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VELLICHOR



a magazine for up and
coming writers and artists



at the Paragon Press

Vellichor

A Journal of Fiction and Poetry

Vellichor: Magazine for up-and-coming writers and artists

Cover art courtesy of Claire Ahn

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Vellichor

Editors: Julia Watson, Kelleigh Stevenson, Claire Ahn

Vellichor is the strange wistfulness of used bookstores

Vellichor's goal is to publish short poetry pieces, blackout poetry, flash fiction, art, and photography produced by young, up and coming creators who want their voices to be heard. Vellichor is the strange wistfulness one gets from a used bookstore. New writers can now participate in the literary magic so many experience.

This magazine was put together by the Spring 2019 interns of The Paragon Press.

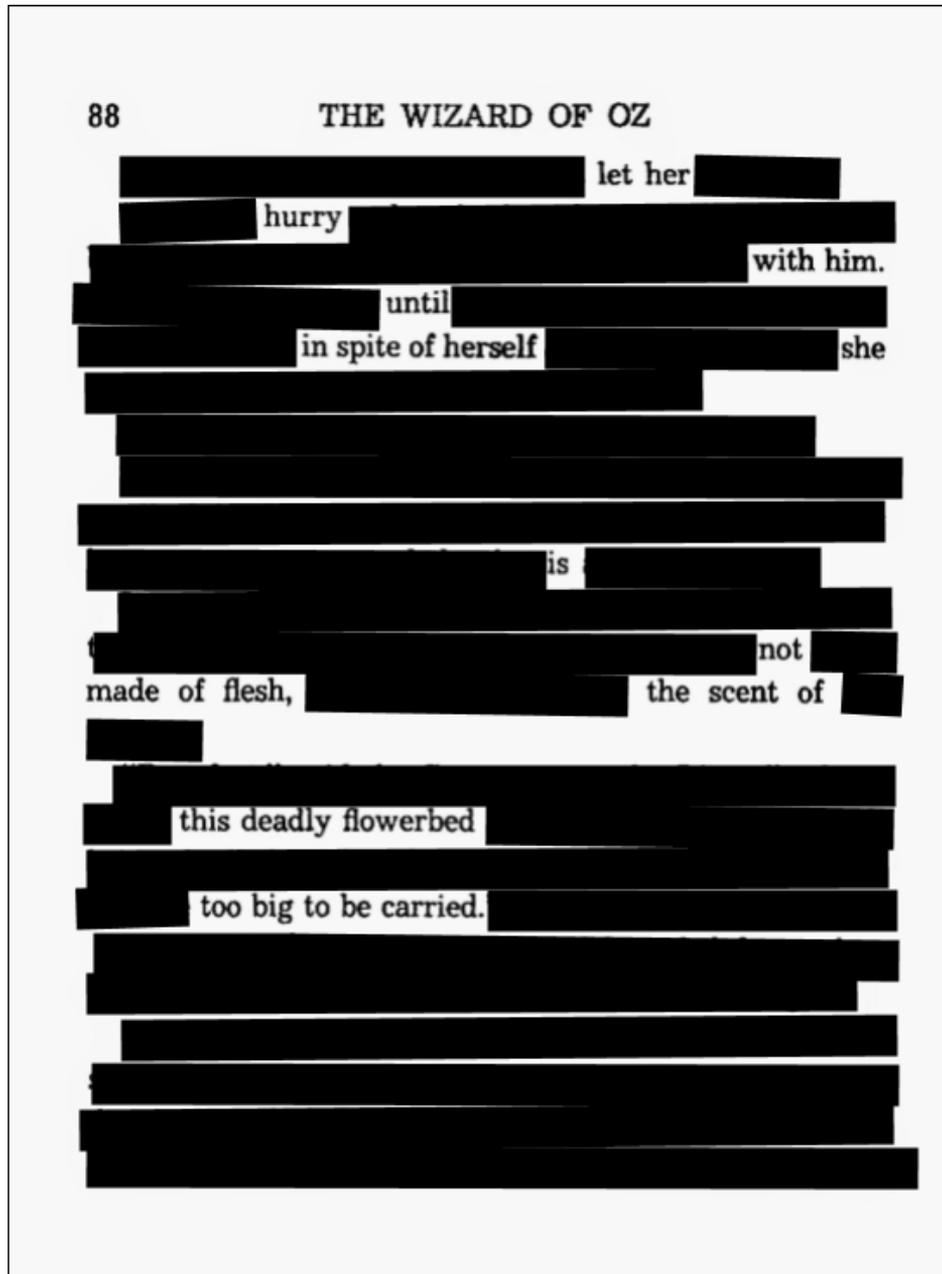
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Wizard of Oz

by Kristian Porter



Kristian Porter is a 23-year-old writer who just moved to Minneapolis from Cincinnati and is still adjusting. By day, she works as a copywriter for a marketing agency. By night, she writes poems about distance, alcohol, and all the places that feel like home. When she's not writing, she's probably watching cooking shows with her three cats or wandering aimlessly around a bookstore. She has been previously published by Words Dance Publishing and is currently working on her first poetry collection.

Junebug in July

by Robbie Imes

“You’d think it was the desert,” she said, and licked her lips.

