

ASSIGNMENT LITERARY MAGAZINE

WINTER 2025

# LUCID



# Assignment Literary Magazine

2015-2025

Winter 2025: Lucid

Published electronically December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025

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*Assignment Literary Magazine* is the official literary magazine of Southern New Hampshire University's Mountainview MFA program.

**Mission** Here at *Assignment Literary Magazine* we believe in the joy of creating and sharing art. Our editorial team is passionate about curating a platform that both celebrates and elevates literature and the diverse individuals who produce it. We are looking for literature that pushes the boundaries of excellence. We want work that makes you pull over the car because you have to get it out of you so quickly. The art that throbs in your chest and flashes across your vision like a daydream. We want work that hypnotizes us and floats back through our minds while we're folding laundry. Send us something that will change our minds, force our perspectives, or expand our vision. Send us something beautiful. Send us something ugly. Send us something raw. Send us something we can eat. Send us your best.

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## Editor's Note

Dear reader,

Thank you very much for exploring our magazine. Your desire to examine the stories told by this collection of art is why Assignment Literary Magazine has life. To the contributors, I express my heartfelt thanks for sharing your work with us and trusting us to give your creation a home.

“Lucid” immediately popped off the whiteboard in the editor brainstorming session. The word has a delicious duality; it somehow feels both blurry and familiar. There’s a relatability to bringing awareness to your own lucidity and also a lot to analyze. As I read the submissions, I discovered that trying to examine the human experience with precision often brought me to places of greater blurriness. I found that satisfying. What, if not being more confused after seeking clarity, is more representative of what it feels like to exist in this world?

I was surprised by how nonfiction shined in this issue. Typically, nonfiction is our least popular submission category, yet the magazine is more nonfiction than anything else. We didn’t make a choice to feature more nonfiction, it was just how it worked out. I’m tickled by this because it naturally became a perfect expression of the theme.

As ALM is run by students of SNHU’s MFA program and I am about to graduate, I’m sad to share that “Lucid” is my final issue as a part of the editorial team. Working on this magazine has supplemented my education wonderfully and I feel that the opportunity was a large part of why my writing improved so much during my time here. I’m enormously grateful to Benjamin Nugent for his offer two winters ago to let me be a part of this publication as an incoming student. I’m also very grateful to the wonderful co-editor’s I’ve had the pleasure of working with and learning from while on the team. Thank you for your flexibility, creativity, professionalism, and, above all, dedication to the quality of this journal.

Now that we’re all feeling painfully lucid after my sappy goodbye, I’m thrilled to introduce the next issue of Assignment Literary Magazine. Please enjoy.

All the best,

Lauren Rose

## **From Terrible Weather Conditions to Chlorine**

*with John Engman*

By Christopher Michel

Someone should write to someone, as I am writing to you  
anonymously, intimately, assertively  
reaching through the barriers of page and time,  
the way our brains behave differently,  
the values we ascertain or assume,  
to say, like a finger  
touching a chest, the thing that will change that someone's life.  
Someone should write to me.

I wander, many weekends, through bookstores filled—  
their walls filled to the ceiling with writing: plaintive, threatening  
beguiling, and I wish my life would change  
without any effort on my part. I wish the change would change  
everything and nothing at all, so I could go  
back to the life I muddle through with my same wife and kids  
my same house (maybe a bigger house) and job (better job) but without  
the weight of hating it and everyone and everything that  
makes me so sad,

all the time sad. I wish someone would write something  
to me that would change me enough that I could finally  
lay back in a wild new shimmering pool without wanting  
to drown  
in the shallow end

**Dream Journal, 4/15/24**

By Georgie Contreras

You're missing. No one's seen you in a week.  
I'm convinced you've run away from the dead-end job  
The disappointments and banalities of this life.  
Before, you put aside all fears and promised me  
A future in the form of a white moonstone ring.  
Now, I hand out flyers in the town square  
Call your phone just to leave another voicemail:  
*I'll forget everything you said, if you need me to.*  
*You can take it all back. Just come home, please.*

I end another inscrutable day in the house I grew up in  
Surrounded by friends that can't stand each other.  
K—says that hope is a delusion in the face of reality.  
I hate her for it. And still, I switch up my approach.  
I start hitting suburban commuter rail stations  
Recalling my own ill-conceived, teenage plan.  
I'm headed north along the Haverhill line when  
K—calls me. I don't press "accept," yet.

I wonder if you have your favorite pair of Vans  
If your bike feels lonely, lying under a blooming oak tree.



## **Contemplating Heaven in St George's Garden**

By Phillip Zapkin

In a strange little park,  
slow and grassy  
as our Sunday stroll,  
we pass the muse  
of music,  
silently eternal  
in carved stone,  
we pass tombs  
of beloveds  
and grave markers  
of locals long dead,  
we pass the living trees  
growing as they have done  
for hundreds of years,  
and I look up  
to the azure blue  
of an English summer sky,  
and think,  
on a day like today  
one is tempted  
to believe in a heaven.

Almost.

# Un/Bound: the dreamer wakes inside her own mind

By Wednesdae Reim Ifrach

fractured light  
spills across rib and bone:  
a clasp of grief (heavy as rusted steel)  
threads through each inhale,  
the waking world  
a cathedral of half-remembered sighs.

here, in the soft hush of REM  
the membrane blurs:  
I slip from vertebrae into stardust,  
eyes wide, commanding my own architecture.  
“Awake,” I murmur to my dreaming self,  
a calibration of consciousness,  
An electric hum beneath reconstruction.

(blue blood blooms in pixelated veins)  
I sculpt sorrow into origami wings,  
fold and unfold  
to escape the gravity of my own despair.  
Each crease is an incision of intention.

the sky fractals open,  
I step through a portal  
made of breath and longing.  
I taste the ease of being unbodied:  
a dancer in the synapse,  
an alchemist of midnight impulses.

yet authenticity  
bleeds back into these lucid tunnels:  
a whisper  
of bone, of heart  
that demands its presence.  
In dream, I cannot outrun the self,  
I negotiate with shadow,  
exchange control for revelation.



the choreography of grief  
translates into dream-code:

1. attend to pain
  2. transmute into vision
  3. release into the electric horizon
- (and watch the phantom sorrow rise, phoenix-bright).

I dream-remember the taste of morning:  
coffee's bitter warmth  
sip by sip reconstructing truth.  
My hands still hum  
with the pulse of lucid possibility,  
hands that once only folded laundry now cradle galaxies.

here, between two breaths,  
I find the prayer of paradox:  
to live is to grieve,  
to dream is to forgive  
the weight of being.  
In lucid currents I learn  
that control and surrender  
are the same strange coin.

and when the day fractures open  
I carry the dream's echo beneath my skin,  
a clandestine pulse reminding me  
that every tear can be re-imagined  
as luminous tide,  
and every waking moment  
a gift to claim my own becoming.





## **Philosophy**

By Rizwan Akhtar

Do not ask me about love. At its  
best, lost, the worst, regained, lost.  
A seer in the street asked me for  
a coin, now I am a hostage to his  
smile. He will meet me in dreams  
from the moment our gaze settles.  
Punctual like a train. Like fireflies  
winking in the backyard. Like leaves  
assuming shapes, or just an idea  
hollowing me. Questions are  
bands of imagination; there is a  
wind that bends trees into answers.



## **HAPPENSTANCE**

By David Avila

To be schizophrenic,  
It is univocal,  
Yet varied in its definition  
Hallucinations possibly-  
Differ with great variance,  
But their effect-  
Unambiguous;  
Equally, so is delusion,  
Affect, spanning from high vista  
Of the very little effected,  
With proper added inflection,  
To the depths of the terrifying  
Canyon of catatonia...  
Trauma is left in the wake  
Of this singular experience,  
Sometimes visible,  
Sometimes not,  
But always there,  
Behind the windows  
Of each unique soul struck  
By this happenstance.



## This is the Hard Drive

By Daniel Buccieri

My dad could drive anything. That's what my mom always told me. He was steering cement trucks in and out of worksites across Manhattan before he was 21. He could park anything anywhere. I don't have that confidence in my motoring abilities. I imagine what he looked like back then. Beating the sun to the construction site. Heel of his left palm at 12 o'clock spinning the steering wheel in a celestial orbit. Right hand cavorting through 12 gears. Thin and muscular. So young and handsome. Green eyes, and that mustache that declared 1970s New York Italian young man. White undershirts, crucifix and cornicello necklaces. "Mom" between two sparrows tattooed on his arm.

