



The Debut Review

Issue (4): “Bittersweet Bloom”

Cover photo by Kara Dekutoski

The Debut Review
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The Debut Review

Summer 2025

“Bittersweet Bloom”

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

For this issue, we ask you to visit a bittersweet moment in time steeped with nostalgia. Remember the days when everything was tinted sepia and 2010s pop music drifted out of storefronts? We ask you to reminisce, remember the sticky popsicles and skinned knees, sandals slapping on blacktop as you ran down the street during golden hour. Remember the days with dandelion crowns and crayon sunflower drawings? Revisit the shy, skinned-knee child, or the bright-eyed, suntanned, spirited child, or whatever child of summer you were as you began to bloom, planted in soil watered with faith and joy. Who were you before you were resilient? Who were you before you healed?

These are some pretty tough questions to answer, but like always, our young poets and artists did not disappoint. Each one of the works enclosed in this issue left the sweet taste of summer on our tongues. To our contributors, thank you for your vulnerability and trust in creating these works. We are forever grateful for the tales of hurt and healing, deeply personal stories, that you offered into our hands.

I am also incredibly grateful to our editorial board. They are to thank for this issue's beautiful theme, "Bittersweet Bloom,". They undertook the Herculean task of sorting through countless submissions and hand-selecting the works included in this issue. They are unbelievably persistent and strong of heart, making the difficult decision of which to accept and which to painfully decline. A special thanks is due to Fareeha and Amira, who went above and beyond to take on the role of design editors and compile this very issue. And of course, thank you, Caitlyn, for always being by my side and sorting through the endless poetry submissions together.

I also have to thank our wonderful marketing team for all the time and passion they pour into creating beautiful and engaging social media posts. The stunning Word of the Week and crisp announcements on Instagram are all due to their hard work. Last but not least, thank you to our outreach team for being the face and voice of the Debut Review. This issue would have been impossible without all of you.

So, Reader, who am I to hold you back? We hope you return to this issue time and time again, whenever life is cold, so that you may remember once more what summer tastes like.

Happy Reading,
Brianna Park
Editor-in-Chief
The Debut Review, Summer 2025, "Bittersweet Bloom"

AIRPLANE SHOULDERS – BY EVIE

USA

I loved to run and play like every young child, but at the ripe age of five, walking became a struggle. I would go out with my grandparents. It was just me for a while, or my baby sister being pushed around in a stroller. I remember the giant mall that just kept going in a circle, thinking it would never end, on and on like a whimsical dream of average-income households running around Claire's and Ross going out for lunch and buying discounted clothes.

I had developed a disability. My muscles were all cramped up from the toe-walking I have had since I learned how to walk. It was the result of stress and ballerina-fueled dreams. I loved the mall so much. I loved running around this endless loop, weaving between other kids, and playing on the floor of lava with certain colors being lava. Sadly, it was also my biggest fear, my legs burning after walking a short distance.

Exhaustion would come quickly at the play area, crying with big tears and heaves as I couldn't move my legs due to pain. My Papa would wipe my tears and lift me on his shoulders and ask me if I was ready for take off. I still remember to this day every detail about those trips. The way the little button of his hat felt in my hand as I fiddled with it. The overwhelming feeling of being way up high always gave me a rush of giggles. The way his hat felt against his balding head, with the edges of hair against my fingers. My little leg bones against his strong old man's shoulders, and his hands holding onto them. The old man's smell of his bar soap that would bring me comfort would sift through the air. I would no longer feel the pain as he made me fly above all the walking traffic, watching all the other kids fly by with clear eyes, not red eyes.

I would forget about my burning, painful legs and watch moms scold their husbands, groups of girls giggling while walking by, and my sister sleeping in the stroller as we walk the noisy walkways. I was ever so often interrupted by a few plane noises as he would speed walk and weave through them all. I wish I could've stayed there forever. I remember slowly being picked up less and less, with my sister now getting a turn more than I was. My papa was not saying, but showing that he's getting tired faster. I started getting leg therapy, and I began to walk longer and grow taller. With my latest memories having all four of me and siblings walking alongside each other, no one on his shoulders. It's been years since he's been able to lift me; he's currently not in this world either. I will always love my papa with his airplane arms and shoulders, the ones that would scoop me up from the ground and into the clouds away from the pain.

SKIP PARKER – JACOB KLAUNG

USA

And with the power spilling out of that
chest, the air would expand
into twelve holy measures,

each note a pounded nail or
a cast stone,
the intensity of
a thousand tongues
out of one.

Skip Parker,
old-guard practitioner of
the Chicago Blues,
lived on the street,
2nd and Rockford Avenue.

