

# KISSING DYNAMITE: A JOURNAL OF POETRY

## ISSUE 4 APRIL 2019: "REVENANT"

In our fourth issue "Revenant," follow our poets through memories of times past, shadows of nostalgia, and reveries with ghosts.

This month's featured poet is Jeni De La O.

Issue 4 includes work by Jeni De La O, Rachel Egly, James Croal Jackson, Lucas Jacob, J. I. Kleinberg, Kathy Mak, Brandon Noel, Holly Salvatore, Lexi Vranick, Lindsey Warren, Brian Wiora, and Mathew Yates. And Jason B. Crawford is featured in "Lore" to make it a baker's dozen.

### Featured Artist

This month's featured artist is Fabrice Poussin, who teaches French and English at Shorter University. Author of novels and poetry, his work has appeared in *Kestrel*, *Symposium*, *The Chimes*, and dozens of other magazines. His photography has been published in *The Front Porch Review*, *the San Pedro River Review* as well as other publications.

### "The Weight of Lemons" by Jeni De La O

Citrus and fresh wood, summer at seven;  
mmm, the smell of them. Lemons that cut  
through the heaviest, that bring the brightest,  
that will cut you--sting you, and also lift you  
on the right winter evening, when you're seven  
inches of snow away from your tropical home.  
Blizzards are deafeningly silent and

I miss the rustling palms of home, sometimes.  
Always lemons, the weight of lemons—on a silver  
scale, against a replica of a replica of a gleaming metal  
disc in France—the last uncalculated measure  
of love. The weight of lemons is

the distance between the end of abuela's cigarette  
and my cashmere lined gloves; between

your front porch jungle of jasmine and the salted  
hem of my wool trousers; the two of us, who call  
(or don't) each day, despite the pithiness. The two of us,  
who love so brightly.

### **Jeni on "The Weight of Lemons":**

I grew up in South Florida and my backyard was home to mango, avocado, bitter orange, lime and lemon trees. Citrus like lemons and limes are a staple in Floridian and Caribbean cuisine, they're so much a part of our culture it's easy to forget that they're not native to the region; they were brought over and cultivated by the Spaniards who conquered those territories in the 13th century and have since thrived, becoming part of the local landscape. I wanted to write a piece that conveyed two simultaneous experiences: the sense of existing outside where you're from and the physically heavy sensation of homesickness that can exist alongside the brightness of thriving elsewhere. To convey a sense of the physical weight of homesickness I brought in the reference to *le grand k*. Literally every other type of measurement in the world is mathematically calculated except for the Kilogram, which is still calculated against a physical disc of metal. I love the tangibility of this measure, and the contrast it provides against the maddeningly intangible sense of loving across great distance. Lemons, having become part of the fabric of South Florida, are the perfect metaphor for acclimation. "The Weight of Lemons" is a sort of sad love song for my mom, who will forever ask me to move back to Florida, despite how proud she is of me for making it "up north."

### **EIC Christine Taylor on "The Weight of Lemons":**

I spent the first half of my adult life living overseas in Hong Kong, so the homesickness that Jeni illuminates in her poem spoke to me. Having lived my entire childhood in the same house in Plainfield, New Jersey, I thought I would be happier being away, and although I valued experiencing another part of the world, I longed for home. The "weight" of being the only black American at my job and in my village wore on me over time. I came home after my mother passed away, and now I'm back in the same house in Plainfield, a reconciliation I never expected.

### ["On dead fish" by Rachel Egly](#)

the eyes are the first to go, honest as they are  
then soft cheeks rubbed down to moonbeam bone  
finally belly, stretched tight around swollen organs.

the sun completes the process, takes back  
all the water the creature has borrowed from the river.  
but if you look closely, you can still see scales shining like constellations  
and in the background  
the sound

of rushing  
water  
persists.

