

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE #42 JUNE 2022: "WHEN"

Welcome to Issue 42 "When," in which our contributing poets explore family, friendships, and relationships, all with a hint of nostalgia.

Issue 42 includes work by Penny Blackburn, Crystal Cox, HLR, Maria Gray, Kenny Likis, Laura Ma, Claire Matturro, Lis Chi Siegel, and Rae Theodore, and Victoria Nordlund is featured in our Baker's Dozen spot "Rules of the Game." Please view The Gallery below!

### Featured Artist—KJ Hannah Greenberg

KJ Hannah Greenberg is eclectic. She's played oboe, participated in martial arts, learned basket weaving, and studied Middle Eastern dancing. What's more, she's a certified herbalist, and an AP College Board-authorized teacher of calculus. As a professor, mostly, she's taught critical and creative thinking by means of English, communications, philosophy, sociology, and psychology courses. Hannah's art and poetry are featured in her new book, ***One-Handed Pianist*** (Hekate Publishing, 2021).

### Poetry Gallery

#### "Windfall Love" by Penny Blackburn

There were miles of sterile plastic polytunnels.  
Neatly labelled, well-ordered crops inside, waiting  
for organised workers who spoke  
with accented politeness in the village shops.

After, we passed through the muddy yard  
and on the track we saw the wild fruit fallen,  
bright bruises on the tarmac. We debated  
what they were, decided damsons –

too small for plums. Usually too sharp  
to eat raw, but these were sun-soaked  
in the heatwave and flooded us with sweetness.

We gluttoned. We could not stop.

Once plucked, some showed their secret shame.  
Eaten away by birds, or insect-ravaged inside.  
We abandoned them, snatched higher and higher  
for others. The last – split by your stained thumb,

spilt out two perfect, golden halves. I rolled mine  
in my mouth from teeth to tongue, tasted the coming  
of the end of summer. Felt myself swelling, skin  
stretched taut like over-ripened fruit.

In the pit of my gut, the buzz of guilt.  
Like a cascade of wasps, honey-taunted,  
uncontainable.

“Cathexis” by Crystal Cox

Honestly, I probably dream about your ex-girlfriend  
more than you do.

Last night, after you kissed my lips into dry kernels,  
I dreamt of her

emerging from my bathroom in nothing but a towel,  
the steam plumping her

skin into supple imagination, the bottom of her asscheeks  
poking out a little like mine.

Once, a friend of yours said I kind of look like her,  
which isn't really saying

much. I look like most white women who've learned  
to wield an eyelash curler.

But, I'll admit, ever since I keep wondering whether  
she wears waterproof mascara

and if she has to toss a leg up the tub to shave her insides  
or if when she texts you sweetie <3 it

makes your words hard. Once, you offered me her old makeup wipes,  
and I refused. I wanted to exit

the shower looking like I'd earned battle wounds. But memories never cut,  
they just smudge. Mirrors are worse,

they see me too much all at once or not at all. In the post-shower  
blur, I could be her.

In my shut raccoon eyes, I could be anyone.

“Teen Aesthete” by HLR

approaching our thirties, we noticed that our bedrooms still look  
the same as they did when we were teens. will we *ever* give up  
on twinkly plastic fairy lights twisted around a bed frame?

dinner candles ceremoniously shoved into the spouts of fancy-looking wine bottles  
and litre smirnoffs, us gals busy playing adults. plastic ears belonging to small animals  
attached to headbands, the bunny, the mouse, the kitten, those sexy-saccharine survivors

of crazy halloweens that now we feel to be obscene yet keep on display anyway. bureaus  
perpetually trashed with a mass of make-up brushes, cracked shadow palettes, bronzer  
crumbs treaded into the carpet, lipstick smudges and empty perfume bottles, no scent

left to sniff, just dust and nostalgia and missing lids. faded polaroids blu-tacked to walls,  
postcards and cinema tickets and concert stubs and decades-old birthday cards. I still have  
the same scallop-edged mirror (the main feature of my room when we were schoolgirls,

hours spent poring over our pores) with the same purple rosary artfully draped across  
its face, a face that today throws back an image of someone older-but-surely-wiser-  
*surely*-after-everything-you've-been-through (but no, I *still* make *all* the same mistakes).

