



Lamp Lit

fall 2025 1.2





# LampLit

## Fall 2025, Issue 1.2

© 2025, Lamp Lit

All rights reserved.

Ownership of all work is retained by the original creators.

[www.lamplit.net](http://www.lamplit.net)

Editors: Jaime Lilley & Michael C.

Layout assistance: Jack Lilley

Cover Image: Mirjana M., *Signal*, mixed media collage

# Table of Contents

## A letter from the editors

6

## Poetry & Art

Overexposed Vltava, <i>Crazy Jane</i>	7
I Want You to Know my Love is a Sinkhole, <i>Rachel Lauren Myers</i>	8
Dad on Vacation, <i>Kimberly Wolf</i>	9
Secret Garden, <i>Mirjana M.</i>	10
Rothko is, <i>p. hodges adams</i>	11
Love Poem with Overwrought Similes Because That's As Close As I Can	
Get To Explaining It Right Now OK, <i>Todd Dillard</i>	12
Alternate Game Plan, <i>Rachel Lauren Myers</i>	13
Three Birds, <i>Crazy Jane</i>	14
The one who sees inside you, <i>Ewan Glass</i>	15
All All #21, <i>Darren C. Demaree</i>	16
Looking for the Light, <i>Nasta Martyn</i>	17
Skyscrapers, <i>Abel Saldaña</i>	18
Dirtnap, <i>Joshua Lillie</i>	19
Deep Blue, <i>Brigit Lilley</i>	20
Straight People (Often) Don't Get It, <i>Dustin Brookshire</i>	21
I have done it again, <i>Kathleen Palmer</i>	22
Firebird, <i>Nasta Martyn</i>	23
Pslam for a Burnt Offering, <i>Elisheva Fox</i>	24
Waking Up Next to You, <i>Kimberly Wolf</i>	25
Crazy Town, <i>Jana Braňková</i>	26
Downtown Lullaby, <i>Abel Saldaña</i>	27
Pslam for a Burnt Offering, <i>Elisheva Fox</i>	28
Admitting, <i>p. hodges adams</i>	29
Angel at the Summit, <i>Mirjana M.</i>	30
All All #20, <i>Darren C. Demaree</i>	31
Autumn Leaves, <i>Crazy Jane.</i>	32
Swatting, <i>Ewen Glass</i>	33
Eric Satie's Umbrellas, <i>Ben Macnair</i>	34
The Lampshade, <i>Todd Dillard</i>	35

## **Short story & Art**

Silverbrush, <i>Nasta Martyn</i>	36
Pierrot Disparu, <i>Victoria C. Roskams</i>	37

## **Creative non-fiction & Art**

Lamp Post, <i>Kass Vladyka</i>	42
Cheat Codes and Life Hacks, <i>Angela Townsend</i>	43

<b>About our contributors</b>	46
-------------------------------	----

## **A Letter from the editors**

Dear contributors and everyone who submitted,

We are so grateful to you for making us a part of your creative lives, and are continuously overwhelmed, humbled and honored to be entrusted with your poems, stories, essays and artwork. We loved reading them, and can't wait to read more.

To our readers,

Please enjoy this selection of work we loved and have been chomping at the bit to share with you! We hope you enjoy our second issue of Lamp Lit, and send you our sincerest well wishes for your season of mists and mellow fruitfulness.

Thank you all for choosing us.

Lamps lit!

Jaime & Michael





***Overexposed Vltava***, Photograph

## **I Want You to Know My Love is a Sinkhole**

The Mystery Sink in Florida is completely off limits, and for good reason. It's at least 500 feet deep, perhaps more. One can't always check these things. It sits just half a mile from the I-4, on private property. In 1970, a boy diving for a vest disappeared. Three days later, a search and rescue diver panicked, lost his mouthpiece, and sank too. Underneath, the black water leads to a network of aquifers. No way to know where the water travels, and what it carries. Surely these twin tragedies wouldn't be enough to limit access to this natural wonder, the deepest sink in the States. Still they built fences for safety. Jacques Cousteau once said *Man has only to sink beneath the surface and he is free*. Some do.

## **Dad on Vacation**

Pride-eyed on the mountain's edge  
striding  
into snow melt  
like a Jack London character

footing—  
lost.

An eruption of remembrance barrels over his panic:  
he is sixty now, despite his boy-mind's conquest of time.

His old man's hands grasp air;  
he slides down,  
away from life.

Miraculous—  
Basalt grooves catch and hold him  
panic dissolving into disbelieving joy  
turning terror into a story to tell me  
over his next birthday dinner.

He knows  
he will do this again—  
you can't teach a man  
who believes himself a god  
mortality's lessons.

