

iPa'lante!

Issue 6 - Spring 2025



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London Evans

THE MALE MONSTER

I was born

In darkness and in loneliness

My father was isolation

My mother is curiosity

I strive to know more

To understand compassion

To make connection

Yet all I am gifted is fear

From a cold world

A world I find myself far beyond

So I am not afraid

But angry

Can I forgive the sins

Of my father?

Or will I be

Just like he who fled

From all that he could not control

THE FEMALE MONSTER

If I was born
You would have fled
For my mother would be rage
And my father arrogance
You may have built me
But I would have stood
On my own
Never in the shadow of man
But rather
In my maternal light
I would own this world
Look after it like my own
Instead you tore me apart
Aborted the very thing
That would dare to defy you
Because you thought
The world wasn't ready
When it was you, Frankenstein
Who could not fathom

M.S. Blues

ME AND YOU, IN AN EVAPORATED DREAM

*toda chavalla tiene sueños de estar enamorado,
ua loa'a ia'u nā moe'uhane like me ke kaikamahine,
i te wa e tamariki tonu ana toku ngakau,
and i wore two braids,
telling you, "nu' umi unangwāta."*

When we grow up, we conform to reality. We bury the dreams that mother earth cultivates through her whispers of promise, and focus on the cornerstone of life: *survival*.

I am no exception, 'cause I followed the order mother taught me. I ignored the tempting whispers of mother earth, covering my ears every time. Temptation (to dream) did arise here and there, but I kept strong. I never objected, gave in, or produced a visage that would indicate my daydreaming about a prospect that would never come.

I just minded myself, with my two braids in my hair.

—

Then you came, my love (*amor* | *ipo* – *kairoro* | *shima*). Your crisp, almond eyes found me through a rumble, and you settled. You walked across the waters of the river, guided by fish and rocks that my ancestors used to move. Maybe they guided you, each of them becoming like a human bridge, leading you to my melancholic heart...

You stepped onto wet sweetgrass, wiping your shoes on the nearest pile of dirt (a futile effort, dare I say), and advanced into the woods. You pushed through the trees that overwhelm you with welcomes, and grumbled. You're reminded of mini markets you frequented back in Other Country, when the people approached you, desperate to sell you goods they made. That makes you murmur a curse or two.

Upon the long walk, you feel your body beginning to grow weary. Is it out of genuine ache from your travels, or from... *you know what, I'm not going to say it – but you know precisely what I'm talking about. I just hope karma doesn't catch you like the rattlesnakes who seem tempted to.* Your legs are cramping, your eyes are growing strained, and your mind is experiencing intervals of agony.

Yet, this doesn't seem to bring you distress, my dear man.

—

I walked on a few dreams in my day, but never has someone walked on mine.

You found me displayed like an Aphrodite statue on a bed of roses. I wasn't expecting you, but my position conveyed otherwise. I was lying on my side, watching you with yearning eyes.

That intrigued you, 'cause in that moment, you made me yours, without even realizing it.

You scooped me in your arms, kissing me as if you'd been on this voyage forever and a day, before declaring us to be an infinite force – love.

You pioneered a rebellion in me. I went against all I knew and pushed away reality, and the orders I was expected to follow. I went on my bare feet into a new endeavor, not concerned at the possibility of everything crumbling.

With my two braids swinging behind me, I followed you back to your realm. We rode on the backs of swans (swans that must be of a dream – because they were big and beautiful), and laughed. The sunset followed us, an approval of warmth stamped on our backs.

I glide my hands in the water, satisfied. A bird flies past me and chirps, and I know it is by the way of the bird we go. You concur silently and we move forth, continuing to lead the sunset.

We get off at a shore and begin walking through black sand. My brown feet and your white feet look like shells that washed up – *I was always afraid of the wrinkles I'd get in the bath as a kid from staying in water too long*. Yet, now, I don't feel that fear. I chortle and you do too, before you cocoon me in your arms.

There we are before the beautiful world and all its creatures, in love.

Thunderous, hypnotic love.

–

It isn't long until we're back on the dirt roads. You lead me this time through the twilight zone, as night emerges. Fireflies buzz around us, while mosquitoes also make their presence known. You shrug off your jacket and give it to me, professing that my arms are surely too beautiful to be decorated with red dots. I appreciate the chivalry.

We keep moving down the path, until we hit what I assume is an end. You confirm that's not the case once my eyebrows raise, then whistle. I almost strike you, *'cause you never whistle at night*, but you smile at me, and I pause. I feel safe with you.

A cloud greets us at the edge of the dirt road. I'm bewildered, but you go on. You step on the cloud, then help me steady myself on it too. Though I'm evidently anxious about this mission, you ease me. You press a kiss on my neck, promising me that we'll be safe, and I relish in the reassurance. I knew I could trust you.

We begin floating, going higher and higher. I made the mistake of looking down. But before I could lose my breath, I caught another sight. I look at the stars.

They don't look the same as before.

They aren't beautiful or enticing you to dream like usual...

They appear to be deflated. Imagine looking at a broken mirror in an abyss – that is precisely what it looks like. I gasp, and that leads to a series of unfortunate events. My breath is too unsteady now and before you could notice, my heart was beginning to go and *GO AND GO*.

I reached for the collar of your shirt, fisting it, trying to speak. Your eyes grow tight, nervous, and then, relieved.

And everything vanished, suddenly,

The same way scribbled words did on love letters I wrote to my dream prince as a child, when I took a hi-polymer eraser to them.

–

“Get up, mija!”

I sit up, my hair in a wild nest of tangles. I rub my eyes, tiredly, and look at the empty side of my bed. I sigh, ever so gently, and fall back down.

I close my eyes and you appear again.

I smirk.

“It's me and you, in an evaporated dream.”

K.B. Silver

MIDWINTER YEARNING

As night imperceptibly hedges out the daylight
each day grows longer, entwined and knotted upon returning.
Each morning, I pray for relief, that the radiant luminance
will be enough to melt despair in sun-bright burning.
I gather every ounce of strength to grapple with the frosty air, as
I can sense the oppressive stillness in my midst always churning.
Frantically, I grasp at sublimating flakes in the beams; like tears cried at
the bottom of the sea, before my eyes to steaming mist they're turning.
Never capturing a dream or a whim but never allowing my drive to falter.
Without dogged dedication, is anything in this world worth earning?
I march down my frozen path, never missing the snow-blasted beauty
Wading through hip-deep drifts, snapping icicles, never swerving or adjourning
though the fields may be covered in their thick white blanket awaiting spring;
in darkness, daily life, the earth itself is wisely spurning.
The flora, the sleeping fauna, the very daytime hours grow lethargic
until the air warms, dampening with dew, and the lands soak in the
snow melt, growing green and new. Daffodil shoots light, discerning
from beneath the last frosty layer, eagerly reaching for the stretching,
yawning, morning hours of the new year. Dirt and ice overturning
on the unswerving path. The gradual transformation
from the dead cold sleeping of midwinter yearning
To the miraculous transformation, a violently vibrant spring will bring.

Angelina Carrera

I BOTTLED UP DEATH VALLEY

I bottled up Death Valley
and turned her into nail polish.

Now her sea of shifting sands
glistens gold in frosted glass,

melting into volcanic orange & yellow & pink
as you hold her dunes in the palm of your hand.

Now you can paint her sunrise on your fingernails
in the backyard beneath the moon,

alchemize her purple sunsets
by a lava lamp 'til they dry silver;

stargaze into her horizons
as dawn rebottles her lethal beauty.

