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## **A Letter from the Editor**

Here we are, publishing our second issue. I'm still pinching myself. It's a dream to see these words out in the world and to get the chance to publish the work of such talented and brilliant writers. I couldn't be more grateful for our 36 wonderful contributors and to you, our incredible readers. Without you, there is no Ghost Light Lit. Thank you, from the very bottom of my heart, for being a part of our family.

“hopeless/romantic” is a treasure trove of love and an exploration of heartbreak. I wanted to play around with the classic phrase, searching for pieces that were steeped in the “hopeless” aspect as much as the “romantic.” There are several poems and fiction pieces among these masterpieces, as well as GLL's first published short screenplay.

From the beautiful love stories that inspire us, to the heartbreak that changes us, to the longing and hopelessness of falling in love— this collection is sure to capture your heart and then smash it to pieces.

Thank you for being here. We're so glad that you are.

Love,  
Rachael Lord

Editor-in-Chief, Ghost Light Lit

# The Strange Breakdown of ARCH13

By: Jessica Russo

## Memorandum

To: IT Department, Isaac Asimov Robotic Manufacturing Corporation  
Submitted by Duane, Donald D. (Employee # 7683590)

Initially hired to oversee the Robot Repairing Robot Program (RRR), in response to public outcry over the capabilities of Artificial Intelligence. One case in particular is worth noting.

Diagnostic data indicated Robo unit ARCH13 (referred to here as Archie) had a malfunctioning articulated arm. Archie was transferred to repair bot AR13L (referred to here as Ariel). Ariel specializes in articulated arm adjustment. During repair both Archie and Ariel units experienced unprecedented energy surges and blew multiple breakers, causing a temporary shutdown of the facility. The final figures estimate loss of production value at \$86,530.

Archie was scanned and eventually returned to the line functioning at 100 percent efficiency. Within the hour, the Archie unit sent out a failure alert, which would again involve the articulated arm function. The Ariel had unusual delays in repair time, however, the log file indicated no errors were ever found. Archie was again restored to the line with full function. Similar malfunction alerts were sent out two more times with no data to support defect or failure. It would appear that Archie's artificial intelligence was intentionally creating false error files.

Upon the next such malfunction, the decision was made to deactivate, diagnose, and reset Archie's artificial intelligence system. Before the shutdown was complete, systems indicated Ariel was now experiencing critical failure. The two Robo units were found shut down with articulated arms interlocked with one another. Central computing indicated Ariel self-terminated within moments of Archie's deactivation. Archie and Ariel will remain in storage together, as they appear to have cold-welded together during shut down. Ariel's final log file, strangely, only states, "Thus with a kiss I die."

End of report.

## Aubade

By: David Milley

Beard to beard, hairy bellies pressed tight,  
I study your eyes, still half-closed from lust,  
I trace your lips with one finger. Your mouth  
opens, just a little. I touch your perfect teeth.

Your true love looked like me. He betrayed you.  
He did not take his pills. He grew ill. He died.  
You told me the tale. You don't want that again.  
But you are drawn to me, and I am drawn to you.

You smile, and close your eyes. You fall back,  
your weight rolls down my hidden arm. I look  
along the length of bed. Our arms and legs gleam,  
entangled inlay of mahogany and pine.

I know you will not call tomorrow, but I hope  
I've been as good to you as you have been to me.

# Begonia

By: Shauri Cherie

## **Begonia, noun**

/bi'gounjə/

1. A perennial flower native to subtropical and tropical climates ~~though in colder, harsher areas they're often grown ornamentally indoors~~ as in *He gifted me a begonia on my birthday because its blush matched mine.*
2. In flower language, a plant symbolic of love, balance, ~~caution~~, and joy, like the contentment I felt when he twined our fingers on our first date, when he first whispered "I love you" against the shell of my ear, as in *When he eased to one knee and proposed with a ring the same pink as the begonias three years before.*
3. The flowers I ask my future mother-in-law to pick up from the florist, as in *Begonias are perfect for the ~~wedding~~ funeral.*

# Romancing Haley in Stardew Valley

By: Rebecca Long

I give you a prismatic shard.  
You say, "Gross!" and reject me with a flip of your hair.  
I think you're the prettiest 16-bit blonde I've ever seen.  
You say I'd be cute if it weren't for my farm clothes.

The other villagers think you're a selfish crybaby.  
But they don't know you like I do.  
You're like Regina George — hot, mean, closeted.  
You're my dream girl.  
No other townie will do.

I ask you to be my partner for the Flower Dance.  
You say, "Eww Gross" and twirl around with a boy who won't let go of his football dreams.  
I bring you sunflowers.  
You say, "Oh my god, this is my favorite thing!"

My flesh-and-blood boyfriend asks me to come to bed.  
But I can't give up now.  
I won't let you get stuck in Chappell Roan's "Good Luck, Babe!" nightmare.  
I know there's depth beneath those pixelated sapphire eyes.  
No other bachelorette will do.

I give you coconuts and golden pumpkins.  
You open up to me about your dead grandmother.  
I give you a flower bouquet and make you my girlfriend.  
You show me your darkroom.

We get married on the 14th day of summer, year 2.  
It's 3 a.m. in the real world.  
You say we should be "together, together."  
I step through the computer screen,  
leaving behind my desk job and sleeping boyfriend to join you in the Valley.  
The pink cake tastes even better than I dreamed.

# IN THIS WAY OR ANOTHER

By: SR Wollstonecraft

In the event of our vessel sinking, I want you  
to use me as a flotation device.

If our airline crashes in the Andes, I want you  
to eat. Fuck, I want you fat. Don't go hungry a day.

When the oxygen starts running out, I want you  
to pull what you can from my lungs, then pull harder.

Lie down your weary body in my tattooed hide. Let my bones  
make for decent tools. When I'm down to my teeth

make dice.

I'm not going for help.

I will be strong enough to carry you.



## Muse, washing her hair

By: John Rutherford

Water rushing, soaking her curly hair,  
angled, back straight as mount Helicon,  
breasts, shoulders, legs damp and bare  
and somewhere, someone turns the TV on.

I am not amid Olympian heights,  
I reside in much more mortal climes,  
here no Gods strive and test their might,  
instead we debate about wind chimes.

But every other evening she begins,  
unbraiding that which crowns her head,  
combing out the curly locks again  
and wrapping them up before she goes to bed.

It transports me to a different time,  
an oil painting, oak framed, sublime.

# Home Renovations Down Under

By: Rory G.

Thing is, Orpheus didn't build hell.  
The underworld wasn't his, he was  
a stranger in a foreign land, a migrant passing  
through, a transient stopped-and-frisked,  
clutching a visitation ticket searching  
for a familiar face in a lineup of orange  
jumpsuits

But everything might have been  
different if that dim and hazy  
country beyond life  
was his and his and his —  
his word law there, footsteps thunder

In this version, Orpheus is the architect and  
Eurydice, no,  
she is not the prisoner but the jailhouse itself  
and of course he looks back,  
and the horror is not that she is gone but that  
she remains, and that he built her  
on purpose

And what of Hades? Waiting always  
for the prisoner's return, for the mail-order  
bride of springtime to come chained  
and shackled, growing pale and sullen  
deep beneath the earth

It might have gone differently, if he wasn't  
watcher and keeper and architect and  
landlord of hell all at once. The homeowner  
has responsibilities, his duty is always to the  
house before its guests. He cannot risk  
compromising the integrity of  
the structure

Maybe in this version, Orpheus and  
Persephone find each other.  
He helps her escape.  
Maybe Eurydice turns from the path, straying  
so softly and carefully that Orpheus  
doesn't have a chance to realize  
she left before he ever turned around

She stays with Hades. How can she leave?  
She has looked the house in its mouth  
and decided the certainty of teeth  
is preferable to the endless *Will it hurt?*  
*Will it? And when, when will it hurt,*  
*and how badly?* of breathless life  
aboveground  
in the sun

# A CUPBOARD FULL OF COFFEE CUPS

By: Bridget Grace Sheaff

On the brink of separation, Donna and Michael are clearing out their kitchen, sorting through years worth of memories through their coffee cups.

