



PAPER DRAGON

FRIENDSHIP

VOL. 6

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Letter From the Editors

MFA class of 2024 is proud to bring you the first of our two *Paper Dragon* volumes. We received hundreds of submissions and are excited to show you the hard work and wonderful creativity of those selected for Vol. 6. To improve your reading experience, we have provided a downloadable PDF and an e-reader ePub file—a special gift for our email subscribers!—in addition to reading the volume on the website. We hope these three avenues will increase your reading satisfaction.

We chose friendship as our theme for this volume to highlight how connection with others has influenced and moved us. The selected pieces invite us to reflect on the effects of our closest relationships.

Because of the phenomenal work we've received, we want to move into next year reading more! Our next call will allow for longer works of fiction. This means our submission open period will be extended by a month. The theme is your choice. Get your submissions ready and thank you for reading *Paper Dragon*.

~Tori Chase and Seth Kazmar, Co-editors

Fiction



Begonia, Lisa Tang Liu and J. David Tabor

About the Artists

This is a series of collaborative works between Lisa Tang Liu in Stoughton, Massachusetts, and J. David Tabor in Phoenix, Arizona. They have never met in person, but they are good friends. This project involves a "film swap"-- a process that requires one photographer to first expose a roll of film, rewind it, and then send it out to another photographer for a second exposure. Lisa and David did not inform one another in advance what was specifically photographed on the film. The landscapes and plants of Arizona against those of Massachusetts create surrealist images that transcend climate.

The Astronauts Break Up

Timothy Reynolds

As he spun into the void of space, Jason wondered what had gone wrong with Rachel. He wasn't one to contemplate breakups too much but considering that it was his co-pilot and girlfriend that kicked him out and that he had time, it seemed a worthy exercise. Something had to distract him from imminent death.

In his spacesuit, he felt the sweat of his body pressing against the lining, especially in his hands and feet. His helmet had a tinted visor that was pulled down to mute the visual motion of the stars swirling in front of him. Over the last hour, his breathing was controlled but his thundering heart continued to pound.

Even if he did figure out what he did wrong, so what? Anything could end him. Radiation could cook him. The speeding particle of an asteroid could puncture his suit and the pressure could crush him. Worse still, none of those things would happen and he could die of dehydration after a few days of perpetual tumbling. The closest human that could rescue him was Rachel and her feelings were clear. While trying to figure what went wrong was futile, he focused his thoughts back to that morning. It was better than thinking about dying.

Intimacy between pilots on long-term missions was officially against company policy. The reason to discourage it was plain: if they fought, the mission could be compromised, leading to a loss of millions for the company. The reason to look the other way was also plain: if they fired someone for every infraction, no one would be left to work.

Jason felt something would begin between them from when they first met. She smiled, her eyes wide, and she gently shook his hand. During the briefing, Jason's thoughts wandered to the thought of Rachel naked, her full lips, her short-trimmed regulation hair. He hoped she was thinking the same of him.

Once the mission started, he didn't wait too long to find out. For a blissful eighteen months, they were happy. Or so he thought. It was all that he could want.

That morning, he woke to the sound of the alarm of the airlock depressurizing. He opened his eyes to find Rachel, wearing a suit and helmet. Her eyes were as wide as when they first met but now they were filled with tears and frightful determination. She kicked Jason square on his chest. He flew backwards towards the portal. He reached out in hopes of grabbing the threshold. He slid easily through, looking at his ship and Rachel one last time before careening into space. He called out but he was out of range.

What was it? Was it something that he said or did? That he didn't say or do? Jason thought everything was fine. If it was something, he wasn't aware of it and since he didn't have Rachel to ask what he had done wrong, there was no way for him to reason what it might be. Maybe he should let it go.

The long voyage could have made her snap. There were numerous tests, mental and physical required for pilot certification. It couldn't predict something like this. Maybe he had the awful luck of Rachel getting space cabin fever. He felt a small bit of relief. There was nothing that he could have done to prevent it from happening. Sometimes people are just crazy.

Maybe she never loved him. Maybe she lied the whole time and just wanted someone to sleep with through the next several hundred nights. That didn't seem like her but what else could it be? He knew how he felt about her, how she delighted him, and he thought he delighted her. Jason loved her. The weight of everything bore down to full effect. He choked back tears. Crying would make him consume more oxygen more quickly. His throat ached and tears welled. He couldn't hold back anymore. He bawled, he screamed, he whimpered. There was nothing else to do at this point. All he had were his thoughts and the air that he breathed.

He was still breathing. He had an oxygen tank. She gave it to him. Putting him in the suit made sense because without it, the pressure would have caused his body to explode, and she would have to clean up that mess. The suit would prevent that. But why give him the oxygen?

He took a breath. The air was still crisp, not yet stale which would indicate he was nearing the end of the tank. Maybe she thought that he would be rescued and wanted him

to have a chance. Small chance but it was worth believing. It was more pleasant than the thought of dying alone in space.

Jason lifted the tinted visor to better see the stars. Even in their constant motion, he recognized constellations, the same ones that he pointed out to Rachel when they laid together. It hurt to think about those quiet moments. He didn't want to think about what the stars were then, only what they are now and what they could be.

Stars were a constant hydrogen explosion that would go on until they simply couldn't. Old songs often made reference to the fact that people and stars were, in essence, the same. Jason finally understood this.

The tears that landed back onto his cheeks and dried. His eyes had been closed for so long that he began to drift to sleep as he drifted deeper into space. In the unclear thoughts that lead him to sleep, he saw Rachel's face, smiling as when they first met. It made him happy. His heart relaxed for the first time in several hours. Jason became one with the stars.

About the Author

Timothy Reynolds is a writer that wanders between poetry, prose, and playwriting. He lives in Marietta, Georgia with his fiancée.



Yucca Lily, Lisa Tang Liu and J. David Tabor

About the Artists

This is a series of collaborative works between Lisa Tang Liu in Stoughton, Massachusetts, and J. David Tabor in Phoenix, Arizona. They have never met in person, but they are good friends. This project involves a "film swap"-- a process that requires one photographer to first expose a roll of film, rewind it, and then send it out to another photographer for a second exposure. Lisa and David did not inform one another in advance what was specifically photographed on the film. The landscapes and plants of Arizona against those of Massachusetts create surrealist images that transcend climate.

Overdue

Rowan MacDonald

Judith wasn't a fan of lateness. She detested it. "Why can't we ever be on time?" she would moan to Eric. "I hate being late."

Eric always *tried* to leave on time, but certain things remained out of his control.

"How was I supposed to know about the gridlock, Judith?" he would say. "They didn't forecast this rain either."

Judith knew compromise was a steady feature of life—Eric's lateness was something she just had to deal with. His voice echoed in her mind.

"You don't hear me complaining about twenty-five pillows on the bed, Judith."

"There you go. Always exaggerating. Can't even get into bed on time."

"So many pillows. I'll be dead before I get in there."

Judith sipped her French Earl Gray, flicked through the pages of *Country Living*. She made note of each bedroom, the perfectly manicured photos, and how each room had a beautiful selection of pillows.

She tapped the face of her watch. Catherine would arrive shortly—always on time. So reliable that Judith ordered on her behalf.

"Eggs Benedict and a hot chocolate, please," she said. "With an extra marshmallow."

Judith liked this predictability.

As life ebbed and flowed, Monday lunches with Catherine remained constant. Their lunches stood firm, outlasting fashion trends, marriages, and even the lives of their peers.

Catherine slammed down her stick, careful not to slip on the damp concrete outside. The last thing she needed was to injure her good hip. She once read a statistic on death rates from falls in the elderly. Couldn't remember it, but knew it wasn't good.

"Sorry I'm late, Judith," she said, breathing heavily.

They glanced at the clock near the counter.

“Oh, don’t worry,” Judith laughed. “You still had another two minutes!”

The waitress walked over, placed their meals on the table. “Can I get you anything else ladies?”

“Just a new hip, thanks Ellie,” smirked Catherine.

“You’ll have me reaching for the Tums!” laughed Judith.

Their Eggs Benedict were cooked to perfection—anything else was not good enough for Redwood Café’s most loyal customers.

“I went to see Walter yesterday,” said Catherine, sipping her cappuccino, enjoying the froth.

“Oh?” replied Judith. “And how is the ex-husband?”

“Still dead,” said Catherine. “Kangaroos had stripped the azaleas bare and shit all over him.”

“Stop!” laughed Judith, clutching her chest, red-faced. “There’s only so much laughter a girl can take at our age!”

It was a friendship that spanned decades, yet they still had their differences. Like in all good relationships, these only made their friendship stronger. While Judith enjoyed gossip about the Royals and browsing real estate, Catherine preferred crosswords and newspaper obituaries.

“I saw poor Max Hoffmann died last week,” announced Catherine, wiping Hollandaise sauce from her lip.

“There goes another one,” reflected Judith. “How many left from Year 8 now?”

“Can’t be many.”

Ellie, the smiling waitress, approached with another pot of Earl Gray.

“Careful of the bag, dear,” said Judith, moving it under the table.

“I would go with you if I could,” assured Catherine, lowering her voice.

“I know,” sighed Judith. “Just something that has to be done.”

“I’m dreading my appointment later too,” said Catherine. “Hopefully they’ll give me a date this time.”

“We make a good pair,” laughed Judith. “Both dreading the afternoon.”

“We’ll probably laugh about it next week!” replied Catherine.

“True,” said Judith, shifting in her seat. “I just *hate* lateness.”

They finished lunch, leaving behind empty plates, a third pot of Earl Gray, and no doubt as to who Max Hoffman fancied in Year 8. For the record, it was Agatha Cooper. They often caught him reading Agatha Christie books and figured her name sealed the deal.

“Good luck,” said Catherine, hugging her dear friend.

“You too,” smiled Judith, leaning over her walking frame to embrace. “Your scan will be fine.”

They departed in separate directions, Judith’s canvas bag resting on the seat of her walker. She could see the building up ahead, children running outside, students carrying laptops.

There weren’t many things that made Judith nervous. She had seen much and done plenty in life. Nothing could surprise her these days, yet she hadn’t expected to make this discovery in the wardrobe shared with Eric. It made her nervous. She had a reputation to keep.

She clutched the walker, noticing her palms clammy.

“One foot, then the other,” she told herself. The sliding doors opened. She couldn’t back out now. “Time to face the music.”

A young man stood at the front desk, adjusting a murder-mystery display, trying to make himself look busy.

“Excuse me,” said Judith, harnessing her strength to place the bag on the counter. “I believe these belong to you.”

“Let’s take a look!” the young man replied.

Judith rocked on her toes, knowing the man’s enthusiasm would soon disappear.

“Oh,” he said, gritting his teeth. “Looks like we have some latecomers!”

She knew this would happen. She had rehearsed the lines in front of the mirror that stood atop the old pinewood dresser her mother had left.

“These books,” she started. “They were on my late husband’s card.”

There was a brief pause, as Eric’s death processed between them.

“I’m very sorry for your loss,” the young man said, placing his hand on hers. “I’ll sort this out for you.”

Judith was taken by the librarian’s kindness; a weight lifted from her shoulders, reputation intact.

“Thank you, dear,” she said, collecting her empty bag. “I appreciate it.”

“Please take a look around,” he gestured. “We also have some great classes that meet weekly.”

Judith studied the pamphlet he slid across the desk.

“Oh wow,” she said. “Libraries have more than just books these days.”

“Yes, there’s a sewing class later today,” he smiled. “I hear they’re making pillows.”

About the Author

Rowan MacDonald lives on the island of Tasmania with his dog, Rosie. His words have appeared in a variety of journals around the world, most recently: The Ocotillo Review, The Ignatian Literary Magazine, Defunct Magazine, and Scriblerus Arts Journal. His work has also been adapted into short film by New Form Digital.



Blessings, Jennifer Weigel

About the Artist

Jennifer Weigel is a multi-disciplinary mixed media conceptual artist. Weigel utilizes a wide range of media to convey her ideas, including assemblage, drawing, fibers, installation, jewelry, painting, performance, photography, sculpture, video, and writing. Much of her work touches on themes of beauty, identity (especially gender identity), memory & forgetting, and institutional critique. Weigel's art has been exhibited nationally in all 50 states and has won numerous awards.

Website: jenniferweigelart.com

Young Americans

Shannon Frost Greenstein

“No tunes!”

