

WANDERING LIGHTS



a literary magazine

issue 1 / spring 2026

Wandering Lights Literary Magazine Issue 1

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Wandering Lights Literary Magazine

“The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.”

—John 1:5

Dear Readers,

We want to thank you for your support of our inaugural edition of *Wandering Lights Literary Magazine*. This magazine was born from a group of writers, editors, and artists, who are passionate about the craft of storytelling and its ability to promote empathy, foster belonging, and bring about light in the midst of darkness.

We are deeply grateful to those who have come alongside us as this magazine has transformed from a fond topic of conversation around university picnic tables, late-night FaceTimes, and scone-and-tea book clubs into a wonderful and tangible reality. We want to specifically thank author and professor David Athey, from Palm Beach Atlantic University, who has served as a long-time mentor to us, and, more importantly, a dear friend. Furthermore, we want to express our sincerest gratitude to Katy Keffer, founder and managing editor of *The Bluebird Word*; Veronica McDonald, editor and founder of *Heart of Flesh Literary Journal*; and Sigma Tau Delta, the international English honor society, for their support and promotion of *Wandering Lights*.

And, most of all, we wish to thank all of you who so kindly submitted your authentic, poignant, and deeply inspiring writing to our journal, resulting in 152 submissions across five countries. We are overwhelmed to receive such interest for our first publication. And now—after long (yet much enjoyable) hours of reviewing, editing, and designing—we are thrilled to share the work of our eloquent and brilliant contributors. We know that their writing will speak to you as much as it has to us.

We believe that good storytelling doesn't just lie stagnant within the ink of a page. It sits with us in the silence, and subtly offers what we are all seeking: companionship. It is our hope that within this magazine, you find more than plots and line breaks. It is our mission that you find words that sit with you in the grief, the loss, and the hopelessness that too often stretch out in our minds and our days—words that emit a glimmer of light, like a piece of garnet glinting in the dirt, or a star scintillating in solidarity.

And, most importantly, we hope this journal inspires you to keep writing. The world is a better place with your voice in it.

In the candid words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that."

With love and thankfulness,
Editors of *Wandering Lights Literary Magazine*

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First Poem

Poetry

Chase Strawser

I leafed through my old notebooks the other day

It was like walking through a hallway with doors
fluttering like wet laundry left out to dry

Whispers trickled on the floor, walls, and ceiling

I got lost because the rooms had no numbers
(I rarely remember to date my poems)

One seemed to reach out to me like the warm fur of a puppy

It was a blanket I had in childhood, an endangered species,
as it was on the eve of my 13th birthday

One candle on the cake would be lit to lend its light to the rest

I muttered like a field of butterflies in my sleep and wrote the words down
that would become my greatest work

The one that would inspire my daughter to write her first poem

Ah, yes, the poem
the poem I was to send to you
gonna have to take a raincheck on that one

The typewriter I used to start it
well, not really start it
maybe a rousing *rgdhbjhkgf* or two
that failed to ignite anything like wet kindling

Anyway, the typewriter with keys
that tip-toed in the night
as not to wake either of us
sounded to me (maybe not to you)
a lot like droplets from procrastinating clouds
tapping like idle fingers on
the roof of a long overdue library book
used like an umbrella

Within the margins of those unread pages
(that had accrued quite the late fee I might add)
resided the first draft of said unfinished poem
written in squinting pencil-gray
the cursive penmanship ice-skating in its sleep
melted in the improv of that summer shower
that never really was
because I made up the whole thing

First draft lost; final draft never begun . . .

However, in the demise of that poem
this one grows like a flower

Curfew

Poetry

Chase Strawser

The dying light
creaky bones
leaky veins
crinkled up
autumn leaf tongues
once revered for their speech
now one with the dirt
to be stomped on
by those who may not even know we were there

Mountains are now just
smooth glowing clues in the river at dusk
skipping stones to throw and
make as many ripples as I can
before the ice mutes the youth in everything

The trees are falling asleep
melancholic lullaby of the stream
reflections of family and friends
sneak up behind me
I want to run with them until
the bony cradle of this being falls apart
to join the submerged stones

Our murk may settle at the bottom once more
our songs sink under the gurgling of the stream
while our bodies curdle ephemeral

But are we not
sentient fruit
waiting for the end to render our
brains to raisins
and thoughts to a migraine wine
as our souls corrode uncorroborated

Our human suit of armor
may have a curfew of a century or less
but the pit you usually just spit out
will be the seed from which we will
easily fit into our new form that doesn't flee
from us in increments
and I can't wait to meet you again my friend

Chase Strawser is a writer from Westerville, Ohio. He earned a BA in English from Muskingum University and was the 2015 featured writer in their literary magazine *First Circle*. He has published in Christian and secular publications, such as *As Surely As the Sun*, *The Penwood Review*, and *Teach. Write*. Chase has also published as a freelance reporter. Chase received his MAEd from Mount Vernon Nazarene University in 2021 and helps future writers fine-tune their indispensable voices. He is the faculty advisor for Oakstone Academy's Creative Writing Club and *Stepping Stones* magazine that amplifies the voices of students with autism.

Baptist Back Hallways

Poetry

Mattea Fitch

the gold-gilded painting
of sovereign Saint Stephen
sleeps open-eyed in the broom closet

Father, forgive them,
as they forget his tears
as the dust of the stones
so carelessly thrown
cling to the brushstrokes of his sorrow

each plane of his face
each ripple of his rags
each stone held high overhead,
are too full of suffering
for the clean whitewashed walls
of the lobby where newcomers tread

here sleeps Saint Stephen
his story not preached
his God-fulfilled calling unseen

must the first martyr
hide away in his grief
so the multitude outside
might idle?

Seven Million Skylines

Poetry
Mattea Fitch

seven million skylines
seventy-times-seven more
four hundred and ninety canvases
stack up flat against
the painter's celestial wall

he flips through his exhibit
while his people sleep
under a moon he carved mere hours ago

tangerine to coral to salmon
to dandelion and persimmon
scarlet-shadowed clouds
reflect mercy for today

the painter signs his work with a flourish:
a tug at the throat
chills on the forearms
sweet-stinging salvation under the eyes

forgiveness written in another sunrise,
for joy comes in the morning

Mattea Fitch is a freelance fiction writer based in West Palm Beach, Florida, where she is attending college to receive her Bachelor's degree in English Literature. She grew up in Orlando, Florida. When she is not immersed in the world of words, she might be found on a hiking trail, at a local coffee shop, or getting lost on the way.

Joyous Carp
Acrylic Painting
Heather Dickinson*



*To view all artist bios, please see page 63.

The Imago Stream

Poetry
Danielle Page

Waters rise and recede like a heart pumping
coming and going as if each beat may be its last—
a lingering pause with each fall, the question
of life sealed and set or if the song will carry out
into the wind, into the expanse, into the swell
of switchgrass, where shrubs have yet to sprout.

The dirt stirs, a swirl of songbird and stardust
breathed into clay, an eye opens, an ear unfurls,
a mouth extends, and the first rain pours from
the sky, welcoming the worker, anchoring
the waves to the shore, a steady pulse for us.

Heuningbos

Poetry
Danielle Page

As the water bubbles,
tell me your story—
how your yellow petals
rare and bold brew a
butter brown elixir, both
in hue and temperance.

