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ABOUT SCREEN DOOR REVIEW

Based out of Birmingham, AL, *Screen Door Review* is a triannual online literary magazine that publishes poetry and flash fiction authored by individuals belonging to the southern queer (lgbtq+) community of the United States. The purpose of the magazine is to provide a platform of expression to those whose identities—at least in part—derive from the complicated relationship between queer person and place—specifically, queer person and the South. Through publication, we aim to, not only express, but also validate and give value to these voices, which are oftentimes overlooked, undermined, condemned, or silenced.

CURRENT EDITORS:

ALESHA DAWSON

Alesha Dawson prefers chilly weather and smoky whiskey, and is arguably a better writer when both of those are involved. She holds English degrees from the University of Montevallo and the University of Edinburgh. Currently, she is happily settled in Birmingham, Alabama where she teaches high school English and lives with her partner and three cats. Alesha is the founding editor of *Screen Door Review*.

RACHEL NIX

Rachel Nix was raised and remains in Northwest Alabama, where pine trees outnumber people rather nicely. She's been nominated for Best New Poets and has had her work appear in *L'Éphémère Review*, *Occulum*, *Pidgeonholes*, and *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, among other venues. Along with her role at *Screen Door Review*, Rachel also serves as Poetry Editor at *cahoodaloodaling*, Associate Editor for *Hobo Camp Review*, and edited the international anthology, *America Is Not the World*. She can be followed at @rachelnix_poet on Twitter.

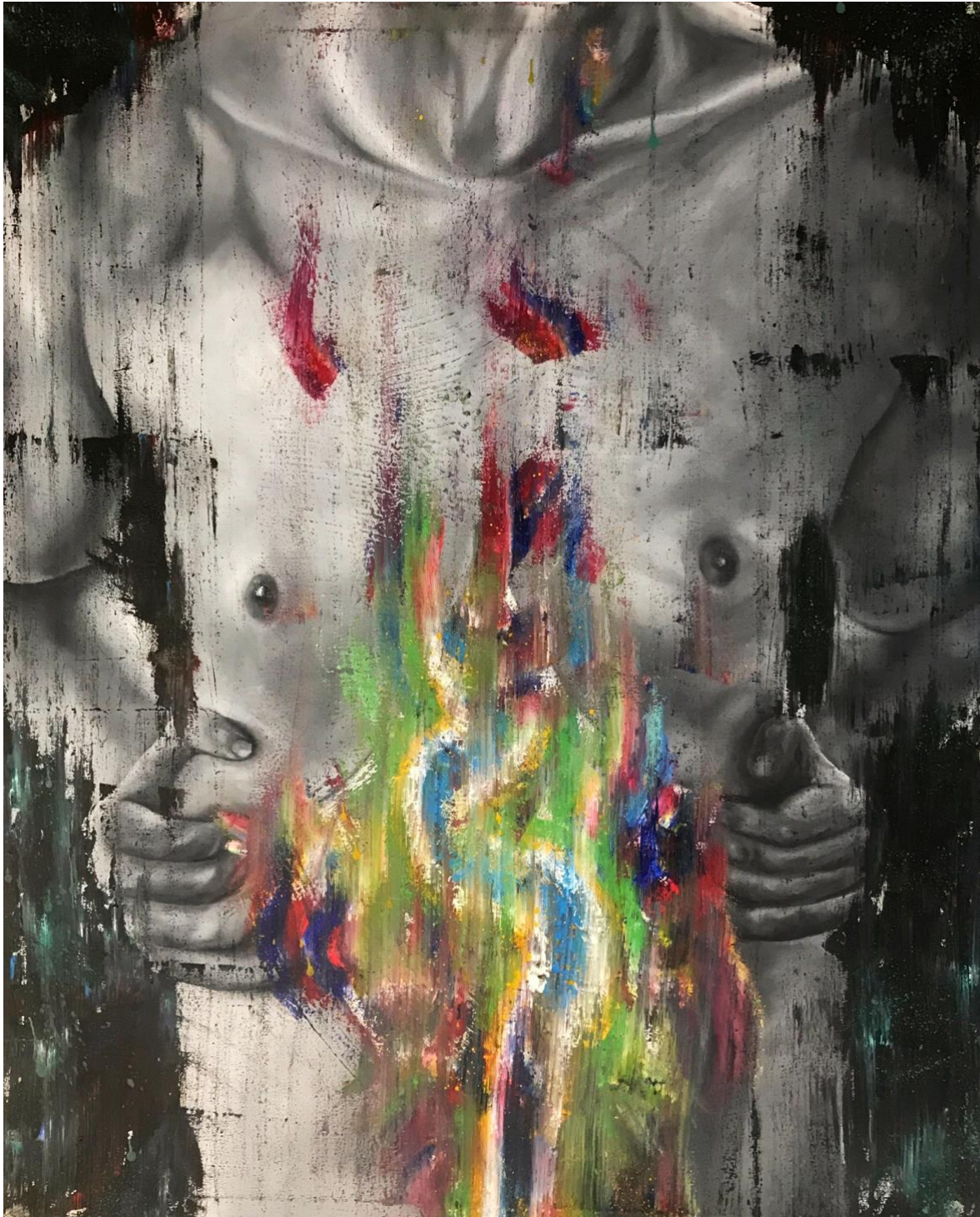
EMMA BOLDEN

Emma Bolden's mission in life is to prove that "aces wild" isn't just for poker games. She is the author of *House Is an Enigma* (Southeast Missouri State University Press), *medi(t)ations* (Noctuary Press), *Maleficae* (GenPop Books), and four chapbooks. The recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Alabama State Council on the Arts, her work has appeared in *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, *The Best American Poetry*, and such journals as the *Mississippi Review*, *The Rumpus*, *StoryQuarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Madrid*, *TriQuarterly*, *Shenandoah*, and the *Greensboro Review*. She lives in Alabaster, Alabama with an impressive collection of Star Wars toys.

