



PHOSPHENE
LITERARY
JOURNAL

ISSUE ONE

**PHOSPHENE LITERARY
JOURNAL**

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Masthead:

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Phosphene | fāsḑē n | noun:

a ring or spot of light produced by direct stimulation of the visual system other than by light.

Phosphene Literary Journal is a not-for-profit, international literary journal that hopes to give student writers a chance for their voices to be heard. By providing detailed feedback, conducting author interviews, and reviewing international literature, art, and pop culture, we hope to forge connections between writers of different countries and backgrounds in this increasingly globalized world.

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www.phosphene.co.nr

Submissions are welcome year-round. To submit, please visit our website at www.phosphene.co.nr. For further questions, email us at phosphenelitmag@gmail.com.

A Note from the Editor

Electric, eccentric, and strangely scintillating. After a year of work, *Phosphene Literary Journal* has finally come to fruition. After reading and editing dozens of submissions, I am glad to be able to present the finest in art, poetry, and prose from today's youth. The content in our first issue is raw and real, words and images taken directly from the soul.

First, I would like to thank my fellow editors and contributors for making the dream a reality. What started as a casual vision in the mind of a high school student has turned into a fully-functioning literary journal, complete with work by some of the best and brightest young writers in the world. Our writers include Foyle Poets, Scholastic Art and Writing winners, a Poetry Institute of Canada awardee, a National Student Poets Program nominee, and an associate of the Academy of American Poets.

Phosphene's motto is "Bring us a candle, and we'll show you the way," but this issue has proven to us that the young artists and writers of today are far from being lost—in fact, they are well on their way to forging out their own path with their exquisite, never-before-seen art and writing. In today's increasingly globalized world, *Phosphene* understands the importance of an international perspective on art and literature. As a result, our issue consists not only of work from young talents in the United States, but also work from countries like the UK, Canada, and Russia. The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow, and through *Phosphene*, we hope to provide an outlet for the writers and artists of the future.

Please take the time to read, breathe in, and lose yourself in our first issue. Join us on our journey, and *enjoy*.

Thank you,
Hannah Miao
Founder/Editor-in-Chief

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Gabrielle Baumann

Twenty-Two

My building was built as a lofty reminder and at night, I can hear its whispers. It sits high above the tenements and city blocks, all gray stone and expensive glass. So far removed from all that down below, and at night I can see the city dance for miles.

Everything is beautiful twenty-two floors up.

Twenty two floors up, you can't see the sidewalks (not so much cracked as erupted), the gum wrappers, gutters, glass. Uneven pothole pavement leading motorcycle gangs (as young as ten, they learn how to wheelie for a mile and never fall) up and down Broad, thundercrackers on a fall day.

You can't see the roots of the trees turning city blocks back into what they once were. You can't see the roots of my lovers Girard and Spring and Vine. You miss the flow of a living machine bred out of hardship and survival at all costs—a surprising animal elusive and cunning. My city will cut you, she will. She'll slice you open one way or another, check your pockets gentrified germination check your volume indoor listener check your answering machine mom's calling again. Above all, check the nick above her left ear where the dead blooms.

Everything is deadly twenty-two floors up.

Down below, children play in quiet streets while their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents keep out a watchful eye for strangers. Bicycles and branded cars eat up pavement, trying to escape an ideal no one can name. Twenty two floors up, you can't see the rust on the schoolyard fences.

Down below, a bicyclist is struck by a car. Steel meets rubber. Flesh and asphalt and asphodel. Questions, an ambulance, a small crowd gathers. More walk by—a normal day. Violence becomes routine, the tiny shocks of scraped elbows and broken ribs

and sirens. Yellow tape is a decoration taken seriously only by its doorways.

Everything is there twenty-two floors up.

You never notice it on the street, this melding of green and grey and yellow and siren. When everything is taller than you are, the world becomes focused on the near, the looming. Cities are built as reminders to your own smallness – it's easy to become lonely in such a crowded place. People come to cities to become lost, and because of this we grow up with a romantic love—and wariness—of them. The promise of glamour, the lure of empty alleys, we are attracted to these dangerous places built of stone and blood. It becomes a blur.

Except when you're twenty-two floors up.

Lemons

The smell of rotting lemons
hangs in the air
cloys, wraps, remember when
we found the bananas
laying between the shelves—
forgotten fruit five days overwrought,
mothballs and unhappy mistakes
a mercenary taste.

The bananas wrap themselves in
perversion, a reminder of sterile
diner scenes—*just water, please?*—
and a hint of sour sweetness
hangs unspoken on my coated tongue;
remember the lemon grove

we saw on a page and swore over,
diagrams perfectly placed,
moments we meant to join in
but never knew
the meaning of a rotting lemon on the ground.

Minotaur

The smell of fingers wrapping
cigarettes mix (more
than one substance).

A lighter – wind
your hands
shelter
then inhale, exhale
fog.

Minotaur
on the concrete
Hands
Small
Horns
Hidden
Mythic mixtapes you made for
Girls you met once
Girls you hate once
Give a tribute for the
Minotaur

Labyrinths smell like
toes and rubber
Underneath sweat
-y shirts
and iron
imaginary
shackles
For Theseus
was a father too, you know

Sophie Nadler

jackson

he was 12
when his father
succumbed to the
devil's concoction,
turning everything to
night. crows pecked
at him in his sleep,
a constant reminder
of loss. and then time
turned, as it always
does, until the boy
turned 17. before
school, he would
climb onto the roof
of his step-father's
home. he takes a
blunt from his pocket,
watching the tip burn
red as the devil's tail
until finally he is no
longer alone. pills remind
him of the bitter end and
tears and sinking to the
center of the earth only
for it to swallow him
whole. but he no longer
thinks of such things,
no longer thinks of
much at all. anything
to forget; anything to cut

the silence. it still hurts,
like a burn that finds
sanctuary in wretched skin.
but he's a soldier, just like
his father. each year he goes
to the same grave with everyone
behind him singing, desperately
singing, praying for him to
become a different man than
his father. he lays the flowers
against cold stone, whispering to
the soul in the grave:

"they don't know the truth."

two oceans

I took it that day
and it's painted in my lipstick
all over your redding face,
revealed in the way
your fingers twitch
at the beckoning of my voice.

