

Rejected Lit Magazine

Issue #6



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Rome Smaoui

I learned to raise my pain like god

raises lightning, disappearing as soon as it opens the sky

I let it haunt me, as I let most things. Every time I leave

a city I tell myself to become new again:

Joy is my mother holding her American dollar

America falling around her like a voice that has never once prayed

I have decided I no longer care where it is

I came from. I let myself fear death only

to remember my body. I think language is a gun with no bullets in sight, just the blow,

the mouth belonging to nothing but ends. And I know

where this road turns, I will follow it like a fire

on a hill of pale

grass.

I am always watching the door for my body, the room defeated

with silence

dust wind against the gentle wind, you fly towards me, pull me to the ground and we kiss—

Are we not an extension

of the shoulders on this earth we've crashed into?

Who are we if we can't at least give each other this. At least

the distance between a sentence and the eyes avoiding it— Everything is dark

except for the wound, you can see how lovely

it glows; right there, I am free except for the moment where I chose to forget

you. Like an arrow, you are both a killer and a bird,
I tell myself this before it's over.

Rome Smaoui is a Tunisian poet and writer based in the U.K. Her work has appeared in *Narrative Magazine*, *Litbreak Magazine*, *Sonder Midwest*, *The Roadrunner Review*, and other places. She received Gold & Silver Keys for her writing by the *Scholastics Art & Writing Awards*, and she was recognized by *Palette Poetry's* 2022 Emerging Poet Prize. In 2021, she was featured in *Narrative Magazine's* 30 Under 30 List. She is currently an editor for *Nighthawk Literature*, and is completing her undergraduate studies in English & Creative Writing at The University of Manchester. When Rome isn't writing, she can be found near the sea reading poems to a society of mermaids.

OVUM

Karla Lamb

At nine weeks, slant shadows pull across
the stained floor of the outpatient clinic.
Dirty blinds shield the cracked window
putting out the lit cigarette of horizon.

I imagine how a soul enters the body.
How we sweated off winter, on carpet
or couch. How our tossed sheets became
my Tuesday afternoon appointment. I—

imagine the drawbridge to my future.
I imagine us, living in your parent's
Michigan basement. I imagine having
enough wire—to hang myself.

Outside, pro-life chants thunder
like a psalm of drills—I also pray:
an empty meditation upon the nothing.
My modicum of truth. I sign the fine print,

pay the requisite blood. A volunteer nurse
walks me out. I puke in the parking lot.
Tell work I can't come in. Sunset slowdrags
against dusk's lining. Heavy rain recoils off

my Honda's dusty windshield. I drive
the familiar stretch edged with the small shrines
that memorialize car accidents. My little
fugue—You're no one, I'll pine after

Karla Lamb is a Chicana poet, with work appearing or forthcoming in *A Women's Thing Magazine*, *The Shallow Ends*, *Yes Poetry*, *Word Riot*, *Coal Hill Review*, *Fine Print Press*, *Dream Boy Book Club*, & elsewhere. Her work has been nominated for the *Best of the Net Anthology 2019*, & translated in *Revista La Peste*. She co-hosts *Charla Cultural*, a bilingual podcast centering underrepresented literary artists. Lamb lives in L.A. with her cat Fulano. More at karlalamb.com & [@vinylowl](https://www.instagram.com/vinylowl).

II. TO CONSUME / TO BE CONSUMED (FROM DRIPPING IN GOLD)

Davis Martin

to consume / or to be consumed / spoken in whispers around
the house / or written on street signs / above the lights

across / I am among the verdant grasses / melding with
the greenery / eaten alive / eating / among the fireflies

mindlessly interceding death / I have written over the doors
prepared the rooms / filled the lanterns / detuned the
strings / buried the roads / to see / or to have been seen
holding a knife to someone's throat / it's in the mirror

in the hallway / it's marked with a gravestone out back

I would die for you I said / over the entryway / driven across
the doorstep / I am above the setting sun / to be alone / or
just to be / there is victory / spoken in
whispers / around the house / crawling perpendicular
to death / I have prayed for rain / I have closed my
eyes / on my knees I awoke / to consume / or to be
consumed / I have lifted you to my lips / I have
written over the doors / I have seen you in
the streets / I can feel you now / yes, even now

I can feel you / I can feel you now / yes, I can feel you

Davis Martin is a composer and writer currently working as a Teaching Fellow at the Hartt School where he is pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts in Music Composition. In addition to composing, he maintains an active performing career as a vocalist, specializing in opera and new music. His work in both musical and literary idioms draws from horror, his queer experience, and his Southern roots. In Davis' free time, he enjoys photography and tending to his growing collection of plants. He can be found online @davisforpres and at davismartinmusic.com.

