

Spring 2023

University of Portland

In the *Garden*



Writers Literary and Art Magazine

WRITERS

Senior Editors

Mia Tierney
Valencya Valdez

Editors

Murphy Bradshaw
Isabella Byers
Hannah Monti
Alyssa Repetti
Lauren Rees Savas

Advisor

Prof. John McDonald

Cover Design

Isabella Byers

Cover Image

Fiona Haselton

Writers Logo

Designed by Reece Smith

Writers Photo

Ryan Reynolds

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Letter from the Editors

Dearest friends of *Writers*,

As the cold of Winter fades away and everything begins to awaken, we are reminded of the opportunity for new life. Spring is a time for renewal, growth, and rebirth. It is a flower blooming through melting slush and snow. It is reaching down into the roots once forgotten underground and returning to them, like a songbird singing once again from its perch outside of your bedroom window. It is hope for what is to come and healing for what has come to pass. As we enter a new season for *Writers*, we are given the unique opportunity to display the fruits of the heart.

Our theme, *In the Garden*, embodies these Spring moments and the feelings they bring about with them. It is inspired by one of the most well-known stories within the Abrahamic religions of a botanical safe haven, a place of pleasure, and the site of mankind's original sin. The Garden, in all its terrestrial glory, is Paradise. In our imperfection, our fall from grace, we are faced with the choice to follow the temptation to consume Earth's pleasures and subdue it, to have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens, or to confront our transgressions against Mother Earth and redefine our visions of Paradise.

We entrusted our contributors to create scenes of delight, not confined to any specific interpretation. We follow our contributors where their hearts led, whether into Eden, out of Adan, through California, or stuck in Babylon. AM Blank's play explores the desperation and persistence of human connection, all from aboard a ship. Our Editor's Choice pieces reflect the pillars with which we interact with love and identity. Claire Carter captures the nature in which we grow from our roots, while Soleia Yemaya Quinn's vivid painting is a beautiful devotion to the mother figure.

We reap what we sow. This edition of *Writers* invites you to think about how we might cultivate our lives and harvest the crop from our familial trees. We urge you to hold tight to blissful moments and to daydream of greener grass. Most of all, we applaud and thank the community of authors and artists who share the fruits of their labors with us. This publication is always a collective, the product of many hearts and hands. With that, take a look over the garden wall, into the Spring 2023 issue of *Writers Literary and Art Magazine*.

With love,

Mia and Valencya

Senior Editors 2023–2024

"When angels speak of love
they tell us it is only by loving
that we enter an earthly
paradise. They tell us paradise
is our home and love is our
true destination."

- *bell hooks, "All About Love: New Visions"*

The Beekeeper's 'Daughter'

CLAIRE CARTER



My father keeps bees and my mother sews quilts.
My hands are not precise enough for threading needles,
so I keep rather than sew.
I take my chafed fingers and grip the edges of wooden frames, pump the
bellows of his tin smoker,
and chaff my lungs as well.

“What should we name the new queen?”
“Furiosa.”
We giggle at the absurdity,
a trace of me
and him
on late Friday nights watching movies.

I see myself in:
The way he towers over the boxes.
The hissing, in-drawn swear at an unexpected sting.
The *sotto voce* nonsense noises as he hunts down the queen amidst a sea of
buzzing.

My mother once asked, my hair freshly cut
“Do you feel like a boy?”
What?
I laughed at that.
“Do *I* feel like a boy?”
Tomboy (but nonboy),
boyish like him.
Ought I? (I think not).

I keep rather than sew,
but I have come to learn that keeping is a preciseness.



Mother Ocean

SOLEIA YEMAYA QUINN



foraging

MURPHY McDONALD BRADSHAW

He wanted to look for acorns with hats /
To grow an oak tree for love and for shade.

He planted three seeds in muted green pots /
Seized by squirrels in the silent night.

He took my hand and led me toward /
A breakfast of sweet pepper and apple.

We traveled down the sidewalk together /
Testing the neighbor's chalk hopscotch.

A world woke up before us /
Offerings of fig and laurel.

*"You know," he said,
"You remind me of a dream.
Silver and missing in the morning."*

Traveling home I whispered,

*"The looming trees, oak and ancient and loving,
Are a tunnel outside your house.
Let's run beneath them,
Cradled and breathing,
And find acorns for your pot."*



daydreaming

ALYSSA KANALAKIS

The Curtain

LILY GREY RUDGE

A little blue boy lay sprawled across a rumpled duvet. In just his underwear, a dampness dripped from under his arms and pooled at his white elastic waistband. A soft crooning waded its way through the humidity as his Grandmama sang softly, threading another ring onto the rod perched above his open window.

*Inch by inch, row by row
Gonna make this garden grow
All it takes is a rake and a hoe
And a piece of fertile ground*

Now you have a garden of your own. Her lips dragged across his cheek, leaving behind bits of crusted flesh. Warm air draped over the room thickly, distorting the striped wallpaper, waving softly like rows of wheat dyed pink from the sun's rays. The room was frilly. Plastered with lace and ribbons, it had served as a menagerie for his Grandmama's collection of stuffed rabbits. The moment their glassy eyes met his, he had burst into tears. Now, they lived in the wooden chest tucked under his new bed. He hoped he wouldn't wake one night to find them nibbling at his toes. Grandmama had asked him what toys he liked, but he didn't want new toys. He wanted his fuzzy blue monkey, and Samurai Jack, and his giraffe that had bells in its tummy. He wanted to sit on the mattress while Mom made Monkey sing, and Jack fight, and Gerald dance. Giraffes can't dance! He would squeal. Mom would just pull him closer on their mattress, her tart breath tickling his nose as she exclaimed that of course they could, they just needed the right shoes. Sometimes Mom would sleep through their play time. Sometimes she hated to play, pushing him away when he tried to give her Monkey. When that happened, he turned blue too. Flipping onto his stomach, the boy scooted himself forward, hoping for the slightest kiss of a breeze. There was none, the thick curtain hanging limply. Little boys needed privacy, Grandmama had said, their very own rooms with curtains they could pull whenever they wanted. She had gone down into the basement and come back with a large piece of fabric. It had looked duller when she had first shown it to him, just a jumble of browns, blacks and reds. Now, hung as it was, it loomed above him, fully animated. Grandmama had said they were roses, embroidered by her mother when she was his age, but the little boy knew better. Straining against the drab cotton were hundreds of deftly stitched faces, leering down at him. Their red, threaded tongues dangled wetly from gaping caves of velvet. What would those pieces of fabricated flesh feel like against his own? Rough and irritating, like the spotty brown cat who would stretch out on

Grandmama's porch? Or silky, like the soles of Mom's freshly scrubbed feet? They looked bashful, he thought, a tint of scarlet dotting their hollowed cheeks. He didn't know people could look bashful while screaming. Long, thin bodies supported each of their bobbing heads, and the boy watched them sway from their top heaviness. No eyes or noses revealed themselves as he continued to stare. Only their unhinged jaws, stretching into those silent screams. A sudden ache lanced through the boy's skull, who squeezed his eyes tightly shut. When he opened them again, he found his gaze was focused on the chipped vanity, sitting just a few feet away. Staring back at him was a little blue boy, in just his underwear, his pink, fleshy tongue dangling wetly from a gaping cavity.

Grandmama made meatloaf and artichoke hearts that first night. The little boy spit it back up on the porcelain plate. Dinner was supposed to come from boxes and be eaten off of shiny plastic plates. This plate broke when he threw it on the ground. She didn't yell or even try to shout. She was doing it wrong, so he screamed for her. His throat was swollen when she carried him to bed. She was sorry, she said, that she didn't have anything to read to him. It didn't matter, only his Mom could do the right voices. Grandma only had one voice, and it sounded like her gravel driveway. Perching on the edge of the mattress, she began warbling once again.