"I like the silence," you say.
but you truly don't
because it's teeming with rolling waves of thought.

My head's in your lap before we go,
and instead of absorbing the warmth
radiating from your pores
I sink to the center of the earth
to find it is colder than I imagined.

I shoot you my closed-book glance
and then I hear the engine purr
as you speed away;
and in that moment
we were two oceans
apart.



Astha Chourasia/Conformity: Mixed Media

Isla Anderson

Letter to a Shrike from its Prey

Dark-stripe, do not leave me
unravaged. This liver you breached
impaled but uneaten; corkboarded limp

to the air. It didn't hurt when
you caught me, bright-taloned; you
lowered me onto the barb, and I

breathed *lama sabachthani* at the
plume—my blood. Your feathers, quilted
undergrowth and mud; my stomach

unstrung tendon, withered rubber, pierced
balloon. The party he was not invited to,
pronged and trembling; spit-roast

feast that you abandoned midway
through. In your absence, I replace his face
with yours, my butcher-bird—in my

paralysis, it rusts me
through and through.

Carrion

The room smells of earth, and it is partly the cigarettes and partly because your mother has brought potted flowers with her every time she's visited for the past three weeks, and that is because this is the closest you've been to a hospital ward since all of this began and it is easier to watch hyacinths bloom stark white as blips on a monitor than admit there is nothing bright or inevitable about the way you are breathing in this place where night-frost tangles jasmine's curls. Every week, another urn of grit and bulb; another shrine from which some votive thing might grow if lit and watered, though morticians say *she died a floral death*, by which they soothe, by which they mean *a body rots like flower heads*. The soil gathers blood, and it is partly to embalm, and it is partly / making use / of what is shed.

Where We Were

Hands through doe hair
like hands through water, oil
bright as blood. Blood

bright as nothing and we
hadn't talked in months; your flesh
reluctant as an eyelid filming

mine, that globe. Its silverskin,
so sclera-white and frail and yours
pink; yours a quiet, epithelial

seam, sewn tight. Cigarette scab
like a fresh dug grave; the dead
pull their blankets so close. So

knitted—we had planned for
everything except fatigue; these
roots. Death, webbed like rye

beneath the earth; tiny spiders
black and graceful in the sweatsheets
of our bed. Spindle red. Wrapping

bone with earthsilk whilst
we slept or decomposed; lacing
venom-spittle, kissing me

awake.

Brittany Burton

Let Light Break the Ghostly Blue

The night is not dead. It is brimming with life
whispering from corners

bathed and stained with shadows.

The empty room's door gapes open,
key teeth twisting at the phantom-locked latch
and the sound bites at his ears

while his brother's monsters nip at his heels.

Everything bites,
fights.

Light breaks the night like shattering eyeglass lenses
crushed by a motorman lighting those blasphemed tracks—
threaded gleaming through train tunnels.

Sewage water runs close beneath
snarling, screaming and overflowing with people—
jumpers' ghosts gnawing blue-tinged lips,

bloodstained skin and eyes bleached white,

losing color when no one remembers their names,
unable to see, unable to speak, unable to...

And accumulated blind limbs leap and flail to
decipher walls, wheels, final breaths.

Now the night is not dead. Brother's eyes judge,
that icy, brittle gnat crushed,

face smeared across the obituary page.

Lying words and praises and stories of laughter,
shared on childhood playsets, stare sharply in
black ink

his brother wouldn't be able to read—

imprinted at the back of his eyes.
If it was an affidavit in red, would it make a difference?

In his mind he was there
to bar brother with an iron-clad arm in place of a safety rail,
both glowing useless silver in fluorescent light.
Playset bars held back more, halting screams and
swinging is a playful thing not falling with no control
as he imagines halting his brother
at a yellow caution line with no
caution, yelling for him to
stop.

Now.



Untitled II/Kerry Luo: Canon EOS Rebel T3i DSLR, 18-55 mm

Mallika Singh

Sea Salt

the day i decided my favorite color was red
was the same day i noticed my laughter
was no longer measured and laced away
i laugh with my throat raw, stretched open
nerves aflame and eyes alive
my voice is lightning
my hands are clumsy but bold
it was the same day i began to love
the darkness of my eyes,
love the way they let me drink light in
the smell of rain tangled in my hair
knots and curls and tiny braids
the way my waist becomes my hip
just like finding home
a mermaid taking her suitcase
and heading back to sea

Ducks In August

Shannon Marie McQuillan
the girl with orange hair
has hands of faded blue sky
 bent curls and small nails
 green gray seas
 under wayfarer frames
she speaks (so soft soft soft)
and thinks too loud
her head's on the ground
her foot's in a cloud
she never drinks ginger ale
prefers pale pink peony petals
sometimes she's an elephant
other times a drowsy cub
she sleeps with
one ear to the window
the other in her palm
in Deming, she says
 they have duck races

Kerry Luo

Every Night They Have Rain

Every night she sits on the rooftop
looks out at the planets
and fixes her eyes on
one.

surreal
extraordinary
ethereal

It seems to illuminate
a nebulous explosion
and curve
like an eyelash of a smile
that she will never have
brighter than she will ever be.

Every night they have rain
real
ordinary
mundane

It is too much nutrition for their plump grasses
too much wet for their costly hairs
Everybody wears umbrellas except
one.

He sits on the rooftop
and looks out at the planets
wondering if the drops
that land on the curve of his eyelash
come from a girl's
eyes

Sabrina-Ortega Riek

Creation Myth

When the world was over we descended into the subway tunnels
and walked the rails for miles—just you and me
holding hands in the sepulchral gullet of the city.
We brought cans of beans and bags of jerky
and ate them in the dark. It was dark all the time so we didn't need
to sleep:
we walked the tunnels for weeks feeling the walls
for the graffiti atlases left by prophets who saw the end when no
one listened.
They're gone now, and everyone else; so the monsters weren't
scared
to walk with us: the Rat Kings with tails tangled into roadmaps;
the skeletal black creatures that crouch in between train cars;
the ghosts of those who rode the trains into darkness.
They told us stories in languages we didn't know,
but they touched our skin with claws and tails
so we understood. We told them about the sunlight
and they sighed, imagining what warmth could feel like.

