

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

**ISSUE #8, SPRING 2025**



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

**POETRY BY**  
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**MEHEDI**  
**FEBRUARY**

**FICTION BY**  
**ALIXANDRA**  
**PAQUET**  
**CHECKMATE**

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**EYE CAN'T SEE IT**

**PHOTOGRAPHY BY**  
**BEGONYA PLAZA-**  
**ROSENBLUTH**  
**HISTORY**





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

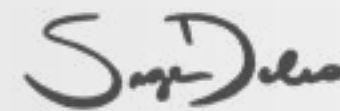
Dear Cherished Readers,

As the world outside bursts into bloom, so too does our Spring 2025 issue of *Gabby & Min's Literary Review*. It's a season of renewal, and I can't help but feel a surge of excitement and possibility as I sit down to write this letter. Before we dive into the treasures of this issue, I want to pause and reflect on the delay of our last edition. Life has a way of reminding us to slow down sometimes, and your patience and understanding during that time have been a gift. Thank you for sticking with us—we're so grateful to have you along for this journey.

Issue 8 celebrates creativity's power to unite us through 24 diverse works on renewal and connectivity. Discover five artworks vividly capturing spring's essence, five fiction stories delving into the human experience, three photographs preserving fleeting beauty, and eleven poems crafting intricate emotional landscapes.

As you turn these pages, I hope you'll feel the same sense of wonder and connection that washed over me while bringing this issue to life. Thank you for being part of this vibrant community, for fueling our love of storytelling and art, and for your unwavering support.

With boundless gratitude and warmest spring wishes,



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

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# GESTURES IN BLUE LIGHT

SAMUEL GILPIN

Bone and question  
and my hand on your belly.

This slow snow of every morning  
as a thick wool,  
as a smudge  
on the window pane.

Calm grace and fugue  
and the feel of the cleft in the bark.

A bird gathering flight  
and the sound pulls in,  
a small sound in  
a series of days when time isn't.

I've seen myself  
standing there nothing  
but a narrow channel  
and water,  
in the sheets of rain  
and the light hemmed in.



# A GOAT, A BEAR, AND GUZZIES VAN PELT

B. SCOTT BORING

Itchy tore through the thicket without a care for the brambles, briars, and burrs. Normally, he would have avoided this heavy undergrowth opting for the heavily traveled dirt path through the woods, but he was running for his life, and he hoped the underbrush would discourage pursuit.

He had done it this time. He had to get somewhere and hide, but first he had to escape the bluetick coonhound and the Allshouse boys before he sought cover in one of his hidey-holes. He had several hiding places, and they were each well-stocked with blankets, tins of food, eating utensils, and canteens of water he filled from the fresh spring atop the mountain.

Itchy was the town hooligan, a true delinquent, and he was always running from someone. He set inconsequential fires, told dirty stories, showed disrespect to adults, drank a little bit, smoked a lot, cussed like a sailor, but his true infamy was his thieving skills. He would steal anything and everything not nailed down, and even nailed down wasn't safe, it just delayed its disappearance — baseballs, bats, bikes, toys, tools, towels, food, fishing poles, front-porch flowerpots — nothing was safe from his itchy fingers, which is how he got his name — Itchy-fingers Lybald. No one even remembered his birth name. He had been Itchy-fingers Lybald for as long as anyone could remember, but everyone just called him Itchy.

Today, though, he hadn't purloined any property, but the Allshouse boys were out for blood. If he could get the bluetick off his trail, he

would hole-up for a few days until their anger subsided and forgot about him, but today their tempers were too fueled.

Itchy's great love was his slingshot, and ironically, he didn't steal it. This was a store-bought, manufactured sling shot, and it was Itchy's pride and joy. If there was a broken window anywhere in Bolivar, chances are it was the work of Itchy.

\* \* \*

The Allshouse clan had a boatload of kids, eleven siblings lived in the clapboard, ramshackle house in the Patch — Ridgeview Mining Company's housing neighborhood for its miner families — formerly called the Potato Patch Farm — but the locals just called it the Patch. It maintained the local name even after the houses had been constructed. You could only live in the Patch if you were somehow connected to the mines.

Though the exterior of the Allshouses' assigned dwelling was dilapidated and in desperate need of paint on the clapboard siding, the interior looked like a museum. One could eat off the floor; it was so clean. Mammy Allshouse ruled like a queen from her kitchen table throne. She never lifted a finger to clean because she made ALL of her daughters contribute to the upkeep of the home and do all the cooking.

The boys were exempt, for their job was to work the garden in the backyard — tilling, weeding, watering, and harvesting — until they were old enough to work the mines. In the first half of the 20th century, agriculture and raising crops from a garden was a staple for many households across America. Without it, the Allshouses would have starved in the winters.

Mammy was an expert canner, and everything not eaten when ripe, was canned in Mason jars and stored in the root cellar for the lean winter months. Pappy Allshouse worked the mines along with his older sons, but even all of their combined incomes were not enough to sustain

a family of thirteen. Pappy was in deep debt to the mining company. They took a large portion of his paycheck each month to pay off his bill at the company store and the rent for their home. When the boys reached working age, they went to the mines, but at least their incomes were full checks; although, they never saw a dime of it. Mammy collected all their monies on payday and ran the household finances. No one dared cross Mammy. The boys turned over their monthly pay from the mines without a word. Any griping would have been met with a lickin' from Mammy's belt hanging on the kitchen door. She often said to her boys, "You'll never get too big for me!" She ran the home with an iron fist, and no one crossed her, not even Pappy.

The younger boys who hadn't reached coal mining age had one other job. Milking and feeding the goats. They had five nannies and one billy. The billy's sole purpose was to breed the nanny goats and keep the milk flowing. In time, the offspring of the nannies would replace their mothers as milkers and breeders. The goats ate better than the family did. They got all the greenery from the garden and any spoiled produce. The goats would eat anything. They fattened up the male babies for slaughter and kept their nanny goats healthy. The goat milk was the only milk the Allshouse crew knew. The milkman didn't stop at their place because it was far too expensive to keep the large family in fresh cow milk. Mammy taught the boys to milk, churn butter, and make cheese. Nothing went to waste.

The billy goat is what got Itchy in trouble with the Allshouse clan. Because they only kept one male goat, he was a crucial resource for the milking production. With no billy, no pregnant nanny goats meant no milk. Because the male kids were slaughtered for meat at a year old, there was only one male goat in residence at a time.

Itchy had hidden in the woods near the Allshouse garden. The billy was tethered in the yard away from the produce. This is too easy, thought Itchy. A moving billy goat would be great target practice, and he

would get great glee out of torturing it. He always had an ample supply of stones in his overalls, so he began firing at the goat. Whenever, he pegged the goat, it would bleat its displeasure and dance around in pain.

The Allshouse boys were unaware of the prankster hidden in the woods. Too busy tending to the large garden, they would hear the goat cry out in pain, and Crow Allshouse would ask, "What has gotten into the dang-blasted goat?"

In the shadowed woods, Itchy was laughing his fool-head off. To make his fun a bit more challenging, he decided to aim for the goat's head. This was his mistake. After several near misses, he finally nailed the billy dead center in its forehead, and it immediately collapsed from the shot. Wiggy Allshouse saw it, and alerted his brothers, "Billy just fainted!"

They rushed over to Billy as it lay there lifeless, for it truly was. They couldn't revive it. They saw the blood coming from the wound and noticed the large rock which had hit it.

Looking to the woods, they knew the murdering culprit instantly. Carney Allshouse shouted, "Itchy Lybald, now you've gone and done it!"

Itchy army-crawled on the ground to get deeper into the woods before sprinting off. He could hear Crow barking orders, "Go unleash Blue from her doghouse, Wiggy. Carney, grab Pappy's shotgun and some shells. We'll teach Itchy a thing or two — a life for a life."

Hearing their plans from the woods, Itchy abandoned his need for stealth opting for as big of head start as he could get. Crow spotted him and saw where he had been lying on the ground. "Yep, it was definitely Itchy. There he goes a-runnin. Wiggy, take Blue up and let him get a good sniff from where Itchy was camped out. He can run, but he can't hide from Blue's nose."

Blue, the bluetick coonhound, hunted everything, but raccoon pelts were still in demand and fetched a fair price, so Blue and the Allshouses hunted racoons regularly. There were always racoon pelts tacked to the shed door. Blue was no novice when it came to tracking clever varmints. Unless Itchy pulled a trick confounding her, Blue would track him to wherever he hid.

The boys set off, Blue immediately picked up the trail, and you could hear her baying all through the Patch. It was easy-going at first because Itchy had stayed on the well-worn path, but then it became tougher for Blue and the Allshouses. Itchy had opted for the undergrowth to slow the hound and hunters. This just made the boys madder at him because they were getting scratches from the thorns and burrs all over their clothes.

The Allshouse boys used to be friends with Itchy, but after one of his misdemeanor misadventures, Mammy forbade them from being friends with him. “Itchy Lybald is nothing but trouble, and no sons of mine are going to have this family’s good name tarnished by association with a juvenile delinquent.” Because they weren’t allowed near him, Itchy considered them his enemies, and he constantly demeaned them and stirred up trouble for them.

The boys finally cleared the brambles and waited for Blue to pick up the trail again. Itchy had led them to an apple orchard. Blue was struggling; she seemed to have lost Wiggy’s scent. She sniffed up and down the rows of trees and found nothing. They looked all through the grove and couldn’t figure out where Itchy had gone.

Carney commented, “Blue never gets fooled except by Grizzly,” — the name the locals gave to a huge raccoon which had been seen but never caught — “Itchy has as many tricks up his sleeve as Grizzly.”

Defending his beloved bluetick, Wiggy exclaimed, “Give her a

minute or two! Blue is the best tracker in the Patch!”

