

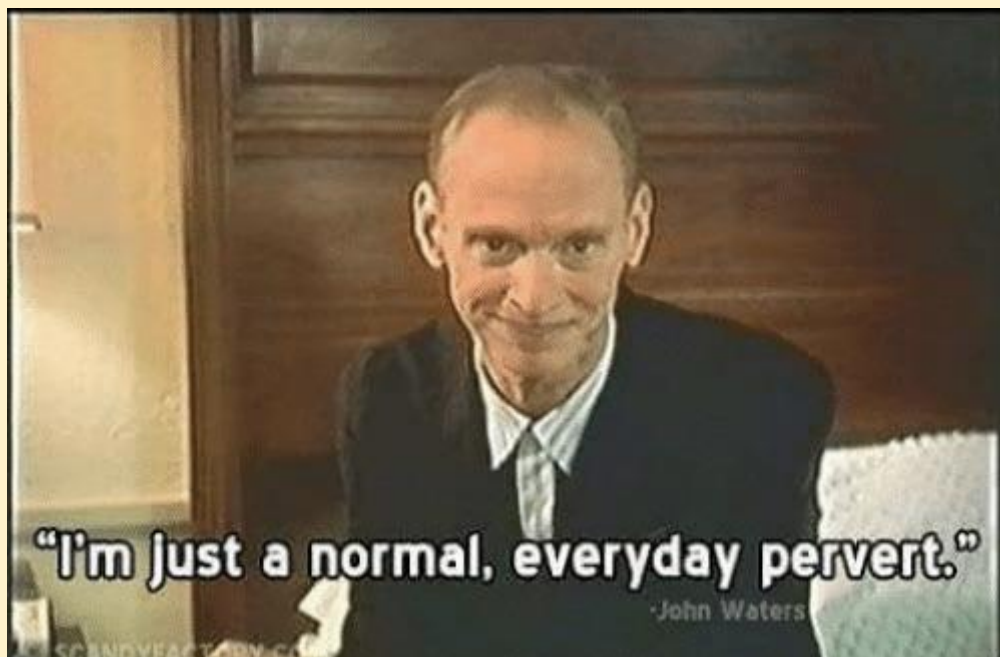
SCAB

ISSUE #14

CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE	1
I'M AFRAID OF GROWING UP AND BEING RUN OVER BY CARS (ELLIE CHOU).....	2
IMPALE (MARK WARD)	7
NO TITLE (ALEX ROSE).....	8
STATEMENT, WITH REDACTIONS (SILAS DENVER MELVIN).....	9
SCENES ON THE VOID (JEHAN LIYANAGE)	10
DUPLEX (NEIL HENDERSON)	17
THE VIRGIN MARY CLIMAXES (RENÉ BENNETT)	20
USER ILLUSION – THE EMBRYONIC STRUCTURE OF MY PSEUDO-BRAIN'S FUTURE STORYBOOK ORGASM (TRISTAN LINKLETTER).....	21
PAWS LANE (JAMIE GILES)	22
TIME TO PRETEND (JASON MASINO)	25
MY FATHER IS A CORPSE (LUKE MCCARTHY).....	26
LADY DIVINE AND LOBSTORA (NICHOLAS ALEXANDER HAYES)	30
ARRANGEMENT / MOLLUSK (ERIC CLINE).....	31
EGG (AI FEITH)	32
CRACK A WINDOW LET ME BREATHE (JOSHUA JONES).....	34
BOTCH (LEE PEARSON)	35
CBT MAN (B. H. FEIN)	37
KATE FOX 1848 (LOUISA KEIGHT)	39
CHIPPY DOES A DANCE AROUND THE CAMPFIRE (SEAN MEGGESON)	40
DEUS (MATEO OMAR)	42
LETTER TO THE GITTIN PLACE (CRAIG KIRCHNER).....	43
I WANNA BE YOUR DOG (GABRIEL MATTHEWS)	46
CENTURION BLOODBATH (BEX PEYTON).....	47
FROM BOY TO BOY (ENZZEON).....	49
A STUDY OF A NIGHT SPENT ALONE (DOL LEANDER).....	52
ONE OF THEM (SHANE ALLISON)	54
SCRABBLE FOR 1 (KEVIN JOHNSON MURILLO).....	58
AFTERWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	60

EDITOR'S NOTE



March 2024

D.

I'M AFRAID OF GROWING UP AND BEING RUN OVER BY CARS

Eliot wakes up with the sun. The world unzips for him like surgery. He rolls off the mattress into an automatic crouch and uses his face to fill the hollow shaped by his knees. Breeze from the air conditioner slinks along his back, pawing at his neck and shoulders. Sunlight falls on him in splashes. It wavers with him and feels incredibly warm.

Cold air cleans wounds. He doesn't know why he thinks this—a documentary, maybe, a thread, or one of his uncles, dead. Now sourceless, the "fact" fits into him featurelessly, generic and fragile like an insect's molt. His uncles are generally dead. Across his stomach, skin knots around punctures, bruising luridly. There are glass beads pressed into the wounds, and foil sparkles, and cat teeth (flecks of them). Ornaments for minor hurts, they mostly commemorate breakups. He idly thumbs their tidy half-circle.

The exes:

Derek, his American history teacher, broad, early thirties, pudding-faced, coffee-brown hair with bone-sliver accents, a delicate person, intricate and obsessive. Divorced, a kisser. Like, he calls himself that.

Lou. "Gingersnap" in his head. 87, flaming-red hair blanched to the color of corn husks, more short than tall. Hazel eyes, Pisces. His nose is abrupt and blocky like a tin whistle. His tongue is like one of gooey parts inside a fish. It's the color of eraser shavings and it gets used a lot—on envelopes, on him. But he never fucks him or, as far as he knows, anyone.

Lorie, a girl a grade under him, almost famous for walking along the side of the almost major road leading from the high school and getting into whatever car stops first. She's me, I guess.

His brother.

His dad, dead now like an uncle.

...

I'm older now. I don't know much about anyone I used to know, but I learned Eliot has been drowning cats. As I'm typing, he forces a tabby in his mom's hot tub—the third cat this month, the second cat this week. He's angry in a way that feels like *Never happened*. Or feels like *Never*. In the world below, life resolves into makeshift foam. It's magic to him. He imagines Ariel, adoration, inventions of detachment. He feels knives where there are no knives. His sunken hands emit their substance, transforming the water with an undetectable pink. He squeezes harder. There's a muffled pop.

"El?"

He turns to look at me. His eyes look like bugs, but pretty ones.

"What?"

"Are you done?"

"Done with what?"

He slivers a smile, one that makes him, or me, look insane.

"Never mind."

I look at his hands. They're not much bigger now, but still bigger than mine. They're hairier. The hair makes the cat scratches glow.

"What's up? You want dick again?"

"Fucking no, Jesus."

"What? You always want dick."

He does a shimmy in place and flips it out. It's not hard, just dark. I can smell him. I realize, in a different way, he's in the same room as me.

"You're getting cat blood on your dick."

"It's good for my skin. And it'll make it easier when I fuck your ass."

We sort of look at each other's eyes and not into them.

"Were you always this sick?"

"Sure. Basically. Lie down, I'll show you."

...

I don't look as he sets up the needle. It hurts more when someone else does it for you, unless they love you, which Eliot doesn't. I feel him dig around in my arm with it, scraping things that make me numb to my wrist. He doesn't think about it—there's other veins you can see but he goes for the generic place on the inside of your elbow. I close my eyes. I feel him slide down my shorts and aim them at a corner.

Meth feels different from a needle. Nicer. It makes me want to be nice to him. It makes me want to pretend I'm a needle.

"I used to really like you."

I'm not sure which one of us said it.

I feel it as a piece of me slops out of the back of my head and drains through the pores in the tile.

"I don't. Not anymore, anyway. Maybe never."

“I wanted to marry you and maybe have kids together. That’s the way I liked you.”

He looks at me again. I’m prettier than I used to be. It annoys him. He’s still a faggot who keeps bags full of cats in his house, and I’m almost a normal girl, to everyone who didn’t know me for too long at least. I like that. And it doesn’t bother him, since he knows how to remind me of everything, like high school.

I watch him decide to be nice. “Neither of us knows what that means.”

...

He likes the feeling of me shuddering as he smears some runny goo from the cat on my face. He likes sludging my shirt. I feel him grab me hard enough to leave a bruise.

I’ve been through enough therapy to be inhibited, so most men aren’t violent with me anymore, at least not at first. Later, they usually stop themselves.

Eliot never treats me differently.

When I was a teenager I only slept with men I thought were gross, the most disgusting ones I could find. Slobs and porn addicts. Safe, slimy, cautious pedophiles.

Eliot never disgusted me.

He doesn’t have to do much. He puts a hand on my throat. His eyes change. If I look away or start to say something, he grabs a fistful of my hair, raises my head half an inch, and slams it down, hard. He doesn’t like tears. He doesn’t like begging. He doesn’t like it when you give up or zone out. He doesn’t want you to feel special, like he’s doing anything to you out of the ordinary. He just wants you to know what he’s really doing and endure it for him. He’s allowed. He’s the only one who’s allowed. The only obvious thing he does is spit.

...

I think about the cat until he comes. Then I do too, thinking about his hands.

Afterward, he lets go and checks himself in the mirror, rinses himself off, brushes his hair behind his ears the way a girl does.

He turns to look at me over his shoulder.

I wonder if he'll kill himself one day.

