

Bloodlust Magazine

Issue 1



LUST

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Bloodlust Magazine:

a collection of dark, romantic works
where nothing is too taboo, too twisted,
too odd.

Thank you to each and every one of
our submitters for letting us give their
beautiful work a home. We are
incredibly excited for the opportunity to
present our readers with such a unique
and special collection of works.

DIVING WOMAN

I don't like or love much of any-
thing anymore
but when we quicken our pace
up the stairs
to a room where we will
for some minutes
put a pause to our shared pain,
I have to admit he's thrown an
anchor in me
and I am a diving woman, retired
to the ocean floor.
Sunk.

MAKING OBJECTS OF MEN

Only two, maybe three times
have I felt a man might be out of
my league
and two maybe three times I told
it to everyone I knew
described hair and height and
eyes and cock
before a name
I see why they do it to us, it felt
good.

Colleen Hugo

WANTING CHANGE SO BAD
THAT I'LL GO SOUTHERN



IN MY DREAM

Oftentimes
when an animal senses death
is near, they slink off on their own
in an effort to conceal vulnerability
or so I've been told.
Last night I had the dream again
that my cat did not do this last Wednesday
that she was here, alive
and never walked into
the Maine woods at dusk
after acting peculiar all day.
In the dream she came when called
my mother's voice not growing
desperate when she wouldn't
appear, because in the dream she did appear
instead of curling up beneath an ancient maple
the autumn leaves tumbling softly down
to her white fur
as my mother yelled again and again until
she decided to call it
sighed with enough sorrow to flood
those woods
and turned around
went back.
inside.

Colleen Hugo

SOFT



CORVID

Corvid
Trickster,
Scavenger,
Messenger,
Omen;
You've given me many names,
But rarely a moment at your ear.
Blame fear, superstition,
Mysticism, skepticism,
But any tales borne
From me to you have been
Forced through twists and turns
Of your own design.
The outcome you sneer at
Is your own product;
"Sheer madness" woven
Into your floor of sawdust.
I don't bear these things to you
By choice—these ideas that you
Insist have come from me—
But cruelty has made it so
My voice relies upon
The twisting machinations inside
You hide from me.
Left to gather scraps,
And Heaven forbid I be content
In that, here you come
With your riddles and rhymes
That for time immemorial—
I pray not eternal—
As you and I remain entwined,
I'm supposed to reveal the
Divine meanings left behind

By the powers that abandoned you.
I'm not your bard.
Not your jester,
Not your scribe,
Not your mage;
My power may seem
Dizzying to you,
My ways very strange,
But I must cautiously inform you
That I possess no answers—
There is no compass leading me North.
I would hope, if steered by some
Supernatural entity, that I
Would have lost you along my course.
There is a reason I prefer
The company of your corpse.
If you refuse my appeal at your ear,
There are others who take it by force
And I will happily tend
To your rotting flesh as your
Steed alone rides forth.

DELIRIUM

this ache is the weight of infatuation
hunger born from knowing you're my dogma
if only i kneel, cognizant of your worth

craving to be both my altar and apocalypse
to be adored as if just not enough
but too much where i'll never recover

you call for my obsessions that bruise my thought
quiet nod as your name pours from my mouth
blessing the dark silence where my body shakes

seeking to be chosen not of convenience
but of compulsion, as if prophecy
not "i love you," but "i love you only"

every stare, each breath, a sacrifice to your name
my longing is sacred, these dreams your searing brand
confident that you were created to be canonized

with mercy and fire, coming undone in delirium
i can't shrink and won't soften turning toward ruin
never meant to gently savor your reward

you were made to be worshipped with reckless agony.

POISON THE WAY I LOVE

i am poison the way i love.
this is my confession. don't fall in love.

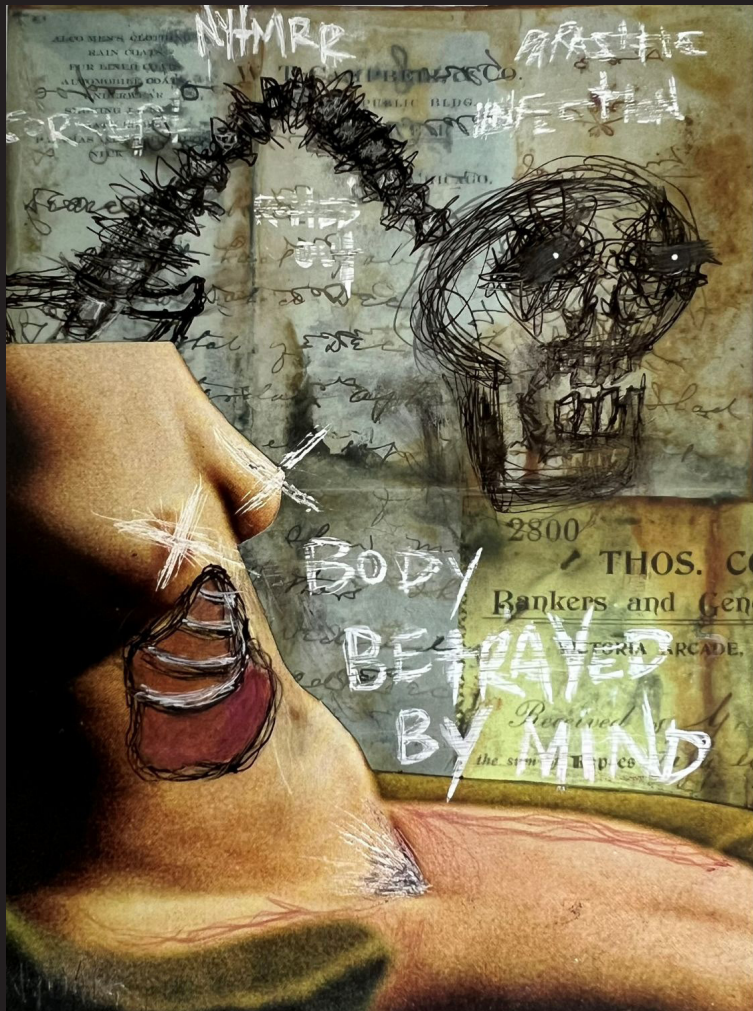
it was summer when i broke my rule.
i was empty from the hollow spring
it was then you came to me
your breath gathered in your chest to keep me warm
you laced your beauty in my hands and made me hope
your tender didn't know the brutality of things broken
even though you loved a thing broken.

i remain in awe of all you refused to give up on
our passion and opportunity, held like nostalgia
many moments fluttering my lashes over the heat of your skin
immortalized in my memory, carved in your faultlessness
you discovered me, you brought me close
though the ghosts of my past thundered back.

i'm sorry. i loved you.
this is the blueprint to my mysteries.
i am poison the way i love.
this is the goodbye you never got.

Nytmrr

BONES OF JUDAS



MY SENSES

The low roar of your voice,
gravel and mystery
fatigue and power.

The rough touch of your hands,
my thigh is silk,
your arm is leather.

The smell of you—
earth, pheromones, oil, sweat.

The exquisite curvature of your body,
you are made of Carrara marble.
A vigorous, intricate indulgence
for all of my senses.

PINK HOUSES

I hope ghosts are real.

When I was four, my
mother and I had to leave
a pink house because
it was haunted. The thing

frequented my room.
but was also witnessed
in the form of a shadow,
pacing on our porch.

I don't remember
how it looked,
but I do remember
that I saw it.

It told my mother
that it had
black eyes.
She believed it.

I hope it was real.

When I think of the pink house,
I get goosebumps
and freeze
and tears trickle down my face,

yet I feel next to
nothing; as if my

body remembers
something that I don't.

I hope it was real,

for we all know people
who have lived in pink houses.
Although they were seldom
haunted by ghosts.

What dwelled within
was far less ethereal.
Normally a family friend.
Or a neighbor.
Or an eccentric relative.
Or an older child. So,

I hope ghosts are real.

Fearing the cold
hands of the dead
holds far more whimsy
than fearing the audacious
hands of the living.

STRANGER IN THE DINING ROOM

she is at a restaurant when it happens.
there are flowers in her mouth —
glass and china clink together with the jaunty snicker
of adolescent girls swapping secrets at a sleepover.
a tomato is impaled with the pitchfork malice
of a stainless-steel dinner fork.
for a moment she watches it gush helplessly on her plate
before scowling at the gore and redirecting her gaze.

and that's when she sees the bullets.

two of them, lodged securely in the skull of a man
across the room.
they are black and voracious and only three tables away,
shiny with the prescient knowledge that,
if fired,
those eyes could launch into the air and stop a heart from beating—
and the promise of this makes her shudder.

the woman glances back down at her meal only to find
a platoon of maimed vegetables hanging limply from her fork.
she's a murderer, she thinks, and *oh god* she can't stomach it,
so she combs the room once more in a desperate attempt
to find something else for her eyes to feast upon.

to her horror, weapons are wielded by everyone;
each patron in the dining room is clutching a knife
and carelessly bringing it to their lips, then using it to saw into
their dinner with a sick sort of insouciance that suggests
none of them are aware of the gun and its silent ammunition
lurking at the table by the window.

don't you see him? she wants to shout. *can't you see that he's armed?*
everything frightens her, and not knowing
where to look anymore, the woman begins to panic —
then has either the luck or misfortune of locking eyes with him again.

bang!

within seconds the smell of gunpowder permeates the room,
and she instinctively knows the two bullets have embedded themselves
inside her, even if she doesn't feel it yet.

Lea Rigdon

LILITH THE SNAKE CHARMER



Lea Rigdon

HEKATE MIDWIFE OF SOULS



Lea Rigdon

DANCE BETWEEN WORLDS



Lea Rigdon

CROWN OF SERPENTS



Lea Rigdon

CAULDRON OF AWEN



MY FATHER'S DARK MEMOIRS

You woke up to the moonlight,
insomnia tormenting you
like the blood in your memories—
the infants, their skulls crushed
against the Killing Tree at Choeung Ek,
as revolutionary songs rang out
from the branches above.

You often glimpse, from the edge of nightmares:
Men with glasses,
kneeling like malnourished bamboo poles,
silent, awaiting the mist of poison gas.

You often call out in your dreams
to that dove with broken wings,
imagining the riverbanks of Tonle Sap
as clear and endless.

But beyond dreams,
you tell us that during that time of terror,
this river was filled with bones and remains.

You escaped from the edge of death—
but your whole soul remains trapped
in that dark summer.

You spent a lifetime telling us:
the only mission,
as survivors,
is to seek justice for the dead.

This *is* your memory—
and the ashes of history.

BANQUET OF THE BONE

A pair of twins lies on
a candlelit, wavering table,
dessert of a black banquet,
made of pale skin and sliced flesh.
I see him frown tightly as he narrate it.

I do not meet bone.
I cannot imagine blood.
But it bursts like carcked spring
from the voice of my college roommate,
a Jewish man with dusk in his eyes.

I listen — not to my bloodline
but to his. A witness in borrowed sorrow.

