spent in her garden, observing sunshine and rain. She also enjoys reading.

Devyn Riddick is a female aspiring writer from southern New Jersey. You may find her work published in *The Elevation Review*, *Juste Milieu Zine*, and *Avant Literary Magazine*. She is an alumna of the Rowan University Writing Arts program. When Devyn isn't working or writing in her free time, she enjoys reading a good book.

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Marco Etheridge is a writer, occasional playwright, and part-time poet based in Vienna, Austria. His work has been featured in over 180 literary reviews across Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States, and India. His story *Power Tools* was nominated for Best of the Web (2023) and is the title of his latest collection of short fiction. He serves as a contributing editor for *Hotch Potch Literature and Art* and as a reader for *Marrow Magazine*. When not writing, he travels the world with his wife, Sabine.

Sreedhari Desai is an oil painter whose work reflects a deep engagement with light, atmosphere, and the poetry of everyday life. Born in India and based in North Carolina, Desai draws inspiration from classical traditions, European travel, and a lifelong practice of close observation. Her paintings—ranging from landscape and portraiture to still life and the figure—are marked by quiet sensitivity, formal balance, and an enduring sense of place. Her work has been featured in solo exhibitions in Utah and North Carolina, as well as on book and journal covers.

Christina M. Rau, The Yoga Poet, leads Meditate, Move, & Create workshops for various organizations worldwide. Her collections include *How We Make Amends* and the Elgin Award-winning *Liberating The Astronauts*. She moderates the Women's Poetry Listserv and served as Poet in Residence for Oceanside Library (NY) 2020-5. Her poetry airs on *Destinies* radio show (WUSB) and appears in various literary journals like *Carmina Magazine* and *The Rome Review* while her prose has appeared in *fillingStation* and *Reader's Digest*. During her downtime, she watches the Game Show Network.

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Christine Stoddard is an artist and journalist working in film, video, and photography, known for projects such as Art B*tch!; Don't Mind If I Don't; Sirena's Gallery; Mi Abuela, Queen of Nightmares; and Heaven Is a Photograph (CLASH Books). Named one of Brooklyn Magazine's Top 50 Most Fascinating People, she produces via her storytelling studio, Quail Bell. Her work has appeared in *Teen Vogue*, *Bustle*, *City Limits*, *Native Peoples*, *Portland Review*, *Ms.*, *Cosmopolitan*, and beyond. She earned an MS in journalism from Columbia University and an MFA in digital and interdisciplinary art from The City College of New York-CUNY.

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Donald Patten is an artist and cartoonist from Belfast, Maine. He creates oil paintings, illustrations, ceramics and graphic novels. His art has been exhibited in galleries throughout Maine.

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STAFF

Sage Delio is an award-winning visual artist, creative technologist, musician, and writer based in the Greater Philadelphia Area. Her multidisciplinary work spans art, music, and code, exploring perception, neuroscience, and the shifting architecture of internal experience through experimental forms. She is the author of *Blue Confessional*, a collection of poetry and prose, and serves as Editor-in-Chief of *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*. Her practice often merges geometric abstraction, sound, and narrative to translate complex psychological states into shared, experiential forms.

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*.

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ON THRESHOLDS AND RETURN

Every issue reaches a point where it must begin to close, even as its ideas remain open.

What we have moved through in these pages is not a single narrative, but a constellation of crossings. Between people and places. Between memory and present experience. Between what is seen and what is felt beneath the surface. Again and again, this issue returns to the idea of the threshold—a space that is neither one thing nor another, but something in between.

A threshold is not simply a boundary. It is an active space. It holds tension. It asks something of us. To cross it is to change, even if only slightly. To remain within it is to experience the friction of becoming.

Spring itself exists in that space. It does not erase winter; it carries it forward, transforms it, and allows something new to emerge from it. The works in this issue reflect that same movement. There are moments of tenderness and rupture, of isolation and connection, of stillness and motion. There are images that hold time in place, and texts that move through it, reshaping meaning as they unfold.

In the fiction, we encounter lives caught between who they were and who they are becoming. In the poetry, language compresses experience into moments that feel both immediate and timeless. In the visual art and photography, we see how light, structure, and form can hold emotion without needing to name it.

What becomes clear, when viewed together, is that no work stands alone. A photograph reframes a poem. A painting deepens a story. A line of verse lingers differently after encountering an image.

The issue becomes a structure—layered, reflective, and interconnected. It asks the reader not just to observe, but to move through it. To pause. To return. To reconsider.

There is also a quiet persistence running beneath the surface of this issue. A sense that even in fragmentation, something endures. That meaning is not fixed, but it is not lost either. It shifts, reconfigures, and reappears in unexpected forms.

And then, inevitably, we arrive here. Not at an ending, but at a pause. Because the work does not conclude when the final page is turned. It continues in the reader—reshaped by interpretation, memory, and personal experience. What is taken from this issue will not be identical for any two people, and that is precisely the point.

Art does not resolve. It resonates. It echoes forward, sometimes quietly, sometimes with force, altering the way we see what comes next.

And so, as this issue closes, it does not ask for conclusion. It asks only that you carry something forward—an image, a line, a feeling, a question—and allow it to remain unresolved long enough to matter.

END

