

kings river

KRR Review



Fall 2023

KIDS RIVER
KRRReview

Fall 2023

The *Kings River Review* is published each fall and spring semester by the students in English 15J, Literary Journal Publication. Our desire is to produce a journal that reflects the emerging voices and visions of community college students, designing a space for their creative expression. The journal is named for the Kings River which runs along the western boundary of Reedley College.

The *Kings River Review* is made possible by the support of Dean of Instruction, Dr. Todd Davis, and Title V Grant funding.

We welcome submissions from two-year college students from across the United States. Please visit our website (kingsriverreview.com) for submission guidelines:

Kings River Review
995 North Reed Avenue
Reedley, California 93654
kingsriverreview.com



Number 5
Fall 2023

Editors

Audrey Bergen
Daniel Carrera

Eileen Apperson, Instructor

Kings River Review logo courtesy of Steve Norton.

Printing by Dumont Printing, Fresno, California.

Letter from the Editors

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the fall 2023 edition of the *Kings River Review*. We hope you find the pieces in this edition as inspirational and captivating as we do. We are grateful to have the opportunity to give a voice and a platform to community college artists and writers. Thank you to all of the students who shared their work with us. We recognize the level of courage and vulnerability that this takes, as well as the time and dedication needed to produce art and writing such as this. This edition would not be the same without your creative expression and originality.

We hope that readers gain inspiration from this edition just as we have. We welcome fellow community college students to submit their work to our spring issue. We wish you all the best in your future creative endeavors.

Sincerely,

Audrey Bergen and Daniel Carrera

Editors of *Kings River Review*

Table of Contents

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

Kaitlyn Bozzo— *Today I Cleaned My Room*..... 1

Michael Combs — *Masking*..... 4

Dylan Newell— *Fiery Pins*..... 10

FICTION

Diane Brinkman — *Ruby*..... 12

Michael Combs — *Ouroboros*..... 16

POETRY

Samantha Aguilar Villanueva — *Creepy Crawlies* .. 23

Melissa Vincent — *Beetles' Ball* 25

Dani Conklin — *Please Leave Me Be* 27

Samantha Aguilar Villanueva — *Hush Child* 28

Chasity Clark — *An Ode to Womanhood* 30

Chasity Clark — *To Mothers Like Irene* 32

Amy Cutting — *Ode to Mom* 33

Table of Contents

<i>Chasity Clark — To Those I Love</i>	36
<i>Melissa Vincent — The Body Politic</i>	37
<i>Raquel Vasquez — i am but a woman</i>	39
<i>Triana Monserrat — She is Wise Innocence</i>	42
<i>Chasity Clark — The World Beneath Us</i>	44
<i>Samantha Aguilar Villanueva — My Grace</i>	45
<i>Michael Combs — Finally Leaving a Toxic Relationship</i> ..	46
<i>Carolyn Feres — Hopeless Moments</i>	47
<i>Kinderlyn Fay Issel — Surrounded by Sickness</i>	48
<i>Kinderlyn Fay Issel — TV Remote</i>	49
<i>Lindsey Leight — Cold Water</i>	51
<i>Jamileth Moran — Passive Anxiety</i>	53
<i>Lavender Passalacqua — Windmills</i>	54
<i>Kaylee Szabo — Bones</i>	55

Table of Contents

<i>Tecna Mostafa — Painting Easel</i>	57
<i>Makya NeVilles-Sorell — Spirits & Me</i>	58
<i>Kia Walton — On Poetry</i>	60
<i>Lois Wickstrom — Earthquake</i>	64
<i>Melissa Vincent — Aftermath</i>	65
<i>Lois Wickstrom — Enter</i>	66

ART

Reedley College Featured Artist:

Jose F. Moreno

<i>Jose F. Moreno — Precious Life</i>	29
<i>Sophía Lavrov — Unwanted Resurgence</i>	41
<i>Jose F. Moreno — Morning Dew</i>	56
<i>Sophía Lavrov — Observing the Roomies</i>	67
<i>Jose F. Moreno — Downtown Reedley</i>	68
<i>Jose F. Moreno — Heaven and Earth</i>	69

Today I Cleaned My Room

by Kaitlyn Bozzo

My favorite part to any movie is the moment right after everything goes wrong. There seems to be no hope. It is the place at which most people would give up and turn around and move on, but instead our hero tries again. Queue the training montage. Moving through them is the determination of a winner. This is the Rocky moment of running through the streets, up flights of stairs, practicing hit after hit every day for months until the song ends at the start of the championship fight.

The last few days I have spent in sickness and the last few weeks I have sat in dread over the future. My tool for distraction has been watching silly little videos over and over, but today, I woke up with the need to get out of bed. It took me hours of excuses and sidetracks before I could. I'd scrolled through every type of video on my feed, checked my email faster than new ones could get sent, replied to days old texts, and stared at my face through the camera on my phone until I began to understand why birds enjoy the company of a mirror. Once I had nowhere else to click, I threw my phone away from me and paused at such an abrupt action.

The feeling of recognizing your hands after staring at nonsense for days is surreal. Like an animated character who has stepped out into the real world for the first time. That's what it is, going from two dimensions to three. From a picture to an object. Your mind transitioning from second hand processing to first hand experiencing. It was in this switch, I saw my room had become a messy nest of trash, snot, and clutter.

Not a surface of space lacked an object resting on it. I realized I was living on a page in an I Spy book.

I spy the 6-month-old packet of unopened sweet and sour sauce peeking through the scrunched up take out napkins. I spy a ruby red condom square acting as a bookmark for a novel placed poorly on its shelf. I spy a little gray bundle of spider eggs protected by a net of webs on the ceiling. An umbrella on the wall. A gas mask by a hammock. An orange peel in the Vaseline tub. Elf ears on the river rocks. Shoes in the dresser. Lotion on the birth control packets. Chaos. Disgust. Disorder. Who was going to fix this? Who could make things right?

And thus, the music begins. The spark of inspiration lights up those dusty neurons that have been kept numbed for days. There is a sense of determination to change everything for the better, not because of necessity, but out of want. The messy bed gets made. The trash goes into a bag. Sex accessories returned to their rightful place. Books ordered shortest to tallest. Posters rearranged. Mirrors, smudge free. Window blinds, mold free. Dishes and condiments banished to the kitchen. The spiders... allowed to stay for one more week, but that pile of clothes has got to go. To donate, to wash, to fold, to trash. The grimy water bottle that has followed me around gets scrubbed and finally the weird taste is gone. Shoes are arranged once more and so are the bottles of neglected vitamins and the bags of miscellaneous make up. Finally, a candle called Autumn Breeze can be lit.

Sitting on the edge of my bed, basking in the calm of a clean room, the clutter has been tamed once again. The sequence has ended, but not at the part where I'm about to win the big fight. There is no fight, no contest, no battle, no duel. There is no opponent beyond the time it will take to undo all

the effort I just put into today, and that is okay. I'm sure this won't be the last time I have to resort to a silly narration just to complete as mundane of a task as personal maintenance, but at least I can say, today I cleaned my room.

