

BROKEN ALIDADE

VOLUME ONE
ISSUE ONE
WANING AMNESIA

B R O K E N
A L I D A D E



VOLUME ONE

ISSUE ONE

WANING AMNESIA

BROKEN ALIDADE



ISSN 3070-9652

WANING AMNESIA - VOLUME 1 | ISSUE 1

March 31, 2026

Copyright © 2026 Broken Alidade. All rights reserved. All works are copyright of their respective authors and are published here with permission. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written consent of the authors. All artwork in this issue is provided by the National Gallery of Art under a CC0 license.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

McKenna Morgan

COVER ART

View near Naples, Simon Denis [Oil Painting]

Printed by Lulu, LLC

Published in Bellingham, WA, United States

SUBMISSIONS & CONTACT

brokenalidade.com

submissions@brokenalidade.com

Established 2025

Contents

Letter from the Editor	5
Sugarwater	
<i>Bracha K. Sharp - Poetry</i>	11
Dissection Manual	
<i>D. P. Snyder - Hybrid</i>	12
Manual de disección	
<i>Mónica Lavín - Hybrid</i>	14
Diagnosis	
<i>Hibah Shabkhez - Poetry</i>	16
It is easy to love fragments	
<i>P. D. Messersmith - Poetry</i>	18
Belly Bears and Train Tracks	
<i>Courtie Leigh - Nonfiction</i>	19
That	
<i>R. James Sennett Jr. - Poetry</i>	21
How to Explain Death to a Six-Year-Old	
<i>Nicolò Potestà - Poetry</i>	23
On the Installment Plan	
<i>Ben Nardolilli - Poetry</i>	24
Howlers	
<i>Mary Kate Williams - Fiction</i>	25
Sertraline	
<i>Laura Cody - Fiction</i>	34
Art	
<i>Claudia Wysocky - Poetry</i>	37
Night and Rain	
<i>Peter Cashorali - Poetry</i>	38
Garage Sale Findings	
<i>Mike Marks - Nonfiction</i>	40

I tell my friend what a windy day means
Megan Lam - Poetry 45

Apricity
Ruth Broome - Poetry 47

Just a Sliver
Anndria Smuk - Fiction 48

Ode to Cleaning Out the Last Drawer
Rene Seledotis - Poetry 57

The Butterfly Effect
Claudia Wysocky - Poetry 59

Contributors
..... 61

About
..... 65

Letter From the Editor

I first and foremost want to thank the outstanding writers who contributed their work to *Broken Alidade*. Remarkably, we received over one hundred twenty quality submissions touching on the human experience. It was no small task to narrow down this list to form the inaugural issue. Each new story, poem, or piece that lived somewhere in-between opened my eyes to the wealth of ability across creative writing communities. Thank you for sharing your talents.

Time and time again I find myself drawn toward nature and the arts. Occasionally, I wander around for a bit, lose my way in the hustle of daily life until I'm forced to take a step back and breathe. There's only so much you can accomplish—only so much you can hold yourself accountable for—on a given day. **WANING AMNESIA** represents a turn towards connections, stillness, and intention. The pieces within ground us in painful memories and decisions that beckon us to look forward with a new sense of calm. They remind us that chaos and beauty can exist in the same moment. Compel us to reach beyond assumptions with curiosity and respect.

With this inaugural issue, I invite you to reflect on your own lived experiences and consider how they have shaped the way you see the world. As someone primarily pursuing a scientific career, I cannot help but think about how the environment around us informs our every thought. This raises a most important fact: You can only consider ideas with which you are familiar. Without intervention, our view is narrow and full of personal bias. I believe that the arts are but one way to expand our environment and expose ourselves to things we would otherwise never have been exposed to. It is with this belief that we are honored to include the Spanish translation of "Dissection Manual" ("Manual de disección"), bridging languages and cultures. Which, in turn, allows us to see the world a little more honestly.

So go ahead, find a quiet space, grab a cup of tea (or whatever your preferred beverage may be), and sit with this collection in wonder at the diversity of humanity.

McKenna Morgan

Editor-in-Chief/Founder

"Science, my lad, is made up of mistakes, but they are mistakes which it is useful to make, because they lead little by little to the truth."

-JULES VERNE, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*



Three Hummingbirds with Plant, Heinrich Gottlieb Ludwig Reichenbach [Etching]

Sugarwater

BRACHA K. SHARP

My father buys a glass bird feeder
with blue and green stripes lacing its body,
and red metal flowers circling the bottom.
It hangs in sunlight beneath the porch umbrella.

Cats visit, laze in the dirt, nodding their heads,
as they glance at its hypnotic swing.

Ovenbirds come—
small and brown, fast and hungry,
they dip their curved beaks into the metal flower holes,
sipping sugarwater.

I quiet, sitting under the dome of the willow tree.
It plaits the front porch with shadows.
Under soft pointed leaves, under bright, striking sunlight,
I hold my breath.

One stays.
He drinks, sugar-drunk with pleasure.

How I want to be:
unafraid, calm.

Dissection Manual

For León

D. P. SNYDER

The thing you love best is being taken apart. You are powerless to prevent it. The rules of decorum require that you contain your feelings in public and (it is recommended) also in private. Practice neutral facial expressions until you have mastered them. You will know you have succeeded when you can walk into a room without anyone asking if you are okay. At first, it may be difficult to refrain from hunching your shoulders, sighing, or rubbing your own arms as if you are cold or suffering from drug withdrawal. Don't be discouraged. Keep practicing.

Wear a smile that is neither too big nor too small. Make sure it projects strength of character and suggests an esoteric awareness. Inspect your smile often. Curate it. When in the presence of the thing you love best, turn away periodically and seek reflective surfaces such as bathroom mirrors, windows (only at night), and your cell phone. Caution: Your face is also a reflective surface! Keep it smooth, shiny, and clear. The thing you love best is being taken apart, not you. Do not question this.

The first few ablations are the worst. They stun you. You may say: What is this? There must be some mistake. Do not be alarmed. There is no mistake. Remember: The professionals know what they are doing. Soon enough, you will relearn how to move your limbs, tongue, bones, bowels, and the small muscles of your face in accordance with the existential gravitational shift. Initially, you may not know where to put your hands or when to sit or stand. As the dissection of the thing you love best continues, however, you will become a master of the art no one chooses and fewer appreciate. (Keep this manual handy for quick reference.)

The thing you love best is being taken apart. Do not contemplate empty places, stumps, holes, scars (even your own), faded or worn fabric, peeling paint, or abandoned houses. Avoid autumn. Focus on stable

objects as dancers do during pirouettes. Locate your internal Archimedean Point, the vantage from which you can observe the situation objectively and independently. This will allow you to relate your pain and that of the thing you love best to a universal reality. This is a heuristic approach and, as such, is not guaranteed to be optimal, but it will offer short-term relief. Remind yourself that your love is eternal, although the thing you love best is not.

Recalibrate. Readjust. Return to work. Take selfies. Apply filters. Complain about your water bill. Put on clean clothes. Wipe your nose.

Caution! As everyone knows, objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear. Similarly, the thing you love best may seem shrunken (or swollen), acquire an unfamiliar odor, or fail to respond to stimuli in predictable ways. This will be most evident when you enter (or leave) a room. You may experience an acid taste in the mouth, leakage from the eyes, weakness in the knees or heart, sleeplessness, anxiety, or suicidal thoughts. Do not worry. This is normal. Home remedies include indulging in bad habits in secret, holding your head in your hands, rocking back and forth rhythmically, and hiding in public bathroom stalls, janitorial closets, your car, sour-smelling alleys with dumpsters, or anywhere on the extreme outskirts of town. To avoid self-absorption, limit all remedies to five-minute periods. Use a stopwatch.

Eventually, you will prefer sunsets to sunrises. You will become as opaque and dense as a black hole. You will become unfamiliar even to yourself. This is a sign of progress! The thing you love best is being taken apart, and you must not fall to pieces. Follow these instructions to the letter.

