

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 23 NOVEMBER 2020: "FLY"

Welcome to Issue 23 "Fly," in which our contributing poets explore escape, freedom, and reckonings.

This month's featured poet is Jessica Davis.

Issue 23 includes work by Elizabeth Bluth, Marissa Castrigno, Jessica Davis, Sofia Fey, Shannon Frost Greenstein, Amanda Kay, Elane Kim, Praise Osawaru, Mandira Pattnaik, Charles Rafferty, Kevin A. Risner, and Sydney Vogl. And Elizabeth Kuelbs is featured in "Expose" to make it a baker's dozen.

### Featured Artist—Natalie Bradford

I am from Detroit, Michigan and recently graduated from the University of Western Michigan Frostic School of Art with a Bachelor's degree in fine studio art with an emphasis in print media. While at school, I explored the medium of printmaking and other alternative forms of mark making such as drawing, painting, and collage. I have exhibited artwork locally in Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, Detroit, Ypsilanti, and Lansing, as well as internationally through PxP Contemporary Gallery. I currently live and work in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

My artwork is mostly surreal/imaginative and oftentimes deal with themes of absence, decay, humans, and nature. My work explores my concerns, anxieties, and curiosity about the future and what happens to our bodies and souls when we die. I'm also interested in the duality of animal life and human life as they exist together in the world. I create images and narratives of what I perceive to be both fleeting moments right before death and (possible) life after death depicted by the human figure, nature, and animals.

### "Crossing Country" by Elizabeth Bluth

Open windows draw the heat of summer into  
our compact, mobile world.  
Your hair, caught in the breeze,  
spirals around your head, catching in your teeth  
as you smile.

I see myself in your sunglasses.

The fields and farmlands of our country  
spread out around us for miles  
and miles. A lone bovine  
or two occasionally flitting by  
as we continue on the highway.

When we reach our destination on  
the eastern shores of this continent,  
we'll say goodbye.  
And I'll watch you board a plane that  
takes you back to where you started.

Your diagnosis looms in our future,  
wholly unknown to us now.  
On the horizon we see only the setting sun  
and signage for the next small town,  
the promise of a bite of food,  
a bed to rest our stiff and drowsy bodies.

In time, this will all be a blur of memories,  
some of my last warm moments with you.  
But today, motel coffee and cheese danish in hand,  
the road ahead brimming with possibilities,  
we are untroubled, enveloped in the joy of  
our own companionship.

“Inheritance” by Marissa Castrigno

Her father, my namesake, died four thousand miles  
from Annapol speaking four tongues after more than  
four decades with his wife, and for his children

left nothing but bruises,

the clothes on his back  
so small they might outfit a seashell.

He fled Poland not long before pitchforks  
speared hay carts where Jews hid beneath  
false bottoms, holding breath. His brother

lived to tell of it. Five of my eight kin

murdered, my grandmother left  
with one aunt and one uncle.

Reared in a land foreign to her father, reared  
my mother in a land first foreign to herself.

What if after seventy-four years she still  
gets homesick for Havana? After two cities  
and two marriages and two generations, the echo  
of a second country still shouts back at her  
on Fifth Avenue, the dark and gilded tower looming

in the twilight she awakens reaching  
for mamey or some other flavor without an  
English name and realizing the ruse turns  
towards my grandfather for a  
sleepy laugh only to find he  
too is a dream.

I fear this inheritance, chasm between house  
and home made wider with each alien phrase  
uttered easily beneath Spanish moss swinging  
different than Sketchers strung up above  
the same Brooklyn neighborhood where she  
married my grandfather, eons before I treaded  
that broken sidewalk along the Parkway.

Did I walk towards them or away?

Last spring another love sprouting beneath that tree-  
lined promenade, we sank teeth into savory dough  
so many mornings and laughing laughing at ourselves  
I fished the light from your eyes like a shimmering line  
between us. Maybe when I say I want to go home I mean  
to that day, that corner bench where I kissed you for  
the last time as Earth tilted me towards summer and you  
flew off into autumn as if traveling through time.

