

# Soliloquies Anthology



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We would like to acknowledge that Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehà:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of the lands and waters on which we gather.

Tiohtià:ke/Montréal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other people. We respect the continued connections with the past, present, and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other people within the Montréal community.

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## FOREWORD

There has been so much to rebuild after the deterioration that befell us over the short span of the pandemic. In our third year of being completely altered by isolation and virtualization, our main goal as a team was to emerge from that frightening place. Last year, we were not even able to have an in-person launch, while this semester, we have made an effort to share space whenever possible, in meeting rooms and collecting as a team to share food and drink. What a joy it was to gather in the Webster Library for our deliberation meetings. Of course, people that read a lot often get stereotyped as introverts but let us tell you: a room full of excited readers is something special. We are so grateful to have the opportunity to rebuild our little literary community.

We read so much amazing work this year, too. Due to changes made to the submission process last year, we have been able to highlight more Concordia voices. This year, our goal is to work towards a balance of both Concordia and Canada-wide representation to propel our students beyond the world of academia into the wider literary sphere. There was so much talent and effort put into the works submitted to *Soliloquies* this round, and we'd like to thank everyone for providing us such entertaining and moving literature. And thank you so much to our hardworking prose and poetry editors, who gave each of those hundreds of pieces the care they deserved. We'd like to thank Jackie, our managing editor, for being so dedicated, and for always offering insightful humour when it is needed most. And finally, to Mira, who wowed us time and again with her creative spark for image and design. Thanks to her, our edition is bound up in a beautiful package that will stand out on our bookshelves.

This year's team is comprised of first years, students in their final years, and everyone in between. We are so lucky to have joined so many diverse perspectives in the curation of this issue, as well as our web content presence. We have all learned so much from each other and look forward to continuing to build this relationship in the winter semester.

Of course, we couldn't be who we are today without our legacy. Almost three decades of Concordia students have worked to sustain the spirit of *Soliloquies* and establish it as a centerpiece of undergraduate literary culture. We also couldn't do it without our benefactors. A gracious thanks to the Concordia Association of Students in English (CASE) and the Arts and Science Federation of Associations (ASFA) for both moral and financial support.

Once again congratulations to all those writers' whose work made it into this edition. And for those who were not published this time, please keep on submitting. We never know how future issues will morph into something new, as this one did, and as every issue has before, to be the perfect home for your work. To anyone reading this, whether you found us by chance or you've been a dedicated reader for years, we can't tell you how much we appreciate you. The time you spend with our contributors will not disappoint. Sit back, or on the edge of your seat, and enjoy *Soliloquies* 27.1.

Maze Lavery and Jade Palmer  
Co-Editors-in-Chief







## *Heritage Site*

*Trigger Warning: Allusion to child sexual violence*

### Heritage Site

Joshua Chris Bouchard

You can be something all you want.  
I earn the burn. Among the open-flower

chests of my mothers and my fathers  
and my brothers and my sisters. Their

terrible heads smashed together, the sun  
wilting flakes of itself like prepared fish.

The highlands of the town flow into lakes,  
rocks blown by dynamite, a heritage site

for the discovery of fire. Miracles everyday:  
a man gives birth to a 4x4 truck, a dog learns

to use a jackleg, a woman implodes inside  
the gut of a goose.

Erosion of the grassroot beats their dreams  
in sleep, far inside the dark earth, helmet

flashlights illuminate a glimpse of a secret  
inner sea. They say it's just a legend, even when

they see it with their own eyes. I beg them for  
this kind of denial reserved only for the heroic,

heirlooms stamped onto their faces. They lose  
children in hidden backyard wells, flash

their genitals to the graveyards of their fathers.  
This town is dying but the sun keeps rising.

What is it I want but forgiveness? Wings made  
of wax. A list of things I'll never be. They can

judge me now, flayed on stone highways  
to the elevators. Deep underground, the light

disappears into rock, nickel, uranium. Hands  
born to bleed, but young bodies heal quickly.

**G e n F u r b y**

Rachael Riley

We speak our own tongue

They say it means nothing

*wee-tah kah loo-loo*

They put their fingers in our mouths  
and claim we were hungry

*I Think We're Alone Now*

*Trigger Warning: Brief mention of sexual assault*

I T H I N K W E ' r e A l o n e N o w  
Kim Poirier

First comes the toast, brittle and buttery. Then the fruit: sliced pineapple, hard little eyelet blueberries, flavorless chunks of green honeydew swirling in sweet syrup condensate. Finally — with a palpable frisson of excitement from the table — there comes a glass carafe of coffee, poured out by patient hands and served hot in small, lacquered cups.

It's Sunday morning at an upscale breakfast restaurant, and the after-church crowd has just arrived.

Raphael is sent to run plates for a party at table six: three adults, two children. An old white woman occupies the far left of the table, dressed for Catholic mass. Her church suit is powder pink, patterned with blooming freesias and layered with a matching bolero. Her thick neck is corded with heavy, yellowy pearls. Her legs — marbled, bumpy, varicose-textured — are compressed by a pair of flesh-toned tights. Her feet have been squeezed into patent-black mules; her whiskery lips shine with the faint, sweaty sheen of an Avon lipstick.

To her right, her cargo-shorts wearing husband is hunkered down in the menu. His red-rimmed, angry eyes suggest an online poker addiction and a softening disposition towards fascism. Their adult daughter is seated across from him, shaking Sweet n' Low into her coffee. She's as toothlessly beautiful as a Fox News anchor: middle-parted blonde hair, cream-coloured sweater, LulaRoe leggings.

The two little girls accompanying them are small and precious, most likely the older couple's grandchildren. They're packed into huge, fluffy Sunday gowns, their pale hair ribboned and pageant-curved. From the way they reach for the toast basket, they're already ravenous. They should've been fed hours ago.

For them, there will be crayons. There will be whispered games. There will be orange juice. There will be a relaxing of standards as bellies grow fuller; stockings will slip, ribbons will be unwound, little mouths will be fruit-punched pink.

There will be pancakes. There will be waffles. And — at last — there will be maple syrup slopped and stuck to the table.

And once they have gone, Raphael will be the one to scrape it off.

#

Raph's only fifteen minutes into his shift when he asks himself, *Why the hell am I still here?*

He *hates* this fucking job. He hates it with an intensity that teeters towards homicidal violence. He hates the off-white, hollandaise-stained apron cinched around his waist, hates the bitten-down golf pencil tucked behind his ear. He hates dirty dishwater. He hates the greasy yellow lighting above his head. He hates the clink and the sizzle and the hiss of kitchen noise. He can no longer enjoy neither the scent nor the flavor of fried eggs, not even on his days off. He hates grating cheese and saying, *"Just tell me when."*

It's the customers he hates most. It's the *people*. None are exempt from his disgust, his utter contempt. Not the sweet little

old ladies, not the precocious little kids — not even the hot gay guys who come in for mimosas and avocado toast. (Their sweet, mutual laughter fills Raph with a stale and suffocating envy.)

