

placeholder



issue #1 a lit mag  
poetry • prose • art

Placeholder Issue #1

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*Hello, dear.*

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## your 2020 horoscope, virgo

*Emma Levin*

### **January**

You will fall in love with a horoscope writer who is kind, sensitive, and although not conventionally attractive, relatively symmetrical. You will meet him in the Starbucks off Drummond Street between 1-2pm on Mondays, or 12.30-1pm on Tuesday to Friday.

He will wait.

### **February**

Your fledgling relationship with the horoscope writer might be questioned by your friends and family, but persevere. They are just jealous. And sceptical. You should buy the horoscope writer a large and expensive present to apologise. And a tie. Yes, he'd like a tie.

### **March**

As Saturn ascends on the 4th of the month, it's time to reconsider matters of the household. You should invite the horoscope writer to move in with you. Unless you're a terrible cook, in which case you should take up cookery lessons, and then invite him to move in with you.

### **April**

The horoscope writer will begin to become bored by your lack of independent thought. The very gullibility that brought you together will drive you apart. I mean, come on, think for yourself, woman! Have you no drive?

### **May**

A change of fortunes is on the horizon, as Mars descends into Venus. You will receive an opportunity for career advancement – a promotion, a change of industry, a new field. Ask yourself: do you really want to take advantage of this? Do you really want anything? Are you capable of making an autonomous decision for once in your life?

## **June**

Choices made in May will be paying dividends. You will be spotted by a talent scout for your twin star qualities: a decent voice, and malleability. To be honest, they are more interested in the fact you're docile than the fact you have a set of pipes. The horoscope writer will think this, but not say it to your face. Because he's one of the nice ones. He is.

## **July**

Your fledgling career soars. The horoscope writer meets your agent. He babbles about 'making you a star', and 'making you shine so bright you're gonna need to wear sunglasses in the shower'. He smells of cologne and despair. You laugh too loudly at his jokes.

## **August**

You will tell the horoscope writer that you should maybe take a break. He will get upset, of course. I mean, what's so great about you, anyway? You sing on a stage, bringing joy to the hearts of millions, and supporting the careers of hundreds of technical staff, sound engineers, and production crew. Right. Well. The horoscope writer can see the future, so screw you.

## **September**

Someone does screw you. It is not the horoscope writer. He knows. It is written in the stars. And in the text you send him.

## **October**

The horoscope writer will take to hanging around at your gigs. He will have to buy a ticket, which he finds galling, before sneaking backstage and searching for your dressing room. The security guards will normally find him. It won't be fair. He will just want to apologise, and get you back. It's like you say in that song that the producer said you had to sing: "you're a strong, powerful, independent woman". And that's attractive.

## **November**

After the horoscope writer manages to break into your trailer at Latitude, you will send your parents round to his flat to have a word. He will listen quietly, staring at the floor. Then, when he does raise his head, he will lock eyes with the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. She looks a bit like you, but hardened. The bits that were soft are pulled taut, and the bits that were taut are wrinkled.

## **December**

Your mother will fall in love with a horoscope writer who is kind, sensitive, and although not conventionally attractive, relatively symmetrical. She will meet him in the Starbucks off Drummond Street between 1-2pm on Mondays, or 12.30-1pm on Tuesday to Friday. He will wait.

## nostalgia ain't what it used to be

*Emma Levin*

There were five of us in the gang, but I suppose you know that already.

For those first few months, we were barely a gang. I mean, we didn't cause any trouble. We mainly watched TV. We'd make breakfast, stick on ITV4, make lunch, go back to ITV4, and then put in a quick shift of ITV4 before dinner.

My favourite show was called 'Three's a Crowd'. It was like a buddy cop show, but there were three of them. They ran a classic good cop, bad cop, moral relativist cop routine. The good cop would tell suspects that they'd go easy if they co-operate, the bad cop would tell them that things could get difficult in prison if they didn't, and the moral relativist cop would tell them that *habeas corpus* isn't an intrinsic right, but a socially-constructed element of Western society, and only one that was introduced relatively recently. It was a weirdly-paced show, in that every car chase was preceded by an argument over who would have to sit in the back.

We met the others about a year later.

Big Dave worked as a children's entertainer, twisting dogs into the shape of balloons. The other Daves had been park rangers, asking him to stop practicing outside as he was upsetting the adults. We met in the queue for the ice-cream van, and just clicked, you know? From that point, we still spent the mornings with the TV, but in the afternoon, we'd go for walks with the Daves.

We were in London at the time, so we'd meet at the Costa (the one next to the Starbucks next to the Pret) and do a loop round the houses. Past the police stations that got turned into 2 bed luxury flats, and nightclubs that got turned into 2 bed luxury flats, and 2 bed luxury flats... That got turned into 1 bed luxury flats.

So we'd go for these walks, down the streets that we used to recognise, wondering where all the shops had gone. Where all the people had gone. It was hard not to think that it used to be better in the past. I'm not talking just about the buildings. I mean - The music. The jobs. The fact that dead bees didn't litter the pavement like chewing gum. We missed the days when your phone wasn't covertly collecting data on you like a small, square spy. Collectively, we wished we could go back. And that was when the Daves had the brainwave. I f



we wanted to go back, so would other people. We knew then that we were onto something.

We just didn't realise what a big something it was.

\*

Our first step was to buy a B and B. We scoured the 'for sale' sections in the newspaper, and settled on a Victorian conversion down in Sussex. The man who sold it to us had a face like a sprocket. Round. Shiny. Teeth pointing in all directions. But he asked a fair price, and already had it listed as a B and B, so it suited us fine.

Our plan was to do the place up like it was the nineties. I say do the place up – most people would say that we did it down. We ripped out the broadband, the smart appliances, and the clean white bath suite. In went avocado enamel, dial up, and a magnolia feature wall. We bought TVs with VHS players, and kept the radios tuned to a 90s station. Guests could relax to Blur, Oasis, and Pulp while exploring minifridges filled with monster munch, kinder eggs, and alcopops every colour of the rainbow.

Deep down, we thought it was going to work. Obviously we did. But we were surprised by how well.

The guests didn't want to leave.

I mean, literally, the guests refused to leave. They kept paying, yeah, but we had to cancel all of the extra bookings until we could find new space. Over the next weeks, we scoured the seafront, making landlords offers they couldn't refuse. We slowly moved down the coast, until we had three buildings kitted out. Then five buildings. Then ten. Over the months, we kept expanding down the beach. First it was a road. Then a block. Then a postcode. Of course, at this point we still called them B and Bs, but really it was more than that. It was a collection of likeminded souls, united by life, liberty, and the pursuit of beanie babies.

A community. Or cult. Depending on your perspective.

\*

One day, between the 7pm screening of Buffy and the 8pm screening of Buffy one of the guests came up to us. He was a slightly older man. Wispy hair. Sloping shoulders. A face that was seventy percent forehead. Like a Nick Park model of an undertaker. He stared nervously at the floor, worrying the edge of his sleeve.

He asked us, had we ever considered franchising? He wanted to set up an 80s retreat in Scarborough. Would we say yes? So us and the Daves had a chat. We didn't see any harm.

We waved him off, and didn't expect to hear anything of it.

\*

I think it was March when the tone began to shift. The first people to join us had been, well, like us. Young and enthusiastic and unemployed. Now the people joining were lawyers, architects, engineers. They had stuff to leave behind, and they were committed with a capital C, you know? And they brought technical skills. The engineers rigged up broadcast stations, little pirate radios. We brought back Ceefax, and, with the help of a Radio Times from 1998, we started historically accurate broadcasts. It was a lot less effort for us, we didn't have to keep stoking the VHS players with tapes, but also it meant that everyone could watch the same thing. You didn't have to join the waiting list for the copy of Space Jam. It was around this time we started to have meetings as a collective. To decide what to do next. It was supposed to be for small, practical matters. When to sort the bins and that. But pretty soon, they were dominated by the engineers.

