

portraits & persimmons

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# *londemere lit*

the still life chapter

ISSUE 1.2



## note from the editors

*still life* is a genre that's transient across all of art history.

while a still life is traditionally a painting or drawing that depicts an inanimate object, the *still life* chapter instead incapsulates vignettes. snapshots, if you will, ephemeral and blurry around the edges.

a single moment, a blink of life stilled in time, tells an infinity's worth of stories. what can be found in the delicate cracking of an egg, a darkly inked dictionary definition, a slide of game pieces across black and white?

we believe the answer weaves within these pieces, all of which we are humbled and ecstatic to share. thank you so much for your support of the *art gallery* chapter; we hope you find the *still life* chapter just as worthy of hanging in a museum.

all our love,

lien-huong & cece  
*editors-in-chief*

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# ‘where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?’

N.K SAID

It's that time of the year again, where someone slips a noose around the sun. These days it hits 6pm and the sky is already a shadow of its former self. Even on a Saturday night, when the voices in the street are high-pitched and full of honey-like warmth, and I think I know the feeling. You see, I used to feed off the light but now it feeds on me. 23 and I'm tired of living in the space between who I was and who I'm going to be. I want to be somewhere different. Somewhere where things feel Connected. Like where the sea meets the shore. Or the hammering of your knuckles on my door after the city falls asleep. Somewhere your voice carries into the night, past into the early morning light on a Sunday morning, that gentle morning hum, reminding me of fifteen, where it looks like rain but it doesn't, and summers are spent dreaming of a future filled with golden promise. Where the light retracts back into the centre of my chest. Where the sky shifts and I let it.

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**N.K Said** has since turned 24 and spends her time arranging Teams meetings and rearranging the poems saved in her notes app. You can find some of the ones that made it out alive on her Instagram account @flxw.d or follow her on twitter @nk\_writes. She hopes to see you there.

# the thousand things that i am

ELIZABETH LI

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Noun: Grace

\ 'grās \

Origins: *Middle English: via Old French from Latin gratia, from gratus 'pleasing, thankful'; related to grateful.*

Definition:

1. A disposition of kindness and courtesy like the shimmering surface of a perfectly still lake. Sunlight settles and refracts to weave a blanket of glittering white, shielding the gaze from what lies underneath

*Example sentence: The world becomes a roiling ocean, surging and crashing inwards and plunging me under. Fellow kindergarten students crowd around me – bodies taller than mine, faces I don't recognize. The words that spew from their lips fall as meaningless noise on my ears: animalistic sounds patterned into foreign jargon; jagged puzzle pieces that collapse around me like the haphazard site of a natural disaster. The asphyxiation of anxiety seizes my throat as they press closer with bright, curious eyes, their foreign babble a cacophony that fills my world. And then*

*I pick out what they are saying in their bastardized tongue: “Nee hao?” “Ni how!” “Nee how?” “Nee how?” I am a deer in headlights, standing perfectly still and silent, my mind buzzing with white noise. During a parent-teacher interview, Ms. Johnson says, “She holds herself with such grace. You’ve raised a very polite child.”*

2. A temporary exemption, a precarious intermission in time, a fortress of peace

*Example sentence: My fingers press solidly into the small of her back just as she spins around, her fingers crossed in a “t” position. I skid to a stop, blinking in confusion. “It’s a time out,” she explains smugly. “Like a grace period. You can’t tag me when I’m in it.” I murmur a small “oh” and pivot to tag someone else. The other girl with the pigtails makes the “t” just before I reach her. The others snicker, but it sounds like laughter, and laughter means they are happy. So I swallow back the bitter, bubbling frustration and run from person to person like a dog, thinking myself part of the family even as they taunt me with their joy.*

