

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 15 MARCH 2020: "WATERCOLOR"

Welcome to Issue 15, "Watercolor," a poetic and artistic landscape in which we are held in suspension.

This month's featured poet is Gayatri Rajan. Please view the commentary on Gayatri's work [here](#).

Issue 15 includes work by Diane Callahan, Rob Colgate, Madeleine Corley, Jason B. Crawford, SK Grout, Dipe Jola, Quinn Lui, Aura Martin, Gayatri Rajan, Arianna Sebo, Krystal A. Smith, and Sophie Furlong Tighe. And Rachel Stempel is featured in "A Series of Stories" to make it a baker's dozen.

### Featured Artist

Iranian-born **Pouran Lashini** has been an active painter for more than twenty years. Growing up in Tehran, she was immersed in the rich culture of traditional Persian art and poetry from her teenage years. Going back to her Persian roots, in her artworks she creates a uniquely personal expression of the ancient method of illustration. Her scholastic insight into the philosophies of beauty, poetry, and aesthetics serve as a foundation for her affinity in creating artwork and writing. She holds a Master of Philosophy from Azad University in Tehran, and is currently pursuing her PhD in Aesthetic Studies and Philosophy of Ideas at the University of Texas at Dallas. She has translated two books to Farsi (*Just Patty*, by Jean Webster, Tehran, 2015, and *Biography of Margaret Mitchel*, Tehran, 2019). She has written articles about Rumi, Sohrwardi, and the history of Persian art.

### "On a Whim" by Diane Callahan

Delete every version of yourself all the pixels of thought X's mar  
the spots you no longer want to be touched arms cradle air nothing  
can escape the skin, not even a name, and one sunny afternoon  
while weeding the garden you will forget whose hand holds  
the trowel an improbable schism of body and mind but one can

destroy the self on a whim.

“Gay Wasteland” by Rob Colgate

I drew the boundaries of a gay wasteland  
then shared the wasteland with a drowning boy

spent eight hours there don't remember much  
except for all of it

the image of my glass filled with sparkling water  
and the boy hiding at the bottom of it

bleaching tunnels for people to drive through  
oh sunshine courtesan you'll never be clear

and the flash photo of us with the straws and the panic  
and the waiting to panic until I was home alone

all of the stomachs were moving in circles  
all of my trees turned into trees

that I didn't know how to name  
for their deadness or their color or their virility

briefly I was a cloud raining sweet peroxide  
over that dead dead lagoon

and yes sweet lakeshore I still adore you  
but here I am staring at another boy

who is staring at another boy and that boy is  
pink where i try to be white

just tell me how much for tickets to the show  
for the archived love letters

first you see a light then you take it away  
and then what a field of absence

and then the winter apartment  
and then the summer apartment

"Subtext" by Madeleine Corley

I wanted you  
when I received  
*Hi hello have you been*  
veining migraines in my  
head like ice between side-  
walks in the winter expanding  
this act called me  
*writing lately?*  
was just that a play I disguised  
with fervent type my hyper-  
ventilating eyes darts thrown  
hastily from clenched fist  
*You're someone who I know*  
from peonies from city drives  
at dusk from new shoes  
dawned when my dark got too  
thick and my soles too sodden  
*will*  
to  
*offer*  
back what I dug up the timber  
I logged and froze  
with what I believed was  
*genuine*  
love I know I keep pontificating  
dirt because I am leaking the mud  
grouts my gums these brimstone  
fires I spew  
*critique and*  
contrarian I was planted among  
undergrowth forgetting this  
vibrant was nothing before hollowed  
*ideas that*  
want was all I could  
survive off of give  
a seed the taunt of sap and she will  
*allow*  
stem  
*growth*  
in that rime of morning  
dew there is truth  
in some soil

*and thought*

I am windswept and  
cannot recall what I left under  
your fingernails what shade of  
soot I buried in the crook of  
your elbow

*as opposed to*

the longing that  
comes with autumn's sleep I drove  
myself leafless after hope and if I  
thaw to empty forgiveness and I hear  
you spout

*it's good or it's bad*

I will pretend I am sleeping but  
if you knock and slough  
your icicle teeth I might unfurl  
in groves

