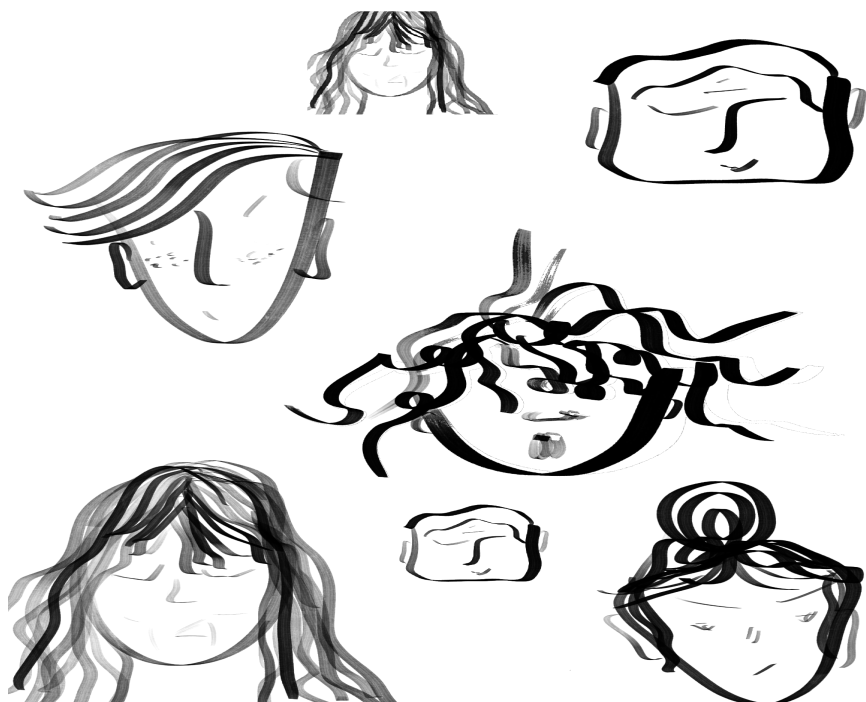


Radically Human

Celebrating the Human Voice



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Created especially for the **Los Feliz Writers Festival 2026**



The Los Feliz Neighborhood Council has generously provided a Neighborhood Purpose Grant via 501(C)3 21st Century Writers, celebrating creative expression. Funding of this publication does not constitute endorsement of any views, opinions, or content contained herein; the Neighborhood Council bears no responsibility for the ideas, perspectives, or creative works expressed within these pages.

Festival Schedule [[Partiful](#)]

Wednesday, August 19, 2026

Event #1: 6:45pm-9:30pm | [Shut Up & Write Opening Party](#)

Thursday, August 20, 2026

Event #2: 7pm-8:30pm | [Personal Essay Writing](#)

Friday, August 21, 2026

Event #3: 8pm-10pm | [POETS ARE THE NEW POP STARS](#)

Saturday, August 22, 2026

Event #4: 10am-11:30am | [Fall in Love With Your Own Voice](#)

Event #5: 12pm-1:30pm | [Sensory Portal: Writing Through Taste & Scent](#)

Event #6: 2pm-3:30pm | [Tarot for Writers](#)

Event #7: 4pm-5:30pm | [Writing with Audio](#)

Event #8: 6:30pm-9pm | [Voices of Los Feliz - Radically Human at Barnsdall](#)

Event #9: 9:30pm-... | [After-Party](#)

Sunday, August 23, 2026

Event #10: 12pm-1:30pm | [Local POC Voices](#)

Event #11: 2pm-3:30pm | [Writer and Activist Mixer](#)

Event #12: 4pm-5:30pm | [PorchFest Open Mic](#)

Event #13: 6pm -7:30pm | [The Story of You: A Sunset Journaling Stroll](#)

Find the venue, specifics, and sign-ups at
losfelizlitfest.org or on our Insta @losfelizwriters

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Letter from the Editor

by Sammy Ginsberg

Omg! So excited to share our Radically Human zine with you! The voices that are documented in textual form pressed to paper now part of the archive of all the human voices that have ever put pen to paper or finger pad to keypad as some divine consciousness radiates outward from our brain cells starting in our guts and out out out, they are here with all the beautiful chaotic flawed messy brilliance of human beings.

I am in awe of what this invitation to submit brought forth.

The dialogue between these pieces, this yawp, in a time where we are asking ourselves what is the function of a human, what is the value of a human, and our very humanity is being commodified and sold back to us. This attention economy!

All the writers included in this zine and me are grateful for your attention.

In the back are the bios and contact for all the writers in this zine. Reach out! Become penpals. Connect. This is about connecting human to human.

Join us at the Los Feliz Writers Festival! We want to meet you. We want to commune!

Bring your bodies; bring your brain; bring your pens.

Let us be radically human together.

Sammy Ginsberg

Obet & Dell's, 9:29am

July 23, 2026

The Radical Humanism of Intimacy

by Phil Leirness

Phil's podcast The Voice of Los Feliz inspired our first Voices of Los Feliz Celebration at Barnsdall in 2025. He will be our host at our Radically Human zine launch party at Barnsdall as part of the Los Feliz Writers Festival 2026.

Intimacy is our birthright. I strive to achieve it in my writing, through the interviews I conduct for podcasts like “The Voice of Los Feliz, and when I am hosting events like “Voices of Los Feliz”.

Increasingly what interests me are the adventures people seek in their moments of knowing, and even more what adventures seek them in their moments of not knowing. It occurs to me that The Los Feliz Writers Festival not only celebrates both kinds of adventures, but also provides fertile ground for their invention.

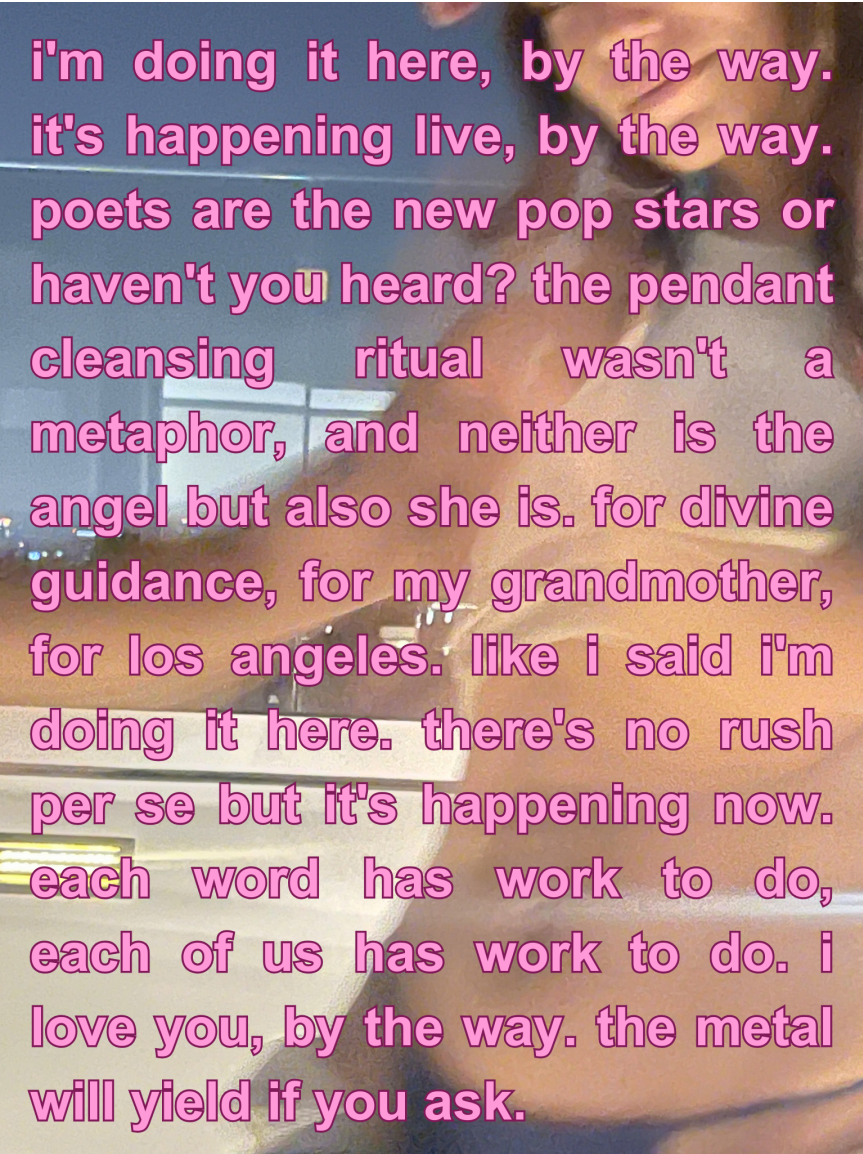
Taking place on the oh-so-fertile grounds of her Olive Hill Estate, “Voices of Los Feliz” helps fulfill the vision of oil heiress and arts philanthropist Aline Barnsdall. It was her wish that the location would eventually house an entire arts complex. It took many decades for Barnsdall Art Park to become what it is, a place where, through a variety of art forms, people are expressing the nourishing truths of what it means to be human.

To attend or to perform at the Writers Festival’s “Voices of Los Feliz” is to have the opportunity to participate in an ancient and ongoing conversation. It is a conversation that can honestly, without shame, explore the good, the bad, and the so-called ugly of our makeup. Achieving that is, to me, true intimacy.

And it’s radically human.

The Angel

by Rachel R. Carroll

A photograph of a person wearing a blue shirt, with their face partially visible in the upper right corner. The background is a blurred indoor setting with windows and interior lights. Overlaid on the image is a block of text in a pink, outlined font.

i'm doing it here, by the way.
it's happening live, by the way.
poets are the new pop stars or
haven't you heard? the pendant
cleansing ritual wasn't a
metaphor, and neither is the
angel but also she is. for divine
guidance, for my grandmother,
for los angeles. like i said i'm
doing it here. there's no rush
per se but it's happening now.
each word has work to do,
each of us has work to do. i
love you, by the way. the metal
will yield if you ask.

optimization

by estel franklin

let's optimize this.
 let's optimize this. let's
 optimize this. this
 could've been
 optimized don't you
 think? all of your read-
 ings could've been an e-
 mail don't you
 think so? let's optimize
 everything. don't tell me
 when you love me you're wasting
 time and i
 would hate to be a waste. late-
 ly i've been watching
 where i step looking
 out for ants
 instead should
 optimize my steps
 make it a per-
 fect twenty-two and a
 half inch gait so i can
 march in steady
 4/4 time all
 the time let's
 optimize our lives.

don't you ever
 get sick of living
 want something
 to do it for you?
 let's optimize
 my hand on your
 shoulder or

yours on my
arm down-
load the memories so we

never have to do this again.

i tell my boy
friend “optimize your
love for me” it’s
exhausting
always feeling
so much all the
time i’m
sorry this hasn’t been very
optimized
has it i’ll
stop now and
prepare
to optimize my life resist
the urge to care

DOES ANYBODY HAVE A FORK?

by Melanie Zoey

you're turning 36 in six weeks (double chai),
 you're disabled and chronically ill,
 you were given X amount of money that's tied up in stocks, and every
 time you sell, you're meant to put some aside for taxes,

you don't put any aside for taxes,
 so you'll have to sell more, again, for taxes,
 and you know this 'cause you called the stock guy on the phone and made a
 lot of brave jokes and asked good questions and did not cry at all when you
 learned you could not offset the gains, still there might be more money, but
 your parents are divorcing, so none of it is safe or stable, plus your parents
 need retirement funds, and nothing is guaranteed,

nothing is guaranteed, you have X amount of money and you've learned
 how to sell stocks,
 a monthly-ish ritual during which you thank your ancestors,

you've got X amount of money and your annual medical bills are bare
 minimum \$25,000, the cost of which increases exponentially according to
 the quantity of Postmates required when you do not have the ability to
 make food,

the kitchen is too dirty after weeks of flare ups,
 you cancelled the housekeeper when you were overly optimistic.
 you cannot clean.
 you cannot make your own food.
 you can walk for 10 minutes around the block while your heart spikes from
 anxiety:

you're turning 36 in six weeks (double chai),
 you have X amount of money,
 and if this all goes on, according to your dutiful calculations, you'll

run out in 2.5 years.