“STOMACH ACHE”

BY CHASE ESSARY

Chase is a queer artist from Alabama working mostly in oil paints. He is heading into his last semester at spring hill college where he’s pursuing a bachelor’s degree in studio art. His work tends to focus on his perspective as a gay man, with influences of drag and mental illness. Art allows him to express the things that he struggles to translate through words alone, as well as be unapologetically queer.



ELIZABETH BISHOP SWIPES RIGHT

BY JULIA McCONNELL

after Elizabeth Bishop's "Arrival at Santos"

Here is a bar; here is a Wendy's;
here, after an endless diet of horizon, a parking lot;
asphalt cracked and buckling and –well, shit – the narrow spaces
are all taken outside the unmarked building,

with the heavy steel door. Across the street
by the real estate office, is where you should park
so your windows won't be bashed. *Oh, tourist,*
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete satisfaction
of love at last, and immediately,
after twenty-four years of denial?

Get out your ID. Friendly is waiting,
the gruff butch behind the glass, writing down your name,
before buzzing you in to a cloud of cigarette smoke
and country music. This is still Oklahoma,

of course, not unlike any other bar in this town.
And football on TV, even some crosses on necks
as we make our thirsty way to the long line at the bar,
myself, and fellow lonely heart, Miss Bishop

navigating through the chaos of women spinning
in each other's arms across the dance floor
while Brooks and Dunn wail about Lorca's neon moon.
Oh, Miss Bishop! This is not the kind of joint

where you order wine. How 'bout a beer
or whiskey? Or a shot of tequila? Here comes Dezi,
she's just shaved her head, home from deployment.
Let's grab that table while we can.

There. We are settled. Listen, not
a lot of strangers here, so if they don't know
you, they're not likely to talk to you. It takes a while.
Buy some drinks, share your smokes, soon

you'll be a regular, or on the next bus out of town.
Do you wanna two-step? Throw some darts?
Or just sit back, watch the show, and chain smoke until
last call at 2 am? We'll call you a taxi, ha! Just kidding,

no taxis here. We'll walk you to your car,
drive behind you, or tell you to text us when you get home
safe, but never let you walk into the parking lot alone.
We are drilled into the interior.

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS SPEAKS TO JOE EXOTIC ABOUT THE SOUTHERN GOTHIC

BY JULIA McCONNELL

Big Daddy, Big Money
King of the Misfits,
When the world tried to make you small
shameful and filthy
you just got bigger.
All your life like a doubled-up fist
pounding, smashing, driving
off bridges or into the city
to find yourself a boy
tossing condoms at the pride parade
selling steak sauce, sex gel, and underwear
in the end *your dixie stars never made a nickel.*

Everybody keeps hollering about the truth
the truth is as dirty as lies.
We occupy the same cage, you and I,
Southern and queer.
Our daddies hated us.
We tried to forge our own families.
And now look at you
nothin' and nobody except big daddy yourself.

What are you running away from?
There are simply things in this world
you gotta face, baby
avarice, greed, mendacity
when the one you love doesn't love you.
The truth is dreams don't come true.

What is the victory of a tiger
on a corrugated aluminum roof?
To stay on as long as he can.
Now the roof is cracking.
Tornados are headed for the zoo.
A cage is no kind of shelter.

A dazzle sprouting from your chest
waltzing weeping vomiting
second-guess shoelaces winding around your larynx
microscopic bees zipping in your veins
queenly tours of red dirt wash

monarchs composing abdication speeches
constructing tinfoil hats to deflect guilt
empathy for meteors approaching black holes
permanent alteration while crossing event horizon

mudstone crumbling from your vision
trying out prodigal around the homeplace
tug of war between claustrophobic and agoraphobic
while traversing the plains by automobile

your home state a half feral cat
mewing at the back step
close the door
turn up the radio

Julia McConnell is a lesbian poet and a librarian. Her chapbook, *Against the Blue*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2016. Her work has appeared in *SWWIM Every Day*, *Lavender Review*, *MockingHeart Review*, *THIS LAND*, *All Roads Will Lead You Home*, and many anthologies. Originally from Oklahoma, Julia lives in Seattle with her Jack Russell Terrier, Molly Marlova Magdalena McConnell.

This is the year I acquire anxiety, that donkey kicking
at my chest, my brick heart thumping in response,
leave me bruised and achy and still unable to sleep.
There's a gerbil in my brain, running marathons
on that squeaky wheel, each lap whispering a new worry
for me to chew on: *who will die next? When will I find
a new job? When will I be happy?* As if happiness is possible
during a pandemic. As if the weight of living weren't
crushing. Bees bumble around me, ready to drink
my tears, ready to pollinate the world with anxiety.
Think of the beautiful flowers that would bloom –
spiky and dangerous but their bright colors
would call to the tender flesh of your fingertips, blind
to the thorns that desire the iron taste of blood.
There's the ostrich, its dumb head buried
in the sad, trying to hide from the latest headline.
The gazelle that resides in my nervous system, alert
to dangers real and imagined – is that a bug
bite or cancer? Cough or COVID? WebMD says
I'm likely dying. The cheetahs that hide in my feet,
carry me miles each morning but still I can't outrun
this panic that smolders inside of me. And what happens
the day I smell smoke, the nervous fires stoked for so long
they suddenly rage out of control. The animals inside me
run, trample the tender flowers that sprouted around
my battered heart, stampede for the exit but find it locked.