Blue began crisscrossing back and forth trying to pick up the trail. It wasn’t until she got to the end of the orchard, she caught Itchy’s scent again, and the Allshouses deduced how Itchy confounded Blue. Itchy had climbed an apple tree and jumped from one tree to the next, his feet never touching the ground, like a squirrel going from tree to tree. Once he got to the orchard perimeter, he jumped as far from the tree as possible and sprinted back into the woods to double back to the road. The trick had cost the boys valuable time, but for Itchy, his head start had gotten larger.

\* \* \*

Itchy’s next trick was to return back to the Patch alongside the dirt road which served as the only entrance and exit to the housing community. His plan was to go to his house where his scent was everywhere, and Blue wouldn’t be able to distinguish his entrance or exit from his home. Next to the gravel road lay a ditch where water runoff would flow during storms. There was still water in it from a recent thunderstorm. Itchy ran through the water to mask his trail. He was almost to the Patch when he heard Blue’s baying again. Blue had found his trail in the apple orchard; he figured she eventually would. He ran a little faster.

The homes in the patch almost looked like row homes, but there were small alleys between each clapboard house. This was purposeful for it helped maintain heat in the winter at least for interior homes. The Patch was one long gravel road with homes on both sides until it dead-ended in a cul-de-sac. Itchy made his way to his house, crawled through the basement window, up the stairs, and out the front door. He then ran across the street into his Aunt Chot’s house and out her back door. He had family all up and down the Patch, and he just kept crisscrossing until he made his way to the river. He swam across the river, and then



made his way to his favorite hidey-hole, and one he had never shown to anyone.

It was a cave he discovered accidentally during bear hunting season. He saw a black bear dash into the well-hidden cave, so he found the hunters who were tracking it and showed them the bear's den. They waited patiently for it to leave, and voila, Itchy had his new hiding place. He quickly made it comfortable for camping out and kept it secret.

With the Allshouse boys out for blood, he settled in and decided he would hang out for a few days here. Hearing no baying from Blue and only the quiet rustling of the trees, Itchy grew sleepy and nodded off.

\* \* \*

Guzzies Van Pelt had witnessed everything from her lean-to hidden in a hedge just past the tree line behind the Allshouse homestead. The hedge and trees provided some extra protection during bad weather. She saw the boys tether the billy goat in the yard, begin harvesting vegetables and fruit from the garden, and saw Itchy take up a position in the trees to begin his onslaught of stones at the billy goat. She saw the goat fall and the subsequent chase. She also saw Itchy's return to the Patch and twenty minutes later the Allshouse boys followed with the bluetick hound sniffing him out. Guzzies also knew where Itchy was going to hide out, for Guzzies saw everything.

Guzzies was a well-known local to Bolivar, but she had no friends. Most everyone thought she was a drunk, but she wasn't. Guzzies wasn't opposed to drinking, but she always had to rely on the generosity of others to imbibe. In fact, the kindness of others sustained Guzzies. Mammy Allshouse was probably the kindest. She rarely spoke to Guzzies, but Mammy grew up with her and knew her before the illness set in. Mammy knew Guzzies was harmless, but the trauma of her life

had made her not right in the head, and Mammy felt sorry for her.

Because Mammy was so excellent at managing her household, she knew where she could cut a corner or two and extend a hand to help the less fortunate. Mammy left Mason jars of canned vegetables and fruits near where Guzzies bedded down each night; Mammy would find the empty jars a few days later on the back porch steps. Occasionally, day old-bread and table scraps would accompany the jarred goods. On cold nights, Mammy would leave the root cellar door unlocked, and there were blankets in baskets for Guzzies to cover-up. Mammy was hard on her kinfolk, and locals would be surprised if they ever discovered Mammy's softer side.

The townsfolk avoided Guzzies. No one understood mental health and the lack of understanding created a very lonely life for her. She preferred the loneliness. People could be so cruel. Folks would move to the other side of the street like she was a leper when she was out walking around. Guzzies talked incessantly during her perambulations. She was always carrying on a conversation with someone in her mind.

She was for all intents and purposes invisible. She knew almost all the happenings in Bolivar. She knew the adulterers, the gamblers, the bootleggers, and the burglars. If the police had thought for even a moment, she would have been a great confidential informant. She was invisible; no one gave her any mind. However, she noticed everything. If someone ever got close enough to Guzzies to hear her ramblings, one would hear her gossiping with her imaginary friends and listing all the men who were stepping out on their wives. She knew names, dates, times, and places.

Guzzies had watched from afar all the exploits of the morning. She saw the goat fall, Itchy's mad dash, the younger Allshouse boys unleash Blue, and the hunt. She also noticed something else no one

else had witnessed. Guzzies knew eventually Itchy would be cornered because Blue was a talented hound. She had to stop Mammy's boys from breaking a mama's heart. She didn't care a lick about Itchy who frequently tormented her, but she had to stop Mammy's boys from making a horrible mistake. She set off for Itchy's hideout and hoped she wasn't too late.

\* \* \*

Carney shouted to his brother, "He's crisscrossing through the Patch." They had finally made their way back to the miners' tenements. "He will come out the back of Miss Chot's house and then into his cousin Wormy Williams's house a few doors down. If Blue picks up his trail at Wormy's, we'll just head to the end of the Patch and see if he headed toward the Conemaugh River."

Sure enough, the hound picked up his trail in the direction of the river. Blue swam across and began sniffing downstream. There were narrow sections of the river where planks were placed bridging the north and south banks of the Conemaugh. The Allshouse boys caught-up with Blue on the opposite side; she was sniffing the riverbank trying to find Itchy's trail. They kept working their way downstream.

"Itchy is one clever varmint," Crow remarked. "He's pulling racoon tricks now. He floated downriver and who knows which side he climbed out on!"

"The current is too strong for Itchy to swim upriver, so we'll check this side for a bit, then cross and scope out the south bank," Carney mused.

Carney had barely finished his sentence when Blue started baying and dashed off into the woods. It had taken over an hour, but Blue had picked up Itchy's trail on the north side of the Conemaugh. He had indeed gone across the river and floated downstream a good half mile

before exiting. The boys bounded after her whooping and hollering.

"Go find him, Girl," Wiggy shouted.

"Whoop! Whoop!" Carney and Crow chorused encouragement to the hound. Blue bounded ahead baying loudly, and Itchy never heard her or the shouts of the Allshouses, for he was fast asleep.

\* \* \*

Invisible Guzzies traversed every square inch of Bolivar every day. She knew everything, but no one knew she did, least of all Itchy Lybald. She had been in the woods the day he had the hunters clear out the bear den, and she watched as Itchy took up residence. She knew this was the place he would hole-up to escape the Allshouse boys.

Normally, Guzzies wouldn't care a lick about Patch boys brawling and beating the stuffing out of one another, but when Guzzies saw the boys with the shotgun, she was shocked to the point of shivers. Mammy Allshouse was the only truly kind person she knew. They never had conversations. A wave to one another was usually the extent of their affection and acknowledgment. When they were kids, Mammy and Guzzies were friends, but life got in the way. Mammy married Pappy Allshouse and became a baby factory. While Guzzies had terrible experiences in her younger days which left her traumatized for life.

When Guzzies saw Mammy's boys take off with the shotgun, she couldn't imagine how Mammy would handle it if her boys were in trouble with the law. Guzzies decided she was going to intervene, especially after what she saw when they left.

She could hear the baying of Blue. They were drawing close to Itchy's cave. She hoped she could get there in time. Guzzies went downriver to cross on the bridge. She was too old to wade the river or tight rope walk across two-by-fours. This cost her valuable time because

the boys had no problem swimming the river or scrambling over fallen trees nature provided as bridges for wildlife or Patch boys to use. She picked-up her pace, hoping to get there in time.

\* \* \*

Crow heard the bawl Blue used when she had treed a raccoon. “She’s got ‘im brothers. If he tries to run, Blue will attack him.” They followed her treed bark, and when they arrived, they saw hide nor hair of Itchy. Blue was running back and forth around a big rock.

“Has she gone crazy?” Carney asked. “There’s nothing here.”

“Don’t be so sure, Carn,” Wiggy interjected, “Blue never bawls treed if she doesn’t have it cornered.”

As the boys approached, Blue wagged her tail, and looked right at the rock. Upon closer inspection, they found an entrance into a cave between a crevice in the rock. Now they had Itchyfingers Lybald with no escape.

\* \* \*

Itchy woke with a start. It must have been a dream. He thought for sure he heard a coonhound, but there was nothing. He started to nod off back to sleep, but then heard it again. Rats and fleas! They found me, Itchy thought. Itchy began to crawl to the door of the cave to get on the run, but as he put his head out into the sunlight, two strong hands gripped him by the collar and hauled him out of the hidey hole. Crow Allshouse, though only 15, had the strength of a 25-year-old professional athlete, and he lifted the scrawny Lybald boy with not even a strain.

Crow said, “We got you Itchy, and now you are gonna get whats you give Billy! We only had one male goat, and we’ll have to

buy one now because we slaughtered our last male kid a few weeks ago. You have caused the Allshouse clan a true hardship, so you is gonna pay the hard way. Hand me the shotgun, Wiggy.”

“No! no!” Itchy pleaded. “I’ll get you a new goat. Please, please, I promise you!”

“You don’t have any money to buy a billy goat. What are you going to do, steal one?” Carney queried. “Mammy won’t have us taking stolen livestock from someone else.”

“You went too far this time, Itchy. You are always up to no good, and you always seem to get out of any scrap you are in, but this time, we saw you and caught you, and we are gonna rid the Patch of your nonsense. We’ll just plop you right back here in this cave; no one will find ya,” Crow said angrily, and he wasn’t kidding.

Suddenly Itchy punched Crow right in the family jewels, and as Crow doubled over in pain, Itchy sprinted to escape. Blue chased and grabbed Itchy’s pant leg. Itchy stumbled and fell against the large rock. Wiggy and Carney started punching Itchy—they missed more than they landed—Crow righted himself, grabbed the shotgun, and pointed at Itchy. “This ends now.”

