

CAROLINA MUSE

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LITERARY & ARTS MAGAZINE



CAROLINA MUSE

literary & arts magazine

VOLUME V • NO. III • OCTOBER 2025



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From the Editor

The past repeats itself. This is something you hear growing up: in history class, in relationships, in nature. But, as many times as we hear it, we're always shocked when it happens. Sometimes, we're so disconnected from the past that we don't realize it's happening again until it's too late. Of course, as 2025 has unfolded, it is impossible for many of us to ignore the cycle of events that echo the origination of some of the largest-scale traumatic events in history. Each day, those in power feed a dangerous fire of fear that seeds a distrust of science and a hatred of those different from them. This festering fire has engulfed our country, and its impact feels tragically predictable.

As history repeats itself in real time, it takes no effort for us to feel hopeless. In moments of anguish, I wonder why humanity gets the say in whether life on this planet, human or otherwise, persists. No living thing should have this power, and yet, our innate greed is what's causing dysregulation in the Earth's ecosystem, both human-to-human and human-to-planet. As I reflect on how we got here, I wonder: How can we truly learn from our mistakes?

I believe conquering this cycle requires a collective reckoning that we can never settle into complacency in the fight for justice & equity. And, of course, I believe that one way this movement can persist is through the creation & consumption of art. Something we love talking about here at Carolina Muse is how art is a means of finding connection with yourself, with others, and with the world. This connection can dissolve differences and can facilitate understanding & empathy. In this small way, our hope is that we hold fast to the parts of humanity that are good—the ways we care for one another and our passion to create.

The work in this issue shows ways we can learn from the past, how we come to terms with our own impermanence, and what it looks like to connect with ourselves & nature when the world is overwhelming beyond our control. As you read, I hope you feel moments of peace that give you respite in this dark time we're living in, and moments of discomfort that remind you what's at stake.



Madison



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Extinction

Jeffery Allen Tobin

At the museum, we walked
between the glass cases,
your hand brushing the sleeve of my coat,
always just lightly,
as if not to disturb the bones.

You stopped at the great skeleton,
ribs like the beams of an old ship,
and asked, almost shyly,
whether extinction was necessary—
whether the world needed
to be emptied first
before it could begin again.

I think I said something,
something about time,
about conditions changing,
the way adults explain away
what they cannot answer.

Now the house is full of sun.
The garden shivers
under a breeze that lifts
the edges of the pale leaves.
I sit by the sliding door,
watching the light make bright patterns
across the hardwood floor,
and the clock,
always the clock,
heaving every second
every day.

You are nowhere in this house.
And everywhere.

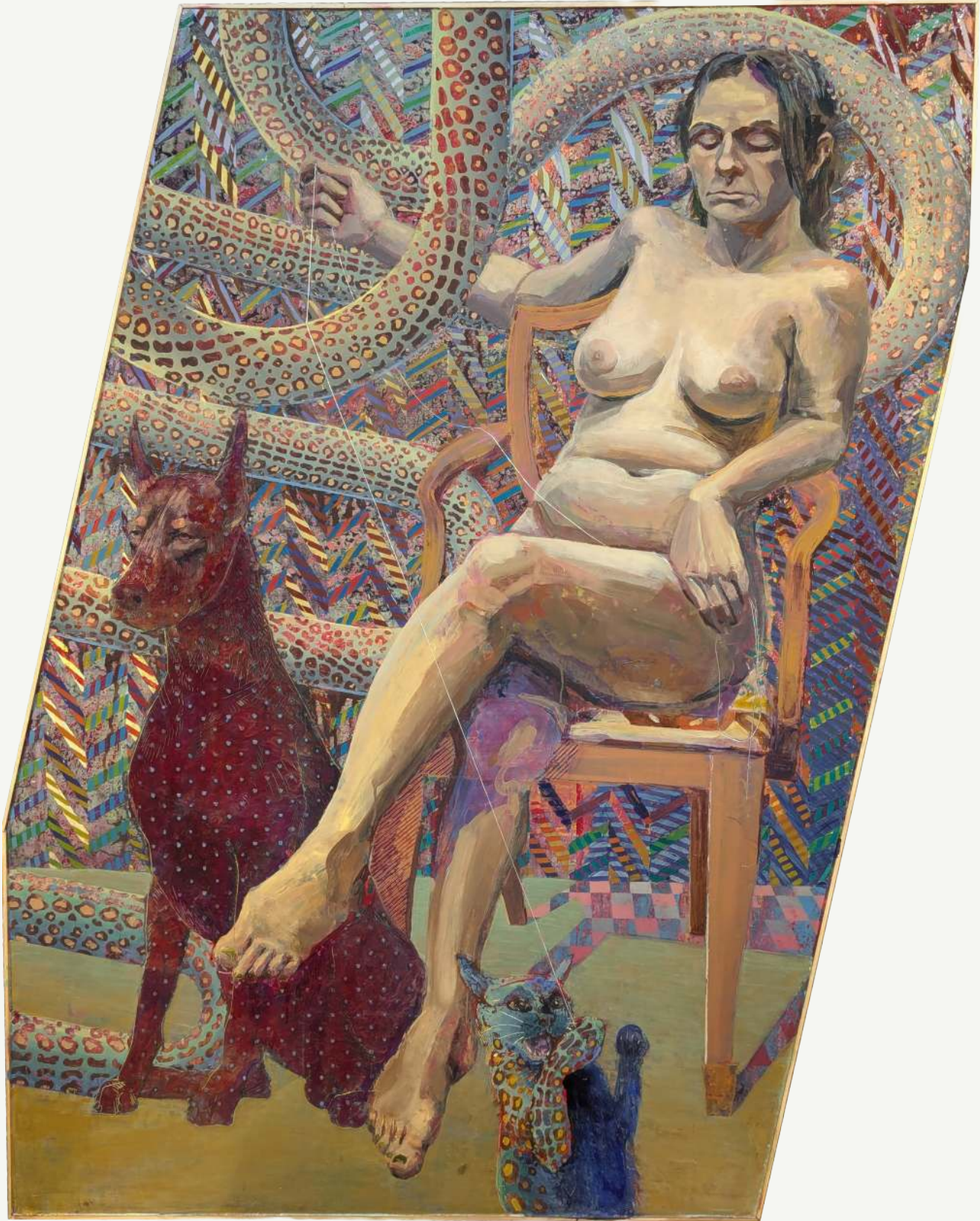
The garden still grows.
The yellow tulips bend and straighten,
the basil seeds push green against the soil,
the light flares briefly at noon
then begins its slow, clean withdrawal.

It was never about necessity.
Extinction is not a decision.
It happens because the heart
cannot think of another way.
It happens because we loved each other,
and even love could not hold
the structure together.

Bones Humming

Sybil Greene





$\Psi(x,t) \rightarrow |\psi|^2$ — aka Sarah *Drew Miller*

Seeing Snakes

Hannah Star Rogers

When I was a child, a snake was something to be afraid of—
 an S-shaped danger, tongue flicking binary: yes/no,
 safe/not, myth/science.
 I watched them through the slats of the porch,
 the way they moved like cursive
 under the barn's loose boards—
 letters written in muscle and dirt.
 In school, the diagram showed
 a cross-section of the fang,
 venom sacs like black grapes,
 a label in Helvetica: *hemotoxin*.
 But that wasn't the same
 as the rat snake under the porch swing
 coiling, not striking.
 She knew something about stillness
 that no textbook could draw.
 I learned: not all snakes rattle.
 Not all fear is useful.
 Sometimes the wild
 is only wild to the uninvited.
 At the nature center,
 a man with a patchy beard
 and a plywood terrarium
 told me: "They're older than us."
 That knowledge has teeth,
 but it doesn't bite.
 Later, I studied their skeletons—
 vertebrae like beads,
 a prayer you can't say aloud.
 The bones do not hiss.
 But the story persists.
 Now, in the garden,
 I see one threading itself
 between stalks of collard greens.
 I don't flinch,
 But witness.
 The earth doesn't care for symbols,
 but it does allow them.
 So I say: the snake
 is a form of seeing—
 a sentence I've just begun
 to read.

Rare Act of Violence

Brett Gordon

Gebelein Man, British Museum, 2024

I'm looking
at your body,
dehydrated apricot
curled, face down.
Voyeur of an unwilling
exhibitionist,
does your soul know?
Perhaps our bodies
after death
do not concern us.
I snap a photo
and feel guilty,
grossly fascinated.
Left shoulder stabbed
in a "rare act of violence"
in ancient Egypt.
Was violence rare?
Or did you just not have
to suffer the 24-hour
news cycle? The first
of 6 bodies excavated,
they nicknamed you "ginger"
for your tufts of terracotta hair.
We don't call you that anymore
due to the museum's ethical concerns,
but we do stare at you
through glass.
No ornate embalming,
no gold sent
for spiritual passage,
no gilded tomb.
Only the rich
get resurrected.



Fuga

Bárbara Rais

Dear Department of Transportation

Hannah Star Rogers

I know you tried—poured the mountain
 down in neat layers,
 laid tar across stone like it might remember
 being part of something larger.
 Every morning I drive past
 the place where my cousin flipped his Honda
 and left the road
 to become part of the underbrush.
 You said the curve was safe.
 The speed limit isn't law, you said.
 It's a suggestion.
 The deer don't read signs.
 The crows don't bother to look both ways.
 Still, you paint the lines again after each rain
 like they might hold us inside the story.
 One day a man in a truck waved me through
 a four-way stop,
 and I stopped
 because he reminded me
 of someone who hasn't been kind in years.
 That's how these roads work—
 you trust strangers
 to not kill you,
 and in return
 you promise not to die in someone else's lane.
 Maybe this is what they mean
 by infrastructure:
 the false intimacy of asphalt.
 The danger that movement is proof
 we're still here.



raceway diptych *Gabby Kiser*



Radioactive Foxes

Alexandra Wings

The wood and wire door of the chicken run squealed open, Lyla's rubber boots squelching in the thick slush of mud and bird dung. The sun was westering, late afternoon light spilling like dense water through the trees that surrounded their property, all choked with creeping vines and tangled shrubbery. An explosion of green.

The birds flocked around her, squat mounds of flailing red-gold feathers and needy squawks—as though this would be the day she finally decided to deny

In the Quiet

Ana Moreno

them the coveted kernels that weighed down her rusted bucket, digging its handle into the tender crook of her arm.

She tossed the kernels, nuggets of gold raining on the bird's heads as they dispersed into an ecstatic feeding frenzy. Lyla watched their convulsive pecking and breathed deep. The air smelt of wet earth, and the hot musk of animal shit, and growing things. She had never known that smell before she came here.

One chicken laid dormant in the far corner of the

run. Lyla went to check on it, turning its body over to find it mauled. Its breast had been split open, a lurid red cleft running through the thick mass of feathers. Half-gnawed organs hung out of its body like the loose threads of a faded pink and purple sweater unraveling into the dirt.

The foxes were back.

Here, nothing was wasted, so Lyla took the gnawed carcass inside, tore out the feathers by the fistful—which she saved in an old soup can, the plumage would make excellent fire-starters come winter—and started butchering. She cut away the backbone and split the breast open like an oyster to find two identical hearts tucked on either side of its chest.

They had chosen this.