I was too short to
see out the window,
my hands clinging to the flaking
sill paint.
I could never catch a glimpse,
but the music gushed through the window,
that voice, hanging in the air,
in lonely yodels,
and the fervent thrashing twangs.

I felt
each progression wandering like
a pilgrim off to find an ear and
the weight of his
chest rolling out like fog, the soul
departing through the fingertips,

each verse a crownfire
jumping from molecule to molecule
and the strings that

beam a hallowed firewhirl, a zephyr.

On summer nights I remember the
hiss of his guitar,
the stomp of bootsoles.

He could find the sun
in a point of air and
a drop of rain
in a glass of wine, but

it wore on him,
bursting the air asunder,
all that energy out of those lungs
for so many years,
fingers on the strings wringing the
spirit from his breath
for cigarettes
and whiskey.

I can't remember the day
I didn't hear him.
But I remember the moment
I realized it had been quiet
too long.

I could hardly understand how such power
was on earth, let alone fathom
it wasn't strong enough to stay.

BILDUNGSROMAN – BY JACOB KLAUNG

USA

Let's say you start right
here:
Maybe you're the son of a space wizard or
the town drunkard.
It is clear from the start
that you are different from the others.

You might
be an orphan, perhaps well-educated,
or maybe a whiny teenager.

None of that really matters, though.
Your situation is too much to bear.
You would go mad if you were to stay
another minute at that
stuffy prep school or
in that closet under the stairs.

It's a bad situation, so bad
in fact
that you might
fake your own death if it comes to it.
Yes, you must go now and

leave your Midwestern town,
or that cartoonishly cruel family
member, behind. You're
off; confident and naïve, you decide to
go help the rebellion or climb that
mountain to visit your cousin.
You walk, smiling while you walk, whistling as you smile,
until

some jerk steals your bus money
or you have too much money.
You learn your dad was actually an evil space wizard,

that the Catholic Church lied,
and as if things couldn't get worse
it begins to rain.

The world is much crueler than you expected.
Which is why
you begin to ask important questions;
after all, you
are different from the others.

You learn that
you're at odds with society most of the time, and
go through a great deal of psychological
and spiritual development.
Learning that not everyone is treated fairly.
Even if you are.

Your newfound maturation allows you
to restore balance to the universe,
or be the best burglar even if
others had their doubts.

But most importantly,
you realize everyone
and everything might not be phony,
or not as phony,
as you once thought.

AN ANECDOTE OF “ANECDOTE OF THE JAR” – BY JACOB KLAUNG

USA

saw a Dasani bottle in Tennessee,
Half filled with piss upon a hill.
It made the wilderness not so wild
Even though it surrounded that hill.

The cap was tight upon the bottle.
Neon liquid filled the port.
Rain nor sun could get inside
And return that piss from where it came.

Why not pee behind this tree?
The wilderness let out an awful cry.
I poured the piss atop that hill,
Libation for the slovenly wild.

THE GIRL ON THE BUS – BY RODRIGO HARO

USA

The girl on the bus, I saw her again.

She looked down, waited for me to be by her side, then took a step. We walked away from each other I did not say a word. I wish we had said bye. She showed grace, submissiveness, and an elegant demeanor. She was near.

The bus stopped. She got off her seat, and walked to the bus doors. The doors opened. She looked down, stood still, and did not take a step. I approached her, and said, “Oh, you want to go together?” We then stepped. What was I supposed to do?

I felt guilt. Moments earlier, we were sitting in the back of the bus. She was eating a pudding, and passed one to me. I held it in my hand, and watched the streets go by. I said, “I don’t drink milk,” and handed it back to her.

After the step, she went her own way, and I didn’t follow. The girl on the bus, I saw her again. I saw her by the library. How is she now? I remember her. I should not let go of anybody who gives. She was a true friend who built a friendship on giving.

I did not think.

She was pretty. The girl on the bus, I saw her again by the library. She kept walking. I stood still.

The girl on the bus, I saw her my first day in San Diego. She asked for a lighter. I passed her a light.

“How are you?” I asked.

“Coming down,” she said. She lit her cigarette.

She stared. I tried to understand. I knew what she meant. She needed to feel safe. She needed to feel okay, wanted, and comforted. She was surrounded by people, love, and nurture. She showed love.

My thoughts said, “Do you want to be my girlfriend?” but my words were silent.

The ins and outs of my life in San Diego relied on a friendly demeanor, a steady posture, and a glance of friendship. A girl donated Gatorades to others and I. I was on the steps of the library.

