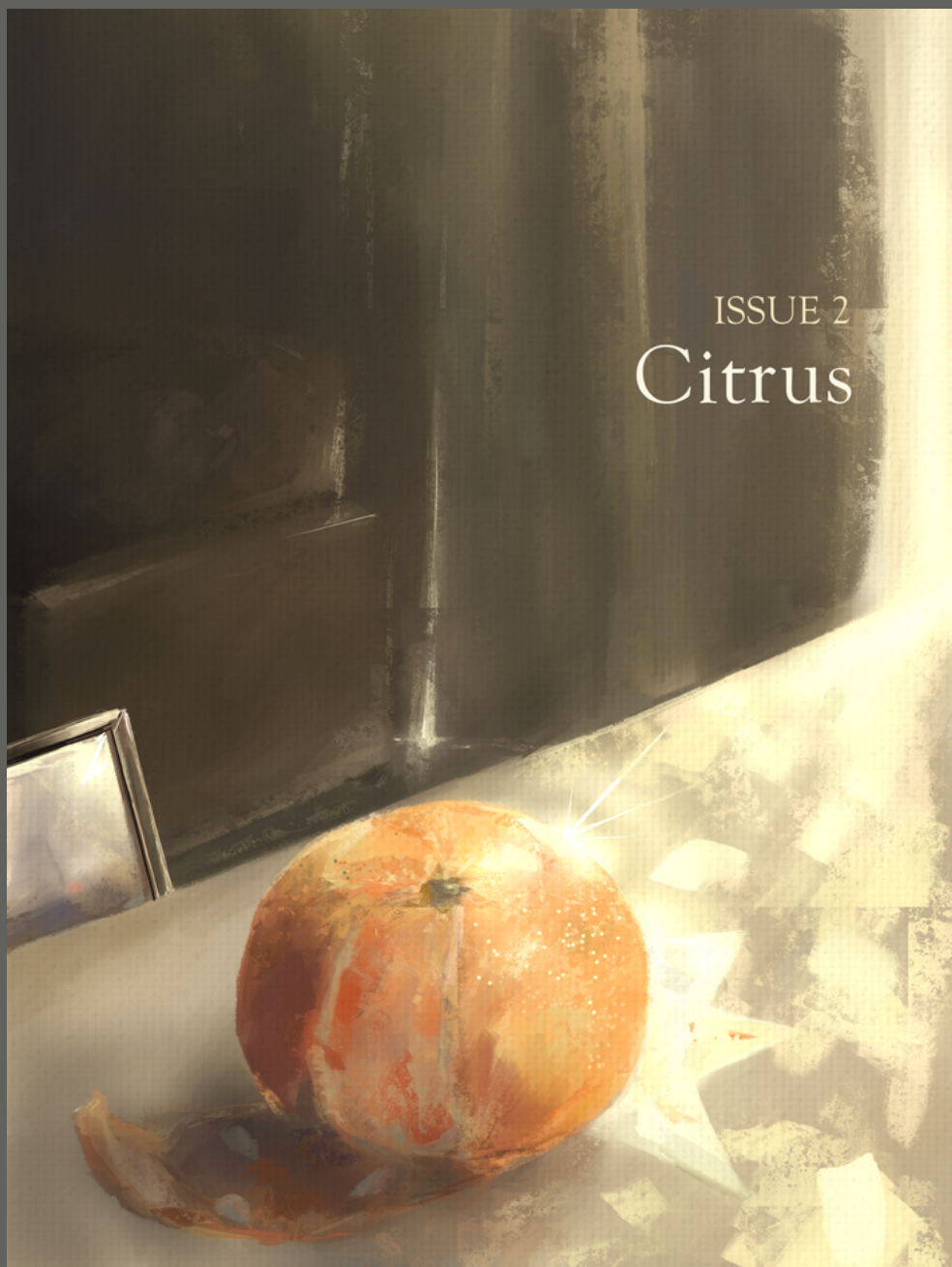



FULMINARE REVIEW




ISSUE 2

Citrus

SIC ITUR AD ASTRA






editors' note



Hello and welcome to Fulminare Review's second issue – *Citrus*.

Plants that bear citrus fruits undergo most of their preparation for fruition in winter. It is a season that holds anticipation as much as discontinuation; it involves being in a contradictory state of thriving dormancy, that is, a period of reconciliation between things that have fallen, that are transitioning into the next phase of their life, and that have yet to sprout into existence. Having said that, each piece in this issue exists on a spectrum of ripening to rot – from nostalgia to rumination. From the soft natural imagery of B. L. Bruce's *It seems only a matter of days*, and the nostalgic longing of Natalie Nims' *photo albums*, to the theoretical musings of Sanjana Rajagopal's *Presentism*, the idea of 'citrus', arises as a social construct and as a peripheral theme in memory.

This is where the sweet and tart combine, where the overripe becomes frostbitten, where small pleasures turn twisted. Like an orange, this issue is segmented – perfect for reading all at once or saving parts for later. So what are you waiting for – dig in!



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The background of the page features a collage of several bright, ripe oranges and several strips of film. The oranges are scattered across the upper and middle portions of the page. The film strips are arranged diagonally, overlapping each other, and show various scenes, including what appears to be a person's face and some abstract patterns. The overall aesthetic is artistic and layered.

Part 1:

UNDERRIPE/RIPENING

define

1. *not sufficiently ripe to pick, eat, or use*
2. *not completely ripe, as fruit*
3. *prelude to a progression of growth*

/ , ʌ n d ə ' r aɪ p /

B.L. BRUCE, KENDRA MILLS, AVE GOORBARRY,
ELIZABETH B.J., CAROLINE MORRIS,
CONNOR DONOVAN, GRACE KAYE, NATALIE NIMS,
LAURIE SWINARTON, LYDIA BUSH,
ANDREA GERADA

It seems only a matter of days

It seems only a matter of days before the trees begin to leaf—
which is to say that spring has announced its arrival. The heat
brings out the snakes. The crow-dance over the oaks is slow.

I pluck an overripe orange from a tree at the edge of the abandoned
orchard, peel it absent mindedly. A jackrabbit is startled and
bounds away from me. The pale backsides of its ears catch the
light until it disappears into the thicket.

I bring an orange home in my pocket, later place it in the bowl
beside the browning bananas, remember the rabbit—bob of white
tail through the grass—the smell of citrus.

B. L. Bruce is a Pushcart Prize nominee and award-winning poet. With a bachelor's degree in literature and creative writing, Bruce is the editor-in-chief of the nature-themed literary magazine Humana Obscura and the author of four books: The Weight of Snow, The Starling's Song, 28 Days of Solitude, and Measures.

Ode to the Pulmonata

We nestled grapefruit halves into the straw
of the berry fields.

Overnight, the hollows filled with slugs,
swimming in the sugars and the mucosal

emissions of their bodies.

The air was redolent

with the scent of citrus, like California
where

the boughs of the lemon trees grew heavy
with fruit.

They dropped quietly into the pool,
plentiful and unlikely

daybreak
swimming companions.

Kendra Mills lives in Washington DC. She is a recipient of the Elisa Brickner Poetry Prize and her work may also be found in The Rialto, Moria Literary Magazine, and Mud Season Review.

Purgatory Girl

You're the first moment in the evening when the quiet sets in.
When the sun is peeking through the candied skies,
reaching their orange and mixing with their brothers in cloud:
when the blue fades into cotton.

The neighbor's flood in and out of their picket-fenced houses,
and the kids from down the street; the ones without the shoes,
are playing basketball with the asphalt licking their calloused heels.

The purgatory of day and the encroaching of dark.

When the car meets driveway, and the tires sigh to cement.
To the house on the street where care resides.
To open the door, swing the weary joints so metal begs to be closed.
So house begs to be opened.
The length of day riddles its colors of permanence.

Feet meet doorway, meet her.
Open the door and the stiffened bone-body loosens 'cause
hands meet face—

You let fingers move with trepidation,
palm against cheek.
Doe eyes with the irises their mixed brown-black.
'Cause her touch lingers like daybreak gone too soon;
and it feels too good to listen to the patter of street kids play.

—

Ave Goorbarry is a teenage writer born in New Jersey and currently lives in South Florida. Ave's writing has won awards regionally from Scholastic Art and Writing and has been previously published in The Firefly Review, A Thin Slice of Anxiety, Words & Whispers, The Bibliopunk Lit Zine and remains forthcoming in Dead Skunk Mag. Ave is an alumni of The Iowa Young Writers' Studio 2022 and Co-Editor-in-Chief of Diet Water magazine.

"How to grow a lime?"

You might ask yourself
as the bitter and the sweet fill your breath.

Well, first, you'll have to deceive a seed
to make it grow to something that wasn't it
cut leaves, grow two branches
that's all you'll need to make up for past disasters
that made the coast weather uncertain
and the plagues of miners, scales, and mites stronger.
All that work to fulfill a demand
Accidentally proving genetics a scam:
A tree born with an orange trunk
Became a lime, 'cause it had to.