Some called it slow-living. The more cynical called it slow-dying. But, they had known the risks and entered their names into the lottery anyway. Having lived the first 25 years of their lives with the suffocating alternative, they decided the peace, the return to the way things once were—the way they should have stayed—was worth the price. Even if they didn't yet know what exactly that price would be. How or when the cost of this paradise would creep inside them, like foxes in a chicken coop.

And, it would be different for each of them. The Rehabilitation Agency had been eager to share happy stories of previous inhabitants living to a comfortable old age, dying peacefully in their beds. But, Lyla had yet to meet anyone over the age of fifty-five in town, and she knew that for every old-timer slipping from this place in their sleep, there were four or five who coughed up pieces of their own lungs. Who died with bodies playing host to more cancer cells than human.

At the time, it had seemed by far and away the better option. Many things did after spending their entire lives in megacity tenements, so tightly packed you could hear all your neighbors every word, every cough, every moan—of sex or death, sometimes it was hard to tell. Anything living and green had been a luxury worth its weight in gold.

Here, she had so much green she could choke on it. So much life she could roast it up and swallow it whole. But, she wondered if it was worth the toll it would take—would she rather live a long life of crowded misery, or one of short-lived beauty, bursting with bounty?

She cooked the chicken in the small range, forgetting again to open the flue, the smell of wood smoke flooding the kitchen. By the time the bird was done, Isaac had come in from the fields. She kissed him, and then they

held each other a moment, Lyla resting with her lips against the damp salt of his neck.

She loved how he smelt after a day working; like dirt and ripped potato-stems and sweat. That smell! Like coming home to something new and familiar at once. Something ancient and animal and pure.

They ate the chicken, one meaty heart set aside for each of them. The dark, coppery flavor was rich, the roasted organs springy to the bite as the hollow chambers of the hearts gave way beneath her teeth. It felt decadent. In the city, they had only ever eaten meal tablets, the artificial flavors labeled things like “Turkey Dinner” and “Pot Roast.” It wasn't until they moved here that they realized what a sorry imitation they were of the real thing.

They cleared up, passing dishes between each other for washing and drying. She thought about asking Isaac if he ever thought of moving back to the city, but every time their hands brushed, she saw the dirt beneath his fingernails—so precious to him he sometimes refused to scrub it out, and the question withered to grit on her tongue.

“Do you want to take a walk?” Isaac asked when they had finished.

Lyla looked out the window. The haze of dusk had fallen over the world, the sunlight gone heavy and golden. It looked slow, the air thick as sap. As though time had suspended. She could almost imagine that the world went on like that forever. That there were no megacities or green-deserts. That no one lived in super-scrapers that speared into the sky like they could cut the skin of God.

“Yeah. Let's walk.”

They walked the two miles into town, their hands entwined, necks swiveling to stare at the forests and fields as they passed. Three years and it still never got old—all that open air. All that earth.

They walked through the center of town, waving at their neighbors—if they could even be called such; no one lived closer than half a mile to each other, the population density carefully controlled.

They passed the old gas station, grown over with kudzu and creepers, vines twirling about the rusted pump stations like a sea-creature tangling a ship in its tentacled-grip.

They wove between the pump stations, stopping to gaze at the one with the red



toy truck lassoed to its base, vines spilling out from the plastic body. One of the tires had been popped off by the leaves unfurling. They'd spent a whole afternoon in their early days here searching for it, but it had been lost to time.

"Do you think the kid survived?" Lyla asked, her hand sweating in Isaac's.

"In my head he did."

That was something she loved about Isaac. If they didn't know the ending of a story, he assumed it was a happy one. She looked out over the square, populated exclusively by thirty and forty-something's packing up shop windows and locking glass doors.

There were no children in the exclusion zone. They constituted an automatic disqualification from the lottery, and a condition of residency was sterilization. They had known this when they entered their names. It had been no great loss then—they'd never wanted to bring a child into the world they'd come from. But, seeing that little truck made it harder. Imagining how things could have been if the world was different.

Isaac led her, wordless, out of the square, and she knew where they were going. The old fairgrounds rose in the distance, the dilapidated rides faded to rust-pocked pastel ghosts in the process of being overtaken by the surrounding forest. An oak tree had grown up through the center of the Ferris-wheel, its branches supporting the dangling metal carriages like a mother with a child in each arm.

When they'd first moved here, they had come to the fairgrounds almost every day, unable to resist the cotton-candy call of the relics of a simpler time. It was like a picture you'd see in a history book, or stepping into one of their grandparents' stories from the world before. She had felt impossibly young and happy, so lucky to have won the lottery. So sure of their choice.

They climbed up the branches of the tree, shuffling into one of the lower carriages. The metal container shifted with their weight, the branch beneath it complaining with a shiver of leaves.

The sun had sundered, the horizon a seam of burning light sandwiched between the dark slab of the earth and the blue-black abyss of the sky. The moon was full, brushing silver light against the oak leaves that

enveloped them like a hidden fortress.

"Do you think we made the right decision?" Lyla asked, thinking of how they might suffer. How painful the toll. They'd lost one of their neighbors just last year, the woman only thirty-nine. By the end, she'd had to breathe through a hole drilled into the base of her throat, the tumor filling her esophagus like an apple swallowed whole.

An owl called somewhere in the woods behind them, the quick punch of the second *hoot* pitching up like a question.

Isaac's thumb ran over the back of her hand, right over the red-brown spots that had appeared there over two months ago. At first, she thought they were freckles, but then they had multiplied, spreading like coffee stains against her skin. They'd started to raise, like something was bubbling beneath her flesh, trying to get out.

"I think it was the only decision."

Her heart dipped down to the bottom of her ribcage, hovering there. She allowed herself one moment to hate it. To hate the cities and their gray, lifeless air that

sucked away your will to live. To hate this place and its deadly beauty, the terrible cost it exacted for such freedom. Then, she breathed in the cool night air, let the smell of rusted metal and

gathering dew soothe the thoughts to a hum, rather than a roar.

A little despair was good; it kept the edges of the world sharp. But, after too long, it just becomes cowardice. She loved this life, loved its dirt-caked rigors and its hot breath on her neck. Had dreamt of it for years. Pasted hundred-year-old photographs of farms and forests on their cubicle walls just so they could play pretend at having what they now held in their hands.

There was a price for everything—you just had to decide which one you were willing to pay.

Something yipped beneath them, and they leaned forward, the carriage tilting with the groan of old metal as they peered through the branches to the ground below. A fox slunk about beneath the Ferris-wheel, seven kits crowding around it like minnows flocking around a breadcrumb.

Lyla wondered if it was the same fox that had killed the two-hearted chicken. She had imagined it mutated,

“There was a price for everything—you just had to decide which one you were willing to pay.”

to mirror the bird. Perhaps with four ears layered like shark's teeth, or an extra tail dragging through the dirt behind it.

But, this creature looked normal. A bit mangey; its fur spread thin over protruding ribs, patchy coat the same red-brown as the spots on Lyla's hands. It looked up, and the moonlight was so bright that even from the distance, Lyla could see the perturbing, vertical slit of the fox's pupil locking on her. It licked its chops, holding their stare as the kits mouthed at its face. Lyla couldn't blame it.

They were all hungry for something.



Death of girlhood

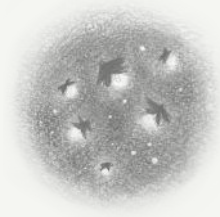
Maddie Foss





Marshland Ruminations

Alexander Rouse



Signalfire

Robin Lowe

Before bed, I walk back to the window
to catch the remainder of the day—
pink to lavender to grey to dusk.
My eyes fall to a magical dance
of fairy lights, popping on and off.
Smiling, I watch the performance—
the fireflies have been waiting
for their time to shine.

I stand mesmerized,
transported to another Appalachian
June night, weaving through my
grandmother's yard, jar in tow,
waving haphazardly to catch a flash
of lightning. My grandparents in their
scratchy green, nylon folding chairs,
watching, eyes affixed to a show
far better than network TV.
My brother and I frantically racing
to see who could capture the most.

I went to bed with a little glow lamp—
fireflies trapped in a jar, lid jagged
with hasty knife holes. Pinned to the
moment, their lights slowing fading
to a dull yellow. Proud and in wonder,
I fell fast asleep believing in fairies
only to wake to dead, brown bugs,
the beauty of the night erased.

Awash in nostalgic bliss, keeping
my gaze on the flickering neon sparkle,
an imaginary presence silently assures me
that they had seen and understood
the mystical flitting and flaming,
announcing to potential mates
“Here I am. Notice me. Look what I can do!”

The irony is not lost
as my solitude drapes over
my shoulders, a familiar comfort.
My heart longs for someone
I may never know. Drowning
mermaids and deathly Siren calls.
I know it is time. Yet.



Lawsons Fort Creek

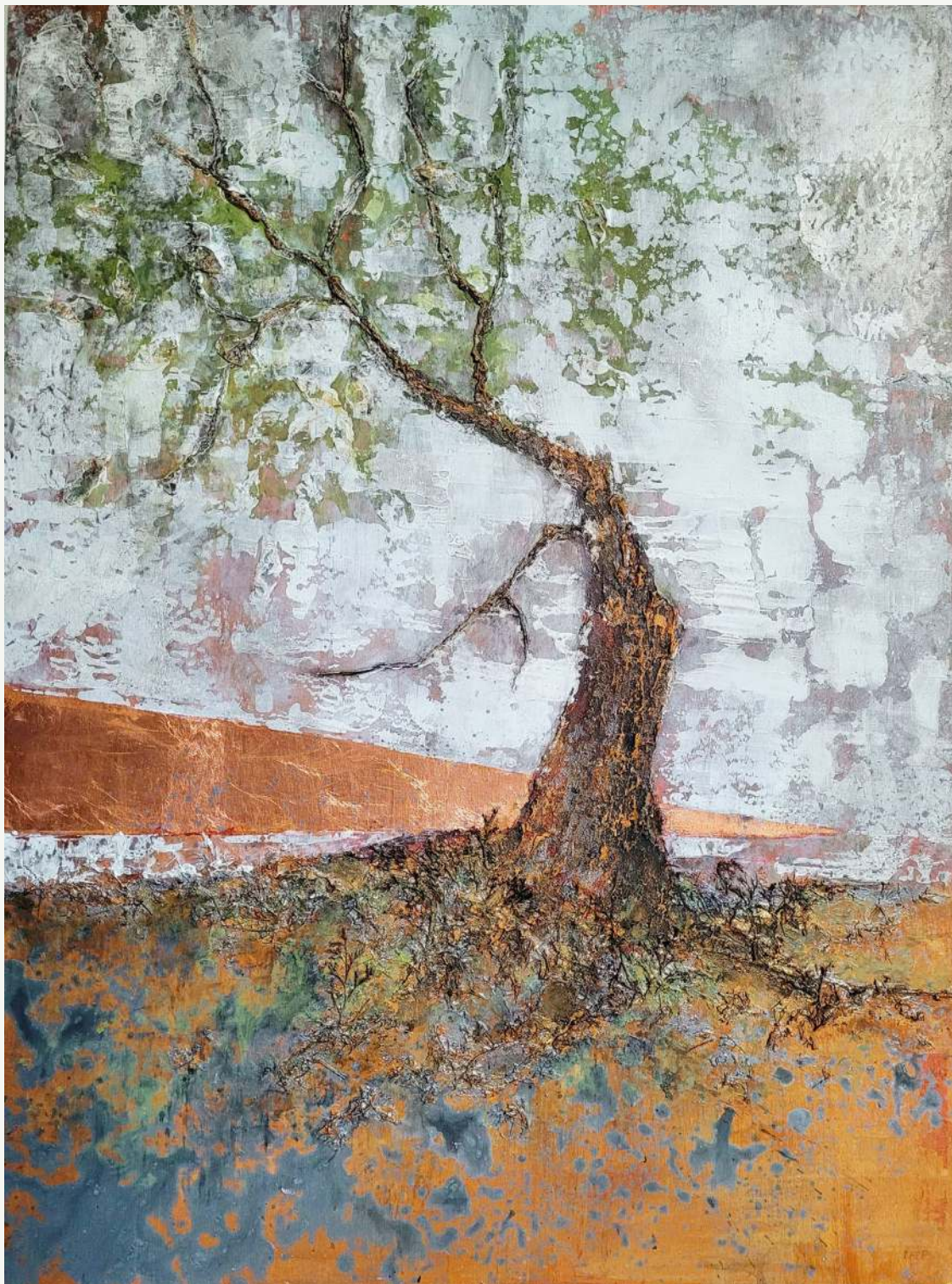
Meta Marie Griffin

The thucks and bubbles take us
swirling in the river's spiral. Your voice
becomes wet branches against sky.

