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SIPPING DEW DROPS
Rose Nielsen

Sipping dew drops from
the fern’s underside, sparrow
hangs upturned on green trapeze.

Calico, entranced, ignores
the pinprick of the thistle.
I had a babysitter who threw calico kittens into the pool from the balcony. Short shorts and hair sideways boombox convertible cigarette. The way she would sing and wink, like I wasn’t there. Men with ink and greased ease, a leer for her trapeze bend. Denim fringed inside thigh, smooth.

I think I loved her more than the kittens. Even when they went under and came up to float, mewing wet like they had just been reborn.

*You better run down and get them.*

My bare feet slapping on 1950s apartment building cement, gathering them up into her borrowed yellow crop top, soaking with claws and pinprick.

Pit hungry because there were no snacks.

Me looking up at her, saying with my eyes, I saved them, I saved them.
Marion Ryan

PINPRICKS ON CALICO
The first time you saw me (you recounted to me later), I was sitting in row three, seat fourteen, next to a woman in a fur coat (who you would later find out was my mother). She wore a blue scarf she’d purchased an hour before at a kiosk outside, the kind of thing that murmurs like a fairy waterfall in the lights of the circus but loses its luster and dies in the back of the closet once the popcorn and elephants are out of reach. My mother has the same quality. You must have noticed her first. Drenched in the swirling, champagne bubble spotlights, she must have looked like a lion herself, her talons painted blood red, her fur shoulders framed heroically against the backdrop of crying children. You wouldn’t have known that later, when we turned the corner and hailed a cab on Market Street, she shrank back into her regular skin, a shell too large and clumsy in average lighting. You would have only seen her as she is best seen: glowing and clapping bravely in the face of the lions, who terrify her.
Then the lights turned blue. They always do before the elephants, you told me later (you were babbling quite a lot). They drowned the stands and turned my lips aquamarine and when your eyes found mine you imagined you’d found me frozen in ice, preserved and packaged by the elements as perfectly as I’d lived, like those wooly mammoths they found in Siberia.

The elephants arrived with the sound of trumpets. My mother whistled gratefully as the lions made their exit. The circus tent turned pink, spinning through its kaleidoscope of colors, and I saw you watching from the trapeze. You looked like a baby sparrow up there above the noise, warned to stay out of the way until your entrance. When it came time for you to cross the chasm over the fiery rings, which the elephants stepped through cavalierly, I held my breath the entire time and my mother had to pat me on the back to make sure I hadn’t choked on a kernel.

When the show was over, you found me exiting the tent and asked me to run away with you.

***

But the first time I saw you was in the elevator.

I think you must have been fighting. I never got the whole story. Your nose was bleeding and your left eye glistened with shocked, angry skin, the kind of welt that turns into a charismatic black eye in twelve hours. It was three days before the Y2K scare. (How do I remember? Well, my wife Maria had sent me grocery shopping and warned me not to get a potato more than three days’ worth of supplies, in case the world ended and we’d spent that extra money
for nothing. I was clutching my grocery list, trying to calculate how many apples we’d need for three days, when I saw you.)

You were mumbling to yourself, casting a complicated scowl around the elevator, begging someone to ask what the matter was so you could snap at us to mind our own goddamned business. There were five or six of us crammed shoulder-to-shoulder. I smelled perfume and wondered if it was yours or my neighbor’s, who stared resolutely at her feet.

I should have asked your name. Should have tapped you on the shoulder and accepted the punch to the chin I would have received. Should have accompanied you out of the elevator, followed your mumbles like bread crumbs through the parking lot, boarded the same bus, kept my distance only long enough for you to reel and scream and demand what my problem was, and then I should have said, “Please run away with me before the world ends.”

Instead I stayed on the elevator when you and the others exited. I watched your shoulders hunch into the December evening and your red curls flex with wind. I let the elevator doors bisect you into two winter halves when they clattered closed. By the time I composed myself enough to follow you, the maternal street had hidden you from me, turned you into another anonymous pedestrian trying to get home before dark.

As I told you these things outside the circus tent, sharing a lip-moistened cigarette while my mother searched for the toilets, you insisted you didn’t believe in that sort of thing.

“It’s like reincarnation,” you said, hoping the long word with all its consonants would impress me. “Past lifetimes and stuff? I’d never have been a redhead.”
“I always wanted to know who you’d been fighting,” I said. I accepted the cigarette. I tried to impress you with how pensively I smoked.

“Did we meet again after that?”

***

We did. It was many lifetimes and empty elevator rides later. I was a calico cat in an alley and you were asleep, nearly dead, in cardboard beside the bins. I followed the sound of your deep sleep snuffling from three gardens down, out for my nightly hunt, to find you behind Mrs. Hopkin’s house. I watched you for a while on the wall and tried to purr to the tune of a human lullaby. Something about swing sets pushed by the tide of the moon and mothers in the dark, something I remembered from an ancient, faded cradle.

I like to imagine that the lullaby saturated your sleep, turned your skin blue in your dreams. Maybe you’d remember it still if I could recall the tune.

But nighttime is very intoxicating for a calico cat. I was silly and drunk on the smell of birds and the motherly black fur of the sky and the whisper of my name in every crack of the brick wall. I let them lead me away, though I should have nestled in the crook of your elbow and joined you in your dreams. When I returned to the alleyway at dawn, you’d vanished along with your cardboard.

“But how did you know it was me?” you asked.

“I recognized you,” I said.

“How do you know you weren’t mistaken?”

“You’re very easy to recognize.”
Even, as I saw many alleyways later, as a pinprick of dust on a chalkboard. I was a slender piece of chalk, new from the box, gouged from my mother rock quarry, pulverized by machines, stripped of impurities, molded, baked, and inventoried among dozens of my white brothers and sisters, shipped to the school with a blue roof, where I saw you that morning stretch your legs through the air.

You were dancing. The light from the window turned your body into a firecracker. You pirouetted and grand-jetéd and if I’d had a hand I would have reached out and beckoned you into the valleys of my palm, where I would have kept you until your fine frame dissolved into sweat and oils and became part of me.

If I’d been a braver piece of chalk, I might have cast myself to the ground, snapped in two, and limped away with you to the door, dodging the sneakers of startled children, making our break for the wide, unknowable world.

“How about now?” you asked. The cigarette was almost gone, and so was the crowd. “That’s what you’re getting at, aren’t you, that all of these lives and missed opportunities, each one led to here, tonight, finally in the right place and the right bodies at the right time? I’ll take you across the country in the back of our touring bus. We’ll slip away one night in Cincinnati and join a
traveling jazz troupe and hitchhike up to Quebec where we’ll get in with unsavory sorts and change our identities and run away to New York City. You can go by Benjamina and I’ll go by Clark. We’ll change our hair and you’ll stencil a beauty mark onto your cheek each morning and we’ll be illegally and humiliatingly happy together, just like we should have been all those other times.”

The colors from the tent bled across the muted city park grass, the enchanted world mingling with the real one. Night fell over the shoulders of the buildings. I felt giddy and sick with tobacco. I imagined myself as Benjamina, rising before Clark to stick my head out the window and smell the new morning from our dingy flat in New York. I imagined the strange, spinning world pushing us together with its centrifugal force (instead of flinging us apart, as it has always seemed to do). We’d get a calico cat and die in a retirement home somewhere close to the ocean.

My mother arrived from the bathroom. She clutched her scarf around her throat, though the night was ambitiously warm for February.

“What have I told you,” she snapped at me, shooting you a dark look as she grabbed my elbow, “about lions?”

She pulled me out of the tent’s glow, surrendering our bodies to the serious nighttime of the city. I looked over my shoulder, and for a moment you stood on the membrane between two worlds, your face cast in blue shadow but your edges framed against the babbling lights, which eventually sucked you fully back beneath their surface.