all those trinkets amassed during summer trips and outlandish bucket lists scrawled in neon  
glitter pens. and somewhere, tucked away in a wardrobe, a tiny polo shirt emblazoned  
with the marker-penned names and well-wishes of our feels-like-it-was-a-lifetime-ago

classmates (it *was*), the majority of whom we have absolutely definitely forgotten,  
some of whom are dead and buried now. george in the car crash smash. izzy gone  
from an accidental o.d. the first time she tried ketamine. tariq stabbed to death

in a row over twenty quid. simone the preventable suicide. ali who went to sleep

aged twenty-three and never woke up. marianna the decapitated passenger  
of the peugeot speeding on the motorway rushing home to her baby daughter.

and danny hanging from the rafters after losing too much money on the horses.  
is this why we hang on to so much trash, trappings salvaged from hazy schooldays,  
dusty knick-knacks, all the tat and needless crap that we *simply can't* throw away?

because we're scared of ending up like that? it's as if we need evidence  
to confirm that we've made and retained so many precious memories,  
as if we need proof that we are living, have lived, will live forever...

hey, girls? we're going to need more candles dripping wax over more green bottles.  
we need more nights out, more halloweens, more hangovers, more blurry photos.  
we'll need endless strings of fairy lights. we're going to need more life.

### "How Dare You Leave Me" by Maria Gray

Upon hearing the news  
of your death,  
you are the first person I call  
and you are devastated.  
The clouds take a day  
to catch up, but they weep  
with us, too, in time.  
Santo, I'm smoking myself sick  
without you. How dare you leave me  
alone? How dare you leave me, slip  
silently from the party without so much  
as a goodnight? And how dare I —  
how dare I think of me  
on this national day  
of big nothing, of rope  
and pills, the gun's greasy tip  
against your tongue. How dare the world  
carry on without you, spin without a thought  
to the age-old plight of the sun?  
We are such selfish creatures.  
You never were. Your first and only failure,  
old friend, was your softness, and for that  
I could never fault you. There is so much  
I need to tell you, but now I talk to you  
and I'm talking to God. My stomach roils

with the acid of your absence, the soft curve  
of your smirk, the women's clothes  
you soaked with gasoline.  
What to do but sit alone  
with my poems, circle your corpse  
like a vulture, invent new sorrows  
to embalm — what to do but live  
without you. What to do but live.

[“Everything’s Going My Way” by Kenny Likis](#)

Old men should be tap dancers. Rage, page, against the burgeoning blight.  
The afternoons grow shorter, in a moment they’ll be gone. Summer  
sang rosier songs back when summer carried a tune. Walking on seashells

up the sidewalk talking to yourself. Keep your pants up. Sleazy does it.  
You wonder at the words wandering out the spout around the clock.  
Who reads this stuff anymore. Or bites it. We go forward like sleep

to daughters, like flocks of geese muscling north, home just over the  
mountain. Why wait, sweet cakes. The elocution will not be  
ostracized. Put another pickle in, in the pandemonium. Send flowers,

bowers of glowers, free for the taking. So long, story line. Howdy,  
Hieronymus Bosch. Fake a blue wake for William Blake. What you said  
broke the bed we mine diamonds in. Hunker down, dear ones. The

afternoons grow shorter. Stack the wood to the windows. The evening  
eyes your tea and pies. Excuse me while I bliss the sky. Oh, what a  
beautiful mourning. Oh, what a beautiful stay.

[“Apparitions Do Not Dream of Second Chances” by Laura Ma](#)

My younger self is luminous, decaying in the radiation  
of dying stars. She dreams my image

into memory through crayon wax. Pigments streaking  
cellulose. Meteorites trailing pages

of a future lost to cataclysm. To her, I am the cosmic  
bottleneck, the what-could’ve-been,

supernovas and probabilities vortexing through phantom  
limbs. In five years, she will have no

shadow and I will spend millennia chasing the last of  
her sunburnt flickers. In a heatwave,

her skin will roughen with blisters, hands  
flinching at voices, hemoglobin

saturating constellations. *What is memory if not the  
next iteration?* Soul floating to the

exosphere, it loops to portals to parallel universes over  
& over again. I cradle her gossamer

half-lives and piece her from a million infrared timelines,  
praying that this one will listen.