3. A short prayer at a meal asking a blessing or giving thanks to He who created the world and brought us light

*Example sentence: “Grace,” her parents say at dinner before we dig into our meals. I sit delicately with my back straight, a napkin folded on my lap. The boy beside me knocks over his drink with an over-enthusiastic gesture, and orange juice spills across my shirt. “Sorry!” he apologizes, lasagna dribbling from the corners of his mouth. I wipe at myself with the napkin and tell him it’s alright. Later, her birthday cake is unveiled; it is massive and rectangular and slathered in frosting. The children clamber for the slice with their favorite fruit or drawing, and I am jostled back and forth in their hungry pursuits. I hang back, waiting, and receive the plain, remaining piece. Sticky and uncomfortable, I offer her a smile as I return to my seat.*

4. That of purity and sanctity. Don’t ask who defines what is what.

*Example sentence: She confesses on Valentine’s day with a handwritten note slipped into his desk after school. He reads it aloud to the class and laughs in her face. She flees to the teacher’s vacant desk and sobs behind the chair, all while he mockingly recites again and again the carefully crafted letter she had written. Fury burns; I drive my fist into his*

*shoulder and he staggers. Ms. Davis gasps in scandalized horror while the boy wails that he can never golf again, and she ushers me to the principal's office. How easy it is, for the boy to simply be “rowdy” and “young.” How easy it is for them to sit me down and lecture me about respect and kindness. This is the inconsistent bar I’ve leapt day after day for the sake of grace, but I might just prefer to be down here, limbo dancing with the devil.*

5. A title given to the all-forgiving Father that loves all

*Example sentence: Shall we play at romance, darling? Perhaps the cute boys we’ve been chasing around the mall will let down their guard. How easily amused you are—you with the name of a German necromancer, the slender curve of your body pressed against my back, your arms wrapped around my neck as we ride down the escalator. I’ll braid your hair if you kiss me, but I can’t say that His Grace would approve.*

6. The ease and suppleness of movement, immortal beauty attributed to that which is calm and silent

*Example sentence: Her face is bisected in two from the other side of the piste, the golden curls of her ponytail brushing against her shoulders.*



*There is grace in the arc of silver through the air as I swish my blade down in a salute. Does she think I didn't see her across the court, pulling her eyes into slits and preening as her friends crowed with laughter? Go on: trivialize my history and the beautiful tapestry of lives that have woven together the fabric of who I am. En garde, prêt, allez. I will tear you to pieces.*

7. (transitive verb) To confer or bestow, sometimes something good and desirable, sometimes an insubstantial shadow that brushes against the human consciousness just as the serpent whispered to Eve

*Example sentence: Here are the things that grace little girls in dreams but are never to be spoken aloud: the indescribable fascination with the calamity hidden behind our smiles, the conflagration we could incite over the porcelain dolls we haunt, the blasphemy of a young woman becoming god. We are all stars ablaze in our own fire, careening soundlessly through space, poised to rend catastrophe through the universe. Destruction and creation. Supernova.*

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a professional daydreamer and sometimes-poet, **elizabeth li** is a chinese-canadian writer who seeks to use surrealism as an exploration of identity, as well as a medium for cultural reconnection and catharsis. she is also the editor-in-chief of the origami review, and her debut chapbook "anatomy of wonderland" was published with Bottlecap Press.

# dance studio, after hours:

A . W O N G

one by one the dancers  
rend the shoes from their  
figures, brush sweat from  
their temples and tears from  
their eyes. they withdraw  
to the world outside; all except  
one, who stays despite the  
gilt parting the settling shadows.  
she peers at the mirror, observes the  
halo draping her frame: to her, the  
sunrays are a spotlight, the  
muted freeway buzz is applause.  
she is armored in a jeweled  
tutu and a glittering tiara,  
standing proudly before a  
faceless cheering audience.

she curtsies, the epitome of  
grace— the crowd stands,  
the theater quivers with  
applause. in this vision the  
dancer is gorgeous, flawless,  
loved— *everything i am not*,  
she thinks, shredding her  
reflection apart in the empty  
room. eventually, she leaves  
too, turned bitter by a future  
she cannot believe in.

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**A. Wong** is a Chinese-American student writer. Her works focus on dreams, memories, and most importantly, home depot tools. Find her studying at a nearby coffee shop, where upon closer inspection, you can tell she is not actually studying.