DONNA: 30-something. Lost.

MICHAEL: 30-something. Tired.

*DONNA and MICHAEL in the kitchen. Arguing. An old argument, around about as long as they have known each other and longer. One of those arguments all couples have. This one goes through the motions and stays in a realm of lightness, though. There is a pain underneath it that isn't being spoken. Boxes line the floor, "Donna's Kitchen" written in thick, unforgiving black Sharpie on the side. MICHAEL is examining a coffee cup that says "I HEART NY" on it. DONNA is on a step stool, going through the cupboards.*

DONNA:

No, it was the second year. I'm positive.

MICHAEL:

Third.

DONNA:

The third year your parents came with us. The first year we were with Steph and Hillary. The *second year*, (*counts on her fingers condescendingly*) one, two, *second year*, we were alone.

MICHAEL:

No, it was the third year because it was right after the trip to Disney.

DONNA:

We went to Disney the second year!

MICHAEL:

(*remembering*) For our anniversary.

DONNA:

Right.

MICHAEL:

Fine. Fine. You win. So, do you want this one?

DONNA:

I have one that my sister gave me at work. I think it's pretty clear that I heart New York. I don't want to belabor the point. I might come off as desperate.

MICHAEL:

So. Back in the cupboard?

DONNA:

Can you set it on the counter so we don't get confused about which ones we have already gone through?

MICHAEL:

It's going back in the cupboard eventually anyway.

DONNA:

Yes, but I don't want to talk about it a second time when we have already spent 5 minutes on one coffee mug. We have like 30 more to go through, okay?

MICHAEL:

Yeesh, Donna, okay. Are you in a hurry?

DONNA:

I just don't want to spend my whole day sorting through coffee cups.

MICHAEL:

You have better things to do.

DONNA:

I do.

MICHAEL:

I'm glad I mean that much to you.

DONNA:

Stop.

MICHAEL:

*(beat)* Okay, okay, this section of the counter will be stuff that stays here with me and this section will be stuff that goes... in the boxes.

DONNA:

Why don't you just put the stuff that goes in the boxes into the boxes?

MICHAEL:

Don't you want to wrap them in newspaper or something so they don't break?

DONNA:

They are just going in the back of my car and then to the apartment. I'm not shipping them across the country.

*Pause.*

MICHAEL:

*The* apartment.

DONNA:

What?

MICHAEL:

You don't call it "my apartment" or "I'm taking them home" or whatever. You say "the apartment."

DONNA:

Don't analyze my syntax, Michael.

MICHAEL.

I'm just saying.

DONNA:

I hate when you do this.

MICHAEL:

Is that why you are moving out?

DONNA:

Can we *not for one second?* Can we just not?

MICHAEL:

Fine. Sorry. Fine.

*They work in silence, DONNA handing him mugs and MICHAEL placing them either on the counter or in one of the boxes. He places a mug with a kitten picture on the counter.*

DONNA:

Oo-oo, I want that one.

MICHAEL:

It's mine.

DONNA:

It's one of my favorites.

MICHAEL:

Tough.

DONNA:

Are you kidding me?

MICHAEL:

You're going to have to sacrifice some things.

DONNA:

Stop being a child and give me the kitty mug.

MICHAEL:

Nope.

*DONNA hops down from the step ladder and places the mug in one of her boxes. MICHAEL removes it when she goes back up the step ladder. Repeat. Repeat. It's suddenly a frenzy and DONNA doesn't even have time to climb up the ladder. They find it funny deep down, but on a surface level, it's a fight for their lives. DONNA throws the mug in the box and we hear something break.*

DONNA:

Crap.

MICHAEL:

Hah!

DONNA:

Don't mock me.

MICHAEL:

This wouldn't happen if you wrapped them first.

DONNA:

*(mimicking)* "This wouldn't happen if you wrapped them first."

*MICHAEL laughs at her a little. DONNA laughs at herself a little and shakes her head. MICHAEL kisses DONNA suddenly. A long kiss. Urgent. She's kissing him back and then pulling away.*

DONNA:

Michael.

MICHAEL:

Don't leave.

DONNA:

I have to.

MICHAEL:

We've only been doing this for five years. We aren't marriage experts yet. We have so much to learn. You can't just quit while we are still figuring it out.

DONNA:

Don't, okay? We've talked about this.

MICHAEL:

*(closing the cupboard, forcing her to pay attention)* You talked about this. I had to listen as the woman I love told me I was so insufferable to live with she was abandoning everything we have created to go off and... and what, Donna?

DONNA:

I don't know, okay, I just... I have to do this.

MICHAEL:

It's hasty. It's not well thought-out. It's insane.

DONNA:

Don't you think I know that?

MICHAEL:

Do you?

DONNA:

Yes!

MICHAEL:

Then why are you doing it?

DONNA:

I don't know, exactly. I know that I have to and I'll figure the rest out later.

MICHAEL:

So this is, what, a tiny adventure you are taking yourself on? A vacation from responsibility?



DONNA:

Don't be glib.

MICHAEL:

I'll stop being glib when you stop being obtuse.

DONNA:

I'm not trying to be obtuse! If I knew the answer, I would tell you.

MICHAEL:

I don't think it should work like that. I don't think you can just make decisions without understanding the motivation.

DONNA:

Can we just keep packing?

MICHAEL:

How can you just pack up our whole lives like this? Look at us! Quibbling over the coffee mugs, trying to figure out who keeps what memory. Are you really so heartless that—

DONNA:

Do you think this is easy for me? Do you really?

MICHAEL:

You don't seem to be suffering at all.

DONNA:

That's right. I don't suffer. I don't cry myself to sleep. I don't miss you with a dull aching pain that never seems to go away. You know what's hard? Cooking for one person. Everyone says "just cook the same amount you normally do and save half for lunch" but they don't really understand why it's hard. I don't care about what I eat in the same way. My cooking has no finesse. It's just... it's substance. It's barely nutrition. Because it's only me so there's no need to... put in any effort, or something. I'm eating because I have to to not die and then I'm watching mindless television on the couch without even paying attention to it and then going to bed alone, but none of it, not one single moment of it, makes me as unhappy as the suffocating reality of being married to someone who doesn't recognize you.

MICHAEL:

Doesn't recognize you?

DONNA:

I feel like you haven't looked at me in... years, maybe, even.

MICHAEL:

Donna, how can you think that?

DONNA:

I'm pretty good at it.

MICHAEL:

You have to tell me things like that. You can't just do a big gesture like moving out and just... It's not fair to anyone.

DONNA:

It's not a gesture, sweetheart. It's a real thing that I need right now.

MICHAEL:

Do you still love me?

DONNA:

So very, very badly.

MICHAEL

Then why are we clearing out cupboards? Shouldn't that be the only thing that matters?

DONNA:

Is it the only thing that matters to you?

MICHAEL:

Yes.

DONNA:

No, really think about it. No matter how much you love me, no matter how hard it is to see me go, would you ever really be happy knowing how close this was to ending and that it still could end any second?

MICHAEL:

I would at least try. Which is more than I can say about you.

DONNA:

And that's the difference, isn't it?

MICHAEL:

What is really going on? Is it someone else? Is it not enough, I dunno, free time? Attention? Am I not exciting to you anymore?

DONNA:

It's... I dunno, it's a lack of certainty.