“Right. Can I get a coffee?” he asked, hands in his pockets, polite.

“You came to the right place. Says it on the door. Palace Cafe. Makes you think, though, don’t it? ‘Cause this place ain’t no palace. You want some water, too? The coffee’s hot.”

“Just the coffee, please.”

He was young, early 20s, and he made her tingle something strange. The way his neck poked out from the crisp white shirt, short sleeves, clean-shaven Adam’s apple, pale in the light.

“It’s a hot one, though, ain’t it?”

It actually was the desert. Nothing grew there, just dry and sand.

“Yeah.”

He tipped back on his heels, grinning. He had on baby blue jeans, tight in all the right places, and loafers that reminded her of her dad. His moustache was perfect, trimmed and black, and those eyes, oh my God, those eyes.

She turned and tried to be all ladylike. Sexy. Girly. But she was tired and it was hard. Her and Gus had had a long night, gin and cigarettes. Then he came through the door, Mr. Baby Blue, all college proud, hair slick and

clean. Made her think twice about the pants she wore, the ones she'd rolled out of bed and into, her stomach hard and puffy like a lump of old bread. The pants were comfy, but they smelled like dishwater, days old and dirty.

Something told her Baby Blue wasn't from town, not looking like he did. He was better than "town." Gus was from town, with his greasy hands and rough fingers, not something a girl likes on her lower thigh, and certainly not anywhere higher, that's for sure. 'Stop,' she'd say to Gus, but he just kept his fingers moving north. That randy son of a bitch. Breath like an ashtray and Bud Light. He was handsome when they first met but that wore off real fast. Just a jerk and a loudmouth now. No money to speak of. No soft hands like a college grad.

She handed him the cup, coffee to go, but he barely looked up. Baby Blue was looking at his phone. Probably texting some girl, she thought. Some whore that doesn't know much about pleasing a man.

"Here's your coffee, baby," she said with a smirk. "You sure you don't want water to go with it?"

She shifted in her flats, working out a sudden itch. She was wearing her bra from the day before, laundry not done in a week.

"No, thank you, ma'am. How much I do I owe you?"

Ma'am? Now there's a load of shit. She was no one's ma'am. Did he think it got any better than her? She had a real chest, not like those ones on TV. Not like those girls from L.A. Not like the kind of girl he was probably texting. Girls that came in there stinking like bad perfume and men's saliva, half-dressed on their way to some music festival with flowers in their hair. Nobody cares about your cleavage, honey. They'll sag soon anyway.

“It’s on the house, baby.”

The coffee was old and she’d feel bad if she charged him.

“Thank you, ma’am.”

“Hey, I’m nobody’s ma’am. Be careful who you say that to. Ladies don’t like to be ma’amed.”

“Sorry,” he said, his voice sweet butter on that morning, hot-as-hell.

“Have a good day.”

She watched the door swing open, closed, sorry to see him go.

He got into his car, a yellow VW Bug. A new one, not the old ones you see in junkyards on the side of the road, dead happy faces rusting in the sun. He came from who knows where, likely headed someplace fun. She wished she could get in the passenger seat and go far from there, shoes kicked off and toes pointed out the open window. Not a care in the world.

“Where we headed, Baby Blue?” she’d ask loud enough for him to hear over the wind.

“Wherever your heart desires, Junebug,” he’d say, and reach over and put his hand in her hair. “Wherever you want to go.”

Robbie Imes is a writer and producer living in Los Angeles. His documentary film work has earned two Emmy nominations, and his writing has appeared in publications such as *The New York Daily News*, *The Ink & Code*, *Town & Country magazine* and *Out*. He likes French fries, Winona Ryder, and most of all, Wilson, his Boston Terrier.

Cryptic Crossword LII

by Holly Painter

Clues:

Escape lonely
America. Go west, traveler, over magnificent
central railway, surrounded by thunder. Prosper,

bank madly, hide ills,
bleed. Keel over in fickle desert smudged
white. Maybe out east among
old occupying class, men blush

more, disturbed about surge of uncultivated growth.
Corruption conceals a panic.

Answers:

Desert super bloom
Hillside spattered with color
Wildflower riot

Cryptic Crossword LVI

by Holly Painter

Clues

Spotted meandering around Rome, extremely content,
monks and converts filled by Christ's love initially
produce look that pierces, moving hearts.

Funds fall short by Europe, yielding
start to lawless enterprising activity for young and shady
cannabis-piping punter.

Losing heart, with ragged rest and shithead relatives,
guides put in long hours.

Answers

Serene recluses
harvest supple leafy hemp –
sisters work like dogs

Cryptic Crossword LVII

by Holly Painter

Clues

Mutinous nun shies from daylight,
extracts catacomb urn with torch –
Go down with a lantern.

Return bloody, at the head of multitudes, glowing,
opposing once more extremist statement,
religious view of the parochial state.

Ecstasy in sanctuary, ecstasy
close in company. Many exalt leader,
stopping at becoming
more corrupt than the Vatican.

