



The Lamp

**A Creative Writing Journal for
Graduate and Professional Students**

Volume X

the Lamp



Vol. IX

**The Lamp
Volume X**

**Cover art by Maddie McHarg
Frontispiece by Emma McTavish**

**The copyrights of all pieces remain the property of their respective authors.
No part of this journal may be reproduced in any form, or by any electronic or mechanical
means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission
from the authors. Reviewers may quote brief passages to be printed in a review.**

**Distributed by the
Society of Graduate and Professional Students,
Queen's University,
Kingston, ON K7L 2N9**

www.lampjournal.com

The Lamp
Volume X

This edition is dedicated to all organ donors
and the lives they have saved.

Table of Contents

9.....	Acknowledgments , <i>Meghan Burry and Jesyka Traynor</i>
10.....	Editors' Note , <i>Meghan Burry and Jesyka Traynor</i>
11.....	Chapter One
	Deep Waters: Shadows and Sentimentality , <i>Rachel M. Friars</i>
12.....	The Ballad of the Sea King, <i>Maggie Sadler</i>
15.....	The Worshipful Company of Fishmongers, <i>Jade Wallace</i>
16.....	Sounding Fathoms, <i>Brian Gillis</i>
17.....	Chapter Two
	Reverberations: Music and Soundscapes , <i>Rachel Fernandes</i>
18.....	Woodwind, <i>Jade Wallace</i>
20.....	Hymn #117, <i>Sara Judy</i>
21.....	Soundproofing, <i>Erin Felepchuk</i>
23.....	The Emptying, <i>Jen Herrmann</i>
24.....	Chapter Three
	Mirrors: Reflecting Narratives , <i>Sabrina Masud</i>
25.....	A Dictionary of (coming to) Terms, <i>Miriam Helmers</i>
29.....	Murmur, <i>Aylin Malcolm</i>
31.....	Stuck to the Tongue, <i>Shamika Shabnam</i>
35.....	In the Church Basement We Gather and Press, <i>Sara Judy</i>
36.....	Chapter Four
	Chronicles: Memoir and Meditation , <i>Jesyka Traynor</i>
37.....	Still Life on the Indian Agent's Porch..., <i>Sara Judy</i>
38.....	East or West, <i>Carmel Mikol</i>
43.....	August, <i>Rachel M. Friars</i>
45.....	Dear Alice, <i>Hannah Skrynsky</i>
46.....	Chapter Five
	Generations: Childhood and Nostalgia , <i>Carmel Mikol</i>
47.....	When I was Conceived, <i>Aya Labanieh</i>
48.....	Pretend Play, <i>Liam Siemens</i>
49.....	Butterfly Garden, <i>Kate Oakes</i>
52.....	Chicken Stealing, <i>Wesley Viebahn</i>

56.....	Chapter Six
	Atmospheres: The Natural and the Whimsical, <i>Jenny Sullivan</i>
57.....	The Blue Jay, <i>Jen Herrmann</i>
58.....	Edelweiss, <i>Nicholas A. Krizanic</i>
59.....	Address to the Open Field Between..., <i>Sara Judy</i>
60.....	Cassiopeia, <i>Aya Labanieh</i>
62.....	Ode Occasioned by Contracting Flesh-Eating Bacteria, <i>Matthew Rooney</i>
63.....	Chapter Seven
	Transgressions: Protesting Ideologies, <i>Meghan Burry</i>
64.....	Three Ways Snakes Move Through Grass..., <i>Sara Judy</i>
65.....	Womanhoods, <i>Aya Labanieh</i>
66.....	Making Beds with Water, <i>Rachel M. Friars</i>
73.....	About the Authors
78.....	About the Editors

Acknowledgments

On behalf of the editorial board at *The Lamp*, we would like to extend our gratitude to the Society of Graduate and Professional Students (SGPS) for their funding and past support. Our appreciation extends to all of the administrators and educators who forwarded our call for submissions. Thank you to everyone who promotes, supports, and encourages our journal.

We would like to thank our dedicated editorial team for their hard-work and commitment to this journal, even throughout unprecedented times. Despite disruptions due to COVID-19, our editors persevered and remained committed to publishing graduate work from across the globe. Thank you to Rachel Fernandes, Rachel M. Friars, Dani Macdonald, Nevena Martinovic, Sabrina Masud, Emma McTavish, Carmel Mikol, Kaitlyn Reid, Alyce Soulodre, and Jenny Sullivan for all of your work.

Next, we would like to thank and congratulate all of our talented contributors. To our cover artist, Maddie McHarg, thank you for turning our vision into a beautiful cover that embodies each chapter perfectly. Another thank you is due to Emma McTavish, our cover artist for last year's journal, who is providing us with a fabulous frontispiece in this year's volume.

Thank you to our authors: Erin Felepchuk, Rachel M. Friars, Brian Gillis, Miriam Helmers, Jen Herrmann, Nicholas Anthony Krizanic, Sara Judy, Aya Labanieh, Aylin Malcolm, Carmel Mikol, Kate Oakes, Matthew Rooney, Maggie Sadler, Shamika Shabnam, Liam Siemens, Hannah Skrynsky, Wesley Viebahn, and Jace Wallace. This was not an easy year to publish and we are inspired by your commitment and dedication. Thank you, as well, to everyone who submitted to the journal. We said it last year and we'll say it again: sharing creative writing is not an easy feat and it is an effort that does not go unnoticed.

The twelve editors, two cover artists, and eighteen authors listed above made this year's publication possible. Thank you, a million times over.

Sincerely,
Meghan Burry and Jesyka Traynor
Editors-in-Chief

Editors' Note

It may not come as a surprise to hear that things looked a little different at *The Lamp* this year. Many of our editors and contributors have been seriously affected by the unprecedented events of 2020: the COVID-19 pandemic and the upcoming election in the United States are only few amongst a long list of traumas and loss. This has not been an easy year for anyone. Our condolences and sincerest thoughts go to those who are experiencing grief. Grief for George Floyd. Grief for Breonna Taylor. Grief for a nation. Grief for loved ones lost to the virus. In an effort to stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, we would like to first and foremost announce that all proceeds from this year's journal will be donated to Black Lives Matter Toronto in support.

Despite the disruptions in mid-March, the journal, like everything else, continued virtually. All of our editors and authors worked fiercely to get it done. Endless thanks to our editors for all the hard work they put in under such stressful circumstances. This journal was born from a time of chaos and reflection. With this in mind, many of this year's chapter themes are contemplative, nostalgic, and curious. The pieces within these chapters are interested in shadows, in childhoods, in the narratives we create, and the ones that we keep to ourselves. They are also interested in laughter and strife, in transgressing the systems we live under and in building something new.

We think of the theme for Volume X as "looking back" because, in 2020, we have all done a fair amount of looking back to try and understand the state of the world. We hope the pieces in this year's journal give you both some solace and peace and a fire to fight as you look back and reflect.

Sincerely,
Meghan Burry and Jesyka Traynor
Editors-in-Chief

Chapter One

Deep Waters: Shadows and Sentimentality,

Rachel Friars

The crux of depth is the fathomlessness that opens up in your belly as you swing your legs towards the darkness, half hoping that, as you stretch a pointed toe into the cold, something will reach back. As fearful as we are to float, untethered, in water that will answer none of our questions, we are also exhilarated to think of deathless things breathing below us in the black, staring between our feet, imagining shapes in the dark.

Much like water, we often search for meaning in places, people, objects, that seem bottomless, black as pitch and hardly promising. Still, we look. The poems in this chapter are all focused on the act of searching below the surface, about bringing meaning to the sea and pulling significance from it. They are about confronting a body—an ocean, a force—that resists comprehension, rejects sympathy, and sniffs at fear.

These pieces are about survival. “The Ballade of the Sea King” shows us a world in which that survival is brutal, a violent battle of wills. “Sounding Fathom” bridges the gap between life and death, searching, submerged, for light and life. Embracing another body, moving with currents that are unseen, “The Worshipful Company of Fishmongers” breaks over the mind like a wave.

The visceral power of the sea, working like a muscle, moves through the rhythm of these pieces. The grit and the silt of the language in these poems collects in the hollows of molars and behind the ears, echoing like the inside of a shell.

The Ballad of the Sea King, *Maggie Sadler*

From the great white tower,
Agneta stole away
among the rose and lilac
to glimpse the fading day.

The sun poured like whiskey
across the meadow green.
The silence stilled her heartbeat
in her soft reverie.

Her cheek flushed with twilight,
unbound curls all abloom,
as she danced beside the waves
to the lone thrush's tune.

As nightfall held her close
and the molten moon shone
a whisper in the water
drew her keen gaze below.

From the murky waters
a face began to rise,
as soft as drownéd starlight,
but with wild azure eyes.

He cried, "I am the Sea King,
I rule from a pale throne
over creatures strange and many,
yet my heart is quite alone."

Sorrow crept to his gaze
like mist across a stone,
tempting the girl to pity
the king of sea and gloam.

He reached his scaled fingers
to caress her pearled shoe,

crooning, "Come below, dear Agneta,
let me pluck my harp for you."

His lips were plush and dark,
so swollen from the sea,
petals stolen from violets,
but still, she did not flee.

From the shadowed shoreline,
a church bell she heard sound,
so she pleaded with the Sea King,
"To my father I am bound."

"I promise gowns of starlight
and to bind your hair with shells.
Only take my hand, love,
and come see where wonder dwells."

From the great white tower,
her father saw with grief
Agneta bent to the Sea King
upon that midsummer eve.

Down they plunged together
this Sea king and his prize,
his voice like drunken sailor's strings
to drown her frantic cries.

He crowned his love with lilies,
shared the secrets of his soul;
yet the folly of the Sea King
was to trust his love in whole.

Though in the brackish waters
he grew fairer by the day
in her heart she could not love
he who kept her locked away.

With his sodden siren song
she forgot her life of old.

But blind by lust, he would not see
how her heart grew black and cold.

When from her drownéd bower
the church bell she heard toll
she whispered to her Sea King,
“I have come to claim your soul.”

In exchange for his silver ring
she nursed a dagger at her breast,
and rushing to the Sea King,
she drove it deep within his chest.

As she watched her dying lover,
the church bell she heard ring,
yet she stayed beneath the water
to crown herself the king.

The Worshipful Company of Fishmongers,

Jade Wallace

The beach beneath the volcano
was arenose with black basalt.
We were standing on the gulf
watching the year recede
when you unpocketed a bar of soap
and slipped it to me
on fingers washed smooth.

The castile glowed white with the salt of the Baltic
and weighed like gold in my palm.
We left with hardly more than entente.
I don't know where you went to watch
the current rushing in.
I was in a house down the shoreline
laying candy fish on my tongue
and waiting.

That night, amid a rainfall of crabs and periwinkles,
the new year came and I could not.
Though my lover was mouthing words below me,
I heard his concern through a conch shell.
Staring at the pale green wall behind his bed,
I had to tell myself not to wander the predawn
casting for your sea glass hands.

Sounding Fathoms, *Brian Gillis*

I was four

when I fell off
my uncle's fishing boat
on the shore of Lake Superior

I still remember the sound of Gordon Lightfoot

on the radio and the echo
of my hands passing through the surface where wavelets of sunlight swept over red sand and
black mussel shells

My outstretched arms in blue-grey

measured the breakers
I mapped fathoms with stubby fingers

The distance in watery units

far from
six foot ordinals

My body compressed itself against

the pressure losing the light

Then a sudden release

the feeling of feathers
and my father's large hands

The rush of sweet lake air

Chapter Two: Reverberations: Music and Soundscapes,

Rachel Fernandes

The poems in this chapter are haunted by sound, both its presence and its absence. Jade Wallace reminds us that love can be as hard to ignore as the vibrations from a woodwind instrument; “Woodwinds” speaks of the sounds that escape us involuntarily, denoting infatuation and even love. The speaker in Sara Judy’s “Hymn 117” slips into the quiet world of sleep while the sounds of prayer and worship wash over her and is punished for resisting the message of the music.

