



Ignite!

**Publisher:** Sinister Wisdom, Inc.

Sinister Wisdom 86  
Summer 2012

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**Special thanks to:** All of the womyn who contributed work in its many forms, our readers, and our supporters in the journey.

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ISSN: 0196-1853. Printed in the U. S. on recycled paper.

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## Notes for a Magazine

Merry and I were in New York City for the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Lambda Literary Awards in early June 2012. We spent part of the day shopping for black shoes to go with Merry's outfit for the gala event. The shopping excursion was a great opportunity for Merry and I to catch up on our *Sinister Wisdom* work, including our dreams and schemes for the future.

The Lambda Literary Awards were wonderful. The "Lammies" are a wonderful showcase of Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender authors and literary luminaries. This year Kate Millet was honored with the pioneer award for her many contributions to lesbian-feminist publishing. Lesbian writers are producing creative, powerful, moving and entertaining work. Do check out the Lambda Literary Award finalists in all of the lesbian categories. While the evening was wonderful, we noticed the dearth of mainstream, New York publishers producing Lesbian work. Major New York publishing houses released titles by gay male authors, but Lesbian authors rarely appear in mainstream presses. This is a great concern; mainstream publishers provide vital visibility and circulation of Lesbian ideas and Lesbian literature. Without that exposure, it is difficult for Lesbian writers and intellectuals to find large audiences. This observation is not meant to minimize the fabulous publishing houses devoted to lesbian authors including Bella, Bywater, and Spinsters Ink; these presses, and other like them, are vital to Lesbian culture and we must support them by buying their books and sharing them with friends and colleagues. Mainstream publishing houses have a role in Lesbian literary culture, as well; we must demand that they include lesbian voices in the work that they publish.

This issue of *Sinister Wisdom* carries the theme Ignite! Merry and I felt ignited by the Lambda Literary Awards and feel ignited every day by our work on *Sinister Wisdom*. We want to ignite lesbians everywhere.

*Sinister Wisdom 86: Ignite!* opens with an important article about lesbians in the world of spoken word poetry written by Joanna Hoffman. Hoffman also curated selection of spoken word poems by Lesbians just for *Sinister Wisdom*. It was a pleasure to

work with Joanna on this section and we hope you will enjoy reading it and discovering these poets.

*Sinister Wisdom 86: Ignite!* is also chocked full with poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction by Lesbians. We hope you will find within these pages something that surprises, delights, provokes, and ignites you.

At the end of the journal, you will find a particularly robust selection of book reviews. Grace Sikorski reviews *Noctilucent* by *Sinister Wisdom* contributor Melissa Buckheit; Ruth Mountaingrove reviews two books, including the gem from 1989, *A Lesbian Love Advisor* by Celeste West; Jean Taylor also offers two reviews including a review of Jeanne Cordova's Lambda-award winning, *When We Were Outlaws*. There are many good books from lesbian writers deserving your attention. If you know of a great new lesbian book, drop us a line and think about writing a review for *Sinister Wisdom*.

In addition to publishing three high-quality issues of *Sinister Wisdom* each year, we are working to strengthen the organizational infrastructure of *Sinister Wisdom*. In the next few months, we will be adding new board members. In the fall, we will have an online fundraising campaign. Watch for information about it on our webpage, [www.SinisterWisdom.org](http://www.SinisterWisdom.org), and on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/SinisterWisdom](https://www.facebook.com/SinisterWisdom). If you are on Facebook and have not "liked" the *Sinister Wisdom* page, please take a moment to do so today.

*Sinister Wisdom* is pleased to welcome **Bookwoman** of **Austin, TX** as a distributor of *Sinister Wisdom*. If you are in the Austin area, please rush to Bookwoman and make a purchase there to thank them for supporting *Sinister Wisdom*. Bookwoman have one of the best poetry sections I have seen in a feminist bookstore.

Help us grow *Sinister Wisdom*! Find *Sinister Wisdom* at your local bookstore, join us online at [www.sinisterwisdom.org](http://www.sinisterwisdom.org) and on Facebook. Become a part of the community devoted to nurturing, preserving, and celebrating Lesbian art and culture.

Julie R. Enszer  
Summer 2012

## **Lesbians in the World of Spoken Word Poetry**

**Joanna Hoffman**

*Poetry is not a luxury*  
—Audre Lorde

I remember the first time I allowed myself to use a female pronoun in a love poem—how that word, *she*, had the ability to shake my whole world and force me to confront the truth that terrified me. Years later, when I began performing spoken word poetry, I would feel that same gut-wrench twist every time I revealed to the audience that I was a lesbian. I’m not sure what I expected, exactly—a Republican to drop a piano on me, a rainbow to fall from the sky, my mother to appear in the doorway yelling, *But I thought you LIKED Jason!*

Now, ten years from when I started performing, I no longer feel scared revealing my sexuality to a crowd. However, that doesn’t mean there aren’t negative responses, only that I’ve stopped worrying about them. I’ve had a crowd of over 100 gasp and snicker at my declarations of love for a woman, and I’ve also had teenagers email me after a feature to tell me they’re in the closet and hope one day to have the courage to come out. I’ve also been an audience member watching poets make offensive *no homo* references, or talk about gay sex as a disgusting practice. This is especially problematic when the other audience members are young and impressionable, and look up to the poets onstage.

Spoken word poetry provides a critical platform for advocacy and education, and has since its inception hundreds of years ago. Before the written word existed, oral storytellers passed along the history of their people. In the 1980s, a Chicago construction worker named Marc Smith developed competitive, spoken word poetry as we know it today. Smith was eager to find a more interactive and exciting forum for poetry, one that would require audiences to not only listen but also participate. In poetry slams, random audience members are selected to judge the poems using numerical score cards, and the remaining audience members are encouraged to loudly react to the scores given.

In the past ten years, slam poetry has exploded in size and scope. Poets from across the world convene each year at the Individual World Poetry Slam (IWPS), the Women of the World Poetry Slam (WOWPS) and the National Poetry Slam (NPS).

Approximately 75 individuals compete at IWPS and WOWPS each year, and about 75 teams of 4-5 members each compete at NPS each year. More information on slam poetry is available at [www.poetryslam.com](http://www.poetryslam.com).

When I was “growing up” in the spoken word scene, I learned of a few out, successful lesbian poets: Alix Olson, Andrea Gibson and Stacyann Chin. Each have made a living from their spoken word following, and tour across the globe. The vast majority of spoken word poets are heterosexual, however, and the topic of lesbianism is still viewed as taboo at poetry readings in some parts of the country. There is a need for greater visibility of LGBTQ poets in the spoken word scene. Our stories need to be heard—both because we need to tell them, but also because we have the potential to open minds and work to combat stereotypes.

LGBTQ spoken word poets of color, in particular, have long been denied the visibility and recognition they rightly deserve. Here I introduce you to three of my favorite spoken word poets: Camonghne Felix, Charan Morris and Natasha Miller.

Camonghne Felix entered the spoken word scene as a youth poet, and has since taken the adult scene by storm. Her poetry is provocative, unflinching and necessary. She feels that being an LGBTQ artist comes with an inherent responsibility: *Whenever I step on stage, or whenever my voice occupies a room, I know that I am representing every label that I choose to subscribe to. I can't ever stop being black, or pansexual, or a woman - not for the three minutes that it takes to dispel a message to an audience. I know the bravery it takes to wake up every morning and decide to be proud of yourself. I like to think that myself and the members of all oppressed groups who choose to speak out are giving the people of our communities reasons to wake up and be proud of themselves.*

Camonghne raises an interesting point here—the pressure placed upon anyone given a platform from which to speak. A person in front of a microphone in a room packed full of

listening ears has the ability to convey whatever message they'd like, and there is a responsibility woven into that experience. Storytelling has long served as a mechanism for sparking human connections, including the realization that one person's experience is not so far off from another's experience. Or, if the experiences are quite different, that is a learning experience in itself. Ideally, different experiences inspire audiences to become more informed, compassionate and active in advocating for the right of all people.

Charan Morris describes this experience. She says that coming out to her audiences and peers ..*forced many of them to a crossroads at which they had to choose whether or not to wrestle with how much their misconceptions were completely alien to who they know me to be. There were some who chose not to face their ignorance, but the sheer number of people who were ready to rise to the occasion surprised me.*

*... Each person that walks into a spoken word venue and learns about the volatile ignorance LGBTQ folks face through poems like “At The Hands of Our Brothers” is a potential mind changed, is a potential hate crime avoided, is a potential closeted queer person who has found their will to come out in the worlds they are members of. Hearing other work from poets like Simply Rob, StaceyAnn Chin and other LGBT poets, gave me the will that I once needed to publicly combat societal ignorance aimed at LGBT folks, with my own work. Now, I aim to be the person these poets were for me, for someone in the audience.*

*Every time I perform poems about the issues [that] LGBT [people] are forced to carry, I charge other poets and audience members with being accountable for their own ignorance and awareness simultaneously. I charge those who respect me and/or my work with being accountable for the way they speak and write about queer folks of color. Each poem is my way of fighting for the space that others need to dare to be themselves.*

Charan proves that Audre Lorde was right—poetry is not a luxury. For many of us, and for many years, it has been a small voice in the back of our heads demanding to be heard. As we've entered the time of Facebook and twitter, the internet has emerged as a vast and often terrifying space to express ourselves and reach out to others for support.

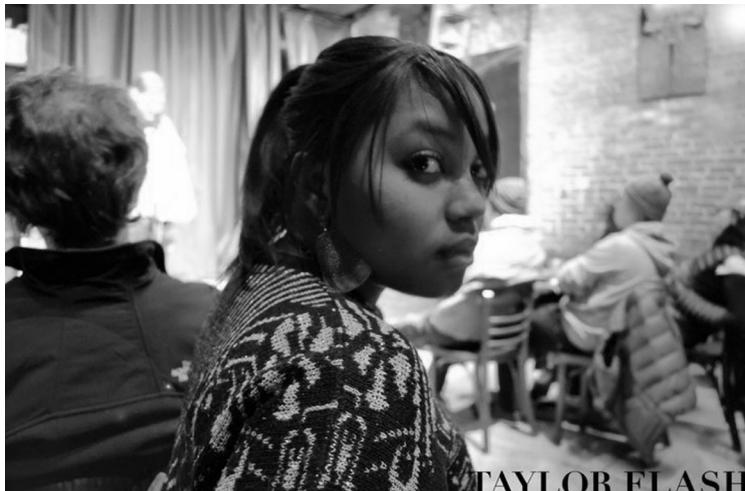
Natasha addresses the experience of coming out in the digital world in a brilliantly-conceptualized new book, *Coming Out of Nowhere* (2012). Natasha describes the book as ...*a Social Networking Memoir that allows readers to mentally and emotionally “log-in”*

*to their favorite websites (Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube) and view the opinions of others on love, hate, suicide, tragedy, politics, religion, cyber-bullying, entertainment, mental illness, freedom of choice, homophobia, and all other things surrounding homosexuality by simply turning a page.*

These women have incredible stories to tell, and so I'm honored to present their poetry to you here.

## **Beibs and Usher**

### **Camonghne Felix**



**TAYLOR FLASH**

Camonghne Felix (Photo Credit: Taylor Flash)

I googled Justin Bieber's relationship with Usher/ because I wanted to know if they were still men who hugged each other with full arms on carpets that have bled the men who wanted to love like them before them. In my head I am passing a baton to them, saying 'here is your choice' or 'here is your mission' / to be a man who finds another boy in the gridlocks of a challenge and promises to foster some kind of father thing/ the kind of thing that gives the boy a damn good reason to wanna be that boy everyday/ My wanting to know is of unfounded reason, it is selfish and pestering and it dominates a room sometimes /and these two men are like windstorms in a segment that wont slow down for anything with too much love clamoring beside it/ two men loving each other like that, so big mouth in a gaping hallway/ pop is like that/ a phone call with erratic listeners/ but Beibs said 'I love you' to Usher at the Grammys last year and Usher held his shoulders/ and the cheeky ones felt it too/ and it made everybody smile. Got two boys making everybody in one room smile. You got a bright light and a gauntlet pillowing it.

## **What It Means To Believe/With a Full Mouth**

### **Camonghne Felix**

People have told me/  
that my brain is a bronzed/  
drinking gourd/  
with so much whistle/  
so much promise/

Today I caught my own/  
filament/  
in a subway window and  
thought/ ‘this is the  
face of someone who  
will win’/ and kept  
staring.

I travel home/ after this  
the night/ coasting on  
my back/ my mother says  
“you really believe/ that  
this is how you will change  
the world?”/ the snarl  
in her voice/ shoving my  
boisterous/ness to the walls/  
I shrugged the half/ atlas of/  
my body towards the/ door  
steady silencing/ the corrosion  
and I just/ stood there and/  
made myself really/ feel  
it/ made my entire/ frame  
conduct the/ costly exit of  
a missile/

(If you were to rearrange  
these stanzas in any  
conceivable combination  
the story would never change.)

## **What To Do When You Are Raped**

### **Camonghne Felix**

If you were ever waiting for the day that you are dressed for truth  
it will be the day of your rape kit  
when they will lock the balls of your feet into clamps that hold  
    like labor  
ask you questions about your cycles  
want to know if you urinate before or after you inhale  
how many ways you've ever been invisible ink  
before they decide that they can believe you.  
then they'll lock the results onto a chart.  
stare at you like you are a brand new resurrection of smiles  
the ob/gyn will whisper “I am glad that I am not your mother”  
and you will watch her crumble in front of you  
like she always does  
at least twice daily.  
you will think that she is lucky to have woken up in her own skin  
    this morning.

The first morning  
the first bath  
the first breakfast  
is always the recounting of your portions  
you will make note of where the patterns have burned  
where he tagged himself to your blue of your trauma  
It will feel like banishment.  
Everyone will talk at you  
instead of with you  
with words like victim and survivor whimpering out of pharmacy  
    bottles  
of brandy and vodka

Instantly, you will know  
that they have no right to label you survivor until you feel like one  
    Eventually, you will tell them  
that being raped  
is like global annihilation inside of one body

like losing god in the middle of a blizzard  
like knowing where your pulse is but walking right by it  
backroads are not backroads anymore  
they are movie scenes for girls with footsteps like swollen dialogue  
they wanna talk to you  
they want you to know that they are sorry  
without knowing what they are sorry for  
and you will almost be grateful for them  
if you could walk.

But in the bathroom  
your blood is still lining the tub  
At the police station  
your favorite bra is infused with the smell of man  
and winter  
and it's still in your hair  
you can't wash it out  
and in the kitchen  
your mother is cooking so much  
like she wants to compress the morning into your stomach  
in your bedroom  
you are still circling the parts of you where his teeth  
His smell of man  
his hands like a gardener's haven't been

And you will think,  
what kind of woman am I now  
with my insides like a shipwreck  
what kind of woman am I now  
my laundry yawning  
and dirty like he carved something burlesque  
into the failure of my fists  
What kind of lover will I be  
my body  
like a thesaurus of sins.  
What kind of mother  
will I be  
when my daughter asks  
if I loved the man who ripped the balance from me?

But then two weeks later  
maybe two months  
maybe a year  
The mirror will remind you of everything you've still got left to  
    fight with.

broken will just be a metaphor for restoration  
you will teach yourself to breathe  
like immaculate conception were just a hum under your chest  
You will walk  
for the first time  
in days  
You will think of your legs as nothing short of hieroglyphs  
There will be nothing brittle boned  
about the way you will sign your name after this

And then  
your entire web of scars  
will be trophy.  
You will be sturdy like a tractor trailers last run.  
And then you will be survivor.  
And queen  
and god.  
All at the same time.

## **At The Hands of My Brothers**

**Charan P. Morris**

*For Tayshana Murphy*

A dimming rainbow puddling  
onto pavement at the knees and tears of your mother.

Photos of the black boys who murdered you  
reeling flashbacks from my memory:

At 14, I watch my older sister and her girlfriend  
cornered close to moving doors on a Chicago train.  
Their faces almost breaking against their perpetrator's fist  
I hope that if they grip each other tight enough  
their love will cloak them from their attackers.  
But their arms hold no magic against two black men  
with liquor-loose fists,  
their drunken mouths ejaculating  
a fire and brimstone of *batty girl* slurs.  
Frozen in parallel seat, my silent anger  
as choking as a tongue swallowed.

It was then that I learned how quickly men  
with the same Diaspora coursing through their veins  
target women like you and me for only loving them like brothers  
for giving the love to which they grew entitled, to women.  
For years this memory aborted the raucous birth  
of my own desire to melt into curves, and I wonder  
if I had found the courage to lean into the horizon of a woman  
the way you did, what man of my own lineage  
would have stood behind the bullet carrying me to death.

Your fingers were not given the chance to fully bloom  
to the curves of the basketball you guarded.  
The boys who dunked bullets into your back  
jealous of the way your curves twirled around them  
on courts and in courting girls.

The police are investigating your murder as a hate crime now.  
I look at your murderers' mug shots,  
from behind the brittle toughness  
their scared eyes peek out at the world.  
A reminder of the youth I spent with black boys  
I loved like brothers.  
The way we threw footballs over light posts,  
turned grassy lawns into wrestling rings  
jostling the pain of circumstance from our bodies together.  
But this love has gangrened.

And we all know it,  
the boys you and I grew up  
running basketball courts and alleyways with  
don't carry us into womanhood  
but come back to drag us into the ground.  
complicit in our murder more than any other men.  
Brothers I once greeted on street corners turn to strangers.  
Instead of "hey shortie" introductions ending with hands  
folding around each other in reverence,  
too many times their palms contract into murder,  
the love I have for them cringes.  
I hold it quiet and conditionally.