Tell me how your kind's
aromatics rival the
rosemary, basil, or dill
I use for cooking,
how the natives knew
of your herbal properties
and shared your secrets.

Your scent is mixed
with orange and rooibos
swirling a simple remedy
for inflammation,
an old trick passed down
and down and down again.

As I pour, tell me of the earth
you were rooted in, where
tradition taught you
to gather, so I can thank it
in the still moments where
I wait patiently for you to brew.

On Youth Group (circa 2010)

Poetry
Danielle Page

If I had asked, I bet I could have been
Baptized in Mountain Dew and taken
Communion with Chips Ahoy.
The smoke machine and Skillet album
Would have rolled off the stage like the
Cherry blossom perfume all the girls
Were wearing, a fragrant offering of sorts.
And there he'd appear:
Double Finger Gun Jesus.

He'd don his shades as I rose
From my sticky green tub.
He'd tell us how cool it was
To follow him, how you can
Read Harry Potter and be holy.
He'd lead us to streams of Starbucks
And make us lie down in fields
Of Airheads Xtremes.

He'd tell us he loved us,
That if we followed him,
Everything would be *awesome*.

On Youth Group (circa 2010)

But maybe a brave 6th grader
Would have stormed the stage,
Struck him down with a plastic
Sunday school sword from the
Armor of God set they used at
VBS last year, and hollered, “No.”
Maybe they would have pointed to
The LED-lit cross on the wall,
Unfurled finger-gunned hands
To display his wounded palms,
And maybe a little revolution
Would have started right there.

Danielle Page is a truth-teller, educator, and writer currently hailing from rural Maryland. She strives to live wholeheartedly in her endeavors alongside her husband and daughters. When she’s not scribbling in her Moleskine journal, she’s tackling her To Be Read list, baking banana bread, or serving in camp ministry. She is an editor for the *Clayjar Review* and has been published in *Ekstasis*, *Heart of Flesh*, *Vessels of Light*, *Traces*, *Solid Food Press*, and elsewhere.

When she insisted on “I Will Survive” for our wedding song, I started to wonder how seriously she was taking this whole marriage idea. And she didn’t want the Gloria Gaynor version, with its uplifting message of resilience. No, she demanded that we dance to the bitter and acerbic cover performed by her favorite band, CAKE.

The weekend of weddingcakeapalooza was in full swing. Ten bakeries, twenty slices of cake, one victor. In addition to finding the perfect bite to serve our guests, I had hoped to conduct a test, a la *The Newlywed Game*, of how our tastes aligned after all these years together. That lasted until the second slice.

She slashed her fork through the lemon cake with lavender buttercream. Purple frosting ringed her lips as she chewed. She winced, wiped her mouth, hacked like a cat coughing up a furball, then chugged a glass of water with loud gulps. “Yech, that was like eating the potpourri my Aunt Mildred used to put out in her guest bathroom.”

“Enough of the foodie bullshit,” she said as I waxed on about how the subtle floral notes complemented the tang of the lemon crumb. “We’re feeding a cattle call of people who don’t care about floral notes. Let’s just get a sheet cake from Safeway.”

That’s when she came up with the idea for the wedding song. “It will be a subversive commentary on the absurdity of the marriage-industrial complex.”

It was meant to be a party to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the day we moved into our first apartment. A celebration of a life together that never needed—through two mortgages, two kids, two cats, two dogs, and too many goldfish to count—the validation of a piece of paper.

Until a night a month ago when, after two pitchers of my trademark paint-stripping margaritas, I rolled onto my side of the bed and offered to make an honest woman of her. She scoffed that my inept bartending had rendered me a sentimental mess.

Piece of Cake

But I had a plan. “Everyone else will think it’s just a party, until—bam!—wedding. Then we party all night and go back to our normal lives the next day.” She eventually relented to my full-court press, begging me with a yawn to please let her get some sleep.

At first, I laughed off her attempts to subvert my planning, like when she suggested renting out a funeral home for the reception. But the steady barrage of irony and skepticism grated, the cake possibly the last straw. Maybe a funeral wasn’t such an outlandish metaphor.

I returned from the kitchen with two paper plates. “Last one you need to suffer through tonight.” I slapped hers on the table.

“Don’t be such a baby,” she called as I headed out to the deck.

She threw open the bay windows. “I thought maybe you’d like some music while you sulk.” A light mist fell as she disappeared from view.

The opening notes of “I Will Survive” rang out. The punk rock girl who, when we started dating, never wore a pair of jeans that wasn’t ripped, had held onto every disco record from her safe suburban youth.

She leaned out the window. “The original version. Compromise?”

“It’s still not a wedding song.”

She threw some disco moves in the window, smiling with each hand thrust in the air. “You look like John Travolta with hip dysplasia,” I yelled through the propulsive beat.

I tasted each component separately: the yellow cake just this side of dry; the buttercream a sugar bomb that coated the roof of my mouth; the top layer of chocolate shavings all mouth-puckeringly bitter cocoa with no leavening sweetness. I fought the urge to run inside to grab her plate before she took a bite.

The mist turned to a steady drizzle. She gyrated in the window as Gloria Gaynor crooned about having all her love to give. I considered joining her to salvage the evening, but I owed this cake my full attention, even if it had loser written all over it.

Her hand darted out the window. “Ooh, it’s raining!”

Minutes later, the stereo blared Donna Summer singing about leaving a cake in the rain. She was back in the window, looking eager for praise. “I thought this one would be fitting.”

“It’s another breakup song.”

She waved me off. I took a bite and jumped out of my chair to see her working out the steps for what looked like the bastard child of the hustle, the electric slide, and the foxtrot.

I banged on the glass. “This is it.” I pointed at my plate. “This is the one.”

Rain plastered my hair to my forehead. She looked up from a spin move that almost took out a shelf of potted plants.

I pushed the plate through the window. She wolfed a huge bite, smiled, and gave me a thumbs up.

“I don’t know how that demon baker pulled it off,” I said. “The parts are almost inedible on their own, but it comes together when you try it all at once.”

“That’s what I’ve been telling you all these years, dummy.” She grabbed my hand and twirled under my outstretched arm, twisting from my grasp when the song ended.

I watched, raindrops spattering my T-shirt, as she dropped the needle. CAKE’s deadpan vocals filled the space between us, atop the relentless bassline. She picked up her plate

Piece of Cake

and shimmied to the window. “Let’s do both. One bitter, one sweet.”

“Let them eat CAKE . . . and Gloria Gaynor.”

“Now you’re getting it.”

She shoved a forkful in my mouth then herky-jerked around the room, singing in her own key, at a volume that would have the neighbors wondering if we were torturing our cat.

“We will survive. We will surviiiiiiive.” Like she really meant it.

Jim Parisi is a freshly unemployed editor who lives in Occupied Washington, D.C., with his long-suffering wife, Beth, and Dolce, a spicy mix of boxer, pit bull, and Australian cattle dog. (Their two kids, Aidan and Nora, have flown the coop.) Much of his free time is spent coaching Little League softball. He writes the occasional essay for ihavethatvinyl.com, and his fiction has appeared in *The Good Life Review*, *FlashFlood Journal*, and *The Bluebird Word*.