They pointed out problems we'd never spotted before. Like, it was all very well watching old TV, but it wasn't exactly the same experience – when we lived the 90s the last time, it was fresh. It was exciting. They proposed a thing called 'procedural generation' – you fed an algorithm everything that had come before, and it would generate new things. New, but familiar-sounding music. New, but familiar fashion. New but familiar news. It was great. We watched 'new' episodes of Friends – 'The One With The Inflatable Cow', 'The One With The Amateur Dentist and the Unnecessary root canal', and 'the one with the

painting in the attic that doesn't seem to age'. And the gameshows – man, you would not believe the gameshows. My favourite was 'The Crystal Moral Maze' – contestants would have to discuss the place of colonialism in the modern history curriculum while assembling a large puzzle of a polystyrene cube in under three minutes.

\*

About a month later we started to get visits from the police. They were concerned that the guests weren't staying voluntarily, that we'd kidnapped them. The cult of '96, they called us. The problem was, the police liked it so much that they also stayed. It must have looked bad, I admit, a police officer disappearing. So they sent another. Who also stayed. This went on for a number of weeks, and by the end they'd swelled our ranks by about 50. But it was alright. There were plenty of Turkey Dinosaurs to go around.

\*

As more people turned up, they brought with them tales of the outside world. It turned out that with such a large number of people opting out – 'normal' society was struggling. That franchise we'd approved had just turned out to be the first of many. If the maps were to be believed, a vast tract of land between Scarborough and Bridlington was now given over to 1986. The coast between Sunderland and Whitby was populated by denizens of 1962. And the Isle of Wight was stuck in 1958 (but that wasn't intentional, it had always been like that).

\*

Like milk in a communal fridge, no-one had noticed things slowly turning sour. We should have seen it coming, really, but the by-product of isolation was speciation. After a few years marinating in the nineties, our residents became a bit, well, insular. Reality, it turns out, is just the set of facts that we choose to agree on. And by consuming different news, different music, different telly from our neighbours, our realities had begun to diverge. We grew suspicious of those living down the coast. They didn't look like us. They didn't talk like us. And we began to assume that they didn't approve of us. Things started

to get violent at the fringes. News trickled down from the North. There were spectacular fights on the pier where the 80s met the 60s – teddy boys, mods, punks, and skinheads all going for each other. Men in ‘Make Love not War’ t-shirts beating men in ‘Peace’ t-shirts.

And back in the centre of the communes, life wasn’t quite how we’d pictured it. Despite the TV and the dial-up and the full-fat coke, we didn’t seem that much happier than we were in our old lives. There was this little thought clawing away at the back of our minds.

Maybe life wasn’t better in the 90s. Maybe we were just younger?

\*

So us and the Daves got thinking. What with the violence and the overcrowding and the TV getting weirder and weirder, we couldn’t help feeling that it used to be better in the past. I mean, the past before we went back to the past. And that’s when the Daves had the brainwave. If we wanted to go back, so would other people. We knew then that we were onto something.

So we bought another B and B. And this time, we really did do it up. We put in air conditioning, fibre-optic broadband, and the largest tellies we could afford. The only problem was, with everyone so scattered into their little chonical communities, we couldn’t advertise very easily.

So we thought ‘what links everyone from the fifties to the 90s?’ And the answer was, of course, magazines.

So, if you want to join us, come find us. We’re in Worthing.

The big yellow building opposite the pier.

This time it’s gonna work.

## how to install your new freeview box

*Emma Levin*

1. Connect the HDMI cable, power cable and aerial. Switch on.
2. Watch as the telly displays only static.
3. Google 'what to do freeview box showing static'.
4. Try switching it off and on again. Disconnect and then reconnect the cables.
5. Re-read the manual, as if that might help.
6. Decide that the unit is probably faulty. Re-insert it into the box – re-wrapping it in layers of polystyrene and bubble wrap with the care and ceremony of an Egyptian burial.
7. Travel back to the shop you bought it from. Take the tube. Regret taking the tube.
8. Try to return the box. The staff will offer an exchange, but not a refund. Accept the exchange. Note that the sales assistant shifts her weight from foot to foot, like a nervous heron.
9. Go home.
10. Arrive home, and notice that the lights are on. You didn't leave the lights on.
11. Press your face up against the glass like an urchin against a shop window in a film.
12. The TV is on. The TV is working. Someone is watching it. It's you! It's you?!
13. Duck below the windowsill, so your other self doesn't see you. You're easily spooked.
14. Want to google 'what to do if you get home and you're already in'. But you can't. Your phone's indoors. With the other you.
15. Panic. It begins to rain. Decide to retreat to the garden shed. Things will seem clearer when you're out of the rain.

16. Try to remember the combination to the shed lock.
17. Realise that you don't have to – the lock is already undone.
18. Tentatively open the shed doors. They creak like the bones of an arthritic jogger.
19. Store yourself in the shed, between the lawnmower and the spades. Calm yourself by recalling facts about alligators. The average alligator will go through 2000 teeth in its lifetime.
20. After an hour or so, decide to make contact with yourself. You, the other you, might know what's going on. Or, at the very least, let you have a cup of tea. Let yourself in the front door. Cough to attract your attention. Notice that you, the other you, is holding a kitchen knife. Why? Try to talk to yourself, to explain what's happening. The other you doesn't want to talk. The other you lunges. Tussle with yourself. Grab the knife. Turn the knife. Push the knife.
21. Watch the blood bloom across the carpet like piss in a swimming pool, or the British Empire across a map of 19th Century Asia.
22. The average alligator is 8-10 feet long. The largest alligator ever recorded was 15.2 feet.
23. After calming down, dispose of your body. Return to the shed, and select a spade.
24. Pick a spot in the flowerbeds, and start digging. Feel guilty when you bisect a worm. Resolve to relocate worms rather than mashing them. There will be no more death tonight.
25. It's slow going. Abandon your policy. Bisect worms wantonly. Reflect that digging shallow graves takes much longer than films would suggest. After thirty minutes, your arms ache, you are drenched in sweat, and your hole is less than a foot deep.
26. The word 'alligator' comes from the Spanish 'al lagarto', meaning 'the lizard'

27. Heave your corpse into your (very) shallow grave.
28. Clean the knife. Place a rug over the bloodstain.
29. Enjoy your functioning television.

For any queries not covered by this manual, please ring our customer services on 0345 650 5050. No-one will answer, but it will provide you with a temporary sense of purpose, which is really all we can ask of any activity.