Before you disappeared, you raised a hand in farewell, and I should have turned and run back to you. I should have shaken off
my mother’s red claws and cried “Run for it!” and fled with you into the tent, where we’d hide among the elephants. Should have said to my mother, “Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye,” and kissed her sweetly and asked her not to weep and written her postcards from Quebec and long, Victorian letters from New York.

But the rush of the circus tent melted into blues and dark greens and purples, and my mother’s scarf wilted and so did she, shrinking back into herself and gripping me more tightly, interrogating the shadows with wide, worried eyes, and I shrugged into her, trying to remember the tune of that lullaby about swing sets and moon beams.

Your hand still raised in farewell, you called, “See you later,” before letting the other world you belonged to gulp you back down. You were right.
TRUST?
Neil Berkowitz
THE SÉANCE
Nicholas Budny

I remember well we piled into the Brown—
the Ford Bronco the color of rust Grandpa bought
from an old cowman whose children sent him east to a nursing home—
to drive up the rutted ranch paths to the reservoir.

I remember well how the air felt:
thick with dust, slightly
abrasive as it combed my hair, me
leaning out the window to gaze at the sky very
blue as the Brown growled and spit up pebbles.

We tiptoed past cacti and, fearing
rattles and those water snakes,
we swam in the frigid lake
(I paddled behind them, curious,
reflective in their shadow and wake).
Their worn faces smiled, and their eyes shone in the setting sun.
The evening chilled and we hurried back, without towels, through the dust toward the shuttered old ranch house where the water ran brown from the tap, grasshoppers snapped through doorways to knotted rugs in a springing trapeze, and ever-present was the smell and tang of mineral.

Quiet collected after dinner, and I watched from behind a calico curtain the men and women in their farm clothes murmur and laugh. In a dark room, I sat playing with kitsches from the mantlepiece; I listened to the crickets in the shimmering fields outside; I gazed up through the spackled skylight above me, watching a plane blink so very high up among more stars than I could count.

Under the light of the moon and a yellow lamp, sweeping aside the tablemats, the men and women placed a Ouija board between them. Their hands twisted through, calloused, paper rough—interlocking them their voices hushed.
The woman beside the board wore a bandanna about her hair, her eyes closed in reflection.

I sat in the dark watching them, falling in and out of sleep. Maybe a coyote yelped, and the far off mountains slumbered as the light dwindled to nothing in the main room.

A pinprick in the howling darkness. A small breeze blew back the screen door and sent a shiver through my dreams.
VACANT lot, stolen shovel. Calico clouds of exhausted summer.

the tool bites earth. A hole—beginning of nothing—leaks, and into it his feet, shins, knotted knees, thighs, slowly disappear. He doesn’t know or care about school words like *engulf*, but he is old enough, this year—as the hole takes him into herself, dirt clotting dungarees—to feel its meaning. His palms weep. Yet he digs, coughing, grasping nothing except the rough handle and the nature of holes: there is no other direction but down.

Breeze absconds with warmth and lumens. The shovel blunts, but not his curiosity. His hair swings, an empty trapeze, as he heaves, and the sky pinpricks. The clammy earth hugs him as no one in life ever has.
Hope, as dirt melts like sugar. He dips into chocolate, swirling and swaddling. No, on the end of the shovel like a marshmallow on a stick, molten, he molts, the world melts into his mouth; he has needed it for so long—so, so long, to grow. To become sweet, to ripen.

He works hard at falling. Wonders if he will end the opposite of where he began. And what the opposite of himself is. A man? When he arrives in China (although he has held a school globe and knows the opposite of his roots is mere ocean) will he be the only one walking right-side up, with his hands above his head hanging onto feral grass? What is the opposite of chocolate? He has a day to find out, before September begins. Feverish shoveling, furrowing, the answer comes: up.

He is that one, futile but ridiculous, ignorant of logic, who attempts what cannot be done.

and as he tumbles, pockets and self turning inside out, he becomes first chocolate then molten lava and then muscle and gonads, then he swims. and he and the earth are no longer syrup but whatever fire is without oxygen: instant potential, flameless burning, the central energy of seasons and universe. and just as suddenly the boy is devoured in his own shovel mouth and spit out, along the earth’s radius, at the speed of light. emerges, if ever certainly not now a boy, on the other side.
AERIAL CALICO PATTERN

Kathleen Frank
Summer left early.

In its wake,
we were still hungry for make-believe.

So my father hung a trapeze from the ceiling.
A mop sawed in half and some thick rope.
The beginnings of a circus in the basement of our house.

High on sweet Halloween leftovers,
we would use it to taunt the inevitable:
gravity, bedtime, growing up.

That winter my brother and I lived upside down,
by the nape of our knees.

We’d watch the snow outside rising from the clouds to meet the ground,
let our fingers scrape the milky carpet as if it were the sky,
and laugh at our omnipotence.
We’d flip the world on its side for a while,
until our legs went numb,
our heads ballooned with blood,
and our vision turned to blotchy calico, yellow and blue.

We were full of light and sugar,
small and mighty in our imagined kingdom.

We did not yet know the laws of physics or the mechanics of loss.

That nostalgia is a paper cut.
Regret, a pinprick.
Grief, a freight train.

We only knew what our limbs could do.
Baby brother,
sixteen and all bone,
calls me sis—ter.
Tone falling,
then a pause,
sis—

Meets my eyes,
in the quiet
he looks like Papaw
hunched over the Toyota.
Inherited silence
rests on their backs.

Before Papaw,
a coal miner,
Appalachian eyes
carved deep into calico skin,
pinpricked by sun and time—
he sought this too.
Generations
built from the same
torn blueprint
on shifting rust-rot earth
sit here in this place,
my brother
invites them in.

Both raised without God,
treading water
we angle our hands
wrong for worship
or buoyancy
but clasp
each other’s
just right for
this trapeze trick.

—ter?
The end of my name
swings skyward,
seeking.
DEATH OF A MASSIVE STAR IN AQUARIUS

Marj Hogan

*a muwashshah for my mother*

Of course there’s no time anymore
for stars, leaves, beetles, but before,

I tried to know all intimate
butterfly things, the intricate
trapeze-webs of hindwings, to sit
all afternoon in the gutter
in a glut of bees. Where once were

streetlights that made warm, calico
shadows (where in the dark we’d go
past the arbor vitae hedgerow
down the silent streets in summer),
in this decade there are newer

matrix lights that throw their stippled
shades under the maples, rippled,
blinking shapes. Last month, a little
pinprick in the water-bearer
just burned out, for now, forever.
THE night the house collapsed, Noni and her mother, Delia Deleon Veracruse, were having a superfluous debate over what the lapels were called on her white suit—an homage to Sandy Powell’s brilliant and heroic calico number at the BAFTA. They had finished their dinner of tilapia, garlic fried rice, and coffee—no soda because, oh, they were on a diet—when Delia rose from her seat, startling Noni with the crash of the tower of old VHS tapes by the leg of her chair and the flap of old magazines by the leg of the table. Noni bent down to pick up what she could, inadvertently tipping over another pile, this time a stack of newspapers from the early 2000s. She pored over pictures of George Bush and people covered in ash running in the street while Delia ranted down at her. She could feel her mother’s spittle and fury like the virgin pinpricks of a storm. She could see the cuff of her coat darken in dust.

“Sulapa. They are called sulapa,” Delia insisted.
“It’s lapel in English, Mom. You’re not wrong. You’re just using the wrong language. You’re getting it confused with Tagalog,” Noni said, still looking down at the papers. She folded a withered review of the first Pirates of the Caribbean movie from her $400 Air Jordans.

“Noni, you’re the confused one. I haven’t spoken that island jive in forty years.”


“It’s not racist if I’m Filipino. I’m more Filipino than you. Remember that.”

