



# The Seraphic Review

*Issue 6 / December 2024*

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# Angie Yeung

*unlearning the future to happen again*

i walk home between the cracks,  
close to

how you feel when we slept till midnight,

counting down to mid-autumn

as if we were a location,  
meaning

under lamplight  
the bed  
in hopes of rejuvenation.  
we called jesus

to come as andromeda,  
naming every sun

we never had a star for  
eight minutes

after they burnt out.

stardust eating

stardust,

>>>

addiction to what is

crushable as

white powder,  
the unbitten nails rebraiding  
our molecular distance as

ceilings

strung  
into our heads  
have never been a human thing

is but

an evolutionary phenomenon.  
one day we can be homesickness again,  
mercury reddening into

metal  
we,

wish for luck,

the tipping point,

rubbing against each other

for heat

>>>

for us to do it all over again,

the corner of an eye where lantern light

burns and

remembers the blind spot  
connects us to our beliefs

our brains

in an alternate reality,  
can

only

exist in memory.  
i run water

between my fingers and the shoelaces

to practise doing your hair

when you plucked your milk teeth like relief

and smell the sky  
with

skin,

>>>

the negative space

unslipping into my mouth.

hug my knees into

a three-leafed clover

blessing until

something happens.

# Sarah Ogden

## *Pressed*

I've spent countless hours  
crafting you into words,  
fitting the image you left  
within letters' curves while  
my back molds stiff against  
the desk chair's rigid back.

Your sleek reflection nestles  
in laminated sheets,  
your gentle stroke on my neck  
a ghost touch I cannot  
swivel my pen-held eyes  
to see face-to-face.

Like the inkblot of us,  
I am dried in a blur  
to wonder the use when  
margins are not set to fit  
you as more than  
a wish on paper.

What is the point in verse  
when you will never hear,  
when I will never dampen,  
never  
dribble off the table  
into your rounded ears?

---

**Sarah Ogden** is twenty and a college junior from Florida. She is previously published in Ice Lolly Review and Blue Things Zine, among other journals. She is also the founder and editor-in-chief of Gray Flamingo Review, managing editor of her college newspaper, and co-editor of her college literary magazine. She recently published her first book, *Together, Separately*. While she spends most of her free time writing, she also enjoys traveling, reading, and listening to music older than her parents. She hopes to pursue a career as a writer.

# Prakriti

## *A little death*

clogged spiracles of an arthropod  
inaudible shrieks from this supposed error of a god  
showered by wisps of grey bellied pesticides  
for apparent rejuvenation of the floral blades at the farm sites.  
seeping deep underneath into the clementine fields  
a new kind of venom awakes, the grimy bosom aches softly.  
an orphan drinks away the tears it spills  
and soon he shall be beckoning to the ravens of the hills  
while his father, unaware, hustles away at the timber mills.

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**Prakriti** is a 17 year old writer from India who's often found filling paper boats with her musings and sending them off on a voyage into the unknown.







Thus, we set out to commit our usual mayhem. All full of alcohol and anticipation of our impending bounty, Larry, Moe, Curly, Shemp, and I decided to sneak into a wildlife refuge—some names were changed to protect the guilty. Using our inferior hypo-deductive reasoning skills and only armed with finite teenage wisdom, we deduced that the frogs would be plentiful in the chosen area because it was illegal to hunt there. Decisions like these were seldom weighed against legality. More often than not, they were on a whim, deemed the most cost effective, or the product of a dare. In a drunken stooper and under the cloak of darkness, our caravan of buffoons set out on our clandestine effort into their watery world with hopes of harvesting a bounty of green, watery, croaking prey.

The evening hunt proved rather successful. There was a serene moment when all that could be seen by the moonlight was a basket of frogs and a bunch of smiling idiots—serenity be damned! My warped teenage mind decided it was a “good idea” to spear a seven-foot water moccasin near his tail, while we were half submerged in water and reeds, aweing over our bounty. With tremendous ferocity and flailing, the snake violently attempted to dig his fangs into anything or anyone within reach, all the while I was overcome by laughter from watching my instantly cowardly compadres thrash their way through the dancing reeds to escape my newfound friend. After a moment, the snake freed itself and slithered into the night. Only then was it realized that the snake was merely wedged between two prongs and lost no advantage in the ensuing battle. We collected ourselves at the riverbank only to discover that Curly had inadvertently lost all of our catch in his effort to escape with his life! After a bit of cursing, and focusing directly on Curly, we called it a night and headed back home empty-handed.