you need to heal from chronic illness and become able-bodied so you can work. if you never become able-bodied again, you'll really need the savings (and what about emergencies?)

you need work right now.

you need work right now that accommodates your chronic illness. you need work right now that's worth the fatigue and the money (you have X amount).

you need to work for yourself,

start a business as a tarot reader at corporate events. you need to study herbalism and heal yourself (nothing is working), there's a school in Berkeley, fast track a degree for \$10,000, by age 38 you're a professional herbalist, and maybe you'll have healed yourself!

if you have not disabled yourself further from the stress of a fast-track, if you can leave behind a career at which you've steadfastly chipped for 15 years, if you can release the dreams you carry like a stillborn. oh, and you want children.

it's getting time to freeze your eggs, so you need to cap your expenses, reduce all stress, focus on getting well: nothing can stick until you are well, so you need to move home with mom.

home is the root of your illness in a dysfunctional, abusive family, so you need to re-do your apartment to make it a Sanctuary of Healing, to call in clarity, your apartment has become a deranged storage closet for all your random shit, shit left behind by cousins and mothers and brothers who cannot conceive it takes you months to move a single heavy object from the door to the closet, you need to stop ordering packages, you don't have the energy to put things away, your apartment is flooding, there's a hurricane, you're removing the water with a small measuring cup, and people keep asking why you're still wet.

you now have X amount of money.
 the ancestors told you not to worry about money.
 you need to stop changing the rules on yourself,
 you need to head to New York for the fall, breathe different air, stay
 with your mom,

you can't stay with mom in New York
 (she says yes, but your nervous system says no),
 you need to stay in Los Angeles and finally organize your home,
 re-write those scripts,
 get an agent and manager: because that's the plan to make money. But

you cannot make a plan:
 plans over-ride your body, causing disabling flare ups.
 you need to hire a coach for \$567 an hour to help you make a
 non-disabling plan, you need to drop the coach, the non-disabling plan
 made you even more disabled,

you need to run (walk) into the woods, take off your clothes, and not come
 back, you need to write and cry in the empty courtyard, you need to pretend
 you're not crying and smile warmly for Jennifer from Postmates,

you need a fork for your noodles,
 you need to walk to get the fork,
 you need someone to get the fork,
 you need someone to find the fork,
 you need someone to wash the fork,
 you need to ask your neighbor for a fork,
 you need to ask your friends for a fork.

Does anybody have a fork?

BEST POEM IN THE WORLD FOR THE END

by Aubrey Mayne

Oh no.

The best you say?

I—

Ooh OK, I guess everyone can try, right?

But what does “right” mean anymore?

And you presume You have the “Right” thing to say?

Why, the audacity...

That’s the problem. Everyone’s telling everyone else how

“right or wrong they are” and why

Everyone just needs to do exactly what they say...

This Aubrey girl is pretty Presumptuous

To think SHE’S the one to say...

AGH!

It’s impossible

To have an opinion on ANYTHING these days!

Crying Cancel Culture!

How did you not already come to the same

Conclusion as the rest of us?!

When we already came

to this conclusion 5 mins

ago! How dare you not

be ahead of the game!

How dare you be wrong out loud!

SHAME! SHAME! SHAME!

omg, calm the fuck down.

I guess I’m a little nervous,

About my first work of priceless art,
 My manifesto,
 The first time I've written a holy scripture,
 The poem that belongs in a museum.

A truth, that's all I want.

To find gold in them there hills,
 To give birth to something
 beautiful in someone's brain,
 To say something the world
 NEEDED to hear right now.

But I've noticed that truth is organic.
 It is solid, gas, and liquid.
 It is viewed through a prism.
 It is in the eye of the beholder.
 It is a moving target.
 But the target must exist, if we chase it so.
 May I suggest a nice place to start?

FLOWERS ARE BEAUTIFUL: THAT'S A FACT.
 FIGHT ME.

FOOD IS GOOD AND FUN TO EAT
 MOST OF THE TIME.

DANCING TO '90'S HIP HOP AND '80'S SYTH-POP
 WITH YOUR FRIENDS SHOULD BE MANDATORY.

HOARDING WEALTH IS SMALL DICK ENERGY.

THE WORLD IS ALWAYS CHANGING, BUT IT STILL
 REMAINS THE WORLD

TILL IT ISN'T,
 TILL THIS ALL BLOWS UP SOMEDAY.
 WE'RE ALL GONNA BE DEAD SOMEDAY!

Tell that one person you love them!

Get bangs!

Go on adventures!

Dance!

Cry!

Be weirder!

Go see everything you can!

Taste your life before it's all gone!

And we're all part of the soup again,
 The universe,
 The one you haven't marveled at once today,
 The one that contains all the marvelous things:

Nutella, Bioluminescence, Pasta, Lightning, Jungles, Fore
 head kisses, Silk, Butterflies, Butter, Leopards, Crystals,
 1980's *The Octagon* starring Chuck Norris,
 Everything!

We're gonna be learning and trying new things
 Constantly.
 Organic,
 Curvy,
 Random.
 Nature loathes straight lines.
 Best poem in the world? To hear more
 WOAH!
 than
 WHY?

A Dog Called 'Ease'

by Tracy Chabala

"Face not recognized."

She pressed her cheeks. She pressed her eyes. She pressed her mind with all the might of her mighty thumbs, hard into her forehead, but her mind didn't move, just as her forehead didn't move, just as the skin wrapping around it didn't move. It was smoother and stronger and more resilient than ever before she'd ever existed, at least it seemed quite so after a round of shoots and daggers. Five-hundred dollars of beauty shot into her face that day, and now she needed to pay for it, but the bank wouldn't recognize her new face. She pressed her lips with the tips of her fingers. They were puffed up and thick, not her fingers but her lips, wistful and divine like she pictures from the sign off the side of the road that told her night after night, "This is how to be just so." She walked around and around and around that sign every night, searching for her lost dog, Ease, who she always found but who always ran away because Ease could not recognize her owner's face. Tonight, Ease would recognize her.

She put her face up to the phone again.

"Face not recognized," the bank app read. This was the second time, and after three tries she'd be locked out. Now a line formed behind her, at least someone or other stood behind her, and the Rabbit behind the counter began plucking its whiskers.

"Is it confused about your face, Dread?" the Rabbit said, pulling a grey pen out of its grey ear. He began chewing it.

"No," she said, trying the bank app again, this time facing her face towards the ceiling, flooding her eyes with blue-white fluorescent light. She put the phone in front of those eyes and stared straight at it, waiting to be recognized.

"Face not understood," the bank app said.

"Not working!" said the Rabbit behind the counter, slamming it three times. "Not working!" "No, not working," she said.

"Well," he said, putting the pen in his ear and twisting it around then taking it out and smiling at it, "how are we going to solve this problem of yours, Dread?"

"I can go to the bank and pull out the money that way," she said.

“There’s one right next door, I’ll be gone just ten minutes.”

“Oh, we can’t let you leave,” the Rabbit said, smiling wider at the pen and then smelling it. “But there’s no other way to pay!” she said. “I’m locked out of my bank account for an entire day!”

“No other way to pay,” the Rabbit laughed, putting the pen back in his mouth. “That’s what they all say,” he said while chewing.

A tall cat with a new-moon smile and diamond eyes started rocking side to side behind Dread, clearing its throat. Dread turned around. The cat’s nose was pinker than the pinkest she’d ever seen, and she wondered how much that kind of pink cost.

“I am so sorry, my love, I have a meeting,” the cat said to Dread, then walked up to the Rabbit, “I really must go now!”

“Of course,” the Rabbit said. Then, to Dread, “Please Dread, please step aside. Let me get our big Kitty’s bill. It’s a very big one today, five-thousand dollars! And then, rest assured, I’ll get to you.” Kitty smelled like lemon piss and every time she tried to smile, all anyone could see was an empty mess where her teeth used to be. They’d been gone for good since Kitty stopped counting them. “A very very big bill!” Kitty said, winking at Dread who didn’t see the wink. She was staring down, straight at the floor, which white-grey like her dull mind, which was growing duller every day. Kitty flashed her face before its phone and placed it on the pay machine, which dinged eagerly. “All set!” the Rabbit said. “See you in three weeks!” Kitty tried to smile, then realized she couldn’t, then walked out the door, which didn’t squeak. The Rabbit snapped back to Dread. “So,” he said, taking the pen out of his ear and placing it on the counter, then rolling it back and forth over and over, a bit of wax falling off the tip, “what are we to do with you?” “I told you I can run to the bank,” Dread said. “Then I can pay.”

“We can’t let you skip out without paying,” the Rabbit said, “that would be unfair to the rest of them. And if the bank app doesn’t recognize you, who’s to say a human won’t too?” “Dread twirled the air where her hair would be, then stopped short when she realized she couldn’t.”

“You took my hair today too?”

“You asked for that,” the Rabbit said.

“I don’t remember asking for that.”

“Well you asked for that,” the Rabbit said with a sigh, “the removal of your hair.” “Where is it, can I see it?” Dread asked.

“Let’s focus on the problem at hand,” the Rabbit said, slamming again. “Your payment. Now, let me ask you a few questions so we can get you on your way and me on with my day.” “Okay.”

“Do you have a sister?”

“No, I do not have a sister.”

“A sister might come to pay your bill.”

“No, I do not have a sister.”

“Then do you have a mother?”

“No, I do not have a mother.”

“A mother might come to pay your bill.”

“I do not have a mother.”

“Do you have a father?”

“No.”

“Do you have a friend?”

“No, I do not have a friend.”

“Do you have a spouse?”

“No, I do not have a spouse.”

“A boyfriend or a girlfriend or any other romantic attachments?”

“I have none of the above.”

“Do you have a Rabbit?”

“I’ve never had a rabbit.”

“How about a cat?”

“I don’t have a cat.”

“Interesting. Might you have a dog?”

“Yes, I have a dog. A dog called Ease.”

“How wonderful! Where is your dog?”

“Lost.”

“Lost?”

“Lost. I can’t find my dog, that’s the whole reason I changed my face.”

"You don't say!"

"You see, walking around and around the road where I lost her, I saw your sign about my face." "Our sign?"

"This is how to be just *so*.' That sign."

"Well, then call your dog called Ease!" the Rabbit said. "Call her up and ask her to bring things like money!"

"I lost Ease. She's been gone for days. Every now and then I find her but she runs away. That's how much my face has changed since I saw your sign. Every day, it changes, more horrifying and horrifying than the day before, and now Ease can no longer recognize me."

The Rabbit stopped rolling with the pen.

"Oh, I see," he said. "Well. She will surely recognize you with the new face we gave you." "She will. But I can't find her unless I go to the road tonight. I need to leave. I can come back tomorrow."

"No, no, no. You will just have to wait for Ease to come."

"Wait where?"

"Here in the waiting room!"

"Until when?"

"Until Ease drops by to pay your bill. Or your face returns to itself and the bank app recognizes it!"

"But I don't know when that will be! Or if it will ever be. Will my face be changed back?" "Who's say? It's your face," the Rabbit got down off his chair and walked around the counter, pointing to a chair beneath a large ticking clock. "Sit there, my love. Sit there. And wait for someone who loves to come to you."

Dread sat down and tried to twirl her hair. She tried to frown but couldn't. She tried to cry but her face wouldn't let her.

"And if no one comes?"

"Surely, your face will find you."

"And if it doesn't?"

"My dear Dread, just look around! We have plenty of mirrors to take your mind off itself."

Face of Joy

by L. Fuller

I know we have problems with Jonah Hill (human). Still, in the 2022 Documentary "Stutz," he described a most beautiful practice: taking a selfie at a moment when life is forever changed. I took this practice on. First, with early 2023 self portrait in the bathroom mirror at my cousins charade-religious-funeral. More recently: these. In a brief moment of hope within a 4 hour intestinal cramp and screaming bloody murder, trying to sign the legal paper work to close the estate of my father's blood line. I also am submitting the writing by hand as I know that is human too. There are hundreds and hundreds of people out there journaling by hand, because I made them. The transmission in handwriting and texture is deep. AI could never replicate it completely. The moment and everything held in it. In the end, I am just a white lady crying about nothing. In so many ways, doubt could shame it all. And yet, I am here. And this raw is all I have to give.