Masking

by Michael Combs

I am a hologram. An amorphous substance casting a static image of a man as the human population swirls around me. I can't picture this image, all I know is the mask I project is designed to keep myself from being perceived. To keep my relationships on the surface, so the people I meet don't sink into the twisted mess of ribbons and loose threads my inner dialogue has become. I wonder what I would be like if I rotated with the Earth like everyone else. What my personality would be like if it wasn't diluted with a decade of deep conversations occurring only in dreams. Would I see my face?

I've had insomnia since I was five years old. Thirty years later I was diagnosed with autism, and I told my mom I thought the two were connected. She lifted her chin and looked at me under creased eyebrows for a few seconds, "You have insomnia?" she asked. I guess I've always been good at masking unwanted behavior.

I wonder if masking was instinctual, coming from an inherent need to not draw attention to myself. Or was it a part of infant learning? Was there a simple cause and effect relationship that if I got too excited or distressed I would disrupt the calm of my parents, and my world would rumble and quake under heavy stamping?

However, my masking started, refining the skill was a group activity. At home bedtime began with my parents catch-

ing me unaware, fixated on the TV screen, and wrapping their trunk-like arms around my waist then floating me into bed. I'd lie in bed, staring at the ceiling, and the bugs would burrow through my brain until the gray wrinkled morning lumbered in through the window. Soon I started to plead with my parents to let me stay up longer. Why did I need to go to bed if I wouldn't sleep? They waited for me to finish then proceeded with the established bedtime routine, smiling the whole time like I was a dog unhappy about taking a bath. "Typical child doesn't want to do what he is told," they said, and "typical child, doesn't want to go to school" when it was a battle to wake me every morning. Then pleading became shouting, I tried to make as much noise as I could, trumpeting across the house, determined to distort those smug smiles. I turned from sad dog to bad dog.

Masking is like when someone challenges you not to think of elephants for ten seconds. Impossible after the idea of elephants is put in your head. I'd overhear my dad talk about the people who deserved to be in prison or were unsuccessful because they were lazy, those who couldn't do what they were supposed to do. Was I a natural sinner like them? I gave up the fight to stay up late, and went to bed quietly. Then each night I'd wait for the house to go quiet and turn into a little night ninja. I lurked through the house like a mime mimicking slow motion, or sat six inches from the TV, watching it at the lowest volume. I planned to learn how to sleep like everyone else soon. Before I could get caught. Before they could look down on me again, under their long noses. The elephants' march began.

If I had to define my childhood in one word it would be tired. Tired. Tired for hours, days, weeks. It's something you get used to and never get used to simultaneously, like an itchy wool sweater. The elephant's march became background noise.

By the time I was eleven the idea of suicide was such a natural part of my thought stream that I didn't know why the school principal would meet with my parents after I wrote about it in a personal essay. I didn't even know they'd met, I just started seeing a child psychiatrist. Depression wasn't said, just danced around like movie mobsters talking about dealing with a loose variable.

“How bad is the problem?”

“How can we take care of this?”

“What would be easiest on everybody?”

“Maybe he just needs to go somewhere else?”

If speaking with a psychiatrist helped in any way it was convincing my parents to send me to the local public school, which was an hour closer to home. They never understood why I wanted this, and I didn't understand what they were processing during the twenty plus times I said I wouldn't have to get up as early. Even throughout high school my dad pushed for me to go back to a private school, “It will help you get into a good college, Mike”

My extra hour of morning came in the seventh grade, when sports and games at recess turned to talking and flirting. Then I learned about social anxiety. Well, not so much anxiety as the blank slate that would obscure my thoughts whenever I spoke to a new person. My attempts made other students cringe. School became a daily cycle of disapproval.

“Why'd you do that?”

“Why'd you say that?”

“What was that for?”

“What's wrong with you?”

Even traits that made me feel like a would-be superhero, like a high tolerance to pain, got me side-eyed glances from kids like it more likely was evidence I was a super villain.

At that time my mask became a cover for normalcy, but what is normal? At the time normal meant being good at the things I wasn't, a definition that grew with every criticism. I wanted to blend in. Sneak in a successful social interaction at recess, then disappear. I practiced chit-chat at home by creating scenes based on how I saw the other students act, and cycled them through my head every night. In school I'd find a group of kids, insert my script, and then retreat to the bushy corners of the school grounds. My hope was for them to say, "I don't know him well, but he seems cool." Hopefully, over time, I'd be familiar with someone enough before the weird-kid label invaded their amygdala.

In high school my humanness began disincorporating into hard light. I didn't know I was masking, I just felt like I was balancing on the edge of getting caught for something, which I interpreted as social anxiety. I had confided about this with a few trustworthy students, and their answers were always the same. "Just don't be shy," they'd tell me like they were blowing my mind. Like it was something I would never have thought of myself. Like it was all I needed to hear for the blank slate to magically produce words. Socialization was like a video game with a level I could never beat. That one level of making friends. "Don't be shy. Don't be shy." Each Time I lost I would make a mental note of what happened and promised myself I would be better next time. But there are so many ways to not make friends. "Don't be shy." What a stupid thing, but why couldn't I do what everyone acted like was so easy? When college became a repeat of high school I had accepted that my

brain was broken.

By the time my final mask took center stage my masking powers had reached their prime. I was even able to fool those extensively trained with modern science. My psychiatrist didn't really assess me, I just said I was depressed and the prescription guessing game began. "Take 20mg of this every day and tell me how you feel in a month at our next appointment." What followed was a year of "Let's increase this. Let's wean off of that so you can try something new. Let's try taking these together." I never felt undepressed, just different, and I hoped this "different" meant progress, so I continued. When I told my psychiatrist, it felt like my personality was fading away, "That's good! Then you can start being a different person." She was right.

I turned into someone new. I could do homework from all my five classes at once, and throw in a video game break every 20 minutes. I could lose my hunger in the middle of cooking a meal and be happy to let it chill to inedibility on the kitchen counter. I could drive drunk. I could occupy myself with internal debates about how stupid everything was for hours. All my non-friends could go to hell. I could fly with my ears. I wasn't tired.

Telling my psychiatrist about my new self-caused her face to light up like she suddenly got the answer to a pop quiz, "You have a little bipolar in you." Then the medications quintupled as I entered the realm of antipsychotics. To be fair to my psychiatrist, she was able to turn the pendulum in the direction she wanted, just maybe a little more than expected. No more mood swings. No more recklessness. Everything was calm and muted, like I was driving a car underwater. Reality flowed past me at a steady 2-3 mph. Steering was sluggish, but I didn't need to steer all that much. No, not hardly at all. In about six months my psychiatrist dropped me as a patient after

I had missed a couple of appointments and forgot to return some of her follow-up calls.

Soon after that my car stalled, or I just stopped pressing on the gas pedal. The headlights went out a mile under the surface and my life became lost in the cold, dark current. Graduate school drifted away, along with my research on a dead-end theory about Autism. With school went health care and medication, but the apathy remained. And agoraphobia. I remained inside, protected from the pounding pressure of public space, with the soft glow of the dash lights, folding my arms over myself to stay comfortable in the lukewarm interior. Too uncomfortable to leave, it took over ten years before I plunged back into open space. My Autism diagnosis finally came, and the stampede of problems unmasked trampled over me.

