

CAROLINA MUSE

VOLUME I • No. I • JANUARY 2021

LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE



CAROLINA MUSE

literary & arts magazine

VOLUME I • NO. I • JANUARY 2021



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From the Editor

2021. We've made it. There were days when we thought we wouldn't, but here we are: living, breathing, and connected, despite the distance. We have been brought face to face with the deepest parts of our selves and our society, and through this reckoning, stories of loss & resilience have emerged.

This magazine tells those stories.

One painting tells the story of someone who challenges the conventions of society. One dancer expresses their relationship with their body through movement. One poem describes the poets' feelings of isolation because of their sexuality. One short story confronts the concept of falling out of love. One song hearkens on the pain that comes from losing a loved one.

The five art forms we feature in this first issue work together to give a full picture of the human experience. The sounds, colors, movements, and words in this magazine reveal the love, loss, acceptance, and resistance that we have each experienced throughout the past year.

We have survived by creating, expressing ourselves through the arts. May we continue to bloom through adversity.



Madison

table of contents

Art & Photography

- 7 *Ally Zlata* • The Value of Lightness
- 8 *Phoebe Carlton* • Shedding Expectations
- 13 *Ethan Monte-Parker* • Purple Moon Beard
- 16 *Amanda Bingaman* • Static Rise and Fall
- 19 *Liv Gwynn* • We Keep Us Safe
- 20 *Ezekiel Ring* • Shaded Exposé
- 21 *Haley Gadzik* • Pulse
- 22-23 *Mary Gilden* • The Kitchen
- 24 *Ezekiel Ring* • Southern Nights
- 25 *Fawnly* • Romanticism
- 29 *Sarah Rusthoven* • Eye
- 31 *Genevieve Munch* • Self Portrait
- 33 *Traci Wright Martin* • Confinement (*Spilosoma Lubricipeda*)
- 35 *Kyle Pruestel* • Pastel Knot
- 39 *Rachel Huang* • untitled
- 40 *Atom Edwards* • Vampire v. Capital
- 42 *Carlynn Ferguson* • Shifting Dream
- 44 *Lindsay Voelsing* • Traditional Magic
- 46 *Sarah Rusthoven* • Hand
- 49 *Anton Nikolov* • Western NC Trail
- 50 *Rosemary Hall* • Wild Cosmia
- 52 *Anton Nikolov* • Southern Boundaries Basketball

Dance

- 18 *Alyssa Vacca* • Despair
- 34 *Mariel Loughlin* • seg(mented)

Music

- 11 *five thirty two* • first eighteen
- 26 *Liz Wilson* • Lies
- 37 *Sabataj* • Sun City
- 41 *Rocco And His Bones* • Last Thing You Wanted
- 45 *Zachary Cooke* • Melody of the Mist
- 50 *State Park Ranger* • Mountain Kin

Poetry

- 6 *Gillian Kick* • swimming lessons
- 9 *Grace Taylor* • Macbeth's America • Reuben
- 10 *Mary Emmerling* • Lipstick
- 11 *Mary Emmerling* • Rice
- 19 *Ono Akporotu* • N.O. Police Department
- 20 *Derek Berry* • a bacchanal
- 21 *Lauren Memery* • to dethrone god
- 22 *Griffin James* • Small Dreams
- 23 *Griffin James* • Heritage
- 24 *Francisco J. Douglass* • Carolina Nights
- 25 *Lindsey Kaminer* • Wildflowers
- 32 *Jane Goodwin* • Woodlands Forgotten
- 33 *Jane Goodwin* • You
- 34 *Devon Smith* • Moonlight
- 35 *Devon Smith* • The Scarlet Letter
- 43 *Amanda Conover* • orange • clouds
- 45 *Kendra Kuhar* • 10 cents
- 48 *Audrey Harris* • Lessons from Ants
- 49 *Hrishika Muthukrishnan* • Arcane
- 50 *Rachel Rodriguez* • I Am A Butterfly



Short Stories

- 12-17 *Madison Engle* • Glitter
- 26-30 *Emily Sledge* • Layover
- 36-41 *Abby Fuller* • The Uncrustables
- 46-47 *spicy buddy* • What They Said That Night
- 51-52 *Matt Stephenson* • I Get That From You

Other Acknowledgments

- 1, 62 Cover Spread *content by Fawnly & Laney Milham; designed by Steph Brendel*
- 3 From the Editor
- 30 whimsyjuice *ad*
- 53-61 Meet Our Creators
- 61 Credits *with submission guidelines*

swimming lessons

Gillian Kick

my therapist asks me what would happen if
instead of running from my anxiety
i stepped into it

what if i made tea with it
letting it steep in the hot water
with rooibos leaves and eucalyptus honey

maybe I could dance around the kitchen with it
while we listen to bob dylan songs and shout to one another
“that the times they are a-changin’”

i don't like this advice, and i want to tell her:

i thought with the pills and the counseling and the scheduled mindfulness activities
i could make it go away
anxiety was just another problem i could fix
another mystery i could go full nancy drew on

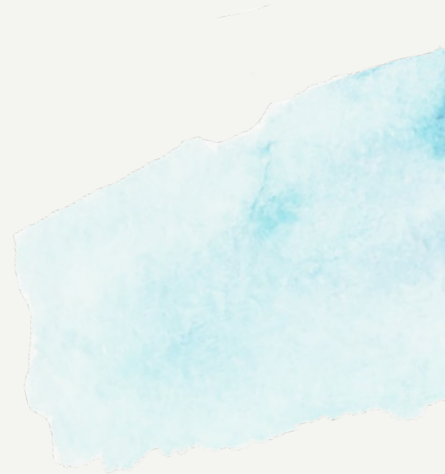
but instead i nod my head
take a sip of cool water
and listen to the sound of my therapist's slow and steady breath

the measured rhythm of it tells me that she isn't just pushing me off into the deep end, she is teaching me
how to swim

i am drowning
so she tells me to dive deeper
to see if i can learn to breathe here

The Value of Lightness

Ally Zlatar





Shedding Expectations

Phoebe Carlton

Macbeth's America

Grace Taylor

we started with bloodied hands
Out out damned spot

we bleach

today ignorance is a choice
we see white and call it pure

call it color blind.

strategic ignorance.
enough lacking to plead

innocent.

offload to other.
black and white -

call it grey.



Reuben

Grace Taylor

Catcher as in Rye
pickled pronouns
acid sweet

strangled flavor
sauerkraut steamed in masses
sorted by genitals

swiss cheese logic
thousand islands dressed
disguised dysphoria

nonperformative
derived down to one
ground meat

forced pastrami
flavor packs punch
panini pressed thin

binary bite but
mouth tastes more
Rye as in Catcher

& he didn't know himself either



Lipstick

Mary Emmerling

We laughed
and I smeared a raspberry
stain on your lips.

Your hair was tangled
and your hospital gown bunched
in folds, but
I won't let that doctor see me
without lipstick.

I didn't want to see you,
you know.
My mother
wrapped in wrinkled linen, surrounded
by machines
whirring and beeping
in a starch white room.
My hesitation to see you
fed off
the fever dream
that I would walk in
and you would be
gone. That they
would have taken
more than just
the cancer.

My mind overflowed
with smoky tendrils of
images, icy premonitions,
that I'd open the door
and you'd loll your head in my
general direction and
in some sudden
and cruel twist,
I would become a motherless daughter.
An amputated reflection.

But I went anyway,
holding my breath through
bleached hallways,
cringing past hospital-gowned
patients, bracing myself against the
spring-loaded door
to your stuffy, fluorescent room.

And when I walked in,
my footsteps slow,
you flashed your blue eyes at me
and tossed me your makeup bag,
clunky and smeared
with old foundation.
Will you help me?

So I stood over you,
puffing powder on your cheeks,
and for a moment,
the gauzy mess on your left breast
and the angry red gash underneath—
already bruising purple and orange—
vanished in a wisp.

I'm breathless
remembering it,
how mundane it was
to paint your face
after they tore you open.

And how they could have possibly
taken a piece from you—
sliced a fistful of death
from your chest—and given you back
to me, completely whole again.



Rice

Mary Emmerling

I was pushing the rice around on
my plate,
watching the grains stick
and split
and get lost
in the ridges of my fork.

Our conversation had
swerved into biting sarcasm
and my throat burned and
my eyes breached like
levees. And then you
mumbled, Stop crying.
Stop being so emotional.

It was the tagline
for the men
in our family,
but the memories
of when you were
different were still so fresh
that the air
between us
grew heavy
and still.

And as the waitress
wavered just behind
your head, waiting
to whisk away our
uneaten food,
I remembered—
do you?—
when you had braces,
and I had bangs,
and we had each other
when we
were nobody.

And while I stared
at the plastic tablecloth,
suffocating under a sheet
of water-stained glass,
I remembered—
do you?—
when laughter ran
electric between us.
The windows down,
the wind screeching
as we bolted down the highway
in your magic black car.

And when we trudged
out of the restaurant,
walking through the chilled
fog of each other's breath,
I remembered—
you do—
when we walked barefoot
across the wet grass
of a dark golf course
in July,
talking about how you
felt empty.

Empty of our childhood.
Empty of our memories.
Empty of our mother
with your same turquoise eyes.

And I thought—I guess,
hoped—that it was unspoken.
That it was clear. That you
were not empty of me.

But now,
in a sharp twist,
a roaring mystery,
the silence sits
between us like
a cup of cold coffee,
staining the once white ceramic
with dusty rings of neglect.

first eighteen
five thirty two

Glitter

Madison Engle

Angie got a tattoo after her grandma had called her a whore for the fiftieth time that summer. It wasn't anything crazy like a tramp stamp or a tear drop below her left eye. It was a moth on her back, cascading over her shoulder blade. She got the tattoo out of spite, but she liked it, too. She thought moths were tragic: they were the dark cousins of butterflies, constantly burning themselves in the search for light & color.

She drove home after getting the tattoo and sat in the car for a moment, staring at her grandmother's rotting house. She didn't want to go in, but she had nowhere else to go.

She got up and walked in slowly.

"Angie," her grandma called from the back porch.

The old lady had heard Angie arrive but couldn't get her lazy ass inside to say hi. Angie walked out to see her on the porch swing, a cat toy in her wrinkled hand. She was always messing with the stray cats in the neighborhood. She had been obsessed with them since Angie's grandfather had died.

"I'm taking a nap before my bar shift, okay?" Angie said.

"What's that on your back?" her grandma asked. "Did you fall down?"

That was always her grandma's first question—*did you fall down*. It infuriated Angie, but she assumed that's what old people thought about most of the day. Though Angie had pictured herself marching in and showing the tattoo in her grandma's face, she felt embarrassed now. Her grandmother could kick her out. Living there for free was the only possible way Angie could stay in LA and try to make it in the film industry.

Angie drew in a breath and stepped in front of her grandma. She turned her shoulder and wrinkled her nose, waiting for a wave of criticisms. *Whore, skank, boyish*.

"Are you bleeding?"

"I got a tattoo."

"You what?" Her grandma sat up straighter, the swing creaking as she tried to get a better look. "What did you do to yourself?"

"It's a moth."

"Oh, Lord."

"Grandma, it doesn't matter."

Her grandma clutched the weathered fabric of the cat toy, her rosewood hued nails digging in. "You'll never be an actress now."

"They can hide it if I get cast in something," Angie said.

"Nobody wants to see that." She looked like she could cry. "You ruined your body."

"Grandma—"

"I might as well send you home. People on the street will think you're a whore."

Angie clenched her fists together and stomped inside. She had already had a month and a half of her grandmother talking to her like that, and she was nearing the end of her patience. She was relieved to flee upstairs to her room—her mother's childhood bedroom. It was warmer on the top floor, and carpeted. She laid down on the old twin mattress under a dusty quilt and made sure to let her shoulder out of the cover to breathe. As she stared into her pillow, she didn't remember why she got the tattoo.

She couldn't get to sleep for that whole hour. When the alarm rang for her to get up, she was already putting on her shoes to leave.

• • •

Growing up, Angie thought it was cool that her grandparents lived in Los Angeles. It was a distant, dreamy place, since the people around her only knew it from movies like *Clueless*. It was the Emerald City, and the famous people were Oz himself. Not real.

Junior year of high school, her mom saved up her tips from a job waitressing at a local chicken & waffle joint and took her to visit. It was the first time Angie had flown. She pressed her nose to the thick, plastic window and watched the clouds shift in the sky the whole way over. She found herself staring up that whole trip.

When she got back, everyone in school interrogated her.

"Did you meet Brad Pitt?"

"Did Scientologists convert you?"

"Does your grandma live in Malibu?"

Angie sometimes hinted that all of those things

happened and were true. But in reality, her grandparents lived in an area called Los Feliz, which was nothing like Malibu. It wasn't too far from the Walk of Fame and Chinese Theater, but her grandparents didn't like to go. Her grandpa had been an entertainment lawyer most of his life, and they were tired. Angie thought her grandma would move after her grandpa died, but instead she grew nostalgic, bitter, and stagnant.

Angie didn't understand her grandma's rage surrounding the city. After her visit, she fell in love. She decided she could aim to write movies and act in them.

"It's harder than that," her mom said when she told her. "You can't write a script by yourself with no research."

Hailing from wealthy parents, Angie's mom had never worked hard to get anywhere and didn't go to college. She got a job serving food once her parents stopped paying for her, and she had been working in restaurants ever since.

She figured her mom didn't know what she was talking about.

After months of begging, her mom agreed to send her to live with her grandma the summer after her sophomore year of college. If she made it big, she could drop out of school.

Angie didn't think she could possibly fail.

• • •

The bar she worked at was called Julian's, a pub filled with older men who liked to lay low. Angie enjoyed it because they mostly sat & talked while tipping her generously.

Angie heard once that J.K. Rowling first wrote down the idea for *Harry Potter* on a cocktail napkin, so she kept a pile of napkins and a pen behind the bar. While she worked, she jotted down script & character ideas.

She was writing down an idea for a road-trip film when a man walked up.

"What's on your shoulder?" the man asked. Angie looked up.

"Oh. It's a tattoo." She tilted her shoulder to show him.

"Pretty," he said. Angie smiled shyly, didn't say thanks. She was careful not to be too kind to some of these men. They often got the wrong idea.

"Can I get you something to drink?" she asked.

"Makers Mark, neat," he said. She nodded, grabbing a glass. "How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"Jesus. You look eighteen. Why are you working here?"

Angie finished pouring the whiskey. He picked it up. "I'm making some extra cash while auditioning and looking for PA jobs."

