

KISSING DYNAMITE

A Journal of Poetry

SERENITY

a special feature zine illustrated by
Kori Millhimes & curated by
Christine Taylor

About this Zine

Every day brings more news of tragedy as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to sweep across the globe. I have had friends lose close family members, friends fall gravely ill, people I love struggle to get financial support from a system that is supposed to catch them in times like these. Yet, I have watched people do all they can to be a safety net for those around them. And that's what we can do for each other.

This special feature zine is intended as an expression of good will in the communities that have kept us safe. Anyone who knows me knows my love for body piercing and tattoos and my fascination with body modification. Several years ago, I happened into Diamond Heart Studios in Flemington, New Jersey, carrying my newly-cashed tax return and a desire for something new. The shop's owner Len Gherardi took good care of me, and over the years, I've learned about their personal journey into body piercing and entrepreneurship. I had so much respect for Len before the pandemic struck, and when it did, my level of respect tipped the scales when I found out that Len made it a point to financially support their employees after New Jersey's executive order shut down body modification shops. Doing what is right in the most challenging circumstances is, to me, an act of love.

And love permeates Diamond Heart Studios—I have always felt welcomed and accepted by the folks who work at the studio. So I wanted to see how I might be able to support the studio in return. I threw Len this wild idea about having one of the tattoo artists at the shop illustrate a zine, and Kori graciously accepted!

I asked Kori to put together a portfolio of complementary images, and I had no idea what she was going to send [insert here “super exciting!"]. And when she sent through the images you will see in this zine, I was at first thrown—I didn't expect the earthy, soft, tangible, and hopeful images because I had been so wrapped up in the chaos of the times. I took a breath.

Do what you can. Take care of our health care workers, first-responders, and essential workers. Support our small business owners and artists. Check-in on your strong friends—they're holding up the world.

And don't forget to take care of yourself. Retreat into calm. *Serenity*. . .

Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Singing | |
| Aleah Dye | 4 |
| Place | |
| Laurie Koensgen | 5 |
| The Song of Less | |
| Kat Lehmann | 6 |
| Wash and Overlay | |
| Marjorie Moorhead | 7 |
| Reasons to Love a Mother | |
| Lia Robles | 8 |
| untitled | |
| Jonathan Roman | 9 |
| i'm learning to be alone, slowly | |
| Hannah Rousselot | 10 |
| One Wish | |
| Anna Teresa Slater | 11 |
| Silver Anniversary | |
| Rodd Whelpley | 12 |
| Author Biographies | 13 |
| About the Artist & Editor | 15 |

Singing

Aleah Dye

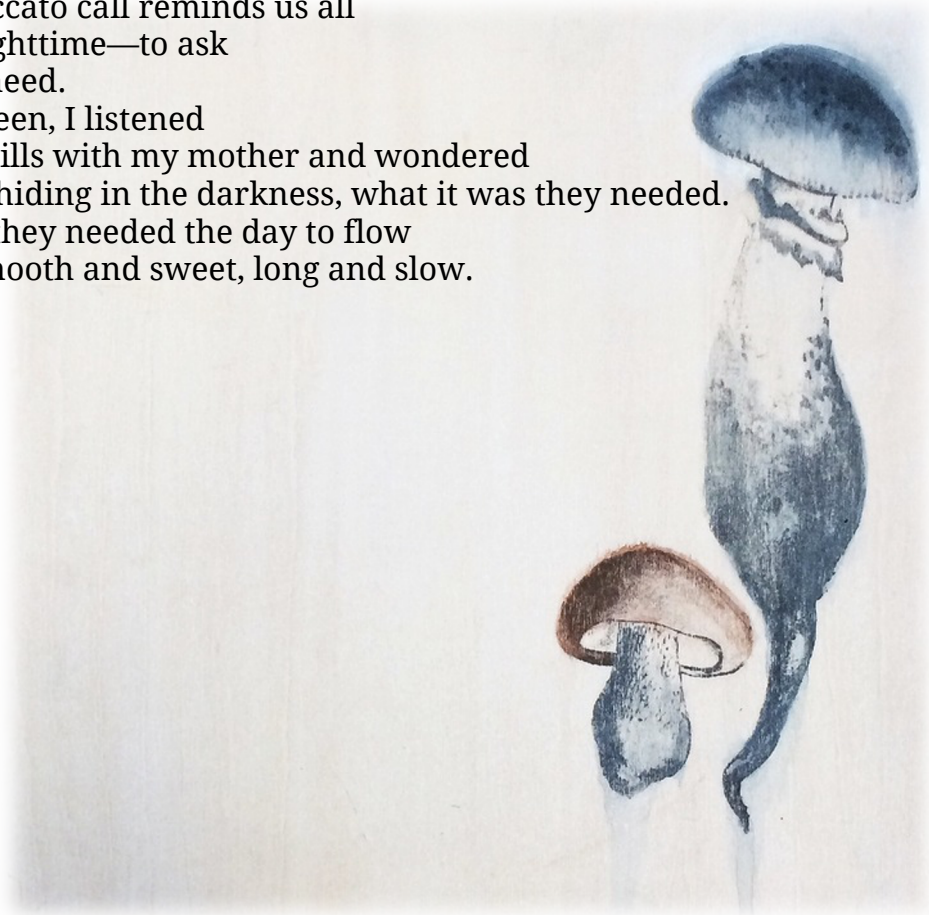
They say a bird call can
stretch daylight into an evening.
They say if it makes you feel
warm enough, you can love something
other than yourself.