*Pulling weeds and picking stones,
man is made of dreams and bones.
Feel the need to grow my own
'cause the time is close at hand.*

Despite the heat, a chill danced down his spine. Not even the hefty quilt Grandmama had offered him could imitate the comforting sensation of a plush body curling against him. Once again, he found his attention snagging towards the towering tapestry which hid the night sky from view. Sliding from between the sheets, the boy crept across the coiled carpet as quietly as he could. His chest rose and fell in rapid starts as he leaned closer to those solemnly gaping faces. The pads of his fingers brushed the rippling fabric, coming away damp. It hadn't been raining. Seizing against the wet sensation, he began to push his way past the heavy material. It suckled at his skin, like those sloppy kisses Mom would press to his cheek after returning from an especially late night. He knew where this window led; out to Grandmama's rotting front porch. Opening wide before him, the curtains spat him out somewhere new.

Hedges weren't meant to be this high. He had seen them before, at the park by his house, and they weren't even as tall as Mom. These hedges reached much farther, so far that the little boy couldn't see where they

ended. Above him, there was no sky or ceiling, only more up. He had no way of going up, so he went forward instead, hitting the first wall almost immediately. It should have been visible from where he had been standing. The coarse leaves scratched at his arms and legs, coaxing him deeper. About-facing, he began again, toes sinking into the muddy path as he tried each new turn. It wasn't clear how much time had passed, or how many dead ends had been discovered, when the boy felt something sharp tear through the flesh of his right heel. Falling onto his bottom, he strained to see what had buried itself in his foot. Unable to get a proper view, the boy gripped the offending thing's base and pulled, slowly surfacing it. His hand felt warm and sticky as he drew it away from his throbbing heel and lifted it to his curious gaze. On his palm sat a long, sharp thorn.

It took a whole roll of gauze to stop the bleeding. He must have stepped on one of the plate's shards, Grandmama reasoned. It was nearly impossible to walk more than a few steps with his foot wrapped so thickly, so the boy stayed in bed. The faces stayed with him. He had asked Grandmama that morning if she could take them down, but she had argued that he would be baked alive. Like the plumpest mother hen, she had laughed. So he laid in bed and stared at the curtain. It stared back. Could mouths stare? The boy thought so, his Mom's mouth had always seemed to. Whether it was her plump lips, perfectly symmetrical teeth or that pink, dangling dewdrop at the back of her throat, it always seemed to look at him. Even when it closed around those dirty brown bottles, or spewed back out those bottles' contents. He used to think he had come out the same way. When he had asked Mom how he had been made, she had looked perplexed. What do you mean? Obviously Mommy made you. But don't Mommies need Daddies to make babies? Where did you hear such a silly thing? She had reached for a book then, smiling when she found what she was looking for. Bringing the boy onto her lap, she pointed down at the open page. See, my love? Mommy is like an orchid, she can do it all on her own.

Crawling through the curtains once again, the boy discovered that the maze seemed to have only gotten larger. Limping along the best he could, the boy found himself shivering fully for the first time since moving into the frilly room. A subtle breeze tickled his spine, licking between his shoulder blades. Or maybe it wasn't a breeze. Maybe it was a long, wet tongue. That next morning, an angry red rash had bloomed across his back. It must be the sheets, Grandmama decided. Laying on his newly bare mattress, the boy craned his neck, studying the blistering boils. She had made him change his underwear too, and the replacements no longer dug into his bony hips. It had somehow gotten even warmer throughout the night, and his neck dripped with sweat. The mouths were dripping too, droplets falling like cherry blossoms, coating the carpet.

*Plant your rows straight and long,
thicker than with prayer and song.
Mother Earth will make you strong
if you give her love and care.*

The hole in his heel remained, as did the burning streaks which marred his back. Mazes were meant to be solved, but the boy never seemed to get any closer. All he could do was gain what knowledge he could, and by the third night he knew he wasn't alone. The deeper he ventured, the more things seemed to nip at his heels. The hedges grew thicker until he was forced to edge his way through, back pressed against the expanding greenery. All around him, on every inch of his flesh, he could feel the soft pucker of something hidden within those walls, sucking him in deeper. Grandmama gasped when she took in the circular bruises which covered his whole body. You have to tell me if your mother has come to see you. She hadn't, he promised, but why couldn't she? He used the firmest voice he could muster. It wasn't fair, she needed him. Sometimes, Grandmama brushed a shriveled hand across his brow, you need to water your own garden before worrying about anyone else's.

He tried watering the hedges, but he couldn't find a watering can. They had grown enough already, he supposed. Once again edging his way down one of the many paths, the little boy felt something tickle his ankle. Glancing down, his eyes caught on something small and delicate wrapped around his leg. Crouching down as carefully as he could, he examined the thick stem which had dug its way into his flesh. And connected to it, a white orchid. Nearly as large as the boy's hand, the orchid's petals emerged from a hollow darkness. A single pink pistol bloomed from its center. The orchid was gapping at him, so the little boy gaped back.

She may have been screaming, her jaw unhinged at the sight of her Grandson. He didn't think she was. He wasn't. Climbing through that window, hundreds of faces had stared back at him, mirroring his joy. And nestled within them, Mom's stretched grin. How foolish he had been, believing those were silent screams. Now he saw her, and they could sing together once again.

*Inch by inch, row by row,
gonna make this garden grow.
All it takes is a rake and a hoe
and a piece of fertile ground.*

If you ever have the chance to eat earth's essence (it is best eaten raw)

SARA BROWN

The curves and folds of ancient mountains
The seam and split of soil and sediment
That scratches and scrapes our palms
Only for us to pick and prod at the callouses that form
To pick off the scabs of dried blood from the cuts that remain
Angry pink flashes of flesh and blood exposed
where friction severed the bond between skin and muscle
And rendered that which once coalesced so beautifully

I will live bright and die burning
Choking on smoke and ashes in my mouth
I will leave scorch marks on this holy ground
Walking into the throng my footsteps
Resound and reverberate through time
Though my destination will remain unknown
I will have lived a life forged in fire
When all that remains of me are ashes
Let me return to the earth from which we are all formed
Each of us a Galatea with our Earthen Pygmalion
The rich aroma of wet clay molded to suit our formation

/ Remix: intended to follow “when all that remains of me are ashes”
My one wish is that they be mixed with yours
I would never part with you willingly

I Can't Keep Looking to Other Ppl for a Sense of Self

SCOTT WINKENWEDER

i'm gonna kill God
with my bare hands!!
sharp fingers, cherry branches
sticking cold!! I've got a
pink hole in the back of my
head, shaped jagged
like a geode!! I've been
looking for birds on the sides
of the road, feathers dusty
and rolled in oil-
skinny feathered ghosts
rumbling under tires-
greasy eyes lamenting
the law under pavement,,
like, when it's you who picked
the apple, it's you who
let your hair crumble like
so many miles of the Kalahari,
you a spiral style of blood,
alone in the thick wool sheets
of the red tent. I've been
sucking in so much smoke,
fat and green, dust purpling
on the back of the
dashboard, that I think my
hair is falling out.

so what!?! I'll wear more hats!!!
im not lonely anymore!!!
& the ladder to heaven was
chopped down a long time ago!!!
I think it's somewhere in
George Washington's teeth!!
so now we'll only be saved
thru language-and if you
weren't afraid of loneliness,
again of the wide slick
coil of the snake, then

we could be saved thru love!!
But I was born with pwrful
hands, opposable thumbs–
so I could spray paint on the billboard
I AM NOT AN ANIMAL.
Wide fat thumbs good for
crushing grapes into wine
and then blood. The miracle
is that I'm trying so hard to
not be the only thing in this room
that I can't even see you,,
can only hold on with
claws and teeth and tail while the
branches whiplash back and forth
across the cliff.

sure!!! punish me!!! the stigmata
raw and mumbling promises.
I thought I had cotton candy
stuck in my hair, glued
in chewing gum to the floor,
caught in the tractor beam of
somebody else. it's something
Hegel said: we are only made real
by each other. Dogs cats and apes
proclaiming heaven and Providence.
floating coherent in somebody else's
eyes: like, this way,
God can't touch me.