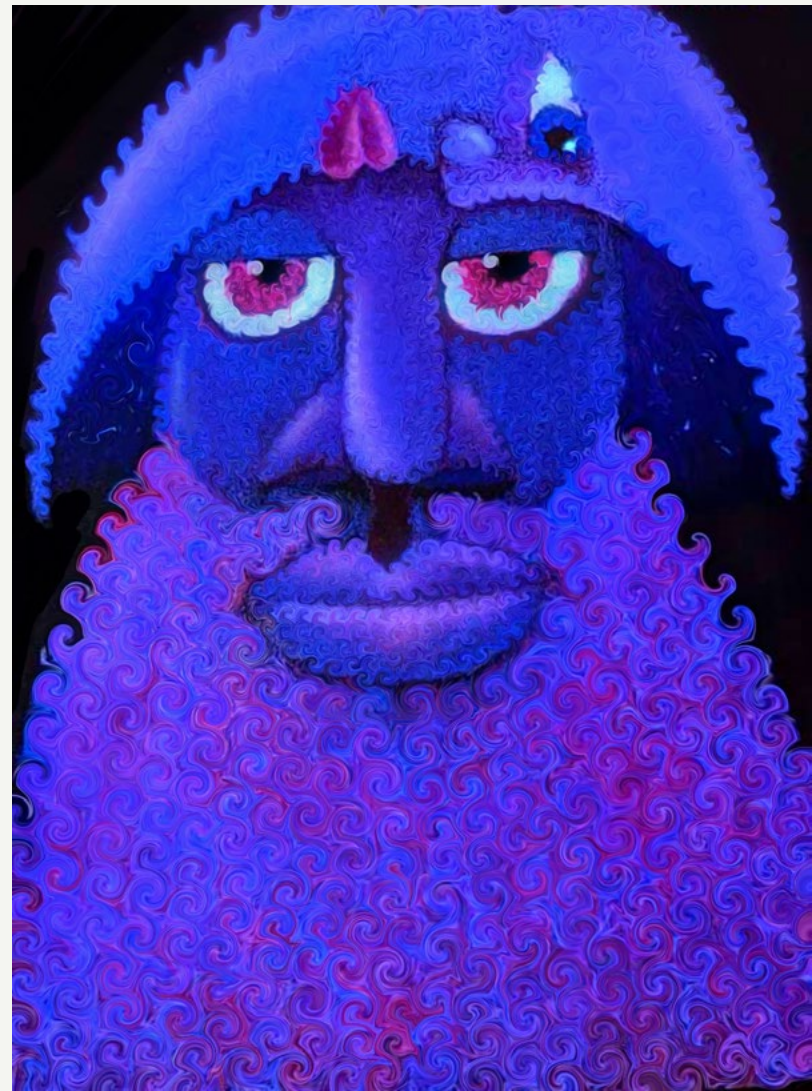
"Both?"

"I want to be a writer-actor," she said. He smiled as if she didn't know what she was talking about. Most people did that when she told them what she wanted.

"You get anything yet?" he asked, leaning against the counter.

"A couple of commercial jobs. Nothing big," she said.

"What's your name?"



Purple Moon Beard

Ethan Monte-Parker

“Angela Biernesser.”

“That’s a mouth-full,” he said. He took another sip and scanned the bar before looking back at her. He picked a business card out of his inside-jacket pocket and slid it across the bar top. “Email me a resume and headshot. I’ll see if I got something for you.”

He walked back to his table. Angie stared after him, wide-eyed. She picked up the card and felt the hard edges with her pointer finger. On it, his name and his job title:

Kenny Newman, Talent Agent at UTA.

She looked up to thank him, but he had walked away. She put the card into her back pocket and promised herself that his next drink would be on her.

Angie got off shift at midnight, and her grandma was already long asleep. Often when she got home at this hour, she’d think about her grandpa. He’d always stay up late with her when he visited South Carolina, and he’d even let her have a beer with him. When she came to LA in high school, he let her try some whiskey and watch Tarantino movies.

She wished she could ask him about Kenny.

Even though it was one in the morning, Angie sat at her kitchen table and drafted an email to him. She paused before sending, looking at the name on the top of her resume: *Angela Biernesser*. She opened up the document to change it.

She wrote: *Angie Bier*. It was catchier.

She finished the email, shut her laptop, and went up to bed. She rubbed non-scented lotion on her tattoo. She set up a stick of incense on her bedside table to mask the old-lady smell in the house, and she slipped under the heavy quilt to sleep.

• • •

Angie helped her grandmother feed the stray cats later that week. Her grandma sat fanning herself on the porch swing while Angie squatted over the numerous bowls, scooping out wet cat food from cans. She shot her grandma angry looks to try and show her annoyance at

the activity.

“Oh, look,” her grandma said with a smile. “There’s one now.”

Angie turned and saw a disgusting white cat creeping up to the deck. Its fur was caked in mud, and its nails needed to be cut. Angie stood and wrinkled her nose.

“It smells.”

“I call that one Winter.”

“You should call it Mud.”

“Come here, Angie, sit with me,” her grandma said. Angie walked over and sat, crossing her arms and letting her legs spread. Her grandma *tsked*. “You’re sitting like a boy. Cross your legs.”

“But then my legs will be sweaty.”

“It’s ugly.”

Angie didn’t reply, just rolled her eyes. She looked back at the cat, who looked nervous to come up to the deck. Angie didn’t get it—they fed them every day. The cats had to know that she and her grandma weren’t bent on killing them at this point.

Angie’s phone dinged with a new email.

With a gasp, she shot up from her seat and ran inside. The cat meowed & bolted.

“Angela!” her grandma exclaimed. Angie grabbed her laptop from the kitchen and collapsed onto the couch in the living room, pulling up her email.

Open-Audition Thursday at 9 a.m. for an upcoming episode of Glitter.

There were directions to the building and a side attached. That’s it. Angie kicked her legs on the couch and squealed. She couldn’t believe it.

“What’s the matter with you?” her grandma asked. Angie turned to see her grandmother standing in the doorway of the living room, hands on the wall frame.

“I got an audition, Grandma,” she said with a smile. “I can’t believe this.”

“How?” her grandma asked.

“An agent I met at the bar.”

“For what?”

“It’s a show called *Glitter*. For pre-teens.”

Her grandma was quiet for a moment. “Well, that’s good.”

“I know,” Angie said. She was beaming. She re-read the email. She had heard stories of people making it just from meeting the right person at the right time, but she never actually imagined it would happen that way. She figured she *was* special.

“Make sure he’s not trying to make you his third wife,” her grandma said. Angie sat up on the couch and glared at her.

“There are good people, Grandma.”

“I’ve lived here a long time. All I’m saying—”

“I know you don’t believe it, but women have merit.”

“I’m only saying—”

“I have talent, too,” Angie said.

Her grandma started to deny it, but she couldn’t listen. Angie shut her laptop and ran up the stairs to her room. She jumped on top of her bed and tucked her face under her arms. When the noneal smell from the quilt became too strong, she ripped it off the bed and kicked it to the floor. She curled up into a ball on the striped bed and focused on breathing so she wouldn’t cry.

• • •

The Wednesday night before the audition, Angie spent her whole shift at the bar looking over her lines. The side was one page from the script, and she had two lines of dialogue. She said them out loud, feeling every word carefully in her mouth.

“What are you wearing?” Angie said to herself. “It looks like a trash bag.”

She frowned at the page. She wondered if there was more to the role, or if it really was only this scene. It didn’t seem like more than a featured extra role.

“Could you hand me the rag?” Angie heard from behind her. She turned to see her co-worker, Nikki, pointing at the small towel by Angie’s hand. Angie nodded, gave it to her. “Cool tattoo, by the way. Is that new?”

“Yeah,” Angie said. “I just got it.”

“Wow.” Nikki stared at Angie for a minute. “You want to act, right?”

“I figure most shirts will cover it,” Angie said. Her face flushed red and her hand self-consciously slid back to her script. She could see the judgment in Nikki’s eyes.

“What are you reading?”

“I have an audition tomorrow,” Angie said, smiling.

“Shut up—what for?”

“*Glitter*. Do you know it?”

“My baby sister watches it. That’s fucking awesome,” she said, wiping down a part of the counter that was wet from glasses sweating. “How’d you get it?”

“Get this—” Angie started with dramatics “—a talent agent came into the bar earlier this week and gave me his business card. I sent him an email and *boom*.”

“That’s like a dream,” Nikki said. “Why didn’t that happen when I was working?”

Angie smiled again, feeling proud.

“What time’s the audition?”

“Two.”

“Oh, that’s not bad,” Nikki said. “I’m going out after the shift if you want to come. Meeting some people at The Abbey. Think we’re rolling.”

“I don’t know—”

“You’ve met them all,” Nikki said. “But only if you think you’re ready for your audition.”

Angie looked down at her side. The two highlighted lines taunted her. She knew them by heart now—but she also had an urge to practice more. Nikki glanced over her shoulder.

“That looks easy,” Nikki said. Her voice was dismissive, and Angie got defensive, tensing her shoulders. Nikki had already had a few featured roles in lower-budget movies and recently got signed to an agent. Angie couldn’t even get an ensemble role in a local play.

She didn’t want to seem like a coward.

“I’ll go out with you,” Angie said. “I’m not worried.”

• • •

Angie was woken up the next day by her grandmother. She was sleeping with her knees under her body, quilt tucked tightly over her head. Her grandmother pulled the sheets down.

“Angela?” her grandma asked.

Angie flipped over, moved her hair from her face. Her grandma gasped and backed away.

“I’m calling your mother. This—this is shameful. Just shameful.”

Her grandmother didn’t bother to open the blinds before she left the room. Angie sat up on her bed, steadying herself. She had cold sweat on her neck and under her boobs. She noticed blood stained on the sheets.



She got up and went straight to the mirror. She glared at herself—matted hair, makeup down her face, hickeys that looked like bruises on her neck & shoulders. She was pretty sure she was still rolling from the molly they took. She was embarrassed her grandma saw her like this.

A whore.

She felt pain on her shoulder and lifted her t-shirt to look at her tattoo. It was oozing & bleeding, which explained the blood on her sheets.

She switched into a tank top so her tattoo could get some air. She sat on her bed and plugged her phone in to charge.

Only when her phone turned on did she realize it was 1 p.m.

“Oh, no no no—” she whispered, jumping back up. She had to leave for her audition in thirty minutes or she wouldn’t make it in time. She ripped her clothes off and stepped into a cold shower, wiping her makeup off while washing her hair clean. She lightly blow-dried her

hair and slapped mascara & lipstick on. It wasn’t her ideal look for an audition, but it would have to do..

By the time she was dressed, she was already late. She didn’t have time to clean her tattoo, so she put the tank top back on to avoid staining another shirt with blood. She ran down the stairs, looking for her side in the kitchen. She realized she left it at the bar.

“Angie,” her grandma said. She walked in from the living room, landline at her ear. “Your mother needs to speak to you.”

“I have my audition,” Angie said.

“We think it might be best for you to stay home today.”

Angie stared at her grandma. She knew she should be feeling more anger, more anxiety. But since she was suspended in euphoria, she felt sympathy for them. She felt guilt & love.

She smiled at her grandma.

“I understand you’re worried about me,” Angie said. “I get it. But I came to LA to get a break—and this is it. I’m not staying home.”

“You should have never come here,” her grandma said. She was holding her own hand with the phone, fingers pinching at her wedding ring. Angie knew then her grandma was thinking of her late husband. A man who was owned by the industry. Hurt by it, even.

Or maybe he wasn’t. Maybe it was her.

“Help me bring Winter to the vet today,” her grandma offered. “I can’t catch her.”

“She’s not your cat.”

“She might have ticks or rabies.” Her grandma walked closer, holding out the phone. “Talk to your mother.”

“No,” Angie said.

Angie could hear her mom’s voice faintly, panicked, through the phone.

“Aren’t you happy for me?” Angie asked her grandma. Her grandma looked away from her. She looked outside, maybe towards where Winter might have been. Angie walked out the door.

. . .

Angie arrived at the audition building and stepped into a waiting room. She noticed the actors around her were mainly 16-year-old girls with pink bows & sparkles in her hair.

Did she look that young & immature?

She noticed people staring. She didn’t blame them. She brought her hair in front of her shoulders but failed



Static Rise and Fall

Amanda Bingaman

to cover up her numerous hickeys. She wished she had the script she could at least look over while she waited.

“Angie Bier,” the woman with a clipboard called.

Angie didn’t process it at first without the *-nesser*.

“Angie Bye-er?” the woman tried again. Angie realized and shot up.

“I’m here,” she said, smiling brightly. “Sorry.”

The woman did a double-take at her. She started to walk back down the hallway, Angie following behind. She was grateful for the slight euphoric feeling left over, since her neck & shoulder were burning from bruises & blood.

The woman opened a door for Angie, and she stepped in. Three men sat in comfy chairs on one side. On another, there was an x taped to the ground in front of a whiteboard. Angie immediately made her way to the x and smiled at the casting team.

“My name is Angie Bier, and I will be auditioning for the role of—”

“Are you okay?” one of them asked.

“Yes.” She paused. Nobody said anything. She decided to begin and avoid more questions. She cleared her throat and dropped her hip to get into character.

“What are you wearing?”

In a monotone voice, a second man said, “It’s a new skirt design from my Etsy page.”

She opened her mouth to continue, but couldn’t remember the second line. Her face flushed, and she smiled.

“I—I don’t remember the line.”

“It looks like a trash bag,” he said. The way he said it disturbed Angie. It was as if he thought she was stupid for forgetting such a stupid line.

“Okay. I’ll start over.” She cleared her throat.

“It looks like a trash bag.”

When none of them read the next line, she realized she said it incorrectly. She lifted her hand to her mouth. She could have cried if she had it in her.

“I’m sorry—”

“That’ll be all,” the last man said. Angie stood there.

“Thank you.”

“But—”

“That will be all,” he repeated. She felt naked standing there. They all judged her with the same eyes of her friends, her mother, her grandmother.

“I can do it,” she said. “I’m good at this.”

“You’re not,” the same man said. “There are a thousand other girls who can remember the line that don’t have a huge tattoo on their back.”

“That’s not true.”

“It is,” he said. “Please leave.”

After another moment of awkward silence, Angie walked out the door. The woman who brought her in tried to show her out, but Angie ignored her and went to the nearest bathroom. She stared at herself in the mirror. Her pupils were wide, skin sensitive.

She wasn’t ready to give up.

She unlocked her phone and found the email from Kenny Newman. She typed a new message in, apologizing for botching the audition and begging him to meet her. She ended it with:

You saw something in me that night at the bar. I am passionate and talented. Please consider meeting with me and seeing what I can do.

Angie sent the message, tucked the phone back in her pocket. She was tired, and she looked like someone had beat her with a phone book, but she knew she was special.

She knew she was special.

She knew she was special.

• • •

Three days later, Angie hadn’t gotten a response from Kenny.

She had taken off work the night before. She couldn’t get out of bed. Nobody warned her that ecstasy deleted all happiness for the next week after taking it.

Her grandmother had tried to talk to her since the audition day, but Angie wouldn’t listen. She didn’t want any more talk of how she shouldn’t dress so slutty or how she should be getting sleep at night instead of drinking.

She was starting to think maybe her grandma was right.

When she thought her grandma was napping, she snuck downstairs to make food. She hadn’t been eating much, since she was avoiding her grandma at all costs. She would come down the stairs when her grandma was bathing, or napping, or sitting outside.

She stuck a k-cup in a stained Keurig machine and started to brew coffee when her grandmother entered the kitchen. She settled down at the kitchen table.

“I talked to your mother.”

Angie didn’t say anything.

“She’s flying you home.”

Nothing.

“We let you come down for the summer and try

this. But it doesn't seem to be for you, Angela," her grandmother told her. "It would be best for you to finish college."

Angie's coffee finished, and she didn't bother to put milk in it like normal. She wanted the energy, not the comfort. She couldn't be comforted right now. She felt like the world had imploded. Her one chance at proving everybody wrong faltered, disappeared.

Her grandma looked out the window. "I'd like you to help me catch Winter."

