

# IT'S NOT IN MY HEAD

MOLEDRO MAGAZINE  
ISSUE 5: MARCH 2017

## Table of Contents

*Editor's Note*

**Rohan Garg**

Rebirth

**Emily Boyer**

The Girl in the Mirror

**Karissa Dong**

Bitterness

**Audrey Lee**

2 Pieces

**Alina Zeng**

3 Poems

**Sharon Xiao**

Bottled Up

**Brianna Boulay**

After The War

**Maribel C. Pagan**

2 Poems

**Sreya Sreedhar**

Mind

**Maya Rabinowitz**

2 Poems

**Sarah Feng**

Anxiety

**Michael Meyerhofer**

3 Poems

**Riley Grace**

Dancer, This Wasn't Pulled from a Dream

**Sharon Xiao**

Voices

**Sharon Xiao**

3 Poems

**Ellie Black**

La Brea

**Caroline Goldenberg**

2 Poems

**Olivia D'Agostini**

starved & stitched & saved

***Unthemed*** (Image Credit: Fabrice Poussin)

**Cindy Song**

3 Poems

**Danie Knopf-Weinstein**

3 Poems

**Ashley Tan**

Body of Art

**Vidhima Shetty**

3 Poems

**Nikhila Kulukuru**

Idol

**A J Nicoloff**

Lego Hands

**Kara Knickerbocker**

2 Poems

**David Rodriguez**

Grief Eating

**Helli Fang**

2 Poems

**Fabrice Poussin**

Memory Jars

*Featured Poets* (Image Credit: Rohan Garg)

**Meggie Royer**

4 Poems

**Jeanann Verlee**

3 Poems

**Gillian Cummings**

3 Poems

**Toni Bowers**

Five Messages for a Dead Artist

## Editor's Note

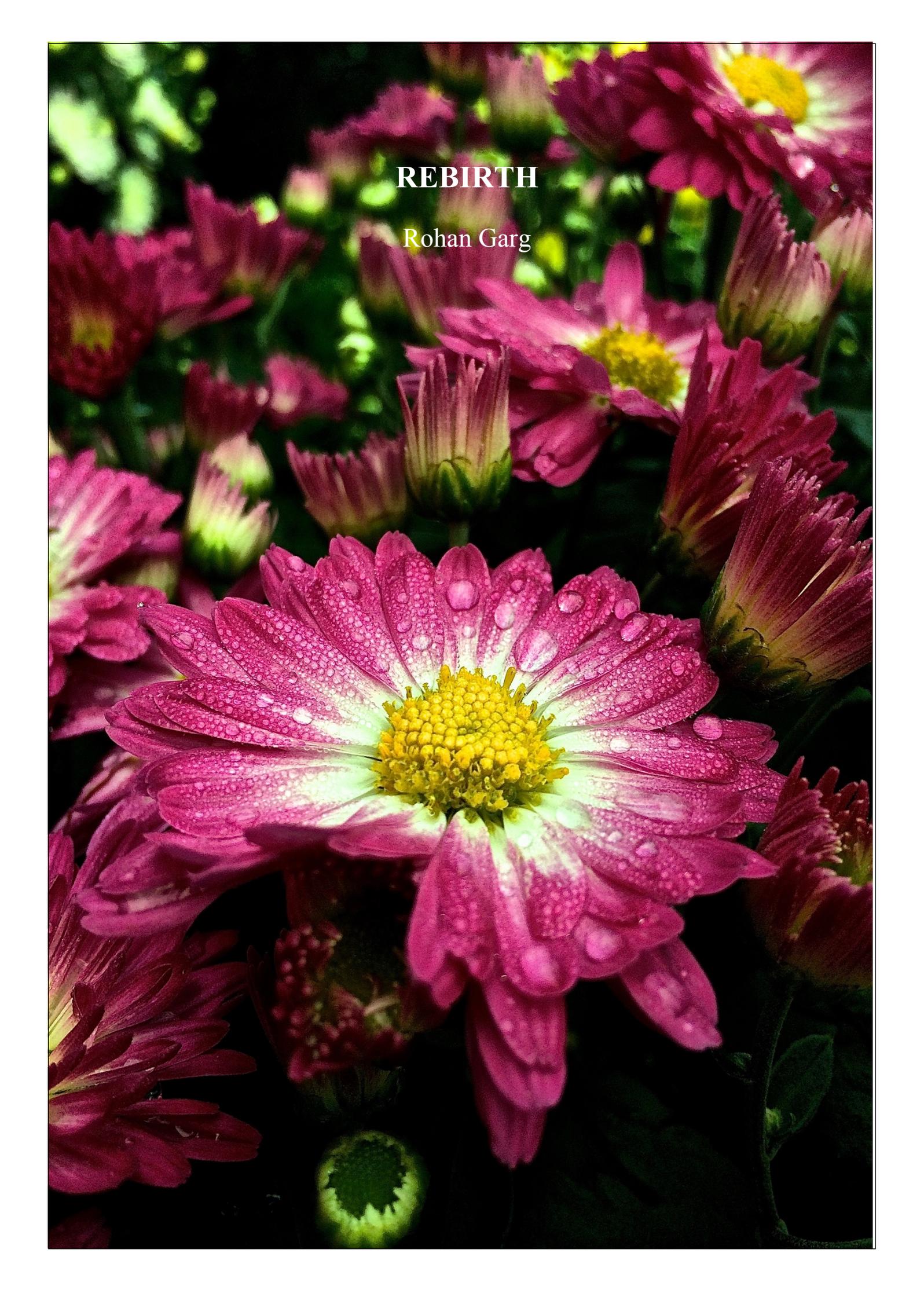
Thank you for your interest in *Moledro Magazine*! We're beyond delighted to present Issue 5 to you, which addresses an issue of supreme importance in today's society: the ignorance and stigmas surrounding mental illnesses and disorders. We also have an unthemed section (starting Page 50), which features poetry on a diverse spectrum of themes. Moreover, two of Issue 5's Featured Poets have written extensively on the themes of mental health and illness (Meggie Royer and Jeanann Verlee); we're honored to have the opportunity to share their eloquent words, in addition to the brilliant works of the two others (Gillian Cummings and Toni Bowers).

I'd like to thank my incredible team, which consists of editors (poetry, prose, and photography), designers, blog editors, and blog writers, for their unwavering dedication and support. I'd also like to thank Sharon Xiao, a high school student from California, for being a Guest Designer for this issue (Sharon helped us design the cover page and posters, and also has work published in this issue).

I'm honored by the number of people who've trusted *Moledro* as a potential home for their powerful words, and have been inspired by their talent and strength. Issue 5 features work on a variety of mental illnesses, such as anxiety, PTSD, eating disorders, and trichotillomania, among others. There is a myriad of mental health misconceptions that inundate us on a daily basis, and we hope that Issue 5 will help unseat these misconceptions from their pedestal. So, as the editor-in-chief of *Moledro*, I invite you to inhale the vibrant, compelling words of its contributors. I invite you to imbibe the raw stories, intense emotions, and striking opinions. Welcome to Issue 5 of *Moledro: It's Not In My Head*.

Best wishes,  
Richa Gupta  
Founder/Editor-in-chief

**Navigation tip:** To view a particular piece, click on its name in the 'Contents' page. To go back to 'Contents', click on the piece's author's name.



**REBIRTH**

Rohan Garg

## EMILY BOYER

### **The Girl in the Mirror**

#### **125 pounds**

Empty stomach, nothing but a craving for perfection, knots piling in her stomach while she looks at the food that sits upon her plate. She remembers them, girls with plastic skin and perfectly puckered lips with no wrinkles, and their words, sharp as kitchen knives that struck her skin and caused invisible blood to run down her body. Her parents are like the rest of the adults in the world, close-minded to teen problems, only worrying about the future and things that may never happen instead of living in the present. The fork's sliding up and down the food, creating a grid design that soon is destroyed by the push of the utensil. She slides out of her chair and is unnoticed as she slips upstairs into the seclusion of her bedroom.

#### **122 pounds**

She doesn't look any different; same frumpy clothes that hide all her insecurities and skin that has the remnants of bad acne, like someone dotted her face with a red Crayola marker. Then they would be easy to wash off. No time for breakfast anymore, rushing to the corner to stand on the same cracked pavement to wait for the bus to come wheezing down, and she throws out the snack her parents packed for her. Lunch isn't important, just a meal that could cause her to gain unnecessary amount of fat. Classes whiz by in her mind as a series of images that don't want to stay together so they end up a muddle of colors stained in her head.

#### **118 pounds**

She cuts the chicken, cold and dead, into small pieces, so small that they are hard to catch with her fork and break into strings of meat when they are pierced by the tongs of silver. They don't see her slip the pieces into the napkin on her lap, instead they complain about the grades she never has and the colleges that are too far out of reach. They don't see her; the one who is desperately reaching out for them. The measuring scale is cold and hard under the layers of blankets under her bed. She watches the little red hand flicker to a number, a number that is too big. The bathroom is across from her room, hidden from her parents' view, and she slithers inside. Her knees are burning from the tiles that are too cold and she holds the white ceramic with one hand as she sticks a finger down her throat. She flushes everything down.

#### **114 pounds**

The girl in the mirror stares back with a wan complexion, even more pallid when the pillars of moonlight hit it, and has blue and red veins slithering up and down her body like snakes ready to release their noxious venom; she doesn't see the blue marks that disfigure her fingers, no, all she sees is excessive fat that needs to be cut, the body that is too big to be perfect, too full of flaws. She scowls when she looks at the girl in the glass, prodding at places that are "fat" and "ugly."

### **108 pounds**

The cafeteria is filled with moronic students, all snickering, gawking, chattering, complaining, moaning about something; she is oblivious. The line for food is long, weaving through tables and students, and yet she still waits. Tray in hand, food weighing it down, she dumps it in trash in the blind spot of all teachers and students, inhaling the malodor that the garbage emits. She walks by a table, girls like life size Barbies, staring at her with repugnant looks in their eyes and sneers so sharp and full of anger they could have killed her. Literally. Her hands automatically slide down to her hips and the fat that juts out of her jeans. She drops the tray, dashing to the bathroom before anyone can see her, and she stares at her reflection. It makes her vomit.

