



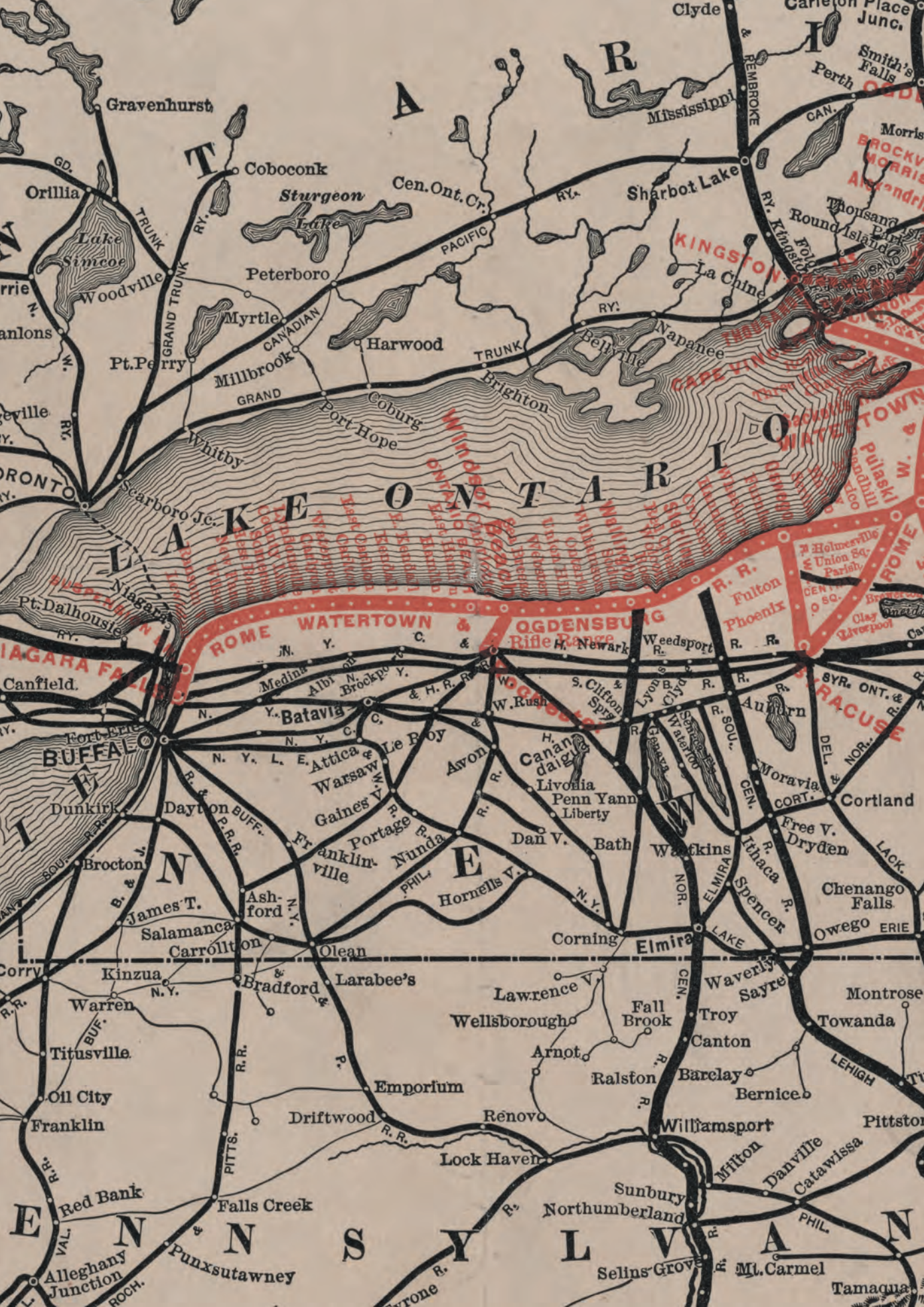
# Gandy Dancer

*A student-led literary magazine of the State University of New York*

Issue 13.1 | Fall 2024

**gandy dancer** /ˈɡɑːndi ˈdɑːnsər/ *noun*

**1.** a laborer in a railroad section gang that lays and maintains track. Origin: early 20th century; of unknown origin.





Wellington  
PAC.  
GRAND  
R.V.

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MOIRE L.  
Alburgh  
Dickinson  
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MOIRE L.  
Alburgh  
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BOSTON  
Essex  
Jc.

PHILADELPHIA  
STERLING  
VILLER

De Kalb Jc.  
Richville  
Gouveneur  
Sene's  
overp

Buck Mtn.  
Paul Smiths  
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Albion  
Kasong  
Williams T.

Richland Jc.  
Albion  
Kasong  
Williams T.

Ft. Ticonderoga  
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Baldwin

Leicester  
Junction  
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WELLS RIVER  
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Richland Jc.  
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Williams T.

Richland Jc.  
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Kasong  
Williams T.

The Glen  
Caldwells  
Glen's Falls

Whitehall  
Ft. Edward

CLAREMONT  
Keene

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North V.  
Herkimer  
Little Falls  
St. Johns V.

Johns T.  
Glovers  
Fonda

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NEW YORK  
LONG ISLAND

WATERTOWN &

WATERTOWN &

**gandy dancer** /'gɑn dē ,dɑns ɔr/ *noun* **1.** a laborer in a railroad section gang that lays and maintains track. Origin: early 20th century: of unknown origin.

We've titled our journal *Gandy Dancer* after the slang term for the railroad workers who laid and maintained the railroad tracks before the advent of machines to do this work. Most theories suggest that this term arose from the dance-like movements of the workers, as they pounded and lifted to keep tracks aligned. This was grueling work, which required the gandy dancers to endure heat and cold, rain and snow. Like the gandy dancers, writers and artists arrange and rearrange, adjust and polish to create something that allows others passage. We invite submissions that forge connections between people and places and, like the railroad, bring news of the world.

*Gandy Dancer* is published biannually in the spring and fall by the State University of New York College at Geneseo. Issues of *Gandy Dancer* are freely available for view or download from [gandydancer.org](http://gandydancer.org), and print copies are available for purchase. Special thanks to the College at Geneseo's Department of English and Milne Library for their support of this publication.

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We publish writing and visual art by current students and alumni of the State University of New York (SUNY) campuses only.

Our Postscript section features work by SUNY alumni. We welcome nominations from faculty and students as well as direct submissions from alumni themselves. Faculty can email Rachel Hall, faculty advisor, at [hall@geneseo.edu](mailto:hall@geneseo.edu) with the name and email address for the alum they wish to nominate, and alums can submit through our website. Both nominations and direct submissions should indicate which SUNY the writer attended, provide a graduation date, and the name and email of a faculty member we can contact for confirmation.

We use Submittable to manage submissions and the editorial process. Prospective authors can submit at [gandydancer.submittable.com/submit](http://gandydancer.submittable.com/submit). Please use your SUNY email address for your user account and all correspondence.

*Gandy Dancer* will accept up to three submissions from an author at a time.

**FICTION:** We accept submissions up to 25 pages. Stories must be double-spaced. We are unlikely to accept genre or fan-fiction.

**CREATIVE NONFICTION:** We accept submissions up to 25 pages. CNF must be double-spaced.

**POETRY:** Three to five poems equal one submission. Poems must be submitted as a single document. Format as you would like to see them in print. Our text columns are generally 4.5 inches wide, at 11pt font.

**VISUAL ART:** We accept submissions of art—especially photos, drawings, and paintings—in the file formats jpeg, tiff, and png. Submitted images should have a minimum resolution of 300 dpi and be at least 5 inches wide. Please include work titles and mediums in your submissions.

Please visit us at [www.gandydancer.org](http://www.gandydancer.org), or scan the qr code below.

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*Special thanks to: the Parry family and Lucia LoTempio.*

# Dear Readers,

We are extremely honored and excited to be a part of this issue's *Gandy Dancer*. As it is our first semester as Managing Editors, 13.1 feels extra special. We are so thankful for the work *Gandy Dancer's* staff has done in order to make this issue happen, and for the writers and artists who trusted us with their work. This issue catches us—readers and staff alike—during an enormous period of transition. In the wake of the most recent election, and amidst uncertainty and fear, we are looking to art to sustain us.

Poet and former *Gandy Dancer* editor, Luica LoTempio, was on campus recently and her workshop and reading reminded us of art's transformative nature, how darkness can grow into something beautiful. An interview with LoTempio and a review of her book concludes this issue and we hope that it is both informative and inspiring.

The fiction in this edition of *Gandy Dancer* offers us solace by suspending us in new realities. In Kaiser Kelly's "Clearing," ambiguity leads to clarity and we are told a story that gently toes the line between poetry and prose. Bruso's characters long to reach a clearing in the forest, and find that it is both unlike their expectations and exceeds them. Their fear was justified, but no longer needed. Kelly writes: "We were sacrificing ourselves to warnings of the past, to dangers that no longer lurked behind the trunks. We saw all now as it was in these fresh grasses." This story urges us to look outside ourselves as the characters do the same, journeying to a place they have yearned for, and to think about the consequences of both running and staying where we are.

Zoe LaVallee's "Inherited Survival" navigates the complexities of time and familial ties. She writes, "time dances like grinding metal and sings like bullets. We hide but do not escape. We scream in silence." She thinks through heritage, circumstance, and time beautifully, without hesitation. "Head-On" by Alex Fisher considers time in a similar way, writing: "go west down on thirty-nine for an hour, / almost exactly / an *hour*, / like clockwork, / every time." The piece is exhaustive in its consideration of what ifs and repetition. The narrator knows their routine, knows what is expected of them, and learns that there is pleasure in those schedules and patterns being broken, in exploring what is beyond.

The poetry in this issue highlights the strength of our bodies, reminds us that they are our own, and yet also inextricably tied to the environment around us. In Giulyana Gamero's "to the journal i carry (like a burden)," the speaker compares their body to a "living and breathing conch shell." "my second daughter refused to come out at birth" by Liz Ann Young carries a

reader through the process of giving birth, and explores how the speaker “taught / the crickets. / Screamed, / keened / until the crows pleaded with [her] *enough*.”

Though poetry is often thought of as illusive, these poems stabilize and ground us, despite what Ken Dukes Jr. refers to as “the world’s uncontrollable / unraveling around us” in his “Talk Like Trees.” We’re brought together through the universality of metaphor, through the act of creating meaning. Kelli Charland’s poem, “THIS LIFE OF MINE,” explores exactly that. She writes, “My girl, she calls, / what’s this life of yours / about?” You will find the art in this issue encourages this self-reflection. It is a mirror.

The visual art in this issue plays an important role in this conversation. Isabell Mathew’s “Control” shows an unnerving image of hands grabbing at the face and head of a person, prodding around the subject’s mouth and nose, one red tear falling. This drawing conveys the anxieties many of us share as we face an uncertain future.

*Gandy Dancer* recognizes that we’re a single organism, completely attached at the hips. What affects one of us affects us all. This journal lets us think through our heartache, our joy, the never ending cycle between the two. Crack open the spine and read along with us.

Sincerely,  
Mollie McMullan and Jordyn Stinar

# Table of Contents

Dear Readers	vii
<b>FICTION</b>	
Amy Nicol	
<i>Allure</i>	4
Kaiser Kelly	
<i>Clearing</i>	20
Amanda Puchalski	
<i>Season's Grievings</i>	67
<b>CREATIVE NONFICTION</b>	
Alex Fisher	
<i>Head-On</i>	12
Zoe LaVallee	
<i>Inherited Survival</i>	25
Sean Novak	
<i>The Way of the Cone</i>	61
<b>POETRY</b>	
Hannah Fuller	
<i>Things My Mother and I Don't Talk About</i>	1
<i>Aquarius</i>	3
James Dowling	
<i>Long Island</i>	17
Audrey Redmond	
<i>our rot</i>	18
Ken Dukes Jr.	
<i>Talk Like Trees</i>	21
Kiel M. Gregory	
<i>This Is What I Know</i>	29
Giulyana Gamero	
<i>to the journal i carry (like a burden)</i>	36



Liz Ann Young	
<i>missed miscarriage</i>	39
<i>my second daughter refused to come out at birth</i>	41
<i>ode to an old farmhouse in the rain</i>	44
Kelli Charland	
<i>SILT HAS COLLECTED IN MY CELLS</i>	49
<i>TRAVEL-SIZED MAP TO THE ANTIDOTE FOR MISERY</i>	51
<i>THIS LIFE OF MINE</i>	53
Katie Penna	
<i>Chandelier</i>	57
<i>(Language)</i>	59
Wrendolyn Klotzko	
<i>How to Keep Secrets Like a Telephone Booth</i>	63
<b>ART</b>	
Isabell Mathew	
<i>Control</i>	11
Quinn Youngs	
<i>Remembering</i>	19
Animus Zhang	
<i>A Lost Child</i>	24
Sophia Turturro	
<i>Morphogenetic Space</i>	31
<i>Indelible</i>	32
<i>Postulate</i>	33
<i>Mundane Harm</i>	34
<i>Unpleasant Memory</i>	35
Noah Bonesteel	
<i>Rootscape with Fish and Columbine</i>	46
<i>Across the Water</i>	47
<i>Waiting</i>	48

Meghan McMullan	
<i>The Jester Deity</i>	55
<i>Rick's Dwelling</i>	56
<i>Ladycave</i>	65
<i>The Magician's Lounge</i>	66
<b>BOOK REVIEW</b>	
Mollie McMullan	
<i>Hot With The Bad Things: A Review</i>	73
<b>INTERVIEWS</b>	
Jordyn Stinar	
<i>An Interview with Lucia LoTempio</i>	77
<b>POSTSCRIPT</b>	
Kelly Facenda	
<i>Look, She's Gone</i>	82
<i>I Gather the Fawns</i>	83
<i>Jupiter</i>	84
<b>ABOUT THE AUTHORS</b>	86

COVER PHOTO: Flower Farm Relics (digital collage), Meghan McMullan

# **Gandy Dancer**



# Things My Mother and I Don't Talk About

Mother taught me to linger in doorways.  
Assess intent. Always sleep with one eye open.  
Suffer immensely.

