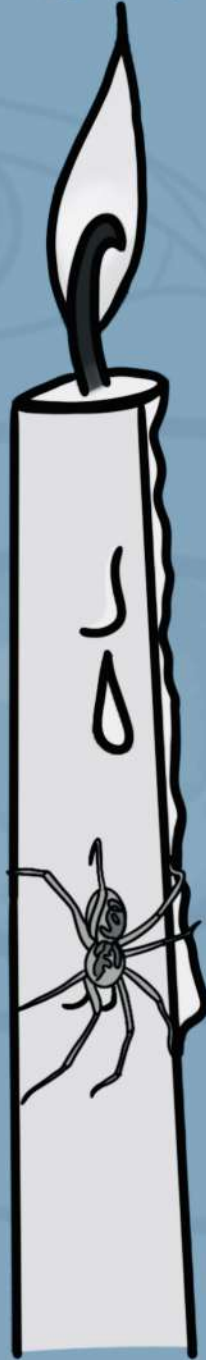


POTTAGE



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

POTTAGE is dedicated to misfits and scraps. As a literary magazine, preference is shown to literary works, but we accept any form of art that can be printed onto paper. POTTAGE seeks to platform artists of all skill levels and specializations, questioning what can be considered art or literature and what metrics a creator “should” be aiming for. We will always prioritize inclusivity, intersectionality, and interdisciplinary work.

I say “we” but, in truth, I am the sole member of the POTTAGE “team.” Growing increasingly frustrated with the publishing industry, the U.S. job market, and the scourge that is generative AI, I decided I would make my own opportunities: publishing experience for myself, publications for lesser-known artists, and a collection of human-made work for readers. While I am the only staff member, POTTAGE is a community-driven project, introducing me to some wonderful artists and giving me an excuse to reach out to old friends.

I believe the collective can empower the individual; I hope that, by curating various pieces, each one can shine a bit brighter. Further, no work is complete until it is perceived—an act which irrevocably changes it. As such, I must thank you, reader, for contributing to POTTAGE with your attention. Your support is priceless.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "St. Rowan Tackitt". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "St.", "Rowan", and "Tackitt" being capitalized and prominent.

Saint-Rowan Tackitt, Founding Editor

Table of Contents

Time to Frolic by Kale Brand	1
The Price by Gloria Sladek	2
Everything Has a Cost by Gloria Sladek	3
Several Parts of Me by Fred Tackitt	4
Beach House by Lucas Simone	5
The Universe by Anne Sladek	6
Dovetail by Alyson Lucas	7
Spider by Will Nelson	8
Mystic Ocean by Anne Sladek	9
Trust by Lucas Simone	10
Dumpling Soup by Will Nelson	11
Changeling by Gloria Sladek	12
Take Their Place by Gloria Sladek	13
Contributor Bios	14

Time to Frolic

Kale Brand

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7

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10

13

15

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Take a Deep Breath*by Gloria Sladek*

Though the air may be clouded and your mind may be hazy, soon this will all make sense.

Why the war's wage on in and out of our minds, why so many mourn the deaths of those they love while we sit inside and dream of brighter days that may never come.

Take a breath because this is where we live. A painting that coats the blood soaked land that we stride on. The white curtains that hide the cloudy skies from the smoke of wars we turn our eyes from.

Take in a breath and close your eyes to the horrors you try not to face, as you hear the screams you turn up the sound of the music. Soon there will be better days.

Better days for some on the shoulders of others who fight to survive as they are pushed to the dirt. And we walk on like they are nothing to us with our designer shirts.

Take a deep breath as it may be your last as the smokey air causes your lungs to collapse. Take a deep breath and close your eyes, one last time.



Everything has a cost *by Gloria Sladek*

Several Parts of Me**by Fred Tackitt*

Between the several parts of me,
I stand and watch them move,
And wonder with the coming on
Of night what sounds will prove
To be the greatest ease to sleep:
The thunder of a union
Or the crash of seperation
Or the quiet pensive tension
That pervades the preservation
Of the lone and lonely, individual
Several Parts of Me.

