## Art

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>IN BED</td>
<td>Yolanda Santa Cruz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>GHOST ROOM</td>
<td>Gregory Dirr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>MOTHER</td>
<td>Michelle Spiziri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>HIBISCUS BLOOMS AMONG THE MADNESS</td>
<td>Jury S. Judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>CREATURE AND THE CAVE</td>
<td>Sofiya Levina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>SWINGERS</td>
<td>BethAnn Lawson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>HEAVENLY GHOSTS</td>
<td>Susan Yergler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>SCENES FROM OUR COMMUTE</td>
<td>Sarah Kalsbeek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>NIGHT IN THE SUBURBS</td>
<td>Hannah Silverman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>THE GOLDEN RECORD</td>
<td>Zahra Choudhury</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Photography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>COASTER TRACKS</td>
<td>Christopher Woods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>FLOATING GREEN HIBISCUS</td>
<td>Roger Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>DOUBLE EXPOSURE WITH FLOWER</td>
<td>Hannah Radeke</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

Poetry
8    THE SUMMER FOLLOWING YOUR FATHER’S DEATH          Carl Boon
20   WAITING ROOM POST-HYSTERECTOMY               Kay Ulanday Barrett
38   DEAR OVERPASS AT THE END OF MY CHILDHOOD STREET    Tania Runyan
41   INCANTATION                              Kristin Indorato
52   WE ALL HAVE THAT ONE UNCLE WHO WAS FAILED BY HIS COUNTRY   Raphael Jenkins
65   EMPTY HOUSE                        Chloé Firetto-Toomey

Contributors
70   Contributor bios
THE SUMMER FOLLOWING YOUR FATHER'S DEATH

Carl Boon

We mistook the orange hibiscus
for a loop of fire then backed away.
That was the summer I mispronounced your name
again and again, and your scoldings
subsided into sadness. At breakfast
I watched you rearrange the olives
on your plate until they made a silhouette—
what used to be your father in profile,
what used to be him
crouched in the garden, his arms
poised upon the lowest branches
of his failed kiwi tree. You’ve made a ghost,
I said, but you didn’t understand
because our memories of the dead
were different, and the living world follows.
I went to the village for bread and wine;
you went to the kitchen
where your mother peeled tangerines
and prayed, reciting your name’s syllables
until they came out something like a song.
IN BED
Yolanda Santa Cruz
SUMMER was past and day was past. The house was dark and felt strange inside. It held wakeful sleep inside its curtains. A forgotten swimsuit hanging from the faucet in the children’s bathroom had grown stiff from the aftereffects of evaporating saltwater.

The forms of the summer ghosts were only understood by their white nightgowns. They were small, no larger than a gathering of human hands, different ages. They were worried, frantic creatures huddled in the corners, under the beds. Days later, certain they were alone, they drew themselves out into the open and scattered. From outside the house, looking in through the window, they looked like self-lit clouds darting about inside the dark. They wouldn’t talk to each other—it wasn’t time for that yet. Instead, they murmured excitably to themselves in their buzzy little insect voices.

Shadows moved incrementally across the empty wooden floors,
dawn to dusk. The rooms held the scent of sunbaked air for as long as they could. Looking out, fall was happening. A gray-blue line drew itself across the curve of the sky. The moon’s color moved to white mold. There were ghosts, too, in heaven.

The heavenly ghosts were astronauts inside the distant sky, living in a space-vamped vessel shaped like a massive perfume bottle. Inside, everything was metal and plastic and supremely functional, if dated. These were the very first astronauts to float free. Or almost free: they were tethered to their spaceship by an umbilical cord that sometimes kinked up and stopped them. Held them back. Here, inside the sky’s sky. The skies of distant planets. Our constellations. They clamored for their turns, their almost-free rambles into the audacious Great Open.

Something there is that doesn’t love a home. That something is an astronaut. Earth jostled away from them.

They had been here a very long time. Many years ago, they were blasted up into the black for a short list of specific research missions. There had been much fanfare at their parting. Their wives had come in miniskirts to watch. But then there had been some sort of radio interference, a wrinkle in the non-atmosphere, and they had lost contact with Earth below. Above. Anywhere. They had long been assumed dead, probably. *Lost in space.* These astronauts tried to forget everything they’d ever known.

Certainly possible here. They pranced, swam, looped the space vessel. Nibbled at tubes of freeze-dried lasagna. They stayed and stayed, like the drunkest drunks at a party. Their behavior was
completely obnoxious and unwelcome. If someone had told them that, they’d laugh about it. Laugh and then drink from one of those abandoned, half-full glasses.

It was just such fun. Pleasure has its prison-like qualities. One can’t break free.

But there was one, named Mike, who wanted to. This present freedom wasn’t enough freedom. He didn’t want to be tethered to the floating perfume bottle. He tried to tell one of the others. There were three total. Mike thought his name was Barry, but Mike couldn’t catch his eye, and there was no real talking, either inside the spacecraft or out. Their voices didn’t work without air. The third astronaut was Pete. Pete Shuling. Once, back on Earth, the two had rescued a cat from a tree in the middle of the night at a party. One of the swankiest neighborhoods in North Houston, the houses made of plates of gleaming white and modern architectural edges. Carefully molded trees. The cat had not come down willingly.

But Mike couldn’t talk to Pete now, even though they were always only a few feet apart from each other. He couldn’t know what the other two lost astronauts were thinking.

If only he could wrestle a rend in the umbilical cord. His carefully trained urethane hands had grown clumsy, and sometimes it was just so hard to think.

He remembered the sight of his own wife in a miniskirt. She had hair the color of chocolate. There were two children, boys. He had kissed her goodbye the morning of the launch and then, pulling away, she had glanced down at the slender gold watch on her slender pale wrist. Better be going. She would spend the next three
months missing him and sending the boys every night at eight p.m. to take their baths, ready themselves for bed.

It might instead be a blast of negative charged matter or an errant, heavy chunk of rock. A precisely reckless piece of space junk. Some alien force, at home here, in the sky, could knock him free.

He would never come down. He would wheel out into space while the others, still attached to the perfume bottle, floated there, watching him go.

Now, he was a snowflake in a black sky. He was a member of the next galaxy. He was gone.

Sometimes, the summer ghosts crowded at the east window to look. The first time they found the light of day was only because they found the end of night. Looking. At first light, the inlet, the houses’ little piece of ocean away from the ocean, lying out there just outside the fence, was multi-colored, here orange, here gray, here such a deep green-blue it was almost, still, gray.

The chittering began. They were consumed with questions and gossip and not-so-great ideas. What does cold feel like? There was a room upstairs with a pile of moldering laundry where you could bury yourself inside very deep and feel that way. As if you were a corporeal reality. One angel remembered. They were angels, not ghosts! What a thing to realize. A whole different way of being dead. The lack of air conditioning combined with the fact of doors that were shut and not opening—not all day long—lent the air a weighty humidity. The angels felt it inside their wee, still-becoming angel lungs. The sky outside was the color of heaven. Blue. Sharp
blue. What does blue feel like? Can you smoke it? Breathe it? Believe in it?