>>>

There was only room for two in Moe's single-cab Chevrolet pickup, so Larry and I rode in the back—the same as many star-filled nights before. Through the sliding glass window, I could hear a tune on the radio. It was “Dixieland Delight” by the band Alabama, popularized in the 1980s. Being a typical unabashed high-schooler, and on cue, someone yelled “*turn it up, man,*” and, in four-part harmony, we all joined in the howling out the tune as we headed home. Unbeknownst to any of us, that would be the last time we would spend together as a group. You promise to keep in touch, but you don't. All in the group exceeded expectations—whatever that means. Some of us have successful careers; some don't. Some are fathers and husbands; some aren't. But whatever we are today has its foundation in those hills and creeks where we first went looking for, and found ourselves. The imprint of that star-filled night and our antics is forever etched into my memory, and as fun-filled as it was, today it brings me sadness. Most of us experience this to some degree, but empathy sometimes feels like a band-aid when you need a tourniquet. And we all share a teary smile. But still, whenever I hear that tune on the radio, I am transported to an age of innocence and that night, and I'm forever grateful for the memories.

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**Jason Abshire** is a writer and graduate of Louisiana State University in the field of anthropology. Currently, he resides in Corpus Christi, Texas. His writing endeavors are fearless, spanning from drab technical to erotica—his extensive travel and literary knowledge permeate every draft. When the pen is not in his hand, you might find him with a fly rod, jogging in traffic, manning a helm, or serenading a crowd with a favorite tune on his Martin guitar. You can contact him on Facebook or view his portfolio at [www.theabshirestudio.com](http://www.theabshirestudio.com).

# John Brantingham

## *The Inexactness of Light*

Out in my backyard, I look at the stars and wonder if any of those that I see are where they appear to be or if they have winked out, or if their lights have been bent by the tremendous gravity of the objects they have passed.

I can hear my wife inside talking to my daughter. I can hear the two of them laughing about something, talking about something, but I can't hear their words.

I understand that I cannot see the stars exactly, and I cannot hear the women of my life exactly, and that I stand on this Earth wonderfully remote.

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**John Brantingham** was Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks' first poet laureate. His work has been featured in hundreds of magazines. He has twenty-one books of poetry, memoir, and fiction including *Life: Orange to Pear* (Bamboo Dart Press) and *Kitkitdizzi* (Bamboo Dart Press). He lives in Jamestown, New York.

# James Croal Jackson

## *Rain Delay*

Perhaps I have been denying my whole  
life saying it is rain that makes me sad.

Or maybe that's the game– denial itself–  
stretching to the heavy clouds in my brain,

blanketing across the mind's sky. Inside  
of me is a green tarp that could cover

a ballfield, folded neatly in the stands,  
needing hands in unison to protect

the field in even the weakest  
of storms, a team to preserve

the green of all my artificial  
grass before a stadium full

of friends and family who–  
in lemon ponchos, gripping

tangerine umbrellas– root  
for this sadness to pass.

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**James Croal Jackson** is a Filipino-American poet in film production. His latest chapbooks are *A God You Believed In* (Pinhole Poetry, 2023) and *Count Seeds With Me* (Ethel Zine & Micro-Press, 2022). Recent poems are in *The Garlic Press*, *Remington Review*, and *ONE ART*. He edits *The Mantle Poetry* from Nashville, Tennessee.  
([jamescroaljackson.com](http://jamescroaljackson.com))

# Luke Miller

## *All My Friends*

The diner was nearly empty; few people came in this late. The floor was fake tile, a linoleum pink-white, the pink booths sitting side by side with white plastic chairs, all surrounding cheap plastic tables. Everything was livened up by the neon that circled the ceiling and shone in through the large windows. Ashley looked out the glass to her right, eyes wandering over the various signs; some in English, some in other languages. All of them demanding the same attention, all of them playing a part in the rainbow of fluorescent light that bathed the city street. It was raining and the lights blurred through the window, obscured slightly by the smearing water droplets. An occasional car drove by, adding the sound of wet tires to the diner's own unique background noise. The pattering of the rain, the murmur of a quiet conversation a few booths down, the distant hiss of the fryer and clinking of dishes. Together they made a muted symphony that Ashley found relaxing, even comforting. She smelled the grilled cheese before it landed in front of her: brown buttery bread, yellow melted cheese, with two pickles on either side, exactly how she liked it. It made her mouth water.