### **100 pounds**

Phone keeps buzzing like a hive of bees, pinging when a green box with words appears, but she silences it with a click of a button. Head under the pillow, warm breath suffocating her into subconscious territory, the only sound the pounding of her heart. They, her friends, want her to go out, but she wants to save them from looking at her. More sounds coming from the phone, so much she chucks it across the room and watches as it hits the taupe walls and shatters into a million pieces. Parents are calling her down to dinner. Dinner? She doesn't even recognize the word anymore, just a combination of letters. Her parents believe her when she says that she is sick; if only they knew how sick she really is.

### **94 pounds**

They finally notice the slimming of her body, telling her that she is sick and mental and stupid for not seeing it, but she looks at them with the strange look. What are they seeing? She screams, holding back the tears that accrue in her hazel eyes, and smashes the plate full of food against the table, watching the pieces fall to the floor like snow on a winter day, but it hurts more. Days pass, maybe hours or weeks, her sense of time distorted by her obsession with her body; it is the priority these days, her weight that is. She cooks food, watching it sizzle in the pan, flopping it onto a plate, handing it to them on the table that is covered by a thin carpet of white. She says that she ate, patting her stomach repeatedly, watching their eyes give into her excuses. At one point she is mad at them for not pushing her more, for not making sure that she ate instead of giving in so dismissively, but at the same time it is good. The skinnier the prettier.

### **88 pounds**

She is unrecognizable, carrying around a forlorn demeanor that affects others that surround her, dark circles so big they could be considered black eyes, sallow skin and hair that falls out with every stroke of the brush. Her gaunt features haunt anyone who sees her, body so thin, so much bone, that she looks unnatural, like a living dead person. Bones jut out of her paper skin, rib cage visible when she lifts up her shirt, nails brittle, emulating an old woman's. No one talks to her, no one tries to catch her eye or help her.

They leave her all alone, even her parents who call it a “phase.” One girl tries to reach out, telling her that she is perfect, pretty, too skinny for her own good. She wishes that was true. That night she lets the cold tiles burn her knees and her hands grip onto the ceramic toilet and then she vomits.

### **84 pounds**

She is pretty now. Hair done up in a bun that swirls her brown and blonde tendrils into rose like design, with small wisps falling down and framing her pale face. Chapped lips hidden by bright red matte lipstick. Pink satin dress hiding all bone and skin and marks that disfigured her into a beast, an abnormality of nature. They all walk by her, lips smacked tightly together, all thinking the same thing: if only they helped her when she was alive.

## KARISSA DONG

### BITTERNESS

~a prose poem~

He lurks in the hint of shadow. Most often people sense his presence when alone or in pubs where they try to drink him away. He spreads with ease to the hopeless and the helpless. They frequently disdain him for dragging them down from dreams to disaster, but perhaps they desired too much; and Bitterness gave them a piece of his mind.

Not a miscreant, he lives unaware of the disease he causes. Those who survive his contagion understand he sneaks into the hearts of those too attached. They accept Bitterness will remain, to some degree, a part of their lives; but not clutching objects or others will keep him at a safer distance.

## AUDREY LEE

### 2 Pieces

#### **On Being Quixotic**

Eat this - no, they don't anger me anymore. Eat this, - no, I don't want to be here anymore. Here is where I want to be: teeth white because I haven't eaten, stomach aching with cotton balls bulging at its acidic lining. No, they don't - they don't do that anymore. They don't use a knife like kiddo scissors that slice me open like surgery, like peach pie. - Don't eat that anymore. I don't want to be here anymore. Some days - no, days with other days far in between - I am not angry. I am placid - no, like the lake - and lay to rest in bedsheets that my legs succumb to. No, I do not shave my legs. Razor blades - yes, they shave their legs. They are covered in down feathers like a goose, like a dove. Eat this - no, razor blades are in between your teeth. Cleaned by your voice. Yes, innocent, yes, pure. Yes, I don't shave my legs to stay warm. Some days - no, not a day like today - I am warm and moonshine fills my stomach so my throat burns and my tongue gets blisters. Some days it is summer and my mother serves peach pie. I would rather eat kiddo scissors, razor blades, have surgery in my stomach to take out the warmth of the alcohol, to take me out. Eat this - no, they don't love me anymore, and they don't want me to be here anymore. Eat this - please, let me be. Yes, my lip is bruised. No, they did not hit me. Hit on me. Please, let me be. Please, let me live in my denial.



## ALINA ZENG

### 3 Poems

#### ANXIETY

~a prose poem~

With his crooked smile, he hungers for games, anywhere and anytime. He used to play alone, but now he tricks others into his games by shielding his identity with shades; so players don't realize they run a risk.

He loves tag. When he plays it, no one can outrun him. If you try to escape into crowds, he will still catch you. His loud laughter overpowers everyone's chatter as he chases. When not it, he always manages to stay one step too far away to grasp and control. He also plays hide and go seek. If you hide, he persists in finding you. Fearless, he specializes in the unknown. If you so happen to evade him long enough to tire him, he buys a triple espresso, then shoots from the café to seize you. He never quits.

Anxiety didn't always excel at games. Before training, he used to run the slowest and everyone got away from him. They could tag him with ease, and he would stay it forever, always him against everyone. He loved to seek, but no one ever wanted him. He spent hours hiding before realizing none cared to look for him. To this day, Anxiety just wants a friend; but befriend him only when you play for the same team.

## Butterfly

Face flushing, hair free in wind,  
I trudge toward the frost-glazed lake.  
Snide comments muttered in the halls  
Echo in my mind and turn to shouts.  
I inch further to the heart of the ice;  
Peering into patches of water, I  
See what I don't want to see:  
My birthmark on my left cheek  
Reflects back at me. I hurt more.  
Then my eyes flicker to my wrist  
Where a frayed bracelet peeks out  
From my sweater. I tug it off,  
Remember my sister's gentle hands  
Tying the knot that has held to now:  
Her gift, despite my self-hatred  
Often forcing me to take my blade  
And cut my arm where no one  
Would ever see, not even she.  
I remember her tracing my blotch,  
Whisper it was like a butterfly--  
As I ached for it to fly off my face  
To some garden where it belonged.  
Still, thinking of her kindness  
Makes the nasty voices fade away  
Until I can hear my own voice  
Comforting me like my sister did  
Long ago. One step too far and the  
Ice cracks, pulling me through as  
Numbness rushes into my veins;  
But I clench the bracelet, grab  
The slippery ledge, pull myself up  
Breathing in self-acceptance, and  
Head home where my sister waits.

*This poem appeared in Florida's Whispering Angel Anthology: Soul Survivors From Trauma to Triumph in 2016.*

## **For All**

We join together for the fallen,  
Hold candles, bringing light  
To us on vigil in this dark city  
Where bluecoats too often  
Do harm from their qualms  
Over different shades of skin.

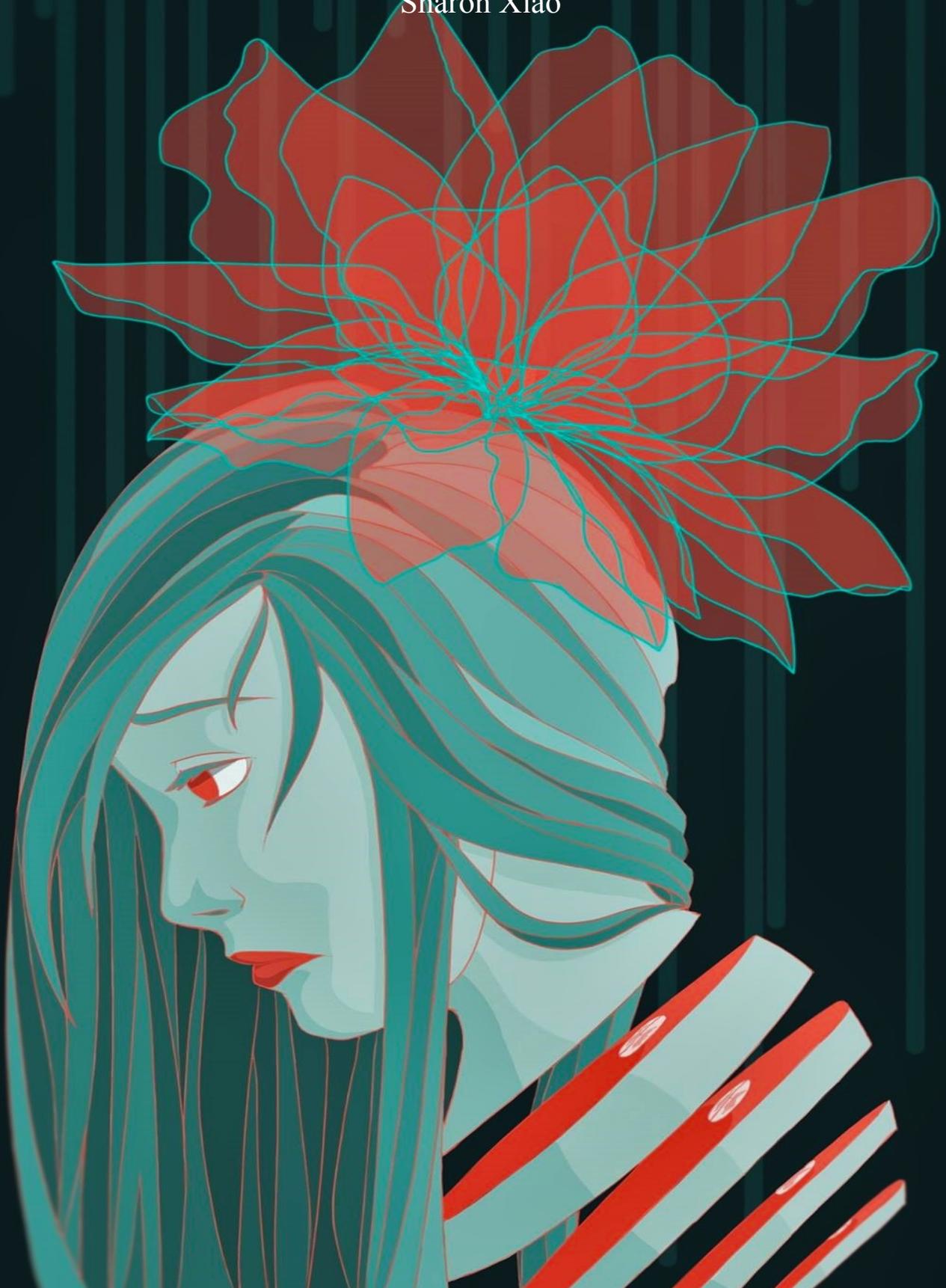
We stand together, not to fight  
But to chant and pray for those  
Who paid the price of prejudice.  
Some mime the pull of triggers  
From needless use of guns  
By both sides, all of us victims.