*and for*

once I admit

*that*

I am wanting you  
like  
frostbite

*I value you*

["Mad Scientist" by Jason B. Crawford](#)

It's funny how bad news seems to bring everything down like gravity/Like broken  
branches/piled on grass/sun beating down on rouged jaw open/like detaching  
hinged screws from back teeth/like bodies collapsing onto earth/making pillow

out of ant hill/The thinning of blood becoming river to cross/The moment when  
reddening saliva/becomes your lake to drown in/we forget how real News can  
be/The doctor said he split the back of your skull into two/as if he was trying to

open you up and examine you/ as young boys/we all want to be mad scientist/got  
our doctorates in Legotology/Learn to pull everything apart to understand  
it/unstitch it from the seems /We must comprehend what makes it

tick/Too often we forget how to put it back together/this is what happened  
right/He forgot how to realign your pieces/once he was done operating/That's  
clearly not it/You shot off at the shotgun lip and he was the recoil pushing

back/This is how you lived/unwilling to be shoved into lockers/for fear of it

being too close to closet/This is how you lived/refusing to take punches/without  
penduluming back/When they told me you had gotten into a fight with the new

boy for calling you faggot/It didn't surprise me that you wanted to show him that  
you were more flames than wood/It wasn't until he was gripping your  
throat/cutting off your oxygen/did you realize that he knew how to

kill a fire

“Self Portrait as Sentimental Star” by SK Grout

Today strikes out

with light so intense

I ready sunglasses, sunscreen and baseball cap.

I let the peppermint tea steep too long,

accept the consequences, wince through bitter sips.

Time wants to be an emotional star sighing, dancing and growing hay.

On the street outside my flat, the argument between a group of men lingers against the  
echoing brick

longer than I can see their battling bodies.

What if I truly believe the end will brighten this right now?

The mixtape on repeat allows me to manage

the siege within my skirling brain.

A bell invokes the question.

And can the sentimental museum

reply in sonorous terms, that

I exist in this L I M I T L E S S and still

lock myself inside a cage

I have agreed to construct.

Galaxies return the sparkling in the mail.

Here is a moment prepared with your face

so inevitably, I stand in its shadow.

“Red Night, Candles and Moaning” by Dipe Jola

My lover's body is a city of landscapes - in between oceans  
& rocks & mountains & beaches & borders & me - torn with  
diversities and a mouth shaped into footmarks structured along  
the path to heaven. One, he is a sucker for slim figures coupled  
into a corset like a collection of stars along the body of the sky.  
My lover's body is a ghost of flower petals bidding breathes to  
thrusts and pants to the gentility of the night. Two, he is made  
from everything in between light & borders & oceans & night  
& candles & me. Three, he pitches his loneliness on the littlest  
of things - like the mark on my right breast, like the shape of  
my lips, the volume of my wound, like the weight of my ghosts.  
My lover's body is a different kind of salvation - not tears & fears,  
not empty corridors salted in the ghost of absence, not sea lines  
bleached into no colours - of red nights and candles and the tales  
of Shrek, *how ugly we get?* I shriek out between the borders, the  
lanes rippled in lipids and liquor, the sailboat rowing my contours  
like supermarket carts copulating with floor greased in effectiveness.  
Four, he is a fan of our body in perfect sync. Love letters littering  
the tiles, a disco of angelic tunes - in bodice, breaths hitched and  
lungs pleading for air. Five, a city in paradise melts on his arrival,  
he is a fan on wars fought on bodies as everything is within the  
palm of his hands - muffled cries, blades, borders, blue & me.

“poem pinned out on the dissection tray” by Quinn Lui

set all your wolves to ru(i)n this city. i'm  
used enough to checking for blood under my nails  
in the morning, so believe me, i'll love anybody

who looks at me like that: all splinter-eyed,  
the distant curiosity of the predator born  
into the hunt. smile red-tinged by the light  
of your teeth. *i don't trust anyone else with this*

*so it has to be you*, fingers pressed smooth  
over the sun-point at the temple. in theory,  
the first time your house tries to kill you  
it will use the gentlest way it knows. but i've met

all these kinds of glass: flight flayed open, pressed flat  
and pinned down. pierce a body the right way

and it will spill light. i know i chose dissection  
over any kinder display. i know

i'd do it again. believe me, i've loved everybody  
who's looked at me like that, blood-wrecked gaze  
and all. understand: i favour a swift

and shard-sharp breaking. i lack the patience  
to wait for rot.