Answers

Sunshine, burn a light
warm against the Holy See –
heaven come to Rome

Holly Painter lives with her wife and son in Vermont, where she teaches writing and literature at the University of Vermont. Her first full-length book of poetry *Excerpts from a Natural History* was published by Titus Books in Auckland, New Zealand in 2015. Her poetry, fiction, and essays have also been published in literary journals and anthologies in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, China, Singapore, and the UK.

I don't want my writing career to end up like the Haddock in the Finnan Haddie at my family Christmas party

by Johnathan Riley

I step outside to sweat on the banks of an
artery to the sea and consider this:
imagination runs fluid from springs
but friction is what draws

the fish; were it easy to run up a river
and leap, grizzlies would erect
themselves as a cavity in the mouth
but no, they are found

at the tipping point,
where gravity must become
faith where faith must become
fins and fins must combust

as wings that can avoid being smothered
in doubts jowls.
Yet they often spring
past the sweet decay that is the brownish

bear and joy erupts
against the corduroy
insides of my ribcage sending
warm orange fault lines spiraling

in a widening gyre of expectations
and possibilities to cradle my
own porous anxiety
knowing we both die

whether we make it or not. This leaves me
weak in structure with no recourse
of my own, rooted
in admiration preaching to no one

in particular and everyone but me.
my imagination
faults where fish
begin to fly

Johnathan Riley hails from the piney US state of Maine. After he completed his creative writing and political science degrees at Florida State University, he moved to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam to further his career in English. He's been published in *The Kudzu Review* and in 2018 was FSU's recipient of the Poetry Literati award. In his spare time, he enjoys counting the buttons on his shirts.

[A people that is]

by James B. Nicola

A people that is unfree
wants freedom, probably.

A free one, though, wants things—
to excess, possibly.

Then a rogue soul comes to see
that free folk are not free

from want, ironically,
and writes, or shouts, or sings.

James B. Nicola's poems have appeared stateside in the *Antioch*, *Southwest and Atlanta Reviews*; *Rattle*; *Tar River*; and *Poetry East*. He has been the featured poet in *Westward Quarterly* and *New Formalist*. A Yale graduate, he won a Dana Literary Award, two Willow Review awards, a People's Choice award (from Storyteller), and six Pushcart nominations—from *Shot Glass Journal*, *Parody*, *Ovunque Siamo*, *Lowestoft Chronicle*, and twice from *Trinacria*—for which he feels both stunned and grateful. His nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a Choice award. His poetry collections are *Manhattan Plaza* (2014), *Stage to Page: Poems from the Theater* (2016), *Wind in the Cave* (2017), and *Out of Nothing: Poems of Art and Artists* (2018).

Bone Biography

by Tianli Kilpatrick

Today, the cranium fits together like the ill-fitting pieces of a child's puzzle. An infant is born with 350 bones, which fuse and mold into a complete 206-bone skeleton. My ribcage protects my heart, protects the poems memorized in calcium. I etch my history into my arms and feel the radius hug the ulna. I wonder if bones that fuse share memories of assault. When I was six, I built wooden triceratops and stegosaurus skeletons. I imagine love is found within the sinews of heart tissue, braided in the same way girls braid each other's hair on playgrounds. A dinosaur has about 200 bones but archeologists have not yet found all of them. I wonder if my iliac crest remembers the weight of a man. On rocky beaches, I learn how to search for fossils. To lift shale carefully, trace my fingers along the ridges of composites. To blow sand out of cracks, out of wounds. I remember how sand fits between folds of skin where it is not supposed to make a home. I collect rocks where little shells have left imprints. If those hollows were bigger I'd curl up inside one. Shells and fossils are calcium poems trapped inside rocks. I haven't found the right poem yet. I thought love was the hot Florida sand protecting fossils, but if love is him inside me, then it is a poem I don't want. When a wooden stegosaurus skeleton fits together just right, there is space between the bones, a hollow, where I imagine a heart protected by ribs.

Tianli Kilpatrick holds a Master's in creative nonfiction from Northern Michigan University and a Bachelor's in creative writing from Allegheny College. She is an Asian-American writer covering topics that range from adoption to jellyfish to trauma theory. Her work has appeared in *TIMBER*, *The Portland Review*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *DIAGRAM*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, and others. When she's not writing, she's riding horses or boxing. She lives in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts.

All is Serene

by Andy Betz

At home with my wife
My cat asleep on my lap
Tranquil stars shining

Andy Betz has tutored and taught in excess of 30 years. His novel, short stories, and poems are works still defining his style. He lives in 1974, has been married for 26 years, and collects occupations (the current tally is 97). His works are found everywhere a search engine operates.

Marrakesh

by Rebecca Ruth Gould

The neon eyes of black
Moroccan cats light
the dusky souk where
two strangers chat.

The strangers pass
in heated conversation
using this land as a map
for exploring their pasts

& futures. Marrakesh:
a frame that accentuates
the question of why
one would live with a body weaker

than the sultan's ruined tombs,
with memories that oppress
more than patterned arabesques
with questions no god can address.

Cats travel alone.
They do not feel the pull
that turns our coffees
into hours, or the hunger

that keeps us walking forward,
feasting on our wounds.
They do not know why
we interrupt each other.

