

A stylized illustration of a pink flower with five petals and a black vine with several leaves and buds, set against a light gray background. The flower is positioned at the top center, and the vine winds across the page, framing the text.

EDITED BY  
ERIN ELIZABETH SMITH

# DELICATE MACHINERY

**POEMS ON SURVIVAL & HEALING**

# Delicate Machinery

Poems on Surviving and Healing

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## INTRODUCTION

When we planned our first Retreat for Survival and Healing in 2017 during the #MeToo movement, we were admittedly a little nervous. We knew, personally, how the sinister tendrils of sexual assault can infiltrate every part of your life, how it can feel like it changes the very fabric of your being, and we felt a tremendous responsibility to hold survivors gently. We wanted to offer not just the vital space to dwell in the pain and loss, but also hope, power, and communal creativity. The stakes felt so high.

The attendees of the first retreat quickly created something beautiful, tender, and remarkable together, and left all of us changed. Each year since then, the retreat has its own unique personality, but is always transformative and inspiring. We are continually humbled by the resilience, bravery, and vulnerability of the people in this community.

Stories and voices like those included here are often excluded from the publishing landscape, to all our detriment. This topic is difficult, yes, and essential. So many of us have had our lives and selves remade by sexual assault. We deserve better. We deserve safety, freedom, agency. Our voices deserve to be raised, revered, and echoed until every one of us has what we deserve. We hope this anthology is a step toward that.

-Krista Cox

## ROWAN QUINCE BUCKTON

### Creatures of the Cetacea

v.1.

Today the radio told me / memory is a hoax. The scientist / on the program said we're all just/ re-  
imagining the moment / outside of the moment. Had / I know this sooner / I would have picked  
a different / tale. I never trusted my own story. Now it's a different lyric / I woke up without /  
sound. I woke / up my body threaded. I woke. /

v.2.

Tell it again.  
Render the action  
alive. Pluck  
me free of mourning.  
Suck me clean  
of bellow. Call  
home the body.  
Quicken my voice  
to sound.

v.3.

Biologists say the great blue // whale sleeps with its body half // awake, shuts down fifty  
percent of its brain // along with the opposite eye, while // the attentive side watches // for  
predators and obstacles, signals // when to rise to the surface for breath. // All these years I've  
been // trying to name why // my voice stopped sounding // but I was just half awake, a big  
blue creature // trying to stay alive.

Preferences

*for Gisèle Pelicot*

If you had asked at what age I would have preferred to be raped,  
I wouldn't have said *fourteen*.

Because at fourteen, you are not absolved.  
You are guilty for having breasts, for not distinguishing  
between the love of a father and the sex of a man.

If you had asked me where I would have preferred to be raped,  
I wouldn't have said *in a cornfield under the October sun*.

Because that would mean the leaves in their colors  
had also betrayed me when I needed the world's  
beauty to align with what was happening.

If you had asked me who I would have preferred to be my rapist,  
I wouldn't have said *my teacher*.

Because that would mean that someone I trusted had betrayed me,  
and I would need to distrust everyone after that to protect myself.  
I have only so many betrayals in me before I am changed.

If you had asked me what reason for being raped I would have preferred,  
I wouldn't have said *because it made a man who preferred boys*

*feel more normal in this world to rape a girl instead of a boy. For him it was a victory.*

Because then I couldn't even say I was an object of desire.

If you had asked me what I would have preferred to have happened to me instead of being raped, I would be speechless.

Because I didn't know in this world I had a choice.

## Let It Burn

This is our kitchen before it burned—  
dingy mint-green walls  
the color of dead caterpillars,  
square windows like mausoleum mirrors  
that cast back hunching bodies in Islamic prayer.

I am four and sitting on the man's lap.  
He wants to play a *good* game.  
No toys, no boards.  
Fingers dabbing.  
The splintering inside.  
A blaze sweeps upward from the kitchen floor  
as if someone strikes a match  
tosses it on purpose.  
The long table is now bright orange.  
At its center, the melamine fruit tray  
an homage to a late god,  
the cheap vinyl tablecloth, Mother's favorite,  
flares up, its edges browning like torched sugar.

Everything burns down—  
the Persian rug's flying stallions, cypress trees, white tulips,  
Qajar nymphs, jugs of wine, lovers coupling in the warp and weft.

Every yarn, a spindle of flesh.

No one puts out the fire.

There is No One

Two in the afternoon.  
Even God in Siesta.  
Children giggle, clutching alley pebbles,  
tucking them into slings—one sparrow,  
sacrificed, sprawled on the pavement.

Then, the red siren of a bombing,  
a wartime symphony.

I watch the top of a weeping willow  
parting the clouds. A man with wild hair,  
a ragged black mustache, grimy hands,  
scans his surroundings, circles me  
on his bike, asks me for directions.

I inch closer. He drops his kickstand,  
lunges forward, lifts my little blue skirt,  
touching the cold sweat between my thighs.  
He tugs at my panties, pulling hard.  
I bolt—run home, panting.

*A man touched me!*

*A man touched me!*



My mother, rinsing dishes, glances  
out the window. *There is no man.*

*There is no one out there.*

Fingermarks through my skin,  
carving into flesh, staining my bones.

12 ft for Boyhood Memory

The first turf I had was my innocence. Comfort, budded  
to discomfort me in a class of pupils & didn't give a reason,  
*no*— didn't ask for permission. So it is with whatever terminates.  
In a dream, I think my mother asked me if I was ever touched.  
I said nothing because *touch not* was a warning phrase whenever  
my hands slink towards our unclad lamp; a twine embedded  
in a bottle of kerosine that fuel the fire. As a boy, I've always  
imagined myself as an inferno. As I often say, *unsafe is (s)he*  
*that touches me or whoever I touched*. But Comfort didn't burn;  
rather, a melody died in me. & to keep it away from my mother  
was to bury it. I dug a grave 6 ft deeper than I would for the dead.  
I didn't know how I got a sarcophagus, but I buried it anyway.  
I, who once combusted the face of a boy who rubbished my pedigree,  
into two rivers crisscrossing each other. Call this a confluence or carrefour.  
& if this was a miracle, O God, aren't my fingers the gods that made it?  
The day I touched fire, I got seared. Fire ought to hone fire,  
or perhaps, conflate —*right?* However, the testimony lives with me,  
with my right hand, a little finger crooked into a tortoise shell.  
If I was really what I think I was, then I wasn't made to hurt,  
& there's a reduction reaction: every flame left in me is to nudge me alive.

Afterward

On Wednesday my mother took me shopping

after the doctor.

*Just us, honey.*

*Anything you want.*

    In the changing room,  
Mom blocked  
the mirror with her body  
as I dressed, undressed, dressed,  
undressed, dressed—becoming  
ritual, becoming routine, becoming.

She smelled of sun lotion,  
peanut butter. I wanted  
her skin, her freckles. I wanted  
her eyes. I wanted  
to smile her smile, eager, wanting  
to fix it.

    I wanted that.

On Thursday, I looked at my body

Sisters gone early to summer camp  
I had the bathroom to myself  
morning light  
washed my body  
pink cotton nightgown  
puddled by my feet

I leaned into the mirror  
saw my neck  
red as a plum    swollen  
ringed    by purple    fingerprints  
large thumb marks crawled  
like beetles up the side

small bruises stained my clavicle  
purple    with    green edges  
paint seeping into paper

stepping back my eyes  
looked away from  
what they'd seen  
looked again

saw my chest            saw skin    white  
from my swimsuit top  
saw pink nipples  
saw   ribs   stomach   summer   brown

until  
tan line    white  
until  
pink    puffy    a torn peony

the doctor said it would            hurt    to            pee  
hurt    it            hurt

  this girl  
in the mirror  
this stranger.

On Saturday, I packed my body into a satchel and carried it along with my diary, pjs and toothbrush to my friend Jill's for a sleepover. Late afternoon, we walked down the road, stopped to pick blackberries until our palms, fingers, lips bled red. Wiped juice on our cutoffs before entering Mr. Minota's Corner Store. Screen door slammed behind us, bell jingling. From behind the counter, Mr. Minota nodded our way. Jill steered me to the back, behind the shelves of booze, the magazine stand. An older boy was looking at a *Playboy* inside a *Car & Driver*. He turned away. Jill opened the tobacco case, pulled out a pack of White Owl tipped cigarillos. At the counter, Mr. Minota looked at us, the White Owls. Jill coolly asked for a pack of matches. Maybe he thought they were for her dad. Maybe he didn't care. We walked down to the lake, slipped into the rush along its shore. Sat, feet in the water's wash. Jill knocked a couple of the White Owls from the pack. We bent our heads to the match's spark. Inhaled the White Owl's sad foul smoke, coughed. Coughed what little girl remained.