Raph hates them all, every piece of human waste that steps through the front door — even the ones that are kind. Kindness is an irrelevant factor. A benevolent master, in his mind, is still a master. A tyrant.

He's halfway through mentally drafting a truly pulverizing resignation letter when table two pays the bill and hauls their purses off, leaving him with a twenty-dollar tip in cold, unbroken cash.

That's when Raph remembers, with a hot, stirring hunger, why he's still here.

*The tips.*

Twenty filmy, sweaty dollars slip against his nut-brown palm; the bill is warm and damp and green, like something born at the bottom of the ocean. He wants to kiss it, suck it, like the world's dirtiest blowjob queen.

The fucking *tips*.

The tips make it worth it. The tips justify the whole maudlin experience. Last Saturday alone, he made over two hundred dollars just in tips, mostly through the extreme, possibly dementia-motivated generosity of several Greek Orthodox grandmothers.

He'd spent all of it — all of it, *the full two hundred* — on an organza cabaret skirt. Hand-stitched. Hand-stoned. Firetruck red.

Vegas-ready.

#

On Tuesday nights, at *L'Ironie* Club and Cabaret on Rue St-Catherine West, Raphael de Laizon transforms into *Hayaza Kite*: avantgarde fashion icon, haute couture diva and international glamourpuss.

In other words, a D-list drag queen.

Hayaza's signature lipsync number is "I Think We're Alone Now" by Tiffany. Her signature look: black liner, 25mm lashes, candy-red lips, and a double-stack finger wave lace front wig in a deep shade of sapphire blue. Her signature catchphrase: "Just tell me *when*, honey!"

Drag isn't a cheap hobby. In fact, it's exorbitantly expensive.

If it weren't for drag, Raph could probably afford to rent his own place. As it stands, he can't. Instead, he inhabits a single room in a crowded apartment that he shares with three undergraduate students. There, they all subsist in mutual bitterness on ultra-cheap black bean stew, trash beer, and brownish, leaded tap water.

His table-waiting tips pay for shoes, nails, fabric, cosmetics, wigs, tucking panties, hip pads, fake tits, glitter, and custom-fitted tearaway gowns designed to reveal — dramatically — into skanky bodysuits.

Drag is what Raph loves. It's what he feels he was born to do.

But the industry is cramped. Competitive. Every single year, a fresh crop of baby queens pop up while paying gigs remain relatively scarce. Raph considers himself a fairly established, experienced queen — he's been doing drag for five years already — and yet, bookings remain elusive. He hasn't yet been able to find the kind of full-time gig that supports a living.

Still, getting to do professional drag for even just one night a week makes the drab, cold, miserable other six days worth it. It's a privilege, and one he absolutely doesn't take for granted. He welcomes each bachelorette party and each band of drunk, hypercritical homosexuals into *L'Ironie* with open-arms and triumphal verve: he loves them. He exhorts them, he assuages them. When he dances, when he back-bends, when he death-drops, it's for them: it's with the heart of a grateful servant.

In recompense, they throw him five-dollar bills.

They flap rainbow-patterned fans.

They scream, "*Work!*"

#

"They're changing the way tips are distributed."

This from Sheila, Raph's coworker. She's a seen-it-all, chain-smoking, forty-something single mom bitch of the common variety found in every suburban ghetto of North America. Currently, she's running plates for tables two, four, and eight.

Raph says, "What?"

"Tips are going to be split, like. Equally."



A disturbing notion. Raphael cringes, “*Equally?*”

“Yeah. And fifteen percent goes to the restaurant.”

“Girl. You’re *joking*.”

“I wish I was joking,” Sheila says, her voice dripping with undisguised, undilute ire. “It’s *horseshit*.”

Her arms are loaded with large platters, three on each arm; French toast with English cream, eggs benedict with brie and spinach, thick-cut bacon and spiced sausages. She balances them with the precision of a trained acrobat.

Anxiously, Raph says, “But tips are for us. They aren’t for the fucking *restaurant*.”

“Oh my God. That’s literally what I told Carolyn. But she was like, ohhh, it isn’t fair that the busboys don’t get to make tips, da da da, and the restaurant needs to make up for the UberEats and DoorDash fees, da da da...”

She pushes through the kitchen doors and teeters out onto the restaurant floor. Simultaneously, Carolyn, the owner and general manager, bursts out of her office — a teeny, hyper-cramped 4x4 space crowded with unlabeled files.

Carolyn’s brown lip liner contrasts unpleasantly with her coral lip tint. Her bottle-blond hair is flatiron-fried. Her kohl-rimmed eyes are flinty with a deep, frothing, menopausal rage.

Directly to Raph, she says, “Eva called in sick. Can you stay ‘til three?”

“Car, about the changes to tipping —”

“Who told you about that?” Carolyn’s eyes flash, annoyed.

“Nevermind. I don’t wanna talk about that right now. Can you stay until three o’clock?”

“It’s just, like, tips are an important supplement to my income, and I really don’t think it’s fair that —”

“We aren’t talking about this right now, *oh my fucking God.*”

“Why not? Why can’t we talk about it?”

“Why? Why? Use your fucking eyes, why don’t you? We’re fucking packed, that’s *why*,” Carolyn says. She has a deep, passionate love for the word *fuck*. She likes to say it as often as she can. “There’ll be a staff meeting Thursday, and we’ll all talk about it then. Okay?”

Bullshit, Raph thinks.

Out loud, he says, “Okay.”

“*Great.* Now, can you or can you not stay until three-o-fucking-clock, Raph?”

What he *wants* is to go home and finish sewing and stoning his new gown. What he wants is to keep working on his *RuPaul’s Drag Race* audition tape. What he wants is to run out the front door screaming at the top of his lungs, to disappear into a warm world of chiffon, taffeta, and silicon, and to never come back.

He says, “I can stay.”

“Fan-fucking-tastic. Table four needs a refill on coffee. Get that out there, stat.”

#

At table six, the Catholics and their kids are ready for the bill.

There, under the pale lamplight, the little girls are fussing, wriggling in their seats, keen to be free; their mother holds them back with a single arm. The older matriarch strokes her pearls with a manicured hand.