* Poem titled by Manchester University archivists

Dovetail*by Alyson Lucas*

I nosedived into lakewater
and it's cold swallowed me whole.
Felt memories permeate my skin, like blue, coagulated, thick.
I shine now. Heavy, I shine.
Anchor pressed to my forehead in prayer,
she kisses me once on each cheekbone
before saying goodbye.
I look up and imagine quiet. Rehearse its sensation.
Orchestrate my muscles to draw love
in a crystallized outline.
Muted eardrums mumble merry.
My veins nerve and swell with salt.
A dove flutters above the surface.
Daffodil seeds lace her wings against the wind.
I think about what it must feel like to feel light.
Stranger to no one but myself.
Dovetail.

Beach House*by Lucas Simone*

I drip water in the wax
so the candle makes pops
like the radio makes pops.
My girl's hands smell like
incense, her room
like cup noodles.
There's sand in our scalps.

HER: Does your goatee make you
feel like a real person?

I'm on the floor, she's on the bed.
She's holding her arms in the air
and stroking them.

ME: It really does.

Because it really does.
She gets me.

ME: I look just like my dad.
I want to stand next to
a wheelbarrow.

HER: My hips make me feel
like a woman.

They go in and out at
the bone.

And my tummy gathers
under my bellybutton like
a hand cupping water.
It makes a shadow in my
sun dresses.

ME: I've noticed that.

Because I have.
My girl is gorgeous.

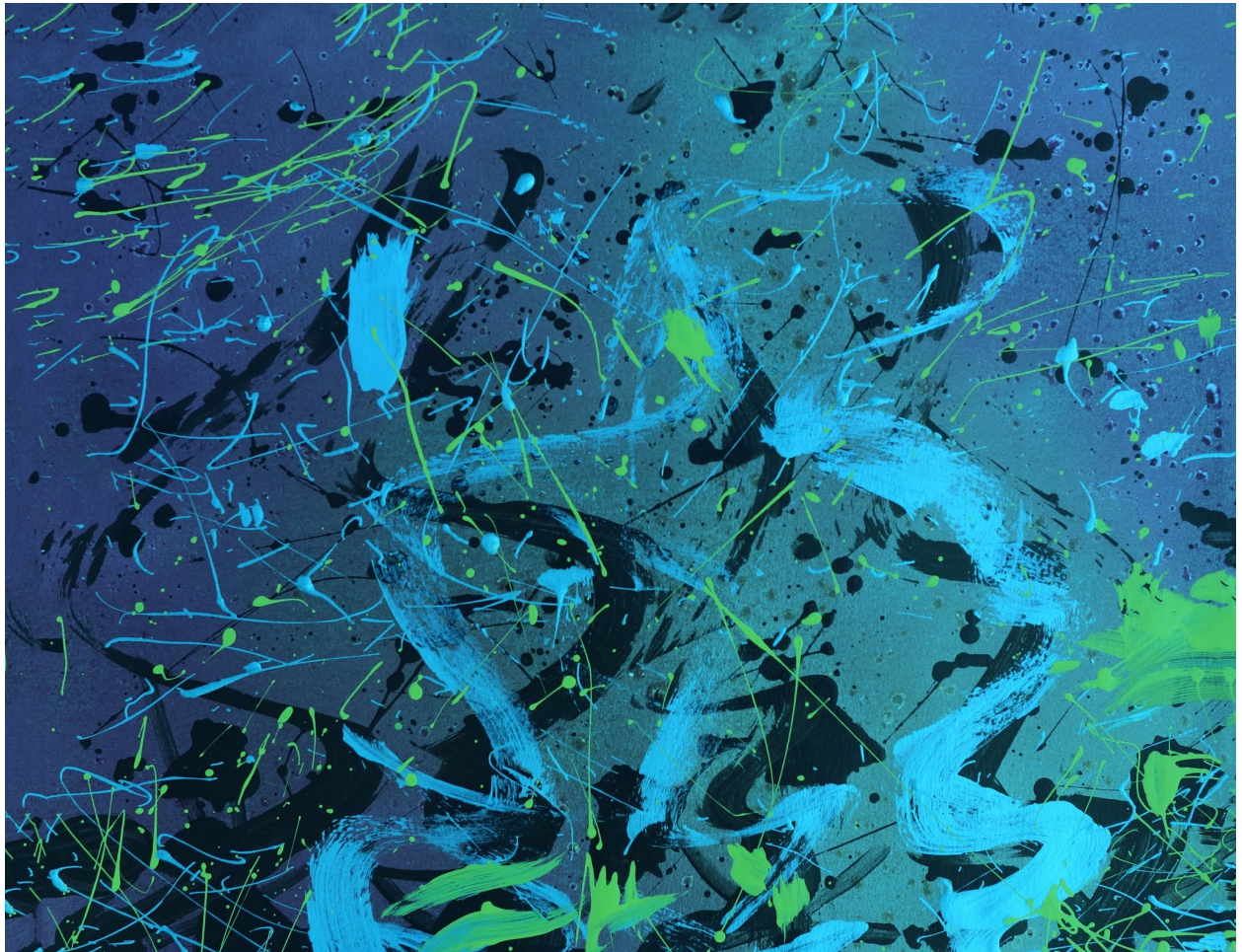
HER: My mom's tummy
did that too.

