

# KALOPSISIA

LITERARY JOURNAL



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# Neighborhood Arrangement

by R. Gerry Fabian

It is to be a marriage  
of convenience.  
She needs a man  
who is handy around the house,  
likes the children her ex refused  
and has a steady job.

He needs a woman  
who can cook beyond burgers,  
offer him a roof over his head  
and will be home when he returns.

It would never be elaborate;  
more like  
a corner grocery store operation.  
They hadn't counted on  
falling in love.

## About the Author

R. Gerry Fabian is a retired English instructor. He has been publishing poetry since 1972 in various poetry magazines. His web page is <https://rgerryfabian.wordpress.com>. He has published two books of his published poems, *Parallels* and *Coming Out of The Atlantic*. His novels, *Memphis Masquerade*, *Getting Lucky (The Story)*, and *Seventh Sense* are available at all e-book publishers including Amazon, Apple Books and Barnes and Noble. His third book of published poems, *Electronic Forecast*, was published 4/2020.

# The First to Go

by John Grey

Books will outlive me.  
Not just any books,  
but these...  
the ones on my shelves.

Even the cheap paperbacks -  
those whose pages are yellowing,  
but at a much slower rate  
than my kidneys.

And the tomes printed on fine paper  
could well outlive the forests  
that birthed them.

A hundred years from now,  
when I'm a footnote to a footnote,  
someone may be leafing through  
my treasured coffee-table book  
of paintings from the Louvre.  
Or the volume on old cowboy movies,  
or Dickens' collected works.

Maybe a descendent,  
maybe a stranger  
who picks it up  
in a secondhand store  
or a library.

Maybe a mouse  
who comes across it  
in an attic.

My wife calls me a hoarder.  
I say I'm a collector.  
But, when it comes to people,  
life is neither.

### About the Author

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident who was recently published in *Sin Fronteras*, *Dalhousie Review* and *Qwerty* with work upcoming in *Blueline*, *Willard and Maple* and *Red Coyote*.

# Axilla

by Julie Harms

I saw two plump petals  
nestled like twin butterflies  
beneath my thickening arms  
—a sudden, sombering appearance.

The two blooms have never emerged before,  
yet as suddenly as spring sings into being  
I now meet two crowns of love  
two crevices of comfort  
two identic cornerstones of a temple  
that I cannot turn away.

Oh this strange swelling season, and all  
of its little  
unfurlings!

# Félelem (My Fear)

by Julie Harms

I should be afraid  
to return to Hegyesd.  
My soul must be wary  
of the sweet trap waiting  
in the dew that tips  
each blade of fű,  
in the Hungarian air  
that kisses blushed cheeks,  
in the arms of mothers  
and small adoring hearts,  
in the silver-linings that drape  
every hegy.

I should be afraid to  
return to Hegyesd, because  
if I walk down the road to the park,  
if I pass by the little mountains,  
if I sing to the csillagok  
of the Hungarian night sky,  
I'll fall in love again,  
and isn't falling such  
a wondrous,  
terrifying  
thing?

# When the Gargoyle Rose Up and Shrugged on the Side of Our Bed

by Julie Harms

neither of us were surprised.

He stooped his shoulders and we knew  
it was our fault that he felt the cathedral  
burning down to ashes.

Sanctity sometimes feels so fleeting,  
so foreign, so Notre Dame,  
separate from what has arisen between us.

We wonder who or what lit the flame,  
and if we are safe amidst our pillows,  
our shields from the cameras  
catching our fiery wind.

We wonder if this gargoyle  
won't rile up the daunting fumes before us  
and cause the roof of our love to cave in.

We wonder if the gargoyle  
will lash out in his sorrow  
because he's not the man  
he wanted to be.

# Where Might You Look for Me?

by Julie Harms

Down Josephville Road  
the first farmhouse on the left  
will shine back at you,  
its hydrangea-blue siding  
ricocheting the sun.  
A happy house—old, but happy,  
still finding itself useful.

You may look for me there,  
stealing the still-beating heart  
of an ancient American home,  
sweeping its floors with my lengthy arms,  
filling its walls with my simple songs.

Come to the back porch,  
No—not the front. Be wary of our lively spring,  
the one bursting beneath the world of earth between us  
and the sinking shed—you may just drown  
in anticipation, if you step off the sidewalk  
into its depths.

Maybe we can fix it soon?

Remember, there's almost no limit  
to where you can go, what you can plant,  
how many wild creatures you might find,  
how far you can walk this land and yet still

hear the highway—  
but first, please, come inside.

Step into this truly man-made home,  
with its harsh wood floors and aching  
basement, its white oak door frames and stoic  
plaster walls, the shadows of crucifixes that once  
blessed every door—

O do you see how this home yields for me?  
Do you feel the cracks and crevices where  
it stores its years of memories?  
Do you sense it still thriving  
on the edge of our fingertips  
with its slow and inevitable  
dying breaths?

## About the Author

Julie Harms is a Midwest-based poet whose poetry you can find in the *Mid Rivers Review*, UMSL's *Litmag*, and forthcoming in *Goat's Milk Magazine*. She graduated with a B.A. in English from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, where she'll return in the Fall of 2020 to begin her MFA in Creative Writing. In her spare time, you'll find Julie either indulging in photography or reading innumerable books, usually historical fiction or Arthurian-esque tales — or literally anything to do with the Middle Ages.

# Poems for Sissy

by Megan D. Henson

For Sarah Lee Henson

I.

*i have something important to say*

i tell my class

but can't remember what

and stare blankly

at them and their cell phones

at the rain washing the big windows

of this multi-million dollar building

if i wrote a love letter to myself

i would say *take it easy*

then erase it

and see if erasure leads to dementia

i would turn it into a butterfly

or a carrier pigeon

with lilies tied to its leg

i would look at my class just once

just once

in order to have something to forget

then turn around

and never look back

## II.

she daydreams she's dead  
without touching sadness  
file cabinet drawers slam shut  
*click lock click lock*

all day long

like being in a morgue  
the cold metal drawers  
the cold corpses  
cussing the copier

two more hours, then  
back-to-back traffic

glassy blue eyes  
lit by fluorescent bulbs now  
lit by headlights

plug one hole after another  
to keep the thin oily sanity  
of an anxious humanity  
from leaking out

this is the ecology of our times

yet one fine golden hair caresses her cheek  
imagine a microcosm of a world there  
an ecosystem of warm meadows

## III.

she may stand at the copier now and wonder why she hasn't had a date but don't worry your pretty little golden head kitten because it all ends in haunting a damp hotel room listening to the patter of rain on your skull dome the rain always gets in the rain always gets in just like how in your mind the semen will always get in through the condom because you will tell yourself you are bad that you deserve to contract some disease and the bible in the wooden nightstand reminds you of the bible in the back of the wooden pew in front of you in church when you were little and you are dirty and impure and now you have some terrible disease and will need to get checked but you are too shy to ask the doctor and you will blush so hard your eyes water—

this is the way  
i worried  
when i became  
a  
woman

## IV.

when she was three  
she was in love with John Denver

now she has a geology degree  
which entails licking crystals  
in colorado coors country

she has gems in her gut  
in her intestines river rocks

she pans her spinal fluid  
but it's not gold she seeks  
it's space  
space between the bones  
space between the stones and her stomach

that space where the solar system circles  
in the darkness

and sometimes  
she's almost there

## About the Author

Megan D. Henson received her MFA in Creative Writing from University of Kentucky. She is the author of *What Pain Does* (Dos Madres Press, 2018). Her work has appeared in *Snapdragon: A Journal of Art and Healing*, *Gravel*, *the winnow*, and *Silver Blade*. It is forthcoming in *Breath & Shadow*. She lives in Cincinnati, Ohio.