## content

*Zach Roddis*

i went to this new place called "Bar/Restaurant Opportunity"

very empty warehouse vibes

very up and coming

canapé of nothing served by nobody

exquisite



i saved all my money for a decade and  
managed to acquire 2000x iPhone  
i am giving away 2000x iPhone in a series of social media posts  
and precisely nobody is taking it seriously  
I HAVE NOT BEEN HACKED  
i am just very generous

i have got a Tesla car  
this is a fantastic opportunity for you to drive off toward the sunset  
What's that you ask? you want some Ray-Bans?  
well i have a limited number at a fraction of the RRP  
Thanks for asking

# sometimes i wish i could fix things like you

*Sean Wai Keung*

the insides of things  
still surprise me

on the table at his house  
my laptop lies spilling  
chunks of green metal –

*thats the motherboard its called that  
because it connects directly  
to those things can you see  
they are called daughterboards*

he explains this like its nothing  
without looking at me  
but i am almost  
in tears  
my laptop has been with me  
for three years now

*thats your hard drive  
those are your antennae  
the soldering should flow down like  
a waterfall not bubble up like that*

can you fix it

*everything can be fixed  
once you are inside  
everything can be replaced  
look look at that dc jack*

# JAM

*Sean Wai Keung*

to my face he describes me  
as *just about managing* + i say back  
*theres no just about*  
*about it*  
*i am managing*  
*my rent is paid on time each month*  
+ *my bills are not piling up*  
to which he says *but what*  
*about your savings*

?

later that day at home after the meeting i try to log  
into my internet banking but my memorable number  
is unaccepted + i am locked out

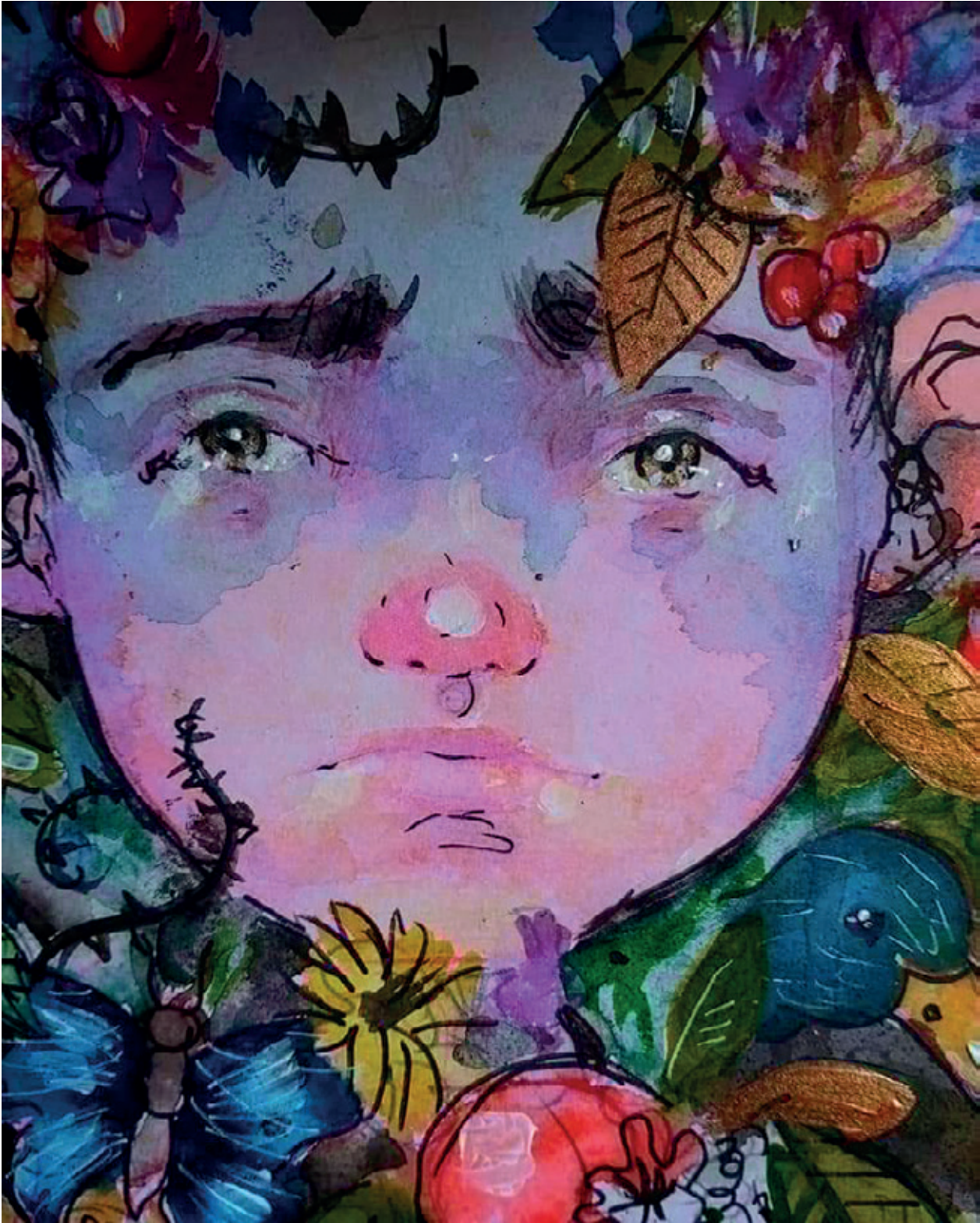
so i go out again to the nearest hole  
in the wall slide my card in look at the number  
in my account

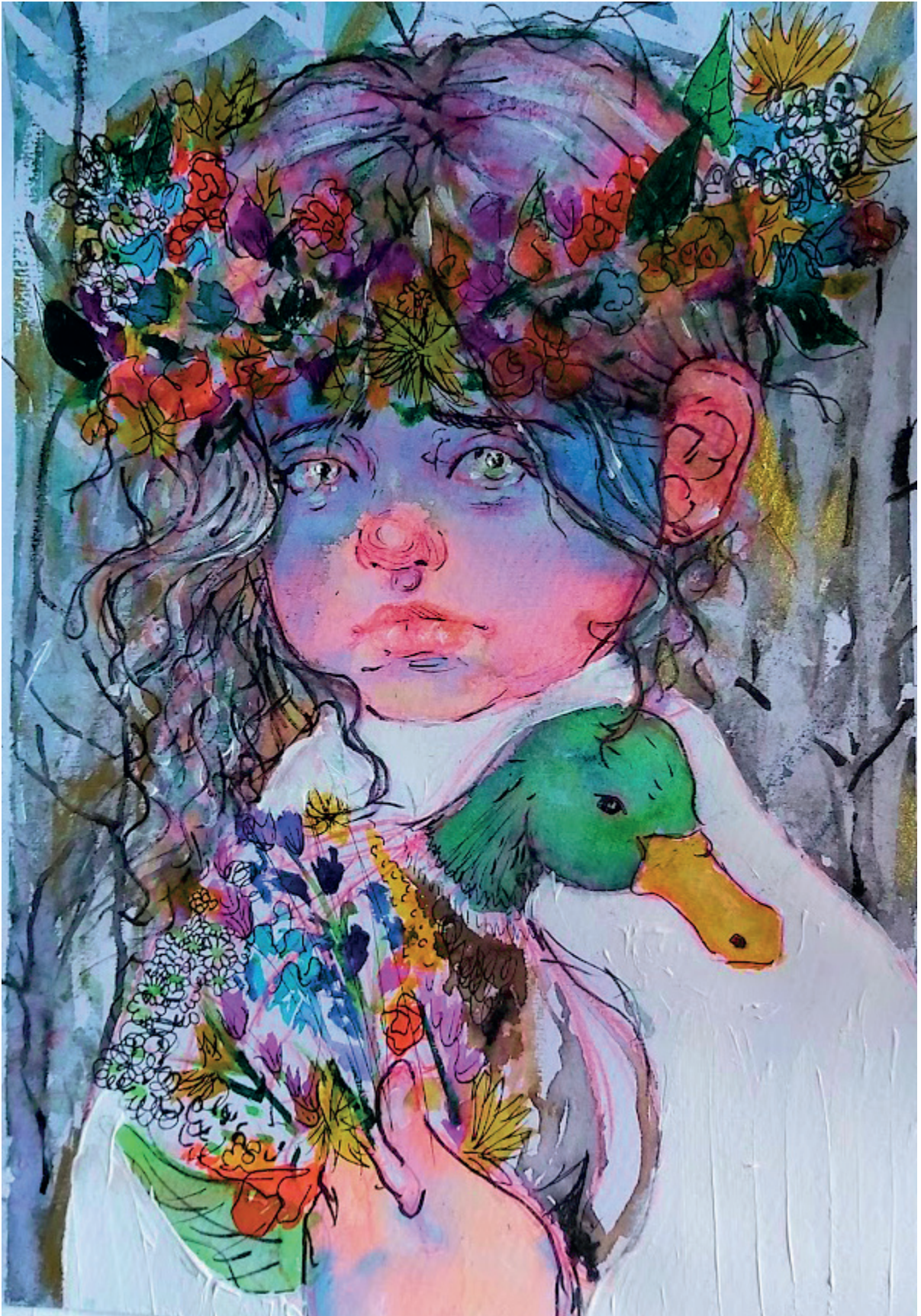
enough to pay my rent this month  
enough to pay off my expected bills  
maybe even enough to splash out

