

CAROLINA MUSE

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LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE



CAROLINA MUSE

literary & arts magazine

VOLUME IV • NO. III • OCTOBER 2024

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Poetry Editor

Amanda Conover

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Communications Strategist

Misbah Chhotani

Newsletter Writer

Jenna Duxbury

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From the Editor

Over the past two weeks, our Carolina Muse family has been hurting for a place that many of us have called home—Western North Carolina. Hurricane Helene brought a level of unpredictable destruction that the area has never seen. People’s loved ones, homes, and livelihoods were lost within just a few hours, and the devastation & grief this community is experiencing cannot be put into words. Our hearts are broken for WNC. But, these communities tucked into the mountains are close-knit & resilient, and it has been beautiful to see support flowing in from other areas of the Carolinas and beyond. As you are able, please consider donating to or volunteering for one of the organizations linked below. We will also be donating 100% of profits from print copies of this issue to the hurricane relief efforts & arts organizations listed.

Western North Carolina is rooted in the arts, from music to visual arts to storytelling. And, though galleries, venues, and beloved creative works may have been lost to the storm, the arts are still alive within us, and we can & will create again. Let your creative process serve as a means to process grief, to mourn and to celebrate the people & places you love. And, as you read through this issue, we encourage you to look for hope & beauty in what can grow amidst the desolation.

Asheville’s River Arts District Flood Relief Fund
Friends of the Hot Springs Library for the Town of Hot Springs
The Flood Gallery Hurricane Relief in Black Mountain
Hearts With Hands in Swannanoa/Asheville
BeLoved Asheville
NC Arts Disaster Relief Fund
IamAVL Music Industry Relief Fund
WNC Creative Resilience Relief Fund for Appalachian Makers



Madison

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Instead of a Cross *Jo Tempick*



Sitting Still

Isabella Serene

1

From the roof,
I watch the trees sway
as the sky swallows itself.

When I stand up,
I sway too.

2

Inside Walmart and Dollar Tree,
in the fluorescents,
the world isn't that real.

Inside the security screen
above the door,
you aren't that real either.

3

I would like to drop a jar
from my tired fingers.
Maybe it would break and the shards
would flash across the floor.
Maybe I would want someone to come
and pick them up.

Maybe I am the jar.

4

When I click off the lamp,
if I'm lucky, what I'm left with is this:
my own arm pressed into my cheek
one warm against the other
though I can't tell which,
the earthy smell of sweat
on my skin.

It's more than I know how to ask for.

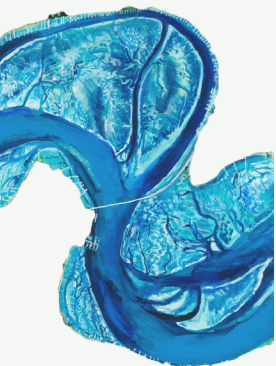
5

If not, what I'm left with is
this: a thread pulled taut through
the center of me, so deep
I cannot touch it, only feel it
faintly trembling.

Sleep slinks around silently in the dark.

6

When you sit still
for long enough,
you notice
the way the light cracks
through the sky.



Rain

Savannah Tew

I

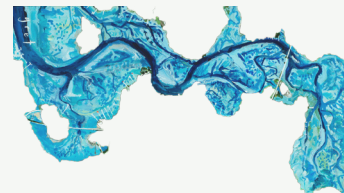
Steam lifts from thirsty pavement fogs my glasses air still laden with storm rain would fall whether I walked through it or not drops roll through my hair skittish bees welcome lover's hand lately I chase water brings me right to some meditative space I sit on the floor in the shower stand too long in the rain find words some animal comfort in the pause the downpour calls for words like rain demanding to be felt.

II

Trust the hand of time lay in the river let the current deliver me to the right sea in the engine of the rainstorm I think everyone is so lonely now I think we are all of us starved together we season ourselves with sugar the secret is take each other in all our flavors push tears from your friend's face let them cry like the world is ending in your arms gather them to your breast feel every sob that rattles their body like it broke from your own sorrow-stung lungs like thunder shakes window glass in the engine of the rainstorm.

III

Juice of some unfamiliar flower on the wind the sky tries to keep from crying flirts with rainfall teases us on the ground with her quivering lip welling eyes what ecstasy must there be in the cloud burst couldn't we all use such release torn apart so many condensing pieces sipped by the grasses reconstituted in breath some great limitless shape darling lately I chase water maybe in some spiritual longing I'm certain my baptism never did take no I suspect it is not the wash I'm after the submersion flavor of my breath gone stale for the waiting I am after engulfment I want to know what it is to be swallowed.





Beaufort *Gret Mackintosh*



Feeding Frenzy

Jo Tomsick



Asymmetry

Ashley Roncaglione

where did
 you go?
 did you not
 hear
 my cries
 for help
 through the echoes
 of the waves?
 I thought I saw
 a bird
 fall from
 the sky and I wanted
 to tell you
 how it feels
 like the
 universe is
 speaking to me

how I'm
 always
 searching the
 water for my own face
 peering back
 but it remains
 unseen.
 isn't a reflection
 supposed to be
 a perfect match?
 my inkblot
 in the mirror
 yet the symmetry
 is not there
 you do not answer me
 so I guess it's time
 I remove
 the feathers
 from my hair.

Beetle Must Die

Kaylin Hechtle

The Japanese beetle, invasive to New Hampshire, can spend all summer devouring tiger lily leaves. They loitered on the sides of Oma and Opa's cranberry-colored house and hid in the leaves of their eclectic garden. Even from the top of my grandparents' long front yard, I could see them at the bottom, floating like a puncture of light when the sun hit their polished bodies. The Japanese beetle's head, glossy & green like a pinchable jewel, becomes groggy beneath New Hampshire's white sun. But the beetle will continue to eat. They protect their tea-colored wings in an incandescent, brown shell. To kill one, I first had to find it. My young eyes admired the shell's rainbow tint before I flicked it into a small cup of lighter fluid.

The Jackson house, where I was born, was Oma and Opa's home. In Jackson, New Hampshire, at the top of Sarah Hill Road, was my grandparents' strange garden. Their red-leafed maple tree barred the view to the juniper bushes that pricked me when I reached for its hard berries. Pink & purple phlox, Queen Ann's lace, and overlapping pansies lived between bouts of freckled, orange tiger lilies.

Every summer, Oma would send my two brothers and I outside, outmanned against the Japanese beetles. I didn't ask why we were only armed with little glass jars filled with gasoline. Her logic seemed sound. Drowning was bad enough, and lighter fluid was much more violent than water.

I wish I could claim a gentle heart and say that my little hands weren't the kind that wanted to kill. But, I found steadiness in the task of angling the cup so that its mouth was open to the beetle. A reliable tension wound up in the spaces where my nerves met while I lined up the release of my finger. I flicked him into the cup. He tried to swim, but he got bogged down by the other beetle bodies. There was honor in my job. The beetle had to die so the lily could live. New Hampshire smelled

like many things—but here, it smelled like dry pine & faint gasoline.

Opa had me tend the lawn in a different way. I learned to drive, not in a car, but sat on Opa's lap in the riding mower. He had his foot on the gas and his chin to the top of my head, telling me to turn turn turn, tight circles, tight circles.

Long before Opa was in his seventies, mowing the lawn with a grandkid on his lap, he was Donald Hechtle, sixteen, pushing the manual mower around the apple orchard.



In Mount Hope, New York, in the fork between the Shawangunk Lake Reservoir and Shawangunk Road, was a house skirted by river, road, and pines. Since Mount Hope was all pastures & farmland, practically every plot was entitled to a pond fed by the reservoir. These ponds were for crops & cattle—except the Hechtles didn't have cattle, and they hardly had crops.

The country house was flanked by two apple orchards. These apple trees were not the seven-foot kind, bred for casual picking. These were gangling, and they were Donald's colossal enemies.

The orchard demanded upkeep. Donald's major problem with apple trees is that they wanted to keep on growing. When new branches—shoots—sprout off the existing branch, they run off with nutrients that should be going to the apples. Every time a shoot skims some

“My young eyes admired the shell's rainbow tint before I flicked it into a small cup of lighter fluid.”

nutrients, an apple is coerced into bitterness. Don had to put himself high on the ladder. With much sour persistence, he, his brother, and his father clipped the shoots from their places and put them in a heap. For hours beneath the sun of rural New York, Donald sacrificed the shoots to preserve the richness of the apple. The shoot heap was soaked in lighter fluid and set on fire.

Opa tells me this story while we sit in his bedroom. We are in their new house in Conway, New Hampshire during my family's summer vacation. This Conway house is only seventeen miles from the Jackson house, and they've lived here for eight years now. The Jackson house was one basement too big for them. It hurt Oma too much to take the laundry up and down the stairs, and it cost too much to heat in the winter. Yet, after

nearly a decade, the move feels perpetually fresh.

Summer with them stays the same, despite the house being different. We still hike in the day, dip radish cuts in hummus before dinner, and find travel documentaries to watch before bed. My family gathered gently in low-lighting makes me feel giddy, like I'm drunk on reinvented childhood. Oma makes fun of the travel guide while Opa starts to snore in his chair, and no one acknowledges that it might be my last summer in New Hampshire.