"I can't eat that Daryl, you know I don't have anything to spend." Ashley looked up at the older man who had brought her the sandwich. Daryl always wore a grease stained apron and Ashley was positive he didn't sleep; there never seemed to be a time at the 24-hour diner when he was not behind the grill.

"I know, but a girl's gotta eat. I ain't taking it back neither." He smiled warmly at her.

>>>

“But what happened last time, your job—”

“Is of no concern of yours miss. That there is a mess up, well within my rights to give away.” He winked at her, then moved slowly into the booth across from her.

She smiled weakly back at him but hardly waited a second before tearing in. It tasted good, the simple food more than delicious. Daryl watched her for a second, letting Ashley demolish one of the triangles, then spoke while she sipped her cola.

“You got a place to go tonight darling?”

“Yeah I do,” She spoke quickly, between breaths and food. “Thanks.”

“You sure? I told you, Sheri don't mind. The kids will be asleep. Just let me give her a call, she'll set you up on the couch.” His brow furrowed with concern and Ashely realized her hunger was showing. She made an effort to slow her eating down, focusing on the pickles instead of the cheese and bread. They were homemade. Salty with a tang of sweet. She bit into them with a satisfying snap, another sound common to the diner.

“Yeah, I'm sure. Don't worry 'bout me 'kay? I got a place. A guy is coming to get me soon. Stayed with him before, he's sweet.” Ashely studied the walls instead of looking at Daryl. They were checkered with small tiles to match the decor, which themselves were covered by numerous framed pictures and magazines wherever the lack of windows allowed. To the right hung a neon lucky cat, standing straight, whiskers framing a pendant with some blurry symbol. Below that a picture of Elvis sang to an invisible crowd, with something scrawled under the microphone. She could barely read it, an advertisement for a concert showing from many years ago.

“Well, alright then. Promise me you'll stay with us if you ever need to?” The unmistakable pity that plagued his voice made Ashely look at him again, angry and guilty at the same time.

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“I don’t want to intrude.” She said, his face broke a little more and she backtracked. “I promise, okay? I’m thankful for that, really.” There was a shout from the kitchen. Daryl looked behind him briefly then started to get up.

“Alright then kid, take care of yourself tonight.”

“I will, thanks.” He was barely through the swinging doors before she attacked the next half of the sandwich, and it was gone before the doors had settled. Content, Ashely took a long breath. She stirred her drink, watching the ice chunks swirl and dip, pushed under by her thin black straw. She liked to think of them as small living things, sliding and pushing over one another, grasping and fighting for air, in a constant state of distress, never on the surface long enough to catch their breath, never under long enough to drown. Out of the corner of her eye she could see her own reflection in the pale plastic that covered the table. She frowned at it. Her reddish brown hair frizzed and her purple collar, the most impressive part of her simple button down, was wrinkled. It matched her pale eyeshadow, slightly smudged, also purple. Shivering slightly, she checked to make sure her sleeves still covered the bruises on her upper arms. Happy no unwanted questions would be raised, she fidgeted with her skirt. It was a little too short for the current weather, and she wished she’d put something else on.

Her phone buzzed, making her jump. She forgot it had been laying on the table. The manicured nails that reached out, still covered in crumbs, felt like they didn't belong to her. Looking at the screen, she read the angry text that seemed to pounce on her. It took her a second to make sure she understood it correctly. Putting the phone down without sending a reply she reflexively grabbed at the purse next to her and checked to make sure she still had the plastic bag. It was there. Ashley squeezed it and felt slightly more at ease.

