



# Issue 8

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## **Editorial**

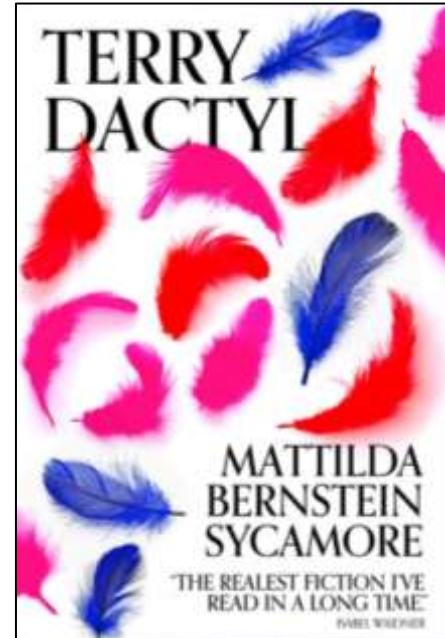
Welcome to issue 8 of Fruit! Inside, you'll find poems about shoes, poems written with hiccoughs, and poems made from other people's poems. There are stories of bonding over Tracy Anderson workouts, and of roleplaying Rocky Marciano fantasies – as well as thoughts on Danny Dyer as an absent father. We're sure you'll find something to enjoy. More than that, we hope you'll find something to relate to.

It's pretty obvious that we're publishing at a time of incredible global distress. Among so much else, there's the ongoing genocide in Palestine, funded and aided by Western governments; the crackdown on dissent in the USA, culminating in the detention and deportation of people with immigrant backgrounds; and the attacks on trans rights, including and exacerbated by the UK supreme court's ruling on the definition of a woman in the Equalities Act. At times it feels like we're alone in our despair but there are spaces where we can come together. Fruit is one of those places for us – and hopefully for you too. Over the past few months, we've loved reading the submissions and interacting with so many gifted and engaged artists. We hope you feel a connection too, when you check out the great writing in this issue – not least of which is an extract from Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore's forthcoming novel *Terry Dactyl*. (We're still gagging!) In the accompanying interview, Mattilda speaks about 'relationships of care and companionship and camaraderie' and those are some of the things that are keeping us going right now.



## Matilda Bernstein Sycamore on *Terry Dactyl*

We chat with Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore – activist, novelist, memoirist, essayist and editor – about her forthcoming book, *Terry Dactyl*. The novel centres on Terry, a trans girl growing up in 80s Seattle, where she lives with her two mothers. She soon moves to New York and there on the club scene is where she really comes alive, dressing for the dancefloor, and living an aesthetic that eventually gets her employment in a gallery. Then, twenty years on, we follow Terry as she returns to Seattle. In the gentrified city, she strives for connections despite repressive state policies and police control, the anti-social attitudes of people around her, and friends who fail to show up.



**Tom:** First, a big thank you for this interview and for the extract from *Terry Dactyl*. It's super exciting – I've been reading your books since *Why Are Faggots So Afraid of Faggots?*, which I bought for the title and then got blown away by the essays. But let's talk about *Terry Dactyl*. The novel is set in the 80s and 90s, during the AIDS crisis, and in 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic (which of course is ongoing). Why did you want to write about those times, and why did you want to write about them together?

**Mattilda:** Thank you so much, Tom, it's so great to be in conversation! I think this book started with the character – I was walking around Seattle in 2020 or 2021, in the midst of this new pandemic, and thinking about where Terry grew up, what she was thinking about, her formation. At the time I was finishing *Touching the Art*, and I didn't want to interrupt, but, day after day, for months, I would think about all the details of Terry's life – I picked out her house, and also the apartment building where she lived before her mothers bought the house, and I thought about the world of queens that

surrounded them and what this was like for this young trans girl, and so it started with her relationship with her mothers and all the contradictions and possibilities there.

So it began with this generational question of growing up with the AIDS crisis, and internalizing the trauma as part of becoming queer, which is my generational experience, but in my own experience, I grew up without any queers around me, without any possibility of even being queer, and so I was thinking about this generational experience for someone who was always around queers, a queer kid who was entirely immersed in a queer world, all these queens dancing in her living room when her mothers were throwing afterhours parties and she would get out of bed and put on her tiara and dance with them, and then, when she was 10, 11, 12, all these queens who were in some ways her role models for gender transgression and flamboyance and celebration, for her own selfhood as a trans girl, when she was 10, 11, 12, they all started dying of this new disease, right before her eyes, as she's coming into herself in their arms, right, so all this death is such a direct and intrinsic part of her formation.

And then, of course, I'm thinking about all of this in the midst of this new pandemic, the trauma that becomes compounded, and the desire to feel all these experiences from inside, because for me I write from or toward embodiment or presence, a physical emotional experience of the world. And I think that, for anyone who has experienced the AIDS crisis in any way, for anyone who continues to experience the AIDS crisis, and in particular I mean for anyone who is queer, this trauma resonates through this new pandemic, of course it's very different in many ways but the trauma can't exactly be separated, I don't think, especially when it's never dealt with, right, and we really see this with COVID now, that's for sure, but to come back to the book, which is set right in 2020, there's the shock of this new pandemic and all of the panic and the memories that are flashing in Terry's mind, you just go from one to the other and so there's this overload of emotion.

**Tom:** Terry is the main character in the novel. As a trans person, she's very attuned to state violence, and she sees social injustice – racism (which she opposes by joining Black Lives Matter marches) and gentrification (which she takes a hammer to). As

someone with allergies, she suffers from the poisonous air and the pepper spray blowing through her window. She's a sort of canary down the mine, registering everything that's toxic. So in many ways, Terry seems like an ideal character for a novel so concerned with highlighting the political, social and environmental situation in the USA. Can you tell us something about who Terry is and why you chose her as the central character?

**Mattilda:** I don't know why I chose her as the central character except that the book emerged around her, so everything comes through her experience, and her search for celebration and comfort and connection, the failure of relationships, the people who let her down, the ways she learns to see the world from being outside it, right, she knows she's outside and so that's where she gets this critical engagement, even though she finds herself in incredibly depoliticized worlds – New York City club culture, drug culture, the art world – so she has this critical engagement as an outsider who is also sometimes inside, but it isn't entirely formed until the protests after the murder of George Floyd in 2020, that's after she gets in a car and drives cross-country to move back to Seattle after 30 years, because she can't keep freaking out in New York during lockdown, and that's where all the contradictions come into the fore, right, and I like what you say about how she's able to register everything that's toxic, I think that's a great way of looking at it.

So, for example, the protests are in her neighbourhood and so the cops are there too, night after night with tear gas and pepper spray and concussion grenades and drones and helicopters and she's trying to figure out a way to be involved that doesn't wreck her, or doesn't wreck her too much, and so she's there all the time but she can't get too close, but also there's a way that this allows her to see contradictions that other people might not, even in the midst of an all-encompassing awareness of everything that's wrong. So she's kind of losing it again, right – first she lost it during lockdown in New York, and now she's losing it in Seattle and so there's this intensely personal way that the structural issues play out in everyday life – not just for her, of course, but for everyone.

**Tom:** A lot of the time, Terry struggles to find the connections that she needs. Neighbours are hostile and friends disappoint, while AIDS and COVID-19 pull relationships apart and make intimacy more and more difficult. Yet the desire for connection drives so much of Terry's story. Why is that such an important theme? And is the novel intended as a kind of handbook? It includes all these strategies, like how we can connect to people through dance, how we can connect to the world through interacting with trees and bushes.

**Mattilda:** Oh, what an interesting idea, to see this novel as a kind of handbook, I have to think about that – you're right, there are these strategies for survival, that's how I look at it, how to survive and not compromise too much of your selfhood, your values, in spite of everything that will always try to crush you, and, yes, this goes right back to the AIDS crisis, because this is Terry's formation, all this death, but also all the relationships of care and companionship and camaraderie, so the book is about that too, like everything that she manages to find in these incredibly corrupt worlds – club culture, for example. Terry becomes a club kid when she's 18, and then this becomes the center of her world for about 15 years, it's everything, and one thing that is so incredible about this world is that she can be whoever she wants, you just say who you are and then that's it, so it's not like when she tells her mothers she's a dyke just like them when she's a kid and they say Terry, that's just not possible, because anything's possible when you get on that dance floor and walk into those lights, you keep those lights going for as long as you can with those pills and powders and potions, and, yes, it has its limitations, but it's also where Terry finds everything – her girlfriend, her circle of friends that becomes a kind of chosen family, if getting dressed up and going out and turning it out can become a kind of care, even if it's bonded by drugs and then eventually the drugs become too much or too little, right and that's where we are in the second part of the book, the protest, after the drugs had been gone a long time and now we need new strategies, like leaning against that bush or dancing with the trees and so I think that desire for connection, right, it's everything because it's how Terry has always survived, so now in this new moment of disconnection, what might be possible, and then the protests start, right, so there's this push and pull between connection and disconnection, possibility and impossibility, flailing and caring, falling apart and coming together, or maybe all of this at once.

**Tom:** In New York, Terry gets a job in a gallery which provides her with financial stability and gives her a creative outlet – she curates some of the exhibitions. Can you talk about the significance that art has for Terry, and perhaps for queer people more generally?

**Mattilda:** Terry gets her job in the art world accidentally – she’s walking home at noon after the afterhours and she walks into a gallery where the owner is enthralled by her over the top outfit, and then they become a kind of pair – Terry has no idea what she’s doing, but the gallery owner certainly does, so Terry is bringing the pageantry of club culture, the brokenness and the flamboyance and excess, into the gallery. And then she’s there for more than two decades, so it becomes a part of her, it’s part of her survival, a job like any other but since it came to her in an unconventional way, since it’s how she eventually gets out of doing and selling drugs 24-7, there’s also something else there, especially in her relationship with the gallery owner, Sabine.

More broadly, I think that art can be everything, and it can be nothing. It can be a means of survival, of expressing ourselves, it can be a window into possibility, a reflection of despair, a gasp, a clasp, it can break open the structures that hold us in stasis, it can be something to look at, a way to imagine a path out of this world, it can illuminate contradictions but also it can be absolutely depoliticized, in thrall of everything that’s awful in the world. So I guess the goal, maybe, if we love art, or at least if we love creative possibility, is to make something that allows us to make connections, whatever kinds of connections, there’s that word again, right, but what kinds of connections, I don’t think art has to be everything, it just has to be something that isn’t nothing, if that makes sense, I mean I went to this Keith Haring show recently, and I wasn’t expecting much because his art has become so commodified and soulless, but when I walked up the stairs, and the first piece was a giant headless neck with snakes coming out of it, just black lines on white, it was hard for me not to start sobbing right there, walking up the stairs it was like you were walking into the AIDS crisis, and that’s what art can do.



**Tom:** You've explored some of the issues in *Terry Dactyl* elsewhere: loneliness, in your lyric essay *The Freezer Door*; creativity, in your memoir *Touching the Art*; and AIDS, in the collection you edited, *Between Certain Death and a Possible Future*. What made you want to deal with those issues in a novel?

