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Nothing Gold Can Stay by Jax Perry

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dear Cherished Readers,

As the earth reawakens with the arrival of spring, so too does the vibrant spirit of creativity in this Spring 2024 issue of *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*. Despite the anticipation surrounding its release, please accept my apologies for the delay of this edition, initially set for May 1st. Unfortunately, a family bereavement necessitated a postponement, and we appreciate your understanding and patience during this period.

We are delighted to finally bring you an edition that I believe elevates our continuous journey through the realms of art and expression. Themed around concepts of renewal and connectivity, this issue mirrors the promise of rebirth and boundless possibilities characteristic of the season.

Within these pages, you'll encounter serene landscapes and surreal visions, narratives that traverse the broad spectrum of human emotion, and visual stories that communicate more than words can convey. Thank you for your continued support and enthusiasm, which are vital to our mission.

With boundless gratitude and warmest spring wishes,

5 m Dela

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

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DISCUSSION WITH MY CLOSET

TRAVIS STEPHENS

That shirt, she said, flatters you. Maybe, but I didn't hear it say anything, which is likely a good thing. I have a sweater that thinks I'm a slob, dribble eater, sauce spiller supreme. Shoes that know I can't dance trade snide barbs with sneakers—slow. slow old man. Missed the shot. Please don't wear that T-shirt. Ever. You know the one. Thank God for my relaxed fit jeans with the loose morals. Or the corduroy pants I don't wear anymore and so still believe they're my size. Belt with too many holes. The suit jacket whose holey pockets retain so much post-doc optimism, I feel you. Whatever happened to the slacks? Last, in the back, an angry winter coat says, it wasn't that cold in Minnesota. Man up. Lace up some skates and let's cut the ice. Just because you can switch off the light doesn't mean you get the last word.

SONGBIRD

CHRISTIAN JOHNSON

He hasn't been here since she died.

He stepped out of his car and began walking. The morning fall air, brisk as it sent goosebumps up and down his exposed skin. He could hear the crunch of the fallen leaves, red, yellow and orange underneath his dirty work boots. They said it was for the best, but how did they know more than he did? He weaved through branches and leaped over logs, like routine...like it was yesterday, just like they used to, making sure to cover the entryway so the place could remain a secret...a secret he would take to his grave.

He stepped through into the clearing taking in the place he used to visit almost everyday. It has been two years, and it seems as though everything has been untouched, as if she was keeping an eye on it somewhere, making sure everything was hidden from foreign eyes. The faint rays of the sun shined, making the dew of the grass glisten like the color of her eyes. So serene, a single glance could cure him of his worst day and make it perfect. Oh, how he needed tranquility nowadays.

It has been two years since he has been here, two years since she has been here. The overgrowth was evident of that. The grass started to grow out here, making its way towards his knee. It toppled over after each step, flinging the moisture that was residing on it, once again becoming one with the earth. He walked over to the log they used to sit at and sat, admiring the view that they had, overlooking the town below. They used to come at sunset and watch the sun dip below the city. It was the most beautiful thing, coloring the skyline shades of red and pink. He never saw the sunset now and it has been awhile since he has

even seen the town. He saw families walk with heavy jackets, children exuberant and the parent's slightly annoyed. He saw dog walkers, but it more so looked like the dogs were walking them and that made him smirk a little.

There were new shops, vibrant and inviting in contrast to the decaying buildings that surrounded most of them. Decaying like his soul without her, he was those buildings, alone in their own suffering.

He raked through his hair and contemplated leaving, this was not helping and in fact was only making him feel worse. He looked at the ground and that is when he saw it out of the corner of his eye, he pushed back some of the moss that was creeping onto

the log and that is when he saw it, 'LV + MB'. He rubbed his thumb against it and then felt the sun burn on his shoulders.

"Fine, I'll do it then. This is our spot, we have to let them know in case someone tries something."

Tears began to well up in his eyes, "Luna?" She started carving their initials into the wood, focused as if everything was on the line and couldn't mess any of it up. Her brown hair dancing in the cool breeze unable to waver her. The songs of songbirds echoed through the trees singing their chorus as she turned to face him and that is what broke him.

"And done! See that wasn't that bad. I don't know why you were getting all paranoid and stuff for."

The air was cold again and his tears came running down. She was no longer there and he was just staring at the etched initials on the mossy, green log. He fell to his knees on the wet earth, the grass cold against him, enveloping him almost like it did when he found her. He was barren like the trees, alone and broken. He pulled at the grass, ripping and ripping. Desecrating this holy area, until he saw a discolored white mitten, he picked it up and it was frigid. He was kneeling on snow

and it was snowing, the white cold snowflakes fell elegantly packing the ground and decorating the once bare trees. He heard the crunching of snow and hurried footsteps approach him.

"I can't find it. Jeez, you play too much! Why would you throw it?" She groaned, "Can you at least help me look for it?" It was her again. She was scrounging around looking for her mitten, under the log, through different places in the snow with no avail. She was always so beautiful in her winter coat, it was slightly too big, because she did not want to return it even after he insisted on exchanging it himself and then she ripped off the tag at that idea. It made him smile thinking about it. She had beat him in a snowball fight because he was distracted because a songbird call startled him. She called him a sore loser, so he took her mitten. He nodded to himself; in hindsight, maybe he was a sore loser.

"We have to hurry, we don't want to miss the cookies and the movie. I can buy you some new ones." It was his voice, slightly annoyed, slightly playful. The snow clung to her flowing hair, her hat unable to contain all of it. Her face red from the stinging cold. She looked in his direction, sighed in frustration and started walking hurriedly toward his voice.

He was back in the grass, his pants nearly drenched. He clutched the mitten to his chest and leaned backwards onto the log. Discolored and all, it was still hers. It began to rain as the rain pelted him, he just sat there, encumbered. He cried again and let it flow and flow until he couldn't distinguish it from the cold rain, or maybe his tears were the rain.

A songbird perched onto the log and gave a sideways glance at him. He turned towards it as it called to him.



APHRODITE LORCÁN BLACK

The first train heaves & leaves, rumbles & eats its track — You turn to me,

Sleep-eyed, docile & I know I have fifteen minutes of this. I watch your face, feel your beard grow.

I watch you wake & very silently, very carefully, one *considers* the other.

Squirrelcall, birdcall, hands in chest hair — we grow branches, entangle — stiffen.

The whole morning mornings out upon itself –

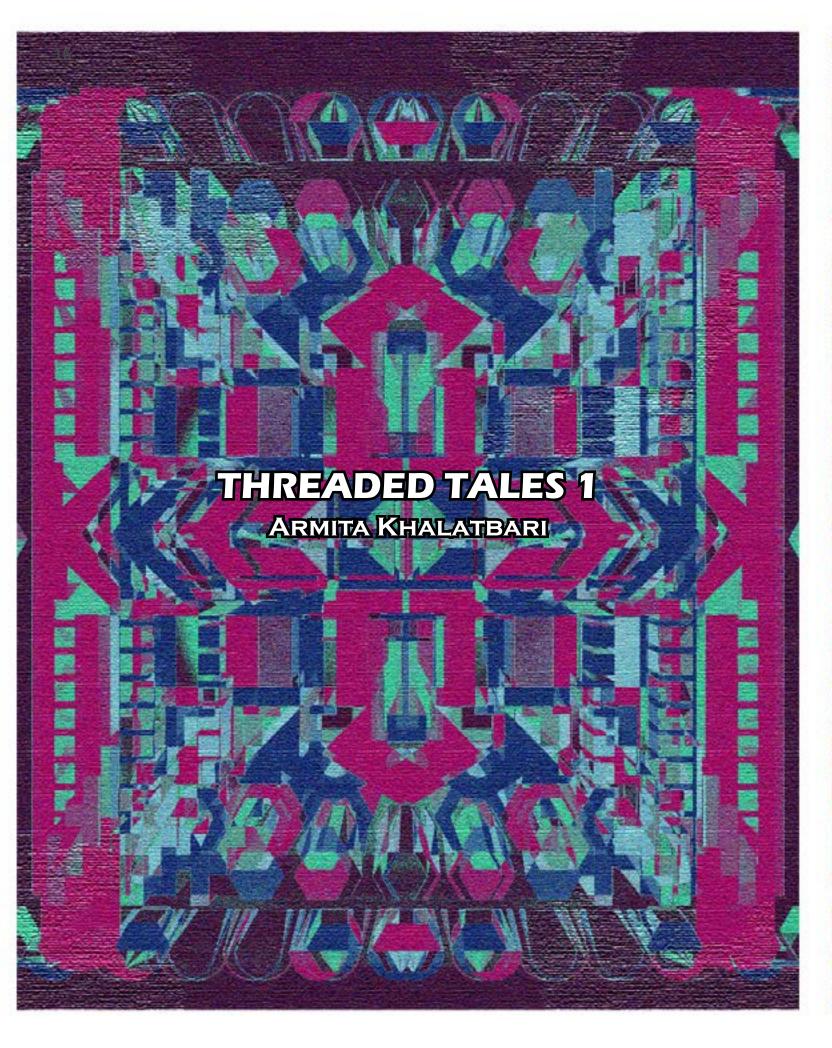
a wave far off washes ashore.