Angie did. She spent the afternoon chasing that muddy beast around the yard. She caught Winter and tucked her into a carrier. The cat scratched her arm, and Angie didn't blame her.

Since her grandma didn't like to drive, Angie drove them all to the vet. In the back, Winter kept meowing. It sounded weak, broken. Hopeless.

"Listen to her meow," her grandma said with a smile.

Angie wished she would stop.

"I never noticed how yellow Winter's eyes are," her grandma said, voice full. Angie glanced sideways at her grandma and saw how happy she looked. She then looked at Winter in the rearview window, and they met

eyes. They stared at each other for a moment.

"They're beautiful," Angie said.

"I'll clean her up just fine."

Angie was pretty sure Winter didn't want to be cleaned up. If Winter could talk, she would tell them she preferred to be muddy. She preferred the way it toughened her fur and kept her hidden in tall grass at night. It made her feel safe.

But maybe Winter didn't know what was best. Maybe she would feel better after the vet brushed out her fur, gave her a rabies shot, and tied a tick collar around her neck.



“Despair” by Alyssa Vacca

N.O. Police Department

Ono Akporotu

“A Government of Law, Not of Men” - N O P D (New Orleans Police Department)

What distinguishes Men from Law,
When men make Law?
This proclamation seems f.Lawed.

...

“In this state
We are committed
To segregation
by CUSTOM and LAW.
We intend to
MAINTAIN IT.”

- Montgomery Alabama Grand Jury (1956)

...

*A Government of Law,
Not of Men.*

...

And what of the Hanged,
and
The Beaten.
The Shot; Raped; Drowned; and Burned.
The Tortured; Tormented; and Terrorized.
What make them
of this LAW?
what make them of this Government
which denied them their humanity?



We Keep Us Safe

Liv Gwynn

a bacchanal

Derek Berry

after Guido Carponi & after Sam Herschel Wein

all my friends, they can't fit
 into the booth at waffle house.
 they order too much food, get
 sick & clog the drains with glitter.
 they wear desire in their hair
 like flowers or scavenge-bone.
 they know magic tricks from the internet,
 but don't know how to execute them.
 all my friends, lushsweet vodka slurpers.
 all my friends pixeldumb & sofabound,
 arguing about who that one actor in that one movie,
 no the other one!

all my friends, they're sad in the old ways
 looking for new ways to die.
 all my friends, their throats tangled
 yoyos they keep dangling
 from the bridge.
 but still

all my friends hold sparklers in their teeth.
 all my friends, they know ghost lexicon, translate
 spit into love ballads.
 all my friends make out. what gorgeous faces—
 don't you want to kiss their gorgeous faces?

we ke\$ha karaoke
 until the bars close down.
 we thirst like desertfruits, stupidsweet
 as miracle. we carry water
 from the well come morning,
 booze-blunt rituals heavying our heads.

we are so tired of the labor
 being alive demands.



Shaded Exposé

Ezekiel Ring

to dethrone god

Lauren Memery

The small, careful slice of,
“We should make some room in this night for prayer”
Makes me feel like i have ants inside
So i lick his pulse
Him N the Girls
Makes me giggle and squirm
The flesh slide on the jaw
Is when i feel holy



Pulse
Haley Gadzik

Small Dreams

Griffin James

Stillness is a palpable thing
as I slip into the solitude of washing silverware,
my hand sunk deep into water, camouflaged by white suds
clinging to my arm like moss.

I want to live in small moments such as this
as I watch my dreams replay
across the circumference of a spoon's backside

small dreams like drinking hot chocolate with my mom
spiked with Bailey's Irish Cream
to start the day off right. We'd watch
Holiday in Handcuffs as snowflakes fall in precision
onto the spinning, tilted ground
racing its lap around the sun. One day,
Jupiter will lose to us.

Or, the dream across the knife handle
where grandma's still alive
and I had the chance to meet her.
She'd sit beside me on her three cushioned couch
patterned with decades of stain.
I'd smell the last cigarette on her breath,
and she would smell the coffee on mine
as we carry our lineage between our teeth.
She would ask if I go to church and where,
and I would lie.

My dreams are as palpable as the silence I drown them in.
I could try to grab them out of the sink someday,
but I'd need to let them dry, or risk they slip away.

I place the knife onto the drying rack.
I might cut myself one of these days,
and regardless of the pain -
a knife's cut is a knife's cut.
It's the scar I'm scared about.



The Kitchen

Mary Gilden

Heritage

Griffin James

1.

My daddy beat me 'cause I looked
like my mamma, he never spoke to Emmajo
'cause she looked like her sister.

Our ebony hair shining like an onyx
against fluorescent light,
our curls disobey the products we spray

like pesticide, they sprout towards
the wind in
spite of what they're told,

much like my mamma,
much like Emmajo,
much like me.

That's the Hoffman way.

After mamma died,
daddy beat me 'cause I look
just like her.

2.

When I gave birth to my first child,
I thought I had died. The pain ploughed
through me as if I were a field.

I didn't know how long it had been,
I only knew this child wasn't coming out.
I'd been induced three times already,

so I guessed it'd been a while.
Only now the pain wasn't pain,
it was a white noise my body grew

accustomed to, a language I learned to speak,
taught to me by my daddy, but he didn't
teach me a thing about blood loss, or how to speak in

tunnel vision, but none of that mattered
'cause I knew I had died.
I watched the light pour in

behind her as her black wings unfurled,
and I knew mamma came to save me.
I slowly raised my hand, holding my palm toward her light,

and I whispered her name, my final prayer,
my goodbye to this world, but I was
not greeted back with the hallelujah of her love,

or the holy communion of her hello.
I was greeted by my Emmajo came
to visit her newest great nephew.



Carolina Nights

Francisco J. Douglass

ah, the evening frenzy.
toads conduct the mood—
cicadas sing with a transcendent song,
whispering you away
to a place beyond;
swamps,
low country marshes,
palmettos
swaying & bowing
underneath
cotton candy skies.

catch silhouettes
of midnight blues,
against a sweet tea sun.

your eyes gaze
upon royal oaks
laced with ferns &
draped in Spanish moss.

the Atlantic mists
the air with salt kisses,
Magnolias blush;
lushed blooms lit
by a rising moon—
on these
Carolina nights.

Southern Nights

Ezekiel Ring



Wildflowers

Lindsey Kaminer

The leaves did blossom,
 I saw them so
 Embroidering the trees above us,
 Creating canopies,
 As if you shone too bright
 and we needed umbrellas.
 The leaves stretched out, grasping together.
 The sun saw a reason to hide your figure.
 I bathed in the shadowed wildflowers,
 Asking for your breath.
 Tasted foxglove -
 And await true death.
 Dancing in my visions,
 Your chest rises with my fall.
 Blue eye hallucinations,
 Leaves me feeling sedated.
 My lips taste oleander
 Pink petal kisses
 The edge of your jaw outlined by velvet fingers.
 I swallowed the lotus flower whole,
 Stretching firm into the ground like cedar,
 Our faces mirroring,
 Pressed grass outlines surrounds us.
 Wildflower, you are something of divinity.
 And to stay wrapped in wooded shadows,
 I would eat from the poisonous tree.

Romanticism

Fawnly

“Lies” by Liz Wilson

John F. Kennedy International Airport felt like limbo to me. I was one flight closer to my fiancé, Henry, and one flight further from Toronto. A three-hour layover gave me time to think and reflect and drink. After making it to my next gate, I found the closest bar, set my carry-on in a stool, and sat down in the one next to it.

The bartender wasn't looking at me, but I was admiring her. She was tall and had curves in all of the places I wished I did. She had dark hair, almost purple in the light, with bangs, glasses, and a piercing in her left eyebrow. I hoped she would be the one to come take my order, but—as usual—I got my hopes up for nothing. A short, curly-haired redhead man who barely looked twenty-one came up to my spot at the bar to take my drink order.

“Have you had a chance to look at the menu?” he asked.

“Surprise me,” I said, too tired to pick out my own. He smiled and nodded and went to grab a glass to start making my drink. He looked giddy, like he was either going to give me the most disgusting drink of my life or his all-time favorite.

I continued watching the girl with the dark hair. She leaned up against the side of the bar and looked around at all the people walking past. I tried to watch where her eyes went. I saw a woman talking on her phone

Layover

Emily Sledge

in Spanish, running in a pencil skirt & heels a bit too high for a business meeting; a father buying a burger from Shake Shack, hoisting his young daughter up so she could hand the cashier a twenty dollar bill; and a college-aged girl dressed comfortably in sweatpants and a t-shirt standing between two gates, trying to figure out which one was hers. I looked at the dark-haired bartender again and met her gaze. Our eyes stayed locked for two seconds before she turned away. Her arms were folded, and her stance was relaxed. I had my elbows on the counter and my chin in my hands, anxiously wanting her to come over to say hello, but wanting her to stay away at the same time.

“Here you are,” the redhead said, bringing me my drink and interrupting my moment with his co-worker. “Eight dollars. Tell me how you like it.”

I handed him my card, and I looked down. I felt a chill of guilt wash over me. Just two nights ago, I went out to a bar alone. Just me—dressed in a tight, too-revealing top for a woman who's about to get married. At that bar, I forgot about Henry. I knew I shouldn't

forget about Henry.

I took a sip from the straw and let the drink rest inside my mouth. I couldn't taste anything but the alcohol. It hurt. I swallowed.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"Good," I said. "What is it?"

"Long Island iced tea," he said.

How could he mess up a Long Island iced tea so badly? Weren't we on Long Island? "Thank you." Redhead nodded & walked away to serve another customer.

The airport speakers shouted announcements. **DO NOT LEAVE ANY BAGGAGE UNATTENDED.** I looked to make sure my carry-on was still next to me. It was. Just a few days ago, at a bustling bar in downtown Toronto, a beautiful girl was filling that seat instead of my bag. I thought back to sitting alone at a bar that played exclusively seventies rock: Henry's favorite. I thought about why I went out that night. I told myself it was to drink after a long day. To explore after being cooped up in housing logistics meetings. To dance by myself and lose every care in the world. But the real reason seems to be that I was looking for some attention or validation from strangers I didn't need to meet.

• • •

A shorter, pale girl caught my eye that night. Her outfit was simple, but sexy. She wore only black & purple. I knew her image was going to stay in my mind for a week or two, and I wasn't going to remember how she got there in the first place. Like a bruise.

Even if she hadn't approached me, I would've watched her all night. She didn't have company, but she acted like she did. She spoke to strangers and cracked jokes and danced like there was no one to impress. She knew all of the words to "Cherry Bomb" by The Runaways. Our eyes met each other's as she mouthed the lyrics, "I'm your wild girl." I kept her gaze for a moment, then turned away in fear that I was going to get what I came to the bar for in the first place.

Henry & I had been together for six years, but in that first year of dating, I realized I was bisexual. I'd never kissed a woman's lips or felt her hands on my waist. Henry's hands were wonderful, safe, and soft—but despite him touching every single inch of my body, I still felt like a part of me was unexplored. I often wished I knew what it felt like to be with a woman, but I might not ever find out.

I felt a hand rest on my shoulder. I knew it was her. I slowly turned my head to admire her face up close. "You seem lonely up here drinking by yourself," she said, sitting down in the seat next to me at the bar. I wasn't sure how to first respond. Was she mocking me or trying to be flirty? How could I even know if this girl was into girls?

"Just trying to unwind after work," I said.

She looked at me like she was trying to figure me out. Like what I said wasn't what she wanted me to say. Henry used to tell me I wore my emotions on my face. He could always tell how I was feeling just by me giving him a look.

"Where are you from?" she asked. "You're not from here."

"No, I'm not." The bartender brought me my drink. I handed him my card. "I'm from the United States."

"I know," she said. "Where?"

"Georgia."

"Ah, so nowhere." She smiled. She was funny. I laughed.

"Atlanta isn't nowhere," I joked, taking a sip of my drink. She rolled her eyes and smiled. "Where are you from?"

"Portland," she said. "I moved here for a job just about a year ago. I miss it, though."

Henry & I met in Portland at college. I imagined him sitting at home in the living room with our cat, Lady, and dog, Barley, next to him on my grandmother's old floral couch. He was watching episodes of *Great British Baking Show* and snacking on microwavable popcorn. He missed me. I needed to miss him. I needed to tell this woman that my fiancé & I met in Portland. We fell in love in Portland. We talked about marriage and starting a family together in Portland. We moved from Portland to Atlanta together. But instead I said, "I went to undergrad in Portland."

"Where?" she asked. With confidence she reached out and grabbed my drink, taking a sip for herself, then making a face. She was beautiful.

"Reed," I answered. "Not a fan?"

"Not at all," she teased. "Of the drink at least. Reed's nice. I went to PSU." She pushed my drink back to me. Her lipstick left a mark on the side of the glass. Purple. Dark, like the dusk sky. I kept staring at her lips. I wanted to kiss her. I wanted to ask her to come outside with me, to walk back to my hotel or to her apartment. I wanted to pretend like Henry wasn't here for a night. She knew I was getting lost in her lipstick stain. This

was probably what she did. She must have had a routine. Step 1: put on the purple lipstick. Step 2: find the girl waiting to be approached and seduce her. Step 3: take her home. And most importantly, step 4: move on. I wanted that too. I wanted to kiss the girl that night, then go home to my fiancé and cat and dog like nothing happened.

“What’s your name?” My name would change soon. No longer Eliana Allen. In six months I would be Eliana Richards. She, of course, didn’t know this. So I decided to lie. I decided to tell her my name was Jane. Jane, like my little sister, except my little sister would never sit at a bar wearing a red, lace push-up bra just because her fiancé was a thousand miles away and she finally had the opportunity to flirt with a woman for once.

I didn’t know if I was lying to myself or this girl more. Using a different name made me feel like I wasn’t engaged. It made me feel like I wasn’t flying home in a week to reunite with the love of my life. Who I hoped would be the love of my life. But I was.

“Jane,” I answered. It took me too long to tell her. She could tell my mind was preoccupied.

“Macy,” she said. “It is so nice to meet you, Jane.”

The music was loud, and I wanted to pretend I couldn’t hear her so she’d repeat herself closer to my ear. I wanted her to say her name, and I wanted to feel it on my cheek.

She called the bartender over to us. I watched her. I sipped on my drink where her lipstick was. Macy put her elbows on the counter and smiled at him. He whispered something into her ear, and she laughed. He began making her drink. He was into her, but she turned to me.

“Jane, what brings you to Toronto all the way from Georgia?” She leaned closer to me.

“I work for Emory University Office of Global Education,” I answered honestly. “I’m here for a housing meeting for our Toronto study abroad students. We’re trying to purchase more permanent housing.”

Macy nodded. The bartender touched her on the shoulder, and she shot back a smile and said, “Thank you.”

She didn’t pay. She just sipped the drink through

her straw, and the bartender moved on to serve more customers. He looked back at us occasionally to see when our conversation would inevitably end and he could swoop in to continue it. He might say something like, “I get off at two, want to come with me?” or, “A pretty girl like you shouldn’t be walking home by herself. Let me take you.”

“I studied abroad my junior year,” Macy said, bringing me back to our conversation.

“Where?” I asked, following her lead and drinking my drink as well.

“Copenhagen. Really great city.”

“I’ve never been.”

“You should if you get the chance.” She stirred the straw in her drink. “Try this.” She handed it to me.