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She sat for a while longer playing with the straw absently, wishing for something stronger than the ice-watered cola that lay in the bottom of the glass. Eventually she grabbed up her phone and pushed herself up out of the booth.

“Tell Daryl I said bye.” She called out, waving at her favorite server, Dianne, who was busy serving some late night coffee.

“I will hun, take care now!” Dianne called back over a mug.

“You too.” Ashely walked quickly to the end of the booths, past countless singers and more lucky cats, through the glass doors and out into the rain.

He was late. The rain didn’t bother her, standing there on the curb. If anything she enjoyed the feeling of the cold drops on her skin, soaking lightly into her top. But she briefly wondered if she should go back into the diner. She glanced around and saw no one except for a man smoking a block down. Ashley wished she had something to smoke. Waiting for someone had never been her strong suit and she tapped her foot and glanced at her phone, nervous without knowing why. John had never been late. Not once. He would have been waiting at the curb when she came out, giving her a smile and searching her with those hazel brown eyes that looked so intently. She wished she didn’t have to compare everything to what he had and hadn’t done. But she wasn’t nearly that lucky.

Zac pulled up in a black hatchback, down the road. The reflected neon lights looked dull and hazy in the worn out paint. Ashely walked with a tight purpose toward the car and pulled twice on the handle before he remembered to unlock it. She slid into the passenger seat. It smelled like cigarettes. Not the clean cigarette smoke that lingers longingly outside of movie theaters and inside bars, subtly reminiscent of the busy city, worn out streets, and Hollywood glamor.

>>>

It was the kind that stuck in the nostrils, the kind that hangs in the air hand in hand with carbon monoxide. A suffocating smell, mixed with shitty cologne, it rubbed in all the wrong ways. She wrinkled her nose, and cracked the window once the door was closed.

“Goddamn it girl, keep that shit shut. It’s raining.” He barked it at her, she twitched slightly, but left it down.

“I know it’s raining, dammit, I had to walk in it Zac. Why can’t you pull around to the diner and save me the walk?”

“You know why. I don’t trust the people that own that place, gives me the creeps. And that cook always talking to you, I don’t like you talking to those people.” Zac bent down and took a bump off of something on his finger, then leaned back and lit another cigarette, taking a drag like his life depended on it.

“If you’re going to smoke that thing in here I’m leaving the window open.” Ashely ignored his comments about Daryl and refused to look at him, staring out at the street. She could feel his eyes on the back of her head as he tried to decide if it was something worth fighting over. He finally grunted and turned the car on, it stalled briefly before coming to life. The rain started to fall faster, leaving streaks on the windshield as they flew through the city. Even in the wet, the night was alive. Ashely watched from the car as they drove by countless scores of party goers, all in varying states of inebriation. A group of college guys singing loudly to each other. A homeless man pushing his cart, hidden under a mass of coats. A pair of girls in high heels, walking as purposefully as possible while using each other for much needed support. It felt like here the lights never went out, and the sun never came up, and everything became a blur of neon.

>>>

A familiarly violent bump alerted her to their arrival. Zac got out of the car without a word and, ducking against the rain, hurried inside. Ashley dallied, watching the rainfall. Across the street a young couple, younger even than her, helped each other down the sidewalk, holding onto each other tightly under an umbrella, unable to go two steps without a burst of giggles. She remembered the feeling of John touching her lightly on the small of her back. He would do it when walking behind her. Not out of direction or any purpose beyond connection. Zac didn't do that, nor would she have said she wanted him to. As the black that was night started to turn into the gray that would soon herald the blue and pink of sunrise, Ashely got out of the car, hugging her purse close, and wandered inside. Zac's place was a small nest; one room and one bathroom. He was already undressing by his mattress which lay dumped in the corner. It didn't take him long to slide under the covers, moving close to the wall to leave room for her. She walked in slowly sitting on the edge, by the lumps of his feet. They moved and squirmed under the sheet, looking disconnected from the rest of his body, making her feel uncomfortable. After her shoes were off, she stood up, shimmying out of her skirt as if in a dream. That done, she reached into her purse, taking out the plastic bag. Picking three of the many small white bars, she slipped into bed next to Zac.