This is the face of joy.



Something so beautiful
that we'd all prefer
to hide.

Doubled over in a chair
in the back corner of CVS.
Nothing is wrong. But
we can't always know
when that grace will come
to shake us to our core.

Nothing is wrong,
I just need to buy a blue pen.
To sign that it is over.

The pain.
The hope. The fear & delusion
that someone is there.
That they would make good
in the end.

Nothing is wrong, I am finally
Everything made right. Free.
It is all on me now.

As soon as it seems I'll make it though,
I want to make it into art.

I am wrong though.
Soon, & for hours, I'll be sweating
and salivating again.

But, in this reprieve, I want to
 look in my own face.
 I want to know how real it is &
 see if I recognize myself there
 at all.

My face so old,
 already unrecognizable,
 twisted by these years.
 In this moment, the display
 of everything of the past.

Everything. Absolutely everything
 before this moment in these
 eyes.

Because I know — as soon as I have
 any regard at all, I will doubt it.
 think it wasn't necessary "so
 dramatic" =

And so, There is something sacred
 in the mercy of the inevitable.
 A line in time when things will
 never be the same again

Real & Bare,
 Pain, so exquisite in its purity.
 The alienates found in pain that
 can't be numbed. A moment so human
 for people to walk around. So incontinent
 and sacred that they don't know what
 to do.

I am in so much pain.
But not too much to love the art.

The mercy of the inevitable,
Strange hope in hitting the edge,

Nothing is wrong,
I just need to buy a blue pen to
sign the paper.

Isn't it amazing?
It's just a piece of paper & it
dropped me to the ground.

We live in a way where it's possible
to get shocked that anything
is real, or matters at all.

And — though some births take time —
the force of force on my cells lets
me know that emotion is real.

Perhaps. even I am real.

Perhaps. All that was done,
could be undone.

As I sign for this ending.
Alone & free, No one to stop me,
No One to blame.

I did try to numb it though.
 as I sat in the chair, ~~pose~~ hands
 on the ground, I reached in & took
 the drugs. For everyone else's
 convenience. But. When it
 didn't work. I realized:

I have been numb for so long.
 I tried though, to take the drugs for everyone
 else. But I just wanted to lay on the
 floor and wail.

I know how to do it,
 and I felt like I would be ok if
 I could, it would be ok with me.

But the people around me.

They were so ~~industrial~~ industrious.
 In this corner of the drug store, as
 people walked by, with no one
 to hand me a ~~ssue~~ assue,

I thought,

"that's a big part of why we
 need all these drugs." (because times no
 waiting allowed on the ground of CVS)

People would be afraid, when really,
 that may be the one thing they see
 today that they shouldn't be
 afraid of at all.

I've heard
 that if someone is stabbed in the
 head they may not actually
 bleed out until the shard of
 glass is removed,
 So much glass.
 Piercing my heart. Holding
 back the bleeding, so much
 already dead. That I didn't
 even know was there. The
 shallow, sticky, gasping, Careful
 heart beat
 I had been left with.
 I thought that
 was what a heart was,
 J. Sh 7-17-26

Kent Unsatisfactory

by Molly Sanchez

All the conference rooms at The Daily Planet were named after famous journalists. This is how it came to be that Kal El, son of Krypton, was sitting inside “Ida B Tarbell” half-heartedly swirling a mug of cold coffee. He considered zapping it with his laser vision. Nothing crazy, just a warmer. But, of course, he couldn’t because, at that very moment, he wasn’t The Man of Tomorrow, The Great Blue Blur, Last Prince of a Bygone Star. He was Clark Kent, and he was in deep shit.

“Do you even want this job, Kent?” Perry White, editor in chief, barked.

“Tone,” reminded Linda Applebaum, HR representative.

“Sorry, Linda, it’s just so frustrating. You came in here with such promise! Everything on your resume checked out; you were eager, you were ready. And now... Well, now you’re this.”

That was the trouble, as far as Clark could see it: he wasn’t *this*. Not exactly.

Outside, he could hear a child crying. Nothing serious. He could tell through even the thick walls and several stories of concrete, glass, and steel. Just a dropped hot dog...no, a cheddar wurst. They sounded so different, and neither of them warranted flashing out of this meeting.

All of this existed far away from Ida B Tarbell. He’d give so much for the convenience of a near car crash, or (he’d never be this lucky) a double homicide attempt with a side of a kitten stuck in a tree, because it would mean escape.

“Let’s go through the template, shall we?” Linda said a little too brightly, passing out two printed sheets of paper. Clark saw headers like “Excels at:” “Needs improvement,” and “requires immediate action”. Under each header (except for the first one), there was a massive block of angry text.

“Compliment sandwich,” Linda prompted. Perry sighed and cleared his throat.

“Clark is a great addition to our office culture. His prowess during softball season is not to be dismissed. Love his enthusiasm. He always exhibits teamwork by refilling the heavy water cooler.” Perry rolled his eyes. “What this ISN’T saying is you only played one game. A heck of a game, but you left

everyone hanging the rest of the season. AND you're never in the office! Enthusiasm, my ass! Who wrote this? Olsen?"

"The water cooler part is true, let's not dismiss that," added Linda softly.

The kid outside, 20 stories down, kept crying. Clark prayed it was trouble: real and true trouble, and his ticket into a phone booth and out of this meeting.

He could just fake an emergency. He'd done it several times before to cover actual absences. The time he stopped the bus crash, he'd "had a doctor's appointment." When he needed to catch that septuagenarian who was about to fall into the river, it was "the funeral of a beloved aunt." Heck, last month he claimed to have "eaten a bad falafel, and now it's comin' out of the attic and the basement" to cover up a full-blown downtown duel with Lex Luthor. He'd come back from that one the next day, appropriately disheveled, buzzing with victorious adrenaline, and miffed that he could no longer eat at his favorite Greek place in front of his coworkers.

But for some reason, those lies felt justified. A means to an end. Someone was actually in trouble; those lies helped him actually go.

You can fudge the truth part for the good of the "justice and the American way," bit. But if you're fudging the whole thing well, then you're not a hero, you're just a schmuck.

"Mugging, mugging, mugging," he prayed silently inside Ida B Tarbell.

Perry rolled his eyes and, through gritted teeth, said, "I'll say one thing, you're fast. You're turning in stuff fast."

Not hard to do, Clark thought, with super speed.

"But what good is that if it's full of mistakes? For God's sake, Kent, do I need to bring up the headline debacle?"

He had really messed up that time.

He could see inside Perry's head. He could see inside his skull. Inside his capillaries. He could see all these things at once, but over and over he'd sent copy in without commas, or too many commas, or the headline for the human interest story on top of the obituaries. "METROPOLIS RESTAURANTS DEBUT BOLD NEW FLAVORS DURING BBQ WEEK: EDITH HOOPER, BELOVED MOTHER AND NURSE."

This was excruciating. His whole life was devoted to doing the right

thing. Everywhere else, they cheered for him. And here he was in trouble all the time.

Please mug the kid. Please mug the kid. Mugging, I know. Rescue, I'm so good at. No commas, no words, just me, and I swear I'm so, so good.

Linda interjected, "How are we feeling? What's everyone's body telling them?"

Clark's body was telling him that the street child had stopped crying. Did he stop because he was about to be beaten? Clark hoped so. God, he hoped so.

Perry took an agitated breath. "Kent, you're no dummy. You're a good kid. I want to be on your side."

There's no reason Clark couldn't be a janitor—or a grocer. Or a god damned phone booth inspector. He picked a dream job, a fancy newspaper journalist in a giant city, to be his day job. The thing smarter, less super people ached for.

Because in a shabby kitchen in west Kansas, taped to his mother's ancient fridge stood a cutout of every new article he wrote.

She loved telling everyone in town who he was, the version that it was ok for him to be. It made her flush with pleasure to think that two farmers raised a "big city newsman." He often spoke to her Sunday school class about following their dreams. This made his Ma glow with pride, and he wanted to say, "if you think THIS is great, you should see me hoist a mass transit vehicle over my shoulder!" But he never said that. He just kept trying to make the kind of honest living she could look at.

"Clark?" Linda simpered quietly, "Are you listening? You seem like you're somewhere else."

He was somewhere else. He'd touched the side of the earth and felt dirt that was Paraguay and with one quick flick of his wrist, he'd touched the same dirt but now 5 days ago. His wrists twitched; he could turn it again. This meeting would be in the past, and maybe in this version, a kid would have the decency to get mugged so he could be sure of a quicker exit.

Silence from the street. No such luck.

"I'll sure try to do better," Clark said meekly.

"You'll have to, or you're out." Perry stood decisively. He turned to Linda, who clucked disapprovingly, "That's all the 'next steps there are.

There are a million other people who want this job, Kent. And they'd do it with a smile."

Like the smile the hologram that contained all the wisdom of his father Jor-El had shot him last time Clark had made the mistake of venting about his job in the Fortress of Solitude.

"Son," laughed the greatest mind of Krypton dismissively, "you're bigger than this. Show them. Tell them. Crush them."

Easy for him to say, Clark had thought, he doesn't pay rent.

"Kent? Kent? Linda, can I hit him?" Perry's voice punctured his fantasy.

"Sorry, I was er, ruminating on actionable changes," Clark said.

"Yeah, well, why don't you ruminate on that 7 Celebrities

Without Makeup piece I gave you DAYS ago!" Perry snapped, "I want that in an hour! Faster than a speeding bullet. Hear me, Kent?"

He heard, and he did. He crouched at the too-small desk and sighed. He wished he could cure the sting of this review the way he cured all his other injuries. He wished he could fly directly into the heart of the yellow sun. Let the pulsing rays of a star slough off the humanity of embarrassment, of pride. To have his resolve regrow like a bone. How refreshing it would feel to sidle out into misty clouds, like a newly hewn dagger going from forge to water bath. Hardened, perfect, sublime.

He settled for the glow of his ancient desktop.

The son of Krypton, the metropolis marvel, the friend of the lonely, the scourge of the wicked, the man of steel, the great blur on the horizon, sighed. He squared his shoulders, opened a new doc and started writing, "NO MAKEUP, NO PROBLEM THESE CELEBS BARE ALL--THE 8TH WILL SURPRISE YOU!"

At the warehouse rave under 6th Street Bridge

by Brian Sonia-Wallace

I left my lighter in the car! he says
but I have a lighter. A drenched stranger

asks to borrow it. We're all shirtless,
outdoors, 3am, impervious to cold &

there's enough fire to go around.
The gods must be jealous. My phone

pings, another gorgeous brilliant college friend has killed himself. *I'm
sorry to tell you*

but I didn't want you to just find out xx. I take refuge in another surfer's
tattooed arms,

his hunger. Suddenly, it's not that death isn't real, it's that it's very
small, & life

is kindling already mid-blaze. Show me a boy who isn't burning. Our
mouths

work furiously, wordlessly (aimlessly?), dawn, almost, not yet, breaking.
On the drive

home we stink & all we talk about
is how much we love each other.

Thomas O'Malley ("the alley cat")

by lenny love, jr.

Big papa with the black coffee,
a notification
to practice my meditation.
A nice view, she twerking too
the governor George Abbot.

A cool cat
but black,
any pussy could see that.
I went from alley cat to house cat
and I ain't going back,
I tell you that.

Actors are a lot like cats.
Bagged two bad bitches
with a bookbag and a staff.
I can smell your pheromones
through the glass.
My self awareness is rad.
I can't get rid of my dad
even if he passed.
I've inherited his hair line.
I've inherited his laugh.
Been working on my craft
But I haven't been hired
in a year and a half.

I am no longer interested
in becoming a member of your church.
SAG comes first,
my middle finger hurts.