I decided to get myself together. It was a time of struggle. It was a time of never-ending doings, friendships, and wanderings. It was a time to give in to sanity. There were times when the struggle defeated me, but every day I fought for justice (and for that day). I needed to tell her things. She needed to know she was a beautiful person.

There was peace, immense peace, an immensity of understanding. It was a time of peaceful union.

There are more ways to pray, and stay free. The girl from my first day was the girl from the bus. I met her on a Sunday on the bus. She was great. She did all she could to relate.

She wanted more. I could have done more. I did not have the words. I did not have the thoughts. My thought was “kiss her.” I did not. I stared at her and was silent. I did not speak to her. I did not talk. The silence engulfed us, and we stared wanting more, not less. She saw the world through my eyes.

The girl on the bus, I saw her again. She is nice and in my heart. I had to give to receive. I had to give. I had to believe. She was a surprise to me, a worthwhile surprise. She offered grace, friendship, and a shared unity, and a love for country out of the grace of God. I wanted to share that moment with her and tell her not to go. I turned. May she be safe. We shared a unity of humanity.

She reminded me of a girl named Sophia in San Francisco who was headed to Sacramento.

“Do you need help?” I asked.

“Yes, I need help getting on the bus,” she said.

“The bus stops there,” I said pointing West.

“Do you have a phone to call my mom in Sacramento?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said handing her my phone. She called her mom.

She was a good person. She did not pursue her own interests. She offered me ten cigarettes. She was an Angel from Heaven. I saw the example of life. What does the memory, or even better, the person mean to me? Love. Innocence. A pursuit of happiness?

Sophia. Sacramento.

We had a good day. She was nice. She cared for me. I went to a parish afterwards.

The girl on the bus, I saw again. I was surprised by her kindness. I was also surprised by her grace, happiness, and care for me. She was not thinking of herself when she waited for me and when she gave me food. She waited for her step to match my step. I was surprised by her eagerness to simply love. She stood still at the ledge, looked down, and waited for me to stand next to her (“You want to go together?” I asked). We went together. I had her. We stepped down.

I denied myself, and helped myself grow, and saw what I had created, what each other wanted and asked for (a partner, a relationship) a future, and not a past.

The End.

UNFOLLOW – BY ROWAN TATE

USA

Today you are not with me at the table but I
feel you there, a touch that
feeds hunger, familiar and foreign, breath
on the bare of my neck.
I left the room
but i am still looking for you, I am still
wearing your socks, aware of a body of mine I've
never seen in the mirror, or in someone else's eyes, borrowing
your hands in motion, the current between us when glances
were our only language for love.
The way i opened
in your palm, like lips parting so the tongue can push,
but became perforated edges, scraped elbows, raw.
You appear in my coffee cup so i can drink you, keep
you in my mouth until you're cold, have to swallow your name.
you are not with me at the table but i keep you there,
flowers dying in their vase.
underneath the pan-seared salmon,
we are holding hands.

REMEDY – BY ROWAN TATE

USA

I improvise a body,
sewing together the dark fish
who ate the night out of the blood
of the women before me.
Their lungs and stomachs,
which I've inherited, which I
knead and mold into fingers, the flat
of a palm, tendons, the delicate
wiring of worlds.
Skin grows back
so many histories later
in the shade of the people
we loved.
In the grooves
of mortality, nouns
multiply and divide, bear
children who wear your april brown eyes
into new hemispheres.
Whoever gave me my
breast and my belly
had her own bad dreams
but they are better now.
Yam makes the liver less skittish.
I dry dandelion root and
nettles for tea to remember
the shape my grandmother took.
When you hold my hand,
you hold so many others.

HAZARDS – BY ROWAN TATE

USA

Praying mantises, old church ladies, willows
in winter, chihuahuas, the color yellow, songs that are
8 minutes or longer, pedestals, pigeons,
beat poets, the cross, fruit made out of
marzipan, the roman calendar and
abandoned grocery stores in ohio,
the fourth grade, melon rinds, underwear lines
on the skin, pens without caps, alphabet songs,
youtube videos with comments disabled, beets,
a generation that has forgotten how to read a clock.

HALF EATEN FALAFEL ON A BUS STOP BENCH – BY MICHAEL ROQUE

ISRAEL

**Do you ever feel like a half-eaten falafel
abandoned on a bus stop bench at 3AM?**

Traffic dies down,
people stop passing by,
you're sat half-consumed—
a stale pita lost to the anticipation of a next bite,
wondering why you weren't finished.

Did the purchaser think you weren't good enough?
That you lacked taste?
Maybe you made them feel too full—
too much for them to stomach?
Too spicy for their senses,
perhaps they didn't want the fragrance of your amba
sticking to their fingers?