"What have you got for me, huh?" His words slid off her.

Ashely opened her palm, revealing one bar, and he snatched it up like a frog catching a cricket. He threw his back and immediately started chatting about nothing. She waited a while. This was the best part of her night. After a moment, she took one, then the other. He rambled on for a while, she sat and looked at him. It didn't matter if she listened or not, he'd talk all the same. Eventually she would lean back, ride the wave slowly bubbling up inside of her, until the swirls of trembling black swam into the sides of her vision, and the room faded away. >>>

Zac's voice was far off, and Ashley was not quite certain he was saying actual words anymore. She was glad John couldn't see her right now, that he would have no idea what it was she spent her nights doing. She thought about living for herself and wondered how to do that. She tried to stop herself from thinking about him, but that made her feel very lonely. She felt Zac grabbing at her arms and his hot breath on her neck. She thought about doing something, considering both pulling away or pulling closer. But she did neither and then the mattress enveloped her and she sank deep into the floor, down, down, down, into the earth itself.

Whenever she thought she'd gotten over him, John was there, in her dreams. Before they'd been together she'd dreamed about him, and now that he was gone she dreamed about him even more. He was naked, stretching in front of her, his back turned. He was spotless. There was a deep tan to his skin that turned his muscles a deep shade of olive. There was a sheen on him, and he turned his head slightly to the side when she called, as if he could hear her but didn't want to turn back around. In her dreams John never wanted her. She had wondered if this was a sign, and then they had been together and she'd thought it was anything but. Now she knew it was more akin to truth. Ashley watched him ignore her; she stood, realized she was naked too, and tried to chase him--but he was already gone. She heard laughing and it was John's laugh and even in the dream it gave her a feeling so deep in her chest she started to wake up. She thought for a moment she would wake to the strong arms and brown eyes that she'd craved and when her eyes opened there was nothing but a blank wall.

The morning anxiety was familiar, but always took her a little off guard. The warmth in her chest had turned into a sharp pain and an inability to gasp for air.

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It clutched and clawed at her chest threatening to suffocate, to collapse. It was inescapable and terrified her. Ashley fumbled around for her phone.

*I miss you*

She typed it out. But she knew she couldn't send it. She stared at it for a while. It did little to help the pain in her chest. She took a forced breath and opened instagram. She swiped over into the dms and looked down for a name. Last online: 3h. It was just a name on a screen. She thought she must be the only person crazy enough to do this. But she had to feel connected somehow and she felt so far away.

Ashley felt a stirring next to her and turned her phone off. Zac made a sound between a yawn and a snore and slowly sat up. The blanket they were sharing was pulled away from her as it slid off of his pale body. It bunched all in a bundle in his lap as he stared around in a slight daze, making an odd smacking sound. Ashley could see his acne covered back from where she lay. He stood up after a second and the blanket fell away onto his feet. Ashley felt a small lurch in her throat and became conscious of the refreshed aching in her biceps. He kicked off the bed disrupting the blanket completely and in turn revealing her own nakedness. She hated the thought of being naked in the same room as this boy. He slipped into the bathroom and soon there was the soft sound of the shower coming around to temp.

Ashley had felt lucid while he moved, but with him out of the room that driving force seeped right out of her and onto the floor. She fell back down from her propped position onto her back, no longer caring about her vulnerability. *It is Saturday*. The thought wormed its way slowly forward, starting as a vague recollection and growing from infancy into a fully acknowledged fact. *It is Saturday*. She didn't have to work today. Didn't have to work tonight.

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For even as Ashley made this remarkable recollection she watched the last rays of sunset blink out one by one against the far wall. Then silence. A brief moment of silence before the night began.

The shower clicked off. Ashley hurriedly reached out and grabbed the blanket, huddling underneath it, doing her best to cover everything that was previously bare. After a couple minutes of waiting Zac opened the door and shuffled out wrapped in a ragged beach towel. She took the queue and jumped to her feet, not able to stand the sight of his pale chest, framed by scraggly chest hair and a beer belly. Wrapping the blanket close Ashley grabbed at her skirt and made for the vacated bathroom. Zac stared at her blankly, the shower not fully wiping the sleep from his face. It was unnerving. She hurried into the bathroom and locked the door. Letting the blanket fall she couldn't help but notice her muscles were tense and she trembled. Crossing her arms Ashley sunk to the floor. Then Zac found his voice.

