

CAROLINA MUSE

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LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE



CAROLINA MUSE

Literary & arts magazine

VOLUME V • NO. II • JUNE 2025

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From the Editor

This summer, Carolina Muse has its very first art exhibit on display at the Artistry Gallery in Greenville, South Carolina. To select art for the showing, our magazine hosted a juried art competition under the theme, “What is your muse?” Aptly named MUSE: A Carolina Creatives Art Competition, the artists who submitted work to us answered this question, each with their own unique interpretation. What we have in the final collection is a beautiful, comprehensive picture of what inspires these Carolina-based artists, from the natural world & its creatures to the community, culture, spirituality, and activism alive in this special section of the South.

As I’ve worked on both the gallery and this issue of Carolina Muse, I’ve been reflecting on what inspires us to create. What fuels us to translate our ideas into something we can hold or watch or read or listen to? I think part of it stems from our innate drive to understand and to be understood. We create not only to make sense of the world but to bring sense into the world. We notice patterns, reflections, contrast, and imbalances. We feel deeply. For those who have that creative itch, our lived experiences & noticings incite such strong emotions that they claw inside of us until they’re released through our selected art form.

In this issue, you can see where our creators found inspiration—in death, love, nature, mental health, and social injustice. A creator’s muse can permeate through their whole practice, or it can be fleeting within an individual piece. The purpose isn’t for a muse to stay static but to grow & change as we do. Each release day, I ask our featured creators about their muse as a recurring last interview question. Now, as you flip through this issue, I encourage you to ask yourself, what is your muse? And, how can you translate your inspiration into creation?

 Madison

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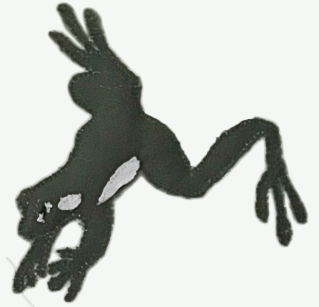


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Love Bunnies *Emily Shelton*

Bumbles

Micah Brewer

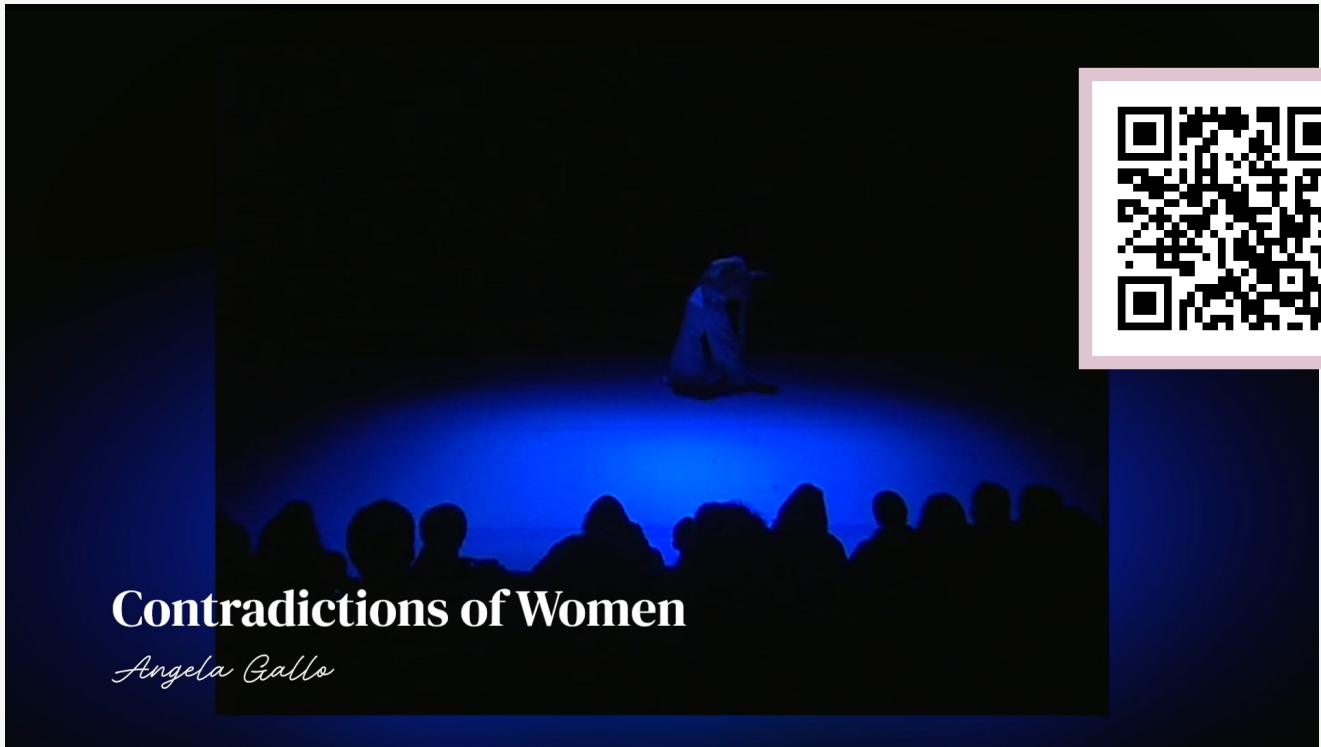
My body of bees,
a buzzing belligerence deep in my bosom,
tingle through my fingers and toes
for search of warmth—a morning sunray
on purple-yellow viola petals.

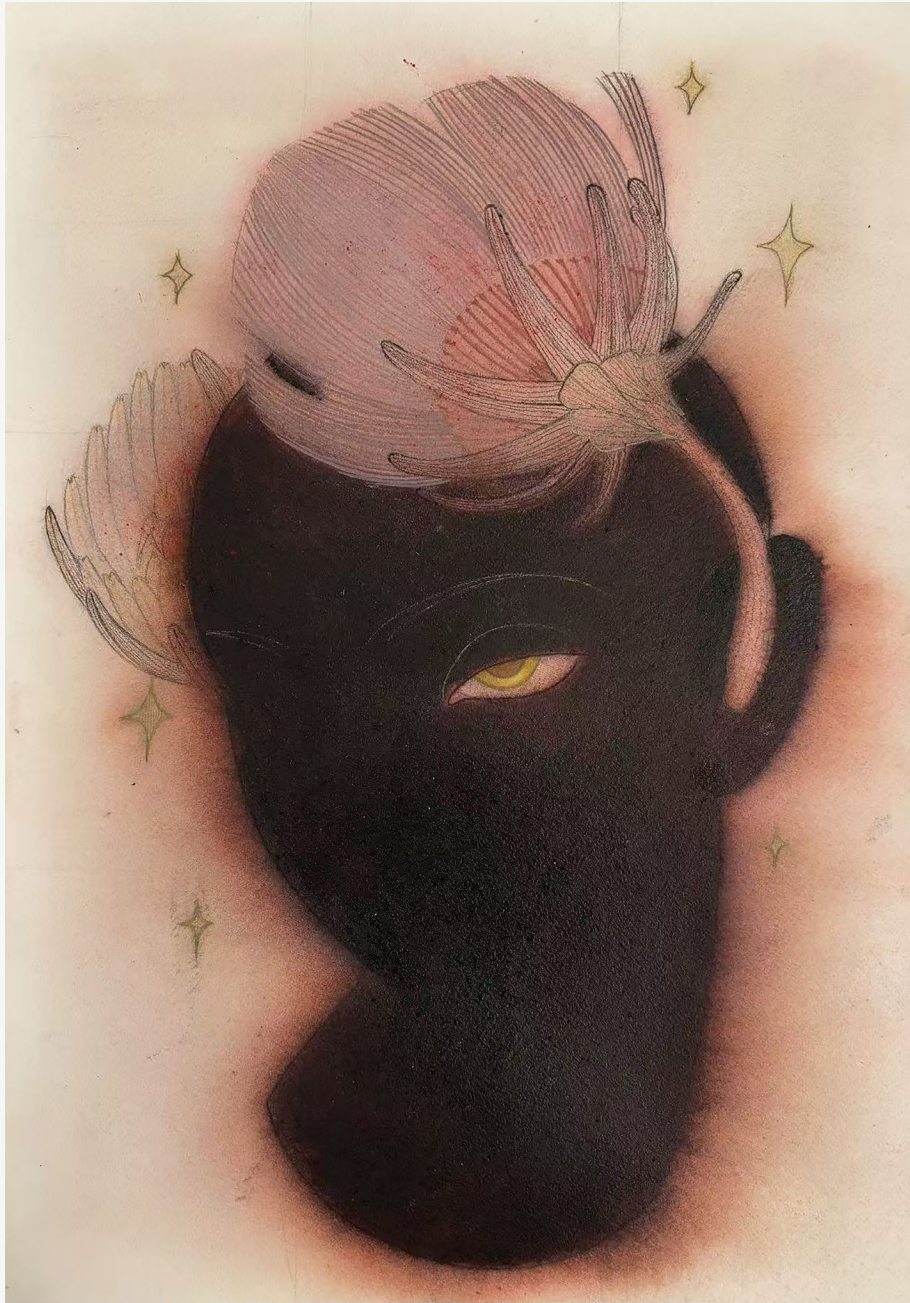
The frost-numbered ground holds us tight,
and the bees in my body burrow deeper
down through the ventricles of my heart.

They palpitate there in velvet slumber
until the knock of spring muddles
drowsed antennae. They barrel out
of arteries and my trachea as I release
a long-concocted sigh of relief and bees
and butterscotch schnapps—their winter
rations until pollen’s plentifulness.

They’re drunks now, buzzing about, bopping
into one another, dissociated. they slur—
*Spring’s too bright. Take us back to your lungs.
The nougat smoke sucked from your pipe puts us
at restful ease. Let us return.*

I shake my head, the bees claw at my lips—
they’re blinded by another sigh of nougat
and drift away to find a sun-kissed petal to sleep on.





Grass Will Grow

Moyan Wang



Morph *Emma Rich*

Doe

James E.

Stephenson

Or most of her,
young probably,
never tracked or ate a breathing thing,
likely saw something tender, green,
delicious and nourishing, just
on the other side of the flat hard place
where the loud noises occasionally
raced by,
a few steps away,
then the rushing lights,
the adrenalin,
the bound.

Blackening now
as flies carry the bits off,
the dark carcass that remains
of all the things that
have surprised us
with their ferocious speed,
brute force,
and callous indifference to our good
intentions, our best efforts.