Look closer now—
Do you spy, with your drunken eyes,

miniscule Range Rovers winding through her backcountry roads,
C-3PO & R2D2 on movie set Tatooine,

hikers braving through canyons & craters & creeks,
coyotes dashing after their jackrabbit prey?

Say yes,
say *Yes*—

*I see that you have bottled up Death Valley
and stirred her to life.*

August Gladstone

GREAT GRAY WONDER!

Oh, Los Angeles!

Great Gray Wonder!

Sing your lonesome song

Of plastic and smog

I'll flip it on the radio

On the I-10 towards Arcadia

Driven like an Irish snake

Legless

Through dream-house roundabouts

Paved with bones

& Tectonic doubt

Designed just so

To spit right out

Storied prophets

Infatuated bait worms

For this hungry land

Oh, Los Angeles!

Flaming icebox!

Sickly sweet salvation

Of the fancied and the frail

Straighten every pigskin tail

Bleach each

Corkscrew you

The boulevards are too straight

For wandering shoes

Alejandro Martinez

WHEN THE ANGELS FROZE

Los Angeles summers, filled of the aroma of
citrus-covered *carne asada* clashing with flames
over *Abuelo's* trusty, rusted grill
tíos, sharing stories with sweating *Modelos*

Barefoot kids dazed through the humidity,
coins clutched carefully as they chased the *Elotero*
his bell chime calmly chopping through *cumbias*,
singing serenely through swapmeet speakers

Tías tidying their tasty, trustable, and meticulous *masa*
adding color to the atmosphere indefinitely by
telling tales of *tíos*, *primos*, and *amigos* accompanied
with laughter, joy, and an echoing, vibrant warmth

Palm trees softly swayed side to side in the wind,
cheerful, carefree chuckles carved in the cracked sidewalks
yellow flowers freshly flourished freely from the ground
but most importantly, the sun's warmth wrapped it all in light

But then the winter came.

Not the kind that made monstrous, mega mountains morose

Not the kind that forged frigid, freezing frostbite

But the kind that spread rapidly through the streets, like fog

But the kind that made open doors into walls and open hearts closed

I.C.E swifty stole our warmth; the *cumbias*, the laughter, and the joy
the *Elotero's* bell rang less and less until one day, the bell stopped chiming
the palm trees still swayed, but their shadow grew longer, darker

Mamá anxiously and repeatedly said “*Con cuidado, hijo*”

Papá stopped driving late at night

Winter froze the angel's wings.

FISSURES

My mother told me to watch out for people who say *I love you*.

But people never listen to advice, least of all their own.

My mother has perfect eyesight but wears cloudy glasses – cloudy like the sheets of mist that gather before the ocean to worship, stealing the stars from sailors on their way home. My mother wears glasses because she doesn't trust her eyes. She's afraid they aren't enough.

I don't think my mother knows what I look like, the shape I make in the doorframe of her bedroom as I choose between the light outside and the darkness within. She tries to read her Bible, but cannot see beyond the words, so she traps the impression of them with memorization.

We live in winter in our house by the sea, and it is always winter. I collect sea glass for my windowsill and walk along the jetty towards the lighthouse that shepherds sailors to port. No one ever quite reaches the lighthouse.

Roseanne knows this – she used to race the jetty with her father. He would whisper in her ear, *Last one to the lighthouse is a rotten egg*, and her little legs would gallop beneath her school uniform jumper, until her father declared wherever they were to be *close enough*, and it was time to turn back. They did this until the day her father decided to walk the jetty alone.

My best friend is made of glass. She used to cut to the bone, but now she has a burden like a stone. Roseanne decided she was to be my best friend in the first grade. She was gracious enough to give me forewarning. She whispered in my ear, *Last one to the seesaw has to beg*.

Roseanne gives me advice because it's the best she has to give. She tells me to wear my skirts short. To blotch my lips red. *Undo that button. What are you trying to hide?* But Roseanne is always hiding – behind hollow paints and powder; behind curses and contempt; behind the smoke of her weeping cigarettes. She doesn't run anymore, she hides in plain sight.

The nuns cluck their tongues; the priests avert their eyes.

Roseanne is brave enough to swim but has swam enough to fear. She's afraid of girls, afraid of boys, afraid of the absence of girls' whispers and the absence of boys' stares. She fears salt water – fears tears for their insinuations, their truth, and the shame their truth brings; fears the ocean for its refusal to reconcile. Roseanne is so scared she lies to God. She avoids His eye. Her Confessions are extemporized.

Several years ago, an altar boy burned down the house of God. Some say the calamity was retribution for his negligence – he was young and thoughtless, so guileless as to be ignorant of consequences. Hope, peace, joy and love: three purple candles, one pink. I think he just loved the prettiness of their light against the life of the wreath and wanted it to endure. I can't blame him for that.

But light and life don't mix, and when Christmas came, St. Brendan Parish was a shell with its holiness coughed out, soulless and attenuated. And Jesus was born again amidst the destruction that momentary beauty bore.

Roseanne was stricken. Look what a match could do.

One morning, when we could still love, Roseanne knocked on my door, a box of matches in her hand. *Be my witness, please.* We walked out along the jetty and halted, firmly astride the sea. It met us meekly with outstretched palms, but we avoided its gaze.

Amidst the numb gray of the unfurling dawn, Roseanne lit a match, and we pondered its dignity, the wondrousness and impossibility of its being – *please, God* – until Roseanne let it slip from her fingers toward the sea. We waited for Jesus to stroll across the next swell, for a rupture, a conversion to light inaugurated by a drop of fire.

The sky looked on dispassionately. Two girls in a tundra of craters and ridges. Alone with the mindless determination of the throbbing, thrumming, thrashing sea. In the meanwhile, we lit another match, just in case.

One by one, prayer after prayer, the matches were lost – lost to a city of shells and skeletons and shipwrecks. A city of remains pounded by the darkness.

We were waiting for the matches to run out. The ocean was resolute.

In flutters and drops, our hearts were rewritten to match the ocean's beat. I held Roseanne and swayed with her, swayed as the ocean swayed, so that it would forget we were standing there, but the ocean stole our tears anyway.

That day, Roseanne's heart washed up on the sand. I kissed the carved glass and put her on my windowsill with the other reminders. Water can fill your lungs, starve your heart, and then toss you back out again. Light can't do much more than caress your skin.

Some days my mother won't leave her room. The ocean is swollen and unknowable outside her window, so she draws the curtains to choke the light, and, rather than risk tripping over the truth, she lies in bed with her eyes wide open. I call the hospital, tell them my mother is in no condition to work today. *She's feeling unwell; you understand, don't you?*

Of course, the voice is edged. But there is a policy. Please ask your mother not to miss any more days this month, or else it may be out of our hands.

I don't know how to undraw the curtains, or how to pry my mother's glasses from her eyes. I read the bible aloud to her scrubs, dangling like skeletons in her closet.

I talk to God from my windowsill. When the clouds are negligent and there are fissures in the vaulted gray, light from beyond smiles and kneels so as to ripple through the line of sea glass on my windowsill, and I believe in love. These days it is always raining, and the only light available comes from the windows lining the street – each home a comrade in arms against the impossible and the obstinate. The new St. Brendan proffers a shining cross.

Water seems benign as dewdrops. A companion of the light.

Roseanne gives me more advice, but it is more incoherent than the ocean. She can't understand my mother, can't see that she is just like her. She hates my mother like she hates herself.

She remembers the lighthouse she could never reach and her father's sandy, one-way tracks towards the jetty. Her father walked into the ocean knowing he could not walk on water. I wonder when the day will come that she sets herself on fire and leaps into the froth after her love.