On Sunday, I came home to the herb garden, my sisters  
who slept like moths in my bed.  
The chill  
shadow at my elbow—  
yellow breath, fresh-scented grass.  
The horizon's curve.



ALYSSE KATHLEEN McCANNA

Woman Turned Inside Out

*This is what a healthy pink vagina looks like*  
the doctor says to the intern

The room is white, glinting metal caught  
in fluorescence, half-closed shades  
betraying a litter-strewn park

Girl will hold this compliment  
inside for a long time

even as woman, when her hands are raw-  
pink from dishy soapwater, her body strange,  
turned inside out like a housewife's yellow gloves

like a blossom or a wallet or a womb,  
a nicer word than uterus—too raw, too empty,

such a nicer word than matrix or mold,  
pear or purse. Why *pink*?  
Why is *pink* compliment?

A man she loved, of goodish devilllooks,  
said he loved her pink and also her mind

but what he really meant was *I am lucky*  
*you are so blind to the bruise that is my love*  
sting-pink and singing, high note of honor

Woman stands in line at the gas station,  
smells the aftermath of a cologne

so familiar yet untraceable that she flees, throws up  
in the parking lot, asphalt home to half-cigarettes,  
Styrofoam, now the body's memory:

pink on the blacktop, bird flown from cage, the body's  
language, a shout that becomes

a kind of singing.

STEPHANIE FRAZEE

Confession

My father tells me  
the pet rabbit  
from my childhood  
had been pregnant when we got her  
he put the kits in a bag  
and drowned them in the creek—  
held them under the water  
until they were still.

We kept the rabbit  
in a wooden hutch  
elevated on a post  
to keep predators out  
the box just big enough  
for her to stand up  
and turn around  
we never let her out—  
she would have run away.

One day after school  
I found her dead,  
wasps crawling over her body  
my scream echoed  
back to me from the hills,  
hovering emerald green

and duff—  
standing in judgment  
not of the cruelty  
but of my inability  
to be quiet about it.  
The hills returned the scream—  
usually a quick learner,  
it was hard for me  
to learn to be a vessel.

My father tells me  
drowning the kits  
is the second worst thing  
he's ever done to an animal.  
Unlike most things  
he says  
I know this  
is not a lie—  
I am also an animal.

## ROWAN QUINCE BUCKTON

### Animalia Chiroptera

My mother would call me into her bedroom and  
firmly pat the quilted bedspread. *All of the details* she'd say.

It was the summer our teenage neighbor phoned, screaming  
*something's got my grandmother!* A bat

flew up her pant leg, fastened to her upper thigh.  
My mother unbuttoned the old woman's pants

and slid the waistband down, begging the creature to forgive  
the daylight and find a different hook. Stuffed its velvet body

into a garbage bag, pressing at the wings,  
my mother's eyes—a holy silence.

Maybe when memory is too slick with dark,  
the body just shakes and shakes to move through it.

All of the details.

She made me repeat the story some Sunday evenings.  
*All of the details.* Patted the bedspread and waited to compare facts.

I was six when my twelve-year-old cousin told me to touch him.  
Held my hand to his torso and pressed it down.

He stroked his penis in his hand and said *now yours,*  
*now yours.* He has a daughter now: eight. I wonder

if the neighborhood boys cradle her  
behind their families' sheds, playing "Pickle in the Jar,"

press up against her in the unbuttoned dark, telling her *hush.*  
I should say: I don't remember my body. The details.

paterfamilias

when the word *father* disappeared from the dictionary, so did  
its brethren *papa* & *daddy* & *master*, brethren  
that—

for as long as we could remember, for as long as  
our first fond then armored hearts had kept count  
from embryo to now (one beat  
two beat three beat four) with such patience  
amidst a grief long unnamed, inchoate, like the flutter  
on tip of tongue when saying *felicity*, or  
living in the broken thing before you know  
what's broke, or  
the expectancy of *promise* + *girl*,  
each unchristened grief the daughter  
of something, someone—

had kept us breathless, heart-stop,  
ready-to-kill but still  
as moss searching for its very  
own stone,

a great space, green & lush, opened within each  
of us, flung agape,



& a great space, opened up before us,  
the forest singing a new song  
from the songbook  
of all *bird + call*,

so we skipped & sped dazzle-eyed  
rings around the rosey trees,  
trees we had long longed to rub up against  
like the baby bear we saw once  
in the copse, her eyes closed so pure  
so pleased & now we could too,

screaming *sassafras* because of its sound  
at the top of our lungs, tearing off  
dresses & tops to feel woodsy & bark,  
running naked nothing riven,

soon such brown sounds soft in our mouths,

to see the forest cyclops slowly die, our  
small selves no longer struck beneath  
his one eye—

now shuttering, soon  
blind, but once  
as patient as our hearts & perhaps as grieving—

pressed rapt to the holes  
in every forest tree trunk  
drilled by the three-toed black-backed woodpeckers

whom he'd wheedled with acorns  
& berries & asters & azure eggs—

holes, according to *sylvan* + *sun*,  
meant only to nest eggy ovals warmed  
through night & dark night by noble poppas  
into life—

but the woodpeckers, knowing  
deeply of love, knew that love  
would never peep  
through holes, so with us,  
perched & watched—

we pounded the earth,  
we sang.

## Bootleg Poem

It starts with a boy and a Walkman, but no it started long before that. It's late and he's mowing the lawn as the stars start to shine behind the streetlights, his mother calls to him, dinner is ready, his brother yells at him, his leg screams with rose-bush-scratched knees, and his father is probably quiet, the quietest man he's ever known, but he can only hear the rhythm of a piano, a song about horses and milkwood and demons. And no, it started long before that, too, when stars filled his eyes, concentrating on constellations instead of the man who crawled into the bed, the hand in his pants, the hand holding his mouth, his eyes searching for planets and satellites and black holes and a question: *Can you see a black hole?* Yes, he thought that, in that moment, at a time like that, and yes, it started even before that, the first fist to the ribs, the first shove into a locker, the first the second the third the fourth tears running off his cheeks, to his mouth, settling on his tongue, where they stayed, where they curled like a semicolon, like a tattoo, like a reminder, a lesson about silence and safety, and now he sees them, everyone calling him, their mouths a pantomime, a dissonant music video, as he turns the mower and his back on them, the song turning to its bridge, the strange piano nearly silencing the lyrics he doesn't yet understand but feels moving under his skin. He needs this, this moment, this darkness, alone, to dream himself away. They call to him, and I want to say, no,

for now, let him be an X-Man on the Starjammer, soaring through Shi'ar space, let him have spandex bursting against three-color stars. Maybe tomorrow he'll be a Power Ranger or a Ninja Turtle, in church he'll grow a tail and blue fur and save the life of the girl, the cute one with the freckles just like his who asked for his help with fractions, who touched his arm and, when he jumped, smiled and swore she wouldn't hurt him. But it started before all of this, before the cassette he stole from his brother, before losing tug-of-war to a girl, he and his tears kicked out of the classroom, before his ripped pajamas, before his parents, long before the man with the boy's sperm on his hands and lips, back before the first person spoke the first word, before the continental shift, before the earliest wind and waves, the first volcanic explosion, back when the first particulate collision destroyed that first, endless silence. And it continues, after the lawn is finished, the dinner cold and ruined, after the high school where he learned to turn invisible, beyond to almost thirty years ahead, when I can look at him and say, honestly, everything is not a fight between silence and sound, when I can pluck the tears from his tongue and say, tell me your secrets, all of them, even the ones you've hidden from yourself, when I can hold him, stilled like a memory, because he is a memory, a living recording like the bootlegs we love, and because I can hold him I can keep him calm as he tells me what I already know, what neither of us knew how to say, and when I stroke his hair, he doesn't flinch, he doesn't hide, he listens and, yes, he sobs, and I sob, and I tell him to never stop looking to the sky, I tell him the stars are like in the song: *your demons can't go there*. And maybe, together, we can make some sense of the silence of this solar system, what we spent all those nights looking to,

our arms stretched as far as they could go, our hands grasping  
and coming away empty, still empty now, but I know it's okay,  
I tell him it's okay. Now, decades later, satellites took pictures  
of a black hole. Now, I can show him the invisible, the unimaginable,  
the impossible. Now, I can show him how beautiful it all is.

RIVKA CLIFTON

Belief

*after Shane McCrae*

My mother  
can't  
believe  
it—not  
to boys,  
never.