He loved Harley Davidsons. He told me when I was young *there are two types of bike riders, those who haven't crashed yet, and those who will never crash again.*

Dad lived in car dealerships. He shocked everyone with his wild idea to switch careers and coasts, from hairstylist to car salesman, from New York to California. Gone were his white tank tops, his faded blue jeans. They were replaced by sharp suits. 40 different ties. Fine leather shoes. He worked *bell to bell*, he always said, from the moment the dealership opened to after it closed. My dad sold cars. He sold stories, he sold laughter. He could sell anything to anybody, whether you wanted it or not. I didn't inherit that power. He went from being on the lot, to being on the desk, to sitting in his own office behind glass doors.

His first motorcycle crash happened when I was too little to have any memory of it. The story goes that a car parked ahead of him flung open its driver side door, causing him to somehow lose control. He *went flying*, he would say with a smile, flying through some glass, then down onto some Long Island asphalt, then to the hospital. I would trace the scars left across his skin with my kindergarten

index finger. They ran along no set pattern, disfiguring the face of Jesus tattooed on his right shoulder into a tangled mess of black ink.

For a few weeks out of a few high school summers, Dad brought me to work with him at the car dealership. I'd be out on the lot washing the cars under the Fontana sun. He'd be inside his air-conditioned office. He'd let me take too many breaks. I would sit with him in his office and just watch what work was for him. I was uncomfortable with the amount of power my dad was able to brandish. No one could say no to the boss. They laughed at all of his jokes. Even the ones I did not understand. He would introduce me to everyone, *This is Daniel, my first-born.*

He drove me into the city to see Yankee games.

When I was 15, my dad took me to the DMV for my driver's permit test. The woman at the counter there handed me a paper test and a pencil and pointed to the railing alongside the windows near the entrance. She told me to go and take the test over there and bring it back when I finished. My dad, standing next to me, saw that I was struggling. He looked over my shoulder and gave me the answers to a bunch of the questions. I brought my test back to the woman and stood there looking down at her as she scored the test. I failed.

It was a Memorial Day weekend. I was camping with friends alongside the Colorado River, out past the California-Arizona border. After a long day of too much sun and silver cans, but not enough real food, we headed onto the freeway in my van towards the Jack in the Box next to a gas station, guided by the distant glow of the neon that sliced through the black sky. Somewhere after Jack in the Box my van died. Engine seized. In the dark of the quiet desert night, my van on the shoulder, no signal on my Nokia, beneath a bed of judging stars, I walked back to the pay phone at the gas station, and called my dad collect somewhere past midnight, across two states, and miles and miles of night. *I'm on my way*, he said.



On one drive back home from a summer day working at the dealership, my dad turned to me and joked, *you know if you would have passed your permit test, you could be driving right now.* And he smiled.

My dad went on long motorcycle rides. Pretty much the only type of vacations he ever took. He'd often venture on the famous Harley rally to Sturgis, South Dakota, 1,392 miles away. Like him, I love the open road. The beauty of the highway unfolding ahead. The dance of the distance out through the driver's side window. Getting from Point A to Point J and all of the places in between. I drove across the country by myself during my second teacher's summer. I called my dad at night from wherever I stopped. Williams, Arizona. Tucumcari, New Mexico. St. Louis. Chicago. Erie, Pennsylvania. New York, where we were both born.

His second crash happened much later in life. At an age when I thought it was silly for my dad, or anyone to still ride motorcycles. A woman changed lanes in front of him; he must have been in her blind spot. With emergency skill, he guided his bike to hit her tire and not the body of her car, hoping that would protect the bike a little better. He *went flying*, he would say with a smile, over her car, into the bed of a pick-up a lane over, and then out onto the hot Temecula pavement. His shoulder was destroyed—he'd never be able to ride a bike with high chopper handlebars again. His heel was shattered—his leather vest of invulnerability torn to shreds.

Dad was a corvette. Classic, American muscle. Loud and flashy. His favorite car. He bought his first one the year we moved to Temecula. When he dropped me off at school, he would make sure the Corvette was louder than normal somehow. Unnecessary revving of the engine or something like that. He wanted the heads to turn. I wanted them to turn away. He must have known.

Just as every driver quarrels with their gas tank, my dad constantly battled growing old. When I was small, he'd put me on his lap and let me steer his car



down the blocks surrounding our home. Just like in the Springsteen song. I remember the presence of a first grader's fear, but I also remember its dialectical companion of feeling completely cared for. That as long as I was with my dad, I'd be safe.

I let him be in charge of the car radio. Classic rock stations, like 95.5 KLOS. He had a story for every song. He had a story for everything in his world. I learned how to hear music through his story memories of concerts by Led Zeppelin, David Bowie, Lou Reed, Sly and the Family Stone, and his all-time favorite, Carlos Santana. Dad took me with him to see Santana play in concert. My first one. The aural aura washed over me. I felt music. I fell in love with music. Loud and live, grooves were etched deep into my being.

Anytime he stopped for gas with me in the backseat, he'd buy me a pack of baseball cards.

My dad taught me how to drive. First on a stick shift. One morning, junior year of high school, I thought I was in reverse. I was in first and launched myself through our garage door. Dad came out and saw me in my state of utter disgrace. *Go to school*, he said in a tone softer than I expected. After a Top-5 worst day of high school, Dad said, *Your stick shift days are over*. And he smiled.

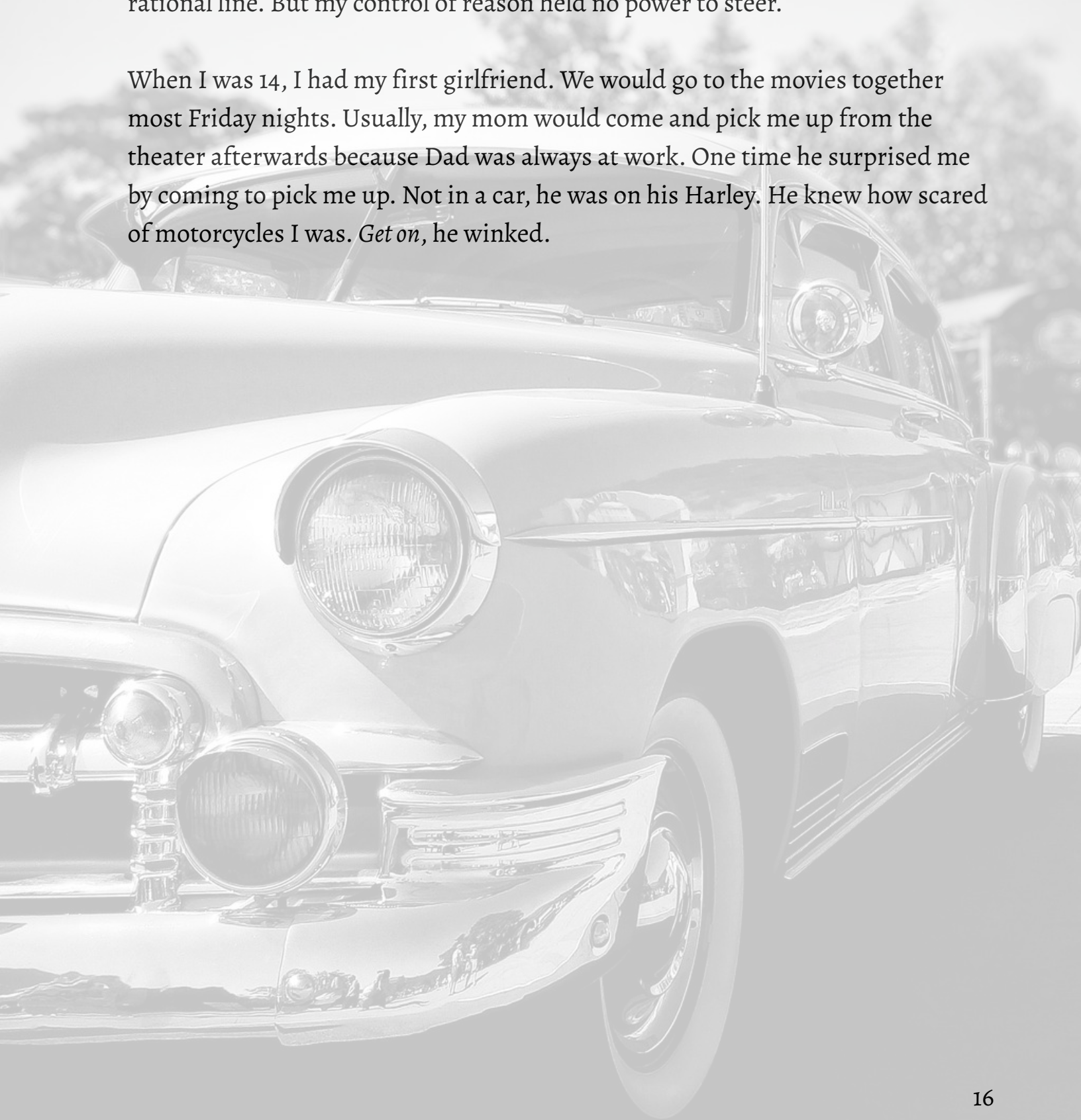
His third motorcycle crash was his last crash.