They perish for their color  
Or for their decision to become  
Guardians, now condemned  
Due to rashness of comrades  
In blue. So we place flowers,  
Light candles to glow for all.

*This poem appeared in Poetry Nation's anthology in 2015.*

# BOTTLED UP

Sharon Xiao



## **BRIANNA BOULAY**

### **After the War**

PROLOGUE There's a truth evident about soldiers that has stood the test of time; nothing is the same after the war.

END OF PROLOGUE "James, get up," Tessa threw a pile of clothes at the man tangled in the sheets, surrounded by empty beer bottles. He slightly jumped from the noise, pulling the pillow from under him and covering his face. Tessa stepped around the disarray of the room, huffing as she stepped over random objects on the floor.

"Five more minutes?" He pleaded with her, his voice muffled from the pillow and his heartbeat began to slow as he attempted to block out the negative thoughts that flooded his conscience. These thoughts plagued his mind, taking away every bit of peace he craved with vivid pictures of the horrors he witnessed.

She sighed at him and tilted her head as she gazed at his disheveled appearance, "Babe, it's noon and your mother is here. You know how she drives me crazy."

He sat up in the mess of sheets and rubbed his eyes, "Fine, sorry, Tessa. I just need a moment."

He tiredly put on the shirt that was crumpled up in his sheets, sighing vociferously. Tessa set the laundry basket she was toting onto the carpet and walked over to him. She bent down and took his face in her hands. He looked at her sleepily, but cracked a faint smile as he gazed over her face.

She returned the soft smile and placed a kiss on his forehead, whispering, "Nightmare?" He sighed and gave a slight nod, looking down at his lap, "I thought about the rain again."

"You need to stop letting that get to you. That doesn't define or control you," she cut him off abruptly and closed her eyes in discontent.

He nodded hesitantly, pulling her hand off the side of his face and placed a kiss on her palm, "Thank you, Tess."

Tessa blushed and looked away as the red flush crept up her cheeks. She stood up as he pulled his lips away and patted his shoulder. She took the laundry basket back into her hands and walked out of the room. James ran a hand over his face and leaned over the bed.

He took one of the hair bands on Tessa's nightstand and pulled back the strands of hair that fell in his eyes. He tied the tangle of brunette hair back at the nape of his neck and pushing the shorter pieces back behind his ear. He had no motivation for self-care after he returned, leaving the scruff on his face and his long hair to grow out. He began to resemble his father as the days passed and his hair grew longer, a fact he loathed deeply.

James shuffled into the kitchen, giving a weak smile to his mother who sat in the front of the table, sipping her tea. The floral upholstered chairs blended in with her gaudy dress, causing James to chuckle very softly at the sight. He walked over, giving her a disinterested hug.

She huffed at the lazy embrace and looked away, "That is not how you should greet your mother."

Tessa rolled her eyes, stirring her coffee with a bitter look and James nodded, "Yeah, sorry, I just- haven't had a good night."

His mother reached into her purse, pulling out a small notebook, "I've written down some methods on how to deal with your... daydreams. I saw a holistic doctor in the valley and he told me green tea cures every sickness in time."

Tessa spat at her, "Sarah, it's serious. He has PTSD. This isn't a simple daydream that can be fixed with fucking tea, but of course, you think some overpriced hippie bullshit will work."

Sarah rolled her eyes and waved her hand at Tessa, dismissing the anger, "I know what's best for my boy, not you."

Sarah's phone began to ring and she looked at the caller ID. She smiled at the name and slipped the phone back into her tote bag.

"It's my friend, Carol, from yoga. You should join me for a class one day, James. Anywho, I need to meet some of my friends in town for lunch. Look at it if you wish..." James gave her a nod and put the small notebook down on the granite counter. Tessa sighed in relief as she watched Sarah walk out of the small house. She placed her mug on the counter and rubbed her temples, releasing a content sigh.

Tessa reopened her eyes after a few moments and looked to James, offering a sympathetic frown, "I'm sorry. She just really annoys me and I can't handle her snobby attitude."

He looked to the tiles on the floor, giving a shrug. He observed the small cracks in each tile, lazily retracing them with his big toe. She walked up to him, embracing him from behind.

She rested her cheek on the back of his arm and softly spoke, "I'm trying and I know so are you."

He glanced at her, giving a soft chuckle as she peaked her head around his shoulder, "Don't worry 'bout me."

She pouted dramatically as he looked down at her, meeting his gaze, "You're my husband. Your problems are my problems."

He shook his head at her and took her hand into his, giving it a squeeze, "As nice as that sounds to you, my problems shouldn't be any of your concerns, sweetheart."

Tessa let go of him, cleaning up the mess in the kitchen slowly, "Alright, whatever you say."

James sighed as she let go and rolled his shoulder. He stiffened his posture up and looked away. He started to walk down the empty hallway, keeping his silence. He stopped at a white door and took a deep breath, before slowly pushing it open. He peered inside at the pastel colored walls and glanced over the mess of boxes shoved to the center of the room. Light cast in from an adjacent window, giving the room a soft, delicate glow. He pushed the door open fully, stepping inside with mindful movement, as if the floor beneath him was crafted from glass. James stopped at the plush rug and bent down, pulling a box towards him. He ran his fingers over the smooth cardboard and reached in. Tears began to trickle down his face as he pulled out a small, brand new blanket. His heart began to pick up its pace and his throat went dry. He ran a hand over the yellow knitting before an angered scream erupted from within him. He threw the cardboard box violently towards the wall, breaking the peaceful silence with the disruption. The box fell to the floor with a loud clatter and its contents burst out of the newly ripped tears.

A few moments passed and Tessa burst into the room, "What are you doing in here?!"

He looked up at her with hurt as tears dripped down his cheeks. He angrily clawed away his tears with his shirtsleeve as she returned the painful look.

She looked at the mess scattered about the room, and her voice cracked as she yelled,

"Get out! Get out of here!"

He stood up abruptly and walked past her. Their shoulders collided forcefully and Tessa was jolted backwards from his forceful movement. He stormed out of the room

and the door slammed shut after he exited. Tessa winced from the sound and resumed her sobs as she glanced back at the mess in front of her. She picked up the blanket at her feet and choked on sobs as she reached down to grab it.

James shot up the stairs in his rage, making his footsteps heavy as he stormed up. The walls shook from the force and small photo frames clattered to the floor. He bursted into the bathroom and ripped the shower curtain open hastily. James ripped the clothes off of his body and left them in a orderless heap on the bathroom floor. He stepped into the tub and sat down. He reached for the silver faucet, gripping the small handle and pushed it towards the small 'C' on the dial. Water began to cascade down and pelted his bare skin. The chill stung as each droplet hit him. He rested his head on his knees and pulled his arms around his head protectively.

James began to yell, "Cease fire! Cease fucking fire! It's pouring, we gotta go!" Tessa tapped on the door carefully as James screamed under the chilling stream of water. His heartbeat began to pick up, vigorous beating in his chest. Each heartbeat pounded as he took struggled breaths. She stepped in quietly and walked over to him slowly, frowning at the broken figure in front of her. She bit her lower lip, feeling a heavy weight on her chest as she watched him hurt. There was mutual pain within her as he whimpered under the spray of water.

After his screams began to subside, James looked up with a bewildered look and widened his eyes at her, "We've got a man down! Someone needs to save him for God's sake!"

Tessa bent down to the edge of the tub and pulled the faucet handle to a close. She reached out to embrace him, taking deep breaths as he shivered from the pool of freezing water around him.

She placed her hand on his lower back, rubbing small circles on his cold and damp skin and whispered softly, "Shhhh, shhh, you're home now. You're safe and no one is hurt." James snapped at the touch, rejecting it with displeasure. He gripped her hand and pushed it away forcefully, "Don't touch me, Jap scum!"

She nodded and slid her hand of his grasp defensively, "I'm sorry. Hold on please." He gave her a glaring look, furrowing his eyebrows at her. Tessa backed away and walked to the medicine cabinet, opening up the small glass door. She rummaged through the mess of pill bottles and boxes, pulling out a small orange bottle. She ripped the top off and emptied the contents on her palm. She picked up a few small pills before rushing back to James' side.

He looked at her with voracious eyes and lunged forward, "Don't fucking touch me when we have a hurt man!"

Tessa yelped as he dove towards her, dodging the lunge. James stood up in the tub, his posture stiff with anger. His weight caused water to cascade out and gush over the sides of the tub, flooding the small room. Tessa narrowed her eyes at him and grabbed his face in her hands, attempting to pry his jaw open with her might. He snapped at her, shoving her away forcefully. She fell to the ground with a thud and widened her eyes.

"Please, just take the xanax..." she pleaded with him. James stepped out of the tub and marched towards her, "Commies will pay for their sins." Tessa took a deep breath as he came over and grabbed onto the lid of the toilet, pulling herself up. She bolted towards him and water seeped into her shoes, sloshing around her. He stopped inches away from her, glaring with dark, hateful eyes. Tessa launched herself forwards and forcefully jumped onto him, prying open his jaw. He attempted to shake her off as she clawed his mouth open with her nails and slid the small pills into his mouth.