I wonder if she knows how long I've carried this. I still do.  
Sleep evades me. There's a guillotine under my eyelids instead.

Are we so obsessed with messy hearts?  
Spilling pink matter onto paper,  
onto sidewalks,  
onto oncoming passerby.

Who decides when we've endured enough?  
Cosmic fingertips plucking us up by  
shirt collars. We are covered in shards of glass  
that we've renamed Love.

Mother taught me to be inconspicuous and  
calculating both.

To give my heart but never said to whom.  
She bleeds pink. I stay awake.

# Aquarius

I read your palms in my dreams. Your hands are soft. They rest in mine like a bird on a branch. Temporary. Ready to take off. The lines are deep. The heart line is straight. I think this means you don't love me. I think this means that you never can.

I do not ask the time that you were born. I know you were born in February and that is mostly enough for me. The cold months make the most independent babies. I think it's something to do with survival. Maybe Uranus and her radical change. Calves, shins, ankles. I think you'd laugh at me asking either way.

I wonder if you care what my palms look like. How the sky looked when I was born. If my hands are steady or shaky. I think this means I'm in love with you. I think this means I always will be.

I wake up to the sound of you shifting—moving farther into the distance.

# Allure

“I heard that one was good,” said Liz, pointing to the lipstick in Stephanie’s hand. She’d picked up the lipstick mostly to have something to do with her hands. So far she’d picked up an eye shadow palette, a perfume bottle in the shape of a beer can, and a foundation for middle schoolers called Glow Job only to put them back on their shelves.

Stephanie nodded, but ultimately considered this trip a failure. She didn’t know what she was expecting, dragging her younger sister to this asylum-white makeup store. She felt in her bones the purpose was to gain something more than a headache and sweat under her brow.

Stephanie opened the cap of the lipstick she was holding to look at the color. She hadn’t looked at the color before, but now she felt like she couldn’t justify putting it back on its shelf without at least giving it a closer look. Maybe she would even rub the glossy finish on the inside of her wrist to feel the comforting moisture of the product.

The color was clearly red, practically the same red as the three other lipsticks in the row. Yet, when she looked at it closely enough she could see that there was no orange hue; she loathed nothing more than an orange hue. This might’ve been a useless detail to someone else, but it made her more curious so she looked closer. The lipstick was practically out of its tube and pressed against her eyeball at this point. Subconsciously she knew this was not how people picked out lipsticks, but if she didn’t look this closely, how would she be able to detect the shine and almost glittery aspect of the color? Stephanie didn’t like glitter; she couldn’t think of one thing in her drab wardrobe that had glitter in it. Still, she didn’t think she had ever seen something so mesmerizing in her life.

“I guess you like it,” her sister said, laughing.



“Yeah, it’s nice.” Stephanie looked at Liz and found her staring at her. “What?”

“No, it’s just—” She laughed again. “You’re smiling at it like a maniac.”

Stephanie responded by gazing at it once more.

“You know, you could try it on.”

Stephanie looked at her reflection in the mirror with the shade close to her lips. She applied it slowly, enjoying the easy application. She felt as if the pigment was being trapped in the grooves of her skin. As she noticed the transformation, she felt herself smiling. Then she stopped, careful not to crease the artwork she had created.

“Allure,” said Liz.

Stephanie was awoken from her spell and looked over at her sister. She was examining the box that it came in; it was shiny and new, unlike the tube with the peeling *Try Me!* sticker. “What?” Stephanie asked.

“That’s what the color is called,” Liz said, giving her the brand new box. “Cool right?”

“Yeah,” Stephanie said, curling her fingers around her new favorite toy. “I like that.”

Stephanie marched in the front door without Liz. Liz had dropped Stephanie off at home before driving to her friend’s house for a party. Sometimes this made Stephanie jealous, but tonight she didn’t care. She had plans of her own.

“What’d you buy?” Stephanie’s mother asked from the dinner table, still on her work computer.

“Just lipstick,” she said, shrugging her shoulders.

“Did you use your debit? Because I’m not putting any more money in your account until next month.”

“Liz paid for me,” she murmured.

Her mother closed the computer.

“She offered, I didn’t ask,” Stephanie explained quickly.

“Stephanie, do you think it’s appropriate for a seventeen-year-old girl to buy something for her twenty-year-old sister on a trip to the mall where she drove them?” her mother asked.

“I don’t know. She wasn’t upset about it.”

“Of course not, because this happens all the time. We’ve been having this same conversation for years. I was fine that you didn’t want to go to school. I didn’t understand it, but I accepted it. Now you’ve been sitting in my house doing nothing for two years. Your sister is going away next year. She’s taking her car with her, and her debit card.” Her mother pinched the bridge of her nose and closed her eyes. “Do something; get a job, get a license, go to school, something.” Stephanie’s mother sighed. “You need to get out of this house.”

I don't even know what you do all day. I can hear you buzzing around your room. I feel you going stir crazy."

"Okay," Stephanie said, her mind far away from this conversation. "I'm going to my room." She left before her mother could say another word.

Usually, when Stephanie took home any kind of makeup product, it sat in the family bathroom, free for the whole house to use. Eventually, it got used by Liz, which was fine with Stephanie since she didn't really intend to use it. But this time was going to be different. Allure didn't deserve the same fate as all the others; *she* was different. Stephanie would be different for using *her*.

Stephanie looked in the mirror at her canvas. Even though she had never even thought about it before, all she could see was the hair. The thin blond hair, almost translucent, covered every inch of surface area from her cheeks to her chin; the thick hair in between and encircling her eyebrows, creeping in all different directions because she'd never bothered to do anything about it.

The worst was the hair on her upper lip. At the store, she was too distracted by Allure's beauty, but now she wondered how she could bear to see such perfection so close to the distractingly dark peach fuzz above her cupid's bow.

Stephanie wrapped Allure into her favorite tank top with no stains and tucked it into her dresser. "I'll be back for you," she promised Allure, "when I'm ready, when I'm good enough for you."

She crept to the upstairs bathroom across from her room, which wasn't really necessary since her mother had probably reopened her computer and was grinding away downstairs. Yet it did feel exciting to be doing something secret, just for *her*. She ventured into the medicine cabinet to find Liz's waxing strips. Liz had offered to teach her how to do it once. Stephanie told her she was scared of the pain, but now nothing could stop her.

She found a box with a picture of a hairless woman on it next to a pot of thick yellow liquid. Inside, there were at least ten pairs of finger-sized wax papers with honey-colored substance in between them. She rubbed her hands together with the strip in between her palms like the box said. The sound of the wax paper rubbing together and the smell of the wax warming up sent Stephanie's brain signals of impending doom. As she listened to the sticky sound as the strips peeled apart from each other she started to panic, but this would all be worth it for *her*.

Stephanie looked in the mirror and tried to align the wax with the unwanted hair above her lips. She placed a strip onto one side of her lip, already feeling the tugging of each individual hair that she'd neglected all her life. She smoothed down the area, warning her skin for the pain it awaited.

"One," Stephanie whispered, taking a deep breath. "Two." *Why am I doing this?* "Three." *For her*. She ripped the strip off, feeling every hair struggling to cling onto her skin to no avail. She doubled over and reflexively reached to her upper lip and started to scratch, only to feel the sensitive skin burn under

her fingernails. Stephanie looked into the mirror excited for the fresh new face that awaited her, but instead of seeing a smoothed beautiful stretch of skin, she saw a red bumpy upper lip. She went closer to the mirror to make sure all the hair was off, but there were still at least two strands of hair right in the middle of the patch.

“Fuck,” she whispered. She took a deep breath and looked back in the mirror, at the stubborn hair that would ruin perfect Allure.

She knew she had to do another round in the same spot to get the rest of the hairs off. It needed to be just perfect for *her*. Stephanie picked up the other side of the strip and repeated the same process. She felt her skin sting from putting the wax on. She didn't feel resistance yet because she didn't have enough hair to even feel a tug. She ripped it off again and muffled a cry of pain. She leaned over the skin to check her progress and the hairs were removed. All that was left was skin; bright pink and burning to the touch, but she would fix that later. Stephanie smiled; she already felt closer to *her*.

By the time she finished off all twenty wax papers, her entire upper lip and chin were hairless. The unwanted hair around her eyebrows was also removed. So was the bottom half of her left brow and the tail end of her right brow, but she would fix that. Stephanie would fix it the same way she would fix the red damaged skin the wax left in its wake: with Liz's makeup bag.

Inside Liz's bag were two kinds of liquid foundation and one little sponge. One was darker than the other and she decided that the darker one would cover up the redness better while the lighter one could fix the acne on her forehead. She dug deeper for something to fix the eyebrows. She'd seen drawn-on eyebrows; thick luxurious ones and razor-sharp ones and drawn-on peach fuzz. Which one would Allure prefer? She found a tube of mascara and opened it to see a brush that circled the tip of the stick. She vaguely remembered that mascara was usually used for eyelashes, but they were made of the same hair, so what was the difference? She'd start with the liquid foundation. She squirted the darker one onto the sponge and used her finger to spread it around. Then she rubbed the sponge onto the redness caused by the hair removal. She was surprised she couldn't hear the sizzle from the burning sensation on her skin. She rubbed it in harder, trying to itch the redness while also covering it up. Every time she rubbed it harder it only got more irritated, which made her want to rub harder.

Stephanie thought of her mother telling her not to pick at her mosquito bites. She thought about the painful scabs that appeared on her legs the morning after mutilating the bites in her sleep. She thought of her sister's smooth legs, which were never being bitten so she didn't have to resist itching them. She could sleep soundly while Stephanie clawed at her skin during a fitful night's sleep.

She pounded the foundation in her skin as hard as she could stand. She looked in the mirror. There were fingerprints on her face from rubbing in the foundation with her hands instead of the sponge. The foundation, just a little too dark for her skin, was patchy and haphazard on her face. Not good enough for *her*.

Good thing there was a whole other bottle of foundation.

Stephanie squeezed out the lighter foundation on the same sponge as the darker one. Instead of the two colors blending to make something more similar to her face, they overlapped and swirled around each other in a pool of liquid complexion. Stephanie looked at the sponge for a moment, mesmerized.

*Please make this look good enough for her*, she prayed.

She prepared to smooth out the bumps of acne that littered her forehead. The acne was raised and came in all different sizes. What she really needed was something to smooth down her skin so her entire face was level. She could get sandpaper and sand it down, or maybe a knife to cut off all the unwanted texture.

Stephanie looked in the mirror once again. *Still not good enough*, she thought. The final touch must be the eyebrows. They were the darkest parts of her face, what stood out the most, at least until she put on Allure.

If Stephanie was in an observational mood, she might've noticed that the mascara she was planning on using was much darker than the color of her eyebrows, which were dark brown and sticking out in all directions. Since she wasn't in the mood to focus on that kind of thing, Stephanie decided to proceed without caution and unsheathed the brush from its bottle.

The action of brushing all her eyebrow hairs in one direction was definitely the most soothing of all her makeup endeavors, but was also the least satisfying. Through the night she had learned that the more something makes you burn, itch, or cringe, the more necessary it was. That's what Allure had taught her; it's what everyone in the world knew but her. Her whole life Stephanie had chased comfort. She had lived in a state of inertia for twenty years waiting for something to go right. Little did she know that this is what she was supposed to be doing all this time; she was supposed to be changing from the girl she was to the woman she was destined to be. The "girl" version of her was useless, a disappointing waste of space. The "woman" version of her was going to be different. Some people were born knowing how to be a woman—Liz knew, her mother knew—and now it was Stephanie's turn.

As she brushed the last stroke of the mascara onto her eyebrow, she started to hum. A quiet ladylike hum that would come from a Disney princess, or a female CEO, or an evil queen, one of those.

Stephanie backed away from the mirror. Her face was two different colors, three if you included her neck. The hair that was left on her face was patchy

and uneven. Her eyebrows looked greasy and villainous instead of elegant and regal.

It was all wrong.

She felt a loud grunt come out of her throat.

“Stephanie, what is it?”

Allure would hate it, she knew it. Unless this is what she wanted. Stephanie started to laugh.

“Stephanie, are you alright?”

Stephanie ran to her dresser. She slowed down enough to unwrap *her*. This is exactly what Allure wanted, she wanted to be the star of the show. Stephanie could never look good without Allure. Allure could make Stephanie perfect. Allure could make Stephanie beautiful.

Stephanie uncovered the lipstick. She closed her eyes and smeared as much product onto her lips as possible. After she had already gone over her lips twice, she started circling around her lips until it went up to her nose, almost in the nostril. Stephanie opened her eyes and looked at the mirror.

“Stephanie, should I come up there?”

Wrong. It was all wrong. Her face was wrong? Her hair was wrong? Her smile was wrong? Allure was wrong? No, Allure couldn't be wrong. Everything else was wrong. Stephanie didn't deserve Allure, not even a smudge of her. What was Allure to do since no one was worthy of her beauty?