They became a line of pinwheeling handkerchiefs aimed at the window. You wheeled toward it, following your sister, then all of your power, plus the power of your turning, sent you crashing into the smallest of the panes of glass. Now you understood what the beginnings of a bruise were. You collapsed onto the day-warmed wood floor, waited for the things around you to settle, gathered yourself up again. Rose up. Returned to your place in line, You. Let’s have another go.

In this way, angel muscle was built. Angel memory. Angel thought, if constrained to one tiny pulsing question: How long until the glass breaks?

The world was lovely, dark and deep. The blue outside sunk into indigo in one place while the sun melted away at the bottom. Down an unseen gravelly path, the enormous loud ocean slept on.

The escaped astronaut had had an earthly life. Turning through the black, he remembered. There had been that pretty young wife with dark hair, neatly bobbed at her chin. At breakfast, her turning to the window to look out while sipping her coffee as he watched her face in profile. The bones. There were children, twin boys who walked home from school just like in the old days. Under the boughs of the birches.

She was altogether too tall. When they met, she was a sharp-boned, lanky girl with a regal neck. She paused on her bicycle, one sneaker on the street, one on the pedal. Poised. She was eighteen years old, with smooth brown-black hair tucked behind her ear,
an open, clean face punctuated by her eyebrows. They decided to marry, and she seemed to grow a bit taller as she stood there at the end of the aisle in that tiny, cramped church. The candles, the flowers, the gleaming hard pews. There had been a single hot pink hibiscus in her bouquet of white roses. Him walking toward her. After the wedding, too. This wasn’t possible, of course, and yet it seemed so very true. His wife growing up and up and away from him. A giant working the human-sized stove. Bending to make the bed. Her name was Joyce.

He was at first just a regular pilot, sticking to this earthly atmosphere. He lost himself in the escape of it all, though. From this distance, the world was perfect. Unbroken. That was his first flight, and it only got worse. He was reckless about it. It came to be that the only chair that felt right to him was the bucket of a pilot’s seat. His brain went to total gauge-reading, numbers-calculating, and the supersensory instinct: things felt right in the solid buoyancy of flight. Such a thing is a sure thing. The soft mechanical hum of everything going as it should go. Even when he wasn’t flying, he was flying. He readied machines. He quit smoking and tried microgravity on the same day. He flew. Found space again and again. Apologize? Why should he apologize?

He kept peeling into the black. The blue Earth as beautiful as she could be. Beautiful and far away. Perfect and blameless and something he couldn’t touch. Hanging there outside the window which looked as regular as any other window. Paneless. One had to chuckle to himself. One had to look back, believe.

One could do worse than be a swinger of stars.
The angel, too, had had an earthly life. She had lived one full summer here.

Angel memory. The tight feel of a sunburn. Sand in the creases of your cool, damp, underneath-your-bathing-suit places, your hair, your ears. The grit of it behind your knees. The soles of your feet are toughened by the scorching sand.

There is relief in the sharp cold of the water. You walk on a murky unseen bottom until there is no bottom. Or not one close enough to your feet. You drift out onto waves. Move past the breakers. Lean back, float, eyes closed while the too-bright sun explodes in purple streaks against your closed eyelids.

You, floating, are trying to hold tight to those spent moments. You are one of those spent moments. You want to inhabit this moment, this sun, this soft feel of the caring, buoyant ocean beneath you. You, floating on the thin membrane of the planet Earth. You want to keep all the moments in place. Not too fast, you scream, from the inside. Time spinning past. Hold still, you call. But nothing does.

Angel heart. The glum-colored fibers found their way, knit themselves together: this one wrapped round this one which wrapped around this one and so you go. On and on. A muscle made of intentionality and striations. Long lines with spaces for contraction in between. Cardiac. Blood. Lung-ready.

There comes a shock, breaking free. The outside air was cold and wild, and it chilled her tiny, just-formed angel lungs. Angel heart going. And going and going. A new thing was this wind. The determined thrust of air that had the whole world to gush over. No
stopping it. Whatever could stop a thing that had no boundaries? Angel memory. She tumbled to the earth, rubbed the sore places, stood. Stood. Angel muscle, angel bone, angel skin. She was a thing becoming. Becomed. Where were her sisters now? This world was simultaneously raucous and quiet, like a blankness. Birds. That wind. Nobody out here. She was alone in the world. She was a stretch of street away from the beach.

She covered the slick, dark grass, prickling at the hem of her nightgown, the mild, new sun poking out. Covered the sidewalk, crossed the street, sun-warmed asphalt. The little wood-slatted footbridge, sand-scattered. The sun grew in size, completed its roundness, grew stronger, as did the wind. Sea wind. Breeze. Angel muscle working against. She found him flung farther down upon the wet, firm part of the beach. Like a toy the ocean had found, swallowed, and returned, safe and sound. Safe and quiet. Slow to move, blinking.

It was a man. Vocabulary from her former, word-full life.

She watched him, fascinated. He was wearing his little white astronaut suit, complete with helmet, and tiny dots of spittle from the surf sparkled there. He lay on his side, drawing his leg up, trying to get it so he could stand. Failing, falling back on the sand. He touched the helmet. Angel understanding: the tiny toy man wanted to be free.

She bent over him. Her fingers—so new they were translucent, like wax paper—touched the system of clasps, what held the helmet to the suit. Fastened tight, and they hurt to work free. She looked at him through the glass. His blinking eyes, now staring eyes. She couldn’t find the color of them in the too-strong sunshine.
She squinted to see him. She didn’t know her own situation. In her new becoming. Was there a face yet? Seeable? What did he see, looking at her?

It must be. His eyes found her eyes which meant she had to have them. Eyes. And then, real careful, she slid the helmet out of the slots that held it. She took it off. The thing that separated him from the world. That separated him from the wind. He was looking at her now with nothing in between. She looked back. The wind. The sun. The sand. The always-sleeping ocean. Finally, she found an angel smile and gave it to him.

There had been a time before and before and before when he was just a kid romping through the woods, alone now because his brother was at home, sick. Inside the sunshine, inside this particular aloneness, this Wednesday, the boy-before-he-was-an-astronaut stopped at an oak tree. It was the tallest tree in the world, the boy thought, looking up. The branches crisscrossed against the blue. Massachusetts blue. It was the flu which kept his brother away. And a job to keep his father. Dishes and dinner to keep his mother. And nothing to keep him.

And so he began. Climbing up, his ears full of quiet and birdsong, the even-steven sound of his own breathing. Everything smelled like dirt and water. Green things, and things greening. Gold. He climbed, up and up and up, trunk to trunk toward heaven.
GHOST ROOM
Gregory Dirr
1.
You’re supposed to memorize brown and red spotted clots. Sometimes bleeding becomes spider-shaped, hibiscus bloom, a jellyfish lost yet finding its way to the shore. Something about feeling abandoned.