Loneliness
TAIT VIGELAND

Ptolomea

CARLOS MORENO-VEGA

Paradise
in a verdant valley
Golden rays deflect from marble fountains
Abundant vineyards of the sweetest, plumpest grapes pressed into
crimson wine that stains pink lips,
inebriating a nobility nestled in stone castles

Many perish on their way to paradise
 Their cadavers fortifying its thorny barricades
Marigolds and cobwebs
Adorn the skulls of brave souls
Forging forgotten futures

Thousands of miles away,
a mother and her newborn
Tread into the mist of the unknown,
Yearning for an Arcadia promised to them

The baby's wails yearn for their old oasis, memories of
Pink dahlias blooming, green parrots and blue mockingbirds
Cawing and singing in harmonious coexistence,
 Now an empty desert of
 decaying saguaros and venomous scorpions
 Feasting on the rotten remnants of abandoned oaths

With each step, her tattered robes
Leave trails and petals of
Red poinsettias and white roses

Scarred and stabbed by rose thorns,
Her dripping blood, the sacred ichor, enriches the soil
From which the plump grapes are grown

In the freezing desert night
The tears crystalize on her cheeks
For she knows her son
will forget her language and
bear the same scars as her

Scars which he will display like a badge of honor
While others wrap theirs in fig leaves

Through persistence,
She will nourish the seeds,
Of an uncertain future
Create a new paradise,
 A garden in full bloom
 Which she might never see

Por nuestra lengua (Translation, For Your Convenience)

CAMI VILLANUEVA

Por nuestra lengua
Español

Un toro que destruye todo
Su voz, cantando la historia
del Oro, del Dios, de la Gloria

*Through Our Tongue
Spanish*

*A bull that destroys everything
Its voice, singing the song
of Gold, of God, of Glory*

Nuestras lenguas cortadas y cosidas
en su imagen de unidad
El conquistador, el opresor

*Our tongues cut and sewn
in its image of unity
The conqueror, the oppressor*

Los oprimidos, los pobres
Luchamos para construir
La Esperanza,
Para probar nuestra humanidad.
¡Bienvenidos a América!

*The oppressed, the poor
Welcome to America!
We struggle to build
The Hope,
to prove our humanity*

El idioma no es nuestro
pero tampoco es inglés
Una lengua extraña para un cuerpo raro

*The language is not ours
But neither is English
A foreign tongue for a strange body*

Una lengua silenciada
Un cuerpo desaparecido

*A tongue silenced
A body disappeared*

Gritamos, gritamos, y gritamos
hasta nuestra garganta sangra
Escribimos, escribimos, y escribimos
hasta nuestras uñas se caen

*We scream, scream, and scream
until our throat bleeds
We write, write, and write
until our fingernails fall out*

*But what if it was in English?
Oh? Now you hear me?*

*¿Pero si estaba en inglés?
¿Ay? ¿Me escuchas ahora mismo?*

Inglés

English

*A fat cow that does nothing
Its words a series of denials, defenses,
and deflections
¡Ayudanos, por favor!
Its slack jaw smacks its lips,
belching poison into the air.*

Una vaca gorda que no hace nada
Sus palabras una serie de las negaciones,
las justificaciones, y las evasiones
Help us, please!
Su quijada floja mastica con los labios
eructando el veneno al aire

“Go back to your shithole country”
Pero, ya estamos aquí.

–Regresa a tu pinche patria–
But, we’re already here.

stand still

HAZEL BURTON-TILLSON



Seaside Rendezvous (can we do it again?)

SARA BROWN

Thoughts of you cling to me like granules of sand between my toes
I couldn't wash you away if I tried
I wonder if I will think of you every day for always
Or maybe I'll shut you out of my mind for a time until one day
I shake sand out of an old pair of sandals
Or pull out a bag shoved to the back of my closet
and find a tube of your old lipstick left forgotten in a side pocket
And the rising tide of my mind will bring me back
To the shoreline and your hand in mine
Cheeks stricken red and hands chiseled out of warmth
To dull and senseless stone except for the places where our fingers
interlocked
The wind roaring in our ears, clawing at our clothes
and matting our hair, wholly inundating our being
Underneath the artless wind can be heard
The crunch of eelgrass under our feet and the pulse of the waves
I remember how it felt to kiss your shoulder sun-blotted and bare
The taste of you and salt and brine where we entwine on each inhale
When we finally left at sundown, we would both always reek of bonfire
smoke
I can still taste grit and saltwater on the undercurrents of my memory
Some days it is all I can do to prevent it bubbling to the surface

A mermaid fair

ALYSSA KANALAKIS



Is It Horrible That I Do Not Want To Leave?

SOPHIE KERR-DAVIS

I found my way across the sea
Never thought my life could exist
without surrounding myself with the echoes
of those with my blood in their veins
The scent of lavender settles inside my nose
Whispers promises into the liquid metal pumping throughout my chest
Soothing the erratic beat to a gentle thrum

I sit on a grassy edge overlooking the edge of the world
Surrounded by castles sticking
their toothy grins out to bleach in the sun
I never thought I would find comfort
resting in one of history's forgotten skeletons

The sun warms my back but I don't
worry of burns under the assisi sun
Nothing can harm me in the only city
I have never been able to get lost in

I want to cradle the knolls and dips
the air that tastes sweet on my tongue
The hills that are a balm to my tired body
I wonder if the earth grieves for all those buried within it
I want to spend my days helping these ruins remember
Pour love into the soil in places that once housed humans
Rebuild and figure out how to cancel my ticket home

Eternal Patrol

AM BLANK

PROLOGUE

We open in a cozy living room beside the fire. Everything is decorated in reds and greens— clearly, it's Christmastime.

NARRATOR sits in a large armchair, mug of cocoa in hand. There's a small, leather-bound book in his lap. SON perches on the arm of the chair, holding a smaller mug of cocoa, watching NARRATOR intently.

NARRATOR

(with the air of one who has recited this many, many times)

Let me tell you the story
my father told me:
The Christmas time tale
of the men lost at sea.
There once was a time,
when the world was at war
we sent out our boats
to the ocean floor.
But under the waves,
contact was hard.
From outside detection
they had to keep guard.
These infrequent comms
came at a high cost--
they'd lose silent battles,
to the waves they'd be lost.
With nothing to bury,
and not wanting to guess,
they were 'Still On Patrol'
instead of 'At Rest'.

Now, this next part is where you come in, pay attention!

(resumes storytelling air)
On the night before Christmas,
each radio op
would put on their headphones
to backchannels they'd hop.

Do you remember the next part?

SON
(after thinking for a moment)
'Merry Christmas, boys,'
they'd say into the phone,
'Have a blessed holiday
wherever you roam.'

NARRATOR
Very good! And what's special about this year's broadcast?

SON
I get to send the messages!

NARRATOR
That's right! We've only got a few hours before it's time... you ready to help
me set up?

SON
Yeah!

SCENE ONE

Lights up on a submarine bunk room. It's small, the walls plain, the furniture spartan. There's a small desk crammed in one corner, a bed pressed up against the wall. Somewhere, an alarm clock is ringing, but the sound is faint, as if it's been smothered by several military-grade blankets.

The only other sign of life in the room is a lump under the blankets that, if you squint, is sort of person-shaped.

They make no move to silence the alarm, though, and it continues its muffled shrieking for several long, annoying seconds.

MIKE knocks at the door, loudly imitating a trumpet playing Bugle Reveille.

MIKE
(through door) GOOOOD MORNING BUNKMATE!!! TIME TO RISE AND SHINE! C'MON, YOU LAZY DAISY, UP AND ADAM!