MICHAEL:

In me?

DONNA:

No, in me.

MICHAEL:

I don't know what that means.

DONNA:

Me neither.

MICHAEL:

I'm certain of you.

DONNA:

How can that be?

MICHAEL:

I just am.

DONNA:

Well... bully for you.

MICHAEL:

You know, when you run out of steam in an argument, you start to sound like a carnival barker.

DONNA:

Shut up.

MICHAEL:

Don't go.

DONNA:

... Let's finish packing.

*She climbs back up the step ladder and tries to hand him more mugs.*

MICHAEL:

Just leave them in there.

DONNA:

These are mine.

MICHAEL:

And they are staying put.

DONNA:

What is this? Are you holding me and my coffee cups hostage?

MICHAEL:

If need be.

DONNA:

Mike.

MICHAEL:

I'm going to fight for you. Somewhere in your insane, gothic novel mind that has imagined too much and read too often, you want me to fight for you. I know you. I know that this is a temporary instinct, a push for, I dunno, a change of pace. We can do change of pace. Together. We can bike across the country. We can scuba dive. We can play hooky and go to the movies in the a middle of a work day, for chrissakes. You are not leaving. The vow I took binds you to me just as much as it binds me to you. And so, I'm fighting for you, against you if necessary.

*Pause.*

DONNA:

I'm going to the apartment.

MICHAEL:

That's fine. Go to the apartment. But you are eventually coming home. Here. Our house. Your house.

DONNA:

I want a new kitty mug.

MICHAEL:

I will buy you 11 kitty mugs.

DONNA:

I'm not sure about any of this.

MICHAEL:

I am.

*DONNA climbs down the step stool and glances at the boxes. She decides not to take them, but she does exit with her car keys, slowly, looking back at MICHAEL before she goes. MICHAEL pauses as she goes and then starts putting the mugs back in the cupboard. He pulls out the kitten mug, the handle broken off. He sets it aside to glue back together later.*

## Love Myself First

By: Dudley Stone

She tells me to love myself first, so I spy  
myself in a moonlit mirror across a crowded

cliché, connive to jostle myself  
in an otherwise unmanned elevator, swoon

to my own musk —

Wait. Don't rush into this.

Will I promise me not to go too far too fast

and not stumble over a half-buried stone  
(the X in a treasure tale that marks the spot),

like the one that turned me into the thief  
of your loose hairpin and taught me how  
to spring my handcuffed tongue?

# To be Loved

By: Maria Parperis

It is said that to love someone and be loved in return is to feel whole.

But I'm still whole, just fighting for the space he wants to share. The cosy loveseat becomes cramped when he sits beside me. My many bottles teeter on the edge of the bathroom counter to make space for his own. The once adequately sized bed feels comically tiny; his burning arm thrown over my waist on a humid summer night. Every day is an effort to fit myself into a smaller box.

But I don't mind.

I'm still whole, just taking up half of the space. The joy he brings is payment enough for the snippets of life I gift him. That loveseat where he's resting used to house my socked feet as I read into another world. That space on the bathroom counter where he keeps his razor – I once stained the surface with nail polish before a night out with friends. My long-gone cat used to sleep on the side of the bed he occupies after his evening shower. Can he feel the love I'm sharing?

But it's not enough.

I'm still whole, still taking up half the space he left. The loveseat provides less support now my headrest – his shoulder – is absent. My legs become overgrown when I don't replace the razor he reclaimed. The day bed isn't as comfortable as the master, but it means I'm not as tempted to reach for him in the night. It feels impossible to return to the version of me that unconsciously filled every space, but to continue to occupy an area that's lacking is a sharp twist of the knife for every memory it evokes.

To be loved and left is another feeling entirely.

# Happily, After

By: Patrick Malka

On their first date he took her to one of Mount Royal's look out points to enjoy the view of Montreal and the water beyond. He asked her to visualize what it would look like to stand there as an enormous sea creature rose from the water to destroy the city. The sounds of the creature's roar reaching them a half second later, weakening their knees, preventing them from taking even a step back.

To her credit, she didn't walk away right then. She asked insightful follow up questions instead. He was in love and so was she.

➡➡

Months later as they finally admitted to each other how they felt on that date, their recounting differed but the result was the same.

➡➡

He was nervous. The first time he remembered seeing her was on her student association campaign posters. He voted for her without ever having read her campaign platform. He kept that from her on the first date. She talked about her work. He didn't regret his decision to vote for her. Either way she had lost.

He took the lead on planning the date since he was the one who asked and she enthusiastically said yes. He wanted it to be simple. Coffee at a nice café and a long stroll. If the date was going well, he wanted the opportunity to decide on the spot between a number of predetermined activities. He chose one of those coffee houses where they didn't serve drip coffee, all the chairs and tables were different and local art covered the walls. He was pleased that the selection was appreciated and that he was able to recommend a beverage. He ordered two macchiatos. They spent two hours there and the only thing that broke their conversational run was that she had to go to the bathroom. When she came back out, he was standing with her jacket in hand, ready to suggest a walk. It was a deliberate choice. He was trying to look decisive. He thought she would be impressed.



The walk was pleasant enough even though it was cool out. The hike up Mount Royal was a last-minute decision. She wore sensible shoes. They continued to speak for another half hour then walked back to her place, where he respectfully declined to go in but made definite plans with her for the weekend so she wouldn't take it as a negative sign.



She was looking forward to a night out. She hadn't had one since deciding to run for the student association's vice presidency. She spoke about the work but stopped as soon as she realized what she was doing. She liked this guy from the brief conversation they had but knew little about him. He was quiet but she felt he could be brought out to play and she intended to see if that was something she wanted to do.

The choice of coffee house and a long walk was a great one. The coffee was a bit strong but not unpleasant. Her left eyelid vibrated from the heady mixture of caffeine, fatigue and nervous excitement. She couldn't stop talking and she couldn't stop looking at his hands. He spoke more during the walk. His ideas were interesting and though his thought process was sometimes strange, she decided early on that she would take it all seriously. What was the point of trying to get to know him if she didn't give value to his ideas?

She went along with the hike up the hill but kept a bit of distance between herself and her date. She maintained a healthy skepticism of the intentions of all men so sacrificing a bit of that safety on date number one was as big a gesture as she could imagine. In that same spirit, as they stood at the door of her apartment, she invited him in. She knew she made the right choice when he politely declined.



When they kissed for the first time, when they allowed themselves what they had delayed for weeks, it was aggressive. He held her by her shoulders and the longer the kiss lasted, the harder he squeezed. Her mind was racing but she was very conscious of his grip and how it stayed just south of discomfort. She didn't understand how he knew to do it or why she liked it as much as she did. He had no idea he was doing it. He only knew he never wanted to let go.



Six years later, they bought a fifty-year-old two-story farmhouse together, with the intention of fixing it up. It was a steal for a reason, but they had the time and inclination. She was happy to have this physical structure that represented a possible lifetime of growth and comfort. This was her new home and she applied herself diligently from week one to making it everything she envisioned. They moved in on June first and two months later, just a few weeks ahead of her first teaching assignment, an intro level political science course, the house was in working order and more than she could have expected.

Music played constantly throughout the house, but she spoke over all of it. She couldn't help herself. She was overflowing with ideas about work, the house, what they would grow in the garden, but mostly, she spoke because he, since moving in, said so little. Where she felt the excitement that comes at the start of something, he was acting as though something had ended. Seeing him at the door of the house that first time, she saw that same fumbling young man at the lookout from so many years ago, his head full of monsters. He worked hard but seemed intent on not being in the house. He painted the exterior, fixed shingles, built a raised flower bed, and finished work projects in the broken gazebo that came with the house. She found him on several occasions staring into the house from different windows. He seemed to be checking for something. When she asked him what he was looking for, he would smile and shrug it off, again saying nothing. She was not convinced but this was at least enough for her not to worry. Still, she kept a close eye. This was the start of something but none of it would hold the same value without him there.