What if it didn't? How could it know? What could have been? Would an orange have grown?
Or from the start, was up to fate,
Did it have to follow that path to please everyone else?

Elizabeth B.J. is a Mexican writer in her early twenties, she's studying English language and literature at UNAM and has published poetry, articles on entertainment, opinion pieces and critical essays. You can find links for everything on @cazandocolibris both on Instagram and Twitter.

Frozen Orange Juice From A Can

For Scott Morris

I don't know why it was his favorite,
But it was.
Most of us fear the metallic
Punch in the molars taste-feeling-pain
Of orange juice and toothpaste,
But he loved that aluminum cylinder filled with frozen concentrate,
Almost begging for the taste of pennies.
He never shied away from pungent,
Eating tuna from a golden tin and biting the bulbs directly off the scallion,
His kiss on the top of my head smelling like cigarettes.
Even when you love someone,
You cannot crawl inside their mouth and know what their world tastes like,
But I can try.
And try as I might, I cannot remember where he used to find his
Frozen orange juice from a can,
So, tricked and let down by pop-open Pillsbury cinnamon rolls and waxy Tropicana cartons,
I wander the aisles of every grocery store,
Searching and searching.

Caroline Morris is a writer and editor based in Philadelphia and received her B.A. in English literature with a concentration in writing at the Catholic University of America. Both her poetry and prose wrestle with the nature of femininity, internal and interpersonal relationships, and what it means to have a body. Morris has previously been published by Green Ink Poetry, Moonflake Press, Hearth & Coffin, Beaver Magazine, Vermilion, and the Penwood Review, with two honorable mentions for the O'Hagan Poetry Prize. Find her on Twitter @Lean_writer

Clementine Seeds

Greyscale printer paper hangs low
on our battered, Ibiza blue, basement
walls. Sometimes, when the moon is
still round & milky, I lay starred in bed
bombarded with spiritual wishes.

Please,

keep my sisters safe.

Redrawing their
middle-school pencil portraits hung on walls
below, my finger can't trace like it used to,
knuckles knotted, managing singed childhood
photos, carcasses of hazy memories.

Did we really used to count our
white clementine seeds, pocket
change, see who ate the wealthier
bloom? Every one knew an orange
would sprout in your tummy if you
ate the seeds—
mature, fertile, ready to be planted &
infiltrate muddied Earth flesh with new
fruits. They were always ready, from the
moment we spit them onto our paper plates.

I can't

*remember if we planted the seeds. Did we
ever plant the seeds?*

Connor Donovan is a senior mathematics and educational studies student at Ursinus College (a small liberal arts college outside of Philadelphia) and has plans to become a teacher in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, upon graduation. He enjoys gluten-free food and logging all his watched movies on Letterboxd.

Lemontwigs

They were like two halves of the same person.

Maybe they were, they had almost the exact same face. Identical smiles—when her sister did smile, anyway—Twigs' with a gap between her two front teeth and her sister's a perfectly straight, post-braces smile that always seemed forced. Her sister wasn't that much older, but it always seemed like she knew so much more than Twigs. Like she had seen more of the world, but she had always acted as if she were more grown up than her anyway.

Sometimes Twigs wasn't exactly sure why she'd stuck around for her. Maybe it was just that she was her oldest friend, and even if it was sometimes bad, it was familiar. Maybe it was that she viewed her through the same rose-colored lense that she saw everyone else through. Knowing her was all light and dark, just like knowing anybody was. It was like the woods behind her house, splashes of sunshine against the great shadows of the crowded trees. Even after she had accidentally hit her eye with a stick during one of their sword fights and pushed her into the muddy creek after losing, she couldn't really help but love her. She'd followed her around like a lost puppy ever since she'd met her. Whether she had to crawl, or toddle, or dart barefoot through the woods to the creek, all she really wanted to know was her. That day, the earth was soft and springlike, and smelled fresh and new after the rain of the night before.

You couldn't really help but love your sister, could you? Even when she hated you, you couldn't help but love her.

Watching her grow up from her place almost half a head shorter than her was bittersweet, because Twigs just watched her soft brown eyes—eyes that mirrored her own—grow tired and dim, the bags under them darker with every passing day. Sometimes she wondered why, but her sister had become quiet. She had shrunk into himself, like he was trying to fold herself smaller and smaller and then eventually disappear. She didn't really talk to Twigs anymore, and sometimes she thought her sister's gentle eyes didn't look onto her with any care at all. She wanted to ask her what made her so sad, but she knew she wouldn't get an answer.

Eventually she started to give up, she just didn't understand. Why did her sister isolate herself from her? Why didn't she play with her like she used to? What had Twigs done to her that she just didn't seem to want to be around her.

"Do you know that lemons are sour?" Her sister asked her, taking the cover off of a small plastic container and taking out a slice of lemon. Twigs raised a skeptical eyebrow, sitting down crossed-legged next to her. She watched as the water danced down the stones in the creek softly singing alongside the birds in the trees.

"Yes," Twigs replied, confused.

"But do you know that?" Her sister asked, placing the lemon slice in the palm of Twigs' hand. "Have you ever tried to bite into a lemon? You know, to find out for sure?" Twigs shook her head as her sister smiled wickedly, as if she were daring her to do it. Twigs furrowed her brow as she stared at the lemon in her hand, before taking a breath and sinking her teeth into the lemon. The sourness of it burned down her throat, forcing her eyes shut and her face to turn. She scowled at her sister's smile as she opened her eyes.

"That sucks," Twigs forced herself to smile. "Literally." Deep down she was just happy that her sister was talking to her. She didn't really do that much anymore.

"When life gives you lemons," her sister scoffed. "I don't know man, I think life just sucks. I'm tired of making lemonade." Twigs scooped closer to her sister, tentatively resting her head on her shoulder. Twigs was used to this, all she ever heard growing up was the sadness of her mother. Then when her sister grew up, she was sad too. And, back when they used to talk, she would tell Twigs about it. It was as if it were in their blood to shoulder some kind of burden, passing it down to the next girl in line like some kind of family tradition. Twigs simply turned to her, her eyes wide. She couldn't help but look up to her sister—literally *and* figuratively—as she held her own lemon slice in her hand.

“It runs in the family,” her sister began. “You’re not going to be able to explain it. It’s this kind of worry, it’s like—” her sister paused. Twigs’ brow furrowed again, her sister said the word “like” too often.

“It’s like this worry. It’ll come from your ribs, that little space right between them where your heart is,” her sister rubbed her thumb over the rind of the lemon. “Your heart will start to beat, faster and faster, and you’re not going to be able to breathe. Your thoughts are going to go a mile a minute, and you’re going to be scared. And when that happens, you take a hit of lemon.”

“Why?” Twigs squeaked, suddenly feeling nervousness creeping up her spine. The woods went quiet.

“It’s a trick Dagan taught me,” her sister said his name slowly. As if it was a bad word, her eyes suddenly became cloudy. Twigs hadn’t heard it in a long time, not after the funeral, but she still thought it was unusual. “When you start to feel that feeling, anxiety, yeah? You bite into the lemon and your brain stops acting like the world is ending and is like,” she smiled, putting on a voice. ““Oh wow, that’s a real sour lemon!”” Twigs laughed softly. “When life gives you lemons, and it’s sour and bitter, your head just needs something to snap it back to reality. Then things aren’t as bad as they seem.”

“I love you, Cala,” Twigs whispered. Cala smiled, a real one this time.

“I love you too Twigs.”

Grace Kaye (she/her) is an aspiring novelist and occasional poet, who writes under her first and middle name because she thinks it's unique. She will always claim to be from Massachusetts and enjoys reading and writing, but is often procrastinating both of those things. She can be found on Instagram @gracekayewritesstuff

photo albums

It is always tinted meringue in my memories. Like the kitchen where I made a crackling pie for the first time. It's so clean in the pictures that it's as if the top has been glazed with sugar. Back then, winter used to crust on the windows so simply. Some days are dull edged enough to push you back and leave you to watch the past. I observe the sweetness of oven baked pastry without really being able to smell it, caught between then and now. We remember people through the orange wood of home as it shut frost out. That's something I realized about our house, seemingly unscratched in these pages. I don't like looking at picture albums because everything is so orange and yellow it hurts my eyes. Those leather bound pages only make the future feel empty. The pictures in there are captured as a singular moment, taken from a life of thousands as if trying to convince me of its perfection. The lemon meringue pie was actually quite bland but we managed to laugh about that later. I flip through all these photos and then look up to something that feels like a deep heat blue. I think the problem is that we idealize that sweetness through still images, washed over with nostalgia but fail to remember one crucial thing. That happiness is not finite. Those good memories are not something locked away.