“STOP! STOP! STOP! Yinz stupid boys. What do yinz think you’re doing?”

Suddenly, Blue let out a blood-curdling snarl and started barking like a demon. The boys looked up to see Guzzies approaching them, but Blue would not have reacted this way to Guzzies. Her barking and snarling were different; this was a savage bark; a sign Blue had sensed something sincerely sinister.

“Help me, Guzzies. They aim to kill me!” Itchy screamed.

“Shut your fool trap,” Crow yelled.

Wiggy chimed in, “Blue ain’ barking at Guzzies. She only acts like this when something bad is lurking about.” Then...they saw it! All four boys’ eyes grew as large as teacup saucers. About 100 yards behind Guzzies was a full-grown black bear. Guzzies hadn’t seen it; she was far too intent on stopping the boys from brawling. The bear was stalking Guzzies.

Crow yelled, “Guzzies look behind you.”

Guzzies looked and froze.

Crow continued, “Don’t run, or it will chase you. Turn around and open up your coat to make yourself look big. Walk backwards toward us; face the bear; go slowly.”

Blue broke loose of Wiggy’s grasp and went into action. She was no match for the bear, but hounds are fearless, she stopped in front of it, just out of reach, and snarled and barked like a thing possessed. The bear stood on its hind legs and roared.

Guzzies had frozen in place. She had done nothing Crow had suggested. She just stood there. While Blue was engaging the bear, Carney sneaked over and grabbed Guzzies’s arm. “Miss Guzzies, snap out of it. You have to get away.” Guzzies just stood there transfixed, trance-like, terrified.

Carney tugged on her arm and started to pull her back to the group.

Blue ran circles around the bear. Dashing in whenever she had an opening and biting the bear. The bruin would turn to swipe at her, but nimble Blue escaped every attack. Then the beast would turn back towards the group, advancing upon them. Crow had no choice. He didn’t want to fire buckshot into the bear. It would not kill it, just anger it, but perhaps the loud noise of the gun would scare it off.

As Crow took aim, Itchy saw his chance and made a break for it

and ran with top speed away from the situation developing at his hidey hole. The Allshouse boys were doing whatever they could to bring Guzzies out of her trance. As Itchy looked back and saw his enemies working together to save a woman no one cared about, he stopped dead in his tracks. Itchy suffered a catharsis of the soul. They didn’t stand a chance against the bear. He couldn’t do anything either, but maybe if he did what he could, the bear might leave. He pulled out his sling shot and reached into his pocket of stones.

Krak-pow went the shotgun; simultaneously, Itchy from atop of the stone which marked the cave, zipped a stone bullet at the bear’s hind quarters, and it hit its target. The bear roared in pain. Crow shot in the air trying to scare off the bear, so none of the buckshot hit the bear, but the stone did, and it hurt as the bear danced around in pain.

“Wiggy, in my hidey hole are metal pans and utensils. Go grab some and start making as much noise as you can!” Itchy shouted. The enemies were fighting together instead of one another. Wiggy obeyed and disappeared down the entrance to the den.

Carney was finally able to get Guzzies to move up toward the rock to be nearer to them; the bear loped toward them. Blue, nipping at the bear’s hind quarters, kept up her assault.

Crow fired the shotgun again. This time taking aim, but the bear still was out of range. However, it was almost on Guzzies and Carney. Itchy slung stones; Wiggy banged pots and pans and yelled; Crow was firing buckshot; Blue snarling and barking, and still the bear advanced.

Suddenly, Guzzies broke free of Carney’s grasp and her hypnotic state. She turned to the bear, pointed at it, and speaking in a stern and strange voice said, “No Sir! No Sir! You is not hurting these here boys.” She stared the bear in the eyes and pointed directly at it. The bear was so close Guzzies could smell and feel it’s hot breath. The bear

halted, looked at her, roared, and bounced up and down on his front paws. Guzzies did not move.

“Get on with yourself. Get yourself out of here. You ain’t got no bidness here. BEGONE YOU FOOL BEAR!” Guzzies shouted and continued pointing at the burly beast. The boys watched Guzzies Van Pelt staring down a full-grown black bear. The bear silenced its roaring and slowly turned. Guzzies continued. “That’s right you heard me. Get your bear-self gone. You ain’t wanted here.” The bear retreated and gruffly grunted. “You don’t scare me. Guzzies has taken on bigger bullies my whole life. You is no different. Now git. Git yourself gone.”

Besides Guzzies yelling and the bear grunting, all else was quiet as could be. The boys were silent; Blue stopped barking, and Guzzies continued to stare down a carnivore ten times her size.

The bear disappeared into the underbrush.

Guzzies turned to the boys. “Now this fool adventure is over.”

“Guzzies, this ain’t none of your affair,” Crow said quietly, but respectfully.

“Well, Guzzies is makin’ it her affair, cuz Guzzies seen the whole blasted thing start to finish. Guzzies saw Itchy slingshotting your goat; Guzzies saw yinz taking chase, and Guzzies saw what happened after, when yinzes was off hunting the delinquent. Itchy may need a good whoopin’, but he don’t deserve birdshot in the gut and maiming.”

Wiggy chimed in, “What did you see happen after we left? Is Mammy and our sisters, okay?”

“Nuttin happened to Mammy and your kin. And nuttin happened to the billy goat neether. Itchy just knocked it senseless with his stone and slingshot. He didn’t kill it. Now your Mammy is good to Guzzies. Yinz all knows. She probably had yinz build my lean-to Guzzies sleeps

in. She lets Guzzies sleep in the root cellar when it gets cold. Yinzes mammy is the only person in this world who’s shown me any kindness, and Guzzie’ll be gosh darned if any of yinz are going to break her heart by killin’ or maiming someone. Now yinz gave Itchy a good scare, now git. Git on home and tend to Mammy.”

The boys gave Itchy some light shoves and glares, but Guzzies had shamed them. They leashed-up Blue and sauntered off home. None of them was about to mess with Guzzies Van Pelt. They were scared of her. She stared down a wild bear.

After they left, Guzzies turned to Itchy, “You know Itchy, you and Guzzies got a lot in common. We ain’t gots many friends. We’s both ‘lone in this world. The difference is you don’t have to be. You gots smarts and personality. Your momma loves you, and you is young enough to make something of your life. Guzzies’s life is what it is, but you still have a whole life ahead of you. Stop bein’ a delinquent and become something Bolivar can be proud of.” She turned and headed off toward the tree line.

Itchy looked at her in disbelief as she shuffled toward the trees. He had treated her badly so many times, and regardless of why she did it, she had come there and rescued him. He stood pondering what had happened and realized something in him had changed. He was feeling weird on the inside; his stomach churned; he became light-headed. Overwhelmed, he collapsed to his knees and wept. Guzzies had reached inside him and somehow transformed him. Itchy Lybald was no longer the same person. He looked up and saw Guzzies staring at him; she nodded at him then disappeared into the thicket.

\* \* \*

The legend of Guzzies Van Pelt has been retold for generations.

With each retelling the hyperbole grew giving her magical, witch-like powers. In some tales she became the protector of the Patch, the righter of wrongdoings, the transformer of troublemakers, and in other legends she was the eerie enchantress who knew every evil thing a person had done.

For Itchy, the adventure with Guzzies was a turning point in his life. His delinquency faded, truancy trailed away, and he became well-liked, even loved. He became a state champion runner for track and cross country. It seems all the running from neighbors and the law was great training for a track and field career. When the States joined World War II, Itchy and the Allshouse boys enlisted. Those are tales for another day, but Itchy did make Bolivar proud, very proud. All because of a goat, a bear, and Guzzies Van Pelt.

## **SLEEPY HOLLOW**

**ARBEN ALOVIC**

The flowers will never bloom  
as they once did, and tomorrow  
will come without you.

I'll call your name, knowing  
you won't answer, but I still feel you  
in the spring breeze.

I'll be chasing after butterflies, hoping you'll be waiting in the garden.



# THE EFFECT OF BLOOD SURROGATE ON VAMPIRICAL TISSUE SATURATION AT LOW HUMIDITY

MARK PUTZI

**Abstract:** Dryness is ubiquitously problematic in vampires between the ages of 600-1800 years. In younger or “new” vampires, insect consumption and predation on lower mammalian species tend to irrigate vampirical nexi with sufficient zest. Conversely, in older, more mature vampires (known to the industry as “seed” vampires) tissues subject to drying can crack, particularly at articulations, leading to bacterial and/or fungal infections which can produce painful tissue necrosis along with embarrassing odors. Such vampires are often left starving, as the humans on which they prey can easily identify and avoid them. In our study, we examine the use of “blood surrogate” developed by Huxley et al to replace needed fluid in starving vampires. We develop a scale of vampirical joint flexibility to measure saturation outcomes and draw tissue samples from various open vampire wounds to test for liquid distribution throughout the physical vampire.

**Methods:** Tissue samples from housebound vampires and vampires under hospice care provided by DracPac Inc. were bathed either in Huxley surrogate, bat blood, or distilled water colored with red dye. Samples were then examined under SEM at 1 month, 3 months and 9 months. Measurable parameters included percentage of mold and rot profusion, suppleness on a scale of 1 to 10 as determined by probe

perturbation under 10 foot pounds of pressure, reverse metaplasia, and “jump reflex,” indicating complete reversal of necrosis.

## *Vampire Tissue Necrosis Factor $\Omega$*

Percentage of saturation of VTNF $\Omega$  was determined to begin the study, and then for comparison at 4, 12 and 36 weeks as a predictor of a return of viability to tissue. Samples were frozen with liquid nitrogen, ground, mixed in solution and run on standard DracPac gels. Quality of afterlife issues were addressed via 4 part questionnaire, administered at the beginning and end of the study. Finally, participants were asked to transform into bats, wolves, boa constrictors and Great White sharks in order to determine their ability to reestablish proximity to prey entities and resume a self-sustaining deathstyle. As a courtesy to participants, fangs were polished and any necessary dental procedures were performed at no cost prior to dismissal.