“I didn’t call you racist. What’s that thing around your shoulders called?”

“A Manila shawl,” Delia said, closing it more tightly around her nape.

“See, Mom? It’s just called a shawl! You’ve definitely got more Filipino in you.”

“No, it’s just I have more fashioned sense. Don’t insult me.”

Noni let Delia’s continued misphrasing go without further correction. “I’m not insulting you. You’re just Filipino, Mom.”

She looked up at her mother’s face. It was a mix of horror, disgust, and shame foreign to the present moment. The house groaned in the silence like an empty stomach. Standing before her, Delia was moving further and further, regressing to the age of perms and her pristine house with the tacky orange carpet, now a crypt for mountains of devalued remembrances and cold wooden floors. Noni wondered who in her memory had taught her mom to call her language “island jive” and the importance of not sounding like you came from anywhere in a country where everyone was
from everywhere.

Noni visited Delia and her childhood home every chance she got, although the frequency had dwindled the closer she got to her girlfriend, Rupee. Rupee was a gem she had discovered at the gallery she curated. Another first-generation Filipina traversing the art world with an arsenal of art degrees, fashion, diaspora, and pithy art critiques to help them sell five-figure priced canvases. Her medium was acrylic imposed on old clippings. Think Poons meets Afremov meets a magazine rack. Noni’s medium was whatever sold. Think someone who wasn’t an artist but who could appreciate it enough to find value in it. Of course they fell in love. What was art without its lights and darks? What was love without its contrasts?

They dated for months before finally sleeping together—an ordeal, as Rupee had only slept with men and Noni had never slept with anyone—but they managed to figure things out. Despite her inexperience with the physical, Noni always had an acute understanding of the emotional side of relationships. It was an ability tempered by her profusely emotive mother, Delia Deleon Veracruse. She was a firebrand of dancing, screaming pain and pleasure, happiness and sadness. Delia’s house had been full of her voice, her touch, her soul. Noni had to live with the weight of it so as not to be crushed, to have a spark of her own. Her mother was a storm she had to weather. She knew how to live with mood swings. She knew how to tame and live with a wild heart.

When her husband passed away, a decade before the house collapsed, Delia spent an entire year nude and confined to her home. She called it her newest performance art piece, “the
unraveling of her portrait,” but only Noni understood it for what it was: grieving. In her early years, Delia had been an art professor and proponent of civil rights at an all-white college that labeled her originality as “exotic,” and defined her intelligence based on how well she spoke without an accent and how many remedies she could share for lightening your skin. Five years after retiring, Delia was naked and in her sixties, and Noni could see the toll that her mother had paid for her career. Her arms, neck, and face were lighter than the skin she had been hiding underneath. The darkest part, her sex, was peppered gray and white. Her true self showed. Noni imagined that only she and her father knew what this looked like.

Like a trapeze artist balancing on a rope, Noni made her way through the clutter that filled the house, stepping thoughtfully so as not to knock over a stack of outdated encyclopedias here, a jade Buddha missing two fingers there. After her year in the nude, her mother put her clothes back on and spent the next couple years unboxing things from the garage and storage. She was looking for an old photo album one day, a dress with butterfly sleeves the next, an old parol to put up for Christmas, and so on. The piles grew. Noni was amazed how much her mother had kept, but she should have known. She should have known they had a problem.

An hour before the house collapsed, she and her mother traversed through a home filled with physical manifestations of her compulsions. They found their way to the living room and found seats, an upturned trash bin cushioned with a satin pillow and a wooden chair, an abulario blessed with kalamansi and sampaguita petals. Above them, Delia had replaced her crystal chandelier
with an old bar fixture that read *Red Horse Lager*. Light poked out of holes in the paint and made arbitrary lines across the ceiling. Coupled with the dim brown glow emanating from its warped plastic and falling on everything like a tawdry veil, the thing looked like a dying star.

“As I was saying, about this suit,” Noni began, picking a cobweb off her shoulder, “this famous costume designer wore a suit like this one to an award ceremony and got a ton of celebrities to sign their names on it for a charity of hers.” She had quelled Delia’s anger earlier by proceeding to take out a fabric pen from her breast pocket and writing her name on her sleeve. This took her mother off guard long enough to move them to the living room and closer to the door. Noni had not thought of leaving yet, but being close to the exit made the passage safer for her suit, which was nearly impossible for her to keep clean in Delia’s house.

Delia inched forward on her wastebasket and looked at the signature Noni left on her wrist. “Wow. How much did it sell for?”

“I don’t know if she sold it yet, but it had Robert de Niro, Al Pacino, Joaquin Phoenix, Scarlett Johansson, Laura Dern, Brad Pitt—”

“Who’s Walking Phoenix?”

“Joaquin.”

“That’s what I said. Who is he?”

“The one who played that depressed clown.”

“Oh yes, sad. Wow,” Delia said in awe. “But why did you write on your suit?”

“It’s meant to be written on, Mom. It’s art.” Noni took out her fabric pen again. She stuck the cap on its bottom and held it out
to her mother. “You give it a try. Write something, whatever you want.”

“Oh no, Noni. I can’t. It’s so white. I’ll ruin it,” Delia said, her hands gathered under her chin, gripping her shawl, eyes still on the tip of the pen.

Noni waved it like a conductor. “You won’t ruin it. If anything, you’ll just be adding value to it.”

“I don’t think my name’s worth anything, Noni. I’m no Walking Phoenix.”

“Joaquin.”

“Yes, I’m no Scarlett Johansson.”

The house bellowed again, this time with a slight shake. In the first couple of years, Noni came over to help her mother every Sunday. She was in her late twenties, and things in the gallery were slow but lucrative enough. She pored over each article they uncovered like an artifact. There was a story with a coffee machine, an old comforter, a bin of hats. Some of these memories Noni shared with Delia. The baggie of dead batteries labeled “Noni’s nightlight,” her Barbie backpack she’d worn on her first day of school. Others, only Delia Deleon Veracruse kept stowed away in the spirit of laughter and tears. There was the rusted machete with a leather sheath and broken handle, the carving of a goat missing its face, the shoebox of candy wrappers flattened by an iron and bound in string. Everything had value, even if its value was unknown.

“Come on, Mom, it doesn’t matter. I want you to write your name on me,” Noni said, following her mother back to the kitchen. She winced as the heel of her shoe was scratched by a metal fan.
with a dragon pattern. She nearly cried when the hem of her pants caught and tore on a plastic bonsai tree.

“Don’t ruin good clothes, Noni,” Delia said, and ran water into the empty tin container from the rice maker.

“You’re not ruining it! If you think so, how about writing your name under my sulapa?”

“Don’t patronize me,” she puffed from the sink as she scraped the dregs of burned rice off with her fingernails.

“I’m not trying to patronize you! I really want to you to write on me, Mom. Really, I wore this suit for you,” Noni half-lied. She had worn it as part of her gallery’s “dismantling project.” The goal: to get Filipinos to sign it and put it up for sale. The aim: to put it up during a show without a price so that, if someone asked, she could explain that it was not for sale, that no exorbitant financial value or act of contrition can be exchanged for a life, that wanting the suit wasn’t as important as having your name on it. That or some other bullshit to get enough publicity and clout for the actual pieces with price tags. She knew it would be easier if she explained this to her mother, but she also knew Delia liked not being told. She liked the mystery, the drama.

Still, Noni wanted so badly to explain to her mother that where Powell’s suit was trying desperately to save her teacher’s home—a notable hub for underrepresented artists and intellectuals—her enclave’s white suit was trying to dismantle a metaphorical one—the auction house of the oppressor in which the value of one’s identity is weighed. She wondered if Delia would appreciated this irony. Alas, messages were lost if they were explained, Delia had taught Noni.
And things don’t sell themselves, Noni had taught herself. Delia lifted her hands from the container and rinsed them under the faucet. “I won’t write my name.”