We have miles to
go, and
we must leave this behind,
return our attention
to our road.

Moonlight
Richard Hurteau

They've taken everything that they could carry
They've closed down
All that I love
Well, displacement and moving away from the spaces
From the roots,
Families rose up

Chorus

In the moonlight, everything everywhere's too bright
In the moonlight, I'll be here
Well, in the moonlight, you can't see the stars for the tail lights
'Cause in the moonlight, it rings in my ear

Well, I've built up a lifetime filled with so much
In a house
Full of my years
And they ran here, skipped around, broke down, and played here
Who am I,
To give it all up?

Bridge

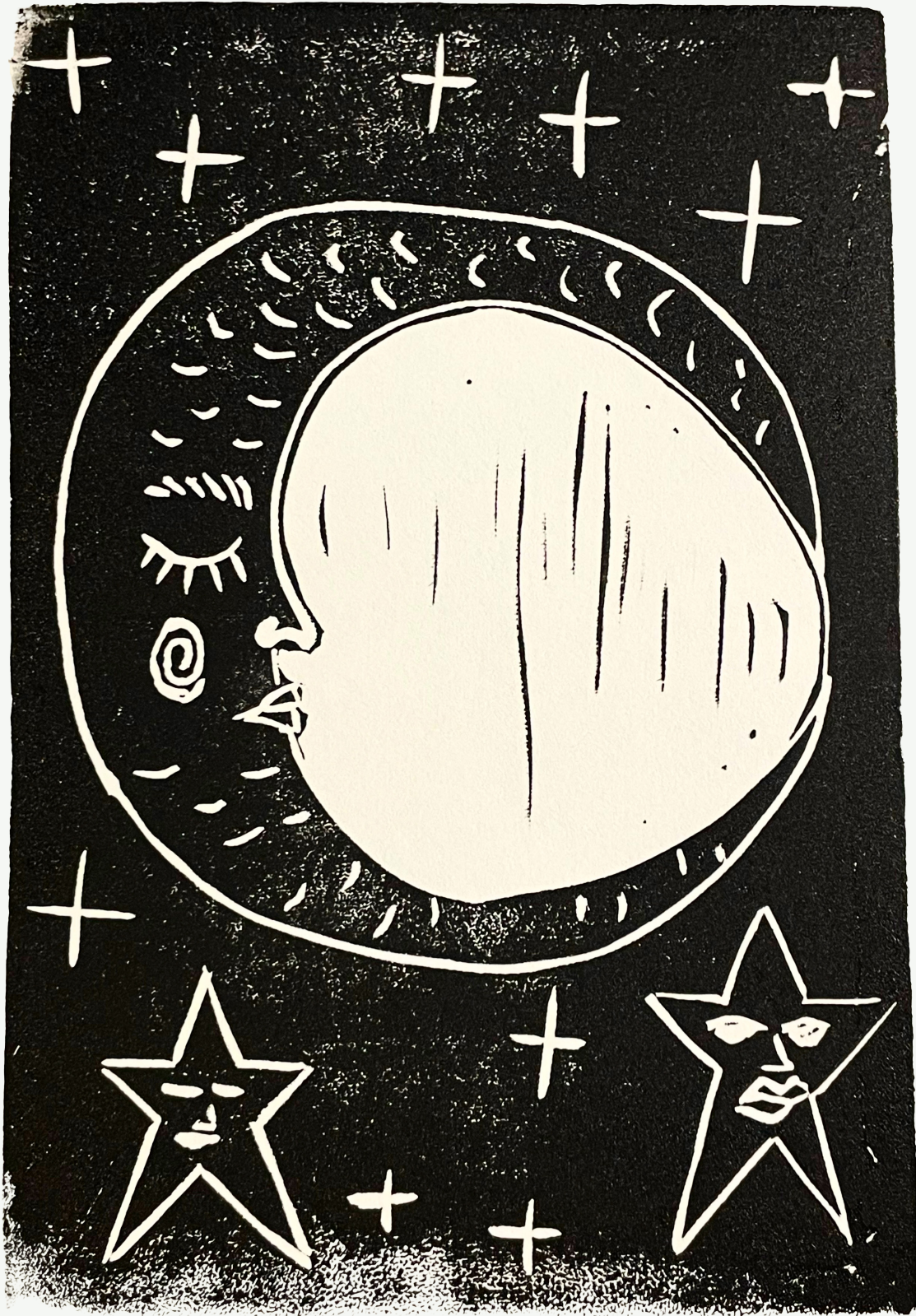
And time just slips
And melts to the end of my wits
And I'm running low on steam
I'm much too old
To start like I did before
And build on my own

Chorus 2x



Moonlight

Richard Hurteau



Celestial *Hanna Gelwix*

The End of History's an Abattoir

Zander Lyvens

She told him she was like one of the trailers here in the park, born to roam but forced to stay put. He smiled, his dimples punctuating her confession like a comma, as if always waiting for more exposition, more backstory, more rising action.

When they kissed amidst the pines, a hundred or so birds were raptured to the heavens, a great whooshing sound of flaps and flutters one second and falling detritus the next, feathers and leaves leisurely zig-zagging down to earth, riding the crest of the westward wind.

That was crazy, he said. She had obviously felt him flinch when he pulled back from her face to stare at the sky, his braces nearly catching her lower lip.

It's okay, she said. Happens all the time.

Do you know why? He asked.

They just found somewhere better to go. Or, she mused while placing her freckled pointer finger on her freckled chin, they felt like they were in danger.

They reciprocated grins, as if asking each other *are you sure this is a good idea?* As if their union was upsetting the delicate balance of nature.

Although neither was exactly what you'd call self-aware, let alone class-conscious, at sixteen years old, both of them felt love and fear burbling inside them, a Machiavellian dissonance, all but undermined by the latent understanding that a whole world of sybaritic indulgence lie beyond their respective property lines in the bosom of the woods.

Then came the rain. Trish began to shiver, so Noah pulled her close into his hoodie.

Strange for such a sunny day, he said, before a thunderclap flipped a switch. Soon, he would have to head back through the brush and over the felled oak tree to traverse the swelling creek to reach his home, the McMansion on the hill. She would cross the deer tracks, back to the park where her supper would be waiting for her on a paper plate.

But, for now they clung together, drinking each other in, giving shelter from the storm before coming in from the wilderness.

•••

Black rain during the wedding seemed a bit too cliché of an omen, a little too on the nose.

She felt like a stranger, since most kith and kin perceived her as nothing more than an interloper. The only thing worse than her presence here would have been if Lucifer himself had clawed his way out of Hell and strolled into this particular Lutheran church, late of course, Starbucks cup in hand, taking a seat before casually flipping through the Bible, Googling himself in the most prosaic sense as Pachelbel's canon boomed from the organ.

The crowd was made up of a cross-section of Southern society: debutantes, Huguenots, and the nouveau riche on the groom's side, and the salt of the earth, the down to earth, and even a few of the wretched of the earth thrown in on the bride's side. Whether or not she was invited was irrelevant. She was a part of him.

•••

She first brushed her hand across Noah's face in fourth grade. Her family had just moved into town from the foothills of Appalachia, and that's exactly how she described her origin story to acquaintances—"the foothills of Appalachia" had a Tolkienesque quality to it, and after all, she was from a place where the trees seemed to move and everything felt rooted in Jesus-y undertones.

Trish had been invited, as had everyone from her homeroom, to McDonald's for a birthday party. There in the ball pit she swam, pretending she was in the middle of the Atlantic, plunging her hand deep into the greasy macroplastics, only to be pulled down from the undertow. Shhhh, said the boy who was hiding. It was calm on the ocean floor, safe from the din of screaming children. There they explored, combing through crumbs and fossilized French fries, occasionally

unearthing antique Happy Meal toys and other sorts of mass-produced bottom feeders.

At school they were distant, yet their fates were destined to intertwine with each passing year. Their inevitable coupling was like two trains headed for each other at different speeds, merely a math problem to be solved.

There were hurdles along the way. One of the boys in the locker room started calling her Trailer Trish, an epithet that would follow poor Patricia like a shadow into young adulthood. Noah did not partake, nor did he speak up. He didn't even really understand the insult, assuming that most people grew up like he did, with his parents struggling to meet the monthly minimum at the country club dining room—constantly failing to spend enough money as both were teetotalers with eating disorders, while others relied on scraps to scrape by. That all changed when he first visited her neck of the woods.

...

She glanced at the disgruntled parishioners in the front row, a baroque painting pulsating from the pews. She gazed up at the ceiling, which was carved to resemble an inverted ark. They were all now tangled and tethered, in the same boat so to speak, as the words *I do* flew out of her lips like a dove, soaring over the hawks perched in the nave.

Her father smiled, a tear of joy streaking down to his mustache, as if racing the tears of sadness that were pouring from the other side of the aisle.

She searched for acceptance in the faces of her in-laws, only to find contempt when she scratched the surface. As she dodged the daggers that

were shot her way, her eyes wandered to the safety of the building's perimeter. She surveyed the stained glass vignettes that lined the walls of the cathedral. Sunday school lessons brilliantly brought to life by thunderbolts, history written with lightning.

Trish tried to focus on the gentle words of the pastor as he quoted scripture. In all fairness, he was doing his best to shepherd her into the family, despite her inevitable designation as the black sheep. Trish was not simply some hick who married in, but something far more menacing to the blue bloods of the county. To them, she was the succubus who convinced Noah to go vegan, to take a gap year to travel around South America, to drop out of business school and join the

Blooms



Carlynn Ferguson

Peace Corps, torching his CV along the way.

Throughout the whole ceremony, Noah's nuclear family could not actually believe that he loved this woman. No, he was doing this to spite them, to publicly bite the hand that fed him.

•••

In seventh grade, Noah and Trish were both in a language arts class where they were assigned to put on a one-act play about Pandora's Box. To prepare, the teacher gave them a box full of mothball-scented costumes and a script that was likely laminated during the Reagan administration. She was to play Pandora, and Noah was slated to embody Epimetheus. Noah asked if she wanted to practice after school, and Trish suggested her place since they would have plenty of space. Noah soon realized that plenty of space meant the great outdoors, as the mobile home that Trish's family occupied was dwarfed juxtaposed to the auxiliary clubhouse that Noah's family had just finished remodeling out back.