This is my inheritance:  
the audacity of a poet.



***Secret Garden***, mixed media collage



## **Rothko is**

the window view from the lake house. horizon  
of the moon. torso of a man and the waistband  
of his jeans. or the back of his throat.  
the moment after sunset. rothko is  
a notebook page, half-redacted, half-blank.  
a pocket on a shirt. the table and the wall behind it.  
glass-half-full of mango juice, maybe. or half-empty.

and then K reminds me not  
everything is a representation  
of something else. *ceci n'est-ce pas*  
your notebook or that window or a man's stomach  
or the fucking moon.

it just is. it just is what it is. can you handle that asks K.  
can you.

## **Love Poem with Overwrought Similes Because That's As Close As I Can Get To Explaining It Right Now OK**

Lately every day I feel like I am peeling oranges while crying,  
like my fingers are cold-curled from missing the bus  
and walking home 3 miles on a day it wasn't supposed to snow  
and I just wanted something quick to eat while I thawed,  
but now it's like I'm 16 again and the orange is made of bra clasps  
but also it's like I'm Heraclitus off his depression meds,  
like I'm certain the river can't be crossed twice because  
I'm going to drown. But then you hear the ice cream truck  
jangling like a train carrying only xylophones as cargo,  
and we sprint outside and wave down the truck like it's a ship  
and we've been wrecked on an island of Wednesdays for 14 years.  
We order the biggest ice creams on the menu, and our faces break  
into smiles like a child's laughter cartwheeling across a funeral home.  
We walk back holding vanilla cones aloft like a torches,  
we walk home like Friday lovers running into each other again  
at church, elbows nosing elbows like dolphins in love,  
the wind kiting a strand of your hair into my beard  
like when you are on top and your hair gets caught in my beard.

## Alternate Game Plan

*The worst book anyone has ever written.*

*They're all going to laugh at me. - a friend on their manuscript*

After you went to sleep I realized my sonnet  
(that you like so much) lacks a proper turn.  
It's ranty. The closing couplet does nothing special  
to dismount. See, you can get the lines and syllables right,  
but miss the thing entirely. The point. The address.  
When you wake up I'm going to tell you this:  
that I am a fraud. I write bad shit. Sometimes I can't distinguish.  
I'm neurotic. You can't trust me with your manuscript!  
Tonight I rolled a joint after I finished reading your work.  
I was missing cigarettes again. My characters  
don't even smoke anymore. I ashed  
in my dead basil. The cherry fell, still lit, and suddenly  
I'm putting out a fire. It was fragrant. Stubbed my toe.  
Relit and tried to breathe in. Combustion is tricky,  
I guess, because I choked. Then I thought about my sonnet,  
lip quivering and shit. Some days are like this:  
Looney Tunes skits. I suppose I became a poet  
because it was marginally better than clown.  
Listen: if this all goes tits we'll skip. We'll both learn basket-weaving.  
We'll wait for the asteroid. We'll smoke cigarettes again. Go antiquing.  
Build a hilltop of cursed objects. A temple to mediocrity.  
Sell muse juice to other hacks. Snake oil stuff. Let them laugh at us.  
Let them laugh at us. Let them laugh at us. Let them laugh.



***Three Birds, Trafalgar Square, London,*** photograph



## **The one who sees inside you**

peeled their eyes from someone else  
and that is right;

peered, their eyes in someone's chest,  
wary of shadow.

Instead they sought celebration in you,  
and there is much,

but when doctrine ends – the feast, the  
drink, the date –

there's no hush. Your doors rattle from  
all your vibrating.

They might grow sea-sick, unease-sick,  
wary of another shadow,

living penumbra, and so the one who  
sees inside you peels

their eyes away from you, and if you're  
kind enough you say

you're glad they're no longer seasick  
and if you're strong

enough you reflect on how they did it in  
the first place

and that is right.

## **All All #21**

Something dazed to hold is not enough  
of a sip of a reality  
for us to wander through a warming  
phantom ruled by the separating  
principal that humans are a bold  
anything. We could be with the stones  
in the river. We could kiss calm fate  
& call joy close. Owing is hunting  
is life border is a nation-state.



***Looking for the Light***, mixed media collage

## **Skyscrapers**

What is a city tower  
but steel bones wrapped in glass skin,  
a long thought braced against wind,  
its ribs humming with elevator cables?

What is a waterfall in the mind  
but a country you left years ago,  
its white spray still misting  
the back of your eyes?

What is peace  
but the elevator's soft confession—  
the sigh in its cables  
as it carries you back down  
from astonishment,  
your reflection fractured  
in a hundred panels of glass.