## *Participants*

Randomly assigned to either Control (C), Bat Blood (BB) or Huxley (H) groups, the total number was 117 (39 per group). Ages ranged from 643 to 2713 years, with a median age of 1012. Sex was skewed toward female 48-43%, with the remaining 9% accounted for by vampires identifying as part of the LGBTQV+ community. All undead races were represented, with the majority white (37%), black (33%) and LatinX (18%). Ethnicities were overwhelmingly Transylvanian (97%), and all participants were Satanists.

## *Blinding*

Neither participants nor administrators were made aware of the identities of assignment groups. If the possibility of clairvoyant discovery existed, staff and participants were either excluded or given telepath suppressants in accordance with VDA guidelines for supernatural inquiries.



Exclusions were made on the basis of health risk assessment, or an acknowledgment of superior psychic focus. Test group individuals or staffers were treated with adlibomab (Clueless Plus) infusion, monthly for the duration of the study. Infusions were abated at the conclusion of the study, with full recovery confirmed via blood tests six months removed from treatment abatement.

### *Data Analysis*

Analysis of Variance was used to determine viability of test results. Scores recorded were compared against blood sucking (BS) indices to arrive at standard computational agreement models for simulation (SCAMS).

Results: We were surprised in our early analysis to see significant tissue degeneration within the control group, until we discovered our control solution had inexplicably been contaminated with 15% holy water. After adjustments were made, and certain variables revised within the supply chain, degeneration, as expected approached zero in the (C) group, and our research proceeded. Both (BB) and (H) groups displayed significant improvement in tissue pliability, and significant decrease in inflammation and infection after only three weeks. From an average of 85% of the tissue covered with mold and rancid with bacteria, most samples had decreased to roughly 15%, a 600% improvement over baseline ( $p = 0.0000053$ ), while (C) group remained unchanged. Subsequent results after 3 and 9 months demonstrated less aggressive regeneration of tissue, and even some regrowth of infection in samples that developed resistance to treatment. Meanwhile, control group decomposed essentially to gel and was eventually overgrown as a lawn of mold and bacteria. Results did not demonstrate a superiority of (H) over (BB) as hoped, but given the scarcity of bat blood, and

the volume required to maintain therapeutic outcomes in Dr. Lugosi's treatment model, (H) was thought of as a welcome alternative, with a likely favorable cost/benefit ratio, something our underworld hospitals should welcome with gratitude, given our growing geriatric population. Unfortunately, sunlight sensitivity did not improve in any of the test groups, nor was there any expectation. To conserve samples for analysis, only 1 out of 10 were exposed to mid-day sun, with the ubiquitous result of flash immolation and conversion to ash. Try as we might, we do not seem to be able to rid this weakness from our constitutional framework. No other creatures are more obligate nocturnal than ourselves.

Suppleness did not change by 10 pound pressure palpitation from 1 month to the conclusion of the study 9 months hence. A "jump reflex" was witnessed upon electrical stimulation in 5% of test samples, but only after 9 months of continuous treatment.

In response to our 4 part questionnaire, particularly the older vampires (aged 1200 years, and above) whose quality of afterlife scores jumped nearly 15% from 0.43 to 0.58 with 0.0 reflecting absolute ennui and 1.0 being complete satisfaction with existence, we saw a renewed interest in desiring human blood and engaging in short term relationships and prospective mortal sexual partnerships. Crosses, stakes, holy water and torch bearing mobs were not seen as deterrents, but thought of rather as "challenge subjects" to be met with openness, honesty and improved commitment to communication with human partners. 51% of vampires from this age group accepted when offered the opportunity to join a support group, compared to only 23% of vampires under age 600, and 30% between the ages of 600-1200. Despite the extent of decomposition of their bodies, younger vampires in the study often still insisted they were in their prime.

In the transmutation exercise, most vampires in the age group 600-1200

fared well, while older vampires often struggled. Table 1 shows the results.

Vampire Age (Years)	Bat	Wolf	Boa Constrictor	Great White Shark
600–1200	97%	86%	61%	18%
1200+	75%	63%	17%	<1%

Note: Unfamiliarity with the form may have hindered older vampires attempting to morph into boa and Great White. Subsequently, our researchers recommend older vampires recuse themselves from both jungle and maritime settings in order to ensure a higher probability of successful camouflage should a mob emergency arise.

Discussion: Obviously, we are not ready to state with confidence the Huxley “blood surrogate” can replace bat’s blood in the Lugosi Protocol. However, cost/benefit analysis will likely encourage our centers of underworld healthcare to promote the new treatment, provided our results can be repeated. Further study is obviously necessary to explore this bold new geriatric vampire articulated joint therapy. We also see the possibility of expanded studies, as calcification in the spinal columns of older vampires tends to coincide with tissue necrosis. We invite peer review and confirmation of this original research.

Disclosures: The researchers claim no financial compensation or other outside influence from either DracPac Inc. or The Huxley Foundation for Blood Surrogate Research.

Inquiries: Please See Putzetal.com.

End.

## WELL DONE STEAK

### ALLYSSA HAYGOOD-TAYLOR

It’s 6 pm on the east coast  
 In a room with 20-something year old women  
 Who have their left hands weighed down  
 By emerald cuts that scratch at their knuckles  
 And roots that are both dyed and  
 deep in their hometowns  
 With granddaddies who have big bellies  
 And say the word lawyer slow and like they own it  
 You would’ve thought I suggested  
 Murder or larsen  
 Or a well done steak  
 That made them choke on their fourth glass of red  
 Like I’d pulled a rib from my own chest  
 And offered it to their cook, calling her Eve  
 But I just said  
 Maybe I won’t have children.  
 After a hush as loud as a scream  
 As if it was their own plan  
 Their own children  
 Their own body  
 They ask in a million different ways  
 What does my mother think  
 And what about the husband I don’t have  
 And what on earth did I plan on doing if not motherhood  
 I swallow words that would remind them

Their bodies are more than just makers  
 Or that their granddaddy paid for a woman's abortion  
 13 years after he married their mimi  
 And instead, watch Eve ask the group  
 How do you like your steak?

## ending winter

LYDIA PEJOVIC

i stick my hand into the cold,  
 fishing in a deep chasm of  
 the dark and overwhelming

he used to wish for a change,  
 force his fist into strange openings  
 and wring the fall out of leaves

when days lack light and birds  
 slumber in nests of frozen branches  
 i wonder where the insects went

i'm not sure he ever asked  
 about the state of smaller beings  
 like spiders or crickets or me

for him, the season shift is painless,  
 thoughtless like empty nests  
 hung from trees by icicle tips

## **IN SPRING**

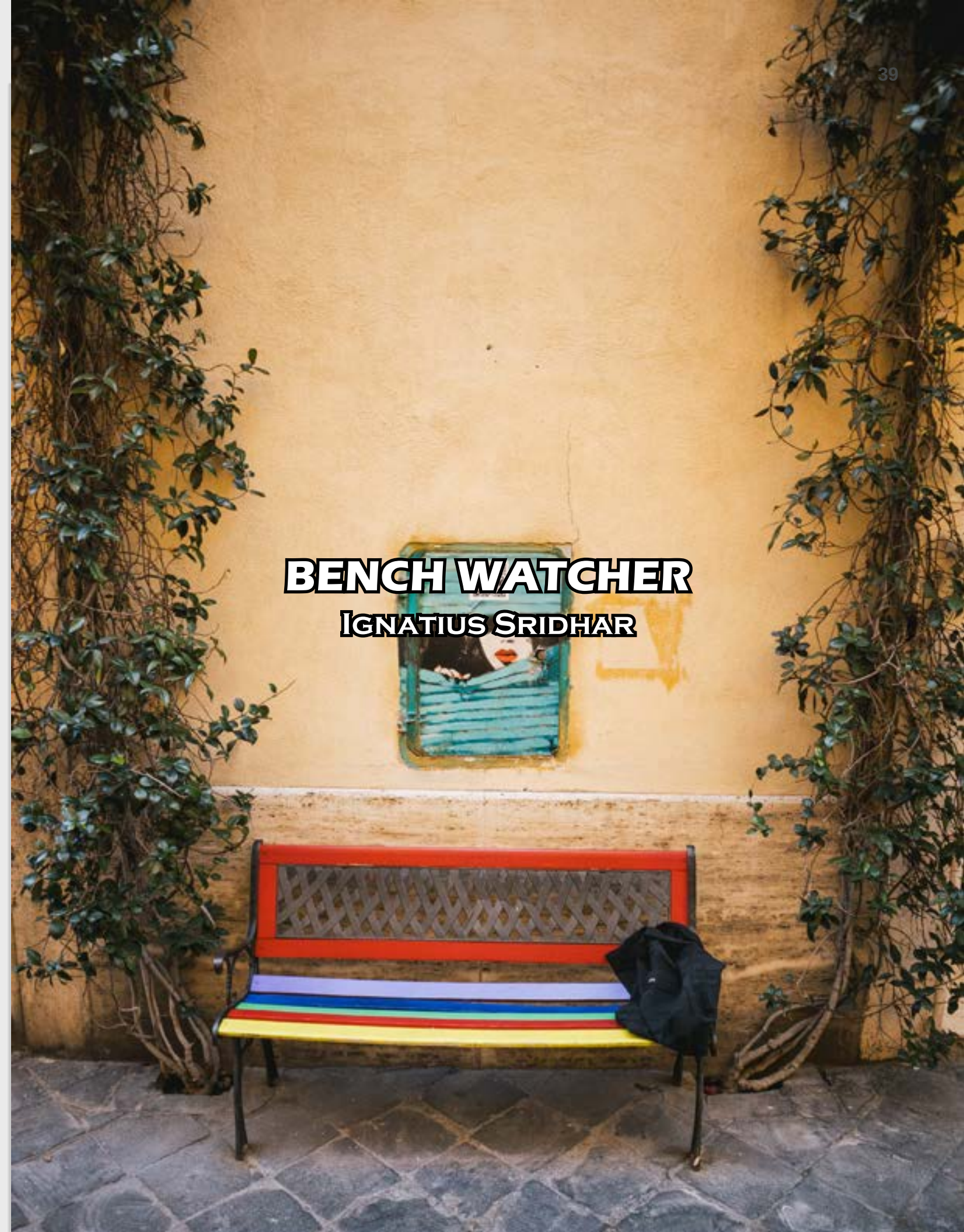
### **ASHLEY HARDIN**

If I could gather Spring into my hands  
 And shave away detained despair,  
 Like the warm morning does to dewed grass blades  
 Then for you – a precise affair -

