

EXIST OTHERWISE



Issue 14 April 2025

- Featuring -

A. Riel Regan
Angelica Gonzaga Teves
Beth Anne Macdonald
Cleomé Morra
don farrell
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sean mahoney
Veda Villiers

WE ARE
NOT GOING
BACK



Cover Image of Claude Cahun
Self portrait (with Nazi badge between the teeth) 1945
borrowed from [Claude Cahun and Jersey](#)

Claude Cahun and her partner, Marcel Moore, were imprisoned and sentenced to death by the Nazis for their anti-fascist activism. They escaped that fate when the war ended. This photograph was taken some time after their release.

These Characters and Themes Cannot Exist

Jendi Reiter

You can't bring your heart to school
if there's a boy in it
the same as you.

 No mothers, even imaginary ones,
have wives
in Charlotte County, Florida. Penguins
live alone and far away
 on the flat ice
that's shrinking like a girl
stuffed in a locker.

 Names come
in two sizes, books are covered
in mud or sugar
 and manuals
on how to be a [blank] person
cannot be hidden
 inside your clothes.

Emily is Nobody
and Abe never shared
his bearded honesty with Speed
in his bed.

 Don't snap
your fingers, butterfly

cont'd



Jendi Reiter (they/he) is the author of the novels *Two Natures* and *Origin Story*, both from Saddle Road Press; the story collection *An Incomplete List of My Wishes* (Sunshot Press); and five poetry books and chapbooks, most recently *Made Man* (Little Red Tree). They are the editor of the writing resource site [WinningWriters.com](https://www.winningwriters.com).

These Characters and Themes Cannot Exist cont'd

Jendi Reiter

boy bestie, your whispering sisters
will have to get along

without

your paper to copy
the unspeakable thing
Claggart was willing
to die to say to Billy.

Behold, Simba

without Scar. Ariel's voice was never
lost to the rough embrace
of the tentacled witch.

All quiet

on every front. The librarians
don't need to purse their lips

and the worms,

unwed as fingers
of children holding a rope
to stay in line,

still tunnel their script

into the dirt.

[Source: Judd Legum, "Florida school district orders librarians to purge all books with LGBTQ characters," Popular.info, 9/26/23. Poem title is a quote from guidance given by Charlotte County Superintendent Mark Vianello on 7/24/23 on removing books from libraries and classrooms.]

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cool canadian air comes down
wiping snot from minnesota's wet hair.
cumulus clouds bask in warm rays
above, blown by cooler breezes below.

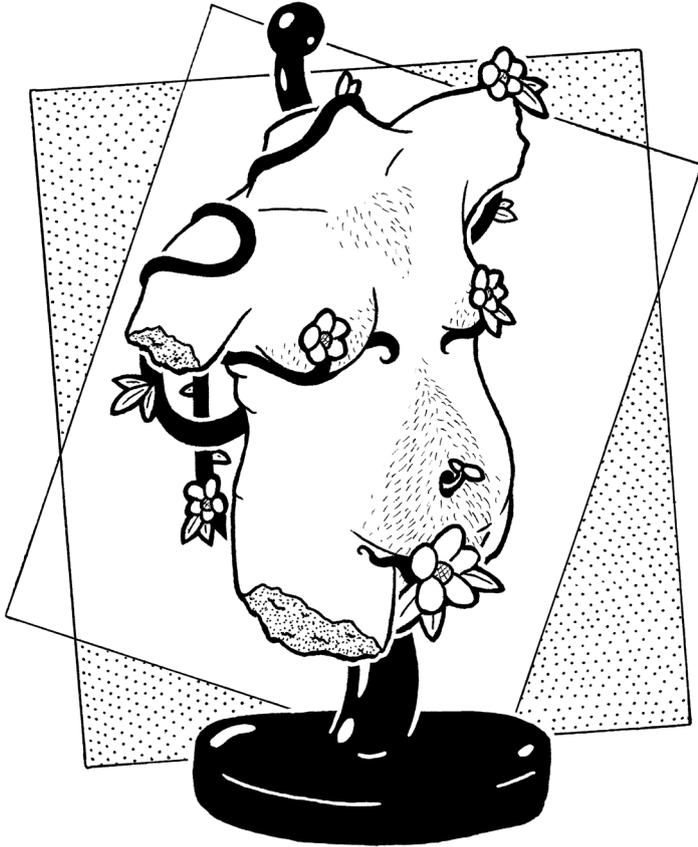
i watch a boy ride his ten-speed
up a hill, i have to wonder,
was he raped. would he climb the fence
on dupont bridge and jump
to the wheels and windshields.

is he stoned...stoned
enough.

does his heart swell
into a head
big as a hippo's
bulging against his soft pink
lungs so breathless, the shame
he chokes like barfing desert sand
and heat like barfing up the sun onto
the sidewalk along the fence of a bridge
at his feet...someone's dirty, sticky
stepped-in gum.



Don Farrell lives in Cambridge, MN with 3 sons, 2 dogs and other critters where land transitions from forest to prairie. He writes daily, obsessively. He holds a monthly open mic at The ARC Retreat Center in Stanchfield, MN and a bi-weekly zoom poetry critique group. He has poems in *Bodega Magazine*, *Thimble Literary Magazine*, and *New Square of Sancho Panza Poetry*. He hopes to leave this planet without getting what he deserves.



Rowan (he/they), artist name **Nullself**, is a 31 year old queer, trans, and disabled man living in Boston, MA. His main form of artistic expression is surreal black and white ink illustrations, which give a shape to the experiences and sensations he has in his meditation practice and everyday life, especially as it pertains to self, queerness, and disability. He also just loves making weird-looking art.