"Don't take too fucking long in there. I promised Van and Ernie we'd meet them at the club at nine. That's in..." A distinct pause. Ashley could imagine him rummaging around for his phone, how his head would scrunch once it was found, trying hard to do the simple math. "An hour and a half, and you can't bail this time. You got product to move."

Ashely didn't have to work, so she'd have to help Zac. She knew this. Zac was just reminding her. So she closed her eyes tight and tried hard to forget it. A couple minutes later she opened them. No luck. Resigned, she got up and turned the shower back on. Cold water shocked her ankles as it bounced off the edge of the tub onto her feet. She turned it as far to the left as possible, until the heat was scalding and the small bathroom filled with steam. She soaked, letting the water try and burn away the filth of the bed in which she had slept. The water turned her skin red and she could feel her blood throb.

>>>



She tried to think of what she could wear later and didn't like her options. She was glad John couldn't see her, but still wished he could. She wondered, as she had many times, if after death she'd be able to play moments like this back from her life. She imagined sitting in the eternal movie theater with John and showing him all the parts he'd missed. She'd have to edit a lot out. Banging on the door broke her trance. Zac yelled something incoherent. She sighed and turned the water off.

The club was loud. Too loud, too annoying. *Leave it to Zac to pick the one place full of narcs*, Ashley thought to herself, hand over her plastic bag, filled with bars that were supposed to be rolls of green by now. Everything about clubs made her uncomfortable. The prevalence of alcohol (she didn't drink), the deafening music (she didn't dance), the unbearably emboldened men in fishnet shirts (she didn't hookup). Van and Ernie had been there alright. They were already two bottles deep when Zac joined them, and now Ashley was positive they had lost count. This place had a strong red neon that seemed to permeate every corner, washing the faces and bodies of the dancers red. It reminded her of blood. She was there to take advantage of these people, to butcher them. Reaching into her bag she took out two xanax, downing them without a thought. There was someone across the bar looking at her. He glanced over from time to time, with an uncomfortable stare that left her feeling chilled. She found herself checking her phone a lot, anything to avoid making eye contact. Her friend from back home had sent her a song. She hated the music they were playing in this bar. Her love language was sending songs. She'd loved sending songs to John and he'd never once sent any back.

Thinking about that, Ashley scrolled down in messenger to see how long it had been. Sixteen months.

>>>



Sixteen months since the last time she talked to him. She remembered exactly the texts they had sent back and forth, but tapped into the conversation anyway. She read them back to herself. His replies got so few and so far between she started to think he was looking for a way out of keeping contact. So she'd given him one. She'd gone away. Gone on a trip. Told him that she wouldn't be reachable for a while. Not that it mattered. He'd never tried to reach her. And she loved him so much that when he asked her to stop talking to him she never sent him another message.

Before she knew it, Ashley was ordering a cocktail, sex-on-the-beach. *That's funny*, She looked at the orange-blue thing in her hand, and briefly twirled the small paper umbrella. *I don't drink*. The alcohol felt great. The warmth slowly flooded through her stomach and into her limbs. It made her feel good, happy and right. She smiled. It was a silly grin that spread across her face, purely joyous and optimistic. She watched Zac and Ernie and Van in their booth. They were arguing with some people she didn't know. Van saw her and waved her over. Ashley didn't like any of them, but the drinks were making her feel good. *Maybe this is why we all do the things we do*, she wondered, almost saying it aloud before stopping herself with a giggle. Her head hurt vaguely and she wondered how she was going to get home. She tried to think of a time when John might have come and saved her. Thinking about him felt so wrong. She knew she wasn't supposed to. She knew that he hadn't thought of her half as much. But she didn't know how to stop dreaming about him.

Out of the mist and party haze walked the guy from down the bar. He offered to buy her more drinks and she let him and then offered him drugs and they went to the bathroom a few times and lined empty glasses on the bar. Zac wasn't upset because the guy was clearly rich. He assumed she was doing her job and Ashley despised him for it.