“Fine. Then how about you draw something?”

Delia stepped over a dusty bread box and dried her hands on the kitchen towel hanging on the oven door. “Jesus, I don’t know how that’s any better.”

“Look, like this.” Noni drew a butterfly under her signature. She held it up over a stack of calendars from Seafood City. The one on the top read 2012-2014 and had the picture of a smiling husky on the cover. “See? It’s nice. Not tacky at all.”

“Mura is more like it.”

“What? Is that one of your English-not-Tagalog words again?”

“It means cheap. Mura, mura.”

Noni rose her wrist to her eyes. “Ok, it’s not the best butterfly.”

“Besides, butterflies are not anything special. They are attracted to rotten, dirty things just like any other fly. They smell the salt in our sweat and blood and waste. They crave it.”

“They want to eat us?”

“Yes, but their mouths are too small for you to feel them trying to suck the life out of you. People forgive them because they are beautiful, but they are ravenous and filthy. I don’t like them.”

“They fly on shit?”

“Yes. A lot of shit. Don’t use that word.”

“Shit. Remind me not to let one of those things land on me again.”

The windows creaked and the walls crackled. Above, the weight of exercise machines, baby clothes, Christmas lights,
musical instruments, geodes, fossils, car parts, bicycles, autographed portraits, masterful forgeries, originals, Noni’s diaries, and everything else kept and unseen on the second floor leaned on rotten, brittle beams ready to give way. Everything was succumbing to years of accumulation. Nothing would be saved.

By the sixth year of the hoarding, Noni finally recognized her mother’s actions as a problem and approached her about the topic. At first, she did it in a subtle way. She suggested her mother watch Marie Kondo’s special on Netflix and forwarded several links on tidying up her home, hoping she would come to her own realization about the state of her living conditions. However, as Delia continued to crowd her house, Noni decided to try more direct approaches at the risk of upsetting her.

First, she tried talking to her directly. Mom, she would start, and then an interrogation of her actions: what are you looking for? Why are you doing this? When does this end?

But, of course, Delia escaped these words like a fly escaping clapped hands.

I’m looking for A. Because of B. This ends when I find C.

The answers always stopped Noni from digging deeper and, in her frustration, she would carry on, sorting through old copies of the same Carpenters record for the one with the Circuit City label on it, clinking through empty glass candle holders trying to find the one with Jesus holding a lamb, Saint Lorenzo Ruiz hanging upside down, his hands in prayer as samurai watched from their horses, katana drawn.

Then, finally, without any options left, Noni began taking things from the house. In the beginning, she would take things
that her mother wouldn’t miss, a few clothes there, a couple of old unused stamps here. Then she began taking bigger things: a bust of Athena, a dozen rolls of rugs. She would stuff them into her car and drive to the closest dumpster before her mother would notice. But Delia filled the house faster than Noni could take things away. Paintings were replaced with posters, tubs of chalk exchanged with tubs of molding clay. If Delia noticed, she never mentioned it. The house filled more and more as Noni came and took less and less.

Now, fifteen minutes before the collapse, Noni decided to take something from Delia right in front of her eyes. She would casually grab it, announce her removal of it, and leave with it no matter what happened. She was determined to get a response that elicited some change. All that needed to be decided was what.

“If you’re not going to write on my suit then I will have to take…” she commenced but couldn’t decide on anything. Her eyes went from the magazines at her feet to the clocks marring the kitchen counter.

“What will you take?” Delia said, her voice unmoved from its default charm, her tailored American accent.

Noni continued to look around. There was too much to choose from, and the longer she took to decide, the more she hesitated. “I will take other measures.”

“Such as?” her mother asked.

Above the sink were empty flower vases sitting on the windowsill. By the drying rack, an array of mugs. There was her father’s green mug with the chip on the handle, her mother’s yellow *The Little Prince* mug, Noni’s old robin mug that had graduated from brushes to hidden dime bags of weed to coffee. Branches
outside of the window rasped the glass. The mugs rattled more than they should have.

“Such as…” Noni repeated, moving now, hopping over a pile of *Seventeen* magazines, darting past the three-foot tall, four-foot wide bronze statue of stampeding horses. She squatted before the garbage bags of Beanie Babies, parted a rack of plastic-clad coats. All the while, her mother watched her, following where her hands went in anticipation. Their hearts pounded in their chests so hard they did not notice the whine and sag of the ceiling, the stucco molting like snowflakes. Neither did they notice the white suit continue to collect wounds of refuse and debris, gashes at the arms, the shoulders, the seams, the knees.

Noni saw the wildness in Delia’s eyes begin to surface.

Delia saw her daughter roaming through her most precious things like a child carelessly running her hands through tall grass, at any moment ready to pluck a blade.
CHESHIRE CAT'S PEEP SHOW

Carol Gerhardt
TO MY FUTURE CHILD
R.C. Davis

Before you were just a pinprick
in your mother’s grin, small as an appleseed
stuck between her teeth. Before your father
used to mow the lawn and leave half unshorn
to Grandma’s smirk, and every time
that his lungs felt screwed in tighter
there were rows of hospital rooms
shaking in his mind. (What they used to do
to test for it was twist a swab around
your nostril, felt like a saltwater piercing,
drop of metal.) Before your father was
a girl stuttering into a man. (You’ve heard
this story before, your grandpa crying
at the table once, everyone molting separately.)
Before Grandpa made us a backyard trapeze
from a PVC pipe. Before it snowed
to everyone’s elbows one winter and it was all
empty branches and pancakes merging
on the griddle. Before your dad was even born
and the world starts folding now. You and I
are tucked inside nowhere’s cheek.
Before your grandmothers
and mine. Before some great-great-great
in her calico dress, snapping
a chicken’s neck. Before every story
I’ve ever been told. I’m sputtering now,
losing track of direction. Before the sweet bite
of any sort of lineage. I’m itching for words,
losing track of our faces in the mirror.
You aren’t real yet and might never be
and here I am, with my cheekbones
from Mom and long fingers from Dad. Before me
keeps on running into nowhere,
and after is just the wind
and the imprint of my raised eyebrows.
MORE THAN A PINPRICK
Gordon Skalleberg
THE smooth lilting voice falling like water from the speaker every morning predicted an almost perfect day. “A sky as blue as my right eye,” she called it. They have a way of letting us see the world through the odd detail. No matter. It’s a blue sky and I’m an industrious soul, so my thoughts turned to laundry. I’d done the wash days before when it first started to rain, then waited for a dry spell to hang it. And waited. The dome was supposed to be weather resistant, but the drains are always clogged so the weather has nowhere to go but through the wonky seams, and if untreated water touches my clothes, well then, I’ll be in worse shape than when I started. The laundry was beginning to smell like a mushroom-sprouted log but a few hours in the open rotunda would cure all.

I grabbed my basket and slid open the glass to the deck. The plexi-dome capping the rotunda was tinted pinkish-yellow from the sun and it felt good to stand under its glow. I took a cleansing breath in through my nose, then held it for a long moment before
slowly letting it out through my mouth. The dome seemed to breathe along with me, expanding and compressing like lungs as it regulated the oxygen of our living center. The deep vibration of the plexi was a perfect bass note to the piped-in tinkling of chimes. I took one more deep breath and set the basket down before pulling on my gloves. To protect against—what? And there my brain stalled as my healthy-mind kicked in, my years of training falling in step with my breath. Why worry about such things? Worry was a misuse of imagination, as a host once told me. It was best to forget why I should exercise caution when handling laundry, without ever forgetting that I should. We value mindfulness and positivity here at the center. Yes, laundry has to be done, but enjoy the moment. Live in the light, even in darkness. Find joy in your surroundings. Look out over the rotunda, but do not look down. Down is the past. Acknowledge other residents across the wide pit, standing on their decks, assessing the day, testing the air. Nod, smile. Take a breath. Give gratitude for the low volume of particulates in the air. Be thankful the power grid was working, without which we could not view our enlightened master in hologram form twice a day for meditation. More importantly, power kept a floor of light suspended over the pit. If the grid goes down the floor disappears and the sight is horrific. There is no other word for it. If a black-out is expected to last more than a few hours, a giant canvas tarp has to be manually cranked over the dome to block out any natural light. Turning the rusty gears is not easy, but I crank with all the rest when need be. We put our own selves in darkness, but anything is better than seeing what was really there.