Full Moon as Mirror of the Unexpressed

Poetry
Douglas Talley

βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι
—1 Corinthians 13:12

How the moon in full silence
never seems to lie,

its blank stare offering mute
omniscience in a mirror,

a truth chilling everything blue,
a truth I would share,

if possible, without words.
The lone coyote howling

in my thought dispels that notion—
the memory of her voice

during a bout of depression
confessing she'd be happier

taking our two youngest girls
and leaving Houston for good—

her pain a dead blackbird rotting
at the side of the house

in a bed of pink hyacinth. Something
so rank she could not articulate,

so deep I could not touch. I only
widened the wound quoting

Dante. *I am not Beatrice*, she said,
not the woman to lead you to God.

No woman should have to, she said
and then buried herself again

in chores, shrinking within like
a waning moon, her custom

Full Moon as Mirror of the Unexpressed

when unsettled, a few blouses
to iron, a fishbowl to clean.
In her hand the fishbowl rounds
into a moon housing two
creatures, male and female.
She separates the creatures
from their element, empties the moon
of its water, its pull on her
blood. With fresh water she restores
the orb, returns the creatures
to their element. The fishbowl, like
every moon, hides a riddle,
or in Paul's Greek, an "enigma."
We look through that glass
darkly and see two wounded gods.
If only we could sit quietly in
the darkness and listen to our waters,
we would total the sum of all
our hours in the solace of a simple
caress. The night would be
endless, the moon endure forever,
and we would call it peace.

Early Reasons to Feel Wounded

Poetry
Douglas Talley

For my twin brother

Blue iris was Mother's favorite, you may recall, and she planted
a straight line of them along a red fence that fronted the house.
Not the wild blues that bloom late June much farther north,
but rather the domestic bearded iris, and the dried rhizomes

of which the ancients gave whole to babies to soothe their teething.
No one in the family knew that remedy when you took my left arm
as your own teething ring, and when, after two days of swelling,
your clean bite surfaced on my skin like a red bracelet of the pox.

The ancients also viewed the flower as a warning, taking its name
from the Greek word for "rainbow"—goddess of the rainbow
and a messenger of Zeus—and a symbol of lost love and silent grief,
since it was Iris who led young girls and boys into their afterlife.

But in Hebrew tradition, that rainbow arced the sky like a pastel comet,
a sign of God's covenant of peace. Yet grief more than peace followed
when I broke Mary's bracelet and let you take the blame, because Dad
assumed it was you all along as he unbuckled his belt and doubled it

in his hands and snapped it like a wide, scoffing grin, assuring us both
there would be no punishment if we just told the truth, and you, speaking
God's own truth to save your soul, had to brave the threat of one good
stripe of the belt, since you always found trouble, even as early as four,

swiping newspaper money from a neighbor's mailbox and burying it deep
in the woods, or lighting an oven in the neighbor's kitchen and almost setting
the whole house on fire. You were telling the best childhood truth you knew
to no avail, and perhaps that was why you broke into English first, since

Early Reasons to Feel Wounded

earlier we had a private language I refused to drop. But it was time for us to separate, like blue iris which must be divided every two to three years when the roots congest. Time to separate, no longer one, though we once shared the same womb, later the same bottles, diaper pins, and clothes,

and the same gibbering language, and the same mother and father, but it was time to separate because the truth had become slippery and punishment for truth, harsh. No wonder when Pilate sneered, *What is truth?*, the Nazarene said nothing. And I to my shame said

nothing, and it may be faulty memory, but it is odd now as I consider this quiet ruination, I think of blue iris, always our shared mother's favorite, blue iris along the fence line, blue iris cut for a vase in the kitchen, blue iris when it finally wilted, and water in the vase turned a dirty yellow.

Doug Talley has BFA and MFA degrees in creative writing and a JD degree. After receiving his BFA, he worked in Italy for two years offering volunteer church service. His poems have appeared in various journals, including *The American Scholar*, *Cimarron Review*, *Tampa Review*, and *Christianity & Literature*, and his collection of poems, titled *Adam's Dream*, was released by Parables Publishing. As a lawyer, he has advocated various environmental and social justice causes, including the recovery of Jewish assets confiscated by Nazis during World War II. Presently, he leads a writers' workshop for inmates in a local prison.

Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall

Poetry
Abigail Diaz

In Chicago, Winter used to mean *you*.
Your boots by the door, salt-crusting white,
your laughter rising like breath in the air—
a warmth no radiator could imitate.

Now the snow hushes the street.
I walk alone past the frozen elms,
each branch a whisper of what was.
Even the lake seems to hold its stillness close.

When Spring finally unclenches her fist,
I think of your hands—how they planted,
how they fixed what broke, how they trembled
when the doctor said *months*.
The lilacs bloom anyway.
Their scent is too alive, almost rude in its joy.
I breathe it in, half-ashamed, half-grateful
for the ache that reminds me I can still feel.

By Summer, I've moved south—
Florida sun pressing against my back,
the air thick as memory.
I float in saltwater,
let the Gulf cradle me like a whispered creed.
If grief could melt, it would sound like this—
the slow hush of tide against skin,
the steady pulse of the earth still turning.

Fall arrives in thundercloud disguise—
palms bend, streets flood,
and I think of your voice, calm even in storms.

Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall

The wind roars, the world tilts,
but I stay standing, barefoot on soaked ground,
waiting for the quiet that comes after surrender.

Each season remakes me,
peels away what I thought would last forever.
Yet in the breaking, I find a kind of light—
not blinding, but soft,
a glow that hums beneath the skin,
like your laugh on the cold Winter air,
like the sea that keeps returning to the sunny shore.

Maybe you are there—
in that meeting of water and wind,
where everything ends
and begins again.

This is the existence she now lives in.

The house is quieter now—
still, except for the hum of grief
that seeps through the walls like wind through pine.
Every night she watches the stars
bleed into their places, one by one,
their silver pulses soft as whispered prayers.

Somewhere up there, she tells herself,
one shines brighter—the one he might've become.
She traces its path with trembling hands,
as if she could pull his voice down through the dark and let it settle on her skin.

Some nights are calm, and she thinks they are mending—
one day it seems good, and the next it's pure chaos,
grief twisting like smoke from a candle that refuses to stay lit.
The ache moves in circles, inhaled . . . exhaled . . . until even the silence has rhythm.

She prays for God to unspool the sorrow from her ribs.
But it's never that simple, is it?
Because grief isn't linear;
it winds like the Milky Way,
a tangle of light and loss,
a map she never wanted to read.

Flint and Hollow

Poetry
Abigail Diaz

There is a stillness that isn't peace—
just the weight of not moving.

Air clicks against my teeth.
The clock limps through another hour.
My chest rises like a door warped in its frame.

What name do you give a prayer when it no longer knows its own shape?
When it comes out like steam off cooling soup,
like breath on a window you don't mean to fog.

Faith, if it's here, is flint—
not flame, but the idea of it.
A hardness struck against the hollow.

Most nights, I forget the candle.
Still, its presence ghosts the room—
wax-still, wick-closed.
It reminds me:
light doesn't beg to be seen.

I no longer aim for answers.
I let the questions hang like coats on winter hooks.
Weightless in form, but soaked through.