Noah knocked on the aluminum door, eliciting a tinny echo instead of a dignified thud. Trish's dad came to the door, a handsome yet shaggy man. He had a warm smile framed by a handlebar mustache, with curling wings like two arms reaching in for a bear hug. As Noah walked in, he couldn't help but feel like he was inside a Tupperware, a space typically reserved for housing the ephemeral.

As the two shook hands and exchanged introductions, Noah couldn't help but notice an unusual constellation tattooed on the old man's right arm.

Is that Xenomorph? Noah asked, thinking that perhaps the two could bond over movies while Trish finished getting ready. He had just watched *Alien* on VHS a few nights before.

That, good sir, is the Philippines. An archipelago of 7,641 islands. Airforce, 1968-1969.

Sweet! Noah responded as Trish emerged, swiftly ushering him down the cinder block steps.

•••

Tell me about your Dad. He seems like a cool guy, Noah said as they traipsed through the woods, a No Man's Land separating their deeply entrenched lifestyles and worldviews.

He's done a lot of odd jobs, Trish explained. He said his career is chasing the American Dream. He puts a lot of pressure on himself, but he never quits. Mom jokes that it's more like he's hunting the American Dream, like all of his hustles are traps he's laid out. Eventually, he just might catch something.

Sounds ambitious, Noah said.

He is. He's a glass-half-full kind of guy. He's always talking about The End of History.

Like, Armageddon?

No, it's like, we don't have to worry any more. As a species. We're entering a period of no more fighting, more jobs for everyone, and so on. He keeps saying good times are just around the corner.

All but abandoning Pandora's Box, the two willingly

“As Noah walked in, he couldn't help but feel like he was inside a Tupperware, a space typically reserved for housing the ephemeral.”

allowed themselves to be swallowed up into the belly of the beast, voluntarily shielding themselves from seeing the forest through the trees. As they drifted further away from their respective comfort zones of the country club and

trailer park, they embarked into terra incognita. This could be Middle-earth, their own private Pangaea. Trish was a seasoned traveler of these woods, while Noah had to cloak any apprehension, cinching it tightly behind his stiff upper-class lip.

After weaving through a colonnade of cedar trees, they were spit out at a scene most disturbing. Trish let out a scream, and Noah stepped back, breaking a branch, further disorienting the two of them.

Before them lie a pyramid of slaughtered hogs. Each one boasted grotesque features that were all pointed in different directions, like a piled up *Guernica*, with the exception of the eyes, which were staring straight at the two of them, shattering the fourth wall.

They held hands and ran like Hell through the forest, not stopping once to look back.

•••

After consummating the occasion with a kiss, she walked back down the aisle with her new husband, catching glimpses of the crowd flanking her on the left and right, imagining them all with thought bubbles emanating from their heads, the words *GOLD DIGGER* fixed in the middle in a crude font, spray painted in all caps followed by a manic and slapdash slew of exclamation marks.

But, this was a spurious claim. She was an alchemist. Before Trish, he was just a base metal with a trust fund. She created gold in Noah. Some would say she cast a spell on him that day in the McDonalds, but in truth, she breathed life into him. Trish knew what her detractors would say, but how could she be a gold digger, when it was her love that transmuted his essence into something precious?

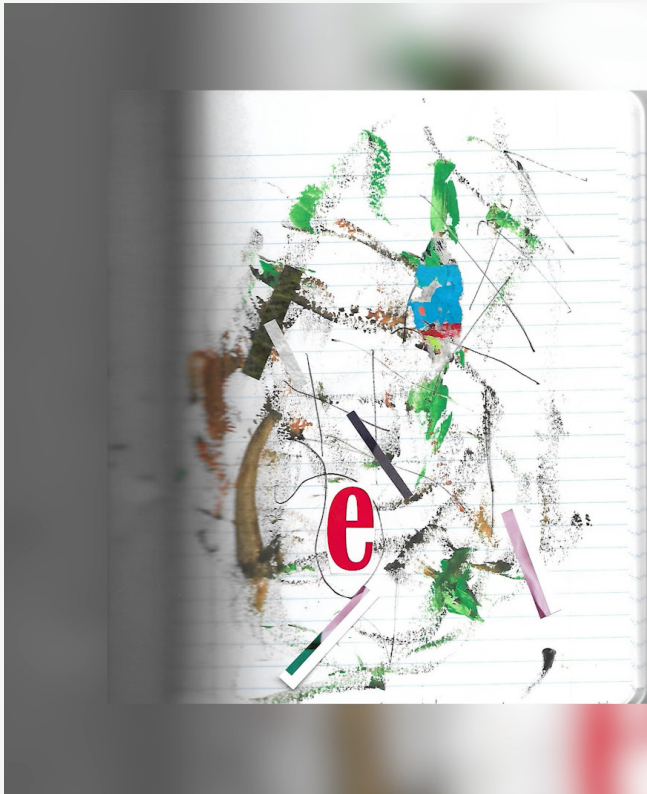
The downpour was straight out of Genesis, or possibly Revelations. A current of electricity jolted the guests' pockets as a flash flood warning caused phones

to vibrate in the pews.

Trish's mind wandered as she and Noah walked hand in hand towards the narthex, adjacent the segregated graveyard out front that housed sharecroppers, confederates, civil-rights activists, a signatory of the Declaration of Independence, and two authors of the South Carolina Ordinance of Secession.

There was nowhere to go as they approached the entrance, where a cataract cascaded down the church steps. Noah smiled at her, with eyes that said *your guess is as good as mine*.

Who knows, she thought. The rising water might cause the spirits to be swept away from their resting places, their echo chambers, so they might finally listen to one another.



And Fore There the Horses Remained, Dampened Underneath the Land's Golden Blasts

Jordan Veres

Weary

Kim Melohn



A Sonnet for the Souls of Flowers *Haley Jameson*

Buried hearts in backwoods, sweetening soil,
peppermint and pink on camellia,
Sing cicadas, dying magnolia.
Y'all and I, unsure of our sinning souls.
Sitting alone, you're beneath trees, soiled
lives of withered bone. Pluck azaleas,
pick the ripened buds, withered dahlia.
Why do we go stomping, wearing fake soles?

Grubs and I, not minding our pressured fate.
Seventeen years to grow, rot, unending.
Step without care, carry death impending.
Swear to me, an oath, a broken keepsake,
y'all forget I am withered, always gone.
Listen nightly, I'm in cicadas' song.

She Billows, Restless

Matthew Anderson

She climbs the corners of buildings, feels them scrape against her, hears their howling at her passing form. She has twirled through the flags and banners and laundry along these streets, has long enjoyed the resistance of the glass towers like the deep immobility of mountains but with a smooth, sharp texture only known to the wind and only offered by people. She whips and dances among the lumber, the concrete we have dragged into standing, free and reckless like some anonymous god who needs no belief. She knows the tousle of our each and every hair, just as she knows the tangle of our flying ropes as she blew our sails and ships across our fleeting empires. The wind has swallowed the final cries of legions of soldiers as gently as she has grasped the whispered prayers of children found floating through warm windows and carried them up to the indifferent sky with the same precious faith of a moth who is certain it will land upon God's finger.

HOME

*san Aika Movement
Collective*





A Green Gathering

Emily Shelton

Here on the Bayou



James E. Stephenson

There are things that will eat you
in the water, in the air, in the dirt.
If not you, then someone, something,
sometime soon.

They have to eat, and
they will, and then,
sometime later, be eaten.
You know
you do, too,
and you will, too.

You can see places where the water
comes and goes,
covers the dirt and then
doesn't, goes up stealthy
all day long into the air and
then rains down on the dirt and the water.

You can cut the air here,
the air that carries the dusty dirt as far
as it can, then breathes the water up,
fluffs and kneads it and casts it back
down by turns with gentle caresses
and fierce towering tantrums.

You can kneel in the dirt here,
the dirt that dries up and blows,
as dust,
as far away as it must,
the dirt that muddies its sneaky way into
the water that comes and goes
then drifts down to dirt again,
or slips up with the water
into the air,
or stays,
right there in front of you
in the water,
so you can't see the eating in there.



Hanging Rock *Al Torres*

Walking Meditation on Sycamore Trail

Angela Heiser

we snake along a path embedded
with speckled quartz all hues and sizes
ferns grow like a wreath carpet around tree trunks
downed trees remind me of battleship guns
sun scattered across the trail
moss-skirted live oaks

*look, guys a stick bridge
Mom is this tiny rock perfect*

I want to come back in the spring

*it's a little shortcut
just crawl on it*

don't stumble on the roots

fallen trees with emaciated fingers like limbs grasping eternity
before developers dig up what remains
my kids crawling like lizards across a downed tree
mucus trails leading up both fleece jacket sleeves now

I'm almost there

take your time

how do we get to that side

five woodpeckers
tap taptap tap taptap
a different tune to
the woodpeckers at home

my son settles noiselessly at the base of a tree and awaits bird companion
building trust
plunging pockets replete with rocks
collecting sticks, amassing treasure
keepsakes remind us why we came here
why we preserve

Heuristic for Prägnanz (Pastoral Behind Latigo Farms)

Patricia K. B. Manley

Angel hair sunlight, it comes down as cream
 a cream-orange flower sleeping, remaining fresh in one corner of the sky,
 one last glance of itself in the tiles of trees,
 fragments of pasted pinks, oranges, blues curdling:
 the clouds.
 Blue-blush shales concaving cutting faces through the sky, it then
 revises itself in the pond,
 the space between shards of green little squabbling puffs of
 green,
 vermillion green trees are grass in the sleepish light.

It is like some less-antiquated English
 countryside. It all leads fresh,
 to the center I stare at.

It all smells of trotted mulch,
 memory of bucking steers, and dew.
 There are shapes I think I see: that the clouds make way for,
 I think I carve myself from there.

Floral Flares

Hanna Gelwix



untitled

Irina Tall (Novikova)

Woodworking for Beginners

Andrew Haynes

Somerville woman dies after falling into Fresh Pond Reservoir, DA says

*By Angela Chiang, Globe Correspondent
Updated January 7, 2024, 7:52 pm*

A 57-year-old woman from Somerville drowned Saturday afternoon after she fell through the ice on Fresh Pond in the Cambridge Highlands, officials said.

Around 1:35 p.m., police received a 911 call reporting a woman in distress in the freezing water, according to a statement released by the district attorney's office. A bystander attempted a rescue but was unsuccessful.

