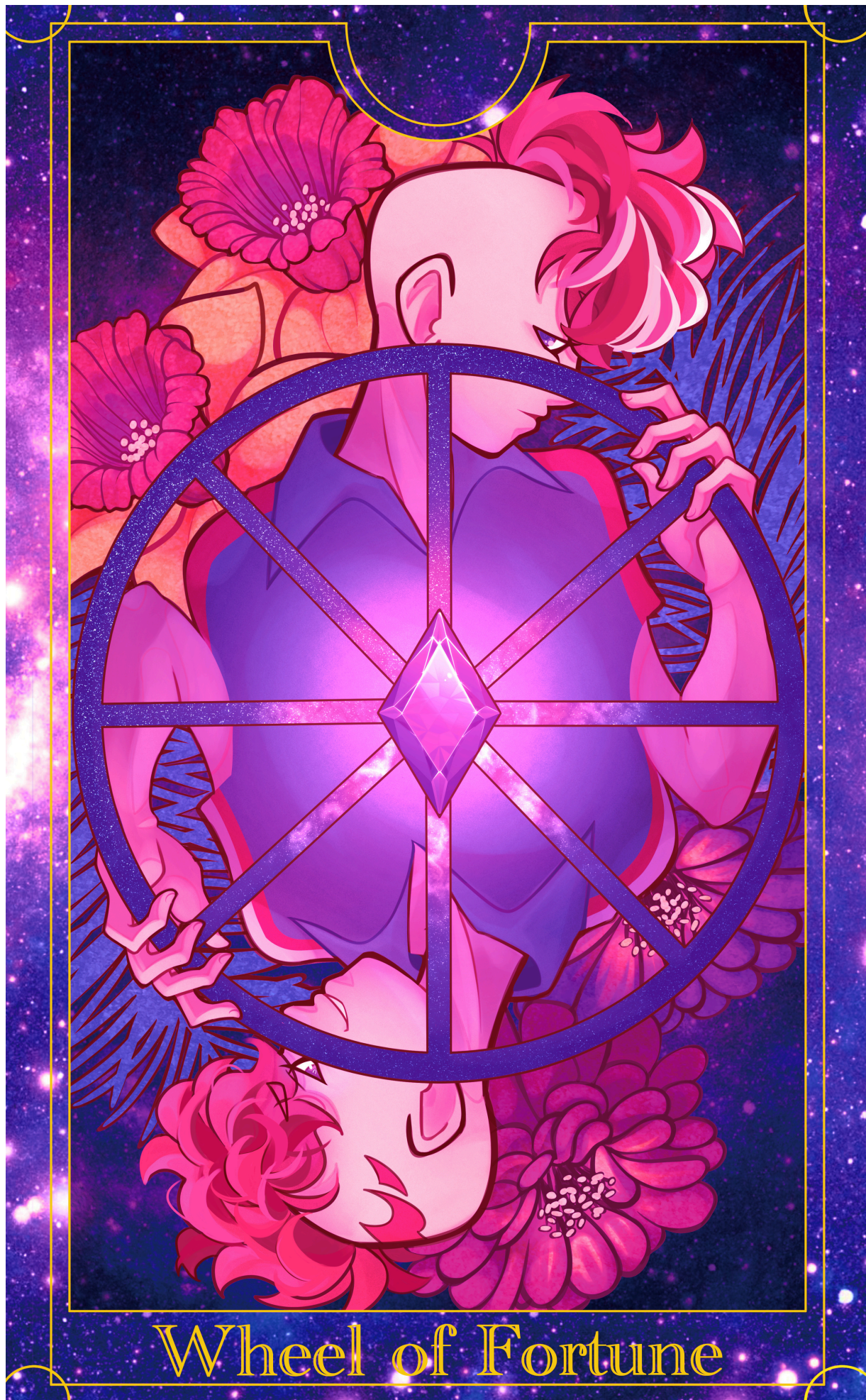


The **ARTIFACT NOUVEAU**

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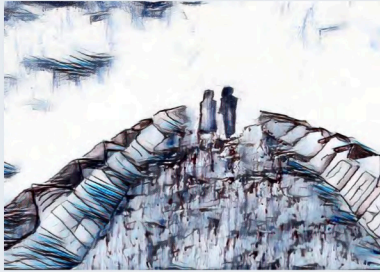
FALL 2023
SPRING 2024



Wheel of Fortune by *Ro Schmidt*

Artifact Nouveau

Artifact Nouveau



FALL 2021/SPRING 2022 VOLUME 7 ISSUES 1
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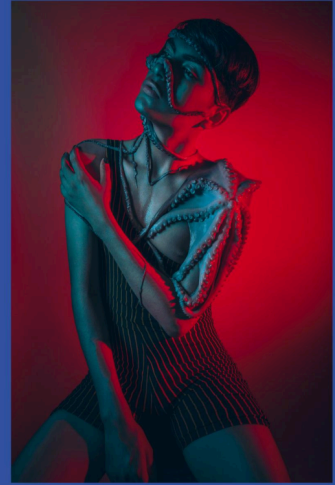
Fall 2021/Spring 2022
Volume 7 Issues 1 and 2

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Fall/Spring 2020
Volume 5 Issue 4

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ARTIFACT NOUVEAU



FALL/SPRING 2020 VOLUME 5 ISSUE 4
A Writers' Guild Publication

ARTIFACT NOUVEAU



FALL 2019 VOLUME 5 ISSUE 3
A Writers' Guild Publication

Fall 2019
Volume 5 Issue 3

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ARTIFACT NOUVEAU



FALL 2018/SPRING 2019 VOLUME 5 ISSUES 1 AND 2
A Writers' Guild Publication

Fall 2018/ Spring 2019
Volume 5 Issues 1 and 2

.....

EDITOR'S NOTE

April 2024



Dear Readers,

This is the post-covid comeback of The Artifact Nouveau,

Starting with (nearly) an entirely new Editorial Board, the Winter 2023/Spring 2024 issue was challenged from the start. Add to the plate scheduling conflicts, a learning curve and major technical issues and the three publication delays begin to make sense.

Despite these obstacles, working with the Editorial Board has been a very positive experience. For instance, the Editorial Office has been reclaimed. The tiny 5x5 room, covered in a layer of dust and cobwebs hadn't seen a visitor in some time—if the 2007 scrabble manuals and diskette labels weren't a big enough hint. With some spit and polish, the office returns to the glory days of activity—perhaps, in the spirit of our charming 1970s architecture we will get a rotary phone. In the same spirit of blowing the dust off the office, the team has restructured the networking and submission processes and opened a Writers Guild Discord, with a QR code located on the back page.

As for the future of the magazine The Artifact Nouveau will continue to be a platform for the creative voice of San Joaquin Delta College. Everyday new faces walk onto campus, carrying with them fresh concepts and ideas. The Editorial Team wants to hear more from this renewing community: more poems, essays, articles, interviews, features, artworks and photography.

We have big plans for the future!

Thank you for reading,

K. L. Brandon

Head Editor
K. Brandon

letter from the editor

The power of the human voice as a composite of each person's life experiences, from their moments of inspiration to their moments of despair and seemingly insurmountable challenges, sings from the pages of this latest issue of *Artifact*. In this time of AI generated content and writing, the unique characteristics of each voice seems even more potent.

In this issue, we will learn of how individuals like Sammie Hernandez, Neetu Bhullar, Gregory Ramirez, Joe Leonardi, Rosemary McKeever, Fermin Fernandez, and Michelle Vang have persevered through challenges and come to hone their own views on the nature of existence in their specific human forms. We will read fictional stories by the Writers' Guild members Joe Romero and Kaitlynn Brandon as well as a poem by Savannah Byrd, all who have come into their own as writers after having engaged in intense writing practice during our bi-weekly meetings.

Writing as a creative act is a sacred way for our human minds to make sense out of our world as well as an action that can carry us through our most devastating moments as we begin to put experiences in the context of our lives' threads.

As writing asks us to draw on our individual life experiences, so does the act of reading require us to pull from these same experiences as well as with our past reading experiences. Reading is a creative act in which everything we have ever read repeats in our minds. A chorus of past and present texts that we have read will play in our minds while we read the latest issue of *Artifact*. No piece of writing stays in the past in a passive way; it informs our present like an artifact unearthed shows us how we were in the world, how we are in the world now, and how we can be in it moving forward.

I hope that our readers will find a reason to start recording and writing their own un-AI generatable life experiences after reading this latest issue of *Artifact*!

Gabrielle Myers
Gabrielle Myers

ADVISOR TO ARTIFACT AND THE WRITERS' GUILD
PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH
SAN JOAQUIN DELTA COLLEGE

Break Self: Feed, a New Poetry Book, on Pre-sale!

<https://www.finishinglinepress.com/product/break-self-feed-by-gabrielle-myers/>

Too Many Seeds, Poetry: <https://www.finishinglinepress.com/product/too-many-seeds-by-gabrielle-myers/>

Hive-Mind, Memoir: <https://www.amazon.com/Hive-Mind-Gabrielle-Myers/dp/0976498693>

Farm-to-Fork Column: <https://insidesacramento.com/sacramento-dining/farm-to-fork/>

Website: www.gabriellemyers.com

Editors Choice

Of all the talented entries this issue, there are so many that stand out. As with all creative platforms some pieces speak directly to the viewer. In that spirit, these are the pieces that spoke directly to me.

K. L. Brandon
K. Brandon
Head Editor

Art

Upside Down.....Michelle Vang

As a connoisseur of art oddities, *Upside Down* was love at first sight for me. An inverted merperson seated in the sky. Even with such a lighthearted color palette, this image is a big statement.

Cosmos.....Anne McCaughey

McCaughey's *Cosmos* presents a very alien image, but the longer the viewer spends viewing the more familiar the image becomes. Is that aflame? An eye? A heart? A light in a dark tunnel? In *Cosmos* the patterns of life are universal and cyclical.