This shared birthright, vestiges in déjà vu rewind; it  
whispers: *We were meant to live.*

[“Helping My Mother Bathe” by Claire Matturro](#)

As she steps from the hard porcelain tub,  
Mad and wet and gripping my arm tightly,  
Her own all bone, tissue, and red veins, with  
Her damp hair twisted on top of her head  
Like some ancient turban of thin white strings,  
Behind her against the moist yellow walls  
Soap she flung drips like an angry blue fog  
Crawling its way down to some ruthless sea.  
With skin like raw nerves, she swallows her moans  
As I pat her dry more with a whisper  
Of towel against her than a true touch,  
Her back to me so she can still pretend  
She is tall and strong and filled with grace, and  
I am not the one seeing her naked.

[“Acclimatization—diptych” by Lis Chi Siegel, June’s Featured Poet](#)

***I. I don’t know where they come from***

poem from the lip of my kitchen trash bin with fruit flies  
dripping black bag edges with salty oil that fat I couldn't use from fish cans.  
each step says my feet don't understand the floorboards here yet,  
and each move isn't a new start so much as replanting last year's seeds,  
such hard pupils

however many flights of stairs I have to lug my mattress. in dreams I am  
one of the fruit flies. I have my five-roommate-flock, too,  
and we don't trust the red wine and its cling film. we gorge on slick scraps. we spawn on  
a whim and patrol in our curious circles. if we were me, we would remember  
to take out the trash.

## II. Reflexes

I got better  
at grabbing them out of the air. Now I find them pressed between my fingers  
when they uncurl, smudges smudgier than before.  
each new day brings only a few, nothing like an invasion, just waves  
of scouting, and with each one I wonder what their reports say. is there some  
central nest where they share notes on how I live? perhaps

one marks my home to be spared from a coming pestilence. or,  
on fruit fly *Yelp*, one rates the deliciousness of my drain-catcher, or  
leaves a middling comment about the heaping scraps of carrot skins in the bin,  
brittle and lifeless, curled like my hair. their bodies like dots  
come off my hands easily in the sink.

### Lis's Commentary on "Acclimatization—diptych":

Adults in their twenties — or even just their early twenties — share, I think, a similar amount of transience: we possess a constant feeling of uprooting and moving, and we can never be particularly settled in any one place. One can find joy in that, as I often do, knowing that in a month or a year you will not and cannot be in the same place as you are now; one can also find plenty of exhaustion. I originally wrote this as two separate poems during a strange period of 2021, after a stolen passport and Covid circumstances kept me from returning to my 'home' apartment (outside the U.S.) for a span of three months. I stayed in a cramped NYC apartment with two friends, to whom I'm grateful for allowing me to remain for such a longer period than expected. We acutely felt the space's limiting size, especially as we waited indoors for the days to pass until we were vaccinated. I sat at the same shared, square kitchen table day after day, watching tiny fruit flies circle for hours on end, wondering at where they came from and what could be done about them. I set pointless traps and never came to a conclusion about these flies' origin (though of all the possible NYC pests to be dealing with, fruit flies felt like a blessing). My time there felt like *acclimatization*, my having to adapt to these very specific

circumstances, and these two poems bookended my stay. It is true that "I got better" by the time I was set to depart — through adaptation both physical and mental — but looking back, it is impossible to say how I truly felt about all those changes after.

### **General Editor Shon Mapp's Commentary on "Acclimatization—diptych":**

In "Acclimatization," I was transported into the microcosm of the fruit fly. From the trash bin, the mundane details are imbued with intimate testimony. The descriptions are almost wistful, with "dripping black bag edges" and "slick scraps." The writer confesses early that "feet don't understand the floorboards here yet," which captures a longing in its vulnerability.

As a humbled observer, the fruit fly carries us into Lis Chi Siegel's world and asks us to ponder the merits of our existence as we "gorge" and "spawn." What I liked most about this diptych is its ability to remind us that in spite of its perceived insignificance, even an insect has the ability to form a flock, take stock of the world, and appraise its beauty. Significance is a matter of perspective and regardless of the arbiter, our lives are both worthy and subject to something greater.

["Even cavemen wanted a bunch of random shit" by Rae Theodore](#)

Like bigger caves, faster feet,  
a better way to say I love you

than a blow to the head.  
Me? I want a million dollars.