I cried then and I cried weeks later when I left  
my grandmother at that same curb

and I cried after that, careening toward the distant marsh  
where now I eat and sleep and think of them.

I fear this inheritance: longing, leaving, flashes of  
recognition that smack at the pain of lost familiarity so  
that it rings like a bell.

When I packed my car it held more  
than my ancestors probably possessed leaving  
Poland, cusp of genocide, or Cuba, cusp of coup.

Now on my balcony, ashamed of my yearning,  
revolted by the soft rustling of a potted palm  
I stare into the warm winter breeze and  
track the blizzard back home.

It is summer in the southern hemisphere.

Riding out to the sand I squeeze my arms,  
stare down at the pier its gargantuan wooden legs the same  
blue as your irises; a collection of blues.

[“Substitute for a Lost Future” by Jessica Davis, November’s Featured Poet](#)

I watch gilded wallpaper fade.            We haunt  
each other.    What that means. There is

          longing here. A patina  
          creeps across the face

of remembrances no longer shiny yet  
still situated on a shelf of all the selves

on display, past surprises  
for the future to diffuse. These days

it’s either *we’re all gonna die*  
*maybe even soon*

might-as-well-start-smoking again nihilism  
or     *I must train this body to sustain a run*

for when the revolution comes.        Hours  
widen cracks        between        like ice

splitting pavement across a season. Tonight  
we blow your bonus check

on fancy wine, rare steaks, speak  
of travel plans we'll never make. Escape

can take many forms. I stare, hungry, at pictures  
of space: stars and nebulae, the place

where the moon should be        when it's gone  
missing        stay up late to paint

a giant silver orb  
across my bedroom wall,

just in case        it never comes back.  
Just in case.

#### **Jesica's Commentary on "Substitute for a Lost Future":**

I wrote this poem in the *Before Times*, back in 2017 while I was still in a disintegrating marriage and living in a city I didn't yet understand I needed to leave. Now, in late 2020, this piece takes on a different cast: the concept of a lost future has expanded from personal to global, and temporality has become even more slippery. We all contain nesting dolls of identities that surface as needed, shifting and mutating in response to external and internal events. Who do I need to be today to get by? Adaptation is a form of survival. Escape can take many forms.

#### **Editor-in-Chief Christine Taylor's Commentary on "Substitute for a Lost Future":**

When Jesica's poem came over the transom, we commented, "Yep, that's all of us now." The following section of the poem best sums up how I personally have been feeling for the past several months now:

These days

it's either *we're all gonna die*  
*maybe even soon*

might-as-well-start-smoking again nihilism

or *I must train this body to sustain a run*

for when the revolution comes.

Some days I'm "training"; most days I'm "smoking." Most nights, I sit by the fire out back and pretend that nothing bad is happening. It's just me, my aging dog, the rotten-ass stray cat, and stars.

"a letter from my hands to my heart" by Sofia Fey

*after Rachel McKibbens*

held contempt from other  
organs giving you all the credit  
blamed you, solely you, for all wrongdoings  
& for bringing us to barren lands  
when you must know We are for building

I'm the one with opposable thumbs  
I'm the one that can write this list  
yet, without you,  
there would be nothing to  
move me

& do you realize your pulsed wanting, your  
infatuated flowing, puts the whole decision on me?  
& I can ignore it, but you'll send more, layers for later  
you'll hit me at 4am, your vein vines  
grow longer, cover more ground, at night

& what if I have nothing to reach for?

that wrinkly dude upstairs sucks, certainly no help.  
most certainly no help with you two arguing either  
what do you want me to do,  
if I have nothing to reach for? & if I do  
what if they don't reach back?

**A letter from my heart to my hands**

open & close for me would you?  
*again.*

now let's talk about why you feel  
like you always have to build

"Purple" by Shannon Frost Greenstein

*after Mary Ruefle's "Red"*

(<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/153198/red-5e83d380020c0>)

After comes the  
bittersweet remorse, viscous regret at the corners of your eyes  
while you convince yourself  
you'd be fine on your own.