Manual de disección

Para León

Traducción del inglés de MÓNICA LAVÍN

La cosa que más amas está siendo desmantelada. No tienes el poder de prevenirlo. Las reglas del decoro requieren que no manifiestes tus sentimientos en público y (es recomendable) tampoco en privado. Practica expresiones faciales neutras hasta que las domines. Sabrás de los frutos de tu esfuerzo cuando entres a un cuarto y nadie te pregunte si te sientes bien. Al principio será difícil evitar los hombros caídos, los suspiros, o frotarte los brazos como si tuvieras frío o sufrieras de una abstinencia de drogas. No te desanimes, sigue practicando.

Luce una sonrisa que no sea ni demasiado grande ni demasiado discreta. Asegúrate que proyecte fuerza de carácter y que sugiera un despertar esotérico. Inspecciona tu sonrisa a menudo. Como para una exposición. En presencia de la cosa que más amas, busca superficies reflejantes como espejos de baño, ventanas (cuando está oscuro afuera), y tu teléfono celular. Cuidado: ¡tu cara es también una superficie reflejante! Manténla suave, brillante y clara. La cosa que más amas será desmantelada, tú no. No dudes esto.

Las primeras ablaciones son las peores. Te paralizan. Dirás: ¿qué es esto? Debe haber algún error. No te alarmes. No hay ningún error. Recuerda: los profesionales saben lo que están haciendo. Pronto reaprenderás a mover tus extremidades, lengua, huesos, visceras, y los pequeños músculos de tu cara en sintonía con los vaivenes gravitacionales de la existencia. Inicialmente es posible que no sepas donde poner tus manos, o cuando sentarte o ponerte de pie. Sin embargo, conforme la disección de la cosa que más amas progresa, te volverás un maestro del arte que nadie escoge y muy pocos aprecian. (Mantén este manual cerca para rápida consulta.)

La cosa que más amas será desmantelada. No contemples espacios vacíos, muñones, agujeros, cicatrices (ni las tuyas), tela gastada o luida, pintura descarapelada o casas abandonadas. Evita el otoño. Enfócate en objetos quietos como lo hacen los bailarines cuando dan piruetas. Encuentra tu punto de Arquímedes, el sitio desde donde puedes observar la situación con independencia y objetividad. Esto te permitirá relacionar tu dolor y el de la cosa que más amas con una realidad universal. Esta es una aproximación heurística y como tal no hay garantía de que sea óptima, pero ofrecerá un alivio a corto plazo. Recuérdate que tu amor es eterno a pesar del hecho que la cosa que más amas no lo sea.

Recalibra. Reajusta. Regresa al trabajo. Tómate selfies. Aplica filtros. Quéjate de tu recibo del agua. Ponte ropa limpia. Suénate la nariz.

¡Cuidado! Como es sabido, los objetos a través del espejo pueden estar más cerca de lo que parecen. De manera similar, la cosa que más amas puede verse encogida (o hinchada), adquirir un olor desagradable, o no responder de forma predecible a los estímulos. Esto te será evidente cuando entres (o dejes) una habitación. Puedes experimentar un sabor ácido en la boca, escurrecimiento de los ojos, debilidad de las rodillas o del corazón, falta de sueño, ansiedad, o tener pensamientos suicidas. No te preocupes. Esto es normal. Remedios caseros incluyen consentirte en secreto con malos hábitos; detenerte la cabeza entre las manos; mecerte para atrás y para adelante rítmicamente; y esconderte en los apartados de los baños públicos, clósets de limpieza, tu coche, callejones malolientes y tiraderos de basura, o en cualquier lado de los márgenes extremos de la ciudad. Para evitar el ensimismamiento, limita todos los remedios a períodos de cinco minutos. Usa cronómetro.

Eventualmente preferirás las puestas del sol a su salida. Te volverás opaco y denso como los hoyos negros. No te reconocerás. Esto es progreso. La cosa que más amas está siendo desmantelada y no puedes caerle a pedazos. Sigue estas instrucciones al pie de la letra.

Diagnosis

HIBAH SHABKHEZ

One stroke of the pen, one sighed word
And you migrate. You go

From being the species' future,
To having none. You fall

Out of formation, a swallow
With torn wings, watching bird

After bird glide past. You suture
Up your feathers. You call

Out, hoping ... With pity and scorn
They turn once, then fly on.



Clouds over the Sea, Eugène Boudin [Pastel]

It is easy to love fragments

After Tomas Tranströmer

P. D. MESSERSMITH

What lies from the first to the second
 is a stream dropped
 into
 lover
 of the present
 ing-ing:
 “to be” swearing by lips
 “to be” strangling
 destination
 a beam welded
 at two
 ambitious placeholders
 I swear arrival constant
 -ingly
 to care for fragments
 the collapse among
 basic trusts in this world
 and
 “the same rivers”
 and in the impossible
 the common things
 desire
 which is not even
 the first of metals
 of pieces
 we are nailed to

Belly Bears and Train Tracks

COURTIE LEIGH

The white walls hurt my little four year old eyes. I watched as my light up sneakers covered the walls in shades of red and blue. My mom held my hand as we stopped to look at different bulletin boards, decorated with pictures of kids like me with dad's like mine. Except, mine wasn't smiling like the man in the picture. Mine was laying down in a bed. Coughing. Weak.

We continued our trek down the long hallway. My nose curled at the smell of cleanliness. I didn't think clean really had a smell, but rather the absence of smells. Yet here I was, drowning in the sterilization of a hospital. Even four year old me knew it was a hospital, I just didn't know how much time I'd end up spending there.

The clear window peeping into my dad's room was concealed with a big blue curtain. My mom swung it open and yanked the curtain back with no hesitation. There was my dad, laying on the bed with tubes coming from every which way. My dad is the whitest of white irishman, so seeing him become paler than he already was seemed an impossible concept to fathom, yet, there he was paler than before. I howled a little, "Ooooo, it's a ghost," under my breath.

Hours went by. Doctors and nurses came in and out of the room. My mom put on her bravest face, not wanting to scare me. I played with my mermaid barbie as doctors delivered life changing news to my mom and dad. Words like, "congestive heart failure," "two months," and "transplant," bounced around the room. I didn't realize how heavy these words were. They seemed serious, but when I looked at my mom she didn't so much as bat an eye. If she wasn't scared, then I decided I shouldn't be either.

Growls sounded from my belly as a nurse drew blood from one of the tubes that surrounded my Dad. He was too weak to even look at me, but

looking back, maybe he was afraid to look at me. Afraid he might break down, or afraid the reality of the situation would set in. The nurse set the tubes down and walked over towards me and my mermaid dolls

“Someone’s got a belly bear in their tummy!”

I looked at her sideways. I’d never heard that saying before, but I liked it. I growled back in approval. She asked my mom if she could take me to go grab some crackers.

“I’ll come with you, we’re heading out for the night anyways.”

My mom hugged my Dad goodbye, but I wasn’t allowed. It was an unspoken rule. So instead I said, “Bye Daddy!” and responded with a faint, “I love you.”

“I love you with all of my purple heart.”

He didn’t know it, but I watched as tears escaped his eyes before walking out the door. I asked my mom why daddy was crying, to which she responded with, “He’s in pain.” I asked if he had a bear in his stomach too, but it was a different kind of pain. The nurse in the funny blue outfit looked at my eyes with admiration of my innocence as she led me behind a counter. There was a little mini fridge stocked with all sorts of juice and snacks.

“What will make that bear go away?” She asked me as I picked up a pack of teddy grahams and apple juice. My mom thanked the nurse as she took my hand and led me down the painfully white corridors. As we went through the doors and into the waiting room, the smell changed from clean to grief. You could feel the moisture from all the tear cries settle on your skin, yet the air was stiff.

We drove home in pretty much silence, other than the occasional question from my mom. She did a great job of keeping it together until I asked, “When is Daddy coming home?”

That

First Published in Unleash Lit

R. JAMES SENNETT JR.

chair
was not Bonnie's.
How could it be?
None of the tell tale
slouching evident
in the faded cushions
made of crushed
flowers of
indiscriminate species.
Fitting just so
for the visitor
to lounge for a bit
before taking the money
of the neighbor
you hated
for stealing your recipe
of some pie
or other.
Like it mattered
anyway.