Poetry

Dolls Picnic.....Srinjay Chakravarti

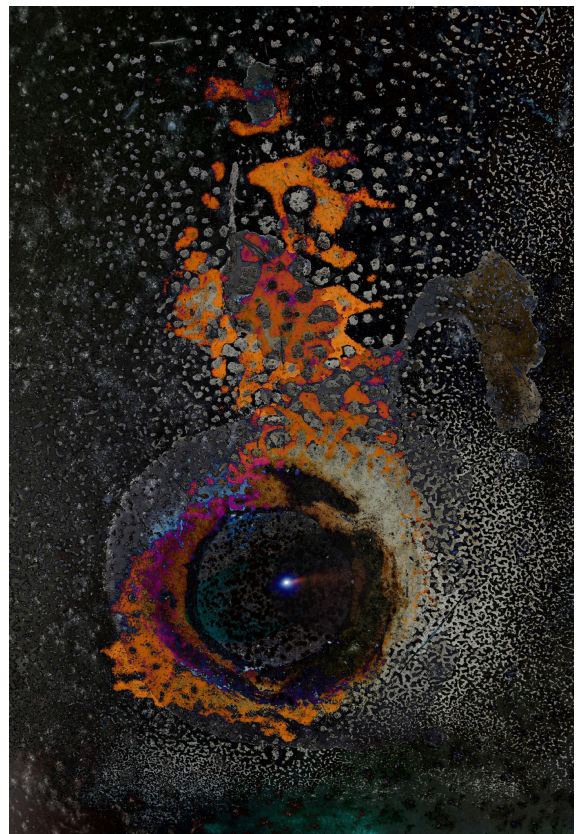
Chakravarti's ethereal poem reminds readers of the ingenuity of children's imagination. Word play ignites memories of childhood whimsy and creativity. Sometimes for adults it's easy to forget just how innovative child's play is.

Envy.....Rosemary McKeever

For anyone who has lost someone important, this poem rings true. The surreal experience of doing the mundane, of continuing on living while missing a piece of yourself is so very hard to express, yet McKeever easily makes it poetry.



Upside Down...Michelle Vang





Cosmos....Anne McCaughey

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All Once Ann McCaughey



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Budd 102
5151 Pacific Avenue
Stockton, CA 95207

Editorial Team:

Editorial Director—Gabrielle Myers
Editor-in-Chief—Kaitlynn Brandon
Managing Editor—Ro Schmidt Senior
Editor—Andrew Un Associate Editors
—Ansley Chen, Savannah Byrd,
Andrew Un, Joe Romero

Design team:

Design—Ro Schmidt
Assistant Design—Kaitlynn Brandon

Production & Publishing

Production Editor—Gabrielle Myers
Production Assistant—Ro Schmidt

Marketing and Social Media team:

Engagement Directors—Savanah Byrd,
Kaitlynn Brandon
Marketing Director—Kaitlynn Brandon
Marketing Representative—Savanah Byrd

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La Vida de Loteria 2

by Anne McCaughey

Letters To Myself

Mariana Husling

Dear Alcoholic,

You are the one who makes me forget
The pain and the regret
The loneliness and the fear
The things I don't want to hear

You are the one who gives me a thrill
A sip, a gulp, a swill
A buzz, a high, a glow
A way to let go

But you are also the one who hurts me
You make me sick and dizzy
You make me lose control
You make me sell my soul

You are the one who breaks my trust
You make me lie and cheat and lust
You make me hurt the ones I love
You make me hate myself

You are the one who needs to stop
Before you make me drop
Before you take my life away
Before you make me pay

Please, Alcoholic, leave me alone
Let me heal and grow
Let me find a better way
To cope with every day

Sincerely,
Inner Child

Dear Inner Child,

I read your letter, and I felt a pang
Of guilt and shame and sorrow
I know you think I'm the one to blame
For ruining your tomorrow

But you don't understand how hard it is
To live in this cruel world
To face the stress, the pressure and pain
To deal with the problems hurled

You think I'm the one who makes you forget
But you're the one who makes me drink
You're the one who can't handle the truth
You're the one who needs to think

You think I'm the one who needs to stop
But you're the one who needs to start
To face your fears and your wounds and your
scars
To heal your broken heart

You think I'm the one who hurts you
But you're the one who hurts me too
You're the one who makes me feel alone
You're the one who makes me blue

Please, Inner Child, don't judge me so
harshly
Let me be and let me cope
Let me find a better way
To live with some hope

Sincerely,
Alcoholic

From Darkness to Light

Sammie Hernandez

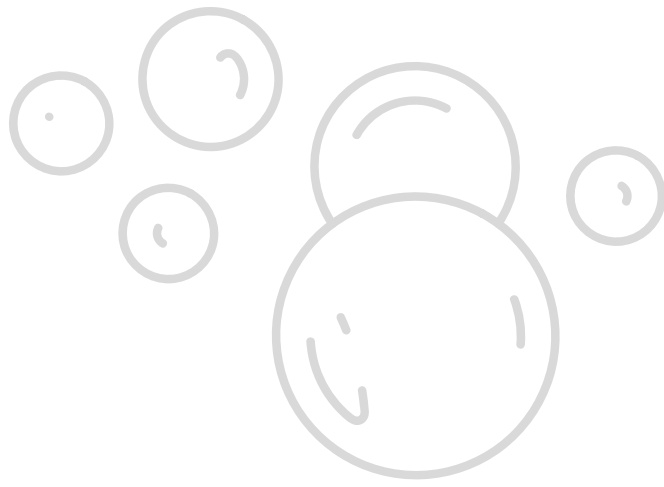
Once a beaten child, father loved to drink, I was his little punching bag,
I tried to be a playing kid instead, I hide to avoid the monster brother,
Teachers said I was messed up in the head, put me in the corner,
Abused, battered, beaten, molested, too young to understand,
Barrios became my friend, gang banging is all I knew, too cool to be in school,
Drugs, booze, needles too I survived heroin induces, DIED many times,
Battled Mental Health didn't succeed suicide, yet I tried,
Lost, lonely and abandoned, parents did not care a thing about me,
No hope, no life just barely breathing, just existing,
Asking why? I had no answers, there was something in me that just didn't disappear,
Crazy crimes of mine sent my life to Prison, my eyes saw so much death and corruption,
Shut down to the world around me, heart was full of hate, despair, mass destruction,
Chosen few tried to save me just wasn't time,
I knew of God, but God was not my friend, I blamed him,
All a sudden one day the light above hit my head the dove of life found me,
Come to find out that Gods Angels were all around me kept me safe,
On my knees I prayed and asked forgiveness, cried until my soul was free,
Now I stand 4'11 tall, PROUD Native American Indian, full of life,
Hopes and dreams goals I have I live each day to help many who have a story just like mine,
I went to programs to teach me about addiction, Now I know what I once did not understand,
I accept my truth, I admit my faults, when I'm wrong, I correct myself,
Now I own my own car, I have my own place, I love me,
Seventeen years off drugs, Fall of 2023 and now a student at DELTA college,
I fought the battle, beat the odds I didn't die a statistic,
I am A SOLDIER from the streets, I am an OG, I am an EX-Dope feign, yes, I am,
Most of all I AM A WARRIOR, worth so much more, the end is not over....cont....



Deep Secrets

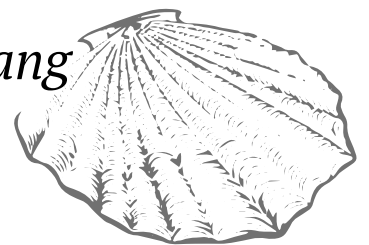
Sofia Venero

Amidst the abyss where shadows dance,
Beneath the waves in a mystic trance.
Creatures of legend in depths concealed,
Drowned in mysteries, their fates are sealed.
Eerie whispers of the abyssal zone,
Fathomless chasms, an otherworldly unknown.
Giant squids lurking, their tentacles spread,
Horrors below in a kingdom of dread.
Inky blackness swallows the light,
Jellyfish glowing, a spectral sight.
Krakens stir in their watery lair,
Leviathans lurking, beyond compare.
Midnight currents, a siren's call,
Nautical nightmares come to enthrall.
Octopuses twist, taking inhuman shapes,
Prowling predators, an ancient race.
Quietude reigns in this hidden place,
Rays of hope scarce in the ocean's embrace.
Serpents of legend, colossal and sly,
Tales of terror spread through public outcry.
Uncharted horrors call the ocean home,
Vast and enigmatic, dark secrets roam.
Whales in the deep, singing abound.
Xanadu below, where no man is found.
Yonder the darkest parts of the sea,
Zero escape from its obscurity.



Twisted Fall

by Michelle Vang



PENELOPE & SELENE

Kaitlynn Brandon

PENELOPE & SELENE

by *Kaitlynn Brandon*

In the salt sea, a seraphic moon dipped her toes. She was a lean crescent, barely there at all, with a light so weak the water looked black as ink against the pale beach of Ithaca. The moon saw a vision, the same she had seen every night for twenty years; a solitary figure, a woman, wrapped in white cotton like a funeral shroud, a crown of soft iron-red curls flowing like water over bare arms, plump and tanned from the sun, and toes that had abandoned sandals for the texture of the fine sand. The figure stepped close to the water. The moon had waxed and waned nearly two-hundred and forty times to the same vision, and after those long years, if moons could know any human by name, it would have known hers: Penelope.



“Magnificent Selene,” said Penelope, “Silver shining goddess cloaked in the dark. O, goddess, to you I offer my greeting and praise. Odysseus, my husband, sails the far oceans, may your light guide him, in your time, back home to me.” It was a ritual well memorized by both celestial and human, in which one remained as silent as a wall and the other bent with grief like Atlas.

As all the nights before, once the praises were given, Penelope sat on the cool shore and buried her feet in the sand. Once, long ago, there had been faith in the following prayers she told Selene, after the many years that faith had dwindled to hope and hope into habit. Penelope only came to talk to the moon because no one else would listen.

The moon was silent.

PENELOPE & SELENE

"I still believe Eurymachus, and his gang of suitors were plotting my son's death. For that reason, I pray to you that he never returns. Let Sparta, my once home, be his sanctuary." The water lapped at her toes. A swift green crab scuttled over the shoal. On a rock near the shore, a rare, red-billed seagull spied it.

"I want to go with him," continued Penelope, "I would be happier to see home, and mother, and father." Penelope pressed her palms hard against her eyes, "Foolish daughter of Icarus and Asterodia...I cannot abandon what Odysseus entrusted to me." Her nostrils flared. The hands came down and, despite the shine that threatened tears, her eyes held only a fierce anger.

The moon looked down at her.

"Otherwise, Eurymachus and those who challenge him will either eat the entire estate, kill me or both. They've killed many of the goats. They've littered the courtyard with refuse and trash and our wine, some laid up by Odysseus's grandfather, has nearly been depleted. Even while they extend a hand to court me, their other finds a way up my maids' skirts. Yet you do nothing."

Penelope looked up at the moon, "Twenty years is nearly half a human lifetime."