“He’s right. Stop everything. What’s up next?”

I pause, razor in hand, hand dangling over the mirror, drifts piled as far as the eye could see, as far as our bank accounts could stretch.

“Dark Side?” I suggest.

“Yes!”

The chorus of voices agrees upon Pink Floyd in harmony, cigarette smoke circling around the ceiling, ash falling in every direction, sullyng everything that had once been clean.

“Put that shit on!”

I resume my work, vaguely aware of the first few bars of “Speak to Me” drifting into the room, the air fetid with our sweat and our musk and our mania. My teeth grind together and the insides of my eardrums itch, and I light another cigarette with my lucky pink lighter as I wait for the group to reassemble around the large mirror on the coffee table.

Our motley crew of students and friends and lovers and strangers had come together as the sun set several hours before; now, we are flying high on our camaraderie and our dopamine and our collective potential to change the world.

So wise are we, now that we are in our early twenties.

“C’mon, you guys!” I finally yell over the din. “It’s ready!”

They come, bringing smokes and water bottles and pheromones and exuberance. We sit like snake charmers around the perimeter of the table; cross-legged; single-minded with purpose. We are a study in austerity, a study in hedonism.

“Did you know,” Mike comments apropos of nothing, “that David Bowie had two different-colored eyes?”

Love for David Bowie is strong here, in this room full of bisexual acting students and Liberal Arts majors. We appreciate the beauty of androgyny; we have watched “The Labyrinth” mainly for his codpiece.

“Not true!” I interject without looking up, attempting to crush a particularly stubborn pebble with the side of the razor. “One of his eyes was just permanently dilated.”

“Is that a fact?” asks Jenna.

“Google it.”

I separate the white powder into piles as the group, indeed, Googles it, learning of the childhood fight that injured Bowie’s eye; lamenting Bowie’s absence; lauding Blackstar, Bowie’s final go, Bowie’s swan song.

“Bowie liked cocaine,” comments Will absentmindedly.

“So did Matthew Perry,” snickers Eddie.

“YOU GUYS.”

Mike has had an idea, and it would appear to be a relatively significant one.

Mike is, in fact, fidgeting on the floor, so excited is he in this Eureka moment, and I take a second to reflect how *all* ideas seems significant right now, because every single idea is just *amazing*.

Then I take a second to reflect how I’m going to feel tomorrow morning.

“You know how a ‘Bowie’ is a circle?” he asks.

“Everyone knows that!” Jenna agrees, and I carve a few Bowies out of the drifts to illustrate. “It’s ‘The Width of a Circle’!”

“But wait!” Mike continues. “Wait til you hear what I learned!”

He is vibrating with this information, Isaac Newton on the verge of inventing calculus, and I notice my pack of cigarettes is empty. How many have I smoked? What time is it?

“I was visiting my girlfriend last weekend, and I met a guy next door who showed me how to do a ‘Matthew Perry’!”

The group breaks into laughter at this, our voices echoing in the apartment, still empty except for a futon, coffee table, and pathetic little floor lamp. It is the end of summer, and the community will descend on campus en masse over the next few days.

But until then, it is only the occupants of this room, alone in the world, the spinning of the planet paused, the rest of the human condition politely waiting for our fun to end before resuming their own lives.

“May I?” Mike questions, indicating the razor.

“You may,” I respond, “if I can bum a cigarette.”

We trade, our fingertips trembling against one another. From my position on the floor, I can see the moon through the window. It is nearly full, though I have no idea if it is waxing or waning, and this realization makes me sad.

After all, what is in store for tomorrow? Has this moon already reached its peak, its climax, a moment of splendor to which I didn't know to pay attention, and everything downhill from here? Or does the full moon still await, this entire evening a breath of anticipation, the piece de resistance yet to come and dazzle us all? Is the moon fading in spirit and size, losing luster like Matthew Perry's career? Or is it preparing a magnum opus, Bowie dropping *Blackstar* through sheer tenacity?

“Shannon! Watch!”

Mike has been busy with the razor while I was staring out the window, and an array of lines have appeared on the mirror.

“So, a Matthew Perry is two lines next to each other,” he gestures with a rolled-up dollar bill in his left hand, “only you do them at the same time.” He displays another rolled dollar bill in his right hand and adds, “Top to bottom and bottom to top.”

Mike demonstrates, left and right hands coordinating like a drummer at a kit, the sound of his sniffing very loud in the room. Then, of course, nothing can continue until the rest of the group attempts a Matthew Perry of their own, and what follows is several minutes of delicate choreography to avoid spilling anything on the floor.

“But that's not even the best part!” says Mike. He picks up the razor and works quickly, shaping a large circle around two of the parallel lines. “Any ideas what this is called?”

Silence greets this question – or, something as close to silence as a dozen hyperactive misanthropes clenching their jaws and biting their nails and jiggling their toes can achieve, that is.

Mike grins.

“It’s a Bowie *around* a Matthew Perry...because Matthew Perry is a ‘Young American.’”

It goes on all night, and it is the best night; and things indeed go downhill from there.

About the Author

Shannon Frost Greenstein (she/her) resides in Philadelphia with her children and soulmate. She is a former Ph.D. candidate in Continental Philosophy and a multi-time Pushcart Prize nominee. Shannon is the author of “Pray for Us Sinners” and “These Are a Few of My Least Favorite Things,” two traditionally-published, full-length collections of fiction and poetry, respectively. She was recently a finalist for the 2023 Ohio State University Press Journal Non/Fiction Prize. Her work has appeared in McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Pithead Chapel, Bending Genres, Parentheses Journal, and elsewhere.

Website: shannonfrostgreenstein.com

Twitter: @ShannonFrostGre

Insta: @zarathustra_speaks



Confession, Karen Schwartz

About the Artist

Karen Schwartz is an Atlanta and New York City-based artist working primarily in painting and drawing in a range of media. Karen began her 30-year career as a mostly self-taught artist creating portraits and human figures by whatever means possible and available to make marks.

Process-driven, she has an appetite to explore the properties and interactions of materials not necessarily meant to be used together. Schwartz sees making paintings as a way to find meaning in the piling up of images without regard for hierarchy, a means to make unformulated experience real and concrete through visual form. She enjoys the physical and nonverbal experience of making visual art, so

different from the highly verbal and relatively sedentary practice of her other practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

Currently, Schwartz is represented by the Jennifer Balcos Gallery in Palm Beach and Atlanta. Previously, Schwartz was a featured artist at the Hathaway Contemporary

and The Bill Lowe Gallery in Atlanta. Her work, twice curated into the Red Clay Survey Exhibition of Southern Contemporary Art at the Huntsville Museum, earned a merit award in 2017.

In Brooklyn, NY, Schwartz's solo exhibitions have been at Life on Mars Gallery (reviewed in Hyperallergic, The New Criterion, Tilted Arc, The Huffington Post, and Painter's Table) and at David & Schweitzer Contemporary. Schwartz has shown work in solo and group shows around the US and abroad. Her work resides in private and public collections, including an acquisition by the New York Historical Society for the launch of their Women in History Center.

A practicing clinical psychologist, Schwartz finds that her clinical psychoanalytic practice informs her artwork in fascinating, sometimes less than conscious ways, as her studio practice offers curious insights into her work as psychotherapist. Both support her faith in free association and unconscious meanderings to get at unanticipated meanings.

Bonjour Dog

Daniel Webre

When it's this hot out, it's best to remain indoors, even in late summer. But the processed air gets so stale and stuffy, and the thought of all those assorted germs incubating in other people's sinus cavities, is enough to make you forget about the weather and seek shade, iced tea, and the solace of a good book, or with luck, a few moments of pleasant conversation. Perhaps now you can understand what brought me to this row of wrought iron tables under the wisteria-covered awning at Mathilde's.

Mathilde's is a small café, the only one of its kind, at least in this area. And it is here that I wile away my time when the chance presents itself. The outdoor ceiling fans keep the air circulating just enough until the breeze stirs again and clears the dust off the waxy leaves of the plants. At the center of Mathilde's patio, surrounded by date palms, hibiscus, and banana trees, is a small fountain—nothing fancy, just a trickle of water down a series of shallow basins, gurgling, in mimic of a gentle rain. In other seasons, I recall such a rain, but these days are mostly parched. When the rains do come, the weather is violent and angry—a reminder that one day the elements will rise up and reclaim all this land in the name of the Gulf of Mexico. But for today, I try not to think of that future and refresh myself with tea steeped with papaya and passion fruit.

There are many regulars at Mathilde's, some I know well, but most I've spoken with only casually or they're familiar by sight. Of this latter type is a distinguished-looking gentleman, quite tall and striking in appearance. He stands well above six feet and carries himself with a bearing both unapologetic and upright. No matter the weather, I have only seen him wearing light-colored suits of airy fabric, either an ascot or no tie at all, slip-on shoes, and always a wide-brimmed hat of Panama style from under which wisps of brown hair are escaping. When he is not engaged in conversation, his expression is stoic and chiseled. In the company of others, especially young females, his face becomes as fluid and expressive as the most accomplished and seasoned of actors.

Without question, his most noteworthy feature of all, however, is a pencil thin mustache that looks like it has been freshly painted with the precision of a razor-sharp wand.

But even this is not what caught my attention first. I was initially held spellbound by a medium to large dog at his side, patterned of a gray so wispy and ephemeral, and yet with the richness of marble, to produce the dominant impression of his wearing a blue coat. If this coloring proved illusory or merely suggestive, not so the piercing blue of his eyes, in sharp contrast with the brown of his master's. Oddly, the dog also wears an ascot and a navy-blue beret. On another animal, with a different owner, I would have rightly found this absurd. Yet somehow this combination, and the curious way the dog emulated his master's carriage and gait, even down to the dignified expression on the animal's face—if a dog can be said to wear an expression—made everyone regard this pair with the utmost respect.

Though the dog walked with the man on a leash, the man never once tied the dog to anything when he went inside for his espresso. The dog sat without being told, head held high and slightly cocked, looking with disinterest about the courtyard until his master returned, coffee in hand—always, always with a bottle of Evian, and a cup, and a saucer for the dog. Anyone passing by could not help but greet them both with a hearty *Bonjour!*

About the Author

Daniel Webre's short fiction has appeared recently in DASH Literary Journal, Emerald City, The William & Mary Review, Talking River Review, and other places. He is the recipient of the 2023 Willow Review Award for Fiction.



Irina Tall (Novikova)

About the Artist

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

The 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, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

Instagram Collections:

<https://instagram.com/irina369tall?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

<https://instagram.com/irinanov4155?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

Bound for the Future

Soramimi Hanarejima

I've barely looked at the student artwork posted on the wall when there you are standing next to me.

"Hi, I'm Zefiro's mom," you say, all cheery with bright eyes.

And immediately I'm sure we're going to be a big part of each other's lives—this certainty coming by way of intuition and not clairvoyance, for a nice change.

"Oh, you know, don't you?" I say, because of course you do. Clearly you already know who I am. Who my daughter is. Why else come right over to me after tonight's PTA meeting finished?

And now that you know I also know what the future holds for our kids, your smile widens—looking huge against the array of little classroom desks behind you.

We become fast friends. The affinity that comes from being distant descendants of oracles would alone be enough to accelerate our bonding, but we're catapulted into treating each other like long-lost siblings, thanks to the foreknowledge our ancestry has serendipitously granted both of us: my little third grader and yours are destined to be the loves of each other's lives. And it helps that we're both sure Aethera and Zefiro will make a terrific couple. After all, they are and will be good kids, so far as we know.

Though they're largely oblivious of one another and years away from getting together, that inevitability entralls us. During long lunches and meandering walks, we gleefully speculate on the many unknowns of their eventual romance. I say they'll start off as friends. You say it'll be an immediate mutual attraction that later turns stormy. I put my money on their relationship growing the way many plants do: fast at first, then slow and steady. We agree that we'll be grandmothers to 2—maybe 3—grandchildren, even though I really can't imagine Aethera pregnant, let alone a mother.

In all my visions of her as an adult, she seems someone else entirely. To me, Aethera is simply a 7-year-old girl who loves to do cartwheels, and I can't see how she'll

be a college student shoplifting to relieve stress or a sentimental middle-aged woman getting teary-eyed nostalgic over the sight of hills bright with autumn foliage.

“Having the dots doesn’t mean you can connect them,” you have a habit of saying—once adding, “But I like having all the dots the universe confides in me.”

