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**Karina Fantillo**

## **freckled & brown**

i am like the hard  
boiled quail egg  
cracked & swallowed  
by the half dozen  
in manila traffic  
kids 7 or 8  
like me slid  
between cars  
wearing sando  
& shorts & tsinelas  
hawking cigar boxes  
open with chiclets quail  
eggs cigarettes sampaguita  
sticker of the virgin  
tap my window  
call me *ma'am*

sf quail eggs canned  
or refrigerated  
with white chicken  
eggs in asian market  
only visible  
to those who look  
for them

## revelation

i do not remember  
seeing mama & papa kiss  
on the lips just on the cheek  
like i do greeting my elders

no one had to tell me  
papa ruled the house his  
voice rumbled in eardrums  
his hand swift on the ready

he remembered my brothers'  
birthdays but not mine even if  
i was on honor roll & riding  
my bike without training wheels

tita reme told grown me a story—  
set to marry another on the eve  
of his wedding rehearsal papa  
drove 10 hours to pick up mama

both families outraged  
papa already engaged  
mama 13 years younger  
leaving her family

they married i was born 2  
years later *a baby forgives all*  
tita said i cling to the hope—  
i was born out of love

## tug of the ocean

i would drive to ocean beach park my corolla  
turn off engine just sit my heartbeat steady  
synchronizing to chorus wind surf water  
splashing in darkness other cars fogged up  
couples making out i'd unpack my mind  
cramped like our in-law cuts & bruises  
invisible to the eye but still leaking

years after i moved to san francisco i dreamt  
of a beach undisturbed in albay summers with  
my grandparents i would run down to the shore  
tightly packed sugary sand dipped stair step  
foamy crests flirted at the fringes where water  
made shore wet i'd jump in burrow toes into grains  
greeting ocean floor hello

lolo angel would saunter where water lapped  
to his chest dunk his head wrap my arms  
around his neck giggling from behind  
he'd pull me scaling his back 'til my slippery  
feet stood on his shoulders then i'd let go  
fall back into undulating gelatin molding me  
*again lolo again* sometimes current surged  
against attempts to swim back my 5 6 7 year  
old self never got scared i believed my lolo  
would save me always carried back to him

maybe the ocean pitied me she must've  
known someday i would be yanked  
other side of the pacific & she saw  
how happy i was

## Lunar Notes: An Interview with Karina Fantillo



**Why writing? What pulls you into the page? What writers or artists first inspired you? Who continues to inspire you?**

I started writing at about age 10. I had immigrated to San Francisco from the Philippines with my family a year earlier. Although I spoke and wrote English fluently (it was the only language I learned to write in school), I didn't know anyone except my immediate family. I retreated inward and found solace in writing.

In Catholic school, I remember reading Emily Dickinson's "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" I felt like she was talking directly to me. I also loved Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. The rhymes were catchy, but even as a child, I felt like there was a bigger meaning behind the poems. As a teenager, I read Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and that book taught me that there is beauty even through trauma.

So many amazing writers out there and discovering a new one is like finding hidden treasure. I will say that my favorite poetry book to date is Safia Elhillo's *The January Children*. It is gorgeous in its use of languages, English and Arabic. Even though I don't know Arabic, the poems still speak to me. I'm especially drawn to the historical, political and cultural messages in her poems. Elhillo educated me as a reader about Sudan and still made me appreciate the art of her poetry.

**What are you currently working on, and do you have anything coming up that readers should know about?**

I'm currently working on my first book-length poetry manuscript, which should be done before the end of the year. The manuscript includes the poems featured in this issue of *Night Music Journal*. The poems in the collection explore the feelings of identity, trauma, home.

**What was the first thing you had published? What is the focus of your work and has it changed since then?**

The first poem I had published was "ghazal for asian americans" which I wrote in response to anti-Asian violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. This poem was the result of a conversation I had with my Chinese American friend. I had her read it and it resonated with her, even though she's not a writer. Instead of submitting to a journal, I wanted to share it with the community, not just literary. I was thrilled when it was featured as a Poem of the Day by San Francisco Public Library, an institution I grew up with. (Much thanks to Maw Shein Win for facilitating.) I hoped in this way, it would give voice to people in the community and help them feel seen.

**What space does or should writing occupy right now?**

I think writing has always been an opportunity to chronicle the times and make sense of the chaos. It is a form of revolution, and now more than ever, I feel we have a responsibility with our writing to create the world we want to live in once we emerge on the other side of this pandemic.