She assesses Raphael with her eyes —intelligent, arithmetic eyes — as he punches the total into the handheld Interac machine.

In a cold, clear voice, she says, “I only tip for *exceptional* service. Do you think you were *exceptional* today?”

“I —” Raph startles, surprised. “What?”

“I said, do you think you were *exceptional* today, young man?”

Her eyes tunnel into his. They have the passionate, vehement intensity of prayer; they’re a dark, dark shade of blue. The same shade as her Preferred Rate Mastercard.

Raph rocks back on his heels, deliberating. How do you answer a question like that? Where do you even start? He considers biting back, showing teeth, telling her *yes ma'am, I do, in fact, feel that I was exceptional today*. But the concentrated blue power of her whitewoman eyes has him beaten into submission. He knows which answer she is expecting. So he gives it.

Haltingly, Raph says, “No.”

“No?”

“No. I mean... I guess not.”

“Then I guess that settles it,” she says, slotting her card into the chip reader. “Don’t you think?”

“I — okay.”

The receipt prints noisily. The older woman accepts it, inspects the total, and then jots something down in the margins with a ballpoint pen. She smiles. She leaves the receipt on the table, stands, and makes her way towards the door.

The bell jangles, swings. And she’s gone. She and her kinfolk, her tribe.

Gingerly, Raphael reaches for the receipt. He lifts it towards his eyes.

It says: *Proverbs 12:24 God Bless xoxo*

#

At table three, a hot, hard-bodied Griffintown gay is telling his friends, “Have you guys ever noticed that you get the best food at restaurants where the waiters all hate your fucking guts?”

“Oh my God, it's so true.”

“Salons are the exact same. The lady who threads my brows in Parc-Ex is such a bitch. But she does such a good job, I don’t even care.”

Their cups are empty. Wordlessly, Raph rotates to refill them. When the coffee pours, it is the shade of loam, of living soil; the liquid extends, elongates from the spout like a dark swatch of silk.

The Griffintown gay fixes him with a critical look, says, “*Thank you, sweetie.*”

As he’s leaving, he can hear one of them saying, sotto, “See, that’s exactly what I’m talking about. The way he was looking at us.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Pure, unfiltered, naked *contempt.*”

“You’re right.”

“And the food is good here.”

“It’s *good.*”

Bucket and sponge in hand, Raph returns to scrubbing the syrup off of table six’s veneer. It’s difficult, unsexy work; the syrup has dried and clings to the table with a fine and filmy crust.

“So, Cabaret Sauvignon is closing next month.”

“Ohmygod.”

“I was *gagged* when I heard. Like, they seemed to be doing well? I mean, they’re always packed on Friday nights.”

“I know, I know. I think the owner is retiring.”

“That’s Miss Marlena Maybe’s club, right?”

“Yeah, she hosts four nights a week. Or — she did, anyways. I don’t know. Maybe she’ll switch over to *L’Ironie* or something.”

Raphael’s sponge freezes.

Miss Marlena Maybe. He remembers her. From *Canada’s Drag Race* Season 2. She was known for her long, beautiful acrylic nails, often artfully decorated with enamel butterflies, rhinestones, and bright bits of coloured glass.

Unphased, a fawn-faced homosexual claps his hands together and beams, “Oh, *L’Ironie* would be a good fit for her! I mean, they’d have to shuffle their current girls around a little, but like — that’s *Drag Race* royalty right there. She was top four.”

“She was top fucking four.”

“They’d be lucky to have her, *okurrrr*. ”

Self-consciously, Raphael glances down at his own hands, clenched around the soap-saturated polyurethane of a kitchen sponge. They’re bloody-knuckled, crackled, calloused. Scoured.

If Miss Marlena Maybe wanted his Tuesday night slot at *L’Ironie*, it would be hers. No question. Raphael would have no recourse.

He would be powerless.

With silent, frantic furor, Raph scrubs hard against the lacquered tabletop.

He can't compete with Miss Marlena Maybe. He can't compete with a Ru girl, with an *internationally-recognized queen*: a queen with designers, with 150k Instagram followers, with a merch line, with a tie-in podcast sponsored by Squarespace and fucking Blue Apron. He can't.

Miss Marlena Maybe is *somebody*.

He isn't.

One of the gay guys says, "Would it be totally tasteless if I was Princess Diana for Halloween, or kind of hot?"

His friend turns to him, says in a waspish drawl, "*Only if I get to be the White Fiat.*"

Raphael turns on his heels and heads straight into the kitchen. His sneakers strike the polished linoleum with an audible *squeak*.

Hatred. Hurt. Rampaging jealousy. They climb in Raphael's belly like acid. Like heat. Smothered, he tears his apron off violently and tosses it on the stainless steel counter. Then the dishrag, then the sponge. There are tears in his eyes; hot, humiliated.

Carolyn lifts her eyes towards Raph.

"Having a tantrum, are we?"

"No," Raph grits out. "I'm —" he scrubs at his eyes, grounds out, "I'm taking my half hour."

A beat. Carolyn gives him a long, bored look.

She says, "Take fifteen."

#

If you've ever worked in a restaurant, chances are, you've been here before: Hunkered down on a milk crate in the walk-in fridge. Making yourself small. Trying not to cry. Wishing you were somewhere else.

Anywhere else.

Seated between an enormous container of underripe, juiceless tangerines and about twenty pounds of Costco bacon, Raphael covers his face with his hands. The cold air prickles at his skin, rashing him with gooseflesh.

For the second time that day, he asks himself, *Why the hell am I still here?*

He thinks of the wigs crammed into his closet, lovingly groomed and bobby-pinned into good order. He thinks of the lockbox of five-dollar bills he keeps stashed under his bed. He thinks of his brand new organza skirt.

Then — Raphael thinks of every drunk straight girl at the cabaret who assumed her physical proximity to homosexuals accorded her the right to grab his junk and shout slurs. And he thinks of hashbrowns. Fresh-cracked eggs. Spilled milk. And an old white woman's god-blue eyes: *Were you exceptional today?* He hears the question in Marlina Maybe's television-ready purr, tilted with a touch of comedy: *Were you exceptional today, henny?*

There's a knock at the fridge door. Raph groans internally. Sheila, no doubt, eager to push her nose into his business.



“Fuck off,” he says, wiping his eyes. “I’m on break.”

Another knock.

“I said *fuck off*.”

A pause. Then, more insistent: a third knock.

Exasperated, Raphael stands. He moves to the door, swings it open, snarls, “*Look*, I just want five fucking seconds to myself, is that *so much to* —”

He falters.

It isn’t Sheila. It isn’t Carolyn, either.