I need to work on some shit
cause niggas ain't working on shit.

Hip-hip hooray,
hip-hip hooray
I have work on set today.
I am a beautiful African American artist
with some eccentric ways,
and some eclectic taste.

I usually meet a chick
on set that I vibe with
but all the fun be done
as soon as you hear cut.

I guess the magic wore off.
Let go of the things
that are falling apart.

Forward March by Jen Miller

Written March 2024 while in my car driving stuck in traffic. I happened to have a journal and pen in the seat next to me. I wasn't planning to write - it just came out.

I move forward
Drive forward
Molecule by molecule
Like a plant
Whose limbs once
Overcome by fungus
Let those limbs die off
Let new green growth emerge
Untethered
Remember what it was like
Before love
Love lost
Love unrequited
Love on hold
Start over
Innocent again
But with deeper roots
That give me
Self reliance
To fertilize my own soil
With the decaying limbs lost
I am still alive
And reaching for the sun

Bereft

by Xochitl Bentley

To witness is to feel the wave breaking, she thinks. Not just seeing it at a safe remove on TV or watching it mindlessly on a YouTube channel loop. The force of that violent smack on your face, your chest, knocks you down so forcefully that there is no chance of finding a tow line. The problem with witnessing the suffering of others is that we often don't understand what we see. The insect floating at the surface seems wholly disconnected from the pesticide spray. The chemical stew bottled by the worker bee, just getting by on his factory wage.

Consider for a moment the perspective gained from a distance. A honey bee surveying the world from above. Sideways. Nearly unseen in the periphery, but with visual orientation so acute it can find a nectar source mid-flight. A precious pollinator whose small size belies the magnitude of its importance. Working in concert with the rest of the colony, toiling on behalf of us all. To be a member of a keystone species is to sustain a balance among organisms reliant on your dependable industry. To be a member of this species means suffering the collapse of your colony. It is nearly unfathomable to imagine what this kinship loss might feel like. To be bereft of the community to whom you belong. To have a homing radar unable to take you back.

Mystical Cactus

by Derek Talbott

“A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.”

(Revelations 12:1)

the sun bleeds gloriously behind
a tuna cactus in the midst of a matorral,
bowing gently in prayer.

yet, as if cursed like the four-horned serpent,
her thickened tongues lick the dust off the air.
she seems like the equivalent of a reptile,

but instead of eggs, she lays golden flowers
in which the eternal pilgrims are well pleased
to soon give birth to a spiky, bloody, fleshy fruit.

shall it be enough to feed the hollow men of earth?
or do they still look for signs in the celestial bodies?
or worse, will they now dance round and round the prickly pear?

and by their fruits you shall know them, right?
so are their thorns like a crown of thorns
or are they more like horns? I cannot tell

yet now her shadow falls and lengthens
like the chasm of uncertainty she evokes,
but I see it more clearly now: her skin is like the tilma cloak

and even more like the constellations on your royal coat.
shall this be enough to please the hollow men of earth?
or will they also ask you for a rain of roses?

and rightfully so, for you shall give it to them
so that you may reveal your image on the cloak,
and their image in your image on the cloak,
as the proof of the proof behind the proof.

and if I painted you with scales and horns,
forgive me, for I am no John or Juan to interpret
the occult incarnations of your majesty.



'Mystical Cactus,' Illustration by Derek Talbott

once, a friend asked if the earth turned me on

by Alyssa Canepa

i would like to open

myself to the sky

as the oak

spreads

her fern laden thighs take in

the cosmos to melt back

home is my refracted beginning

time will seep toward

the pool of my sternum a spine

as mother's trunk

oh that i could breathe in the worms us in union

waiting wide

Causeless Mercy Cleanses My Calcified Pineal Gland

by Kevin Stack

And now I see through time again.
Like when I was a pink infant,
cribbed and agnostic to imprisonment,
tasting the savory colors,
tasting each hidden name
of every object.
I pined for proper
deciduous order:
I forgot my first word.
I remembered:
Fluoride
I forgot fluoride.
I remember
causeless mercy,
how milk pure
my enamel
was when
I could see
through time.

Farewell

by Trevor Bashaw

Last night I drank so much blue spirulina I became per-
-ception itself: witnessed the candor of the world, pre-
-dicted patterns within nature / engraved glyphs in the
spiritual architecture / of salt-of-the-Earth Athleisure
-clad asses. Hidden in the sweaty cracks of Cruel Life,

I was groomed by Hobo Johnson until I could not speak. It
is no coincidence every time I start to read / I feel papercuts
between my fingers and my toes. Is it a warning? Should I
be farming? Should I be fucking? My brain's a scantron, my
heart a fish lung. Vestigial / Forgettable. At the end of the day

I was a friendship machine. I was a Friend-bot / gravid with
Autofill. I installed an erasure inside myself / for the approval
of Capital. I was a naïve Gay man. I thought Pottery Barn was
nice. I had no knowledge of Greek or Latin roots. I was held
between a man's thumb and index finger / and squeezed like

a flea. Like putty in the hands of the Earth / a Terrible Sculptor
transforming me into and out of ugliness. I exercised my Vagus
Nerve. I sacrificed the animal inside myself and saw Fortune
in the entrails: an ethereal vision of a Children's Choir singing
Joga by Bjork. I was in the baptismal tub / shaving my belly for

Club Eat in a Hospital I had forgotten about ideology. I ate a
Tide Pod. I wanted for nothing but my funeral to resemble The
1999 SuperBowl Creed ½ Time Show. As a ghost I would give
up writing and reading to pursue my true passion: sucking dick
beyond the grave while He reads Baudrillard / He checks on his

cryptocurrency / He vapes, meditates to Kundalini Waking Subliminals. As a ghost I felt by notching emotions like an arrow in a bow seeking a target. As a ghost I took ghost pills to function in a normal ghostly manner. My words were like sunlight in a bottle. Ringing the air like a crystal bell / in paradise dilute

with trim citrus—such devastating vegetation—the kind that whips / the ankles sparse / coarse with thorn. The hill is grey and sour. It smells of nickel crunched. Murky eyes bleared by oil / smoked by salt / a goopy drizzle falls from heaven, Nestle choco syrup, (yummericious 😋) anthropocene skymilk brainwashing us babies

or trying to but NO! We shall never bow down to Amerika's oblong attempts to restrain our will—the femcel's dreams will always win.

Flying Lessons

by Felix Flauta Jr.

My wife's message, when it arrives
through my cell phone, gets interpreted by
the car's speech to text program in a voice
that's thunderous and dispassionate
as the voice of God.

"Our son is mildly autistic."

I had been asking her about her day,
if they had gotten home yet, did they need me
to pick up anything for dinner, but she doesn't
hesitate to share the message she's held
as tightly as a breath that pauses before
a bird might leap off an edge.

And for moments I'm the one struggling
to process information, I can't text back,
I try to flap my hands in the air like
our son does sometimes, attempting to fly,
and I'm emotionally reacting to a possibility
we've seen coming since
we tried to schedule this evaluation
six months ago.

For years, we've appreciated watching
our son succeed so much that we've overlooked
the moments when he seemed stuck
to the ground. It was always so beautiful
to watch him in flight.

We even signed him up for martial arts,
thinking, this could be a therapy
for his emotional outbursts,

for his social withdrawal,
for the unnecessary motions with his hands
that turned out to be so necessary
for his emotional well being.

But our bird couldn't adjust to school
five days a week, and martial arts
for two more. He loved to punch and kick
the bag in the dojang, but everything else
proved to be too big a challenge.

And now we're faced with adding
other therapies to his schedule,
and doctor appointments,
and parent-teacher conferences,
and child support groups,
and anything else he might need,
and it's frightening to think that
we might stress him out more than these
consultations stress us out, and he might
never adjust to a calendar filled
with activities to show him
exactly how to adjust his wings.

To conditions in the world.

To other birds.

To the turmoil that goes on inside himself.

We pray we can do enough now
to help him to fly after we're gone.

The Class Group Chat by Keleigh Ferguson

Her message hung like a ghost: Sign my Petition to Ban
Disgusting Books. Her AI-generated prayer untangled like
rotting flesh with bones emerging. Ceaseless subheadings:
Why This Matters and Next Steps. Emotional cues
for the emotionally clueless: Rockets, sparkles,
and brains gyrating across the text.

Her list of books grew like bougainvillea: Bursting
plum colored tips, vines suffocating the closest structure.
A prince who wants to marry a prince, boys kissing
in high school. Ladies who were “more than friends.”
She declared it better suited for the public library.

As mothers with children at the same school, our sons
spent second grade learning to skateboard together.
Red helmets soaring like hummingbirds. Darting between
cacti and the sun. For Christmas she gifted my kid a race car
Its hidden trick: It could slide up walls like a cellar
spider, sneaking into corners to reveal its truth.

In college, I confess to my aunt that I have a girlfriend. My closest
ally, or so I thought. A fiery woman with red-wine hair. But I pit
desire against religion. She spreads the news to all my cousins.
In less than a year, I will have a boyfriend. I bounce between
my life and my silence in the Class Group Chat.

As a teacher in this town with only one high school,
I know the parents, and I am woven together. Intertwined
by back-to-school nights and birthday parties. I am a submarine
surfing waves. Gliding and drawing beneath my skin.

“Mom, I think I have a crush on a girl,” my daughter whispers, while folding herself into sheets before bed. She is twelve. Outside, street lamps are auditioning for stars. Blinking on and off with knowledge. Waiting for light to join them. Inside, I’m a firefly. A flicker of hope that I’m trusted.

For a few more seconds, the group chat is still. Before a reply leaks from a phone: Signed! Another: Signed! Why did they have to announce it? I yelled to another parent, over Joan Jett’s “I Love Rock N Roll” playing on repeat as we waited for color guard to end. Our daughters twirling crimson and indigo flags. *At least now we know who the assholes are.*

Later that night, parents battled. It’s illegal to ban those books. “I am a stylist,” she shimmers. I have gay friends. But not my kids. Not these books. Each message sinking the conversation further. I hold my response tight beneath water—a starlight under the sea.

Trying to make up for a lifetime. Weaving it together like clouds or constellations. My mother, with plenty of gay friends. But not her daughter, not her religion. Not queer enough. Not straight enough.

My daughter tells me black swans mate for life. While moths flutter outside her window. The group chat will disappear next school year while my silence is etched in a world that warns of digital demise. Memory is a fierce liar, a tornado that desires stillness.



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At a Lunch with Artist Friends

by Tim Carrier

At India House, leaning in a curving line at the buffet,
—in a rainy, colder season when the leaves have started to go—
something in the air moves around us. By now I know that everything is
a portal: the jar of spoons, the neon
filaments in the fixtures hanging lightly in the air,
the music, the doorframe, the gleaming copper cups.
We talk about astrology & tarot & dreams & signs & wishes :
A crow with a bright orange something
hanging from his mouth.

L. says her grandma, in a dream, answered a prayer: young boys &
an arrangement, of long folding tables, stacked with wooden forms.
C. says he moved, with concentration, a stone tied lightly
to a thread. I say each poem, these days anyway, is a spell. I can only make an
incantation. I would like to open a little more.

Once, I went to a gathering at a gallery in the town, for an artist
who'd left the world with their own two nimble hands.

Now I'm only trying to remember where we came from.

Song forms & grasses & pennies cracking open. All the blessed dead. How
they dazzled when we knew them. They were human
when they were here.