Natalie Nims is a teen author from Ontario. As an art lover as well as an artist, you can probably find her passionately ranting about her favorite pieces. Natalie also enjoys listening to 60's music at 3pm on a Saturday, watching hour long video essays, or struggling to decide on one author bio. Her work has been published or forthcoming in Musing Publications, Livina Press, and healthline zine.

Winter Break

“Wakey, wakey,” mom calls to us and – like prairie dogs – we burrow our way out of our beds, our faces slick with sleep. Then we’re packed into the back of the car, our arms and legs jumbled together as the rising sun begins to pierce through the plum-coloured sky. Exhaust billows out of the tailpipe leaving black sooty plumes against the white snow.

On the highway, we play a made-up game called “read the bumper stickers” as cars whiz passed. “Honk if you’re horny,” my youngest sister yells, causing the game to end with a “Shush!” Somewhere between Kentucky and Tennessee, I throw up. “It’s *kinetosis*,” I say through puke-scented teeth. Motion sickness. I’m in grade 6 and gnaw on science words, chewing them before letting them roll off my tongue.

We drive through the seasons, then arrive in a blossomy world. A humid breeze – juicy and full of salt – lingers on our winter chapped lips. Like alchemy, it turns our winter blues into gold.

At our pink stuccoed motel, a rust-covered sign dangles near the pool: *Women must wear bathing caps. No beverages allowed.* Of course, we smuggle cups, filled to the brim with Coke and neon bright Fanta, beyond the pool’s gate. Our contraband sits in a tidy row which we upend with careless feet. Syrup sticks to our flip-flops and the rubber bottoms become magnets for ants and discarded cigarette butts. For the rest of the day, our sandals sound like packing tape being ripped off boxes.

We dive into the pool, gliding as if we’re no longer awkward, flicking our legs and wiggling like eels. Our hair drifts behind us, shiny as polished seaweed. We’re Nereids, daughters of the sea god. I hold my breath and the tempo of my pulse sings a song – a song just for me – that fills the cavities of my ears. I hold my breath until I can’t stand it any longer then wrestle against the water’s weight and shoot upward into the oxygenated world where I drink in mouthfuls of sticky air

As the afternoon ripens, we bake under the sun. Coconut lotion, mingled with chlorine, clings to our skin while the vinyl straps of the lounge chairs glisten with our sweat and etch lines on our legs. Overhead, the dry leaves of palm fronds cackle and whisper a secret of impending change.

Without warning, the sky is bruised; lightning ruptures expectant clouds. We run, our flip-flops are left behind and our bare feet slap against the hot tarmac. In the cool room, we wriggle out of wet bathing suits and towel dry our hair as fat raindrops hit the window then ricochet off like tiny gymnasts or pole vaulters.

Our parents give us quarters to put in the box that says *Magic Fingers* and the bed jiggles us to sleep. At night, our skin itches. It blisters and peels and we compete to see who can pull the longest strips off each other's backs.

After a week, we tuck the tangy scent of *citrus sinensis* into our pockets and fit ourselves back in the car, wedged in between crates filled with heavy fruit and plastic bags from Stuckey's filled with pecan logs and souvenirs: *Eat Here & Get Gas!*

We drive north and watch the seasons unwind in reverse and return to a driveway filled in with snow. And then ... and then.

We wait for summer to find us again.

Laurie holds many unpopular opinions such as preferring winter to summer and that pineapple belongs on pizza. She's most content when she's buried in a book with a cup of lapsang souchong tea steeping nearby, her menagerie of strays sitting beside her, and Bach playing in the background. When not doing that, she can be found yelling out her window at neighbours who drive noisy cars.

Sugar and Acid

I'm sorry to your craft beer, but I scan the cocktails.
It's not that I want a fruity drink- I just can't pass the citrus.
I've seen berries turn what's sweet to sweeter then melt to nothing,
but my mandarin soul could make a stoic pucker. My tangerine spine
will take up space when it feels sour. My clementine memory
can linger long enough to turn the most pretentious coffee bitter. My
orange juice can spoil your taste for minty peppermint fresh in just one
dirty night. The lemon in soul can preserve guacamole. My pineapple heart
can break the toughest chicken down. My lime veins are always getting
kissed by bourbon's hottest fires. My grapefruit blood bathes in coconut's
milk. I'm sure you've heard that I can't make up my mind, but I can make
my mind into any of the things that I will always open myself to. I will let
you peel my own layers by yourself. My love will drip down your skin.
You would have to wash me off to forget me, but you will never want to
wash me down. And depending on which version of me you choose,
you couldn't even do it if you tried.

Lydia Rae Bush is a former Creative Writing Instructor, whose poetry focuses on themes such as Mental Health, Trauma, Sexuality, and Spiritual Abuse. Her work can be found in publications such as The Lanthorn, The Open Culture Collective, Ink Drinkers, Pinnacle Anthology, and Amphora Magazine.

satsuma and cheese

And because the afternoons were slicked
with snail-gloss sweat; because the sun
tangerine fire, was oppressively cheerful
the only repose for one's bone-dry
throat

Warm-colored fruit. Glossy cake peel.
Your favorite is suha, pink pomelo
champagne-fleshed sourball
feasting with quiet gusto, you make fun of my
satsuma and cheese

One day you'll love it, crave that summer
tartness and angel mold, lush acidity
fermented from the simpatico marriage of fruit
and cheese,

how food healed us, in those days.

Part 2:

RIPENING/RIPE

define

1. Ripe fruit or grain is fully grown and ready to eat; fully developed or matured
2. maturity of the mind or body; in judgement or knowledge
3. ready or eager to undertake an action
4. suitable; right or opportune
5. emitting a strong scent, as in, a more polished expression of one's individuality, beliefs or values

/ r a i p /

SOPHIA DUEÑAS, VARNIKA THUKRAL,
LORI D'ANGELO, COMET CELESTE,
JOSHUA MERCHANT, JESSICA KING,
ADORA WILLIAMS, LAVINIA VIANINI, FIFI WANG.

clementine consequence

for months i wondered
why you had packed your pivotal, pretty
entities, pulled away and left me to suffocate, buried, decaying,
in the winter season's sentient,
saccharine, sardonic rush.
didn't you realize that it was too much
for my small, inconsequential self?

then one night recent, under cover
of deep midnight, by candlelight,
i reassessed the weekly harvest logs of months past and found,
much to my bewilderment,
that a certain sacred set of citrus
had vanished.
and many more of the same

over our time. some how, some way,
unseen, unreached.
had they always been missing?
only on nights when you, dutifully,
devoutly, divinely, charted the clementine consequence.
had you been plotting, masterminding,
scheming, designing a heist

of my tangerines?
of my clementines?
of my heart?

had you already? come out unscathed,
unbothered by your citrus seamstress' shears
sticking five-sixths the way into my back?
karma-driven, alleged, due to me
for desiring to boost
an equally qualified hand.
he has proven now more qualified than you ever were.

your tangerines are tart, aching,
tang in my mouth.
these are the yields i have reaped,
but did i sow the poison, acid,
yearning, pining, burning, unrequited,
disloyal seeds of this, my own,
clementine consequence?

Sophia Dueñas (she/her) is a 17-year-old writer, high school senior, and story lover from Los Angeles, California. Sophia enjoys whimsical, wondrous fantasy world-building, and hopes that someday soon she will be able to tell stories of queer euphoria set to the backdrop of such worlds.

tangerine pies

I. HONEY

sweet. fresh. familiar made new again.
reintroduction, but simple.
easy.
you took to my antics like bees take
to youthful, pollen-heavy flowers,
and i gave you me, the seed
of a tangerine tree.

II. TANGERINE

you took that tree, made it you,
part of yourself, and we bloomed together.
we collected the fruit of our affinity
with full, bursting hearts.
i knew it. know it.
i could smell the sweet scent of your affection under the stench of your faux indifference.
i adored, craved that bittersweet. carnally. *ravenously*.
we took our tangerines from us, our tangerine tree,
and baked them into love-laden pies.
the warmth-tang, warmth-tart clung to us
like we to each other.

III. MARMALADE

we parted, briefly, from our kitchen, each other, to let them cool.
i gifted you my bronze compass so that you could find your way home.
you promised you would.
i knew the route by heart. i would return first.
i swore i wouldn't eat until you came home.

IV. ROT

our pies rose, hot, on the window sill.
waning waning waning waning *cold*.
they began to rot, from the inside out.
i made it back home, back to rotting
pies and absent, vanished you.
our pies are rotting, but i promised
not to eat
until you
came home.
the sweet-sour of rot fills, suffocates.
are you coming home?
come home.

Sophia Dueñas (she/her) is a 17-year-old writer, high school senior, and story lover from Los Angeles, California. Sophia enjoys whimsical, wondrous fantasy world-building, and hopes that someday soon she will be able to tell stories of queer euphoria set to the backdrop of such worlds.

Because December is Like a Fruit From a Foul Tree

Because December is like the fruit of a foul tree,
A gift-wrapped box of green glitter
And underneath, a heap of memories
That smell like limes and rotten kinships,
Garnished with sweeter ones in red.
Of apple pies and birthday blues,
Say, it's winter already.