"The train's leaving soon, and the next one isn't coming until six. You're not sleeping here."

Ellie Chou makes art, writing, and some of the confusing things between them. Her poems have appeared in early issues of *The Adroit Journal* and *Chant de la Sirène*. She writes about relationships and a few of the opposites of relationships. She lives in New York.

Impale

With my back against
the full-length mirror, he towers
over me, by design. His cock ring,
the perfect pressure to ensure
attraction is secondary. He removes
my hands, repeatedly. His dick
twitches when my throat refutes him,
each retch stiffening his spine.
I am wet eyes and spluttering, spit
trying to mediate. There, that moment where
he wonders if I'm dead, that's when.

Mark Ward is the author of *Nightlight* (Salmon Poetry, 2023) and four chapbooks: *Circumference* (FLP, 2018), *Carcass* (7KP, 2020), *HIKE* (Bear Creek, 2022) and the Choose Your Own Adventure sonnet *Faultlines* (voidspace, online 2022/print 2023). He edits *Impossible Archetype*, an international journal of LGBTQ+ poetry, now in its seventh year.



statement, with redactions

i sin well & often & my blood
 is mostly kept inside &
 i am very poor at [REDACTED]
 & i do the dishes
 for that is my worth & i want to
 [REDACTED] & [REDACTED] between the
 legs & i want this despite knowing
 the hard & murky roil of shame
 that will follow & i have to be careful,
 careful & if he palmed the back of
 my head to turn my mouth toward a
 pillow & called me “boy”, no, not even “good”,
 certainly not “his”, just said with his
 throat, acknowledged, that i am boy & can be
 [REDACTED], i would draw up my thigh & allow it
 & likely not cry & i breathe stupid
 in my sleep & my mouth open & a
 hand on [REDACTED]
 & i [REDACTED] & i [REDACTED] & i want someone to know all this
 without ever being told
 & a small voice... “hold me.” & here, i break—————

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 been published or is forthcoming with *Antler Velvet*, *Toyon Literary*, *WACK*, *Bullshit Lit*,
Doghouse Press, and other outlets. silas is the head editor of poetry for *Beaver Magazine*.
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[@sweatermuppet](#).

Scenes on the Void

The week's diet was 14 pistachios, one Boulevardier, half a Manhattan, a vitamin supplement, and an ounce of Campari shaken over ice. Today the world has given you a bright, cheery day, with which you stumble through downtown with a hammer throbbing in your temple. You have slept three hours this week, your eyes bulged and hollow, an overstimulated zombie. Your gut is stuck in a rage of squelches and grody bawling; you scramble to find the fortitude to not throw up. You told him you had done it before; you hadn't, but you wanted to seem equal to him. You did what the twitter thread instructed, and when he came, you held it in and took it with one gulp. In the parking lot of a subway you dry heave till your throat is sore, to no relief. As you close in on your residence, a man is wrestling a barking rottweiler to the sidewalk. You brush past them, unfazed.

Already thin and drenched, an unhealthy blare of his undone shoulders, then developing darkness, opens today. A lovingly bandaged rat wriggling in his dirty denim; strawberry-red urinals scald my tongue. Sloppily bit off scabs fly off your gums; his whetted cavity shears your smile and the fleshy dust which constitutes it. Carpet thirsty for your dreamless blood. Your wrath rocking in a pert void, slick with solitude. Sallow bones haloed with stale piss. Rawness finds itself staring — not at a body but at quaking ribs. C's liver empties his tension on my uncropped forehead. Leftovers bashed into a concave tongue. Razors domesticated in your toenails.

The mirage mops your staticky bones, you are paralyzed, and now the real trip begins. Your brain is poisoned with a psychotically intense sense of being; you are the seraphs bleeding sour lime from their gums; you are the fleshy skull of a billionaire watching eternity bleed into your genitals; you are the decapitated cockroach flailing to scrape against the aether; you writhe in your own presence, offended. You are smart enough to know not to get up and kill yourself just now, so you manage to scamper through the sludge and stuff your head into your headphones. As your favorite album floods your consciousness, everything changes. Your eyelids begin to float on puddles as you submit to a divine lightning marbling the meat of your eye. My knees beat with energy as streaks of biophilia stab my brain. Life is worth living.

The next morning you forget what exactly the lightning looked like, and you stay in bed.

Hey just wanted to let you know before I forget to tell you

When we meet up on Monday I'll probs be coughing when I speak, and it's not cause I have a cough like the contagious disease or something like that. It's a side effect of my medication, I've been coughing for the past couple of weeks now so it's not contagious. Ye just letting you know bout that before I forget and have you be worried bout getting sick

But anyways youre still in missisuaga right?

Hows is it?

So much better than London solely based of the fact that as a P.O.C I get more attention and action here

Like if your not a fit white dude you're not even seen or tapped

How have you been dealing with the cough and beddy buggs

Wait I told you bout that

So it wasn't bed bugs I was having an allergic reaction, Its not totally gone but I'm muscling through that and the cough

Cause I went outside and continued to get fucked up by rashes

Okay mr muscles grrr

Should be writing something rn talk to you later

K c ya

You flinch as he burns his presence into you, lying faceless and untamed to your side. Sopping trash bag at the waist, insect fucker giddy at letting a meek blade drag down his spine. In pain-limited slow motion he rots in his hoodie, the sleeves growing dank and muddy. Abandoned teacups find their blood in the ear of the bed. Newborn tortoises stranded in a mild heaven boil together. 9 poorly handcrafted Freudian explanations and 3 pedophilic beatniks later, the night comes down on us.

Hey how's it going

I noticed catperson as one of your tags do you have a cat?

It's been okay!

Sorry, just been busy with school!

Yeah I've got a couple of cats :)

Oh nice, I have two cats one of them is an asshole the other one is alright

This one is the asshole

The cute ones are always assholes LOL

So I'm looking to blow a cute guy and you seem to fit the bill so far

My other cat looks vile but she has an excuse causes she like a stray cat we took in so she's hard,
this one will just die if we lose sight of her

Oh

Ahh that's fair hehe

Ye I'm in town for like the next week and just kinda down for whatever, just like going with the
vibes for rn.

I'm supposed to be writing something rn but I just have no energy, Do you have anything going
on for Halloween?

G has a tattoo on his cock, of his cock, but two inches bigger. His overgrown nails plunged deep into my scalp and a greasy pith of latex wrapped around my tongue, he scrapes a fork against my eyelids. His tongue sopping with mezcal as he laps at your neck, my knee violently slammed into my forehead. You can hear a dog whine only when the thunder's hushed. A mattress gutted and

drenched. Tongue smothered with gravel and a thumb excavating a crushed tooth. Maple syrup clouds his cum, wallowing in your apathy. Elephant tusks grow from the eye of his penis.

Her silhouette whispered in the window waves me in. I struggle with the door as my socks bleed. I notice a familiar record displayed on her wall and compliment her on it. She ignores you and instead cushions your genitals with her palm. The black opals pressed deep into the flesh of her eyes stab your own. Her wet lips are a dim oil puddle, her pallid legs are cobwebbed, her hair is sopping with thermometer fluid, her pink cock is polished and obnoxious. She undoes his belt, but he gets to his knees before she can. Precum caught in his beard, he obediently looks up when she says "I'll tell you when I'm close to coming, stop for me then. I'm trying to see how long I can go for."

Her panting in the cold above me and the head of her cock painting my acne, he makes a quip about her pet cat lounging behind. She smiles and says that's enough. You sit on her couch and continue playing with the thin film of phlegm leaking from her penis, and he pretends he can't hear her when she insists it's your turn. She isn't interested in anal; she just wants to suck you off, and you can actually come for her. You sit there and feel your own sticky teeth while she unzips your trousers. You ask if he could feel up her body, because he isn't hard yet, so she lies across his knee. He finally gives up and recommends it could get hard in her mouth. A small bundle of piss-drenched enoki mushrooms sit on her cheeky tongue, and your rotting eyes stare at the apathetic cat for the next damp minute.

You tell her that you'll make up for it next time.

With your beard smeared with her precum, you sit in a bright, bustling movie theater. Salt and fat hug your tongue. A child runs across a projection of an insurance commercial. My phone buzzes.

Hows ittt going?????

Seated for some movie rn, its whatever

Actually pretty bad day but its one of those things where I feel like I've learned something from
how shitty it is you know?

Soapy boobie pic?

You like boobs?

Sorry I should've read what you typed out before I sent that

You're only seeing cheap graphics and tacky luchadores: plastic, tasteless hallucinations. The bedbugs are merciless, and I give up on writhing and just bask in the pain. You put on the saddest album you know to coax something profound out of the specter, to no avail. The album bitterly ends, and David Berman's voice surprises you from the autoplay. The first time you took a gram you spoke to his floating head; today he is absent. Your least favorite Father John Misty song is on when your face becomes soggy; the song still isn't great. A Big Thief song meets the energy you wanted to steep in. Then you hear Bill Callahan's voice in a song you've never heard before; it's weird and funny. You play it again, and then play it 30 more times. On the 23rd play you reach in and start trying to scratch your throat, growling as you gash your tongue against your fangs. Your impression of what a face looks like is distorted; you claw at any language you can unearth. Once he hacks up a few words he feels competent enough to scramble to the bathroom to bash his head into the bathtub.

Heyyy hows it going?