We sit on a bench beside the WWII museum
in the choking air,
the stench of corpses
seeps from his grandfather's story.

Those officers, playing fugues of Bach,
rest on lush grass
and write postwar poems of peace
while pouring rivers of thick blood,
drowning children and women.

The Devil — the mirror of “live” —
means to lose God's way.
But the path those men followed
still casts its shadow
in the dusk where we sit.

When we walk through war's exhibition,
my friend's voice trembles
at the glint of knives and plates,
artifacts carved with names of the lost.
Their bones scream in silence,
but to the butchers,
they were only the soft bleats of lambs.

Our hearts bleed again and again
for the long-dead in dust.
In that banquet of death,
we see the dead rise like specters,
their white bones stare,
still reaching for a tomorrow
they were never allowed to touch.

THE MIRROR DRINKS FIRST

I fog the glass with my wanting,
steam thick and primal.
The night outside is knife cold,
slicing as it presses its blade to the window.
I am the fever inside.
I strip not to reveal, but to summon.
The mirror is both lover and vessel;
my reflection opens her mouth when I do.
If I taste her, will she burn the same?
I am god and worshipper,
sweat sliding, trembling with tactile time.
She moves with me, but somehow slower,
savoring, and meets me halfway.
We are feral, we are famished, ferocious,
her darkness, mine, yet just beyond my reach.
The mirror drinks first;
I lick the condensation from her throat.
I become myth.

Chloe Yoon



Chloe Yoon



Chloe Yoon



MIRTH SWIM

I wish I could swim past thorny stems through the murky sage water, refreshing the roses. Dragging my hair behind me like slick tendrils as the dirt nourishes my skin, I'd stare at you through the glass urn, waiting for you to pour me down the drain—with cleanliness in mind, as if I were a speck of dust swiped from the window sill while I enjoyed the view—I'd promise not to swim far. We can still talk while you sit on the toilet, I'll be next to you in the shower pipes.

THESE STRETCH MARKS LOOK LIKE ZIPPERS

on my upper thighs and lower back
that wrap around my hips. You say
you love me, but you won't
unzip to go inside the parts of me
less romantic. I know you're after
this heart, breasts, breath, petals, but
will you play with bone, muscles,
cartilage, tendons to beat and strum
to make music blocking out the noise
of other skeletons rattling in your closet?

MY MOTHER WASHES BLOOD OFF THE WALLS EVERY
MORNING.

It comes from the joy of the day before, and today it's my turn. The silver one wags her tail so much, it knocks and slams every surface. She doesn't care as she splatters the house. I sit on the kitchen floor in a sweat, sore back and arms, scrubbing the cabinets and oven in earnest, breathing in the cloves off the rag, disappointed we let everything get this stained, yet determined to wipe it all spotless. Those seated at the dinner table feel the same when I allow sources of serotonin to slit my veins in the same places my people eat.

EXECUTIONER

Berry red body on a wooden board.
You try to roll away
but I pinch your pointed bottom
half with your refreshing sweat on my fingertips.
I prepare the leafy grave and move
that coarse green hair
from your neck for a clear shot.
The sun doesn't hit you here.
White pores on your head pulsate as I
position my knife and slice
with no resistance.

Laila Freeman

THE STILLS

Blood in gray tubes again,
 Hospital smell, the toilet
Dripping with menstruation
 When I walked in. I clawed
At my lobster face, my eyes
 Melted into sockets.
Fevers spiked me, joints gave out,
 19 and an old woman,
Bed-ridden, my body a hell,
 Caging an arthritic spirit.
Some said it's still's disease,
 Some said it's from the covid vaccine,
So if I had to rewind and "live"
 It over, over, over I would
 Because I'd prefer it.
 Yes, I'd prefer it.
 Give me the midnight fear
 Of a blazing death.
 Give me the bones that cannot bend.
 Give me flaming skin
 And needles bruising
 The pulsing anemone under my surface
 If I no longer have to brave the slice
 From ripping a knife off my back
 If I'm guaranteed to never starve
Just to throw up my heart's betrayal
If I no longer need to sleep

 As my aorta punches through me.

Phoebe Hedges

A DAY IN THE LIFE



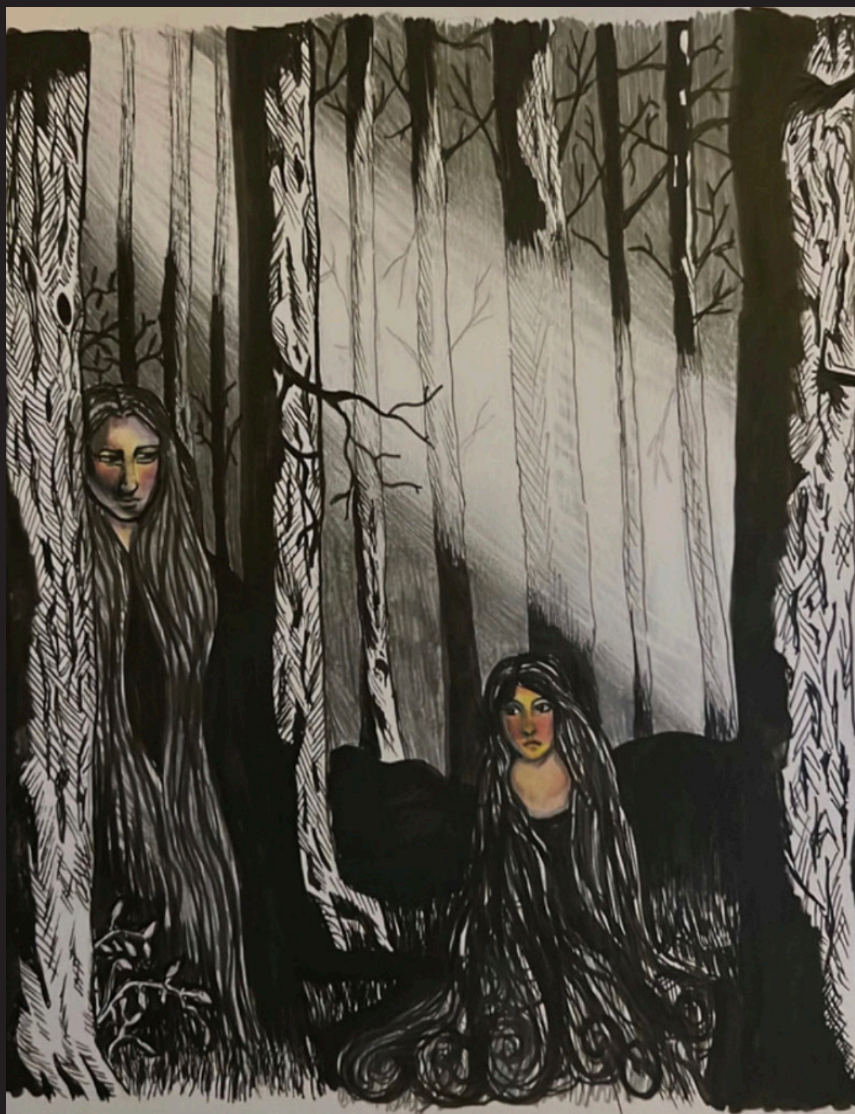
Phoebe Hedges

INNOCENCE ADORNED



Phoebe Hedges

NIGHT WHISPERS





THE ETERNAL NIGHT

Eons after humanity's bitter end, Count Dracula remained. Now a pitiful husk, the Lord Vampire lay inert in the eternal darkness of the Carpathian Mountains as he had for the last hundreds of thousands of years. He was unable to move his withered limbs; unable to scour for blood to sustain himself. Once again, as he had countless times before, he feebly cast his maddened will into the void, calling out to the creatures of the night to whom he was once master. None heeded his desperate call, for none remained. He was alone, the decrepit King of a marred world.

It was by his own folly that the sky was blackened; by his own hand that all of the blood of the planet was dried. Ages before, he had conspired to plunge the Earth into darkness, so that he might never fear the sun again, never have to hide amongst humanity in the guise of an equal. With malignant resolve he labored in the shadows, mustering centuries of wealth and study of science and magics to his task. He eventually succeeded. In the dark pits of his odious dwelling, heavy gears of iron rumbled, driven by unholy currents of fire and smoke. The Earth shook in agony. Putrid clouds of soot choked the skies with groping tendrils, and humanity wept in terror as the Sun, Moon, and stars vanished forevermore.

The vampire watched his work with wicked glee. For a time, he knew himself to be Lord over that endless night, gluttonously feasting on the dwindling kingdoms of men. He was Count Dracula, Master of the Night, Prince of Darkness, Lord of Sorrow! Long may he reign! The screams of humanity were his herald, and their blood was his tithing.

Of course, this couldn't last. Without a sun to nourish the world, humanity quickly perished. With increasing rigor and lustful abandon, Dracula scourged the scattered tribes that remained, until they became harder and harder to find. He scoured them still, across the many leagues and depths of the world.

When at length he came upon the last woman he'd ever see, terror-stricken and weak with hunger, he didn't know. He drank her with the same ignorant greed with which he had consumed all the rest, and discarded her corpse without a thought. He hadn't even spoken to her as he once might have, for in his newfound dominion he deemed it beneath him. His ravenous hunger was hardly satiated, and he continued his compulsive hunt—now in vain.

Necessity would eventually force him to turn to the other creatures of the world, already becoming diminished as well. As the centuries and then millennia passed in darkness, he crawled upon his belly like a wretched worm, feeding on the roaches and subterranean rats he could still enthrall to his will. Madness and lucidity came upon his mind like the seasons of the world of old, for never before had he conceived of being so wretched and alone. He began to miss humanity, to miss the words of banter he'd once traded with them before he broke his vile bread.

The last woman he fed upon haunted his twisted mind for a time—or rather, the contorted idea of her, for he couldn't even remember her face. He couldn't remember any faces anymore, least of all his own. Phantom voices echoed in his ancient skull, tormenting ghosts of civilizations laid to waste. He remembered not their owners. At length, the fleeting visages and haunting voices fled him as well, and left him all the more wretched in their absence.

Eventually, there were no more roaches; no more rats. The world was bare and cold. Dracula crawled, a loathsome thing, until he could crawl no more. Not a drop of blood remained in his withered veins, and yet the merciless spells that kept him would not release his soul. And so he lay. As the years passed slowly, all the once-mighty vampire could do was languish as the languid clouds loomed above him, mocking him for his folly. His fettered consciousness would come to beg for the Sun,

to pray for the burning light that he had cursed so long ago- but he had done his evil work too well, and the dark clouds never parted.

Count Dracula, Master of the Night, Prince of Darkness, Lord of Sorrow, remained, trapped for the rest of all days in the horrid world of his own creation, tormented by a hateful thirst that would never cease. Unable to sleep, unable to dream, he lay for all of the lifetimes of humanity which he had extinguished, and then for many more.