Despite the perfect peace of the moment, or maybe because of it, I mourn every beetle I killed in the garden, wishing for the chance to be eight years old, killing them all over again. I wonder if the land has a way of remembering me. Is the knowledge of every beetle I flicked wound up in the tiger lily roots?

Whether the Jackson house likes it or not, I've

planted myself there. My placenta was in the freezer of the Jackson house for fourteen years before Oma told my mother to do something with it. We buried it in the ground, by the juniper, and I decided to plant a blueberry bush on top. At first, I was upset. As soon as the blueberries were ripe, the turkey vultures came and ate them early in the morning, when the light was still gray and easy on the eyes. But now, I'm glad the vultures spent their mornings putting their beaks in the leaves of my blueberry bush. The land cannot forget me because it cannot forget itself. Everywhere the land looks, there I am, inside it.

I wonder if Opa wants the land of the country house to remember him. I wonder if it would be out of love or spite. I wonder if it matters.

Opa and I, we've put work into land that we could not hold on to.

On the last day of my visit, I go to the post office with Opa. Going to the post office together has always been our sacred tradition—our “us” time. We used to drive down the mountain of the Jackson house to the post office, singing, “My name is Jan Janssen, I come from Wisconsin, I work in the lumberyard there. When I walk down the street, all the people I meet, they say, ‘Hello.’ I say, ‘Hello!’ They say, ‘What’s your name?’ I say,” and then we’d repeat the song, all the way down the mountain.

On the way home from the Conway post office, Opa tells me it’s okay if this is my last summer with them.

“No matter where you are, if you’re doing good, and you’re happy, then that’s good enough for me, and I’m happy,”

Rebirth

Tianming Zhou



he says.

Opa has spent my whole life telling me I'm going to do something special. On the verge of a college graduation, I spend every day getting closer to sacrificing summers in New Hampshire in order to begin a life I can do something special with. I'm left with soaking my summers in gasoline so my lilies can grow. I'm left with the dread that Opa isn't getting younger.

I have more time with Opa than I did with the land of the Jackson house. But with the land, I can force my placenta into it. The birds will eat my fruit at dawn and dusk, and they will plant my blueberries elsewhere, and the land cannot forget me. I do not know what to plant in my Opa to force him to remember me for eternity.

But I do keep calling, and we do keep laughing, and we keep telling each other stories. As the years pass, and I continue to till the soil, I recognize he is a land I cannot keep. But in recent years, we have shared more about ourselves to each other than ever before. He tells me his father's stories. I come out and tell him I have a girlfriend. He tells me he loves her.

As we both grow older, we keep taking out our hearts to force inside the other, so that everywhere we look, we cannot get away from the other one, and it means:

Do not forget me. Do not forget me. Do not forget me.



Sunscapes

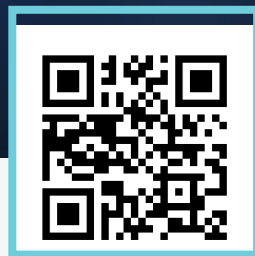
Trudy Thomson





LOST

Motherwell Drive



Pedestrian Daydreams I

Jack Deal

The rosemary shrub choir;
 a bittersweet song meant for couples on their silly walks.
 Hear it with the lungs. Hear it like the midday sun.
 The dogged summershine climbed; oh, those ancient rays;
 fierce, like how our parents tried to raise us.
 Don't they know that solace hides in April showers?
 We prayed for unfaltering rainclouds
 and lazy petrichor mornings. The irony.



Halfway Beyond

Tianning Zhou

Pitstop

Marissa Elizabeth

I am living a beautiful life
full of characters that are not you
I find you in bits and pieces of them
and if I keep hacking at whatever is damming up inside me
Maybe one day it will feel whole again
I do pottery by the roadside
River clay clotting between my fingers
and music bubbling from my lips
between prayers for fish that fester just above the waterline
Their eyes are missing
so I tell them about the sunset
and the colors of the silt
and what it felt like to run my hands through the silk strands of your hair



The Wild Swan

Jo Tomsick

Moonbrown

Yuna Kang

My dreams were wet with untidiness,

that ugliness that comes with woman
hood, I bring my face up to silver rain. She dangles like

earrings from some pale neck, I bite down and it tastes
clean, empty. I remember shooting upright from mesalliant

dreams, last night of a shooting star, the purple moon moving
from the headboard to the floor. My fingers were dipped in a mystic

glow, nebular dye. and moving upwards from the belly I sought
blood, crispening and crinkled, in that old August
rain.





Swallow

Tiffany Hale

Butterflies

Nate Darden

Wings hit my stomach walls,
legs crawl through my intestines
surely they should lay eggs on my kidney
cocoon in my liver, larva
living on gastric juices, sleeping
under my spleen
tucked from the air.

Drank my nectar until
I grew tolerant of tickling.
Celibacy turned extinction.
Wings shredded by cruel hands,
crushed in calloused
palms of someone I love.

Be Someone You Love

Victoria Lora



Multiplicity into the Depths of the Universe

Mahdi Meshkatee



Love and Other Dead Things

Bailey Garrison

We became friends because you always found the best places to play. You were the one who told me about the field with the stones, and I followed you away from the playground toward the church. We leapt from the flat stones, hidden in the long shadow of the church steeple, and left muddy Skechers prints in our wake, frozen dance steps. You chased me, but I was faster.

When you caught up to me, your cheeks were rosy, your freckles glistening like dewdrops, the morning newness of childhood. The bells rang from the church three times, and the grass quivered at our ankles.

“We should make a club,” you said.

“What kind of club?”

“Like a secret club.”

“Yes, we should,” I said. In those days of crayons and swing sets and first-grade foolishness, it was a lucky thing to be in a club, especially if it was secret. The clubs were always nameless & purposeless, and I had never been in one.

“And we’ll have our club meetings here. In this field that no one else knows about. The bell will start our meetings.” You pointed a chubby finger at me. “And you can’t tell anyone. Not even Suzy H.”

“I won’t tell anyone,” I promised, and then I took off running, daring you to come after me. I could hear your laughs dying behind me, and I looked over my shoulder to see how far ahead I was and ran into a great wall of human.

“What’s this?”

I looked up to see a man towering over me, snow-white hair and the lightest eyes I knew, dotted by tiny, piercing pupils. Father Tiller, the great & terrible.

“Anna, Oliver.” It seemed as though those little pupils could suck us both into a hellish void, dark matter. “Where are your parents?”

“Home, sir,” I said. We were next-door neighbors.

“This is no place for play,” the priest said. “Don’t you have any respect for the dead?”

“The dead?” you said, a haunted thrill in your voice.

“Yes,” the priest said. “This is where the dead rest. It is not a playground.”

“Yes, sir,” I said.

“Go home, children. And I don’t want to find you playing here again.”

We nodded sullenly and turned for home. I could see the priest watching us in a halo of stained-glass light created by the afternoon sun. Then the trees swallowed him and the church, and we didn’t look back. You walked with your hands in your pockets, biting your lip in thought.

• • •

The first time you kissed me, you bit my lip.

We were fifteen, giddy and stupid and pure, and we were walking home from the diner where you had bought me a milkshake. It was before your parents had told you they had bought the house uptown, and we said wouldn’t it be convenient if we were older and got married, because we already lived next to each other? Every second I was with you now, I felt light and incessantly anxious and unable to stop smiling. We paused at the corner of Milton and South, giggling about something, and then you stopped giggling.

“Anna?”

“Yeah?”

“Would—would it be okay if I kissed you?”

It was clumsy and ridiculous and wonderful, and I remember thinking that maybe this was what love felt like, but I wasn’t sure. My lip didn’t bleed, but it was sore until the next morning. You said sorry a lot for that, but I was too happy to care if you hurt me.

• • •

“We have to come back,” you said as we left the last rays of stained-glass behind us and walked past the playground, where we were supposed to have been playing. “Otherwise we can’t have our club.”

“But Father Tiller will catch us,” I said.

“He’s an old toad. He won’t catch us if we’re careful.”

The next Saturday, we were careful. Instead of running and squealing and leaping between graves, we sat hidden behind a tall stone, talking in excited murmurs. There was a name on the gravestone, and you asked me to read it because you had only learned A through F at that point.

“Paula something,” I said. “I can’t read the last name.”

“Paula,” you repeated.

“We should make Paula part of our club,” I said. “We wouldn’t want to make her feel left out.”

“But she’s dead.”

“I think dead people can be sad, too.”

“Okay. She can join.”

It was early into the summer, the time of year when the bees & wasps make their presence known to us again. It’s funny how I forget about them all winter. But, as we sat in the shelter of Paula’s grave, I remembered again. I planted my hand in the grass so I could lean back and then shrieked and pulled it back like I had plunged it into a bonfire. A fat wasp droned away, unsympathetic to my cries of agony.

“Shh,” you snapped. “Father Tiller will hear you.” But, when you saw my palm turning purple, you started screaming, too.

Father Tiller found us easily enough. He pulled us to our feet by our sleeves, his brow creased like wrinkled laundry.

“I thought I told you children that you were forbidden to play here,” he said in his quaky preacher’s voice. “You show no respect for me or the dead.”

“We were keeping the dead company,” you said.

“The Lord keeps the dead company.” Father Tiller swiveled his eyes to me. I was still blubbing, holding my swelling hand and trying not to look at the fantastical colors staining my palm. “And, what happened to you?”