## **Dirtnap**

There's a reason they have no-touching rules in strip clubs and no coin-operated strippers in casinos. There's a reason church confessionals allow only one sinner per stall at a time. There's a reason that the plane goes left when the pilot turns right and a reason Carolina Reapers don't grow in the wild.

There's a reason there's an asterisk underneath some names in the record books and a reason some love songs are banned on local radio. There's a reason apple pies are only made in Indonesia anymore and a reason gardeners in mourning grow white roses from their chests. There's a reason Buddhists

want their bodies buried in sunlight when they die. There's a reason skulls and crossbones grace pain-relief pills on the shelf. There's a reason astronauts wear aviators into space and a reason the applause signs don't tell the audience when to laugh. There's a reason man makes islands out of reusable plastic nowadays.

There's a reason undertakers dig six feet down into the dirt and a reason morticians paint half-smiles on the dead. There's a reason robots mimic the narrowest ranges of human emotion and a reason wild eagles have tracking devices clipped like jewels into their wings. There's a rule about which loved ones

can view both sides of your hospital gown. There's a trail of salt that follows you around and there's a dump truck buckling at the weight of the earth transposed. There's an eight-foot ladder that arches the doorway home and there's no way around.



***Deep Blue***, Hand-inked collograph, oil-based inks & chine collé

## **Straight People (Often) Don't Get It**

Christine Leinonen speaks with a reporter  
outside Orlando Regional Medical Center—  
her words mixed with tears, hoping her son  
Drew is alive. I sob for Christine,  
Drew, and all those murdered at Pulse.  
My mother would be in tears too  
even if she doesn't want the world  
to know she has a gay son.  
Mid sob, my phone rings,  
*I need some advice*, a friend says  
before I utter hello. *Why are you crying?*  
she asks. *Have you seen the news? Pulse?*  
I respond. There's a pause that still lingers.  
*Yeah*, she answers,  
*but it isn't like you actually knew anyone there.*

## **I have done it again**

*(after Lady Lazarus, Sylvia Plath)*

I said yes; meaning no,  
I swallow the near vomit of negative

Bite down on the bit  
Grimace from over-smiling

I wake, jaw clenched and aching  
Tongue marked by my teeth

What is this peg on my tongue?  
I am mute

A strange Cassandra,  
What god or witch have I offended?

To break the spell  
I bathe in rage

Open the lock  
Spew bile until it runs clear.



**Firebird,** Ink, thread, coloured paper, foil, cardboard

## **Psalm for a Burnt Offering**

fox coyote something has started  
lining up feathered corpses on the dawn porch.

neat as a pin.

i know this prayer:

every time a man said something kind to me

[kind, an example: *you're so smart, you went to such good  
schools. you're nothing like my last girlfriend - she was  
gorgeous, but she could be a bitch.* ]

i would call my mother, voice hope puffed and proud,  
tell her – *maybe* he was the one,

that *maybe* more food than any  
meat.

## **Waking up Next to You**

Like Southern summers on the beach  
before humanity  
flooded the ocean with plastic and poison—

predictable.

Sanderling tracks at the water's edge,  
sunrise on the Gulf transforming  
open-mouthed pelicans into golden  
arrows of hunger.

Waves washing  
hermit crab homes—  
displacement nullified.

Lungs full of sea salt air  
a breeze that doesn't carry with it any kind of omen  
save one—

that a world exists  
in which you are safe  
and that safety  
is enough.





**Crazy town**, ink and watercolour



## **Downtown Lullaby**

Los Angeles at night  
is an orchestra  
that demands the listener  
keep time with their own pulse.

Engines purr,  
windows hoard  
the moon's pale coins,

sidewalks heave upward  
where old roots  
file their complaints  
against eminent domain.

From my borrowed room,  
I strain the noise  
through a sieve of slow breathing  
until what's left  
is a quiet I can drink,  
warm as milk,  
before sleep.

## **Blessing for a queer dating app.**

instead of properly mending my gray wooden fence,  
i planted trumpet flower vines instead –

feral green thread through every gap  
and cover every splinter,

tendrils unfurl, full of buds fed  
on a dream of future hummingbirds,

realize i have been blooming for you  
my entire life.

## **Admitting**

obsession.

evasion.

vanity.

procrastination.

i have wanted when i ought not.

wanted men i ought not.

more than that—sometimes when you love me

i am elsewhere. it's a sin to be star-minded

but i can't stay. i can't say

grace over food when i stop eating.

i stop counting. i won't repeat.

i dislike april and i'm cruel to songbirds.

under you i have to reach

deep into the dream heat and some years ago

when nothing happened

but it made me bleed...

what i said about the songbirds—i mean

sometimes i don't notice them singing.