When still there was no answer, as Penelope had come to expect, she said, "If you, a weak Olympian woman who bends to the will of an earthly water god, then I will cease worshipping your name, and offer myself, soul and body, to Poseidon." Many nights alone she'd spent dreaming of following Anticlea to Hades, by walking into that deep, inky water.

The moon winked out. Astonished, Penelope jumped to her feet. The green crab, that had been picking up small clams in its greedy claws, scrambled away. The gull called. To the right, a soft, silver light drew Penelope's attention. There stood a startling woman, six-foot or taller with a delicate, shapely form, and an endless cascade of dark hair that wrapped around her pale skirts and flowed back into the ink sea. Wide-eyed Penelope could not speak.

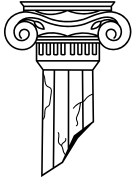
"Dry your eyes, child," said the spirit in a voice like song. Penelope obeyed. "I have seen what you desire, child—a desire which will go unfulfilled if you give yourself to the cruel Poseidon. He is the source of your troubles, not I.

Men like Odysseus sail believing they control the waters, but oceans are deep and filled with nasty monsters and jealous spirits. Your husband challenged Poseidon and has paid for it every day for ten years."

Penelope did not hesitate, "Bring Odysseus home," she said, clasping her hands together.

"I have not seen him for some years now," admitted the goddess, when Penelope shrunk under hopelessness she added, "I cannot say for certain what has become of Odysseus, whether he lives or dies it is on land these past few years, but for you my faithful Penelope, I will send Hermes himself, and with his winged-sandals, he will find your Odysseus. Now go and finish weaving the eventual death shroud of Laertes, father of Odysseus, though yet he lives healthy and strong. Then cover your face with a veil and call together the suitors of your court. Show them the tapestry and announce that you will choose a new husband by way of a contest."

PENELOPE & SELENE

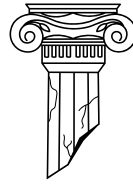
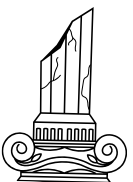


Penelope finished the tapestry in a month. As instructed, she veiled her face, left the sanctuary of her home, called together Eurymachus and the other suitors, and presented the tapestry.

“The shroud is finished,” she said, “A choice will be made by way of a contest,” her audience greedily consumed each of her words, sure that their wait had finally come to an end.

“My husband’s bow...” she began, and then stopped. Who should cross the threshold of the court but Telemachus and with him, limping, was an old beggar man. Generous Penelope welcomed the hobbled elder into her home and bid her maids to give him bread and wine. The old man hardly drew another glance from those suitors whose eyes clawed hungrily at her, but Penelope looked at him, and he at her and she saw that his eyes were clear and green, alert and wise. It startled her. In those eyes, she felt the same alien power that had made up Selene. It was magic, of that, she was sure. The tides had shifted, and somewhere on the shore, a red-billed seagull called.

End.



Rain

Evan Hugh Flander Pueliu

By the simple sounds of rain
With its washing winds
I am myself again

I am thoroughly tamed
And removed of all fins
By the simple sounds of rain

There’s no one but me to blame
So I check my bones, my limbs
I am myself again

I am returned to sane
But reminded of sins
By the simple sounds of rain

When I think I’m only vain
I search the dusty bins
I am myself again

So this is what I gain
From nature’s subtle hints
By the simple sounds of rain
I am myself again



The Fall Night Casts a Shadow

Evan Hugh Flander Pueliu

The Fall night casts a shadow
Upon the broken glass of leaves
Street lights betray the chattel
And hurry them to their needs

Its cold wind picks up limbs
And shakes off the new dead
On the floor they meet their kin
And blanket a new bed

It's hard to imagine the break of day
When the darkness slowly struggles
To find the perfect way
To say it's lonely and has troubles

It fights for every breeze
For every cold breath and shiver
It hardly knows when to leave
But it sure knows how to deliver

One stray squawk from crow
And you know the morning's coming
But not before her neighbors know
That your day will sure be boring



The Old Man Sits High Upon His Throne

Evan Hugh Flander Pueliu

The old man sits high upon his throne
He looks down upon the herd that stands
below

He knows that all he must do is ask
And for him they will sow Death

For he has created an answer to a question
they did not know they sought
And he gave it to them for their toil
And they are grateful for it for they know
not

That their lord is Darkness and he is Death

As they march upon his enemies
Their eyes glazed, wide, and black
They see nothing, nor hear anything
And as battles consumes them, they fall

The old man sees their bodies bloat
He watches the fowl feast upon them
And he has learned nothing
For him, these people have not changed

And he has gained, he thinks, more of the
Blood of the Earth
Taken from inferior creatures
By inferior creatures
For his good

Now, the old man will call upon his new
people
Who stand upon this new blood
And he will create an answer
And they will be grateful

And they will toil
And they will perish

RAW

Savanah Byrd

thick, bloody, not Ready to be consumed
Devour and Desire, buried deep
potential of sickness worries me not
cold juices, a warm throat; insatiable
Steak delights provide brief Satisfaction
regret will find you before you Swallow
tapeworms timely arrivAl tomorrow
sickness will be the cure to my hunger
crying, begging, screaming, *satisfy me*
Burning in my Belly
Devoted to your Digestion
chugging and churning
close is not close enough
Consumption is not close enough
ache as you are Ingested
Tastebuds testimony; you are without a flaW
Flavors of the Flesh, this intimacy leaves them in awe
Infatuation this deeply leaves love *ra*

RAW



Dig In by *Kaitlynn Brandon*

Lurking like a lion PROWLING for his feast,
 The shadows of hatred running through his veins,
 He SMELLS for the innocence of purity to take as his own,
 Out in the open in day and night walking next to young and beauty,
 There's no need to hide, out on a HUNT,
 Bold cold hard as stone yet LOVELY and ATTRACTIVE,
 He is the master of his domain the role's he plays is DISASTER,
 Corruption in his brain his thoughts are one his own,
 A GENTLE voice says, "Hello may I help you",
 Reaping widow's shrieks of laughter wailing children met their dreadful monstrosity,
 Not a soul is safe no not one,
 Makes you FEAR what you cannot see tricks the trusting beings,
 Manipulates, DEVOURS, and destroys,
 Captures, TORTURES, plays killing games, dominoes of teeth
 His fun FANTASIES quench his thirst,
 Blood, flesh, guts, stench in the soil of his home,
 Graves too many to count bodies with no names,
 Yet BRILLIANT intelligent beyond smart,
 Clean neat and smells like soap and Armani nails trimmed,
 Pants ironed, creased, hemmed, shoes shiny buffed,
 Orderly precise and POLITE,
 Hung up all the tools, washed, labeled and stored,
 Closed the door and made some coffee,
 Looked at his watch grabbed the keys and left,
 Parked the car, locked, walked in and said, "Goodmorning" sectary,
 She replied, "Goodmorning Dr. McPayne".

Hunting

Samie Hernandez

Things I want to do? things that make you go "HUMM"
 Just maybe know what love is, to fall in love is thee unknown
 Just maybe have a family my very own, I wonder what it is to be married
 Or own my own bike, what a dream that would be
 Hike a huge mountain in Yellowstone Park, and fly down like an eagle
 Ride a skateboard again without falling off, back at Capital Park San Jose
 Build a 64' Impala burgundy and silver trims with white walls roll'in on 20's,
 Get messy with a paint ball fight, just to see who fires best
 Run a thousand miles away from reality, owe how that must be
 Travel a new country other than Mexico, not to fair away I might get lost
 Paint a portrait worthy for the museums, make thousands of memories
 Make many lunches for the hungry and homeless, make my heart smile again
 Bake a cake make a steak grill the pork, ice cream or fruit on ice
 Dancing the dust away from noon til midnight, living as if it's my last night
 Laugh at dumb jokes even if they make no sense, just because my soul is happy
 Buy toys for children that fight cancer in St. Juds hospital, then I know I did my job
 A mixture of things many things but they are my things I would like to do.

List poem
Samie Hernandez

Dolls Picnic

Srinjay Chakravarti

an omnium gatherum of discards,
the rejectamenta of the household—

the quotidian flotsam and jetsam
of the schoolhouse and playground
pack luncheon baskets
with inedible marvels:
devoid of provender, perhaps,
but not of inventiveness

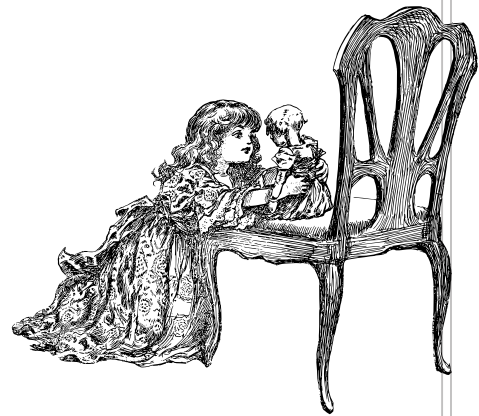
from Daddy's can of shaving foam
comes a dollop of fresh rich cream;

pieces of pink chalk, mixed with water,
caricature rose-flavored milk shakes;

an orange sweater button, wrapped
in its torn white wool, yields
an egg poach (sunny side up).

from kitchen to library, garage to garden,
mimesis victuals the luncheon table
with a verisimilitudinous feast—

ready recipes that utilize
the ersatz, the metaphorical, the ingenious
to feed all the neighborhood's families.



yellow-and-brown matchsticks serve
as ice-cream wands with chocolate topping;

wood shavings from the carpentry workshop
double up as potato chips and cornflakes;
pieces of cellophane imitate jelly crystals,
naphthalene cubes serve as sugar lumps.

and not to forget the Castro oil,
dripping molten gold into glass jars:

wild honey for the teddy bears.

Scarecrow

Srinjay Chakravarti

Clad in rejectamenta
of the farm, the beggar's rags
are always my lot:

discarded coat,
tattered trousers,
threadbare scarf.

With a broomstick
and a wooden peg
for my bones,

and with hay and straw
as my flesh—

I stand guard, all alone,
in my little corner of the field,
doing absolutely nothing

all day long,
In my syntax
of perpetual stasis,

My pinioned arms
are always stiff,
my brains are always stuffed

with sand, sawdust,
and all kinds of idle thoughts.
I keep these all under my hat:

oh, wouldn't you like to know
just what goes on inside my head!

Hay, man! I was a caricature
of a traffic policeman
in another life.
(Or that's what I'd like to believe.)