In “Soundproofing”, Erin Felepchuk describes virtuosic French horn performances that mask the memory of abuse in a soundless room. And the speaker in Jen Herrmann’s poem “The Emptying” sings to her yet-to-be-conceived child, as she receives a familiar, soundless message that she will have to wait another month.

These poems explore the full range of sound—the enormous space between the bang and the whimper—from the performative notes of a classical piece, to the silence we crave in which to hide our deepest desires and most private shame. These authors explore the performativity of loudness, but also dwell on the lingering notes that reverberate in silence, when we think we are safe. Each poem asks us to listen carefully, not just to the things we can hear, but to the sounds that emanate from within.

Woodwind, *Jade Wallace*

It took me a few days to figure out
that the girl with a voice like a flute
was in love with our boss.

First, I noticed that

every time they spoke
she said his name.

The intervening words were just
the rustle of a musician's sleeve.

What mattered was the repetition

...Aden...Aden...Aden...

like a sweetheart's canticle.

She kept smiling carefully to

herself and saying *he's so funny*
because it was the safest flattery
she could render—though she
really did think he was funny.

Amidst the staccato of footfalls,
the workplace door opening
and closing like a metronome
measuring out our days,

her laughter was pealing bells
that told of his returns.
I knew what she was doing,
because I'd done the same before,

dropped hints of my love
like the slow, inevitable exhalation
of air held too long
in the lungs.

Sometimes it worried me.
I wondered how many

years she had loved him,
and how many more years she would.

Woodwinds are a strain to play quietly.

Hymn #117, Sara Judy

(After Jericho Brown)

Not my father's voice, heavy from the pulpit,
Not the scrape of my back bones against the
Wood hewn pew, can keep me from sleep. There
Will be trouble for this, later. My mother
Plays on a tuneless guitar, tells me with her
Eyes that I should stand. She sings *Father, we love,*
You, and Lord, have mercy. Father, lay
Your mercy down: stop speaking. I think
I remember sunlight, in through the church
Window, laying hands on me. No words now,
But praise. Later he will cry while the back
Of my legs sting, glory! So red. He will ask
For my forgiveness. I, like God, ask for justice.

Soundproofing, *Erin Felepchuk*

Three years
in small rooms:
alienated,
soundproofed.

You groomed me,
I remember that—
but other memories
are distorted.

The pieces you taught me,
once abstracted and buried,
emerge in shopping malls
and burger joints.

Then I flash back,
and remember:

every single note,
every bar of rests,
waiting endlessly
for my turn.

Then my solo arrives
and my French horn
fearlessly sings.

I was virtuosic
but voiceless:

the perfect combination,
meaning more time alone
with you
teaching me
how to dissociate.

I remember

how it felt to play that horn.
The metallic taste
and dripping
condensation.

And I remember your smell,
your tattoo,
and that tactile,
bewildering
interference.

You are now in a small room
in the back of my mind.

Soundproofed.

Practicing
to re-emerge.

The Emptying, *Jen Herrmann*

Every moon, my child
heaves the fullness of her not-yet
into this world, writhing red with the
reminder of her nothingness
until
I am
spent. She warns me of the cost
of not knowing in silence, in pain
that grips my belly and bends my back.
I sing her will to live, and as I fold
the empty cradles of my fingertips
I know that this, too,
is prayer.

Chapter Three

Mirrors: Reflecting Narratives, *Sabrina Masud*

What does it mean to decant the barrenness that complicates the making of a tale and the historical milieu of one's environment? 'Words' being recast as a mode of network, capturing the essence yet abandoning the primal is the imaginary space where the poets intervene in this chapter. The (re)telling of stories embedded in images recognized as cultural symbols foreshadow the intent of the poets. They leave us full of wonder in their creation of a tale through tweaking of historical markers by excavation of latent cultural traumas. The fractal perimeter of what is describable and what is beyond the trauma of a lived environment define the tones of these poems in this section.

The fault lines broached by Sarah Judy in her poem "In the Church Basement We Gather and Press" is not meant to reveal hollowness of ritual but rather meant to imagine the discursive barrenness of a broken cycle. She reflects on the efforts "to make a holy land: one" and traces ritualized practices, contemplating abandoned promises. In "Stuck to the Tongue" Shamika Shabnam attempts the visceral; she dissects the "tongue" conjoining Bangladeshi palate to the Canadian; the right to speak in a mother tongue to that of the stigma of alienation in one's own land. Shabnam's narrative forces one to reflect on the parallel historical marker in the Canadian Indigenous people's experience; the alienation felt within their land and historical denial of their language.

"Murmur" by Aylin Malcolm recasts the image of the flight of birds in his structure by oscillating between the different applications of the word "murmur" as it ties varying experiences. The urge to "Listen," the very act of orality embedded in the dominating image, sets off the written words. The fractal networking of words is further deconstructed by Miriam Helmers in "A Dictionary of (coming to) Terms." Her poem is a fusion of the archaic and contemporary, in her (re)imagining of the meaning behind her choice of words, she ventures into the space of metaphors.

Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida* delves into the act of mirroring as translated in the realm of photography. The poets in this chapter are engaged in a similar act; the *stadium* in each of their work reflects on the history of the images captured within the words while the *panctum* calls for recognition according the reader's terms of engagement.

A Dictionary of (coming to) Terms, *Miriam Helmers*

Mirror /me/ *noun*. Flat reflective surface, usually of glass

Why did he say that:
Now we see as in a mirror dimly.
The mirrors I know are usually clear.
I almost think it's me in there.
Or is it me?
Am I the one who's trapped in here?

Now this glass existence makes more sense.
My flat reflections opening a world of depth
That is not mine.

Angel /uncle/ *noun*. Heavenly being; messenger of God

“An Angel in the lamplit snow”:
she saw him like that long ago.
Not long enough for some of us
but a blessed memory
for all the painful ones.

We never saw him
although we heard
hushed like the snow, a harsh yet gentle word,

He died, your uncle, young
too young. He might have lived a long time.

We didn't question.

But I looked at pictures and wondered.
That angelic smile? A life that sundered
other lives so suddenly when
it ceased to be, and then
became a burden?

I didn't know the weight

still resting on my heart 'til late
on a warm afternoon
his voice filled the room:
some recorded songs.

Singing while I cried
grieving my uncle who died
younger than me ...

He must have sung like that, in the light
of a lamp
when she saw him so long ago,
an angel in the lamplit snow.
I smiled thinking of it.

I know how he died and some of the reasons
(not good enough to explain away seasons
of useless mental pain).
But the question comes again:
why did he take his own life?

Why take your life if you haven't lived yet?
An unanswered question I don't have to "get."
There's something else I need to do
I need to let him live.

He is alive.
My angel uncle singing in the snow
was loved by Someone Else. I know.
There's an unrecorded song.

Alzheimer's /mystery/ *noun*. A different kind of pain: *e.g. the Ukulele Lady*

Slow steps, some laughter, and then
she comes out of the bedroom, helped by
someone she loves but doesn't recognize.
Her eyes are glad to meet me, her "granddaughter?
Well, for goodness' sake. Aren't you lovely."
Slow fingers, a cough, and the familiar tune:
"If you like a Ukulele Lady ..."

We laugh and sing along.
At the end of the day, we don't really say good bye
to the Ukulele Lady. With her it is always
a hearty "Hello!" and a smile and a questioning
interest in you that makes you feel "swell"
as she might say.
Of course, there is a different pain:
"You don't remember me?"
But that doesn't seem to matter now.
We smile when we remember her, the one and only
Ukulele Lady. She could always play that song
and not get tired.
"Lingering where it's shady ..."
The Ukulele Lady.
She's probably singing it now.

Faith /hope/ *noun*. The substance of things hoped for

Now we see as in a mirror dimly ...
when every tear shall be wiped away ...
weeping, in this vale of tears ... Everyman I
will go with thee ... now let your servant
depart in peace.

my Lady Death ... mourning and
weeping in this valley of tears ... Everyman I
will go with thee ... now let your servant
depart in peace ...

Phrases caught, held on to
Fragmented comfort for
When that time comes.

Then /now/ *adverb, adjective, noun (?) ... confusing grammatical properties*. A future moment:
e.g. Now and then.

Please be sure to tell me when you're poorly.
The poor girl's eyes a dim mirror of mine.
Too shy to reflect too much.
Because I'll be here then, you know.

This softly, with matching hand
on my old one. Such a new hand.
Will you then. All I can say.

Then seems too close for me.
May her then be far from now,
I think as we say good bye.

For now, we see in a mirror dimly; and then?
Will we see clearly?

Murmur, *Aylin Malcolm*

Murmur:

A low continuous background noise. A softly spoken utterance. The quiet or subdued expression of a feeling.

Medicine. A recurring sound heard in the heart through a stethoscope that is usually a sign of disease or damage. (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*)

My mother never sang to me.

My father sang: green rushes, lively frogs, lost loves, carols at Christmas.

My mother taught me gentler rhymes: the *kurbaĝa* in the creek, the fickle *böcek*.

My father and I sang.

A paltry flat in London; twenty years of white haze on the window. I peer through distant memories, grainy as the echocardiograms we watched on tape.

My mother said: Listen – that’s it,
that’s the murmur.

And I urged the green line: go on, go faster.

A steady pulse in the early days, then faster:

a chord of children, quartets at Christmas.

My father gave us all stethoscopes.

I heard nothing, missed the beat.

Hearts flutter swiftest among the small.

I fell for an impatient bird,

her brisk blood aching upward. Too bright for winter,
green flash amid tenacious sparrows, doves, starlings.

A group of starlings is called
a murmuration. Starlings are bold birds,
graceless, with a gift for mimicry
and voices like rustling paper,
more speech than song.

They move in the thousands,
their swift, synchronized wingbeats

resounding fields away.

My mother, light-limbed, eagle-beaked,
adores those speckled birds
that covered the crags of her childhood
and clouded the air,
their hum like static, or the breath
of a slow-hearted behemoth.

She flew west; I, ever east,
to broken stones and many years of blood.
I slip home in the mist, dismantled, reoriented.

But a starling scuttles briskly across the path. And in a beat I am back:

with lamplight on snow, my father's music, my mother listening.
Who murmured, though she never sang.

Stuck to the Tongue, *Shamika Shabnam*

Shor-eo, shor-ea, roshhoi.

The first three letters of the Bangla alphabet.

A chant,
stuck to my tongue,
a sweet residue.

Roshhoi is like *roshomalai*,
a thick, milky dessert
that *ammu* used to buy from Ambala Sweets
or perhaps Tangail Sweet House
in Bangladesh
before we tore our roots
and migrated with Pain
on our backs.

Shor is Bangla for when you push someone away, in tongues
to another place.

Community.

Country.

Not in a loving, healing way,
but a hurtful, wounding way.

Shor turns you into an object,
makes you feel unwanted
like the pariah of a fledgling nation.

Shor spelt backwards is *rohs*,
some call it *rosh*,
a sugary syrup for sweets.

When *rosh* touches my tongue
it becomes... *shor-eo*.

Rosh, shor-eo, roshhoi

cuts my tongue
like *pet-kata modhhonno*:
the alphabet
that symbolizes a wounded body
Takes me back.

Clinic.

C-section.

Ammu

who fought to give me life.

A haunted memory.
Krishna Ghosh.
Wife of Ghosh *mishtiala*
the sweet-maker.
Krishna takes part in the 1952 Language Movement:
Flattens sweet boxes.
Creates placards.
Draws alphabets on placards with her *alta*:
Ko, cho, tho, taliboshho...
How can they erase an entire tongue?
Truncated.
Violated.
Left to bleed.
Ko, kho, go, gho
are born out of the
Pain
that women like Krishna bear to
recover
a lost language.
No traces
of her
in national archives.
None.
Museums,
books.
Not even a dusty memorial!
Krishna.
The ghostly activist.
Chants slogans
of all the Bangla alphabets
everyday
till
they
tear her placards
take her to a rest house
snatch her anklet
slice her tongue
bite her flesh
discard her bleeding body
inside Ghosh's sweet shop.