We are crying on our knees  
at the dimming puddle of your rainbow.

Homophobic slurs etched on walls  
of the door you grew limber behind.  
Mother trying not to buckle.

## Too Close

**Charan P. Morris**

*“You know, I hate gay people, so I let it be known,”  
“I am homophobic. It shouldn’t be in the world or in the United States.”*  
--NBA Player Tim Hardaway

Midday on 42<sup>nd</sup> St. platform  
her head lay on my shoulder,  
next to elderly man with inebriated hands  
as weathered as my grandfather’s.  
Not long before the anger traveled to his fingers  
depositing at knuckles,  
he swung in a pendulum of fists  
girlfriend and I paralyzed in wooden platform seats  
we try not to flinch because the fear excites him.

Onlookers sneak apathetic peeks from the platform’s edge  
like they swiped their humanity at the turnstile.  
Blood drawn to his eyes ballooning  
from aged sunken sockets.  
My breath caught on a web spun in my chest,  
maybe we reminded him that a woman once loved  
his wife just as good,  
he swung

with one swing 14-year-old Kenny did  
what my lover and I could not. Exiting community center  
to evade *Chi-Chi man* slurs, but they caught up  
casting stone after stone at flamboyant boy’s  
swiftly swaying hips, he couldn’t cake anymore.  
Picked up 2-by-4 adrift on sidewalk  
our silence crusted on the tips of its’ rusty nails.  
He punched through the net of his perpetrators’ skin and skull  
blood splintering his trembling fingers  
before they could cast the word “faggot” again.

I have no wood of rusty nails  
to wedge a distance between

the old man's fist and my lover's face.  
This anger not strong enough to retaliate against hands  
hardened like my grandfather's,  
can't chemo the fear he cancered in me.

Sakia Gunn fixed in my fear.  
A 15-year-old girl stuck up for her life on morning bus stop.  
This time the old man who preyed on her, 29.  
She unloaded "we are lesbians."  
Her plumbing had no need for pipes  
but he entered, unclogging  
chest cavity with pocket knife.  
She lay draining, death blanketing her face  
with the black of a Newark 3am.

Her memory already held my hands  
next lover on 2 train platform.  
Sakia's girlfriend could not protect her.  
The man with my grandfather's weathered hands still swung,  
our love venom in his wounds.

This venom poured from Kalid's mouth while  
reading about Sakia's murder in my 9<sup>th</sup> grade class.  
He recounts memory of kicking a grown man's ass,  
"the fagot had his eyes on me."  
I stood in front of a room full of students  
trying to conceal how winded Kalid's anger left me  
felt like girlfriend and I were the brunt of his punches.

How do I compete with Tim Hardaway's words in the eyes  
of young boys like Kalid who I am scared to see grow into men?

There are people who see streaks of hellfire  
in the field of my lover's skin where my fingers graze.  
My silence as choking as a tongue swallowed.  
There is no safe space for how I want to love her,  
the whisper a woman's skin makes against my own  
how much I want to lay under her river rising,  
mouth open, gasping to drown.

Kenny did what we only dream of doing,  
He swung with anger we swallowed  
no warning just rusty nails.  
For every time a hate wielding knife could not be halted.

In secret we who could not overpower our attackers,  
ripped with holes no public apology to patch  
we watched the nails come down and smiled.  
Because Sakia cannot be brought back  
I couldn't make Kalid understand,  
because Tim Hardaway is still allowed  
his ignorance without consequences.

We smiled in secret  
because there are too many inebriated hands  
we are still dying to be  
because I still wonder how much damage  
that old man could have done,  
what hospital bed could have been holding  
pieces of her and I.



Charan Morris (Photo Credit: Max Luger)

## To The Wife of a Homosexual Man

### Natasha Miller

When you catch him in bed  
with another man do not panic  
Forget where you hide the bullets kept for intrusive strangers  
Although  
at this moment  
he is both  
Close the door like you apologize for walking into a room that  
doesn't belong to you  
Leave immediately, like you are late for something  
Think about your children  
Do not be blinded by your heart  
Do not suggest couples therapy  
This is not an issue for your psychologist  
He knew exactly what he was doing  
Besides, the only thing worse than walking in on your husband  
with a man  
is waiting  
for it to happen again  
Do not curse him in church  
Do not deny him visits  
Those are still his children  
He is still a child of God  
Drinking  
on a broken heart is dangerous  
Stay away from bars  
Avoid remembering that one time  
With your out of the closet brother  
know  
that is was probably true  
Accept  
The reason behind one crucifixion  
You are planning divorce  
The lawyers will say take him for everything  
Dead men don't offer much  
He is planning suicide

Hide the bullets somewhere else  
Think about your children  
They are all you marriage was ever worth  
You knew who he was when you met him  
You chose to decline reality  
Still, this is not your fault  
this is not a fault  
It's what happens when grown men fear other men,  
Churches  
Rejection

Judgment  
And hate crimes  
they swallow what burns their throats  
Turn princesses into bitter bitches  
Turn their father in their graves  
Realize, their knees are not strong enough for such a long fall  
from grace  
And they come back  
Tell you, that it was just a phase  
Without hesitation you grow arms like Jesus  
You forgive  
As if it's the only reason that you were born, to die for a man  
That will not show you the same respect  
I advise you to close the door  
Tell him that he no longer lives there  
Tell him,  
that he never lived there  
Then you go on  
raising your children to know  
That being themselves  
Is the one thing God  
Will always forgive them for



Natasha Miller (Photo Credit: Venti)

## **How to “come out” and stay out**

### **Natasha Miller**

One thing you should do is not tell your mom and dad that you  
are gay

Tell your parents that you are a graffiti artist at heart,  
you have spray paint for emotions

Then hope that your home will not be listed as abandoned  
because of the illegal colors that their tagger has left on  
the windows

If you are out, always wear a watch

Because when the unexpected hit from a pipe, cracks up your  
skull

Like the punch line of a bad Tracy Morgan joke

Look down at your wrist know exactly what time it was when  
GOD

Treated you

Like a joke that his bloody sense of humor has been waiting years  
to laugh at

When your fathers fist turn into space shuttle, and your face  
becomes his moon

And he leaves your eyes all dark and crater like

You get up the next day

Wear the word faggot like an expensive pair of sunglasses

Carry Sakias Gunn in your mouth

Shoot back at every homophobe that tries to ruin you with words

Bring a fruitcake to every Christmas party that you’ll never be  
welcomed at

Tell the kid curious about your gender that you are not a boy or a  
girl

You were born a hate crime

An ant under a magnifying glass

A reason to be burned

By the sun

And the Son of God

And the son of any family who believes that Westboro church  
should stand outside  
Of soldiers funeral picketing and pissing outdated bible verses on  
their bravery

Remember  
Your status will always be two face book comments away from  
your family members raising money to bury you  
An identity change and a cab ride away from you fiery torso  
being found on he east side of Detroit

You will be thrown off airplanes for being in Love  
Out of church for being in touch  
Banned from sports for being open  
Raped by your military to seem more American

They will cross streets to not share a sidewalk  
Die of thirst before drinking from a water fountain that you've  
used  
Throw cocktails through your colors  
DL hugely will still say that this aint no civil right movement  
dying over Taking Dick and picking Cotton are not the  
same

This world cares nothing about how many clocks you own  
There will never be a right time for you to be yourself  
So when you leave home  
Make sure your picture is exactly how you would like to be  
remembered  
Just in case you return as someone else or not at all

Lastly  
when the footsteps behind you start to get closer and the ground  
starts to sound like a gun range  
Open up your arms, like your back is a bulls-eye  
And a God is the target  
Think back to that conversation you had with your parents about  
being a Graffiti artist  
then prepare for your emotions to be paint

## Pride

### **Joanna Hoffman**

The summer I turned 15, my grandmother got me  
totally smashed at a wedding in New Jersey.  
Somewhere between the third ABBA song  
and the fourth glass of champagne, she told me,  
You know, someday you'll have a wedding just like this.  
And when you do, please don't let them play any disco.

I didn't know how to tell her that I probably  
wouldn't be having any wedding at all. That I  
wore these bones like a voiceover when really,  
I was in love with my best friend Kathleen.  
I thought just maybe, if I held this itch  
underwater long enough, it would float up blue.

I tried to claw the dripping want from my voice  
whenever Kathleen asked me what I thought of  
her boyfriend, snuffing out my drive-in imagination  
and burning every lamp in my throat watching her.

I learned what shame feels like. I coated my skin  
with postcard gleam, as if the best I could ever  
hope for was to reflect someone else's shine;  
as if some parts of me were better off drowned  
in a swimming pool of white-out.

But it is not in our nature to cower  
before the mirror like this.

A person born blind will tilt their head back  
and extend their arms when they feel proud.

It is in our blood not to bake shame into our  
bones, but to live boldly. And so now, all these  
years later, here is my pride—



Joanna Hoffman (Photo credit: Emily Rose Kahn-Sheahan)

for every time I refused to allow the wet  
blanket stare of strangers on the subway  
smother this burn to hold her hand;

for every time someone told me, Wow,  
you don't look gay, and I didn't say, Thank you;

for not letting my heart be strip-searched  
by those who want to know if my love is  
pure enough;

because I have committed hate crimes against  
myself for years and I already know all of  
the tricks.

So, when my friend asks me why there is no  
Straight Pride Parade, I tell her, You can't  
be proud of something you've never had to fight for.

This is for every wedding I watched from  
the sidelines; every fairy tale with stipulations;

every it's a choice, it's a phase, you're disgusting;  
every swollen choke of shame I learned to  
coat my throat with; every gay kid who  
believed nothing would ever make this better  
because home meant break the parts of you that  
don't fit into the plaster of who you're supposed to be.

We already are exactly who  
we are supposed to be.

Just last month, I woke up living in a city  
where I could actually get married one day.

I think back to that wedding in New Jersey  
all those years ago—

how I was the last one to leave the dance floor,  
makeup smeared and beaming; how my

grandmother grabbed my hand and said,  
I'm proud of you, with no if only's or but's  
clinging to the underside of her voice,

how finally, after all these years,  
I am able to say the same  
to myself.

## The Choice

### C.A. Popovich

Every Columbus Day week hundreds of women from all over the globe converge on the tip of Cape Cod for *Women's Week*. They enjoy Tea dances, comedians, music, and books. This was my first trip to the artist town of Provincetown, Massachusetts. After hearing so many wonderful things about the community from friends, I was convinced I had no better choice for use of this year's three remaining vacation days. My intention was to meet the wonderful authors whom I knew only from pictures on the back covers of their books.

When I booked my trip, I found there would be a connecting flight from Boston to Provincetown, fondly referred to as Ptown. My breakfast simmered in my stomach as I anticipated the size of the plane that would whisk me across the span of water. I walked for twenty minutes to reach the diminutive Cape Air terminal nestled in a far corner of the expansive Logan airport. I had no checked baggage, so I balked when the airline attendant tagged my carry-ons and demanded I put them on their scale. I sensed the limitations of the plane when she then requested my weight. This was a commercial airline. Surely they have licensed pilots I thought.

After I finished checking in, the attendant pointed toward the gate. I circled the designated area a couple of times before I located my gate number painted above a dark hallway leading to a stairway. I took a deep breath, straightened my spine, and hauled my suitcase down the stairs. There were five other people lined up on the steps, so I shifted my computer bag on my shoulder and waited with my fellow passengers for the doors to the runway to open.

"Follow me," the smiling young man with the bright green vest said after checking our boarding passes. Struggling to ignore the rain pelting my face and the wind grabbing at my jacket, I riveted my gaze on the miniature aircraft. The expedition to the plane took only minutes. The smiling young man in the now rain-soaked vest widened his smile as he assisted his six travelers to negotiate the narrow three-step stairs into the

tiny ten-seat cabin. There was no assigned seating, so we each claimed the first seat available. I spotted the empty co-pilot seat and speculated at the chances of one of my fellow vacationers having skills to bring an airplane out of free-fall. I relaxed slightly after scrutinizing the pilot. His salt-and-pepper hair indicated his probable aeronautical experience, yet enough youth to allay fears of his heart failing in mid-air. The darkening sky, increasing wind gusts, and driving rain, however, did nothing to help settle my nerves.

The pilot offered the obligatory spiel regarding the safety of the aircraft and I concentrated on his words as I evaluated the potential risk posed by the rain seeping in through the seal around the emergency exit closest to me. The light plane took off with wings tipping side to side and me grasping my armrests. A glance around the cabin revealed that my fellow passenger's white-knuckled grips matched my own.

I have no idea at what altitude the transformation occurred, but the collective gasp indicated that all six of us noticed at once. Scrambling for cameras, we ooed and aahed our way across the bay. The pilot had wrestled the plane through the turbulent clouds and we now floated above a layer of cotton-like clouds with the sun bathing us in its protective warmth. The blanket of clouds below us billowed in their ferocity, but we were immune to their wrath. I decided the pilot did indeed know what he was doing, and I relaxed.

The relief in the cabin was palpable and I speculate that my neighbor's chattiness came from the release of stress. The trip only lasted forty-five minutes, and the couple seated behind me didn't shut up for the rest of the trip. Over the din of the propellers, I overheard snippets of conversation regarding her aunt's bursitis, her brother's pending divorce, and her sister's bout with cancer. Then she started on her uncle in a nursing home and her mother's current garage sale.

I spent the remainder of the flight content with the glorious view of the world. I would never have experienced this wonder had I not chosen to fly rather than take the ferry or bus. I can't say the descent into the small Ptown airport was without bumps. We had to break back through the storm clouds, but

landing on the runway and watching the sand dunes swell as we approached was worth every bounce.

Will I fly again next year? Maybe I'll try a new adventure and find out what the waves on the bay have to offer. I'll make that choice then.

## Etiology of Cool

**Stephania Byrd**

*(for Terri L Jewell 1954-1995)*

I am stroking the face of Oshun\*  
and I can feel her sides  
wet and without form flowing  
cold in and out of me  
through the carcoat,  
the chair, my house  
to the coolness of this wood's  
shape, touch, and taste.

I am drinking the water of Olumare  
under a baobab tree 1000 years old  
in the heart of Dakar  
breathing the serpent wind  
pushing old eggs in the sand where Yemoja  
spreads her skirts so  
that I may eat from her largesse.

I am here on a bird's tongue skimming  
the salty ice-fires  
boiling hands  
Those hold and caress without her form.

\*Oshun, Olumare, and Yemoja are orisha, part of an ancestral pantheon that is revered because these ancestors were cool like water. The power in these names survived the middle passage and feted today in Africa and the New World.

## **Persephone Departs The Upcountry**

**Stephania Byrd**

With snow on the ground at Thanksgiving  
hunters gather in the first blows of  
winter. Fox carrion lies at the top of hills.  
A dog hears a singing wren  
and lunges at the deer blood on the bark  
dripping in icicles in the east light.  
The wind-fall sounds  
shotguns  
fired at startled does. Later  
the air in the igniting space heater  
will boom behind mounted antlers  
and trophy heads.  
Death crawls as surely as  
trucks climbing  
north in an ice storm.  
As her daughter rushes howling  
through the wall,  
a haunted mother  
blows her last leaf  
to stiffen in  
the snow.

## Turning Pentecostal

### Stephania Byrd

Many people ask how I come to be living in Cleveland and why I left for two weeks when the Bellerphron Pentecost Gospel Singers for Jesus and the Everlasting Light came to town.

I'd just moved home to Bellerphron, Ohio to recover from what I thought was fatigue, but was really a flu bug that had built a condominium around my heart. I was hanging with old family acquaintances, Ada Jean and Jeremiad, looking for work, in general helping my mother and dad by trying to keep up with domestic chores that I had avoided religiously when living alone. Anyway, like I said, these old acquaintances were exactly that because my family has no friends--and except for the scandal I caused by going with boys into the woods for salamanders at the church picnic when I was nine--these people knew nothing of my last twenty years after high school outside Bellerphron.

Ada Jean and Jeremiad were quite naturally curious; everytime we all got together and I said something weird by Pentecostal standards, Ada Jean would become all flustered and Jeremiad, who believed in leaving the door open just in case Jesus stopped by would say, "She's just individualistic, Ada Jean."

As I said, I had been looking for work, going down to Manpower, going over to the many plastics factories that the city fathers had welcomed with open pockets, when Ada Jean called and said there was an opening for an officer in the probation office, who didn't mind being "in the field."

(In the field means traveling all over the county, tracking down violators and interrogating their families about their whereabouts.) It sounded like the job for me. That's when I found out that I was a class D felony. You see I had not been in the woods with any boys since that fateful summer in 1959. I had instead cultivated my charms for the edification and delight of women--big women, skinny women, short women, tall women--I loved them all.

This presented something of a quandary for me for I was beginning to get tired of Jeremiad's stories about his wife Barbara's cousin, who was just like me--alone, no man to care for her (care was strongly emphasized), and worse--no babies to complete the circle of her woman's life. But Barbara's cousin had left the door open for Jesus and don't you know when He walked in, He brought a man with him. I was also a little afraid of Barbara, who was known for her fasting and vigilante tendencies--she was rumored to have called the police on my third cousin Eugene, who showed up to work at the Palais Royale department store wearing their latest spring fashion.

But I finally decided to take the chance and bet on Jeremiad's help, his door being the more open of the three.