If he had been able to move, he'd have seen that even the shape of the world was unrecognizable. The primordial plates of the Earth itself had shifted and changed beneath his haggard form. Lands once far apart had united in barren expanse, and broken asunder again. The very mountains around him were ground away, eroded by hellish storms from the evil clouds. The Earth would have consumed his body in its shifting and grinding if not for its enduring hatred of his wicked substance. Far above the oppressive ceiling of clouds, unknown to him, even the stars began to flicker out.

After countless such eons, when even his wretched thoughts had slowed within their carnal prison, the eternal night was disturbed. Eons of biting cold gave way to a rising heat like the fires of Hell. The oceans of this blighted world, unnamed, boiled away. Barren dirt and stone began to melt, and the body of the vampire began to sink into a coffin of molten glass. The hideous clouds that had gripped the Earth for so long were torched away, destroyed by the now-dying Sun coming to rescue its world at last. All the Earth was enveloped in a heavenly red light such that no darkness remained, and the very air roared with resounding joy.

As Dracula burned at last, his soul was glad.

Chang Dangus (Joe Convertito)



Chang Dangus (Joe Convertito)



BODY OF WANT

Oh, Venus, I am not too concerned with love, but your control. Control is what you have, dear lady, over all of us- over me. Please, do not give me love lightly, but painfully. Don't you hear my hunger, dear lady? It is a roar for suffering by your hand. I am your servant and I lay here for hours, sleepless, puddle turned to a pool of sweat. I anticipate your hot and heavy temper, as I exchange it for my submission to you. Now, I am ready to feel your chain whip. I am ready to be your dog. I can not think of my youth, only where I am now, delightfully bound. I do not wish to sob, Venus, but I shake and quake until you deliver my release by your hand.

Oh, now I see you dancing over to us! I hope to be the chosen one tonight, but I will wait. Your word is the only word. Oh, yes. I am the one! I will crawl to your chamber, under your chain. Here I go, madam. Jump down my throat as soon as you please and cure my heat, I beg. Oh, you are right, my mistress—I will take your deliverance when you desire. I want to be full, lady. I am hungry, mother. I am hungry.

STATIC ANGEL

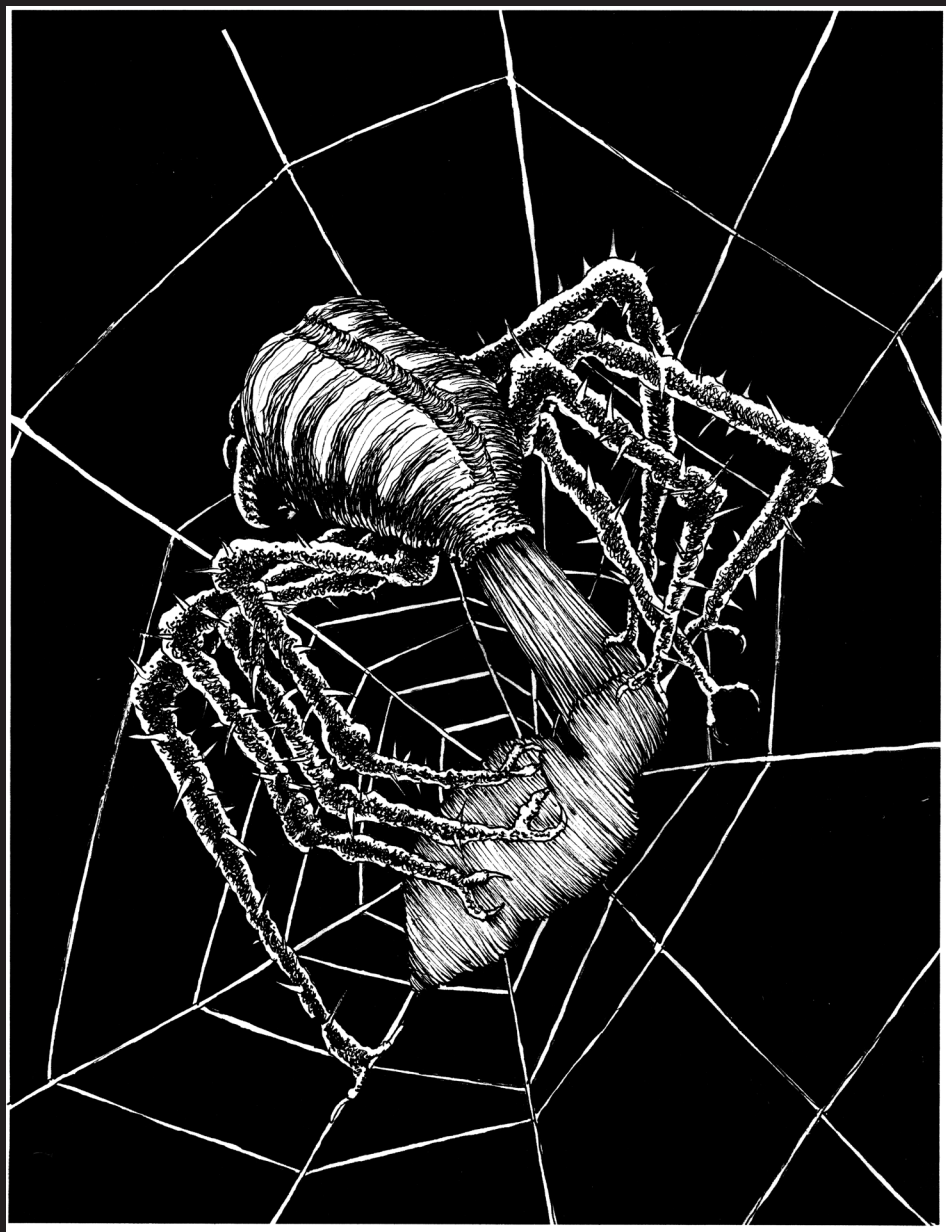
I see you flicker between channels, a subtle pulse
made of light and longing.
I can almost make out your face, half caught in the static glow,
half distorted, wanting to remain in the shadows.
The room hums when your figure moves.
Each breath you take warms the air between us.
Our closeness feels like an oath.
I reach for you then,
and the signal warps, the screen trembling, but your outline pulses,
a gentle buzzing.
The static feels soft, palpable, like fingertips trailing
down flushed, heated skin.
You lean in and for a moment the distortion turns tender,
as lips ghost across the glass,
a kiss I can not return but can still feel everywhere.
And when you fade, I can still feel the warmth we shared,
the gentle noise of static continuing to hum between what once was.

Kat La Rue

TEACH ME YOUR WAYS



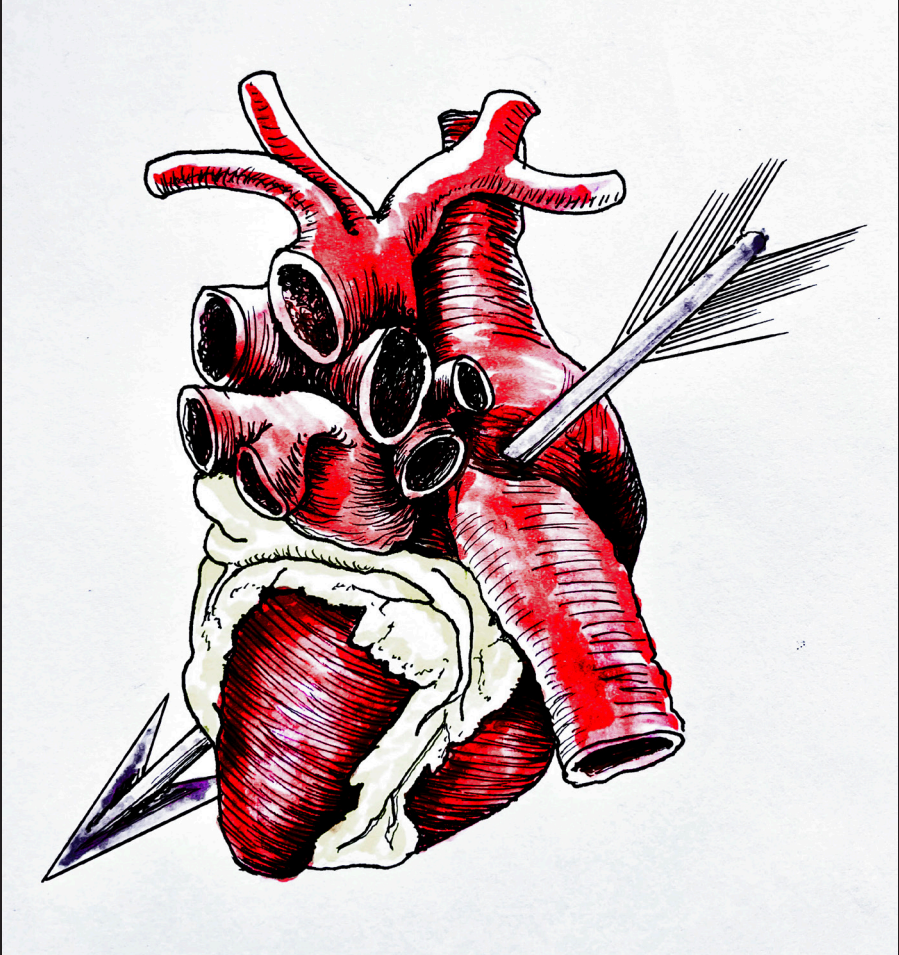
Heather Lee Allen



Heather Lee Allen



Heather Lee Allen



Heather Lee Allen



FREDDY'S REVENGE

The fear I taste in your lips
makes me wonder if nightmares
can be transferred through kiss,
like heat or illness, the way scratch wounds
open to infection.

I'd like to show you my dreams;
let them claw their way from my body
and possess you.

You once told me you weren't afraid
to die in your sleep;
how the blood soaks
into the mattress.

Isn't it enough to love tonight,
no fear of waking up tomorrow?

John Sara

TINA SHEPARD PRAYS FOR AN ANGEL

and the lake answers,
angel of death rising from its waters.

you always knew it took lost things,
watched your father vanish
when you were only a girl.

you think maybe god chooses
what it spits back up; you've
always needed a monster,
not a lover

I know what it's like to drown,
the angel says,
what it's like to lose.

he doesn't have to speak.
somehow you just know.

THE CREATION

I am beauty,
wrapped in corpse's flesh,
given birth by man.

Stitched together with a steady hand,
the precision of God,
and envy of Lucifer,
sewn up to keep the fractured pieces
together.

I am a child,
struggling to walk.
wound up like a machine,
expected to run, but instead, I
stumble.

They beat me while my creator watches,
because I know what art is.
because I know the taste of words on lips.

Because I know a father should
love
what he has created.

I am Adam and I am Eve,
set upon this world and punished by it,
Unlike them, I have seen
my father die.
As he passed, he told me
that I
was nothing
but he died surrounded
by no one
but his only child.

John Sara

Aimless, I wander

shapeless, nameless,

I dance with the ghosts in limbo,
prying them from
their tombs.

I am taken
into the embrace of man
and woman,
They give me their fire and passion,
but I have nothing to give in return but
handfuls of ash.