I remembered this guy, a real clown, someone new to the
center, who, while we were turning the gears, told us that he thought the black-outs were done on purpose to keep us off balance. We had to kill him. But what was the point of remembering that? I brought my buzzing mind back with a few breaths, then tightened the gloves around my wrists. It was the perfect balance. I could attain equilibrium at will. My mind was my thoughts and my thoughts created who I was. As the master often told us, “You can decide what to think about. It’s all up to you.”

It wasn’t until I reached for the basket that I noticed Doniker out on his deck, abutting my own. “Oh,” I said. “Oh.”

He sat so still on his meditation pillow he seemed to be part of the building. Stillness was good. Most predators cannot spot their prey unless it moves. They see not the thing itself, but the motion. I hoped I hadn’t already disturbed him. His eyes were open as he stared out into the middle distance. He was centering well, but he did not look well. He had developed a bluish cast since I’d last seen him. When was that? When was the last time we could go outside? Again, I sensed my thoughts wandering and brought them back to my breath before I tripped myself up. In. Hold. And release.

I only wished the weather could stay the way it was so Doniker could sit outside long enough to repair his damaged cells. But there was no point in wishing. It was going to be whatever it was going to be. Worry got you exactly nowhere. A trainer I once worked with taught me that worry was only a way to pretend you had control over what you don’t. Amen to that.

I let Doniker be and went back to my laundry, bending with
intention as I pawed through the basket. My head was lower than my heart, something we should strive for a few times a day, both physically and spiritually. “Lead with the heart, not with the brain,” as the master always says. The plexi flexed and the chimes tinkled, but there was no human sound. All of us seemed as lost in our thoughts as Doniker. It was tempting to just hold my position but there was work to do. The laundry—my best calico tunic, my worst pants, my wool foot coverings, and the fine, impermeable film I wore against my skin—was tumbled together like a single, wet creature. Taking care to keep my spine aligned, I stood up straight holding a damp foot covering. It was just like the ones on my feet, but clean, washed in the distilled rainwater collected from the dome and pumped right to the tub inside.

It was such an improvement from before. What misery that had been, but I did not allow my thoughts to linger in that grim place. It could only drag me down. I glanced over at Doniker and took a deep, mindful breath. I clipped one foot covering on the rigging, then the other. The structural wires crisscrossed the domed rotunda from every one of the hundreds of cubes to another. A beautiful metaphor. “Think of your minds going out on silver cords,” the master once said. “If you can separate your consciousness from your body, all you wonderful souls will be connected by energy.”

And yet, here we were hanging laundry on those silver cords because, really, what else could we do?

A child warbled, the one who lived on the floor below, one of only two at the center. I got on my knees and squinted between the deck planks to see if the parents might let it out. It was so exciting to see a living, breathing young human instead of the
jars some couples kept on their shelves. I wondered if it oughtn’t to be in some other, special place, to be on the safe side. For the child’s sake, and for ours. A child sighting could trigger all sorts of useless emotions in even the most resolute. It was hard not to think of the future when confronted with the young, making it difficult to tend to the balancing act of the mind. To be wholly in the present. There was nothing to be gained by looking back in nostalgia, and everything to be lost by looking forward with dread. As was stressed in our training, the mind can live in the past, it can project into the future, but it can only process the now. I was here now. I was fine now. I counted my breath to pull myself back to the moment.


“Mariclaire?”

“Oh, Doniker.”

He did not look my way. I crawled over to him. We were separated by a wall of wire mesh, and I leaned in close and spoke through it.

“Hi, Doniker. It’s good to see you outside.”

“Mariclaire,” he whispered, his eyes still focused on a point in the middle of the rotunda, exactly where the master would appear later for centering down, helping us shut out our worldly cares for the night, complete with sedating incense and the hypnotic hum of chants and singing bowls.

“Mariclaire,” Doniker said again, and my mind snapped back to the present.

“What is it, Doniker? I’m right here.”

“Goodbye,” he said, still not looking at me. “I’m dying.”
That was a shock. I counted my heartbeats for a full minute before speaking.

“We’re all dying,” I said, forcing a chuckle. “Do you mean to say you’re dying right now?”

He didn’t answer, nor did he move his eyes or change his focus. He was already far along.

“Should I do something?” I asked, my voice betraying the knot of bile I felt rising in my throat. “Do you want me to help you?”

He did not respond. I looked around the rotunda, but all the people who had been outside just a moment before were gone. Could it be healthy nourishment time already? I hadn’t heard the gates open. It didn’t matter, there was no way I could leave now. This was my duty. I’d been called upon to spot Doniker, to make sure his transition went well. I began mumbling a mantra that a trainer had taught me long ago: *Panic may cause the situation to get worse*. *Panic may cause the situation to get worse*. *Panic may cause*... The proscribed steps came to me, and I lowered my voice.

“Doniker, should you go get your Kit? It can help…”

He shook his head no.

“You’re not in pain?”

He shook no again, and I felt my breathing slow, returning to normal.

“Then you’re probably not dying,” I said. “Are you concentrating on your breath? That will get rid of any feelings of impending doom.”

His head lowered in response and his gaze shifted down to the hologram floor of the rotunda. He seemed to be seeing right through it. Why would he do that to himself? He was too young.
Mid-twenties, at that. He still had his hair. I didn’t want to seem judgmental, but he had not rebounded from the loss of his wife the year before. He had not worked hard enough on processing his grief and moving on. I’d watched as he’d tenderly placed her body into the platform chute, the same foul place where our urine-soaked shavings and other messes were swept off each day. He cried openly when she disappeared through the hologram floor, and our eyes locked when we heard her land in the absorbent muck below. He had not really been himself ever since. He paced day and night. It did not speak well of his character or his training. It was a wonder he’d been allowed to stay.

“I’m hanging laundry,” I said. “If you want me… If you want me to do anything, anything at all, I’m right here.”

I stood up and clipped a piece of impermeable sheath to the rigging, then lifted my tunic from the damp pile, but the fabric began to separate from its own saturated weight. Using my most gentle touch, I tried to extricate it from the tangle of other wet things, but the more I pulled, the more it disintegrated in my hands. I had let it sit too long. The acidity of the water had already begun its work and there was no stopping it.

“Damn,” I muttered.

“Don’t,” whispered Doniker, and he closed his eyes.

“Oh. Sorry. Sorry about that negativity. It was just…it was just that I really liked that tunic.”

Doniker groaned and his chin fell to his chest.

“I know I shouldn’t get so attached,” I said. “I know that only leads to a world of hurt.”
A shadow passed over the dome, a flying, living thing. And then it was gone. Before I knew it, tears burned on my cheeks. Breathe in. Exhale. Hold. Again. Count the breath. Count some more. If Doniker was determined to leave there was nothing to be done. There was no point in focusing on a problem when there was no solution. It was what it was.

“Doniker?” I said, but he did not respond. His color had gotten worse. He did, in fact, seem to be dying in the here and now, not in some abstract future. My pulse accelerated. I had never done this on my own before, assisting in a death-affirming action. It was harder than I could have imagined. I began to sway back and forth, then sideways, a self-comforting trick I’d learned along the way. Maybe I should go inside and get my own Kit, and find something in it to ease his transition. But by the time I ran in and got it, he could be gone, and I had an obligation to stay with him. That was the most important thing. To be with him now.

