

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 21 SEPTEMBER 2020: "SAVIOUR"

Welcome to Issue 21 "Saviour." Here in the Northeast, the sun is rising a little later, setting a little earlier. Mornings are wet, drab. Covid-19 is still with us. Police brutality is still with us. And the pull to paint the world in technicolor may be more than just a dream. Follow this issue's 13 poets through journeys that attempt to save, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, and meet them where they've come out on the other side.

This month's featured poet is Jennifer Chiu.

Issue 21 includes work by Iyanuoluwa Adenle, Hayley Bernier, Despy Boutris, Juliana Chang, Jennifer Chiu, Savannah Cooper, victoria mallorga hernandez, AE Hines, Ellen Huang, Shon Mapp, Stephanie Seabrooke, and Ryleigh Wann. And Isaura Ren is featured in "Gaining Perspective" to make it a baker's dozen.

### Farewell

With this issue, we say farewell to Assistant Editor Jason Bates. He has been with KD from almost the beginning, and he will certainly be greatly missed. But we will be in his corner as he ventures into new projects, and he will always be part of the KD fam! Take some time to check out the special feature zine that he edited with Libby Cudmore titled "**Play It Again.**" Jason also did the photography for **Issue 10 "On the Brink,"** so revisit that beauty. Cheers, Jason, and thank you. . .for everything :)

### Featured Artist

CHUCK TAYLOR, raised in Texas, Minnesota, Illinois, and North Carolina, won the 1988 Austin Book Award for *What Do You Want, Blood?* His latest are *Being Beat* (2018), and *I Tried To Be Free* (2020) published by Hercules Press.

Taylor worked in the Poets-in-the-Schools program, served as CETA Poet-in-Residence of Salt Lake City, operated Paperbacks Plus, runs Slough Press with Christopher Carmona, and was Creative Writing Coordinator at Texas A&M. He also taught at UT Austin, UT El Paso, and UT Tyler, and also taught in Japan.

Today, he lives in the Texas hill country on the border between the South, the West, and MexAmerica. Taylor loves to swim in and canoe the local spring fed San Marcos River. He is also a photographer and a children's magician.

"Practise" by Iyanuoluwa Adenle

& i tried to imagine birds with words in their tiny beaks  
perched on the roof of my mother's house.

except that birds don't just perch on rooftops. they are drawn  
by words, they said.

except that no story is ever as it is told.

last spring:  
i was calling birds to the history of  
songs lost in my mother's throat.

trying and failing to fill up  
the orifice of her wounds with the scent of peonies.

i didn't know how frightened i was of drowning until it was  
just me on a dinghy in the middle of the sea.

& all my years of  
practicing drowning became smoke.

you didn't know how long you had been quiet until now. & all  
your years of practicing silence seemed almost theatrical.

come sunset:  
the birds will ride high on the wind home; lighter.

at sunset, imaginary curtains will fall:  
your heart heavier with your preference for silence and

mine, pumped with fear for anything with wings & the water.

both, larger than our lives.

“wanting what you can’t have” by Hayley Bernier

a keen eye for stony interruptions in the fields  
of daydreams you wish you took  
for granted out your bedroom window  
hatred for the work you can’t reconcile with  
you don’t recognize  
his desire to be free from  
dirt hands and blazing sun  
scorching naked teenage shoulders  
thick denim on damp thighs  
his body straining in this heat  
like throwing rocks will rid him of his country burden  
like cursing the sun will bring it down a notch  
like hating this air could pull it from his blood  
such stark contrasting love  
misplaced from his ungrateful dry mouth  
resenting such sweet lemonade  
for it was also born of this dirt he can’t bear  
you wonder at the chaos of a boy  
who doesn’t allow himself to gleam  
or pull the freshness up from his roots  
like mouthfuls from this mother  
her kitchen brimming with hand-made adoration  
all of it made for him

“On Drowning” by Despy Boutris

With every drowning, first comes  
the terror. This I learned young.  
When I started sitting on the shoreline,  
watching what went on in the water,  
I always knew when to jump  
in. The second someone lost  
their footing, their eyes bulged,  
arms flailing, mouth searching  
for air. & running in to help  
them, I learned how deep that  
desperation goes: how they’d stand  
on my skull if it meant a gaspful

of air. So I learned the value  
of escapes: duck beneath the water  
& they'll let go. Keep your safe  
distance. This has gone on for years:  
all these near-drowners nearly drowning  
me. Only now it's me who's drowning.  
I'm stranded in this lakeful of loss,  
& what hope remains  
keeps escaping me.