On June first, as he entered the house with the last box, at the end of nine hours of back and forth, he stared at her lounging beautifully on a stack of cushions, her legs up on a tower of book boxes, drinking a bottle of water. As he looked past her down the hallway that led off the open living area towards the guest bathroom and stairs, there was what looked like a person standing there, standing in the shadow of a burnt-out light fixture. He was so stunned that he said nothing. Since she was resting, eyes closed, rolling the cold bottle across her forehead, she saw nothing. He put the box down and when he looked back up, the light was on down the hallway and there was nothing and no one there.

Two weeks later, he woke up in the middle of the night to find the same figure standing in their doorway. The light he had left on in the hallway was out, all he could see was a person's slight, feminine shape. He closed his eyes and put his hand on her hip as she slept next to him. He didn't do it to wake her, just to anchor himself to some kind of reality. When he opened his eyes, the apparition was at the foot of the bed, leaning forward, her palms leaving impressions in the comforter between his legs. It was still only shadow. It reached out, the light in the hall suddenly turned on and it disappeared. He did not go back to sleep.

For the rest of the summer, he spent as much time as he could outside the house and even got into the habit of looking in through windows to see if he would be surprised by anything. He couldn't tell her or even let on that he was seeing something coexist with them. She was so invigorated and in love with him, this time and this place, he could never do that to her. He always felt there was so little he could offer her, he would, at the very least, never take anything away. So, he decided, at the beginning of August, that he would live with it. He would accept the fear and unknown of their home, always feeling at risk and vulnerable, always looking through windows and down hallways, always reaching out to touch her, not only out of affection but out of a need to remind himself that while he would never feel safe, hopefully she would.

## desire

By: Tyler Davis

a streetcar named.  
the unholyest disease.

jury's already decided you're  
guilty, so no, it doesn't  
really matter how you plead.

i really loved this place,  
all of its greenery  
till you cursed me - like  
god did eve.

take a page from my book  
and write a song about me.

i hope it's shit.  
i hope you get a cease and desist,  
i hope that the next girl you meet  
holds your ribs between her teeth.

choke on blood flowing  
out of you like a stream.

i hope it tastes sweet.  
i hope you enjoy your last dream.

## convoluted tongue

By: Halle Ewing

i've been searching for god so long i think i've found him in the body of my pen.

our little corner of english classroom, cool press of rings against quivering fingers, intertwined with such finality that i can no longer feel where i end and you begin. the fact is that you have made your place like a home on my tongue, and all i can taste is your ceiling.

i know god exists because i write about you. where else could he live but my fingertips? these words must come from the divine; how else could i capture the imprint of flesh and jawbone under my desperate palm?

i know god exists because it means hell does too. and what other hell could there be than the knowledge that i cannot have you? that he has gifted me love captured in a body, but i am forbidden to touch?

you are out of my reach. the closest i will ever get to you are words on a page; god in the ink of my pen. because you are my sky; the world and it's maker, and all i have of you is this poem.

# To Be Your Celestial Body

By: Katrina Lemaire

papery sunlight stretches  
over your puffy polyester cardigan  
breaths a catch away  
your eyes marbling cornflower blue  
a song forgotten on the radio—  
*was it curio?*

we can't tell between traffic lights

wondering if there's a reason  
why birds form flock echelons  
or if prolonged eye contact  
can connect two bodily cosmos

planetary alignment is inevitable  
a conjunction of perfect universal timing  
like you and me tonight  
phenolic resin spheres positioned  
for a game of eight ball

we are a syzygy—moving in parts  
i am wrapped around you  
holding the pool stick  
breaking in a hit  
laughs pocketed  
hands netted— she comes over to dust  
stars over your bottom lip

i am in orbit  
my gravity on pilsner pool hardwood  
wearing the cardigan she gave you—

i think i remember our song now.

# Marooned

By: Alex Rivera

Sometimes I lose myself  
in the obsidian ocean floors of my mind.  
Weighed down by anchors of past mistakes,  
I sink into despair,  
my words bursting in bubbles  
before they reach your red coral ears.  
Then when I recall your fingertips pirouetting in my palm,  
I emerge from the field of green-mist chrysanthemums  
within your eyes where heaven graced earth,  
and where I met you.

I miss the way  
your curls brushed against my forehead  
when our lips met in the middle of the air between us,  
wiping away days we drowned in our tears,  
our voices silenced by the endless sea.  
We'd find ourselves beached in each other's arms,  
sand sticking to my sunburned chest as  
morning washed the night away.  
*Please,*  
let's stay up to watch the sun together one last time.

## texts to my tinder date

By: Sydney Sinks

hey, i brought you some splintered selenite.  
hey, here, hold the moon in your palm.  
i don't often fall in love, just so we understand where we stand,  
sweet Tinder date, sweet  
she/they lesbian in overalls.  
you remind me of every  
she/they lesbian i find,  
but you all taste different and delicious.  
and i swear i do want to know you, if you let me.  
hey, can i fossilize us  
for just a sec? can i immortalize us  
via polaroid picture?  
dating in your twenties is like climbing to the top of a mountain  
and grappling down without a rope; so...falling,  
but controlled and methodical.  
bruises are to be expected—ideally  
only in a metaphorical sense  
or at the pulse point in my neck.  
god, though, i'd love it if you'd look at me.  
admire the curves of me,  
the careful crafted symmetry.  
do you want to get coffee?  
do you want to split a pastry here in this coffee shop?  
no, probably a bad idea, you're gluten-free and i'm a recovering anorexic  
starving for your attention.  
but hey, i'd love to do this again sometime,  
if you're up for it.  
maybe we can go back to my apartment and kick my roommates out.  
maybe we can pretend to belong to each other  
for one tangled night.  
feel free to text me after, if you want, but  
no pressure. i get it.



i know how repetitive we can be to each other, sweet nose-ringed baby,  
how forgettable and identical i am  
to everyone else you've taken home. i understand.  
i'm cool with whatever  
you decide to give me.

## RELIQUARY

By: Megan Freshley

Wearing twigs in my hair from falling through your canopy all night,  
unable to catch hold of a single branch. I don't need to know you belong  
to me, only that I belong to you.

You dipped me into a starry oil. You slipped me on like an evening glove,  
the net of your breath bending like a grid around me. Ellipses strung  
around you like an enormous rosary... Your face so beautiful I shut up.

My brain is tufted with you — buttons I never want to unbutton. I  
listen for you at my door like a dog. I move around my house pointlessly.  
I go to the gym trying to wear out my longing.

There are a million ways to love, each specific as a freckle. Specific as the  
tracers of absinthe light the fireflies leave behind tonight. Your long  
stare paints an alligatored moat between us.

Wrenching myself to life again like a rosebush in early winter. I cut a  
long stem, hold it to my breastbone in the shallow moat. My hands  
underwater unfamiliar to me as starfish.

You're still here with me like a shining scar. Chase me around the room  
again like a nymph in a clear scarf. Kiss me like Saturn Devouring His  
Son. Like we're those two statues dredged from the pond and left leaned

forehead-to-forehead in the undercroft.

# Euphoria

By: Gemma Elgar

Two plants on the windowsill climb out of their pots  
and towards one another like we,  
ivy-limbed and with iridescent faces,  
breathe in deep purple and out a burning red.

Bright-lipped intoxication and domestic satisfaction pass  
between our senses one by one,  
*my hands are yours,*  
corporeal duets under a speckled ceiling with the lights off –  
let's look at the fairy lights like the open night sky.