It shoulders into any indentation
past conquered territories then bulks
into waves that hit the spindrift.
Calligraphic images are formed
and washed away.

Birds and squirrels chatter from angles.
We were here years or minutes ago.
Blood root springs up from crevasses
of lichen-covered rocks. A water snake
zig-zags in russets. Leaves deepen their pleats.

The relic ebullient current is alive
with the spirits from many summers ago.
They return to this place with you.
I wait for the river to speak.
I will answer in time.



Rusty Tree

Kathleen Deep



Drawn In

Erika Strickland

Homestead

Jeffery Allen Tobin

Gray road, two lanes, lined with palmetto scrub
and motels that gave up decades ago.
Nothing fancy—just a gas station burrito,
lukewarm coffee, radio static
turning into a preacher's voice,
then just static again.

Somewhere around Florida City,
light changed—more glare than sun.
A billboard peeling back its own name.
A truck loaded with old mattresses
weaving slow across the lane.

Homestead rose like a shrug from the earth.
No skyline, no welcome,
just a sudden weight in the chest.
Like the news had followed the car,
waited quiet till that town
to speak plain.

Could've been the long straight road
or the fields lying fallow,
or how the air felt heavier,
but something settled then—
and stayed.
Like the truth had pulled up a chair
and was ready to talk.

Genesis of What I Do

Arthur Turfa

Flashes of color on coats
and buckskin re-enactors
stood on palisade and field—

not able to read and yet
in my mind, I saw back two
centuries, before steel mill

smoke colored the blue sky and
soft coal trains ran by slag heaps
and towns dotted river banks.

Starting at an early age
I imagined what had been
and later on, what could be.

Some capture it in painting
Others render it in song.
I paint, I sing, in my words.



Ida Red *Kelli N. Scott*

The Coughing House

Joely Williams

The heat pressed down like a mouth on the back of my neck as I pulled into the gravel drive. The house looked smaller than I remembered, though maybe it was just the way everything in childhood grows when you're gone too long. It crouched at the end of the lot, not standing so much as waiting. A squat frame of peeled paint, slanted porch, and broken blinds—like an eye half-shut in suspicion.

I killed the engine but didn't move. Just sat, windows rolled down, letting the cicadas scream their warning.

It was the house that had called me back, not a person. Mama never answered my letters, and Grandma was buried now—next to a man I never met and whose name no one ever said. My cousin, Dee, texted me the news three months late: *She gone. Ain't nobody claim the house.* I didn't reply. I booked the bus ticket three weeks later.

I stepped out of the car, keys in my hand, sweat already soaking through my shirt. The air had that Carolina thickness, like walking through a wet cotton sheet.

The porch sagged beneath me, groaning like it recognized my weight. I slid the key into the lock—still the same old brass cross Grandma swore would keep the Devil out—and turned. The door resisted before finally giving in with a moan.

The first thing that hit me was the smell: mildew, memory, and something just beginning to rot.

Then, the house coughed.

A low, rasping sound, like something stuck in its throat. Not the creak of settling boards, not a draft. A real cough from deep inside its frame.

I froze. My hand still on the doorknob. The air inside held still, too, like it had surprised itself. For a moment, I wasn't sure if I'd imagined it. Then I laughed. Just a quick puff of breath, sharp and stupid.

"Alright then," I whispered. "You remember me, too."

I stepped inside.

The house had changed, but not in the ways I expected. Same wallpaper curling like dried petals.

Same water stain on the ceiling over the kitchen table, shaped like an angel if you squinted. But something else was off. Like the corners had shifted slightly when no one was looking. The living room was too quiet, as if the furniture had learned to hold its breath.

I set my bag down by the couch. The cushions wheezed in protest. My shoes tracked dust across the linoleum floor, each step marking time. The kitchen light flickered when I flipped the switch, then settled into a dull hum.

I opened the fridge out of habit. Nothing but a bottle of hot sauce and an expired jug of buttermilk. I closed it quick. The house didn't like sudden movement.

Upstairs still called to me, but I wasn't ready to answer yet. I needed to sit. To listen.

So, I did. I pulled out the kitchen chair closest to the window—the one Grandma used to sit in with her switch fan and her Bible—and lowered myself into it. Outside, a dog barked once, far off, then silence.

The house was watching me. I felt it. Not in a horror movie kind of way. More like a mother who hasn't decided whether to forgive her child yet.

There was a time when this place was full of voices. Mine, Mama's, Grandma's. The occasional uncle come to sleep it off on the couch. The phone ringing off the hook until someone—usually me—answered with a sigh and a *Hello?* that always hoped for something more.

But that was years ago. Before Mama packed her bags without folding anything. Before Grandma started calling me her sister's name and then stopped calling anything at all.

I ran my hand across the table's edge. The wood was split in places, sticky in others. A lifetime of spills, scrubbed prayers, and too many meals eaten in silence.

Then the house coughed again.

This time, it sounded tired. Not angry. Just old. And maybe lonely.

I stood and walked to the hallway, pausing under the arch where Grandma used to hang dried lavender and cinnamon sticks. The scent was long gone, but the nails were still there.

Something scratched faintly inside the walls.

I closed my eyes.

"Alright," I said aloud, though to what or who I

wasn't sure. "You want to talk? I'm here."

But the house didn't answer.

Not yet.

•••

The upstairs hallway felt narrower than I remembered, like the house had clenched its teeth around its own secrets. I ran my fingers along the wall as I climbed the steps, dragging my touch over the peeling wallpaper. A small part of me hoped it would cough again, just so I knew it was listening.

My old bedroom door stuck before it gave way with a small protest. The air inside was denser than downstairs—hot, layered with dust, perfume, and old skin cells. Everything was coated in that soft film of

abandonment, the kind that turns memory into artifact. The twin bed was still against the far wall, its quilt faded and tucked tight like Grandma used to do. Above it, a corkboard still held tacks and yellowed corners of missing pictures.

There was a dent in the wall from when I threw a lamp at age fourteen. I didn't remember what I was mad about. Probably everything. Mama's voice was still somewhere in that drywall, sharp and sudden:

"Why you always so angry for no reason?"

"You think I had a choice?"

"You got food, don't you?"

She never yelled to hurt. Just to silence. Like noise could cancel out the truth if it was loud enough.

I sat on the edge of the bed and exhaled slowly. The floor groaned beneath me in recognition. Across the



red brick bungalow *Randy Akers*

room, the closet door stood slightly open, like it had been waiting this whole time.

When I was little, I swore something lived in there—something not quite monster, not quite memory. I used to close it tight with a chair pressed against the handle. Grandma told me I had “an old soul,” which was how Southern Black and brown women explained away children who saw too much too soon.

She was right. I was an old soul. But I was also just scared.

The summers Mama left me here, she’d say it like a blessing: “You get to be with Grandma. She’ll teach you how to be a woman.” Then she’d hug me like she was already halfway gone, eyes fixed on something just past the doorframe.

Back then, I thought the house loved her. That it coughed more when she wasn’t here, like it was calling for her. But, maybe I had it backwards. Maybe the house had always tried to warn us.

I remember one August when the air conditioning broke. Grandma tied cold rags around our necks and sat with her legs in a bucket of ice water. I was eight. She told me stories about her first period, her first heartbreak, the first time she buried someone and didn’t cry. That was the day I learned women don’t always bleed from grief—you can just harden instead.

Later, when Mama called, I held the phone and didn’t say a word. I just listened to her breathe.

“Y’all hot over there?” she asked. I said yes.

“Miss me?” she asked. I said nothing.

Then she said, “You ain’t mad at me, are you?” And I hung up before she could tell me not to be.

That night, the house coughed so hard I woke up. I thought maybe it was Grandma, but when I went to her room, she was snoring soft and steady. The house was just... sick. Like it had caught a virus from all the words we never said out loud.

Now, I lay in the old bed of that same sick house. The mattress remembered my shape. That same ache in the middle where all my weight used to fall.

Above me, the ceiling fan hung dead. I remembered once when it worked, Mama standing under it with her wet hair slicked back, trying to look like she wasn’t crying.

She used to come back here between breakups.

Between jobs. Sometimes just to hide from herself. She’d sleep for days, sweat through the sheets, and then one day she’d wake up and make pancakes and call me her “little life raft.”

“You keep me floatin’,” she’d say.

But she never learned how to swim.

I sat up and swung my legs over the side. The room pulsed faintly, like it was breathing beneath the paint. I opened the closet door and found nothing but old shoes and a collapsed box labeled XMAS 2004. I left it untouched.

Downstairs, I boiled water on the stove. The gas burner flared with a sudden whoosh, and I jumped. The house shivered. I placed a tea bag in a chipped mug and waited, staring at the window while the kettle screamed.

When I turned around, the back door was open. Just a crack.

The screen door didn’t move. There was no breeze. I shut it slowly and locked the bolt.

“Okay,” I said out loud. “We’re doing this.”

I carried my tea to the kitchen table and sat down.

The house said nothing.

But, I could feel the pressure in the walls, like it was holding something in. Some breath, some word, some final cough that hadn’t come yet.

And me—just sitting there, waiting to see if it would be my name.

• • •

The next morning, I woke up to a wet cough—not mine.

It was loud this time. From the walls or the pipes or the bones of the place itself, I couldn’t say. But it came from the house. That much I knew.

The air had changed overnight. The smell of mildew deepened, sharper, with a faint metallic edge like blood in water. When I stepped into the hallway, the wallpaper on one side had started to peel in long strips, curling like skin after a sunburn. A slow leak had started in the ceiling—though there was no rain outside—and pooled into a perfect circle in the hallway, just large enough to step around. The drip, drip, drip echoed as I moved through the upstairs, like the ticking of a soft threat.

**“The room pulsed faintly,
like it was breathing
beneath the paint.”**



Downstairs, the front door was unlocked.
I stood still.
I had locked it. I remembered locking it.
The handle was still warm, like someone had touched it just moments before. I opened it slowly, but the yard was empty. The dogwood tree still leaned east. The bird feeder still hung crooked. Nothing out of place—except for the air, which now felt humid with waiting.

I shut the door again and clicked the lock harder this time. Then I did something stupid: I talked to it.
“You trying to tell me something?”
The house creaked. The hallway light flickered.
I waited.
Nothing.
But, something had shifted. Not just the house—me. I hadn’t spoken aloud in over a day. Hadn’t said a real sentence to another person in longer than that. Maybe I missed it. Maybe I missed her.