Your body frequently discards old shells of you wiped by the palm. When your girlfriend asks half-asleep how bad is it, you can only think about puddles.

How you’ve jumped in them ankle-deep, how this current wetness is no fun. If you could only fling yourself out of this skeleton. How your pelvis has been a rainy day in loop for years.
You lie and say *Not too bad.*
What is there to compare to this kind of scraping?

To wake yourself up while the moon is still glowing.
To wage measurement between your thighs

is a language you never wanted.

2.

*Globular,* you inform the nurse.
How does one tell a stranger you sense kindling in the sternum?
She types fast, spelling *globe* first;
her confusion isn’t far off.
Your whole world has fallen apart.

The streak of her red manicure mocks your whole body, curved and futile.
This color is your primary terrain.
The planet of your body you’ve been trying to both love and escape only speaks in ultrasound.
Speaking of pelvis, it feels like ghost. Skin paused to the gradual ovation of speculum. Under you, syllables are severed. As the clamp opens I’m told, *The sutures are still there.*

Afterward, when you correct another medical receptionist about pronouns, you wonder why there’s space on maps that remain unlabeled. How can we visit places and yet they still belong to no one?

Dearest body,
how you have been the destination people refuse to name.
THE first time I tried the bands. You know, those motion sickness bands? I stretched the elastic over my hands. A plastic ball, tucked in the fabric, pushes against the wrist and nestles between the tendons. Acupressure, I think it’s called. I tipped my chin back and the train tilted forward, carrying me, us.

2

The time I sent woozy psychic messages to the perfume-shrouded woman sitting next to me. Could the woman decipher my brain waves through her hibiscus patchouli veil? I recognized the scent from a sample vial your great-grandmother gave me years ago, only days before I got my first period. That smell will be forever accompanied by a memory of icky shame and the big fat pads I stole from your grandmother’s bathroom drawer. I pushed the bands further into my wrists with my thumbs and felt the sinews pop.
The time I vaulted from the train after two stops. The doors were still closing behind me when the vomit splattered on the platform. Plain bagel and lemon candy; my desperate attempt at breakfast. I peeled the motion sickness bands back to look at my wrists. My veins merged and divided like the train lines on the map above my head. I flung the bands into the garbage can. Acupressure, my ass. My doctor said it would get better at sixteen weeks. I might live until then.

The morning, at nineteen weeks, I leaned my forehead against the cold metal pole in front of me and told my doctor to go to hell.

The evening a woman clear on the other side of the car shouted, “Do you want my seat?”

Everyone else looked up. Then back down.

I said, “Sure?”

What else was I supposed to say? But the train was jam-packed, and it took her forever to vacate her spot. I clambered through a floor full of bags and legs, pulling a muscle near my crotch as I stepped over a man’s suitcase.

The occasions when the only available seat was between two large men, legs splayed wide. There was no way my increasingly
large self would fit between them. No one else moved to give up their seat. *She can have that spot right there*, I imagined them thinking. Who could blame them? To commute is to exchange one place for another, but I was becoming more comfortable staying right where I was.

7

That morning when, lo and behold! One seat left on a quiet car. I sat my eight-month-pregnant butt down, sighing. Another hugely pregnant woman lumbered through the door. She stood directly in front of me. I paused, waiting for someone else to stand. When no one did, I felt a familiar panic, the force of an expected performance.

“Do you want my seat?” I said.

“Yes, that’d be great,” she said.

I stood and her eyes widened as she saw me.

“No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, that’s silly,” she said.

“Truly, it’s ok. I sit all day,” I responded.

My belly bounced above her as she sat. I wish I could say our chatter (*our due date was the same day! Both having boys! Cribs not set up!* ) filled the silence as the train dipped underground, but we simply smiled, and that was that.

8

The evening when the number 66 bus was *right there* as I stepped out of my office. Usually, I walked the six blocks to the train station, but that night my feet were so swollen. The bus would be a welcome respite. I ran, in my rush forgetting what the last nine
months had done to me, my body melting into a former self that could easily sprint half a block to catch a bus.

Unsurprisingly, I fell. I fell hard. I tore my only pair of maternity work pants. My knees and palms were bleeding. I pushed myself off the sidewalk and half-ran, half-limped the last few feet. Son, we made it to that damn bus. I sat down. I cried. People stared, then tried not to stare.

9

The Weeks of Unparalleled Exhaustion, let’s call them. You weren’t with me anymore, not physically at least. At the end of each long workday, I’d look for women my age and flash my black cooler bag—a popular brand for those with the health insurance to cover it. Most people wouldn’t know it contained the meager amounts of breast milk I had pumped in an empty office with a glass door, which I had plastered over with scrap computer paper. But I prayed that some mom would see the bag, recognize it, look up to see the matching bags under my eyes, and offer me her seat. It happened once. Honest to god, it did. I could have kissed that woman.

10

The finger trap of the train, and me in the middle with headphones, watching, re-watching, the video of your dad tickling you. I’d flash the phone a bit to the side, hoping someone would notice and say oh my, what a beautiful baby. A work email pinged in my ears and pulled me south, towards my office, while you, radiating your first real, uncontrollable giggle-screams, pulled me north, towards home. And the ride stretched.
11

The times when I held my purse in front of me, terrified someone would look at my stomach and offer their seat.

“The weight will fall off if you are exclusively breastfeeding,” some dumbass mom-friend told me.

12

The first time I strapped you to my chest in that baby carrier you hated, and I brought you on the train, the one remaining space, outside the bubbles of work and home, where I brushed against the world. I never developed the coordination to both carry you and lug a stroller up those narrow steps to the platform. I saw other women do it every day, and I’d think, now that’s talent. I felt all eyes turn as you began to shriek. I desperately bounced you, us, holding on to a strap above my head. I tried to remember the last time I’d seen a mom on a train with a screaming baby. We were failures in our attempted outing, you and me, so we stepped off the train together and walked two miles home, screaming all the way.

13

The times when a body-filled rush hour train was the only time I was alone. I would pull out a novel, or simply watch the passing brownstones and dive bars. I imagined my breath—the only wasted breath of my day—weaving around playgrounds, glowing in the light of the Green Mill sign, twirling above Wrigley Field. But the train, that trickster, was whizzing me off, like some nutrient through an umbilical cord, to the places where I’d be used up. To serve my employer, feed the economy. Then back home, to feed
you. If a commute is an exchange of one place for another, are you the same person on either side? If not, who are you in the middle?

14

The moments I would scan stomachs, terrified of not noticing a woman who was pregnant. The times when I wasn’t sure and didn’t know what to do. The time my best friend told me how devastated she’d been when someone stood up on the train for her, sensing that she was expecting. But she wasn’t pregnant. Had been trying for a while, actually. Was toying with giving up, actually.