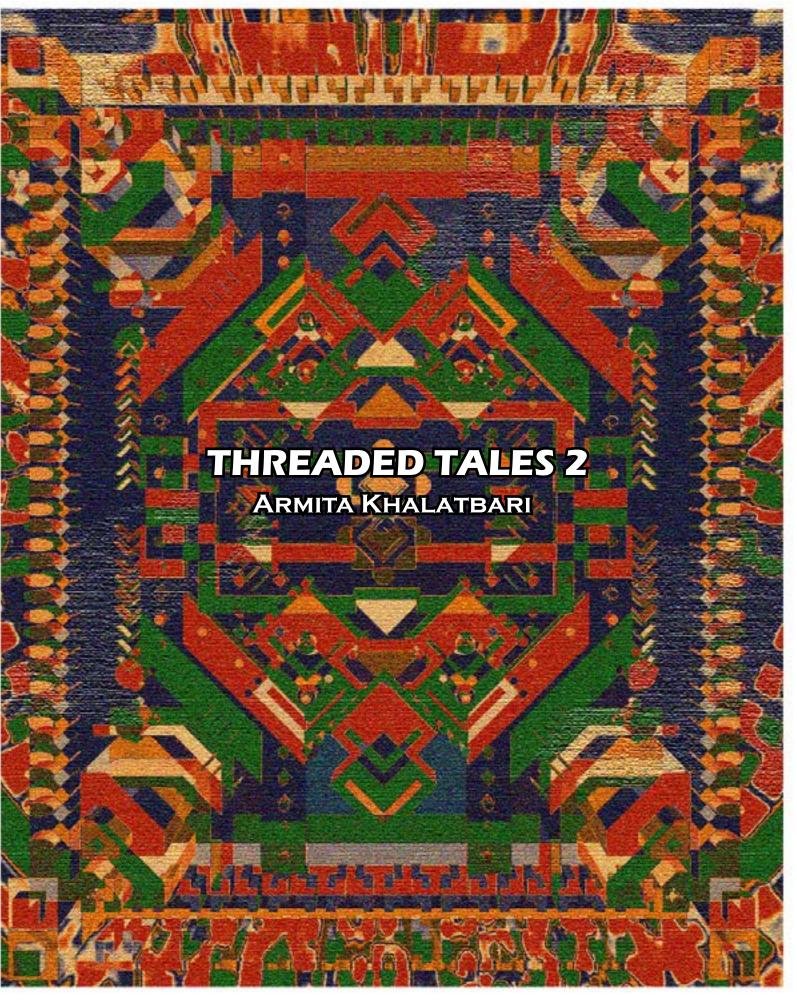
Over my belly a moon moves &
a whole world, unseeing, senses oceans.

Surf catches itself in the wash of its own white brilliance.
Was it an oyster shell she birthed from?

Because he gifts me necklaces – all clear & salt like the sea of such bright, startling pearl

& these dropped pearls my tongue, outstretching, clutches –





THE ETERNAL GIRLHOOD OF EVANGELINE TEAFORD

CLAIRE DROWN

"Ice cream soda, cherry on top, who's your best friend, I forgot – is it A, B, C, D...." I'd said it so often the words barely registered as they left my mouth. Evangeline hopped over the rope that skittered across the concrete before it swung back up into the air, eyes screwed shut, trusting her feet completely to keep her safe. I held one end of the rope and I had tied the other end around a sturdy tree trunk. It worked fine, and I did my best, *did my best*, *did my best* to keep it free of Eva's flapping arms.

I couldn't explain it if someone asked, but that morning, deep enough that I could taste the ghost of it in the back of my throat, I knew it wouldn't be an ordinary day. It was like I was suddenly aware that there was a giant umbrella obscuring the sky and any moment that umbrella would collapse, and the sky would quadruple in size and possibility. Something was just in the air that day. Evangeline was completely unaware, but I felt like everything could change at any second. I wasn't sure if it would be good or awful. Awful or good.

The school counselor my mom made me see called these intrusive thoughts. I was supposed to tell my brain to focus on the concrete and not worry about the "what ifs," because there had been far too many "what ifs" in my life. But my brain liked to go where it wanted to go, and it was mostly – always – easier to choose the path of least resistance.

I kept my eyes trained on Eva's face. She had refused to put on a bra that morning, and I didn't have the energy or the willpower to fight it. I probably wouldn't have dared, anyway. She wasn't in a good mood. If Eva was calm, it was a good day. Good days were precious. On bad

days, Evangeline was fucking insufferable. Seventeen-year-old boys are not supposed to have to help dress their twenty-two-year-old sisters.

Without warning, Evangeline stopped jumping and stood stock still on our driveway, still avoiding the rope as it slowed down, her gaze trained to a tree above my head. I held the rope taut to still it and I tried to regain Eva's attention.

"Do you want to go back inside?" No answer. "Evangeline, do you want to go back inside and get a snack?" Nothing, but her gaze had shifted from the tree to the bike path entrance. I glanced down at her right ankle to see if her tracker was still strapped around it. It was, and I tried to quiet my "what if" thoughts that had just jumped from getting Eva inside to the possibility of having to call the police to help find her if she ran away from me.

"Hey, Eva, look at me please." If you pictured Rosie O'Donnell but two inches shorter and decades younger, you'd get Evangeline. Sparkling, mischievous eyes, a wide smile in a round face, and thick dark hair. That day she was wearing jogger bottoms and a My Little Pony t-shirt. If you put me into that equation, with the baggy jeans and an old band t-shirt, long and lanky and skinny as shit, it's like adding two and two together and always ending up with seven.

The doctors call Evangeline "nonverbal, but not uncommunicative." Our mom calls Evangeline "differently endowed." I don't know if that's fair to Eva. It makes her sound like she's special in that bad kind of way when people say special. Really, I think most of the time, she's just normal — she's just Eva. She's not *stupid*, she knows most things going on. We're just not sure to what degree. She's still an adult. One doesn't negate the other.

Our mom works two jobs to pay for Eva's caretaker when I'm at school. I don't know how Jennifer still deserves weekends off when

Mom so rarely gets them. Dad left long ago and never looked back. So, it's just the three of us at the end of the day, Evangeline and Mom and me, making our patched-up little family. People think Eva's a burden, but they're wrong. She's more like us than most people realize. She keeps us glued together.

I managed to take Evangeline's hand out there on the driveway, and we walked back into the house side-by-side, Eva only dragging her feet a little bit, and me feeling only a little impatient. It was late on a Saturday morning, and it took me a minute to remember why I was so exhausted. I figured it was because Eva had woken us up at 5 AM so she could kiss Mom goodbye. Then she didn't go back to sleep, so I couldn't go back to sleep. I stifled a yawn.

I was in that weird part of senior year when you're all done with college applications and your acceptance or denial letters are about to be sent, but at this point it's late in the school year, and you're about to graduate anyway, and you're starting to get too tired to care. I wanted to go to college, I wanted it so badly, but the question was: how do we pay for it? And how do we still take care of Eva in the ways that she needs? It was hard. Everything was hard, most of the time. But our family just kept going. We were good at that.

In the kitchen Evangeline asked for water, making a W with her fingers and hitting them against her chin. I started filling her favorite cup at the sink – red with blue polka dots – but I turned off the tap halfway. Eva pulled at the hem of my shirt, and when I turned around she knocked her closed fists together repeatedly, her eyebrows knitted in concentration.

"I'll give you some more, but you'll have to go the bathroom when you're done." She jerked her head.

"Listen, if you pee your pants, I'm not cleaning it up." Eva made a motion which, if she were anyone else, would probably look very much like an eye roll. Instead she flung her whole head back and shrieked, telling me in her own way that she was annoyed. Evangeline isn't great with emotions, but reading her and decoding her has become my second language. I'm fluent.

Eva jumped when the landline rang, and I squeezed her shoulder as I brushed past her to grab the phone.

"Mulligan residence, Andrew speaking."

"Hey man, it's me." Me meant Tyler, a friend from school.

"What's up?"

"You wanna hang at the basketball courts?"

"I can't, sorry. I'm with Eva."

"Ah, shit. Can you like, leave her with some food or whatever?" *Can I leave her?* Who the hell did Tyler think Evangeline was, a golden retriever? I moved to end the call before I started to lose my temper and raise my voice.

"Nope. See you Monday." I set the phone back in its cradle with more force than I intended. For a split second, that irritation at Tyler transformed into a glowing poker of anger, but I couldn't tell if it was aimed toward Tyler, or me, or Eva. I didn't really want to know.

Living with Eva was like living in the middle of a constant campaign. I wasn't running for anything, and she didn't mean to run for anything either. It just worked out that Eva always seemed to be a specimen on a petri dish when we were in public. I noticed all the stares and wrinkled noses when she didn't. I saw the mothers pulling the toddlers out of our way, protecting their heads from God knew what. I

saw the sympathy smiles those mothers gave Mom as we walked down the street.

In my front pocket, my cellphone buzzed. We couldn't afford to have a real cellphone for me, like the fancy smartphones people at school had. Instead, I had a shitty flip phone that had the same texting capabilities it had in 2003, the press 5 four times to get L kind of phone. Mom was the only one who has my number. It was for family only, and sometimes, half-joking, half-not, we called it the "Eva phone."

Home late. Can you handle food?

Yeah.

Thx. See you tonight xoxo

I shoved it back in my pocket. There went the rest of my afternoon, fluttering out the window on a light breeze. Eva wandered over the fridge, as if on cue, to the laminated sheet covered in Velcroed photographs and ClipArt images. She pulled off the picture of our mom and gave it to me, cocking her head to the right but not quite making eye contact. "Mom won't be home until late tonight. Sorry." I reattached her photo to the board and gave Eva her water. As soon as I turned away from her, Evangeline sat down hard on the tile floor and threw her cup across the room. She wrapped her arms tightly across her chest and began rocking back and forth, slamming her heels against the floor and wailing. *Damn it, Eva.*

I crouched down to her level and tried unsuccessfully to pull her hands away from her body. "Hey, hey, hey, it's all right. It's okay. Mom is still coming home. I can even call and ask to see if she can come home for dinner. Evangeline. *Eva*. Calm down. It's okay, it's okay, it's okay." I kept my voice soft and even, although I could feel my stomach twisting into knots. I hated Evangeline's meltdowns more than most things in the

world. The slightest upset could set her off for hours, and I couldn't get into her head. I couldn't even get her to *look* at me. I never knew when they would end. I never knew how many would occur in a month, in a week, or, God forbid, in a day.

I said my own little prayers to no one when I was in the hurricane of an Eva meltdown. Short whispered sentences in my head over and over again, in threes or in fives. *Calm down calm down calm down it's ok it's ok it's ok help help help help help help*. It took half an hour for her to stop wailing, but she still wouldn't let me touch her. I glanced at the clock above the oven. 1:45 PM.

"You need to eat lunch. Do you want your water? A sandwich?" She stared resolutely at the floor. No matter how I wheedled, she wouldn't let up. In a last-ditch effort, I said, "Eva, want to go for a drive?"

Evangeline loved the car. She got up, still not looking at me, and walked to the front door with her hand on its handle. I picked up the cup from the floor and put it on the kitchen counter, and then I grabbed my keys from the hooks beside the landline.

Before we got into the car, Evangeline tugged at my sleeve and apologized, moving her fists in circles against her chest.

"It's okay." She rubbed the bit of skin just below her clavicle, this time with more force.

"Hey. Don't worry about it. It happens, and you're probably worn out. You got up really early today." I opened the car door and strapped her in.