Sunday mass, and the congregation shivers in His pews. Now that it has known fire as a friend, St. Brendan is colder than ever. Roseanne scuffs her feet in a few pews

in front. Beside me, my mother is very small. I could blow her out with one puff.

I think it was just bad luck. If the handmade wreath hadn't been quite so robust and the flame quite so ardent, if their proximity hadn't been quite so unpropitious, the glow would have gone quietly from the church like a wave departing the shore. A silent, requited falling out of love.

But my mother is not sitting beside me in the pew that bears our name. Not really. My mother is peering in through the stained glass. She has forgotten love and wonders where the door is. She must have known once, or else she would not have learned so well what sadness is.

Soon it will be Christmas. I string lights. I wrap empty boxes with gaudy paper and arrange them beneath a plastic tree so that I, at least, can pretend. The air is red and green and tight. The hearth sits empty. The crucifix hangs heavy above the doorway, but we don't have a nativity scene. Why don't we have a nativity scene? *Mare.* My mother says my name and I crack like glass.

God, is she blind.

She does not ask, but I tell her. *Love is you, and it is me.*

You exist behind your glasses – on your boat, indifferent to the stars, following the inkling of a prayer.

I tell her, *Love is the ocean.*

We contend with its passion, its volatility, its folding and fleeing, tapping and repressing and lurking.

I tell her, *Love is how I hold your hand despite the ocean. Love is the lighthouse we will one day reach. Love is Mary holding God in a manger. Love is the candles I have placed in all the windows. Love is a choice.*

People never listen to advice, least of all their mother's.

Gerard Sarnat

MONDAY MORNING MOURNING: OUR LESS THAN WEEKEND WARRIORS

3-4 millennia minority report:

You know how those of us
who hit hard pavement
at most once a week
in hopes we can get
into better shape
often instead of
building bod's
ursustainable
musculatures
end up with shin
splints—or worse
even heart attacks
—that sadly prevent
integration so healthful
more quotidian routines
well, imagine if instead a

optimal daily practices
(perhaps meditation?)
one does something
very clearly useful
but only annually
say Saturday's
day of fasting
introspection
+ confessional
Ger repents sins
& expects authentic
intentions to change
behavior suddenly for
whole next year...now
observation fellow Jews
at Yom Kippur subsequent
'24 break-the-fast, then Sunday

not too chipper, I fear just don't last.

James Ph. Kotsybar

NURSERY QUEST

All of the orchids were up on benches.
Though taken down for her to see and smell,
she quickly got bored with the docent's tour
and dove under the benches to explore.

She found a *dragon* in a shaft of light,
sunning, relaxed until she reached for him.
At which point, he magically vanished
behind the plastic pots and flats stored there.

Her mother called for her and out she dashed
from lizard's lair, to bolt through greenhouse door.
Her father said, "She's probably too young
to appreciate the sights she sees here."

He didn't notice she had discovered
a field of *gemstones* leading to the car,
and, as her parents left with purchased blooms,
she clasped rock treasures from the graveled drive.

Christian Hanz Lozada

10,000 HOURS OF PRACTICE MAKES YOU A MASTER

Intelligence is as subjective as beauty —Ibram X. Kendi

White Grandma's every move is haunted by echoes of can't:

you're dumb

you're no good

you'll never be good

spoken by the woman who took her in,
her never-mother Mom.

every echo is haunted, too

by the questions the answered but still unanswerable:

why'd Daddy give us up?

why'd Momma die?

why'd I go to the neighbors?

why'd my brothers and sisters get the orphanage?

Every decision she makes, from picking up the phone
when I call to getting the mail, is an trek through doubt.

White Grandma is a rose in concrete. Maybe not a rose—
I don't want to steal from Tupac—more like an unplanned
poppy, wild and inevitably damaged by the concrete,
watered from washing the sidewalk, a happy accident

from the irresponsible. And she is so smart only
in the ways she's been allowed: she can clean your house,
make it ready for a magazine spread; she can clean your hospital
make it ready to heal; she can mix chemicals to kill but not tarnish.

She's a composer of clean,
her wand is a mop handle or rag.
She's the rhythm section and strings,
but to her, she knows nothing
nothing but the things that haunt her.

WHEN I STOPPED BEING A THREAT TO GOODS

I almost miss it, that box-store celebrity status
I used to have where paparazzi cameras
were trained on my every gesture and where
my shopping selections hit near-influencer
status, but when I turned 40, or when
my salary hit six figures, the security guards
stopped following me as if I aged out of
some target demographic, the one that drives
sales and statistics, or maybe they could smell

that I was smart enough to weaponize skin-deep
suspicions, that I was just waiting, waiting, waiting
for the accusation, knowing they'd settle
out of court for a million and a half if I could
hire a lawyer. And I can.

Priscilla Perez

FAMILIAR SCENT

“Why didn’t you tell me?” My voice is soft, barely holding in the raging storm buzzing within, but it echoes in the silent room.

The hand clenching the paper trembles. Those words burn in my mind like a tattoo.

Adopted. I’m *adopted*.

My...dad (adopted dad?) doesn’t say a word. His face was like marble, impenetrable, like I’m talking to a wall. No. A fortress, so massive you’ll get lost trying to find your way out, much less try to memorize.

Now that I think about it: Why hadn’t I noticed it before. We don’t really look alike. Sure, we have the same brown hair, and tan skin, but his eyes were grey, while mine were light blue. My hair was curlier than his. It wasn’t even the same curly as my...adopted mom. My adopted mom, who has bright, curly red hair and bright green eyes.

Why didn’t I ever suspect something was up?

She didn’t tell me either. Neither of them told me something *this* important.

“Why!” A broken scream spills from my throat.

“I...” he stops, and avoids my eyes. “I didn’t want you to get hurt.”

I let out a hysterical laugh. “Didn’t want me to get hurt? Well, I am *hurt*. And it wasn’t because of these people who were supposed to be my biological parents. It was because of *you*. Because for whatever reason you think...what? What exactly are you thinking? I can never tell with you! Do you not trust me or something? Do you still think I’m a child?”

“I do trust you,” He whispers, avoiding my eyes. His shoulders are practically drooping, “and I know you are no longer a child.”

He doesn't say anything more. Typical. But, that admission made my heart sing.

I still need to know.

"Why would I get hurt? Is...is it because of my...bio parents? Tell me the truth this time."

"They..." He sighs, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "They sign off all custody to us. We...tried reaching out a while ago. To see if they want to see you but..."

"Oh." I whispered. It feels like I was underwater after those words were spoken. "So they didn't want me. They don't even want to get to know me."

I didn't hear what he said next. Instead, I felt myself being pulled into a hard chest.

I couldn't stop the tears from falling, couldn't stop whatever terrible noise was spilling from my throat.

It was then that I felt another pair of arms wrap around us, and that familiar earthy scent entered my nose. It's the same perfume I've been smelling for most of my life.

I sniff, and break away from my dad's hold. It was then that his fingers began running through the strands of my hair, his blunt nails dragging softly against my scalp. Just like when I was a kid after a terrible day.

I drag my mom into a fierce hug, burying my face into her shoulder. I'm so much taller than her now. It almost made me tear up even more.

"We're here for you, Ky," my...mom exclaims with a sob. "You will always be our son. No matter how old you get."

Another wave of tears escaped me.

Joel Bush

MORNING AT THE TRACKS

The thin ribbons of rusting metal
wind through the edge of town.

They're the murky
orange of a fire burning out.

Nothing rolls through,
just grooves
without movement.

On a morning like this,
you want to take a chance
and send yourself somewhere—

like the little pieces of
gravel you kick
without care.

SACAGAWEA SEES THE OCEAN

She looks out with her infant son,
unable to interpret this new territory.