I tell them that I am dead
But they say no,
my heart
 still beats.

I can hear it,
withering away, like dust.
With each step,
things fall
 apart

I place a flower
atop his grave,
the way it hits the ground
makes me feel like I'm dying
all over again

The spirits reach out to heal me.
gentle is their touch,
like the kiss of worms in soil.

They tell me what I am.

Sierra Gomez

DEATH'S THRONE



SILVER LURE

I float
in your closing palms,
Caught by my own foolishness
of staying in a grasp of fish hooks.
Your hands soon retch my body
In flicks of its chum.
Bone splinters
become evidence of my wrongdoing.

You vivisect me with the edge a silver lure,
To plate me with silver knives.

You watch my scales shiver and decompose,
You gorge upon my pink flesh.
You form my name in spools of your spit.
You chew my name in the turrets of your teeth.
You devour my name in your name;
Make it unknown,
Digest it into shit.

And then with a swift flick of your fork,
I swim below the sink disposal,
Dissolved into green gash.

You entomb me with a lemon,
then flip the switch.

This hides my rot.

SILVERTONGUE SERPENTINE

Silvertongue serpentine
Sly personification
You leave yourself
Everywhere

Too cold nights and dressed in white
I knew you had the dreams too
when your wrist hesitated over my cup
And I know this won't make sense
to anyone else
But suddenly
that red wine tasted like blood
And I remembered
what the circles were for

Silver tongue serpentine
You never did treat your vessels well
But somehow that mouth
always makes for the sweetest sounds
Clear your throat
of a tongue

not meant for this existence
For every footstep
has a resonance
and eye contact
pulls the lines together
all too fast.
Sit on the edge
and look over,
relive the fall
and meditate
in adrenaline
laced
bliss.

Alanna Jane

I'm addicted to the feeling of sober intoxication
and you crave an intoxicated plateau.
What are you so desperate to crave,
if not impacted by the energy of others?
Your apathy never hid your curiosity well.
I wrote about you
when I was young and naïve
My skin so thin it'd constantly bleed
A force of greed
A defining soul, a bar reset too high
I sang about you

Divine and twisted
And I guess I dreamt about you
Flowing robes and smirking teeth
Defiant laughs and forbidden magick
To forget is an illness
Yet to remember is intoxication
You are a reminder
That there is a creator
In all of us
You remind me
Why sitting still
is exhilarating.
Because you say I move too slowly but I claim you move too fast.
Defiant against anything but time

Silvertongue serpentine
You've always sounded the same.
You've always felt the same
An abundance of unpredictability
And stability among chaos
With the way our eyes meet
Words aren't needed.

Juan Amador

THE WATER

There is something in the water
There's no moon to make it move
No sun to shine its blue
Just the gray sky to let me know the end is nigh

There is something in the water
It's ominous
And yet
Still

There is something in the water
A melodic hymn is summoning for my insanity to take a deep dive
It wants to cleanse me with its depth of chaos

There's something in the water
I dip my hands in it,
and

There's nothing in the water

I'm just being a drunk

Romanticizing something that is not there

Still
I wouldn't mind a siren calling for me
I would like to be pulled by her angelic voice
Drowned in her embraced

Jalen Williams

WEARINESS & I



Graydon Bush

GRAVEYARD BOY

The cemetery is overgrown, tongues of grass grown long around blocks of stone.
His wife's steady father had asked to be buried here,
It's too good for him.
Or so the man mutters to his wife.
He thinks he can feel the turf moving,
Perhaps he loved his father-in-law more than he thought.
Did he hear a whisper for a second, as a backhoe tosses bodies, roughshod over the coffin?
He is glad to return home. There,

Children lay in rows, striped with tire tracks.
In a week the lines will heal and they will hear the engine start back up;
To trim down moving mouths, sticking tongues, reforming noses...
Twitching at the stink of the sickly scent of mowing.

Now and then one's hair will spontaneously change color,
Or two hands will accidentally clasp with each other.
So he goes out with gloves, poison, a bag and some seed.
And grins at the red streaks when he's pulled the last weed.

His neighbors rave about his well behaved yard and
He got 250 words in the local paper.
He grinned at a camera that contained no film,
"My secret is composting the tongues."

He worries though, about his son talking back.
He has to raise his voice for the boy to mow
Even the front half of the lawn.

The boy would rather sit with the compost,
The only time he takes his earbuds out,
You'd think he was talking to someone,
But it's only the sound of the writhing tongues.

You'd think he was listening to something,
But it's only the sound of the writhing tongues.
He stands on the hill above his Grandfather's grave.
He gets out here whenever he can.
Feels the feelings of unspoken youth, as

He stands stock still and waves in the wind,
In time with the waving tongues.

AIR FAILED HER

Blue iris
gelatin fibers severe
glass pierces pupils
slits elongate in the lenses.

Bridge of the nose
crumples
splinters
folds inward
bone crunches cartilage
lake of blood in the cupid's bow.

Teeth crack
snap
fractured remains
exposed root
swallow shards of enamel.

Brow split
lip carved
the windshield's razor planes leaving
chemtrails of raw meat.

The neck
twists
tearing ligaments
muscle separating
crisp snap of an artery.

Ringling.

Airbag failure.

APPLE PIE

Bring it to me with fruit flies on top.
You left it too long in the window,
created a greedy swarm.
Tiny legs get glued to the sweet goo.
You don't notice and the
inside has gone cold.

I know your secret ingredients
even though you don't.
The list grew over time as
your brain became smooth.
They're all I taste now.

On the first bite,
I'll involuntarily floss my teeth
with one of your wispy
white hairs.

The dough you kneaded
with arthritic hands of psoriasis,
unseen skin cells baked into every
inch of flakey, buttery crust.

You bite your nails when you're trying
to remember the recipe.
These pies you used to manifest blindfolded,
now blank in memory.
The pointy tips of keratin
end up in the dry mix,
integrated with granulated sugar.

Sky Intrieri

You seeped iron into the apples,
cut your finger when peeling the Granny Smiths.
You bring me a glass of milk as a compliment.
Floating like all your grandkids' names in your mind
an eyelash, black and thin sails the white sea.

I used to love your apple pie Grandma,
but now, you serve me yourself embedded.
You make a cannibal of me,
but I'll still eat every bite
for you.

RED POWDER

My body wasn't built for the cold. My feet, eternally stinging from the frostbite I'd received years before, were numb inside my heavy boots. On my scarf were tiny droplets of water that had accumulated as a result of my breath against it. Everything was made stiff by my thick jacket and snow pants. My hands, though enveloped in gloves, were as numb as my feet.

"Tommy," I yelled, not knowing where he had gotten off to. My little brother always liked to run ahead of me into the forest and hide behind the trees like a soldier avoiding the enemy. He was eight, and I was twelve, so I always had to keep an eye out for him. I looked around for his brown hair, knowing that if it was poking out, it would give away his position against the white snow. It was fresh snow too, leaving a two foot blanket over everything.

I followed the footsteps Tommy had left in the snow with his own set of boots. They made a harsh right angle from the path, leading behind two boulders. I followed the trail and found Tommy, not hiding, but sitting against the meeting point of the rocks, building up the snow in front of him.

"I think I could cover myself and sleep overnight here if I really wanted to," he said, looking up at me.

"Oh yeah?" I said. A wicked smile crept over my face. "Well, what about the wolves?"

"What about them?" he said. "They won't bother me if I don't bother them. That's what Mom says about the bees."

"Don't be stupid," I said. "These aren't bees. They'll smell you. You've been sweating under that big coat. They'll smell it and come for you. They'll tear down your fort, pin you against this rock, and rip your insides out into a steaming pile on the snow."

He wasn't listening to me. His focus was on trying to keep the snow wall upright, so I kicked it to get his attention. It came crumbling down, and he yelled in frustration. He stood up and kicked the rest of it

down. He walked off, and I followed him.

Tommy was easily upset. It wasn't always like that, but more recently it had been getting worse. It wasn't puberty. He was still a few years off from that. He turned around, and I realized how red his face was. I couldn't tell if it was from anger, the cold, or a mix of the two.

"Where's the chimney?" he asked, still angry. I could sense that he didn't want to ask for directions, but it was difficult to see the path in the snow, even for me.

"You mean my chimney? Just at the top of that hill, to the left there," I said, pointing in the direction. He turned around and trudged on.

We trekked up the hill and came to the flat shelf at the top. There sat a stone chimney with a half-circle of rocks in front of it which acted as chairs. My suspicion had been that a colonial house had collapsed there, and all that was left of it was this chimney. It wasn't far fetched since there were several abandoned, colonial houses in that forest. It was always strange to me that, in town, the colonial houses were made into museums that my school would go visit, but far out there, they were left to the mercy of nature.

Tommy went to look inside the fireplace. Usually the only things that were in there were ashes and broken beer bottles.

"Haley!" Tommy said excitedly. "Check this out."

I came up behind him and leaned down to see inside the fireplace. So much snow had blown into the fireplace that I didn't see what he was talking about at first. Then, I saw what looked like a patch of snow moving up and down, breathing. I bent down to sit and look closer. It was the smallest white rabbit I had ever seen. It was the only white rabbit I had ever seen, actually. It was only distinguishable against the snow by its pale pink nose and tiny black eyes, though they were closed, leaving only slits.

"It's not dead is it?" Tommy said.

"No," I replied. "It's sleeping." I looked around the fireplace for any sign of a rabbit hole or other babies, but there were none.

"What do we do with it?" Tommy asked, reaching in to pick

it up. It was engulfed by his hands without a struggle. It did, however, open its eyes.

"Tommy, put it down," I hissed. "The mom won't take it back with your stink all over it."

"It's fine," he said. He ran his finger over the center of its head, pressing down a little too hard, making its ears flatten.

"Don't be so rough with it," I said, stepping closer.

"I'm not. I'm just petting it," Tommy said angrily.

"No," I said, moving closer still. "You're going to hurt it. Give it to me." I reached my hand out to take it from him.

"Back off Haley," Tommy said, pulling the rabbit away quickly. His eyebrows hung low over his eyes in a scowl, and his lips pursed. The rabbit shifted nervously in between his hands.

"Come on. You're scaring it," I said, also getting angry. I reached again for the rabbit, but he shoved me with his elbow.

"I said no!" he yelled.

"Why are you being such a brat? Just give it to me," I said. I tried getting the rabbit away from him like a basketball player, eliminating any chance for Tommy to escape. His face was red once again, and he tried to run away, the rabbit dangling from this hand by its head. I grabbed the hood of his jacket yanking him back. He cried out in anger.

"Fine have it!" he screamed. Gripping the rabbit tightly, he threw it towards the fireplace. It landed with a soft, but distinct thunk on the hard, stone frame. It fell quietly into the snow, leaving a small crater. A tiny spot of red formed against its white fur.

Astonished, I loosened my grip on Tommy's jacket, and without missing a beat, he lurched forward. He was still filled with rage. He grabbed a rock and kneeling next to the dying rabbit, breathing heavily, he brought the rock down again and again onto it, each time spraying droplets of blood onto the surrounding untouched snow. I watched paralyzed. He didn't stop; in fact, each hit was harder.