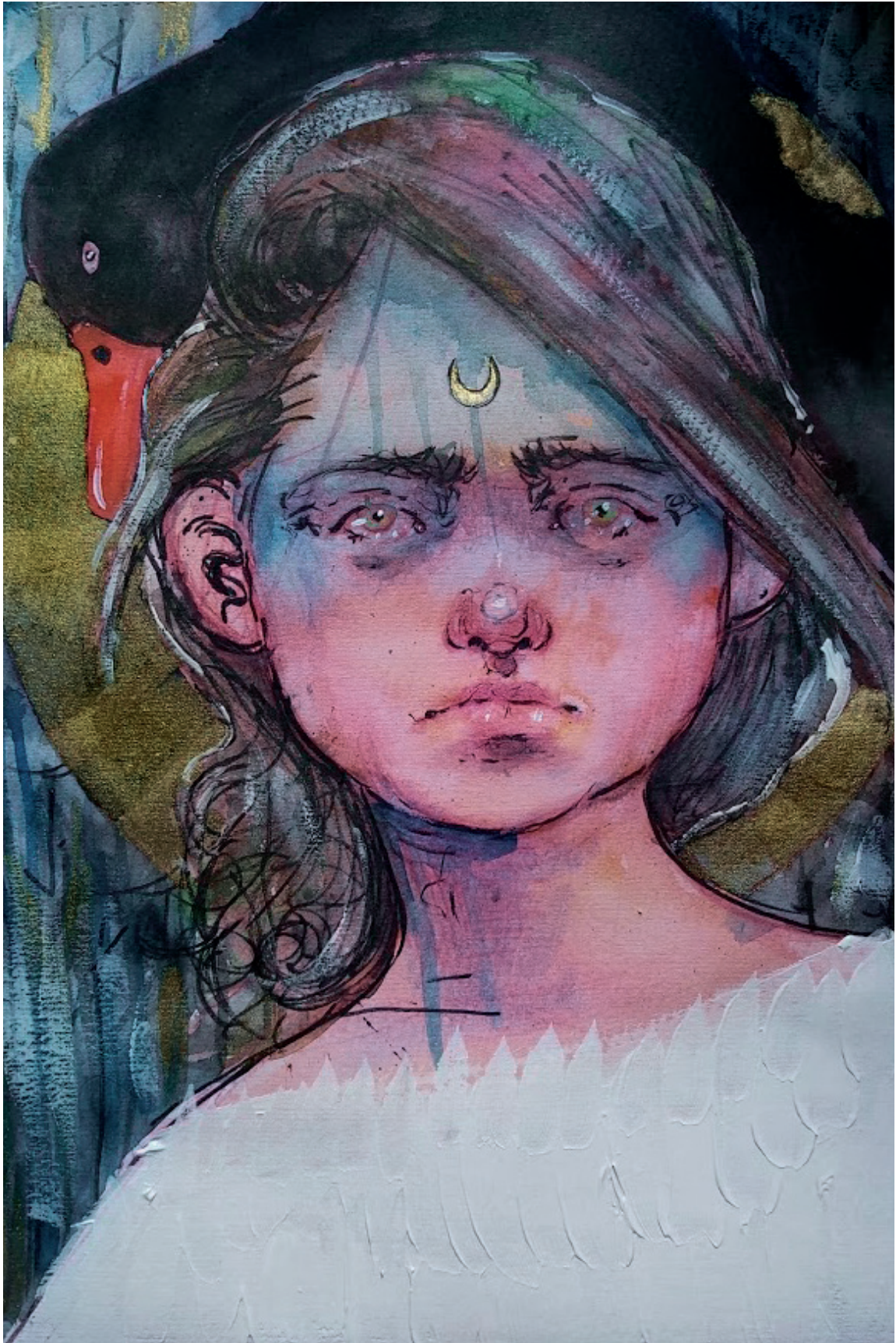
buy a fish – salmon fillets or sea bass –  
something to eat as a congratulatory meal  
next time i come home  
from a nine hour shift

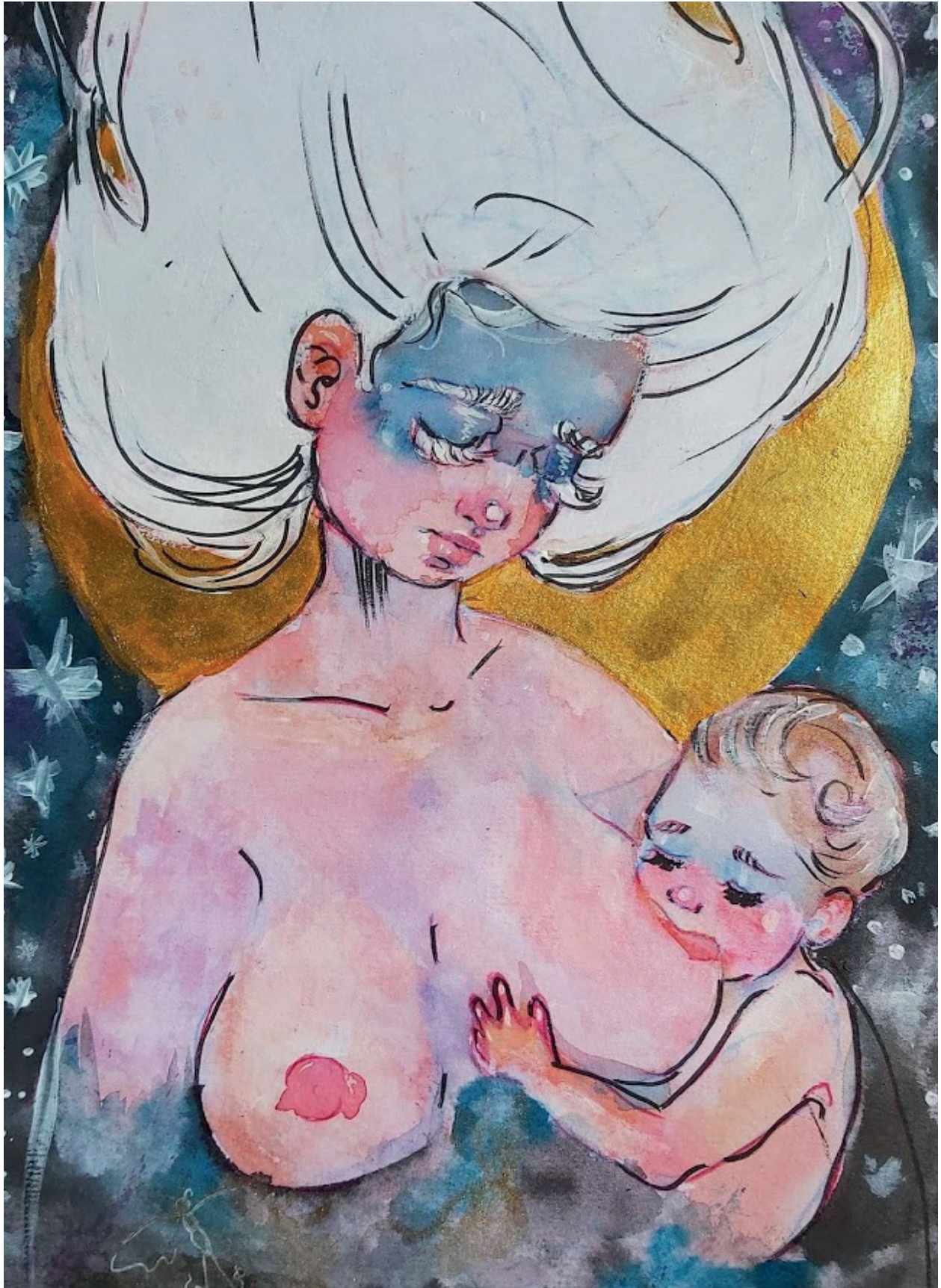
four paintings

*Stevie-Rose Maguire*









## three poems

*Joe Hedinger*

///

i lyke my parst lyke marballd meet  
ful ov fat an shadoes  
dug up loos wif all my hans  
dapalld wif all thins  
thins i did or thins yoo did  
or maybee thins wee did not doo