I look up at the bed,
which is lofted.
A quilted altar.
My girl is holding her arms in the air
and stroking them.
I stand,
fingers in wax sarcophaguses,
and kiss her.

Spider*by Will Nelson*

I saw a spider in the shower this morning.
Blindly, two pale forelegs tapped curiously,
Feeling out her next step as she spindled her
way
Along the mildewing drywall above the
shower.
I am not afraid of spiders, but my heartrate
leapt.
She was the grey-white of dead skin
With mandibles the color of menstrual blood.
There are no venomous spiders here,
But still I found myself edging to the other side
of the shower.
My naked body, soft and pink from the hot
water,
Felt vulnerable in front of her raptorial
gracefulness.
A deep instinct compelled me to keep an eye
on her.
She inched her way down the wall
And slipped on the damp slickness of the
acrylic shower panel.
All eight legs splayed and flailing wildly
She fell for almost a foot before stopping to
hang suspended in mid-air.
Twisting, focused.
Each appendage searched independently for
some kind of purchase.
Finding none, they all fell still.
Now only inches from my face,
I looked at her motionless form, so flawless in
design.
I wondered what I would have done if she had
fallen into the churning water below.

Would I have succumbed to panic
And brushed her quickly down the drain with
my foot
So that I could continue my shower in
comfort?
Or would I have bent to pick her up?
I indulged to imagine her nestled gratefully in
my palm.
Or, would she have sunk her dark mandibles
into my fragile skin?
I watched her dance her way back up to the
ceiling.
I turned off the shower.
If I ignored her, one of my roommates was sure
to see her
And her dignified, athletic body
Would end up a smear of organs in a crumpled
tissue.
Maybe I would trap her in a ceramic mug,
Flick her out the back door before washing the
mug out with soap.
And she would freeze in hours.
Or perhaps I should bring her to my room,
And allow her to hunt fruitlessly for prey
through the winter months
Until I find her behind the radiator
With all eight legs curled lifelessly towards the
heavens.
Would it be more kind,
I asked myself, squeezing leave-in conditioner
from a plastic tube
To kill her right then?
Instead, I turned out the bathroom lights
And went to bed.



The Universe *by Anne Sladek*

Trust*by Lucas Simone*

The bus. I make eye contact with its subtle, almost-evening headlights and it begins to wink and move dreamily toward me. I close my book and bend to the backpack at my feet to slip it inside, and I'm still bent over when the bus slides into place against the curb, so close it brushes the hairs on the top of my head before stopping and kneeling with a small exhale. It's harmless, this massive machine. It's a dog or a child unafraid of social boundaries, coming to see if I'm okay. I board and walk to the back, steadying myself with poles, swishing against the arms of others' winter coats. I'm on my way to Howard Brown, where people will treat me with kindness. The person at the desk will smile, a physician will offer me free PrEP, the phlebotomist will find a vein on his first try and the tingling in my fingers will feel like champagne bubbles, an older woman will hand me a paper bag of clean needles.