**What advice would you give to a writer just starting out? What are some valuable things you've learned so far that have helped you grow as a writer?**

I would say writing is like a muscle that we have to exercise regularly. Believe in yourself. Editors, teachers and mentors can give advice, but only you will know if/how that applies to you and your writing. Sometimes what we plan to write and what wants to come out may be different. Honor what wants to come out. In writing about trauma, I like to think that once I get it on the page, it's one less thing I have to carry.

**If you were the last person on earth, and you pulled the last book from a pile of ash, what do you hope it would be? Why?**

I would hope it's a photo book with pictures of how life used to be, so I can preserve it and remember.

**Sophia Marshall**

## **For Rachel**

It was the end of another night, which is always  
The beginning of morning, and it was as easy  
As that to say the day had begun, with the  
Rhythms of the sun inside my mind, the motion  
Of the light, which was becoming brighter  
Though the sky was still dim, because the sun  
Had just barely risen – and it was the end  
Of night, and I had touched its silent lips  
And waited for the whisper to come to me  
The whisper of her name of the one who had  
Heard me, and opened her eyes when I spoke  
And told her mine, and the women I had  
Known, and she was one of the women I had  
Known, and I had needed her, and she was  
There, listening to me speak my name  
And smiling inside because she knew it

## **Woman with a Bright Future**

I was just where I wanted to be, in the heart  
Opening my lips and singing, a woman with a  
Bright future, walking the beach by the blue  
Surf, and putting my striped towel down,  
With another woman there, lying down  
On her stomach in a yellow bikini tight at the  
Butt, and a big tattoo swirling like a birthmark  
On her lower right side, just above her hip  
Her eyes were closed, and I kept waiting  
For her to open them so she would look at me  
Then she was in the water, wading in the surf  
At the bottom of the shallow beach, just  
Standing there in the waves, looking back  
And forth from side to side, and I went in  
Right next to her, and she stepped out  
To put her sunglasses with her other things  
On the towel on the beach; and I waded out  
Further into the water until the waves were  
Splashing above my chest; and she came  
Back and walked out slowly, into the sea  
And I was staring at her, waiting to see  
If she would dive under and get her hair wet  
Then she did, and I did the same thing,  
And I swam out into the deep and back,  
And watched the glittering sunlight  
Dancing on the waves... and I came back  
To dry myself with the towel and leave,  
And she lay down again, on her striped towel

**Deven Philbrick**

## The We We'd Be

Speaking slant to historical  
    tensions,  
therein lies the occasional  
demand. Occasion by time not  
special, tension by surface not  
tense, tensed our thighs as we walked  
the walk, the squawk of the walking  
we'd do deafened us, deafening blast  
we'd thought we'd heard, but hearing,  
    lost word to Time,  
never came  
    as demanded. It's  
a question of  
    tense.

It(')s history, baby, and we know too  
much to say, too much to touch, too  
much to *slant*, as they say, the they  
they knew they'd one day be, the being  
they'd be thrown into, the seed sown  
only for them. Birth, death and the other  
thing, the quick surprise one reads about,  
an amulet n all that, fundamental texture  
of elemental torpor, essential switch  
    of the withering  
    spine,

it's fine, we swear it, our  
lines never lie, the world lies,  
lies in wait, telling its violent prevarications,  
ennobling those of our mortal station  
to puncture it with nimble barbs  
    and ruinous imaginations.

*We thunder'd there*, we said  
in our final dream, not collective but  
    communal.

Careening and careering from one pole  
to the next, death's a drift  
    nearly continental,  
    slow  
    aching  
    rapturous.

**Matthew Johnson**

## **Jazzman Plays the Songbook**

Tonight, the long cool is whittled down to the essentials of the essentials.  
He is only one musician, and all the water and lip-licking in the world  
Would not be enough for more than three hours of play.  
Between *A Kiss to Build a Dream On* and *Darn that Dream*,  
Bystanders pass to drop off coin in the porkpie  
To honor his invocation of the ancient cries.  
The past is brought back, and the old songs are wrung out  
From atop his foldable stand, then sent out into the atmosphere;  
The music pours into the street and rides the drift of the breeze,  
Passing between pedestrians on Saturday night hikes seeking metropolitan distractions.