Once as an impetuous teenager I made the mistake of not coming home one night. Dad found me at a friend's house the next morning and drove me home, erupting with rage. Lava seeped out of the pores of his skin. The air around him boiled. I understand now that his fury and fire was actually fear.

In the final chapter, my dad sold his home and bought an RV. Defiantly, he told

me his plan was to live on the road, criss-crossing the US to stay in Florida part of the year and California part of the year and parts in between for the rest of the year. In our final conversation, I implored him to reconsider. I offered line after rational line. But my control of reason held no power to steer.

When I was 14, I had my first girlfriend. We would go to the movies together most Friday nights. Usually, my mom would come and pick me up from the theater afterwards because Dad was always at work. One time he surprised me by coming to pick me up. Not in a car, he was on his Harley. He knew how scared of motorcycles I was. *Get on*, he winked.



## Line Drawings

By Martin Perez

It's tempting to lie there. It's tempting to give up. It is tempting to die like Job's wife explained her husband should when afflicted by malady after malady. Lay there in grief. Lay there in repose. It's ironic to suggest that we want to die sooner than our time, whatever *that* means, but when life is too difficult, has too much agony, is too full of grief, we brush up against the idea of endings, whatever *that* means, too.

"When my son died, his body didn't look like him at all," my friend Scott says.

It's only the third time we've talked about things concerning his son. I met him at a karaoke bar through a mutual acquaintance, and we quickly became *amigos*. He has a wonderful voice that is reminiscent of Dwight Yoakam. And a lingering sadness. I have a habit of making jokes to diffuse awkward situations. My other friend sometimes shushes me quietly, behind Scott's back, when the circumstance takes a mild, unexpected turn, and I understand it.

My friend's eyes are kind, beautiful, but deeply grieved. The depth of sadness that speaks after his words end. There is a melancholy glint that is seconds from crying uncontrollably, or a bad movie line from depression, and screaming. I can imagine him sitting alone, his body convulsing, and it doesn't feel like it would be unexpected. His eyes are dark pools where I cannot see the other side, because to see the other side is to witness the birth of his son, and how memories go no further; to see the other side is to find my friend's thoughts the moment he learned that his son was no more. It is to see a brutal car accident where his six-foot-three son, in a compact car, suffered a head injury that he didn't recover from.

"Same with my dad," I say, but not sure I mean it, or even if I could mean it. I enjoy my buddy. It's always difficult to talk with my friend, though, because behind the sometimes-good times or sometimes laughter or sometimes joking, his son is still dead.



“It wasn’t him,” I say. “It was like a line drawing of who he was.”

“That’s a good way to put it,” my friend says. “The exact way to put it.”

I smile lightly.

When things get “touchy,” and they are almost always touchy, I get scared more than anything. I am afraid of saying the wrong thing as though there was a right thing to say. I am fearful that even talking about things has some supernatural power to bring death closer to my world. And my world has enough death as it is. It feels as though to mention death is to call it over, to tempt the dark end of us all, into paying attention to me. I know it’s already clawing its way this direction – it does for everyone – but why hasten it, even if it’s only in my mind?

I’ve had a long-time battle with what I try to call forced indifference to death, and I’m clearly faltering. I like to think I am okay with the inevitable, that in some grand way I have looked death in the face and accepted the ultimate destination, but that is bullshit. Thus, the forced part of my approach to acknowledging or disacknowledging everyone’s maker. It is, in fact, preposterous to suggest I’ve somehow come to terms with losing a lifelong game of “you’re going to die, stupid.” The ups and downs in the battle seem to be cleverly tied to successes in my life financially, relationally, mentally, and physically. But I hadn’t felt compelled to the zero-sum-ish game until I was in my late twenties. I awoke to an episode of sleep paralysis in my bedroom. All I could hear was the static from the nearby television at what was probably three in the morning. My eyes opened, but the rest of my body was closed. Except for the inability to move my extremities or my eyes in any direction other than forward, and the terrifying weight of some unknown presence over my body, everything was perfectly normal. The lights in the room were on. It was quiet. Peaceful in the outside world. My inside world was a fishbowl of anxiety and fear. I woke up a second time a few minutes later, and everything was fine. No paralysis, no presence. What lingered, what I paid attention to, for the first time, was a sense of dread. It was time to look over my

shoulder. Who knows, perhaps it was death itself leaning over me, window shopping.

It's as though our collective fate has a one-way advantage. We are wearing plastic name tags like in a retail store, but we know zero about death other than anecdotal evidence and the fact that the human body ends, deteriorates, and we bury, cremate, or can't find what's left of it. In some ridiculous cases of tragedy, other mutilations happen. Regardless, the result is that our bodies stop working. How do we comfort ourselves? We say we are not the buried. We are not the body. Or are we? Is the entirety of who we are, our memories, dreams, our failures, losses, grieving over others that passed, all the times we were angry or hopeful or sexual or funny or ironic or scared or happy or pissed the fuck off or hurt – is that all buried too? Is there anything to suggest otherwise, once past a Fox television series where men with night vision hunt for ghosts, or a grandparent's stories, or a few drinks over Karaoke songs, where the compelling reason that there must be something more is across the table in my friend?

Life is special. Inconsequential bits of memory, tiny victories, first dates, first and maybe fifth loves, even the bad stuff. It all makes life what it should be, and helps us frame death. I saw a random clip where Mark Hamill surprised Adam Scott on the Jimmy Kimmel show the other day, and a situation with the group of celebrities never felt so unrelatable, but as I watched Adam Scott's handshake with joy as he covered his mouth when Hamill appeared, I knew that life's events, big or small, negligible or profound, even if it didn't matter to me, matter to someone.

And so maybe death isn't about loss. Maybe death isn't the culmination and the ending of someone's journey. Perhaps life is all the little joys that signal to humanity that in a universe as vast, dark, and often unwelcoming, death allows us to consider a different phase. Maybe those little events that make up life extend beyond us. Scott's son's impact is still here even though his son isn't. I wonder if we never knew thirst, if a nice glass of water would have an impact? If we never knew hunger, would a hamburger ever make sense? If we never longed for love, affection, or lust, would we ever understand the heart? I doubt it. It is



not to say we need what we consider bad to appreciate good, but it doesn't hurt. Life is difficult, and death more so. Sometimes death feels like it is too much to handle because it is. Grief is real. But then, so is life. I must remind myself of that.

Scott and I raise our glasses of beer. "George Fucking Straight," we almost shout, as a refrain of a regular toast. The bar around us is lively. Our other friend is on the way back from the restroom. We all smile and drink a sip, but then we get quiet, pensive. I don't know what Scott thinks. I don't ask. It is for him. And it matters.



## Something to Be Admired

By Lauren Short

David Adam was bent across the checkout counter drinking stolen tea he'd brewed from the café and a book he was reading off the shelves, the spine bent over and broken on itself.

I walked up to the counter, setting my dusting rag down.

"So, what kind of music are you into?" he asked.

"I've been really into Rogue Wave and Pinback lately," I said, despite being annoyed that he was so sedate while I'd been wiping down bookshelves but hoping to impress him, nonetheless. "There are others on my iPod, but I just can't think of them right now."

"I love *Summers in Abaddon*."