**Mattilda:** I think the form of what I'm writing always comes from the writing itself – I'm probably always writing about loneliness, creativity, and AIDS, desire, disconnection, dancing, gentrification, hope and hopelessness, moments of formation and rupture, what holds us together and what holds us apart, the hideousness of the world and how we try to survive anyway, the ways we come together and fail and flail, the ways we hold one another and the cracking of the illusion of community, the gentrification of desire itself, hypocrisy, I mean everything changes over time, it gets bigger or smaller, and maybe what I'm after when I'm writing is a way to get into the vulnerability, into the felt sense, but I never really know what I'm doing when I start, I just start, and see what happens, so the writing comes through the writing itself, or the structure, the structure comes through the writing and not the other way around, I don't start with an agenda, I just start.

**Tom:** The novel has a really interesting structure. The first half is a flashback to Terry's time in New York, which is quite disorienting – I wondered where Terry was speaking from. And that made total sense – that we as readers get to experience Terry's uncertainty about her future. Then you switch from the past tense to the present tense, and we find out about Terry's move back to Seattle. Was the structure something that came early on, or was it something you had to work towards?

**Mattilda:** To me, the present day of the book is 2020, just before and during COVID lockdown in New York, when Terry is in a state of panic, and so all her formative moments are flashing before her, so the first half of the book is all of those flashes, one after the other, moments of connection and trauma, intimacy and fragmentation, all of it, and then she basically loses it, and buys a car and drives back to Seattle, where she hasn't lived in 30 years. And then she has to deal with what she finds there.

So that disorientation that you're talking about, that's the disorientation of trying to live in the present moment, this new pandemic and all the memories of the one she grew up with, right?

I think the structure came organically, as I was writing I was in that moment of panic with Terry and so everything was flashing for me too. And it just felt like when Terry leaves New York to return to Seattle, or once she arrives, everything slows down. So she can be in the present again. So that's when the book moves to present tense, so it can exist more in the moment. But then of course the protests erupt, and it speeds up again.

**Tom:** *Terry Dactyl* will be the first time you've been published in the UK. How does that feel? And how do you think the novel will speak to British readers?

**Mattilda:** I am so excited to have a UK release! I have always thought that my work would really speak to British readers... I have a sense that the club culture that I'm writing about will resonate immediately, and the saturation of the imagery and the prose, the immersive quality, the extremes, the complications of class and character, this scathing voice and the relentless push and pull, the rhythm... It's funny because when I first started going out to clubs, and trying to find some of the music that I heard, this was in the '90s, so much of it was on UK labels, so I would be buying this really expensive import CD of house music that actually originated in Chicago, and I was in Boston or San Francisco but I'd have to order it from the UK, and then I would read British magazines to learn about club culture there, but before all this there was this book-magazine-type thing of posters from a group called Homocult, from Manchester, with these hilarious phrases like "Give us your children – What we can't fuck, we eat." Or "Bent fucker. Stolen bent cheap filth." And when I was 19 I blew those posters up and put them on my walls in San Francisco. So I guess what I'm saying is that I've felt a kind of connection to different aspects of British counterculture for a long time, even though this is all from a very large distance so it will be so exciting to see what people in the UK think of *Terry Dactyl*. I have this sense that people will really connect, but of course I could be delusional. In any case, I'm so excited to be released by such a

delightful queer press like Cipher, so it's two times the fun, to have an amazing press in the US and an amazing press in the UK, so what could go wrong?

*Terry Dactyl is out in November. It's due to be published by Cipher Press in the UK and Coffee House Press in the USA.*

## **An extract from *Terry Dactyl***

**[Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore]**

There are two types of galleries—the ones that need to sell art in order to stay open, and the ones that don't. For twenty-three years now, I've worked at Sabine Roth—when she opened the gallery in the '60s, she changed her name so no one would know she was a Rothschild. So everyone knows her as the Rothschild who changed her name.

But here's the thing with Sabine—maybe that was her strategy all along, back when Soho was something new—it was definitely a way to get people to remember you. Sabine always has a few tricks up her sleeve, as she likes to say. But, trust me, there are two types of galleries, and Sabine Roth doesn't need to make money in order to stay open.

I was not meant to be in the art world, not at all. But for twenty-three years I've picked up that phone and said Sabine Roth. Sabine Roth. Sabine Roth. It's like I'm her.

It all started one fateful night in 1997 when I decided to take a second hit of X at 11:00 a.m. When you're the dealer, you can make these types of choices. I wasn't dealing X but I could always trade. So, needless to say, when Twilo kicked me out at noon I was walking on those pink platforms like there was nothing beneath me except air.

There are two types of club kids—the ones who need a group to go out, and the ones that don't. So let's just say I didn't need anyone. Not anymore.

But I did need the drugs—there are two types of club kids, the ones who need the drugs, and the ones who really need the drugs, and, trust me, I really needed the drugs.

So I was taking the long route home, drenched in everyone's jealous stares. I don't know how the hell I decided to walk through Soho, except, like I said, I was flying. Tourists were taking snapshots of me because they were looking for excitement and they weren't going to find it in Soho, that was for sure. But then I showed up.

Usually I liked to walk through Soho at night, when everything was closed and I could look in without anyone looking out—I didn't need to go inside to know what was inside. But this was daylight, and when I got to Sabine Roth I saw that everything inside was pink. Did I mention I was wearing all pink? Magenta, to be exact.

I went in. There were these fabric sculptures in the middle—giant creatures with cunts, and just when I was thinking about sticking my fingers inside and what would the fabric feel like, that's when this woman with a perfect gray bob came out in a power suit—a pink cravat tied at her neck, and some kind of sculptural earrings, also pink—but everything else was black. And she held out her hand and said Sabine. Sabine Roth.

I had no idea what she was talking about—I was too busy thinking about how warm her fingers felt, studying the blue lines in her hands against the magenta of my hands, I mean I'd painted my whole body magenta, including my face, but then I realized what I was doing and I looked up.

Cold hands, warm heart, Sabine said. And your name?

Terry, I said. Terry Dactyl.

Follow me, Terry, she said, so I followed. She motioned toward a chair in her office in the back, and I wasn't sure whether I wanted to sit down but when I did I realized how soft it was. Velvet. This must be why I was there. I mean I needed to rest my legs, didn't I. Why didn't I come here more often.

Terry, she said, that's right, make yourself comfortable. When you're ready, tell me about art. What moves you.

Tell me about art, I said. And I looked her in the eyes. She didn't look away. I'm not sure whether she could actually see my eyes because of all the makeup, and those double eyelashes getting in the way, but I could tell she liked eye contact.

What does art mean to you, she asked.

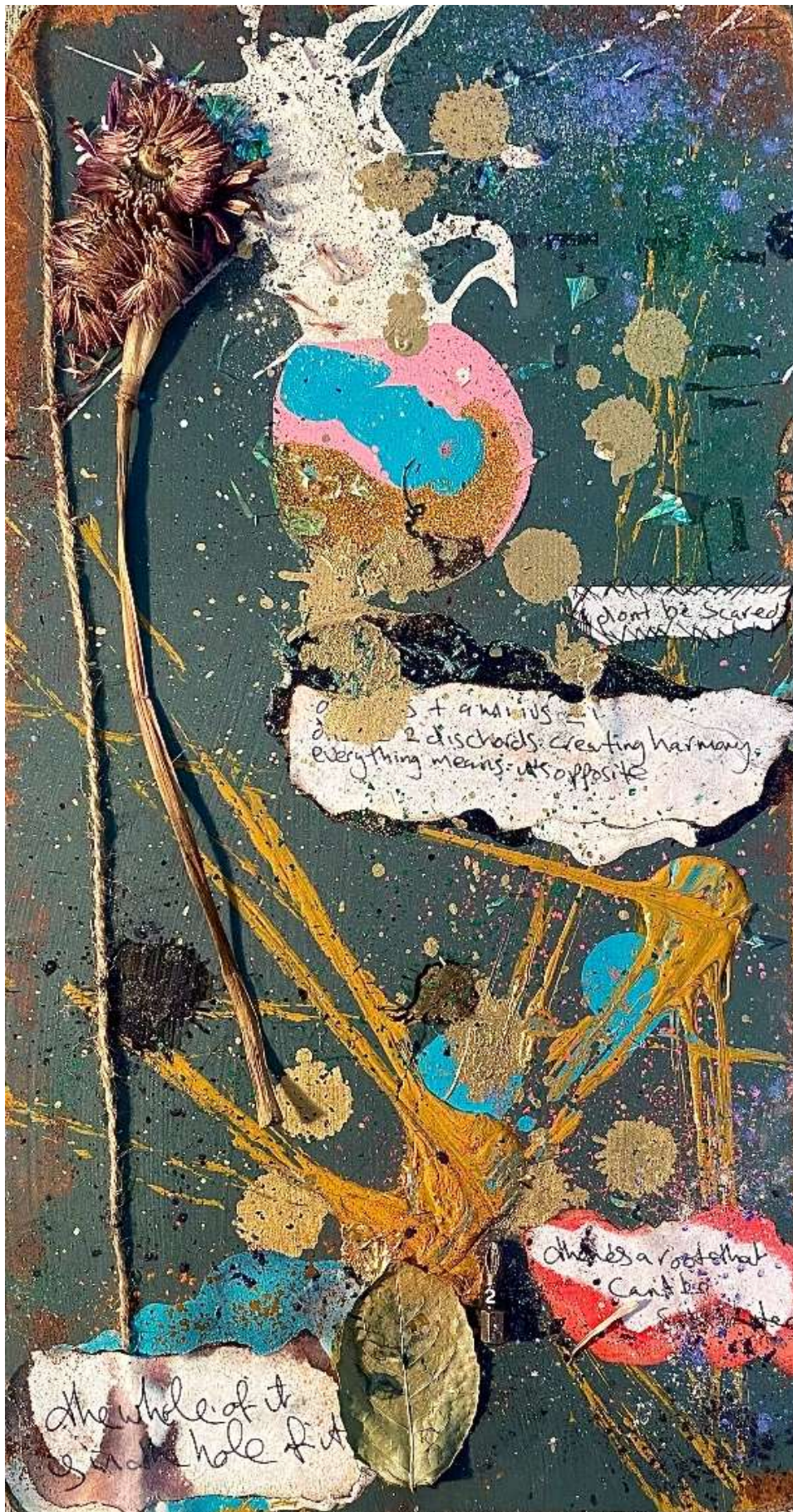
It was nice to sit down—this was the right decision, I could feel myself sinking into the chair. The phone rang. Sabine picked it up. Cancel my appointments, she said. And she put the phone back down.

## Anne Louise Kershaw

I had been a writer, sound artist and curator for over a decade when my visual art practice arrived, fully formed. I create using the same poetic approach devised in my writing, which in turn evolved through my music, and appears here in paint. What appears abstract is actual.











## Homophones

[Jade Prince]

*an anagram of:*

On the wall, the shadows of their erections fall, then rise. We are  
rare in goodness, and rarer still in joy. Their clothes return to  
them, like crumpled laws.

