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Letter from the Editor:

The world is uncertain at the moment, but we still have art. As you read these poems about the tender moments, remember what it is like to be around people.

Sophie J.K. Scott

A Thank You Note to My Ex-Boyfriend, or, A Closer Look at the Inside of My Mouth and Other Things I'm Insecure About, Harvey Mitchell

I always reach out first. It stings along the seams.
In french, to miss is a reflexive verb, which makes it red, and against you.
I find myself worrying. You find me wanting
everything to be love and soft and too big for our hands.
You find me wanting to be missed.

I touch our hands together.
My whole body holds it. It will not be so big but you make it so soft.
I kiss tight fistfuls of grass and coming home from parties with hard kneecaps
until I am guilty of not cushioning the ground against my blow- the blow of my body.
The blow of my need to be missed. There is a red light in your bedroom. There is
Only red light.

Grab myself by hangnail and pull,
I am peeled clean and raw. It's righteous act. The mirror reveres me.
The part underneath is exposed and excited.
The good part. The red softness.
There is some crying. There is more goodness.

I find the longer it goes on, the more I am unraveled than undone and that means
all the pieces still work under the red-
Inside the red and along
the frayed part that used to
hurt. You reach out and your touch is so soft and good and flat along my arms.
My body is the torn part of the inside of your cheek.
You are kind against it.

In french,

(which is a red-language, burning hot)
you are not angry AT me,
(and a tongue-language, twisting inside my mouth and against the bleeding inside of my
cheek)
you are angry AGAINST me.
(and a reflexive love, twisting against my bleeding body inside your cheek)
But you, warm, still tongue, are not angry at all.
(and the green glass mirror is jealous, wants to be red but is not, and the blood is jealous,
wants
to be still but is not, and I want and I want and I want)

The Long Dream, Harvey Mitchell

I had a long dream last night. I touched you
just once. The whole dream and I only touched you once.
It was your waist. I could feel the nick between ribs. I wanted to live there.
You were climbing a tree and I touched you to help you up.

It was a long dream and you were only in it to leave.
I only touched you to help.

I don't know why you were climbing the tree. It doesn't matter.
My sleeping brain knew it didn't matter- you wanted to climb for the reason
anyone does. To get to the top. To see if you can get to the roof from there.
To throw back down long forgotten soccer balls and smile down and stretch your arms out.
I would touch you, if you let me. But you knew that.

I woke up and my fingers were alive and loud.
I could see you, if I really focused. I spent the whole dream,
the whole morning after, in the yellow light,
trying to make myself from your rib
like I didn't make you up myself. Like you don't blame me already, for doing it.

The four year dream between now and me, long after you
and I only touch you once.
It is just one touch. It dips in and out like radio when you're getting away but it's still
one hand in the night. Before you get to the top of the tree.

HEATWAVE, Sarra Culleno

-

isn't is glorious they beam -
in kyoto agreement
the bbq brigade
ice pops

-

dig out some flip flops
it's cracking flags it's cornetto time -
waterbombs and garden slime
not ice caps.

-

the inconvenient truth is
i plaster factor 50 on Your too white faces
from a bottle cursed to haunt Your rightful places -
spaces You will miss

-

Your freckles unnerve and blare
enough to drown a deafening static
premonition of Your own sweet wee bairnes
fighting for foul water and finding only plastic -
temperature charts rocket and soar
in centuries and more
like never before
still they ignore
that bore
al gore.

-

we do You wrong little ones
Your skins crisp up under scorched suns
our victorian garden is in deceptive bloom -
no swammy swans left to sing a song
too soon doomed

-

with the scorched earth
we'll wish we knew its worth -

-

ARACHNE Vs ATHENA, Sarra Culleno

Arache plaits with panache and elan.
Spins her thin silks in vim and vip pride,
Cloths so rare full of dare and ardour.
She sat in the sun and span smoothest skeins.
Later under stretched shade, aplomb she wove
And in her equanimity, of Athena never thought.
Insensed was stern, grey Athena at Arachne's mettle.
"That mortal's gumption needs whittling.
Her intrepid brio requires undercut clipping.
For verve is frail; pluck and poise brittle.
All flair and esprit are friable to shatter.
Intrepid mortals all perish, insubstantial.
Her gift is too Godly. I will reduce her
to mountebank masquerade, a mimic imposter.
I'll frame her smarts as a charlatan's scam."
Achne, belittled to bug, curtailed to critter,
is undwindled in endowment and forte.
She still twines yarns, luminous and subtle
with a knack God's can't diminish.