Never  
for my mother  
could it happen. Boys  
can't;  
not  
to other boys. She believes

in icons, believes  
their forever  
burning and knotted  
hearts. My mother  
saw an icon sow flames but can't  
imagine a boy

doing that to another boy.  
She believes  
in what she can't

touch. Never.  
My mother  
says not

who but how. Not  
which boy  
but why. My mother  
believes  
saints live forever.  
She can't;

it can't.  
She knots

her hands; never.  
A boy—  
not possible.  
My mother

can't imagine boys,  
no, refuses; believes  
icons forever moving alone for her.

## On the Upside

There's no such thing as monsters.

But there are boys with shiny smiles and open hands.

I know it wasn't my fault.

The thought made the water levels start to rise and I was too tired to swim.

There were no signs for me to miss.

But that meant there was no planning for this. Suddenly every edge was sharp.

I did not break into crystalline pieces that day—I'm still me.

Not the bits that mattered. The bits I liked to hold up to the light.

There will be good days and bad days and I'll grow through them all.

The good was wisps of smoke and the bad was a noose around my neck.

The world doesn't look the way it used to and it probably never will again.

In the end my thoughts are unreliable, partial prints.  
I've known since I was little-  
sweetness doesn't linger long on the tongue.  
I knew it even before I packed up the dorm to move home.  
I think I knew it on the cold walk back.



I will wear perfume and read honey-suckle sweet romances.

And I walk with my keys between my fingers, the palm flat over the glass  
love my friends and keep a tire iron in the trunk, eye new acquaintances  
the way one might look at a bear trap in need of disarming.

The world doesn't look the way it used to.

And it's a lot harder to read.

## MOLLY PERSHIN RAYNOR

### Chrysanthemum

they call you a late bloomer & smile with something in their eyes that says *stay that way*, stay seed, unbloomed, unruined, but you've been smearing momma's lipstick on your mouth since before you could speak. you are 12 now & ready to shrink what does not yet exist, ready to contain flesh that has not yet grown: you beg your mom to buy a bra for your flat chest, slather bath & bodyworks sweet pea lotion on legs newly shaven with pink bic razor, golden hour painting crown across your frizzy bangs, your turquoise braces gleaming, your awkward ache, your clean faith that the right combination of delia's catalogue purchases & glitter eyeshadow will pull you to the other side.

you want the sparkling secret of a sharp sin to stain your lips, you want to shed your girlskin, molt into a bad bitch, a cardinal shimmering, ripped jeans & spaghetti straps, tampon stashed in bra like amy & kiara, you want that vermilion baptism, that ruddy parade of saffron ribbons, you want that river of proof so you can say you are a woman now, so you can feel the pain & name it yours, see the stain and claim it. you want to be an early girl, thickening plump like topanga on the vine in june.

but you are more chrysanthemum, which blooms late summer when the roses & peonies & lilacs are long gone. you do not know you are safest there beneath the earth, your body still flat as dirt. you do not know that one day men will grab your hips without asking, that you will find yourself trapped & grasping for an out of this very body, hips and tits spilling like heavy cream, just how you dreamed, but some days you just want to walk to the corner store in peace. you do not know your

first day in oakland, while waiting to cross at e. 14th & 29th ave, a man will ask you *how much?* & you will laugh, thinking he's asking for weed & he will look at your crotch & ask again & there will be many days like this, many times you'll have to run, times you'll have to slip silent from beneath a heavier body when he passes out drunk on top of you, times you will change your dress, cover the breasts you once wished

for cause your boyfriend doesn't want other men eyeing your chest, times you will have to check the gun beneath another lover's coffee table to make sure it's still there,

so many hours you will spend comforting other women, safety planning & bearing witness, you will gather their grief & wear it as a garland. & there will be times, too, when the violence is more subtle, when it slithers from a tongue in a classroom, across a conference table, from a classic text—when it climbs you like fast ivy & you almost forget it's root. almost accept it. i love that you don't know this yet. you just want to be wanted, just want a note passed with your name scrawled across its tucked tenderness, that's what you want—tenderness. not to be owned, tracked, followed, possessed, kept.

i love that you don't know this yet. you will feel the pain & name it yours. you'll want to give it back. you'll wish to come back to this moment, where you're giddy & giggling with your sister in lake michigan & neither of you are survivors yet, you are just sea creatures, blue-lipped & shivering, shapeless & genderless, free as you'll ever be, twisting with the seaweed, tangled in your own sweet, sweat washed clean. remember this so you will know how to return.

## ELIZABETH HART BERGSTROM

We're all trembling all the time

The astronomers in the headlines say,  
*We're all trembling all the time*  
which doesn't feel like news to me,  
but still, I find the story comforting  
while hiding inside my apartment from the wildfire ash  
that turns the green hills to gray poison haze.

My legs trembled for five years  
while doctors shrugged their shoulders and I struggled to walk.  
My heart palpitated for a decade  
like a wild bird crashing against the bars of its cage.  
For one pandemic year, my left eye twitched uncontrollably.

I spent most of my adult life with an intrusive drumbeat  
of suicidal thoughts.

These astronomers in the headlines,  
they used delicate machinery to listen  
to low-frequency gravitational waves  
traveling across the universe.  
They say it's the music of thousands of ancient black holes,  
which is another name for dying star.

One reporter wrote that the waves  
cause "spacetime to ring

like a gently struck bell.”  
No wonder I laugh when a friend or stranger laughs,  
or cry when they do  
since we’re all reverberating in one soft peal together.

The most earth-shaking thing I’m finally starting to believe:  
You are not the exception to the universe.  
You are not the one single part of it that is unworthy.  
Since you’re made of the same atoms,  
it is scientifically impossible  
for you to be any more broken or any less brilliant  
than any star in the sky.



## ZOEY PLYTAS

boys

keep / only their ID / thirty dollars / two condoms / in their wallet / pull / out of me / socks up / to  
their calves / fingers / still in my mouth / hammocks in the trees / call / the empty sky / a void /  
call me / the moon / dry hump / not knowing / the body / take / too long / gelling their hair / look  
/ so blue / hanging their head / over the balcony / bum a cigarette / from the mailbox / pull me /  
to the foreign / film section / the porn dvds / punch the wall / when that doesn't satisfy / punch  
the chair / I sit in / talk / about their family / when they're not high / smudge incense out / on the  
car window / drop my hand / to hold the bug / eat strawberry lemonade / with a fork / leave / the  
used condom / on the dresser / on the floor / of the parking garage / ask / if I'll be okay / walking  
back to my car / alone

**HARASSMENT COMPLAINT FORM**

*The key to writing a persuasive sexual harassment letter involves providing as much detail as you can. This requires you to describe every act of sexual harassment, including a detailed account of what happened, who committed the unlawful act, and whether any witnesses saw them sexually harassing you.*

~~FIRST OF ALL, FUCK YOU & YOU & HIM & ALL OF THEM~~

**Complainant:** Prefers to remain anonymous

**Date(s) and time(s) of the alleged incident(s):** september 21st, 2017 & then again october 21st, 2019 except alleged means “without proof”  
and my body would disagree

**Name of person you believe harassed you or another person:** I believe  
every person who will or will not can or cannot should or should not  
file a complaint against their harasser & his name  
starts with an “S” & the rest is dissociative amnesia

**If the alleged harassment was toward another person, identify that other person:**  
STOP saying alleged I can feel the knots stiffening  
the delayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress rising up to my throat  
in gigantic undulations

**Describe the incident(s) as clearly as possible. Include a full description of the events, verbal statements (threats, requests, demands, etc.), and what, if any, physical contact was involved.**



his breath a convulsion of black market whiskey  
his finger a retractor dilating my jaw my teeth numb with dread &  
when I came home three hours later, my only non-threatening male friend  
brought me the nankhatai with browned edges from Paharganj,  
the roughness of sugar abrasing the roof of my mouth.  
With it, I wiped the grime of his claws  
& every time I peed in the shower it stung  
in so many places all at once  
like when Uncle pierced me with his old man nails  
in the daycare Ma left me in when I was four  
& I turned from girl to vixen

**Where did the incident occur?** two different terraces, twenty-seven kilometres apart.  
his hands marking the geography of my mouth & both times  
he chose a dim staircase where no one ventured  
& it was a new moon night as he prowled

**List any witnesses who were present:** none  
except my many bodies & his eyes that follow me across cities

**How did you or the person harassed (if not you) react to the harassment?**

& when I invited him over the next evening to confront him  
he leaned forward to kiss my neck & I thought of Ma's face  
when they held her against their limbs walking through  
the market square as her father pounced till Aaita bled  
every few days I swim into myself & excavate  
the remains of his moustache  
mopping the night his body pricked my body  
& I froze

**This complaint is based upon my honest belief that [insert a man's name here] has sexually harassed me multiple times. I hereby certify that the information provided in this complaint is true, correct and complete to the best of my knowledge.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Complainant's signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Received by)

ZAIN MURDOCK

golden shovel for 2018



## COLUMBIA UNDERGRADUATE ADMISSIONS

Dear [REDACTED]

Congratulations once again on your admission to Columbia! In the time since you received your likely letter, I hope that you have been exploring Columbia through the Columbia Blue website, and have found useful the emails and letters sent to you by various members of the Columbia community.

