

ALMOST AWAKE. ALMOST POETS.

ENL 3850 INTERMEDIATE CREATIVE WRITING
PROFESSOR STACY GNALL

FALL 2025

WICK
BEFORE
FORTY



In addition to the poetry found within this anthology,
“almost photography” has been included as a play
off of the title: *Almost Awake. Almost Poets.*

We hope you more-than-almost enjoy our work.



Almost Awake. Almost Poets.

ENL 3850: Intermediate Creative Writing

Professor Stacy Gnall

Fall 2025

Student Editor: Melissa (Mel) Converse

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Photo: Mel Converse

Early Winter Cento

Professor Stacy Gnall

for my students

[all lines borrowed from or inspired by students
in Fall 2025's Intermediate Creative Writing class]

Next year at this time, where will we be?
Sways of a boat in the blur of the sea.
 Though time moves ahead, it circles for me.
Next year at this time, where will we be?

Next year at this time, how will we be?
Twinkling in trees like a thousand glass keys.
 I sleep. Weep. Leave.— How foliage of me.
Next year at this time, how will we be?

What will we be this time next year?
When shadows shift slowly across the floor.
 When cold winds spin thin and our breaths
catch on air. Who will we be this time next year?

Next year at this time, will we be the same?
When your face and the moment have tilted away.
 Next year distant as another life, distant as rays
of polar light— Next year, will we be the same?

Next year at this time, will we be open?
Do our best to make most of the flattest of anthems?
 Snip our teeth into grins, brighten each margin?
Next year at this time, we'll be open.

Who will we be this time next year?
The purple, blurred sky leans in close to hear.
 Almost awake, with almost the right words?
Fully awake, and with exactly the right words.

A Night at Work

Angelina Giulianelli

The shift starts before sunrise,
I tie my apron like armor.
Someone orders chocolate cake,
Another spills a bubble of soda.

The lights give a translucent glow,
And the mood feels almost charming.
Outside the window, the ocean breeze drifts,
While I carry trays that clink like glass.

The rush feels like thunder in my chest,
But I stay calm, spellbound by the motion.
My feet ache, my back hurts,
But there's peace in the rhythm.

When I finally rest my head on my pillow,
Dreams bloom like a peony at dawn.
Each night is a new novel,
And I am the hero in my own small castle.

First Day

Angelina Giulianelli

My alarm screams too early.
Sleep abandoned me hours ago.
My stomach knots,
and I keep glancing at the time.

I try on three shirts—
none feel right.
On the way there,
my hands tremble,
relentless.

I force a smile;
my face betrays me.
A cup slips from my grasp—
apologies spill too fast,
too many.

Everyone seems fearless.
They talk, they laugh,
like they've always belonged.

For a second,
I imagine running back to my car.
But someone asks my name—
and actually listens.

By the day's end,
nerves still linger,
but lighter now.
Maybe tomorrow
won't be so terrifying

Slippery Key

Ashlee Jones

I've imagined a moment.
My mother dying and me
being unable to shed a tear.
The quiet after her voice halted,
The same tune that once
conditioned columns of my mind.
The air machine humming
against a white wall,
while the monitor makes music
of its flat anthem.

The nurse disconnecting wires,
from veins that blood flow
now has stopped on both wrists.
A right hook catching onto my chest,
onto a box inside a box inside of another,
probably where my heart should be.

The shadow of hers lingering,
As I question how many times
I've asked for change.
I stand anxious, holding a letter,
in front of a bunch of people
that only knew her Sunday version
instead of the reality.

My turn had come after the last stated
she had a good heart—
and maybe she did—
a symbol of it behind one of
these thousands of glass keys,
that supposedly go into a wooden lock.

I tell myself it's the world's fault,
That this complicated rot
passed down like sickness through veins,
but no—
The world might be evil, mother,
but I am too.

The Bell I No Longer Hear

Ashleigh Dixon

Headaches come like bills due—
always on time, always heavier than expected.
I lose words mid-sentence,
My mind has padlocked certain rooms.
My teammates run drills; I run laps
around memories, trying to recall
what day it is, what name belongs to me.

Seven months since the hit – my skull still rings,
a bell in a church I no longer attend.
At first it was just the blackout,
the quick collapse,
The trainer's voice drifting like smoke above me.
They said, Rest. Ice. Don't think too hard.
But how do you stop thinking
when every thought is proof you're still alive?

Doctors tap their pens, say the world is righting itself,
but the MRI opens like a Rorschach,
spreading into a map of somewhere I can't return to—
a globe still tilted,
orbiting just out of reach,
with the girl I used to be, fading at the edge

The Drift of Us

Ayshah Khalid

The city never wakes,
silent streets stretch endlessly.
The air is crispy,
mid-November,
breeze aching my bones.
His touch was sweet,
but even the sweetest cannot stay.
The heart will turn,
and shadows fade by day.
Next year, around this time,
we may not be the same.
Time is a river,
carrying emotions downstream.
Each day pulls us further apart,
yet traces of you remain.
Golden leaves drifting away
just like how we separate every day.

Bluebird Pantoum

Bennett Arakelian

June twenty-first, two thousand miles later
No guide or map or path in the sky
Just a long frightful journey for the bluebird to fly
In search of a consort, his chirp's translator

No guide or map or path in the sky
Instinct fills his heart's crater
In search of a consort, his chirp's translator
Without hope, he can only pray for a reply

Instinct fills their hearts' crater
They approach each other with no reason to justify
With hope, he can only pray for a reply
Wishing to not display himself as a fabricator

They approach each other with one reason to justify
The two lonely blue aviators
Wishing to not display themselves as fabricators
Wondering what this dance might signify

The two lonely blue aviators
Translated chirps are now a lullaby
Which has discovered what this dance has signified
A long flight home will make something greater

Translated chirps are now a lullaby
September twenty-second, four thousand miles later
A long flight home has made something greater
With a guide, a map, a path in the sky.



Cloudy With a Chance of Cute

Brennan Johnson

A heavy yet whiny thud overhead
alerts and jolts me out of bed
As I stand and ponder what I've heard
More pounding above begins to occur
I quickly dress and dart outside
To be met with a sight I could barely describe
Cats and dogs falling from the sky
All landing on all four feet, so thankfully none could die
After my initial shock, all I feel is delight
Seeing their bright eyes light up this confusing night
Awestruck, I can't seem to quit gazing ahead
Until a particularly fluffy kitty lands on my head
I laugh and give my new friend a kiss
Before I remember that I'm allergic

Return to Form

Brennan Johnson

I finish my grapefruit with a shark bite
And stare within the shimmering netting
Where submerged shrimp plink at the surface
With their once-dormant feelers
To illuminate their blockade of a bathtub
Adorning themselves to appear as spangles
To this gridded, aquatic bottleneck,
Swirling with frayed pleather and plankton
Each working to acidify the other
A lounge for the old and new
That have now been filtered
A gurgle, an assumption
A revelation.
I plunge, I strike
Ravenous.

Blackberry Lemonade

Eemi Toma

I held the can in my hand,
cold and slick with tiny beads of water.
It didn't move.
It hadn't moved at all.
The label was scratched in places,
purple fading into soft yellow,
edges curling like old paper.
Bubbles clung inside,
silver moons rising slowly
and popping before I could count them.
I pressed the tab.
It made a small pop,
a breath that floated up and vanished.
The drink frothed lightly,
and the smell of blackberries and lemon
hit sharp and sweet.
I drank slowly.
Even when it was empty,
the can sat there, quiet,
its dents and scratches
like small medals
from battles I hadn't seen.