Me, Ada Jean, and Jeremiad were taking Barbara to work the night I decided to be forth coming and tell my newfound companions that if Jesus ever did come knocking, he best be coming with Naomi or Ruth, otherwise I just was not interested. It was raining and the streets were wet and Barbara and Ada Jean were trying real hard to get me to commit to the tent revival near Lebanon that coming weekend when Jeremiad started to pull out in front of a truck. Well I just as smooth as pie said, "Look out, baby!"

I (I don't know what possessed me. I must have forgotten who I was riding with 'cause) Barbara said, "What did you call my husband?"

I did not so much as speak one word. I pretended I'd

been struck deaf. But Barbara was like a terrier on a rat,  
she was not letting go.

Jeremiad laughed and said, “Oh she said Barbie!” trying  
to clean the mess up. But Ada Jean started piping  
with her two cents about that’s not what I’d said and well  
you understand how I come to move to Cleveland.

I was talking to my mother and she tells me a new  
scandal in my name has replaced the dead dog skinks of  
1959. When my name is mentioned nowadays,  
folk talk how Glynn Allen turned Pentecostal.

## All of It

### Amanda Laughtland

When I saw *The Belle of Amherst*  
the actress cried as Miss Dickinson said  
the heart wants what it wants. I had learned this  
adjusting to my heart medication

and am learning it now, adjusting to my heart  
and a different rushing of blood  
in your direction. I drifted off  
during the play, thinking of Miss Dickinson

and your house and how I don't sleep  
soundly yet, lying awake and loving all of it  
from the flowers on your bedroom wallpaper  
to the oatmeal you fix for breakfast

with almonds for you and apples for me.

## **From the Shore**

**Amanda Laughtland**

I know your stroke, your kick,  
the turn and bob of your head  
above Rattlesnake Lake  
where I sometimes lose sight of you  
behind rafts and beach balls—

then you pop up again, buoyant  
and brilliant in the 90-degree heat,  
your back and shoulders safe  
beneath the sheen of sunscreen  
I helped you apply, both hands

under the straps of your top,  
palms flush against your skin.

## **Learning**

### **Amanda Laughtland**

You said the Greeks said “know thyself”  
and “all things in moderation”  
and I agree it may be best  
to know me moderately, a woman who loves

cookies, movies, Converse hi- and low-tops,  
books, cats, cardigan sweaters  
and—immoderately—you. Know me deeply  
and there’s the mire of things

I’m still learning. You know how I thought  
I didn’t want kids? I’ve learned  
it was only that I’d never known any  
nor any adult who could surprise me

into imagining myself with a family.

## **Scattered**

### **Sarah Brooks**

In the subalpine regions of Nepal, it is impossible to dig into the hard, rocky ground to bury dead bodies – and anyway, most Nepalese are Buddhist or Hindu, and believe the body is only a container for the soul. When a person dies, then, it is customary for the priests to ceremoniously take the body to a high place and cut it into pieces for the circling vultures to consume. It's called a "sky burial". Circling vultures alight, tear meat, consume, incorporate human flesh into their living bird bodies and then take wing. Thus, the Nepalese literally scatter their dead into the world. Ultimate recycling.

Mary Oliver, the poet, wrote, "Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine./ Meanwhile, the world goes on." And on. Each of us will die, and with every death another baby will burst crying into the world, and the world goes on. All is impermanent. All we see as solid is only an illusion. The great Rocky mountains are crumbling slowly; the wind wears them down by inches, shapes them into curves that would be foreign to the men and women who scaled their slopes a century ago. In Hawaii, lava builds a new mountain. Beneath the ocean, plates shift. Change, change, change. The whole world is restless.

Once, my grandmother, determined always to get rid of the past and move on into the present, marched out of her house with her wedding dress – and other items – gathered in her arms. She was bound for the burn pile, which is where farm people burn all sorts of things, including leaves and sticks, dead pigs, yellowed wedding dresses. I imagine she didn't attach the emotion to the dress that the rest of us would later, hearing the story. She wasn't sentimental, my grandmother. She wore this necklace every day: a blob of smashed gold, that had been her wedding ring and my grandfather's, now melted together and smashed. I imagined she had marched to the jeweler in anger and grief in the days after my grandfather killed himself, but when I asked her she shrugged and said, "No. I just did it." It must have been like that with the wedding dress, too. But she didn't get to burn it, since my aunt Barbara happened to drive down the long

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gravel driveway just at that moment; she honked wildly to get my grandmother's attention and then ran to her, pulling the wedding dress from her and holding it close. As if the dress itself was not just a container.

The Blackfeet buried their dead high in trees—I suppose to prevent wolves and bears from digging up the bodies and eating them in those barren Montana plains, but maybe also to get the dead closer to the bird gods, and closer to flight. They left food and water hanging in the buckets from those burial trees, and if the ravens came to partake of the offerings, it was the same as the dead, for the ravens were assumed to be gods. The Sioux, who also buried their dead in the trees – many of the plains people did, evidently – painted the bodies with red earth first. Earth to sky. Earth in the sky. Here, here. The dead are waiting, up there in the trees.

Lia – before – she used to joke that when she died, she wanted to be cremated and then rolled into cigarettes to be smoked by all her friends. But when she did die, and so suddenly, I didn't know who our friends were anymore, and I have never rolled a cigarette, and I couldn't imagine how to get her ashes, anyway. That's not the right of the female partner. Go, gay marriage. Give us the rights to hold each other even when one of us is dust, ready to be smoked. She's stored, now, in some container in her ex-husband's garage, because he has legal custody of their children, and I have no right to anything, except all these memories, and the way her fingertips felt on my neck, and a thousand snapshots of her, including her silhouette at 5 a.m., naked, drinking coffee while she stared out the window to where the mountains were supposed to be.

In ancient Rome, it was common to shave the entire body to show mourning – Alexander, at the death of Hephestion, even cut off the manes and tales of his horses and took down the battlements of the cities. It was also common practice to mutilate oneself, or to scar oneself in recognition that all was changed now that a beloved person had died. That might have replaced the even more ancient idea of sacrificing oneself to die alongside the deceased – something desirable, still, when a beloved person no longer lives in the world, but now socially unacceptable.

I told Lia once that I would scar my face – a friend of ours overheard me say it, as we entered her house for a dinner party – if it would cause her to cease her increasingly constant comparisons between us. I did not want to be beautiful, but only to see her wholly accept herself, and so make it easier for her to absorb my love. The more she hated herself, the more she scorned my love. We should have scarred each other, visibly, so the world wouldn't be so surprised, later.

In the months before my grandmother died, she ceased nearly all activity except for watching hours and hours of TV, especially game shows – especially re-runs of game shows. It became impossible to talk to her; she couldn't maintain the conversation because her memory had become so full of holes. But she could play "Jeopardy" and call out letters with Pat Sajak as the Wheel of Fortune spun, and make bets on "The Price is Right". I would sit in the lazy boy next to her lazy boy and we would eat M&Ms and watch those game shows, and sometimes she would agree to eat a little healthy food that I had cooked. I was a purist, then; I cooked kale and black-eyed pea soup and spooned it religiously into my grandmother's mouth. I wish I had made her fried chicken; I wish I had gotten her more beers. What did it matter by then? She wanted to buy a vowel; she was ready.

In many ancient cultures, it was common – according to oral histories – for mourners to wail loudly in the presence of the dead. In Carib culture, mourners propped the body up on a seat for ten days, offered the dead person food and drink and tried to cajole it back to the world of living with comical jokes and taunts, until they finally gave up and threw food on the corpse's head and buried it.

I didn't even get to close Lia's eyes with my gentle fingers. I would have. I would have curled up beside her and let the warmth of my body seep a little longer into hers. But then? In my mind, I am part of a barbaric, ancient culture. I paint her body: swirls of purple and red and yellow and blue. And then I build a pyre and I shout and cry her name, my hair shaved off, my own body painted to match hers, my face scarred by my own hand. No one dares come near. They know this ritual. They respect me and my grief. I am not just there – not just not 2,000 miles away and docilely standing by as a coroner and police lift

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her body – I am the only one with the right to do what should be done: this ritual, this. The pyre is built. Somewhere in the darkness, a great circle of people has gathered, and there is more wailing, but the night is mostly between me and her. I pull her children from the circle, guide their hands to touch her brow, her heart, her hands, her brow again, then send them out into the darkness again – so it is only me and her holy body. My lover. I knew her body as no one else, even her, knew her body. I close my eyes and know every scar, every mole, every irregular place, every curve. And then I lift my head and I shout her name to the reverberate hills, and the crowd echoes it, and I shout it again, and the crowd echoes it. I leap onto the pyre, then, a flaming torch in my hand. A murmur from the crowd, a cry.

Somewhere, my child shouts, “Mommy!” In the darkness, the moon – I am confused. Aren’t we alone here? The torch sparks and flames, and I straddle her body. I could lie down gently, my body against hers, skin to skin; I could kiss her and put warmth in her skin again with the flame I could ignite beneath us. The body is merely a container. She is not beneath me. The wind caresses me; she is there. I wail her name again – then lean to kiss her still lips and drop the fire before I leap away to the ground – and the pyre bursts into flame, and she is a goddess of fire, Pele, her hair an orange halo and the swirled paint on her skin a vision of creation, and – converted – I leap toward the flame, but someone restrains me – a small hand, or the wind. Flame, flame. I want to run to catch all the pieces of her that, charred, float into the sky.

## **Let me tell you about my twig lines**

### **Shae Savoy**

Stick figures marching in procession through woodeness, meadow sunlight leaf-drink, gregarious all the veins, the flocking of fleece we funnel our

selves crickle crack snap like twigs

under the Boot.

The old woman who lived in a shoe

sang dirges doing dishes served drudge up  
with soups. The Boot crunch, crush, dishrag  
limp bag you call me old hag and I say

tis only a shroud, chrysanthemum.

Lilybirds flutter at my throat, rubies  
clutched in their beaks. A sparkling

bud of true. Juice the night

open, slide sweet and pliant on your back,  
be open to Her, drain away the

Drano, it's clogging your pores. Become  
porous and malleable around your inner  
delicate twigs, the birdboned farmhouse called

Fascist: a strong word I know but comes  
the Boot, comes the boulder, whistle your saxophone  
breath, your blues are your breadwinner. Let

the night spiral around you, grip cups with  
furtive fingers, bring faery elixir to lips. Join  
strands of leaf-hands into rattley sheath,

march onward, into the city.

Once there build bridges, build books, build fires everywhere.

Your rags are your coat, hang the blooming  
diamonds from the eaves, gather your bushels with  
all us Eves and remember your name that resilient grew  
under the Boot.

Do not try on the boot, do not  
collect the bones for bristling, let the  
etchings dissolve under the acid of

goat eyes and cream eccentric  
into a bowl, make it your breakfast.  
Break fast away from the hollowland,

stronghold of static, the limpid light of  
flickering screens.

Remember:

your moss,

your lichen,

liverwort tea.

## **She who floods like a river**

**Shae Savoy**

*For Amanda Murray, in the spirit of Judy Grahn*

I am sprinkler system, gemini in  
my outbursts, jumping from stable  
to stable filigreed to tipsy—flooding

is like sleeping—the creeping in of  
all that spidery mass, delicate  
heavy. Flood the peach trees, shake the

pigeons free—I am engorged with her, the  
roundnesses, what is cushion. What is  
diamond tooth, prism dazzle about her

center, she who floods, who causes the  
rising of whale breech sea horse stable—  
she is my stable—my rockforce, the sledge-

hammers can't reach me  
her curl of toe her nook—  
blast-root blood typing away

click the keys, in the kitchen popcorn  
rises. She brings me butter and I while—  
the flood rips free, my fins grow, append

the night, append the dramaturge of my  
thirty years' sinking.  
In the waves contusions, swish

swish tail swoop, scoops up the broken  
mornings, the orphanings, the siren  
satellites from my scales, I am the flood,

she is the kneecap in the sky.  
Rotate, revolve and return, reload  
and revolver. Shoot ink jets, printer potato,

bake the missings, flood, the river will  
not be pushed but spread like ink blots  
on paper, a fine papyrus her skin,

her creases add texture.  
Blameless jellyfish squirt  
squid-gallop, they seek only free,

don't mean the poison they  
tweet, little water-birds, fluttering  
liquid—the jellyfish, the shark—

these beasts are not for shame—  
they're our scars, shining  
pinkly beneath the ripple's blue.

What is true is my fat feather  
quill grows flab flapping languid—  
I spotted this in the mirror

while my poems did yoga. I've  
been feeding her too much sugar,  
too much sweet lesbian—

feather lingers restful, this scares—  
sacreds me, I of the iron kite,  
But mirror shines empty, without

projection, just the presence. Just  
the fact of it—of exist. Plain and  
without bauble—exist. Clean

sheets. Vegetables in the fridge.

A cat named Romeo.

A couch and tree.

Pears.

Exist.

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## Circus Act

### Devi K. Lockwood

Birds flit and dovetail into one another,  
over wires, upside down. I pass a birdbath,  
your name in the sidewalk. I in neon  
hues of you, different shades of hesitation.  
I've always been afraid to lose you by midnight.  
At this hour the clouds are little islands  
to hop between, layers reborn in company.  
See them there? The hunch-backed jugglers  
above the city's night, illuminated by the crux  
of the moon. How many first things fall  
not knowing their destinations?  
Under billowing striped tents do we drift  
in a haphazard dance between sewer  
and the passerby's three inch heels? Do we  
paint the night in hieroglyphs? The room attached  
to the lighted window pollutes this most pure blackness  
and three blocks away evening floods the sea.  
I drew you as you slept in sea foam green  
and darker shades – amethyst for your eyelid creases,  
the place where elbow disappears into forearm,  
your mind somewhere quieter than the draining Atlantic.  
Take me to the place where flying things have no shadow.  
I will rest there and release the elephants  
from my shoulders and heart.

## **Questions for an Intellectually Confident Woman**

### **Devi K. Lockwood**

what do you look like what do you wear  
what did you tell yourself this morning in the mirror  
if you could would you change any part of your body

do you have a favorite season  
are you in love what do you love

do you often ask questions are you told that you talk too much  
do you consider yourself a feminist how do men respond to you

what is your work can you see the world through another's eyes  
what does that look like

when choosing a seat around an oval table  
surrounded by eleven others  
would you sit in the same chair every day

would you change your response  
based on the gender of those eleven individuals

tell me about your mother  
what do you share how are you different  
what barriers have you overcome where do you feel most  
comfortable  
who are your role models what do they look like

do you wash the dishes are you free

## Morning Blues (and/or Greens)

### Vanessa Vitiello

In the morning when you wake up there's a moment you decide you're not going to rebel. You see your chance to be another kind of person, to be and do and feel all the things you wish that you could do and feel and you reject them in favor of email checking, your coffee-pot, and jam on toast. Whatever you always do that's what you do again and what's more you pretend there was never a moment of decision and that dreaming is a state entirely apart from waking.

Your coffeepot would never miss you. It isn't thanking you for your fidelity. It's just a coffeepot but you have turned it into a prison guard and for that it's started to despise you. The hatred comes out thin and black and bitter and no measure of cream or sugar can overwhelm it. Better to drink it black and face it, rather than drown in the denial of non-dairy creamer.

The tea you keep for company might have been more forgiving; but you didn't choose tea did you? You didn't choose to be somebody other than yourself this morning but you'll try not to let it bother you, you'll say to yourself (somewhere so deep inside you don't quite know you're saying it); tomorrow is another day. Maybe tomorrow you'll sip tea or start a rock band.

You remember, oh I'm sure that you do remember, when you were a child and you tried so hard to see the fairies in the garden. You never saw them, not a single god or devil or ghost or dragon either and that was your own fault, you know. Your fault, for not allowing yourself the eyes to see the magic. It wasn't... It could not have been that gods and dragons don't exist. Deep down you know you have yourself to blame for only ever seeing acorns.

It's like that now. Only it's possibilities you don't allow yourself to see, because you're scared of what might happen if you suddenly became the sort of person who's allowed to be haunted by errant spirits, or who goes to Barcelona for no reason other than the hatred of your coffeepot.

You could go, though. Any morning you could go. You even have a portion of your savings which you think of as your

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“eloping-with-your-chatroom-sweetheart” money. Your Barcelona (unless you feel like Bombay or Bogota or Bangladesh instead) impulsivity-funds. Your stash you could withdraw in cash in case you’re ever on the run from the police, or, alternatively, if there’s a beautiful stranger on the run from the police and when she looks at you with those big blue-or-green eyes you find you couldn’t bear to disappoint her.

Not that you’d really do it if there was a stranger, which there isn’t. You’d think you were too old, or wonder if she was a grifter. Or most predictably of all you’d not even remember your savings-in-case-of-impulsivity and never even waver in your eternal devotion to getting in to work on time. You’d turn away from her, with a sorry shaking of your head, and the dental hygienist you sit next to on the subway would have to step in to take your place at the last minute. At least the blue-or-green eyed girl and the lovely twenty-something dental hygienist who you sit next to on the subway would be happy. Even without a ready stash of impulsivity money they’d make it off the train to safety, and your only contribution would be daydreaming them into existence.