No, make that three million dollars,  
a new dishwasher, silver sneakers

all the books.  
No matter how many cats I have,

I will always want one more.  
I want to be 40 pounds lighter,

ten years younger.  
I want wings

so I can reverse fly  
around the earth like Superman

and turn back time.  
People always say your mistakes



make you who you are,  
but let's be real,

that's bullshit.  
If you could erase your past

mistakes, you would be a shinier  
version of yourself.

I want to sleep at night,  
not worry so much,

dig deep, strike peace  
somewhere inside.

I want this deck of famous female poet tarot cards  
that's too expensive to buy for myself.

I want to live in a shack  
that has clouds for walls

and a stardust floor  
so when I dance

my feet stumble  
on new constellations.

I want more than I have.  
My friend Linda says that's the source

of all suffering,  
wanting more, less or different,

but isn't that what it means  
to be human?

To want something  
and then when we get it

to want for something more?  
We are all unapologetic wanting

machines. Like cavemen who made bacon  
when they craved crispier meat

and built rooftop patios  
on top of their caves

so they could gaze at some other rock  
they would rather call home.

### “Rules of the Game,” Our Baker’s Dozen Feature

In "Advance to Boardwalk" **Victoria Nordlund** explores the profound connection between and girl and her grandmother.

### “Advance to Boardwalk” by Victoria Nordlund

It was the summer of ‘83 & Grandma Kitty & I play Monopoly at our glass-topped kitchen table. She lets me be the banker again & we start with way more money than the directions allow. The macrame basket plant’s spiderettes dangle close to my head as I roll the dice & pray I don’t land on her Virginia Avenue hotel— The rattan chairs make our thighs holey. It is hot & we

are both in shorts & I note her swollen blue veins that snake down her calves & wonder if I will get those too & we listen to Thriller top level on repeat— We both agree this album slays as the boombox buzzes at my un-bunioned feet. *The fan’s just not cuttin’ the heat*, she declares as she passes *Go* & ends up with Connecticut. & I am still stuck in jail. Even the gold linoleum floor is *s w e a t y*. I tell her I am thinking of cutting my waist-length hair but Mom won’t let me— as I stare at her short gray frizzled perm. She grabs my braid & says, *Why not? You only go around once.*

Gets up to show me a black & white photo of her at 18—she is icon-level Clara Bow beautiful & her hair is flapper bob short & her smile is for days & she looks so confident & free & I am 13 & can’t begin to fastforwardmyself to my 18—

& she had dad at 19 & they ate Crisco & lived with her 9 brothers & sisters to stay afloat in 1931 & 2 & 3. & Grandpa Walter had another family that we don’t talk about & he must’ve had a house & Grandma had another husband + a house (or maybe 2) in CT in the 40’s & 50’s & somehow Grandma & Grandpa ended uptogether inalittlegreenCape in NJ until he died of lymphoma in ‘80. & now she lives with us— & pre-teen me & 72-year-old her are best friends. We both don’t drive & we are bored so board

games & The Price is Right & Days of Our Lives & General Hospital & ignoring  
the rules so we never go bankrupt— so it never ends — fill up the day  
as she trades me Park Place for Baltic, as we drink Cherry Hi-C out of Silly Straws—

I think I still have the red pitcher in my basement—

### **Victoria’s Commentary on “Advance to Boardwalk”:**

“Advanced to Boardwalk” emerged from a prompt: Write a poem using these words: summer, red, Grandma, chair. I rarely use prompts...and I rarely write about preteen me, but this photographic scene that expressed the relationship I had with my grandmother poured out.

I wanted the form to echo playing a board game on a lazy hot summer day—back when a day and a game and June and July and August stretched out endlessly before me.

My poems usually deconstruct and construct realities, blend the past and present, and try to make sense of a world that often defies logic. I wanted to follow the rules of that memory and explore my relationship not only to my grandmother but also to a self that has long since passed. It is interesting to visit a self that no longer fits— to analyze a routine that is no longer a routine, a comfortable moment that has become a comfort.

It’s funny how this mundane moment became a core memory – and how my present self felt the need to peel back the ordinary to discover a profound connection between two humans in different stages of their game.