Fiery Pins

by Dylan Newell

It starts with a faint tingling sensation in my fingers. It's barely noticeable at first. From the moment I *do*, I know today won't be good. The feeling spreads down until it encompasses both of my hands. It's an unpleasant feeling, but I can ignore it for the most part. When the pins start to press into my skin, however, is when the point of no return has been passed.

Anything can set off the feeling, honestly. It doesn't have to be a big shock for the needles to sink in and stay. I could be browsing videos on my smartphone. All of a sudden, my hands are allergic to the screen. Even a worrying thought running laps around my already-anxious brain can trigger it. Once the threshold is met, there's no going back. The match is dropped, and the fire immediately engulfs my hands.

I wouldn't call it painful in the traditional sense, but it hinders my day-to-day interactions nonetheless. Touching almost anything sends another wave of needles stabbing into my nerves; It's hard to hold my phone without a strong urge to drop it; The task of typing on my computer becomes a much slower, agonizing process; Even grasping a spoon or a cup to eat or drink becomes a daunting task. The closest thing to relief I can experience is when I ball my fists with my thumbs inside. Even this doesn't help in the end, though, as the discomfort continues while my knuckles drain of all color except for that of the bones underneath.

My hands aren't the only victims of this malady. Despite the intensity of the fiery pins being localized to my hands, my mind arguably experiences a worse toll. For my

mind to process the feelings correctly, it takes nearly all of my attention, lest I forget and touch something that only adds fuel to the flames. When my family tries to speak to me, it's more like an irritating hum in the recesses of my mind as the words are stored for later. Watching videos online or listening to music only worsens it by bombarding my already-overtaxed senses.

I must be alone or risk losing *all* my energy for the day. I can't even muster the will to fall asleep if the fire is lit at night; it takes too much effort to relax from the agonizing sensory high.

The blaze can last anywhere from an hour if the stars decide to be merciful to an entire day if I'm unlucky. I don't know when it will happen, how intense its grip on me will be, or how long it will last. My medication dulls the sharpness, but only that. I don't live in fear of the pain, though. I simply manage it the best I can. It only happens once or twice a week. The fire dies eventually, anyway, so I take solace in the fact that the pain doesn't last forever.

Ruby

by Diane Brinkman

The ruby is a precious, and durable, stone. In fact, the only stones that are harder are moissanites and diamonds. But the thing that truly makes rubies distinct is their red color. The brightest and most valuable shade of red, called blood-red or pigeon blood, commands a large premium over other rubies of similar quality. And like a lot of other precious things, including people, rubies are resourced from Africa.

“Mama, tell me again how I am like Moses.”

I am wearing my Sunday best on a Monday morning and Mama is braiding my hair into perfect parts with bows tied on the ends. She is grooming me as if our lives depend on the perfection of each plait, the absence of every wrinkle on my dress, the shine in my shoes—because it does. They can say what they want about us, but not about my appearance, except for my skin color of course, and not on this day—I look the epitome of a well-loved, and well-kept child.

“Because Moses delivered his people, slaves, out of Egypt to be free. And what you are going to do today will make it so that every other black child can go to school and get an education just like everyone else, baby. And your name is Ruby Bridges. Ruby, red like the sea that Moses parted, and Bridges, the path to deliverance.”

“I’m scared mama,” I say.

“I’m scared too, baby. But I believe that Jesus will protect

us. There are going to be a lot of very angry people out there. They are going to yell and scream and try to get us to never send you back to school. I know you are only six years old and these are big things to put on your little shoulders, but you have been chosen. Just like Moses was chosen to lead his people out of Egypt. You are just as good as any of those white children. You passed the test to get in didn't you? Now, don't you ever let them see you cry. Do not show fear. When you get home you can let it all out. And, you have me and I will never forsake you. I will never leave your side."

"Go home Nigger!" yells a man with a beet-red face and spit flying like venom from his mouth. One woman actually has a black doll inside of a coffin and is waving it at me menacingly. We are being escorted by four armed guards and Mama has got my hand held so tightly that I can't feel my fingers anymore. There are a few kind faces in the crowd, but it's mostly a sea of red mugs that look like masks contorted into various degrees of anger and hysteria. There are news crews everywhere, there to capture the first black student to be integrated into a white school. I can't believe this whole mob scene is just for me. I'm terrified, yet I feel important. I measure the magnitude of this moment and realize, even at my tender age, that this is so much bigger than me. And I arose from my body, from a scared little girl to a civil rights activist that very day. And I wore a bullet-proof vest of responsibility, and promise, and redemption, and above all else hope.

It's Sunday and that means only one thing if you are black: church. All. Day. Long. It's a long day for a young child. All of the women have fans that are multipurpose: as a cooling device, to fan the people that pass out when they get into "the spirit", and to swat flies, and children. The preacher is spitting bible verses into prose, with the live organ keeping time to his

rhetoric. He started off slow, but now he is whipping the people into a frenzy. There are many audible “Hallelujahs” and “Amens” and a “Preach Reverend, Preach” sprinkled in for good measure. Then the Reverend asks us to turn our bibles to Exodus 14:5-29 and he reads dramatically:

And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled... and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with a high hand... And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the [red] sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea... But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea...

And the choir burst into a freedom song from the past: “Go down Moses way down in Egypt land. Tell old Pharaoh to let my people go!”

People are starting to push in on us now. I feel as though I am suffocating, drowning. Just then, a group of men wearing white hoods block our path.

“This little black bitch ain't going to school with our children.”

One of our guards responds, “I'm going to have to ask you all to move.”

“We will do no such thing,” says the pointed hooded fig-

ure with the eyes cut out. We are outnumbered and the crowd can sense that. My mother steps in front of me. The armed guards step in front of the both of us. Suddenly, we hear what sounds like a chant approaching from somewhere behind us. We turn to see hundreds of brown bodies, linked arm in arm, singing “Go down Moses,” and our reverend is leading the flock! We don’t know it yet, but he has organized all of the black churches in the area to come and walk me to school. I step around my mother and the guards and face the clansmen head on. The reverend and at least a thousand people are behind me. I lift my arms just as the sun rises behind my head. With my arms raised high, I signal for them to move. The clansman looks nervously around before he and his comrades get out of my way. The rest of the angry mob follow suit. They part to the right and to the left of me as I lead my people through the middle of the parted sea of red. We march that way all the way to Promised Land Elementary School.

Ouroboros

by Michael Combs

Missy white-knuckled the steering wheel of her car, exited the freeway, and descended into the fog-filled neighborhood that beckoned to her like a smoking cauldron. She navigated through the gray suburban streets by muscle memory, focusing on the misty air in her peripheral vision. The headlights of her car broke the fog into alternating strands of cobwebs and darkness. Symbols appeared within the swirls, and, even though they looked like letters from a foreign language, she thought she could read them if she looked at them long enough. But, before that could happen, a light pierced the middle of the vortex, bleaching out the words and snapping her vision back to the center of her windshield.

She parked her car across the street from the house where the light originated from and turned the car off. As her eyes adjusted to the light, the two-story house materialized in front of her, along with the columns that lined the porch and always reminded her of an ancient Greek temple. The lawn in front of it had uniformly-cut grass that looked green even under the yellow floodlight.