As I stand erect next to the fence
with my semaphore or singularity
I'm always so sinister—

the only reason why I am,
is to scare the daylight
out of the birds.
Oh, stone the crows!

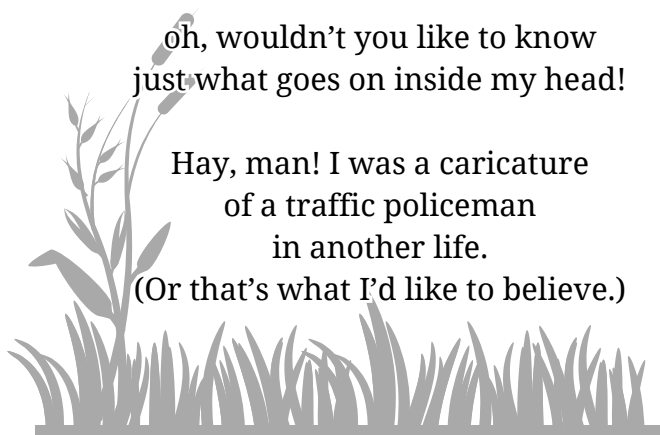
My body rots with the season;
sun or rain, wind or fog,
I stand in my little corner—

one-legged yogi, always still,
always mediating
on the ontology of my loneliness
which is all that makes me real.

Trespass the territory
I have been set out
to mark as my own,
but at no peril

to yourselves,
I always tell my avian frenemies.
After all, use what can

a skeleton like me do?
Oh, if I could but
only flail my arms
even once!



IN FRAGRANTE DELICTO

Srinjay Chakravarti

Within the hothouse of our passion
All the ladies here are
In fragrante delicto.

Immortalized in the gardens of our yearning,
Where we relish our redolent desires
With the cherished names of all those
Unattainable screen goddesses and sex symbols,
Queens and princesses, singers and sirens,
With whole we are all perpetually—
And collectively—in love.

It is here that our Scentimental adoration
Is preserved in Cinderella's and Amber Queens,
Snow Brides and Sunshine Princesses—

Luminous with the pollen of nostalgia
Of all those whom we can never surrender
To the effluvium of oblivion.

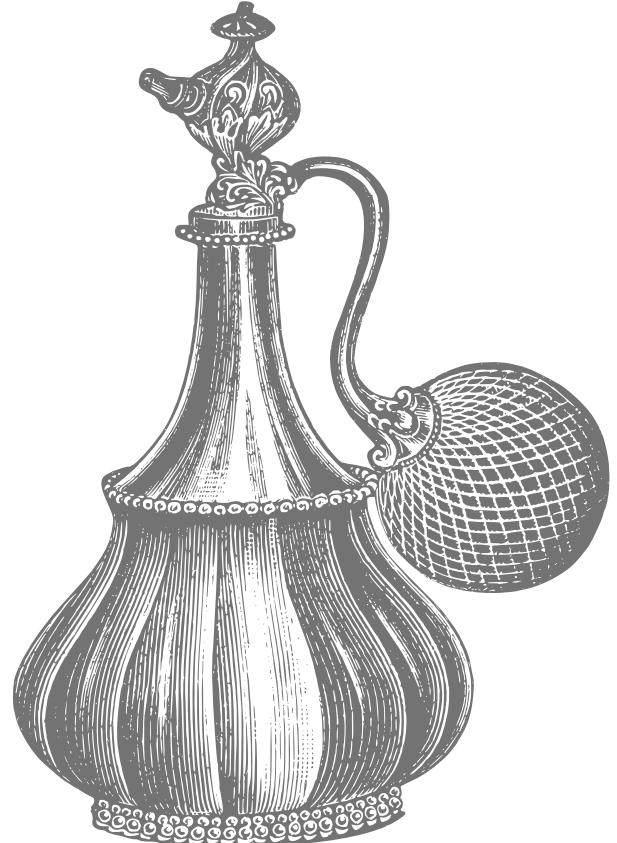
Princess Diana, Marilyn Monroe,
Elizabeth Taylor, Andie MacDowell,
MAria Callas, Dolly Parton,
Catherine Deneuve, Audrey Hepburn...
The list goes on and on.

Would a rose have ever
Smelt as sweet
By any other name?

What better way, then,
Than to say it with flowers?
This is how we cherish
Our public sweethearts
And universal valentines,

Even as the musky petals
Of our youths wither away
Into the crumpled parchments
Of unfulfilled spin desire,

Into the dry desiccated pages
Of our diaries and notebooks.





The Baracade

Fermin Fernandez Jr.

Trapped in a small town for years with no way of escape, not really, I couldn't wait to get out - so much so it felt like forever waiting for a chance to hit the city like I did way back when.

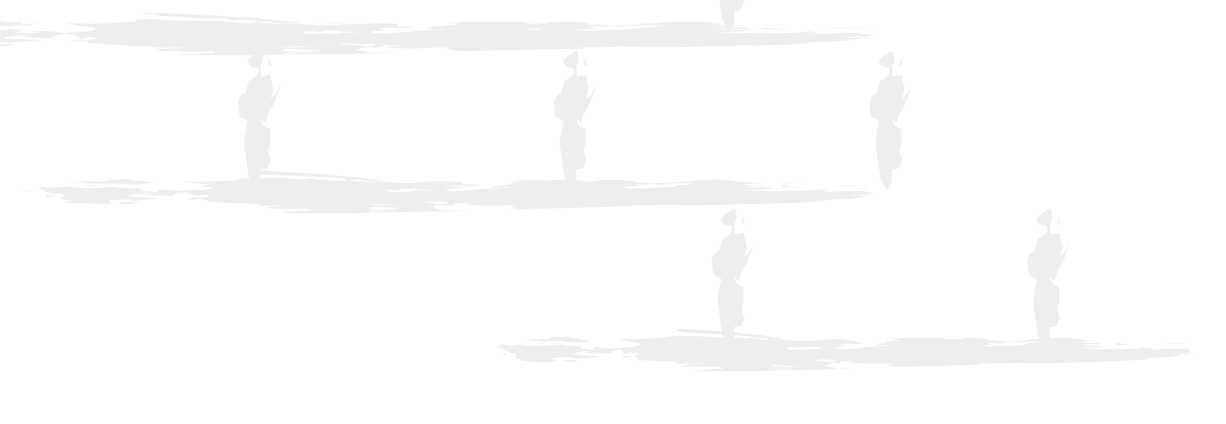
Fortunately soon I found myself in the bay area with a friend from afar, we wondered and wandered from Japan town to the painted ladies, until eventually resting atop a great green hill park - perfect for pictures and paltering. We searched for an arcade to sooth our souls with games and sleaze our minds with intoxicating liquors, but before we faced the entryway I spotted a shop dispensing cognitive euphoria on a stick, the tantalizing temptations arose like dough in an oven, getting warmer.

One tap of a synthetic shape and a quick puff of bitter black grounds later and something ominous as clouds greying above a body of wavy waters erupted within me. In the arcade we played, garnering youth and excitement fulfilling, certainly this will be a day to remember...

Colors bleed, eyes shine

Diverse folk, none recognized

Voice of games, or fear



Masked

by *Anne McCaughey*



It is so close to the date, yet, your desire will not be denied. We make love, unbridled is our passion. To unimagined climax, we bring each other.

Behind closed lids, your beautiful eyes are now hidden. I lay next to you. My hand, upon the outline of our child. Eager to see the world, he presses against your belly. I kiss your cheek. My love, I proclaim. I am with my family.

We are not asleep long.

A contraction wakes you.

You feel a pop, then a trickle.

It is time. We rush to your house. When we are near, you phone your sister. Within the hour, she will be there.

I am like a kid on Christmas morning. I have never felt such joy. I have never been so happy. A life, one created by our love, will soon be here.

My breathing is rapid.

Our son is coming.

My heart races.

We near your home. Your contractions continue. Less than ten minutes after the last, arrives the next.

Your face turns sad. As you place the next call, you tell me you love me. My excitement dims. At his work, your husband's phone rings.

A FATHER

Joe Leonardi

A FATHER

Of paternity, he is unaware. I am the father. However, he remains, your husband. My joy is gone, in its place, despair. It is he, who will witness the birth of **my** son. It is he, who will hold him when **our** son breathes his first.

It is he, who will sit next to you, to share the advent of the life which **we** created.

I stop in front of your house. There is little time. You aren't sure when next we will speak. I reassure you--all is fine. Before darting from the car, you tell me you love me and kiss me. As I pull away, the headlights of your sister's car greet me.

To the hospital, I hurry. I observe you arrive, close behind, so does he. Blissfully blind to the truth, in he rushes.

I leave. For hours, I drive. I am not by your side. I am not there to hold your hand. I am not there to tell you to push. I am not there to wipe the sweat from your brow or tears from your cheek.

I don't know how you are doing. I don't know if you have yet given birth. I don't know if our son has seen his first sight.

What I do know--

It is he, who **our** son will cry out for in the night.

It is he, who **our** son will consider his father.

It is he, who **my** son will call daddy.

Unexpected and unplanned, but not unwelcomed, was his conception. You attempted to leave, but each time you tried, unforeseen events prevented you. Tears fill my eyes.

I will never know my son!

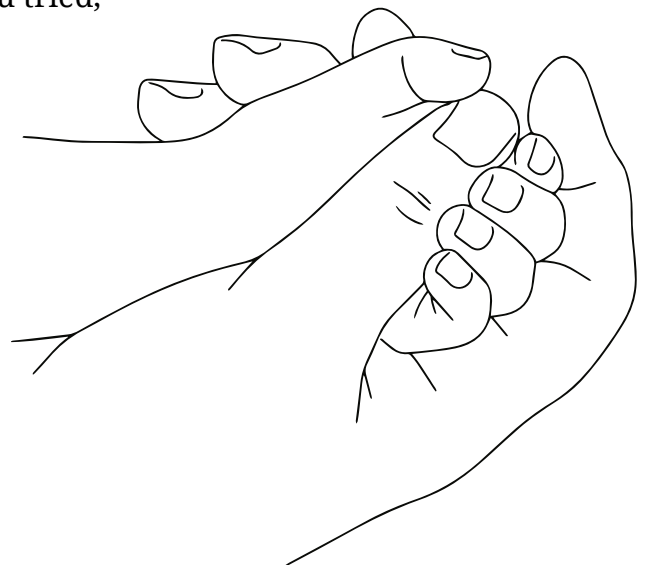
It is that truth, which leads me to the revolver.