“I... I...” I hiccupped for breath. “I got stung by a wasp.”

“If I weren’t an Anglican, I would call that karma. I’d like to walk you two home and talk to your parents.”

We led him to our street, not daring to speak a word, tears filling my nose and running down my cheeks. Shame pushed my gaze to my feet, I couldn’t look at even you. Shame was ugly, and I was afraid that it would somehow make you hate me, even if our crime was equal. To my relief, my parents weren’t home, but there was something even more unbearable about facing your parents.

We stood in silence while Father Tiller told them of our sins, and after he was gone, they lectured us some more. We mumbled our apologies, and then your dad treated my hand and wiped my tears and told me I was a big girl. I didn’t feel like one.

“We weren’t doing anything wrong,” I told him.

“If Father Tiller told you not to play there, you shouldn’t have been playing there,” he said.

“But, what if the people buried there are lonely?”

“They’re not lonely. They have loved ones who come and visit them all the time, and they rest peacefully.”

“It seems so sad there.”

“A graveyard is not a sad place. It’s a serious place. There’s a difference.”

“We don’t want a serious place for our club,” you said. “That’s boring.”

“We have some boxes in the garage,” your dad said. “You can use those to make a clubhouse.”

We stacked boxes in the yard all afternoon, and by evening we had forgotten the graveyard. From the slits between the cardboard, I saw my parents’ car roll into my driveway, headlights slicing through our fortress.

“Anna!” your dad called from the back door. “Your parents want you home!”

“Coming!”

We crawled out of the boxes, and I sat on the porch and fastened the Velcro on my shoes.

“You won’t tell my parents we got in trouble, will you?” I asked him.

“I’ll keep quiet just this once.” He winked. “So long as you’ve learned your lesson.”

I promised that I had.

You were gazing up at him with that serious look you sometimes got, your brow creased, but your eyes softened by your freckles. “Dad?” you said. “If I was one of the dead people, would you come to visit me?”

He frowned and then he had wrapped you in a hug that you clearly wanted out of. “Of course I would,” he said and squeezed tighter so that you squirmed enough to force him to let go.

•••

“It was early into the summer, the time of year when the bees & wasps make their presence known to us again. It’s funny how I forget about them all winter. But, as we sat in the shelter of Paula’s grave, I remembered again.”

When your dad died, he was buried in that cemetery. How old were you—seventeen? Eighteen? Father Tiller held the funeral in the stained-glass chapel and told the crowd that when good people die, they go to heaven. Thankfully, he said, your father was a good man. And it would benefit the rest of us to be good, too, lest we end up in another place if we should also have a heart attack. Then, you gave the eulogy, telling miscellaneous childhood stories without any meaning or emotion because it was the only way you would have been able to get through it.

After the service, I was the first to find you, your eyes red & swollen, your chest visibly rising & falling as you struggled to breathe evenly. Without saying a word, I wrapped my arms around your shaking body, and you clung to me with every ounce of strength you could muster and didn't even try to squirm away.

"I'm so sorry," I murmured and cradled your head in my hand and pressed my lips to your cheek.

You pulled back after another moment and wiped your eyes, tried to shake away the grief like it was water stuck in your hair. "I'm fine."

Father Tiller came up behind you and put a wrinkled hand on your shoulder. "Well done, my boy," he said, referring to the eulogy, and then he turned to me. "Anna. You look very nice."

I didn't like how I looked, in my woeful, black dress and my mother's pearls. "Thank you," I said.

"Oliver, I'd like to speak with you," he said. "Whenever you have a moment."

"I can now." I imagine you wanted nothing more than to avoid the condolences of the dozens of loved ones who were lining up to shake your mother's hand. You followed Father Tiller to a shadowed corner of the church and stayed there talking with your heads bent together for a long time. I watched you, his hand on your shoulder as he spoke to you, your head nodding solemnly. The chapel began to clear out, and I left with



Las nubes tampoco alcanzarán el sol

Leslie Rodriguez

my parents before you had even looked up once.

You started going to church every Sunday, and you told me how magnificent Father Tiller was, how he talked of mysteries beyond human comprehension and made order out of a chaotic & sinful world. There was comfort in duty, and our duty was to be righteous & good. Father Tiller was teaching you how to be good.

“I want to be a priest like him,” you said one day. “I want to study the mysteries and live a holy life and teach others to do the same, like he does.”

“If that will make you happy, then I’m happy for you,” I said.

“Anna, you should come hear him. Just once.”

“I don’t know,” I said.

“What don’t you know?”

“I don’t know.”

• • •

We broke up after graduation because it was the smart thing to do, and you went to Bible college to prepare for seminary, and I went to the state school to figure out my life. I went to the club fairs and the football games and Psychology 101. My roommate ignored me, and I ate too much cafeteria pizza. I went to my first party and drank my first cup of beer and then my second. I thought it would make me feel better if you told me that you were just as miserable as I was, and I was just drunk enough to call you.

“I miss you,” I said into the phone.

“I miss you, too,” the phone said back. You didn’t know I had been drinking. “But, I’ll see you at Christmas.”

Christmas was four months away. I hung up and drank another beer. Even in the haze of alcohol, I

couldn’t stop thinking about you. Even when I kissed some guy and he wrapped his arms around me, I was thinking about you, and I’m sure I accidentally breathed your name over my lips because I couldn’t remember his. He bent down and murmured something drunken in my ear, and I nodded, and there was a dark room upstairs, and after it was over, I cried because I thought it would make me forget you, and I didn’t.

When Christmas came, I was more desperate than ever to see you. In the evergreen haze of my living room, you told me you loved me and that you thought it was a mistake to break up, and it would be good if we got married—after we had both graduated, of course. You said I was a good girl; I would make a good preacher’s wife.

And then I had to tell you about the night I called you and the boy who wasn’t named Oliver.

“Oh,” you said.

“But, I’ll still marry you,” I said. “You’re the only one I’ve ever loved. I just thought you should know.”

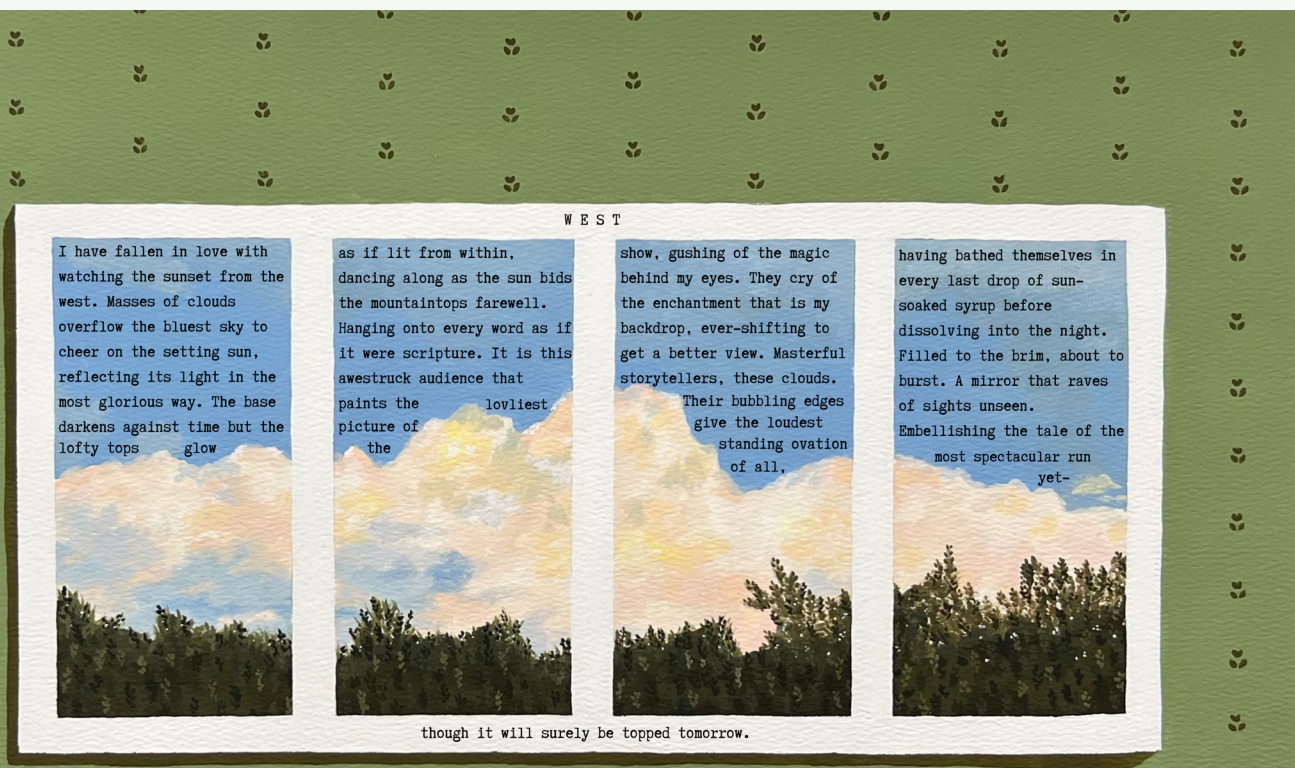
“Anna, what happened? I thought you were a good girl.”

“I am,” I said, though I wasn’t sure if I believed it.