The wire fence between us could not be accessed, so I got back on my knees to be eye-level with him and that’s when I noticed some corroded mesh. With the clever use of a clothespin I was able to pry apart enough wire for a hole big enough for my arm. After weighing the consequences, and there were many, I removed my glove and squeezed my arm through the opening, pressing my torso hard against the wire, extending my arm until I could touch his shoulder.

“I’m here, Doniker,” I said. “It’s Mariclaire.” My training kicked in and I began to breathe slowly and deeply from the abdomen, concentrating on a long out-breath and letting the in-breath take care of itself. It would all take care of itself. We stayed
like that for a good while, his breaths coming weaker and farther apart. I could hear gurgling in his chest. In time, the meditation bell sounded and gymnasts began swooping through the rigging, each on their own delicate trapeze, signaling everyone to come out of their cubes and onto their decks. Usually we meditated from behind our glass walls, but it was, as foretold, almost perfect weather. Funambulists skittered across the wires with their thuribles of smoke preparing the way for the master. A pinprick of white light began to pulsate under the dome and expanded, brighter and bigger, filling the center of the rotunda, where the master slowly and completely materialized, a Tibetan singing bowl in his lap. He was rotating a leather mallet along the rim, producing the range of tones needed to restore our vibratory frequencies and bring us into harmony.

With a few breaths of absolute attention to the sounds, I attained the no-mind we all craved, and just at the moment I was about to drift off, Doniker’s earthly weight began to tug at him. His realm was shifting. As we had been taught in the rare event we might want to release ourselves from our bodies, he had arranged himself to fall forward toward his open chute, head first. With a blinding flash, the hot white light was on us and the master was directing the center’s attention to Doniker’s journey.

“We do not leave this world,” he intoned ever so softly.
“We only go back to it. There was an expectant hush.
As Doniker slid from my touch, I grasped hold of his tunic, unwilling to let him go but he continued to fold away from me. The protective film on his shoulder fell, exposing his bare flesh, revealing a tattoo so small only I could see.
Resist.

Oh, Doniker. Poor boy. You spent all your energy with struggle when, with a little more training, you could have learned to breathe through it. The tunic unraveled in my bare palm as he gently fell onto the chute, a transition of merciful seamlessness. He slid down its short distance, and then, abruptly, went into a stunning freefall, four limbs akimbo. The audience gasped as Doniker disappeared through the bright hologram floor and into the pit, and it was just at that moment our compassionate master clanged sharply on the singing bowl so we would not have to hear him land.
A poem should not mean / But be.
—Archibald MacLeish

One way to dodge the scourge of meaning: toss the language, say that sound is all. If ear were understanding, there could be no fear of heights; the poem as a Pentecost, the earthiest could rise on fire to ride the lyrical trapeze; or its lines a printed calico, however fine the constant weave, a homely cloth allied to common things, it would be eloquent as any tune the wordless fiddle plays. The two are true enough. But resonance and revelation are no accident of form; the pinprick goad within a phrase is purpose speaking through the music’s dance.
FORM OVER FUNCTION

Tony Murray
"If I dive every day, by the end I’ll have a certificate," my dad tells me at our first dinner.

I raise my eyebrows. My dad is a lawyer, but in his heart he’s a salesman who is forever trying to sell me some off-brand shit I don’t want to buy.

Someone thought this was a good idea. A father/daughter vacation. It must have been my mom, but when I asked her about it today, she said, “Every time you went on a vacation with your dad I was terrified.”

Maybe it was his idea. He’s dead, so I can’t ask him. It seems unlikely that he would have elected to spend time with me, though he did try to buy my affection on occasion and so, for a while there, we took vacations to fancy places. For the first trip, eleven-year-old me chose Guadeloupe, because like many tween girls in the 80s I was charmed by anything French adjacent. I’d never been to Club Med before so I didn’t realize that the setting hardly matters. Club
Med is a French influenced world unto itself. Boundaries melt just as they should. That is part of the formula.

“Taking the course, I’ll really make use of our time here. I’ll be getting my money’s worth,” he says, while crunching down on another raw vegetable. I don’t think my father is ever officially on a diet in my lifetime, but he is always “watching what he eats.” And what I eat. And what my mom eats. And he’s usually disappointed in both of us. In fact, he’s doing a terrible job of suppressing a grimace as I shove another fry into my mouth.

“Huh, so you’ll be gone every morning and afternoon?” I ask, already knowing the answer.

He shrugs, trying to downplay his almost complete absence during our inaugural father/daughter vacation.

“I’ll be here for dinners. And breakfast, if you get up early enough,” he says.

I don’t say anything about how he’s supposed to be spending time with me. Or how I’m not sure how I’ll spend my days and with whom. I know I have no choice in the matter. Concern, or cowardice, is unacceptable. If we had a family crest, our motto would be: *I’ll be fine.*

“Sounds fun,” I say.

And that is that.

The next morning, I rise after Dad is already gone. Shafts of sunlight fill the space between our misshapen door and the doorframe. I am not disturbed by the little neon green geckos running in and out of our room. Instead, I am charmed and grateful for their company.
I’d like to say I spent my morning considering the beauty of the tropics. The wide-leafed greenery, the waves crashing in the distance, the stray calico cat that makes its way to my outside breakfast table and nudes my leg with its nose.

But, instead, I look over the kids at breakfast, trying to suss out whose family vacation to crash. There aren’t as many options as I’d hoped. Many of the kids I saw last night left this morning, their week in paradise complete. So I decide what to do on my own. I’m pretty good at that.

I spend the next couple of days water skiing, and finally I work up the courage to walk across the grassy field to the trapeze. It looms high above me.

“Ready! Hep!” The G.O. (Gentil Organisateur—I told you it was French-ish) hollers to the G.M. (Gentil Membre) who’s now swinging through the air.

I get in line and wait my turn. I’ve watched others climb the rope ladder. One woman only made it halfway up before she decided this was more adventure than she desired in her holiday. “There’s absolutely nothing to be afraid of,” I tell myself. “You’re good at climbing ladders. And you love heights.” I do. I stare down from high places. I imagine flying. My mom tells me once, “Just don’t convince yourself you can actually fly and jump.”

I carry the reminder with me—I cannot fly—even though the promise of it can feel real, can take over my imagination so fully I almost believe it is possible. Instead I’d taken up gymnastics, flipped from the high dive, jumped from cliffs into the cool, glacier lake below. I dream of skydiving. I look up at the trapeze and feel comforted, the closest I can get to flying today.
A woman belts me in and walks me through the safety protocol.

“That’s it?” I ask, poorly masking my frustration.

“For now. You have to take it one step at a time.”

She pulls the trapeze bar toward me; I wrap my hands around it. “Ready! Hep!” I say with her and jump off the deck.

I am born for this. I am grace. I am flying. I am at ease. I am free.

I release on cue. The safety net lets out a sigh when I land on my back, my hair covering my laughing face.

“How was your day?” I ask Dad that night at dinner.

“We did two dives. I saw a moray eel and lots of fish.”

I nod.

“Are you going to eat all of that?” He stares down at my plate.

He knows I’m going to eat all of it. I know I’m going to eat all of it, and instead of acknowledging the pinprick of shame in my chest, I drink some water, clumsily slam my glass down and let him know, “I did the trapeze today. I was very good at it.”

He shrugs. “Not a very useful skill.”

“Well, I’m going back tomorrow. We only have one day left.”

And I spend it flying through the air. Flipping through the air. Knowing I will be caught.

I am weightless. In control of this moment. Exactly in the right place.
We run from our names, keep our mouths sealed shut as back pockets, filthy from use, always come back to this clapboard town.