It is that truth, I mutter as I press the barrel to my head.

It is that truth, I repeat over and over, as I cock the hammer.

It is that truth, the last words I speak, before the explosion echoes.

The End





Moonrise by *Anne McCaughey*

Envy

Rosemary McKeever

The night is haunted.

The wet is smothering and the backroads opaque,
The night remains opaque, my headlights do not penetrate.

Reality congeals and twists, reshaping itself around the new fact of your loss,
Contorts in a spasm of hard knotted densities, the repulsive musculature of grief
Reality creeps,
Slides around, encircles our throats, stops our breath.

The envy of the devil wins another round.

The Fall Night Casts a Shadow

Evan Hugh Flander Pueliu

The Fall night casts a shadow
Upon the broken glass of leaves
Street lights betray the chattel
And hurry them to their needs

Its cold wind picks up limbs
And shakes off the new dead
On the floor they meet their kin
And blanket a new bed

It's hard to imagine the break of day
When the darkness slowly struggles
To find the perfect way
To say it's lonely and has troubles

It fights for every breeze
For every cold breath and shiver
It hardly knows when to leave
But it sure knows how to deliver

One stray squawk from crow
And you know the morning's coming
But not before her neighbors know
That your day will sure be boring

The Blood Moon

Rosemary McKeever

The moon rises in eclipse, an un-rising,
A baleful hole in the sky, an anti-moon,
Like banked embers, like a shuttered window.
It exerts an ashen gravity that
Draws my eyes but does not gratify them.

Stillborn and lifeless it sullies the east.
Bloodless it hangs obscure and appalling,
Consuming its own dull radiances
Rather than scattering. It eats itself
Up, quenches itself, collapses inward.

Forbid we should set any course or trek
That orients on such a moon as that!
We would stray. Such moon in its blight cannot
Light a straight path. Better cower and wait
For the devils to pass in the dark.



Upside Down

by *Michelle Vang*

“I won’t fall into this again
the web of candied words
promises made in a haste
to win my heart over
I won’t fall in love again
and let my mind waste away”

-a fool doesn’t fall in love, they fall in lies

Pink Rose *Janet Tabora*

Blushing bloom drawing my gaze;
and gives me delight every morning;
Sweet perfume surrounds me velvet petals, soft to the touch;
Bees and birds gather around you, singing and dancing a beautiful song;
Your rose water is appealing to my taste;
And you provide beauty to nature, for everyone to enjoy;

A Fool Doesn’t Fall in Love, They Fall in Lies

Michelle Vang

Stump

Laila Henderson

In being given a name,
I have become nameless,
the name branded on the roots of a battered tree
its trunk carved, chafed, and chipped,
its bark picked and prodded—
skinned like a dead animal
its lumber sawed, hauled,
and loaded
its fruits picked,
and their sweetness consumed
its leaves perched and sat upon
its branches climbed and swung from
its sap extracted.

Nature could never be so cruel
her most violent winds, like a sigh—
gentler than these abuses.
Severed in two,
it remains a stump,
in being given a name it has become nameless.



Scuttled

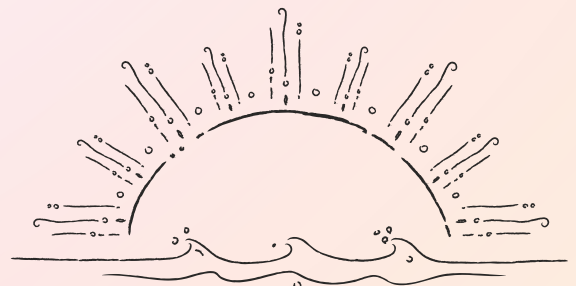
Rosemary McKeever

I know the sun is going down in flame,
spiraling its wreckage in a plunging dive;
I will not look. This vainglorious display
Recapitulates each day, theatrics
On repeat like adolescent angst. The
Detritus of its falling streams out along
Its western path in histrionic pinks,
Overstate mauves and tawdry purples.
The gilded west sinks down to ashy gray.
The sun is scuttled; what is that to me?

We used to join to watch the setting sun
And side by side, waving off mosquitos,
Witness the denouement unfold, curtained
Skies pull back, the flapping black of ravens
Winging home, gleaming water shining flat
As bars of silver at our feet, bronze-gold
Flares in aqua air as fragile as a dish.
The night would close up softly like a book.

We thought we had a lifetime left of dusks.
We only had one at a time, just one
Each time, dusk and dusk, and then no more.

This spectacle, this flailing show of lights
Unsanctified by nearness of your flesh—
I scorn it.





Little Ghost

Rosemary McKeever

She occupies a small place, she's a little ghost--
There are so many other, bigger ghosts swarming behind my eyes,
But her place is a little one, a
Dark little girl ghost with an incandescent smile.

I know we share a space.
Even though I never see her, never see her.
I cannot forget her.

She is small and a little damaged (for life will do that).
She strikes out, breaks things, wanton, irresponsible,
But the breaking does not heal her.

She is small but formidable. Does she know it?
In her, the Amazonian imperishable strength of womanhood,
The dauntless rash potency of desire for transcendent expansion and expression,
The desire to be seen in truth and embraced, and the seeing is the embrace.
She is small but she has the heart of a titan (first impressions are always the
truest) bound.

I keep a little nest in me where she huddles
Warm and forlorn wrapped in self-protection.

I keep watch from far away.

In my mind I see her laughing,
Swimming like a nymph,
Drenched in color,
Washed in sunlight, sparkling like a diamond.
Eager,
Wistful.

Little ghost, I wish thee joy,
Health, wealth, healing.
I pray thee peace.

Because She was Prepared

Neetu Bhullar



Around 2 am on a wretched day, I received a call from the oncologist. The doctor gave his verdict, “Last stage liver cancer. She can live up to six months or less.” My mom was dying! It was just difficult to digest the news. According to the doctor, she had liver cirrhosis, and what caused that is still a mystery to all of us. You see, my mom was always an extrovert person, but she never touched alcohol in her life. And the doctors could not find the root cause of her liver cancer either. My mom was blessed with two daughters and cursed with two husbands-both rotten as hell. Life was bliss when we moved to California and left my alcoholic father and my mom’s first nightmare behind in India. The year was 1991. Then, she decided to invite another trouble in her life in 1995.

My maternal grandparents were always against the guy she chose to marry. My uncle got a classified ad to search for a suitable guy for my mom. Within no time to spare, she went to India, found this guy, and made him her life partner. Who is a life partner? A companion, caregiver, lover, or all the above. My mom found none of the above. He was verbally abusive, and alcoholic, and did not care much about my mom, yet my mom weaved a dream that one day her husband would love her and respect her. An ugly nightmare shadowed her dreams and took that hope away from her too. As an elder daughter of hers, I supported her, but my love was not enough to fill her empty vessel.

“Ma, why do you get irritated so soon?”

“You know my condition.” She brushed her long hair and twisted it in a bun.

“I don’t even feel like calling him, Dad!”

“Hmm...” My mom breathed in what I was saying while looking at her slender complexion in the mirror while she got dressed to go to her job as a babysitter.

“He is not worth it. He criticizes your work and is unthankful. Leave that jerk! I threw my black crossbody purse on her bed.

“It is not easy. Do you think I have nothing better to do than keep on changing husbands?” She looked straight into my red face. The conversation was not going anywhere, but the summer heat was just adding to the conversation.

“Ma, what do you mean? You are not telling me that you are going to be miserable for the rest of your life with a person who does not give a damn about you. He called you, bitch yesterday.” I clenched my teeth as the anger roused again in me.

“Do you think my friends, our relatives, and our society will spare me? They would think that something must be wrong with me. That is why I left my first husband, or he left me. And now, him.” She waved her smoothed fair-skinned hands in the air and walked out of the room.

Because She was Prepared

Indians! I thought to myself. My mom grew up in a culture that would worship goddesses and put them on a pedestal of supremacy, but when the women raised their voices against the unjust, then they were the culprits. The famous saying in our society is, "What will they say?" I have yet to find out who are 'they' we are talking about here. Do they care when someone is going through misery, or weeping at night quietly, and wishing that things will get better for them magically? I think not. Thus, every time I visited my mom in Milpitas from Tracy, she would rant and beef about her husband, but sadly refused to take my advice.

My mom spent 20 long years with her husband. My mom was a fighter, she did not give up on him, but at the cost of her misery and emptiness.

The year was 2014 on the 4th of July, and I was with my husband at Home Depot, I received a call from my mom's husband.

"Your mom and I came to the hospital for her check-up, but they have admitted her."

"What happened? What kind of check-up?" I fumbled over the words and tried to grasp what he was saying.

"Your mom had severe dehydration, so we were at the hospital, but they kept her."

"I need to go to Milpitas." I insisted that my husband and I drove to the hospital in San Jose within an hour.

Lying in the bed on the 7th floor, my mom with a protruding belly looked pale. I rushed to her, and she embraced me in her skinny arms. The tears of pain and fear took over me, but they stopped somewhere in the middle. Good daughters do not let their worries be revealed to their sick parents. My mom was as beautiful as a Chinese doll with long dark hair, fair smooth skin, and eyes- not so Indians, but small and squinty, height- barely 5'2', now lying on the bed of misery. I could not recognize her at first with her pale-yellow face, eyes dung inside, a frail old lady with I.V drips pinching her left arm.

Something that day died inside me. I knew that something terrible was on the way. I still remember that morning when I was dusting around the house and my mom called me. She was weeping and I felt sick for her. She was in emotional pain. The year was 2013. "I don't think I can go on with this life anymore." My mom called me sobbing.

"Ma, I am so sorry. Leave him and come to me. Enough is enough!"

"It's not easy!" Her voice broke. "He curses at me every morning when I sit down to pray. It is just so unbearable."

"But mom, you must take action!"

"Do you know Neetu? Sometimes I feel that the hell will be better than the place I am living in. Death is more soothing than living like this."

"Please, don't say that! I love you." I choked on my words, and she hung up.

That morning my mom foreshadowed what was coming because six months later, May 31st, 2014, the doctor declared that she wouldn't survive for exceedingly long. God has played a practical joke with us. All her two unhappy married lives, she prayed and prayed to find happiness and tranquility in her married life, but nothing was granted. And just one time when she pleaded death upon her, God did not disappoint her. Turned out that the protruding belly she complained about was not fat, but the water that had been released from her cancerous cells.