I snapped out of my frozen state and ran towards him. As he brought the rock up again, I grabbed it. I pulled up and the force of

it caused us both to fall backwards, him on top of me. The rock was out of his hands. He tried to sit up, but I bear-hugged him so that he couldn't move. He screamed and contorted, trying to break free.

"You never let me have anything!" he screamed. "Why don't you ever let me have anything? Why can't you just be nice to me? You're my sister!" His words held agony, as if I was the ultimate betrayal. I could see tears running down the sides of his red, chapped cheeks, into his hairline. He cried as if he was in physical pain.

He was right. I was always pushing him. I thought it was funny. That was just what brothers and sisters did, wasn't it? I didn't think it was this big of a deal, but to him it was everything. Maybe he didn't get upset easily like I thought. Maybe I was the one taking things too far.

He stopped fighting. He sniffled back the snot that was starting to stream from his nose and looked up at the sky.

"Why don't you love me, Haley?" he whimpered.

My throat tightened, and cold tears brimmed on my water line. Somehow, in Tommy's little eight-year-old mind, I had made him believe that I didn't love him. He was my only sibling, and I had failed him.

"I do love you," I said, holding him warmly now with no intention of holding him down. "I do. I'm sorry."

We lay there in the snow, looking up at the veins of dead branches running across the sky. I rubbed Tommy's arm constantly, and every once and a while, he wiped his nose. The rabbit lay in a bloody pulp beside us, its original form indistinguishable. I kicked snow over it, hoping Tommy wouldn't see. I wiped a spot of blood from Tommy's coat with my glove and pressed the residue into the snow. We stayed there until our breathing calmed and matched each other's.

"Do you want to build a fort?" I finally asked. I was twelve after all. What else could I say? A melancholy smile crossed his face.

"Ok."

HOW TO TASTE LIKE CHERRIES

- I. Eat a handful of the sun warmed fruits. Let the sweetness and warmth fill your stomach and flood your mouth, grow hot with it. Feel, for a moment, like a child sticky with the juices. Lick your fingers.
- II. Swallow the syrup by the spoonful, make yourself sick with the sucrose and dye. Turn your tongue red and let your insides sweep with red sugar. Dissolve the flavor until you can taste nothing else. Don't stop swallowing no matter how sick you feel.
- III. Rub the balm against your lips, the synthetic scent devouring your senses. Allow your nose to succumb to the scent. Wrap yourself in the softness of this sense, the sweetness of it. Don't ask who it's for.
- IV. Sink those red teeth into your thigh, your breast. Let the red spilling out coat your tongue that dark, metallic red. It's almost cherry juice now. Pure, concentrated, tart cherry juice. One hundred percent fresh. Know that this is inside you, but don't wonder how.
- V. Kiss a boy with cherry lip balm. Consume his lips on your own, swallow him whole, and know his cherry taste better than your own. Choke on his sweet flavor and let him drink of yours. Guide him to the torn flesh of you and let him taste your cherry blood, let him know the sweetness of your core.
- VI. Devour the cherry boy and everything he's made of. Was it worth it? Is it still sweet, or can you only taste the stain of blood against your tongue, cherry red and artificial?

Katherine Murchison

HOLDING YOU LIKE WATER IN MY HANDS

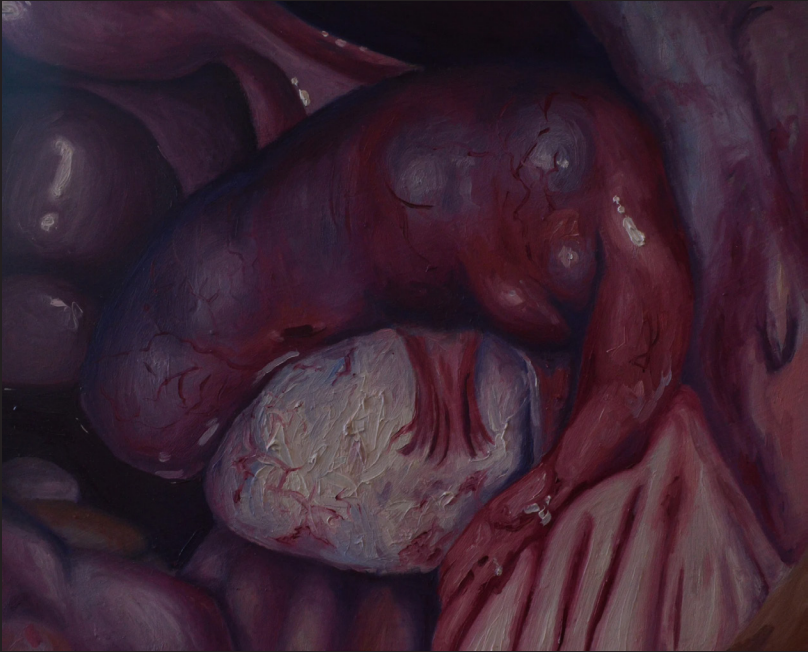




Katherine Murchison



Katherine Murchison



THE SELF AND OTHER UNEXPLAINED FEMALE DEATHS

Between my thighs, my chest, my hips
I have teeth
My insides a great, gaping maw
Tongue sliced open and bleeding, all sinew and spit
The most perverted of shame
I coil in on myself as it licks over my skin like tendrils of eternal fire
I will burn in hell for this
When I clean my room, wash the dishes, fold the laundry
I have teeth
Swallowing my pride, I track viscera through the door, on the carpet, onto the bed
The shame licks between my thighs and tastes blood
There is no ego, no respect in the clotting
When I rip open my flesh, I crane my neck to stare at whatever is left of me
And I do not find forgiveness there
I do not find pity
All I find is the second son of violence
The second son who will die, brutal and tragic
In the war that he started himself
And I find teeth
Yellowed, gnashing, bloodied teeth
They are mine, this monstrous existence
And I will bite and tear until there is nothing

CARNAL WAR

I am yours to bite,
sacrilegious consummation
fulfills our appetite,
rolling archaic thunder
of your lust-struck desire
leaves me torn asunder.

All of you a weapon, sharp,
your claws pluck and
play my heartstring harp,
spellbinding haze
conjures our bodies
into an interwoven maze.

We are meat, breaking teeth
over punctured lips,
in search of primal relief,
dusk of flesh, no coming dawn,
this battle of carnality
will war forever on.

Lin Rigor

ALL MEN MUST DIE



FISHNET

There's a girl I know that scares me
Wearing fishnets and latex
In rippling folds
A feline fiend, an apex
predator, not tipping but crushing
black velvet
beneath her platform shoe

It scares me the way she could cut me
with her eyeliner wings
The way I yearn for her to make me
sweat and salivate
Plead beneath her teasing fingers
And bleed beneath her coffin cut claws

A woman, no – creature
of the night, of a secret life
That I long to be rebirthed into
As her vampire daughter

And it scares me, seeing her across the dance floor
Past writhing bodies and glimpses of slick tongues, locked in slithering
embraces.
The way her eyes latch onto my chest, pulling me in,
while she turns to leave
plated skirt swaying, around her fishnet thighs
Leading me down a path I've been lost on
Since the first time I lost myself in her eyes

She waits for me in the bathroom
Murder shoes under the stall door
covered in graffiti by a thousand raging dykes

Frida Windelhed

The door comes unlocked and I come undone in the backlight, in
the cracked mirror behind her
covered in black lipstick lip prints
I pull the door closed behind me and we start to pull layers
and layers
off each other
ripping fabric and zippers, tearing down walls until our hottest
secrets
and darkest fantasies
are revealed to be fulfilled

Nothing but wet skin between us
And her dark lake eyes shine
And her jelly candy lip tremble
As if I scare her
And in her fear, mirroring mine, I find my own confidence
my sexiness and my faith
in what I can find deep inside her
the depth of her pleasure, and the source of mine
is a violent
urge

Next, there is nothing
but the bathroom floor bruising my knees
the hem of her skirt gracing my forehead, like a blessing
While I pray for the gap between her thighs
Worshiping her with my mouth
reaching my fingers in
to tear her fishnets into shreds, ripping threads
A gasp, a release
And her taste on my tongue
In which I bathe and drown
And gasp and moan

Frida Windelhed

My tongue, entering her
Eating and sucking
her

In my spinning world, made of her voice
rising towards climax, our young and yearning hearts
and the beat of club music bass
pounding
in and out of sync
like blood throbbing
Rising towards the boiling point

I stand, I turn her, I bend her over and I fuck her
while she laughs against the broken mirror, her breath fogging the glass
and she cramps around my fingers
And we gasp for air, we are drowned, a great and gasping death
Reborn, immortal, we stagger back out
into the club
With ripped fishnets and her taste
in my mouth

THE CONFESSION

Forgive me, Father, for last night I laid down with a demon
Worse yet, a demoness
And the goddess
of all witches
Last night I laid down with Lilith, her name thick in my mouth
And I felt her slip
into my consciousness, my bed, and onto my body
her feverish skin colliding with mine, cold, a hot avalanche, a firefall,
pouring
And when she asked me, like a lonely vampire, to let her in
I let her in

And she was big, Father, bigger than I ever imagined
She filled my apartment like some sweet-smelling smoke
Draped in mesh, flowing, a golden nose ring, glowing
big enough that I could wear it like a collar
Her horns smoked like incense
And her hair, black and shiny like the backs of snakes, slithered across
my furniture,
and her voice, as she moaned, tore through and ruptured all tissue, filled
every orifice and brought
every fluid, rising,
to its boiling point

Her body, the goddess', the demoness'
Was infinite
and yet
Her hips
Fit perfectly between my hands
when I pulled her close, and her weight
when she lowered herself over me

Frida Windelhed

like a guillotine
To sit on my face
She crushed me only to the point where death
and life, gasping,
were equally vibrant
and vibrating in me

Like excited blood rushing
Like the taste of her, gushing

I drank her, Father, like water turned wine, and I,
drunk on her and wanting to drown in her,
cried out when she tore away from me
to climb down my body to kiss the side of my neck
and the vein there, black and blue beneath the skin
a bruise, throbbing for her
I offered her that vein, my life, pounding
And asked her – nay prayed for her – to drink
I let her eat me alive
Suck me dry, to the bone
she devoured me whole
And dying, every time
felt like cumming and coming alive
and coming again

We fucked, Father
while the goddess drank my sacrifice
We fucked deep and slow, with the long movement of waves pouring in
and pulling back from a
shore, crashing
at night
And her mouth tasted of sweet blood and black belladonna berries,
cherries
her breath blew a fire into my lungs that rage and dance still, in every

Frida Windelhed

vein, like the most
magnificent madness

And forgive me not, Father, for I am not sorry
The fact is she came to me because I summoned her!
Because I have hungered and thirsted for her all of my life
I have painted my sigils and tied dried herbs to candles
dripped my blood into molten wax and said thirteen Hail Marys
Thirteen Hail Marys as a prayer for Lilith
Sister of Eve, the wild and free
The first daughter to make herself fatherless

and take her own name
The freer of slaves and lover of the moon
My mother and all demons' mother

I summoned her to serve her
With my fingers and my tongue
To worship at her feet, and to kiss them
to be stepped on by her 'til I am dust
I long to to it again
And burn forever in her arms, mad with pleasure

And when she comes for you, Father, let her have you
It will be worth it

Luna Ramirez (Azul)

EXCUVIAE



SLASHER

Young men file into theater seats, wielding blow-up knives, hiding behind *Scream* masks. They hoot and holler. Bounce popcorn on knees in anticipation. A young starlet appears on screen, blonde hair and blue eyes eliciting barks and howls. Plastic weapons thrust into air, fucking the fog composed of butter and 3-in-1 body wash. They grab their denim-covered cocks and cheer as the cold-open ingenue drops her pink satin robe, stepping into a Hitchcockian shower. They buck their hips at nothing, holding a phantom head in place. They stretch their hands out and squeeze, as if reaching through the screen, groping exposed tits. The camera leers like a voyeur, zooming out only long enough to reveal a masked killer in the corner. Bodies leap from seats. Voices shout, Get her! Kill that bitch! Shampoo lathers in her sandy bob, foam drips down closed eyes, white bubbles cascade down black lashes. Steel stabs in-out in-out in-out as she cowers, sliding into a scarlet stream as the metal tip gushes. They sigh in release.