James coughed as they slid down his throat and she tried to shut his jaw with the force of her hand. He slowly began to sway from side to side as the medication took immediate effect. His vision began to blur and he loosed his rigid posture. Tessa sighed in relief as she watched his body begin to relax and let go, lowering herself off of him. He watched her with confusion and fell into a heap on the tile. The water splashed around him from the sudden weight. She bent down at his side, brushing strands of wet hair away from his eyes. Tessa leaned down, resting her forehead on his.

She began to whisper softly, "I'm sorry. I love you. I'm so sorry."

He closed his eyes tiredly and mumbled under his breath as she moved his head into her lap, "I- what... s-stop-..."

She laughed softly at his confusion, "Shhhh, shhh. It's okay. Sleep now."

He relaxed in her arms and fell into a deep sleep, his limbs falling weak. She cracked a soft smile at his peaceful slumber and kissed the side of his face as tears began to fall. They fell from her eyes and onto his cheeks. She reached out, wiping them away with the pad of her thumb.

Tessa placed his head back on the floor, carefully cradling his head. She stood up in the small water collecting around her and took his wrists into her hands. She began to tug his body forward and out of the bathroom. He inched forward and she used her might to pull him out of the small room.

A hearty groan came from James and she sighed at the sign of discontent from him, "I know... Just bear through this with me, please?"

Tessa dragged him onto the bedroom floor as water sloshed around him. After fully pulling his large body onto the carpet, she moved over to the bed took a pillow from the

pile collecting at the headboard. She gently lifted up his head and tucked the small pillow under his head. She reached out, pulling a folded blanket from the foot of the bed and draped it over his body.

Tessa leaned down and placed a kiss on his temple, "Goodnight. Have sweet, sweet dreams."

James laid still as she kissed him, grumbling under his breath as he slowly drifted asleep. Tessa sighed in relief as he began to snore. She pushed herself away from him, bursting into tears. She curled up and pulled her knees to her chest for comfort. She rested her head on her knees, sobbing as his snored filled the room.

"I can't do this... This is too much," Tessa told herself through the tears that ran down her cheeks.

She choked on sobs and tears trickled down her face, falling onto her stockings. After a few minutes she slowly began to regain her composure, lifting her head back up and laid down next to James. She rested her head on his shoulder and gently wiped away tears from her eyes.

Tessa took deep breaths as she observed his face, gazing over his peaceful features in his deep sleep. She sighed at the sight and finally closed her eyes, picturing the small yellow knitted blanket that haunted her. A pained look appeared on her face as she relinquished her body to a deep slumber.

## MARIBEL C. PAGAN

### 2 Poems

#### **Pandora's Box**

A golden portrait  
painted over,  
protecting and sealing shut  
the Pandora Box.

Although the portrait seen is known to be fake,  
it is kept to protect from a worse fate.  
You don't want to unnecessarily release  
an unleashing of Titanic forces and fleets.

So let's treasure Pandora's Box  
and set it aside.  
Yes! Let's do that.  
Let's put it aside,  
lock it up in a safe.  
Then let's forget we put it there.  
Yes! Let's add that to the bargain.  
Let's forget its location,  
let's forget it exists.  
Let's magically disappear it from our minds  
And magically teleport anything nasty there!

A decision made,  
Pandora's Box fades...

...

...

... and then  
reappears.

You have to be running from danger  
in the dark haunted forests  
in order to find it  
when you crash into the safe  
and - boom! - out tumbles Pandora's box  
with that despairingly perfect portrait.

You don't know what it holds,  
and yet you do know.  
After all, it's Pandora's box.  
You don't know that little about it.  
It isn't meant to hold niceties.  
It is meant to hold the proof of human weakness.

You keep it by your side.  
You occasionally shake it,  
hoping something will pop out:  
The reality behind the mask,  
the truth behind the portrait.  
You know that something is within,  
but that's the secret it holds.  
It will not reveal what is held.  
It's no wonder something so terrible  
is hidden from your view.

It is when you least expect it,  
one uneventful morning,  
that the portrait

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Lies drain away  
none can be held,  
the pain lies within the depths of the Box

and invades your being,

Yet the pain isn't painful.

It is shocking.

The pain doesn't make you regret opening the Box.

It makes you regret not opening it sooner.

And through Pandora's Box,  
you find what you've been  
searching for your entire life:

Truth.

## **A Flashback**

A ghost carries a box filled to the brim  
with a bundle of images held within.  
He whispers to you, "Do you remember?",  
asked in a soft voice filled with immense authority.  
You try to ignore him, yet you always remember  
that ghost lingering in the depths of your mind.

It is when someone else mentions the images  
that the ghost finds his opportunity  
and proceeds to yank out the images  
one by one for you to experience and feel.

You are immediately shaken  
to the core of your being.  
You are forced to remember  
what you long to forget,  
yet for the rest of your life  
you will always remember.

You attempt to tear the images apart,  
only the ghost puts them on display  
for your viewing, so that you will always  
remember the horrors of long ago.

Once the ghost finally takes the images back,  
his task has already been fulfilled.  
You are already filled with the immense grief  
for that time you had lost in your life,  
that one moment when you lost your own power,  
power that was inhumanely stolen by another.

# MIND

Sreya Sreedhar



## MAYA RABINOWITZ

### 2 Poems

#### Without Ed

I am glad to give up the grey  
that whispered its way into life  
lacing through the fracture between night and day  
settling as frigid fog,  
the darkest of weighted water

And I ache  
to be free from the  
cloud of furrowed worry  
that knelt at the corner of my bed  
as the night grew green in its blackness  
while I grasped for sleep  
with fatigued fingers  
the only time fear could slip through the cracks  
of an unbreakable wall.

I am glad to give up the silent shriek  
that flattened my ear drums and  
slowed  
each deafening beat of  
a desperate heart  
one starving day more,  
one starving day smaller.

Right?

Its been months since my mind has spoken and  
my brain and all of ours live in total darkness but mine  
especially  
on the inside of a thinning skull

It is a trick that shatters my bones and  
a twisted joy that empties my stomach

And I told me it made me  
special  
I told me it made me  
strong

For there is rush in being closer than ever to  
nothing  
And it will leave me someday soon coming or  
we both will and without him  
what will I  
be?

## Recovery

He does not die easily  
and though his power was snatched from his grasp  
and his fingers ripped from my neck  
he does not go softly

his body has been buried  
so he can no longer stifle  
my muscles  
my brain  
my heart  
and as each piece of him dies  
I feel the excruciating loss  
the gaping black hole  
where something used to be

though his body was demolished  
and buried under layers of muscle  
and fat  
his voice remains

he screams in agony  
clutches at what was once his body  
now deep down under pounds of protection  
that save me from him

he wails at his lost power

he grasps for pieces of control  
composure erased by a primal panic  
that shows the monster he is

and as I'm stripped from his comfort zone  
he pounds against the walls of my mind  
a silent scream pouring from his ruined lips  
flooding my head and dripping through my mouth

a perfect imitation of my own words  
such an expert forgery  
that I fall for it deep  
turning the words over and over with my tongue  
spitting them out at anyone who challenges me  
who challenges him

but those who have met him before  
can see the trickery in all its glory  
with a practiced ear  
and careful eye  
they pull him out from behind his dark disguise  
so I can see him for who he is  
in the light

and time aches forward  
until I can recognize  
his cruel snicker  
his watchful eye

and he gets smaller and weaker  
and he cannot scream anymore  
he can only whisper in a pitiful squeak

and now I can scream back at him  
for in those gaping holes where I thought there was nothing,  
I found more of myself  
the best parts  
where confidence  
self-respect  
and courage had been hiding.

So I can scream back.

I hate you, I say  
look how much you have taken of me.  
look how close you came to taking it all.

**SARAH FENG**

**Anxiety**

2400

2200

2000

2250

make sure you remember to floss daily, rinse your mouth  
with

honey & graffiti the lead into the side of your hand,  
make sure you remember to pluck the mushrooms as they grow,  
before they turn fleshy with mold, before you shrivel

and the black  
digits on that online competition are no high enough  
for

you to pinch and duck inside the vessel,  
make sure you remember to plump your toes until they are dumplings,  
because if you don't, mama will be mad and your spine will drip and wilt,  
Don't make me take you to the doctor's again,  
I don't have that kind of time,

make sure you remember to do your calculus and write that submission for  
that

literary magazine and red circle no, red circle eyes your feet are  
sinking into the spongy moss  
make sure you remember to  
why didn't you? WHY DIDN'T YOU? molecules swim backstroke in the  
pixels, molars lacquered with the lead,  
peel back the mushrooms until they drop into the barrel of the gun  
make sure you remember, **MAKESURE**

## MICHAEL MEYERHOFER

### 3 Poems

#### Sermon At Denny's

In Denny's tonight, a goateed Baptist minister rattles off his daily struggles against the Devil and an unruly congregation, routinely interrupting his well-dressed wife and his mother who nod along and say amen, secretly eyeing their platters of hashbrowns and sunny-side eggs, chilling to hardness.

Meanwhile, across the way at our table, I am sitting with other young professors and a woman with whom I live in sin, reading college term papers on marijuana use and the dangers of jingoist politics, pausing occasionally to swap favorite passages that grossly misquote the Dhammapada.

Later over Spanish guitars, a bottle of crisp wine and this beautiful woman, I will fulfill our unspoken vow to make love in front of an open window, the curtains blowing wildly as we grind our bodies—sometimes whispering Christ, I love you as an ancient trapdoor swings beneath us.

*Previously published in Morpo Review Vol. 12:1*

## Grief Song

I poured my mother's ashes like gravy  
on a nest of wildflowers. The sky

was bright and cold today, winds  
thoughtless as my blood still  
pumping. This is not the first time.

I've decided by now that if ever there was  
something fine inside me, it is broken now.