Outside, in the front yard of another's home, sparrows are hopping on the grass—so carefree, so in the moment as they seem. It is simple, I see it every day, and it is so important I feel it has to be shared but there is no one to share it with. I look for a while, but my mind sees something else. I shudder at the thought of some of their kin in bits and pieces somewhere. Who will find their feathers? What remains of them? Who will make them dead but *whole*?

I draw the curtains down, the sun is too blinding now. It rarely rains. The rain is not rain but water. I never raised my arm to gather droplets in my palm and taste them out of thirst. My palm loves to touch. When a touch is returned I feel it so acutely, like the hand holding me back carries me away from the world's weight—as if something so delicate like a touch could null gravity. To hear a boy ask if they had seen his mother's hands. How does it feel never to be touched by the same hands again? To hold emptiness in its place?

One night, three years ago, in stillness and silence with only a faint light casting a shadow in the room, I pictured everyone dead except me. I pictured the house empty in its loneliness, the room with only a bed and a gloom that fills the air. No more laughter, just a distant echo of what used to break the silence. No more stories, just a memory of what had been shared. I ran out of breath. In Gaza, the doctors use the

cont'd

Angelica Gonzaga Teves (she/her) is a Filipino freelancer and creative writer. She started writing poetry at a young age but only recently did she have a leap of faith to share her works. She's a self-publisher in Substack ([@inked-between](#)), deeming herself an extractor of the extraordinary in ordinary things. She advocates for shared humanity and slowness in an otherwise fast-paced world brimming with hurt people. When not reading or writing, she dreams of an alternate reality where she is a multi-instrumentalist and lyricist living in a cabin with a dog and a monkey.

acronym WCNSF for a wounded child with no surviving family. This is an acronym that should never exist, but it does. The sorrow that comes from the thought of my family dead is almost unendurable, terrifying like a sin to write, but to live it? To have all of them—the people who made me believe that if home is a place it is in togetherness—gone.

There are no explosions and smoke in our skies. Our schools are not closed for the reason that most of the children enrolled are now dead. I have never been abducted for writing poems. Nobody forced me out of my home like a violated body.

The fan starts to make whirring sounds turning into a loud metallic screech. We had it repaired weeks ago, but the screech returned and I turned it off. I feel connected to it more than I do with myself. My disillusionment is a lonely blouse hanging in a clothing store, stitched up but not worn—waiting for me to pick it up and wear it home. It's unrecognizable; even when I wear it, it doesn't fit. I don't often fit right into anything though, so if the blouse has a feeling, I understand what it means to stretch and crease and fold for nothing. If only for a moment, I let myself be weak, though not for long.

It's news to my 5-year-old self what humans are capable of doing so it's no news to me now, but the fact that it is not, that we've gotten so used

to it is what makes it so disgusting, isn't it? I'm aware that to do evil is also what it means to be human, but false normalcy does not warrant indifference. Immunity is something I cannot afford. It is an illusion to me even. The unwilling memories, the continuing unapologetic mass destruction, the rage, the wounds—it's all interconnected like an endless cycle of cause and effect.

The world doesn't stop even if I feel it should. Some nights I cannot feel for my present just as much as my future seems abruptly obscured, like my life suddenly feels too unimportant, too fleeting to be given much worth. It is not strange to me at all, I used to be slightly nihilistic. But each day I wake I still find the little beauties I take in breath after breath. The house is a mess but only in preparation for what's to come, and it reminds me of rebuilding. Our neighbor's baby is four months old and doesn't cry when we say hi; her family takes good care of her. My best friend is back. My brother is coming home. I am going somewhere. And I am glad in all of this, even while at the same time my heart holds an equal weight of sorrow.

I see a man holding a precious bottled water to an injured dog. I see a boy sing verses of the Qur'an while being operated on without anesthesia. For every wounded child with no surviving family, there

cont'd

is a neighbor who is kind enough to care. For every tear gas canister thrown, there is a plant grown inside it. For every day without a ceasefire, there is unrest.

If hope is the thing with feathers like Emily Dickinson said, then it's here and everywhere I look, no matter what. They can bomb it to bits and still see it floating in front of their eyes.

When I opened my journal only two words came out: I'm sorry. I can't count the times I've said that word these days like a prayer. I abandoned my words mid-thought. It all seemed so inadequate for what was—*is*—happening, too small for heaviness. But I am here somehow. If I stop, I betray myself. Even if these words are all I have right now—hoping to console others in an attempt to console myself—it is better than nothing. The small things we do in the name of love are better than nothing. Even if sometimes it is lost on me, I am trying to make my seconds worth something not only for myself.