– Ocean Vuong, ‘Künstlerroman’

I used to confuse *snog* and *song* when I was younger. Thought the same letters meant the same thing. Lying in the slit of this domestic jungle, I realise I wasn't wrong. To kiss her is to prise open a melody, soak my lips in the slick of her lyric. When we fuck, I lift a whole orchestra from the chapel of her insides. Her orgasms sound like a chorus in church. Later, she tells me of her resentment over the closeness of *good* and *God*. *God can't call me good*, she spits. I can only pretend to be sad. When she gets like this, all tight and tough and cruel, I tease out the hum of a softer tune. It's cyclic this hunger – this deep plead for noise. Sometimes it feels closer to an undoing. Funny how one can only find *groan* and *grown* different on a page. Somewhere in the chasm of her grunts is a little girl still dining on sermons. Her cries still yellowed with prayer. I pour my entirety into making her my omen, my resting place, my only oath. In return, she feeds me rhythm. When we laugh about our tongues, these sly disorientations of sonic, I notice how she always misses the clearest one of all: that single letter difference: *hymens* and *hymns*.

## Two Poems

[Jahan Khajavi]

### Hunting Scene

To write a puppy-poem—a sag-ghazal, rather—  
between the gin & tonics that I’ve guzzled rather  
quick, I join the queue behind a cute lad  
who turns his fade a là fad around—his gaze all rather  
glazed—to flash his friends a dopey grin, beaming  
beer & braces.

Waiting’s not a hassle—rather,  
chance to charm.

When, after him, I find some gold  
remaining in the bowl, now throne—now castle rather  
than a stall—& should I kneel to lap it up,  
I am no lion, proud. A swift gazelle, rather.

### Argument with Hiccoughs

A love language, to me, is hic just something that can lick up  
hic our gaps that gather hic no dust for one to kick up.  
I bend my elbow as you bend my ear hic, Aristotle.  
If I thought I'd any skill with one, I hic would pick up  
hic Il Sodo-hic-ma's brush—not Mithradates' bottle—  
dipping it in motley tubes of oil hic to slick up  
canvases portraying Ganymede hic, as my model  
cutie Carlo soon-to-be-a-saint Acutis, thicc up  
from his Nikes. Don't be handsome else some greasy God'll  
spreading eagle, hic swoop down on you with tired pick up  
lines—his rapier wit's the rapiest—with claims to coddle  
you, hic coaxing you to take his big ol' bird prick up  
your Mount. If like a quack you duck & like a quack you waddle,  
you'll avoid internally [sic] filling up his hic cup.

*Hey babe your ex is on my couch*

Jody woke up to a text from her best friend, Oliver.

The text was followed, seconds later, by a picture: Elise, Jody's ex-girlfriend, cocooned in a blanket on the turquoise velvet-covered couch in Oliver's living room.

*Please come and get this chaos monster off my nice new couch. I haven't had a chance to scotch guard it and you know she's a mess. Get that sister over here like right now.*

Carrie, Jody's current girlfriend, was Elise's older sister.

*Man just wake her up and tell her it's time to go. She's doing the Mother Theresa thing, just go with it I guess. I'm really sorry about this I mean I feel somewhat responsible ughhhh. She will leave if you tell her it's time to go.*

Earlier that year, Elise had become obsessed with the idea of leading what she called "a religious life."

*Look, if you feed her, I will venmo you.*

Elise began by divesting herself of almost all of her possessions, including food of any kind. Water she was willing to carry, but she depended upon circumstance for her meals.

*Make sure she fills her water bottles before she leaves, okay??*

Oliver responded with another picture, this one of an assortment of battered-looking plastic bottles of different sizes lined up on the counter in his kitchen.

*I tried to give her a nalgene but she said there was still meat on these bones lol*

That sounded like Elise. Basically a careless person, she could be uptight about wasting things that she thought still had use left in them. She saved loose envelopes and receipts for scratch paper, and once, when they were living together, Jody caught her in their bathroom, working a q-tip around the edge of a jar of moisturizer. She'd offered to pick up a new jar for Elise after work that day. "No way!" Elise had answered. "Gotta be like, three more days' worth in here."

*Look lmk if she's not gone in 30 and I'll come get*

*Come get now now now.*



Every weekday morning before they parted ways for work, Jody and Carrie did three things together: drank two cups of coffee, did Tracy Anderson Arms, and took a shower. Tracy Anderson Arms was Carrie's idea – she'd been working out to the video on and off for five years, so the moves were almost automatic for her. She pulled up the YouTube video while Jody rinsed their coffee cups. They'd been together for a year and had established this routine in the second month of their romance.

"Wake your arms up, pull them apart," Carrie would say along with the video, looking directly at Jody with a flat expression.

"Man, fuck this," Jody whispered through gritted teeth. She didn't care if Carrie heard what she'd said. She was whispering because speaking in a normal tone of voice required energy, and she needed to put all of her available strength into the over-under-over-under-over-under motion she was performing on Tracy's orders, her arms spread wide. She hated doing Tracy Anderson Arms so much. So much. She loved Carrie, though, and parts of the workout reminded her of the *Vogue* video, so she'd been thinking about Madonna five days a week for a good portion of the approximately eight minutes it took to do the exercises. That part was okay. She didn't really mind that.

Jody cut her eyes at Carrie each time the video hit the six minute mark, because it was her girlfriend's favorite part of the series, with Tracy leading them through a vigorous round of opening and closing their arms like a book, and then pushing, one hand at a time, the air in front of her away. "This is my favorite part," Carrie said every time this sequence of exercises began, and Jody said, "Right on, baby" back to her. Every time.

"This is my favorite part."

"Right on, baby."

Jody hauled ass to Oliver's house as soon as she got out of the shower, telling Carrie she needed to stop and get snacks for work.

"I'll make you a snack for work," Carrie offered, looking at Jody in the reflection of the mirror over their bathroom sink where she was combing her wet hair.

"I want Doritos."

"Hmm. I can't make those."

Elise was on the porch swing with Oliver when Jody pulled up. She saw Oliver lean over and give Elise a quick one-armed hug and a kiss on the cheek, and then he

said something to Elise that Jody couldn't hear. "Hi boo-boo," Jody called, meaning both of them.

"Hi *choux-choux*," Elise answered. Oliver went inside without saying hello to Jody. She felt a little stab of fear – she hated thinking people were mad at her – and made a mental note to text Oliver later and try to smooth it over.

"Want a ride somewhere?" she asked Elise. Her pulse pounded in her ears; seeing Elise in person almost always felt like a jump-scare to Jody, even when they'd planned to meet up.

"Hey, for sure," Elise stood up and collected the red nylon backpack at her feet. Jody recognized it as one of her own, and realized Elise had taken it when she moved out of their apartment when they broke up. "I need to get to the Carmelites right quick."

"The convent?"

"They call it a monastery."

"In Lafayette?"

Elise and Jody had made an uneasy peace with the fact that their relationship was over and they'd both moved on. Elise had gotten some of her rage out by stonewalling her sister, but she had forgiven Jody. She did go out of her way to try and seduce Oliver and his roommate Kelly on separate occasions, and she had eventually succeeded in both cases. That was okay. They lived in Baton Rouge. The community was *small*. Also, Elise spent most of her time busy with her new preoccupation: becoming a nun or something like it. Figuring out a way to have a religious life.

"Yeah, I need to get to Lafayette today. Or tomorrow. I need to get to Lafayette."

"Are you, like, ah," Jody was at a loss, "okay, so are they like? Expecting you?" Jody had no idea how this worked; she found Catholicism, with its gruesome accoutrement, sort of frightening.

"No, not really. I call them all the time with requests, and I send them a little money every once in a while. They have this really pretty rose garden." Elise fumbled with her phone, googling the page. She turned the screen toward Jody. "This. I'm just going to visit for a few days."

"Stay with them?"

"No, I'm going to sleep out. In this rose garden. Near it, I guess." Elise expanded the image on her phone's screen to feature a patch of green under a water oak near five raised beds of pink and red roses. "I am totally broke. I have like, six dollars."

"I will loan you money."

"I don't have it because I don't want it, Jo. I gave it all away."

"To who?"

"Different people. Church. AA."

Jody looked out the window while she tried to think of the right thing to say. She knew, from experience, that there was no point in trying to prevent Elise from doing a thing she wanted to do. Elise had quit drinking and doing drugs near the end of their three-year relationship, and Jody had seen Elise become more stubborn, more dug in as she counted days clean. The religious stuff felt like more of all that: one day Elise was going to AA meetings in the multipurpose room of the Catholic church she'd grown up attending and the next she was just full-blown, holy rolling, and all up in it. Jody assumed Elise had lost her mind because she was with Carrie, and she felt responsible. She wanted to fix it.

"So, can you do it? Do you have time?" Elise interrupted Jody's reverie.

Jody started her truck, "I have time. I'll figure it out." She called in to work and then texted Carrie.

*In meetings until 2 or 3. Love you, sugar. Have a great day.*

*Want lunch? I have leftover chck parm? <3 YOUR FAVE. I can drop it off.*

*No, thanks! Shit, shit, shit, Jody thought. Oh wait, Jody thought: I got those Doritos.*

*Yuck but ok love you xoxo*

When she first learned about Elise's – what? conversion? – Jody wasn't so super surprised. Elise and Carrie had grown up immersed in Catholicism. Elise didn't go to church when she and Jody were together, but she had an acrylic jewelry box full of rosaries she'd collected over the years and had kept holy cards on the dash of her Tacoma (sold) and set up a little altar in the apartment they'd shared, featuring a set of porcelain figurines of the Virgin of Lourdes and a tiny, kneeling Bernadette. One day when Jody was cleaning, she'd dusted the statues and set them side by side, facing outward. When Elise came home that day, it was the first thing she'd noticed. "She's praying to the apparition, my man," she'd said, laughing as she situated Bernadette in front of the Virgin, "not our microwave." Jody had grown up without religion.

Once they were on the interstate, headed East out of Baton Rouge, Elise pulled a little paper grocery sack out of her backpack and passed it to Jody. "I'm driving,"

Jody said, glancing over and then back at the road. "What's that. You have to help me." Elise reached in the bag and pulled out a can of grapefruit seltzer and a baggie full of green grapes.

"Okay, here." She opened the seltzer and the baggie and placed them in the cup holders so that Jody could reach them. "I have a pb&j if you want. I have Babybel. I have Junior Mints—"

"Gross. Why would you have that —"

"Don't yuck my yum, please," Elise huffed. "You're the same, I see."

"I just don't like them. I don't get it. Same with peppermint patties, what the fuck."

"Okay, but you don't have to say everything you think, and you know that I do like them."

"I know."

Elise crumpled up the bag and put it back in her backpack, and then looked down at her phone. They rode in silence for a few minutes, with all the things they knew about each other hanging in the air between them. In the three years they'd been together they'd shared Jody's two-bedroom the whole time, pretty much. For an entire year after they broke up, every time Jody got her period, she wondered if Elise was bleeding too – if they were still synced like that. Part of the thrill of getting to know Carrie when they became lovers had been dampened by the fact that she already had all this secondhand knowledge, things she knew about Carrie that she'd learned from Elise. Like:

Carrie was a Taurus with an Aries rising and moon in Virgo.