Moving slowly and without pausing, like in a Tai Chi routine, Missy grabbed a backpack with her belongings, left her car, and walked toward the house. She paused before stepping onto the property, hoping to saturate her anxiety with old memories before continuing, but the sound of the front door opening jolted her back into motion so as to not get caught standing still.

Missy approached the woman at the door. She is dressed in a robe that stood out by being a touch darker than the poorly lit hallway behind her. The floodlight above didn't touch her face, but illuminated an outline of her hair, which was wrapped in a tight bun above her head, giving the appearance of a crown.

"Hiya mom. Didn't think you stayed up this late," Missy said.

"I don't. I couldn't sleep. Tonight of all nights," said Missy's mother, who stood motionless in the center of the doorway like a stone gargoyle. "Lucky for you it seems. Do you still have a key to the house? Or did you plan on sneaking in? After all this time, either would have led me to call the police when I heard something. Even if you knocked on the door at this hour."

"I dunno mom. I was hoping to get here sooner, but, you know..." Missy ran her right hand, up and down, along the front strap of her backpack a few times and settled her eyes on her mom's sternum, "it's good to see you."

"Yes, well, come on in," Missy's mother said, then disappeared into the dark, wide hall behind her, leaving the door open.

Missy entered the house and shut the door. The light from the kitchen on her left bled into the hallway enough to show a set of stairs that led away from her before turning ninety degrees and continuing to the second floor. There she could see a set of closed doors. Or was one of them open?

"Would you like something to drink?" Her mother softly called from the kitchen. Missy followed her voice.

Entering the kitchen felt familiar to Missy, yet off, like being a passenger in someone else's car that was the same mod-

el and year as hers. The chandelier from her childhood still dangled over the table like a lazy, long-legged spider. Some of the bulbs had burnt out, causing an asymmetrical splotching of shadows throughout the room, similar to sitting under a leaf-filled tree at dusk. She fixated on the jet-black marble counter, and the chip in the corner that exposed the off-white underbelly, something she hadn't seen before.

“After a day of driving, some coffee would be nice. Do we still have that espresso maker?” Missy asked while staring at the blemish in the marble.

“No. That was your machine, and I don't drink caffeine. There's some instant in the pantry.” Missy grabbed the instant coffee and made herself a cup from water heated in the microwave. “So, how did you end up here?” Missy's mother asked.

“I was just in the area and...”

“In the area? What, just passing through and you thought it would be a simple thing for a visit?”

“I'm not visiting, mom. I'm back.”

“You're back? After all this time do you think you deserve to just be 'back?' Missy's mother lowered her eyes and shook her head slightly. “This is...This is a lot for me to handle seeing you right now. Do you understand the consequences that suddenly showing up could have on your daughter?” She put her hand on top of Missy's. “Are you of sound mind? Because if you're not, then there is still time to leave befo...”

“Mom?” asked a small, high-pitched voice from the entrance to the kitchen.

“Yes,” Missy and her mother answered in unison.

Missy's mother got up from the table and walked out of the room, running her fingers through the hair of the little fig-

ure as she passed by.

“Heyyy kiddo,” Missy said to her daughter. “Remember me?” Missy’s daughter gave a short head nod in reply. “Can we talk?” The nod repeated. “Cool! Can we go to your room? I want to see it.” A third nod and the two ascended the steps and entered the bedroom.

The room was colored with pastels: pink bed sheets, a yellow lamp on the white nightstand, and white walls with blue lining. Posters of various music bands that Missy had never heard of adorned the walls. Missy sat on her daughter's bed while her daughter sat on a chair at the desk by a window.

“So, are you glad to see me?” Missy asked. “I know I’ve been gone a long time. A couple of years probably feels like forever to a kid.”

“Five,” he daughter replied.

“What?”

“You’ve been gone for five years.”

“Oh, yeah, five years. That is a long time. I’m sorry, I... left for you, you know. I left to be a better mother.” Missy searched her daughter’s face, looking for confirmation. “I didn’t have my head on straight. I don’t know if your mom told you, but your father left me when he found out I was pregnant. Really threw me for a loop. And it was rough raising you alone, you know. Kept me from bouncing back. Even with mom’s help. Heck, maybe she made it harder. She was always perfect, everything she did was perfect, and I felt like I was getting in the way. In the way of raising my own daughter. She taught you everything, and all I did was get frustrated. I had to leave. I hope you’ll be able to get that. I had to leave you in those perfect hands so I could become independent and learn to raise you my own way. And I’m back now. I want to be a part of

your life.” Missy kept leaning toward her daughter as she spoke. When her daughter gave no reaction, Missy held herself still and lowered her eyes to her fingers, which wiggled like a bundle of worms on her lap. “Five years. So that means you’re eleven now, right? What grade is that? Do you have friends? Is it time to have friends that are more than friends yet?”

Missy’s daughter held her blank stare, “I’m in fifth grade. I have friends,” she said. While her mom was looking down she took the opportunity to reach over her desk and turned over a picture of herself and another person of a similar age hugging. “So, where were you?”

“Oh, here and there. I’ve been to a lot of places. Worked a lot of jobs since I left. Mostly in the state though. I never went too far away from you.”

“OK. Do you work here now?”

“I’ll find something. I’ve learned a lot of stuff. I can do something steady now. I know, I know, this is weird, but I’m back. I’m back for good. You should be happy. Aren’t you happy?”

“Yeah. I’m tired. It’s a school night. But I’m happy... mom.”

“Oh yeah, yeah it is. You should be in bed, and I’m here confusing you in the middle of the night. I’ll leave you alone for now. We can catch up tomorrow. OK?” Without waiting for an answer, Missy rose from the bed and moved in to give her daughter a hug. Her daughter paused for a second before mechanically reciprocating Missy’s embrace. Missy gave her daughter one last smile before leaving.

Missy made her way to the backyard, sat in one of the metal patio chairs and stared at the slate outline of a swing set. The same one she loved as a kid and used as a base to play with

her daughter. She couldn't tell if it was still being used or if it had started to break down. Five years? So much happened in that time, yet it all seemed like an instantaneous blur. She had desk jobs, worked as a masseuse, tried to be a writer, tried to be a teacher, but life was always like trying to navigate a maze while blindfolded. With each new career attempt she told herself that this would be the final one, the final push to make her time away worth it, but eventually she would hit a wall and have to start over at some new beginning. Her daughter was eleven now.

"So, how did the conversation go?" Her mother asked from behind the sliding glass door to the backyard, which Missy had left open. Her mother wasn't visible, Missy could just hear her voice.

"Good, I think." Missy replied. "Good. I mean, she didn't say much. I mean, it was late. She was tired. She would be too tired on a school day to be excited, right?"

"She may have just gotten used to you being gone. You may have noticed she calls me mother now. I imagine it would take time to adjust herself again. Maybe not another five years, but...some time. Now that you are here, what's your plan?"

"No plan, I just needed to get back."

"Nothing lined up? What did you do with your time away? I'm hoping you got something out of it."

"Yes, I worked when I was away. I can make money. I can be the mom my daughter needs."