Pool

by Will Vincent

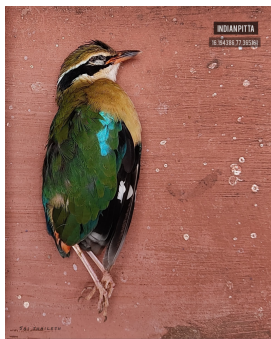
remember how DiCaprio moans
 through the Iowan air of the truck cab
 and the young pre-trial, pre-Sparrow Depp
 looks so lost in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, so lost as I do
 on a summer day when I'm staring into the middlest
 air between my pale sun-burnt form
 at the pool's perfect turquoise
 blue surface oh so gently wind moved
 by waves? I think it's easy
 to say Depp wanted an *easier* brother like
 how I long for the easy endless days
 even when I have them—when they're right
 there? like how Hockney captures a fantasy—a life
 filled with long, easy afternoons?
 thinking about pools and this poem about pools
 for a few days and I love how they become ever-present—
 their ultramarine shades as vital as breathing.
 rest in peace, Hockney, I know it's cliché
 to paint an occasional poem about pools in Los Angeles
 and think of you finding the perfect acrylics
 to capture the peach blazer-clad lover
 staring down at what we can only assume
 is the artist in tighty-whities below the pool
 surface, swimming and playing at drowning in *The Portrait
 of the Artist*. even in the earliest childhood
 play, we flirt with drowning. this summer, I'm thinking of the body:
 the Chekhov's gun facedown in the pool—the fake dead
 horse at the bottom in *A Day of the Locust*,
 or else Gatsby facedown: "A small gust of wind
 that scarcely corrugated the surface was enough
 to disturb its accidental course with its accidental burden."
 to be in the pool is like to live in the ellipses
 between more concrete thoughts,

or the pool *feeling* is like my Santa Monica pier
 sunglasses bent and splayed over a fresh
 copy of *FENCE* magazine and me longing
 for an avant-garde coterie while the barista sings
 perfectly beautifully over that BADBADNOTGOOD
 song featuring Samuel T. Herring called “Time Moves Slow”
 and how I heard my nephew use the word “beautiful”
 for the first time yesterday when talking about a borderless
 Pokémon card and knowing I’ll forever be
 the middle kid between movements and brothers
 respectively—though alone as a poolside willow, I might
 let my branches at least grace the surface
 of an experimental “poet’s theater.” a poolside feeling
 is like “Putaria vs. Melodia” by DJVAVAT, MC Morena,
 and MC Bobiloco maximally “letting them rise up
 and show the view from the top.”
 what are we after? the myth I believed
 that sharks swam in the deep end? when I watched
 the lifeguards change under their towels in the private
 pool next to my childhood home and what kind of sublimity
 they accessed in their bronzed heavy boredom.
 we pull each others’ heads down in the wave pools
 at the waterpark and spend most of our time
 floating and shoving through the lazy river
 tube-pushed, eyes red with chlorine.
 elsewhere, coders code away their jobs
 calf-deep in the pool loop turn and burn, laptop hot
 on their laps, and my cousin leaps into the empty pool
 dodging gunfire in Iraq and still I’m returning to the “permanent
 optimism of Hockney,” or watching my best friends
 glide through the California sky over me, skateboarding
 against all fear and cement in emptied pools.
 I sit in the vacant director’s chair
 in *A Bigger Splash* where Icarus backstrokes,
 wingless and happy while DiCaprio falls
 into my so-called Claire’s arms into the MTV-blue

pool “for stony limits cannot hold love out.”
we break into the pool. I watch my brother sprint
toward that moving night-blue pool’s glass—
the boogie board placed just so
he can glide across the surface and land
on the other side without falling
back and cracking his skull on the edge
even if I imagine him doing so every time.

Death of an Indian Pitta

by Masha Amal



love splits your heart inside
heaving pain
a father without a body
mother watering land
a sister without a memory
of a father's body
all that has enough longing
a lifetime worth of love
tea estates
village puddings after funeral service
someone screaming for
more coconut milk.

Ancient Ruins

by Tayi Sanusi

We used to fall to our knees among ancient ruins
moved by whispers of sand and smoke.
Sun pooled in the glassy dome of your iris.
Brown like tree resin, tears overtaking insectile souls trapped inside.
Green like moss growing on a coin, a reclaiming of design.
Blue like my gaze searching the horizon,
an aching chest with mineral longing,
sulfuric.
The stench of creation.
An old me I can't let go.
Layers of bone and sap
crystal and stone.
But when I reach inside my rising spring, I get swallowed by the current.
Now I'm stranded but not alone.
An insistent shaft of afternoon light came through rounds and squares
and slivers.
Woven sacks of linen filled with grain for your journey to the
sky.
I knew it was you wrapped tight with strips of gauze.
Sun glinting over your iris creating the beacon that brought me here,
forever strapped to my stone seat always gazing at horizons.

These Are the Words I'll Carve on Your Grave

by Zachary Tyler Gatliff

Truth is a bare sword that cuts deep. You can't keep it around lest you nick yourself, but the further it is, the closer it lies. I've seen people live under lies Damocles wouldn't have trusted. But once again we're lost in the world of metaphor. Rob my words of merit and make them easier to swallow.

In short, most people lie to themselves. They're afraid what's on the other side is worse. But when you double down, all you do is build a repeating pain. Feedback that chokes regardless, and eventually guides you to the world you so feared. I have seen people speak of love with an emptiness to make you shudder. Love is not habit.

So give me an open view in which to throw myself, preferably over the water. All my dreams consist of foaming surf.

We write big images to bandage small moments. The small losses that add up through no fault of our own. We wrap ourselves in new identities, the sheer cloth obscuring lines for our lovers, and when it holds we claim we've changed. That is us. We have become, something. But truth, that precious bitch, still exists. A thread pulls us back to our creation, running our fingertips across flesh to create a shape in the dark. To meld this shape with us, and another, and another. A thing that happened, and that thing caused another thing to happen. You could chase a thread back to the beginning if you just knew everything.

You can see our silhouettes through the flimsy curtains of a four-poster bed. It's all very cliché. Yet when I consume you, nip the buttons to carve away. Breeze creating a sense of freedom across your chest. It is because I want to know you can be stripped down.

My therapist suggests I write a scene of how I wish my life would have gone. If I could somehow slip my words past the tongue of this empty shell. It can parrot what I need. It can be. But it is not the truth. The truth is a thread to be followed, that can be unwound. Unwounded.

So I can understand, you.

And admit that I am not me anymore. Flavored by years of independence, years of misfortune, years of watching days go by. Different clothes have become different skins. Seasons I didn't realize I was modelling. People enjoy masks because there are hard edges you can grip, take off. My mask is soft. My breath is sweat and traces of perfume.

Remember that job? That relationship? That apartment? I can't even explain how I got here. I am consumption and what is spat out afterwards. I am fluids. I am the sound of a belt sliding out of its loops. I am the smiling friend. The eyes in your dreams And the curses. Oh, I am the curses that follow you. And when I am with you, I lay my head against your shoulder and breath, looking down your seams for loose threads I know will unravel.

So how do I explain to the person lying next to me that her skin is what I find fascinating? The cords of muscle and movement that define the word flesh. Every scar, every spot, every bunch of twisted fascia marks something; a skin cream, shard of fiberglass, laughter from everpresent gods. Each variation another angle pressing over blank smoothness. Breath, as opposed to this clay body I fear lies next to you. This blank face that I drape every day to fit the mood and makes my actions not my own. It's when she kicks my calf with her foot in some sort of playful comeuppance that I am jolted out, and laughter mixes with mock anger and fraught retaliation.

So maybe I'll do both. I can love you, and hate that I have to love you this way. The best way to hurt someone is to judge them by your trauma.

Scene. Interior. A ranch-style home in suburban St. Louis. The response I usually get? People don't know what the fuck I'm talking about. Is St. Louis, Missouri a city? Did I sprout between concrete spires and graffiti, dirty streets soaring with the sounds of traffic in miniature? Maybe ten blocks of rusted chain link and red-brick homes, a red-light district by the river and we hit cornfields. Or I fell out of an oak tree and bounced down from the green woods, abandoning opioids, meth, sex at the edge of bonfires, and viewing Wal-Mart as the most crowded place in the world.

Both, and everything in between. St. Louis is a brick town. It also has skyscrapers and concrete tenements. All of it stretching maybe fifteen miles in any direction before you hit rolling hills, two story neighborhoods and the cookie-cutter subdivisions. Another fifteen and you'll slowly be strangled by green. The sound of four-wheelers and gunshots echoing across the highway. It's just like anywhere else, but we touch each other in cars, in churches, and kink partners are something to be discovered and held on to. Sweet co-dependency, rather than communities who expect you to know everything about this unsung part of yourself.

Typical for some. Unknown to swathes of others. It's terrifying isn't it, that something so basic to you is another language.

My home exists in the midst of a cul-de-sac atop a hill. One of those curving stamens bisected by water runoffs we arrogantly called a creek. It's a family area, a bedroom community with a few business arteries stitched by roaring freeway intersections. Rural enough for every house to have a yard, to drive past the occasional eerie stretch of unincorporated land, to notice empty sidewalks with their lawn trimmings in the summer and worms after the rain.

In fact there was an abandoned lot on the way to my preschool. God's Garden I liked to call it, back when benevolence still seemed like a thing. In the spring it would burst with wildflowers. . Dots of pink, purple, and orange swaying in the wind, like a private swathe of prairie. They'd built a tire center over it by the time I turned ten, and I've spent an awful amount of time wishing it'd burn down.

Our house was built in the 70s, or maybe it was the 60s. Like so many things in my family, there's little enough reason to know the truth. Three bedrooms and three "family" rooms, one of which was converted into a master bed, turning a bedroom to an office, and annexing one of the two bathrooms for parental use. Outlived one owner, who'd left it a degraded wreck some estate agent sold to a newly pregnant couple. Which led to twenty years of things falling apart despite constant upkeep, and the neverending moan about why they'd done this in the first place. One floor, every room leading into the others, so you never could escape that knowledge.

And there, in the front room, just to the side of the master bedroom, sits a boy. He's watching bright colors move across the television in sync with the click of plastic. An action he can sometimes feel in his bones. An old TV, heavy enough to do real damage rises above him. The medusa tangle, reaching out the back, buzzing faintly with electricity.

Long before people pretended videogames were acceptable. Before the well-coiffed farmed pixels for parasocial currency. These 16-bit landscapes earn him nothing but the illusion of escape. But the game doesn't matter. More importantly, it's summer! Gone are cold school rooms whose activities seem too easy and nearly impossible to follow. Gone are his classmates' habits, and his own. The world is his to direct again, but without an audience. His

supervising adult somewhere deep in the haze of air conditioning, uninterested for now. Certain that until the next feeding, the next camp, the next good night he'll be fine by himself.

But he's played too much, seen too much, and the ennui that will haunt his entire life has slipped in its stinger. Suddenly everything is boring, horribly predictable, as if every time he's done this exact thing looms in front of him. Eyes dart, looking to satisfy, or at least sate, the gnawing hunger. Better phrases won't exist for another ten years, like making out because there's nothing better to do. For a nine year old, this is just boring.

With surprising control, he saves. The purple button blacking the thick screen with a snap. Suddenly he's alone, no longer performing for even the 16 bits on screen. He rolls over the aging carpet, couching himself in the mountain shadow of the sofa. Already attempting to summon the odds and ends that would distract him. Kicking his legs up in the air, arching his back to hear the sound of his butt slamming into carpet. The rhythm helps. Soon might come the imagination, the different worlds.

Two windows face the front yard, filling the room with light. Portals through which his father examined unfamiliar cars. Through which Midwestern thunderstorms shook, promising ends. Through which he tracked the textures of empty sidewalks, marking time on empty suburban streets. And his mother, well his mother didn't have much use for anything outside of her control.

But from that position, low and looking upwards, he could see everything. He could see the rich, blue sky. The white clouds like lumbering giants that momentarily dunked the world in indigo when they stumbled past the sun. He could see trees. The green hedge twenty feet above his neighbor's backyard, progeny of the creek. Twenty different leaves shimmering in the heat of charcoal shingles. And that one tree about two houses down. At least forty feet tall, looming over the street, casting about in all directions as it reached for the sun.

And the branches up top, so different from the gnarled trunk! They were so thin, so alive, brushing the sky as if they could press the epidermis of the world. He'd never noticed before, but the bottom of the leaves were lighter than on top. He'd never thought about it when he picked them off the grass, absently tearing them down to delicate veins. But when hundreds rattled in the wind, it was impossible not to see. A dollop of silver mixed with

the green. The occasional lines of primary flashing through like some lithe, breathing thing.