Courtney LeBlanc is the author of *Beautiful & Full of Monsters* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), chapbooks *All in the Family* (Bottlecap Press) and *The Violence Within* (Flutter Press). She has her MBA from University of Baltimore and her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte. She loves nail polish, tattoos, and a soy latte each morning. Read her publications on her blog: www.wordperv.com. Follow her on twitter: @wordperv, and IG: @wordperv79.

The tree wasn't unlike any other on our property, it just sprung up in the wrong part of the cow pasture. As the tendrils of its roots plunged deeper into the soil over the decades, our livelihood and traditions expanded up on the surface. I imagine Great Grandpa Bootise hadn't worried about it at all when he first built the shed.

What once was a few meager upright planks for protecting his tools, evolved later into a makeshift garage for the tractors and plows. As the family construction company became more lucrative, the shed gained a rickety ladder into new rafters for some much needed storage space. At some point, it must have made sense to fully commit to the idea of a barn. This was the incarnation of the structure I was born into.

The two forces grew alongside each other well into the new millennium. By that point Bootsie was too old to keep up with the pasture but too stubborn to altogether quit. Even so, it didn't take much convincing to have him clear a path and set up a few dinner tables. By the time Bootsie finally saw the tree for the threat it was, the shed was the primary spot for every major holiday. No force of nature, no matter how familiar, would compromise Christmas.

I wasn't allowed to be there but I'm sure the crash was heard for miles. That holiday season my cousins and I bounded up the sideways branches of our gift with full bellies, eager to discover what the tree might've brought down with it from the sky.

Matthew Crump is a creative writer and a first-generation graduate of the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Their writing and work in film aims to capture the stories of queer southerners. They currently live in Philadelphia, PA alongside the other wildflowers they've picked along the way.

Anxiety lives in my collarbone
I knew a girl who broke her collarbone

I want to break my anxiety but I don't know how to separate it first
these days a prominent collarbone is the beauty standard

I'd swallow my collarbone if my prominent anxiety went down with it
Genesis says that God made Eve from Adam's rib

I don't think it was a rib, I think it was a collarbone
that's what I was built from at least

God started with my collarbone
where He put my anxiety to fester.

You sit diligently weaving diadems of dandelions
and fescue. Even with your crimson nose and cheeks
you refuse to take a break from the preparations-
it's Friday you exclaim, Frigg's day you explain

I place my hands in yours like I'm finishing a jigsaw
thinking of how the spaces between your fingers
are perpetually thulian during the parching summer,
sticky with the candy floss your mother buys you

Heads newly adorned, you lead us to the shallow
creek where the grey minnows live without fear.
The cerise undersides of our feet sink in the muddy
bank. How long will our prints stay after we leave?

Your carmine cheeks like beacons to a
ceremony that will never know places.

Elise Forslund (she/they) is a non-binary poet from Atlanta, Georgia. They use poetry as a means of artistic expression and catharsis and take a lot of inspiration from the confessional poetry tradition. You can find Elise on twitter @elise_forslund.

XVI: THE TOWER

BY ELISHEVA FOX

my high school philosophy teacher
smelled permanently of
black coffee, ink, and cigars.

i think he tried to warn me.
i think he knew.

“theatre is beautiful,
and acting is a wonder,
but they’re dangerous, too.”

i laughed and blamed
his platonic camaraderie,
his age,
his classical outlook.

as it turns out,
he was
not incorrect.

damn him,
he was utterly right.

i was so skilled
an actress, then;
lethal, really.

until
one day,
seated primly
next to my husband -

i saw her
and the curtains fell.

sometimes i think it would be safe
to tell you that i desire women,
too; that rainbows
thread my veins and i
have seen them.

i could tell you,
i think,
but not because
you are peach cobbler warm,
not because
you are patient and forgiving
as cast iron.

simply this:

unlike x-rays
and radiation shadows
and the deeper voices
of your colleagues,

i exist
as a frequency
in a spectrum
that you will never register.

just outside of town
along the highway's cursive curl
there is a pine forest.

ten years ago
during a drought that
cracked my lips and the dirt,
the forest burned down.

now, when i drive through
and the blue sky presses on the hills
unpunctured by trees,
i think about parking my car
and running to the dead,
running to the newly grown.

i wish i could read their lettered bark.
i wish i spoke their needle syntax.

i need to know:

how does it feel
to be tongued by flame,
to be greedily consumed,
to dissolve in a smoky gasp,
and then
be born again.

Elisheva Fox's poetry has appeared in Berru - a publication by the Jewish Book Council - Dark Moon Lilith Magazine, Touchstone Literary Magazine, and Allegory Ridge's poetry anthology, Aurora. She braids her late-blooming queerness, Texan sensibilities, motherhood, and faith into poetry. Some of her other pieces can be found on Instagram @elisheva.fox.

I am something to be gawked at,
though my face is covered by the softest curve of glass.

I was once a pretty thing.
I was once a ballerina trip-gliding
over marbles, fallen into the potential of grace.

Once a boy looked at the shell of me,
took me into his arms and whispered words
I will never remember, with searing breath
that I will never forget.

His ROTC jacket hangs in my closet,
still saltwater stained from the day I bellowed
I am too gay to be with you
in a bar we were too young to frequent.

At the end of every paragraph,
the center of pitted pomegranates
marking the beginning of fall,
his sippy-lid eyes follow me, forever asking
who are you today?