I took the drink and put the straw in my mouth. Her lipstick residue from the

straw felt warm on my lips. The drink was strong & gross. I tried not to make a face, but I couldn’t help it. She laughed at my disgust.

“Strong, yeah?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I said, handing back the drink.

“He did it on purpose,” she said, glancing back at the bartender. He was looking at her. “He wants to fuck me.”

“Oh,” I said. I didn’t know what to say. Why would she say that? What did she want me to say?

She studied my reaction. Maybe I should’ve said something else. I could’ve said, “Go for it. Free drinks.” I could’ve said, “Men are so oblivious.” I could’ve said, “Me too.” But I didn’t. Maybe this was something I did right.

“Where’s your favorite place to visit?” Macy asked.

“Charleston,” I answered without thinking.

“Why’s that?” she asked.

I could have said any number of things to continue lying to her. I wanted to continue lying to her. I wanted her to think I was available & beautiful and that she was going to have me in her bed tonight. I finally did what I should have done from the first opportunity I had. “It’s where my fiancé proposed to me,” I said.

I said it like I was sad. I said it like I was ashamed. And I was a bit ashamed. I was sitting at a bar. Alone. I was wearing a top tight enough and low cut enough

“I wanted to kiss the girl that night, then go home to my fiance & cat & dog and act like nothing happened.”

to show off the little cleavage I had. I was wearing a full face of makeup and my contacts for the first time since we celebrated Henry's tenure with a formal dinner and lots of wine.

Macy looked at me like she knew. She knew I wasn't Jane. She knew she was climbing a tree and wouldn't be able to get to the top. She knew why I came to the bar dressed like I was. She was polite. She didn't make me feel bad. She knew I felt bad enough.

"They're lucky," she said, taking her drink from the counter and taking a sip. Her voice was a bit condescending. I deserved it. "Do you want to tell me about them?"

No. I didn't want to. I didn't want her to know about him. But she did know about him.

"We're getting married in six months," I began. "Henry—that's his name, Henry—is a professor at Emory, where I work. He's not here." Macy already knew this, but she didn't say anything. "He's still in Atlanta. We carpool to work most days. We share an apartment. We have a dog named Lady and a cat named Barley. We went to Reed together. He got his PhD at Tulane. He went straight into it after we graduated. We did long distance for a year before I moved to New Orleans with him."

"Was that hard?" she asked. "Long distance?"

I wanted to say: yes, it was hard. Really fucking hard. But I swear I didn't do anything. I love him. Believe me. Please believe me. I wanted to say: no. It wasn't hard because I love him and nothing will get in the way of that. But instead I shrugged. "Yes and no," I said. I didn't elaborate.

"What do you love about him?" Macy asked.

The question felt accusatory. She didn't believe me. She wanted me to admit why I was at this bar thinking about her touching me instead of him.

"He's smart and he's humble and he's kind," I answered. "When he's happy, he kisses me. When he's sad, he likes to lay down on the couch and cuddle with

Lady, our dog. He's probably doing that right now. He likes the dog more than the cat. He's passionate about art. I don't really understand why he likes it so much, but it's really cute."

I thought back to when Henry proposed just a few months ago. We were walking to dinner from our hotel, and he told me he wanted to show me something on the way. He held my hand and took me to the beach when the sun was setting. The sky was covered in pink & orange, and the clouds were large & fluffy. On the beach was a gazebo, decorated in twinkling lights & ivy. In the gazebo was a small speaker, playing our song: "I've Been Waiting For You" by ABBA. We took off our shoes and walked through the sand into the gazebo.

"Eliana Allen," he whispered, placing his hands around my waist.

"Henry Richards," I whispered back.

He got on one knee in front of me. My vision began to blur as tears filled in my eyes. I was smiling ear to ear. "You're the girl I've been waiting for my whole life," he began. "I want to be with you forever. Will you marry me?"

My tears flowed. I couldn't help it. I was so happy.

"Yes!" I squealed. I kneeled down on the sandy gazebo floor and kissed his lips. He placed the ring around my finger, and it was only a little too big.

We continued to embrace for the duration of the song, and we let it repeat a few more times before we left.

When the sky turned dark, Henry took my hand in his—now with my engagement ring—and led me to the restaurant where we ate our first dinner as an engaged couple.

I felt terrible. Henry loved me



Eye

Sarah Rusthoven

more than anyone else in the world, and I was alone in a bar in Toronto, talking to a stranger who I wanted to kiss just so I could know what it felt like. Why did I want to know what it felt like to kiss a woman I barely knew, when I was excited to spend the rest of my life with Henry?

Macy took a big gulp from her drink. I think she was done with this conversation, and she could tell I wanted to be done as well. She took a deep breath in. “Jane, I think I’m going to go dance some more—but it was nice to meet you,” she said. She left her drink on the bar. I didn’t say anything back.

I didn’t want to be in the bar anymore. I tried to finish my drink as fast as I could, then walked myself out of the bar and back to my hotel in the cold. I should’ve worn a jacket.

As soon as I got back to my hotel room, I called Henry to tell him I loved him.

“I love you, too, El,” he said. “I can’t wait to see you.”

• • •

The plane landed, and I waited my turn to exit. Everyone around me stood up in their seats and grabbed their luggage stowed above, then impatiently tapped their feet as they waited for the strangers in front of them to exit the plane. I almost stayed put. I wanted to see if the flight attendants would let me sit & wait for the next flight back to Toronto or wherever this plane was headed. I stared at the headrest in front of me, following the lines & cracks in the leather up & down the seat until it was my turn to get out of the plane and walk back into Atlanta.

A text popped up on my phone from Henry: *Just parked. See you soon!*

I didn’t reply.

The walk to baggage claim was painfully slow. I took one step at a time. Families with kids and couples holding hands felt like attacks to me now. Why was I so upset? I didn’t do anything wrong—technically. I had urges, but I didn’t act on them. I still loved Henry.

My navy blue suitcase came down the conveyor belt of luggage, and instead of racing over to the closest spot to pick it up, I waited for it to come to me. It moved slowly, like I wanted it to. I wanted to let it go around for another cycle, but I grabbed it anyway.

I followed the signs until I reached the welcome home meeting area. There was a man with a decorated sign that read: Welcome Home, Donna! Next to him was a mother and her daughter hugging a man in a military uniform. I wondered if Donna or the military man had been faithful while they were gone. I wondered if their lovers had been as well.

As I walked through the gates, I locked eyes with Henry. His face lit up, and he began walking over to me, spreading his arms wide to welcome me back home. “Hi, honey,” he whispered, almost like he was going to cry because he was so happy.

I held my head close to his chest and listened to his heartbeat. He cradled my head with his hands. He made me feel safe. His hugs lifted a weight off my back, and I was reminded of why I loved him.

“I missed you,” I said. It had only been a week, but this felt like the longest we’d been apart in the last six years. Longer than the year of long distance. I missed him. I really, really missed him. I wanted him to know that.

“I missed you so much,” Henry said back. I savored every word.



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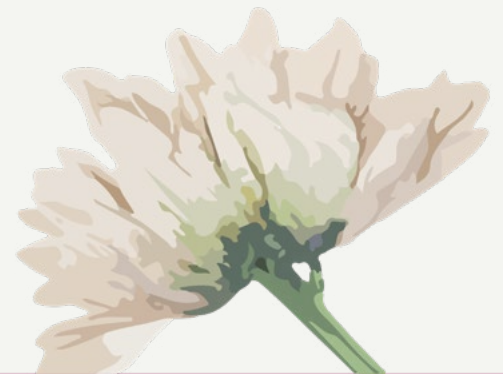
Self Portrait

Genevieve Munch

Woodlands Forgotten

Jane Goodwin

Little, white flags in the leaves.
 They are in stark contrast to their neighbors.
 Their presence interrupts the conformity of the pale headstones.
 Parting the sea of granite in decisive lines,
 Spreading in formless groups, everywhere, nowhere.
 As if past grave-layers knew of their existence,
 As if we all knew of their existence.
 Dark bodies sleep previously unacknowledged below.
 If black is the absence of light, this is the undeniable presence of blackness.
 There has always been a deep, buried blackness here.
 Have you seen their faces?
 Has anyone seen their faces?
 The earth obscures them from the surface,
 Pressing in from all sides.
 Branches encircle their raw bones in writhing, living chains.
 If not for their little, white flags, their presence would be ignored,
 Eroded like their bodies, DNA seeping into the clay of their tombs.
 The bones stripped of muscle and tissue,
 Identity stripped without consideration.
 Like so many accusing fingers, they point at
 The names that enshrine them yet were denied to them.
 The gifts of mourners turn gimmicky and mocking with the luxury
 Of being remembered in the looming shadows of the ever-present woods.
 The trees crowd in, creating a sense of intimacy, of oppression, of surveillance.
 Even now, these black bodies must be watched, analyzed.
 As the wind rustles through the sentinels' great, suffocating embrace
 The rustling takes the form of uncanny whisperings.
 Buried voices announcing themselves,
 Lost knowledge that no longer speaks any language known to humanity.
 Only the flags respect the breath that swirls here while
 Their setting remains intractable.
 Animated in a ghostly dance.
 Unsolicited waves beckoning recognition.
 They mark themselves.
 These little, white flags in the leaves.



You

Jane Goodwin

You are a mountain, girl, unfit to climb.
 Your welcoming centers are in derelict decline.
 You are uninhabitable.
 You are strange.
 No one may climb your face.
 You are a black, still pond
 You reflect midnight
 And match the night sky in opacity
 You don't even know your own depth
 Of course they're afraid to swim here
 To sink beneath your surface
 For you are a moon child
 A wild-thing
 Untamable even to yourself
 You are the spindly tree branch
 In a dark, secret wood
 Catching a stray wanderer by the arm
 Begging them to stay
 But eventually wrenched free
 A great rendering of the self
 You don't belong in this world
 You don't belong in any world
 But life has been foisted upon you
 So you must carry it's great burden
 You are viscerally aware of exactly
 What you are
 Every second
 Of every hour

Of every waking moment
 Of your life.
 A dragon
 Rumbling
 in your slumber.
 You have amassed experience
 Presence
 You have waited
 And guarded.
 Remember, you were born with wings.



Confinement (*Spilosoma Lubricipeda*)

Traci Wright Martin



Moonlight

Devon Smith

I will bring light to your darkest times,
but I am not sunlight
I am moonlight.

You can confide your secrets in me,
and I will hide them away
Tucked into corners.

I don't illuminate the wide world
because it can be too scary.

I'll show you just enough of your path,
so you can take it one step at a time.

I quietly listen,

With the occasional whisper.

I leave with the promise of my return;
until twilight my dear.

**“seg(mented)” by Mariel
Loughlin**

The Scarlet Letter

Devon Smith

I wear a scarlet A on my chest.
Not because I am an adulterer,
But because I am asexual.
Which is just as bad, it seems.

You're a prude.
You used to have sex.
You're leading me on.
They say.

It seems taboo to find love
In cuddles,
In smiles,
In moments.

There are times when I have an orgasm,
But it's much different than you know.
It's an overwhelming feeling of love;
It feels like everything is right in the world.

In my opinion,
my orgasm is better than yours.
You have a bodily reaction;
I have a soul revelation.

In your orgasm,
You feel heat and lust and confidence.
In my orgasm,
I see hope and future and love

Sex is meaningless to me.
I hate the feeling of a dick stretching my insides.
The pain makes me blind;
I grit my teeth and wait for him to finish.

It's not that he is bad,
By others he would be amazing.
I just simply don't enjoy it,
What's so bad about that?

But no matter how hard I try,
How detailed I explain,
How much I hope,
They don't understand.

So that's why I'm scared.
I don't want to say no because I'll lose him.
Sex is a negotiable thing,
I always end up getting the short stick.

I feel the pain.
He feels the pleasure.
I feel hurt.
He feels loved.

So that's why I feel alone.
A freak to others.
Not because of my looks or behaviors,
But because I bear a painful A.

Pastel Knot

Kyle Pruestel



The Un crustables

Abby Fuller

The day that I heard Thomas Clarke got the Netflix special was the day I almost quit stand-up comedy. When we first got to New York, we were in an improv troupe together called The Un crustables. Even though our group would always grab a drink after a good show or hate-watch SNL with dust of hope in our eyes, we always stayed on opposite sides of the social circle. When Thomas started booking bigger venues, it felt like he was stealing my lunch money.

I heard the Netflix news from an old Un crustables member who is now a stay-at-home mom in Brooklyn. She resurrected our old GroupMe and sent “@thomasclarke MADE IT BIG TIME. So proud :)”. Before kids, she definitely would have dropped the f-bomb. After Googling what caused the congratulations, I needed to go on a run so my already rocky rooming situation wouldn’t get worse when they figured out I’m slightly violent with a decorative couch pillow.

Some niche comedy blogs think Thomas & I have hooked up in the past or assume sexual tension, but I’d like to go on record and say that I’ve never banged that man. He might have sexy Warby Parker glasses, and he’s not overweight (unlike 80% of the straight white male comedians who also book gigs at the Comedy Cellar), but no we haven’t hooked up, even though a few times I would have been down to. I want to be successful, not just date someone who is.

• • •

Twenty-minutes into the run, I got a call from my brother, Allan, while dodging tourists who walk slow & small white dogs with too-long leashes. I knew I should answer the phone.

“Tess, your day will come too. Try not to let this get to you,” he said.

He definitely found out.

“Stop that toxic positivity right now. It’s not cute.” I replied, now switching into a walk.

Allan and his wife always came to my big shows, even though they weren’t

that into the New York stand-up scene. He is a middle school history teacher in Queens, she’s in law school, they were college sweethearts, and I’m pretty sure neither of them has smoked weed. They’re too clean-cut for drugs. But they were supportive, which felt nice in a field that was so often undervalued.

“I know Thomas and you have this competition going, but maybe just try to be happy for him. Sometimes it feels good to care about other people.” He placed a forced laugh after that to make the delivery come off smoother.

“I do care about people,” I said, “but they also just piss me off.” It was true. A cute part of my personality is that I tend to find fault with almost anyone & anything. I don’t want to be this way. I want to connect, but I also seem to be missing this compassion piece that makes it easier for other people.

“Maybe just tell him ‘congrats’ at the comedy festival thing tonight and see how it feels.”

It always felt like a sting of annoyance when Allan added the word “thing” to something that didn’t need it.

But after taking a deep breath I said, “I’ll think about it,” while knowing that I would definitely just ignore Thomas at the comedy festival.

“Or you guys could just finally get together. I think he’s great.”

“You’ve never met him,” I reminded Allan while trying to decide if I wanted to pick up coffee on my way home.

“Well yeah, but his act is hilarious. I think about his ketchup punch line once a week,” he said. “It would be pretty sick to have a brother-in-law on Netflix.”

I hated that he automatically brought up marriage. That’s such a married-person move.

We hung up a few moments after, and I just walked the rest of my way home to my apartment, deciding against spending \$6 on cold brew.

• • •

I live with three other girls in a three-bedroom



apartment. I wouldn't have wanted to squeeze, but rent prices were locked in and I had my own bedroom. The rest of them were all friends from college, and I was just the extra person who slipped in from a Craigslist ad. They were all sunshine girls, walking in a bounce and speaking in a soft, self-help tone. As much as I'd love to be the person who is unbothered by their airy closeness, sometimes when I walk in the front door and see them making dinner together or intertwined on the couch watching *The Bachelorette* as I'm about to go to The Comedy Cellar, I wish I was able to connect with girls like them. I wish there wasn't something in me that disdains those comfy relationships and puts an extra deadbolt between anyone I meet. But also, I hear them giggle together and think "what could possibly be *that* funny."