If ever I carried something—a vase,  
say, or a delicate glass bird—it has shattered  
long before this. I have enough:

a long dark funeral coat, strong fingers  
and a knife for slicing open the bag

of well-enriched soot. There are prayers  
but they stick in the throat. Useless, bent—  
if there was hope, its need has passed.

We are as it is, ragged as wolves  
in the common daylight. Aware

of the weight of each breath, measuring  
whether the heart should follow.  
If there is salvation, I do not want it.

If there was water, it has frozen.  
If there was memory, something ancient

and ancestral as the curl of fins,  
if we stirred in the deep, it is finished.  
We are houses propped by grief.

If there is God, keep him away—  
do not relieve me of anything.

*Previously published in Sometimes City*

## After Watching The Texas Chainsaw Massacre

In real life, there was no chainsaw.  
Nor was there a blood-sucking grandfather  
carried down the stairs in his wheelchair  
by a family of bumpkin cannibals.  
No meditation on cows and sledgehammers  
either, much less a van of college kids

pondering astrology just before, one by one,  
they're pulled behind the sliding tin door  
of a killing room under the stairs, resplendent  
with an overgrown chicken in a bird cage.  
There were bones, yes, and grave-robbing,  
even a homemade suit of women's skin

but the true killer, Ed Gein, acted alone.  
His weapon of choice was a small revolver.  
Despite the opening sequence, he was not  
driven to perform by solar prominence.  
His mother, a dominating fundamentalist,  
scolded her sons against making friends,

sermonizing the dangers of loose women.  
He probably killed his only brother, Henry.  
An old photo shows Gein in a checkered  
hunting cap, unshaven, his thin drooping  
eyes clouded by a thoughtful loneliness.  
After the asylum, buried back in Plainfield

where they teased him for being a sissy.  
One woman, Bernice Worden, was found  
hanging from the rafters, gutted like a deer.  
Newspapers showed him descending  
the steps of the courthouse in shirt and tie,  
handcuffed, grinning like a Rockefeller.

*Previously published in Margie, vol. 4*

## RILEY GRACE

### **Dancer, This Wasn't Pulled from a Dream**

*Often mistaken for an anxiety disorder, lack of nutrition due to anorexia or other eating disorders, or simply reduced to the commonly referred to "stress hair pulling," Trichotillomania is a serious mental disorder that currently effects an estimated four million women and two million men across the country. Affliction by Trichotillomania can be triggered by an anxiety or depression-inducing life event, such as the loss of a loved one, or even, like in this poem, a major life or identity transition undergone in adolescence or early adulthood. Those suffering from it are deeply emotionally impacted by the condition, and experience a range of emotions, usually all stemming from the deep sense of shame that comes with "Trich" due to a lack of awareness surrounding it, and the negative stigmas related to its symptoms which include "bald patches," and the compulsion to pull out one's own hair. Even after the event has passed, Trichotillomania still lingers; as do its silent sufferers.*

Sweetie in light pink, stick straight nylon,  
i don't know when i started pulling hairs out for you, shiny, oily, insecure little black-brown clumps  
i left you, left you nearly a year ago and now i'm tucked into a nightmare I used to devour,  
a mesmerizing slogan—BE YOUR DREAM— its ironic message is in night cotton, but it's emblazoned across my breast;

And doll, lyrical darling, the sweet satin pink you wear blinds me  
i can't stand the bitter burnt coffee of reality so i'll wake up over and over and pull deceased desires from my scalp until i can see again,  
only to spot you glinting at me from across the room in a grave of plastic wrap, tiny tips, textured tenacious tops,  
brown jabs the taste of squashed gnats, the color of my hair before i escaped from you and begged the sun to swallow me, sear me, ship me away and stick me here, a bobby pin in its barren bloody cranium

Dearest, i never told you why i thought i could stay and how i came to dream of you because i never really knew—my only certainty was how you would ever fester, growing large like an ill lymphoid, a thickening, scabby bulb at the back of my swan neck  
it was not my pale fingers but a video podcast of Ray Bradbury's words waltzing to Swan Lake that popped the bulbous head it took you eleven years to form  
call it hasty admittance but at last i knew it was words that gave me oxygen, not you

i let them catch me yanking you out, showed how my stiff shoes didn't fit anymore,  
braced for a diagnosis of cancer, of depression, of anxiety, of disillusionment; maybe just  
of stress, but Ray said you were all of that and more, sweetheart  
i fulfilled my prognosis, home, little girl, home and let's say i got better but this is my  
unmelodic coffee cloud of anesthesia, of hairspray the scent of sliced moon and  
scrumptious baked illusions and now  
i'm stuck between a tweezer and my foot, removing bits of gauze and follicle tops  
Tchaikovsky wondering whether or not to stay, here in a sweaty pink dream, blushing  
blue at the thought of you watching me as I sit in the dark, plucking like a harpist from  
the underbelly of my hair, the crown of my head, your clingy rot brown leftovers in  
arrhythmic chords, I mean clumps.





to the sound of trickling tears;  
i hear  
Your voice like a passing wave

(I'm sorry.)

(I'm sorry.)

(I'm sorry.)

## Evergreen Trees

come, come with me and we can  
curse the world together from the  
branches of evergreen trees  
we'll beat the stormy weather and i'll  
let you pull on my sleeve  
and we'll sleep, we'll sleep the day away  
hanging – just hanging from evergreen trees

the burns and bruises on your tongue  
they poison all your kisses, yet it's  
sweet how your world is broken  
we make dandelion wishes, you wished  
the world would end tomorrow  
while i wished to end our sorrow  
we're different,  
so different but we're the same

come, take my hand and i will  
bring you to land that's filled with  
piles of peachy sand  
we'll make castles worth destroying and when we  
decide that we are done  
we'll dance, we'll dance among the waves  
and the castle, the castle now is gone

climbing, Climbing above the horizon  
wishing we could touch the heavens  
falling, Falling my heart rate is risin'  
when i'm with you  
when i'm with you  
when i'm with you  
any place can feel like heaven

come, come with me and we can  
curse the world together from the  
branches of evergreen trees  
we'll beat the stormy weather and i'll  
let you pull on my sleeve  
and we'll sleep, we'll sleep the day away  
hanging – just hanging from evergreen trees.

## Superman

Hey, how are you?  
How do you do?  
Instead, let's take a walk back to your home  
"That building's small  
No good at all"  
You said in an awful tone

The chemistry  
Of you and me  
It makes good conversations in the dark  
Oh, rise and shine  
It's day time  
Lift the curtains to your heart

Ain't it easy to make that jump?  
And the train, it zooms on by  
Trust me, you're better than you think  
Don't ask me why, you're free to cry tonight  
Your tears fill up the sink  
Release the doves up to the sky  
And together we'll fly

I'm sorry, life ain't always easy in these streets  
Pull back the curtains, show off what's underneath  
Rip off that nice disguise  
Open your eyes  
It's just as nice  
Here on earth

And you've been told life's made of gold  
Or at least, that it should be  
But living gets a little old, a little cold  
Sometimes, you'll see  
But being superman is my specialty

## ELLIE BLACK

### La Brea

The day I felt it oozing, jet black,  
tar-like, sliding through my brain,  
I wanted to leave, so I left,  
but came back. Someone may have  
waited for me but I never saw them  
if they did. I tried to ask a question  
but the tar was in my throat. I tried  
to walk away but the tar was in  
my bones. So I stayed with  
claw-marks; so I stayed with salt.  
I wanted to be left alone,  
in the thick warmth of it. I gave  
myself a choice, and I took  
neither option.

I never bled it out but  
sang it instead, flowing out  
of my mouth slowly, slowly,  
covering my teeth, covering my  
lips, my chin, my chest. Singing  
through tar forever. Someone could  
have been waiting for me but I  
never saw anyone there. I didn't  
want to be left alone with it –  
I thought it might smother me.

*Previously published in Aonian.*

## CAROLINE GOLDENBERG

### 2 Poems

#### Her Perfect

a closed door, untouched, bare  
and above all  
pure

they walk by and nod and smile.  
never challenge, never break it down  
what lies beyond, a mystery  
waiting to let itself free  
from its limiting confinement.

i was deceived too.  
walked past that door,  
that door to her own soul.

i saw her in the school hallway  
leaning effortlessly against her locker.  
i saw her in the cafeteria, friends at her beck and call  
saw her in the library, saw her in the school lobby  
every bit a part of my life, every bit not  
just a door i walked past

perfect, they called her.  
she smiled.  
perfect, she nodded.  
it was true  
perfect, she told herself  
but perfect was not a word  
in her mind.

she cried  
she didn't understand why.  
locked in a sea of confusion  
a prisoner behind her door, she banged on it  
let me out  
let me out  
she screamed.  
but no one could hear beyond  
the screen of her perfect.

i saw the glimmer in her face, a speck of the universe,  
stardust, its home in her eyes  
i envied.  
jealousy is a curse, i supposed.

her screams became a plea  
she poured out her feelings into words  
and the words took place in her eyes  
they chased into her vision and pushed out the stardust  
smashing it into smithereens  
where they were swept under her bed.  
the work of magic, the magic of her closed door

i saw her that day, the stardust swept out of her eyes.  
the words of her pleas written all over them.  
my heart gasped. its strings tugged.  
a crack in everything i had known.  
i was not special, so why could i read the words in her eyes?

the oblivious faces of those around me  
i swung my head, taking them in  
they didn't see her. they only saw her closed door.  
they only saw her perfect.

but perfect was not a word  
in her mind.  
and she knew, and i knew  
i had opened her closed door just a crack  
not enough to know enough, but enough to realize  
perfect was not a word  
in my mind either.

## The Vial

cursed is he?  
lost in a void of endless tunnels,  
each one narrowing faster than he can run to its end.

nothing wrong  
nothing wrong  
he presses into his brain.  
But he knows it is nothing but pure and evil lie.

nothing wrong  
they all tell him,  
you're being unsensible.  
use your head.

use his head for what?  
please be more specific,  
his thoughts beg  
use his head to make one more  
useless attempt to stop his derailing thoughts?  
use his head to travel further through the tunnels?  
or use his head to just pound more glass shards of words  
into his mind?