Tranquility would say otherwise,
Mojito in my hand, matcha on the side.
Because tears might be the only staple
Or at least the only stable I abide by.

The blueberry chocolates tastes
Like the cream of anniversary cakes
And jettisoned along
with the fire on candles.

They burnt out like all those flames,
Forgotten now, but oh,
December scrapes caskets off soil
In rags of white of redemption
To paint those yet again
In purples like blueberry cheesecake
And Delphinium bouquets
Sent for the well being
Of my melancholy.

Varnika Thukral is a poet with a curious little brain from Delhi, India. Her interest in Geology and love for literature keeps her at the balance of life and logic. An assistant director for the Book reviewing Department at TYWI, a submission reader for Sea Glass Literary, and a learner to roots, she loves reading just as she adores fabricating words. Her works can be found in Hooligan Magazine Blog, Ice Lolly Review Blog, and Moye Magazine (Valentine's Zine). Find her on Instagram at @varnikathukralrecs.

A Day of Nothing Special

The clouds looked like
 clouds.
I took a vow of debauchery.
I failed the drinking game.
Instead, I watched old
soap operas, spent
too much time on
 status updates.
I folded floors
and scrubbed sinks.
The chili was cooked
 boringly.
You praised it --
out of habit.
And we waited for
the night to envelope.

Lori D'Angelo is a grant recipient from the Elizabeth George Foundation, a fellow at the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts, and an alumna of the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley. Recent work has appeared in Black Moon Magazine, Cream Scene Carnival, Creation Magazine, JAKE, Kaidankai Podcast, Men Matters Magazine, One Art Poetry Journal, Suburban Witchcraft, Worm Moon Archive, and Wrong Turn Lit. You can find her on Twitter @scilly21 and on Instagram at lori.dangelo1.

sour.

As she looks around her new room, Jenna's mouth runs dry. She breathes deeply, moving forward. There are no decorations on the wall; the sheets are white with no character.

Jenna sits her pastel pink bag on the charcoal black desk chair, still taking the environment in. The silence hugs her coldly and she shivers.

She checks her phone for any notifications but finds no messages, let alone any from her mother. Not even a "did you get there safe?" For someone who forced her to enroll, Jenna feels like her mother should at least send a word of encouragement.

She hasn't met her roommate yet and she's grateful for that as she isn't ready to meet someone new. She throws herself on the closest bed and shuts her eyes.

Usually, an occasion like this will elevate someone's mood. Make them joyful. Make them hopeful for their new chapter in life.

Jenna feels sour. Sour and bitter.

Cheers to a wasteful four years.

Comet Celeste (she/her) is a novella writer from Puerto Rico who is currently living in New York. She is working on five writing main projects currently. She is honored to be chosen as a staff writer for Fulminare Review! You can find her current WIPs and characters on Instagram: @comets.tales!

Product

James is in the eighth grade.
doesn't have enough money
to support his diet, not a vegan
out of fear of starving in his
own home, has never known

the monotony of assembly line,
but he pictures his public school's,
when he first imagined farming
he dreamed of straw hats,

pitch forks, cows and barns,
a fairy tale. he didn't know
about the mounds of metal
and synthetic material used
to create what he eats.

he is slave to this. systematically
inclined to break the way buildings
collapsed shopping centers and the
freeway under passages swelled
with tents. do you know where
he lives now? I can't tell you

either. I do dream though-
of him when opening my refrigerator.
when shaking the dust from my pantry.
when I snap open a beverage
quiet as a church mouse
clicking a screen hoping
the dial up doesn't wake
the family. my stomach
is an aol log in I made into
a joke. my stomach drowns
in a sea of exploited farmers

markets I can't afford and for
a moment I'm allowed to believe
I am not alone in this fairytale I
gave a different name. I treat
spilled milk the way I treat spilled

blood. I soak it up. there's too
many stolen paper towels from
bathrooms for me to not have too.
what am I but a customer. what
am I if not building walls of sugar.
if I must taste the wax of pesticides
glossing the apple I'm told to be thankful
for not paying in limbs, a pig's

cuticle, a bed of rice that only
leaves the knees raw when searching
for what I know is not there or arriving,
how do I know self-preservation is real
effort on my part. what is a product
of environment if not in jeopardy

Joshua Merchant is a Black Queer native of East Oakland exploring what it means to be human as an intersectional being. A lot of what they've been exploring as of late has been in the realm of loving and learning what that means while processing trauma, loss, and heartbreak. They feel as though it has become too common to deny access to our true source of power as a means of feeling powerful, especially for those of us more marginalized than others - a collective trauma response if you will. However, they've come to recognize with harsh lessons and divine grace that without showing up for ourselves and each other, everything else is null and void. Innately, everything Merchant writes is a love letter to the unapologetically Black and unabashedly Queer. Because of this they've had the honor to witness their work being held and understood in literary journals such as 58oSplit, Roi Fiancant Press, Snow Flake Magazine, Corporeal, Anvil Tongue, Verum Literary Press, Ice Floe Press, Mongoose and elsewhere. They've recently received the 2023 San Francisco Foundation/Nomadic Press Literary Award for poetry.

Sour Flesh

She bit into the skin of a lemon—
juice stinging her chin as she chewed
slowly, methodically, on the rind

They thrust taunts at her child frame:
“No boy wants to kiss lemon juice!
be normal and eat a peach.”

She then bit into the guts of a lime—
fluids staining her white-lace shirt,
seeds clinging to her virgin-cherry tongue

They sneered at her wet-cloth flat-chest:
“No boy will love a lime-faced girl!
be soft and eat strawberries.”

She left the lunch table without napkins
before teachers rushed to her aid,
lost in the spring field of sticky fingers

Spending recess in an alcove
with a girl with raspberry gums
grapefruit flesh forming her smile

Jessica King (she/her) is an aspiring self-taught writer currently enrolled at Long Beach State University. She's pursuing formal training in a dual-bachelor program in creative writing and comparative world literature before moving on to graduate school and a teaching career in postsecondary education. She strives to use her pen and voice for literary contribution, artistic expression, and social justice.

The Chosen Purpling Fig

*It is a glee winter morning and-
 I could never write a novel if I tried
 My self based character chose another timeline in Platonic realms
 It's been 21,000 moons, it feels like aeons
 My mother was born in that year and my existence was
 Already defined in her womb*

It is the 21st Century — all seems so easy and one's fingers
 Don't need to be strong enough — I keep mine, though — to type
 Someone a letter or write poems along the dawn of the following days
 All seems so easy and poetry is dead, the muse is dead
 I could have my existence cancelled
 In the surface and I've never earned
 My name as a writer

It is a glee winter morning and I survived another year
 The future I lost scripted Violet petals around the fig tree
 And I can't make up my mind and so many reveries and-

*I like to think Persephone ended up falling in love with Hades
 Now she's back with him and the spring that went too hot
 Is over*

It is a glee winter morning and I'm writing sex and sadism in fragments
 I'm ricocheting in between the extremes
 Of every emotion
 I'm anaesthetising constructive action

The feeling of disgust when watching people so unconscious
 So aloof happiness bubbles in an invisible prison
 I sometimes seek an atmosphere of pain to remember me of my humanity
I would have eaten far more than six pomegranate seeds

confessions I would tell you with my eyes closed

I wanted to tell you a story without having to put it into words.
I have seen you in a dream
In a room full of mirrors, a million versions of you
you, you, you
Like a prayer which I cannot help but whisper with trembling lips

and now every time you're inside me I reach for more

I have told you my truths in the middle of the winter evening
Your back facing my chest because I'm always scared
Defense mode
Like a small animal, please handle with care

I see the face of everything I had never yet felt
Every fragment of every poem looking blurred
Dissolving
Within me, heavy, heavy breath

I could never go near a blade but I have cut my chest open for you
Arteries exposed for you
Your name in my mouth like honey
The perfect boy

The only body who has ever touched with lust my first bed
You have torn apart all my seven walls
and I have had enough deaths in this lifetime
so, come in
my beautiful, beautiful accident.

—

Lavinia is a 25 year-old poet, translator and teacher. With a Bachelor's degree in English/Portuguese, her Academic research focused on poetry written by women, which later allowed her to be offered a scholarship in Comparative Literature.

a harvest of body is still a fruit unripened

i dig my fingernails into two halves of a clementine and
yours down my throat. bottom lip bloated, upper overlined.
smears of sweet tongue— but you held up a bandaged hand,
mouth thirsting for nectar against a set of teeth from fruit rinds
—and i wake up the next day with a face littered with scars.
paint chipping from my nightstand, a ghost of a bled note,
trinkets of citrus seeds in ash trays, shrines of unlit cigars
down the hotel bathroom sink & the last of liquid antidotes
turn neon teal. morning light hits the glass of orange juice
on the glass table and i pour it back into the paper carton
but i can't do the same to last night. your fingertips as fuse,
the west europe smoke: from a bitter throat i come undone.
the city forces itself into the muffled room like a gray muskrat,
what you stole last night—and every night i can't take back.