I walked through the front door at about 3 p.m., which was normally when I took my midday nap. It was a Saturday, so the three roommates were all laying together on the couch in flowery maxi dresses and trendy felt hats looking ready for brunch. They were all on their phones. I picked up pretty quickly that they were annoyed that I had 23k Instagram followers from Justin memes while they posted a steady stream of classy thirst traps for only 1000 of their closest friends.

"Tess-y," one of them called, popping up to a more upright position. She wore bright red lipstick that looked

like it was ready to stain something.

I stopped my B-line from the room and stood in front of them.

"We've *loved* having you here, I want you to know that," she continued.

"Yes, it's been *so* fun to do this whole city thing together," the one with the millennial pink streak in her hair interjected.

"You bring a nice artsy vibe to the place that we just *love*," said the one in the ponytail, who didn't even bother to look up from her phone.

"But we can't live like this another year."

I knew where this was going.

"It was cute to be crammed into an apartment in college and just straight out of post-grad."

"But like we are getting close to," she paused, putting it almost in a whisper, "*thirty*."

"And honestly, we each need our own bedroom," the girl in the red lipstick said in her moment of courage. They clearly had rehearsed this.

"And with your career doing so well and everything, maybe you should get a studio appointment to yourself," and she added in a moment of inspiration, "one closer to your shows."

I gave a forced smile that clearly told my anger. I was obviously frustrated that these girls were trying to ditch me. And, honestly, I was annoyed that I cared

"Sun City" by Sabataj

more about having to look for more apartments on Zillow than being blindsided by these sorority sisters.

“For sure,” I finally said, “Enjoy the apartment.” From there, I walked straight to my room that I apparently needed to start moving out of.

“We’re renewing the lease next month, so the sooner you can find something the better,” the streak of pink said as my door closed.

When I moved in, I didn’t expect to be best friends with them, but I assumed I had it in me to try a little harder, act my age.

• • •

I had already done a stress-relieving exercise for the day, and I definitely couldn’t nap anymore, so I stood in front of my full body mirror and started working through my act. As soon as I spoke, I came down with a growing sense of dread. I never sound funny when I talk to myself. So I watched *Dexter* instead, claiming that it was research for a new act, which is the problem with writing: anything can be considered research if you reason hard enough with yourself.

By 4 p.m., I started getting ready for the night, which is the annoying thing about being a female performer: you have to care about what you look like. The image is almost as important as the act. The whole thing is a game of ethos and which type of category you want to be boxed into. Some female comedians wore the same all-black outfits that would be better suited for a twenty-first birthday party, the goal being to look as hot as you possibly could so people might be interested enough to listen.

Then there were people who went the more tomboy route, claiming to be against the system of femininity, wearing flannels and minimal make-up. Because even the girls who looked casual still had to wear make-up. I tended to dress girly, wanting to play the part of my higher-pitched voice and perceived innocence that made expletives sound extra funny. Wearing makeup felt like a chore, too. I was never the kid who did theatre and the idea of riding the subway in exaggerated eye shadow sounded embarrassing. But that was also the beauty of the city. No one cared.

People who see my act think that I’m this quirky girl with a soft voice who refers to herself as a dog mom and is best friends with Melissa Villaseñor. Unlike most other female comedians like Amy Schumer, Ali Wong, and Iliza Shlesinger, my act is pretty clean. I don’t like to talk

about sex that much on stage. It’s not that I’m too shy or prudish about it, but for me, it feels unoriginal & forced. But I also knew that a somewhat hot girl in her mid-twenties talking about blow jobs and one-night-stands is more than funny; it’s marketable. My abstinence from complete vulgarity feels like an artistic choice, and it is probably the very thing that lost me that special.

Thomas & I are pretty comparable in that we don’t appeal to the lowest bar of humor. He dresses up in a suit for every set, putting on the appeal of someone who stands out from the regular open mic night band t-shirts and Converse. But the formality probably made him look about five years younger than his current age of thirty-one. He looks sharp and professional, and I feel like I need to put on a persona in order to do the same. Almost anyone who would meet me off stage would find me cold and unapproachable, which is fair, but I don’t understand why women are called to this higher standard of being nice while men can just be a jerk and blame it on their no-nonsense manhood.

I peeked out of my room and noted, thankfully, that my roommates were gone, saving me the awkward minute of small talk. I got on the subway and immediately I knew I made the wrong choice of who to sit next to. This guy, who couldn’t have been older than forty and had strong youth pastor energy, would definitely be chatty. But it was too weird to move now. I was stuck.

“What do you do?” he asked, making eye contact in a way that felt pushy.

I’m sure he was expecting me to plug an off-Broadway show.

“Well, I worked at a bookstore until about a month ago.” This was true, but I also just hated telling people “comedian,” afraid they would ask me to do a knock-knock joke. Also, it felt desperate. But I was hoping my response gave off the vibe of unemployment, which would discourage a follow-up for privacy’s sake.

“Oh, that sounds charming. What’s it called?”

“End Stopped,” I said. And after a beat later I added, “It has a nice corner location, thus the name.”

“What’s your favorite book?” he asked, smiling in a way that showed he knew he just added a cheesy question I got asked a lot. Everyone else on the subway seemed so silent & peaceful, alone in their thoughts, or noise from their AirPods.

“Honestly, I’m not that into books. It was just a job.”

Which was true. That bookstore was just a job in the way comedy will never be. I could tell people book

recommendations based on what other customers told me, but I mainly just liked the job for the money and the security net. Also, it was nice to be in an environment where other people cared about delivery, word choice, and style like me. Book people were my people, even if I didn't read books. But when I started to book more gigs, I didn't need the job, and it was starting to take up more time that I could have spent on the creative process.

The guy seemed finally disengaged with my responses. I guess he just thought I was a bitch with an affinity for stage makeup and not having a job. That was fine with me.

My dad, always pushing me to pursue a career in business, used to tell me about this entrepreneurial point where the inventors finally quit their day jobs to go full-time into pursuing their passions. I guess that point finally happened to me, but I typically just spend that time getting a full eight hours of sleep. I remembered again that I needed an apartment and a Netflix special, which put money back on the list of things I needed to worry more about.

• • •

I was headed to Governors Island, where the comedy festival was located, which was typically used as a public space for random food truck days with non-Hispanic tacos & canned rosé. The subway took me into Brooklyn and a ferry with a load of tourists in comfortable walking shoes. After getting off the boat, I was struck by how big this festival really was. I had obviously heard about it before, and even though it was only a few years old, I knew they pulled some pretty strong headliners, but this looked more like a Coachella set-up than a bunch of people wanting to laugh at kids who were most likely bullied in high school.

The stage was set up on the big green lawn facing the city landscape that was in the background. Definitely an intentional choice for maximum pictures and social media shares. I walked through the lawn and saw audience members who decided to set up their lawn chairs early. I looked at my confirmation email to find the check-in, trying not to look too much like a nervous freshman. The backstage area for the comedians was in a big rec center room that lost all glamor & prestige as soon as you walked in the double doors. I should have been used to this loss of shine by now. The whole

place looked like a middle school gymnasium. I walked up to a table with a cardboard sign that said “comedians here.”

When I approached the folding table, I waited for a beat before telling him my name, thinking maybe he would be a fan of my material and recognize me. I didn't expect it, but it would have been a nice surprise.

“Tess Taylor,” I said with my high-pitched stage voice.

Without looking up, the guy, who looked more like a bouncer than a comedy nerd pointed to the right, gesturing me into a particular holding room.

“Thanks for the orientation,” I said while walking away, suddenly regretting that line. I definitely sounded like a

diva. If I did ever get my special, I would need to work on my bedside manner.

There was a door with a yellow sticky note with my name on it. Inside, the room was not much bigger than a closet. Next to a blue suede chair were bottles of Shiner, La Croix, and a handle of gin. I'm never the type of performer to get messed up before a set, but I guess this place didn't judge the creative process. I wouldn't have a solid grasp on the audiences' reaction if I'm shielding myself from the shock of people not liking me with the



untitled

Rachel Huang

haziness of a buzz. And even for shows like this, where I perform a twenty-minute set of tight material that I could recite from memory down to the inflections and hand gestures, why would I include a variable that I couldn't control into the perfectly functioning system? But I also knew that the majority of the other comedians who were not recovering alcoholics would be coked up to match the energy level of the crowd. Or at least already a few shots into the night, making the approval of man less daunting. Thomas & I had that pre-show stylistic choice in common too.

Five years ago, I would have been pumped to have my own dressing room, even one of this size. But now, I wanted something better. Instead of enjoying the pampering this gig was trying to offer me, I was curious how big the dressing rooms were of other comedians, like Thomas. I wished I could enjoy what I had a little bit more because I was becoming crushed by my expectations not being as satisfying as I expected.

• • •

Partially because I am nosy, and particularly because I cannot sit down before a set, I decided to take a walk through backstage. Sitting around before I went on left too much time to stay in my head. I also needed to listen to other comedians and feel that mental warm-up that came from silently judging other people's joke delivery or pacing. Plus, I was curious who else was here and what order they would be onstage. Later in the set is always better.

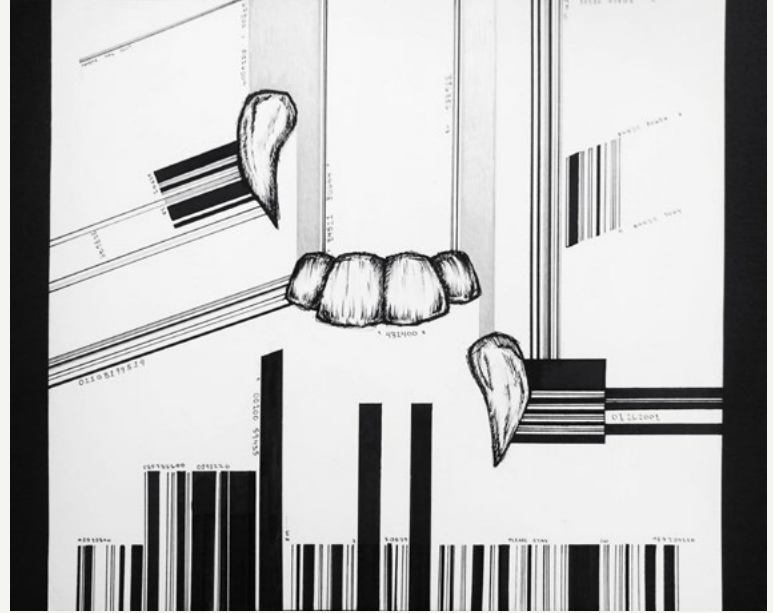
But as soon as I walked into the hallway, I saw him. He looked more attractive than normal and walked straight up to me, breaking our unspoken code.

"Tess," Thomas said.

His wide smile made me hate how likable he was, on & off stage. He went to Georgetown, and that good ole boy charm radiated off him, even though that vibe would typically have no effect on me.

"Thomas," I said, "I didn't know you were on the line-up." It was obviously a lie, but I didn't want him to think I was obsessed with him or anything like that.

"Yeah, this show is going to be fun. Lots of important people in the crowd," and after a pause he continued, "This could be big for you."



Vampire v. Capital

Atom Edwards

I couldn't tell if it was patronizing or generous.

During the improv days, I always thought I was better than him. My jokes were cleaner, more concise, and I was an easier person to market. I knew The Uncrustables thought if anyone was going to make it, it would be me. And in a way, we both had. But he was making it more than me, and that jealousy was starting to get to me more than I wished.

"So, why's Netflix offering it to you?" I asked, surprised at my quick honesty.

He seemed surprised that I just asked him about something that felt so taboo. Instead of Lettman or Johnny Carson, these millennial comedians wanted Netflix, myself included.

"I feel really lucky, Tess. The right people heard it, and my jokes just resonated with them," and after a moment of compilation, he added, "But it still feels like I skipped about seven steps to get it." He started rocking left & right in his dress shoes and loomed over me due to his height and my lack thereof.

I appreciated the honesty.

"Did it feel the way you expected?" I added, "Like some universal acceptance?" I said this in a tone that made the last part sound like a joke even though I really wasn't kidding.

Without even waiting to think over his response and give me the press-approved answer, Thomas said, "It felt like nothing. Maybe I'll feel something after I finish recording it or when people watch it, but it honestly felt unsatisfying."

I didn't even think he was trying to be poetic about it. I saw in his blue eyes something a little dimmer inside them. It felt like he had seen some sort of light and found it unsatisfying.

And at that moment, I really wanted to quit stand-up comedy. I wanted to be a person who didn't find that news so incredibly disappointing. I wanted to be a person who cared more about lasting relationships than the sentence construction of a punch line. I wished I didn't want to be successful so badly that it felt like I was denying myself things that other people seemed to desire so easily.

• • •

From that conversation, I said a quick goodbye, and I walked in thought through the hallway mindlessly until an intern grabbed my arm and started walking me towards the stage. I hadn't listened to anyone before me, and even though I heard sounds, white noise started to fill in the gaps. I grabbed the wireless mic that sat on a table. When the MC called my name, it felt nothing at a time when I should have felt maximum elation.

Even though I was still wearing the baby-doll dress

with a scarf tied around my neck, what came out of my mouth was a lot harsher.

"I was evicted today, but like in a nice way," I said in a tone that someone would use to rant to their mom. That first line always needed to be something surprising, that gives the audience no other option than to engage. I also noticed, as I continued to tell the story of my day, this wasn't the "tight-twenty" that I was planning to tell, but completely new material I was improving. Even though I was being more myself than any other set before, I felt outside of myself, unable to stop it, like a ball rolling down a hill.

But the set was going well, people were responding to the material, and I knew I had their attention captured. After about two minutes, I knew I could say whatever I wanted and they would laugh. I had them convinced. When I exited the stage, I knew people were applauding because even after a bad set, people always clap. Adrenaline filled up my body like a balloon; I couldn't hear the praise. I walked toward the wings of the stage and saw Thomas. He was about to go on. And it mattered a little less what happened when he took the stage because I knew my set was a raging success.



“Last Thing You Wanted” by Rocco And His Bones

Shifting Dream

Carlyynn Ferguson



clouds

Amanda Conover

I wanna be on LSD
so I can write my name in the sky,
leave an imprint with invisible
ink that explains the parts of me
misunderstood by humanity, the parts
only the stars can understand.

I wanna look down
at my life like it's over, see
what I am instead of
what I want to be,
what I should be,
what I will be.

I wanna be a cloud,
shift shapes like moods,
never stuck to a stereotype
or expectation, free to take up space
I can't as a woman in a society that says
I must sit with legs together, crossed.

I wanna collect rain like a sponge
to hide the heat that radiates
out of my every pore, emits
an anger so violent it stays
almost as silent as the girls
with crossed legs, polite smiles.
I could catch my tears and
let them go, let them free.

I wanna believe
there's nothing wrong with me for not living
in a fairytale, for noticing the suffering
stitched into every surface of the earth
with thread that stains all it touches.
for hoarding my anger like
keepsakes when it feels as though
no one else cares about anything.