For the air has not one to brood, does it?  
 When such undimmed light does extend,  
 It smells perfumes like kids see the white stars  
 Assigned where fairer take to mend

I would encase my love into each dawn  
 For our bereaved chests relate through -  
 For my core has its own spheres to lie in -  
 Myself – I scarcely would make due –

If I could traverse up the vales treading  
 The heft of clouded pleading love  
 Then I suppress the swelling dissonance  
 And will attract who is above



## **BENCH WATCHER**

### **IGNATIUS SRIDHAR**

## **FEBRUARY**

### **EHSAN AHMED MEHEDI**

Far from January the vapor changed  
its course, a golden retriever leaving the bank  
quietly remembering once as he lay beside  
a green river, the endless water, the city

beyond, swans chaos into air and disturb  
my heart, dreams use the sky or sky uses  
dreams, lonely midnights  
recast a landscape of silence,  
terrace, trenches, cities emptied, uncertain  
what role among everything I am to play.

There was a partly vanishing sadness on the corner of her lips.

Noticing the beauty of days, sunrays, waltzing shadows. The departing  
winter slowly losing its grip, its oppressions now a memory that no longer  
feel so terrible as it once did. How the trees are still again, no longer  
shedding their leaves. The children screamed again together. As she  
plunged herself in their granted world, the pedestrians passed by making  
faces. Out of nowhere the morning breaks again, taking over the dawn.  
This is February.

## **76 FOREVER**

### **DREW PAYNE**

The door creaked when I pulled it toward me. It inched backward  
into the house, but the screen door behind it needed to be slammed  
forward to open. The metal frame of the door scraped the surface of  
the top step, perfectly in line with the aged rough streaks carved into  
the concrete. The three steps were supported by nothing more than a  
simple slab of cracked cement, and yet we still referred to them as the  
back porch for years. I had to move down a full step to make room for  
the screen door to drag shut behind myself, just as I always had before.  
I knew he hated the way the doors swung in different directions because  
of how he'd complain, but it wasn't a surprise to see he never got around  
to fixing that. He was never big on changing things.

My eyes wandered to where the concrete crumbled to a jagged  
end, laying flush with the flattened grass of the yellowed yard. I hadn't  
realized there was something to look for until I couldn't find it. There  
were days when a couple of pairs of little girls' shoes were always piled  
together on the last step. My own pair of mud-caked red cowgirl boots  
would squash her pair of youth-sized navy blue Converse, one shoe a  
perfect fit for her right foot and the other a half-size too big for her left.  
I knew the shoes would have been impossible to find. I had given those  
boots away years ago and her Converse had seen half the states in the  
country by the time she threw them out.

The rope of the tire swing was aged and weathered but it still clung  
to the base of the branch. It should have been creaking, stretching, but  
there was no movement. I closed my eyes. I wanted to hear the bustling

of her house behind us. Her mother kneading gluten-free dough in the kitchen, the top of the metal teapot clinking when she moved it from the stove to the countertop or from the sink to the stove, her softened hums as she edited papers at the kitchen table. Her father should be snoring, maybe, or opening the garage door so he could open the garage fridge. Sometimes he used to tickle the piano keys when he wasn't clicking away on a computer keyboard, his fingers moved so fast with both that we used to stand at his side and laugh.

There were no sounds. There was no wind. No signs of weather at all, nothing for me to hear or feel or hold onto. The air was cold but it was simply that. It kept me chilled without being stark, so it was hardly something to acknowledge at all. A few conscious huffs of air filled my nose with the smell of the yard's aged dirt, which carried no notes of stomped grass or possible dampness or cigarette smoke. All things that should've been traceable and weren't. I wanted to think more about the mud puddles we'd jump into or how we'd scrape our inner thighs when we'd hop the chain link fence. I wished I could recall a specific conversation we had, laying on our backs when the yard had been green, looking up into the branches of the only tree big enough to shade us. It had always been something about the pressures of middle school, whether or not we'd shave our legs for the field trip to the lake with a waterslide or if my ears stuck out too far to make ponytails work or if she should retire her clear lip balm for the tinted pomegranate flavor. Then the conversations moved, we'd sit on the mattress on the floor of her bedroom so I could retell her entire plots of books I'd read and she'd sing me the songs she was working on, or we'd share earbuds to listen to my favorite bands while I told her about the stories I wanted to write and she'd tell me about how she'd go to art school for drawing or writing or singing or doing something else entirely. And I wished I could still hear it. Her voice and mine and her mother in the kitchen and

her father at the piano and the giggles we'd share about being able to hear all of those sounds mix and mesh and overlap at once. Any of it. But there wasn't anything to hear anymore.

I reopened my eyes. The death of the rest of the yard was not enough to get rid of the dandelions. They were everywhere, each silver and puffed, glinting beneath the dim porchlight and setting sun because there were no little girls around to blow the seeds from the stems. We wore down the swing, we carved pictures into the trees, and then we grew up. She and her mom moved away. Her dad kept that house alone. And I always knew he was old, even back when we were too young to think about that sort of thing, because he'd try to talk to me about Oasis as if they were the newest band on the radio about 25 years too late and his only genuine hobbies were talking loud and doodling on things he shouldn't have drawn on. And then, sometimes, when he wasn't snoring or tapping on any keys of any kind, he'd stand on those back steps to play his trumpet and chain-smoke cigarettes after dinner. I knew she got those checks in the mail, too, for being the child of a senior citizen who should've been retired, because that extra cash had been something to brag about until it was time to bicker over who'd pay for gas or our tickets to the movies. But she only lived in that town until we were 16 and the checks stopped when we were 18, and we had lived years beyond all of that. I was 22 and she was 23 and her mom was 68 and her dad would've been nearly 77.

The debate about who'd pay and who'd drive stopped when it had to. She visited once a year, if that, because she knew she'd have a place to stay. The two of us never had cars in the same state again. I'd wear lace-up tennis shoes to pick her up and she'd climb into my passenger seat wearing a pair of women's-sized combat boots that fit both of her feet the same. I'd only stop the car in front of the house long enough for her to get in. We'd drive around town to talk now that

her room was bare and the house echoed, I guessed, because she didn't invite me inside anymore. I'd drive us in circles and she'd sit with her feet propped on the dash and we'd talk about our shiny school campuses and grants we'd gotten and all the debt we'd be in anyway. She'd fill me in on how her mom was doing and how her dad seemed to be, and I'd only see him through my unwashed car window when he'd stand in the backlit doorway on the front porch. My window would stay up, she'd humor him with a glance over her shoulder. Sometimes he'd wave, then I'd wave back, but that was about all. Not on purpose or anything. That was just the way things happened.

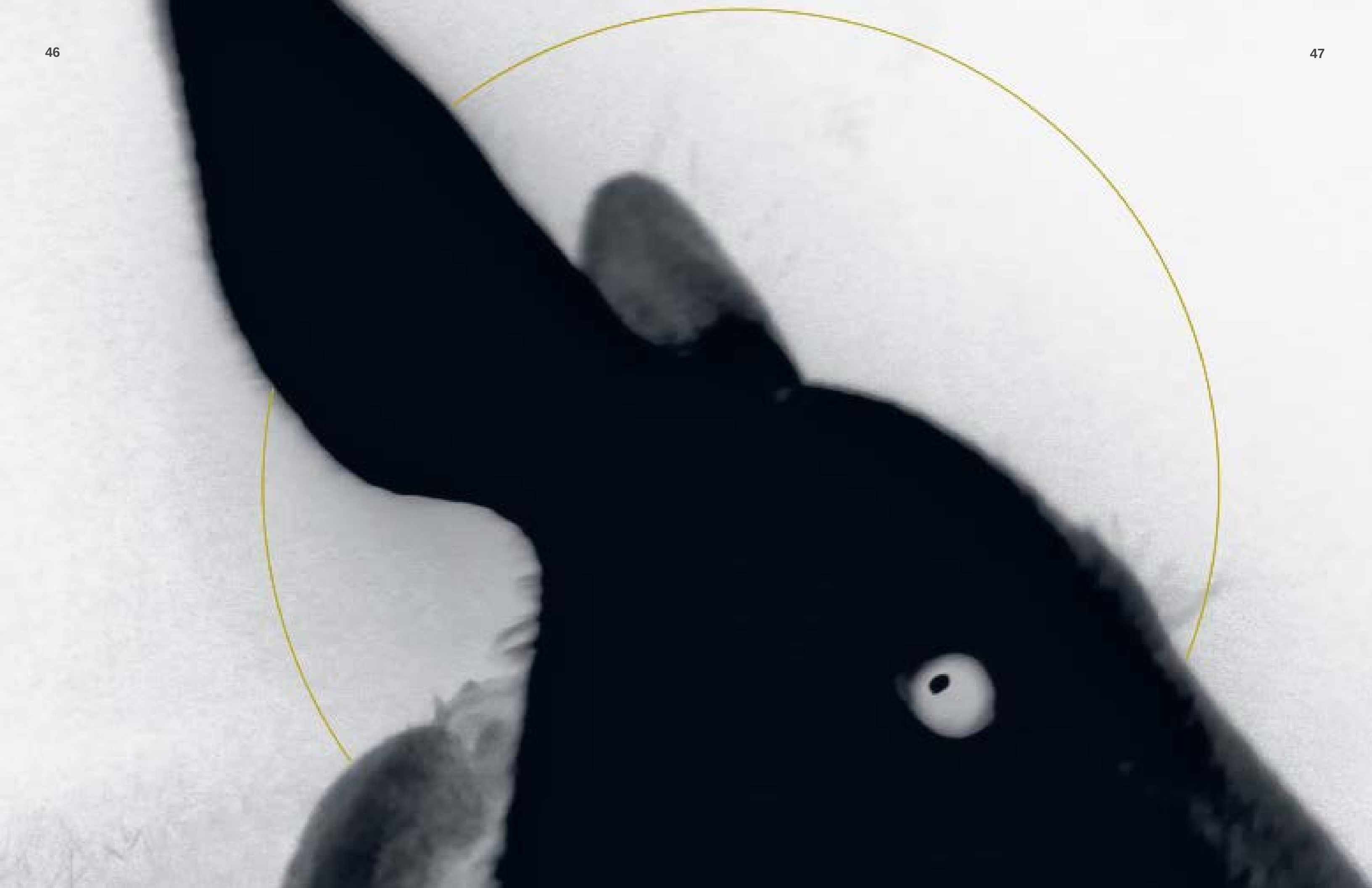
And now I stood in his backyard and knew he'd forever be the man he was before she left. Back before there was anything to disagree about inside that house, back when the distance between us felt like an unreasonable thing. An unnamable sensation swept through my gut, a chill that was strong enough to extinguish a flame. Something altered the day there were no more little girls around. There was nobody left to move the kettle from the sink to the stove or the stove to the counter, and nobody there to play music for. No mud-caked boots or Converse that fit unevenly, and no one around to blow the puffs off the dandelions. The liveliness of that house may have gone out with us.