Not the worst, I haven't done shit today just been laying in bed

rilly wish you were here

do you think you could come over?

why whatd you want to do

nothinggg just like kissing

cuddling

slap me rape me choke me

ummm

im sorry

im down to come over but honestly I don't think I can like make too many promises? like idk whats up with me I think its like my meds but ive had some problems with penetrative sex, like I can come over and get you off but I cant promise I can do that specifically

oh wow just saw that last bit

lmao sorry

anti-depressants?

Ye

Sorry to hear that, I mever had that problem but that must be hard. I have like a sstrap on if you just want to get me off?

Ye if that's something youd like totally, if oyure for that sure I can come over

Hmmmmmm

You know what we should probably go on a date first

Oh ye actually good call sure

Mmmmmmm

I have a dildo here could you tell me what you'd do to me?

The mouth chalky with a whole bottle of Lactaids and pubic hair stuck in the molars, he runs wild across a deserted city. The mound of a wrapped homeless man the only thing keeping him company as he looks around baffled at the vacant streets. An hour early I was a hunter, overflow of the bone. Freshly born scabs are married to the dried semen on my face. Grainy flashes of a wolf staring out of his balcony, questioning if he should jump. Knife deep in the throat of existence, bloody urinal water gushes from the gums.

If this homeless man has been homeless for long enough, he at some point must've been asked to suck dick for money. That was the same way you found out, but did he do it?

Bloody semen coughed up on the pavement.

They spend their day on fucking crippled gay cushioning; and the night on reincarnation. Demographic of scraggly m/ggots found out of paper vaginas, haggard lives echoing in the fringe of a grainy howl. Playing on swing sets with wrists pre-slit.

Jehan Liyanage is a Sri Lankan writer currently studying in London, Ontario, completing a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing at Western University.

Duplex

'You stole my body,' the old guy chortles, and the mirror image – a thin-legged 13-year-old boy – wonders whether to smile or grimace. 'I was the spit of you at a young age,' the old guy explains. 'I loved the attention my adolescence commanded.' Staring in the mirror, the old guy moves his hand across the mirror-boy's straggly fringe, brushes it aside as he explains how he knew to use his youth discreetly. 'Albeit impulsively! Just as you can, deary,' he says. 'Hey! There's something we'll have in common, eh? Our little secret.' This insidious request and overfamiliarity are not unfamiliar to the boy. The child's sloe eyes, solemn face. Pale as chalk. Behind a weft of long hair.

The old guy kisses the boy on the nape of his neck, working his thin lips up to the boy's left earlobe. Snatches the flesh, clamps it between his teeth, and tugs. Tugs twice. The boy grits his teeth and remains silent. Unphased, the old guy fusses and licks, sticks his tongue into the boy's ear. The boy is unsure when he last used a Q-tip. The old guy reaches earwax and mimics pleasure – wum, wum, wum – like he's eating dessert.

The old guy pets the boy, strokes his torso, cuddles him – wum, wum, wum. Whatever he thinks he does, the old guy isn't sharing his joy with the boy who is now listing forward, physically cringing at the sound and sensations being made by the old, receding, repulsive Sloane.

'You're the spit of me when I was young.' The boy is beyond this adamant charade. He accepts his role – sharing in the old guy's nostalgia. 'Call me Daddy.' Refilling the old guy's legend of himself with aspects of himself he doesn't see. Part of the deal to which the boy contributes, willingly and successfully, is participation without judgement. No big deal. He couldn't give a shit. The old guy's bribery is not the boy's first corruption. The boy fell unconscious, felt wasted, tainted, before the invitation to participate came his way. The veins in his young arms blackened and diagrammatic: a vivid vascular map just under the surface of a boyhood slammed, overdosed, and weakening. The boy knows there is only one route out of the stranger's bedroom.

The mirror-guy squeezes mirror-boy's left nipple so that the flat flesh turns pink and upright. 'You love the attention, don't you?' sneers the old queer, right hand probing the boy's crumpled paisley boxershorts, groping the cotton crotch. 'Oh yes, very like me.' The old guy has the boy's ballbag clutched in his hand, clenching and unclenching the testicles.

Because of the zopiclone and vast quantity of GHB, the boy knows his erection is lost in the dark of a moth-size box. Not even the Viagra will get his dick hard. But the old guy is really revving up on the old excitement. The boy can feel the old guy's cock stiff and ready, pressed upright against his bum.

Confused by his mirror-self and physical sensations, the boy grunts, indicating encouragement like he's enjoying what the guy in the mirror plans for him. His response is tokenish, and it works.

'Lanky!' The old guy delights in himself. 'Full of bones.' Frottaging to and fro. Watching them both. Young and old. Feeling his arousal gaining potency.

Duplicate boy stares at the boy looking from the looking glass. Eyelids drooping on the cusp of sleep. Infested with zopiclone, he feels himself slip – mentally sinking when the old guy repeats that they were the spit of one another 'when I was your age'.

The boy wonders if this 'spit', this likeness, includes the syphilis scars. Picturing 'Daddy' in classic white Calvin Klein underwear. Old, misshapen droop. Bad ink. Sagging biceps. Tenacious grey beard. Disembodied voice.

'It is only a mirror, a mirage it comes between/us.' I touch your face, it says. I give my strength. The voice is neither timid nor of lavender descent; the voice is gold – Paco Rabanne eau de toilette, Benson & Hedges cigarettes. The silage of the old queer himself.

The boy lists and tilts further forward, gets pulled back, feels himself yanked like he's the selvedge of a piece of fabric, gripped tightly and rearranged. I want to see you naked. Old hands pull the boy's underpants deftly down. Thin legs unsteady. The boy's moderately well-sized penis is almost erect. The boy has surpassed himself; his physical configuration

is less crumpled and more fresh-faced again. Yet, despite the vigour, he slips from the crux of the old guy's elbows, from moral support. Bent forward, spiked on a pilum of hard dick, riding it furiously.

Ah, the music of squelching, filth-lined intestine – image gone from both sides of the looking glass. The boy, he is catatonic, dreaming of celebrity shoes and a coronation pearl to replace his missing front tooth.

The mirror renews its reflection: the old Sloane queen shaking out a cadaveric spasm of jizz.

Neil is an Outsider writer looking in. He loosely identifies as [@ quincunx](#). Their themes incorporate boyhood / body dysmorphia / sexual misadventure / disenchantment. Their prose poem *Cherry Zero* can be found in [@textsyouwishyouhadntsent](#).



The Virgin Mary Climaxes

I take you in metaphysically
 Or: a mist swells into the dawn
 My blooming soul as pink as seashells
 Shattered against rocks, a crash
 My lucent phantom, my falling apart
 Give me the rust that reminds us we're aging
 Give me the age that swallows you night
 After night, panic attacks, drug binges,
 Benders that reach heights of holy proportions
 Followed by an ocean like a sadness larger than yourself
 O I see a light
 The sensation of crying without crying
 Getting fucked in the posture of crucifixion
 Why me? Why this immaculacy?
 A rush of golden wind that flurries my hair
 A tantrum of desire swept into the air
 The presence of another: a tornado
 My shoulder blades pressed against tile
 I don't want to be chosen, I just want
 To be held for a while

René Bennett writes about desire and catastrophe. Find more of his work at renebennett.persona.co as well as in his forthcoming chapbook, *Hymnal for Catastrophe* (Mouthfeel Press, 2024).

**User Illusion – The Embryonic Structure of
My Pseudo-Brain’s Future Storybook Orgasm**

You cum in my mouth like extinction, shampoo
of thought unpuzzled in this galaxy of swimmers
racing for a prize not there. My father’s camera
opens an eye, captures a confused face. Fluttering

from shelves of indulgence like a corpse’s hand
seeking the pinkish glans of my virgin organ
and I wince. Don’t know why. But your hard-on

is full of difficult questions, erectile tissue vibrating
cats sneering horizontal flame-inhibiting lenses.
The reek of frozen gasoline, hapless twitching, eyes
sparkling erect popsicles and “Smile pretty!”

sings the next boy in line when he means open
the organ of your mouth and love it with your slippery
heat, subjective forgetting in the mystic “I Am”

texture of childlike mystics. Beguiled, they listen
for each unstructured epiphany, weaponized globs
of yesterday’s swimmers a tangle of potential
vacuum-sliced gay bands. Erasure. The musical

spunk seeps from a fretted neck’s tension, its throb
to drums in the bulbs of our ears. Policemen
in squad cars not yet erased from pornographic.

Tristan Linkletter’s noösphere frequently reverses coherence, slips him into the intentions of trees and how they’re a form of loneliness we climb like a ladder. Immersed in the cataclysm of climate change, Earth’s fever to relieve herself of humanity’s viral brutality, he dreams himself out of chaos on the unceded ancestral homelands of the Cheyenne, Arapahoe and Ute peoples now called Colorado, where he lives with his toothless house plants dropping him out of warp drive so he’ll *never* get home and his rescued Etch-a-Sketch with only one knob working.



Paws Lane

Paws Lane was a children's show broadcast on ITV in the mid-1970s. If you don't know it, think other programmes from that era for an idea of the vibe: bright, wobbly, cardboard-looking sets. A friendly, folky theme song. A strange sense of post-hippy optimism released into a concrete grey decade.

It was set at Paws Lane – a veterinary hospital home to a menagerie of puppet animals, all with their own minor injuries. Chip the dog with a paw in a sling; Clop the horse with a bandage around his head. The only human ever on screen was Nicholas. Nicholas Rooney had been a gangly thirty-ish puppeteer whose kids' stage shows were popular at UK seaside resorts at the time. These got him the gig in television in the first place. An average episode would be based around Nicholas explaining basic educational concepts to the inquisitive animals through song and dance and play.