He was referring to Pinback's third album, *Summer in Abaddon*. I thought to correct him. It was *Summer*, not *Summers* and *Abaddon*, the underworld of lost souls, not *Abandon*. But I simply said, "Me too."

"Well, why don't you go run out to your car and get your iPod and show me."

He was patronizing in the way that white Southern men can be, but there was a thrill to leaving the store during my shift to retrieve my touch wheel iPod to see what else we had in common. I wanted to be desired by someone I perceived as intelligent, first and foremost, even if that meant ignoring other shortcomings. So out the glass door I went, a walk-jog with long strides, the bell jingling to indicate that someone had passed through the threshold.

After handing back the iPod, David Adam said, "This is really good. I should give you something that's missing, though. You'd really like Interpol."



A customer appeared at the desk.

“Do you have *The Brass Verdict*?”

“Nah, I’m afraid we don’t,” David Adam said, without deigning to search our computer inventory system. “I’d try Amazon, brother.”

David Adam called women “love,” so I asked him why. He said he was from Northern England where it was a common term of endearment. *Oh okay, he’s British. He gets a pass. But also, Manchester is a convenient place to come from because most people from Kentucky won’t be able to push you for details.*

He’d grown up briefly abroad, he said, but returned to the States to Leitchfield where his mother’s family was from.

“And everyone in my family is a doctor. My mother, father, sister. I fear I’m disappointing them all for not choosing the same path.”

We’d talk about music and books, and he’d accuse me of reading propaganda, and I’d tell him he didn’t understand what the word propaganda meant, and he’d kiss me for the first time in his Jeep. We’d sit in the parking lot for hours and he’d tell me how he almost got kicked out of Belgium for fist fighting some guy and I’d say, “You had some tussles in Brussels?” and he’d smile and continue kissing me. One night, during our Jeep kiss-and-talks, his phone kept lighting up.

“Wow. Someone really wants to get ahold of you.”

“Yeah, it’s one of my friends I’m supposed to meet up with later. So annoying,” he said, as he tossed his phone towards the center cupholder, grabbing my cheek with his open palm to kiss me.

Baely was short, had shoulder-length brown hair, and would often wear the same red t-shirt and a pair of black work pants along with the signature Books-A-Million apron. While she showed me how to remove shrink wrap from books and shelve



them, she asked if I'd read the *Twilight* series.

"People give them a lot of crap, but they're really good."

"Um, I mean. I could give it a go."

"Do you think you could finish it by the end of next week? That's when the movie comes out. We could go together if you finish in time."

She was bossy, and all her opinions were both strong and correct, with no flexibility. But I was attracted to that type of personality. Probably some kind of unresolved co-dependency. We had little in common, but I found being her friend appealing because it meant she'd seen something in me that she liked.

"I think I can do that."

On the opening night of *Twilight*, I'd barely managed to trudge along to the end of the book, but could honestly claim I'd finished it, despite not knowing it was about glitter vampires before cracking chapter one. From that night onward, Baely and I made trips to Best Buy where she spent her scholarship money on Ben Folds Five's *Forever and Ever Amen* and Alanis Morissette's *Jagged Little Pill*. I opted for Rilo Kiley's *More Adventurous*. We listened to these CDs in Baely's car before stopping at Rally's to get cheap fast-food sandwiches and seasoned fries. Oreos and Skittles were dessert.

Baely had known David Adam longer than I had, and she talked about him with an intimacy that made me uncomfortable.

"His accent comes out when he's drunk," she informed me one day in passing, when I mentioned his habit of calling women "love" even though nothing else of his "Britishness" seemed to stick. They hardly spoke or even looked at one another during work. I wrote it off as a bunch of employees getting together and getting drunk one night and Baely knew about David Adam's slurred accent as a party anecdote.



One night I closed the outdoor café, which was accessible only through an inside door on the side of the store nearest the indoor café. It consisted of about eight circular tables with chairs that wrapped around the corner of the building. As I snaked a wire lock through the legs of every wrought iron table and chair, David Adam sat smoking a Pall Mall at the table closet to the door, on break.

“What do you plan on doing for your birthday?” he asked.

“I’ll be 19. So, I’m going to party?”

“Well, 19 is a pretty landmark birthday. Except for the fact that you can’t drink or rent a car.”

“Well, I can buy cigarettes and porn. I’ve never done that before.”

“You could’ve done that last year.”

“I know.”

“Okay, but you will this year?”

“No.”

“Birthdays should always have three things,” he said. “One: you should get to unwrap something. Two: you should get to blow out a candle. And three: you should get something you want.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll come to campus. We can do lunch.”

“It’s a date.”



My birthday fell on an early fall day, the beginning of a chill in the air, counteracted by the hot glare of the sun on my cheeks. David Adam met me on campus in a tight white t-shirt, tight, dark jeans, and lace-up leather shoes. In tow was a simply wrapped rectangular package without ribbon or bow.

“I think you’ll like this,” he said.

It was *No One Belongs Here More Than You*, a bright orange collection of Miranda July’s stories that he probably stole from the bookstore. After walking around the edge of campus, past the Confederate monument, and within sight of the largest Victorian neighborhood in the U.S., David Adam asked if I’d like to see his apartment.

“The rest of your gift is there.”

I think it was the corner of Magnolia and 4th, in a building with a nearly primeval red brick façade. Climbing the stairs, David Adam fished for the keys in his pocket, and when he opened the door into the apartment, I was overcome by a room with no furniture. In the corner of the main living space were a couple of pillows and a sheet, which I came to understand was his bed. The windowsills and floor surrounding the corner were stacked with winding, snaking towers of colorful books.

“You don’t have any furniture,” I said.

“Yeah, it makes it easy to pack up and leave if I have to.”

Although I maybe could have, I didn’t read David Adam’s admission as teetering on criminal, but viewed it, rather, as a brave, bohemian way to live. I was used to living in a secure, suburban cookie cutter home with my parents, whom I was growing more distant from as battles of will intensified. I was aware that money was the carrot my parents dangled in front of me, and I was ashamed of that, but didn’t yet know how to make a way for myself.



He told me to make myself comfortable (how?) while he rummaged around the kitchen. I looked around the sparse space, taking in the mass titles of books and filing away the names of artists he liked on stacks of CDs on the far side of the room. He peeked out of the kitchen and noticed me looking. Wiping his hands on the back pockets of his jeans, he made a beeline for the CD stack, removed the top three or four, and handed me Interpol's *Turn on the Bright Lights*.

"This is the one I was telling you about. You can borrow it."

"Thanks."

Returning to the kitchen, David Adam emerged with brownie atop a paper plate, a single candle skewered through its middle and lit.

"Make a wish."

I closed my eyes and blew.

It wasn't long before we found ourselves with our fingers rushing through one another's hair, tumbling atop the ghostly floor sheet. We kissed and grasped and touched. I was worried he'd found me inexperienced.

"It was sweet," he said. "Like watching a baby lamb try to stand on its legs for the first time."

There was something familiar in the way he'd infantilized me, but made it feel sexy. He walked me back to campus and before I made my way into Strickler Hall for biology, he asked me if my birthday had been everything I'd hoped it would be.

"Well, I got to unwrap a present. I blew out a candle. And I got what I wanted."

After our next shift, we found ourselves talking in David Adam's Jeep. He had a story about a sophisticated older woman who'd seduced him, and it was as if he'd opened a window into the thing I was dying to tell someone, that I could never tell anyone.



“I had a relationship with someone nineteen years older than me.”

In the silence, the gulf of judgment I’d anticipated from everyone else, anyone else, was absent. Everyone else in my life was too close. They knew me. They knew him. And all I could rationalize was how poorly it reflected on me.

“He was a teacher.”

“I figured,” his smile upturned to one side, his eyebrows raised. “So, what did you see in him?”

“It wasn’t so much what I saw in him. It was more of what I wanted him to see in me. Smarter, funnier, and prettier than everyone else.”

“That makes sense, I guess.”

And it was a relief. There was a safety in him, in the seeming anonymity, that made me believe I wouldn’t be judged. I craved his acceptance, anyone’s acceptance, even at the expense of defining our relationship and its boundaries.