15

The evening I caught fragments of a heated argument between two women on the other side of the train. It was hard to tell exactly what was going on, but here’s the gist. One woman: white, pregnant, standing. The other woman: Black, seated. The white woman asked the Black woman if she could have her seat. But the Black woman was wearing headphones. She didn’t hear the request. Did anyone else? The white woman repeated herself, again and again, and when the seated woman didn’t respond, the white woman pulled out her phone and started recording. When the seated woman realized she was being filmed, she asked the white woman to stop. But the white woman wouldn’t. Her expectation—a seat, that seat—was too strong. Both voices filled the enclosed space. Passengers began to cautiously remove their earbuds. Someone pushed the button for the conductor. No one else offered their seat.

Those of us clear on the other side of the car pretended to focus
on our devices, occasionally catching each other’s eye. Shrugging innocently. Far enough away to wait it out. I texted your dad, asking where he was. He was two stops behind me. Then I texted your sitter, letting her know we’d be late. Fine, fine. It’s all fine.

16

The time I watched you—so little—explain to someone how to get to your favorite park.
“You take the number 50 Damen bus to the Brown Line, and the Brown Line all the way to Kimball. Doors open on the left at Kimball.”
“Wow,” the stranger said, “what a cool city kid you are!”
But earlier that week you had scolded me when I told you a tale about a squirrel and a bunny in a forest.
“You’re silly, Mama,” you said. “Squirrels and bunnies live on sidewalks.”

17

The times when I’d see a pregnant woman on the train and sigh. That’ll be me again, someday.

18

The day I stood for a pregnant woman on the train. In her smile, I recognized the embarrassment, the performed and genuine gratitude. I also realized that no, that wouldn’t be me ever again. I was never so desperate to be someone else. You’ll be alone once we’re gone, son. Will you be ok?
Days, days, and days, goddamn those endless days, when there were no more train rides for us. The days when the train was a heavy ghost rattling in the distance. A ghost whose traces were a monthly charge on my bank statement. I should have cancelled those charges. You played with your wooden Red Line and Purple Line on the carpet while I tried to answer emails. My boss needed budget projections in the next five minutes because her boss needed them five minutes ago. Neither of them had kids, but we all still had our jobs. *Be grateful*, my boss told me.

Meanwhile, you had built an elaborate train track. You had an elevated section and a street level section, and a platform made of cardboard. You wanted to show off your work.


I commuted to the kitchen. I fear it might have seemed cruel; I doubt you remember it now; but I need you to know I cried when I got there.

The evening the mayor shut down the Red Line for the night. I read the news on my phone and said to your dad, “She shut down the Red Line? The Red Line? Turned off? Just like that? She can do that? That is something that can be done?”

I told myself we didn’t need to go anywhere, and that it was fine, fine. It’s all fine.

You asked me why the mayor turned off your beloved train.
In your picture books, a mayor was a hero who gave away medals and made rousing speeches about kindness and patience. I tried to explain the situation—the protests, the police, the Black lives that matter—in words that wouldn’t implicate me, while also showing that I understood I was implicated. Your forehead scrunched in confusion as I stumbled along, and I realized I had no idea what the fuck I was doing. I froze. In your wide blue eyes, I saw endless variations of the man you could become; the possibilities were overwhelming, and the outcome seemed all up to me.

That night, the liquor store on our block was looted; a garage in our alley was set on fire. I looked around at our condo and saw a scratch through the illusion of stability; through the scratch pulsed our blistering white core. We didn’t need to go anywhere because we didn’t need to go anywhere. That was our problem.

21

The time that time sped up, a few years passed, things never became normal, and that became normal, and suddenly it was a summer day and you were taking the train without me. A few stops south for bubble tea with friends. I asked you if you had your mask and hand sanitizer, told you to wash your hands at the restaurant’s entryway handwashing station.

“I know, I know,” you said.

And when you came home, you stripped down to your underwear just inside the door, used hand sanitizer from the shelf, and hopped into the shower. I trucked your clothes to the washer and set it on its hottest setting. I sanitized the door handles, scrubbed my hands, singing my ABCs. When you were two, you
called them the ABCDs, and I could have died it was so cute.

22

The day I expected to help you hang a CTA poster in your dorm room. The colorful train lines a gesture to help remind you of home. But you were home, logging in to your classes from your desk. Your dad and I told you stories of our days in college, where we met. Our parents dropped us off and went home without us. That first night, we took the Brown Line, confusing it with the Red Line, and got hopelessly lost.

“Weird,” you said, and shut your bedroom door.

But later, at dinner, you asked, “They just left you there?”

23

Inevitably, the day I helped you move to a different city, with different trains.

24

The last days of my commute, when, finally, no one on the train looks at me. Not with interest nor with compassion nor with hesitation. Finally, no expectation from me to them, or from them to me. Finally, I am invisible, and I reclaim my ride. The poet Mary Ruefle tells me this is a good thing. That being old is like being a child, observing the rush of daily life from the dark corners of a room, unnoticed, unbothered. Free. To commute is to exchange one place for another, and I finally feel so smoothed out that I’m the same wherever I go. Yet I still feel the flush of panic when the operator announces he is stepping off the train, or when there
is a medical emergency on a train ahead. It is hard to remember that, finally, there is no need to rush home to you. I depart at Bryn Mawr and wonder what you are up to, and if I could call you. I realize I can grab a baguette from the bakery or pick up a book from the library. I can’t quite escape the feeling that I need to hurry. That there is never enough time; that we were forced to perform our lives in spaces that robbed us of time. That this is the window that is and will always be dedicated to you.

24, revisited

The first day back to work after my maternity leave. I’m on my way home, the calm veneer I’d lacquered on myself that morning finally peeling. The trains, which have already picked up masses of workers from the Loop by the time they reach me, are crammed, jammed, slammed. I often find myself thinking in silly rhymes these days. I am stuck on the platform at Chicago and State, looking through the window at the inside of a packed car. I shift and see that passengers have not squeezed into middle. There is so much space they could move into. They have not done their part. I’ve done mine. I went to work, like I should. I am rushing home, like I should.

I’m used to this performance, the checking, the waiting for a train or two, until there is space to fit me. It’s a dance I once performed with glee. Young urban working girl, playing her part in the big city. But today, the dance feels old, worn; or maybe it’s that I feel new, raw. Today I am so angry that I feel nauseous. There is plenty of space for, like, five more people!

The conductor announces that there is a train directly behind.
Just three minutes away. My chest tightens.

Three minutes.

Three minutes a day is fifteen minutes a week. Fifteen minutes a week is an hour a month. I silently shriek at those people on the train car. *If you each move a few inches, I could get on this train.*

An hour a month is twelve hours a year. I calculate as I’m pleading with them. *Two inches!* Twelve times eighteen is 216. I glare, willing them to look up from their phones. If they look up, they’ll see it on my face. I’ll be able to push the number 216 through their skulls.

If they move two goddamn inches, I get 216 more hours with my baby.