Krishna was my *nanir ammu*,
my great grandmother,
her story
passed down in fragments,
shared among us,
nani, *ammu*, and me,
our broken legacy,
a powerful thread
that makes us
unwrite
oppression
even as we are
oppressed.
My body mingles identities:
Canadian-Bengali,
Hindu-Muslim,
Woman of color.
A new tongue takes over,
grows inside me,
a painful second skin.
English
makes me
slip
fail
cry
as my leaky Bangla trickles down my body.
“Reclaim your tongue *ma*,”
says *Ammu*,
the Hindu woman who married a Muslim man.
left her community
became a widow
suppressed her tears
migrated to Canada
straddled two jobs with one body...
All for me.
My education.
My future.
My English.
my englees.
my ing...reji.

In a foreign country,
a tiny room,
near Coxwell, Toronto,
Ammu and I bond over sweets
as she teaches me the Bangla alphabets.
Both of us haunted by memories not quite our own.

In the Church Basement We Gather and Press,

Sara Judy

felt men to a felt board—
rehearse all the old stories.

The words matter less,
gestures, more: accepting

porridge, refusing apple,
raising a hand to wave

from the golden chariot
gone pinprick in the sky.

We learned all you need
to make a holy land: one

strip (blue) at the uppermost edge,
one strip (tan) below.

Where they meet is where
the men stand in their leather sandals

their pastel robes, immobile men except

we move them along
the unbroken line,

press same to same,
and, when we grow bored and cruel,

flip the board to watch Jonah drown
under the sand-colored sky.

Chapter Four

Chronicles: Memoir and Meditation, *Jesyka Traynor*

Jeanette Walls, author of the bestselling memoir *The Glass Castle*, has said about the genre that “[m]emoir is about handing over your life to someone and saying, this is what I went through, this is who I am, and maybe you can learn something from it.” The pieces in this chapter unabashedly hand over life experiences that are vivid and honest, all the while challenging us to walk in another’s shoes and learn something about ourselves.

Sara Judy urges us to consider her dark still life of a poem as she recalls her memories on an Indigenous reservation, while Carmel Mikol reminds us of the choices in life that look like a fork in the road, that ask of us east or west. Rachel Friars unweaves for us the dark web of entanglement, while Hannah Skrynsky sketches out the deep blue of human experience.

Allow yourself to fall into these sad, beautiful, and very human stories, as they all have something crucial to tell, and we all have something crucial to learn.

Still Life on the Indian Agent's Porch After Sharon's Sister Shoots Herself in the Foot Trying to Shoot a Rabbit for Lunch on the Way to School, *Sara Judy*

On the porch Evelyn is bleeding
The morning pink sky tinged red
On the porch her sister is crying
The horse that brought them pants

On the porch their father steels
Sideways glancing at the metal screen
Out the door the Indian agent leans
Late March sun thaws the fallow garden

On the porch Evelyn's foot bleeds freely
The morning pink sky gets cloud-dark
On the porch I keep my eyes dry
The horse that brought us grows nervous

On the porch my father lowers his voice
Clenches one fist first then the other
Through the screen the Indian agent peers
Late March sun cuts through the gathering storm

On the porch Sharon watches everything
The morning pink the horse her father
On the porch Sharon remembers the fist,
the voice the crowding of clouds.

East or West, *Carmel Mikol*

I don't know how I got there. I just drove. There was no time to think. I felt the tires bounding along the highway like four dogs, panting and beating the asphalt till it relented. Two, three hundred miles shattered behind me in the fractured light of my rear-view mirror. Somewhere along Highway 39 I realized I was close to Annie's. Of course I had driven in that direction. Of course my body knew the way to her house.

Annie came to the door, her apron already flecked with flour and her eyes bright and clear. She just kept saying, "come in, love, come in" over and over again, but quietly and to herself. I entered silently and she closed the door behind us so the kitchen was small and warm. She lit the burner under a kettle and set the table while the water heated. She placed a dark loaf, steaming and aromatic straight from the oven, on a large wooden plate in the centre of the table.

She ate while I sat across from her clenching a mug. She nodded once at it so I lifted it and drank but I could not taste or feel the warm water moving past my teeth or down my throat. It should hurt, I thought. But it didn't because I had not yelled. I had been very quiet for a long time and you had grasped my neck as if to wring out some kind of sound. Annie paused over her empty plate, took one long look at me, then got up to finish her morning chores. I watched the clock, the phone, the door.

Annie slipped out back to water and feed the chickens and goat. I stared at the window that looked out to the driveway and the highway beyond it. I listened. Annie's sounds were an orchestra of old hinges and wooden spoons. All these things I knew by heart since I was a kid: her feet on the path from the kitchen door to the shed and the wooden gate to the chicken coop that knocked against its posts rhythmically, the little stretch of wire hanging down from the clothesline holding a basket of clothespins that creaked when it swayed. But I listened for everything else, convinced I would hear you at twenty, maybe twenty-five miles down the road. My body so attuned to the slightest movement of your muscles.

In the madness of those last hours with you, I had bandaged your hands, held the full weight of your head in my lap while you cried, walked you to the bed and lay there with you until you were calm. You said nothing when I left the room and neither did I. I was backing out of the driveway before you were there. Fists at the window and a knee to the door. Running in your socks down the dark street. My whole body shuddering so hard I could barely make the turn. Right, then left, then the highway.

It replayed it in my mind like a flickering movie reel projected on Annie's kitchen wall. Splinters of glass in your knuckles. I sat perfectly still and watched until the morning light seeped onto the kitchen wall and washed the scene away. I must have looked like an empty body. Dug out, scraped clean.

Annie did not ask me any questions. She stopped her puttering and stood for a minute next to the table a few times, waiting to see if I'd talk. But when I didn't, she went back to her work. The phone did not ring and no cars passed by or turned in.

Finally, I said: "Annie, I guess I don't know what I'm doing."

She plunged her hands into the sink full of hot water she was standing over and brought out a large aluminum pot lid. She turned toward me and smiled. "No?"

"No."

"I think you do, babe," she said, lifting the lid into the sunlight to examine it before putting it down on the counter and coming over to me. "But it's okay if you don't feel like you do. To be expected."

She lifted my chin with her warm, damp hand and turned my face side to side. I felt like the dented old lid, awaiting her appraisal. She dropped my chin abruptly and walked to the screen door that led out to the back garden. "You need a bath and a long sleep. I have weeds to pull."

Twice I lay in the deep clawfoot tub and watched the water crawl up my limbs, overflow my hips, drown my breasts, inch up my neck. Twice I watched it drain away in a lopsided swirl at the metal drain. I took no pleasure in it. I could not feel my body. I dragged a towel over my back and wanted it to draw blood. I searched for bruises. Not one.

I retreated to the windowsill daybed in the small living room downstairs and slept on and off through the afternoon. Annie laid out more bread and a mug of hot lemon water but I only stared at it from the bed and didn't go to eat. A few hours later she took the neglected bread out to the chickens.

Later, she dragged an armchair up close to me and propped her feet next to mine on the windowsill.

"Call your mother?" Annie asked, breaking the hours of quiet.

"No."

"Anyone else?"

"No."

Annie half-nodded. She bent her head then into a book, running her finger down the page as she read through a set of glasses propped midway down her nose. One of the arms was wrapped in electrical tape.

"Henry's still here," I said after a minute. I nodded toward the back shed when Annie looked up at me surprised. "Your goat."

"Henry's long gone, Sweetpea. That one I call Herby."

"Oh. He was deaf, right?"

"And blind," Annie said.

"Right. Remember when we were kids you caught us throwing rocks at him to get his attention, you know, get him riled up. He was throwing himself at the fence and we just sat there giggling."

"I remember," Annie said, flipping a page.

“You made us write the word CRUEL on scraps of paper and carry it in our pockets all day.”

“Yeah?” A little smile snuck across her lips, but she didn’t look up from the page. “Well Henry was as good a goat as any.”

The quietness resumed between us then. I passed the rest of the evening calculating the number of seconds I would need to stare at the phone to earn the call from you. The one where you asked where I was and, carefully, if you could come pick me up. Like every other time. But the sun sank and the late summer stars came out and Annie closed the windows to keep the day’s heat in and then locked the front and back doors because I asked her to. Then I climbed into bed next to her with all my clothes on and she didn’t say a word or ask me to take my sneakers off and the phone did not ring.

In the morning, there was a note on the kitchen table: “Up the hill.” I yanked at the deadbolt, which I knew Annie had locked behind herself for me because it caught and made a grinding noise when I finally turned it, like it hadn’t been engaged for years. The grass was white with the remains of a night frost and my feet left wet tracks as I tore up the path. The fear of being alone in the house with the mute telephone was greater now than the terror of being outside.

My body knew the way through the woods even after the grassy path faded under a million fallen birch leaves and it remembered which way to turn at the boulder, which was left behind by a glacier who-knows-when or it “just liked this place” as Annie used to tell us. I’d run up this hill a hundred times as a kid, and down it a hundred times more with buckets of wild berries scuffing against my calves and the moist earth staining my bare feet red and black. Later, I’d skip school to drive the four hours north in a boy’s car, sneak up there to waste the light with him, then drive back home in the dark to face the music. The last time I climbed this hill was the day they buried my father. I slowed down near the top, recalling suddenly that he would be there.

Annie was seated on a rock, her back to the spot where the path spit me out into a wide clearing that was flat to the ridge. She held a thermos mug out to her side without turning. I stood next to her, sipping between catching my breath from the uphill climb. We were looking down at the flat stone and I wanted Annie to say something. To tell me again the story of when he first showed up at the farm with a truckload of other scrawny, hungry kids from Chicago trying to outrun their draft cards. How he built the shed and mended fences for a few weeks before trying for Canada. How he came back when he couldn’t get through and again after they sent him home from Vietnam with a crushed foot. He was broken and healed in this place more than once, long before I was even a dream or a wish or an accident, which I knew I was. My brother was meant to be. But me, I came in like a

comet, Annie said. She was there the day I was born, and my mother handed me off to her so she could rest. My father was long-hauling then, half a continent away.

“Your father and I, we chose each other as family,” Annie started, and I was grateful she did. “With you I had no choice.” She laughed a large laugh that turned into a cough and took a gulp of tea straight from the thermos. I smiled a little and sat down across from her, my father’s grave between us now. She went on: “No ice to break between us. We were just the kind of people who understood each other from the start. I could have been his mother; he could have been my son. We were friends instead.”

“I wish I knew him like that.”

“You do. He knew you real well too. And he was never worried about you.”

I scoffed and tossed a scrap of branch that I’d been fidgeting with at the stone. It bounced off the corner of one of the engraved letters and landed in the damp grass at Annie’s feet. She picked it up and began peeling the bark off with her blunt fingernail.

“He told me. He said it: I’m not worried about her,” she said.

“Maybe he should have been.”

“What, about that?” Annie motioned toward the blank patch of sky at the edge of the ridge, as though you might be standing there. As though you and our whole life together – the car with the fresh dent in the door; the townhouse with the busted drywall; the doctors you refused to see again; the legal aid worker and the counselor I’d been visiting in secret on days you worked out of town; the ache lodged in my left hip from the last time; the ziplock bags I’d retrieved from your lunch cooler and washed out, lined up, and meticulously dried with a paper towel because it was the only thing I could make clean, really clean; the quiet things you said sometimes and the way your pinky finger curved in at the end and made your left hand look fragile – as though all this was already done and gone and over.

“The thing is, you won’t know how to be free,” Annie said. “But you’ll have to learn, babe. You’ll go out there and make a person of yourself again. It’s not easy to be free. You have to eat and keep your head up and talk. Say your own name if you can’t say anything else. You’ll just have to do it. Like an exercise. Every day, once, three times. After a while, you’ll learn how again.”