After comes the  
fallout, the wounds of the shrapnel of the voices of  
anger that echoed under the clearing sky  
as you clean the chickens.

After comes the  
mud; the sticky, relentless, suffocating, futile  
backdrop to every experience  
the longer it rains.

After comes the  
sadness, an ache, a blade through the xyphoid process  
when you remember the early 2000s  
and falling in love.

After comes the  
damage control, frantic steps of triage by wartime medics  
because your great-grandmother's china  
is broken on the floor.

After comes the  
rainbow, a prism of color and metaphor  
you will not see because  
everything is still mostly red.

“post-dollhood wilderness” by Amanda Kay

the underbrush has caught flame again,  
    like all the summers when I braided your hair  
into rope. days when I'd let you stay over, as  
    long as the shutters were pulled down. outside,  
the hawk screeches, pauses, then plunges to  
    silence. we watch a man pierce himself on  
the treetops as we laid half-buried beneath  
    wind-strew tulips. back when we were fragile  
enough to topple over with the gust, the sequoia  
    begged us to run and never look back. this was  
how it all began: underwater, you'd time how  
    long you could hold your breath. how you  
wouldn't come up: not until your vision went  
    dark at the edges and sometimes not even then.  
tell me, if we truly loved each other, what we  
    would've said. if we weren't just looking to give  
our bodies to the lust of backcountry, to the brutality  
    of it all. there's no one to set curfew, no one to call  
our names but each other. ribs, bruised from laughing,  
    like a child, like all the bones we buried. in the clearing,  
I take a knife to the soft pelt of a doe, but all that comes out  
    is polyester, your face—the kind of remembering  
that ends with the shattering of knees and sour bile,  
    spilling yourself onto the ground slick with mud.  
watch as the flood cleanses our bodies, an empty  
    field, curling into itself. like a mirage from childhood,  
it was fitting: you would always be imaginary. how  
    the creek was still full and I told you to sink, like everything  
you once dreamed of. the doll / house on fire, ash ebony  
    like button eyes, or last sunday's turkey dinner.

“Chromatography” by Elane Kim

Never look for your reflection in the spine  
    of the city. You will find nothing but blood  
in its sewers & rusted mouths in its graves.  
    A body measures how much it has bled  
by how well it remembers the rupture. I can't  
    tell you how a body recovers, or what it buries



to forget. I can only show you the cracks  
in my mother's hands: the way they have  
cleaved into her skin & burrowed. This is how  
the city whittles skin into skeleton under  
the cover of smog. This is how you forget:  
first a body, then its bones. Someday  
you may realize that a mother's curved spine  
is the home this city never gave you.  
That you have been mistaking mirrors  
for homes all this time. That your  
mouth is waiting under bedrock, buried.

"there is something missing & I know it" by Praise Osawaru

*(after Ernest Ogunyemi's jealous Ghazal)*

I envy every boy who has a brother's arm to tumble into, additional feet on the field  
to frolic around, playing pass & shoot while the morning star tenders them attentive glow.

when I watch a movie & see two brothers punctuating their bond with special handshakes /  
fist bumps / high fives, something in my chest wails & drops from my eyes

measures the length of my face downwards. there's something missing & I know it—  
an exclamation mark in this poem / a reflection that isn't me / sideburns / sturdy hands

to unstick me from mud. & no matter how many times I scurry & seek warmth  
in mother's embrace, that hollowness lingers, gaping like a rabbit's burrow. in an

alternate dimension, two boys of a name enjoy the coziness of earth's fur & witness a star  
abandon the night's sky for the surface. here, I am gazing at a half moon & seeing my heart.