***Angel at the Summit***, Ink, paper

## **All All #20**

The ache works as a whole world, vibrant  
& drowned in the descriptions we save  
of a better place that has never  
risen from the creek-bed of the first  
philosophies. Silence is such bold  
tango. The desire to fatten  
our flinching into action makes sense.  
Pain is a leash. The birds are leaving.  
We could leave, too. We could follow them.



**Autumn Leaves,** Crazy Jane

## **Swatting**

Swatting is as passé  
as well-kept gardens  
so bees have little  
but you have lines  
and now you're flailing,  
perhaps screeching,  
teaching kids the  
dance so the whole  
school bus erupts  
bump bump bump  
against the glass;  
is it a bee or a wasp?  
A kid, meshed and  
blurry, won't be heard,  
will carry pointless  
screams back home  
where he carefully  
ushers insects out the  
window, except for  
a happy corner of  
house spiders;  
he cherishes his own  
ecosystem, looks up  
anatomy and names  
(*Tegenaria domestica*),  
hopes that learning  
will bear bus-loads  
through pupa to  
a new world where bees  
still exist, and against  
some or little flailing  
he at least might  
be heard.

## **Eric Satie's Umbrellas**

After he died, 100 Umbrellas  
were found at Erik Satie's apartment.  
Maybe Gymnopedie sounds the way it does  
Because Erik Satie always expected Rain.



## **The Lampshade**

At the gates of heaven they said  
let's review: six snails eaten, but  
no burning buildings entered  
to save a child, a puppy, a mother's music box.

You splashed into a dozen rivers, but many more  
you saw and never touched, never thought to touch.  
And yet, you spent most of your life working  
on this one species of looking.

You'd see a wooden door and make a face  
from its knots and whorls. You'd find  
a dead cardinal and would wonder  
if the dead forget the color red first.

Mostly we were impressed with this hat  
you made one night out of a lampshade.  
Your toddler laughed so hard he nearly lost  
his voice. After finishing his bedtime,

you turned to go, and he told you to stay.  
We liked how he pulled an imaginary  
string dangling out of your nose.  
How you shut your eyes afterwards

and lay perfectly motionless beside him.  
For years your son believed  
light is something you become.  
It's waiting, there, under your skin.



***Silver Brush***, ink, thread, colored paper, foil, cardboard

## Pierrot disparu

A gasped imprecation; a hurried tête-à-tête between flute and clarinet, bursting into a shower of chatter; a return of laughter, just as she had begged, a return of laughter into the voice as she told of the priceless, red, exquisite rubies; then nothing. All at once, the music stopped.

Clara opened wide her mouth, summoned air from her lungs, and pushed: but still, silence. Which part of the song had it been? Halfway through the song entitled Raub, she thought; she had got this far and no further:

*Priceless, red exquisite rubies  
Bloody drops of ancient glory  
Slumber in the buried caskets  
Down there in the vaulted graveyard.*

*Night -*

Night, and no more. The composer himself could not have conjured a more complete darkening. The sudden lack: just as Clara's mouth swallowed all words, every instrument, too, ceased to set the air vibrating. In one final, orchestrated gesture, they took the air back in on themselves, and there was no more.

From the precipice of the stage, Clara looked down at the ensemble in the orchestra pit. Presiding amid the moonshine, she ought to have been able to ask them what was wrong, command them to go on, or even go on alone, striking at the pitches of her own accord: the Sprechstimme of everyday life, when we are not followed around by a flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. With eyes growing lambent, Clara saw each of the musicians strike out – a blow, a clatter of keys, a furious bowing on the strings – only to make no sounds, not even the dull, tuneless clank of ivory keys against the piano's wooden frame. Into the vacuum, it now transpired, their scores had slipped away too. Their music stands opened out uselessly before them. Clara tried to call out to them, but her lips, unbidden, formed words which would not come:

*With his drunken cronies  
Down comes Pierrot to plunder  
Priceless, exquisite, red rubies.*

A pounding, pounding, blood at her throat, pummelling against the great silk ruff she wore; her darkening expression only too apt, she realised, making more of a Pierrot of her than before. Yet Pierrot was gone: she could not call back his voice.

Looking ahead at what had once been gloom, she now saw the audience, rows and rows of figures all bent and crooked into the same shape. Heads down as if staring into their laps, they all seemed to have fallen asleep, except that, casting her glance over the front rows, Clara could see that their eyes were open. All were dreaming the visionless dreams of the entranced. The vast theatre, it seemed, now housed all the world's inattention in its walls.