“She Tried to Hug Me (But I Pulled Away)” by Aura Martin

—Cento from *The Color Master: Stories* by Aimee Bender

I walked back, kicking twigs and acorns. I want to do better. I ate oranges off the tree  
out back. Downstairs, the man was staring out the window. *I mean, why not just be happy the  
way things are?* On the ground, birds pecked into nothing.

My mother sipped her sherry in the kitchen and sniffed. She hadn't done dishes in  
weeks. Dad tilted his head down to his plate. I'm just noticing the patterns.

We sat and sipped, the warm tea spreading through my chest. The radio expelled old  
songs. My sister nodded lightly.

I once split my lip, jumping from the tree, and she sewed it up with ice and a needle  
she'd run through the fire. *I'm sorry you have to go through this.* The word marked by brake  
lights and bitten fingernails. Arlene, who made sure every used item went into the right bin  
because she wanted all things, everything, to find its way back into the world, new.

*Keep looking.* Those embroidered suns.

I saw myself, skipping through meadows in a yellow-and-blue-print dress. How to be a  
person? There was love to be felt, and discovered, still. There was a powerlessness that was  
kind.

I know I have major cavities. I climbed up a tree and waited.

“We Were Birds” by Gayatri Rajan, March’s Featured Poet

*After "Torso of Air" and "On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous" by Ocean Vuong*

That night he wore a white shirt and leapt  
into the river. Didn't surface for air. More water  
than body, more tide than blood.

We'd just turned thirteen. After,

I closed every window. The mouths of tulips  
broken. Beneath every oak, a lost limb.

I folded hundreds of pigeons, mangled paper into a beak

and a body. This poem is for how his voice cleaved the air  
into feathers, how I took a knife to the wall after,  
until a moon of light shone through the apartment,  
until my knuckles bled like his.

Suppose I woke and saw only lightning.  
Suppose the birds burned their songs  
that summer. Suppose I speared sharks  
in the river. I screamed *Peter*  
which meant *pray* which meant *please*. How a name can sound  
like a clock. A grave in a field full of ticking. Week-old  
feathers. This boy, this bird-- too human  
for this earth. Which is to say: sometimes, I don't exist  
except in the universe where everyone stays alive, where wings sprout  
from our spines, where we have more to give  
than prayer. Which is to say: the morning after,  
I gave my bones to the water. Feathers wavering  
in the river.  
A blackbird in the oaks.

### **Gayatri's Commentary on "We Were Birds":**

This poem was inspired by a suicide at my old high school. I wanted to write about how the entire community was marked indelibly by the incident, and about the slow process of healing. Birds, to me, mean flight and falter, wing and wound. I wrote the first draft of the poem in a single night, then edited it over about two weeks. I found myself thinking often about how we all thought we were immortal. Too young to know better, we pretended we were birds. This poem is both a love note and an elegy for that mindset.

I was also inspired by how we tell stories about death. In obituaries and news articles, we can become numb to death. Yet poetry, and its grounding in nature, can allow us to feel and process loss like no other expression. To hold emotion as powerfully as we can.

I hoped to convey the split between 'before' and 'after' in the visual structure of the poem. The incident is not named— it is only alluded to— and every "after" is lost in whitespace. To convey the possibility of healing, I brought in that final blackbird: though our immortality was dead, our hope didn't have to be.

### **EIC Christine Taylor's Commentary on "We Were Birds":**

The beauty in Gayatri's poem lies in her ability to deal with an incredibly painful situation using the imagery of the natural world. Once I read, "This poem is for how his voice cleaved the air into feathers," I got a welcomed chill. As a reader, I wanted to know the experience of the speaker who tragically lost her friend, and I felt I was in safe hands going on this journey with



the speaker. And by the end of the poem, there is the sense that the speaker and the community are grieving in healthy ways and that their futures will be brighter.