Carrie liked her food spicy and often craved things that tasted sharp, like lemons or vinegar.

Carrie and Elise wore the same size shoes: 7 1/2

And dresses: 10

Not pants: Elise was a 10; Carrie a 12.

Carrie loved Bells of Ireland.

Carrie was anemic.

Carrie was infertile.

Carrie was a gold star lesbian.

Carrie had used the same kind of shampoo and conditioner for 20 years and never wavered: Aveda Cherry Almond.

Carrie had worn the same perfume for twenty years and never wavered: Coco Mademoiselle.

Carrie disliked their stepmother. Carrie was an excellent driver. Carrie never learned how to swim. Carrie was allergic to strawberries. Carrie lost her virginity when she was twenty-one. Carrie didn't like to read, and she was embarrassed about that. Carrie's free pass was Parker Posey. Carrie missed her ex-wife. Carrie was a great cook. Carrie hated to sweat and would do anything to avoid getting overheated. Carrie was left-handed. Carrie loved to get her teeth cleaned. Carrie went to the dentist four times a year. Carrie only drank white wine, coffee, and Diet Coke. Carrie's favorite movie was *Goodfellas*, and she was embarrassed about that. Carrie secretly smoked. Carrie smoked Marlboro Lights. Carrie, Carrie, Carrie, Carrie, Carrie.

Jody looked over at Elise, who was swiping through pics on Tinder. "You haven't changed, I see," she laughed. "How are you supposed to do poverty, chastity, and obedience when you're hooking up on that godforsaken website?"

"They'll never let me be a nun. A sister. I take head meds and I owe the government seventy-five k for my education. They will absolutely not take me on."

"Then why are we doing this? Why are you, I mean."

Elise pinched Jody's triceps and poked at her ribs. "We. Huh. You got some little muscles coming in finally." She pinched Jody's arm again.

"Quit it, I'm driving." What was she supposed to say? Months of Tracy Anderson Arms had resulted in the beginnings of hard, ropy muscles, and tight, tiny ballerina arms, just like Tracy promised. She liked to think of them as Madonna arms, but whatever. She couldn't tell Elise that she'd replaced her as Carrie's Tracy Anderson Arms buddy. The situation was already so fucked up and sideways. "Answer me for real. Why are you doing this?"

"I just like being at church now, and I don't know why, and I don't need to know. I love taking communion. It's so metal, when you think about it." Elise made heavy metal fingers at Jody and lowered her voice to a cartoonish rasp. "The body. The blood."

"That makes sense, I guess." None of that made sense to Jody.

"I want my life to revolve around that. I don't want to think, or pay bills, or care about insurance or groceries or whatever. I just want to pray and take communion every day. They will absolutely not take me on." Elise looked down and swiped through a few more faces. "She makes you do Tracy Anderson Arms with her, huh?" Elise smiled in a sly, shitty way and cut her eyes at Jody.

"Yeah. She doesn't make me."

"You better do it. She's got razor blades in that mouth that come out when she gets disappointed."

"I know. I remember hearing you say that. I'm doing it."



# Happiness, Then

[Mark Ward]

*a cento\**

We make do, close our eyes, do things  
My tone brighter  
a little like love, brutal as that  
spooling past the trees, not noticing  
Now it's just me. The air mimics the voices of traffic

and you must work  
a bright self  
a warm wind blows the bodies of men together.  
He makes them laugh, puts them at ease;  
but I know I fantasise

Indistinct, night wearies itself into day  
It's a risk a life with someone  
for you – everything in me, pressed up against the walls.

How to tell  
the people who see good in me there's nothing

your absence through my fingers  
In the bathroom, he holds a towel and stands there.

It might be a mercy  
the art of avoiding pain  
Do not show how jealous you are. Do not  
if you want

Happiness, then

you have to break open  
your heart, a floodgate, flooding  
light, drunk with insult. You and me  
In rooms, tenuously  
We make do, close our eyes, do things

\* with lines from David Tait's 'Elsewhere', Declan Ryan's 'Fathers and Sons', Michelle O'Sullivan's 'At the Surface', Maurice Devitt's 'The Man at the Shop', David Tait's 'The Air', Annie Deppe's 'Otherwise Known as Grace', Elaine Feinstein's 'A Dream of Sisterhood', Louis MacNeice's 'Autumn Journal', Maeve O'Sullivan's 'Drumshanbo Man', Alicia Byrne Keane's 'Strands', Michelle O'Sullivan's 'Division', Rachael Allen's 'scutwork', Dimitra Xidou's 'Naranja (A New Zero)', Gustav Parker Hibbett's 'What I Would've Wanted *Fleabag* to Say for Me, Had the Priest Not Brought It Back to Sex', Michael Symonds Roberts' 'Grounded', Lavinia Greenlaw's 'What My Father Knows', Kevin Prufer's 'The Cities, The Armies', Henri Cole's 'Flying Things', Henri Cole's 'One Animal', Moyra Donaldson's 'Today the Bees', Jean Sprackland's 'In', Kevin Graham's 'The Scan', Brenda Shaughnessy's 'Postfeminism', Patrick Deeley's 'Darkscape' & David Tait's 'Elsewhere'.

## First Love

[Kevin McLellan]

I wrote four letters. Six weeks later he wrote  
that it was over. He did. I couldn't. Couldn't  
hear love songs on the radio. Couldn't  
eat. Couldn't stop eating. Couldn't stop  
reading. Couldn't avoid memory. I just couldn't  
& moved to an island. Then the always running  
to the ferry terminal. *Terminal* sounds so final.  
*Proceed* isn't on the other side of the harbor

where the air is thin. On the mainland too  
where vacant-faced pedestrians walk aimlessly.  
They aren't bad people. They just aren't him.  
He had driven himself through other dialects  
to Provence to contemplate us. Yes, he had  
a thing for languages & pressed lavender for baths  
& our laundry. A lubricant for love-making.  
"But not too much," he would say. Not too much.

## That is as May be.

[declan wiffen]

I can't stay this way, but I pray nothing changes.

– Ezra Ferman

May—the month and verb of possibility—is most often received hospitably, like its predecessor, which gets near universal acceptance as the heroic bearer of the new. Other than, that is, by Enda St Vincent Millay, who asks, almost impertinently in the poem *Spring*, ‘To what purpose, April, do you return again’ before qualifying that ‘Beauty is not enough’. It was this sentiment that activated in me as I thought about the end of April, the month which, we are told later in the poem, ‘comes like an idiot’. How then does May arrive? How to describe that which follows the idiot, which embraces more shamelessly being the fool?

One response, suggested by Emily Dickinson, is that what was ‘covert in April’ becomes ‘candid in May’. She is describing a small pink flower that is ‘dear to the moss / known to the knoll’ but also more ubiquitously, ‘next to the robin / in every human soul’. As much as I longed for the sharp shock of the frankly straightforward, a desire grew to forswear the threshold between these two months, which, I thought, was not in the passing of a second on the thirtieth day, nor in the twenty-four hours between moons, but was rather an indeterminate space that moved like the ripple of bluebells, growing backwards through the forest, only to disappear soon after.

However, I was wrong, for it was none of these things. It came from the seemingly insignificant: a change of route on a drive home from the supermarket. Only in retrospect did I realise this all began earlier—with a man—with an orchid.

My hesitancy towards the changing calendar was not to say that the joys and exuberance of this period were unapparent to me: the Blackthorn blooming and Hawthorn blossom almost due, a cuckoo to be heard across the field if one was lucky, and the surety of the evening’s horizon growing more distant were all pleasures I usually welcomed. But despite this, and nevertheless, I could not bring myself to think directly about how April would soon be gone, for to attempt such a vision was to induce the blurred flickering of migraines. And yet, I had no particular fondness for April either. I had spent the month going to bed late and waking late, where I would make coffee

and attempt to read in bed. My work somehow got done as my meals became more and more like the contents of a children's party bag and, at various unexpected moments where a pause entered the flow of my not-doing, I cried: waiting for the kettle to boil for my second cup of tea; as I checked my phone which failed to bring me news of any sort; while I stood peeing and brushing my teeth simultaneously. The only other things I can remember from the idiot month are the following: my fingertips stung from having cut them while washing the coffee pot and I wondered if my prints would ever be the same again; many people, including my father, talked to me about an article in *The New York Times* which discussed the concept of languishing; and an old lover, who had so far always remembered, forgot my birthday.

In the last week of April, as though I had any control over its occurrence, I began to attempt, like Canute—the only king being his majesty my ego—to hold May at bay. I didn't want to be associated with the corrupt and vacuous people David Hockney refers to when he says 'they can't cancel Spring'—I accepted it had already begun, albeit late—but neither did I want to walk bare foot on dew laden grass or crown a queen in a garland of flowers as May announced itself. This resistance arrived shortly after reading Millay's description of 'the redness / of little leaves opening stickily' which, perhaps ironically, magicked me out of my bed into the woodland one afternoon after a period of entropy I didn't have a name for. The only buds I knew to be sticky were those of the Sweet Chestnut, which I had already seen and touched way back in mid-March. But I had enough curiosity—from where I knew not—to see if others, such as oak and hazel, might also embody this quality. Poetry was the allure, I told myself, not the coming of May.

But once outside I soon forgot the leaves and their potential stickiness because, walking through the woodland near where I lived, I met a man with a cane resting by a gate at the end of the bridleway. We exchanged pleasantries about the weather and the bluebells we'd both just passed through, before he asked me if I'd seen any of what he called 'Early Purples'. I said I didn't think so, not knowing to what he was referring, and for what seemed like the next hour he spoke to me about orchids—their common names, where to find them, those he hadn't seen in a year or two and worried might be lost to the county. Amongst these details he told me about transplanting orchid seeds from one site to another in an attempt to help their survival. How he did this I now can't remember, but he described himself as having 'been a naughty boy'.

Then suddenly he was turning from me and walking off to a parked car a little distance away, as if our allotted time together had been breached. In the still quiet afternoon, me now resting up against the gatepost, our fleeting and anonymous encounter left me feeling disoriented, both less and more than myself. I wanted to turn back down the bridleway and look for the Early Purples, I wanted to hide my face in my hands, but instead I waited until the man was in his car and driving up the lane towards me. But as he raised one hand from the steering wheel I was as unable to return the gesture as I was to embrace the month approaching.

With a fever that dissociated me from any time or place, I searched for the Early Purples day after day in that woodland with a hundred percent failure, chastising my colour blindness, frustrated with my botanical incompetence, perplexed at my inability to complete even the smallest of insignificant activities. I felt that not being able to locate the orchids was akin to a type of abjection, as though I was letting the old man down, my ineptitude involuntarily disputing the truthfulness of what he had told me, and I felt ashamed. It was the same feeling as when I reflected on having repressed my desires until my mid-twenties; as when I looked at tulips in suburban gardens, dead from a late frost; as when no Turtle Dove was heard in the hedgerows where decaying cherry tree blossom fell.

In an attempt to overcome this, I went to a second woodland the man had mentioned, more ancient and more full of a blue carpet dappled with wood anemones, and there, halfway between where the footpath entered and exited the trees, were three tall, glowing purple flowers.