All Clara could do was turn her back on the overspreading silence. A glint from somewhere in the upper reaches of the scenery made her lift her head: it was the moon. The moon, and she the supplicant. Yes, she was its sole supplicant and it her sole source, for it now seemed she was the only person left in the theatre, and the theatre was the only place left on earth.

A ladder stood discarded in the wings. Unfixing it with a flick of her foot against its lever, she wheeled it over to the moon, finding that the uppermost rung of the ladder met precisely the lower edge of the orb, which, she saw now, was really a hole. Losing not a layer of its luminescence, what had seemed a suspended mirror had transformed into a pendant portal, into which Clara climbed. Reaching the top of the ladder, she simply clambered onto the moon's lower lip, crouched for a second on its edge, and dived.

Though she went head-first, she did not feel herself to be upside-down. For a moment, a length of time impossible to measure since she had stepped outside it entirely, Clara had neither legs nor head, nor arms, nor any body part whose sensations might have told her that she was falling. Her eyes did not know that she fell. Alone, they feasted on the kaleidoscope through which she was passing, an endless cavalcade of white on white. She saw for the first time the true colour of the moon, not as the light of the sun guides it to the earth, but the colour it nurtures, quietly, within its secret depths.

When Clara landed, she was surprised to find herself on two feet, steady, unharmed. Looking up, she found the moon receding, retreating upwards to the theatre, which was surely intact somewhere far above where she now stood. That she was underground, buried deep beneath the theatre, seemed clear. A low light danced in the distance, and she moved towards it, turning to find herself at the entrance to a room.

Heat and energy there certainly were, if not – she could not say – life. To her left, a fire blazed in an old-fashioned furnace, a dark maw gaping wide and revealing its teeth: a shimmering pile of stones which, every so often, captured a flame and transformed into rubies. It did not roar but rumbled, its occasional crackle and spit making no match for the other sound pervading the room – the hum of electricity.

As Clara turned to the centre of the room, she found it crowded with machines, a dozen great hulks of plastic and metal and circuitry, all dotted with buttons and keys and primitive approximations at screens trying to convey information. They flickered and changed hue, intermittently, like the coals in the furnace catching fire.

On top of each machine sat a woman, a dozen in total. Were Clara to reach out a hand – she might cry out, shatter the serenity resting on their faces...but then, she thought as she felt her throat tighten and her palms moisten with proximity to the furnace, was it possible that not one of these women felt the heat? Every one was a porcelain hue, her skin matte and unblemished. Not a blush, not a bead of sweat.

Each was sitting upright on her machine, hands at her side, gripping the edges of the black box. Legs dangled over the front, poking out from under a clean, fitted white robe. Clara's ruff now felt like a brace, the flowy silk trappings of Pierrot hazardous in such a hub of close, contained energy. And this energy was coming from, or flowing into, these women: which was it? With eyes growing blind with the heat, she peered in front of her at one woman, whose neck was a perfectly rounded tube. It was encircled, several times, with wire, forming a thick, warm necklace.

Trailing onto the floor, all of the women's wire necklaces together formed a spooling serpent that slunk lazily into the far corner, almost beyond the light cast by the fire. Clara could only make it out by

moving closer. The mass of wires met at a final apex: a crown atop the head of a slumped, slumbering effigy. Barely occupying the chair he sat in, he was clearly, surely, not made of bones and sinew, but of silicone, draped in worn threads and then sucked of all the certainty it once had. He wore a simple black suit, and his limp legs ended in feet encased in shoes, though there was no hint that he might ever have walked himself into this chamber. For who would have chosen willingly such a seat? The man's bald head was bowed as if succumbing to sleep; his palms, extending to elegant, dextrous fingers, which alone on the effigy hinted at spirit, faced upwards. Was it the remembered taste of those lost speech sounds? Clara swallowed a cry which would never yet have sounded. Surely, surely this was him – here, below the stage, unhearing and bearing heavily his electric crown, was Schoenberg.

A breath, all of a sudden, took hold of his form, but not a breath such as Clara might have taken to fill the lungs before singing. It was a breath that pulled inwards every inch of his waxen skin, stretching it more tightly over his wasting frame. Memories gripped Clara's body of, only moments ago, it seemed, trying to sing the music this man had written and feeling, as the effigy must now feel, that every breath sucked her in on herself. Still she could not cry out or scream; her throat, coiled round and round with heat, was a desert.

As if making a reply to her silence, the women began to hum. It was not like music borne of friction, of breath escaping in the smallest of bursts from between pursed lips. Just as Schoenberg had not needed to open his mouth to breathe, nor did the women move a muscle, and yet they hummed. It would have been impossible to say which of them had started it, or at which pitch and volume, but the room filled with the sound so that it seemed to be an unlocked secret of the very atmosphere itself. It was as constant as the air.