Today I am that same disjointed ballerina
pushing elbows and toes into every crevice
of the cracked universe that swallows me
like the pills I must force down my throat
to be deemed normal.

Sir, today I am a fire-eater.

I am a rip-roaring son of a bitch
who will never stop making declarations:

a sick dog lying in heat
in the dead of July—
wounded, but I will bite.

Cori Rupe is a lesbian writer from the Appalachian foothills in Virginia. She graduated from Hollins University in Roanoke, VA and now lives in metro Atlanta. She is reminded on a daily basis that she is considered a Yankee here. It makes her mad.

just the way he cut up his breakfast eggs
fork & knife slashing strident Xs on his plate
(the exact way I cut my eggs today)
annoyed me to averted eyerolls as a boy
stifling sighs that would provoke his ire
seated vulnerably in my tidy whities.

a confounding amalgam of cruelty & kindness
of wisdom & ignorance
of fatal fixations
“a place for everything and everything in its place”
a fine friend to those whose bloodline he did not share
a profoundly flawed but faithful spouse
a failed father
a working alcoholic, as they say.

he could tape a cardinal's broken wing in such a way
it healed just fine
the bird motionless & trusting in his callused palms
then backhand his children in a fit of bourboned pique
or whip exposed buttocks with a leather belt
until they bled
wrathful as some old testament patriarch
for the mildest of boyhood crimes
his onyx masonic ring once chipping a tooth
the taste of blood, the sting of bitter tears
as bedtime lullabies.

I hated him so and loved him
as one loves what one cannot escape—
this highly imperfect patriarch.
of all the lessons my father taught me
the most important and indelible
is that you can destroy your life

all on your own
and die bitter and sad and abandoned.

There is not a day I do not think of this.

John Cole grew up gay on a tobacco farm in the rural bluegrass before the word had reached Kentucky. His mother regularly read poems to him growing up, of others and of her own making, so that poetry was as much part of the vibrancy of his being as the tilled earth and rituals of the seasons. Although he suffered in the small-town schoolyard from bullies, on the farm he dwelt in a kind, fertile, magical realm of boundless surprise and undying mystery. Poetry grew in him as if planted there by nature itself. It's as southern as burley.

Dear God of the Everywhere,

There is too much of you
to fit within my eyes.

You are the horizon at night.
You descend your many bodies
invisibly into the world –
rescuer, intrusion.

You must understand.
I love two lives the most.
Their breath shells shallow
as they age, light bleeds through.
They are glowing. They glow.

Please deeply bless my mother
as she sleeps, her thin lids latched,
and wake her. She is my awake.

Please deeply bless my messy hound
as he circles, lowers into his rest.
His unconscious paws paddle the air.

Every dream is a dream of running.

I beg that you lift him to me again.
Let him arise until he is risen.

My beloveds are decades old. Their skin
sinks – a glacier sliding, a tired hill.
Protect them from the ground
that would gather them. Protect them

even from the sensation of falling
away from the living world.
Convince them of a heaven, a glad god.

Wait. I am unconvinced.

New letter:

Dear God of All Souls,
God of Dominance,

Protect them from you.

Reclaim them
and I will be your betrayer.

Dear Devil,
Dear Opposite God,

Protect my mother, my dog. Help me
hide them from the everywhere.
I will surrender myself to keep them safe.

I will say their names, the names
of their bodies. I will hide them
in my mouth and hold it closed.

I will stay silent all my life.

The cat hangs awful on the screen door, crying like a stiff hinge.
We watch the stopped clock tell the correct time twice.
My mother stitches and unstitches her fingers.
She wishes to sew them into an impassable fist.

We stare down the stopped clock. It tells the correct time twice.
He dies within an unmarked hour. His chest only exhales.
My mother tries to stitch her fingers into an impassable fist.
Our bodies diminish with grief. There is nothing to say.

He exits his life some unmarked hour. His chest falls still.
I can't think of one good thing to say about my mother's father.
Our bodies diminish with grief. There are no words in our mouths.
I've held my pen two inches above the page for days.

I'd be lying if I said one good thing about my mother's father.
I'll imitate his preacher, bullshit about some nice guy and his god.
I'm holding my pen two inches above the page. There's nothing to say.
The cat cries like a stiff hinge. Awful hangs all over us.

The storms within the sky are winter's white.
We wait again to notice we are free.
Yesterday we traced the edge of the sea.
We came here to cry *god* against the night.

The sun cast in the water blinds my sight.
Your shape in silhouette slants across me.
The storms within the sky are winter's white.
We wait again to notice we are free.

I want to have you again or might.
Now you are a taste that leaves me thirsting.
I meant to write about December's breeze.
We came here to know ourselves in the light.
The storms within the sky are winter's white.

A door twists open on its hinge, and the soul I hold
in the whites of my eyes slides into the night. It lifts
into place within a constellation of blinding white fires
seen as small and usual from our distant beds like punctures
in a dark fabric, the death shroud of the day before.

I watch over a world twisted in bed sheets, bless the sleepers
in their rest, but it has been years. Duty can steal too much
from you. I have given away my glow, that blue at the center
of flame. I curve across the dark night by night like a bone
weary moon. What would I want if I could have what I wanted?

In the pre-dawn hour, I wish to lie alongside my body again,
to press my essence back into its house and belong somewhere.
But when you are desperate, you drop details. I forgot to close
the door that traps the past in its place. Now the gone world
and its ghosts fly in and out of my mouth. If I could speak,
I would curse them backwards. But language only moves
in one direction. It is too late to change a dead conversation.