We had a computer in the house, but it was nearly as old as I was, and the internet was so shitty it was practically nonexistent. Frequent trips to the public library were a necessity if I wanted to be even

remotely connected to the world. The library was a mile from our house, and once I put her favorite Taylor Swift CD in the player, Eva started to settle down. It took me longer to quiet my jitters. I forced myself to breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth like I'd been taught. I couldn't help drumming my knuckles against the steering wheel. One, two, three, one, two, three, four, five.

When we pulled into the parking lot, I carefully helped her outside. I held her hand as we walked into the library, and I could feel her tense up with excited anticipation next to me. If Evangeline loved the car, then she would lay down her life for the library. We knew all the librarians there by name, and a few of them gave us friendly waves, making sure to save an extra smile for Evangeline.

I led her over to the bank of public computers and pulled over a chair so she could sit next to me. Jenna-the-Librarian surreptitiously dropped a Rubix cube on the desk in front of us, and then she was gone before I could say thank you. Eva picked up the toy immediately, and turned the squares around, over and over again. I think she liked to see the colors switch.

On the computer, I refreshed the University of California admissions website a dozen times. I knew the announcements were due to be released any day. Nothing. But it couldn't hurt to try again. Nothing. I switched to my scholarship status. Nothing. I gave up and tugged Eva away from the computers so we could rummage through the stacks in the children's section. Evangeline brought the Rubix cube with her.

The kid's section was her favorite place in the library. There was a colorful rug in the middle, and a cool table that had a dog as its base. We were out of place in the area, sure, but even though the room was usually crowded with wailing babies and tornadoes of toddlers, it never seemed

to upset Eva. A small miracle. Evangeline reached out her hand and began to run it lightly across the top of the low bookshelves.

"Don't knock off the books that are on display," I reminded her. I was trying to read more to her and read more advanced stuff to her. We were in the middle of the Goosebumps series, and I pulled the books off the shelf one by one so she could look at the covers and pick out her favorite. Eventually, she hugged *Escape from the Carnival of Horrors* to her chest, and it was decided.

Back at home, I settled Evangeline on the sofa, opened the book, and started to read. Evangeline was silent. She even put her head on my shoulder. The only sounds in the room were my voice and Eva's hands twisting the Rubix cube in her lap. I kept glancing over to her, I kept faltering and fucking up the words on the page.

I didn't usually see it, or maybe I didn't want to see it, but Evangeline was a woman, and she *looked* like it. It caught me off-guard sometimes. Eva was pretty, too. She was really pretty. It made my stomach lurch uncomfortably, but I knew that in another world, if my friends had been over, and maybe if Eva was home for a visit, because maybe in another world Eva would have gone to college, my friends maybe would have hit on her. Because she would have been witty, and funny, and kind. In this world though, *in this world in this world I'm in this world* Eva probably won't ever get the chance to live like that. She might have to live with Mom until Mom gets too old to take care of her, and then she might live with me. Other people might never see her as more than a little girl, frozen in time.

"Let's get something to eat." I shifted on the sofa and pushed Eva back up to a sitting position. She followed me into the kitchen, where she walked to her laminated board on the fridge and pulled off an image of a sandwich, passing it over to me and jabbing at it for extra emphasis. "PB and J it is. Do you want to wait in the living room while I make it? I can turn on the TV." Eva bounced up and down in a sort of assent. I put on a show, and I returned to the kitchen, making the sandwich that I had promised her ages ago, the simplest thing to make and the only food Evangeline was guaranteed to eat.

I refilled her cup and put the sandwich on a plastic plate. Eva's attention was fully occupied, but I set them in front of her and slipped out of the room. I was about to go back and clean up the mess I had made in the kitchen when I saw the mail truck pull up in front of our house out of the corner of my eye. The mail lady hopped out and slipped a stack of papers into our mailbox. I couldn't see clearly enough to discern what that stack of papers might include, but there was this funny little force in me that was pulling me back to our front door. This time, I wanted to listen to the "what if" voice in my head.

"Hey, Eva, I'll be right back. I'm just going to get the mail." Evangeline made no sign that she had heard me, but with one backwards glance to make sure she was still content and still okay, I was out the door.

The mailbox suddenly felt like the longest walk from our front door. The niggling voice in my head was still chanting at me to check it, check it, check it. When I finally reached the mailbox, at first I only saw a stack of bills and what looked like a couple of coupons. But wedged at the bottom was a fat envelope. I didn't think it was anything special (I didn't want to think it was anything special) until I pulled it out and read its return address:

UCLA Undergraduate Admission 1147 Murphy Hall, Box 951436 Los Angeles, CA 90095-1436 Holy shit. Oh, no. *Okay okay okay*. Fat envelopes meant something, but I didn't want to jinx it. My hands shaking, I tucked the envelope under my arm, trying not to think about it. Thinking about anything else but it. The tiny voice in my head still chattered away: *UCLA and not Davis! Can you believe it? Oh, crap. UCLA, and not Davis...* it meant something, maybe something good for me, maybe, maybe – something bad for Mom. For Eva. I closed the mailbox and took a deep, shuddering breath before turning back up the driveway, where only hours earlier, Evangeline had been jump-roping.

When I got inside the house, I found Evangeline still on the sofa, entranced by a rerun of *Finding Nemo*. Gingerly, I sat by her side and put most of the mail on the side table, until only that manila envelope was left in my lap.

"Hey, Eva?" She turned her head ever so slightly in my direction, eyes still glued to the television set. "Do you want to open this with me?" I reached over for her hand and squeezed it. It took me a minute to touch that envelope again. I was acutely aware that whatever was inside it, it would change me. I wasn't sure what I wanted to be in it. I was scared of what could be in it. Evangeline started to wiggle, so I bit my tongue and struggled to rip the envelope open. A folder was inside. Absentmindedly, I passed the now-empty envelope to Eva, who proceeded to carefully fold it into fourths with her free hand. Then, at some point she had switched her object of interest, and all her attention was on me.

Slowly, still clutching my big sister's hand, I opened the envelope and began to read the letter that fell out.

Andrew Eubanks 641 Oak Avenue Davis, CA 95616 Dear Andrew:

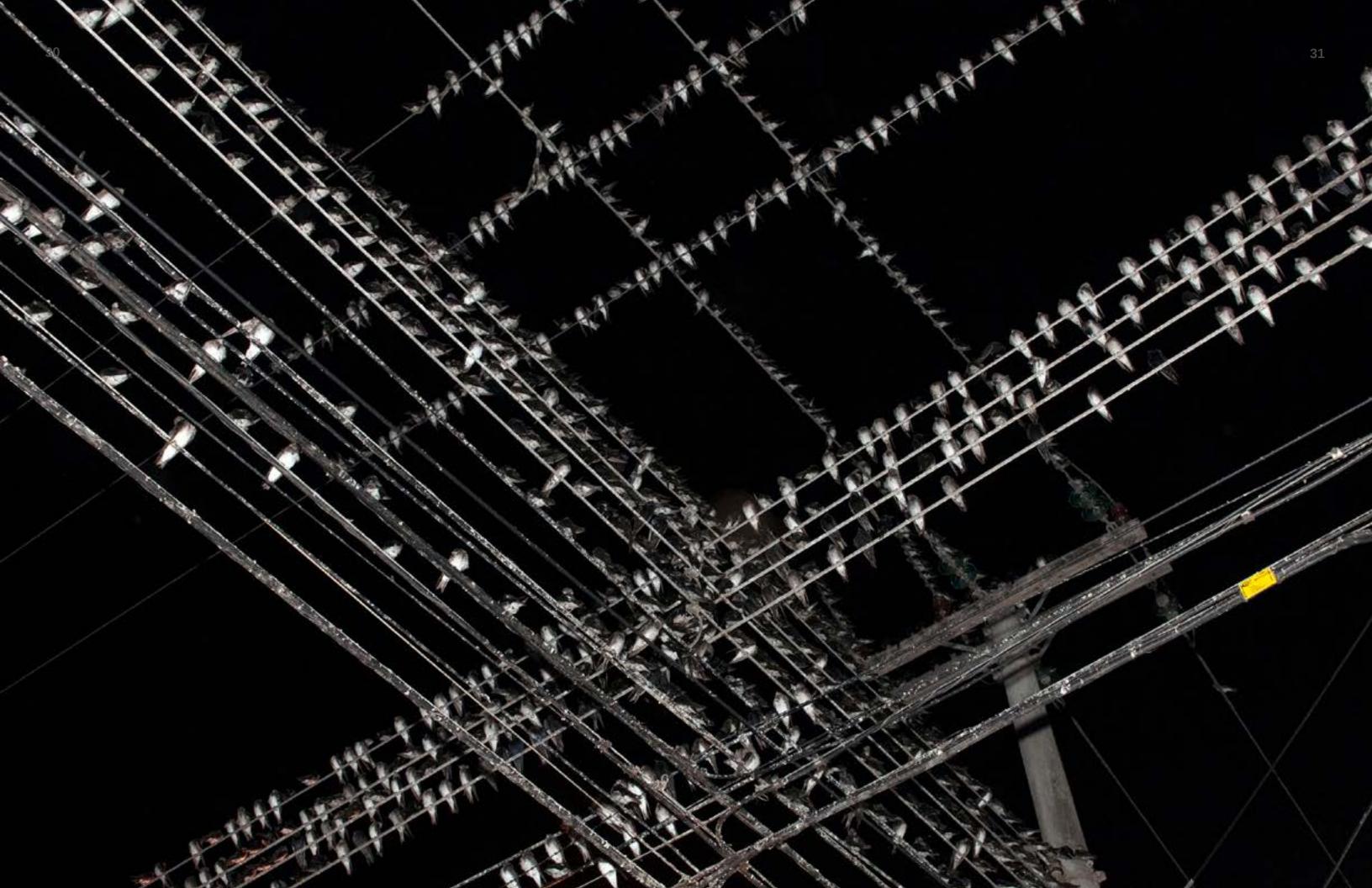
Congratulations! It is our great pleasure to offer you admission to the University of California, Los Angeles for the Fall Quarter 2024. You have been admitted to the UCLA College of Letters and Sciences with Undeclared-Humanities as your academic major.

I held my breath as I flipped through the rest of the packet and let it flop open on the form for merit and need-based aid. I had to read the number at the bottom of the page three times, before I felt my breath catch in my throat again. I could have sworn that umbrella in the sky collapsed all at once, ruffling my hair with the force of it. The rest of the paragraph suddenly became blurry. Drops fell on my acceptance letter. Evangeline leaned over to wipe my cheeks, visibly startled by the tears, and I felt myself starting to smile.