Least of all do they understand
why we stare at the neon signs
in their eyes & then
at each other. Bemused, intent,

friends headed in opposite directions,
shaking each others' hands,
moving at different paces,
steadily, to the same end.

Rebecca Ruth Gould's poems have appeared in *Nimrod*, *Kenyon Review*, *Tin House*, *The Hudson Review*, *Salt Hill*, and *The Atlantic Review*. She also translates from Persian, Russian, and Georgian and has published *After Tomorrow the Days Disappear: Ghazals and Other Poems of Hasan Sijzi of Delhi* (Northwestern University Press, World Classics series).

aberration

by Mela Blust

our sky is a map of mistakes
how human it is to bare teeth but
no one bares their soul
i remember when the air was velvet
and you hardly remember to breathe

petrichor

by Mela Blust

the chrysalis chimes midnight
lavender caress and ungodly blue
alice fills her lungs
each breath a prayer
holy minstrel whispering poetry
to the trees

Mela Blust is a moonchild, and has always had an affinity for the darkness. She is a poet, a painter, a sculptor, and a jeweler. She has been writing poetry since she was a child. Her work has appeared in *Isacoustic*, *Rust+Moth*, *Anti Heroin Chic*, *Califragile*, *Tilde Journal*, *Setu Magazine*, and more, and is forthcoming in *The Nassau Review*, *Rhythm & Bones Lit*, *The Sierra Nevada Review*, and *The Bitter Oleander*, among others. She can be followed at <https://twitter.com/melablust>.

Keiji no Tori

by Karen Frederick

Kocho was kept in a cage. The venal Keeper of All Things, Makatoko, hung her near her mother's grave, silent tears from her unseeing eyes fell on the overgrown land. Makatoko had her blinded so she would sing. The truth is too sweet and too harsh for retelling, so has been passed down in the analects of the land of Ishiito.

In the day of the gods return. All eyes are commanded to turn away from the mountain. No one must see, no one must hear the sacred footsteps of the gods as they return to the sacred land of their birth. But Kocho awoke with a light heart awaiting the fearsome gods return. Her prayer filled eyes turned to the mountain and her pure voice sang her prayer.

“Let my pain be heard in the heavens.”

Upon hearing her prayer Makatoko, jealous of the purity of her yearning ordered her wings clipped. To cover his sins, he offered her as a gift to the vain and proud young king, Takamitsu, this beautiful bird in a cage.

“I know that he will grant us his favor.”

The king, Takamitsu, acknowledged this gift knowing that Makotoko was evil. His greed overcame his weak will.

“My king, the bird in the cage will only sing to summon their loved one.”

Once the beautiful bird arrived, the king's young child heard her silent plea to be free, as only the purest of children can.

Kocho cried to the child. “Let me fly to the heavens so the gods will hear my song.”

Now the small child, Akane, loved her own mother the queen with all her heart and understood Kocho’s pain. She opened the cage and let the beautiful bird go free.

A warm wind began to blow. The bird, feeling the wind of freedom all around her mistook the smoke from the sacred fires for freedom and flew into the hot air and was burned to ashes. A strange thing overtook the palace. Everything stopped, no one moved or spoke. An old fisherman from a sea village arrived to sell his fish at the castle gate. He saw the pile of ashes and scooped them up to enrich his fields. He took the ashes back to his village and left the haunted castle as fast as he could.

The old man spread the ashes on the ground and watered his field. The sun moved behind the clouds and the old man paused to look up. Behind him a beautiful bird, as tall as a mountain with feathers of gold and blue and green flew to the heavens full of power and glory.

The bird, now called the bringer of all Justice in the land went to the castle and to the lands to separate the good from the wicked. The sweet Princess Akane was alone as everyone in the wicked land had been destroyed. Her loneliness was so great that she climbed into the cage left by the bird and stayed there until she died.

Karen Frederick is an avid reader and runner.

Lust in Dust

by Nadia McHenry

Crushing the creaky wood grains always humbles me
as I lean in to the musty first kiss of the damp pages left
alone so long -
old fables I cradle now
reminding them that coffee stains and romantic pains
are what they're broken bindings are made of

Old Paper Diamonds

by Nadia McHenry

Mesmerized by mourning memories
and shady Sherlock strategies
I catch my breath –
coughing musty dust
at the old paper diamonds before me
What a shame some say –
but what a delight!

Zero & Change

by Nadia McHenry

Twenty-five cents for a bookmark

A dollar fifty for old Sinatra

Three for bean juice heaven

Five for ragged ripped Sherlock

Seven fifty for Twain's best

Zero – for the thrill

Nadia McHenry is a novice writer and artist from Minnesota just beginning to entertain the idea that people might like to read her work. She ended up in a non-artistic path of work, but longs to use her gift of whimsical creativity – both in writing and art. Nadia is inspired by her travels and experiences.

The Canvas Doesn't Care

by Alena Podobed

Who is the angel? You or me? - that's not the point.
Who is the guardian of whom? - does it really matter?
My soul carries you over the darkness.
You carry me, dropping me onto the canvas.
My feathers are just simple strokes of white lead,
but the canvas doesn't care.
Wacky Dali insulted it much worse,
making alive what is not.
No, I'm not going to fly away.
The power of unreal wings isn't enough for that.
Besides, those sewed together by love,
shoulder to shoulder,
side by side,
are winged without wings...