“Oliver, I’ll marry you. I’ve always loved you.”

“Father Tiller wouldn’t approve.”

“He doesn’t have to.” I felt you letting go of me, and I started slipping. Desperate, desperate, desperate.



WEST

I have fallen in love with watching the sunset from the west. Masses of clouds overflow the bluest sky to cheer on the setting sun, reflecting its light in the most glorious way. The base darkens against time but the lofty tops glow

as if lit from within, dancing along as the sun bids the mountaintops farewell. Hanging onto every word as if it were scripture. It is this awestruck audience that paints the loveliest picture of the

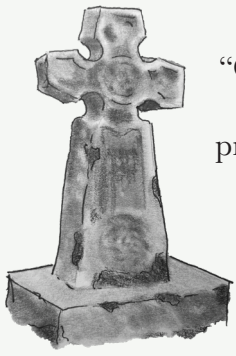
show, gushing of the magic behind my eyes. They cry of the enchantment that is my backdrop, ever-shifting to get a better view. Masterful storytellers, these clouds. Their bubbling edges give the loudest standing ovation of all,

having bathed themselves in every last drop of sun-soaked syrup before dissolving into the night. Filled to the brim, about to burst. A mirror that raves of sights unseen. Embellishing the tale of the most spectacular run yet-

though it will surely be topped tomorrow.

West

Eileen Hughes



“Oliver...”

“I can’t. It wouldn’t be proper for a priest.”

“No one has to know!”

“God knows. He sees all we do.”

“So what?”

You flinched, but then you just looked down at your weathered sneakers and shook your head. “I don’t know what happened to you.”

I wondered for a moment if maybe I was breaking your heart as much as you were breaking mine. My lip trembled, and I remembered crying in front of you all those years ago when the wasp stung me. This hurt more.

“You don’t want to marry me,” I managed to choke out.

“I can’t,” you said again, and then you started to quote scripture, but I was already running out of the room, the tears stinging my eyes, my heart shattering so violently in my chest that I felt the shards burn me.

I’ve told myself that it’s all how it should be, even when I can’t fall asleep at night because my mind can’t stop following the dozen threads of what could have been. This is how it should be. You deserve someone sweet and pure and good, someone who follows the holy life you value so much, someone who didn’t lose her virginity at the first college party she went to, someone who wasn’t stupid enough to lose everything she loved. You’ve always been so good, and so innocent, and I would be selfish if I asked you not to marry that girl because you deserve someone who isn’t me. But, I’m not a selfless person.

• • •

Back to the graveyard.

We were too scared to go back a third time, so we kept to playing in our yards and on playgrounds. Still, every time we walked past the church and the tombstones, I saw the magnetic pull in your eyes, and I’m sure you could see it in mine, too.

“Do you think Paula is happy?” I asked you. “What if she wants us to be with her, but she’s dead so she can’t tell us?”

“Can dead people be happy?”

“I think if they can be sad, then they can be happy.” I gazed over the fence and could barely make out Paula’s

name on her grave. Your dad had said that graveyards were serious places, not sad places. But even in the bright glow of summer, the field looked unbearably sad to me. It looked dead and nothing else. “I hope Father Tiller treats the dead people well,” I said. “I hope he makes them happy.” But in Father Tiller’s eyes, happiness for the dead was an unforgiving silence.

• • •

When I left for college after that Christmas, I drove to your house uptown to say goodbye. I hugged you, but you squirmed away. I had ruined your plan, I was ruined.

“I’m sorry,” I said, but you would never forgive me. I would never forgive me.

“Don’t apologize to me,” you said coolly. Your summertime eyes had frozen, and you had outgrown the freckles to soften them. “You must repent to God.”

All I wanted was to repent to you. “If I repented to God, would you marry me?”

Your silence was enough of an answer. There was nothing else I could say; I let myself be lost.

“Goodbye, Anna.” You turned me away, and that was the last time I ever saw you.

After college, I moved back, and I’m living in an apartment uptown. Wouldn’t it be convenient if we got married, because we already live near each other?

You’re the one preaching in that same little chapel and warding the children off the graveyard. The cemetery is especially beautiful in the stained-glass summers, the wildflowers dappling the field with yellows & purples, but no children dare to come pick the daisies or wish on the dandelions, and so the unforgiving silence persists.

I guess I’m saying that I think Father Tiller was wrong. I think he should have let us run & dance through the graveyard and have Paula in our club and squeal and laugh as much as we wanted, chase away the death and the sadness. If I were one of the dead, I would want to be reminded of the living things, the children playing and the flowers growing. If I were your wife, I would let the children that we’re never going to have run over those tombs, and maybe that’s another reason why you can’t marry me.

I love you, and maybe dead things are meant to be danced on.



for this trick to work

Susanna Spearman

on the be-puddled floor of abandoned textile mill,
I ghost past the windows, I alone with the echoes.
while the velvet woman, old, dries her hands
on indigo dishcloth looking out into kentucky snow,
the sadnesses of her past and future converge
inside her mouth inside the now.

a spectre, I sink down into the floor, through the cellar,
slide through tubes of tongues, pry open the first door I see.
I am become the ridged, brown edge of a mushroom.
I see the dandelion hypnotist preen on stem-stage. he mocks me,
draws me in: catch me if you can! I proliferate without warning.

for this trick to work I must hold my breath,
plug my ears with my fingers,
and bury my severed amygdala in the backyard like an apple core.
then, the velvet woman, old, will glint steely-eyed into me
and pray to her god that I become something else,
something more red and candied.



Hide and Seek

Tammara Zhou



Carmesí *Barbara Rais*

u kiyo

S. Abdulwasih Olaitan

[U kiyo] *Japanese

(n) living in the moment, detached from the bothers of life. The floating world.

i want to float aimlessly like a cloud & live a long life
but my mother says; one cannot always live as he
desires. i want to die here by living the life of a pianist,
breathe my last first breath enveloped in melodies but
i gave my music away to mask my incapacitation.
i know one cannot coerce the gentle hands of destiny
but in this swoon moment detached from the bothers
of life i exist, where birds rebelliously morph into
adornments, ornamenting my wide hungry belly.
existing in the instant when my lips turn into a giant
ballon sufficient to say “as you journey through my gut
on horseback may you find a secure passage ” but the
voice never arrives. i see a dove hovering over my head
i smile. if only i have wings, let say i am able to see the
world from a new look. if only i could fly, imagine being
able to view the world from a different look. i would let go of
my grief. if only i could reach the infinite sky, grief. i would
discard my grief so that my wings would feel lighter &
float by like the sun setting on a summer’s evening.
to whatever method we try to heal yet somehow remains
broken, a hotbed doll of bat settled within each other.
the discovery of endless circle of bats, within bats, within
bats, within bats, within bats, until it’s completed. this is
to say every moment holds its own bile.



Solar Eclipse

Savannah Tew

The light drains to dusk in the middle of the day.
I bow my head to it, for fear and for reverence;
thank seven years for the throwing hand of the heavens
for the interrupting moon.
She cuts a clean smile in a vivid mouth.

I watched the last one from a boat tied to the dockside of a nuclear cooling lake,
up through a stationary skylight.
When the noon night fell
the evening creatures came to life,
crickets with their voices and mosquitos with their violins
harmonized in their impromptu orchestra,
and they tucked back into their hiding places
when the stars slipped out of alignment.

Did I feel small then? I don't remember.
I can feel the reach of gravity;
she tugs at my ribcage, every splinter bone in my body—
the invitation to dance.
I am half partner, half
unknowable
unthinkable
space.

Spin for me, she says,
and I oblige her.



Tuesday Evening

Corey Bryan

I am listening to the new Zara Levina Piano Concertos on a Tuesday evening. The window is open, east-facing. A breeze is whispering secrets I cannot hear to the chiffon drapes. We are well into the andante before I ever realize the squirrel laying well inside the sill. His body is still only if I watch him. His skull is full of the same stars as mine, his eyes are wet and dark as canyons. As the allegro swells, the cymbals crash and I am aware of the transience of my own soul, the blood pooling around my ten toes.



Always remember to bark at men

Maddie Foss



Reunion

Stevie Ouyang

Christof had the oldest face I'd ever seen. His glower lids hung slack, exposing the tissue holding his eyeballs in place, while elsewhere his skin hugged the curves of his skull. His hair & face were both a translucent gray. But, Christof's voice was still clear & steady, and he moved gracefully.

The summer I turned thirteen, my mother signed me up for piano lessons with Christof. He began our first lesson by explaining how to strike the keys, emphasizing the importance of engaging the entire arm.

"You can identify a beginner," he said with a finger raised, "by their frozen arms and busy hands."

As Christof demonstrated, a kettle began to whistle. He acted as though he didn't hear it, even as the whistling rose to a choking sputter. It finally stopped with the knock of a dial, and I looked toward the kitchen to see a woman walking quickly away, thick black hair in a ponytail at the nape of her neck. She was small but held herself with a straightness that projected domestic authority.

"That's my wife, Amy," Christof said, seeing my attention shift.

He gestured toward a picture on the window sill showing him with his head inclined affectionately toward a young Asian woman. In the picture, Christof was laughing while she was stoic, her eyes glassy. She looked girlish with her small hands neatly positioned one over the other on her knees. Yet, the deliberate blankness in her face bestowed a grim dignity. Next to the photo was a glass plaque engraved with: "Best Documentary - Student Film Showcase - Amy Zhou."