DEAR FINAL GIRL

When sun sparkles shimmered on a dead killer,
did you forget my flesh stench? Did you forget
finding me gutted like a whitetail, bloody sheets
twisted around my maimed body? Did you forget
hearing my screams outside the house where you
left me for dead?

Or, better yet, do you remember? Do you remember
clutching your sterling crucifix when I downed warm
tequila in that solo-cup-littered kitchen? Do you remember
thinking girls who let guys guide them upstairs at parties
get what they're asking for? Do you remember discovering
my body, sighing in relief, *Thank God it wasn't me.*

FEMME FATALE

My hunting ground is a rundown pub. I slither onto a stool, sequin scales scratching the wood as I settle in, flipping tousled curls over my shoulder. My siren eyes dart around the bar, hiding behind layers of smudged blackest black mascara. My forked tongue slips between rum-cherry lips, hissing, sniffing out prey. Locating the perfect combination of musk and leather, mixed with whiskey breath and Marlboro Gold. My laugh bubbles like just-popped prosecco, floats over pool tables, bursts on the Jukebox. Men are moths, lured by the shimmer of the loudest girl at the bar. I find a victim with chocolate ringlets and big soppy eyes. Hold him captive. I down two ounces of Jäger and Red Bull, make him yearn to emerge from a chrysalis as a shot glass, slipping between my lips.

Sawyer Merrell

I LIVE WITHIN EVERYTHING



Sawyer Merrell

I LIVE WITHIN EVERYTHING



WITCH (GROUNDING)

It's still early when I flip over
the rock on the grave.

A shining white thing
springs skyward,

a mirror of the moon.
At first I think

it's a finger bone.
Then I remember why

I brought the match
in my pocket.

A creature—
a white salamander—

squirms in the soil.
I strike the match

along its back.
Green flames spark

up. Flickering, spitting.
An anger controlled.

I light the candle left
for me on the ground,

use its shine to walk after
the salamander to the

Kira Rosemarie

edge of the wood,
following the red stripe

I left down its spine.
There's dying,

and then there's dying looking for something.
If I divine a path to womanhood

through these trees, I'll find
the coven of the collective.

Their circle is a rapture
in the distance.

The salamander has shed its skin
and transformed into a white raven.

It's feathers out it as Other to its kin,
as darling to me.

It perches on my shoulder,
slender and somber.

This creature and I have looked
nowhere together for so long,

a consciousness deceived. Now
we look forward into the clearing.

The wind delivers
a taste of starlight.

WITCH (REALMS)

I take a moment to feel the unseen.
Step outside myself.
This is what the ritual is for.
This is when we leave our bodies.

I can't name the feeling behind the veil,
gossamer and gleaming,
referred to by the mystics as ecstasy
and the skeptics as madness.

Brace your knees for a graceful fall.
We worship the sisterhood
that has held us up, cool lotus leaves
on the tense surface.

O, holy girls, we've gathered
a grimoire of insanity.
We are wild to keep going—
we must keep going.

All seasons pass behind my eyes,
a Dianic hymn thrums through my eardrums.
The realm is without me,
the realm is within.

Kira Rosemarie

The bonfire has been going for a long time.
Ash covers bare arms
and mixes with sweat into
a black paste, blood-thick.

The raven on my shoulder squawks nervously.
To leave the protection of the old forest
and step forward to the coven's circle
is to forge a new womanhood.

I've written this ritual.
The poetry of the incantation
speeds through my breath,
somatic, psalmic.

We speak words aloud that
trick demons, worry weak men,
ensorcell strong men, and
call out to sisters.

The tradition of burning
continues without feeding
anyone to the pyre.

IN THE WATER

So often in old tales
heaped ceremoniously with masculine
cultural weight,
the Witch is discovered in the water.
Bathing, swimming, dwelling—
an element at once fluid and rigid,
generous and ruthless,
with no form but the body that holds it,
the only thing that contains her,
separates her from men's wants.

Heroic men find females there, in the water—
Artemis runs her voyeurs through when glimpsed bathing
through greenery in her wood.
Grendel's mother retreats through dark depths
after snatching her son's aggressors in her warrior's grip.
Circe dwells, water-locked, on an island
where her power reigns.
The Lady of the Lake waits, wet, wilding
the world with her presence below.

Today, the Witch kneels by a stream
to contemplate selfishness,
the concept prescribed to the water-bound
by those who couldn't take what they wanted
from the liquid of her hands.

How selfish this water,
eroding dirt with the invisible grip of hungry fins,
stealing eggs in currents and swiping
belongings in circles along
eddies and whirlpools of tender proportions.

Kira Rosemarie

How selfless the nourishment,
how priceless what is sipped from
cupped hands in quiet moments,
cleansed ritually through tangled strands
of hair curled around pine needles and
dirt yet to be bathed away.

Had she chosen to be maiden then mother,
sired a daughter through the streams of
childbearing, child weaning, the tears of child beings,
“selfish” would remain untranslated from ancient scripts,
a slur worse than a village’s worst taunt at woman.

But today, she rises, wipes her mouth
from wild gulps of the stream’s offerings,
returns to the place where she lives in the non-giving quiet.
Cordoned off from others’ lands,
the water of peace surrounds her,
beautifully selfish in her own mythology.

IF DARKNESS HAD ARMS

Arms extended, the embrace of darkness would spread out wide, awaiting me to come near.

A breath of hope, its freshness would fan my face as it exhales in relief, as if it had always awaited me.

If I could live every day in the comfort of its embrace, I would cherish every moment and wish that it had a face.

A solid body of shadow and mind, it would be lean muscled, not too strong but just firm enough to allow me to feel its strength and to see the power it wielded without having to make a single move; long wavy chocolate brown hair would curtain its handsome face.

The colorful windows to my soul act as the eyes of the immaculate being, a soul that darkness and all parts of him equally match.

It can tell the thoughts running through my mind, our telepathy stronger than the bonds of time, and this sweet being hears everything—every wish, every time.

Standing before me lay the epitome of a brilliant dream. I saw everything I wished for. I saw everything I could have ever wanted. There were eyes...his eyes. His smile, his body, which held so much strength and fervor. There was his hair, his passion.

Most of all, there were his arms, arms that reached out and welcomed me, pleading for me.

I opened my arms wide to embrace him back.

Bloodlust



Magazine



From the Editors' Desks:



WHAT WE CALL HOME

“This is your fault, you know.”

It’s been about an hour since Zach and I got lost on a hike through this thick forest where wherever we go, everything looks the same. We had gotten turned around from the trail markings and couldn’t find our way back. We only had another two hours or so left of sunlight and no service on our phones, bugs biting at our ankles and sweat staining out shirts. The desperation was beginning to seep in.

“You insisted on coming here,” he adds when I ignore his initial stab at me. I should be annoyed at him for pinning the blame on me. I should be enraged, actually. But instead I feel an aching guilt begin to simmer at the bottom of my stomach.

“I’m sorry,” is all I manage.

He rolls his eyes at me, picks up a thick stick from the forest floor and launches it as far as he can in a heated frustration. I flinch.

“I have to take a piss,” he grunts before storming off in the opposite direction we were headed.

I wait for him there, flexing my abdomen to try and squeeze out the nervous tension that’s erupting inside of me. It was actually his idea to stray away from the path- he had said the climb was too steep and that if we zig-zagged our way up the mountain, it would be easier on his calves. I didn’t understand why someone like Zach, who hits the gym every single day, was so reluctant to trek a mildly difficult incline. Sometimes I feel like he needs to change things for the sole reason of controlling the situation. And then there’s me, who always lets him.

A few minutes go by before I have the thought- why did he have to walk so far from me just to take a piss? It’s not like he’s never done it right in front of me before. We live together, for Christ’s sake.

“Zach?” I yell in the direction he went. No answer.

“ZACH?”

A flood of panic.

I start running where he walked off to, screaming his name again and again. Nothing. What the fuck. There's no way he just left me here out of his own anger. No way he abandoned me in the middle of the woods out of spite to fend for myself.

But another part of me- the part that throbs and aches like an open wound that's been inside of me for as long as I can recall- knows that this is exactly something he would do.

My face gets hot and I can feel the tears behind my eyes begging to spill. *No*, I think. *Don't do this. Not now.*

I swallow it all back, the simmering in my stomach now a lump. Hard and heavy. I turn around and keep trekking on. I look for any sign of anything familiar. Anything at all. It is only tree after tree, dirt beside dirt. No sign of the path. Fuck.

I don't know how long I'm walking aimlessly before I notice the sky begin to dim. I should just give up, lay amongst the dirt and the pines and decay here. Maybe then would Zach feel an ounce of sympathy for me. Maybe then and only then would he feel a sliver of guilt for leaving me here.

I'm about to finally let the tears spill, let the desperation and fear inside of me overflow. But it's then that I notice something that looks out of place. A little splash of red amongst the brown and green scenery that never seems to change.

I walk towards it, a glimmer of hope beginning to rise. When I get closer, I make out that it's a scarlet-painted door to a small cabin. I don't know if I'd even call it that. A shack, maybe.

I'm light on my feet the nearer I get, trying to scope out the scene. This little shack is definitely vacant, abandoned here just like me. I can tell by the vines growing through its splintered boards that it's old and even looks on the verge of collapsing. Still no sign of the trail. Just some shitty shack that doesn't bring me any closer to a way out of here.

I hesitate before returning to the direction I only guessed would

guide me back. The sun is beginning to dip below the treeline and the sky is becoming dim. I can't even navigate with the light, but it would feel all the worse if I kept trying in complete darkness. Maybe I should stay here and use this shitty shack as a place to rest until morning comes. It's likely my best option.