Because She was Prepared

I remember the time I stayed with her in her apartment with the nursing home bed, wheelchair, and all the medicines that were given to her by her nurse. My mom who was once an icon of beauty was on her deathbed displayed as a skeleton. Nothing in your life is more painful and stressful than seeing your once busy bee parents, helpless and frail on their terminal beds. The sight of her made me curse the lord, the society that she believed in, and her husband who neglected her. The darkness fell upon me that night-the longest night ever in my life. As if I knew that my mom was dying, but I felt hopeless, part of me prayed that watching her was too painful to bear, *so please God, put her soul to rest. She is done being miserable in this life.*

My mom breathed her last breath on June 31st, 2014. Part of me had died with her as well. I lost my mom-my best friend. It has been 8 years since she left me, but sometimes I wonder if she was praying every night for her death. My mom ironically stopped crying when she found out that her case was terminal.

As if she was content and calm with God's decision. I remember, she would say to the healers from the church with her hands up in the air in a fist and the biggest smile ever, "I am happy! I am feeling good!" Sometimes I wonder if the words she chanted on her deathbed were just her way of saying, "I am happy and I am feeling good because I am prepared for my death."



RECONCILIATION

Gregory Ramirez

Tonight, we take turns
Planting words
In earth that was dry
From three months of silence.

Whatever was is no more
As the moon glows above
& we stand,

Mere minutes from
A new day with possibilities
As unclear to us
As what the creek nearby
Carries beneath its surface.

4:37 P.M.

Gregory Ramirez

for *Gabriella Corrine Ramirez*

Five weeks before she and I expected,
Your mom underwent the caesarean
To free you from a body infected
So neither of you would be carrion.
As small as you were, your loud cry was sweet,
And I must admit tears flowed at the sight
Of you—from scant hair to miniscule feet—
And more so as you were taken at night
To ensure your lungs would strengthen. But I
Would discover this was merely groundwork,
Leading me never to ask myself why
You possess resolve, releasing my murk.
Even though that was fourteen years ago,
My love for you, *mija*, will always grow.

GLIMMER AT COYOTE POINT

Gregory Ramirez

The jet's descent disrupts
The nearby ebb, yet
The farther it flies
From this cypress—
Under which I sit on
This flat stone
& recline against this rock,
All while inhaling
This salt-tinged air—
The farther the morning sky
Braves beyond the beach,
Its torso lost to the rising blue.

Tattoo

Samie Hernandez

How about IL the pain on my flesh!
Blood; literally drippn
Staining the floor.
Ink deep into meaty body
Pain making my heart
Ba BOOM! Ba BOOM! Ba BOOM!
A THOUsand tiny needles
RippN IJ my skin.
I can HEar the machine
Making funny sounds.
It's like fighting IL A PORCupine
It's KNUMB, It's TICKLY
It's GRATIFYING, ART.

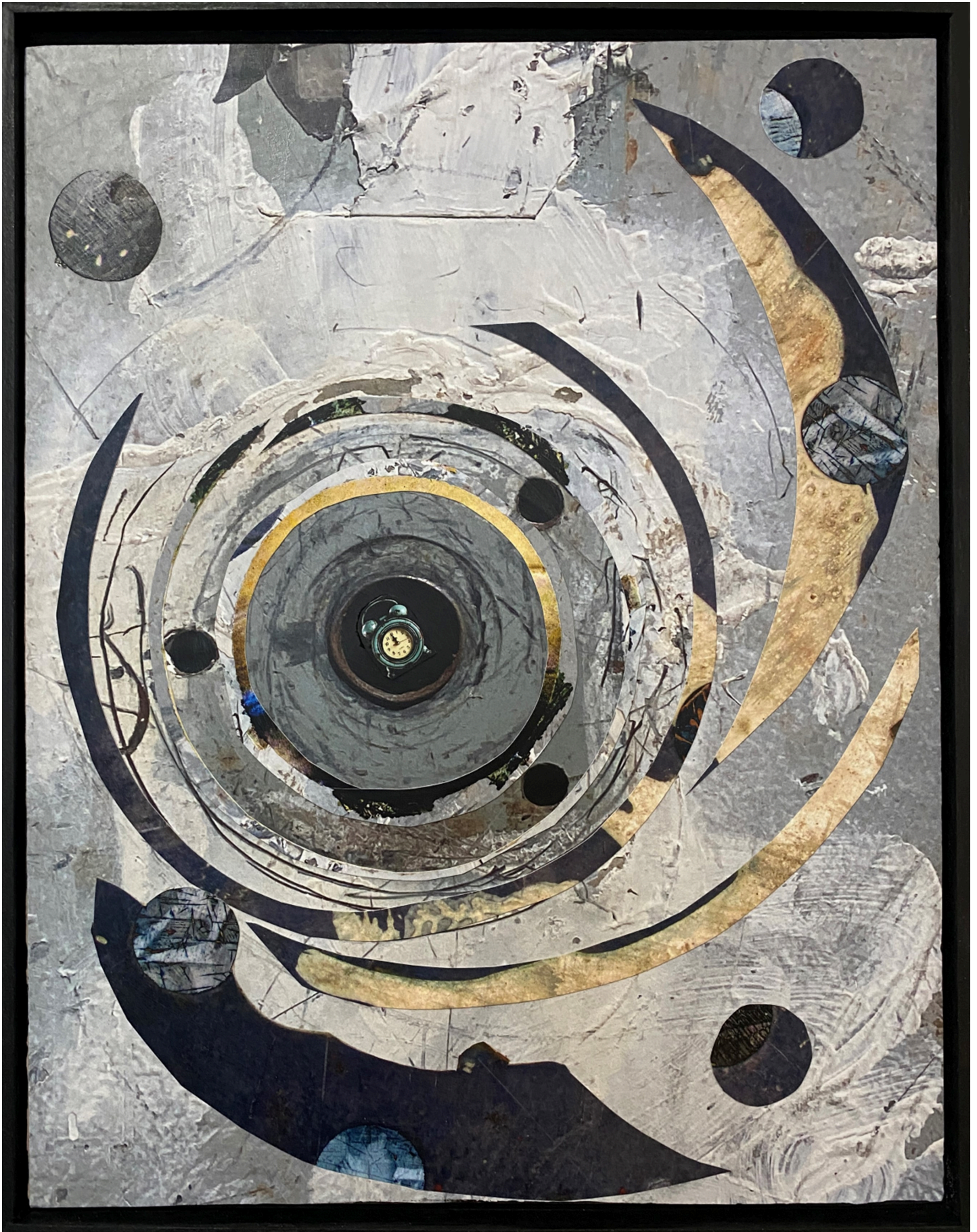


Haze

by *Anne McCaughey*

Feels Like Home
Robin Renée Blanc

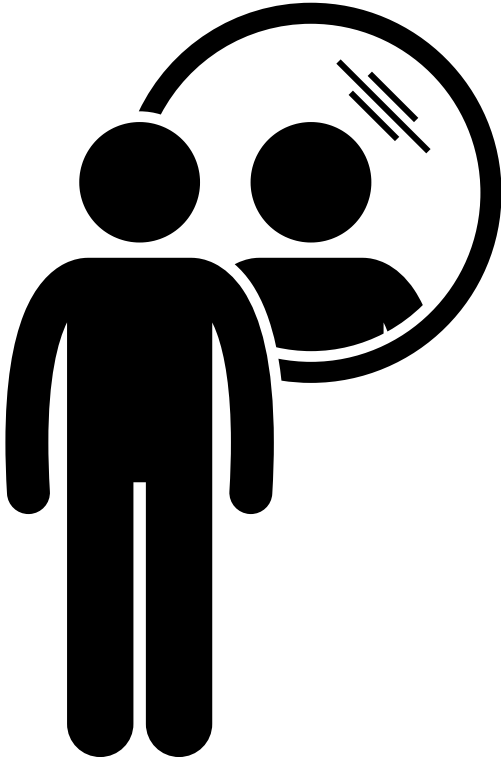
Laying in bed and
Hearing the train whistle blow
Feeling like I'm home



Vortex by *Ann McCaughey*

I'm Not In Love

Joe Romero



Imagination takes over reality to a room full of red. 'Everything is red, if my feelings were a color, they would be red, my feelings are drenched in red. I am lost through the concept of love, a country I have never visited, a place I have no passport to. Love, an idea the world is obligated to accept in order to find happiness and erase loneliness. Personally it is something that hasn't alerted my interest but due to this strange circumstance that I am in I am intrigued.

Trapped in this red room of feelings with no escape. My imagination, who I have named Imagine, appears before my eyes standing with annoyance, as if he or she wanted to leave right away. I could never tell what Imagine was, a boy or a girl. He or she had a feminine posture but carried masculine facial features. "What is with you, I'm tired of hearing you questioning yourself while you stare at pretty girls with so much curiosity on your face. It's really creepy, if only you could see yourself Grayson" said a barking Imagin

"Well I can't help it, okay? Seeing pretty girls just makes me feel interested and sad at the same time," said Grayson with a pouty face while hugging himself for comfort. The topic of love is very confusing for any mortal or supernatural being.

"Look I'm your imagination and I want to help you through this, but I mostly want to help myself so I don't have to sit in your head and endure the constant echoing voices. Let me watch your life in peace please!"

Grayson fires back, "Hey it's not my fault I feel this way. Why is this happening now? My heart can't take it anymore."

The red room was now a regular room that belonged to Grayson as Imagine noticed the change of scenery with his head turning everywhere.

"Can I turn the tv on?" Imagine trying to move on from the conversation.

"No just listen to what I have to say" announced Grayson.

"I'm 24 years old and I have never been in a relationship. When I say that to people they think I'm a liar. All my friends have had girlfriends and they were in love or had their summer fling with them and they still have girlfriends."

"You have friends!?" Imagine said with a surprised expression. Grayson ignored the comment and continued.

"It is so annoying to say this but I kind of want to know what that is like. It's even sadder for me because my parents put life insurance on me because they believe I will die soon with an empty heart. What is love" said Grayson.

"Google says love is a feeling of deep affection for someone or something. Hey you can fall in love with your right hand when you're alone" said Imagine .

I'm Not In Love

Grayson punches down on Imagine's head.

"Get real like I said that kind of stuff doesn't seem to phase me at all. I'm giving up on love, that's the final word" said Grayson with a sign of relief.

"I would take that back if I were you," said Imagine.

"Why" said a concerned Grayson.

"Well I just looked at your heart with Imagination and from what I could tell you, you don't have much longer to live. Your heart is losing its love" said Imagine.

"What do you mean love?" said Grayson.