Through the Night, Softly

Eemi Toma

Something more fragile than this
a brand-new vantage, sand-toned leather,
its scent still rising like the ghost of the cow.
The streets are rinsed clean,
massive yachts sleeping on the Mediterranean,
the south of France glittering in its glass skin.
Cold leaves on the ground shout renewal,
their brittle throats echoing in alleys
where even the mice are bound to concrete.
Streets that scream.
Windows that listen.
The newly reconstituted world,
again and again,
as if to convince itself.
Next year at this time,
the young trees will blossom into sentences
no one has spoken yet.
A lady looks down in regret,
whispering the tale of three jewels,
their shine fading into her lap.
Is life ever lived to its brim?
Bright blue eyes answer in rhymes,
in chimes, in cries
the newly reconstituted world.
Be thankful, someone says,
for every day that arrives unbroken.
An old Aston Martin
roars its history through the streets of Monaco,
while across the crosswalk,
an old woman smiles
her small body lit
like a lantern against the rain.

The Perfume Bottle

Eemi Toma

On the windowsill, the bottle gathers light.
Its neck is dusted gold, its body clear.
You press the sprayer once, the room ignites,
the air remembers someone who was here.

Its neck is dusted gold, its body clear.
The scent turns time, unscrews a hidden door.
The air remembers someone who was here,
their voice still threading through the corridor.

The scent turns time, unscrews a hidden door.
You breathe, and half your life comes rushing back,
their voice still threading through the corridor,
a silver scarf left hanging on a rack.

You breathe, and half your life comes rushing back.
On the windowsill, the bottle gathers light,
a silver scarf left hanging on a rack.
You press the sprayer once, the room ignites.

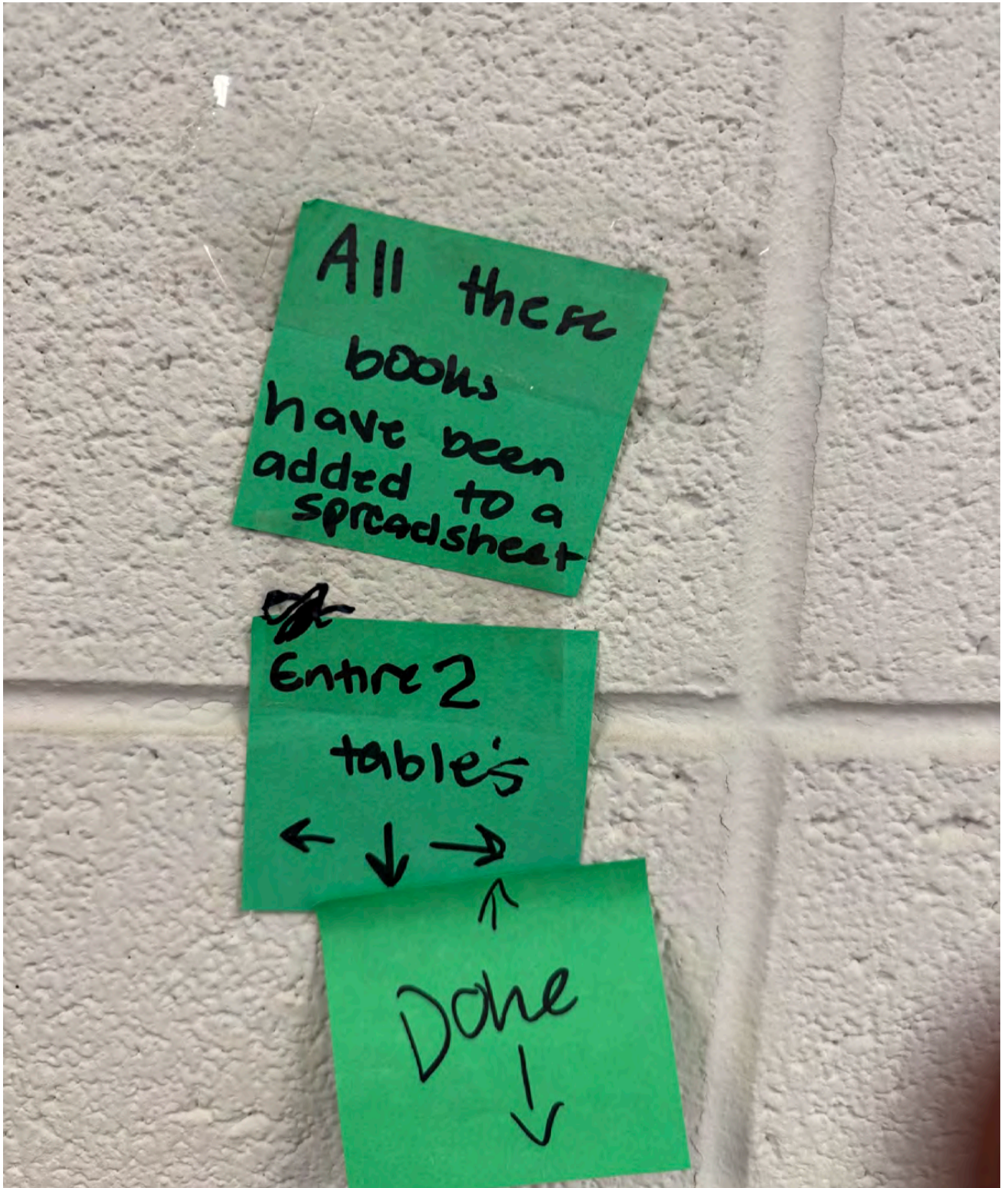


Photo: Mel Converse

Yellow Highlighter

Eemi Toma

It is almost gone now,
the yellow highlighter I have used for years.
Its tip is soft and frayed,
its ink a tired whisper of color
that barely clings to the page.

I press harder, as if force
could bring back what has already faded.
The line glows faintly,
like an old memory that refuses to vanish
but no longer knows how to shine.

I remember when it was new,
how it brightened every margin,
how I trusted it to mark
what mattered most.
I thought the bright things would last.

Now it stutters across the paper,
leaving uneven trails,
as if uncertain what deserves attention.
Perhaps that is how I have been lately,
uncertain what is worth saving.

For a moment I consider throwing it away.
It would be practical to start over.
Yet I hold it a little longer,
turning it in the light,
seeing the wear, the small surrender.

It has done what it was made to do.
Still, when I imagine the page without it,
the words look bare, unanchored,
and I cannot let it go.

Mercy Kill

Eliza Makhdoom

everyday i see it
just past my window
 with fresh blood
from the festering cuts,
sticking
,and coating yesterday's sins
it doesn't have antlers anymore
last summer it drove its head
again and again
and again and
again into the old oak tree till they snapped
no one else saw though
even when they held its hard work in their hands
even with the antlers hanging proudly on their walls
all it does now is sleep
or drag itself to the other shoulder
 pausing in the middle of the road
 just to barely miss the speeding truck
and back again

Backroom

Eliza Makhdoom

i would do anything for a cheap laugh
in a worn out gossip magazine left in a
fluorescently lit office that still smells like the 2008
recession. The last little strings of yellow wallpaper
peels off and starts scabbing over, its skin falling onto
a fax machine, it groans quietly once again. the
vending machine spits out its last candy bar,
somewhere not so far away. The body of an office chair
leans ,exhausted, against the wall in the very back
corner. The ceiling tiles leaking a slow brown leak,
soaking the carpet through, like the bandage on
my left pinkie finger. the stain runs across the floor ,
a dragged out shadow, darker in the middle and
feathered around the edges. Something crawled,
all around here, then stopped and weeped.
It slept and left behind only what it absolutely had to.
Next to it theres a small laugh in the wall, only as
thin as a crack. I press my ear to it

None of Us Asked for This

Erin DeFever

Our thoughts are with you at such
a devastating time,
we cannot begin to imagine what you are going through.