A police dive team later recovered the body of the woman, Elizabeth Thornton, and she was pronounced dead at 4:10 p.m., according to the statement.

No foul play is suspected, the police said. The official cause of death will be determined by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

With the recent spate of unusually warm weather, MassWildlife recommends no one go out on the ice. When leaving the house for a trek in the wilderness, MassWildlife recommends notifying a friend or relative about your plans, including where you are going and when you expect to return.

Carry a cellphone in case of emergency.

• • •

Wade Thornton scooped the hot water from the basin and splashed his face. Still unsatisfied, he stooped over the sink for a minute and inhaled the steam. He lifted his head and ran a moist hand over his scalp, forcing the wild gray hairs to obey. In the dull mirror he

opened his mouth, noticed debris between the two front teeth, and picked it away with a thumbnail. He forced a smile, but it was no good, like bending lumber, and he scratched at the stubble lining his chin and cheeks. He exhaled into his hand, brought the palm under his nose, and winced at the smell of rotting oak. Well, it was too late now.

He returned to his seat in the waiting room, and the yellow light from the buzzing tubes above made him uneasy, as though exposed. He scanned the walls for a dimmer switch, but the other patients in the room seemed content enough with their phones, so Wade checked his own. Another missed call from work. He would call back, eventually. The students hadn't arrived yet, he still had time. It had only been three days, or was it four now? The staff would be forced to attend interminable meetings all day anyway, so he wasn't missing much. What else? He saw there was a text from Laura, his daughter, but before he was able to respond, his name was called.

The nurse checked Wade's weight and blood pressure before sending him along to the doctor's room. He settled on top of the examination table, placed a hand beneath a buttock to smooth out the paper beneath, but accidentally tore it. He inched a thigh over to cover the mistake and waited with his hands beneath his legs until Doctor Sandoval entered in an unbuttoned white coat, looking trim and neat. The doctor smoothed the few remaining hairs over the top of his scalp and greeted Wade. He located the swivel stool in the corner, sat down, and using only the heels of his feet, dragged himself toward Wade. He raised the stool to its maximum height to better meet Wade's eye.

"So, it's been another year?" Dr. Sandoval said.

"Yep," Wade said.

"Do anything over the summer? Go anywhere special?" Dr. Sandoval asked.

"No, not much," Wade said.

"Okay, well, let's start. Let me listen to your heart," Dr. Sandoval said, placing the stethoscope around his head. He stood up and gently kicked the stool away. Wade unbuttoned his shirt and tossed it on the chair next to the examination table.

Dr. Sandoval asked Wade to lie flat, and Wade slowly unfolded himself, like a water hose uninking with pressure. As Dr. Sandoval began to auscultate and palpitate, Wade's body stiffened.

"Just relax," Dr. Sandoval said, his fingers pressing against the grain of Wade's stomach.

While Dr. Sandoval observed, checked, and queried, Wade offered answers that discouraged further probing. At the end, Dr. Sandoval removed the stethoscope from his neck, the latex gloves from his hands, and stood at the computer.

“Well, your blood pressure’s too high,” Dr. Sandoval said, his voice rising, “and I see you’ve lost a lot of weight, too.” He stepped back as though to consider Wade from afar. “Oh, and you can sit up now.”

Wade lifted his weight onto his elbows before dropping his legs off the table. Once properly upright, he eyed the contents of the blue countertop across from him: bandages, tissues, tongue depressor, a bottle of hand sanitizer, thermometers, urinalysis cups.

“Any headaches?” Dr. Sandoval asked, shifting his weight from one leg to the other.

“Sometimes,” Wade admitted.

“How bad?” Dr. Sandoval asked, fingers on the keyboard.

“Not very. Ibuprofen works,” Wade said, which was true enough.

“How many do you take?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“A couple,” Wade said, a better answer than the handful he routinely ingested.

Dr. Sandoval nodded in confirmation.

“And how’s your stomach? Constipation? Diarrhea? Nausea?”

“I guess,” Wade said, and in the silence that followed the smallness of his reply tugged at him. “Seafood doesn’t agree with me,” he added, pleased with the lie.

“Shellfish?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“Yeah, can’t handle it,” Wade said.

“And how about sleep? Getting enough?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“Some,” Wade said.

“Okay, and how much is *some*?” Dr. Sandoval asked, looking over the top of the computer screen while still typing.

“I don’t know,” Wade said, irritated. “I try.”

“You *try*?” Dr. Sandoval said, lifting his fingers from the keyboard. “Do you take anything to help you sleep?”

“Melatonin,” Wade said, instead of alcohol and marijuana.

“Any major changes in your life recently?” Dr. Sandoval asked. “Still working? Everything’s good with the family?”

“Yes, all good,” Wade said, and though it was only three words, he was proud. He had prepared. Elizabeth used a different doctor, so as long as Dr. Sandoval hadn’t read the article in the paper, Wade figured Dr. Sandoval would know nothing of her passing.

“And, what about exercise?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“I take walks,” Wade said, crossing his feet.

“How many times a week?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“Oh, I don’t know,” Wade said, suddenly interested in the tile floor, “maybe a couple?”

“I see,” Dr. Sandoval said, holding the bottom of his chin between his thumb and index finger. “I’m just trying to account for this change in your vitals,” he said. “You’ve lost weight, your blood pressure is high, it sounds like your digestion has been giving you problems as well as your sleep, and to be totally honest, you don’t look very good.”

“Oh, you know, just work and stuff,” Wade said, locking the fingers of his hands together. “I’m just tired.”

“How’s work going?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“It’s good. Just busy,” Wade said.

“Any problems at work? What do you do again?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“I teach,” Wade said, his back stiffening.

“Oh, so that can

be stressful. What do you teach?”

“Social studies,” Wade said.

“What grade?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“Middle school,” Wade said.

“Oh, that’s got to be tough. Do you like it?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“It’s not that bad,” Wade said.

“Kids these days are a handful,” Dr. Sandoval said, typing away again.

“They can be,” Wade said.

“How have you been feeling lately?” Dr. Sandoval asked. “Have you been experiencing any anxiety? Any bouts of sadness? Any loss of interest?”

Wade saw he had no choice but to offer something. “Well, I’ve been a little absent-minded,” he said.

“How so?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

“You know, can’t find my keys, wallet. Can’t remember words. Little things like that,” Wade said.

“Really?” Dr. Sandoval asked, his brow reflecting the alarm in his voice.

“Yes, all good,” Wade said, and though it was only three words, he was proud. He had prepared.”

“It’s nothing,” Wade said. “Just, you know, busy at work and stuff.”

“Any trouble breathing? Shortness of breath?” Dr. Sandoval asked.

Wade remembered the panic attack last night, the choking in the dark. “No,” he said. “No problems there.”

“Yes, I’m sure it’s nothing. We all forget. There’s nothing out of the ordinary about that. It’s called *nominal aphasia*,” Dr. Sandoval said, drawing out the term, as if the Latin itself allayed all fears.

“Aphasia?” Wade said. The word was familiar, ominous.

“Nominal,” Dr. Sandoval said. “*In name only*. Let me just ask a few questions. Have you been forgetting important appointments or lost your train of thought in conversation?”

“No, nothing like that,” Wade said, squeezing the table edge.

“Okay, we’ll do a quick cognitive test here just to make sure everything’s good,” Dr. Sandoval said.

“Oh, I don’t think that’s necessary,” Wade said.

“Probably isn’t, but it’s quick, easy. Just routine. Bear with me, please. I want to be able to rule out as much as I can,” Dr. Sandoval said. “I have to check all the boxes, you understand?”

“Okay, then, let’s check those boxes,” Wade said.

On the test, Wade had to describe how a watch and a ruler were similar, say how many nickels were in fifty cents, write the names of a dozen different animals, identify a wreath and a volcano, and draw the face of a clock. There were other tasks, but Wade put the pencil and clipboard down. “I’m actually in kind of a hurry,” he said.

“Okay, let me just take a look at what you’ve done so far,” Dr. Sandoval said, scanning Wade’s responses and making notes on the computer.

“Honestly, it wasn’t necessary,” Wade said. “I can tell the time.”

“Yes, I see that. I just need to check all the boxes,” Dr. Sandoval said.

“I understand,” Wade said.

“Well, there’s nothing here that indicates anything degenerative,” Dr. Sandoval said.

“Good to hear,” Wade said.

Dr. Sandoval bit his lower lip before asking, “But, have you thought about talking to someone?”

Wade froze before replying, “I am talking to you right now.”

“No, I mean, talking to someone about your life,” Doctor Sandoval said, scratching the side of his head.

Wade pursed his lips together, as though learning how to apply his mouth to a wind instrument, but said nothing.

“I think maybe you should,” Doctor Sandoval said.

Wade resettled himself atop the examination table, the paper producing an irritable sound beneath.

“Oh, I see. You think . . . I see,” Wade said.

“Talk therapy can help,” Doctor Sandoval said.

“Yeah, I don’t think that’s for me,” Wade said, rising.

“No?” Dr. Sandoval said, emerging from behind the computer. “And, why is that?”

“I didn’t come here to talk,” Wade said.

“I see that,” Dr. Sandoval said. “This is what concerns me.”

“It’s nothing,” Wade said.

“Well, it’s not *nothing*. It’s definitely *something*. It’s there in your vitals.”

“Just stress,” Wade said. “Work.”

“Stress at work, I get it,” Dr. Sandoval said. “But, it’s got to be an awful lot of stress to make the changes I’m seeing.”

“I’ll exercise more,” Wade said, reaching for his shirt in the chair.

“What I’m saying is that you might be dealing with something beyond my expertise,” Dr. Sandoval said. “There might be someone else who can help you deal with your stress better than I can.”

“Got it,” Wade said, fastening the buttons.

“Listen, this is my professional advice, which is what you came here for, right?” Dr. Sandoval said.

“I’m here for my usual check-up,” Wade said, tucking his shirt into his pants.

“All I’m saying is you might want to talk with someone if your life is stressful,” Dr. Sandoval said, “so stressful that it causes significant changes in your vitals.”

“Got it,” Wade said, moving for the door.

“Let me give you the name of someone I think could help,” Dr. Sandoval said.

“Fine,” Wade said, stopping at the threshold.

Dr. Sandoval extracted a business card from a small pile beside the computer and handed one to Wade.

“She works in the same building right here,” Dr. Sandoval explained. “I’ve referred many of my patients to her before.”