*Please.*

Would you please make room?
DEAR OVERPASS AT THE END OF MY CHILDHOOD STREET

Tania Runyan

While you went about your business of picking up speed,
I perfected the art of staying put,
a latchkey kid among the white hibiscus petals
whirling through the Santa Ana winds like ghosts.
My skin prickled with sunburn and the occasional freckle
of ash blown in from a distant canyon wildfire.
I took secret pleasure in those destructions. Connections.
Sirens singing along your curves
on their way to silvery hospitals in the hills.
As you honked and hummed, I dug for sow bugs
or constructed a Stonehenge of popsicle sticks
in the grass, comforted and afraid
that if I stood on the right section of curb out front,
I could find your guardrail peeking through a fence
of eucalyptus. The eyebrow of a distant god.
You conveyed the wood-paneled station wagons of my imagination
to families traipsing over the Walk of Stars
or eating in that shop with the giant donut on the roof
without their fists pounding the table.
Now from my Midwestern deck, I zoom in
on satellite images where you’re just another loop
sliding around a full spaghetti plate of bridges and ramps. My mother, 84 and alone in that same backyard, says you’ve gotten louder since I left. “I just pretend it’s the roar of the ocean,” she laughs, five miles from a beach she hasn’t seen in years. I think about that when I’m not sure what to mourn, when aloneness sweeps in with its gifts of kelp and shells then rushes back out like a high-speed chase, the mixed metaphors of memory killing me over here while my mother dozes off to your song.
HIBISCUS BLOOMS AMONG THE MADNESS

Jury S. Judge
INCANTATION
Kristin Indorato

I remember the hibiscus’ silk
Veins bleeding out on the page

The soft brush making loops
In the paint palette

Tiny bricks like glazed clay
Weeping in the flame

Help me remember

Was the watercolor after
The head injury, or before?

There were low clouds
Floating over the sand

Toward the waves
It was sunset, I remember

How we wandered through
Their yielding bodies

Like ghosts who forgot
The way home
CREATURE AND THE CAVE

Sofiya Levina
lamps flicker over empty streets. Wet grass grows between cracks in the sidewalk. The moon is orange and full. A bicycle, silver with ribbons, sails down the hill, through the grass toward the middle school. Its rider, Ana. Fourteen years old. Red helmet, the round kind for skateboarding or rollerblading. Her tires skid in the mud. She pedals backward to break. Stops just before the school’s brick wall. The bike falls to the ground as she stumbles off, away. Helmet still on. Toward the swing set, slide, monkey bars that loop around it all. Toward him.

Ana is sure she is in love.

This is the night the ghosts will come. From another time or place. Ghosts aren’t always dead, you know. They are simply transient. Here but not. Some people can see them. Ana can see them. She is not special for that. She just pays attention.
Or maybe he introduced her. To the ghosts, that is. She can’t remember now.

He waits for her. He also wears a helmet, blue, though his bike is nowhere to be seen. Maybe he scooted. He’s on one of the swings. She hears it before she sees. It squeaks. The only sound in the night. The street lamps don’t make sounds. Neither do the ghosts. He gets up when he sees her. She is close to him. She could touch him if she wanted to.

She wants to touch him.

Hello, he says. Hello, she says. Is it time yet? one of them says. She doesn’t know who said it. Which is to say, later, she will not remember who said it. In the moment, she has the sensation of not remembering. Of not knowing, even then, who is speaking. Or, perhaps, of knowing that later she will no longer remember, which makes the truth, now, in this moment, irrelevant.

They will be here soon, he says. He means the ghosts. She believes him. Is not even conscious that her trust in him is a belief system.

The swing squeaks again. He is swinging again. She is sure that he stood up but now he is sitting, swinging, like when she first found him. A confluence of memory, perhaps. A break in continuity that she just barely registers. Will just barely remember.
She sits in the swing beside his. This one makes no sound. She has the feeling of doing it wrong. Is the feeling stronger because she is in front of him? She wonders. Or, rather, she will wonder later. In the silent swing beside his squeaky one, she has the sense that what happens later is what really matters. That retrospection determines the truth.

Are you wearing lip gloss? he asks. Or, at least, she wants him to ask. She is. She tells him the flavor. Watermelon. Smells like a Jolly Rancher.

He takes out a piece of spearmint gum. Chews it. Hands it to her, already chewed. She has read, recently, that gum does not, in fact, lose flavor at the rate we think it does. We stop tasting it, because we get used to the taste. We forget that we taste it. But, when a new person chews a piece of already chewed gum, the flavor returns. Or, rather, is once again perceived. By the new person. In this case, Ana. Ana takes the already chewed piece of gum from his hands and newly perceives it. Minty. Warm.

The ghosts are coming. Either he says this or she thinks it. She cannot, will not, remember. It doesn’t matter. This is the objective truth. The only truth that matters, right now, on this night in the suburbs outside the middle school, from which they both graduated the year prior. The ghosts are children, mostly. Or used to be children. Most people, aside from babies, used to be children. We can all relate to children. Understand them. Ana can, especially, she feels.
He reaches for her hand. This really happens. She is sure, even later, that she did not imagine or misremember it. She can feel it. In the moment and in every moment after. His hand is small and soft. A boy’s hand.

She is in young love with that hand.

She feels his fingernails. Short and uneven. Like he cut them himself for the first time. She likes to think that he prepared for her in this way. She likes to imagine him, at home, in his own life. She’s never seen him anywhere but the middle school. Mostly, when she imagines him, it is as a ghost. Not because he is one, though he may be, but because the ghosts are all children. And because she only sees him and only sees the ghosts at night. They are one and the same to her.

He lets go of her hand. She doesn’t remember it happening, or won’t, at least, but she is sure that he is the one who let go. She would never let go.

He stands up, off the swing. A little hop. The chains jangle. The seat squeaks. He lands on wood chips. Until now, she would have said that they were swinging above grass. Grass everywhere. Wet and muddy. But now she sees the wood chips. Will remember wood chips, at least. He walks off into the distant grass. Away from the brick wall of the middle school. Toward the perimeter. Of the school yard. Of her memory. He becomes blurry. Foggy.
In memory and in the moment. They are one and the same. She will remember him best like this. A silhouette, cloaked in fog. She wants to follow him but does not want to be a follower.

The moon is full and it is pink. Tropical. Like the hibiscus flower peeking through the wood chips beneath her feet. That flower is not native here. She thinks it might be native to Hawaii, or someplace like that. Probably, the flower is not really there. Probably, it is a ghost. Which is not to say that the ghosts are not really there. They are, or at least, she remembers them to be. That is what, decidedly, matters. That she remembers the wood chips and the flower and the ghosts.

He calls to her. He really does. She yearns so deeply for him to call to her that he really, truly, objectively, does. And she hops off of the swing and now, finally, she follows. She cannot resist.

There, he says. Where, she says. Here, he says. The ghosts. They are coming. They come from nowhere. From everywhere. From the dew-soaked grass. From the clouds. From the moon, which is, has been, retreating this whole time. It is almost dawn. At least, that’s how she remembers it.

The ghosts are children. Even the old looking ones, with wrinkles and gray hair, are children. She can feel them. Perceive them, if you will. Like chewed gum come alive. Fresh and bright under a familiar hazy sky. They say her name. Ana. They whisper it. They never say his name. Only hers. They know her. They
always remember her.