I opened the kitchen cabinet looking for something, anything. A memory. A can of beans. But there was only a single drinking glass, and inside it, curled like a spider, was a dead leaf. Bone-dry. I didn’t remember any trees with leaves that shape. It was narrow, fragile, black as soot.

The house coughed again. This time it was gurgling, closer to a choke than a cough. I backed away, and the window over the sink began to rattle as if a train was passing—except there was no track anywhere near here.

My skin prickled. I went upstairs.

The attic door was open.

I hadn’t opened it.

I stood at the base of the stairs for a long time. The attic had always terrified me. Not because of what was up there, but because of what wasn’t. Grandma used to store broken furniture and boxes of papers no one read. But I had only ever seen someone go inside once.

It was during a storm. I must have been around ten. Lightning struck so close it made the walls shake. I screamed and hid in the hall. Mama pulled me close and whispered, “We’re still here. Storms don’t take everything.” Then she turned and climbed up into the attic alone. I waited and waited. When she came back down, her face was red. She never told me what she was looking for.

I climbed the attic stairs slowly, each step sounding like a question I wasn’t sure I could answer.

The air up there was stifling. And yet... there

was a breeze. Cold, deliberate. Not a draft. A presence.

The attic was almost empty. Almost.

There was a chair in the center of the room, placed precisely like someone had just risen from it.

And, next to it, a shoebox.

I knelt beside it, my heart thudding a little too fast.

Inside was:

A single baby shoe, white leather, scuffed on the toe.

A Ziploc bag of half-melted cough drops.

A folded letter addressed to Mama in Grandma’s handwriting.

And a photograph: my mother, age maybe sixteen, holding a baby I didn’t recognize.

My breath caught. I sat on the floor and read the letter.

Baby girl,

I know you think I pushed too hard. But, I saw how the world chewed your dreams before you even gave them teeth. I didn’t know how to soften for you. I was scared softness would make you break faster.

You left things here. Not just your clothes. Not just the baby. You left the parts of yourself I don’t know how to carry.

I tried. I tried to keep her safe. But she cried like she already knew she wasn’t wanted. I couldn’t hush her.

Maybe I coughed too loud. Maybe she thought it was her fault.

I’m sorry, baby. I tried to keep the sound from swallowing us whole.

I read the letter twice. Then a third time.

The baby in the picture wasn’t me.

I had no siblings. Mama never said anything. Grandma never told me.

But I knew then—something had been buried here. Not a body, but a truth. And the house had been choking on it ever since.

Behind me, the attic door creaked again.

I didn’t turn around. I just said, “I know.”

The house didn’t cough this time.

It sighed.

A long, hollow release—like it had been holding that breath since before I was born.

• • •

I didn't sleep that night.

I sat at the kitchen table with the box from the attic open beside me, the photograph laid flat, the baby shoe placed gently at my elbow like a question. I stared at the letter. I memorized every loop in Grandma's handwriting. And when the house creaked—soft, deliberate—I listened.

At 3:07 a.m., I opened the bottom drawer of the old hutch. Inside, everything smelled of wood polish and grief. Old utility bills, church bulletins, a checkbook dated 2006, and at the bottom, another envelope. This one had no name, no stamp. Just dust and the faint shape of a cross, as if someone once stored it under a Bible.

Inside: another letter.

To the next one,

If you're reading this, the house has started talking again. I always knew it would.

There's things we bury that don't stay quiet. Not because they're angry, but because they were never allowed to be born right.

Your mama left with a suitcase and came back with a baby she wouldn't name. She stayed for two months, then ran again. I tried to keep the girl. I swear I tried. But she wouldn't sleep. She cried like her voice was already cracked.

Then one day, she stopped. Cold. Nothing wrong, the doctor said. Just stopped. Quiet, just like that.

And, after that, the coughing started.

I folded the paper slowly, as if it might bite me. The words clung to my fingertips. I placed it in the box and closed the lid. I stared at it for a long time.

There had been another child.

A sister. A cousin. A shadow.

Dead in the house.

And no one had ever told me.

I didn't know if I should cry, or scream, or pack my bag and run. Instead, I opened the cabinet above the stove and reached for the half-empty bottle of bourbon I'd brought in case of an emergency. I poured a finger into Grandma's old chipped mug and sipped.

It burned going down. I was glad for that.

Around dawn, I stepped outside. The morning fog lay across the yard like gauze. The dogwood tree seemed closer than usual. I walked barefoot into the grass, damp and cold. Each step a small act of penance. I stopped in front of the porch and looked at the house as if for the first time.

Its windows weren't eyes. They were mouths.

Taped shut. Waiting to speak.

Back inside, I made my way to the hallway closet. The one Grandma used to keep locked. I don't know what made me try it, but when I turned the knob, it gave. The door swung open slow, reluctant.

Inside: more boxes. Not labeled. Just stacked like tired bones.

I sat on the floor and opened them one by one. Most were filled with receipts, birth certificates, obituaries clipped from yellowed newspapers. One box held nothing but baby items: pacifiers, hospital bracelets, a bottle with a melted nipple. I pulled out a child's blanket with faded cartoon frogs. It smelled like time.



Hartstrings

Devann Donovan

At the bottom of the final box, I found a journal.

The first page was blank. The second held a single entry:

July 9 – She coughed again today. Same time as always. 4:32 p.m. I lit a candle. I sang to her. I told her she was real, even if no one else would say her name.

There were pages and pages of similar entries. Notes like prayers. Desperate poetry written in Grandma's stern block print. She had mourned someone no one else would mourn. And the house had kept the rhythm—coughing, groaning, sighing—like a heartbeat refusing to stop.

I traced my finger along the page. Then I wrote in the margin:

I believe you.

That afternoon, I stood in the living room where the light came in crooked through the half-open blinds. I looked around at the sagging ceiling, the bowed floorboards, the dust. It wasn't haunted. Not by a ghost, but by a need.

The house had been holding something that didn't belong to it. Pain that should have been spoken. A name that should have been said. A child who should have been buried with ceremony, not shame.

I said the name aloud. I didn't know if it was right, but I said it anyway:

"Isabella."

And, for the first time since I arrived, the house didn't cough.

It didn't sigh, or creak, or moan.

It breathed.

Just once. Soft and whole. The walls expanded slightly. The temperature rose. A quiet warmth spread down the hallway.

I closed my eyes.

It wasn't peace. Not yet. But it was recognition.

• • •

The phone felt heavy in my hand—the same phone Grandma kept on the kitchen counter with the frayed cord, the one that never rang anymore. I stared at the screen like it was a minefield, the letters spelling Mama glowing back at me in soft blue.

I hadn't called in years.

My thumb hovered, trembling. The air in the kitchen thickened, as if the house itself was holding its breath. I thought of the letter folded inside the shoebox, the tiny scuffed baby shoe, the empty crib in the attic—

ghosts I hadn't dared name.

I thought of the last time we spoke. Or rather, didn't speak. The fight that shattered the fragile thread connecting us, the slammed door echoing like thunder, the silence that followed—cold and endless.

I pressed the call button.

The phone rang slow and deliberate, a steady pulse in the quiet.

Then a click.

Her voice came through, rough and tired, like an old vinyl skipping on a scratch.

"Who is this?"

My heart clenched. "It's me."

A pause. A wall of cold air.

"You got the wrong number."

"No," I said, voice barely above a whisper. "It's me. Your daughter."

She laughed—dry, brittle, like dead leaves cracking underfoot.

"Well, honey, I don't have no daughters."

The words hit me like a slap. I swallowed the sting and said, "Mama, please."

There was a long sigh. "Look, baby, I'm tired. I got my own mess to clean up."

"I know. Me too."

We talked in broken sentences and half-truths, circling the hurt without naming it. She said she was sorry, but her voice sounded rehearsed, like apologies worn thin by time. I said I forgave her, but the words tasted like questions, not absolution.

She asked if I was coming back.

I didn't know.

We said goodbye like strangers who might never meet again.

After the call ended, I stepped outside onto the porch. The sun was slipping low behind the dogwood tree, painting the yard with long, pale shadows. The house coughed.

Not angrily.

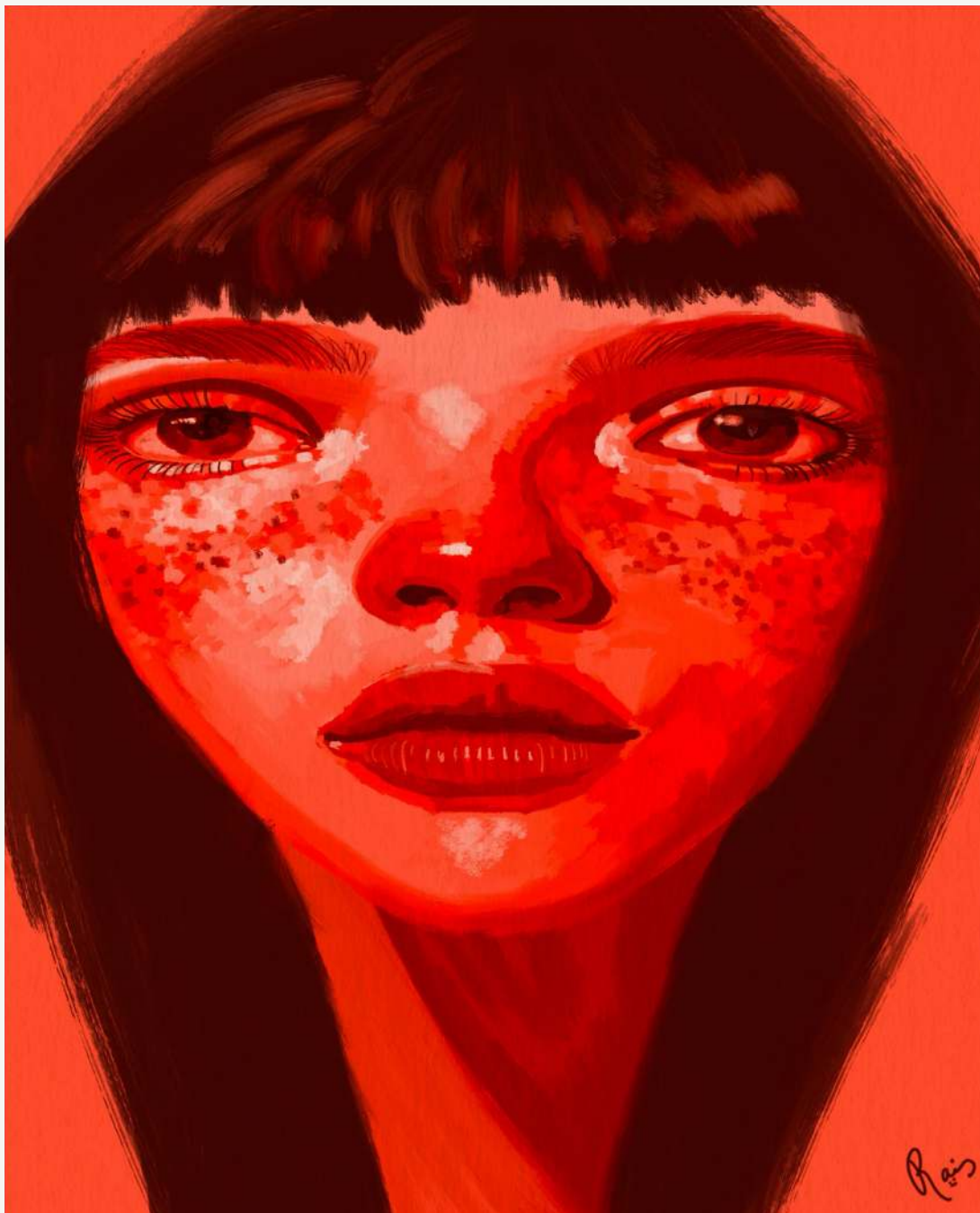
Not tiredly.