The person buried under the covers grumbles, but does not get up. MIKE kicks the door open.

MIKE
Did you hear me? I said, up and AD-

A pillow flies up from the bunk and nails him in the face.

ADAM
(groggy, muffled) It's up and *at them*, Micheal

MIKE
What was that? Sorry, I don't speak pillow-ese

The lump of blankets shifts, resolving itself to reveal an incredibly grumpy ADAM.

ADAM
(overenunciating) It's up and at-

He takes a pillow to the face.

ADAM
(fondly, after removing the pillow) Asshole.

MIKE crosses the room, moves close enough to kick the bunk.

MIKE
C'mon, get up. I had it, you got it, now move before I collapse on top of you.

ADAM
(holding out a hand) Radio?

MIKE unclips the handheld receiver from his belt and tosses it over.

MIKE
Enjoy. Whole lotta nothing to look forward to, out there.

ADAM
Until tonight?

MIKE
Yeah. Speaking of, I'll be back up at ten 'till to run final checks with you guys.

ADAM
Copy that. Hey, did you-

MIKE
Nope. Nuh uh. I'm off, so the questions department is closed, goodnight~!

ADAM
Oh, is small talk not allowed anymore? I'm sorry, I thought I'd just have a nice conversation with my bunkmate who I never see, since our shifts are out of sync, and I-

MIKE
(laughing) Oh, my god, get out, go do your job!

ADAM
Jeez, alright, alright. I'll talk to you tonight, then?

MIKE flips him off. ADAM laughs, finally exits.

SCENE TWO

Lights up on HARRY, fiddling with various knobs and dials on the ship's communications array.

HARRY
This is test 34 for today, December 24, nineteen– two..thousand? Y'know what, the date's not important, just– This is Lt. Harry Wu, onboard the USS Haddock, if anyone can hear me out there, I'd love a response in three, two–

He flicks a switch. Static pours into the room.

HARRY (CONT.)
(sighs) –one. I don't know why I actually got my hopes up for that.

He flicks the switch back off. It chimes cheerfully.

HARRY stares at it a moment, flicks it again. He gets a look in his eye, sits up straighter in his chair, and starts pushing various buttons and clicking switches on and off.

Each device chimes at a different tone, and after a moment or two of auditory nonsense, a melody becomes apparent.

HARRY
(under his breath, underscored by the beeps)
Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the–

ADAM
(from doorway)
Good to know you're taking this seriously.

HARRY
(caught) Call it a full system diagnostic.

ADAM
(teasing) Oh, is that what it was?

He crosses the room, takes a seat in the chair next to HARRY.

ADAM
So.

HARRY
So.

ADAM
Merry Almost-Christmas.

HARRY
Yeah. You too.

There's a beat of silence, the both of them making adjustments to the equipment.

ADAM
What're the odds we actually get a signal through?

HARRY
Low.

ADAM
Lower than last year?

HARRY
Probably. I don't know. It feels like every time we do this, the thought of it actually working becomes more dream than reality.

ADAM
Yeah.
(beat)
What would you say to them? If we *could* get something out?

HARRY
I- y'know, I've thought about it a lot, and I don't know. Obviously, like, I'd want to tell them that we're here, that we can hear them, but...
It's been so long, I'm not sure I know what they talk about, up there anymore. There's just too much ground to cover.
I wanna ask 'em who won the world series, and I wanna hear the celebrity gossip, and I wanna hear about the weather and the traffic and what the sky looks like tonight, and...
God, I don't know.
Maybe I'd just ask 'em to play some music.

ADAM
(a little choked up) God, yeah, music would be nice.

Several people enter the room, chatting amongst themselves.

HARRY

Hey, folks, go ahead and grab a seat, we've just got a few more tests to run, and then it's showtime.

SCENE THREE

Soft transition to the living room. It's clear some time has passed— the fire is dying down and we have moved to stand in front of some radio equipment, which NARRATOR is fiddling with, while SON watches on.

SON

Hey, Dad?

NARRATOR

What's up, bud?

SON

Can they actually hear us?

NARRATOR

(pauses, refocuses attention onto SON)

Well... it's been a very long time since they last responded, kiddo. Longer than you or I have been alive. But I like to think that whatever happened to them, wherever they are, our message brings them some sort of peace.

SON

What if it doesn't, though?

NARRATOR

Doesn't what?

SON

Get to them.

NARRATOR

Well... even then, I think it's important that we try. We're doing our part to make sure they didn't disappear unloved or forgotten. I think sending these messages is our way of memorializing them, of keeping them close to our hearts. It's a way of restoring their dignity, of affirming their humanity, of making sure that they're not without a home or a family who cares about them.

The clock chimes. The sound of it shakes the two out of their thoughts.

NARRATOR

Well. Looks like it's time. You wanna do the honors, kiddo?

SON eagerly flips the switch.

SCENE FOUR

We see both communications rooms simultaneously, SON and NARRATOR on one side, ADAM, MIKE, HARRY, and the rest of the CREW on the other.

NARRATOR

USS Haddock, this is Radio Operator John Loretto-

MIKE

There it is, standby, Comms.

ADAM

Comms One, standing by.

HARRY

Comms Two, standing by.

NARRATOR

Repeat. USS Haddock, this is Radio Op John Loretto-

MIKE

Begin backtrace.

ADAM

Tracing...

NARRATOR

Well, it's that time of year again, so we're calling to say-

ADAM

Trace complete. We've got a partial signal lock!

MIKE

You're a go for transmission, then.

SON

Merry Christmas, boys. We're thinking of you all here at home-

MIKE

(crosstalk)

Transmit it, *now!*

ADAM

I'm trying, it won't-

SON

-hope you have a good one.

NARRATOR
Operators out.

MIKE
(crosstalk)
The signal, the–

We hear a dial tone. It's clear the comms line has closed.

HARRY
(after a heavy silence)
Did it–

ADAM
(crushed) No. It didn't go through.

The crew visibly deflates. They begin to shuffle out in twos and threes, until it's just HARRY, MIKE, and ADAM left in the room, looking at the now-quiet comms panel.

MIKE
Well. It was a long shot.

HARRY
Yeah.
(with forced hope) And, I mean, we've got a whole 'nother year to come up with something else, right? There's always next year.

ADAM doesn't reply, staring at the dials, lost in thought.

MIKE
(with the air of clapping someone on the back bracingly)
C'mon, let's go swing by the mess, I hear there's booze with our names on it.

ADAM continues to stare at the comms panel.

HARRY
Adam. Hey. You okay?

ADAM
(coming out of a daze)
Wha– I– Yeah. Yeah, I'm fine.
(beat)
You guys go ahead, I'll catch up.

HARRY watches him for a moment, assessing. Then, he nudges MIKE, and they exit the room, leaving ADAM alone to continue staring at the radio equipment.

He watches the blinky lights the way one might watch the stars, except there's more hopelessness in his gaze, something more cynical, despondent.

Finally, he sighs and pulls himself out of his chair, reaching for the dial.

ADAM
Next year.

He turns off the console.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

Onion Baby

VALENCYA VALDEZ

Good morning,
Onion baby.
The sun flirts with a cloud
Over your crowned head,
And a stink beetle loses its legs
Under your toes.
I cried for you last night,
When the dinner bell rang.
Black smoke filled the oven
And threatened your crib.
I let the door hang open
Like a broken jaw.
The heat singed your lashes
And left ash on your lip.
Lovely pungent babe,
I know you
Burn, bite, and boil.
These layers of pain,
That you were born with
Make your skin paper-thin.
And yet you smile,
Funky baby,
Though it stings.
Good morning,
Bulbous baby,
You are mine.