Woman Poetry

*when there was an extra petal on the grapefruit
when the grapefruit lost a petal*

The Woman stands-

*we are just self-proclaimed poets
who would vouch for us? The Lyra strings are all broken
and the language disassembled in pieces we can no longer afford to put
together*

the entries for the noun man
called Poetry of Women the
feminine noun **poetry** as it is exquisitely written
in metaphorical aura by Women Poetry
in the last century, the past that
forces itself unto me in the *present* I didn't ask for,
while slips away this strange quill that one day defined
Poetry of Women the Woman Poetry

I shall go on penalising ink, blood
or semen in the dawn, from some object of study still lying down from last
night. I will be a Woman, Woman Poetry evermore
in every molecule on the dimension of everything, landscape
in sight

and perspective vision

-- the sleeping pill is taking
over

*the brave quintessential Women Poetry wrote
in the mirror, in red rouge à lèvres
irradiated to the Moon who desired the feet of a Muse
and the flag of a Venus
Sappho's Fragments
and Beatrice's white robe got dirty, naked
She carried on, the ninth circle fell to the Limbo nobody
laughed,
the Comedy was never defined*

the grapefruit juiced and died

Adora Williams has degrees in Journalism and Languages and writes poetry in Portuguese and English. In the year of 2022, she had 33 poems and her chapbook, 'What if the Quest is Greek;' accepted for publication. She lives in Brazil and there, she co-runs the literary magazine "A Linha do Trópico", with an international version, "Tropico Line".

Part 3:

RIPE/OVERRIPE

define

1. (of food, cheese, etc.) past the usual stage of being ready to eat or use
2. overused, spoilt
3. state of high sentimentality, how far we've come and how far left to go

/ , ə ʊ v ə ' r ɪ p /

LORI D'ANGELO, PAULINA GONZALEZ,
VENUS FUNG, SARA JENKO, SOFIA IACOLARE,
INGRID TANG, OKAFOR MICHAEL

An elegy for my hair

I curled you around small, winter-dried fingers
And my two-year old yanked at you.
If I didn't look closely enough, it
was something he could grab onto,
long and flowing like ropes of licorice:
No, Mommy, no.
I grew you out of love, I grew you out of grief.
I grew you out of a desire
to stay young, to be young.
And then I cut you, like I had
before I turned 21.
Before I knew of marriage, pregnancies.
and babies. Loves found and loves lost.
I wore you short to a cousin's wedding
The picture of that day
a reminder of a style gone wrong.
I referred to it insensitively
as the hair a survivor of an illness
would wear. Not something one would
do voluntarily. Yet, here I am again,
I cut you, almost down to the roots,
And we will start, again.

Lori D'Angelo is a grant recipient from the Elizabeth George Foundation, a fellow at the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts, and an alumna of the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley. Recent work has appeared in *Black Moon Magazine*, *Bright Flash Literary Magazine*, *JAKE*, *Men Matters Magazine*, *One Art Poetry Journal*, *Suburban Witchcraft*, and *Worm Moon Archive*.

the longing never dies

Nothing, not a single entity, can truly last forever. I know that for a fact. To pretend otherwise would be a foolish, grave mistake. Even so, I must have strayed from the path somewhere along the way. I must have blinded myself by my own infatuation and crazed fantasies. It is only now, when the damage has been done and a million tears have been shed, that I can see how gravely mistaken I'd been to think that what we had was something real.

I shake my head as I wrap my coat tighter around myself, still trying to make sense of whatever nonsensical reason made me revisit this very spot. The place I held her last. The flashes of what once was ours come to me in strepitous waves of remembrance. The meteoric strike hits unexpectedly and leaves a trail of ice that paralyzes me. It renders me defenseless as all words she once whispered to me turn into crystal-sharp weapons. Right here, on this very spot where I'm standing, she'd once taken my hand into hers, and in between deep breaths, we'd promised each other that we would be together for all infinity.

It's such a funny thing, to look back at all those moments after knowing how it would all end.

I was aware of how hopeless the whole affair was, but still, all summer I dreamt of her. She remained the constant I always went back to. I kept all those stolen glances and lingering hugs in a safe pocket of my mind, lest it all fade away. I guarded them as a dragon would its sacred gold, and all to find she never did the same for me.

To me, she was otherworldly. To her, I was unremarkable.

It tears me apart to think how long it's been since I saw her last, but it hurts more to know that through all our separation, she has not thought of me once. She has moved on and recovered. Now, I don't take up even the most minuscule space in her mind.

But me? I remain rooted in that same spot where she left me. I can't let it go. I wonder if those feelings are what brought me here tonight. The undying spirit of what once was fiery passion. Though our devotion has wilted into nothing, the acrid aftertaste still lingers, ever-present, eternally tormenting.

I cannot seem to stop returning to those warmer days that now seem long gone. It's as though I'm incapable of taking a step forward. Now that all former affection has turned into frigidness, I find myself frozen to those moments in time when we would claim to stare at the stars, but in reality, we'd just been lost in each other's gazes.

Then, I did not care about the cosmos above. Not when I had such divinity beside me.

Oh, how times have changed. Her blue eyes that I once thought able to see through my deepest desires now can't recall the brown of mine that would have held her for eternity.

And after all the flowers we picked together dried up, I find myself left with nothing but the memory of her touch and inevitably shatter into a million little shards. Should I have said more? Done more? Would she have opened up then? It is in this haunting hour, when the dead of the night freezes everything it touches, that she begins invading my thoughts. It is in this bewitching hour that all the space she put between us seems uncrossable. An endless void of obscurity I can't escape. I am doomed to wander there, all alone and in the dark, calling out to her, but only getting in response the echoes of my own desperate pleas, for she is not here. She is not experiencing this misery. She resurfaced without looking back, thus leaving me to fend for myself amidst this calamity.

When I lift my head up to the stars, this time around, there is no one with me to single out the constellations. My only company now are dried trees and nefarious gusts of wind. My mind recalls, for one last time, instances when the breeze was warmer, and I'd picked a daisy to tuck behind her ear. How bittersweet this resolution came to be. This dwindling, ephemeral dream I'd conjured up had seemed so real to me. I would have run to her in hopes that she'd greet me with open arms, but the inevitable truth still punctured knife-deep: I'd dreamt too much over a person who cared too little. In the bleakness of the snowstorm, I can make sense of how wrong I'd been, and muse over the possibility that my longing for her may be the one remnant left of us never to die.

Paulina González (she/they) is a teenage writer from Mexico. She has always been passionate about fictional stories, even from a young age. Whether it be writing them or reading them, she is a fan of all things creative. She is currently writing a novel that she hopes to publish someday. You can find her on Instagram @paulina_the_writer.

Tangerines

in season.

Taking turns peeling
skins to rind, to the flesh and bone.

A hearth of fruit, flush of gold;
the reunion.

With mother's white orchid and father's
faith-forgotten disposition,
the glaze of rich yearning and
your wishes for snow.

I promise to remember
and I do

as I split another tangerine with you.

Venus Fung is a sixteen-year-old appreciator of literary art based in Hong Kong. Complex literature, well-written lyrical masterpieces and deep conversations make up the bulk of her personality; under her pen, anything could be her muse. She believes that there is a meaning to all that exists if it is read and looked at enough times. Writing is her preferred medium of conversation with herself, and with those who appreciate the arts within life the way she does. She hopes to inspire, but even more so she hopes to simply be there and support those who are struggling through her own words.

Oranges

Mother, oh mother!

I am sorry for making a mess
 I peel my oranges the way father taught me,
 I push my fingernails into their thick skin
 that bursts open with a splash

Then pull apart a piece
 after piece
 Carefully,
 pick off every white string

Oh, Mother!
 you know how I hate
 when the pulps go dry
 and their zesty scent grows foul

I know your way is more efficient,
 You break in halves
 and squeeze them out

Mother, oh mother!
 Do you see my father in me when I rage?
 Do you see him when I dismember your fruits?

Mother, oh mother!
 Swallow me whole,
 like an orange unpeeled

—

Sara is a passionate reader, a poet and fiction writer. An adoring fan of anything old-fashioned, from fashion to music to literature. A lover of the occult who is attracted to anything peculiar and not afraid of controversy. When she grows up she hopes to become Jo March.

tangerine

yesterday i peeled a tangerine and forgot it on the counter.
the kitchen was filled with its scent and i felt like dancing.
i didn't turn on the stereo. i moved my body in the dark
as if it was a branch in the wind. a fruit being passed
from hand to hand. a leaf. as if it was a season. i cried
for sixteen reasons. the tangerine sat there skinless
ill-equipped to deal with life but ready to do its best.
the night was quiet. i was quiet too and happy and a bit
broken. all of a sudden i thought of you. the thought
turned my heart into a tangerine. bumpy. brightly coloured.
easily squeezable. you were the seventeenth reason
you with your seventeen years of misfortune. i fell asleep.
today i woke up and ate the peeled tangerine. i swallowed
my heart slice by slice. it was sour and sweet with just
a hint of bitterness. today is a new day and i still love you
and i still feel like dancing and i'm still trying my best.