Furry Emperor, Sunita Thind

Are they reptilian or contagious in their furry hooliganism.
Chandelier, crystal fur.
Moonlit in adolescence.
Arctic derivative.
Shimmering in your wit.
Spectral in your intelligence.
Moulting menace, fondle the fur.
Nothing can taint you.
You shall be delayed from your playful proceedings.
Polar anatomy.
Exuberantly disruptive in all manner.
Mythical in gleam.
You harvest my spirit with your agility of your duplicitous reign.
I was lungless before you.
Now enveloped in your spectacular obstinate ways.
Dozing and dazzling, slumbering my furry emperor.

Centrifuge, Matthew Whisker

The centre of the universe
is not the sun
but us. Our hearts beat
perpendicular to each other. This centrifuge
of devotion and emotion rotates
until the world fades away
and we slip into the finality of life
and the permanence of death.

Agamemnon, Steve Barichko

dog-eyed but good legs
slit up her skirt
pressing gold leaf
i was sleeping
were there two
i was smiling
into my death mask
woke up to piss

bowl of washed grapes
my mouth smacking
myrrh on her wrists
darling shhh
in cold handfuls
damascus blade
ripe and barefoot
between my ribs

shore of hades
in my kitchen
i call out mom
they cradle me
waist-high goldenrod
they can't hear you
argynnus in the silt
go out in the dark

Queer 1 Corinthians, Steve Barichko

when i was
a child i spoke and thought
as a child i made pb and js and ate them
on the staircase reading friend of my youth
grape jelly dripped
between my legs like almeda roth
menstruating in menesteung
i imagined walking naked
over spilled homemade jars
checking on the boxer shorts
of the man in town
who sleeps over sometimes
washed and hung to dry
i understood as a child
looking through tampons
under the sink after showering
with my father who pulled me back
by the elbow
when i became a man i put away
the jelly

Psalms, Steve Barichko

when someone said miles just play
how you used to he would say tell me
how i used to
i got no feel for it
it's like an old turkey sandwich or psalm 137:3
where the captors
made the slaves sing to them
songs of worship like i'm some uncle tom
like i'm david the sellout
the way he tapped his foot
inside his shoe the way his harp matched
his jacket thinking he was a pharaoh
but when saul asks for dear old stockholm
i don't give it to him
every night

lakehouse, Harper Haynes

we are scraped knees and gravel roads and all
too deep in the forest to worry about
scratched up legs.
over the whistling wind we
tell each other things we've never said out loud and will
never say again.

we don't sleep and
we leave all the lights on and
we're electric with it.
wide awake in dollar general and the world
boils down to what really matters:
me and you and the wedding singer on vhs. and it's not cool.
but it's real. it's the last real thing i've got left.

we bury things in the woods and don't talk about it.

there's a secret that's filling up the space between us, and we're not ready to admit it but the
truth is that this is the end for us. this is our golden summer.
it's in the way that she can't say it out loud.
it's in the way that i can't either.

i swear to you i am feeling things i have never felt before.

walk home, Harper Haynes

i am sixteen
& want 2 b leaking
warm orange light through my mouth,
the kind of light that's a soft glow through the window of
some stranger's house
their quiet love seeping into the street and
beckoning you in with
the smell of dinner and something you
know the name of but can't say out loud.

(it is all so good sometimes.)

i brush my hair and
all my white clothes are just a little bit pink and
i am not much fun at parties but,
i have the warm line of my body against
your body and
i have your arm around my shoulder and
i have you saying my name
in a loud way and
most importantly,
i have you looking at me
and i am looking back.

i have been looking for a place where that
soft light is always on. i think i might have found it.