I'm lost,  
he shouted to her.  
hours and days and weeks of feelings bottled up.  
he watched as the vial of his feelings filled.  
passed the halfway mark  
almost full  
he poured the vial's contents out.  
he poured them in front of her eyes,  
see who I am,  
he begged to demand.

I'm lost.  
no you're not,  
she told him.  
shock and disbelief,  
she wouldn't succumb to the mere thought that  
he was lost  
he was never lost  
not in her mind

so he backed down  
he shut the vial in his closet  
he's never shown it again.  
and it remains there,  
slowly filling,  
slowly bottling up.

**OLIVIA D'AGOSTINI**

**starved & stitched & saved**

starved  
another girl,  
(her thighs don't touch)  
plays it with quirk & fervor & joy.

her vibrant voice reads out statistics  
(8 million of us)  
and pieces together a picture of

counting calories & low self-esteem.  
i have never been so full when she  
made a show of showing pictures

of haggard girls, torn by the pride I have  
spread across my wooden tabletop.  
(the rest lies in my bag)

a pamphlet is stuffed into my hands by her.  
she would rather die than eat the coal dust I have bleed.  
(i could count my age on my fingers)

they applaud her.

stitched  
plaster doesn't stick to blood; it weeps from my skin,  
bores cavities into fissures, eyes are red from  
tears & tiredness & tastelessness.

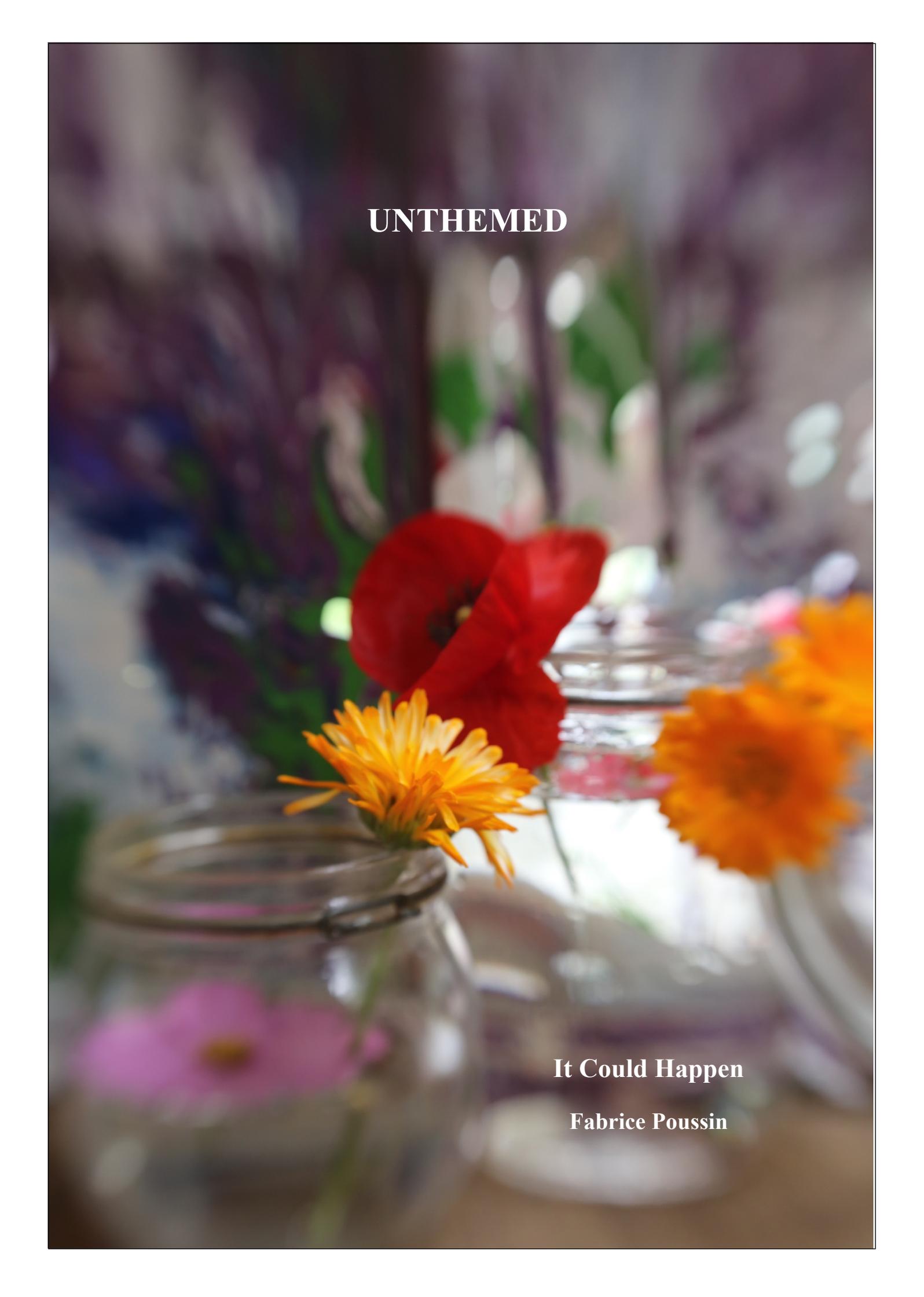
my mother measures her food &  
i have never seen my aunt eat a full meal.  
(and they wonder where i get it from)

she chastised me for forgetting it  
(again)  
while i stomach my half-eaten righteousness.

my core begins to unwind itself while  
january rises from the mist of my despair  
and the phenomenon of solace.  
it has carved itself into my bones;

brittle & cracked but stalwart porcelain  
haughtily on a mahogany shelf.

saved  
it tastes like the moonlight dancing along your skin &  
honey poured down your throat, dripping down your neck.  
(or from what i've heard)



**UNTHEMED**

**It Could Happen**

**Fabrice Poussin**

## CINDY SONG

### 3 Poems

#### **Lift To Juniper Hill**

Tired mouths never stop moving, at least when  
your lips are smacked inside out and wrapped  
around the head like bamboo around a zongzi.  
Mama says fresh air's good for you but sometimes  
you can't breathe when the wheels fly too fast  
down Juniper. A man once wrapped his sticky  
hands around your pigtails and yanked; you were  
left with nothing but bruised knees and a sore scalp.

## Hymn For The Curb

In the past                      you were a girl with a  
broken                              umbrella and strong legs.

In the past                      you were the daughter  
of a drunkard,                      daughter of black

pitch threading                through slant rain  
slapping slick street. The dregs of

Earth and booze                still bleed in your  
mouth and                        sometimes when you

dig your teeth                      into the flesh of a  
rotten apple                      the taste hits you like

Truth.                              Questions are questions  
till they                              drag tongues miles

across a                              parched desert. Till  
you paint your                      teeth black and

pull your lips over              your head.  
The soft rain                      bends and unbends in

your palm:                        no one quite knows if  
the asphalt's                        got a home.

## Off-White

Here's to the girls who bite secrets off  
bitter blues ends &  
stamp their wounds into the dirt. Girls  
who run fingernails  
down a back like peeling the skin off a  
yellow fruit. There  
is a hollow somewhere in the sidewalk  
filled with stained  
letters & cigarette butts like a treasure  
chest that's sunk to  
the ocean bottom. Do you feel this too?  
I scream at the clouds.  
Helpless & out of control like the wind  
is strangling you?  
Muscles clenching and unclenching, toes  
curling into the dirt,  
uncurling. Somewhere it is still but here  
there is only motion:  
naked, invisible, uprooted from the earth.

## DANIE KNOPF-WEINSTEIN

### 3 Poems

#### **Mom's Attic**

The metal compartment  
located above the driver's cab  
is small enough to fit  
a small child, or myself  
if I am determined enough.

I try to argue with my mother  
that we could fit another person  
on the orange truck, but she  
instead slipped her china,  
white and dainty and expensive  
in the small cavity.

She can tell that I am tempted  
to move them to the back corner  
tied under the ropes  
securing the metal bed frame  
I am not sure if it is mine  
or my sisters.

The space is a tight and  
comforting idea, warm enough  
from the metal body that  
I could possibly survive  
while living in it.

## **My Brother Learned How to Play Drums When I Was Thirteen**

When I was thirteen, my brother was determined to learn how to play the drums. My mother bought him a fancy drum set, sparkly and blue with high quality drumsticks that he would walk around and twirl. And tap. And titer. And clack. Against the wooden table in the kitchen that I could run my nail against, and sealant residue would always come up. When I was fourteen, my brother gave up learning how to play drums. His banging that had resonated from the basement was silent, and the oak drumsticks were left abandoned on bookshelves. I was tempted to try them out myself; to see if I could create something louder than my unwanted interjections in class, or my pen-clicking, pencil-tapping induced ADHD. My mother sold the fancy, sparkly and blue drum set before I could try it out, but I still hold onto the drumsticks. Their wooden bodies sit on the shelves above my desk, and collect the dust my mother hoped they never would.

## Glitch

My father smiled a smile  
I misinterpreted as one  
Much more helpful.  
He placed his hand on my shoulder—  
Familial touch to keep me grounded  
As I tried climbing the bars.

He looked up at the sky  
Filled with the silver dollop  
Of childhood memory.  
I paused my movements,  
His silence interested me  
More than the moon.

"Sometimes," he said through his lips,  
Cracked from his refusal  
To use the chapstick my mother buys him.

"Sometimes," he repeated, the emphasis of  
The word making my fingers tighten  
Around the poles.  
"There are glitches in the system."

His voice dropped in volume as he  
Finished the sentence.  
He reached into his breast pocket  
To pull out a yellow cigarette pack.  
Skillful fingers pushed on  
The silver wheel to light the  
Yellow flame.