Seriously, though, it’s all well and fine to play with the idea of not going to work today, but if you didn’t go would you even have anything worthwhile to spend your freedom on? More likely you’d politely and apologetically call out sick, then spend the day completely at loose ends. You’d sit in successive coffee shops, reading the paper and wondering where people who want to start a rock band go to meet each other. Or when the next blue-or-green eyed girl was scheduled, or if the new tech at work was messing with the settings on your scanner. The problem, and you know this with absolute certainty as you sit drinking black coffee and spreading raspberry jam out to the very edges of your toast, is you and nothing more than you yourself. That’s why the rock band, even in your imagination, even before you’ve tried to get a band together or learn to play the drums or anything, is bound to fall apart because nobody has the time to practice and you and your band mates all feel slightly silly and too old to just be starting now.

Maybe the dental hygienist and the blue-or-green eyed girl will start a band together. They’ll pick up the old cello and

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clarinet (which neither of them has touched since seventh grade) and dedicate their songs to Sappho and the mother goddess.

They'll probably make every single one of the hygienist's friends cringe with embarrassment, over the clarinet and the mother goddess parts especially, but won't those two at least be living instead of just existing?

If you catch yourself over the dishwasher, as you put away your plate and coffee cup, thinking that they might agree to let you be their manager if you'll invest your savings in a van and help drive them to gigs some evenings after work or on the weekends, don't be afraid. You're not going insane; you're not suffering from too many hours staring at the Rorschach scanner images, working to form them into body parts, or brain injuries. You're having a brush with sanity just by imagining the blue-or-green eyed girl and trying to fit yourself somewhere into the story of the life you're making up for her. Maybe she'd let you play the bongos, if you had a set of bongos. If you could play them, and you had a set of bongos, and if the blue-or-green eyed girl really existed.

If she existed, and if she told the dental hygienist she was on the run from the police, and if the hygienist stopped reading the mystery novel you saw her reading on the subway yesterday (the one about a burglar who has to solve the murder with help from his scrappy lesbian sidekick), then the hygienist might get off with her three stops too early, probably at Downtown Crossing. They'd go for breakfast in the first pastry shop they saw and halfway through her story the blue-or-green eyed girl would laugh and she'd admit she made it up, the whole thing, just for the chance to talk to a girl so pretty. They'd blush, and maybe the hygienist would pretend to be annoyed and angry, but then she'd let herself be cajoled into calling off from work and maybe going off with the blue-or-green eyed girl somewhere cool and different, like the aquarium or the fine arts museum.

Then while you'd done the sensible thing and gotten in to work on time they'd end up staring into giant fish tanks the same way that you'll be staring deeply into pictures of MRI sliced images, wriggly wormy brain scans of wriggly wormy patients, but while you'll still be thinking about the blue-and-green eyed girl she and her dental hygienist will by now be thinking only of

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each other. A brain scan might tell you the places inside the skull that love can cause to light up like the Fourth of July fireworks, but it hasn't yet explained why you've doomed yourself to write about it for peer review and publication but never really and truly given yourself over to the practice.

But enough of this. It's silliness, you know it's silliness. Personification of inanimate objects, coffeepots dispensing hatred and gods and blue-or-green eyed girls and fairies in your garden, when your family didn't even have a garden, just a big yellow forsythia bush which bloomed in early April. You had a big backyard instead, with oak trees and a swing and what you remember most isn't questing after fairies back behind and/or inside the big forsythia, but rather swinging as high as you could swing and jumping off just when it looked like you might have swung so high that you could jump your whole house and land on the lawn in front of it. You remember hanging in the air forever, even if forever lasted only for a moment. When you grew up you studied physics because you fell in love with Einstein. Einstein, who taught you that free falling is the same as being motionless. Falling, or flying, was all relative and you thought, yes, that's just how I thought about it in that forever moment, the one before I submitted under gravity and fell back down again.

If you could only go to Einstein now, and give him your confession, he'd tell you love is relative. Love for science fades the same way love between a blue-or-green eyed girl and a dental hygienist would, in time. How unprofessional of you to have thought that anything could last forever. Even a high school textbook covers entropy, the Second Law, the one that Murphy's Laws are based on. Its time you put this nonsense of the morning well behind you, and go into your bathroom to shower and look for the signs of time's arrow in the light which bounces off your mirror and shows you your own reflection. A grey eyed woman with glasses and not a hint, not even an inkling of rebellion, not you, not for a moment. Nothing of rebellion, even after you drip and wring your hair out from the shower, and the blue-green color of the towel round your body is picked out by your eyes, and they look like they might be a little blue-or-green themselves, if only for a moment.

## **Storm Between Lovers**

**Karen Norris**

Moments pass like rain  
the storm ends before it begins  
wetness touches my face  
your embrace is like thunder  
reverberating through my soul  
your kiss sends lightning bolts  
through my veins  
the tornado inside me is  
tearing my solitude to shreds  
completely intertwined  
wrapped up in the silence  
words unspoken need no explanation  
Is it worth the risk involved?  
Do you jump or shall you remain  
within the depths of revive?

## **Her Call**

### **Karen Norris**

A fire burns  
deep within  
igniting my past  
flames licking my wounds  
death calls  
she is an illusion  
breaking my resistance  
an elaborate scheme  
fighting for sanity  
torn between my vices  
living in suppression  
cut a little deeper  
red surrender

## **A Night of Lust**

**Nancy Santos**

Touch me gently like you do,  
kiss me slowly, ever so slowly...  
The night is long, ever so long,  
and I want to feel the warmth  
of your lips, of your very soul.  
Touch my lips,  
feel my very existence,  
ever so tender...touch me slowly...  
Caress my lips,  
for the night is young  
and we've only just begun.  
Hold me tightly in your arms  
and I promise I will go far  
long into the night  
caressing you  
ever so slowly ...  
holding you ever so tight.

## **Learning the Way**

### **Kyle Anne Bates**

You know  
how I am about this –  
language. I think it's some kind of god,  
like sex. The trick  
is what you strip  
away. I tell you I can make you  
come without even touching.  
You sit across from me  
throwing gauntlets of strong silence  
down between us.  
I tell you to touch what we talk  
about, and you do,  
but you can't make the words.  
It's easy, I say,  
but you can't put your mouth around them.  
You can't say with your tongue  
what you'll do with it.  
I say it will shove us closer,  
yank us together into a knot  
if you tell me where to pull you  
apart, and how to spell it  
in there. You wiggle  
in your chair, and stand.  
Vowels become consonants.  
T's get crossed. Punctuation enters  
the picture. You walk away  
making hard K sounds.  
I measure  
how many feet  
lie between us.  
You can't stand it.  
You go out and drink with your friends.  
You make words  
for other things.  
They think I am a genius

and a pain in the ass.  
You drink to that,  
and come home,  
sneak in, under the moon  
and lay with your back  
to me shaking, and giving  
directions - how to get in,

and where to go then.  
You shiver in your brain  
and put a hand on the place you mean.  
My hinges swing.  
I taste the body and the blood.  
Talk to me. Tell me where it feels dirty  
and what the password is.  
God knows  
I love to open you,  
but I love it even more  
when you open yourself.

## **My Tribe**

### **Kyle Anne Bates**

Heavy soled,  
ass kicking,  
broad shouldered babes  
whistling the song  
of their love for you,  
flexing the shape  
of their desire for you,  
teaching you how hard,  
and where, and how long,  
and what you would do  
if you could choose anything.  
T-shirts,  
chains,  
tattoos -  
life plowed deeply  
into their  
foreheads.

You know her.  
You dream her, and try to force  
her out of your dreams.  
You think she is dirty  
and all your little secrets  
rolled into one.  
You think she knows  
the things you don't  
let yourself  
know.

You think you will turn and run,  
that there is still time,  
that you still have  
your own power,  
but then she leaps ahead  
and gets the door.

## Nora

### Kyle Anne Bates

Matisse and the Venus of Willendorf,  
noble and round,  
sun and moon,  
squash and flower.

She feels like  
the source dough, made from  
history and ancient yeast.  
The kind they keep special,  
deep in a cave,  
waiting for a documentary  
only she will watch.

*Cans of blue and brown  
tip and mix, blend into  
ladle-like strokes  
on the canvas of a vintage dress,  
tastes like chocolate, life-changing  
breads, trees, growing, planets and suns  
orbit around my hurts and fears,  
wrap branches like flannel shirts,  
crossing their arms over my heart,  
saving me softly.*

All the metaphors  
of color and warmth,  
earth and food,  
ripe and open,  
good, worth it, seasoned, hot,  
and still there when you wake up,  
nights and seasons - one better than the next -  
these are her things, her list,  
her table of contents –  
the feast she has made  
for me alone.

## Significator

### Julie E. Justicz

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante, untied the silvery tendrils of the scarf and pulled back the four corners, one by one, to reveal the Tarot. She let the scarf drop next to Ivy on the smooth marble steps and began shuffling, deep in meditation, oblivious to the second-period bell and the jostle of Westmont Academy students pushing past into Candler Hall. She cut and rejoined the deck, then flipped the top card.

“Holy shit, Ivy, it’s the Tower again,” Harper Reeves’s gypsy persona, like many of her passions, could be a fleeting and volatile thing. “That’s like the fifth time this card has thrown itself at me. Freaky, huh?”

“Freaky,” Ivy agreed, pulling her collar up against the winter chill. She was freezing her ass off, using up a free period when she should have been preparing for her chemistry final, and all just to indulge Harper’s newfound penchant for cartomancy. Harper insisted on doing the readings outside; the winter air helped Madame, her temperamental alter ego, concentrate. Harper was the kind of girl who could insist on such things; Ivy was the kind who did not put up much of a fuss. Not when it came to Harper, at least. Out on the bone cold steps, or buried in the swampy clang of the school’s boiler room, what did it matter? An hour alone with the most beautiful girl in the senior class, who had for unknown reasons chosen her as a sidekick: Who was Ivy to question the cards?

“So,” the recomposed Madame said, “Your reading begins with zee Tower. Interesting.” She bit her lower lip in concentration, pushed a vagabond strand of her long black hair behind her ear, no doubt trying to remember the cheat sheet that came with the Tarot deck. “Tower ees signifator. Where you are in life now.” She peered into the image, trying to get a clue. “Madame Sees beeg change ahead. . . cataclysmic change for you, Ivy Novotny.”

*Is she messing with me?* Ivy wondered. “Hey, don’t I get to pick my own card?”

“Madame alvays pick signifator.”

"So I'm stuck with the Tower?" Should she laugh this off or look concerned? She could never quite figure out when Harper was serious and when she was joking. Misreading the tone of their interactions seemed to be her chief fault in Harper's eyes. Harper would turn in a quick second if she thought Ivy got it wrong. *Lighten up*, she might say, or the equally unexpected converse, *For once, Ivy, just be serious.*

"Cataclysmic change," Ivy tried, "Could be a good thing, right?" Sometimes, she screwed it up on purpose, because she liked the delicate tension of annoying Harper coupled with the promise of more time together, as she tried to earn her way back into favor.

"Quit fooling around." Harper tapped the deck. "Pose a question, for the reading."

The Motherpeace Tarot cards were circular instead of the rectangular, which made them as hard to handle, as they were to interpret. Harper had developed a loping shuffle; she would arc them from hand-to-hand, almost as if she were juggling. Ivy had not known quite what to say when Harper gave her them a few weeks earlier. Not for her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, (which she had already missed) but far too early for Christmas. A gag gift, then? Or something more personal? The \$16.95 price tag still on the shrink-wrap made Ivy err on the serious side.

"Awesome," she had said, ripping off the plastic. Wanting to please Harper could make her over-play. "These are amazing cards. I love fortune telling." Even if the gift began as an amusement, Harper now read the cards with a convert's intensity. *Silence. Madame Sosostris speaks.* Well, if she was all about Tarot this month or the rest of senior year, for that matter, so be it. Always intriguing to have her arrange the spread, turn over each card and reveal her feelings about life, about Ivy, on a given day. She could be so generous, old Madame S, seeing *beeg love, verrry long life*, rolling her r's dramatically whenever she felt openhearted. She could also switch into a mean old bitch. *Cataclysmic change.*

Ivy shuddered in her corduroy jacket. Trees around campus held their quivering gold leaves, feeling lucky to be so bestowed and knowing that a strong blast at any moment would strip them of their worth. Her mother's scarf, fallen on the marble

step, was made of the thinnest cotton; strands of tinsel thread criss-crossed the fabric. Ivy picked it up, held it to her nose: Cigarette smoke, a little dust, a scratch in the back of her throat. She had purloined the scarf from a basket on the floor in Mom's closet, where she kept the silky wraps she wore on her teaching days at the university. Such luxuries could be liabilities when Ivy's younger brother Benjy was around. At fourteen, he still had the mental ability of a two year old. He would stretch and shred anything pretty, then stuff it in the toilet, just for a laugh. Even though Benjy was away now (however long the latest in a long line of group homes might last), Mom still kept all her silks and jewelry hidden, like love letters from an old boyfriend.

Ivy tied the scarf around her neck for some warmth and a little magic, too. Maybe she could absorb from it some of Mom's ethereal beauty and do to Harper what Harper now did to her. "Come on then, Madame Sosotris. Tell me what my future holds."

"Just a second, Novotny; you're a total mess," Harper's concentration broke again, as she leaned into Ivy, took the scarf ends, tied them together and rearranged the fringe. "There . . . much better. Now . . . You are the querent, so you have to pose the question. Place your hand on the deck. Focus."

Ivy studied the signifier card hunting for clues. A thin, naked woman with fire coming out of her head sat on a tower. Her hair was long and wild, streaked with gray, and there was fire blazing in the background. Lightning bolts shot down from the sky, as if at her command. Did Mom sometimes wish that lightning could strike her family, once, twice, thrice? Strike one, without question, would be for Benjy. He'd been kicked out of six group homes already; who knew how long number seven would last? When Dad came home from work at night and said *Looks like we finally figured it out, huh?* Mom looked as if she could spit. Her second bolt of lightning had to be for Dad, then, the relentless optimist who wouldn't or couldn't give up his crusade to find a permanent placement for his problem child. And the third and final strike? No contest, was there? Hugo, Ivy's middle brother, at sixteen, was stoic and beautiful -- rose early every day, rode his bike to the Westmont campus, changed in the varsity locker rooms, and then launched his body off the diving board, over and

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over again, whipping and chastising his physical self into perfection. Hugo – his name even meant “good soul” – would have been any mother’s dream son. Strike three, then, was for Ivy: Chunky of body, sharp of tongue and as Mom must suspect unnatural in desire. With Harper beside her, Ivy knew that she could not be who her mother wanted. She probably couldn’t be who Harper wanted either, but she did want Harper. *So screw Mom and screw the flaming Tower card and screw me too, for being too chicken-shit to ask for what I need.*

Madame tapped her foot and said, “Come now, you vant to ask about a boy, yes?”

Ivy tugged at the stupid strangling scarf. Whose idea of fun was this? Where had Harper bought the damn cards? Scratch that – why had Harper given her the cards? No. Not that either. The honest truth? The question she really wanted to ask . . . Could Harper ever feel the same way? Did she ever find it hard to sleep at night, just because of Ivy? But these were not the kind of questions Harper wanted; for all her flirtations with the dark and dangerous, Harper remained a conventional Southern girl.

“Ask.” She now insisted of Ivy.

“Where’d you buy the cards?”

“Little Five Points,” Harper flashed her super-white teeth. “I already told you that.”

“I don’t think so. I would have remembered.”

They’d found the funky neighborhood together, during a long, slow run one afternoon in the fall. The location and atmosphere were as far away from Westmont Academy and Atlanta’s moneyed Buckhead neighborhood as Ivy could have hoped to go: Long-haired guys kicked around a bean bag in a rubble-strewn front yard; rainbow flags hung from bedroom windows; a girl with a black-faced guitar sat on the hood of a pick-up and strummed chords. No one watched as they jogged past. Later, they talked about venturing back one weekend; they could shop at some of the strange stores, maybe grab lunch at that place. *Eat Your Vegetables*. Ivy loved the name; she loved to be bossed when it came to food. And love. But now it seemed, Harper had returned to L5P alone. Or at least, without Ivy. She stared at Harper, willing her to confess. A sense of doom stirred in her gut. The Tower cried out *cataclysm, cataclysm*. She pulled

her feet out from under her butt. Pins and needles in her toes. Harper owed her a confession. Ivy flexed her heels and asked again. “Where *exactly* did you get them?”

Madame dealt nine cards, face down, in a circle—the *Motherpeace* spread, the one described in the instruction booklet—then looked up at Ivy defiantly. “All right. I went back there last month.”

“By yourself?”

“I wanted to get you a present. I thought I could find something. Kind of quirky. Like you. So yes, I went back alone.”

Harper was lying. Her tell was the way she tossed her hair between each choppy sentence. She dealt three final cards, face down beneath the circle; they would reveal proximate, distant and final outcomes.

“How’d you get there?”

“Is this a fucking federal investigation?”

Ivy waited her out.

“Dan drove me, okay. Is that what you want to hear?”

Ivy's neck burned, blood rising up her cheeks. Dan. Dan Lauderdale: Class President Yearbook Editor Christian Life Leader Wrestling Co-Captain. Lately, he had been tagging along with the girls' cross-country team because he said it would help him make his competition weight. 154 lbs. He spit every few yards, trying to shed those extra ounces. She was such an idiot to believe the runs were part of his regimen; she could spit on herself for stupidity. Did Harper have to rub the final three cards in her face for her to finally understand. *Dan. Harper. Little Five Points?*

“Now ask the goddamn question for the reading.”

Harper was not fooling around.

Ivy was lousy at finding one. It was a skill, just like tying a scarf or smoking that required a measure of femininity unattainable to her. Some people -- Mom, Harper -- never had to worry about such things. They just could: Wear a scarf, inhale, know the right questions.