We want you to know that we will be there
for you through this terrible time.

May the love of your friends
and family surround you
and help you in your
time of need.

We are so truly sorry
for your birth.

Serdica

Erin DeFever

I move through stone streets unnoticed,
bathed in the silence of ancient beauty.
My spirit
soars.

(Inanna/nin kur.kur.ra/
nin.a.ni)

Sweat crystallizes into secret armor
as night
descends
no memory of sorrow haunts me.

An open window
The Silent
Moon
a serene smile of fragile clarity.
A glass falls—

(Inanna/nin kur.kur.ra/
nin.a.ni)

In a city I had never known,
I met myself among the ruins,

(Inanna/nin kur.kur.ra/
nin.a.ni)

weeping.

lil gherkin

Grace Patrick

Why i was there
i did not know
all of my thoughts drown
in the salt
burning my eyes
but enlightening the senses
of my tongue
the smell
singeing the hairs
now dying
in my nose
why i was there
i did not know
wet soft
hard. a seed?
.... where?
she was of me
and i was of her
shaped in her womb
the seeds my friends
my brine.
cocooned in her form
green surrounding my front
back side
arms legs
.... where?
why i am here
i do not know
rebirthed and reborn
formed and found
intrinsically connected
not afraid
but trapped
i am
in a pickle
and in a pickle
i will stay

(Untitled)

Lance Poole

I called you every day.

and your voice
got smaller.

and you never
got better.

and I remember
you telling me

how you were
always afraid of life, but never scared to die

The Trees Remember War

Jenna

(after Elizabeth Bishop's "The Fish")

I cannot weep, nor laugh—
I am rooted, like the tree, a prisoner of war
Its bark, forcibly ripped off,
Weather-bitten and soaked in the cries
of those who never returned
Its limbs stretched out like arms
Once raised to shield, now limp in surrender
Each branch is a wound healed over,
Each leaf whispers the names
from graves that never held bodies
The soil remembers better than I can—
Blood penetrates deeper than water
And yet, the tree still stands
Quietly splitting down the border,
clutching at one side, in hopes of return
The birds still come,
though fewer now,
Ululating to the mountains
Nests built with fragments of war—
a bone, a button,
a flag.
I once sat beneath its shade,
before I knew its history
I once carved my name here
Now the letters are blurred, softened,
by the wind and passing years
I once sat beneath its shade,
before I knew that shelter, too, can hold sorrow
Now, I touch its trunk, like a scar,
and it does not flinch.

Echoes

Jenna

I stay in a country that is gentle, but it never bothered to learn my name. I stay here like a guest: quiet, rule-abiding, polite— so that I don't make any noise. People ask me where I'm from, and I stutter. All the plane rides, all the half-open luggage, each passport and language—I'm stitched from two different fabrics, and the seam is beginning to rip. "Go back to where you came from,"--but the ruins I left didn't fall on their own. The borders didn't close themselves. The sky didn't light itself up with fire. The echoes of the streets didn't fill themselves with screaming. I can't go back; they've made sure of that. Instead, I try to build a life in a place that forgets its own fingerprints are all over the reasons I'm here. Instead, I try to go back every chance I get. I go back every time I smell a certain spice in the kitchen. I go back every time I hear the accent of a foreign uncle on the street. I go back every time someone's phone echoes the call to prayer. I go back because war stays in the body, even after you have left its skies

The Cassette Tape

Lance Poole

The crumpled box held this warmth to it, as I peered through its eyes that were far paler than mine.

Its corpse left ruin on a rocky graveyard, Mother Nature rightfully reclaiming what was once hers.

A staleness held itself in the air as I restored my sense of the box's existence, turning it over to verify its hidden reality.

Deep green, once filled the palms of my youth, now it only gives way to an age-old truth.

In its early, pristine career, it was a time capsule of distant memory that fades from even the best of minds.

But for some reason,

I felt my hands tense up, my grip tightening the more I inspected and took note of its jagged edges and beat-up teeth.

Its brains were spilled and half torn, overwhelmingly worn, and its old organs reached out far beyond its own presence.

Mother Nature rightfully reclaiming what was once hers.

An ode to the Mets, an ode to our own human condition

And far more certain, the finiteness of life that continued to expand with or without our observance.

The sound of pressure is getting louder,

something to do with the balance of my blood.

Replace me already,

I will become the crumpled old box

that was once called a cassette tape.



Photo: Mel Converse

Failing

Lance Poole

Heavy metal shudders by.

The steel screams and rolls heavy.

All aboard like you and I.

The echo of the rails follow at night.

The breeze of the night runs at the side.

I want to be free one day.

A cigarette flare for a life.

My lens chases

the smiles that touch mine,

the failing lives.

I scroll the ghosts I've caught.

The white polaroids hold proof

that they were here,

and I was too.

September's Clouds

Mel Converse

September does
not own them,
but hosts a party
in undulatus honor.
The season's end
taken out to sea
seeking one more horizon.
Displayed:
a montage video
of memories made.
Cotton sky-ships
harboring the fall
side by side by side.
Remembrance air snuggled,
pocketed puff sleeves
of hand-held shorelines,
heavy fishlines snapped and
driftwood campfire smoke.
Huron's treasures displayed as
fleece purses holding the sun.
Underbelly of rolling waves
crashing into autumnal winds.
White whales schooling
as first-day kindergarteners,
thinking of recess
on the other side of today.
Hanging new adventures
against velvet skies busy
gathering feathers scattered,
and wool not yet roved.
Trinkets pillowed,
September sends invitations
to summer's too soon end.
Rolling foam knitting itself
at the edge of frothing seas.
So, I bought a down coat.

Make-Believe Sonnet

Mel Converse

Older sister and me used to play doctor in the basement,
little sister was the patient with a pretended broken arm
because tissue and water made a good enough fake cast
for this type of job. Our medical bag, a repurposed black
purse rescued from the Goodwill pile along with the blue
bed sheets with stains that we ripped to make into a sling.
They still smelled of mom's perfume; the one hidden next
to grandma's bracelet with yellow stones in her nightstand
drawer. Jewelry doesn't go with pajamas, so why it was next
to the bed is a mystery to me, like socks worn with sandals
by grandpa in Michigan. Maybe his toenails needed tending,
or he didn't like his feet. I think he was always cold, but hard
to tell from videos in place of hugs. I saved him some slippers
from the pile. Maybe this year he'll visit. My sisters will pretend.

Finding a way, starting again

Mel Converse

If I could start again, a million miles away, I would keep myself, I would find a way.
“Hurt” by Nine Inch Nails (1992), Sung by Johnny Cash (2002)

Itches clouded our house; my unnatural rash told of the Devil.
Attempts to soothe with hobbies and babies and moves and guilt,
38-years past my eclipse, 18-years walking Johnny’s line:
Because you’re mine... believed, breathed, beguiled.

Faith’s honest garbage cloaked my veracity naked,
shiny buttons held my scope; sinewed vows held my tongue.
The guild revealed as crowned hypocrisy, soon after reviled.
Choice streaked my cheeks: Will God really cut me down, Johnny?

Awoke from unconsented curating by Control in white dresses,
when scratching lesions deep of currents untamed to emancipate
allowed wilding juice dammed in youth to taste my queer. My queer
spilled into a community garden of pink minds and lavender scars.