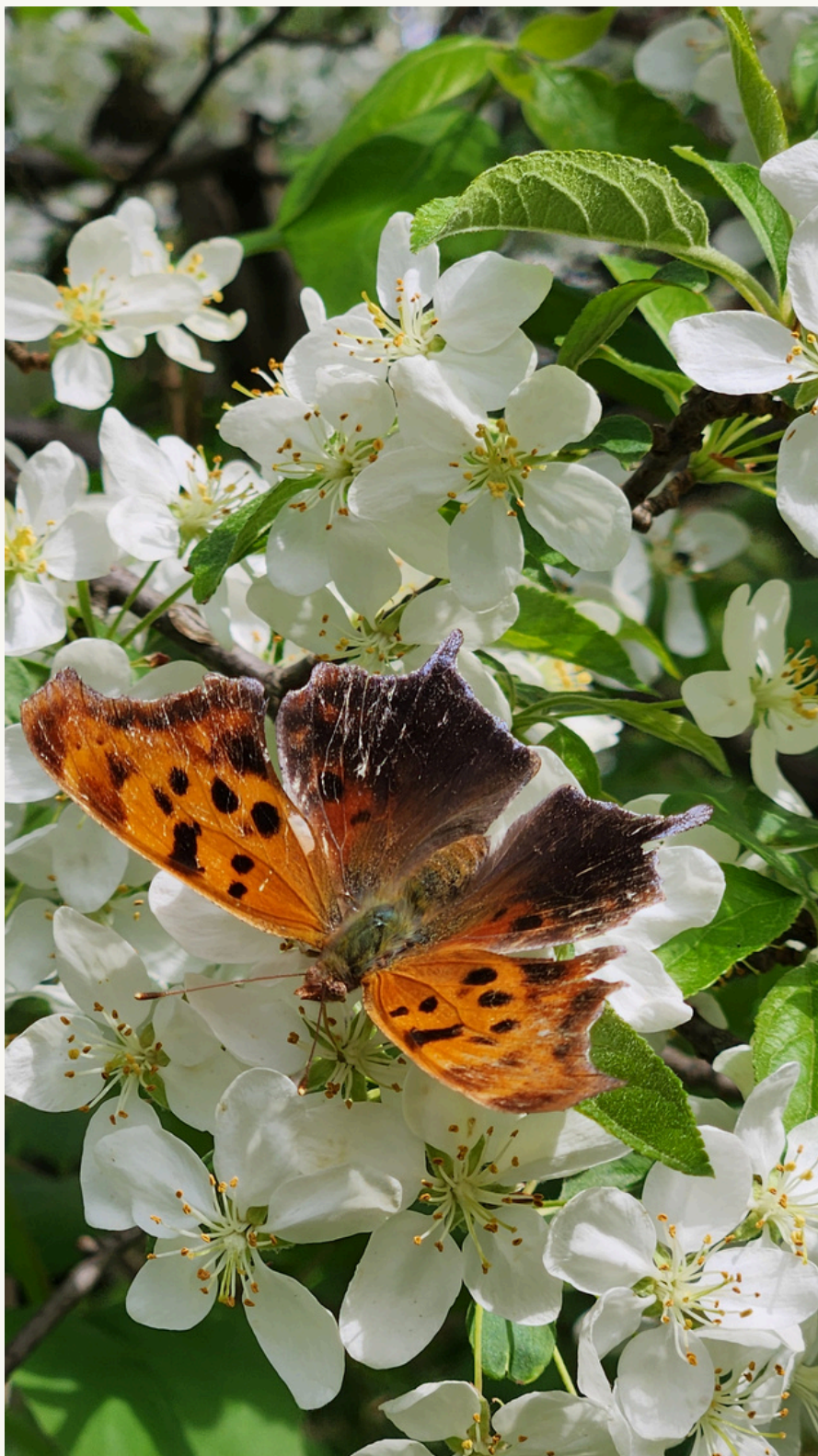
Somewhere in the ache—
which does not heal
so much as become a second spine—
I hear the soft clink of presence.

Not the loud kind. Not thunder.
Just the knowing that I am held even when I do not reach.

Abigail Diaz is a freelance writer based in South Florida whose work explores themes of grief, faith, healing, and the spiritual journey from darkness into light. Deeply shaped by the recent loss of her father, Abigail uses poetry as a means of processing grief and reaching toward God for peace and clarity. Originally from Chicago and rooted in Puerto Rican heritage, her background is enriched by a love for cultural diversity and architectural history. In addition to her creative pursuits, Abigail is passionate about helping others grow in their faith and believes in the transformative power of words to heal, connect, and restore.

Survivor

Photography
Laura Deschenes



Cascarones in the Park

Poetry

Brian C. Billings

The bells from this year's Easter Mass have hushed.
I leave my house and walk three blocks to find
the families from Sacred Heart all crushed
together in their finest clothes behind

the foot-high walls of Torres Park. Aligned
like china figures gleaming in a hutch,
the faithful eat their lunch . . . all of a mind
to rest and cool then resurrect. Not much

attention falls upon the children (such
a feisty bunch). They have confetti eggs
they hold like live grenades. A lively touch
of madness lights their eyes and sends their legs

into a dash across the grass. No begs
for mercy come when shells are cracked on heads.
The victims mount a bright defense. The dregs
upon the trampled ground fly up in reds

and blues and sparkling pinks. The color spreads
until the lawn's become a sprawl of stain
and parents end the fight with threats of beds.
It's half past four, and only I remain.

I walk, and crunching snaps beneath my shoes.
I contemplate how blood pays Christian dues.

Dad's in Your Attic?

Poetry

Brian C. Billings

Dad's in your attic?
You wonder what to do?
You should treat him kindly;
he has a paranoid heart.
It feeds him broken thoughts,
drifting commands;
they take him
to many attics lately.

Relax. I will come for him
(later) with lullabies and spiraling pills.
I will guide him from your rafters,
where he'll be wading in your memories.
I will shepherd him down the folding stairs
and pack him away in duller air.

Dad's in your attic?
Can't you let him stay awhile?

Brian C. Billings is a professor of drama and English at Texas A&M University-Texarkana, where he teaches creative writing and children's literature. He also serves as the university's drama-series coordinator and the Editor-in-Chief for *Aquila Review*. His work has appeared in such journals as *Abandoned Mine*, *Ancient Paths*, *The Bluebird Word*, *Confrontation*, *Evening Street Review*, *Rushing Thru the Dark*, and *The Woven Tale Press*. Publishers for his scripts include Eldridge Publishing and Heuer Publishing.

All We Have

Fiction

Natalie A. Lashbrook

February 4, 2019

The thick, scarlet blood drips into the sink and dyes the soap-foam red. It's an inch-long cut and it stings—stings worse when Matt forces it under the faucet. His new-broken blisters scream. The handle squeaks as he shuts it off a moment later. His thumb is still dripping blood. He doesn't have a Band-Aid. Hasn't had one for years, maybe not since his mother died. So he tears a strip of paper towel off, wraps it around his thumb, and uses a bit of tape to secure it. His blood soon dyes the scratchy white paper red. It doesn't help, and the finger continues to throb, pounding to the rhythm of his veins.

The knife that did it is still clean, lying on the small, rickety table in a pile of pine shavings. The stuff covers most of the table. He would've done it outside, but it's wintertime, too dark and too biting cold.