## ASHLEY TAN

### Body of Art

You started with fine strokes  
of concentrated crimson  
that would seep deep beneath the canvas of my skin  
before coursing towards what would be my pulsating core

Then came the deep shade of prussian  
that was injected into the thin skin of my wrist,  
and slowly the tapestry of cords that would bind every fragment  
morphed into the electric blue of my bundled veins

With a flick of your hand, you swished against a tinge of liquid gold  
and your brush danced deftly around my globed onyx spheres  
to shape the emerald stone of my soul  
that would lead him into the depths of my forest of secrets

And so you constructed  
a creature of artificial nature,

But what you didn't know  
was that you had painted

a masterpiece.

## VIDHIMA SHETTY

### 3 Poems

#### The Killer

Ario Romano dreams the way a man unlearns  
how many seconds it takes to rid oneself of the heartbeat.

He riddles the question, wakes each morning with a pin-back  
and a piece of the answer in his breast pocket.

Our antagonist mouths off to slap-up blondes in teaser skirts,  
manifests his pride like the apostrophe does for contraction.

A grave digger dies for every kind soul that throats Romano's lacquered heel.  
As such, sound is the last sense to go—when a man's face is blue and  
he no longer can taste the backhanded syllable of blood,  
he hears only the rhythm of his burning flesh.

Romano savors dystrophy of the scar tissue that guts him  
clean down the ribcage. A cannibal in the making of words,  
he swallows his own sentences. Sewed the framework of  
the conversation he will pursue with his Ma, this afternoon.

Sinners often guilt away in layers. This Romano knows.  
This Romano whispers in arrested rhetoric for every man he has murdered—  
*Dying is never meant to yield a comfort.*

Nothing is more deceptive than a killer killing himself.  
Even if it was said that Romano thought better of murder.

Tell me now, is it fair that our narrator,  
in fact, has been the killer all along?

## **Impostor Syndrome**

There are eels inside of my chest  
who occasionally move through my ribcage  
just to remind me they are there.

So I was taught  
that modern atomic theory  
yields an incoherence;  
electrons sputter and gag 'round the mother  
in orbitals.

At times, I do the same  
rock back into my heels  
and knock the voice out of my throat.  
It leaves breathing a conscious effort,  
hands me questions I can't answer, like:  
what it would feel like to love strangers.  
why the room won't collapse into itself and take me with it.  
when I will become my mother's daughter  
and not my father's.

This particular day overflows  
with an essence of anxiety.

But suppose I dress for another night,  
forget I belong and mop up spilt milk like a funeral.  
Then can I agree the living are easier to talk to?

## December

I carved out Winter's nose and fed it to Mum for dessert.  
Her intestines, a rich salmon of juice  
bloating into her palms.  
and she belched the latter all over blanket-stitched linen.  
here comes a river japanned a gloss  
the hue of blood, coagulated.  
I daub the essence of mountain  
into the crevices of syringe  
seared all over my sister's thighs. or what's left of it.  
i no longer kiss her pin-cushioned corpse.  
i flesh out veins and beating muscle to save me warm at night  
yet, my jaws lock stiff in foreign valleys  
and Mum is a cannibal, for Winter runs thick in my body.  
I still give chase, although my spine is withering  
into shaves of crisped petals.  
I fish for the nose in the river, assaulted in bruises.  
Winter without her nose is sparse in breath  
but the tears continue  
to fall, like rain,  
this time without a sour  
detachment to save it from the sun.

# IDOL

Nikhila Kulukuru



**A J NICOLOFF**

**Lego Hands**

My room full  
Of Lego bricks and sensitive paper planes.  
Moving my tiny  
Negligible  
Hands at a pace that is somber.  
I understand that  
I have no friends,  
No meaning at this point in time.

## KARA KNICKERBOCKER

### 2 Poems

#### They Told Me

Don't take taxis from outside the Lima airport.  
Danger's written on the license plate, theft will snatch you  
quicker than you can pray to Pachamama.  
*There are men always hungry for something more*  
they said— *book a cab from inside.*

So I did.

Late 40s, thick Spanish tongue, leathered skin,  
he let out an odd laugh at the sight of my hiking boots.  
*You can sit up front*, he motioned  
as I climbed into the backseat, the weight of my pack now a comfort.  
Fragments of language flew as we talked Cusco, ceviche, cervezas.  
I gripped the handle close as he scanned me in the rearview,  
said, *Muy bonita. Me gusta mucho...* spun  
around, slid a hand fast up my thigh—  
split me in a place I can't tell you

## Beating

-After Diane Glancy

If they would have prescribed an easier pill to swallow than news  
that this device was necessary to keep me breathing—

If they could have explained the eternity in 20 seconds of a heartbeat stopping—

If they could have warned me that the first time wouldn't work and anesthesia would  
deliver me  
to the table again before seeing my family—

If they could have prepared my mother before she saw my adult body naked in a tub-  
or me before feeling her hands help bathe, dress me—

If they could have just said never mind wearing a strapless wedding dress —

If they could have written in the reports how wonderful it is that you're a runner-  
but you should probably find a new hobby now—

If they could have diagnosed the symptoms of their words, "It's a shame, you're so  
young"—

If they would have just realized more than this caged organ beats like hell inside me

If they would have just defined *pacemaker* as a parasite in a body I used to know.

**DAVID RODRIGUEZ**

**Grief Eating**

Baby, please. Nothing  
will ever be good again  
or ease your litost?

(We slide into Czech  
for apprehension.) Have  
some coffee and sweet

buns. Plum jam is made  
of finer stuff than my  
understanding. It under-

stands—in runnels  
streaming down a cheek  
and boba slipped beneath  
the tongue. You'll feel

warm. The plum's a better  
spouse, unattached to a  
degree program, and

ignorant of its limitations.  
It soothes because it is  
soothing. Or, the thought

comes again, I'm just  
bad at this. Of all the  
idiots through history,

maybe no one has been  
worse at comforting.  
Though Newton suffered

from an apple, he learned  
how things come together.  
I never built a theory or

could. You're quiet in  
the way monorails are.  
My heart is the plum.

## HELLI FANG

### 2 Poems

#### **Last night I watched myself turn red**

from the window of a stranger's house.  
The wind beneath me like the strangled  
echo of a firework. I wanted my body to move  
so I tied a fishing net to each earlobe—

they caught nothing as I waited in the dark,  
whiskeyed horizon laying a curtain  
over our spines. & don't we touch ourselves  
to remind us of the places where we are not

bruised? How the hollowed deer lying on the  
windshield is just another corpse asking  
to be carried home; how, from the inside  
of a ribcage, it's harder to play the violin

in tune but easier to forget its geometry. Once  
I watched as my mother crumpled to her knees  
in the garage, her hair a halo of white smoke,  
begging my father to run her body over. & so I learnt

what it means to lose restraint: that the sound  
of someone else's heartbeat can splinter into  
a bird's spine if you replace it with your own. When  
I looked back, I saw a man rushing towards me

in the night. His arms were open. I wanted to start  
a fire in them. Because the body only remembers  
what the mind wants to forget. & in the morning,  
i found myself tossed into the river by a bridge

of hands, warm yet bloodlessly white.

## Images from the dark

Somewhere there is a woman  
with hands for teeth. There is nothing  
sharp about her  
except the way she smiles: a stage  
half-curtained to hide the headless necks

of an orchestra. // In a bar I found you  
asking for a trombone that slid  
down the throat  
like water. They sent a woman  
who could whistle the tops

of beer bottles  
instead: & I watched as the thick jazz  
dipped her spine like  
a rabbit ducking beneath a bullet,  
your hands

rimmed red with salt // &  
I pretend to understand how the body moves  
quicker after it is set on fire. How the dark  
passed fireflies into our mouths  
each time they opened

on their own. Because  
// it's the way you swallow eardrums  
that makes me believe in echoes.  
Like how we found our names  
harpooned to birds after we whispered  
them into living bodies. // I remember

the dream where we sat by the river  
with fishing poles  
and reeled in all the bodies we saw  
leaping off the bridge, their ankles  
freckled with bruises // How I thought

I saw god  
once in the smoke, asking me to break  
my knees  
for something other than hurt

**FEATURED POETS**



**Image Credit: Rohan Garg**

## MEGGIE ROYER

### 4 Poems

#### **the year 243,621 octopuses washed up on shore**

They found your thirteen-year-old cousin Ryan floating facedown in the bathtub after a cocaine overdose, the bubbles rising like pearls to the top. The police had to put yellow crime scene tape in the front yard; they wrapped it twice around the trees and the basketball post, even the fences, because all the neighbors were crowding in too close.

You told me that for weeks afterward, all you could think about was the thousands of dead octopuses washing up on the beaches of Southern California, in droves and packs, their tentacles spread out across the sand like lovers' arms surrounding one another.

Sooner or later, you said, everything we love will drown, and, years later, we'll find it all rising to the surface.

*Previously published at Writings for Winter.*

**for a good time, call 1-800 "i miss you"**

I asked the seasons how change feels and they said it hurts like hell.  
I asked my walls how it felt to see you naked and they told me  
it felt like you'd never left and your ankles were the most beautiful thing  
they'd ever snagged a glimpse of from behind the curtains.  
I asked the old man down at the dock sitting beside a fishing pole  
that never catches anything what it was like to be alone  
and learned that even my calendar wants to take a day off sometimes.  
Wherever you are now I hope God or Satan or the tooth fairy  
has been good to you in the afterlife and sometimes  
I pull out your baby teeth just to remind myself that there is evidence  
of your living, that there is proof your feet made prints in the dust,  
that even your eye teeth look like letting go.  
Your loss tastes like an archaeologist's dig in my mouth.  
You seem like you lived so long ago in the time of the dinosaurs.  
If I close my eyes I can still hear your bruises introducing themselves  
to me one by one. The only problem is that I never had enough hands  
to shake them all by the shoulders, rattle them until they spat out  
your reasons why. I wish you'd grown up to be happy,  
instead of jumping out a window.  
So I asked my physics professor what happens to a falling object  
when it hits the ground. He said sometimes the lungs are punctured  
by the ribs first, but sometimes the ribs spike through the heart  
like a meat skewer and cut off all blood flow immediately.  
He said either way was dangerous. I told him loving you was worse.  
I asked you in a dream why you left and you said  
you were surprised I even heard the door close.  
I asked the lone bluebird why it cries and wails at night;  
it whispered that the stars are so beautiful in the dark.  
I hope you saw them on the way down.