This is the last night she will see the ghosts. She does not know it yet. Maybe it’s not true. Maybe she comes back to the grassy wet field outside the middle school and sees the ghosts again another night. Another time. With this boy or a different one. But this is the night she will remember as the last. The last time she was sure. Sure of what she saw and of being seen.

Ana, he says. Yes, she says. Are you sure that you are in love, he says. She is sure. She will not say it. Will not sacrifice her power. Will not let herself become a ghost. Ana, he says. Ana.

The ghosts go as quickly as they came. Not suddenly. It is gradual. But almost as soon as they arrive, they begin their long, slow retreat. We all do that. Ana had all that time to say goodbye to them, but she was too busy saying hello. This is a lesson she will learn. A mistake she will remember. A mistake she will not make again.

He did not scooter here. He has no vehicle to speak of. Only a helmet and his feet. And the swing, which is stationary, though it does move and make noise. She has only just said hello when he begins his retreat.

Are you sure you are in love? Yes, she is sure. With whom, with what, it doesn’t matter. She won’t remember, so, for all intents and purposes, it was never true. That she loved him, specifically,
that is. Never needed to be true. Or false for that matter. She was in love in a wet field where she met the child ghosts. They knew her name and that was enough. He has left already. She didn’t see him go, in the end. She is left alone in the field with the silver bike with the ribbons and the orange pink tropical moon. Or maybe, by now, it’s the sun. Pastel and glittering, casting silent light. That is, at least, how she will remember it.
FLOATING GREEN HIBISCUS

Roger Camp
Raphael Jenkins

WE ALL HAVE THAT ONE UNCLE WHO WAS FAILED BY HIS COUNTRY

Back when Mama and I still lived at Grandpa’s house, Uncle showed me how to catch

fastballs in the backyard, which had sipped blood from years of noses and lips cracked by missed opportunities. The splatters becoming a perennial sea of sticky aster and hibiscus,

each petal a reminder to use the glove not my face. Bi-weekly, we’d hack the yard clean to its green below, talking under July’s temper tantrum. I had as many questions as the sky does blue. Like, what happens when a boy gets looped into war? I watched him light a Kool 100 and pull it like he’d die without its acrid scratch creeping up his throat. He held the putrid wind for what felt like days until he breathed
out, speaking slowly, words like ghosts,

_You’ll learn when you’re older_,
and he was correct. I’d see what can happen

when a boy goes to war and learns to turn enemies
into bullet-plump piles, but never how to cope.

I’d see the spiraling of a man who once knew peace
but lost it to the needles. I’d see the police tape

blocking the trail of wildflowers, leading to where
he’d dragged the body of the man who raised him.
SWINGERS
BethAnn Lawson
THE GOLDEN RECORD
Zahra Choudhury

There was a postcard every six months. Always delivered by nameless agents in smooth suits with wordless actions. Always rang the doorbell, handed me that damned glossy card with slight tilts of the head, and they would leave me in the doorway holding the sharp edges of the postcard, like it was a 4x6 pane of glass about to burst in my hand.

A great ocean of red sand and shadow, like the last one, and the one before it. Rust dusts and hibiscus reds. Scrawled in blue marker at the back, Wish you were here. I knew damn well I didn’t.

The lamplight flickered, and the saxophone bayed across the great empty expanse of the apartment. I imagined it groaning sadly across the rust red dusts, but then I remembered sound didn’t travel through space and I wondered if it was as silent for you as it was for me.

The spring rain pattered the little plants on the balcony. I was surprised they hadn’t died yet. I’d been forgetful, the first-aid kit
was on the dining table still, open. And sometimes the refrigerator wheezed in the middle of the night and I’d wake up swathed in a sea of sweat and sheets thinking it was your breath catching in your throat, and your heart was about to stop beating again.

The painting was in the living room. I moved it because staring at the unfinished vision of you on the moon before I went to sleep made me dream of you on the moon, except the moon rocks were pill dust and you ricocheted off the edges in your astronaut suit saying you wanted to rail it all. And I still felt happiness at having you back, tangible enough to wake up achingly alone. Even though it was a dream of you with your face planted in a crater, just sniffing and sniffing and when I woke up the refrigerator was wheezing again.

You often had friends come calling to the apartment. Old friends with gashed arms, hollow eyes pressed up against the peephole, heaving your name with a sweet tooth only you could tend to. So I suppose I finally figured out your side job. It only made sense. I had to disappoint them all though. I’d lost count of the times I’d pressed my back to the door, yelling-singing that you weren’t here anymore. I sent their zombified selves to Paulo. Scribbled down his number on a scrap and pushed it under the door. I guessed they would miss you and your pharmaceutical grade shit. I did sometimes, too. Didn’t know which it was though.

So here it was, another postcard, taken with deep space Polaroid technology, and I knew you’d taken it yourself, otherwise you wouldn’t have sent it to me. So here it sat, with the rest of the debris on the surface, like the endless space-time ghost of you sitting across the table from me, talking in blue marker. Wish you
were here. Whatever. And the knot within my chest felt like it tightened again, and the walls of the apartment seemed to close in, so I grabbed my keys and stepped outside in the rain and began to walk.

Water streamed in sheets over the pavement. My head was swimming and my feet were heavy. Part of this experience was finding your stash, squirreled away in different parts of the house. In the couch, the cutlery drawer, under the television, the first-aid kit. Pills streaming down from the popcorn ceiling.

Will you go? The words forming an endless scrolling marquee loop through the walls of my skull. How I bore the weight of your resolve. The dilapidated houses I’d dragged you out of. The futility I felt. How I bridged my loneliness with living on.

What was love other than gravity gone insane? What was grief other than love with no place to go? You and your shaking hands and pleading eyes and space stories were so far. I had watched many grainy sunsets alone. And I still didn’t quite understand the knot in my chest. Why I couldn’t follow or beg you. How you didn’t understand that if I couldn’t breathe on Earth, I would have suffocated on Mars. Your sobriety had been a pyrrhic victory. But I suppose such is the nature of things.

I just watched space documentaries and wished you wouldn’t burn upon atmospheric reentry.

Crashes in the kitchenette. You broke a cup. Second one this week. It was like you forgot how to function in gravity sometimes. And then you walked all over the fucking shards in the dark, because you were fucked up and you didn’t feel the ceramic inside your feet because of the codeine. And I winced when I picked
them out, not you. The first-aid kit didn’t have enough band-aids, of course why would it, but it obviously did have a stash of perfect little hydrocodone ovals. You were mummified, muffled, too far away, drooping against the world.

Drooping. Everything was drooping, the dying houseplants in my window, our eyelids, the curtains, the futon drooping under our weight and sweat. The summer was like a slow paralysis, turning time into syrup. I felt like I was melting, dragging my feet. The skies hanging down, a dusty pink. Just dust, blowing in through the windows, settling on everything. In the coils of the telephone and in my paint. The place stunk like ashtray and I let it because I loved you. Never understood why you didn’t just smoke on the balcony.