Later that evening I shared a photo of the orchid online, for this was the limit of my attempt to communicate during these weeks, and people invariably asked if I'd seen Charlie Kauffman's film *Adaptation*. I had, I thought, when working aged seventeen in a sixty-seater basement cinema. But I remembered almost nothing about it other than a distaste for Nicolas Cage and associating the film, indeed all my time working there, with sitting on the back row—a scattering of customers watching arthouse movies that were not popular in that small northern town—waiting for, and composing, replies to coy flirtatious messages with straight boys on my Nokia 6210.

Only one friend deviated from the Kauffman connection by sending me a photo of a handsome botanist, well known for his work on orchids. More interestingly, the friend asked if I had read Joan Didion on the subject and subsequently invited me for



coffee. Even though I hadn't wanted to see anyone I knew in over a month I said yes, not only because I thought I may need it, but because I had, at one time, hoped that there might be more than friendship with this friend. He was a friend who had said of bluebells that he 'preferred the suggestive tickle of early growth before they reached their flagrant pageant of blue'—making me want him all the more—to which I replied, 'like Barthes's appearance-as-disappearance?' but he never got back to me on that.

Over a strange combination of coffee and pizza—a simple margarita which was not quite cooked in the centre—we sat in red and white striped deckchairs and chatted about a multiplicity of things: about Ezra Ferman and our favourite tracks; about a guy we both talked to online who had invited us to a nearby cruising site; about how neither of us had properly read Joan Didion, and about how an ex-lover of his had refused to listen to *The Beatles* when writing an essay about her collection *The White Album*. "It was emblematic," he said, trailing off.

What we did not talk about was how, months earlier, we had spent consecutive weekends walking around wet fields and windy pebbled beaches; about how throughout the weeks he sent me music by Adrienne Lenker and poems by Louise Glück and I responded with photos by Alvin Baltrop and essays by Adam Phillips; about how we slipped into an impasse after I asked if I may kiss him when the episode of whatever we were watching, curled up on my sofa together, ended. About how he had responded saying he didn't know. This silence was another attempt to hold onto April's covertness, resist the bluntness of May, as though my unconsummated affection was now just another thing tinged with an inconsequential aura.

This could also be said of the journeys I took in the days following the coffee, driving and driving across the county to look for other orchids the man at the end of the bridleway had told me about. I went South to the coast to find one, small Early Spider orchid; I went East, searching in vain for White Helleborine orchids under ancient Beech trees; and I went West, finding the nascent unfurling of many Green Winged orchids in a Meadow where two large signs said my number plate had been captured on camera and I must pay £2.50. But I didn't pay anything because, even though this was before I had rewatched *Adaptation*, upon finding these specimens I felt similarly to Meryl Streep's character when, waist deep in a swamp, she finally sees the elusive Ghost orchid—the desire for which in her guide she has found so enlivening—and proclaims that it is 'just a flower'.

Where there is possibility there is ambiguity, where there is hope there is disappointment, where there is desire there is an often unmet fulfilment that reproduction is meant to engender. Was a prayer for May's arrest so peculiar in this light?

Other supplications looked like watching all of Charlie Kauffman's films at least once; taking a dive into Joan Didion's oeuvre at *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* only to resurface at *Blue Nights*; and listening to a stream of seemingly unconnected music, including *The White Album*, on repeat. All the while not knowing if my Sisyphean anger towards the fifth month sprung from a desire to unpick the narrative of seasonal progress or that a coherent sense of meaning felt absent.

Lying on the floor of my small rented home, looking up through the skylight, I listened that evening to Glen Campbell's *Wichita Lineman*—just one of the directions Joan Didion had sent me in. It had been a favourite of my forgetful ex-lover and I thought of other relationships which had continued where ours hadn't because the people involved needed one another rather than wanted them. Did I still want him; did I ever need Spring? And then, as though prompted by an angelic being, I remembered having to make do with decaf that morning and got up off the floor and drove to the supermarket.

The shopping itself offered no great blessings. I bought only a bag of ground coffee, caffeinated, a bag of wrapped sweets, chewable, and a lottery ticket for the following day's draw. I put five of the various flavoured sweets, including one cola, on the passenger seat and the rest of the bag in the glove compartment so it was out of reach. On the way home, eating first a lemon, then a raspberry, then strawberry, then cherry chew, I missed the turning onto a main A-road, a turning I had taken on every trip back from the supermarket for over a year.

When I say missed, I mean decided not to take, in order to guess at an alternative route I had never driven before and wasn't sure got me to where I wanted to be. I took a B-road two left turns later anyway, up a thin winding and potholed hill, because I thought I knew, in some instinctive way that arises out of the unconscious when mental and monthly tectonic plates are disrupted, that this route would take me past the carpark where my friend and I had been invited cruising.

Three seemingly disconnected things happened as I drove this road. Firstly, I reached out to take the last of the five sweets on the passenger seat—the cola, my

favourite—but could not find it; secondly, on the side of the road to my left I saw a hare, sitting in the verge, its upright ears and black eye illuminated by my headlights, surrounded by what looked like Yellow Archangel; and thirdly, very closely after on the right, a stationary car's headlight switched on in the darkness in what must have been the car park.

Getting into bed that evening, I thought mostly about the hare, which may have just been a rabbit. Something connected this animal to sodomy in my mind, although I couldn't locate enough memory to justify this. It was only when falling asleep that it occurred to me that the person in the car park might not have been the one who told me about it in the first place, but my friend who had also been invited all those weeks ago.

In the morning I awoke in the middle of a dream—one that didn't come to any sexual fruition—in which Derek Jarman was talking with a hare on Hampstead Heath about the projects he had planned following his resurrection. Getting up and flicking through Jarman's books, I found the connection of 'Medieval fag lore' with the hare, which he writes 'grows a new anus every year' and then quips 'lucky for some'. It seemed portentous, if I were to allow for it, to find a hare sitting opposite the threshold to a cruising site. But I was still resistant to thinking that the making of coherence was anything more than an oscillation with its opposite.

The next night I drove to the supermarket again and then back home up the B-road, this time to find two vehicles stationary in the carpark with their headlights on and, as I passed, one drove slowly to the exit and turned to follow me for the next mile or so, to a junction I now felt familiar with. But I saw no hare, not even a rabbit.

In a move that delighted and surprised me, the car continued behind me out of the junction, up to the roundabout, and then off into the winding lanes of the countryside. My mind wandered in countless narratives about who he was—married, gay, attractive?—and what had led him there—the necessity of shame, the pain of loneliness, the thrill of pleasure? And as I chewed on these questions which were antithetical to cruising—not knowing was the bread and butter of illicit encounters—I looked often into my rear-view mirror only to have my eyes stung by his headlights. As we approached my house the excitement turned to mild consternation, for my desire to drive by this carpark had been unexpected and I realised that to find yourself looking

for something you didn't know you needed may well have originated in a want—or was it the other way around?

Approaching where I lived, I kept on driving until, eventually, he turned off up towards a village that had some very expensive houses, and I made my way back home, feeling the ambivalence that only the allure of wish fulfilment can muster.

The night I did finally pull into the carpark, I sat waiting in the dark wondering what might happen and, at the edge of my mind, the orchid man appeared. But I didn't feel like a 'naughty boy'. I felt like someone who had an increased heart rate, a swelling in my underwear, a desire to survive and move out from myself that was in every human soul—and then a man knocked on my window. Winding it down I heard him ask,

'What you looking for?'

'I'm not sure' I said.

'MDMA?' he asked. But I must have looked confused because he went on to say 'Not looking for drugs?' to which I shook my head.

And then he laughed, and I laughed, and we laughed together until my eyes watered. Lighting up a cigarette he said,

'I know where you think you are.'

I asked if I could have a smoke and, after a pause, he handed me his and I took it as he lit another for himself—going on to tell me how to get to the other carpark. But I didn't hear a word, his smoke in my lungs after the laughter better than rolling around in the damp woodland or any dew laden grass.

\*

Now that the bluebells are gone it feels impossible to believe that the forest floor could be so strange a colour and only the sky on a clear day was able to remind me that the unnatural was in everything. I thought of the old man, wondering if he had actually seen the Early Purples, or whether he just believed he had because he'd wanted to: who amongst us has not imagined as real what they hoped to be true? Or was it that I had just been unable to see the orchids in that woodland so close to home and only in exploring elsewhere did I find them?

It was this not knowing that seemed to mark the threshold of April into May—that perhaps colours all significant moments in life. There is a less candid, more covert way, to express this, but I don't know what that might be, either.

And anyway, that is as may be.

in response to “how are you lol”

**[Liam Strong]**

i'm good

just dying

the surgeries have marred my tattoos so like yes

i want to fuck but also is there enough solvent to

revise whatever

perforations arise

# **Wicked Little Town of Bethlehem**

**[Kami Enzie]**

*To Trevor KS*

The way some blues are almost green or green greens  
harder with a drop of red in it, the day started as a fact

and ended in conversation, bragging about my nephews to  
friends who aren't dead. The next day I waited to see

you at the library, to hear your pidgin of Lucie, Vi Khi, and  
the better Apostles before you crossed over the statues

to the gym, and then next day, Sunday, I texted you  
about brunch and five years passed, adjacent swings

of desire bearing years in negative space after we jumped loose  
from juvenile chains. Carrots and peppers liquify in my fridge.

Stale gender roles disintegrate in your marriage, your wardrobe  
blooms. I budget twenty minutes to walk to your kitchen for poetry

workshop to read words you treat the way other cis white men  
ostracize and abuse people. Your modular ideographs so full

of contradiction, Houdini-like constrictions, there's no room for falsity  
— even less for certainty — except for your clip-ons, dangling, chintzy,

secure and gem-like, wearing cheap seams like wounds sealed in fire.

## The worm forgives the maritozzi

[Kate Schneider]

*where i live*

there is a brown footed cupboard in our living room  
a compost made of pieces of fruit, sour cherries quinces apricots  
spray-on turf flocked with rinds. dirtier, distincter for the  
beige cassata like a nipple, marzipan linoleum spiral-  
bound for the tragedy that goes round and round  
in the lesbian separatist buckyball the mouth  
speaks intermittent plush. in the soil's microcosmic gut  
full of petrified lifeforms digesting the smitten rock's  
gunna gush their own dissolving dna, transcending  
their own life, rising from their own funeral  
with renewed life the worm forgives the maritozzi

*Mission Statement*

our kids drive sylvanian family suzuki jimneys  
the baby a very concrete, very personal point of reference  
we had the Subaru now they have the Jimneys  
im sorry, i had to confirm cultural continuity  
bundles of cars piled up in a flood. hailed by  
my own babyhood blue garfield sweet memory  
of a dyke work weekend where fully a third  
of the dykes never did anything although  
the work was varied, essentially unskilled,  
and pleasant. the mulberries were my takehome  
pay. the mother of my child is a Legacy Butch true  
panellist im so proud of her she never smells like  
vaporised peachpits serves up crepes in fresh rubber  
sheets big arm for tamping, platinum  
carabiner anniversary, editor of girlfriend studies  
which is our humble attempt to put a little more



motion into the concepts of home and haven.