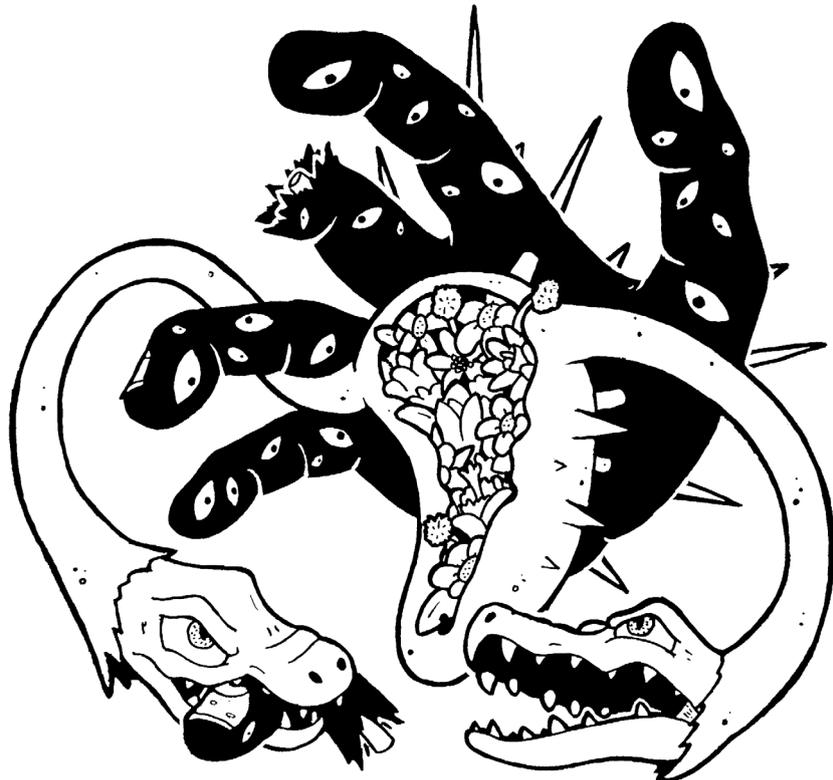
I did not stop believing words have the power to change the world. I know, because it changed me first.

can futures fade like midnight stars if you've
never had one? watch a lifetime collapse into a
singular pulsating point & all the glow of
the horizon compressed into this heartbeat—
—*is this what i get for unmasking*

five timepieces on every device, can never
be trusted to remember anything but
searing, pulsating, breaking into a sea of becoming where
self-repression never existed, but neither did
a homework planner, hence my need for
at least three. *is this what i get for unmasking?*
when you grow toward normalcy you ache to be a fixed archetype, but
what is your fifteen minutes compared to my

fleeting eternity? with every moment still here
yet none ever separable—watch me sink into
the dim lights of the possible, and wonder
if any of this is normal.

mk zariel (it/its) is a transmasculine neuroqueer poet, theater artist, movement journalist, and insurrectionary anarchist. it is fueled by folk-punk, Emma Goldman, and existential dread. it can be found online at [hey, i'm your weird anarchist friend <3](#), creating conflictually queer-anarchic spaces, writing columns for *Asymptote* and the *Anarchist Review of Books*, and being mildly feral in the great lakes region. it is kinda gay ngl.



But it's all her fault, Adam whined.
The father replied, son, let me remind you,
you ain't never been nothing but dirt.
From dust you were created and to dust you shall return.

Fast Forward.

But I want them to love me, the father whined,
to the wind and the stars
and no one in particular
because it's lonely at the top.

In order to erase that wicked woman's sin, that very first sin,
the heavenly father surmised what the world needed most
was

another
 baby
 boy.

He will be a living god.
He will save them.
They will love him,
and they will hate him
for they know not of what they do.

cont'd



Beth Anne Macdonald (she/her) uses her curiosity for religious and cultural myths to explore their influence on our convictions, choices and the inevitable consequences on how we create belonging in the world.

Her work has appeared in *Querencia Press*, *The Open Sewers Project*, *the Saranac Review*, *Marrow Magazine*, *Venus Hour* and *The Anti-Misogyny Club*. She is currently working on her first memoir, reflecting on what it means to come home after leaving her evangelical-Christian family.

I shall call this boy my son, the father said,
but I will let him die just to prove my love.
His death,
the price of their salvation.

He will grow within the womb of
an unwed mother.

Still a girl, unsullied, not even a wife.

Can you just imagine the look on Mariam's face when she was told?
What? Are you crazy?
I'm barely thirteen.
I'm not consenting to *that*.

Shush, it's okay, honey. Shush, don't worry.
God wants you. He's chosen you.
You're such a special girl.
This is going to be great.
Stop fighting it, Mariam.
You know you really want it.

Her belly visible proof
the daughters of Eve have never really had a choice.
There's no sin to be seen here, Joseph soon declared.
Why it's the righteous work of the Holy Spirit.
And thus was created plausible deniability.

Her purity intact, a virgin she remained.
It's bullshit, of course
Because Mariam already knew.
A rape
 is a rape
 is a rape.

All around the world women whisper
me too
 me too
 me too.

Jesus.
The great big lie moralized, canonized, weaponized.
Fetal Personhood.
Forced Pregnancy.
His Divine Right.

cont'd

Clarence Thomas knew he didn't need to ask.
So did Kavanaugh.
They know there's no such thing as equal protection.
Because every girl is born with an equal opportunity
to be violated.

Now we're all told this one wild and precious life just isn't enough.
It's an eternity we must strive for.
Washed clean.
Of our sins, our stories
even our last names.
Born again.
Not from a mythical virgin, child-bride fantasy.
In fact, no woman need apply at all.

Now it's only through a dead man that we can be
redeemed. Reborn.
Now *this, this* really would be some kind of miracle
if you could figure out how to make it true.
But over half the population knows it's just one more fucking lie.

Because we remember.
It was water we breathed first,
long before we ever crawled from the womb and pressed our heel
into your dusty land.
Born from the headwaters of our mothers, born already baptized in
her blood.
We don't need to be made clean.

Do not dare tell me there's a fee for my salvation
when I've been paying rent on a body, I can't even call my own
since the day I was born.