# The Eggs and Changes Collection

KAIA BOYER

## Scrambled Eggs

You do not understand the appeal of it. (The shell splinters and halves under the force of her thumb.) Milk and yolk and pepper do not leave the faintest trace of enticement. (The clear jelly whitens as it dashes across the non-stick, scattering the oil that blends into her freckled arms.) It doesn't fuse well, and the pattern is not at all consistent as it would have been if made sunny side up. (Her spatula taps against the stretched albumen and splits it apart, crinkling edges wilting against the heat, cinched.) You do not like the way it rubs against the insides of your cheeks, clammy and unwhole. (Her clever fingers twist the salt grinder, an attractive mixture of scratch and screech, alabaster flecks dropping from the sky like snow.) But it was made by her. (She spoons a bite into your mouth, a gentle hand caressing your cheek.) And you will clutch and care for whatever she offers. (She smiles.)

## Epiphanies

She smiles. He realizes he does not love her.

There it is again: epiphanies. They're often deadly, that twang of the string in your chest thrumming deeper than a rollercoaster's descent. It creates a cacophony of thoughts and a symphony of endings. Lungs cave and hearts halt and capillaries fracture under your lips, "Oh, your lips, why couldn't I get enough of you? You have to leave. I cannot stand it." Those are epiphanies, with their abrupt materialization and shining chances left in the dark.

They are when one decides that they have taken enough, when one has nothing left to give, when one realizes that they deserve more than desperate

calls at three a.m. (their specially chosen ringtone haunting their dreams) and when one realizes they're going to shoot for whimsical ones. They are split-second things, they are sharp and mesmerizing like fireworks, but they never fizz out. Once an epiphany is born, they loiter like gum under the table, mud in the ridges of your shoe, a pin in your heart.

## Remembrances

I cannot stand it.

The room is littered with you. The socks I told you time and time again to tuck back into the spruce drawers we built ourselves, the frying pan your mother gave us when we moved in. Paint brushes on the coffee table from your latest project, the canvas tucked under our bed because you needed to “sleep on your work, pun intended.” Your perfume hangs heavy in the dank air, infectious like phosgene.

It's almost like you just left for work instead of murdered five days ago.

It's easy to forget that's what happened when life is composed of interviews with detectives and funeral homes and grieving family members and half-hearted *I'm sorry for your loss's*. None of them could even begin to understand the love we shared, the sacrifices we made for each other, the transparent devotion I saw in your eyes.

Under all this, I curse. The sofa still has blood running deep into its pores.

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**Kaia Boyer** is an author born and raised in San Francisco, California. Their love for writing lies in sweeping angsty romance and fantasy with an aspiring interest in linguistics and reading classics. While she's not reading and writing, she can be found on the softball field pitching wildly, making 'aesthetic' boards on Pinterest, watching shows, and listening to music. They're currently revising their second novel.

# all the same

LESLIE CAIRNS

I wake up soaking, but not in yellow sunstreaks down my back, nestled near my freckles, but in pain and fear and memory in deep indigo.

I have one day, and so I retreat to my skull. The dream was stretching, my friend Ellen's hands reaching out to mine, while her boyfriend pulled her forward. A combination of yellow bayadere stripes, mixed with her dungarees, and the sun may have been out, or it may have been a blushing bride. Five of my random friends from my childhood, my golden, frayed college years, all there somehow the night I needed it after swirling around near porcelain sinks, until I fell asleep.

That part didn't matter: we were all strong women, and my sisters were there, too. We gathered around the table, and in the night I didn't worry about empty calories or second helpings, I just devoured the

Feel of the room. There were laughs that you could almost hold like pollen whisps, and the way the tendrils of your voice came in honeydew melon scattered 'round the table. You weren't my mean mother, you were just folding origami birds out of cloth the color of dandelions tickling underneath your chin. A dare, and a dreamy game, and it was dying all the same. We ate until the lemonade grew sweeter by our shared together, we drank until the popcorn flew around our heads—spraying them around us to try and catch them—as we stayed there, near the shimmer on the seaside.