& yeah, I guess if I had known I would've run / for dear  
life / it took me five years to say his real name, [REDACTED],

out loud / & weeks after it happened everyone was still telling me congratulations  
on Columbia, what a great school / & I always knew / what they meant by great / once

I saw how the word stood in their teeth / fresh out / appraising me / *will you end up here again?*  
how the month I got in / the doctors called my leaving an *if* / doubt written / on

the walls the prescriptions the visual maps / of my body / & everyone's face / & your  
part in this story comes soon, I promise / my admission

a catalyst / to fantastic disorder / when you met me I was ecstatic / to be at this school to  
live at this school to learn at this school to answer the phone at this school / *we're so proud / Columbia!*

I bury you / my first memory of you I buried / sweet flotsam in  
the Hudson / the night it happened I spilled out / & disappeared / the

night you came up to me / a warning / a clock / hemorrhaging time  
I saw his side of the room & flinched / before failing to escape death in his hands / since

when did I believe I could have anything I wanted? / you  
don't know / why I disappeared / victims received

\$165 million / from Columbia University / my mother says / for assault / everyone tells me / *your  
school is in the news*, again & I wonder what my grief would have been worth / how likely

in another universe / Columbia Housing would've assigned your roommate somewhere else / better yet / his letter  
of acceptance, never written / that semester I built these universes & crawled inside them / I,

the obsessor, steady counting / the number of days it took this school those hands to drown me / 28 / & hope,  
it lives in those days I climb onto the M60 / looking madly for anything else / that

need to escape, already practiced / those Carolina nights I'd walk out to nowhere / you  
never knew the escape routes I extracted from my own skin / I have

to avoid you / I see you /him/ everywhere / what a small world / *where've you been?*  
my therapist tells me I'm just / exploring

at 18 / I'm supposed to be fucking up / at 18 / at Columbia  
I take that & run / & fuck / & drink / dye my hair & laugh at everything / I waded through

*deeper deeper deeper!* until I'm gone / at graduation everyone says / by the  
ugly bleachers / the pretty blue robes / welcome home welcome back / to Columbia,

home, a prison, plantation, whisper-network-burial-ground, Columbia blue,  
the greatest, in New York the city greatest great *great!* / at 18 I feed / my consent into an admissions website,

my acceptance a eulogy / with a bachelor's in elegy / to trade / &  
this was meant to be a love poem / the same way my mom would have

said, oh she said *be safe* & meant / to shield me from harm / that night / the truth I found  
was that things never stay the way you mean them / how useful

is it that I can see you years later / & read all my attempts in plain sight / all the  
times I tried to rewrite what had already happened into what I thought was supposed to be / the emails

& texts / pictures / daydreams / I hoarded, evidence / of the alternate realities I thought I deserved &  
never came / those bronze letters

wearing the buildings where I watched you / never once saying what I felt / this campus / an imprecise sent-  
-ence, just / however many years until we break / to

Columbia / oh, I can't love like this / anymore / sometimes I imagine telling you  
what he did / but that universe will never exist / & oh, sometimes / I go by

my old dorm to sit on the steps & say / I do wish I was there / to rescue her / these lives / varying, various  
fuck 'em / in this real reality years later I hear them / the elite members

of this 36-acre black hole / where no one thinks anyone knows how it feels / invisible / but so viciously bright / of  
this chain of reoccurring events / they let happen / year after year / & I promise to never forget her / even in the

reality where I am happy / sometimes I'm 18 again / & I'm so sorry / anyone / could've been her / at Columbia  
18 & drowning / thrashing / screaming / *do you see me? who would I tell? I have no friends I have no / community.*

BLEAH PATTERSON

my ex boyfriend asked why women can never stop talking about men in their art  
and I said it's because they give us no choice

My chest still has the bees in it,  
their honey dripping from my rib cage,  
their incessant buzzing, pinballing their stingers into me  
because I was 25 before I met a man who waited to hear a yes or a no  
filled me with them, each man a new hive deposited  
where I didn't want it because at 25 I was lucky  
have mothers and mothers' mothers  
who know men the way you know a bee  
who wants to sting you cannot be stopped and I  
have spent my whole life still, trying not to draw attention to my own  
blooming tricked myself into thinking  
I liked to be restrained because restrained was the only way  
it happened I tricked myself  
into thinking that the hollowing out  
to make room for the clattering

Some nights i lose entirely

Some nights i lose entirely  
googling mobile dog wash companies.  
No—i don't have a dog.  
Still—i'll spend hours searching  
to see if I find him: the father of the young man  
i carpooled with  
during the three years  
i sang  
in a professional boys' choir  
all the way back when  
i was seven years old.

Fifteen years pass.  
This is how it always goes:  
the ritual of my late  
afternoon, my stay up all  
night, my can't fall  
asleep still dark outside  
recess of mo(u)rning:  
rummaging the internet for remnants  
of the not-quite-yet  
baritone whose backseat abrasions  
left me inarticulate  
and intoxicated, smelling



like damp salt and cheap deodorant,  
year after year.

For the life of me i can't remember any identifiers, except:  
his given name; his  
father's mobile grooming service; and  
how, when he wasn't turning me frozen, numb, stiff,  
he would blather on about elaborate designs  
for a time-machine he'd been dreaming up,  
how, if only he could find the exact, scientifically magical fiber optic cables,  
he could finally finish building his machine  
to time travel out of the present  
(anywhere but the present).

Impassioned, he spoke radio signals to me,  
lured me in with colored-pencil-sketched  
sine waves not drawn to scale.  
i wondered:  
Why is he so hooked on it?  
the mission to travel across time  
furtively stowing me within his present  
at the very moment he's  
plotting to abandon it?

Years later, my questions change:  
What made his present so unbearable that he'd  
spend its majority daydreaming  
methods to escape it? or  
did the traveling time machine

offer a safeguard  
to leave our moments open for return?

For now, i click through dozens of browser tabs,  
one by one,  
sifting through local dog grooming pages,  
(pun after woeful pun).

Scan the boys' choir directory  
2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008,  
2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014,  
2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020...

Always the same:  
no new information.  
(i'll try again later).  
i wonder:  
if he's still alive, where  
he is now, and whether he knew, in the end,  
that he needed no fiber optic cables  
to assemble his time  
machine out of me.

Mine only requires:  
an internet browser, whiplash  
of dissociation and  
attachment, a scattering  
of hazy facts that my mind collects  
from the past as she  
cautiously nests her

way deeper into  
the present.

*Dreams of barrel rolling out of the van,  
seatbelts flailing in the rush,  
lungs scooping up sky.*

Diary Entry #34: Epigenetics

It's been eight years  
and the ancestors in me are still  
burdened. I don't know if I am gentle with them.  
I reheat the coffee in the microwave,  
find gratitude when they take what's theirs  
and leave the rest. There will always be  
scarcity—less food, less Klonopin—  
which is to say I own a legacy of fear.  
Tonight, another grandmother is dying,  
and I cannot heal her. But I line up  
my idols like bruises on my belly  
and perform a nostalgic ritual:  
I shower with my clothes on  
like I did as a girl with a man  
who wanted to be my father,  
when I became a little bird, helpless  
to affection. Did he make me  
a good monster or a bad one?  
I can keep my cage clean,  
wipe my mouth with my thumb.

