

KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

ISSUE 30 JUNE 2021: "AFTER"

Welcome to Issue 30 "After." A year ago, we were in the grips of a global pandemic, and while Covid-19 is certainly still with us, there is at least hope that we are rounding a corner. Join this month's poets as they explore times of heartbreak, distress, and trauma and what comes after. . .

This month's featured poet is c m taylor.

Issue 30 includes work by Bobby Bolt, Sita Gaia, Joey Isjwara, Leo Kang, Elizabeth McGeown, Lisa Marie Oliver, Simone Person, Melissa Sussens, and c m taylor.

Featured Artist—Bobby Miller

Bobby Miller is a librarian and amateur photographer. His work has appeared in *Atticus Review*, *Feral*, *Journal of Erato*, and *Wrongdoing Magazine*. His website is bobbymillerphoto.com. With his wife, Sandie Friedman, he publishes a project combining photography and microfiction: sandiebobby.com.

"Looks Like They Haven't Discovered Time Travel Yet" by Bobby Bolt

If you're reading this, no one
came back with the solution we
couldn't see with our present perspective;
this much is true. You could say I'm here
because I still believe in wishes,
still watch the clock for the right time
to ask The Big Ask. Don't
tell me they don't come true or
assert the power of a more proper
prayer. I wrote this to only you,
which is to say I wish you will hear me
to the extent that you might hold this
a little while after we part. This is
the add-a-ball function hard-wired

to the pinball machine of your brain
flipping on, all bells and whistles.
I hope so, anyway. I hope so much
every day that I am filled with it,
ballooned and marooned by it
as I crash around the room.
Anyway, I miss you. I've missed
you. If you've been rescued
by travelers from the future please
let me know only through
a series of elaborate clues
that reveal who will win
the big tennis match or when
I will leave the house with the oven on.
If you could tell me
whether or not I'm ruining my life,
that would be nice, too.
But seriously, go on being you
and I'll go on imagining some sci-fi costume
you wear each day in your world of
inorganic plastic shapes. Leave the past
as you would some litter that's just
a little too dirty to pick up—
yes, that's someone else's problem
and you're someone else's reader
now, as I cannot touch you from this seat
or that one. I can only hold up a glass pane
to the moment and record it, reviewing
and renewing my love for the ruined world.

["I Know It's Not Sexy" by Sita Gaia](#)

I know it's not sexy, but I
ran six blocks, barefoot in light blue sneakers with
unravelling red laces to get the medication for you that I
forgot. Your thumping migraine leaves me
worried and a million wasps sting
me with my horrible memory.

I know it's not sexy, but I
check and see if you need a Cola poured
over ice because it's some sort of

magic fix. I tell you we could swap brains,
& I would care for you forever.

I know it's not sexy, but I would love you
like the way you can count on the rain to be
unpredictable as our stupid brains.
Sometimes it makes me wish you could
lift the curse of the throbbing
because you were a witch.

Jabbing pains in our brains
that they say isn't normal. I'm strange
but you still hit on me when you're in pain,
and I ask someone to take it
out like our stinky trash
bin even though I'm yours.

Your gentlewoman who buys you
iced coffee. I swear to god I know it isn't sexy,
because you could do that for
yourself as you hate asking for
help, but with me you have no choice.

“if an alien decides to research about humanity” by Joey Isjwara

billions of kilometers away,
asterisks from manuscripts
murmurates into a time capsule
floating mindlessly in space.
leaving the cliffhangers
& spellbinding tales once
pressed to their centers.
now, caking the keyboard
and pens of writers. the only
baggage their already collapsing
star-bone veins could carry
are spilling stories; leaving
a shower of excerpts and half-finished
words in the atmospheres of
undiscovered planets. our mind
fleets away the endless trail
of stories like another piece
of fresh oxygen our alveoli cradles

for a moment before forgetting,
resuming its affair with carbon monoxide.
like the car ride from home to school.
like the everyday sunrise hidden
behind asphalt highways and asylum-white
houses. like how an array of warmth
hits the windows every evening.
like a jazz tune playing from a house
we just passed by. like the split-
second pianissimo before a crescendo.

in the time capsule sits a grand piano
nestled in between endless strips
of stories where the words shuffle
into the keys and play a melody:
do-re-mi-fa-sol; add a chord or another
and a bit of decrescendo to the touch.
silent enough to not crescendo
the stories that humanity prides
itself to be—another epic hero's journey.
thumbing through many light years,
mends numbers and stories
as we hit the high *do*. salvages
the ripples of the pond in a
meadow in its middle *sol*. balances
limbs as we play *mi* and *fa*.
sprinkling the same soil we step
on every day that never seems
special with a symphony played
by an orchestra hidden to
our senses. listen closely

to how the words turned song
follows sea foam that dies
as soon as it rises. follows the blades
of grass scratching running shins.
follows the laughter travelling
across the pacific ocean. how
despite all the heroes, we make
ourselves up to be, how despite

we still taped back fragments
of our pride after the tower
of babel, the soil still pulls
us down, whispers in a tongue
only we speak, kisses our skin
and lets the music of mundanity
satin stitches our beings back whole.