(it is all so good sometimes.)

bird song, Harper Haynes

why do birds still sing at night?
do you think they know
it is late
and they are crying out,
“don’t wait up my love, i
am coming, i am
coming as fast as i can”
and their bird heart flutters
and they dip in and out of the sky
painting shadows against the moon clouds.
do you think that’s love?
a song in the night for nobody at all?

maybe their song is for me
burning alone in my room.
maybe they’d sing in the clear
high voice of my mother,
flit a wing at me and start loud and good, singing,
“darling, go to bed. i can see
your light on under the covers. i can hear you tearing
up about birds again. that’s no way to live, is it?
crying over the smallest creature?”

her song would drift through my window
but i would be too busy
caring too much about the next smallest thing to
even hear it.

what if humans are made of fruit flesh? Jana

my nose won't stop running in the middle of winter. you kiss me anyway, and i feel like you could swallow me whole, and i would let you.

we kiss until my tongue is no longer mine and your tongue is no longer yours - but there's one tangible connection, a rope, a love tied tight between our mouths, shared by us both. my energy is yours. every sound you make sounds like me. we kiss until we're both one being. one solid, twisted thing.

where does sex stop being sex and start being love? where you held my hand even though you didn't have to. where you touched my hair and touched my cheeks and told me that i'm beautiful.

the skin of a clementine - not the harsh orange exterior, but the inside. the thin translucent film that covers each individual slice. peeling it slightly, just so gently, so as not to break what's inside. exposing it. this is vulnerability.

i had a dream and you were in it. Jana

i met a witch at a gas station. she said,
“go look in the freezer,”

and i did that, and i saw my heart squished between two tubs of ice cream,
and i did not want to reach for it.

sweetheart, my love, my dear, heart of mine, would you be angry if
i told you i never loved you for real? that witch behind the counter with a wall of
marlboros, in turn, behind her,
she was you.

you pushed me out into the highway and cried when the cars wouldnt come.
i grabbed your arm and cried when you fell willingly into my chest.

in a flood, i see your face under the water. your eyes are rotten green and i grab
your cheeks, i kiss your mouth, and your lips bleed purple onto mine. i am biting
into you, devouring you with salt and water in my lungs.

and you wake up,
cough up the sand in your throat,
you realize half your face is missing;
i consumed you. it's all i do.

waiting for water, Elyse Hart

water is worthy
to waken me to action
to wash away my will
to whittle me like a stone

i am worthy of water
to cradle me into dirt
erode my uncouth earth
& whisper through my tired bones

time so fleeting, Elyse Hart

to hold

what seems irrelevant

irreverent and dismissible

a cup of coffee turned cold

but there exists a cup of coffee

to chase

illusion and whimsy

clutching at cabbage whites

which flutter out of grasp

which cannot be held nor kept

Amnesty, Caroline Murphy

It's not my fault that I'm afraid of the dark – I got lost the last time
I asked for directions to forever and someone burned all the poems

I wrote for myself.

If your first love takes what he can get and you've only got what's left,
is it enough to call your own?

how do you recognize yourself in the mirror

if he took that too?

I break and keep breaking, lay all my pieces out before you, asking

not to be put back together but to hear

that nothing was shattered in the first place.

If I'm capable of any kind of love

it's the way you look at me first thing

in the morning and I don't look away

it's my unfiltered skin in the shower

not afraid of getting wet.

The only promise I can keep is this:

I will love you each day

with a different part of myself,

today with my hands,

tomorrow my eyes,

over and over until

I'm not afraid

to jump in

with both feet.

nameless, Deanna Feuer

she found me when i was hiding away
from everything and everyone
alone like i wanted to be. she
sat down next to me
curled around me protectively, wrapping
her arms around my waist,
blanket and shield, warmth and safety
all in her grip and her smile. she fit
herself against my spine, a perfect
alignment of two in one, and
spoke gently in my ear, her words
soft but resonating –

'don't be afraid
you know who you are, and if
you ever forget i'll be here
with sweet berries and
cool water to remind you
of all you are and all you can be'

she kissed my forehead and left
her gifts (as she said)
next to me,
left me just a little more whole
than i was before

tenderness / love between friends, Adam Ferraz

i am thinking about tenderness.
it is summer, the heat of the sun outside
pulsing like a heartbeat,
i can almost feel it from where i am,
and i am always
thinking about tenderness.
about our heads resting on each other's shoulders,
sharing a blanket as a coat in the middle of the night,
laughter bubbling out of us at all times and in all places.

i am thinking about love between friends,
and of how i feel so safe with these people.

THE 'ROID RAGE WRESTLER, Michael Chin

HAS NO TIME FOR YOUR SMALL-MINDED IDEALS, ONLY BENCH PRESSES AND
HINDU SQUATS AND LATE-NIGHT STEAK AND EGGS BY THE DINER'S FLICKERING
LIGHT

AND THE FIGHT

THE SHOULDER TACKLE-CLOTHESLINE-GORILLA PRESS SLAM

AND THE FIGHT

THE BEER BOTTLE TO FOREHEAD SLAM HIM ON THE TABLE FACE CRUSHING

AND THE FIGHT.