"I'm having a hard time believing that, Missy. You said something similar when you were pregnant and I had to do everything. Then you just left. Tell me you're in a better place."

"I am."

“How? Make me believe it. We’re having this conversation for your daughter’s sake. She’s a happy girl. She wouldn’t show it, but a kind of distance from everything grew in her after you left.”

“I didn’t mean to mess her up or anything,” Missy’s body fidgeted in her chair, causing the joints to groan under her shifting weight. Her bracelets clicked spasmodically on the metal armrests.

“Well, you did. For your piece of mind, I’m telling you she’s happy now. But coming back here like this, you created the potential to cause some major problems. It’s a given her month is already disrupted. Don’t make her whole life disrupted too.” Missy’s mom placed her hand on her shoulder and held it there for a moment before leaving Missy alone.

Missy stayed in the backyard for hours, silently staring up at the window of her daughter’s bedroom, a white silhouette surrounding a reflectionless pool. Its distance from her seemed to grow until it was as far away as the moon. With the same methodical motions of her arrival, Missy picked up her backpack, stepped around the side of the house and returned to her car. By now the fog had lifted into a mesh of ashen clouds high above her. They curved around a single point in a way that reminded her of pictures of the Milky Way galaxy. Her daughter was growing up, becoming her own person. It was too late to be a part of her life now. But maybe not too late for her to be proud of her mom. A normal life wasn’t for her. Motherhood wasn’t for her, but something spectacular was out there and she would find it. Someday her daughter would hear about her becoming a huge success. That would make it all better. She got in her car and drove away.

Missy’s daughter watched the headlights disappear around the corner. She set the picture on her desk upright, kissed it and went to bed.

Creepy Crawlies

by Samantha Aguilar Villanueva

The spirits saw fit to grant me a spooky dream
On that early mid-night morning of Halloween
Engulfed, I was a biome for bugs
All-over they wriggled themselves at home
Against my violent sweeps and shrugs

Worms a plenty in my hair
Shaking them out, A needless affair
For where one was lost another grew
The only difference, a carcass or two
Limp then, on my shoulder drear
Gave me no reprieve from fear

Bumb-ly blue-beetle bugs belted between my ears
Their tiny trampling, too countless to toss
While invisible scabies, my legs they did cross

I awoke in relief, in a terrible sweat
Writing it down with some such regret
For in those words poured out on the page
Came vivid detail from which I was no longer assuaged

And as I finished my account, lying there in bed
The thought of sitting up, did I suddenly dread
For I thought when I pulled the sheets off with a tug
My body'd be covered in the carcasses of bugs

Oh! How my hands trembled at idea I was getting
My breath in my chest was shallow and fretting
With great strength I mustered the courage to rise
And was relieved not to be greeted with ghastly surprise

But still, do I feel the tickles and chills
Of worms and bugs and their amassing wills

Beetles' Ball

by Melissa Vincent

Early summer nights come with their ephemeral song
of cicadas, crickets, and frogs without beacon.
Humming their repartee in this, their short-lived season.

Chipped ice stars and a sliver of Strawberry moon
illuminating the way there.
The goats and kids close behind, in curious stares.

The fire-backed beetles dance
on the tippy-tops of long meadow grass.
Not seeming to mind our crude party crash.

As the soiree gets going,
they waltz around our hips then up to our breasts.
In a dazzling display of bioluminescent conquests.

The affair reaches its peak and in pairs they fly.
Watching as their bright yellow spreads
across a black and astral night sky.

Left alone, down below, as stars no longer frolic
at our knees and elbows.

It was divine to be around our earthly cosmos.

Please Leave Me Be

by Dani Conklin

It was the ants that crawled
Up my skin
And whispered in my ear.
They told me just what
To think and how to feel.
I shook my head in desperation
Scratched at the sores
And rocked.
I rocked and rot
And rot and rocked
I rot you see
See I rocked -
Hoping to let a few go,
But they stayed
And burrowed deep in my brain
Ready to surface
Ready to riddle
A perfectly good mind
A perfectly good thought.

Hush Child

by Samantha Aguilar Villanueva

Hush now child,
The wind needs not love to blow
The Earth's soil smells fresh
And behind the darkened clouds
The stars still twinkle
Quell now, your childish heart
The sun will still rise tomorrow
The bees will still bumble
The world will continue to turn
Give not into your grief

Precious Life

by Jose F. Moreno



An Ode to Womanhood

by Chasity Clark

Womanhood is the bud of the sun
cynical stars and stone
The breast of harvest
giver
lover
feed

This is an ode
To every aspect of our country saved by the grace of women

With resilience so naturally inherited

Of course, it's in their blood
A heritage to conceive daughters

Who are legacies
Trailblazers
and
Royalty

And I owe my character to every woman in my life and before
me

How great you made this world with your mere existence

-To all mothers, sisters, aunts, and friends like mine

To Mothers Like Irene

by Chasity Clark

Creatures of a supernova

Conceived from the collapsing of stars

God built you from the spare rib of men

But how you've blossomed from the dirt he's composed you

You've taught me universes sometimes begin when one ends

Counsel me, in your lessons of strength in a soft body

Endow me with the ministries of womanhood

You are brutal in the warfare of the beliefs you honor

Yet still gentle in the soul

Kindle me in the fire your spirit burns and nurture the one
inside my own

For I am half grown and half empty

Of all the things that make women like you

Ode to Mom

by Amy Cutting

I miss you,
you were my best friend,
the one person
I could go to in any situation,
you are my hero.

I wish I could hug you,
snuggle you,
feel your warmth and comfort.
I wish I could hear your voice,
one last time.

Sometimes I dream about you,
that you are with me,
and we are having fun as we used to.

I remember going to the Ventura Harbor,
having lunch at Andrés,
the feeling of complete Zen,
my hair being blown by the wind
while feeling the coarse sand scratching at my feet
as we walked along the ocean,
and the seagulls squawking
as they flew above our heads.

I remember when we went to Kisho,
when we had sushi,
I remember cuddling up,
watching movies together,
just having an enjoyable time
with my mom.

Sometimes I wonder
how is it up there
in heaven.
I bet your having a blast with your parents
and throwing a party;
sometimes I wish I were there with you.

I imagine you here,
but then you are gone.
It hurts so bad.
It is like a nightmare but it is real.
How do I let go?
When will the pain go away?

Sometimes I have flashbacks,
of you lying there
in a coma
not being able to say a word.
I remember when we had to pull the plug
how gut wrenchingly painful it was.

Cancer sucks.
I wish it didn't take you when it did.
I wish I could have held onto you a little longer,
just long enough to say goodbye.

Dear mom,
saying goodbye isn't easy,
but I guess it's time
to set you free.

To Those I Love

by Chasity Clark

You are the clouds in all of my lifetime, undefined in the
endless heaven and your essence beautiful in any way

You shade me
Storm upon me
And guide me

Sometimes you are there and others you are not
Though you always return

And in the peculiarities of you, I've found solace in the things I
don't understand

Love is not the coming together but the undoing

Of what I believed conjoined me, in a single thread pull

Under those clouds of you, I am bare of the lies I've told myself
and shadowed by the shrouded light of being *alive*

The Body Politic

by Melissa Vincent

My body seen for its potential,
before I could look with my own eyes.
In a *Future Fox* onesie, as soon as the pink balloons arrived.