It was amazing. Amazing that it could exist, that it could feel like this, and no one would realize. A moment unique, this thing that sucked the same air as his pale, boy body. For one glorious moment, his.

Then the gnawing emptiness. What he'd hear a hundred words for: boredom, anger, spectrum, addictive personality disorder, you're just generally a loser. A language that no one else would speak with him, or at best they'd hear it distorted. Nitwit, blubber, oddment, tweak.

There's a hole in your chest and all your organs are being dragged into it. You stare at your body, amazed that nothing has moved, that your ribs don't crack and collapse while you're drowning on land. You throw on the mask, wrap yourself in the sheets, take a deep, choking breath.

It's knowing, knowing that when you get up and tell the other person in the house all you'll get is a blank face. Blank boy.

So he rolls back and turns the videogame on, because that's all he can think to do; live in a flat, colorful world.

That is truth. That is the ending. And they say build a better life in which you can love yourself. Write what you wish she would've done. You're a creator aren't you. Can't you make it better? Can't you make yourself enjoy a game you never wanted to play.

Ugh. These are words. Words written by someone who is currently sweating while an ancient air conditioner coughs beside him. Whose cats lay a few cool feet away, and he worries he hasn't spent enough time with them. Who walks away from his relatively good job every day wondering if he'll still have it next year.

In a better world, a kinder world, a woman walks in. Not quite his mother, because she wouldn't do that. Enter without some command, some idea of where she wanted to place him. No, she shares similarities, but crossed with a person he half-dreamed. Still white. Fairly skinny, though motherhood warps angles with lack of sleep and bites of stolen food. Taller. Hair a toffee brown, lifted into a ponytail. Her face, thinner, sharper in the cheekbones, more reflective of what he would eventually become. She moves uncertainly, like she never quite grew into her body, forever contrasting with her son's ability to run into chair legs and door frames, leaving trails of soft gasps in his wake. A reflection, as opposed to another's personality imprinted on his skin.

She is flawed. She yells at people in the car, people she couldn't confront in real life. Immediately apologizing to her progeny. She cooks like a hurricane. Her husband fills a cart to the brim every weekend, and still her son knows every aisle in the store and how to use the express checkout. And she is determined to be an artist, even if it is just a nook, a bunch of paints and her cub's curious gaze.

"What are you doing buddy?" she asks, coming into the living room and falling onto the carpet. She flips over with a groan, finding the same view as her son. Her arms splay. Her hand finds an elbow. An awkward grip, but one that occurs naturally, connecting to her son.

He giggles, the familiar scent, nerves burn as dendrites' static mixes with his own, and suddenly what was trivial, what could potentially harm, needs to be shared right away. Lost in bliss, because there's no way this person, lying here in this moment, could hurt him. He points out the window at the angle, at the world, but lacks the language to explain. Words run across the cortex and burst forth, unable to hold anything. Unworried, because she is as much a part of him as the air he breathes.

"The sky was so blue! And the leaves were waving in the wind, and just... Mom, it was really pretty!"

She smiles at the tears of frustration. So much of parenthood is parsing the lack. Laughing, because despite her own confusion, what he says is important. He would copy the compulsion for years.

"The trees?" she pauses, watching. "It is nice when the trees are waving. I love when it's breezy in the summer. It makes you want to run!

Her fingers find laughing ribs, screaming in delight as he jumps away. This energy suddenly their own, ready to be spent in the best way possible.

"Do you want to go to the park?"

A nod.

"But let's clean you up first, so you can get dirty again."

The two walk through the squat house, the pink bathroom, the groaning car, the oppressive humidity of the Midwestern woods, and all that comes after: the bigotry, the bullying, the theocracy, and finally, perhaps, the leaving. As maybe such things were always meant to be. Maybe it never was her. Maybe she saw the sun damage on his cheekbones, the bunched shoulders, the blue in his eyes and realized what accumulates pays, defines,

morphs, and it is not the presence that matters, but the lack. And she rejected the lack.

And maybe that is love.

And maybe that is love.

And maybe that is love.

And maybe that is love.

And maybe that is love.

And maybe that is love.

Love by Nastja Nikolskaya

All thoughts taken up by a face
 Not a face even
 But the way they are
 Who are they, why did they say that,
 What will they say to me next time.

Everyone gives advice
 All the advice is wrong
 Maybe some is right.
 Waiting.
 Waiting,
 Hoping to find a home in someone

Is this what it was always like?
 Medieval girls
 Maidens
 Giggling and talking about boys and men
 Waiting for a wedding
 Youth's first infatuation was their shorter path
 Or maybe they had no choice at all
 We will never know the truth of those long lost
 times
 Only snippets of history
 Ancient ballads
 An illustration here, a painting there.

Surely people were always allowed to love.
 Some people. All? Surely it's what a mother wants for her child.

A world 50,000 years ago
 Are we still the same people we were then?
 Seeing who they have around
 Hoping to run into someone else, some people they knew, nearby
 A drunken celebration, even then.

I make a list of burning questions I want to ask
I try to pull back, hold back
Will I hide these feelings
Or will I confess them. Soon.
Some might never.
Others don't even feel it but say it.
That was me once, too.
You will never know what someone truly feels.
Or maybe you will, because they will keep explaining
Until you understand.

A story to laugh at. Love down the line.
Imagine someone that you love that you can hold hands with every day.
So quotidian for some, and so out of reach for too long for others,
that's how life unfolds.

My heart is beating in my chest
We decide to meet
I've been waiting so long.
I've been so hurt, so disappointed.

Let down. Lied to. Mistrusting. Sore.
Why does it feel so strong.
And yet
Feeling safe. Pain fades.
This too shall pass.
Unbearably sad
And then suddenly, when you try to fill your life,
There is revelry again.



Papaya

by Radhaika Kapur

Now I am prized open,
A papaya; black seeds (my toughness) revealed
Amidst the softest orange flesh

Papaya, flesh prone to atrophying
Beneath a finger's pressure or any real yearning
That overcomes, that overcomes...

I am papaya, thick skin
A scent that betrays the need to impress
To be truly delightful for you
and you
and you

Papaya, succulent with juice
Ready for peeling, or a knife?

Papaya,
Cut into delicate shapes for the breakfast platter
Adorned with mint leaves
Drawn into your mouth
Disappeared, disappeared

in the town square by Ren Michael

The only sin
I committed
was stepping away
from who I am

as if it was necessary, ever
in order
to love others.

as we create who we are
and meet at the overlap

the courtyard
we call democracy

where customs and
perspectives may change,
the resistance interests,
at times hysterical
life continues.our role sustained
depends on the will to listen
exposing the ego
the fraudulent, imposter of self
receding and leading to true experience
of who we are.

The only sin, the greatest blasphemy
I committed
was stepping away
from who I am
as if that was ever needed
to love others.

May Mother Suggest

by Adelaide Dicken

a straightforward
ancestral ritual:

Look around
and do not
FORSAKE
one another.

Not this year!
Not this time!

There is not time to waste.

Every day we succumb to the neutralizing and numbing,
every sigh of despair we offer up to the obliterating chase for POWER,
every inch of land and every ounce of control,
every unmentionable evil we neglect to bring out of our screens
and into SHARED AIR,
every time we go silent about genocides,
we pretend it is too late.

Turn away with me NOW from your greatest addictions!
Bring ROARING to the surface your quietest and
most buried predilections!

I promise you there is someone —
at least some ONE else who we do not yet know,
who we have not yet LOVED
— that you and YOU and you and I dropping
out of the skies

and into our bodyminds:
 we came here duty bound to shake them awake!

You must find them and take them NOW by the hand
 and ever so gently stay with them and STAY with them and STAY WITH
 THEM
 and
 SHAK
 E them
 until
 they
 awaken.

It will be *lovely* SEXY *easy* —
 for you,
 and only you
 — to help them discover that they too have a simple PRECIOUS
 necessary role to play in undoing the worst possible timelines of our
 collective fate.

We are all that we have beloveds and maybe just maybe we are all that it takes.

BOXING DAY "Pilot" By Rebecca Slater

ACT ONE

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - ESTABLISHING

INT. ANDIE'S BROOKLYN APARTMENT - HALLWAY - DAY

ANDIE (early 20s, nerdy shrew) carries a suitcase toward the elevator. The door opens and her cute neighbor, DYLAN (early 20s, clean cut) comes out.

DYLAN

Hey, Andie. Going home for the holidays?

ANDIE

No. Sleeping at the office.

DYLAN

On Christmas? Isn't that illegal?

ANDIE

Surprisingly, it's not. I looked it up.

DYLAN

I thought you wanted to work on documentaries.

ANDIE

I do.

DYLAN

So what are you doing at Fashön? I mean, no offense, but it's a dumb fashion magazine.

ANDIE

I know, but one year on Miranda's desk pretty much guarantees I can get any job I want afterward.

DYLAN

Alright. Just don't work too hard.
They smile at each other, too shy to move past pleasant conversation.

ANDIE

Merry Christmas.

DYLAN

Merry Christmas.

Andie gets into the elevator and the doors shut.

INT. FASHÖN OFFICES - ANDIE'S DESK - NIGHT

Andie works at her desk all alone. Everyone else has gone home for the holidays. She rolls calls for her boss, MIRANDA, 50s, the glamorous and powerful editor in chief of Fashön, who is on her holiday vacation.

INTERCUT:

EXT. BEACH RESORT - DAY

Miranda talks on the phone while sipping a drink in a cabana.

MIRANDA (INTO PHONE)

The weather is disgusting. It's
usually so much warmer this time of
year...

Andie rolls her eyes.

MIRANDA (INTO PHONE) (CONT'D)

It wouldn't be the holidays if we
didn't take it in St. Bart's
though. Alright, Andre. Kisses.

Andie watches the red light on the phone disappear.

ANDIE
He's off.

MIRANDA
Ugh. I hate that man. He's so desperate. Who's next?

ANDIE
Nicola VanSpeer left word.

MIRANDA
What does she want?

ANDIE
I don't know.

MIRANDA
You don't know?

ANDIE
She just said to call her back.

MIRANDA
You need to find out what people are calling about. Don't you understand
how this works?

ANDIE
I'm sorry.

MIRANDA
Just get her.

ANDIE
Okay.

Andie dials. The lights in the office surge. There's static on the phone.

MIRANDA

What was that? Is someone listening? Andre? Hello?

ANDIE

No. I think it was just an electrical surge in the building. It's probably my space heater maxing out the fuse. It's really cold in here.

MIRANDA

I don't care!

There's a SHOCK that comes through the phone lines, which zaps both Andie and Miranda in the ear. They shriek in pain.

ANDIE

Ow!

MIRANDA

What was that?

ANDIE

That really hurt.

MIRANDA

Is there something wrong with the phone lines? Where are you?

ANDIE

The office.

MIRANDA

What? Why?

ANDIE

Where else would I be? You said I needed to be available to roll calls for you.

MIRANDA

Well, this isn't fun. Find out what's going on with the phones and don't call me until it's done.

ANDIE

But it's Christmas. No one is working. The phone companies won't pick up.

Miranda hangs up.

ANDIE (CONT'D)

Okay.

Andie starts messing around with the phone for a bit, but really can't figure it out at all. She eventually leaves, all alone on Christmas.

INT. ANDIE'S APARTMENT - THE NEXT DAY (BOXING DAY)

Andie wakes up and gets out of bed. She feels something strange and starts freaking out and pacing around the room. She looks around at all the squalor and screams.

She looks at her hands and body and freaks out. She feels her hair and screams. She runs into the bathroom.

INT. ANDIE'S BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Andie looks in the mirror at her reflection. She realizes what has happened. She's traded bodies with her assistant. This is actually Miranda in Andie's body.

MIRANDA (ANDIE'S BODY)

No no no no no.

She looks scared and traumatized, but then she sees that her neck looks good. She admires it in the mirror. Then she hears a scratching coming from the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Miranda (Andie's Body) tip-toes in and sees a rat scratching around in the empty kitchen. She screams, almost gets sick and runs back into the bedroom.