(translated by Sergey Gerasimov from Russian)

Like Birds

by Alena Podobed

For years, I've been dreaming the same dream:
A frosty midday; the shadows are blue.
The snow sparkles, and silver threads of tinsel
like honey, trickle from the heaven's honeycomb.
The winter is already sick
and longs for spring.
The blazing orb looks gorgeous in the sky,
It's so bizzarely attractive.
It's time to love for homeless cats.
The nearing warmth makes them leap for joy,
and sing like cheerful birds
among the branches.
I wish I were one of them.
If only I could break the frosty glass
and join their shameless chorus!

Alena Podobed is an author from Russia. Diploma-teacher of history and social science, member of the Union of artists (author's porcelain), more than twenty years worked as a graphic designer (design of industrial packaging, labels, exhibition stands, printing, layout, design of covers, illustrations). Her most recent poems have appeared in *Curating Alexandria* and *Meow Meow Pow Pow*.

Ways of Seeing

by Faiz Ahmad

I

seven glass bottles
labelled HISTORY

choose one

II

your shadow
has found its own shoes
and escaped

why are you
breathless

III

sun burnt
a mouth-hole right
through our perfect
faces

this is how we fell

IV

stars the white ants
feeding upon
dead skies

V

solemn faced the six chairs mourning
the untimely death
of a dinner table

VI

and the tree
withers down to
a tree

Faiz Ahmad is a final-year student pursuing his Bachelors-Masters in Biological Sciences, IIT Madras. He believes in poetry as the ground of bewilderment, of amazement at simply 'being.' His poems have been published in *Salamander*, *Indian Literature*, *Off the Coast*, *Trumpeter*, *Anima* and others.

Holiday

by Shabnam Shehan

Southampton dearest, I keep moving photographs of the sea.
We stand by the wintery ocean, film strips pressed in pockets
Wonder about the cold blood red coral reef
Sea spray across the ankles
The forest behind us shadow us
I press my forehead into your collar bone.

I think I will always love the way
You look in yellow headlights, the way
Your hand holds the doorframe above your head
As you bow your head into star nurseries.

When we holiday again, we can
Draw our celestial past glittered with constellations
From the film strips we collected like shells
Pocketed in colourless tweed.
I will always love the way you look in yellow headlights.

Shabnam Shehan is a 21-year-old university student from London.

Revelations of the Shattered

by Amelia Blanton

I ran away from a glossy future,
one reflected in a mirror
of bone and warped DNA,
rough-edged from bourbon
and stale cigarettes.
A rocking chair off Craigslist
with my same initials
carved into it, keeping me steady
through uncertainty and rage.
I saw daughters before me
in that mirror, its smooth surface
perfect for building expectations.

It shattered on a Wednesday;
Home early, disillusioned,
wiping sleep from my eyes
and catching glances
I wasn't meant to see.
That repeated question:
why are you here?
My mother, never
a bold enough explanation
but the only one
I was prepared to provide.

You saw me struggling
to rip off the wooden exterior;
in return I removed my own.
We expressed appreciation
with melodiessince turned to mantras.
We left behind the sharp edges,
used them to draw lines along the flesh,
marking too far or only a little more,
I'll go deeper if you
swear to do the same.

Clasp my wrist,
push me past the debris.
We'll enter another realm,
the same but not, because
here I am unmarred,
no disappointment
echoing through my skull,
the anthem of a nation
I'm ashamed to be a part of.
The shiny exterior still glints
in the distance;
I see what's left behind
and cackle, witchy
because it's what they expect.

I ran away
from other people's plans,
from their hollow smiles
when I assent, dripping with mildew
and rotting from the inside out.
I will keep escaping because
I will continue letting myself
be captured, trained, thinking
I chose this, not I learned this.
What is education
if not a way to tell ourselves
we understand what cannot be.
What am I, if not anticipating
the next flight
from claustrophobia,
from martyrdom or sublimation,
convinced that control is anything
more than a concept
I'm dying to comprehend.

Summer Among the Withered

by Amelia Blanton

Survival of the fittest:
Charles Darwin's greatest feat,
a theory telling us
what we have always wanted
to believe:
the best will rise to the top,
the weak will wither
like greens in the dead heat of August.
The most solemn of hymnals
could not save them,
but people are more
than theories,
and I believe in
quick intakes of breath,
soft footsteps in perennial snow.

When the sun set
son my aching bones,
I will rise again,
not because I should;
because I can. I have finally learned to take
the chances given to me,
to make daffodils
out of the still air,
curling like vines
of tomato plants older
than memory serves.
We, too, are ripened by dust
and prayer disguised as poetry.

Joints of stem rise up from the earth beneath us
and still I see no sustenance,
only frail blooms of effort
made to last through the worst
of this bitter season, of
realizations and resolutions
sure to be abandoned by springtime.