“Acts of kindness” by Leo Kang

1
This house is hardly young enough
to hold out the things behind the air.

We should have knelt

for whatever it was
that nourished the upholstery into bloom.

Atavisms
when we glove that dust.
Who owned it, at first? Not I.
Not I.
Systems of glass doors, gashed
with other colours,
and a giantess
roosts graciously in the keyholes.

Once a generation, the walls will breathe.

There are two forks left in the sink.

2
harissa: pungent
lettuce: sleek green
nuttiness
of tahini,
jounced with lemon
and cumin, fumed
earthly,
no halloumi?
no halloumi,

four fifty, with a water,
three twenty, no water

It's so sunny today, and I've missed this.
It's so warm and lovely today, and I will miss this.

3

We never did unspool our separate
topographies.
Sky? grown tender as it dumbs.

So he left for the Arctic, rippling
tenselessly.
He left for the East, fingers sticky as kings.
South, and we'll keep the window seats
empty.

Stay, then arm us in the hour.

4

A sentence skins dimpled
somewhere in the middle.

Their sons and daughters
quartered themselves, ironed their silks,
kissed cheek to cheek, went out
and hurt one another.

Everything unsayable, gored by butterflies.
Butterflies are blue, or grotesquely beautiful.

"Wait , just five moments "

And her dry legs kindle under the eiderdown.

5

All progress is a sort of falling off,
those eves of gentle atrocities, continuing,
like shedding your flesh from the balcony,
like waking with one stake through the page.

Retrace your footprints in freshwater.

Refurbish the bigger picture.

From pole to pole,
the small, cruel braille of long-lost children
sparkles.

An animal is lethal when wounded, so they say,

as the shadows go on fracturing the dials.

6
This house is hardly old enough to die in.

A poet's immaculate skeleton
stands, just outside,
and whistles new jewels into the dark.

Blow out the taps, the lights. Melt down the doors,
keep the flowers, if you like.

This is all we owe ourselves:

fresh blackberries, to smear,
the machinery to miss,
a place to bleed at sunup.

["Rosy-hued Post-lockdown Hug Scenario" by Elizabeth McGeown](#)

We are walking towards the pulsing pink lights. The pink lights represent the concept of the city. The pink lights represent the concept of music. The pink lights represent the dancefloors of the past. The pink lights represent desire, because of course they fucking do. You are struggling to walk because I am full-weight on you, I am all of a lean, this languid consent of it. Our arms are snaking around, this arm-snaking delight of it. This crushing mouth-shirt of it. This nose-shoulder, breathe-deep of it. This oxytocin flood of it. This aftershave tobacco gasp of it. This soft, threadbare, overwashed flannel of it. This stud pocket, rough denim of it. This someone-else's-waist of it. This face-chest abandon of it. This solid bulk of it. This stomach to stomach of it. This proud-of-our-stomachs of it. This stubby, fat thumbprints, cold on my back of it. This furnace heat of it. This never-let-go of it. This I-am-safe of it. This I-am-safe-I-am-safe-I-am-safe.

“Maybe the Crows” by Lisa Marie Oliver

At the coast we make
a picnic

on a blanket
looking over the ocean

then walk the dunes

before returning for lunch

to find crows

stealing food, a sunchip

in a sharp beak flying west.

All weekend we laugh about it,
running joke:

maybe the crows took it.

Missing pendant,

maybe the crows.

Salt in the freezer, maybe the crows.

Lost blue sock,

maybe the crows took it.

Maybe the crows,

a tired worn toddler,
head resting on my clavicle.

Maybe the crows,

viewpoint: dark cliffs,
bright waters.

Maybe the crows
that one Spring,

I couldn't move
from the couch.

I watched
the poplar
out my window

week after week

until the crows arrived

to heft
and balance
each pencil-thin twig.

Picky builders,

their nests
made of a hundred

such twigs,

sidewalk

scattered

with the dropped, discarded.

Until one day they were done

and gone

and so was my

long wound

and by summer

I could see

the new adolescents

hopping from branch

to branch.

“Lovebomb” by Simone Person

My most shrapnel-edged secret is that I still love
him. In my dreams, he comes back. Holds me, doesn't apologize,
but we both know we're sorry for all our big mess.