Gracelessly, he sits down in the folding chair and exhales. It creaks with his weight. The shavings are all different shapes and sizes, some with jagged edges from where the knife slid too deep and they were ripped off the wood. The lonely light from over his stovetop, left on from the scrambled eggs made over twelve hours ago, illuminates the thing he made. The shadows are deep, highlighting its imperfections. It's crooked and cracked, chipped and wearied. It's too young to be weary, just a few hours old. And yet.

Its eyes are sunken and tired, almost like Matt's own. Its wings are folded against its back, limp and useless.

Matt's hands are large and rough, unused to delicate things. He's still not sure what possessed him to make the little bird. No matter. It's finished now. The wood is raw and yellow. The secret of how to stain it died with his father.

He has a small bookshelf by the front door, populated by old magazines, empty bottles, and one lone Bible, covered by a little too much dust. On top are the keys to the twenty-

year-old Chevy in the drive. Next to them, Matt places the carving. It's a sparrow, and sits beside a blurry, crinkled photo of his father and himself at just three years old.

He had been a carver.

Matt had only been two or three when he broke his first bone. He had followed his older brother up a tree when he lost his grip and fell to the ground. He didn't remember much about it. He didn't remember much of anything before six. But he remembered the blood streaming from his knees and the screaming pain in his arm. His father had run out of his workshop and scooped him up and rushed him to the hospital.

His father never went to the hospital for anyone except his kids. He remembered one evening where a sawblade had made a six-inch cut down his wrist and onto his arm. He just rinsed it out and wrapped a clean cloth around it. "The blood'll wash out," he had said. Matt remembered those words clear as day. The blood'll wash out. Never did, so they threw that rag away, in the end.

Matt stands up from his chair and opens the fridge door. He realizes how dark it is only when the yellow light falls out of the fridge and douses him. A couple bottles of beer are on the top shelf. He grabs them both, pops the lid off of one, and leaves his house. He doesn't bother to lock the door.

His car is cold, almost colder than the black night outside of it. Turning the key in the ignition and starting the AC doesn't make it any warmer. He pulls out of his drive without bothering to look back. The steering wheel scrapes against the newborn skin on his hands and stings like hell.

A bird. What a stupid idea. Matt doesn't know what had possessed him to make it, when nothing flew in the world.

All We Have

He goes around a corner twice as fast as the speed limit would have him go. It felt like flying. It wasn't. His wheels stuck firmly to the ground, as if gravity had its grip around them as tight as Matt's hands gripped the wheel, despite the pain. Pain made a man, he had heard. Well, all he had was pain, and it hadn't done him much good. He goes across a bridge, and the sound of the car over concrete rumbles through his chest.

"Where'm I goin'?" he murmurs. "Where'm I goin'?" The road leads him up a hill. Up, up, up into the sky. Maybe he'll never go down the other side. Maybe he could keep driving upwards. Then the pain would be worth it. Maybe he could find some goodness in the sky, behind the clouds that hid the stars.

From his point of view, the brightness of the headlights that meet him as he goes over the hill looks like heaven itself coming up to greet him. He's blinded by the white-yellow lights, and for a moment, the glory of the light drowns out the darkness.

From the outside, it looks like a drunk man behind the wheel lost control of his car, which flew headfirst into a ditch.

February 10, 2019

"Kinda small, ain't it?" Paul says, looking around at the house. It is small, and rather dirty. He's not sure what the appeal is, aside from the price.

"Well, you could say it's cozy!" the realtor replies. Paul surveys the living area again. It's sparsely furnished, with just a bookshelf, a small kitchenette, and a table in the center. The whole house needs a bit of dusting, and a lot of repairs. Sad sort of place.

"Why's the owner not bothered to take his stuff out?" Paul asks. There were still some magazines and a singular, dusty book on the bookshelf.

"He . . . well, he died," the realtor tells him, apologetic for something that wasn't her fault.

“Didn’t have any family left to take his stuff out, and nobody bothered to clean it up before the bank put it on the market.”

“Really?” Paul’s wife, Ruth, says. She pauses her inspection of the kitchenette and looks around the room with a newfound regret. “Was he old?”

“Er, no. He wasn’t,” the realtor says, shifting her weight from foot to foot. Ruth’s shoulders sag slightly.

“That’s . . . too bad,” Paul says, wishing he hadn’t asked.

“Look at this,” his wife says. She makes her way over to the bookshelf and lifts up a small, wooden bird. “It’s beautiful.”

Paul’s not so sure. It’s small and cracked and rough-edged. He can see where the knife broke off a shaving of wood and the maker didn’t fix the uneven, rough edge left. But Ruth is looking at it like it’s the most beautiful thing in the world.

“Take it,” the realtor says offhandedly. “No one else’ll want it.”

“And I want this house,” Ruth announces. “It’s perfect.” After a moment more of examining the little bird, she slips it into her pocket. Her hand moves to rest on her stomach, rounded out with their first, and she says, “We’ll put it in his room—that one.” She gestures at one of the doors along the wall.

“It’s . . . I guess we should talk about it first,” Paul replies, unsure. This one? He wants to say. It’s not . . . perfect. It’s not perfect by any means.

“It’s just the right size,” she says, looking around. “Just right for the three of us.” Paul looks around. She’ll want new windows, he knows, and for him to rip out the carpet in the bedrooms. “It deserves a second chance.”

“Let’s talk about it first. We’ll get back to you,” Paul says, addressing the last sentence to the realtor. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome! Have a lovely day,” she replies, seeing them out the door.

The short walk to their sedan is freezing cold and gray with the promise of storm. A few, feathery wisps of snow are beginning to fall. The snow and the trees rising up around the small house make the silence quieter. The only sound came from the crunch of their shoes and the car doors opening.

Paul starts the car, and Ruth sets the bird on the dash.

“It’s beautiful,” she says into the silence.

“It’s too bad about that man,” Paul says at the same time. The little bird sat crookedly, like it was about to tumble to the floor. But if he tried, he could see what his wife meant. Maybe.

A ray of sun forced itself out of the clouds and landed on the dash with the early morning brightness of angels. For just a second, the wood of the bird loosened as it ruffled its feathers and raised its head to the light.

Natalie A. Lashbrook began writing stories at seven years old and believes that she has improved since then; whether or not this is true remains to be seen. Natalie enjoys writing short stories and poetry. Lately she has become interested in writing nonfiction as well. In her free time, she haunts her local library, serves coffee on the town square, and helps care for her family’s two dogs, seven cats, twelve rabbits, and twenty-five chickens.

Hot Cocoa, Seen in a Mug Darkly

Poetry
Lydia Kuerth

Pangea floats
on milky oceans,
cocoa sandstorm settling
in a cup's caldera

Fault lines flicker through
chocolate continents,
slow grains of Swiss Miss
subducted in the sea:
the map in the mug
melts

The drinker blows,
somersaulting sugar cubes
across dust-dunes;
the surface of the mug-map breaks,
dissolved by a spoon

Lydia Kuerth is a freelance writer studying English at Palm Beach Atlantic University, where she serves as an editor and contributor to the *Living Waters Review*, as well as a peer mentor at her university's Writing Central. A lover of reptiles, rainy days, and role-playing games, when not burrowing into books, she enjoys hiking and observing the adventures of insects.