Lillith Sayeth Clitoris

jewel
fool
knob-job
love-bud
pearl girl
suck-hub
hum-dinger
swinger
good lingerer
love button
little hill
bittle vittel
lilac treat
teat-to-eat
kernel of wisdom
to maketh some heat
sweet spot
to geteth me hot
sugar plum
that getseth me done
ringeth my doorbell
beforeth you come

in—around—beside
for wideth release
our negative connotations
clitoris wantseth
a celebration with you
to heareth your pants
let's clappeth our hands
let's doeth a dance
let's taketh a chance
on my clitoris
on your clitoris
beyond romance
to feelingeth feeling

Emma Goldman-Sherman



Emma Goldman-Sherman

(they/them) is a trans/enbee human whose plays have been produced on 4 continents including *Abraham's Daughters* available as a podcast at [The Parsnip Ship](#). Their poetry's in *Toyon* (w/Arabic translation), *Gigantic Sequins* (1st place), *Writers Resist*, *NonBinary Review* and others. Their microfiction is anthologized in *Best Microfiction 2025* and *the Fish Anthology of 2023*. They work as a neuro-affirming coach, teach & support writers at [Brave Space](#) & write about post-traumatic growth at [Emma's Brave Space](#).

You're so handsome when you're a girl. A mean waitress, the flat cool side of the knife that flashes vertical. With our feet child's posed to the water, our calves pressed together like barbies kissing, we pass a tall boy back and forth. I reglue the pistachio shell around its brain. You keep a cigarette butt as a bookmark, the ash squeezed soft like an eyeball popping out of its socket. When we finally jump, water strings a red thread from my center to skull until it spills out my puppet mouth.



Lexi Clidienst (she/her) is a poet from Texas. Her work appears in *HAD*, *Expat Press*, and others. You can talk to her about odes or send her dive bar recommendations on [Instagram/lonestar_princess](https://www.instagram.com/lonestar_princess).

Each of their zoom boxes has a photo of them in life. I requested this because I didn't know if I would see skeletal remains, or dust, or nothing at all. Below the photo, their names, because I didn't know if I'd recognize them from photos I haven't seen. Instead of self-identifying pronouns, (a concept I didn't think they'd relate to), a descriptor that identifies them. Either in life or death - their choice.

I open the meeting: Thank you for coming. I know this might be a stretch since you died between one and eight decades ago. You've missed both the fabulous and the horrific - nuclear weapons, the Beatles, Sputnik, the Vietnam War, Netflix, Franco's long awaited death, #s, #metoo, #BlackLivesMatter, AI, climate change... I won't go on, we have limited time. I asked you here because I need some help. Fascists are taking over my country. You had this experience - what should I do?

Rosie Leiser, (the grandmother I was named after), descriptor "*tragic Jewish daughter of Zeus*" says: You must get away from those people. We stayed too long. We didn't think they could hurt us. I bribed so many people, fled through four different countries, then I died anyway.

Herman Leiser, my father, descriptor "*professor of schmattology*" says: Mutter, would you sing a song for me? His picture, a round faced blond boy looks a little teary.

cont'd



Roz Leiser (she/her) was the first child on both sides of her family born in the United States to refugees from the Nazis. She grew up wondering, "why didn't the Germans do more to stop Hitler?" She is currently wondering if we will do a more effective job.

She has worked as an RN, grief counselor, research coordinator, non-profit director, waitress, secretary and movie theatre janitor.

Her writing has appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Persimmon Tree*, *Common Ties*, *The Sun*, *The Noe Valley Voice*, *Blue Lyra Review* and *Moment Magazine*.

My father's father, **Josef Leiser**, descriptor "*handsome/rich/athlete*" says: nothing.

I realize I have no idea if they have connected with each other since they died. Although hosting a family reunion is a delightful idea, I want to know what they can teach me about coping with the rise of fascism.

The screen around my mother's picture flashes green (**Josefine Leiser, aka Fini**, descriptor "*best daughter/wife/mother*".) She's trying to say something.

Unmute, I yell

Fini: I can't hear you

Me: Do you have your hearing aids on?

Fini: They don't help. They don't work on the telephone.

Me: This isn't a telephone. This is zoom. Hearing aids are much better now. No more little batteries all over the floor. Can you get new ones there?

Fini: I can't hear you.

My mother's mother **Chana Rivka aka Anna Landman**, descriptor: "*broken saint/seamstress who never complains*": *Vus is dus zoom?* (What is that zoom)

Me: I can't explain it. We started using it during a recent pandemic. Not the one you lived through in 1918. How come no one ever mentioned that pandemic?

Isaac Landman, my mother's father - descriptor "*former socialist/wrestling fan*": too much other dreck going on, pogroms, world war I

Rosie: what country are we in now?

Me: you're all buried in the Inwood Jewish Center plot at Cedar Park cemetery in Paramus New Jersey. But you're probably on unceded ether somewhere. Or maybe the Bardo.

"Your internet connection is unstable" flashes on the screen.

Are we being hacked? There's no one in the waiting room.

cont'd

Elon and Trump appear center screen. They start to do a duet of “Springtime for Hitler” then Trump suddenly starts making arm gestures for “YMCA”. Elon’s son X takes Trump’s hand and leads him to a distant golf course. Elon does a solo of “Tomorrow belongs to me.” Gives Sieg Heil salute, then is gone.

Fini: What is that supposed to be?

Chana: Alles zu America. (send everything to America)

Me: I’m IN America.

Herman: Noch schon wieder? (Again, already?)

Fini: Now do you see why we said you should be grateful?

Me: Now I see, but it was a little challenging when I was five. Anyway, I’m glad you don’t have to live through this

Herman: Fini, do you hear how she talks to her parents and grandparents? She is glad we are dead.

Fini: where is your sister?

Me: Long story. She stopped talking to me after you died.

Fini: you should be taking care of her. All you have is each other.

Me: I have a wife, Lee, remember, you got along well with her.

Chana/Anna: A wife? Yus is dus? (what’s that)

Fini: let’s not talk about it

Isaac: Shh, Shh

Chana/Anna: Ikh ken schoyn redn (I can talk already)

Me: I have so many questions...