# Cross of Gold

by Nancy Byrne Iannucci

“The virus is slowing us down to the speed of poetry.” – Billy Collins

I feel like a piece of balsa wood,  
light and pliable, just waiting  
to be set on fire.  
He’s snoring next to me, trying to light  
the match even in his sleep.

I’m numb and stunned  
by the magnitude of it all,  
a cranberry floating in a bog of thoughts:  
Will this be the Greatest Depression?  
Will the dollar be worth less than toilet paper?

Should I buy gold?  
*You should have bought gold.*  
He grins in his sleep.  
I can sense it; I think I can see it.  
He has twelve ounces of gold

and sprinklings of silver.  
He’s waiting for the bubble to burst  
just so he can say *I told you so*  
to all of those who thought he  
was overreacting pre-Corona.

He teaches me the ways of Peter Schiff,  
Gerald Celente and my insides drop like oil.

*I don't mean to scare you but...*

*I don't want to scare you but...*

is the only consolation.

It's too late for that, I think.

It's too late for me, I think.

Daisies, daffodils, bumblebees  
are the only yellow things I carry, oh,  
and the trees that go gilt at sunset,

to a metal, I cannot speak its language-  
nor travel at its speed.

It's funny. We do have one thing in common:

We value physical gold  
both are natural, born of this Earth,

yet my kind oppresses you,  
as the weight of yours crushes me.

I become William Jennings Bryan  
screaming, "*you shall not crucify mankind  
upon a cross of gold!*"

## About the Author

Nancy Byrne Iannucci is the author of *Temptation of Wood* (Nixes Mate Review 2018) and *Toxic*, which will be released in 2020 (dancing girl press). Her poems have appeared in a number of publications including *Gargoyle*, *Ghost City Press*, *Clementine Unbound*, *Three Drops from a Cauldron*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Hobo Camp Review*, *Thimble Lit Magazine*, and *Typehouse Literary Magazine*. Nancy is a Long Island, NY native who now resides in Troy, NY where she teaches history at the Emma Willard School.

# At Home in Bed this Morning

by Mark Jackley

My hand crests your shoulder blade,  
I can feel us down-  
shifting from the bluffs over  
Trempealeau, Wisconsin.  
Fingertips on your spine trace the upper Mississippi,  
knobs are pebbles washed  
on the Minnesota shore,  
and as I cross the damp swale  
of your lower back  
a hundred geese take flight. Iowa, who needs it?  
We are immigrants who dream  
over the steering wheel,  
stumbling downstairs  
for trucker coffee in Nebraska.

## About the Author

Mark Jackley lives in Purcellville, VA. His poems have appeared in *Sugar House Review*, *The Cape Rock*, *Talking River*, and other journals.

# this fibbing sun

by Strider Marcus Jones

when this fibbing sun  
dips below this planted plate  
of fields—  
and waits  
to bob back up tomorrow:  
solitude, sucks the color  
out of crimson clouds  
and stars begin their motions  
over night's black curtain.  
this dance of being born—  
to live and die  
in sacred elements  
swirling in dust and gas,  
in beauty and folly  
that repeats itself;  
to what purpose  
does this engine and design  
make civilizations form then fade  
with gods and demons?  
this ship  
of consciousness  
in matter  
has a stowaway  
on board  
decoding cyphers  
in connections.

# two misfits

by Strider Marcus Jones

it was no time  
for love outside—  
old winds of worship  
found hand and mouth  
in ruined rain  
slanting over cultured fields  
into pagan barns  
with patched up planks  
finding us two misfits.

i felt the pulse  
of your undressed fingers  
transmit thoughts  
to my senses—  
aroused by autumn scents  
of milky musk  
and husky hay  
in this barn's faith  
handfasting  
we climbed the rungs to civilization

and found a bell  
housed inside a minaret—  
where monk and muezzin  
shared its balcony  
chanting together for peace—  
this holy music was only the wind

blowing through the weathervane,  
but we liked its tone to change its time.

## About the Author

Strider Marcus Jones is a poet, law graduate and ex civil servant from Salford, England with proud Celtic roots in Ireland and Wales. A member of The Poetry Society, his five published books of poetry (<https://stridermarcusjonespoetry.wordpress.com/>) reveal a maverick, moving between forests, mountains, cities, and coasts, playing his saxophone and clarinet in warm solitude.

# Alis Volat Propriis

by Joelle Lamaie

Filtered sun

runs

down

your spine in line with

the symmetry of the streets.

The blanched brick walls dissolve when

your idiosyncrasies synchronize, and

gravity melts when the breeze collides

with your skin. The sky dips

at the upturn of your lips.

Did Cassiopeia fall envious when you

came into this world with stars

painted across your dark shoulders?

Was Olympus in chaos when the

lightning that sparks at your fingertips

grew more electrifying than Zeus himself?

Or did it

slip

into calm

as the oceans crashed against your feet

and the gold was drained

from the mountains to strive for the chance

that it might rest against your skin

and absorb traces

of

your light.

# Waltz for the Broken

by Joelle Lamaie

And how did  
we get here,  
the crashing  
of words like  
clockwork with-  
in a glass  
birdcage? And  
our feet in-  
tertwine in  
this twisted  
waltz we have  
made our home.  
Bone on bone  
colliding,  
dissonant  
your voice in  
my ear. Still,  
music plays  
on while Cin-  
derella  
flees at the  
toll of mid-  
night. Your toll  
tonight is  
so much high-  
er than I  
could ever  
pay. At the

cost of my  
soul you would  
see the stars  
through a sha-  
ttered tele-  
scope. My hope  
for you is  
that you love  
without de-  
stroying, that  
your next dance  
is a waltz  
full of har-  
mony, peace.  
That the stars  
emerge to  
trade partners  
with you, and  
you twirl in  
their arms like  
a bird set  
free from the  
cage inside  
your own heart.  
I don't know  
how we got  
here, but I  
know our dim-  
inuen-  
do will not  
be gentle.

## About the Author

Joelle Lamaie is a high school student in the class of 2023. She has previously been published in the 2019 Young Pegasus anthology and Train River Poetry's 2020 Summer Anthology. Aside from writing, Joelle enjoys reading, music, and film studies. On special occasions, she can be spotted outside her house.

# a depth of estuary

by DS Maolalai

burned apart like icarus  
in the last stretch of his stumble,  
the bicycle lies  
washed and wallowing,  
wasted in sand  
and a shallow depth  
of estuary.

revealed to the surface  
an arc of wheel  
and weedsprung gearbox,  
showing  
its broken face  
shyly to the sun

like crabs  
waving pincers  
to the dropped assault  
of seabirds.  
the collapse  
of blown sand dunes.  
the creep  
of wheeling tides.

# advertising

by DS Maolalai

"north cider  
or south cider"—  
bolted to the rail bridge  
going over the liffey.

i wonder sometimes—  
must they pay  
for the placement?  
it's a better way  
of saying "dublin"  
than any of the signs  
showing streets.