## DUSTIN BROOKSHIRE

### Poem In Which I Was Never Raped

I'm an unusually happy person. The kind that makes people say, *It has to be an act*, or *Give me whatever he's taking*. I spend nights on a sugar bender, drinking lemonade made from my grandmother's recipe. I create TikTok videos of DIY crafting projects. I learn how to play tennis but ditch it for pickleball—my knees thank me, but totally happy, still unusually happy. I embrace gay culture of loving *Showgirls*. I quote Nomi's epic faux pas, *It's Versayce*. I joke of tossing marbles in the path of anyone in my way. I still use money for therapy— all those pesky mommy issues alive and well. The only nightmares I have come from my obsession with horror movies. I still post my quarterly PSA on Facebook and Twitter: *When are rape jokes funny? NEVER!* It doesn't hurt when I look at my friend—the one that never had the occasion to ask, *Yeah, but are you sure you said no?*

MILLIE TULLIS

housesitting for a stranger in spring

a week spent sleeping                      in the little white house

because it was spring  
you came

because it had been weeks  
since we'd broken up

came and slipped  
my dress

up over the kitchen counter

into me and my  
what was mine

shaking into tile

you were angry

once  
I bought myself flowers  
as we grocery shopped

my love  
my friend

taught me to buy flowers like that

wilting clearance      over blossomed

rescues  
she called them

I bought myself tulips

yellow      opening  
in the white house

I told you to leave  
and called you back

to hold my hand  
without touching my body

four tulips slanted    against the east window      against the ribbon    I tied

yellow      rescues

the first thing      a body would see      rising

from that strange bed

KIMBERLY ANN PRIEST

A Response to *Cod Head* by Anneli Skaar

The body is cooked, I'm sure,  
because it has been painted  
by a woman, and I want to believe  
everything done by a woman is, at very least,  
for food. The belly  
was sliced from anus to head  
along the backbone, a clean shallow cut  
so as not to puncture the intestines. Then the fish  
was opened for gutting, the knife extracting  
a notch-shaped 'v' of innards from the middle  
set aside, the kidneys removed  
by spoon or thumb, and the cavity  
rinsed in a hot bath of running water  
and steam. Tail and fins have been discarded,  
but here lies the head, sliced off and set  
in blue—my least favorite color. Blue  
table, blue oil paint. Why do people like blue  
so much? The head's  
one invisible eye is staring at the blue, the other  
up at nothing, its tongue  
hung out, sideways. Its tongue  
a hooked tube of flesh. The blue below,  
like a mockery of water, taunting me,  
a woman who wants to believe  
the body has been cooked to eat. Some part of my life



ought to be useful for food, one eye  
starring at the table; the other  
at nothing. My first husband's favorite color  
was blue. I want  
to believe a woman's painted fish head  
is evidence of nurture, all the innards carved  
tenderly, sautéed in oil and lemon and laid on an altar  
of greens—sacrifice,  
at very least, for greater good. His hunger  
was a mockery of water. I observe  
the gold-framed fish head with clown-yellow lips,  
old salt still brining my teeth.

## Ghost Peppers

Pier 1 Imports, 1996

past the papasans and wicker baskets, I picked  
at a wreath of dried chilis—New Mexico chic  
all red clay and twine. I broke one open  
on purpose. Crushed it like a brute.  
The brilliant waxy crimson giving way  
to capsaicin with a sickening crack.

Dusty evidence embedded under my fingernails  
smearing the red-hot ash on my eyes, my mouth  
before I knew better. I was nothing but chemical burns,  
passing cinders on to my siblings, who followed me blind.  
No one said a word. Is that what guilt is?  
Pain plus fear equals suffering equals silently closing your eyes  
tight against a bright burning thing.  
We were just bored kids. We never wanted to die.

The ambulance departs soundlessly, lights  
extinguished. Cleaning my brother's apartment  
I find bottles of hot sauce  
powdered ghost peppers  
that old feeling of holding back  
tears, of furious blinks, of trying  
desperately to be good.  
The shame of the broken open thing

sharp across the rim of my mouth  
lingering all these years later.

HEIDI SEABORN

## What I Know of Strangulation

I know the word wedges  
like poorly chewed meat  
in the throttle the gullet the throat

I know how fruit is bruised  
and short grass trampled

I know when a choke berry blooms  
and white blossoms  
become blood red berries

how my rapist must have leaned away  
to admire such beauty  
made with his own hands

my neck is a pedestal  
and on my back a pair of wings

I know when the noose of his fingers  
loosened

stars caught in my throat  
I inhaled

## Embalm

My nights are full of hurts. My body, a compass  
to navigate the atlases of their darkness.  
Men chart their stain across my skin. My mouth  
merges with the needle, blood the gasoline  
on my lips. All it ever does is burn.  
Without the needle, there is absence.  
I still feel its detail dented in the flesh  
like a fish thrashing on land, its conspicuous  
black eye shining with violence,  
inconspicuous in the eyes of the people  
circled around. I stopped screaming  
after I died. I couldn't breathe. I forgot  
language. When I showered after returning home,  
I do not know if it was water or his sweat  
blistering my thighs. Told a boy I met  
four months later about the rape.  
When he tried to kill me, I was prepared  
for it. I did not scream. I was on  
the floor like his fucking shadow.  
His fist, the needle in my mouth, filling the absence.  
When I died again, the wound stayed open.  
A clock, unwound. A compass, spinning.  
Nobody could tell the difference  
between my blood, the rain, and the  
garbage hinging alleyways together.

See—this is how we are different.  
The way I can camouflage. The way I  
could prepare my body for death.  
Soap. Ibuprofen. Soil. Marrow.  
His hand, the spade.  
When I died this time,  
there was no body of mine left to  
bury. No breath. No shadow.  
Not even absence.

## Manhattan

*Chimney* – my mother says from dream-life – *ashes* . my skull’s shaved . exfoliated by experts . next in line to be nude before a clatter of former models . I might be the old one . or the small one . or the plump one . *armor* my mother says . *mettle* . I wear only my red leather boots . ones crafted to take me back through the subways of Manhattan . 1981 . perhaps this was before you were even conceived . can you conceive . the *you* reading this . that I was walking Park Avenue when I passed Jackie O . then Martin Mull ? days later Madeline Kahn and I sat in the same audience watching *Diner* . but I’ve eaten all the marzipan roses . in Greenwich Village we laughed at the cock lollipops . I licked every sweetness from my lips . *enjoy it while it lasts* my mother says . *too bad about your short legs* . my skull stipples with new growth . gone white as chicken feathers . I see them approaching from the lakebed . teenage girls . finally freed from their rapists . walk toward you . think about it : most emotions are merely concepts . the brain . they say . registers only *pleasant unpleasant pain* and *arousal* . everything else is just me penetrating you . or you penetrating me . I run up the subway steps in 1981 . before you even occurred . the assault not what I expected . *your hair has always been lanky* . my mother says . *what happened to your chin ?* I’m wearing my red boots . I’m wearing sirens . I’m wearing Emily Dickinson’s copper hair . splotches hit the steps and trail me on West 56<sup>th</sup> . all the way to the apartment . *ashes* . my mother says . *I’m just ashes* . I waken . arms thrown back.

MOLLY RAYNOR

Turning [Chrysopoeia]

*A Golden Shovel*

*After Daniella Toosie-Watson*

*After Ross Gay*

*After Gwendolyn Brooks*

Today, I unhinge my rusted throat & sparrows stop to listen:

The song of my silver slicing ribbons of red onion, the kindness in

Cutting bitter fuchsia, sweating sweet gold over sudden heat, this

Orchestra of tuning in, thick orchard turning flame, then bare, in this poem,

I kiss my mirrored self & slow wine to Rihanna, rum in hand, there

Is no one eyeing, no one staring but me, the safest audience, there are

So many ways to shimmer, to shimmy out of a mask, to undo sorrow's corset, no

End to the alchemy of solitude, no end to this lawless land without men.



## CASSANDRA MYERS

### On Surviving

“The word Survivor links to a history, links to some of us who have not survived”

-Kendra Ann-Pitt

Violence drove me to madness  
in an ambulance, that red  
white and blue hearse.

My abusers took turns at the wheel.  
Checked me into the hospital.  
Waved from behind the glass.

The intake bed's parchment dress—  
white like every inescapable sheet.

white like the ones icing a gurney—  
the body's final embrace after the wake.

Lest Us Forget the wake  
that morning came for us once,  
and can, someday, again.

Lest Us Forget that surviving outlives us.  
That it walks us to the grave.  
That it gives us our own private eulogy.

Lest Us Forget  
those of us that did not make it,  
those of us who took the rape to the dirt,  
took their life as a way to take their life back.

Lest Us Forget  
that the word survivor is not a club  
for the flesh-wound, but also for  
the hands pushing us towards a ledge of unbecoming

Lest Us Forget  
that to be a survivor is to be  
[ ] and alive.

Let us Forget

All the hands  
and the names  
married to each finger  
when we count  
the small deaths

Let Us Forget  
the handwritten notes  
and the medicine cabinet, and  
the cavalry of knives

Let Us Forget  
the escape taxis.

the phone numbers.  
tinder profiles.