Softly.

Like a whispered breath held steady in the dark.

I sank onto the porch steps, the wood rough and splintered beneath my palms. The cicadas sang their nighttime lullaby—a chorus of life pressing up against the silence.





Carmesí *Barbara Rais*

Cope lyrics *Mystic Syndicate*

Back to when I told you that I wouldn't withhold
 But then we got to moving now that's all that I know
 And I would've if I could've seen what we had to go
 Through
 And that's alright I'm getting by still after what I was told
 But if you don't tell me babe how would I know
 And if I understand it am I able to cope
 Come on get it baby know that's all that you want
 Don't go cause a scene cause you're sad and alone

But I couldn't control
 I'm up to offer what I got when copping on this dro
 I only left at 5 and left at 9 to come back home
 I'm only off a little bit this time of that dope
 I'm only off a little bit this time tryna cope
 Go ahead and hop up in my ride it's time to go
 V8 go full throttle I might stall out if it chokes
 And if it goes that way I guess I'm reaping what I sow
 Take a silent drive and wake up miles down the road

Back to when I told you that I wouldn't withhold
 Then we got to moving now that's all that I know
 And I would've if I could've seen what we had to go
 Through
 And that's alright I'm getting by still after what I was told
 But if you don't tell me babe how would I know
 And if I understand it am I able to cope
 Come on get it baby know that's all that you want
 Don't go cause a scene cause you're sad and alone

Research Series 1 *Anleigh Breedon*



Come Over lyrics *Maggie Collier*

Ran into our old friends,
well, I guess that they're more
yours than they are mine
since we don't talk anymore, no.
Not since the day you asked me to walk out the door.

They asked me how I've been, said, "I'm doing fine," but
they can see the hell I've been in since we said goodbye.
And, they say you're doing well.
Well, I know that's a lie.

Chorus

'Cause now you're asking me to come back, hold you
while you cry,
and I know that I should leave it at saying goodnight.
But you say, "come over, come over, come over, come
over tonight."

And now I'm back up in my truck, I'm driving 90 miles
an hour
down those back roads that'll take me to where home
was for a while,
'cause I'm over, I'm over, I'm over my pride tonight

You say, "come over."
So, I come over.
You say, "come over,"
come over...

It's been a week or two since you said goodbye, and
I still end up with you almost every night when
I know that this is not, not how I get by.
And, every time I'm saying, "it's the last,"
when I've said it maybe 20 thousand times past
'cause every one is my last chance.

Chorus x2

Visual A

Fews Ford - Ice

Holden Richards



The Scars on the Back of my Thighs (Long Faded)

Mackenzie J. Pickard

i had scars on the back of my legs for a while
from the last time i went swimming with you

as the river held our bones we weaved neatly
together, our skin indistinguishable in this light.

nature's gentle quiet held us like a home,
we'll spend forever craving this divinity again.

the ache will begin to seep deeply into our lungs
in the form of the thick July heat

it smells like mildew and dogwoods
like the vague sweetness of your skin

when we sat down i took the side of the stone
with moss and thistles that ate away at my flesh.

i saw you beneath the trees as the white hot sun,
kissed your cheeks and poured into your eyes

as the sun had its way with my tired body.
i knew that nothing could ever matter so much again

but the sun faded them far behind and i can
hardly remember now where they once were.

they say in heaven we are reborn in perfection,
our pains and sorrows long forgotten

but sometimes when i pray to God,
i beg to keep just this one,

to let the time i tasted heaven with you
linger just a while longer.



Swan Song

Emily Shelton

Property Rights

Nina King Sannes

A swarm of crickets settle in my basement the spring I move back home. Their song reverberates through the pine floorboards as I lie convalescent in my childhood bed. My mother, who began to shrink after my father's death five years previous, sits frail and monkeyish at my bedside smoking and reading Danielle Steele. Occasionally, she speaks to me about selfishness and Hell, while my intestines burn with caustic aftereffects that the doctor said may never fully heal.

I have one visitor at home, a girl I knew in high school. Amberlyn, with the straight blonde bob, who married a marine at nineteen and spends her days swanning about the house drinking malbec. She perches on the end of my bed, moving her head unnecessarily so her sparkly earrings dance.

I totally get it, she says, sometimes I get depressed, too.

Yeah, I say.

When are you going back to college?

I'm not.

Didn't you only have like, two semesters left?

One and a half, I say.

She pauses.

Good for you, she says, college isn't worth anything these days.

I am silent.

It's the crickets that make me get up. Their song is a constant sonic reminder that other lives inhabit the house alongside me. I think of mice scurrying behind baseboards, bats hanging asleep in the sweltering attic. The presence of so many distinct points of life swarming about me feels sometimes overwhelming. Maybe it feels like anxiety, maybe comfort. Good or bad, it feels. I find a desiccated set of old watercolors in my child-size desk and begin painting. I paint sunsets and dogs and trees and butterflies, any old trash that comes into my head. There is pleasure here.

My mother's knuckles appear at the door jamb. She peers into the room, the air thick with yellow morning light.

You need to get a job, she says, you've messed around long enough.

...

The town isn't big enough to have its own bar, but this place serves liquor and is open 'til one, so this is where people come to drink. It's one of those Americana seafood places endemic to coastal towns whose name is some degrading and unclever crab-based innuendo. Televisions succor to the walls at intervals, forever flashing some baseball game. A string of lights with bulbs shaped like chili peppers flash red and green above my station, the rows of liquor bottles.

The job complicates my daily tasks, but not overly so. *Pour, wipe glasses, giggle, collect tips. Let them wedge their cash under your bra strap.* Two hoary old men lean heavily on the bar. Occasionally, one of them makes a lewd remark, and I smile blandly. All jobs are the same, I may as well be a secretary, or a coal miner.

Ducking behind the bar, I take a shot of gin and shiver. At this hour, I am in that delicious tipsy locus, where my limbs are light and my blurred surroundings amusing.

The door swings open, and two men enter. One is ginger, bearded, and very tall. The other is moderately short, around my height. His face is somewhat feline, skin stretched taut, lines running from his mouth to his cheeks. This one is somehow at odds with the regulars, who are gruff men with thick, solid limbs and big beards to camouflage slackening jawlines.

The men order beers on tap, and I spill half a glass on the floor. In a short space of time, my intoxication has concentrated to the point of hindrance. The old men leer.

Who you got there? says one of my old men as he gestures to the newcomer. The ginger man answers.

This is my cousin Joe, he's come to take over for Eddie while he's, well...

He lets the sentence trail off. We all know Eddie is in prison, and why. Joe nods at the surrounding men. There is an expectant pause, but Joe does not consent to fill it. The last hour before closing trickles away uneventfully. I kick them all out at one, ignoring the old men's wheedling. After sweeping, I leave the building and lock the door. The stranger is standing outside, leaning against his car.

Let me drive you home, he says.

I live right there, I say.

I can actually see it from where we stand, and I point at the lit window.

Let me drive you anyway, he says.

I climb into his passenger seat, plunging my feet noisily into a mulch of empty plastic bottles blanketing the floor. A Hula girl is suctioned to the dash, springs loaded, poised to dance. He turns the heat on full blast, but the air comes out cold. I wrap my arms around myself and try to keep my legs as still as possible to avoid crinkling the bottles.

Sorry, it takes a while to heat up, he says.

That's okay, I say.

The car is old, an unfashionable low-set body painted a rusting white. I have always admired men with shitty cars, found some charming element of working-class humility evident in them. He slowly reverses out of the parking spot and trundles down the back road. It takes perhaps thirty seconds to reach my house.

Thanks, I say, but I don't move. There is a fizz of anticipation in the chill air. Why do you let those guys talk to you like that? he asks.

I look straight out the window.

Money, I say.

I want to take you out sometime, he says, and I admire his masculine, take-command phrasing.

I'd like that, I say.

The next day, he drives me up to Norfolk, takes me to a mid-scale restaurant beside a shopping mall that sprawls for acres. The lighting is dim, the napkins made of slick white fabric, and a little battery-operated candle flickers from the center of the table. He wears a clean checkered shirt, and his hair curls down nearly to his shoulders. There's something ravaged about his face, those strange lines stretching from his mouth, the pits of old acne scars on his cheeks. He is the type of man I like, made all the more attractive for being very nearly ugly.

You have a very lovely name, he says.

Thank you, I say.

He eats a disinterested steak; I order some sort of grain dish that I pick at nervously. I have been told I am a good conversationalist, and this is because I am good at letting other people talk. I drain several glasses of wine and turn the questions continually back to him. I sidestep any inquiries about the last four years. He enjoys doing most of the talking. When his steak is nearly gone, he tells me he writes poetry, with a falsely embarrassed grimace that belies more pride than anything. *Poetry*. I am amazed, I feel I have never heard something so glamorous.

You aren't like people around here, I say.

Are you? He asks, and I shake my head.

He takes me back to his apartment, and while he drives I watch his hand on my knee, the thumb moving slowly back and forth. My pulse hammers so hard it hurts. He shares the place with his brother, he says, so we need to be quiet. I undress quickly in the dark, fall back onto his unmade bed, the caseless pillows. I'm allergic to condoms, he says, it's fine, I say, I don't care. Afterwards, we lie side by side. My finger is on his wrist, feeling the preternaturally slow heartbeat. I see his skin glowing white in the ambient glare of the streetlight, the shadows of visible ribs, the spooned-out hollow at the center of his chest.

He shifts his weight beside me, and drags his hand up my knee, up my inner thigh, and my skin erupts in goosebumps. I sense his intention and put a hand to his arm, stopping him. You don't have to, I say.

But I want to, he says.

I know, I just—I prefer not to.

He cocks his head.

Why?

I don't know, I get really sad after, I say.

He looks right at me, and the indirect light acts strangely on his irises—they seem white through, inhuman.

Really, I say, there's a French word for it.

He gives a small smile, putting his lips to my outstretched arm.

Don't you think it'd be different with me?

I make some noncommittal noise.

You know this is my favorite part, right?

He says this with a kind of quiet male egoism and moves his fingers once more against my flesh. My body reacts traitorously.

May I? he asks.

I nod, and he dips his fingers between my legs.

When the shudders have passed, I look at him. His face seems feral, sharp-toothed, the whites of the eyes peppered with little red veins. The expression is smug. I squeeze my eyes shut so I won't have to see.

He comes up next to me again, presses his chest to my back. His skin grates on me like sand. I see my own hand resting on the sheet and picture the flesh rotting, skin stretched and sloughing off the white bone.

I wake the next morning, and he has rolled away from me. My nakedness feels newly indecent in the clear, liquid light of dawn. I think over what I told him about myself the night before and can remember nothing of consequence. I think of my body spread out

before him, while the thing behind my eyes remains cagey and obscure. I feel the hot, acrid rise of tears. He turns unexpectedly, and there is not time to feign sleep. We lock eyes.