## About the Author

DS Maolalai has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and three times for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016) and *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019).

# Put Down as a Dependant

by Benjamin Nardolilli

Plea from a captive: please  
give me a captain,  
if I'm going to be held back  
behind these walls,  
then I want orders to order  
the percolating world within myself

Nowadays, all that's left to me  
are restrictions,  
but no directions, cooped up  
in here, I can only fear  
someone, somewhere out there,  
is getting me ready for the slaughter

## About the Author

Ben Nardolilli currently lives in New York City. His work has appeared in *Perigee Magazine*, *Red Fez*, *Danse Macabre*, *The 22 Magazine*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, *Elimae*, *The Northampton Review*, *Local Train Magazine*, *The Minetta Review*, and *Yes Poetry*. He blogs at [mirrorsponge.blogspot.com](http://mirrorsponge.blogspot.com) and is trying to publish a novel.

# Postcards

by Gracie Nordgren

Dear Love,

London is crumbling;  
the city is rocked by tremors  
that collapse its foundations.

You cannot see the sun.

The sky is a swarm of ravens,  
black as oil, rushing, fleeing  
from the ghosts of ancients  
who have risen from the catacombs.

They are so confused, poor things;  
they wander the streets and cry out for loves long lost.

Most pretend not to hear and speed up their walk  
Or duck under some semi-stable structure  
In order to avoid the rubble.

But Love, I spotted one who looked like you  
Had you succumbed to consumption and died young.

I chased it down, and asked it for a tale  
After I listened to the song of life and death, it kissed my cheek.

The searing cold of the kiss thrummed through my veins.

This shade wanted me to join it, to leap off of Big Ben into its waiting arms,  
but I declined, for I had to be stay living for you.

I pocketed a piece of the clock though, a souvenir for you, Love.

Wish you were here.

Dear Love,  
Paris is burning.  
Cathedrals are ash.  
The city shines like the day while the sun is sleeping.  
I cupped my hands in the swirling Seine, raised it to my lips,  
It flamed on my tongue, and in the back of my throat.  
But oh, how electric the thrum of my own panicked heartbeat!  
This place has always been one of turmoil;  
At night I can hear the whispery singing of those who scorned docility,  
who wished to remake the world anew, to shape it in their hands like an earthy clay.  
The birthplace of Madame Guillotine.  
I've met so many of her victims, they frequent the patisseries.  
In one Cafe, I swear, I sat beside the Sun King.  
My french is subpar, love, but I asked him how he liked this new Paris.  
He straightened his cravat and smiled, (I believe he enjoys the spectacle).  
I regret that you're not with me, in the city of passion.  
There are no inhibitions now, the lovers walk freely  
And perfect strangers leap into each other's embrace,  
all victims of the primal desire to be held.  
I am alone, witnessing all of this as if behind glass,  
but I've kissed this note so often that my lipstick has created something of a painting,  
see?  
Miss you all the same, though.

Dear Love,

Venice is drowning.

The buildings are islands fighting against the rising tide,  
and the people paddle about on floating cities composed of all they hold dear.

Aging paperbacks, glittering coins, loaves of bread,  
nothing seems to sink except us.

These makeshift rafts are teeming with crowds  
clothed in rust red and buttercup yellow,

And some sit alone, like dragons presiding over their hoards.

The children open their pink mouths and sing with the voices of cellos

I float on my back down the eternal canals, staring at the fading sun

It dripped a milky wax that hit the water like softened hail

That the Venetians fished out of the water, and they would stuff their ears,

for at sundown, velvet-voiced women would rise from the canals,

Promising answers to every question ever conceived.

And a naive man or woman would beg these sirens to take them, to drag them under.

So many were lost in this fashion.

I must confess I almost was struck by an intoxicating haze.

That must be why the very possibility of drowning never entered my mind.

I was in deep, my last breath escaping to the surface in bubbles,

the grips of the women tight on my arms, I screamed your name, Love.

Did you hear me? Did you send the fisherman's hook that dragged me to salvation?

The gentleman shared his grapes, allowed me rest on his floating vineyard.

I ache for you, my Love, in this world full of horrors and wonders.

Every fiber of me repeats a single thought, over and over, day after day:

I wish that you were still in it.

# The Vestal Virgin's Prayer

by Gracie Nordgren

Oh Vesta, I am in your debt  
Just as your gentle fire is in my care  
This flaming hearth  
This raging flower  
Blooms with the fervor of eternity

Oh Vesta, this glow is my salvation  
If not for your flower  
I would have been chained to him  
And made to bear his son  
A fate they said was an honor  
Yet I fear it more than death

Oh Vesta, the ash is in my soul  
It dusts my hair  
Clouds my eyes  
And blackens my lungs  
It is of me now  
I can no longer separate myself from your flower's pollen

Oh Vesta, it is back-breaking work  
The keeping of the flame  
My sisters and I rarely know the lull of sleep  
Yet I smile, I know it's worth the price  
You should see how the reverence they have for us  
We part crowds, women and men stare  
We are untouchable- walking reminders of divine power

Oh Vesta, all of these blessings  
That keep our souls blazing with pride  
Would be nothing without the gift of your flame  
I implore you, don't let it die  
We would dissipate  
As ashes on wind

## About the Author

Gracie Nordgren resides just outside Denver, Colorado. She enjoys daydreaming and pomegranates. She is an editor for *Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine*, and her work has previously been published by the *South Broadway Ghost Society*.

# Night Figure Skater

by Bruce Spang

On Lake Ellyn, floodlights drenched the ice  
with enough luminosity to let  
wives leave dishes in the sink,  
husband with the chores,  
                  to lace up their figure skates,  
                  and to skate out  
past long-bladed boys, crouching down,  
                  streaking in wide loops for more speed,  
past couples holding hands listening to Bing Crosby,  
                  to the center of the lake,  
                  a spot reserved for them.

                  One lady in a pink skirt  
and white skintight blouse made figure eights,  
forward, then backwards,  
                  careful, exact, extending her arms, cutting  
the eight over and over like an incision,  
                  as she always did to  
                  burrow into the core of the lake  
                  her mark, the fact that she was there.  
When the eight was indelible, she'd swing outward,  
                  her legs quick on her skate's edges,  
                                  easily speeding past  
the boys, widening her circle, once,  
                  twice, building up speed until  
she leapt—suspended  
                  in the night—turning twice and landing,  
                  whipping around in a spin,

arms folded across her chest,  
whirling, her body a blur, round  
and round and  
round,  
accelerating, as if nothing  
could stop her, as if propelled by a turbine.  
If she had extended her arms,  
she would fling her off the lake,  
affix to the sky.  
With one arm out, then another, one skate loosened,  
she stuck it in the ice and  
stopped.  
Her arms raised, she'd stand, her head back  
and everyone else, all skaters having stopped  
to gawk, would applaud,  
the floodlight seemingly drawn to her alone.  
Whatever was at home—the vacuum, laundry,  
dust, husband, kids, migraine—would spin away from her  
for she was the master of the moment  
and no one could deny it.