>>>

She knew she'd have to go home with the guy and so practiced imagining that he was someone else. It didn't work very well. He had horribly wrong, bright blue eyes. When he did ask her back to his place she accepted on the condition they drive.

On the way to the car she took two more bars. It was easy to get behind the wheel, she groped him and took his keys in the same motion. Ashley had barely gotten them from the parking lot before she felt the black closing in. It was exhilarating. The neon city flashing by, red and blue lights seemed to light the way. She heard John yelling, but couldn't help but laugh. The car barreled down a road, getting wilder in its movements, towards the fast expanse of water before her. The lights shone off her face, helping her fight the black. She was weightless. Looking up she noticed the roof of the car had disappeared, betraying a beautiful expanse that could only be stars. Her eyes shone. She let go of the wheel and leaned back, and for a brief moment, Ashley was flying.

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**Luke Miller** studied creative writing at St. Olaf College and the University of East Anglia. Since graduating in 2020, he has pursued teaching opportunities abroad, most recently in Madrid. He now works in the environmental nonprofit sector. When not writing, Luke enjoys hiking and climbing and completed a thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail in 2024.

# Michael LaFrancis

## *Meditation Chapel*

When the door opens  
to this quiet peace,  
holy ghosts welcome me  
coming to pray before  
the altar draped in purple  
with a thick white candle,  
orange flame flickering.  
It is only me in solitude,  
grateful for answered prayers.  
Ode to Joy is playing a flute  
outside. Tears withheld forty  
days, flood my eyes, stream  
my cheeks, words are heard  
*Remember, you are not alone.*

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**Michael J. LaFrancis** is a trusted advisor, advocate, author and connector supporting individuals, groups and organizations aligning purpose and capabilities in service of their highest ideals. Writing poetry is a contemplative practice providing him with insight and inspiration for living a creative life. His poems will appear in *The City Key*, *Mocking Owl* and *Amethyst Review* in the coming months.

LaFrancis' hobbies include landscape gardening, nature walks, collecting fine art and writing. He and his partner Sharon are co-authors of their autobiography: *Our Wonderful Life*. They have two sons and have recently been promoted to being grandparents. His instagram is @michaeljlafrancis.

# CLS Sandoval

## *memories after time*

nostalgia does to a memory  
what time does to a photograph

the sharpness

the pain  
the anxiety  
not knowing

is all erased  
or at least clouded  
by the slightly turned edges  
tiny rips  
tears along the sides

the fading gray sepia tone  
technicolor of those rolls of film

cotton around the borders  
of the mind's eye

soften what was once high definition

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**CLS Sandoval**, PhD (she/her) is a Pushcart nominated writer and communication professor with accolades in film, academia, and creative writing. She speaks, signs, acts, publishes, sings, performs, writes, paints, teaches and rarely relaxes. She's presented at communication conferences, served as a poetry and flash editor, published 15 academic articles, two academic books, three full-length literary collections, three chapbooks, and both flash and poetry pieces in literary journals, recently including Opiate Magazine, The Journal of Radical Wonder, and A Moon of One's Own. She is raising her daughter, son, and dog with her husband in Walnut, CA.

# Fabrice Poussin

## *Sleeping by the Abyss*

There is a hollow memory in the immaculate shroud  
the brushing of unadulterated fabric  
shadowy digits reach for a fainted tremor  
fearful with the enduring innocence of a child.

A wave echoes through the covers  
murmuring like those old passions  
still trembling through eternal walls  
moving a stage, witness to so many adventures.

A blue void blinds this hopeful dreamer  
touching with harmless intent an icy form  
ghost of so many empty dark hours.

A soul rests upon the comfort of sleep  
facing the abyss carved by eternal absence  
a cast as if she was lost in Pompeii's silence.

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**Poussin** is a professor of French and World Literature. His work in poetry and photography has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and hundreds of other publications worldwide. Most recently, his collections *In Absentia*, and *If I Had a Gun, Half Past Life*, and *The Temptation of Silence* were published in 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024, by Silver Bow Publishing.