What's wrong? he says.

I pause for a moment.

I'm a painter, I say, that's what I like to do.

He spares only a moment for surprise. He smiles.

I'd love to see some of your work, he says.

And, I feel a relief that leaves me limp as though I had been tranquilized.

• • •

The next week he cooks for me at his apartment. Soup bubbles on the burner, and the air is aromatic with garlic.

Here, come taste this, he says.

He dips a tablespoon in the broth, brings it to my lips. Then he pulls it back, blows lightly on the surface, and holds it out to me again.

My eyes sting.

Did you just blow on that for me? I ask.

Yeah, he says.

I taste the soup, and it is good. In the movies, falling in love is always predicated on grand gestures, extravagant gifts, shouting one's passion to a fascinated crowd. But, for me, it is these tiny, insignificant moments that mean everything. At that moment, I feel I would lay down in the road and die for him.

This revelation does not make me happy. It makes me gnaw my nails to the skin. Every time we say goodbye, I am sure I have blown it, and the gasping flesh of my lungs feel inflexible, gristled as table meats.

I call Amberlyn.

I must be crazy, I say. Why do I feel like this?

Do you love him? she asks.

I think so, I say, but I feel like shit all the

time.

She laughs like the tinkle of a fountain, like the burble of a baby. The gesture is so perfect I know it must be practiced.

That's how you know it's real, she says.

• • •

In that first flush of infatuation, I delight in his trivial flaws. Those jokes that fall into airless silence, the pale shine of scalp through the widening of his part, the stubborn acne that splashes over his neck. These are things that will make him unattractive to other women, I think. These are the things that mean he will stay with me, forever.

He eventually comes to meet my mother. He wears a button-down shirt and gels his hair back in a way

that does not suit him, but that I know my

mother will like. He is so clever in the

little things like this. She appears

brittle and white in a voluminous

purple cardigan. They sit in the

living room drinking sweet tea

out of tall glasses, making

pleasant small talk while I sit

anxiously on the margins,

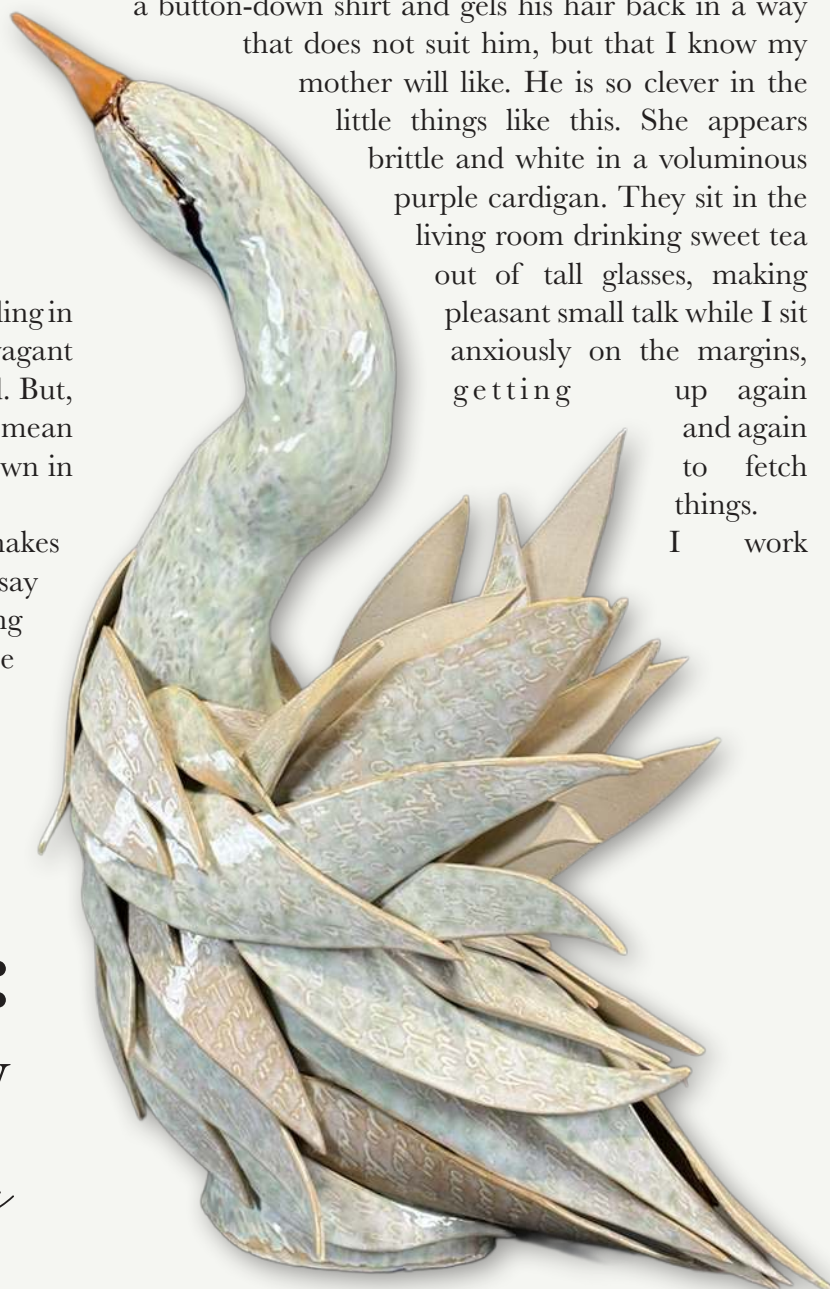
getting up again

and again

to fetch

things.

I work



Finding Wings: Shannon's Story

Elizabeth Foley

construction with my cousin, but it's only temporary, he says. As soon as I can get some money together, I'm going back to school.

My mother makes some nonverbal exclamation of approbation.

Now, if you can get her to finish her degree, she says, she can get away from that horrible job.

You wanted me to get that job, I say.

You were in school?

He directs this at me, but when I am silent, he turns toward my mother. She looks very surprised.

She was going to be a marine biologist, she says.

Joe looks back at me and starts to speak, but there is something in my face that appears to startle him, and he casts around for a new subject.

What's that sound? he asks.

I clear my throat.

It's crickets, I say.

You should get an exterminator in here, he says, and drains his glass.

I walk him to his car.

Are you ever going to tell me about that? he asks.

One day, I say, I promise, but not now.

He nods, and I think there is something in him that likes the air of mystery, that it even elevates me in his eyes.

When I go back inside my mother pats my arm vaguely. He's very nice, she says.

The anxiety eases with time. He speaks to me of how he hates his job, how we need to get out of this dump and go somewhere where things happen. I thrill at his use of 'we.' Sometimes, he reads me scraps of his poetry. It is all fantastical, full of ogres and goblins and elves. When I first heard him read it, my surprise must have shown on my face, for he grew angry. I don't want to do it how other people do it, he said. A few times we go up to Virginia, or as far as Greenville, and he reads at an open mic. He is very hard on himself about it. I don't know anything about poetry, but I am in awe of him. I think he must be a genius.

We have been together a year when he sits me down and asks me.

I haven't pried so far, he says, but I need to know now. Why are you here?

I look at him for a long moment. There are shallow laugh lines around his eyes, but the skin between his brows is smooth. The mark of someone who is kind.

I was in college at Wilmington, I say. I was a junior. There was a party at a frat. They got me drunk on purpose. I had to take plan B.

I tried to kill myself, I say.

What happened? He asks.

It didn't work.

He proposes a month later. We are in his living room, have just finished a movie about teens with special powers. I turn to see him kneeling on the carpet by the coffee table, holding out a ring with a small diamond. I cry and cry as I say yes.

I move into his apartment. My mother stands smoking in the doorway of my room as I carry boxes out to Joe's car, her small hand resting on the trim. Ash splashes down onto my flowered pink rug.

So many rooms to live in alone, she says.

“My mother stands smoking in the doorway of my room as I carry boxes out to Joe's car, her small hand resting on the trim. Ash splashes down onto my flowered pink rug.”

I do not respond. Before I leave, I go down to the basement. It's more of a crawlspace, with a hard dirt floor and low ceiling, the corners scattered with lurid green packages of rat poison. The cricket song is very loud down here. I've read about them a little. They chirp by using a special nodule on top of their wings

called a scraper, dragging it against their wrinkly underwing. Like little concert violinists. I turn my phone flashlight off and sit for a while in the darkness, letting the sound rebound around the walls of my skull. But then, my mother is calling and asking where I am, and I climb back up the short flight of stairs to the kitchen. I look wistfully back through the trapdoor, though I cannot see anything but blackness.

•••

Eddie is murdered in prison. Joe gets better jobs and talks less about moving away. We have been engaged four months and haven't set a date. Work is crazy, we say. We aren't conventional, we say, and thank God for that.

Amberlyn invites me to raucous girls' nights in her spotless taupe-and-cream McMansion, where young

married women drink from big, novelty cocktail glasses and complain about their husbands. When I am drunk, I tell them about sex with Joe, about how he still makes me finish most of the time, about the sadness after. They cackle and say they wish they had my problems. At the end of the night we have coffee, and everyone lies and says they're not that drunk and drives themselves home. I crawl into bed beside Joe, my skin dry and fever-hot, the taste of mango daiquiri still thick in my mouth. I wrap my arms around his sleeping form. I feel very lucky in love.

On a Friday, I take the night off work, and we drive to Durham, farther than we have gone before. For four hours in his little white car, I watch the winter corn stubble flash by in the gathering darkness.

I'm really glad you're coming with me, he says.

We enter the little bar. It's on a crowded university street, the rafters strung with Edison bulbs and kitschy, old-timey art prints. College students are scattered at tables or benches, with cool haircuts and flashing horn-rimmed glasses. It feels otherworldly, and I drink a bitter dark beer, check my maroon lipstick in a pocket mirror. The performances are being broadcast on the radio tonight, and there is a sharpened air of anticipation. Joe sits across the small round table, jiggling his foot, coiling his papers into a tube, then laying them flat, then coiling them up again. Everyone at the mic looks

very young. Some tell jokes, and the indulgent audience laughs uproariously at everything. One tall, thin boy recites a poem about his mother, a girl sings a song about heartache, strumming an acoustic guitar. Then, Joe goes up. He looks very handsome under the bright light, the lines of his face thrown into sharp relief. His hands shake visibly, and the white sheets of paper flutter as though in a breeze.

He reads a few of his old poems, ones I have heard before. The audience reacts with lukewarm enthusiasm to his fairy tales. Then he reads a new one, a funny one, about a man living among the giants. The bar patrons applaud, and he grows more confident.

I've just got one more, he says.

He begins to read, and this one is new to me. It begins with a girl, a fairy. She is beautiful, and her young life is full of joy. Her dress hangs off her pale back like iridescent wings. Joe's manner is serious, and the attention of the listeners grows more keen. The fairy girl attends a feast where a prince falls in love with her on sight. The prince plies her with wine as he pours out his heart, and as she leaves the feast, she feels keenly the endless promise of her life, stretched before her like the vastness of the ocean. But, on her way home, her carriage is ambushed, and she is brutally ravaged by a group of wild beasts. She crawls home, her spirit broken. She cannot stand the taste of food, cannot

endure the warmth of the sun. The prince comes to her door, but she turns him away. Unable to bear it, she swallows poison and dies in her bed on a Tuesday afternoon.