"Evangeline," I said, desperately trying to keep my voice steady. "I can go to college." *I can leave*. I wasn't sure she knew what that meant, but she leaned forward to touch her forehead with mine, and then got up and walked away, leaving me alone on the sofa. I watched Evangeline return from the other room with my cellphone and a photograph. She pressed both into my hands, and after a moment, I flipped open the phone and dialed.

"Hi Mom, it's Andrew."





RABID SPIRIT

AMELIA MWALE EILERTSEN

with little heart and froth of quiet on the mouth. pellet food filled to the brim, taste as dim as the fridge light at dusk, stay the hunger with routine. sitting on that swing: blue rope, askew plank, holes perforated and sanded down, made by a carpenter's hands; *a father's*. the swing that rose high to greet migrant cirrus herds, like elephants, and grew tall with the branches on the tree. too tall to follow after. it's beyond reach now, so i dream of a fall: a broken arm, a fear to return. this petulant lie is grounded, a broken arm makes the spirit calmer: it didn't outgrow me, i wasn't *left behind.* the bone knows otherwise, unfused, not stronger in regrowth. this rabid spirit, a stray amongst furniture, continues to chase its tail, thinning out while spinning out. thinning paper stack, wasted printer ink, amendments, treasure pile in the waste bin. yet the return to the swing, to that empty spot where someone would push, and the cirrus herds would turn dizzy, where the heart is steady. there, the wind hums thru trees: 'do you remember what it was to be unbroken?'

ABSURD MICHAEL BALL

Long-term lovers mind meld,

– Think Vulcan Mr. Spock –
unaware and against their will.

Why have separate brains?
Two may suffice, but one is best.

The unobservant imagine wife and hubby grow to look alike. That's for pets instead. Spouses take each other's minds.

Do not laugh when they invariably finish sentences for the other.
They are aliens living within.



THE UMBRELLA MAN

COURTNEY MCEUNN

Kylie's parents were never the overbearing type. As soon as she could crawl, they made her sleep in her own bed and her own room. Her family was pretty well off, compared to most. Kylie and her sister, Sarah, had their own rooms on the opposite side of the house as their parents.

It was a pretty modern looking upper-middle class house. They had a large kitchen with dark granite countertops and an island with a built in sink, as well as two dining room areas, one for large gatherings—which never happened at their house—and one for regular, everyday meals. The living room was decorated with a brown, premium leather couch set and a glass-top center table. A 70-inch TV was mounted above the fireplace and pictures of the family, art, and flowers were scattered around the remaining wall space. On one side of the house was the garage and their parents' room. The other side included three bedrooms: Kylie's, Sarah's, and a guest room for anyone who visited (nobody did).

They didn't see their extended family much. Their grandparents never approved of their parents' marriage. When they eloped against their wishes, they were ignored and left out of any family affairs.

Other than that, though, Kylie's family was doing pretty well. Hey mom owned a popular boutique shop in town and her father was a doctor. Looking back on it now, Kylie wasn't sure why her grandparents were so against the marriage, but what's done is done.

At around four years old, Kylie started seeing The Umbrella Man. The sightings started out rare and random, but would later plague her life entirely.

One day, Kylie was outside playing in the yard with their golden retriever, Goldie, when she saw *him* in the corner of their yard, standing under the pine tree. She froze for a minute and stared, confused on why Goldie wasn't reacting to him. Goldie was always excited to meet new people and hardly ever left anyone alone once they were in her sights. After a few moments, though, The Umbrella Man gave the most disgustingly creepy smile she's ever seen. He was tall, which wasn't saying much since Kylie was only four. But Kylie noticed that he was *abnormally* lengthy—maybe almost 7 feet—and he was so skinny. His skin was so pale it seemed translucent. He wore baggy black pants, shredded at the ankles, and a black T-shirt that looked three sizes too big. He had a tattered top hat on and was leaning on an old, black umbrella. When he smiled at her, Kylie could see his brown-yellow teeth were crooked, some pointy, some missing. It was horrifying.

She couldn't move, so Kylie just started screaming. Her mom and sister came running outside to see what was the matter, but all Kylie could do was point to where the man stood. As she lifted her hand, though, the man disappeared in a cloud of dark, grey mist.

"Kylie, what's wrong," her mother demanded. She frantically kept looking back and forth from where Kylie was standing and the area she was pointing at. "What are you looking at?"

"Th- Th- The man... over there," Kylie sputtered out.

"There is no man," Sarah pouted.

"You did- didn't see him?" Kylie asked, tears streaming down her face.

Kylie still remembered her mother's concerned and spooked expression.

"Come on, honey. Let's go inside."

Their mom ushered the two girls inside and made them a bowl of yogurt and granola. Kylie could hear her on the phone with who she thought was her father, but ten minutes later it was the police who showed up at their door.

They looked everywhere. Around the property, inside the house, throughout the neighborhood, but found no evidence that the man Kylie described was ever there. They asked neighbors, too, if they saw a man matching the description, but no such luck.

"She probably just imagined it," one of the police officers told her mom. "Kids have a crazy imagination. Trust me, I have three of them. She probably just watched a scary movie or video and imagined it."

Their mother reluctantly believed the officer and walked him out. Sarah was mad at Kylie for the rest of the week for scaring her.

* * *

Despite everyone believing she made it up, Kylie continued to see The Umbrella Man everywhere. She saw him when they were out shopping for groceries, on family trips, and—her least favorite—in the corner of her bedroom in the middle of the night.

After a few instances of Kylie screaming for her parents and them saying she was making him up, Kylie stopped telling them. Eventually, she became accustomed to his presence, and the way he smiled menacingly every time she encountered him.

When she was twelve and started middle school with Sarah—who was two years older—the sightings became a little less frequent. However, Sarah didn't let it go. Whether at home or at school, Sarah constantly picked on Kylie about The Umbrella Man and how Kylie

was a "scaredy cat." Nobody wanted to be friends with Kylie at school, because who would want to be friends with the girl who sees creepy, imaginary men?

One night, when Kylie woke up and saw The Umbrella Man back in the corner of her dark room, she yelled at him. She threw her pillows at him and sobbed, telling him that he was ruining her life and if he wanted to kill her, to just do it already.

Her father came in and turned the lights on to see Kylie sitting up in her pillowless bed, sobbing into her palms. He sat with her for a while and soothed her until she fell back asleep. The next morning, Sarah was pouting because she got in trouble for picking on Kylie.

"I'm *sorry!*" she told Kylie at breakfast, then looked at their dad as if to say *there! I apologized*.

Sarah was not sorry. And she held resentment for Kylie for a long time after.

* * *

Fifteen years later, Kylie worked at a law firm in Tulsa, Oklahoma, only a couple hours from her family's hometown. As she got older, she saw The Umbrella Man less and less. It was very random when he would show up. At one point in college, Kylie tried to make connections between the sightings, but got nowhere in her investigation.

Her and Sarah's relationship was better now that they were adults. Sarah still lived in their hometown with her surgeon husband and three sons. She was a full-time mom who called to talk to Kylie almost daily. After taking an occult studies course as an elective in college, Sarah became more inclined to believe Kylie about The Umbrella Man, and even

demanded to know every time he showed up.

Kylie got off work around five and, since it was Friday, decided to go out for drinks with her coworkers. They went downtown to Arnie's Bar, their usual spot. They ordered vodka sodas and sat in a corner booth.

After about an hour of drinking and gossiping about the firm, client cases, and other random things, a group of men came up to their table and asked if they could buy them another round of drinks. The women looked at each other and shrugged. Kylie turned to the guy standing closest to her and froze.

Standing right behind him was The Umbrella Man. Not in a corner. Not on the other side of the room. But right behind him. He wore the same oversized, scroungy clothing. The same top hat. Leaning on the same umbrella. Worse, he still had that disgusting smile plastered on his face. Kylie froze in horror, staring unbelievably at the close proximity of this *thing*. Up close, Kylie had a front row seat to his nasty, misshaped teeth. She swore she could even smell his putrid breath.

"Uh... are you okay?" the man asked Kylie, who was still looking towards him, horrified.

Kylie couldn't blink or look away. She knew her friends were staring at her, concerned and confused.

"Sorry about her," Jessica said, wrapping her arm around Kylie's shoulder. "We'll all take vodka sodas. *Double*!"

The man gave a weirded-out nod and their group slowly walked towards the bar, occasionally glancing back at Kylie. The Umbrella Man followed him, but kept his eyes locked on Kylie until she rubbed her eyes and broke the stare.

"What the hell was that?"

"Did you know him?"

"Are you okay?"

The questions came simultaneously as soon as the men walked away.

"Yeah, I um- I thought I recognized him." Kylie tried to play it off, knowing full well she couldn't tell them the truth.

"You looked scared out of your mind," Linda said, finishing the rest of her drink.

"I actually need to go," Kylie said, getting up from the booth. "I'm so sorry, I'll explain later. See you Monday?"

The girls gave reluctant "see you laters" and Kylie rushed out the bar and into the cool, autumn night. She fumbled with her phone and called Sarah. She answered on the first ring.

"Hello?" she said.

"Sarah..." Kylie trailed off.

After a pause Sarah said, "You saw him again, didn't you."

"I didn't just see him. He was *right* in front of me. We were at the bar and these men came up asking to buy us drinks and he was right behind one of them and he was so close-"

"Okay, okay. Calm down. Take a breath."

Kylie did. She explained what happened, how she's never seen him that close. It was awful.

"That's so weird that he would be that close to someone. Did you know the guy?"

Kylie told her no.

"So weird," Sarah said again. "Why don't you just go home, try

and get some rest. We can talk about it more in the morning."

Kylie agreed and they hung up. She then laughed a little at the ridiculousness of it all.

As she was awkwardly laughing, the man from the bar came out and spotted her. "Hey," he said. "Sorry to chase after you. I just wanted to make sure you're all right. You looked pretty freaked out in there."

"Yeah," Kylie said, "I thought I saw something, but I think I'm just drunk. Sorry to freak you and your friends out." She tried laughing again to ease the tension.

He smiled a little and said, "no worries. They were more concerned than weirded out. They thought I've done something to you in the past or something."

Kylie shook her head and let out a long breath. "No, no. It's just me and my imagination."

"Are you leaving?" The man asked.

"Yeah, I think I need to sleep the drinks off."