CUT TO:

INT. BEAUTIFUL HOTEL SUITE - SAME TIME

Miranda wakes up in bed, having slept wonderfully. However, she feels some aches and pains in her body that she's never felt before and grimaces. When she gets up and sees the ocean view, she's amazed. This is Andie, in Miranda's body.

ANDIE (MIRANDA'S BODY)

Wow.

Miranda's husband, BOB, late 50s, walks up to her totally naked. Andie (Miranda's Body) screams.

BOB

Oh you love it, Miranda.

ANDIE (MIRANDA'S BODY)

What are you doing?

Bob kisses Andie (Miranda's Body) on the mouth.

BOB

Ravishing my beautiful wife. Is that a crime?

Andie (Miranda's Body) runs away, disgusted. Bob shrugs.

Flower Girl

by Sam Hendrian

Walked down the aisle of Ellis Island
Well, the southwestern version
Where guns outnumbered tons of signs
For the nearest history museum.

Her parents were getting married again
This time to a dream
Passed down from weekly nightmares
Of what would happen if they stayed where they were.

Hadn't yet gone to court
To make it officially legal
But what could be more regal
Than trading rings in front of angels?

Los Angeles became an underground railroad
When the first knock came on the door,
A maze of fruit stands and carne asada tents
Stripped down at the first sight of beige vests and sunglasses.

After Mama and Papa retired
From retiring to holes in the wall
She was sent out to peddle bouquets
Between and beneath every freeway entrance.

Well-timed peripheral vision,
Patronizing smiles from each Starbucks subdivision
Left her seeking sympathy
In the eyes of those who also entered through the back door.

The only answers she received in response
Were what Uncle Sam had to answer for:
They enslaved us, they interred us,
They stole the little we had to begin with.

Oh, she knew she couldn't deny the truth
No more than she could make a living off of roses
And yet she'd always remember that wedding
As the most Mama and Papa ever smiled.

The Cartels Killed My Cousin

by Laura Espinoza

I was on the UCLA campus in front of Royce Hall, watching Palestinian and Israeli protesters, when I found out my detective cousin, in Mexico, had been assassinated. The text from my mom said “Mataron a Ivan.” She didn’t have to explain who did it; I knew. With his line of work in the hotbed of cartel violence that is Sinaloa, the family knew it was a matter of time before tragedy struck, but Ivan was willing to face the danger that would come from following our grandfathers’ footsteps to catch bad guys. I still remember the day he told me about starting at the local academy. It was sunny, and we were on a dirt road on our way to an aunt’s house. The camion was taking forever, so we walked and talked about our grandfather’s legacy and our future.

Ivan followed our grandfather all the way to the grave. Even their assassinations were similar, stalked for weeks, then ambushed by multiple shooters. Their bodies riddled by bullets from semiautomatic weapons, likely from the US. In both cases, family members witnessed their death, extending the suffering. Ivan’s death reopened old wounds even for those who were not present. My mom revisited memories of her father’s bloody body being transported in the back of a pickup truck through their dusty rural town. My tia Betty, Ivan’s mother, sank into depression, but at the same time was very proud of her son for his bravery and service. No one ever found out how many men fired at my grandfather, but everyone knew it was men from organized crime seeking revenge for having apprehended one of their leaders, a savage murderer. In Ivan’s case, all we know is that it was a group of armed men in a white sedan who unloaded on my cousin as he carried groceries to his truck while his wife and baby watched.

My family continues to tell my mother, who fled Mexico after her father’s assassination, about the cartel violence they deal with regularly. Last week, another cousin of mine witnessed a rape and robbery. He is now in

hiding as the perpetrators have threatened the life of my entire family if he speaks. Another cousin had to shut down her accounting office because the cartel was threatening to kill her and her daughter if she did not give them a cut of her earnings.

We are only one of many families who can't escape the violence, but no one cares unless it's news about the national soccer team. Some Mexican nationalists are quick to dismiss the 132,000 people who have been reported missing as of April 2026, the femicides, and the countless pits filled with body parts. Ivan told me about the pits and the Sisyphean task of assembling bodies from decomposing parts.

I've always felt invisible, but getting the devastating news that day on the bustling quad with its imposing buildings made me feel more invisible than ever. I wanted to run up to the protesters on both sides and scream, but I just cried, my blood boiling. Where were the campus protesters against Trump's criminalization of immigrants fleeing the sort of violence my family faces? Because of Trumpers, one of my little cousins cannot cross the border for a surgery he needs, which St. Jude Medical has offered to do for free. His permission to cross was denied, even though the previous administration had allowed him entry for a different surgery. No one cares unless the cause is trending. Perhaps it makes me selfish to expect fellow academics to care about Mexico.

That afternoon, I sat on the grassy slope next to Janss Steps and watched the sun sink, and with it, hope for my family to live in peace.

When I got home, I wrote this:

Deus Ex Machina

by Laura Espinoza

Greed, drugs, and American guns
kill my family. People who live to love
and die in poverty. Penniless, but free
from lies of the American scheme.
No flags for them on campuses.
They go unseen.
Their ghostly groans muffled
By impossible academics ruffled.
God's most savage ranger,
Ban narcos to a fiery torture chamber.
Let screams reverb on
Blood-stained walls.
Blood their own.
Blood of my ancestors,
Come to life and haunt
These trumplers day and night,
And in every dream,
Starting tonight.

February 2025

Where do we go from here?

by Lauren Yang

Where do we go from here?

If we're all driven by fear

No time to cook, plan, or eat

No time to walk, laugh, or sleep

No time to draw, kiss, or breathe

Where do we go from here?

If we're all driven by fear

Stuck in isolation

Stifled by obligation

Family sees erosion

So where do we go from here?

They said

To dream like an American

But our dreams don't belong here

They've burned our roots, broken branches

Emptied us from the inside out

So where do we go from here?

We search for liberation

for freedom

some rare salvation

Money,
love,
or time?
So easily corrupted
The solutions we've constructed

For earthlings to feel
like aliens on Earth
what is any of our work worth?
If not to kill and maim
our sacred souls
our gentle minds

Is romance really dead?
Murdered by machines

I will say
I do see human beings
floating, wandering about

Yet if we're all driven by fear,
where do we go from here?

1.11.26

Radical

by Bobby Crosby

The word radical has been in use for 628 years, with three main meanings:

Foundational, revolutionary, awesome.

Thanks to generative AI, our radical nature is evaporating at a staggering pace. Although some of us still fight against it, our numbers are dwindling fast.

Foundational, revolutionary, awesome.

The foundations of generative AI are all taken — often stolen — from humans.

To be revolutionary is to think different and take risks. AI can't think different, it hates taking risks, and it really hates when you take risks.

And how can something be awesome if its roots are stolen and it's just a cheap copy of something else?

Humans are rarely radical anymore. The vast majority of them are boring and lazy, which is why AI is so popular. It arrived at the perfect time to destroy our minds, when we were so tired of using them.

AI kidnapped our radicalness, executed it, and now it's trying to neuter our ability to ever be radical again.

But, for now, unlike generative AI, humans are at least still capable of being radical, and sometimes they actually are. If we enjoy it while it lasts, maybe it'll last longer.

Choose the radical choice. Why would you want anything less?

Party

by Max Oakland



Things You Can Do That ChatGPT Will Not Tell You To

Do By Ben Deeb

Store malt liquor in a fancy decanter

Throw empty beer cans at a ceiling fan

Legally change your name to Mister Babies or potentially Big Bitch and see
how long it takes people to find out

Become insane and desperate

Sell your soul as an NFT

Catfish Elon Musk into sending you his semen

Overthrow the neighborhood council

Make yourself indispensable and then disappear

Get in a Waymo and yell, "Follow that Waymo!"

Buy a used Waymo and drive it around like a normal car.

Insist that all other Waymos are driven by ghosts

Stop going anywhere, ever

Wear a tuxedo-print T-shirt under a tuxedo

Make a T-shirt with all your friends' phone numbers printed on
the back Get the Da Vinci Code tattooed on your back, and give
people a prize for solving it

Succumb to dark patterns

Make a stained-glass window and hide it in the sewer

Believe without evidence that every mascot costume has your ex inside it

Tell your friends' children that Santa Claus was killed in Operation Desert
Storm in 1991, and it's been an impostor ever since

Engage in frivolous suffering

Find out if they get the new iPhone in heaven

Sell mosquitoes outside the Buca di Beppo at CityWalk

Stage an unauthorized opera on the Universal Studios

WaterWorld stunt show set

Subsist on oblivion

Clone your boss's puppy without permission

Make custom stickers with the outline of Africa and put them on every Toto
toilet you find

Create a secret society so secret that the members themselves don't even
know that it exists or that they're part of it

Give up, but then maybe don't

influenced

by Charlie Tea

i'm influenced by the milk
at the end of a bowl of captain crunch, yet i
haven't eaten
cereal in years

influences are the yin &
yang of those rooting for &
against me

influences are the teachers who teach kids to light
their own
candles, rather than shining a flashlight directly
in their
faces

influences are a fresh spliff & chocolate bar after
freshly
donating blood

i'm influenced by everyone who woke up today hungrier
for truth than food. even over a mumbling
stomach.

i'm influenced by the candycanes that decided to fall
off the
tree.

i'm influenced by new years countdowns from years-old new years
eve concert recordings, i remember that year, sort of.

thinking, pen tapping, eyes scanning old
horizon, for signs of a new one.

man at the bus stop checks his watch, pacing, grinding teeth.

churchgoers change glasses in time for a football game steady, ready, heady,
AIM! hand me a beer

coal miner descendents cook meth, much cheaper than a bed

influences are the yin &
yang of those rooting for &
against me

i'm influenced by the milk
at the end of a bowl of captain
crunch, yet i haven't eaten
cereal in years

eaten
cereal
years

I thrust my face into a fistful of jasmine

by Kathleen Woods Koster

I thrust my face into a fistful of jasmine
Night flowers shine like bright little stars bursting
through the dark ivy the humans hide behind
They won't mind me
plunging my face deep inside their shrubbery
The scent so strong it beckons like a bedtime story from a full block away
Straight to the psyche, sweet nostalgia
Slow, time, slow

I forget how good LA smells in the spring
Same when it rains, that sweet petrichor
Releasing ancestral memories
of soil receiving her rain
It reminds me of childhood
And I shine off my dusty dreams

A storm is brewing, the clouds covering their work
Dense clouds— my favorite
When the rain-grey shrouds these green hills, terra-cotta roofs and winding
drives
And I'm alone with the wild—touching it,
I'm alone with the world
I could reach out and taste her beginning,
end, in our explosive middle
We're so lucky to be in her bloom

I forget who I am until I get outside, feet on the ground,
 Toes in the grass, still wet from the night before
 A gang of parrots crackling overhead
 Their emerald bellies a sight to be seen
 And in a place of so much green
 They don't fit in, they stand out
 you can tell they're from far away

Like the palm trees
 Icons of a place they're not even from
 They set the vibe
 Where we have every kind of human and every kind of tree
 And Pacific Rim parakeets glimpsing us over the
 Edge of everything, that's why I love it here
 How many times have I gone cross country and come back?
 Grounding myself high in the city of Angels

I want to lick life from the stamen
 To burrow my face in her sweet petals and
 Let the flower dust tickle my nose
 Sucking in the sweet spring, it smells so fucking good
 I want it deep down my passageways
 Winding its way to my sunken lung
 My poor lung, collapsed long ago when I was living
 the wrong life with the wrong guy

— a scarab beetle just bumped the glass
 Stay on your infinite way, says the scarab
 swooping off in loose figure-eights
 One landed on me years ago, caught me pining
 For a man I'd made up in my mind
 Took me three signs to make me see
 That man needed guardrails to keep himself in line
 Not me, give me the open sky and time as wide as the horizon

I loved that shrub so much I wished for one
—granted! By a friend who had too many
long pruny mushrooms plugged the hole
I pulled them out like a stopper
She grew back, waxy, green and luscious
With little star clusters, climbing the empty stake
I breathe her in every night
And I think how I love to be alive!!