Stephanie took the lipstick tube into her room. Her eyes scanned everything she had ever owned. All of it was ugly, ugly, ugly. Everything needed Allure, nothing was worthy of Allure. She started with her clothes. Each piece of clothing got an undeserved taste of Allure. Stephanie went through each item in her dresser, then turned her attention towards her bed. What better place for Allure to live than Stephanie's bed? The place where she spent all her time lying down and dreaming of a better life. Allure would help. Stephanie drew swirls onto her comforter, then her pillows, then her sheets.

Stephanie had to twist the lipstick tube more. Stephanie needed more, more than Allure could ever provide. She went over each of her walls and blessed each corner with a smear of Allure's perfection.

“Stephanie, what the hell are you doing?”

Stephanie turned around and saw her mother standing in her doorway, sneering at the room. She stood there with her uneven wrinkled face, her wicked sneer, her undereye bags, and how she dared to question Allure.

Her mother needed Allure too.

Stephanie lunged at her mother, and knocked her over, so her head hit the wood floor of the hallway. Her mother would thank her later when she was conscious. She needed Allure just as badly as Stephanie did, they all needed Allure.

Stephanie drew Allure onto her mother's lips; round and round went Allure. It was working, her mother started to transform. Stephanie dipped inside her mother's mouth to give her tongue some much-needed pigment. Her mother needed more, more, more. It wasn't enough, not even close. Stephanie shoved the tube of lipstick down her mother's throat.



*Control* (ink and marker on paper), Isabell Mathew

# Head-On

## *Copper Wires & the Horseless Carriage*

Because **fear.**  
 Because you aren't grounded—are you.  
 Because what is your life without making *something*; leaving some-  
*thing* behind to prove a life was lived. Because any day could send you  
 slip-sliding to Hell; in a split second—  
 Because tomorrow (a tomorrow) the doctor will deliver a fatal diagnosis—  
 three months, three weeks—and it was under your skin all along;  
festering,  
 and you ignored it,  
 (you told you to)

Because you're a hypocrite, but at least you can see that.

Because last September you thought you were in love (but it's the  
 other 'L' word);  
 you kissed a silhouette (he was *your* silhouette) embroiled in shadow;  
 romance forbidden by nothing except the ghosts of your small-town; and  
 your twin-size bed fit two over six feet; and you wrapped your fingers around  
 his and kneaded hair and shut the blinds because you're on the *first floor*.  
 Because you can name every country by its silhouette; memorized  
 them; and he could name none; missed Mexico, missed Germany, but  
 you didn't poke fun,  
 so as to not give an **ick?**

Because you helped with geology homework (not geography, that's a  
 lost cause) and because 'you're a sweet guy' and he cracked (you cracked) your



concrete-laden titanium shell open and got to the soul language; festering languid inside; because Blue Devil Lounge and because he changed your life with two words—

“don’t think”

Someone gave Grandpa an old shitbox from the nineties and he (selflessly) bequeathed it to you. The hubcaps were the biggest you’d ever owned. It ran loyal—that Acura—and you loved its flaws/quirks (but not your own) Because the AC worked part-time Because the exhaust invaded the cabin sometimes and your ‘friends’ noticed before you Because no forest of yellow pines could kill that ancient smell.

Because you (once afraid to touch a steering wheel), drove *yourself* to college,  
Mom **worried** sick (Dad hiding it better);  
one-handed became one-fingered (don’t think); you called it your ‘straight-shot’,  
(sure, straight)  
go west down on thirty-nine for an hour,  
almost exactly  
an *hour*,  
like clockwork,  
every time.

Because you fell so

hard

and so fast

you needed (to see) him  
that day,  
the first day, actually

grass sprawled out beneath tangled hearts; fingertips inches apart; swapping  
cells; (or that's what it felt like);  
a few dozen stars, and Venus, peering through heavy light pollution  
at two *maybe* star-crossed,  
*maybe*, lovers  
he wanted more before it started;

a direct, untethered line to  
you.

Because the practice rooms are for music  
and you showcased yours;  
your half-baked symphonies and four-note soliloquy (you can't even pro-  
nounce that)  
And you played Orange Pyramid; but you didn't tell him the following:

A) You stole the chords  
B) You wrote it about your last crush

The lyrics: nonsense;

"Orange pyramid, padlocked in the desert of my thoughts,  
"A sarcophagus of broken loves and love-me-nots"  
Or maybe not nonsense.

You tell me,

you  
wrote it.

Because all you could think about while snuggled up in (your) blan-  
ket on (his) bed was  
"I don't *deserve* this" because,  
because,  
because you couldn't explain why.  
then he said it; "don't think."

A nothing saying

changed you.

Because April 3rd is your brother's birthday;  
Because you drove home for the weekend;  
Because you knew the straight shot like the back of your hand  
Because freezing rain polishes blacktop  
Because thick drops splattered against your windshield

Because you took that turn at fifty-five, don't think, too late,  
for a second you'd never see fifty-five,  
Because your life flashed  
(birthdaysfuneralsdinnersbreakfastsgraduationshospitalsbirthpublication-  
sweddingsvacations)  
Because your car veered toward that guard rail, your heart bursting at the  
seams  
Because you practically tore the steering wheel out of the dashboard, turning  
left  
**panicking** back, but

Your headlight detonated, shrieked of shattered glass, you were flung forward,  
sternum smashing into the steering wheel, passenger airbag deployed, yours  
didn't, cabin filled with smoke; although, not exhaust this time, but the car's  
dying breath; you'd hit your chest; hard, felt broken, breathing short, long,  
the telephone wire watched on, you tried to back up; there would never be  
another shift to reverse, never another shift to neutral, never another parallel  
park job and never another Fredonia Parking sticker; never, never, never, at  
least not with this, this crumpled, desolate, damaged heap,  
a wreck.

(It was all so unexpected. This was one of the many dangers of the  
horseless carriage)

Because you nursed (forced) yourself back to health by run-  
ning; (always running) until your doctor told you running could collapse  
you(r lung), but you had to do something, be something. So you—  
So you *what?*

So you dove headfirst, (brain second); taking a rusted axe to your  
breaker box as you  
pressed your lips so tightly against it (him)  
An acceleration,  
an emotional a static charge;  
detonation—

high voltage adrenaline  
grounded you;  
knocked you back (~~i really like you, you're a  
sweet guy~~)  
into your rubberized veins

you left so much behind, there (where you can never go again);  
there is not an alternative; it's direct  
all concurrent  
just  
a frayed copper wire without an end cap  
Because you never thought that would happen to you.

# Long Island

Maybe it is just me experiencing the liminal space between hypomania and the crash, or maybe my nerve endings have been blunted, mutant anhedonia, but the sky and air tonight tinges nostalgia that I want to feel but I can't for various reasons, but you died and maybe I should be glad you're dead so you can't see who I've become, what we have all become, little techno shamans, little Eichmans, yes, I am in my car, not near the ocean but close enough to smell seaweed, the dead fish carried on the breeze, sensuality fled years ago, it's a distant memory, cars go by, people buy their bagels, asphalt molts in the twilight sun and I think about your flesh and how it is rotten, how we sloughed off identities like dermatitis ridden skin, I'm glad you don't have to sit in traffic, your eyes haven't gone blurry from the blue light, eyes no longer fastened to your pupils, no more do you feel digital rape, I'm jealous, even if I have no one to talk to.

AUDREY REDMOND

## our rot

a phallic symbol of death  
nudges me to get out while i still can.  
biting and kicking below the surface.  
gnawing on life so ferally  
until my dolphin smile is kicked in.

the days used to be an idyllic heaven.  
red cadillac seats covered in sticky sweat.  
the peaches were always ripe.  
my insides still smelled like lavender.  
i was an angel until i screamed.

now i think something is rotting  
from the inside out.

maybe there was something wrong.  
an unfixable thing deep under my flesh.  
but you said that's how it is out west.  
*everything is dying if it isn't already dead.*

so, yes, you are well on your way.  
rotting from the inside out.



*Remembering* (digital photograph), Quinn Youngs

# Clearing

We had spent our lives running, it seemed, to this outstretched clearing in the forest. No birds sang there, inside the trees. Simply crawling beetles burrowed into our socks, bug bites littering our skin. But we could hear them, those bright songs upon slender beaks. So we ran.

When we reached the clearing, it did not feel true. We kept looking for those bugs, yet only the bites persisted. As they faded, we found ourselves watching our skin, searching for that strange old sensation that we had woven into our bones. Nothing came, that fire of disobedience, the fear of taking too long. We were sacrificing ourselves to warnings of the past, to dangers that no longer lurked behind the trunks. We saw all now as it was in these fresh grasses. The shimmering creek, the burbling creasing over smoothed stones. The odd new animals that eyed us from far away, their pelts glistening under the warmth of the sun. The breeze, finally the breeze brushing away days of sorrow. And the bird song, oh the bird song.

How sweet it sounded outside of the forest. For it was everything to be true to our ragged ears, just as it was in our fondest dreams. They sang us to sleep, under the pinpricks of stars dancing into stories. They woke us at the sun's zenith, time allusion to our whims. They sang to us during our days of dance and storytelling, new memories to be formed, songs to sway alongside them.

The realization of our arrival came sudden, crashing as sheets of summer storms across the soil. We were here, it seemed, unfamiliar in this new soft place. But we were us, finally. We were safe.



# Talk Like Trees

*Parking lot, Delaware County Behavioral Health Building, October 12, 2022*

I worry about  
the mostly dead maple being  
Swiss cheesed by  
proud pileated woodpeckers.

&

our Honda's grinding squeal and  
if it might heal.

&

porting my cell number  
from Straight Talk to Mint Wireless.

I worry about  
sketch of life haikus being  
16 & 18 syllables long.

&

the mass deaths of swimming crabs  
on Zanzibar beaches.

&

the world's uncontrollable  
unraveling around us.

I worry about  
our children's existence  
without us.

&

this hallelujah holy roller handshake deal  
we've consummated with our Creator.

&

a time when our collective  
health fails.

I worry about  
you being taken before me and  
solo sunsets without the  
heavenly blissful whispers  
of your song's smile.

Who'll name the

stars for me?

Who'll protect me from

gravity's pull?

Who'll hold silvery

twilight seances to recall me?

Who'll save me from

me?

Fingertips swoosh across

the back of my hand.

Instantly turning,

yearning,

my heart melts into

the warmth of

your loving palm.

Mindful mingling fingers

mesh to create an enduring

dovetail joint.

We talk like

trees.

All I worry about

vanishes.

This moment is

now,  
us & beautiful.



*A Lost Child [1]* (photograph), Animus Zhang

# Inherited Survival

My grandfather should have been shot in a foxhole in Vietnam before my father was born. Before he was even a concept. Before the idea of his life was something to perceive. Before my grandfather met the woman who saw demons long before war gifted him his own and made her into a mother.

The photo created in my memory's eye is torn at the edges. I heard this story long ago. I remember the ashes but not the flame. For this reason, I will assemble backward.

Four soldiers are positioned in a foxhole, rifles resting on the ground's lip like a lazy kiss. They are quiet. Solemn. It is so, so dark. There is no wind, no rustling of leaves, no crunch of boots or grind of metal. The men feel the ache of their heels and knees from crouching so low in the hole that stank of earth rot and blood and dried-up shit. They grimace at the pressure forming above their bladders. What little water they have consumed already searching for an escape from their war-torn, toxic bodies.

Two of the soldiers shift. They need to relieve themselves. Begrudgingly, their limbs unfold and they drag themselves up and out of the mouth of the foxhole. The whale spitting out a sanguine leg.

The men prowl quickly to the grove of gnarled trees. One soldier unzips his pants and urinates onto the gray dirt while the other keeps watch. They switch, zip back up, and slide smoothly back to their foxhole.

The stench of death does not hit them. There has not been enough time for the scattered bits of skull and brain to marinate. The two soldiers in the hole are still crouched forward on their knees. On the back of their heads are matching wounds, small and cylindrical and red.

They are not crouched but keeled. Keeled over and dead.

In the five minutes my grandfather took to piss behind a tree, his comrades had been shot. The enemy had spotted two soldiers in a foxhole, teasing its muzzle with their loaded rifles. Swift and silent, the enemy took aim. The bullets did not whistle as they worked through bone, fluid, and flesh. They were deft, straight, cold assassins. They knew how to kill in the quiet folds of war.

I used to think about this story a lot. It is how I first learned about timing. Not punctuality nor scheduling, but the dark mirages and chest-clutching twists of Time's ebony cloak. How, if my grandfather had not gotten up at that precise moment to empty his bladder behind a tree in Vietnam, he would have been shot in a fetid hole and left for the foxes. How, if he had left earlier or come back later, perhaps he would have had his throat slit from behind. Drowning in blood instead of being drained, drop by drop, through a third eye drilled into his forehead. Sticky rivers trailing between his eyes, soaking over the bridge of his nose, and leaving a final crimson kiss across parted, chapped lips.

My grandfather should have been shot in a foxhole in Vietnam.

My father should not have been born.

I should not have been born.

Where would I be if not here? Someone refuses to tell me. My ball of yarn is continuously knit.

I should have been engulfed in splintered metal and burning rubber before I reached high school.

Before I was ever kissed. Before I learned to swallow pills that took my pain and with it my poetry. Before I grew up and wished I didn't.

This photo is not charred at the edges. I remember this story.

My mother is driving out of the school parking lot. She flicks on her blinker, signaling right down Market Street instead of left towards home. One of the bus drivers, John, waves at us in his rearview mirror. My mother and I are leaving school late, and he has finished his bus route. He smiles and drives off in his comically small red car. For a man large in both presence and stature, he looks cramped in the bright cherry vehicle. I squint through the snowflakes as he drives down Market. I am reminded of a dot of blood at the tip of an index finger.