I so wish I could break out the Monopoly board and chat with my Grandma again. Tell her how lucky I was to have this strong sage of a woman under the roof of my childhood who loved me so much she would give me the shirt off her back and Baltic for Park Place. But you can only go forward and you can’t change the rules to this game.

I didn’t realize when I wrote the last line of this poem that the red pitcher fit perfectly with the monopoly metaphor—it had become a totem, and a tangible reminder now housed in a box somewhere in a corner of my memory.

### Poet Biographies

**Penny Blackburn** (she/her) lives in North East England but is originally from Yorkshire. Her poetry has been published by, among others, *Poetry Society News*, *Lighthouse*, *Dreamcatcher*, and *Riggwelter*. Penny was recently awarded second place in the Ver Poetry Competition 2022 and was also commended in the Waltham Forest and Positive Images Festival competitions. She is co-host of Cullerpoets poetry stanza and host of Under the Arches spoken word evening. Penny is on Twitter and Facebook as @penbee8.

**Crystal Cox** is a MFA candidate at the University of Idaho and the managing editor for *Fugue*. She was a finalist for the 2021 Francine Ringold Award for New Writers, and her work is forthcoming in *Nimrod*. Originally from Missouri, she now lives in Idaho with her two guinea pigs and a bunch of half-dead houseplants.

**HLR** (she/her) is a prize-winning poet, working-class writer, and professional editor from North London. She is a commended winner of The Poetry Society's National Poetry Competition 2021, and she also won The Desmond O'Grady International Poetry Competition 2021. She is the author of poetry collection *History of Present Complaint* (Close to the Bone) and micro-chapbook *Portrait of the Poet as a Hot Mess* (Ghost City Press). Find her on Twitter: [@HLRwriter](#). Read more at: [treacleheart.com](#)

**Maria Gray** (she/her) is a 22-year-old poet from Portland, Oregon. Her poems are published in or forthcoming from *Furrow Mag*, *SICK Magazine*, *The Lumiere Review*, *Counterclock Journal*, and others. Her poem "Rhythm 0" was recently selected by Luther Hughes as the winner of *The Lumiere Review's* annual poetry contest, and she was named as a 2021 Adroit Prizes semifinalist for her poem "Where Were You When Mac Miller Died." She lives and studies in central Maine. Tweet her [@mariakultra](#) and check out her other work at [mariagray.carrd.co](#).

**Kenny Likis** (he, his, him) long ago wrote his master's thesis at Auburn University on Robert Creeley. He's read contemporary poets obsessively since, but focused on reading, not writing. Early in the pandemic, he got the urge to write poems and has been hard at it since. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Caustic Frolic*, *Riddled With Arrows*, *The Twin Bill*, and *Birmingham Poetry Review*. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

**Laura Ma** (she/her) is 18 and based in California. Her words have appeared in *The Lumiere Review*, *Parentheses Journal*, *Claw & Blossom*, *Capsule Stories*, and more. She will attend UC Berkeley in the fall. Find her on Twitter [@goldenhr3](#).

**Claire Matturro** was a lawyer until she moved to the Georgia woods and turned to teaching and writing. An author of eight novels, including four published by HarperCollins, she now lives in Florida. Claire remains active in writer's and environmental groups and is an associate editor at *Southern Literary Review*.

**Victoria Nordlund's** poetry collection *Wine-Dark Sea* was published by Main Street Rag in 2020. She is a Best of the Net and Pushcart Prize Nominee, whose work has appeared in *PANK Magazine*, *Rust+Moth*, *Chestnut Review*, *Pidgeonholes*, and elsewhere. Visit her at [VictoriaNordlund.com](#)

**Lis Chi Siegel** (she/they) is the co-founder and managing editor of *sinθ magazine*, an international creative arts magazine by and for the Sino diaspora. She was born in San Jose, CA, but now resides in the UK.

**Rae Theodore** (she/they) is the author of *My Mother Says Drums Are for Boys: True Stories for Gender Rebels* and *Leaving Normal: Adventures in Gender*. Her stories and poems have appeared in numerous publications, including *Reckon Review* and *Barren Magazine*, and have been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize. Rae is the winner of the 2020 Joan Ramseyer Memorial Poetry Contest and past president of the Greater Philadelphia Chapter of the Women's National Book Association. She lives with her wife and three impertinent cats in Royersford, Pennsylvania.

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