Sofia Iacolare is a student and writer. She wrote her first poem at seven and, despite everything, she never stopped looking for beauty in the world. She's eighteen years old and lives in Florence, Italy. Her work has been accepted in several publications, including a Sunday Mornings at the River anthology.

Our Citrus Garden

Today, a random stranger handed me a citrus and
I peeled it in front of you. My heart belonged to another and now
I offer it to you, whole and unscathed,
because how else would you know I love you with every fibre of my being?
You decline with a smile, saying you don't like it
when the scent lingers on your hands.
I hold it close to my heart, cradle it in my palms;
I will always let you ruin me with your kindest words
and gentlest acts.

People love the generous girl who falls too hard and loves too much,
so I dig my fingers into the zest
ferociously, prying underneath the surface for a glimpse of you.
Every time I separate each segment
gently, I offer you piece after piece.
If it's not too much to ask,
I want your secrets in return for my heart.

All my love is within this citrus and
the juice is dripping. I had a thousand of them but
you robbed me of my riches by hanging me dry.
Time may be slipping away from us but come
as I take you to our secret garden.
When this cold, hard winter is over, it will be a deserted land no more,
for I have planted discarded seeds to bloom
in the season of rebirth – you would've grown to love citrus then.

Ingrid can be found consuming books when she isn't busy overthinking about the future or listening to Taylor Swift. She writes to voice her unspoken words and to reveal her untold stories. You can find them on Instagram as @mycherrylime!

ANEMOIA

i moulded myself into a confetti of secrets
the first time i watched someone die
i held your name on my tongue like a secret

where i come from, a girl is killed
for searching for a home in other girls

it was Winter, and
i traced my hand
along fractured
 mem ories
of what your lips would taste like
my fingers mapping out secrets
on your skin
to dissect the geometry of God

heaven is the softness of colliding
bodies between
fatigued sheets

i imagined you liked to
dissolve parts of you into lost girls—
a communion of burning bodies

I die a little to stay alive.

in my hostel, a girl cut off her
head to build a burning house
and we danced around in circles
imitating the motion of

fading

bodies

Okafor Michael is a nocturnal empath whose life revolves around writing, mysticism, rain, and music. He is currently an undergraduate student of the department of Medical Radiography at the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus. His works explore diverse themes and have appeared or are forthcoming in Writers Space Africa, The Borderline Review, Shuzia Magazine, Riverbed Review and elsewhere. He writes from Enugu, Nigeria. You can connect with him on Instagram @okaformichaelo8o8.

Do this in memory of me...

Part 4:

OVERRIPE/ROTTING

define

1. *decaying as a result of bacterial or fungal action*
2. *the approach of an inevitable ending*

/ 'rɒtɪŋ /

JENNA NESKY, MICHAELLA ERICA, CIN QUE,
EDEN LOVELL, AUGUST BLAINE CENTAURI

Before Dawn

A girl rode toward me
on a white horse. She said,

*My horse lifts its silver horseshoe and
look— here's the moon. Look—*

*it's night. She said, I tie my hair
gold as citrus in this blue ribbon*

*and look— the shadows change, and night
into day. She held out*

her hand and said, *Come with me
into magic.* She said,

*Come, and in this life,
fall in love*

*with everyone, go everywhere
so in the next life,*

*no matter where you go
you are returning.*

The horse reared, and its
hooves were bare, moonless.

The girl's hair had white roots,
clouds over the sun.

I knew if I went
into magic, into metaphor

I would have nothing
in this world.

But how lovely
it would be, to have no body

but the shadow where two things
meet.

For a Friend

But that road over there near the bridge. It's distracting me to shut my grief and guilt. That frost night of the road – where you were found breathless and pale from the wheels' force, came back in my dreams. It was a horrible dream. What can you do for me?

Come and follow me.

I can't count how many days passed she's been so considerate to me, but this makes me much more comfortable when she's around me all day in my bedroom. So, I follow her throughout my home till we get to the frosted village.

Now, do these bright memories spark you?

I remember this. The smell, the lights, the noise, the colors, the sky.

The people who come through the shops with their baskets of empty or full treats. The families gather across the cafes, the market, the park, or the iced-glazed floor where skaters perform. The steamed air of hot cinnamon rolls, brewed coffee, and roast ham flows throughout the baker's door or the wives' windows.

The sound of flakiness from wreaths, burnt logs, and freshly baked pastries. And the sizzle of orange marinated chicken, fried slices of bacon, and bubbles of wine and whiskey.

The lyrical hymn and groovy jazz that plays on the road – it can't be denied how warming it is once the song holds my heart and ears.

The hues of red from ribbons, ornaments, and gift wraps.

Gold from boxes of chocolate and bulbs.

White from soft-peak frostings and snowmen

Blue from coffee mugs, woven sweaters, and the evening sky.

Silver from bells, pots, and necklaces – they are giving this village a life in this quiet winter.

Do you remember what we did in this village?

We bought blood oranges and apples for punch, butter for cake, doughs for raspberry pies and strawberry tarts, limes for juice and candies, gingers and spices for our ginger people and houses, herbs for cream soup and stew, yarns and threads for socks and scarfs, wrappers to wrap presents, green garlands and fake poinsettia for decorations, and a free box of chocolate chip cookies – because we were hungry that time. We gave it to your mother, and I'm so glad she invited me and my grandmother to your house to celebrate the party.

Let's go back to your home. And write those for me.

I'm here beside you like an angel would do, though, I don't like people calling you crazy when you're talking about me. They thought I was just made up in your head since they know you write characters.

I went back to my room, get the pen and paper from my bed, and write all the details we perceived earlier. As I'm delivering the imagery into the pages, I may have now accepted the symbolism of winter as the end of life. The way to win this grief battle I endure for so many months is to utilize those good memories in a written piece. This written piece is a big remembrance of her, and I don't want to let my false euphoria waste my opportunity to move forward. I am healing continuously in little steps, but still, it's good to know I am unstuck from this grief battle.

*Hey, there's something else I would like to show you.
Do you mind if we take another trip through the streets?*

No, I don't mind. We have to go there; we don't want to miss the children's carol and the big pine tree.

Michaella Erica is a Filipino writer, a multimedia arts student, and the author of *BEDLAM* (Ukiyoto Publishing). When she's not writing, she's interested in illustrating, reading, and watching Art videos. You can find her on Twitter @ella.blajadia.

A citrus note

It's raining tangerines
and I'm trying to find meaning
In the citrus notes staining my skin;
This vessel that we call a body
Is like an umbrella for the ingrained pain
When the liminal spaces between root and fruit bursts with sour trauma,
I wish to always be strong enough to
Refuse to lose my mind to my body
But I know I can't get it right every time;
The precarity of a raw identity
Brings a hail that can scrape fingertips,
I wish to standby the weakness in my strength
How else do you move on?
So on this fine evening,
Take note, leave the fruit
Uneaten on the ground,
Let it gather by the ankles,
And hold onto the impalpable cast
of the newly fragrant sky.

Cin Que (pen name) is a culturally-ambiguous writer and artist ('Kamaeri') emerging from Melbourne, Australia. She creates with various mediums to reflect and delve into the depths of human identity and societal frameworks. Twitter: @leftoverrain, IG: @kamaeri_

in a dorm room Somewhere

my hands are sticky / so is my heart / i know i cannot live / the way i have loved / everything will
be okay

poetry hours are fading into the Night / i cant decide if baring my soul to the world / is
exhausting / or exhilarating

both / probably

everything and nothing / and there is always room for more

there is not enough life / enough time / to stargaze / but i will remember star-glancing / and
place it next to happiness
on a scale of 1 to 10

—

Eden (she/they) is an artist who dabbles in all things but always returns to poetry. Whenever she is not angry at the world, she writes about how much she loves it. They liked to be perceived as very mysterious, but regularly overshare on their Instagram, @edenlovell

Magic

Mom, who never let me believe in Santa Claus or the Easter Bunny or Tooth Fairy, always hated it when grandma told me her stories of pixies, who laid gem-like eggs within the nutritious womb of luscious fruits. Sometimes these fruits would fall or be picked early by lucky farmers who would be rewarded with pixie wishes for the safe return of their younglings. I would beg grandma for all the tales she had. Even after I could repeat them word for word with her, I continued to ask. Grandma had a lovely, singsong voice that always made the stories feel like magic. Eventually, mom won out, and all I got from grandma were sad, understanding looks and pats on the head.