# The Smell of Light

by Bruce Spang

Midnight's paw presses on my shoulder. 12:56. In a dream, I'm speeding down a superhighway glazed with ice. There's no steering wheel. My foot is on the pedal. She sits like a black sphinx. *Do you really need to go?* I pull on my shirt and pants, follow her down the dark stairwell into night that doesn't seem like night. Daffodils drift on the hillside under the full moon with an unearthly translucence. Far off, there is the steady blasts of a foghorn in the bay, "Not here! "Not here!" warning whatever may be caught in the unseen. Midnight sniffs and tugs at the leash. She pees, lifts her head, alert. The creek slides under the roots of fallen ash. The sky is clear. The air seems brushed and cleaner, less imposing than in daylight. I could spend my life in its godlike calm. Traffic's diminished, done with getting here and there to nowhere. There's a tug on the leash. We're under braided tangles of willows. She stalks by shrubs and daffodils attending to each. She sniffs from shrub to grass, the whole hillside, bottom to top, undreaming my life.

## About the Author

Bruce Spang, former Poet Laureate of Portland, is the author of two novels, *The Deception of the Thrush* and *Those Close Beside Me*. His most recent collection of poems, *All You'll Derive: A Caregiver's Journey*, was just published. He's also published four other books of poems, including *To the Promised Land Grocery* and *Boy at the Screen Door* (Moon Pie Press) along with several anthologies and several chapbooks. He is the poetry and fiction editor of the *Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine*. His poems have been published in journals across the United States. He teaches courses in fiction and poetry at Ollie at University of North Carolina in Asheville and lives in Candler, NC with his husband Myles Rightmire and their five dogs, five fish, and thirty birds.

# The Snow Queen of Singapore

by Savannah Voll

She was covered in icy glitter, no more than three feet tall, spying on me from behind her mother's dragon fruit and guava stand, adorned in a tattered Queen Elsa costume over a pair of pajamas—unequivocally the loveliest burst of magic I've ever seen—and she dashed over to me with electric stars in her eyes, saying that I must be from Wonderland.

She took my hand in both of hers, pulling it under the streetlight to inspect the galaxy-blue veins in my wrist, brushing two teeny fingers across the underside of my forearm, her eyebrows sky-high, captivated by the pieces of my skin that the sun hadn't reached, tracing invisible legends and myths from elbow to palm, whispering Alice and Belle, then meeting my eyes; Beautiful, she declared, like Snow White.

She looked down again at her hands on mine, honeyed bronze against tepid oatmeal, then in an instant her face changed, and it's been years but that confused frown still keeps me up at night.

# Refraction

by Savannah Voll

I wonder if my mother is  
the Loch Ness Monster.

We splash in the shallows  
and I marvel at the  
delicate beads of sea foam  
that adorn her long lashes,  
and the serpentine sway of her hair  
in the thick slap of the waves.

The same roiling surf that is  
eternally unruly towards me  
caresses the dolphin-smooth  
skin of her shoulders,  
and the silver gossamer spray  
that dances across her forehead  
glints in the summer sun  
like a crown.

She disappears under the surface  
over and over,  
sometimes here, more often not,  
gone for who knows how long  
only to shatter the glassy water,  
emerging when I least expect it  
with a sly, coquettish grin,  
finding pleasure in the surprise,  
and every time she returns—

it's pure magic.

But when she stands  
in the shallow water  
I notice that the lines of her legs  
don't match up with  
those seaweed-covered ankles  
beneath the surface,  
instead there is a sharp bend  
where the waves lap at her shins,  
and at once I see that she is not  
the Queen of the Sea;  
she is just the monster.

## About the Author

Savannah Voll is a writer from Ontario, Canada. Most recently her writing has appeared in the Young Writers Awards Anthology. At any given time she is probably reading, writing, or stockpiling Double Stuf Oreos. For more of her work, find her on Instagram at @savannahloveswords.

# Fight or Cohabit the Monsters

by Danielle Wong

You search for help,  
anyone, anything,  
but nothing stops the darkness of the ocean  
from entering your lungs, filling you up, pulling you to its floor.

You search for an approach.  
something logical,  
but earthquakes course through every muscle,  
controlling your limbs, shaking you up, dragging you through lava.

Ocean's twilight,  
mixed with magmata,  
make for treacherous monsters barnacled you  
from top to bottom, from outside to in.

The desire to kill  
monsters, that numb toothache,  
refuses to leave, craves to infest you,  
a cancer that laughs at how weak you have become.

Spent from fruitless  
hunts, you lie alongside  
the monsters, caress their sharp-edged weapons  
that leave behind memories, reminders of what you cannot stop.

# In All My Years, Here Lies Joy

by Danielle Wong

Skin, soft as down, on hands that held tight  
first to pinkie, then finger, thumb,  
was joy I held close. It grew clouded by  
vacant eyes that saw what I could not  
from the cacophony far from us.

Her gorilla strength bound her to me.  
Separation and protection  
were magnets too strong to ignore or fight.  
Years passed as we grew, a trellised vine  
in summer. I learned where lies my true joy.

That twinkle in her eyes, the shy smile  
she tries to hide, her bird chirps drifting  
from the other room, they wash over me  
like gentle breezes on hot summer days  
and sun showers after weeks of scorching heat.

## About the Author

Danielle Wong is the author of *Bubble Fusion*, a collection of poems about raising a child with autism. Her other work has appeared in *Soft Cartel*, *Montreal Writes*, *Patterns*, *Tipton Poetry Journal* Issue 44, and *The Daily Drunk*. She enjoys losing herself in forests. Visit her at <https://www.daniellewong.ca>.

# Silence from Above

by Giancarlo Dominguez

*I don't believe in God.*

*But there was a time when I said my prayers. For centuries, I followed your word blindly like a lamb to its slaughter, begging for something to lift this emptiness that has haunted me. Every day I implored for an answer; only later did I realize your silence was all I would receive.*

*Very well then. If there is no salvation for me, then why is there salvation for the humans? Their morals are nothing but a sham packaged in selfish sentimentality. Integrity has turned into a relic: lost and buried within the darkness of their hearts. They spill their blood over the most trivial matters and commit countless atrocities only to purge themselves of their sins in honor of your name.*

*If you are their guiding light, then I am the shadow that looms over their wretched souls. I am the darkness that will back them to a corner with a cross in their palms and have them begging on their knees. I will show them the bitter truth that will shatter their world when they witness the abyss you left me in. They will curse everything that you embody, and then you will understand. Only then will you answer.*

The sun continued to disappear in the horizon, its light consumed by the dark ominous clouds that had trailed behind it all day. Shortly after the last ray of light fell upon its slumber, the clouds vented with pouring rain, threatening to flood the roads of the city. A shadow emerged from a lonely alley.

*I take no pleasure or pride from this work. My veins do not pulse with fervor when their soft pink flesh peels to the floor, nor does my mouth water at the sight of cascading blood; yet I've killed and slaughtered so many. I've filled countless graveyards with the families and friendships I've crippled. What have you done about it? I still walk and breathe like the rest of them.*

The streets were nearly barren now. A few cars passed by as the lights from the local stores faintly flashed through the soaked windows. A man was lying down on the

concrete, extending his hand to a woman in a black raincoat that was passing by. She only spared a glance and kept walking.