**Maybe sometimes you're more bike than man—
fastened to a Florentin pole.**

Locked for months,
wheels and seat stolen—
you're little more than a rusted steel frame
wondering if you'll ever ride again,
experience the wind you can barely recall
that blew through your gears.

**Maybe you're an umbrella
slammed out of shape by pounding showers.**

Left bent and dilapidated
in a puddle,
recognizing in water's reflection
a defective product,
who couldn't weather the rain—
shelter from the storm.

Snapped plastic wondering why—
why you were dumped into the gutter,
deemed unworthy of repair?

PHANTOM CLASS – BY MICHAEL ROQUE

ISRAEL

Ideological ideals—
 Hardened hearts—
 construct slums over Asia's Southeast.

24/7—
 Construction, steelwork screams
 into ears and eyelids tightly shut—
 9 million thoughts flee
 from a gangland blindly built with cement
 watered down by our mental disease—
 the dull knife we dig into our own spine,
 as we rob ourselves of peace and safety
 decades down the line.

Sinai to Negev—
 Negev to city streets;
 there is an apparent peace
 in the refugee slum I witness.
 Yet hidden behind hollow walls—
 studio flats of fifteen,
 sweat-soaked brows,
 frustrated sighs of a phantom class
 buried in the minds of most,
 viewed as burdens to be removed
 by wrinkled suits defining our morality.

A decade ago—
 I saw men slave with smiles,
 mine for bare minimum
 in jobs no one wants.

Today—
 I see teens with big dreams
 excluded on orders of our elite.

A decade on—

robberies,
murderous thieves
taking by force from a society
denying basic opportunity—
a society saying of me—
I'm a single puzzle piece
fitting into a bigger picture.
A society saying of a refugee—
he's a puzzle of many different pieces,
creating a picture never to be complete—
One they urge me to block out—
duck my head from—
quietly unsee.

CIVILIAN SUMMER 2025, TEL AVIV – BY MICHAEL ROQUE

ISRAEL

Tel Aviv—
Summertime 2025—
sun's familiar warmth burns,
swapping Vitamin D
for the big C,
alluring tans
for rugged, calloused
handbag leather skin.

No standing without concrete burning feet—
No sitting without stinging blisters on the back.
Months pile,
inhaling deceased urban ash
blowing up the beach,
while sizzling masses
dehydrated, disoriented,
sway in a sweltering dance—
to yesteryear's jovial summer beats.

Humidity hanging head-level heavy—
cementing a cycle of struggle, prayer and determination.
A struggle not to suffocate on the hot steam we breathe—
A prayer for a drop of relief from the dripping ACs—
A determination not to drown on the slow crawl to cooler days.

BREAKFAST POEM – BY LANCE HALBERG

USA

Do you think
she was singing about god, the woman
whose voice swept in through your apartment window
like a morning wind from the chapel? Perhaps
god was the fragile chords of her
piano, echoing in the courtyard
of half-strangers held
in concert
by music. The best love is bound
by third things, Hall said. You asked what I thought
of the O'Hara poem, how devotion is revealed
in particulars. This world is made
of third things giving shape to invisible
attachments—what a funny thought:
this morning we shared
an apple you had sliced and sprinkled with cinnamon.
You searched for a flower pot while I rinsed
our water glasses.
I think god is a chapel
full of believers, though I'm willing to agree
if you thought god was this great window in your apartment
as we peered through last night, to ask
whether the sky still held enough
light for one more walk.

AUTUMNAL – BY LANCE HALBERG

USA

You'll never live
to be all the things
I've made
of you. Which is right. Bluebird
swimming in sunlight, swallowing
air, breathing
water. Light
is only what it touches,
and what haven't you
touched? I am
never not staring at you.
It's nearly
cold
enough to be
summer again. The words
are old,
but the wind is
ancient — I'll catch it
for you if you like —
what Keats
called the cold
pastoral.
Passing tides, eternal
newness. In the fullness
of the night,
there's not a thing
you'll ever owe me.

POP HISS – BY SAMANTHA SLAVEN

USA

A machine stands in the hallway outside the door

Pop hiss

In time but somehow off

The beat feels forced

A coil tethering the fading body to the Earth

Pop hiss

I let the rhythm guide me to sleep though it's not meant for my ears

The heart is straining to stay afloat

Loved ones scattered in their designated places

Pop hiss

Maybe peace will arrive by sunrise

Pop hiss

Visitors trickle in

Nurses in scrubs afraid of the dogs

Curious faces almost afraid to say the quiet part out loud 'Did it happen yet?'