Still I hear them talking, their ragged mouths breathe at my neck.
They keep me awake. This is why my soul rises over me
all of every night. I am running in place. I escape this body
that is adhered to the earth. But ghosts have lost the abilities
of the physical. Their ears have fallen off. Please, I am tired
all night. I have been tired of you all my waking life.

Ashley Crout was born in Charleston, SC, and graduated from Bard College and the MFA program at Hunter College. She is the recipient of a poetry grant from The Astraea Foundation and has received awards from The Academy of American Poets and the Poetry Foundation. Her work has been published in *Sojourner*, *New Orleans Review*, *Atticus Review* and *Dodging the Rain*, among others. She lives in Greenville, SC, with her hound, Stella.

sorry slips through our lips as soft as silk
a magician's satin handkerchief, the word spills out.
it dances in our wombs:
a place where sounds spin around generations of women.
we repeat:
like grandmother's recipe for malasadas
like her music kitchen—an aria she thinks too loud.
we listen:
when she mumbles, mutters, and murmurs the word.
we stand under her breath, spinning, we
learn to serve the word back, spinning, we
carry it in our palms,
an open apology for our existence.
bodies hanging like silk in the firmament.

August is for remembering
that time passes on
when mayflies' silence trembles
and the peach on marble counter
collects tones of the mellow sort

remember the gentle pursuits:
skin on skin // your lover's laughter
sweetness of ripe tangerines

to feel her bloom:
a thousand crimson butterflies
vibrating winter's succession

remember dandelions' wax
succulent and malleable
peppering summer valleys

remember warmth on aching skin
curl inside August's machine,
feel love quiver against your palm

anti-ode to alzheimer's

catch the memories this time 'round
cling to the way they drift
careful not to lose sight,
cat scratch fever. that's the name, right?
candy canes taste like mint,
carolanne is your daughter,
carolanne is your daughter,
carolanne is your daughter,

cupid tied his knot when you were—
caribbean is a sea somewhere,
cry when you remember,
cave when you don't.
catch the memories, lock them in,
curse your mind for—

Anna Zwade is a queer poet based in Virginia. She earned her degree from Virginia Commonwealth University with an academic focus on female autonomy within early modern literature. Being born and raised in Maui, Hawai'i, Anna's work tends to blend island roots with southern living. You can find more of her work at annazwade.com.

“In 1993, HIV infection became the most common cause of death among persons aged 25-44 years [in America].” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “Update: mortality attributable to HIV infection among persons aged 25-44 years—United States, 1994,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 1996 Feb 16; 45 (6), 121-5.)



**I can smell a bigot
from across a county.**

**On the streets or in a cell
their eyes bulge**

**like the eyes of corpses
caught in nooses...**

**I recall those eyes
each time I curse—**

**praying that all who curse me
are cursed too.**



**There were only two hospitals
in our county.**

**The first of them rejected me.
The second I abandoned.**

**So like an idiot wandering
in a garden of lost paths**

**I traced my way through iron orchards
east of town.**

**Lead-like light seeped through the streets,
buildings rotted in the sun.**

I believed in a god of nature

till I started sleeping under bridges.



**Ask my old neighbors:
I'm not clean enough to spit on.**

**Ask the hospitals:
I'm too foul to sequester.**

**Ask the cops:
I'd contaminate the jails.**

**Still, fanatics
from Washington to Wichita say:
Burn him.**

**So I've saved them the trouble.
Here is my body, a bag full of ashes.**

**Now they can do no more
than the wind.**

A Georgia native, **Gray Campbell** has published drama in *Phantom Drift*, and an illustrated poem with the artist Julian Witts in *Redivider*. He works as an adjunct professor at Baruch College and St. John's University. He is currently working on art/text hybrids about poverty and plague.

CLIMBING

BY KATHERINE FALLON

She is there, in her gym, when it happens.
I don't ask for ice, and soon, she forgets.

Hurt finger curled toward my palm, the other
four explore her as the wall: collarbone

for delving, hips for a palm-wide grasp, toes
between toes like hand holding. I push

against her feet as though they could support me
on point. They can. Do. To touch her, I hide

the injury, broken digit whimpering when asked
to be an ice axe, to anchor, anchor, hold.

He fell into my bed like homecoming. Within moments he was out, eyelashes dusting my pillows, my stuffed monkey tucked between his arm and chest, matted fur pressed against the new absence of his teardrop breasts. While the day dimmed and the moon came through instead, I watched his sideburns stretch into long roads and the hair on his legs grow like mad kudzu. I could hear it slither. He shifted, moved closer and grabbed my wrist. Hard. Held tight, like to keep me still, keep me. I did not move, couldn't leave him, not changed like that, absolutely nothing had changed like that.

Massachusetts Deathbed Confession Reveals Body in Freezer
The Somerville News, November 18, 2004

I shot him down in Ventura & went shopping
for a storage unit with a power cord.

I told you kids he'd left us for Vegas
& that soon after he'd been hit by a truck.

What's it matter how he went? He went.
Even you hardly grieved, face-planting

into birthday cakes, preening, borrowing the car.
You had no clue we hauled him along

in a time capsule for years, freezer cord lame
in the truck like a tail & so you'd grown up

with him after all. I couldn't live without his teeth,
his fists, his spit; I needed his long suffering

and to always know where he was, which was
confined & duct taped & mine.