"fire in the rearview mirror" by Mandira Pattnaik

forgive me. i never saw you heaving. coming.  
always lived in a saucer brimming. gulped  
stale grey soup, drenched in torrents. i hurried,  
scurried. knocked for work. washed cars.  
never paid enough. you waited. skirt afloat.  
waved from your backyard. among flushed peonies.  
i struggled to etch a life. was carried, a feather,  
by winds that didn't abate. sometimes a dust  
storm. sometimes blind rage. i thought you'd remain

closer than your scarf in my hands. you didn't.

away, i sculpted verses on rocks, on parched earth,  
and on brooks, our story, calligraphy on sand.  
you wafted away like mirage. now, it's twenty  
years of a dome gloating over its fiery wings. on my  
hapless skies. like falling debris, my pounding  
heart hurtles to a stop. coarse yellowing  
photographs, my fingers skim your dried,  
parted lips. feel warmth. sizzling, searing heat.  
a billowing forest fire. now, you're only the city  
that blushes at my great presence. watches stunned.

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### "Habits" by Charles Rafferty

Once again, the sparrows have nested in the gable vent. I can hear them when I open the attic door to put away my boots. The windowbox impatiens never make it to July. Someone forgets to water them twice a day and that's the end. Likewise, this tourmaline crystal will come to grief if I try to tap it free of the pegmatite's embrace. Who moved my cigarettes? Who made this wine delicious? Alas, I have gotten you an airport cab, and there is nothing to stop you from entering the sky.

### "Fireworks" by Kevin A. Risner

This year turns into the hottest one ever. I predict thunderstorms as we follow the path to the park along the lake. It feels like carrying Atlas's globe. I am crushed. I'm fooled into thinking the flashes in an olive dusk sky are distant lightning strikes. I tell my parents, we should go home!

My eyes dart in all directions, stay stuck upon a slice of sky over the lake. The Catherine Wheels, the crackles, the cherry bombs. They shake my body, thud against my chest.

After it's all over, the smoke pours over us like a toxic cloud event. My dad wears a T-shirt proclaiming he survived the Lakewood 4th-of-July fireworks accident in 1982. I always ask him about that night when he wears it. We reach home, dry, safe.

+

My ceiling fan shakes hardest at midnight. My pores had opened like a geyser on the walk home. It's easier when 77 degrees happens at noon.

I sleep on a mattress. Nothing else. Both windows in my room are open, letting all the crickets and the frogs' croaks inside. I hear more bangs and shouts from afar. Fireworks should never explode at this time, every ten minutes after one a.m., surrounded by the tallest and driest trees.

The distant past haunts century homes. Foundations creak as if ghosts are sitting around laughing, shuffling cards, playing gin rummy until the world brightens again.

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I took a vacation to the southern shores the first summer I lived in Istanbul, twelve years ago. We wove around cliffs in a rickety taxi van, my hands clinging to the seat in front of me. We crunched to a stop at Kabak. This was the town's name – but it's also a light-green squash, often stuffed with lamb.

No fireworks that July. I would have heard them at night if I were in Ohio. Instead, I sat in a treehouse with a smile, with nothing in my eardrums but guitars, with nothing in my hand but a bottle of Efes.

The surrounding forests met a peppery sky. There had been a new moon, a newborn silence lasting forever.

["Somewhere in a Suburb" by Sydney Vogl](#)

we floated through summer smoking weed in my parent's hot tub, a half hollowed apple, i bought an '03 camry with a cratered bumper when flames licked through california we sat on the hood, sucked on spiked slurpees & let ash rain into our throats while i drove, she dug fingers into the flesh of tangerines, a dozen of them sunk in her lap seventeen & going anywhere salty, even if that meant our lips after midnight the blood moon became our only witness, a strawberry fork splintering my mom's kitchen table chlorine breath bottling *please don't tell anyone* in my mouth my silence was inherited newspaper headlines, a city skyline inked onto forearm, at the diner around the corner from our apartment, where the red vinyl booth peeled sticky, and the waitresses knew our order but never our names

["Expose"](#)

We can only confront fear and violence when we expose their reality, a theme explored in "Bloom" by **Elizabeth Kuelbs**.