I wanna sink into a cloud,
take LSD, and read
my story to the stars who are
long dead when I see them.
I wanna tell them we are fortunate
to be able to watch carelessly as the
world floats by in its colorful chaos,
leaving us untouched, unbothered.

orange

Amanda Conover

If you peel an orange
near a source of light
speckled balls of white
will float through the air
like an astronaut lost
in space, dancing with
thousands of stars.
these snowy embers
glide in slow motion
as if they were blown
away from the stem
of a dandelion, a child
wishing upon them
as they become lost
in the universe. one day
every star and orange
and plant will be lost,
like they never had
a place in the world
to begin with. and we,
we will be lost too,
wishing on a dandelion
to return to our room,
to sit next to a lamp
and peel an orange.



Traditional Magic

Lindsay Voelsing

10 cents

Kendra Kuhar

Once again, I'm sinking
 Into someone's words
 Where I can feel
 Every letter and every syllable
 Even though we've never met

But I learned every word of every poem
 Like a song I learned long ago
 I recite it with pristine muscle memory
 Like pushing my tongue against my teeth
 Where my clenched jaw can assign my molars
 The weight of what I knew I couldn't be

I'm in a tug of war with my mind every second of every day
 Over saying something that I'm too afraid to really say
 So, I settle on apologies
 To myself, by myself, for myself
 Made of inner dialogue and sub-consciousness
 I'll never acknowledge under any sun I've ever seen

The hangover you give me
 Is worse than any reckless concoction
 I could ever come up with
 And I've lost every inch of my spine to adore
 Something borrowed, nothing blue
 I think of him as 'home'
 As if that's a place I'll ever be able to go to again

And sometimes my lullaby is
 Your voice
 Saying almost anything
 Where the oxygen gives me just 10% more of itself
 And my lungs finally feel full
 And my heart slows down to something regular

I'm calm
 Because you are the only proof I need
 To know my blue blood
 Can run its course
 Without ever becoming crimson red
 And you'll put your 10 cents into every word
 I've ever said

**“Melody of the Mist” by Zachary
 Cooke**

What They Said That Night

spicy buddy

It isn't until Shelby hears the door slam that he remembers where he is. He watches Charlie bring a fresh pot of coffee to the little table left for them on the porch and tries to smile at her as she fills up her mug, slowly. He lingers on the steam for a while, and Charlie reaches over to grab his mug to fill it too, but before picking it up, she stops to look at him, maybe

for permission, maybe for a sign of something else. But Shelby just watches the steam, so she just pours him his cup and sits back down. Only then does Shelby glance over at the coffee pot, piping hot and sat directly on the table, no potholder, not even a washrag between the scalding glass and the table that isn't theirs. Shelby wonders why she would do that, but he doesn't say anything.

Neither of them say anything. They haven't for two days now, not a single word, not a whisper. Charlie will often consider this the quietest vacation of her life. But it felt right, the silence. Talking wouldn't have done them any good, is what she'll always tell people.

She came to this cabin with Shelby four days ago. They had been planning the trip for months; they waited all fall, all four weeks of November, and well into December, but now they're here: the little cabin in the mountains where she first told Shelby that she loved him two years ago. They'd done plenty of talking that first trip, but this time there's none. It's a small cabin; the living room serves also as the dining room & kitchen, and there's barely enough space in the back room for both the bed and the bathroom door. And so, Charlie & Shelby spend all of their time together; they have no other choice. If one of them musters the strength to brave the cold, they might find a bit of room to breathe sitting out on the porch. But it never fails; if one of them goes outside, in a few minutes, the other always follows. And neither of them speaks a word.

Shelby tries to take a drink from his cup but spills coffee all over himself instead. He makes a spectacle of the heat and jumps from his chair and expects Charlie to say something about it. Then he wishes, again, that she had brought something for setting the coffee pot on, something he could use to wipe himself off, him caring less about injury to the table now.

Then he sits back down.

He looks at Charlie; why doesn't she say anything? She doesn't look back; she simply takes a sip, determined, and breathes in sharply, and so he looks away. If only she would say something! Shelby has started to find their abstract isolation silly. They eat together, after all; they read together, they brush their teeth together, they



Hand

Sarah Rusthoven

sleep on the same bed together, they shiver on the same porch together, but they don't *talk* together. They simply don't talk to each other.

This has always been their problem, Shelby thinks, more than the drinking, more than the cheating, they just never quite learned how to communicate. Away from the cabin, living together in their apartment in the city, they talked because they *needed* to, because they needed to decide whose turn it was to buy the wine or see if the other had already fed the cat tonight. If they had only tried a little harder to communicate, they wouldn't be finding themselves where they are now.

Just one sentence, Shelby silently pleads, just say one sentence, and that'll make us both feel better.

A bird chirps the start of a song from some branch somewhere. The chirping sounds far away, lost in the innumerable pine needles that surround them, buried under the insurmountable snowdrifts that have them trapped here.

Shelby decides that *he's* going to say something if she won't, damn it!

But he doesn't.

Their vacation didn't start off like this. There were a lot of words the first two days they spent here, a lot of noise, clatter, a lot of yelling. Charlie puts her mug on the table. Directly on the table, Shelby notices, choosing to avoid the coaster he left for her. She pulls out a cigarette, and Shelby scoffs on purpose. He was never too fond of her habit. There's something that he won't miss, at least. Her smoke threads into the steam still rising from her coffee. She's been smoking a lot, taking every chance she can to light one up. Shelby thinks, since we stopped talking, she's really started smoking since we stopped talking.

That was not last night but the night before, when they stopped talking. The night before that, they yelled. They yelled & yelled. About what? Neither of them cares anymore. They're splitting up, that's all that matters now. For now and for good, they're splitting up.

They've split up before, plenty of times. But never quite like this. They've yelled at each other before, sure, tons of yelling. But never quite these words. These wounding words. Which words? Why would that matter anymore? They've split up. For good this time.

They never really learned how to communicate, Shelby stews.

They were all too good at communicating, in Charlie's eyes.

Either way, who cares about that now. Whatever

they screamed at each other two nights ago, it was cruel enough to seal the deal, to leave them both satisfied without saying another word to one another ever again. There's no reason to anymore.

Shelby has spent his days wondering why Charlie doesn't say anything and at the same time, positive that there is no reason in the world why *he* should have to say anything at all to *her*. Charlie couldn't care less about the whole damned thing.

What they talked about last was to decide to leave the very next morning. To drive off & away from this God-forsaken mountain and immediately pack up their apartment and never so much as glance at each other until they meet once again in Heaven or Hell. But, of course, as always, this did not come to pass. As they slept that night, together under the same blanket but each lonesome as an albatross, it snowed. It snowed & snowed. What they said that night must have been so damned cruel. Cruel enough to make God Himself so sinfully sad that He retreated into His Holy Bedroom and cried. And when He retreated, the world became cold. And when He cried, His tears froze into so much snow. And God cried & cried, and the world was covered in this immense, choking snow. Damn this snow, Charlie thought, standing on this same porch the next morning, smoking the first of her multitude of cigarettes. Soon enough, Shelby followed her outside. They stood together and soundlessly understood what had happened and what it meant.

They were stuck together, in this tiny cabin, caged by snow, for who knows how long; until summer maybe, until forever maybe.

There was nothing more to say about it.



Lessons from Ants

Audrey Harris

and then there are days when all you feel like is a failure
and your inadequacies are staring you in the face.
When every stride is blocked by a bundle of bricks
and the notion of self-sabotage seems imprinted on
your brain

all you long for is the great expanse.
The flat road to nowhere
with no expectations or milestones,
just the rise and fall of the sun behind the horizon
the religious cycle of bloom and decay.

I want to wander,
find a universe between blades of grass,
intricacies on the back side of a leaf,
possibility in the depths of a pond
to remind me that I am insignificant, yet
invaluable all at the same time.

and I must take lessons from ants
who voyage out and return back
day after day,
who are stronger and smarter
than anyone gives them credit for,
who would crumble
without community,
dedication,
hard work.

I know it's hard to believe
but I promise you darling, it's true—
One day you won't stumble over those bricks,
self-sabotage will be rewritten into forgiveness,
inadequacies will bloom into
knowledge and grace.

and when you approach that brick wall,
the tallest and sharpest of them all,
you will collect every brick and stone you've ever
crawled over
no matter how big or how small,
and you will build yourself the most opulent staircase,
and put one sure foot in front of the other to meet it at
its peak.

and even if you get stuck carving and your arms feel
tired,
and the rain has washed the mortar away,
watch the ants scurry home.
Let them remind you that you're trying your best,
that you can always start over, take your time
build a simpler staircase, more straight lines,
that you are stronger and smarter
than people give you credit for.

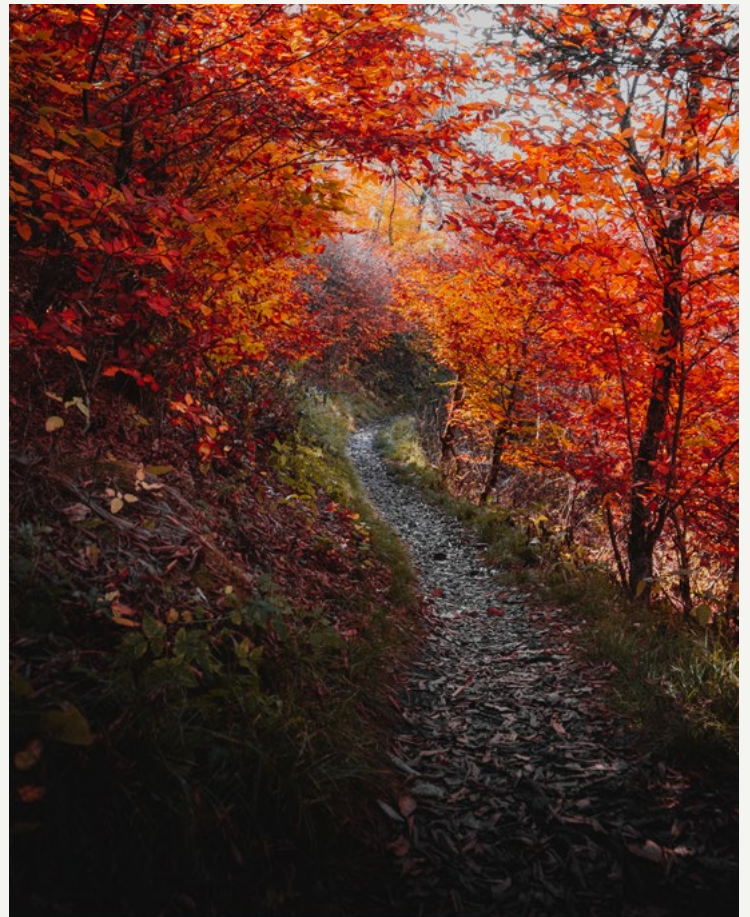
All I long for is the great expanse,
the bumpy road to somewhere.
Though messy,
just as endless,
just as beautiful,
where I can revel in the quiet mundane truth
of hot coffee and fried eggs on toast,
rain beaded on the window of the diner,
a song I know every word to,
showing me that rough things can have soft centers
depending on your scope of view.



Arcane

Hrishika Muthukrishnan

Some people are like the forest.
 Walk down the trails and you catch glimpses
 Never the truth of what lies within
 Crane your neck and you could catch a secret here or there.
 Maybe a deer peering from behind a tree.
 But the sounds, the whispers, the echoes of the forest
 Can't be heard.
 Till you step inside the forest's shoes
 And listen yourself.
 The dewy scent that comes off the trees
 One could only smell once they step in.
 Some people take a great deal to hide themselves as the forest does.
 Few dare step in to discover the beauty within.



Western NC Trail
Anton Nikolov

I Am A Butterfly

Rachel Rodriguez

Acceptance, togetherness, fairness to be Equal with others
 As women, we know what we want
 We will not stop or give up until we get it
 Like The Butterflies of the Dominican Republic
 We grow and we spread our wings to fly
 The Mirabal Sisters, who brought freedom and equality
 To the country of my ancestors
 To the feminists of Latin America
 That stand against racism
 When they enter this country as
 Immigrants. I stand by
 Who I am. I stand by
 Where my family is from
 I am a Butterfly and I am proud of my heritage
 As a Puerto Rican – Dominican woman.
 You see me as a caterpillar,
 But I am a Butterfly
 And I will spread my wings to fly.



Wild Cosmia

Rosemary Hall

“Mountain Kin” by State Park Ranger

I Get That From You

Matt Stephenson

We pulled your 1992 burgundy Chevy S-10 into the parking lot of Dave's Gas and Grill, and you parked in your parking spot. There were no white lines or any indication that anyone should actually park there. Just an empty section of asphalt on the left side of the building. You were taking me to lunch. You'd been going to Dave's well before I was born. Back when it was still called Creech's and they had attendants pump gas for the customers. Every day, except for Sundays, you woke up at 4:15 a.m. and made the five-minute drive to eat two eggs, scrambled, with bacon, toast, and black coffee. You and a handful of other men from the McGee's Crossroads area would have breakfast and solve the world's problems before most folks were even awake.

I had just graduated from college and didn't have a real job yet, so you were paying me to do some work around the house for you & Grandma. We stopped for lunch because you were in the mood for red hotdogs, the only kind worth eating, and Dave's had the best in town. The bell on the door jingled as we entered, and you waved at Jimmy, who was working the register. He owned the place and always seemed to be behind the counter, either to work the register or just make conversation. Maria was working in the kitchen, and she smiled when you stepped up to order. "Two hotdogs. Mustard, chili, onions, coleslaw. And whatever he's having."

"I'll have the same," I told Maria.

"This is my grandson,"

you said. "I'm treating him to lunch today." You added an order of fries for us to share and told me to get us a couple of DPs, what you liked to call Dr. Peppers. We sat in the middle of the long row of tables and sipped our sodas. I watched as people came in and out, getting soda or a bag of chips or a Styrofoam container of fishing worms.

It didn't take Maria long before she had brought over our order, and you thanked her for both of us. You removed your cap from your head and began blessing the food, which always started with, "Our most gracious and kind Heavenly Father" and always ended with, "It is in Your most precious and holy name we pray. Amen." Only, that day, the middle changed. That day,

you thanked God for the ability to spend time with me.

Our food was wrapped in aluminum foil, which you removed as soon as you finished the blessing. I did the same but added a few drops of Texas Pete to my hotdog before taking a bite. "You know, most people have to pay for their food before they eat. Jimmy doesn't mind me doing it though."

"Well, you are a celebrity here," I told you. You laughed at this.

"It's the same thing in the morning. I don't even have to order my food anymore. I sit down, usually over there, and Maria brings it out to me. When I'm done, I pay two dollars for the whole meal. Jimmy calls it the 'Mr. Lynn Special.'"

I can't help but smile. You've been telling me this story for most of my life. I



Quilt for Spring

Rosemary Hall

never get tired of hearing it.

• • •

You don't have breakfast at Dave's anymore. You haven't for a few years now. I don't think you've even been since last year when I power-washed your house and you went to pick up lunch for us. You were only able to eat one hotdog that day. No fries.

Your breakfast is still brought to you each morning, but not by Maria. You tell Grandma that you want to eat in your recliner in the living room. It's more comfortable for you there. You still have your coffee, but you eat less. Maybe some toast. Maybe grits or oatmeal.