The night she told him she didn't feel safe anymore. The taillights. And that face. Small as
the
palm of his hand and pressed to the rear windshield. Disappearing by degrees.

blush, Turi Sioson

numb spot
between my teeth
keeps the conversation going;
cold and on
the verge of shaking thoughts
from a place
on my tongue
i have not gone.

i beg and borrow
from the color of
one of the crowd,
mixing being with not
and existence with
the taste of regret,
as if i could ever
follow through
with thoughts like that.

i let the weather be
my tethered lady
and allow her to
hold my hand
in the cold blush
of evening,
wondering
what hour will she
drop my act
and leave me alone
with the aftertaste of
my truth not
holding back.

my professor tells me a story of evolution, Katheryn Koehler

I rest on the dark stairs and watch the light play over the tall walls. the green makes the windows stained glass, the high ceiling an echoing cathedral I inhabit in careful silence, perched on a pew for one. the paint's fresh—it was done today, covering up our years of living with new color in clean swathes, obscuring the grime that developed over walls we would brush with our hands as we walked past, the tender strokes we left on the banister. it's necessary, but I dislike it, feel some kind of grief over those lost touches. but it was our grime, my brain seems to say, as if it knows anything about being dirty. there's dust on the stairs. it sticks to my socks and legs and soft shorts as I sit midway to the top. the light shifts again. I imagine I can feel the green flutter over my skin, over my bruised knees. it's quiet, like a real church, just me and the murmur of the hvac, but I'm the only one there to leave prayers.

Disturbed Desire, Vivianna Varlack

The last time I saw my wife was a few years ago in the early morning of a warm summer day. We laid together on our lawn, the grass tickling our backs, the dew clinging to my skin and her hair, the water droplets reflecting the stars. The moonlight illuminated the softest parts of ourselves. The dip of her nose, the curve of her smile, the way she laughed. She kept reaching out to trace my face, reassuring herself that I was really there, but even I wasn't sure if I was. In my lifetime of rough edges, the moment seemed impossibly comforting. I wanted to lay in it, to wrap myself in it, to encapsulate the memory and return to it only when I needed to remind myself about the pleasurable discontinuities of life. And I did.

But now, she was standing in front of me, and the curve of her lips had tightened into harsh lines. Everything about her was taut from the moment she opened my door and walked into my house. She dragged her legs behind her in a hobble and jerked an accusatory hand in my direction. When her eyes, which were alive with emotion, met mine I found the only thing about her that wasn't harsh and even without recalling our last happy moments together, I remembered why I loved her.

I remembered how I idolized her and wished to worship her. How each moment in her presence felt like a blessing that I wanted to be solely mine. How it was outrageous to think that she was truly here because I had killed her to ensure that no one else would ever feel her grace.

the healthy decision, Jana

“i’ve found out that ... that falling in love. it hurts.”

“and falling out of love?”

“falling out of love ... ? i don’t know. i never felt that.”

olivia looks at me and the sudden, absolute tightness in my chest threatens to knock me out, it threatens to squeeze

my heart until it bursts and all i am is a bleeding, heaving mess on the ground.

she looks at me like she’s surprised, and also sad.

“isn’t that why we broke up?”

“we broke up because we weren’t good for each other, liv. we broke up because i held you in my hands and you held

me in yours and we fell apart in the process. we - we loved each other, and i don’t know about you, but i still love you.

that doesn’t change the fact that you hurt me.”

“you hurt me, too.”

“i know.” and believe when i say i beat myself up for it every night. i promise you i haven’t gotten a good night’s sleep

since we left each other, i promise you that.

“we can’t change the past.”

“i know.”

if i look around - well, i try not to. we’re standing in her kitchen, and i’ve got a crate in my hands full of shit that i left at

her place and i can smell the coffee brewing and i know that if i look at it, if i think about it, i’ll start to remember

exactly how i used to make her coffee every morning. with a spoon of honey. sweet like we were, kind of.

if i look around, i’ll remember all the stupid, useless little things that aren’t that stupid or useless at all, actually,

because they were us, and we were the most important thing to me. even when i spent the night crying in the

bathroom. even when i pissed her off to the point that she started screaming. we were us, my whole world.

so i don't look around. i look her in her watery eyes and i say, "we can't change the past, but we can recognize it. and

that's what we're doing. i love you olivia, and i don't know when i'll stop, but i have so much hope in my heart.

someday, we won't be hurting each other anymore. we'll be okay."