The magic of the stories always lived on in my heart. No matter what mom did, she couldn't erase the memories. When grandma died, mom frowned with razor-thin lips but didn't stop me when I dropped a couple of tiny kumquats over her coffin with the symbolic handful of dirt. Kumquats were always our favorite. Grandma, unable to handle too much sweet, liked their tart burst of juice. I liked that they seemed like the perfect size for hiding pixie eggs.

Mom never took to kumquats. Once when I was four, I actually convinced her to try one. Her face immediately squelched together, all her facial features drawn together towards the center of her face. A full body shiver overtook her before she managed to spit the fruit out on the ground. She left it there, storming away to a bath and a bottle of wine (her fruit of choice). I laughed so hard I cried. Though I always remember her as full of joy, grandma never really smiled much. I don't know if it was the antics of her daughter or her granddaughter, but the ghost of a smile played at her mouth even as she chided me. I got a three-day long silent treatment from mom for my troubles.

After grandma died, I kept buying kumquats. Their magic could never die for me, even when they tasted of ash on my tongue. It took me nearly a year before I could eat them again. Many of my friends felt the same about kumquats as my mom did. So, I cut all my kumquats in half, checking them over for hidden gems, and made desserts. Candied kumquats and kumquat cake, tart, panna cotta, panettone, and sorbet. My friends laughed and teased at every new dessert I brought, but my kumquats didn't go to waste.

At thirty-two, I got a positive pregnancy test. I was elated. A little one I could share the wonders of the world with. A precious bundle I could create magic with, passing down grandmama's stories to and creating our own new traditions together. I would nurture her spirit and curiosity. It seemed like fate when I couldn't stop eating kumquats as she grew within me. Not even morning sickness dulled the cravings for the tiny citrus. The pop of the firm peel between my teeth and the immediate tang of sourness was like a meditation. I'd suck the seed clean between my teeth, feeling out if it might possibly actually be an egg, before spitting it out and looking it over. I could sit for hours savoring the little fruits. It felt like a sign to come.

Then my ambitious, no nonsense child came into the world with her own ideas and dreams, and I was forced to adapt. We played doctor and lawyer and house. Precocious Macy always wanted to play pretend at being adult. "That's silly, mommy," she'd roll her eyes at me when I tried to teach her the magic of kumquats. She would eat them, but only if I asked. Her stern face would pucker for the briefest of moments before she swallowed and asked if she could be done. I'd sigh and kiss her on the forehead and release her to her whims. Usually, she went to go lecture her stuffed animals or make some kind of hand drawn chart to convince me to allow her something she wanted. The presentation she gave on why I should never make her eat broccoli again, in which she argued that carrots were just fine and would do instead, was a particular masterpiece.

Mom always refused to visit grandmama with us, citing cold weather no matter the season. Macy made annual trips with me until she was sixteen and apologetically admitted that she couldn't miss someone she'd never even met. There were no magic in the stories I told Macy. Grandmama had the singsong voice - not me. To her, they were just words, untouched by the sentimentality of memory. I held it together until I stood alone at grandmama's grave, where I promptly collapsed into loud and ugly sobs. The family a row over stared before a girl of about ten finally wandered over and kindly pat my shoulder, gave me a cursory hug, and told me "I'm sorry for your sadness." Then her father snapped her name, and she scurried off. By the time I wandered home, it was with dry eyes and a falsely cheery smile.

Macy got pregnant with her first at twenty-two years old. It shocked me to see her accepting something in her life that wasn't according to her grand plan, but she did, and I recovered and properly congratulated her. She powered through graduate school, barely acknowledging the pregnancy. I worried for her and her little one, but Macy took her prenatal vitamins and showed up to appointments religiously. Fortunately, the soon to be babe was kind enough to wait for Macy to finish her final exams.

Baby Dalton graced the world with his presence during the early morning hours on the twelfth of December. Macy couldn't stop whispering, "he's beautiful" as she rocked him, love shining through her eyes. I couldn't have agreed more. After Dalton came Lucy, three years younger, and then Bennett two more years later. Dalton was a reserved child, always fussing over his siblings. Lucy was bold and brash and loud and constantly clashed with her mother, even as a toddler. Bennett was goofy and clever and innovative.

All three children were rapt believers in magic. A look that had a little too much of my mom in it would cross Macy's face whenever I wove tales of magic and fairies for my grandbabies. Then the look would fade, replaced with a look of patient, adoring love that a good parent has for their children, seeing them become their own little people. The older I got, the more of a song-like lilt my voice took on. I could finally speak magic into existence just like my grandmama.

We ate kumquats during my stories. Without fail, Bennett would chew with his mouth open, smacking his lips and fanning his mouth with his hands after a particularly tart bite. Half the time, he swallowed the seed, much to Dalton's consternation. Lucy closely inspected every kumquat before she ate it, often discarding the same kumquat over and over again before finally sticking it into her mouth. Delighted laughter always followed when she found the rare sweeter kumquat. I'm not sure if Dalton even liked kumquats. He ate them cautiously and expertly extracted the seed, spending at least a minute carefully peering over to make sure he never missed a potential pixie egg.

The second day of Lucy's first year of school, I got the call that mom died. After I called Macy, I drove straight to the cemetery to visit grandmama. I didn't know what to say; I just needed the company. During the burial, picturing mom's expression in my mind, I dropped only dirt over her coffin. The kids were extra cheerful at dinner that night, which was a nice distraction from my sadness, confliction, and guilt. After they went to bed, them and Macy staying with me for a few days, I was left only with my thoughts. I sat on my couch in the dark, listening to the quiet sounds of night.

The startling sound of my stomach rumbling jolted me out of my ruminations. I slowly ate kumquats like Lucy, picking them up and putting them down several times before I could bring any to my mouth. Tonight, they tasted of nostalgia and regret. Nothing else sounded any better, so I continued rolling them around my fingers and occasionally eating them. I built a tiny pile of seeds on the corner table. Until I hit a seed that didn't feel quite right. It was smooth and sharp and curious enough that I reached over to flick on the lamp.

The "seed" sparkled faintly in the light. Every angle appeared to flash a different color: white, red, blue, green, orange. I gasped and nearly dropped the gem-like egg. It wasn't until drops of water splashed onto the precious prize that I realized I was crying. The egg was absolutely stunning. Holding it was breathtaking. I was overcome with a deeply maternal urge to protect the little one.

Light was just cresting over the horizon when faint tinkling caught my attention. I immediately knew what it signaled. The tiny fae creature, about the height of my ring finger, was fairly humanoid. Sparkling dust dropped in her wake. Translucent wings flapped as fast as a hummingbird's. I wondered if one of the kids might be able to hear the hum they must have produced. She hovered near my hands, where her egg lay cradled. Gently, I offered my palm out to her and held my breath. She landed on my palm, wings tucking down alongside her body. Her footsteps were only marked by the faintest tickling sensation.

She scooped the egg up, smothered it with kisses, and wrapped it in a hug. Wings popped back out and she hovered over my hand. Quirking her head to the side, she stared at me, egg secure in her embrace. “Thank you,” I whisper as quietly as I can manage. “This is all I could have wished for.” The pixie hovers for a moment more, then dashes upwards and does a few twists and turns, sprinkling fairy dust all over me. Some more faint tinkling signals her exit as she disappears from view right before my eyes.

Scuffling noises in the house alert me to Macy waking up. Still in awe and some amount of shock, my legs move on autopilot. I start Macy’s coffee and take out butter and jam for some toast. Then I wait at the kitchen table, right hand resting over my heart, bursting with hope. “Are you okay, mom?” Macy asks, confused at catching me up so early.

I smile at her, tears in the corners of my eyes. “I’m going to be just fine, kid.”

August Blaine Centauri is a trickster in a human’s body who has been spinning yarns since around three years old. Thon is a proud weirdo. In thon spare time from working or writing, Blaine practices piano, lifts weights, and spars in Muay Thai.

Part 5:

ROTTING/ROT

define

1. becoming softer or weakening from decomposition, disintegration, degeneration
2. becoming gradually destroyed, come undone, fall apart, or break away
3. an expression of disgust, contempt or annoyance
4. to become weak, debilitated, or depressed through inertia, confinement, etc.
5. squeeze, see all that is left. where do we go from here?

/ r o t /

CASSIE MCDANIEL, JEROME BERGLUND,
JESSICA KING, ALEXANDRA HECHIMI,
KAYLA MAY BROWNE, LESLIE CAIRNS,
SANJANA RAJAGOPAL

The Last of the Tangerines

The air gets thicker, warmer. Cold only in the morning before light
our daughter a spider in bed with us, elbows, knees demanding
I pull knots from her webbed hair the way I tug tangerines
from sun-topped trees. She puts her arm over my chest,
snores. The cold that makes fruit sweet upon my eyes
before I close them. Tomorrow I will pick the fruit
make jam, give jars to neighbors, see them dance.
Today I track across dried oak leaves, hurrying
like broken glass. I rush to claim what's mine,
what earth extended, I extend. I reach beyond
cracked heels lifting of the dirt, fingers loosing
skin upon branches; is it mine or hers? We tangle.
I tear teeth into the peel, sour puck dribbling down
my chin. I am alone, spitting seeds back to earth from
which they came. It is the season for it, the ground steams
accepts it all. The fruit is sweeter at the top of the tree; we melt
into peppered sand, shadowed by the harsh and darting citrine sun.