Consumed

FAITH SCHEENSTRA



On Earthquake Weather

ISABELLA BYERS

In Southern California, temperatures reached one hundred and two degrees in the shortest month of the year— earthquake weather, they said, and at once I felt cold. In adulthood I have found myself trapped within the confines of a recurring dream— the sea swells over Venice but the ground does not shake. It does not shake until the Wilshire Grand falls to the floor, and only then do I realize the life I have known is collapsing. I seek high ground, but the cliffs have crumbled and high ground no longer exists. It ends the same each time— as the boardwalk washes away and the Pacific Coast Highway suffocates Zuma Beach, harmony settles in.

In February, purple lined the streets and gave way beneath my feet. Jacaranda trees may be California's sole refuge from being overcome by the dusty brush that covers the mountains and beaches alike, but they are as stolen as the architecture in Los Feliz. In these hills, there is a home nestled at the end of a narrow, one lane road. In 1959, it was a stately mansion belonging to the doctor famed for his patent of the modern syringe. It was of the Spanish Colonial Revival variety, though its architectural value is nearly unrecognizable now. At three in the afternoon, I leaned against the car with my arms crossed at my chest. I can't help but squint my bare eyes upwards— the sun is oppressive here, and I loathe myself for my forgetfulness. The exterior of the home was overcome by an invasive ivy species, and I wonder if the stories are true. If everything inside has remained untouched. I begin to feel ill standing here, and know now that I must leave.

We drove the six hours to San Francisco in oscillating silence, he did not want to be there with me, and I made myself unbearable for my own pleasure. I kept my feet on the dashboard. I yell at him when he does the same. It's unsafe, doesn't he know? After a few hours, my drink became flat, and I decided to roll down the window to dump it out. Not a moment later we were both covered with the lukewarm liquid. We were going eighty miles an hour, and the cup did not come close to making it out of the window before the force of the wind emptied its contents. We stifled immense laughter in our anger, too stubborn to let it go, and I spent our time at a rest stop drying the puddles that formed in the back seat.

The 5 freeway has a way of upsetting the traveler, though the 101 reconciles the fear of grapevines and cattle. Though here is when I begin to have trouble noting the shift into Northern California, and that bothers me. Palm Trees don't grow naturally anymore, Bakersfield was left behind hours ago, yet there lie hundreds of miles between ourselves and the Oregon border. Back at home, Los Angeles was steadily approaching eighty degrees.

We came into the city in the late afternoon. It is hot here, unseasonably so, and even Saint Francis himself forced us to take off our sweaters in Golden Gate sun. Though Mark Twain once said that the coldest winter he had ever known was a summer spent in San Francisco, I think that must be a lie. For I know the pain a Missouri storm brings alongside it. For I reached for the crisp snowflakes and they danced along my fingertips for just a moment before the wind bit too hard, blood pooling between my knuckles.

Jupiter has aligned with Mars now, but peace has not guided the planet. Los Angeles has settled on ninety-eight degrees. The sea begins to swell and I seek to find comfort in knowing that we will all go down together. It does not come.

Bakersfield

CLARA SMITH

California has left me dry
Her Santa Ana winds,
dust-bearing through
brown mountains.

She takes everything I've ever loved with her,
Only stopping for the ocean
Faltering for salt and sea
I crawl to where sand meets water
And lay my head on her warm and wet.

I am never *angry* at her
Or upset
I know why she steals,
It's only fair

A graze against open skin
Blood and bone and
Suddenly I remember it all,
A motel room with an open window
A rock skipping against the lake
A quiet we'll never get again

As another city's aflame,
She brings me water
And reminds me I'm ungrateful
For disregarding drought

Desire and longing
Cannot withstand four seasons
So I run far,
I pass rural hills
And empty churches

There's no gold in the Sierras
But we can still meet there.

Sunday School

MOLLIE KLINGBERG



After Babylon

CAMILLE KUROIWA-LEWIS

Mother
Your thighs, lithe and
Marred by green veins
race to me,
slain on the bathroom floor.

You drag a fingernail
Along the laminate vanity
Dipping it into the crevices
Of disturbed plastic
Like bath water.

Mother
Hold my hair back.

My head in a white bowl
And my eyes gone
Like a ketamined dog
You whispered in my ear
Poems about college
And minnesota—
Your breath
Spoiled from sucking warm vodka and
Methamphetamine from my pores
(Those words were
the best things to ever come out of the
Midwest.)

And when I was done—
my throat violated
from the sick and the smoking—
You took a dirty nail
To my eyelids
And closed them
So I could finally rest
In your
freckled arms.

holy moments

SOLEIA YEMAYA QUINN

some bright and familiar autumn day you will, while on the city bus, look out at your new world as it passes in blurred brilliance. you will remember that you love the wind and it rushes around you. you will be reminded of every past sun touched memory and of all the places and seasons now past. when certain people still lived and yet other people you did not yet know also lived, however much apart from you. on days such as these you will feel the frantic love of life. love for each stranger as heavy and varied as each leaf as they dance in the november wind.

you will ask yourself if this is what healing looks like.
you will ask yourself if this is what love feels like.
you will know that you are living.

and with your forehead pressed upon the bark of a cedar you will think about the lecture in which your professor explained just how much of our brain is subconscious. how he told you, rapt with attention, that some people- blind from a traumatic head injury- can still sense where objects are in space and can correctly guess what object a person is holding up. despite their inability to consciously know those visual facts. and you wonder if your mind is communing with the old cedar without your knowledge. if in secret subconscious understanding the world tells us wisdom if we sit still long enough to listen. and on the 75 bus away from downtown the bus driver started a conversation with you. and slowly two or three passengers joined in. sharing little wisdoms between the four people sitting still and recalling what it is to recognize humanity. these moments, a collection of knowledge, a gift of love. the fleeting sublime is present on the bus today.

today passes into tonight- the next ephemeral moment

and tonight there is a sacred transient beauty traveling on the coastal starlight train, away from the rainy hub of seattle. the french

concept of L'heure Bleue; directly translated to the blue hour. In this pre twilight hour, ghostly beryl tones light the landscape while her majesty Saint Helens graces us with her post sunset grandeur. I recall the poem by Marianne Moore. comparing the unspeakable beauty of Saint Helens brother mountain, Rainer, to a gargantuan octopus. with many limbed legs flowing down into the sea of somber turquoise forests. the mountain's accouterments tonight are its pale pink and baby blue snow-touched peaks, wearing a peach cloud cap to accessorize. these blue minutes tick away as the whooshing indigo hour fades into darkness. the countless firs and ramshackle west washington towns disappear as I sink into the eerie darkness of an early winter night. I see nothing but the subtle feeling of movement outside the train windows.

this same transient beauty is present on united airlines flight 1698. carrying me from chicago to portland oregon. bored and finished with whichever book I've brought from home, I glide over frozen farmland imagining for a minute. picturing that the great metal wings of this plane are my arms, that the two pilots are my twin eyes, large and keen. thus for a brief spectacular moment i am a flying giantess. larger than a house, my hair is longer than the ancient kelp seaweed of the southern pacific coast. my toe could crush even the most audacious and criminal of men. even a singular eyelash could cause a car crash if I endeavored to wish, and blow my massive lash in the wrong direction. in this state I am limitless and as beautiful as a redwood. in this size I am swifter than a bird and stronger than a million men.

but

I remember my smallness, that I am invisible to the vivacious sun. I recall that even the moon must squint to differentiate me from the ancient trees, boulders and rivers that dwarf me. this, I remember

and a few polite tears escape down my face. I remember the winter clad lands below me. I feel my face warm as the ever sought fiery inferno of our sun gleams a blinding vermillion. it passes beyond my sorry human sight into the dark horizon and it is holy. in the way my lover's cheeks are warm and flushed like that burning spectacle of a star. it is holy in the soft wisps of clouds as they glow in the sun's magenta reflection.

it is holy.