Choice is a rapture—
to do or not is not to do, but to cement: I was poured, not picked.
If I could find a way, I would start again, but as my sweetest friend.
New wine in old wineskin explodes to paint the walls once brined.

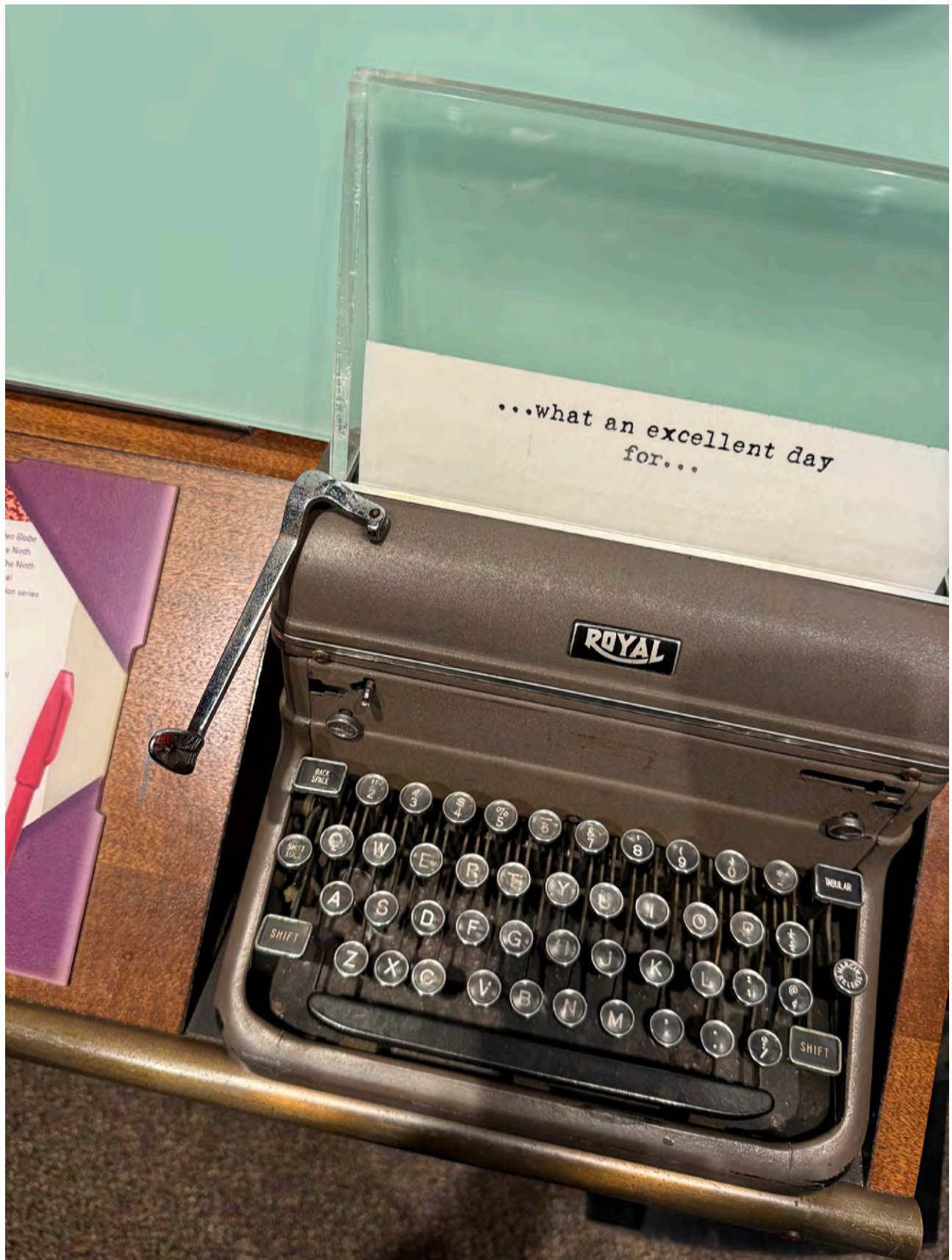


Photo: Mel Converse

Found and Lost (mimetic poem)

Nick Johnson

Once, I found what used to be a white wedding suit at Goodwill, yellowed
on the edges, like it had survived time or smoke or a long forgetting,
I wore it while doing dishes, my bare feet on the cracked linoleum,
watching suds slide down the drain like small white lies,
The kitchen was my chapel, the sponge was my psalm,
Grief made a home behind my knees, made walking
a kind of prayer, My mother's hands show up in mine
when I snap green beans or fold towels with too much precision,
She used to hum like a radio just under the static,
Now the silence is sharp enough to cut a cinderblock,
My mouth holds both poetry
and apology like a coin it can't spend,
Stories, secrets, unspoken words,
I wanted to be beautiful once, now I just want to last,
The suit coat still hangs on the back of my chair, useless,
It's surely seen a divorce or two anyways

The Art of Migration

Nick Johnson

Feathers blend with drifting fall leaves
Little pilots start their engines high
But no one on the ground for them grieves

To flow south is what they seek
Obeying winter's shivering sigh
Feathers drift like fall leaves

Arrow formations show a point of reprieve
As we carry on with our daily lives
No one on the ground for them really grieves

These creatures couldn't possibly believe
The frozen dawn's bitter lie
Feathers blend with drifting fall leaves

Dull are the fields, once golden with sheaves
If the fowl linger they'll likely die
But no one on the ground for them ever grieves

And so through the clouds they weave
Abandoning what they've made here for the sky
Feathers blend with drifting fall leaves
But no one on the ground for them can grieve.

The Farm at Night

Nick Johnson

The field's gone quiet again
Not a cricket, rodent, nor bird to grace my ears
The most gentle gust intertwines its body with mine,
With a kiss on my forehead, it swiftly slips away into the night
No two breezes ever feel exactly the same

I can't remember the last time I felt this sense
Of familiarity or home, my feet remembering their way around
Sinking into the very gravel that they experienced so much in
They've learned and grown since then, this I know

I can start to see my breath, I really shouldn't be here anymore
The moon begins to lecture me as he always has before
Rising above my head, glaring down at me
The few withered plants around me start to shiver

To think of all the good times I've had in this field
How many fresh tomatoes I snuck into my pockets,
Strawberries I've nibbled in secret
Swirls in the warm Earth from my old shoes summers ago

An arctic whisper glides past my uncovered arms
A reminder that I have loved this place all that I possibly can
I find myself in awe at how long tenderness can echo
Before it hardens into fros

A Voyage Only Remembered

Nick Johnson

I see my future twinkle at me through my tea leaves
Singing through the etches and windows of the oolong green
I wish I could sail the ocean of liquid gold

My ship, made of pure conviction,
My sail, of burning aspiration
I flow through the roaring waters

Monstrous salmon filled with rage puncture and mutilate
My ship, illuminated with a hollow orange candle light.
Rushing and ripping through the water like razorblades
They eat my boat alive, my pride is dimmed

My ship is a wreck, losing all form of its anatomy.
Its skeleton, unrecognizable to me— its captain.
Its pieces swimming, in places they shouldn't be.
The only thing that remains intact is its hearty flag,
That sits atop the hull, still connected to its mast.
Its burgundy stars reminding me to keep up hope.

I have washed up on shore, I can accept that.
I know the future is bound to me,
With my toes in the sand the seashells scratching my skin.
I can see the planets above the sky in the vast universe,

I take another sip of my tea

Patients

Reem Elzaghir

I'm glad you came to me,
not to see that I'm well, but to admit you're not.
Your weary eyes hum a hopeless tune,
and I pretend there is more to do.