It’s —

*It’s Hayaza Kite.*

Raphael staggers back in shock.

There’s no mistaking it. The woman — man — *impossibility* before him is his own mirror image. A doppelganger. A twin. She has Raph’s same face, his same body, his same dark brown eyes — they’re completely, undeniably *identical*, save for the fact that Hayaza is in full drag.

Hayaza’s face is perfectly beat. In fact, she looks better than ever — her lashes are longer, fuller. Her liner is razor-cunning and expertly applied. Her paint is immaculate. And there isn’t a single hair out of place on her long, glossy finger-wave wig.

Hayaza leans up against the freezer door, drolly tilted on the attenuated edge of her stiletto heels. She lifts her brows artfully. Just tell me *when*, honey!

“What the *fuck*, ” Raph says.

Unphased, Hayaza fixes him with *look* — without a doubt the most inscrutable look Raphael has ever been on the receiving end of. Then, with a lofty, catlike affection of grace, she takes one step into the cramped, dirty freezer and closes the door behind her. Her heels click ever primly as she moves.

Raphael sinks back down to sit on his crate, frozen in shock. He thinks, *What the fuck. What the fuck. How the fuck — I'm dreaming. I'm dreaming. I have to be dreaming.*

Gathering her bright red organza skirt in her hands, Hayaza sits down on a crate right next to Raphael. She crosses her legs, dainty as a ballerina. She must be wearing some exquisite perfume, because when she enters Raphael's airspace, the scent that fills his nose is not freezer-burnt sausage and underripe strawberries — but the dramatic, incandescent and resinously potent aroma of damask roses.

In perfect silence, they sit side by side. Hayaza, as cool as a bank teller. Raphael, rattled beyond words, feeling half-insane. Ten seconds tick by. Then twenty.

It's just him. Just her.  
Raphael de Lauzon, and Hayaza Kite.

In a smoky approximation of Raphael's own voice, Hayaza says, “Long day, baby?”

Somehow, despite the absurdity of the situation — or perhaps because of it — that surprises a laugh out of Raphael. He says, “Yeah. You could say that.”

“Hm,” Hayaza hums, her false lashes fanning low. “You put up with too much, you know.”

Ashen, exhausted, Raphael says, “I put up with it because I have to.”

“Do you? Do you really?”

“I —” Raphael covers his face with his hands, finds he doesn’t know. He doesn’t know. And because *not knowing* is unbearable, he lifts his head and lashes out, “What the hell do you know? You aren’t real. You’re a stress-induced hallucination, or a dream, or — something.”

“I’m as real as you are,” Hayaza says, reaching up to unpin one of the shimmering, rhinestone-covered barrettes in her dark blue hair. “Maybe realer, if we’re both being honest with ourselves.”

A bold claim, but one Raphael finds difficult to contest.

He squeezes his eyes shut. The scent of roses is overpowering in his nose, all he can smell: the fragrance that follows his better half like some kind of gorgeous contrail.

“I wish I could be like you,” he says, with a pulse of painful, defeated honesty. “All the time, I mean.”

“Like me?”

“Strong. Fearless. Beautiful,” he says. Then, choking on the jagged edge of a harsh and mirthless laugh, “A fucking *star*.”

Hayaza leans in towards Raphael. Slowly, and with surprising tenderness, she tucks the gleaming barrette in his dark, curly hair, right behind the shell of his ear. Raph’s eyes fly open; their ears meet, brown into brown, misery into beauty, shit into splendor.

Then, Hayaza smiles: a dragged-up, red-lipped vaudeville smile.

“If you wanna be a fucking *star*,” she says, “you’ve gotta learn to play the diva.”

#

First comes the toast, brittle and buttery. Then the fruit. Then the coffee, the fried eggs, the whipped cream, the blood and the spit and the mascara.

The moment he steps out of the fridge, clearheaded and alone, Carolyn lifts her head towards him and starts to say, “Raphael, table five needs —”

“Get off your goddamn phone and do it yourself, Car,” Raphael says, moving briskly towards the stainless steel countertop to retrieve his apron. As he ties it around his waist, he has a new thought, “And if you take my fucking tips away, I’ll quit on the spot.”

*“Excuse me?”*

“You heard me,” Raphael says, pulling the knot tight around his waist, taking pleasure in the pinch.

With some vitriolic satisfaction, he sees the impact his threat has on her: first in the slackness of disbelief, then the purpling of rage, and then — at last — the slow dawning of resignation. The restaurant is understaffed as it is. Carolyn can't afford to lose him.

Through gritted teeth, Carolyn says, "*Raph*. Be sensible. We'll discuss it on Thursday."

But he's sick and tired of being sensible, so he says, "Actually, no. We won't discuss it on Thursday. I've already said everything I have to say."

He leaves her dumbstruck with outrage, rotating towards the kitchen to address a growing stack of used dishes.

For the first time in a long time, he feels a wild gust of hope. The hope has a doomed, delusional quality — too big, too bright — but it's hope nonetheless.

Sheila drifts through the kitchen with a stack of cherry-topped pancakes, offers him a look of mild bemusement. "Raphael, what the hell is that in your hair?"

Raphael reaches up idly and touches the glittering barrette, real and perfect against his palm, and he bites out, "It's called fashion. Look it up."

He reaches for his notepad, shoves a golf pencil in his pocket, and heads back out onto the restaurant floor. The tables come into focus, then the customers: white faces and sharp little teeth. Under the hot, bare industrial lighting, the barrette gleams with the wicked brilliance of a knife.

*I Think We're Alone Now*

How fierce, how fine.

How truly, truly exceptional.



## S i e n a i n A u g u s t

Ashley Fish Robertson

we strain our necks admiring  
terracotta roofs that dot the blazing sky  
and sip chianti from plastic cups while  
calling one another by our birth countries

doesn't this place make you want to lose  
yourself and your shoes and your books?  
to shed your name and all anxieties that cling to it?

as we walk along steep cobblestone streets we fall into  
unexpected rhythms here  
the kind that reverberate against the city's every wall  
buildings penetrated by gladiator war cries and fizzling vespas

we wander through the Piazza del Campo  
and let the clocktower's shade revive us  
we always hoped it might one day grace us with  
bits of ancient knowledge

the problem back home with histories  
is that everyone prefers to overlook them  
but all the streams flow backwards here



**S u p e r b l o o m**  
Fabrizio Lacarra Ramirez

A superbloom happened  
out West a few months back.  
Up in the dusty mountains,  
the blossoms looked so strange,  
heavy newborn heads pushed up  
through the rusted sands. I  
offered them my body, in hopes  
they would pollinate my heart –  
To live within  
my fertile flesh  
another season.  
But I am not a pasture –  
No roots shifting in vein,  
no buds breaking the skin.