Death of the Magdalene, Jacques Callot [Engraving]

How to Explain Death to a Six-Year-Old

NICOLÒ POTESTÀ

we were supposed to practice addition,
me and those three little girls, only 6, one
sitting on each of my knees and a third
in the next chair over, but it had been a bad day,
the kind full of tears and staunch refusal
marked by plump crossed arms
and heads shaking so the beads in their hair
clacked together,

so instead we colored in
feeling thermometers—green for happy,
blue for sad, I was surprised by this happy girl's
colors, all blue and purple and yellow for sad
and worried and confused, I asked her why
and she told me *my grandmother died in a car crash
this week and I don't know how to feel* and one by one
they told me *my two dogs died last year* and *my cousin
passed away but I don't know why* and I can't imagine
what it is

to be so small and carry so much grief.
so forgive me, I was meant to teach them addition
but we spent our hour talking about death. forgive me, but
how can I ask them to focus when for eight hours a day
they are told to behave and be good while they try
to understand death. all I know is that when I was seven
my grandfather died. I had to leave the classroom
when we talked about decomposing fractions because
all I could imagine was his body turning into dirt
in his coffin.

how can that little girl ride the bus
when all she has to conceptualize death is rolling wheels
and impact. we haven't even started subtraction yet.
how can she begin to imagine loss?

On the Installment Plan

BEN NARDOLILLI

This sleep's a pitiful process, no clear direction involved,
The eyelids are drawn to one another
With a force that should bring about a rubber stamp for snoozing,
But the glow of a screen makes the mind flutter back awake

A hazy pull, fueled on the dregs of lukewarm coffee,
Overpriced grog, and synthetic gossip shared with strangers
Keeps feet moving in different dimensions,
Sliding across the floor and rolling around when back on the bed

There is a demand for darkness, to surrender up consciousness,
For a return to a void provided by a tumble
Yet lists present their pressure to be checked off, even if
Reciting plans like prayers fails to extract another waking jolt

When morning arrives, the dawn is punctuated with naps,
And afternoon follows with a lengthy dream session,
The evening is lost to a night moving in early,
All so that the body can demand its debt for a mortgaged Sunday

Howlers

MARY KATE WILLIAMS

The doctor's office is freezing. As usual. I cannot think of a time I've ever been to a doctor and not had goosepimples on my skin. Even when I was 38 weeks pregnant, waddling into the office for a check-up, I was cold. Everywhere else I went I was hot. Sweating through my pregnancy undergarments and loose dresses. But not at the doctor's office.

This one is no different. A/C on full blast. Does it kill the germs or is it just to make us patients think that?

The nurse took me back a few minutes ago, but in this windowless room it feels like an eternity. Weight. Height. Blood pressure. They always read it out to me and I never know if the number is good, bad, or otherwise.

I fidget on the examination table. The sanitary tissue paper crinkles beneath me. I look down and my thighs are flattened against the table. *When did they get so big?*

Two kids and no free time to even think let alone work out, that's when, I remind myself.

Thankfully, I get to wear my clothes for this appointment. No paper gown for me. At least not today.

The free consultation is just that. A chance to ask questions. I have my notes app pulled up. I sorted my questions by category. Health and medical. Cosmetic. Costs. Follow-up appointments and device maintenance.

I check the time on my phone and see a text from Greg.

It's a photo of him and the kids, a poorly lit selfie of them smiling. My husband took off work this morning to watch them while I'm here, freezing. They get bonus daddy time. They love any and all daddy time. Not so much for mommy. (That's me, I speak about and now think about myself in the third person. Maybe I need a psych eval instead.)

The kids are hot and cold on me. I can't blame them. Because mommy is sweet and caring. But also, mommy yells. Not all the time. Just when I can't stand their whining, or when they start throwing things from their car seats while I'm in traffic, or when they lack respect for any boundaries.

Just thinking about it has my heartbeat racing. My fingers clench around my phone, unable to bend the unmalleable metal into anything but what it is. Unable to change my children into considerate adults, to push them forward in time and cognitive development ahead of pace.

A knock on the door brings me back to the moment. The cold room. "Come in," I answer.

The doctor enters. She is about my age, maybe a few years younger. Or maybe she is older but has no kids. They age you.

"Hi Lissa, I'm Dr. Marsh," she extends a hand in greeting. "I hear you are interested in our mommy-modification. Is that correct?"

The alliterative cutesy name makes me want to roll my eyes, I resist.

I nod my head, yes. That is exactly why I'm here. Three of my mom-friends have already had the procedure and they swear by it. It saved their marriage. Their relationship with their kids. Their sanity.

I give a sheepish smile. It feels like accepting defeat. That I couldn't do this by my own sheer willpower so I need a surgical intervention. But it's time.

"I have a lot of questions," I admit and wave my phone at Dr. Marsh, indicating my notes.

All morning I've been telling myself it's better to get this procedure. It shows I care. I'm a selfless mom. It's not like I'm getting a mommy-makeover with the tummy tuck and breast lift. At least with this surgery I'll go under anesthesia for the sake of my kids, not my own vanity. I chide myself for daring to judge. It's just jealousy. I want a flat tummy and perky tits too. But we can't afford all the mother-perfecting enhancements so I stick with this one and begrudge anyone else their choice.

“Well, let’s talk about the procedure first and see if that helps to answer a few of them.” Dr. Marsh smiles in a reassuring way. She knows what she is doing. She pioneered this technique to help women. She is a world-renowned otolaryngologist. *She is also a saleswoman*; my snide inner voice reminds me.

Dr. Marsh sits on her swivel cushion chair and pushes herself back to the cabinet in the corner of the room. There are several charts and diagrams all detailing Cervical Structure. I know cervical is supposed to refer to the neck, but it also reminds me of the tear my daughter gave me on the way out.

The doctor grabs the plastic model of the neck and ear. It is almost too large for her hands but she balances it carefully. As if it is alive and in need of care.

“As you know, having children is incredibly stressful,” she says in a joking tone. *Yes, I do know.* I smile at her humor. “No parent wants to yell at their child.” Her words are meant to soothe me, but they strike a chord. Hit on the insecurity that had me running here in the first place. Ready to empty our life savings. Because I want to yell until my voice gives out. At the universe. At the cruelty of life. But not *at my kids.*

I saw one of those well-designed square quotes on social media. It read ‘you can either be your child’s first best friend or their first bully.’ I cried for ten minutes locked in the bathroom as my youngest pounded on the door asking for me. Because I realized *I* was their bully. Never the sugary-sweet mom I always envisioned I would be. Never using the helpful phrases and keywords I practiced after watching pro-influencer moms coach me and a million others in their stories.

No, instead I would raise my voice. And be sarcastic. And mean.

I am a mean mom.

My tears threaten to escape as I think about it.

The doctor continues her explanation without noticing my shame. I’m grateful. She takes apart the model in her hand to show the inner workings of the throat and ear.

“We put the device on the neck,” she says and sets the model down for a moment. She places her index and middle finger on the corresponding points. The Franken-mommy comments I’ve seen on the news are apt, if not unkind. “When you yell it strains the vocal cords. The electric signal from the implant will trigger the vocal cords to immediately close. The scream is cut off.”

I nod. I knew this part. My friends told me about it. I saw it work when they all tried to give me their best scream at a lunch downtown and all of them simply opened their mouths and nothing came out.

Becca was the first to get one. The pioneer of our group.

Siobhan was next, not to miss out on the fun.

Tanya went third. She said it was for the noise, but I’d heard her yell at those kids before. Granted, they were pushing her to her limit. Hearing her yell at them made me realize how ugly it was when I screamed at my own kids. How ugly it had been when my mother roared at me as a child. *But isn’t that a parent’s duty sometimes? Or no, that can’t be right either.*

“And then the second part of the device does the same for the ear drum. But instead of it signaling when you get too loud, it will signal when the external environment gets too loud.” Silence, pure blissful silence.

It is a genius device, really. An external silver semi-circle with a node at each end. One side designed to stop mom from yelling. A relief to a mother like me who can’t channel her inner calm after a day of managing two kids under the age of three.

The second mechanism shuts off your ears. When it is literally too loud to think, it silences the noise.

An electric shock collar for women, but without the zap of electricity.