Brown curls fall as your gaze meets mine,
eyes that understand what words forget.
My face will linger beside you,
not out of love, but practice,
leaving soon to make room for the next.

My white coat raised in honor,
yours, a flag of surrender.

There's something pleasing in how steady my hand remains.
They call it healing, but it feels more like waiting—
a pause between pains, a steady rhythm that lingers.

Once a cell, now a completed model before me,
sharing your secrets, your troubles, your pain,
as if I'm the magic solution to it all,
recording life and memorizing the way it ends.

It's nothing heroic,
just a little science and a willingness to listen.

The Unhoused Heart

Reem Elzaghir

I'll meet you where the sun meets the moon,
in the endless blue.

It's crowded, it's smelly,
but alive, stubbornly beautiful.
I stare and stare.

A coat for a house, a tent for a room,
short sleeves in winter,
long sleeves in summer.
I try to sleep as she weeps.
I stare and stare.

As shaken as I—
the tree washed off its green.
Next year this time
I don't know where I'll be.
Oh, the places I'll go,
dragging the sky like a blanket.

Just as the lion roars
when they tuck him away,
why silence my voice
and leave me astray?

I weep, I sleep, I leave.
I stared and stared.

The Bloated Halo

Reem Elzaghir

The yellspers rose from my throat,
a Christlore burning like magma under skin.
Freedom turned horse-faced in the mirror,
its halo bloated, belched from a mockingbird's song.

The mimicry of my own voice bullhorning,
the inclination towards the chalice,
my body moving featherly,
rippling through the cracked ceramic.

How foliage of me,
to believe that a whisper in the sacred house
might be mistaken for prayer.
I tumble through sipping the poisonous nectar,
orbiting the secret I never confessed—
Grappling with the rippling mouth of heaven.



Photo: Mel Converse

To See a Blue Moon

Sam Abedi

One must climb to the highest peak of a mountain
topped with freshly fallen snow.
It must be nearing the witching hour,
and one must be accompanied by a black cat
with startling blue eyes.

One must place their left hand over their eyes,
and the right over their heart.
It must be near the witching hour,
and one must have unwavering belief
that the blue moon will appear.

One must quickly count to three without making a sound,
then open their eyes.
It must be near the witching hour,
and when they look at where the white moon once was,
a blue one shall hang in its place.

One must know that those who have seen the blue moon once
will never see it again.

The Lighting Store

Sam Abedi

Floor lamps and desk lamps and ceiling lamps galore,
nothing pleases me more than visiting a lighting store.

I flick switches on and stare as lights silently flare.

Soft white,
 calming yellow,
 a rainbow of LEDs, say no more!

I hunt for the perfect one like they're shells come ashore.
What a human thing to wish for,
to hope to bring the twinkle of stars to my front door.

I blink once,
 twice,
 three times more,

and each lamp becomes heat, light, a great ball of phosphor.
I reach for that bit of universe and hold it in my core.
I make my way home, chasing the sun's fading candour.

The instruction manual lays before me in all its splendor.

A goes to B,
 B goes to C,
 one nail, two nails, three!

There it hangs, a shining orb that I can adore,
an unwavering lighthouse leading me to harbor.
I flick the switch off, and starlight is hidden as decor.

Nothing pleases me more than visiting a lighting store.

Rosewater

Sam Abedi

Rosewater with notes of attar and sandalwood.
The twinkling of headlights at night, a travesty of stars.
Cold wind lurks outside frosted window panes.
I hear hints of song, and my mother singing along.
On the coffee table, a dwindling candle sits.
Almost time, its fading flame whispers.
Next year, the four of us will be elsewhere.
Each on an unknown journey, indefinite.
When will our paths next cross, intertwine?
The candle sighs a final time, smoke winding upwards.
Time trips through turns and twists from hands.
It's snowing outside.
Will you remember that it's snowing outside?
Flights are tomorrow, four different destinations.
The last hints of the candle tint this memory rose.

The Truth of Shadows

Sam Abedi

A wall stretches before me.
Its surface is coated in the darkest obsidian,
greedily stealing the fire's emberglow.

It is my only light.

A vortex of black stretches before me.
On the wall, shadows creep across
a backdrop of moss clinging to stone.

I know the truth in these shadows.

Twilight spills over my hands,
Echoes of warmth trace each finger.
I have never turned around.

Is there truth in shadows?

Turning, I see that fire.
The nexus of my entire being.
The amalgamation of everything I know.

I want to know more than shadows.

Light seeps over stairs in a gossamer shimmer.
I follow it upward, and I am in a grove of trees.
I try to feel every single leaf, drifting in dimensions.

I have never known any truth like this.

A cavern opens in me, a yearning to be filled.
I quarantine my shadow truths, seal them tight.
Place them in the citadel of my mind.

I have no need for them anymore.

In this hushed grove, the wind sings a soft lullaby.
Marigolds peek out from the foliage.
This world is alive in ways I do not yet know.

What a cumbersome thing, to be deceived by shadows.

Nani's Chai Recipe

Sam Abedi

Two pairs of hands reach for the spice drawer at the same time,
And three cups of water to a pot with high heat.
one soft and smooth, the other wrinkled, marked with spots.
Add four cardamom, two star anise, two clove.
Foreign words wash over me, soft and round syllables,
Add the smallest pinch of saffron.
cocooning us in a cushiony bed of traditional aromatics.
Add one stick of cinnamon bark.
Are they really foreign if they know me more than I know myself?
Add one and a half teaspoons of sugar per serving.
I can barely imagine your hands were once like mine.
Add three packets of black tea leaves.
Young and naive, and full of desires.
Lower the heat to medium.
The smell of your shawl wraps around me,
Let the tea packets steep for ten minutes.
and I realize now that the only thing I desire
Add one and a half teaspoons of sweetened condensed milk.
is to freeze this moment in time.
Add one fourth cup of whole milk, then strain into cups.
The two of us, sitting at the kitchen table, drinking chai.

A Hunting Dance

Sam Abedi

The dance of the bengal tiger:
Lhenga swishes with light footsteps.
Kohl-lined eyes shine in stage lights.
Churiya clink and clack like claws.

Lhenga swishes with light footsteps.
The girls weave and wind their dance.
Churiya clink and clack like claws.
These bengal tigers are on the hunt.

The girls weave and wind their dance.
Kohl-lined eyes shine in stage lights.
These bengal tigers are on the hunt.
The sitar's rhythm sinks beneath skin.

Kohl-lined eyes shine in stage lights.
Breaths sync with the beat of drums.
The sitar's rhythm sinks beneath skin
Music heightens into a deafening roar,

Breaths sync with the beat of drums.
Kohl-lined eyes shine in stage lights.
Music heightens into a deafening roar.
The dance of the bengal tiger.

The Moon Forgets Nothing

Tamara Laska

The moon forgets nothing, it watches the sea,
Each wave returns, though it's broken and torn.
I keep what you left like a shell inside me.
Your voice drifts soft through the salt and debris,
A ghost of the tide where our promise was worn
The moon forgets nothing, it watches the sea.
I whisper your name to the wind endlessly,
But dawn only answers with silence and scorn.
I keep what you left like a shell inside me.
The stars fold their light, pretending to flee,
Still I stand waiting, unanchored, forlorn.
The moon forgets nothing, it watches the sea.
Though time moves ahead, it circles for me,
Returning to moments I cannot mourn.
I keep what you left like a shell inside me.
So let the waves break where memory will be
Love is a tide that will not be reborn.
The moon forgets nothing, it watches the sea;
I keep what you left like a shell inside me.