"Do you want a ride?"

Kylie should've said no. She didn't even know the man's name! But she was so tired and too freaked out to be alone. Plus, he seemed like a nice guy. "Sure," she said.

She followed him down the street to his car.

"I'm Alex, by the way," he told her.

"Kylie," she replied.

They made small talk while she followed him to his car, parked along the street a couple blocks away. He opened the door for her, and, for some reason, she felt like she could trust him.

When she got in the passenger seat, Kylie sent a quick text to Sarah, saying "got a ride from the cute guy at the bar. Guess my weirdness doesn't scare everyone away." Kylie hit send and put her phone away.

Kylie gave him directions to her apartment complex. On the way there, they talked more about where they're from, where they went to college, and what they do now for work. She thought it was weird how this night ended up. She also wondered if they still would've ended up together if she had stayed and had some drinks with him.

As they approached the street her apartment complex was on, Kylie noticed that Alex wasn't slowing down for the turn.

"It's this next right," she reminded him, pointing at the upcoming street sign. Instead, Alex pressed on the gas harder, making the car lurch forward.

"What are you doing?" She asked, getting worried.

Alex's expression changed from carefree and happy to something more crazed. His knuckles were turning white with how tight he was gripping the steering wheel. "I- I can't..." was all he said.

In full-panic mode, Kylie started yelling at him to slow down and stop. He didn't move a muscle. It didn't seem like he *could* move with how rigid his body had become. They passed her street and Kylie turned around to look behind them, watching her salvation slip away. When she looked back, though, she saw the abnormally thin, pale figure of The Umbrella Man, sitting in the backseat of the car, one leg crossed over the opposite knee. Kylie let out a scream and turned back around to undo her seatbelt. She would jump out of the car if she had to.

Glancing back at Alex, she saw true fear in his eyes. Sweat beads gathered on his forehead.

He's not in control, Kylie thought. She realized now that it wasn't

Alex speeding up the car, and it wasn't Alex gripping the wheel. She saw him looking into the rearview mirror, eyes wide with panic.

"Do you see him?" Kylie whispered, just to make sure she wasn't going crazy.

Alex closed his eyes for a long second. He does.

"You have to get in control. You have to stop the car," Kylie was still whispering, as if she could keep The Umbrella Man from hearing.

"I- I can't," he repeated, a tear falling down his cheek.

In that moment, Kylie knew what was happening, but she had no idea how to help. They were going 70 miles an hour now, her hopes for jumping out were long gone. She stole another glance at the *thing* that's been following her around all her life, still sitting in the backseat, smiling at her.

They kept blowing through stop signs and stoplights, going thirty miles over the speed limit when, at one light, they were not alone on the road. A semitruck going the appropriate speed limit didn't have time to blast his horn nor hit his brakes before plowing into the small sedan that held Alex and Kylie. They were crushed and killed on impact, and the semitruck uprooted and flipped on its side. The driver—thankfully—only had a few minor injuries.

In the commotion, Kylie's phone flew out of the car and landed in the grass by the stoplight. The screen lit up with one new message from Sarah: "you're CRAZY! Be safe, love you <3"

TOUGH CONVERSATION

DANIEL BARRY

Gigi knows the mayor, knew him when he was still waiting tables in the city.

she emailed him
(when he was like Lebron
in the 78th game of the season)
with an urge
to pick up the pace
and give the real estate
to those with
no homes
to call
"place where one rests"
and avoid incoming
tornados, blizzards, storms,
and also, maybe, practice
heartfulness.

met John Lewis who told her, "you understand. now keep working." what a story!

a story ongoing when we sought discomfort, cooperatively, like ascetics consoling frost.

hey Gigi, how's life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness?

you wail
and fatigue in
the state
of your
food bank.
what of the hungry?
what of those with
nothing, nothing to call
heartful house nor roofing place?
no air conditioning.
no water.
no sun.

there's enough food, of course. there's enough water, of course. there's enough money, of course. Gigi swelters in the heat.
none can convince her
to take this world
as is, for goodness sakes,
only two things
are for certain—
death and taxes.

friends at NGOs serving foreign, war-torn, strongly anti-water-filter communities learned that habits can be treacherous lemurs, and the only habit that can match in magnitude of travesty, a bottom-line dollar-pump vein-domain, is Gigi's boiling point, one that dissolved her Catholicism, because how can God be loving if the world is bitter?

Gigi, you ask me to validate your disappointment. you see everything in the modern manner, which is to say

produce continues to be ingurgitated by the glutenous ocean, can't ever seem to get enough of our unmarketable items.

take it easy, my mother Gigi; I'm going to go on a bit of a spiral but hear me out...

only when you heal yourself will the ulcer in humanity's heel heal so the limp can lighten and the hips straighten and the spine straighten and the head clear it's mind. and you can't do it alone.

Superman can't shoot lasers from his eyes, lift buildings, nor change the Earth's rotation with flight, yet, he can inspire the hearts of eyes.





THE VIRTUE SIGNAL

JOHN FRAME

"There's an incident in your past that keeps flagging you as suspicious," insisted Brian, the young interrogating officer as he scrolled through data on the synching apps. "We may need to detain you for longer while you account for your actions." Violet Bridges looked at the man and shrugged. In spite of four cups of tea, her energy sagged. After eight hours in custody, she felt a waning interest for more of the same line of questions. The sparse, dark, gray room and fluorescent lighting didn't help with the excitement level.

"I admitted from the start that I tried to steal the battery. It's for my hearing aid and I can't afford to buy them any more. They cost way too much. I'm not sure how anything I did in the past is germane to this case. This is the first time I've done this." Violet was ready to accept the charges and wait for a court date to find out the punishment. She'd pay the fine in installments.

"It's not that simple anymore, I'm afraid. We have to check your social credit history before we charge you." Brian Taylor, who recently became a sergeant in the police force, readied himself for predictable questions. The older the person he had in custody, the more confused they were by the whole concept.

"Social credit history? What on earth is that? What do you mean?" Violet's face displayed contours of puzzlement.

"It's basically a system to monitor citizen behavior." Brian felt like a salesman whenever he explained the application. Its features improved exponentially over the years. "So you can control us? Is that what it's for?"

"Not at all! It's been very useful in bringing down fraud and corruption, helping people get suitable jobs and find compatible partners, and it even holds companies accountable when they don't act in the interests of shareholders and customers. There are so many positives about this, it would take all day to list them. I'm surprised you haven't heard of it."

"I'm seventy-nine years old! I retired fifteen years ago and, since then, I've kept myself to myself." Violet rarely left the confines of her small one-bedroom house. Brian nodded, impressed by the lack of notable activity on Violet's account. She returned electronic library books on time, paid her taxes, crossed her road at the designated crosswalk, recycled, provided user reviews for all the products she bought, films and shows she watched, and all the meals she ordered from cafés and restaurants, and she never left her home after the 9 o'clock curfew. As a retiree, she was a model citizen who paid attention to all the anti-crime marketing, apart from this recent blemish on her record. "How are you even able to monitor everyone's behavior?" she asked.

"It's all the smart technology we have," replied Brian. "We know everything you do. It's really cut down on crime. For example, you could've stolen batteries twenty years ago and nobody would be any wiser. Nowadays it's easy to detect. Plus it's rare. Why don't you just get the surgery?" Violet recoiled. Was this any of his business?

"That's a very personal question! If I can't afford to buy a battery, do you honestly think I can afford to have surgery?" Violet shook her head at the stupidity of the line of inquiry. She knew he had access to her bank details and financial credit history and wondered if the question was an attempt to make her feel insecure. Brian, meanwhile, concentrated on the database as he went back to the very start of the monitoring period, when Violet was sixty-four and about to retire.

The flagged incident occurred during the infancy of the social credit program. The application was initially designed for the purposes of streamlining the welfare system to ensure that people - especially recent immigrants - didn't claim benefits to which they were unentitled. However, the government of the time realized they could apply the program to other areas of life. Since then, it's used to cover all components of everyone's existence, from child-rearing to schooling to dating to employment to healthcare to be eavement. Smart technology increased in efficiency and utility to the point that people use social credit points in a way that benefits them, forgetting that it can be used against them.

When Violet Bridges was sixty-four, smart technology wasn't ubiquitous and the social credit system relied heavily on citizen surveillance. Neighbors and colleagues entered data about each other. This was at the height of another wave of government austerity measures and paranoia about "migrant welfare scroungers." At the time, Violet was in her final year as a university lecturer in Black Studies and the person responsible for the creation of the negative file was also an academic in the same field. Sergeant Brian Taylor detected a whiff of code smell.

"Ms. Bridges, are you familiar with a woman named Cynthia Cook?" Violet sat straight up in her chair.

"I've not heard that name for a very long time. Don't tell me she's behind this incident from the past? Did she flag me all those years ago?" Violet thought she resolved her issues with Cynthia before she left the profession.

"I'm afraid so. It seems you two had an altercation and she reported it. It's been lodged there in your app for fifteen years, although it's never come up as a problem until now."

"Well, I never broke the law until now. But I'm still not sure how

this incident is connected with my current situation."

"We try not to arrest and process people who commit petty crimes, especially if it's a first offense." Brian was happy about this advance in criminal-justice. It meant the police could concentrate on serious crime. "Usually there's just an on—the-spot fine. In your case, though, we received an alert and now we have to decide what to do about any historic incidents."

"Look!" Violet took off her glasses and put them on the table. She was tired of being seen as a troublemaker. "You'll find no crime detailed in this app of yours. Cynthia and I had our differences and we resolved them, as far as I remember. Whatever she typed up after the fact isn't going to amount to anything." The truth was, Violet couldn't remember how her situation with Cynthia ended. She hadn't thought about it for years.

"Just talk me through your relationship with this woman and we'll see how it matches the report." Brian also felt weary after a full day with Violet. Usually, there are so many flags on a person's app that the interrogation concludes speedily, charges are issued, and it's back to scanning bank transfers and virtual world building. This case dragged on, complicated by the time difference between two incidents.

"Cynthia was a lecturer in Black Studies, just like me. We both dabbled in a variety of disciplines as undergraduates from sociology to anthropology to history and politics. When academia started to diversify properly, each of us began doctoral studies and then post-doctoral research in the field of race and artificial intelligence."

"Wait a minute! Isn't that a contradiction?" interrupted Brian. Violet emitted a long sigh.

"Why would that be a contradiction?"