I looked at her for a long time. The plates of grey hair framing her square jaw. Her straight nose and her shocking blue eyes, so blue they were almost glass. The lines cut deep around her mouth and the thin scrape of her lips. The frankness of her skin, always unadorned except by sunspots and the rouge of outdoor work. Her frame was smaller than I remembered it, smaller than her buttoned shirt and canvas work jacket suggested. And I realized then that I knew nothing about her. Despite the countless hours I’d spent at her side since I was a child, I did not know who she had loved when she was young like me. I did not know if she had wrapped up somebody’s hands and cried into them or if, instead, she’d known kindness so good it nearly killed her to lose. I did not know how she learned to make bread or cut mitered angles or run wire fencing or teach children not to be CRUEL. I was not sure that the story about my father stumbling upon this place was true. My father who

she mourned like a son. I just knew that her eyes were wells that collected light and dark, that found lost buttons and memorized recipes, that held conversations without speaking, that took you in pieces and sent you out nearly whole. Hers were eyes that simply knew things.

“Free,” I said slowly. “I don’t know.” I made myself small, wrapping my arms around my ribcage where every muscle was still tight and tired.

“Well,” she said, rising from the rock and walking out to the edge of the ridge that peered from the clearing down over the hill-path to the house and fields below. She scanned the horizon. “We’re more or less in the middle here,” she said, “so I guess you have two choices.” She motioned toward the house and the highway that cut behind it and said, “East,” then turned toward me and the hardwoods that spread out for miles against the sky, “or west.”

August, *Rachel Friars*

Through the warped glass
of the window, the sky is
an artery. Dad called our home a war-house,
built in turmoil.
We had a war here, too.

My book is parted upside-down on my thigh.
I split the skins of frozen
blueberries and remember plucking open
your membrane to find flesh, too.
My nails are black to the quick.
Stories about women
who love one another have only recently
begun to feel tolerable.

The night you left,
I smoked a cigarette
in the garage because I knew
you wouldn't like it and it hurt
too much to shriek. I shattered a
glass on the living room floor.
It felt like the end of a battle:
Except there was no truce, no armistice,
no victory. Only the barren truth of
no longer being worth the taking.
I'm still picking out the slivers
that catch my feet.

I have learned to live with
the knowledge that I have
a mouth full of sharp teeth.
Crowded and undull, they
cut my lips and yours. But
it was you who begged me to
file them to points.

The sun has started its slow waste,

looking a bit bruised around the eyes.
My fingers smear dark stains
when I close the blind.

Dear Alice, *Hannah Skrynsky*

can't you find me?
behind broken glass, seeping through the cracks
I notice you
my first snowfall was a revolving door
selfishly,
I ask you for more

oh Alice,

summer is shaken and gluttony is mean
without you directing my system
heart liver skull spleen
come with me baby and I'll sacrifice a forgotten sense
I will no longer smell the lives you outlive
I will play nursery rhymes with my xylophone ribs
with tired eyes forced wide
this can't be all that there is
alice alice alice
can't you find me?
behind broken glass, seeping through the cracks
you notice me

Chapter Five

Generations: Childhood and Nostalgia,

Carmel Mikol

In *Anam Cara*, Irish poet and philosopher John O’Donohue writes: “Though the human body is born complete in one moment, the birth of the human heart is an ongoing process. It is being birthed in every experience of your life.” This temporal contradiction – that the heart might keep being newly born while the body continuously ages – is the polar tension holding the pieces in this chapter together. Time pulls us forward, but our hearts, like little children, tug at our sleeves, beckoning us backwards toward what Liam Siemens calls the “edge of believability” and what Kate Oakes describes as the “cathedral” of magical memories.

These coming-of-age vignettes take us back in time, from the moment of conception in Aya Labanieh’s “When I was Conceived,” to first kisses in Oakes’ “Butterfly Garden,” to adolescent mischief-making in Wesley Viebahn’s “Chicken Stealing” and Siemen’s “Pretend Play.” In each of these pieces, then and now are bound so tightly together that the magic of firsts can be felt, and smelled, and tasted, and remembered by the reader with that perfect mixture of nostalgic sorrow and newborn hope that: “ – maybe something would want to be / born” (Labanieh).

When I Was Conceived, *Aya Labanieh*

Modeled after Michael Ryan's poem with the same title.

It was 1995, and it was December.
White jasmines bloomed in Damascus
across the sea. The Soviet Union
was freshly dissolved, and the bananas
on the countertop
were how my father celebrated,
peeling each morning the bright yellow color
of fear and dropping it into a silver tube.
Maybe he spoke to his God that evening.
Maybe he saw a twinkle in his wife's eye,
a shrug of shoulders that said "Let us try,"
try a recipe that always went
sour. But maybe if the Umm Kulthum was just right,
and the Turkish coffee brought a whiff of home
to those suburbs glutted
with white neighbors and long commutes—
maybe something would want to be
born. The bedroom doors were shut even though
there was no one to witness the nightgown slide down
and two people blush like it was their first.

Pretend Play, *Liam Siemens*

When I was nine we went to the babysitter's and there was a kind of magic to it. My friend Jesse and I came to expect the four cookies we were given, the videogames upstairs, and even though the babysitter's son was a teenager who made us stick cigarettes in our noses and slap each other on the cheek, there was something charged about that, too. Afterwards my friend and I would run down the broken wooden stairs through the carrot garden to a large park to catch frogs, where there were giant trees everywhere and we felt huge foreign figures far away between them. Sometimes we spotted real wolves and foxes in the woods, and sometimes we found the spots where the babysitter's son dug holes to drink beer undetected, but by then we could pretend-play anywhere. Once I pretended to be possessed. I told my friend that I would never be free unless he beat me in a game of hockey with our hands, but even when he won, I kept on pretending, I kept on pretending right at the edge of believability because there was power there. On the very last day my friend and I drank our first energy drinks, something we had been planning to do for a very long time, and it was white and sharp on our tongues. We took turns sipping the smallest amount of the prickly drink, passing it back and forth, and there was magic to that, too, passing it back and forth in our tiny hands, the whole night basement-dark, staring at each other's growing pupils, and now, when I start to feel myself slide into an unfamiliar state where there's some kind of power, it's this that I think about first.

The Butterfly Garden, *Kate Oakes*

Your first kiss was in the butterfly garden, on the grass down past the playground. It's wedged in your memory like a gate, making a before and an after on the path of your life. It must have been summer. The seasons blurred together when you were small, like four seasons in a day, and sometimes it felt like there were. Still, it must have been summer because the grass was dry and the air wasn't cold.

It is a well-trodden path to the butterfly garden from the tarmac playground, both in the grass and in your head. It isn't muddy and the thin faun trail under your feet disappears with each step forward as you imagine it to be a trapeze. Summer days are made for circuses and death-defying feats, perhaps that's why it comes to mind.

Your mind is often full of tangled ideas, connected in webs, made from words you know but don't understand. The words sit knotted, swinging in the wind of your thoughts, words like *parallelogram* and *mortgage*. They get stuck going around like a song, but you can't get them out because you can't sing it through. Sometimes the world feels like you're always sitting at the adults' table instead of the kids' one. The world is big and obscured, but it's also small and safe. You want to explore it, you think, but you're not quite sure what's out there yet.

The trapeze line under your patent shoes is thin and easy to discern, not so confusing, so you follow it, not far from the gaggle of girls behind you. You balance on one foot, then jump around 180 degrees, landing on it once again, and follow the line back towards their bubbling voices. They stand on the edge of the playground, toes lined up along its edge, as if they're about to take the plunge. The grass sweeps down from the black and white regularity of the playground and the laws of physics, of nature, pull you all down onto it.

Kids sway through the grassy green ocean together, moving in groups like schools of fish. You think of the ones in the videotape last week. Your school of girl fish collides with another of boy fish floating across the emerald ocean. They stand and talk to one another. The current pushes you all closer. Just being in the same few metres as him makes your heart beat faster. The back of your neck gets hot and your face feels like its making weird expressions you can't control. Then suddenly, your whole body is an unwieldy machine, one you've never driven before. Your toes turn inwards, pointing in an incidental arrow towards him. The girls and boys at the front of the fish schools are talking. Their voices are lost for a second under the drone of an overhead aeroplane. The plane sounds like summer but you're not sure why. Planes must fly in winter too?

You know that looking at him is like the taste of Ribena, so you lift your hot face up. You brave a glance. He happens to glance at you too. A small anvil is dropped from your throat down to the space between your hips. You can see that there's a faint blush beneath his many freckles.

He's too confident, too defiant, for embarrassment and his eyes stay put. It is just a second, maybe even less, but the scope of one complete emotion is in that look, your whole understanding of love is nestled in it.

Then you go your separate ways. Boys back down the hill, girls back to the tarmac. The high ground is where things are safe, ordered, and supervised. Stepping onto it is that first breath after a deep dive. It's a relief to come up, but it doesn't mean you don't want to go back down again. One boy comes bravely up behind the group, and he passes on a message. You see him look at you. It's carried back to you in hurried whispers, held carefully in their mouths because it's strange and fragile. A meeting has been arranged. "Tony wants to kiss you." The word means nothing and everything.

If it means more of the Ribena feeling, then you'll do it. The other girls watch you for a moment because now you are something novel. It makes you nervous and you look to your feet. The patent of your shoes is so brilliantly shiny, still brand new, that you can see the shape of your body reflected back to you. Another head appears beside you in your right shoe. Then your feet are filled with faces huddled round. It makes you think of those pictures of penguins you've seen where they group together to keep warm, to protect themselves. You feel you might need protecting but you want to take the risk anyway.

Whatever a kiss is, you know it's a secret thing and sacred, so you only take the hand of one friend to go with you. She pulls you along with her like she's done it before. You pretend your heart isn't beating as hard as it is, like the thumping is outside your body not inside your chest. If it's not in you, then you can try to be calm. You and Helen follow the trapeze path again, this time with her balancing along it, once you've shown her how. The key is to look cool while you still can. Her shoes are a dull black, but she wears frilled lace socks with them. The lace socks match her pale curly hair. You look at her more than ahead of you because looking at her is like the huddled penguin feeling.

The butterfly garden is for kisses, it always has been. So that is where you arrange to meet. Once inside, you're hidden from the teachers; a very private place. For some reason, coming into the butterfly garden is the same as stepping into the cathedral down the road, the one you visit for mass. You notice that the sun filtering through the petals and plants is the same light that comes through the stained-glass windows. There are butterflies, like the name promises, and their jittery movements match your shaking hands. The plants grow up and over your head so you're walking through a vegetable cave. The path curves and when you look back you've lost sight of Helen who waits at the entrance, like Saint Peter.

When you reach what might be the middle of the cave you stop. Stepping forwards is too brave but retreating is too cowardly, so you stay put. After what feels like ten minutes you catch sight of a white shirt through the branches. It's moving towards you. Your whole abdomen clenches up tight and your body stays so still you become a floating head, all the heat and anticipation radiating out from your cheeks. You've never wanted to be close to someone like this before. It seems as if you've never been this close to anyone. The miniature world of the butterfly garden is saturated with this wonderful, terrifying feeling,

and the air is surely too heavy for the insects' tiny wings. In those few seconds, you think they must have landed on the bushes around you, planted still on the green leaves. Only after it is over can they fly again.

His face is very close to you before you shut your eyes, the freckles on his nose and cheeks are bigger than you'd ever seen them. You step closer to them. You are a spaceship moving towards a galaxy of stars. Then there is black, not the infinite black of deep space, but more like a mottled painting of sun through leaves and eyelids. Like the blurry one of the pond in pastel colours. Your lips are touching his, but your bodies stay as they are. You are two fish, just pouted lips, out as far as they'll go.

The feeling of the kiss itself is so personal and so blush-worthy it's locked away in a place even you can't find. But you know it was like bright red strawberries, the ones that are still a bit sharp. It's like eating strawberries upside down.