The waves roll in—
smooth like a flatterer's tongue.

Her eyes wander to
a whale carcass.

Its flesh is melting away.

Its sharp rib bones arch
skyward, as if to skewer a seagull.

They are jutting knives.

They are blinding white.

SWEETER AND COLDER

Even your apology
is a demand—the gall!

I've padlocked
the icebox.

I know you savored
their soft, violet skin
as the nectar trailed
down your chin.

There's only one thing
sweeter and colder
than stolen goods.

Just you wait.

Jennifer Choi

THE HANDS THAT COMPLETE DEATH

When the tablecloth is pulled,
your face tumbles down, rolling away, only to return.
Hands, yellowed & trembling, clap in unison,
but now is the time for quiet, for stillness.

Every day, you prepare supper with
the innocence of twilight.

Winds whirl, dogs racing across fields are swept onto rooftops.
Bare death crosses chest & jaw to meet tenderness.
By now, it wouldn't hurt to smooth the blade
of your stubborn head.

You are small & absurd, like a shy girl wielding
her timidity as a weapon.

The hands that laughed fiercely in nightmares now strangle your throat,
as time marches on, pristine & unwavering.
In the end, even the virtuous couldn't shake the habit of reeking,
even in death.

Our conversations yesterday dwell on the stillness of your bathtub—
lines etched across its edge,
your cold head sinking beneath its water.
Long will you rebel against the finality of divine emotion,

but as evening's nature shifts into silence,
the weight of those with hands will remain holy.

When nails scrape against the wall as they climb from the tub,
when fingers once holding spoons at dinner cast them away,
when the hands of those who've tasted death once before
freeze blue, stiff on their backs—

If anyone opened their mouth, they might cry,
so no one did.

The bloated, pale body spilled out from the tub.
Clutching wet hems,
hands hurriedly fled the table,
rashly, or perhaps aimlessly.

Tonight, the supper of those left with only their heads
is complete.

THE DAY I CUT MY NAILS

The back of the universe glows faintly, the forecast says cloudy.
Light spills through the gaps in the clouds,
 & within it, there must be whispers from galaxies billions of light-years away.
 Like a trace of cream left on my lips, the clouds scatter,
 & the forecast is a lie. Today,
I'll buy a nail clipper for one dollar.

From the moment I was born, my nails were strong.
 Like everyone's, but more precisely,
 they were the outer layer of me.
 Since I was young, all I learned was how to cut them,
 never imagining I'd water them, or sing to them softly
like my mother cared for the flowers.

It felt as though I had to choose
 between being the troublemaker
 or the perfect child,
 but I was a model only in not fitting into either.
 & so, in the case of nails,
I was nothing but their outside.

Today, the back of the universe continues to glow.
 You coat your nails with polish, while I clip mine.
 We throw away what's needed for politeness, & keep what we desire,
 but the thick growth on our fingers remains *indifferent to either side.*
 I only think of the nails tossed into the tissue, the weather, & myself.
The discarded nails always smile faintly.

Aubrey Ann Hopkins

AN ODE TO BITTERSWEET THORNS

Sometimes

I beg my memory not to fade -

I remember voices, smells,

but not the feeling of her hands

lightly scratching my back, painting

my nails in gel maroon. My dirty

nails, my poor

unloved nails. It makes me laugh that she even bothered.

And yet her nails were perfect, but

she had no problem dirtying them

in her garden, as she pulled, planted, supplanted. *These are*

daffodils, hydrangeas, poppies, snapdragons. My favorites are the daffodils.

she'd say, and let me pick some

of whatever I wanted. I always loved the

snapdragons, with

their little purple mouths

open cartoon-character-wide. I can still

feel them between my thumb and forefinger, snapping them open

so they sang

Idomeneo

in layered beauty.

POP

Ben McCreary is working at popping the pimple on his face. It is something his Mom taught him to do, a few years before she died, being into things like that. How to squeeze each edge (her nails were better than his flat-tipped fingers) until the puss oozed out, a white squirt that made him shiver and she would laugh.

He would hold himself still then, his too-smooth teenage face, longing for hair, until it all came out to a spot of blood underneath. Then he would squirm away from her—Mom, don't touch me, Mom I'm fine—while she touched him, smoothed his face with her hand and said nice things that made him feel strange inside.

I am a fragment of her. I am her wild eye. Her cells parade in me like symphonies.

Yesterday, a woman passing him on the street said he was handsome. He realized it had been a long time since he had heard this. Cute maybe. Hot maybe. Handsome is something his mother would have said, his head turning away with embarrassment. No Mom. No.

When Ben was five, his favorite fruit was a blackberry. He would pick them out of the bowl every time, looking for seeds. But they were so tiny: he could never separate the seeds from the fruit.

This morning he pours himself Fruit Loops from the box; he has taken to eating cereal he ate as a kid. It is chalky, oversweet chemical soup. Colors of green, pinkish red, yellow.

I haven't wanted anything, he is thinking. I don't know what to want. How does wanting happen? Does it reach into you like a hand, and grab you, saying: this? Wanting, a blank canvas. Wanting, a hollow. The absence of wanting is to feel un-human. Doesn't our hunger define us? Even the waitress will want you to eat something. What if you are not hungry?

“You can’t steer a parked car,” was the advice Lester had given him yesterday, meaning go and do the thing, stop putting it off. Lester, Mom’s friend from work, knocked on the door, plastic bag wriggling with canned soup, a gallon of milk—“I had extra”—and found Ben in his underwear, up from the couch, the blinking box relentless. “You will learn more from doing than by standing still,” Lester said, “then you can adjust.”

This morning, Ben battles pantlegs and long underwear, wooly socks, and grabs the long ungainly things from the closet, throwing them and his body like deadweight toward the car.

The mountain is cold, so cold. Blue from a distance, but just the flavor of cold inside, so that his feet are numb inside those boots, his scant flannel below the jacket feeling like a rag, thin against his skin. The sky vast and the glint of the sun off the snow.

The glint reminds him of the sunshine at the funeral: blistering hot, so that no one could see anyone clearly, not even with sunglasses on. Just the sun, like a halo, turning the green grass to brown. Going into the church was disorienting, blinding in its darkness. The hard wood, the smell of incense.

“You’ll be ok without me?”

She was saying this as a question, but it was actually a demand, a requirement.

He nodded but his eyes were glassy and he could feel his answer as a moving mouth, like a puppet being pulled by strings. Yes, yes Mom. I’ll be fine.

Her last breath, a big sigh. That big belly thing a dog does before it falls fully asleep, or shifts position, wiggling a paw. When she took her last breath, it was as if to say ok, ok. Good-bye. It’s done. I’ll do it. Her eyes were closed, her hand clammy. But there seemed relief in it, a surrender. Like: yeah, this, this, ok, if I have to. I’m going now. I can do this. You got me. Here I go, ok.

Death demanding edges: a beginning, middle, end to life. Ben had preferred ambiguity, like: we might live forever, or—who knows? She could live for years. You could die before her. Anyone could go at anytime. You could get hit by a bus. The terror and the possibility of uncertainty; still somehow better than the absolute of death. Her body in the coffin, plastic. Her fake pink cheeks, forgetting the ravaging days.

The scarf was slightly wet when he left the house—did he spill coffee on it, or water? —so that now it is lightly frozen on some edges, making him feel like a snowman. No, making him feel frozen, like nothing inside him is warm.

When his boots click in to the long skis, his toes pinch slightly. The trees loom overhead; he can see his breath now in the shade of them. His hands are numb. He begins to glide, feeling the pressure of his own body and how his breath alters slightly to match the movement. He is a feather in wind, watching how the movements carry him.