My broken lung reinflated all on her own
I no longer remember the puncture
From where I breathe free on the far coast
rooted with the other palm tree transplants,
where the parrots are loud and rude
And the streets smell like jasmine



Rebirth

by Jennifer “Miss B” Baptiste

If we don't remember when we were born,

Do we remember when we die?

Living little deaths each day.

Sunrise

Sunsets

Old favorites

New tastes

First loves

New flames

Learned behaviors

Ego's destructions

Shedding skin, dropping layers, exercising inner demons,

Embracing adventures, collecting data,

Transforming karma.....composing, decaying.....creating life again.

If we could remember when we're born,

Could we remember how to live?

To celebrate our rebirth each day till our end.

Bios of Contributors

estel is a poet and performer currently living in Boulder, CO. It was a poetry editor for the 50th issue of the Bombay Gin Literary Magazine and you can read more of its work at [Online Features | Naropa University](#). estel has loved reading and writing since before it could read or write and in its free time loves to watch movies. To find out more about estel, you can find it on instagram [@estel.franklin](#).

Melanie Zoey is a filmmaker, poet, and performer. Melanie has devoted herself to creating rageful, joyful, poetry, prose, scripts and films that bring taboo to light. After becoming disabled in 2018, Melanie has become a disability advocate in their work, which seeks to make chronic invisible illness more visible. melaniezoey@gmail.com | melaniezoey.com | [@melaniezoeyishere](#)

Sam Hendrian is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker and poet striving to foster empathy through art. From writing poems for strangers each Sunday, to making films about loneliness every month, Sam lives to make others feel seen. More work can be found on Amazon, YouTube, and in various online literary magazines.

Brian Sonia-Wallace is the Poet Laureate of Los Angeles and the author of *The Poetry of Strangers* (Harper Collins). He has written over 10,000 poems for strangers across the world on a manual typewriter. [@rentpoet](#) rentpoet@gmail.com

Lenny Love Jr. The poet of the pavement. The poet of the imperfect. Documenting the highs & the lows through the passion of words. To find out more about lenny love, Jr's work, go to <https://lennylovejr.substack.com/>

Jen Miller is a poet and multidisciplinary artist based in Los Angeles. Her writing explores the intersection of memory, nature, relationships, and transformation, finding beauty in both vulnerability and renewal. "To find out more go to: <https://www.instagram.com/grafikg> <https://www.jenmiller.biz> <https://substack.com@grafikgirl>

Aubrey Mayne is a writer and artist in LA. Her work appears with the LA Poetry Society, Perverse 4 Verse, Spoken Word Paris, Darling Magazine, UCB Theater, and Michelin Guide. She created the podcast Public Display of Connection and her poetry collection, *Read Some Poetry You Buttheads*, was released in 2026. For more go to aubreymayne.com or @aubrey.mayne on socials.

L. Fuller. M.A., S.E.P., C.Ht. Therapist, dancer, writer, human. I have never been good enough. Newly committed to “bad art” and the philosophy of “make.” Follow her at [@lifemovesthrough](https://www.instagram.com/lifemovesthrough) on Insta.

Xochitl Bentley (she/her) is a writer, teacher, and naturalist based in Los Angeles. She is the author of *Helping Students Become Climate Stewards* (Routledge 2025). To find out more about Xochitl's work, go to xochitlbentley.com or contact her at Instagram @xochitlbentley1

Derek is a mystical poet and visual artist. His work conjures mythic and symbolic landscapes to reveal the sacred dimensions of the natural world. To contact me and find more about my work, go to @barondemalahide.

Originally from Wyoming, **Alyssa** is an educator, poet, and activist in various communities across Savannah, Georgia. Her creative work is featured in local zines across Wyoming and Georgia as well as *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Bombay Gin*, and *Hood of Bone*. You can find Alyssa on Instagram at @canepacreative

Molly Sanchez is a writer/comedian/published fan fiction author. Her writing has been featured in *Reductress*, *Brit + Co*, *The Bold Italic*, and ads you read on the toilet. She co-hosts *The Blume Saloon*, a Judy Blume podcast. On Instagram @mollyfuckingsanchez. Buy her a drink IRL, why don't ya? To find out more about Molly find her on Instagram @mollyfuckingsanchez or email her at sanchezmolly@live.com

Kevin Stack has been writing poetry since 1993. After successfully growing a teenager, he returned to the craft in 2023. He has self published two chapbooks, *Who Harvests These Detours*, 2024 and *Departure Gate Television*, 2025. A forthcoming chapbook, *Yoga Cult*, will be released this year. To find out more about Kevin's work, got to Instagram, @k_c_stack

Trevor Bashaw is a writer from the Arkansas-Kansas-Missouri tri-state area that now lives in Los Angeles. They have an MFA from UC Davis and work at the Getty Foundation. Recent poems of theirs have been published with *FENCE*, *Amygdala*, and the *Call Center Collective*. They also co-edit *VERS Literary Magazine*. To find more about Trevor's work, go to trevorb.org or follow them at @w3rmo on IG.

Felix Flauta Jr. lives and teaches public high school in Chicago where he married his public library sweetheart. Together they have one child who is constantly up too late like his father. Felix posts his work on instagram at @felixflautajrpoetry, and you can reach him at felixnation@gmail.com

Dana Cox is a comic artist and illustrator from Los Feliz, California. She makes comics primarily about her own life, but also sometimes about grocery stores. She finds existence perplexing, startling, and often upsetting. If you go for a walk together, she's probably gonna point out a dog, a bird, or a plant and make you look at it. www.danacoxcomix.com or <https://substack.com/@danacomix>

Tim Carrier is the author of the chapbook *Lookout Mountain* (The Song Cave, 2025). His poems have appeared in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Foglifter*, *The Offing*, *Poetry Northwest*, *West Branch*, and other journals. He lives in northern New Mexico.

Will Vincent's book, *Wildfires: I - XVI* was published with sPect! in 2019. His poems and articles have appeared in Cordite Review, Cartridge Lit, rivulet, The Elephants, PANK, Entropy, HTML Giant, and The Iowa Review. He co-wrote a short film with Adam Shecter and edited a chapbook of the same title for the video installation *New Year*, displayed at the 11 Rivington Gallery in New York. He teaches English in Los Angeles, CA. <https://willdavidvincent.blogspot.com/>

Masha Amal is a former performance poet and primary school teacher based in London, UK, now weaves micropoetry between lesson plans and botany trips. A multilingual Faber Academy alumna interested in linguistics, with a poet's eye and a hoarder's shelves, she always seems to have one more book stashed away. @ladypoelondon on X or drop an email: ladypoelondon@gmail.com

Tayi Sanusi is a writer and food stylist whose work explores food as one of our oldest forms of storytelling and the language through which we remember and connect. She studied at NYU Tisch, where she earned a BFA in Drama with a minor in Creative Writing. Her writing has appeared in *NBC Insider*, *Men's Health*, and *Cosmopolitan*, while her styling work spans everything from major brands to neighborhood pop-ups. Learn more at tayisanusi.com.

Tracy Chabala is a writer from Los Feliz and fourth-generation Angeleno. She loves writing silly satirical pieces, and recently had one published in McSweeney's Internet Tendency. She's written about food, culture, wellness, and her own crazy experiences for the L.A. Times, L.A. Weekly, VICE, Salon, and Shondaland.com. <https://muckrack.com/tracy-chabala> and contact tracychabala@gmail.com

Ren Michael is a musician, writer and poet whose work explores the deeper nature of communication, social systems, consciousness and identity. His music is available on all digital platforms including Apple Music, Spotify and YouTube. ...go to renmichael.substack.com or contact them on Instagram @renmichael

Keleigh Ferguson is a teacher, parent, and poet who has been whose work is deeply connected to memory and place. To find out more about Keleigh's work, go to @keleighmaureen or contact them at keleigh.ferguson@gmail.com.

Zachary Tyler Gatliff is a writer and designer living in Los Feliz. He can often be seen at local writing, and reading, events. To find out more about Zachary's work contact them at gatliffzachary@gmail.com

Nastja Nikolskaya is an artist, photographer and image-maker. In their art they like to explore themes of pre-determinism, social scripts and how technology changes and enables us. They trained as a social anthropologist at the University of St Andrews and as a fine Artist at the Glasgow School of Art. nastjanikolskaya@gmail.com

Jennifer “Miss B” Baptiste is a writer, actor, librarian, event host and illustrator. She creates lyrical introspective pieces to promote healing, mindfulness, and curiosity. Miss B's art and poetry has been published in various anthologies, zines and literary journals. Browse her illustrations and zines at jenniferbaptiste.com or @WheresMsB on social media!

Adelaide Dicken sometimes writes poems, sometimes tells stories, farms on Fridays, dreams of abolitionist trans futures, sings jaunty little tunes. Forthcoming: speculative short fiction, seeding a radical street theatre to sprout in the 2040s for Project 2052 (Common Notions) and the Performing the Revolution podcast (Radical Evolution x Bad Coolie Productions). @a_dolls_lil_sis, Adelaide.dicken@gmail.com

Rebecca Slater is a comedy writer and artist living in Los Feliz. She is originally from Newport Beach, California, studied writing at Northwestern University, and has worked on several network sitcoms. To find out more about Rebecca's work, please check out @cutestudio.art on Instagram, or www.cutestudio.art.

Raised in the SFV, **Lauren Yang** observes all that moves and stands around her as she transmutes what she experiences into poetry. Committed to whimsy and the absurd, she performs in local clown shows alongside typewriting and reading poetry. Lauren hopes that her work highlights all that connects us. To find out more about Lauren Yang's work, go to themerrywren.com or find them on Instagram @randomactsof_haiku.

Rachel R. Carroll is a poet, music journalist, and educator living in Los Angeles. Rachel holds a genre-hybrid MFA from CalArts, where they received the Emi Kuriyama Award. They are currently seeking representation for their debut novel manuscript. Follow their work on IG @poetsarethenewpopstars, or get in touch by emailing rachelraycarroll@gmail.com.

Bobby Crosby is a lazy human who strives to be more radical. You can find Bobby on Instagram @bobbycrosby

Ben Deeb is a writer who makes puzzle games, websites, furniture, stained glass windows, and elaborate bits. He's on the Los Feliz Neighborhood Council, which he has no plans to overthrow. Explore more of Ben's work at BenDeeb.com

Charlie Tea is a singer-songwriter, busker, one-man-band, poet and aspiring novelist based in Nederland, Colorado, though originally from Dayton, Ohio. He's an avid concertgoer and hiker, and bookwork, who can be found performing frequently on Pearl Street Mall and in downtown Nederland. Charlie Tea's music is streaming everywhere, but the most direct way to support is at charlietea.bandcamp.com

Kathleen Woods Koster, a former Capitol Hill journalist turned LA creative writer, where she lives with her dog Darby. She graduated *cum laude* from Georgetown University with Honors in English and received her MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Find her on insta [@kwk_writes](https://www.instagram.com/kwk_writes)

Phil Leirness is a Los Feliz Writer, filmmaker, podcaster, teacher, CA-certified Violence Prevention Specialist, and live show host. His Substack – “The Voice of Los Feliz” – celebrates the neighborhood he loves. Phil has loved Los Feliz all his life, though he would move to Malta if his wife would allow it.

Max Oakland is passionate about blending music, gaming, and art, revealing the inspiration behind each project and his commitment to innovative creativity. Check out his work at <https://maxoakland.com/>

Laura Espinoza was born and raised in East Los Angeles. She identifies as a Chicana. After two decades of working as a graphics and marketing professional within the commercial real estate industry she decided to shift her focus to education. Currently, she is a UCLA grad student, and works with PUENTE at Los Angeles City College, a program dedicated to supporting Latinx, first-gen, low-income students. Check out her blog: inmedires.com

Sammy Ginsberg is an organizer, teacher, and writer based between the UK and LA. She is the executive director of 21st Century Writers, co-director of the CSUN Writing Project, and an organizer of Los Feliz Writers Festival. She publishes The Feminist Toilet, and edited this zine! Insta is @literarypixie & email is seeliterarypixie@gmail.com to connect.