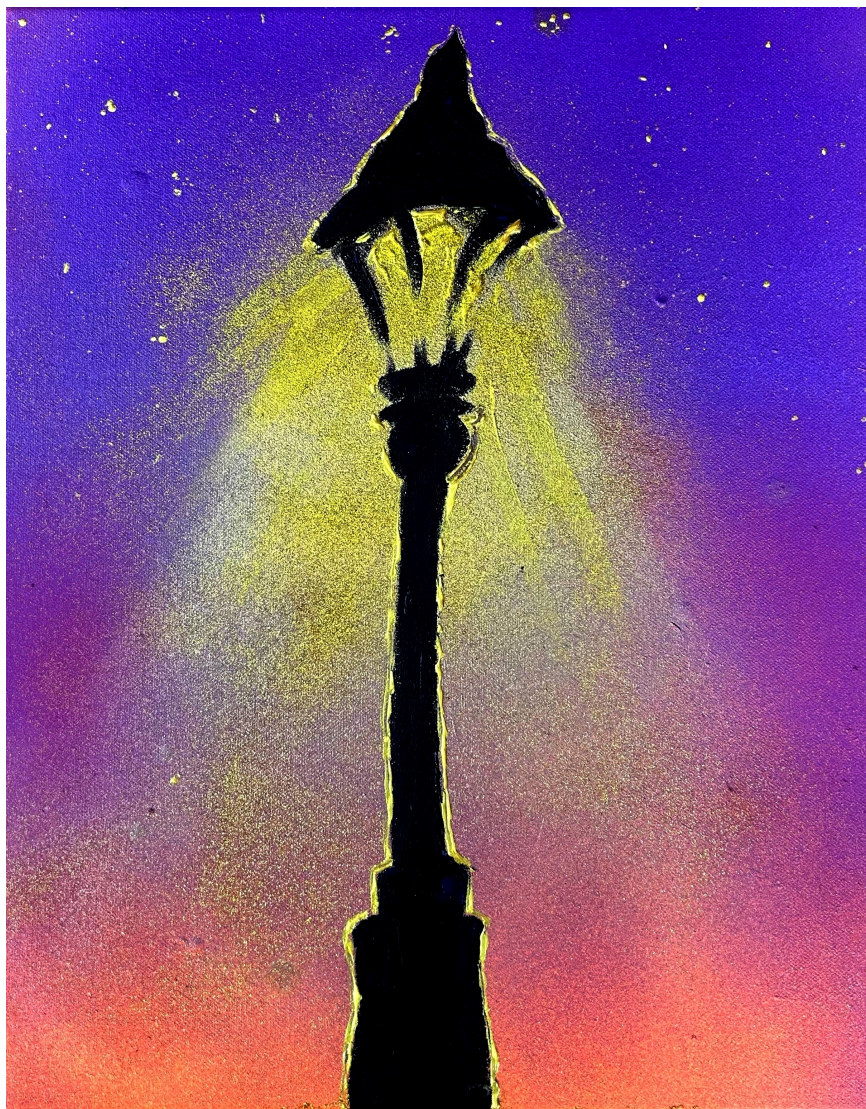
Clara turned away from the body on the chair as it slowly deflated. Colour, glorious red, was entering the women's pallid faces, overspreading their features, so that she saw now how truly beautiful they were. Theirs was not a redness of blood, of danger, of passion: theirs was the ruby redness of the earth's elemental core, an inner heat too long hidden. Their sound too, surely, was some long guarded tone, the synthesised sound of what will be, joined with what has always

been. How else could she account for its strangeness, its impossibility, which – if she did not embrace it – might have deafened her?

Schoenberg saw and heard nothing. Clara's hands reached forwards before her eyes knew what they were doing. On one of the machines, the dozenth one, perhaps, or more, was a space: on either side, the sounding body of a woman. A loose collection of wires spooled on the floor before them. Clara had only to unbuckle the silk ruff and discard it, climb once again, wire in hand, onto the vacant machine, and loop the wire several times round her neck, and their beauty would be hers. First their clear white, then their blush of red – life – light...round and round went the wire. Its tightening, she knew, would be a release from this heat, this airless hub: it would set her free into sound. Clara began to hum.

Eyes now blinded, though from what cause she could not have known, Clara did not see into the far corner. A gasp, a shock of sudden sensation; air shooting up a tube too fast for valves to arrest it. The tube became merely a chute; the mouth, a precipice. In the corner, the effigy laughed as it convulsed, bursts of life racking its wiry limbs and leaving its mouth agape. Then came the shower: pages and pages, so many his mouth could not hold them, and they spewed forth onto the dark floor, each one of them dotted all over with music.