The only time you eat out is when you're in the hospital. You've been going a lot lately. Once or twice a month, the family gets a text from Aunt Beverly, telling us that you don't feel well and Grandma is driving you to the hospital. I can see it on your face, the disappointment, when you remove the lid that covers your tray. Watching you eat chicken pastry that isn't made by Grandma makes us laugh. Grandma tells me

how much weight you've lost over the past year. That your clothes are too loose on you and that your butt is too small. She says that it was sexy before you lost weight. I've never heard her use that word before and I wonder if it's the first time she's ever said it.

She also tells me about all of the gift cards she has to restaurants. Ones for Cracker Barrel, Red Lobster, Olive Garden. Ones that I'm sure are from me because you're hard to shop for, but I know how much you like taking Grandma out on dates. She hopes that when you're feeling better and have more energy, you'll be able to use some of those gift cards, go out to eat. I hope for the same thing. Maybe you can even have breakfast at Dave's again, even just one last time.

I haven't been to Dave's in a while. Not since that last time I went with you. I get my hotdogs from a cart outside of Lowe's Home Improvement. They're good, and a different Jimmy owns the cart, but it's just not the same without you.

When I come to visit you, I take the long way to show my fiancée, Alex, where Dave's is. "That's where Granddaddy used to eat breakfast every morning," I tell her.

"I know," she says with a smile. "Every day except for Sundays." I think I tell her every time we pass it. I guess I get that from you.



Southern Boundaries Basketball

Anton Nikolov



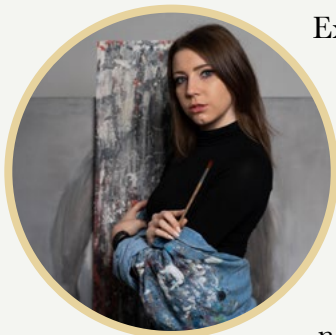
Meet Our *creators*



Gillian Kick is a writer, student, and nomad. She is currently making a home in North Carolina, where she studies English literature & creative writing at Elon University. In addition to

reading & writing words,

Gillian also does research in community writing studies and the impact of social justice writing on high school age students. In her free time, Gillian loves to make up new flavored lattes at local coffee shops, peruse the shelves of independent bookstores, and listen to folk music at a very high volume.



Exploring art making as a methodology that suggests the human condition is more complex than it is currently understood.

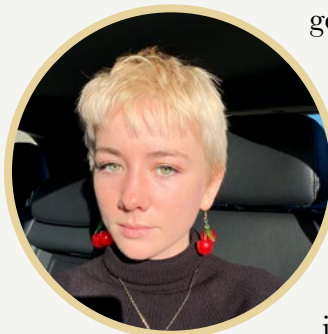
Alexandria (Ally)

Zlatar examines,

instigates, and provokes notions of the individual experience through specifically

focusing on philosophical discourse, body image, embodiment, and ethics. Zlatar acknowledges there is power within the un-well body and believes there is tremendous value & potency in examining these subjects through the contemporary art lens. She is from Carolina, and she holds a BFA in Visual Art & Art History from Queen's University and a MLitt Curatorial Practice from the Glasgow School of Art. Currently, she is pursuing her Doctorate of Creative Arts with the University of Southern Queensland. She has been involved in many exhibition creations and has had personal work shown globally.

Phoebe Carlton is a junior at Elon University in North Carolina where she is working toward a BFA in studio art with a focus in oil painting and a minor in entrepreneurship. While originally from Jackson, MS, she has loved going to college in North Carolina and



getting to explore more of the beautiful state each year. She is currently the art editor for Elon University's Colonnades Literary and Art Journal as well as a co-founder of the Modpodge art club, which is not affiliated with Elon. Her interests include art, music, and fashion. After college, she plans to go to graduate school for either fashion or art.

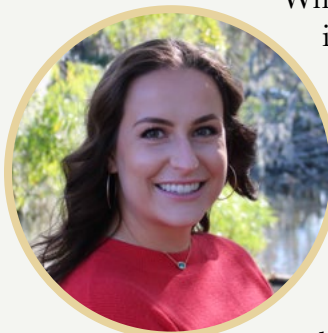


Grace Taylor is a queer poet whose academic journey in creative writing started

at Elon University in North Carolina. Grace's grandfather was born in South Carolina, and as such has spent many summers in the Carolinas.

During Grace's second year at Elon, they decided to pursue a

bachelor's degree in creative writing. After their second year, Grace elected to transfer universities in which they decided to pursue a focus in poetry. Grace is the recipient of Colorado College's Award in Literature. The grant helped with the completion of a three part zine last summer. Grace's work is highly allusive and is becoming progressively experimental. Grace is excited to see where writing takes them post-grad.



While attending Elon University in North Carolina, **Mary**

Emmerling spent most of her time reading whatever she could get her hands on and writing whenever she got the chance. She fell in love with writing while she fell in love with

the Carolinas, spending many weekends exploring from the Great

Smokies to the coast, and learning about people, places, and the stories they have to tell. She writes mostly poetry & personal essays, in which she focuses on her family and the breathtaking complexity of relationships.



EK & Jess started **five thirty two** while in college at Elon University. Quarantine caused them to have to move back to their homes in North Carolina and New York, which happen to be exactly five hundred and thirty-two miles apart.

They released several singles in 2020 and plan to release an EP in the spring of 2021.



Although currently in fly-over country moving out west, **Madison Engle** spent the most informative four years of her life on the opposite coast. Madison graduated from Elon University in North Carolina with a B.A. in cinema and television arts &

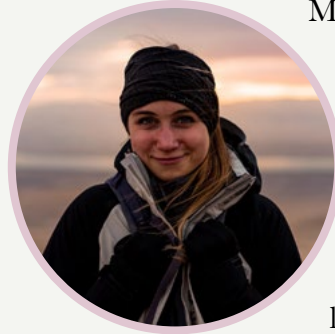
a minor in creative writing. North Carolina holds a special place in her heart, for it's where she developed fundamentally as a writer. Currently, Madison is in the final edits of a feature film and is seeking representation. She is honored to be featured in the first-ever edition of Carolina Muse and can't wait to see how the magazine grows.



Ethan Monte-Parker, born and raised in North Carolina, is an aspiring artist based out of Brevard, NC. Ethan graduated from Western Carolina University having majored in Parks and Recreational Management. Recently, Ethan lost his job.

Since then he has rediscovered his passion to create again. Family, nature, music, and art are what keep him grounded in this world. He captures "Spirit

Guides" through various mediums, primarily colored pencil on black paper. These vibrant colored entities provide relief or contemplation through their gaze. Art has seen Ethan through sadness, loss, and many challenges. He hopes to share his love for creating with others.



Maryland native, **Amanda Bingaman** grew up visiting her aunties in Hillsborough, NC. Her childhood glowed with fond memories hitting tennis balls at the Chapel Hill Tennis Club, devouring local Maple View ice

cream, and hiking with the pups on paths laden with pine needles. She returned to North Carolina to attend Elon University, where she graduated in 2020 with a bachelor's degree in public health. She now works as a public health analyst in Research Triangle Park, NC and continues her love of painting, creative projects, and outdoor adventures in her free time.



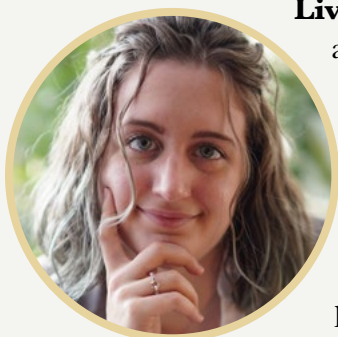
Alyssa Vacca graduated from Elon University with a BFA in dance performance and choreography & a BA in arts administration. She is currently a company member with the Boston Community Dance Project's adult company as well as a member of the Dance As Art

photography project with photographer Kevin Richardson. Throughout her time in North Carolina, Alyssa has felt tremendous growth and has focused primarily on her technique, fine-tuning a variety of styles while also exploring new ones. The opportunities & training she has received in North Carolina have molded her into the artist she is today.

Ono Akporotu is a burgeoning Nigerian writer, photographer, and actor based in the NY/NJ area. His artistic practice began as a coping mechanism for the cultural isolation he felt after relocating with his family to the US from Nigeria at age 9. His work interrogates the intersection of identity, history, and



memory. He finds much intrigue in investigating his disorienting position as a queer Nigerian immigrant within contemporary American society. Ono is currently finishing a Master of Arts in Media Studies at the New School in New York. He is also writing a collection of shorts entitled, *Entries*: a series of memoirs. Ono hopes to one day live in Greenville, SC, a town he says “found him” and swooned him by its commitment to the arts.



Liv Gwynn, 23-years-old, is a documentary filmmaker & photographer based out of Washington, D.C. Though she has never been a permanent resident of the Carolinas, the Blue Ridge Mountains and deep love for the Carolina forests are in her blood. Since she was a young child, Liv spent her summers loving the outdoors and building a community in the valleys of these rolling hills. The Carolinas instilled in her the value of our natural world, and today she works at National Geographic to help educate our world on the topics of our planet’s future. Liv has also dedicated time this year, both as activist and documentarian, mobilizing with liberal organizations in Washington, D.C.

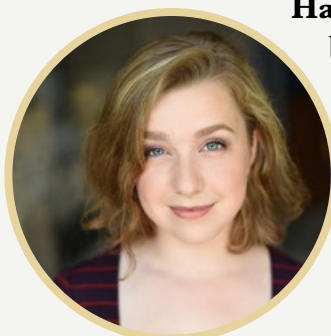


Derek Berry is the author of the novel *Heathens & Liars of Lickskillet County*, as well as the poetry chapbooks *GLITTER HUSK & BUGGERY*. They are the recipient of the Emrys Poetry Prize, KAKALAK Poetry Award, Broad River Prize for Prose, and other honors. Their work has appeared recently in *ANMLY*, *beestung*, *Zingara Poetry Review*, *Underblong*, *Longleaf Review*, and elsewhere. They serve on the board of Poetry Society of South Carolina and on the board of *Free Verse*

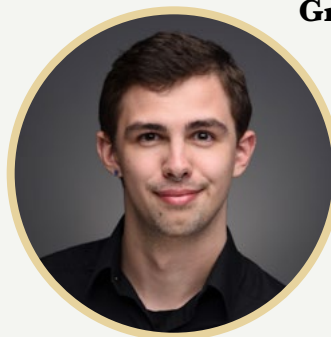
Poetry Festival. They are the host of the creative writing podcast *Contribute Your Verse*. They live in Aiken, South Carolina, where they work in museum education. Website: derekberrywriter.com



Lauren Memery is a writer & comedian from Sumter, SC. She currently studies Drama & Theatre in North Carolina at Elon University, where she has written several full length plays and is currently developing an original TV pilot titled, “*They Told Us We Were Girls*.” She is an alumni of Second City’s Comedy Studies program and plans to relocate back to Chicago after graduation where she can pursue a profession in comedic writing, direction, and performance.

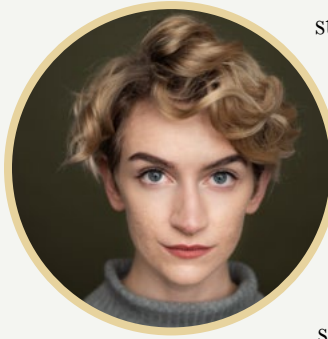


Haley Gadzik is a Chicago-based artist who moved to the city to pursue a life in the theatre and, in the interim, became a plumber. For a long time, she was pretty bad at soldering copper (integral to plumbing). She took some time off from plumbing to work as a children’s theatre programmer in North Carolina one summer. One sleepless night surrounded by the lush natural beauty of Pisgah Forest, worrying about returning home to life in the trades, she realized she could learn to solder more skillfully by making sculpture. She began to appreciate the straightforward beauty of welded copper, and *Sugar Plumb Solder* was born.



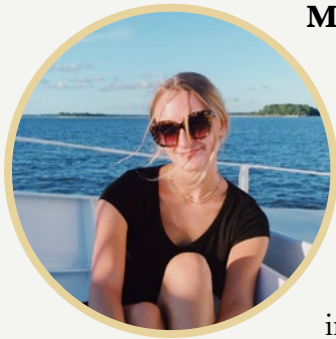
Griffin James (he/they) is a writer & theatrical artist from Willard, NC, currently living in Raleigh. Griffin graduated from NC State University where he studied creative writing, theatre, and arts entrepreneurship. Their poetry has previously been

published in The Windhover Literary Magazine, Roundabout Magazine, and Inlandia Literary Journey. Additionally, Griffin was the winner of the 2016 Ross Andrews Nature Poetry Contest, a finalist for the 2018 NC State Poetry Contest, and an honorable mention for the 2020 Creative Artist Playwriting Contest. His upcoming play “Heritage” will premiere at NC State University Theatre in February. He is excited to share his poetry in the first edition of Carolina Muse.



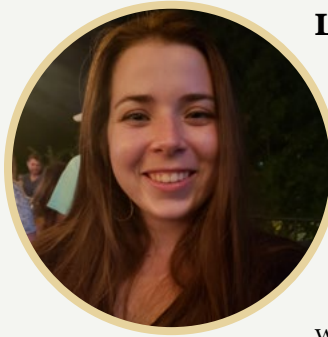
started about five years ago. In that short time, she has worked with many accomplished photographers. Her work can be seen in books, art galleries, and even Vogue Italia. She loves telling stories with her photos and she styles all of her photo shoots

herself. When she’s not creating photos, she is a dance instructor, iced coffee drinker, and pro thrift shopper.



Mary Gilden is a 20-year-old multimedia artist born & raised in Greenville, SC. Mary has studied fine art at both the Fine Arts Center in Greenville, SC as well as the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, MD. Mary’s work is rooted in the concepts

of home & family, particularly her relationship to her own. The traditions & teachings of her maternal family inform the work in a way which shows Mary’s deep, generational connection to the Carolinas. Mary develops on these traditions in artwork which seeks to challenge the conventions of marriage and the American dream.



Lindsey Kaminer attended the University of South Carolina Upstate where she earned a BA in interdisciplinary studies with a concentration in English. Lindsey has always had a passion for writing, with her favorite genre being poetry. She currently resides in Greenville, SC with her cat.

resides in Greenville, SC with her cat.



Francisco J. Douglass, a pen name, lives, works, and plays in the greater Charleston, SC area. His writing is layered in imagery & symbolism as it mirrors his modern contemporary art style.

He writes to draw out the reader’s true emotions, to provoke thinking, and to paint pictures in your mind for the purpose of edification & beauty. As a person of faith, he strives to honor God as well.

Fawnly is a model, choreographer, and performer based in Greenville, SC. She grew up in Upstate SC and became involved in the arts when she was just 3-years-old. She trained for over 15 years in jazz, contemporary, tap, ballet, hip hop, and musical theatre. She has always loved having her picture taken, but her love for modeling & fashion photography



Liz Wilson is a 23-year-old independent singer-songwriter based out of Chapel Hill, NC. She grew up in Charlotte, NC, where she developed a love for music, playing both double bass in her middle & high school orchestras and classical piano. In

early high school, she began writing songs and hasn’t stopped since. She went on to attend UNC Chapel Hill, where she studied psychology, biology, and music; she graduated in May 2020. She released her debut album, *Silly Weeds*, in December 2020 which she wrote, recorded, and produced by herself. The album discusses themes of sexual assault, growing up, and losing loved ones. Website: liz-wilson-music.com

Emily Sledge is a 20-year-old writer born & raised in Burlington, NC. She is a student at Elon University majoring in English Literature & Creative Writing and hopes to teach English post-graduation. Sledge enjoys writing creative nonfiction, such as personal



essays, and her writing centers around the theme of place. As a part of her undergraduate research project, titled, “Female Identity and Hometown Connection in Creative Nonfiction Writing,” Sledge has begun exploring her relationship with her homestate & identity through creative nonfiction writing.