“Another Drunken Summer” by James Croal Jackson

Last summer, clunks of glass,  
grapefruit juice across the veiled  
table. We tried to stay drunk

through sweltering June, to cool  
off with Bella Sera pinot grigio,  
Tostitos, queso. How much is

too much pleasure? These half-  
empty days of water we are  
not eager to drink. Sit in shade

til sundown, table umbrella up  
to block the cancer sun we  
know. We know.

“Defense” by Lucas Jacob

*“...[Y]ou know what [Saddam Hussein] did well? He killed terrorists. He did that so  
good.”*

*--Donald J. Trump, July 4, 2016*

No one attends the weather-warped  
display counter of what was a newsstand  
on the corner. The wares arrayed there—  
a paperweight cityscape from before the fall,  
an ivoried Madonna cradling the space  
emptied of the child, and four volumes thick  
with moisture-bloated pages ever expanding—  
can be purchased at any time  
by anyone credulous enough to slap  
his fear down like currency on the wood.

Yes, it is a he, nearly every time.  
The furtive approach, after many  
passings-by as if by chance. The sidelong glance.  
A watcher at any of the grimy windows

that moan in the winds of this place  
will sense the shudder not quite buried  
by the shabby overcoat. The frisson  
of feeling himself in danger. A grainy  
black-and-white projection of the limited  
imagination of the confidence man.

“hospital of darkness” by J. I. Kleinberg (Note: this is the text of a visual poem)

hospital

of darkness  
faith  
surgeon,  
take the  
ruin of

the sun  
and  
imperfection of pain,

Band-aid  
The  
need

dispense  
light.

“To Moulton” by Kathy Mak

*there was a cobalt blue rubbermaid box  
sitting by the cloakroom walls  
a clipart label plastered on the exterior  
library  
a creamy haven of warmth*

*the polished ancient rocking chair  
creaks back and forth the grainy carpet*

*as you read a rich maple syrup ring  
you introduce to us your pet –  
a ceramic bookworm or caterpillar  
nestled within the ledge of the miniature chart stand  
asleep*

*every friday afternoon school ended at twelve  
I found my way to home our home  
the soft hymn of fluorescent lights reflect  
as you paused over each rigid spine  
fingers poised picking out treasures  
for me to delve into*

*wherever you were you sent me a postcard  
emails updating me on your latest hallmark  
geocaching around the globe  
leaving your mark embracing  
life*

how do you say good bye

when they are no longer

here

and you are still

here

when you reached

o

u

t

nine

months

later

you

find

out

all this time you could have

guessed

predicted

assumed

forecasted

but you could not have

known

and now you are looking back

scrolling through email after email

“Breakfast on the Weekends” by Brandon Noel

In the kitchen. In my element.  
I can feel the whole state  
roll back over me, the five days gone,  
the coal dust in the creek,  
the ankle bone offering of my labor,  
and the Appalachia tea leaves—  
never read them right:

*When I come back,  
I will, with all the noise  
of morning with me,  
come back  
bright as the sun*

A rumble shuddered through the house,  
steps came quicker and louder until  
my four-year-old Abigail jumped around the corner,  
a proud lopsided grin shining at me.

“I saw a big black ant in you-and-mommie’s room,  
but don’t worry cause I smashed it  
with the book that has God’s words in it.”

I thanked her.  
Children start to read without letters,  
and the stories they tell are better for it.  
She said, “You’re welcome!”, already out the doorway.

A lamp unto my feet,  
and a light unto my path,  
sharper than any two-edged sword,  
a holy rollin bug swattin machine,  
ancient of days, the red rock of ages,  
come back to me.