I slip back so easy

into him I barely notice. I help him bury the girl
he bruised me. Death-mask into gentler body.
Here, in this rose-ringed world he builds,

I conjure happiness.

Piecemeal into girlish wanting. I never mind all the dust

I collect waiting up late for him to come home. I don't even remember
my life before him. I am the prettiest thing in his curio cabinet.

A blush behind glass.

“Spell for Time” by Melissa Sussens

First, give me three handfuls of hourglass
sand, dust running in reverse.
Give me the echo of lost friends' footsteps
going backwards, the screech
of six cuckoos marking the hour.
Give me two tockings of a wrist watch
with its batteries run down to empty,
an infinity of 6pms. Add two blank pages
from my high school diary and throw
all of this into the leaking hands free spinning
on my wall. Stir in a minute long pillow scream
and the sound of my fingers rattling
the computer keys into another history.
Grind and twist it all together.
Let it race twice around the clock
and then stop.
Rest it for a fortnight
in a dark and damp corner, next to the chronicle
of unwashed dishes. Remember
to set a timer and then toss it in,
still ringing. Spill two lifetimes of this elixir
directly down my throat and watch
my days lengthen. Watch my shoulders loosen.
Watch me find my words again,
speak poems out of silence.
Watch as I stretch into
the space of hours unmarked
by my checklisted plans.
I pause to smell the sunset.
Stop to admire the bread rising.
Suddenly, a moment is widened
by my presence, my mind uncluttered
of its lists, of all the other
places I should be. On the beach walk

I meditate on each grain against my toes.
See how my toffee ice cream does not melt
to puddle around my knuckles.
Instead, it lives a decade on my tongue.
Watch as I write the book;
its pages are the after of a lifetime
present. Each moment is enough.

“Cotton” by c m taylor, June’s Featured Poet

for JR Finan, with gratitude

I am seven & sunburnt, up to my neck in alfalfa blooms
entirely alone & we never have met or will meet but we were both

alive, once—I scrolled through your Facebook
today, all the way back to before, so now I know

your birthday & that you would be older
than your also-dead father this year.

I do and don’t believe you are anywhere.
Here, there is so much room.

The sky has rediscovered blue. The tip of my nose, red.
Plumes of purple someday-hay the same above in downy cotton.

I don’t know why I’m telling you this.
Why it matters I became myself in horizonless places

or that I love your little brother or that I want to die
sometimes too or how I thought of you on your birthday

& will remember it forever. I cannot remember your death date
but have held the shape of your goneness.

Maybe thank you. Or fuck you. Maybe both.
At seven in summer I gallop through that bright hayfield

on a big black horse who breaks his knee
in autumn & I will watch the needle leave his neck

& hear the heft, the thud of him into packed dirt always.
I hope there is softness for you. And room.

c m's Commentary on "Cotton":

"Cotton" began as a quest for information. I like to keep track of things. I document most of my life in images, hold onto movie ticket stubs, that sort of stuff. It's part natural inclination and part a result of a very severe case of post-traumatic stress disorder I developed as a teenager: though I have a super specific memory for things like dates or the exact phrasing of a comment, I get swaths of chronological time wrong in hindsight and lose whole days dissociating. I often need to piece reality together and have adapted habits to make it quicker.

My husband's big brother J.R. killed himself. My husband usually has a more accurate memory than I do, but they can be vague when addressing details of their worst traumas, a trait I absolutely do not share or relate to. Early in our relationship it infuriated me, and it's been a lesson in patience to learn slowly. Despite now knowing the story of J.R.'s death, knowing where my husband was standing the moment they heard, a few months back I realized I didn't know the actual date it happened. Which led me to realize I didn't know his birthday, either.

My best friend and I are what you might consider amateur thanatologists, which means that we study death and dying, and spend a lot of time discussing it. I'm not more comfortable with death than the average person, I don't think, but I am quite comfortable talking about it. I am fascinated by and mostly accept it. We had animals when I was growing up and my mother has told me it was in part for a kind of healthy practice with mortality: you love something with your whole heart, you hurt like hell when it goes, and someday you are grateful for that love despite its loss. And you know you will live through the loss until gratitude. I believe we can love animals as deeply, if not sometimes more so, than we do human beings, and that our relationships with them can be as robust as our relationships to other human beings. The horse referenced in the poem was not only my close friend but the gateway and witness to much of my earliest freedom. He broke his knee galloping in a field while I was at a friend's party and had to be put down; my mother picked me up from the party halfway through and brought me to say goodbye. Though she's agonized over whether it was the right decision, though I can remember the sound his body made hitting the ground like it was yesterday, I would not trade my opportunity to reassure him of my love for anything.