We told them that we weren't born of the City, and in the cold
our desert plaster bones got wet and crumpled.
Before the end I slept on a trundle bed, beneath my mother,
near the marshy carpet flooded by burst pipes.
The house was full of spiders and had no good lightbulbs,
and the walls sweated ice through the rotting wood—
but at night I slept in my mother's Carhartt jacket
and dreamed a bible of maps into the canvas.
Some afternoons I put the portable heater in the bathroom
and sat on the tile floor painting runes onto my face

with lipstick and eyeliner, thinking about creosote and dawn
beneath a dust storm,
drawing maps to dead lands and dead languages on my skin.
I was built for this kind of empty world.

You took summers to visit your dad in the desert:
you laid your bones in the sun to dry and remembered where you
came from.
You ran miles and miles from his trailer into the juniper scrubland
until you couldn't run anymore: that's when you found the well
with the rusted lock that shattered when you touched it,
and you drank and drank until you vomited into the dust.
You slept in the warm dirt like a Gila monster watching the
cloudless sky
and returned stumbling to the trailer before sunset.
You went back to the well every day until that Sunday morning
when you found a woman, bloated after weeks of soaking,
rising to the surface. She was wearing a black dress and a rosary
and you thought you saw her part her lips. You didn't ever go back
but you still wear the rosary.

When the world is over we can walk forever, if we want—
so we followed the subway tunnels far enough that we found the
desert.
We didn't need to deliberate at the intersections;
we felt the maps within us, the maps that lead us together
down the blackened tunnels and the maps that would lead us home:
in the dark we climbed the ladders by feel and were born into sun
hot enough to dry our bones. After generations
the Rat Kings will regain their sight in the light,
and they sigh, returned to the desert in which everything is born.
We could feel the ancestral memory in our flesh
of summer filling our mouths and veins.
We had been growing sidewalk and trains

from our necks and between our toes—blooming from the
condensation
of ice in our flesh—so we let our skin to the sun,
we left our clothes in the sand except the Carhartt and the rosary
and we kept walking.

When we found the towns we were the only people in the streets.
We plucked oranges from abandoned groves;
we didn't talk because we heard each other thinking
on the shimmering radio waves of sunlight.
Our skin turned browner and our eyes turned copper
like the womb of the earth from which we crawled.
We dressed in stolen clothes and wrapped ourselves in ribbon;
we made skirts of ocotillo and creosote so we smelled like the
desert;
we smashed the mirrors of abandoned cars
and strung reflective rosaries around our waists—
apocalyptic beauty queens walking hand in hand down the
boulevards.

At Gila Bend my hair was too long so we cut it with scissors
into a bristle like a javelina while we sat in the wreckage of a motel,
watching the ghosts and Rat Kings bathe in the rain of a leaking
water tower.

We built sleighs out of empty jugs of water and pulled each other
over the asphalt—
when the world is over no one is left to care about gravity.
When the world is over we can walk forever
and never run out of oranges.

You held the rosary over your head and we followed its swing
like a compass needle lighting a path toward Yuma. I never cried
in the silent wastes of the city, and when you did I braided your hair
with Arizona poppies

and spat on the sand to make a river. We took a raft of empty water
bottles southward
down the river, which cut canyons into the sands
like a rattlesnake carving the desert around its body.
For days we slept and squeezed the juice of oranges into our
mouths,
telling stories of the city and how we had found each other—the
last bodies in the deserted City.
You dragged your toes in the water and told me you had never been
to the ocean,
never seen something to its end, uninterrupted
by motels or mountains. So we beached the raft
and burned it to call the monsters:
gods that were patchworks of birds and coyotes and jackrabbits,
and flocks of moths, and snakes rattling earthquakes into the
paralytic soil.
We danced with them around the bonfire that stood miles high
in the hills; we sang along to birdsong and coyote howls.
We didn't meet anyone who spoke human languages
except the moth who sang in Spanish and told us stories
about a creation of the world that we began to remember
because we had been there.

When we reached the flatlands that feel like cliffs
hemming the edge of the planet, we could smell the salt
of the encroaching ocean. At high tide, in the desolate silence,
we heard the faint break of the sea against the sand.
We camped under stars that multiplied every night, blooming
until the sky turned silver-white like it was at the beginning
before we started turning on the lights.
Under the luminous nighttime we drew maps to the heavens on our
skin
and showed the Rat Kings which ladders would lead them home.
We pinpointed the stars that hung above our old vacant houses

and I told you that I wished we had met sooner. But the people you
meet in the aftermath
are your blood-pact sisters, sealed to you with kisses
that have nothing to do with mouths—kisses of oranges into your
palm
and scissors brushing against your scalp. After that night there were
no monsters:
we watched them climb the sky ladders to go start another world,
to create man in their image like they had done on this one.

When the planet is empty we eat oranges in the sand
where this desert breaks against the next: the great Pacific
where the continent is called to its reckoning.
The shore smells like salt and dead fish beached and pecked
by a constellation of seagulls, their bodies baked under perennial
sun.
We are children at the end of the world, sitting in the sand dressed
in mirrors
and stolen dresses, with our feet in the surf and our hands in the
earth.
We have always known. It was on my face when I drew *sea* and *end*
and *oranges*
in a language my mother had once heard spoken from the sunlight;
it was in the mouth of the woman when she whispered to you her
last words:
we have nowhere to be. We are already here. We wait for the sky and the
sea
to reverse themselves when time quiets on the sand
in the greatest aurora borealis since the beginning of the universe.
And after we watch the final blue somersault of the world, we can
eat canned beans
and keep walking—I've never been to the rainforest.