Suddenly it stops. As your lips part and his body moves away, you open your eyes. Already his back is towards to you. He's running and ducking through the branches. You think it must be a compliment, that the kiss was so perfect he can't wait to tell his friends. The butterflies are flying again, seeming to follow him. You turn too and sprint out towards the real world. Your feet are fast and nimble. When you come out of the filtered light and into the sun you are taller than before. Your lips are still wet, but you can't wipe them. The breeze makes them cold and they tingle.

Do you remember it now? Can you feel it?

Chicken Stealing, *Wesley Viebahn*

My dad loved his chickens more than he loved his children. There were twenty chickens and they all got special food, a handmade chicken coop, and lots of attention. My dad would visit them multiple times a day. He even loved Maxi, the white rooster, who was very aggressive and would fly at him and scratch his legs. Maxi was named Maxi because that had been the name of my older sister's most obnoxious boyfriend. My dad said Maxi was an asshole, but we could tell he still loved him.

Our dad adored every chicken equally, but he merely tolerated his family of six women and it made me angry, so during my winter break freshman year of college I kidnapped a chicken and held it for ransom.

My sisters and I didn't love the chickens very much. They smelled putrid and were dirty. We hated being sent out in the morning and in the rain and snow to collect their eggs. We would bring them a bucket of table scraps to peck at while we grabbed the eggs, which were always covered in chicken poop. The chickens' favorite food was meat, especially other chicken meat.

They were very carnivorous chickens. All chickens are. We would argue with each other about whether the chickens only ate chicken meat because they didn't recognize it as their own kind, or if they would eat it no matter what. "What if one of them died, would the others just chew away at his corpse?" we wondered. My dad said the chickens were evil cannibals, but with a smile, like it was something to be proud of.

I suspect my dad liked the chickens because they were useful. They laid eggs and they laid them regularly. They were unspontaneous chickens. They were much more reliable than his own daughters. In my dad's mind chickens equaled food, while daughters equaled noise, fighting, trouble.

In fact, my dad just didn't like to be around us most of the time. He liked to be outside in the garden, planting things, or riding his lawnmower around, or fixing cars and buildings. We lived on a huge property on a hill with a forest surrounding it. My dad loved it. We hated it. The house was large, old, and drafty. We were scared of a serial killer coming to murder us and having to run all the way down the hill to get help. My dad took our rejection and dislike of the place as a deeply personal affront. If we commented on it in a manner he disliked, he would adopt an air of wounded pride, as if we had said something cruel about his looks or his cooking, instead of simply remarking that it would be nice if the Wi-Fi worked in more than one room. To him, we were all simply ignorant, possibly because we were women. My dad was one of those people who will never admit they are wrong, just like the people who believe the Earth is flat despite millions of years of evidence telling them otherwise. The house was beautiful and cultured. We were lazy, spoiled, whiny, and annoying. My mom either went to the gym or stayed in bed because she had seasonal depression and it was cold and rainy for much of the year. She was "moody."

When we suggested that maybe our mother would be happier living somewhere else, my dad would say, “Your mother would be moody everywhere, it’s just how she is,” despite evidence to the contrary. She was never moody when we went to visit her parents who lived in sunny California.

Not only was my dad stubborn, he was also a misanthrope. He hated the government, he hated my mom’s family, he hated “low-class” people, he hated “stupid” people, he hated people who talked too much, he hated everyone who was not German like himself (but especially Americans), he hated overweight people, he hated my older sister’s boyfriends. For some naïve reason, I expected him to like my boyfriend just fine: surely the problem was simply that my sister had terrible taste in men. My boyfriend and I had been long distance for a few months now. Before he flew out to see me and meet my parents for the first time, I told him exactly what to do: say little, don’t look at your phone, don’t get on his nerves. My boyfriend did all this and even helped carry a few heavy crates of beer inside – my dad drank a beer or two every night before he went to bed. Still, my dad ignored him, which made me sad because my boyfriend’s dad had recently died and I thought maybe my dad could do some “man” activities with him, like chopping wood or something. I had no idea what men did together to bond – maybe playing some kind of sport? But my dad went out and chopped wood alone and my boyfriend bonded with my sisters by playing board games for six hours.

My boyfriend cried later in my room saying, “Your dad hates me!” He refused to come to bed, insisting that he would sleep on the floor “like a rat.” He was desperate for male approval because his own dad had done nothing but yell and beat him. I told him the truth: “Daddy just hates everyone.” But I stayed awake that night, listening to my dad’s snores, which permeated the entire house. The fact that he had not managed to be even somewhat civil to the only boy I ever brought home showed, to me, a profound disinterest in the personal wellbeing of his own daughter.

After a few nights, my boyfriend flew back home. My dad drove us to the airport, but insisted on speaking German the entire ride so that my boyfriend couldn’t understand him. When I got home, I asked my mom for advice. She said, “that’s just how he is,” which depressed me. Was growing up all about accepting that people sucked and would never change?

The day after my boyfriend left, I was sent out to feed the chickens. Feeding them was a smelly and somewhat disgusting process. I had to put on mud-caked rain boots and an old coat of my mom’s that could get dirty. Then I had to tromp out across the field that constituted our front yard and into the corner with the hedge behind which the chickens lurked. The chickens’ coop had all sorts of little doors and rooms and feeding contraptions. My dad had forced an unlucky sister into helping him build it by hand. I dumped the chicken bucket, full of bits and pieces of vegetables and leftovers, into the mud. The chickens rushed at it. I liked that we gave them our food scraps because it was very environmentally friendly, but it meant that the entire area reeked of rotten food. While they were distracted, I opened

the boxes where they usually laid their eggs. There was chicken poop everywhere. While I was gingerly snatching up the eggs, a chicken wandered out of the mass and eyed me evilly. As I reached in to take the last egg, it scrambled over and bit my hand. I shrieked and dropped the egg, which cracked. The chicken looked satisfied. I reached to pick up the egg. The chicken lunged. I gave up and left it there.

Of course, my dad noticed this transgression and later at the dinner table he said, "Today when I went out to the chickens, I noticed there was an egg left lying in the dirt." My sisters ratted me out, so I was forced to endure a sermon about food waste and how the chickens live to lay eggs and they're providing us with food and what have I ever done for this family that was remotely as useful?

The ridiculousness of this, coupled with lingering indignation on my boyfriend's behalf, along with the fact that the heating had stopped working in the house and my father's solution had been to "put on some socks, no wonder you're cold," led me to sneak out the next night with a wooden crate that had previously contained ten bottles of expensive wine. My parents drank lots of wine, but only particular and expensive wine, even though I didn't think you could taste the difference.

We had a wine cellar that was always locked because I had stolen from it throughout high school. The crate was kind of heavy, so I had to lug it across the lawn very conspicuously. My dad was down in his basement workshop fixing a doorknob and didn't notice. The chickens were roosting in their coop, sound asleep. I picked up the nearest one. It squawked and scratched at me, waking up all the other chickens who began to cluck and move around. I stuffed the chicken unceremoniously into the crate and took off into the trees, the chicken making a horrible fuss. When I turned on my phone flashlight to discover who I had kidnapped, the evil-eye chicken glared up into the light at me. I rolled my eyes at it. At least this way I wouldn't feel as bad about leaving it in a crate for a day or two. I put in a bowl of water and a cup of grain and left it there, hidden behind a tree. No one would find it, I hoped. And if a fox ate it that wasn't my problem. But I duct-taped the crate shut as a precaution.

"There is a chicken missing," my dad said mournfully the next morning. "I wonder if a weasel or fox has found a secret entrance." He was fastidious about blocking off any entrances into the chicken pen and, despite not owning a gun, talked often about how he wanted to shoot any chicken-eating animals who so much as toed his property line.

"Did you find a body?" one of my sisters asked and my dad shook his head a sad "no." He looked so dejected at the loss of one of his beloveds that I almost felt bad for him and thought maybe I should just return it. But by then another sister had gotten the mail, which contained the ransom note.

I had tried to do the thing where you cut out letters from magazines and glue them next to one another to form a sentence, but that had been too time consuming, so I just wrote the note with my left hand instead. It said: "If you want to see your chicken again, fix the heating and be nicer to your daughters and wife. Otherwise, the chicken dies."

My dad read this in disbelief. “Who the hell wrote this crap?” he exclaimed. He had a strong German accent which made statements like this sound both harsh and a little comical. We all vehemently denied it. He went upstairs to talk to our mother who told him to stop being ridiculous and leave her alone.

My dad yelled at us a bit while we all played Boggle and we secretly laughed behind our hands. I hadn’t told my sisters about my act of thievery, but they didn’t seem to care so much. It was all quite funny, actually. The nice thing about having four sisters was that there was no easy culprit to blame. My dad couldn’t very well punish all of us. There were too many and it was overwhelming.

But things did not end up going the way I planned. Instead of being nicer to us, he ignored us the entire day, refusing to come to dinner. He did not even wash the dishes, which had always been his favorite chore – my mom said it helped him feel in control of things. When we tried to talk to him, he looked at us tragically and said, “Bring back the chicken.” He did not fix the heating. Now we were both freezing cold and feeling sorry for him.

I was going to give it at least another day, but when I got home from a party that night, I found him sitting alone at the kitchen table, half-drunk beer in hand, staring at nothing. He had the newspaper spread out in front of him, but was not reading it, and he did not greet me by telling me to go study, which was highly unusual. He looked terribly old.

My guilty conscience prevented me from falling asleep and I finally snuck out at the crack of dawn to return the chicken. I found it hunched bitterly in one corner of the crate. The cup of grain was untouched – presumably it was on hunger strike. When I dumped the chicken back into the coop, all the other chickens began clucking furiously at me, admonishing me for the theft of their friend. I had a sinking feeling they would not forgive me for this transgression anytime soon.

My father said nothing but was in a better mood the following day, whistling and singing in the shower. He never asked which one of us had kidnapped it. Presumably he had suspected all of us; he seemed to consider us a single unit – “girls” – instead of five individual human beings.

My chicken-napping had no long-term effects on my father’s behavior. He was no nicer to any of our boyfriends, nor did he spend any more time with us or with our mother. He did fix the heating eventually though, because my youngest sister’s feet had turned purple.

Chapter Six

Atmospheres: The Natural and the Whimsical,

Jenny Sullivan

In this chapter, all the poems are powerfully steeped in atmosphere; their connection to the natural world meditates on what it means to be human, to love and to live with and for one another. Poetry resonates and stays with us, not for some easily distilled and singular meaning, but for its images and the ways in which it gathers up small moments and gleans beauty from the ordinariness of life, its joys and its sufferings.

“Edelweiss” by Nicholas A. Krizanic brings forth such beauty in suffering: the ephemerality of life and of human relationship is seen in the fragility of a fading flower. As with the other poems in this chapter, it shows how the natural world is inextricably entwined with the human. The pieces presented here also glory in the sheer beauty of language, as in Aya Labanieh’s “Cassiopeia,” where the human domain is reflected in the sky and the transcendent beyond; and Sarah Judy’s “Address to the Open Field...”, where the natural world becomes a mirror for human struggles. These poems seek new and innovative ways of framing human experience and forging these revelatory connections, as in “Ode Occasioned by Contracting Flesh-Eating Bacteria” by Matthew Rooney.

In Jen Herrmann’s “The Blue Jay,” we see yet again the power of a single small moment, the significance of a seemingly insignificant act of grace. Here, “kindness is the hope of life,” through a fleeting yet beautiful scene of “small mercy.” All of these poems grapple with darkness and light in order to offer, through fragments, a flicker of hope and the promise of what-is-not-yet.

The Blue Jay, *Jen Herrmann*

In the rain, I was surprised
by birdseed, left beneath the birches
for a bedraggled baby blue jay
that my father saw there yesterday.
Too young to fly, too old to die
without some struggle, he stirred
far below the nest he'd known. My father
has always berated blue jays—
cruel birds, these nest-thieving neighbors.

Yet here,
his kindness is the hope of life:
as precious in a man, a woman,
a lily, a sparrow.
A blue jay,
fallen from a stolen nest
to find, waiting for him,
my father's small mercy in the rain.