[“In the summer, Chris and I go dancing in Taiwan” by Juliana Chang](#)

and we spend the night avoiding a man I scared off on Tinder  
with a rant about the literary merits of rom-coms  
and why it's fucking sexist to be prescriptive  
about what film genres smart women get to like—and Chris is  
a smart woman, sees volcano in my eyes the moment we spot him,  
will pop and lock around me all night so that I never  
have to share the same square of dance floor  
as *Charlie-who-is-surprised-a-girl-like-you-enjoyed-When-Harry-Met-Sally*.  
Chris, designated Large American of this trip,  
cannot speak a word of Mandarin,  
puts her body on the line to guard mine.

In the mornings we eat mango ice,  
take turns swatting each other's greedy hands off  
swollen mosquito bites, threaten one another  
with increasingly bizarre post-climate-change world orders  
*if you don't stop scratching RIGHT. NOW.*  
Chris loves the subway more than anyone  
so we take it everywhere, stay on two stations past our stop  
so she can see the river, the way it holds the city by the shoulders  
like an old friend: once, in college, I woke up after a night of crying  
to find a box of vanilla tea sitting outside my door,  
a handwritten note telling me to be gentle.

We scream Lizzo lyrics while biking.  
We buy too many earrings.  
We hike Elephant Mountain in matching jean jackets  
and sweat ourselves into a parallel universe.  
Chris is dumb bitch hours 24/7, like the FamilyMart  
where she won't stop buying shrimp chips,

(the ones she can't eat without breaking out in hives),  
and it is silly, really, how much her destructive  
looks like her love.

*As in: do you have shin ramen nearby?*  
*As in: one more scratch and we'll lose the ice caps.*  
*As in: show me the parts of yourself you love least.*  
*I will pull them into a freestyle circle*  
*in the center of the dance floor.*  
*I will keep you moving to the music*  
*until your hurt grows small enough*  
*to hold in one hand, or one eight count,*  
*until we have created more, here, than you've lost.*

["When night comes and hides your monsters,"](#) by Jennifer Chiu, September's Featured Poet

Call me streetlight: the yellow light beams  
tendriling your ghosts, chasing their shadows

into your path. Call me flame: orange trembling  
between your hands as cigarette ignites. Don't

you know that monsters tend towards smoke, every charred  
memory you try to wisp away? Your throat chokes

with unsung bodies, coughing out something  
like a repentance. So call me daylight: the sun burnt

into a crisp you piece between your teeth, all the world  
in flicker and kindling. Your footfall heavy as you trace

the streets and flay your soles against everything  
broken. Or perhaps flashlight: illuminating these ghosts

until your eyes can no longer claim milky,  
writhing away from sight. Come, there is no blindness

here—you see the world overturning on its axis now. Your cigarette  
singeing bullet wounds into your sundress, these bodies sinking

into their graves. When night has passed, the ghosts, these shadows

and their after-images will remain. Do not be foolish, the monsters  
you cannot burn away: it was your fire that created them.

### **Jennifer's Commentary on "When night comes and hides your monsters":**

I was inspired to write this poem in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, as a response to some of the willful ignorance or inaction that I've seen arise from it.

I've always been fascinated by streetlights and how they illuminate and reveal our surroundings. In a way, the past few months have served as streetlights: opening so many people's eyes and revealing the injustices of our society. For me, light is often associated with fire, which can be destructive but also revolutionary and purposeful. This is a poem for those avoiding these issues by hiding in the dark, but also the ones who aren't afraid to be the streetlight, the fire, the daylight.

It's my hope that, as a society, we can move forward with change now, but it can't happen if inequity and injustice are not realized. To reconcile this idea with the original image of hiding and darkness, I wanted to bring all of these threads back together in the ending: we're no longer blind, and we can't use that as an excuse anymore. We're aware of these injustices now, and we must confront them.

### **Editor-in-Chief Christine Taylor's Commentary on "When night comes and hides your monsters":**

I watch John Oliver's *Last Week Tonight* religiously. On the June 7, 2020, episode, Oliver featured a clip by Kimberly Latrice Jones, who explains her perspective on the riots that have occurred in 2020. At the end of the clip, she says, "Far as I'm concerned, they could burn this bitch to the ground, and it still wouldn't be enough. And they are lucky that what black people are looking for is equality and not revenge." Well. . . yeah. And here we are. We see you now, and we've been seeing you through your attempts to hide in the shadows of your own misdeeds (a euphemism, for sure). When Jennifer's poem came across the transom, I immediately thought of Jones' words. . . and they linger. It's time, people. It's been time. . . .