The plaintive, staccato call reminds us all
to speak in the nighttime—to ask
for what it is we need.

When I was fourteen, I listened
to the whippoorwills with my mother and wondered
where they were hiding in the darkness, what it was they needed.
Now I know that they needed the day to flow
like molasses—smooth and sweet, long and slow.

Soft.

Dripping.



Place

Laurie Koensgen

Although the great elm in the courtyard
is dead, it must remain: the noble figure
at the fable's crux, the elder with closed lips.

Its blackened branches are antlers locked,
their velvet lost in the clatter of old wars.

Its hollow trunk is the heart of this still life:
still life there in its labyrinth for swallows.



The Song of Less

Kat Lehmann

And what about the hereafter—its scents, and sounds. Will our senses, as we know them, continue in some way, or does an extrasensory existence await us? All I know is that here, in this place, there are only a small number of things I need. I can count them like ripe fruit. I cannot hold more than this without overflowing. Nutrients. Warmth. Presence. Desire. Love. What, then, of the rest of it? It seems I've been merely passing time.

*simplicity
ends a complicated story
snow crocuses*



Wash and Overlay

Marjorie Moorhead

As evening approaches,
sun sets behind branches
who leave tangled patterns
in the sky.

This unruly-snarl, like hair
pulled from a brush, a free-form mandala
whose intricate shapes generate outward,
one from another.

Each branch-line a dark silhouette
against white and blue-grey. Brush-stroked
faded denim watercolor wash,
with India ink overlay.

My very own cathedral-glass design
of light through shape. Reminding:
take an in-breath, and out, serene.
Shimmering connections, revealed to all

who look anew. Take comfort
in gifts given, everywhere. Be amazed
at spiderweb's silver cape, glinting,
bejeweled, in rainbow-ed dots of dew.



Reasons to Love a Mother

Lia Robles

Good day bumblebee <3

Foods with vit. D, you need 600IU.
And 25gr of fiber.

I am gorgeous and I love you

Sometimes you prefer feysffç
*fries

I cry for everything

University is doing you good

Cover up
Tomorrow's still cold and snowy

So I'm freezing to death. The power came

back, but obviously no internet
So its hell
Cali was like "I am a fucking desert
tortoise!"
And I was like "I am mexican!"
So ahhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!

I like aliens

Are you asleep, or do you want to sleep?

I hate makeup
its itchy

Just olive oil and vinegar with dill and salt

I need chocolate

Are you safe at home
Or frozen someplace?
Text me so I know you're not an icicle

In the end it doesn't matter what you do if
you do it with passion and take the time to
appreciate things along the way

We helped out a guy who went into a ditch
We got wet, cold, and tired, but hey!
Brownie points!

I deposited 106\$ from the government in
your account

Mystery question:
Squirrels?

I am beyond impressed. Looks very good

I think I am a banana
You???

Do you want to read it to me before I
succumb to the arms of morpheus?

Pretend you are on a plane

I sent you awakes, they'll arrive in 3 days

I'm a little dramatic

Both of you are amazing
So proud

All women should start flashing
Maybe all evil will disappear.

So, did you finish your editing?
Did you have pasta?