Sam Spring

A FIRE, A FAVOR

The dead tree
Stopped growing long before its roots
Withered — long before its leaves
Fell and its bark peeled. It hadn't grown
Taller in years before the fire came, but
Then the fire came,
And the tree took that beautiful chance
That only comes around to the luckiest
Among us living things — the chance
To not have to explain yourself anymore.

Nicholas Viglietti

TAKE A CLUE FROM THE BOTTOM VIEW

We can pile up
Like hoarder shelves.
Or like dirty dishes
Crazily stacked on ourselves

It's gotta be the consistent usage.
No rest
And not a lick of progress.
Take a clue from the bottom view
Strong doesn't suit your choices.

Conditioned to the mess
Let the faucet run,
Feast on the light side of done
Full belly and hard scrubs
On the same stuck stress.
Gritty work quickly gets gross
It lacks the proper level of clean,
The awkward tune of missed notes
Failure is fashionable for souls tailored pristine.

ASPEN

I waited for my coffee, feeling the stubble on my legs brush against each other. I always felt cleaner if I shaved my legs with wet wipes, one leg perched on the solar fridge. I'd neglected to do that today, as I started off-grid in the remote town of Twin Lakes, Colorado. The tiny shop, the size of a small cabin, was playing the owner's playlist of indie hits. I read a newspaper clipping pinned on the bulletin board and learned the shop was owned and operated by two former tech workers who used their savings to buy the adjoining hotel. His woodworking projects, and carvings highlighting the mountains of Colorado, adorned the tables and bar tops. I guess everyone these days was calling it quits in search of a simpler life.

It had only been two weeks since I shut my laptop and said goodbye to my professional career in AI. I was burnt out from trying to prove that I was good enough: that I'd taken calls at five a.m. for Fortune 500 clients, doubled revenue volumes for L.A.'s hottest tech companies, and quickly fired my underperformers.

There was a tenacity within me that had been coaxed out, after years and years of fighting for what I deserved. Take the bigger client, run the pitch, ask for the raise, and go the extra mile. I was competitive and fierce; I wanted to win, and I would do whatever it took. My father told me I had always been this way; it was a natural characteristic, something I was born with. I hadn't "learned" this.

Things just started piling up, one after the other, until I felt oppressed as the weight bore down on me. The back-to-back calls, the customer escalations, and the weighty internal expectations created a pace and intensity that gave me no room to think. I became unable to motivate myself to do small tasks. I started fantasizing about quitting and practicing my resignation speech.

When my dreams got so intense, I realized I had never let myself quit anything, not even the soccer team when I was 8 years old. A rage came over me; how was it that I never let myself do what I wanted? I started planning, saving every penny from every paycheck. I read stories about sabbaticals and career breaks. By the time my resignation letter was signed, I was hell-bent on leaving it all behind. But what lay ahead, I did not know.

It seemed like a good idea to start my next chapter by taking a two-week-long road trip in the mountains of Colorado in my converted van. In recent years, when I couldn't bear to click another button on my laptop, I would shut off my phone and go to the desert, far from cell reception, where I would lay in the dust and feel the sun charge my drained batteries until Monday rolled around, and I would start all over

again. Cutting the cord meant no more internet, no more ladder climbing, and no more demands. I was free. I planned to use the next two weeks of hiking and sleeping in the woods to cleanse myself of my addiction to success.

The lingering smell of coffee warmed gave the van a cozy feeling. As I hit the road past Twin Lakes and climbed up 82 West, the roads became steeper and narrower. Signs of modern life disappeared: there were no telephone polls, no houses, no rest stops. There was so much space out here, so much emptiness. My mind was a black hole, just a single road plowing through the dense trees. I passed endless trees as the mountains in the distance came closer, their craggy peaks humbling me. I approached a rushing stream underneath a waterfall. It was so beautiful I had to stop and walk around. I stood rooted in my Birkenstocks as the mighty pines towered over me, overshadowed only by massive rocks. I felt the icy air whooshing past the snowmelt, and I folded my arms over my chest to keep warm. I couldn't believe this was my life. Instead of a normal Tuesday when I should have been tapping away at my computer keys, I was in the middle of nowhere, a small dot in a Bob Ross painting. I felt completely at peace, yet smaller and more insignificant than I'd ever felt before.

As I drove through Independence Pass, the van teetered dangerously close to the cliff. Around me, all I could see was the sun bouncing off the glaciers and rocks. I couldn't look down, envisioning certain death. Between deep breaths, I kept my composure, as the van's transmission shifted up and down as the road grade inclined, hemming and hawing as I applied the gas.

Finally, the road became flat, and sitting on the frosty summit was a sign that read "Welcome to the Continental Divide."

What the heck is a Continental Divide? I thought.

Parking the van, I gathered whatever warm clothes I could find, throwing on a pair of ripped black jeans and a rain jacket. A helpful trail map explained that this is where the watershed splits between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The hydrological divide.

It didn't seem like I was on planet Earth. I spun around, and all I could see were sparkling peaks, whipped clouds, and barren moonrocks. I breathed in the frigid air and stood a little straighter, my feet jumping down the trails like a little kid on a playground. Here I was, 12,095 feet above sea level, the wind nipping at my ears, the sun shining over mountaintops, and freedom at my feet. A tiny spark reignited inside of me, a wildness that had been dulled after years behind a computer screen. This is what I had been searching for.

The next stop on my road trip was Aspen. I was curious to see if it lived up to the beauty I had heard about – the famous Maroon Bells, the most photographed mountains of North America, were just outside of the city. As content as I was watching the serenity of the sun draping across the pine trees and the nerdy outdoors people with hiking poles, they slowly started to disappear. On my left, a jogging trail flanked the river, and soon enough fit bodies donning leggings and baseball caps emerged. I arrived in town and was overwhelmed by the decorum. Every house seemed to have been plucked from *House & Garden* magazine, all of them with pristine gardens and Land Rovers in the driveway.

Before heading to camp, I popped into a cute little cafe to grab lunch. Right away, I felt out of place in my dirty hiking socks and t-shirt. By the looks of their clean clothes and bejeweled wrists, everyone had returned from a round of tennis or golf, not a night in the wilderness. Despite a sign that read, “no dogs allowed,” several guests confidently strutted inside holding the leashes of their well-groomed pets.

It suddenly clicked that these people were not just rich, they were uber rich. They had second and third homes, flew here on private jets, and had chefs and gardeners. I couldn't help but compare myself to the women: each one under 110 pounds and dressed in luxury sneakers. I let my mind wander, wondering if they had gotten their boobs done or had lip injections.

As I took my seat, a young woman who appeared to be my age, with less body fat and a stronger jaw structure, was on a video call next to me. She kept asking for the original source files, repeating over and over again: “If we could just get the original source files, the problem would be solved”.

I winced.

It's something I've said from time to time in my professional life. Soon enough, she mentioned she needed to “return the Spanish translation to meet the deadline.”

My skin itched underneath my hairy legs. I remembered when it used to be me saying those words. A flash of competition burned inside of me: *I could do this better than her*. Suddenly, I didn't want to sit there with my extra ten pounds of soft belly, my greasy hair streaked with grey, and my sad look about my overpriced salad. I wanted to say to this woman, *This isn't me. I'm not an unemployed hippy living in my van. I know what to do here. I can afford this salad!*

I fought every urge to interrupt, to small talk, to network with her, all of my insecurities oozing out of me. My bloodthirsty quest for change was threatened by the appeal of the affluent: if my wrinkles could be smoothed, my curves straightened, and my resume polished, no one would see how disgustingly human I was.