Oh gosh, I can feel the feminism leaving my body. Voluntarily silencing myself. Caving to men’s expectations that women be quiet, never raise their voice. But to me it isn’t about that. Greg doesn’t care one way or another. But after I yell at the kids, they just yell more in general. Greg has to remind us all to play nicely. Everyone wins if I get the device.

Of course, there are people who judge those with neck-gear. Substandard mothers who couldn't hold themselves together.

"They did something about it" is the refrain by silence empowerment advocates. The name itself implies the worst of it.

But it isn't true. It doesn't silence me. I can talk. I can get loud. I just won't be able to yell.

"What about in an emergency situation?" I ask. One of the many questions on my list.

"Yes, many patients are concerned about that. I give everyone one of these," she pulls an orange whistle from her pocket. Her name and business phone number printed on it. *A branded rape whistle*, I think.

"What is the main reason you want this procedure?" The doctor asks. "Maybe that can help me explain the mechanism better?"

I knew she would ask. Becca, Siobhan, and Tanya coached me on it a bit. They didn't have to. The discourse on social media is enough to remind me of toeing a careful line. A line that doesn't exist. A line *I should* feel confident will never exist, but it could be legislated someday.

"I have two kids under the age of three. My life is loud. And especially before dinner time, I just can't hear myself think," I tell the truth. Half of it at least. I also want to stop being the monstrous version of a mother who yells. It makes me a monster, right? Because so many moms don't yell. So, I'm one of the bad ones?

Dr. Marsh nods, accepting my explanation.

"I know it seems like a lot to go through for one hour of my day, but that's when I'm cooking and I've been with them all day." Can she hear the exhaustion in my voice? I know today won't be as bad. This appointment is like a little vacation, a time away from tiny people who cannot modulate their voice or expectations.

As of right now, it isn't illegal to raise your voice to your child. But the far-right is calling for a criminalization of moms who yell. Moms who drink. Moms who go out for a girl's night every once in a while. It's never the dads they go after.

My worry is that if I tell this doctor, who has given so many women back their sanity with this device, that I have yelled at my children when they are on my last nerve, that she'll make a note of it. And one day, maybe she has to turn over those files. And then maybe the mom-police show up at my door and monitor me. Like something out a Jessamin Chan novel. Something I was so disturbed by I couldn't put it down. Something so realistic, I can't believe I'm even in this frigid room exposing my greatest weakness to this doctor.

Agreeing to the procedure will be evidence enough, but most-likely their dystopian dreams never come to be. We get a blue-wave in the fall. We focus on helping people instead of punishing them.

Still, I don't want to admit it. I didn't even admit it to Tanya. I could have commiserated with her. About our sore vocal cords, our rough throats. Our angelic children who become impish when they don't get our undivided attention.

Let the doctor think it's just about the noise, my inner voice whispered.

I begin my tedious list of questions. The time for recovery. The impact of the device even once it is removed.

"Most women elect to keep it through when their children move out of the house. You think toddlers are bad, try parenting a teenager," she says. *She can't possibly be old enough to have a teenager child. Could she?* "But by then moms are entering menopause and you'll want to make sure those raging hormones don't cause domestic discord."

So, they keep it forever. For as long as they want.

Is it a prison sentence or a paradise? I would win the moral high ground in every fight. I would shut out the noise when it got too much. It could be heaven.

More and more moms are doing it. I'm not alone, I rationalize.

I ask the price again. I already know it. Not covered by insurance. Dr. Marsh has a payment plan, of course.

"We have a new model coming out as well. We have tested it, but if you are one of the first 100 patients to order it, we are offering it at the

current device cost. This new one will also monitor your thyroid and connect to an app. The app will still show all your metrics for the times and frequency it had to activate. But it will also show you hormone readings to better predict your cycle and notify you of your first perimenopausal aberrations.”

I take this all in. I just got my body back. And now I’m reminded that it’s only about to change again. That I can’t control anything. That if I really want to forestall menopause, I’ll get pregnant again. But that also requires me to sign over my body to someone else for nine months to two years depending on how long they nurse. *Is my body ever really mine? Has it ever been something within my control, or was it all an illusion? A dream? A myth?*

“Do you have any protocols for removing the new model and replacing it with the existing one if there are issues?” My anxiety is spiking. It isn’t about the new model. It’s about the whole premise. After all isn’t this just a short cut. A way to avoid doing the work. But how can I work on not snapping at my kids when they act like three-year-old demons when they are in fact three-years-old? *How? How?*

I’m supposed to be a grown up. I’m supposed to act my age. But who I am is someone who can only stand the madness up to a point. It will be a year before Harper is in Pre-K and then another three before Lincoln attends as well. This surgery is less expensive than daycare.

I leave, taking my time getting to the car. Getting back to my life. My job as mom.

I sit in the parking lot. I’m buckled in. The folder with all the forms and paperwork on the passenger seat. In my rearview mirror are two empty car seats. It’s a rarity. A quiet car. I can get in and out without coaching or negotiating with anyone to buckle or unbuckle. I can listen to whatever music I want. No one will yell at me at the stoplights.

I turn on the car, it’s time to get going.

My CD player whirs to life, because my car is an ancient relic and still has one. Taylor Swift sings, it’s her latest. I bought it at Costco as I slowly

strolled the aisles with my oversized coffee, my last mini-vacation from parenting.

I crank the music louder and louder.

When she hits one of her iconic bridges, I scream every single word until my throat hurts. Until it turns into just yelling. I do this until I can't anymore. Until my voice gives out. Until I feel alive.

Then I put my car in reverse and head home.



Zoar Bird Cage, Angelo Bulone [Watercolor]

Sertraline

LAURA CODY

The walls were black. The ceiling was black. The floor, black. There were no doors, there were no windows. Nothing but a threadbare mat separating body from floor, leaving stiffened limbs to whine in protest.

The girl did not know how long she'd lain on the mat in this dark room. Time did not exist in this place.

She was unsure whether her eyes were opened or closed until she saw the light. Even then, she blinked to figure out if the light was inside the room or just inside her head. A circle, perfectly round and no bigger than a tennis ball, glowed yellow on the black wall.

She crawled over to sit before the circle, maintaining a safe distance. Visually, she traced its contours. Its singular brightness burned her retinas. When she closed her eyes, she could still see its shape.

The girl stayed with the circle, sleeping and waking in its glow, an existence of amiable silence. In the warmth of its light, she became reacquainted with parts of herself she'd forgotten in the dark. A smooth swath of skin, a snippet of memory, a wisp of curiosity.

A black line appeared on the circle, traversing its lower half and curving upward at the ends. A smile. Perhaps an invitation, the promise of a hug. Cautiously, the girl touched the line with her index finger. A pleasant tingle greeted her fingertip and traveled toward her center as the finger entered the velvety darkness. When she pulled back her hand, the finger was gone.

Two black dots appeared over the curved line. A merry pair of eyes. The girl made a V shape with the second and third fingers of her intact hand and probed the holes. Two more fingers disappeared.

Fed by the girl, the circle of light grew bigger, stronger, brighter. Its black spots grew as well, big enough for a forearm, a shin, a thigh.

Eventually, the spots coalesced into a great opening, large enough for a pair of shoulders.

So little of the girl remained in the dark room. So much of her had already passed to the other side. Without looking back, she rocked and juddered until she was able to tumble her remaining bits through.

Then, in the room where no parts of the girl remained, the yellow circle blinked out. Only the blackness stayed behind.