*Previously published at Writings for Winter.*

## Bipolar

When the first manic episode came, we ate ice cream sandwiches and I held you against the sink, naked, as you filled my mouth with chocolate syrup. Rome was burning and I was losing myself in your skin, your longings, as the sky outside turned to pink ash. We went grocery shopping at 4 am, you running screaming down the aisles, throwing boxes of Cheerios and instant pancakes in the cart, the store lights flickering on and off with your footsteps. The next day, you dumped the computer out a seven-story building and watched as it crashed into glass on the ground below. Hear that? you said. That's the sound of my heart. I couldn't get you out of bed, so we didn't get out of bed at all. The darkness of the moon on the walls, the sparrows outside, your chest rising like smoke beneath my hands. Everything blue, blue, deeper than Picasso's favorite shade. Every unspoken particular hanging in the air between us: two bodies, inconsolable, or maybe insoluble, we couldn't tell which. Some days your mind is like the Sunday horoscopes: looking up, an unexpected visitor appears on your doorstep, new and fresh things will happen, and other days it's the ones that read Today your own existence will wound you deeply.

*Previously published at Writings for Winter.*

## **whatever happened to Danielle**

You prefer to eat Chinese food with your fingers and tell me in between bites about your cousin Danielle who wanted her parents to love her so bad that she carved the phrase "Living evidence" into her own skin with an X-Acto knife.

When I was a child I expected morphine any time I got a bruised knee or a banged-up heart, but was only ever rewarded with a few swallows of my older brother's whiskey stash.

John always shot heroin in the bathroom with his legs drawn up in the tub like a little bird so my parents wouldn't hear his moan when he inhaled.

I was always the one in charge of tucking him into bed after his high was finished, the weight of our two bodies stumbling through his open door like a couple who kiss with their mouths closed.

So I ask you whatever happened to Danielle, because there are over fifty-three different ways to say lonely and I only know two of them, the first in French, abandonner tout espoir, which means abandon all hope, and the second the sound of your thighs when my tongue moves like sadness through them.

The Aztec civilization was left in ruins when Hernan Cortez conquered them in the 1520s, but that does not mean we, as human beings, are destined for the same fate.

(She pulled up the anchor, you say, and learned to swim.)

*Previously published at Writings for Winter.*

## JEANANN VERLEE

### 3 Poems

#### The Mania Speaks

You clumsy bootlegger. Little daffodil.  
I watered you with an ocean & you plucked one little  
vein?  
Downed a couple bottles of pills & got yourself carted  
off to the ER?  
I gifted you the will of gunpowder, a matchstick  
tongue,  
& all you managed was a shredded sweater & a  
police warning?  
You should be legend by now.  
Girl in an orange jumpsuit, a headline.  
I built you from the purest napalm, fed you wine &  
bourbon.  
Preened you in the dark, hammered lullabies into  
your thin skull.  
I painted over the walls, wrote the poems.  
I shook your goddamn boots. Now you want out?  
Think you'll wrestle me out of you with  
prescriptions?  
A good man's good love & some breathing  
exercises?  
You think I can't tame *that*? I always come home.  
Always.  
Ravenous. Loaded. You know better than anybody:  
I'm bigger than God.

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"The Mania Speaks" by Jeanann Verlee was originally published at *Muzzle Magazine* and appears in her second book, *Said the Manic to the Muse* (Write Bloody Publishing, 2015).

## The Smallest Girl

You notice your breasts have dropped a cup size.  
Two. The toenails you clipped two weeks ago

haven't grown back. The rings you usually wear  
slip straight off your fingers. Your teeth are nubs

the size of a baby's. Every dress drops from your  
shoulders  
to a useless heap at your ankles. You slurp pudding

from straws because spoons are too wide for your  
mouth.

You take showers in the sink, drink wine from  
thimbles.

Perch atop overturned teacups, shouting to be heard  
in ordinary conversations. You teach the dog to hail  
cabs,

sit shotgun on top of the meter. Hitch rides beneath  
shoelaces,  
inside coin purses, along the loops of ladies'  
earrings.

Write emails by leaping from one key to the next.  
You miss, fall into the crevice between the j and the  
k.

Your friends have stopped calling.  
Some rumor you moved away.

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"The Smallest Girl" by Jeanann Verlee originally appeared in her second book, *Said the Manic to the Muse* (Write Bloody Publishing, 2015).

## Tracing Wrist Scars

I used to keep exquisite potted plants.  
Now, just pots of dirt.  
My friend Meghann keeps pots of dirt.  
One with a ceramic hand creeping out,  
another, a foot. Funny, the things we covet.  
I only learned to begin wanting again  
recently. I don't know where to place my wants.  
How to justify them, or actually obtain.  
It isn't fair to want things  
after trying to give everything away.  
The wine isn't fair, the overpriced penne.  
Paycheck, new boot laces, a night out for music  
or poetry or beer. This guilt.  
Wanting a day of sun. Or even rain.  
Things that racket and wail, things that shimmy  
or sit quietly on a window sill.  
Shameful, I think, to covet a tattoo  
or philosophical conversation.  
A book, a trinket. A new poem. A pulse.

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"Tracing Wrist Scars" by Jeanann Verlee was originally published at *Lunch Ticket* and appears in her second book, *Said the Manic to the Muse* (Write Bloody Publishing, 2015).

## GILLIAN CUMMINGS

### 3 Poems

#### When World Is Whale

Something surfaces. Not an idea. Not  
an idea of an idea or even its underside,  
though just afterwards, beneath the surface,  
a white-green shadow, or the opposite of shadow,  
fades into darker depths below. You know nothing,  
not where it came from, not why it appears  
or shows a largeness built from a myriad  
of smallnesses so little they pretend not to be,  
before they are caught, caught by the one, this one,  
this presence of something, someone, moving  
below the motion of all you can't see, all you have  
forgotten in the sleep of your sleep, cradle-rocked  
above what you would call love: of water for air, of  
inside for outside, of black for the blue it breathes.

*(Previously published in Ecotone)*

## **Beech, Birch, Buckthorn**

What breaks the heart more than autumn,  
yellow leaves fallen fragile as a child's  
grasp of joy, the porcelain doll dropped,  
broken, and then the cry, as if to startle God.  
A letter reads, *Who will never abandon  
whomever you thought you were? No one.*  
*You who liked pretty colors and never looked  
at the texture of trunk, the roots gripping, sunken.*  
But the way leaves catch in wet wind, blur  
of rain, motion of water through air, water  
ending without ending, how the heart hears.  
Breathe in and everyone breathes. Breathe out,  
the world exhales. Only the child, fevered, could know:  
*Not to pray, not even for nothing, but to become prayer.*

*(Previously published in Carolina Quarterly)*

## Never Disparage a Moon Girl

The other girls don't understand, won't  
hear rain downrushing shadows of hemlock,  
tangling their hair in evergreen scent, a wash  
of color purpling crocuses pulsed from mud,  
their never-forced-to-dig hands not callused  
like hers, not sun-scorched or wind-wizened.  
They laugh at her licking ants off daffodils to spare  
a day more of glow, giggle at how she counts  
backward to the first butterfly, forward to the last  
frost, days lost nimbly but numbly. How dumb  
can she be? Not to stammer with them the names  
of all boys, yet to bend beneath the beech's first  
buds, early, mourning the last glimpse of orb-white  
cradled in a drop of condensation, how earth cries—

Clawed, spined and thorned—  
the things that trammel her traipse  
through storm-bent brush, briars bruised  
the hues of her hem, lavender over violet,  
torn dress, tresses knotted like wisteria vines.  
Her cheeks as though crows cawed color there.  
Such shame, shame, to be ragged, to be rent, to be  
unceasingly the seed of all-and-ever's contumely,  
not comely in costume but a calamity of form  
once-over-uglied from their scorn: those girls  
who eye her in wait, clamor their magpie-shrill  
calls to bait the breath of her only beauty, her one  
soft-spoken sentence: *Come sticks and stones, come  
talons and tricks, I will love the shy dove inside you.*

## TONI BOWERS

### Five Messages for a Dead Artist

1.

Now that you're gone  
You are everywhere.

In a dim fluorescent aisle  
Amid grinning cereal boxes  
Your voice shines down  
Like sunlight.

On a sweltering street where nothing grows  
Children nod and float to your beats  
Bodies sure, faces intent.  
You dwell in their dignity.

Everywhere  
What you planted quietly ripens.  
Your unreasonable hope  
Your wild kindness  
Your song.

2.

When I listen for you  
This is what I hear  
    A gulp of breath, warm and alive  
    Then a voice I've always known  
    Returns to soften my eyes.

When I look for you  
This is what I see  
    A child spinning in dust and glare  
    Precise, resigned, remote, enchanted.  
    A mystery shaman dancing alone  
    Face in shadow, fingertips bright.

Miracles live in the curves you trace  
Absolution hovers in your pause.  
You move, and the sacred world returns  
I am lost and found in your light.

3.

The simplicity was, of course, illusion.

As if you had only to give in.

As if you did not get up every day

And carve it again with bleeding feet.

As if you did not work alone all those midnights

All those 4 a.m.'s

Spinning straw in darkness to discover the secret name.

4.

You were taller in person than people expected.

Gentler, more watchful, more normal. Quicker.

Surprisingly strong, too, it was said.

But of course you were strong.

It took strength to enchant a roaring darkness

that reached for your quicksilver with thousands of arms.

It took strength to keep faith with a vision of healing sure to be mocked.

It took strength to stand straight amid stampedes

Finding stillness within.

It took strength, after giving all you had,

To face down hate with courtliness and courage.

5.

Thank you.

# MEMORY JARS

Fabrice Poussin