“Thanks,” Wade said, shoving the card into his pants pocket.

“You should talk to her,” Doctor Sandoval said, approaching closer. “She’s good. She deals with all

kinds of issues.”

“I’ll think about it,” Wade said, reaching for the door.

“Oh, before you go,” Dr. Sandoval said, “let me give you something to help you relax a little. Help you sleep.”

Wade released the handle and turned around. “I’d appreciate that,” he said.

“Stress, lack of sleep. You know what that can cause?”

“Memory problems?” Wade said, relieved.

“Okay, I’m going to give you something,” Dr. Sandoval said, writing out a prescription. “We’ll start with the minimum dosage, which should be plenty. And, if you walk more, get more exercise, you’ll sleep better.”

“Sounds good,” Wade said, reaching out for the prescription.

“And, give our psychiatrist a call. She can help,” Dr. Sandoval said.

Wade turned the paper over in his hand. “What if the minimum dose doesn’t work?” he asked.

“Then I’m going to insist you go talk to our psychiatrist,” Dr. Sandoval said.

• • •

Wade texted Laura, and they settled on six o’clock that evening. The Berklee College of Music was only thirty minutes away by public transit and fifteen by car, but that made little difference. He couldn’t ask her to commute. What’s the point of college and living independently for the first time in your life if you still live at home?

If she hadn’t received scholarships that covered the cost of tuition plus room and board, he could have argued that staying home would save all kinds of money, but he couldn’t, so he had no choice but to drop his daughter off at the Residence Hall on 150 Massachusetts Avenue, a squat unremarkable structure of red brick in the heart of the Fenway neighborhood, with all her things outside the opened doors of the minivan spilling over onto the sidewalk. She invited him up to see the dorm and meet the roommate, but he offered a stiff hug and a cautious wave goodbye instead.

The call didn’t come through until 6:23 p.m. Wade affected nonchalance.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t call earlier,” Laura explained. “I just got so busy talking to everybody and getting

settled. Here, take a look.”

She turned the tablet’s camera around and showed Wade the view through her window down to the crowded sidewalk, and the bare mattresses in frames on either side of the room, and the desk pushed up against a wall with books askew, and a mass of clothes on the floor, and an acoustic guitar on a stand in a corner, and a stranded keyboard in the opposite corner, and some cardboard boxes blocking the doorway.

“Looks a little tight,” Wade said.

“Yeah, but everybody tells me I’ll never be in here,” Laura said. “I’ll be spending all my time in the classrooms, the studios, and the practice rooms.”

“But, not out partying,” Wade said, deepening his voice, masking fear with sarcasm.

“Yeah, right,” Laura said.

“How was orientation?” Wade asked.

“Good. I’ve met so many people already,” Laura said.

“How’s your roommate?” Wade asked.

“She seems fine,” Laura said, “Cool, actually. Mei seems like the same person I was chatting with over the summer, so no surprises. Her flight got delayed, and she didn’t get here until this morning, so I’m sure she’ll crash soon. I’m hoping she can tell me which of the Chinese takeout spots here are legit. I think we’re going to get along. She seems very chill.”

“Chill is good,” Wade said.

“Chill is good,” Laura said. “Let’s see, what else? Oh, and I talked to a bunch of people about my classes, my schedule, the professors and stuff,” Laura added.

“What did you find out?” Wade asked.

“Well, I mean, and I already knew this, but sometimes the instructors will get this incredible gig in the middle of the semester, and they’ll just disappear to do a tour,” Laura said. “They have to because the money’s too good, and then somebody else fills in, so I’m not sure how that’s going to work.”

“You’ll handle it,” Wade said.

“I know I’ll *handle* it,” Laura said, “but it doesn’t exactly sound *ideal*.”

“True,” Wade said.

“And, I’m a little worried about the music theory classes,” Laura said. “Everyone says they’re really hard and they assume you already know a lot.”

“But, you do know a lot,” Wade said.

“My ear’s really good,” Laura said, “but I’ve never studied theory like I should.”

Wade thought of Elizabeth, who struggled teaching

theory to her students at the high school. “You’ll learn,” he said.

“Easy for you to say,” Laura said.

“Easy, but *true*,” Wade said.

“So, what are you going to do tonight?” Laura asked.

“Not much,” Wade said, straightening.

“I can come home this weekend if you want,” Laura said.

“No, don’t do that. Stay there,” Wade said, turning away from the screen.

“You can’t tell me what to do,” Laura said, lightly. “I can do whatever I want now.”

“You’ll have a lot more fun there than you will here,” Wade said, his chest tightening.

There was a knock at Laura’s door, voices, commotion. “Well, I should get going,” Laura said, distracted. “I’m supposed to meet up with some people now for dinner.”

“Okay, talk soon,” Wade said, neatly ending the call before he was overcome.

He pulled the shades down and turned the television on to a roundtable discussion on the state of the New England Patriots. He spread out on the sofa, laid an arm across his brow, and concentrated on breathing: in through the nose, down into the belly, hold for five seconds, and out through the mouth. Repeat. He continued until the commentators concluded that ownership was too cheap to sign a top-of-the-market cornerback.

Suddenly Elizabeth’s voice, with its easy banter, cut through the babble from the commentators. *Why do you feel the need to watch football constantly?* Well, that’s an easy one. I like football. *But, why does it have to be all the time?* It’s not all the time. It’s frequent. *Why does it have to be so loud?* It’s better that way. *But, isn’t it all just soap opera for men?* Which doesn’t make it any less fun. *So, why is violence fun?* Now you’re asking me questions above my pay grade. *But, what’s so fun about it?* It’s a way of having a conversation, just like you with music, like you’re always saying. *Sports aren’t much of a conversation.* That’s also part of the fun. It doesn’t really matter if you’re right or wrong. The stakes are low. *If the stakes are so low, why are you always losing your mind over it?* Again, these are questions above my pay grade. *But, why don’t you put that time and effort into something more worthwhile?* That’s a good question.

Wade put his hand up to catch the early evening sun peeking through the shades. As he watched the

light travel across his fingers, he thought of Laura in her dorm room. She had come so far. Take her freshman year. In middle school, if she used makeup at all, it was only some lip gloss and a little eyeliner, but on her first day at the high school she laid it on so thick there was a clear line separating her natural skin tone from the orange of her face. He mentioned it to Elizabeth, fearing the dysfunction might spread to her clothes.

He remembered Elizabeth snorting at him. “*Dysfunction?* Oh, so you’re calling it a *dysfunction?*”

“Yes, dysfunction,” Wade said. “And if she starts advertising her body, then then we’ll really have some problems to deal with.”

Elizabeth placed her hands on her hips and glared at Wade as if he were a simpleton. “So, makeup isn’t the issue at all,” she said.

“What are you talking about?” he asked.

“What are *you* talking about?” she asked.

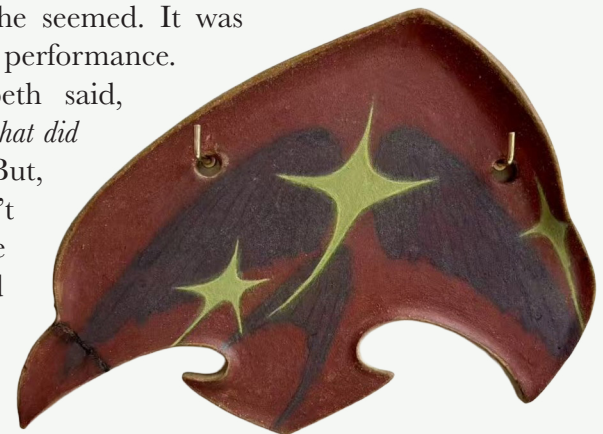
And Wade remembered that, in the end, Elizabeth did agree to talk with Laura, though more for his sake than their daughter’s. And that was that. The orange line disappeared. He innocently asked Elizabeth how she had handled the situation, but she turned on him, finger pointing.

“You should consider yourself fortunate. Out of all the possible destructive habits she could develop—habits that many girls her age do develop—and you’re worried about a little makeup.”

Wade lifted his hand to the window above the sofa and peeked behind the shade. He may have overreacted to the makeup, but Laura was not doing as well as she seemed. It was a kind of performance.

Well, Elizabeth said, impatient, *what did you expect?* But, why doesn’t she know she doesn’t need to hide anything from me?

Because she



Last Year’s Swallow

Moyan Wang

can see her father is not doing well. But, she needs to take care of herself. *But, she knows you're not well.* She doesn't have to do that. *Are you sure?* I can take care of myself. *Does Laura know that?* Well, she should. *How would she know?* I will prove it. *How?* I'll think of something. *When?* Soon. *You don't understand.* What don't I understand? *What Laura's doing.* What's Laura doing? *It's an act of generosity.* What is? *Her performance.*

Wade pulled his hand from the shade and laid his forearm across his forehead. Should he tell Laura that he knew she was pretending? She was seeing a therapist, but when he asked, she didn't want to talk about it. The only person in the world he thought he might talk to didn't want to talk. But, why should she? Laura had a right to privacy, too. No, it was better to leave her alone. To trust her.

He remembered listening to Elizabeth at the piano. She found his presence a distraction, so he used to hide around corners and listen in.

He recalled one day, when they had both started on their summer vacations.

It was hot. Wade came in from outside after futzing around in the yard for some time, and he heard the music. At that point in time, he knew it was his wife and not his daughter, as Elizabeth was so much more advanced. He snuck into the hallway and pressed himself against the wall. He peered around the corner and watched Elizabeth close the score sheets and bow her head, as if in prayer, before lifting her hand to play again. She started to improvise, or at least, he thought she was improvising, it was something he had never heard before, bewitching and haunting with a classical sound. He was deeply affected. When she stopped, he entered the room as though he just happened to be passing by.

"Please, don't stop on my account," he said.

She stared at him for a moment and then closed the piano.

"That was nice," he said, sensing a stronger word of praise might offend.

"Yes, but unremarkable," she said.

The memory was interrupted by the dry tightness in his chest squeezing his lungs. He looked down at his hand and found it shaking, and his mouth felt dry as

well. These were some of the symptoms, as the grief counselor had explained, before he decided he didn't want to talk to her anymore, didn't want to join any groups, didn't want to do any work, as the counselor called it. How could she expect him to? Getting out of bed required an effort he didn't possess. The counselor warned that the longer he remained inactive, the worse it would become. She pressed the need for Wade to continue with his medication, even though it gave him headaches. She said he needed to try a variety of antidepressants, perhaps in combination with others, in varying dosages, until they found the right mix, but Wade doubted such a mix existed, and if one did, it all sounded like so much *work*.