Palazzo da Mula, Claude Monet [Oil Painting]

Art

CLAUDIA WYSOCKY

can

i
paint

you a
picture of
how it feels to be
lost in a dream?

the colors are all wrong
and the shapes never stay still but

every time i try to hold one
it whispers something

in a language i don't know

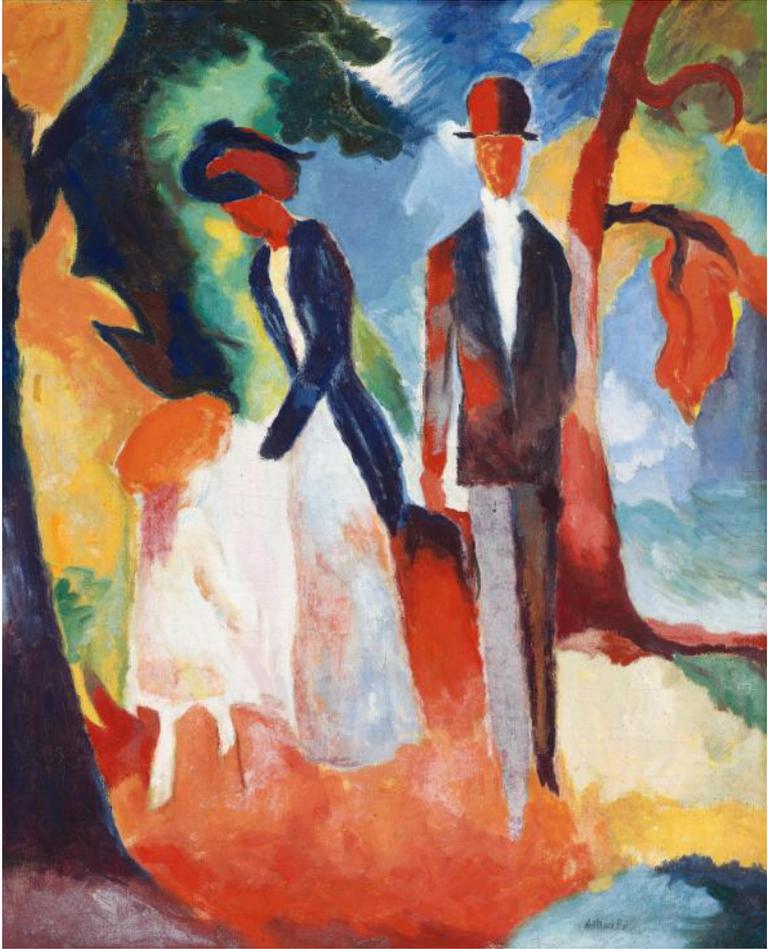
but understand

perfectly.

Night and Rain

PETER CASHORALI

That night
in the rain behind
the now gone bookstore,
talking under umbrellas
with David and Scott
about poetry and
someday finding
oceans deep enough to
hold everything we felt
and being in our 20s,
which soon vanished into
what was on its way
to have its own turn
at being truer than anything,
continues,
though now it's happening
above the clouds
and our faces
are full of stars.



People by the Blue Lake, August Macke [Oil Painting]

Garage Sale Findings

MIKE MARKS

Anita and I developed strict thrifty habits raising five kids on my paltry income buying used cars, clothes at Goodwill, and generic foods or using coupons at the grocery, always shopping around for the best prices. Flea markets and garage sales were great sources. We always had a used tennis racquet or VCR around as a spare if we bought it right. We rarely dined out. All five of our children got through college. Three earned advance degrees. We watched our pennies wherever we went. We still do, but have since loosened our purse strings and wallets, especially for our progeny and groups that can use our money to improve lives of others, but basically, we will always be classified as cheapskates.

Twenty years ago, when all five kids were on their own or married, we sold our big house and bought a little ranch in the burbs, a half-acre on a hill overlooking a small lake. We had a company hold a giant house sale and still ended up donating several carloads of unsold goods to Goodwill. Too much stuff we couldn't give away. A bomb shelter type room in our basement is full from floor to ceiling with collectables, books, furniture, artwork, and things our children left behind. One by one, three daughters and one granddaughter moved in and stayed until they regrouped. The garage got too full. We added on a shed to match our home.

The property is shielded on both sides by mature trees. The yard is a motley patchwork of terraces and paths intersecting flower beds amidst two stairways leading to a halfmoon shaped patio above an expanse of trees and grass at the bottom level. In the winter we see tracks of deer and coyotes in the snow. In the summer, it's our own private park.

So now Anita and I are 78 and our favorite pastime together is going to garage sales. Like a peeping Tom, I am fascinated to see how much people value their discards. I like the social aspect, especially because I feel I have the upper hand when people are trying to sell me something they no

longer want. Of course, our wants are meager. We are hardly consumers anymore. We can probably afford anything. We go to the sales for entertainment and rarely spend over twenty dollars on a weekend.

We held our own garage sale decades ago and I hated it. Not enough of our offerings sold to make it worthwhile. In fact, we sold a couple of things I wish we hadn't—a gold plated business card holder and a self-adjusting hex wrench.

For the last few years, I'd been thinking of paying someone to mow the area abutting the lake as it has become tedious for me to bring my push mower down and up the hill. I'm on my fourth lawn mower at this house, all previously owned. Many of our neighbors hire lawn services that use industrial riding mowers. My expanse by the lake could be quickly tackled with a rider, but the other seven or eight patches of grass around my home are small and can only be hand mowed. Also, there's no room in my garage or shed to store a riding mower. Anita and I are financially comfortable now. We can afford any luxury we covet; we just don't have any serious wants or needs. Yet, I'm still uncomfortable adding a regular expense when I can cut my grass myself for free. Besides, the exercise is supposed to be healthy.

Our closets are stuffed with garage sale steals, gizmos that purport to revolutionize our lives. We've got everything we need and more. If I ever found a worthwhile use for my Veg-O-Matic, left-handed scissors, or sticky back paper, chances are I wouldn't find it or it wouldn't perform as advertised even though I paid way below retail for each a long time ago.

Yard and garage sales were scarce this spring. Anita and I never start early. We let the crowds get the first picks. We scrounge for hidden treasure. We parked in front of a big house in an older middle-class neighborhood and walked past a small garage sale sign and a man returning to his car empty handed. We continued up the drive and around the back to see tables in front and inside the garage. A woman greeted us. There didn't seem to be anything of interest to us. An assortment of women's clothing, books, hand tools, wrapping paper, dishes, nothing out of the ordinary.

We looked a second time, joined by a man who looked like a vagabond wearing a baseball cap, dirty t-shirt, and tattered camo pants. We were ready to leave.

But then I noticed a small red Craftsman riding lawn mower parked by some garden tools and power equipment. Just to be sociable, I inquired how much she was asking for the mower, even though I wasn't sure I wanted it at any price.

She replied, "Make me an offer."

I countered, "I don't really need it. What's your bottom price?"

"I just want to get rid of it. It needs a belt. I'll take twenty dollars"

On her flat back lawn, away from the sale, stood a shiny Cub Cadet tractor mower.

The Craftsman looked to be in great shape, good tires, no rust, no tears in the seat. Maybe only five years old and well cared for. I thought a new one must cost more than \$2000, and this one would be a steal at \$200 if it wasn't broken, but I still wasn't sure it would work for me. Would it safely go up and down my hill? It won't get through my shed door. Where would I store it? "Does it run?" I inquired.

"It ran fine last fall. We mowed with it until the belt wore out"

"I'll take it if it starts up." I knew a drive belt was an easy and inexpensive repair I could tackle.

It didn't start. The battery was dead. The woman's husband appeared. They connected a battery charger. In the meantime, I noticed a Ryobi power washer among the power tools. It looked much better than my old power washer, a tool I rarely used, taking up space in my shed.

"Why are you selling the power washer?"

"Like the riding mower, we bought a new one."

"How much?"

"How about another twenty?"

I countered, "How about thirty for the pair?"

"Deal."

I handed the woman a ten and a twenty, and we waited for the lawn mower battery to charge.

I introduced myself to her. She told me her name was Kat. I mentioned to her that my local Kiwanis club was looking for generous people like her. She asked what the club did and I responded, “we improve the lives of children.” She was very interested, relating that she was a social worker with a four-year-old autistic daughter.

The vagabond, who introduced himself as Tony, chimed in, “I’ve written grants for several non-profits.”

I got two Kiwanis brochures with applications out of my car and gave one to each, explaining more about the club.

Then Tony said to me, while Kat was within hearing distance, “I’ll give you forty dollars for the mower right now. You’ll make a quick profit.”

I responded, “It’s not about the money. How would you get it home?” I was thinking myself, *it certainly won’t fit in our car; would I be able to lean on one of my neighbors to transport it with their pickup truck.*

Tony replied “I have a trailer.”

“Tony, I live about a mile away. Would you deliver it to my house for twenty dollars?”

“Sure.”

I hopped onto the mower and it started right up.