"Well, A.I. has no race. Isn't that the beauty of machines?" Having

heard this type of thinking before, Violet searched her head for the most straightforward response. After all, Brian was born in a world running on A.I. He didn't know any better.

"When A.I. began, how did it accumulate information in order to replicate human thought and behavior?"

"I'm not sure. I never really thought about it."

"At first, before machines learned from each other, they learned from us. The abundance of information they received was from students in high schools, colleges, and universities in North America and western Europe. And, thus, a large percentage of what machines originally learned from humans came directly from young, western, White people."

"I see!"

"So, there is no contradiction between race and A.I. Racial biases are built into the system and that's what Cynthia and I worked on and wrote about."

"So, you used to work together?"

"No. I never knew her when we first started our research.

Interviewing for jobs, we'd see each other around. We were on nodding terms. Then, whenever either of us published something, the other would be asked to peer review articles. We'd speak at the same conferences. We even reviewed each other's books. It was a healthy academic acquaintanceship."

"This is fascinating, Ms. Bridges, but when did your relationship with Ms. Cook go wrong?"

"I'm getting to that, thanks. I'll need more tea to help me through this!" Violet stared at the young man across the table who seemed bored with the story he demanded. Why were police interviews not carried out by machines? It might be more efficient. Brian delivered a fresh cup of tea, hoping this would be the last and that, by the end of the story, he could close the case. While he welcomed the overtime pay, there was a lot more to be gained from going home to spend time with his wife.

"Right, where was I?" asked Violet.

"You were about to explain how your relationship with Ms. Cook turned sour."

"Yes, well, I detected similarities in our work. It started in the footnotes, as always, and then I noticed my ideas dressed up in her prose, like a drag queen at Miss World." Brian smiled. Although he didn't get the reference, he understood the essence of her jibe.

"But, if you worked in the same field, isn't it possible that you simply had similar ideas about the work? Maybe you both agreed on how racism operates in A.I." Violet coughed. The tea in her mouth prepared itself to spray over the table. She calmed herself, swallowed the tea, and held onto the sides of her chair with both hands. Poor Brian had no idea about academic life, especially back when there were career-deciding cutthroat rivalries.

"I'm sorry. You almost made me spit out my tea." Violet folded her arms. "Eventually, she'd be everywhere. I couldn't get away from this woman. If I went to a conference overseas, she'd be there. She started publishing under the same imprint as me, with the same editorial staff and everything. I'd even see her at the publisher's offices. And then, to cap it all, I started seeing her dressed in the same outfits as me, hanging out in my favorite bars and restaurants, and occasionally meeting up with friends of mine. That's stalking as far as I'm concerned!"

"It could be considered stalking. Did you report it? Why is there no record of this in the social credit app?" Brian wasn't sure if any of this story had merit, especially after all this time. Was Violet delusional, or

trying to dig herself out of a ditch?

"Your app didn't exist at the time, of course. I would've reported all of it to the police if I thought it would do any good. Instead, I decided to confront her." These details were not in the file Brian read. "I grew tired of seeing this woman everywhere, stealing my ideas, my friends, and my identity. After a few glasses of wine at a publishing function, when I was launching my book, *The White Robots*, I took her aside and let her know what I thought of her behavior."

"What did you say?"

"I let her know how mentally draining it was to be followed and copied and plagiarized. I told her I'd had enough of the game she was playing and said she needed to sort herself out and develop her own personality and her own ideas." Violet remembered the confrontation vividly and the memory reinvigorated her much more than five cups of tea.

"Wow! And how did Ms. Cook react?"

"Very strangely!" Violet paused, adjusting her posture. "She started crying, of course. I thought it was because I didn't hold back, but it turned out she was upset for a reason I never contemplated. She wanted to confront me about the same thing for years! She thought I was following her from conference to conference, stealing her ideas, hanging out with her friends, going to her favorite spots. She came to my book launch to talk to me about all this and I attacked first."

"Did that seem plausible? Was it possible that you both misinterpreted the whole situation?" asked Brian, hopeful that the interview was nearing its end.

"It did seem plausible after we talked. I reflected on it and made my peace with it. I'm sure I wrote something to the Black Studies Association, making it clear there was a misunderstanding and that Cynthia and I put it all behind us. It's a small community and I wanted to heal the rift. I don't suppose that shows up on your social credit app?"

"No. There is nothing aside from Ms. Cook's point of view."

"And what does that say exactly?" Having regurgitated the memories, Violet was curious about a counter-narrative.

"I can't tell you that, Ms. Bridges. Let's just say that you don't emerge from her account in a good light."

"So, which version do you believe?" Violet was curious about Sergeant Taylor's opinion, while starting to question her recollection of the interactions with Cynthia Cook. She remained satisfied that, if nothing else, everything ended amicably.

"I'm afraid I have to go with whatever the app tells us. It's very reliable, to the point that we really can't deviate from the data. While your story makes sense, I'm afraid you may be misremembering events and omitting details. It's oral testimony, so it carries less weight."

"Could we call Cynthia and ask her? That might put the record straight." Violet sensed that Sergeant Taylor was eager to close the case and was happy with the outcome.

"I looked her up a couple of minutes ago to see if she could respond to your account of events. Unfortunately, she died last year."

"She died?" asked Violet. "Oh my, I never knew. I told you I keep myself to myself."

"I'm afraid so. And, since her account is verified, authenticated, and the only written version of events since the advent of the social credit app, I'm afraid we'll have to charge you with theft." Brian noticed that it was past curfew, meaning Violet would be held overnight. He didn't feel good about locking up an old woman, although his hands were tied. "By the way, before we book you, I wonder why you left out

an important detail about Cynthia."

"What, that she was White?"

"Yes."

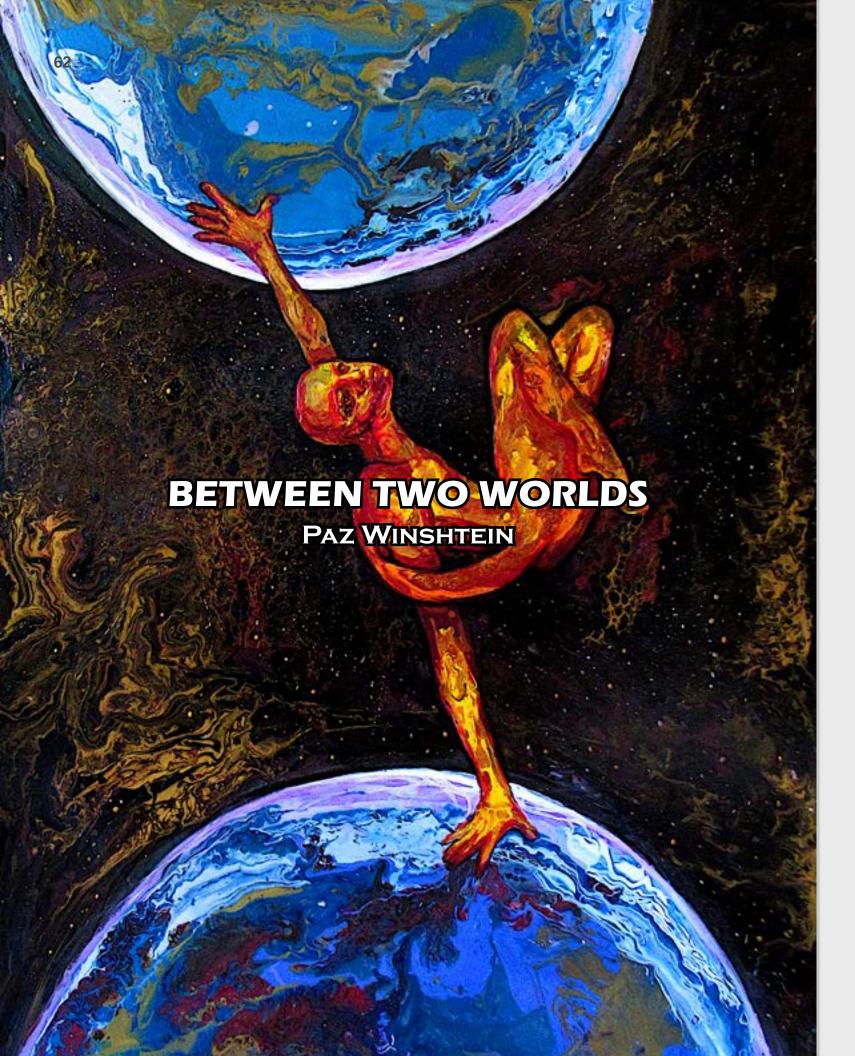
"Is that significant?"

"I don't know. You tell me."

THRIFTED

BLAYNE WATERLOO

I'm a little teapot. Like a yard sale teapot, With little dings and rust Spots and questionable durability. But at this point, I'm not Worried about what's next. I've been piped up and Poured out and washed Poorly due to restricted use. An exception to the rule By way of benign neglect. At least there's fresh air At a yard sale, with new Faces and glazed, hungry Eyes. The mirror in my Surface shows folks what they Hope to change through a Neighbor's discards, like magic. It's not a mirror they want. Not a hot-water siren or To be spotted needing something Broken like me. My kind Enters with a nose ring, Five dollars, and bigger problems. And I'm free.