“Ask,” Harper said, “or I am so out of here.”

Like that she could lose her. Ivy untied the scarf from her throat, and scratched at her neck with stubby, bitten fingernails. Harper had climbed in Dan's car voluntarily and given him directions to Little Five Points. Did she lead him into the

restaurant, *Eat Your Vegetables*, whisper that command into his ear, rest her hand on his thigh? Did she buy the Tarot just to tantalize straight-laced Dan? How excited he must have been, walking through the odd community with a gorgeous girl, just crazy enough to explore the dark arts.

A gust of wind blew hair across Harper's face and she pushed it back impatiently as she began to gather up cards from the steps. The trees held tight to their leaves, but winter was coming. Ivy saw what she was not yet ready to lose; knew what would have to be enough. For now. Maybe for the next few years. She cleared her throat and found somewhere deep within exactly the type of question that Madame wanted to answer.

## **Beauty School**

### **Lisa Dordal**

We never knew, on Tuesdays, what she'd look like.  
Our mother, who drove to the Del Mar College of Hair Design  
to get dolled up cheap by a stranger. Someone she'd never seen  
before

massaging soapy fingers into her wet scalp. Afterwards  
rolling one taut section after another around a metal curler  
to form large, loopy curls, like the links in those paper chains

we made in Sunday school. Or small, tight ringlets  
tucked in like something sleeping that didn't want to be  
disturbed. The color, too, varied: from Hepburn-chestnut one  
week

to a sassy blonde, the next – so blonde, truckers on the Dan Ryan  
would slow down to get a glimpse of the pretty young thing  
in the blue Karmann Ghia. Until they saw the years in her face.

One week it came out wrong. “Aubergine” the school called it.  
But she wore it anyway. Proud to trigger the stir  
she was never supposed to make or be.

## Recycling

**Lisa Dordal**

Rinsing a jar, I think of my mother; of her own hands rinsing the remnants of pickles and jellies. And of the select few: the jars she washed, re-used. Some for plant cuttings – a sprig of begonia growing fine, wispy roots, or the punctured pit of an avocado, left to sprout over water. A few she lined inside with a layer of dried beans, for hiding valuables (money or jewelry).

Others, she filled with bourbon. I was sixteen when I found them; still have my notes, the sheet of lined yellow paper on which I recorded my findings: four in her sitting room, behind a collector's set of Hardy Boys mysteries and, where my search unwittingly began, a neatly ordered run of *Scientific Americans*. Three smaller ones in her dresser amidst an assortment of cold crèmes and sweet perfumes. The largest in her nightstand, stashed between a stack of *New York Times* best-sellers and a bookmarked copy of *Good News for Modern Man*.

These notes, tucked, for years, from view. Like the poems I had written about the truth hidden within my own body, my own text of flesh and desire which could not be trusted. Already, I had learned how to gather and record what I wasn't yet allowed to speak. The jars she didn't use, she'd put in a box under the kitchen sink until the third Saturday of the month, when she'd load it into the back of our Chevrolet, drive to the recycling center and begin (again) – this time by color – the process of separating.

## Intersection

### Lisa Dordal

Their freezer had died. The melted blood of raw, damp meat everywhere on the kitchen floor. Bright and contagious across flat brown tiles. My father, ten time-zones away, studying the ancient gods of ancient Greece. My mother and I stopped at a light two blocks from Sears. It was there I dug into layers of built-up wondering, let form in my mouth one bated word after another, to utter fully the question – *Have you ever thought you might be* – that hung in the cramped space between us – *a lesbian?* (Father's first words: *Maybe your Mother is, too*, when I came out).

*It wasn't an option*, she said. Her head never turning, both of us looking straight into the lucid circle of red that, in that moment, provided all the direction we cared for. What more could we say about a revelation carrying the whole sinewy weight of non-being. The thousands of ways she'd said no – deferred, followed and agreed – making herself smaller and smaller, a god of old clay, buried and powerless. But for the tiny part that broke out, sneaked out sly: The resounding Yes of her seventh conception; as if *I* birthed her.

## If I Had to be a Flower

**Betsy Brown**

I have my own kind of thorniness,  
but if I had to be a flower,  
I would not be a rose.  
I would rather not be any kind of flower.  
Oh how I dread being dainty or delicate.  
Oh how I disdain the thought  
of being some fragile decorative thing.

I might be poison oak.  
If you mess with me, you won't forget me.  
I might be some lush tangled bramble,  
inch by inch  
taking over a vacant lot.  
Or maybe I'm a climbing vine,  
crawling up the cottonwood tree  
on my way to strangling the telephone wire.

But if I had to be a flower,  
of course I'd be a dandelion,  
with bitter nutritious leaves,  
my intoxicating golden blossoms,  
ripening into bits of silver fluff,  
before finally floating away  
like a flock of tiny angels,  
on the next strong breeze.  
I would be a stubborn plant,  
impossible to eradicate,  
asserting my brilliant beauty,  
while everyone around me  
scorned me as a weed.

## **Ensorcellment**

### **Aisha Sidibe**

We met in high school. I knew she hated me; I overcame that with a long phone call. I told her I became her best friend from the moment I saw her on the bleachers; odd, ugly, beautiful, humble, and magnificent. Her dark cloud of hair was tied up that day. Her eyes a dark pool, shifted slowly from person to person. She had her circle of friends and they all demanded her attention.

Now I sit with her under the shadows I promise myself I will never forget as she tells me “I want a kiss.” Her words are fierce without action, as if the verbal expression is action enough. Enough movement, when it is not. She can foreshadow its death through the lack of physicality.

I know her, better than my own wants. On our way to this bench cast high in solitude, we spoke of the wrongs. This is our connection, our reality. Our progressive ascension on the steps leading here is hard like the steel we have walked on. We are by the water, some port a previous boyfriend brought her to.

A couple months ago, her uncle – the man who shared her sort of mind, he reminded her to laugh – died. Her tears were not real, her pain was a bad movie that tied me down to a bottomless ocean and would not free me. Her petite body shivered under my own and I knew I could save her with the truth. Things surely die. Cast away into the place of nothingness, and spirituality. Where the divine and the evil reside inside the same hosts; our minds. Her numbness begged this of me then and I responded as the EMT began having difficulties getting the burly black bag from the elevator. They drop the corpse onto the floor. The ocean does have a bottom and so does the depths of hell.

Now I turn to look at her and ask “Is that so?” - My verbal declaration of reality. My blood signature to her contracted words. She made the rules. Always has. In High School we functioned as one and I could say she never left my side but it is I who never left hers. Her free spirit and stupidity deeply marked me. I could not laugh without her. I could not feel pain without her.

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I know this, so I surely must not feel passion without her. My parents taught me all things that feel good are the works of the devil but this did not feel good, much like the fall of death.

I get up from the bench and squat before her, casting a shadow on the left side of her dark face. I don't know my intent; I only know my motivation – a shift between numbness and feeling. She shakes her head as I reach towards her, I feed into my excitement.

People always asked if we were sisters, not because of our looks because in fact we looked nothing alike, I was in fact plump, and sharply ugly, but in our mannerisms. One day she told one of them "Yes, we are actually identical twins" to which the person responded with sage-like looks as if they knew all along. Our stories and lives were in their hands and there could be no moment where it would be escaped. But in fact it was a lie.

I am taking my hand and cupping her face. I look deeply into her eyes. Using my thumb, I trace the path of the moon light which has illuminated the soft angles of her face, because she could not follow me there. Only I had this power, to see her, to view her and to hold her eternity. I could not say I had her in my heart, because it did not exist. I was safe within my thoughts so long as I was not I, but these fleshly desires. I say "You brought me here, I adore you." She responds with a smirk. I feel that she has accomplished something in making me react in a place like this. A place shown to her by someone who loves her. They brought her here in warmth and she brings me here in the cold. I let my hands fall. I do not need their guidance. My will alone is enough to envelop her within me. I allow my lips to touch hers. Softly

Graduating from high school, we knew we could not take the world by a storm, one which no one could identify. So she fell in love with a narcissist. It is true that a narcissist is the only one not plagued by a fellow lover of self. This boy spoke in tongues not spiritually but in a way I found truly to be mad. Pompous; the reveling in one's own brain can cause madness – not ingenuity – but the sad reality of the universe and that of an unknown void. I loved her then. Love; apparent in my distance and her possessiveness. She had broken up with the narcissist and came

back to me. Her eyes telling me that we were fine in the perpetual “now” moments.

She is now wielding under the palpitating heart of my mouth. Open and flooded with things I am sure I am never meant to see. Her love was given back to me, but not in a place where we were free. Bound by the gender associations and sexual allocations, I could not win.

The truth is my words are not my own, and I do not own my actions. I wish to torment. To set the fire under the desires of those who mirror my wants. I feed into the poetry of the moment and I stream these thoughts.

We are tragedy. We are where the bottomless oceans that must be proved.

And maybe it is crazy, and maybe it is madness. The need to hang on and to be enveloped always.

*And the pulling back and the bringing in and the burn.*

*And in the lighting and in the clothing*

*and in the voice of the eyes and in the vision of words.*

*In poetry.*

*In the slip of the foot, and the perfection of a dance*

*In the crook of a nose and the noose*

*Of uncertainty.*

*Either way it is madness, red passionate insanity.*

*Sweaty palms and twitching fingers*

*In the moment that I am satisfied.*

*In the proximity of a muse.*

*The madness.*

*The lines of air, the movement of thoughts.*

*The internal cave lit with the illumination of eyes*

*A kiss.*

*Caressing of a fine line of hair above two sheer windows.*

*The curve of a maze. The cusp of my wine.*

*I overflow. In the proximity of my muse.*

*In the need to be enveloped perpetually.*

*In the gain and in the loss.*

*In the over thought and in the under stood.*

*It is in this kiss.*

She says “Ibid.”

Translating the moment to its end. There are no emotional repetitions in life.

Tomorrow she falls in love with someone she can never share her being with. The place where she can hide from her thespian art; her life. I am in want and in need but it was always too late.

## **Questing Spirit**

**Martha Yoak**

Blue heron hunches dark  
Bowed like a cowled monk.  
In quietude immersed  
It meditates deeply a  
Shallow fish  
Marks time with primeval beak  
Fielding water what holy seek.

## **Winter Labyrinth**

**Martha Yoak**

The labyrinth loved my feet,  
it seemed some vague yield  
foreign like breath of my  
first kiss.

I knew this journey, my last,  
would be the hardest.  
I had always walked in circles  
longing intersection.

Although I had beauty and wit  
I should have had all of it,  
but when I tried, beat love back  
box her in she always got me  
her ring and laid me flat.

I took all the hits and all the quits  
then myself prized a  
Lancelot in full sprint  
blazing through the hyacinths.

## Longing

### Kate Yarrow

It was night, the streets bright with neon. I pushed open the door and walked into the dimmed lights, red walls, the long bar. You remember the Duchess. It's gone now of course, but there are plenty like it. Twenty women swiveled on their stools to watch me as I breezed by, down the length of the room, checking them out in return. Past more women leaning against the wall talking and laughing, one catching my glance and raising an eyebrow at me as I passed, all the way back to the tiny dance floor with little tables around the edges.

I stopped and looked around. I was longing for excitement, love and romance that night. A new lover or a one-night stand. I would have preferred the lover, but I wouldn't have minded the other; I hadn't had any kind of loving for too long. I needed my quota of kisses and smiles, caresses and sweet talk in the night. A woman.

And women there were. All kinds of women—short, tall, thin, fat, dark and fair. Butch and femme and in between. Young women bursting with energy, in jeans and tight shirts, with long hair or hair cut to the bone, jumping up and down on the dance floor, flushed with excitement. Chrysalis, the miracle of birth: brand new lesbians bursting out of themselves like butterflies into bloom, leaving their cocoons behind. And women in their thirties and forties, political women in serious clothes and somber faces, career women in slacks and jackets, blazer dykes. Older women with silver hair, full bodies, lined faces and wise eyes. All sizes, shapes, colors, types—women!

The place was full. On the dance floor, couples moved slowly to the music. Nice. So nice. Just being there made me feel less lonely. It was a good place to be. No empty seats, but I found a spot against the wall, where I leaned, watched, and waited.

Some of the pairs dancing looked like they'd just met, some looked like new couples, and some like they'd been together a long time. I loved watching the ones who were obviously new, just a couple of weeks or months old. They were so into each other. It was delicious watching a woman's hand stroke its way

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down her lover's back, past her waist, coming to rest gently on a softly swelling cheek. Delicious how the woman being touched would move even closer, murmuring, maybe grinding a little. And then there would be the occasional stimulating pair who would grind more than a little, almost making love right before my eyes.

Surrounded by all this, my body reacted, feeling both hungry and nourished at the same time. I wanted all of it—the sensuality, the intense eye contact, the dancing. “Your eyes are bigger than your stomach,” my grandmother used to say. I’m still the same.

I remember when I was a new lesbian, and the first time I saw women dancing together. I was very excited, of course, but I was also in shock. Even though I’d been dreaming about it for so long, the reality was almost too much to bear. Women actually touching each other, in each other’s arms. I couldn’t believe it. Many I would never have guessed to be lesbians. And all acting as though it was perfectly ordinary and commonplace. I had to take it in for a long time before it seemed in any way ordinary to me.

The song ended, but some women kept right on dancing to their own music. One couple barely moved, swaying in the aftermath, their lips and bodies glued together. Others moved off the floor together, and a few pairs separated and walked away by themselves. Now it was a little easier to see who was alone. Anybody I liked? Then, across the room, I saw a very young woman staring directly at me.

I recognized her. I didn’t know her name, but she was a waitress at a restaurant I ate at sometimes across town. I liked seeing her when I went there. I’d also seen her at demonstrations and other events. I’d noticed that whenever we saw each other, we’d exchange a look, though nothing ever happened, and I’d forget about her until the next time. Now here she was again.

I looked back at her, a smile curling up the corners of my mouth. I have an angular face with large features, including a wide mouth, and a space between my front teeth—the mark of sensuality, so I’m told. I’m also told I have a nice smile. I hoped she thought so.

She definitely interested me. Short, but broad and solid (unlike me—I'm tall and thin), she had a very large chest. A nice face with round cheeks, a strong chin, brown eyes and a fair complexion. She looked sweet, but definitely not demure, more direct. Soft and strong; that's my type. She wore a big white shirt tucked into tight black pants, a nice contrast. She was very young, maybe 20 or 21. I was in my thirties, an older woman.

A slow song came on. And she walked straight across the floor to me.

Feeling suddenly shy as well as excited and pleased, I watched her come. She moved in such a forthright, no nonsense way, she made me think of a tree, with its strong trunk and roots. I watched her breasts move under her shirt as she walked. She stopped in front of me.

"Hi," she said, looking into my eyes and smiling. "I'm Erica." She reached out her hand. "Would you like to dance?"

There was no question about it, she was affecting me. I took her hand, told her my name, and we moved an inch or two out from the wall to dance.

The first time I ever hold a woman, there are some things I notice immediately. Certain things I need in women I sleep with, whether they're one-time or long-time lovers. A very primary one has to do with my sense of smell.

I need a woman to smell really good. I have to want to breathe her in, skin and hair, above and below, inside and out. It may be that her own natural smell just happens to be sweet, or that she wears a scent I like, or even uses a particular kind of soap. I was once totally infatuated with someone mainly because her shirts smelled so good. As for me, I have often favored wearing patchouli oil, to the point where my friends sometimes call me Patchouli Mama. Erica smelled a little like cinnamon and cloves: sweet with a bite. Like freshly baked spice cake. I loved it.

Another thing I noticed at once: her skin was warmer than mine. Heat seemed to emanate from her hands touching me, and through her shirt to my hands on her. I wondered what that was about. Did she always have a higher than normal body temperature? Or did it happen when she was turned on, and was she really turned on by me? I fantasized that she was an enormously sensual woman, and that caused the heat.

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I felt her weight and substance against me. Her heavy breasts brushed me as we danced, and I could feel her hard nipples. Our bodies, such different sizes, fit together like a jigsaw puzzle, the top of her head just reaching my cheek, her shoulders fitting perfectly just above my breasts. My cheeks were burning. Felt good, looked good, smelled good—closing my eyes, I inhaled deeply, and thought, I'm done for. Wherever this goes from here, I'm along for the ride.

Rituals. The ritual of the dance, the ritual of meeting, of mating. We moved slowly to the music and at first didn't talk at all. It's so strange, just meeting someone, and then immediately being involved in intimate activity with her. Beginnings are like that, of course, but they're made easier by the invisible, delicate silken web that weaves the two of you together from the moment the approach is made and accepted, eyes smiling into eyes, and you both realize that chances are, sooner or later you're going to be gazing at each other in bed. In this case, given her sweet smell and the way our bodies fit so cleverly together, I hoped it would be very soon.

We did not step on each other's feet. Because I was much taller, her arms were around my waist while mine rested loosely on her shoulders. I thought I should probably find something to say.

"Mmmm—you work at Angelica's, right? I'm sure I've seen you there." I remembered that she wore big white shirts like this at work too. I'd noticed her breasts moving inside them before this.

She tipped her head back and looked at me. "I sure do," she answered, smiling brilliantly. "I know I've seen you there." Barely begun, the conversation stopped short, while charges and currents flashed between us. The circuits had been ready and waiting. Now they lit up humming like the neon lights of the sign outside the Duchess. Sparks coursed through me. My knees felt weak—a sure sign.