And both of us like sharing them. Whole hours go by as we swap tidbits of what lies ahead in our kids’ lives. When I tell you Aethera will be the jealous type, you tell me Zefiro will withdraw from everyone during bouts of brooding reticence. Then I tell you that sounds like a bad combo of personality traits for the times they’ll have to be apart for the sake of work and passion projects, but you say maybe it’s the other way around: time apart might make Aethera jealous of people Zefiro sees regularly.

Eventually, we talk about ourselves. One rainy afternoon, while we’re making noodles from scratch in your kitchen, you tell me about how you grew up in a country with vast forests, a pleasant place that somehow never really felt like home until after you left, then no longer felt like home once you had a family here—now, how could anywhere else ever be home? Later that week, we go rock climbing, and I see in you a future version of my daughter—a woman in direct contact with nature and her elemental self.

Our habitual meetups get interrupted when you have to travel for a conference. For a couple weeks, I don’t hear from you. I assume you’re busy catching up on work after getting back. But when I stop by with blackberries, I picked with Aethera, your husband tells me you haven’t returned yet.

“It happens from time to time,” he says. “She gets an idea and has to pursue it. Maybe she was really taken by the landscape while driving and decided to do some impromptu backpacking.”

But it’s been over two weeks. Shouldn’t you have at least called by now? I can’t help worrying that something’s happened to you, and we won’t get to babysit our grandkids together. Decades from now, will it be just me teaching them how to ski and make dumplings?

Driving home, I wish—for the first time in a long time—that my clairvoyance didn’t only work for family. I wouldn’t be worried if I had just a glimpse of you safe in some future moment—any future moment. You stuck in a broken elevator or giving

Zefiro an earful after he's been out with friends past when he agreed to be home. But there's nothing like that stopping me from fearing the worst. You aren't part of anything I know about Aethera's future, so maybe you won't be part of her future. Then again, few of the things I do know about her future involve Zefiro directly.

Later, in the shower's warm spray, I remember what Mom often said: worrying isn't helpful unless it gets you to do something. So, after toweling dry, I go straight to my desk and write down everything you told me about Zefiro's future—a list that ends up being 3 pages long. I read it over and pick something to start with: there will be times when he'll be inconsolably upset.

Tomorrow, I'll watch the news with Aethera. The next day, I'll take her to the animal shelter downtown. I'll encourage her to feel whatever she feels, then tell her that sometimes even though your heart goes out to others, you have to accept the way things are and let time pass. I'll keep working at it with Aethera until she understands the importance of this. Then I'll move on to another item on the list. That's what I can do for our children, whether you're here or not. Though of course, I'd rather you and I prepare them for their future together.

About the Author

Soramimi Hanarejima is the author of the neuropunk story collection *Literary Devices For Coping*. Soramimi's recent work appears in *Pulp Literature*, *The Offing* and *The Cincinnati Review*.



Irina Tall (Novikova)

About the Artist

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

The 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, draws on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

Instagram Collections:

<https://instagram.com/irina369tall?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

<https://instagram.com/irinanov4155?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

Service with a Sigh

Christopher S. Bell

“I can’t remember the last time I felt quite like this,” Brianne’s head rested against Ella Jane’s shoulder in the bright casino elevator.

“Is that good or bad?”

“It just is anymore.” The light dinged above them.

“That’s us,” Ella Jane smiled.

“It just is,” Brianne mumbled again, before setting her dented heel on the orange-striped carpet.

“You’re pretty spacey, aren’t you?” Ella Jane led Brianne down the hall a moment then let go.

“I’m most certainly something,” Brianne stumbled slightly before laughing upon arrival at their room.

“Okay,” Ella Jane quickly swiped the key card.

“Beep,” Brianne echoed the door as her friend turned the knob. “Beep. Beep, bitch,” she stepped past and collapsed onto the nearest bed.

“You’re gonna sober up before falling asleep,” Ella Jane declared.

“Who’s sleeping?” Brianne grabbed fists of comforter, rolling onto her back. “I’m ready for some nachos.”

“Check the top drawer,” Ella Jane removed her heels and earrings. “I think it’s in there.”

Brianne fidgeted with the dresser handle, groaning ever so slightly before grabbing the laminated room service menu and flinging it at her maid of honor. “Here! You always know what I want.”

Ella Jane grabbed the menu from the hotel carpet. “Yeah, it’s a curse,” she sighed.

“I gotta pee.”

Switching on the light and fan, Ella Jane wiggled out of her underwear and sat. It only took a moment of scrolling before her bladder emptied in the bowl. Maureen and Paula were still taking selfies at the slots. They'd been there all night, reapplying dashes of blush before sexy faces. Brianne's bachelorette was a mere afterthought, an excuse to act unsavory.

Room service forced pleasantries through the receiver as Ella Jane ordered turkey clubs with fries and cheese. "You take care of it?" Brianne's eyes were slits, watching TikTok's when her friend exited the bathroom.

"Yeah, we're good," Ella Jane stepped over to the dresser and pulled out their pajamas. "You don't wanna sleep in that dress, do you?"

"I think I'm okay with it since I'm not getting up right now," Brianne replied. "Did you see Jed's post?"

"Uh huh," Ella Jane slipped into her pajama bottoms then tossed Brianne her set. "Here. In case you change your mind."

"What's wrong with him anyway? Why am I marrying this person?"

"Because you love him, and because you told me to tell you that you said it was okay for him to go to strip club," Ella Jane observed.

"Well, I couldn't let him know that it bothered me," Brianne groaned. "Then he'd think I was naggy or something."

"Ya gotta nag at some point."

"When it's necessary. Anyway, maybe we should get a manwhore to come to the room." Brianne suggested.

"And do what?" Ella Jane fell to opposite mattress, exhausted by notions.

"I don't know. Is it weird that I want to fuck at least one more person before I marry Jed?" Brianne asked.

"Getting married never stopped you from fucking other people before," Ella Jane replied.

Brianne's mouth went wide. "Wow, that was harsh, girl."

"The truth has that effect sometimes."

"Why are you giving me a hard time right now? Especially when this is my weekend. You're here for me, remember?"

“How could I forget?” Ella Jane scrolled on her phone.

“So yeah, don’t go bringing up the past, alright?” Brianne scoffed. “It’s not doing me any good.”

“Maybe I’m just trying to get a point across here,” Ella Jane replied.

“Yeah, I know, okay?” Brianne stared her down. “I get drunk and wanna fuck sometimes. It happens, okay? Like you’re any better.”

“I’m not married... at least not anymore.”

“Is this about Anson?” Brianne asked. “Are you still mad about all of that shit?”

“I’m not mad about anything,” Ella Jane replied. “I’m just calmly sitting here, waiting for room service so you can sober the fuck up.”

“Yeah, it’s Anson, ain’t it” Brianne shook her head fiercely. “You’ve been holding that grudge since eighth grade.”

“He was my boyfriend first,” Ella Jane said.

“Yeah, and he only dated you to get closer to me.”

“Sure. That must be the only reason.”

“He was a shitty husband,” Brianne said. “You don’t know.”

“You’re right, I don’t,” Ella Jane replied. “And I’m not the one who brought him up in the first place.”

“It’ll be different with Jed,” Brianne’s tone subsided. “I just know it will be.”

“Definitely,” Ella Jane nodded. “I still don’t know if I wanna try and find another man. I’m finally at this point where I’m happy just being alone and not having to clean shit off the toilet seat every other day. Plus, it’s so hard getting to know anybody anymore, and these dates I’ve been going on have just been awful. Maybe I’m just not interested in the first place, but it’s been hard. Anyway, I’ll probably end up flying solo for your wedding.”

“Uh huh...” Brianne breathed into her pillow; eyes closed.

“I’m gonna go get some ice,” Ella Jane stood and slipped into her tennis shoes, before grabbing the key card and ice bucket. She walked on the tips of her feet and waited for the machine to vend, before dialing his number.

“Hello?” Anson answered.

“Hey, how are you?” Ella Jane whispered into the receiver.

“Awe hey there, babe. I’m good,” he said. “How’s the weekend going?”
“It’s going, baby,” Ella Jane sighed. “It’s going.”

About the Author

Christopher S. Bell is a writer and musician. His work has recently appeared in Propagule, Arboreal, and The Dead Mule. His latest novella, Contemporary Disregard, is out now. He currently resides in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



Irina Tall (Novikova)

About the Artist

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design.

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animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren. In 2020, she took part in Poznań Art Week. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

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Everett and Hossein

Joseph Celizic

We're watching our sons play in my new basement, in the house we've saved a decade for. High interest rates are nothing compared to leprosy.

There's grief in the air, flashcards laying frustratingly on the table, but we're thankful for the rough blue carpet that's older than us all. Forough tells me the basements in Tabriz are used as pool rooms and they keep their kitchens there to stay cool.

"All of them?" I ask, and she pretends my words don't sound silly.

"Just some."

She's here posthumously, like *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season*. She'd knocked on our door, a warm "Hello" on her lips. The wind ruined the streets and combed her hair as she waited on our porch, hand-in-hand with Hossein, somehow a young boy again. She wondered if we were up for a playdate. I was too entranced to ask how she got here.

"I am cold," she'd told me, and I made us coffee.

We sip and they teach my son Everett new signs in ASL. *Moon. Sun. Flower. Game*. Beautiful in every tongue. All morning I've been at a loss with the flashcards. He can recite them, but only if I lead with the sounds. It's like I'm bracing his tongue, the same way he holds my hand when he walks downstairs, or how I help him pull up his socks each morning. I need him to not need me.

"It's slow, like rain. Then all at once," she says, her eyes never leaving Hossein. There's no halo or aura, but there's something eternal about her. Maybe that's how she always was.

Hossein shows off his somersault and my son tries to follow, falling sideways and laughing. Always laughing. His joy is as relentless as peak Schwarzenegger on the bench press. It's lifted us out of some dark places.

I want to tell her that I too have watched children run barefoot after dogs, my daughter and son infatuated with the neighbor's Scottish terrier, but she's already down on one knee, holding out her arm. She tries to roll my son over it. "Here, let me show you," she says, but he

gives her his stomp-foot grunt, lowers his chin.

I start to tell them that Everett has Down syndrome, but they seem to already know. "He does that to everyone," I say instead, and I try the flashcards again, one word each. "Help. Me. Please," I read.

"No, no," Everett says, almost as strong as his laugh. She smiles at his spirit.

Still, I feel the incapacity of concrete hands. I feel rude. I want to apologize.

"Let him speak," she tells me.

The room's too full to talk of the ones we've lost. Her son, Kamyar. Our unborn, unnamed. She's so full of love. Of course she is. The one who visited the lepers and told their story. The one who adopted Hossein, his parents already passed. If the nations were full of her

then I wouldn't have trouble sleeping. I wouldn't fear that the aged world has lost its heart.

They let him choose his own words from the scattered cards like he's seeing their beauty for the first time, finding them through the wreckage. *Horse. Orange. Rest.*

Everett hugs her, slow and soft. Hossein comes in too, and it's the three of them huddled, like they're worshipping grief, all as the clock strikes four.

I know that she's going to leave. She'll ascend, her skirt full of lilies. She's going to set the sky with geraniums and the sun will finally reach her. She'll turn the corner, riding that last ribbon of road, and never look back. I keep trying to think of ways we can keep from losing her. Maybe if I don't write it, she'll never actually be gone. Maybe, if we keep it in future tense, it'll stay a stanza away. With every syllable and second, maybe we can recover what we lost.

About the Author

Joseph Celizic teaches writing at Bowling Green State University. His work has been published in *Indiana Review*, *Third Coast*, *North American Review*, *Redivider*, and *CutBank*, and has been shortlisted in *Best American Mystery Stories*.



Nightstryker and Mishap, Jennifer S. Lange

About the Artist

Jennifer S. Lange is a self-taught artist creating illustrations for books, games, posters, and worldbuilding projects. Her work has been shown internationally and in online exhibitions.

Jennifer lives in northern Germany with her partner, and a lot of cats.

The Last Weekend in July

Zach Murphy

It was the summer of 1993 and Keilani and I sat by the crackling fire as the bullfrogs croaked a sonorous symphony, the grass swayed from a whispering breeze, and the stars zipped in different directions across the vast night sky.

“What a weekend,” Keilani said, resting her hands on the back of her jet-black hair.