He stops reading. A girl to my right is staring towards him, white visible all around her irises like a spooked horse. Then the bar is applauding, and he is walking off the stage. A few people stop him on his way over, put their hands to his elbow or shoulder.

He finds me, smiles, reaches out. My hands are cold. I catch sight of a small diamond glinting on my finger. I feel a sense of gathering, as though I am retreating into myself, observing my surroundings from the end of a long tube. I cannot think, so I cede control to custom and duty, and smile back.

We have a few more drinks at the bar. He does not notice my silence, is too wrapped up in his afterglow. I know he lingers in the hope of being approached and congratulated, and this wish is occasionally gratified. At intervals, he remembers me and wraps an arm around my back, presses his lips to my hair. Finally, he says we have a long drive, we have to go.

He notices me when we are alone.

Are you okay? he asks.

I still feel removed from myself, as though I am someone else, a person we have picked up hitchhiking who sits in the backseat pretending not to listen.

That was mine, I manage.

I wrote it for you, he says.

But it wasn't yours.

You couldn't talk about it, so I did it for you.

I am thrown by this.

I say: I didn't want—

He interrupts me. His voice is loud and impassioned. It hurt me, when you told me those things. It hurt me to hear what happened to you. We drive on for several minutes in silence. I watch approaching headlights grow larger and swoop away, never to be seen again.

I'm sorry, I say.

In the following weeks I take refuge in mechanization. My body performs its duties flawlessly, my mind blank and cool as a pond in spring. I drop weight, ten, fifteen pounds. I feel weak and frail, and the veins show green through my transparent skin. Everyone I see makes a point of telling me how well I look. Amberlyn congratulates me, asks my secret.

I get a call from Joe when I am at work.

Great news, he says, a musician in Durham heard my poem on the radio, he wants to buy the property

rights and make it into a song.

Wow, I say, good.

The song is released two months later and enjoys moderate success. It is lauded for its unflinching examination of violence against women. It is played on indie radio stations in the South, and then across the country. Joe sends me a link to an interview with the musician. Why is this song important to you, asks the host.

I just want to help raise awareness, he responds.

Joe is not pleased by the success, as I thought he would be.

He never acknowledged me in those interviews, he says. He only gave me a hundred dollars, I should have gotten more.

He slams the flat of his hand against the drywall.

When he leaves for work, I walk to the kitchen and forget what I have gone for. I wander down the hall and am sidetracked into the bathroom. I turn on the harsh white bulb and examine my face within inches of the mirror. In the surgically white lighting, the skin looks pitted as a strawberry's, and the shallowest of lines extend about the eyes. At some indefinite moment, I think, I will crest my peak. It will likely be soon. I wonder if I will feel it, this incitement of a downward tumble. There is no guarantee that anyone else, anyone decent, will ever want me.

I marry him. We are wed at the courthouse, and my white summer dress hangs off my sharp bones.



MUSE Gallery Artists

June – July 2025 at The Artistry Gallery in Greenville, South Carolina

Emily Shelton • *Cicada*

Kilta • *10*

Maddie Foss • *Girl, so confusing & Death of girlhood**

Michelle Grana • *Beautiful Wrinkles Tall White & Beautiful Wrinkles Metallic*

Aubrie Galey • *Warm Winter*

Macy James • *Mountain Shine*

Rebekah Alviani • *1426 & Family Gatherings*

Anleigh Breedon • *Arrowmont*

Harumi Yukawa • *Falling in a Constellation*

Sarah Harvell • *Lily of the Valley Diadem & Ginkgo Leaf Moonstone Sculpture*

Syd Greene • *Bones Humming**, *Hog Wild*, and *Barren*

Megan J. Tapley • *Keep Your Hands Off Me*

Kelli N. Scott • *Ida Red**

Devann Donovan • *Hartstrings** & *Heirloom*

Emma Barnes • *Morgan & Harbor River & Spanish Moss*

Rae Hamilton • *Vigilance*

Heidi Nisbett • *Trail Through Autumn Forest*, *Looking Glass Rock*, and *Weathered Blaze on Max Patch*

Rachel Ashworth • *The Left Knight & The Right Knight*

Elizabeth Foley • *Finding Wings: Sage's Story & Finding Wings: Shannon's Story**

Erika Strickland • *Drawn In**

Alexander Rouse • *Marshland Rumination**, *Things Will Change*, and *Shelter*

Anna Grace Burch • *Burch Still Life*

Holly Ferguson • *Holding Onto You & I Am My Own Muse*

Varsha Pradhan • *Cloud Forest*

Avery Claire Williams • *Mrs. Robinson, Embodying a Lamb's Form*

Drew Miller • $\Psi(x,t) \rightarrow |\psi|^2$ — aka Sarah*

Katrina Hill • *Rejoice in Hope*

Jurors: Madison Foster, Amy Coleman, Lilliana Cameron, and Kelly McSharry

**Gallery Award Winners*

meet the creators



Bárbara Rais is an artist whose work explores the struggles & complexities of human existence. She studied photography at Bildungszentrum Nürnberg in Germany and pursued pottery studies at Loops and the National Center of Arts (CENAR) in El Salvador. She also took wheel-throwing pottery classes at Cape Fear Studios in Fayetteville, NC. Her bond with North Carolina is shaped by the abundance of art across the Carolinas, the natural landscapes, and the diversity of cultures that inspire her work. A graduate of the ESARDI School of Art and Design, she works with watercolor, acrylic, collage, and digital art (without AI). Her pieces combine pain, satire, and fragile beauty within life's chaos.



Holden Richards is native North Carolinian currently residing in Hillsborough. His primary medium is large format film photography via printing in the traditional wet darkroom. His artistic practice is inspired by walking the creeks & rivers of Orange, Durham, and Alamance counties in North Carolina. These locations & subjects predominate his photographic work. His recent monograph, "Riverwalk," is included in the archives of the University of North Carolina & Duke University, and his darkroom work has been included in the Cassilhaus Collection and the collections of the cities of Raleigh & Durham, North Carolina among others. *Headshot by Will Richards.*



Jeffery Allen Tobin is a political scientist & researcher based in South Florida. A Pushcart nominee, Jeffery has been writing for more than 30 years. His latest poetry collection, *Scars & Fresh Paint*, was published in 2024, and his poetry, prose, and essays have been featured in many journals, magazines, and websites.

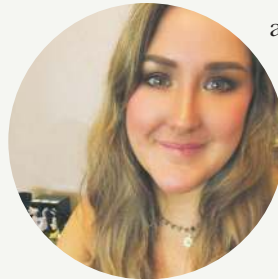


Syd Greene is drawing-based visual artist from Greenville, South Carolina. Her practice is largely informed by her upbringing in the foothills of the Appalachian mountains. Greene's work investigates the natural world, internal conflict, and technical processes through mixed-media drawing.

Drew Miller likes to paint all night sometimes.



Hannah Star Rogers grew up in rural Alabama, and she received highest honors in English from Duke University and an MFA from Columbia University. She is past fellow at the Akademie Schloss Solitude Fellowship in Stuttgart, Germany, and was a Visiting Scholar at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Her poems & reviews have appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Boston Review*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, and *TSR*. She has received the Djerassi Artist Residency in Woodside, California, the international artist residencies at ArtHub in Kingman, Arizona, the Arctic Circle in Finland, as well as residencies with the National Park Service in Acadia, Maine & Everglades, Florida.



Brett Gordon is an Appalachian poet and the inaugural poet laureate of Pilot Mountain, North Carolina. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from West Virginia Wesleyan College. Her work is rooted in the landscape & culture of the Blue Ridge Mountains and is shaped by her travels as an international flight attendant. Brett is the founder of Magnolia Writing Co., where she partners with creatives, entrepreneurs, and nonprofits on strategic storytelling. She also facilitates expressive writing workshops. Her debut chapbook, *If It Calls Your Name*, was published by Jack Wild Publishing in 2024. She is currently working on her first full-length poetry

collection, which will debut in April, 2026.



Gabby Kiser is a PhD student in the University of Virginia's English Department. Originally from the Appalachian mountains of Southwest Virginia, she called North Carolina's Triangle home for a few years before beginning her graduate program. Though she's returned to Virginia, she still visits Kure Beach each summer and has done so since she was a girl. Photography is a new medium for her, but her writing has been published in the University of Richmond Messenger, Susurrus, and MudRoom. "raceway diptych" was shot with an Olympus Pen EF.



Born & raised in upstate South Carolina, **Ana Moreno** is an up-and-coming artist based in Simpsonville. She earned her Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Greenwood at Lander University. A jack-of-all-trades, Ana has worked with a variety of media, including steel, ceramic, soft sculpture, paper mache, and various illustration methods. As of late, she has rekindled her love of photography. Experimenting with both digital & analog cameras, Ana explores themes of nature, beauty in decay, melancholy, and the spiritual. She is drawn to old or lost things, always having a soft-spot for the forgotten. When Ana is not taking photos, she is busy writing & planning her stories that she hopes to share with us one day.



Alexandra Wingo is a neurodivergent writer, actress, and multimedia storyteller from the mountains of Western North Carolina. Her work has appeared in Flash Fiction Magazine, and she has work forthcoming in Crow & Cross Keys this fall.

Maddie Foss is a Charlotte-based interdisciplinary artist whose work explores identity, gender politics, and internet aesthetics. She earned her MFA from Winthrop University in 2024 and her BS from Birmingham-Southern College in 2021. Foss has exhibited across the East Coast, was a studio artist at McColl Center for the Arts and Innovation in 2025,



and currently teaches as an adjunct professor of Fine Arts and Design at Winthrop. In addition to her studio practice, she runs Maddie Monstera, a small business offering original designs on stickers, prints, and tufted rugs.



Alexander Rouse is an artist, designer, and writer from South Carolina. His work was influenced from an early age by the natural world, religious iconography, and a deep curiosity for any art around him. After receiving a degree in graphic design, Alexander has pivoted to a more studio-focused practice, working on building stability as a fine artist and expanding his work to new dimensions. As a designer, he has received awards from the American Advertising Federation, and as an artist, Alexander has exhibited in a number of galleries, received publication, and created client work across multiple applications.



Robin Lowe, high school & college English teacher for 25 years, has recently turned her attention to cultivating & sharing her own work. Rooted in Watauga County, she gains much inspiration from the beauty of Western North Carolina on walks with her delightful border collie. She holds a MA in English from Appalachian State University and a BA in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A life-long reader and participant of two writing groups, she continues to explore the power of language. As a single mother to two thriving adult children, her work explores themes of femininity, womanhood, loss, nature, spirituality, and memory.



Meta Marie Griffin was born in Columbia, South Carolina and currently lives in Spartanburg, SC. She studied journalism and creative writing at USC Spartanburg and East Carolina University. Meta has published fiction & poetry in a variety of journals, including Live

and Let DEI Anthology of Banned Words, Freedom Fiction Magazine, zsznR Review, and Litteratuer. Meta has also participated in podcasts & opinion forums for USA Today. Meta is involved in Free to Read Spartanburg. She loves books and her brilliant felines, Athena & Isis.



Kathleen Deep is an artist & analog photographer most known for her highly textured mixed media works inspired by her walks alone in the wetlands & landscape. She uses natural dried material, clay powder, collaged old photographs, items from the hardware store, hydrophobic methods she's developed, hand-ground powders, and sprayed solutions to recreate a scene from memory. Samples of her nature writing prose, "To Slow the Sinking," can also be seen written in some of her works. Deep currently works as a gallery manager & curator in Raleigh, North Carolina.