On a night when David Adam was closing the bookstore, and I was closing Joe Mugs, I found myself in a hidden nook, scrubbing frothing pitchers and the espresso portafilter, my sleeves rolled up to my elbows and a black apron tied around my waist. I heard footsteps approach and before I knew it, I was up against the wall, David Adam’s mouth on mine and his hands firmly skimming my ribs. A sign reading, “ALL EMPLOYEES HANDLING FOOD SERVICE ITEMS MUST WEAR GLOVES” crashed to the floor, dislodged by the back of my head. David Adam shoved a note in my apron pocket and walked away without looking at me or saying a word.

The crumpled paper read, “Our clandestine affair is something to be admired.” It was ridiculous, truly. But my heart was pounding.



David Adam started texting me song lyrics and I responded back in kind. *Gouge away, you can gouge away. Stay all day if you want to*, pinged my phone. I texted back, *Sweet desire*, a misheard lyric from Sonic Youth's "Teenage Riot."

Each message was a puzzle. I felt validated when I knew the song instantly. If I didn't know the lyric's origin, I Googled it and pretended like I had known all along.

In the café, David Adam made another cup of tea, and I did the same, a blackberry sage. I could feel his hunger when we were alone, so I paused, taking a breath and said, "I'm not ready to have sex." I continued with more courage than I thought I had in my wobbly lamb knees. "I haven't had sex."

"I know, love. I wouldn't want you to do anything you don't want to do. And besides, it will make it even more special when we do because you'll really want it."

On the surface, it was seemingly supportive, but there was something presumptive about thinking I'd change my mind with him, in time.

On the next shift, as David Adam leaned against the checkout counter, I scanned books for inventory into our computer system. He was talking about his love for David Bowie and how his Berlin era was the most underrated time in his career.

"So, you're into cocaine Bowie? Didn't he only drink milk, eat green peppers, and snort cocaine while recording *Station to Station*?"

"Ah, but *Station to Station* isn't part of the Berlin trilogy."

"Fair," I conceded. "Hey, would you maybe want to come over tonight?"

David Adam smiled but diverted his gaze. "I'll be there."

It didn't sound like he would be. I had no reason not to believe him, but maybe it was because of his tepid response or the fact that we only ever hung out at work and the one time at his apartment on my birthday.



Baely was perched against a book cart off to the right, slowly placing books on the Religion section's shelves. When I walked away from the checkout desk, I caught her eye, but she diverted her glance, turning around quickly to grab a small stack of paperbacks. She'd been listening.

David Adam never showed. He texted an excuse about getting caught up in other plans he couldn't get out of. He'd so much rather be there with me, but he'd make it next time. There was almost a relief in me expecting him to let me down and it actually happening.

Back at work, I sat at the single circular table in the break room, which also doubled as the inventory warehouse, heating a can of Amy's vegetable lentil soup in the microwave. Baely came into the back to unpack more plastic totes to load onto book carts. Her eyebrows were raised, her lips pursed, looking like she had a Gettysburg to address. She cracked open a tote, handling the books, without looking in my direction.

"You know David Adam sleeps with every girl here, right?"

My body simultaneously felt hot and cold, pins and needles. I dropped my spoon.

"You know that night he was texting someone when he was in his car with you? That was me. I was waiting on his apartment steps for him. He left you and came over to fuck me."

I didn't know what to say. I couldn't have said anything if my mouth would've allowed it.

"He does it with everyone."

Baely left the break room, the swinging doors closing together on their rubber floor dusters.

After my break, I returned to the bookstore, to find David Adam with a warm smile on his face.



“How was break, love?”

I walked past him without a word.

That evening, my phone rang continuously. I took it as a good sign. *He cares enough about losing me that he will keep calling until he gets through.* But the calls stopped the next day. And within a matter of days, the new girl was asking David Adam to get her chips and queso from Qdoba on his break. I never knew for sure if she knew about David Adam's many bookstore entanglements, and that I was the latest one, but if she did, she never said anything. It might not have mattered to her. I worried I was a failed conquest, not worthy of the effort because I didn't put out fast enough. And my outrage was stoked by Baely's inability to let the whole thing go. She suggested bonding through vodka, which quickly became depressing. Our friendship disintegrated a month or so later because I didn't want to continue waking up sad in the rich kid's basement that we partied in.

It later came out that David Adam, in addition to his womanizing, was a compulsive liar. He wasn't British at all and was simply born and raised in Leitchfield. No one in his family was a doctor. While David Adam's lying probably came from a place of insecurity, I couldn't see it that way at the time. I lumped my disdain for him with my crushed feelings of being rejected, even though I'd been the one to do the rejecting. Put simply, I never asked him if he was seeing anyone else while we were together because I was too afraid to know. And I never gave him the chance to tell the truth.

The last time I checked up on him, David Adam seemed to be in a steady relationship with a new woman. They seemed happy in the way that couples do in the glare of internet patina. That was years ago.

I've tried to find him recently and haven't had any success. He's faded away into the obscurity of my memory and the world wide web. But I imagine him older now, wizened, sitting at a wrought iron table, puffing a Pall Mall, blowing smoke into the Kentucky wind, alone.



## FORT WALTON BEACH

By Kirby Wright

THE WEATHER SHIFTED shortly after passing the 10 East sign “Welcome To Sweet Home Alabama.” What was once sunny and mild became foggy and cold. The fog was more like a creature than bad weather. It was a beast sweeping in to swallow up Mobile’s towers. It was unrelenting as it engulfed the harbor and the passage in and out. I called it Southern Soup. It made me think the entire state was thick with it, and that the residents’ veiled view of the world hampered their ability to see what was in front of them. The sun was a gray orb. Even if locals could make out forms, the fog blurred the edges of things and people.

George Holiday, the driver, had said the Southern states would fall like dominoes as he steered his Catalina toward Florida. But here we were crawling through Mobile. I felt confident with him behind the wheel. He was a black belt with a track record of gang fights in New Jersey. When a bully had tried rolling me in an arcade on The Hill in Boulder, he punched him out and tried throwing him through a plate glass window. George was slightly taller than me but more muscular from years of training in the martial arts. I’d once conked him on the top of his head with a lucky punch. After that, he refused to spar again because he labelled me “a goofy lefty.” I almost always let George make the decisions, mostly because he was a mighty junior while I was a lowly freshman. I think he’d liked me from the start, since I was the only one in our dorm to loan him forty bucks for peyote.

George turned on his wipers and swept water droplets off the glass. Our crawling made me think we’d never leave the state. I could barely make out the brake lights of cars ahead of us, and it made me think all of Alabama was blanketed by a suffocating fog. George didn’t seem to mind the weather. He scooped pink Peruvian out of a plastic baggie wedged in his ashtray, using the long fingernail on his baby finger. He cranked the volume of the in-dash radio as Grand Funk Railroad belted out “The Loco-Motion.” The map said we were passing over the Mobile River. After another mile we reached Polecat Bay. Then came Chacaloochee Bay and finally Mobile Bay. We reached land on the other side.



The fog ended minutes after crossing into Florida. We stayed on 10 East and scooted through the suburban sprawl of Pensacola. After passing the exit for the Redeeming Grace Church, I saw a billboard advertising Stuckey's. It promised Hot Coffee, Tasty Sandwiches, Milkshakes, and Hot Dogs. The second offered Pecan Log Rolls and Chocolate-Covered Pecans. The Stuckey billboards made my belly rumble. "I wanna go to Stuckey's," I blurted.

"What for?" asked George.

"Gas and dinner."

"Those Gulfport sausages and collard greens didn't hold you?"

"No."

"We could use some gas," George decided.

There was a NEXT EXIT STUCKEY'S sign on wooden stilts stuck in the marsh beneath the freeway. We took the Garcon Point Road exit and followed the signs. We pulled into Stuckey's. This one-story stop had a teal-blue roof that looked like a peaking wave. It was a family place, with station wagons and big American cars parked in the lot. We drove a road that forked. One fork led to gas. The other fork led to the store. We headed for gas. A Phillips 66 sign loomed above a teal sectional canopy roof joined at angles to resemble wings. There was something Disney in that roof, something hinting at the magical. A grandpa attendant in a white jumpsuit and matching cap guided us into a spot beside the pump.

"Two gallons Ethel, sir," George told him.

"Free box o' Peanut Brittle with a fill-up," grandpa offered.

"Fill 'er up," George said.