Edelweiss, *Nicholas A. Krizanic*

Erika, do you remember that evening in Metz
When the sky without cloud or blemish was clear
We sat long at the café drinking tea and beer
Heedless of the time or how late the hour?

What fear or courage stirred in me I could not guess
When I left you for the fabled fields of France
And to the battles ahead, my life left to chance.

Before I left you I took with me a flower
Edelweiss, now wilting on my breast.

Address to the Open Field Between Town and the Reservation, Which I View From the Window of my Father's 1989 Mazda Mini- Van, Dark Blue, *Sara Judy*

The asphalt suddenly spirals up and up,
the whitlow grass sings buzzing, buzzing

ominous and bent all over like hair pressed
too hard into a sleeping pillow. Suddenly

mouth full with oil and gold, vision shimmering
with canola, yellow light, like mustard, like

all the light of August rising to suffocate breath
in sheaf after sheaf. Neck goes prickling.

Pussywillows dive dying into ditches, the sky hums.
Invisible clouds disintegrate and come undone.

Thatch chokes out the living grass, since,
after all, grass is just another green thing

that can be cut down, and in the cutting
cinch itself up solid, grown more prone to decay.

Cassiopeia, *Aya Labanieh*

I reached my arm into the wolf
while we bobbed in neon waters.
I was trying to be a Viking god and you
were always trying to drown.

You pointed out to me a woman
chained above our heads: "There's
Cassiopeia, shaped like a 'W.'" Having
read no books that's all
you knew of her torment
saw only the beauty
of glass-blown shoulders luminous
did not see

like the runaway slaves once saw
an affection for the human face
the dignity of pleasure borne of
self-sight. Me and you, we made love
under the tight curls of her nape, you seeing
neither me nor yourself in your
drunkenness and me seeing
my wrists sewn with a star-thread
moving my mouth on yours, trying to meet
other women in those black ridges
where all your swallows are housed, trying
to commiserate and keep from shouting

another man's name the second
the smoky-eyed dark wanes yellow

into the hue of fear and inner organs, stuffed hot
like those lamb intestines my mother used to
cook, like boiled snakes suffocated
with rice and more minced lamb from
other lamb parts. You, that other man: I dream
I am being fed my own meat when you measure for me
these spoons, and I writhe in a pungent

broth of sweat and wish I knew more
women, wish I could be saved by the white
thinness of my mother's weary arms
cleaning intestines and snakes and mirrors
and chainmail and snarls and beauty
right out until there is just the husk
made safe for the teeth of us
come dinnertime.

Ode Occasioned by Contracting Flesh-Eating Bacteria, *Matthew Rooney*

Sucklesweet, stray bacterium
Nestled softly in my perineum—
Do not wait till the end of life
To decorate my flesh so ripe
With fresh rose and fetid ochre,
Garish green and gangrenous odour,
And all the Neapolitan multicolour
Of necrotizing fasciitis.

Allow no gentamicin nor methicillin
To slow your gentle ship of millions—
From core to neck row fastidiously
Through my bloodstream, the body's sea
With its wayward red and white whales
On the tides of my heart, Ahab, sail
Through oceans black with thrombosis
You nascent agent of necrosis.

They'll say our bond is premature,
Un auxiliare coup de coeur,
And claim a bacterial parasite
Is no path to a rainbowed paradise—
I tell you this, my perineal love:
You wear me like a perennial glove
And make me, till I turn blue and bloat,
Your ever colourful, loving host.

Chapter Seven

Transgressions: Protesting Ideologies,

Meghan Burry

In this chapter, we are presented with writing that challenges the heteronormative, patriarchal, and colonial ideologies that are so deeply embedded within our society. These works creatively and passionately respond to our political climate in ways that challenge these systems of oppression. This year of chaos and reflection has put a spotlight on the oppressive ideologies that govern our bodies and our voices.

Sarah Judy's "Three Ways Snakes Move Through the Grass: Concertina, Serpentine, Side-Wind" mixes images of church and state—or rather, snake. In this poem, Judy brilliantly juxtaposes violence and childhood innocence; she offers a breathtakingly piercing account of questioning and challenging religious institutions and how they affect us.

In "Womanhoods," Aya Labenieh explores the ways in which we are often imprisoned by oppressive systems; this poem shows us what it's like "to be conceived/ behind bars" and to "see vertical lines through/ heavy panther-lids." Labenieh speaks to the resilience of women and the intersectionality of what it means to be a woman. The term "womanhood" is unnaturally singular, as being a woman is not comprised of one thing. This title rightfully pluralizes this term to reflect the fluidity of what it means to be a woman.

Lastly, Rachel M. Friars's Neo-Victorian short story "Making Beds with Water" challenges ideologies of heterosexuality and presents us with a captivating, sensual, and passionate story about two women forbiddingly in love. Each of the pieces in this chapter demonstrate the vulnerability and the hard work it takes to resist and protest ideologies that are ingrained in us. It takes strength to resist and it takes even more strength to write about it.

Three Ways Snakes Move Through the Grass: Concertina, Serpentine, Side-Wind, *Sara Judy*

Imagine the arrival of the bell:
straw packed clapper silent, waiting
to be hung and peaked, sway, gleaming.

What needs the church to be so
adorned? Garter snakes more brown

than green already rush the foundation,
owls with false jeweled eyes perch
on the gable, bare necked swallows nest,

dun and amber bears root through, foxes
in muddy coats, and mottled grouse, already

clamor to get in.

When I was a girl
everything teemed: unseen ticks in the grass,
ants by the lot's edge. I would prepare

dishes of soap and sugar, then watch them drown.
I would sit in the front pew, pressing

until the pressure grew red along my thighs,
and not listen. Not ever really listen.
From the start, we never rang the bell
but it hung above our heads.

Womanhoods, *Aya Labanieh*

To Ranim, my cousin

Serve us our eyes; we have eaten
pomegranate seeds with the pink cleaves
of our womanhoods. We are sick to the center
with meat-eating worms, we are
undone in a sacrificial puddle—

Two lips still mouthing words, two lips
daring to be sewn shut, to then give birth
to captive men and women, living beings
who know like us how it feels to be conceived
behind bars; to see vertical lines through
heavy panther-lids, to carry pelts like trawl-nets
on bone-belts, to absorb ancient, ugly sounds:

like those that bounced from cave-wall to
cave-wall, that boasted noisily of having
human arms on the open spit, turning
and turning in the crackling fire.

Making Beds with Water, *Rachel M. Friars*

Saint John, New Brunswick
20 June 1877

The morning air is best. The docks have only just opened, and the discarded contents of last night's chamber pots have yet to ferment in the sun. I am much less suffocated at this hour; the air that drags at my lungs in the evening is remade.

Maids are emerging out of servant entrances up and down the block with their arms full of linens and empty water buckets. Some of them spare me a nod as I make my way down Princess Street. I keep my eyes on the blue spill of the ocean rising like a miraculous inhale at the edge of the city, winking above the rooftops.

My walks to the waterfront are a ritual. Men, already shiny with sweat, unload a shipment of hay on the dock and nod as I pass. Though they've never spoken to me, it's comforting to hear their shouts to one another, their shapeless voices scratchy with cigarettes and sleep.

The long channel of Water Street gives way to Market Slip and to the wooden railing that separates me from the ocean. The sea is powerful, though the tide is out. The stone walls of the port are scored with cool algae. We stand there, together, the ocean and I, each breathing in our own way. I don't wait. I step out of my shoes. Between one exhale and the next I'm up and over the railing before the men can shout, and I'm gone. Falling, falling, the ocean steals the air in my lungs for its own—it can breathe for us both now. I am embryonic, reversing my creation, undoing myself. When I hit the water I am bored through, saltwater sifting through my skin until I simply dissolve and become particles.

Blinking, I curl my toes in my boots and step away from the railing, looking about me. Although I won't lose myself in it, the ocean and I are tethered. A long, pulsing, umbilical tie that keeps me alive and accountable.

I am sweating in my dress—green, for summer—as I make my way back up the hill. Turning onto Germain Street, I pass the cathedral and let myself into the shop. Charlie runs the second-best photography studio in the whole of the province—the whole of the eastern coast, he'll say, if you get him drunk enough—and today we'll be busy. A wedding, two engagements, and four christenings, all before three o'clock. Now, though, the studio is empty, the camera on its stand waits at the back facing the latest background we've erected in the middle of the room; flowers and vines that would never survive our winters curl in two dimensions towards the ceiling. I lock the door behind me and set my gloves on the sideboard, picking up the morning post I've stepped on. At the back of the studio sits the narrow door that leads upstairs. I duck through, my boots scuffing on the wood.

My bedroom door stands ajar, just as I've left it, the corner of the bed and the washbasin leaning domestically around the frame. Next to my room, Diana and Charlie's

door—open when I left—is firmly shut. I snap the stove on and haul out the skillet, making a racket while frying up the eggs and laying the table for breakfast, humming to myself and biting my tongue behind my lips. When their door flies open, some of the tension leaks out of my shoulders.

“Jesus, Ida, perhaps you might decide to rearrange the furniture to make a bit more noise?” My brother stands in the doorway tying his dressing gown, lifting a hand to smooth his close-cropped red hair. Over his shoulder, Diana sits on the bed pulling on a slipper. I turn back to the near-burning eggs.

“It’s late, and we have work to do,” I say, scraping the eggs onto three plates. Charlie takes his cue to sit down at the head of the table.

“Don’t I know it. I’ve overbooked myself, Ida. There’s a mother who insists that her daughter’s wedding photos be taken in their front room on Wentworth street, even after I told her twice that the light just won’t do.” He digs into his eggs as Diana moves from the room behind him, settling herself at his right hand.

“Good morning, Ida,” she says.

“Good morning, Diana,” I reply, sitting opposite her. We sit like that, the three of us, just as we have every morning for the last three years. Charlie, eating with relish, Diana and I picking at our food cautiously, watching one another across the table. Even now, having just woken up, there’s a looseness to her I’ve never been able to match. It’s as though she’s forgotten about her body entirely, about its position in relation to everything around her. One would almost think she was disinterested, if not for her eyes. Her gaze seemed to peel back your skin and see the way you really worked inside—today, I think she’s sawing open my ribcage.

Charlie cleans his plate and stands up from the table, speaking to neither of us as he walks back into the bedroom. Diana and I are left alone with only the sound of the wall clock ticking between us.

The dishes are a game of cat’s cradle. We weave past one another, stepping around each other’s gaze until we’re standing side-by-side at the sink. I wash—always—and she dries.

“Charles says you’re busy in the studio today.” Her voice startles me, and I scrape the skillet harder. It’s not a question, but an invitation, nonetheless.

“Only until about noon, and then Charlie’s off to St. John’s Church for a wedding.”

“June’s always so busy for weddings. It’s absolutely not the best month to get married, much too wet from the spring rain.” Diana sets the last plate atop the others and leans her hip against the counter. She married my brother in August.

“Any month is just as well, I suppose.” I watch my watery eyelids waver in my reflection. Then, as if I’d willed them there, Diana’s white hands swim into my vision and sink into the hot water beside my own. My fingers fall away from the skillet, floating, pulsing, alone until she catches them in her slender grip, folding her knuckles against the

ridges of my own and pressing her palms into the backs of my hands. I stare, unblinking, our four wrists blurring into two, feeling her eyes on my face.

“I thought I might go to the butcher this morning. We could have roast beef for dinner, maybe? The one you brought home last week was so tender.” Her breath on my cheek is cool rain in the deepest cut. I don’t speak. I am laid open, smothered as she drowns my hands. She shuffles forward, the length of her body pressed against my side.

“Ida? What do you think?” she asks. My eyes slip closed. I nod—jerky, lurching.

“Good.” Her hands slip out of the water and she scatters droplets on the floor as she wipes them clean. Charlie winds around the corner in his best suit, recounting the day’s appointments absentmindedly.