“Rad like a cat wearing sunglasses,” I said.

“Satisfying like spelling Sriracha right on the first try,” Keilani said.

That was our thing. One of our things. In fact, when you’ve known someone since the age of five, you amass a lot of things.

I leaned in toward the warmth of the fire, took a deep breath, and prepared to tell Keilani something that I hesitated to tell her all summer. “I decided I’m not going to Northwestern.”

“What?” Keilani asked.

“I’ve thought about it a lot and I just don’t think college is for me,” I answered.

“But we had it all planned out,” Keilani said. “Together.”

“I’m so terrified of tossing four years away,” I said. “And going into debt forever.”

“Why did you wait until the last minute to tell me?” Keilani asked. “You always do that, and it drives me crazy.”

“It’s not the last minute,” I said.

“That’s another thing you do,” Keilani said. “I know it’s not literally the last minute, but you just have this affinity for suddenly dipping out on plans.”

“Like when?” I asked.

“Remember when you didn’t even show up to your own birthday party? The party that I organized!”

“I had the flu!”

Keilani stood up. “And the time you said you would pick me up from my dentist appointment and didn’t show up?”

“I had a panic attack about driving in downtown traffic,” I said. “I had just gotten my license!”

“I had to use a pay phone while half of my mouth was numb!”

Keilani tossed another log onto the fire and a flurry of sparks burst into the air.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

Keilani sat back down, fanned the smoke away from her eyes, and brushed the ashes off her sweatshirt. “I’m going to miss you. That’s all.”

“I’m going to miss you too,” I said.

“So, what do you plan on doing?” Keilani asked.

“I want to save the world.”

“Like Wonder Woman?”

“No,” I said. “I keep having these dreams about rainforests losing their color and oceans warping into garbage dumps. I want to try and do something. I’m just not sure what yet.”

“Maybe someday there will be an invention that allows us to see each other’s lives from far away,” Keilani said.

“Sure,” I said. “And maybe Blockbuster will go out of business!”

We both laughed until we snorted.

Keilani reached over and grabbed my hand. “We’ll still look up at the same moon,” she said.

I wondered if I’d ever have a moment with Keilani like this again. “What a weekend,” I said.

Keilani sighed. “Over too soon like a Prince song.”

About the Author

Zach Keali’i Murphy is a Hawaii-born writer with a background in cinema. His stories appear in Reed Magazine, The Coachella Review, Raritan Quarterly, Another Chicago Magazine, Still Point Arts Quarterly, and more. He has published the chapbooks

Tiny Universes (Selcouth Station Press) and If We Keep Moving (Ghost City Press). He lives with his wonderful wife, Kelly, in St. Paul, Minnesota.



Blessings, Jennifer Weigel

About the Artist

Jennifer Weigel is a multi-disciplinary mixed media conceptual artist. Weigel utilizes a wide range of media to convey her ideas, including assemblage, drawing, fibers, installation, jewelry, painting, performance, photography, sculpture, video, and writing. Much of her work touches on themes of beauty, identity (especially gender identity), memory & forgetting, and institutional critique. Weigel's art has been exhibited nationally in all 50 states and has won numerous awards.

Website: jenniferweigelart.com

Non-Fiction



Day Lily Elephant Bush, Lisa Tang Liu and J. David Tabor

About the Artists

This is a series of collaborative works between Lisa Tang Liu in Stoughton, Massachusetts, and J. David Tabor in Phoenix, Arizona. They have never met in person, but they are good friends. This project involves a "film swap"-- a process that requires one photographer to first expose a roll of film, rewind it, and then send it out to another photographer for a second exposure. Lisa and David did not inform one another in advance what was specifically photographed on the film. The landscapes and plants of Arizona against those of Massachusetts create surrealist images that transcend climate.

Best Friends for Life—Whatever Is Left of It

Mary Senter

When we became friends, I told you, inexplicably, all my stories—my hopes, my fears, my dream, my failures, my everything. I told you things I'd never told anyone. I told you things nobody else knows—things buried so deep down that I don't even tell them to myself. I don't know why I told you these things; because I felt safe with you, I guess. I trust you. You listen and accept everything without judging and then you tell a funny anecdote to make me laugh. I can say anything to you, and it doesn't faze you. I can use my inner voice with you. I don't have to filter myself or pretend to be something that I'm not. You hold all of the unvarnished knowledge of me. You are the warehouse of the contents of my soul.

It was easy telling you everything in long emails that felt more like rambling diary entries written to remind myself one day, but there was that one truth I had to tell you in person. You already knew part of the story from when I knew you long ago, but like everyone else who knew a mirage of me, you didn't believe the version of the story I told (it was only the tip of the story, anyway). When I saw you again and told you the final truth—the one I couldn't tell in an email, you held me. I cried.

I knew, my friend, the first time I put my arm around you and rested my face on your warm chest that it was a place I always wanted to be. I felt protected by you, holding all that knowledge of me.

I've only felt that safe once in my life, when I was a small child, and I would sometimes get to go to sleep in my dad's bed. He would tell stories or sing songs and then I would throw my leg over his hip so that I knew he would remain there after I fell asleep. He would protect me from the boogieman, monsters under the bed, or any other thing that could hurt me. But then, the divorce, and that was the end of any sense of security.

Not that I expect you to save me from anything...but there's a sort of sanctuary in knowing that someone knows what's going on with you and is taking the journey with you—they have your back.

You are a treasure, BFF. You've enriched my life in ways I could not have foreseen. It's odd that I should find true friendship in mid-life, with a man who lives in another state, but I'm grateful for it just the same and I want it to last for the rest of our lives.

I wonder, though, what will happen to me when you die and take all your knowledge of me with you. Who will know me then? Who will "get" me? Who will understand my strange idiosyncrasies? My true self will, once again, be buried deep inside me.

Maybe I'll go first, and you'll never even know what happened to me. One day I'll just stop writing. You'll get worried after a few days and text, but I won't answer. You'll wonder if you did something wrong. Offended me. You'll go on my Facebook to see if I've posted. Eventually, you'll figure it out. And you'll be upset that I didn't send you a rambling email, spewing forth exit words like vomit, trying to explain the feelings of death, grief, and loss...and saying goodbye. But I'll always be with you, because I've given you all of my intimate details to carry with you forever, just as I'll carry your stories with me.

About the Author

Mary Senter creates in a cabin in the woods on the shores of the Salish Sea. She earned certificates in literary fiction writing from the University of Washington and an M.A. in strategic communication from WSU. Her work can be found in North American Review, El Portal, Drunk Monkeys, Ponder Review, Cleaver, and elsewhere. She is the founder of Milltown Press. Visit her at www.marysenter.com.



Bee, Rachel Singel



Bee, Rachel Singel

About the Artist

Rachel Singel is an Associate Professor at the University of Louisville. Rachel grew up on a small farm in Charlottesville, Virginia. She received a Bachelor of Arts

from the University of Virginia in 2009 and a Master of Fine Arts in Printmaking from the University of Iowa in 2013.

Rachel has participated in residencies at the Penland School of Crafts, the Venice Printmaking Studio, Internazionale di Grafica Venezia, Art Print Residence in Barcelona, Spain, Wharepuke Print Studios in New Zealand, and Proyecto'ace, an Artist-in-Residence Program in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She has studied non-toxic printmaking at the Grafisk Eksperimentarium studio in Andalusia and has continued her research at AGA LAB in Amsterdam, Netherlands in Spring 2023. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and represented in private, public and museum collections.

Friends

Debra White

Are diamonds a woman's best friend? My friends are as precious as diamonds.

Lacking family ties, my friends were always family. Friendships started in childhood. I grew up in a scrappy NYC neighborhood called Astoria. We kids played stickball, rode bikes, and walked the neighborhood to look at rats in empty lots. I made friends throughout my high school years (68-72). I spent at least six hours a day with my classmates, five days a week. We laughed, celebrated birthdays, and made corny jokes at lunch. After graduation, I missed my former classmates but life interfered. We drifted apart. I attended college at night, making friends with students who shared my harried lifestyle of full-time work and fighting fatigue during lectures. In 1982, I quit smoking and befriended runners. In my work life, I made friends with co-workers. The lettuce on the BLT's may have been limp and the coffee weak, but it was a pleasure to eat lunch with co-workers. After long runs, we often went out for breakfast. A serious car accident in 1994 ended my social work career. To stay connected to people I do volunteer work. A group of us older women volunteer together on Thursday for a global humanitarian agency. I look forward to our time together.

I cherish all my friends, past and present, but Maryann, Tui, Kristin, Mary and Julie are special. I wish there was space to mention everyone.

I met Maryann in the mid-1970s when we both worked for a large NYC corporation. We connected right away, and our friendship endures. We share lots of memories, but one stands out. In earlier days, Maryann, her sister Virginia and mother Kathleen bonded in the furniture department of a large department store. On a cold morning, they probably lingered longer than a salesman liked. So, he asked Kathleen if she needed help. It sounded like a prompt to get moving since it was evident they weren't buying the couch. Kathleen smiled and said coffee and a bun would be lovely. Maryann

married, raised a family, and is now retired. I look forward to our daily e-mails and hearing about her life.

Tui entered my life in 1998 at a writing class. We had similar literary interests. After the six-week class ended, we made a lunch date. Tui welcomed me into her family. I spent holidays at her home enjoying good food as well as good company. Last May, Tui and her husband moved away to be closer to their daughter and her family. I miss our lunch/movie dates, chats over coffee and the festivals we attended. Holiday season won't be the same. Nor will the festivals.

I moved from upstate NY to Phoenix in 1997 and quickly became entrenched in the animal rescue community. I met Julie as she toured the county shelter where I was a volunteer. Two ragged Dachshunds, impounded as strays, caught Julie's attention. Due to their wretched condition, the dogs were likely headed to the euthanasia list because an owner hadn't show up. Julie contacted a rescue group that agreed to accept the pair. Neither dog lived very long but at least they died in caring, loving homes. Our love for animals brought us together and we're still friends. Each week, we take a walk in a local riparian preserve. Sometimes, we play cards. I'm glad she's my friend.

In 2015, I converted to Islam. The 1994 car accident nearly took my life. I believed I was spared for a reason. I wasn't sure why. I met a Muslim woman at the airport where I volunteered, and we became friends. Islam filled a gap in my life. There was pushback, however. Not all my friends approved. But not Kristin, who I also know from animal rescue. Kristin and I get together once every two months or so. We're predictable eating lunch at the same restaurant and ordering the same dish. We see a movie afterwards. I'm happy she stayed.

I met Mary maybe fifteen years ago. We're both animal lovers. Until the pandemic walloped us in 2020, we got together at least once a month. In her 80s, Mary is fearful of the virus even with vaccinations. I had to respect her wishes not to see movies or eat lunch indoors anymore. We're still friends, sharing regular emails. I miss getting together. Our conversations were always invigorating.

The car accident left me reliant on a meager disability income. I can squeeze a dime until Lincoln gasps. I shop in thrift stores, buy day old bread and water down dish soap and shampoo to make them last longer. Around 2017, my car broke down. The repair

bills were enormous, and I wasn't sure how I'd pay them. Enter the ladies from my weekly Quran group. They collected every penny. They also contributed to my rent increases and utility bills. I feel humbled by their generosity. My own family was never that helpful, even after the accident when I had no income for a while. I can't give money but I give my heart in return.

Animal friends have also enriched my life. I got my first dog in 1985. I found a scrappy mutt that I named Scottie. Having company filled my lonely apartment. I talked to Scottie as if he was human. Along the way, at least twenty more unwanted dogs found their way into my life. I loved each and every one, including Lucy. She only lived for six weeks. They each brought something special to my life.

The internet opened up friends from faraway places. I wish I could meet them all. It's likely I won't. Nonetheless, I am blessed to know so many people not just from the US but from around the world.

My friends make me feel safe and warm. I'd be lost without them.

About the Author

A 1994 car accident ended Debra's career due to a traumatic brain injury. She re-invented herself through volunteer work and writing. Debra wrote for Animal Wellness, Arizona Republic, Social Work, Airports of the World, Psychology Today, and others. She reviewed books, contributed book chapters, and wrote a book for TFH Publications.

Website: www.debrawhite.org



Milady and Friend, Janis Butler Holm

About the Artist

Janis Butler Holm served as Associate Editor for *Wide Angle*, the film journal, and currently works as a writer and editor in sunny Los Angeles. Her prose, poems, art, and performance pieces have appeared in small-press, national, and international magazines. Her plays have been produced in the U.S., Canada, Russia, and the U.K.