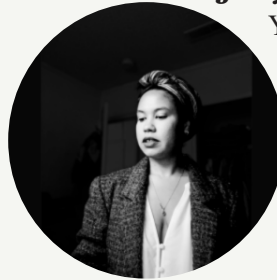
Erika Strickland is a joyful wife, mother of two, and a musician & artist based in Taylors, South Carolina. Raised in small-town Iowa and shaped by years in Norway and a decade of missionary work, her journey has deepened her vision & faith. Guided by the Holy Spirit and grounded in her relationship with Jesus, Erika creates in many unique rhythms of worship—painting live, playing strings, and thoughtfully crafting commissioned pieces that inspire & uplift. She weaves with song & color as threads of grace. Each creative act is both a prayer and an offering, revealing beauty that gently points hearts toward Christ.

Arthur Turfa is a poet & writer with several poetry books, a novel, and a short story collection. His work has appeared in numerous print & online publications. Originally from Pennsylvania, he has lived in the South Carolina Midlands for 20 years. A reviewer for the Tupelo Press, he is a poetry editor for the Eleventh Hour Literary Review and a fiction reader for the Northern Appalachian Review, as well as a member of the South Carolina Writers Association.

Raised in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia, **Kelli N. Scott** draws lifelong inspiration from the region's natural beauty & rich Appalachian culture. Now



based in Huntersville, North Carolina, she maintains a painting practice that blends expressive brushwork with an intuitive, story-driven approach. Her work celebrates her Appalachian roots and explores themes of memory, place, and emotional resonance. A banjo player as well as a painter, Scott finds joy in playing traditional old-time music. When not creating, she enjoys traveling, reading, and time with family & friends—sources of connection that fuel her art.



Joely Williams is a poet born in New York City who is now rooted in Columbia, South Carolina. Her work carries the rhythms of memory, resilience, and cultural inheritance, while her recent move to the Carolinas has opened new landscapes for her to explore quiet streets, shifting light, and the questions of belonging in unfamiliar ground. Her writing has appeared in *In Parentheses*, *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, and *Louder!*, among others. She is the author of *Put the Phone Down*, *We Got a Job to Do*, and *Even the Spider Keeps Records*. When not writing, she can be found collaging, collecting books, or sketching out new ideas.



Randy Akers travels the world seeking vernacular dwellings marked by rust, decay, and imperfection. Each painting captures the passage of time, the lives & dreams once held within these fragile walls, and the undeniable beauty of age, transforming overlooked structures into visual testaments of resilience & memory. He has shown at the Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art, University of New Mexico's Harwood Foundation, Brownsville Museum of Art, Philadelphia Art Museum, Anchorage Art Museum, the University of North Carolina, Valdosta University, Masur Museum of Art, SUNY Genesee, Florida A&M University, Marietta / Cobb Museum of Art, LaGrange Art Museum, Ormond Memorial Art Museum, and Maryland Federation of Art, among others.



Devann Donovan, originally from Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, creates work rooted in her personal narrative, exploring memory, nostalgia, and pop culture. Holding an MFA from Winthrop University, she weaves personal anecdotes into artworks that blur the line between fantasy & reality. Her practice spans quilting, crochet, fiber painting, and soft sculpture, materializing memory through malleable materials & familiar imagery. Donovan's work has been exhibited nationally & locally across South & North Carolina. She is currently an art professor at York Technical College and lives in Rock Hill, SC with her husband & three dogs.



Maggie Collier is a Nashville-based indie synth-pop artist whose cinematic, confessional songwriting blends classical training with modern edge. Influenced by artists like The 1975, Carole King, and Florence and the Machine, her music transforms personal experiences into storytelling that explores love, loss, and the beauty hidden in everyday life. With a master's degree in opera and four generations of musical lineage behind her, Collier crafts soundscapes that are both emotive & resonant. Her debut EP, *Repeating Myself*, released in 2024, with a full-length album slated for 2026, marking her as a rising voice in today's indie-pop landscape.



The Greensboro, NC-based **Mystic Syndicate's** high-energy approach to music is a breath of fresh air to the scene. Songwriter & founding member Ansen Eldred, a North Carolina native, has spent a lifetime drawing inspiration from the Appalachian mountains to the Outer Banks, aiming to echo the landscapes & stories of his home. Known for their electrifying live shows, the band has taken the Triad by storm while steadily expanding across the East Coast. With their *Stage Fright* EP, they've fallen in love with the art of music production, crafting a genre-blending sound where each listen reveals something new. Welcome to the Syndicate.

Mackenzie J. Pickard is an Appalachian poet from Western North Carolina. Her body of work is primarily centered around themes of the liminal and often obscure rural queer experience.



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 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.



Anleigh Breedon is a visual artist from Greenville, South Carolina, where she was born & raised. She received her BFA with a concentration in drawing from Clemson University in 2024. Anleigh uses drawing as her primary art medium, but she also enjoys working in printmaking & photography, where she focuses on the natural objects & landscapes around her. She uses her subjects as a way to represent parts of herself or her emotions & feelings, which begin to operate as a form of self-reflection and a catalogue of her experiences. The physical process of rendering these experiences allows a deeper connection to the subjects, concepts, and materials within her practice.



Nina King Sannes is a writer from the Great Dismal Swamp of North Carolina. She holds a Bachelor's degree in agroecology from Cornell University and an MFA in fiction from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she served as assistant editor for Ninth Letter literary magazine. Her work aims to carry on and to reimagine the Southern Gothic tradition, investing in stories that examine isolation, marginalization,

violence, and a rooted sense of place. She is a winner of the AWP Intro Journals Award, and her work has previously appeared in EPOCH magazine, the Colorado Review, and the Broadkill Review.



Elizabeth Foley is a multi-passionate artist who works in ceramics, mixed media, and acrylic paint. Her first creative love is clay—she loves taking a humble lump of clay and transforming it into something marvelous. Her award-winning Finding Wings series features large-scale ceramic swan sculptures carved with the stories of domestic violence survivors. Through this work, she hopes to raise awareness & generate healing for survivors. You can learn more and support her ongoing Finding Wings project on Patreon at <https://www.patreon.com/artistelizabethfoley>.



Dani Knox is an interdisciplinary artist, born & raised in upstate South Carolina. Since 2015, Dani has taught, led, and choreographed for organizations all across the upstate, including multiple non-profit organizations, competitive performance programs, high school organizations, and more. Most recently, Dani has launched the organization “Gestalt Performance” as an outlet for performers of all ages to come together and collaborate through creative methods of performance together. As a former preschool- and primary-age classroom teacher, Dani celebrates performers’ individuality & expression through open-ended performance opportunities & personalized choreographic methods.



meet the team



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



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

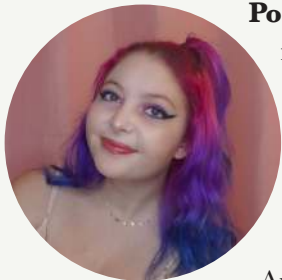


Dance Editor, Rush Johnston (they/them) is a Bronx-based multimedia choreographer, poet, performer, filmmaker, and movement researcher. Rush creates at the intersection of visual & performing art, often exploring modes of artistic expression beyond the binary. As a queer, Native, neurodiverse artist, their work often plays with perception & identity, inviting viewers to question proposed truths of self & social misunderstanding. Social justice work is a key element of Rush’s creative vision, often encompassing themes of political turmoil, queerness, and mental health. Rush is the founder & artistic director

of Kaleid Dance Collective, an interdisciplinary artistic platform for creative experiments & exhibitions.



Music Editor, Jake Shores is a multidisciplinary artist from Greensboro, NC, with a background in theater, music, visual, and literary arts. He is a 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.

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.



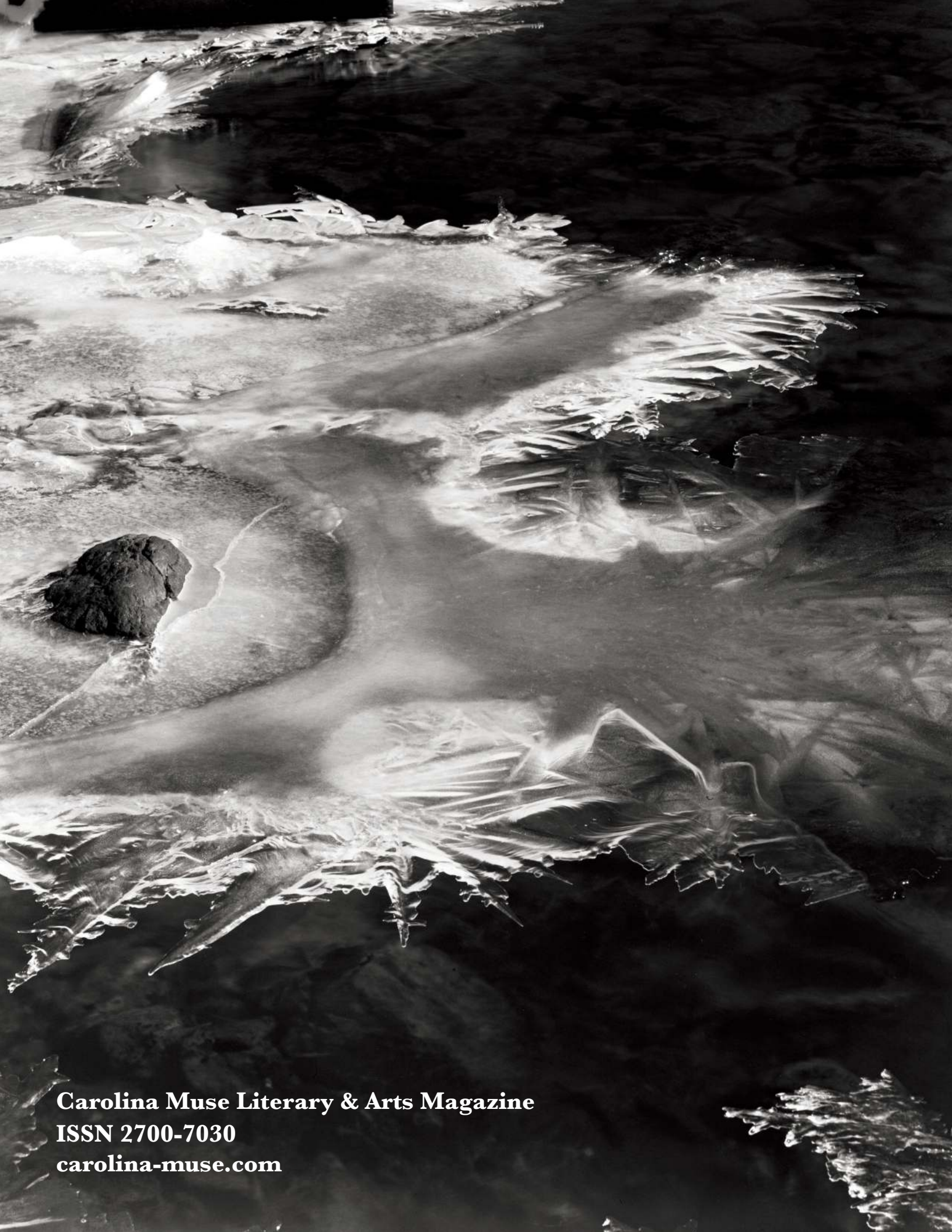


credits

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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