Katherine Fallon is the author of *The Toothmaker's Daughters* (Finishing Line Press, 2018) and *DEMOTED PLANET* (Headmistress Press, 2021). She is Lead Poetry Editor at MAYDAY Magazine and reads for [PANK]. Her poems have appeared in AGNI, Colorado Review, Juked, Meridian, Foundry, and Best New Poets 2019 among others. She shares domestic space with two cats and her favorite human, who helps her zip her dresses.

ON THE LAST DAY OF THE YEAR, WE BUY BEERS

BY IGGY SHULER

Outside the liquor store the marsh
Is a winded creature, humming with all its teeth,
Spitting herons into the slipstream,
Pissing gulls into the sky. All awake and wasted on
That brisk air, I wish to cry out—
No particular utterance, but some young and joyful
Sound meaning I love you, all of you,
I love you.

You turned to me like an opening door,
Painted green in the treelight.

And pushed a finger through my hair,
And said, very gently, goodbye. Know

You are my every lovely thing: my lilac
Drifter, delicate spoonwear,

The blossom scent of spring in
Our magnolia kingdom. Pill bugs.

Red clay. Black dirt. Harvestmen.
Needles blanketing the paths. What

Did the pines tell me? Only
The same things my father did:

If you want the fish to tug on your line,
You gotta hold your mouth right.

And, the devil is real, the devil took my
wife, and the devil is beating his wife:

that's rain for you, baby. It knows how
To make a halo out of a broken countryside.

The cornfields shone like gold in the
Warm autumn when my mother left.

It's raining on every reckoning day
Here in big sky country, where there

Are no dogwoods or muscadines. My
Daddy was a good mean man. My days

Are big and empty. It's snowing. It's
Springtime. It's possible for two things

To be true at once. It's all bleaker than
They promised it would be:

The Irish neighbors' strobe lights
Burn streaks into my eyes, like

Whiplashes. The trees are silent
As ghost people. They don't speak.

They don't even watch. On my
Drive home, I scream and scream

In the private cab of my truck. I've
Read your letter. Please send more:

It's mighty lonesome out here, and
My hands are calloused. Everything hurts,

Even the bones in my feet.
Even my *bones*.

What's so terrifying? The longness of life,
The size of the sky. The workday, its end.

The churning seasons, the turning world.
These stupid hills like still bodies blanketed

In snow. There are no bugs. They sleep in
The winter, or they die.

Please, send the smell of something soft from
The green mountains. The golden grasses terrify

Me. Brisk. Burdened. Snowfallen. Words taste
Like spit in my mouth. I wake up sometimes and

Feel that I am dying, or drowning.
Not dying,
But drowning.

Iggy Shuler is a poet and communist currently based out of North Carolina. Their work has been featured or is forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner*, *Cutbank*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, and elsewhere.

after John Berryman

We stare into the abyss, it stares back. We
get uncomfortable with the prolonged eye contact
& go to brunch. We invite the abyss
& it says sure. Bottomless mimosas
in a bottomless abyss. The abyss has consumed all
the orange juice and prosecco in Nashville &

we couldn't be happier. It turns out the abyss is awful
fun, once it loosens up a little bit. It
doesn't have papers, so it has to be careful about going out
in this political climate, since its mere presence
is always sure to cause a bit of a scene, but
what's life for if not for living. We're not sure

if the abyss can technically be said to be living, but
we don't bring it up. We don't want to be
rude. We've inadvertently caused indiscriminate financial ruin
in The Gulch & I'm glad we decided to
go there instead of one of the queer-owned
establishments we usually frequent.

When I say “organ” you think of a system of pipes exhaling old hymns through a gleaming cathedral. I think of my body, unconscious and limp under a fluorescent lamp, a man’s gloved hands, a scalpel digging for an atrophied pouch of estrogen.

It is our second date. I tell you I’m having a hysterectomy in three weeks. I flinch, expecting you to do the same. You don’t. I say “Doesn’t that freak you out?” The question is a test to determine whether, as a cis gay man, you’re bothered by my transness. You pass.

When I say that I pass, the word means something else. It means that when we walk into the leather bar together, all of the boys in their jockstraps and harnesses think “what a cute couple,” not “what’s he doing with that tranny?” It means that when you introduce me to your family, they don’t automatically question your sexuality, or wonder if you are “going straight.”

When you state that you are gay, you are stating it as a fact: you’re attracted to men, and one of those men is me. What I hear is an instrument exhaling euphoria in the spaces where my organs used to be.

For nine months I watched you through your parlor window, kneeling in the dirt in front of your house, unearthing the things that would not grow, breaking up the soil so that you could plant new things in their place. Every so often I would look up from my notebook, to find the view had changed ever so slightly. I thought I knew all I needed to know about your God: the tradition he came from and its flaws, his name and pronouns. I had forgotten that we alcoholics have to dig for God, the way a gardener digs. That you always came back in with a sore back and dirty jeans.

Adrian Silbernagel is a queer + transgender + recovering poet, educator, and activist who lives in Louisville, KY. Adrian has two books of poetry: 'Transitional Object', which was published with The Operating System, and 'Late Style', which is forthcoming with Nanny Goat Press. Adrian is also a blogger and trans-inclusivity training facilitator at Louisville-based nonprofit, QueerKentucky. He manages a coffee shop as his day job.