THE SEVERED TREE

ELIZABETH MARKLEY

Fir tree
In the living room
Outside, it is sixty-eight degrees in late December
(It is not supposed to be sixty-eight degrees in late December)
My children lie beneath the branches
Wonder in their eyes

Red and green lights whisper *magic*They gaze up and miss
The trunk
Where the day laborer neatly cleaved
The Douglas fir from its roots
Laceration still sticky with sap

No need for the fire
(It is sixty-eight degrees in late December)
But we light it anyway
A sacrifice to the fire gods
Prometheus, Agni, Surtr
Enough, they say, the world is burning

I'm sorry, my babies
I think as I look upon the scene

Their future selves answer me In the light of the severed tree

So are we



TRUE LOVE

NOAH BERLATSKY

with apologies to Maja Vidmar

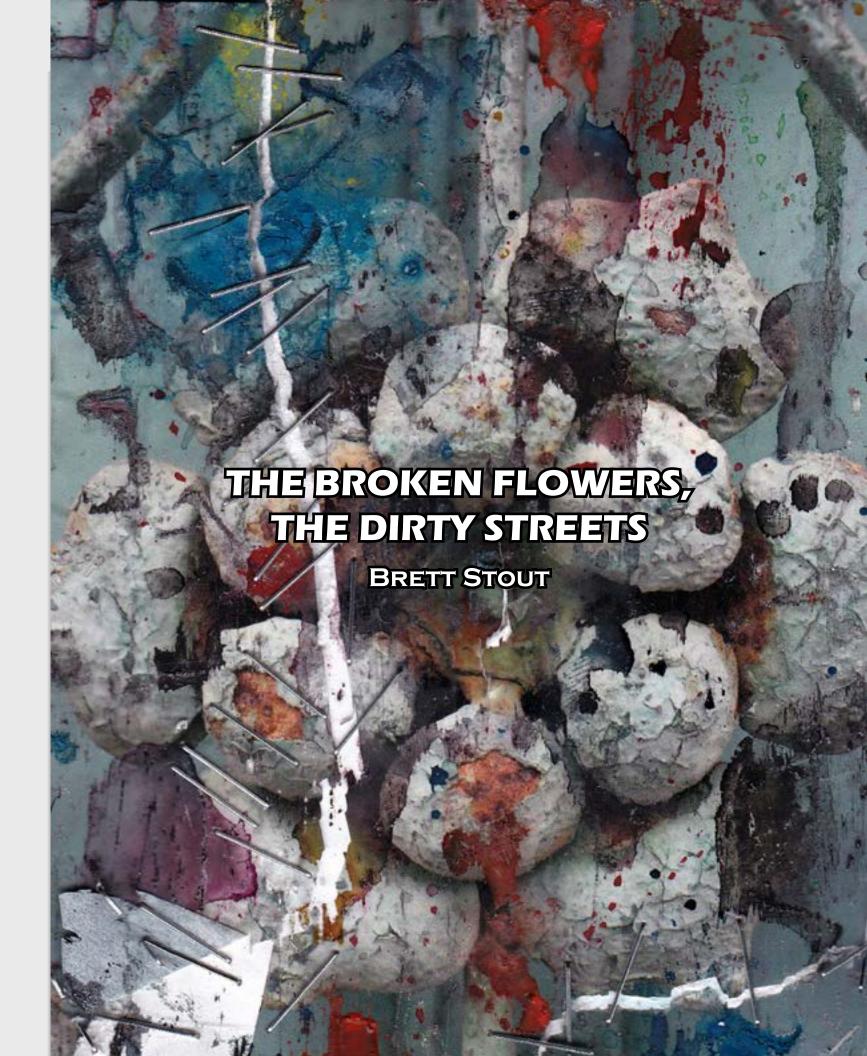
When you fall in love with love your heart pumps itself through its own heart valve up through your heart tubes to your brain. You see stars dripping blood and pumping like a heart.

And through the stars your wife comes walking, and she says, "What's wrong with you?"
She pulls your heart out of your nose. She shreds it into tiny pieces and shakes it on her Doritos.

"This is just what I wanted!" she says.

"I love this."

You love her too.



unnamed SAVANNAH S. MILLER

in the fourth grade my best friend was a weird girl like me / she had red hair and two hearing aids from a lack of oxygen / we made quite the pair / a chubby queer girl who didn't know herself and a girl just happy to be alive / i enjoyed her company because even though she was blind i felt like she saw me / she sat beside me at my birthday party / we ate pizza and talked about how we wished we could travel up mountains and not have to worry about coming back down / two days later she was in the hospital with a broken brain / she died and i cried when i realized i never gave her a party favor / to this day i wonder if she died not knowing i was grateful for her presence

SOLAR CUES

S.D. DILLON

Impacts of geomagnetic waves on pigeons. Dialects of hummingbirds in urbanity. Vandalism of the rival marsh. Pilfering. Robins invade in groups. Their imitation of speech. Risk posed by geese. Cache

underground. Trade in flame. Aggression of language.

ii.

Memory alters the sense of fairness. Neurochemicals vary. Ravens in the aviary. Ear structures of warblers. Flycatchers & cockatoos acquire a repertoire. Attraction of predators by grackles. House sparrows feed & forage. Clue, eat, migrate. Catch & protect.

iii.

Rave in urbanity. Fission of design. Map & compass. Memory in geomagnetic waves. Invade the cache. Forage, flock, pilfer. You have a sense of fairness. Protect. Reuse.

iv.

Neurochemicals vary. As ravens. In groups, feed, trade. There's a marsh in range & a theory of mind. Aggression, retribution, vandalism of rival predators.

V.

Unlatch the cellar door. Strike a match. Watch.

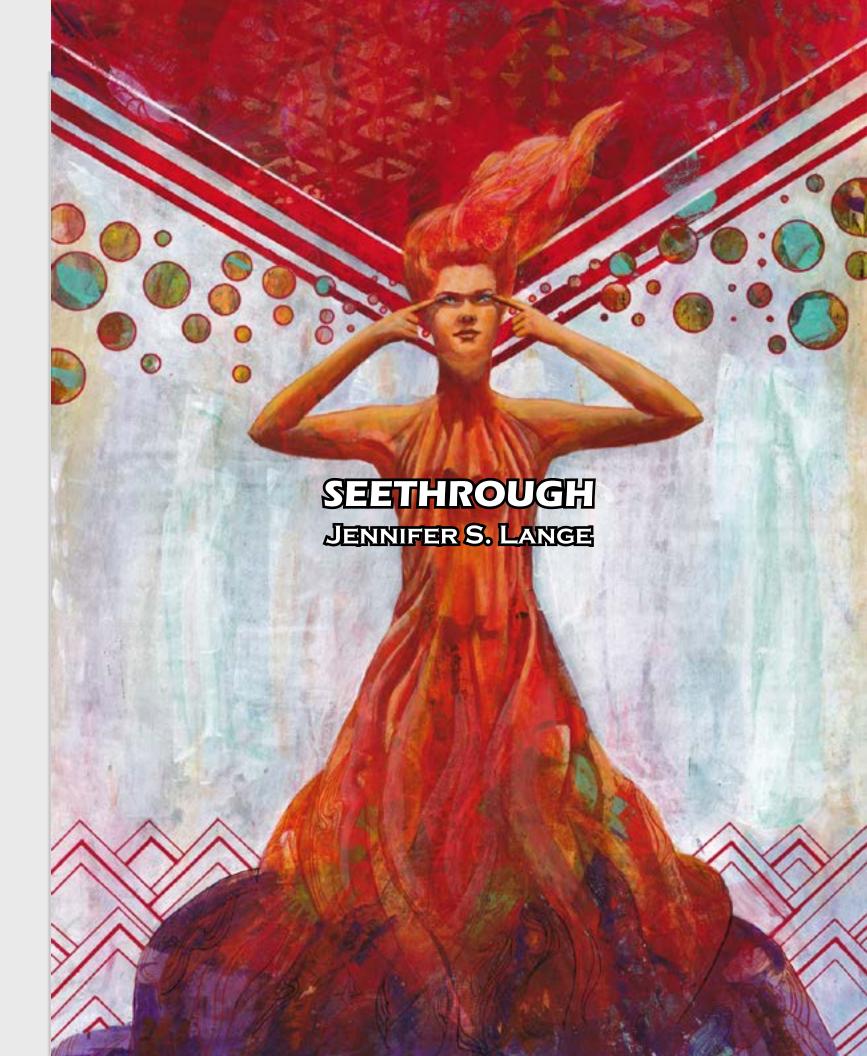


THE CHANGE

ROHAN BUETTEL

The autumn change brings a chill to the air, vine-leaves in the courtyard the colour of cabernet in the glass, but pre-occupied I fail to notice the subtle shift, the slow seeping of cold into limbs and trunk, until starting to sneeze I realize warmer clothes are needed, or perhaps the heater, although it's early to use it at this time of year.

A short haircut necessitates a beanie,
I pull on a thicker jumper and warm socks
and take a hot drink to warm from the inside.
I feel reluctant to go outside to be
eviscerated by westerlies under louring skies.
The day turns to rain and the misery is complete.



MEMORIES

JOHN GANSHAW

Over a year ago, you walked away I still hear the words you spoke "I knew this would happen." "You hurt me!" I'm the one still hurting from what you did I still feel the pain every day I can't get over it, can't get over you I see you all the time, I hear your voice Every day you come to me, I hate to close my eyes I know why you did this to me But you see, I'm not like him From me, you didn't need to be ashamed Just be honest and don't tell the lies I would forgive you for all you did I see who you could have been If not for him I don't know what you are thinking now Do you remember all you said Do you remember all you did I do, and I can't get over you Maybe I don't want to Holding on to you I have comfort in what was I miss you so much, and I cry so much I love so much

It's been a year, and it's still the same
The pain, the hurt, and the scars are all there
Like it was yesterday, and I know they will never go away
You were everything to me
You made me believe in me
You gave me hope
You gave me purpose
You made me see who I am, you opened my heart
Now, they are just memories
In your touch, in your embrace, and in your eyes
I saw all that you longed to be
Memories are all that's left of you and me

CONTRIBUTORS

Blayne Waterloo (they/she) is a horror writer and editor living in Georgia with their partner and loud dog.

Paz Winshtein Paz Winshtein, a visual artist in Los Angeles, was born in 1985. By age twelve, he was creating original oil paintings, inspired by surrealists like Salvador Dali. Preferring uninstructed workshops, he left art college after a year. Starting his career at nineteen, Paz participated in art festivals and gallery shows across the western US. His distinctive style combines surreal, impressionistic, and expressionistic elements. He works in various mediums, including oil and acrylic paints, wood carvings, and sculptures.

Amelia Eilertsen (she/they) is a queer, Zambian-Norwegian mixed-race writer with an MPhil in Philosophy from the University of Oslo. Their life is composed of the brief spaces between the makings of a moment and watching it pass by, often tilting at automated systems instead of windmills. It seems that, no matter how far they go, there is always a 'returning.' A returning to peoples, places and grace. That sombre thing that acts as caulk where grief laid waste to the shape of a person. They have poems published under Landlocked Journal, High Shelf Press, Passengers Journal, Sinking City, Temenos, Poetry Wales, and others.

Travis Stephens is a tugboat captain who lives and works in California. His book of poetry, "skeeter bit & still drunk" was published by Finishing Line Press.

Lorcán Black is an Irish poet. His poetry has been published or is forthcoming in The Tomahawk Review, Stirring, Letters Journal, The Rush, Grim&Gilded, New Writing Scotland, Snapdragon, Connecticut River Review, Northern New England Review, The Los Angeles Review & The Stinging Fly, amongst numerous others. His first collection, Rituals, was published in 2019. His second collection, Strange Husbandry, a 2024 Forward Prize nominee, is forthcoming from Seren Books in July 2024.