Cassie McDaniel has published poetry and fiction in *Capsule Stories*, *Human Parts*, *Split Quarterly* and elsewhere. She lived in England and Canada for over a decade before moving back home to Orlando where she works as a Design Director, grows fruit trees, and is writing her first poetry collection, *Letters to Dead People*. Find her online at www.cassiemcdaniel.com and @cassiebegins.

Passion Fruits

sparkling brüt
in long-stemmed plastic
trailing scraps of gold foil
wire cage lifted, loosened cork
unpaid jobs

when never
get harvested
come to realize
vegetables being grown ornamentally
purely for decoration

at least put in a little effort,
dress up once in awhile
wear something nice
spritz of eau de toilette —
caffeinated water

mumbled dispersal order
telephoned from afar
too late, only avenue remaining
into their hands
mulligan stew

desire path
through the grass
slow drip from spigot
rooted things immobile
stretching, leaning

—
Jerome Berglund, recently nominated for the Touchstone awards and Pushcart Prize, graduated from the University of Southern California's Cinema-Television Production program and spent a picaresque decade in the entertainment industry before returning to the midwest where he was born and raised. Since then he has worked as everything from dishwasher to paralegal, night watchman to assembler of heart valves. Jerome has many haiku, senryu and tanka exhibited and forthcoming online and in print, most recently in the Asahi Shimbun, Bear Creek Haiku, Bamboo Hut, Cold Moon Journal, Daily Haiga, Failed Haiku, Haiku Dialogue, Haiku Seed, Poetry Pea, Scarlet Dragonfly, Triya, Under the Basho, Wales Haiku Journal, and the Zen Space.

Sweet and Sour

[Lust]

Kiwis, mangoes, strawberries—
flesh bleeding gently on my tongue

Advertised on television as a fairytale:
lust so sweet and tender, dripping
down my chin like seduction

Portrayed as the burial grounds
for my teeth to fall, soft skin
soft earth for my greeting

[Love]

Oranges, lemons, and limes—
bodily armor scorning my tongue

Rolling over the edge, splitting
open, guts and all, down my body
like sinful confessions

I love citrus fruits because they demand
consent in scrunched and groans
before being undressed

Jessica King (she/her) is an aspiring self-taught writer currently enrolled at Long Beach State University. She's pursuing formal training in a dual-bachelor program in creative writing and comparative world literature before moving on to graduate school and a teaching career in postsecondary education. She strives to use her pen and voice for literary contribution, artistic expression, and social justice.

grapefruit entrails

i strain pulp between my teeth, gnaw on rinds and swallow and let rose
liquid pool at my chin, fall and filter through my veins, swarm lacerated lips,
writhe down my throat,

fifty-two follows me, *half of half of half* i swear and it burns and burns, acrid bile
rising fast as i heave and take another bite, i watch the clock, six to fill myself with blush pink
blood and eighteen to wait

i taste it still hours later, seeds saturating my mouth, slink into me, i forget warm
cherry flesh, forget and bite down, smear sweetness and perform, gnaw at my cheeks
until they rust and smile and look away, press my palms against the frozen counter,
enough,

enough, i must digest, digest until skin erodes and hair falls out, digest until nails
break and eyes go black, digest until twenty- two inches and ninety pounds,

digest until i can hold my wrist and touch bone

i gorge myself on grapefruit entrails every night, gooseberry guts soaking into my
gums and the metallic tang of guilt rotting my teeth, it could be worse, it could always be
worse, nothing counts after

eight, she says, and i start again

Alexandra Saida Hechimi (she/her) is a trilingual high-school senior who strongly believes in the healing power of creation (and sugary coffee). She loves iced macchiatos, writing at midnight, and listening to music. If she isn't painting or singing, you can find her composing speeches for her Women's Rights Association or planning her next Halloween costume eleven months in advance. Her work is published or forthcoming in Moonflake Press, Sage Cigarettes Magazine, and Heart Balm Literary Magazine.

lemonade

1.

i kneel
by the lemon tree
i pray
for the sour taste
i lift
my pale face to you
i extend
my parched tongue

i raise the fruit
clawed in two withered talons

will you wrap your hands around
my shaking frail ones and squeeze

squeeze my dear
for one more drop
just one

2.

it thickens to tar as it slides
under the cracks in my baron
lips that you left to dry up when
you fled to the vineyards
craving a taste more sophisticated
than your childhood lemonade

the fruit thunks to the ground
black rotting covered
in brown leaves sticks branches

as the mother crumbles
all the sisters die

3.

i'm so cold in the summer air
the rays fade to shadow where
they disappear
into the black hole
that you left in my soul
when you fled to the vineyards

4.

squeeze my dear
for tonight is the revelry

you will dance across my corpse
sweeping the soil with your
feet as you spin and turn
until it covers my remnants
buries the memories
leaves you free to drink
to the night sky
where the stars burn out
like lemonade

Kayla May Browne (she/her) is a nineteen-year-old poet and novelist living in Perth, Western Australia, where she has been her whole life. She lives with her father and brother and attends the University of Western Australia, majoring in English and Literary Studies. She graduated from Duncraig Senior High School in 2020. She wrote her first novel, *Like a Cigarette*, in 2016, when she was in grade eight, and followed it up with two other novels to make the *Kara Van Whiete* trilogy, which she published on Amazon in 2021. For more information visit kaylamaybrowne.wordpress.com.

Citrus Adjacent

The way lemon residue leaves you curling your fists under blankets. The way winter shouldn't blend with citrus, but when you offer me tea with a swig & a sprig, *it does*. My therapist says that when we disassociate, it's the time to peel off the layers, slow down. I pretend to take off the wounded scarf, the boots, mittens wrapped with ivy from the date we never left. I still picture us parting, turning with our petticoats. Yours coral. Mine, devine & wrinkly. I turn the corner of my thumping, the neurons telling me that I am nothing, and I tell the therapist – lovely woman – that I am fine. I wish my past & my present went with the future. Instead, it comes out in hands turned orange and lime with a twist, and stochastic phrases of mother, *rabbit, mildew, haven*.

I take off the layers: lemon zest, squeeze for juice, rind, bruise, compost, bin, remains, seedlings, ghost, wavering–

She asks me what I mean, and I tell her again: *I'm rind. The part you spit out and wonder how it got there, in your sweetness–*

Would you love me if I was only hesperidium? I ask. She tilts her head, her own ginger red hair twirled delicately down; takes some words about my mystery, to read over when I'm not around. Or, perhaps, to savor for later. Secrets and lives and spirals of ivy about myself that I will never see, never know. Bills me for my session, but in tinges of berry notes, which makes me like her; how politely she asks me to give her tender–

She is whipped cream, cherry. I wonder what it's like to blossom first.

Wondering how to sprout. If I were only floats, if I come up and realize all around me is freckled air, a pear with frost, a handmade lime carved out from dust–

Saved for last, and only

For me.

Leslie Cairns (She/her): Leslie Cairns holds an MA degree in English Rhetoric. She lives in Denver, Colorado. She is a Pushcart Prize Nomination for 2022 in the Short Story category ('Owl, Lunar, Twig'). She was an honorable mention in Flash 405's call in Exposition Review (2022). Leslie has upcoming flash, short stories, and poetry in various magazines (Full Mood Magazine, Final Girl Zine, Londemere Lit, and others). Twitter: starbucksgirly

Presentism

A laugh that fills a room
like a star shooting across the marshlands;
light extricated from fog and dust
on a tender evening,

love that bears no name in the *now / now / now*.
Tell me,
when will *then* be *now*?

The tranquil petals
of an orange peeled
lay spread out on a desk—

like the hands of time
blossoming into
a wheel of fate /
emerald tears shed
just a little too late.

How precious each individual moment—
shall there be no rebellion against
this ceaseless succession of presents?

To this I can only say:
Passage always bears fruit.

Every fresh second
is a chance to start something wonderful—
every segment of a life
is filled to the brim—
is positively overflowing—with possibility.

Sanjana Rajagopal is a fifth year philosophy Ph.D. student at Fordham University in New York City. Her work has appeared in *The Quarantine Review*, *The Augment Review*, *Northern Otter Press*, *The Confessionalist Zine*, *Ayaskala Mag*, *L'Ephemere Review*, *Stone of Madness Press*, and more. You can find her on Twitter @SanjanaWrites, and on Instagram @astrangecharm. You can find more about her on her website as well.

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Sic itur ad astra.