He didn't know how to explain it to the therapist at the time, but it felt like there was no connection between himself and the outside world, no tether anchoring him to the immediacy of his surroundings, and the idea of returning to work scared him, having to face all those faces with his own. The therapist asked if he had thought about suicide, but the idea of making that much effort exhausted him.

And Laura. There was still Laura.

Wade returned to the couch, reached for the remote control, and turned the television up.

The roundtable discussion had turned to the Red Sox and the need for ownership to *spend, spend, spend* in free agency. He remembered that Elizabeth hated the seats at Fenway Park. She said anyone with a butt like hers couldn't fit, but she was exaggerating. There wasn't a thing wrong with her. She often reminded him that the reason she couldn't shed the extra pounds was simple: She loved food and loathed exercise.

The walks around the pond were his idea.

•••

He told her the road circling the reservoir was a two-and-a-half-mile loop, they could start with one lap and then work their way up. He was genuinely curious, having never seen it for himself. That part of Cambridge was a far cry from Harvard Square, but apparently there was a golf course, too. You couldn't see a thing from the roadway, so the rumor of hidden

“He peered around the corner and watched Elizabeth close the score sheets and bow her head, as if in prayer, before lifting her hand to play again.”

attractions amongst the blight intrigued him.

Their first time out, they decided on one lap but would keep their options open. They soon came upon a children's playground, with a mother pushing her child on a swing, three boys on the merry-go round, two girls in pigtails at the ends of a seesaw.

Wade told Elizabeth how quiet it was when she or Laura weren't at the piano, almost like a tomb. In fact, he bet that the piano was going twelve hours a day.

Elizabeth scoffed. "Like I have that much spare time," she said, "I *wish*. Besides, Laura's in her room all day with all her keyboards and barely comes out anymore to play the upright."

"I'm forced to listen to the piano so much that I'm starting to feel uncomfortable in the quiet," Wade said, in mock exasperation.

"*Forced?*" Elizabeth said, slapping her thigh, "Who's forcing anything? Besides, haven't you noticed that it's never quiet around the house regardless?"

"How do you mean? Wade asked.

It was then that she mentioned the birds.

"Have you really not heard them?" she asked. "They're flying all around the yard constantly," she said, her fingers twitching with flight. "They've got nests in the trees, they're fighting with the squirrels all the time, making all kinds of noise. It's *constant*. It's *impossible* to miss."

"I know," Wade said, "I've heard them."

"No, you haven't," she said.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

She stopped walking and held an arm out to stop Wade in his tracks. "Close your eyes," she said.

He hesitated.

"Stand still and close your eyes," she repeated, turning to face Wade, grabbing his shoulders.

He obeyed, eager to indulge her spontaneity.

"Now, listen," she said, releasing him.

Sure enough, the sound filled his ears, an entire chorus, whirling round his head, thick with vibration. He turned left and right to capture it all. He must have heard the birds as soon as he had entered the Fresh Pond Reservoir, and they must have been causing a clamor the whole time he had been walking along the path, but somehow, he had missed it. The intensity of the chatter was almost overwhelming, the unprocessed sounds engulfing his mind, until finally he opened his eyes.

"See," Elizabeth said, triumphant. "It's never quiet. Any time you think so, just listen."

He didn't respond but privately admitted he couldn't argue with her. They walked on, hand in hand, commenting on various birds along the way.

"Look at that puffy brown one up there," Wade said, pointing up at a maple. "He could stand to shed a few pounds."

"He needs a diet more than I do," Elizabeth said.

"That's a huge pack of geese in the water," Wade said.

"Look at the white patches on their cheeks," Elizabeth said.

"Do geese have cheeks?" Wade asked.

They continued their stroll, occasionally stopping, their eyes constantly scanning. "Oh, and look at that one over there," Elizabeth said, indicating a birch. "It's got a red crown. What is that? A woodpecker?"

Eventually, they came across a Wildlife Habitat sign nailed to a conifer with color pictures behind plexiglass that showed the common flora and fauna in the area. They started with the trees.

"A big-toothed aspen?" Wade said. "A tree with teeth?"

"It says right here it's named for its leaves that have these thingies on them that look like teeth," Elizabeth said.

"Thingies?" Wade asked. "Is that the technical term?"

Elizabeth went through the fauna. "Look at this," she said, grabbing Wade's elbow, "it says Fresh Pond is home to a hundred and forty-nine species of birds." She looked at Wade to make sure he was listening. "Wow, they must make a lot of noise."

"Okay, okay," Wade said, pulling away. "I get it. I surrender."

"Oh, and look at this. Guess how deep the pond is," Elizabeth said, reading from the sign.

"I don't know. Ponds must be shallow, right? Maybe ten or fifteen feet," Wade said.

"Fifty," Elizabeth said.

"That's a lot deeper than I would have guessed," Wade said.

They turned around and faced the water. "I wonder why it's not a small lake," Wade said.

"Let's find out," Elizabeth said, pulling out her cellphone. "It says that if sunlight can reach the bottom, it's a pond, but if the water is deep enough that sunlight can't reach, it's a lake."

"So what does that make you?" Wade asked. "A





Spring Messenger

Amylane Reeve

...

His chest uncoiled, which prompted Wade to leave the confines of the couch. The grief counselor had told him to write, to get it all down—whatever came into his mind and not worry about grammar and all the rest, and it didn't need to make sense either; the act of writing itself would help. The need to clarify would come naturally, she said, and the clarification would make him feel better. He doubted it at the time, but now the urge clawed at him. He sat down at the kitchen table with the silver pen and leather-clad journal the grief counselor had offered as a gift.

He wrote a careful sentence, reread it, moved the words around, added and subtracted, but no matter what he did, it sounded false. He tore out the page from the journal and tried again. Maybe start with only a few words and build slowly. He scribbled on the page, read the words, then crossed them out. Elizabeth had become a problem to solve, and description wouldn't suffice. He had to mark her down on the page, to celebrate her, but she kept receding, she weighed down the paper and fell through the lines.

He formed a picture of Elizabeth in his mind, but he couldn't see, she was too close, her lines too thick and heavy. He needed distance, but when he tried to access that distance, she disappeared, her lines melted away, she became flow without substance and floated away. He turned to a new page, smoothed the crease, and started again, but no matter what he wrote, she fell away. He placed the cap onto the pen and tossed the journal across the table. It fell onto the floor with the pages flying open.

He descended the stairs into the basement. Elizabeth liked to tease and call it his *workshop*. He owned some basic power tools, cans of paint with lids poorly secured, a couple of hammers, a motley assortment of nails and screws jumbled together in a bucket, random pieces of wood and sheets of sandpaper. He was never any good with his hands and didn't understand how such creativity was possible. He only knew he did not possess it. At the bottom of the stairwell, he found it was cool and comfortable, with the smell of moss permeating.

pond or a lake?"

"What do you think?" Elizabeth asked.

"I'd say lake," Wade said.

"Is that an insult?" Elizabeth asked.

"Not at all," Wade said. "Lakes are far more beautiful than ponds."

"But they have more hidden creepy crawly creatures hiding in the dark at the bottom," Elizabeth said.

"But more depth, more mystery," Wade said. "I wish I could be a lake."

"Don't be too hard on yourself, you're a good-sized pond," Elizabeth said.

"Not too shallow?" Wade said.

"What's wrong with shallow?" Elizabeth asked.

"Plenty of sunshine at the bottom."

They walked ahead in silence until they reached the golf course. He noticed a mother duck with mottled brown feathers leading her yellow ducklings from the brush into the water. He wondered if the ducklings would be old enough to fly south by the time winter arrived.

"I wish I could do that," Elizabeth said. "Just fly away when things get tough."

He turned on the light and stood before the wood workbench he had purchased at a yard sale.

He looked along the walls to see what materials he might scrounge up: broken table legs, dented end table, moldy headboard, discarded bureau, warped bookshelf, and a decaying chest of drawers. Okay, he would make do.

He assumed cutting two symmetrical pieces for the roof would be easy enough, but once he finished and pressed the pieces together for comparison, he found they were far from a perfect match. But, he went ahead anyway and cut out the four pieces for the front, two sides, and back. He pressed the front and back pieces together and then the two side pieces. His lines were uneven, and the gaps obvious, no doubt it would slant once he fastened it all together, but the idea of finishing was more important than perfection. But, there was one problem he couldn't solve: how to carve out the hole in the front? He turned the wood over in his hand while he considered. He would have to cut a circle, obviously, but he didn't have the right equipment.

He could pick up a jigsaw tomorrow. In the meantime, he plugged in the power-sander and went to work. Luckily, he owned safety glasses, so he was able to keep the dust out of his eyes, but he didn't have anything for his mouth besides the collar of his shirt.

When he finished, he marveled at the improvement. The four disparate pieces looked more like a unified whole now. The grain was exposed, and the imperfect lines brought out the character of the wood. Maybe he wouldn't paint it, as he had initially thought. Maybe he would use a polyurethane? Or a shellac? Was there a difference?

He turned his attention to the paint. He grabbed a can of red, removed the lid, and peered inside. The pigment had separated from the oil. He found a used paint stick and stirred a couple of times, dredging the color up from the bottom and mixing it with the oil floating on top. After much effort, the pigment spread evenly, surprising Wade with its clarity. He kept mixing until all the material inside the can turned candy red. He opened the other cans and stirred their contents until he was satisfied. Now he had options: forest green, eggshell white, and sky blue.

He pulled at drawers and turned over buckets looking for a good brush, the few he had were caked in dried paint. Soon he gave up and located a can of thinner, half-full, on one of the shelves under the bench next to an old dish rag and began cleaning the goop

out of one of the brushes. He dipped it into the can of sky blue and painted a tiny corner on the workbench. The paint was thick and completely covered the uneven grooves in the wood. He decided to remove all the materials from the bench and paint the entire top.

When he finished, he saw the paint had covered all the dings, splotches, and dents. The brush needed to be cleaned once more, but he was out of thinner, so he tossed it in an empty bucket. He could pick up some new ones tomorrow. Some more wood, too. Better wood. And more tools, as well. Better tools. And paint. And thinner. And don't forget the jigsaw. And a mask.