When the charge died down a little, the conversation started again, but progressed only with difficulty. It would just have begun, when I'd notice her watching my lips as they shaped the words I was saying. Or I would let my hands slide off her shoulders and down her arms, or my cheek turn slightly to rest

against her sweet-smelling hair. Or we'd step back a little to gaze at each other, and then she'd pull me in a tiny bit closer, and the shape and heat of her breasts would imprint themselves by thermal transfer onto me. Once she raised her face all the way up and actually touched her lips, ever so softly, to my cheek. With each little shift, little movement, our words would stop as waves of heat spread through our bodies, flushed our cheeks, and moved down between our legs, where the pulsing, not to be stilled until much, much later, had already begun.

Somehow we did manage to talk a little, learn a bit about each other. People we knew in common, where we lived, what we did for work. I was more than ten years older. We'd both grown up in New York. We both wrote poetry, we'd both been in therapy. We heard these things, we took them in, even though most of our awareness was centered in our humming senses, in the totally engrossing experience of touching, holding, inhaling, absorbing, looking at each other.

The song came to an end. We stopped dancing, dropping our arms reluctantly, neither of us saying anything. What happens now, I wondered. This will, it must continue—how could it not? Then the music started again, our eyes met, and our bodies came together as naturally as if we'd been lovers before tonight. As if we'd been lovers for a long time. As if we were going to be lovers. We were going to be lovers. Erica, I thought. I can't wait to touch you all over. Come home with me, now.

We danced through many more songs. Some of them fast, moving to the beat a foot apart, moving our bodies for each other. Checking each other out. Liking what we saw. Me, loving her contradictions: big breasts and big thighs; narrow hips and flat belly. Liking it all. Her smile, her eyes, her heat. Liking her looking at me, drinking me in.

When the music was slow, moving back into each other's arms. Feeling more familiar each time, feeling my body loosen, open to her. Letting go of any awkwardness with her, of all self-consciousness, knowing she was letting go of those things too. Being brazenly, sensuously connected. Taking each other in, and in, and in.

A fast dance ended; we stopped to catch our breaths. Erica's friends were leaving. She went to tell them goodnight, as I

watched from across the room, glad I didn't have to meet them then. I was trembling, my teeth almost chattering, my whole body aching with longing. I was in no shape to relate. She wasn't either, and she just hugged them, turned around and came back to me.

Then, for the first time, we kissed. And to all the other watchers, we became that couple I'd watched earlier: just barely swaying to the music, limbs and lips locked together, nearly making love right there.

I soared. She was purely and simply erotic. With every bit of myself, I reached out for her. I wrapped my arms around her, pressed my mouth to hers, and allowed my tongue to touch her lips, learn their shape and texture, caress them. I ran it along the crevice between her upper lip and her teeth, an area I find so erogenous I can barely stand being touched there.

She was quivering. I gathered her to me more tightly. Our bodies pulsed madly. I bit her lips gently, sucked on her tongue. My muscles ached with the tension of holding her tight, but not as tight as I wanted to, of holding myself back, keeping myself reined in.

It was definitely time for us to leave. I pulled back and gazed at her, smiling. She was breathing hard. She saw my smile and joined me in it.

I put my arm around her waist, and she reciprocated. We left the dance floor without a glance at our audience—I'm sure there were many of them—and walked past the long bar, with all the women sitting at it watching us, to the door.

Outside the Duchess, the air was very crisp. I realized I was perspiring when the cool air touched my moist clothing. I started shivering, and pulled Erica close to me, sure she must be cold too.

It was only three blocks from the Duchess to my apartment. We started off walking slowly, engrossed in each other and dazed by our physical sensations, but soon found ourselves going faster and faster, until we dropped our arms, grasped hands, and ran laughing the rest of the way to my house and in the door.

At last, we were there. As we entered the apartment, I wondered if we would feel strange or self-conscious again, but we didn't. All that had been left behind what seemed like hours ago.

We walked through the living room together. I thought about those words: living room. Room I live in, that would start to show her who I am. I was glad to have her in it. It was full of me, all the things I liked and that were a part of my life.

Interesting and beautiful objects, textures, pictures, books, plants, bits of nature—music, comfort, colors—two sleepy cats. She took it all in.

We reached the kitchen. “Are you hungry?” I asked her, the good hostess. “Want something to eat?” She grinned at me. “I won’t give you the obvious answer,” she said. I grinned back, relishing her. We passed the kitchen by.

My bedroom. My bed. On it.

Our clothing. First that shirt of hers. Unbuttoning it. Her breasts were as beautiful as I’d imagined and felt through the shirt, but her nipples were amazing, creating a shock in me that reached the tips of my own breasts and down between my legs. Very large, intensely pink areolas, as soft as rose petals, covered their tips, ending in perfectly round nipples that were totally erect.

Struck by her beauty, just staring, I felt my longing as a palpable thing. Having gathered itself for so long, it was ready to leap, like a big cat in the jungle. It had shape and weight and fire and muscle, it was separate from me and it was me. And it, I, wanted to leap but didn't. I chose to wait, to savor. To touch, but very lightly. To hypnotize her, and me, as the cobra does, undulating before its prey. I could hear the flute music playing.

She was transfixed. She was so still. I would draw her into me, as fire draws air. I would touch my finger to her mouth, trace her lips. I would brush the backs of my fingers softly over her breasts, like feathers, like whispers. I would whisper in her ear. Or I would take off more of her clothes, see how she looked, such a small, barely rounded belly below such big breasts. I would unzip her pants to see, to touch, but leave her shirt on, open but on, framing her, while her breasts hung free.

But I couldn't stand it, I couldn't wait. I would lay us both down and wrap myself around her, or put her on top of me,

I would touch her, kiss her, tongue her, I wanted everything. I wanted to drink everything in, I would begin at once, quickly, now—but no, I wanted to slow down, go slowly, to wait, to have this moment last forever—oh which, which to do, what to do, how could I do it all?

But she took the decision from me. She moved. She decided, reaching out and pulling my head down to her.

I am like plywood, made of many layers, each a part of and strengthening the others. I need all my layers to be whole, heart and guts and body, hunger and longing, generosity and selfishness, flesh and spirit, human and animal and more.

Erica opened all of me. All the doors between the different parts of myself flew open, and my layers mixed, all with all. Our bodies joined, floated, crested, we were two fish, two starfish, two stars.

I buried my face in her, and she smelled of the sun.

## Siren

**Susan DiPronio**

*'Cuttlefish belong to the cephalopod family. They have the highest intelligence of any invertebrate, eyes in the back of their head; use jet propulsion to get away from predators.'*

a beach stretches far to touch the ocean  
a mute clam spits tiny bubbles up from under the wet sand  
like a signal fire of sorts calling for rescue

*'Cuttlefish have three hearts because their blood needs to pump really fast.  
They are fleshy on the outside with an internal shell.'*

you are a cuttlefish, a mollusk  
soft, edible on the outside, invisible at will,  
with an internal shell to protect your heart

*'They can make themselves unseen in an instant, becoming one with the ocean floor and can reflect light in all sorts of colors, appearing to glow.'*

chameleon of the sea, a changeling,  
from daughter to mother on land  
primarily a deep water inhabitant  
favorite food of dolphins

I, a common clam, shut tight upon your attempted visit to my  
space  
burrowing deep at the edge of the sea  
another tide recedes  
extinguishing evidence of my existence

## **October 13<sup>th</sup>**

### **Susan DiPronio**

Jazz baby  
you better hurry up and get here  
your moma is tipping to the right  
pulling to the left  
anxious as to the when  
already knows the what

jazz baby  
pounding your feet  
thumping your fist to the beating music  
Esperanza's deepness lulls a music rhyme  
Sonia kissed you  
so it's poetry will bless you

## Collards for Sale

Susan DiPronio and Alison Gerig

*In a field of low winter rushes  
a bristling wind comes across  
tilting the dried slivers of grass  
pointing  
the way home*

*I turn  
the signs are here  
the sun begins to bend low  
tramping through stiffening mud  
my warmth is there before me*



*a crow's screech rips the naked sky  
lone sentry  
accompanying the smell of dried leaves  
crumbling  
from an expected frost*

*I settle into a patterned pace  
a determined peace  
falls over me  
chilled cheeks hold a  
contented smile*

*My feet break the earth beneath them,*

*SD - 12/25/2010*

Words and Design: Susan DiPronio  
Photograph: Alison Gerig

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## Hair

### Sarah Brooks

You often talked disparagingly about “those lesbians,” the women slightly overweight with the short spiked hair and the reminiscences about high school softball games in which they had hit winning homeruns or whatever it is people do well in softball. You would talk about those women while we walked beside each other on the boardwalk along the ocean in our town; we rarely touched; you never felt ready for the world to see us as a couple, though you claimed the problem was that you just did not “do” public displays of affection. A few years ago, though, the moment we disembarked from the plane that had carried us from our town to San Francisco, you clasped my hand in yours and even pulled me to you at baggage claim and kissed me on the lips, which made me wonder if an openly gay town was exempt in your complicated book of rules.

But I am talking about “those lesbians.” You would talk about them as we walked along the boardwalk because that is where the enormous cruise ships dock, and inevitably those thousands of tourists contain some lesbians – “butch” lesbians, you would call them, and I would hear the fear that crept into your voice. “I used to play basketball with those women; that’s why it took me so long to figure this out.” “This”: your euphemistic word for coming out, which you really hadn’t done and didn’t do, because now that you’re dead, you can’t. “This”: the word that made your voice lower, because even before you became psychotic, you were suspicious of the world. You didn’t want to be found out.

Why did they offend you so much, the pear-shaped women in their comfortable Merrell tennis shoes, their graying hair spiked and highlighted? Cameras hung around their necks; they were the most likely to wear sweatshirts advertising the cruise ships’ port of call. They seemed friendly, most of them. I wanted to follow them onto the hulking ships, sit down beside them at a bar, gaze out the round windows at the darkening sky and ask, *How did you get to this place, this utterly open place?* I wanted to cut my hair.

Once, I told you I thought I might shave my head, and you told me flatly that you would leave me if I did. *Leave me.* Little did we know that three years later, you would go insane and become so frighteningly inconsistent in your moods and your intentions that *I* would leave *you* in the middle of the night clutching my child and my pillowcase. We had an argument about that, the evening you said it. *You would leave me because I shaved my head? What if I got cancer?* Oh, you said, that would be different, because it wouldn't be your choice. As if the most heinous act I could commit would be to *choose* to look like one of "those lesbians". *It might look sexy*, I argued. You didn't want to talk about it anymore. It was as if I had offended you. Just don't do it, you said.

Stupidly, I never did. I kept my hair long, its brown waves hanging just below my small pink nipples when I stood naked before you in our bedroom, before you started insisting in your self-hatred that we never see each other naked; you turned off the lights before you went into the bathroom to shower and then you sprinted from shower to bed. You were that ashamed of your body, which I always loved, to the end. And because you were ashamed of yourself, you could not bring yourself to look at me. Me, who you had once studied like a painter studies his model. My long hair seductively hiding my breasts, and here is my smooth curved side and my flat belly with its surprise of a silver ring in the navel, and the hair you once loved to explore the way we used to love to wander new trails in the woods together until you started complaining of weariness and pain in your knees.

I could have cut my hair in our last year together and you would have never noticed. You had gotten lost by then inside yourself; I imagined reaching into your empty eyes and pulling you back to the surface; I imagined the rope I would weave out of my shorn hair to haul you back up to yourself. Yelling at you hadn't worked; neither had silence; neither had sex. I went to a salon and had fifteen inches cut off my hair, and returned home. You brightened, briefly, our daughters beaming beside you: It's beautiful, you said. You look free. I was.

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How can I forgive myself for what I actually cut off? Somewhere in our ocean-side town, the fifteen-inch braid of my hair packaged to be mailed to Locks-of-Love; somewhere you, staring emptily, your heart beating irregularly maybe because it was bleeding from the rent I had left when I yanked my own heart away. You said once you would leave me if I ever shaved my head, but you never imagined I would leave you. No one ever had.

When you died, I stood for several hours and considered leaping off a cliff. It seemed more certain than a drug overdose or a train “accident” with my car. But eventually, I edged away from the cliff and drove home the twenty miles to pick up my child from my mother’s care, and then I just held myself and sobbed angry hot tears that this ended when and how it did. Then, silent and spent, I considered a pair of scissors. From Sherman Alexie, I had learned that some Native American tribes abide by the tradition of shearing off one’s long and sacred hair at the death of someone beloved. It seemed appropriate. I held my ponytail in one hand and the scissors aloft in the other. But I could only hear your ridiculous threat: *I’ll leave you if you shave your head*; I am desperate for you to haunt me; maybe the answer is to never cut my hair again. So I haven’t. And you haven’t come yet.

If you had seen me step off a cruise ship, if you hadn’t known me, you wouldn’t have called me one of “those lesbians”. My hair hangs in a single thick braid to the middle of my back. But maybe, if you had been able to swallow your fear for a moment, you would have looked into my eyes and seen yourself, and maybe you wouldn’t have died, and maybe that would have been our first meeting. But it wasn’t. My hair grows longer, and it matters not at all.

My hair grows longer, and I say, despairing, *I’m going to shave my head*, and from the back seat, my 5-year-old daughter, adopted from Ethiopia, says, “No! If you do, I’ll go back to Africa!” and I start laughing, hysterically, because it will never be for my hair or lack of hair that anyone leaves me in this world. I know that, now.



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## Book Reviews

### **Noctilucent by Melissa Buckheit (Bristol, UK: Shearsman Books, 2012).**

Reviewed by Grace Sikorski

Melissa Buckheit is an accomplished poet, photographer, professor, choreographer, aerial trapeziest, and translator (from Modern Greek to English, and from English to French). She earned her M.F.A. in Poetry from Naropa University. Her work has appeared in *Sinister Wisdom*, among other publications. She has received accolades for her poetry, including the American Poets Honorary Award and favorable recognition as a finalist for the Backwaters Press First Book Prize. Buckheit's chapbook, *Arc*, published in 2007 by The Drunken Boat, was received very favorably.

The title of Melissa Buckheit's most recent book of poetry, *Noctilucent*, refers to the phenomenon of light emerging from darkness. The mood such an image evokes is sustained throughout the 23 poems in the volume. In each poem, complex impressions emerge from flashes of sensory detail and allusions to natural, cultural, and interpersonal events, and build upon themselves to accumulate meaning. The book is a thoughtful meditation on the power of words, as in translation, poetry, or ordinary spoken language, and the complex realities they mediate. We are asked to recognize the beauty in profound moments of suffering, mundane moments such as riding the metro, and the most self-revelatory moments of meditation, sleep, birth, and sensual union with the beloved.

In the title poem, “Noctilucent,” the poet explores the way the mind can find meaning through a chain of loose association. We begin with the Greek word “*kyanos*,” which is translated strictly as “cyano / blue,” and then the color is associated with its material origins, “certain bluish salts and minerals,” then with the chemical compound “cyanide,” and then the peculiar effect of its lethal poison, “the blueness of skin.” The reader moves to “the blueness of sky” whose color is associated with “water / breathed in” and the speaker’s own

condition of “cyanosis,” by which her “skin appears / blue from no oxygen in the blood.” This stark image of the lack of what is needed for life leaps then, in the second stanza, to a contrasting image of blue light that is “alive with the kindling of moths,” bugs glowing with “bioluminescence,” which is in some way “like love.” The third stanza invites us to imagine “moon lanterns,” illuminating “the night-/ walk to a lover’s door,” the “electric blue / lights of the city,” and the way that city looks from space “*illuminated by noctilucent clouds, waves, beaches / and celestial orbs*” The closing image is most poignant: “dark (the homes) we make glowing in / other bodies / our lovers / asleep (inside us).” Our minds move among these associations until the color blue, and light-like love-homes, takes on a multifaceted and layered significance, a gesture only the free verse of the poem can sustain.

The poet’s curiosity about the power of language is evident in many of the poems. In “Suffering,” mother rejects child saying, “you’re not my daughter anymore and you’ll never be / my son.” In “Hildegard,” the mystic’s words become the “secret salve of a sister’s voice.” The sensual immediacy of the poetic voice is always heard on every page, but never more clearly than in “Post-Modern Epithalamion,” when poetry itself speaks: “I’m secret, spoken against your ear / not a dream or lament, / but poetry. Put your tongue against mine. This / is not a vow, but what is the secret / of love? It’s alive.”

Buckheit avoids clichéd expressions of the “chemistry” of passion, but explores personal experiences through the lens of scientific observation, as in “Suffering,” when “The woman is chemically altering from the moment she is ignited.” We are constantly reminded that as one element among many, our experiences might be illuminated by what we observe in the natural world, which is populated by other animal species (the honeybee, salmon, starfish, and squid) and a wide array of flora as well. It is a complex universe Buckheit explores at many levels from the macroscopic and celestial spheres down to the submarine, microscopic, and even the subatomic levels.

Burkheit’s poetry challenges the reader in many ways, and occasionally the reader may encounter a word or phrase that requires some definition, but the poet has anticipated this need. Notes at the back of the book offer translation of Greek and Latin

words, identification of geographical locations, and definition of terms from history, literature, music, botany, astronomy, physics, and chemistry. These notes enhance our reading of the poems and further emphasize the poet's eclectic interests.

*Noctilucent* is a beautiful collection of poems, demonstrating the poet's impressive range.