Ellen's telling me her new words; she learns some every day by scouring  
the newspapers. *Ephemeron*

*lives only*

*for a day.*

*What would you do?*

These creatures only live

for one day, she's telling me, a whisper now. The words coming out like  
campfire flecks, the wolves' eyes, the howls just behind their vowels. Their  
irises slack in the passing hours. *Where would you go?*

I'd go under covers, flutter eyelids with tiny miniature veins on the irises,  
that fleck upwards towards the starry nights.

I find my lost family in the buttery coppers of meadow, in the twenty four  
hours that I get to fall back into the past, while my toes flay outward,  
sprawl, unaware of what's ahead.

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**Leslie Cairns** is a lover of Gilmore Girls (check out her twitter, GilmoreGquotes!), huskies,  
and reading mysteries too late at night. She has upcoming poetry, flash, and short stories in  
various magazines (Cerasus Magazine, Pink Plastic House, etc). She loves writing about  
nostalgia, mental health, and nature. Or: all three.

# trust fall

LATIFA SEKARINI

*“Love the invader compromises the self’s autonomy. Love the rescuer is the hand held out across the uncrossable sea.”*

— Jeanette Winterson, Gut Symmetries

before you, i hung my hopes on motherhood made for the madhouse  
i wished for moonbeams mangled by mama’s hand. i learned misery  
loves company more than my mother loves me. the umbilical cord of daughterhood,  
a pinkie promise tailored to fit my waist, a silk sash with splintering threads,  
symmetrical stitching, and [my] small victories threatening to choke me.  
she taught me puffy cheeks and unanswered prayers don’t win pageants—is love  
*even worth winning if you’re not first place?* you see, my mother is asking for the  
impossible. mama wants a winner, she wants me to never be wrong, she thinks  
i might be worth the wait. *i don’t know if i’m worth the wait, but i will*  
*pick up the phone and find out.* put God on the line. somehow shove an armful  
of prayers onto His lap. grovel my guts out while i count down the hours  
i have spent before you: is it possible [for me] to exist in a story without sin?



*why are our prayers always punctuated with the past? why is our life's tapestry  
always always always tinged with tragedy when i have done nothing to deserve it?*

i met you as the world was ending. pizza and pho paving the way for honeyed pawning,  
our voices chasing through corridors inside telephone lines, [our] universe learns to crawl  
in between lyrics: kiss me, beneath the milky twilight and lead me out on the moonlit floor.  
love looks like your hands ladling beef into my bowl; your moon-fingered mouth  
rippling into a sunburst smile as we order another plate of biryani and naan.  
you've always wanted me to eat well and i can't thank you enough for cooking dinner.  
i think of laughter echoing like prayer. our voices saying amen, amen, amen, long after  
[my] heart has forgotten where to pause when praying. the world is still ending but love  
is no longer a rug for God to pull out from underneath my feet. i find pieces of you,  
both in God and in a plate of French toast. i hope someday you find me too.

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**Latifa Sekarini** is a sweet summer child from Indonesia. When they're not sobbing over poetry, you'll probably find them sitting at the kitchen table munching on fruit. Her special talent includes sending her friends heartfelt paragraphs about which Mary Oliver poems reminds her of them. Her works have appeared in magazines such as Kudeta Magazine, Ashamed Magazine, and Sumou Mag.

# rules of chess

## TEI HURST

### **THE CHESSBOARD:**

Love is a lot like playing chess, for in both cases, I had no idea what I was doing.

He turns to me over coffee with cream and two sugars, and asks me if I have ever played chess, an innocent question in an attempt to make conversation outside of talking about work. I can picture it now, me in my new grey wool coat that was \$35 from Primark, and my V-neck black sweater that already has a hole in the sleeve, him in one of the five awful grey hoodies he owns and the jacket that loudly proclaims the name of the university we both attend. He's looked better, we both have, outside of work clothes neither of us really knowing how to dress, the red and black check of flannel shirts keeping us tucked inside lines that we know, that we are familiar with.