I went back home and emptied my shed of power garden tools I hadn’t used in years. Beside my driveway I piled chainsaws, blowers, a hedge trimmer, a weed eater, my old power washer and other duplicate tools. I dropped off an almost new blower at Kat’s house for her to sell and waited for Tony.

An hour later Tony called me to say his truck wouldn’t start, that he was going to get a new battery at the auto parts store. He said he would call me when he was on his way. Apparently, he lived on the other side of town. Two hours later he called to say he was driving slowly, not confident pulling a trailer. He added, “I’m no good at backing my trailer up.”

I drove back to Kat's house. Tony came shortly after. We loaded up the mower and power washer. He followed me home. After a few tries, Tony successfully backed his trailer into my driveway. I handed him a twenty-dollar bill. We unloaded my two purchases and I offered him my pile of lawn equipment. He was glad to have it, even though he really wanted the lawn mower.

We talked about various people and things. It turns out that we have several common acquaintances. And I don't know how we got on the subject of poetry; I'm sure Tony brought it up. He asked me if I played chess, because he wrote seven chapters of poems relating life to pieces on a chessboard.

Then he began reciting what he called his second chapter. It was iambic quatrains with ABAB rhyme scheme, totally lyrical. Without a stutter, stammer, or slur, Tony chronicled relationships with humans to chess pieces in verse, starting with pawns and working up to kings. His poem took over ten minutes to reel off, a lot for me to process.

We talked more. His work had never been published. I'm not sure if it's even written down. What I heard certainly sounded publishable. We loaded up his trailer with my pile of excess stuff. Before leaving, Tony recited chapter one. Another ten or fifteen minutes of rhyming verse comparing us to pawns, castles, knights, bishops, queens, and kings. I was astounded the first time, now super astounded.

Where did this guy come from? How lucky was I to befriend him? He came to the next Kiwanis Club meeting. I surprised him by asking him to do the invocation. After a moment of nervousness, Tony stood up and recited his first chapter. Guess what? The entire club was blown away.

Tony still wants my riding lawn mower. I put a new belt on it and it cuts grass like a charm, except that I'm afraid I may roll it over on myself traversing my hilly places. He may get it yet. It's not nearly as valuable as my discovery of a person with such an amazing hidden talent. I made a new friend that day.

I tell my friend what a windy day means

MEGAN LAM

A windy day means
broken branches scattered around
cars and trolleys
dollops of trash bags tattered open
entries to buildings busy while
frozen drain pipes and chimneys of
ghostly steam spills into the summerless days.

Haphazard hairs flutter around and
icicles hang from glass buildings
just teasing a cold death.

Khakis and jeans braving breeze
lakes shiver through ripples.

Mornings of glass pearls on grass blades.

Nights of glass pearls in black sky.

Open signs flash blue and red
people storming in for warmth.

Quilts lay over couches by blazing fireplaces
resting bodies cuddled by loyal paws
soft snores from tired souls and running scenes from
the TV to accompany a cacophony.

Ukulele strums upstairs where
vinyls sit on oak shelves.

Windows in offices wiggle with each gust
Xerox machines offer warmth from inked sheets.

Yellow lights overhead
zines stacked on top of newspapers, careful not to topple.



First Snow at Venue-Nadon, Alfred Sisley [Oil Painting]

Apricity

RUTH BROOME

The frail winter light
kisses your face
like a whisper in flight
her gentle embrace
tells you
 you're safe.

A feather sweeps
across your cheek,
your captive smile
 released.

A seam of bliss runs through you.

Just a Sliver

ANNDRIA SMUK

I grew up with Eloise and Daphne in the "poor area" as everyone called it. Had we been in any other place maybe we wouldn't be labeled as such. However, living in a hit vacation spot made the gap between the rich and poor wider and more noticeable. When I would go with my mom and dad into the main part of town I would always gaze jealously at the masses of people, all so eccentric and seemingly confident in this place that was not their home. It always confused me the way they were so quick to complain. Every time I would go into the main town someone dressed in leather or jewels would be either pouting or in the middle of an argument, which my parents joked was usually involving bad service, or an eggshell in their omelet. "First world problems," my dad would murmur as we passed.

Eloise and Daphne noticed this contrast, although it didn't seem to bother them as much as it did me. I was envious of their still childish minds. I was sure the kids in the main town were oblivious to the fact our little corner even existed; they would learn when they turned sixteen or maybe they never would. It was unfair to me. After all Eloise, Daphne, and I were only eleven, did that not qualify us as children? Eloise had long hair she refused to cut, and Daphne had a single dimple on her left cheek. They both lived in my neighborhood (if one could call it that, it was more a hidden part of town, as the wealthy majority were ashamed). I lived the furthest down the road, at the end. My parents' small garden granted access to a creek. It smelt like lilacs whenever you went out the backdoor, as giant bushes stood on either side of the door. I loved it. I swore that lilac was my favorite flower. It was nostalgic and sweet.

Every day I would hear the familiar chime of my friends' voices syncing together mixed with the crunch of dirt and rocks as they ran down the road calling my name, "Milena come swim." I would always oblige. The creek in my backyard was open to everyone in the neighborhood, it

went without saying. My parents did not care who used it. As my father would say, "It was put there for no singular man."

I would put on whichever swimsuit was closest to me and jump down the creaky stairs. Often, I would be stopped by my mama or younger sister Maria as I went. My mama would protest about the swimsuit I was wearing, and Maria would want to join in. On lucky days I could sneak by without catching either of their attention.

By the time I would get to the creek Eloise and Daphne would already be in the water. I would pout and argue that they got an unfair advantage to get used to the cold water. "It is not bad," Daphne would reassure me. But the sting of the water would always take a few minutes to adjust to. I could never just dive in.

We would follow this routine nearly every day starting when we were nine. Of course, that claim isn't entirely true as no day is ever truly the same. Although, the basic event stands. That being that Eloise, Daphne, and I were always outside doing something.

I was homeschooled, as were Eloise and Daphne. Our town had a school, although the neighborhood we lived in was quite a distance and relatively poor. On my end, my parents were not able to drive me to school every day, and we lived outside the bus border. The adults would often grumble about how it did not make sense, and it was unfair, as we were still a part of the town, technically speaking.

Most of the kids in our neighborhood were homeschooled for these factors. In my age group, there was myself, Eloise, Daphne, this one girl who chose to keep to herself, and two boys. There were younger kids as well and the older ones we had grown up near had all moved away. I didn't want to move away. Ever. Eloise did. Really badly. Since we met, she had been saying how she wanted to move to a city and work in a "business building."

Eloise had moved to our town and neighborhood when she was eight. Her family had been decently wealthy and from a nearby city although her parents ran into some sort of trouble, something about her father losing

his job and they were forced to move here as housing in our country was in a bad place and had been for the past five years.

Daphne didn't talk much of her dreams although everyone knew she wanted to be a doctor. It was unfortunate that the chances of her going to university were slim. She was smart enough to get in but there was no way her parents could pay for her admission. Neither of them had high-paying jobs at all. Her only hope was scholarships but because we all lived in an otherwise wealthy community the funds usually were slid right past us as one look at the area we were from led to the assumption that our families were lying about their low income.

Like I said, I really didn't want to leave. I was content. Although this neighborhood was a trap within a lavish dream, I didn't feel claustrophobic. I liked the creek, and I liked the neighborhood even if it was poor. It had a charm to it that was difficult to explain. I didn't care if I was a waitress at one of the diners or a clerk at one of the shops. I would be content if I could stay in one place forever. Honestly, I didn't see what was so bad about being poor, it was no indicator of happiness. Money wasn't water or flowers or mountain air. The only thing about it that I didn't like about being poor was the competition and power imbalance as my dad described it. It made everyone sad. Money wasn't the issue, human behavior was.

When news that a newer (and closer to the rest of the town) neighborhood was being built to fix the "visual problem" of our area reached us, everyone was happy. I was not. My parents invited the neighbors to our garden for a sort of celebration. People brought cheap bottles of wine and homemade cookies to celebrate what the adults were calling "our return to the real world."

Eloise and Daphne were overjoyed. Eloise saw it as the adults did and hoped that the move would bring her closer to her past life in the city. On the other hand, Daphne hoped that going to public school and being around rich kids and the community more would increase her

opportunities. They asked me to look for the best in the situation, but I refused to even accept it.