The Sweetest Sound

SOLEIA YEMAYA QUINN

Song Bird

BRIEL GOURLEY

and he was there
the warm sweetness of him stirring my blood,
into a warm hibiscus tea
his butterfly lashes dancing
his pillowed lips smiling
his ivoried hands working
he lives in rhythm and innocence
the chocolate of his honey eyes wanting, but never insisting
the forests within them bearing selfless gifts
he is sweet sticky pomegranate juice and tea cup rings on scattered
loose sheet music
the most golden sugar gracing my skin with his touch
filling my heart with every spoonful
his tongue smooth as a butter knife on warm toast,
over conversation,
over me
my unexpected love,
becoming as routine,
as breakfast

Our Spring Days

HAILEY NAM



goodnight

MIA TIERNEY

your words tear through me like vines. though i am not as young as i used to be, and i will never be again, i feel with rosy cheeks fresh blossoms. of all the things i have ever wanted, you are more. i harbor my ship in the waves of your calm acceptance, inviting me in and pleading me to stay. i want your eyes on me always, though forever is not promised, no more than an

hour. these words taste sour in my mouth, and i know some actions are unforgivable. but i think of you in the morning and the evening and the night. you appear behind closed eyelids and in shaded corners, as my skin itches from the playful tickle of grass. i tell you i hate to be

tickled. though i love to be touched, as your fingers caress my hair with the kindness of a wind's whisper. as the evening haze makes the stars glow brighter, i hope for a kiss, and as we stumble home, i hold your hand.

though no other can attest, the moss on my doorstep felt our bodies depart as you kissed me
goodnight.

The Gardener's Seeds

TALLIN RIVERS

Once upon a time, when there was magic still in this world, there was a graveyard. This was no ordinary graveyard, for the dead were not marked with tomb nor headstone, but with plants: this graveyard was a garden. The plants in this garden were no ordinary plants either: the old Gardener who tended them was a mighty magician, who planted special seeds which completed the lives and legacies of those buried beneath them; the seeds were a guarantee that the dead's good work would not end with them. However, the Gardener only buried those who came to die within the garden itself, and very few dying people ever made the journey. One year, during a time of great turmoil in the kingdom, a record number of four arrived at the garden, hoping to see their destinies fulfilled.

In the spring, when the leaves just started to bud and grass bristled from the earth like stray hairs, the first arrived. A great Knight, with shining helm rent in two, sturdy shield splintered and bejeweled sword long since discarded. The Knight slumped from his limping horse, crawled into the garden, and shouted through bloodied teeth: "Gardener, I have come from the defiled land of the heathen, where I dispensed my glorious wrath upon all barbarians. I have been dealt a mortal wound, and will die in your garden. I wish that when I die, you will plant with me a seed as mighty as I! Plant for me a sturdy oak tree, with branches strong and unbreaking, so that they may be made into bows and lances with which to strike down all foreign heathens!"

And so the Knight died, and the Gardener buried him with a tough acorn, which then grew into a magnificent oak tree, with branches as long as ship masts and strong as solid brick. The tree was then cut down, and its branches were made into timber, to send overseas and build new homes in war-torn lands.

In the summer, when the sun shone like a bonfire and the wheat turned from green to gold, the second arrived. A dignified Bishop, perfectly clean robe stained with pus and manicured hands cracked with sores. The Bishop doubled over and wretched as he entered the garden, and pleaded through his vomit: "Gardener, I have come from my bright churches, pure as maidens, where I forbade all the unclean and locked out the debased masses. Despite all my virtue, I have been struck with plague, and must be put to rest in your garden. I wish that when I die, you will plant with me a seed as saintly as I! Plant for me a beautiful olive tree, with fruit sweet and clean, so that they may be consumed by saints and prophets which wander by!"

And so the Bishop died, and the Gardener buried him with an exemplary seed, from which a miraculous olive tree sprung, with leaves unblemished and olives as ripe and sweet as the finest orchards. Soon the olives were picked, and used to feed the poor in slums and shanty towns.

In the fall, when the trees were a fiery swath of orange-red and the pumpkins were as round as cheese wheels, the third arrived. The King of the land, rings slipping from his skeletal fingers and crown drooping from his balding head. The King leaned against the gates of the garden, and croaked with a quavering voice: “Gardener, I have come from my castle of gold and marble, where I have lived a long life of wealth and plenty. I have spent all my riches on potions and spells, but I cannot prolong my life any further. I wish that when I die, you will plant with me a seed as magnificent and everlasting as I! Plant for me an immortal redwood tree, divine and imposing, which will stand taller and longer than any other thing!”

And so the King died, and the Gardener buried him with a regal pine cone, and soon a titanic redwood towered over the garden, with a trunk wide and dominating and with stature greater than giants. An autumn storm soon rolled in the next day, and the redwood was struck by lightning.

In the winter, when all became quiet and the garden slept soundly, the fourth arrived. A humble Beekeeper, shivering ribs swaddled in what few clothes he had, toes blackened with frostbite. The Beekeeper walked into the garden, and knelt at the feet of the Gardener, and said: “Good friend, the army burned my house down, the clergy barred me from their temples, and the crown took all my savings. I have no food and will surely starve soon, and have no way to care for my beloved bees. When I die, I ask that you plant with me a seed as simple as I: plant for me a humble dandelion, ordinary and happy, so that my bees may drink of its nectar in the spring.”

And so the Beekeeper died, and the Gardener buried him with a handful of tiny seeds. In the spring, when the snow melted and the rains came, the entire garden exploded with a heavenly carpet of flowers, encompassing all colors, patterns and sizes. From swarming

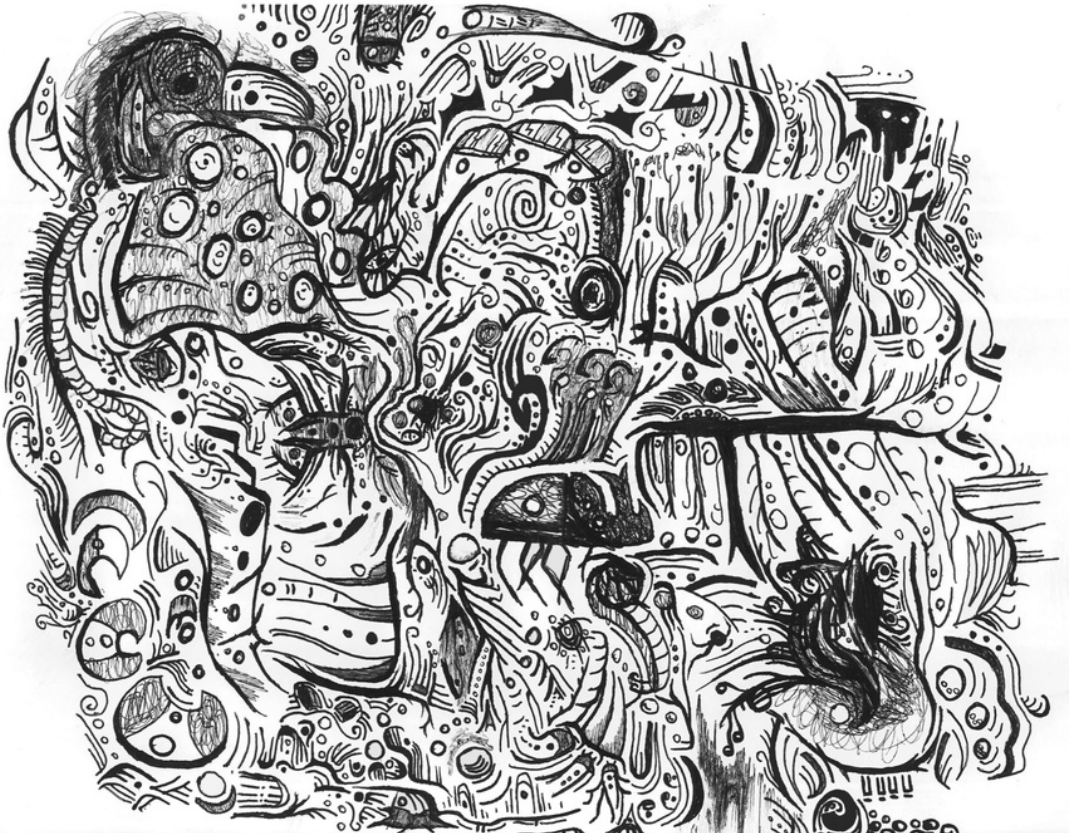
forget-me-nots to proud rhododendrons, the garden flourished with color and magnificence. Bees, butterflies and hummingbirds drank freely from their nectar, finches and squirrels gorged themselves on their seeds, and rabbits picked from their leaves.