I have decided I want to play on an indoor soccer team, or at the very least try it out. Of course, it had nothing to do with the blond boy I was in love

with telling me I should come. I unzip my book bag as my mother asks if I have everything I need. Water bottle, check. Shin guards, check. Sneakers... I look down at the brown boots warming my toes. It is February and everything is icy and cold and leached of color. It is barely 4:00 p.m. and the sun is already too cold to stay above her covers.

My mother is annoyed. She pulls the car over and flips around. We head back towards the house; luckily we hadn't gone too far, and we drive around the corner of Adirondack and John's Brook.

I rush inside and grab my forgotten sneakers. My brief visit inside offers little reprieve from the biting cold. Heat seeks escape from every corner of the narrow, one-story structure. My little sister's room becomes so bitter that we huddle together in my room to keep warm at night. Clouds of breath weasel out the door as I open it and bolt back to the car. I am careful not to slip on the icy walkway. I have lived here long enough to know the ice is sneaky, only reflecting its danger when stabbed purposefully with light.

My mother backs out of the driveway and nudges the car carefully down the quickly disappearing road. The snow is coming down hard, concealing the cracked asphalt tucked between blanketed trees. She puts on her headlights and wipers and we fight our way through the encroaching dusk.

We do not get far. My mother's knuckles on the wheel match the pasty color of the snow she is pushing through. She looks worried. The weather is especially bellicose tonight, threatening to consume anything in its path and bury it under flaky iron.

After about twenty minutes, we come to a slow, slippery halt. A pickup truck is horizontal on the road. On the right side, pushed over the lip of the ivory-painted asphalt, is a car crumpled up like a tin can.

"Is that John's car?" My mother asks. She puts her hand to her mouth. "Oh my god, that's John's car." Her blue eyes grow even wider than usual. I can hear her thoughts. *Please please please please.*

I can admit now that I felt a bit excited. I had always imagined tragedy with myself at its center. It made me feel important. I could have a story to tell.

My mother eases our car up to the left of the red car. She gets out of the car and runs over to his window. I watch from mine.

Blood trails from John's temple. That is the image I remember. I remember crying soundlessly in the passenger seat. I remember my mother talking to John and then to the cops. I remember her calling John's wife. I remember how she started the conversation with "Everything is okay, but John has been in an accident." I remember her telling me that you always have to tell someone everything is alright when delivering bad news (unless, of course, it isn't) so they can listen to what you are saying without panicking. I remember thinking back to that moment a few years later when my grandmother woke

me up by telling me my father was in the hospital, and that she seemed to enjoy making me wait to hear if he was okay. I remember that I did not go to my soccer game. I remember turning around and going home. I remember we got a cheese pizza for dinner. I remember it just being my parents and me that night, my little sister was at a sleepover. I remember feeling very grown up to be talking with my parents about what I witnessed; very grown up to have been a part of something people would be talking about the next day. I remember we watched *The Parent Trap* and my mother played with my hair. I remember that it was warm.

I do not remember when, whether it was a few days later or sometime in the following weeks, my mother realized what could have happened had I not forgotten my sneakers. We were right behind John. I remembered his smile and the wave of his hand in the red car's mirror. Would we have been hit too? Would my mother and I have been the ones with blood pouring from our temples? Would we have sat paralyzed in our torn seats while first responders disassembled the twisted metal holding us captive?

Wine-colored roses in a cage of thorns.

My grandfather had to pee. I forgot my sneakers.

He did not get shot in the back of the head. I did not crack my skull after getting rammed by a pickup truck sliding across the ice.

Time dances like grinding metal and sings like bullets. We hide but do not escape. We scream in silence.

Our quilts unravel and we are buried in the folds.



# This Is What I Know

*a cento\* for LD, who asked me to write this poem*

I am the next, the one more, another who hasn't heard you,  
and all I can feel are your earnest eyes:  
stubborn sun,  
choosing to rise,  
stopped seeing beneath the shadows.

I don't know your past.  
I can't cross this ground.

I imagine myself inside your skin.  
I saw what waits there.  
O heavenly dark rendered in a woman's body,  
I am truth. I am evidence.  
I can make it all visible:  
between god's legs there are no answers  
hard and unbending,  
and I can see why you'd hate  
wounded poems.

When it's over, I get into my car,  
then you're human again.

You too once knew what it was to feel impressive.  
How different is that from lovemaking?

\*

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This cento is composed of text from the following poems:

Title: Christine Grimes, "The Heritage of Leon Clovis Grimes"

Lines 1-2, 6-7, 11-12, 15-16: Jan Beatty, "Letter to Mario"

Line 3-4: Kathleen Sheeder Bonanno, "A Poem About Light"

Line 5: Philip Levine, "On the River"

Line 8: Maria Mazziotti Gillan, "Piecwork"

Line 9-10: Tracy Brimhall, "For the Glory"

Line 13: Jan Beatty, "The World between Jim Morrison's Legs"

Line 14: Laura Donnelly, "Of Knowledge"

Line 17: Laura Boss, "For Months"

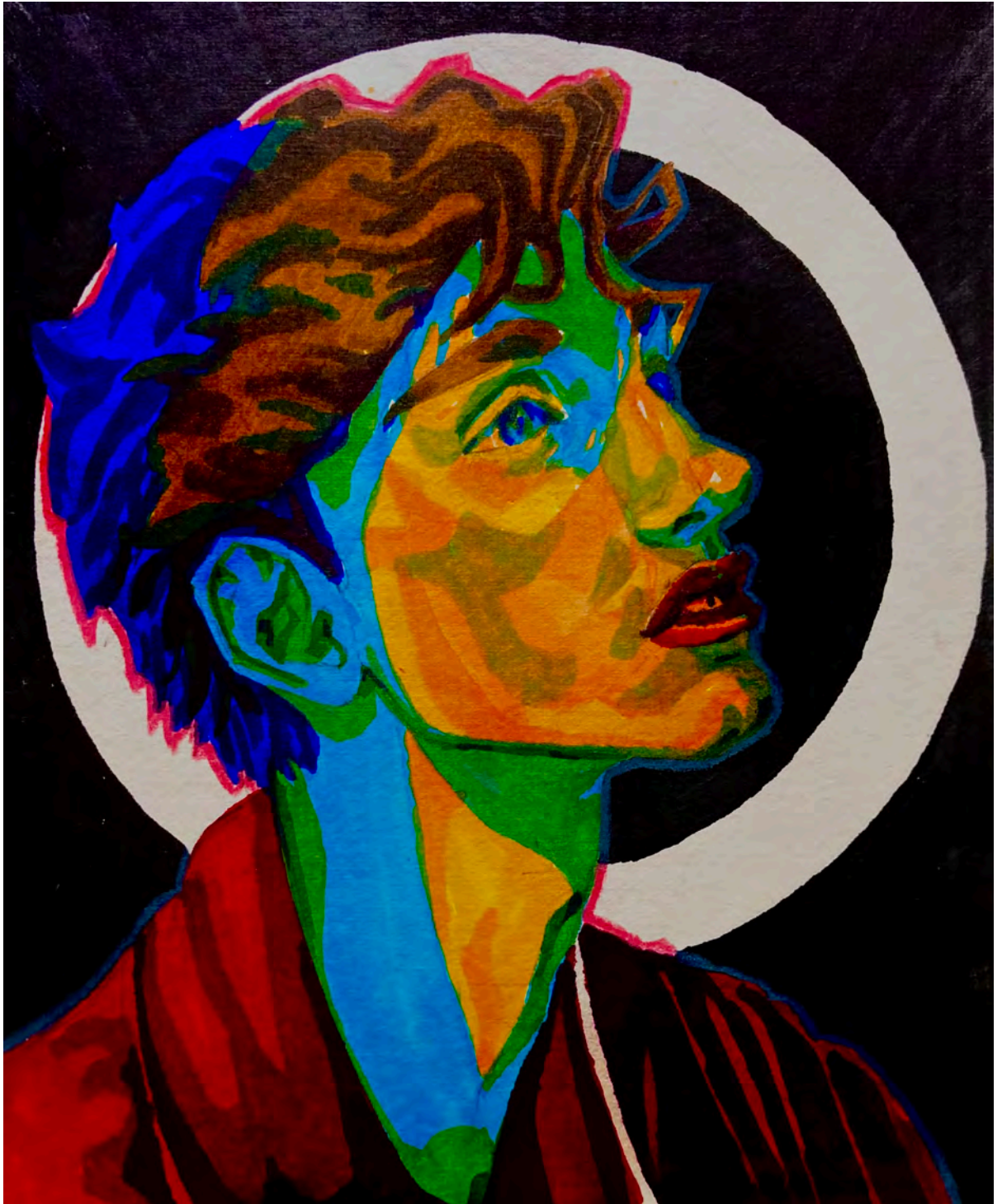
Line 18: Marie Howe, "The Mother"

Line 19: Justin Phillip Reed, "On Being a Grid One Might Go Off Of"

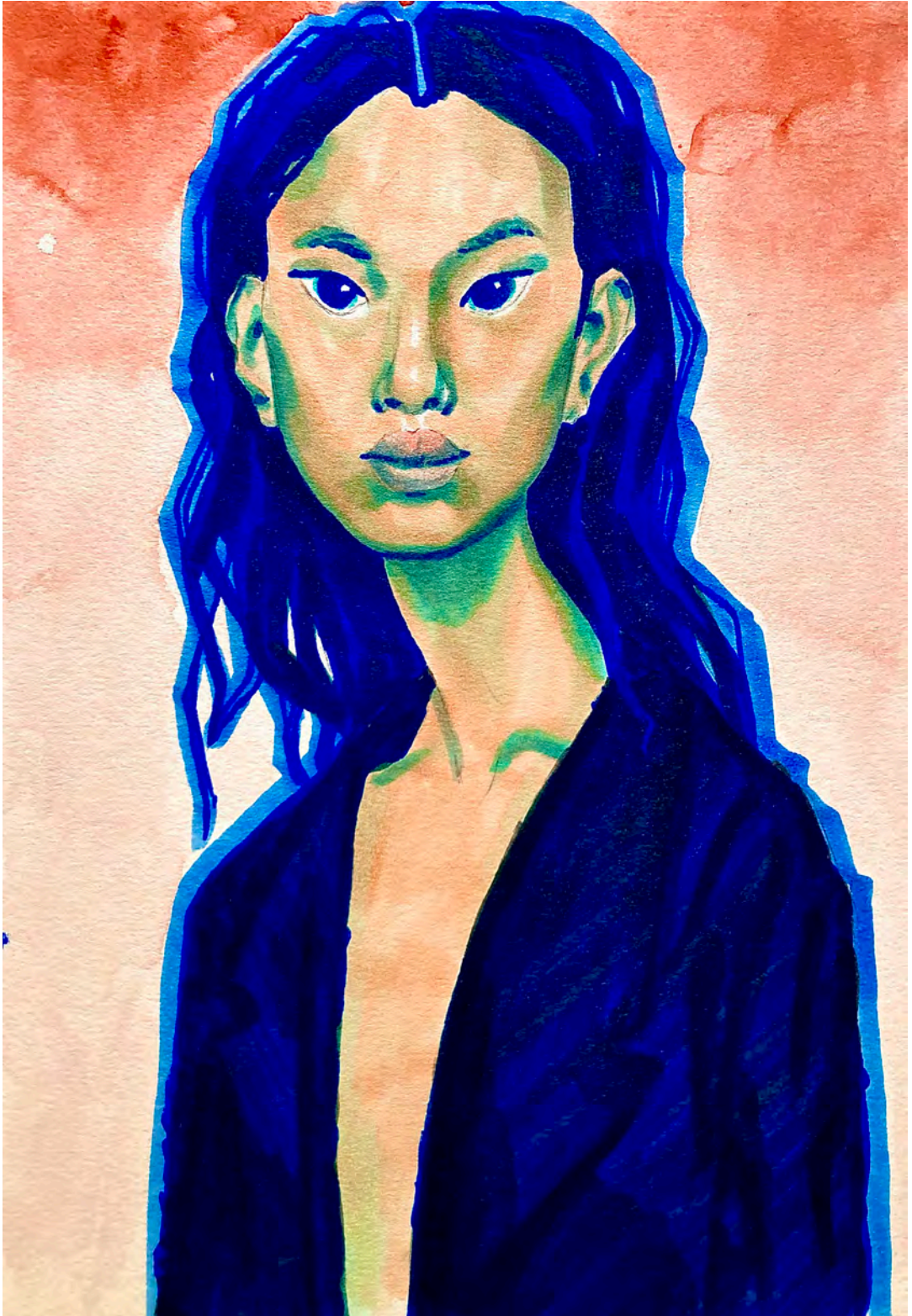
Line 20: Gregory Pardlow, "Alienation Effects"



*Morphogenetic Space* (ink), Sophia Turturro



*Indelible* (markers), Sophia Turturro



*Postulate (markers)*, Sophia Turturro



*Mundane Harm* (watercolor), Sophia Turturro



*Unpleasant Memory* (watercolor on paper), Sophia Turturro

# to the journal i carry (like a burden)

I wrote in you again today  
simply because there was no one else to listen  
or to hear.  
Where there were excited, grasping hands  
now lay the soils that turned over the slithering  
stream beds.

Silence was always a value I'd learn to not negate  
because of you.

Sadness was just as insatiable—  
it'd pour through up the head  
and out of the mouth  
like the tongue I've been forced to live with,  
like sitting in my own flesh broth.

There was nothing I could do,  
for it was all wet—  
I didn't want to live, you know—  
more so, I didn't know how to.