“Bloom” by Elizabeth Kuelbs

The leaf-gold wind willows Jenna’s hair  
into my cupcake gloss. I don’t care because  
she equals PanAm jets and tap shoes  
and I equal geodes and (will secretly marry)  
Shadowfax. We lift the canoe off its stand,  
swing it toward the sun-dazzled lake,  
try not to scythe  
the coneflowers, obedient.

*Steps that can be taken:  
Stock walleye to hunt crayfish and  
minnows and free little Daphnia to eat  
the blue algae blooms. Plant calico aster  
and fern in the watershed to filter  
phosphorus and deter invasive  
species. Do not babysit  
for the Harley dad.*

Mallards burst up quacking  
at two boys,  
walking the waterline,  
tall, gilded.  
The grass unroots  
at a beryl gaze, the chlorine sheen,  
the high shoulders.  
The lake laps at the bow.  
One says, *We think you’re cute.*  
One says, *We want you to suck our*

*Carpet the bedroom floor  
with wire hangers so you hear if  
the fish eyes at the window  
try to get in. Mark your exits. Learn  
to injure. Avoid stairwells, ponytails,  
deep thought. Fist your keys. Pack  
a canteen. Raise your daughters to  
fight and your son to be a good man.*

The ducks turn rooster  
and splash down: all claws,

red wattles and skin crowns.  
*Oh. My. God,* Jenna says. *Get off her yard.*  
We shove out through the weeds  
and paddle toward the bright middle,  
my meat hands electric,  
trembling.

### **Elizabeth's Commentary on "Bloom":**

Listening to the voices of the #MeToo movement and talking with friends about their experiences surfaced memories for me of being sexually harassed at the edge of independence. It also sharpened my fears for my two daughters about to go out into the world. Those memories and dangers merged into this poem, which attempts to blend times and natural elements to evoke the persistence and prevalence of sexual harassment and violence. And by calling fears into daylight, it attempts to fight them.

### Poet Biographies

**Elizabeth Bluth** is a writer of fiction, poetry, and plays. Her work has appeared or is upcoming in *LIT Magazine*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *VERSIFICATION Zine*, *Kissing Dynamite Poetry*, and others. She has a BA in Theatre and Creative Writing and an MFA in Fiction from The New School. Twitter: @elizakbluth. Website: [elizabethbluth.com](http://elizabethbluth.com)

**Marissa Castrigno** writes from Wilmington, North Carolina, where she is pursuing an MFA in Creative Nonfiction, and reading for *Shenandoah* and *Ecotone*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *PANK*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, and *Lavender Review*. She lives with her cat, Sula, who pretends she can read but is a liar. Find her on Twitter @marskc

**Jesica Davis** (she/her) is a poet and technical writer from Chicago. She's an Associate Editor for *Inverted Syntax* whose work has appeared in *The Laurel Review*, *Zone 3*, *streetcake magazine*, *Stoneboat*, *Storm Cellar*, and other places. Sometimes she makes poemboxes, which sculpturally interpret her words. Find her on Twitter @j3s, Instagram @\_\_j3s\_\_, and [jesicacarsondavis.net](http://jesicacarsondavis.net).

**Sofia Fey** is a Queer and Non-Binary writer living in LA. Primarily they are a theatre maker, filmmaker, and a writer of poetry and cartoons. Most recently their work has appeared in *Hooligan Magazine*, *Hominum Journal*, and *Homology Magazine*. Currently, they are the founding editor at Cabaret Contributor's Journal. They are hoping to eventually write for TV and publish a chapbook of their poetry. Find them on Twitter and Instagram @sofiafeycreates

**Shannon Frost Greenstein** (she/her) resides in Philadelphia with her children, soulmate, and cats. She is the author of *“Pray for Us Sinners,”* a collection of fiction from Alien Buddha Press, and *“More.”*, a poetry collection by Wild Pressed Books. Shannon is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, a Contributing Editor for *Barren Magazine*, and a former Ph.D. candidate in Continental Philosophy. Her work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *McSweeney’s Internet Tendency*, *Pithead Chapel*, *X-R-A-Y Lit Mag*, *Cabinet of Heed*, *trampset*, and elsewhere. Follow Shannon at [shannonfrostgreenstein.com](http://shannonfrostgreenstein.com) or on Twitter at @ShannonFrostGre.