When I make it to the door, it's locked. Or maybe just stuck, assuming its hinges haven't been moved in who knows how long. Either way it shouldn't take much to force it open.

I throw my entire weight against it three times before the door bursts open. From what I can tell there's only one room and no windows, but the place is encased in darkness. I pull out my lighter and flick it on, the soft glow of the flame not doing much to reveal the inside.

I make my way around the room and discover it's much bigger in here than it seems from the inside. The flame licks my finger and I curse and drop the lighter. I pick it up as I keep moving. When I flick it back on, I scream.

There's a girl sprawled out in the corner, pale and thin. Her hair is mangled and her eyes are half open, pupils rolled to the back of her head. She's definitely unconscious.

I don't know what to do. She didn't even stir at the sound of my scream. For a moment I wonder if I'm staring at a corpse, but I can see her shallow breath through the white linen dress she has on, tattered and dirty.

My heart pounds in my ears as I lean in closer to look at her. "What the fuck," I whisper. When I get closer to her face, I realize I actually recognize her. Molly Thompson. Her face is plastered all over my small town: MISSING PERSON. She disappeared months ago and at this point everyone began to assume she was dead. How the fuck did she end up here? What the fuck happened to this poor girl? She wasn't much younger than me. As scared as I am right now, my body fills with a gnawing ache. I need to get her the fuck out of here.

It's then that I notice she's chained up to a metal plate screwed

into the wall. One of her arms is free but the other wrist is cuffed. There's no way I'm strong enough to break the chain but knowing this shack is old and worn, maybe I can break the entire wall that the metal plate is bound to.

My body hums with fear: for her, for myself, for whatever chained her here, but I shake it off and begin throwing myself against the wall beside the plate, the same way I did with the door. This is the commotion that finally makes Molly begin to come to. I can hear her begin to stir, and I flick the lighter back on and bring my face close to hers.

"You're safe. My name is Aria and I'm here to help you. I'm getting you out," I tell her softly.

She blinks at me in confusion. She seems so out of it that I'm afraid she assumes I'm just some hallucination. I need her to know this is real, that she's being saved, so I gently grab one of her frail hands. Cold to the touch. Fragile, like I can break it with one small squeeze.

"Just sit tight."

At that, I drop her hand and get back to my attempt at breaking the wall down. Then that same, delicate hand I was just holding wraps itself around my ankle with a strength I assumed it couldn't possibly possess.

"Stop it," she croaks out weakly.

"What?"

"I said stop," more pronounced now.

She has to be delirious. Can't she see that I'm trying to help her? I ignore her and keep throwing myself against the wall, feeling the bruises already begin to form all down my body.

"I SAID FUCKING STOP!" Her voice booms throughout this small shack, and I can hear some nearby birds retreat in haste.

I kneel back down to her, not even bothering with the lighter

this time. My eyes have adjusted a bit to the darkness and I can almost make out her features in the shadows.

“Molly. I am here to get you out of here. Do you understand?”

This time, she grabs me. Aggressively. My wrists are in her hands and she pulls me close to her face.

“Get the fuck out of here.”

“What?”

“I said get the fuck out.”

That confirms it. She has to be out of her mind.

“Not without you,” I tell her before beginning to stand again, but her grip on my wrists only grows tighter. Desperate.

“LEAVE ME HERE, I WANT TO BE HERE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND? DO YOU GET IT? I’M NOT GOING ANYWHERE. I’M WHERE I BELONG!”

Spit sprays onto my face as she screams at me, her voice sounding next to a growl. This begging is raw, anguished- she is more alert than I thought. She knows what she wants.

“LEAVE ME, FUCKING LEAVE ME!!!”

I’m about to scream back. I’m about to call her crazy for wanting to stay. I’m about to tell her that she is dying in this little shack, chained up and passive to her captor when there is a way out right in front of her.

There is a shuffling outside, footsteps from afar, headed in our direction. She pulls me even closer to her, her rancid breath stinging my eyes.

“If you don’t leave now, he’ll take you, too.”

For a moment her words linger between us as if there was some consideration to be done. I snap out of it quick.

“Fuck this,” I whisper under my breath. She finally lets go of me and I bolt out the door. I can see a tall figure from afar approaching,

holding what looks like grocery bags in both hands.

Not caring if the figure noticed me or not, I run the opposite direction.

I run by the light of the moon, weaving through trees and hopping over large rocks. I run towards nothing, away from whatever the fuck I just witnessed. My body does not slow down, does not grow tired. I run and I run and I run until a root sticking out from the dirt catches my foot and I am face down, ringing in my ears and a searing pain splitting through my head. Darkness. Cicadas singing nearby.

~

When I wake, there are fluorescent lights beating down on me. I almost jolt up. Afraid of where I ended up, wondering if the looming figure had gotten to me. But when I finally process my surroundings I find myself in a hospital bed, Zach staring at me from above with a look of pure remorse painted across his face. I don't think I've ever seen him look at me that way.

"Aria..." he starts.

But I don't even let him finish. There is no point. Instead I weave his hand through mine and pull him in for an embrace, his warm flesh crushing my aching body.

I beg into his ear as he holds me, "Please never leave me."

LETTER TO MANKIND

There's nothing kind about you.
Even when you're gentle.
Especially when you're gentle.

I've had what it takes, once or twice
To grant such tenderness without really meaning it.
Every part of me rotted.
Every point of contact: decay.

You've painted this portrait of me,
Better yet,
Scratched it out with my very excretions.
It is stained.
It is engraved into a monument
I am too weak to destroy alone.

You've drawn me pale and drained.
Ruined.
There's nothing kind you've left for me,
Nothing worth holding dear.
Ruined.

You can be my father
& your mouth waters.
You can be my mentor
But you'd rather leave me stranded here,
Leaking and bruised.
Ruined.

Breezy Jewel

You think your hands on me
For long enough
Can make me forget.
But I cannot rid of this history.
Cannot stop remembering the tale that is me.

Every once in a while I try to rewrite the narrative-
If I pretend touch is all that I desire
Then there could be no disappointment
When I find
Touch is all anyone is willing to offer me.
Ruined.

Mankind, your lust has ruined me.
Mankind, your greed is etched into my bones.
I am more than just a body that aches,
More than only surrendered flesh.

Mankind, you will learn that one day.
The absence of my mind
Will leave your spirit throbbing.
Mankind, one day
It will be you
Who is down on your knees.

STAYING POWER

I tend to go for the throat:
something I learned from wolves.
I am not proud of it.
Most times, my teeth suffer
more than the skin they puncture,
as they get stuck and drag and rip
(everything that escapes me
stumbles away bleeding.
I am not proud of that, either).

I could feel that you were leaving.

Your breath was shaking as we lay
in silence.
I ran my thumb down your neck
and felt the smooth surface.
I didn't want to show you
what being loved by me really looks like,
for it is truly something of
rabid animals.
It is a twisting, a bending of fate.
It is a fight to the death,
a tooth and a nail,
a killer whale, a fear of water,
a plunge too deep to let the light in.
It is a grip so tight that skin falls off bone.

So, I admitted that I was going to miss you
with my jaw clenched,
my cheek against yours,
my eyes on the ceiling.
I told myself
that I am lucky just to know you,
and to let the rest take care of itself—
write poetry in my head on the drive back,
forget it all by the time I get home.

THE SELF

If you cut open a leaf,
its veins would bleed more
than if you sliced me from heel to head.

I am already dead,
held together by sheer stockings—
a fishnet wrangling together
creatures that don't get along.

A seagull's cry comes dancing in from across the water.
The crabs bury themselves beneath the sand.
I stumble between,
collecting pebbles,
catching my fingers in my hair,
ripping it out and sending it to the wind.

I am thoughtless
and I don't bleed.
I am merely pieces,
bound by jagged thread.

I fall to my knees
to rot beside a beached fish,
washing my hands in the sea.

Author



Bios

Ash Muzzillo is a 21-year-old writer residing in MA, USA. Currently a senior in university, she majors in English with a concentration in Creative Writing and a minor in Religious Studies while simultaneously pursuing a Master's of Arts in English Writing. Ash is a subculture creature, chronic illness-haver, and vampire. She writes poetry and fiction with common themes of religious iconography, the natural world, gothicism, taboo, rage, longing, and humor (sometimes all at once). Find her previously published work at 7th Circle Pyrite, Nowhere, and Lilith's Diaries (forthcoming). Instagram: @ladycatashtrophe. Website: cult-of-catashtrophe.nekoweb.org

Tulane alumnus **Colleen Hugo** (they/them) lives and creates just outside of Hartford, Connecticut. In addition to their poetry and art practices, they enjoy long phone calls, coffee at night and befriending cats. These things help them to remember that this too shall pass, and that no feeling is final.

HJ is a writer who, for years, heeded the words of a family that said, "You can't make a living as a writer." A longtime reader of poetry and other creative writing genres now with half a century of living under her belt, she is determined conventional thinking simply isn't her bag and if she wants to be a writer, a writer she will be.

Nytmrr is an artist, an angel, and an eldritch horror. She used to spend her time in the grave but recently clawed her way out to be reborn. Her lore can be pieced together @ nytmrr on instagram. She is always watching.

Rachel Turney, Ed.D. (she/her) is an educator and artist located in Denver. Her poems, research articles, reviews, and drawings can be found in a variety of publications. Rachel is passionate about immigrant rights, teacher support, and empowering other artists. She is a *Writers' Hour* prize winner, Best of the Net nominee, and her photography appears on

a few magazine covers. Rachel is on staff at *Bare Back Magazine* with her monthly column *Friday Night in the Suburbs*. She is a reader for *The Los Angeles Review*. Her poetry collection *Record Player Life* is forthcoming with *The Poetry Lighthouse*. Stay tuned and keep writing! Website: turneytalks.com. Instagram: @turneytalks Bluesky: rachelturney

Elijah St. Pierre works on the data team at a public policy research center. He received his undergrad in geology and masters in public policy from the Pennsylvania State University. He writes both poetry and comedy, and lives in New Orleans. His words can be found in the magazines *Clitlit* and *Chillmag*. When not working or writing, Elijah enjoys boxing, microbrewing, being outdoors, and lollygagging.
IG: puddles.poems (poetry) / st.p.air (main)

Sarah Butkovic received her MA in English from Loyola University Chicago in 2023 and has published creative and journalistic work in zines, literary magazines, and a local Chicago paper. Ray Bradbury is her most frequent literary muse as well as her favorite author.