CRIP

Kwame Daniels

in the act of perception we are rendered

invisible
there is only the cane,
there is only the cripple

cripping our clothes,
cripping our queerness,
cripping our speech
are there enough ways that you know we are disabled?

weighing the sound of skin on dry skin
the thump of the cane
against tiled floor

iridescent scales running down the shaft
we used to dream
we were descended from mermaids

a descent into madness quickened by dreaming
each bead of sweat
soaking our clothes into waking

in the wake of illness,
we suffer banality
each mark of fatigue like chipped nail polish

nailing the shaft in place
as we lean on the cane
but in the act of perception
we are rendered invisible

Kwame Sound Daniels is a mad black trans artist based out of Maryland. Xe are a VCFA MFA candidate and an Anaphora Arts Residency Fellow. Xir debut poetry collection (*Light Spun*) came out with Perennial Press August 2022. Xe often write about xir disabilities and xir spiritual identity seated in blackness and ancestral worship. You can find xem on Instagram, @the.okra.winfrey or on xir website www.kwamesounddaniels.com, where xir publications are listed. Kwame learns plant medicine, pickles vegetables, and paints in xir spare time.

GENDER AFFIRMING CARE

Gabriel Waite

Rusting, which happens when a thing is still
or moving, and too long exposed,
happened, of course, to us,
so that we became thinner
and brittle, and rang like bells when struck.

Still, eventually,
the surgery happened. And we suspect it helped us
stay alive. I invited everyone to the celebration
of my razed chest, and later, on the beach,
I kept my shirt on. There was less of me,
and more, but I was taken with the small, shy spiders
under beach rocks who ran for cover even from
the harmless sky.

And when, in a dream, the dead dog turned her patient belly,
she was mindless of her scar, and in patting her there
I touched, with a ringing as though from the waking world,
her softest part, where, though hollower
she was still whole.

Gabriel Waite is a queer/trans spoken word performer and an emerging writer of poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction. Their work has appeared in Poetry Pause at the League of Canadian Poets, and their short story Jet Lag won the Lakefield Literary Festival Senior Fiction award. They live on the unceded territories of the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ people in Victoria, B.C.

TERRAIN

Ana Carrizo

Death between the eyes.
How we could have known
who left with red in their hair.
To give me a terrain—unutterable
when I learn him by taste.
A god sits in the kitchen watching us
keep score on the scorching of ourselves.
We eat with all the hunger.
Curvilinear passages & shuddered core-strings.
Entering the sheets like a body in drought.
I may open myself in the chilled morning.
Become unfiltered into first desire, then nowhere.

Ana Carrizo is a 31-year old writer living in Texas. Her works are a way of healing and a personal reflection on the process of continual growth. She loves carrying orange peels in her pockets and buying used poetry books. You can read more of her poetry on tumblr ([@elvedon](#)).

PERENNIAL

A.J. Birch

a bearded iris
burrows deep
in winter
grips petaled quilts
tucks its entire being into a fist
and waits for the warmth
of spring
to open pollen-crusting eyes.

mold grows fuzzily
leaves a film that erodes
love and
memory
wishes to come
backandbackandback
no matter how many times
it dies.

i'm so tired of curled days
that go by
before it's time to unfurl again
but i don't know how to stop
this heart from
 perennializing.

my body forgets to flinch
when it senses an exhale of warmth
a faint knock asking to
be let in again

you are just checking if i'm still
breathing but
you're here and a touch
would send me spilling into
frostbitten april mornings
without a speck of
memory to remind me
 this will hurt.

A.J. Birch is a prose-writer turned poet by quarantine. She loves anything subtle, small, and haunting. She lives in North Carolina and is a 2021 graduate of Catawba College. You can find her at @ajbirch444 on Twitter or ajbirk444 on Instagram.