And the Gardener decided that it had been a good year after all.

when the world gets too heavy

BRANNA SUNDY

I rest my head on a pillow of grass and stretch my feet among the
blooming cosmos,
leaning the shoulders of Atlas against the earth I've been holding.
There's a while to go before this body lowers six feet under,
so I'll lie here in the lightness of the garden and watch the clouds sweep
across the sky from my velvet bed of soil.
The spiders might creep in, but for once, I won't scream and run;
for once, I will let them share this rosy golden sky with me,
and we can breathe through the tangle of thorny hedges in our throats,
letting the teardrop rivers run the curves of our faces, telling us what
I know I'm here for:
to feel.



***Murder Bird and the 12,000
Chocolate Eyes***

SCOTT WINKENWEDER

Godzilla in the Atlantic

SCOTT WINKENWEDER

i'm begging you:

do not memorize the Bible.
do not write those saltwater passages
on your spinal cord.
the oak trees twist betrayed,
gleam yellow in sun.
the vines whisper about bullets and
brutal necessity. termite mounds terrorize
both of our mothers' kitchens,
and i blow smoke shaped like God
off on a cliff.

i always thought you were
built on a PC, in 1997,
nursed on iCarly and the promise of Hell.
when we were in high school
i imagined blood, drying,
under your fingernails,
while we followed a curly-haired dog
through the woods.
but you cast your spells, dried sage and ivy,
and moved to the city.
sometimes you sent me ghosts
in the mail.

so now i'm writing
to tell you, i saw your future,
your blue-light adulthood:
was pulled over on the highway
by four boa constrictors in ball caps.
they waved batons, like cartoons,
demanded *get out of the car*.
Martin Luther watched
from the bleachers.

but you and i already know it:
don't put too much faith in the future.
don't scrape those lines
on your skull. there is really
only one thing we can't deny,
and it is that gun, cold,
on the deputy's belt.

On Pharaoh Cicadas

ISABELLA BYERS

I don't like bugs. I often sat on the porch in observation while my cousins chased lightning bugs to clasp between their palms, garnering bare footed bee stings in the fields that loomed over all of us. I couldn't allow myself to hold the looking glass up to the anthill that, every Spring, reappeared in the backyard. I think about the bitterness of this disdain when, come Winter, I find it hard to sleep peacefully without the collective chirpings of a midwestern Summer. Even more perplexing is my recent realization of the contempt I have for the fact that I could only see the Pharaoh Cicada once in my youth. In many parts of the midwest, they appear every seventeen years—in 2007, we last saw the Brood X variation of the magicicada septendecim, and because the nature of forming memories as a child is to sensationalize, I remember this being a monumental event— but why? Not a person in my life could have possibly cared about the elusive Homopteran with the longest known insect life cycle. Though I held the hands of my grandmother as we walked through the garden on Lake Springfield, I saw the swarms, and they were red, loud, and heavy with the weight of their imminent reappearance in twenty twenty four. But before I shed the itchy skin of childhood, I would only marvel at this spectacle once.

I'm twenty now and it feels like mourning the death of a distant relative: I did not weep for my teenage years, a tumultuous eve of adulthood I could not call innocence, but a portion of me ached. It feels to be a significant milestone but I myself have never felt more insignificant or more ordinary. There were many things I could only do once before I turned twenty, and likely there will be many more I can do once before thirty, and perhaps forty, but when does time stop allowing for firsts? It saddens me that I do not know. That one day, it will be over, and I will not understand the end until long after.

At fifteen years old, it was extremely hard to reconcile that events have purposes that exist outside of yourself. But on a warm night in Florida, before hurricanes inflicted irreparable destruction, the shoreline was made unusually bright by factors monumentally more considerable than

I will ever be: the Fourth of July, the oil-garnering cities that plague the southern coast of the Atlantic Ocean, and the intermittent lightning threatening to strike down locals and trees alike. The firework displays made me nervous and I made my first mistake, first felt grief over a love that could only happen once before I shed my skin. The mistakes that followed happened in November, in cars and in rain, in twin sized beds at two in the afternoon. Really, it happened too many times to count, yet it could only happen once. Kissing in fast food parking lots and impersonating my mother's childhood John Hughes fantasy in the form of two straws, a sticky maraschino cherry, and an Oreo milkshake. I wish I did not shed my skin.

The annual cicadas don't mean much to me anymore. In fact, their incessant humming is distracting and makes me feel unkind. And in twenty twenty four, the midwestern year of monumental homecoming, I will no longer be twenty, and I will no longer anticipate the return of Pharaoh Cicadas. I will not be grazing my palms along the tall grass in my grandmother's fields, I will not run through the downpour along the unpaved back roads or get lost in the dense, suffocating woods, weeping loudly during hunting season, shamefully afflicted by the aggressively virulent oil of ivy. Though I will not see the red swarms over Lake Springfield, perhaps I will hear them across the miles, and they will not make me miss you, or boating accidents and fleeing Panama City Beach, getting high by the bonfire of trash, crackling and snapping while I coughed and wept, even the days spent hauling water and wasting it with long, warm baths. The return of the cicadas may not make me miss the itchy skin that once belonged to me, but they will make me mourn.

Someone's once

FIONA HASELTON



botanic of the departed

SOLEIA YEMAYA QUINN

a cemetery too is a type of garden
lush with the shades of grief
the roots under the plots here never grow
never birth any new sprouts of life
and yet
never was there an orchard more varied in its arbors
never a conservatory more redolent of memory the
ground here tilled by the gravediggers
corpses gently planted by despair's dark hands
those that walk this terrestrial tract act as
no other visitor to another garden ever did
leaving more flowers in their stead
than the garden grew before
a most benevolent exchange
fragments of the lost souls life
reflected in bouquets of roses and forget me nots
left here by the mourning few
the remembering ones that wander
this labyrinth of loss

The Apple Doesn't Fall Far

CLARA SMITH

I am scared
That at my core
I am seedless
And this is my one chance
At all of this

I pray every
Night, "Please,"
Please wake up
Ripe.

Mother,
Does it feel good to be held?
She tells me,
You have to give yourself over to them
You have to let yourself be devoured

I yearn for days
When sunshine brought
Sweat to my forehead

The constant cloud
Above me
Preventing any growth

What could be stopping me from sprouting?
This dead tree I'm latching onto?
Fine!

I'll fling myself into mud
I'll wash myself clean
I won't flinch when bitten into

I envy mulberries
Mature in the springtime,
Consumed in handfuls
With inconspicuous imperfections

A brown spot engraved into me,
Costing me everything
Mistakes and scars
Sticking out against my deep red

Mother, I don't know how long I can wait
I don't know how long I can live,
and be left whole

She sends suitors to me
Offers them each thirty pieces of silver
But even the most ravenous
Turn me down

I am her rotten child,
Her scorned potential
She hoped for a Solomon
But I cannot give wisdom
I cannot give understanding
I can only produce anger
I can only seeth and push her to regret

She holds me down
Plants thorned weeds around me,
Begs me to stay put
But even with restraints
I cannot be still

I force myself free
Roll down a beaten path
And hope to be picked up by a greedy wayfarer
Pray they have an acquired taste for banal things

WORMS IN THE WOODPILE

VALENCYA VALDEZ

There are worms in the wood pile. Rows of cedar and pine stacked much taller than my head. I can hear them in there. Though I know it sounds quite strange, to hear worms and their whispers. Such tiny conversation is no more than the scent of a sound!