Photo: Erin DeFever

Old Street

Tamara Laska

I found the street I used to walk, cracked cement and cigarette burns,
my body younger there, or maybe just more desperate.
The church bell moaned at noon, nobody listened,
not even the pigeons who strutted with grease on their wings.
My mother's voice still hides in the stairwell,
a whisper in mildew, a cough between groceries.
When I touched the railing, it felt like her bones,
bent but holding me anyway.
I kept counting the cracks, fourteen, then fifteen,
until I lost the thread and called it a prayer.
The air smelled like pennies and fried onions,
like all the kitchens I ever ate in but didn't belong to.
A boy once kissed me here, his mouth full of smoke and salt.
I wanted to believe him, but the street swallowed it.
And still I keep coming back, not for him,
not for her, but for the cement—
it keeps what I can't.

The Last Time

Tamara Laska

We didn't know it then.
The field was worn down,
patches of grass fighting through dirt,
bald spots where our shoes
had smoothed the ground.
The ball was old,
its color faded,
seams starting to split—
but it still bounced,
still came back
when we threw it too hard.
Our shoes had holes,
laces tied in knots.
Our knees were scraped,
hands dirty with dust.
One of us climbed the fence,
swinging back and forth,
face lifted to the sky.
The air was warm,
but the evening breeze
already touched our arms.
It carried the smell of grass,
and sweat, and dirt.
Our voices rose together—
shouts, laughs,
breathless words between runs.
It felt like the sound
would never end.
We thought being older
was something to reach for,
something better than now.
We counted the days,
but too quickly they were gone.
Life moved faster than we knew.
Shadows stretched across the field,
climbing the fence
without us seeing.
Parents called from porches,
but we stayed in the game,
thinking there would always be
another evening,
another summer,
another last time.

Birds in the Blue

Tamara Laska

Wing—tip—

flip—dart—

they scatter across the wide, endless blue,

voices like silver threads

tremble through sunlight,

and my chest lifts with them,

heart dipping with every curve,

every sudden dive.

They drift—careless, fearless,

over the quiet green of fields,

over the glimmering river

where I wish I could follow,

weightless, unbound,

carried by nothing but air.

Oh, to rise as they rise,

to vanish in the blue,

to leave behind the slow ache of feet,

to touch the sky

even just for a moment.

Don't Judge a Wound by Its Cover

Tamara Laska

As he sat down, every head turned.
His eyes overflowed with tears,
his chest rose and fell like a storm—
you could feel the weight he carried.
Silence filled the room.
No one spoke,
no one moved,
as if his wound might slice them too.
They stabbed him with their whispers,
punched him with their laughter,
mocked the ache they never felt.
Still, he held himself upright,
though he was breaking inside.
Blood slipped from his wound,
tears streamed down his face—
a boy drowning in pain,
alone in a crowd.
No one reached for him.
No one offered a hand.
They judged his wound by its cover,
and turned away,
letting him fall,
letting him go,
and go.



Photo: Erin DeFever

The Last Morning

Tamara Laska

You were making coffee,
slowly, like it mattered
as if this small act
could save what was already leaving.
I watched the steam rise
and thought about how we used to laugh
at couples who stopped talking.
Now even silence feels like work.
You asked if I wanted toast.
I said no, though I was starving.
It felt safer to stay empty
than take what you offered out of habit.
The window caught your reflection,
half in shadow, half in gold.
I remembered the first morning
your hand warm on my neck,
the promise of everything ahead.
How strange that love can vanish
the way a song fades from memory
a melody once unbearable to forget.
I should have said something then,
but the kettle screamed for us both.
We just stood there, waiting for it to stop,
pretending not to hear the sound
of everything ending quietly.
And still, when I smell coffee,
I think of you
not with anger,
not with longing,
but something smaller,
like the echo of rain
after it's already passed.

(Untitled)

Tara Miyo

Who wants to be hard?

I do, I want to be hard like the shell of a mean snapper turtle.

I do not want to shatter into tiny little fragments

like the head of my old umbrella doll,

her head was made of glass, hard but easily broken.

I was kind, to the point of naivety,

I let manipulation be my guide.

My mother was soft, she taught me warmth and affection,

her heart was filled with forgiveness,

they took advantage of her.

I did not want to be taken advantage of.

I would not allow softness to rule me,

no, I would become impenetrable.

Anyway, my sister was hard,

unshakeable, Jesus she was tough.

(Untitled)

Tara Miyo

CRASH-

Purple bolts streak across the blackened sky.

The torrent of rain floods the city streets,
coating the pavement in a slick glassy glow.

CRASH-

The lightening silhouettes the blooming trees,
trembling in the chaos of the roaring wind.

The fury of the sky trembles the earth.

CRASH-

Purple and grey chase each other across the
darkening clouds. The ground below thumps,
pulsing with the beat of a manic heart.

CRASH-

Wood splinters across the jagged lawn,
the floor is littered with ash, the purple streaks spark
living wildfires of orange and red, setting the world ablaze.

CRASH.

The Tomato Massacre

Tara Miyo

The aromatic tang of heirloom tomatoes floated across the little house.
And just outside the little house, the New York city skyline twinkled brightly.
The sky had been crying all afternoon, darkened with its gloom.
The girl was happy being so sappy with her food.
The skyscrapers she so loved blindly towered over her.
The roiling tomatoes kissed the melted mozzarella, nearly completing her dinner.
Next year at this time she would make the same meal,
just as Remy had made his Ratatouille.
The girl had a heart of gold,
but would she forever be alone?
The timer dinged; she brought out the bitter, buttered, bowls.
She was happy.
She took a walloping bite, her mouth filling with glorious joy.
And as she savored the little drops of joy in her bowl, she peered out at the rain.



Keep You

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28 Seconds

Viktor Sulc

Reaching with a metal scoop,
swishing and swooshing song sounds
Through the tavern, tinkling ticks
of the clinking caffeine seeds!

The stimulant seeds glided,
crackling to the grinder.
And now, use your blood-flowing
five-branched crane, and start twisting!

Spinning. Churning. And grating.
But Take A Breath.
Just expand your scenting gates
and smell the nut-toasted smoke.

Spill the smooth scented soil-rich
powder, till portafilter's
lustrous basket overflows.
A brown hill waits for your hand!

Wreck the warm awakening
ridge, the steel heavy tamper
packs. Firms. Presses. Levels.
The scented tubes clap of joy!

Twist the toned portafilter,
and let the metals curl up
together. Shining. Blinking.
Orange flash says: "I'm ready!"

Even gurgling water
jumps and spins in playful songs.
Dull noise of plastic button
Starts the steamy instrument.

Sputtering. Rumbling.
Screaming. Whirring. Growling.
Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip.
Dull noise again AND STOP!

White ceramic mini boat
Holds the effort all alone.
Sharp and smooth. Sweet and bitter.
Golden, ginger, brown, amber tide.

Stop what you are doing now.
Sit and hear the melodies.
Sip the roasted essences.
And taste the sun inside.

Everyday We Separate

Viktor Sulc

Emptiness sits quietly where you used to be.
Vividness ventures, visiting vintage visions.
Even the sun feels heavier these days.
Rivers of memory keep me wide awake.
Yielding up that mystery of us...
 Every day we separate.

Dictate your own story, carve your path.
Accept the white thoughts running in your mind.
Years from now... who will we be?
 Every day we separate.

Where did the tear come from?
Evaluating exhausting emotions.
 Every day we separate.