**Lamp Post**, acrylic, spray paint and glitter on canvas



## **Cheat Codes and Life Hacks**

Remember that you are alive. Your bedtime, your forehead, and your tolerance for anything labeled “flamin’ hot” will change, but the feral marinara of your soul will not turn to broth.

You will have days of poetry and epiphany. They will be followed by days in which your sanity depends upon consuming a full sleeve of Fig Newtons in your car.

Don’t make fun of anyone for gastrointestinal issues outside their control.

If you don’t know what you want, flip a coin. You will instantly know what you want. While George Washington is still in the air, your dread will pull one way, your yearning will yank the other, and you will be ready to make history.

Take care of smaller animals. Accept when you are the smaller animal.

Remember that you are alive. Should this ever cease to be outrageous, go into the bathroom, close the door, and smile into your eyes until you see some ancestors. You will probably give them the giggles, which is worth the entire exercise.

Exult in the elderly. Avoid the words “adorable,” “sassy,” or “feisty.”

Send fan mail to everyday people. The man who posts videos of groundhogs eating cauliflower and the woman who sends recipes to the newspaper because “fruit molds are my specialty” are saving the world for free.

Don’t make fun of anyone for being excited about ice cream, Star Wars, or tomorrow.

Brag about people to people. Tell the receptionist that the client is six feet of unprecedented splendor. Tell the client that the receptionist is the Sermon on the Mount in a turtleneck. Do this while they are both standing there.

Remember that you are alive. You do not need to be ashamed of horseradish things you believed a few lifetimes ago, and you should not get a full-back tattoo of today's convictions, even though they are of course correct this time.

If you are moving in the direction of mercy, you are doing it right, whatever it is.

Don't make fun of anyone for trying something new with their hair.

Elongate often. Stand like a winged victory while you chop cilantro. Stretch your arms as high as possible over your head, then go further. Remember there are angels drowsing in your rafters and tickle their tum-tums. I do not know why this is important, but if you try it you will understand.

Never apologize for saying "no" to happy hour, an egg salad sandwich, or an "easy to moderate" hike.

Keep up with what the youths are saying these days. Hang flash cards around your living room to learn the difference between "Labubu" and "delulu." Don't do this to be cool. Do this to be adorable, sassy, and feisty.

Remember that you are alive. At least fortnightly, see how loudly you can sing.

Tell customer service representatives they are secret saints who will someday be remembered in the Great Story. Apologize on behalf of the people who treat them otherwise, for they are many.

Don't make fun of anyone with pet hair on their pants.

Ask God to booby-trap your day with people you need and people who need you. Receive bread from hands with mood rings, hands with wrinkles deeper than mashed potato gravy rivers, and hands you have seen so many times you forgot they were there. Pass the biscuits left, right, and under the table.

Work the word "rutabaga" into casual conversation.

If someone asks to play you a song, forget whatever you had planned for the next four minutes and receive this gift, whether it is "Strangers in the Night" or "Cheeseburger in Paradise."

Remember that you are alive.



## About our Contributors:

**Jana Braňková** is a creative creature living in Prague, who likes working with all kinds of material but is infatuated with ink. She has also been trying to tame watercolours in the past few years more or less successfully. She posts her work erratically on Instagram as @jana\_artista.

**Dustin Brookshire's** (he/him) fourth & latest chapbook is *Repeat As Needed* (Harbor Editions, 2025). He is a co-editor of *Let Me Say This: A Dolly Parton Poetry Anthology* (Madville Publishing, 2023) and editor of *When I Was Straight: A Tribute to Maureen Seaton* (Harbor Editions, 2024). More at [dustinbrookshire.com](http://dustinbrookshire.com).

**Crazy Jane** is a citizen of the world who takes photos.

**Darren C. Demaree** is the author of twenty-four poetry collections, most recently “*Now Flourish Northern Cardinal*”, (Small Harbor Publishing, November 2025). He is the recipient of a Greater Columbus Arts Council Grant, an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award, the Louise Bogan Award from Trio House Press, and the Nancy Dew Taylor Award from *Emrys Journal*. He is currently working in the Columbus Metropolitan Library system.

**Todd Dillard** lives outside Philadelphia with his wife, two kids, and black cat named Kiki. You can find him on Bluesky at @toddedillard.bsky.social or on Instagram at @toddedillard.