Grandpa stuck the nozzle in our tank and put it on automatic. He busied himself



washing the windshield, checking the oil, and testing the tires with a pressure gauge. He handed George a Free Peanut Brittle coupon to bring inside. He tipped his cap after I paid him five bucks.

We entered Stuckey's. The AC blasted cold wind. The store smelled of recycled air, coffee, and nuts. A father paid his bill at a register manned by a blue-haired matron in a muumuu. The Arctic blasts caused the matron's blue hair to shiver. The father's kids roamed the store digging through trinkets while his wife tried rounding them up.

We wandered the store. I liked the orange Formica countertops and matching tabletops in the booths. The aisles offered a plethora of novelties, knickknacks, and packaged sweets. There were rubber alligators, fridge magnets, ladybug keychains, shot glasses, and Mexican jumping beans. A rotating display stand sold plastic signs with clever sayings, such as I'M IN SHAPE, ROUND IS A SHAPE and NORMAL PEOPLE WORRY ME. It was a kitsch paradise, especially if you enjoyed pecans drenched in chocolate and caramel. Pecan log rolls of various sizes claimed the entire side of an aisle. Also available were packages of Hillbilly Taffy, Peanut Brittle, and Goo Goo clusters. I spotted a rack of ponchos for sale, along with a selection of flags and banners advertising Stuckey's and its Milton location. A boy unfurled a Dixie flag. I was tempted to grab a package of chocolate-covered pecans but dismissed that craving, thinking my money would be better spent on gas. I wanted to return to CU and salvage my classes. George wasn't hyped to get back to school because he was on the verge of dropping out, even though he had yet to relinquish the key to his Baker Hall room.

We grabbed a booth. The neighboring one featured a nuclear family with a crew-cut dad, a bouffant mom, and a boy and a girl making rubber snakes dance on the table. They ate hotdogs. Mustard, ketchup, and relish were splashed across their blue plates. George struck up a conversation and found out they were "on a road trip to see America" from Oklahoma City. The boy's green snake pounced on the girl's purple snake. "Don't!" the girl whined.



Our waitress seemed a tad under thirty. She wore a yellow blouse over a chocolate-brown skirt. SAM was on her nametag. Her hair and eyes were the same color as her skirt, and she wore it pulled back and held in a clip. She gripped her order pad with long, thin fingers and was ready to scribble what we wanted with a pencil. No wedding ring. Her fingernails were painted the same color as the pencil. I liked her because she didn't rush. We ordered cheeseburgers.

"Anything to drink?" Sam asked.

"Water's fine," said George, handing her our peanut brittle coupon.

Sam smiled. "Burgers, water and peanut brittle, coming right up."

The sun was falling. It cast the long shadows of poplars across the parking lot. A few cars were still in the sun, including the Catalina. Our destination was Fort Lauderdale, but that was so far away it seemed like a town in another country. Our order arrived. We wolfed down burgers, gulped water, and started in on the peanut brittle. I gobbled most of the brittle because George hated sugar. He let me have most of the sweets. I let him have all the drugs.

The Oklahoma City family gathered up their packages of pecan rolls, fridge magnets, shot glasses, and rubber snakes. Mom stuffed everything in her Pensacola canvas bag. Dad bid us a good day and they slid out of their booth. It was odd making acquaintances with strangers and then realizing you'd never see them again. The road had a way of bringing folks together for a short time and then hurling them apart.

Sam cleared off the Oklahoma table. She stacked the plates and collected the plastic Stuckey's cups.

"Need a break?" George asked.

Sam gave him a quizzical look. "Break for what?"

"I have something fun to show you in my car. You won't be disappointed."



“Gimme five minutes,” Sam said.

Sam returned to our table. “Let’s take that break,” she said. George popped up and escorted her out. They trapsed across the lot to the Catalina, where George opened the passenger door for Sam and closed it behind her.

I got up to use the restroom. When I returned, a roach was crouched over a grease spot on my plate. I paid the matron at the register and headed for the Catalina with \$29 left in my wallet. Inside the car, George and Sam were snorting lines off the dashboard through a red straw. Her hair was down. Sam spotted me through the windshield but managed to finish her line. She pulled her hair back and clipped it. She was out the door making a beeline for Stuckey’s. Her strides in white tennies were long and fast.

I re-claimed shotgun in the Catalina. “You gotta mother fixation,” I scolded George.

“Whadya talkin’ about? Me and Sam are practically the same age.”

“Oh? How old is she?”

“Twenty-six. Twenty-seven tops.”

“Sam’s got ten years on you, easy. Maybe more.”

“Well, she did attend Woodstock. For three days she lived on hotdogs, acid, and kisses.”

“Hotdogs?”

“Yeah.”

“Hippie chicks age well,” I said, “but they’re big trouble.”

“How so?”



“One never knows. You’ve got less coke, right?”

“Less is right. We did it all up.”

“You guys do the nasty?” I asked.

“We would have,” George snapped, “had you not been snoopin’ around.” He licked his index finger and used the wet finger to mop up stray white granules off the dash. He stuck the finger in his mouth and sucked. He claimed Sam had hung out with Santana’s boy drummer at Woodstock and that she shared a joint with Hendrix. I don’t know why I didn’t like Sam. Maybe I was jealous. If she’d had a girlfriend for me things may have been different. Sam seemed like the kind of woman who could turn a man’s life upside down in no time. George fired up the Catalina and tore through the lot. We were back on 10 South in minutes.

We reached the Blackwater River Bridge. I wondered how George would deal with his stash vanishing. I could see kayaks and pleasure boats beneath us. We took the 87 South. George wanted to see the ocean. So did I. We reached the coast and hung a left on 98 west. That took us to Fort Walton Beach.

“Our treat?”

“Dutch. Plus, she’s bringing pot and pecan rolls from Stuckey’s.”

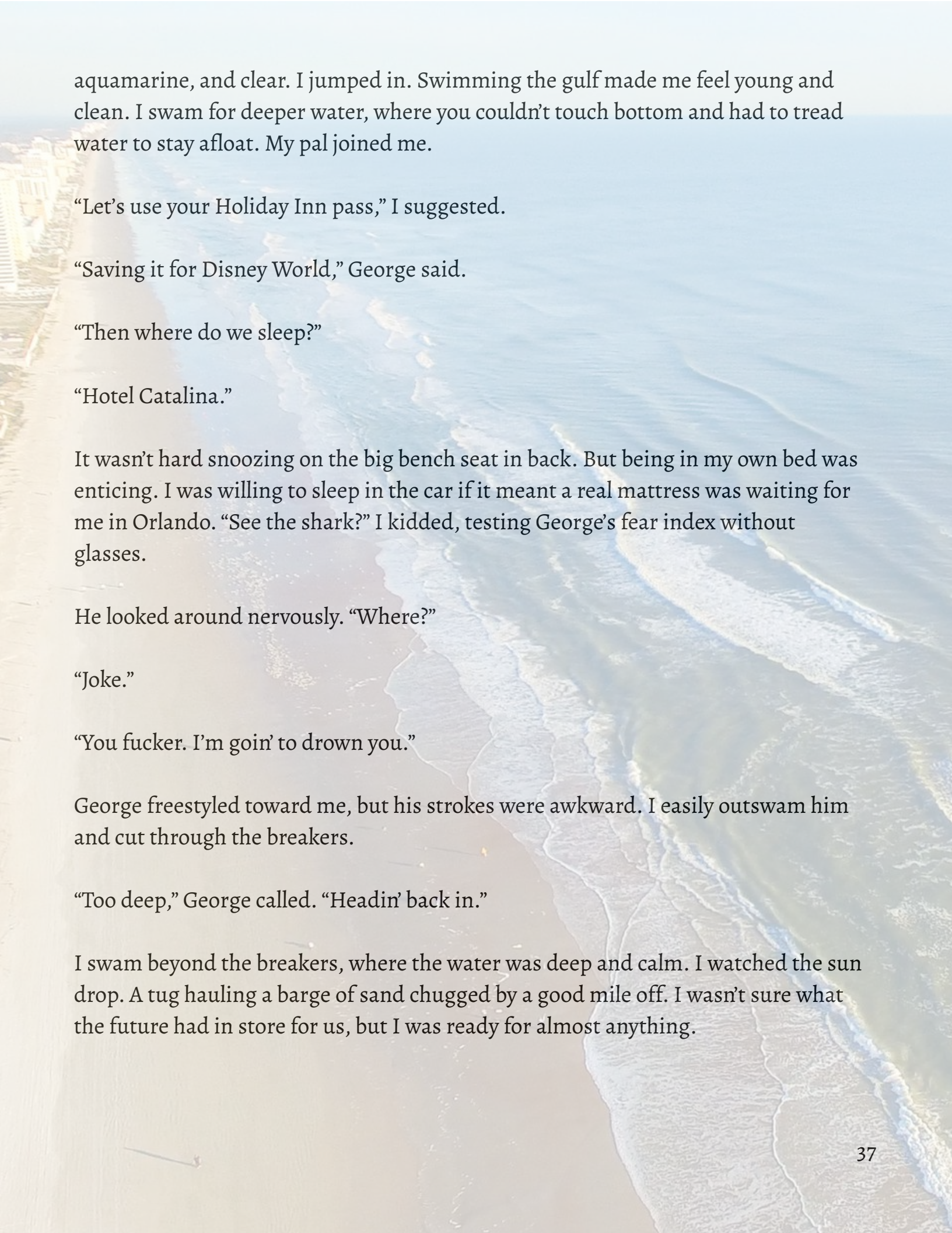
“You have her number?”