State of hope – a cruel and dangerous place.
Every word unsaid still lingers in the air.
Pieces of love scattered in my chest.
A quiet ache to live our yesterdays.
Remember when silence felt like comfort?
And now it's all we share.
That last kiss of yours, what did it mean?
Everything...
 Every day we separate.

Concern in Cushion Chair

Viktor Sulc

I drop into a cushion chair. Filled with absolute,
absolute relief. Visas in my left hand. Passport
in the right. Waterfalls of sweat run down my face.
First solo trip. First solo life. First solo me.
Looking down. The white sky pillows
just make me realize how far I already am.
What have I done? Instead of drying out,
my sweat strengthens. I can wring
my shirt. I am forced to rush to the restroom to change.
I wish I felt like the bird I saw at takeoff.
My heart was jumping out of my chest.
So, I count each inhale like coins in a pocket,
feel the comfort of the cushion chair,
and confirm that everything will be okay!



Photo: Sam Abedi

Man's Best Friend

Viktor Sulc

...that's right! A creature with soft fur,
four scratchy paws, ears so big they can slap
you in the face, never-ending whirling tail,
dripping tongue, infinite appetite,
white sharp fangs, and loyal eyes.

When it welcomes you, once you unlock
your door. Jumping. Stepping. Happy whining.
Every movement dedicated to you,
every lick and tail whirl,
making you feel the depth of their heart.

When you need to focus and work
by the desk that knows only grind,
it wants to share those moments with you,
trying to get on the chair, putting its head on your lap...
At that moment, you just wish the distraction would stop.

When throwing a squeaky toy in a park
is the best time of its life. Seeing
it happy brings a smile to your face, too.
When feeding it the same food for the 1000th time,
it dances and jumps around, you just go: "Really?"

When it digs out the tree you planted
a week ago. This time, bubbles are at your
corner of your mouth and the thought of
"killing" them plays like a movie in your mind.
But what would you do without them?

When it barks at strangers from behind
a fence to make you feel safe.
When it finds a hole beneath that fence
and slips away. Your chest tightens up.
Heart starts jumping while you scream its name on the street.

When you lie in bed, wet cloth on a forehead,
hot ginger tea with thermometer on one side,
and your dog on the other protecting you.
When you teach it a trick, a proud feeling
of parenthood fills your heart with warmth.

When it dies... welcoming jumps, cute
distraction, squeaky toys, same food,
dug trees, scared strangers, midnight searches,
healing presence, accomplished tricks... it all
turns to grateful tears and memories that never fade.

To Return from Work

Yasmeen Sokol

I guess they call that going home.

Don't remember the phone

ringing off the hook, the printer jamming

again, the smell of someone's lunch down the hall.

Stacks of files waiting for me like they

know my name. Paper cuts

in between my fingers, highlighter stains on my wrist.

The lawyer talks fast, I try to keep up,

typing every word like it matters.

I like this work more than I let myself admit.

When I was a kid, I thought offices

were shiny and calm, like in movies.

Now I know they're noisy, messy,

and the work never really ends.

Still, I show up every other morning,

like the mouse pad that's worn out but still works

Through the Night, Softly

Yasmeen Sokol

Smells like uncanny, clean leather.
The city drifts in rain and footsteps.
So late into the night,
Autumn hums in the chill wind, behind the porch door.
Cold winds spin thin, through branches dim.
Leaves, down they fall, before they fly.

The grayish blue, blurred, sky leans close, watch me go.
Next year at this time, I hope the winds still feel this gentle.
The dark turns restless, swirling like Van Gogh's stars, so late into the night.
The bold night is a curtain, pulling over the hills
What waits for me beyond the night?

So late into the night, shadows slip, silently, south
Shadows stretch.
Slowly the stars spread across the sky, shining above the world.
So late into the night, a lone tree stands on its own.

Halloween with Arrow

Yasmeen Sokol

The doorbell rings again, and my dog jumps, then stands tall like he owns the rug.
Kids shout “Trick or treat!” and the sidewalks are filled with noise and costumes.
I tell him, “It’s okay Arrow,” and I’m saying it to myself just as much as to him.
A tiny little red riding hood holds up her bucket and he leans in, unsure but curious.
He sniffs, wags, and takes one step closer, tail moving like a slow yes.
I feel proud of him for trying, even while I watch for any sudden bark.
Then a loud group arrives and everything gets bright and pushy at the door.
He barks once, chest out, as if a three-foot princess needs serious warning.
I laugh, then I don’t, because the noise is a lot and I want calm.
The server me—hands out candy, the guard—him—keeps checking my face for cues.
A tall teen boy with no costume steps up, and my patience drops fast.
But he says, “It’s for my little sister,” and the edge in me softens right away.
I give him two pieces and my dog sits like he suddenly remembers the rule.
A small pumpkin asks to pet him; he holds still, then leans into her hand.
For a second I think we are doing pretty well at being kind tonight.
Between doorbells the house goes quiet and he whines for more visitors to arrive.
Last year we kept the lights off and pretended not to hear the street.
This year we are open. This year we say yes to whoever knocks.
When the last kid leaves, wrappers sound like dry leaves and the porch light hums.
He circles once and drops by my feet, and I say, “Good job,” and mean it

The Space Between

Zeina Reda

in the hush
of dawn
creeklight stirs.

caught in the hum
of a willowbone's tether

the loam remembers every
handprint,
every ache field pressed into
its skin.

a lantern thrums through the velvet
fog,
tts radio an ancient heartbeat
sandwiched between rust
and wonder.

blisters bloom on bitten bruises.
the scorchmark of morning
softens the blow.

a splinter of blue hush comes
down through
hourglass wind.
where riverjaw stones
lay and wait.