Pop hiss

Merriment marred by fear

Not knowing you enough to be in mourning

Knowing you too well to understand memories will be formed by your passing

And just as I become used to the noise

Like sounds of traffic outside or the gentle background banter of the evening news

The pop hiss no longer plays on the

Floridian air 'She's gone. Come say your goodbyes.'

I hold his hand

We look on the face frozen in a silent scream

A life that stopped living weeks before the last breath

Imprinted on my brain for the rest of my days

Pop hiss

Cannot be unheard like metal screeching against rubber

Pop hiss

We'll lower you into the ground when the snow melts

I'll try to focus on the good times

Wondering if there was a way your story could have ended differently

BLACK RIDES AND MAPLE LEAVES – BY ETHAN JACKSON

USA

When we were kids, Saturdays meant freedom. The kind of freedom only found in bike rides through our quiet suburban neighborhood. Maple leaves drifted lazily, carried by a breeze that would weave through our bike helmets and get tangled in our laughter. We rode until our calves were sore and our voices echoed from the quiet cul-de-sacs. We were inseparable then. We didn't just ride our bikes; we pedaled through questions about the world we didn't quite understand. Through endless what ifs and dreams of what we'd become. I can't seem to recall a time before I knew how to ride a bike. All I remember was riding with you, the thrill of racing and the comfort of knowing you'd always wait when I fell behind. But life isn't as simple as a ride around the block. It veered the moment the diagnosis came. I didn't tell you at first, what would I even say? How could I explain it all at such a young age. So I stayed silent, hoping our bike rides could stay untouched by it all. I began to notice the shift before you even said anything. How your eyes became glued to the medical supplies I would take when I stayed over. How your laughter hesitated when I slowed to catch my breath. You started pedaling faster, and I couldn't keep up. The rides grew fewer, the plans for tomorrow turned into excuses. You never said it outright, but I knew. You saw me as different. The weight of my disease became a third rider that sat between us. One day you didn't wait for me anymore. You raced ahead and when I called out you didn't look back. You're engaged now and I'm still different. The photos of you two beneath the arch of the same maple tree. You looked so happy and maybe you are. But I wonder if you ever thought about how those leaves once fell around us like confetti. How our laughter used to fill the streets. I'm still riding, though not as far. My bike isn't a celebration anymore, it's a time machine. Every turn of the pedal carries me back to those Saturdays when we were kids, before the diagnosis. Before you left me behind. Before I was different.

THE LANGUAGE OF DREAMS – BY CLAUDIA WYSOCKY

USA

Look here.
This is the language
of dreams. It speaks in tongues,
in symbols, in signs. And it whispers
to us of things unseen— of secrets lost
beneath the waves.
We are but vessels for its message,
a conduit between worlds. Listen closely.
Hear the truth in its riddles,
the clarity in its confusion.
For this is the language of dreams,
and you must learn to speak it.

THE SHADOW OF OUR MINDS – BY CLAUDIA WHYSOCKY

USA

Can	I
touch	your
hair?	Place
my	hand
on	your
shoulder?	Feel
the	warmth
of	your
body?	Your
presence	my
anchor,	keeping
me	steady.

But	in the
darkness	of the night
when	I close my eyes
and	feel you near
I	know
you	are
not	here.

THE SEEDS WE PLANT – BY MICHAEL ROQUE

ISRAEL

Planting seeds in soft soil
sprouts from earth
diverse fruits that nourish—
assist from birth,
empowering bodies to flex and bewilder,
propelling minds to mount the moon,
dream beyond our prism—
see through our toil.

Planting bullets—
blood in baked concrete,
sprouts from cracks
another blade in a blindsided back.
Morgues stuffed with mutilation
from blown buses, car rams,
An endless supply of stifled minds,
endless sets of feet stubbornly unmoved,
inhaling through nose decaying man
exhaling from mouth—
defeat.

IF YOU WERE HERE – BY ZACK

USA

If you were here
I'd say hi,
And I'd ask about Jeff,
And we'd laugh,
Because what kind of a name is that?

If you were here,
We'd recite marching songs,
And you'd conduct horribly,
But we'd smile,
Because what else is there to do?

If you were here,
I'd watch you pick dry skin
off your arms,
And you'd talk about your fears,
And I'd talk about mine,
Because no one else is there to listen.

If you were here,
You'd tell me that it's okay,
That I don't belong here,
And that neither do you.
Because you don't.
And because I don't.

If you were here,
I'd talk to my friends,
And tell them what happened,
And tell them that I'm normal,
Because I am.
I am normal.

And if you were here...
It'd all be okay.

If you were here.