"*Milady and Friend*" is a humorous take on old oil paintings of aristocrats--by adding a kind of friend most unlikely to have been included in this historic portraiture.

The Sleepover

James Osborne

Mike's parents and mine agreed one summer weekend that I could have a sleepover at his house. We were seven or eight. Our farms were two miles apart. It would be our first sleepover, and our last.

Mike's mother was a warm, kind-hearted soul who spoke little English. No need. The smiles that danced in her sparkling blue-green eyes spoke volumes. She and Mike's dad had moved here from Ukraine many years earlier.

Over supper, she encouraged me to learn a few words of Ukrainian. The words coincided with the English words for common expressions like 'hello' and 'goodbye', 'good morning' and 'good night', and items like 'knife', 'fork' and 'spoon'.

It was interesting and fun to learn a wee bit about another language. I concentrated hard, trying to remember how to pronounce words that came awkward to my tongue. It was challenging but I wanted very much to please my friend's mom.

Later that evening, after we were sent upstairs to bed, Mike encouraged me to learn more Ukrainian words. He was like that. I agreed eagerly, looking forward to impressing his mother in the morning. We worked at it until she called sternly for us to quiet down for the night.

The next morning, I got my first opportunity to show off my newly learned Ukrainian words. I was drawn to the kindly nature of Mike's mother and wanted to please her. So, when Mike and I walked into the kitchen I greeted her, as best as I could remember, with one of the phrases she'd taught me during supper.

Before coming downstairs, Mike had rehearsed me again how to say, "Good Morning!" in Ukrainian. As soon as I said it, her face lit up with a beaming smile. I was so proud! She warmly replied with some words I'd not yet learned. But it confirmed for me she was pleased with my efforts and was impressed. I was delighted.

Mike and I then joined the rest of the family at the kitchen table for breakfast. It was Sunday morning, and everyone was there: Mike's parents, his two sisters, one brother...and both of us. It was obvious where Mike had come by his engaging smile—his dad also sported a massive beaming smile. His Dad's perpetually happy face lit up a room wherever he went.

Encouraged by Mike and his mom and eager to please everyone with my newfound grasp of Ukrainian, I proceeded to show off even more.

I picked up the glass of fresh milk where I was sitting and promptly rhymed off the words for the milk and the glass that Mike had carefully schooled me on the night before and coached me again in the morning.

Mike's mom was holding a huge cast iron frying pan filled with scrambled eggs. It crashed down onto the cook stove. Her eyes widened and her mouth opened, speechless. A stern expression came over Mike's father's face, but he couldn't hide the laughter in his eyes. His brother made no such effort. He burst out laughing. Mike's sisters seemed undecided whether to laugh or feign shock. They turned away.

Mike's mother pointed her finger sternly at Mike and then toward the door from the kitchen leading upstairs. Mike slinked out, presumably up to his room, where his dastardly plot had been hatched the night before.

Within minutes, I was heading down the gravel road toward my home two miles away...without breakfast.

Eventually, I learned the Ukrainian that Mike had taught me. When translated into English they included words rarely uttered in polite company.

Oops.

Happily, we've remained friends to this day and like most boys growing up as friends, we chalked up many another adventure, happily less offensive ones.

About the Author

James Osborne is the author of four novels including Amazon #1 bestseller, *THE ULTIMATE THREAT* (Endeavour Press, London, UK), a suspense/thriller about the resurgence of terrorist group ISIS. He is also the author of the award-winning suspense/action novels, *THE MAIDSTONE CONSPIRACY* and *THE PLOT TO*

ASSASSINATE SECRET SHEPHERD (Solstice Publishing, Farmington, MO). His latest, A PRESCRIPTION FOR DECEPTION is an action/suspense novel.

Osborne's essays and short stories have appeared in dozens of anthologies, magazines, and literary and professional journals, many to be found in an award-winning collection of short stories, ENCOUNTERS (Solstice Publishing).

His varied career has included investigative journalist, college teacher, army officer, vice-president of a Fortune 500 company, business owner, and professional editor.



Blessings, Jennifer Weigel

About the Artist

Jennifer Weigel is a multi-disciplinary mixed media conceptual artist. Weigel utilizes a wide range of media to convey her ideas, including assemblage, drawing, fibers, installation, jewelry, painting, performance, photography, sculpture, video, and writing. Much of her work touches on themes of beauty, identity (especially gender identity), memory & forgetting, and institutional critique. Weigel's art has been exhibited nationally in all 50 states and has won numerous awards.

Website: jenniferweigelart.com

The Hideout

Michael Collins

Growing up in a small town is incredibly boring. They try to warn you in books and movies, but unless you experience it firsthand, it's a little hard to believe. I learned the hard way when I moved from West Palm Beach to Sebring. It was a couple hours north, but much safer than West Palm by a longshot, which had considerable appeal to my parents at the time.

After living there for a few years and staying relatively bored and isolated due to living in a neighborhood full of old people- my grandma included- we moved. It was only a few blocks away, to a house near the YMCA, but it made all the difference, because one of my -at the time- acquaintances lived right across the street. We'd ridden the same school bus, and he'd insisted on talking to me and becoming friends. When I found out where we would be moving to, I tried to be as covert as possible in finding out which house was his. It didn't matter, because he figured it out when we moved in, but I thought I was so clever for trying to be sneaky.

With Lane came Casey, a girl our age who also rode our bus. We bonded over being mean to him, because we were teenagers and it seemed like the thing to do at the time, but eventually we all became best friends. We started spending as much time together as we humanly could. If one of us had a bad day, we would get together and, because there was nothing else to do in a small Florida town, go to the Circle K down the street to get the largest sized Polar Pop we could before vanishing into the woods to take a walk. We stayed out for hours, and annoyed our parents to no end, but it was fine. It was worth it. We didn't get into the stereotypical teenage mischief, so our parents trusted us to go on our little walks. They didn't know where we went. They never asked, and we never told.

We ended up finding the hideout by accident, exploring paths that were already overgrown and muddy until we came to a little clearing, the ground covered in pine

needles. It was the coolest spot ever. Private, quiet, isolated: the perfect spot to sit and talk and drink our sugary beverages when it was too hot to actually walk. Getting to it was a bit of a task, but we had two routes we could take. One we used more than the other, which I personally enjoyed because it made Lane do an incredible balancing act over a muddy puddle in order to avoid getting his shoes dirty. We were best friends, but teasing him was still fun. Still is.

That path is now dried up, in large part thanks to global warming. The overgrown paths we walked and managed to turn into walkways with our boots and sneakers have turned back into overgrown paths that make you worry about snakes lurking in them again. Getting to the hideout all these years later is more of a struggle than ever, especially going alone, but it's doable if you know where to turn. What tree branch to duck under, which conjoined trees to slip between. If you hit the state park boundary, you've gone too far.

The initials we carved into the one big tree have faded, grown over because we were too worried about the tree to carve them deeply at the time. The stuffed animal we left out there as a mascot was still there, hidden beneath more pine needles. It vibrated once, and we thought it was hilarious, but the batteries have long since died. The already matted fur has degraded in the three years since it got left there, going from a vibrant maroon to a grayish pink. The facial features of the lion weren't spared from the passage of time either, going from a lovable valentine's day gift to something out of a horror movie.

Somehow, despite the changes, the hideout in general looked almost the exact same. Emptier from going back alone, but the same. Pine needles don't change as much as people do, it seems.

About the Author

Michael Collins is a 22-year-old student at Valencia College in Orlando, Florida. He enjoys baking, knitting, gardening, spending time with his friends, and drinking tea. He is studying to be a writer and hopes to publish his own fiction one day.



Rooster, Rachel Singel



Chicken, Rachel Singel

About the Artist

Rachel Singel is an Associate Professor at the University of Louisville. Rachel grew up on a small farm in Charlottesville, Virginia. She received a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Virginia in 2009 and a Master of Fine Arts in Printmaking from the University of Iowa in 2013.

Rachel has participated in residencies at the Penland School of Crafts, the Venice Printmaking Studio, Internazionale di Grafica Venezia, Art Print Residence in Barcelona, Spain, Wharepuke Print Studios in New Zealand, and Proyecto'ace, an Artist-in-Residence Program in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She has studied non-toxic printmaking at the Grafisk Eksperimentarium studio in Andalusia and has continued her research at AGA LAB in Amsterdam, Netherlands in Spring 2023. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and represented in private, public and museum collections.

Friendship Sting

Sunday Dintro

We met between sixth and seventh grade. She was older by a year. Just enough to be worldly yet approachable. We were essentially trapped, our mothers taking us to a resort that functioned like a gated community: everyone knew you and where you were. The only way out: to swim far enough into the ocean, which didn't appeal to me—I wasn't a rebel then, just lonely.

We met the first day. “Jane” in the pool with her mother and sister, my mom and I being escorted to our room. We locked eyes, the connection immediate. We knew one another like we'd grown up together. An instantaneous knowing; an experience entirely new to me.

I don't remember what swimsuit I wore or what the food was like. I can't tell you how hot it was or what my mother did for the week we were on vacation together but apart. All I know is, for the first time in my life, I had a curfew of 10pm, beads as currency, and someone to run around with.

When the vacation ended, the promise to stay in touch exchanged, we returned to our separate lives. I wrote a letter immediately, sent it off, hoped for the best.

The letters came. We wrote furiously, and occasionally found ways to visit one another. Our friendship triumphed over school, friends, love, and life.

In a blink, I was living with a person who was essentially my life-partner...only it wasn't going so great. I got up the courage to walk away after nearly a decade, starting over completely at a time when all my friends were beginning to settle into adult lives; backwards.

I moved back with my parents to save money, buy a house - that super adult thing you're supposed to do to prove your worthiness.

I'm about to turn thirty, feeling like I've screwed up my entire life, when the phone rings. The voice on the other end tells me she's pregnant. Not only is Jane pregnant, but the father isn't in the picture. She's terrified but thrilled.

I'm jealous.

Of course I'm happy for her (in the back of my mind somewhere), and say the encouraging things: how she'll be amazing and doesn't need that guy. How we'd been raised by single moms, she could do this. How I'll check in and come to the baby shower. Through it all, I'm jealous. So jealous. She's doing the one thing I haven't figured out how to do: have a baby alone.

That's the moment our connection became a bit tenuous. The fray in the cord visible. We spoke less and less, letters slipping from once a week to once a month to not at all. There was email now and while Jane was responsible for getting me to join MySpace and later Facebook, the connection was never what it had been.

I bought a house, moved again, sold the house, met a man, had a baby. And then Jane called. She'd be in town for one night on a stop-over to Cuba. Her family was going to Cuba but would stop and stay with us for one night.

It was a whirlwind; we caught up on so much in such a short time, but it didn't feel right. Still, I invited them to our wedding when we decided to marry, and they came. The connection felt a little stronger, even as I could feel the connection between Jane and her husband weakening.

And then everything was locking down, the house we'd been living in for free we were told to fix up, sell, vacate without telling anyone what we were doing until the house was on the market. I had a new baby that was only a few months old.

Jane called. I could only hear every other word, partly because she was crying, partly because she was whispering so her kids wouldn't hear her, partly because phones are the worst, and I couldn't see her expressions. I gathered she was having a hard time. I gathered she needed someone. I gathered she wanted me to come to her, to be there for her.

And I said...no.

I wasn't at liberty to explain all the reasons why, although two of the reasons were apparent: COVID and a breastfeeding baby. Even with those, I could have forced my way to her if I wanted to.

But I didn't.

I wrote letters and emails. I never heard back.

I can't blame her, of course. She was the ultimate in bravery, asking me to be there, and I was the ultimate in douchery, saying no. What friendship could recover from that? And yes, the friendship had been fraying before that anyhow, the "betrayal," for I don't know what else to call it, merely the final weight the cord couldn't bear.

Still, it bothers me. Our friendship survived decades of intense emotional and physical differences and distances. How had this moment of impossibility broken it? And if the cord of friendship was already dissolving, what am I mourning the loss of? If Jane waltzed into my life today, in this hour, how would my life be different? What am I clinging to?

Perhaps it's youth. Perhaps it's the idea a person can know a person at first sight. Perhaps it's having a friend in your pocket that will always be your friend. There's an awareness about this just outside my vision, shimmering on the periphery, but every time I glance, it disappears.