*Another day, another face, another corpse. Is this all part of your glorious plan? Or perhaps you hide in fear of what I've become. If you're truly all-powerful and forgiving, then stop me, and it will all be over. Your creations will be safe from my grasp, and I will finally get the peace I deserve.*

The rain had diminished to a drizzle, its soft pitter-patter being the only sound on the quiet street. For a moment, it seemed as if the moon could shine through the darkness, almost casting its radiance upon the desolate city. But the silence was broken by the rage of the clouds that roared through the sky, plunging the city and its citizens to the abyss of the night. The scent had grown stronger.

*Do something! Don't you see her life arriving at its end? The shrieks that pierce the air as her soul ascends into the sky? Do you care so little about your creations? I've unjustly waited for centuries, filling my mind with the choir of screams as they fall to the floor. I've done my time believing. Now I want answers!*

A flash of lightning illuminated the condominium. For a few moments, everything became still as if time had come to a stop. Another streak of lightning thundered across the sky as the clouds cried harder. The door opened.

*I lost everything in a blink of an eye, and the world just watched as they stripped me bare until an empty shell remained. Your creatures have spurned me as a token of imminent misfortune, leaving me to the pity of Death to end this suffering. Why didn't you answer? What right did they have to cast me out?!*

The shallow breaths were the only sound to be heard. The shadow stood there, waiting for something to occur, something to stop him once and for all, but nothing moved.

*I approach my next victim, hoping each time it is the last one that will set me free. I can almost savor the bittersweet mellow of freedom. And yet this woman, who maybe never harmed a fly, will be dead. Her only sin was believing in you.*

The scent, sweet with perfume, had invaded every inch of the hallway. The shadow's steps were barely audible, each soft thump bringing forth a heavy breath as the time came near.

*I don't believe in God, but I pray with every kill. I pray that God will notice what I've done. I will give you another chance.*

The doorknob twisted.

She woke up, her heart beating rapidly and forehead sweating. The room was consumed in darkness, partly illuminated from the moonlight that came from the window. Her eyes told her to go back to sleep, but then she noticed the faint smell of rain. She reached out to the lamp beside her bed, until her hand froze in mid-air at the sound of a gentle voice.

"I would refrain from that if I were you. It is best to keep you in the dark."

She remained motionless, pondering on whether she should turn on the light. At last, her hand moved swiftly to turn on the lamp and pulled the string, but nothing happened. Her heart turned to lead, slowly sinking to her stomach.

"Don't make this harder than it needs to be."

"Who are you?" Her voice was a quivering whisper, fearing that any gesture of resistance will mark her for death.

"I don't know anymore."

"What are you doing here?" She slowly turned her head as a bolt of lightning flashed through the window, revealing a silhouette in her chair. Her eyes widened in horror.

"Someone wants you dead. I don't want to do it, but I have to do it. You don't deserve this, nobody does, but I just happen to people."

"No!" She tried to scream, but all that came was a croak from her throat. Her face paled as tears sprung from her eyes and her hands tightened around her throat.

"No one can help you here."

"Take whatever you want but please don't—"

"I'm not here for anything else."

"Please," she begged, "Isn't there s-something I can do? I don't want to die..."

"It doesn't matter. The first rays of dawn will shine upon your corpse."

The woman buried her face in her hands and cried softly, her sorrow echoing freely throughout the room.

"I owe you an apology."

The woman stared at the shadow and rubbed away her tears. "Why?"

"It wasn't supposed to be this way, but maybe that's why I woke you up. This isn't about you; You've done nothing wrong."

The woman could see how a dark figure that resembled a hand moved upwards for a few moments then lowered itself back down.

"Then don't do it. Y-you can simply walk away."

"They always say the same thing. That I should just turn my back on them. But if God wanted me to stop, he would've intervened."

The woman looked towards the light at the bottom of the door, hoping that someone would come to save her, only to lower her head with a heavy sigh. Her tears had dried up.

"Can I say a few prayers then?" She sniffed loudly, her body shivering under the covers.

"Yes."

She slowly reached for her drawer, grabbing a necklace with a golden cross. The woman closed her eyes and mumbled a string of prayers, appearing like a radiant angel that glowed in the moonlight. The shadow longed for comfort in her words, wishing her halo and wings would shine brightly and fill the room with hope. Suddenly, the moon was obscured by the rolling clouds, sending the room into despair.

*Will you forsake her as well, or will you finally answer?*

"Amen," she whispered, opening her eyes and taking a deep breath. A strange sense of tranquility began to settle over her body, haunting it with an unnatural stillness.

"Why did you pray? It didn't change anything."

"Maybe, but now I feel less terrified. If He believes my time has come, so be it."

A blanket of silence fell over the room for a few moments.

"Very well."

Dark circles appeared on the carpet floor beside the chair as the shadow stood up and approached her. A hand extended towards her and gently touched her forehead like a faith healer.

"Will it hurt?"

“No. I already did it.”

The woman gave a small gasp as her head fell to the pillow and her eyes fluttered shut. The rhythm of her chest ceased.

The droplets of rain tapped lightly against the window, creating a soothing atmosphere. The shadow lingered for a long time, waiting for a sign. The moon appeared once more, illuminating the sleeping woman with its warm and gentle embrace.

*The soul has gone and I remain...*

The light that shined through the bottom of the door remained undisturbed. The doorknob didn't move. The hallway was dead silent.

*Another life taken in vain...*

No one came.

*I promise you, an answer I will obtain.*

Her face looked so peaceful.

Amen.

## About the Author

Giancarlos Dominguez is a 18 year-old undergraduate student majoring in computer science at SMU. Some of his hobbies consist of writing short stories, poems, and reading novels, particularly within the dystopian genre. He aims to encapsulate the infinite colors and faces of the human soul within the beauty of words for everyone to see.

# Crayon Fish

by Anna Kieseewetter

“Darra.”

I stop, midway through the stack of magazines, my thumb hovering between Women’s Digest and a lipstick-smearred issue of the National Enquirer. “What?”

My mother touches my hand lightly, faintly, almost like she’s afraid I’ll disappear. “I’m just—I don’t know—” Her voice falters, the silence swallowing the rest of her words.

“Mom, it’s okay. I’ll be okay. Let’s just see what the results say.”

She shakes her head, her pale lips folded tightly against her face, and scoots back over, training her eyes on the brightly-colored fish in the tank.

I abandon the magazine stack, which is grimy anyways, and follow my mother’s gaze. There’s something about that fish tank that’s always upset me. Maybe it’s how out-of-place it seems, all fluorescent and exotic amidst the stark white walls. But despite all the hectic colors, there’s something indescribably lonely about it. The fish live for such a small time, only one or two years, before they inevitably float to the top. They’re taken out and flushed down a pristine white toilet, and no one even seems to notice.

I guess when your life is that short, you’re replaceable. No one really cares whether or not you exist.

I suck in a breath as my gaze swivels around the room. The women at the front desk are as busy as ever, the nurses rushing in and out of the double doors. Most of the other patients are my mother’s age, in varying states of decay. Many are bald from the chemo, others burdened with oxygen tanks or heavy crutches. But as I look around, my eyes fall on one person in particular.

She’s tiny, frail—really a wisp of a little girl. Thin golden curls fall just past her chin, her shining eyes trained on the toy truck in her fist. One of the bald patients bends a little and pats her on the head, and for the briefest second, a shadow passes over the little girl’s face.