The streets all lead to the last point south, imaginary boundaries loop us in chalk; we refuse the run of our names, keep our mouths private as checks we can’t cash. We’ve grown weary of jukeboxes moaning our names, loose and musical as change. Coming back to this bloodshot town, pinpricked pride burns like shots going down; the trap in trapeze is a pendulum—we don’t choose. We run from our names, keep our mouths full of calico, colors melting off tongues rough as the last ride home, a dirt road potholed, abused. We run from our names, keep our mouths
close to smiling; a barely audible hiss sounds alarms across the county. Please excuse us, our names. They run soft in our mouths, sing us all the way back to the ghost of this town.
Time is alit in the open ache of the long freeway 
Where the calico trees split off into fireworks. But first 
The drone, a different kind of vision that never stops. 
A pinprick in the whole of your mind, the way papers 
Tattoo your arm on a hot day. Your skin peels 
To let the light out. My father told us stories about 
Goblins and hobgoblins who only visited children, 
Then left when they were too old to notice. How we 
Never doubted the goblin tales, or that my dad fought 
The biggest goblin of all and won, the way he stood 
Up to anyone no matter who they were, or how big. 
I learned to eat blades in the meadow. How the edge 
Wrapped into my stomach and I felt brave, and small. 
How swans seem elegant but are the most brutal 
Of all birds, angry, prone to attack with no provocation 
Except to protect their own delusion. Everywhere you 
Go there is a battle and a solution. The fight is easy. 
Find the real trapeze inside the fake circus, footfall 
Over the ring of truth, a balance, where the ivy 
Holds each step and the flowers are nourished.
Spiders trapeze through branches, competing with Queen Anne for best lace. Rain pinpricks grass, like needle through quilt. Chickens peck corn, spotted, blue- and green-colored eggs. Hollow disappears, but keeps winding off in the distance, like the dream of a sustainable future, sweet as summer peach, bi-colored corn. Mountain mama, in her camo, calico, and denim. Sometimes I need a telescope and Spruce Knob’s clear summer sky to see a bright tomorrow. Other times I simply enjoy a slice of tomato with salt, to know paradise.
REFLECTIONS ON AN AMSTERDAM STREET

Amanda Baran
ONCE when she was collecting laundry, she saw a house centipede scurry out from under the laundry basket. She killed it and went on to expect to see another every time she collected that basket. In the three years since spotting it, she had not seen one in that place. It was the same level of expectation as thinking she would see a dead mouse in a trap where a trap no longer existed, but memory once killed.

Soon there were expectations of things that would make her recoil all around her. She thought she would find a snake in the corner, a spider on her arm, or a ghost skulking in the mirror. On her walks outside, she feared stepping on toads. Near misses under street lights with toads leaping to safety. Felt the skim and pinprick of a mosquito on her shinbone. Expected to see a corpse discarded in the brush along the creekbank.

Late summer brought memories of girls found in cornfields and trenches and an elongated praying mantis making staccato
movements on a trapeze of tall-grass fronds. The truth-seeded lore of unmarked cars pulling them over on late-night drives home. Urban legends of strangers backlit by headlights. Persistent stories without the frequency their fear evoked.

She made a map of where skeletons were found, wondering where contemporary tales of Resurrection Marys had gone. Where were the new ghosts, draped in calico, walking the roadsides? Were they not interested in the night air and moonlight?

Walking along the perimeter of corn fields, tall and green, she thought she could hear the shrill of coyotes. She wanted to walk through the rows and have them join her at her side. Her fingertips brushing at their fur as they trotted with anticipation.

The wind brought faint melodies in B minor. Haze obscured the moon in gossamer. She heard a woman speaking, low and plain. She thought to scream, to announce herself, but inhaled thick night air that caught in her throat and would not release.
How soft the Moon thrush hum of moths, breaths sewn like prayers among the floating, trapeze of stars, sighs of wolves, lingering gently stilled in the stilled dark. Something like a dream always dies by sunrise—Quietly, Fragile like the shadow of pinprick to skin. Gravestones, Dried leaves howling. Rustling,

Nightfall winds are like littered fingers, tapping blindly, in the milkweed. And meanwhile, Sky rises like dust, like an exhale, slowly, swallowing like a last gasp, calico cats in the distance.
CONTRIBUTORS

**Amanda Baran** is a writer and strategist based in the Washington DC area.

**Neil Berkowitz** is a visual artist living in Seattle. He pursued a dual major in photography at the Newhouse School at Syracuse University many years ago, followed by coursework in photography at the New School. He has recently begun dividing his time between photography and printmaking and is an active volunteer in the digital media lab at Photographic Center Northwest in Seattle.

**Phoebe Blake** is an artist and tattoo apprentice living in Tucson. She is currently studying anthropology and studio art at the University of Arizona.

**Nicholas Budny** is a rising junior at Princeton High School in New Jersey. He has been writing poetry and fiction as far back as he can remember. He also enjoys piano, tennis, and competitive debate.

**Lisa Caloro** teaches college, bartends, and writes in a small Catskill Mountain town. She was recently named Poet Laureate of Sullivan County, New York, and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Madcap Review, The Carolina Quarterly, The Packingtown Review,* and elsewhere.
Sung Cho is a student from the suburbs of Pennsylvania who enjoys reading and writing in his free time. When he isn’t writing, he’s up late at night eating potato chips (either sour cream & onion, or kettle-cooked).

Sara Dallmayr is originally from Kalamazoo, Michigan, where she attended Western Michigan University and graduated with a BA in Creative Writing/Poetry. Dallmayr works for the post office as a rural mail carrier. She currently lives in South Bend, Indiana, with her husband and three cats. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Esthetic Apostle, Texas Literary Review, Third Coast, Tiny Seed Literary Journal, Write Launch, Glowworm*, and *High Shelf Press*. She dreams in Technicolor.

R.C. Davis is a high school junior from Oak Park, Illinois. He is a 2019 winner of the Gwendolyn Brooks Youth Poetry Awards and has work forthcoming in *Driftwood Press Literary Magazine*.

Kathleen Frank is a Santa Fe landscape artist who was raised in Northern California. She earned a BA in Fine Art/Design from San Jose State University and Certification in Art Education. Her work has been featured in many publications, including *Southwest Art, Western Art Collector, Cowgirl Magazine*, and *The Santa Fe Travel Insider*. 
Carol Gerhardt engineers Gerhardt Studio Lab in Houston, where she has exhibited artworks with Rice University, Diverse Works, Lawndale, and Poissant Galleries. Longview Museum of Fine Art in Texas soloed her works in “Cracking Plastic Code.” She has acted as community liaison with youth to build connections with Museum of Fine Arts Houston, NASA, Lawndale, and The Children’s Museum. Gerhardt has written studies and curriculum for Yale University and Houston ISD and has been artist team leader for Creative Capital New York via the Andy Warhol Foundation. The Lester Marks Collection, one of the top two hundred collectors in the world, has acquired Gerhardt’s installation work “Safety-Net.”

Kelly Gray is a writer, naturalist, and educator living among the redwood trees on occupied Coast Miwok land in Northern California. She’s recently been published or has work forthcoming in The Atticus Review, Lunch Ticket, River Teeth Journal, Dime Show Review, Burning House Press, The Account Magazine, and Bracken Magazine, amongst other fine publications.