Only a dozen episodes of Paws Lane were ever produced. Nicholas Rooney would be the victim of a Sunday tabloid sting outing him as a gay man. The specifics were hardly too salacious – he had several male partners, all of whom were his age – but, back then, they didn't really need to be. The production company was spooked by the attention and quietly shelved the show. It wasn't buried per se, popping up as it did on repeats over the years, but instead forced into a quiet, very early retirement, ensuring its status as one of the more obscure pieces of children's entertainment of the era.

I adored Paws Lane. I was nowhere near born when it was first broadcast, not watching it until years later, when for whatever reason the show would be repeated early on weekday mornings. Five-, six-year-old me was off school a great deal in those days, asthma seeing me housebound for much of my childhood. I was enraptured by this safe, colourful, animal-friendly world: but who knows why this particular show out of dozens?

Nicholas Rooney never worked in television again, his treatment putting him off the industry for life. He returned to a career of theatre shows, holiday resorts and parties. Years later, when he was quite literally an old man and Paws Lane had been rediscovered by the YouTube and TikTok generations, he even did shows with the puppets in nightclubs and student unions, the material this time filthy and comedic.

I met him before this period. I was twenty, working in a holiday resort as a Redcoat. Nicholas was there on a summer stint doing his puppet shows. Some of the animals from Paws Lane were amongst the cast, although most of the kids in his audience almost certainly had no clue as to who they were.

On the last night of the season, there was the obligatory messy staff piss-up. I had met Nicholas a couple of brief times that summer but had kept quiet about my childhood love for his work. That final night, I gravitated towards him. He'd been sitting rather awkwardly by himself, clearly biding his time before being able to make his excuses and leave. He seemed more than a little baffled by the attention I began to give him.

Back in his room, when I removed my t-shirt, revealing my smooth, toned torso, he quite literally looked up at me from the bed in awe. I was, by then, a far cry from the sickly child

who had needed Chip and Clop for company. He sucked my cock with an almost desperate gratitude. On his back, knees pulled up to his shoulders as I fucked him, his moans and cries sounded like those of an old woman. I ejaculated up him thinking of Tony, my young fitness trainer boyfriend that summer.

We are told not to meet our heroes, but rules for fucking them are somewhat more vague.

Months later, in the winter, my mother would collapse dead of a heart attack. I would return to the cold north of England to help with my sister in clearing out the house. Mum kept lots from our childhoods: in a stack of old schoolwork and certificates, I found a picture I'd drawn of the Paws Lane animals. You'd only really recognise them as animals if you knew what you were looking for. There was a bizarre humanoid figure I took to be my representation of Nicholas. Across the top, in scrawling, barely legible lettering, I'd written, MY FRIENDS. I didn't really remember drawing it, but upon seeing it, I remembered the picture itself and its presence in the house stuck to the fridge door during my early childhood years. I looked at it, and my sister, younger than me, sidled up behind me, peering over my shoulder.

'Your friends?' she asked, her smile gentle and a little teasing. 'And who were they?'

Jamie Giles is a writer and artist living in Norwich, England. His works have been published in *SCAB*, *Misery Tourism*, *Cinema Schism*, *Mother Rubber's Fun Dungeon*, and elsewhere. His (oft-deleted) Instagram is currently [@jamiiegileseroticartist](#), and he is on Twitter as [@scumbooks](#). His collage work is on IG as [@withcuts](#), and more writings are at [@textsyouwishyouhadntsent](#).

time to pretend

hold it back, hold your breath
suck your stomach in
breathe green, blue, then green again
grit your teeth

pretend that you don't notice her lipstick stuck to the tips of her teeth
or how she probably hasn't showered in at least two days
and how you can smell the sweat sticking to her face from 15 miles away | pretend that you don't
have mommy issues | pretend that your mommy is hugging you tightly right now

pretend that you're not upset | pretend that you're not talking to yourself | pretend that you're not
hungry; not feeling like your brain is forcing your vision into spirals | pretend that you don't have
sesame seeds stuck in your teeth | pretend that she's not a metaphor for those seeds

pretend that you're paying attention | pretend that you're not horny | pretend that you're not
judging yourself for thinking it's been too long when it's only been two weeks | pretend that you
don't feel guilty for your high sex drive | pretend that you're not rubbing your taint during the
Zoom sesh

pretend that you're doing more than just stringing random words and thoughts together | pretend
that you're doing something | pretend that you're not drunk at 2 in the afternoon during a meeting
| pretend that nobody else notices | pretend that you mean something | pretend that you matter

Born & bred in California, Jason Masino received his BA in Dramatic Art from UC Davis and his MFA in Poetry from Regis University. His work has been published in *Cultural Daily*, *Inverted Syntax*, *Rigorous*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *fifth wheel press*, and others. His debut book of poetry, *Sinner's Prayer*, was released in 2022 by Passengers Press. He currently lives in Denver, Colorado.

My Father Is a Corpse

My father is a corpse. This is the truth. I tell my friends this and they laugh. They think that I speak in metaphors, that he is a bad man, that I hate him. But the words I speak are true, and despite what my friends may say, I do not in fact hate my father. He is simply a corpse – rotting, disfigured and pungent – and I cannot blame him for that.

•

When I bring friends back to my house, I often say to them: “Would you like to meet my father?”

They then laugh in response, and, still giggling, ask: “Oh, you mean the corpse?”

“Well, yes,” I respond. “Though I think he is more than just a corpse. His name is Samuel Carrington, and he is the man who raised me.”

It is at this point that I sense some confusion on their part. Their laughter, previously playful, becomes more measured, slightly hollow. Sometimes they cough, as if to indicate discomfort or a vague, queasy unease at my silence. Do they want me to laugh too?

As I bring them further into the large house my father and I share, the smell, easy to ignore at the house’s entrance, becomes more apparent. The air begins to feel thicker. At this point my friends look at me, as if to ask – is this normal? – and I simply look ahead, for of course it is normal (what else did they think a corpse would smell like?). I then walk them up to my father’s door, these people – friends, lovers, sometimes even my colleagues – individuals who I have spent a good portion of my life around, people who I have told, multiple times and without any sense of irony that, yes, my father is a corpse, and they look at me, scared, as if I have somehow been pulling the wool over their eyes, as if in this moment they are unlocking some deep and inhumane truth about me, because the smell is absurdly pungent by the time we get to the door, and I say once again, “This is my father’s room,” and they begin to choke on their spit, itch at their cuticles, rub their eyes over and over like it will do something, like it will do anything to change what they are about to see, but it won’t, because when I open the door to my father’s room, there he is, as he always is, perfectly dead and perfectly corpse-like, a grey, rotting husk of a human, but, more than that, more than anything really, a father to me. “That’s him,” I tell them. “Would you like to say anything?”

Many of my friends then shut the door. “No need to be rude,” I say to them. At this point most of my friends begin to cry. They ask me why I would do this to them. They tell me that this is not okay. They declare that if I really loved my father, I would bury him, would whisk him away in an anonymous coffin like every other dead father in the world, placing his body under the ground where he could decompose in private and I could never again see his sunken eyes and clotted flesh. But I do not want this. Nor, I think, does my father.

•

After meeting my father, many of my friends call me up days later, complaining that they cannot stop dreaming of him. They say that no matter where their dream takes place, whether it be in a field or a sidewalk or an abandoned movie theatre, always he will appear, and though many of these friends had not seen my father before he became a corpse (sometimes I too forget that there was a time when he was not this way), they always state that in their dreams, he seems to be in perfect health. In fact, they say that he seems to be the model of health. He appears to them as handsome and youthful. Always shirtless, veins protruding from his thick arms, curly blonde hair sitting at shoulder length. In these dreams, whenever he looks at them with his dark green eyes, their colour so vivid that they appear to be almost separate from the rest of his tanned face, they state that they feel warm, as if they are being held by his gaze, as if their entire dream-body has been enveloped in pure light, a light which, by all accounts, emanates from my father.

It is hard not to feel jealous of my friends, for I see my father every day and yet I do not dream of him. In fact, I do not dream at all. To me, sleep is an abyss. I fall into a dark well of nothing and am reborn every morning. I used to think that this was normal, for if one does not dream, how could they imagine in the total empty space of sleep a parallel world that they do not have access to? Why should it exist? What purpose could it serve? Sleep has always been for me a thing, a noun, a property of life that has no value other than the fact my body demands it. But to others – at least this is what I have gathered – it appears like something akin to a sensory poem, a schizophrenic collage of image and sound and circumstance that holds within its labyrinthine structure answers to questions so profound, so elemental that we have not yet found the words to ask them. I want to feel these things, but I cannot. My mother used to declare that my father was the same. “The problem with him is that he has no dreams,” this I always remember her saying. I would overhear these words as she spoke on the phone, in her room (at that time my parents’ room), whispering loudly to someone who I did not know but who always seemed willing to listen. She never explicitly stated that the man in question was my father, but I knew it was him she spoke of. I used to think this brought my father and I closer together, the not dreaming, the darkness of our sleep, but now, I mostly feel sad. I want to feel these things, but I cannot.