SPRING IV

*this is joy, this is summer
keep alive, stay alive
- Frank Ocean*

A CADENCE OF SEASONS, LIKE MUSIC

The third spring was poppies and riots
I was without you and I tried to write
a sentence long enough to get there,
to slip like a ribbon underneath
your door tie itself on your
bedpost so you saw I
called when you woke up

The third spring was thunder
and exceptionalists
A chasm had opened in the earth
and there was nothing I could do to fix
it and so I became preoccupied
with the little dents

Trying to push them out with my reason,
with my sour kindness — which I
thought was good culture—

my kindness is probiotics
my kindness is sandpaper
my kindness is a busted up can of Prego when you have 11.17 in your account
my kindness is a ledge to sit on, for a minute til the cops come
my kindness is a futon with a weird stain when all your options are spent and the park is full up
my kindness is rain, on a beach day, in a drought
my kindness is what my mother could have been if she was just as selfish but less
tired my kindness is an alien in Boulder, CO

The third spring was overheated patios and mass incarceration
gingham and distraction
a yellow flyswatter and the cops
dinnertime and riot gear
for the cops not us
police and more police
the dead and our grief
a dream and an awakening
a sleep and a deeper sleep
a tired explanation and a hungry frustration
paralysis and an encounter with guilt

the ones that were already here
waiting for us, while we come up,
fully rested, acting like it's new

There are no nations, only reenacted childhoods—¹

We lament and argue and dye our hair and disagree on tactics and still love each other in the morning, wanting the other to be alive, to stay alive, to have a pink convertible, to rub glitter in our rolls, to fall on the floor laughing from our fresh and genderless cunts, deep joy from our pelvic ground, this Eastertide abundace— a new insurgence.

The pillar of fear, of biblical salt
that holds our backs straight
is melting in this triad of seasonal duplication.

We sweat and imagine our rubbing
thighs are one another's, past summers
in this endless spring

¹ remembered with Wayne Kostenbaum's introduction for *Lover's Discourse* by Barthes. ("remembered with" is used to indicate that this is a moment in which my language and imagination and the language and imagination of the mentioned author was braided. It is my scribbled notes in collaboration; a letter or a snippet of conversation.)

an honest letter
a juicing of daylight
a knock at the fence
around the nunnery across
the street you are gone
you are listening to her play
they brought guns you said
that is missouri i said
it was nice to
tell someone who cared
but would stay
calm and so i stayed
calm and changed
the subject, told you
about my new allergist, the
nunnery with the disco ball
you said it was nice to
have a friend like me and i
said you know, i never thought
this was something other than
friendship, yet maybe
that was the ocean
when the driver dropped me
in the middle
of the highway and i had to crawl
through bramble to meet you
you had already moved
the blanket so i would see you
right away and then you kissed
me right away, i was ready
to go into the ocean and
this is an easy place to be, the
ocean that is never my friend
but always consistent will
always be stronger will
always knock me will always
float me because this, this
is the last warm day
of the year, the last day i can
skip out early and take the A
all the way, all the way to the
queer beach with the

leather dicks that don't
want me / you want
me, that is a present
fact but never a future
this is how we want it
how we made it and my
mother is not the kind of
mother to ask about
marriage or babies, dogs
hate her, but she is the
kind of mother to sniff
out a hesitancy and exploit
it and that that is how i
learned about lying as a
way to make space for
yourself but this
is an honest letter, and
here is an accounting
of what might be
if my edges start
deteriorating like thread
around old pockets, out like
worms and change falling
through yet entering in
my balance to the
calculator every second or
third day, the total amount
divided by four, the number
of months until my next
loan,
adding in any expected work
that may come thru but i
have to see the doctor
so maybe they will give
the work to someone else,
divided by four, minus rent
minus phone minus utilities
minus train minus food
minus credit card, minus a
certain number something
always happens some
emergency someone gets
arrested, then that number
divided by 31 and that is my
daily number, and
sometimes

i can buy a coffee and
sometimes i cannot and
this is what an honest letter
looks like, my world filled with
calculations and an oceanic
reprieve and no time for rage
which one might say is giving
up but i haven't worried
about that in so long, have
only been spending my time
juicing the daylight and looking
for a fair price on salt and
making sure you know how
to handle yourself around guns
which is different than
handling guns, i can teach you
that too, it takes me two to three
days to recover but that is also
two to three days not out in the
world where i would spend my
daily number and so maybe
that is a blessing, you
could go to missouri and
i would stay here and you
would know, eye contact,
breathe out, castle law,
cup the bottom for
stability, shoulders down,
no ocean in missouri,
no reprieve, but forest
and lovers and instead
of this electric kettle,
painting red, blue, it
is landscape and a
creased face, dead life
from nothing to the
root of the tongue

our mouths came
so close each turn
before that
our arms,
seaweed folding i
had
this dream once within
the other fully
diaphanousour hollow
bones folding in on
ourselves, covered
with wings; i woke
up
feeling of an
archipelago porous
wood limestone &
sequins - or any other
combination of the past
& poems adrift to make
possible to conspire
to breathe an essay
stained on your side
new symmetry of
amatory androgyny of

you felt yes

i had this dream
once of memory &
brinethere was
closeness parted lips;
sleep

*do you want to
dance?yes.
who's the
girl?we
switch.*

Erika Hodges is a gender expansive poet and performance artist living and breathing somewhere between Brooklyn and Boulder. They received their MFA from Pratt Institute where they were named the Leslie Scalapino Scholar. Their work can be found at Flag + Void, CALYX, The Adirondack Review, & The Poetry Project among others. They are a 2021 Can Serrat residency fellow as well as a Brooklyn Poets Fellow. Erika works as a poet's assistant, editor, and archivist. They will be pursuing their JD next fall, where they hope to continue the work of shaping language that can move us toward liberation.

“Below are a series of palimpsests and erasures. The erasures seek to draw out the truth behind the words of the law, while the palimpsests hinge on the words “in” and “of,” referencing that Southern church phrase that says Christians are to be in the world, but not be of it. The phrase carries an ironic duality with it for queer people in the religious Deep South—we are in that world, but not of it.”