He arranged the wood in a circle on the damp cement floor and nudged the various pieces with his foot, pushing them in different directions, considering. He had a tree in mind. The thick maple out back was perfect. But, what's the sense of going through all this trouble if the house didn't look right? The birds might like it, but that didn't matter.

He found a tape measure, bent down on his hands and knees, and began marking up the wood with a pencil. Tonight was practice, he decided, his first attempt, and he had much to learn. Tomorrow, he could try again. While measuring and adjusting, he considered ways to improve the design, with every idea prompting another question. But, he kept working through the night, encouraged by the solutions he was able to find.





i hope you think over this time
 about all you have done
 maybe all the tears i've shed crying will amount to something when wrung

embarrassment and pain are all i feel when i think of being with you
 but please, from my neck, remove your heel so that maybe i can breathe anew

i'm crying but i'll never be heard
 over the waves of your lack of care and while i'm inducing the blood
 you're sitting pretty over there

i'll take the vitamin c
 and you will swallow the air
 i dont get how some people can be just so grossly unaware

i've carved into my thigh
 words you would never say
 slowly realizing i've wasted my time as my skin starts to fray
 so go hang out with your high school friends who think youre so cool
 for having sex while midnight ends where i play the laying fool

i'm crying but i'll never be heard
 over the waves of your lack of care and while i'm inducing the blood
 your sitting pretty over there

i'll take the vitamin c
 and you will swallow the air
 i dont get how some people can be just so grossly unaware

6000mg lyrics

dog fanclub

Wishing for a Tie

Megan Tapley



theme & variations on the roadkill trope

Macie Hayden

i'm driving one march and it's daytime, early afternoon.
the oak trees are budding in north carolina. the air smells
raw and rotten and i don't know why until i turn
a curve and see a dog sprawled across the yellow
center lines, his black fur bloodied and buzzing
with flies. that day i am a nightgown, hung in a closet
covered by a thick sheen of dust. the next i am my own
feet, dirty in the dirt and washed clean by mercy.
guilt is a fleeting feeling. it sways in my chest
like two dancers who could not be less in love
but more determined to continue waltzing
just to pass the hours. i loved her like that.
because there was nothing else to do. nowadays
i don't seem to like anything i write—every subject

feels both impossible to hold and inseparable
from the top layers of my skin. back to washing
my feet: sometimes i feel like i have too much
god in me to access some innate and honest
emotion i've been hiding. when i feel that way i drive
down highways and backroads for hours, curbing my car
downtown and picking up my feet when i roll
over train tracks, because a girl in high school
told me once that if your feet are on the ground
in a train's path, you won't ever get married;
i'm sorry if you disagree with the institution,
i do too most days. anyway, i promised
to make a statement about guilt, so here:
today i am a dead dog in the road, tomorrow i am the flies.



Threads of Connection

Emily Shelton

Living Room Playing Cards

Keyana Dayev

“We bury, for a time or for a lifetime, contradictions that might lead to revisions or reconstruction. Yet, ultimately such inconsistencies have the potential to resurface, piercing through our complacency like small daggers.”

- Susan Fisher Sterling on Carrie Mae Weems

I'd love to break the ice
take up some space

with this voice
of mine

but this room
is temporary

this place
is for fun

and games
and not

what's on

my mind

Yes

this is
a safe space

my friends
are light

full of
love

Where

is
this empty

feeling
going

if I keep
the game going

No

I lied
I know

where it goes
it builds a home

in my body
wanting more

of the same

Primary Thoughts, Secondary Actions

Megan Tapley





Georganna

JD Boatwright

Georganna

JD Boatwright

Georganna speak your mind
What's not said will be left to time
Time's in an hourglass
All things shall pass
Georganna speak your mind

Georganna, please don't leave
You don't know what you mean to me
Every season has an end
I've only got my heart to lend
Georganna, please don't leave

Georganna I hate to see
The look on your face when you're not happy
I know everything's a mess
I know that you tried your best
Georganna smile for me

Georganna speak your mind
What's not said will be left to time
Time's in an hourglass
All things shall pass
Georganna speak your mind

Georganna, let's run away
Look for tomorrow in a brand new place
Anywhere you wanna go
I never could tell you no
Georganna, let's run away

Steel Toe *Macy James*



grief grows scales

Macie Hayden

granny keeps a calendar / from the first national bank nailed / to the living room wall under / the clock that chimes on the hour / and it's a red-letter-day / so we'll take the outside quilt / and two cans of diet cherry vanilla dr. pepper / underneath the bridge / splash in creek puddles / broken glass bottles in the mud / hexagonal glitter from powerbait tins / scattered across my fingertips / drying after separating / from the neon paste / papaw used to roll in rough hands / and use to bait hooks / i wind fishing line around little fingers / i play ispy in muddy water / i cannot see through / papaw used to play with me / he used to pretend to see rainbows / on the rainbow trout / because there's nothing wrong / with a little refraction / after all / aren't we all just / passing through? / he says this too / but papaw can't get down the bank / anymore, so he sits on the porch / and waits to hear *i caught one!* / in two months / we will catch lightning bugs / in four we will buy flowers / for corinth baptist decoration day / but for right now we are fishing / i'll see you in a little while.

meet the creators



Emily Shelton is an artist & educator based in South Carolina with a focus in soft sculpture & recycled materials. She recently earned her Master of Fine Arts from Winthrop University and currently works as an elementary art teacher. Her artistic journey has been an exploration of unifying themes, with a particular focus on her local flora and fauna and empathy. Emily intertwines the beauty of nature with the human experience and often combines recycled textiles with found & natural objects to craft experiences that evoke contemplation & connection. Through her art, she aims to spark curiosity & reflection, inviting viewers to consider their place within the interconnected web of art, nature, and humanity.

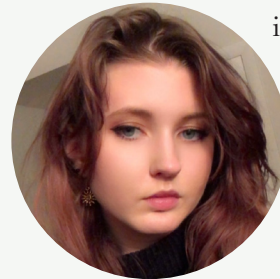


Hanna Gelwix's work explores memory, material, and process through photography, focusing on themes of presence & impermanence. Working with both digital & film formats, she embraces tactile, experimental methods that allow the medium to shape the narrative. Since 2019, she has created long-exposure images using everyday objects & light manipulation, capturing fleeting moments and the interplay of light, space, and emotion. Her evolving series reflects shifts in identity, environment, and time. Originally from Michigan, she moved to North Carolina six years ago for school, and the region continues to influence her practice. Select works are available at hannagelwix.com.

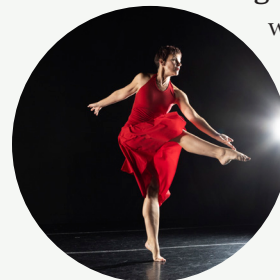


Arden Stockdell-Giesler is a queer poet using poetry to explore the intertwined relationship between grief, intimacy, and identity. Recipient of the Brooklyn Poets Fellowship, their work appears in *Broken Antler Magazine*, *Brooklyn Poets*, *Bruiser Magazine*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Eunoia Review*, *Allium Journal of Poetry and Prose*, *Bullshit Lit: HORNS*, Rachel Bochner's

EP Lovergirl, and elsewhere. They are from North Carolina and currently live in Brooklyn, New York. You can keep up with Arden's work on Instagram at [@17blackberries](https://www.instagram.com/@17blackberries).



Micah Brewer is a published writer who is currently a substitute teacher and a master's student completing a dual degree program. Her poems often immet hints of her roots from South Carolina, though she now lives in Pennsylvania. Outside of writing & teaching, she enjoys whispering calamitous secrets to her houseplants or visiting the nooks & crannies of bookstores. She often finds inspiration for her work through her environment & travels. Her writing has appeared in *Bridge Ink Magazine*, *Teach. Write.*, and university publications.



Angela Gallo is a movement expert, wellness advocate, and travel coach who empowers people to reconnect with their bodies, minds, and spirits through travel & movement. As the artistic director of *Sapphire Moon Dance Company* and dean and professor of dance emeritus, she has spent over 20 years teaching dance, somatics, and Pilates in higher education. Angela's performance highlights include: *White Wave Dance Festival*, the *Dancenow Downtown Festival*, *Dance Theatre Workshop*, and *Williamsburg Arts Nexus (WAX)* in New York City; the *Edinburgh Fringe Festival* in Scotland and the *Fringe Festival of Independent Dance Artists (fFIDA)* in Toronto; and the *Piccolo Spoleto Festival*, *Alabama Dance Festival*, *Charlotte Dance Festival*, *Dimensions Dance Festival* in the Southeast. She has danced with *AmDAT: Dance Art Technology (NY)*, *Eisenhower Dance Ensemble (MI)*, and the *Power Company (SC)* and worked on smaller projects with *Ballet Preljocaj (France)* and *Anou Skan (France)*. She has also been a guest choreographer for *South Carolina Ballet*, *Columbia Classical Ballet*, *Vibrations Dance Company*, the *Power Company*, and others.



Moyan Wang is a multidisciplinary artist and MFA candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her work spans ceramics, painting, and sculpture, drawing from Chinese heritage & personal diasporic experience to explore cultural memory, labor, and environmental degradation. Wang's recent projects center on spring as a contested symbol of growth, often referencing propaganda & historical trauma. Based in North Carolina, she integrates locally sourced wild clay & minerals to root global narratives in specific landscapes. The works evoke tenderness & dissonance, fusing human, animal, and botanical forms in spaces of transformation & unresolved memory.



Emma Rich is an abstract painter based in Bluffton, South Carolina. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in painting and minor in fiber arts from Savannah College of Art and Design in Spring 2024. Her work has been exhibited in galleries, earning awards and honors, across Georgia & South Carolina. Her work has also been published globally both online & in magazines. Her work explores themes of connection & life through explorations of recurring shapes & patterns found in nature.

James E. Stephenson is the oldest of six brothers & sisters. He grew up in one-high-school towns in Texas & Arkansas. He earned degrees from Yale University & Duke University. He was a trial lawyer for 18 years. Then, he led a 1,000-employee company for 25 years. Now, he writes.



Richard Hurteau is an Americana musician from a small shrimping village in South Carolina. He is currently releasing singles to prepare for his upcoming solo album. His sound comes from his pride in lyrics and desire to match those with complimenting instrumentation. Richard also has a rock group, Richard and The Twins, that he collaborates with extensively.