Let Us Forget  
all of their faces  
but never each other's  
never our own names.

Let Us Forget  
everything that tried to kill us,  
including the times we tried to kill us.  
Our violent parades, wading into the lake.

Let Us Forget the lake  
Pack up the stones. Leave the rope.  
Turn on the car and drive yourself  
anywhere, but here.

## ELIZABETH HART BERGSTROM

### Mist Nets

When I was eight,  
my father took me to the forest  
to catch songbirds in mist nets  
as fine as spiderwebs.

He wrapped a band around one skinny leg,  
then threw the bird into the air to free it—  
a small gesture of hope  
like a wedding guest scattering rice.

What its fragile bones needed more than anything  
was gentleness.  
The bird was stunned for only a moment  
before its wings caught the air.

My father's father never told him he loved him,  
so when I was little, my father said it to me every day.  
It was a call-and-response ritual  
after he sang me old songs  
about foxes going out on chilly nights.  
My favorite was Green Grow the Rushes-O  
because its twelve verses kept him  
by my bedside the longest.

Sleep tight, don't let the bedbugs bite,  
small gestures of hope like tossing a banded bird skyward—  
may you journey safely through the dark  
and arrive on a far shore still remembering  
where you came from.

STEPHANIE GLAZIER

Trout Sonnet Number Eleven

A perfect triangle of land at our  
broodstock pond held my mother's begonias.

The white pine that hovered over them left  
the ground acidic. She was watering, said

some cousin had called. The arc of shower in light  
slowed time so as that water is still falling.

He was dead.  
A stroke, she'd said.  
I'm sorry your dad died, I say.

Wind in the pine, flower, pond shine, fish take  
the overshot of spray for feed, leave

the surface ringing—their speckled pretty  
jaws. No one could tell me they weren't singing.

BLEAH PATTERSON

In a parallel universe I am borrowing grief from my daughter, who has it to spare

her absence is not because she wasn't wanted  
but because I didn't want to be  
a braided thing, my legs him between I didn't  
want to be I didn't want  
and I said as much but he too drunk to care  
knew I'd only ever known men like containers  
only known women like water it's been seven years  
and no one ever asks why I stay so quiet about her  
politeness is catching down here  
so is silence  
but I think about washing her blueberries  
I think about the frayed hair  
of the dolls I bought her not the pills not  
not the way I washed  
her away I think about her bud of a peony  
cascaron mouth, bursting open hear her tin can full of alms  
laughter rattling in my sleep

## HARRISON HAMM

### Field Dresser

You'll find me in the rearview mirror:  
Naked as daylight. Somehow younger in the snow.

I'll sleepwalk—all hooves—through the middle of town.  
Eyes: more like black glass than the brown you don't remember.

I'll dare you to lay me backside, so the trees can watch.  
Spread the hind legs like you never got to.

*Antlers up. Easier to cut.*

Fruit flies, earthworm, the light cracking through—  
Even here, stars die like an afterthought.

Your favorite game:  
busted radio, empty parking lot.

Stuf my heart in a plastic bag, and don't look away, Man—  
I've seen the rife under your dirty jeans in the closet.

The hunting knife with a gut hook. The one I dreamt of kissing instead.  
I said, *Christmas me the scalp*. Look into these taxidermy eyes, and

take of your clothes. Call it forgiveness  
if you need something to believe in.



And when you dig inside—no gloves,  
only churchbells coated in winter-skin—

I'll open my mouth.  
Let you cradle my breath,  
TV static on your tongue—tell me:

*Can a body of legs still find its way home?*

TEDDY L. FRIEDLINE

Jamais Vu

“I don’t know if he knows he’s building a world where I can one day  
love a man—he sits there without saying anything.”

-Marie Howe

looked at my friend’s face today and saw yours. my heart  
is a slick lighter. keep expecting him to want to touch  
me like you did, settle his hand on my thigh while he

drives me home. tips of his long fingers brushing the seat  
carpet. it wasn’t just the angle I had on his face or, y’know,  
his resting expression that made me think of you—I’ve even

said to Austen before, *he’s a lot like N*—. sound of white noise  
& cypress. know how I mean it. that he’s sweatshirts and  
bookish and kind, not that he seems like he’s going to rape me.

and the glasses, he was wearing thin glasses. this isn’t a love  
poem like that. he doesn’t touch me like you, for the record.  
it is a painful, spasmic flower to brace for what doesn’t

come and pitch forward into safety. told me once he’d’ve killed  
himself if he’d *hit the deer* and I thought about you differently  
after that. the standard I hold you to and everything. how I still

say you’re *bookish and kind*. dove, locust, thorn. anyway,  
I see you in my friend’s face sometimes, and in the D’Angelo  
records he plays and the football he watches and the way he

bumps my fist and reads the new stuff I send him. every citrus  
fruit, every earthy liquor, every tender broth. silence is easy  
and scalding, and sentences are too long. I see you in him and

it hurts like fuck, of course, but also. liver and  
birthday candles. just trying to say I didn't  
forget how to love you, cause I love him,

my hands are bleeding & I'm showing him sharp  
hunks of broken mug, beautiful, and I tell him  
*the guy who broke this had eyes just like yours*

## Nice

In the next booth a woman explains, *most people avoid mean people. Most people are kind. Most would acquiesce or back down in this situation*, and it's then I realize through opposition, I'm the mean person, when I thought I was only disagreeable, or at worst, there was this one time at dinner when I refused to like *Samurai Jack* and a man insisted that, as a child of the 90s, I should appreciate Adult Swim, that illicit hour. I said something I rarely say even to myself about that hour and another person our age who had also begged that I watch. *I acquiesced* and of course there's so much more I said, so the man at the table covered his head with his hands. I had ruined something precious with my ruin. He told me as much. It made me feel better.

## Whisper

This is the only prayer I remember  
how to make: the scuff of feet  
on a worn path, the whisper  
of fogged breath in a frozen wood,  
the pale winter sun on my searching,  
upturned face.

How could I ever  
trust in a god who calls  
himself father when he left me  
so many years on my knees,  
need hard on my lips, my throat  
already full of spent praise?

ANINDITA SENGUPTA

I tested the tricky dark

This dark became familiar & family  
& I, director and actor, playback singer,

prop & costume, the gig a reckless substitute  
for life, the underground summoning as it does

sometimes. In Honduras, it rained fish. I read  
the locals prayed salt-mouthed. Azaan twined up

the mosque. I believed in no god but animal  
tides, moon, the curlicue of leaves. A spiral

of death is when an ant colony loses  
track of scent. The ants follow their own trail

in a circle unto death. I fear such running out  
of energy. Yet some days, my heart

is a gamma-ray burst, several stars exploding  
at once and I think, *only the forest knows*.

A.M. HAYDEN

(The) United States of this Body (An American Psalm)

This body is rattle, snakeskin shed to earth.  
This body is underground bunker, tent, and yurt.

This body is tree trunk, roots, thick branches stretched,  
imperfectly filled with perfectly twined nests.

This body is sparrow and sinew, spleen, and sanctuary.  
This body is *Gemara* and gospel, epistle, and elegy.

This body is tongue coated red, white, and blue, untied shoes.  
This body just wants to age with grace, becoming its own muse.  
This body is milk...letdown cream, catfish mouth and baby breath,  
Proverb, psalm, love letter, and lament.

This body is overpass, bridge, and tunnel  
sunken ship, and highway vixen vessel,  
billboards that warn, "Hell is Real."

This body is pox, virus, and compost covering.  
This body is regenerating as it is hibernating.  
This body is detour ahead, under construction,  
covenant, sworn oath, independence declaration.

This body is Land of Enchantment, Prairie, and Garden State,  
wheat, soybean, corn, and fingers tobacco-stained.

This body is daffodil and daisy, sunflower and magnolia.  
Sequoia and sycamore, sweet gum, and catalpa.

This body is red-winged blackbird and cardinal,  
cactus blossom and waterfall.  
This body *flies with her own wings*, heart of it all.

This body is Red River, Rio Grande, and Shenandoah,  
cracked pavement, dusty miles, and dirt roads.  
This body is maple syrup on tap, sugarshack.  
This body is coal-dusted canary of this country's mineshaft.

This body is broken treaties, broken vows, and broken teeth.  
This body is rushing waters, maps of tributaries.  
This body is shushed mouths, erased herstories.  
This body is trauma on trauma on trauma on repeat.  
This body is love my country, not my government.

This body is on its knees, not for some man, but rising a mother's pleas  
for her children to go to school each morning and come back alive.