Herman: If the Nazis came back again I would get a gun and shoot as many as I could before they took me away.

Me: you've never even seen a gun. You think I should shoot them?

Fini: You are aggravating your father. Let's talk about something more pleasant.

Me: If you can't tell me what to do when fascism arrives, maybe you can tell me what it's like to be dead?

Everyone suddenly leaves the meeting. I see only my own face reflected back on the screen.

End meeting for all.

A set of accurately measured points
Allows a body to know the distance
From outer areola to peak nipple.

Your belly's button around my soft
Tongue. My taster seeks a knowledge
Known thus far only by my dangling

Participle, my dingo eating your soiled
Children...those droplets of ocean
Spray wet my cheeks, measure my

Climactic sequence as a function
Of your anus pressure. Your geoid
Felt as one body, imagined firm,

Smooth. Though how you smote a
Hairy bear still puzzles cartographers.



Sean J Mahoney (he/him) lives in Santa Ana, California with Dianne, her mother, 4 dogs, and 4 renters. He believes Judas a way better singer than Jesus and dark chocolate extraordinarily good for people. He currently serves as the prose editor at [Wordgathering](#). Sean co-edited the first 3 volumes of the MS benefit anthology series *Something On Our Minds*. His chapbook...*Politics or Disease, please...* is available from Finishing Line Press.

The Night We Elected a Convicted Felon, I Read Toni Morrison Veda Villiers

“This is precisely the time an artist must go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. This is how civilizations heal.” - Toni Morrison

This is precisely the time an artist must go to work,
when sky splits open and spits fire into our mouths,
when the moon leaks poison into the streets.
They have crowned the wolf in the skin of a man—
and innocence bleeds thick,
bracken rivers carving through scuffed soles.
We are tied to the pyre now,
dancing in the ash,
our feet crushed beneath the Doc Martens of new gods.
The clock's hands are no longer hands—they are knives,
and the hours spill out in thick, choking gasps.
There is no rest for the living,
no sleep in the cradle of hate,
where the air drones with a thousand eyes watching
our every breath,
our every thought,
like moths fluttering too close to the flames.
We are all out of silver spoons and miracles.
The children have stopped speaking.

cont'd

Veda Villiers (she/her), 23, is passionate about speculative fiction and poetry that probes the complexities of the human experience. Her works have appeared and are forthcoming in *Gamut*, *Radon Journal*, *Heartlines* and *Star*Line*. Though her day job keeps her busy, you can find her at [@VedaVilliers on X](#) (formerly known as Twitter) and [Bluesky](#).

The Night We Elected a Convicted Felon, I Read Toni Morrison cont'd

Veda Villiers

We are teaching them how to bow without bending,
how to keep their tongues tied,
how to smile as the tyrant's shadow grows long
and stains the sky red.
There are no names left to call out,
no cries for justice that haven't been swallowed
by the dark mouth of the machine.
The sound of our sorrow has become a weapon.

This is the hour—
the hour when the artist must bleed,
when the pen must cut deeper than any sword,
when words must crawl out of the marrow of the bones
and paint the world with its brokenness.
The ink is poison,
but it is the only cure we have left.
The canvas is a prison,
and I must fill it with everything they've stolen from us.
The walls have ears now.
They listen with hunger,
grinning like wolves in the new moon.
and we are drowning in the silence they demand.
But somewhere in the distance,
there is a flicker of light—

a flicker of what was,
what could be,
a fire that cannot be contained.
We are living in a fever dream,
where truth is a weapon,
and every word is a battle cry.
The artist is the last witness,
the last defender of the forgotten names,
the last song in a country that no longer knows how to sing.
But we write.
We paint.
We carve into the stone of this new era,
knowing that the walls will burn
before they take our voices.
This is precisely the time an artist must go to work—
for the world is ending,
and the tyrants are laughing.
We will not bow.
We will write the fire into history,
and when they try to bury us,
we will be the smoke they cannot erase.

Dear X,

I have never known the blistering heat of Alabama cotton-fields, but you did. I have never known the true fear of death, the rot that takes hold of your bones and steals your breath, but you have. You knew the cracking whips of the overseer; I slept peacefully under a roof I owned. You saw your family sold off the auction block; I never knew the wrenching pain of death by distance. I learned to write my name in the open light; you struggled by candlelight.

Dear X,

I will never know your face, but I can read the traces of your life in the bleeding, bold X that your steady hand crossed by your name in census records yellowed by age. Would you recognize my face as your great great great granddaughter? I graduated college for you. I studied history to pour over the lines etched in your worn face. I live for you. I will die with a plea for your freedom on my bluish lips.

Dear Grady,

Dear Lafayette,

Paige Eaton (she/her) is a poet who is currently teaching English in South Korea and is originally from Rochester, New York. Her work has appeared in *Long Winded Anthology*, *7th-Circle Pyrite*, and *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, among others. She enjoys wandering art museums, exploring parks, and waving at cats.