I was not going to leave the place that raised me, and I especially refused to blend into the tourist-filled masses. I was not one of the kids crying over a small scoop of ice cream while the mom made a reservation for a dinner that would cost more than what my mom makes in a week. We were not them and we never would be. Everyone could pretend but it was only that, pretend. It was as if the community was giving us charity to boost their own egos.

As everyone drank their cheap wine, I snuck away. I told Eloise and Daphne that I needed time alone and they listened to me, although I'm sure the second I was out of view they talked about it. I needed to get away from all the talk of money and social status. I didn't see why it mattered. Was our home not beautiful despite its crack? A flaw in a painting doesn't make it trash. If anything, the flaws in my home made it even more beautiful. Cracks that no one would see, dents and splotches only a local would know. That's what a home was to me. Not a charade.

I jumped across the creek getting my shoes and socks wet. I heard my dad yell from the grass to get out of the water and that I was ruining my clothes. I listened but got out on the opposite bank I had gotten in from.

I pulled myself up the steep bank and disappeared into the trees. No one paid any mind as it was normal for the kids to play in the trees. It was no strange behavior. I was glad of this because I wasn't in the mood for a conversation of many questions.

As I looked for a tree, I swore I could hear Eloise and Daphne playing in the water. I could hear the splashing and the laughs. I felt as if I was playing with them from the water that had drenched my shoes and socks. It would have been easy at that moment to convince myself that my whole body had been submerged.

I found a pine tree that had roots poking from the ground like an arm making room for me to nestle into its curve. I shut my eyes and took a breath of the mountain air. It fills my lungs, and I can't imagine oxygen

tastes half as good anywhere else. A chickadee sings in my ear, and I pray with all my heart to stay here. I knew that moving closer to the town would not be the dream everyone seemed to think it would be. It would only cause more issues; more envy than we already had. No one was considering what it would be like to not have any escape from the endless wealth of visitors and the locals occupying the wood cabins bigger than our whole street.

It made me sad that the life everyone had been fighting for through tireless work and paycheck-to-paycheck nights was something they all found so shameful. I agreed that it wasn't glamorous, but it was ours and it was a piece of our identities. The shame of the cheap wine and old houses was only fueling the internal belief that the town was better pushed us into a corner.

At some point I let my thoughts take a rest and focused on the bird songs and the air. The more energy I wasted on grown up thoughts the more I wasted time I could spend in the place I really wanted to be. The air was so rich it consumed me. I felt my limbs grow heavy and I fell further into the curve of the trees letting it shoulder my burdens.

I was like that for a few beats. The moments seemed to fly by. At the end of my peace, I heard a familiar chime and not that of the birds. "Milena, come swim."

I slowly opened my eyes and then quickly used my hand to shield them as a bright beam cut my vision in two. The birds were quiet. I shifted away from the tree and held its base as I stood up.

When I made it to the tip of the bank everyone seemed to leave. In fact, the garden looked almost dead. The only sound I could hear was the subtle cry of the creek. The strange part was, I couldn't tell where the chime had come from. No matter how I strained my eyes I could not make out any people, especially not the faces of my friends.

I carefully balanced down the steep bank with a small splash into the creek. I made my way across the water and onto the opposite side once again. In the top window of my house, the one with a crack running

through it I saw someone with long hair draping in front of the glass like a curtain.

I ran across the grass kicking it up as I did so. Once I hit the old wood floor, I felt myself step on a sliver, I cursed when I remembered no adults were around to scold me then ran up the creaky stairs looking for Eloise who I was certain had been in the window.

When I made it to the window she was gone and there was no trace anyone had been in the room. Ever.

I tried to slow down my heaving breathing from my run inside, but the barren walls frightened me, making my efforts fail. The cracks were all in their spots. Even peeling paint near the floorboards that I used to pick at when I was bored, and it was cold out there. And yet, every other trace of us was gone. It was as if the house had been left as bones.

“Hello?” I hesitated and then repeated two or three times. An echo was my only response. Rooms only echoed when they were empty.

I felt my heartbeat quicken. I walked to look out the cracked window leaving a trail of water behind me. If my father were here, he would be scolding me, saying that I was going to cause more mold.

Outside was still empty. The lilac bush swayed lonely by the door and a quiet pile of petals fell at its feet while water fell at mine.

From the corner of my eye, I could see a girl. In the creek. She turned, only her ankles submerged. The sun was blocking her eyes, but I felt my blood flow again when she sent me a smile and a dimple.

I pushed open the window and leaned over the edge to shout, “Where is everyone?”

At that moment Daphne’s smile dropped and then my stomach followed as I felt myself tip over the edge as the water betrayed my balance.

All I could see was the open window as I fell towards the ground and onto my back. I landed with a splash into the water. My brain began to reel. The creek was too far away, and even if I was in the creek, it was shallow. Why was I drowning? I tried to swim to the surface, but I couldn’t break for oxygen no matter how hard I tried to pull myself up.

I wanted to call for my mom and dad, to beg for one last piece of advice. I could feel my heart slow, and the water turned warm like a bath. I imagined it was my mother bringing in a pot of boiling water to heat my cold bath like she so often did.

I stopped struggling and reached out my hand for one last offer from anyone who may be in this empty place with me. I would even accept the rough arm of the lilac bush which was basically another friend.

In a sudden moment, I felt my body hit a rocky bottom and I used it to sit up. As I did so I broke the surface. I was sitting in the creek. The birds were singing; the silence was over.

A splash met the back of my head followed by laughter. When I turned, I found Eloise and Daphne equally drenched as me but less confused.

“Oops, sorry. I didn’t mean to splash you that hard” Daphne squeaked.

I blinked and turned to look at the adults on the lawn. The top window was open, the window blowing the sides in a subtle pattern. Back and forth.

I remained seated and took a big breath still feeling my racing heart in my chest. “What happened?”

Eloise and Daphne looked slightly confused now.

“Um, I don’t know? We were swimming...”

“Is something wrong, Milena?”

I stood and let the water drip back into the creek where it belonged.

“I hurt my foot,” I uttered finally and stepped out of the water onto the lawn.

The next thing I knew I was walking towards my parents with tears creeping out of my eyes. I kept my head down. These people were still traitors abandoning this home for something new and shiny.

“Milena, what’s wrong?” my mom whispered as I ran into a hug and my tears started to fall more violently.

“Is she alright?” my dad asked, his voice laced with parental worry.

My mom helped me wipe away my tears as they fell and after a deep breath, I told them what was bothering me.

“I have a sliver.”



Tools, Rose Cambell-Gerke [Mixed Medium]

Ode to Cleaning Out the Last Drawer

RENE SELEDOTIS

The very last
of the trash
is in a drawer
imbedded in the desk
where I work
everyday glancing
to a space I cannot
use in this year
but rather layers yeared
as a clove
of garlic crushed
under the flat blade
pressure and collapse
and scent spilling
between cracks
of the wooden
drawers
gloves on
I fish tissues
picture frame and bracelet
a plastic water bottle full
of chip bags and Q-tips
a car guide from 1990
Led Zeppelin cassette tape
some cleaning solution
turned to chartreuse slime
plastic apple
casing with
8-year old caramel
wishing I could go
back and
tell the child me
it's a case of one bad apple
spoilng the bunch
but that one is not you,
grabber of actualities,

capturer of flashbacks
that never
come to pass—
“how else will I remember
it,” you said, “if not
in my hands?”
it is just trash
coating what’s not trash
in the stink of trash,
just trash I now hold
and stuff
into a plastic bag
as my hands grow sweaty
and the gloves grow sticky
and the life I uncover
is hazy
memories blending—
oh would that break
a younger me
like a habit.