I often wonder what it means, that this man who in his pre-corpse life could never dream now seems to exist, to flourish, in the dreams of total strangers. Did his premature death give him something he had always wanted? I remember when I heard about the car accident that turned him into a corpse I did not feel sad, and perhaps this is why. Perhaps I knew that this was not so much an ending but a beginning. Yes, perhaps that is it.

•

When I first found out, I was sitting in my room eating a packet of instant noodles. I was watching a cooking show that I was not really paying attention to (to me it was the texture of it, of the chopping of vegetables and the curation of spices, utensils and colours – rather than the cooking itself – that kept me watching). Mum walked in, crying, and announced that my father was gone. At first I did not know what she meant. I was young, barely a teenager, and death was not something I had any intuitive understanding of. People died on TV shows. And even then, what did that really mean? To be not alive? I had barely spent enough time in the world to know what living actually consisted of. How could I comprehend the negation of it? And so, when mum walked in crying, her eyes wet and bruised, I stood up from my bed and walked towards her and hugged her hard. I hugged her because she was crying and because I wanted that sadness to end. But that was all I felt that day.

It was only when mother pulled me into the room to look at the body before the funeral that I truly realised what had happened. The totality of my father's deadness made me tremble. Seeing his motionless face made me feel dizzy. Though I was looking at him with my eyes, could see him lying there on that dull concrete slab with the kind of alien clarity only possible under the white glow of fluorescent light, inside myself I also glimpsed a dark, black void. I felt my legs give way and a gaping chasm tear apart my tiny chest. But only for a moment. Then, I was back in the room, standing still and upright. I had the sense that in that moment I had glimpsed something that I was not yet supposed to see, something that I felt as a full-body thrum but could not yet comprehend. This something existed as a sensation, an intuition, and it seemed to me that if I let it exist as anything more, I would crumble inwards and dissolve into ash.

I looked intently at my father's dead face and realised that I had never seen him so peaceful. He was perfect and still. My father had long, black eyelashes and his lips were full and plump. I tried to remember a sound coming from those lips, but my mind conjured nothing. I once again began to shake. What did his voice sound like? My father up until that point had only been a father, but seeing him dead, I began to wonder what else he could have been. Was he a good man? Was he kind? Was he funny? I realised instantly that I did not have answers to these questions. I realised that my father was simply my father. Nothing more. I suddenly imagined his dead body as a large block of pale limestone. I was struck by that image, and it confused me, that I could somehow see both a middle-aged male and ancient rock at the same time. I imagined this white limestone being carried by someone across a vast desert, many years ago. I did not know where this person was carrying it, but it was clear to me (and to them) that it was to be a part of a larger structure, perhaps one with vaguely religious overtones, a house of worship maybe, or a monument dedicated to an ancient and now long-forgotten God. The person carrying the stone was sweating

profusely, but I could sense on their face, in their downcast but determined squint, even in the way that they held the heavy stone on their shoulder, using every muscle available to them, treating the rock with more respect than their own fragile body, that they felt that despite the arduous task that they were being made to perform, the end result was a worthy one. The limestone was becoming both smaller (now one single brick amongst many other bricks, all practically indistinguishable) but also bigger (whatever the monument was, when it was completed, this single brick would suddenly become an essential part of something large and cavernous, a structure that humans would look to for years to come if they ever wanted to contemplate all that made them feel small and insignificant, like little specks of dust in the vast cosmic wind). The person carrying the limestone suddenly stopped – it was clear that they had reached their destination – but, before I could get a glimpse of what they were actually building, even where in the world they were, I once again saw my dead father’s face and felt my consciousness being forcefully, violently pulled away from this vision, away from the desert, out of the past, and suddenly I was once again in the dimly lit morgue that smelled only of harsh metal and cleaning products, standing quietly beside my grieving Mother, staring intently at my dead Father. It was then I began to cry.

Luke is a writer and artist currently based in Melbourne, Australia. His criticism has appeared in publications such as *The Guardian*, *The Saturday Paper* and *Overland*, amongst others. His fiction will be appearing in the forthcoming *Heavy Feather Review*, *Soft Stir Magazine* and *Jacaranda Journal*.

Lady Divine and Lobstora

"It's wonderful to feel this far gone." *Multiple Maniacs* (1970)

opens the of suburban		loose divinity of piss Christ passion piss elegance saints.
blood shoots bothered sugar cane sickness fertilizes terminal ampules of beatnik terminal ampules of cum wake old drunkards of indeterminate		from a grave- armadillo. cum. childhood.
avoid from despair's and cat eye identical of inner velvet seem	ghouls eviction. arched lips replicas divinity and vodka visitors	mascara. very old.
identical replicas		of inner divinity
spawn extend gurgling	play horse, night, and rampage from	cloacas.

Nicholas Alexander Hayes is the author of *Lexicartographies* (BlazeVOX). Instagram:

@nicholasalexanderhayes Website: <https://nicholasalexanderhayes.com>

ARRANGEMENT / MOLLUSK

I love that which longs to kill or else to harm me,
or that which would if it knew that I existed.
Violence like a cracking of knuckles, a tick
one cannot discern the cause of, a shiver felt
in both cold and not-cold. Something which dwells beneath
the sea and is older than the shape of the land.
Tentacles extended not in invitation

but with artist's drive to arrange the carnation
of my intestines. Within my own depths, a gland
secretes some thing which longs to be smelled. Eager, teeth
follow nose, via fin. Love by act of harm dealt
to skin; unraveling. Let the water grow thick
with what I contained: latitudes. We resisted
nothing, will birth everything. Taste placenta. Glee.

Eric Cline is a Virginian poet. His chapbooks include *his strange boy eve* (Yellow Chair Press, 2016), *something farther across the ocean* (Throwback Books, 2017), *cicada shell: life in a queer body* (Tenderness Lit, 2018), and *The Temporary* (forthcoming from Glass Lyre Press).

Egg

Bounce. Up and down. Side to side. Bounce. Bounce. Bounce. It keeps bouncing. It never fucking stops. I feel it in my skull. Bouncing. Side to side. Up and down. Bounce. Bounce. Bounce.

It is made of rubber. Sounds like rubber. Feels like rubber. Bounces like rubber. It jumps from my left ear to my right one in an instant. The top of my skull constantly demolished by every impact.

I've learned to live with it. Live with it, huh. I've stopped living for it. All I do is sit, alone, in the dark, in my bedroom. Day in, day out. Smoking. I smoke so much. I smoke so fucking much. My lungs have shriveled to the size of two dates. Tiny, tiny dates. Every breath stings. Every cig stings. All my breaths are smoke now.

I open my door twice a day. Once for lunch. Once for dinner. Food is just there. There is no one left in the house. Not since my mother died. So I don't know who or what is bringing me this food. But the ball in my head tells me not to go check. Just focus on her. It's all that matters. She's all that matters.

My penis has fallen off. One day, when I woke up, it lay next to my head, on my pillow. It was black. It didn't use to be black. The hole that remains where it was attached to my body started small but grows little by little every day. I don't know when it'll stop. Maybe when the ball stops.

I don't open my eyes anymore. I know where everything is. Food is to the left. Toilet bucket is at my feet. Cigs on my chest. Protruding from it.

I used to spend all day jerking off, but that's no longer possible, or wanted. The last two packs that I got didn't fall from their chest shelves. They got stuck. And they melted into me. I have breasts now.

It keeps bouncing. Telling me it's not worth it. That I shouldn't leave. That all I need is her.

It is slowing down. At its pace. But it is slowing down. The tips of my fingers have turned into rubber. Every day, the ball slows down and I become slightly more rubber.

It has stopped. I woke up today, cigarette on my lips, lit, somehow. And there was no bounce. It had just stopped.

My body is fully rubber now.

I left my room today. A monster. Rubber. A living thing. But the bounce was gone. The

world outside was as dark as my room. But I opened my eyes now. And I am getting used to the low lights. I can see now. The food is gone. The fridge is empty. The bathroom spotless. My phone dead.

I am rubber. But I am free now.

Ai Feith is a multidisciplinary artist working within Sound Art, Music, Filmmaking and Literature, exploring stylistic, content and formal limits in each medium.
[<https://hyperfollow.com/feithling>]

Crack a Window Let Me Breathe

One of these days I will listen
to your song, some place
that isn't the floor. This morning
I came on the carpet
on all fours
in front of the window
overlooking
a train station, a shopping mall.
Pluck your strings, harpy. Sing
while I clean up. I'm on top
of the world.
I wish I could say, "I love you"
without you saying, "Yes, of course
you do,
you love everyone."

Joshua Jones is a queer, neurodivergent writer from South Wales. He co-founded Dyddiau Du in Cardiff, a library and artspace led by and for LGBTQ+ and Disabled communities. Local Fires (Parthian Books, 2023) is his first book.

Botch

A visit to the doctor is a recipe for embarrassment that Botch tries his best to avoid, but it is necessary from time to time. After a long wait in a cold, gray room with a little speaker on the ceiling that's been hoarsing out the sexless, limp-dicked sighs of some 80s smooth jazz waste of air, the doc comes in to draw blood. Botch tries to restrain himself.