Never more strongly had I looked at myself in the mirror and felt  
so estranged to my own self.



Never more strongly had I looked at myself  
and known I was disfigured.

There was a beating heart in my throat when I spoke,  
but the way the lips move  
out of tune, off-key,  
defunct and disjunct,  
one throb ahead of the other,  
syncopating,  
had left an open rift where they took it all from me.

Never more strongly had I felt so violated  
than when I stared out the window  
and the sky, the trees,  
the shapes and the nonsensical  
began to skin me nude,  
past the breastbone,  
to the crux and no deeper.

There is a twilight where the sun sets,  
a star where the world fades,  
and there is a pity where I last placed my heels and  
jumped.

Cradle me, coddle me:  
it will all end up the same.

There is no me left to be made.

Even the bones have withered, too,  
along with the syrupy flesh that sticks  
like a tick,  
and the membrane which once held me together  
dismantles from this day forth  
until I am nothing but rotting bone.

I've grown accustomed to living  
in my own matte.

So now, the resting site is littered with the faces of  
the would'ves,  
the kisses of

the could'ves,  
the fire of  
the nothings,  
and that song  
which no one took to heart.

If my skull cap isn't a bowl by the time the  
flesh has melted on my prong body,  
I want it to be worn like my graduation cap.  
The cap is the flat, and you can even  
pull the brain stem out from the top  
to parade that little tassel around.  
Rip up the lips from the body to blow  
like a noise maker.  
When you rattle the hands,  
doesn't it sound like the ocean?

My body is the living and breathing conch shell,  
and if you stoop low—  
put your ear real close  
to the stomach,  
you might be able to hear the sound

of the soul leaving the body.

# missed miscarriage

Last night in my dreams—  
a man's hands around my neck,  
me, pleading with my daughter  
to run away and save me,  
but no one else was there.

\*\*\*\*

Last year the cat left a bunny,  
dark as spilled oil  
and one blond foot,  
dropped on the sheets between us.

Then he brought another,  
smooth like honey,  
black-tipped ears  
hid underneath the couch.  
Ears and feet and fuzzy butts  
appeared in every room.

He found them—  
the color of burnt august grass  
between backed-in sedans  
that need a jump every morning,  
or the color of standing dead larch  
behind rusted compressors for always-leaking tires,

skies without light pollution,  
the two-toned frankenstein cars  
of montana towns without sidewalks.  
My cat brought them inside.

A friend told me:  
*they do that when you're pregnant.*

\*\*\*\*

Weeks later, when he stopped,  
I thought nothing of it.  
The bunnies had grown too big,  
wiggled from his grasp  
before he could drag them in  
and left him spitting fur off his tongue  
the orange of a wildfire-smoked sky,  
of octobers in this place,  
leaves gathered around tires,  
extra jackets.  
Then I saw a small one hiding  
behind the log for the trailer hitch,  
tiny ears peeking around bark.

I saw it again the next day.  
And the next.  
Brand new, smaller than my hand.  
And the ultrasound said  
*no heartbeat.*

# my second daughter refused to come out at birth

Each time labor moved forward,  
she retreated back:

waited through the ice storm,  
sliced branches off every tree in the yard  
whether they bore fruit or not.

Cross five cleared fields.  
Cross battlegrounds.  
Mustard blossoms,  
goldenrods. Fight  
another farmer's volunteers,  
old posts lean south, brittle  
remains of electric fencing,  
overgrown gate twice as tall as stone walls.

\*\*\*\*

We plied her here,  
the first snow drops hanging tiny white heads.

So close to the ground.  
We raised them up in villages to sing to the oncoming warmth—

spring peepers to hold,  
small in her hand,  
wet and hiding,  
adding their verse to the chorus

*listen little one,  
we are calling only to you.*

She waited.

\*\*\*\*

I beat a rotting stump,

hollowed it out with my teeth,  
my braid coming loose,

wrote song after song for her,  
called now and *now*.

Taught the crickets.  
Screamed,  
keened  
until the crows pleaded with me *enough*.

Posted signs every sixth tree,  
drove nails into trunks,  
bark growing over my words  
before I even turned around.

\*\*\*\*

We moved the ferns outside,  
added hooks to soffit,  
green arms unfurling by the dozen  
reaching towards their first rain storm.  
I waited.

We milled logs for her,  
built vegetable beds for her,  
poured dirt for her,

gathered mulch for her.  
Wore worry lines in the floor.

Find root stock—  
could still be growing any drupe,  
    too early to tell—  
grafted plums or pears or peaches.  
Too early to tell.

Asparagus crowns lay in the mud room  
waiting, drying up more each day,  
too early. And she stayed  
to tell.

Primrose oil, figure eights for her.  
In through the nose, out through the mouth for her.  
Raspberry tea,  
walk the edges of the forest,  
stack firewood for her.  
Beat rugs on clotheslines.

\*\*\*\*

In our fields  
black thorns guard the apple trees  
who look the same from the road  
but stab your hand when you reach,  
drawing back too late.

LIZ ANN YOUNG

# ode to an old farmhouse in the rain

I will find the ax head in your crawl space  
and polish its rust.  
I will trim the rot from your beams for you.  
On hot, close nights at your tilted doorways  
I can feel how you have ached for spires  
to pierce the flooding sky.

How many storms have thundered your roof,  
crashing sheets and loose limbs and torn off leaves?  
You waited. Let them rage.

Dark, moisture-buckled floorboards catch my toes  
but I forgive nail pops,  
wrap jade-speckled pothos around their heads.

For two hundred years  
your cedar shakes have watched goldenrod fields,  
monarchs who visit only to fly away.



No one asked, but you have odes to herringbone,  
tools to fix your plinth.  
You tell ghosts until the living listen.

You will creak and groan though men try to sleep.  
They will wake afraid  
while you dream of transoms. Of rib vaults. Arches.

Silence paints ceilings for you.  
Hands have moved your walls through lathe, through plaster.  
The mud outside always finds a way in.  
You never chose beige flowered wallpaper  
or the constant water dragging  
strong, stacked rocks from foundation to moss.

If the rain dries up  
I will slice painted window frames,  
let breeze slide east to west.  
I will cry. I will level you.



*Rootscape with Fish and Columbine* (acrylic and mixed media on panel), Noah Bonesteel



*Across the Water* (acrylic and mixed media on panel), Noah Bonesteel



*Waiting* (acrylic and mixed media on panel), Noah Bonesteel

# SILT HAS COLLECTED IN MY CELLS

*S.J.M.*

The print on my favorite shirt  
crackles off,

gone soft  
together with my nerves.

A new age rests  
on his shoulders.

My fondest memory—  
twisting snow peas

off the vine.  
A new kind of

loneliness sent off  
down the river toward

the geese in the heat  
of July

and yes,  
a gentle hand cupping a nape

under the cover of  
silence and sky.

It's all fragmented.  
There were no words

for the longest time until  
a finger was plunged

into the deep to poke  
at a river snail

and we realized it's stupid  
to guard feeling by burying it

in the marrow of our  
bones.

# TRAVEL-SIZED MAP TO THE ANTIDOTE FOR MISERY

To get there, find an old abandoned sandbox  
with *C+L4EVR* carved into the NNE plane  
of its chipped frame. Plant your knees down  
into the grit and dig                    dig  
until your  
finger pads bleed.

*Fingertips.*

The air turns to pink gossamer spun  
from the sound of Neptune's rings.

Two squirrels squawk and chase each other up  
and down the telephone pole that you are unsure was there before  
until it *tips* but does not  
*fall.*

Slowly                    slowly  
your knees will disappear and your fingers will be grated to knuckle  
and somehow before you know  
it what you knew  
melts down                    down  
into the grass and you will see a little blue-gray fuzzball  
who just three days earlier

dozed under your breast  
and you will erupt in tears at the loss but keep  
digging. No more elbows and no more femurs,  
mince everything all the way to the quick, gored  
into carmine mud.

Destination:  
the merciful unfolding of the cerebrum.



# THIS LIFE OF MINE

There's a peculiar kind of sunshine in your bones,  
she tells me, like that of a soft spring  
evening. I am sitting on the bathroom floor  
using the soggy bath mat as a blanket  
rocking back and forth—

A sudden premonition, a wide-eyed gut feeling:  
this is not a good thing.

On those nights, my father and I  
would sit and wait  
for the bats to wake.

It has been a dozen years  
and yet, a sob.

My girl, she calls,  
what's this life of yours  
about? Out with it! You think  
you're evil, a goblin in human skin, just say it,  
and let me rub the knots from your neck.

Oh, I don't know I don't know sometimes  
I feel like I miss all the meaning the baby lies  
on the edge of the bathtub and cries and cries  
this life is not mine

and yet, it is.  
And I know it's true, we miss all the meaning,  
let us trace a face in life's foggy mirror  
A dozen years, or more

we trace the blue tile  
We slug down bath water like a lifestream, cold  
and mean  
with wrinkling skin and yellowing teeth  
missing all the meaning, and so on.

But no matter, she says.  
No matter those poisoned guts, no matter  
the heartache. No matter.



*The Jester Deity* (digital collage), Meghan McMullan



*Rick's Dwelling* (digital collage), Meghan McMullan

# Chandelier

Sunlight swirls  
In the window panes,  
Sending  
S h a r d s  
Of color  
the floor.  
The  
F r a c t a l s  
In their dormant state  
*Glint*  
Off one another  
As  
Human strangers  
(sneaking)  
Glances eye to eye.  
The lovely dissonance of  
Yellowandpurpleandblueandred  
Beating

The fringe—                      Their wings against                      —of the other  
Is a divine h a r m o n y.  
Perhaps if                      one                      listens  
One could discern it,    the gentle *buzz*    of the fad ing ca de n c e of two crystal cups  
*Clinked* in silence.    It is the sound of a wink,    of half a smile, these f r a g i l e little  
chords  
That connects us if we look.

# (Language)

The thing about (language) is that  
It isn't exactly  
Real.

But it's not exactly truth.  
Not exactly medicine,  
Not exactly logical,  
Not exactly simple.

We could not  
Cannot  
Will never  
Understand infinity.

And a dash

(Nothing  
you  
can  
say  
is  
Real.)

How  
sweet  
that  
We  
think

We  
can  
bottle  
Infinity  
in  
a  
(Word).

It's not exactly a lie (I'm lying to you)  
by writing these  
(words).

It is its own form of legend,  
a legend that conveys everything  
from dirt to gold to dust to death  
to first breath.

But we have a  
sign  
to mark the place,  
a few dots

To save forever  
So we don't forget  
(forever).

These seconds

Don't exist

—And say good things

Because

(time)

isn't

Real either.

so live slower; you won't forget—

because if language is a story

It may as well not be a lie.



# The Way of the Cone

Ice cream, a summer treat. Hercules had his labors, Troy had its horse, and I have my ice cream. Step aside, heroes of old, for it is time for a new tale to begin: the tale of the five trials needed to become a master of the way of the cone.

Trial one—the making. The first step is often the most crucial in a difficult journey, for once you have begun, you must stay until the end. The cone starts before the cone, with the mix. You must brave the tundra that is the freezer; the mix must be kept cold otherwise it will spoil, and the task will be over before you start! Pour the tidal wave of flavored milk and cream into the hopper, spill not the mix, as it could attract flies and ruin everything.

Trial two—the serving. The early climax, and the easiest to mess up. Journey to the land of the cones and select the most promising candidate to be your serving receptacle. Travel far to the land of the ice cream, fighting crewmates for the illustrious ice cream machine; there is only room for so many. Then, make the cone, struggling to get the perfect swirl with the non-Newtonian solid that is soft ice cream. Quickly, you must get it to the customer, there is not much time until the ice cream melts, and if that happens, the operation will fail. Come, we do not have time to waste, we must move on to trial three—the dreaded customers.

Customers are troubling for some; it depends on the day, the customers, and the time. You cannot prepare for this trial, only fear it. With each oncoming customer, There is no knowing whether they are rude, ordering one hundred things, or speaking in their mother tongue. If lucky, you will get a nice customer: one with simple taste. If the gods are angry, however, you will get a “Karen,” or even worse...children. Not much can be said about trial three, as there is no consistency. Customers are a labyrinth of ill-mannered souls and forgotten orders, so, we shall move on to trial four—the mess.

After the cars leave and the neon “OPEN” sign dims, the one reality is thrown into your face: it’s a mess! From the vomit of a child to a ripped garbage bag, you must harden your resolve and go dignified into the night, fully prepared to be met with the most vile, disgusting smells in the world, all to prepare the shop for tomorrow. It must be done. If it is not you who sacrifices yourself, it will be someone else. Delve into the barren swamps that is the drain, clearing it out for tomorrow’s dishes; heave a sack of rotting sugar cream, bearing the putrid smells of bile, old food, and flies feasting on the remains of your hopes of having an easy task, all so someone else doesn’t have to.