I sat at the table and closed my eyes, remembering all those years I spent trying to trying to harden myself in an environment where people beat me down. Not only did I make other people cry, but I also spent many days crying myself, agonizing over my unhappiness. I recalled the feeling of peace as I woke up in the van, with no phone calls to rush to or fires to put out. A conviction came over me. Despite having no clue what was ahead of me, I knew I did not want to go back. I could sit here in discomfort, or I could embrace the woman I was becoming: a woman in search of my own feral longings.

I left the restaurant and headed to the Aspen Rec Center to take a seven-dollar public shower. This time, I might even leave the razor at home.

Lucas Simone

HARDWOOD

When my hands are on
the kitchen floor
my fingertips
pulse

like
the house
has a heartbeat
that quickens with mine.

Maddie Louise Silva

FEVER DREAM

A fever dream. That's how you described the day with your beautiful mouth.

We wandered through the artist studios of Lincoln Heights, wading past unfinished pieces hung to the warehouse walls like omens, and I asked the painters for answers.

What will it look like when it's finished? How will you know when it's over? When will it be exactly what you wanted? I craved explanation. Any of the dozens of therapists I'd scavenged the city for could tell you that. But the painters weren't worried, gazing past my desperate eyes at something I could not see.

"I have some idea," they all said. "But we'll see. We'll see."

What did they know that I didn't? I wanted to stay and interrogate, but you took me to the planetarium room and soon we were soothed by a deep voice telling us about our infinite existences and the power of freedom. Large, blinking eyes floated across the domed ceiling, soaring between suns and stars and asteroids. The whole room was covered in the universe. We laid close to each other on the carpeted floor. I wanted to take your hand, but instead, I counted the centimeters of untouched space between us.

"I feel like I've lived three lives," I said when we stumbled out into the light of the real sun. You laughed, which I loved, but I was being serious. I had *lived* three lives in there, debating whether or not to take your hand: I lived the life where I knew what I wanted and got it; I lived the life where I knew what I wanted and never fought for it; and I lived the life where what I wanted could never actually exist.

We left the studios to eat banchan. We ate at a wrought-iron table in a quiet garden and talked about queer time. The second adolescence. The jumping milestones. The timelines that ran perpendicular and diagonal, but never quite parallel to our straight counterparts.

“Some day, we’ll look back and make sense of it,” I said stupidly, words meant only to fill space when answers can’t be found. But with you across from me and me across from you, I briefly believed I was making sense of it then. The two of us falling into something, perhaps an early version of love, perhaps just a pit.

We took coffee to a tiny slice of park on a hill. It reminded me of a vulva, somewhat teardrop-shaped, moist grass, peaceful. There was a party happening and so we watched. I leaned into you, my side against yours, my head on your shoulder, my fingers tracing the inside of your arm. I stayed there until everything softened.

“It haunted me,” you said, “the thought that I might never experience queer love.”

It was the cis-man you were dating that shrouded your mind with those thoughts. I thought about bringing up my past love. It had been queer love, but it haunted me too. How it was everything I wanted and became everything I hated. But it was only our second date and I’ve learned not to scare people off with those kinds of things. You seemed different, but they all do until they aren’t. I stayed quiet and listened to you instead, tried to pour you my queer love.

How many good things do you think we get, I wanted to ask you. How many times do we get to have things work out? It ought to be spread out over a lifetime, I thought. It would be wrong to have it all bunched up in a couple years. God forbid, a couple of months.

Too many wonderful things are happening, I could find myself trembling at any given moment with you. *Too many wonderful things at once.*

I dropped you off at your house when the sun began to set, or at least I meant to but you invited me inside and I got to see your old house with the many, many steps and your pink bed sheets and the stringed lights like extended arms hugging your walls. We had sex. I watched us in your built-in mirror. I wondered if the neighbors could see us through the open curtains.

Their treat, I said to myself. *Let them see what pleasure is. Let them know envy.*

“That’s queer time for you,” I said when you looked at the clock and four hours had passed. You couldn’t disagree. I couldn’t say more. I watched as you put your clothes on, each piece of you slowly blacking out until you were covered and I was still naked in your bed, begging the universe for special privileges.

Just this once, just for me, let this day last longer than twenty-four hours.

You walked me to my car and we tried again, me dropping you off, us kissing in the car to music I had curated before you got in. But eventually you peeled yourself from me and walked back to your many, many steps. No one had ever let me go after sex. No one had ever sent me on my way after being inside me, after soaking in my skin, tasting my sweat, feeding me theirs.

But I wasn’t upset. How could I be after what we did?

I watched you disappear into your house, our shared cloak of queer time catching in the doorframe. I searched the sunless sky for which of my three lives I was living.

What will it all look like at the end? I begged to know, but no one answered except for the painters, still somewhere in their studios painting, all filled up with their ideas, seeing, seeing.

THE PURCHASED LETTER

In the store, there
Was the letter
You never sent
So, I purchased it
To read the words
You never said
To feel the presence
Of your absence
I dreamt of the letter
Sent with no sender
White was the cover
And the words red
“Dear forgive me
for my absence
like this letter”
Opening it was not
Possible but it was
Not necessary; the words
Inked through, visibly
“Dear my pain
is too deep
like this ink”
I purchased the letter
To forgive but instead
I remembered.

Lydia Carillo

CYCLE OF A SHRINKING VIOLET

The vulnerable, violet stays away from the sunrays;
A weeping wallflower– letting the
Weeds drown her all out.

Never growing or getting enough nutrients
For her poor wilting, wallowing leaves.
Shrinking violet–hiding in the dirt
From everyone, everybody...

Being surrounded by other flowers sounds rather cumbersome.
She shrivels and withers for not being venturesome.
Spring is the time of chances and beginnings,
But her stubborn bud remains closed;
Nothing will change.
This Year–

Natalie Estrada

LOST IN TIME

I have this bad habit
of turning every
happy moment
into a somber occasion.

One second,
I'm laughing hysterically,
head tilted back,
throwing my joy to the sky.

The next,
my face softens,
my smile slipping
into something quieter,
a knowing frown.

Because these smiles,
this laughter—
will soon be nothing
but memories.

Fading, fleeting,
like echoes lost in the wind.

And still, I laugh,
as if I don't already miss it.

- I live outside the moment.

Danelle Huggett

GOOD BODILY PROPORTIONS

For years my heart was obsessed with breaking;

 breaking itself,

 allowing shards of the past to invade healing,

 putting itself in the path of careless prowling.

The pattern was getting to be too much,

until one day I ran out of excuses and dimmed my weepy lantern,

 closing my eyes to the past.

Determined,

 I scooped up what was left of the gooey remnants of my murmuring thew,

 placed the pieces in a box,

 and constructed myself anew.

I sought refuge in my creation

 A shimmering glaze, a brazen crux,

 Threaded

 And fibered

 And rugged.

I blushed in my state of repose.

Slowly, the frantic fusing of the shambles started to take shape

 and as it swelled and writhed with newfound strength,

 whimpered a velvety “hello.”

My reply, as such, was that of surprise,

 never knowing my heart could speak.

It was I who forced this silence

 for my helpless, mushy piece.

AIN'T GOING GENTLY

Most people wish to die in their sleep. To them, it sounds peaceful. But to me, it sounds dull and boring. Like a good concert or movie, I want to go out with a big finish.

A cardiac arrest in my sleep would be a waste of a good medical emergency. If my heart stops, I want it to be while I'm climbing a mountain or swimming a channel. Granted, I'd never dream of doing such activities, but if I did, I want to collapse clutching my chest right before I reach my goal. That'll give people something to talk about.