My heart weighs a thousand pounds. I want to curl up into a ball and block out the memories flooding through my mind. I've seen that look before, that same shadow. It's something I want more than anything to forget.

It happened a month ago, when my little sister finally caught on.

"Da-wa, come play with me," was my greeting when I rolled out of bed.

I yawned and stooped down to ruffle Becca's hair. "What, no 'good morning' anymore?"

Becca swatted my hand away. "It's four o'clock, Da-wa."

I swallowed hard, glancing at the clock. So it was. The dusty mirror behind my clock showed a scrawny scarecrow, dark shadows beneath its drooping eyes. You could almost see the outlines of ribs beneath my loose T-shirt. I winced and sunk down to the floor.

"What're we playing, Becca?"

My sister slid over next to me. "Hide and seek. You hide, and I'll count down."

I smiled at her bossy tone, her little face set and determined. "Yes, ma'am."

Becca toddled away, and I proceeded to prop myself up behind the couch, willing myself to ignore the jarring pain in my chest.

"10, 9, 8. . ."

I couldn't help it. I started to cough.

"7, 6, 5. . ."

I was heaving. Big, hacking breaths that sent my entire body trembling.

"4, 3, 2. . ."

I collapsed in on myself, head between my knees, lungs rattling.

"1. Ready or not, here I come, Da-wa."

I heard her assured footsteps coming up towards me. I curled up tighter, begging my body to just relax, to be okay.

When I peeked out from behind my legs, Becca was frozen beside me. Her trusting smile had faltered.

"Da-wa?"

I tried to muster a smile, but all I could get was a faint grimace. My every limb was shaking. "You found me," I croaked out. My hoarse voice sounded eighty years old.

My little Becca began to slowly back away, and that's when I saw it.

Her big brown eyes were pricked with tears. There was a dark kind of doubt clouding her expression, like some kind of realization had just clicked inside her and dimmed down her happy light.

In that moment, I hated myself. I hated how pathetic I looked. How much worry I was causing.

That look in Becca's eyes was forever burned into my memories, a scar I could never quite erase.

Out of the blue, Dr. Evan's voice draws me away from my thoughts. "Darra. Can you join me in my office?"

My throat is bone-dry. I draw in a breath, then push the air back out before I rise and follow her through those dreaded double doors.

The doctor sits me down as her printer whirrs to life, dishing out dozens of tables and charts and tiny lines of text.

This can't be good.

Dr. Evan's voice is neutral as she turns to me, papers in hand. "Darra, I'm going to be straight with you. Your body is very weak right now. I've diagnosed you with Stage II lung cancer."

I blink hard.

"We're going to get you into treatment, and we're going to fight this. Survival rates are going up every day, and we're constantly improving our drugs." She pauses, her voice softening.

"How are you holding up?"

"I just—I'm sorry. Can I have a moment?"

"Of course. I'll go get your mother."

As the door clicks behind her, I sink to the floor, head between my knees. Surprisingly, I don't feel angry or devastated. I'm numb. The whole thing feels surreal, as if I'm simply watching a movie play out.

When Mom slips inside the room, I enter her outstretched arms without hesitation. There are no tears, which is a relief; instead, she clutches me as if afraid to let go.

When at last she pulls away, she takes a slip of paper from her purse. In a voice she's fighting to keep steady, she tells me, "Becca made this for you this morning. Somehow she knew where we were going."

Scrawled across the page is a crayon fish holding a lollipop, scribbled underneath: "Get well soon."

I try to speak, but the words are lodged in my throat, and only this choking, hoarse, animal noise escapes my mouth. I clear my throat and say the most normal thing I can. "Why the lollipop?"

My mother's gaze sweeps over the page tenderly. "She was pretty proud of that. A little joke of hers; she said you're the sweetest sucker she knows."

And it's something so banal, so mundane and silly amidst my tumultuous news, that my lips curve upward into a startled laugh. This, if nothing else, feels real.

I take the paper into my hands and peer closer at it. I can see every deft stroke her chubby little fingers made, purple wax pressed into the thick cream-colored paper. With a start, I realize it's the same as the fish from the lobby. A tropical swimmer, only this one seems happy. Somehow, this fish doesn't upset me. Unlike those in the tank, it will last.

The door opens, just a crack, as Dr. Evan peeks in at us. "Are you ready for me to come in?"

"Yes," I say, as my little sister's drawing smiles up at me. "I'm ready."

## About the Author

17-year-old Anna Kiesewetter is a high school junior from Issaquah, Washington. Her work has been recognized by the Scholastic Writing Awards as a top-five regional entry, and her writing has also been published in the *Skipping Stones Literary Magazine's* youth honors issue. When she's not scribbling down stories, she works as a first-read editor at *Polyphony Lit Magazine* and as the founding executive editor at *Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine*. She also loves playing the violin and eating anything matcha-flavored.

# Eva and the Bishop

by Paul Lewellan

Bishop David Heinrichs threw the hotel key card onto the nightstand and removed his black wool overcoat as Eva Lewis wheeled in her suitcase. The young woman didn't take off her coat. She removed a bottle of his favorite Cabernet Sauvignon from her luggage along with two glasses. They usually reserved the wine for their evening debriefing. "Eva, the Bishop is in the room."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

The edge in her tone surprised him. "We can't pretend we're just 'Eva and David.'" Reverend Heinrichs presided over the Western Iowa Synod of America Lutherans. "The Bishop's in the room."

"I scheduled the early flight," Eva told him, "so we could have time together before the other delegations arrive. There won't be another chance."

"I know—"

Eva considered retreating to her room across the hall. Instead she took off her coat and kicked off her heels. She carefully removed the tailored suit jacket that flattered her Rubenesque figure.

David hung up his suitcoat. "Even if I take off this clerical collar and enjoy a glass of wine with you, the Bishop—that is, the office I hold, and the call I serve—will still be in the room."

"And that sucks."

"Yes," he laughed, "it does."

Eva met the Bishop when she served as the Youth representative on Synod Council. She'd been raised on her grandparents' farm outside of Waverly, Iowa, after her parents divorced when she was five. Her mother taught chemistry at Wartburg College where the Bishop did his undergraduate work.

After her term as youth representative, they remained in contact. Her senior year in high school, Eva won the Miss Iowa Dairy Princess Pageant. The Bishop encouraged her to work with church youth groups, conducting seminars on teen self-esteem.

As a National Merit Scholar, Eva had her pick of schools but chose Winterland College, located near Synod headquarters. In her freshman year she volunteered at the office, ran errands, photocopied, and set up meeting rooms. Sometimes Eva and the Bishop stole moments between his meetings and her course work. A friendship evolved.

The volunteer work turned into a part time job and so, for the next two years, Eva watched the Bishop agonize over his wife's losing battle with cervical cancer. She died during finals week of Eva's junior year.

After graduation, Eva continued working at Synod, taking night classes instead of going on to graduate school full-time for her MBA. "I'd like to keep my options open," she told the other staff. "I don't want to cut myself off from the church."

Eva became the Bishop's administrative assistant after Sheila Hicks took maternity leave. She would remain his assistant until August when she started seminary.

"I need to ask the Bishop a favor."

David looked up from his suitcase. Her tone surprised him. "Of course."

"I'd like to ask him to step into the hall for a moment." To accentuate her request, she walked over to the door and opened it.

"I'm not sure I understand...."