The answer has nothing to do with Jane. The answer is how disgusted I am with myself.

I love the idea of myself as the friend who drops everything when needed, who swoops in and saves the day, or at the very least is the shoulder to cry on. I love the idea of myself as dependable and available. I mourn less the loss of "Jane" and more the loss of the idea that I am a good friend. And that stings.

About the Author

Sunday Dutro lives in Montana with her husband, children, dogs, cats, and chickens. She is actively working on a memoir and can be reached at sundaydutro.com



Blessings, Wall Hung, Jennifer Weigel

About the Artist

Jennifer Weigel is a multi-disciplinary mixed media conceptual artist. Weigel utilizes a wide range of media to convey her ideas, including assemblage, drawing, fibers, installation, jewelry, painting, performance, photography, sculpture, video, and writing. Much of her work touches on themes of beauty, identity (especially gender identity), memory & forgetting, and institutional critique. Weigel's art has been exhibited nationally in all 50 states and has won numerous awards.

Website: jenniferweigelart.com

Poetry



Day Lily Elephant Bust, Lisa Tang Liu and J. David Tabor

About the Artists

This is a series of collaborative works between Lisa Tang Liu in Stoughton, Massachusetts, and J. David Tabor in Phoenix, Arizona. They have never met in person, but they are good friends. This project involves a "film swap"-- a process that requires one photographer to first expose a roll of film, rewind it, and then send it out to another photographer for a second exposure. Lisa and David did not inform one another in advance what was specifically photographed on the film. The landscapes and plants of Arizona against those of Massachusetts create surrealist images that transcend climate and geopolitical divides.

At the Tone

Bruce McRae

I can't come to the phone right now,
I'm wrestling the tigers of indifference.
I'm up to my waist in holy water.
The sky is burning.

I'm not in at the moment,
I'm paddling in the piss-green sea,
herding lizards, seeding the stars.
I'm being driven to distraction –
dark-eyed men in hats and sunglasses
are taking me away from myself.

If you must do, please leave a message.
But I no longer have the ability to listen.
My time is tempered by destruction.
I'm made miserable with compassion.

About the Author

Bruce McRae, a Canadian musician, is a multiple Pushcart nominee with poems published in hundreds of magazines such as Poetry, Rattle and the North American Review. The winner of the 2020 Libretto prize and author of four poetry collections and seven chapbooks, his poems have been performed and broadcast globally.

Friend, It is November Now

Stephen Mead

Days go by. Time is flurries but there is no hurry in this snow. It goes over brambles and wild grape vines. This is the astonishing quiet I breathe and feel you through. I am like a fish bubbling up against ice, all thaws a ghost's opaqueness then transparency. Surely I remember how there was spring in your touch, the safest stream in which to traverse.

Funny, some thought it perilous, a nerve-journey, and your fear too big for handling. Mine might have been in the too-quick months of you heading towards death, but I hadn't time, will enough for anything but inhabiting that world of yours.

Generous—you let it become mine, giving access as child or brother. I played Hepburn to your Grant, growing past the trial by jigsaw of what a life ending may endure.

In me I've preserved all of that as the nights, the months fall same as this great snow.

We are in the hush, the lightness, the light until I can shed the rest and perhaps, as you, rise pure.

About the Author

Stephen Mead is a retired Civil Servant, having worked two decades for three state agencies. Before that his more personally fulfilling career was fifteen years in healthcare. Throughout all these day jobs he was able to find time for writing poetry/essays and creating art. Occasionally he even got paid for this work. Currently he is resident

artist/curator for The Chroma Museum, artistic renderings of LGBTQI historical figures, organizations and allies predominantly before Stonewall.

Website: <https://thestephenmeadchromamuseum.weebly.com/>

Apollo Mourns Icarus

James Penha

I would have saved him,
a beauty, lithe and lean
hair as yellow as mine.

Often I came to him
in the maze, his father
busy in his workshop.


The boy adored me
of course and opened
himself to my longing.

Of his father's plan to fix
wings of feathers, string,
beeswax I knew nothing.

I would have saved him
but I attended elsewhere
as he flew into my radiance.

I would have tried
although mortals who love
divinely almost always fall.

About the Author

Expat New Yorker James Penha (he/him ) has lived for the past three decades in Indonesia. Nominated for Pushcart Prizes in fiction and poetry, his work is widely published in journals and anthologies. His newest chapbook of poems, *American Daguerreotypes*, is available for Kindle. His essays have appeared in *The New York Daily News* and *The New York Times*. Penha edits *The New Verse News*, an online journal of current-events poetry.

Twitter: @JamesPenha

Civil Twilight

Katie Arrosa

Had I known you
the summer before high school
in muggy mornings,
waving away gnats
we'd have stalked frogs
torn around on bikes
and started a band.
Let's make up names,
draw a logo,
and get instruments:
we can BOTH play guitar.

Damn, your wild flashes would've fit
just right with mine.
We'd stash bang snaps
in ratty denim pockets
and do cartwheels
around 14th-birthday bonfires.
We'd smash every button because
for fun is a good reason
and why not is a complete sentence.
I'd double-dare you
to eat TWO Mega Warheads
just to see.

For this long indoor winter
of breeding dust bunnies,
adventures only happened
in movies I watched alone.
But you finally kicked down the door
on our mutual hump day
so even though white wires scatter our scalps
tonight, it smells like spring.
I'm old enough to know
late beats never
so let's raise hell.
You and I have so many songs to make up
while we throw long shadows
standing up on bike pedals.
It's still nice out at dusk.

About the Author

Katie Arrosa writes technical content for money and experiments with words, art, and multimedia for fun. She performs standup comedy tailored for punk-rock people; interviews her most fascinating friends; writes short fiction, how-to guides, and fun short essays; makes JavaScript toys; and experiments with digital art software to make pretty and/or marketable assets. You can see artifacts of these adventures on her website, katiearrosa.com.

Winter Desert

Debbie Cutler

My friends and I dance beneath starry nights

Arizona desert—earthy, dusty, herbal

Warmed by bonfire bright with flames

Heat against our backs

Long hair, fluid, like the music

Claps, cheers

To the beat of 8-tracks blaring

Pat Benatar, Stevie Nicks, Foreigner

Swing to “My Sharona,” “Bad Girls”

Rock with soul

Boys flirt with girls

Dressed in hip huggers, tight sweaters

Clogs, platforms, go go boots even

Swaying their stuff like a “Brick House”

Four corners to the wind

Kisses beneath saguaros and red yuccas

Howls at the moon

Breath thick with frost

Hardly aware of nocturnals

Scorpions, coyotes, rats, owls

Sing into the night

Brodies in the sand
Pricked by cactus
Joints pass hands
It's all good

Police warn us
Week after week
We pile in backs of trucks
Drive down deserted roads
Never with consequence

About the Author

Debbie Cutler, a writer of more than 30 years, has been published in numerous mainstream and literary magazines, including Cirque, Wingless Dreamer, Journal of Expressive Writing, The Dewdrop, Pure Slush, Shanti Arts (Still Point Arts Quarterly), Sweetycat Press, The MockingOwl Roost, Prime, Of Rust and Glass, Paddler Press, Red Wolf Journal, Columbia Business Times, Editor and Publisher, Independent Living, Wanderlust, IHRAF Publishes, among others. She has a piece coming out in eMerge Magazine in 2023.

Crazy Glue

Nathaniel Lachenmeyer

This vase has so many cracks

let's agree to agree

to call it a pattern

knowing it's only a matter of matter

or time before

one of us accidentally

or accidentally on purpose

elbows it off the shelf

of our lives again.

Let's agree next time

it falls to the floor

shattering everything

except the recollection

that it once held flowers

to lie and say there is no glue

crazy enough to fix it

that can be bought

for love or money

or anything in between.

Let's lie next time.

About the Author

Nathaniel Lachenmeyer is an award-winning disabled author of books for children and adults. His first book, *The Outsider*, which takes as its subject his late father's struggles with schizophrenia and homelessness, was published by Broadway Books. His most recent book, an all-ages graphic novel called *The Singing Rock & Other Brand-New Fairy Tales*, was published by First Second/Macmillan. Nathaniel lives outside Atlanta with his family.

Alone Together

Tomas Gustav

Where exactly had they been friends?
Was it high in the Wicklow Mountains,
in a long, uncertain afternoon,
after the car door thudded open
and they were left, suddenly alone;

or flying at nighttime above lives
like theirs, stubbornly invisible
between the capillaries of lights
that make homes as impenetrable
as air in the section of a lung;

or stood apart on a bridge in Pest,
so hopeless that it had turned pale
and become an outrageous stage set
for their own self-conscious, tired play,
shamed to awkwardness by their distrust;

or was it loving, but still loveless,
as, over London, an autumn sky
spent itself and they watched on benches
hidden in suburban shrubbery,
sure of no other nearness than this?

About the Author

Tomas Gustav is an art historian and writer living in Austria. He studied and then taught at Cambridge University for many years before moving to the University of Vienna. He has been a member of many creative writing groups and workshops, and has published poetry in books and journals, as well as numerous journal articles about poetry, art, and culture.

Reunion Tour

DL Pravda

Have a cigar. You're gonna go far. Pink Floyd

Kov the guitarbuilder peers over frozen Powell Creek.
A week after wind chills hit -5, we walk with blackhawks
through the marsh of the James River Refuge.

Kov pokes his walking stick through the crystalline ice:
not wise to walk on. I kneel at the edge and shoot
close-ups of white fractals fraying blue sun.

We sit on the wood overlook and share a joint.
Point of land. Tree of hands. Clay and sand.
You can't win if you don't play/guitar. Yellow finch

harmony. Karma on bass. Kov tests the border of ice.
Prudent wisdom will not suffice. Crunch. Crack. One step.
Smash through. Step back. Maybe we're not as stupid

as we used to be. Maybe it's enough to sit and look
and listen to dead reeds chattering and the woodpecker
waiting for cocky human humor. The current continues

under solid water like good blood pressure. Windless winter day
gets late early. Trudge back to the truck, muscles complain,
but I admire the slightest break of sweat: that all ground

is momentary, all steps are chance. You can't win
if you don't dance the gravel trail balcony over the smiling
mighty river of forty years of friendship.

About the Author

DL Pravda tries to keep it together either by jamming distorted reverb juice in his ears or by driving to the country and disappearing into the woodsfarm dimension. Recent poetry appears in Blue Collar Review, Bookends Review, Poetry Quarterly, Rockvale Review and South 85. His book Normal They Napalm the Cottonfields is a past winner of the Dogfish Head Poetry Prize. Pravda teaches at Norfolk State University.

Arrow in Flight

Buffy Shutt

i

She grabs the friend-thermometer.

Instant winter.

My words a snowbank.

She sets me afield

in frozen rhythm with the wind.

I whirl back, remembering what I said.

Repeat—

repeat the carelessness.

Can't hear it. The wind is in charge.

There are such things as sentence stems,

line scaffolding, word banks, cut-outs.

I count out the words on my fingers.

I open my mouth

the wave

the straight pin

the seed

spill out.

Oh, to be a bird and to have a tail, a rudder

that moves effortlessly and within that gesture is sorry.

ii

I dig: my hand deep into the bed
slits open the mattress.

I light: an old newspaper with a matchstick,
burn off my fingertips.

I research: apologies, rituals.

I tread: lake inside of me welcome-deep.
My skin itches. The drought is real.

I pull tight on the threads that fasten
my mouth to the doorknob. Arms unadorned.
I slam the door. Ten times a day.

iii

Unlike marriage there is
no ceremony.

Unlike marriage

ugly words —
cannot be
sucked back
or sloughed off
like so many snakeskins

piling high the marriage bed.

Unlike marriage

it expects more.

It is that tenderness

that waits to be trampled.

About the Author

A former marketing executive for movies and documentaries, Buffy is a two-time Pushcart and Best of the Net nominee. Her work appears in Anthropocene, Drunk Monkeys, Lumina, Sonic Boom, Dodging the Rain, Split Lip Magazine, The Door is a Jar. Buffy is collaborating with younger artists on a work of eco-feminism. She is learning about the present moment from her two grandsons. She has published two novels and her first poetry collection, Recruit to Deny will be published in 2023.