“St. Vrain Pantoum” by Holly Salvatore

i like the smell of dirt  
i cannot hear “song”  
without seeing bird  
i cannot see bird

i cannot hear “song”  
without smelling Juniper  
i cannot see bird  
without a pebble in my mouth

without smelling Juniper  
in her boughs I twine my hair  
without a pebble in my mouth  
the St. Vrain tugs at me

in her boughs I twine my hair  
anchored in the sandy clay  
the St. Vrain tugs at me  
i cannot speak

“last times.” by Lexi Vranick

There was a last time:

we held hands crossing a busy street and your warn, rough palm swallowed mine whole;  
we got sea salt in our hair and on our skin and in our bagel shop coffee cups, sitting on  
worn wood benches and watching seagulls fight for clam shells and all the treasures  
trapped inside -

alphabet letters cluttered your fridge,  
numbers in elementary arithmetic, and you taught me how to build them up  
to add to two and three and four and five - to ten, to twenty - to multiply

and swept back in cardboard box for the night,  
and then the week -  
and then a decade, and a second, and maybe they're in the back  
shed now, artifacts of all those snowy afternoons

bowls of soup and saltine crackers and hot chocolate piled with  
marshmallows  
and whipped cream

And maybe there's a poetry in all these lasts that we didn't know were lasts because we were just living in moments and moments and making memories we didn't know would become

memories

and if I dug up all those fossils of all those times we laughed rib-aching laughs in the leather breakfast nook of your yellow tiled kitchen, would I find ghosts I didn't know we'd left behind?

Ghosts of all the last times that we said there'd be a next time.

Ghosts of you in glass chess boards and a king with his cracked crown -  
in the rusted bones of a broken swing set,  
in the mossy plastic playhouse - the purple slide  
the toy lawn mower -

all rushing up to make something  
that looks like the you I remember  
from the last time

we talked.

["Sentence, Forest" by Lindsey Warren](#)

There are places I want  
to leave. Places where I  
am not dreamed of.  
Places in my dream that

are just entrance  
and loosely there, places  
where the thoughts don't sit  
well on my skin.

I could know everyone:  
the hidden woman with the hot  
cheeks and the stone  
house, the chairs in the

fluorescent lights but I



know this is underground,  
and I have a leaf  
from me, I have to

keep going. Going from one  
basement to another  
part dream, part plant, part  
green pressed on in a mind

in love with but unaware of  
its feet, and places become  
words that only know how  
to speak to each other

with absence: grace:  
out. I give myself  
to the air and receive myself  
in return, a feeling goes there,

right there, I had it but  
gave that up, too. Once  
I made a TV show  
for my neighbors to watch –

one full of cocktail parties  
and news from under  
my bed – while I went off  
to look for the other

parts of me that were  
most likely dream and did  
not find them, I only  
made a place: a pond

I call an e for blue  
and a b for fire pink  
and an ave for when I  
float over the water before

moving toward the green. And  
the forest: I haven't been  
there in years. A year  
is a century in this place

I might not have created  
but dreamed, like I  
was dreamed, an ocean  
of trees my birthright and all

my steps, steps that  
one by one go  
out like lights, or like  
me when I green,

go out.

### "Séance" by Brian Wiora

The gospel man outside my window  
has a voice like an airplane hangar, mid-echo.  
The kids on the street have voices  
that lift themselves like slow balloons.  
The streets have different voices  
in the morning and at night.  
The radio coughs up voices.

I walk around with my fingers in my ears.  
I close my throat with my scarf when it snows.

Last night, I was tired of hearing my voice  
sit at the table. I said nothing important.

I kissed someone with a voice  
that tasted like dust. It was dreadful

after that, when I found the gospel man.  
He said I looked nothing like God  
and gave me psalms to recite.

I've lost my voice. I'll find it.  
I'll drink to it. I'll drink until  
I hear your voice. I remember it

in the bedroom, where our bed  
was dressed with sheets  
white with noise. Those nights of covers

and uncovers. Those vows.  
And how tomorrow always came  
with its inevitable voice, the distant name  
of church bells, never ours.