...

I didn't like the piano. I felt silly practicing, dryly plunking along with the metronome. I formed the belief that music was vanity and that I was bound for more important things. I drew strength from this notion, dwelled on it, nurtured it as if it were a revelation. I pitied Christof and recoiled when he assured me, cold hand on my back, that it was not too late to follow his path.

However, I practiced devotedly. There would be a recital for Christof's students at the end of the summer, and I had agreed to perform Pachelbel's "Canon in D." Christof's house was nearly an hour away, so my mother would drop me off and then run errands, often not returning until long after my lesson was over and Christof had moved on to other students. When this happened, I would grab a worn copy of *Gone With the Wind* from the bookshelf and settle into the couch. I practiced affecting Amy's dignified blankness from the photo, sitting very still with my knees together. For the most part, the book would lie open in my lap where the spine had split while I watched the other students.

There was Alex, a little boy with frizzy hair and a hook nose who played timidly but precisely. There was a teenager named Prince, overweight & sullen, who worked on Rachmaninoff's "Elegie in E flat." He played with stunning virtuosity, his chubby fingers a blur over the keys. He avoided eye contact with Christof, staring at his hands while Christof gave instruction, and he never gave any indication of being aware of my presence except to close his eyes when I walked past. There was an adult student, Ann, who played nervously, glancing at Christof whenever she fumbled a passage.

Once, I arrived early and Amy answered the door. She said, in accented but fluent English, that Christof would arrive soon and to make myself at home while I waited. She hovered at the living room threshold, seeming to debate whether I needed to be chaperoned. I asked her what she did for work, wanting her to stay.

"I work in film," she said. She straightened. "I'm a filmmaker."

I said I'd been wondering about the film she'd won the award for, gesturing at the plaque on the window sill. She waved her hand as if to dismiss the question, but then sat down and proceeded to describe her film in detail. As she spoke, she became animated and even, at one point, closed her eyes, seeming to relive some pleasure.

The subject had been Thomas Darrow, a magician from Wisconsin whose signature bit was to smoke two packs of cigarettes in a half hour live TV segment. He would smoke one cigarette down to the foam end, then push a new one in and repeat. He toured the late night variety show circuit performing this bit. Fans entertained various theories of the illusion, that he was storing the cigarette ends in his cheeks, that he was regurgitating them after the show, that it was all a trick of the camera and studio audiences were in on it. And,

he was happy to sustain the mystery. When friends & family asked him how the illusion worked, he would just laugh. Only Thomas’s husband Steve who served as his manager knew he was simply eating the cigarettes. It seemed no one considered this possibility, and when he finally developed cancer and died, he was quickly forgotten.

We sat in silence for a few moments. Finally, I said that it sounded like a love story. At this Amy turned and peered at me, her eyes narrowing, and I felt a sudden, urgent need to change the topic.

I asked how she and Christof met.

She did not answer immediately but continued staring at me with narrowed eyes. Then, she turned away. She said they had met at a bar, where Christof was playing the piano. He played “La Serena,” an old Spanish love song that mesmerized her and that afterwards she’d felt a preoccupying need to hear it again. She searched for recordings of the song but soon realized that Christof had an entirely unique interpretation. She spent weeks following him around town to his various gigs just to tap him on the shoulder and ask him to play “La Serena.” He always agreed, increasingly amused by the request and by her. He played it in a slightly different way each time, but each performance had the same mesmerizing quality.

There was a rustling at the door. Amy excused herself. The door opened to reveal Christof with a gallon of milk in one hand and a bag of groceries in the other, keys dangling from his thumb. He apologized



for being late and said he needed a moment to get organized. Indeed, a moment later he hurried into the living room but stopped when he saw me in his usual seat next to the piano. I gestured at the bench and asked him if he would play “La Serena.”

Christof tilted his head and blinked.

I explained that Amy had been telling me about his interpretation of the song. “Ah!” Christof said and clasped his hands together, squinting with sudden delight. He looked down the darkened hallway, craning his neck as if to see through the closed bedroom door. Still smiling, he said he’d play it for me another day when we weren’t running behind schedule.

• • •

Guests for the recital arrived in a steady stream such that Christof was stuck at the door greeting and taking coats and could spare me no more than a smile. I went to the living room, which had a few rows of folding chairs, clearly not enough for the crowd, and joined Christof’s students in the front row. I sat between Prince, hunched over his sheet music, and Alex who slumped far down in his chair and stared blankly at the ceiling. I closed my eyes and began playing through Pachelbel’s “Canon” on a mental keyboard, my fingers tapping along in my lap. I had planned to perform the piece from memory but could only summon a few measures before my memory faltered. I felt a panic swell, and my eyes opened wide to the sight of Christof & Amy now presiding over the

Setback
Casey Wells

assembled guests from a small platform next to the piano.

Amy was inscrutable, but she smiled graciously as Christof cleared his throat and said, “Friends!”

An abrupt silence fell, and all eyes were on the couple. Christof thanked everyone for attending and explained that these recitals were an annual highlight for him, something that he had looked forward to each summer for the last thirty-three years. As Christof proceeded to recount highlights of past recitals, I became distracted by the prospect of bungling my performance.

I had resumed my mental rehearsal of Pachelbel’s “Canon,” my gaze fixed on the smooth, black surface of the piano, when I noticed Christof was no longer speaking. I looked up and saw that his face was slack and his eyes were closed. When he spoke again, his voice was tentative.

“When I was young, my dream was to be a famous musician,” he said. “I imagined performing in large concert halls in front of audiences who had traveled to see me. And, for years I pursued this dream. But, for whatever reason, it never worked out for me. I don’t know whether it was a matter of talent or grit or luck. But, now that I’m seventy-five years old, I have to admit that my story is mostly written. And, how should I feel about that? I suppose I could feel disappointed. But, when I look out at your faces, at my students, some of whom I’ve worked with for many years, at the community we’ve built, I only feel gratitude.”

As Christof spoke, Amy stiffened, seeming to retreat into herself. Christof turned toward her. “My wife always believed in my dream,” he said. “In fact, sometimes I wonder whether I haven’t disappointed her greatly.” Christof draped his arm around her and pulled her close, smiling uncertainly. Moments passed in silence as Christof seemed to search for some clue in Amy’s face, which remained impassive. Then Amy laughed, suddenly coming to life.

Addressing Christof, but looking at the assembled guests, she said that far from disappointed, she was

filled with pride at the thought of all that Christof had accomplished, and furthermore that every time she hears one of his students perform, she felt equal parts proud of the student and (here she spread her hands in mock defensiveness) proud of Christof for bringing them to this point. Keeping her gaze fixed on the audience, she placed a hand on Christof’s arm, which had

remained around her shoulder. At this gesture, the guests burst into applause. A beaming Christof declared it was time to begin the recital. He took a seat in front while Amy walked past the empty chair next to him and stood against the back wall.

“He played deep, rumbling trills that never resolved. He played dissonant phrases without melody but full of longing. I turned to see the guests rapt, hanging on every note. But, I was searching for Amy’s face.”

When it was my turn, I approached the piano slowly. Sitting down on the tufted bench, my feet barely reaching the pedals, I began to play. As I neared the passage I had fumbled during my mental rehearsal, I felt my heart begin to race. I played a wrong note, then another one. I stopped, restarted, but fumbled again. Suddenly, Amy was by my side with the sheet music I’d left on my chair. She spread the music on the stand and turned the pages for me as I played the piece over from the beginning, this time without mistakes. As I played the final chord, I turned to thank her but she had returned to the back of the room. She smiled seemingly to herself as I walked back to my seat to scattered applause.

After the last of his students performed, Christof approached the piano. “I’d like to play something, if it’s alright,” he said, looking shyly at the audience. “It’s a medieval Spanish love song called ‘La Serena.’”

He raised his arms as if to attack an opening chord, and for a moment he remained frozen with his arms hovering and his head bowed. Then, he began to play. He played deep, rumbling trills that never resolved. He played dissonant phrases without melody but full of longing. I turned to see the guests rapt, hanging on every note. But, I was searching for Amy’s face. The spot where she had been leaning against the wall was empty.

Then I heard her. A peal of laughter followed

by rapid-fire Mandarin. A few people in the back of the room turned their heads. Amy was on the phone outside, her pacing figure visible through the doorway.

I crept to the back of the room and closed the door softly, then stood in the spot Amy had occupied for the remainder of the performance. Christof lingered on the final chord as he explained that he'd been playing this song the night he met Amy. Guests turned, looking for her, but there was only me.

•••

Years later, I saw Amy again. She walked into my yoga class and introduced herself as a new instructor. She looked almost the same as she did in my last memory of her, laughing with her head tossed back and a phone pressed to her face, her sequined dress glittering under the sun. But now she had a soft, solicitous demeanor.

Amy was a competent instructor, performing each pose accurately, and she delivered the course spiel in a way that felt extemporaneous. I lingered after class, stretching elaborately, and when the last straggler had gone, I approached her.

Amy was disassembling a complex video rig in the back of the classroom. Peering through the camera sight, she flicked her thumb over a track wheel attached to the body, nodding to herself. I said I was sorry to interrupt, but I used to be a student of Christof's, and did she perhaps recognize me?