"Well everyone's heart has to have a deep affection for someone or something and for your case Grayson you don't have any love for anything or anyone" said Imagine.

"That's not true I love my parents and I love my playstation five" said Grayson with nerves.

"Yeah but it's not that kind of love because everyone needs a certain type of love for their hearts to be satisfied. And since you never experienced a romantantic kind of love your heart itself is desperate for it and must know what it feels like" said Imagine. Grayson walked in circles with both his hands placed on his hips.

Does that explain the red room?" said Grayson.

"Most likely. You must find and be in love with someone before your heart dies on you" said a very serious Imagine.

"Does that mean I have to talk to people? And be on social media?" said Grayson sounding scared.

"I'm afraid so, but hey at least I'll see a different place besides your room" said a cheery Imagine.

Grayson attempted every single idea of trying to find and fall for girls. With very little help from Imagine Grayson was struggling with every encounter. For starters they went to the easiest place to possibly meet women. Dating apps. Grayson sat at a bookstore with Imagine hovering over his head who will do his best to coach him on his first time date.

"I can't believe I'm doing this, I have never been on a date. I don't know what to do" said a panicked Grayson.

"Will you stop worrying? Just be yourself" said a supportive Imagine.

"Isn't this like paying for a hooker to sleep with you. The only difference is that the girls—

are on an app and not in the streets" said Grayson. "You have a lot to learn about how women work my friend" said a disappointing Imagine. Grayson only lasted 2 minutes. Imagine popped out of Grayson's head with a demanding approach. "What the hell happened, how do you blow it in under 5 minutes?" said Imagine. "She asked for a brief summary of myself and I gave her my answer" said a quick Grayson. "And what was your answer?" said a questioning Imagine. "I'm a big ass nerd who will call you pretty every 5 minutes" said an embarrassed Grayson.

"Oh brother you didn't. Well it's on to the next idea" said Imagine.

The next quest to save Grayson's heart was to find a potential love interest in Grayson's college class.

"Okay do you see anyone that you like buddy" said an excited Imagine.

"Hmmm I don't know, mostly all these colors look the same. The only difference is the different shade colors of their makeup. Ugh, why is this love dating thing so hard to find" said an exhausted Grayson.

I'm Not In Love

"Well normally love comes to someone when you least expect it but for your situation we got to speed things up for you. At this point any girl will do to get your hopeless romantic saved" said Imagine.

"Hey, why do you want to save me anyway? I know you don't like me much" said Grayson.

"I want to keep playing your PS5 when you are not home. If you die your parents will sell it for cannabis lotion" said an honest Imagine.

"Wow you must really care about me," said Grayson rolling his eyes.

After days of rejection from every girl at his school, neighborhood, and city Grayson has now truly given up the quest for love. Grayson sits at a park bench staring at the sunset with ducks sitting peacefully in the water. Imagine being there with him.

"Oh come on, even ducks can fall in love but not me. What am I doing wrong? I'm telling these girls who I am and what I do for fun, my intentions for my love life and my looks aren't bad at all. I'm handsome" said an out of breath Grayson. Imagine comes out for his piece of advice.

"Too bad you ain't gay we could have got that heart of yours to be satisfied if you were gay" said a funny Imagine.

Grayson chuckles "I know but I'm not believe me I thought I was" said an upfront Grayson.

"Well dude I don't know what to tell you. It is not you at all, these girls are just too picky nowadays you don't know what exactly they want or how long they are gonna toy with you. Just know they're all missing out on a great guy" said Imagine. Imagine left to play Grayson's PS5 knowing that he would die with his heart unsatisfied, but couldn't bear to see him dead. "The world is in spring, while I sit in cold winter" said a sad Grayson.

A miracle has happened. A gold sunshine light approaches Grayson until the light is visible. A woman with blonde white hair, chocolate colored eyes and an athletic fit figure stands in front of Grayson's presence. Without warning she kisses Grayson on the lips where Grayson falls down with his legs in the air hyperventilating with his face as red as a crayon.

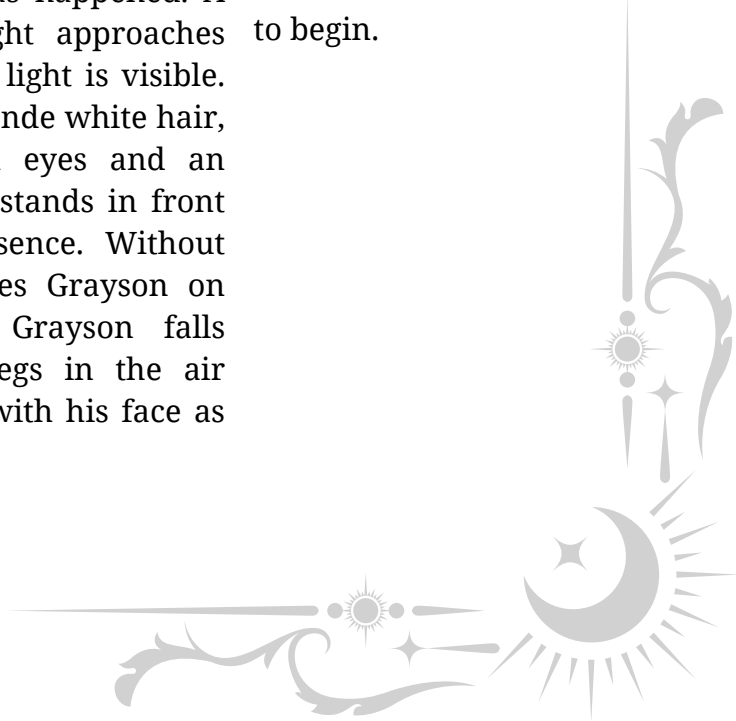
"Wh-wh-what was that for you could've made my heart explode" said a blushing Grayson covering his face. The woman says her name.

"Sorry about that my heart just told me to kiss a guy with an empty heart, which belongs to a person like you, huh?" They both stare at each other's eyes.

"Name's Viola. I happen to never kiss anyone before but for some reason I'm glad it was you" said Viola reaching her hand towards Grayson to help him up. She helps him up.

"I'm Grayson" reaching his hand for a handshake. She shakes back.

"Nice to meet you" she said all bashfully. They start holding hands and walk off for their love to begin.





Fall

by
*Ann
McCaughey*

seasons *Jose Reyes*

my mood changes with the seasons
colder than a winter snow
a summer's day's just what i needed
to melt away the pain and sorrow
the sunlight dims as grey clouds form
and spring showers turn to storms
the autumn leaves breeze through the air
and i feel my joy turn to despair
everything is still and the sky begins to clear
as i anxiously wait for the light to reappear

New Year's Day on the Farm

Robin Renée Blanc

A had texted me a few days before, inviting me out to ST's parents' farm. (ST is one of her instructors). Of course I said yes – I'd been wondering what I'd do on my day off. She picked me up a little after 9 and then we went to pick up some more teachers: S from Canada and R from Australia, and his (Chinese) wife. A had borrowed a friend's car that was more rugged than her regular car. I would soon discover why.

The drive out to the farm took about 40 minutes. We had a lively conversation as the scenery became increasingly rural. Finally, we turned off the main road and drove through a small village. We kept going and eventually turned onto a dirt road. It was quite narrow and bumpy – we pulled over several times to let vehicles coming from the other direction pass by. And then we went down into a gully, through a short tunnel with a sharp left turn immediately after – and were trapped, because a huge truck was coming to go through the tunnel and it was in the middle of the road in preparation for making the tight turn. We couldn't scoot over due to mud and a significant drop off.

The truck backed up and over so that we could squeeze by.

We then made another turn a bit further on, and the road was even narrower, and super bumpy. It reminded me of Jamaica – but much worse! The scenery had changed significantly at this point. There were lots of those small mountains that are so familiar from Chinese paintings. I tried to take photos but the car was bouncing up and down so much that most of my photos were blurry.

Next, we went up a very steep hill with a hairpin turn, and then down the other side, which was also steep. At last, we saw rows of trees and a building in the distance. We had finally arrived!

———

We got out and greeted the other guests. ST gave everyone clementines while we chatted outside and then he took us inside the house, where his father was busy cooking.

He gave out more clementines before leading us back outside and around back to where the chickens and turkeys live. On the way, he and his mom gave us some small sticks of wood so that we could smell how aromatic it was. He told us that the wood wasn't for making furniture – it's used as incense and for medicinal purposes.

As we approached the birds, his mom went ahead of the group and got a big scoop of birdfood and called them. Suddenly there was a mad rush as dozens of chickens and several turkeys raced over for food. ST's mom offered the scoop of food to several people so they could feed the birds. I declined. I had a childhood incident with the flamingoes at Ardastra Gardens in Nassau and didn't want another one.

Once everyone finished playing with the birds, we set out on a tour of the property. ST said it would be about 40 minutes. I was glad that I'd worn my leather walking shoes, which can be cleaned off pretty easily, and gave support in the uneven terrain.

New Year's Day on the Farm

One of the women was wearing four inch heels (!) but she gamely went along, while **S** complained repeatedly that he should've worn different shoes, and a young guy kept stopping to wipe his shoes on the clumps of grass. (They were both wearing athletic shoes).

Other than the rocky path, and some mud puddles, the hike was enjoyable. The two farm dogs accompanied us, though they kept running off to chase something in the brush. We saw a bunch of pellets which were certainly scat. **ST** told us there were wild goats in the mountains and they often came down to the farm to graze.

Upon our return to the house, **ST's** mother gave us all cups of tea made from the leaves of the trees from the farm. It tasted herbal. She had large diagram showing the tree and how the different parts can be used. We asked what kinds of trees they were, but none of the Chinese people knew the English name.

We then were invited upstairs into what appeared to be a large living/dining room. It had a TV, sofa, coffee table, chairs, and a large round table at the far side, which was set for dinner.

ST brought more clementines for everyone, and also some slices of fresh wild papaya. We chatted for a while and then were invited to be seated at the table for lunch. A large bowl of turkey soup as already in place and was quickly joined by a whole crispy turkey (including head and long neck). It was juicy and the crispy skin was delicious. We were each given a plastic glove and told to just tear off a piece of meat. This was easier said than done however, since the bird was piping hot. Someone brought a knife and managed to cut up some of the turkey so that we could all get a piece.

Then, the parade of food began. I lost count of how many dishes were served, most featuring different parts of the turkey, or the same part cooked in a different way. There were some veggies, but it was primarily turkey, raised by **ST's** parents. They also brought out an enormous egg custard and also a dish featuring the famous *Thousand Year Eggs*. I tried the former, but not the latter.