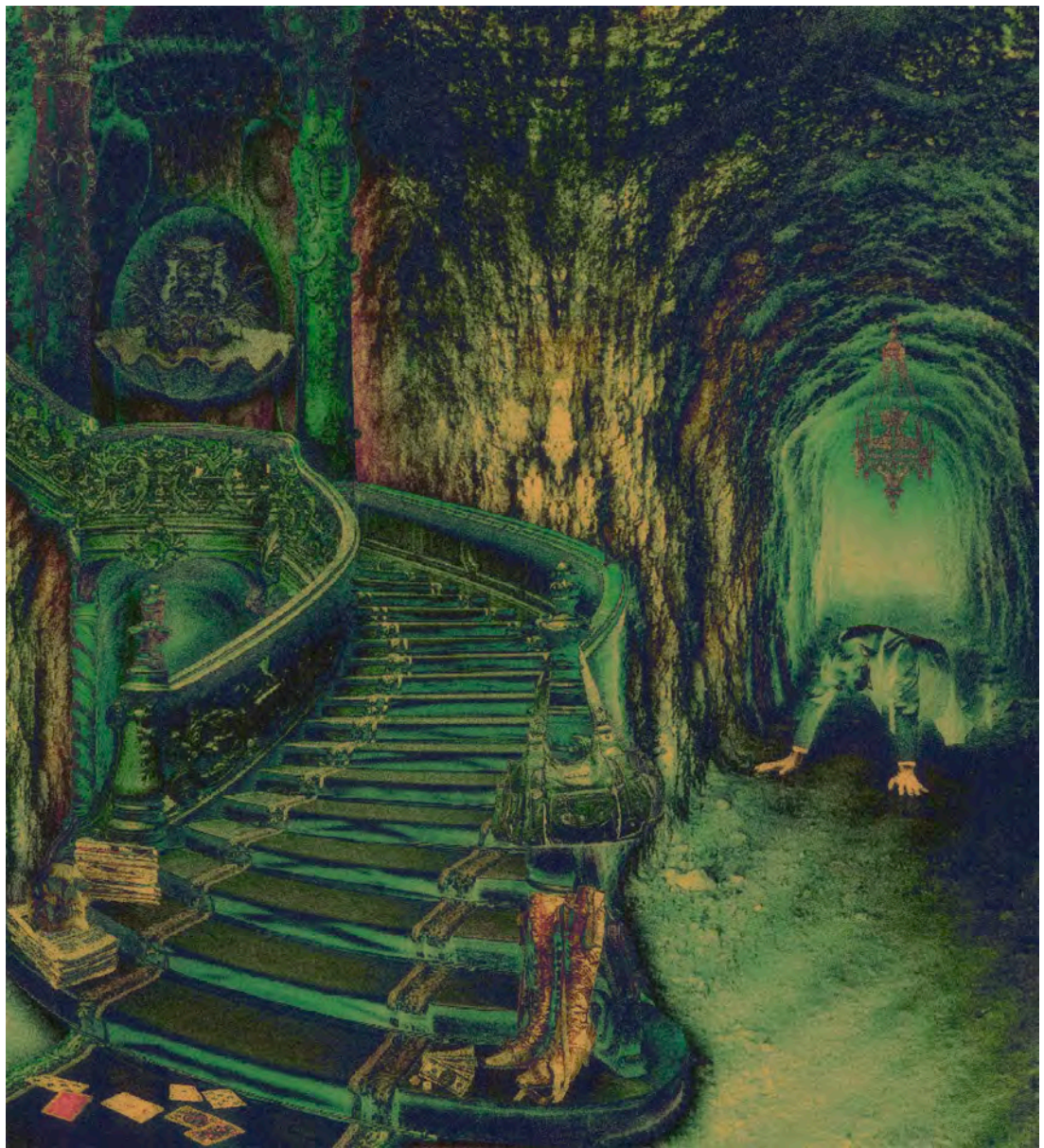
We are the comedic relief to the gods above us. However, we are the ones that have the last laugh. Through these trials, unexpected friendships are formed. We laugh with one another when a joke is cracked, and we cry with one another when they move on to bigger and better things. Ice cream, a simple treat, builds bonds with unlikely friends and ties those together, those who are completely different. It allows us to overcome hardships and understand that it’s imperative to ask for help. These small things, the trials that we overcome, the friends that we make, the laughs that we laugh and the cries that we cry, truly show us that the real cruelty is that so many people will never know the true joy of ice cream.

# How to Keep Secrets Like a Telephone Booth

*After Ada Limón's 'How to Triumph Like a Girl'*

Whenever I walk down a  
New York City street and see  
a box of whispers  
that is full of windows  
but holds secrets like  
a clogged city street drain,  
I am astonished. Astonished  
how one stranger after  
another speaks to the  
public confession booth.  
How the phone never reveals  
to the new sinner what

the last sinner whimpered.  
But I always imagine  
late in the darkness,  
when the sun is streetlights,  
when no one is there to hear,  
that the phone rings and rings  
all night long,  
telling God what the people  
shamefully admitted regretting—  
the number of souls saved  
for the low, low price of  
25 cents.



*Ladycave* (digital collage), Meghan McMullan



*The Magician's Lounge* (digital collage), Meghan McMullan

# Season's Grievings

The twins trying to kill each other have crashed into the counter and are taking the garland down with them. I hope my shift ends before the destroyed decorations become my problem. The sister is clearly winning; she has her brother in a headlock and has already pulled off his hat to reveal his matching blonde hair.

Their younger brother, the only brunette of the bunch, is screaming at the top of his lungs while his mother is desperately trying to keep him from slumping onto the slushy floor with her one free hand. The cause of his screaming? We don't have any green skates. I've never heard of an ice rink having anything other than black or white skates, but this kid doesn't care. He wants green ones and is letting anyone within a mile radius know we don't have them.

I would be annoyed but his crying is drowning out the same twenty Christmas songs that have been on repeat for the entire month of December, so if anything I should be thanking him.

"Just the six skates for an hour then?" I try to move this along, though I'm not sure if it's for my sanity or the mom's.

A giggle comes from a fourth kid who looks a little too old to be strapped to his mother's chest. I can't blame her for wanting to keep one contained for as long as possible, though. He stares into my soul with big blue eyes while he chomps on a red toy truck he's trying to stuff into his chubby cheeks. I decide he's my favorite of the little monsters until he stuffs the truck a little too far into his mouth and spits up all over himself.

"Oh! Gross, Jojo," the mom says, using a part of his snowsuit to wipe his mouth. She quickly grabs a couple of bills from her wallet and says, "Just keep the change," before grabbing some of the skates and walking towards the door.

The change turns out to be seventy-three cents but it all adds up, I guess.

The fight breaks apart briefly while the twins grab the last few skates before the sister chases her brother out the door.

Through the window, I see a man, who I'm assuming is their father, lift his head from his phone long enough to snatch up the little girl and place her on the bench between him and a diaper bag. The twin brother bolts right past them and joins a blur of two more weaving through the crowd in what looks to be an intense game of tag.

I am *never* having kids.

My phone vibrates as I pull it out to check how much time is left in my shift. Swiping to decline another call from my mom, I see there are ten more minutes. *Almost there.*

My least favorite regulars reach the front of the line. Mr. and Mrs. Clark—they won't let me call them by their first names—are an elderly couple who frequent the rink three times a week.

From the many, *many* stories they've told me, I know they're trying to relive their glory days as a champion figure skating pair. They always come with their own skates and matching, skin-tight outfits. It would be cute, if they weren't so rude. They're a constant reminder of why growing old with someone just makes you more miserable.

"Just an hour today, Mary," Mr. Clark says before I have a chance to get any words out.

My name isn't Mary, but I plaster on a smile and tell them, "Have a great skate."

Mrs. Clark heads toward the door, and her husband goes to follow her but not before he adds, "You should smile more, sweetheart. Show some Christmas spirit." He gives the countertop a tap before following after his wife who almost whacks one of the speedy little monsters with the door on her way out.

I frown as soon as he turns his back and glance at my phone again. Right above nine missed texts from my mom, the time says 6:53 p.m. Seven minutes left.

When I look up, another familiar face greets me.

"Eve?"

She looks up from the young girl and dog next to her, and a wide grin takes over her face at the sight of me. "Macy? Oh my god, I didn't know you worked here! I feel like I haven't seen you in forever! Did you cut your hair?"

I tuck my bob behind my ears and nod sheepishly. "Yeah, I cut it a couple of months ago. I tried to dye it too, but it's hard to tell in this lighting."

She squints a little. "Oh yeah, I can see a little red throughout the brown. I like it!"

"Thanks!" I beam.



Eve was my best friend at the beginning of high school, but we grew apart since we had fewer classes together as we got older. We've only seen each other twice since we started college a couple of years ago. It's easy to lose touch with someone when you no longer live ten minutes from each other.

"This is my cousin, Hallie." She gestures to the girl next to her and adds, "The one I was always babysitting." Hallie looks to be around ten years old and has her dark hair in braided pigtails. She is zipped into a purple puffer jacket. "And this is Angel." The dog's white tail wags at the sound of her name, but my smile falters a bit. She's wearing a pink "service dog in training" vest.

"It's so nice to meet you both," I manage.

"You too!" Hallie hands me some crumpled bills. "A size four for an hour please, Macy!" She puts some coins from her pocket in the tip jar.

"You got it," I reply and select the least smelly pair of skates I can find.

"Have a wonderful time," I say when I return with the skates.

"Hey, text me! Maybe we can hang out over break," Eve says.

"I'd love that." That cheers me up a bit.

"Bye!" Hallie shouts.

I wave to her. I wonder if Eve's family still does their cookie tradition. They used to bake a different kind every day of the week leading up to Christmas in honor of her dad who used to be a chef. If they still keep the same schedule then tonight they'd be making cutout cookies, my favorite.

My family has never been big on holiday traditions because my parents have been divorced since I was young. I think that's why I enjoyed going to Eve's house so much. Her house always felt like Christmas to me. Now, I can barely find the motivation to decorate my own apartment or even buy Christmas cookies. It's just not the same. Especially after last Christmas.

A pair of black skates slam down in front of me and instantly stink up the counter. They're not being returned though. They belong to one of the hockey players who frequents the rink, John.

"Do you know if the hot chocolate stand sells alcohol?" he asks. I assume he's trying to act cool for his date next to him.

"I'm not sure. You could go check the menu."

His date lightly puts her skates on the counter, and unfortunately they also reek. I quickly grab the spray from under the counter and hold the skates as far away from me as I can.

"Whatever," John mumbles and drags his date away.

When I stand up from putting the skates back on the shelf, I freeze at the voice I hear.

"Macy?"

"Mom?" Even with gloves, a scarf, a hat, *and* earmuffs, she's shivering. "How do you not freeze working here?"

I tug on the white turtleneck I've layered under my blue Canalside sweat-shirt and ignore her question. "Why are you here?"

"You haven't been answering my texts, angel." She raises her eyebrows as if expecting an explanation.

"I'm working," I say, somehow managing to keep my voice calm.

"Macy, don't be mean. I came to see if you were coming over for Christmas tomorrow."

For a minute I wonder if she's forgotten last Christmas. The memories kept me up for months, the penguin on her mug haunting my sleepless nights. The shards of both our mugs are long gone, shattered on her kitchen floor and swept away.

The next day, she texted me apologizing, but not for the alcohol in her mug. She couldn't find the same mugs at Big Lots again, she said. I never cared about those mugs; I cared that she relapsed.

I still avoid going to bars with my friends even though I turned twenty-one this past semester. I can't stand the smell of beer, and I'm afraid the sticky floor will remind me of her kitchen that night.

"Will you actually be sober this time?" I whisper and my voice shakes. I didn't expect to have this conversation for the first time in public, but if she insists.

She lowers her voice. "I haven't had a drink since Christmas, angel. I promise. You know my job made it hard for me to get help. I'm so sorry I let you down."

I make eye contact for the first time since she walked up. "I'm twenty-one. I don't have to spend Christmas with you anymore."

She lets out a sharp sigh. "I just want to spend the holidays with my baby girl. Is that too much for a mother to ask? After everything I've done for you?"

"I'm not your baby girl." I hold eye contact until she breaks it.

"You know," she starts, "you really hurt me when you say things like that. My parents were never there for me like I am for you. I have presents for you, I got stuff to make you breakfast—"

"I'm not coming."

She takes a breath. "I'm trying so hard to fight this disease. Please just do this one thing for me. I promise I won't drink."

"You said that last year."

She huffs, shaking her head, "Well, have fun at your father's then. You always like to spend more time with him, anyway."

"Get out," I say, my voice cracking, "I'm working."

She just looks at me with her brows furrowed and her tongue poking her cheek and says, "Merry Christmas. I love you," before walking out.

I can't see the customers who are waiting in line behind her because my vision blurs.

Before I even get a chance to wipe a tear, a shriek comes from the wall of windows. "SANTA!"

My manager, Alan, walks up next to me munching on a plate of cookies. His white beard looks exactly like you would imagine Santa's. It doesn't help that he is literally dressed as Santa. He told me once that the kids kept mistaking him for Santa so often that he just started dressing up around the holidays.

The siblings from earlier have their faces pressed up against the glass. Their mom looks relieved they're all frozen in place, even for a second.

Alan ignores them and pats my shoulder. "Sorry I'm late, kid." Some cookie crumbs fall out of his mouth.

*My shift's over?*

"The rascals outside wouldn't stop jumping on me. You can head out now." If he notices my tears, he doesn't give any indication.

I nod in a trance.

I walk to the back, grabbing my coat and bag from their hook. Alan shouts after me asking if I can fix the garland before I go, but I'm already out the door. Christmas is almost over anyway. Those kids probably did him a favor by taking it down early.

The frigid air makes the tears falling down my cheeks feel like icicles on my face. I walk past the porta-potties and the Adirondack chairs to the bridge that overlooks the rink. Beneath the string lights, I glimpse the Clarks spinning slightly out of sync and more hockey players showing off by speeding past little kids.

The Skyway casts shadows overhead as I walk until I'm met with an empty Canalside before me and the sounds of the rink are just distant noise. The Buffalo River is frozen and quiet; the grain elevators reflect green and red on the ice.

I avoid the lawn that's wet with snow and brush off a bench close to the river. My tears are now just stains on my cheeks that I can't seem to wipe off, but they return the minute I sit down.