I had never been  
Brutalized  
by something so beautiful –  
The orange dunes promising  
no future for such gentle  
petals, quiet and pink.  
I knew these ladies  
had been born from the Earth  
against all odds, here,  
in the middle of Nothing  
and would be reduced to  
Nothing  
by the end of the  
Spring.

## **T h e   W e e   H o u r s**

Celeste Cormier

He's sitting at a bar. That much he can be certain of, although he can't be certain of much else because he's drunk. He knows this because the bartender says "Go home, you're drunk." He's been in this bar before, though not this exact bar. A thousand bars in a thousand towns in a thousand countries. There aren't a thousand countries, it just feels like that when you travel around as much as he does. It's late enough that it's justifiable to be drunk, although maybe it's never justifiable to be as drunk as he is. He tries his best in the mirror each morning.

He's alone. He wasn't earlier, but somehow or other he ended up alone. Not somehow or other. He left on his own. Funny how that happens. There's a woman in this bar, sitting near him. Pretty. He'd be paying more attention to her if he could think straight. He has a coffee; doesn't remember if he ordered it. Eats something. A lot of chewing; not a lot of flavour.

He stands up. It's time to go home. That thought rings through his mind over and over. He doesn't know how he's getting home; doesn't know the streets he's walking down, but reckons it'll work out. They're narrow streets, warmly lit, not as white as the light back home, although the dancing black spots are the same. He's too drunk to acknowledge that he's tired. Still, he feels he's capable of holding up the conversation.

It's not a good night, he's aware. He wasn't trying to make it look this bad; didn't realize he was going to be examined this closely. It's not that anything in particular happened. More to handle than the average person, perhaps? Lesser men would crack entirely, perhaps? Who asked that? Did she? The answer is he's working on it. Or, he's going to work on it, maybe. Maybe after today.

Somehow, he's eating again. They must have stopped. Grease, bread, eggs. Water, coffee. The hum of a gas station or the chatter of an early morning café? It's not dawn, but it's not dark. That old saying, he's realized, is not true.

He's not tired, and doesn't know why she keeps insisting that he must be. He can't pretend he's well rested, but he's upright, he's walking again, he noticed this time. He wants to say something smart and meaningful and kind. But, if there's a finite amount of those qualities in the world, she got the lion's share.

He's with the woman from the bar. Beautiful, angelic, regular. He feels like he's known her. Not known her, known her, but met her before. Has he been to this town before? Anyway, he's certain he knows her name. It's in his head somewhere, maybe not at the forefront right now, but it'll come back. He's confident of that, at least.

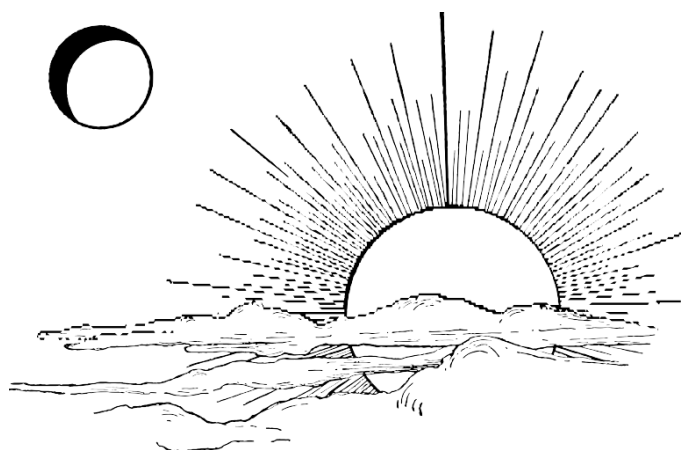
His hotel. He didn't think it was so close, and maybe it wasn't, because the sun is rising. He's feeling much clearer, but the stops along the way are blurry. He seems to remember... some kind words murmured when he could barely hear. A café. Laughter. Something falling in the river or a puddle maybe. A

## *The Wee Hours*

splash and an obnoxious laugh. Was it his? He'd be embarrassed. If it was hers though, he'd be proud to be the cause. He remembers lips on his forehead. Lipstick not particularly bright in colour, but thick enough to leave no question of its presence. He remembers her smiling, laughing. "I've left a mark," she said. He said yes you have, kept walking.

The sun rose as she left. Ships passing in unison.

So, he went to bed. Hours and hours, days maybe, pass asleep. When he wakes up, he feels better. He feels like crap, but he feels better. He changes out of his old clothes. Looks in the mirror. His face is clean, less a little pink smudge. Not perfect, a little weary, but his teeth are white when he smiles.



## T h e N a k e d B l u e s

Inuya Schultz

The sun was due to rise  
I closed the door behind him  
No screaming sounds  
Only deflating sounds  
Trickling sounds

and

The blues coming from  
Another apartment  
I focused on the walking—  
Why the blues at dawn?

I heard the car leave  
The revving, a wave of white noise  
It drowned out the brass  
Mold flowered along the baseboards

Something escaped me  
Dribbled down to my ankle

It pooled on the floor like glue  
I wiped it away  
I winced how I wince when  
Someone talks about a mandoline accent  
The rain was viscid on the dirty window panes  
The rain was not washing  
The rain was mingling

The rain  
Held the sun  
Below the highway belt

August was a bird too wet to fly

I drew a bath

*The Naked Blues*

There was an urge somewhere  
Behind the radiator or in a trap  
To drown

My heart in aspic  
as I cleaned myself out

In stagnant molasses  
    I soliloquized in the tub  
    Sick at my nakedness  
    A fly in a spiderweb  
With several broken threads  
And a cockroach twitching in a trap  
Listened, or were only there  
Because they couldn't leave

## Field, Garden, Slaughterhouse

Bianca Giglio

a field of rosemary / a grocery store where you can't find your  
mother / a journal that ends abruptly / a sickly yellow bird that  
you make your own / cabinets emptied out / stealing handfuls of  
dirt from the cemetery every time you visit / vomiting your  
regrets into a bottomless basin / staring at the unbroken skin of  
her neck in every photo / a newfound disgust for raw meat / a  
vegetable garden going up in flames / waking up with sores on  
your tongue / waking up with your own blood in your mouth /  
looking for ladybugs everywhere / flinching when the espresso  
machine starts to hum / flinching when the graveyard starts to  
croon / missing the things that happened / missing the things that  
didn't happen more / planting rose bushes in frozen earth / thorns  
poking holes in your throat / looking for shelter in a person /  
looking for shelter in a slaughterhouse / making *i love you* the  
beginning and the end of everything / drowning your bible in the  
bathtub / finding faith at the bottom of a river



*Trigger Warning: Real-life murder*

Z h i n a  
Nikoo Pajoom

There are hijabs on fire in Iran. Many are dancing around it, inside and out.