She said with a start that she did recognize me. She regarded me

for a moment and then reached out her arms, saying that so many years after his death not many people were left in her life who had known Christof, and that seeing me now felt something like encountering a childhood friend.

"But, we are peers now," she said with a small laugh. "You're probably wondering what I'm doing as a yoga instructor."

I admitted I had been surprised when she walked in.

She made a whistling sound as if to say: there is much to catch up on. She said she wanted to explain. She explained that I had met her at a peculiar time in her life. A time of disappointment. Disillusionment, she corrected, which was followed by a blossoming.

It had to do with Christof. She'd been drawn to Christof because he gave her a certain idea of what

he was capable of, of his talents. Maybe she should have known - marrying someone in their sixties - that the trajectory of their career was unlikely to change. But, she had nevertheless believed that it would. In fact, she had convinced herself that she'd encountered Christof at an inflection point in his career. And, besides, by the time she learned his age, their courtship had already advanced to a certain point. All the time she had been developing illusions about his future, she didn't realize how little time he had left. It's different - she raised her hand as if anticipating an objection - it's different when you date someone outside of your culture. You do things out of order. You ask about someone's

Floral Passengers

Michelle Schenker



hopes & dreams before asking their age.

“Don’t get me wrong, I knew he was old,” she said. The age gap had served to incubate her attraction, allowing her feelings toward him to develop without the complications of sex. Christof waited several months to ask her to get dinner, and at that dinner she looked at his body appraisingly for the first time. She noticed that he was still slim & straight. His skin was mottled, but that was fine. The only thing that bothered her, that she had to work through, was his mouth. Gaping & lipless, his mouth was the oldest thing about him. Over the course of dinner, she noticed that he used it modestly, minimizing its movement as he ate, as if he were aware of her dislike. She was moved by this, and she went home with him that night. To her relief, she was not repulsed by his body, and he didn’t grovel to hers.

But, above all, she loved his music. In the early days of their relationship, she would sit on his couch while he practiced and listen for hours in a state of wonderment. She had also felt lifted by others’ discomfort with their relationship. She loved to slide up to Christof at a party and watch people’s eyes grow wide. It was further evidence of her commitment to his art, that she would be willing to overlook others’ scorn.

In exchange, Christof helped her to see that she was herself an artist. The notion had been a private fantasy and source of embarrassment until one day Christof watched her film about Thomas Darrow and pronounced her an artist.

She said she believed her life as an artist began on that day, the day of Christof’s pronouncement. For several years afterward, she toiled at production studios while pursuing her own projects on nights & weekends, sustained by Christof’s faith. The studio work consisted of manual labor—carrying rigs, assembling sets. Work that she was far overqualified for, but a rite of passage for all filmmakers, or so she believed.

She laughed and said at last it was no longer painful for her to admit that none of it amounted to anything. Not the stuff that came out of the studio, and certainly not her own projects. It was all self-gratifying nonsense that she was ashamed to have participated in.

“Ashamed?” I asked.

“Ashamed,” she said with conviction. “Because now I understand that art can be unselfish. That art can be outward-facing, so to speak.”

She explained that during this period she had also become an avid yogi, practicing in her living room with her phone propped up playing yoga videos from online

instructors. She got a mirror and put it against the wall behind her phone so she could see herself posing while she practiced, to work on her form. She discovered that her poses were starting to look better than the instructors’. She began choosing her yoga outfits more deliberately, liking the sight of herself.

At first, this was all just a bit of vanity that entertained her. Yoga was merely recreational, a form of exercise. But, the time she spent every day practicing became increasingly sacred to her, so much did she enjoy the art form. Then, she had a thought: why shouldn’t she be on the screen? Why shouldn’t she help others attain the feelings of satisfaction & serenity she enjoyed when practicing? Eventually, she abandoned her independent film projects and spent all her free time building content for her own yoga channel.

Christof was extremely skeptical at first. He said to her, but Amy, you are a filmmaker. You are an artist.

And she told him yes, I am a filmmaker. But, I need content. Yoga is my content. Once she explained it this way Christof understood, he was completely supportive. She launched her channel, and soon it began to thrive. She built a following from the ground up and was able to quit her day job and work on her channel full-time.

“Christof was supportive all the way until the end,” Amy said. “He was a good partner.”

Suddenly, she reached for my hands. She said she felt very close to me, that there was no one left in her life who knew Christof’s music. She apologized for talking so much and said that she very much wanted to know how things turned out for me, that she and Christof had been impressed by my talents and thought I would surely have been successful at whatever I decided to pursue in life.





Passions Cross and Converge

Trudy Thomson

Vicissitude

Devanshee Soni

Where did I think this
needlework was going when
the gelid air swept my threads
as you crept, cloaked in spring,
stumbling sluggishly in the hallway,
my paper boats descry their harbor
on tatty geography textbooks.
Creaking floorboards twinkling with familiarity,
like aircrafts leaving contrails in the blue,
frozen tears on my visage,
thawing into mauve inlets.
I embroidered constellations on your
back, Aries, Sagittarius, pewter stars
and beads resembling ice.
My clock wedged at midnight when
I tinted sunflowers on your hands,
folded cranes float from my beam ceiling
with hints of yellows, the polaroids lay strewed
on my nightstand and I make you
a carcanet from cobwebs, adorned with dew,
like pearls strung on a lace.
You break it—my decanter filled with
paper stars, take your keys and your
T-Rex dolls, which you used on
shortbread dough to make claw marks.
Tell me now,
shall I name it a tragedy,
that you're on platform 9³/₄,
and I've never known magic.

Obliterated in the dancing swarm of fireflies

Shanley McMillan

A soft mist arrives like the first snore,
someone sleeping in your arms.

Outside, a swarm of fireflies
crystallizes in the flickering morn.

The fireflies are blown across the dark,
unbodied and alive.

Like a bouquet of small flowers,
which the wind blows apart.

I feel the fireflies
curling their leathery wings under,

probing inside
the small, muscled arc in my heart.

Light climbs my spine.
Like a nightlight, lulls me to sleep.

The dancing swarm of fireflies
finds me in a dream, where I discover

the nuance of a quiet movement
in the otherwise complex choreography
of love and wondering.



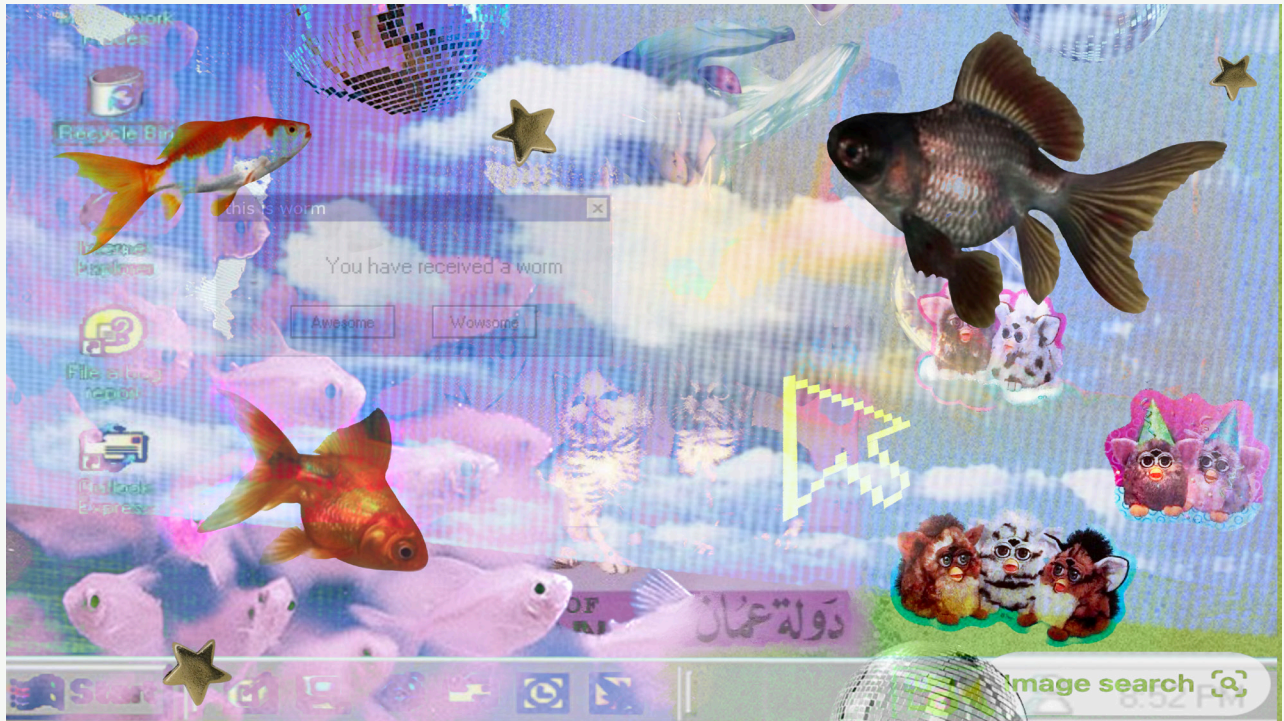
Tide Pool

Donna Vitucci

Pedestrian Daydreams VII

Jack Deal

Take me on a skate date. We'll go in the dead of night
and only the cops and the frogs will notice us.
They'll watch us laugh and skin our knees on the pavement.
And they'll croak at us when we kiss
beneath silvery streetlights and a blanket of moonbeams.
Let's go when the air is cold and the wind is dead.
I want to be shivering when you lean into me;
arms and lips and longboards.