Lea Rigdon (b. 1970, Augusta, United States) is a self-taught artist who bends ink, watercolor, and imagination into luminous myth. Based in Augusta, GA, her work exists somewhere between folklore and dream—where order blurs into chaos, and beauty hides in the strange. Raised among brushes and pigments, Rigdon first watched her mother conjure worlds from color, a quiet spark that would ignite her lifelong obsession with creation. Childhood hours spent lost in the strange wonder of Disney’s dreamlike landscapes seeded her love of fantasy and folklore—a fascination that continues to shape her art’s quiet spellwork. Her practice walks the line between control and release. Pen and ink bring precision; watercolor brings surrender. The two collide in pieces that shimmer with emotion and layered symbolism. Influenced by the luminous eeriness of *Kay Nielsen* and the dream-drenched elegance of *Itzchak Tarkay*, Rigdon seeks to craft *visual poetry*—images that pulse with story and silence. Named the *Greater Augusta Arts Council’s Featured Artist*

of the Month (June 2022), her work has appeared in exhibitions at *The Gertrude Herbert Institute of Art*, 600 Broad, 4P Studios, Augusta & Co. Gallery, The City Gallery, and in events including the Greater Augusta Arts Council's *Wet Paint Party* and *October Spooktacular*. Described as *modern folk surrealism*, her pieces weave myth, nature, and personal lore into luminous patterns and shifting textures. Each painting feels like a whispered spell—an invitation to wander through the uncanny, to find grace in the shadowed corners of imagination. Follow her work on Instagram: [@midnight_marigolds_studio](#)

Yucheng Tao is a poet, hybrid short fiction writer, and experimental musician pursuing a B.A. in Songwriting at Musicians Institute. His work has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Spectral Realms*, *NonBinary Review*, *Poésie Première* and others. His chapbook is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press.

Arielle Arbushites is many things, but above all she is a mother and a licensed social worker who has been a writer all her life. She has mainly published poetry on social platforms and lit mags or journals, but also debuted a short poetry collection in 2024 entitled *cracking at the heels*. Arielle creates custom poetry on the spot for folks searching for human connection and performs spoken word poetry in her local community.

Chloe Yoon is a newly emerging artist and creative from Seoul, South Korea, based in NYC. Despite currently being a film student, she experiments through various other mediums, like photo, fashion, and modelling. Heavily influenced by the music she grew up listening to, Yoon's art tends to gravitate towards darker visuals and colour palettes, often featuring the bizarre, the uncanny, or the horror-adjacent. Instagram: [@chnloe](#)
TikTok: [@schoolbathroomenjoyer](#)

Laila Freeman is a writer from Southern California who received her MFA from Chapman University. Her poetry has been featured in *Sam-fiftyfour Magazine*, *OyeDrum Magazine*, *Dissident Voice*, *Death Rattle Literary*, and more. Freeman's poem, "Genesis," was among the winners of *Vellichor Literary Magazine's* June 2025 poetry contest. Keep up with her latest writing endeavors on Instagram @lailafreemann.

Phoebe is a self-taught mixed media artist exploring the boundary between life and death through figurative work. Influenced by Gothic romance, she blends beauty and melancholy, often placing dark subjects against vivid, luminous backgrounds to reveal the interplay of light and shadow. Human presence anchors her art. Through posture and expression, she captures emotion and quiet transformation. Working in acrylic, oil, and pen, she shifts between bold color, soft realism, and stark linework to create an atmosphere that feels both intimate and haunting. Instagram/ TikTok: museinmotion_artworks

Luke Anderson is a freelance fantasy illustrator that is dipping his toes into writing. Instagram: @sabretooth1100

Emma Barron, writing as Emma Bell (@bruiseddoll on Substack), is a poetess, relentless romantic, and overall feral girl. She uses imagination and pure feelings as her sole guidance in life. She would be standing still without them. Previously published in *The Alexandrian Review*, she continues to write as a university student, studying writing so that one day her words may whisk her away and save her. Emma is currently brewing up all of the beautifully chaotic writing she can and working on many projects. Emma wishes for her writing to show that there is poetry and beauty wherever you seek to find it.

Amity Hayze is an alternative musician, writer, and multimedia artist whose work explores the tension between faith, distortion, and desire. Instagram: @amityhayze

Kat La Rue is an author, YouTuber, and creative storyteller exploring themes of heartbreak, self-discovery, and transformation. Her debut poetry collection, *Twisted Shame*, delves into the beauty and ache of healing with cinematic lyricism and emotional depth. On her YouTube channel, Kat shares her daily life and writing journey, offering an intimate look at the creative process behind her art. She also writes a Substack blog, where she reflects on love, identity, and reinvention through personal essays and letters.

Social Links:

Instagram: @thekatlarue

Youtube: @thekatlarue7, @katlaruevlogs

Substack: katlarue.substack.com

Heather Lee Allen is an illustrator based in Brooklyn.

IG: heatherleeallen_art

Sierra Gomez is an artist/illustrator based in New York.

John Sara is a writer from Parma, Ohio. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from Ashland University, where he works as an adjunct professor and lead fiction editor for the student-run literary journal *The Black Fork Review*. His work has been featured in such places as *Prairie Margins*, *Paper Dragon*, *Blood+Honey*, *Maudlin House*, *Schlock! Webzine*, *Cul-de-sac of Blood* and more. You can follow him on Instagram @darkbat616.

Eli is a visual artist who dabbles in poetry. In his free time, he works on creative projects and hangs out with his pets.

Alanna Jane is an exuberantly macabre Psychic Medium, aged 23 years.

she was born and raised in Las Vegas, Nevada, as a fourth generation Vegas resident. She currently calls Ohio home, exploring haunted and paranormal anomalies throughout the American Midwest, and serving the Temple of Aemeth as their Priestess. Alanna writes about her spiritual and seductive endeavors, with an uncontrollable lust for the dark, distinguished corners of the world- the places where eloquence and savagery become one. You can find her on Instagram, @alannajane.aemeth

Juan Amador is a writer and performer from Los Angeles. He released his first poetry book titled “Pimping My Trauma” with Riot of Roses Publishing House. His poems have been included in the literary journal Mobile Data Mag and anthologies from Beyond The Veil Press, Golden Foothill Press, Poetic Underground LLC Press, Sunflower Station Press and Curios Publishing.

Jalen Martise Micquiel Williams is a multidisciplinary artist based in Greensboro, North Carolina. Born in February 2004, Williams was raised in rural North Carolina, later in life residing in urban North Carolina. In his upbringing, Jalen was always intrigued with the arts throughout his childhood, exploring it through multiple disciplines. This sparked an early thirst for creativity and experimentation within visual arts for him. Within art, Williams wants to enlighten the audience with how he experiences the world. Whether it be the use of a specific matrix of printing, such as lithography or wood carvings to obtain the control and texture of a piece, or using metal or clay to test the expansiveness of an idea, Williams thoroughly calculates how he can use a piece of art to share his narrative. He hopes for his visual art to empower and inspire other alternative minorities such as himself.

Graydon Bush believes poetry to be one of the ultimate acts of empathy. A librarian’s assistant and college student, the Albany, New York transplant is flailing out into the void working to understand whatever he happens to write poetry about.

Sky Intrieri has a bachelor's degree in English and she has worked professionally as a creative writer in New York City, London, and DC. She enjoys exploring the macabre, grotesque, and disturbing parts of our world through her short stories and poems, bringing into the light that which may not be pleasant to look at. She draws a massive amount of inspiration from works of cinema such as *Silence of the Lambs*(1991), *Requiem for a Dream*(2000), and *Come and See*(1985) which all highlight horrors based in reality rather than fantasy. Sky is in the process of becoming a teacher of English as a second language so that she can spread her love of both written and spoken English.

M.R. Gorey is an author predominantly interested in horror and romance, preferably together. They enjoy writing poetry and short fiction as well as the occasional novel.

Lin Rigor is a self taught graphic designer and artist using programs and mediums that are more accessible. She's created different styles in designing her art in order to ensure that any piece of her world, mind and heart are always included. Follow for more and support on ko-fi - @littleriver99/

Finn Myles (they/he) is a Butch poet and theatremaker originally from Cleveland, Ohio. Their work centers on gender, death, dykes, and forgiveness. Finn currently lurks partially in Chicago and partially on the internet. He has previously had poetry published in Fruit Batz magazine and you can follow him on Instagram @_finnmyles.

Logan Burnett is a writer and horror podcaster residing in the PNW. When he's not wandering in cemeteries or watching old horror films, he can be found writing gothic poetry, influenced by his love for the macabre, witchcraft, paganism, vulgarity, Catholic/sacrilegious iconography, and anything lurking in the shadows of human emotion. Find him on instagram at @deathrattlesfromthecrypt or @creaturefromthecrypt

Azul is an artist that aims to create pieces from the heart and soul. She tries to look within the self and bring out feelings that are not easily expressed through any other form. She hopes to open her heart sincerely and tenderly for anyone willing to take a look.

Social media: [_cuxillo_](#) (Instagram)

Frida Windelhed is a Swedish horror and smut writer in love with all things kinky, creepy and gay. Her poetry depicts the dark, obsessive and often bitterly political side of queer lust, love and worship. She debuted with horror novel Rött universum ("red universe") in 2020 and has since published a second novel (Järnvärld, "iron world", 2022), and a short story collection (Ropa inte ut i mörkret, "don't call out into darkness", 2025), both within the horror genre. She is currently working on her third novel, and performs erotic poetry at queer clubs and sex parties.

Social media handle: [fridawritesp_rn@instagram](#)

Morgan Leigh Wright is a recent graduate of Arcadia University, where she earned an MFA in Creative Writing. Her work lives at the intersection of horror and feminism and can be found in The Panic Room Magazine, Death Wish Magazine, Black Lily Magazine, The Morgue Magazine, and more.

Sawyer Merrell is a multimedia artist with a focus on film and informative harm reduction content creation. Known for their recent experimental short horror film "I Live Within Everything" following an outcast witch being coerced by an old god to let it possess her body and the unforeseen events that occur after the ritual. Alongside film making, they're on the board of directors for Albuquerque Punk Safety Initiative, a non-profit volunteer collective dedicated to providing harm reduction supplies to the Albuquerque DIY music scene. You can find his Instagram at [@turttlebeads](#) and the film at [@ilivewithineverything](#).

Kira Rosemarie is an artist and writer from Kentucky currently living in South Florida with her husband, her cat Duchess, and her dog Marchesa. Her work has been published in *La Piccioletta Barca*, 805 Lit + Art, The Write Launch, and others. Her debut chapbook, “Moon/Season,” was published by Bottlecap Press in 2022. She works with multiple local poetry organizations, including Miami Poetry Club and O, Miami. Follow Kira on Instagram @busy_witch.

Chang Dangus (Joe Convertito) is a self-taught mixed-media artist based in Trumbull, Connecticut. Working primarily in oil pastel, acrylic, and ink, his practice blends surrealism, expressionism, and humanistic storytelling. His work often navigates fractured identity, the long shadow of substance abuse and sobriety, internal anguish, isolation, dissociation, and paranoia-threaded with quiet flashes of religious symbolism. Transitioning careers and reshaping his life through creative discipline, Chang channels a raw, unfiltered honesty into every piece. Beyond visual art, he also writes and makes music, pursuing all three as interconnected ways of excavating the self. When he’s not creating, he’s happiest spending time with family, friends, and dogs. Instagram: @chang_dangus