“Does a bear shit in the woods?”

Fort Walton Beach was a mecca for locals and tourists. The plates on the cars were mostly Florida, but I did see Maine, Maryland, Nebraska, and Idaho. You could tell who the regulars were if they went straight into the sea after rolling out their towels. The sun was closing in on the horizon.

George and I pulled on our trunks in the restroom and raced for shore. He’d left his glasses in the car. We waded through the shallows. The ocean was warm,



An aerial photograph of a beach and ocean. The beach is sandy and runs along the left side of the frame. The ocean is blue with white waves breaking near the shore. The text is overlaid on the image.

aquamarine, and clear. I jumped in. Swimming the gulf made me feel young and clean. I swam for deeper water, where you couldn't touch bottom and had to tread water to stay afloat. My pal joined me.

"Let's use your Holiday Inn pass," I suggested.

"Saving it for Disney World," George said.

"Then where do we sleep?"

"Hotel Catalina."

It wasn't hard snoozing on the big bench seat in back. But being in my own bed was enticing. I was willing to sleep in the car if it meant a real mattress was waiting for me in Orlando. "See the shark?" I kidded, testing George's fear index without glasses.

He looked around nervously. "Where?"

"Joke."

"You fucker. I'm goin' to drown you."

George freestyled toward me, but his strokes were awkward. I easily outswam him and cut through the breakers.

"Too deep," George called. "Headin' back in."

I swam beyond the breakers, where the water was deep and calm. I watched the sun drop. A tug hauling a barge of sand chugged by a good mile off. I wasn't sure what the future had in store for us, but I was ready for almost anything.