This body is sick of being mansplained, man-lawed, and colonized.  
This body writhed and cried, scrapped, and survived.

This body is tired of being told to smile when she don't *feel* like it,  
days when it takes volcano strength to hide it.

This body is folklore, fairytale, urban legend, and fan fiction.  
Liberation, emancipation, *natural* rights, not just given.  
This body is broken systems.  
Coins flipped into fountains.



More valleys than mountains.  
More turquoise than gold.  
More shadow than smoke.  
More clay than sky.  
More funnel cake than apple pie.

This body is po' boys and grits, cobb salad and deep dish.

This body is pueblo, holler, and hill, bison, bear, elk and eagle.  
This body is "We the people."  
This body is Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian,  
Sikh, Jewish, Baha'I, and Pagan,  
believer, sinner, seeker washed clean, bhakti, devotee, image of Divinity.

*This body is your body. This body is my body*  
This body is poetry                      slingshot into the void.

This body is imbalanced scales, cradled in a Borderless Palm,  
whistling her wild and weary,  
centuries old American Psalm.

## Authors

**Diannely Antigua** is a Dominican American poet and educator, born and raised in Massachusetts. She is the author of two collections, *Ugly Music* (YesYes Books, 2019) which was a 2020 Whiting Award winner, and *Good Monster* (Copper Canyon Press, 2024). She received her BA in English at UMass Lowell and her MFA in poetry at NYU. She is the recipient of fellowships from CantoMundo, Community of Writers, and the Academy of American Poets. From 2022-2024, she served as Poet Laureate of Portsmouth, NH, the youngest and first person of color to receive that title. She currently teaches in the MFA Writing Program at the University of New Hampshire as the inaugural Nossrat Yassini Poet in Residence. Her poems can be found in *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, *Poem-A-Day*, and elsewhere.

**Willa Bell** is a queer poet from Central Pennsylvania. They can often be found with their dogs on less-traveled paths in the woods.

**Elizabeth Hart Bergstrom**'s short stories, essays, and poems appear or are forthcoming in *Bennington Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *The New York Times*, *Passages North*, *Uncanny*, and elsewhere. They are a queer, chronically ill writer who was born in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia on Monacan land.

**Shlagha Borah** is a 2024 Ruth Lilly Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship finalist. Her work appears in *Waxwing*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Florida Review*, etc.

**Dustin Brookshire** (he/him) is the recipient of the 2024 Jon Tribble Editors Fellowship and the author of four chapbooks: *Repeat As Needed* (Harbor Editions, 2025), *Never Picked First For Playtime* (Harbor Editions, 2023), *Love Most Of You Too* (Harbor Editions, 2021), and *To The One Who Raped Me*

(Sibling Rivalry Press, 2012). He is a co-editor of *Let Me Say This: A Dolly Parton Poetry Anthology* (Madville Publishing, 2023) and editor of *When I Was Straight: A Tribute to Maureen Seaton* (Harbor Editions, 2024). His poetry has appeared in numerous journals, been read on NPR and other radio stations, featured in Georgia Poetry in the Parks, and earned Pushcart and *Best of the Net* nominations. Dustin is the founder and curator of the Wild & Precious Life Series. Find him online at [dustinbrookshire.com](http://dustinbrookshire.com).

**Rowan Quince Buckton** (she | they) grew up along the Hudson River and holds an MFA in Writing from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her work has appeared in *PANK*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *the Writer's Chronicle*, *Grist*, and elsewhere, and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She lives on the land originally known as Lháqemesh, an island off the coast of Washington on the Salish Sea.

**Ali C** is a poet and author of the chapbook, *NIGHT OF THE FIRE* (Ethel, 2025). Poems have been published in *Sontag Mag*, *Diode*, and others. Learn more at [www.alixyz.club](http://www.alixyz.club).

**Rivka Clifton** is the transfemme author of *Muzzle* (JackLeg Press) as well as the chapbooks *MOT* and *Agape* (from Osmanthus Press). She has work in: *Pleiades*, *Guernica*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Colorado Review*, and other magazines.

**Asa Drake** is the author of *Maybe the Body* (Tin House, 2026) and *Beauty Talk* (Noemi Press, 2026).

**Leila Farjami** is an Iranian-American poet, translator, and psychotherapist. She is the recipient of *The Cincinnati Review's* 2024 Schiff Awards in Poetry, a finalist for the 2024 Prufer Poetry Prize by *Pleiades*, a finalist for the 2025 Perugia Press prize, has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and *Best of the Net*. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Pleiades*, *Ploughshares*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *West Trade Review*, *The Penn Review*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *Diode*, a Guernica Editions anthology, among others. She lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.

**Anthony Frame** is an exterminator from Toledo, Ohio, where he lives with his wife. He's the author of *Where Wind Meets Wing* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2018) and the editor of Glass Poetry Press. His work has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Verse Daily*, *Harpur Palate*, and the anthology *Not That Bad: Dispatches from the Rape Culture* (Harper Collins, 2018), among others. He's twice been awarded Individual Excellence grants from the Ohio Arts Council.

**Stephanie Frazee**'s work is forthcoming from or has appeared in *Centaur*, *Midwest Weird*, *Variant Literature*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Marrow Magazine*, *The Evergreen Review*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Juked*, and elsewhere. Her poetry has been nominated for *Best of the Net* by *Door Is A Jar*. She is online at [www.stephaniefrazee.com](http://www.stephaniefrazee.com) and [@stephieosaurus.bsky.social](https://www.bsky.social/@stephieosaurus).

**Teddy L. Friedline** is a Pittsburgh-based queer writer. Their work has appeared in *Vagabond City*, *Fauxmoir*, *DEAR Poetry Journal*, and elsewhere. He was the recipient of the 2022 Sophie Kerr Prize. They hold an MFA from Chatham University.

**Andrea Fry** has published two collections of poetry, *The Bottle Diggers*, in 2017 (Turning Point Press) and *Poisons & Antidotes* (Deerbrook Editions) in 2021.

**Stephanie Glazier**'s manuscript, *Of Fish & Country*, has been a finalist in the National Poetry Series, Tupelo's Helena Whitehill Prize, the Airlie Press Prize, the Perugia Press Prize, Milkweed's Ballard Spahr Prize, and at Changes Press. Her poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and others. You can learn more about her at [stephanieglazier.com](http://stephanieglazier.com). She lives and works in Detroit.

**Harrison Hamm** is a multi-genre writer from West Tennessee and Goldwater Fellow in NYU's Creative Writing MFA. His work appears in *POETRY*, *The Missouri Review*, *Verse Daily*, and more.

**Abby Hanna** is a full-time teacher, occasional writer, and eternal lover of bodies of water.

**A.M. Hayden** is a Pushcart Prize nominee and 2023 River Heron Editor's Choice winner. She lives with her family and many rescues, including Wonder Pup Vinny Valentine.

**Maurya Kerr** is a 2025 NEA Creative Writing Fellow. Much of her artistic work is focused on Black people reclaiming their birthright to both wonderment and the quotidian.

**Alysse Kathleen McCanna** is the author of *Fish Wife*. Her poetry has appeared in *North American Review*, *The Rumpus*, *Poet Lore*, and other journals.

**Brittany Micka-Foos** is the author of the short story collection *It's No Fun Anymore* (Apprentice House Press, 2025) and the prose poetry chapbook *a litany of words as fragile as window glass* (Bottlecap Press, 2024). Her short stories, poetry, plays, and essays have been published in *Ninth Letter*, *Witness Magazine*, *Literary Mama*, *Identity Theory*, and elsewhere. Brittany lives in Bellingham, WA, with her family. A former victim's rights lawyer for a national nonprofit, Brittany hopes to channel her writing career into increased opportunities for dialogue on mental health and trauma.

**Zain Murdock** (she/they) is a bisexual Jamaican and African American poet, Pisces, and abolitionist journalist with other poems in *Poet Lore*, *Slice Magazine*, *The Adroit Journal*, and elsewhere. Currently Maryland-based, Zain is also working on a Black speculative fiction piece exploring time travel as a remedy for traumatic events. Find more at [zainmurdock.com](http://zainmurdock.com).

**Cassandra Myers (My'z)** (they/she/he) is an award-winning poet, performer, dancer, illustrator, and counselor from Tkaronto, Ontario. As a queer, non-binary, South-Asian-Italian, crip, mad, survivor of sexual violence, Cassandra's work is cinematic and juicy with its critical anti-oppressive eye.