This city takes care of me. Even the bus, with its bulk and exhaust, coming so close to what was once my soft spot, would never hurt me.

Dumpling Soup*by Will Nelson*

Today I made dumpling soup.

I'd rolled out the dumplings by hand on a cutting board on the other side of the kitchen from the stove top. Experimentally, I tossed one of them across the room and it splashed into the pot, sending a plume of soup splashing out over the counter.

I laughed, and threw another. Then a third. The fourth one missed, and the dumpling crumpled onto the formica. But I was already throwing a fifth.

I threw all eighteen dumplings. By the time I was finished, there was soup splattered all over the stove, against the kettle and the knife block, up onto the microwave, and I was laughing and smiling and feeling just wonderful.

I picked up the dumplings that lay mangled around the pot, and threw them into the soup. The one on the floor went in the garbage.

Then, I set about looking for some more fun to have, heedless of the destruction it might cause.



Mystic Ocean by *Anne Sladek*

Changeling*by Gloria Sladek*

The pencil dropped from Farren's hand and she trembled with emotions. She had to make a plan, a way out. A final act. Yes. That's it, that's what she was good at.

Come on think, what would you do? How would Simara say goodbye?

James had said I love you tonight. This is always where she broke character. Always where she messed up the mission. Why was that? It wasn't like it changed anything, she was lying before just as much. But somehow these humans' desire for affection ruined her every time.

It was just so pitiful. Seeing them fall for something that wasn't real, seeing them enamor themselves in an act. No, somehow, after they said I love you... she always ran away.

But now she was in a pickle. This was the longest life Farren had lived in the human world and she needed to find an excuse for her departure fast. Something that would make sense to all of the people she'd met along the way. If she wanted any chance of being forgiven by the chicanery tribe again, she had to make a clean cut escape; her chances were slim as is.

Why'd I have to play a social butterfly this time?

Farren had been a problem child from birth. Most changelings were natural liars, or were kept unaware of their origins until they came of age. She, however, remembered where she was from—she remembered her true parents. She would often doodle them and ask when they were coming to get her. Luckily, Farren's human guardians brushed this off as an active imagination.

They wished they had gotten "help" when she went missing.

The chicanery had scolded her and sent her to a bootcamp to learn how to blend in with the humans. For many centuries, the changelings had perfected the art of taking on the role of humans. They were taught cautionary tales of changelings who lost their way, forgetting their true selves and withering away in the human world.

The older they got, the harder it would be to integrate into society unnoticed. When taking the place of a human who had already lived some life, made some connections, there was a lot more research involved. Because of this, each changeling tries to stay in one life for as long as they can while still reporting back to the tribe and maintaining their true selves.

Farren never quite understood why it was so easy for them. To go everyday being someone they weren't. Never truly being known by anyone. So many of them found joy in the experience, but Farren only felt disgust.



Such a messy process *by Gloria Sladek*

CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

Kale Brand is a musician and composer currently teaching music in Chicago.

Alyson Lucas is a writer from Camarillo, California. She currently lives on the Southside of Chicago.

Will Nelson is a midwest based writer and a Writing and Publishing MFA student at DePaul University. His work has appeared in Block Club Chicago, Minnesota Monthly, Flavor Magazine, and Minnesota Conservation Volunteer. He currently lives in Uptown Chicago and is getting pretty good at rollerblading.

Anna Sladek is a unique & gifted artist with Down syndrome. She is pursuing her passion in life, which is painting. Her supportive family is behind her in this movement to share her artistic expression. Learn more about her story at annasartstore.com.

Gloria Sladek is a web developer and part time hobbyist based in Ohio.

Lucas Simone is a gardener in Chicago. His writing has appeared in Same Faces Collective, Thimble Literary Magazine, The Santa Clara Review, and elsewhere.

Fred Tackitt was a thespian, musician, sketch artist, philosopher, and writer from South Whitley, Indiana. His work is included in POTTAGE to honor his legacy as a beloved son, brother, and friend. You can find a collection of his writings, drawings, and performance photographs at <https://libguides.manchester.edu/archives/tackitt>.