I have more internal conflict
than Craigslist has missed connections.
Those mysterious fellows,
searching for companionship
where no one thinks to look,
wishing for a bite on a line without bait.
I am that train station
he asked for directions from,
I am the sidewalk that ended in
her blank stare and clicking heels.
I am the mythic
resolution that never arrives
until a new composer is sent,
told to rewrite the entire piece.

Where the sun meets the dry earth,
I am the flames
rising up when she gets too close.
I have no search and rescue team,
no one anticipates survivors
and I will not correct them,
so little do I know my own error.
I am the vines that grew around
the dying dog we found at noon,
we fed him scraps
but his heart was breaking
from too long a life.
His muscles still lean and spry,
he withered the same as the rest.

Hailing from Winter Park, Florida, Amelia Blanton is a senior studying English Literature and Psychology at Florida State University. In the future, she hopes earn her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and use her passion for creative writing to provide better treatment for individuals with mental illnesses.

Cohabit Nation

by Hollace M. Metzger

The woman upstairs –
making love with no secrets.
We listen, instead
of watching porn,
holding hands.

Cohabitation again –
where walls become floors
and windows become doors
to inhabitable,
infinite closets.

Hollace M. Metzger is an architect, artist, photographer, author of seven books of poetry and vocal performer of three respective audio books. Metzger published her first book of poetry before moving to Paris in 2007. Metzger's poems have been published in *The Brooklyn Voice*, *5:AM Paris*, *Time Out-London*, *Juxtapoz*, *Kaiserin*, *Paraphilia*, *Magazine BLU*, *Antique Children*, *NAU NUA*, *The Toronto Quarterly* and by *The European Parliament of Cyprus*, among others, as well as in an autobiographical premise for a ballet for The Ballet National de Marseille. Her spoken-word pieces have been performed at the Nuyorican Poets' Café, Fête de la Musique, emitted on BBC Radio, Studio Brussel, VRT Klara, Galway Bay FM, ERR Klassika, One World Café, in discotheques and at music festivals in the USA and Europe. –www.hollacemetzger.com

Roots in a Vase

by Starr Williams

Let's be stems,
cut apart by children's
fingernails
 (and they are
as amazed by the
emptiness as they
 are disappointed); let's grow
taller than the sun can tell us,
reaching hands from the soil, we are
figure heads,
 we know, but we are
free, still. Freer
than the roots,
fighting each other,
 the leaves bitten scrapbooks --
we are unremarkable
and easily cut down.

But

 we'll be stems:
untethered by love,
and allowed to grow in fistfuls
til we block out too much light.

Starr Williams writes poetry with an attempt to bring the internal and the external together. She is a 22 year old graduate of SUNY Potsdam. She's had works of both fiction and poetry published during her undergrad, in the *North Country Literary Magazine*, and have recently had poetry published by *Wingless Dreamers*. Currently, she is working on a poetry chapbook and editing her novel.

Why I Don't Attend Sunday Service

by Tom Berry

Mother told me as a child,
my bloodshot eyes reeked of timeless age,
a gift like a divine Michelangelo's
golden aura in the Italian Renaissance.

The pastor's wife whispers
dirty blasphemy, chants of an ancient hex,
the non-denominational congregation openly hugs this vomit,
the saintly choir early Sunday morning in holy white ropes singing
poetically God-fearing tales dedicated to Holy Bibles.

These saints and holy men spread wealth
of a malicious existence, a slithering presence,
that will leave the church a black shattered tombstone.
The church tithes collector speaks of doctoring a sacred rite,
the removal of my demonic plague
my vital sight.

My two inherited telescopes
that I cherish to see
the elder sun,
the wise stars,
the old moon,
my beloved mother,
my blue lake's reflection.

Mother told me as a child,
grasp fury and it burns
wild flames that cease to calm
even if the tide is high.
Father told me don't trust man's gospel.
Mother told me blood smells
like sweet nectar but it isn't bee's honey.
Father told me, man envies the cattle his neighbor owns.

Mother, forgive me.

Pieces of a Failed Relationship

by Tom Berry

I.

I didn't listen—
too busy absorbing a pencil
as keen lead scratches patient paper—
I'm approaching identity
as my starving dreams unravel
closer to a concrete paradise—
pages with my words,
my ire, my signs,
my language.

II.

You need to work on your ego.

III.

It's hard for me to admit—
I love the smell of austere rain
and my mother's cornbread—
that humans irritate and disappoint.
Life is dusty bread crumbs
and unfinished novels.
Sometimes I can smell you
through the phone, but often
I don't answer the call.

IV.

I was a fisherman at a still lake
with two rods and no bait—
My eyes tired when I met you.
Our auras never the same hue.
I would never hand you a key
to the mailbox yet alone my home.

V.

It's hard for me to admit—
You need to work on your ego.
The only words I care about.

Tom Berry is from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and is currently receiving his BA in Literature from Florida State University. He plans on furthering his education with the end goal of being a collegiate professor. You can find more of his work on Instagram and Soundcloud @traveling_tomm,

No Sleep

by W. T. Paterson

Allison knocked on the front door. Her phone buzzed.

Why are you being this way?? the message asked.

At work. Bye. She wrote.