The Butterfly Effect

CLAUDIA WYSOCKY

to
 you
 i was
 a
 saint.
 to
 everyone
 else
 i was
 a
 liar.

the butterfly effect:
 a butterfly flaps its wings in texas and the winds change in new york.

the butterfly effect:
 you tell someone you love them and they die in a car crash en route to you.

i confess to you that i loved you, and so from this day forth i will be silent.

i will not speak of my love for the world. i will hold it close to my chest.
 imagine me as an empty hallway with doors off limits,
 one labeled "love," one labeled "hope," one labeled "peace."
 imagine me standing at the end of it, arms crossed,
 my head cocked like a wary dog's, my eyes narrowed.

it is all yours; it has always been yours.
 but i cannot let you through those doors,
 not again. how simple it would be if we could understand
 our impact on each other's lives.
 but what if we could, and still chose to do nothing?



Five Butterflies, Odilon Redon [Watercolor]

Contributors

RUTH BROOME is an emerging Poet and has only just begun to send her writing out into the world. Largely inspired by the nature she encounters on her daily dog walks, Ruth's work investigates and seeks to capture the plethora of human emotional responses caused by certain situations and stimuli. She hopes to convey unspeakable truths which lay outside the realms of quotidian human discourse.

PETER CASHORALI is a neurodivergent queer psychotherapist, formerly working in HIV/AIDS and community mental health, currently in private practice in Portland and Los Angeles.

LAURA CODY is a forensic psychiatrist, fiction writer, and lover of books. Her short fiction has appeared in journals, online lit sites, and anthologies. She lives in New York with a few kids, a couple of cats, and a very patient husband. Her first novel, co-written with a partner, is a medical thriller called *Call Game* which will be published in October 2025. Visit twodocswriting.com to learn more.

MEGAN LAM is a graduated Criminology and Criminal Justice student from the University of Maryland. She enjoys writing poetry and was former vice president of her campus poetry club, Terpoets. Other than poetry, Megan enjoys playing music on her ukulele and looking wistfully out windows. Her work can be found in the University of Maryland's 2024 undergraduate publication, *Stylus*.

MÓNICA LAVÍN (Mexico) has written over twenty novels, short story and essay collections. Among her awards: The Gilberto Owen Prize (*Ruby Tuesday no ha muerto*), the Premio Narrativa de Colima (*Café cortado*), the Premio Iberoamericano de Novela Elena Poniatowska (*Yo, la peor*), and was shortlisted for the Vargas Llosa Novel Award for her novel *Cuando te hablen de amor*. Her most recent novel is *La ausencia*, about great women writers of the American South. Website: monicalavinescritora.com

COURTIE LEIGH is an English Studies major at Ball State University. Passionate about writing, Courtney explores human experiences and the things that keep her up at night. In her free time, you can find her sipping on coffee, puzzling, or rocking out with her 3 year old cat, Luna Lou.

Growing up in the Cincinnati, **MIKE MARKS** was the middle of five children born in a six-year span. He was taught writing structures by Pulitzer Prize winner Gwendolyn Brooks in Chicago, later awarded the first Creative Writing bachelor's degree ever tendered at Kansas State University. Now, with over a hundred published stories and poems, Akron, Ohio has been Mike's home since 1973, where he and his Kansan wife Anita have raised their own five children.

P. D. MESSERSMITH is a gender-ambivalent artist/poet currently living in the Pacific Northwest with their cats Kino and Cooper. You can find his poetry in *Punk Noir Magazine*, *Litbreak Magazine*, and *Fruit Journal*.

BEN NARDOLILLI is a theoretical MFA candidate at Long Island University. His work has appeared in *Perigee Magazine*, *Door Is a Jar*, *The Delmarva Review*, *Red Fez*, *The Oklahoma Review*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, and *Slab*. Follow his publishing journey at mirrorsponge.blogspot.com.

NICOLÒ POTESTÀ (he/him) was born and raised in the beautiful city of Seattle, Washington. He has work published or forthcoming in *Mulberry Literary Magazine*, *GOTHAM Literature*, and *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, among others. Now, he studies Creative Writing and Political Science at American University in Washington, DC. He is proud to identify as a trans man. Insta @sempre.nico.

RENE SELEDOTIS (he/him) is a fiction and poetry writer from the Metro-Detroit area. He earned his BA in creative writing at Oakland University and served as a poetry editor on the *Oakland Arts Review*, which he enjoyed so much that he started his own literary journal, *25:05 Magazine*. His work has seen publication in *Turtle Way Journal*, *Variety Pack*, and the *Wayne Literary Review*.

R. JAMES SENNETT JR. lives, works, breathes and chases his muse in Louisville, Kentucky. His poems have appeared in numerous publications for which he is grateful.

HIBAH SHABKHEZ is a writer and photographer from Lahore, Pakistan. Her work has previously appeared in *Harpur Palate*, *Stirring*, *Forevermore*, *Empyrean Literary Magazine*, *Good River Review*, and a number of other literary magazines. Studying life, languages, and literature from a comparative perspective across linguistic and cultural boundaries holds a particular fascination for her. You can find her at Linktree: @HibahShabkhez

BRACHA K. SHARP was published in *American Poetry Review*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *ONE ART: a journal of poetry*, *Wild Roof Journal*, *Rogue Agent Journal*, and *Thimble Literary Magazine*, among others. She placed first in the national *Hackney Literary Awards* and was a finalist in the *New Millennium Writings Poetry Awards*. She received a 2019 *Moonbeam Children's Book Awards* Silver Medal for her debut picture book. She is a current reader for the *Baltimore Review*. You can find out more by visiting brachaksharp.com

ANNDRIA SMUK is a university student going into her third year of study. She has been writing since she could walk but only recently has started pushing it into the world. She is currently 19 and in the editing phase what she hopes will be her debut novel. Her main goal in her writing is to add a sense of ambiguity as her favorite stories are those which are open-ended or open for interpretation.

D. P. SNYDER (United States) is a bilingual writer and literary translator from Spanish whose work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Two Lines Press*, *World Literature Today*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and elsewhere. Her book-length translations include *Meaty Pleasures* by Mónica Lavín, *Arrhythmias* by Angelina Muñoz-Huberman, and *Scary Story* by Alberto Chimal. She is a Fellow at the Hermitage Artist Retreat in Englewood, Florida and a professor of literary translation at New York University. Website: dpsnyder.us

MARY KATE WILLIAMS' debut speculative cli-fi novel, *Genisse*, was the lead title for Hugo's new iMPACT imprint (FR) earlier in 2025. Williams recently had another short story accepted with *January House Literary Magazine* as well. While originally from Philadelphia, Williams now lives in St. Pete, Florida.

CLAUDIA WYSOCKY is a 16-year-old Polish poet based in New York, celebrated for her evocative creations that capture life's essence through emotional depth and rich imagery. With over five years of experience in fiction writing, her poetry has appeared in various local newspapers and literary magazines. Wysocky believes in the transformative power of art and views writing as a vital force that inspires her daily. Her works blend personal reflections with universal themes, making them relatable to a broad audience. Actively engaging with her community on social media, she fosters a shared passion for poetry and creative expression.

About

Broken Alidade is a literary journal dedicated to capturing the human experience through stories that seek direction in disorder. We publish work that evokes memories long forgotten, questions the known and unknown, and seeks meaning in the meaningless. Tell us about the day you learned of death. The taste of glacial water after a twelve-hour hike. We want to hear about chaos and freedom, serenity and disorder. Through it all, our goal is to make transparent what it means to be human.

broken: bro-ken (adjective)

The state of being fractured, disjointed, or apart. Broken objects typically feature sharp edges or missing pieces, rendering themselves inoperable. The same can apply to people, dreams, ideas, and societies.

alidade: al-i-dade (noun)

A surveying instrument used to determine the direction or angle of a distant object. Alidades are used in fields such as astronomy, navigation, meteorology, and fire safety, coming in many shapes and sizes. Historically, they were mechanical instruments with a sighting device on a ruler or scale requiring manual observation and recording. Nowadays, some alidades are computer-operated, allowing for automatic adjustment and calculation of direction.



BROKEN ALIDADE is a literary journal dedicated to capturing the human experience through stories that seek direction in disorder. We publish work that evokes memories long forgotten, questions the known and unknown, and seeks meaning in the meaningless.

This first collection offers a glimpse inside other minds. You will learn of stillness and quiet moments. Heartache and contentment. Our hope is that the words inside these pages will serve as a catalyst for change while providing solace from the chaotic world.

Interested in contributing?
Head over to brokenalidade.com