Good nightocolina bonita. Love you. Sleep
well and deep. Don't help the statistics of
people that sleep bad. I will not

untitled

Jonathan Roman

six feet
from the living
i take
the damp earth
into my naked hands



i'm learning to be alone, slowly

Hannah Rousselot

it started with a tattoo, a walk,
a breakup. i kept it going in increments—
ten minutes at the coffee shop,
twenty minutes in a cozy clothing store,
fifty minute strolls, eventually a two hour
movie. it's easier if i have a goal in mind
and my therapist said that was okay,
for the beginning, not that i need her permission
she reassured me, even though i totally do.

apparently it's important to be alone
so that i can find the elusive taste of self-love,
so i can weather myself. so i can survive
the waves that churn steadily inside.
they are created by me; but when the current
starts pulling at my legs i can find my
island and my point to my lighthouse;
those are created by me, too. there exists
a shore somewhere here—i'll find it soon.



One Wish

Anna Teresa Slater

You say *rosebush*

Because sometimes a rosebush
is all you really need Yes of course

there's the leaky fridge that needs
fixing The son that won't come home

the lost words in your purse
unpaid loans and loneliness

But a rosebush

is beautiful and wild
and wise One cannot lie

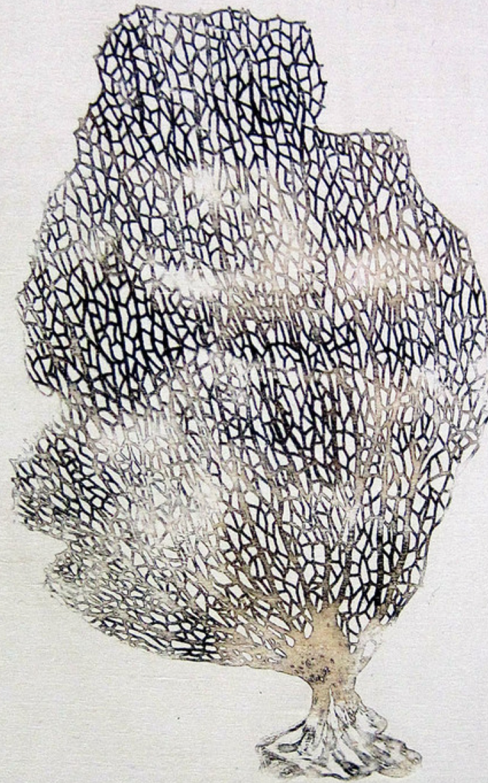
to a rosebush

Its sickle-ridden stem
puts you in your place

Petals open up in slow motion
to the sky rely on you

a little A rosebush will
die one day

but you will expect it to



Silver Anniversary

Rodd Whelpley

Sometimes in the night
after the clock blinks three,
my head bobbing
crests of liquid thoughts,
a sea that never steadies,
I whisper how I think
I'll float away.

And she,
still sleeping, will cast
her arm her arm around me,
her deep, slow breaths become
a metronomic lullaby,
a conch shell to my ear.

I wake.

Discover a tiny anchor
laid firmly on my chest –
her soft, curled fist,
shaped so much like a heart.



Author Biographies

Aleah Dye is a graduate of West Virginia Wesleyan College with a B.A. in English and Philosophy. She is inspired by Walt Whitman and specializes in the free verse he pioneered. You can find Dye's published book of poetry, *If I Just Look Hard Enough*, on Amazon and Sweek. Dye's most recent publications are with *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, *East Jasmine Review*, and *The Showbear Family Circus*.

Laurie Koensgen (she/her) lives in Ottawa, Canada where she advocates for the Arts. Her poems have appeared in *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Literary Review of Canada*, *In/Words*, *Barren Magazine*, *Juniper: A Poetry Journal*, *Kissing Dynamite*, *Burning House Press*, *Black Bough Poetry*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, and elsewhere. She was shortlisted for *The Malahat Review's* Far Horizons Award for Poetry 2018, and received Honourable Mentions in *Arc's* Diana Brebner Prize 2018 and *The New Quarterly's* Occasional Verse Contest 2019. Find her on Twitter @EkeLore

Kat Lehmann (she/her) holds a Ph.D. in biochemistry and an unwavering awe of nature and the process of personal transformation. Her poems have appeared in *frogpond*, *Mayfly*, *Rattle*, *Human/Kind*, *the Red Moon Anthology*, and elsewhere. Her third book, *Stumbling Toward Happiness: Haibun and Hybrid Poems* (29 Trees, 2019), shares her meditative notes of self-exploration. Kat leaves her books in public spaces for strangers to find as part of her Ripples of Kindness project. She lives in Connecticut on the edge of a fairy forest. Visit her on Twitter or Instagram at @SongsOfKat.