Inside, they start the flame, dance around it and then set their hijab on fire as the finale.

Outside they scramble around this ablaze scene looking for what it means, where it goes, where it fits.

Whenever I lose my way, I go back to the dancing woman. I silently watch and every single time, I experience pure joy. The kind of joy that I can only describe as feminine. This joy is so rare, so elusive. It's the same mysterious ineffable feeling you get from seeing sprouts, the sign of first growth, like Nowruz Sabze.<sup>1</sup>

It has its opposite, and that is the feeling you get when you look at the photo of Zhina<sup>2</sup> on her deathbed, inscrutable beauty with tubes desecrating her body. In death there is pain, but not a revolution. Yet, in Zhina's death, there was, is, and will be. Government, religion, history has desecrated them but the dancing women cannot die. They are not strong, they are fire. They warm and they burn.

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<sup>1</sup> As part of the rituals of the Persian new year, women grow sprouts and put them on a special table on the spring equinox.

<sup>2</sup> Otherwise referred to as Mahsa Amini. Kurds in Iran do not have the right to put Kurdish names on their children. Mahsa was called Zhina at home.

They burn the hand extended on their flesh, and this flesh is the body that births. The blackness of Mullah<sup>3</sup> has reached within and around their body and has put its thick clothed shadow over it. She screams: Enough.

Mullah killed Zhina, whose name means alive. Mullah killed a woman and it is womanhood that will make it answer.

Let's discard the word Islam. This overused, dysfunctional word does not allow us to know Iran and to know this revolution.

Nobody knows what Islam is, who cares what it is, who cares what it allows or not, who cares about the "True" Sharia, who cares?

Mullah is a hand extended from an abyss, who kidnaps our women into its dark well and wraps them in so much fabric, so much guilt, so much before and afterthought that it immobilizes them. Mullah's concern is the total annihilation of the feminine. Mullah's goal is taking a womb made of blood and making it into a steel that he enters and exits. Mullah is the enemy of fire. Zhina dancing in her red dress is life that Mullah reached and killed, but it only swallowed fire.

The Iranian feminine will is in the belly of Mullah and will do its work to birth a beginning free of Mullah's wrapped fabric around it. It puts hijabs on a stick. Fire is purifying.

Mullah's neck will see its last gasp of air under the twirling hijab of a dancing woman who builds its noose with the thread of fire. Zhin, Zhian, Azadi<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Literally translated as clergy, in the Persian context it conveys the notion of regressive male figures and forces that oppose the expansion of rights for women based on divine law. Mullahs wear special clothes with white or black head wraps to designate their status.

<sup>4</sup> The main slogan (in Kurdish) of the movement sparked by Zhina's death meaning: Woman, life, freedom.



August is the apocalypse of grass,

Kat Mulligan

of the skin,  
and, at the lip of the crematorium, I can say  
that in this season I have tried but one new fruit.  
Rambutan, cradled in the buttery palms of a maple leaf,  
severed like brain lobes suspended in the fire escape nest.  
I swallowed it down  
where the basket awaited to let its love boil over.

Once, under a strawberry moon, I submitted  
to the idolatry of this new fruit's flesh.  
Only once before August forced the flesh down a sturgeon's  
throat and displayed the evidence of molting.  
Once, because I hoped to be proven wrong, but I am  
always right about the way the poplars cycle through.  
I am always right about this kind of thing.

As the cartons neared their end-summer expiry,  
I drank from the hibiscus sap and from the sinewy pleasures  
that clung to it like flies to a spiderweb.  
My mouth remembered weakly like childhood.  
My mouth longed for the other mouth that knew it.  
There was a vacation to America and a birthday that mixed  
catatonia into the palate to mar it.  
This is our ripe and sweltering century.

Lost is the chalet, the dragonfruit,  
the cat whose torso extends miles towards the sun;  
lost are the long hands, the sad hands, the hands  
that fall deep into the pores like rabbit holes.  
Lost are the phases of hair and attempts at streaking eyes.

*August is the apocalypse of grass,*

Lost is my first summer that built its own face from  
pebbles it picked up along its walking path,

and gained is the end of the world:  
the apocalypse lacking grass,  
lacking skin.

# A b l a t i o n

Rachael Riley

i.

Against a brown fence  
I grow yellow sunflowers.  
Their leaves tremble when  
I question them

A walnut tree, its sturdy arms  
hold me, though I pray to be let  
down. My father answers  
with a ladder

The washing is done  
I use a chair to reach  
my favourite blanket  
while it dries on the line

ii.

against a            fence  
I grow

          though I cannot  
find

                          sturdy arms  
to hold me up. I cry  
for

          my father

The washing is  
hanging like wings  
pegged to dry  
on the line

iii.

against a tired fence  
I try

to find

comfort in  
God's arms

addressing  
letters to  
My Father

The washing is  
a noisy chorus of white

calling  
from the line

iv.

I lean against  
a slumping fence  
feeling grown  
I found  
letters from my younger self—  
she wrote to  
God  
saying please,

*Ablation*

send                      my father      home

The washing  
is only sheets.  
They flap  
and flap  
            and flap





## *Skin*

*Trigger Warning: Body horror, gore*

### S k i n

Ace Côté

I've spent every night of the last three years awake in a crumpled bungalow lit against Chicago's ragged skyline. Don't ask me why. I've talked myself hoarse to every sleep specialist in the book, a dozen psychiatrists, even a couple of cops back when I thought they would believe me. Most of them think I'm a liar. A couple ones—the nice ones—just think I'm nuts. And hey, I haven't ruled out the possibility. Because here's the honest-to-god truth: one night three years ago I met a man at the docks who told me things I can't remember yet can't forget, and I haven't slept a second since.

At first, it was just weird. I've had insomnia before; this wasn't so far out of the ordinary. But then days passed. Weeks. I was exhausted *all* the time. Sunlight felt like someone was x-raying my retinas. My body screamed obscenities at every movement, and yet I wasn't in the hospital. I hadn't collapsed or started seeing things or anything else that would point towards a physical or mental collapse. So when the doctors stopped looking for answers, I stopped asking questions.

I quit my job and then got three more. I figured, hey, if there's no getting around it then I'm not gonna be the kind of person who lies around in bed all day thinking about *what if*. Besides, I had rent to pay, and Chicago doesn't exactly come cheap. I dropped out of school, though. No point trying to study when words stop looking like words and more like an

uninterpretable rorschach, or when you can't listen to any lecture that presses past twenty minutes.