“Aliens and the Mountains” by Arianna Sebo

you could live in that cabin  
and gaze out at the mountains every day  
smell the sweet, simple wildflowers  
and feel the cool breeze on your cheeks  
you probably wouldn't like it when it  
snowed  
white stuff up to your belt  
soaked socks sticking to your frozen toes  
but at least everything would have a  
glow about it  
I passed this cafe in Montana  
called the Two Sisters Cafe  
it had a rainbow flag on the roof with  
a sign that read Aliens Welcome  
there's a Three Sisters' Cafe in another  
city, maybe in Canada  
these people love women, nature  
aliens  
and the mountains.

“Extinction” by Krystal A. Smith

My mother was your mother,  
your father was my father,  
but like a bad word on my name a knife cut the bloodline, your face out of old photographs.  
If I don't speak of you,  
think of you,  
you'll be gone.  
Forgotten.

Men go extinct, brother  
because they trample earth, women, with no consequence. Taking and taking, calling it survival  
until  
all that's left  
is the falling sky.

“(Nothing but) Flowers” by Sophie Furlong Tighe

Once a friend told me that women's self-defense is often  
*quite ineffective, actually.*

He showed me with his own two hands,  
how when men defend,  
they push heavy and straight between the ribs.  
But a woman stabs up, with all the might in her  
thin arms  
the intruder can push  
her weight down and knife out  
before she breaks skin.

He said,  
that if I was ever scared  
I am best to swing over stab  
find a wrench  
or a pickaxe.

The morning after he broke his girlfriend's arm I brought him to  
the park and we set rose petals racing under the bridge.

*-How do we know who's is who's?*

*-Mine's redder*

*-What's our wager?*

*-If I win I throw you over the bridge and when you win you don't  
have to speak to me for the whole rest of the day.*

*-What if I want to explain myself?*

*-Heads I win, tails you lose.*

We waited for the flowers on the other side  
Our silence  
making us the same  
until,

*-I am always surprised when they appear again.*

*-Curious for the life they live under the bridge?*

When I sent him pictures of my own bruises he couldn't understand  
How that man could want to hurt me  
How could anyone strike to leave a mark—  
—*Genuinely, unsettling.*

It is the ones who think  
they never could



I hear Japan has beautiful ones.

### **Rachel's Commentary on "A GREIMAS SQUARE FOR SPRINGTIME":**

I created a Twitter originally to @ USPS when my packages are late, but at some point I stumbled down the rabbit hole of B-list celeb accounts and discovered a world rife with accidental poetry. Maybe it's something about the brevity of the platform? "A Greimas Square For Springtime" began as a cento after Jose Canseco's Twitter feed but became a textual Greimas square dealing in dialectics--feminine/masculine, intimacy/loneliness, human/nonhuman.

### Poet Biographies

**Diane Callahan** strives to capture her sliver of the universe through writing fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. As a developmental editor and ghostplotter, she spends her days shaping stories. Her YouTube channel, [Quotidian Writer](#), provides practical tips for aspiring authors. You can read her work in *Short Édition*, *Riddled with Arrows*, *Translunar Travelers Lounge*, *Rust+Moth*, *The Sunlight Press*, and *semicolon*, among others. Twitter: [@quotidianwriter](#); Website: <https://www.quotidianwriter.com/my-writing>

**Rob Colgate** (he/him/his) is a poet from Evanston, Illinois. He holds a degree in psychology from Yale University and has studied poetry at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He is currently pursuing his MFA with the New Writers Project at UT Austin. His first chapbook, *So Dark the Gap*, was published by Tammy in March 2020 and is available online and in select bookstores. You can find him at [robcolgate.com](http://robcolgate.com), on Twitter @YoungAdultRebel, and on Instagram @swing.sets.

**Madeleine Corley** (she/her) is a poet by internal monologue and loves writing in confinement. She calls Ohio and Georgia and California and Ireland home. Her work has been / will be featured in *Moonchild Magazine*, *Penteract Press*, *Okay Donkey*, and others. She currently serves as *Barren Magazine's* Poetry Editor. You can find her on Twitter @madelinksi, on Instagram @wrotemadeleine, or on her website [wrotemadeleine.com](http://wrotemadeleine.com).