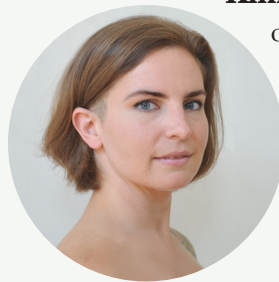
Zander Lyvers is originally from Columbia, South Carolina, but he currently lives in Madrid, Spain where he teaches social studies. He published his first novel, *Last Great American Whale*, in 2021. He has recently published stories in Deal Jam Magazine, All Existing Literary Magazine, and Dionysian Public Library.



Mostly operating on the other side of the fence protecting creative works & brands, **Carlynn Ferguson** moved to Charlotte from Chicago, drawn to the city's youth, appreciation for the arts, beautiful weather, and trees. Inspired by color & nature, she gravitates towards ethereal abstract oil & watercolor landscapes, experimenting with blending (and not blending) colors and incorporating the occasional gold leaf.



Jordan Veres is a Jewish musician/songwriter/composer/lyricist/producer, shutterbug, poet, sculptor, artist, and welder currently residing in the Upstate of South Carolina. If you need to contact Jordan, he can be reached at krupafan8@gmail.com. Or, if you are interested in hearing his music, he can be found on YouTube as The Dearest Truth (General Variety).



Kim Melohn is a multi-disciplinary circus performer & coach specializing in contortion & vertical apparatus, making gravity her bitch since 2014. Known for high-energy acts filled with intricate wraps, daring drops, splits-for-claps, and corny humor, she brings bold personality to every performance. Now based in North Carolina, Kim is passionate about using circus as activism—harnessing movement to challenge perspectives & advocate for change. She recently produced *I Am Woman, Watch Me Bleed* to raise funds for Planned Parenthood South Atlantic and support her Carolina community. *Headshot by Elsie Smith.*



Haley Jameson (she/her) is a queer autistic writer from South Carolina. Her most recent work appears in *The Mitre*, *Rattle*, *Pink Apple Press*, *The Promethean*, and *Bananamilk Magazine*. She is an MFA student of creative writing at the City College of New York. Find her chronically on Instagram @QAWriterHaley.



Matthew Anderson is a prose poet & essayist living in Portland, Oregon. He was born and lived in Central, South Carolina most of his life, and he studied at Clemson University. He is currently working on a memoir that will bridge his time in the Carolinas with his life in Portland.



sarAika movement collective, founded by queer immigrant women Aika Takeshima (Japan) and Sara Pizzi (Italy), is a bold voice in the New York City contemporary dance scene, using multidisciplinary performance to uplift stories of identity, migration, and social justice. Since its 2021 launch, the collective has delivered over 300 performances, performing at Lincoln Center, New York City Center; appearing on a Times Square billboard; and touring in Japan, Sweden, and Italy. Continuing to break artistic boundaries, they recently earned a 2025 residency at University Settlement and a commission from IATI Theater. sarAika shares Carolina Muse's mission to amplify diverse voices across mediums.



Considered to be one of the only artists in the United States to continue on in the painting genre started by Yaacov Agam, **Al Torres** has taken on the challenge to proceed further in this style. He is doing this in a representational manner. The visual effect in this unique genre of painting is perceived as movement, revealing & concealing at the spectator's pace. Incredibly, he paints directly onto the painting surface, which are

aluminum angles, at 45 degrees. Torres received his MFA in painting from the New York Academy of Art. His work has been exhibited in venues such as the Hickory Museum of Art in Hickory, North Carolina. He is represented by the Hidell Brooks Gallery in Charlotte, North Carolina. His website is: www.altorresart.com.



Angela Heiser lives near Raleigh, North Carolina. Much of her writing is inspired by hikes with her family, exploring North Carolina's forests & coastal regions. She writes to immortalize the memories of her children discovering something new to love about nature. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *The Poetry Lighthouse*, *The Red Mud Review*, and *County Lines*. Her poem "Cornhusker" was awarded the Poetry Genre Winner for the 2024-2025 issue of *The Red Mud Review*. She is an alum of *Writers in Paradise* and reads for *Abode Press*, *Wildscape*, and *Libre Lit*.



Patricia K.B. Manley is a freshman at Western Carolina University in North Carolina. She is the former design editor for *Crashtest*. She has been published in *Johnny America*, and her short story "Slip" is forthcoming in the ninth edition of *Paper Crane Journal*. She received a Silver Key from the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards for an essay in 2022 and another Silver Key for her fiction portfolio in 2024. Read her flash fiction piece "Vesti La Giubba" on the *Johnny America* website. In her free time, Patricia enjoys exploring the Appalachian outdoors, making crafts, drawing, sewing, and knitting.



Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, and illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a Bachelor's degree in design. Her first personal exhibition, *My soul is like a wild hawk* (2002), was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology. In 2005, she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, which draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was *The Red*

Book, dedicated to rare & endangered species of animals & birds. She also writes fairy tales & poems and illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren.



Andrew Haynes graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English in 1992 from Keene State College and completed his Master's degree in English from the University of New Hampshire in 1996. He is currently teaching English as a Second Language in Lowell, Massachusetts.



Amylane Reeve is a photographer, writer, and illustrator based in Nashville whose love for storytelling is influenced by the natural world. She was raised in rural Appalachia and has a strong love for the mountains, seaside, and culture tied to the Carolinas. She draws creative inspiration from the coastal landscapes or wandering through celebrated towns deeply enriched in history. She believes that stories & moments are best captured through multiple forms of media, and her work reflects a thoughtful blend of craft, connection, and place.



Katherine Anne Ledbetter, **dog fanclub**, is a North Carolina born & raised artist currently residing in Tallahassee, Florida. As a child, she performed all over the Triad in various musical & operatic performances. Ms. Ledbetter has studied classical voice at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts in Winston-Salem, NC and at Florida State University in Tallahassee, FL. While her main focus is opera, she also enjoys performing in the more modern or indie style. She released her first full-length album under her solo project name, dog fanclub, entitled *it won't last forever* December 2022 and has a new one on the way. She also has a dog named Texas Pete (no relation). Instagrams: @katoutboy & @dogfanclubmusic



Megan Tapley is an artist growing up and residing in Irmo, South Carolina. She works primarily in ceramics & mixed media. Her work focuses on identity, specifically what it means to be a woman in the South, and how she has broken those traditions throughout her life. Her work is rich with pattern & texture, symbolizing her familial ties to textile work. The patterns created help Tapley reconcile with her life & choices. The vessels published here represent Tapley's realization of what it means to be autonomous over herself and her life. She hopes to inspire tangible change with her work and continues to focus on socio-political problems throughout her practice.



Macie Hayden is a poet born & raised in the Blue Ridge Mountains. From West Jefferson, North Carolina, they are now earning their Bachelor of Arts in creative writing and literature from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Macie is extremely passionate about activism surrounding Appalachia and the rural South as well as queer & trans joy & liberation and, of course, all things poetry. Their work also appears in *Eunoia Review*, but otherwise is awaiting publication. You can connect with them on X/Twitter as well as Instagram under the handle @macewritespoems.



Keyana Daye is a poet based in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she writes poems exploring relationships & nature. She's a lover of letters, cats, and flowers. When she cannot be found crafting fun beverages, it is normal to find her wandering the many walking trails of North Carolina or tucked away inside of a book.



JD Boatwright is a product of small town South Carolina (Monetta, SC), where his songs were shaped by a large family & farm background. As a songwriter, JD uses his upbringing in the rural South to weave tales that evoke raw, human emotion, and connection. His debut

album, *Songs Outta My Head*, consists of 12 songs written by JD that run the spectrum of love, loss, and good times, while also provoking thoughtfulness & community. With songs that feel timeless & pertinent, JD finds his own way through a continuing tradition that many Southern storytellers have blazed before him. Whether performing in local venues or recording in makeshift studios, JD's authenticity shines through, proving that even the smallest places can shape voices that resonate far & wide.



Art Editor, Lilliana Cameron is a visual artist who has lived all over the Carolinas and is now residing in Greenville, SC. She is an alumni of the College of Charleston, where she majored in studio art & arts management with a minor in art history. In her art, she aspires to capture

beauty in the small, everyday moments and inspire a sort of introspection. She works in a variety of mediums but has a strong love for oil paint, watercolor, and charcoal.



Macy James is a rising senior at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Here, she finds her immense love for sculpture & ceramics. She enjoys working with sheet metal, wheel-throwing, and hand-building clay. She has called Mebane, North Carolina,

home for her entire life, as has her family for multiple generations. She feels a deep connection to rural North Carolina because it is where she grew up. She spends most of her summers at Hyco Lake, NC, enjoying the peacefulness of the water. She also finds solace in the North Carolina mountains, where she enjoys hiking. Her art is strongly rooted in the rural North Carolina lifestyle because she strives to make art for hard-working, everyday people who appreciate a simple life.



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

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

meet the team



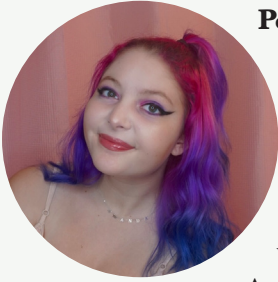
Editor-in-Chief, Madison Foster

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



Music Editor, Jake Shores is a multidisciplinary artist from Greensboro, NC, with a background in theater, music, visual, and literary arts. He is a recent graduate from High Point University, receiving a degree in English with a focus on writing and a minor in theater. He plans to further pursue his education by

studying poetry at the graduate level while continuing work on his other creative pursuits in a non-academic setting. He is inspired largely by the natural world and by his interactions with people. His work takes on the challenge of putting a name to the indescribable.



Poetry Editor, Amanda Conover

is a queer writer based in Raleigh, NC. She has a BA in English from Elon University and is currently a student in Arcadia University’s MFA in Creative Writing program, where she specializes in poetry.

Amanda has been the poetry editor for Carolina Muse ever since volume I, issue II and absolutely loves everything she gets to do with the literary & arts magazine. Along with her studies and editor responsibilities, she works full time in scholarly publishing, getting to contribute to the publication of scientific articles in journals.



Stories Editor, Aidan Mel

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

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



Communications Strategist, Misbah Chhotani

is based in Burlington, North Carolina. She received a Bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Currently, Misbah is preparing to

pursue graduate studies in hopes of becoming an occupational therapist. In

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

Newsletter Writer, Jenna Kay



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

manager for an online community

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



credits

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

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

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





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