**Kate LaDew**

**depending on who I am at the moment**

I think of halloween  
or death  
or the skeleton inside me  
that's the same skeleton inside everybody else  
almost  
and how, years from now,  
if I were to somehow find myself under the earth  
and a living hand dug me up  
it could find the little break in my bone  
where I sprained my wrist jumping out of swings  
the one that throbbed boom boom boom in stormy weather

**Manuela Williams**

## **What You Did to Survive**

*ft. Ellen Bass & Laura Davis*

Here is what they tell you:  
*it can permeate everything*

ugly light pouring  
past the body's latches

you decided to let it in  
*(coping is what you did)*

made yourself  
into a different myth

someone else's brave daughter  
a more aggressive animal

*(you turned your head the other way)*

pretended your teeth  
could rip through anyone

unbuckled your throat  
revealed the furious red sounds

you grew inside yourself  
*became the person calling the shots*

it was easier that way  
*(escape by any means)*

you stretched and stretched  
in your new skin

marveled at the click  
of claws on linoleum

imagined all the ways  
in which you could become

a more graceless and violent  
spectacle

*Content Note: The title and italicized lines in this poem are borrowed from The Courage to Heal by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis.*

**Kuo Zhang**

## Wait

Just wait

as if you are waiting  
for the death  
of a centenarian,

as if you are waiting  
for a cancer diagnosis,

as if you are waiting  
for a bee  
to finish collecting nectar,

as if you are waiting  
for the wind  
to remove a dune,

as if you are waiting  
for your 2-year-old  
to nap in the back seat,

while his brother shouts  
something nonsense:

我们没有天空 (We don't have sky.)

我们没有草地 (We don't have grass.)

我们没有一条河 (We don't have a river.)

**Moriah Hampton**

## Life Lessons

I am tired from too much growth.  
I have stored within me  
a book filled with life lessons, suffering  
transformed into a list of truths:  
Never expect someone to change  
when, in desperation, they promised.  
Listen closely to how people talk  
about their mistakes.  
Avoid people who play with your mind.  
But how many lessons do I need to learn?  
How much growth must I endure?

Faced with another round of “bad luck”  
(substitute: sexism, classism, ableism), I  
retreat to my bed for six months,  
stricken.  
Days turn into weeks as I relive  
memories that eclipse  
my entire life. I am kicked, slapped, battered  
by these memories. Outside  
my bedroom window, pink flowers bloom  
on the dogwood, but I don't notice.  
Kicked, slapped, battered.  
This pain is all there is.  
Outside, bright green leaves unfold  
from many trees, but I feel  
no joy from the change. I lack  
the strength to transform my suffering  
into another truth to spare me from future  
pain. Gone is my faith that these truths  
will keep me safe.  
Outside, green leaves press  
against my window,  
but I don't move. I lie suspended  
between the world renewing  
itself and the world of pain  
that is my only truth.

## Exposure Exercise I

At a desk, I sit, my eyes drifting around the classroom. Sunlight beams through the windows, but I don't see what is bearing down on me. My head turns. You stare, your middle finger cocked, aimed at me. I jerk in my seat, afraid. You smile, your finger extending across the empty space. It's in my face even though you are ten feet away. A 44-year-old female returning student is being flicked off in a classroom. You glare, baring your middle finger. Your middle finger.

In a classroom, my eyes drift. Already you sit staring at me from somewhere I can't see. I turn. Your metallic eyes are fixed on me, your middle finger raised. It's no mistake. I jerk. I am wide awake. Your middle finger is aimed at me, crowding out the class. It extends through space. A 20-something-year-old male student is shoving his middle finger in my face. The slide of the teacher's wingtips on vinyl. He pivots towards the board. What did he see?

Something is bearing down on me, something I don't see. I turn. You stare, your middle finger stiff. Behind it, your metallic eyes burrow deep into me. I can't look away. I'm afraid. Your long, white middle finger leaps through space until it's in my face. The teacher turns towards the board. Did he hesitate? Your smile widens from behind your middle finger, pleased. Am I the only person in the classroom who sees? At your desk you sit, hand lowered, face calm. You did nothing wrong.

Self-Reminder: read repeatedly until anxiety subsides

**Yuan Changming**

## **Set to See in Silences**

Standing still on a huge rock  
The pale horse holds its head high  
As if it had been running at full speed  
On a wild range, looking up afar  
To the most distant mountain

Its eyes glittering as raindrops  
Keep falling from heaven  
Straightly down to hell, &  
Water-carving its paleness  
Into a demonic statue of history

## Island

I do not know if it is a  
Spirited home-  
Land of myriads of human whims &

Dreams, like so many spectres drifting around

But they keep getting off their sinking body-  
Boats, gather together there, anchored thickly  
Like the foreshadow of tomorrow night

**Rachel Tanner**

## **I Cannot Name This Anchor But It Holds Me Silent, Calm, and Still**

By most

Fridays,

I am ready  
to sit with your  
hand between my  
thighs. Often, distance  
isn't the only thing  
separating

us.

I try to keep up  
with the way  
you gaze

towards the future  
like it's something  
set in stone. I've  
never known a  
future that could  
recognize me, could

pull me  
back around to  
believing

again.