Moving our conversations to a coffee shop I have not been back to since, is something far less familiar, and feels like the smudging of boundaries that have been put in place.

It is with a hand tucked under my chin that I tell him I have no idea how to play chess, and perhaps he should teach me some time—flirting in

the only way that I know how to, laughing at my inability to do one thing in hopes that someone will offer to take me under their wing and teach me how, with careful words and loving actions. In part, I think I have watched one too many sitcom romances and my standards are all over the place, so when it works, it comes as a shock, the careful moves I made resulting in a trip to Target and an arm around my waist in the parking lot.

*“So, should we start a relationship?”*

## **THE PAWN:**

In chess, the pawn is said to be both the simplest piece and the one with the most impact, despite their inability to move in any direction other than forwards, and even then, slowly. One square at a time passes underfoot until they can hop over someone else and get them gone, a smooth action after much duress, working hard to get there in the first place.

I felt like a pawn in the relationship.

He asks me, two hours into my saying yes, how we should deal with the situation we find ourselves in, how do I want to take it, will I be comfortable to kiss him, are we telling co-workers, is this serious, and I am quietly overwhelmed into taking deep breaths and reminding him that I have never dated before, that I want to take things slowly—which he is

gracious with. He doesn't push me for affection, doesn't beg for my love (oh, what a word), but wants to spend every day by my side, moving slowly forward in our standing as we hide it under wraps from everyone around us other than our families.

Moving through the motions, swishing across the squares.

He pushes me gently forward, one step at a time, keeping me comfortable as I remind him that I want to take things slowly, and puts me in settings that I know well already—the white floor tiles of Trader Joe's organic food and florals section, the black drapes in the front window of the Panera Bread where I stop to get a cup of tea much to his disdain, for he has never drunk hot tea, and doesn't plan on doing so any time soon. He keeps me close as I sift through second hand coats at one of my favourite consignment stores, tucking me under his chin as I pick up and put down houndstooth patterned blazers and run my fingers through the soft fabric of shirts that have already paid their dues to the washing machine, a kiss to my hand as he tells me just how right this feels, how he hopes we last forever.

Two weeks in, and slowly moving ever onwards.

## **THE ROOK:**

According to notes I took in my green journal when he was teaching me how to play chess with the revolutionary war set in his basement, the rook can move straight in any direction, forwards, backwards, left or right—

smooth movements, which seems to be the ideal way for anything to go.

Looking back, I'm certain he thought that I felt as worry-free about our relationship as a rook gliding across the entire chessboard, nothing in my way, and being straightforward and quick to the point, but I would be lying if I said I had nothing holding me back. In truth, there shouldn't have been anything to throw me off track, I shouldn't have had reason to cry myself to sleep or feel sick mere days into what he thought was the long haul, quiet moments where when asked if I was okay, my replies would be quietly crafted lies.

*"I'm just so happy, I'm thinking about how this feels so right!"*

The rook should be able to glide through life like a knife through butter, simple but effective movements that leave those watching stunned by how well they are played out—sitting at dinner on a double date that I did not want to go on, as conversation spins around me in well woven threads of gold, sipping my water as he talks of how great things are while swishing his fringe out of his face, turning to me and smiling before going back to explaining how things are going so perfectly, how he can really see this going somewhere, how I seem happier than my friend has ever seen me.

Inside I am wishing there is a cat sitting next to the gameboard, who could just swipe the pieces off the black and white squares and have everyone forget what the point of the game was to begin with.

## THE BISHOP AND THE KNIGHT:

The bishop can move along any diagonal, taking shortcuts to reach what it wants, when it wants. When playing iMessage chess late at night, it is one of my favourites, jumping over pieces however I desire, making up for ground that was lost when other, more stupid moves were made before. The knight, in my eyes, is much the same: hops and skips of diagonals that make no sense but are crucial to winning a game.

When sitting in his basement, both of these are pieces that I have to keep questioning how they move, and if it makes any sense at all. Despite notebook scrawls, I do not understand why the knight can jump and then dance, why the rook can do whatever it wants on the board.