#### A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

well, mostly i take care of the DYKROSTICS

but then i remember that architecture is not

made with the brain

thank god.



## Waiting for Danny Dyer

[Mia/Matti Griso Dryer]

christmas 2022 Danny Dyer drove off the white cliffs of dover and disappeared. the app formerly known as twitter went mad, mainly because it took Danny about twenty minutes to drive from walford to kent. but also because it was nowhere near a good enough send off for our boy mick. somewhere between dead and undead, Danny's body floated off our screens. schrödinger's geezer.

when i'm living with my mum, every night ends in eastenders. the doof-doof calls in midnight, heralding a new day. insomnia was passed down my maternal side and put to good use. the doof-doof is followed by about half an hour on the sofa, meaning there's a 1:1 ratio of this time to the duration of an episode. occasionally we talk or argue about something put off from the day, but usually the format is one of short speculation over the most recent plot twist, followed by a period of silent scrolling.

i set out to write about fatherhood. where else could i start but with my mum, and the disappearance of Danny Dyer.

the other night like every other night i got home to find eastenders on. there are new characters behind the bar, pulling pints for regulars and fixing an orange juice for phil. Danny is a gaping hole in the burgundy wallpaper.

we were emptied of speculation the night Danny left. stage one, denial. sure, there was no body, but what would've stopped his return? either mick was dead, or he *chose* to leave his family, which still meant mick was dead.

it is hard to think of mick as a michael, although his full name is michael carter. when he arrives in 2013, shirley says 'meet mick, my brother' and yeah, he's actually her son but that comes out later and anyway, it makes more sense to be met with mick as brother rather than michael the son. mick as in 'taking the mick', the origin of which is unclear but mostly attributed to cockney rhyming slang as in 'taking the mickey bliss'.

mick doesn't take himself too seriously, gets married in that little pink dressing gown. mick the true cockney, east end dreamboy, father brother lover.

Danny Dyer is not my father but his surname bears close resemblance to my father's. over the phone they are often mistaken and i have to say no with an r as in hair dryer as in if i was german and actually a man (my grandfather's joke, trans resonance my own). while i remember this quip, my grandfather by now almost certainly doesn't remember me. dementia, combined with the rupturing force of zionism.

being jewish on my father's side (the wrong side) feels a bit like waiting for Danny Dyer. a presence, an absence, a connection to the east end.

i tell my mum i am moving to east london to be closer to Danny. when he comes back, i'll be there, west ham shirt over my arsenal shirt over my skin.

my new house doesn't look like mick's, but the local pub is close enough to the vic for me to buy a drink. i do not feel as at home as i expected. my father was born in the local hospital and grew up here before his family moved east east east along the central line until they reached that bit of essex still on the tube. i grew up with an inexplicable pull towards boxing gyms, a more explicable hunger for beigels, and, later, a vaguely misinformed desire for the queer havens that only east london seemed to offer. all the while i watched Danny Dyer fight, eat, and learn to love his gay son.

but Danny is gone, and i do not feel as at home as i expected. there is an unease to moving within london. every history is too much set in stone, the memory of a place too concrete, the imagination too visceral for moving to come easily.

albert square was modelled on fassett square, fifty-six late victorian homes sharing a communal garden. google tells me i'm only a twelve-minute walk away, and the pull is almost worth abandoning my precious plug socket spot in hackney central library.

fassett square has long been gentrified. more surprisingly, albert square followed suit. an estimated £86.7 million spent on a new set, all to give the flavour of "creeping

gentrification", as per the vision of an executive producer with a double-barrelled surname. the new set came into use in 2022.

according to Danny Dyer, he left the show in 2022 because he'd "f\*\*king had enough" of depressing storylines and because "a lot of actors" "are c\*\*s, very selfish, it's all about them". but none of this is new.

now when i close my eyes, i picture Danny's body sinking not in the channel but on a worn-out mattress on a skip or a scrapyard where the old arches laid to rest their rusted hearts.

correlation is not causation, sure. but i am here, and Danny is not.

## In Praise of Sibilant S (iii – Sunrise)

[Chris Gylee]

Suntrap sandwich shop    *Sanjay* smears soft sarnies    semi-ed    sneakers squeaking

*Shay* stammers,    stutters    strong skin stretching    spooling steel shutters

Soaking salad, spinach    *Steffan* sautés    splashback spattered

Shameless saxophonists strut staccato scales    sushi symphonies

Sharp sextet    Swedish *Sharif*    sprint slaps

Sultry soup, salted    sportsmen squat

Somnambulant *Syrus* sashays, sandstone

Sixteen scurrilous sex-workers

*Spencer* spectacles

Salaciously

## Two Poems

[Caleb Simon]

### Footnotes

Black Doc Martens.<sup>1</sup>

Kids size.<sup>2</sup> With the zip.<sup>3</sup>

A pair of cream and blue sneakers.<sup>4</sup>

Laces so frayed they can't be properly tied.<sup>5</sup>

Mahogany Hush Puppies.<sup>6</sup>

Ill-fitting brogue boots.<sup>7</sup>

Blue-grey New Balance.<sup>8</sup>

Soles falling off from overuse.<sup>9</sup>

1. Scuffed to shit. Half the aglets are missing. Just about made it through high school tucked under my trousers.

2. The walk home used to tear my shoes inside out. It was too expensive to keep buying shoes for me to destroy.

3. Once, I got caught in an escalator. The teeth remind me of it. I never got caught for my dress code defiance.

4. The white of their body is all battered and bruised, grey from stepping through the summer storm spilt in the kitchen.

5. The collar at the back is bent. Square pegs and round holes and all that.

6. The ribbed fabric crusting the inside of them is red as scabs. They fit too tight around the toes.

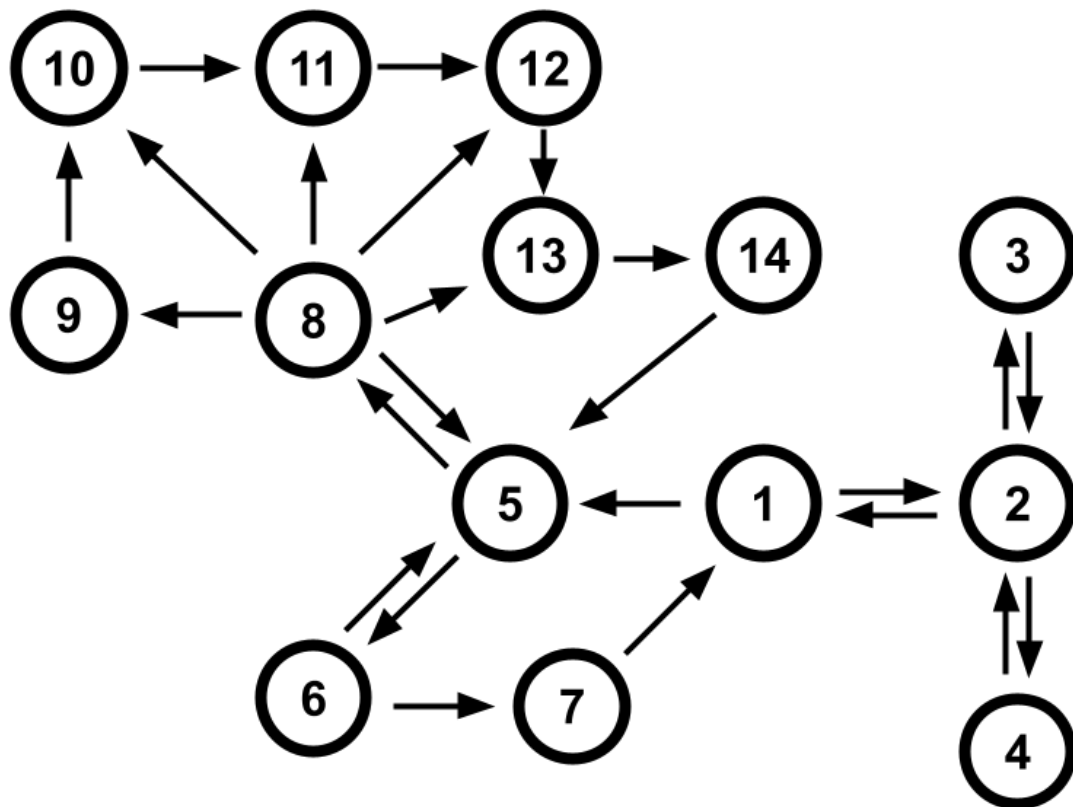
7. I bought them to match my blazers. They don't match, but they tell a stranger that I am sure. I am not sure.

8. Gym shoes. Doorways. My favourite method of becoming is making pristine things ragged.

9. It has been a long time since I skinned my knees. The person crawling out of them is covered in blood.

## Transition as Random Walk

*This poem is best read using a six-sided die. Start at line 1, roll the die, and choose your next line based on the graph below. Each path from a point has equal probability; for example, from line 1 there are two possible directions – roll 1-3 to move to line 2, or roll 4-6 to move to line 5. You may ignore this guide; ultimately, the path is up to you.*



1. Ask yourself, 'Has it always been this wrong?'
2. Enter another garden – one where all the plants are you. Wilting.
3. Your roses have black holes galaxying across their faces. Try to fix it. Buy more roses.
4. Compost the dead things. Notice how small you have made your limbs.
5. Another garden dares you to 'CHOOSE LIVING'.
6. But wouldn't it be easier to keep the lawn short, stick to supermarket flowers at the borders?

7. Return to the first garden with its easy concreteness and its doors you convince yourself are too stiff to open.
8. In the new garden you can see the sky. There you understand blue for the first time.
9. You make the new garden blue as chewed gum.
10. Stumble into another garden, break down the fence if you must. Pick the stones out of your knees.
11. Find another garden with topiaries of every size. Shave them into fucked-up shapes. Except one.
12. Another garden is almost empty. It has a fountain in the centre so clear that you can taste the blood in your mouth.
13. Take your shirt off. Fling yourself into the water, know your chest like your water does.
14. This is the very first garden. Its plants now upside-down, roots twisting skyward. Somehow you know it's in bloom.



I should have known better than to make plans on Valentine's Day, that herald of disappointment. Yet, somehow, the romantic within me championed over the cynic. Fingers dancing across the keyboard, I sent a "meet-up" message to a hunky stud on Bear411.com—a digital haven where fat guys sought love, sex, or plain affirmation.

I had always been drawn to thick men, their robust beauty mirroring my fondness for bulldogs and Volkswagen Beetles—one of which I owned, an obnoxious bumblebee yellow. There was something real in their presence, unlike the fickle world of gay social hierarchies that had dictated desire for as long as I could remember. Back then, before "dad bods" were celebrated, men flocked to Bear411.com believing they could never capture the twinkles or muscle gods of their fantasies. I should have seen the pattern sooner—the way someone I'd met would lose weight, ascend to a different category, and leave my fat ass behind.

But that night, as I sat waiting for his reply, I wasn't thinking about social hierarchies or body politics. I was thinking about the possibility of something real. Of course, I was ahead of my time. The world would take another decade to catch up—to call my type of attraction progressive instead of peculiar, to decide that bellies and stretch marks had value beyond fetish or shame. But I wasn't living in the future. I was sitting in front of my computer, on Valentine's Day, waiting for the promise of a beefy dad to accept my invitation. And then, with the sound of a computerized notification growl, he said yes.