Marjorie Moorhead (she/her) writes from northern New England. Surrounded by mountains, in a river valley, with four-season change, she is happy to have found her voice and community in poetry. Her poems can be seen in many anthologies, online literary sites, and her two chapbooks, *Survival: Trees, Tides, Song* (Finishing Line Press 2019), and *Survival Part 2: Trees, Birds, Ocean, Bees* (Duck Lake Books 2020). Before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, Marjorie met with local groups 4th Friday Poets, Lampshade Poets, and WISE women writers. Now, she "zooms" all over the place, which is pretty cool. In summer 2019, she was awarded tuition scholarship from Indolent Books to attend FAWC, Provincetown, MA. Find Marjorie on Twitter @measofnow and check out her website: <https://marjoriewriterpoetry.wordpress.com/places-you-can-see-my-work/>

Lia Robles (she/they) is a Canadian writer currently finishing up a B.Sc. in Biology, Creative Writing, and Journalism. Her work has appeared in a few college-level literary magazines, and she has an upcoming piece in *Twist in Time Magazine*. She spends her days procrastinating on science by writing and spends her nights procrastinating on both science and writing by watching Netflix. It's a

wonder how she ever gets any science done at all. You can find her on Twitter @liaroblesgil.

Jonathan Roman is engaged in making art with words. He hails from The Bronx & currently resides in Yonkers. When he's not writing or working, he's with his wife & two sons, who lovingly push his sanity to the brink on a daily basis. He can be found primarily on Twitter (@deft_notes) but also on his website (jonathanroman.com).

Hannah Rousselot (she/her) is a queer French-American poet, writer, and educator. Her work revolves around her experiences with mental illness, love, loss, and her connection to the world. Her poetry has appeared in many publications, including *Parentheses Magazine*, *The McNeese Review*, *The Blue Nib*, and *The Broadkill Review*. Her first collection of poetry, *Fragments of You*, is available for purchase at Kelsay Books and Amazon. You can follow her work on facebook.com/hmrpoetry or @hannahrousselot.

Anna Teresa Slater is a high school teacher from Iloilo, Philippines, and a postgraduate student in Creative Writing at Lancaster University. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Channel Lit Mag*, *Ghost City Review*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *The Literary Nest*, *Poetica Review*, *Door is a Jar*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, *The Fib Review*, *Better than Starbucks*, *The Big Windows Review*, *Song of Eretz*, and *Nine Muses Poetry*, as well as in anthologies by Kasingkasing Press and Hedgehog Poetry Press. She lives on a farm with her husband, dog, and cat. Find her on Twitter: @AnnaSlater.

Rodd Whelpley (he/him) manages an electric efficiency program for 32 cities across Illinois and lives near Springfield. His poems have appeared in numerous poetry journals. *Catch as Kitsch Can*, his first chapbook, was published in 2018. His second, *The Last Bridge is Home* is due out in the summer of 2021. Find him at www.RoddWhelpley.com and on Twitter @RoddWhelpley.

About the Artist



Kori Millhimes is a graduate of the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. She currently resides in Stockton, New Jersey, where she works in a small studio space in her home. Her work primarily focuses on a poetic relationship between humans and nature. She tattoos full time at Diamond Heart Studios in Flemington, New Jersey. Find Kori on Instagram @koritattoos and on the Web at korimillhimes.com.

About the Editor



Christine Taylor identifies as biracial and is an English teacher, librarian, and freelance editor residing in her hometown Plainfield, New Jersey. She is the Editor-in-Chief of *Kissing Dynamite: A Journal of Poetry* and the author of *The Queen City* (Broken Sleep Books, 2019), *Petal* (Bone & Ink Press, 2020), *CLAW: A Collection of Haibun* (Ghost City Press, 2020), and *Buffer Zone: Snapshots from an Abortion Clinic Escort* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press, 2020). Christine has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Right now, she's probably covered in cat hair and drinking a martini. Visit her on Twitter @cetaylorplfd and at www.christinetayloronline.com.