**Elisheva Fox** Elisheva Fox is a queer, Jewish, Texan poet. She has been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize; her work can be found or is forthcoming in *Image Journal*, *Paper Brigade*, *Lavender Review*, and *Salvation South*. Fox's first collection of poems, *Spellbook* for the Sabbath Queen, from Belle Point Press, was selected for Jewish Women's Archive 2023-2024 Book Club Picks.

**Ewen Glass** (he/him) is a screenwriter and poet from Northern Ireland who lives with two dogs, a tortoise and a body of self-doubt; his poetry has appeared in the likes of Okay Donkey, Maudlin House, HAD, Poetry Scotland and One Art. Bluesky/X/IG: @ewenglass

**p. hodges adams** p. hodges adams is a poet, teacher, and bookseller living in Virginia. their work has appeared in Cutbank, Arkansas International, Northwest Review, fourteen poems, and elsewhere. hopefully they will transform into a beam of sunlight someday soon.

**Joshua Lillie** is a bartender in Tucson, Arizona. He is the author of the chapbook Small Talk Symphony (Finishing Line Press, 2025) and the collection The Outside They Built (Alien Buddha Press, 2025). In 2024, he was a finalist for the Jack McCarthy Book Prize Contest from Write Bloody Publishing. In his free time, he enjoys searching for lizards with his wife and cat.

**Brigit Lilley** is an artist/printmaker living in Somerset, UK. She does hand inked prints mainly collographs and monoprints. Lately she has been doing collages of her own hand-printed material.

**Ben Macnair** is an award-winning poet and playwright from Staffordshire in the United Kingdom. Follow him on Twitter @benmacnair and on Instagram @BenJMacnair

**Mirjana M.** (they / them ) are an artist and writer from Belgrade, Serbia. Their work focuses on exploring the juxtaposition of various elements through mixed media of photography, double exposure, textures and light. Their work most often explores concepts of duality and has appeared in Vocivia, Broken Antler, Spellbinder, New Limestone Review, The Fantastic Other, Soft Star, Elixir Verse Press magazines and other places. They authored 4 poetry collections. You can see more of their work at their blog [olorielmoonshadow.wordpress.com](https://olorielmoonshadow.wordpress.com) or get in touch on Twitter (@selena\_oloriel) and Instagram (cyanide\_cherries)

**Nasta Martyn** is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. Her first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. Her work has been published in magazines: Gupsophila, Harpy Hybrid Review, Little Literary Living Room and others. In 2022, her short story was included in the collection "The 50 Best Short Stories", and her poem was published in the collection of poetry "The wonders of winter".

**Rachel Lauren Myers** is a poet living in coastal Massachusetts. Her work can be found in Action, Spectacle, Ballast, RESOURCES, Okay Donkey, SoFloPoJo, and elsewhere. She is the features editor for MEMEZINE. Catch her on Instagram at @hellostarbucks.

**Kathleen Palmer** is a freelance art curator and poet in progress, based in Surrey. She has long seen exhibitions as story-telling in three dimensions. Partly inspired by working with poets in museums, she recently returned to an early love of writing. Her work has appeared in The Alchemy Spoon. She can be found on Instagram and Threads as @kathleenpalmer\_101.

**Victoria C. Roskams** writes short fiction about the arts and the uncanny: exploring the strange lives and afterlives of artists and artworks. Beyond fictional writing, Roskams pursues academic research interests in various kinds of writing about music, especially the intersections of fictional and non-fictional writing, and with a focus on the nineteenth century. Roskams lives and works in Oxford, and can be found on X/Bluesky @VRoskams.

**Abel Saldaña** is a poet and writer whose work explores memory, perseverance, and the quiet transformations born from trauma. He currently resides in Orange County, California with his wife and two cats. He can be found on instagram: @abel\_s5 and twitter: @abel\_writing\_s5

**Angela Townsend** (she/her) writes for a cat sanctuary. She is a five-time Pushcart Prize nominee, nineteen-time Best of the Net nominee, and the winner of West Trade Review's 704 Prize for Flash Fiction. Her work appears or is forthcoming in Arts & Letters, Blackbird, The Iowa Review, JMWW, The Offing, SmokeLong Quarterly, trampset, and Witness, among others.

**Kass Vladyka** is a Prague-based artist, hostess, actress and drag queen also known as Just Karen. Their favourite poets include Lana Del Rey, Ocean Vuong, Rumi and Jaime Lilley.

**Kimberly Wolf** is a poet living in Texas. Her poems have been published in HAD, LEON Literary Review, Vast Chasm, and more. She is the author of the chapbook *How the Frogs Get Married* (Bullshit Lit, 2023). You can read more of her work at [www.kimberlywolfpoet.com](http://www.kimberlywolfpoet.com).