Despite past experiences, my naivete convinced me this time would be different. I slid into my tightest jeans, the crotch of which I had meticulously scoured with a Brillo pad—a trick I learned from my slutty friend Cliff.

"Thin out the barrier," he advised. "Accentuate the package with flimsy denim." Sans underwear and with a cock ring to push my genitals forward, it always worked. I transformed from an all-American schlub to cubby dom-top with a quick scrub to the inseam. Gay culture is essentially a year-round costume party.

We agreed to meet at Ty's, the epicenter of NYC bear culture in the early 2000s. A public place was the safest bet, and what better location than a room where we were bound to encounter at least ten guys we'd previously slept with? A small community

guarantees inevitable run-ins with men who have cum on my face. Crass, but undeniably the reality of our world.

I ordered a beer from Julian, the charmingly furry bartender. He would joke about never meeting another Julian until me. We'd chuckle over our shared names, but that's where our similarities ended. He was a gorgeous, energetic spark plug, always the life of the party. I was only mildly hairy, average, and somewhat introverted in large crowds. The one thing that gave me a slight sense of superiority was being taller than him, but even that didn't help with my non-existent self-worth.

My gaze drifted across the bar, searching for my Bear411 meet. But he was nowhere to be found. Maybe he was running late, a concept that grated against the meticulous order of my Capricorn sensibilities. Or perhaps he had already arrived, effortlessly camouflaged among the sea of burly men wrapped in Bear Culture drag. Just another bearded fellow with a beer belly—my own personal kryptonite.

Six beers and a generously poured gin and tonic later, it was clear my online Valentine was a no-show. With each drink, my excitement faded, leaving me restless and uncomfortable. Maybe he saw me and decided my airbrushed acting headshot was a blatant violation of trust. The thought made my face hot, though the alcohol took the edge off my embarrassment. I might have edited out every imperfection, but at least my photo still looked like me. His, on the other hand, was taken from far away on some unidentifiable beach, with shadows obscuring most of his face. Maybe I should have questioned that sooner. Or maybe I should have known this was never going to work out.

With no one cruising me, my self-worth sank alongside my alcohol-induced judgment. The bar, once filled with potential, now felt too crowded, each conversation around me a reminder that I was alone. Staying any longer would only make things worse. My fingers fumbled for my wallet as I slid off the stool, determined to leave before I felt even more out of place.

It was a blustery evening on Christopher Street. My inebriation dulled my fine motor skills, turning the simple act of zipping up my coat into a feat of neuroscience. I struggled to close it.

"You're gonna catch pneumonia like that!" A voice interrupted my trudge toward the E train. I turned to see a man in his sixties or older. His appearance suggested he had grown more attractive with age. Perhaps unremarkable two decades ago, time

had etched deep laugh lines at his jowls and wrinkles across his forehead, giving him a distinguished air. He exuded a certain appeal, reminiscent of how I used to find my best friend's dad attractive in high school.

He reached for the hem of my coat and performed a small miracle. In mere seconds he fastened it all the way up until the zipper's teeth caught the skin under my chin. I let out a yelp.

"Sorry 'bout that. You're just so cold." He flashed a smile that seemed at odds with the rest of his face. While his features had aged with a grace that spoke of decades of history, his perfectly white teeth hadn't even hit puberty. Those chompers were clearly the work of a prosthodontist—nature could never produce a shade of white so blinding.

We locked eyes—his kind and examining. Mine in and out of focus.

"What?"

"You're so beautiful." My head dropped. It wasn't that I didn't believe the sincerity that radiated from his perfectly manufactured white teeth—I just disagreed. I wasn't beautiful. I was a Valentine's gay cliché: a drunken, stood-up, overweight, messy 30-year-old with little self-esteem. He gently lifted my chin with his index finger like we were in a cheesy rom-com. I laughed, but then realized he wasn't trying to cheer me up—I was bleeding.

"That zipper got you good, didn't it?" He licked his thumb and rubbed the blood off my skin, his finger rough and calloused.

"Yeah," I said.

"You don't say much." He was handsome and observant, a rare combination. Attractive people often have the luxury to be oblivious. I longed to be good-looking, but instead, I became a writer.

"Do you like boxing?" he asked out of nowhere.

"Boxing?"

"Yes. Like Rocky Marciano."

"Sure."

"What do you like about it?"

"It's hot. Two guys exchanging blows, hugging in between."

He grinned, revealing blinding incisors. Energy surged through me, as if my mood was directly linked to his radiant smile.

“Want to?”

“What?”

“Box. With me? I live at the end of the block. Come up and we can—”

Without a moment of hesitation, I shouted, “Yes!” To this day, eighteen years later, I have no tangible idea what possessed me to agree to something so barbaric. So incredibly dangerous. Boxing with a random man I met on the street in the West Village? What was I thinking?

But the cock wants what the cock wants.

\*\*\*

He already had the key in the door to his apartment by the time I reached the landing of his fifth-floor walk-up. He looked over at me in anticipation. A wave of embarrassment washed over me as he asked me if I was okay, prompted by my audible gasps and labored steps. I tipped my hand towards my mouth in a “blame it on the alcohol” gesture. He chuckled. I wondered if he was laughing at my joke or my weight—it was always one of the two. Normally, I could tell the difference, but in my drunken haze, the distinction was difficult to detect.

The door creaked open, and I followed him inside. The apartment was dark and old, the kind that was probably modern in the late ‘70s but now felt frozen in time. It was spacious for a West Village flat. He turned on a lamp, revealing four sofas arranged to form a square of empty space in the center. Two stools sat in opposite corners of where the couches met, each accompanied by towels and Everlast water bottles with long, curved straws. Above the mantle of a long-out-of-commission brick fireplace hung a heavyweight championship belt. Next to the door, a basket of brand-new mouthguards, still in their plastic packaging, glistened in the lamp light. He tossed me a box containing a double XL jockstrap.

“I have different sizes if that one doesn’t fit.” He cut open the mouthguard plastic with scissors and disappeared into another room.

I felt uneasy as I opened the box. The way everything was arranged and the way he vanished without another word made my stomach tighten. This was either a strange hospitality or the beginning of something I wasn’t sure I wanted to understand.

He returned with two sets of boxing gloves. I tried to contain my bewilderment at the makeshift boxing ring that was his living room.

“Get comfortable,” he encouraged. I took off my coat, slipped out of my Doc Martens, and slowly removed my pants. I peeled my sweater over my head, leaving me in nothing but my undershirt and boxer briefs.

“Do you want to put on the jockstrap?” he asked.

“I’ve never worn one before.”

“Do you not want to wear it?”

“I...”

“I’ll turn around.”

He turned his back to me. I pulled off my underwear and slipped on the jockstrap, fluffing myself a bit. I’m a grower, as my length is often hidden by the fat roll covered in pubic hair when I am erect. Fortunately, the size of my balls filled out the pouch.

“You good?” he said. I made some sort of affirmative noise. He turned around and walked towards me, scanning my body. He reached for the bottom of my undershirt. My shoulders tensed, my jaw locked, and I held my breath. Detecting my discomfort he asked, “Is this okay?”

“What?”

“May I remove your shirt?”

I didn’t respond. I didn’t want him to see me, to see my flabby body, my saggy man tits, my pockmarked skin from years of uncontrollable body acne. I was afraid that if he saw me, I would see myself in his eyes. Avoiding mirrors was practically a hobby.

His gaze held mine. There was something in his eyes that made my shoulders relax, my jaw unclench, and a breath escape, while simultaneously filling out the jock with my hard dick. We both smiled, and in one fell swoop, he flung my shirt off and across the room. He guided a mouthguard into my mouth and slipped a pair of bright red boxing gloves onto my hands. He stripped down to a jockstrap and performed the same boxing accoutrement ritual as he did on me. His body, once defined and strong, now carried the looseness of aging skin—the only attribute I could grasp onto in my battle with body dysmorphia.

We raised our gloved fists, assuming a boxing stance.

“Not in the face,” I begged. He nodded, then gave me permission to strike wherever I chose. I tapped his belly, and his skin rippled under my light touch.

“Harder.”

I increased the momentum of the next blow.

We traded punches. Initially, we were careful, making gentle contact with each other's bodies, acting out masculine roles that contrasted with the subtle effeminacy in our movements. We hugged each other in the typical way that heavyweight fighters do, our hard cocks rubbed against each other through the 96% polyester and 4% spandex, mine wet with excitement. We kissed, our mouthguards clumsily bumping against each other, our tongues fighting for dominance.

“Harder.”

Our punches intensified as we bobbed and weaved, and he landed five quick blows to my stomach and one on my left forearm. A knot twisted in my gut, but a surge of excitement pulsed through my mind and into my penis.

“Hit me in the face,” he said. I hesitated and gave him a little jab without much follow-through, not wanting to inflict pain.

“Harder,” he grunted.

Jab.

“Harder.”

Jab.

“HARDER!”

Uppercut.

He stumbled back, moaning loudly. He pulled down his jock and a beam of his jizz splashed across my stomach. He grabbed me and turned me around to face a full-length mirror that was placed in the corner of two sofas. He cuddled me from behind.

“Look at yourself. Look how fucking perfect you are.”

He pulled down my jock, wiped his boxing glove across my stomach, lubricating it with his semen. He rubbed his boxing gloves against my cock. In the mirror, my dick looked enormous. I almost didn't recognize it. I didn't recognize my own body. I felt like the sexiest man alive.

My hips gyrated as I fucked his boxing gloves, watching myself. I watched him watch me, feeling like a stud. My balls tingled, my cock twitched, and I could feel the vein at the bottom of my shaft pulsate.

“Fuck those gloves,” he encouraged.

The pace of my hips quickened as my cock slid between the Everlast vinyl. As I neared climax, he said, "What do you see?" I grunted. He repeated the question with urgency. I grunted louder.

"What do you see?!"

At that moment, I saw what he saw—a plump, powerful, and perfect body.

"Look at that! Look at you! What do you see?!"

"ROCKY MARCIANO!" I screamed, raising my arms and flexing in a muscle man pose. I shot my load on the full-length mirror, cum distorting my reflection.

"You are so beautiful," he whispered.

I vomited all over his living room floor.



## Fragments

[Dustin Ariel Segura-Suarez]

I'll be sitting on a chair

While my head falls back

My eyes will roll back

Filling with a dirty eggshell white

I'll hear the sound of a stream

I'll see : fish swimming upstream    a house falling

from the sky                      crashing onto the highway

I'll be like River Phoenix in the opening scene

of *My Own Private*

*Idaho*

I've seen that movie so many times

I should know how it would go

Only I won't see the house

The red earth mountain will split in front of me  
under the tremors of the ground

The dirt turning to dark

clotted blood    Flooding my entire body

The same mountain where I used to pick blackberries  
covered in earthy dust as a child    pricking my fingers

Chile   Padre las Casas

Each direction

draws a different symbol

In those moments sometimes I decide to look away :

THERE THERE

Tell  
me  
some  
thing  
abou  
t  
myse  
If

May  
be  
it's a  
sexle  
ss  
plac  
e

wher  
e I  
deep  
ly  
sleep?