"I'd like to ask the Bishop to step out for a moment," she repeated, holding the door open and praying that no one was in the hall.

"But...." He knew the look on her face. She'd dug in and wasn't going to budge.

"It's a simple request."

The Bishop set his clerical collar down on the desk. "I suppose it is." He walked over to the open door, but as he moved to step into the hall Eva stopped him.

"No, David, I'd like you to stay. I asked the Bishop to step outside for a moment. You stay here." Eva spoke to the empty hallway, "Thank you, Bishop. This shouldn't take long." She closed the door, turned to the man beside her, and kissed him. And when he returned the kiss, even more passionately than she'd hoped, Eva unbuttoned his white shirt.

David's hand slipped from her shoulders, down her back. He drew her body into his. "This is bad," he said softly.

"Very bad," Eva murmured. She reached for his belt.

“I’ve wanted this for a long time.”

“Well, duh,” she laughed as she pulled at his zipper.

David undressed her, as the Bishop waited in the hall.

## About the Author

Paul Lewellan lives and gardens in Davenport, Iowa, on the banks of the Mississippi River. He shelters in place with his wife Pamela, his Shi Tzu Mannie, and their ginger tabby Sunny. He keeps a safe social distance from everyone else. He has recently had work accepted by *Statement Magazine*, *The Daily Drunk*, *Passenger*, and *White Wall Review*.

# All the World's Light

by Dorian J. Sinnott

I spent the long hours of fading sun searching for you. In the shafts of light that cast shadows on the walls. Like dancing ghosts, phantoms of a life so long ago. I could smell the dew, freshly birthed on the crest of the new morn, wafting in from the crack in the window. The splinted old glass covered in cobwebs. Hazing the world just beyond the pane. But that's all the world was behind the thick and dusty glass. An illusion. A specter. A reel of memories looping on replay.

And they haunt me. So deeply haunt me.

No matter the time that passes, some ghosts never fade away.

We met in the autumn, under a sea of scarlet leaves. We breathed in the decay on the wind, the fading light of summer, giving way to winter's cruel teeth. Nipping the night air. How beautiful it all had been. A world caught ablaze in nature's finest wonders. You told me you loved me then, in the milk light of the harvest moon. How I knew you meant it. The star fall reflecting in your eyes spoke celestial words. Invocations from godly forces of a world beyond our own. And I knew it was true. Every whisper and smile.

*I love you...*

I kept the autumn close to my heart. Though the decaying leaves brushed up against my doorstep, lingering with the stench of death, I found life in each of your steps. We hid away from the world, under a canopy of trees, making wishes on acorns and toadstools. You told me you wanted to be forever. That you saw eternity burning deep in my eyes. And you swore you'd never leave my side.

And you kept your promise. Even when the nights grew colder and the first blanket of snow reached my porch.

Through the frost and the never-melting ice, you kept me warm. You sang graces of spring, huddled up beside me, watching the night. How dark and endless the skies were. But

freckled in tiny, flecks of cosmic light. That very light that caught in your eyes months before.

The light I still search for in these very walls.

The snow lay heavy that first year, painting white the branches of our sanctuary. We counted each of the crystal snowflakes as they fell from the skies. Silent, but still, I could hear the melody. The breath on the wind. And deeper in love I fell. Lost in your eyes, and under sheets of snow.

You were the first to point out the blossoms in the spring; sprouting from beneath the ice and the cold. We listened for the return of birds, the faint shafts of mid-afternoon light. The evening became longer and the air soft and fresh. We waited on the porch, watching technicolor sunsets. The horizon endless. Free.

And at dawn, you planted cherry blossom kisses across my skin. Soft and beautiful. But so very short lived. Brushed away by the breeze. The spring always had been so short lived. Just as autumn had. As quickly as death crept upon the branches in the late November, so did new life.

The Earth bled green. Blending in with the mossy tones of your eyes.

We hid away from the summer sun, back beneath the old trees of the wood. Only, there was no scarlet to be found. Just the endless velvet canopy of green—lively and fair. Beneath the old oak, we sang songs of eternity. Of life and love. And we ran barefoot to the forest streams, letting the cool water lap at our toes. Dreaming of wee folk, hidden in the ferns, ivy, and clover.

How long those days were. Fading in and out in the unbearable heat. You'd laugh and tell me how you longed for autumn. That chill on the breeze, and all the world to sink back to the heart of harvest.

But for me, no matter the season, I found my peace late at night, in your room. Bathed in moonlight. Nestled up against you, beneath blankets, lost in the rhythm of your breath and heartbeat.

When autumn finally broke, we took to the attic. We made friends with our shadows on the wall, dancing in the late afternoon light—setting the world outside ablaze in gold and amber. We recounted our blessings, promises of forever. Wed, even if only for pretend, by the spiders, spinning salutations in their silver webs. How brightly they shined, captivated in cascading glimmers from the crack in the window. The window that overlooked the rest of the world. Slowly and silently fading. Leaving in an inferno of nature's finest beauty.

But for us, in the safety of the attic, life went on. Over chipped teacups and stale biscuits, we laughed. Rejoicing in the beauty the year had given us. The love, so deep and sure. I had been so sure...

I should have caught it then. In winter's approach. When the days became longer and darkness prowled the earth. The bitter chill of the night air pierced daggers. And for the first time, the coldness gnawed deeper than the surface. Striking the bone. The heart. A coldness that never seemed to go away. Not even in the brightest rays of spring and summer sun.

The ice had simply grown too thick.

The skies, too black.

And I never found starlight again in your eyes.

The following autumn, in a gust of leaves, you vanished. There was no strain of pleading, no harsh words to display. Instead, there was silence. And the most bitter truth to swallow. The truth of a thousand lies—painted so perfectly on porcelain lips. On lover's tongues.

*I love you...*

Beautiful words become weapons when sharpened just right. When aimed so direct to the heart. Yet, perhaps even more so when they drop like missiles. Not only on your ears, your heart, your lips... But on others', as well. Destruction. Deception. Betrayal.

And just like that, you were gone.

I watched through that attic window, as the seasons changed, year after year. Watching the rain droplets collect in the splinter of broken glass every spring. And your melody, the

heavy breath of light and life, echoed off the walls. Capturing every spec of sunlight. A kaleidoscope of beauty. Of love.

But that sunlight had been taken. Ripped from the wallpaper. Hidden from the world.

Your shadow still lives here, though. Dancing along the panels. Caught up in the spiderwebs.

I still brew our favorite tea and serve it in our chipped china. Sometimes, I set a cup out for you—for your ghost—should it feel the need for warmth again. For comfort. For a time where promises were more than hollow words.

Yes, I still see you. Your reflection still haunts the dusty glass. Shattered, splintered, broken. It doesn't go away. It never will go away.

But, it's not your smile that returns the winter chill. Nor is it the shifting of shadows. The resonance of old words. For no matter how dirty the glass, how dark and cloudy the skies, part of me still swears...

Faintly. Distant. I see light in your eyes.

## About the Author

Dorian J. Sinnott is a graduate of Emerson College's Writing, Literature, and Publishing program, currently living in historic Kingston, NY with his two cats. When he's not writing for himself, he leads a weekly writing program and teaches workshops on the craft. He enjoys English horseback riding, playing violin, and attending comic cons up and down the east coast with his family. He is the social media editor for *Coffin Bell Journal*. Dorian's work has appeared in numerous magazines and journals, including: *Riggwelter*, *Crab Fat Magazine*, and *Nightingale & Sparrow*.