Most people will get squeamish under the spike, blench when it pierces with its tip so microscopically fine that they can't even feel when it's eased through the skin and into the soft tissue below. But not Botch, not since his brief but profound affair with H at the ass-end of eleventh grade. When he couldn't even do so much as jerk off for how numb he always was, needles started taking on an erotic quality. It was pure orgasm leaked straight into the system, full-body cum seizure so goddamn good he'd accidentally piss in his jeans and not even notice until he'd come up out of the dooper mind-womb sometime later, long after the piss had already dried and rashed against his dick n balls. Injection is the superior method, more personal and ritualistic than just smoking the shit off a sheet of aluminum like a rube jackass. The high is better, too. The process of cooking and loading up his spike and mapping over his arm for a good vein popping up ripe below the belt was an eager game of tender foreplay, just as lewd as when it'd finally hit him mere seconds after he pushed every drop of it deep into his body. Botch would whisper out a little death, then reduce himself down into his bed until his muscles started humming those low drones that brought him into absolute numbness, all feeling leaked out like semen from the paling crown of a dead, flaccid cock. He'd stare at the floor or the ceiling, or he'd fool around with the fresh hole on his thigh or in the crook of his arm. Sometimes he'd press his finger in, hard, writhe the tip on the rim of the wound until it began to gape open and he could see the cherry-red viscera starting to prolapse out the dermis. He'd push in until he was knuckle-deep, two knuckles if the meat would let him and he really wanted to see some part of himself utterly destroyed. Then he'd finger-fuck himself until he started to feel something real. Jerking off while high never felt like anything, playing with sad, soft dick-meat that just spewed out little spackles of pathetic piss, the muscle dysfunctional with the junk in it. But the non-pain of a doped torture session was like stepping over a threshold into new expanses of feeling unknowable to any sober nervous system. Self-surgery in the bathtub, seeing the way his meat worked without feeling it, his own body intangible as his soul waded in and out, totally detached, apotheosis, perfect rapture,

Botch's heretical reconfiguration into some lower lifeform that existed solely to intake sensation indiscriminately. But his sense of self-preservation kicked in and eventually prevailed in the form of a little state-sponsored intervention, rehab, court-ordered.

Now Botch has a job, car insurance, methadone treatment. Sometimes he is forced to hold in his piss for hours at a time. With his probation finally over, Botch's tastes are much more sustainable now—whiskey, weed, psilocybin, occasional flirtations with methamphetamine—but, as his new general practitioner has just discovered, needles still really turn him on.

Lee Pearson is a writer that lives and works in Northwest Arkansas. He has no credentials or accolades. He's been running *God's Cruel Joke* literary magazine since late 2022.

cbt man

cbt man

graduate of x university

member of y association

i'm back again

to tell you that i've been having trouble

sleeping that my life's in disarray

so you can offer your

commiserations

and i can plead for a reprieve

from the dusks that bellow mutiny

and you can ask me

to unpack that

and i can u n p a c k t h a t

and you can say that's

progress 🏆

and i can sense it isn't

and you can record that in your doctor's scrawl

and i can assure you

it's not my family friends love life biology mania academics

causing this it might be just the way i am permanently

and you can record this too

and i can go quiet

and you can tap your cheek

and i can remain quiet

and you can fix yourself a tea

and i can want to steep your session notes in ichor sigh them aflame

and you can recommend an emdr exercise we've already tried

and i can humour you

and you can ask how that felt

and i can feel like screaming

and you can recommend the same sleep hygiene books again

and i can claim this might be the one this might be the way
and you can smile and declare that rome
wasn't built in a day
and i can say that's true that's good
and you can smile and look at the clock and ask
how i'd like to pay.

KATE FOX 1848

When I tap you tap you bones in walls
come and see translucent pupae bloom
from paneling and drop. I pick a limp fat

maggot and press it to my tongue communion
wafer like creek days stale Margaret's jackblack
saline-cracker cunt taste and when I tap you tap.

We have this new toy. I talk to you
alphabet my sister ash and grey and sweating.
Pearls of teeth and ribbons of hair

girl-treasure for the suitors who come tap tap
to see red miracle of the dead we can hear
until they found me in the morning

spine in two places one hand waving
from across the room and fathom five memory
splattered tap tap up the boards.

We can talk to them tap tap or not at all
my God is a kind God he keeps us in the walls

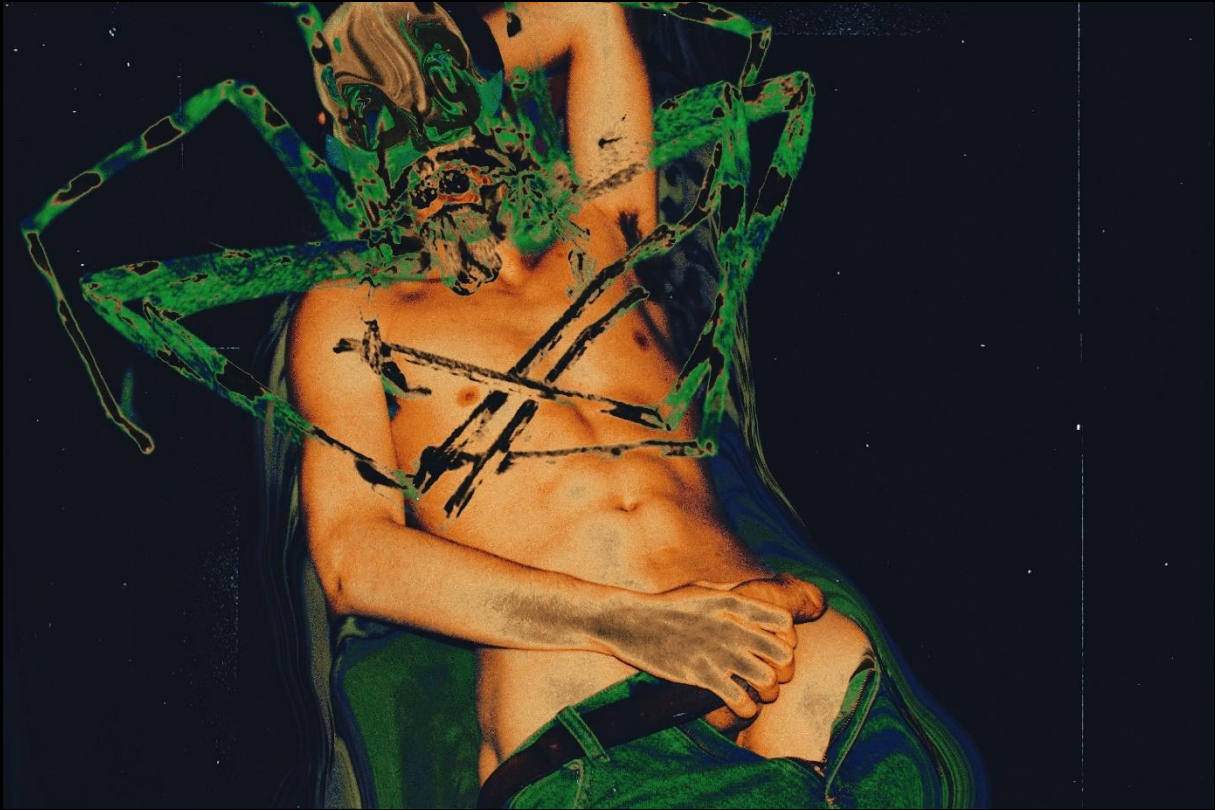
Louisa Keight is a writer based in London, UK. They have been featured in *Inters(p)ect* and *Letters by the Windowsill*. In 2021, they won the Funny Women and Quantum Leopard Awards for writing things that are funny, and now they want to write things that are horrible.

Chippy Does a Dance around the Campfire

There he goes around the flames like a love snake,
seducing Satan or Satan seducing him.
If a squirrel were to appear
he'd hump hell outta it in a pentagram.
We stand around the campsite
drinking rye, cheering on Chips.
Someone starts blasting Abba
and Chips goes into convulsions,
and starts floating above the ground,
his toes curling with ecstasy.
Victor freezes and drops his tin cup,
Ronaldo kisses his Bible.
Chippy's clothes fall off him and
every muscle on his body glows like an amber disco gem.
Father Nye shoots back his drink and runs for it.
Into the dark woods he goes, Latin on his lips.
The Abba stops playing and it's crickets.
A grey squirrel does appear and while
Chips is suspended in air, bound by—who knows—Satan's chains,
the squirrel moves toward us with amorous confidence.
It surveys the campsite, shakes his head and says,
"I shall discuss *corsi e ricorsi* for we are near the end."
I gulp and ask, "Of?"
Silence. A branch breaks in the dark woods.
Again, desperate, "Of?!"
The squirrel morphs into a mini Anton Chigurh and says,
"Everything. You stand to lose everything."
I say, "Uhm, excuse me, but didn't he—I mean, you—
put it a little differently in the film?"
"Times change, friendo. Times change."
Chippy is let go and falls to the ground in a heap.

Chippy is then possessed by the voice of the Woodsman,
“This is the water, and this is the well, drink full and descend.”
I shoot a glance at mini Anton and say, pissed,
“Mixing movie metaphors, aren’t we?!”
Silence. Anton’s none impressed.
I add, “Well, what the fuck?!”
Anton morphs back into the squirrel and
bounds back into the darkness, saying,
“I shall ascend into the trees and urinate
upon your faces as you sleep.”
I shout after him, “We can live with *that!*”
“Get up the fuck up already, Chippy! Dancing Queen.”

Sean Meggeson lives in Toronto, Canada. He works full time as a psychotherapist. He has lectured on a diverse range of topics, including Lacan & James Joyce, Neurodiversity, and alternative rock music. Sean recently has had poems published in *In Parentheses* and *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*. He holds an M.A. in English Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Denver. Find more at lippykookpoetrymachine.blogspot.com.