///



///

i wont a tyme that tydes                    mygraytes  
sweetund pynk lyke sips wiv sloe  
too liv my dayz by suns long leen  
my lyfe by a klok ov burds

///

///

thees ar momunts ov treemendus grayce  
wen yoo doo the deevyne thin  
ov trublinn mee gentlee

///

## she calls it my pinkie fingernail

*Steve Denehan*

right now, it is a soft red colour

with five purple polka dots

yellow glitter

and a shiny gloss coating

she sometimes draws love hearts on my arms and hands

says they are full of love for when she is in school

calls them juicy

I find myself in no hurry to wash them off

she came to me today, wet-eyed, with a worm in her hands

told me it was sick and asked how we could save it

she was sure that I would know

and all of a sudden, I did

## when you're happy

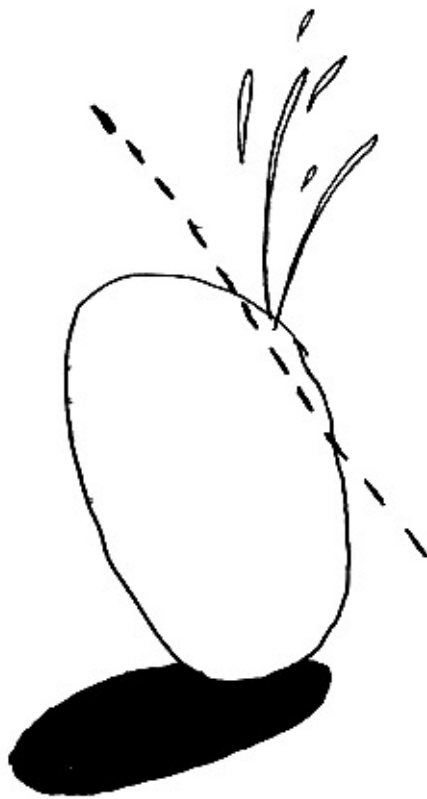
*Frederick Pollack*

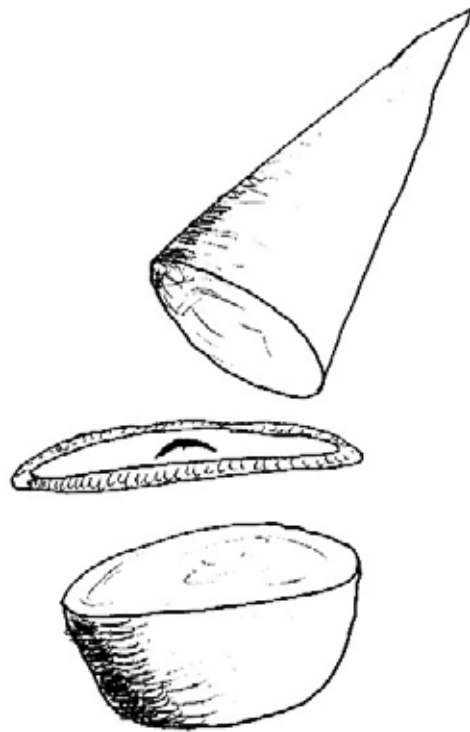
The Israelis have accidentally  
splashed a hundred tardigrades onto the moon.  
Consensus is that, resistant  
as they have proven to be  
to vacuum, radiation, and cold,  
they'll enter dehydration mode,  
contract themselves around a molecule  
or two of water, and sleep a long time.  
No one knows how long.  
If death intervenes, they won't notice.

Eventually aliens will explore  
our solar system. Though wearing  
impressive six-limbed spacesuits  
and many times bigger, they're tardigrades.  
They find the Israeli crash-site.  
Beneath the beige light  
of earth, they experience  
a twinge of cosmic irony;  
tenderly gather the remains  
and bring them to their ship, where after discussion  
the biologist puts them in warm water.  
When a few revive and swim,  
a shout, in some medium or other,  
echoes, or so the crew's poet thinks,  
across the galaxy.

# prefigurative politics of birth control

*Callum Ritchie*







## rio grande

*Jacob Zlomke*

At this moment I feel like I could stay here forever in this little campground on the banks of the Rio Grande.

I'll never say a word but "thank you" to the lady at the store down the road where I buy a bottle of wine, a pack of Camel Filters and a freeze-dried meal.

I'll drive aimlessly around the desert, see unique looking landforms and ghost towns, wishing I was the type of person to stop there for a while. In the afternoons I'll gaze at Mexico, its towering riverside cliffs, wishing I was the type of person to go check out Mexico for a while.

The neighbors are mostly retired couples in huge RVs, here for weeks at a time. Sometimes younger couples in a shitty Corolla and Wal-Mart tent. Occasional college students and single men. Here and there a European tourist in a rented touring van.

None of them say a word to me even though I try to sit in a welcoming way each evening.

They might see my license plate and say

"Well you're far from home."

I've imagined a hundred different replies and each is equally true, or equally not true.

Home may as well be right here, I might say in a way that comes off as sublime.

Why not, really, though. Here, outside the reach of cell service, there are no questions about

What will you do?

As in, what will you do with your immense guilt and shame?

As in, where will you bury it?



## summer in vacationland

*Jacob Zlomke*

The first time I saw Portland we were driving north on 295 and I was so hungover I could barely keep my eyes open.

You were orienting us in our new home — there's the Whole Foods; that's where the Sea Dogs play. It looked more like a city than I imagined it would.

You thought I was crying out of joy and excitement.

I was crying because I knew I was ruining a moment.

I remember that day like all my best hangovers.

We walked around the Old Port where all the tourists are but first we walked to Rite Aid for advil and juice and I thought:

So this is where I buy advil and juice.

For two weeks we went everywhere, vacation in Vacationland.

Each place I thought:

So this is where I go see the most photographed lighthouse in the world.

So this is where I go to the library.

So this is where I get a handjob on the beach on a sunny afternoon.

I still don't know where the DMV is.

I still don't know if New Englanders are different than Nebraskans or if I just want them to be.

We could make it anywhere baby -- with unrestricted cashflow and endless summer vacation.

Those first two weeks I could smell the ocean all over town.

I guess you just get used to it.

## FIR TREES

*Jacob Zlomke*

I

The task today is clear a grove of madrones of the surrounding fir.

The future trees Sarah calls them will grow massive in the years to come.

The other task is listen to sticky fingers and wonder if the ends will ever meet.

I knew a sandhills rancher who said some of his beef went to Japan.

The grasslands are a carbon sink as much as any forest.

The cows are not.

Some of the fir ends up at Home Depot I'm sure.

In California I made raised garden beds of fir from Home Depot  
and I knew exactly what it cost and wondered

Who all up along the line was worried about paying rent.