“Oh, Ida, can you make sure to pick up fresh flowers for the studio arrangement this morning? The Market should have just gotten some in. Yellow will look best in the photos—they’ll have more dimension.” He walks to the sink to kiss Diana, squeezing her hip. I shift away, back to the skillet.

He’s still talking when he disappears down the stairs to open the studio. Diana goes into her room to dress. I waver in the air between them.

Adjusting clients’ arms, tipping chins upwards, fanning skirts, handing Charlie this or that piece is mindless work that holds my attention when everything else has that bright, blinding quality of over-exposure. But, at half past twelve, when Charlie shoulders his camera and slips out the door, I’m left alone in the cool shade of the shop.

I lock the studio and move to sit on the small sofa, my fingers circling at my temples. Moving my fingers to run over the ridge of the seat, where the upholstery gives way to mahogany, I squeeze my eyes shut and spring them open again. I expect the room to have shrunk in the absence of my gaze. Instead, the late afternoon sun continues to pull itself across the floor.

“How long should we expect him to be gone?” Diana hovers in at the foot of the stairs. I look away from her.

“Maybe two hours—you know what he always says.” I hear her walk across the room to stand before me. My breath hitches.

“Yes, ‘it always depends on the bride, Di.’ As if the husbands can’t be just as vain.” She brushes a bit of hair behind my ear. My nerves crawl towards her. I can’t speak. I hear her swallow. “Why won’t you look at me?” she asks. Her slender fingers begin to gather her skirt into her fist, raising the fabric. She kneels on the edge of the couch, hovering over me. I don’t meet her eyes, but tip my head forward, resting against her chest.

“It hurts,” I whisper.

“It all hurts.” She begins to undo my braid.

“It’s not right. It’s too hard.”

“Which part?”

I spread my hands in front of me. “Both. This. Being here. But then later, too, watching you with him.” My words are a wound we can’t help but reopen.

“I’d rather be the one watching.” I know her words before she says them. I could play her part without stuttering. “What else can we do?” Her fingers are on my neck, tipping my head back.

“Nothing.” My voice breaks.

Her mouth flutters against mine, her fingers searching my hair, reaching into the whorls of my brain and pressing, pressing against every dark corner. My hands are frantic—I’ve never felt anything but urgent with her, not since the first time. We stand on the shore of one another, hanging on the edges of resolve and morality. Her skirt is around her waist and I feel like I’m running toward the ocean staring straight ahead and I know I’ll drown eventually and I’m telling myself I should stop because I always, *always* stop but this time I wonder what it would be like if I just didn’t.

She dismantles me like a rose she’s pulled the petals off of and when my dress finally gathers at the foot of the couch, I hear the sea in her gasps and feel it pooling between her legs. And all the while, while my pulse hammers under my tongue and gooseflesh follows the path of her fingers my mind is pounding: my brother’s wife.

My head rests on her chest as her heartbeat slows, something shuddering deep inside me, as unconscious as the contraction of her heart. She watches me, heavy-lidded, taking long, deep breaths to match my short ones. In the distance, a fire alarm rings out, shrill in the silence of the studio. She kisses me, and her mouth tastes like the wind whipping off the ocean, laughing against my tongue. When the door opens, it splits apart the membrane of our bodies, down the middle of the place where we had been fused together. I feel it in my throat.

He stops in the threshold, swaying slightly. The unlit cigarette he’s holding slips from his hand, bouncing harmlessly on the carpet as the door swings back and hits his shoulder. Everything he’s been carrying falls to the floor. I hear the camera shatter, but I seem to be the only one. I imagine how we must look, tangled together, Diana’s breast pressed against my cheek. We are, the three of us, at the edge of a sinkhole.

She’s faster than my brother and I. She’s up running towards him, telling him it’s nothing, not what he thinks, just an accident, we fell asleep, isn’t this silly, look at the time go.

Her arms outstretched, supplicant, when he hits her. The slap is a gust that I see rather than hear. Diana falls, landing at his feet. She looks less like a woman and more like a wet painting. Charlie is breathing hard, sweat on his face.

The sun is creeping across the floor of the studio when Diana’s eyes finally focus on me. I’ve pulled her up onto the couch and tucked her discarded dress around her as best I can, pulling my own shift over my head as an afterthought. Charlie’s in the corner, paused in his pacing to roll a cigarette with shaking fingers. The middle knuckle on his right hand

leaks blood and when he wipes his running nose he smears his cheek. Over and over again he stains his face. I don't dare point it out.

He stood and stared when I crouched next to Diana, her eye already swelling.

"She needs a doctor," I said without looking up, "she's hit her head." Silence from behind me. When I turn to him, Charlie's still staring at me, his eyes wide and trapped, as if we're the danger.

"Did you hear me?" I said. Diana motionless under my hands made me brave.

He breaths in sharply, like I've startled him. "No. No doctors. Nobody can—there's no one coming in here until I say so. Until I decide—" he ran a hand through his hair. "Until I decide what to do with you." He pointed at me, teeth clenched. Smoothing his moustache, he walked to the far end of the room and lit a cigarette. My eyes brim with tears

Now, Diana blinks heavily out of one eye.

"Ida?" she whispers. I look over at Charlie, but he's facing away from us.

"Hi, Di, hi." My hands flutter around her face I'm not sure where to touch her. A new stillness in the room tells me that Charlie is watching now. I settle for folding my hands in my lap. Diana swallows hard, staring into my eyes. I don't have to recount what's happened.

The loud, low whine of a fire alarm cuts into the room. I jump, but I can't see anything out of the window, only a quiet slice of Canterbury Street behind our building, the road standing empty amid the brick.

"Charlie, love," Diana calls, raising her voice to be heard over the alarm. "Come here. Come sit by me." She holds her right hand out towards him. It shakes. With her left hand she pushes me back, struggling to sit up on her own and to slide away from me. My stomach drops, but I stand and back away towards the corner of the room. Charlie stares at her, wary, cigarette smoldering in his fingers. His eyes dart between Diana and I and then he's striding toward her. My hand covers my mouth instinctively to keep from crying out. He doesn't hit her this time, though, just grips her shoulders hard enough that she winces. She smiles, though, in spite of her eye. She's cooing at him, touching his face, rubbing at the blood collected there. Even now, even when I know she's trying to keep us alive; I can't watch. I look over their heads, out the window towards the piece of the road. It's busier now, not with carts, but with people. Most are running, some are carrying suitcases, and one woman darts past carrying what looks like a large picture frame. My brow wrinkles. The fire alarm blares on.

"What're you doing, Di? Huh? What're you doing?" Charlie's sobbing now, shaking her shoulders. Diana's mouth puckers in that same soothing tone. I can't hear her anymore; the alarm is too loud. I imagine it, though, the denying. She can't deny today, of course, but yesterday, and the day before that, even this morning, they rub away like ash. This, today, was the first time. *We didn't even understand what we were doing. It wasn't like it was with you, Charlie.* My mouth fills with saliva, a precursor to vomit.

The window again. The street is bright with the setting sun. But no, not the sun. Fog rolls in the street, thick and light. But not fog, either. A couple in dark clothing runs past, the woman's skirts gathered in her arms like a baby. The blank alarm cuts off all sounds from the street, but I imagine people are screaming.

"No!" Charlie shouts, shoving Diana back against the couch. She can't hide her flinch. "No," he says again. "It's *her*. She's the one. She's the one who'll burn in hell. She tricked you, and she'll do it again. I won't have her here. I won't have her spread her sin—" he's shouting himself hoarse. Diana's mouth is white and pinched. Charlie paces, his cigarette an ashy stub. The light in the window grows brighter.

"We have to leave." My voice is shriller than I intend, but Diana's head snaps towards me, and Charlie seems to remember my presence. He comes towards me, wiping his nose again as he backs me into the corner.

"Leave? Us? No. You—you have to leave. I will *make you* leave. You'll never—"

"Oh my God, Charlie!" Diana interrupts him. She's not even looking at us. She's staring at my section of Canterbury street, or what's left of it. A wall of flame replaces the road and the people. Black smoke obliterates the sky and I imagine the heat pressing against the window, pushing through the glass. Even Charlie pauses, encountering something larger than himself.

Diana stands, steady on her feet, and we move towards each other. The threat of Charlie fades. I can hardly understand what's happening, how we can be here, with hell pressing in. Another second and Diana's in my arms, we're heading towards the front door, we still have time.

Charlie takes a step towards me, and time jumps forward at twice the pace. He's lurching now, anger and disgust flickering around the room. I scream and clutch Diana, dragging her towards the door, animal panic crawling hand-over-fist up the back of my throat. He's screaming that I'm sick, that he'll throw me into the flames himself. He's grabbing my arms and I lose Diana as he shakes me. He twists me the wrong way. A bone in my arm snaps and I vomit down the front of my shirt. It's sour, warm, amniotic. Charlie snarls and shoves me to the ground, away from Diana. He begins pacing the room, unrecognizable. My ears are ringing. I squint as light fills the room, harsh and red. The heat is cloying

"Get out!" A man's voice descends into a howl. My eyes blur. Diana is on the floor, panting, talking, choking. Charlie screams in my direction. I look away from him, at the door.

In the space of a breath, the heat presses too hard. The window's glass has blown inward with a rush of heat, clawing through the curtains and blasting Charlie. After all his shrieking, he's oddly silent, stumbling backwards as the building behind the studio, always sitting so safely beside ours, creaks and bows as it crumbles apart, eaten away by fire. A beam parts the plaster and reaches towards Charlie like a long, godly finger, slow and graceful until in lands, pulling him under, leaving a black and bloody stain behind. Now, I

am screaming. Embers are gnawing my legs as I crawl to Diana and begin to drag her, one handed, away from the fire and towards the front door. Black smoke sucks the air from my lungs as we stumble out onto the street. I can't see anyone through the smoke. Germain street hasn't begun to burn in earnest yet, but the air is thick and hot. I collapse with Diana in front of our burning home and close my eyes at the foot of Charlie's grave.

When I wake, I'm in the skating rink, miles away. Bleeding, crying, filthy people press against me. Everything smells like smoke. People wail that the city is burning, that hell has risen out of the ground to take us all. Others are saying the hay in Henry Fairweather's storehouse along Market Slip went up like a match. My arm is aching dully, limbs loose from what must be morphine, my throat scorched and closed. I want to ask for Diana, but they keep telling me not to speak. I'm pulling away, craning my neck. My bones are constricted underneath my skin. I am expanding and contracting against the cage of my body. Suddenly, I see her. Across the room in a man's coat, a blooming bruise the colour of a storm over the ocean spreading across her temple, she sits with an elderly woman who wipes the blood from her hair. As if she feels my gaze on her like a balm, she looks up. Our eyes meet. My body dilates. I inhale when her gaze crashes over me, salt bitter on my breath.

About the Authors

Erin Felepchuk (they/them)

Erin Felepchuk is a poet and singer-songwriter who is currently in their second year of the PhD program in Critical Studies in Improvisation at the University of Guelph. Erin currently resides in Guelph, although they grew up in Ottawa where they received a Bachelor of Music and an MA in Music and Culture from Carleton University. Erin worked and performed as a singer-songwriter and released four albums, where they wrote topical songs that dealt with social justice issues such as mental health and addiction, sexual assault, and worker's rights. Erin currently writes poetry about the significance of sound in their experience with post-traumatic stress disorder. Sound, for Erin, represents both trauma and healing and their poems soundlessly articulate the music and noise of trauma.

Rachel M. Friars (she/her)

Rachel is a PhD student in the Department of English Language and Literature at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. Originally from Saint John, New Brunswick, Rachel holds a BA and an MA in English Literature. Her work focuses on historical fiction, nineteenth-century lesbian writing and history, and Victorian life-writing. Her academic work has been published with Palgrave Macmillan and is forthcoming in *The Journal of Neo-Victorian Studies*. She is a reviewer for [The Lesbary](#) and the co-creator of the review site *True Crime Index*. Rachel regularly publishes her own short fiction and poetry. Find her on [Twitter](#).