**Jason B. Crawford** [He/They] is a black, non-binary male, bi-poly-queer writer born in Washington DC, raised in Lansing, MI. In addition to being published in online literary magazines, such as *Wellington Street Review*, *Barren Magazine*, *The Amistad*, and *Kissing Dynamite*, he is also the Editor in Charge for *The Knight's Library Magazine*. His chapbook collection *Summertime Fine* as a Short List selection for *Nightingale & Gale*.

Website: [JasonBCrawford.com](http://JasonBCrawford.com)

Instagram: [jasonbcrawford](#)

Twitter handle: [@jasonbcrawford](#)

Facebook page: By Jason B. Crawford

**SK Grout** grew up in Aotearoa/New Zealand, has lived in Germany and now splits her time as best she can between London and Auckland. She is the author of the micro chapbook “to be female is to be interrogated” (2018, the poetry annals). She holds a post-graduate degree in creative writing from City, University of London and is a Feedback Editor for *Tinderbox Poetry*. Her work also appears in *Crannóg*, *Landfall*, *trampset*, *Banshee Lit*, *Parentheses Journal*, *Barren Magazine* and elsewhere. More information here: <https://skgroutpoetry.wixsite.com/poetry>

**Dipe Jola** is a poet, a lover of nightmares scribbled into lines of poetry. Published in *Kalahari Review*, *Echelon Review*, *Turnpike Magazine*, *NantyGreens*, *African Writer*, *Scynsynchronised Chaos*, amongst others. She was the First runner up for the Eriatar Oribhabor Poetry Prize, 2018. She finds her way in life by writing what she sees, feels and hears. She writes from the lower bed of a two-bunked bed in Lagos, Nigeria. Can be reached on Twitter via @Jola\_ng

**Quinn Lui** is a Chinese-Canadian student who has been described as 1) mostly made up of caffeine and bees and 2) dedicated to being a menace. Their work has appeared in *Occulum*, *Synaesthesia Magazine*, *Okay Donkey*, and elsewhere, and they are the author of the micro-chapbook *teething season for new skin* (L'Éphémère Review, 2018). You can find them @flowercryptid on [Tumblr](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#), or sharing a fire escape with raccoons.

**Aura Martin** graduated from Truman State University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. She is the author of the micro-chapbook “Thumbprint Lizards” (Maverick Duck Press). Her recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *3 Moon Magazine*, *Flypaper Lit*, and *Poetry WTF?!*, among others. In Aura’s free time, she likes to run and take road trips. Find her on Twitter @instamartin17.

**Gayatri Rajan** (she/her) is a writer and high school sophomore from Andover, MA. Her work has been recognized by *Eunoia Review*, *Creative Minds Imagine Magazine*, Best in Teen Writing, Write the World, and the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, among others. In her spare time, she loves listening to electro-pop, hanging out with her sister, and drinking far too much tea.

**Arianna Sebo** (she/her) is a queer poet and writer living in Southern Alberta with her husband, pug, and five cats. Their home is brimming with cat posts, pet beds, fur, and love. She received her B.A. in philosophy from the University of Calgary, working in the field of law to feed her family and writing poetry to feed her philosophical soul. Her poetry can be found in *The Writers Club* at *Grey Thoughts* and forthcoming in *Front Porch Review* and *Lucky Jefferson*. She can be found on the web at [AriannaSebo.com](http://AriannaSebo.com) and @AriannaSebo on Twitter and Instagram.

**Krystal A. Smith** is a Black lesbian writer of poetry and speculative fiction. Her stories have appeared in *Lez Talk: A Collection of Black Lesbian Fiction* (2016). Her debut collection *Two Moons: Stories* was released from BLF Press (2018) and was a 2019 Lambda Literary Award Finalist.

Website: [krystalasmith.com](http://krystalasmith.com)

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**Rachel Stempel** (she/her) is a queer poet originally from the Bronx who now larps as a Long Island townie. She is an MFA candidate and adjunct instructor at Adelphi University. Her work is forthcoming in the spring issue of *The Nasiona*.

**Sophie Furlong Tighe** is a Dublin based poet. She has work published or forthcoming in *DUST Magazine*, *Boston Accent Lit*, and *Vagabond City Lit* among others. She tweets @furtiso.

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