JoeAnn Hart is the author of Stamford ’76: A True Story of Murder, Corruption, Race, and Feminism in the 1970s (University of Iowa Press, 2019), a true crime memoir that weaves together the personal and public threads of a friend’s 1976 bow-and-arrow death. Her novels are Float (Ashland Creek Press, 2013), a dark comedy about plastics in the ocean, and Addled (Little, Brown, 2007) a social satire that intertwines animal rights with the politics of food. Her work, which also includes short fiction, articles, essays, and drama, often explores the relationship between humans and their environments, natural or otherwise.
Marj Hogan’s poems have been published in *The Rendezvous Reader: Northwest Writing*, *The Charles River Journal*, *Bear Deluxe Magazine*, and *VoiceCatcher*. Regarding Marj’s poem published in this issue: the muwashshah is a poetic form developed in Muslim Spain beginning in the tenth or eleventh century. There are many variations; the topic is often love and loss, and the form generally includes a rhyme in the opening lines that is repeated at the end of each strophe.

Paula Kaufman lives in DC and once lived in West Virginia. She likes the West Virginia night sky in Pendleton County. Her work can be found in over twenty journals, including *Rue Scribe*, *What Rough Beast*, and *Heartwood*.

Graham Marema hails from the blue foothills of the Smoky Mountains, whose gullies and lakes continue to inspire her writing. She studied creative writing at Davidson College and currently works in East Tennessee as an advocate for conservation and renewable energy policy.

Libby Maxey is a senior editor at *Literary Mama*. Her poems have appeared in *Emrys*, *Pirene’s Fountain*, *Stoneboat*, and elsewhere. Her first poetry collection, *Kairos*, won Finishing Line Press’s 2018 New Women’s Voices Chapbook Competition. She lives in Western Massachusetts with her family.

Maggie Munts is a Utah-based writer and creative. Her poems illuminate the transcendent aspects of seemingly ordinary moments and memories. She received her BA from Pomona College in Claremont, California.
**Tony Murray** is a self-taught artist whose work has been in over seventy-five national and regional juried art shows and exhibits. His eclectic works involve various media such as drawing, scratchboard, painting, videography, sculpture, and photography. More recently Tony has concentrated his efforts into a new medium called “sculptography” which combines his sculpture and photography. His works begin with a title or a word and then he begins the process of creating that vision into captivating verisimilitude while informing otherworldliness.

**Rose Nielsen** is a poet, fiction writer, and songwriter from Nelson, British Columbia, and has published work in *CV2, RiverLit, As It Ought to Be, DoveTales: Writing for Peace, NonBinary Review*, and in an anthology of Mississippi River poetry, *Down to the Dark River*.

**Penny Pennell** received an MA in English from the University of Illinois at Springfield. Her fiction has appeared in *Barnstorm, Sundress Blog, The Illinois Times*, and other places.

**Ernst Perdriel** lives in Quebec, Canada. His mission is to transmit the passion of the cultural and environmental heritage through arts, lifestyle, and sharing of knowledge. He has contributed to numerous publications as a writer, illustrator, artist, and photographer.
Bette Ridgeway has had an art career spanning four decades. Her work has been exhibited globally in over eighty museums, universities, and galleries, including Palais-Royale, Embassy of Madagascar, and London Art Biennale. She has also penned several books about art and process.

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Alyson Shelton wrote and directed the award-winning feature *Eve of Understanding*. Currently, she’s finishing up Issue 1 of *Reburn*, a comic with artist Elise McCall (*Spy Island, Man-eaters*). Her essays have appeared on msmagazine.com, *Hobart Pulp, Survivor Lit*, and *Little Old Lady Comedy*. She lives in Los Angeles with her family.

Gordon Skalleberg is a Swedish artist now residing in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He is known for his paintings of faces and people, done in oil on untreated wood. Skalleberg has been part of the prestigious annual Studio Tour in southwest Sweden since 2015. He is represented in museum, corporate, and private collections in Sweden and the United States.

Kimm Brockett Stammen’s writings have appeared or are forthcoming in *Oyster River Pages, Pembroke, Typehouse, Rosebud, Crack the Spine, Atticus Review, Ponder Review*, and others. She won second place in Typehouse’s 2019 Short Story Contest, and was shortlisted for the Eyelands International Short Story Prize. She holds an MFA from Spalding University.
E. P. Tuazon is a Filipinx-American writer from Los Angeles. He has published his works in several publications and has two books, *The Superlative Horse* and *The Last of The Lupins: Nine Stories and The Comforters*. He is currently a member of Advintage Press and The Blank Page Writing Club. In his spare time, he likes to wander the seafood section of Filipinx markets to gossip with the crabs.
Submission due dates are November 30, February 28, May 31, and August 31, for issues forthcoming February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1, respectively, unless otherwise noted on our website.

There is no minimum word count, but please keep your fiction and nonfiction submissions under 3,500 words. Poems must be under two typed pages.

It is equally important that all three elements given for the specific submission period be included within your story or poem. Artists and photographers are only required to represent one element.

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Mikaela Shea received her MFA in Fiction Writing from Columbia College Chicago. She was a writer-in-residence at Ragdale Foundation and has published stories in *Midwestern Gothic*, *Copperfield Review*, *Hypertext Magazine*, and others. Mikaela won the Editor's Choice Award for Fiction at *Waypoints Magazine* and *Superstition Review's* First Page Contest. Mikaela is currently looking for a home for her novel. She lives in Iowa with her husband and three kids, @mikaelashea.

Megan Collins is the author of the novels *The Winter Sister* and *Behind the Red Door*. She holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Boston University. A Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, her work has appeared in many journals, including *Off the Coast*, *Rattle*, *Spillway*, and *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*. (megancollins.com)

Katherine Ann Davis's work has been published by *Passages North*, *Nat. Brut*, *The Pinch*, *Gigantic Sequins*, *Sycamore Review*, and other journals. She has an MFA in fiction from the University of Maryland and a PhD from the University of Tennessee. Recently, she completed her first novel and is now revising a collection of short stories. A small flock of cockatiels lives with her in Wisconsin. For more about her work and background, please visit: KatherineAnnDavis.com.
Erin Evans received her MFA in Poetry from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her work was nominated for a 2018 AWP Intro Journals Award, and she has attended the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference. An avid photographer, she works and lives in Vermont with her husband and their 2-year-old son.

Christian Anton Gerard is a woodworker, a poetry editor at 3Elements Literary Review, and the author of Holdfast (C&R Press) and Wilmot Here, Collect for Stella (WordTech). He’s received Bread Loaf Writers' Conference scholarships, the Iron Horse Literary Review’s Discovered Voices Award, and he was a 2017 Best of the Net finalist. His poems, reviews, and interviews appear in magazines such as, The Rumpus, Post Road, The Adroit Journal, Diode, Orion, and Smartish Pace. Gerard is also an associate professor in the creative writing program at the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith.
Lisa Buckton grew up along the Hudson River and holds an MFA in Writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in Hayden’s Ferry Review, The Writer’s Chronicle, Grist Journal, and other journals. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and received an honorable mention in the 2018 AWP Intro Journals Project. She lives in Vermont, where she works as a librarian.

Phoebe Whittington writes fiction, nonfiction, and comics. Recently, she completed her BA in Creative Writing at Pacific University. She has previously served as both an assistant and layout editor for The Silk Road Review: A Literary Crossroads and as the managing editor for PLUM: Pacific’s Literature by Undergraduates Magazine. Her creative work has been selected for presentation at the Sigma Tau Delta International Convention and the Northwest Undergraduate Conference in Literature. Her first short story publication will appear in Iris Literary Journal, and she is currently working on a novella.

Tamar Jacobs is a writer and editor based in Philadelphia. Her short stories have appeared in Glimmer Train Stories, Hayden’s Ferry Review, the Louisville Review, New Ohio Review, Grist, and other publications. Her flash fiction appears and is forthcoming on the Akashic Books website, and her essays appear and are forthcoming with New York Spirit. She placed second in a Glimmer Train Stories “Short Story Award for New Writers” contest. She holds an MFA from University of Maryland, where she was awarded the Katherine Anne Porter Fiction Prize.