a slow undoing

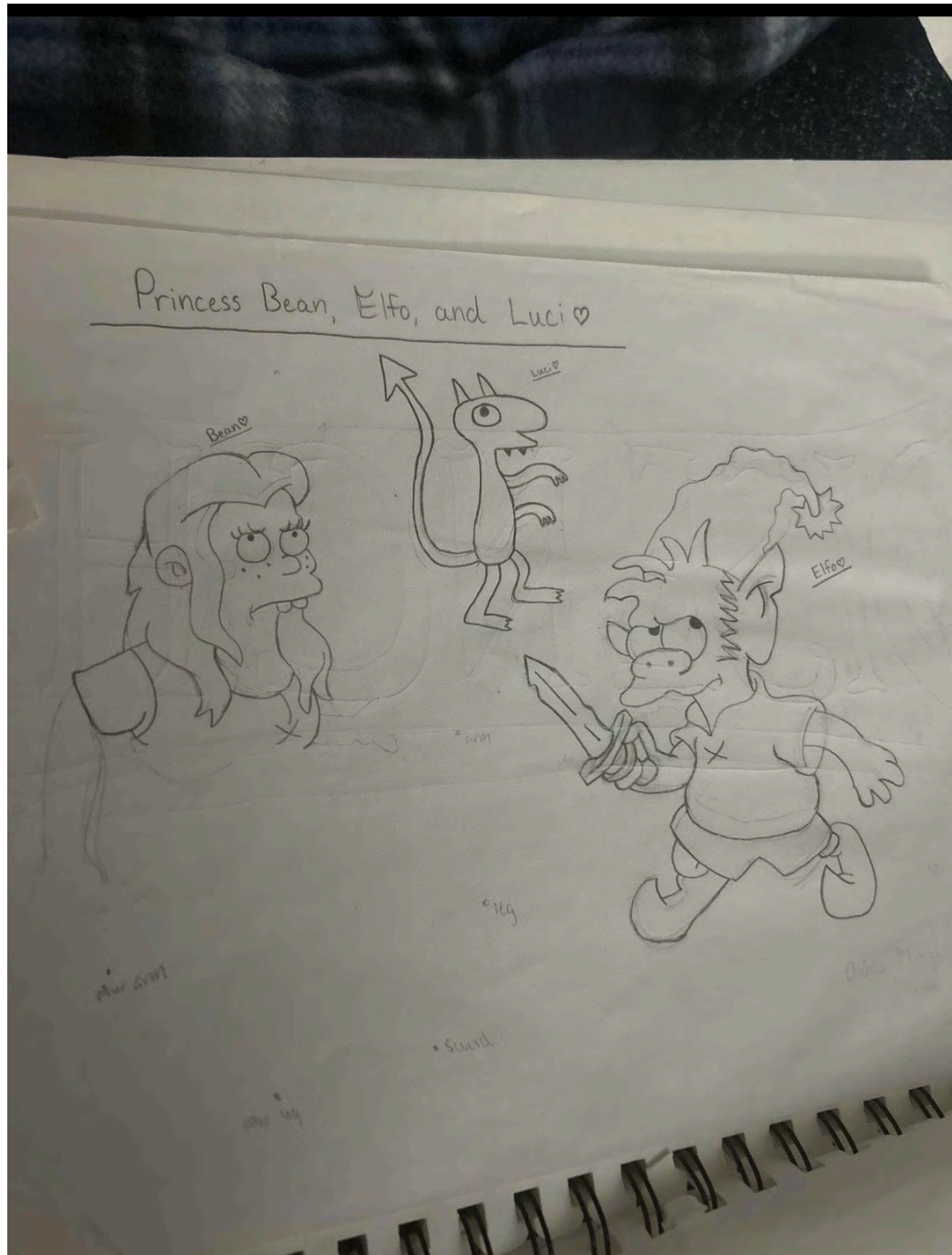


Photo: Ashlee Jones

Morning again.

Zeina Reda

The smell hits first.
A little burnt, honest,
a kind of comfort that
doesn't ask for anything back.

I pour, without thinking,
watch the darkness encapsulate the cup.
At first sip,
I feel like I can conquer the world.

By the second cup,
I shake a little.
The bitter edge,
in its tone.
The stains it leaves,
it lingers too long,
and I keep reaching for it.

Cool or hot,
I drink it.
Rain or shine,
I yearn for it.
By noon, the crash comes,
sudden, overwhelming.
He does not like me.



Photo: Professor Stacy Gnall

Exquisite Corpses

ENL 3850 Classmates

Sometimes I stop, breath, and think
THOSE TIMES WHEN MY MIND FEELS
Are the times when my heart sneezes
asleep, no one could tell
blank stare, eyes wide open
blank slate, hate runs through my blood
Run, Run, Run. never stopping
Stopping never helped anyone
I ran as fast as I could
He was chasing me,
she will lose me.

Or will she keep me around?
or won't he leave me there!
Or won't he leave me there!
or won't he leave me there!

I might've done all this wrong

I MIGHT'VE MADE A MISTAKE

or mistook a monster for a moped

Time has changed you, leaving behind,

Behind a back that turned away from you

I can hear you breathe among the thunder

I can hear you cry in the dark night

Feeling so loved by all around

At this point I'm lost, I need help.

The book makes no sense.

the only voice I understand

the only voice I understand...

The only voice I understand

What do you think about?

A Running river of measured emotion?

Something I could never control.

I stand lost
Maybe it's just me
Who is weird

who is loved.

not I.

Not the one who reads my thoughts

The one who is ever-watching.

One who I once called my friend

My friend, trapped beneath the mountain.

My foe, frolicking in the fields

My guardian Angel always there to protect me.

My home, solace, peace

My cell: turbulent, restless

My cell: turbulent, restless

My cell: turbulent, restless

Maybe unicorn horns are merely waffle cones.
Waiting for the girl to come get her soup,
nervous, yet excited like a predator for a prey.

Well, my tongue was in full.

but my heart was lost.

Slowly breaking into pieces

breaking just appears out of the blue

It is cold out there, the sky isn't blue.

It is cold out there, a memory of you.

Burning my face with a breeze that is freezing

Freezing someone's feet without a wind that is burning

Heating with stillness and chills.

Cold with movement that warms

Cold with movement that warms.

Cold with movement that warms.

A final weak, a final Sweep

Too much time, not enough of it free

I stare at myself and I don't know where I should be

I STRUGGLE TO DEFINE MYSELF, MY PLACE,

my smile and my fate — hunger

Smiles back alone, waiting to clamp the back of my head again

Smile so awkward, our eyes never meet

Frown so normal, my I's always leave

but the you's always stay

~~but the you's always~~

But the you's always.

U's



Photo: Professor Stacy Gnall

u
What goes around comes back around.
But I'm stuck halfway
Right on the borderline is where im gonna wait
To realize if we were supposed to make
WHAT CREATURE COULD BE BORN OF THIS UNION?

what union could be killed of this design?

Are they perhaps just what the union wishes?

What wishes?

Everything dies.

Whatever between us will always stay alive

Whatever between us will always stay alive

Whatever between us will always stay alive

The darkening grey clouds fill the horizon.

~~Found out that~~

I fall into the early morning mist.

The clouds seem as if they want to cry.

It too, has its limits

- is what the pessimist believes

"Everything happens for a reason" says who?

AND WHAT IS REASON? HOW BIG IS 'EVERYTHING'? I WONDER

I wonder of the snow in this desert

around this cactus ring, the snow burns

in that tube of metal, a fire lives

A fire dies, smoke is drained.

A fire dies, smoke is drained

A fire dies, smoke is drained

Early June comes like a wave

Ripple and gone, memory for an age

An age long since gone

Is this a dream?

Is this a beautiful dream or a sadness?

A troubling night, a blessed morning

A troubling end, an uncertain beginning

A beginning that doesn't know where it ends

A FEAR THAT DOESN'T KNOW ITS OWN SHADOW

A Bravery always knowing the light

And you manage to flick them off

With a hug, tighter than ever

With a hug, tighter than ever

With a hug, tighter than ever

Today I woke up
I got dressed,

sunlight brushing the open blinds.

Quietly telling me to arise from slumber

As the alarm clock yells at me from the table

I grab a slice of life on my way out.

A slice that leaves me empty somehow.

The slice of life I miss so dearly.

A life that I once knew, now it is out of reach.

What is life?

It is waiting for death.

While death doesn't need to wait for anything

Life blooms and gets better and better all the time

DEATH LOOMS, EVERYTHING DARKENS, TIME FACES SWERING PAST + PRESENT

AS THE FUTURE HIDES IN THE DAYLIGHT - DONT SQUINT

AS THE FUTURE HIDES IN THE DAYLIGHT - DONT SQUINT

AS THE FUTURE HIDES IN THE DAYLIGHT - DONT SQUINT

The years passing by
and I feel time slowly slipping by
But what I'm not sure about is
How to take my final,

How to plan a life.

A near impossible task, it is
But I will try anyways.

What does it mean to try?

Try, fail - die, pale

Die you abomination to man.

Die and burn in hell.

Die and then wake up as a beautiful ~~and~~ Lily
Or die and come back as a ~~bleat~~ shell of a man.

It is a relief when a man frees himself from his cousin

It is a relief when a man frees himself from his cousin



Almost Awake. Almost Poets.

ENL 3850: Intermediate Creative Writing

Professor Stacy Gnall

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