They do not make sense to me, and neither does he.

A gentle hand guides my own as he reminds me that he'll keep me safe in the shopping mall where there is no danger, cutting through crowds so I can buy my favourite soap without having to ask people to move out of my way. The blue card that sits in his wallet to show his father's authority if he were to ever get pulled over while we were driving. The same gentle hand that reminds me that the knight jumps two forward, and then one over.

Whatever he wants—straight along the diagonal and right onto my lips.

*“Did that give you butterflies?”*

## **THE QUEEN:**

The queen is the one piece I know, the one I remember, turning over in my hands a small figurine of a woman on horseback, explained to me as if I were stupid.

*“She has her own feminist agenda, like you. She can do whatever she wants.”*

The one line he would always throw back into my face.

He couldn't hold the door: that would be against my feminist agenda, he couldn't pick up the bill, because that was something feminism didn't allow. I could do whatever I wanted, so long as it fitted with the preconceived notions of me that already existed in his mind. The queen could do whatever she wanted on the chessboard, so long as she stayed on the straight and narrows.

I could do whatever I wanted, so long as I was perfectly his. There really isn't more to possibly say about her.

The crown is slipping.

## **THE KING:**

Checkmate. Trapped. The weakest piece in the game. One last move.

## HOW TO WIN A GAME:

*“You’ll win if you capture all my pieces, or the king,”* he says, kissing me on the cheek and brushing a hair out of my face. I feel sick to the stomach at his action, and reach to move another pawn on the board, hopping forward two spaces before he can move another piece and steal it.

*“Checkmate, sweetie,”* he says, and my king is trapped.

I am trapped, and ten moves in, he’s won the game. I have two pawns of his sat at the side of the board, and he has half my pieces opposite.

I sit on a bench and wait for him two weeks later, harsh words on the tip of my tongue, unable to play the part I’ve been given any longer.

*Checkmate.*

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**Tei Hurst** (she/her) is a non-fiction loving lesbian hailing from the South of England and living in the USA. When not writing or drinking tea, she can be found yelling online @teihurst on both instagram and twitter, and her written words can be found in lit magazines such as *Queerlings*.



# ode to my best friend

**B O B**

last night, i asked if i could borrow a hoodie from your closet and you handed me a new one. i'd never worn this before, you'd said, thinking i was won over. i wanted something that had your smell but didn't get it. and neither did you.

the night before, even after it set i still saw the sun in your eyes. i was washing the dishes in your sink and i teasingly asked what you would say about me when i died. it was desperation. i hoped for a heartfelt answer more than i expected one, so when you started talking i had shushed the running water into the smallest of trickles so i myself could drink in the gushing.

i fear someone hears your words from that night and the words in this poem and thinks too much. no, this is love so alive we do not have to touch its pulse or each other to prove it exists.

when i remember you i remember something richard siken wrote:  
*sometimes you get so close to someone you end up on the other side of them.*

i grew so dizzy with love for your face, i soon discovered you had, like everyone had, more than one. it was similar to the discovery of the americas, and just as violent.

i loved you to the point of revolution. the beginning of love is a feeling. the rest is a choice.

in your parents' living room your mother makes small talk with me. me, scraping all my nail polish off with my fingers. me, in your clothes. i don't dream of being robbed but i hope, with just enough embarrassment, that your hoodie stole my scent.

whenever i live a moment i always wonder how i will remember it. even the present is in some ways both a future and a past to me. there, sitting on your parents' couch i feared i would look back and remember only the date my heart had with anxiety, instead of the way it opened up to you. a sunflower in the light that would never go down. everything is blooming.

i remember it all as it was. you sound asleep. the banana bread we baked. your hand on my heart.

my heart, my heart—you are where i go to when i want to go home.

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**Bob** is not the builder, but she likes poetry and books. She is lying on her couch like a seal as she types this. If it weren't for iPhone's predictive emoji she would've thought she spelled seal wrong just now.