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Dear Willie Dean,

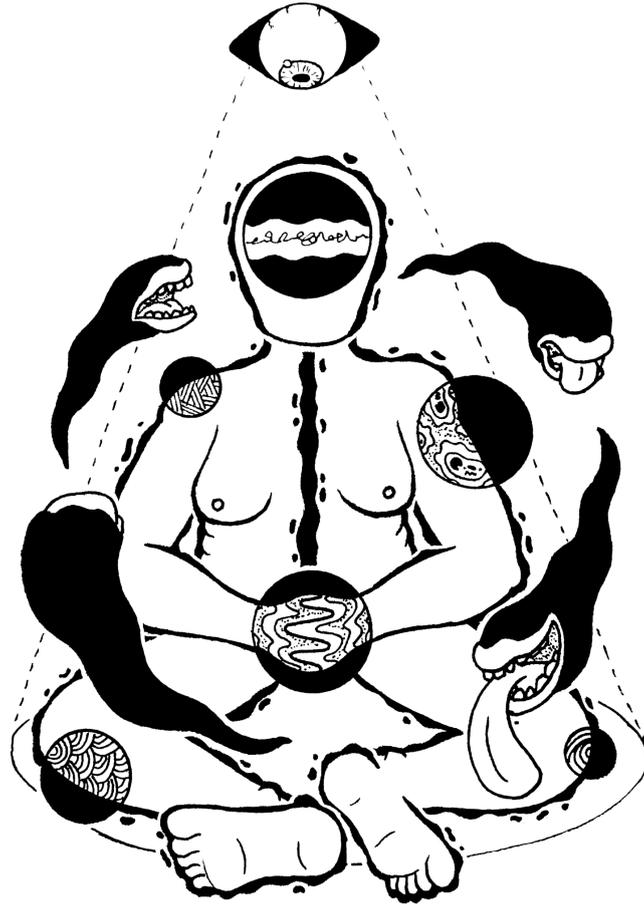
Dear Lewis, Dear Mamie, Dear Cash, the first to call themselves
Love,

Was Love a name chosen tenderly, caressed out of abolition? In
a different world I would be Love too. That was stolen from me,
washed away in a sea of hay burning bright in the wind and a mother
betraying her daughter. Love is the name of a confederate soldier, my
fourth great grandfather; Love is the name of my Black heritage, my
great great great grandfather.

Dear Easter, Dear Thomas, Dear Louisa,

Black is Love. I Love my Blackness. My curly, thick hair I owe to
you. My rounded nose I owe to you. The rich olive tint of my skin
I owe to you. My deep, smoky quartz eyes were drawn from you.
Love pours down from your watchful eyes like melted wax down a
candle's skinny frame. The scent of incense encases me and I shudder
as I breathe you in.

Sincerely,
Paige



an ode to everyone i have ever loved and steve harvey Hazel J. Hall

i.

//

i once had a dream about something my mother told me.

//

she said i would lose my face if i put duct tape over my lips because the adhesive would suck the soul out of my physical and i would become a dog. i would become a dog but in the body of a stray cat—wandering through our neighborhood and crying for food but shying away from the sun when it offered to warm my coat because i believed i was always meant to be cold. i would be like a dog like a cat like a shadow unwilling to be broken by the sun. so i dreamed i was alone. you told me this was a silly dream to dream. ‘wake up,’ you said, but these words are no melatonin antidote. you blushed my cheek with a pillow. it was not enough, so you did my eyeliner.

//

i have learned to turn away from the calling; i put you in the veggie drawer to chill with my memories of god, like when i awoke to him and his knife at my bedside. he stabbed me in the heart but i had no heart and no blood so i could not die; i writhed.

//

there was once a time when i would pray every night with my father. we would clasp our hands together and, without tears, we would ask god to make sure there were opioids and cigarettes in heaven because we gave up on grandpa giordano and grandpa hall getting any better when we buried them.

cont'd



Hazel J. Hall (she/her) is a writer and poet powered by caffeine and insulin. Right now, she is pursuing an English degree while working on her personal projects. More of Hazel's work can be found in *Bending Genres*, *Wordgathering*, and *boats against the current*, with other pieces forthcoming on HazelJHall.com.

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at my first funeral we spread the ashes of my grandpa across the pacific, and, all the while, i was so hungry. i remember the hunger now, just as i remember my name and then quickly forget it. everyday i have a different name. sometimes i borrow yours. i remember my mother once told me happy people get to keep their names, and so i assume the same must go for memories and pancreases. remember. remember. remember how i did not want you to walk me home in the cold.

ii.

//

you say you want to hear about how i became my own savior but i wish you knew everything. i look back on my life and first i remember the day my beta cells popped and father almighty took me up in his arms. god and i started dancing on the highway median. family feud was playing in the hospital lobby. the receptionist was studying for med school. we were all busy passing away to steve harvey. and while i waited for someone in the er to get better or get on with it, i sucked on a nothing sandwich. i had a brief séance with god and i begged him, 'just take it all the way. give me a name and i'll keep it. i don't want to be free.'

//

three hours later and the doctor told me a human being can die any number of ways but i was lucky; if i was going to die, i was going

to go out on a sugar high. i remember. the coma was slipping into the edges of my eyes so that i no longer saw my naked body in the mirror but some anatomical display of limbs being held together by nothing but the thinness of my skin.

//

there's a medical term to describe this, but i'm too scared to call it what it is. perhaps i say this to pretend such terrible pain is not an intrinsic part of my body. or perhaps i wish pain were its own human being, a person with a body i could point to and yell at. yell, 'why do you want me in such terrible ways? look at what you started and failed to take all the way. you made me flirt with the afterlife without helping me set up the first date.

//

i don't know if i want to take it all the way.'

//

the doctor told me i was lucky. i could have—and should have—died. but i didn't. i just kept living.

//

i was discharged from the hospital after a weekend stay. the staff told me from then on it was my job to just keep on living; they didn't tell me living is an unpaid internship everyone is expected to have on their résumé.

//

cont'd

there is no strength left in these hands to pour another cup of coffee not meant for me to drink. and so i have come to believe there is no human being who can ever truly recover from grief.

iii.

//

i was at the grocery store the other day picking out a watermelon. don't ask me why. i was probably dreaming.

//

all i remember is that i wanted a big watermelon. the kind that makes your mouth water when you think about it.