FROM OUR ECHO OF SUDDEN MERCY

“FOUNDATIONS ARE BEING SHAKEN”

—“IMPERYALISTA | THE TOWER” JANA LYNNE UMPIG, *KAPWA TAROT*

Hari Alluri

i

Beneath the earth the earth
is always rumbling.

And here, a little helplessness to hold like a newborn child—
it's not only the child who's helpless it's the holding.

i

If you ever get to watch the eggs fall as you rush them
out the fridge, crack on the lip left by its open door, spill
there and onto the linoleum as they tumble; if you towel
those eggs up, sob-sobbing the whole time, “I can't do this, I
can't,” hand and knees to floor, “I can't,” pour the surviving
yolks, from the somehow upright carton into the already-
warmed-up frying pan, no need to panic:
there will be other chances not to quite pull through.

i

Please, don't appropriate
this error into the good small
moments of your day—*we need more*
betrayal if we want to keep forgiving—not if you believe
that language is a spell.

Blessed are those
who ghosts and demons
flock towards. And every time, ingat,
my loves. My loves: Ingat.

i

Is it possible that countries do not have a body the same way

my knees my hips my spine my lips don't have a country?

It's true: some days will sorrow more than other days,
and the lightest drizzle mocks us by refusing to downpour.

That must be part of it, yes? The gravity we need?
Strong enough to pull down rain, weak enough to let it rise,
kind, no maybe soft, or dare I say it generous
enough we aren't pummeled always by the falling.

Hari Alluri (he/him/siva) is a migrant poet of Philippine & South Indian descent living and writing on unceded Musquea,, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh. Oayqayt. Kwikwetlem lands. Siya is the author of *The Flayed City* (Kaya Press) and the chapbooks *The Promise of Rust* (Mouthfeel Press) and *Our Echo of Sudden Mercy* (forthcoming from Next Page Press). A co-editor of *We Are Not Alone* (Community Building Art Works) and co-founding editor at *Locked Horn Press*, his work appears in anthologies, journals, and online venues, most recently – via *Split This Rock* – in *Best of the Net 2022*. Find Him @harialluri and at <https://linktr.ee/harialluri>.

BONFIRE NIGHT

Rebecca Faulkner

I dye my hair gunpowder black
in the kitchen sink scrub

the spuds November raw
watch men outside toasting treason

their charcoal fingers kindle the sky
my mouth tastes of salt & vinegar crisps

Terry's braces lies I craft
so boys pretend to like me

I want to tell her about Thursday bruises
but Mum says *raven hair* *you look so pale*

I am cross-country brave long-legged
& low-cut with the hustle of becoming

burn my book report wash blood
from my underwear in the girl's bathroom

chipped pipes & the water scalding
I dry my hands try to forget

the alley behind the playground
leaves crackle when I kneel their laughter

floods the storm drain as flames lick
the windows

I suck sulphur from my hair
my tongue an unlit match

CHAPLINESQUE

Rebecca Faulkner

Starving inside cogs of steel
poor as a church mouse
I wear my clown face long
mustache coy head cocked

I know humiliation

a distant foghorn
the edge of a barber's blade
boots made from licorice
I devour

piano keys the color of milk
& soot believing
each octave is you
whispering yes

press a penny in your palm
to stop the world make you
tune your radio to the sound
of my voice call it a white rose

as the screen fades

call it hope

Rebecca Faulkner is a London-born poet and arts educator based in Brooklyn. Her work is published or forthcoming in journals including *New York Quarterly*, *Solstice Magazine*, *SWWIM*, *The Maine Review*, *CALYX Press*, *CV2 Magazine*, *On the Seawall*, and *Into the Void*. She is the 2022 winner of Sand Hills Literary Magazine's National Poetry Contest and the 2021 Prometheus Unbound Poetry Competition. Her work has been anthologized in the Best New British and Irish Poets 2019-2021. Rebecca was a 2021 Poetry Fellow at the Saltonstall Foundation for the Arts. She holds a BA in English Literature & Theatre Studies from the University of Leeds, and a Ph.D. from the University of London. Her debut collection is forthcoming in the US and the UK from Write Bloody Press in spring 2023.