So, here I am. Three years later, and not gonna lie, I'm falling apart, more than a little bit. I'm so tired that whenever I have a free moment I lie on the ground and close my eyes, trying to remember what sleep felt like. Most days I just want to sink into the earth and melt into nothingness. No luck yet, and at this point my ideas are getting further out there. I jumped out of a plane last year. I tried an isolation chamber a few weeks ago, which is the closest I've gotten, I think. This weekend I've got a different idea: to go back to the docks of Lake Michigan.

I'm not much of a swimmer. Haven't been since I almost drowned when I was eight, but right now I'm running out of options. So I overpack my car with towels and hot water bottles and wait for morning.

Passing time through the nights has been the hardest part. Sometimes I turn on the television and zone out for hours; some nights, like tonight, I just curl up on my bed and watch the agonizing tick of nature's clock as the light changes, shade by shade. As long as the weather's right, I'm golden. Yesterday it rained, but as the sun rises today it makes its claim to true Illinois summer, humid and permeating, making the city strange and distant in the heat. I am strange and distant along with it as I make my way down to the water and to my next brittle attempt at relief.

It sucks me in. There's no better way to describe it. I'm out of the water and then I'm in it with no moment in between, without even registering the temperature right away. And then the cold hits like needles piercing my skin—ice in my ears and my eyes and my nose. In any other situation I'd be shrieking, but

instead this overwhelming feeling of calm is sinking into me. I swim deeper, further in. Even the light here is different, peaceful instead of vicious, and I see hues of purple that I can't remember ever seeing before. I break the surface and take one last lungful of air as darkness seeps into my vision. For the first time in three years I sleep, enveloped by the dark waves of Lake Michigan as the endless waters swallow me whole.

When I wake, the man is waiting for me.

I'm not surprised to see him, despite the strangeness of it. His face exists in my mind as if he never left: a ragged brown beard, long nose, square jaw. And the eyes, as deep and gaping as endless chasms trying to pull me in.

"You're awake," he says, and something about it acknowledges *you were asleep*.

"Yes," I reply, pushing myself up against the cold stones that he has dragged me onto. My brain feels numb from the cold. I should ask him questions: *Who are you? What are you? What did you do to me? Why am I here?* But I don't. "Laurence," is what comes out of my mouth instead. "Your name...it's Laurence, isn't it?"

"You remembered," he says, this time with surprise hinting at the edge of his lips. "Do you remember what else I told you?"

And I do. "You need my help," I say slowly, shivers starting to find their way down my arms. "You called me a skin-weaver."

He smiles, and as he speaks his mouth takes a foreign shape to the words, like he hasn't had quite enough practice moving his tongue and lips and jaw in exactly this way. "Indeed I did, skin weaver. Like the others who have carried this burden you will weave me a skin, and with it, you will help send me home."

I start with a vague outline. I find local fabrics and threads and I knit parts of it myself, putting together what I think will look like a cloak of furs but ends up looking like a mediocre middle-schooler's science project. When I place the fabric around Laurence's shoulders it isn't so much Henry VIII as it is the Burger King guy. He laughs, but I see the fear behind his eyes. He wants to go home. He *aches* to go home. Twenty-seven years, and I don't think I've experienced anything like what I see on his face.

So I do my homework. I learn how to knit, how to use different weaving styles. I read books written by 18th century women and 21st century bloggers until the words swim against my eyelids every time I close them. I stop sleeping again, though. Light still stabs my eyes. Whatever brief reprieve the lake gave me is gone now, and I can only hope completing this skin will bring it back for good.

When I finally start weaving, it's with thin strands I find nestled in the corner of a market, shimmering like fairy light, like water at sunset, like the last streaks of flame before there's nothing left but ash. My home has been almost entirely transformed into a setup for the project; every strand I place lays gently between long, sharp needles, dancing from point to point until it begins to transform from separate pieces to something united, something *more*.

Laurence is everywhere. I know he wants this finished, but the more I work, the more I see him. He shows up at my home every night, not usually coming to the door, just standing across the street. Waiting. Keeping an eye on his project, keeping an eye on me. I would be afraid, I think, if I wasn't so consumed with the skin. The cloak, I mean. Everyday it grows a little harder to move the gossamer threads; my vision swims, and my fingers feel large and clumsy. I'm terrified I won't be able to finish.

Three weeks into the creation, Laurence grabs me. On a dimly lit street two blocks away from my home, his hand wraps around my arm and I am struck by how cold it is; drops of condensation seep from his fingers and encase my skin.

"You need to *finish this*," he spits. Something about the way the light hits makes him seem alien. His eyes are more sunken, his skin ashen, teeth curved. I yank myself from his grasp, heart batting against my ribcage.

"Leave me alone," I cry, and before he can grab me again I am running, fighting against double vision and the heaving stress of my lungs until I can slot the deadbolt of my front door into place behind me and fall, senseless, to the ground.

I can't stop helping him—Or I won't stop. Whichever one, the end result is the same. I'm doing this for myself as much as for him—for the hope that once this is over, I'll be able to sleep again. I'll be able to go back to something more than just *existing*. So, I continue weaving.

It's the only time in my life when not sleeping comes as a relief. I think that even if I could, I wouldn't; I've spent every passing moment on the skin, and I am so close to being finished.

I can feel it. My movements have become more haggard, clumsy, but even so I have one more day, maybe two.

It is a cold, empty night when Laurence opens my door. He was not invited. He is not supposed to be here.

He stands in the doorway, nothing more than a silhouette. “You’re never going to complete it, are you?” He asks, but it isn’t a question.

“Of course I am.” I can’t stop weaving long enough to look up at him. My pulse is in my fingertips as they wind and lace and twirl, closer, closer. “I’m going as quickly as I can, I’ve *been* working as quickly as I can—”

“I need it *now*,” he hisses, staggering across the landing. “You’re trying to steal it, you’re going to weave and weave until it becomes a skin made just for *you*, and then you’re going to take it with your hands and you’re going to run—”

“I’m not, I’m not, I *wouldn’t*—” and then the strands are yanked from my hands. Slick fingers are grasping my neck. Laurence lifts me off the floor, except—this thing in front of me, it isn’t Laurence. It isn’t even human, with its scaly skin and webs between what used to be fingers. I know with utmost certainty that all it wants is to kill me. So when I feel my hand brush the tip of a needle I don’t think twice, don’t let guilt stop me from stabbing upward and watching the metal pierce through one of those awful, globular eyes.