# En Vogue

by Meneese Wall

Scissors. Pink tape. Lucky Strikes. Mom placed the first two items on the boomerang-patterned kitchen tabletop and leaned back in one of its glittery vinyl-and-chrome chairs. She thumped the pack of cigarettes on the edge of the table a few times and propped the first escapee between her lips. I struggled with her lighter for a hint of teamwork despite its obstinate stance. Once a blazing yellow soldier stood at attention and fulfilled its duty, Mom leisurely drew smoke into her lungs, rested her feet on the table, and relaxed into the moment. I knew to wait.

Ponderous trails of smoke eased their way from Mom's nostrils, moseying aimlessly in a slow breeze created by the fan on top of the turquoise fridge. Across the room, the percolator's spirited refrain and seductive aroma lubricated her interest in the day. It was 10 am.

Mornings were my favorite time, especially the weekend kind. Actually, any day I could wake up and say *there's no school today* was like Neapolitan ice cream, Bugles, and flying on a plane all in one.

"The Carlisle Beauty Salon is open," Mom smoldered in her gravelly low pitch. Our ad hoc Saturday home beauty treatments were marvelously cosmopolitan: Hot chocolate heated on the O'Keefe & Merritt range, assorted donuts displayed like dominoes for a ravenous toppling, and twin terrycloth robes with our names embroidered on the lapels to wrap us in luxury. The first hour was for relaxing, cartoons, and pigging out.

As we flirted with sugar comas, Mom guzzled a half pot of Folgers coffee and I a quart of cold milk—after the usual pinching-pulling struggle to open its waxed paperboard carton. Soon Warner Brothers announced, "Th-a Th-a Th-a That's All Folks," and it was down to business.

Monday was school picture day, which meant Saturday commenced a fuss over my hair and clothes. We borrowed the tall rectangular mirror from my closet door and leaned it against the chair opposite mine at the kitchen table in preparation for my improved coiffure. Mom's grey eyes twinkled as she studied the comb's effects on my

hair. The glowing butt of her third cigarette danced in rhythm with her words. “Hold still,” she repeated often. With the calm and focus of a hunter whose prey was in her sites, she gave a swift yank on the pink-tape dispenser, a rip, and a carefree smile to indicate her confidence in the next step. Zigzag-edged hair-styling magic dangled from her fingers - 3M’s contribution to home hair salons.

Mom pressed the tape gently against my bangs. Her scissors merely had to follow the line, stay on track like a train. A few snip-snips later and *Ohhh* she’d groan with protraction, indicating that the tape required a slight relocation—a bit north to true up the line. More often than not, the goal of a superb seven-year-old hairdo and our home salon results were at odds.

I envied my mother’s hair with its natural auburn curls. Mine was thin, brown, and straight—forever in need of an orchestral coaxing to even hint at a wave. But Mom was never daunted. Foamy pink curlers and bobby pins over spit curls came to the rescue. Soon I’d be en vogue and ready to go.

While we waited for my hair to set, we danced to my favorite 45s—The Monkees’ *I’m A Believer* and The Turtles’ *Happy Together*. It didn’t take long for Mom to be out of breath. She cupped her hands around another flame to fuel further focus. At this point, I’d lost count.

I do recall, though, that she never smoked Virginia Slims. “They imply that work is preferable to mothering. They’re wrong,” she’d say. “I choose you.” She fantasized about the Marlboro man, but smoked her brand because she fancied the good fortune in its name.

I sat again for my hairdo’s unveiling. “Ouch!” I snarked. Without preamble, Mom had swiftly removed the tape, uprooting untold hairs that clung to the sticky pink gizmo’s promise of perfection. As I bid adieu to those stragglers, along with the rollers and bobby pins, I realized that fashion was a fickle friend—one who advances her agenda through much flinching and toil, obliges her followers to trust in others’ opinions, and ultimately forces us to surrender to the process.

“I’m sorry, sweetie. How ‘bout we show off your beautiful new do at Mac’s Diner and go shopping for a new dress?”

In that year's second grade school picture, I was fourth from the right on the front row—one of twenty-two kids, all with eager eyes and toothless grins, and many with bangs that teetered above barren landscapes of forehead.

## About the Author

Meneese Wall is a writer and graphic artist. Her work is inspired by the public, private, and often secret lives of real people. Meneese lives in Santa Fe, NM with her husband and daughter.

# Birthday, Someday

by Laura Weir

The security guard in the entryway glanced at us for less than a second before his eyes slid on to the next waterlogged visitor. He knew my dad already, and a sullen little girl didn't warrant a pat-down.

Inside, the slanted ceilings were sliced into strips by long panes of glass, where, very far above me, I could see a tiny trail of water following each raindrop as it made its way towards the ground. The whole antechamber was white and bright and cold. I felt plain and grubby with my brown braids and windbreaker, and despite myself, I held onto my father's hand as we made our way past what felt like a thousand artfully twisted ficus plants and empty gleaming wastepaper bins. My dad's feet made a spectacular *toc, toc* as his shiny shoes paced across the shiny floor. Mine made more of a wet squelching as I hurried to keep up in my rainboots with the hole near the heel.

In the time it took us to cross the room, I made a list in my head of places I would rather be. The petting zoo, the library, the cinema, the museum, the schoolyard, the beach, even our backyard in the rain was more fun than this.

We turned a corner and came to my father's frosted glass office door, which he unlocked for me. He knelt down to be at my height before saying, "Don't worry hon, the meeting won't be too long, and then I promise we'll go do something fun." He leaned towards me for a kiss but I turned away and made him settle for the top of my head.

The door clicked shut as he rushed off down the hallway. I sat down in his twisty chair with the wheels and looked through his drawer for pens in nice colors. Only boring blue and black. I used them to make myself a drawing of eight blue candles on a black cake (chocolate), and wrote "Happy Birthday Cassie" across the bottom of the cake before I pinned it on top of some pages on his bulletin board. I hoped my dad got the hint when he came back. So far, this had been the worst birthday ever.

## About the Author

Laura Weir lives on the West Coast of Canada, where she has spent the spring waiting for rain.

# Solarized Portraiture with Fire

by Kristin Fouquet



# Solarized Portraiture with Flexion

by Kristin Fouquet



# Solarized Portraiture with Flowers

by Kristin Fouquet



# Solarized Portraiture with Fronds

by Kristin Fouquet



## About the Artist

Kristin Fouquet photographs and writes from lovely New Orleans. Her photography has been widely published in both online journals and in print: magazines, chapbook and book covers, and CDs. Her preferences are conceptual photography, street photography, and the occasional traditional portrait. When not behind the camera, Kristin writes short literary fiction. She is the author of five books. You are invited to visit her humble virtual abode, Le Salon, at the web address <https://kristin.fouquet.cc>.

# Growth

by Kieu Anh Nguyen Le



## About the Artist

Kieu Anh Nguyen Le is a high school junior. She is from Vietnam but now lives in California. She is an editor for *Polyphony Lit Magazine*. When she isn't reading through poetry and fiction, she's playing volleyball or debating. As an intern for Loa: Broadcasting Vietnam, she is invested in political activism.