All of the pain and loneliness of the past year pours out of me at once. I was hoping I could just avoid Christmas this year and ignore all the memories that it brings up, but of course, my mother had other plans.

It's not long before footsteps approach from my right. Eve, Hallie, and Angel come to a halt when they spot me. Eve bends down, whispering something to Hallie. She nods and guides Angel to the rails on the water's edge, out of earshot. Eve hesitantly sits next to me and offers up a festive tupperware container. "Cookie?"

I shake my head, not in the mood for chocolate chips right now.

For a while, we just sit in silence, but her presence is like a warm blanket after a day of sledding.

“My mom showed up,” I say, sniffing.

Eve was there for me when I first realized my mom was an alcoholic. I didn’t want to complain to her about my mom when she only had one parent left, but she insisted that I could always lean on her.

“How are you feeling?” She places a gentle hand on my knee.

As if my mom can hear us, my phone dings with a text from her.

Everything I’ve kept bottled up in the past year comes rushing out of me at that moment. I tell Eve what happened a year ago and then what my mom did today. I even tell her about the countless times I’ve asked my mom to not contact me this year and how she constantly ignored it

“She’s my mom, you know? I feel like a part of me will always need her, but I also feel like I never really had her.”

Eve turns her body towards mine and grabs my hands, making me look at her, “You *can* grieve for someone who’s still alive, Macy.”

In a way, she validates all of my feelings in that one sentence.

I start sobbing again, burying my head in Eve’s shoulder as she strokes my hair. Relief and sadness glide down my cheeks.

We stay like that for a minute before I hear a bark and Angel hops up on the bench next to me. She starts licking up my tears and somehow, I find it in me to laugh.

Hallie comes running after her and sighs, catching her breath. “She might not graduate service dog school, but she’d be a great therapy dog one day.”

We all smile and I grab a cookie from Eve, as Angel bounds off into the blanket of snow.

# *Hot with the Bad Things: A Review*

Lucia LoTempio's debut, *Hot with the Bad Things*, is a lyric published in a post-MeToo world. For women everywhere, this movement felt like a shooting star: burning brightly and dying quickly. But LoTempio's lyric doesn't let a reader forget "the girl [she] was and the women who knew her." This book honors those women, and clings to the belief that all women deserve a voice. Broken into seven sections—which center primarily around a murder/suicide that happened during the speaker's time as an undergraduate student, the speaker's experience with violence, her internalization of that violence and abuse, and the ways in which people insert themselves into narratives—LoTempio's lyric is a soothing balm in a culture where male violence is uncontrollable and unavoidable.

The first section of the lyric opens up the entire narrative. LoTempio writes: "I should be a single cauterization; removal to pin down this red." The mention of cauterization is the first time a reader hears about heat, but its presence is repeatedly threaded throughout the narrative, appearing in lines like: "I'm a fever with the girl" and "If I could reach into the past, would I snuff it out?" In this collection, trauma frequently manifests itself as heat. The speaker is, like the lyric's title suggests, burning up with the trauma she's experienced. She wonders if she would "snuff" out her past as if it were a flame, but the speaker's mouth is paradoxically "full of fire." Heat becomes the speaker.

Ending that first section is the line, "Listen: if nothing goes to plan, imagine it as bad as possible." This final line fills a reader with dread. If the first section functions as an entryway into the collection, LoTempio appropriately

prepares her audience. What follows is unflinching. The speaker refuses to name her abuser, who is identified in the collection as a dot on the page, but speaks of what he did to her, including the times he raped her. LoTempio examines her speaker's reaction to violence and abuse, not her abuser. The lines, "Once, ● tied your arms and legs to your throat, demanded you crawl because he / made you immobile. I think a person can be there without being there" is a gut punch.

The second section of the lyric begins with a dream, the speaker rousing "after the moment of plunge." This dream occurs right after the speaker finds out about "the man [who] murdered the girl and her new lover" in her college town. In January, 2016, during Lucia LoTempio's time at SUNY Geneseo, two Geneseo students were murdered a street away from the school. The perpetrator, who was an ex-boyfriend of the female victim, killed himself after committing the murders. This tragic event dominates most of the narrative, with the speaker paralleling her own experience to the female victim. With this crime forefronted, LoTempio is able to introduce the complexity of violence, how observing brutality becomes a "mirror game." She notes the tendency to center oneself in crime, in the "quiet swirling center." There are ethical considerations here. Is it right to involve ourselves so deeply in others' tragedies? On this, the speaker—our storyteller—asks: "If telling a story is the mark of victory, what does that make me?" LoTempio, through her speaker, inquires about a writer's role in relation to the world, and the distance between an author and their subject—especially when dealing with violence of this caliber.

Interrupting this section are pages titled "[Status Update Upstate]," which are composed of "language culled from January 2016 posts and comments on Facebook about Geneseo." These comments range from the shockingly mundane "I go back [to Geneseo] every few years" to the cruelty of "No / girl is worth this and I know some perfect tens" and "You know what we need? Knife control." These comments, formatted as a seven-line block of text, feel overwhelming in both their form and content. Within each [Status Update Upstate], a reader assumes the speaker's place, transported back to 2016, placed right in the aforementioned "quiet swirling center." We are made to care about the speaker and what she experienced within the turmoil of a crime so close to home, especially knowing the intimate partner violence she herself experienced while at Geneseo.

The next section dips heavily into memory and the ways in which the speaker experienced violence extremely intimately and regularly in her own life. The speaker says: "I loved a man. I loved ●. I don't know how else to begin." This admission is a heartbreaking one. Loving someone, as seen in the murder/suicide LoTempio writes about, does not make one immune from abuse. Once, the speaker "ran up cardiac hill, raced ● so hard [she] threw

up,” and though the danger here isn’t overt, this hill “teemed with violence.” Sometimes, peril manifests itself quietly, under the illusion of choice. We see this multiple times throughout the lyric. Once, during a shift, the speaker’s boss “told [her] to stir powdered sugar and milk until it was like a / certain kind of fluid.” The speaker “vomited over a bed into a fold of blankets and some man kept / fucking.” “After sex, all sweat, a man laid out how to unsheathe a buck. Pointed on [her] / thigh where to penetrate a fleshy doe.” Over and over again, the speaker experiences indescribable threat from men. LoTempio lets these heart-stopping moments breathe on their own, lets the memories unfurl.

An epigraph from Louise Bourgeois opens up the next segment. It reads: “Fear can be spotted like gold in the ground. Dig them out, and make them help you. Fears make the world go round.” As indicated by the epigraph, this section focuses on the speaker’s relationship with fear. The speaker believes that “A climate of fear is both counting cards and laying its hand on the table.” Our culturally-constructed notion of fear allows for precaution, for an assessment of who has the upper hand, but it also allows for vulnerability, since acknowledging fear—both to yourself in others—turns you on your back, arms up, stomach exposed. The speaker feels this deeply, worried that their fear minimizes them and leaves them unprotected. Originally, they are a “little mouse,” chased by “something shadowed.” However, on the final page of the section, this metaphor transforms. LoTempio writes: “Mouse, but not a mouse–wolf cub learning. Soft belly.” The danger, here, is not between two different species, like a mouse and a cat. Instead, the speaker fears her own kind.

Halfway through the book is the next section, each page formatted as a letter that ends with “Soon,.” Even without considering the contents of each poem, this “Soon,” asks a reader to look towards something. “Soon,” is a promise, left open by the comma. These pages, in contrast with previous ones, are lighter. The speaker comments, “Whenever I’m in the car, I sing like he’s buckled next to me,” and “I feel so little, so small with him & I love it.” Knowing what this relationship grew to be leaves a sourness in the back of a reader’s throat, but sitting in this love is important. The abuse the speaker experienced was so painful in part due to the closeness she had with her partner. The economy of LoTempio’s language is something to admire, but her ability to nuance relationships and trauma in this lyric is a life raft. Something flourishes from this love, the speaker promising: “One day, you’ll write a beautiful book; the love you feel for him will be a palimpsest of joy.” *Hot with the Bad Things* is that “beautiful book.”

In a life where so much autonomy and personhood is taken from a person, it is difficult for that person to find and use their voice. This is explored in the second to last section of the lyric, this theme beginning with: “The novelist

writes, *There is no good language when it comes to the unspeakable.*” This section is quite meta, but it goes beyond being a book about the mechanics of writing itself, largely through LoTempio’s emotive imagery and diction. “In the bad dream,” LoTempio’s speaker “sit[s] behind a desk, [and] nothing shifts or is altered.” Her voice, as a writer and as a woman, is stunted. Her throat is “crackled,” and she hangs “up a phone to cry,” effectively silencing herself. However, the speaker is able to break from this. The collection lingers in Geneseo for so long—and rightly so—but it is clear that distance facilitated the speaker’s ability to communicate. After moving away from Geneseo, the speaker “talked about ●. [She] talked about him a lot.” This sort of triumph is quiet, the simplicity of the language elevating this narrative.

LoTempio’s lyric journeys through her speaker’s experience at Geneseo, but the book ends outside of Geneseo’s center, in a “new city, hemmed in with bridges.” In this section, the speaker refers to herself exclusively as “I” rather than a distant “you.” This technique is used sporadically throughout the collection, but the exclusivity resonates in this particular section. Since “you” usually creates the effect of a speaker talking to their past self, this final section feels more current. In it, the speaker acknowledges memories that are like “flash bang[s],” a shock like the “crack of knuckles.” Memory is startling, and yet the speaker still works through these echoes. Despite these explosive flashbacks, the speaker now feels safe enough to be “jealous of anger.” She’s working against rage, now “open like the hull / of a ship.” This allows for some difficult admissions like: “How do I tell him      Every time / a man touches it’s better with the promise of worse.” Honesty like this prods at a reader’s own hidden proclivity for pain, since the naturalization of violence is a difficult thing to talk about.

*Hot with the Bad Things* ends masterfully, the final line reading: “That memory could still be stilled then framed, like a penned-up animal.” This book is like that animal; caged in the frame of memory, both literally and figuratively “penned-up.” This metaphor rings, crystal clear. The lyric ends with the image of two eyes, gazing ahead. There is power in watching, in testifying, in going beyond that. Throughout horror and violence, the woman does not look away. She stares, resolute.



# An Interview with Lucia LoTempio

Lucia LoTempio is the author of *Hot with the Bad Things*, originally published in May 2020, and a finalist for the National Poetry Series. With Suzannah Russ Spaar, she is the co-author of the chapbook *Undone in Scarlet*. She is a Geneseo alumni, and a contributing editor for *Gandy Dancer*. LoTempio often teaches virtual writing workshops and is passionate about nonprofit work, and was a manager of programs and outreach at the literary arts and international free speech organization, City of Asylum in Pittsburgh. Her work can be found published in *West Branch*, *BOAAT*, *The Journal*, *Linebreak*, among others.

**Gandy Dancer:** There is no table of contents at the beginning of *Hot with the Bad Things*, so the first page works as an introduction. There are themes mentioned that we can better understand after reading: “The man says, Alone on a bus? That’s how a horror movie starts,” motifs of red and blood. The final line of the page, “Listen: if nothing goes to plan, imagine it as bad as possible,” is a nerve wracking introduction to what will transpire. In your opinion as a poet, how should a first page function for readers?

Lucia LoTempio: It’s funny, I think that first page can be the most read poem in the book. When I’m browsing a bookstore for a new collection, I flip to the first page to see how the poet is asking me to enter the book. Sometimes it urges me to continue, sometimes I’m not engaged, and I move on. Now that’s nerve wracking for a writer! In obvious ways, the first page serves to set the mood, open an atmosphere, give you clues to carry as you go, but it can

be such a gut check for a reader. Do I want to continue, or is it already time to bow out?

**GD: You mention a particular case of partner violence that happened here in Geneseo, NY during your time as an undergraduate. How did your familiarity and connection with Geneseo influence your writing and how did it feel to revisit that setting?**

LL: I'm so invested in image in my work, that the minutiae of place always feels like home when I write. And for this particular project, place was so so key. I explore how it can be tangled up in experience and memory, and in many ways inextricable. The experience of violence felt unapproachable by straightforward language, so the book attempts many ways of new expression, and image and atmosphere, all grounded in place, was central to doing that.

**GD: Despite parallels to your own life and a familiarity with the violence in Geneseo, what do you feel is your responsibility in using that event in the collection? What are the ethics for a poet to use stories like these within their poetry?**

LL: Much of the book is an exploration of that ethics, and it sprang from questions of what is ethical response. In 2016, everything felt so flattened on Facebook, which was the social media platform *du jour* (and from where I culled lines for those collaged “[Status Update Upstate]” poems). I saw all these posts that centered the murder-suicide as something that personally impacted the poster. It bothered me. As an artist, my first instinct was to make art. But then what—was I just creating a new flattening? And so in a way the project always came from wanting to investigate the response to the violence, and the way the response felt lacking in a certain humanity. As an artist, I think the best place I can speak from is from my own experience, and the ways in which that experience reflects and refracts through others should be approached with responsibility.

**GD: In the middle of the collection there is, what we understand to be, a jump back in time. The speaker appears to be referring to moments with her partner prior to the abuse, using the repetition of the word “soon” to indicate cruelty to come. Could you talk about the process of sequencing and placement within the collection?**

LL: For a good chunk of the drafting process, the whole book was in second person, speaking back to a past self. Yona Harvey, an incredible poet who I was lucky to work with, suggested I draft poems from that past self, give her a speaking voice. In a way, that voice is the beating heart of the book, and its central placement feels reflective of that. Though it does feel ominous in its naivety, those poems are meant with genuine sincerity, and I pulled lines from poems I wrote while I was a junior at Geneseo.