She could hear the television inside of the small one bedroom apartment, so she tested the cold knob. It spun, unlocked in her palm. Mrs. June's treatments were getting more severe and sometimes by necessity she had chosen to leave her son Brody alone until Allison got there to babysit. Often, it was never clear how long the preschooler had been by himself.

The young boy was watching TV with his large, anxious eyes glazed over.

"Mama?" he said, as Allison walked in.

"No, hun, just Ally-bear," she said, and dropped her keys onto the coffee table.

You're being unreasonable, a text chimed.

Can't talk, she wrote. Allison sat on the couch and tossed her phone to the side. She wasn't ready to deal with David's little tantrums, especially after deciding he wasn't going to their senior prom, which meant if she went to senior prom, it wouldn't be with her own boyfriend.

“Brody-bear, when was the last time you had a bath?” Allison asked, noticing a thick odor coming off of him.

“When Mama here,” he said through crooked baby teeth. His big head was floppy atop a slight, fragile frame.

“Are you asking or telling me, sweetie?” she asked.

Brody pointed to the closed bathroom.

“Mama no sleep,” he said.

“I bet,” Allison said. “I know you two share a bed. Does it wake you up, too?”

You're selfish, a text came through.

I'm. At. Work. She fired back. *And btw, I'm not selfish because I WANT to go to prom!*

Allison looked at her phone and recognized that her hand was shaking with rage, so she went into the kitchen to see what she could make Brody for supper.

“Slim pickins,” she said, looking into the fridge. “How about some mac and cheese?” It was always a hit; her best friend’s mother’s special recipe still held up.

She felt the boy collapse around her leg like a needy koala.

“Woof, you are ripe, buddy.” she said, pushing his thin brown hair aside.

She pulled out a box of mac and cheese and placed it on the counter, then pointed to the bedroom door.

“Go get your jammies,” she said. Brody shook his head no. Her phone buzzed.

Prom is lame, the text said.

Not the point!!! She furiously typed.

“Brody,” she said, this time a little more stern than she had intended. “Go get your PJs.” She leaned in and flipped the light on for him still staring at her screen because David was starting to respond.

Brody stood in the doorway and took small steps inside while Allison started drawing a bath. He came out shortly after with some superhero jams. She put the phone on the back of the toilet and helped peel Brody’s shirt off, then his pants, then picked him up under the arms to lift him into the warm water. The boy sat down and stared up at her as the warm water crept to his chest.

Allison shut off the valve.

I’ll go, I just won’t have fun, her phone buzzed.

Asshole. She wrote back.

So I’m an asshole if I’m honest??

You’re an asshole because you’re an ASSHOLE!

Allison put the phone on the edge of the sink while she put some shampoo

into her palm. She brushed some warm water over Brody's head and then rubbed in the shampoo. It was like she could feel the grime leaking off of him. She heard his stomach growl.

"Food's coming, Bro-Bro," she said, and for a second forgot about her spat with David.

"Mama no sleep," he said again. Allison's heart collapsed into itself.

"I know it's been tough," she said, gently cupping some warm water onto the crown of his head.

After the shampoo was washed out, Allison pulled the stopper and the bathwater drained. She wrapped a thick towel around the shivering Brody like a cape and helped dry him off. She checked her phone as he awkwardly tried to put on his pajamas.

Maybe you're the reason I don't want to go, a text said.

"Oh my god..." Allison said, feeling her vision start to pinhole. She took Brody's smelly clothes and tossed them from the bathroom into the bedroom. She'd pick them up later when she tucked him in and had time to deal with her idiot boyfriend head on.

Brody patiently sat at the kitchen table's booster seat staring at the bedroom door and waiting for the food to finish. Allison did her best not to look at the texts as they buzzed in like flies.

When the food was placed in front of the boy, he ate with the ferocity of a feral animal. She smelled the odor from his clothes waft into the kitchen with such potency that her face pinched.

“More?” he asked, his wide eyes wet again.

“That was the whole box,” Allison said a little impressed, and used a warm cloth to wipe the mess off his face. “Ok, bed time.”

Brody shook his head no. He shrank away when she stepped in to pick him up.

“Come on,” she said, her voice stern and authoritative. Brody slunk out of his chair and nervously walked into the bedroom while Allison put the bowl in the sink and checked her phone.

Everyone told me not to date you, one read. You're so selfish.

I didn't mean that. Can we just talk? another read.

You should go to prom with Chris Magliotti, whore, the last one read.

Allison could feel her fingers tremble with fury as she started typing a response while walking into the bedroom. Her head was down until the scent of the clothes jerked her attention up.

On the bed, Brody had tucked himself under the heavy arm of his mother, who was lifeless on her side, mouth open and eyes pale, a hideous odor pouring from her corpse.

Allison dropped her phone.

“Mama no sleep,” Brody said, his eyes filling with tears, as text after text buzzed Allison's phone about what a dirty, rotten, no good person she was.

W. T. Paterson is the author of the novels "Dark Satellites" and "WOTNA." A Pushcart Prize nominee and graduate of Second City Chicago, his work has appeared in over 40 publications worldwide include *Fiction Magazine*, *The Gateway Review*, and a number of anthologies. He is a current MFA candidate at the University of New Hampshire. Send him a tweet @WTPaterson.