But you're not here.

You're dead,
and you're alive.
You're in college,
and you're with your dad.
You're out there marching,
and you're trapped inside your room.
You're starved.
You're beaten.
Humiliated.
Hurt.
Alone.
He makes you feel like nothing,
But you mean everything to me.

And you're Dead.

...

I wish you were here,
But I'm glad that you're not,
Because then I won't know
The truth.

INFINITY HIDES IN YOUR MIND – BY MICHAEL ROQUE

USA

We all know what a mind is made of—
our own,
but if I could crawl between the crevices of your brain,
get lost in a thought—
maybe see the whole production line,
would I find something familiar?
Something like mine?
The morbid, the cruel,
or would I meet something sweet, innocent, wholesome—
A beauty—
so long gone for me.

What drifts in your infinite universe?
What thoughts are echoing over what backdrops?
What rushes at you from the dark alleyway you move toward,
when your head's on the pillow at 10 p.m.?

The meteorites you throw at me are nice—
but I want your whole asteroid to pulverize
the face of my planet.
I want to be shaken by your advancing booms,
burnt by the fire,
rearranged by the underworld
you feel you need to hide.

ILLUSION OF FREEDOM – BY ELLY VERITAS

QATAR

The human
lives under a sliver of silver sky
his soul aches for glimpses past frigid towers
so he stands on his cold grey street
wrapped in his city of steel
amidst shadows of flowers his head's
craned to heaven
he listens. He hears.
He gawps:

A flap of ashen wings carry it ever higher
and so it bursts! Bursts beyond the skyscrapers
soaring with the wind, wild
free, shot through with brilliant sunlight
free forever—
and mad with glee he claps at what
he could never do.

But wait—
something's tucked in heaven's folds:
a darkened sprout
swoops. It snatches the bird from the sky
and is gone quick as July.

Ash rains down, warm from the heart it served
the human plucks one out the air to

tuck in his grey vest.

Yet another colour to adorn.

MY LONESOME EYE – BY KENNETH BOYD

USA

I wish I'd seen you with my lonesome eye
Though my folks made me a myth in their wake
I longed to hold you so high you could fly

You were a soft ten years old when I died
Before I failed to ask for more days
I wish I'd seen you with my lonesome eye

I practiced the ruse of staring half-blind
Stamped... I knew too much about Mary J
I longed to hold you so high you could fly

In time I perfected the turtle-eye
Ask your sister to show you my odd game
I wish I'd seen you with my lonesome eye

There was a detour in my family line
I was the sanction, you were my saint
I longed to hold you so high you could fly

In Knoxville by a rail yard, amplified,
Dreams of my great-grandson in disarray
I wish I'd seen you with my lonesome eye
I longed to hold you so high you could fly

RED-LETTER DAYS – BY KENNETH BOYD

USA

During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days
Hand-in-hand to the tea-colored river we walked
For the sake of disguising our whitewashed stains

Grandpa Roy was a tall man, a man of means and taste
Thrown together like okra and tomatoes, I thought
During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days

He was handsome in a Stetson hat for the day
His thin moustache neatly trimmed and cropped
During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days

He dressed elegantly in the style of the age
Always ready to nod at a passerby, ready to talk
For the sake of disguising our whitewashed stains

Grandpa smoked a pipe with sighs of sweet grace
With a fragrant suggestion I could not balk
During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days

Grandpa Roy always gave more than he saved
And I watched his kind expression, passing down his lot
During my time with Grandpa Roy on red-letter days
For the sake of disguising our whitewashed stains

MY SKY – BY ANDELINE WHITE

USA

I dreamt a dream of purest bliss
Where I had wings of snow
They were strong and steady, powerful
A beauty to behold.

They carried me above the trees
How high, I could not say.
The earth, she slept, down below
And I drifted farther away.

I felt the warmth, the fiery glow
The dawning rays of sun.
They carried me into the night
For we were one.

Inseparable, through time and space
Ethereal stars pass by.
They sang the song, of dreams far lost
And I began to cry.

My dream, my dream to fly away
On great clouds of purest white,
Would never bloom upon the earth
For on the earth, I cannot rise.

I woke that morn with dewy cheeks
They glistened as the sun woke up
Her brilliant rays reminded me
Look up, my child, look up.