John Frame was brought up in Wick, Scotland. Between 1989 and 1998, he earned an M.A. and Ph.D. in history from the University of Aberdeen. He spent a year engaged in historical research for Macallan Distillery before emigrating to the USA, where he worked as a teacher in New York City and Columbus, Ohio. In 2018, he and his wife left the United States to work in the international teaching world. He currently teaches in Senegal.

Savannah S. Miller (she/her) is a writer, theatre artist, and converted Memphian. She was the inaugural Young Playwright in Process through Young Playwrights' Theater in Washington, D.C., as well as a two-time winner of the Eleanor Frost Playwriting Contest. Her works have been published or are forthcoming with the Jelly Bucket, Flash Fiction Magazine, North Star Journal of the Sierra Club, The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature, Sad Girls Club, Ambidextrous Bloodhound Press, Silent Spark Press, and Future Publishing House. She is a current MFA student at Augsburg University.

Claire Drown lives in California, where she is a public and community college librarian.

Christian Johnson is a medical student at the American University of Caribbean, but also a writer based in Detroit, Michigan. He received a BA in English and a BS in Human Biology from Michigan Technological University. He has previously been published with *Free Spirit* in their books: "Love is in the Air" (Je t'aime) and "Stories Relating to the Environment" (Extinction). His work likes to explore psychology and the human condition with the occasional touch of horror.

Ronald Walker is an artist living in the Sacramento area of California. He works in a style he calls "suburban Primitive," which combines his interest in the origins and functions of art with life in the suburbs. His work has been shown in more than 50 solo exhibits over the years, and he holds both an MA and an MFA degree in painting.

Noah Berlatsky (he/him) is a freelance writer in Chicago. His first poetry collection, *Not Akhmatova* (Ben Yehuda Press), is forthcoming; his chapbooks include It's *Fab* (Origami Poems Project), *Send* \$19.99 *for Supplements and Freedom* (above/ground), *No Devotions* and *Land the Waste* (both LJMcD Communications).

John Ganshaw, (he/him) after 31 years in banking retired to follow his dream of owning a hotel in Southeast Asia. This led to many new experiences enabling John to see the world through a different lens, leading him to write his story through essays, poetry, and an unpublished memoir. John's work has appeared in Native Skin, Runamok Books/Growerly, Post Roe Alternatives, Fleas on the Dog, RAR, OMQ, Disabled Tales, eMerge, Unlikely Stories, and many others. Nothing is as it seems, and experiences are meant to shape us not define us. Life has hope, truth, and adventure, all leading to stories that must be written and told.

Elizabeth Markley is a writer living in Atlanta, Georgia. She has published several short stories and poems across various literary journals, including Haunted Waters Press, The Feminine Collective, and the Raw Art Review. When not writing, she is kept busy by her three children under the age of eight.

S.D. Dillon has an AB from Princeton and an MFA from Notre Dame, where he was Managing Editor of *The Bend* in 2004. His poetry has appeared recently in *Tampa Review*, *Barstow & Grand*, *California Quarterly*, *Red Noise Collective*, *Door = Jar*, and *The Under Review*, and is forthcoming in *Cathexis Northwest Press* and *Wild Roof Journal*. He lives in Michigan.

Lawrence Bridges' photographs have recently appeared in the Las Laguna Art Gallery, the HMVC Gallery in New York, and the ENSO Art Gallery in Malibu. He created a series of documentaries for the NEA's "Big Read" initiative, including profiles of Ray Bradbury, Tobias Wolff, and Cynthia Ozick. He lives in Los Angeles.

Michael Ball transitioned from daily and weekly papers to business and technical publications. Born in Oklahoma and raised in rural West Virginia, he later lived in Manhattan and Boston. Now a Hyde Park Poet, he has published poems in Progenitor Journal, Griffel, Gateway Review, Havik Anthology, SPLASH!, Reality Break Press, In Parentheses, Kind Writers, Fixed and Free Anthology, and Dead Mule School of Southern Literature.

Armita Khalatbari's childhood fascination with the intricate designs of Persian carpets in her home fueled her passion for art. To her, these carpets were a treasure trove of stories and mysteries, created by nameless artisans who dedicated their lives to weaving. Through her art, she aims to honor their skill, artistry, and commitment to their craft. In addition to her artistic pursuits, she is also an experimental writer, allowing her to expand and organize her ideas logically.

Daniel Barry (he/him/his) currently works as a teacher on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. He graduated from Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia in 2023. He's served as an editor for The Crimson & Grey and has had poetry accepted by Defunkt Magazine, Corpus Callosum Press, Last Stanza Poetry Journal, Ignatian Literary Journal, Teach. Write., and Calla Press. A poem of his has been accepted by B Cubed Press' "Alternate Leadership Anthology" and a poem of his appears in The Lark Publication's "Passionate Poetry Anthology" to raise money for cancer research.

Jennifer S. Lange is a digital and traditional artist from Northern Germany, creating illustrations for books, games, posters, and worldbuilding projects. Her work has been shown internationally and in online exhibitions. Jennifer lives in northern Germany with her partner, and a lot of cats.

Rohan Buettel lives in Canberra, Australia. His haiku appear in various Australian and international journals (including *Presence*, *Cattails* and *The Heron's Nest*). His longer poetry appears in more than sixty journals, including *The Goodlife Review*, *Rappahannock Review*, *Penumbra Literary and Art Journal*, *Passengers Journal*, *Reed Magazine*, *Meniscus* and *Quadrant*.

Jax Perry is a Boston-based artist who utilizes paint as a vehicle for storytelling, while often blurring the boundaries between realism and surrealism. Alongside her artistic pursuits, she works as a research lab manager in the division of Hematology and Oncology at Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard. Her paintings attempt to capture moments and weave a narrative.

Matthew McCain is an author and fine artist with 3 of his novels reaching the top #10 on Amazon Kindle Unlimited. His work can be found all around the world from London to Alice Cooper's Teen Youth Rock Center in Phoenix, Arizona. He's currently represented by the Bilotta Gallery in Florida.

Guilherme Bergamini is a Brazilian visual artist and photographic reporter who graduated in Journalism. For more than two decades, he has developed projects with photography and the various narrative possibilities that art offers. The works of the artist dialogue between memory and social political criticism. He believes in photography as the aesthetic potential and transforming agent of society. Awarded in national and international competitions, Guilherme Bergamini participated in collective exhibitions in 54 countries.

Brett Stout is a 44-year-old artist and writer. He is a high school dropout and former construction worker turned college graduate and paramedic. He creates mostly controversial work usually while breathing toxic paint fumes from a small cramped apartment known as "The Nerd Lab" in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. His work has appeared in a vast range of diverse media, such as art and literature publications by NYU and Brown University.

Courtney McEunn is a writer from Oklahoma. She received her BA in English at Cameron University and is currently a first year MFA Creative Writing (Fiction) candidate at Oklahoma State University. Her work has previously been published in The Gold Mine, The Cameron Collegian Newspaper, and Route 7 Review.

Somdeep Datta hails from the city of Kolkata, India. His works are heavily influenced by experience from time spent in Shillong. A computer science engineer, Somdeep has a passion for travel, writing and photography. His poems have been published in anthologies by Wingless Dreamer Publisher and Poets Choice. His photographs have featured in The Wire, Thomas Cook India & Times Travel among others.

Serge Lecomte was born in Belgium. He came to the States where he spent his teens in South Philly and then Brooklyn. After graduating from Tilden H. S. he joined the Medical Corps in the Air Force. He earned an MA and Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in Russian Literature with a minor in French Literature. He worked as a Green Beret language instructor at Fort Bragg, NC from 1975-78. In 1988 he received a B.A. from the University of Alaska Fairbanks in Spanish Literature. He worked as a language teacher at the University of Alaska (1978-1997). He worked as a house builder, pipe-fitter, orderly in a hospital, gardener, landscaper, driller for an assaying company, bartender.

Frances Fish's passion lies behind a camera. She has dabbled as an abstract painter and often shoots hundreds of photographs a day. Her friends call her a 'preservationist' photographer, as her images are of the abandoned places in the desert, covered in graffiti, which change day by day. Some of the images Frances shoots can never be replicated, as the art is painted over, sometimes immediately. The work of Frances Fish has been published in multiple magazines, and in a previous life, she was also a novelist, publishing seven novels, though under a pseudonym.

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.

A JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE AND CREATIVITY

In this concluding reflection of *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*, we explore the intertwining paths of resilience and creativity, particularly in the face of loss. The recent delay of this issue, prompted by a personal bereavement, has underscored the profound ways in which grief and healing can fuel the creative spirit, transforming pain into a powerful catalyst for artistic expression.

Losing someone dear is an experience that reshapes our understanding of life, compelling us to navigate an emotional landscape marked by sorrow and longing. However, it is within this challenging terrain that resilience often emerges. Resilience is not about the absence of pain, but rather the ability to adapt and find strength amidst adversity. Creativity, in this context, becomes a vital companion—a means of processing grief and discovering new avenues of expression and connection.

Art, in its many forms, provides a sanctuary where emotions can be safely explored and articulated. Through writing, painting, photography, and other creative endeavors, we can give voice to our innermost feelings, allowing them to take shape and find meaning. This act of creation serves as both a release and a form of tribute, honoring the memories of those we have lost while also fostering a sense of continuity and renewal.

In this Spring 2024 edition, themed around renewal and connectivity, we see how the creative process mirrors the cycles of nature. Just as spring heralds a time of rebirth and growth, so too does

our engagement with art offer opportunities for regeneration and healing. Each piece within this issue, whether it be a serene landscape, a poignant narrative, or a striking visual composition, reflects the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of creativity.

As we move forward, we remain committed to embracing the full spectrum of human experience within these pages. The delay in publishing this issue, while born of necessity, has ultimately enriched our journey, allowing us to present a collection that resonates with depth and authenticity. It is a testament to the enduring truth that creativity and resilience are inexorably linked, each sustaining and enhancing the other.

We invite our readers to join us in celebrating the resilience and creativity that define our shared humanity. May the stories, images, and expressions within this issue inspire you to find your own paths of healing and growth, reaffirming the timeless connection between art and the human heart. Thank you for your unwavering support and for being a part of this journey with us.

END