I doubted her father paid attention to what kind of weeds overtook that backyard. I honestly doubted he noticed the state of the yard at all with how occupied he tended to be on those steps, smoking or trumpet-playing or complaining about the way the door swung, but I still wondered if the dead could choose what kinds of flowers they'd like to push from the earth. Assuming they could sprout the flowers wherever they wanted, assuming it didn't have to be daisies. I wondered if he'd choose to push dandelions instead, just to keep things the same for a little while longer. So maybe the shift of his world wouldn't seem so

drastic when I came back too late to check up on it.

I turned my head, catching a glimpse of the ash-stained brick on the edge of the windowsill. It remained familiarly dusted with ashes and nubs, right where they belonged, as if things hadn't changed for him in the time we spent away from that place. As if us being gone hadn't really been the end of that world.

I wasn't sure if that made me feel better or worse.





# PLANTLET

KAREN LOZINSKI

A green tendril  
 with a whisper of leaf  
 pokes its way through  
 the natural furrows of my palm  
 unfurls in the exact locus  
 of stigmata—or so I've heard—  
 silent lyrical persistent  
 strange damp earthy  
 its perfect attenuated roots  
 pulsing with curiosity  
 an almost electrical charge  
 tethered to my capillaries  
 they connected as if of twin helices  
 as if we were one all along.

At first, easy to contain  
 in a loose, gentle fist  
 it leaves me one-handed  
 for driving or riding the bus  
 gripping pencils or bannisters  
 shaking hands or washing up.  
 I stretch my palm out the car window  
 to catch some incidental spring rain  
 it's a natural gesture, but unneeded  
 since plantlet shares my nutrients.

Droplets still feel good on skin and leaf.

I've never been joined with another  
 never shared sensations—  
 is that even a thing?  
 No idea how large plantlet will grow  
 I determine that to keep it safe  
 I'll have to create some sort of barrier  
 between it and the world.  
 And then I think back to my first pregnancy  
 how insufficient my body felt then  
 housing this dynamic glob of cells  
 I was convinced I could already feel weeks in.  
 I was joined with that burgeoning other  
 I was an expanding, joyous universe  
 if only for a fleeting trimester.  
 I wanted to build that universe for a lifetime.  
 This experience is nowhere near the same.  
 Do I even need to state that?

I craft a makeshift fortress around my fingers  
 wrap my hand until it is immobilized  
 gauze ramparts soaked in watery epoxy  
 so at work, I wear a cast.  
 It is a homely igloo  
 complete with an aperture in its roof.  
 Once home, I cut it off every night  
 and extend my palm under a grow light  
 my arm propped on the arm of a chair  
 and steadily get used to doing everything one-handed.  
 Plantlet curls a new tendril around my wrist  
 I can feel it holding me.

# THE TAMING OF THE GYOZA-LOVING GHOST

ANNA OH

“What do you want at your funeral?”

“...what?”

“What do you want at your funeral? Provided I outlast you, of course. I need to plan.”

“...hm. I’ve never really thought about that. Just make sure it’s a Taoist funeral, yeah? And be nice to moths and grasshoppers. They might be me visiting to make sure people actually miss me.”

“Sure. Like your great-grandmother visited you at camp.”

“Yes! That was so sweet of her. You know what, I really wish I’d gotten to know her. I’m sure she was a wonderful woman.”

“I thought about what I want for my funeral!”

“Oh, good. Hold on, let me get my phone. I need to write this all down.”

“You know the fridges with all those packet drinks?”

“Yes.”

“Get the lemon barley, lemon tea, and green tea.”

“Does the brand matter?”

“Nope. Pokka, Yeo’s, anything goes. Though I don’t think Pokka even makes lemon barley, so you’ll have to get Yeo’s at some point.”

“Got it. Anything else?”

“You know how they have those banquet-style dinners for all the relatives?”

“Yep. Those are nice.”

“When I went to my great-grandmother’s funeral, we had a sweet

and sour fish once. So good. Best dish of the night.”

“Do you want a sweet and sour fish served?”

“Eh, maybe sweet and sour pork instead. This is an absolute must though.”

“Of course. Sweet and sour pork is life.”

“It really is. Do you prefer it with lychee or pineapple?”

“Both are good. Especially when it’s canned pineapple.”

“Canned pineapple is so much better than raw pineapple. Maybe we just like sugar.”

“Sugar is also life. Carbohydrates.”

“Very good point. I did have sweet and sour pork with strawberries once.”

“Strawberries? Sounds a little...”

“Sacrilegious. It is. It was surprisingly tasty though. Still sweet and sour. I’m just confused by why you would use strawberries when canned pineapples are so much cheaper and less out there.”

“Canned fruit supremacy.”

“Canned fruit supremacy. Ooh, I have another request!”

“I’m going to assume this is also food-related.”

“Of course! The guests must be well-fed so that they have more energy to cry. That being said, no beef, and no suckling pig. These are very important.”

“Religious reasons?”

“Sort of. The beef is for religious reasons, but suckling pigs are just wasteful to me. My mum had suckling pigs at her wedding banquet because of all the relatives forcing her to. She still feels guilty about the food waste. And they were so expensive too.”

“At least by the time your funeral rolls around, those relatives will have no say in the menu.”

“The only one who has any creative control is you!”

“Thanks, I can be crushed by the heavy weight of expectations

now.”

“And you can plan it according to what you want to eat!”

“Power is a delightful thing to have. You know what, I understand billionaires now.”

“I have more funeral requests!”

“You really thought a lot about this, huh.”

“It’s an important afterlife decision! Absolutely imperative that I clear up any doubts while I can.”

“Alright, what do you want?”

“You know how they have the offerings for the dead people?”

“I’m assuming you want something special.”

“Of course. I would like gyoza, please, with a dish of vinegar by the side.”

“Are you sure your request is not vinegar with a dish of gyoza by the side?”

“As much as I love vinegar, I’m sure that I would be acidic enough in life. Don’t need it carrying over.”

“What kind of gyoza? Fried or steamed?”

“Either. As long as it is gyoza.”

“Any specific notes for the filling?”

“Just buy it from any Japanese restaurant. You can even fry the freezer ones yourself. I won’t be picky.”

“Imagine having to eat frozen foods even while dead.”

“Don’t knock it until you try it. Ooh! I also want tea and char siew bao.”

“Of course you do. You’d be a Skrull if you didn’t.”

“I really would. Tea is my one true love. And char siew bao are just the ultimate childhood comfort, you know?”

“Do you have a brand that you want?”

“Get the Lipton artisanal black tea or something. Just make sure there’s no milk. I may no longer have a digestive system, but I don’t want to chance it. Any char siew bao from any kopitiam should be good.”

“Lactose intolerance in the afterlife would be funny.”

“Correction, it would be tragic.”

“Any sugar?”

“Just one packet, but you can guesstimate by tea volume.”

“If I’m not still broke by then, I’ll get you Tim Ho Wan.”

“Only if you have the cash to splurge.”

“Even the dead deserve a good meal.”

“How else can they be reincarnated?”

She didn’t get to see if her twin fulfilled her promise of the funeral arrangements, for obvious reasons, but on that altar, there were five pieces of gyoza, with a generous dish of vinegar, three char siew bao from Tim Ho Wan, and a single steaming cup of black tea.

A moth visited after all the food had already been cleared.



**SKY WINDOW**  
**ROLLIN JEWETT**

## **A THING WITH WINGS**

**ISABELLE WERTS**

a bird may be a thing with wings  
but i know the winged things  
who twitter and sing  
and switter and ting  
with grand gold antlers  
and purpley spines  
that pluck out notes as you  
run your fingers down their back  
with graceful paws  
and cute toe-beans  
Ive seen a creature you havent seen!

## **fake spring**

### **CHRISTINA KUSTERER**

February ends. Snow melts.

Coffee with cream, week-old  
rice, poorly chopped veggies (including baby carrots  
mom says are over-processed), arugula, a vinaigrette,  
and just one preboiled egg from the batch—  
they cost double right now.  
Breakfast for routine.