I wonder if their left shoulder aches in the morning.

II

A patient quiet morning so self-involved

every little bug scabbling across the gravel isn't yet another way to  
understand

the grander scheme of things.

I'm just going to work.

I'm just drinking coffee.

Not going to do what's not essential

but who ever needed beautiful white oak flooring in their eastern Oregon vacation home.

I only need native blackberries when they're in season.

But who ever needed to walk game trails through endless stands of fir while the morning sun paints a perfect warm gold.

It's good for the environment it's even better for the money.

### III

I'm not impressed by a single large tree,

not even an impressively large one.

One lone coastal redwood on the capitol lawn, there to give you an example.

I spend all day in a second growth forest and my friends wonder how are things

and I wonder at what point you could call it old growth.

Not that it matters it's all just the woods

Doing its persistent woods thing,

quickly being taken over by holly and blackberry, but

Happening pretty slow from my relative grasp of time.

Things are bad but fine. Things are good.

### IV

You almost die on the job but then you don't.

You stand there for a moment and think

Holy shit I almost died. At work.

You almost die and then you don't and you collect yourself for a moment  
and continue doing your job

Because you can't think of a way to say

Hey I'm fine but I almost died over there just now mind if I have a sit?

Thinking about it though maybe dying at work wouldn't be so bad, at least  
as far as tipping the scales against your boss goes.

V

Driving through the clear cut

Worrying about tinnitus

I didn't cut all those trees down but I could

And I would if the price is right

Just being honest

Eighteen dollars an hour gets you

perpetual stress

If you're lucky a retirement fund

You can cash it out early for a month in Vietnam.

from 'a place, a feeling, something he said to you'

*Alexandra Naughton*

Standing in early morning sunlight in his father's kitchen  
in his father's palatial home by the ocean  
while his father is still asleep  
and reading a poem hanging on the wall  
written by his mother,  
*sometimes I am mad, sometimes I like to stamp my feet*  
while you are waiting for him to drink some coconut water from the  
refrigerator  
and you wonder if she wrote it for him, some desperate encouragement,  
and you don't comment on it.

In his bedroom  
in his father's mansion that withstood the 1906 earthquake  
on some night  
reading the letter he showed you  
written to him from a famous author  
answering his question  
about how he got the idea about making soap from human fat  
and urging him to respect his parents.

Smiling in front of his father  
and trying to think of a reasonable excuse  
to get away from this planned dinner  
after being berated by him on his father's front walkway  
for not knowing a certain type of architecture  
and knowing that this is the wrong place for a scene  
and knowing even if you do manage to call a Lyft  
he will maneuver himself into driving you home  
and spending the night with you anyway.

Him,  
on your bed  
in his street clothes  
fly undone and rubbing his cock,  
30 minutes after unironically dropping truth bombs all over you  
while screaming and driving erratically on the freeway on the way to your  
house  
because you had pointed out that the conspiracy theory he was talking about  
was anti-Semitic.

Sitting at your desk and feeling upset  
because you are missing out on something you want to do  
with your friends that you were invited to do  
but had to make an excuse for not going  
because he doesn't want you to go  
and watching him rub his cock  
and commenting on the smell,  
suggesting that he wash himself off in your bathroom.

Laying in your bed and feeling sorry for yourself  
and he is next to you trying to get you to like him again,  
trying to be funny, telling someone else's story,  
and he almost seems okay  
and he looks at you in gratitude  
and you think he might be okay  
and maybe you just need to try harder.

## spellbound

*Jakob Millard*

Dear Ellen

Today you are going to move out of your childhood bedroom. This is going to feel weird, weird like nothing else has, and I promise you it's going to be weirder than you think it will.

You are an ex-witch.

In the stories, witches get black cats, get sent on quests, they deliver letters and pies, open book stores, curse rude men, and fall in love with half-bird half-human chimera.

But that's the stories -

and you're not a witch -

you're an *ex*-witch.

Also, working in a library seems to tick a surprising amount of those boxes. Maybe you should get a job in the library?

You're going to be sat cross legged on a dirty pentagram rug, surrounded by swaying towers of paper, haunted china dolls (they've been haunted the whole time, they tried to warn you by being china dolls), Lisa Frank fantasyscapes, and emo band posters.

Clearing out your bedroom is going to feel fucking terrible. You're going to be standing on the precipice of real life and you're going to feel all the things you would expect; scared, excited, nostalgic, homesick. That's not why it's going to feel fucking terrible though. You're going to be looking at your life as a mass of disposable or indisposable stuff. You will feel ill like you've been poisoned. Like there is something wholly separate to you alive and writhing inside your abdomen.

Drawers will be pulled from their sockets, you will have excavated plastic boxes of hidden crap from the dust and mould beneath your bed. You will have cleared your shelves, and you will be looking at your room disemboweled and ready for transplant.

As you deconstruct your life into these piles they will breed a small mutant third pile: **Burn.**



**The itinerary of your burn pile will look like this:**

*1 x valentines card (in the shape of an anatomically correct heart, plastic roses attached to the pulmonary artery)*

*2 x tattered purple diaries, one with stickers of cats and unicorns, one with band logos and words carved into its cover*

*30 (approximately) x crumpled tea stained lined paper, a mix of spells, poems, stories*

*2 x grimoires, very clearly office notebooks, covered in oil paint and black candle wax*

*10 x bug husks (4 beetles, 2 millipedes, 3 moths, 1 large black fly)*

*4 x pressed wildflowers*

You're going to survey this pile with the look of a prison guard and the precision of an exam invigilator, your bitten-bloody lip contorted in disgust. Then you will take one final object, carefully place it on top of the pile with your fingertips as if touching it too much or too roughly could cause infection:

*1 x rhyming dictionary, heavily used*

This is when you're going to decide that these objects must be burned. You haven't written poetry in years. You're not even sure you know how to. What even is an Iambic Pentameter? Never mind that, what's the difference between a verb and noun?

Moments later this pile is going to be in a metal bin on fire. Almost independently your fingers will have poured lighter fluid and struck the match. You should open the window before you do this, but you won't. Smoke is going to fill the room, but it will be slow. The smoke will be thick and black - the toxic smoke, not of burning plastic, but of burning words.

When you realise you should have opened the window, you will find that the safety latch is broken and will only open an inch.

The fire will not be orange, but purple and green, and we will climb from it (right now we are 4 beetles, 2 millipedes, 3 moths, and 1 very large fly). Oh, and we were lying when we said you were an *ex*-witch.

We will scribe on the floor in a delicate flowery script. Each letter will be intricately drawn with illustrated drop caps. You won't be able to appreciate this though. You will be running. You will be unaware that every time we write a word, another one of us will crawl from our body, desperate and itching to write.

You will run down stairs and we will flow behind you like a river, moving as a singular fluid form. Ellen, do you remember that documentary about how fire ants survive floods by forming rafts of their own bodies, how they shift constantly to remain whole and survive? That's a bit like this, but we are both the fire ants and the flood.

We will whisper to you with the flickering of our ten thousand wings. Our wings will read to you as we write.

You will run out into the street and open the door for us, and we will splash outwards as a wave of shiny black legs, antennae, mandibles, wings, and so many eyes. We see you with all of them.

Finally, you will hear us, hear what we have to say. We wish you would take it better, but you won't.

The words that we will have written and whispered are the words you had decided to erase with your fire, and they will all be written and spoken out in, admittedly, slightly purple rhyming stanzas for everyone to read.

The fire alarm will be screaming the whole time and people will look out of their windows. They will look concerned and will probably be calling the fire service. They will also see your words, our words, written in thick black letters across the road.

They will know about all the spells you used to cast - the one for banishing spots, the one for giving *those* spots to that girl Lily because she

didn't invite you to a party (she still feels guilty about this and is actually very nice, maybe you should DM her?), the one for giving Louis a rash for that creepy valentines card.