Crying at the nail salon

Maddie Foss



Duet *Victoria Lora*

Moi *Susanna Spearman*

I remember pronouncing it *moy*
 trying to teach myself French
 from a library book at eight years old
 so I could speak her language
 the way she was learning to speak mine
 she giggled, her nose wrinkled
 I blushed

then she taught me how to say it
 her top and bottom lip kissing each other
 opening into an O
 ending with a *wah*
 it was then that I understood
 why when she spoke English
 every word was dripping with honey

Devi

Michael Singh



meet the creators



Originally from the birthplace of rock, **Jo Tomsick** is the only painter born into a family of musicians. She now calls North Carolina home and credits the lush nature of the ever-changing Carolinas for allowing her work to blossom. Jo's imagination is stocked with the fairytales & myths that captivated her as a child. Interpreting these narratives as an adult begs questions like, how do fairytales shape the way a person sees the world? How does experience change our remembrance of childhood stories? Jo seeks to impart a sense of connection, of shared experience, through her work.



Maddie Foss is an interdisciplinary artist who concentrates on identity, girlhood, and online aesthetics. Her artwork sits in the juxtaposition between humor & self-reflection, engaging with gender, queer, and media studies. Foss grew up in Rock Hill, South Carolina and received her Master's of fine arts at Winthrop University and her Bachelor's of Science from Birmingham-Southern College. She gets most of her inspiration from her pet rats and spending too much time on TikTok.



Isabella Serene is a writer & musician who grew up in Western North Carolina. Every time she returns to her stretch of the Appalachian mountains, she feels like she's coming home. When she's not writing, she likes to climb things, mostly rocks, though she's not picky.



Savannah Tew is a graduate student at the University of Florida. Growing up in a small town in rural South Carolina taught her to consider place & belonging as central themes within her writing. Her work is deeply informed by the imagery & emotional experiences of

living in the southern United States, including the region's specific & complex relationships to its people, history, and the natural environment. She has been writing prose & poetry since her childhood and is particularly inspired by the work of Mary Oliver.



Born & raised in Burlington, North Carolina, **Gret Mackintosh** attended the College of Design at North Carolina State University, earning a Bachelor's in both landscape architecture and art & design. After graduation, she moved to Charleston, South Carolina, beginning her career as a landscape architect, while continuing to pursue painting on the side. In 2018, Gret made the leap into a career as a full-time artist. In her current work, both her experience in landscape architecture and living life on the coast play a large role. The subject matter often explores aerial landscape views & waterways, both natural & man-made patterns and their connections. Her paintings fall somewhere between large scale maps and landscape renderings. She lives in Charleston, SC and works out of her backyard studio.



Ashley Roncaglione is a registered nurse living in Durham, North Carolina. She was born in Wiesbaden, Germany, and has lived in many of the South Atlantic states. Themes on mental health, trauma, and the human experience are sources of inspiration for her writing. She has been featured in publications by Dark Thirty Poetry Publishing, Curio Cabinet Magazine, Same Faces Collective, and Mulberry Literary. Her passions outside of writing include sustainable beekeeping, mushroom foraging, and beach combing.



Kaylin Hechtle is the hidden gem of Jacksonville, North Carolina. Born in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, but raised in the salt marshes of Onslow County, Kaylin loves stories about people's

relationship with land. In 2024, they graduated with a BFA in creative writing from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Kaylin remains in Wilmington where she lives with her friends and works as a snazzy graphic designer.



Tianming Zhou (Alaric) is a Chinese filmmaker & photographer based in the USA. He grew up in Mainland China and earned his bachelor's degree in Hong Kong, where he developed a passion for photography & filmmaking. Tianming later moved to Durham, North Carolina, to pursue his MFA at Duke University. His experiences at Duke and life in North Carolina inspired him to explore the boundaries between living & non-living objects in natural settings, with the landscapes of the Carolinas playing a crucial role.



Trudy Thomson began fiber studies in her early 20s when she attended classes at Rochester Institute of Technology. When she was 25, she moved to Chapel Hill to attend graduate studies in media at the University of North Carolina. Her Master's degree background influenced her interest in creating unique patterns & compositions that she applied to fiber art. To expand her experience with various tapestry structures & techniques, she attended classes at the Penland School of Crafts many times. She continues to live in Chapel Hill.

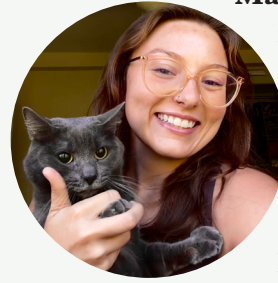


Motherwell Drive is an indie rock band born in the summer of 2023 in Greenville, South Carolina. Drawing inspiration from both the rock & indie scenes gives the band a unique sound that flows smoothly between sweet vocal promises & powerful electric tyrades. The cultural influences of Upstate South Carolina come through in the lyrics that challenge, comfort, and inspire listeners to be their most authentic self and to love the world and the people around them as freely as possible.

Jack Deal is an experimental filmmaker, installation artist, and poet based in Wilmington, NC. He frequents the city's underground art scene as both an observer & participant.



In May of 2024, Jack received his Master's in Fine Arts from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and in July, he organized & hosted a non-profit underground community screening of local feminist media.



Marissa Elizabeth was born & raised in woodsy Lexington, North Carolina, but received her BFA and BS from the breezy University of North Carolina at Wilmington. She is currently residing in Grenada pursuing her DVM but has not let that quell her passion & commitment to her writing. When she's not studying or writing, she can be found pondering stained glass, baking banana bread, playing volleyball, or hanging out with her cat, Tempesta. She writes most often about loss, connection, and how the two really aren't so different. You can also find her work in previous editions of Carolina Muse and Second Story Journal.



Yuna Kang is a queer, Korean-American writer based in Northern California. She has been published in journals such as Strange Horizons, Sinister Wisdom, and many more. Their work has been published in multiple languages. They were also nominated for the 2022 Dwarf Stars Award, as well as the 2024 Best New Poets Award. Their website link is: <https://kangyunak.wixsite.com/website>



Tiffany Hale is a dancer, educator, and choreographer from South Carolina. She graduated Cum Laude with a BA in dance / K-12 certification from Winthrop University, where she received multiple modern dance awards, and she has had her choreography showcased at the American College Dance Association Regional Conference. Post-graduation, Tiffany taught dance at Central Academy of the Arts in Easley, South Carolina and served as Upstate Regional Coordinator for the South Carolina Dance Association. She is currently pursuing her

MFA in dance choreography at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a research interest in women and gender studies in combination with screen dance.



Nate Darden is a recent graduate of Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, North Carolina, where he obtained his degree in English with a minor in creative writing. Nate's poetry dives into the nuances of his familial & romantic relationships, detailing the intricate emotions that come along. Born & raised in North Carolina, he has found an appreciation for his home state and the lessons he learned within its borders. He currently lives in Mount Holly, North Carolina, where he works as a marketing intern and continues to refine his poetry. You can find him on Instagram @nate_darden.



Victoria Lora is a portrait photographer with a passion for vibrant, subject-focused photography. Having grown up in Charleston, South Carolina, surrounded by the city's rich hues, Victoria developed a love for color, texture, and cohesive color palettes. Collaboration is at the heart of her creative process, and she thoroughly enjoys working with others to bring their creative aspirations to life. The two pieces she has published in this issue were the result of a collaboration with model Liz Gilman, who developed much of the styling & concept. She currently lives in Greenville, SC, with her husband and two bunnies.



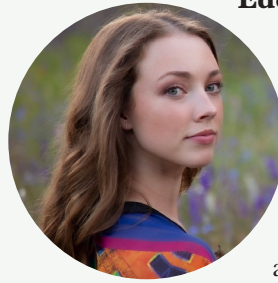
Mahdi Meshkatee is a UK-born Iranian poet, author, and artist. His work has been published in several magazines, including October Hill Magazine, Nude Bruce Review, and GAS. His writings are a continuity of attempts at decoding himself. Even though he doesn't have a direct connection to the Carolinas, he has been inspired by Carolina Muse time & time again.

Bailey Garrison is a writer from Raleigh, North Carolina currently studying English at Wheaton College in Illinois. Her short stories have been published in the Wheaton



Kodon and The Pub Magazine, and her play, *Through an Open Window*, was produced by St. David's School in Raleigh and The Imperial Centre Theatre in Rocky Mount. She is inspired by stories that contain timeless truths, and her own writing explores these truths through a contemporary lens. You can find her work at www.baileygarrison.com or follow her on Instagram @baileyg_writes.

Lessle Rodriguez is a 20-year-old majoring in psychology at her local university who partakes in creating art as a hobby & pastime. She has always been fascinated by drawing people and how she can attempt to capture & preserve their beauty in whatever song best fits their grace.



Eden Hughes is a contemporary author & poet happily inhabiting the magical mountains of her beloved home state, North Carolina. She is primarily a performing artist, having graduated with a double BA in dance performance and arts administration from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro but always makes her way back to her other first loves: the written word & painting. Her work peeks through the windows of the human experience and gifts language to the heart, and maybe even the point, of this wonderful life.