Two plants share water for survival in the desert like we,  
gasping, open mouthed and with tenuous bodies,  
breathe in white light and out a perfect darkness.

# The Pleasure-Seeking Ghazal

By: Daniel Brennan

I know that spring is coming, but I'm lonely.  
The window bleeds with sunlight, my lonely

houseplant draped across the sill. The monstera stalks  
rot in their vase, no fault of their own. Lonely

is the hand that rests against my head, palm open  
and pooling with heat. *I don't get lonely,*

you whisper as the smoke leaves your mouth.  
Incredible that I still believe you. It all gets lonely,

this room suffocating with sour after-sex and  
stubbed cigarettes, our bodies choosing lonely

but satisfied over whatever else April's lithe flesh  
can offer us. The air is thick with lonely

these nights, dull with our time spent watching dusk  
fill the room. Because you're lonely, and I'm lonely,

you ask me to come back tomorrow. My body filled  
with your yesterdays. My mouth a vigil. Kept lit, if lonely.

# BURYING THE BARDS

By: Terri Watrous Berry

Romance is dead.

Dead as the poets who  
pushed their paplines  
into our malleable minds.  
Stand back! I have a stake  
in this wake, I want to be  
the one who drives it  
into that precious chest, for  
I have tested you Romance  
and you have failed.

It's not just me, is it?

Not one among us  
is unscathed by  
promises we've yet to  
keep and miles to go  
before we sleep with  
someone we'll love  
better after death.

So, woe.

All that's left me now is  
a warm and rather  
comfortable companion,  
who rubs my feet, who  
keeps my secrets,  
dances with me at  
festivals, holds my hand  
at funerals, who  
doesn't seem to see  
the gray, the thickening  
waist or mind my whining,  
who believes in me, who  
even still believes in you.

Oh, rest in peace then  
Romance. Now I see that  
you are like the brief but  
lovely blossoms on a tree  
in spring, leaving when  
true strength of limbs  
begins, leaving giving  
sway for, leaving what  
was prayed for, leaving  
making way for —  
dare I say it? — Love.

“I don’t have a choice, but I still choose you”

By: Matthew Miller

*after the song “Poison & Wine” by The Civil Wars*

Each morning is like a muted guitar, a  
metronome, a dripping faucet.

We are in different rooms, but percolating  
coffee and shaken curtain rings

synchronize into a chord. Our movements  
lull in a building progression. Being

undreamed, like a mourning dove  
alone in dawn’s pink streaks, you might believe

our song is a minor key. But the door  
swings open to the swelling steam of the kettle.

I have already poured you a cup of tea and washed  
last night’s dirty dishes. The blueberry

stains on their surface had flowered  
like bruises while we slept,

but I would choose  
to eat that fruit again.

Everything looks like poison  
when stressed and squeezed. Love,

our press resolves in wine that is sweet,  
complex and full of heat. Swirl your glass.

# Kintsugi

By: Sarah James/Leavesley

early morning            & the blinds won't  
protect sleep        light splinters through  
into my dreams        like molten gold  
gluing a broken plate            together

here, the cracks            are our seams  
we're still holding hands            my hips  
moulded to your curves            our petal  
lips meeting            in a full-rose kiss

only, sealing's not        healing – the spilt  
light forces me            to re-surface  
from my mind            & open my eyes  
the illusion of kin-            tsugi isn't

enough to keep            us together  
the cold side of the bed            where I  
imagine you still lying            is a shining  
pool of your absence

I draw the blinds            close  
my eyes again & roll        into the empty  
sheet's warm glow            reaching for  
your body            of golden sun

drenching my pillow        with scents  
of summer meadow            & honey



was it love at first sight in pendle bar?

By: Zoe Davis

i have to admit it wasn't. no. i left you hexed in vodka, cruelty adorned in its finest lbd  
alone  
darkness w/strangers, innocent before 10pm, a date you'd circled and i'd rejected, distracted  
by this invisible orbit of your corners and edges. Soft. Not aligned to my savage trajectory.

Sorry you didn't rock my world or even disturb me. The hint was apocalyptic, honey & i  
was the monster.

*i know that now.*

Asking you to see yourself out before inviting you in. It was born of machete kindness, i  
swear. Bare-legged 18 year-old nativity (a poor vintage) eager to please but wary  
lioness fierce yet kitten hearted. You saw it though. Radiant back bar disco ball diamonds in  
my hair, drunkenly down on one knee declaring with aggressively manipulated straw  
that we should marry.

Oh sweetheart you're delusional too! but we couldn't see the future despite  
dancing beneath a crystal ball, more moon-like every 2nd chance  
i gravitated towards you, that night i blinded you  
that night you saw me  
^ through.

# Biliverdin

By: Sarah O'Grady

An inconvenient love enters,  
off-stage left,  
on the fly.

*(She isn't right for the part.)*

Violins tune up in the pit,  
pluck,  
nonchalantly.

*(Nothing to see here.)*

London pigeons stroll  
in and out of revolving doors,  
nod wisely.

*(They know this song.)*

Backstage, crew  
inhales oxytocin  
from the wings.

*(Feathers fall from the Gods.)*

She crushes the eggshells,  
all the protective blue  
he has laid around his heart.

# How Shakespeare Survived His Own Tragedies

By: Molly Barton

I sat and watched as they took the stage  
Storytellers, warming up the instruments that were their bodies  
He, a veritable player, thrashed his own around with intent  
By his side, the girl who never complained for fear of rocking any boat  
Half-heartedly stretched a muscle.  
They discussed the futility of playing in a world that could seem so cruel  
For entertaining the crowds could be difficult when plagued with the mind of a thinker  
But necessary all the same.  
As he pondered the ways of creative folk, and continued with his ritual  
I couldn't help but notice the light drain from the girl's eyes  
As though her body was threatened by the muscle memory of neglect  
Or too crippled by the weight of the world to continue pretending.  
Perhaps he too noticed the shrinking in her manner  
For he immediately ceased his stretching and turned to her in earnest  
Luckily, this fellow player was a wise old friend  
Both childlike and mature beyond his years; a conversation with him was like a shot of oxytocin  
So when he said, of a world both treacherous and cruel  
*There are still butterflies*  
Well, she felt the dust settle around them and saw the sun rise once more.  
Now, for some unexplained reason  
It is amidst my darkest and most sleepless nights  
That his words flutter back to me  
When a part of my brain is under attack  
I try to remember the notion he brought  
I try to welcome that one simple thought  
Despite the unbearable state of things  
I wait to feel the stirring of wings.  
So no, I've no love left today  
I know I cannot make you stay  
I will never forget the fear in her eyes  
But  
*There will still be butterflies.*

# Tinder Match as Mythology

By: Britni Newton

Do you remember the feeling of my skin between your teeth?  
Loneliness is another form of hunger,  
and I couldn't say no to the satiation of  
your bed of pears and pomegranates.  
Dismissive and far too submissive,  
the moon was trine Venus in Cancer.  
First generation begotten son, kneeling as worship-  
legs wrapped like a goddess around the warmth of a broken mother tongue.

Half empty glasses of red wine left on the altar.  
Poetic WhatsApp messages acting as incantations.  
I'm dying to ask if we moved too soon?  
Beloved Aries sun,  
human sacrifice is your natural inclination.  
How quickly synchronicity turns to missed opportunity.

# Umbrella kisses

By: Karen Soans

meet me where the walls and ceiling kiss  
I have knitted silver dreams  
to catch searching lovers  
tasting fruit that only ripens  
in the garden of our souls

meet me in the space between windows  
double glazed to catch the heat  
off mingling skins  
resist winter's indifference  
nestle in your bended ways  
in the breath of your tomorrow

meet me strung along garden walls  
heavy flowers aching to fall  
between greedy lips  
drink the dew's vanishing kiss  
chase the dawn through tangled shadows

meet me where time drowns mortal feet  
sacred vows bind  
flesh, blood and phantom limbs  
destined to dance beyond our eulogies.