But now: you  
and your joy

fill what I didn't  
even realize  
was empty. You:  
in the driveway, texting  
me that you're here.  
You:

always sighing sweet  
into my palms

those weekend nights  
I finally  
get to have you.

## **Blackberry Winter**

Stay.

Please stay.

There's  
more warmth

coming than  
you could ever know.

The cold  
won't  
last long. The cold

will make its  
home elsewhere

and we

will be free  
to bloom.

## Contributors

**Karina Fantillo** is a storyteller, dancer, daydreamer. Karina immigrated with her family at the age of 9 to San Francisco, where she learned about Filipino and American culture through folk dancing. Once an astute student of English grammar and its rules, Karina now writes poems in the first person in lower case and minimizes any use of punctuation. It is her stand against the infrastructures that deprived her of learning her native language and history in an American colony. Karina's poems have appeared as San Francisco Public Library's Poem of the Day and in *The Racket*. She is currently a third-year poetry fellow in the University of San Francisco's MFA in Writing program.

**Sophia Marshall** is a perceptual poet, characterized by her treatment of the senses. She has been compared to e.e. cummings, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, and Sappho. She is a credentialed journalist and music critic, as well as a poet, with credits in several jazz journals and other music publications, and she has published letters on politics in *The Boston Phoenix*. She has a blog, *The Flash Boston* ([theflashboston.com](http://theflashboston.com)), covering Boston music and culture. She is a transgender woman. She lives in Boston.

**Deven Philbrick** is a poet, fiction writer and scholar living in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Washington and is currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University of Michigan, where he focuses on the intersections of 20th century poetry and process philosophy. His writings have previously appeared or are forthcoming in *Your Impossible Voice*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Protean Magazine* and *Diode Poetry Journal*. He previously served as the prose editor of the *Seattle Review*.

**Matthew Johnson** is a northern transplant living in NC and a MA graduate of UNC-Greensboro. A former sports journalist and editor who wrote for the *USA Today College* and *The Daily Star* (Oneonta, NY), his poetry has appeared in *Maudlin House*, *The Roanoke Review*, *Maryland Literary Review*, *New York Quarterly*, and elsewhere. He's a two-time Best of the Net Nominee and his debut collection, *Shadow Folks and Soul Songs* (Kelsay Books), was released in 2019. His second poetry collection is scheduled for release in Fall 2022 by *New York Quarterly*. Twitter: @Matt\_Johnson\_D. Website: <https://www.matthewjohnsonpoetry.com>.

**Kate LaDew** is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art. She resides in Graham, NC with her cats, Charlie Chaplin and Janis Joplin.

**Manuela Williams** is the author of two poetry chapbooks: *Witch* (dancing girl press) and *Ghost in Girl Costume* (originally published as part of the 2017 Hard to Swallow Chapbook Contest). Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Thimble Literary Magazine*, *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Bone Bouquet*, and other places. She is a columnist for DIY MFA and is currently pursuing an MFA in Poetry at the University of Nevada, Reno.

**Kuo Zhang** is a faculty member at the University of Vermont. She has a bilingual book of poetry in Chinese and English, *Broadleaves* (Shenyang Press). Her poem "One Child Policy" was awarded second place in the 2012 Society for Humanistic Anthropology [SHA] Poetry Competition held by the American Anthropology Association. She served as poetry & arts editor for the *Journal of Language & Literacy Education* in 2016-2017 and also one of the judges for 2015 & 2016 SHA Poetry Competition. Her poems have appeared in numerous literary magazines, including *Gyroscope Review*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *The Roadrunner Review*, *Lily Poetry Review*, *Mom Egg Review*, *Bone Bouquet*, *K'in*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Rigorous*, *Adanna Literary Journal*, *Raising Mothers*, and *MUTHA Magazine*.

**Moriah Hampton** received her PhD in Modernist Literature from SUNY-Buffalo. Her fiction, poetry, and photography have appeared in *Hamilton Stone Review*, *Entropy Magazine*, *Rune Literary Collection*, *The Sonder Review*, and elsewhere. She currently teaches in the Writing and Critical Inquiry Program at SUNY-Albany.

**Yuan Changming** hails with Allen Yuan from poetrypacific.blogspot.ca. Credits include Pushcart nominations and publications in *Best of the Best Canadian Poetry* (2008-17) & *BestNewPoemsOnline*, among others. Recently, Yuan served on the jury for Canada's 44th National Magazine Awards (poetry category).

**Rachel Tanner** is a queer, disabled writer from Alabama whose work has recently appeared in *Tenderness Lit*, *Wine Cellar Press*, and elsewhere. She has a monthly videogame writing column in *Videodame* and she tweets @rickit.