# Getty

By Ella Wang







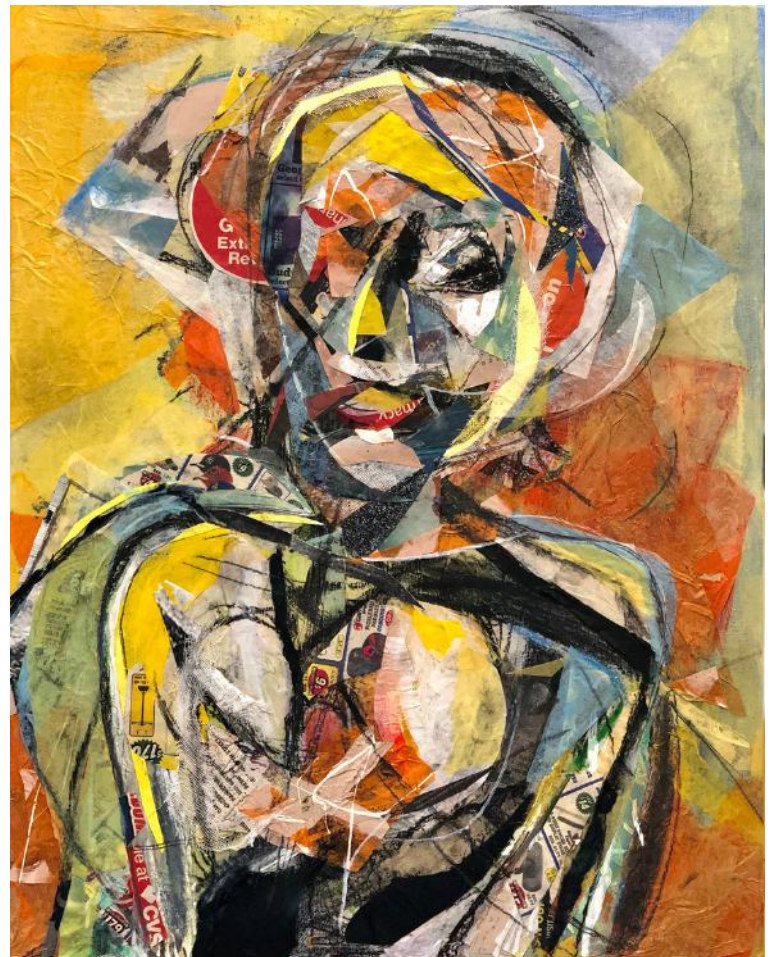
**Flux**  
By Sabrina  
Abbott





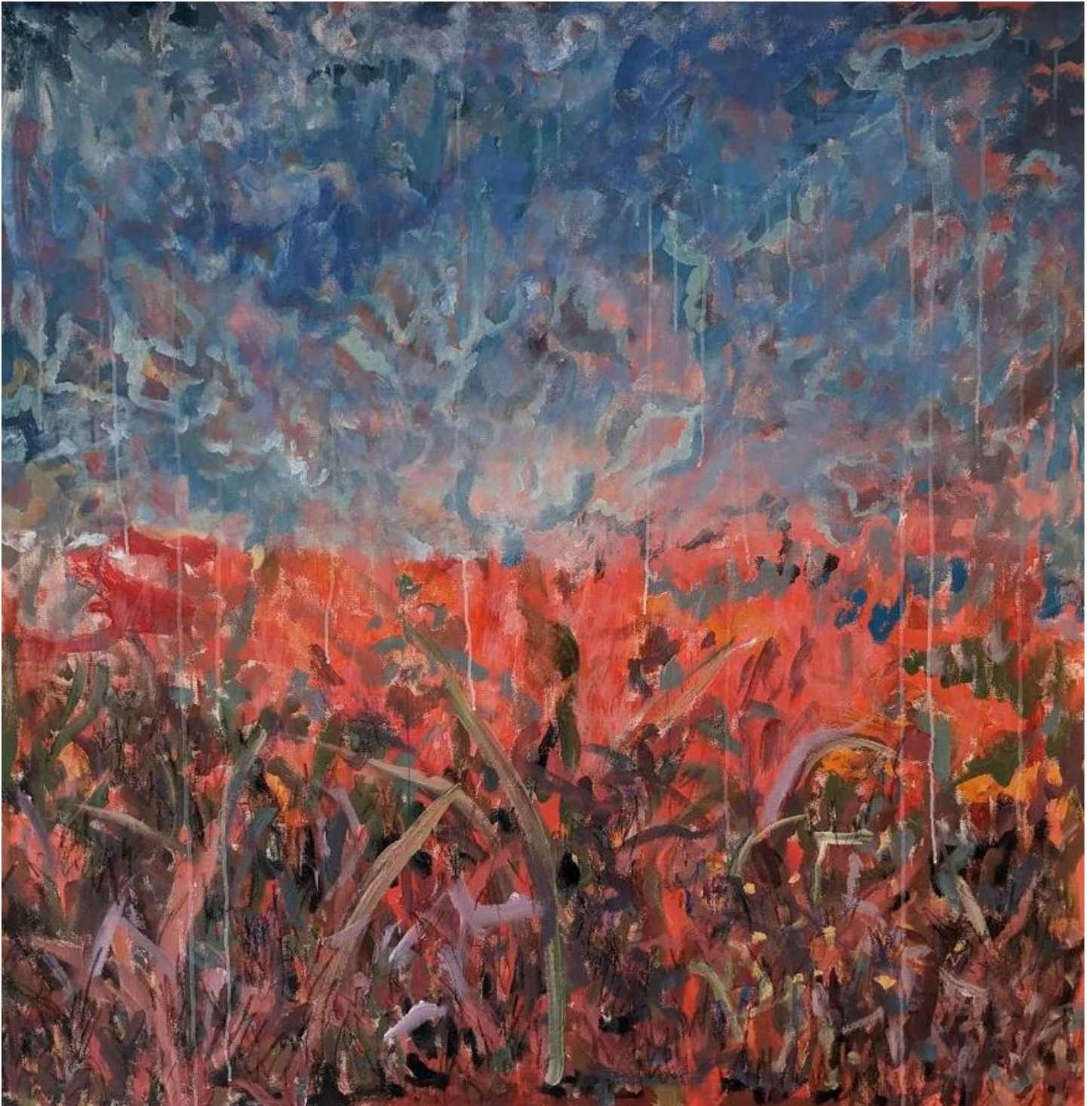
**Mercury**  
By GJ Gillespie

**All I have to do is Dream**  
By GJ Gillespie





**Dream**  
By Moey Hewitt







**Feel**  
By Donald Patten



## About the Artists

**Christopher Michel** is a writer living in Birmingham, AL, with his wife and two daughters. His poetry has been published in Barrow Street, Fourteen Hills, and Stone Canoe among others. He has no social media accounts of any note, and likes it that way.

**Georgie Contreras** (she/her) is a Latine writer raised and residing in the Boston area. Her poetry has been published with The Ana, Loud Coffee Press, Querencia Press, and Rappahannock Review. Her work has received support from GrubStreet's Boston Writers of Color and the Fine Arts Work Center. Whether she's journaling or reading a book from the library, you'll usually find an indie wrestling match from the mid-2000's playing in the background. Instagram: @gxcons

**Phillip Zapkin** is an Assistant Teaching Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, with a PhD from West Virginia University. Primarily a scholar of theatre and drama, Phillip is returning to writing poetry after several years on hiatus. For 2025, he is doing a 52 poems in 52 weeks challenge. Phillip's primary public social media are his YouTube channels: TheatreOfPhil about literature, drama, and film, and WritingNotes about rhetoric, composition, and teaching.

**Wednesdae Reim Ifrach** is an art therapist, counselor, and scholar specializing in LGBTQ+ wellness, trauma-informed, and healing-centered practices. They integrate poetry, visual art, ritual mapping, and mindfulness to create body-positive, client-centered spaces for individuals navigating eating disorders and body-image concerns. Their art-based scholarship includes projects with the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, and they developed an online body-image course. They also mentor emerging practitioners in expressive arts therapy and recovery contexts through collaborative networks. Their forthcoming book with North Atlantic Books explores expressive arts for queer body image; they also contributed to "Queer Worldmaking in Art Therapy."



**Rizwan Akhtar's** debut collection of Poems Lahore, I Am Coming (2017) is published by Punjab University Press. He works as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan. He completed his PhD in postcolonial literature from the University of Essex, UK in 2013. He has published poems in well-established poetry magazines of the UK, US, India, Canada, and New Zealand. He was a part of the workshop on poetry with Derek Walcott at the University of Essex in 2010.

**David Cleofas Avila** A former Peer Support Specialist with a B.A. in Psychology from Sonoma State University, David Cleofas Avila lives abroad as an expatriate. Having experienced psychosis as a teen, later diagnosed with schizophrenia, David writes and makes art & music to better square away the sequelae of life. Residing in the Susan Fleming family collection, curated by L. Marx, David's art has been priced by Ames Gallery, recognized at the National Arts and Disability Center UCLA, and published in Peatsmoke Journal, Gabby & Min, NUNUM, and Harpur Palate. The artist's poetry has been published in Oddball Magazine, eMerge-magazine, Flora Fiction , and Breath & Shadow.

**Daniel Buccieri** lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children. He has taught history in the Los Angeles Unified School District since 2003. His writing has previously appeared in various literary journals and in the UCLA Writing Project annual anthologies since 2009. He loves spending Sundays in the kitchen cooking dishes so exquisite that now his family just cannot eat Italian food anywhere else.

**Martin Perez** is a Mexican-American MFA student at Vermont College of Fine Arts and a previous Writing Fellow at St. Mary's College of California's MFA program, focused on creative nonfiction. He has a BA in creative writing from the University of Arizona and graduated summa cum laude. He currently lives in Tucson, Arizona.

**Lauren J. Short** is a college teacher of writing, including creative nonfiction. Her small joys include Jack White, beeswax candles, and jumping into fjords. She lives in Waco with her husband, sons, and corgi named Steve, after Stephen King.



**Kirby Michael Wright** lives in Del Mar with his wife Darcy and a cat named Gatsby.

**Ella Wang** Seattle based photographer, Ella Wang, picked up a camera two years ago and has fallen in love with photography since, no matter the genre: street, portrait, underwater, and more. Being a highschooler, she has had to find time for photography along with academics. During class, you might catch her adjusting grain level to an image for that "vintage" look. She cherishes the editing process of photography where she transforms ordinary images into frames of emotion. At the heart of it all, Ella hopes her photos make you pause, feel, and maybe even see the world a little differently. Instagram: @her.camra

**Sabrina Abbott** began the Preceptionist Art Movement in 2006 while studying at the Academia di Belle Arti in Florence, Italy. While living in Italy, Sabrina worked for curator Dr. Giovanna Giusti at the Galleria degli Uffizi. In 2008 she graduated magna cum laude from California State University Chico with a bachelor's degree in Studio Art and minor in Italian language. After graduating, Sabrina moved to Paris, France to work at the Musée du Louvre and create paintings for a solo exhibit requested by Pierre Cardin at the Espace Pierre Cardin on the Champs-Élysées which was held in May 2010. Sabrina returned to California in 2011. In 2024 Sabrina's brush with death inspired her to create new work rooted in this profound experience. She continues to show her work in both public and private venues.

**GJ Gillespie** is a collage artist living in a 1928 farmhouse overlooking Oak Harbor on Whidbey Island, WA. A prolific artist with 22 awards to his name, his work has been exhibited in 70 shows and appeared in more than 190 publications.

**Moey Hewitt** is an artist based in Tallahassee, Florida, where she is currently pursuing an MFA degree at Florida State University. She holds a BFA from the University of Central Florida (2016) and previously worked as an elementary school art educator. Her artistic practice is deeply informed by her lifelong connection to Florida's diverse landscapes, which have provided a consistent sense of identity and inspiration.



**Donald Patten** is an artist and cartoonist from Belfast, Maine. He creates oil paintings, illustrations, ceramics and graphic novels. His art has been exhibited in galleries throughout Maine. To view his online portfolio, visit @donald.patten on Instagram.



## Meet the Editors of *Lucid*

With the unique properties of a graduate literary magazine, where the editors can change from one magazine to the next, we would like to introduce you to the managing editorial team of this magazine.



**Lauren Rose** has a BS in Biology and BFA in Creative Writing from Sierra Nevada University. She is a queer author and currently pursuing an MFA in Fiction from Southern New Hampshire University. Her previous work can be found in a variety of print or online journals like *Flora Fiction*, *Bridge: The Bluffton University Literary Journal*, and *Running Wild Press Anthology of Stories*. Her debut poetry collection “Peter” was published in 2024 by WordTech Communications.

**Davi Schweizer** (they/them), from Philadelphia, is the hottest poet you know. They are the author of *Only Seconds Until Detonation* (forthcoming, Querencia Press) and *Echo Decay* (Kith Books). They are the editor and founder of *Troublemaker Firestarter*, follow them on Twitter: @trblmkrfrstrtr Instagram: @troublemakerfirestarter



**Sarah Tenney** previously received her Bachelor’s degree in Creative Writing and English from SNHU and is a member of Sigma Tau Delta, the International English Honor Society. She has written and edited numerous children’s books, including a children’s book about an Olympic bronze medalist which was featured on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune*, and *Mira’s Nutracker Dream* which is featured and distributed by the Washington Ballet. She has edited over 100 children’s titles used for literacy education.

**Briona Diaz** (she/her) earned two BAs with High Honors Designations from Hofstra University and is currently pursuing her MFA in Fiction from Southern New Hampshire University. Her publications range from poetry to academic articles, drawing inspiration from history, astronomy, mythology and folklore, and her literary foremothers.







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