### ["Three and a Half Months After" by Savannah Cooper](#)

I found a baby rabbit stranded by the back fence.  
I can't say how. The dogs were sniffing over there,  
and I thought back to when the lab had tossed  
naked bunnies in the air like toys.

I heard something near a squeak and ran outside.

The noise was just a bird screaming as the sun fell in the sky, but there *was* a baby rabbit, gray and frail. I thought it was dead until I looked closely, saw the gentle shudder of its body.

The mother stood in the yard against the dogs as long as she could, desperate, and finally slipped through the slats of the wooden gate. She waited in the yard between our house and the neighbors'—still and watching.

I sent the dogs back inside and gently lifted the baby with a shovel. I didn't want to touch it, whether that's myth or fact, that the mother would catch my scent and turn away. It tumbled across the black surface, waking and reaching out with tiny legs. I carried it over to the gate, placed it on the other side of the fence. The mother watched, didn't move. I wanted to tell her to come collect her child, that it was unhurt and safe, but there was nothing I could do.

I left them there, ten feet apart, the baby sleeping helplessly in the grass that needed to be mowed, the mother alert and patient. I didn't return until after dark, shining my phone's flashlight into the grass until it drew moths. They were both gone. And I held that moment close, that feeling of saving something. A small thing, sure, inconsequential even, but I had done it, had stopped nature from its relentless course.

There would be other rabbits and other losses loud and quiet, but this day I had given a mother back her child, and that was something. I already knew what it was to lose, and maybe she did too, but I gave her what I couldn't give myself and wished blessings upon her, this wild animal that made a home of the space under our worn deck.

[“lover, summer girl” by victoria mallorga hernandez](#)

lover,

summer girl climbing up my legs  
feeling careless  
softly opening my body  
to the promise of empty august air

recklessness  
that tints the afternoon red  
forgets the taste of loss  
upon your lips  
disorientating  
because

wouldn't you want me to forget  
your breaking promises  
the color of words unbidden  
as you trail upon my skin while  
tripping over half truths

lover,  
summer girl kissing my belly  
like a bit out of a Sappho  
fragment  
you wonder if I would cross  
the stream and whisper  
promises again,  
but you have burnt my hands

once again rotten feeling of disappointment  
as I try to be enough for  
someone that was always  
waiting for the right moment to leave

so, lover,  
summer girl, part your hands  
bless the departure as a resignation  
love tainted with loss before you closed  
your eyes that very first time:  
colors of the morning  
crawling upon lost eyes  
in this sweltering  
sweltering  
weather.

“Almost Like Being Choked by a Lover” by AE Hines

That summer I follow him down to the shore  
amid the salt grasses, beneath languid gulls,  
follow their calls of longing while the sun  
chases our shadows east into the surf  
like departing souls. We bed down in the dunes.  
I let him touch me however he likes  
for as long as he dares. First day senior year,  
his posse now in tow, from behind he wraps  
his arm around my neck, then slams  
my thin body into the dirty bathroom wall.  
Not the first time. A whispered hiss. *Faggot*  
poured over the red coal of my ear. Not the last time  
my trembling hands reach back to touch the face  
of a man who hurts me.

“Snogging Frogs” by Ellen Huang

I'm told it's sweet, the first kiss  
There's fairy balm upon my lips,  
there's strawberries to taste,  
& then there's drinking,  
& then there's a feast.  
Upon my lips is the first time,  
something that must be broken  
at just the right time—  
Bottled princess virginity,  
sparkling eternal youth.

The frog never asked for a kiss  
exactly, but worse. To be kept,  
to eat from my plate and drink  
from my goblet, to sleep in a  
bundle of sheets by my bed.  
You understand why I threw  
him. You understand why  
the wall splattered.  
You understand why I chopped  
off his head.

Then a human prince emerged,  
naked, from the wet frogskin.  
I'm told he was handsome.  
I'm told I should have given him  
a chance. I'm told  
the kiss would have  
turned sweet.  
But there is only the frog  
only the tadpole  
only the wet amphibian  
where there should have been  
transformation.

Nothing's worked yet.

### “Bygones & Mixtapes” by Shon Mapp

we'd lie penguin bellied in a makeshift seance circle,  
a boombox at our heads, legs bent like L's spelling laughter into the room,  
waiting for songs our mothers wouldn't let us hear.

we were convinced the play, pause, and record buttons pressed,  
made for a cleaner transition.  
but in the end, most of them were messy, muddled, clumsy, things  
evidenced by our puerile creations, rife with ad snippets for shoes and eczema cream.

we'd listen all afternoon, for songs that never played  
and still considered it time well spent.  
joyfully expectant.  
bright red sugary drink stained tongues singing and sucking teeth,  
giddily unaware of how quickly  
songs, cassette tapes, and friendships become outdated

i'd mumble-mouth the lyrics to “O.P.P.”  
because only immigrants and weirdos didn't know them, and i was both.  
i still don't know them.  
that autumn of pretending robbed me of that, long before its popularity had waned.  
and my little coven never even noticed.  
only after decades, came my eviction from our group,  
and for a lesser offense.