Cassandra's work has won national literary and spoken word titles including the National Magazine GOLD Award in Poetry and Champion of the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word. Their work has been internationally received at the Ada Lovelace Festival in Berlin and elsewhere. Find their poetry in *ARC Poetry Magazine*, *Canthius*, *The Tahoma Literary Review*, and more. Follow them @cass.myers.poetry or find them online at [cassmyers.com](http://cassmyers.com).

**Blessing Omeiza Ojo** is a Black bard, art administrator, and editor. He teaches creative writing to children in schools, guiding them to succeed both on the page and the stage. He is the coordinator of Hill-Top Creative Arts Foundation, Abuja. His work has been published/is forthcoming in notable journals including *Frontier Poetry*, *The Shallow Tales Review*, *The Deadlands*, *Còn-sciò*, *Split Lip Magazine*, *Poetry NND Column*, *Lumiere Review*, *MAAR Review*, and others. Omeiza has received numerous accolades, including nominations for *Best of the Net*, the 9th Korea-Nigeria Poetry Prize, the 2020 Artslounge Literature Teacher of the Year Award, the 2021 Words Rhymes & Rhythm Nigerian Teacher's Award, the 2022 & 2023 HIASFEST Best Teacher Award, the 2024 Eugenia Abu/Sevhage International Prize for Creative Non-Fiction, and the 2025 Golden Award for Art Administrators. When he isn't writing, Omeiza enjoys gaming or daydreaming of paradise, where he embraces his dead loved ones.

**Bleah Patterson** is a queer, Southern poet from Texas. Much of her work explores the contention between identity and home and has been featured or is forthcoming in various journals, including *Electric Literature*, *Pinch*, *Grist*, *The Laurel Review*, *Phoebe Literature*, *The Rumpus*, and *Taco Bell Quarterly*.

"Manhattan" appears in **Amy Pence**'s collection *We Travel Towards It*, released spring of 2025 from Serving House Books. She authored the poetry collections *The Decadent Lovely* and *Armor, Amour* as well as the chapbooks *Skin's Dark Night* and *Your Posthumous Dress: Remnants from the Alexander McQueen Collection* (dancing girl press, 2019). Her hybrid book with Emily Dickinson at its speculative center— *[It]* *Incandescent* — (Ninebark, 2018) won the Eyelands International Poetry Award in Athens, Greece. Red

Hen Press will publish her debut novel, *Yellow*, in 2026. She is a freelance tutor in Atlanta. Find her online at [amyponce.com](http://amyponce.com).

**eva pensis** is a multidisciplinary artist, writer, and nightlife performer in the tradition of transsexual storytellers who speak truth to power. Recent essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Ruckus!*, *The Drama Review*, *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly*, *Critical Inquiry*, and *The Los Angeles Review of Books*. She currently works as the Trans Oral History postdoctoral fellow with the University of Pennsylvania.

**Zoey Plytas** is a poet based in Tucson, AZ. She can be found collecting sentimental receipts or as @zoey.plytas on any social media.

**Kimberly Ann Priest** is the winner of the 2024 Backwaters Prize in Poetry from the University of Nebraska Press for her book *Wolves in Shells*, as well as the author of *tether & lung* (Texas Review Press) and *Slaughter the One Bird* (Sundress Publications). A professor of first-year writing at Michigan State University, she lives with her husband in Maine.

**Molly Pershin Raynor** is a poet, healing practitioner, and community-builder. Her poetry has been featured on NPR and published in several literary magazines, including *Vinyl*, *The Rumpus*, and *Split Lip Magazine*. Her poetry collection *ZAFTIG* was released from Fifth Avenue Press in Spring 2024. Molly co-founded RAW Talent with Donté Clark, a youth performing arts program in Richmond, California, and Staying Power, a youth-driven arts activism program in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Her work is highlighted in the documentary film *Romeo Is Bleeding*, which was on Netflix. She draws inspiration from Audre Lorde, Octavia Butler, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Frida Khalo, Nina Simone, and from the recipes, jokes, and legacies of her ancestors. Molly comes from a long line of storytellers and plumbers who taught her how to bend words and weld new worlds.

**Heidi Seaborn** is winner of *The Missouri Review* Editors Prize in Poetry and author of three award-winning books/chapbooks of poetry. Her third collection, *tic tic tic*, is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press (2025). Recent work has appeared in *AGNI*, *Image*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Terrain.org*, *The Slowdown* and elsewhere. Seaborn is Executive Editor of *The Adroit Journal* and holds an MFA from NYU. Find her online at [heidiseabornpoet.com](http://heidiseabornpoet.com).

**Anindita Sengupta** is a poet from India and has lived in Los Angeles for nine years. She is the author of *Only the Forest Knows* (Paperwall, 2022), *Walk Like Monsters* (Paperwall, 2016), and *City of Water* (Sahitya Akademi, 2010). She has received fellowships and awards from the Charles Wallace Trust, the International Reporting Project, Muse India, and TFA India. Her work is in anthologies such as *The Penguin Book of Indian Poets*, *The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry*, *Witness (Red River)*, and journals such as *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Plume*, *Salamander*, *Folio*, *One*, *Feral*, and others. She is currently expanding her artistic practice to explore photography and mixed media.

**Millie Tullis** (she/they) has published poetry in *Sugar House Review*, *Stone Circle Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Ninth Letter*, and elsewhere. Find more at [millietullis.com](http://millietullis.com).



## Notes

“TURNING [CHRYSOPOEIA]” is a golden shovel that includes the line “Listen: in this poem, there are no men.” from [“A Series of Small Miracles”](#) by Daniella Toosie-Watson. Toosie-Watson wrote this piece after a poem by Ross Gay, and he wrote his after Gwendolyn Brooks. Thus the poem is working to honor this lineage of poems building on each other.

“We’re all trembling all the time” quotes the line “causing spacetime to ring like a gently struck bell” from Robert Lea’s article “The universe is humming with gravitational waves. Here's why scientists are so excited about the discovery” from the July 3, 2023 article on [Space.com](#).

“golden shovel for 2018” includes portions of the author’s Columbia University undergraduate admissions letter from 2018.

“A poem in which i was never raped” quotes the film *Showgirls* with the line “It’s Versayce.”

“Jamais vu” references Marie Howe’s poem “The Attic” from *What the Living Do* (W. W. Norton).

“(The) United States of this body (An American Psalm)” quotes both Oregon’s state motto, “flies with her own wings,” and Ohio’s state slogan, “heart of it all.”

## Reprint Credits

“Afterward” by Heidi Seaboard was first published in *The Matador Review* and later in *Give a Girl Chaos {see what she can do}* (C&R Press, 2019).

“Belief” by Rivka Clifton first appeared in *Arkansas International*.

“Bootleg Poem” by Anthony Frame first appeared in *West Trade Review*.

“Diary Entry #34: Epigenetics” by Diannely Antigua first appeared in *Good Monster* (Copper Canyon Press, 2024).

“Embalm” by Ali C first appeared in *Diode Poetry Journal*.

“Field Dresser” by Harrison Hamm first appeared in *Broken Antler*, then reprinted in *Furious Pure*.

“Ghost Peppers” by Brittany Micka-Foos first appeared in *Epiphany Magazine*.

“golden shovel for 2018” by Zain Murdock first appeared in *Breakwater Review*.

“housesitting for a Stranger in Spring” by Millie Tullis first appeared in *Sugar House Review* (Issue 25).

“I tested the tricky dark” by Anindita Sengupta first appeared in *Only the Forest Knows* (Paperwall India, 2022).

“In a Parallel Universe I Am Borrowing Grief from My Daughter, Who Has It to Spare” by Bleah Patterson first appeared in *Jet Fuel Review*.

“Manhattan” by Amy Pence first appeared in *Denver Quarterly* and later in *We Travel Towards It* (Serving House Books, 2025).

“My Ex Boyfriend Asked Why Women Can Never Stop Talking about Men in Their Art and I Said It’s Because They Give Us No Choice” by Bleah Patterson first appeared in *Anti-Heroine Chic*.

“Paterfamilias” by Maurya Kerr first appeared in *Southern Humanities Review* (Vol. 55.2).

“Poem In Which I Was Never Raped” by Dustin Brookshire first appeared in *Honey Literary*.

“The United States of This Body (An American Psalm)” by A.M. Hayden first appeared in *American Saunter: Poems of the U.S.* (FlowerSong Press, 2024).

“There is No One” by Leila Farjami first appeared in *Silk Road Review* (25).

“What I Know of Strangulation” by Heidi Seaborn first appeared in *Driftwood Review*.

“Women Turned Inside Out” by Alysse Kathleen McCanna first appeared in *FishWife* (Black Lawrence Press, 2024).