Desperate slow crooning came through your obnoxious gramophone, the words all crunchy and incoherent. Not like we paid attention. Nothing really came through our cotton wool minds. I forgot to water the plants. You forgot you weren’t weightless. But I suppose this was all about forgetting. For you, at least.

It was all a godawful mess. Lawn flamingos in the corner (mine). Newspaper clippings plastered to the wall (yours). A scale model of the solar system, the planets all tangled up in shambles on my hardwood floor (also yours). Dried up oil paint, everywhere. On the floor, in my shoes, some of the kitchen knives. I’d just gotten the smell of linseed and turpentine out of my hair and brushes, but it clung firmly to everything else. The painting sat heavily, lopsided on the easel in the middle of the bedroom, the paint on it thick, cracking, drying too quickly in the heat. My lips were cracking and I was sweating from the heat, and you were sweating from the shakes.
Here I was painting us on the edge of the moon, you in that astronaut suit you didn’t get to wear, wondering if love could get stale. But I suppose that was the difference between an artist and a cosmonaut. That I could still imagine what you didn’t get to see. That I still wanted to be exquisite and that you cut the dreams out of your own head, and laid them at my feet and called it love.

You swung out of bed, creaking like a rusted hinge. Hacking and coughing as you sat up, clutching your chest, wheezing breaths whistling through you. Looked around wildly for your Cherry-Koff with liquid eyes. Looked around wildly for me. You were looking gaunt, more than usual. More than the muscle atrophy zero-gravity training in the _Soyuz_ left you with. I poured out the Cherry-Koff in the prescription cup for you. Otherwise you’d swig half the bottle yourself. I’d seen you do it. I knew you could.

“Irina,” you’d start, “Irina…Irina.”
And I would say yes, and put a hand on your face.
“Life is unbearably loud today,” you declared.
I always half smiled. “I’ll drown it out for you,” I said.
You still tasted like syrup when we kissed though. Like bitter cherries. I was always going to think of cherries when I thought of codeine. And then you would get mellow, put on your prized records from the ‘Jims’ pile of the shelf, and we’d have Morrison or Hendrix or Page. And then we were brushing our teeth to the sliding electric guitar, and my face would look at yours in the mirror, still fresh mint foaming at the mouth. Into those honey-glazed eyes and I was a fly stuck in amber. Time would come unstuck.

And somehow it was always back to how we first met, at
the protest, when you still had fire in your eyes, railing against the cessation of the space exploration program, still hopeful and waiting. I was still bored and self-absorbed and there you were with your just causes and dreams just waiting to be a muse. And I was devoted. The only Icarus I ever needed.

“They should’ve put your paintings on the Golden Record,” you had said.

“Huh?”

“Oh, on the Voyager, there’s a record, like an archive. With sounds and shit from earth, y’know, waterfalls and violins, people talking in languages and art and airports and animals. The periodic table,” you paused, “they’ve got instructions on how to play it. And it’s out in deep space, so you know, someone knows how we lived and died.”

“We’re quite the self-obsessed species,” I quipped.

And I blinked and we were back in our sticky slow summer. That was before life in this apartment was so stagnant, when it was just you and me, and not you, me, and prescription pills. Not that I blamed you. I hated everything I painted sober. But I didn’t want to be as far away as you, floating in your own interstellar space, a hollowed-out zombie of the man I still wanted to love.

You poured out fruity cereal. Most of it on the gingham tablecloth. I steadied your hands from behind you. You shuffled around a little bit, picked up A History of the Universe from the floor. You couldn’t focus enough to read. You shuffled back into bed and I followed, sitting on the floor cross-legged, reading aloud about Andromeda and constellations and all the things you never got to see, while you brushed out my hair in slow motion. You were
asleep in minutes. It was midday.

It was snowing again. We had pitched a two-person tent on the balcony and filled it with blankets. It was one of your crazier ideas, but winter always made you more lucid. Clearheaded, even. One side of the tent was unzipped, and we were snug, watching the snow collect on the trees and the railings, softly padding on the nylon roof, and every so often you would shake the roof of the tent, sending snow sliding down the sides of the roof. As magical as a child’s first snow. The world was muffled and we were delightfully untouched.

The painting in the bedroom was also mostly untouched. I had fleshed out the shadows on the moon, but I had barely started painting myself. It was always the hardest part, painting the expression on my own face. Never knew what would look right. It had been a busy two months of commissions from museums and an art fair, but it was easy to get paid for your angst. And you knew how to be happy for me, if anything, and we were drinking champagne in plastic flutes inside our tent in the snow.

You were laughing at my little party trick. I was smoking hands-free, something I had learned while painting, inhaling from one corner of my lips and exhaling from the other, so I wouldn’t have to busy my hands with something as trivial as pulling my cigarette when acrylic dried so damn fast. You’d had two overdoses in the last three months. One right in front of me, and I’d driven you to the hospital, digging out the car with my hands while you convulsed in the snow. White knuckles gripping the wheel, smoking hands-free while you convulsed in the backseat. I spat the filter out of the window before we got there. I shivered in our tent.
Sometimes I wondered how far *Voyager* was now. If someone ever got to hear that record of babies crying and people laughing and waves and look at pictures of X-rays and supermarkets. You know, everything that made us human. And I supposed in a way, this is what made us human. Watching you wonder at the snow and picking shards out of your feet. Loving you and begrudging you.

But you had been better, you took down the old newspaper clippings about space you’d plastered to the wall and put them away. Hung up the model of the solar system above the bed. Put the lawn flamingos out on the balcony. Cleaned religiously, still high as a kite, but a coherent sort of high, I suppose. Euphoric, dreamy. Singing to yourself, and cleaning the paint off my palettes, changing the water for the brushes while I worked.

And one morning you moved the easel, breathing hard, because apparently I worked *too far away* from where you enjoyed your television on the droopy couch, so you laid your head on my lap and watched world news with watery eyes through the legs of the easel. I dropped paint on your cheek. You unpeeled oranges, split each petal down the middle, and absentmindedly offered them to me, pulpy and convenient. I lazily swirled paint brushes on your face. Your arm shot up to cup mine.

“*God,* you’re radiant.”

“You’re funny,” I said

“I fucking hate that half-smile of yours.”

“Why?”

“Because I wish it was like this all the time.”

A week later, you were standing still, catatonic in the kitchenette. Clutching the mail I had brought in earlier with the
official-looking postage, staring at it dazedly. The way you usually got before your bones started shaking from withdrawal. I laced my arms around you, attempting to wrench the crumpled paper from your hands, when you turned around, barely choked out a whisper, handed the paper to me.

“They need Soyuz trained pilots...for the Mars Initiative.”

The call had come. I read until the words turned in on themselves. And then I was dazed. My muse could finally take flight. And you sank to the floor, against the refrigerator, and all the magnets of the places we’d been came sliding off with you. I looked at you over the counter, crazed with fear. Codependency was an ugly thing. I saw it in your eyes. The same crazed look in your eyes, when you finally pulled yourself to your feet, and pulled me under your chin, still shaking, clutching so hard I felt my ribs might crack.