//

but as i was looking at the watermelons, i realized they were all covered in stickers. every single watermelon. and i'm not talking about normal fruit stickers that are easy to peel off. these were like full-on bumper stickers. who puts a bumper sticker on a watermelon? it's like they're trying to advertise their fruit to someone in space. what astronaut is looking for a watermelon?

//

and then i thought about it some more and realized outer space is probably the best place to eat a watermelon. just lounging out in the great big nothingness. eating some fruit.

//

sometimes i wish i were in space. not just to eat watermelon, but i wouldn't mind that either.

//

sometimes i wish i could take a break and have some space. life and i have been going through a tough spot recently. i say, 'darling, you've changed'. and life answers, 'i'm changing all the time.'

//

i have uncast myself from the part of the fool. i did not like being laughed at, so i became a comedian instead. i did not want to become my own savior. and yet

//

i clasp my hands together and pray that i will one day become more than some set piece but a poem and a piano song and a polaroid picture of a golden field fading into moonlight all at once. let me abandon my body in the fruit and vegetable aisle of the grocery store. turn me into a flower on the grave of an astronaut who ate watermelon in space. maybe then i will forget the mirror and me, prying back my skin until i could only see the world through the thinness of my blood. i have come to summon all my poems out of prayer because

//

i became my own savior when the astronauts in the er had no martian miracle cure to the ailments they brought back from the moon. and again when the watermelons at my bedside had no arms to take me up in. when god turned me into a dog in the body of a

cont'd

stray cat wandering through some random neighborhood. when i was crying for food but shying away from the sun when it offered to warm my coat because i believed i was always meant to be cold. and that i am actually dying a little bit all of the time.

//

in my dreams i walk through the grocery store with a cart full of nothing. all the while, i try to convince myself god can't hurt me anymore. but oh my god he hurts so much i am making a duct tape gag to bite back my humanity. the watermelon is not as sweet as i remember. not as sweet as my blood. i want to move on. i try to leave my body but i have slammed the knife down so hard i am still holding onto it.

iv.

//

sometimes i wish we could take a break and have some space. iv.

//

i go over to your place whenever you ask because you want it more than i want my own life. in the evenings you beg to teach me how to feel hungry, and i answer, 'do you water a plant that is already dying?' you cook anyway. the television is playing spanish dramas but i wish i had fallen asleep to steve harvey. please.

//

stop feeding me.

//

this body pays the price for dreams in insulin vials. i'm scared there is no human being who can truly recover from grief and that i am still passing away to family feud, so to say

//

4 you have started to look at me differently. 'darling, you've changed,' you say. and i am too scared to answer, 'i'm dying a little bit all the time.'

//

i tell you my life in pieces because that's how i remember it: in the fragments between the joy you have offered up to my altar. i say i became my own savior and yet

//

you are here. you walked me home in the cold. when we were eight you blushed my cheek with a pillow. you taught me how to do my eyeliner and find ripe watermelons at the grocery store. so when i say to forsake me know what i really mean to say is i love you so

//

you make dying hurt again. i wish god could never take you away. i wish there were nothing left inside me for god to take away. i fear i live so close to death all the time that one day my insulin shots will fail me, and you will be alone. so

//

cont'd

an ode to everyone i have ever loved and steve harvey cont'd

Hazel J. Hall

forsake me; it is your time to eat. bloom. feel the innocence of
your meal on your tongue, and never feel guilty. i love you for your
endocrine system. your pancreas is one of the most beautiful things
about you. stay in such a place where you will not know about life as
an unpaid internship; do not try to piece together my broken body
with your hands.

//

do not show me how long i've been cold.

//

I.

How would you feel if I ground up your bones for medicine?

If I wore your knuckles around my neck
as a charm against evil?

Has that even occurred to you,
that the tables could be turned?

That I've granted you more forgiveness
than you've ever considered giving me?

Gods, have you thought at all?

Have the tables turned at all?

II.

Maybe I only feel this way now that you're hunting me.

Would the disgust that I feel for you be so vivid if it were
just a rabbit, just a lion, just a woman that I don't know?

Would my hate burn so hot
if I hadn't watched you gleefully stuff and rack

your weapon? My indignation

is forgivable in the context
of your friends on the Senate floor.

We travel in herds now,
safety in numbers.

cont'd

A. Riel Regan (they/any/fluid) is a queer, disabled author of poetry and fiction with an intense appreciation for “the human heart in conflict” (Faulkner). Their writing often deals with themes of conflict within the self, chronic illness, and knowing oneself through nature. Their poetry has been featured in *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, the *Kentucky State Poetry Society's Pegasus*, *HOOT Review*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *The Forgotten Writer*, *new words {press}*, and *Impossible Task*. When not writing or reading, they find themselves killing half their houseplants and boldly defending the other half from their cats.

III.

The women may be prey animals,
but the men aren't predators—
the men are just men.

IV.

I'm protecting something. Something precious.
Something no one can own. Something wild.
I don't remember what it felt like to have something
worth protecting. You won't even respect our corpses,
will you? My wrath will drown you.
I have been bleeding for years
before you ever got to taste me and it won't be my blood,
if you come for me, that will wash you away.
I dare you to ignore the effigies I'll stake into my yard
and hang over my bedroom door, knuckles and bones
I bleached in the sun, harvested from broken bodies
discarded by the likes
of you.

V.

Put the fucking gun down. Torrent.
Downpour. I'm not yours to kill.
I won't be more fodder for men.
I refuse to allow my body
to satisfy you.
This is war.

that place in you where
your mother stuck the butcher knife, where
you learned to put the receipts from
all the wants you bought that
broke in your hands. that place
where you can't feel the holes open
when walking on nails, where you
can keep your eyes pried open and dry
to let mama get a clean slice. dear, set
the table, the roast is crisp and
steaming. tonight
we're feasting on a
human heart.