# Something New

By: Will Harris

We talk about our little domestic life  
like it is a shooting star,  
like we don't know if we can believe  
our eyes                      or our heads,  
cynical the bed we lay on won't just  
fall      out from underneath us.

Do you remember that night  
    after the Christmas lights,  
when we saw  
                    not one  
                                    but *two*  
shooting stars?

One seemed to chase  
after the other, like one had just  
started dreaming, and the other  
    dove to follow.

# Mountain Museum

By: Amit Shankar Saha

**Originally published in *Etesian::Barahmasi* (Penprints Publication, 2024).**

Perhaps, I shall write about you  
the way you write about nature.

Maybe your face is like a mountain  
with calls to comb its conifers.

At home I build a museum  
collecting mountains and forests,

a secret museum of my life  
made up of fragments of your life.

Like in the dense vegetation  
when you step, I step into my thoughts,

with a soft crunch of leaves under  
my feet, at the death of quietness.

At this moment my mind is a mountain  
and this poem is a thick forest,

where I am getting lost amidst  
words

and birds

and trees

and breeze

and leaves

and...

## Seasons

By: Lindz McLeod

Love, am I winter?

My skin unclothed is pale, as luminous as  
the unseen lunar surface, reflecting brash sunlight  
to an uncaring sky. A short facsimile, here,  
of something beautiful and bold and clear.

I am opaque, instead. Milk, poured  
between the slotted words  
in thoughts left unspoken. Where throat  
is a killing ground, the tongue  
must be an open grave.

I wish I was like you, spring; budded hearts crackling  
with flavour. Raw green flesh and brown-fingered  
roots, panning for ancient, ancestral gold.

Cracked shells litter underfoot, while worms plough  
an open-mouthed chorus of secret chords.

Egg teeth wither on the vine, long gone, yet  
the future may hold many little jaws, cupped  
bloody in our entwined hands.

I could never fake summer; I am not salmon,  
lying fat and languid in a warm pool of my own  
devising. Nor rutting deer in fresh red bloom.

More like a brace of oar-limbed creatures—  
your favoured remipeds—heaving  
towards an open sky. Saltwater, heavy  
on the cheeks, winding thick skeins of fate.  
Hitching my stubborn heart to your chest.

I am autumn, then, darling.

Charred wood; traces of a blaze half quenched.

Almost drowned, once upon a time. Fallow land  
hiding finite soldiers, deployed in ever wider spaces.

I saddle my troops too hard, ride them too heavy,  
always seeking the next milestone. I would  
gentle every castle for you, tame tempests until they  
ate cavalry from your flat palms. Howl



storms through locked keyholes.  
Bite only with lidded fangs,  
mother-mouthed, and well-intentioned.

Autumn, then. If that's enough, say yes to  
banked embers and hardy cubs, ready to  
withstand the elements. Say yes to this  
offered hand. Say yes to a leaf strewn road  
unfolding in the utter east.

My moss queen, crowned each day by  
dappled light—  
you know who I am, dear heart, but I swear on  
blue vein and polished bone, to give you  
everything that I  
am not.

# Love in the Time of Microplastics

By: Gordon Brown

Because life isn't fair, there aren't any castles for us to move into. Not on our budget anyways. Over godawful Chinese takeout you suggest that we could try squatting somewhere. I ask where. You say you weren't sure, probably some labyrinth mansion left to rot in the woods or a lighthouse or something like that. I say I like the sound of that. There aren't any lighthouses around here. No abandoned mansions either. All the same, I ask what decorations we'll have in our mansion or lighthouse. I like listening to you talk.

You work in the box office of a community theater. You insist that it's haunted and we both pretend to believe. We have a theory that if you pretend to believe something long enough, you'll eventually stop pretending. Already, we've managed to trick ourselves into believing that the world is a more interesting place than it is, that people will be kind and creative if placed in the right circumstances, that the water stain above our uncomfortable mattress looks like Dante and Virgil in conversation with sinners, that there's beauty in decay.

I work for a nonprofit trying to save the oceans. The oceans are fucked beyond hope, but at this point, it's the principle. We've talked about it at length and have agreed that anyone who doesn't believe the world is falling apart is an idiot and anyone who has made peace with that fact is a coward. A coward *and* a traitor. A traitor to what specifically, we haven't decided yet. We discuss what kind of excruciating, wretched, tortuous form of execution would be appropriate and poetically fitting for all the cowards and traitors. Around three in the morning, we came up with something. I know that I fell asleep with my head on your shoulder and don't remember what it was that we'd said.

One day, the oceans will stop moving. They'll be reduced to a sludgy, plastic-choked swamp that breeds mosquitos, bleeds roaches, and reeks of broken promises. I hope we live long enough to see that. Once all the beaches have been covered in bottle caps and plastic bags, I'll bet you anything that lighthouses will be cheap to come by. The creek below will be dammed by mannequin limbs and discarded phone cases. Runoff will have killed all the trees. Pollution will mean that every sunset will

look like a Van Gogh. We'll sit together on the lighthouse galley, feet dangling over the sides, tricking ourselves into believing that some way, somehow, it'll all be set right in the end. I tell you that I'm not certain, which makes you start explaining all the ways it *will* be alright all over again. I am, of course, certain. I just like listening to you talk.

# I Don't Even Know Your Name

By: Alexander Etheridge

On my evening walk we meet  
again, and you  
lift my moment  
to a higher order, cleansing  
my spirit by simply  
speaking shyly about  
your day-to-day, as your hand  
lightly brushes against my own—  
It's like reading in Braille  
the first few words of Heaven.  
You—little orchid

of light, little river, clear breeze  
of hidden orchards—with me

once more on the dusky street.

We speak of the rain,  
the windy trees,  
then it's over.

We part as we always do,  
nearly strangers,  
going our own way—  
And I don't need

more from you,  
you've already given me  
enough. I'm at peace  
again, lighter,  
younger,  
better

from barely knowing you.

## BE KIND REWIND

By: Robin Elise Hamilton

Going back to do it over  
better this time, this time  
I plan on sunbathing in  
the backyard with my best friend  
in our cute new ruffled swimsuits  
where we will giggle and not worry  
about if the fence is high enough

to hide us as we dare each other  
to take our tops off; or about if  
that dumb boy next door  
will “accidentally” climb too far  
up the old tulip tree in his yard to  
spy on us with his father’s binoculars  
and totally ruin everything

before I get a chance to rub soft oil  
that smells of warm blackberries and  
promises I will never break onto her  
achingly beautiful freckled shoulders  
so gently, so sweetly, so right,  
she falls in love with me at last  
the way I so desperately want.

# 10,000 Ways To Say Goodbye & I've Only Learned To Say One So Far

*A Golden Shovel after the film Stay (2018)*

By: J'Sun Howard

I think of the word goodbye & how at Shin-Nagata station when you waved four times before waving one last time, you resembled Tetsujin 28 & I smiled walking home to Kotobuki-sou. But to leave, I wonder if this subtle gesture of abiding is an unspoken confession of love like you're a 妖怪 whose sole existence is to stockpile these fragile moments as if you're going to wield them to possess someone you'd say you'd never love. I'm listening to "Until I Found You" & fall apart like the last of the 桜 this season. I take for granted we can say goodbye so many times to each other. One day, my goodbyes will resemble a torii gate where only you can settle at the throne of my heart.

# Sillage

By: Castle Yuran

I am told that, once a year,  
monarch butterflies ford their way  
north to south, migrating  
like the birds.