At night we sleep in the sand with my Carhartt as our pillow,
we sing to the seagulls—the sempiternal guardians, the first souls
and the souls left after every other soul had gone—
the creatures that were too busy picking flying fish
to catch the ladder to the sky. The seagulls look at us
and we don't know if they understand with their black eyes
but when the world is over, we have time for all the stories we
want—
so I tell them about the City, about climbing a skyscraper to the top
to scream until the ghosts held me in their clouded hands,
and brought me home: a spectacle in the streets, a thousand spirits
in a procession, carrying a sleeping child through the blackened
City.
When I got home the house was quiet, the lights were off,
and in the bed where my mother should have been
there was a rattlesnake coiled on the sheets—
and that is when we started walking.

*Note: In Pima legend, Rabbit was the first creature on earth to die—
he had been bitten by Rattlesnake.*

Masaya, 1979-1989

You and me, our white dresses blotted with dirt;
we crouched in the crowd and watched the procession
of helmeted soldiers in parallel lines like the bodies
in the mass graves. Land mines
couldn't kick so much dust against the horizon.
I need you to remember what I remember: that afternoon,
our white communion veils lifting
above us on dry-season air currents
that baked our brown skin and the skeletal bougainvillea
crumbling against the church crumbled
by the first air strikes—the cobblestones flayed
and the chapped earth laid bare to the sun.

Months and months with skies of amber
dust storms, the drought stretching taut the land.
The wind was my years-old white veil, filmy with dust
like the windows. At night there were gunshots, riots,
landmines in the fields exploding. We brought them home:
the women swaddling the absence where their legs had been.

When the rains washed the roads there were bodies in the gutters,
children drinking from the gutters,
the gutters snapping in the hurricane, the rain swelling
from the streets, flooding the house; the tidal pools
in the living room washing the dirt from our feet onto the tile
floors.

At night I slept on dampened sheets. The waves
under my bed collected green frogs and dead scorpions.

The rain rift the forest floors,
the soldier's truck bucked through troughs
and the mud that speckled his skin shed onto the seats.

The tires spun mud into the air behind you in the truck
and your hair dripped water onto your hands
gripping a rifle. It rained for years, rain spilling forever
through towns mutilated by earthquakes
of ammunition sliding tectonically against flesh and stucco.

I need you to remember what I remember.
When I saw you again had a different veil,
different flowers crowning your hair;
I changed your bandages and picked shrapnel
as it pushed itself from your forehead through drooping blooms
of hibiscus blood. We could no longer feign our innocence,
nor the innocence of the men in camouflage,
nor of the earth itself on which we stood barefoot
and parched despite the downpour.

When the bus came it was you and me
on a vinyl seat among crying people hunched
over their belongings, grasping
their clothes, their arms, their children: whatever they had left
to save. I lifted your bag into your lap
so you could light a cigarette. You held the beam
of cheap tobacco between your teeth and smoked veils
around our heads. “Cariña,” you said, “I need you to remember—
in my right hand I held guns to the ears of screaming boys,
and so it was ripped from me. Men sighted me with rifles
and so they lost their eyes.”

When the last bus stopped in the Nicaraguan barrio
in Harlem we walked through warm rain to a crowded apartment:
it didn't matter—we had only backpacks and a sandwich.
Months and months we could hardly sleep
for the nighttime gunshots, and sometimes we heard them
and slept clutching each other without blankets,

fearing the veil of a sheet over our eyes.
Months and months we watched over each other's shoulders
until the fake drivers licenses came through;
until we stopped closing our eyes and seeing blood and landmines.

I don't think it will ever be over, really.
I don't think we will ever hear Fourth of July fireworks
without expecting shrapnel.
But most days we can lie in our bed with blankets
and we don't even need to remember anything.

A year ago you bought curtains for our new apartment
where bougainvillea grows up the bricks.
The curtains were white, and today
we sat in the living room with the painting of the hibiscus flowers
under a rainstorm, and I helped you light your cigarette.
"Cariña," you said, "do we have milk for coffee?"
In the kitchen there are curtains:
white veils on the breezes lifting.

Lifers—Part One

When Ellen was fourteen she went skinny dipping in the river at night, in January. She had to break the membrane of ice like an eggshell, like a fingernail, like a bone. In cold water, after a while, it feels warm as the body shuts down. That meant she was becoming the ice. She never made it back to the shoreline disappearing in the fog and snow.

The school wrote an obituary for her across the pages of the yearbook: five girls at a dance, not six. The Praise Choir missing an alto, the freshman class photo missing an Ellen, the space where her picture day portrait should have been emblazoned with a black epitaph—*Photo Not Available*.

They didn't expect her to come back but they weren't surprised when she left again and again. She appeared sophomore year—a ghost, her purple-bruised eyes hovering over a white blouse as she stumbled through the linoleum halls. That time Ellen liked to hide in the bathroom, where it was quiet in the stall by the frosted window. They hardly even noticed when she wasn't there one Tuesday.

The second time she came back there wasn't anyone to welcome her besides the first-floor janitor. Everyone looked right through her body's white husk. If you shone a light on her it would have gone all the way through. No wonder she didn't want to stay; no wonder she thought of the frozen river and remembered the ice she called her bones.

I don't know how Ellen is these days.
The girls said she was a *lijer*—she signed a twenty-year contract.
So I guess I can assume she left for good. Ellen was always the best
at taking it to the end. “When I was a kid,” she told me once,
“my brothers and I would put grasshoppers on our tongues.
We wouldn't chew or swallow—
we just wanted to see who could hold them in longest.
I always won. I could hold them until they stopped beating
against the roof of my mouth.”



Astha Chourasia/*Vibrations*: Mixed Media

Katie Shi

chance encounters

i memorized your contours—
the bounces in your stride,
light as pale slants at dawn.

we're so close i could reach out
and take your hand in mine,

but i don't.

instead, i stare straight ahead
until you disappear from sight.

we curled our fists and fought
the all-consuming with burning
lungs and anger roaring in our ears;

we built soft moon ladders to
preserve our rotting sweetness
as it crumbled into nothing.

we held each other's vulnerabilities
close to our bruises and sharp edges
and bled like two wounds cut for desire—

my bones and voice rang hollow,
but you flew away first.