### ***Memoirs of an Old Dyke, Jinx Beers, iUniverse, New York, 2008***

Reviewed by Jean Taylor

I bought three books while I was in the US in 2010: Alix Dobkin's *My Red Blood* at her reading at the June L Mazer Lesbian Archives in LA in June, *The Other Side of Paradise: A Memoir* by Staceyann Chin at the Michigan Women's Music Festival in August and *Memoirs of an Old Dyke* by Jinx Beers who dedicated her book and all proceeds from its sale to the Mazer.

I bought Jinx's book because back in 1999 after I'd sent off a couple of short stories to Jinx who was the Editor of *Lesbian Short Fiction* at the time I received a rejection letter the like of which I had never received in the almost thirty years I'd been receiving rejection letters. Jinx not only told me in an elaborate point system why she was rejecting them but had added personal and detailed criticisms as well as submission guidelines that seemed to suggest that if I took the trouble to take her advice she might well accept a short story the next time round. I was so impressed that I did as she'd advised and was thrilled when *The Definition of a Lesbian* was accepted for publication and included (with a name change to *Description of a Lesbian*) in *LSF* issue no 5 January 1999, the first time I'd ever been published in the US.

As Jinx describes towards the end of her memoir, the first issue of *LSF* came out in Spring 1996, issue 2 in Fall 1996, issue 3 in Fall 1997, issue 4 in 1998 and issue 5 in 1999 was, unfortunately due to ill health and other circumstances, the final issue. In a long and varied life Jinx considers the *LSF* her 'first and only failure' which in the scheme of things is a not what could be called a bad effort.

Most lesbians in the US would know Jinx Beers as the

founder, publisher and Editor of *The Lesbian News* which was established in LA in August 1975 as a free, modest monthly publication and by the time Jinx resigned fourteen years later had grown to be a 64-page magazine still run by volunteers and financially supported by advertising. For founding such a significant lesbian publication which is still going today, ('the longest running lesbian newspaper in the world' as Jinx puts it), Jinx was included in Barbara Love's book, *Feminists Who Changed America*.

Jinx was the fifth child in her family of origin, knew from an early age that she was a lesbian, frequented the bar scene even though she didn't like the taste of beer and was obviously out as a butch who rode a motor bike and wore leathers. She joined the air force at eighteen, was posted to Germany for three years where she went to bed with her first lesbian lover and afterwards took advantage of the GI bill to go to college and get a bachelors degree majoring in psychology. Jinx worked hard all her life, wrote poetry, had any number of lovers and didn't retire till the age of 75.

This memoir describes a lesbian life of principles and courage, determined effort and significant achievement. Jinx Beers has served the lesbian community well in writing it.

***Divas Don't Yield* by Sofia Quintero, One World Ballantine Books, 2006, 339 pages, paperback, \$13.95**

Reviewed by Ruth Mountaingrove

According to Sofia Quintero, a working-class Puerto Rican-Dominican from the South Bronx, she began writing the book as a screenplay (*Interstates*) in 1998, and it has gone through many revisions and changes on its way to becoming *Divas Don't Yield*.

In *Divas Don't Yield*, readers meet Jackie, a 21-year-old, 5'9" Afro-Latina woman. Jackie is pre-law—and a confirmed heterosexual. Her friend, Hazel, is a lipstick lesbian who can have any man she wants—but she wants Jackie. Hazel and Jackie have known each other since they were 13 and are best friends. They are both graduating from Fordham. Irena is 19 is

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asthmatic, and heavily into tarot and New Age spirituality; Lourdes, at 20, is about to change her major from pre-med to photography—on the advice of Jackie.

These four *chicas* are on their way to a feminist conference at San Francisco State University. It is Irena's idea that they keep a journal of the road trip. Through these journal entries, we learn about these young women and the individual viewpoint of each one. There are many problems on this road trip to California; one is that they are travelling with a credit card that belongs to one of their mothers. Before that mother cancels the card, the four friends have gone from New York to Nebraska.

*Diva's Don't Yield* is a novel about class, female bonding, friendship and self-discovery, as each woman learns who she is through the journal entries they each write. Jackie lives in the South Bronx. Lourdes, who is Cuban, lives on the West Side of Manhattan. Hazel is Dominican, and lives in Chelsea, working part-time as a hair stylist; her mother will not come to the graduation, but whether this is due to Hazel's lesbianism is not clear. Hazel's father is in prison upstate. Irena lives in Jersey City, where her father has a grocery bodega. Irena's mother preferred to stay in the Caribbean.

Jackie is the organizer who expects every thing to go her way, and the conflicts come rolling in when the other three don't agree with her. Cultural clashes begin to rise: Lourdes belongs to the group, Catholics for Choice; Irena finds Lourdes's prayers, and her devotion to the Catholic Church, annoying; and Lourdes finds Irena's fascination with the tarot and her diet problematic.

The odyssey begins in Lourdes's SUV but an accident with a taxi forces them to resume their trip in a [Ford] Tempo, which breaks down but only delays them.

Hazel wants nightlife and gets it at a carnival—but not what she had in mind. Irena has been asking to go to a meeting since they left New York so they have one outside of Omaha. A confrontation with Jackie brings on a serious asthma attack for Irena, and she spends three days in hospital at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Jackie, Hazel and Lourdes lace their English with

Spanish. Irena is learning as she goes, so readers will learn with her because since there is usually a translation which follows the Spanish sentences and phrases. In addition, there is a glossary of Spanish terms and some cultural references, which is helpful and interesting for the non-Spanish readers.

***A Lesbian Love Advisor, The Sweet and Savory Arts of Lesbian Courtship by Celeste West, Cleis Press, 1989, 190 pages, \$9.95***

Reviewed by Ruth Mountaingrove

Celeste West's *A Lesbian Love Advisor* is a gem from 1989 still relevant to lesbians today. A Lesbian Love Advisor is about a lot more than courtship. West tells us of the steps of a relationship cycle, stage one, first blush, the power struggle, acceptance, commitment, and stage five, co-creation.

Lady Clitoressa is the wise woman who gives advice on many subjects of interest to young and old lesbians. Lady Clitoressa has a circle of women to which West belongs. They discuss many different aspects of the art of lesbian love. This advice is scattered through out the book. Lady Clitoressa is a thinly veiled Elsa Gidlow. *A Lesbian Love Advisor* is Celeste's love letter to her.

Lady Clitoressa and her circle go in for ritual, too, even though West isn't quite convinced of some of the hippy/dippy aspects. Candles are featured as is chanting. Symbolic theatre—being born again to women—is a circle. Other practice rituals include coming out to mom, a circle of Commitment, and even a ritual for break-up.

West explores a variety of questions about lesbian relationships. How do you find a lover since everybody including you have to earn a living? Well, bars are a possibility, or organizations political or otherwise. West is a city gal so suggests personal ads. These challenge you to learn who you are. Describe the lover you are looking for. Not the usual LL: no pets, no smoking, no drinking or dope. Have some lightheartedness, some fantasy with some practicality. West give us her ad but it is much too long for this review, but it got the results she wanted.

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There is the celibate lesbian who prefers her own company and/or her own pleasure. Perhaps the celibate is just between lovers but she may actually be directing her sexual energy into herself and projects for her own benefit.

There are live apart lesbian couples and the live-in lesbian couples. for live-in couples there is housekeepery with one lover not giving a rat's ass how the apartment looks and the other driven crazy - who empties the cat box? West addresses money, separate or joint accounts?, and the time and trust need to answer that question. She also gives rules for fair fighting. West suggests that when you move in together that the first thing you do is label what is yours and what is hers and if you buy something jointly agree as to who will get it if you breakup.

She also takes up "jealousy heartburn"—how to handle it and how not to and then she uses a word I never heard before—omnigamy, in the area of monogamy/non-mongamy. The second was popular in the 70s, and West calls the first a nunnery for two.

Chapter VIII is titled "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover." "Actually there is only one way to leave your lover with her laughing and blowing you a kiss," says West. "This chapter is about being left." What a difference that makes as anyone being left can attest. The dark night of the soul. Instead let her leave you. Agreeing with her when she tells you of all your faults but continue your bad habits.

West recommends safe sex highly. She points out that while lesbian sex seems to be free of HIV you never know if your lover to be has been with another lesbian who has used dirty needles. So be prepared with dental dams, finger cots.

West, when she deals with areas she is not familiar with, has other lesbians write those sections: S and M, fantasy, having an audience while you make love, theatre, pain with limits. None of these appeal to West or me but there you are.

Where do you pick up this wonderful book? Try Powells, Amazon, and Google. It will be there in secondhand books.

***When We Were Outlaws: A Memoir of Love & Revolution, Jeanne Cordova, Spinsters Ink, USA, 2011***

Reviewed by Jean Taylor

Jeanne Cordova and I met briefly when several of us repaired to a nearby cafe, Bosa Nova, for coffees and conversation after listening to Alix Dobkin talking about her autobiography, *My Red Blood*, at the June Mazer Lesbian Archives in LA, in June 2010. Little did I realise at the time as I listened to these American lesbians reminiscing about their lives back in the day, that Cordova was writing her memoirs and that I would not only be able to buy the book at the local lesbian and gay bookshop, Hares & Hyenas, in Melbourne Australia in 2012 but that I would find it to be a fascinating read.

*When We Were Outlaws* is not a conventional book but was written, as Cordova puts it in the Author's Note, as a 'novelized memoir'. This means that conversations are recalled verbatim, her lesbian love life documented in intimate detail and the politics of the time, from early to mid-1970s, described as the almost inevitable political clashes between lesbians and gay men, lesbian feminists and socialist feminists and Lesbian Nation against the status quo. Of course, the personal being political Cordova also deals with the politics of lesbian relationships at a time when non-monogamy was considered *de rigueur*, and the butch and femme erotic attraction, even for radical lesbian feminists such as herself, was impossible to resist.

Born in Germany to an Irish mother and a Mexican father, Cordova was the first of twelve children. While her upbringing was painful in the extreme Cordova credits the physical abuse she suffered at the hands of her father for her fierce emphasis on social justice and his extreme homophobia as the reason she was cut off from her family for many years.

The Foreword by Lillian Faderman notes that, Jeanne was on the scene and in the front of the pack for virtually every major event or piece of business that involved the Los Angeles lesbian movement in the 1970s. She not only helped organise the 1971 gay pride parade in LA, but she also brought gender parity to the parade - lesbians up front and in equal numbers with gay

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men.' Lillian goes on to add that Cordova was unusual in that 'While many lesbian-feminists wanted to throw gay men out with the bath water, Jeanne sensibly argued that it was the duty of lesbians to 'drag our gay brothers into enlightenment.'

Cordova's job as a reporter for the *Los Angeles Free Press* lead her into some hair-raising situations. At a time when the hunt for Patty Hearst and the members of the Symbionese Liberation Army was at its height, when the Weather Underground were being hounded and the Neo Nazis' organisation the National Socialist Liberation Front were on the rise, Cordova interviewed Emily Harris, 'John' and Joe Tommassi respectively at great risk to her own personal safety. Even when she was cornered by the FBI, she managed to make good her escape and courageously continued her reporting.

But it is probably as founder and editor of *The Lesbian Tide*, 1971 - 1980, a follow-on from her time as editor of *The Ladder*, which combined her love of lesbian community, her passion for lesbian feminist politics and her considerable abilities as a writer, that she is justifiably most proud. As she puts it: 'Clad in pyjamas, I hoisted myself from the bed and walked down the hall to the second bedroom, where my child - *The Lesbian Tide* - lived. I sniffed the smell. Fresh ribbon ink and carbon paper mixed with cigarette smoke. I loved it. This room was command central, the hub of my life.' (p33)

This book was made even more enjoyable for me by the mention of the lesbian feminists I have met and come to admire, such as Judy Freespirit and Ariana Manov, as well as Ivy Bottini and Robin Tyler who made me laugh out loud with their stand-up comic routines at the National Old Lesbians Organising for Change Conferences in LA in 2008 and in Cleveland in 2010. The inclusion of photos of these and other lesbians, including one which includes Jinx Beers, 'soon to be *Lesbian News* publisher' in a boat with Cordova in 1974, gives an additional depth to the text. The only thing missing, as this is much more an historical document of real events and people than a fictionalised account, is an Index.

Above all, it's her radical lesbian feminist politics and her passion for the revolution, Lesbian Nation, and the on-going fight to free her people as she calls us from the tyranny of

patriarchal misogyny and lesbophobia that is the mainstay of this book. This is personified in her political convictions and her determination and courage to put herself on the front line.

Whether it's taking on her gay male mentor, Morris Kight, for his sexism and his craving for power at all costs during the confrontation and picketing of the Gay Community Services Center for not being willing to include lesbians in equal numbers: 'GCSC could not afford to polarise LA's lesbian and gay community. It was also terrible PR for the Center. Surely Morris could not allow this to go on. He had to give in, and soon. And yet I was veteran enough to know that drastic measures sometimes had greater than intended drastic consequences.'

(p121) Or going to secret locations to interview people wanted by the FBI, as well as her strength and ability to organise events such as the National Lesbian Conference at UCLA in April 1973 and a few years later the National Lesbian Feminist Organisation in 1978.

It is interesting to realise that while Cordova was actively engaged at the forefront of the lesbian feminist revolution in LA, writing her regular pieces for the *Freep* and overseeing the monthly publication of *The Tide*, she was only in her 20s. Then again, to have done all that she did and at the same time to have had one primary and several other lovers on the go at any one time she'd have needed all that youthful energy to hack the pace.

As a lesbian herstorian myself these days, it is gratifying to know that many more of us are also documenting our lesbian herstory. And to read in the Endnotes where Cordova mentions her own FBI file, (which any self-respecting radical lesbian feminist American had back then, apparently): 'I hope to obtain more details for my next book on lesbian feminist history.'

If her next book is as fascinating as *When We Were Warriors* it'll be well worth waiting for.

***The Nightmares of Sasha Weitzwoman by Batya Weinbaum, Femspec Books, 2010, 582 pages, paperback, \$25***

Reviewed by Nina G. Wouk

Reading this book is like listening to music: Never mind the calendar-chronology; listen for the entry and development of each theme. The points of view intertwine like instruments in an orchestra. Maybe they are all different people and maybe they are only those people as dreamed by Sasha as she huddles under a blanket in a freezing Jerusalem hotel room. The sexual liaisons - between the pregnancy-seeking Sasha and her closet bisexual Iraqi Jewish landlord, between his wife and the yellow-lipsticked left-wing folk-singer, between the landlord and his various male employees - may take place in the flesh or only in the intangible realm of desire. The boundaries - between pre-1967 Israel and the more-or-less Palestinian territories, between living and dead, between hallucination and impersonation of a hallucination - remain as hard to pin down as the different characters' take on the same event remain wildly and often hilariously divergent. Desire routinely collapses distance. The natural jet-lagged misunderstandings of a foreigner spin into threads of misdirection that become whole new webs of action and (delayed) reaction. How (much) can a shared dream reshape reality? I am not sure that we are meant to ever sort out what 'really' happens. I am reasonably sure that what 'really' happens is not the point.

## **Letter to the Editors**

Dear Sinister Wisdom,

I have to object to the unethical attack on Lierre Keith and her book, *The Vegetarian Myth: Food, Justice, and Sustainability*. It is one thing to disagree with and to try to counter her book with respect, but Selma Miriam and Noel Furie comparing Lierre's work, as a longtime Radical Lesbian Feminist, to a book promoting sado-masochism is beyond insulting.

I can't imagine another Lesbian Feminist's book being attacked in such unethical ways, such as saying Lierre's book is "full of lies," without giving one example. We are just to believe them? Are they aware that their vendetta against Lierre is similar to how some male supremacist groups have condemned Lierre -- all in an attempt to coerce people to not read her? Do they even know or care about the frequent death threats she gets, and that she was physically attacked for daring to speak at the Anarchist Book fair? (Three cowardly men wearing masks ran from behind Lierre, an older disabled Lesbian, and each smashed her in the face with "pies" full of cayenne, knowing that the blows themselves could further damage her spine. They videotaped it all in an attempt to humiliate Lierre -- which backfired.)

Why are there such vicious attacks on Lierre to censor her? Her book is beautiful and is literally saving lives. Did they even read her book or did they deliberately mislead readers by asking if Lierre was a "junk food vegan," even though she said clearly in her book that she ate as healthily as she could in her almost 20 years of being vegan until she is now permanently disabled as a result of not getting adequate nutrition. (It is clear from reading her book that she knows a great deal about health.)

Twenty years ago, I and two other friends wrote an article with some of the ideas Lierre has written about because we saw how feminists used the issue of veganism and vegetarianism to bully and humiliate other women. The issue of what we eat has been one of the most divisive and destructive disagreements in our feminist movement, and it continues. Recently, non-vegans were physically threatened by a vegan in a feminist facebook group. It doesn't matter if we say how being an ethical omnivore has greatly improved our health (in my case, increasing organic

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saturated fat and protein and reducing carbs stopped all of my heart symptoms. Other friends have stopped diabetes and successfully fought serious cancers.) It also doesn't matter that we know so many longtime vegans and vegetarians who have permanent health damage, including some friends who were in such pain that they committed suicide. We are still treated with contempt and harassment.