“Dual” by Stephanie Seabrooke

The girl I ran down is leaning  
on the dogwood, smoking a slut butt  
and snapping ash into the sun.  
*Want one?* She asks me, and she knows  
I do, and she knows I just quit.  
Her fragrance chokes me  
like a favorite lover.  
Tonight she'll slip through  
the keyhole and sit on my chest,  
a sleep demon stewed in lipstick  
and tar sighs sucking on my  
sheet slobber. She was supposed to  
stay on the pavement so I could  
paint shutters and pick up  
dry cleaning and crease into the ether.  
Instead she pulled her brains back in and  
bashed my mailbox with a baseball bat.  
Now she's behind me in the produce aisle  
pounding against a part time deejay.  
She's wearing my perfume and singing  
to the swell of my pencil skirt.  
She's splayed out on my spreadsheets  
eating a ribeye as rare as ruth and tossing  
the fat to the hell hounds thrusting at her feet.  
Even her vowels are obscene, mauling my ears  
on my twilight jog. *Moaning dear one, don't you know  
we're doomed to commune forever? Don't you want  
to be my double star on the tip of the centaur's arrow?  
Now slow down and let me swallow your shadow  
while scorpion hearts sink behind the summer sky.*

“Elegy with Spanish Moss” by Ryleigh Wann

*poem ending on a line inspired by Roger Reeves*

Look at the crane. It stands soundless  
in the ripples of the lake. It does not  
seem to mind the echoes of falling leaves  
creating currents. It cares only for the solitude,  
the dull greens of the cypress trees and their

reflections in January, the suspended silence  
of an unanswered question.

Red berries, bright like fireworks, shoot  
from a branch in the water. If I eat them, crush  
the skin into my palms, press the pit between my nails  
until I cannot tell if the stain is juice or blood,  
what would you say? *I didn't know it could get this messy?*  
Or would you have me hold my hands above my heart?

In a dream, you told me you loved me and a stone  
fell out of your mouth. The words were written on it.  
When I said it back, a bird crawled out of mine—  
pushed its beak through my pursed lips, spread  
its clumsy wings one at a time, breaking my jaw  
bones, crooked and cobbled like a loose hinge.

My tongue hung, tangled and gnarled, like spanish moss.  
I think that bird, too, was a crane.

### “Gaining Perspective”

In her poem "half-measure," **Isaura Ren** explores her relationship with her father and how she has been able to have empathy for his pain.

### “half-measure” by Isaura Ren

*CW: homophobia, child abuse*

My father played the flute  
when he was young. He never

was any good—at the flute, that is.

Too hesitant. His tiny freckled fingers

never pressed quite hard enough. Baseballs,  
under his command, crashed wildly into the dirt.

*Kids can be cruel*, he muttered through a cigarette, as if  
I wouldn't know. *They called me queer, but I showed them.*

He made it four months in the Army, forty years in blue.  
Decades grew on him like calluses. He ironed his grip,

willed away flinches, passed them down to me.

Yet when he wrapped those hardened hands

around my woodwind throat—just

then, for a second, he faltered.

#### **Isaura's Commentary on "half-measure":**

"half-measure" is a reflection on my early relationship with my father. The events in this poem took place when I was in grade school, maybe seven or eight years old. As you'll notice, this piece centers around my father's background, not my own. As this man raised me, he had to grapple with his own childhood insecurities and trauma, the effects of which he took out on his own child. This perpetuated a toxic cycle of abuse. I gave this information about his early life not to excuse his actions, but to contextualize them, to make plain the ripple effect of trauma in one's formative years. Adulthood has given me perspective and empathy toward his pain. Understanding is greater than forgiveness. By becoming aware of this cycle, I can and will end it.

#### Poet Biographies

**Iyanuoluwa Adenle** (she/her) is a poet and essayist from Nigeria. Her works have appeared or are forthcoming in *Empty Mirror*, *One Jacar Press*, *Lolwe* and elsewhere. She tweets at @teleayo\_

**Hayley Bernier** (she/her) is a queer Canadian writer, who at the moment is favouring and focusing on poetry, especially in relation to her family history. She just completed her dissertation for her MSc in Creative Writing from the University of Edinburgh. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *From Arthur's Seat: Volume 5*, *Spoken Word Scratch Night*,

*The Dog Door Cultural*, and more. You can read her sporadic posts and see some cool photos she's taken if you follow her @burnyayhayley on Instagram.