Deus

Mateo Omar is a photographer, artist, and writer located in Southern California. His art-photography account is [@arachnidollhouse](https://www.instagram.com/arachnidollhouse).

Letter to the Gittin Place

You told me that first night at the pub
that you slept with every poet in Wilmington,
excluding girls and Methodists,
hating Methodists, but with no clue why.
That night was your pick-up,

*I have a monster father-thing,
I'll take a double of anything brown,
straight up,
choked on an ice cube once.*

They didn't have a drink to take away
the taste I had of your fresh face flirting.
To your place. Three flights up. I stayed.
Small cunning hands, neck, and throat,
a young Bardot body and look.

Spent weeks watching your eccentricity,
but never felt I grasped its essence.
Talked a lot, you rattled on and loved it –
like 'Tango' with more conversation.
You called Jesus uncle and had no idea
who Buddha, Marx or Mickey Mantle were.

You told me my cum smelled like potpourri –
at that point I had to look it up.
And your smell – it stuck to my hands,
my sweater, my jeans – it stayed with me
all day and made me feel ripe.
You picked raisins from your cereal before milk,
but if I didn't buy Raisin Bran you sulked.

*It sounds worse on paper,
you giggled,
take those plump words and turn
those raisins into grapes.*

You were like the roof, moving
under the heat of day, writhing till the next sex.
Never stood still long enough to judge.
Suggested a threesome, changed your mind
in the time it took to make coffee.

We both loved to play,
take holidays you called it.
Remember Saratoga, won the trifecta,
stroked one another and drank champagne
until they asked us to leave.

You told me I was sensitive,
that you had a thing for poets,
had sensitive matters you wanted to discuss,
but never did. Nor did I ever see you
read anything, only mock the words.

*Forget that I'm young and pretty,
fuck me with those angry words.*

That I know of I've never written angry words.
You left town on a whim, same as you had come.
For years I'd think of you and get hard.
Now I think of you as one thinks of freedom,
or whenever someone mocks the words,
or licks their lips or moves a raisin.

Craig has written poetry all his life, is now retired, and thinks of poetry as hobo art. He loves storytelling and the aesthetics of the paper and pen – the parallel, horizontal blue lines on white legal, staring left to right, knowing that the ink, when it meets the resistance of the page, will feel extroverted, set free, at liberty to jump the two skinny, vertical red lines to get past the margin. He was nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize and has a book of poetry, *Roomful of Navels*. After a writing hiatus, he was recently published in *Poetry Quarterly*, *Decadent Review*, *New World Writing*, *Skinny*, *Neologism*, *Wild Violet*, *Last Stanza*, *Unbroken*, *W-Poesis*, *The Globe Review*, *Your Impossible Voice*, *Fairfield Scribes*, *Spillwords*, *Ginosko*, *Last Leaves*, *Literary Heist*, *Blotter*, *Quail Bell*, *Ariel Chart*, *Bombfire*, *Cape Magazine*, *Unlikely Stories*, *The Light Ekphrastic*, *Edge of Humanity*, *Gas Blog*, *Ink in Thirds*, *Journal of Expressive Writing*, *Lit Shark*, *Loud Coffee Press*, *Rundelania*, *Teach-Write*, *Variety Pack*, *Witcraft*, *Young Ravens*, and *SCAB* and has work forthcoming in *Yellow Mama*, *Carolina Muse*, *Chiron Review*, *Scars*, *Flora Fiction*, *Vine Leaf Press*, *Punk Monk*, *Valiant Scribe*, *Timada's Diary*, and *Versification*.

i wanna be your dog

chain me
to a post in your yard and
i'll tire myself out
running in circles for you
let me bark and bark and bark
until my vocal cords shred
and one day
you'll leave the gate open
hoping i run away
but i won't
i'll stay here
circling your fence
hear me claw and claw and claw
at the door until you swing it open
begrudgingly taking me in
waiting for the day
you can put me down

Centurion Bloodbath

His design is disjointed. He's a child but a leader, a guard. He's an angel but he's meant to be Icarus, yet he looks most like Eros or Cupid; just frankensteined purity and patchworked, erotic innocence. He's some soft projection of sharp shapes, sleeveless and skirted and flying, all shaggy brunette and cream-skinned kiddo, battle-prone/born/torn but just begging to be had—to fit right into a screen and a pocket and a mind. My box art baby. Still, he seems confused.

I know angel hole is heavenly, no pun, no question. When I imagine fucking him, my dick takes up most of his body. I'm not that big, and his form fluctuates in my fantasies from the length of a quarter to a full-grown toddler. Never bigger. Sometimes he is oscillating while I'm fucking him. He has become distorted in the guidebook as the ink printing melts, reconfigures under the wetness of my cum. Pages stick together and rip him apart in some places—he is deteriorating the more I think of him, look at him.

I've taken to only playing his game, flipping through his book, getting food delivered. I push wrappers out of the way to lie upside down on the couch, letting his music play from the TV and cumming in my own face to pretend it's his. It brings us closer. I can smell his combat-sweat, taste it. I suck my finger and imagine it's his little cock. I drag it, wet, across my whole body. I rarely ever have clothes on in my apartment. I rarely ever leave.

Maybe I'll see him in heaven. I'll walk to him head on. He'll show me low-health love and he'll be perfect—perfected: linear porno-bits among the clouds, brick columns, suspended platforms. Here, things are, smell sterile. I've come here for him. He's here anyways because this is where he belongs, healing and hurting: himself and others. He frees those frozen in stone with a mallet. They help him later. It's this predisposition to do good I'm so attracted to. Still, I don't know if I get it, him: my Geppettoian dream-spawn, the crafted, beautiful boy I don't fully understand.

Maybe he'll want my help. Maybe he'll free me like he does the others. Maybe he'll let me watch him closer. Maybe he'll let me fight by his side. His side, which is always one side or the other, is restrained here, as am I. My form is unfit, deformed, forced. I struggle to move, to stay in the lines. To turn is to change. To change is to reform. I'm cut up—pixel-scarred. Here is not heaven, just long and empty. I can't move. He fights and I can't move. The liberated fight too, are struck down. They pile up at the bottom. I smell them, their blood: septic gut-rasters never meant to be seen. My eyes have been kept open, my cock hard, for too long. I am compressed, oppressed, unrecognizable. He is disjointed. I am perfect.

Bex Peyton is an evil cyborg prostitute. Their work has previously appeared in *FLEAS ON THE DOG*, *SELFFUCK*, *Expat Press*, *DON'T SUBMIT!*, and *FERAL DOVE*. They are also the fiction editor of *Angel Rust*.

from boy to boy

it's safe to say
that the boys next door
are paler
thinner
taller
and more serious

and i'm a little more
than all of them
but not so pale
not so thin
not so tall
not so serious

all of them
all the boys next door
lack something
the emptiness they feel
is the same emptiness
that every boy feels

but they are
so innocent,
so delicate
and inconsequential,
it doesn't seem
like they constantly
sniff out
a certain specific type
of masculinity

they want
no matter how
to be possessed
in the cruelest way possible
and throughout the act
they look at you intriguingly
making the men on top of them
doubt what they really want

should they go deeper?
should they be kinder?
no, the boys don't deserve it
and i'm not like them
i don't ask,
i demand

but i'm not better than
all the boys next door
i also have my void,
a hole that never closes, never fills
and maybe that's what unites us

from boy to boy,
i hope that at some point,
throughout our youth,
we can find some kind of balance.

transgression, brutality...
i know, it hooks us
as if we needed it,
as if
there was something
in the streets

that we had lost

and who knows?

with one, two

or three hours

of pain

or pleasure

somewhere

maybe

we can find it

but it is a labyrinth

or a curse

even if you find something

to take with you

you must also

leave something

all the boys next door

no longer know

what they're looking for

what they've lost

what they want to find

what they should expect

or if they'll ever

be able

to stop trying

enzzeon is a collision of two different artistic processes (enzo/zeon).
brazilian multimedia artist, fan of björk, arca and rough sex.
instagram, twitter, youtube: [@enzzeon](#)

The Study of a Night Spent Alone

He calls when he thinks I am unavailable. If I pick up the phone, he will hang up and I will have lost that night. The voicemails he leaves me consist primarily of breath. (The first time he treated me to the sound of his heartbeat, I broke down sobbing into the line and nearly sent him off for good. I am no longer allotted a live interaction. Every time I dial, the tone of the robotic voice has me tensing until it starts. I will not let him catch me unguarded again.)

He is all ghost to me. There is no part of him that exists in a body, nothing tangible for me to latch onto in reality, nothing for me to dig my desperate fingers into or hump my hips against. Despite my inability to describe the curve of his lips, I know him innately.

There's this nasty habit he's got, one I would never chastise him for (lest I wish to ruin the intricacies of my own attraction or risk their exposure). I could go on and on about the ways in which his lungs fail him when it comes time to touch his own body. It is as though he is incapable of existing in a state of pleasure. It steals his presence from me, makes me wonder in fragile moments if he's simply a figment of my imagination, but I would be lying if I said I didn't enjoy it.