**GD: In the first section the speaker says, “In the bad dream I’m not her but I am watching. / In the bad dream why am I watching.” Other poems or individual stanzas are written in second person perspective which suggests a kind of scrutiny. There is an image of a pair of eyes at the end, and social media status updates throughout. What is the relationship between watching, witnessing, and experiencing? Can you discuss those acts as they exist within the collection?**

LL: To me, watching implies a singular action; witnessing implies some sort of later testimony; and, if experiencing is the third escalation, I might see it as implying a sharing. In the book, the self is multiplied and fractured, and I was often reflecting on the shiftiness of pinning down understanding across time and place. I also often thought about complicity and active choice, and what we owe our past, present, and future selves.

**GD: The speaker has several experiences with harassment and violence enacted against her, shaping her and impacting both her physical and mental health. Can you speak to the way violence against women is portrayed in media and literature today? How is *Hot with The Bad Things* in conversation with that topic?**

LL: Contextually, this book was largely written in a pre-Me Too world, and then it was published after it felt like a fad that had passed, and now “Me Too” can feel like shorthand acknowledging violence against women, but not really engaging in the experience and impact of it. I think that good media and literature that approaches these topics are engaged with both the personal and the aesthetic. So, not so much dumping it all on the page, but rather thinking about what of the experience can only be expressed through artmaking. I’m working in a confessional lineage, and I’m interested in work that is also best served when it goes all in on taboo to create art. Violence against women unfortunately is not taboo in art—often it’s scintillating, titillating, a selling point. And, maybe that gives it too much credit—usually it’s boring, expected, and unimaginative. A great example of media that deals with violence that comes to mind is Michaela Coel’s *I May Destroy You*. Rather than centering the violence, Coel’s series is invested in the personal response of a compelling main character. The series ends in a way that offers no audience closure, no traditional triumph that “solves” the plot, but rather focuses on Coel’s character Arabella’s emotional and personal response and development. To me that ending is the real taboo—its rejection of revenge, of factual understanding, of how media about violence is “supposed to” wrap up.

**GD: Throughout the collection, you use epigraphs from various writers to introduce each section. How does the work of other artists or authors influence your writing?**

LL: It influences it immensely! I can often track what I've been looking at or reading or watching through my writing, and I like having that multiple and evolving influence in the background of my work.

**GD: We noticed the presence of memories and dreams in this collection. There's a direct parallel between the two, most obviously when the speaker says "I had a dream of a memory and the memory was when I had died" (70). How are memories and dreams related? How are they involved in your writing process?**

LL: I used to teach a class on dreams in poems because I find them so tricky to pull off. In poems you do not need the confines of a dream for things to get surreal, poems are already ripe for wildness. In this book, memory is positioned as this unpinnable thing, and I was thinking a lot about active versus passive speakers. Dreams became a way to add a layer of twisting to the memories, reseeding them through a new lens and freeing me from caveats. Dreams became shorthand for sanctioned imagination, perhaps even a space of hopefulness as well as nightmare. I also was actually dreaming a lot about the book and the past and Geneseo at the time! So much of my life during those years is marked and remembered by dreams.

**GD: We, the managing editors, received copies of the collection with different covers: one was the final edition and the other was an Advanced Readers Copy. What are the challenges of creating a cover design and what are the intentions behind the final cover choice for *Hot with the Bad Things*? What went into the final decision?**

LL: The ARC cover was a placeholder and I wasn't part of that process, so I can't speak to it. For the final cover and layout I worked closely with Alice James's managing editor Alyssa Neptune with input from Editor-in-Chief Carey Salerno to select art that reflected the mood and atmosphere of the book. I was really adamant not to have something with a dismembered woman, so no headless or limb-detached bodies, but rather have a woman obscured in some way. Ultimately, we worked with designer Tiani Kennedy who offered a few different cover options with interiors, and this moody face with the red and yellow just popped for me. From there we futzed with font until it felt right. I was really adamant about a matte cover and cream pages, because I personally like that experience as a reader. One thing I didn't realize is that we wouldn't be able to print Apple's emojis, so I had to find fair use replacements. All in all, it was a really cool experience and I'm really grateful to the amazing Alice James team!

**GD: Ultimately, what would you like readers to take away from the collection? Who is your ideal audience?**

LL: I think one of the great joys of this book has been it becoming, in a way, a resource. Friends who teach tell me they often recommend it to young women in their poetry and memoir classes who are looking to write similarly personal works of hybrid lyric. Generally, I hope the takeaway resonates both emotionally and from a craft perspective.

**GD: We'd love to hear what you're working on now.**

LL: Writing, writing, writing away! I'm working on some poems that are much more invested in the line, and have begun to dabble in fiction. Nothing too project-y yet, but enjoying my groove!

# Look, She's Gone

This is what I said, mom.  
I said look at her, she's not  
coming back. I said look,  
she's gone.  
One more stop and one more  
violent start, again.  
They were very good at making  
your wounded heart pump  
and your chest  
rise and fall with their tubes and lines  
and drips but  
you weren't fooling me.  
I said, look at her eyes, because  
once, someone said  
something eloquent about the eyes  
being a window and that's how I knew,  
that behind the filmy glass of your  
corneas, behind your stubborn  
pupils, was an empty beach,  
and no matter how many shells  
we looked inside of or turned over,  
you had taken your soul and dug deep  
into the cool and quiet sand,  
where the earth  
held on and on and on.

# I Gather the Fawns

I gather the fawns,  
their spindly, uncertain legs,  
their tawny fuzz,  
spots like hopeful stars.

I gather the orphans, and the babies rejected  
in a flurry of pushing, stomping hooves.  
I gather the ones that get too close to the road,  
eating grass, mother absent.

My father says that buzzards  
stand guard over the farmers' fields.  
A doe can hide her baby in the tall growth,  
only to lose it to harvesting.

I gather those fawns to my chest,  
and I outrun the engine and blades and birds  
that feast on the dead,  
the hungry sound of swallowing and  
slashing on my heels.

I put them in the farm of my heart,  
soft babies, who will easily  
forget the warm milk of their  
mothers. They take the bottle eagerly  
from my hand, heads thrusting back  
and forth, tugging, pulling, alive.

# Jupiter

I pray that the neighborhood skunk doesn't find her way to our side-yard at 3:14 a.m. when I let my dog out. He pisses and roots around, nose to dirt, for smells from the night. I sit down on my narrow porch step and look up. Sometimes I wonder where my mother is. It's the best time to ponder big things, before the noises of the day increase with the slow climb of light from the horizon. It's August and I'm staring at a small light in the sky. Brighter than a star, my phone tells me it's Jupiter. I know so little about the planets. I only know it's Jupiter because my phone told me. Sometimes I think of how little I know about things and feel shame. But I do know my dog, and I can see the shadow of him in the corner by the arborvitae, and I know insomnia. I am familiar with all shades of black and gray. I am an expert on my couch, its nubbed fabric and where the cushions sink just so. I could give a short lecture on sitting under the dark shawl of night while others are sleeping or write a chapter on my racing brain. I can discuss the aggressive hum of white noise, and the feeling of resignation as I rise once again to make coffee too early. But please, just don't



ask me to name Jupiter's moons, or how to go about  
untethering oneself from grief's sinking cinder block.

## About the Authors

NOAH BONESTEEL, a senior at SUNY Plattsburgh, is a mixed media artist working from the outskirts of the Adirondack park. He is deeply influenced by his love of nature and fascination with natural history and ecology. Art is a way for him to understand the climate and biodiversity crises, creating loose narratives centered around natural relationships as seen through a human framework.

KELLI CHARLAND (she/her) attends SUNY Plattsburgh for English literature and creative writing. She has worked as the copy editor for North Star, SUNY Plattsburgh's student-run literary magazine, and as an editorial assistant and social media manager for *Saranac Review*. One of her essays appears on *Saranac Review's* blog. She was awarded 1st place for the Robert Frost Memorial Poetry Prize in May 2024 for her poem, "A letter to my amygdala."

JAMES DOWLING is an undergraduate creative writing major (BFA) currently in his junior year. His work has previously appeared in the *Sandpiper Review*.

KEN DUKES JR. was born in New York City and resides in Davenport, New York, with his wife and two children. After a three-decade career in telecommunications, Ken retired in 2019 and enrolled at SUNY Oneonta. He expects to graduate in 2025 and plans to

resume a Masters in Pastoral Studies at St. Bernard's College of Theology and Ministry. Ken practices zazen, meditation, yoga, and is a volunteer minister. Reading is his refuge.

KELLY FACENDA graduated from SUNY Geneseo with a degree in English. She took all the creative writing courses that she could. She eventually went back to school and got a nursing degree from Villanova. She thoroughly misses being surrounded by writers, however, and started playing with poetry and fiction again. Fantastic at starting things but truly terrible at finishing them, Kelly finally wrapped up a few of her poems. She hopes you enjoy them.

ALEX FISHER is an author, musician, and artist based in Western New York. He's in his senior year at SUNY Fredonia and serves as president of the College Democrats of New York. His work spans sci-fi satire and deeply personal artwork, such as his short story "Fiftieth Street" published in Fredonia's *Trident* and his nonfiction work, "On Toronto." He's currently developing his debut novel, *Bleach*, which takes its inspiration from disinfectants and cleaning equipment...obviously.

HANNAH FULLER is a graduate student at SUNY Brockport pursuing a career in school counseling. She has been published in *Gandy Dancer*, *Third Wednesday*, and *Polemical Zine*.

GIULYANA GAMERO is a sophomore at SUNY Geneseo and the former Youth Poet for the City of Rockford. She loves to take on various artistic projects in any medium, such as 89.3 WGSU's *Sunflower Story Hour*, a paranormal audio drama. Her writing has appeared in the *Young American Poetry Digest*, *The Lamron*, and in Carnegie Hall's *Traveling the Spaceways*. Her visual art has appeared at the Rockford Art Museum and Bridgeport Art Center.

KIEL M. GREGORY teaches philosophy and world literature at Binghamton University where he is a PhD student in Comparative Literature. His nonfiction has been nominated for inclusion in *Best American Essays* and the Pushcart Prize. His creative writing and photography appear in *Lips*, *Atticus Review*, *Hypertext Review*, and other fine journals. Visit [kielmgregory.com](http://kielmgregory.com) for more.

KAISER KELLY is a freshman at SUNY Purchase, where they are studying creative writing with a track in narrative work. They enjoy writing horror and literary fiction.

WRENDOLYN KLOTZKO is an aspiring poet studying education, English, and creative writing at SUNY Oswego. She originates from the Adirondack Mountains of Upstate New York, where she fell in love with obscure and obsolete words, used bookstores, and the outdoors. She has been published in *The Great Lake Review* and continues

to write and submit her work. In fact, she is probably doing that right now if not distracted by whatever is outside the window.

ZOE LAVALLEE is a senior at SUNY Geneseo where she studies adolescent education and English with a concentration in creative writing. She is currently a student teacher attempting to mold teenagers into writers. In her spare time she plays with her cat Bug and thinks about words that refuse to settle on the page.

ISABELL MATHEW is a junior at SUNY Geneseo, where she is studying neuroscience. She is deeply interested in the inner workings of neurodegenerative diseases. Her preferred medium is pencils and ink on paper.

MEGHAN McMULLAN is on her third campus for her third semester and would also like to know what is going on. She currently attends Suffolk Community College for a degree in liberal arts. Her true passions are the backroads and gas stations that make her feel far away.

AMY NICOL is an up-and-coming writer from Long Island, New York. She is a freshman at SUNY Oswego where she is majoring in creative writing and is an editor for the *Great Lakes Review*. Her story "Rain" was published in an anthology entitled *Road Trip to El Dorado* (Free Spirit Publisher.) She has also published in *great weather for MEDIA*.

SEAN NOVAK is a first-year sustainability major at SUNY Geneseo. He considers himself a “casual hobby writer.” Sean enjoys creation in all capacities, such as cooking, writing, and drawing.

KATIE PENNA is a freshman at SUNY Geneseo where she studies music performance on flute/piccolo. She is a current member of the college’s creative writing club. Katie enjoys writing everything from poetry to plays and is excited to continue developing her work in a college setting.

AMANDA PUCHALSKI is in her last semester as an English major at the University at Buffalo. In her free time she enjoys reading, spending time with her friends, and attending concerts.

AUDREY REDMOND is a student studying theater and creative writing at Purchase College. Her writing stems from a place of love for human connections and all the weird, grotesque parts of life that often go unnoticed.

SOPHIA TURTURRO is a senior psychology major at SUNY Geneseo. She enjoys long walks on a short walk, wading through the mediate, and playing with sticks. Recently, she’s been dabbling in cryptic nonsense, self-reference, and lists of three.

LIZ ANN YOUNG (she/her) lives on a small farm with dogs, cats, chickens, and some humans too, on land originally inhabited by the Haudenosaunee and Susquehannock peoples. She is working towards her PhD at Binghamton University and received her MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. She is the longstanding poetry editor of *Atlas + Alice* and her work has been

published by *Black Heart*, *Big Muddy*, *Tinderbox Poetry*, and *San Pedro River Review*, among others.

QUINN YOUNGS is a senior at SUNY Oswego studying journalism and creative writing. They live in Vienna, New York.

ANIMUS ZHANG uses photography to explore themes of isolation, memory, and the passage of time. The monochromatic compositions evoke a sense of disconnection, as ordinary objects and spaces take on haunting, unfamiliar qualities. Zhang invites the viewer to question the meaning of belonging and loss within the familiar, creating a narrative that bridges the personal and the universal.