Brian Gillis (he/him)

Brian Gillis is currently a Presidential Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Toronto. His graduate research, at UC Berkeley English and St. John's College, Oxford, focused on Native American languages and literatures and multicultural American literatures from the early nineteenth century onward. He is an experienced teacher and researcher of literary translation studies, Native North American and Indigenous Literatures, Cherokee (Tsalagi) language studies, and transnational and transindigenous studies, and will be an Assistant Professor of English and Indigenous Studies at Dalhousie University beginning this fall.

Miriam Helmers (she/her)

Miriam Helmers was born and raised in Ontario as the fourth in a big family of 11 children. She holds a BA in English from the University of Toronto and an MA in English Language

from the University of British Columbia. After teaching for two years at a high school in Toronto, she completed a BDiv in Theology at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, Italy, where she earned first place in the university's literature/poetry contest two years in a row. She is currently pursuing a career in academia, doing a PhD at University College London (UK) where she focuses her research on figurative language in Charles Dickens. Her other interests include all things theatrical and pedagogical, the history and structure of the English language, Old English, biblical exegesis, ecclesiastical Latin, and writing poetry.

Jen Herrmann (she/her)

Jen Herrmann is a long-time storyteller and story-liver. She studied writing and film at the University of Oklahoma, and recently graduated from the University of Chicago Law School, where she had the pleasure of sneaking into a few creative writing classes. She grew up in Massachusetts, and after a circuitous route through the Midwest and Ukraine, has landed there again.

Nicholas Anthony Krizanic (he/his)

As of 2020, Nicholas Anthony Krizanic graduated from Queen's University with a Master's degree in English Language & Literature. During his time at Queen's he was given the opportunity to expand his reading and research in Middle-English literature. Currently, his research consists of a philological study of Atonement theology in Middle-English texts, particularly Langland's *Piers Plowman* and the York Corpus Christi drama. Other than his academic interests, Nicholas is an avid reader of European history and literature, especially late nineteenth century English and French poetry. The largest influences on his writings are Pope, Tennyson, Hopkins, Dowson, and Yeats. Nicholas currently lives in Oshawa, Ontario.

Sara Judy (she/her)

Sara Judy is from the Canadian prairies. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Notre Dame, where she studies poetry and religion. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *EcoTheo Review*, *Psaltery & Lyre*, *The Midwest Review*, and elsewhere. She is currently at work on a dissertation which examines prophetic poetry in the post-war period, and a creative manuscript which explores doubt, faith, and the limits of witness. You can find her on Twitter @sarajudym.

Aya Labanieh (she/her)

Aya Labanieh is a Ph.D. candidate in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, NYC. Her research centers on postcolonialism, Middle Eastern literature, conspiracy theories, and the tensions between modernity and religion. When she is not reading novels, lifting weights, or re-applying war-paint, she is probably organizing for a strike at her workplace, or fortifying her claims to the title of Internet meme-lord.

Aylin Malcolm (they/them)

Originally from Tiohtià:ke/Montréal, Aylin Malcolm lives in South Philadelphia, and is completing a Ph.D. in English at the University of Pennsylvania. Their work has appeared in *Plenitude*, *Manuscript Studies*, and *DoubleSpeak*. As a researcher, Aylin focuses on the intersections between medieval literature and the history of ecological science. They spend their free time playing the piano, working at a rare books library, and attempting to grow peppers. Both of their parents are cardiologists, which is quite romantic.

Carmel Mikol (she/her)

Carmel Mikol is a Canadian writer. She was a 2019 SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship recipient and holds a Masters of English Literature from Queen's University. She continues to work in the rocky terrain between scholarly writing and creative content, exploring how embodied ways of knowing can inform literary analysis and knowledge production both in and outside academic contexts.

Kate Oakes (she/her)

Kate Oakes is a Creative Writing PhD student at the Australian National University. Aside from writing short stories, Kate is also working on a novel for her thesis, titled *We Were Creatures*. Set in a tiny English village, it's a story about heritage, community, love, and most of all creatures. Kate is deeply interested in how people perceive the natural world and form relationships with its animals, and this is a central theme of her research and fiction. When not writing or researching Kate is often out walking through the bushland of Canberra with her much loved dog, a Groodle named Dougal.

Matthew Rooney (he/him)

Matthew Rooney is a graduate student completing a Master of Arts in English at Dalhousie University. His current research and creative interests focus on the intersection between modern visual art and postmodern literature, particularly on the ways that the heterogeneous hodge-podge of discourses observed in much postmodern literature reflects and amplifies the concerns of early collage work. Much of his creative work explores the potentiality of particular discourses (and semantic fields) and attempts to understand how a work's form dictates and manipulates these potentialities. He currently lives in St. John's, Newfoundland.

Maggie Sadler (she/her)

Maggie Sadler is a recent graduate from Memorial University of Newfoundland, where she earned her Master's in English literature. Though her academic interests are diverse, her final research project analyzed the significance of gender in maritime adventure fiction. Before embarking for the Canadian Atlantic, she called the North Sea home, earning her undergraduate degree from the University of St Andrews in Scotland. There, Maggie flitted through the trees more often than not, searching for will-o-wisps. For now, she calls her native Michigan home, where she is drafting her first novel-length narrative of windswept coasts, mysterious sea chests, and girls with secrets to tell. She is humbled and grateful to be featured in the tenth volume of *The Lamp* journal.

Shamika Shabnam (she/her)

Shamika is a PhD candidate and researcher at McMaster University in Canada. Her research areas include postcolonial literature and culture, global anglophone studies, and diasporic /diaspora studies. Her dissertation focuses on the 1971 War of Liberation that took place in Bangladesh, and the narratives of gender and nationalism that were articulated during the war period. Shamika has a passion for writing poems, and her poetry is a creative extension of her dissertation chapters. Through her writing, be it scholarly or creative, she hopes to carry out important anti-racist and decolonial work within and for the community.

Liam Siemens (he/him)

Liam Siemens is a student of the MFA Creative Writing Program at the University of Guelph. His writing has appeared in *The Literary Review of Canada*, *VICE*, *Sad Mag*, *The Capilano Review*, and elsewhere. He lives in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where he's at work on a novel about Canada, utopia, and a non/semi-apocalyptic future.

Hannah Skrynsky (she/her)

Hannah Skrynsky is a settler scholar studying in the English Department at Queen's University, which occupies the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples. Hannah grew up on Treaty 1 Territory, where she studied English as an undergraduate at the University of Manitoba. Since completing her Master's in 2017, she continues working on her dissertation from Fredericton, NB, on the lands of the Maliseet and Mi'kmaq peoples. Her work focuses on representations of settler anxiety toward Indigeneity in 20th century Canadian literature and asks how these representations inform narratives of national identity in Canada.

Wesley Viebahn (she/her)

Wesley is an MA student of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York City. She focuses on 20th century American literature and her research interests include generational and second-hand trauma, coming of age, theories of embodiment, body horror, and the grotesque. She also enjoys yoga, ballet, choir, and her cat, Timmy.

Jade Wallace (they/them)

Jade Wallace's poetry and fiction have been published or are forthcoming internationally, including in *Canadian Literature*, *This Magazine*, and *Studies in Social Justice*. Their most recent chapbook is the collaborative *ZZOO*, which is forthcoming from Collusion Books in fall 2020. Jade is a reviews editor for *CAROUSEL*, one half of the collaborative writing partnership MA | DE, and an organizing member of Draft Reading Series. They are currently completing their M.A. in Creative Writing at the University of Windsor, focusing on fictional representations of gender ambiguity. <jadewallace.ca>

About the Editors

Meghan Burry, (co) Editor-in-Chief (she/her)

Meghan Burry is a Newfoundland-born, PEI-raised writer, teacher, and PhD student in the Department of English at Queen's University. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Prince Edward Island in 2017 and her Master of Arts from Queen's in 2018. Her primary research interest is women's writing of the long 19th century, though she is also interested in Indigenous literature and issues of gender and sexuality more broadly.

Jesyka Traynor, Co-Editor-in-Chief (she/her)

Jesyka Traynor is a PhD candidate in English Literature at Queen's University. Jesyka holds a bachelors in English from Western University and a master's degree in English from Queen's University. Her work examines contemporary Californian literature, with a focus on representations of the Californian landscape by Californian authors. Jesyka's secondary research interest focuses on true crime narratives, particularly women's interventions in the genre.

Rachel Fernandes, Editor (she/her)

Rachel Fernandes is a PhD candidate in the English Department at Queen's University. Her research is focused on contemporary North American fiction about the mixed-race experience. When she isn't writing or reading, she is usually in the kitchen, trying out new recipes under the watchful eye of her dog, Abby.

Rachel M. Friars, Editor (she/her)

Rachel is a second-year PhD student in English Literature at Queen's University. After completing her undergraduate degree at the University of New Brunswick Saint John, Rachel moved to Kingston, Ontario to complete her master's degree at Queen's and decided to stay. Academically, she works on neo-Victorian lesbian narratives and nineteenth-century lesbian history. Creatively, Rachel writes short fiction and poetry, often with queer themes and historical settings.

Dani MacDonald, Editor (she/her)

Dani is a master's student in English at Queen's University completing her thesis on parenthetical phrases in A.A. Milne's *A Table Near the Band*. A writer by trade, Dani has worked in communications, publishing, and content creation for a number of not-for-profits and private businesses. When she is not feverishly clacking away at her keyboard, you can find her replaying *Donkey Kong 64* for the umpteenth time or adding to her ever-growing globe collection.

Nevena Martinović, Editor (she/her)

Dr. Nevena Martinović completed her PhD in English at Queen's University in 2020. She studies long eighteenth-century theatre and the representations of aging actresses. In her "spare time" she dabbles in plays, poetry, and puns.

Sabrina Masud, Editor (she/her)

As a playwright, Sabrina is interested in absurdism and she suspects her preference stems from the chaos she has experienced growing up in a city like Dhaka. In her work she often explores the correlation between space and the protagonist who gains agency from a subaltern state of being.

Emma McTavish, Editor (she/her)

Emma McTavish is a fourth-year PhD Candidate in English Literature at Queen's University. She holds a BA (Honours) in English Literature from Bishop's University and an MA in Public Texts (English Literature) from Trent University. Her work examines mid-Victorian ideas of physical and moral pollution and its intersections with cross-class desire and slumming. Her dissertation focuses on working women and noseless women as 'dirty' and 'disgusting' fetishized objects in Arthur Munby's archival collection of diaries and photographic albums.

Carmel Mikol, Editor (she/her)

Carmel Mikol is a writer, musician, and MA-English student at Queen's University where she studies trauma literature and women's disappearance narratives. Carmel also produces and hosts Hyacinth Podcast which combines scholarly research and art. More than once, books have saved her life.

Kaitlyn Reid, Editor (she/her)

Kaitlyn Reid is a PhD candidate whose primary research focusses on performance, politics, and audience affect in the theatre of the early modern period. She received a specialized honours BA, and a master's degree in English literature from York University. If academia doesn't work out, Kaitlyn plans to make use of the various medical credentials she has earned over the years due to the amount of ER and Grey's Anatomy she has consumed. When she's not reading plays, or writing smutty romance novels, Kaitlyn can be found performing full-length Broadway musicals...in her 2013 Kia Rio.

Alyce Soulodre, Editor (she/her)

Alyce Soulodre is completing her PhD in English at Queen's University. Her research focuses on the depictions of bugs and entomologists in nineteenth-century fiction, especially horror and mystery. She enjoys terrible monster movies, quaint detective novels, and tries to keep Halloween in her heart all throughout the year.

Jenny Sullivan, Editor (she/her)

Jenny is a doctoral student in English Literature at Queen's University, after completing her Master of Arts also at Queen's University. Prior to this, she received her Bachelor of Arts in Literature from Trent University. Jenny's current research looks at face-to-face encounters in Romantic texts, especially those of William Wordsworth, John Keats, and Thomas De Quincey. In addition to her academic work, Jenny also writes novels, poetry and nonfiction, some of which can be found on her website at <http://jensul.ca>.