My body sanctioned in men's lines.
In their names, in their gaze.
Wanting to live outside of them, will be written off as *just a phase*.

My body of work always on a Labor Day Sale
20-50% off! Priced to Go!
Depending on the color of tag I hold.

My body not seen as whole
until I split myself in two.
Making more bodies to lie within these rules.

My body under the control of a man
who never listens when any woman dares to say no.
Who sees dividing cells as more important than the cage in
which they grow.

My body politic less mine with what soil I stand on.
On fixed blades of Kentucky Blue
or where points of Lone Stars, might as well run you through.

My body discovered dead in a ditch, the first words they use to
describe
is who I belong to... Wife and Daughter, to *them* there was a
crime.
So when and where exactly will my body be just mine?

i am but a woman

by Raquel Vasquez

i am but a woman-short in stature and dainty in frame.

i do not curse when i am frustrated and i dare not show when i
am angry.

My hips are plump like ripe plums ready to be picked

by any worthy or unworthy Man, either way, They, *not me*
deem themselves to be.

In being a woman, i am less than any Man, so in any manner, i
am but a rib.

Insignificant and undesirable, unless i am so in which i cannot
show.

Then i am conceited and damn the conceited woman for she is
a witch.

Burn her! Crucify her! This bitch of a woman.

The woman who cannot but resist

the temptation of poisoned evening apples and adamant opin-
ions.

i am both the snake in the grass and the lamb of god

To beaten with rocks till my heart stops and i'm long forgotten
or sacrificed, blood staining my pure white wool like the fin-

gertips that crack open a pomegranate.
The choice was never mine to begin with.

i should be angry, raise my tiny fist in protest
to detest the patriarchy and push the limits of my unrest.

Unreasonable they say. i'm unstable, unable to win

When will women be more than just worthless

I am not worth less, I am worthwhile.

my Mother's grateful child and yet my father's denial

liable only if i bear a son—Abandoned

a companion of Catherine of Argon, but a pawn in your gambit

and why is that ever son can inherit the family merit

yet every Daughter's cursed to carry the shame

of being your unfazed house maid, hysteric slut, bimbo-bitch
cunt, loose homewrecker whore

No order for Her. No justice for She. No mercy for I.

Closed and eyes open but blind must i remind you that;

I am but a woman-short in stature and dainty in frame.

A cursed frustrated angry woman who's anger so ripe that it is
rotten

Soddened by wanton,

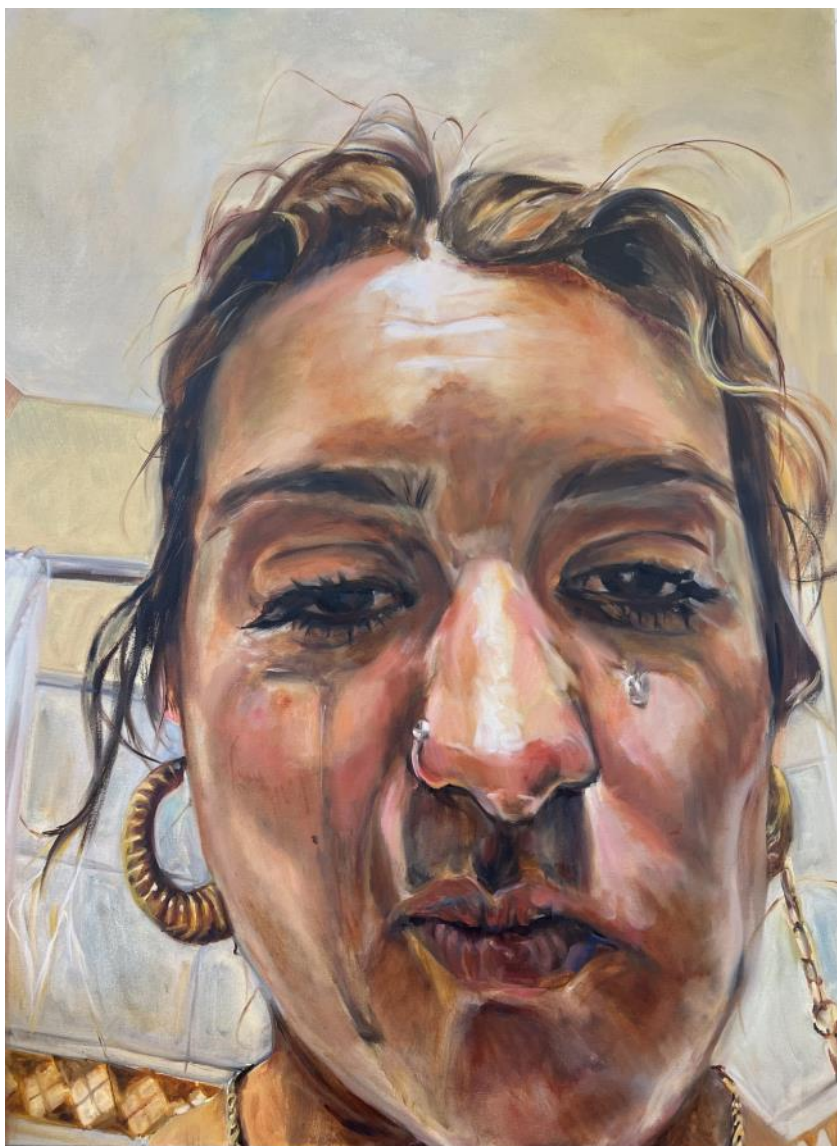
Wanting only to be a Woman, not the woe of Man.

Unwanted Resurgence

by Sophia Lavrov

Oil Painting

3X4 feet



She is Wise Innocence

by Triana Montserrat

And she painted
 a rainbow
But she picked
 the darkest shade
 of each color
 she could find

The sky was black
and the rain
 was gold
and the sun was burnt out

The lawn was dewy
and plump and dark green,
 too
And the tree that acted
as the sun bore one red apple.

It had a crown
 of light, the tree.

And the grass smiled.
The apple was
 God Itself.

"The rainbow and sky
That's you and I
We reach for
 God
and weep our golden tears,"
 she said.

We're as lost as the moon
Who misses her dearest
 sun.

The World Beneath Us

by Chasity Clark

The pomegranate was not the sin, but the loneliness
The ill-stricken emptiness we can all harbor
Even in bodies so full

And are we not half water?
How easily we feel drowned in our bodies

I too might have crawled, desperate, broken nailed, and bloody
under the dirt and crust of Earth

Just to be immersed in anyone's *loneliness* but my own

My Grace

by Samantha Aguilar Villanueva

I open my mouth to static
Scattered, disjointed thoughts
Too jumbled for the learn-ed
Too complex for the laymen
I feel alone

I open my journal to eloquence
A pen unrestrained by time or manor
The pieces slowly fit together
To form the luminations of my heart
I feel achieved

I open my mind to silence
And catch the falling stars
Of memory and tempered faith
A mind's imperfect grace
My grace

Finally Leaving a Toxic Relationship

by Michael Combs

On a moonless night
I tiptoe
Along the edge of a sea cliff.
The grass around me
Hisses in the wind,
All I see is a dark column
Beaming the cone of your light ahead,
And I duck every time it circles over me.