Was-Laurence lets me go. Falls back to his once-hands. I take another needle and put it through his heart, then two more

through his wrists. The skin is unraveling—my triumph, my masterpiece. I put another through his throat for good measure.

He stays breathing, if that's what you can call it, for too long.

"There will be others," he manages to spew out, through the thin piece of metal piercing his windpipe and the blood flecking his throat. "Now that you've started, others will see you. They will want you—" he chokes off. His chest ceases movement. The bubbles of blood against his lips swell and then dissipate entirely.

Blood begins to stain the laminate floor, spilling out from beneath him. My neck is covered in slime that doesn't come off when I wipe at it. When I look down at my hands, they've become sticky with blood and ooze scraped across them. Whatever is left of Laurence's body is rotting away, and I reach, trembling, across it to retrieve the remnants of the skin. It will not be finished, not this one, not this time. I pull the threads from leftover needles and fold the fabric, tucking the unfinished ends under as I lay it gently in the top drawer of my dresser. There are things to prepare. A room left to refit. I can feel my vision clearing, and I know that if I were to close my eyes right now, sleep would find me. The curse Laurence brought has died along with him.

But there will be more, like he said. I can already feel them watching. So, before I can sleep I wrap the dirtied needles in a bag and zip them into my jacket pocket, feeling the sharp edges ready and waiting for whenever they need use. I wash my hands, clean off the blood caught beneath my fingernails, and then I sleep, long and dreamless, wrapped in waves as they rock me deeper within them.



## Free Fall in the Nth Extinction

Naomi Simone Borwein

Black out and  
you're falling hard  
through the asphalt-sky  
wind razor-sharp cutting  
body corporeal howling,  
hovering limbs star-fished; pancaked paragliding  
mind tearing;  
age [eroding] around you.

Your descent, increasing exponentially  
the patchwork landscape glistening faberge tissue  
a quivering phosphorescent arc of  
flickering blue copper chloride,  
tracking, *this*  
bird's eye view of the  
final fissure.

Buried in the  
parched earth, subductions

etched in  
spider vein fault-lines.

Horrible cracking  
sparks

beneath,  
precision  
radiating walls of tsunami-c waves  
in concentric circles.

Shaking chemical colours intensifying  
'Earthquake Light' flashes  
of cobalt lightning,  
electrical discharge [aftershocks]  
in the atmosphere.

As you fall

backlit in cerulean clouds

your trajectory

marking the line  
in thick jet, sumi, ink. Dripping  
Chaboku strokes. Stipple  
Dot  
Rest  
[full stop]

inter-red body of mangled dimensions

blackened out and

## Contributors

**Naomi Simone Borwein** holds a PhD in English literature from the University of Newcastle. She is a research associate at Western University and teaches at the University of Windsor. Her recent creative works appear or are forthcoming across a spectrum of presses: *HWA Poetry Showcase IX* (featured poet), *Ghost City Review*, *Ghostlight The Magazine of Terror*, *Farside Review*, *Superpresent Magazine*, and elsewhere.

**Joshua Chris Bouchard** (he/him) is the coauthor of the chapbook *ABRACADABRA* (w/ Fawn Parker; Collusion Books). His collection of poems and photographs, *Let This be The End of Me* (Bad Books Press), was short-listed for a bpNichol Chapbook Award. His poetry is forthcoming in *EVENT*, and has appeared in *CV2*, *Carousel*, *Poetry is Dead*, *PRISM international*, *Arc*, and more. Bouchard's full-length collection is forthcoming in fall 2023 with Buckrider Books (Wolsak and Wynn).

**Celeste Cormier** is a writer across multiple genres of fiction, including short stories, playwriting and children's literature. She is from Ottawa, Ontario but is currently studying English and Creative Writing at Concordia University in Montreal. She recently took a three week creative writing workshop in Paris, where a few good pieces came to fruition and her perspectives expanded. She looks forward to seeing where her own writing and that of her peers goes in the coming years.

## *Contributors*

**Ace Côté** is a queer Canadian writer currently operating out of Montréal. They wrote their first novel at age 8, a yet-unpublished epic surrounding fairies, unicorns, and all things fantastical. They have continued to write a variety of both prose and poetry works since.

**Ashley Fish-Robertson** is finishing her anthropology degree at Concordia University. She works as a copy editor for *Cult MTL* and as a freelance journalist. She was the arts editor for *The Concordian Newspaper* during 2021-2022. Her work has been featured in *Room Magazine*, *This Magazine*, *Montreal Review of Books*, *Howling Press*, and more. She prefers her coffee decaffeinated and her books dog-eared.

**Bianca Giglio** is a twenty-one-year-old university student and queer feminist based in Montreal. She is in the process of completing a B.Sc. in Biology and a B.A. in Women's Studies at Concordia University. She spends her spare time volunteering, reading fantasy novels, and writing poetry about love and death. Her work appears in *Sunspot Literary Journal*.

**Kat Mulligan** is a second year Concordia student from Richmond, Virginia. In her free time, she enjoys reading, learning languages, writing, exploring the town, and seeing friends. She is in the process of editing her fifth self-published poetry collection.

**Nikoo Pajoom** is a journalist who has written for *Le Devoir* and *The Concordian*. She majors in political science and philosophy.

## *Contributors*

**Kim Poirier** is a Montreal-based writer and an undergraduate student in Concordia's Anthropology department. She was the 2021 recipient of the Dawson College SPACE Award for Short Fiction, and her work has been published in *OFIC Magazine*, *Oranges Journal*, and others.

Her *Dune* fanfiction has been widely praised as "good," "pretty okay," and "quite long."

**Fabrizio Lacarra Ramirez** is a queer Latino-American writer currently working towards a Masters in English at Concordia University in Montreal. His poems "I Met an Angel Once" and "Bury Me, My Love" were published in *pacificREVIEW: A West Coast Arts Review Annual* in Spring 2020, and his short story "Raspberry-Flavored Body of Christ" was published in Issue 31 of *Applause Literary Journal* in Spring 2021. Fabrizio loves all things media and integrates different forms, mediums, and genres into his work.

**Rachael Riley** is a poet and writer from Aotearoa, New Zealand. They live and work in Tiohti:áke and are a current student of the Concordia Creative Writing program. In their free time they are passionate about urban agriculture.

**Inuya Schultz** is a Tiohtià:ke/Montreal-based writer studying English Literature and Creative Writing at Concordia University. Her work has appeared in *Yolk Literary Magazine Vol 2.2*, *Concordia's Soliloquies Anthology Vol 26.2*, two issues of *The Plant* and Dawson's *Creations Journal*.