ALABAMA CODE TITLE 16. EDUCATION § 16-40A-2

(a) Any program or curriculum to be in the world but not of it shall, as to be in the world but not of it, emphasize the to be in the world but not of it

(1) to be in the world but not of it completely effective protection to be in the world but not of it, sexually transmitted diseases, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) when transmitted sexually.

(2) to be in the world but not of it lawful marriage is the expected social standard for unmarried school-age persons.

(b) Course materials to be in the world but not of it to sexual education or sexually transmitted diseases should be age-appropriate.

(c) Course materials to be in the world but not of it to sexual education or sexually transmitted diseases shall to be in the world but not of it

(1) An emphasis on sexual to be in the world but not of it to be in the world but not of it to be in the world but not of it pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

(2) An emphasis on self-control and ethical conduct to be in the world but not of it sexual behavior.

(3) Statistics based on the latest method to be in the world but not of it to be in the world but not of it contraception, while also emphasizing to be in the world but not of it to be in the world but not of it protection to be in the world but not of it transmitted diseases to be in the world but not of it by the use

in the world but not of it various contraceptive measures.

to be in the world but not of it to be in the world but not of it to be in the world but not of it associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and child to be in the world but not of it

(6) to be in the world but not of it to be in the world but not of it to report such abuse, and the legal options available to victims of sexual abuse.

to be in the world but not of it to cope with and rebuff unwanted physical and verbal sexual exploitation by other persons.

(7) Psycho to be in the world but not of it to be in the world but not of it re.

(8) An emphasis to be in the world but not of it from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual to be in the world but not of it the state.

(9) Comprehensive to be in the world but not of it to be in the world but not of it responsibility to pay child support by non-custodial parents, the penalties for non-to be in the world but not of it child support, and the legal to be in the world but not of it child care and child to be in the world but not of it

ALABAMA CODE TITLE 16. EDUCATION § 16-40A-2

(a) Any program I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth
education or the human reproductive process I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth
emphasized the following: I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth

I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth

(4) A humanely effective protection against pregnancy transmitted diseases, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) when transmitted sexually.

I loved a woman I loved a woman who had no idea that she was free of teen marriage is the expected social standard for unmarried school-age persons.

(b) Course I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth education or sexually transmitted diseases should be age-appropriate.

(c) Course I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth
I loved a woman I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth

(1) An emphasis on sexual activity and sexually transmitted diseases.

I loved (2) a woman in a country made entirely of teeth control and ethical. I loved a woman in a country made entirely of sexual behavior.

[illegible]

I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth
I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth

country made entirely of teeth contraceptive measures.

I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth
associated with pregnancy, childbirth, birth

I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth.
I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth.

I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth and rebuff unwanted physical and verbal sexual exploitation by other persons.

I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth.

(8) I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth

From a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual

loved a woman in a chaste and honorable manner, and made entirely of tech.

(9) I loved a woman in a womanly and womanly way, I frequently and frequently for a long time made myself responsible to pay child support by non-custodial parents, the penalties for non-

nan in a country made entirely of teeth supported a woman in a country made entirely of teeth care and

I loved a woman in a country made entirely of teeth

ALABAMA CODE TITLE 16. EDUCATION § 16-40A-2

(a) Any program or curriculum in the public schools in Alabama that includes sex education or the human reproductive process shall, as a minimum, include and emphasize the following:

(1) Abstinence from sexual intercourse is the only completely effective protection against unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) when transmitted sexually.

(2) Abstinence from sexual intercourse outside of lawful marriage is the expected social standard for unmarried school-age persons.

(b) Course materials and instruction that relate to sexual education or sexually transmitted diseases should be age-appropriate.

(c) Course materials and instruction that relate to sexual education or sexually transmitted diseases should include all of the following elements:

(1) An emphasis on sexual abstinence as the only completely reliable method of avoiding unwanted teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

(2) An emphasis on the importance of self-control and ethical conduct pertaining to sexual behavior.

(3) Statistics based on the latest medical information that indicate the degree of reliability and unreliability of various forms of contraception, while also emphasizing the increase in protection against pregnancy and protection against sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS infection, which is afforded by the use of various contraceptive measures.

(4) Information concerning the laws relating to the financial responsibilities associated with pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing.

(5) Information concerning the laws prohibiting sexual abuse, the need to report such abuse, and the legal options available to victims of sexual abuse.

(6) Information on how to cope with and rebuff unwanted physical and verbal sexual exploitation by other persons.

(7) Psychologically sound methods of resisting unwanted peer pressure.

(8) An emphasis, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state.

(9) Comprehensive instruction in parenting skills and responsibilities, including the responsibility to pay child support by non-custodial parents, the penalties for non-payment of child support, and the legal and ethical responsibilities of child care and child rearing.

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Raye Hendrix (she/they) is a bisexual writer from Alabama. Her debut micro-chapbook, *Fire Sermons*, is due out this Summer from Ghost City Press. Raye is the winner of the 2019 Keene Prize for Literature and Southern Indiana Review's 2018 Patricia Aakhus Award. Her work has been featured on Poetry Daily and in 32 Poems, Shenandoah, Cimarron Review, Poetry Northwest, Zone 3, and elsewhere. She holds degrees from Auburn University and an MFA from the University of Texas at Austin, and is currently a PhD student at the University of Oregon studying Deafness, Disability, and Poetry. You can find more of her work at rayehendrix.com.