TO DAD: WE NEVER GOT TO FINISH RIDING A BIKE – BY FAREEHA

CANADA

I think my whole life I have yearned for someone, for something that brought me such immense comfort that I finally feel like I'm home. And by whole life, I mean right after I stopped being 13. That was when everything changed, it was like I grew a new set of eyes where wherever I went those eyes followed me. Those large distraught eyes that held so much judgement in them that no matter where I went, it lingered. In the mirror, in my room, in school.....everywhere. Having a Barbie lunch box wasn't so cool anymore. Having bows and clips in my hair didn't make me feel pretty anymore. And all of a sudden, the fruit flavored chapsticks didn't suffice my lips anymore. These new set of eyes were so disgustingly observant that nothing would go unnoticed under them. I remember the time I got into trouble at school for bringing my mom's makeup to school. There I was in the school bathroom trying to do a winged eyeliner, trying to find the right lip shade and the right brush to accentuate my features. I relied on a powdered blush to make me look like I was alive enough. This was the absolute opposite of me coming back to my childhood home after playing in the sun all day. That was the last Summer I felt alive. My mother would tell me I look like a mess, that my face was too red. I also remember her sitting in the principal's office when she found all of her makeup in my school bag. Her sunken face, and her inability to meet my gaze, made me want to sink into a puddle. My childhood home was a safe haven for me for the longest time but it was soon enough, when the walls started to creep in on me and all I did was try to run away from those giant pillars, that huge balcony and that tall roof. Everything in that house was so big or maybe I was just too small that I felt lost. Everything changed so fast...I never got to finish learning how to ride a bike. I had a pink barbie bike with shiny tassels on the handles, my father would grab the handles because I was too afraid to peddle. I'd keep telling him not to let go, to not let go of me. Even though it was a four wheeler and I wouldn't have fallen, I was still so scared. I was so terrified that I never built up the courage to let go, to let go of his hand, to let go of the extra two wheels. It's been a long time since we moved from that house but I still remember everything. The noisy next door neighbours, all of the kids I played with, our sticky faces, from eating all those orange popsicles. I remember how I would spend the whole day with those kids, often in their homes until their parents got sick of me. When I look at myself today, I realise how much I yearn for her. How much I yearn for that little girl who never cared about anything, who would play all day, who didn't care how she looked, who woke up at seven in the morning to watch Scooby Doo on the television, sitting so close to the screen until her eyes got dry. I miss her so much. I miss her so much that I wear bows in my hair now, I put on fruit flavored chapsticks and every time I see anything pink or Barbie my heart sinks a little deeper in my chest.

ELEGY FOR THE ECHOES – BY SAMANTHA HISLE

USA

When my bones were not yet sturdy
I wobbled on the lateral
But with the tap of the metal
the Scrape of the edge,
my soul was encouraged to dance

Sports were never my thing:
too fragile, I was told
I spoke the language of movement;
My feet
Begged.

I came out wiggling,
The songs slithered under my skin
Hymns swelled and twirled
Through my head
to my toes instead

Jazz and hip hop were just fine
but tap...
Tap was sublime
I don't mean to show, but
my moves made me glow.

The white hot lights,
my caked face
still echo in my dreams
The sound of the Shirley Temple
Tip tap tippity tap

Tap, tap was my love.
My anger transformed
Into art:

A burst of light,
each movement created
I danced with a lightness I wish I could find
scared to miss the beat.
Dragged back moments from the stage
made my mind solemn but sweet
with purity.

I pull weights over my shoulders,
strength is always worked for.
Movement creates my peace,
pained with labor and of years past
just a tap of the foot clears them.

Bouncing with worry
creating an aura of sin,
the shadows decrescendo
to my hands
the spark dimmed to shame.

The music thumped just the same,
spoke another language
complex and playful.
Here, my childhood lives
transported among

bass music and the sweat sliding down
my tits against the stranger
that I will not remember tomorrow
against the bar as I tip my head back
Cheers!

On the dance floor, it all comes back
in a haze of music, my dancing turns
into an outlet: rhythms still
flowing through rotten veins, echo
into the vibrations of the TAP.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY – BY SOPHIA ZOMPETTA

USA

The day that only comes around once a year has ended
I rip down my decorations
Put away the leftover cake which only misses one piece
I throw away the only piece of wrapping paper
And I stick the pair of socks in my drawer
I pop all the balloons one by one
Because the day i've been waiting for
Was better the day before

I WOULD RATHER NOT KNOW – BY KANDY ALVAREZ

USA

I will never know

what it's like to have parents who speak the language I speak,
parents who didn't frequently fear coming to my school events,
fearing they wouldn't fit in,
fearing they would embarrass me.

I will never know

what it's like to have parents who spoke to the doctor for me,
not knowing what was wrong with me,
hearing my sickening symptoms,
having to translate
words I barely understood.

I will never know

how to tell my parents that the letter from school
didn't actually say I was exceeding in all my classes,
but I was still struggling in them all.