I don't know what about scrolling to J.R.'s most recent posthumous birthday on Facebook made me think of cantering on Merlin's back through those alfalfa fields of my childhood. I can picture him in a purple heaven, maybe, or maybe heaven is the memory place where we get to talk to the person the person we love misses the most. J.R. has been described to me as many things, but common among them is a sense of tremendous scale—a flair for the dramatic, a wide open heart. Inescapable pain. I recognize him in my husband and I recognize him in parts of why my husband chose me as a life partner and I am honored and I am reaching for him the

best way I know how, which is on the page in a made up horizonless place where I can recount for him a piece of my own sadness to warrant my attempt at understanding his. I wanted to reassure him it's okay, that I accept it, that my husband loves him with their whole heart and hurts like hell that he is gone and is grateful for that love despite its loss. That I am grateful for his love, too, and I hope he has escaped what he ran from. I hope he knows he was and is wanted. And I will keep his brother safe.

Assistant Editor Sofia Fey's Commentary on "Cotton":

This poem by c m taylor was a must for me in Issue 30. It navigates, seamlessly, through a difficult emotional terrain. One of loving without the physicality of even an introductory handshake. Of loving through someone else. It illustrates how people can be connected tethers of care—of how if we love someone enough, we love who they love too. This poem is a pleasure to read, and one that will come to me again and again in my headspace.

Poet Biographies

Bobby Bolt recently completed an MFA at Texas State University where he was a 2019 Round Top Poetry Fellow and Poetry Editor for *Porter House Review*. He lives in West Michigan where he teaches English and eats blueberry doughnuts. Bobby's work appears in *Poetry Breakfast*, *Rappahannock Review*, *Pretty Owl Poetry*, and elsewhere.

Sita Gaia (she/they) is a Social Artist and a queer chronic illness warrior. Their much anticipated chapbook *Knocking on the Body's Door* is to be released through Prolific Pulse Press and Amazon in June. They love owls and drink way too much coffee. They have been published through *Harness Magazine*, *Fine Lines Literary Magazine*, and *Last Leaves Magazine*. They reside in Vancouver, BC, with their wife. You can find them on Instagram at @sitagaia_poetry.

Joey Isjwara (she/her) is a Chinese-Indonesian writer and student. She loves reading, listening to ABBA, and playing with her very adorable dog. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Juven Press*, *Hecate Magazine*, and *The Hearth*. She wishes you a wonderful rest of your day! Find her on Twitter @saneginger.

Leo Kang is tucked away somewhere dour in Yorkshire, England. He is sixteen years old. When he grows up, he hopes to write good things that last.

Elizabeth McGeown (she/her) is from Belfast, Northern Ireland and has recently been featured in publications including *Banshee*, *Abridged* and *Anti-Heroine Chic*. She is a 2021 Pushcart Prize nominee. She has been a finalist in the All-Ireland Poetry Slam and represented Northern Ireland at the 2019 Hammer & Tongue UK Slam Finals in the Royal Albert Hall, London. She has received funding from The Arts Council of Northern Ireland and The National Lottery to work on her first full-length spoken word show.

<https://elizabethmcgeown.com/>

<https://twitter.com/CandysEyes>

Lisa Marie Oliver (she, her) is a queer Filipina-American poet. Her poems are featured or forthcoming in *Book of Matches*, *Windfall*, *FERAL*, and *Literary Mama*. She recently completed ARIM, An Artist Residency in Motherhood and is a passionate gardener in her spare time. She lives in Portland, Oregon with her wife and toddler.

Simone Person (they/she) is a Black queer femme and two-time Pink Door Writing Retreat fellow. They are the author of *Dislocate*, the prose winner of the 2017 Honeysuckle Press Chapbook Contest, and *Smoke Girl*, the poetry winner of the 2018 Diode Editions Chapbook Contest. Simone grew up in small Michigan towns and Toledo, Ohio. She can be found at simoneperson.com.

Melissa Sussens (she/her) is a queer South African veterinarian and poet. Her work has appeared in *Capsule Stories*, *Horse Egg Literary*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *SFWP Quarterly* and *Gnashing Teeth Publishing*, among others. She has performed at the *Poetry In McGregor* festival and at *Off The Wall* and placed 2nd in the *New Contrast National Poetry Prize*. By day she works as a small animal veterinarian and whenever she's not doctoring animals, she assists in teaching Megan Falley's *Poems That Don't Suck* international online writing course. Melissa lives in Cape Town with her partner and their two dogs. Find her on Instagram @melissasussens and on Twitter @girlstillwrites.

c m taylor is a poet, songwriter, painter, and essayist living in Buffalo, NY. They earned their BA in Creative Writing and Dance Studies from Knox College in 2016. They serve as Art Editor for *Variant Lit*.

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