Truly, it takes a careful listener to be caught in it. Between the wind's whistle // the hum of cars returning home // hold tight to the gap separating your uneven breaths // buzzing lightbulbs // the sizzle of the gas stove // their voices. Oh, but those voices – they live through the night. There are wigglers whispering. It's an incessant ringing, like the eardrum ricochets after concussion – the taste of soft-bodied tinnitus.

It's the murmurings of maggots. Each syllable strung out into a solid line, an infected tune. They don't speak the language that you and I do. What a silly assumption, to think worms know English words. But they know my name; and they know yours too.

I move 3 logs to the wood stove fire within an hour during the afternoon. It's winter and the house is cold. The fire will burn for hours if you feed it steadily. The thick flame, hungry, will consume everything you put in its mouth. A cracking blaze of laughter and purring heat in the furnace. White hot noise. Make your ear soft again, and you can hear the screams of grubs – their agony. And then the ringing, the gossip, for a moment it stops.



the end
MELISSA PLANKEY

About the Contributors

AM Blank (any/all), æm·blank, noun:

1. contemplating switching majors at the tender class standing of 'junior'; 2. 100% committed to the bit; 3. dresses like a technicolor Dean Winchester according to several reliable sources. See also: 'writer', 'performer', 'crazy ideas guy'.

Sara Brown (she/her), s·AH·r·uh b·r·OW·n, proper noun:

1. Senior pre-law / environmental policy & ethics major & aspiring enemy of the state; 2. One-man non-prophet with BGE (Big Gay Energy); 3. Long-suffering but loving mother to tiny dog (they both have social anxiety).

Hazel Burton-Tillson (she/her), ha·zel bur·ton till·son, proper noun:

1. colorful hair, short 2. natural habitat consists of sunshine, many colors and plants 3. often found at the beach and/or behind a camera

Isabella Byers (she/her), is·uh·bell·uh buy·yers, proper noun:

1. See definition for 'editor.'

Claire Carter (they/them), kl·air car·ter, noun:

1. aspiring conservation biologist and ecologist, 2. enjoyer of speculative science fiction, 3. birder

Briel Gourley (she/they), bri·el gour·ley, proper noun:

1. collector of pretty things; 2. legendarily bad with money; 3. average Fiona Apple and Amy Winehouse enjoyer. See also: 'scared to talk to people'.

Fiona Haselton (she/her), fee·O·nuh has·el·ton, proper noun:

1. video game enjoyer; 2. passionate dr. pepper drinker; 3. depeche mode lover

Alyssa Kanalakis (they/she/he), uh·liss·uh can·uh·la·kiss, proper noun:

1. canadian tuxedo enthusiast; 2. sudoku wizard 3. big hobbit energy

Sophie Kerr-Davis (She/Her/Hers), Soh·fee Kurr·Dae·vis, noun:

1. One who lives within the pages of a million books including her own, 2. Somehow not a fae creature in disguise, 3. Poetry Club President

Mollie Klingberg (she/they), mol-ee cling-burg, noun:

1. prolific painter person
2. hair-cutting and ear-piercing professional,
3. tofu eater

Camille Kuroiwa-Lewis (she/her), kuh-meal coo-row-ee-wuh loo-iss, noun:

1. woman,
2. yogurt-fiend,
3. writer of mean GoodReads reviews

Murphy McDonald Bradshaw (she/her), mur-fee brad-shaw, proper noun:

1. See definition for 'editor.'

Carlos Moreno-Vega (he/him), car-los moh-reh-no veh-gah, proper noun:

1. propagator of cursed humor
2. braindead caffeine addict
3. su perro vive mejor que él

Hailey Nam (she/her), Hay-lee nam, proper noun:

1. Kind
2. Hardworking
3. Ocean lover

Melissa Plankey (she/her), muh-liss-a plank-ie, proper noun:

1. still sleepy,
2. word counter,
3. burdened by many, many tabs

Soleia Yemaya Quinn (she/her) soul-ee-ahh, yey-my-ahh, ka-winn, noun:

1. lover of symmetrical body modifications,
2. pinterest god,
3. proud chicagoland transplant

Tallin Rivers (he/him), Tall-in Riv-ers, proper noun:

1. Is happy to be here;
2. Enjoys niche and nerdy hobbies.
3. Loves stories and will never change that.

Lilly Grey Rudge (she/her), li-lly grey rudge, noun:

1. grandma chic;
2. bitch for body horror;
3. recovering theater major

Faith Scheenstra (she/her), fae-th skeen-stra, proper noun:

1. a wandering wraith;
2. has the tortured soul of a deceased ghost writer;
3. is enjoying life in "retirement"

Clara Smith (she/her), clare-uh smith, proper noun:

1. lover of all fictional bunnies, e.g. The White Rabbit, Miffy, Thumper, Max & Ruby;
2. sandwich connoisseur

Branna Sundy (she/her), bran-na sun-dy, proper noun:

1. self-identified crow; 2. child of the moon; 3. can be found in the cracks between your bookcase and the wall

Mia Tierney (she/her), me-yuh tier-knee, proper noun:

1. See definition for 'editor'

Valencya Valdez (she/her), va-len-s-ee-uh val-dez, proper noun:

1. See definition for 'editor'

Cami Villanueva (she/her), cah-mee bee-yah-nway-bah, proper noun:

1. Future educator; 2. someone who likes to cook for her family but can only do it once a week 3. the kind of person that says 'hey cool cats'

Tait Vigeland (she/her), tay-t vig-land, proper noun:

1. contagious laugh; 2. my favorite movie is Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs 2; 3. I will be late to class if it means getting my coffee

Scott Winkenweder (he/him), scott wink-en-weed-er, noun:

1. that great purple monster hammocking fruit snacks in a backyard, 2. cleaning demons like vomit off the bottom of the desk, 3. the howl of arugula behind his mother's mother's house.



About the Editors

Mia Tierney (she/her), me-yuh tier-knee, proper noun:

1. intramural soccer captain
2. avid hiker
3. can make a one-second interaction into a 10+ minute story

Valencya Valdez (she/her), va-len-s-ee-uh val-dez, proper noun:

1. subgenre of a subgenre, 2. alchemically altered celestial body, 3. literally has no idea what she's doing.

Murphy Bradshaw (she/her), mur-fee brad-shaw, proper noun:

1. twin (fraternal)
2. quilt lover
3. clog wearer

Isabella Byers (she/her) is-uh-bell-uh buy-yers, proper noun:

1. joan baez super fan
2. honorary midwesterner (slanty face)
3. will never finish a story because she is laughing too hard

Hannah Monti (she/her), han-uh mon-tee, proper noun:

1. worm wrangler
2. boot wearer
3. Idahoan
4. not a cowboy

Alyssa Repetti (she/her), a-lyss-a rah-peh-tea, proper noun:

1. plant enthusiast
2. GTS kombucha stan
3. from the bay area (and won't shut up about it)

Lauren Rees Savas (she/her), lo-ren ree-suh sah-vah-suh, proper noun:

1. aspiring Addison Shepherd;
2. lover of dry lightning, iced chai, and stray cats;
3. The Worst Photographer™

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Submission Policy

Writers Magazine accepts submissions of original creative work by current students of the University of Portland. These works include but are not limited to short prose, poetry, short plays, photography, visual arts, and cartoons.

All submissions are evaluated by the editorial board. Submissions are kept anonymous throughout the evaluation process.



University of Portland
Department of English
5000 N. Willamette Blvd.
Portland, OR 97203