Keeping to Himself

The Making of a Pendragon

Poetry

Lee Kiblinger

For he would have known
what was in a stone;
the little he knew
lay bedded in brooks
brushed smooth, buffed
in the tow of girded streams
that flowed through
the grasses he combed,
his dreams weathered
beneath sworn stars,
where he lie down
to learn shepherd—

to rest within his mean,
to bear the staff of the decried,
to trust in a sling;
for what was another beast
when the humble
still silenced those who mocked,
who dared him to pull a mythic sword
from some rock,
to heed the call of the unknown,
to live as legend,
to dress in some armored
sham of self
and walk as one who believes
that stones are for skipping across water.

Lee Kiblinger is a Texas poet who loves to travel with her husband, laugh with three adulting children, play mahjong, and enjoy words with Rabbit Room poets. Her work can be found in *Ekstasis*, *The Windhover*, *Solum Journal*, *Heart of Flesh*, *Calla Press*, *Clayjar Review*, *The Way Back to Ourselves*, and others. You can read more of her poetry in her first collection, *All the Untils* (Wipf and Stock) or on her Substack at www.ripplesoflaughter.com.

Morning Light

Photography
Gail Purdy



for Leah

but not in the blood kind of way. More like the *land*. That deep thoroughfare of earth and soil and sun and moon brushing over coarse hay and knobby dandelion-green hills that bind, guide like a bridle, reins directing our way. It's in the swaying, lush bluegrass where mares, foals, and stallions roam and dance and lift their faces to the sweet, admiral blue sky before they run along black fences in open fields. If blood plays a part, it's in the running for roses where the thoroughbred, a hot-blooded horse, spills its magnificent energy onto the dirt. There, too, the breed minds its intelligence in speed and purpose and promise. Ever sensitive and alert, vigilant brown eyes watch and gallop and trot ever ready, ever wary on turf. Eyes now allowed to retire in farm pastures, a moment to soften and breathe and release any pain of a hard life. Oh yes, the land is our kin, our binding, our bond. So, when I learn the saddler is the trade that makes bridles, I am reminded of my sadness and emptiness and halting that yours guided you into the raven-colored sky where a Blazing Star—a future Derby pick perhaps—now rises. There's a reason the song is sung for our Kentucky home. Its haunting homage to the land of our youth, its stirring spirit in fast footsteps, and its sweet richness of country is conviction: life persists and threads and shimmers evermore in these grasslands—yours and mine—under glowing sable sky.

One Friday Evening in Early April

Poetry
Katy Keffer

An afternoon glides toward sunset
as we depart a restaurant, dinner
of Italian fare, delights of food, ambiance, too.
Warm garlic, olive oil, soft bread tumble
after us, as golden light astonishes—

flourishes of a humming calm stretch as intention
alights *en plein air*, where mood softens the glare
of high-rise windows, bending back into
reflections like curves of ocean blue
awash in startlement, we observe:

all around are threads of easy ambition
filling outdoor tables—couples, families,
teenagers cupping ice cream. A canvas
of week's end turns its steady, pointed rumble
onto one Friday evening.

Then, having stopped to admire early buds on trees,
there arrives a gurgling, a delighted swirling
in a rush of laughter rising: a child,
a dauntless boy, a toddler of bowed legs
inside crumpled khakis, raised arms

as goal posts beside his head
evasive maneuvers already at play, as father
gives chase. And we (sudden thrill seekers) join,
spur encouragement with “go, go!” as he runs—
up a sidewalk, between chairs, free with childish glee.

We listen, faces transfixed, pulled in
like a drought, as fields desiring rain—taken
in by this innocent, joyful participant.
And in a moment, the chaotic life race
is subdued. A city's sharp edge retreats.

Katy Keffer is a Kentucky native and writes poetry, nonfiction, and fiction. She is the founder and managing editor of the online literary journal *The Bluebird Word*. Some of her work appears in *Freshwater Literary Journal* and *The Adroit Journal*, among others. Her poetry collection, *Porch Light*, published in January 2025 (Finishing Line Press). She presently calls Virginia home.

If Ever I Abandon Myself in You

Poetry

Natalie Kimbell

will I end in the Lost and Found tossed
among the mislaid iPod cases,
flannel jackets, forgotten Dollar Tree reading
glasses, be that one shoe, mate less, untied?
How long will I wait, jumbled among the sweaty
athletic high tops and discarded red flats
before I find a new purpose
like a single shoe flower planter
or an inspired multi-media art project
and re-discover me?

East Tennessee writer **Natalie Kimbell** was born in Norton, Virginia, spent her elementary years in Worcester, Massachusetts, and settled as a teenager in Dunlap, Tennessee. After forty-two years as a public-school teacher in Tennessee, she has retired focusing on her writing. Her work is published in *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Mildred Haun Review*, *Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *Tennessee Voices*, and *Artemis*. Her first poetry chapbook, *On Phillips Creek*, was published in 2024. Her second chapbook, *And the Weather Remains the Same*, was released June 2025. Both books were published by Finishing Line Press.

¿Cómo se Dice Betabel?

Poetry
Rebecca Nancy

“¿Cómo se dice *betabel*?”

betabel . . .

brain broken by a bystander
between bins of fresh fruit
bilingual pride prohibits a Google search

the puzzle pesters the walk home
flimsy bags stuffed with peppers and mangos,
I scour stored, neglected stale syllables
sounding out slightly similar symphonics

betabel-fueled fear forces
my hand to clutch a *paliacate*
digging for the rhythm of *pan con miel* in flats
brushing dust off thoughts with flicks of my kerchief

muscle memory does not refresh vocabulary
cursing subconsciously English prayers
dreadfully aware I didn't lean for a *beso* at church
cross-examining contentment with mediocre tacos
contaminated with lettuce and tomato

clutching passport proof of my identity
I chuck my phone away
determined to find deep within me
whatever the heck a *betabel* is.

Beneath Bethesda Terrace

Poetry

Rebecca Nacy

Skilled olive fingers grace an artisanal instrument
strings keeping time with pattering rain.
A chorus pools between cool stone arches,
harmonizing hallelujahs to the guitar's invitation.
Showering serenades echo off holly-flowered tiles.
Crowds flood in, scrambling for Kleenex or permanent archival.
Bird trills trickle in unison with hundreds of souls,
lamenting loss and love,
heavenly harmonies hovered, reigning over brisk March air.

Peering through Bethesda's archways,
the angel of water
blinked twice to ensure he still was on earth.

Rebecca Nacy is a ginger born and raised in Mexico City and is currently teaching English to elementary students as a Fulbright Scholar in Galicia, Spain. She graduated with a degree in Zoology, Honors, and a deep love for all things poetry. When not researching in a lab, you can find her covered in mud, measuring oysters. While her brain thinks in STEM, her heart loves the arts like singing, tap-dancing, and, of course, writing. Right now, she fills her days by learning Galician, dancing sevillanas, learning people's stories, and trying foods from around the world.



The Captive

Fiction

Leah Johnston

I'm fleeing. I want to run, but I can barely hobble forward down this hot, hardened, asphalt road. Pain sears up through my knee with each step. My bones crush against each other. My chest is burning. I feel my heartbeat slip out of rhythm. My pulse pauses and then trips ahead. *Faster, Carol*, I silently urge myself forward. *Keep going*.