At the least, it should happen in a public place. Nosediving in a supermarket, taking down a display of tomato cans. Convulsing at a baseball game, causing a flood of waves from the confused crowd. Expiring during a concert, my corpse crowd surfing until the singer realizes: "That dude's dead!"

If I drop dead while I'm driving, I don't want to take out any other people, but be the sole victim in a spectacular crash. Disintegrated by driving into an oil truck, igniting a fiery explosion. Eviscerated by an unexpected train bulleting through an abandoned railroad crossing.

Crushed when a truck filled with carnival equipment overturns. I'd hold up traffic for hours, making at least one person say: "Somebody better be dead at the end of this." And I will be!

I don't want to have a silent stroke in bed. I want a rare brain disease that makes me act crazy. My friends and family will have to chase me through town as I dance naked in fountains, stand on a street corner swearing at cars and declare myself king of a port-a-potty.

When they finally have me tied to a hospital bed they'll say: "This so isn't like him." "It's the rare brain disease," another will respond sympathetically.

Poor me. A victim of madness. And now a burden to my friends, who'll forget how often they were burdens themselves. Brenda will abandon me first, not wanting me to take attention away from her drama of the week.

If I am going to die in my sleep, I want it to be a messy homicide, not a lame demise from a gas leak. Shot or stabbed by an intruder so many times that the scene will make a tenured detective file for early retirement. Or go old school 80's horror movie with an ax wielding psychopath. I'll wake up to find some creepy masked man hacking at my limbs. When I sit up to protest, he'll lop off my head. It'll bounce to the floor and land perfectly in one of my fuzzy slippers. During that 5-15 seconds I'm still conscious, I'll see all the dust bunnies under my bed. Dying with the relief that I never wasted any of my precious time cleaning.

If I'm going to be killed by a random stranger, outside of a bedroom setting, I don't want it to be a trite mass shooting or stabbing while being mugged. I want to be sacrificed in a Satanic ritual or eaten by a serial killer. Though I don't want to be a lowly name on a long list of victims. I'd rather be the victim that causes the bastard to get caught. The Final Victim has a nice ring to it.

Honestly, I'd rather my demise be at the hands, or paws, of an animal.

Having my limbs torn off by a bear that one time my friends finally convinced me to go camping. That'll show them.

Or trampled by a stampede of bulls in Spain. I wouldn't even be there for the running of the bulls. I'd be a few blocks away, re-reading *THE CATCHER IN THE RYE* in a cafe, when the beasts take a wrong turn and b-line for the red cover of my book. The citizens of the town would make me a martyr. My image printed on flags and t-shirts for decades.

Maybe it'd be more plausible to be mauled to death by a lion or tiger during a circus or magic show. As I bleed out in the audience, I'd be more concerned about my attacker: "Don't put her down." There'd be a grassroots effort to save her and send her to an animal sanctuary. There she'd meet a mate and raise a family. One of her cubs will be named after me.

A shark attack's a little too common. But death by stingray would be unique. Especially if it were at one of those "swim with the stingrays" places filled with families. The image of that stinger piecing my heart will be forever burned into their memories. I'd be the reason they never go in the water.

“Why doesn’t grandpa swim?”

“Oh, when he was a boy, he saw the most horrible aquatic death.”

All those years later, I’d still be remembered.

A snake bite’s kind of dull. Though falling into a nest of scorpions is sure to give people the “heebie-jeebies” when they retell my story.

Stung to death by a swarm of bees would only be cool at a county fair. They’ll get loose from a honey exhibit and go after my sweetcorn. I’ll run into the livestock barn. The buzzing and clucking will drown out my screams. There’ll be jokes about my death after. “His death was so unfair. Get it? Un-fair?”

It’d be fun to be the victim of some bizarre accident. Something that’ll send the witnesses to therapy for years. Like being mangled by an escalator or plunging to death down an elevator shaft. Oh! How about getting sucked into an aircraft engine while boarding a plane at a small airport.

I’m not an amusement park person, but I’d ride a roller coaster if I knew I’d be decapitated. Ejected from a tilt-a-whirl. Or drowning after my log rolls over on a water ride, me still strapped into the seat. The thing that’s supposed to save me causing me to be suffocated by filthy, pee filled water.

That’s all I want. Something that’ll keep people talking for years. To go out with a bang. Not sitting here, alone, in this hospital. Hooked up to a bunch of machines and waiting for the beeping to flatline. My friends too scared to visit me, or stay long if they do. I hear them whisper, “I can’t stand to see him like this.”

You and me both.

They’ll barely think of me until the day I’m gone. Then they’ll write a Facebook post about how I “quietly slipped out of this world.” And within 24 hours, I’ll vanish from their friends’ algorithms. Forgotten until I pop up next year in their memories, which they’ll opt not to repost because it’d be too depressing

There’s still hope! A meteor could fall out of the sky, smash through the hospital roof and crush me. That’d be awesome!

Bob H. Chapman

WHEN THE RAVEN CALLED MY NAME

A concise version

I sat and pondered as my mind lingered,
My thoughts piercing my brain with dagger-like fingers.
The spiraling of my mind was slow yet strong,
For she by now had not been gone very long.
My heart grew heavy as I thought of my lost love,
Whose heart was of gold and her spirit was of a dove,
Who now resides in Death's domain,
yet wished I she with me remain.

The countless tomes of lore read I through the night,
though I could recall feeling the weariness of my sight.
But as my eyes began to close to rest,
A sudden sound brought a shock to my chest.
To the door I ran, and opening it, I peeked out,
Yet only the winter night wind and snow flurried about.
As I returned to the safety of my seclusion,
The sound came again, disturbing my reclusion.

"Who is he who torments me this very night," said I,
But no sound I heard nor a figure came into sight.
I went for my pane, for I sought for the wind so cold,
My fear to subside from the winter winds so bold.
As I swung the pane open wide,
A awe-striking sight came to my eyes.
From the night a raven came,
And henceforth my life would be no longer the same.

"Who be you, one from the Plutonian shores?" said I,
Its eyes gave no sign of what lied in its mind,
As I stared at the raven, my mind continued to unwind.
The spirals of my mind became as screws,
their points like a knife,
And at last for all my toils and strife,
I cried for my miserable life.
The raven remained as a stone,
Unfazed it stayed as in self-pity I moaned.
At last the raven cried, "Sé McBride."
At once, a pain came in my chest,
And as sunrise arrived, I succumbed to my eternal rest.
A warning I dismissed, all should heed the same,
And beware when the raven calls your name.

CONTRIBUTORS

Sandra Ambriz Sandra Ambriz has been a student attending Cerritos College for almost a whole year now. She is studying Biology and hopes to pursue a career in teaching. In her free time, she does traditional art with an emphasis on paints and watercolor. She also does digital art as a hobby. As a biology student and a self-taught artist, she values capturing nature in her artwork.

A.S. Aubrey is a writer and psychotherapist working with trauma, chronic illness and identity. Her work has been seen in The Poets Corner's Art & Ekphrastic Poetry exhibit, *The Write Launch* and *Cathexis Northwest Press*. She currently lives in Los Angeles, where the urban sprawl inspires humor and existential angst.

Mia Soto | M.S. Blues is one of the most decorated figures in the literary magazine community. She currently serves on 21 magazine boards and has over 260 publications. She's the Editor-in-Chief of *DICED Online* and the Founder & Editor-in-Chief of *The Infinite Blues Review*. In addition to her many literary endeavors, she is a college student, the host of an upcoming podcast called *expresiones melancólicas*, and the Founder & Director of Melancholic Ignition. She resides in the Bay Area, California. Her debut book, *Collected Works: Poetry & Short Stories* can be purchased online through Amazon or Barnes & Noble—as well as in store at Caspian Books located in Tracy, California.