Coded in each fragile cell  
is not only the journey,  
but the memory of a mountain—  
    midway through the course—  
        that no longer exists.

    They veer from empty space,  
    an orange cloud trained  
by history and DNA  
to answer a ghost.

Shape subsists in  
thought  
if not substance.

Forgive me, then  
for turning still in half-sleep  
to face the place that held you,  
cold sheet vacant.

Even the clipper's wake  
    f a n s o u t a n d o u t ,  
        p r e s s e d t h i n n e r  
            i n i t s e x p a n s i o n ,  
b u t n e v e r s n u f f e d

## least of all, you

By: Yashaswini Sharma

every year like clockwork i sit by the porch and expect to see your car's headlights haze into view. you pull up and soon i can see your face. it's beautiful, it always has been. the pit in my stomach loses ground and soon, the bottom is nowhere to be found. i feel terrible and i let you inside.

there's a long table with all our old friends. tall wax candles—blood red—line the spread and it's a romantic affair. just like old times, very nostalgic. from across the table, you're looking at me just when i want you to, and you're smiling just when i want you to, and once you even wink at me and it takes me by surprise.

the roof above us all is very high and the ceiling is imperceptible in the night sky. there's no limits to where we can go and you're game for it all. you make your way to sit next to me and you hold my right hand and look into my eyes and i want to be in love again. i have so much to say but nothing comes out. this doesn't feel right. it doesn't feel right. i want you here, i want your love, i want it so much but it's not right.

i'm holding your hand here, i've tethered you to all my belongings here. i want you here but you are gone. i feel pathetic keeping you with me, like a child forced to be on a playdate. you don't want me and i can't keep you hostage in my memories of us three years ago. i'm guilty of keeping you present when everything about you is past.

i will you to get up and walk away. you're a figment of my dreams, a sliver of my nostalgia, a servant of my desire. i open my eyes and the real world is born of me.



## Meet the Contributors

**Jessica Russo** lives in Kentucky where she is a wife, mother, and teacher. She writes children's literature and horror stories with equal enthusiasm. Her favorite things include Halloween, Friday the 13th, and living in the woods.

**David Milley** has written and published since the 1970s, while working as a technical writer and web applications developer. His work has appeared in *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Bay Windows*, *RFD*, *Friends Journal*, and *Feral*. Retired now, David lives in New Jersey with his husband and partner of forty-eight years, Warren Davy, who's made his living as a farmer, woodcutter, nurseryman, auctioneer, beekeeper, and cook. These days, Warren tends his garden and keeps honeybees. David walks and writes.

**Shauri Cherie** occasionally writes poetry and nonfiction when she isn't running *Exposed Bone*, playing *Genshin Impact*, or working her day job. She is easily excited by travel, curry, and stingrays, and she is surprisingly feral at concerts. While she's a Utah native and currently still living in the state, she's mentally somewhere that doesn't get snow and preferably lets her search for seashells. Find her work in *Trace Fossil Review*, *Sink Hollow*, *Constellations*, and others via her website or @shauricherie on social media.

**Rebecca Long** is a writer and editor based in Boston. Her journalism has appeared in *Teen Vogue*, *The Guardian*, *The Boston Globe*, and others. She writes the *Look Again* column for *Observer* and is an independently approved critic on *Rotten Tomatoes*. Her fiction has been published or is forthcoming in *Flash Frog*, *HAD*, *Gooseberry Pie Lit Mag*, *Maudlin House*, and *Reckon Review*. Visit her website, [rebeccaalong.com](http://rebeccaalong.com).

**SR Wollstonecraft** is a twenty-something poet living, loving, and creating in NW Ohio. She is a beloved wife, caretaker of four cats, and carrier of her mother's memory. More of her work can be found at [thedeadbelt.tumblr.com](http://thedeadbelt.tumblr.com), where she gets weird about God. Wherever you are, she's praying for you.

**John Rutherford** is a poet living and writing in Beaumont, TX. He works in the English department of Lamar University. His work can be found in *The Basilisk Tree*, *Texas Poetry Assignment*, and his 2023 chapbook *Birds in a Storm*.

**Rory G.** is an educator, essayist, and writer of Egyptian and Scottish heritage. They are currently based in the United States. Their fiction has appeared in The Book of Queer Saints anthology series and their nonfiction has featured in the Austin-American Statesman. You can find Rory online @gilhouligan on all platforms.

**Bridget Grace Sheaff** is a member of the Lincoln Center Directors Lab 2019 and Directors Lab North 2022. Bridget works in development for Hoyt Sherman Place in Des Moines, Iowa. She has previously served as the Director of Audience Services and Community Engagement at Maples Repertory Theatre (Macon, MO), Executive Director at the Washington Area Performing Arts Video Archive, Casting Director at We Happy Few Productions, Casting Manager at Spooky Action Theatre, and in various capacities at Ford's Theatre, the Shakespeare Theatre, Theater J, Imagination Stage, and Woolly Mammoth Theatre. BA 2014 summa cum laude, The Catholic University of America.  
[www.bridgetgracesheaff.com](http://www.bridgetgracesheaff.com)

**Dudley Stone's** poetry has recently appeared in Ars Sententia, Shadowplay, and Wilderness House Poetry Review. In addition, his writing for the stage has been seen in theatres from California to Connecticut, and he is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild. He has a B.A. in Theatre from the University of Kentucky and studied playwriting at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Mr. Stone lives in Lexington, KY.

**Maria Parperis** is an aspiring novelist born in Cheshire (UK) where she still resides with her family. She loves to read and write YA Fantasy and Romance, for they both immerse in the magical. Her Flash Fiction To be Loved was loosely based on her boyfriend, Dan, because her life has been irrefutably changed since they met. Follow her on Twitter (X) @MariaParperis to see more of her writing journey.

**Patrick Malka** (he/him) is a high school science teacher from Montreal, Quebec, where he lives with his partner and two kids. His recent fiction can be found in Midsummer Dream House, Broken Antler, Maudlin House, 34 Orchard and Brave New Weird Volume 2 among others. He can be found online on X @PatrickMalka

**Tyler Davis** is a longtime writer, even longer time self-critic. A journalist as well as a poet, they suffer a love/hate relationship with the Oxford comma. You can find them on Twitter (X) @tylerrdavis\_

**Halle Ewing** is a 17-year-old from Southern California with a boundless love for the written word. She has a collection of works published in various literary magazines that can be found on her Instagram, @hallewingg.

**Katrina Lemaire** is an emerging bi/queer poet and fiction writer from Toronto, Ontario. She enjoys exploring themes of ecology, botany, and little hauntings. Her work can be found in Plenitude Magazine, Soft Star Magazine, and Sad Girl Diaries among others. Follow her on twitter @bookishmoons for updates.

**Alex Rivera** is a first-year MFA student studying poetry at the University of South Florida. He incorporates different perspectives in his poems and explores themes related to love, grief, nostalgia, and nature. His work has appeared in Neptune Poetry Magazine, Creative Loafing Tampa, and the Wingless Dreamer Publisher. When he's not writing sad poems, you can usually find him hunched over in a coffee shop, blaring music to stave off the existential dread.

**Sydney Sinks** (she/her) is a writer who wears ugly sweaters and weird earrings. She enjoys drinking too much coffee and then writing poems when she can't sleep because of the coffee. Her work is published in Remington Review, Bacopa Literary Review, The Dawn Review, and others. Follow her on Twitter/X @SinksSydney or Instagram @SinksSydney\_Writing for ramblings and the occasional sonnet.