Tess Walsh

The Banshee's Love Son

They say that I am a witch woman, a white woman, a bloody bride. They say I eat hearts like meals and spit out the veins; they say I walk on water and braid my hair with babies' bones. They say I am the mistress of death, promising what no one wants in a childish cry that rattles bones loose from their sockets.

They are wrong.

I am not a monster; I do not haunt, I do not prey. Your children, pale as pearls, need not fear the lonely cries that echo from the stones and the streams. I do not wish to beckon them to cold or watery graves; I do not dwell on the dead, but on the living—the ones filled with feeling and warm wine. The same ones who tell hollow stories about me, give me black eyes and long fingers to rip love and flesh apart—they are the ones who deserve more than what they have been given. They cannot see what I see; they cannot cry as I cry, and they draw their shutters tight when they hear my song, the opposite of a lullaby, because they do not recognize the sound of their own misery. The sounds I make are merely the sounds of their souls.

My voice is thin and high, severed steel, raw silk. It is not beautiful. I am not beautiful—I know too much. I see their secrets like laundry on the line—the sick child in the attic, the broken rosaries on the stained wooden floor, the dull sewing needles stuck into dimpled fingers, the melted candles creating shadow, the glass pieces of whiskey rotting like fruit. I see their disease, their shame, their fear like hands in the throat, pulling out teeth for a necklace. I see their worst; I see what they keep hidden.

I love them. No one else will.

Their homes are perched on shaky love, like eggs on a cliff, and they live in a nightmare season of blue babies, empty bottles, thin money. The dark peels back their skin and wraps around their nerves, and I watch from the window, trying to help, trying to warn, but I am just the ghostly girl with wet hair and an unearthly voice, loving those who do not love me.

Ksenia Vasilieva

My Gypsy Granny

It's funny how time flies. It seems so far away now—everything I had in my childhood. When I think of it, it's like peeping into a dusty file, goose bumps all over my skin. Fifteen years ago, I was a teenager under the total, overwhelming control of my parents and a smothering grandmother stricter than Stalin. During that time, a terrible drama was unfolding in my family.

I always had two grandmothers, no grandfathers. I lived with my mother's mother, but my dad's mother lived several blocks away. I visited her maybe three times in my entire life. She died when I was in my twenties. Why did I not visit? I'm not sure; my dad visited her regularly. I can remember how our whole household got nervous when he went there, anxiousness flying in the air even after his return.

My father had two brothers, uncles with families of their own. There were cousins, boys and girls who I never met. Never. Although they all lived in our tiny village where practically everyone knew each other, I didn't even know where they lived. The reason: my mother and the Stalin-granny who lived with us didn't let me meet them. My other grandmother was a total mystery to me. Her house - from what I can still remember - was a small flat in a row of common wooden one-story houses. She lived near the village stables and sometimes when my parents had their rows my mother accused my father of being born and raised in the damn stables. Apparently, that was supposed to be derogatory.

My father and his two brothers were the sons of three different fathers who were never present, completely unknown. My grandmother came to the village one day with three boys, of whom my father was the youngest, and the villagers, gossiping bored dwellers of a God-forsaken northern gold-miner's settlement,

believed her to be a prostitute. Three kids, no husband. They talked about her. They named her a gypsy whore because of her so-called vagabond life. The villagers said she was exiled to the north because of her unbecoming conduct in her native place. They spread rumors that she still brought men to her tiny flat even when her boys were at home. I don't know; I'm not sure of the truth.

When I was born, my father only had one brother (one had committed suicide) and I just never had the chance to really know my gypsy grandmother.

Sometimes when I walked with my mother, we met her, a passerby, a stranger to me. My mom told me not to say a word to her, not even a simple "hello." We just marched faster, not looking at her, sometimes even crossing the street just to avoid seeing her.

As a child, I asked why. Later on, I stopped. It was easier that way, thinking that I only had one "good" grandmother who was not a whore, whose husband had died and who struggled to raise her only daughter with dignity. My mother used to say over and over again that my father was not raised properly by his mother, that they had an unfair, unequal marriage because of his upbringing.

When I asked questions, my mother and Stalin-granny told me that my dad's mother was the devil in disguise, that she tried to kill me with her spells when I was little. Oh, the stories they told me! I imagined myself, a chubby-cheeked infant lying in my cradle peacefully, people coming to see me for the very first time. Everyone was happy. I was healthy, and my cheeks were cherub-pink. Such a nice creature, I was. And then SHE came. She crept up to the cradle, only held me in her arms for a second, and suddenly, I would begin crying! I imagined myself unable to stop, just screaming and screaming, until I was out of breath and my face was turning pale blue. We got frightened, my granny would say. SHE left but you did not stop crying. We thought you'd die.

I believed her. Later, when I was walking and saw my gypsy-granny from the distance, it was I who bent my head low, lower, and made no sign of recognition. She was no one to me.

She sent me a present (through my father) every birthday. She never forgot the day I was born, even after so many years. She sent toys and sweets which my mother and granny never allowed me to see. Sometimes I became curious; I wanted to see those things, to touch and smell them, to eat all her sweets and chocolate. I wanted to tell my mother: “These are my presents and she is my grandmother; you have no right!” And when I felt especially nasty, the words actually came out of my mouth, and I was grounded.

My mother tried reasoning with me, telling me that those sweets were terrible things, that SHE put a spell on them and something horrible would happen if I ate them. Well, once I did. I had a tiny bite of her chocolate bar. It tasted normal, just like any other chocolate. I took another small bite. I waited a bit and nothing happened. I wanted to go to my mother and tell her: “See? I have just eaten HER chocolate and I am still alive.”

Good thing I never did that. Because moments later, when I went outdoors to the playground, some spiteful teenager pushed me onto the ice and I slipped and broke my arm. I immediately made the connection between the accident and the chocolate I had eaten earlier, and I knew that my mother was right: the gypsy-granny was evil and she wished upon me many, many bad things.