I look around for a place to hide. I know my captors will be close behind me. They always are. They always chase after me, hunting me down to imprison me again. But why? The question pursues me as relentlessly as my captors do. Why do they keep me a prisoner? Why won't they let me leave? Why do they always follow me? I don't remember much about my life, and I'm often confused, but one thing remains clear: I don't want to be with these people.

Ancient oak trees flank the roadside. I limp off the path and lower myself to the ground behind a thick, dark trunk. I can feel sweat leaking down the back of my neck. Leafy branches arc high above my head, casting shade and making it hard for me to see. I wonder if the shadows will help hide me, but I know the tree trunk is my only certain protection. Hopefully, they won't see me here.

Why am I so tired? Why does my body seem so frail? I look down at my hands as I sit there. Why is my skin so wrinkled and thin? Why do my fingers seem so gnarled? My captors are young and much stronger than me. If they find me, I will have to go back with them. I don't want to go back.

I hear their footsteps as my captors near my spot beside the road.

"Carol, where are you?" One of them calls out.

"You need to go back to your room," a different voice calls out.

I glimpse them as they walk toward me. I recognize these two girls. What are their names?

Why can't I remember their names? One has glasses with peony-pink lenses. The other has a bird tattoo above her elbow. They're wearing the matching blue uniform all my captors wear.

"Wait," one of them stops, "there she is. See the purple."

I hold back a whimper. I look down to find I'm wearing a lilac-colored blouse. Why had I worn this?

They round my tree. The one with glasses kneels down to me. "Hey, Carol," she says, "Come on, it's time to come back. You know you aren't supposed to run away."

I don't resist. There is no point once they've found me. They pull me to my feet and bring me back to their building, leaving me in my room.

I don't like my room. There are no windows. I do have a chair and a bed. Every morning, someone in the blue uniform helps me move to my chair, and every night, one of them helps me get up into my bed. I have a TV too, and sometimes I watch shows, but it is not enough. I still get lonely and restless. I want to work in my garden and see my friends. I can't remember who my friends are, but I know I have them, or at least, at some point, I did. I don't know how to get back to my garden, but I know I need to get my roses ready soon. Only I know how to tend to them properly.

Someone knocks at my door. Someone unlocks it on the other side, and the door opens gently. "Grandma? It's me."

Wait, I know this girl. She is my granddaughter. Her name is Carly. How had I forgotten about her? Of course! She had come to rescue me.

I push myself up out of my chair as she steps into the room. My legs are shaking.

The Captive

“O, Grandma!” She takes my arm and steadies me. “It’s alright. You don’t have to stand for me.”

“I’m so glad you’re here,” I smile at her. She is a lovely girl. I’d forgotten how old she is. She has to be in her twenties. “I’m ready. Let’s go.”

“Wait, wait, we’re not going anywhere. I’m just here to see you.”

“Not going?” My voice quivers, and I start to cry. “You have to help me. Don’t leave me here.” She looks at me sadly as if *I’m* the one who doesn’t understand.

“Now you just sit down. And don’t run away again, okay? We don’t want you getting hurt. It worries Daddy too. He said if you run away again, we’ll have to find you a different place to live, but the other assisted livings are a lot farther away from us. I’ll come back soon,” she smiles again. “Now that it’s fall, I’m just a few minutes away on campus.”

She leaves, and I sit alone in my room. I’m still a captive, but she said she would be back soon, and maybe next time I can make her understand.

Leah Johnston delights in capturing beauty through various forms of art, including music, photography, painting, and writing. She specializes in writing short stories but dabbles in poetry, songwriting, and academic writing. Her photography is featured in *Pure in Heart* magazine’s November 2025 issue. She is a worship leader at her local church and organizes a writers group called “The Quillers” with a variety of individuals from her community. She has hopes of earning a degree in communications and of reading each of C.S. Lewis’s books before she graduates from high school.

start to sip caffeine from tins
I've heard it's supposed to help with this

paint the nails a darker shade
crop the hair, a drastic change

build a new aesthetic
while I pierce holes in my skin
a body to be painted with fresh ink

buy a ticket to New York,
maybe Boston
I haven't been there yet

expending every energy possible
in trying to feel something again
stringing me along in a game of pretend

plant my feet in a world where I don't exist
only playing a character
ever changing, always bliss

constantly redefining, reimagining,
the person that I choose to be
never content with what I see

when will I understand what is me?

Gabrielle Greenlee, a freelance writer currently located in Florida, is an undergraduate student studying English. As a born and raised Delawarian, many of her works stem from her natural experiences in that area. Raised in a conservative Mennonite community, she aims to push past the boundaries in which she grew up, wrestling with the reality of determining one's own beliefs. Her creative projects revolve around themes of spirituality and self-reflection through multiple mediums of art. She not only creates written pieces, but she also experiments in songwriting and painting.

Today I asked a sandhill crane
as he craned his neck and scratched the sand
beneath a Christmas palm: "Why would you
ever migrate from paradise
to God knows where?"
The bird squawked an appropriate response
I could not interpret
and stabbed one last lizard
through the lizardy heart, gulped it
down the grateful gullet,
then beat his wings through the Christmas
fronds, flapping awkwardly
as if hungrily following some all-
consuming Star.

Sword of Truth

Acrylic Painting
Heather Dickinson



On a record player,
monks spin notes like silence
in moonlight at sunrise.

Words throw shade
against living-room blinds
burning as if protesting the age-

old raising of rent and lack
of bread. Praying with the poor
a thousand years young

keeps irregular heartbeats
one step ahead
of the riches of death. I fear

for everything most mornings
when I hear the tv, radio, phone;
and yet I fear the nothing

less this morning
when monks spin records
into the living room—

all of them dead, and gone, and
still—
singing in the Kingdom.

Yes, We Can Have Class Outside

Poetry

David Athey

In the cemetery,
our class is searching for signs
and wonders of light
to write. The crypt
where I plop my notebook
is chest-high, the home
away from home of one
Anonymous. Died 1900. Such robust
stability—this mass
of concrete molded
by shadow and sun. And the wind
through the banyan tree
is the elder poem
of this place, a love-sung
presence strong enough
to crack the crypt,
eventually. And now
rest peacefully, Anonymous,
as we are bound
to continue (the class
scattering ahead) among the signs
and wonders of the dead.

David Athey's poems, stories, essays, and reviews have appeared in over a hundred literary journals and magazines, including *Christianity & Literature*, *Iowa Review*, *Dappled Things*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Windhover*, *Tampa Review*, *Relief*, *Seattle Review*, *Notre Dame Magazine*, and *Harvard Review*. Athey lives in South Florida on a small lake with large iguanas. His books, including *Art is for The Artist*, are available at Amazon.

Lightning cracked across the dark sky, splintering the abyss with fearsome illumination. Angry waves tossed Jonah's little craft, jumping inside to assault him and rob him of every last dry stitch of clothing he owned. The rain crusaded viciously from the vaults of heaven as if God had decided the flood wasn't so bad after all.

Jonah was on the run. He knew he wasn't going to get away with his crimes on land, so he embarked on a grand odyssey, with no hope of getting anywhere. His canteen had run dry, and hunger tore at the cage of his ribs. He was too weak to face the storm on his own, but what choice did he have?