**Despy Boutris's** writing has been published or is forthcoming in *Copper Nickel*, *American Poetry Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Journal*, *Colorado Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and elsewhere. Currently, she teaches at the University of Houston, works as Assistant Poetry Editor for *Gulf Coast*, and serves as Editor-in-Chief of *The West Review*.

**Juliana Chang** is a Taiwanese American writer, storyteller, and filmmaker. She is the 2019 recipient of the Urmy/Hardy Poetry Prize, the 2017 recipient of the Wiley Birkhofer Poetry Prize, and a 2015 Scholastic Art & Writing Gold Medalist in Poetry. She received a BA in Linguistics and a MA in Sociology from Stanford University in 2019. Find her on Twitter @julianawrites\_, Instagram @julianawritespoems, and on the web [www.julianachang.com](http://www.julianachang.com)

**Jennifer Chiu** (she/her) is from Memphis, TN. Her prose and poetry are published or forthcoming in *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Rust + Moth*, and elsewhere. When she's not writing, she can be found admiring the sky or bullet journaling with one of her twenty-one 0.38mm black pens. She tweets at @jenniferrchiu.

**Savannah Cooper** (she/her) is a Missouri native who now lives in Maryland with her partner and dogs. Her work has previously appeared in *Mud Season Review*, *Steam Ticket*, *Gone Lawn*, *Midwestern Gothic*, and *Rust + Moth*, among other publications.

**victoria mallorga hernandez** (she/her) is a peruvian taurus, trickster, and poet. currently, she's an associate editor at *palette poetry* and editorial assistant at *redivider mag*. her first poetry collection, *albion*, came out with alastor editores in 2019. her poetry has been featured or is forthcoming in *revista lucerna*, *el hablador*, *perhappened mag* and *anti-heroin chic*. her book reviews have a home in the monthly newsletter *la libretilla* (@tiny\_libretilla). you can find her as @cielosraros on twitter and instagram.

**AE Hines** is a poet who grew up in North Carolina and currently resides in Portland, Oregon. A recent Pushcart nominee, his work is widely published in anthologies and literary journals such as *Potomac Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *California Quarterly*, *I-70 Review*, and *Hawaii Pacific Review*. He is currently at work on his first full length manuscript. Find him on the web [www.aehines.net](http://www.aehines.net), on Twitter: @PoetAEHines, and on Instagram @poet\_aehines

**Ellen Huang** (she/her) is an ace writer of fairy tales with a BA in Writing + Theatre minor from Point Loma Nazarene University. She is a peer reviewer (née Managing Editor) of *Whale Road Review*. She is published/forthcoming in 50+ venues including *Elemental Anthologies*; *Mookychick*; *White Stag*; *Sword & Kettle Press*; *From the Farther Trees*; *FERAL Lit*; *Nymphs*; *Rhythm & Bones*; *Three Drops from a Cauldron*; and *Gingerbread House*. She also runs a blog where she explores her spirituality with books and movies. She lives in San Diego with her pan

roommate and a dragon. Find her on social media:

Twitter @nocturnalxlight and via blog: [worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com](http://worrydollsandfloatinglights.wordpress.com)

**Shon Mapp** (she/her) is an emerging writer with words appearing or forthcoming in *Fourteen Poems*, *Ghost Heart*, and *Cathexis Northwest Press*. Her works explore queer intimacy, multicultural identities, and nuclear kinship.

**Isaura Ren** is a queer poet, editor, and stargazer from Northern California. She's the editor-in-chief of *perhappened mag*, an online lit journal. When she's not busy reading other people's words, she dabbles in writing her own. Find her Twitter at @isaurarenwrites and portfolio at [isauraren.tumblr.com](http://isauraren.tumblr.com).

**Stephanie Seabrooke's** work explores identity, relationships, the subjectivity of perception, and the inexorable march of time. Her poems have appeared in *The Shore* and *Q/A Poetry*. She holds a BA in English from Towson University and resides in the Baltimore metro area. You can follow her on Twitter [@StephSeabrooke](https://twitter.com/StephSeabrooke)

**Ryleigh Wann** (she/her/hers) is an MFA poetry candidate at UNC Wilmington. When she isn't writing or reading on her balcony, she can be found playing with her dumbo rats, missing the Midwest, roller skating, or exploring nearby swamps. You can find her writing forthcoming in *Press Pause Press*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, and *Semicolon*. Follow her on Twitter @wannderfullll

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