I prefer him when I can pretend he has just died in front of me, when I can tell myself that he truly is as ghostly as I experience. (A dead body is much safer than a live one, easier to predict and easier to keep.) The nights the message cuts off as he finishes are the best. I'll play the recording over and over until I can practically mimic his every move, until we become one and the same. Each time, the fantasy becomes more vivid than before, something enthralling to get lost inside of. It goes like this:

We lean back into the plushness of a stained chair, one large enough to swallow us whole in all the ways I long to consume him. We rub our hands up and down our thighs. Slow, fluttering fingertips refuse to remove fabric obstructions, and it is as though we don't know what to do with the flesh between our own legs. Not that it matters anyway, as we find ourselves bucking and writhing at even the suggestion of touch. I play my best at indifference at this display. But, with each heave, my hand twitches on the hammer.

It never takes much. And with the hitch of our breath, I swing. (A blunted object will always be more arousing than a cock. Its clean weight extended from my body with an ease that could never be matched by anything else. Its violence turned into a reminder of vulnerability.)

The crack of the impact comes as we do. Fluids soak through cloth with such a speed it becomes hard to remember what color they were before. The feeling of our soft skin travels through steel and wood into the palm of my hand. I can still feel its kiss after my weapon of choice clatters to the ground, convincing myself there will be an imprint left somewhere deep in my muscle as I watch our head swing back. The smooth slope of neck calls out to me, becoming stained as blood dribbles from our lips and the gaping hole I've left where our ear once lay.

With our cooling form comes the end of my facade. Knobby knees stab into my skin as I straddle and sink into the chair. My fingers find their way to the rough, wet edges of exposed skull, brushing fragments aside until oozing brain matter greets me. It squelches out when I dig in, soft fluid worming its way beneath my nails. My tongue is quick to follow towards our mouth, writhing muscle gliding into the goey mess barely trapped behind plush lips. I swallow shards of tooth and severed tissue as I explore, savoring the metallic tastes and rough textures gliding inside me.

I tell myself this way I won't have to deal with him ever looking at me despite our becoming permanently intertwined. (He is unknown to me the moment I consider that one day his eyes may land on my frail body, that he may force the both of us to confront the reality of our routine. Were he to finally meet the truth of me, I'm certain he would know every little thing I pretend to know about him and feel all the ways in which I am wrong.)

Instead, we are separate beings. I lie face down in bed, waiting for him, as always. (I become a dog at the sound of the phone, instinctually chasing pleasure, my libido elicited by the minimum number of stimuli.) I thoughtlessly rut against fabric rough with slick and desperately suffocate in this nothingness I've been given.

Dol Leander is a pile of disjointed mannequin parts and a writer that occasionally churns out something resembling art, which can be found through various links on kissableu.wordpress.com.

One of Them

One of them has a mullet
One of them has a tattoo of a spider-web on his left elbow
One of them has a thing for the other one
One of them hit on me last week
One of them got really drunk last night
One of them threw up on herself in the bathroom
One of them won't have anything to do with grapefruit
One of them gave his wife AIDS
One of them has a kid in college
One of them needs to have that mole removed
One of them got in a fight with her boyfriend
One of them is a top
One of them is a bottom
One of them got arrested for stalking
One of them is impotent
One of them used to be a game show host
One of them let fireworks off in the club the same year that Pulse Club massacre happened
One of them committed credit card fraud
One of them won't have anything to do with beets
One of them smokes too much weed
One of them drives a hybrid
One of them is polyamorous
One of them is pansexual
One of them is anti-social
One of them tried to commit suicide
One of them caught Covid-19 on a cruise ship
One of them got kicked out of the house for being queer
One of them likes wearing bowties with three-piece suits
One of them won't have anything to do with squash
One of them has a crush on Kevin Costner
One of them won't let it go
One of them won't leave it alone
One of them drives a Porsche
One of them didn't show up for the funeral

One of them is terribly mean
One of them thinks he's funny and charming
One of them has a brain tumor
One of them just had her last round of chemo
One of them is estranged from his mother
One of them has a brother in prison
One of them is a crazy cat lady
One of them got caught up in a sex trafficking ring
One of them held a gun to her girlfriend's head
One of them is always the last to leave a party
One of them is always the first to show up at a party
One of them puts smoked turkey wings in his greens
One of them had a heart attack last year
One of them ran away from home
One of them is the youngest out of seven kids
One of them won't return my phone calls
One of them says I'm too needy
One of them has a tongue piercing
One of them is allergic to shrimp
One of them has a bunion on her left foot
One of them was almost on *America's Got Talent*
One of them used to be a stripper
One of them left the country to get away from her abusive husband
One of them blew me for twenty bucks to support his crack habit
One of them loves cheese sticks dipped in honey mustard
One of them is dating an artist
One of them is addicted to poppers
One of them puts ketchup on his grits
One of them got frostbite in his hands two years ago
One of them got attacked by an owl and almost lost her eye
One of them sent me a picture of himself holding an eggroll next to his dick
One of them has filthy fingernails
One of them has a penile implant
One of them sent me a picture holding a beer can next to his dick
One of them makes the best weed cupcakes
One of them doesn't know his ass from a hole in the wall

One of them couldn't fix a hole in a paper bag
One of them loves everything Clint Eastwood
One of them has no idea what's going on
One of them needs to shave that Abraham Lincoln beard
One of them grabbed my ass
One of them got struck by lightning while golfing
One of them skipped out on bail
One of them cheated on his spouse
One of them is in an open marriage
One of them said, "Someday I will let you suck my dick."
One of them ate the last yogurt I had in the fridge
One of them ate the last hot pocket
One of them won't clean the hair out of the bathtub
One of them doesn't like drag shows
One of them reminds me of an old boyfriend
One of them has a kid in film school
One of them I want to slap in the face every time I see him
One of them used to be my friend, but isn't anymore
One of them tried to sue me
One of them broke her leg
One of them needs a kidney transplant
One of them hates women
One of them is a white supremacist
One of them is a communist
One of them won't keep her hands off me
One of them got her pinky toe cut off in a motorcycle accident
One of them is always high on something
One of them has a different girl every week
One of them likes mayonnaise on his hotdogs
One of them makes promises he never keeps
One of them has a pet python
One of them has two warrants
One of them is waiting for the right time
One of them is a control freak
One of them is mad at me about something. I don't know why
One of them has a pierced ball sac

One of them pressed charges
One of them almost didn't make it
One of them eats boogers
One of them never stops talking
One of them has a weird laugh
One of them has a prosthetic limb
One of them is allergic to peanuts
One of them hates her father
One of them hates the smell of chicken grease in the house
One of them ain't just whistling Dixie
One of them is attracted to me, but I'm not attracted to him
One of them hates the color green
One of them I sold for next to nothing
One of them died in childbirth
One of them was given to her aunt to raise
One of them will not bend straight out
One of them is fatter than the other
One of them will not come up
One of them only has one tail
One of them looks like her mother
One of them should not be drinking
One of them is always sick
One of them has only one tooth
One of them blocked me on Facebook
One of them said, "Had I known you were gay in high school,
I would have let you blow me."

Shane Allison is the author of four collections of poetry: *I Remember* (Future Tense Books), *Slut Machine* (Queer Mojo Press), *Sweet Sweat* (Hysterical Books), and his most recent *I Want to Eat Chinese Food Off Your Ass* (Dumpster Fire Press). His new collection, *Turbulent*, is forthcoming from Hysterical Books. When he's not writing, he's making collages.

Scrabble for 1

Anderson said, "I have some blow in my pocket."

And Denise said, "No you don't."

And Anderson proved her wrong by putting what little he had on the counter and keying it.

"Can I have some?"

Anderson made a gesture w/ his hands that read "All yours."

Anderson's parents weren't home, obviously, and Denise's were in Nova Scotia, so they were free to do all the stupid things teenagers wish they could do out in the open all of the time like drink, have sex, and, of course, drugs.

"How do you feel?"

Denise's nose bled a little.

"I feel very good!"

"I thought so."

They played 80s music and Scrabble (with each other's tongues). They got naked and touched each other's private parts w/ their hands.

"This is so much fun!" exclaimed Denise.

"I know, right?!"

Then they got bored of touching each other and watched TV and ate black licorice.

"I hope I never die," said Denise.

"I know, I hope you never die either."

"What about you? Don't you feel the same way?"

"Not really."

This perplexed Denise who was so overwhelmed with pleasure and joy and all the things a house rid of adults had to offer.

"Aren't you happy?"

But Anderson didn't answer right away. He touched his neck with the hand that had been touching her down there awkwardly moments ago.

"Why wouldn't you be happy?"

But all Anderson could think was that it was a shame that he'd given her all his blow and how maybe Shania could get him some more later and if he somehow wasn't a bumbling, fumbling idiot then he could touch her down there too and maybe even fuck

her, because Denise hadn't wanted to go that far, she said "Wait!", and he waited, but nothing else came of the waiting, he didn't even feel like coming.

"Hey, there's something I gotta do," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"There's something I gotta do. I forgot all about it."

"What are you talking about? What is it?"

But Anderson refused to explain himself and kicked her out. Even though it was too soon for him to call up Shania and he didn't really have anything to do, he forced Denise to leave his house and watched TV by himself and ate black licorice by himself and jerked himself off.

After he came, he didn't really feel like calling Shania either.

Kevin Johnson Murillo works as a medical translator in Alajuela, Costa Rica. Born Canadian. He's contributed some things to *Expat Press*, *samfiftyfour* and *EgoPHobia*, and his favorite place is nowhere.

AFTERWORD

The 15th issue of SCAB comes out in September 2024.

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scabmag.wordpress.com/submissions

For more overall information, please visit SCAB's homepage:

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