Looking back, of course, it was just a coincidence, but the connection was instilled in my mind: gypsy-granny and her deeds—terrible curses to befall upon me. I truly believed in that.

So I never asked questions about her anymore. I simply erased her from my life altogether. She was my skeleton in the closet that I was afraid to reveal even to myself. My father tried to arrange a meeting between the two of us, but it was in vain. He couldn't fight the endless tandem of my mother and her mother, united in the holy struggle against the gypsy-granny. He simply gave up.

I started thinking about my gypsy-granny when I grew up, built my own family, witnessed how other people lived and how they treated their grandparents. Equal—that's how; no matter what, grandchildren knew their both grandmothers if they were alive. As for me? I didn't know when the gypsy-granny's birthday was. All I knew was the gossip. Were they nasty lies? I cannot even say for myself what was true and what was hogwash.

One thing I know for sure—she was a redhead. My father had her face—and so do, I suppose, because I am my father's spitting image. Who knows—maybe I have her character, too? I wonder sometimes about the qualities we share. I wish I could have taken my father's side and insisted on seeing her, visiting her when she was ill, spending time with her, listening to her stories. Why did she come to the North, anyway? Did she have something to hide? Was she a fugitive? Was she really a whore? Who were her boys' fathers?

Did she really want to kill me?

Sometimes, I think that not having the answers to these questions does something irreparable to my identity. I cannot know who I am.



Astha Chourasia/Holi: Acrylic

Jada Thomas

Let's Do Stupid Shit Together

Let's do stupid shit together.

Shit my mom had too much sense to do when she was sixteen.

Shit she had the sense to teach me not to do.

Shit I have the sense not to do but will do anyway because I really, really, really like you.

Let's get drunk together and throw the bottles at your neighbor's windows like last time,

And by that I mean how about *you* get drunk again while I sip

Lipton tea and laugh at your stupidity.

I want to flirt with you endlessly and look at you with deceptively innocent eyes,

So you'll wonder if I'm catching feelings or if that's just me in my normal state.

I wanna waltz you in and out of platonic, romantic, and sensual moments.

Dance with your feelings.

Make you think you're my everything and you ain't shit at the same time.

Let's do that,

That thing where you have to look deeply into my eyes to see how I really feel,

Where you force yourself to stop because you don't want to gaze,

Or you don't want me to see you gazing,

Because you don't want me to gaze back to see how you feel, too,

And we won't have to think about what it all adds up to.

Yeah,

Let's play that guessing game.

"Is he just a flirt?"

“Is this one big misunderstanding?”
“Is she just a starstruck little girl?”
Is it really something?
Can it be real?
Or should we remain suspended
In questions and dismissed loaded gestures?
I suppose so.
I suppose we should.

Daniella Cugini

tarantino heart

Rational fire, let me calibrate what you will leave of me.
All names boil down to *meat construction*
and I am regretting my pride. / My soft hands.
I am living in a snake-skin I picked up
I am learning to shrug myself off
like a coat. / Make me admit I am built
to be consumed. Make me knock back the salt
before the shot. / In our bed you bequeath me
a chainsaw: *find yourself*. Here. Stirring
my drink until the ash dissolves. / Apocalypse.
Vesuvius. Something is coming and it has
eyes. / Cardiology. Something between
the sheets. I am nothing related to orchids.
I am nothing like your girls. / They are all dying
in puddles of coconut milk and I want to be that;
the delicacy of leeches. / I am addicted to your
art. Skin roses on a wedding cake. Make me
sorry. / Make me moan. We watch the cherry girls
pit children from their stomachs like stones
and send them down river. We waste nothing,
they say; we will find use for it all.

Julia Mastroianni

A How-To Guide for Falling in Love

1. Go to their concert. No need for research beforehand. Pretend the music is too loud, the fans too wild, the atmosphere too anti-you. Make decidedly neutral comments about it afterwards.
2. Think about them for the next couple of days. Deny that you're doing so, but only to yourself, because no one else could imagine you giving them a second thought.
3. Talk to other people, who incidentally *do* give them a second thought. Listen with outwardly distant interest, inwardly sinking intrigue.
4. Look them up when you get home. Like, *really* look them up. Do it all. Do it all, compulsively, until 4 in the morning, for many consecutive summer nights.
5. Decide it's time to peruse their music. Look up their songs. Become a little bit enraptured with the kind of music you've never enjoyed before. Wonder whether it's even the music you're enraptured with at all rather than— ignore that thought at the back of your mind. Buy their albums when your mom isn't looking, shoving them into your bag and then holding it close to your heart for the rest of the afternoon. Wait until a couple days later, when you're home alone, to blast them through your house for your own personal dance party. Feel liberated.
6. Become a fan. Become friends with fans online. Open up to these people more than you ever could anywhere else.
7. Wonder whether all it takes to fall in love is intense and lengthy devotion to every detail of a person until you see the good before anything else. Wonder whether it matters to you.

8. Become protective, fiercely so. Forget that not everyone knows them the way you convince yourself you do. Become defensive, ashamedly so.
9. Tell no one how you feel, what you do on your phone all day, why that birthday present matters so much to you. They wouldn't want to understand.
10. Understand that it's less about them not understanding and more about you worrying that they will.
11. Realize you're wasting your time. Realize you've become a better person because of them. Realize you don't matter and they don't matter so everything matters all at once.
12. Drop hints of their existence in everything you do. Use their catchphrases in your texts. Write their lyrics in the margins of your tests. Acknowledge that if you can't live on as you, you'll live on as part of them. Feel surprised when you instinctively feel that's enough.
13. Let them seep into your veins. Breathe them in. Hope that one day, you'll have the strength to let them go.
14. Love them unconditionally. Do this unintentionally, not realizing they've become your children and the best part of a waking dream all at once.
15. That means crying when anything remotely sad happens to any of them. Real, true crying.
16. That means spending days on end pushing food around on your plate as you worry about them and telling your parents it's because of a stomachache instead.
17. That means wishing you had never found them while simultaneously thanking every higher power you can think of for letting you have them, if only for a little while.
18. 18. Forget that you're not supposed to like them. Forget that you don't, officially. Wonder whether you even care about the official narrative anymore.