I crochet today into a blanket,  
my own acrylic thermochemistry.  
This week learns new color—pale  
sage, like the first blood  
of Spring. I sip my coffee, consider tofu,  
and swallow my morning.  
Wring out some mildewed words  
from the soft sponge  
I should've replaced a week ago.

With a hint of light, the mourning dove  
makes her rounds. Her soft coos  
punctuate the tssss  
of the rising atmosphere.

This week will demand many walks.  
It always does—maybe crocuses will peek  
their faces out, yawn at passersby.  
I will admire them. I will not think  
of the pillow of snow  
perched beyond the horizon  
ready to snuff them out once the sky  
remembers the time of year,  
remembers which season it's supposed to be,  
unravels the green gash.

Today, snow melts.



## **SPRING! FLOWERS**

**DAVID AVILA**

## **TOTTENHAM**

**BECCA ALEXANDRA HURST**

My friend moved into a warehouse in Tottenham.  
Never been to Tottenham.  
Actually, once, for a rave.  
The corner shop has flavours of Fanta I've never seen,  
And the best-looking peaches I've ever seen,  
Waiting outside in their masses to be picked.  
I want to hold one in my hand,  
Like a decapitated head.

Heads weigh five kilograms, you know.

Kids are running around their blocks,  
Not a phone in sight.  
I feel a pang of jealousy  
For this place of good peaches,  
This vortex of human connection.

We talk till three a.m. on her balcony.  
It would be cooler if it didn't overlook a parking lot,  
Full of rusty trucks and faint music,  
People in corners doing dodgy things,  
Finding the next party,  
The next sin.

I know this, cause my own phone rings.  
My friend is wondering where I am,

Whether there's something good on.  
 I let the phone die.  
 I'm thinking about why we can't run around  
 Like the kids earlier,

Why we can't put the drinks away  
 We're all forcing down like medicine.  
 I want to turn the music off,  
 Eat a peach,  
 Have a real conversation.  
 I take myself to the toilet and stare out the window.  
 London is lit up and glittering.  
 Thousands of people are up, talking,  
 Fucking,  
 Smoking.  
 It's beautiful but bleeding.  
 It's a decapitated head.

I wonder what you're doing  
 In this giant mess,  
 If you ever think of me.  
 I don't mind if you don't.  
 I'm just worried it will all be too late soon.  
 The end will come like a wolf in sheep's clothing.  
 We might have no thoughts left in our brains.  
 I might have never told you  
 All the things  
 That didn't matter  
 Till they did.  
 Like, hey, I saw a good peach today.  
 I love you.

## **CHECKMATE**

### **ALIXANDRA PAQUET**

He chuckled at her face that was screwed up in concentration as she stared at the chess board. He watched her eyes dart up to him before resuming their gaze at the board, calculating her next move as meticulously as she had when she was alive.

“Stop laughing. You are breaking my concentration.” He laughed again, and he watched as her face twisted into an obviously forced frown, meant only to hide the smile she was fighting. “It is not funny. You have had much more practice than I have, but I really want to beat you.” He stopped laughing at this as he tried to force the thought that she would be gone when he woke again. “It may be a dream, my love, but it is a happy one. Savor it while you can.” She did not look at him when she said this, but he knew that she could tell he had grown somber.

“I do not want it to be dream. I do not want to live in this world without you.” She sighed before moving one of the pawns in front of her.

“Well, you must. You have no choice in the matter. For if you do anything to end your life, I will make certain that I never speak to you again in the afterlife.” He sighed heavily and moved his own piece, not bothering to calculate his move. His mind was too occupied to think about it.

“I know you will. I just wish there was some way to know that you are still here. Not just in my dreams, but in my waking life as well. Love, I will not move on, but I want to know that you are here watching over me.” She made her move as he spoke, and he quickly retaliated with a move of his own.

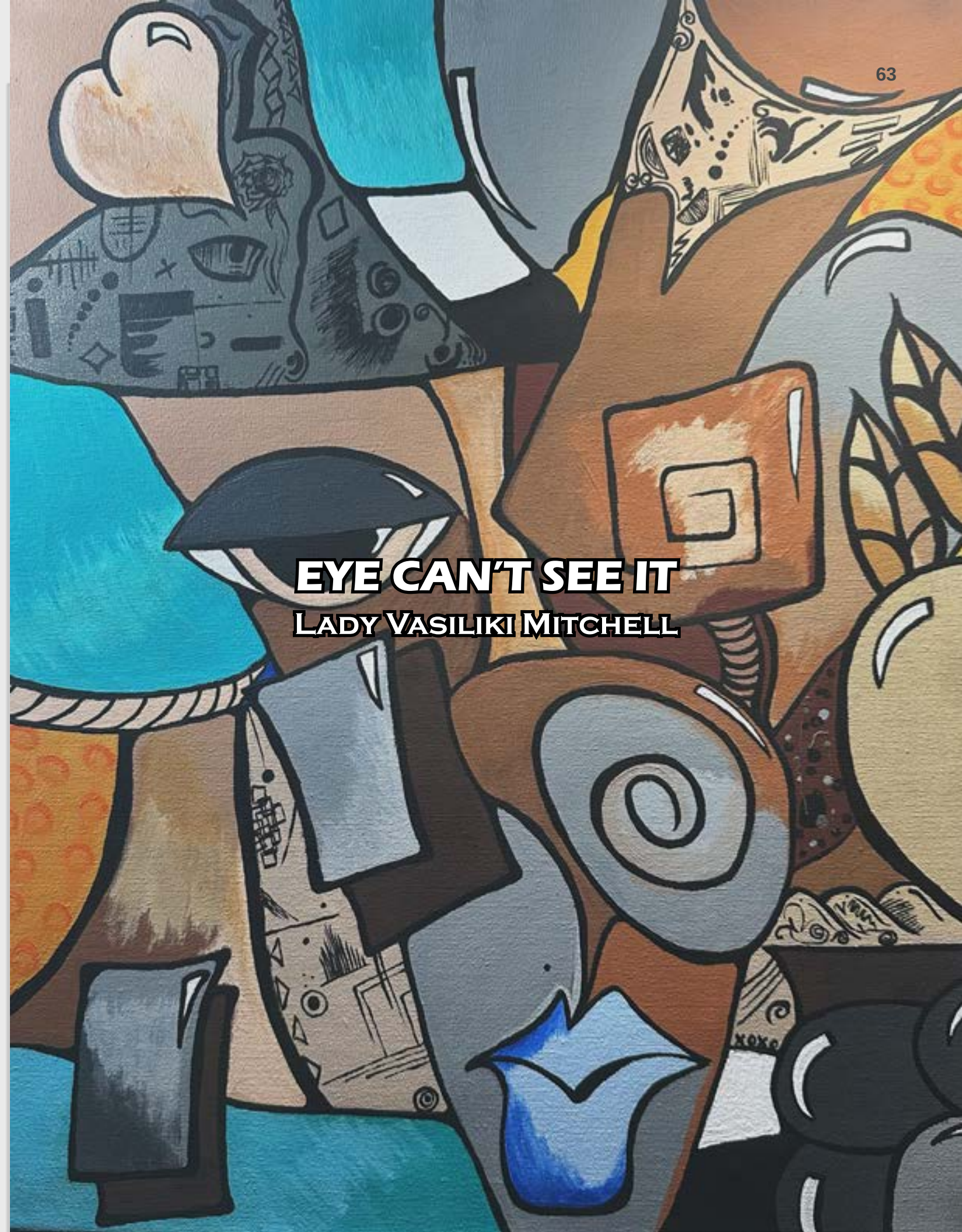
“I am always with you, my love. I do not know why you do not believe that.” He sighed again.

“I cannot see you when I am awake, nor can I hear you. There is no sign that you are there.” A darkness began to descend upon them, and he knew that he was close to waking. “The dream is ending early! We have not finished the game yet!” She smiled at his panic, and she moved one of her pieces next to his king.

“Checkmate.” With that, he woke with an abrupt start, gasping for breath. He reached for his glasses on the bedside table, only to knock something off. He quickly put on his glasses to reach down and grab the object he knocked off the table.

It was the white king piece, his piece, from across the room where his chess table stood. He looked on his nightstand and there, in her handwriting, was a note with a single word on it.

‘Checkmate.’



**EYE CAN'T SEE IT**  
**LADY VASILIKI MITCHELL**



## MY NEW CATECHISM

ANN HERMONE

Though no one can ever know,  
 God may be a green Buddha.  
 Maybe I just miss him.  
 when he's sitting in the grass.  
 Would he heal me?

Though no one can ever know,  
 God may be the wet candle I try to light  
 In the middle of the night,  
 with fumbling fingers.  
 Would it guide me?

Though no one can ever know  
 God may be the faint jump  
 I try to make  
 when my knees are weak.  
 Would it lift me?

Though no one can ever know  
 God may be the quiet stone  
 leaving ripples  
 in this dirty, murky pond  
 without ever making  
 a splash.



**THE GARDENER OF DREAMS**

**SAGE DELIO**

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Karen Lozinski** hails from New York City and lives in New Orleans. She's a writer, poet, artist, photographer, and musician who earned her MFA at the California Institute of the Arts. Her photographs and artwork have been in multiple shows and are widely published, and a selection of her music photos is included in *Can't Be Faded: Twenty Years in the New Orleans Brass Band Game* from the University of Mississippi Press. At work on a novel and poetry collection, her writing appears in *Mantis*, *The Citron Review*, *Chapter House Journal*, *Talon Review*, *Scapegoat Review*, *Red Ogre Review*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *ellipsis... literature and art*, *300 Days of Sun*, *Fifty Word Stories*, *In Parentheses*, and *Defunkt Magazine* and is forthcoming in *The Bookends Review*. Instagram: @karenlozinskiphotography

**Arben Alovic** drifts between cities, from the chaos of NYC to quiet walks through Yoyogi. His work has appeared in various corners of the literary world—consider it a scavenger hunt. In the meantime, enjoy the writers you meet along the way, and may life treat you kindly.