Susanna Spearman (they/she) is a queer, Appalachian poet originally from Greenville, South Carolina. They are a recent MFA graduate from ECU's Bluegrass Writers Studio (2024). They currently live in central Kentucky with their partner, four cats, and senior chihuahua. She has poems out in Still: The Journal's 2024 Winter Journal, and is the 2023 winner of the BGWS Emerging Writer Award for Poetry (selected by Bernard Clay). They have pieces forthcoming this year (2024) in Yearling Journal, West Trade Review, and The Jelly Bucket. They teach college-level English at Eastern Kentucky University and Bluegrass Community and Technical College and are 2024-2025 secretary of Kentucky State Poetry Society.

Barbara Rais is a Salvadoran artist born in 1992. She studied photography at Bildungszentrum Nürnberg in Germany, took ceramics classes at Loops and at the CENAR School of Art in El Salvador, and is currently studying art at the Higher School of Art and Design ESARDI.

S. Abdulwasi'h Olaitan is a Nigerian, introverted poet, savant, graphics designer, and essayist. He writes from a hole 54 kilometers away from Kwara State. He is deeply devoted to God and is a lover of his parents. He's the author of the shortlisted chapbook *Life, An Objet D'art* (Arting Arena Poetry Chapbook Prize 2023) and was a finalist for Chukwuemeka Akachi prize (2024). His works can be found in Believeau Books, Bare Hill Review, Pictura journal, Pawniers Paper, UGR, The Graveyard Magazine, Arts lounge, OPA, Avant Appalachia, Ta Adesa, Wordsmpire, Shooting Star, and elsewhere.



Stevie Ouyang is a software engineer based in Washington, D.C., where she lives with her husband & daughter. She came to the United States from China with her parents at a young age and enjoys writing & reading about immigrant experiences in America. Stevie's in-

laws have been in South Carolina for generations, and she looks forward every year to spending the holidays in Pawley's Island, eating fried oysters & swimming in the ocean.



Casey Wells is a singer, songwriter, multi-instrumentalist, and producer from Charleston, South Carolina. With a lifelong passion for music and a fascination with recording technology, he began releasing music in 2017 while studying recording & production at Appalachian State University in Boone,

North Carolina. After returning to his hometown, Wells embarked on a journey of growth & self-discovery illustrated by the efforts of his debut album *Impermanence*, released in 2023. His most recent release "Setback," also from the era of *Impermanence*, explores the challenges that come with growth.

Michelle Schenker was born and lives in Winston-Salem, North Carolina with her husband and two rescue dogs. She has always loved being outdoors and spending time in nature. One person's trash is reimagined into treasure. At the heart



of Michelle's pieces, you will discover found materials & breathtaking nature. Her artistic passions lie in finding ways to blend the two into new creations of beauty. Using paint, collage, printmaking, and lots of glue, Michelle unearths the unexpected magnificence that is all around us in our natural landscapes. Find her at www.MichelleSchenker.com.

Devanshee Soni is a student majoring in business management who has a knack for writing & reading poetry. She lives in India with her family and is an avid enthusiast of all forms of art. Her work has appeared in Literary Yard, Witcraft, and Molecule: a tiny lit mag.

Shanley McMillan is an essayist & poet. Born in the mountains of North Carolina, Shanley immigrated to the United Kingdom as a young woman and is currently based in London with her photographer husband. Her work has been featured in The Harvard Review, Dundee's Review of the Arts, the Sentinel Literary Quarterly, SaveAs International Poetry, the Oxford Review of Books, Be Still Media, and the Courier. More writings can be found on eris & eros, the Napkin Poetry Review, and Passenger's Journal.



A life-long Cincinnatian, **Donna Vitucci** has called North Carolina Piedmont home since 2018. She's been writing & publishing since 1990—work that explores the aches & mistakes of lovers, family, and friends. Read about her four novels at www.magicmasterminds.com/donnavitucci. She began painting in 2022. Her visual art has appeared in venues such as Glacial Hills Review, Anti-Heroic Chic, Perceptions Magazine, Chestnut Review, and more. She is a member of Alamance Artisans Guild; her work can be viewed on Facebook at Donna Vitucci, artist and at Donna D. Vitucci | Alamance Artisans Guild.



Michael Singh is an interdisciplinary artist from Southern California who works across collage, printmaking, painting, and illustration. He worked as an art instructor across three studios in Los Angeles. While living in New York City, Michael

briefly took painting classes at The 92nd St Y and The New York Art Students League. He currently works and resides in upstate New York.



meet the team



Editor-in-Chief, Madison Foster

has been passionate about the arts in their full scope since she was little. Growing up in Greenville, SC, she could always be found with her face in a book or a guitar strapped over her shoulder. While attending Elon University in North Carolina, she grew her writing & design skills as an English literature major with minors in communications & multimedia authoring. After graduating in 2020, Madison's love for publishing and the arts led her to bring Carolina Muse Literary & Arts Magazine to life. The multimedia arts magazine provides a platform for artists from all of the creative arts to share their message. In addition to her work as editor-in-chief of Carolina Muse, Madison works as a social media manager in Western North Carolina.



Art Editor, Lilliana Cameron

is a visual artist who has lived all over the Carolinas and is now residing in Greenville, SC. She is an alumni of the College of Charleston, where she majored in studio art & arts management with a minor in art history. In her art, she aspires to capture beauty in the small, everyday moments and inspire a sort of introspection. She works in a variety of mediums but has a strong love for oil paint, watercolor, and charcoal.

Dance Editor, Rush Johnston (they/them) is a Bronx-based multimedia choreographer, poet, performer, filmmaker, and movement researcher. Rush creates at the intersection of visual & performing art, often exploring modes of artistic expression beyond the binary. As a queer,



Native, neurodiverse artist, their work often plays with perception & identity, inviting viewers to question proposed truths of self & social misunderstanding. Social justice work is a key element of Rush's creative vision, often encompassing themes of political turmoil, queerness, and mental health. Rush is the founder & artistic director of Kaleid Dance Collective, an interdisciplinary artistic platform for creative experiments & exhibitions.



Music Editor, Jake Shores

is a multidisciplinary artist from Greensboro, NC, with a background in theater, music, visual, and literary arts. He is a recent graduate from High Point University, receiving a degree in English with a focus on writing and a minor in theater. He plans to further pursue his education by studying poetry at the graduate level while continuing work on his other creative pursuits in a non-academic setting. He is inspired largely by the natural world and by his interactions with people. His work takes on the challenge of putting a name to the indescribable.



Poetry Editor, Amanda Conover

is a queer writer based in Raleigh, NC. She has a BA in English from Elon University and is currently a student in Arcadia University's MFA in Creative Writing program, where she specializes in poetry. Amanda has been the poetry editor for Carolina Muse ever since volume I, issue II and absolutely

loves everything she gets to do with the literary & arts magazine. Along with her studies and editor responsibilities, she works full time in scholarly publishing, getting to contribute to the publication of scientific articles in journals.



Stories Editor, Aidan Mel is a writer living & working in the Greater Philadelphia area. He graduated from Elon University with a BA in creative writing and religious studies and is planning to continue his education by pursuing an MFA over the next few years. His work draws

on his fascination with religion & mythology, examining the intersections between the two and their implications in his own life. Currently, he is working at an independent bookstore in Philadelphia, PA while continuing his writing.



Communications Strategist, Misbah Chhotani is based in Burlington, North Carolina. She received a Bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Currently, Misbah is preparing to pursue graduate studies in hopes of

becoming an occupational therapist. In addition to her academic pursuits, Misbah actively contributes to various online communities. She recently joined the team at Carolina Muse, where she lends her expertise to curating engaging social media content. Outside of this role, Misbah serves as an admin for a worldwide mental health Facebook group, providing support & resources to individuals in need. She also acts as a moderator for the Dermot Kennedy Discord community, fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for fans of the artist.



Newsletter Writer, Jenna Kay Duxbury (she/her) is a writer, musician, and painter living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She graduated from Western Michigan University with a Bachelor's degree in professional writing and anthropology. As the project

manager for an online community focused on nurturing the intersections of artistic expression & spirituality, Jenna regards the arts as a cornerstone for building community and enriching public & private life. In addition to her role as the newsletter writer for Carolina Muse, Jenna is the lead singer & keyboardist of Skeleton Crew, an alt rock cover band based in the Raleigh-Durham area. Currently she is learning how to rollerblade and play the trumpet.



credits

Carolina Muse Literary & Arts Magazine is a multimedia arts magazine primarily showcasing young adult creators in the Carolinas. Our mission is to provide a multi-sensory, immersive platform for young adult creatives that reveals the way various art forms can work together to tell the true stories of our human experience. We publish short stories & scripts, poetry, art & photography, music, dance in a digital multimedia format on a tri-annual basis.

Whether you submit a document, image file, audio file, or video file, our team loves to see creators test the boundaries of their art form to bring their passions, interpretations, experiences, and messages to life.

Want to add your voice to the arts community of the Carolinas? Submit your creative work through our Duosuma platform at duosuma.com/submit/carolina-muse-literary-and-arts-magazine-1Yu2X. Please view the specific requirements for your art form as well as our submission window dates at www.carolina-muse.com/submit.





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