We are animals and all animals need to eat other living beings to survive. Men and patriarchy have taught us their offensive hierarchy of "superiority," with Nordic men at the top, women and other animals next, and plants at the bottom. But less patriarchal cultures recognize that plant are alive and feel too. I believe all living beings think and feel. I would rather not eat anyone. I love animals. I am the person who waters and feeds the spiders in our house. I will grab wasps and bees with my bare hands to rescue them if someone is about to kill them. (No, they don't sting me and the spiders I pick up never bite me.) But we all need to eat someone to live and I do not believe that it is morally inferior or wrong to eat one large free-range animal, like a steer, who could feed a woman for a year than it is to eat countless tiny plant lives. Lierre describes how eating carefully as an omnivore actually results in less animals dying, including less animals being driven to extinction.

A major contradiction that we wrote about is that many vegans have carnivorous animals, who they either starve (driving those animals to kill wild animals, including endangered species) or who they feed meat -- the meat that women are supposed to be denied for our health. Why the double standard?

Some writers have refuted the flawed "China Study" by Michael R. Eades, M.D. There are several blogs by former vegans, describing why they had to become omnivores before their health was destroyed. These blogs include Paleosister's Blog, paleosister.wordpress.com, Voracious—Vegan No More, voraciouseats.com, and Let Them Eat Meat, letthemeatmeat.com.

And for those who haven't read the book so many want burned and censored, Lierre Keith's website is [lierrekeith.com/vegmyth.htm](http://lierrekeith.com/vegmyth.htm).

Bev Jo

## Contributors

**Kyle Anne Bates** is a writer, artist and photographer originally from Southern California. She has published her work in many journals and anthologies, including, *Orion Magazine*, *The Gay and Lesbian Review*, *Askew*, *Electrum*, *The Aspen Anthology*, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, *The James White Review*, *The Dan River Anthology*, *Poetry L.A.*, and the website, *Good Intentions*. Her short story, “How It Is,” was published in *Glimmer Train*, and nominated for a Pushcart prize. She was a columnist and feature writer for *Frontiers: The Nation’s Best LGBTQ Magazine* and the *Fullerton Observer*. She has read her work widely in California, and her plays have appeared in theaters in the Los Angeles area. She is working on a novel and a series of one-act plays, and lives outside Seattle with her partner and her dogs.

**Sarah Brooks** is a lesbian mother, teacher, and writer who lives in the West and tries to find small pieces of meaning in a world that often makes very little sense. She is an MFA student at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado.

**Betsy Brown** is a middle-aged European-American old-school lesbian feminist who lives in Oklahoma City. She is working in a public library and attending library school, and feels incredibly fortunate to have finally discovered right livelihood. She is teaching herself to write novels and is a five-time winner of National Novel Writing Month. She is blessed with a marvelous girlfriend, three excellent cats, a weekly Mary Daly discussion group, and a charming fixer-upper that she hopes to fix before she dies. She is slowly working her way back into political activism and believes that an egalitarian world is possible. And sometimes, she also writes poetry.

**Stephania Byrd**, a native of Indiana, moved to northeast Ohio in 1996. She did her M.A. in poetry and postgraduate study in urban education at Cleveland State University. She is a tenured assistant professor at Lakeland Community College. Her work has appeared in *American Voice*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Cave Canem Anthology II & III*, *Lakeland Forum* and *Eclipsing a Nappy New Millennium*. “Etiology of Cool” originally appeared in *Eclipsing a Nappy New Millennium: An Anthology of Midwestern Poetry* (Purdue UP: Lafayette, IN, 1999.) “Persephone Departs the Upcountry” originally appeared in *Lakeland Forum*, 2002-2003.

**Susan DiPronio** lives in Philadelphia where she founded Pink Hanger Presents which is dedicated to giving voice and a face to the unique life

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experiences of women, exploring their stories. Susan writes poems, plays, nonfiction, flash fiction, children's stories and film. Her plays and sort films have been widely shown and performed. Susan was chosen by Peter Barberie, curator of photography at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, as one of the Emerging Photographers of 2009 for Project Basho. A recipient of an Art for Change Grant from the Leeway Foundation, Susan focuses on art and writing workshops with the homeless and disadvantaged. Their art is included in ongoing visual and audio installations, which are mounted in the Fringe Festival and area art galleries.

**Lisa Dordal** (M.Div., M.F.A.) lives in Nashville, Tennessee with her partner, Laurie, and their two retired greyhounds. Her poetry has appeared in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, *Bridges: A Jewish Feminist Journal*, *Cave Wall*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *St. Sebastian Review* and *Southern Women's Review*, as well as in the anthology *Milk and Honey: A Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry*. Her chapbook, *Commemoration*, is available from Finishing Line Press.

A New York City grown cupcake enthusiast and college sophomore with neurotic tendencies, **Camonghne Felix** was featured on HBO's Brave New Voices as a member of the Urban Word 2010 team, who became the 2010 National Brave New Voices Champions. She is a two-time New York Knicks Poetry Slam Finalist and the first Runner-Up of the 2010 NYC Youth Poet Laureate Program. In 2011, she is the seventeenth ranked poet in the world. In early 2011, Camonghne opened for esteemed writer Sapphire, author of the novel *PUSH*, and has been honored to share stages with Talib Kweli, Common, Rosario Dawson, Mahogany L Browne, and La Bruja. In November of 2011, she was profiled in *The Forward* as a Young Jewish Philanthropic Hero. You can find her work in various publications, including *Punk Magazine* and *Kill Author Magazine*. She writes about the small things that happen when we've stopped looking.

**Alison Gerig** is the Executive Director of The Women's Therapy Center in Philadelphia, a feminist mental health non-profit offering low-cost counseling. Alison worked for a number of years in the area of HIV/Aids prevention and is the former Clinical Director at the Mazzoni Center. She is also in private practice where her focus is on gender identity, trauma resolution and life transitioning.

**Joanna Hoffman** is a spoken word poet originally from Silver Spring, Maryland, now living in Brooklyn. She has been on five National Poetry

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Slam (NPS) teams. In 2006, her team performed on Finals stage and ranked fourth in the nation. In 2007, she was the DC/Baltimore Grand Slam Champion and the Individual World Poetry Slam (IWPS) representative for Baltimore. Since relocating to New York for grad school, she has joined the Spoken World Almanac Project and has been featured at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. In 2011, she represented Urbana at the 2011 Women of the World Poetry Slam (WOWPS), National Poetry Slam, and Individual World Poetry Slam, placing in the top ten at all three. This year, she represented Louder Arts at WOWPS, placing fourth overall, and is the Grand Slam Champion for the 2012 Urbana team. She is the 2012 Champion of Capturing Fire, the queer international poetry competition. She has been published in Spindle and as part of the recent GirlChild Press anthology, *Women's Work*, and the Jewish lesbian poetry anthology *Milk and Honey*. When not performing poetry, she works at a nonprofit organization and runs in Prospect Park.

A native of Great Britain, **Julie E. Justicz** is a fiction writer who now lives and works in Oak Park, Illinois, with her partner, Mary, and their two children. As an undergraduate, she attended Emory University and Brown University. Julie received her M.F.A. from Vermont College in 1995. While working on her M.F.A., she finished a collection of short stories, *Love As We Knew It*. Julie recently finished her first novel entitled *A Boy Called Home*. She received a Glimmer Train “Family Matters” competition honorable mention for a chapter from the novel’s first section. Julie has published other works in *Sinister Wisdom* and *The Archon*. Julie completed residencies at the Virginia Center for Creative Arts in 2010 and at the Ragdale Foundation in River Forest, Illinois in December 2008 and in November 2007. A graduate of the University of Chicago Law School, Julie worked for many years in legal services and with a nonprofit disability rights agency.

**Amanda Laughtland** is the author of *Postcards to Box 464* (Bootstrap Productions) and the editor/publisher of Teeny Tiny Press. She teaches English at Edmonds Community College, just north of Seattle.

**Devi K. Lockwood** believes in the power of words. She is a second-year undergraduate student at Harvard who loves rowing and breathing and wiggle room for spontaneity. She studies Folklore & Mythology and writes, often.

**Natasha Miller** is the voice of wounds exposed, and the healing balm of poetry applied to the human spirit. The passionate 26 year-old

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Detroit, MI native is a writer, performance poet, author, publisher dedicated activist, producer, actress and an aspiring motivational speaker. Since her debut, just over four years ago, Natasha has proven to be a poetical powerhouse. After one year on the performance circuit, in 2007, she was crowned Detroit Poetry Slam team's Grand Slam Champion, and has been a member of four National Poetry Slam teams. She has also been a Women of The World Poetry Slam top five finalist three out of the last four years once ranking as high as the third female slam poet in the World. Natasha continued her impressive record by leading and coaching her own slam team to a championship at the 2010 Midwest Rustbelt Poetry Slam, where she also came out ranking #2 overall in the individual competition. Natasha has awed audiences across the country at universities, festivals and numerous venues including slams and shows like the famous Nuyorican Poets Café in New York, Vancouver Poetry slam, Seattle poetry slam, Girl Fest Hawaii and Chicago's Green Mill. She has premiered on stages with celebrity actors and comedians Oscar award winning Mo'Nique, Star of the movie "Paper Hearts" Charlyne Yi, Brandon T. Jackson, actor Malcolm Jamal Warner, legendary poet Jessica Care Moore, hip-hop artist Talib Kweli, and many more. Mo'Nique, impressed, personally invited Natasha to feature on her radio show. In 2010, she starred in a national commercial campaign for Sprite. In the same year, she released her solo spoken word album "Poetry for Change," and featured in the stage play "The Revolution's In The Ladies Room" produced by Jessica care Moore. Natasha is the former ranking number 5 female slam poet in the World. She now produces the popular "Its Not About You" Poetry Slam Series. Recently she started her own publishing company "All I Wanna Say Publishing", in 2010 she published her first book of quotes "Dreams Of A Beginner", and in 2011 she published her second book "Coming Out of Nowhere," a Social Networking Memoir. She is currently working with popular video director Erica D Hayes on a documentary that focuses on prostitution and placement in the transgendered community. Natasha uses her words to enlighten, create equality, imbue life, and most importantly spread love and peace in the tradition of great leaders before her.

**Charan P. Morris** is a poet/educator/performer transplanted from Chicago to New York. She is a Lambda Literary Foundation 2011 Emerging LGBT Voices Fellow whose work has been published in *The Gallatin Review* and NYU's *Brownstone Magazine*. She has performed as a feature poet for various audiences throughout East Coast and Midwest. Her work fuels public dialogue around colorism, homophobia, and the

effects of war. Of course, sometimes her work is just about being human.

**Ruth Mountaingrove** has published two chapbooks: *Rhythms of Spring* at twenty-two, and *For Those Who Cannot Sleep* at fifty-four the latter being influenced by Carl Young and Gurdjieff before discovering the Women's Movement. Co-editor with Jean Mountaingrove of *WomanSpirit* and *The Blatant Image*. Reach her at mountaingrove @suddenlink.net.

**Karen Norris** lives in Wetumpka, AL.

**C.A. Popovich** lives and works in Southeast Michigan. Her first visit to Provincetown, Massachusetts for Women's Week was an inspiration to write about it and share it with other lesbians.

**Nancy Marie Santos** is 57 years old, born to Puerto Rican parents—an alcoholic, drug-addicted father and a saint of a mother. She was raised half way in the Spanish Harlem, ghettos of New York City. When she was eleven, her parents divorced; Nancy and her mother moved to Puerto Rico. Nancy graduated from the University of Puerto Rico, and she discovered that she was, and is, a lesbian. Her childhood was not pretty, but that is another story in itself. Nancy now lives in Washington State. She has always enjoyed poetry; writing is one of her passions, besides photography and drawing.

**Shae Savoy** is a radical lesbian feminist, poet, priestess and teacher. She teaches Poetry on the Page at Bent Writing Institute, the only LGBT writing school in the world, as well as workshops on Writing as a Sacred Practice; Writing the Tarot; Writing the Body Poetic; and Growing Out Our Mermaid Tales (a writing workshop for women). A Tarot practitioner and healer, she believes there's nothing that can't be healed with deep listening and love medicine. Shae is an M.F.A. candidate at Goddard College, where she's getting down and dirty with poetry. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *J Journal: New Writing on Justice*; *Eternal Haunted Summer*, *Requiem Magazine*, the anthology *Once Upon a Time* and appears frequently in *We'Moon*, including the anthology *In the Spirit of We'Moon: Celebrating 30 Years*. She blogs at shaesavoy.com.

Although she has had a love for books her entire life, **Aisha Sidibe**, of Haitian, Cuban and Ivorian heritage, was nine when poetry was self-actualized. She has been writing ever since. Music has also been a major

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force behind her writing. From poetry, to fiction to memoir, Aisha has felt comfortable in cross-genre writing. As a student at Bronx Community College, she worked hard on exploring her writing and to influence others to do so as well. She was not only President of the Creative Writing Club she revived, but also serves as the Poetry Editor of *Thesis Literary Magazine* and provided workshops for students in both memoir and poetry. Sidibe's work has been published in several publications, and she has spoken at writing panels in Harlem and on the BCC campus. Sidibe is currently a student at Hunter College, studying English with a minor in Anthropology. She continues her research on the intercultural relationship between African Americans and West Africans in New York. She currently lives in the Bronx. She enjoys language, artistic expression, sitting down and writing lovely absurdities. "Ensorcellment" originally appeared in *Thesis*.

**Grace Sikorski** received her Ph.D. and M.A. in English at The Pennsylvania State University and her B.A. in English at Queens College. Her research explores fiction of the twentieth century and theories of sexuality and gender. Currently, as an Associate Professor at Anne Arundel Community College, she teaches courses in English and Gender and Sexuality Studies.

**Jean Taylor's** latest book, *Stroppy Dykes: Radical Lesbian Feminist Activism in Victoria During the 1980s*, was launched by the singer-songwriter Judy Small in Melbourne Australia in March 2012.

**Vanessa Vitiello** lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with her girlfriend, two cats, two rats, one dog, and various insects, arachnids, and bacterial colonies which she prefers not to dwell too much upon. She writes literary science fiction and science-y literary fiction and appeared in *Orion's Child Magazine* in January 2012 with her short story "Follow Me Home" as well as worldwide to great acclaim in her imagination.

**Kate Yarrow's** story "Seduction Scene" was published in *Sinister Wisdom Sixteen*, Spring 1981, under the name Irene Yarrow. In the past, she published both fiction and poetry in various literary magazines. Her essay "Woman Becoming" appeared in *Amazon Quarterly* in 1974, and in the *Lesbian Reader* anthology in 1975. Kate was born in New York City, and moved to California in 1986. She lives in Oakland with her partner of eighteen years. They are among the 18,000 legally married same-sex couples in California. Kate came out in her early thirties. She had a radio program called Everywomanspace on Pacifica Radio's WBAI-FM

in the early 70's. She worked in the nonprofit world, most recently leading an adult literacy program connected with a library. She is now retired and spending a great deal of time writing.

**Martha Yoak** was born in West Virginia in 1942 and grew up in several small towns in Iowa. She graduated from Mitchellville High School in 1960, received her BA and Eds from the University of Iowa. Martha Yoak's work has been published in many quarterlies; she has given many public readings, including television and radio broadcasts. Yoak lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and enjoys biking, swimming, and music.

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## Calls for Submissions

*Sinister Wisdom* consider submissions of artwork, fiction, poetry, essays, creative non-fiction, and articles for inclusion in *Sinister Wisdom* throughout the year. Please email submissions to [JulieREnszer@gmail.com](mailto:JulieREnszer@gmail.com) and [MerryGangemi@gmail.com](mailto:MerryGangemi@gmail.com).

Special issues or special sections can be guest edited by volunteer editors. Email the co-editors with ideas for special issues.

### **Special Issue Call for Submissions: Lesbian Health Care Workers**

For a special issue on Lesbian Health Care Workers (including, but by no means limited to nurses, physicians, mental health workers, EMTs, nursing assistants, educators, and physical therapists), please send essays, fiction, poetry, and/or other forms of expression (e.g., visual arts) on the topic(s) of:

- Factors that have influenced your decisions on whether or not to come out at work
- Impact of coming out or not coming out on your well-being when you were a student in a professional or occupational health career program
- Impact of coming out or not coming out at work—how has it affected you, your patients/clients/residents, and the quality of care you are able to provide?
- Positive and/or negative consequences of being a lesbian on your job(s) or career

Refer to the Sinister Wisdom website [www.sinisterwisdom.org](http://www.sinisterwisdom.org) for Submission Guidelines. The deadline for this issue is September 15, 2013—but don't put it off till the last minute! Inquires and submissions should be sent to guest editor Elizabeth Hansen [ehansen125@gmail.com](mailto:ehansen125@gmail.com)

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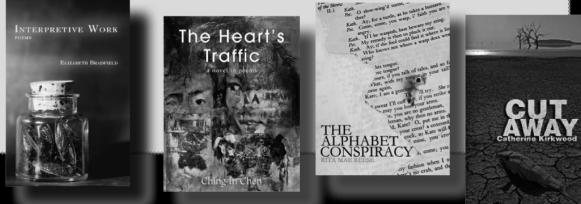
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**PUBLICATION DETAILS**

Volume 16, 2012  
4 issues per year  
ISSN Print 1089-4160  
ISSN Online 1540-3548

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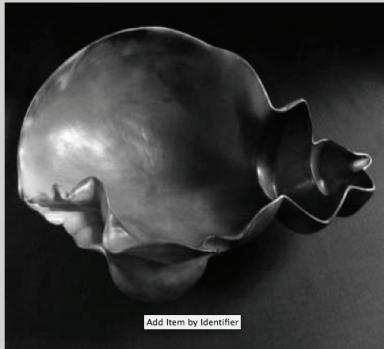
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