“Will you go?” I muttered into your chest.

“Irina,” you persuaded, “Irina...sweet Irina.”

“Answer my question.”

“I’d have to get clean.”

I tipped my head. “Yes.”

“I don’t know.”

You left.

Came back, stumbling, slumped against the doorframe. We had many versions of the same conversation.

“It’s not forever,” you pleaded. Three years.

I was quiet for a very long time. And I stood up, to clear my head in the cold air on the balcony, when you thought it was a good idea to add,
“You could come with me...” And looking at my face, trailed off.
And we were just staring at each other in the darkness again.
And I looked at the painting in the bedroom, still unfinished, and perhaps I was sort of glad I hadn’t started painting myself, that it was just you in your spacesuit on my incomplete moon.
My father’s love is an empty house
with a full bar in the basement,
a trumpet in the closet.
He is in the rooms I just left:

furniture marks loop the vinyl floors,
hibiscus across the patio, in the pool—
palm fronds in the pumps. I sit outside
his bedroom, a child—

ear pressed to a locked door.
Shadows are ribbons, fingers
tracing carpet patterns, hungry

for a baloney sandwich,
for Mum to come and get me
for light to appear around his frame.

Now I sit in the therapist’s office,
sip water from a mug that reads Love.
Trauma is a Russian doll.
Place the grief
in the center. The grief
to the center.

... ... 

Mum said, Grandma slid
enemas into my young father, his sister,
the first to use the bathroom
took a beating. Grandpa watched.

On our trip to visit my grandparents
my father’s face is a wet rag:
glossed in the dim-lit motel bar—
we are the only two here. Heads bowed
in prayer. He prays to the ice cubes,
in a drained rum and coke.

I pray for the strength
to maneuver him to our room.

Now dreams reoccur:
ghosts make molasses of the air.
Always this empty house,
shapeshifting

spiral stairs without entry or exit,
a door behind me.

I cannot pass through it.
DOUBLE EXPOSURE

Hannah Radeke
DOUBLE EXPOSURE WITH FLOWER
Radeke
CONTRIBUTORS


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Chloé Firetto-Toomey has an MFA degree from Florida International University. She won the 2017 Christopher F. Kelly Award for Poetry and the 2020 Scotti Merrill Award. Her chapbook of poems *Little Cauliflower* was published in 2019 by Dancing Girl Press.

Kristin Indorato lives in Nashville, Tennessee, with her musician husband and their son and dog. When she is not scribbling in a notebook, you can find her hunched over a jigsaw puzzle, reading dystopian sci-fi, or photographing spiders and discarded furniture.

Raphael Jenkins prefers to go by Ralph, as he feels it suits him better. He is a native of Detroit, Michigan, currently residing in central Kentucky with his four-year-old boy and the girl who stole his heart. He is a chef by day and an essayist, poet, screenwriter in his dreams. His work has been featured on his mama’s fridge, his close friends’ inboxes, and wherever you happen to be reading this. This is his first publication.
Jury S. Judge is an internationally published artist, writer, poet, and cartoonist. Her “Astronomy Comedy” cartoons are published in Lowell Observatory’s quarterly publication, The Lowell Observer. She has been interviewed on the television news program NAZ Today for her work as a political cartoonist. Her artwork has been widely featured in over one hundred and twenty-five literary magazines, such as Blue Mesa Review, The Tishman Review, Blue Moon Review, and The Ignatian Literary Journal. She graduated Magna Cum Laude with a BFA from the University of Houston-Clear Lake in 2014.

Sarah Kalsbeek writes fiction in the early morning hours and spends her nine-to-five day working in fundraising. Her fiction has appeared in Psychopomp Magazine. She received her MFA from Northwestern University, where she also served as a fiction editor for TriQuarterly. She lives in Chicago with her family.

BethAnn Lawson was born and raised near San Francisco, California, and learned her artistic skills at an early age from her street-artist father. Having spent over three decades as a graphic artist and illustrator, she began painting again in earnest upon his death in 2011. Her contemporary paintings marry brush-precision with colorful whimsy in an engaging mix of abstract when viewed at close range and more realistic at a distance. Her urban landscapes seem to capture the little secrets of strangers and the amazing architecture of both nature and man.
Sofiya Levina is a Russian-born mixed media artist. She blends idiosyncratic characters and abstract environments to represent her internal worlds. For the past five years, she has been working in Los Angeles and New York City. Recently, she held an eight-month-long live painting residency at Raised in Los Angeles for DTLA Art Walk and has showcased her art in stores and galleries in New York City and Los Angeles.

Hannah Radeke is a poet and photographer living in Chicago. They studied art history and creative writing in undergrad.

Tania Runyan is the author of the poetry collections *What Will Soon Take Place, Second Sky, A Thousand Vessels, Simple Weight*, and *Delicious Air*. Her guides *How to Read a Poem, How to Write a Poem*, and *How to Write a College Application Essay* are used in classrooms across the country. Her poems have appeared in many publications, including *Poetry, Image, Indiana Review, Atlanta Review*, and *The Christian Century*. Tania was awarded an NEA Literature Fellowship in 2011.
Yolanda Santa Cruz is a multidisciplinary artist from Cuba. Her visual works explore gender dynamics, question societal constructs, and promote female empowerment. She is also linked to the literary world, with many of her writings tapping into relationships, sexuality, and memories. Santa Cruz has participated in festivals such as The Ephemeral Sculpture Festival (2013) and attended residencies such as Hypatia in the Woods (2016). Her work has been shown at the National Art Museum, Cuba; Confluence Gallery, Washington; Art Scene West Gallery, Los Angeles; and Light Space Online Gallery, among others. She received her BFA from San Alejandro’s National Academy of Fine Arts in 2013 and continued her education at the University of the Arts of Cuba up until 2015, when she decided to migrate to the United States.

Hannah Silverman is a Brooklyn-based writer and filmmaker. She earned her BFA in Film & Television with a minor in Creative Writing from New York University. She is an Editorial Assistant at Pigeon Pages, where her prose has been published.

Michelle Spiziri is an artist based in the area of Baltimore, Maryland. She is a painter who uses a mix of different wet and dry mediums. Spiziri creates artwork that excites, evokes, and challenges the viewer. Many times she is struck by an impromptu phrase, word, or memory that sparks an idea for a new painting. Time in the studio is dedicated to contemplation, researching, and pushing the limits of visual expression.

**Susan Yergler**, nee Woodring, is the author of a short story collection, *Springtime on Mars* (Press 53), and a novel, *Goliath* (St. Martin’s Press). She currently lives in Western North Carolina with her husband, songwriter and musician Freddy Bradburn, her two children Abigail and Aiden, and her cat Lucy.
NEXT UP
Issue No. 30
Spring 2021

3ELEMENTS:
Chamber, Nightshade, Confetti

DUE FEBRUARY 28, 2021

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.

Visit www.3ElementsReview.com for more info.
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, @mikelashea.

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.