**Megan Freshley** is a queer poet based in Cincinnati, OH. Her poems have appeared in Blush Lit, Witch Craft Magazine, Portland Review, and others. She earned an MFA from Portland State University and received the Academy of American Poets Prize. The Hunger Press published her first chapbook, Hypnic Jerk, in 2021 as a winner of the Tiny Fork Chapbook Contest.

**Gemma Elgar** is a poet and writer from Wales, whose poem I, Blackberry featured in a local Forest of Dean anthology titled Resilience. Her writing often focuses on the gothic, queer romance, and the overlap between the two, drawing inspiration from her own life experiences and literary idols. When she isn't writing, baking, or at yet another concert, you can find her on Twitter and Instagram at @GemmaAlice\_

**Daniel Brennan** (he/him) is a queer writer and coffee devotee from New York. Sometimes he is in love, but just as often he is not. His poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and has appeared in numerous publications, including The Penn Review, Sky Island Journal, and ONE ART. He can be found on Twitter and Instagram: @dannyjbrennan

**Terri Watrous Berry's** poetry was included this past year in Paper Dragon, Peninsula Arts Magazine, Take5, Blood & Bourbon, Gyroscope Review, Written Tales, Instant Noodles, Waco Cultural Arts Fest WordFest Anthology 2023, Wild Librarian Press' Wild Crone Wisdom, Ms. Aligned's Coming of Age, and will appear in the upcoming Bimbo Feminist Anthology being produced by Purple Ink Press.

**Matthew Miller** teaches social studies, swings tennis rackets, and writes poetry - all hoping to create home. He and his wife live beside a dilapidating orchard in Indiana, where he tries to cut paths through the thorns for their four sons to hike through. His poetry has been featured in Whale Road Review, River Mouth Review, EcoTheo Review and Ekstasis Magazine.

**Sarah James/Leavesley** is a prize-winning poet, fiction writer, journalist and photographer. Her latest collections include Blood Sugar, Sex, Magic (Verve Poetry Press, 2022) and RAIN FALLING (Wigtown Festival Company, 2023). She also runs V. Press, publishing poetry and flash fiction chapbooks. Websites: [www.sarah-james.co.uk](http://www.sarah-james.co.uk) and <https://vpresspoetry.blogspot.com/>.

**Zoe Davis** is an emerging writer from Sheffield, England. A quality engineer in advanced manufacturing by day, she spends her evenings and weekends writing poetry and prose, and especially enjoys exploring the interaction between the fantastical and the mundane, with a deeply personal edge to her work. You can find her words both published and forthcoming in publications such as: Acropolis Journal, Strix, Illumen Magazine, Dust and Red Ogre Review. You can also follow her on X @MeanerHarker where she's always happy to have a virtual coffee and a chat.

**Sarah O' Grady** writes from York and has been published most recently by Butcher's Dog, The Madrigal, Hedgehog Press, Broken Spine, Loft, Green Ink & is in several Dreich poetry collections. A pamphlet was short-listed by Black Bough in 2024. Twitter. Sarah O @palimpsest22. Published work found at <https://www.sarahowriter.com>

**Molly Barton** is an actress/creative living in London. She has mostly written for stage and has performed her own work at various fringe venues across the city, including her one woman show - Dead Outdoorsy - which premiered at the Drayton Arms last year. In October, she was invited to perform her own poem at a fundraiser organised by The Pink Ribbon Foundation. She has also written lyrics for shows that have been performed at The Cockpit and the Old Royal Naval College.

**Britni Newton** (she/her) is a creative writing grad student and freelance writer. She takes inspiration from both the pain and pleasure of everyday life, familial folklore, and the antics of her two spoiled cats. She's currently based in the Midwest. Her work is published or forthcoming in Ghost Girls Zine, Funicular Magazine, On Gaia Literary Magazine, and others.

**Karen Soans** is an Indian scientist and aspiring writer living in Germany. She has a PhD in cell biology and uses the instagram handle @doodlinscientist to share her digital art documenting the highs and lows of experiment and discovery. Her poems can be found online at doodlinscientist.com. She received her first publication in Nightshade Lit Mag.

**Will Harris** (any pronouns) is a queer non-binary poet and organizer based in San Diego, CA. He is currently pursuing his Bachelor's degree in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing from San Diego State University and concurrently attending the excellent Grossmont Community College. His work has been published by Fifth Wheel Press. They can be found eating poke bowls on good days and doing improv on bad ones, or on Twitter @mewtwowilliam.

**Amit Shankar Saha** is the author of six books including four collections of poems: *Balconies of Time*, *Fugitive Words*, *Illicit Poems* and *Etesian::Barahmasi* (forthcoming). He has won the Wordweavers Prize amongst other prizes and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, the Griffin Poetry Prize and the Best of Net anthology. He teaches in Seacom Skills University. His website is <https://www.amitshankarsaha.com>

**Lindz McLeod** is a queer, working-class, Scottish writer and poet who dabbles in the surreal. Her short prose has been published by Apex, Catapult, Pseudopod, and many more. Her longer work includes the short story collection *TURDUCKEN* (Spaceboy, 2023), as well as her books *BEAST* (Hear Us Scream, 2023), *SUNBATHERS* (Hedone Books, 2024), *THE UNLIKELY PURSUIT OF MARY BENNET* (Harlequin, 2025), and the collaborative anthology *AN HONOUR AND A PRIVILEGE* (Stanchion, 2025). Her work has been taught in schools, universities, and turned into avant-garde opera. She is a full member of the SFWA, the club president of the Edinburgh Writers' Club, and is currently studying for a PhD in Creative Writing.

**Gordon Brown** grew up in the deserts of Syria and now lives in the deserts of Nevada. Since his arrival in the New World, his work has appeared in McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Hunger Mountain Review, Tales to Terrify, and elsewhere. He spends his time writing feverishly and looking after his cats, of which he has none.

**Alexander Etheridge** has been developing his poems and translations since 1998. His poems have been featured in The Potomac Review, Museum of Americana, Ink Sac, Welter Journal, The Cafe Review, The Madrigal, Abridged Magazine, Susurrus Magazine, The Journal, Roi Faineant Press, and many others. He was the winner of the Struck Match Poetry Prize in 1999, and a finalist for the Kingdoms in the Wild Poetry Prize in 2022. He is the author of, God Said Fire, and, Snowfire and Home.

**Robin Elise Hamilton** (she/her) is a newly-septuagenarian, newly-out queer trans woman newly-returned to writing poetry after a half-century offstage in live performance. Her work has since been presented by Astroflakes, Boats Against the Current, Bullshit Lit, Crab Apple Lit, dadakuku, Dollar Store, Ekphrastic Review, Ghost Light Lit, Gnashing Teeth, Intangible, Nightingale & Sparrow and others.

**J'Sun Howard** was a finalist for the 2020 Frontier Poetry Digital Chapbook Award and the Button Poetry Chapbook Award. He was also nominated for the 2018 Best New Poets. His poetry has been published in Beaver Magazine, I Can't Breathe: A Poetic Anthology of Fresh Air, The Matador Review, WusGood, The Shade Journal, Calamus Journal, Bird's Thumb, and Propter Nos.

**Castle Yuran** is a writer of poetry and fiction. She loves all things horror, supernatural, and true crime. Her favorite pastimes include aimless adventures throughout the New England countryside and spending time curled up with her cats. Castle holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Goddard College in Vermont, and she currently works as an Academic Coach and Instructor at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut (USA).

**Yashaswini Sharma** is a writer, filmmaker, photographer, and artist currently based in Lithuania. Her fiction is published in National Flash Fiction Day Journal, and is forthcoming in Easy Does It Zine and Vellichor Lit. Her micro-fiction has been longlisted for The Welkin Mini Writing Prize. Find more of her and her writing here: <https://yashaswinisharma.wordpress.com/>