Scaling to the shore,
Fingers rip
On jagged handholds.
The open sea,
Distant ripples in black water,
Timelines,
White waves bursting
On the rocks before me,
Scream now,
Now

Overhead, a seagull cackles before disappearing into the sky.

Hopeless Moments

by Carolyn Feres

Lips, soft lips, ... just go —
Deep and bleak thoughts,
your silence booms, it echoes.
These hopeless moments —

Eager eyes are full —
left unwanted, unanswered.
My heart is beating, less and less,
Together yet so alone—

Spirit, My Spirit, is fading—
You are here and far,
You are present but never future.
Hands are aching, searching, longing—
Where is home? What is home?

Can't you hear my screams?
I can—and so can death.

Surrounded by Sickness

by Kinderlyn Fay Issel

The summer we married,
We could not let the heat out,
The windows condemned to closure,
Outside an orange glow and red sun
Grey snow fell blanketing every surface.

The summer we married,
Inside unbearable heat,
Cooling off not our only discomfort,
We never did get used to the masks,
Paper or cloth.

The summer we married,
Surrounded by sickness,
Engulfed in fires,
Till death do us part.

TV Remote

by Kinderlyn Fay Issel

Spotted across the room in the same instant as my kid brother,
Laying there in innocence on its glass pedestal,
Leaping over couch edges, stumbling over runner corners.

Who knew you'd hold such power?

Matte black in color with deep lines carved into your edges,
Odd risen bumps, circles, squares, with even odder patterns
and colors I've yet to master,

Granting absolute control and power, do you even realize what
you've done to this world?

This magical wand which allows me to view into any world I
could wish on any planet I dream,

Worlds of witches, wizards, druids, in epic battles to save the
world from a greater evil,

See into the deepest depths of the ocean, you reach out to
touch the tiny fish as they swim by,

Music notes of the oldest blues to the newest Hindustani seep
out through tiny mesh squares.

Hand reaches out, fingers wrapping, palm connecting, my possibilities endless,
That which controls this seeing stone of black onyx,
For one shall control both with absolution,
There is no need to question worthiness,
May you be pure or tainted heart, there is no difference.

I lift the stick of magic in my hand, victory, absolute power.
Glancing down, the sad hazel eyes of a child,
All the power there is right in my possession, kindness, or cruelty,
My kid brothers' eyes brimming with tears, knees red with carpet burn from falling,
Using my powers for kindness, I handed him the magic wand.

Cold Water

by Lindsey Leight

Grief is like jumping into icy water

Just must be done

And when you make the leap

Your head goes under

The freezing water rushing your body

Hard to breathe, hard to swim, are you drowning?

Dizzy, cold, and blurry

Lungs feel as they are about to collapse

Panic as the water continues to fill your body

Screams, but no one can hear

And just as you think it is the end

Your head comes above water

Relief sets over your body, you can breathe, you can see, you
can relax

Still cold, hard to swim, but you are alive

From there, each step gets easier

Water starts to feel more room temp

Your body starts to move, swimming

The hard is part done - all you must do now, is; just keep
swimming

Passive Anxiety

by Jamileth Moran

I've mourned my mother's death near daily
Since I was 5 and counting down the minutes
Until she came home from work. She's died
In fiery crashes, in racial assaults, in her abusive
Relationship. I've had her blood stick to my 10
Year old skin, I've held her hand in the hospital
As she drew her last breath, I've received her blessing
With a pat on the head and her tear streaked face
Searching me out through the veil of death.
I've sobbed myself to sleep, listening to her
Breathing freely in the next room, wondering
If god will steal her away from me if I closed
My eyes. How many more times do I have to promise
That I'll behave. How many decades more
Must I be good so she stays.

Windmills

by Lavender Passalacqua

When I was born there were no windmills
Still air graced our lungs, and together we would
Explore the remnants of a
Neglected world.
Where life and death walked hand in hand
Across the bridge of strength and sorrow
And dipped their distant toes into the
Waters trickling underneath;
Like souls forlorn who'd grieved before.

Bones

by Kaylee Szabo

My soul is one with the earth,
Born of clay, and it is worth
More than a thousand jewels.
Though, to my body, I may be cruel,
It is merely a vessel for
My lovely soul to rest once more.
May these bones carry me home
Until from this earth, I have gone.

Morning Dew

by Jose F. Moreno



Painting Easel

by Tecna Mostafa

Standing, knees bent, arched towards the wooden stand
It's quite a large, yet wide canvas
Staring so deep into it that one's reflection may suddenly
 appear
Rapid colors immerse onto the flat sheets
Splashes of paint strokes and brushes start to twirl and whirl
 diagonally
And forwards, backwards, upside down
Traditionally, we would once stand
Perhaps to gaze in awe with our eyes meeting
This newly found creation imprinting the brain
Propped up, hung up, a stream of admiration and vivid hues
 begin to pour
Plucking a bucket and tossing it mischievously
The waves are moist and viscous
Flows of oils and acrylics and water and
A mirror capturing fragments of imagination
Of course, it's designed to display, with all these eyes caught up
 in it
I was always watching, after all.

Spirits & Me

by Makya NeVilles-Sorell

I found what happens, when it comes to mixing spirits & me.
It's nothing close to spiritual, it's about my family worrying,

Spirits insisted in contentedly worrying down my body
and mind. And my, the last sip of firewater is what changed

Me. As I sipped firewater, I changed for pure water
And like that, it forked my path. I took the left turn

When faced with two paths, we choose who we left
Behind. We must choose which path is most right

I don't know if my path was most righteous or
My choice was only made by hoping for the best

When I lost hope, I tried to not let it get the best of me
Which, I know now, I needed to learn the hard way, if I

Were to learn at all. My mind is easy, my addiction's hard-
headed

And clashes to get its way. This happens, when mixing spirits
& me.

On Poetry

by Kia Walton

Poetry is hard.
It always has been.
To digest, to create
To appreciate.

I wish I could say
The End.
And feel pleased with my
Stanza and one half
And the punchy cute ending.

But I won't feel done
Until the end
Is at the top.
Internal word minimum, and all that.

But against my bitter judgment
This is not so bad.
Maybe this "Cdub" is onto something

Even if this poem is not.

It beats making a reel on Instagram.

And don't I look quaint

Writing by hand

On a plane.

By God.

I've turned the page.

And committed to committing

More thoughts to paper.

I think what it is is this:

When I write

In this formless form

I don't know Good from Great

Or Great from Trite

Or Trite from Honest

Or Honest from Dull.

I can't tell if I'm doing it right.

But.

I do feel how slowly the fog thins

Kings River Review

To reveal some true thing
And that much is at least writing

I do feel myself feeling into the column of air Behind my sternum

For something I can trust.
And that feels like writing.

And I only allow a few five cent puns
Because I am only human
And I have avoided rhyming
Because of inflation

And I am stroking my hair
Stimulating my follicles
Absentmindedly, as I do
When I write.

So.

I am giving it a real go.
Even though I don't know what it's giving.
Besides this opportunity
To write.