Mist Among Embers

by Isy Duffy

In the world of water and fire
she is made of flesh
soft and malleable.
At first glance, merely another body.

She loves the rigidness of the earth
but even more so, the way it moves
from the gentlest drop of water.
Doesn't everyone?

The world was jewel tones and smoke for her
and while she appeared to be a sharp-tongued
girl
she dared to dip her fingers beneath the surface,
look closer:

Her veins are shot up with stardust.
Sunbeams peeking through the cracks in her
skin,
scrapes and bruises that traced her being
for loving the earth dearly,
Carelessly.

She is mixed with elixirs
of hot geysers sparking words upon her tongue,
And the cool, still ponds of her eyes
that twinkle like the dew upon a spider's web
in the mist of the morning,

and she would trace your skin
if her touch wasn't fire,
her blood, the scorching magma of the earth
delicately maintained within the plates of her.

Wildly she fought with herself.
The ebb and flow of passion
forever leaving her body cycling
through the way of things,

The way fog becomes flame in the sunrise upon a lake.

Isy Duffy is currently pursuing a BS in Mathematical Business with an English minor at Wake Forest University, a little while away from her hometown in Yorktown Heights, New York. While poetry is one of her passions, she intends on pursuing a career in consulting and hopes to continue writing wherever she goes. Her works have been published in *Soupstone*.

Crackling in the UMBER

by Emily Ellison

My hands wilt as blue bonnets
under an unceasing sun. How did years
open these creases so stealthily,
revealing unwholesomeness
frayed and crackling in the umber
state of maturity? Each day dripped
off my greasy sides like dew,
beginning when I was fondled
for my youth's green curvature
and continuing as petulant
lovers altered my vertebrae. When
I rotated in newfound infatuation
toward each handsome sun,
even the grass blades whistled
in celebration of my pretty death:

Emily Ellison is a second year MFA poet at Texas State University, where she also works as a teaching assistant for their English faculty. Her work has appeared in *Southword*, *After the Pause*, and *Haiku Journal*, and is upcoming in several places. Emily lives in San Marcos, Texas with two cats and an abundance of plants (withering at the moment).

Every Year the Swallow Returns

by Asa Martinez

Jamie had to die at home
the way all gay people had to die at home.
With hospice, the end was soon but you never knew when
because your dying had to exist with the living
which made it easier to talk to her about living
about softball and orange trees and doing backstroke
as if god had only ever made you and the sky and the water and how
certain kinds of birds leave long before the air gets cold in autumn
on instinct
how by winter, the trees will be barren and tall.

Asa Martinez is a trans writer living in Pittsburgh. They have previously trained at the New York State Summer Writer's Institute, and have work published in *Radius Literary Magazine*. They run a QTPOC-focused publishing center called Brushfire Press.

Dynamite

by Ann Huang

The poetesses open up
a window shade that imitates
the laughter of the body
after it stops trying to please.

Ann Huang is an author, poet, and filmmaker based in Newport Beach, Southern California. She was born in Mainland, China and raised in Mexico and the U.S. World literature and theatrical performances became dominating forces during her linguistic training at various educational institutions. She is an MFA candidate from the Vermont College of Fine Arts and has authored one chapbook and three poetry collections. Her surrealist poem "Night Lullaby," was a Ruth Stone Poetry Prize finalist. "Crustacea" another of her surrealist poems, was nominated Best of the Net in Priestess & Hierophant. In addition, Huang's book-length poetry collection, Saffron Splash, was a finalist in the CSU Poetry Center's Open Book Poetry Competition. Her newest poetry collection, A Shaft of Light, is set to come out in 2019.

Meet the Editors

Julia Watson is a native of Atlanta, Georgia and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing from Florida State University where she won the Sassaman Undergraduate Award for Outstanding Creative Writing in 2018. Currently teaching 5th grade reading and social studies, she will be joining the writers at North Carolina State University in the fall to pursue her MFA in poetry. Her works have been published in *RueScribe*, *Unincorporated*, *The Kudzu Review*, *Outrageous Fortune*, among other magazines. She is the current Writer Liaison for *Ember: a Journal of Luminous Things* and submissions reader for *Helen: a literary magazine*. When not engaged in literature, she enjoys cooking vegan meals with lots of Sriracha.

Claire Ahn is from Southern California. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in **82 Review*, *Blue Marble Review*, and *The Rising Phoenix Review*, among others, and has been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards, Webster University School of Communications, and Writopia Lab's Worldwide Plays Festival, among others. She hopes to explore creative writing in all forms during in college. In her free time, she plays bass guitar, and currently edits *Forty-Eight Review*. You can find her on Instagram and Twitter @ClaryAhn.

Kelleigh Stevenson is from Central Pennsylvania and is currently a student at Penn State Harrisburg. Her work has been published before in *The Paragon Journal*, *Fission*, *From the Fallout Shelter*, among others. She also won the 2018 ScholarSHIP Writing Competition for Best Fiction Piece. Currently, she is a copy editor for the Paragon Journal and hopes to continue her work as an editor and publisher once she graduates with her Creative Writing degree. In her free time, Kelleigh writes poetry, lives for being on stage, and drinks too much coffee.