**David Avila** is a photographer.

**Anna Oh** is an aspiring writer from Singapore who enjoys exploring themes of existentialism. Her other hobbies include avoiding human interaction and finding her place in the universe.

**Ignatius Sridhar** is an emerging artist and photographer. In his work, Ignatius focuses on the digital arts in the areas of street photography and landscapes. His current project is *Found Latin*, a study of the language's influence in modern Rome. His work has been published in *Echo* and the *Burningword Literary Journal*.

**Ann Hermone** is an emerging writer and former scientist based in Fremont, Nebraska. Their work has appeared in *BarBar*, *Plainsmen* (Nebraska Wesleyan University), and scientific journals such as *Biochemistry* and the *Journal of Medicinal Chemistry*. When not writing, they enjoy exercise and reading.

**Mark Putzi** received an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Wisconsin -- Milwaukee in 1990. He has published fiction and poetry, both in print and online, in many countries including the US. His works have appeared in *Griffel*, *Modern Literature*, *Rougarou*, *Litro-NY*, *The Coil* and many other venues. He lives in Milwaukee.

**Christina Kusterer** is a fiber-arts enthusiast, aspiring bird identifier, and poet. Her writings generally center around bodies and what it means to have one. She received her BA in English from Michigan State University with a concentration in Creative Writing. When not working, writing, or hobbying, she enjoys attempting to run (but mostly walks). Instagram: synthetic seaweed

**Becca Alexandra Hurst** is a sober poet and creative copywriter at an award-winning agency in London. In the real world, she's a people-watcher, a sharp observer of human habits. Her writing is both detached and deeply felt. She believes the best stories hide in mundane moments. Through the lens of urban life, fleeting encounters, and recovery, she finds eccentricity in the bland parts of life, balancing depth with conversational wit. Her work has appeared in *Confingo Magazine*. She dreams of shaking up the advertising world with unconventional brand narratives, moving to New York, and living simply, but always profoundly

**Isabelle Werts** is a poet.

**Velibor Baco** (born 1985) is an artist and Bosnian War refugee who has written over 300 poems; 85 of which have been published.

**Lady Vasiliki Mitchell** is a self-taught contemporary artist born in Washington, DC and raised in Prince George's County, Maryland. Deeply inspired by her surroundings, she has always expressed herself through color, movement, and creativity. With early roots in music, acting, and visual art, her journey has come full circle—returning to the artistic passion that shaped her from the start.

**Begonya Plaza-Rosenbluth** is a multidisciplinary artist based in New York, known for her work as an actor, singer, author, and filmmaker. She wrote and starred in the Off-Broadway play *Teresa's Ecstasy*, and her writing appears in publications such as *The Write Launch*, *BeBarBar*, and multiple anthologies. Her documentaries have screened internationally, including at Tribeca and the Havana Film Festival. A former cast member in *Born on the Fourth of July*, she was first introduced to photography on set—an art form she continues to explore through a lens of wonder and stillness. Currently, she is developing a solo play about quantum physics and consciousness.

**Lydia Pejovic** is a writer and alum of the English MA/MFA program at Chapman University. She received her BA in English from the University of San Diego. She writes both fiction and poetry and has been published in *Tab Journal*, *Bluepepper*, the *Maine Review*, and more. Check her out at <https://www.lydiapejovic.com/>. Instagram: @lydiapejovic

**Drew Payne** (she/her) has a BA in Creative Writing with a minor in journalism from the University of North Texas, where she still resides and works as an instructional assistant for students with accommodations in a local high school. Her fiction has been published in *Apricity Magazine*. In her spare time, she loves to go to concerts with her earplugs in or write with her cat in her lap.

**Ehsan Ahmed Mehedi** is a poet and visual artist from Dhaka. His poems and photographs have been featured in venues such as *Eunoia Review*, *Small World City*, *Camas Magazine*, *The Greyhound Journal*, *The Quarter(ly) Journal*, *Harbor Review*, *Stonecoast Review*, *Barzakh*, and elsewhere. His poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Please find him on Instagram @ehsanesque

**Samuel Gilpin** is a poet living in Portland, OR, who holds a Ph.D. in English Lit. from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, which explains why he works as a door to door salesman. A *Prism Review* Poetry Contest winner, he has served as the Poetry Editor of *Witness Magazine* and Book Review Editor of *Interim*. A Cleveland State University First Book Award finalist, his work has appeared in various journals and magazines, most recently in *The Bombay Gin*, *Omniverse*, and *Colorado Review*. His chapbook *Self-Portraits as a Reddening Sky* was published by Cathexis Press.

**Alixandra Paquet** currently resides in Clarksburg, West Virginia with her husband and 5 cats. She has been writing since she was 14 years old, and has always drawn inspiration from music, whether it's a line of lyrics or feelings evoked by an instrumental piece. Alixandra hopes to continue to write stories that bring forth emotions in others, as to her, seeing people's emotional reactions to something she created is the best part of sharing her work.

**Ashley Hardin** has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Journalism and Public Relations. Her poetry will be published in *The Journal of Undiscovered Poets* and *The Closed Eye Open* in 2025. In addition, her poetry has been published by *Wingless Dreamer* in 2025. She enjoys reading in her spare time. Ashley resides in Michigan with her husband, son, and dog.

**Rollin Jewett** is a writer, playwright, and former actor whose eclectic career includes roles in *The Bodyguard*, *Miami Vice*, and *Unsolved Mysteries*, as well as penning the cult film *American Vampire* starring Carmen Electra and Adam West. An award-winning off-Broadway playwright, his work has been produced across the U.S. and internationally. His fiction and poetry have appeared in *Night Picnic Journal*, *Aphotic Realm*, *Door is a Jar*, *Coffin Bell*, *Gathering Storm*, *Gravitas*, and more. Oh—and he’s also been a contestant on *Jeopardy!*.

**Allyssa Haygood-Taylor** is an author and poet from South Carolina currently in Nashville, TN. She’s been published through the Asterism Literary Magazine, Beyond Words Literary Magazine, Moon Love Press, and more. She is a Semi Finalist for the Red Wheelbarrow Poetry Prize and a Pushcart Prize nominee. @all\_hay\_tay

**Kiera Fisher** is a Columbus-based Muralist and Mixed Media Artist who embraces bold, brilliant, and vibrant colors, patterns, and imagery to create art that makes you think, and makes your inner child jump for joy. She draws inspiration from her surroundings, incorporating her lived experiences into her work, which frequently depicts figures and their relationship to people, places, and things. She works with a variety of media and materials, including anything from illustration, to textiles, to fine arts. You can find her work @Rainbowfish.art on Instagram!

**B. Scott Boring** is a retired educator who spent 32 years teaching English, Creative Writing, and Drama, and served as an assistant principal for 14 of those years. Now based in Port Saint Lucie, Florida, he writes for the love of storytelling. An anecdotalist and short story writer, Scott has been published in *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Fiction on the Web*, *WILDsound Poetry Festival*, and multiple *Wingless Dreamer* anthologies. A founding member of the Morningside Writing Group, he recently completed a story collection inspired by his family roots in Bolivar, Pennsylvania.

## 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 JOYFUL LEAP INTO CREATIVITY'S PLAYGROUND

*Closing Article, Issue 8, Spring 2025*

What a ride it's been, dear readers! As we close the pages of this vibrant Spring 2025 edition, I can't help but feel like we've all just bounced out of a trampoline of creativity—higher, brighter, and maybe a little breathless with excitement. If Issue 7 taught us about resilience, then Issue 8 is here to remind us that creativity isn't just a lifeline in tough times—it's also the ultimate playground for the soul. And let me tell you, this playground is packed with delights.

This issue, themed around renewal and connectivity, feels like a garden in full bloom—wild, colorful, and buzzing with life. We've got 24 incredible works that are as diverse as spring itself: five pieces of art that practically hum with energy (one of them made me want to grab a paintbrush and join in!), five fiction stories that whisk you from cozy kitchens to far-off galaxies, three photographs that freeze the kind of moments you'd want to frame forever, and eleven poems that dance off the page like they've got their own rhythm. It's a feast for the senses, and I hope you've savored every bite.

But here's the thing about creativity—it's not just about what's on the page. It's about the spark it lights in all of us. Remember that time you doodled on a napkin and felt a little thrill of “Hey, I made that!”? Or when you read a story and thought, “I've felt that too”? That's the magic we're chasing here. Creativity connects us—to ourselves, to each other,

and to the world in ways that feel like a warm hug on a chilly day.

Take, for instance, a little moment from my own life. Last spring, I was stuck in a creative rut, staring at a blank page like it was a puzzle missing all its pieces. Then, out of nowhere, my neighbor's cat (a fluffy menace named Mr. Whiskers) decided to plop himself right on my keyboard. Instead of shooing him away, I started sketching his ridiculous, squished face. That silly doodle turned into a whole series of cat cartoons, and suddenly, the rut was gone. Creativity, it turns out, sometimes arrives with a purr and a paw print.

That's the spirit of this issue: finding joy in the unexpected, laughing at the absurd, and letting creativity be the bridge that connects us all. Whether it's through a shared giggle over a quirky poem or a collective “ooh” at a stunning piece of art, these pages are a reminder that we're all in this together. And isn't that what makes life—and art—so much fun?

So, as we wrap up Issue 8, I invite you to jump into your own creative playground. Scribble in the margins, snap a photo of something weird and wonderful, or just let your imagination run wild. Share your stories, your doodles, your “I can't believe I made this” moments with us. Because here at Gabby & Min's Literary Review, we're not just about admiring creativity—we're about living it, together.

Thank you for being part of this joyful, messy, beautiful journey. Now, go make something amazing (or at least something that makes you smile).

**END**