19. Know that you've fallen in love, despite never having done so before.
20. Tell yourself that falling in love isn't supposed to feel like finding your truest self in the last place you would look.
21. That it's supposed to be hard work, not *comfortable*, not *belonging*, not *wishyouwerehere*.
22. That you're falling in love despite everything. Despite yourself.
23. That it's worth it.



Astha Chourasia/Moi: Mixed Media

Topaz Winters

How to Talk to Imaginary Things

Real soft and gentle, but confident too, like they're skittish horses or panicking children. The trick is making sure they're safe here and they know it, something like *hey now, you don't have to hide, I know you're there*, like *we're all a little lost and a little lonely, you're no different from the rest of us*, and *it's just me, what's there to be afraid of?* See, darlin', the world's built on the faith that everything'll turn out okay in the end, so you gotta remind them, make sure they know it. Just 'cause most folks don't want to see them doesn't mean they're not there, doesn't mean they're not important too.

It's easy to tease 'em a little, let your words be sort of wry but sweeter than honey at the same time, get them laughing in the shadows where you can hear them but not see them. Echoes are child's play. Anybody can do that, and who's got time for the parlour tricks?

Let's skip to the ending instead – you gotta coax 'em out, see, make 'em trust you. Way out in the open where you can see them through and through, no secrets here anymore. When they're laughing in the open air, when they're letting you get a look at the glint of sky off their wings, when the clouds pause overhead and don't know what to make of a shadowed thing brought to light – that's when you know you've got 'em, sure as sin.

What do you say to them, though?

That's the thing, now, isn't it. See, darlin', it's tough to talk to imaginary things. Not because you need a full moon or newt's eyes – no, no, this type of magic is harder 'cause all you got is your words. You talk to 'em like they're real as anything, just need a little soothing, somebody to tell 'em it's okay to quiet down. Once you've got them in the sunlight you could do anything you want with them, but you gotta treat them all like porcelain lawnmowers or they'll

hide in the shadows again. Devils could be angels if you talk to them the same.

See, the thing about the imaginary ones is they're invisible, don't know how to stop talking 'cause nobody's ever been around to listen. That's why you want to quiet them early, let 'em simmer down soon as you can so you can start doin' the talking. They were burnin' long before you brought them into the light, darlin', and don't you forget it.

Unless you want to listen.

Now, it's tougher goin' down that path. Not gonna lie to you, 'cause the imaginary ones know the best stories. Hell, their atoms are woven out of stories, they've got so may it drowns them, and who's to say you won't get caught up in the riptide? If you wanna listen, some days they'll surround you, choke you in smoke and stardust. All those things the sun can't reach.

But darlin', I'm gonna let you in on a secret: the devil's nothing more than a drunken angel, stony-eyed and steely-hearted and goddamn *tired* of being underestimated. You know how it is with impossible things – they only stay that way till you start believin' in them, the stories they tell. Who ever heard of a witch letting her familiars wave the wand? You're gonna be chewin' on your own ribcage sooner or later if you sign up for this, but darlin', you mark my words: when the world crumbles, the ones that don't exist are the ones who'll make it out alive.

So fine, maybe you let them stay in the shadows. They're creatures of the night, so maybe you forget about sun. Sit under the porch light. Swat moths and listen to invisible crickets and let them whisper secrets in your ear instead of the other way 'round. Might do you both a bit of good, don't you think? That's all they want, darlin', they just want to be heard. And don't we all.

So maybe you let them be make-believe, if only 'cause nobody else is. Maybe you just listen. Listen. Listen.

Who even knows with these imaginary things, but maybe that'll be enough.

Lisa Zou

A Red Eulogy

My grandfather wants to be
cremated near Tiananmen

in Beijing where his eldest son protested,
while the Square slips through

his views—once more to reach the nirvana
he never believed in. The coffin cycles

past the cabin his uncle built during a better dynasty
with trunks of weeping willows outside the cemetery

where he spent his youth, and the cabin's roof
held my grandfather's baby teeth; he told me

it was a family tradition —teeth decaying for centuries
on a roof above three generations, my brother

lacks the Chinese to tell—and my grandfather does not know
two apartment complexes stand where his home had,

and his son's dog which chased away the thieves had not aged,
but was shot by a new neighbor who did not know my grandfather

much better than I did.

Devyn Andrews

the 4 am kind of private desperation

a million pieces of human heart splattered against a brick wall
tourists come from miles and point and take pictures
no one is sure which medium the artist worked in but conspirators
think from certain angles it spells out 'i still want us to be friends'

molly in high school prays to god that god is real
dreams about holding half of a tin can and a string telephone
sees everything slipping and yells 'HELP there it goes
please somebody help me stop it' but everything cracks and
its yolk spills out anyway
she tries to write a poem with fingers to catch everything before it
hits the ground
she tries to write a poem that feels full volume when it's past
midnight
and silent and dark; here's a real-life problem:

a train leaves a station traveling north at 51 miles per hour
a train leaves a station traveling south at 73 miles per hour
how long before the person contemplating lays down on the tracks

regarding topics we will never discuss over email or anywhere else

re: the empty side of my bed

re: current weather in boston

re: last week's SNL justin bieber skit

re: my dream that you were in last night

re: the stoplight near your house that is always red which is eternally aggravating

re: how scared i am to travel across the world

re: junior prom 2011

re: some poor life decision or another i will inevitably be making in the near future

re: your fingers

re: suitcase zippers

re: the instagram photo that you look really hot in that i obviously didn't double tap because i was stalking you and that would have been uncomfortable for everyone involved

re: that time i said i didn't know how to write love poems

re: tattoo design idea

re: candle wax

re: the state of the union

re: the state of the universe

re: friendship

re: Hey check this out! I just won a free \$500 gift card by clicking below!

re: buildings that remind me of you

re: the artwork i made that i can only presume you might have considered throwing away

re: the burned flakes in my coffee this morning

re: me being melodramatic and ridiculous

re: also sometimes a jerkhole asswipe

re: driving to portland

re: your apartment

re: something that's not really that important and is clearly an
excuse to send this email
re: the bike trail
re: frank o'hara
re: your new haircut
re: this guy from high school posted an ignorant article on facebook
that you would hate isn't he the worst
re: the sunset over the river
re: ballpoint pens
re: you'll never guess what bill did yesterday
re: the last birthday present you gave me
re: plane flights and airports
re: hey how is everything



Untitled III/Kerry Luo: Canon EOS Rebel T3i DSLR,
18-55 mm

Hannah Miao

Water Dancer

I tread in the black end of the
ocean so that you may be buoyed up at
the edge, our mother's wistful cantata

seeping into the slivered curve of your ears.
That summer, your arms shied upwards, a spiral
conch-shell piercing through the turmoil of the waves.