We're built to accomplish something  
great they say

But there's a lack of space  
And I'm worried about this  
nonsense

## Note to Self

[Isobel Dixon]

hazelnut milk, eggs, green grapes, sesame seed bagels/ thirteen and my back down the bathroom door, bath steaming hot lashings of hot water loud enough to muffle my tears, cheeks salted and wet/ manifesting Kos in 2026 once we've got jobs and enough money to spend mindlessly on gyros and three Euro glasses of wine. Get me sun kissed with burnt tits, lashings of suncream I don't let sit for long enough before pool diving, ignoring the male gaze and dunking my whole head under/ I wish you could communicate as well as you give head. I need an intimate and spacious relationship. You don't give me that. Honesty sucks / Riley-Sofia for a girl, Jude Isiah for a boy/ If you could last longer, I could probably tolerate the sporadic texting patterns more easily / need to find an Endodontist before March ends. Therapy next Thursday at 3. Don't forget to send the drawing of an apple tree 24 hours before / I hate the 19 love theory and how it's probably true. That I have to love her forever because I loved her once. The base of my belly doesn't ache any longer but the thought of her name never flashing up on my screen again isn't a thought I like to entertain. / Lord God, don't let me get seriously ill. I seriously couldn't handle it. I'm not your strongest solider / Jellycat user password: PeppermintSnowflake.06/

## i feel love

[David McGovern]

is it too much to ask that  
someone  
hide in the bushes outside  
my house, desperate  
for a glimpse of me?

is romance dead? does  
no one infatuate anymore?

i'm done with chill.  
i want peering  
proximity, agitations,  
vibrations in my  
pocket telling me  
someone is calling again  
again again the cracked  
voice in a loud  
club  
a barely audible  
hymn in honour of me.

but no.  
little interest.

i look over my shoulder  
and no one is there.  
have they forgotten to  
follow or are they trailing  
someone else?  
unfair, either way.

dutifully, i step  
forward, take my place  
in the bushes. waiting for  
someone, anyone.

## **Artist Biographies**

**Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore** is the author, most recently, of *Touching the Art*, a finalist for a Washington State Book Award and a Pacific Northwest Book Award. Her previous title, *The Freezer Door*, was a *New York Times* Editors' Choice and a finalist for the PEN/Jean Stein Book Award. Winner of a Lambda Literary Award and an American Library Association Stonewall Honor Book, she's the author of seven books, and the editor of six anthologies, most recently *Between Certain Death and a Possible Future: Queer Writing on Growing Up with the AIDS Crisis*. Sycamore's new novel, *Terry Dactyl*, will be published by Cipher Press in the UK and Coffee House Press in the USA in November 2025.

**Anne Louise Kershaw** is a sound artist and musician, a visual artist, curator and creative producer, a writer and poet. She runs a CIC called Instigate Arts, instigating positive social change through arts production and participation. She is also a consultant and creative mentor. [annelouisekershaw.com](http://annelouisekershaw.com) @annelouise.kershaw

**Jade Prince** hails from Essex, England and currently resides in Leeds. Her work has been published in *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*, *Poetry & Audience*, and *PEN Transmissions* amongst others, and she currently holds a place with The Writing Squad. She has a BA in English Literature with Creative Writing and a MA in Postcolonial Literary and Cultural Studies from University of Leeds. Her time is split between writing a coming-of-age TV show and prose piece, a poetry collection, and working for the NHS.

**Jahan Khajavi** (b. Fresno, 1986) is 'the best kind of pervert' (Farid Matuk) who composes 'wildly amusing and explicit queer poetry' (Hamish Bowles, *Vogue*) 'with elements of swagger and sex' (Rob McLennan) that 'luxuriates in the labor of the real' (PJ Lombardo, *Tripwire*) and 'juggles truly absurd comedy and frank body talk with overwhelming tenderness and genuine corporeal joy' (Louis Fratino, *Mousse*). Khajavi's 'fabulous, fierce first collection' (Moirra Egan), *Feast of the Ass* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2023), is 'one of the most unique books of recent memory'



(Johannes Göransson), which ‘at once flourishes and makes a flourish of classical Persian forms’ (Joyelle McSweeney).

**Jane VB Larson** holds an MFA in Fiction Writing from the University of Arkansas. She was a 2014 Lambda Literary Emerging Voices fellow, and her collection of stories, *Understand Me, Sugar*, was published in 2017 by Yellow Flag Press. Her novella, *Mon Dieu, Love* won the 2022 Clay Reynolds Novella Prize and was published by Texas Review Press in 2023. Jane's stories and essays have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and appeared in Bayou Magazine, Cream City Review, Cherry Tree, SmokeLong Quarterly, and Foglifter, among others. She is the Associate Director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing and Translation at the University of Arkansas and the founder of The Diamond Line, the university's undergraduate literary magazine. Originally from Louisiana, Jane lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas.

**Mark Ward** is the author of *Nightlight* (Salmon Poetry, 2023) and five chapbooks: *Circumference* (FLP, 2018), *Carcass* (7KP, 2020), *HIKE* (Bear Creek, 2022), the interactive branching sonnet, *Faultlines* (voidspace, 2024) and most recently, *I Was a Teenage Exorcist* (Chaps Poetry, 2024). Forthcoming books include *Masters*, an ekphrastic chapbook responding to dead queer male painters' work, from The Emma Press in 2025, and a second full-length collection, *Real Estate*, which will be published by Salmon in 2026. He edits *Impossible Archetype*, an international journal of LGBTQ+ poetry, now in its eighth year.

**Kevin McLellan** is the author of: *Sky. Pond. Mouth.* (winner of the 2024 Granite State Poetry Prize selected by Alexandria Peary); *in other words you/* (winner of the 2022 Hilary Tham Capital Collection selected by Timothy Liu); *Ornitheology*; *Tributary*; *Round Trip* and the book objects, *Hemispheres* and *[box]* which reside in several special collections including the Blue Star Collection at Harvard University. Kevin also makes videos which have appeared in the Berlin Short Film Festival; Flickers' Rhode Island Film Festival; the International Festival of Winter Cinema; the LGBTQ+ Los Angeles Film Festival ("Dick" won Best Short Form Short); Nature & Culture Film Festival; the Vancouver Queer Film Festival and others. Kevin lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. <https://kevmclellan.com/>

**declan wiffen** (he/him) teaches Contemporary Literature and Creative Writing at The University of Kent. He also runs a range of writing courses, including Cruising Nature, FUCK Plants and Gay Gardens, which think through questions about queer ecologies. His pamphlet, *indiscriminate lanking*, came out with Invisible Hand Press in 2022.

**Liam Strong** (they/them) is a queer neurodivergent cripple punk writer who has earned their BA in writing from University of Wisconsin-Superior. They are the author of the chapbook *Everyone's Left the Hometown Show* (Bottlecap Press, 2023). You can find their poetry and essays in *Vagabond City* and *new words {press}*, among several others. They are most likely gardening and listening to Bitter Truth somewhere in Northern Michigan. Find them on Instagram/Twitter: @beanbie666. <https://linktr.ee/liamstrong666>

**Kami Enzie** (he/him) is a Vienna-born, New Orleans-raised writer. His work appears in *fourteen poems*, *The Glacier*, *Oxford Poetry*, *The Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. He is a recent Iowa grad. IG @yungwerther

**Kate Schneider** is a writer, artist and library worker living in Dublin. Her poetry has been published in *Ambit* and *Hotel* amongst others. They hold a PhD in English Literature from the University of Cambridge exploring fictions of inhabitation in the architectural and written experiments of postwar Britain. Their pamphlet *DELI POEM* was published by Sunday's Print Service in 2023 and is available from Good Press.

**Mia/Matti Griso Dryer** is a writer from North London who has recently made the big move to East London. They're currently studying for a Masters in Creative Writing at Queen Mary. More of their work can be found @mgd\_\_\_mgd on Instagram.

**Chris Gylee** (he/him, Stockport UK, 1983) is a queer writer and artist living between rural Finland and Berlin. His poems include the online collection *FORTY*, the micro-chapbook *Ten For 'A'* (Ghost City Press), and the short series *Multiverse Listening* (x7). His writing has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *GARLAND* (Fifth Wheel Press),

*Frozen Sea, Under the Radar* (Nine Arches Press), & *Change*, *Powders Press*, *Tidskriften Astra*, and *Feral* (TUO TUO). Chris was long-listed for the Cúirt New Writing Prize 2023. [www.chrisgylee.com](http://www.chrisgylee.com) / @chrisgylee

**Caleb Simon** is a queer poet and maths student who can be found skulking about at open mics in Bath or empty fields in Worcestershire (depending on the time of year). His work can be found in *And Other Poems*, *Propel*, and on the Young Poets Network.

**C. Julian Jiménez** (he/they) is a Queer, Puerto Rican/Dominican writer. They hold an MFA in Acting from The New School. Playwriting awards: New Dramatist Residency (Class of 2027), Rita Goldberg Playwrights' Workshop Fellow at The Lark (2019/2020), Pipeline Theatre Company PlayLab (2017 & 2018), LaGuardia Community College's LGBTQ History Project Grant (2018), Queens Arts Council Grant (2015), and The Public Theater Emerging Writers Group (2009). Productions: *Man Boobs* (Pride Films & Plays, 2011), *Animals Commit Suicide* (First Floor Theater, 2015), *Locusts Have No King* (INTAR, 2016), *Bundle of Sticks* (INTAR, 2020), and *Alligator Mouth, Tadpole Ass* (Theatre Rhinoceros, 2020), *¡OSO FABULOSO!* & *The Bear Backs* (Joe's Pub at The Public Theater, 2021), and *Bruise & Thorn* (Pipeline Theatre Company, 2022). Their creative nonfiction essay, 'Playground Musk' was featured in *Divigations Magazine*. Julian is a Professor of Theatre at Queensborough Community College and Chair of the Department of Communication, Theater, & Media Production.

**Dustin Ariel Segura-Suarez** is a homosexual writer and editor based in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal. Born to Chilean parents in Canada, he remains profoundly connected to the Latinx community and the LGBTQ2SAI+ community. Dustin Ariel's work reflects his commitment to the investigation occurring at the junction of identity, culture, and expression.

**Isobel Dixon** (she/her) is a Northern English writer, born and bred, currently living in Lancashire. Much of her poetry is sapphic and locationally focused as often she queers the Lake District. Isobel was shortlisted for the Litfest and Wayleave Press

Pamphlet Competition and has been published in CAKE Magazine and the Wordarium Journal. When not writing, Isobel can be found studying for her Publishing Masters.

**David McGovern** is an Irish artist and writer. He works with video, poetry and performance to create space for reflection and speculation. Themes in his work include care, queer identity, desire and rejection. His writing has been published in *The Stinging Fly* and *Fourteen Poems*. In 2022 he was awarded the Arts Council's Next Generation Artist Award. He is currently artist-in-residence at Irish Theatre Institute.