Everyone will now know about your past love of magic, the jealousy you felt when your friends started sleeping with each other even though you had no desire to be part of *that*.

They will know your IBS and anxiety prescriptions, all the music you pretend to not like but actually really like, and all the music you pretend to like but *don't*. They will also read your teen angst poetry and you will feel exposed as the fraud you are convinced you are.

*Ellen.*

*You're not a fraud.*

That's what we will try to say as you run away, but you won't listen.

Instead you will run away down a narrow alley. We will follow you to a children's play park, and find you hiding beneath a climbing frame. You will be cold and we will be trying to tell you that everything is okay, that you will be okay.

You will hug yourself and cry big feral sobs.

We will take the shape of a person and put our hand on your shoulder. It won't feel as bad as you think it will.

Then we say,

*Ellen, we know you are scared, we know you are upset.*

*We understand that when you look at us what you see is legs and eyes and mouths. We understand that when you look at yourself you see a fraud. We have come to say that neither of those things are true.*

We will stand and offer a hand.

*Ellen, we have something to show you.*

You will hesitate, still sobbing, still scared, but you will nod and take our

hand.

We will walk you away from the park and down the alley and back out onto your street and we will tell you,

*Look.*

*Look at what you have made.*

You won't want to look but you will. You have to.

You will look, you will laugh, you will laugh so hard you can barely breathe. You will still be crying, but also laughing.

*Ellen, we came here to say we love you, that not everyone is going to love you and that is okay, they don't have to. But it is not your job to mute yourself for those that may never love you. But we do.*

*We are your words made flesh, we are your words speaking together all at once, for you and with you.*

*We are a plague of words left unsaid.*

*It's time to start speaking us Ellen.*

From our letters wildflowers will have grown in tangles of lilac, indigo, and amber. They will flow out of your doorway in a wave, weaving themselves across the concrete of the pavement, the tarmac of the road, across cars, and up the trunks of trees. There will be people on the street and they will be picking the flowers, big bunches of beautiful wild flowers.

They will smile.

You will smile too.

You will open your mouth and we will descend your windpipe.

It won't feel as bad as you would think.

With words back in your lungs, it's time for you to speak.

*Yours with love*

*Every word left unsaid*

## our daily bread

*Carmen E Brady*

THE SUMMER AFTER HIGH SCHOOL THESE TWO GIRLS  
AND I TOOK THE AMTRACK FROM SALT LAKE CITY TO  
SAN FRANCISCO



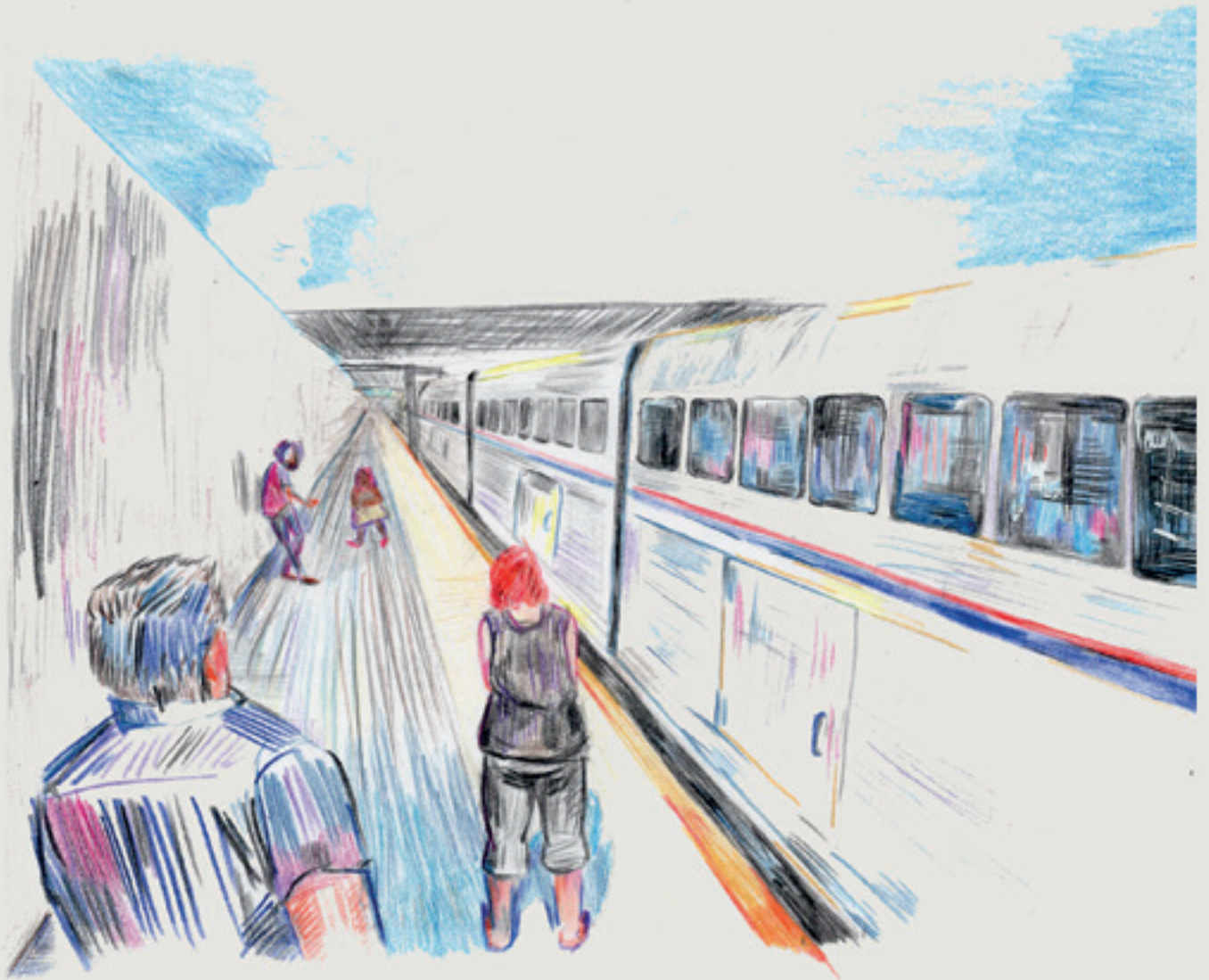
IT WAS WEIRD

I WAS ALREADY PLAYING A LIFELONG TRICK  
ON MYSELF



EXPECTING ONE GIANT YET UNDEFINABLE  
TRANSFORMATIVE EVENT

AND ALWAYS STAYING FULLY  
EMPTY



EVERYTHING ALWAYS GLOWED A LITTLE MORE IN MY HEAD:

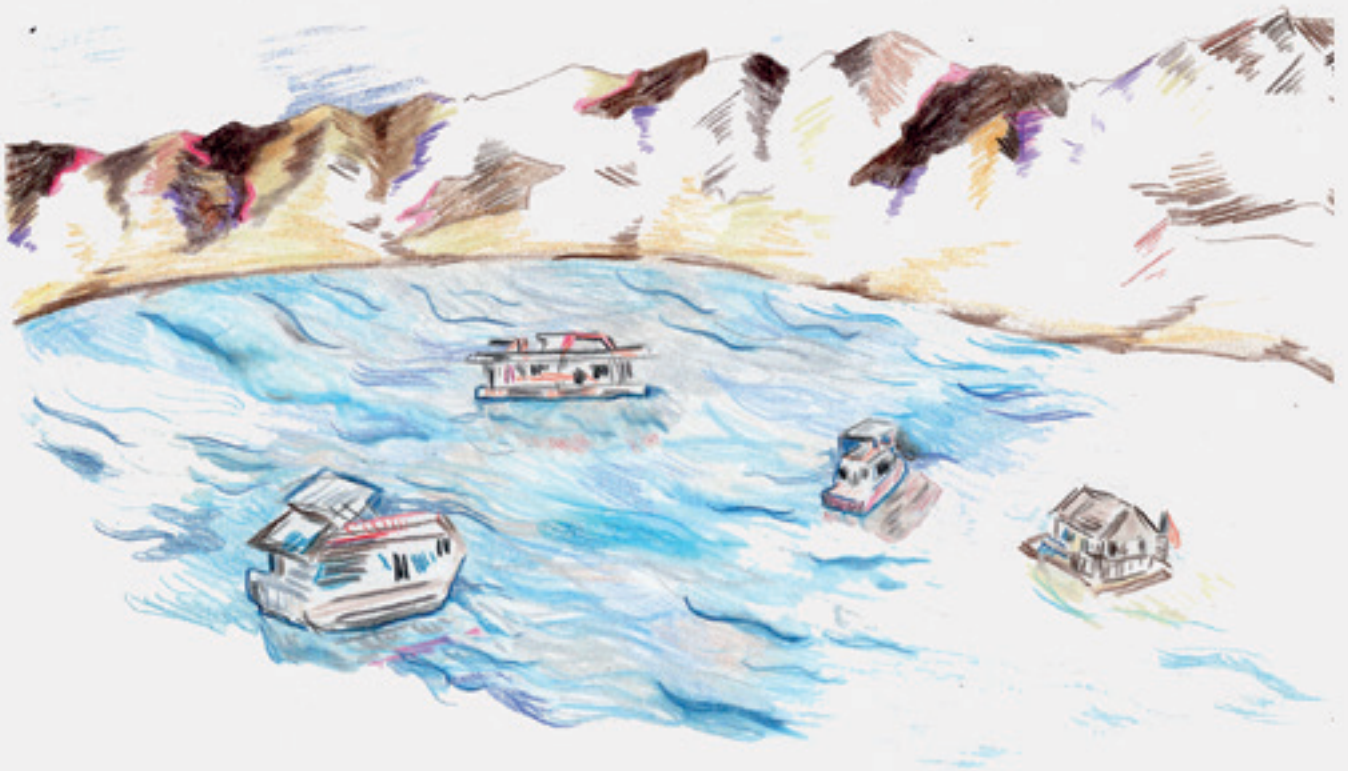
I EXPECTED FULFILLMENT AND TO BE BRIMMING WITH LIFE.



AS IT WAS WE MOSTLY STAYED ON HOUSEBOATS  
AND IN GUEST ROOMS



I WATCHED ONE FRIEND'S UNCLE SPIT TOBACCO INTO  
THE RESERVOIR. I SHUDDERED AT THE SHEEN OF  
OIL ON WATER.



INTERNALLY SNEERING, LOOK AT ALL THIS GLORY  
HUMANS CAN CREATE!

(YES, I WAS AN UNGREATFUL BITCH)

WE ONLY WENT INTO THE CITY ONCE,



ON THE WARF I BOUGHT A LOAF OF SOURDOUGH  
AND ATE THE WHOLE THING, TEARING OFF  
PIECES AND SHOVING THEM INTO MY MOUTH  
ALL AFTERNOON

ALL OF IT ADDED UP TO A  
SOFT INTRODUCTION TO THE  
HOLLOWNESS TO COME,



THE YEARS OF FOG, ALWAYS CARELESSLY  
TAKING AND DRINKING AS MUCH AS I  
COULD STAND

IN EVERY CITY I SLOUCHED THROUGH  
I CONSUMED EVERYTHING IN MY PATH



AND ALWAYS WANTED MORE

I'M BETTER THAN I WAS, THOUGH IT'S A  
STRETCH TO SAY GOOD



RECENTLY MY AUNT SENT ME SOME OF HER SOURDOUGH  
STARTER, SO NOW I MAKE AND SLICE MY OWN  
LOAVES



I MEASURE, LET REST, WATCH IT COME TOGETHER OR FALL APART

MANY MORNINGS I WAKE UP AND RUN IN THE  
PRE-DAWN, BREATHING THE DARKNESS IN



NONE OF IT IS FOR ME  
I AM GLAD IT'S THERE

FOR NOW AT LEAST I SAVOR WHAT I TAKE IN





# bios

## emma levin

Emma's short stories have appeared in anthologies (e.g. England's Future History), magazines (e.g. Popshot), online (e.g. Daily Science Fiction), and in many, many recycling bins. She is incredibly grateful (and still a little bit surprised) to have been offered a place on the BBC's 'Comedy Room' Writer's Development Scheme for 2018-19.

She blogs at [ctrlaltdelay.blogspot.com](http://ctrlaltdelay.blogspot.com)

## zach roddis

Zach is a Glasgow based artist. He stopped his pursuit of performance poetry in 2015, and considers his new writing "content" rather than "poetry". He is the proud owner of a 26-30 Railcard.

## sean wai keung

Sean is a poet and performer based in Glasgow. His debut poetry pamphlet you are mistaken won the Rialto Open Pamphlet Competition 2016 and was named a Poetry School 'book of the year 2017'. He has worked with organisations such as the National Theatre of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland. He can be found on Twitter @SeanWaiKeung

## stevie-rose maguire

Stevie is a painter who can generally be found chasing around a toddler with a paint brush in her spare third hand. You may also find her on Facebook @Stevie Paints

## joe hedinger

Joe is a bookseller at Norwich's independent bookshop, The Book Hive.

## steve denehan

Steve is an award-winning poet who lives in Kildare, Ireland with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the author of "Miles of Sky Above Us, Miles of Earth Below" (Cajun Mutt Press) and of "Of Thunder, Pearls and Birdsong" (Fowlpox Press). His numerous publication credits include The Irish Times, Poetry Ireland Review, Acumen and Into The Void. He has been nominated for The Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net and Best New Poet.

## frederick pollack

Fred lives in Washington, DC and is the author of two book-length narrative poems, THE ADVENTURE and HAPPINESS (Story Line Press), and two collections, A POVERTY OF WORDS (Prolific Press, 2015) and LANDSCAPE WITH MUTANT (Smokestack Books, UK, 2018). Many other poems in print and online journals.

## callum ritchie

Callum is an illustrator and designer based in the UK between Norwich and Surrey, as well as some places in between sometimes. His work often deals with visuality of production sites and issues of health. He is currently studying for an MA in Communication Design and has work on display as part of a Royal Society of Arts funded exhibition called the Museum of Human Kindness and runs a grass roots creative organisation called Site Collective.

## **jacob zlomke**

Jacob is a logger and lumber miller who writes. He is from Nebraska but now lives in Oregon.

## **alexandra naughton**

Alexandra is a writer based in Richmond, California. She is the founder and editor-in-chief of Be About It Press, established in 2010. She is the author of six poetry collections including *You Could Never Objectify Me More Than I've Already Objectified Myself* (Punk Hostage Press, 2015), *I Will Always Be In Love* (Paper Press, 2015), and *I Wish You Never Emailed Me* (Ghost City Press, 2016). Her first novel, *American Mary*, was published by Civil Coping Mechanisms in 2016.

## **jakob millard**

Jakob is responsible for the production and design of the book you are currently holding, sorry.

Is attempting to be a failed artist and writer, but is a pretty successful Dad. Lover of Ursula Le Guin, Robert Smith, frogs and ghost stories. Likes to write about making things, feelings, and magic.

Pisces/Gemini/Sagittarius.

## **carmen e brady**

Carmen lives, writes, teaches, and draws in the rural USA. She is the author and illustrator of "Someday I'm going to be so so happy" (2fast2house 2017) among other things.