After the meal, some people went outside for another walk, while the rest of us stayed to talk. I did have to use the toilet, so went downstairs to use it.

When I came out, **ST's** mom filled a large bowl with water for me and dropped something into it, indicating that I should rinse my hands. The water smelled herbal.

Shortly after that, the walkers came back and it was time to leave. Of course there was a lot of talking as we made our way downstairs and said our goodbyes. **ST** was handing out small bottles, saying that it was from the trees. A lightbulb flashed in my head. I asked him if was oil. He answered that it was, and that they distill it themselves. OMG! I told him that I sell essential oils! He called his mom over and told her, though she explained that they don't produce enough to market it – it's just enough to share with family and friends. I had to know the name of the tree! Fortunately, one of the guests was able to find it on his smartphone: *camphor*. Aha! That explained the familiar smell.

ST told us their story. His parents had owed a factory, but they sold it and moved to the countryside to farm. They'd had to clear the land, build the road onto their land, plant the trees, and then wait years for the trees to mature.

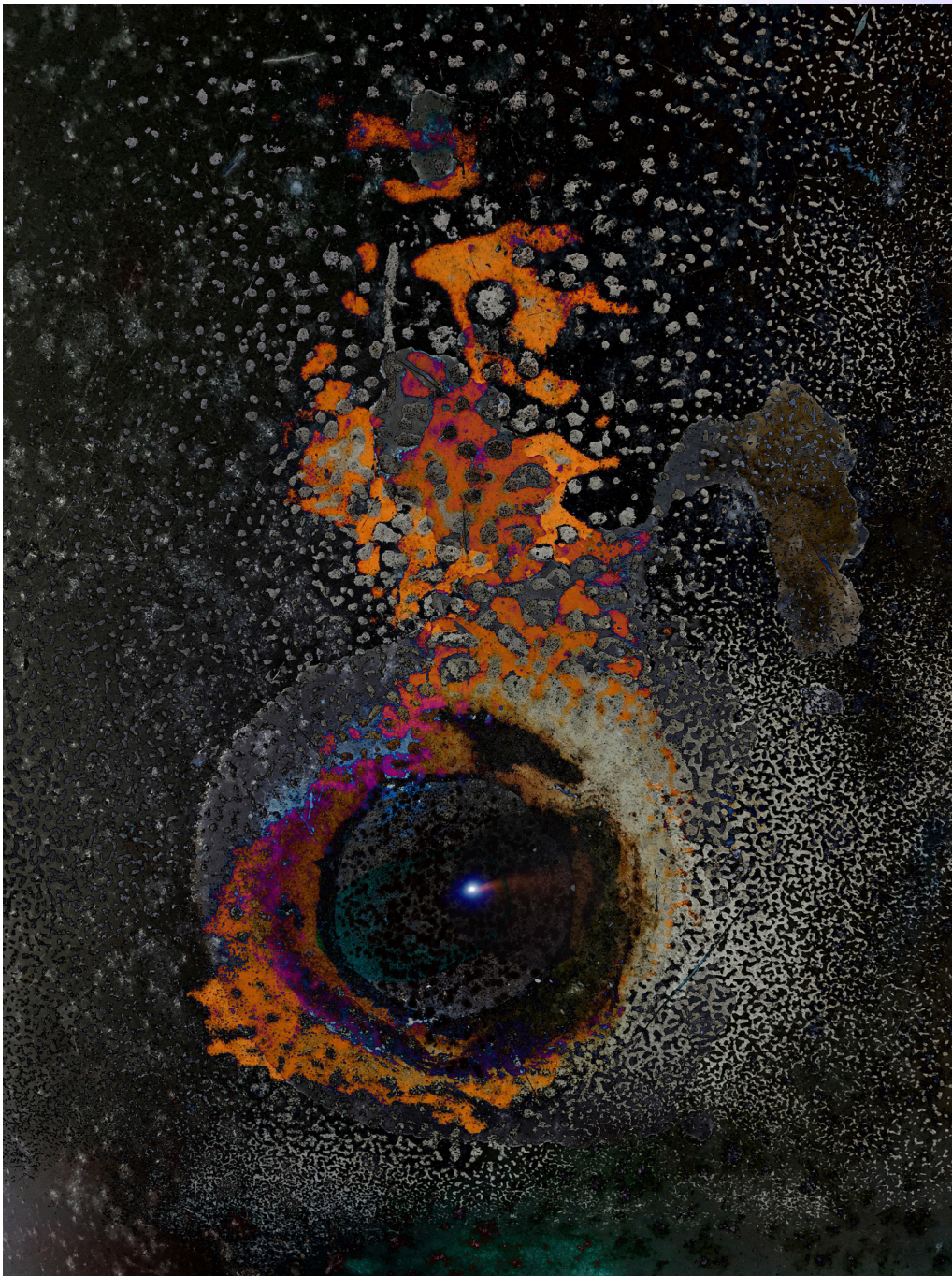
New Year's Day on the Farm

OMG! I realized that his parents are homesteaders. Their house might be rustic, even by Chinese standards, but they are doing something that few people would choose to do.

They are amazing!

And they invited us to come back in Spring, when everything will be blooming.

I can't wait!



Cosmos
by *Anne McCaughey*

THE CORPSE THAT WAS US

Gregory Ramírez

When I saw dirt on them,
I washed my hands.
And when I said bad words to you,
I learned to be quiet.
And I even sprayed cologne
At the smell of shit.

But I will no longer continue dragging
The corpse that was us
Not because you detached yourself,
But because—after all this time—
You never moved with me.

And I cannot tell you
How my bones no longer ache
And my arms and legs
Are no longer tired.
At last, I will no longer bleed
For you who only cares about
Those with whom you share blood.

please don't forget my name

Jose Reyes

people come and people fade
a phrase that you'd always say
i never thought that we'd drift
away now you're driving off on the interstate
every time that you weren't okay
i used to wipe tears off of your face
hope we meet again soon some day
and please don't ever forget my name

which one of us is to blame?

Jose Reyes

i tried to do the best i can
tried so hard, you wouldn't understand
to keep us from becoming a mess
but it all just turned to madness

and what you said
still replays in my head
left me in a silence so dead
i just wish you were here instead

i roam the busy streets at night blinded
by tears and the city lights i look past the
place we first met back before we had to ruin it

wounded and stained
i walk out into the rain hoping it will
cleanse the pain which one of us is to blame?

Beauty in All I Am

Michelle Vang

I carry my soul in a body not mine,
for I have aged beyond my years,
and grown beyond my skin.

I carry on and I do not fade
from a poor little girl
to a being out of place,
but from a girl whose dreams
reached beyond the universe
where there were no stars.

I look at my worn, torn hands
held against the gray-stained sky,
and I see beauty in all I am.

My Resurrection

Michelle Vang

For a moment I let myself slip away
Into an emptiness I covered up
with void expressions
and hollow vocals.

This empty space is too familiar—
I've been here a million times.

But today I brought a pen with me,
so I could write on blank currents
of the air from my lungs
when my voice was taken away.

I begin to write.

Black ink fills my vision
until all I see is yet again nothing.
but also everything.

I can poke a finger into the darkness,
and pinpoint how I came to this place.
Then I pull on these words
until I resurface to meet myself
with stronger bones,
and thicker skin.

I am new,
yet I am old.
I am the same person
who was hurt and lost.
I am the new person
who is healed and found.

For a moment I see my strength
in the form of rebirth,
and I rejoice in the beauty
of my silent resurrection.

Whispers of the sea

Michelle Vang

I stand on a cliff
feeling miles above the breeze.

I hear the whispers telling me
that I should fall
splat on the concrete flow
of sparkling waters below.

Freedom is sweet
flying at two thousand feet;

then at one

onto

n o n e.



Moonset Port of Stockton

by *Anne McCaughey*



You gave me a chance when no one else would,
I took classes day and night,
In the heart of Stockton surrounded by strife,
Your wisdom gave me a better life,
I am grateful for the wizards that trained me,
Becoming a mustang was the right choice,
Delta College thank you for supporting my life.

Featured Artists

Ro Schmidt

A self-taught artist from Pleasanton, CA. Their digital illustrations capture vibrant colors and experimental techniques from piece to piece, aiming to create fun and new pieces, even when depicting the same characters.

Gregory Ramírez

Gregory Ramírez has taught English full-time at Madera Community College since 2008. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from California State University, Fresno (CSUF) then earned his Doctor of Arts in English Pedagogy from Murray State University. Dr. Ramírez has presented (or co-presented) at numerous conferences and published poetry nationwide.

Anne McCaughey (art pseudonym Annie Mack)

Photo artist. Abstracts, layered photos, electronic and physical collages.

Author of *Bad Ass Pix with a Cheap-Ass Camera* (Cresting Wave Publishing 2021;

Available at Amazon at <https://a.co/d/23ZAZcC>). Former student at San Joaquin Delta College in darkroom photography.

Michelle Vang (Michuyu Visuals)

Michelle Vang is a digital artist and poet. You can find her artworks on her social medias @Chresamoon.

Srinjay Chakravarti

Srinjay Chakravarti is a writer, editor and translator based in Salt Lake City, Calcutta, India. He was educated at various schools in Calcutta (now Kolkata) and Bombay (now Mumbai), at St Xavier's College, Calcutta and at universities based in Calcutta and New Delhi. University degrees: B.Sc. (Economics honors), M.A. (English). He was also offered admission to the University of Chicago, the London School of Economics, and other institutions of higher education in the US and the UK.

Robin Blanc

Robin was born in Missouri, USA and grew up bi-cultural, shuttling back and forth between her father's home in Missouri and her mother's home in the Bahamas, flying on her own since the age of 7. This early exposure led to her love of travel and learning about new cultures: a French Club trip to Quebec in junior high; a high school exchange student in Brasil; a college term abroad in Vienna; and traveling to South Africa in grad school, the year after apartheid ended. She has taught ESL at a juku in Japan and in a Chinese public high school. While teaching ESL in Japan, she experienced first-hand the transition from the Showa period to the new Heisei period. Most recently she lived in South Korea, working on US military bases. She has now repatriated with her cat Greta and is looking forward to the next adventure.

Kaitlynn Brandon

Author and multi-media artist, Kaitlynn “K” Brandon creates historical fiction, Grimdark fantasy and surrealist scenes and scenarios.

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Satisfaction 1 by Ann McCaughey