I will never know

what it's like for my parents to conversate with other adults,
instead of me having to softly speak for them,
not knowing what to say.
How was I supposed to tell them,
that they didn't want them here?

I will never know.

But I never want to know.

YO LE VI – BY SHONTAY LUNA

USA

Yo le vi, hablando por la
balconia. Susurros in the
late afternoon. La brisas
media calientes against
the droning monologue
of the television. I don't
remember si era una
película, noticias o una
programa. I just recall
the tone and the words;
drowning out and fading.
Drowning out and fading,
the tv but not his words.
His words that dripped
slowly out the mouth I
could never recall having
said ever loved me. Running
down the phone cord like
deeply craved molasses. Y
en ese memento Le rogué a Dios
que nuestra hija would never
be tricked like I was por un
humano masculino. Nombrandole
asi porque no merece la palabra
"hombre."

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER – BY CAROLYN ROSE KLEIN

USA

there is something to be said
about two creatures that know each other more than
anyone else in the world

when tiny patterns on the wooden stairs turn into soft knocks on my door,
you want to ask me if i'm okay

I roll my eyes, but there isn't a single thing in this world
i wouldn't tell you
And we go about learning from each other -
greater lessons than any catholic man ever gave us

you still care for every girl you ever loved, and you
would start a war for every kid we grew up with
because that is who you are
down to your core lives ruthless compassion

but no one else gets that quite like i do
because i am your sister

and you are my brother
And we have the same eyes, same minds, and when we look out
to the tree-lined path of decatur, we see the same things

you have a scar above your eye and a scar on top your thumb
split-second incidents when i felt your pain
- now i swear i have the same marks on my heart

the night when the weight of your life felt like it was in my hands,
because i could hear your heart breaking
from my childhood bedroom next to yours

and you think you must protect me
but it's because of you that i will never need to be protected again

so, the only promise i could ever make in this world
is to always stay by your side,
and to think of you
every time i see a bird take flight from a tree

NOVEMBER IN A GRAVE YARD – BY CAROLYN ROSE KLEIN

USA

november feels like an old friend
who kind of makes you sad, but also reminds you that you're just a kid

november is a wolf
who discovered he doesn't need his pack,
but calls to them nonetheless

november is cruel, like a 3rd grade teacher
who misses her mom

oh, but november is kind,
like a sunset my grandpa would have loved
(i like to think the smoke from my breath is the same as his)

november is bliss,
it can be easy to forget how cold you are until warm water touches your skin

november is a graveyard
the face of a ghost in every crowd
of the man you thought you'd know forever

november feels like the tooth my dad pulled from my small mouth
less painful than my shakes accounted for, but I was just a kid

UNTIL I SEE YOU AGAIN – BY CAROLYN ROSE KLEIN

USA

I can still picture you sitting there in your chair, in the middle of a mess we had created earlier in the morning air

Your drunken eyes whispering that you loved me. That you needed me

A splash of green staring into my boldest blues, a mixture of colors that we thought the future of ourselves would one day infuse

You were the sweetest answer to the most desperate prayer, sitting there in your chair when no one else existed, and the friends in your living room must not have known a thing because they didn't know what it was like to be us

To know a love so magnificent and true, so scary and so blue, I could have sat in that room for the rest of my life not having a clue, only knowing you

It would have been enough

I can still picture you sitting on the edge of my bed, those green somber eyes saying everything that needed to be said

When I pleaded and I begged, and you just watched while lowering your head

Yet I can still picture you sitting on that porch, in the middle of a mess that my family had become,

that you said you loved and loved and loved

Your eyes looking for mine in any sudden movement reading every thought in my mind without me having to prove it

When every light from above only shone down on you, my mother spoke very softly that I'd found my forever true

I could have sat on that porch for the rest of my days, having you in my view

You were the joke of forever, the truth of pain, the muse of the ages, and the conman of a lover who only has himself to blame

Now I can only picture you going back into that room, the mess of a lifetime that passed us too soon Dust falling slowly onto my clothes on your floor, framed pictures of moments that I wish were never born

And I wait by my phone like I'm getting paid for a man who will become someone I knew way back when

just for a message that arrives "Until I see you again"







About The Debut Review

The Debut Review is an online, art and literary journal that launches new work from emerging student artists. We believe that every artist deserves only the best opportunities to nurture and grow their passion for artistic expression. With The Debut Review, we hope to build a community where artists take joy in each other's works and flourish together as the next generation of creators, thinkers, and explorers.

We publish every issue quarterly with our readers' interests in mind, providing compelling, diverse, and thoughtful material for you to read, share, and remember