Stupid, he thought to himself, *at least in prison you'd be dry.*

Yeah, he replied, *well, how does dead sound? Electric chair, lethal injection? Maybe even waterboarding? Wouldn't be too dry then.*

Just as he was contemplating his decisions up to that point, he became aware that the storm was not pushing him farther into the middle of the sea, as he had assumed without really thinking. Instead, he realized he was suddenly close to shore . . . a light.

Unlike the lightning that haphazardly illuminated his watery world every minute or so, this light was designed to illuminate.

Wonderful. They're looking for me.

Mustering up all of the strength he could, he readied his oars (for there was no way to effectively sail in a storm like that) and rowed as hard as he could into the desolate ocean. He wanted nothing more than to be back on shore, but that dreadful search light kept him away; even the famished tiger in his belly seemed to lie down so that he could focus on escaping his just damnation. However, the harder he rowed, the closer the light seemed to get . . . the harder he rowed, the harder the elements strove against him.

The Lighthouse

I'm not gonna make it, am I?

Jonah heaved a sob that racked his whole feeble body. Nothing in the world could have been colder than the sense of dread that poured down his spine, making him want to throw up—but of course, he had nothing to regurgitate. He dropped the oars and buried his head in his shaking, callous hands.

Oh, I'm sorry, he cried. He cursed, and cried, and thought of the life he left behind. His wife, his daughter and boy, his God. He wept as he thought of them, until his eyes could offer no more tears, and his mind could offer no more thought.

His wretched ghost abandoned him.

“Look like shum poo’ soul din’t make it thro’ last nigh’,” commented the lighthouse keeper, noticing through his window a little empty vessel washed up on the rocky bay, sails drawn and oars hanging out the side as if they had been abandoned for a lack of hope. “It’s always them dadgum outlaws, think the beacon is out to find ‘em.” He gestured passionately but vaguely at the now-calm sea. “Nah, boy, what good it does fo’ a lighthouse to stand out here if ain’t no body gonna go to’t?”

Alexis (Lexi) Solomon is passionate about literature. She grew up in Florida, spending all her free time reading, writing, and climbing trees. Now, Lexi enjoys long walks, quiet coffee shops, and good audiobooks. She plans to attend law school after graduating with her BA in English and work towards a career in pro-life advocacy. Her God-given passion for this civil issue has been a driving motivation for her involvement in ministry, public policy research, and development of rhetorical skills. Lexi is sure to integrate her love for writing in everything she does.

Heather Dickinson is a somewhat feral teaching artist in eastern Washington, who dabbles in poetry among illustrated sketchbooks and outdoor adventures. Her days are spent disciplining young creatives in Catholic education. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in English (LCSC 2006) and a Master of Education in Humanities (GCU 2025).

Laura Deschenes is a born-again Christian who desires to honour and glorify The Lord Jesus in everything that she does. She is married to a wonderful man named Seth, and they have a wonderful son who they love. Laura enjoys spending time with her family, exploring the outdoors, reading, writing, and creating things using different forms of art.

Gail Purdy is a writer and visual artist living on the west coast of British Columbia. She is the runner-up recipient of the 2021 International Amy MacRae Award for Memoir. Her writing has appeared in the 2021 *Amy Award Anthology*, *The Bluebird Word*, *Last Syllable*, *Quillkeepers Missing Pieces Grief Anthology*, *Witcraft*, *rhizomag*, and *Four Tulips*. Her photography has been included in *Beyond Words*, *The Waxed Lemon*, and *January House Literary Journal*. Long walks in the forest accompanied by her inner child nurture her creative soul.

Editor Bios

Kira M. Tjomsland's award-winning work—specializing in fantasy fiction, travel nonfiction, and ekphrastic poetry—is published in journals including the *Rectangle*, recognized with distinction by the Palm Beach Civic Association in partnership with James Patterson, and presented at English Honors Society national conventions. Her recent work can be found in journals including *Four Tulips Press*, *Still Point Arts Quarterly*, and *Living Waters Review*. With an honors degree in English and creative writing, Kira's academic adventures include a semester abroad at the University of Oxford. Currently preparing to pursue an MFA in creative writing, Kira lives in south Florida with her husband Cade.

Ariane Campbell has published poetry, creative non-fiction, and award-winning fictional short-stories in journals across the U.S. With memberships in MENSA and Sigma Tau Delta with two poems in their international journal *Rectangle*, Ariane loves literature. Studying her craft in the U.S., England, and Australia has earned her two Bachelor's degrees, and now she's in pursuit of a Master's of English at Clemson University. Academically, Ariane has an article in *Oil, Gas & Energy Quarterly* and an article in *Westmarch*. Away from the writing desk, Ariane can be found baking or researching her next article.

Grace Cram is a writer and poet armed with a Bachelor's degree in English and a little student debt. Born and raised in Minnesota, she resided in Florida for seven years, and now lives in Colorado, effectively living in almost every climate the U.S. has to offer. Grace has been invited to present poetry at two national English Honors Society conventions. Her work is published in *Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle*, *Living Waters Review*, *Saw Palm: Florida Literature & Art*, *The Sailfish Review*, *Euphemism*, and *Clackamas Literary Review*.

With a B.A. in English, **Sarah G. Pouliot's** stories and poems have appeared in journals such as *Cagibi*, *Saw Palm*, *Timber*, *Relief*, *Ekstasis*, and *Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle and Review*. In 2022, she received the International English Honor Society's Runner-Up Award in Creative Nonfiction, and, in 2024, she received the Scholarship & Christianity in Oxford's De Jager Prize for innovative research furthering disability studies. She is proud that her research expanded the breadth of books on this topic available to students at the Bodleian Libraries. She now works as a nonprofit grant writer, where she partners with philanthropic endowments and foundations to fund initiatives that uplift women worldwide, with a focus on the demographic of mothers.

Avery Bryant is a Systems Integration Manager by day and a writer, artist, and cinematography enthusiast by night, based in Orlando, Florida. She serves as editor of *Wandering Lights* and as co-social media manager. Dedicated to both the literary and visual arts, she designed the cover for *Wandering Lights* inaugural issue. Her work has appeared in *Sigma Tau Delta Rectangle* and *Living Waters Review*. Through her creative and editorial work, she seeks to cultivate thoughtful work that engages readers with purpose and artistic integrity.

Originally from Kansas City, **Hannah Moore** is a Legal Assistant for a law firm based in South Florida, as well as a Project Coordinator for a Texas-based marketing firm. She is also a published poet and photographer, with pieces featured in *Living Waters Review*, *Westmarch Literary Journal*, and *Kelp Journal*, as well as a piece forthcoming in *Streetlit*. Outside of work, she can be found paddle boarding, taking hikes with her camera, or socializing at local coffee shops.

Terra Miller hails from across the U.S., and it reflects in her writing inspired by multiple states and countries. With poetry and short fiction published in a few different magazines—including *The Bluebird Word*, *Westmarch Literary Journey*, and *Tenth Muse*—she has also placed in a fantasy-based writing competition. When she's not working or writing, she can be seen reading in local parks of central Florida, walking a dog (who might not be hers), or playing bass and acoustic guitar. She also has a tendency of diving down rabbit holes of interest when time allows.