"you always said that."

"said what?"

"that we'll be okay."

"now's different."

"why?"

"because we're not together, now."

Contributors

Jana is a sixteen-year-old student and aspiring writer living in Munich, Germany. She posts most of her work to her writing blog **@favoritebuoy** on Tumblr, and can also be found **@o4ngel** (also on Tumblr).

Steve Barichko is from Terryville, CT. His work has most recently appeared in Honey and Lime Lit, the Rockvale Review, and the Main Street Rag. He is working on a forthcoming chapbook. He lives in Terryville with his wife and daughter. He can be found on Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr **@stevebarichko**.

Michael Chin was born and raised in Utica, New York and currently lives in Las Vegas with his wife and son. He is the author of two full-length short story collections: *You Might Forget the Sky was Ever Blue* from Duck Lake Books and *Circus Folk* from Hoot 'n' Waddle; his third collection, *The Long Way Home* is forthcoming in 2020 from Cowboy Jamboree Press. Chin won the 2017-2018 Jean Leiby Chapbook Award from *The Florida Review* and *Bayou Magazine's* 2014 James Knudsen Prize for Fiction. Find him online at miketchin.com and follow him on Twitter **@miketchin**.

London born but Manchester based, **Sarra Culleno** is a poet, mother of two and English teacher who performs at open mic poetry events and slams across the UK. She writes about children's rights, motherhood, identity, gender, age, technology, the environment, politics, modern monogamy and education. Sarra is widely published, and was longlisted for the Cinnamon Press Pamphlet Prize. She co-hosts Write Out Loud at Waterside Arts, and has been a guest poet at numerous literary festivals.

Adam Ferraz is a twenty-two year old writer who studies English and film at Davidson College. In his free time, Adam enjoys reading, copy editing, art museums, and indie music.

Deanna Feuer is an English Literature graduate from Vancouver BC. She is a long time lover of words and poetry.

Elyse Hart is a poet, songwriter, and composer residing in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in *The Nervous Breakdown*, *Okay Donkey Magazine* and *The Los Angeles Press*. Her first chapbook will be released by Subphonic Press in 2020. Find more of Elyse's work on Instagram at **@elysehartpoetry**, SoundCloud **@elysehartmusic** and Twitter **@to_stardust**.

Harper Haynes is a sixteen year old poet and artist based in the United States. She specializes in text-based collage art about love and anything warm and good and clean. You can find her at **@ophanims** on Instagram and **@oozins** on Tumblr.

Kathryn Koehler is a newly-nineteen year old poet and student in California. Her work has been recognized by the National Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and is forthcoming in the Moorpark Review. You can find her on tumblr as **@alightings**.

Harvey Mitchell is a 16 year old poet born and raised in Northern California. He writes short poems about gayness, Native American identity, mental health, youth, love, and whether or not he wants people to look at him. When not writing, he can be found painting, doting on his cat, or **@tastebblind** on Instagram.

Caroline Murphy graduated from the University of Maine at Farmington in 2015 and is a former Fulbright English Teaching Assistant. She currently teaches ESL at the American University in Bulgaria and is the founder of DOMA: the literary journal of Fulbright Bulgaria.

Turi Sioson spends most her time crafting poems and flash fiction pieces, often with some form of rhyme. She is currently a first-year university student studying creative writing and hopes to publish larger pieces in the future. You can find more of her work on her Instagram, **@ridiculoustales**.

Sunita Thind has always been passionate about her writing and now she has the time to concentrate on it fully. She has dabbled in many things including being a model, primary and secondary school teacher and trained as a make up artist. Make up, poetry and animals are her passion. She has recently suffered from Ovarian Cancer and is grateful she has survived it but is not in remission yet. All these experiences have coloured her as a person and enriched the poetry she writes. She loves to sing and take singing lessons and has a beautiful, male Samoyed puppy named Ghost.

Vivianna Varlack is a junior at Communications High School in Wall, New Jersey. In her free time, Vivianna enjoys reading and creative writing. Her work has been published in The Writers Circle Journal, and she runs a blog where she posts book reviews. When Vivianna is not immersed in the literary world, she loves to bake and listen to music.

Matthew Whisker is a writer from Lincoln, England. He is on the autistic spectrum. He has a passion for normalising and breaking the taboo of mental health through his writing.