I watched as your mouth rasped,
sandpaper throat snapping for air,
the gritty salt choking your cry of protest.

As children, we sailed as Vespuccis and
Columbuses on the sand-tipped shoals of Galveston
shore, our breaths fizzing like frothy glasses of

ginger ale. Your arms lunged as we explored
hidden coves, schools of flounders skimming
past our lacewing legs. Later, we swam home

as veritable Melusinas, tarnished
arms tangling in seaweed and soapstone,
curls of laughter drifting through the water

like prairie smoke. As women, we rode a
crest to the end of the earth, blowing out death
through the interposition of our teeth. *Brutes*,

my mother had cringed. I bit my lips a blooming

rose as we lingered in the waiting room, pressing
your sea-torn body to awake.

Contributors

Gabrielle Baumann lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and currently attends Temple University. She has been published in *A Literation Magazine* and *Insert Lit Mag Here*. In her free time, she enjoys cooking for her friends.

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Isla Anderson is a 16-year-old who attends school near London, England. Her first chapbook, “Things That Were Important in November,” was recently published by *Vademecum Magazine*. She was also named a Foyle Young Poet of the Year in 2014 and has been recognized by the Ledbury Poetry Competition. Aside from writing, she enjoys taking uncomfortable photographs, sleeping too little, and attempting to become part of the forest.

Brittany Burton is a writer from northern Michigan. She attends Interlochen Arts Academy, where she is a creative writing major and has studied writing in various forms of poetry and prose.

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Kerry Luo is a student from San Diego, California who has attended workshops at the University of Iowa and Bard College. She likes the feeling of dipping her feet in the ocean, drinking tea at coffee shops, listening to music constantly, and writing poetry. Her writing often focuses on social issues and injustices.

Sabrina Ortega-Riek is a Nicaraguan-American writer from Arizona who has previously interned with the Academy of American Poets in New York. Her work is published in *Teen Ink* and *Cuckoo Quarterly*.

Katie Shi is a high school student from Austin, Texas. She has been published in *The Teacup Trail* and *The Composer* and was featured on the blog of *words(on)pages*. Besides writing, she enjoys reading, gardening, standing outside in the rain, and running at six in the morning. On the Internet, she explores the weird and fantastical while posting on her blog [CITRUSY](#).

Tess Walsh currently attends Saint Michael's College in Vermont. Her work has appeared in *The Ampersand Review*, *Literary Orphans*, *Creaky Hammock* and others. When she is not writing, Tess enjoys drinking iced coffee and posting artsy pictures of said coffee on Instagram. You can find her at misstesswalsh.wordpress.com

Ksenia Vasilieva is a writer from Irkutsk, Russia, a cold, remote Siberian city. She works as a translator/interpreter and graduated from the Linguistic University. Her work has been published in *America Upside Down*.

Jada Thomas is an incoming freshman at Agnes Scott College. She has been published in the *Shared Worlds* 2011 and 2012 anthologies and has been invited to the 2014 Sharjah Children's Reading Festival as a guest writer. She enjoys catching toads, eating avocados, and dancing at midnight.

Daniella Cugini is a 17-year-old A-level student who has been published in *Far Off Places* and *Miracle E-zine*. Her writing has been recognized by the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award, the inaugural Young Romantics award, and the Hippocrates Young Poets Award. She hopes to continue writing when she begins

university in the fall, as she enjoys pouring detergent on mundane experiences. When she's not writing, she likes to read or run.

Julia Mastroianni is a 16-year-old Canadian student who has been published in *A World Away*, *The River's Song*, *From the Cerulean Sea*, and *Island Magic*. She has been recognized by the Poetry Institute of Canada and Young Writers of Canada.

Topaz Winters has been published and recognized by organizations like *Glass Kite Anthology*, *Ology Journal*, the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, *Neon Ink*, *Thistle*, *Authors Publish*, the Jane Goodall Institute, and *Germ*, among others. She is also an editor for *The Teacup Trail* and runs the blog *Six Impossible Things*.

Lisa Zou is from Chandler, Arizona and is currently a junior in high school. She is the winner of Mount Mercy University's Creative Writing Contest and the 2015 *Dovetails* Young Writers Contest. Her work can also be found in *Creative Communications* and *Parallax Online*.

Devyn Andrews is currently a student at Tufts University in Massachusetts, where she is majoring in Community Health and English. Her first poem was published by her mom on the fridge at age 5. She has since been published in her high school's literary magazine and has performed at various spoken word shows at her college. In her spare time, she pretends to play rugby, runs for exercise and away from real life problems, curates a list of potential memoir titles, and watches '00s pop music videos.

Hannah Miao is a student at Hamilton High School. Her work has been recognized by Princeton University, Hollins University, Sierra Nevada College, Notre Dame-Maryland University, and Gannon University, as well as the National Student Poets Program. Her

poetry can also be found in *Aerie International*, *Navigating the Maze*, *Cargoes*, and *Cicada*, among others.

Astha Chourasia is an artist whose work has been displayed at District Art Shows and the Congressional Art Competition. She has been awarded "Best in Show" at the Arizona State Fair art exhibition, was named "Artist of the Year" at the largest public school in Arizona, and is president of her high school art club. In her free time, Astha volunteers by doing face and henna painting at charity events. She also teaches young artists at her home.