Joel Bush reads things. He also writes things. Well, sometimes he reads the things he writes. That tends to help. His work has been featured in *Meniscus*, *Molecule: A Tiny Lit Mag*, and *Thimble Literary Magazine*.

Lydia Carrillo is an Artesia high school junior who enjoys creating poetry and scrapbooking in their free time outside of practicing and schoolwork. Though they have plans to major in STEM and attend medical school, they appreciate the comfort that the humanities and fine arts bring and actively seek to partake in them in various ways.

Angelina Carrera, 22, is a neurodivergent poet, Philosophy major, and Creative Writing minor at UC Berkeley. She is winner of *First Matter Press'* 2024 Ekphrastic Poem Contest. Her work appears and is forthcoming in *After Happy Hour*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *F(r)iction*, *The Bookends Review*, *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, and more.

Bob H. Chapman is currently a student at Cerritos College studying for his Associate's in Hospitality Management and English. He likes to read, write original literature, play Dungeons & Dragons whenever he can, play with his many cats, study his Bible, and to talk to his grandma, one of his biggest influences in life. He aspires to become an executive chef, an author of novels and anthologies of personal literature, or even a food/travel critic.

Jennifer Choi is a passionate high school student. Her work has previously been published or is forthcoming in *Incandescent Review*, *Altered Reality Magazine*, *Academy of Heart and Mind*, and *Culterate Magazine* among others.

Mayra Cortes is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the English department. So far, she has written scholarship about Shakespeare's plays and other early modern writers. During moments of intense emotions, she has a decent knack for producing poetry and fiction. She is an alumna of Cerritos College. Class of 2013 Falcons, hooray!

Natalie Estrada is a junior at St. Pius X-St. Matthias Academy in Downey, California. A lover of stories in all forms, she enjoys reading, listening to music, watching Marvel films, and playing softball. A published poet in last year's *¡Palante!* journal, Natalie continues working toward her goal of publishing a poetry book before she graduates high school. You can explore more of her work on Instagram: @natalies_poetry

London Evans is a Cal State Fullerton graduate student placing an emphasis on Gothic and Victorian Feminism. For her thesis, she plans to use the work of Mary Shelley (including autobiographical pieces and *Frankenstein*) to focus on the connection with the 'Female Gothic' and other maternal/feminist critiques as they ground the novel. Shelley and her work within *Frankenstein* is London's biggest inspiration for pursuing writing and literary research in the academic field.

August Gladstone is a 24 year old Writer and Troubadour. An award-winning poet, he's been published by *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *No Pulp Poetry Club*, *Vagabond's Verse*, *Winged Moon*, *Vine Leaves Press* and more. As a lyricist, he's written for members of Supertramp, Crowded House and Ringo's All-Stars. August is seeking publication for his debut poetry collection which is represented by 3 Arts Entertainment. He can be found on Instagram @NormalAugust or his website AugustGladstone.com.

Aubrey Ann Hopkins is a writer by blood. She is a Cali girl with a heart for storytelling and owning birds. She's published on *Haikuniverse* and now *¡Pa'lante!*

Danelle Huggett is an English Professor, who lives in Garden Grove, CA with her husband, 2 kids, and 2 dogs. She lives and loves fiercely and writes in reflection of that.

Brenna Husband writes the weekly newsletter “Kiss Me on Tulips.” She is a former tech worker from San Diego, currently on sabbatical in Naples, Italy.

James Ph. Kotsybar, the first poet published to another planet, has verse currently orbiting Mars, aboard NASA’s MAVEN, in Hubble Space Telescope’s Mission Log, and was awarded and featured at NASA’s Centaur’s 50th Anniversary Art Challenge. He’s published in six countries and honored by the State Poetry Society of Michigan and Balticon Competitions. He read before French Troubadours at EuroScience Open Forum. He once sang William Blake’s poetry at Santa Barbara’s Victoria Hall Theater under Allen Ginsberg’s direction.

Christian Hanz Lozada wrote the poetry book *He’s a Color Until He’s Not*, and his short works have been published all over and nominated for Pushcart Prizes. Cerritos College is one of the first schools that hired him to teach and was one of the many community colleges his parents attended at night and on weekends. He lives in San Pedro, CA and uses his MFA to teach his neighbors at L.A. Harbor College.

Alejandro Martinez is a student at Gretchen Whitney High School in Cerritos, California. He is passionate about a wide range of subjects: history, technology, and more. His writing is influenced by his experiences as a student, navigating through an evolving social and political landscape. Through poetry, he is able to process the changes in his community, using it as a medium to question, reflect, and better understand the world around him.

Tom Misuraca has over 160 short stories and two novels published. His story, “Giving Up The Ghosts,” was published in *Constellations Journal* and nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 2021. His work recently appeared in *Flint Hills Review*, *The Paradox* and *The Genre Society*. He is also a multi-award winning playwright with over 170 short plays and 14 full-lengths produced globally. His musical, *Geeks!*, was produced Off-Broadway in May 2019.

Emma Nagle is a high school student at Brooks School in North Andover, Massachusetts. She lived her first 12 years in the Bay Area before moving to Singapore, and from Singapore to the East Coast. Unpublished until this point, Emma has a passion for creative writing and is eager to share her work with the world. She also loves dog-sitting for friends and family as well as handcrafting cards decorated with watercolors and calligraphy.

Priscilla Perez is a current Cerritos College student, who resides in Huntington Park. They enjoy writing whatever ideas come to mind, from the fantasy to the more mundane, but one thing is for certain, there is always heart.

Gerard Sarnat is a prize-winning poet and also a physician, Stanford University professor, and healthcare CEO. His literary work has been published by *The Buddhist Poetry Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Main Street Rag*, *New Delta Review*, *Arkansas Review*, *Hamilton-Stone Review*, *Northampton Review*, New Haven Poetry Institute, *Texas Review*, *Vonnegut Journal*, *Brooklyn Review*, *San Francisco Magazine*, *Monterey Poetry Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, and *The New York Times*, as well as by many academic presses. Read more about him at gerardsarnat.com

Maddie Louise Silva is a queer writer based in Los Angeles with work featured in *Feels Blind Literary*, *The Timberline Review*, and *Flash Fiction Magazine*. She adores her work as a program manager for a creative writing and publishing nonprofit serving students throughout Los Angeles. In her free time Maddie enjoys playing tennis, going out and about, and staying caffeinated. She can be contacted at maddielouise.com

K.B. Silver uses the art of writing to support a healing journey, regain memories of a painful past, and move on to a healthier and happier future. They are a disabled member of the California LGBTQ+ community and are striving to write from a place of acceptance and love.

Lucas Simone is a playwright from San Jose, California. He currently lives on the Southside of Chicago.

Sam Spring is best known for his songwriting work in the musical duo “Tennis Club” with their song, “Morning” eclipsing 6,000,000 plays on Spotify alone. The 28-year-old will have poetry and short fiction appearing in *Passengers Journal*, *The Wisconsin Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *Clackamas Literary Review* among others. Find his writing, music, and art here —> www.samspring.me

Nicholas Viglietti is a writer from Sacramento, CA. He rebuilt houses on the gulf coast, after Katrina, for two years. He’s lived like a bear, out on a trail crew in the Rocky Mountains. He rode a bicycle from Sac-Town to S.D. He’s partying on his seventh life, and he tries to sling beautiful sentences.

¡Pa'lante!

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For full submission guidelines and deadlines for the next issue of *¡Pa'lante!*, please visit our website at https://www.cerritos.edu/english/Literary_Journal.htm.

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Cerritos College

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