“heliotrope” by Mathew Yates

is a thing with wings  
always an angel?  
i have my doubts  
& none of them are right

the way the midday light catches  
the birch out front & bleaches it  
whiter than moonsoaked snow  
is proof enough the sun  
is god

i don't need to be  
an ant under a lens  
to understand this

all of life is lent  
& is retaken  
in a way that even  
shadows know

fate is a thing  
with a past tense

& though the sun feels  
still in the way we follow it,  
really it is falling too

“Lore”

From EIC Christine Taylor: At some point, we must grieve the loss of those who have touched our lives in loving ways. Memories of them often become the nourishment we need as we continue living. In his poem "tell the ghost," **Jason B. Crawford** explores the loss of a friend and the road he has taken to find peace

“tell the ghost” by Jason B. Crawford

tell the ghost, there's nothing haunting about being dead  
anymore. in a city where the maggots lick the acid off

our bones, there's nothing here to fear that's not a  
bronzed woman with a switch and a hair wrap. when the

dirt took the last as good as kin from me, i opened the  
only bottle of communion you and i ever shared to take

to your gravesite and toasted every single tombstone  
there. i refuse to mourn a life built on celebration.

instead, i make laugh track of your bones and play it  
when I swear the dust kicks up the sound of you. your

moms keeps reminding me how we rode our dirt bikes  
up the hill on west street when she told us not to. you

remember? you lost control of your bike. a stick lodged  
into your spoke or something. I just remember you

catapulting head first into a tree and laughing. walked  
into the door, 3 teeth in hand, smiling. your moms keeps

saying it was hard that day to punish you because she  
then knew there was nothing that could break her baby

boy. she kept those teeth, you know? they are in a jar in  
the kitchen. they keep smiling like you.

### **Jason's Commentary on "tell the ghost":**

The poem "tell the ghost" is a story of me reconciling the death of a good friend of mine, as well as my grandfather. During my day to day work, I have become numb to death, and this was a way for me to feel for the loss in a way that allowed me to be at peace. During this process, I wanted to tell stories of loss, friends, and loved ones through the eyes of someone failing to cope, so the only way is to sedate and find joy at the same time. Sometimes we find the most joy in memories, even the bad ones, so we hold on to them for long as we can.

### Poet Biographies

**Jason B. Crawford** is black, bi-poly-queer, and a damn force of nature. In addition to being published in online literary magazines, such as *Royal Rose*, *High Shelf Press*, *BeLightFilled*, and *The Knight's Library*, Jason is a recurring host poet for Ann Arbor Pride. He is currently working on publishing his second volume of poetry.

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

Instagram: [jasonbcrawford](https://www.instagram.com/jasonbcrawford)

Twitter handle: [@jasonbcrawford](https://twitter.com/@jasonbcrawford)

Facebook page: [By Jason B. Crawford](https://www.facebook.com/ByJasonB.Crawford)

**Jeni De La O** is an Afro-Cuban poet and storyteller living in Detroit. She is the author of *Lady Parts*, forthcoming from Grey Borders Books in April 2019. Her work has appeared in *Obsidian*, *Tinderbox*, *Rigorous Magazine*, *Fifth Wednesday*, *Gigantic Sequins* and others. Jeni edits poetry for *Rockvale Review* and organizes Poems in the Park, an acoustic reading series based in Detroit.

**Rachel Egly** (she/her/hers) is a bi poet, engineer, and ecologist in love with all things water. Her work has previously appeared in *Vagabond City*, *The Rising Phoenix Review*, and *Ghost City Review*, and is forthcoming in *Bone & Ink Literary Magazine* and *Tiny Flames*. She currently lives in Chicago with her partner and cat, where she catches crayfish, naps as much as possible, and spends most of her money on good food. You can find her [@SPF\\_6](https://twitter.com/@SPF_6) on Twitter or at [rachelegly.wordpress.com](http://rachelegly.wordpress.com).