Even Light Must Fall Eventually

B. R. Jayne

It was a squirrel in the garbage can digging for food
He was so close I could count his whiskers,
 name every spot that had seen struggle on the flesh of his stomach
His eyes met mine and I smiled, turning to you—

*While Lucifer plummeted, did he try
to use his wings to slow his descent
before realizing
 that they had been ripped from his body?
Or did the misery of their absence remind him with every rasping breath
that they were gone*

I turned to you.
 the squirrel blinked, scars on his skin shifting
When I realized you were gone I wondered
how long ago the pain had receded enough for me to forget
as if forgetting is any less painful

*I'm sure they were beautiful
Where does God keep them?
Maybe the heavenly mantle, a warning and promise
or perhaps to show off his craftsmanship
 Unless he threw them after his child
to flutter uselessly in the wind
Never would he forget if they were in front of him, tormenting*

but the urge to try wouldn't go away, I am sure

The squirrel finds a molded cube of waffle,
eating away at the edges like it would be taken from him at any moment
For a second I want to guard him to prevent such a thing
but he scurries off suddenly, waffle falling back into the garbage

I am alone again

This time, I will not forget

About the Author

B. R. Jayne is a transgender trauma-carrier poet and creator. In life and on paper, Jayne explores the complexity of human relationships, ties to God and religion, and the ever-present figure of Death in a society so devoted to life. Jayne lives in Minneapolis, and has a cat named Biscuit.

A History of Leaning

Jacob Reina

Since this pillar on which we both lean leans
Toward a sea even bleaker than ourselves,
With its twin sky, high and held
By the unstillling ripples
That resemble trembling hands—those
Of some old man, weak and sallow
From the weight of defeat
Crushing his shoulders,

(Never could I show you anything more broken
Than the spirit of a proud man shamed to ruins)

I will tell you of its impending topple, into
A bottomless abode marked by infestations
Of eight-legged martyrs —shells all broken
And captured by the sun that pierces
The surface, lying there, quaking
Like the remnants of some body
Crushed by disappointment

(I would share with you the secret well
From which I source such knowledge, but...)

About the Author

Jacob Reina is an undergraduate English student at Fresno State, where in 2023, one of his short stories won the Fresno Friction Prize. His work has been featured by New York Quarterly, The Banyan Review, Gabby & Min Press, Watershed Review, Rougarou, and Clackamas Literary Review. His first memoir, *Purity of the Sky*, is set to be released in 2024.

Letter to Fernando Fernández

Charles Haddox

Between the subjective and the static,
you opened the door to discourse.
I have never met you,
and only know you
through those radio and television interviews
and through your stanzas.
In you there is something of my father
—and a baby chick
not yet out of its shell—
as if champagne
escaped a sealed bottle.
The carousel voice, the piloncillo smile,
the feral hair, they're in the poems, too.
You don't need a friend,
surrounded by the poets of Anahuac,
but I ask for the friendship
of your hieroglyphic words.

About the Author

Charles Haddox lives in El Paso, Texas, on the U.S.-Mexico border, and has family roots in both countries. His poetry has appeared in a number of journals including *Birdcoat Quarterly*, *Volume Poetry*, and *Vita Poetica*.

Website: charleshaddox.wordpress.com

What Thrives

Melodie Bolt

I've listened to your garden.
Garlic, deep in mahogany soil.
Miniature cabbage folded like newborn skin
A library of herbs.
I've leaned into your Bowie.
So many frequencies of art.
Still no word from Mars.
How silly to name this quiet space between us friendship.
The tornado siren sounds every first Saturday,
a warning for what may come.
Wild wind thrashing garden gnomes and wheelbarrow.
But we always meet again on your golden sun-kissed porch,
righting planters and finding joy at unbroken stems.

About the Author

Melodie Bolt's poetry has appeared in venues such as *Prairie Schooner*, *Verse Wisconsin*, *Qua*, and *Making Waves*. She earned an MFA in Writing from Pacific University. Her poetry has been nominated for a Dwarf Star award. She currently resides in Flint, Michigan with her partner, children, three dogs, and a kitty named Nyx.

On a Flight to Paris

Connemara Wadsworth

The night stretches long—before the man
in the next seat and I introduce ourselves,
first the simple things, the world of work,
how we made those choices as if spinning
out the first threads of friendship.

The plane darkens, others sleep,
we keep talking.

I will meet the husband in my failing
marriage, he his girlfriend. Is it my
hunger or sitting side by side in the depth
of darkness, not looking eye to eye,
that sucks me into the fleeting intimacy
of fellow-travelers? I want to sew
his friendliness into me

want his name, phone number,
want to keep that ease. I don't.
He moves toward warmth and I
toward lonely facts. We walk out
apart. I watch him at the other end
of bags that circle and circle until
claimed. I see how I am a stranger
grasping at what won't be.

About the Author

Connemara Wadsworth's chapbook, *The Possibility of Scorpions*, about the years her family lived in Iraq in the early 50's, won the White Eagle Coffee Store Press 2009 Chapbook Contest. Her poems are forthcoming or appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *Solstice*, *Chautauqua*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, and *Valparaiso*. Her poem, "Mediation on a Photo" was a winner of The Griffin Museum of Photography's *Once Upon a Time: Photos That Inspire Tall Tales*. Connemara and her husband live in Newton, Massachusetts.

For But a Moment, We Were Gods

Hario Tezawa

1. And for but a moment, we were gods...
2. While we lost ourselves in conjured memories forgot
3. Before we slipped away from present thoughts

4. As reality first begun to fade
5. I found myself amongst the stars beyond my comfort's lot
6. And for but a moment, we were gods

7. While we watched the universe erase
8. Entire concepts like the Olmec's faces made of rocks
9. Before we slipped away from present thoughts

10. I spilled into my wings and flew with grace,
11. Things once large stood small below while soaring swift aloft
12. And for but a moment, we were gods...

13. But then my feathers ruffled with malaise—
14. I crashed into Yggdrassil where I died and felt the rot
15. Before we slipped away from present thoughts

16. Where I wept because you found me safe
17. Amongst the quiet moments which our memories forgot
18. And for but a moment, we were gods.
19. Before we slipped away from present thoughts.

About the Author

Hario Tezawa is a fantasy writer based out of the barren wastelands of New Jersey. He enjoys pretending to write at pretentious cafes and has a short story published with October Hill Magazine, Faeries & Ents, & Shredbox Studios.

Our Favorite Song

Jean Janicke

Dedicated to Lucy and her pet rats Teacup and Splat.

As the night starts pulsing like a flickering
streetlight. my friends bustle by the bins
in the back alley.

I gather the girls giggling
by the garbage, smooth my hair from whiskers
to tail, and wait for Lucy to turn up the volume
on our favorite song.

Lucy taps her foot to the tempo,
faster than her heartbeat, slower
than mine, sings into a wooden
spoon, metronome waves her arm
at the reflection in the kitchen window.

She doesn't see us in the dark, naked
eye can't tell we're bopping in sync, heads
nodding a greeting to the downbeat.
I always call "I love that song too"
but my words wisp like a blink.

We burrow into the shadows of Saturday
night, leaving behind the myth

that only humans feel the beat.

About the Author

Jean Janicke is an economist, coach, and writer living in Washington, DC. Her work has appeared in Green Ink Poetry, The Orchards Poetry Journal, and Rabbit: A Journal for Non-Fiction Poetry.

Notes for Next Time

Chris Faunce

Once you know someone,
you will never unknow them.

After you depart,
they will be a knock on the door,
the silence on your phone.

You'll see them in your dreams
and be reunited in a mysterious place.

Maybe you'll wake up and remember
they're not there, gone
three months ago,
three years ago,
three decades ago.

There they are, in the face across
the street—

Never mind, just another vision of
redemption or belief.

You hold on as if to hold on,
then let go, excusing yourself
for your distaste of resolution,

each friendship lasting forever until it passes you by.

About the Author

Chris Faunce is a writer from Pennsylvania. He graduated from Drexel University in 2023 with a degree in Civil Engineering. He won Drexel University's Creative Writing Award for Poetry in 2019.

Friends

Lisa Low

for Lorna

We sat drinking tea in my parlor, my kitten
curled in your lap, purring as you pet her, your lips
a small red bow, your parted hair two braids
of river flowing. I love my friends and want to
hold them close. I want to smell their small smells
and listen to the sounds they make, sweet as flutes.
But on that day I must have said the wrong word—
fat?—because suddenly you fell to the bottom
of a well, in your flouncy dress, tipped over. It was
too late, but I wanted to jump in to save you.
I wanted to fling my arms around you and wing
you to a safe place where we could hold hands
and look together at the stars. I wanted to tell you how
glad I am you are my friend. How glad I am to know you.

About the Author

Lisa Low's essays, book reviews, and interviews have appeared in *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Boston Review*, *The Tupelo Quarterly*, and *The Adroit Journal*. Her poetry has appeared in many literary journals, among them *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Phoebe*, *Pennsylvania English*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Delmarva Review*, and *Tusculum Review*.

Incapable by Nature of Being Seen

Abigail J. Swanson

you used to be invisible
walked past
talk uninterrupted
learned plans
after they happened
you stood alone
or fringed groups
nodded as members shared one with another

now look at you
out of the chrysalis, a regular butterfly
flocked by friends. Always
ask your opinion
seek your laughter
you know the wheres and whens of every plan
if you didn't make them, they were made with you in mind.

I see who you've become,
but my cornered smile falls

because when you were invisible
you were invisible

with me

About the Author

Abigail J. Swanson has an MBA, presented at the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention in 2022 and 2023, and edited the 2021 edition of Tenth Street Miscellany. She writes across all genres and is currently teaching English as a second language in the middle east. Abigail loves cheesecake and climbing trees.

Email: abigail0swanson@gmail.com

Website: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/swansonabigail/>

Chicken Truck

Whitney Schmidt

*a “golden shovel” poem in the style of Terrance Hayes
after William Carlos Williams’s “The Red Wheelbarrow”*

We are free now, newly hatched adults ditching class—so
full of adventure and caffeine we don’t tell anyone, don’t plan much
just light out south from Columbia on Highway 63. So much depends
upon miles per gallon upon map skills upon chance upon

how long it takes till the cash runs out. You pass me a Coke, sling me a
map of Missouri and Oklahoma — the Tulsa dot a bullseye circled in red
a warning, an incorrect answer. I grip the map as you turn the wheel
and I wish us anywhere but Tulsa slouching in dusk like an ancient barrow

mound of earth over my old life. Still, I sing along, the windows now glazed
with rain water now with icy streaks now with sleet like bullets now with
wet clumps of fluff. We do not hesitate. *So what* if it’s no longer rain?
So what if we slide? Snow drifts ripple dark pavement like cresting water

and we glide along as if sailing. We speed on, draw up beside
a hulking semi-truck stacked with metal cages obscure in the hazy fog the
steely mist. Volume up! Windows down! We do not slow when the white
turns from flakes to feathers to frozen wings. We pass them going 80. *Chickens.*

About the Author

Whitney Schmidt (she/her) is a teacher and amateur lepidopterist with a passion for poetry and pollinators. She founded the first student-led secondary school Writing Center in Oklahoma and co-sponsors an LGBTQIA+ affinity group. Her work has been published in Harbinger and So to Speak. She lives near Tulsa, Oklahoma with her partner, two pit-mix dogs, and various moth and butterfly guests.

Lani

Hari B Parisi

Wasn't the house on a small rise?
You had to park on the street and climb.
Concrete steps.
I slept in the one bedroom.
You, in the mud room, though we didn't know to call it that.
Don't remember how we met.
Why we moved in together.
So close, so fast.
We thought it'd be a lifetime.
Your guy must have been friends with my guy.
Don't recall the exact year.
You were from Hawaii.
I'd never known a wahini.
You never called yourself that.
Smart and smart-mouthed, good cook, when you did.
I was hopeless, except for hamburgers and a soup
my dad would make for the family on occasion.
We did a lot of drugs.
Always the music.
People came and went. You stayed.
So did I.
Think we ran out of money when the rent was due.
Did we even work?
Lost each other.
You married your guy. I, mine.

When I think of you, I miss you with a stab.
The way you laughed with your head thrown back.
Got angry in your eyes.
In my mind the house is yellow.
Our house was yellow.