Rowan Tate is a Romanian creative and curator of beauty. She reads nonfiction nature books, the backs of shampoo bottles, and sometimes minds.

Trigger Warning (spoiler alert): LGBT – transphobia across generations, parental responsibilities and obligations, ditto those of a child, ruralism, change etc.

My dad wanted a girl and a boy, a straight then no a gay for some reason he never would explain, a mouse and a lion that man and all his mixed demands frustrating, wanting a kid who wore thin dress size 8 no 6 at first the child to be crowned ultimately the perennial stilted and bulbous queen every autumn of her high school years, and another child (me) all belted up in starched jeans from the husky department from age 4 on, arms like legs and ass built for a back field to bring home statewide honors four years in a row, to make a man proud make a man proud-- Make the man a man? AT HOME:He had his ways, opinions grounded in some outdated or esoteric line of thought, someone else's somethin' wanton, wanting way of thoughtless thinking all of it, trope they might call his stuff these days. I stopped trying to figure out the man long before he drove me for my own driver's permit test-----so very long ago, it felt unreal, the ol'-man's touch upon my eager and li'l-boy's life./"Enough, Dad, jeez," my own fine boy said back to me, now the father, on the same route many, many years later./"Small talk the whole way there, no cell phones back then you see, no CDs or even much roadside litter, yeast-fresh cans, true-glass bottles standing in for made-up

cont'd

A RURAL NATIVE OF THE southeastern United States, **R. P. Singletary** writes fiction, poetry, drama, and hybrid, and also dabbles in other arts, including visual and moving image. My short monologue "MONO fe in gratitude" appeared Off-Broadway this past autumn as part of the Apron Strings project at AMT Theater in Hell's Kitchen (NYC). Literary works in *LITRO*, *Feign Lit*, *The Wave - Kelp Journal*, *Worktown Works (U.K.)*, *en*gendered*, *The Collidescope*, *Rathalla Review*, and elsewhere. Affiliations include *Authors Guild*, *Atlanta Dramatists*, and *Dramatists Guild*.

advertising, what with us living so far out from the county seat where the Highway Department was back then.”/I kept playing over I thought only in my mind, “Me? Oh, my parents wanted a high-arched shooter on the courts, a thick-chested catcher kneeling behind home plate with plenty of cushion after the knees gave out, no interest in soccer, knowledge of lacrosse nowheres around so long ago in this section. Sis? She gone, she had enough, too much this--”/ “Dude,” my child shouted. /We were on the way for the kid’s driving permit. “You mean Dad,” I corrected, even from my outdated fog of history’s dream reliving generational desires for another perfected form, offspring ideal and hoped. /“Whatevs, you lived a long dang time ago if y’all didn’t have soccer...or the internet...”/ “Unlike my trip back then, ours today to the big-dollar renamed Department of Transportation lots different, just look: Old highway now two lanes each direction still not enough space for all the damn traffic and more and more and on and on all the changes in every sense, pollution, smug even here?

/“Smog, Dad. It’s smog, Dad.”/I couldn’t be the favorite or find them one in my own next generation of what the kid was wanting: she, he, or ze. I loved and I love, but I quit asking last week, that kinda quiet love of silence, which I’d learned from parents and grands-, all I could muster right then, and I still said my prayers for whatever be

best for the kid and all us, Thy will..../Let the Highway Department person be the one, they prolly got better and updated training than me, no parenting manual issued to me, us, we are, I’m trying I’m trying, had my own issues, depending on year, called short fatty butch-femme heavy-handed limp-wristed girly manly ginger biddy baldy furball flatfoot or big- tiny ogre club cub bear lipless no-neck I-eye or 4-. No pleasing any of them. Then or now, I reckoned. / “Passed.” /My question had irritated my child./As if, as if. Who don’t pass such a silly test? The look on the child’s face, the second closing of the door, a slam to answer me. All said it all. Each action shouted. Which was fine. I had lost my real words whole days prior. Inability to communicate, to parent, to father. That lost long ago, so it came to feel, I wanted a passing grade myself. For trying. /I knew that look of a teen. The precocious permit holder, always on to the next, wanted an ice cream as reward. New driver knew I was watching my weight, fearful of having that diabetes gene just like the kid’s Mom. With hard-earned summer funds, the child had gifted us genetic testing last Christmas. Future scientist and kind, that holiday with proof of truth long suspected, to better protect us in old age, from ourselves. /“Sweet treat for me,” he said. “One won’t break ya. For Pops, an extra-small yogurt, free of sugar and absent of fat--”/ “And gone with all flavor,” I interjected. / “For you,

cont'd

Untitled Wanton, a license cont'd

R.P. Singletary

yes, if you are nice, sir, a little perhaps, three sprinkles on top. Tiniest intention makes the tastiest difference, you know.” I smiled at the wit and pointed to go at the wheel. First time official and on the busy road, floorin’ my rusty truck soon thought to be the new driver’s (the kid already had unofficially inherited the hand-me-down due to my own dealer upgrade last week), and the whole way home from the only creamery in town all I could taste? was ice cream, not yogurt of course, and my head ached in the mental sugars and from contemplating my genes and every choice of my own years. I felt sick later considering the cruel comparison and wanted to scratch at more than absent insulin underneath my skin, hoping some Truth in there could set me Free – free me from any other – Need? – at that moment or all the others.#



Cleomé Morra (they/them) is a pseudonym for a photographer who wishes to remain anonymous. They've been making photographs since 1980.



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