**James Croal Jackson** (he/him) has a chapbook, *The Frayed Edge of Memory* (Writing Knights Press, 2017), and poems in *Columbia Journal*, *Rattle*, and *Reservoir*. He edits *The Mantle*. Currently, he works in the film industry in Pittsburgh, PA. [jimjakk.com](http://jimjakk.com)

**Lucas Jacob's** poetry and prose have appeared in more than 50 journals, including *Southwest Review*, *Barrow Street*, and *Hopkins Review*. He has work forthcoming in *RHINO* and *Cherry*

*Tree*, among others. His first full-length poetry collection, a finalist for Eyewear Publishing's Beverly Prize, is forthcoming in 2019. In 2015 his chapbook *A Hole in the Light* was published by Anchor & Plume Press.

Artist, poet, and freelance writer, **J.I. Kleinberg** is a Best of the Net and Pushcart nominee. Her found poems have appeared in *Diagram*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Rise Up Review*, *The Tishman Review*, *Hedgerow*, *Otoliths*, and elsewhere. She lives in Bellingham, Washington, and posts most days at [thepoetrydepartment.wordpress.com](http://thepoetrydepartment.wordpress.com) and occasionally @jikleiberg.

**Kathy Mak** is an emerging writer based in Vancouver, British Columbia. Her poetry and creative nonfiction have appeared/are forthcoming in *The /t&nz/Review*, *Marías at Sampaguitas*, and *Kissing Dynamite*. She writes to reflect on her experiences, and to explore the unbounded. Visit her website: <http://kathymak.weebly.com/>

**Brandon Noel** (he/him), lives in Northeastern Ohio and has worked as a machinist for the last ten years while writing on his breaks and brief moments of down time. Poetry is this struggle he can't seem to quit. Sometimes he wins and other times a poem stumble out. He facilitates a local monthly writers group called, "The Makeshift Poets". Brandon turned 33 last December and has two daughters, ages 10 and 5, whom he raises with their mother.

Follow him on Twitter: @The\_Mongrel. He has self-published two poetry collections: *Mongrel* (2015) and *Infinite Halves* (2017), which are available at <http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/BrandonLNoel>

**Holly Salvatore** is a farmer in Boulder, CO. They tweet @Queen\_Compost and are excellent at naming chickens. Find them outside.

**Lexi Vranick** is an independent poet and fiction author residing on Long Island, New York. She holds a B.A. in Literature from Excelsior College, where she completed her undergraduate thesis on cultural perceptions of mental illness in literature. She is the author of three self-published titles in poetry and short form fiction. Her work has been published in the Fly on the Wall Poetry Press anthology *Please Hear What I'm Not Saying*, *Cagibi*, *Peculiars Magazine*, and *Soft Cartel*. She is the founding editor of *Little Lion Literary*. When she is not writing, Lexi enjoys fiddling with cameras, advocating for mental health awareness, and trying to find the legs in a glass of merlot.

**Lindsey Warren** is a recent graduate of Cornell University's MFA program. She has been published in *Rubbertop Review*, *Marathon Review*, *GASHER Journal*, *Josephine Quarterly*, *American Literary Review* and *Hobart*, among others. Lindsey is the recipient of a Delaware Division of the Arts Fellowship and has been a finalist for the Delaware Literary Connection Prize and the Joy Harjo Prize. A poem of hers is in the anthology *What Keeps Us Here: Songs from the Other Side of Trauma*. She splits her time between Ithaca, New York and Newark, Delaware.

**Brian Wiora** is an MFA candidate in Poetry at Columbia University, where he serves as the Online Poetry Editor for *Columbia Journal*. His poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *Alexandria Quarterly*, and other places. Besides Poetry, he enjoys listening to classic rock music, performing standup comedy, and traveling.

**Mathew Yates** is a queer, disabled poet and artist from Kentucky. His work can be found in *Barren Magazine*, *Epigraph Magazine*, *Human/Kind Journal*, *Rhythm & Bones Lit*, *awkward mermaid lit mag*, and *Memoir Mixtapes*.

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