Sarah Rusthoven is a second-year communication design student at Elon University. She always loved the arts as a kid and grew seeing creativity as a big part of who she is, but she didn’t always have time to invest in her art until recently this year. Sarah’s quarantine experience led her back

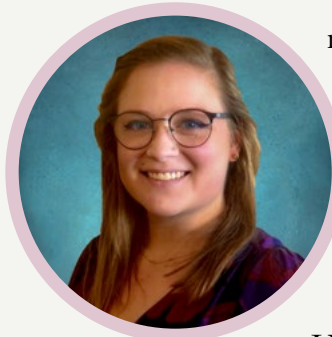
to her passion. She found creating art to be a mentally healing activity and has probably created more art in the past few months than she has her whole life. Sarah has an art commission shop which can be reached on Instagram at the handle @sarah.hearts.art. Website: srusthovenf9b1.myportfolio.com.



Genevieve Munch works with oil paint to create primarily abstract works on paper. She views the process of painting as a personal & evolving relationship in her life. Her process is a form of daily journaling, often leading to layered & repetitive compositions

created over several months. In her artist statement she writes, “it satisfies a need to re-center in a world overflowing with content, voices, and contradictions.” She is a recent graduate of Virginia Tech’s School of Visual Arts, where she received her BFA in creative technologies. genevievemunch.com

Jane Goodwin has lived almost her entire life within the state of South Carolina. Having lived in all three

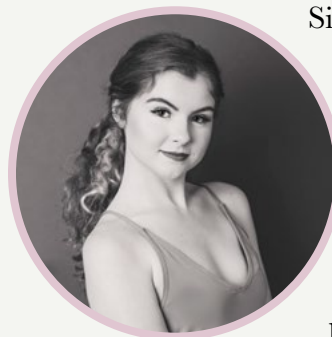


major cities in South Carolina (Greenville, Columbia, and Charleston), Jane finds that each has imparted its own lessons on her life & creativity that she will carry forever. She is a current student at Clemson University, an alumna of the College of Charleston, and was raised a UofSC Gamecock. Creativity is where she finds comfort & self-expression, and South Carolina is a small world of inspiration, whether it’s the history, the people, or its natural beauty.

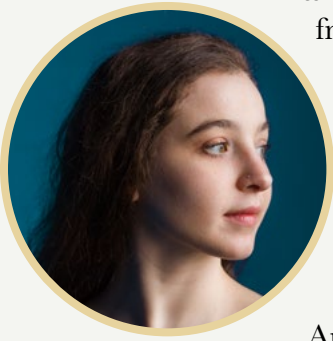
Traci Wright Martin



has recently moved from Oklahoma to Greenville, SC and has been a part of the art community there for about a year. She shares The Bank Building Studios in the arts hub of The Village of West Greenville with three other women artists. Her national award-winning charcoal and mixed media work can be found in private & public collections both internationally and throughout the U.S.



Since birth, **Devon Lacy Smith** was an avid reader who took great joy in transporting herself into the pages of books & video games. She fell in love with attractive mysteries, endless possibilities, and exciting adventures. Her ability to write laid dormant until the great shutdown, known widely as Isolation 2020. Forced to find ways to express herself, she started revisiting narratives that inspired her. She was forced to write about the world she knows. Through the pain, passion, uncertainty, and insecurity, she was able to put together a series of thirty beautifully-crafted works of art. A sample from her collection includes the first poem she wrote, “The Scarlet Letter,” & “Moonlight.”



Mariel Loughlin is a graduate from Elon University with a double degree in dance performance and choreography & dance science. Growing up in Clark, NJ, she trained at the Union County Academy for Performing Arts, the New Jersey School of Ballet, and the Well Performance

Project. She attended the American Dance Festival in Durham on a scholarship where she was able to further develop her artistic goals. She has had the opportunity to perform works by Casey Avaunt, Renay Aumiller, Jason Aryeh, Dawud Jackson, and more while studying under Lauren Kearns, Sayward Grindley, Justin Tornow, and Gerri Houlihan, to name a few. Currently, she works as a rehab tech for Jag-One Physical Therapy and is applying to pursue her Doctorate of Physical Therapy, specifically for dancers & other performing artists.



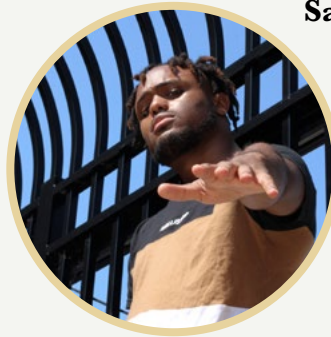
Kyle Pruestel is an up-and-coming artist currently going to school for Graphic Design & Fine Arts in the Greenville area. Pruestel has been living in South Carolina for over 10 years, where his love for art is always evolving. He typically works on paintings & drawings

in a traditional style but also experiments with other processes & mediums. Pruestel believes it is important to learn about all aspects of fine arts, not just what one would be comfortable with. This kind of thinking encourages growth in skills and can be fueled by a love for art. His passion for fine arts comes from a thriving art community of the Carolinas that embraces new artists & ideas with welcoming arms.

Abby Fuller is a senior at Elon University, majoring in English, creative writing & professional writing and rhetoric. Although Abby was born and raised in Dallas, TX, she has loved living in the piedmont region of North Carolina during her four years of college. This state has been where Abby has stepped



into her identity as a writer and where she has met some amazing people who have inspired her to keep creating pieces of prose writing. Abby is also the Editor-In-Chief of Colonnades Literary and Art Journal and hopes to pursue an MFA in Creative Writing sometime in the near future.



Sabataj carries the spirit of the Bronx with him in his music. When he was 9-years-old, he moved away from NYC and a large part of his family to Greensboro, NC, but he brought with him that “New York State of Mind” and continued to feel a strong connection to the city. The people of

the Carolinas seem to really connect with his music. He favors meaningful and inspired lyrics, and he continues to demonstrate his connection to East Coast Hip Hop in his own music with hard sampling, rough lyrical content, and authentic storytelling, similar to NC native J. Cole. His genre is truly unique in an age when trap dominates the hip hop scene.



Rachel Huang is a recent graduate from Georgia Tech with a major in computer engineering and a minor in industrial design. She grew up in Durham, NC and has always been surrounded by a wide variety of culture & arts that sparked her interest in art &

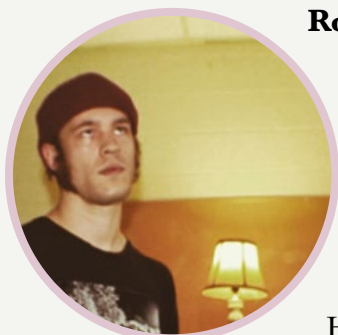
design from a young age. Currently, she lives in Seattle for her job, and she is constantly inspired by the city, nature, and the people surrounding her. She is beyond grateful that she can continue to enjoy a hobby that she loves.

Born and raised in Durham, NC, **Atom Edwards** is a transgender, black artist who’s been making art



since 2016. The media used for “Vampire v. Capital” was black & silver sharpies on a bristol board. The 12”x12” ink work was inspired by capitalism’s ability to suck the wallet and the soul dry.

After losing his job at the beginning of the pandemic, Atom was stretched thin in trying to pay for medical appointments (insurance didn’t want to cover), testosterone prescriptions, and therapy. The barcodes being stretched out and glitching represent his monetary concerns at the time of making this piece, while the numbers represent the barcode number on his prescription bottles.



Rocco and His Bones is a DIY solo project from Zac Dehlbom. He does all the writing, recording and production himself in between work & playing with his band, Act Normal. Raised in Houston, TX he moved to

South Carolina to spend time with his father and get away from the big city. Zac is a simple man that thinks too much. His passion is to explore and play different types of music and express different ideas, discoveries, and emotions through this craft. This song comes from his newest record “Right Around The Corner,” and it’s about the difficulty sometimes involved with honest open conversation.



Mostly operating on the other side of the fence practicing copyright & trademark law, **Carlynn Ferguson** moved to Charlotte from Chicago four years ago – drawn to the city’s youth, appreciation for the arts, beautiful weather, and trees.

Inspired by color & nature, she gravitates toward abstract oil portraits & landscapes, experimenting with blending (and not blending) colors and incorporating gold

leaf to express emotion. “Shifting Dream” is about embracing change, one of the few things you can count on, and finding excitement in uncertainty.



Amanda Conover is a 22-year-old currently living in Raleigh, NC as an online ESL teacher & tutor. She is a fairly recent graduate of Elon University’s undergraduate Creative Writing program and is passionate about

poetry. Most of her creative writing centers around topics such as mental health, environmentalism, and various social justice issues. Her poems have been published in the Fall 2020 issue of Bridge: The Bluffton University Literary Journal and in the Special Remembrance Edition of The Rainbow Poems. Outside of writing, she loves making lifestyle-based YouTube videos, getting involved in animal rights activism, and being creative in any way she can.



Currently residing in Charlotte, NC, **Kendra Kuhar** was born and raised in Northeastern Pennsylvania. There, she earned a degree in English at Wilkes University and spent summers conducting research in biology. Kendra has

continually crafted her writing skills by becoming a proficient technical & content copywriter, though never failing to neglect her love of poetry & short stories. She also loves playing piano and is an experienced digital marketing professional working with clients across various industries.



In a world filled with progressive-minded musicians and artists, **Zachary Cooke** has embedded transcendent, flowing musical chords, alongside luscious melodies that embody the eternal purpose of modern-day

piano music. Born in Bronx, NY, Zachary has lived in New York, Virginia, Kansas, Mississippi, and North Carolina. From these different unique living environments, the aurora & soul of North Carolina has influenced Zachary to promote a healthy, neospirtual style of contemporary piano music. By utilizing the essence & fervor of North Carolina, Zachary is able to convey a distinct variation of modern piano music that can evoke the deepest of human emotion.



spicy buddy is a writer & poet living in Raleigh, NC. In pursuit of those ephemeral truths that the soul knows but the body can never articulate, his work lands in our own reality (though ever so slightly skewed and certainly a little haunted) and

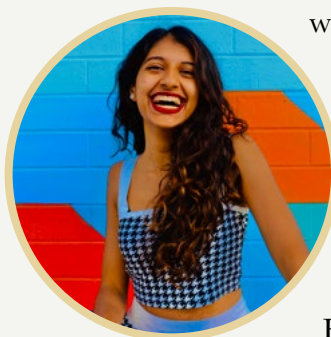
explores our deepest emotions through themes of loss, discovery, religion, and the natural world, the last of which is influenced heavily by the wonderland splendor of his home state, most significantly by the incomparable Blue Ridge Mountains and the incredible mysteries they hold. When not writing, spicy buddy sits somewhere, preferably near a small animal or two, preferably damp with morning dew, and does absolutely nothing.



Audrey Harris grew up in middle Georgia, surrounded by pine trees & deer. She credits her parents as the origin of her love for all written works and is extremely grateful they never turned down a request for more books. She moved to North Carolina to attend college

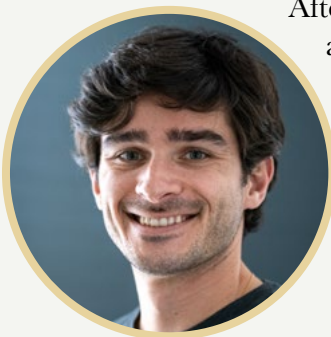
at Elon University, where over the course of four years she studied literature & communications and fell in love with the mountains & squirrels. After graduating, Audrey moved to Austin, TX to live amongst the rolling hills & armadillos and rediscover what it's like to read for fun.

Hrishika Muthukrishnan grew up in Cary, NC,



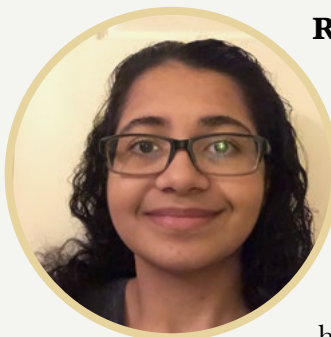
where she spent twelve years thinking there wasn't much to the suburbs before slowly discovering how much her hometown had to offer her. She is currently a senior at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. During her summers, she

works as a creative writing camp counselor where she and her campers frequently invest in quirky inside jokes. When she's not writing at sporadic moments of the day, she spends her time painting and immersing herself in the field of fashion photography. "Arcane" is her first published poem.



After arriving in Wilmington to attend UNCW, it didn't take long for **Anton Nikolov** to realize North Carolina was going to be home. It's been 12 years since then, and his appreciation for everything the Tar Heel state offers has only grown stronger. Working as a software

engineer full-time, photography has provided Anton an outlet to expand his creativity through the practice of composition, imagery, and color. He credits the vast mountains, beautiful coastlines, and thriving cities of North Carolina for making it the perfect environment to cultivate inspiration.



Rachel Rodriguez is a 23-year-old graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a B.A. in English. Her biggest aspiration is to write her own novel and attend graduate school at her alma mater to receive a Ph.D. in English & writing.

Rosemary Hall is an artist & illustrator born and raised in Greenville, SC. She gets inspiration for her work in finding the fantastical in everyday life. Rosemary attended the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts & Humanities and then went on to



receive her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Kansas City Art Institute in 2018. She now resides in Greenville again with her partner & two cats.



Band founder, Nicolas Rhinehart, grew up in a small southern town in the middle of North Carolina, where close-mindedness was a given, and the majority of people were reserved with unknown

hate. He prides himself in raging against that by creating projects that feel new but familiar, weird but tangible, and bold in love. **State Park Ranger** forges new steps of folk but still nods to the past. The Commons Collective addresses the changes of the music industry today but retains the feel of a DIY show. What excites him most is being a part of the future and being with the people that mold it.



Matt Stephenson was born and raised in North Carolina. He received his bachelor's degree in English & creative writing from The University of North Carolina at Charlotte as well as his MFA in creative writing from The University of

North Carolina at Wilmington. He currently lives in Morrisville, North Carolina with his wife, Alex, and their two dogs. You can find more of his work in The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature and Idle Ink.

Credits

Carolina Muse Literary & Arts Magazine is a seasonal online magazine that publishes creative text, images, and videos to provide a multimedia artistic experience. Each creator has a connection to the Carolinas that has shaped them in some way, whether this reflects in their work or not. Our mission is to provide a multi-sensory, immersive platform for young creatives' work that reveals the way various art forms can work together to tell the true stories of our human experience. We also seek to uplift voices that have been systematically ignored in our society.

Want to add your voice to the arts community of the Carolinas? Submit your creative work to carolinamuse.arts@gmail.com by midnight on February 28th, 2020 to be considered for our second edition. The subject line of your email should read: [Art Form]- "[Title]" by [Your Name]. Please view the specific requirements for your art form at carolinamuse.com/submit.

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