And what's up with the stanza breaks?
Is that arbitrary?

Earthquake

by Lois Wickstrom

Did you feel it?

They asked, excited

The earth shook.

Bottles fell from shelves.

Glass shattered.

Cans bounced.

I saw none of this.

I was outside.

Riding my bicycle.

Jouncing through potholes.

On soft tires that cushion the impact.

We have an earthquake every hundred years.

Should I admit I missed it?

Aftermath

by Melissa Vincent

The still of dawn,
against an obedient dark,
docile hush.

Curious room,
blue and black,
a chaotic conclusion.

Abandoned armor of
eager buttons and
scuffed stilettos.

Your lonely wine glass
on my nightstand
and disheveled sheets.

Such a glorious mess.

Enter

by Lois Wickstrom

No stars pierce the darkness
We who enter by torchlight
Among cold damp spikes
Built drop by drop
Precipitates of eons
Build our den of worship
Under the black wings
Of night marauders
Seeking ever deeper altars
In the caverns of our minds

Observing the Roomies

by Sophia Lavrov

Oil Painting
24X30 inches



Downtown Reedley

by Jose F. Moreno



Heaven and Earth

by Jose F. Moreno



Contributors

Kaitlyn Bozzo is a student at Cabrillo College. She writes to feel understood and to capture the beauty in the mundane. She grew up reading fiction about girls, realizing they were secretly the key to saving the world, and they would embark on adventures with danger and romance. She grew up waiting for that to happen to her, but in her world, it seems obstacles are less far-fetched. Regardless of the things life throws at us, chaos seems to settle beautifully before it shakes again.

Diane Brinkman is an English major at Santa Rosa Junior College. She was encouraged to submit her work by one of her professors there. She is a married mom of two children: Miles age 10 and Simone age 13. She plans to start Sonoma State in January to finish her degree.

Chasity Clark is an inspiring writer who has been in love with the art of poetry all her life. Her home community college is San Antonio's beloved St. Philip College. She's decided to create these poems based on the amazing women in her life and the exploration of emotions.

Michael Combs is taking journalism and creative writing courses at Santa Rosa Junior College. He has just begun his journey into creative writing and these works are his first stab at connecting with the outside world.

Dani Conklin is in her last year at Fresno City College. She is studying English and Philosophy, hoping to pursue a career in writing. Her future plans always seem to be changing, but she seems to find comfort in this. She hopes to study at a 4-year university and eventually get a master's degree. One day she'd love to have her stories published and bring entertainment to others.

Amy Cutting is 36 and is going to College of the Canyons to get her Associate's in English. Her goal is to write an autobiography with non-fiction poetry in it. She was born and raised in Santa Clarita, CA. She is an animal lover and has a service dog who helps her with her disability. She has a mild brain injury from a near drowning at 13 months old. She also has psychogenic non-epileptic seizures from childhood PTSD. She has her own dog grooming business and does dog boarding out of her home.

Carolyn Feres is an entertainer at heart and a storyteller by nature, and has been charming audiences since childhood. Her passion for the arts has led her to many years of studying acting, dancing, writing and stage combat. We currently find her today a student at Golden West College pursuing a degree in Literature.

Kinderlyn Fay Issel currently attends the College of Marin as an English major. As a child she was severely dyslexic and didn't read or enjoy English. As an adult she picked up a book she

couldn't put down and now her end goal is to have a Master's in English with a focus on Rhetoric.

Sophia Lavrov is a twenty-year-old artist based in Marin County and Berkeley. She has long been captivated by all things creative, but she primarily works in the fine arts, having owned and operated a watercolor stationery business since age fifteen. Lately, she has been breaking her scale and exploring larger paintings, making large figurative oil paintings. Now majoring in Art Practice at UC Berkeley, she wishes to further explore the arts and all its scopes. Regardless of which direction she goes, she always aims to create.

Lindsey Leight is a senior in high school doing full-time PSEO (Post Secondary Enrollment Options). She is expected to graduate in June from Irondale High School. She is submitting a poem she has drafted this year in her Poetry Writing class at Anoka Ramsey Community College.

Triana Montserrat is 29 years old. She has residence and employment in both Fallbrook and Tustin, California, but attends school at Golden West College in Huntington Beach. Transience is part of her story and a usual theme in her writing. She goes where life takes her.

Jamileth Moran is an English major at Fresno City College. Her goal is to get an MFA in creative writing and teach at the collegiate level.

Jose F. Moreno is 37 years old, attending Reedley College as well as Fresno Pacific University. Photojournalism was his original passion, and he is now into landscape, portrait and astrophotography. Studying Sociology (social work), Jose is looking to capture the future lives of society and people in need of help through a different socio-lens.

Tecna Mostafa is a sophomore and English tutor at Golden West College. She is also the proud president of GWC Arts & Letters Club! Her dream is to publish a Sci-Fi Fantasy novel, and her current work is based on personal experiences and life encounters.

Makya NeVilles-Sorell has had poems featured in the *Rapids Review*, a literary and arts magazine published at Anoka-Ramsey Community College, which is where Makya currently attends and studies for an eventual MFA in Creative Writing.

Dylan Newell is a professional writing student at Mount Wachusett Community College. He always held a passion for writing in all its forms, though creative fiction is his favorite. He hopes his writing will someday bring joy to others, no matter how big or small the impact is.

Lavender Passalacqua is an aspiring writer studying at Santa Rosa Junior College. Her hobbies include writing, board game design, and hiking.

Kaylee Szabo is a student at Golden West College, pursuing an English degree so she may become a high school teacher. Ever since she was young, she has loved reading and writing, often using poetry as a form of self-discovery and expression. Publishing just one of his poems is his dream.

Raquel Vasquez is currently a student and cheerleader at Fresno City College. She is pursuing an English degree in hopes of transferring to a UC and becoming a professor. For Raquel, writing has always been an outlet to express her feelings and experiences. She especially enjoys the creative process and academic and personal challenges that come with being a writer.

Samantha Aguilar Villanueva is an English major at Reedley and Fresno City College. She had the pleasure of submitting a poem for last semester's *Kings River Review* and was ecstatic at its acceptance.

Melissa Vincent is an English major at Grossmont Community College. She is a poet and fiction writer, born and raised in San Diego.

Kia Walton is a proud student of Laney Community College in Oakland, California. Kia lives in Oakland with their partner, enjoys roller skating, recreational math, healing-centered rest, and of course, writing. Kia is a true believer in goodness and seeks to contribute their talents to the world.

Lois Wickstrom is a senior citizen student at Community College of Philadelphia, in Philadelphia, PA. She's a former chemistry teacher, who is now taking a poetry class. She also writes children's picture books and middle-grade novels. Since CCP gives reduced tuition to seniors, Lois is taking advantage of the situation by taking classes she never took when she was getting her BA.

Kaitlyn Bozzo

Sophia Lavrov

Diane Brinkman

Lindsey Leight

Chasity Clark

Triana Montserrat

Michael Combs

Jamileth Moran

Dani Conklin

Jose F. Moreno

Amy Cutting

Tecna Mostafa

Carolyn Feres

Makya NeVilles-Sorell

Kinderlyn Fay Issel

Dylan Newell