**Amanda Kay** (she/her) is a sixteen-year-old, Asian-American writer from the Bay Area. In her free time, she enjoys drinking caffeinated beverages hot enough to burn her throat and walking sandy beaches. You can find her at @akay\_amanda on Twitter.

**Elane Kim** (she/her) is a high school student based in California. The editor-in-chief of *Gaia Lit*, she enjoys chemistry and rainy days. Her writing has been recognized by the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, and can be found in *Rust + Moth* and *Vagabond City Lit*, among others. She is very happy to meet you!

**Elizabeth Kuelbs** (she/her) writes and mothers at the edge of a Los Angeles canyon. She holds an MFA from the Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her poems appear in *Solo Novo 7/8: Psalms of Cinder & Silt*, *The Timberline Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Cricket*, *The Sunlight Press*, and elsewhere. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee, and the author of *How to Clean Your Eyes*, a chapbook forthcoming from dancing girl press. You can find her online at [elizabethkuelbs.com](http://elizabethkuelbs.com).

**Praise Osawaru** (he/him) is a writer and poet of Bini descent. A Best of the Net nominee, his works appear or are forthcoming in *Blue Marble Review*, *Giallo Lit*, *Glass Poetry*, *Ice Floe Press*, *Kalahari Review*, *Rising Phoenix Review*, and elsewhere. He's a 2020 Jack Grapes Poetry Prize Finalist, and he was also shortlisted for the Babishai 2020 Haiku Award and the Nigerian Students Poetry Prize 2020. A Virgo and lover of the strange and speculative, he's a prose reader for *Chestnut Review*. Find him on Twitter: @wordsmithpraise.

**Mandira Pattnaik's** first poem appeared in the national daily *The Times of India*. Her work, poetry and fiction, has since appeared in *Eclectica Magazine*, *Citron Review*, *Watershed Review*, *Bombay Lit Magazine*, *Splonk*, *New World Writing*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, *Not Very Quiet* and *Passages North*, among other places. Her writing has been translated and included in anthologies. Forthcoming are pieces in *Prime Number Magazine*, *Feral Poetry* and *Reflex Press*. She is BotN and Best Microfiction nominee this year. Lives in India, loves to embroider. Tweets @MandiraPattnaik

**Charles Rafferty's** (he/him/his) most recent collection of poems is *The Smoke of Horses* (BOA Editions, 2017). His poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Gettysburg Review*, and *Ploughshares*. Currently, he co-directs the MFA program at Albertus Magnus College and teaches at the Westport Writers' Workshop. Find him on Twitter @CRaffertyWriter

**Kevin A. Risner** (he/him/his) recently published *Five Seconds Could Last Five Years*, a summer mixtape poetry collection. He also has poems in *The Second Chance Anthology*, a collection of re-homed work released by Variant Lit over the summer. His work can be found or is forthcoming in *Glass*, *Mineral Lit Mag*, *Non.Plus Lit*, *Ocean State Review*, *Perhappened Mag*, *Signal Mountain Review* and elsewhere. Find him on Twitter @mr\_december, on Instagram @kevinarisner, and on the web [www.kevinarisner.com](http://www.kevinarisner.com)

Originally from Los Angeles, **Sydney Vogl** (she/her) is a queer poet who lives and writes in San Francisco. In 2020, she was chosen as the poetry fellow for the Martha's Vineyard Institute for Creative Writing. Her work, which was nominated for Sundress Publications' Best of the Net 2020, has been published in *Entropy* and *The Racket* and is forthcoming in *Hobart* and *I-70 Review*. She currently serves as a poetry editor for *The San Franciscan Magazine* and an assistant poetry editor for *Invisible City* and works as an educator to Bay Area Youth. Find her on Twitter: @sydneyvogl, Insta: @sydneyvogl, and on her website: [www.sydneyvogl.com](http://www.sydneyvogl.com)

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ISSN: 2639-426X

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