About the Author

Hari B Parisi's (formerly Hari Bhajan Khalsa) poems have been published in numerous journals, most recently in *The Blood Pudding*, *Anacapa Review*, and *Black Fox Literary Magazine*. She is the author of three volumes of poetry, including *She Speaks to the Birds at Night While They Sleep*, winner of the 2020 Tebot Bach Clockwise Chapbook Contest. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband.

Website: <https://haribpoet.com/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/haribpoet/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/haribparisi>

Written for the Backyard Naturalist From Maine

Richard Collins

– *After Du Fu**

We've lived our lives for the most part apart
Like the poles of North and South.
Yet this evening we share
The light of one lamp.
Once, for a moment, we were young and sharp:
Suddenly dull and gray.
What about old So-and-So? Dead and gone.
Our surprise is no surprise.
How could we have known it would be twenty years
Before we met again?
When we parted, your wife was still your bonny sweetheart,
Your kids neither married nor buried;
My youngest, not yet conceived.
Unhappy or content, they live their lives,
Never asking about our friends.
We don't bother to answer the unquestioned,
They don't bother to fetch the wine.
As the rain falls on the mountain, we chop chives,
Mix rice with seeds and dried cherries.
How hard it has been for us to meet in person,
And so we imagine a meal and conversation,
Endless drinks yet never a drunken word.
It's your long-lasting friendship that matters.

Tomorrow we'll be parted like the Red Sea;
Life will go on, with or without you and me.

* "Written for Scholar Wei."

About the Author

Richard Collins, abbot of New Orleans Zen Temple, lives in Sewanee, Tennessee, where he directs Stone Nest Dojo. His poetry and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in Southern Humanities Review, Exquisite Corpse, Negative Capability, Xavier Review, Urthona: Buddhism and the Arts and Shō Poetry Journal, among others.

I Don't Think of You as Asian

Jeanne Yu

When my friend says,
I don't think of you as Asian,
the puzzle of me unexpectedly
disassembles into a jumble
of shapes
amongst all the familiar
of what makes me
who I am, my genetics,
ancient culture passed thousands
of years, deep brown eyes
looking back at me
questioning my question,
was this meant to be
a compliment?

The big picture box top
nowhere to be found,
assimilation misplaced, I resort
to sorting the corner and edge
pieces first, for something to hold onto,
lost among the keys
and locks of the repressed,
spilled on the floor.

I begin to cajole and rally

all the fallen pieces,
back into who I
have become.
My reluctant inside
pieces collide,
frantically working to reassemble
a composure cultivated
over decades
to resemble
this me -
who does not on this day
want to unduly upset my friend.

About the Author

Jeanne Yu is a writer, a technologist, an environmentalist, a proud mom, and an urban chicken farmer who lives with curiosity and hope for the world—one day at a time. She completed an MFA at Pacific University in January 2023. Her poems appear in Rattle and her book reviews in the Oregon Poetry Association. She is the assistant poetry editor at Northwest Review.

Before You

Diana Raab

before there was you
there was me lost

in a web of confusion
and uncertainty

receiving mixed messages
from other universes

as birds lingered
on barren doorsteps of the beyond.

Before you, hope whispered
in the distance

but my arms were too short
to touch its gentleness.

Before you, there were
no words spoken out loud

only poems scribbled
in marbled composition books.

Before you, turtles

moved backwards

and oceans waved quickly
to the sand.

Before you, time had no momentum
and ice cream cones broke from pressure.

Before you, I had far away looks
and deep grief in a web of love.

Before you, I had no answers
nor self-esteem,

But then you made your way
into my life, and sprinkled hope

on my every day and gave me
a reason to continue living.

About the Author

Diana Raab, MFA, PhD, is a poet, memoirist, blogger, speaker, and award-winning author of thirteen books. Her work has been published and anthologized world-wide. She blogs for Psychology Today, The Wisdom Daily, Thrive Global and is a guest blogger for many others. Her latest book is, *An Imaginary Affair: Poems Whispered to Neruda* (Finishing Line Press, 2022). Visit her at: dianaraab.com.

Colors

Terri Watrous Berry

We were a balloon bouquet, just
barely blown-up in our youthful
hues—your sunshine yellow, my
pie-in-the-sky blue, her cherry
red and cheerful lust for life.

Winds of change changed nothing,
not for awhile, not marriages
motherhood or miles so we took us
for granted, like air or like sunshine,
both noticed most when they are gone.

For life sent your saffron self into
hiding, and turned her rosiness
to scarlet rage. Me? I gaze at azure
skies and watch balloons fly,
vacillate between indigo and slate.

About the Author

Terri Watrous Berry is a Michigan septuagenarian whose work has appeared in anthologies and journals over the past four decades. This fall her poetry is included in Waco Cultural Arts Fest's WordFest Anthology 2023, Wild Librarian Press's Wild Crone Wisdom, Ms. Aligned's Coming of Age anthology, Gyroscope Review's Fall Edition 2023, and The Devil's Party Dress's Instant Noodles.

Friendship Reassessment

James Ph. Kotsybar

I must call everything into question, now
that you've smugly done your one-eighty,
mistrust your most innocent suggestion and
find your lightest of motives weighty.

I see, in a new and much harsher light, that
what I took for truth was just an act,
and I must review, with improved hindsight,
what once I blindly accepted as fact.

I don't blame myself for naiveté.
In fact, I'm proud of my guileless trust.
I wouldn't have it any other way.
I don't expect you to feel guilt. It's just
my measure of you needn't be reversed,
if you'd been honest with me from the first.

About the Author

James Ph. Kotsybar, published in six countries, is the first poet (honored by NASA to be) published to another planet. His verse orbits Mars (at NASA's request and www voting), became part of Hubble Space Telescope's Mission Log, and was awarded and featured at NASA's Centaur's 50th Anniversary Art Challenge. Other honors include State Poetry Society of Michigan (awarded while Joseph Gordon-Levitt serendipitously workshopped this one-page poem into a short screenplay). He's read for Troubadours, (Europe's oldest literary institution) in their founding city of Toulouse, France, at EuroScience Open Forum, Europe's largest interdisciplinary science event, earning a

standing return invitation. He also once sang the poetry of William Blake with Allen Ginsberg at Santa Barbara's Old Vic Theater.

Robin Sitting on the Windowsill

Steven Luria Ablon

Her feathers flutter in the wind,
brown eyes shine, look at me
with a flicker, a turn of the head,
look at me again. Seeing her

this close is as rare as watching
a wild geranium bloom.

I hope we will linger,
become great friends

with no words, just conversing
in our heads. We could sit for hours.

The clouds thicken. Will it rain,
will worms come to the surface

to breathe? Her coat is tangled,
her breast dull red.

We are no beauties.

If she leaves, I will

look for new friends,
frogs, a turtle, an otter,
maybe a mourning dove,
but none as rare as her.

About the Author

Steven Luria Ablon, poet and adult and child psychoanalyst, teaches child psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital and publishes widely in academic journals. He won Academy of American Poets' Prize 1961 and the National Library of Poetry, Editor's Choice Award 1994. His poems have appeared in many anthologies and magazines. His collections of poetry are Tornado Weather (Mellen Poetry Press, Lewiston, New York, 1993), Flying Over Tasmania (The Fithian Press, Santa Barbara, California, 1997), Blue Damsels (Peter E Randall Publisher, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 2005), Night Call (Plain View press, Austin, Texas, 2011), and Dinner in the Garden (Columbia, South Carolina, 2018).

Undeliverable

Linda Lamenza

Occasionally I text my
dead friend.

*I wish
you were here.*

I send up a signal.
You won't believe what happened.

I wonder if the messages
land there,

or maybe we and our words fall
away from the Earth's surface,

become part of the universe,
linger there.

i.m. Madeline S. McEneney, 1969-2020

About the Author

Linda Lamenza is a poet and literacy specialist in Massachusetts. Her work has appeared in Green Ink Poetry, Lily Poetry Review, San Pedro River Review, The Comstock Review, The Tishman Review, and elsewhere. Her chapbook, *Left-Handed Poetry*, was a finalist for Hunger Mountain's May Day Book Chapbook Series and is forthcoming with Finishing Line Press.

Before We Were Jaded, We Danced to Records

Shana Hill

Can we play like we did at ten?
Hula-hooping on the yard patch
when we were are all still friends

I almost won that hula match,
moved hoop from neck in sway
to chest then down my back

Let's dance in the yard of clay
The soil's full of rocks
we'll plant our feet on curtains stained

we found in the cellar box
Dance in floods and dungarees
floor puddles will be ominous

I want this song to make you sing
to beat staccato, sing false falsetto
the vinyl to scratch from jumping

We spin round the way the record goes
What does the singer say?
Investigate the liner notes,

drop the needle set to play

We're worn but we won't stop our swing
Dance Bump, the Freak, YMCA

Do I still flutter when I sing?
Not cry from mournful lines but bray
in hootenanny, celebrated in a ring

like the tune we'd beg my dad to play
as crickets soft above the scatter
The piano rag without a name, so briefly played

About the Author

Shana Hill's poetry has appeared in Naugatuck River Review, Ocean State Review, San Pedro River Review, and Slipstream Magazine. Her poem, "Tied," published by the museum of americana, was a 2020 Best of The Net finalist. She is a co-editor on Essential Voices: A COVID-19 Anthology (WVU Press, July 2023). Shana is a member of the Poemworks Collective of Boston and is the founder of Poetica Pastor, a business which assists writers in the publication process.

When Next I See You

James King

When next I see you, your hair
will be silver skies over the Seine,
much as they were when we lay
in each other's arms, knowing
that before the clouds clear
one of us would be gone.

When next I see you, your eyes
will be the last blinding rays reaching
out before sinking into the blood-red
horizon. Remember when you dared me
to take you—here and now, you said—
not far off the beaten path? I hesitated.
Your laugh was a thunderclap, signaling
how far we were from shelter.

When next I see you, I fear I may hesitate
again. What could be the point of pulling
close slack breasts to sunken chest,
shriveled lips to wrinkled cheeks,
thighs that have long forgotten heat?

Then again, perhaps we will embrace after all,
trace each other's blue veiny hands, and listen
to the gentle lapping of loss against the quay

when next I see you.

About the Author

James King's poetry has appeared in *The Dillyduon Review*, *The Thieving Magpie*, *OpenDoor Poetry Magazine*, *Oddville Press*, *Big City Lit*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Crowstep Poetry Journal*, and other journals and anthologies. He is also the author of the award-winning novel, *Bill Warrington's Last Chance*. James is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame and has an MA in writing from Manhattanville College. He lives in Wilton, Connecticut, USA.

As Though A Poem Can Fix Anything

Margot Wizansky

Come back, dearest friend of my teens,
come back so I can make it right with you,
walk with you a while in your dying.
Come back—we can relive our awakenings,
our first loves, our laughter bubbling
like your mother's yoghurt soup.
I miss you. You blasted into eighth grade
from another galaxy, exotic like I'd never seen,
curtained with black shiny hair that covered
your lazy eye, made you tilt your head to look at me.
I miss your noisy, crowded house—I'd never even
heard of Syria—food I'd never tasted, grape leaves,
kibbeh, labneh, your eyes glowing like olives,
the music low and sad, a dirge repeating,
an unfiltered cigarette your constant,
always indoors we were, smoking,
playing cards in the kitchen while the pita baked.
I'd been a child in a family buffeted by a war
that took the men off and I deluded myself
about my own importance. I was not a kind child.
Don't be angry with me. I gaze into the reflecting
pools of your eyes, tell you I'm sorry love so often
got caught in my bristles. Love is alive in the naming.
I'm sorry for saying anything else.
I've been lucky. My luck could run out any time,

old comrade, like it did for you.

About the Author

Margot Wizansky's chapbook, *Wild for Life*, was published with Lily Poetry Review Books (2022). *The Yellow Sweater*, her full-length poetry collection, is available from Kelsay Press (2023). Her poems have appeared online and in many journals such as *The American Journal of Poetry*, *The Missouri Review*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Ruminate*, *River Styx*, *Cimarron*, and elsewhere. She edited anthologies: *Mercy of Tides: Poems for a Beach House*, and *Rough Places Plain: Poems of the Mountains*. She co-edited *What the Poem Knows*, a tribute to Barbara Helfgott Hyett, her teacher. She won two residencies, one with *Writers@Work* in Salt Lake City and also with Carlow University in Sligo, Ireland. Margot is from a career developing housing for adults with disabilities. She lives in Massachusetts.